

## **DIRECTORS' REPORT ON 2004 SEASON AT DIME ES-SEBA/SOKNOPAIU NESOS (EL-FAYYUM)**

After a first season held together with Bologna University, the Centre for Papyrological Studies decided to continue the works on the site autonomously beginning from 2004 season. The archaeological mission, directed by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli, carried out its second excavation season at Dime (El-Fayyum), a Graeco-Roman town on the north edge of Lake Qarun. The works were concentrated in the courtyard of the temple found in 2003, in the middle of the great *temenos* area dedicated to the god Soknopaios. A subsidiary mud-brick building on the east side of the courtyard was completely brought to light (ST 200), as well as part of a second structure located on the western side (ST 23). A rubble mound, created by previous excavators in close proximity to this area, was also excavated.

### **Team 2004**

Mario Capasso (director), Paola Davoli (director), Angela Cervi (recorder), Fabio Congedo (topographer), Valentino Desantis (topographer), Giuseppe Alvar Minaya (assistant archaeologist), Natascia Pellé (papyrologist), Timothy Pepper (papyrologist, University of Berkeley), Patrizia Piccione (recorder), Anna Maria Toma (recorder) and Ashraf Senussi (drawer). The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Inspector Sayed Awad Mohammed.

### **Archaeological Report**

The Second Archaeological Season was carried out inside the *temenos* of the main temple of the town dedicated to the crocodile god Soknopaios, in the same sector of 2003 season. It is placed in the middle of the enclosure (122.30 x 84.37 m ca.), north of the best-preserved building in the area. This structure (32.53 x 18.90 m), labelled ST 18, is preserved to a height of at least 5 m; it was built with local rough stones and surrounded by mud-brick walls. The general plan of the building is similar to other small Hellenistic period temples, but a door was opened in the middle of the rear wall of the *naos*, on the same axis as the main entrance (fig. 1). The 2003 excavation was concentrated north of this door in order to clarify when and how it was opened (fig. 2). North of this door a paved courtyard of about 20 x 7 m was found. In front of the building ST 18 a façade of a monumental temple built with isodomic limestone blocks was revealed. It is provisionally dated to the late Ptolemaic period or to the beginning of the Roman period for its masonry. The wall measures 20 m in length, 1.44 m in width and it is preserved to a maximum height of 1.53 m, or 7 courses of isodomic blocks (67-77 x 40 x 20 cm), bonded with white and pinkish mortar. Its southern face is quite rough, with blocks showing bosses surrounded by four chiselled bands. This part of the building was not refined and some stylised letters of the Greek alphabet are engraved on the bosses of some blocks as mason's marks. The masonry, similar to those of other Fayyum temples, suggests the Roman period for its construction. The door, which is halfway down this wall, was 2.40 m wide. It is on the same axis as the gateway opened in the rear wall of ST 18.

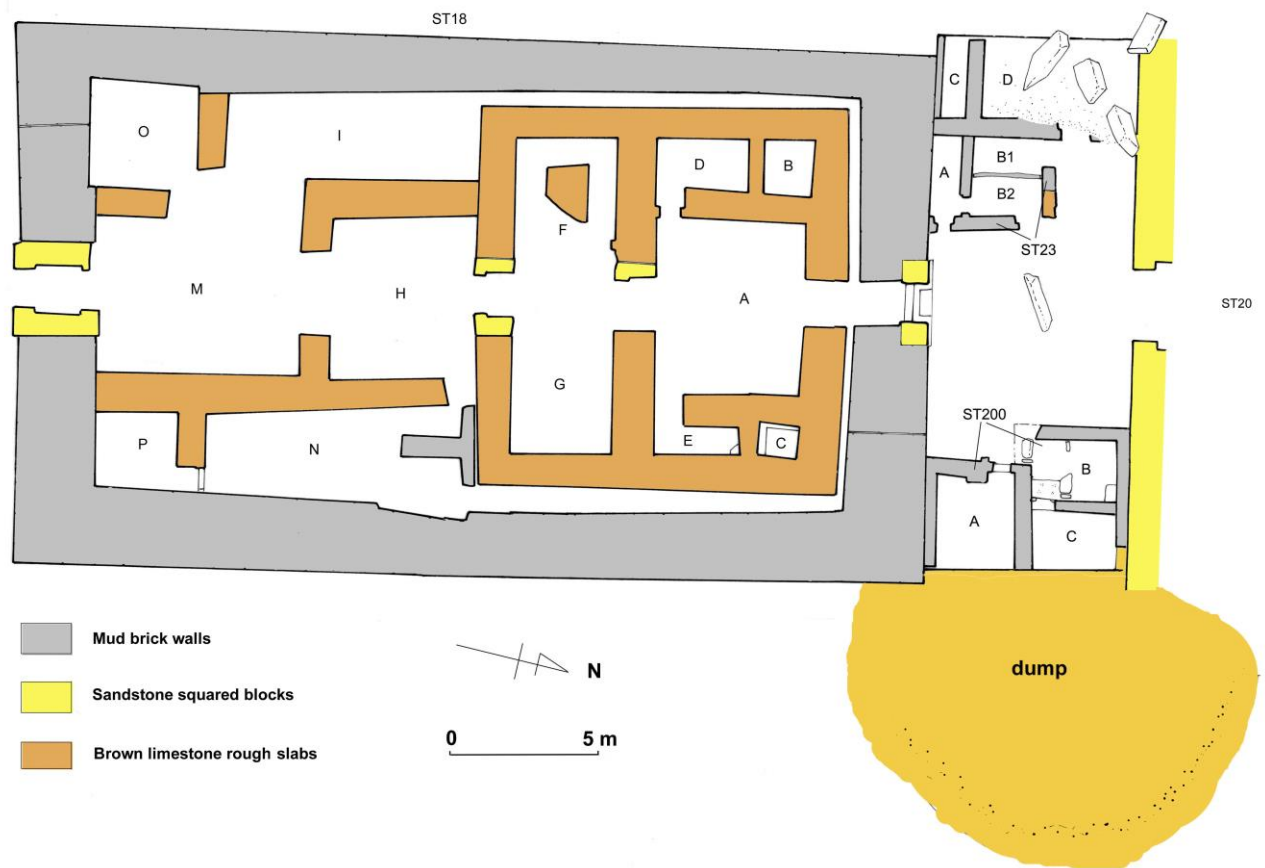


Fig. 1

On the eastern and western sides of the courtyard are two mud-brick subsidiary buildings (ST 200, ST 23), only partially excavated in 2003 season. The whole area turned out to be heavily plundered, probably between the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as some modern items found there have demonstrated. The rubble and sand packed originally on the area were removed and deposited on the east side of the courtyard. The mound (about 13 x 14 m, high 3 m) filled and covered three rooms of ST 200 (rooms A, D and C) and an area immediately to the east. Its stratigraphy is reversed, with layers rich in objects at the top and sand mixed with rubble at the bottom. The mound was dug in two seasons and it turned out to be rich in architectural elements and objects such as amulets, *ostraka*, mainly demotic, fragments of papyri in Greek and Demotic, objects of daily use such as sandals, combs and pottery vessels. Some mummy bandages were also found and they can be interpreted, as the coffin mask found in 2003, as the results of plundering activities in the area around Dime.



Fig. 2

Building ST 200 (6.4 m north-south, 4.6 m east-west) is composed of four rooms, one of which is an underground small cellar (figs. 3-4). The building was completely plundered and nothing can be said on its function with certainty. It closed the courtyard on its east side and was built abutted to both temples. The main room seems to have been the one labelled A (3.2 x 2.68 m), with four vaulted niches of about 45 x 30 cm, h ca. 63 cm. Two other niches are visible on the west wall: one reaches the floor level and is 1.07 m wide and 13 cm deep. The other one is placed in the south-west corner of the room and it is quite articulated. Its poor state of preservation prevents us from any interpretation. The room is now preserved to a height of about 1.80 m and the floor in mud-brick is still partially in place. The walls were originally plastered with mud, partially preserved to a height of about 80 cm on the east wall. A series of irregular indentations, cut in the wall at the same height from the floor, suggests the presence of a piece of furniture or of a wooden shelf (84 cm high and 80 cm large), inclined towards the centre of the room. A small vertical shaft (47 x 42 cm) is in the middle of the floor of the room and leads into cellar D. This room is still partially covered with a barrel vault, in the middle of which a neck of an amphora is placed vertically to ventilate the cellar. The storeroom is oriented east-west, is 2.10 m long, 0.91 m wide and 1.20 m high; the entrance is

on its western side. An amphora is inserted in the southern wall at the bottom of the shaft with its mouth toward the interior of the room. The mud-brick floor still exists on 1/3 of the room and it was originally plastered in mud, as well as the perimeter walls.

Room A did not communicate with the other two rooms, B and C; its entrance, placed in the north-western corner, led directly into the courtyard. The door to room B is badly damaged and is placed in its south-western corner. Room B communicated with room C through a door in the south-eastern corner and a shallow space opened at floor level in the division wall (l. 57 cm, h 37 cm). Room B (fig. 5) measures 2.90 m north-south and 1.87 m east-west; it is preserved to a maximum height of 1.70 m. Its western wall was badly damaged by the collapse of two heavy lintels in local marl stone. The room seems to have been divided into two minor spaces using some rough stones set vertically in the middle of the room. The northern area (1.60 m long) was completely plundered in recent times but the floor made of rough stones, similar to those of the courtyard, is still extant. Instead, in the southern space, which is in the worst condition, an original layer of sand and packed organic materials was found in place in front of the door leading to room C (Fig. 6). This layer (SU 113) was covered by a mud floor (SU 109). They were rich in organic materials and fragments of papyri, both in Greek and Demotic. A secondary use of this room as a stable is probable.

The door between B and C is 58 cm large and it was originally closed with one leaf door hinged in the south-western corner. The limestone pivot is still in place. The room is 2.82 m long, 2 m wide and 1.93 m high. The mud-brick floor is almost completely lost and the north wall is partially collapsed. The filling of the room can be considered part of the rouble mound and consisted of a series of alternate layers of sand and stones; three different Egyptian style cavetto cornices were found at the bottom.





Fig. 3



Fig. 4





Fig. 5



Fig. 6

On the other side of the courtyard is building ST 23, not completely brought to light (fig. 7) yet. Similarly to ST 200, it was built abutted to the two temples and closed the courtyard on its western side. Four rooms were excavated to the floor level and they all seem, on the basis of their shape and dimensions, to have been used as storerooms. At least two of them, rooms A and C, were covered with barrel vaults, of which a portion still survives in the north-western corner of room A. Rooms B1 and B2 were brought to light during the 2004 season (fig. 7). They were completely plundered and covered with sand and rubble coming from collapsed walls in stone and mud-brick; a “modern”



hearth, with some burnt papyri, was found in the north-western corner in B2. The north perimeter wall and the north-eastern corner are badly damaged. Originally, there might have been a unique room B (2.28 x 2.38 m), with a vaulted niche in the east wall (43 x 23 cm; h 40 cm). Then, it was subdivided into two spaces of the same size with a thin wall built with reused mud-bricks. On its south side there was a door, 61 cm large, that was blocked. The floors made with packed mud disappeared almost completely. B2 and room A communicated through a door that measured 50 cm in width; the door leading to B1, instead, is placed on its north side.



Fig. 7

Buildings ST 200 and 23 were built following *English bond* pattern, with mud-bricks of light grey colour. The range of their sizes is between 24 x 11 x 9 cm and 31 x 16 x 11 cm. The bonding and the sizes of the bricks are common among the whole *temenos* in Dime. The foundations of the two buildings are very shallow (about 5-20 cm): in some walls the first courses are built with rough stones and a great quantity of mud. ST 200 and 23 seem to have been built at the same time in the Roman period, but the evidence found till now does not provide a more precise date.

On the eastern side of the courtyard and of ST 200 is the dump created by previous diggers. Its excavation began in the 2003 season and has been almost completed during the following season; it was necessary, however, to leave a small portion of the dump intact to preserve the integrity of a mud-brick wall which was supported by it. The portion of the dump excavated in 2004 was 10 m long from North to South, 4.80 m from East to West and 2.30 m high. Its stratigraphy was almost uniformly composed of mud-brick rubble, sand, unworked stones, fragments of plaster and reeds and wood from the buildings of the area. Fifty Demotic *ostraka*, sixty fragments of Greek and Demotic papyri, architectural elements, amulets, mummy wrappings covered with painted stucco and objects of daily use were found in this dump. Part of a Doric freeze with a triglyph and plain metope was also found in the dump (fig. 8), together with what seems to be a piece of a Corinthian capital. The freeze can be dated to the Hellenistic period and it suggests the presence of a Classical style building in the *temenos*.

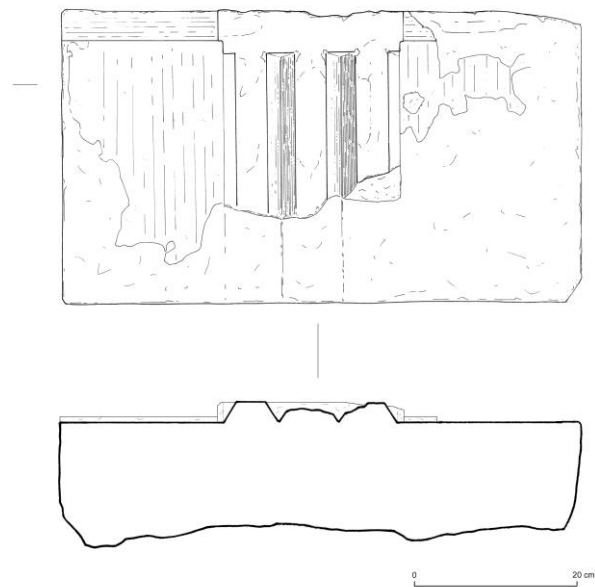


Fig. 8

### **Papyrological Report**

During the 2004 excavation, 71 papyri and 61 Demotic *ostraka* were found. Papyri can be subdivided into groups: 47 are Greek; 17 are Demotic; 1 has a Greek text on one side and a Demotic text on the other; 2 have few signs of hieroglyph writing; 3 are illustrated with magical figures; 1 is probably figurative. The Greek papyri are in good but fragmentary condition; for this

reason the texts are mostly incomplete. They are all documentary texts, which can be palaeographically dated, to the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

Two papyri (ST04/100/512 and ST04/100/533) are of particular interest because they were found in the dump still rolled up and tied with papyrus fibres. On both pieces a line of Greek writing is preserved, probably a name of a person. Another papyrus still rolled up and tied contains a Demotic text (ST04/106/630).

Two papyri with magical figures (ST04/100/639 and ST04/100/666) were found closed and sealed with clay, the first one, and tied with a fibre the second one. In both cases the unidentified *figura magica* is outlined with a large-pointed and soft *calamus*. Another magical papyrus is probably ST04/100/714, which is in a very fragmentary state of preservation. The three papyri were amulets that people wore for apotropaic reasons. They are similar to ten papyri found during the 2003 season in the same sector but in better state of preservation. These last are of the same type of eight papyri found by F. Zucker at Soknopaiou Nesos and interpreted as probably amulet (W.M. Brashear-A. Bülow-Jacobsen, *Magica Varia*, Bruxelles 1991, pp. 74-78). Therefore, it seems probable that all these small papyrus amulets were prepared inside the *temenos* during the Roman period by the priests.