

# SCRIBE

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## UNLOCKING TUTANKHAMUN

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The latest from ARCE's Antiquities Endowment Fund (AEF)



## Soknopaiou Nesos Project. Conservation and Presentation of Dime es-Seba (El-Fayoum) Project

PAOLA DAVOLI (UNIVERSITY OF SALENTO)

In 2021 a three-year project for the presentation and restoration of the temple area dedicated to the god Soknopaios began, funded by ARCE's AEF grant program, began. The work was planned and carried out in collaboration with architects Nicholas Warner and Ahmed Abdelgawad in the frame of a Supreme Council of Antiquities' concession to the Soknopaiou Nesos Project (SNP) of the University of Salento (Italy).

The SNP has been working in Dime es-Seba since 2003, under the direction of Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli. Soknopaiou Nesos had its maximum development between the 4th century BCE and the mid 3rd century CE. The ruins lay in the desert north of Lake Qarun in the Fayoum, far from the inhabited and cultivated areas. For this reason, the archaeological site (660 x 350 meters) is quite well preserved but was pillaged of its stones and treasures including hundreds of papyri in Greek and Demotic, today found in collections and museums worldwide.

The site is famous for its papyri among scholars, but also among tourists and visitors for its impressive conservation of the templar area; the white mudbrick enclosure walls (temenos) are still standing 15 meters in height. They are a veritable landmark in the desert, visible from the south shore of the lake in clear days.

The site is now part of the North Lake Qarun Park and thanks to newly built paved roads is easily accessible to visitors all year round. It is thus urgent to proceed with a proper plan of presentation and conservation of the site.

The first-year interventions involved the clearing of the large and heavy architraves found while excavating the two temples built in limestone blocks and located in the middle of the temenos. These blocks were temporarily stacked on both sides of the sanctuaries, preventing safe circulation. They have now been moved outside the temenos to areas free of buildings. The work was accomplished without the aid of mechanical means given the fragility of the monuments. A

- 1 Moving lintels from the west side of the sanctuary
- 2 Making mud bricks to be used in 2022 season
- 3 The west wall of the temenos with deep erosion and the trench already prepared for 2022 restoration

PHOTOS: PAOLA DAVOLI

debris dump from previous old excavations was also removed from the temple area.

Some sectors of the mud brick temenos have been identified as particularly eroded at the base and therefore at risk of collapse. Consolidation will consist of constructing new courses of mudbricks that will fill the erosion gaps. This work will take place in 2022. It has been estimated that at least 50,000 new mudbricks (30 x 15 x 10 cm) are needed. The making of these bricks is in progress by local specialized workmen with local clay similar to what was used in antiquity. The excavation of trenches at the base of the walls has already begun, in order to reach their original. The SNP also plans to produce a printed and web-based guide as part of its long-term project objectives.