

University of Salento  
Centro di Studi Papirologici



Soknopaiou Nesos Project  
Archaeological Expedition in Egypt  
directed by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli

**SOKNOPAIU NESOS PROJECT**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION OF THE CENTRO DI STUDI PAPIROLOGICI  
OF SALENTO UNIVERSITY (LECCE) AT SOKNOPAIU NESOS/DIME ES-SEBA  
(EL-FAYYUM - EGYPT)**

**FIFTEENTH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEASON, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2019.**

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## 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 27<sup>th</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

The team consisted of Stefania Alfarano (supervisor archaeologist), Ashraf Barakat (Assistant to Directors), Bruno Bazzani (computer management and photographer), Alberto Buonfino (Papyrologist and Registrar), Clementina Caputo (ceramologist), Francesca Cozza (assistant to ceramologist), Salima Ikram (American University in Cairo, Palaeozoologist), Massimo Limoncelli (archaeologist, 3D modelling), Cesare Iezzi (archaeologist), Roberta Petrilli (Egyptologist), Francesca Silvestrelli (ceramologist), Laura Schepis (topographer). The Ministry of Antiquities was represented by inspectors Rasha Ramadan Nazeer, Iman Alaa Eldin Mahmoud, Ahmed Ab del Taweb Mohammed (restorer), Mustafa Faisal Hemeda, and Ahmed Hassan.

The Mission would like to thank Prof. Dr. Khaled el-Anany, Minister of Antiquities and Heritage, the General Director of the Foreign Missions Dr. Nashwa Gaber, the Director of the Inspectorate of Antiquities of Fayyum Sayed Shura for the support received in the course of the works. Warm thanks are due to the President of the University of Salento, prof. Vincenzo Zara and to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, for the financial support granted for 2019, and to prof. Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi of the Archaeological Centre of the Italian Institute for Culture in Cairo. 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. Warm thanks also to the Istituto Internazionale di Studi Borgiani of Velletri, chaired by dr. Rigel Langella, and to Rotary Lecce South for a scholarship to Cesare Iezzi.

## Temple ST 203 (Figs. 2-3)

The excavation was carried out in the area north of the temple dedicated to Soknopaios (ST 20) and fully investigated in the past years (Fig. 1). The new building, ST 203, can be considered as a *contra-temple* built against the north wall of the temple ST 20. ST 203 extends from north to south for 14.66 m and from east to west for 12.30 m (Fig. 2). The building was excavated during the 2016 and 2017 campaigns. The temple has an unusual shape and consists of 4 columns on each side, joined by intercolumn walls; other 4 columns are in the center of the building. The temple was built with local yellow limestone blocks probably in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and then it was restored with the addition of a second floor in the central nave and intercolumn walls perhaps at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. This second phase was characterized by the use of local nummulitic limestone of beige or gray-violet color and by the use of basalt elements.

During the 2019 season, the area in front of the temple and the one to the west of it were investigated. ST 203 was completely surrounded by paving in blocks of local nummulitic limestone which is fairly well preserved. Furthermore, we have ascertained that the restoration phase of the building also involved the base of the perimeter walls eroded by the wind and reinforced with blocks of reddish-brown limestone. The same

phase of restoration had involved the temple ST 20 dedicated to Soknopaios, also eroded at the base of the walls and restored with the same type of material. The current floor is pertinent to the restoration phase: thanks to a robbery pit dug in the past in this pavement it was possible to ascertain the level of the original stone flooring below. The exterior pavement is well preserved thanks to the presence of a thick and hard layer of lime mixed with blocks and architraves originating from the dismantling of the building during the Islamic period.

The Byzantine phase of re-occupation, already identified in the temple area in the previous seasons, is documented by the presence of a thick layer of anthropic soil or midden preserved in front of the entrance of the *contra-temple*.

Among the materials found there are blocks belonging to an unfinished composite type capital, the only one so far recovered, the lower part of an altar with a Greek inscription, fragments of Greek epigraphs, fragments of Greek papyri, coins from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, and architectural parts of two chapels in mixed classical-Egyptian style. A bust of a female statue (Fig. 5), probably a Ptolemaic queen, was found in the demolition debris: its head had already been found in 2012.

#### **The ST 6 building (Fig. 4)**

The excavation of a new building located in the north-west corner of the *temenos* has begun, at short distance from the *contra-temple*. It is labelled ST6 and is built in mud bricks against the walls of the *temenos*. The building consists of at least three rooms and of a partially preserved staircase. Only the walls of the large room A are preserved for a maximum of 8 meters in elevation. Room A is 12 meters long and 5 wide. It is characterized by the presence of 15 large niches arranged symmetrically along the sides and plastered with white plaster mortar. They were originally closed with wooden doors and some retain a plastered stone base. The niches on the east side are surmounted by windows.

The room has certainly been excavated in the past and is filled with windblown sand, collapsing bricks and wooden beams from the perimeter walls. It seems that it was not re-occupied in the Byzantine period. Monuments and cultural objects have been found (Figs. 6-7): a dozen pine cones in excellent condition, decorative elements in limestone and stucco, perhaps originally placed inside the niches to constitute real chapels of worship with columns and capitals, an Egyptian cavetto cornice with winged sun, incense burners in terracotta and stone, an altar decorated with four lion's heads (Fig. 8), painted wooden tablets, and some Greek papyri (Fig. 9).

The building does not have a traditional temple-like structure, but its function as a place of worship is demonstrated by the different types of materials found.

### **Survey of the town (Fig. 10)**

This season a photogrammetric and ceramic survey of the town started, conducted by two teams of specialists in 3D photography and ceramic. The survey consists in photographing the surface of the site at very high resolution by means of a pole 4 meters high, in a systematic way and following a predetermined grid. The three-dimensional images are then processed with Agisoft Photoscan to obtain an image and a 3D model of the site surface, with the possibility of detailed analysis.

The ceramologists collect and analyze the ceramic lying on the surface of the squares already documented photographically, taking into account the contexts and the disturbing actions that may have altered the surface material, such as the clandestine excavations or the passage of cars and motorcycles.

The final purpose of this work is to document what is visible and what is preserved on the surface of the site, so as to preserve the three-dimensional image of the ruins and materials. Furthermore, the study of ceramic pottery and objects found in the examined squares allows us to understand both the activities carried out in the various areas of the town and to advance chronological hypotheses on the use of the buildings.

### **Report on the 2019 Work on Dime Bones (Salima Ikram)**

Work on bones and coprolites from Dime was carried out on 24-25 November 2019 at the Fayum Magazine. Identification for the former were based on comparative skeletal materials from the Ibrahim Helmy Memorial Laboratory at the American University in Cairo, publications, and photos. Identifications for the latter were based on my personal photographic archive.

#### Bones from good contexts:

A total of 258 specimens were examined from the 2019 excavation (Fig. 1). All but five were from context 1325, which I believe is a midden or part of one.

<b>Animal</b>	<b>NISP</b>
Cattle	1
Sheep	1
Bat	2
Rodent	6
Mammal	1
Mammal Large	32
Mammal Medium	4
Ostrich	1
Partridge	2
Plover	3
Bird	60
Clarias spp.	9
Nile Perch	3
Synodontis	4
Tilapia	5
Fish	22
Tortoise	2
Reptile	2
Melanoides tuberculata	1
Shell	1
Mussel	3
Unidentified	7
Fly larva	2
Insect	3
Beetle	81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>258</b>

Specimens from reliable contexts excavated in 2019

The vast majority of remains came from beetles that were probably feasting on the flesh attached to the bones. Birds are the next most commonly represented, but the numbers give a false impression as a large number of the specimens (25) are from the shaft of feathers. Eggshells of possibly duck/goose as well as an ostrich also comprised part of the assemblage. Fish remains included Nile Perch and different types of catfish, as well as tilapia.

Domestic mammal remains were limited (save in the category of large and medium mammals) to one cow/bull/ox and one sheep. The most notable feature of the mammal bones was the evidence of butchery on several bones, mainly ribs of cattle (assuming that the large mammals are cows) as well as ovicaprines, all of which were chopped into pieces ranging between 5 to 9 cm. One sheep bone was broken possibly for marrow extraction and one juvenile cow vertebra was chopped through vertically through the centrum body. The quality of tools used on the ribs varied as there were some of the large mammal ribs that were not cleanly cut through—perhaps the tools were too blunt or too light to achieve clean cuts.

One notable find that is vegetal rather animal was a part of a pinecone. Apparently complete ones have been found at the site. These are interesting as they are probably imported.

#### Coprolites from good contexts

More work needs to be carried out on the coprolite identification. It is clear that cattle, ovicaprines, donkey (and possibly horse), and carnivores, such as fox and dog were present. It is possible that some coprolites belong to camel, but these identifications need to be ascertained. Certainly in the 2016 season no camel bones were identified. One or two specimens might conceivably belong to hyrax, but these identifications are tenuous at best, as the samples were a bit squashed. Thus, the majority of coprolites belong to cattle or donkeys/equids.

#### Species from unreliable bone contexts

ST10 706, 708 yielded bird, fish (generic, synodontis, large perch, very large Clarias), hare, fox, cattle, and a burnt peach pit.

The directors of the Mission

Prof. Mario Capasso

Prof. Paola Davoli

Medinet el-Fayyum, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019

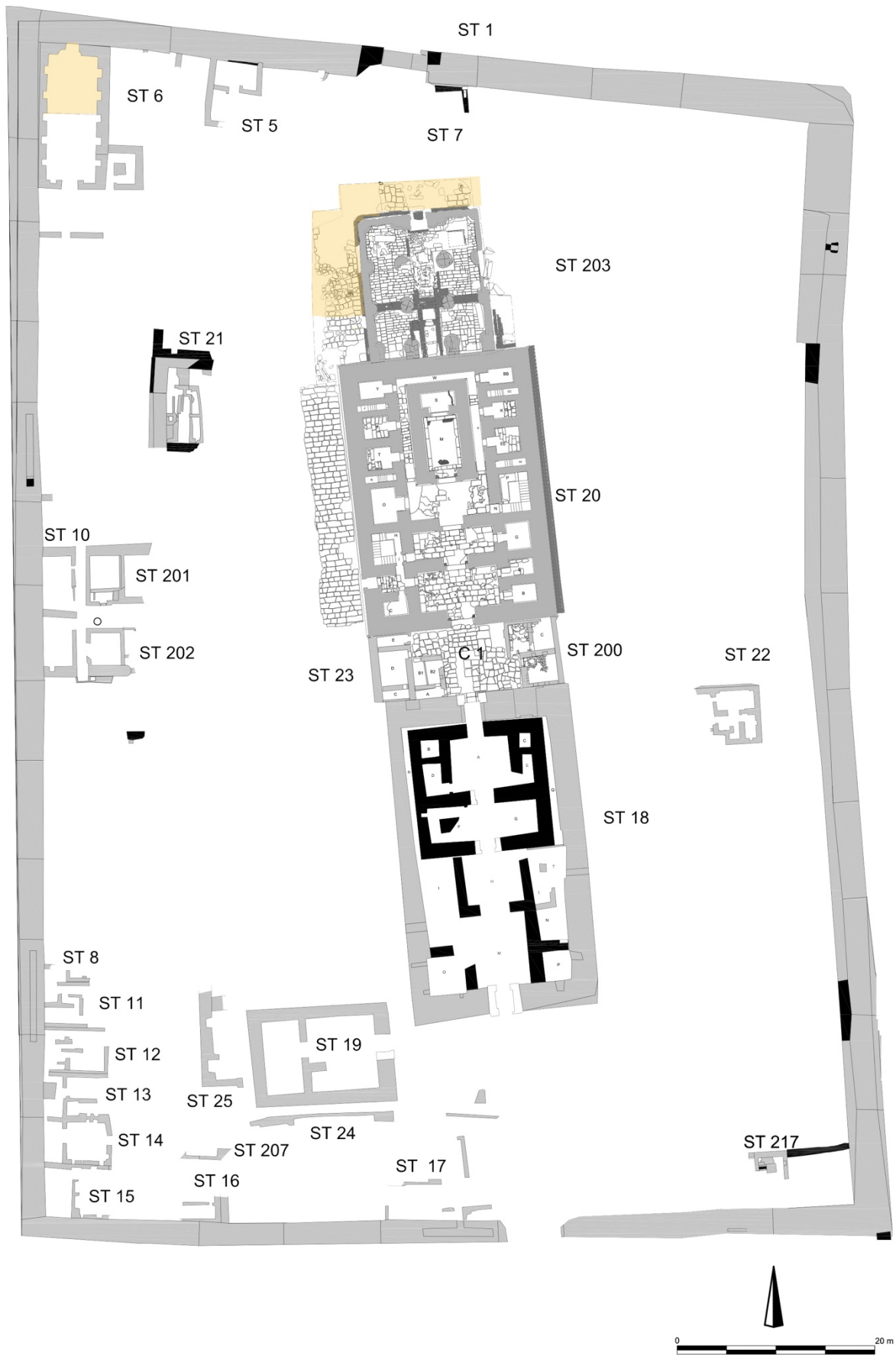


Fig. 1. Plan of the temple area with trenches excavated in 2019.

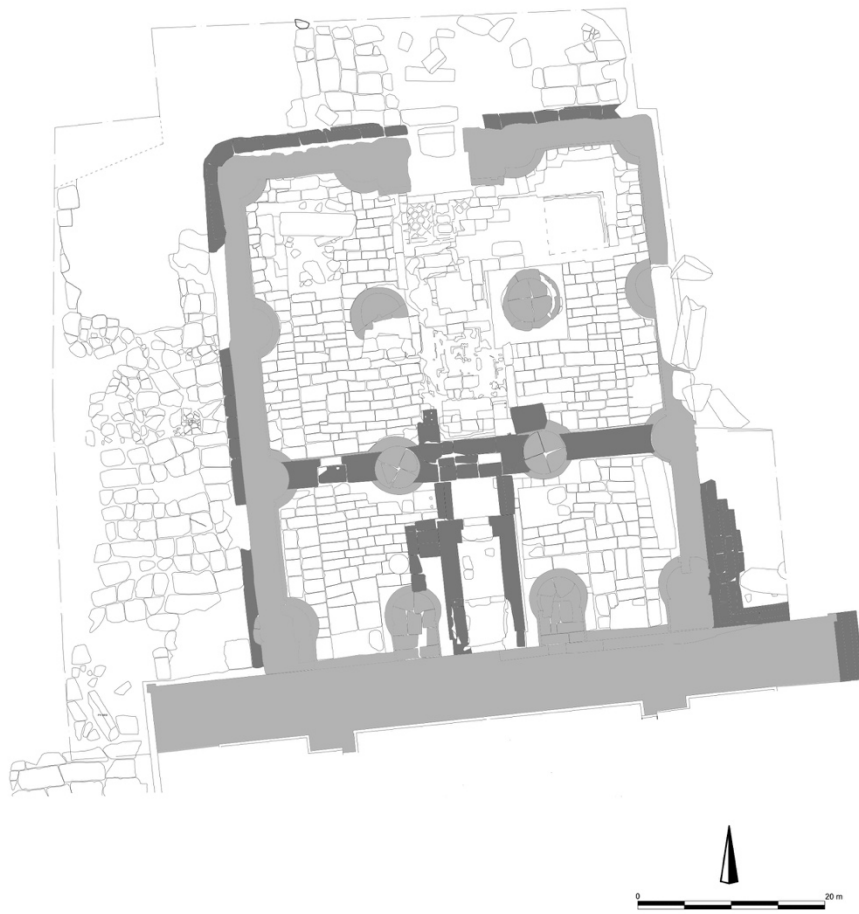


Fig. 2. Plan of the *contra-temple* with floors surrounding it.



Fig. 3. View of the *contra-temple* from Northwest.





Fig. 4. View of ST6 A from South.



Fig. 5. Bust of a female statue, probably a Ptolemaic queen.



Fig.6. Decoration of one of the chapel of ST 6.



Fig.7. Cavetto cornice with winged sun from the main chapel in ST6.



Fig. 8. Round altar decorated with lion's heads.

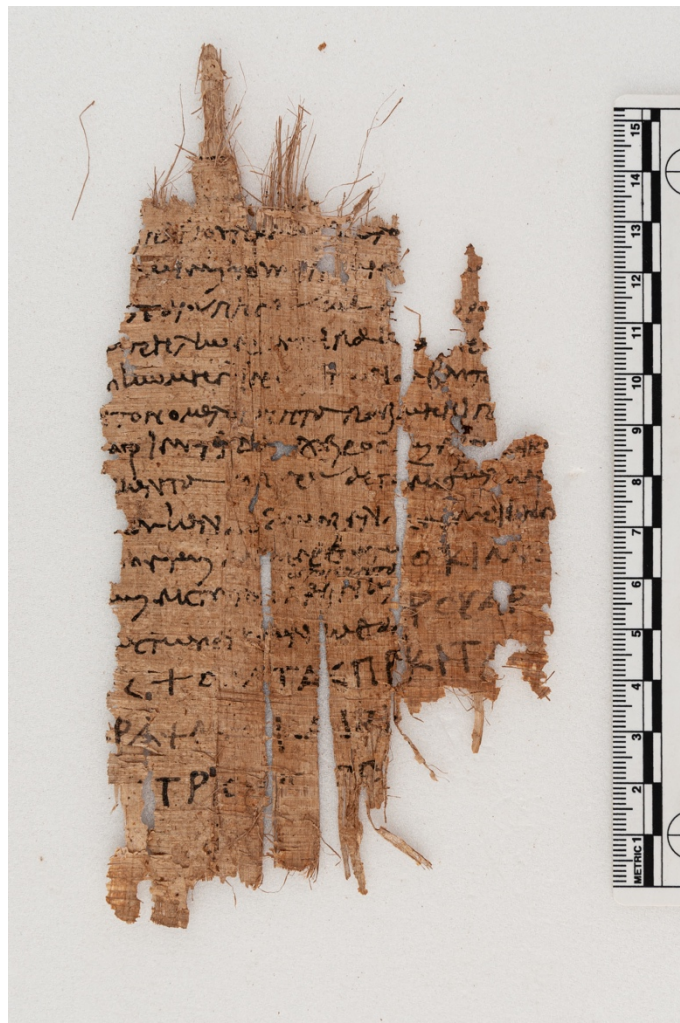


Fig. 9. Greek papyrus.

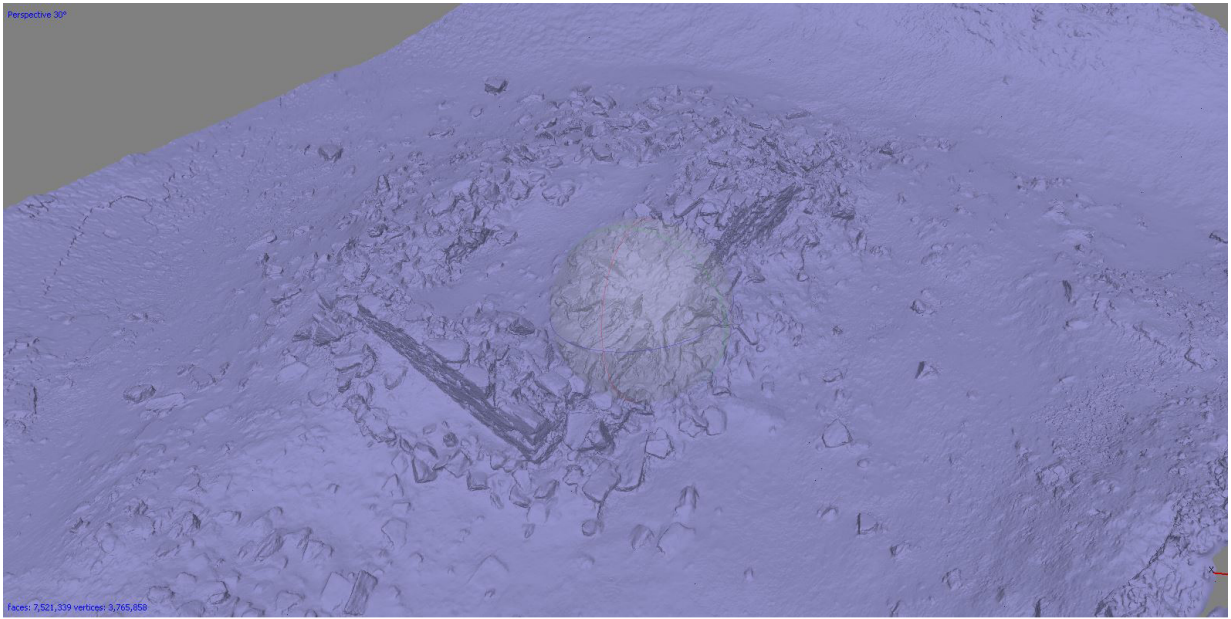


Fig. 9. Photogrammetric survey.

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