

DIRECTORS' REPORT ON 2005 SEASON AT DIME ES-SEBA/SOKNOPAIΟΥ NESOS

Team 2005

Mario Capasso (director), Paola Davoli (director), Alessia Armillis (student), Anna Boozer (archaeologist, Columbia University, New York), Ivan Cancelliere (archaeologist), Angela Cervi (recorder), Ivan Chiesi (topographer), Martin Fink (archaeologist, Würzburg Universität), Francesco Meo (archaeologist), Giuseppe Alvar Minaya (assistant archaeologist), Simone Occhi (topographer), Natascia Pellé (papyrologist), Timothy Pepper (papyrologist, University of California, Berkeley), Corrado Pino (student), Ashraf Senussi (ceramics illustrator), Martin Stadler (demotist, Würzburg Universität), Mohammed el-Zahabi (civil engineer, Giza University). The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Inspector Wagida Abd el-Aziz Mohammed.

Archaeological Report

The Third Archaeological Season has been carried out in the *temenos* (fig. 1) of the main temple of the town dedicated to the crocodile god Soknopaios, in an area north of the sector investigated in the 2004 season.

The excavated area (labelled Sector 2) (figs. 2-5) measures 22 m from west to east and 7.50 m from north to south, corresponding to the entrance hall and four side rooms of a temple built with yellow limestone blocks probably at the end of the Ptolemaic period or at the beginning of the Roman period. This building, labelled ST20, was identified during the 2001 survey and its façade was previously uncovered during the 2003 and 2004 excavation campaigns. The entire sector and the rooms were full of blocks, architraves and roof-slabs collapsed from the ceiling and doors of the original building. Moreover, the fill of these rooms consisted of windblown sand, rubble and lime mortar from the dismantling of the walls of the temple. The stratigraphy has been largely disturbed by previous excavations and sometimes the floors were reached and partially dismantled, like in the side rooms C, B and E.

The building was built with yellow limestone isodomic blocks, while local grey limestone was used for the architraves of the roofs and slabs of the pavements. The temple is 19.30 m wide and its main entrance is located in the middle of the southern wall, facing the paved courtyard (labelled C1) (fig. 3). The gate is in front of the north door in building ST18, interpreted as the Hellenistic sanctuary later transformed into a monumental passageway in front of the new temple ST20 (fig. 1). The door passage is 2.35 m wide, 1.85 m long and it had two wooden door-leaves, of which the two limestone sockets are still preserved in the floor. A hole (8 x 8 cm, 11 cm deep) for the vertical bolt of the door is in the floor, in the middle of the doorsill.

The entrance hall, labelled A (fig. 4), is 8.20 m wide, 4.15 m long and it is preserved for a maximum height of 1.50 m. The pavement consists of slabs of local grey fossiliferous limestone with traces and squared holes that probably mark the positions of some of the temple's furniture. The floor was probably covered by a layer of whitish mortar, partially preserved in the north of the room. A second axial door leading to the sanctuary is in front of the gateway. It is 2.20 m wide and it is flanked by two semi-columns on squared bases that were parts of the *torus* cornice framing the door. The floor rises 34 cm from the first to the second room situated on the main axis of the temple: a ramp flanked by two sets of three steps (2.99 m east-west, 1.23 m north-south) leads from room A to room F (fig. 5).

Two small rooms (B and E) lie to the east of the entrance hall A. Room B is 2.47 x 1.87 m and it is preserved for a height of 1.30 m. Its floor has been completely dismantled, except for a block in the passageway. A roof lintel has been left in its eastern side. Some limestone blocks of the floor are still in place in room E (2.57 x 1.76 m, h 1.44 m). Traces of hearths lighted with papyri and pieces of wooden furniture with glass inlays and gold leafs are still on the preserved floor. A number of pieces of these objects have been recovered under the floor. The room may have been used as a shelter during the Islamic period, as the presence of potsherds of this period seems to suggest. A great quantity of papyrus scraps was found in the hollows in the floor: about ten Greek and Demotic papyri have been identified among them. Only one, in Greek, is complete and sealed with a stamped mud sealing (inv. ST05/251/1092). Other two mud sealings used on papyri were found in the room; they bear hieroglyphic inscriptions impressed with signet-rings.

On the west side of room A only one door opens and leads to a vestibule (labelled room D) (2.50 x 1.83 m, h 0.85 m). Through this vestibule one can access the outside by means of a door 0.90 m wide that once opened in the western perimeter wall of the temple and thus constituted a side entrance. At present two dry courses of blocks close the passageway. It is not yet clear if the door was completely closed to avoid a side passage or if the sill was roughly raised. The floor is completely preserved and was restored with grey fossiliferous limestone slabs in the past.

Room D also joins to the south with room C and to the north with another, still unexcavated room. Room C (2.55 x 1.58 m) in its current state of conservation reaches ca. 1.20 m in height, while its pavement is only partially preserved along the western wall and in the passage of the door.

The temple was built according to the well-known techniques for stone masonry used from the Late Period to the Graeco-Roman period. The façade measures 19.30 m in length, 1.74 m in width and it is preserved to a maximum height of 1.53 m, or 7 courses of regular blocks (67-77 x 40 x 20 cm), bonded with white and pinkish mortar. Its southern face is decorated with bosses surrounded by four chiselled bands in *rustica* style masonry. It is uncertain if this part of the building was completely refined because some stylised Greek letters are still engraved on the bosses of some blocks as mason's marks. Projecting torus cornices, characteristic of the Egyptian-style temples, are at the south-west and south-east corners.

The surfaces of the inside walls have been smoothed only in some parts, as those inside room A. The other surfaces have been only partially levelled. The masonry, similar to other Fayyum temples, suggests that the temple was built in the Roman period.

Sector 1, a paved courtyard (C1) south of temple ST20, was excavated during the 2003 and 2004 seasons. A mud-brick building, labelled ST23, whose excavation was finished during the 2005 season, is located in the west half of the courtyard. The building is composed of 6 rooms, two of which (labelled D and E) were brought to light in the 2005 season. They are preserved to a height of ca. 1.50 m and are both accessible from courtyard C1. In the filling of room D (3.50 x 2.70 m) many *ostraka* and scraps of Greek and Demotic papyri were found. The pavement is not preserved and a large architraves of temple ST20 is still stuck in the middle of the room. Another architrave of temple ST20 is inside room E, a narrow storeroom (3.20 x 1.05 m) originally covered with a barrel vault. Also rooms A, B1, B2 and C were originally covered by vaults. The subsidiary building ST23 (fig. 6) was completely ransacked as well as building ST200. For this reason it is extremely difficult to identify the original function and the content of the rooms. Originally it was composed of three parts represented by rooms A+B; rooms C+D and E, each one with its own entrance opening directly on courtyard C1. In this phase the main rooms were B and D, while A, C and E were

narrow storerooms. In B and D there was one niche each, both on their eastern walls. In a second phase, the building was remodelled and room B was divided into two small rooms, of which the westernmost (B1) having its own entrance opened in the north wall. Most of the rooms of the building were then used as storerooms.

During the season Dr. Ivan Chiesi and Simone Occhi completed the topographical mapping of the town by means of a Total Station. It is now possible to appreciate the extension and the organization of the whole town in its last phase of life (3rd century AD). The plan will be completed with the contour lines during the 2006 season.

Papyrological Report

25 papyri were found during the third season. Thirteen of them are Greek, nine are Demotic, two are blank. Twelve of the Greek papyri were found in two contexts: five came from room D in building ST23, seven came from room E in temple ST20. In the first group the most important one is ST05/238/1119, with two lines from the beginning of a document. The year and part of the name of an emperor are preserved: ll. 1 f.]*a Antoninou Kaisaros* | [].[The document was probably written in the first year of an Antonine emperor, between the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161 AD) and that of Elagabalus (218-222 AD). The other four papyri of this group are in rather bad condition with few lines of documentary text of the Roman period (2nd-3rd AD).

The most important papyrus of the second group is ST05/251/1092 (fig. 7), found in a hollow of the floor in room E. It was rolled up and entirely flattened. The unrolling of the papyrus was particularly difficult because of the fragility of the fibres. It is almost complete, but some parts of the text are lost. A perfectly preserved mud-sealing is on its upper margin. The image of the god Soknopaios is reproduced on the sealing. At ll. 1 f. we read: *etous pemptou Tiberiou Kaisaros Sebastou Phamenoth 28th*. The document is thus dated to the fifth year of Tiberius (18 AD).

Under a block of the floor in room ST20 E four Demotic and two Greek papyri were found completely crushed and stirred. On one of the Demotic papyri (ST05/256/1127) we can read the name of the god Sobek. Because of their poor state of preservation it is not possible to identify the content of these papyri that can be dated to the Roman period.

During the 2005 season 30 *ostraka* were found, 22 of which are Demotic, one Greek and two probably Greek. Few of them are well preserved. Thirteen Demotic *ostraka* came from the same context in room ST23 D.

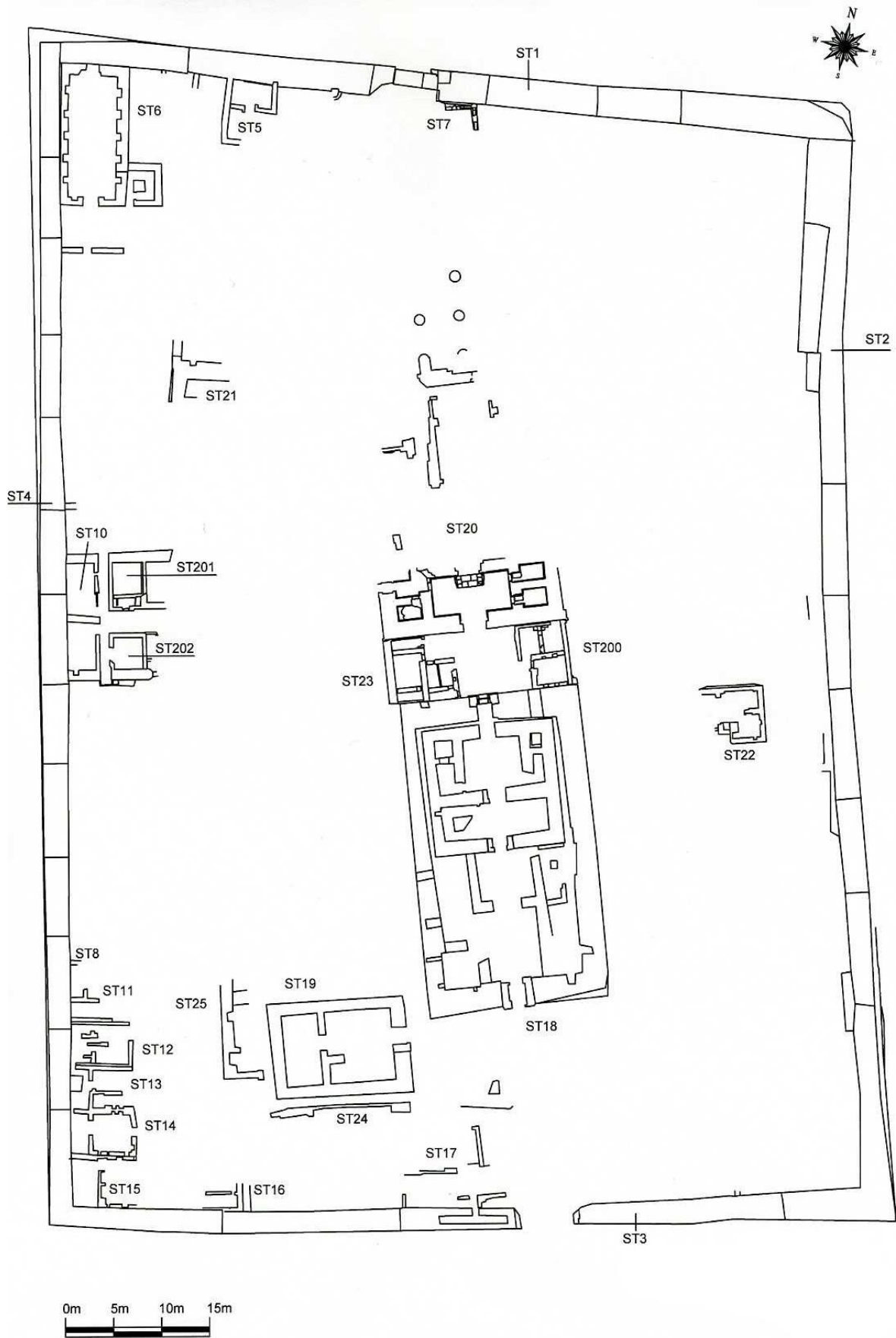


Fig.1

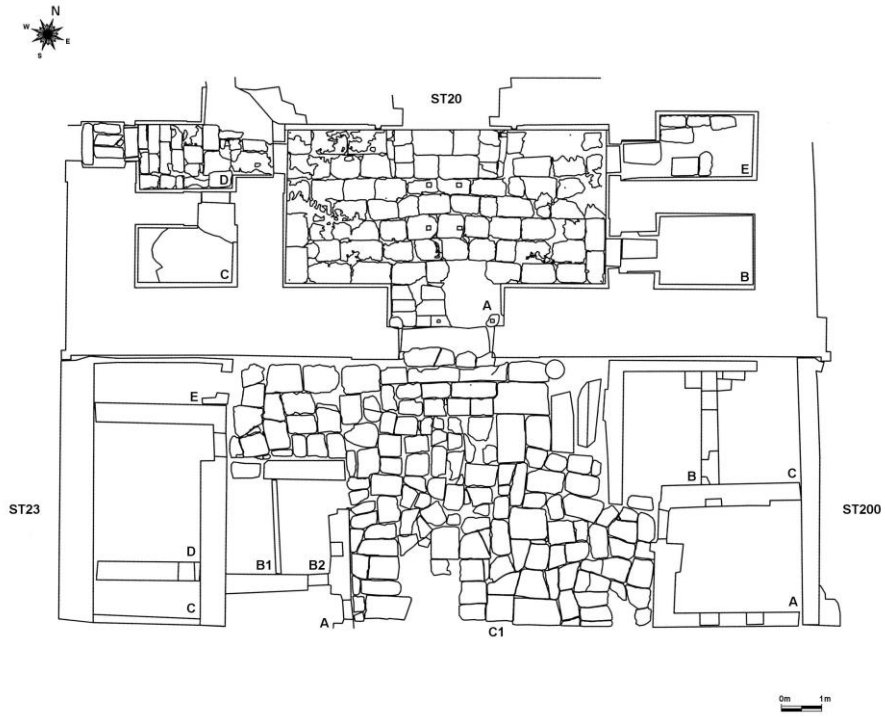


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

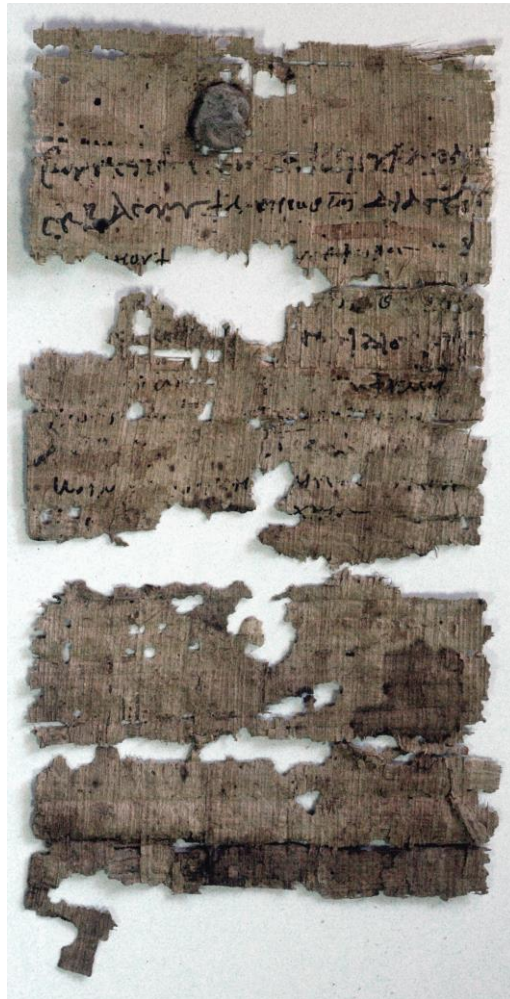


Fig. 7