

Tradition and Transformation:
Egypt under Roman Rule

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Tradition and Transformation: Egypt under Roman Rule

Proceedings of the International Conference,
Hildesheim, Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum,
3–6 July 2008

Edited by

Katja Lembke
Martina Minas-Nerpel
Stefan Pfeiffer



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PREFACE

Following the victory over Marcus Antonius and Kleopatra VII in 30 BCE, Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire. The era that began for the land by the Nile was only partly new, since the Roman emperors were foreign rulers like the Ptolemies before. A fundamental change, though, was the fact that the new rulers resided not in Alexandria, but in Rome. Alongside unbroken traditions—especially of the indigenous Egyptian population, but also among the Greek elite—major changes can be observed as well as slow processes of transformation. Three cultures met in the new Roman province—the Greek, the Roman, and the Egyptian—and the multi-ethnic population was situated between new patterns of rule and traditional ways of life.

However, as Günther Hölbl recently pointed out,¹ it is almost entirely the Greek and Roman culture and organisation, including the Greek and Latin languages, that usually determine our perception of the Roman Empire and of Roman imperial history. Although the province of Egypt, with its age-old traditions, formed a significant part of the Roman Empire, and although it offers considerable insight into the Egyptian material culture, society, religion and the cult topography, it has hardly ever attracted attention from Egyptologists except for literary and linguistic research regarding the Graeco-Roman temple texts and Demotic. Historical or cultural works, such as Friedhelm Hoffmann's *Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit. Eine Darstellung nach demotischen Quellen* (2000) or the illustrated introductory studies like Günther Hölbl's three volumes *Altägypten im Römischen Reich* (2000–2005), are rare exceptions. Usually, mainly Classical Archaeologists, Papyrologists, or Ancient Historians investigate certain aspects of Roman Egypt. This is evident from exhibitions such as *Égypte romaine. L'autre Égypte* in Marseille (1997) and *Les empereurs du Nil* in Tongeren (1999–2000) and Amsterdam (2000–2001). The same is true for Alexandria, which primarily draws the attention of Ancient Historians like Manfred Clauss² and Classical

¹ Hölbl, G. 2000. *Altägypten im Römischen Reich. Der römische Pharao und sein Tempel I. Römische Politik und altägyptische Ideologie von Augustus bis Diocletian, Tempelbau in Oberägypten*. Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie. Mainz, 7.

² Clauss, M. 2003. *Alexandria. Schicksale einer antiken Weltstadt*. Stuttgart.

Archaeologists like Jean-Yves Empereur,³ Günter Grimm,⁴ Judith McKenzie,⁵ and Michael Pfrommer.⁶ As a result, the research on Roman Egypt is fragmented into numerous disciplines that analyze data according to diverging traditions and *foci*, rarely taking into account interdisciplinary questions. However, that Egypt offers an opportunity to study a Roman province not only during a period between change and permanence, but also from several perspectives all at once has recently been highlighted by the survey of the Classical Archaeologist Katja Lembke, the Coptologist Cäcilia Fluck, and the Egyptologist Günter Vittmann in the volume *Ägyptens späte Blüte. Die Römer am Nil* (2004).

In the last decade or so, the disciplines of Egyptology, Ancient History, Classical Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Papyrology have produced significant new insights into Egypt under the Romans. The conference was launched to assemble scholars from these disciplines and from institutions worldwide in order to discuss current projects carried out in Egypt and to provide a multi-disciplinary dialogue for the contextual analysis of crucial aspects of Roman Egypt. A total of twenty-six scholars presented their new and on-going research on a variety of topics, including written sources such as Greek and Demotic papyri as well as Greek, Latin, and hieroglyphic inscriptions, art, architecture, administration, society, religion, and scientific methodology. Beside these fundamental topics, the centre of attention was directed at field and settlement archaeology, which is the only discipline that will vitally expand our knowledge of daily life and religion outside the *metropoleis*. We hope that the conference *Tradition and Transformation. Egypt under Roman Rule*, which took place from 3–6 July 2008 at the Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim, provided a useful forum for developing critical and reflexive approaches to the primary data and for exploring the wider disciplinary and cultural contexts of Roman Egypt.

³ Empereur, J.-Y. 1998. *Alexandria rediscovered*. London.

⁴ Grimm, G. 1998. *Alexandria. Die erste Königsstadt der hellenistischen Welt*. Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie. Mainz.

⁵ McKenzie, J. 2007. *The architecture of Alexandria and Egypt c. 300 BC to AD 700*. New Haven.

⁶ Pfrommer, M. 1999. *Alexandria im Schatten der Pyramiden*. Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie. Mainz.

In the course of organising the conference and preparing the publication of these proceedings we have incurred many debts of gratitude, which we are pleased to have opportunity to acknowledge here. First of all, we would like to thank the *Gerda Henkel Foundation*, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft SFB 600: Fremdheit und Armut* at Trier University and the *Schafhausen Stiftung Hildesheim* for their generous grants. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Donata Schäfer (Trier), who helped us with the formatting and the publication of the volume, and Dr. Troy Sagrillo (Swansea) who read various parts of it. Our sincere thanks go to Professor Thomas Schneider (Vancouver), the editor of *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* (CHANE) series for accepting the proceedings, to the publisher Brill and to Jennifer Pavelko, Assistant Editor at Brill. Our thanks are also due to Sabine Wehmeyer and the staff of the *Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum* who helped us with the logistics of the conference and the receptions. Finally, we would like to thank all the speakers and especially those colleagues, who chaired the sessions, and everyone who attended the conference and helpfully commented on various research aspects.

July 2009

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Hildesheim

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SYMPOSIUM PAPERS (ALPHABETICAL BY AUTHOR)

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Stile und Ikonographien im kaiserzeitlichen Ägypten.
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Ein römerzeitliches Pyramidengrab und seine Ausstattung in Tuna el-Gebel. Ein Vorbericht zu den Grabungskampagnen 2007 und 2008.
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Die Nekropole von Tuna el-Gebel in römischer Zeit.
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Die Transformation eines Textes. Das Verhältnis des lateinischen und griechischen Teiles der Gallusstele zueinander.
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- Vleeming, S. P. (Trier)
Tradition und Transformation. Einblicke in die Verwaltung des römischen Ägypten nach den demotischen Urkunden.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN ROMAN SOKNOPAIU NESOS: RESULTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Paola Davoli¹

Dime es-Seba, the Graeco-Roman *kome* of Soknopaiou Nesos, has been the object of papyrological studies since C. Wessely published² the first group of Greek papyri in 1902. The site is well known as the source of thousands of Greek and Demotic papyri and *ostraka* spread in many collections all over the world and found in unknown circumstances since 1887. According to A. Jördens,³ the published Greek papyri are about 1100, but an unknown number of documents is still waiting for publication. A much greater number of Demotic papyri and *ostraka* came from Dime and they are still mostly unpublished.⁴ A great improvement to the study of Demotic sources came recently from a group of scholars from Würzburg Universität and others who are lifting the veil on documentary and religious texts.⁵ Most of the texts we have from Dime belong to the Roman period, as is the case for several other Fayyum settlements.

The available documents gave rise to a number of articles concerning taxation, personal names, religious matters, population and depopulation, local economy, presence and use of Greek literary texts. All of them agree on the fact that Soknopaiou Nesos was abandoned in the middle of the 3rd century AD, but the causes of this event are still to be clarified. However, there are some papyri and parchments dated to a later period that claim to have been found in Dime, as for example some in Vienna Papyrussammlung and in Freer's collection in Smithsonian Institution, Washington (DC).⁶ All of them were bought

¹ www.museopapirologico.eu.

² Wessely 1902.

³ Jördens 2005, 41–42.

⁴ Clarysse 2005.

⁵ See among others Lippert and Schentuleit 2005, with further bibliography at p. 71 n. 1. Muhs 2005. Widmer 2005. Lippert 2007. Stadler 2005. Widmer 2007. Schentuleit and Liedtke 2008.

⁶ Cf. with previous bibliography Capasso 2005, 2–6 with previous bibliography. Clarke 2006.

through the antiquities market and thus their provenance is far to be sure.

The foundation of the settlement is generally placed during the reign of Ptolemy II, as part of the wider program of land reclamation and foundation of new settlements in the Fayyum. However, K. Lembke⁷ suggested an earlier foundation in the 18th Dynasty due to the discovery of some monuments and objects in the area (i.e. the statue of the governor of the Fayyum during the reign of Amenhotep III, Sobekhotep). The period and the reasons of the foundation of a settlement in the desert and the exact meaning of its name are, in my opinion, far to be clear. The basic condition that allows a complex society to live in a place is obviously the presence of fresh water, which is completely lacking nowadays. This problem of paramount importance has not been studied properly and is often neglected, assuming that there was an artificial canal running from Karanis to Soknopaiou Nesos, as suggested by Grenfell and Hunt.⁸ Its existence has never been demonstrated and it is extremely unlikely due to the harshness of the desert in between, with depressions and high ledges to cross. The lake might have been a supply of fresh water, but up to now we have not been able to determine the degree of salinity of its water in different periods. It is possible that the lake water was drinkable and useful for the few green lands nearby, which existence is attested by papyri. However, it must be noted that the shore of the lake in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods corresponds approximately to the modern one⁹ that is about 2 km far from the settlement.

These controversial or unsolved questions can possibly find a solution only with archaeological and geological investigations. From an archaeological point of view the site and its surroundings are largely to be explored and studied. The major bulk of archaeological information we have comes from the 1925 survey of G. Caton-Thompson and E. W. Gardner and from excavations carried out in 1932 by the University of Michigan.¹⁰ Since 2001 Lecce University has been involved in a project of documentation and excavation of the site, called Soknopaiou Nesos Project, directed by me and Mario Capasso.

⁷ Lembke 1998a, 110.

⁸ Grenfell, Hunt, and Hogarth 1900, 15; Geremek 1969, 45. Contra: Caton-Thompson and Gardner 1934, I: 156–157.

⁹ Cf. Davoli 2001.

¹⁰ Caton-Thompson and Gardner 1934 (2 vols.). Boak 1935. Cf. Davoli 1998, 39–54.

The aim of the project is to document the urban area and to survey the area around Dime using all the technologies that can provide new knowledge—as topographical survey, photogrammetry, satellite images, magnetometry—and to excavate part of it.

The surveys of the visible structures and of the contour lines of the site were carried out in 2005 and 2006 seasons by a team of topographers.¹¹ In 2007 the pavement of the *dromos* was cleaned and fully documented on a length of 265 meters. High resolution metric photographs were taken and then mosaicated. On this basis a 1:20 scale drawing was obtained and was then improved on site with details, such as chiselled lines or marks present on the pavement.

The territorial survey started in 2006 with the acquisition of a high resolution satellite image,¹² with some tests in the settlement and in the area West and South of it by means of a magnetometer and a conductivity meter¹³ and with quick geo-archaeological survey. A number of archaeological features, as tombs, houses, embankments and small settlements of different periods—from Neolithic to Islamic—were located together with the shore of an ancient lake. No traces of ancient canals have been recognized from satellite nor on the ground so far. Considering the complexity of the natural and archaeological features of the area, the survey will continue in the future with specialists in different disciplines.

Since 2003 an excavation started inside the *temenos*, in an area located North of the still standing building previously identified as Soknopaios' temple. The *temenos* occupies a large part of the northern area of the *kom* and it is considered as the centre of the major activities of the settlement. Many robberies-excavations occurred in this area, including a Late Roman or Medieval spoliation of the limestone block buildings, but no scientific investigation have ever taken place there. The main temple, built in limestone block at the centre of the *temenos*, has been brought to light almost in its entirety. Four small lateral

¹¹ The topographical survey carried out by the joint archaeological mission of the Bologna and Lecce Universities during the seasons 2001 and 2002 was not completed: Davoli 2005b. Davoli 2005a, 224–231, pl. 13–18. The new survey was conducted by a team of topographers from Archeosistemi society (Reggio Emilia). On methods and results see Davoli et al. (in press).

¹² Nominal resolution of 0.70 m, taken in March 18, 2006 by Quickbird satellite.

¹³ The survey was carried out by Tatyana Smekalova (St. Petersburg University) with EM38RT round conductivity meter from Geonics limited (Ontario, Canada). The magnetic fields were measured with an Overhauser magnetometer.

rooms and the so-called mysterious corridor will be excavated in November 2008.

After five seasons of archaeological investigation what can we add to the knowledge of this site? Are we able to give answers to some of the questions listed above? As it often happens, some questions started to be clarified but many others arose.

A first consideration can be made on the number of buildings surveyed. What have been plotted in the general plan of Dime (Fig. 1) are the walls visible on the top surface of the *kom*, on an area of about 640 metres North-South and 320 metres East-West. The major temple occupies a large part of the northern area of the *kom* (9000 square metres). South of the *temenos*, the site is divided longitudinally by a long paved *dromos* (320 x 6.5 m) which led to the temple area from the South. The general plan testifies to the current state of preservation of the site, but it can give us an idea, even if vague, of the number and the kind of buildings.

Perimeter walls enclosed the settlement at least in its northern half. These allowed for control of people going in and out through easily controllable gateways, two of which can possibly be recognised on the *kom* to the North and East of the *temenos*. This condition matches quite well with the high number of receipts of payment on goods found and related to the Roman period¹⁴ and with the mention in some papyri of a *Pyle*.¹⁵ A building is placed outside the North wall, not far from one of the supposed entrances and we can presume it may have been the customs house. On the contrary, to the South of the site there are no traces of walls and the monumental stairway to the *dromos* stands alone, as we could verify cleaning it all around. Nonetheless, a small and only building is still visible in front of it, to the Southwest, apparently far from the blocks of houses. It may also be interpreted as a control station, but we can verify all these hypothesis only with archaeological investigation.

In the area North and Northeast of the *temenos* we can see a wide open-air space connected with a second one and with some buildings. Its position and shape suggest it may have been an area to host temporarily animals and travellers. Another building with a wide courtyard is placed in the central area of the settlement, East of the *dromos*.

¹⁴ The customhouse receipts from Soknopaiou Nesos known so far are 615: Musardo 2007 (in press).

¹⁵ Cf. Calderini and Daris 1986, IV: 300; Id. 2003, 139.

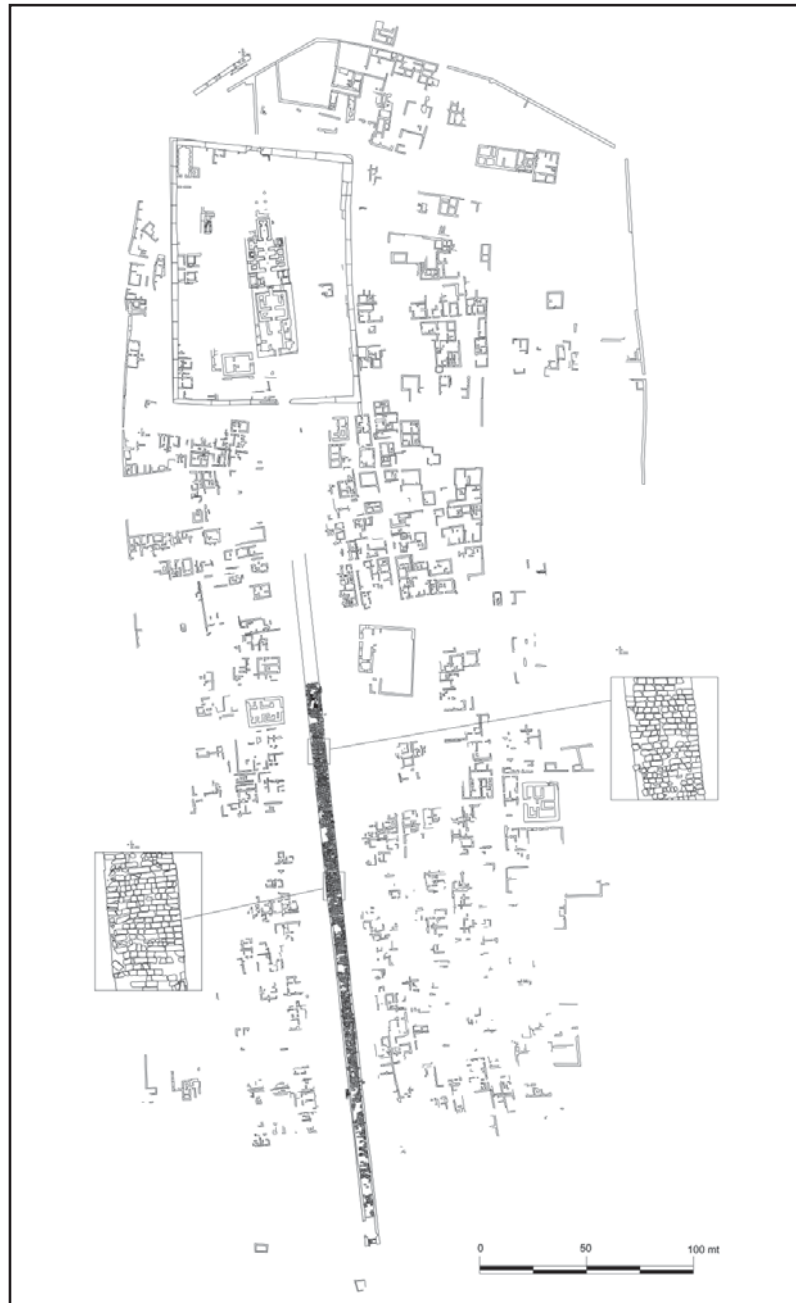


Fig. 1: General plan of Dime (2007) with details of the *dromos* pavement.

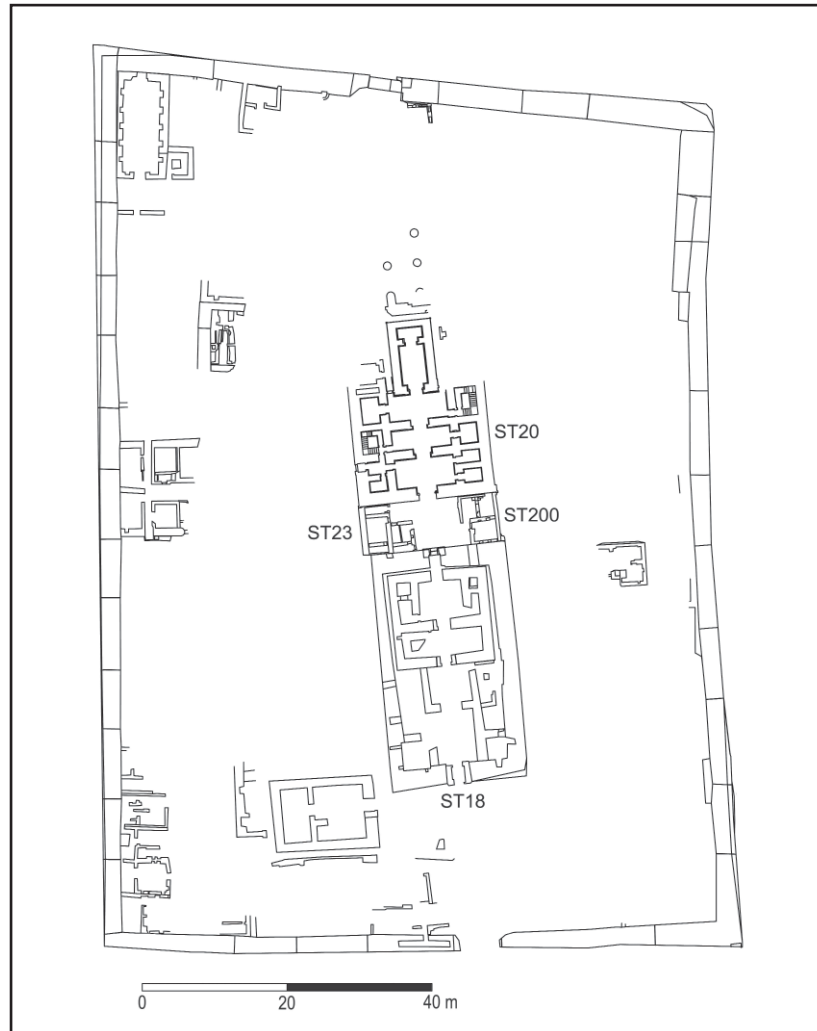


Fig. 2: *Temenos* plan (2007, oriented to geographic North).

Most of the surveyed structures are domestic buildings, with their courtyard and ovens.

In general, the urban layout is well preserved, especially in the area East and Southeast of the *temenos*, where it is possible to follow the layout of the blocks. The urban plan becomes less and less organised towards the South and Southwest, where buildings and streets lose much of their legibility and are reduced to simple alignments of walls.

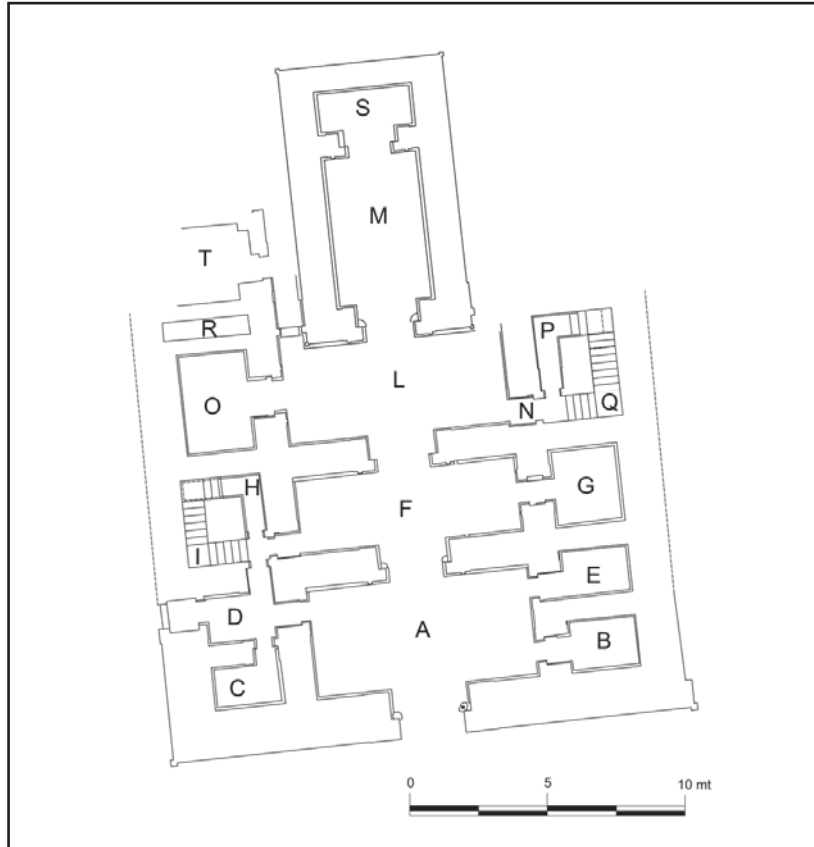


Fig. 3: Plan of temple ST 20 (2007).

The area with the greatest density and number of buildings seems to be the one East of the *dromos*. On the contrary, the buildings and blocks seem to be limited to a narrow strip adjacent to the *dromos* West-South-West of this road. However, it must be noted that the ground in this sector is rather flat, suggesting that the area was levelled by the *sebbakhin*. The impact of this activity, very frequent and common in the sites closer to the cultivated area South of Birket Qarun, is still in doubt in regard to Soknopaiou Nesos.¹⁶ Another hypothesis

¹⁶ The razing activity by the *sebbakhin* is mentioned in Boak 1935, 3; however, the correspondence of D. L. Askren with F. W. Kelsey (letter on 27 July 1915) indicates that the *sebbakhin* themselves considered such activity in Dime as too costly and time-consuming, especially because of the difficulty in transportation. See Clarke 2006, 63 n. 121.

that can explain this situation more convincingly is that the settlement was less stratified in this area and that the buildings are less densely built. At this stage we cannot count the buildings one by one because most of the visible structures are simple walls without connections, but we estimate a number of structures, mainly houses, comprising between 500 and 600 units, not taking into consideration the areas where nothing is visible.

The number of inhabitants of Soknopaiou Nesos has been calculated according with pool-tax registers. According to W. Clarysse, if we apply a multiplier of 3.1 to the number of tax payers we can calculate the number of the inhabitants that were 756 in 178 AD (523 in 179 AD and 413 in 207/209 AD). P. van Minnen and G. Messeri Savorelli, on the basis of other papyri, estimate for the end of the second century a population respectively of 900 and 1100 inhabitants.¹⁷ These numbers appear to be underestimate when compared with the visible buildings and even more when compared with the general dimensions of the settlement. Thus a series of suppositions rises from the comparison of these data: we can suppose that a great part of the buildings of the upper level of the settlement was not in use at the end of the second century, or that most of them were not domestic buildings, or that the calculation of the population based on data collected from papyri and the application of a standard multiplier are not correct. Certainly this matter deserves more investigation.

The survey allowed us to recognize a new mud brick temple (Fig. 4), located West of the *dromos* and in a quite central position. We do not have evidence that can suggest the name of the god to whom it was dedicated so far. It must have been connected with the *dromos* through a short street or *dromos*, of which there are no traces. However, on both sides of the *dromos* there are two spaces parallel to it and apparently free from structures. These two spaces are completely covered by clean wind blown sand and they look like modern trenches deeper towards the South of the *dromos*. However, I did not find any mention of past excavations along the *dromos* except for a trench cut in 1892 by Major R. H. Brown, a general Inspector of irrigation for Upper Egypt and a Royal engineer. He wanted to define the purpose of the *dromos* being persuaded that the settlement was located on the shore of the lake, considered as the unique source of water. He wrote: "I had a

¹⁷ Clarysse 2005, 21–22; Messeri Savorelli 1989; van Minnen 1995, 43.



Fig. 4: Detail from the general plan. The mud brick temple and the *dromos*.



Fig. 5: View of the West foundation wall of the *dromos*.

trench dug against this quay or causeway [the *dromos*], at about the middle of its length, to determine the depth to which the masonry was carried down. If this had been merely a causeway, it is not easy to understand the necessity for so great a depth of masonry. It is therefore more probably a quay projecting into the water.”¹⁸ As is well known, the lake could not have reached this elevation in the Graeco-Roman period. Our survey of the *dromos* proved that several excavations damaged the foundation of the paved street determining its collapse. The hypothesis of K. Lembke¹⁹ that the famous private statues found in Dime and now in Cairo Egyptian Museum, Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria and Berlin Museum had been placed on the *dromos* suggests that there must have been other excavations along it. These statues were found in 1890 probably during the excavation of Ali Farag, a dealer of Giza who got permission from the Service des Antiquités to dig in Dime for two winters. The presence of statues

¹⁸ Brown 1892, 51–52.

¹⁹ Lembke 1998a (with a complete list of statues and stelae from Dime); Lembke 1998b; Bianchi 1992.



Fig. 6: Platform on the *dromos* (looking South).

on the *dromos* is not mentioned in any previous description of the ruins nor on any plans.²⁰ Moreover, we have to consider that these statues are very well preserved and almost complete, a clear sign that they were deeply buried in soft context. Thus we should assume that Ali Farag excavated on the sides of the *dromos*, probably for a certain length. However, we do not have to believe that the two narrow strips at the sides of the monumental street are the result of robberies trenches. Although we did not excavate the *dromos* area, we collected a number of new data that can help in the interpretation of this important feature.

The foundations of the *dromos* consist of two parallel walls retaining the sand on which the paving is set (Fig. 5). Parts of these walls are visible on the sides of the *dromos* and in its southern half, where the floor slabs are not preserved anymore. The pavement is neither well preserved in all places nor uniform: sectors of pavement made with different stones were identified, perhaps corresponding to different periods of construction or re-paving. They may be connected with the

²⁰ A plan of Dime was drawn by Sir J. G. Wilkinson in 1821–33 (now in Bodleian Library, Oxford); a second one was published by Lepsius 1849, I: Bl. 52.

progressive expansion of the habitation blocks toward the South. For the moment we can divide the surveyed part of the *dromos* in two different sectors: in the first 160 meters from South to North the pavement is very damaged and made of grey soft limestone slabs. In this space the street rises slightly towards North and it is quite high on the lateral sand surfaces. This difference in level turned out to be original as we found two stairways leading from the *dromos* down for at least 1.8 m. They are 80 meters far from the South stairway and are placed one in front of the other on the opposite sides of the street and parallel to it. This means that the *dromos* was, in this area, a banked street and that perhaps two other streets ran on its sides. The lateral stairs allowed people to cross or to get on the processional way. I did not find any comparison for such a banked street and probably this peculiarity is due to the local morphology of the ground rather than religious needs.

A sort of rectangular platform (Fig. 6), slightly larger than the street and marked by a threshold and five drums of columns, is located at middle length of the *dromos*.²¹ Until this point the street goes up towards North with a light slope, then it runs flat. The pavement of the platform and of the street North of it is different from that to the South, suggesting that the southern sector of the *dromos* was built in a different period. Numerous are the chiselled marks on the slabs of the northern sector, including a line that marks the centre of the *dromos*, some scattered Greek letters and the name Satabous.

In front of the new mud brick temple the pavement of the *dromos* changes (Fig. 4) and in some way part of the foundation filling, as was demonstrated by the magnetometry survey. In fact, there is a highly magnetic area between the foundation walls and under the pavement. North of this magnetic area the pavement is unfortunately very damaged but finely executed with squared tiles (26 x 26 cm) of black basalt and brown limestone surrounded by a cornice and set in a thick layer of white mortar placed on a foundation of yellow limestone blocks. It is similar to the pavement found inside the *naos* (room ST 20M) of the temple of Soknopaios. East of it a statue of a lion was discovered deeply buried in the sand. The statue had been deliberately smashed up with the aid of fires at an unknown point in time.²² The religious importance

²¹ It might have been a kiosk or a tribune: cf. Cabrol 2001, 565.

²² The modern name of the site, Dime es-Seba, suggests the presence of statues of lions, but no one has been found up to date. This statue and some other fragments recovered near the *dromos* suggest the real presence of a number of lion statues and of sphinxes on the processional causeway. G. B. Belzoni (1819) and K. R. Lepsius



Fig. 7: View of the excavated sector (2003–2007): temple ST 20 from Southeast.

of this area is also testified to by the presence on the *dromos* of a limestone slab whose surface is covered by ‘pilgrims stretches’; moreover, two square holes are symmetrically located on the *dromos*, probably to hold some kind of monument or poles. No traces of a kiosk or other features have been recognised so far in this area and a proper future excavation would probably clarify the situation.

The area immediately in front of the *temenos* gate is in very poor condition. A limestone building with columns was once on the *dromos*, but it was robbed as well as the last sector of the paved street and the gateway in the *temenos*. Something interesting for the treasure hunters must have been in this area, as the presence of a wide crater in the sand testifies to.

Soknopaios’ temple is one of the best-preserved sacred areas in the Fayyum,²³ but it was never scientifically excavated (Fig. 2). The great number of papyri, mainly demotic, that came from this temple at the

(1843) did not mention them in their descriptions of the site: Davoli 1998, 40–41. On the contrary, Sir J. G. Wilkinson (1821–33) mentioned the presence of parts of lion statues inside the *temenos* and at the North end of the *dromos*: Ms. Wilkinson dep. A 15, fol. 41.

²³ The *temenos* area with the visible buildings are described in Davoli 2007.



Fig. 8: The central rooms of temple ST 20 from South.

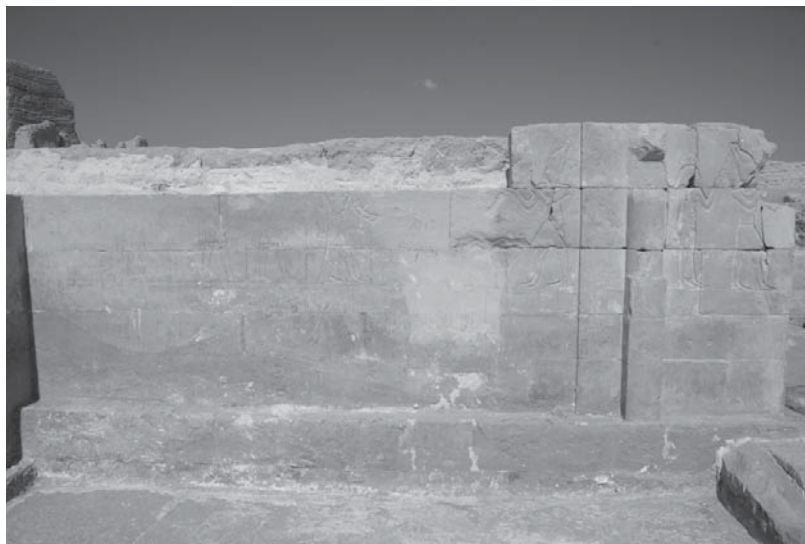


Fig. 9: Northwest wall in room F with the decorated register.

end of the 19th century,²⁴ offers the extraordinary possibility of a

²⁴ In 1887 a number of Greek and Demotic papyri reached the antiquities market in Cairo and was divided and sold in several lots to many institutions: Wilcken 1912,



Fig. 10: View from South of the *naos* M and S.

multidisciplinary study of an important context. The Soknopaiou Nesos Project carried out five excavation seasons (2003–2007) in a sector located inside the *temenos*, North of the temple built in mud brick and stone (labelled ST 18) identified by Grenfell and Hunt as the temple of Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses.²⁵ Its entrance is located in front of the main gate in the *temenos* and in front of the *dromos*. On the basis of its plan, I have proposed to interpret it as a Ptolemaic temple transformed into a monumental *propylon* with the opening of a door in the rear wall of the *naos*.²⁶ The presence of this door suggests the extension of the temple towards North, in a centrally located area where a huge number of heavy lintels and blocks are concentrated. Thus it was evident that the temple proper was situated in this area, of which we excavated a sector of 25 x 40 m, beginning from the rear wall of the building ST 18 (Fig. 7). Its North gate leads to a paved courtyard in front of an imposing temple built in limestone blocks, labelled ST 20. Two small auxiliary buildings (ST 23 and ST 200) closed the courtyard on its West and East sides, forcing the entrance to the

I: XIX; Turner 1939, v–vi. Monuments or fragments of them found in the temple during the excavation of Ahmed Kamal in 1915–16 were also probably sold: Kamal 1916.

²⁵ Grenfell and Hunt 1901, 5.

²⁶ Davoli 2007, 101–104.

courtyard and to the temple from South through the *propylon* ST 18. The temple ST 20 had a secondary entrance from its West side, through room D (Fig. 3). Thirteen rooms, two staircases and two crypts have been brought to light so far and are preserved to a height of about 1.6 m

Of these, two are wide rooms on the main axis of the temple (rooms A, F), both with a grey limestone slabs floor in quite good condition and with ramps flanked by two rows of three steps (Fig. 8). The third room on the main axis is the vestibule (L) in front of the *naos*, which is divided into two rooms (M and S) (Fig. 10). The pavement of the first room M is completely missing in the centre, but it is preserved at the entrance and along the perimeter walls. It consisted of two series of rectangular paving stones in brown limestone and basalt that formed a sort of cornice for a pavement of square and triangular tiles. Some of these were in basalt and others in brown limestone. It is a quite unusual kind of floor for a temple, highly elaborated and in contrast with the plain pavement of the following room S. It is of the same kind we have seen on the *dromos*, therefore we can assume that they were built at the same time. The basalt and limestone elements of the floor were not properly tiles, as they are quite thick,²⁷ with a polished upper surface and a rough lower one to be inserted in a thick layer of white mortar. The mortar was smeared on a course of limestone blocks, which formed the foundation of the floor.²⁸

A wide door opening to the North led into the *naos* (S). The door, originally closed by two leafs opening inside S, was flanked by a flat cornice on which two large male figures, identifiable as the ruler stepping toward the entrance, are carved. Only the knee-length garment and legs of these figures are preserved. The *naos* S is only 2 m long and the pavement in limestone blocks is preserved at its eastern end only. The walls are smooth, with the exception of an area 1.6 m wide, which was left rough at the centre of the rear wall, where presumably a *naos* was originally placed. According to the traces left on the rear wall, as well as the measures of the room and of the door leafs, the *naos* should have occupied an area of 1.6 m by 1.3 m in depth.

The *sancta sanctorum* formed by the two rooms are different from others known in the Fayyum, while the general plan of the temple is

²⁷ Their dimensions vary from 20 x 20 cm to 31 x 31 cm; the thickness is 14 cm.

²⁸ This kind of floor can be defined as *opus sectile*, but the elements used here are not thin slabs as they use to be. Cf. Ginouvés and Martin 1985, I, 144–152.

very similar to that of the ground floor of Qasr Qarun temple, with minor differences.²⁹

Because of the spoliation of the temple and several treasure hunters' excavations carried out in 19th and 20th centuries the stratigraphy consisted primarily of debris, blocks and large architraves, belonging to the original covering of the building and resulting from the collapse and dismantlement of the structure. The stratigraphy was almost everywhere disturbed. Many are the objects and monuments belonging to the original furniture of the sanctuary that were found, but they are all fragments. Pieces of the same object have been recovered in different rooms as a result of numerous tampering. For this reason it is difficult to recognize the function of the lateral rooms in the temple. Two of them are chapels (G and O) because of the *torus* cornice around their doors, both originally closed by a double leafs wooden door. Their floors were completely removed. Chapel O (3.75 x 2.54 m) is heavily damaged, but is preserved to a maximum height of 1.15 m above the original floor level. On the faces of the walls there is a light-colour stain, which suggests the presence of a masonry structure abutted to the rear western wall. Stains and traces of mortar on the North and South walls attest that this structure must have occupied most of the space in the room.

Among the lateral rooms there is a storage for ritual objects—room E—where it was possible to securely identify traces of use of the building in the Late Roman period. The layer of ancient rubbish spread on the floor was not completely removed by previous diggers because of the presence of a very heavy lintel inside the room that did not allow the excavation. Among the finds are fragments of wooden furniture decorated with glass inlays, beads, Greek and Demotic papyri in bad condition due to their use as fuel for late fireplaces.

Traces of a late use of the building are present in other rooms also, as for example in G, F and L. They consist of a fragment of a literary Coptic papyrus³⁰ from the 6th century AD and late Roman amphorae datable between the end of the 4th and the 7th century (late AE3 and LRA7). The coin found by Boak and dated to the beginning of the 4th century is no longer the only late object found in Dime.³¹

²⁹ Arnold 1999, 257; Daumas 1980, 262.

³⁰ I would like to thank R. S. Bagnall for this dating.

³¹ Coin of Costantius I (305–306 AD): Haatvedt 1935, 38, 47 no. 87.

Two crypts were found so far: one was built in the thickness of the wall (room R) and was probably entered from the top; the second one is located under the East staircase (room Q). A small trap door situated in the first landing gave access to a crypt that extends below the second flight. It is well preserved (3 x 0.76 m), except for a portion of the floor that has been dismantled as well as the landing with the trap door to make the entrance easier for the diggers. The roof of the crypt is the bottom of the second flight of the staircase and therefore the height of the crypt varies from 1.18 to 2.04 m from South to North. A low passageway (69 cm height and 50 cm wide) in the north wall connected the crypt with a small hiding-place situated under the pavement of room P, which is a room under the stairs. This hiding and well protected place was probably used for the treasure of the temple.³²

The decoration of the temple was not finished: the external surfaces were not levelled and rough bosses were left on the walls. Some of the inside walls are smooth and some others are simply flattened. All the doors are surrounded by flat and slightly raised cornices on which are the torus cornices in the case of the main central doors or of chapels. The lintels of the doors were in yellow limestone, while the architraves were in grey shell-limestone, and decorated with cavetto cornices and uraei friezes. Many fragments of lintels and of freezes, sometime painted, have been found.

A bas-relief decoration was certainly part of the original project of the temple, but it was only partially created around some doors and on the Northwest wall in the offering room F (Fig. 9). The figurative register is about 60 cm above the floor and it represents nine partially preserved characters in different stages of completeness. Some decorated blocks belonging to this relief have been found in different rooms during several seasons. These allowed us to reconstruct part of the scene: on the actual wall there are seven male figures, two of which can be identified as depicting a king and five as representing gods. All the figures are outlined with red ink and only two were carved in bas-relief, but these are unfinished. The gods are all standing and have the same peculiarities. The king is wearing a triangular skirt with the front decorated by two hanging cobras.³³ The register was probably divided into two panels: the first one to the right showing the first two figures

³² We can suppose that the perfectly preserved incense burner in wood and gold leaf found in Dime around 1893 and now preserved in Cairo Egyptian Museum (JE 30700) was left by the priests in this crypt or in a similar one.

³³ Type similar to Vassilika 1989, MS 79.

where the king, turned to the left and crowned with the Upper Egyptian crown, was presenting an offering to the god; the second one, to the left, enclosed the other five figures, with the king making an offering to four standing gods.³⁴

Other two figures are represented at the same level as the aforementioned register, but on the flat cornice West of the door that connects the offering room (F) with the vestibule (L). They are a king with the double crown followed by a queen wearing a long robe and the *basileion* with two high feathers. The names of these rulers should have been written in front of them, but that of the king is missing and the cartouche of the queen was left empty.³⁵ However, it is certain that they represent a couple of Ptolemaic rulers.³⁶

The bottom of a figured register is on the West cornice of the door leading inside the *naos* (M). The reliefs were finished and painted but only the feet of two facing male figures remain. It is certainly one of those scenes, enclosed in squares and arranged on more than one register, that usually decorate the cornices of the portals and often comprise two figures: the king, always turned towards the entrance of the temple, making an offering in front of the standing god with his back turned towards the door.³⁷ In this case, the king is painted brown-red, while the god is light blue. The lower part of two hieroglyphic inscriptions on facing columns is recognisable between the two figures.

As we have seen, two standing kings were represented on both sides of the entrance to *naos* S. Their original height can be estimated as 1.2 m.

The decoration of the temple is described in a Demotic papyrus kept in the Papyrussammlung in Vienna (pWien D10100) and recently

³⁴ As is well known, the decoration of the Graeco-Roman temple followed a series of rules one of which has been disregarded here: the positions of the king and the gods seem to be inverted, being the gods represented looking at the entrance of the temple and not vice versa: Gutbub 1985, 125.

³⁵ An empty cartouche is often found in captions of queens in the temple at Dendera, see for example: Chassinat 1934, II: pl. XCVIII. Part of this relief was published by S. Pernigotti who dated it to the Roman period and did not notice the presence of the queen behind the king: Pernigotti 2004, 120, pl. II.

³⁶ The presence of queens next to emperors in Egyptian temple reliefs is rare. The only example known to me is in the temple of Kalabsha, in which the emperor is followed once by the queen crowned with two high feathers: Gauthier 1911, I: 41; II: pls. XIVA, XVIII B.

³⁷ See Vassilika 1989, 11. This decorative scheme is typical of the Graeco-Roman temples. See for example the gate of the *naos* of the temple at Dendera: Chassinat 1934, I: pl. XLVI.

published by G. Vittmann.³⁸ The text was transcribed during the Roman period (1st–2nd century AD), but it describes figurative scenes depicting a Ptolemaic king followed by a queen. The decoration of a temple portal is described in another Vienna papyrus (Wien Aeg 9976) from Soknopaiou Nesos, which mentions Ptolemy VIII.³⁹ In both cases, however, the depictions and texts in the papyri do not match what has been found so far. Thus, it is possible that the papyri belong to parts of the temple still not brought to light or decorations that were designed but never made.⁴⁰ From other Demotic and Greek sources recently published or under study we can gather information about the economic and religious life of the temple and its feasts. Many of these data are not fully comprehensible due to the lack of comparisons or of the features to which they refer. In some cases the excavation could solve or enlighten texts, as for example the daily ritual followed by the priests in the Roman period that mentioned the crossing of five gateways before entering the *wesekhet* hall. M. Stadler, who is in charge of this text, could recognize the gates and the *wesekhet* hall respectively in buildings ST 18 and ST 20, which were part of one temple during the Roman period, as the excavation demonstrated.⁴¹

A short mention of the finds will complete the overview of the archaeological results of the excavation. Many papyri and *ostraka* in Greek and Demotic, papyri amulets,⁴² incense burners and many fragments of monuments and statues in basalt and limestone have been found scattered in and around temple ST 20. The stone monuments are all badly ruined. Some are cornices in classical style, such as a Ionic-Corinthian style cornice with rosettes,⁴³ a Doric frieze with a triglyph and plain metope, the base of a small column in imperial attic style and what seems to be a piece of a Corinthian capital.⁴⁴ These

³⁸ Vittmann 2002/2003, 106–136, pl. 14–21.

³⁹ Winter 1967. The wide temple building program of Ptolemy VIII is well known: Hölbl 2001, 257.

⁴⁰ Both papyri can be defined as copies of “pattern books” for the decoration of the temple: Vassilika 1989, 7–11.

⁴¹ Stadler 2007.

⁴² Capasso 2007.

⁴³ A similar cornice was found in Theadelphia: Pensabene 1993, 510 cat.-no. 924, pl. 97.

⁴⁴ Inv.-no. ST04/100/517; cm 35 x 65, th. 13–16.5. Inv.-no. ST04/100/699; cm 10 x 11.5 x 11.

architectural elements suggest the presence of one or more Classical style buildings inside the *temenos*.⁴⁵

Among the statues we could recognize several different standing males of the well known Dime style, one with the more traditional *shendit* and at least one female statue with long curls, perhaps the goddess Isis or a priestess, three crocodiles, one enthroned figure probably of dynastic period and part of a sort of a stela with a high relief head resembling the iconography of Amenemhat III or Premarres. Surprisingly, none of these statues is in basalt.

An exceptional object has been found in a building immediately West of the temple ST 20. It is an iron Roman cavalry sword, very well preserved, 1 m long and 6 cm wide. It is complete, with an iron scabbard and an ebony pommel. The sword, which has only been consolidated so far, will be restored in the future. It is comparable to the depiction of three swords on a relief representing the three gods of Palmyra and dated to the first half of the 1st century AD.⁴⁶

In conclusion, after five seasons of investigation we have reached a much better and clearer idea of the site's layout and of the main temple at the present state of preservation. However, it will take time and a lot of interdisciplinary work before coming to solid conclusions on the many open questions about the settlement and its surroundings.

On the basis of what we know from an archaeological perspective, we can argue that the area was inhabited with a certain degree of continuity from the Neolithic to the Islamic period. In this wide span of time there have been major changes in the climate that influenced the landscape and the available resources. The comprehension of these variations is one of the main tasks of the Soknopaiou Nesos Project for the future.

The continuous anthropic presence in the area does not mean that Soknopaiou Nesos was founded in a pre-Ptolemaic period nor that it

⁴⁵ We cannot rule out the possibility that the pieces belonged to the same building, since it is well known that in Alexandrian style architecture different styles could be used at the same time; however, it is also possible that they are part of different structures. A small chapel with columns, labelled ST 7, is located on the North side in the *temenos*: Davoli 2007, 100.

⁴⁶ Limestone relief: Louvre Museum, AO 19801 (height 56 cm, width 72 cm) from Bir Wereb, near Palmyra (1945). Three similar pommels, but smaller, are exhibited at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Two of them are in bone and ivory (JE 45047) and belonged to swords found in Mit Rahina in 1914. The third one is in serpentine (JE 25554) and was found in Thebes.

was still an organized settlement in the Late Roman period. Little evidence from the Late Roman period has been found especially inside the *temenos*, such as pottery and a Coptic fragment of papyrus, but they can be considered as proofs of the presence of sporadic small groups of people. The pottery survey did not reveal so far the presence of a consistent amount of Late Roman pottery on the site as we could expect from a community. Therefore we can continue to consider the mid-third century as the period of the abandonment of the settlement, but we have also to bear in mind that people continued to pass by and to live, probably for short spans of time, among the ruins of Soknopaios' temple. The North shore of lake Qarun was then not completely deserted.

Comparing the results of the excavations and surveys carried out by the University of Michigan and by the University of Lecce, we could put forward a series of preliminary hypothesis about the development of the settlement. During the beginning of the Ptolemaic period the settlement occupied the area immediately around or South of the main temple. This one, the original temple ST 18, was built on a hill at about 25 m above sea level, while the contemporary houses, found by the University of Michigan in the West sector, were at about 17 m. The floor level of the temple did not rise in time, as is well demonstrated by the second temple ST 20 built between the 2nd and the 1st century BC and still in use in the middle of the 3rd century AD. On the contrary, the settlement underwent numerous changes in elevation and in the first two centuries of the Roman period it reached its maximum expansion. The *dromos* was probably set at the same time as the first Ptolemaic temple as a processional way, but the present feature was probably built in different moments, following the extension of the settlement toward South. The steep ground slope forced people to build it as a banked street connected with the lateral roads by stairways. A kiosk or a monumental building with columns was built on top of it in front of the gateway in the *temenos* and a second one or a tribune was at its middle length. Along the *dromos* or near the kiosk and the tribune were possibly placed the private statues found by Ali Farag and at least a cippus found by Boak (IFay I 72, 68/67 BC) with a dedication of two royal statues and the stela with the Prefect L. Lusius Geta's decree (IFay I 75, 54 AD). Their completeness suggests that these monuments cannot have been found inside the ruins of the

temple, where all the furniture had been crashed by heavy collapses.⁴⁷ Moreover, as A. Cabrol has pointed out, the *dromos* was the ideal place to set official decrees and private statues, well visible by priests and people.⁴⁸

All these new finds open new perspectives on the history of the temple, of the settlement and on the landscape in general, but further multidisciplinary research is necessary before a comprehensive picture of Soknopaiou Nesos can be reached.

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⁴⁷ Also the statues and the other monuments found by Ahmed Kamal inside the temple were all fragments.

⁴⁸ Cabrol 2001; royal statues and royal decrees were probably set on the tribune of Karnak temple: Lauffray 1971, 131.

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