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*Tell el-Amarna. The three eldest daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, followed by two attendants and Nefertiti's sister, Mutnodjmet. Part of a scene in the tomb of Parennefer, reproduced from pl.IV of Norman de Garis Davies, The Rock Tombs of el-Amarna VI, now reprinted by the EES (see p.13).*

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Cover illustration: *Deir el-Barsha. A gilded limestone mummy mask, found in an intact secondary Second Intermediate Period burial in one of the early Middle Kingdom tombs in the plain (see pp.10-12). Photograph: Deir el-Barsha Mission, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven.*



# Excavations at Soknopaiou Nesos (Dime)

Since 2001 an Italian mission has been excavating at the Graeco-Roman town of Soknopaiou Nesos (Dime) in the Fayum. **Paola Davoli** reports on the results of the expedition.

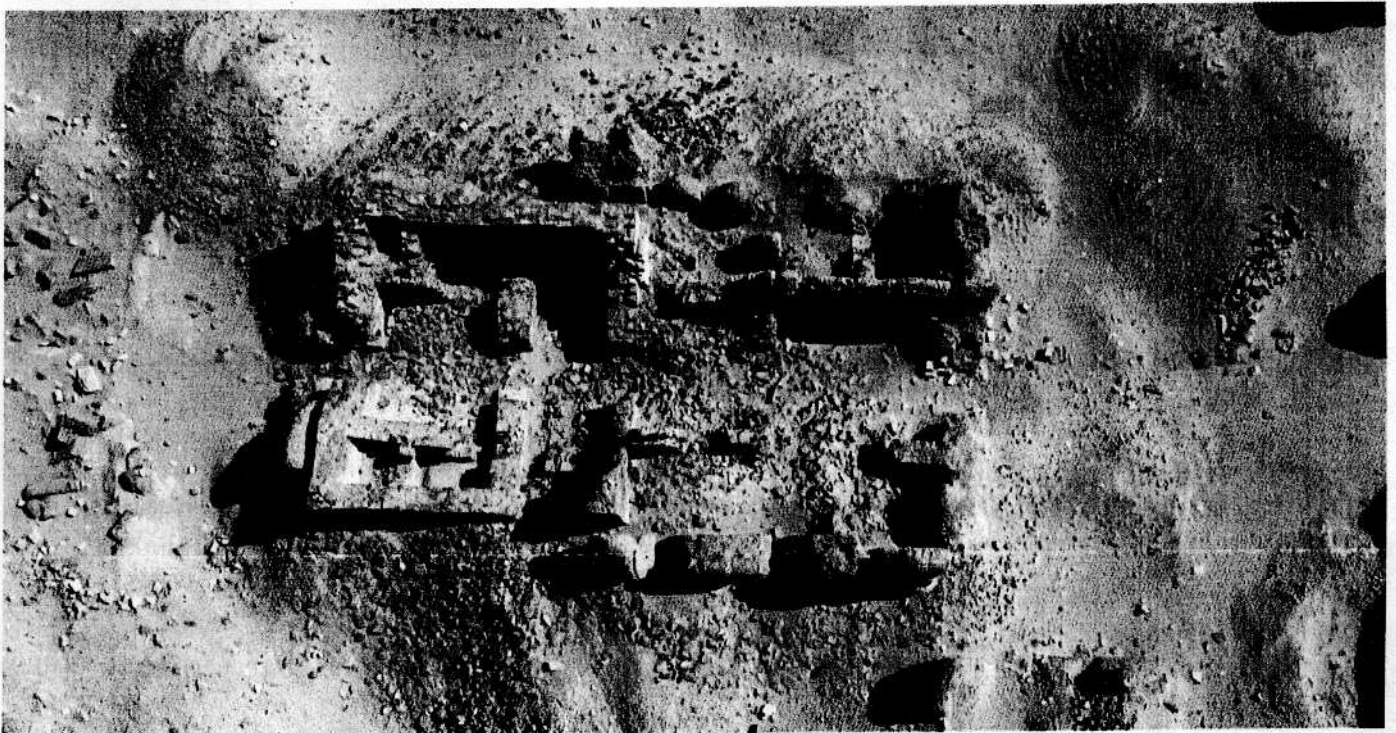
The Italian Joint Archaeological Mission of Bologna and Lecce universities, directed by Sergio Pernigotti (Bologna University) and by Mario Capasso (Lecce University), started work in 2001 at Soknopaiou Nesos (Dime), a Graeco-Roman town north of Lake Qarun in the Fayum. The first aim of the expedition was to prepare a topographical map of the entire archaeological area, as the only published map of the site is that of Karl Lepsius, who visited the ruins in July 1843.

From an archaeological point of view Dime is not well known and very little has been published about it, despite the fact that it is in a good state of preservation. The only archaeological excavation to be undertaken using stratigraphic methods was in 1932, by the Archaeological Mission of Michigan University directed by Ernest Peterson. There have, however, been many other 'excavations' over the years, the sole purpose of which was to find objects and papyri. In fact many papyri, now housed in various collections, were discovered at this site.

The topographical survey (2001–2002) of the present mission has enabled us to learn a great deal about the

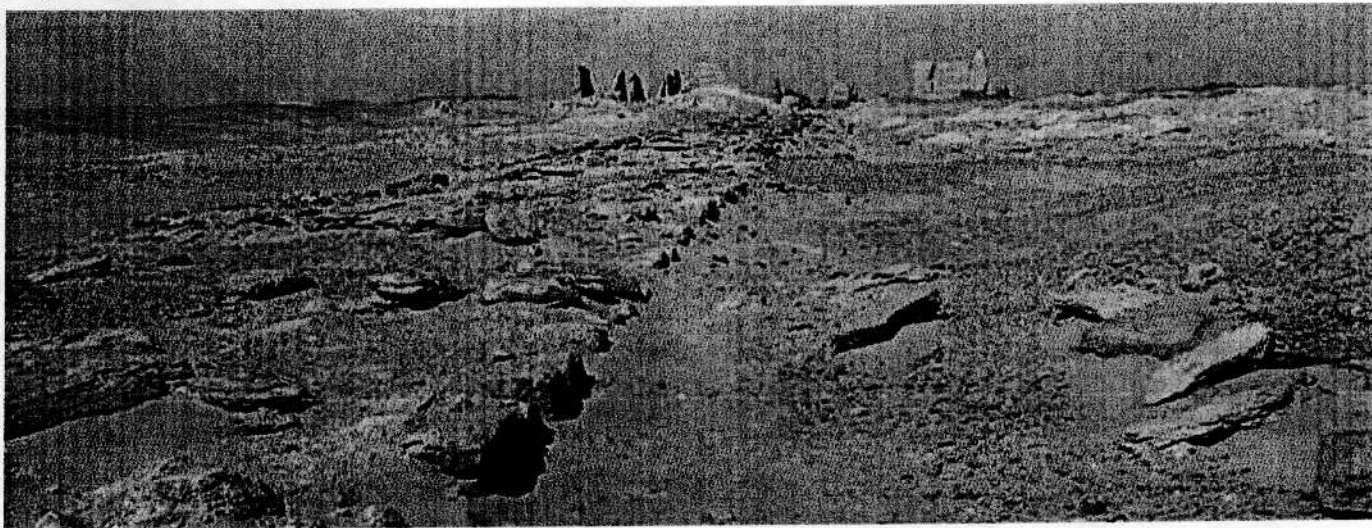
archaeological area, which measures 640m from north to south and 320m from east to west. During the survey all the visible above-ground buildings were catalogued and a scientific topographical map was drawn up. The plan was realised by topographers and archaeologists of Bologna University, from the Department of Archaeology and from DISTART (*Dipartimento di Ingegneria delle Strutture, dei Trasporti, delle Acque, del Rilevamento, del Territorio*) using modern methods of topographical surface survey as well as by means of a series of photographs taken at low altitude using a specially equipped aerostatic balloon and a digital terrain model (DTM) was obtained for the site. The DTM provides the base for different representation products and is useful at different stages of the study; some examples are contour maps and shaded relief maps.

During the survey various structures were identified, such as houses, *insulae*, large enclosures, temples, and kiosks on the *dromos*. The area inside the enclosure of the *temenos* of the main temple, dedicated to the crocodile god Soknopaios, is of great interest. Numerous buildings in mud-brick and stone are still partially pre-



*Aerial view of the temple (courtesy of DISTART)*





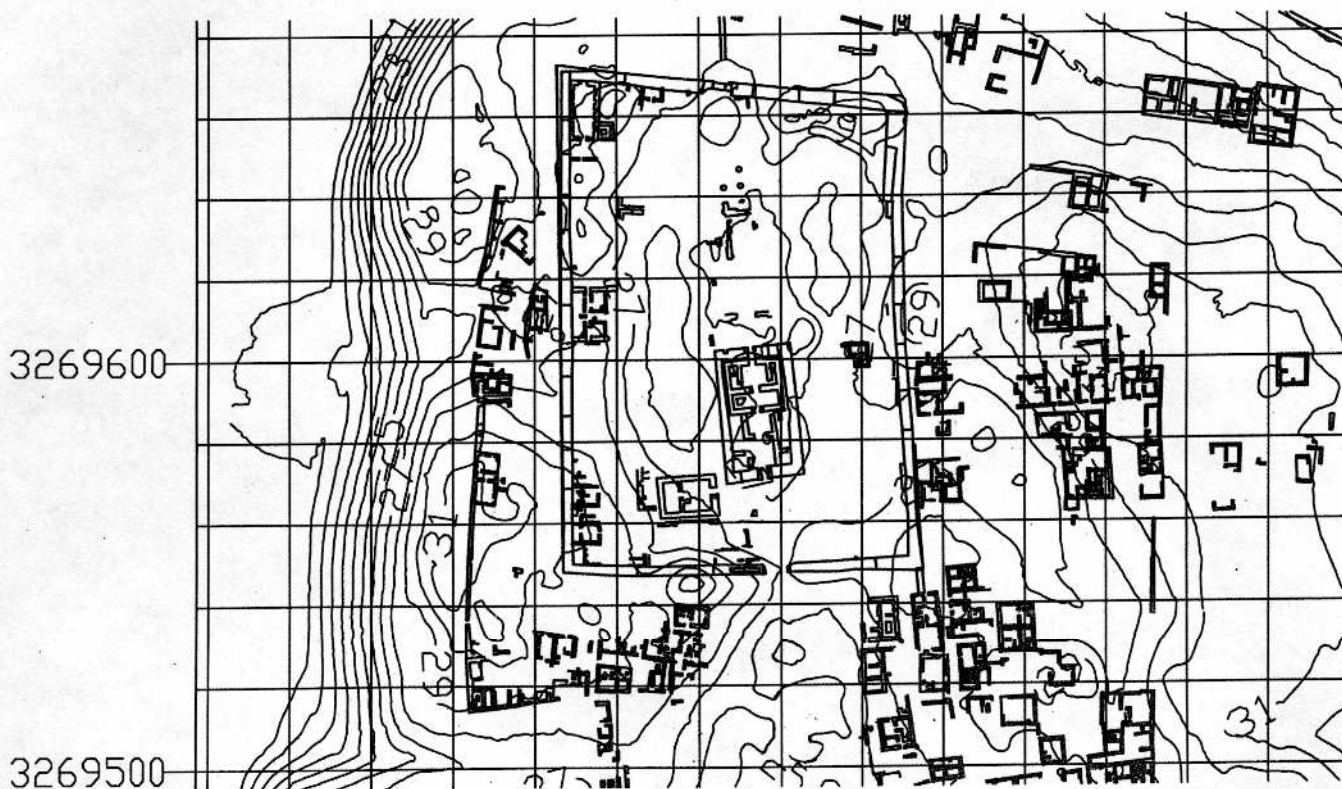
*View of the site from the south, showing the dromos and the temenos of the great temple*

served. Some of them were subsidiary buildings while others were small temples and chapels in both Egyptian and classical styles.

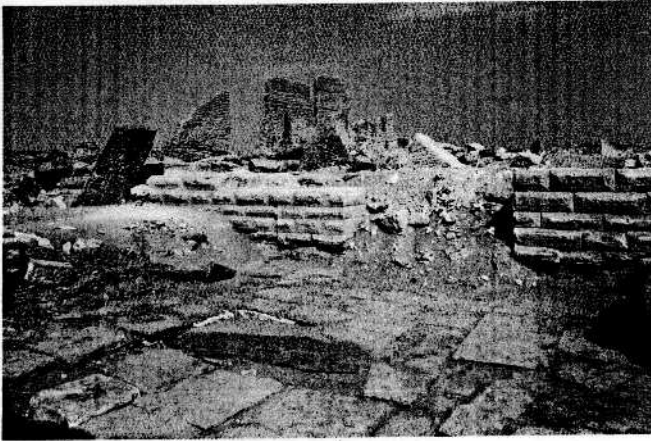
In February–March 2003 a more in-depth archaeological investigation was undertaken inside this great temple enclosure, which still dominates the ruins of the ancient town and within which no scientific excavation work had ever taken place. Although nothing was known about its use and chronological evolution, the temple of Soknopaios is well known as the provenance of numerous statues, architectural elements, and a large number of Greek and demotic papyri belonging to the temple archives which have been brought to light there. The area was also extensively quarried

as the many stone structures provided a good source for building materials. What is left today is a large, irregular enclosure which measures 122.30m × 84.37m, surrounded by mud-brick walls which are c.3m thick, 10m in height and mostly still well preserved. The main entrance was about halfway along the southern flank, at the end of a paved road, the *dromos*, which ran southwards for about 400m, dividing the ancient settlement into two parts.

In the middle of the enclosure there is a building which can, by its position and plan, be easily identified as the temple proper. Its entrance faces south, opposite the original gateway in the *temenos* and the *dromos*. This temple (32.53m × 18.90m) is preserved to



*Plan of the northern part of the town with the temenos (squares of 20m)*



*The courtyard from the south-east*

at least 5m in height and was built in local stone originally covered with a heavy layer of plaster, which only partially remains today. The building is surrounded by a mud-brick wall and its general plan is that of a small Egyptian temple of the Graeco-Roman Period, but it has a second door in the northern wall opposite the main entrance, at the rear of the naos. Beyond this door, in the middle of the enclosure, there is an area of c.60m x 20m where a large number of blocks and lintels cut from different types of local stone lie. They may represent the remains of one or possibly more as yet unknown monumental buildings.

The excavation started from the northern side of the temple, in order to understand how and when it was enlarged northwards. The sector under excavation was 20m wide (east to west) and 7m long (north to south). It turned out to be a large courtyard surrounded by walls and paved in local stone. In front of the rear door of the temple and on the other side of the courtyard is an imposing wall built in the Roman Period with local isodomic sandstone blocks belonging to a building which has not yet been excavated.

At this stage we can hypothesise that the original

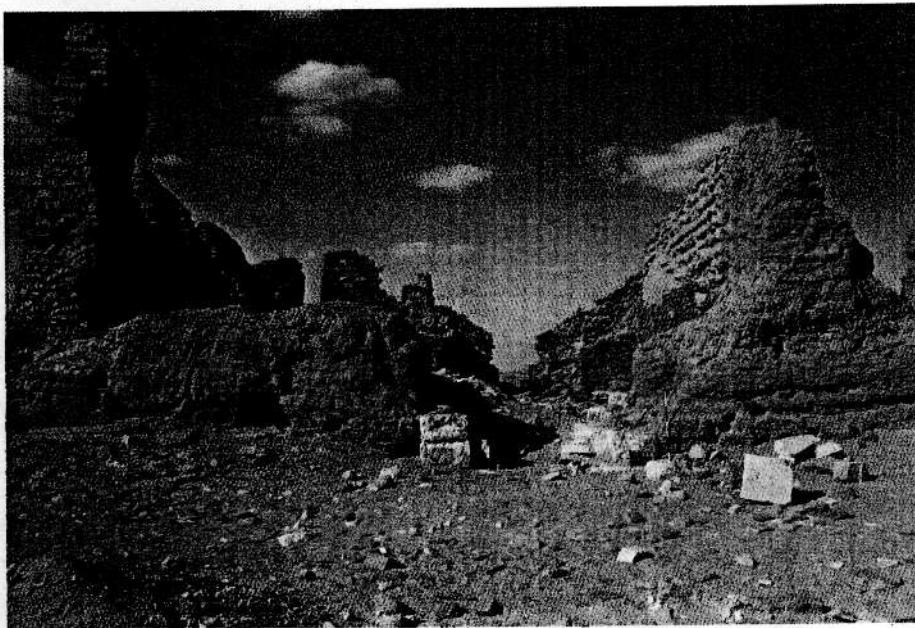


*The courtyard from the north*

temple, dedicated to the crocodile god Soknopaios and founded during the Hellenistic Period, was enlarged northwards in the Roman Period. Although the interior of the temple has yet to be excavated, subsequent building phases, which gradually altered its plan, can be recognised. The four gateways, of which two are internal, were built with fine sandstone blocks on the longitudinal axis and probably date back to the last of the restructuring phases. The fourth gateway was opened in the back wall of the naos and led into the courtyard, revealed in 2003. On the opposite side of the courtyard and on the same axis there was another gateway in the sandstone block wall belonging to the Roman Period building. At this stage in the research this building phase cannot be dated more precisely.

Among the objects found during the 2003 season were a piece of a wooden naos with the Horus name of Ptolemy III, a small scarab with the inscription *nsw bit*, the face of an anthropoid sarcophagus (probably Late Period), 80 demotic ostraca, a few dozen fragments of Greek and demotic documentary papyri and nine figured magical papyri, many of which were still rolled up, tied with papyrus fibre and sealed with mud.

From the results so far obtained it would seem that the temple of Soknopaios at Dime was constructed in the Hellenistic Period and then enlarged in the Roman Period, when a new building was added behind the older temple, which then served as a passageway to the new Roman temple. This later temple seems to have been built according to the same techniques and in the same style as can be seen at other sites in the Fayum, such as Karanis, Bakchias, Narmouthis and Dionysias.



*The temple of Soknopaios from the south*

□ Paola Davoli is Field Director of The Italian Joint Archaeological Mission of Bologna and Lecce Universities (working at Bakchias and Soknopaiou Nesos) and Professor in Egyptology at Lecce University.