



CEN_iM 9

Cahiers «Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne»

Le myrte & la rose

*Mélanges offerts à Françoise Dunand
par ses élèves, collègues et amis*



Réunis par Gaëlle Tallet et Christiane Zivie-Coche

Tome 1

Montpellier 2014

Université Paul Valéry (Montpellier III) – CNRS
UMR 5140 « Archéologie des Sociétés Méditerranéennes »
Équipe « Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne » (ENiM)

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Françoise Dunand à sa table de travail, à l'Institut d'histoire des religions de l'Université de Strasbourg, dans les années 1980 (d. r.).

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THE TEMPLE OF SOKNOPAIOS AND ISIS NEPHERSES AT SOKNOPAIU NESOS (EL-FAYYUM)

PAOLA DAVOLI

*Introduction*¹

Since a few years a new temple built in sandstone blocks and dedicated to Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses has been put to light and thus must be added to the list of the Graeco-Roman period temples.² These new discoveries in a Graeco-Roman settlement of the western desert are here presented to celebrate Françoise Dunand, to express a deep gratitude for her strong interest and long commitment to field archaeology in the western desert of Egypt.

The existence of this temple was well known from a number of Greek and Demotic papyri found at the end of the nineteenth century and from the impressive *temenos* that marks the landscape of Dime es-Seba, north of Birket Qarun (fig. 1). Dime is a well-preserved archaeological area despite the natural decay, the numerous illicit excavations, the *sebbakhin* activity and the systematic removal of limestone blocks that probably started already in Late Antiquity. This last activity is responsible for the lack of the monumental buildings, of which little evidence remains. The stone spoliation was very selective and concerned only the buildings, or their parts, built with yellow local limestone blocks.³ In fact, several features and buildings at Dime are made with other kinds of local limestone, still *in situ* like lintels and floor slabs made out of grey or purple-grey fossiliferous limestone,⁴ or raw slabs used to build walls in brown-grey limestone. One of the most striking stone features – very well preserved – is the high *dromos* with its two foundation walls in raw slabs more than 3 m high and 329 m long, and the grey slabs of its pavement *ca.* 6.5 m wide.⁵

The *dromos* was intended as the processional road of the main temple of Soknopaios, of which it was a real extension into the settlement, thought to be a monumental and spectacular scene for the processions during the numerous local feasts. It goes from the temple to the south end of the settlement with a slight inclination, due to the fact that the temple was built on top of a small natural hill.⁶ The temple of Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses played a major role in the life and economy of the settlement and the cult of the oracular god may have been the reason for the Ptolemaic foundation of the settlement itself. A pre-Ptolemaic foundation has been supposed, but evidence to support this hypothesis is still scarce.⁷

The precinct of the temple,⁸ and its buildings, covers about 5% of the archaeological area and it is the result of different building phases. In the past it was never excavated scientifically and thus it is not well known. However, it is certain that it is one of the most interesting temple areas in Egypt due to its

¹ I would like to thank Nicola Aravecchia for having revised and corrected my English.

² The temple precinct is under excavation by the Soknopaiou Nesos Project of the University of Salento, Lecce (Italy). The project started in 2003 and is directed by M. Capasso and P. Davoli. Website: www.museopapirologico.eu/snp. M. Capasso and P. Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003-2009)* (Roma-Pisa 2012).

³ The same kind of spoliation occurred in other Fayyum sites like at Kom Umm el-Atl/Bakchias, where a similar temple was razed to its foundations: P. Davoli, “Examples of Town Planning in the Fayyum”, *BASP* 42 (2005) 213-233, esp. 217-24.

⁴ One of the quarries of this material has been identified about 2 km west of Dime.

⁵ The *dromos* was originally 397 m long, of which 68 m at its northern end are now missing or buried: cf. G.A. Minaya, “Il dromos”, in: M. Capasso and P. Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 83-109.

⁶ At present we do not know the dimensions of the hill, whose top was reached in a test trench in the middle of the *temenos* (in Courtyard 1). Its top elevation is 22.7 m asl, while the bed-rock reached by the University of Michigan in their west sector (about 100 m south-west of our test trench) is 16 m asl: A.E.R. Boak, *Soknopaiou Nesos. The University of Michigan Excavations at Dimê in 1931-32* (Ann Arbor 1935) pl. XIII-XIV; P. Davoli, “Lo scavo archeologico: 2003-2009”, in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 207-210.

⁷ The remains of a mudbrick wall were found below the foundations of the Ptolemaic temple and on top of the *gebel* but its condition does not allow to understand its function and date: cf. Saggio 4 in Davoli, “Lo scavo archeologico: 2003-2009” (2012). Moreover, pottery sherds of New Kingdom and Late Period were found north-west of Dime during the 2010 survey.

⁸ Its measures are: 86 m (north wall), 88 m (south wall), 114.5 m (east wall), 124.5 m (west wall), with a thickness of *ca.* 3.4 m. See P. Davoli, “The Temple Area of Soknopaiou Nesos”, in: M. Capasso and P. Davoli (eds.), *New Archaeological and Papyrological Researches on the Fayyum. Proceedings of the International Meeting of Egyptology and Papyrology. Lecce, June 8th-10th 2005*, *Papyrologica Lupiensia* 14 (2005) [2007] 95-124.

good state of preservation and the numerous texts (religious and documentary) that refer to it. The *temenos* wall (fig. 2) in mud-brick is still standing and reaches in some points the maximum visible height of 13 meters. Inside the enclosure, twenty-eight buildings are still visible, but some others are deeply buried in deposits of windblown sand and debris and had been detected by means of magnetometry.⁹ The newly excavated limestone block temple (labelled ST 20) is in the centre of the area, but it was not visible until 2004 due to its demolition and successive accumulation of sand and debris. Its existence was well known since G.B. Belzoni visited Dime in 1819, but it was not clear to him that it was a separate building from ST 18; in 1915-16 it was partially excavated by Ahmed Kamal in order to find monuments and objects.¹⁰ In 2009 the excavation of the rooms was completed and in 2010 the external eastern wall was exposed.

The objects found during the excavation of the temple are all fragmentary and loosely scattered due to the several excavations of the filling of the rooms that are attested to by a number of pits. However, these illicit excavations in search of treasures are not the only cause of the damaging of the furniture of the sanctuary. Stone statues, *naoi* and wooden furniture were already smashed and used as fuel in Late Antiquity, when the temple, after its closure, was used for different purposes. Pieces of statues and parts of stone monuments were reused to restore or to make new floors and small retaining walls inside and outside the temple. The careful documentation of each fragment allowed us to have an idea of the objects that were present inside the sanctuary when it was closed and their distribution – at least of those that survived the time. The picture is not yet complete, as the excavation of the external sides of the temple has to be finished. The puzzle of the hundreds of stone fragments is thus to be pursued, but it is certain that there were stone *naoi* and several male private statues, together with a female one with iconographical characters of an Isis or of a queen.

The excavation and the surveys carried out in these last few years yielded new elements for the knowledge of the temple. However, the precise identification of chapels, temples and other features mentioned in the texts coming from Dime is not yet possible and will not be so until the end of the excavation. This is a long period project of which we cannot predict the end. The interpretation of the archaeological features and textual evidence is thus to be intended as tentative and preliminary, a work in progress that must be continuously updated and revised.¹¹

The temple of Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses

Temple ST 20 (27.40 x 19 m) is preserved only in its ground floor with seventeen rooms, two staircases leading to upper floors, east and west of the main axis, four small staircases hidden in the walls leading to subterranean crypts and the so-called mysterious corridor (fig. 3). Two other crypts were hidden under the floor of the eastern staircase. The floors are well preserved only in the central rooms,¹² in which grey slabs were used; in the lateral rooms and corridors the floors were made with yellow limestone slabs that are only partly preserved with some ancient restorations. These were probably made during a Late Antique phase, when the temple was reused for other purposes. The floors of the *naos* are an exception: the *sancta sanctorum* S had a very simple floor made of yellow limestone slabs, while the *naos* M was very nicely paved, with a sort of *opus sectile* made of squared basalt and limestone tiles set into a perimeter cornice.¹³ Both of them are badly damaged. The floor level increases along the main axis after each doorway; two ramps flanked by three steps on each side run south of the two central doors in A and F (fig. 4b).

⁹ T. Smekalova, “The Geophysical Survey”, in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 111-115.

¹⁰ Accounts on previous explorations and excavations reports are in Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 11-18 and *infra*. See Ahmed Kamal, “Quelques jours de fouilles à Dimeh es-Sebaa”, *ASAE* 16 (1916) 183-186, esp. 184-186.

¹¹ For a first attempt on the identification of buildings in the *temenos* see Davoli, “The Temple Area of Soknopaiou Nesos” (2005); M.A. Stadler, “Zwischen Philologie und Archäologie: Das tägliche Ritual des Tempels in Soknopaiou Nesos”, in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *New Archaeological and Papyrological Researches on the Fayyum* (2005) 284-302.

¹² The floors were heavily damaged recently, following the revolution of January 2011.

¹³ P. Davoli, “Soknopaiou Nesos Project 2007-2010: New Archaeological Discoveries”, in: C. Arlt and M.A. Stadler (eds.), *Das Fayyûm in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit – Fallstudien zu multikulturellem Leben in der Antike. Proceedings of the Conference May 4-7 2011* (Wiesbaden 2013) 53.

Inside the temple only some wall surfaces are completely smooth and ready for the decoration that was begun, but never finished.¹⁴ The only decorations that were apparently completed are those on the cornices of the south sides (on view for those who enter into the temple) of the last three doors, those of the *vestibulum* L, the *naos* M and S. Unfortunately, only few blocks are still *in situ*, but others have been collected in the fillings of various rooms. Their study will be carried out after the excavation of the debris surrounding the sides of the building is completed. The best-preserved relief, in different stages of execution, is on the northwest wall in room F, with the representation of two offering scenes with the king in front of a god, presumably Soknopaios, and in front of other four gods (fig. 3). The first figure of the king is the only one to still have the head crowned with the Upper Egyptian crown.¹⁵ The doors, at least some of them, had yellow limestone lintels decorated with painted *urei* freezes and the winged disk. Several fragments of this kind of decoration have been recovered in the debris.

The external surfaces of the temple were originally decorated in *rustica* masonry, but the east side was later decorated with an unusual revetment of 1.5 m in height and consisting of six courses of grey-reddish fossiliferous limestone blocks, slightly tapering and well polished. The uppermost course is made of rectangular blocks round topped (fig. 5b). It certainly had a decorative purpose, but was probably made to protect the bottom of the wall that was already eroded. The west side was not decorated in the same way (fig. 6a).¹⁶ A pavement of grey slabs like the one in courtyard C1 was built along the west and the east sides. The one on the east side was removed in Late Antiquity, while that on the west is well preserved. On the latter, an intact stratigraphy with organic deposits and a new Late Antique period floor with related features was found in 2010. These late features were built in front and around the lateral door of the temple with reused stone elements, like fragments of statues and cornices. The presence of a late pavement (2 x 2.57 m) just in front of the lateral door suggests that it was conceived for a specific purpose that cannot be simply related to a generic reoccupation of the temple. However, no clear evidence has been found so far to clarify the kind of activity and a precise date for it.¹⁷ Four *ostraka* and a papyrus scrap found in different stratigraphic units in the temple bear Coptic texts, but their fragmentary condition does not allow us to reach any conclusion.¹⁸ The reason for the presence of people there was not the demolition of the temple, that occurred at a later time, or simply sporadic refuge. The new discovery of a Late Antique phase in Dime is of great interest and more investigation is needed to understand how long it lasted and what kind of activity was performed into ST 20.

The temple is strictly connected with the best preserved building in the *temenos* (ST 18), made of mud bricks and raw slabs of limestone, that stands in front of it. Between the two there is a courtyard (C1), paved with grey limestone slabs, closed to the east and west sides by two auxiliary mud brick buildings of the Roman period. ST 18 was certainly the original temple of Soknopaios (32.5 x 18.6 m), with its closer *temenos*, probably built at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period (Ptolemy I or II).¹⁹ It had a second floor

¹⁴ It has been demonstrated that the decoration inside the temples was realized before the building of the roof: P. Zignani, "Le temple d'Hathor à Dendera. L'architecture du temple: quand l'homme compose la perfection du divin", in: R. Preys (ed.), *7. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung. Structuring Religion. Leuven, 28. September – 1. Oktober 2005* (Wiesbaden 2009) 267-287, esp. 284. This would mean that the decoration of Dime temple was stopped during the building of the sanctuary. The causes of this decision and change in the original plan are obscure and cannot be even suggested until we establish the precise date of the building. On the sponsorship of temples building during the Ptolemaic period see C. Thiers, "Observations sur le financement des chantiers de construction des temples à l'époque ptolémaïque", in: Preys (ed.), *7. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung* (2009) 231-244.

¹⁵ On this basis, it seems that the decorators put the south on the right side of the temple (= west) as it is common to temples placed on the west bank of the Nile. However, this 'rule' was not followed in Edfu temple: S. Cauville, "Une règle de la 'grammaire' du temple", *BIFAO* 83 (1983) 51-84, esp. 52.

¹⁶ In the 2010 season, a trench of 15 x 4 m was opened along the west side of the temple.

¹⁷ Davoli, "Soknopaiou Nesos Project 2007-2010" (2013) 51-61.

¹⁸ First accounts on written materials found in excavation and survey 2003-2009 are in M. Capasso, "I papiri e gli *ostraka* greci, figurati e copti (2001-2009)", in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 231-248; M.A. Stadler, "Demotica aus Dime: ein Überblick über die in Dime während der Kampagnen 2001-2009 gefundenen demotischen Texte", *ibid.*, 249-268.

¹⁹ We do not yet have archaeological evidence for its dating, being the temple unexcavated. However, it is assumed that it was built within the foundation of the settlement that already existed in 241/240 BC according to P.Lille I 3, 20. A piece of a wooden *naos* with the name of Ptolemy III was found inside ST 18: S. Pernigotti, "Ptolemy III at Soknopaiou Nesos", *Studi di Egittologia e di Papirologia* 1 (2004) 119-122, esp. 119-121.

and a terraced roof, reachable by means of a staircase with a central pillar (room F). The walls built in raw slabs were originally covered by a thick layer of lime plaster, of which some patches remain in rooms A, G and H, plain or moulded to replicate courses of regular blocks. Restorations and additions are also visible. A major restyling of the building was carried out immediately after the new temple ST 20 was completed and opened to the cult. When this happened is a matter of discussion²⁰ because no substantial evidence, like foundation deposits, has been found so far. The relief preserved on the west jamb of the door between ST 20F and L shows a royal couple, with an empty cartouche, who can be identified as a Ptolemaic couple. The temple ST 18 was not demolished, but transformed into a monumental passageway or *propylon* for the newly built temple ST 20 (fig. 5a). The works for its transformation took place after the images of the gods and their cults were transferred into the new building. In fact, the foundation trench of the north door opened in the rear wall of the old *naos* (ST 18A) was cut into the debris used to level the area of the building yard. It is interesting to note that this debris filled an older demolished building to the north of ST 18 and raised the new floor level by about 1.5 m above the original one.²¹ As a consequence, we can assume that the floor inside ST 18 was also elevated of 1.5 m above the original one.

Preliminary observations on the architecture and cult implications

The state of conservation of the buildings and the present stage of the archaeological excavations allow us to have only a partial view of the temple complex. However, some preliminary observations can be made with the aim of stimulating further considerations and interpretations.

The temple is oriented toward south, and the new temple ST 20 also maintained this orientation. Thus, the two buildings ST 18 and 20 formed a unity,²² with the same orientation and longitudinal axis. In the Roman period the construction of the two auxiliary structures ST 23 and 200 forced the entrance to ST 20 from the main entrance through ST 18 or from the lateral west door. The previous temple ST 18 was then used as a *propylon*, but its complex articulation with rooms, courtyards and upper floors, originally conceived as a proper temple, must have received new functions. Its ground floor became certainly a passageway, in its original fashion with covered, and dark or semi-dark rooms (A and G), and open-air courtyards (H and M). This would mean that during the processional feasts the god had to come out from ST 20 in the light of courtyard C1, pass into a dark zone in ST 18A-G before passing again in the light (H, M) and reach the *dromos*. This sounds quite improbable considering the ritual and symbolic aspects of the ‘come out’ of the god.²³ Thus, we can suppose that the restyling of ST 18 was much more complex than a simple opening of a new door in the rear wall in A. It probably involved the removal of the ceilings in A and G, and the raising of about 1.5 m of the floor level, as proved by the excavation in C1. As a consequence, the upper floors were also modified, at least in the central area of the building corresponding to A and G. In this context of deep renovation it is also possible that the doors were rebuilt.²⁴

In terms of relative chronology, we can imagine that the cults were celebrated in ST 18 until ST 20 was completed and the deities were transferred into it. Then the renovation of ST 18 began. During this period of works in ST 18 the courtyard C1 must have been accessible from both the east and west sides to allow access to ST 20. The two buildings became part of one project, together with the *dromos* and thus

²⁰ We can tentatively date the new building phase in the reign of Ptolemy VI or VIII according to some works done in the temple mentioned in Demotic papyri and based on parallels: Davoli, “The Temple Area of Soknopaiou Nesos” (2005) 103, 107. However, Stadler suggested the possibility of a Roman period foundation, based on the date of Demotic papyri describing the temple decoration: M.A. Stadler, “Interpreting the Architecture of the *Temenos*: Demotic Papyri and the Cult in Soknopaiou Nesos”, in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 379-381. However, it is highly possible that the temple was founded in the Ptolemaic period, but completed during the Roman period. For discussion on this hypothesis see further on.

²¹ Davoli, “Lo scavo archeologico: 2003-2009” (2012) 207-210.

²² The *contra-temple* ST 203 was certainly part of this unity, but I will not mention it as it is still to be excavated and is only partially visible.

²³ R.B. Finnestad, “Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient Traditions in New Contexts”, in: B.E. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York 1997) 185-237, esp. 210.

²⁴ These hypotheses must be archaeologically proved. ST 18 has never been excavated and its roofs are not preserved. However, parts of beams are still inserted into the walls and mark the presence of two roofs at different elevations. It should have been quite manageable to renovate or remove roofs made of wooden beams.

they must be considered as one temple. In this perspective, the ‘daily ritual’ of Soknopaios’ temple – a demotic text preserved in eleven copies, of which the most extensive is P.Berlin P7043+30030 – is perfectly consistent with the architectural evidence.²⁵ According to this text, the priests had to recite five spells in front of five consecutive gates before entering in the broad hall. M. Stadler noted that the text and the described procedure follow a long tradition in the Egyptian religion, but they were adapted to the local context and specifically refer to the presence of four gates into ST 18, to be passed toward the entrance of the temple. If this interpretation is correct, the compilation or adaptation of the ritual must have followed not only the building of the new temple ST 20, but also the renovation of ST 18.

The complex articulation of buildings and spaces differs from that of other known temples in the Fayyum, but the reuse of an older temple, instead of its demolition, during a new building phase and its integration in the same *temenos* is attested to at Bakchias.²⁶ Moreover, the plan of temple ST 20 follows the architectural scheme of the major Greco-Roman temples of Upper Egypt, like Dendera and Edfu, and it is very similar to the plan of Qasr Qarun/Dionysias temple (29.30 x 19.75 m).

The temple of Dionysias and ST20 are very close with regard to their plan, dimensions and building details, but with differences in the *sancta sanctorum*, the mysterious corridor, the position of some doors and of the crypts.²⁷ The similarities are so numerous that we can argue whether they were built in the same period and based on the same, but modified, project. Unfortunately, the decoration was not completed in either of them and thus their date remains uncertain. Dionysias temple is preserved up to the roof for about 10 meters with a complex subdivision of spaces and a roof sanctuary with lateral rooms. We can infer that a similar situation could have been reproduced in the Soknopaios’ temple. Some architectonic elements found so far prove that there were roof gutters decorated with lions statues, like in Dionysias and in Upper Egyptian temples. How the roof in the Soknopaios’ temple was structured, we will never know, and thus we can only try to find suggestions in parallels, texts and archaeological evidence. In fact, among the numerous architectonic fragments found in the debris that filled the temple,²⁸ many belonged to a series of small structures built in different kinds of local stones, which we cannot even suppose where they were located. One of the possibilities is that at least some of them were on the roof of the temple, like a sort of small kiosk of which forty complete blocks for screen walls and some pieces of columns survived.

According to Stadler, it is possible that the ceremonies connected with the New Year and the resurrection of Osiris took place, like in other sanctuaries, on the roof of the temple. That there were ceremonies celebrated on late Egyptian temples’ roofs is well known and they were deeply rooted in the Egyptian tradition. They are specially connected with the Osirian and solar cycles and thus it would not be surprising to find similar practices on the roof of the temple of Soknopaios.²⁹ The calendar of the feasts at Soknopaiou Nesos during the second century AD is known thanks to annual accounts of provisions due to the priests for the feasts.³⁰ From the first day of Thoth, seven days were dedicated to the New Year feast, while the birthday of Soknopaios was celebrated for 19 days starting from day 7 of Hathyr. This feast has been convincingly connected with the Osiris cults by G. Widmer, on the basis of the liturgical Demotic

²⁵ M.A. Stadler, “Das Ritual, den Tempel des Sobek, des Herren von Pai, zu betreten. Ein Ritualtext aus dem römischen Fayum”, in: B. Dücker and H. Roeder (eds.), *Text und Ritual. Essays und kulturwissenschaftliche Studien von Sesostris bis zu den Dadaisten (Hermeia 8; Heidelberg 2005)* 150-163; *id.*, “Zwischen Philologie und Archäologie” (2005).

²⁶ Davoli, “Examples of Town Planning in the Fayyum” (2005) 217-224.

²⁷ I would like to thank E. Papi from Siena University and director of the mission at Qasr Qarun for providing me with information and plans of the temple that are still unpublished. The measurements of these four temples are all different from each other, and those at Dendera and Edfu are about double size (but with different proportion) of those at Dionysias and Soknopaiou Nesos. The Soknopaios’ temple measures were not taken at the base of the external walls as they are not completely exposed.

²⁸ We must consider that the objects and architectonic elements found in this archaeological context are not in their original position, which could have been on upper storeys.

²⁹ It is well known that solar and funerary cults and rituals were celebrated in the late Egyptian temples. The architecture of the temples strictly reflects and is conditioned by these two opposite but contiguous aspects of the cosmos. The best documented is Dendera, but see also Khonsu temple at Karnak: S. Cauville, “Les mystères d’Osiris à Dendera. Interprétation des chapelles osiriennes”, *BSFE* 112 (1988) 23-36; J.-C. Degardin, “Le fonctionnement du toit du temple de Khonsou à Karnak”, *Cahiers de Karnak* 13 (2010) 227-241. On the complex meaning of the temple see Finnestad, “Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Period” (1997) 215-223; Stadler, “Interpreting the Architecture of the *Temenos*” (2012) 382-384.

³⁰ On these accounts and related bibliography see L. Capron, “Déclarations fiscales du temple de Soknopaiou Nêsos: éléments nouveaux”, *ZPE* 165 (2008) 133-160.

papyrus P.Berlin P 6750 (from Dime), in which a series of Osirian liturgical texts are copied.³¹ The theme of the passage of the power from Osiris to Horus son of Isis in these liturgical texts suggested to Widmer the possible identification of Soknopaias as the old crocodile with Osiris function and Soknopaios as the young crocodile enthroned as Horus. The strict connection between Soknopaios and the Osirian cycle and gods, is also stressed in another ritual text (P.Berlin P 7043+30030) and in the hymns P.BM EA 76638.³² The presence of Osiris in the *temenos* is now also testified to by two fragmentary bronze statuettes representing the god. They were found in room ST 20E and immediately outside it, to the east (fig. 6b).³³

Like in Dendera temple, the doors in ST 20 were built and decorated following a hierarchy.³⁴ For obvious motives, we can only evaluate the doors' width, the presence/absence of the torus mouldings around them and the number of the leafs (if one or two). The heights and the decoration of the lintels for the single doors are basically unknown. Those located on the main axis were all closed by two leafs, were surrounded by torus mouldings, and their width decreases towards the *naos*. This is particularly evident if we trace two lines connecting the jambs from north to south (fig. 4a). The space between these two lines decreases towards north: on the rear wall of the *sancta sanctorum* S this space measures 1.7 m and coincides with the surface of the wall that was not smoothed and that we suppose was the space occupied by the shrine. It is hard to think that this can be a mere coincidence. As P. Zignani pointed out in Dendera temple,³⁵ the widths of the doors on the central axis were calculated according to geometrical lines converging towards the bottom of the temple that coincides with the shrine. On the other end, the space between the two geometrical lines progressively increases towards south in Dime, and it remains roughly comprised in the doors' spaces in the ST 18 and coincides with the paving of the *dromos* that is rigorously contained between them (fig. 2).

Only two other doors, those of the side rooms G and O, were surrounded by torus mouldings and were originally closed by a double leafs wooden door. Room O is also the widest of the side rooms and appears to be the most important chapel. During its investigation five pieces of a female statue with an isiac dress were found, but several others fragments of the same monument were found scattered in different contexts. Thus, it is not possible to identify the destination of this chapel as well as that of room G based on what was inside their filling. In both cases the floors are missing and the only remarkable trace of furniture is a well-defined stain left on the walls in O. The stain suggests the presence of furniture of some kind, probably made of stone, abutting the west wall of the chapel on all its length (3.74 m); it was about 1 m deep and 0.70 m high.

It is tempting to suggest that the other two members of the triad, Isis Nepherses and Soknopaias,³⁶

³¹ The diffusion of the Osirian cycle interpreted by two forms of Sobek in the Fayyum seems to be confirmed by other documents as well as the diffusion of the cult of Isis and of Horus son of Isis. See G. Widmer, "Un papyrus démotique religieux du Fayoum: P.Berlin 6750", *BSEG* 22 (1998) 83-91; *ead.*, "Les fêtes en l'honneur de Sobek dans le Fayoum à l'époque gréco-romaine", *Égypte, Afrique et Orient* 32 (2003) 3-22, esp. 15-20; *ead.*, "On Egyptian Religion at Soknopaiu Nesos in the Roman Period (P.Berlin 6750)", in: S. Lippert and M. Schentuleit (eds.), *Tebtynis und Soknopaiu Nesos. Leben im römerzeitlichen Fajum. Akten des Internationalen Symposions vom 11. bis 13. Dezember 2003 in Sommerhausen bei Würzburg* (Wiesbaden 2005) 171-184.

³² Stadler, "Das Ritual, den Tempel des Sobek" (2005) 291; G. Widmer, "Sobek who arises in the Primaeval Ocean (PBM EA 76638 and PStrasbourg Dem. 31)", in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *New Archaeological and Papyrological Researches on the Fayyum* (2005) 345-354, esp. 351-52. See also G. Tallet, "Isis, the Crocodiles and the Mysteries of the Nile Floods: Interpreting a Scene from Roman Egypt Exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 30001)", in: A. Mastrocinque and C. Giuffrè Scibona (eds.), *Demeter, Isis, Vesta, and Cybele. Studies in Greek and Roman Religion in Honour of Giulia Sfameni Gasparro* (Potsdam 2012) 149-151.

³³ Inv. nrs. ST05/251/1469, ST09/601/2664. A limestone statue of Osiris in throne was documented by K.R. Lepsius during his visit of the site in 6 and 7 July 1843 (*LD II*, 37). The same statue was photographed by W.M.F. Petrie in 1889 (see Griffith Institute archive: nr. 935 in http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/ppoe_opening_page.html). Unfortunately, it is not clear where this statue originally was. Since then it has disappeared.

³⁴ Zignani, "Le temple d'Hathor à Dendera" (2009) 272-275. On the importance of the doors and gates in temple architecture see also Finnestad, "Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Period" (1997) 210.

³⁵ Zignani, "Le temple d'Hathor à Dendera" (2009) 272-275.

³⁶ The triad of Dime is not explicitly mentioned in any text, but the frequent mention of these three deities strictly connected to each other makes this possibility plausible. A basalt statuette dated to the Late Period suggests another triad. Hor-wja, a priest of Sobek-*en-pa-*iw**, Isis-Neferset and Renenutet, dedicated it: W. Spiegelberg, *Demotica II (Sitzungsberichte der bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse 1928/2; Munich 1928)*

were hosted in these two major chapels and that the *synnaoi theoi*, and possibly the royal ancestors, were located in the side chapels of the mysterious corridor. Unfortunately, there is no archaeological evidence found *in situ* that can suggest the name of the deities living in the temple. Despite the large number of Greek and Demotic texts coming from Dime, the local pantheon is not well known.³⁷ a number of temples, chapels and altars are mentioned, but in many cases it is not clear where they were located, whether inside the *temenos* or even outside the settlement. We are aware that in the Roman period the main temple was classified as a first rank temple (*P.Louvre* I 2, AD 133) and that it was dedicated to Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses. Soknopiais has been considered as part of the local triad because of his strict connection with Soknopaios in the texts. Isis Nephremmis and Serapis were probably part of the *synnaoi theoi* to which Rübsam suggested to add Ammonapis, Apis, Horus/Harpocrates and Amun, who is mentioned in several Roman period oracular questions alone or together with Soknopiais.³⁸ A Demotic Roman period temple inventory (P.Berlin 6848), recently published, raises the question about the location of two chapels which the inventory refers to, the chapel (*h'* shrine) of Isis and the side-chapel of the lionesses. The text mentions two other unknown local gods, Satabous and Harpagathes, whose items were listed with those belonging to the two already mentioned chapels. It has been suggested that these two names “could have been personal names of sacred crocodiles who had undergone the process of mummification and associated funeral rites”.³⁹

The association of two crocodile gods, Soknopaios and Soknopiais, led Widmer to suggest the above-mentioned explanation about their role in the osirian annual ritual based on texts. The couple of crocodiles in the Fayyum sanctuaries is a quite common recurrence; they have been considered as brothers to be identified with the Dioscuri.⁴⁰ Capron has recently proposed such an identification of Soknopaios and Soknopiais with the Dioscuri on the base of weak evidence.⁴¹ A temple dedicated to the Dioscuri is mentioned in a Roman period inventory list (*BGU* XIII 2217, col. II, 2; second century AD) and a complete limestone *naos*, now in Cairo Egyptian Museum, was dedicated to them in 50 AD. Its shape is suitable to host statues and not crocodile mummies.⁴² In both cases there is no evidence that can suggest the location of the temple or shrine dedicated to the twin gods. We can now add a new piece of evidence concerning the Dioscuri at Dime, although it cannot be considered as a proof of the presence of their shrine inside the *temenos*. It is an impression of a seal on a mud sealing (*cretula*) found along the west side of the ST 20 temple (fig. 7a). In it the twin gods are represented with their horses and spears.

The shape of the *sancta sanctorum* (ST 20M+S) differs from the others in the Fayyum temples being bipartite on its length: a long room M (6.3 m north-south, 3.6 m east-west) precedes what we can consider as the *naos* S (2 m north-south and 3.6 m east-west). In my opinion, the image of Soknopaios was kept in room S, the smaller of the two, in which the available space for a shrine is quite narrow. The shrine abutted the rear wall in its centre, where an area of *ca.* 1.6 m was not smoothed as was the rest of the

55-56. Its provenance is unknown, however, and its date would raise the question about the existence of a pre-Ptolemaic temple and settlement at the site, which is not impossible, but not yet proved: see n. 7.

³⁷ W.J.R. Rübsam, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum während der griechisch-römisch-byzantinischen Zeit* (Bonn 1974) 154-172; É. Bernand, “Épigraphie et histoire des cultes au Fayoum”, in: *Hommages à la mémoire de S. Sauneron 1927-1976* II (*BdE* 81; Le Caire 1979) 57-76, *passim*; L. Bricault, “Isis Néphersès”, in: W. Clarysse, A. Schoors and H. Willems (eds.), *Egyptian Religion. The Last Thousand Years. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jean Quaegebeur* I (*OLA* 85; Leuven 1998) 521-528. For the Ptolemaic period see P. Bottigelli, “Repertorio topografico dei templi e dei sacerdoti dell’Egitto tolemaico. II”, *Aegyptus* 22 (1942) 177-265, esp. 188-196.

³⁸ On Ammonapis see also T. Dousa, F. Gaudard and J.H. Johnson, “P.Berlin 6848, a Roman Period Temple Inventory” in: F. Hoffmann and H.J. Thissen (eds.), *Res Severa Verum Gaudium. Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich zum 65. Geburtstag am 8. Juni 2004* (Leuven 2004) 139-222, esp. 163, l. 2/15; on Amun and oracular questions: G. Bastianini, “Una domanda oracolare da Soknopaiou Nesos (*P.Vindob.* G298)”, in: *Paideia Cristiana. Studi in onore di Mario Naldini* (Rome 1994) 189-197, esp. 191. A new oracular question of Roman period addressed to Amun was found in ST 20Y in 2008 (ST08/533/2389): Capasso, “I papiri e gli ostraka greci” (2012) 240, nr 92.

³⁹ Dousa, Gaudard and Johnson, “P.Berlin 6848, a Roman Period Temple Inventory” (2004) 195; see also 192-196.

⁴⁰ J. Quaegebeur, “Cultes égyptiens et grecs en Égypte hellénistique: l’exploitation des sources”, in: *Egypt and the Hellenistic World* (*StudHell* 27; Leuven 1983) 303-324, esp. 113-16. On the diffusion of the Dioscuri cult in the Fayyum see also Bernand, “Épigraphie et histoire des cultes au Fayoum” (1979) 70.

⁴¹ Capron, “Déclarations fiscales” (2008) 155, l. 64-65.

⁴² *IGFayoum* I 74 (50 AD) and G. Roeder, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du musée du Caire. Nos 70001-70050. Naos* (Leipzig 1914) 112, nr. 9287, pl. 35b and 64d.

surface. Considering that the double leaf door opened inside room S just in front of the shrine, the space left for it was at most 1.3 m deep. This piece of evidence suggests that the shrine for the image of the god was about 1.6 m wide and less than 1.3 m deep, a measure that is not enough to contain a crocodile mummy on a litter. As a consequence, we should think of a shrine for a statue.

Soknopaios, or ‘*Sobek neb Pay*’, like Sobek, was considered a universal god in the Graeco-Roman period, a god of fertility with solar and cosmic characters, a god of the origin with a strict connection with the royal power.⁴³ Images of Soknopaios from Dime are not numerous. He is represented in his animal shape, with a combination of crocodile body and falcon head, or in an anthropoid shape with a crocodile head.⁴⁴ We can thus speculate about the shape of the statue of the god in his shrine. The archaeological evidence has not been of much help up to now: several pieces of limestone crocodile statuettes were found in different contexts during the excavation, but because of their small size it is difficult to establish whether they were cult statues. An image of the god as a crocodile with falcon head is impressed on a mud sealing still preserved on a Greek papyrus found in room ST 20E. The god, in the classical position with the hanging tile, wears the double crown of Egypt (*pschent*) (fig. 7b).⁴⁵

Another possible representation of the god is on a Roman period stele found during the 2010 season on the external floor in front of the lateral door of the temple (fig. 8c).⁴⁶ The god is represented with a human body, sitting on a throne, and with three heads: the central is a frontal male face, while the two laterals are those of a crocodile and of a falcon placed instead of the ears.⁴⁷ The three-headed god wears the *pschent* crown and holds the sceptre *was* in his left hand. The celebration of the sacred kingship on the stele is also confirmed by two falcon figures represented on both sides of the god and wearing the *pschent*. The frontal face of a king is a recurrent iconographical theme in the Fayyum and represents Premarres, Mestasytmis (‘the ears who listen’) or Pnepheros, already identified by Bresciani with the hypostasis of the divine kingship and thus with ‘Sobek-Horus who lives in Shedet’.⁴⁸ However, these gods wear the *nemes* and not the *pschent* and use to have prominent ears. Despite these variants, it seems probable that the god represented on the Dime stele should be identified as Soknopaios in his function of ‘Soknopaios who listens to the prayers’. The oracular function of Soknopaios is well known from a number of Greek and Demotic oracular questions on papyri of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The presence inside the *temenos* of a chapel of ‘Soknopaios who listens to the prayers’ with a monumental gate has been supposed by Stadler, who suggests its possible location at the rear of ST 20, in the columned building ST 203 still to be excavated.⁴⁹ The few representations of Soknopaios from Dime seem to be characterized by the *pschent* crown, which is very distorted on the Roman period stele of the ram breeders.⁵⁰

Other few objects recently found are related to *synnaoi theoi*, like a small wooden tablet⁵¹ (fig. 8b) of indefinite usage that was found on top of the ruined walls of the north side of the *temenos* of ST 18. On the smooth surface the rough representation of the bust of the god Amun is traced with black ink.⁵² The

⁴³ See *Sbk-n-P3-iv: LGG* VI, 261; Widmer, “Sobek who arises in the Primaeval Ocean” (2005).

⁴⁴ Two stelae from Dime: *IGFayoum* I 73 and 76.

⁴⁵ The image of the god on the *cretula* ST05/251/1092 is very similar to that on the stele dedicated to the breeders of the rams (24 BC), where the crown is much more stylized: *IGFayoum* I 73. The papyrus ST05/251/1092 is a fiscal account dated to the fifth year of Tiberius: Capasso, “I papiri e gli ostraka greci” (2012) 239, nr 66.

⁴⁶ Limestone stele (ST10/731/3533) of 23 x 23 x 9.3 cm, with incomplete text in Greek mentioning an emperor.

⁴⁷ On these iconographic features of Sobek, see Tallet, “Isis, the Crocodiles and the Mysteries of the Nile Floods: Interpreting a Scene from Roman Egypt Exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 30001)” (2012) 149-151; V. Rondot, « Le dieu du relief Caire CG 27569 », in: C. Zivie-Coche and I. Guerneur (eds.), « *Parcourir l'éternité* ». *Hommages à Jean Yoyotte* II (*BEHE SR* 156; Paris 2012) 947-963.

⁴⁸ G. Wagner and J. Quaegebeur, “Une dédicace grecque au dieu égyptien Mestasytmis de la part de son synode (Fayoum, époque romaine)”, *BIFAO* 73 (1973) 41-61; E. Bresciani, “Iconografia e culto di Premarres nel Fayum”, *EVO* 9 (1986) 49-58, esp. 53. See also Y. Volokhine, “Une désignation de la ‘face divine’ *hꜣwt- hꜣwtꜣ*”, *BIFAO* 101 (2001) 381-383.

⁴⁹ Stadler, “Interpreting the Architecture of the *Temenos*” (2012) § III.

⁵⁰ *IGFayoum* I 73. Another kind of crown is on the stele *IGFayoum* I 76, where Soknopaios is sitting on a throne and wears a crown with double feather. Unfortunately, his face is badly damaged. Both crowns are common to representations of the god Sobek/Suchos.

⁵¹ ST03/3/1007: 14.3 x 5.3 x 1.8 cm.

⁵² The drawing looks like a rough sketch; the identification with Amun is due to the crown with two feathers and the sun-disk in between. The beard and the long ribbon on the back are missing.

god, turned towards left, wears the traditional crown with two high feathers. The god Amun was certainly part of the local pantheon, but up to now he was represented only by some oracular questions addressed directly to him or to Amun-Soknopiais.⁵³ The findspot of the tablet suggests the roof of ST 18 as its possible origin.

The frontal bust of Serapis is engraved on the round base of a wooden seal used to impress mud stoppers, dated to the first-second centuries AD (fig. 8a).⁵⁴ It was found in the filling of the chapel G, collected to serve as fuel in a Late Antique context. It is difficult to establish if it was used as an official seal of the temple, but it can certainly be associated with the practice of sealing wine jars stoppers. These kinds of seals could have been used in different contexts to guarantee the content of a vessel in the place where it was produced, during its commercial life or even, as suggested by K. Vandorpe, at its destination place. Assuming that this wooden seal was originally used inside the temple (probably in service buildings), it could be associated with the *sarapeia* feast⁵⁵ and the use of wine for aspersions during the celebrations. Wine destined to this particular feast could have been put in jars sealed and marked with a sealing that bears the image of the god.

Numerous are the pieces of shrines in stone or wood recovered in the 2003-2010 excavation seasons. Of these, only the wooden fragments have been studied so far and tentatively interpreted as shrines and portable *naoi* of the traditional shape, suitable for statues and not for crocodile mummies. The lack of inscriptions and the poor state of preservation of the findings prevent us from knowing the names of the deities hosted in each one. The accurate study of the wooden furniture pieces and of its decoration with glass inlays suggests that there were at least five *naoi*, of which two shrines and three portable shrines datable to the Ptolemaic period.⁵⁶ Thus, they had different functions, as fixed furniture, probably located in the wider chapels and/or in the *naos* to house the cult statues, and movable shrines used only during the feasts. The shrines were bigger than the portable shrines and their decoration was in relief; one of them bears the *serekh* of Ptolemy III.

The numerous fragments and abundant figurative evidence used as parallels allowed a fairly good reconstruction of the portable shrines. It has been calculated that two of these portable shrines should have had the dimensions (*ca.* h 75 x 39 x 50 cm) and also the shape of those represented in Dendera temple relieves, brought by the priests on the staircases up to the roof during the feasts of the New Year. These kinds of small shrines were common in several temples as it is testified to by figurative scenes and by fragments of their parts found in many archaeological sites in Egypt and dated from the 26th dynasty onward. Also the decoration with glass inlays seems to be quite common and uniform, with representation of a king, followed by a queen, making offering in front of a deity. Most of the glass inlays, that were part of figurative scenes, found so far in Soknopaiou Nesos, attest to the presence of figures representing kings, queens, Horus/Harpocrates and Isis. This evidence is consistent with the rituals of the New Year feast and of the Osiris cycle, and supports the idea that in ST 20 temple these ceremonies were held on the roof sanctuary, where the images of the gods were transported in these small shrines through the staircases, like in Dendera temple. The Demotic liturgical compendium P.Berlin P 6750 and these portable shrines can thus possibly be related to the same feasts.

The third portable shrine was bigger (*ca.* h 150 x 80 x 100 cm) and could have been transported with a litter out of the temple along the *dromos* during the processional feasts.

Mentions of wooden *naoi* can be found in Soknopaios' temple inventories of the Roman period,

⁵³ Amun-Re is also mentioned in the dedication formula on the statue of Sobekhotep, governor of the Fayyum in the 18th Dynasty (reign of Amenhotep III), that it is said to have been found at Dime: K. Lembke, "Dimeh. Römische Repräsentationskunst im Fayyum", *JDAI* 113 (1998) 110; M. Zecchi, *Geografia religiosa del Fayyum. Dalle origini al IV secolo a.C.* (Imola 2001) 226.

⁵⁴ ST06/344/1414 (h: 4,1 cm; ø: 4,2 cm): M. Capasso and P. Davoli, "Due sigilli in legno e una lucerna con centauromachia di Eracle da Soknopaiou Nesos (El-Fayyum, Egitto)", in: M. Lombardo and C. Marangio (eds.), *Antiquitas. Scritti di storia antica in onore di Salvatore Alessandrì* (Galatina 2011) 47-56.

⁵⁵ F. Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine d'après la documentation papyrologique grecque* (*StudHell* 31; Leuven 1993) 129-136.

⁵⁶ A. Cervi, "L'arredo ligneo del tempio di Soknopaios", in: Capasso and Davoli (eds.), *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I* (2012) 169-314.

but their descriptions are too generic to allow any identification.⁵⁷ Despite the ubiquitous presence of these fragments in the stratigraphic units of the temple area, it is worth mentioning that the highest concentration of them is in the area of the *naos* and the lateral chapels, with a major concentration in the *naos* M, the vestibule L, the chapel O and the room E.⁵⁸ A number of pieces found in the crypt Q (below the east staircase) suggested a possible location at least of one of the small portable shrines.⁵⁹

The shape of all these shrines, if their reconstructions are correct, are consistent with statues of deities instead of crocodile mummies, whose presence in a temple dedicated to Sobek is expected.⁶⁰ The characteristic shrine with long and narrow barrel-vaulted niches, typical of the Fayyum temples *naoi*, is not present among the findings, but deep barrel-vaulted niches were probably located at upper levels in the building, as attested to by some curved limestone blocks of the vaults found in the debris immediately outside the temple along its east and west sides.

The archaeological investigation of the temple dedicated to Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses substantially increased our understanding of religious, cultural and social aspects of this important temple of the Fayyum. The large number of religious and administrative texts coming from past excavations are now integrated with new texts and data. Textual and archaeological data are part of the same puzzle and receive a better interpretation within a multidisciplinary approach. The archaeological research is only at the beginning and further investigations are desirable to improve our knowledge of this desert *komê* and its inhabitants.

⁵⁷ F. Burkhalter, "Le mobilier des sanctuaires d'Égypte et les listes des prêtres et du *cheirismos*", *ZPE* 59 (1985) 123-134, esp. 132-133.

⁵⁸ A lot of unfinished glass inlays and residues of their production from the workshop was found concentrated in room ST 20E and suggests the idea that the furniture and/or its decoration were made in Soknopaiou Nesos; the extra pieces were probably kept for future restorations in a container placed in this room: A. Cervi, "L'arredo ligneo del tempio di Soknopaios" (2012), 313-314.

⁵⁹ The other crypts are too small to contain a portable shrine.

⁶⁰ Scattered bones of mummified crocodiles were found in ST 20 and ST 24-25 areas.

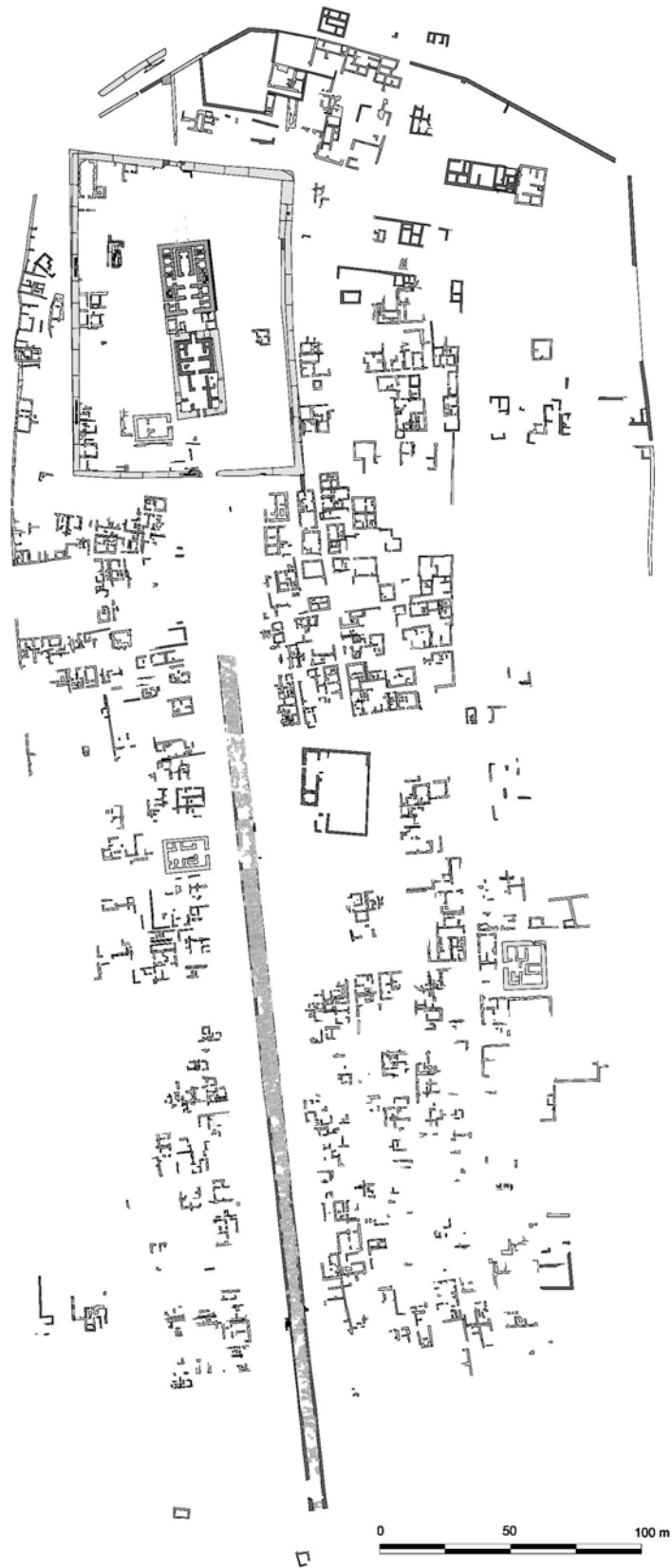


Fig. 1. Dime plan 2010.



Fig. 2. The *temenos* and the *dromos* with the projection of geometrical lines.

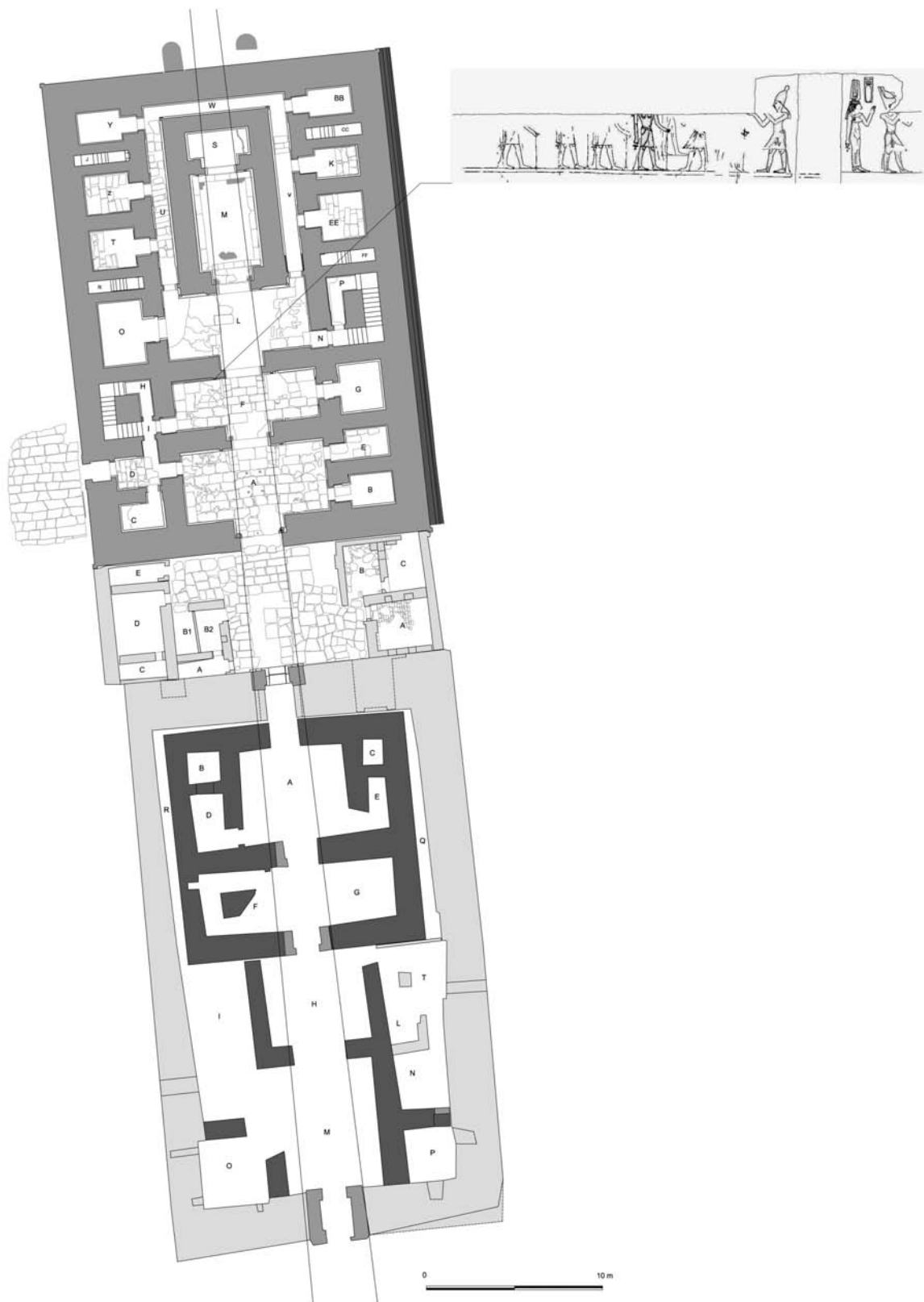


Fig. 3. Plan of ST 18 and ST 20 with projection of the geometrical lines. In the side box relief from room F.



Fig. 4a. Dime from south: the *dromos* and the *temenos*.



Fig. 4b. View of ST 20 from south (2008).



Fig. 5a. The temple ST 20 and ST 18 from north to south.



Fig. 5b. East side of temple ST 20.



Fig. 6a. West side of temple ST 20.

Objects found in the temple excavation 2003-2010



Fig. 6b1 et 6b2. Osiris bronze statuettes.



Fig. 7a. *Cretula* with impression. Dioscuri with horses.



Fig. 7b. *Cretula* on papyrus. Soknopaios as crocodile with falcon head.

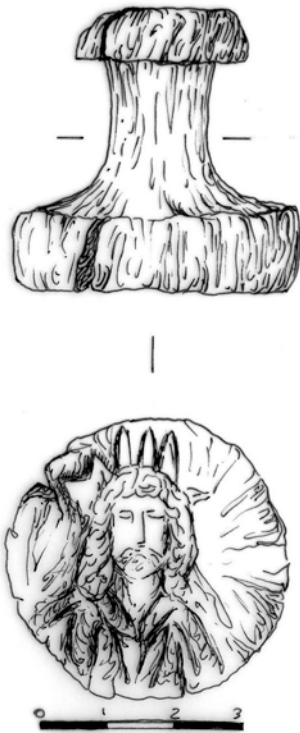


Fig. 8a. Wooden seal with the bust of Sarapis.

Fig. 8b. Infra-red image of wooden tablet with Amun.



Fig. 8c. Roman period stele ST10/731/3533.

De nombreux étudiants, collègues et amis de Françoise Dunand, professeur émérite d'histoire des religions à l'université de Strasbourg, ont souhaité s'associer à l'hommage qui lui est rendu à travers ces deux volumes. La diversité des contributions organisées par thèmes reflète parfaitement le parcours singulier de la récipiendaire. De formation classique, Françoise Dunand s'est très vite orientée vers la papyrologie grecque d'abord, puis vers l'étude des cultes isiaques, ainsi qu'on les a appelés. Sa rencontre avec l'Égypte fut décisive pour le choix ultérieur de ses champs d'études : religion dans l'Égypte hellénistique et romaine sous ses formes de continuité et d'innovations, travail de terrain dans les nécropoles des oasis occidentales, poursuivi aujourd'hui encore. Reflet même de son enseignement et de ses recherches, témoignage de son rayonnement, on passera des éditions de papyrus au « cercle isiaque », des pratiques funéraires de l'Égypte tardive en faveur des hommes comme des animaux, du rôle des images à l'histoire des religions, des études sur les oasis à celles sur les femmes.

