

**SOKNOPAIU NESOS PROJECT**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION OF THE CENTRO DI STUDI PAPIROLOGICI  
OF SALENTO UNIVERSITY (LECCE) AT SOKNOPAIU NESOS/DIME ES-SEBA  
(EL-FAYYUM - EGYPT)  
FOURTEENTH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEASON, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2017.**

## Introduction

The archaeological Mission of the Centro di Studi Papirologici of the University of Salento, Lecce, led by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli, carried out the annual Archaeological Season at Dime es-Seba (El-Fayyum), the ancient Soknopaiou Nesos from 29<sup>th</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

The team consisted of Stefania Alfarano (supervisor archaeologist), Ashraf Barakat (Assistant to Directors), Bruno Bazzani (computer management and photographer), Louise Bertini (American University in Cairo, Palaeozoologist), Alberto Buonfino (Papyrologist and Registrar), Massimo Limoncelli (archaeologist, 3D modelling), Cesare Iezzi (archaeologist), Filippo Mi (Egyptologist), Roberta Petrilli (Egyptologist), Valeria Rizzo (ceramologist), Francesca Silvestrelli (senior ceramologist), Martin Andreas Stadler (demotist, Würzburg Universität). The Ministry of Antiquities was represented by inspectors Nesma Hussein Abd el-Aal, Ahmed Hassan, and Mustafa Faisal Hemeda. Fatma Hussein Rabeea from Fayyum Inspectorate, participated in attending a complete training with the Mission.

The Mission would like to thank Prof. Dr. Khaled el-Anany, Minister of Antiquities and Heritage, Dr. Mustafa El Waziry SCA Secretary General, Dr. Mohammed Ismail General Director of the Foreign Missions, Sayed Shura Director of the Inspectorate of Antiquities of Fayyum, for the support received in the course of the works. Warm thanks are due to the Provost of the University of Salento, prof. Vincenzo Zara and to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for the financial support granted for 2017. The Mission also expresses its gratitude to cav. Luca Trombi and to the “Friends of Soknopaiou Nesos Project”, who have assured a generous financial support to the Mission. Sincere thanks also to the Istituto Internazionale di Studi Borgiani of Velletri, chaired by dr. Rigel Langella; to Mehen, Studiecentrum voor het Oude Egypte (The Hague), and to Huis van Horus (Leiden), and to the Centro Italiano di Cultura in Cairo.

## Temple ST 203

The excavated area is immediately north of the temple dedicated to the god Soknopaios already fully investigated and labeled ST 20 (Fig. 1). The new building ST 203 is a *contra-temple* built against the rear wall of temple ST 20. ST 203 extends north to south for 14.66 m and from east to west for 12.30 m (figs. 2, 3). The building was partially excavated during the 2016 season, when three rooms and a pseudo-peripteral chapel had been fully investigated. The temple has an unusual shape, similar to a kiosk, with 4 columns per side, joined by screen-walls and 4 columns in the middle of the building (fig. 4). Unlike the kiosks, however, our building had a flat roof made in local stone lintels. It was built with yellow local limestone blocks probably in the 1st century AD

and then it was restored, perhaps at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, with the addition of a second floor in the central nave and internal screen-walls. A revetment of the external walls covering the strongly eroded blocks at the base of the walls and a new external paving were also built, in continuity with the same type of intervention carried out outside the temple ST 20. This second stage of construction is characterized by the use of beige or gray-violet local limestone and the use of basalt elements. The construction of the pseudo-peripteral chapel inside room A, found in 2016, refers also to the restoration phase.

The area excavated during 2017 corresponds to the entrance room E (11 x 8.20 m) and to part of the area to the west of the building (17 x 6 m). Room E is characterized by 4 columns, of which one is demolished down to the base (fig. 5). The floor in yellow limestone slabs is preserved in the south half of the room, while there are two major gaps caused by the excavation of two robbery pits in the north corners.

During the second construction phase a new floor was prepared in the central nave: only part of the layer of lime on which the tiles were disposed is preserved. It reveals a composite floor, consisting of tiles arranged in diagonal within rectangular frames and bounded by two curbs. Several of these floor elements have been found scattered in the debris filling room E. These have helped in the reconstruction of part of the pavement.

The temple is preserved up to a height of about 2 meters and was demolished in the past like ST 20. The demolition was more intense and systematic in the north half of the building. In the filling, consisting of mixed wind-blown sand and debris resulting from the demolition of the building itself, numerous architectural elements from the *contra-temple* and also from chapels likely to be located nearby, were found. Numerous local limestone architraves of ST 203 ceiling were recovered and removed from the room.

A thick layer of organic soil was on the limestone floor and attests to the presence of a late-antique community and animals during the 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, already found in 2016 in the three chapels (A, B and C). A Christian cross traced in black ink on the western jamb of the door between rooms E and A is another evidence of this late phase (fig. 7).

The excavation of the area outside the temple along its western side had begun this year (fig. 6). In a layer of debris deriving from the dismantling of the temples ST 20 and ST 203, about 1 meter thick and very compact, numerous architectural elements, such as two gutters and a guardian lion of a gutter, were recovered. The latter (120 x 39 cm, h 70 cm) represents the front part of a couched lion lacking only of its right paw (fig. 8). This compact debris layer protected a floor made with local limestone slabs during the phase of restoration of ST 203.

In this season other fragments of the unique architectural model of ST 203, many of which had already been recovered in 2016, have been found, like columns, a composite capital, and parts

of the roof (fig. 9). The model does not reflect the real *contra-temple* on one side, probably modified during the construction. The reproduction is in scale 1:12.

Among the materials found there are small statues and fragments of statues depicting lions, part of a Greek inscription mentioning Ptolemy Philometor, a monolithic altar in local limestone, a papyrus amulet, two demotic *ostraka*, two Greek *ostraka*, four Greek papyri containing documentary texts of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, fragments of painted wooden panels with Greek inscriptions, various *faïence* amulets.

### **Preliminary report on the analyzed faunal remains during the 2017 Dime excavation season**

by Louise Bertini (SEA Department, Egyptology Unit, American University in Cairo)

The assemblage of archaeozoological remains that has been analyzed during the 2017 Dime excavation season focused on the remains from the Contra-temple. The total examined bones assemblage from all examined units consisted of a total of 641 elements (Table 1).

All bone fragments were examined, with information being recorded for each on its taxon, element, portion, side, age, butchery marks, being worked, gnawed, burn marks, erosion and breakage patterns. Fragments of limb bones, ribs, and vertebrae that were identifiable only by mammal size were counted, but not weighed. The ageing methods for bones that were used are Silver (1969), Grant (1982) and Payne (1973). Measurements, when possible, were also taken on all adult (fused) mammalian fragments, as described by von den Driesch (1976). The number of identified specimens (NISP) will be used to quantify the abundance of each taxon. The NISP will be used to establish ratios to estimate the relative importance of animals.

The mammals, birds, and fish at Dime from the 2017 season are represented by a total of 311 elements that could be identified to its genus (Table 1). While domestic mammals do seem to be more prevalent over fish and birds, this is partly skewed as there are many rodents and bats in the mammal assemblage which does skew the results a bit as they are likely intrusive. Cattle do seem to be the dominant animal and the mallard duck is the most frequently identified bird. There are, however, a wide variety of bird species present (Table 1), with notably frequent ostrich eggshells in the assemblage. These eggshells, however, are more likely evidence of offering vessels than consumption, given that they come from a temple context.

Driesch, A. von den. 1976. *A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites*. Peabody Museum Bulletin I. Boston: Harvard University.

Grant, A. 1982. The use of tooth wear as a guide to the age of domestic ungulates. *Ageing and Sexing Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites*. BAR Series 109.

Payne, S. 1973. Kill off patterns in sheep and goats: the mandibles from Asvan Kale. *Anatolian Studies* 23.

Silver, I.A. 1969. The ageing of domestic animals. *Science in Archaeology*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

<b>Taxon</b>	<b>Total NISP</b>
<i>Bagrus bajad</i> (bagrus catfish)	3
<i>Lates niloticus</i> (Nile perch)	9
<i>Siluriformes sp.</i> (unidentified catfish)	27
<i>Synodontis sp.</i> (Synodontis catfish)	4
<i>Tilapia</i> (tilapia)	14
<b>TOTAL FISH</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>Anser anser</i> (domestic goose)	9
<i>Anas crecca</i> (teal)	2
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> (mallard)	20
<i>Corvus cornix</i> (hooded crow)	4
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i> (kestrel)	1
<i>Fulica atra</i> (coot)	2
<i>Gruidae</i> (crane)	2
<i>Passeriform</i> (perching bird)	15
<i>Pelecanidae</i> (pelican)	2
<i>Puffinus sp.</i> (shearwarer)	6
<i>Streptopelia turtur</i> (turtle dove)	1
<i>Struthio camelus</i> (ostrich)- eggshell	25
<b>TOTAL BIRDS</b>	<b>89</b>
<i>Bos taurus</i> (cattle)	32
<i>Canis familiaris</i> (dog)	2
<i>Chiroptera</i> (bat)	18
<i>Equus africanus asinus</i> (donkey)	3
<i>Felis catus</i> (domestic cat)	2
<i>Lepus capensis</i> (hare)	26
<i>Ovis aries</i> (sheep)	1
<i>Ovis/Capra</i> (sheep/goat)	6
<i>Rodentia</i> (rodent)	75
<b>TOTAL MAMMALS</b>	<b>165</b>
Unidentified Fish	15
Unidentified Bird	87
Unidentified Mammal	11
Medium Mammal	2
Medium-Large Mammal	103
Large Mammal	100
<i>Homo sapiens</i> (human)	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>641</b>

**Table 1:** Number of Identified specimens (NISP).

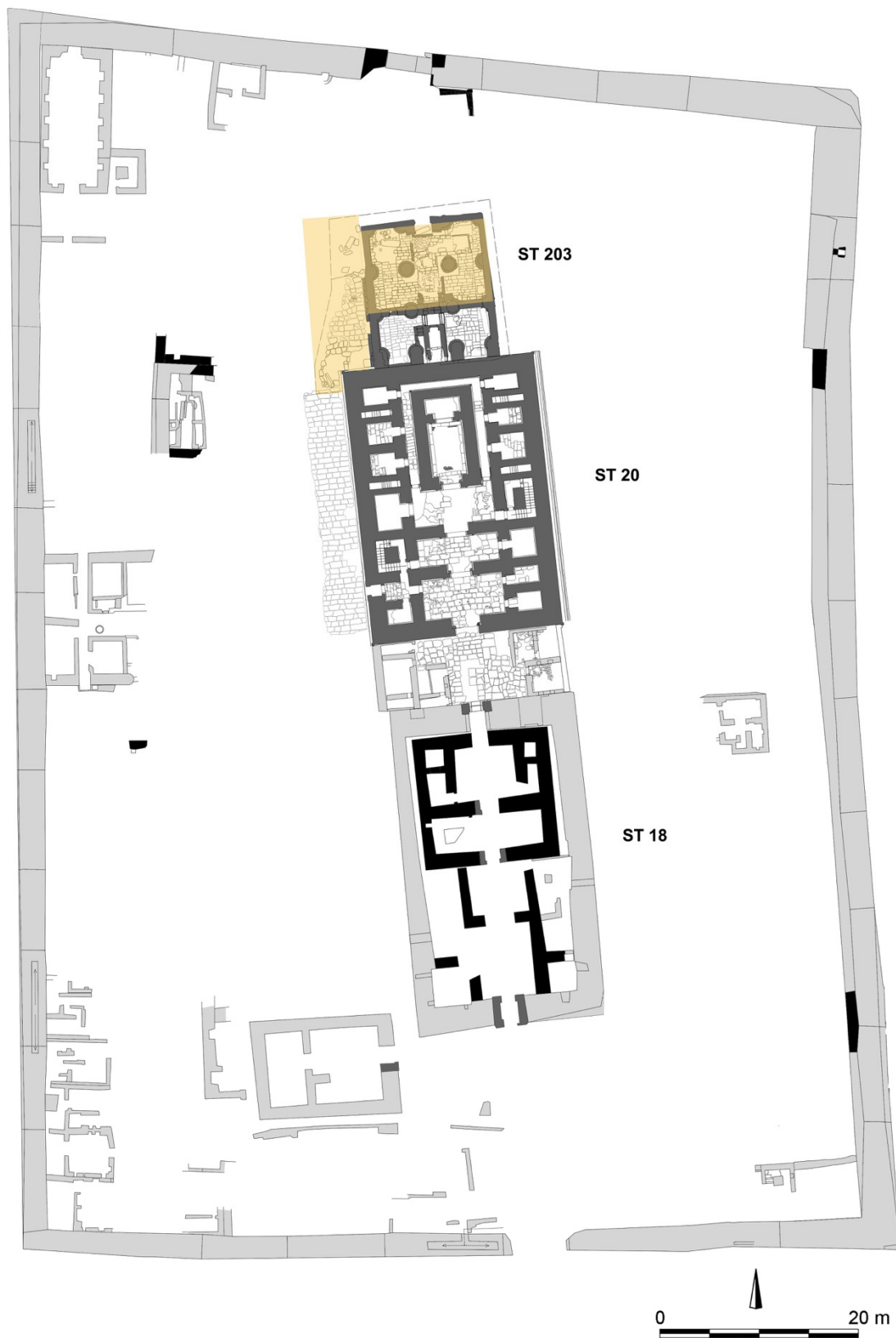


Fig. 1: 2017 excavated area in the *temenos* of Soknopaïos.



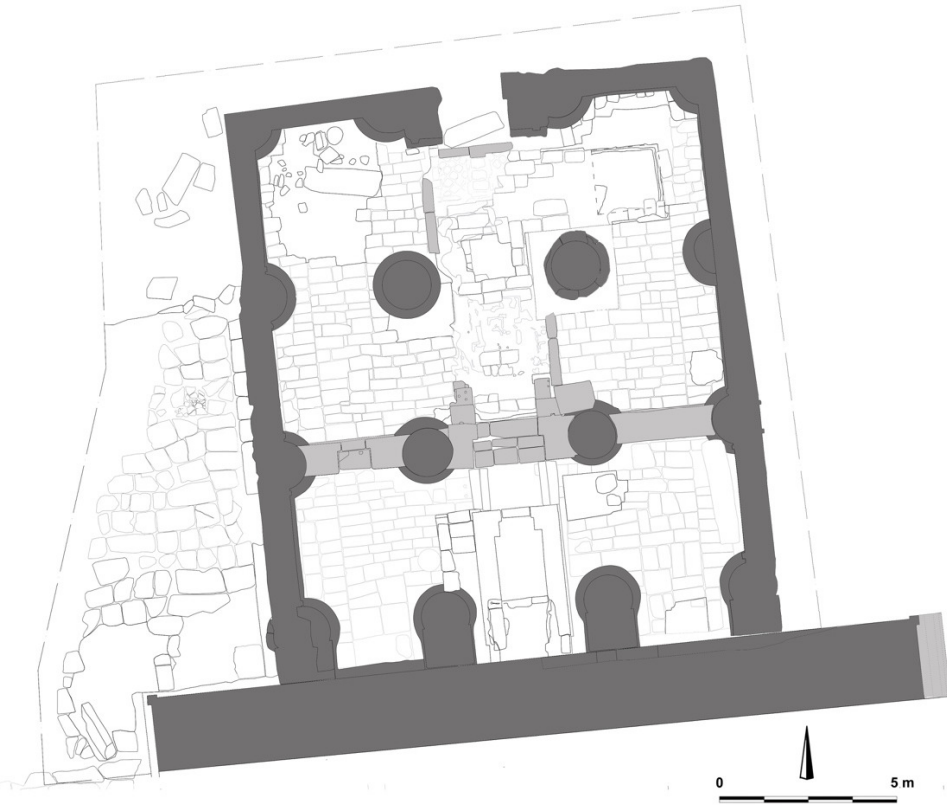


Fig. 2: plan of *contra-temple* ST 203.



Fig. 3: orthophoto of ST 203 at the end of the excavation.





Fig. 4: view from North to South of the *contra-temple*.



Fig. 5: view from West to East of room E.





Fig. 6: floor west of ST 203.



Fig. 7: cross in black ink on the West jamb of the door between rooms E and A.





Fig. 8: lion for gutter.



Fig. 9: architectural model of ST 203.