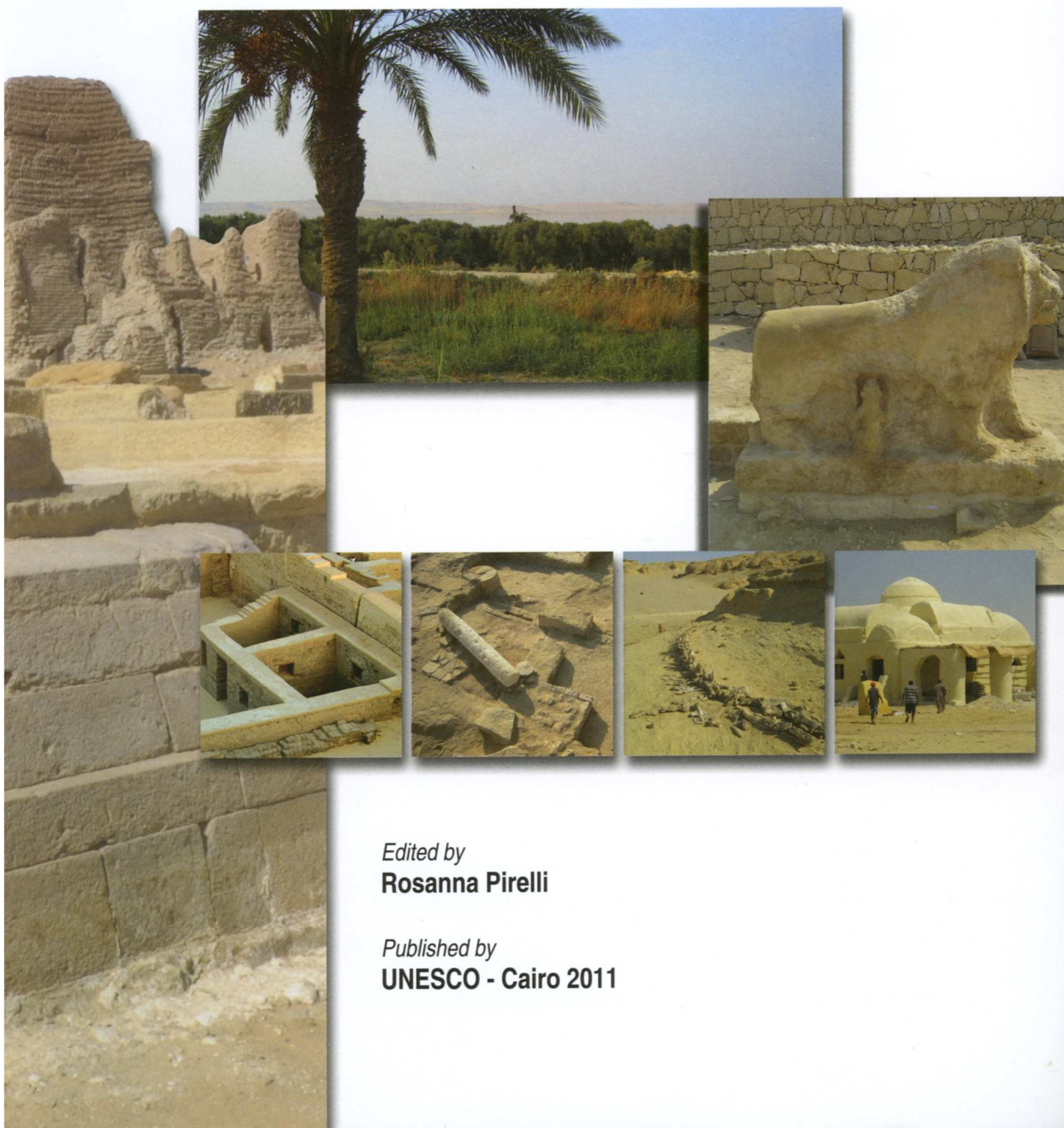


NATURAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN THE FAYOUM

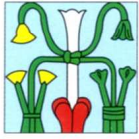
*The Safeguarding and Management of Archaeological Sites
and Natural Environments*

Proceedings of the International Colloquium
31st October - 2nd November 2010



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Rosanna Pirelli

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H.E. CLAUDIO PACIFICO

Italian Ambassador to Egypt

The publication of the acts of the international colloquium *Natural and Cultural Landscapes in the Fayoum. The Safeguarding and Management of Archaeological Sites and Natural Environments* provides me with a welcome opportunity to retrace, not without a certain pride, the stages of Italian involvement in this region of Egypt.

As attested by the pioneering researches and scientific discoveries of Evaristo Breccia, Achille Vogliano, and Carlo Anti, Italian presence in this extraordinary area was already significant in the early years of the twentieth century; although even earlier, in the early decades of the nineteenth, Belzoni had already visited the area and described many of its sites. It is after World War II, however, that archaeological activity in the Fayoum became one of the focuses of Italian research in Egypt. Our scholars did not concentrate exclusively on the major sites of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods in the area; they also investigated – as they are still doing today – all the periods and aspects of the cultures whose vestiges the region has preserved for us over thousands of years.

Because of their number and character, the sites excavated by Italian missions in the Fayoum are especially interesting for scholars seeking to define, compare and reconstruct, with ever increasing precision, the stages in the region's development: from early prehistoric settlements to the foundation of important religious centers during the Middle Kingdom; and from the great urban and economic growth of the early Ptolemaic period to the new flowering in the Roman period. These two last phases were characterized by high demographic growth, the cultural integration of different peoples, and the consequent rise of original forms of art, such as those extraordinary "Fayoum portraits" that were later "exported" to coeval sites outside the Fayoum.

The excavation and study – as well as the restoration that often goes hand in hand with them – of the Paleolithic sites around the Bahr Yusuf, of those datable to the Middle Kingdom such as the Khelwa necropolis, the earlier phase of Medinet Madi, the later phases of Medinet Madi/Narmouthis, and the towns of Bakchias, Dime el-Seba, Tebtynis e Dionysias – all the activities, that is, in which our missions were involved – have given an important contribution to the overall picture of the region scholars have been drawing since the beginning of the twentieth century.

I should add that Italian involvement in the Fayoum is not limited to actions concerning its archaeological heritage. For many years the Office for Cooperation to Development of this Embassy has been promoting, financing and implementing projects of great socio-economic impact in the region. It is sufficient to go across the oasis to the splendid Valley of the Whales, passing through the Wadi el-Rayan, to witness the fruits of the activities of the Italian Cooperation to this area in Egypt.

Through the reconversion of debt and various types of investment, the Cooperation Office is taking concrete action not only in support of cultural and environmental heritage, but also to help the population to cope with its economic and social problems, such as emigration. The Office is engaged in defending the rights of the weaker part of the population, and supporting small artisanal companies and local artists.

It is for this reason that I appreciated the program that provided the backbone for this colloquium, which the present publication faithfully mirrors. In this program, all the inspirations of our commitment are merged into a single broad vision meant to lay the foundation for a true revival of this very important region of Egypt.

The Fayoum is regarded as one of the most important Egyptian Governorates for its long tradition of both natural and human heritage. The natural heritage of the Fayoum can be traced back to the Eocene, 40 million years ago, with the celebrated fossils of the Valley of the Whales. The ancient Egyptian civilization has its roots in the Fayoum, where agriculture and settled life began in the 5000 BCE with Fayoum A and Fayoum B cultures. The Fayoum went through all stages of social evolution, from prehistory to the Islamic period. It is intriguing to consider that Fayoum is sometimes seen as a miniature replica of Egypt for its geographical shape, as the Bahr Yousuf resembles the Nile, and the Qarun Lake the Mediterranean.

Italian work in the Fayoum has been highly beneficial ever since the start of its cooperation in 1936, when Eng. Vogliano came to and excavated at Medinet Madi. Since then, Italian archaeological missions from various universities – Milan, Pisa, Bologna, Lecce, Florence ad Siena – have been working at different sites in the region.

I would like to express many thanks to the Italian government and both the Italian Embassy and the Archaeological Centre for their constructive cooperation in the investigation of the great history and civilization of the Fayoum.

PATRIZIA RAVEGGI

Director of the Italian Cultural Institute

The decisive involvement of the Italian Cultural Institute, Cairo in the International conference on Fayoum, is meant to emphasize the considerable institutional interest towards one of the most important naturalistic-archaeological sites in Egypt, an important opportunity of growth, both in tourism and Italian-Egyptian cooperation field as positive example of partnership between institutions.

The Fayoum Area has always been studied both by academicians and laymen being rich in natural resources (its precious water sources; its legendary fertility) and cultural resources (numerous archaeological sites dating from Prehistory to Greek-Roman and Islamic age; its traditional architecture; its handmade products, folk music and contemporary art).

Thanks to this enviable combination of nature and culture, the Fayoum may be able to assume the mode role of "sustainable development": through the establishment of a Park combining natural environmental protection, heavily threatened by careless tourism, and the preservation of a wide area rich of archeological sites.

The project of socio-economical development focused upon during the Conference avails itself of collaboration of Italians and Egyptians specialists in several fields: archaeology, economy, environmental protection, cooperation and preservation with the aim of establishing an archaeological and environmental Area as a virtuous example of sustainable tourism.

This challenge of recovery and protection of archaeological sites will be closely linked to the needs of the local community; only by listening to the local needs it is possible a successful development policy: the multiphase project will take advantage of the Italian experience in creation of polythematic parks of protection of environmental and artistic heritage in agreement with the needs of local communities.

Allow me first to convey the greeting and wishes of success to this gathering from the Director of UNESCO Cairo Office Dr. Tarek Shawki. It is also my great pleasure to extend a very warm welcome to all of you. I would like to thank the government of Egypt represented by the Fayoum Governorate and the Italian Cultural Institute for their invitation to participate in this important Event.

Distinguished guest, Ladies and gentlemen

Travel to ecotourism destinations can enhance our understanding and appreciation of the value of the natural world and of distinctive cultural features. Responsible tourism can also contribute funds for the better management and protection of natural areas. Today, ecotourism has become a rapidly growing segment of the travel industry. It has greatly helped nations in their economic growth and strongly contributed to social development. The UNESCO MAB (Man and the Biosphere) Programme is an intergovernmental initiative originally created to set up the scientific basis for improving people's relations with nature, linking the natural and social sciences. In particular, MAB aims at increasing our understanding of the structure, functioning and dynamics of ecosystems and people's roles therein. Assessing the impact of global change on ecosystems and promoting appropriate management of natural resources in these systems have become key issues in recent years for the MAB Programme. The World Network of Biosphere Reserves is the principal instrument for the promotion of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development within UNESCO's MAB. Having evolved from traditional protected area approaches, in particular as related to national parks, the biosphere reserve concept and the World Network have usually been associated with more pristine, scarcely populated environments than what urban areas and their hinterlands offer.

Egypt is rich in tourism resources including natural, cultural, religious and scenic sites. The development of ecotourism projects for the Fayoum Governorate will certainly help the Region toward enhancing the value of their cultural history and marvelous landscapes. We believe that Ecotourism should therefore span all levels of tourism, including not only the environmental impacts of one's journey, but also cultural and economic aspects. This gathering will surely contribute greatly to the development and planning of activities and projects for this wonderful Governorate.

In closing, please allow me to mention that UNESCO through its Man and Biosphere Program will continue to contribute to issues related to the sustainable development of the region. A major challenge for the Organization is to ensure that the scientific and technical capability of governments, universities, NGOs and private sectors expands to keep pace with the growing demands of sustainable development.

ZAHİ HAWASS

Secretary General of Supreme Council of Antiquities

Co-operation between foreign archaeological missions and Egyptian scholars is very important, not only in excavation techniques, training, and restoration, but also in site management.

In 2002, the Ministry of State for Antiquities issued management guidelines for archaeological sites focusing on the essential components needed for site management protection. Examples of this are sites in Upper Egypt, Tell Basta and San El-Hagar in the Delta as well as sites in Alexandria. Protection, conservation, restoration and the construction of educational buildings are all integral to the site management strategy. The site management plan I most admire is the site of Dendera.

Fayoum is one of the most important archaeological and environmental sites in Egypt. It has unique archaeology dating from prehistoric to Pharaonic and to Greek-Roman periods as well as several significant environmental sites. The area of Fayoum is very fortunate to have many Italian archaeological missions in Medinet Madi, Soknopaiou Nesos, Bakchias, Dionysias and Tebtynis. I was so impressed by the work carried out at Medinet Madi. The site has become a popular destination for both scholars and tourists.

The conference was unique because it informed us of the urgent need to safeguard the natural and cultural landscape in the Fayoum area. Egyptian and Italian scholars had the opportunity to give his or her point of view on how to protect and conserve cultural and natural heritage and share advice about site management.

I am now very proud to see this publication and to know that action is being taken to protect and manage the important archaeological and environment sites of the Fayoum.

JAMES W. RAWLEY

UNDP, Resident Representative, Egypt Country Office

Statement by UNDP Resident Representative in the Arab Republic of Egypt

Mr. James W. Rawley on the occasion of the International Colloquium on the Fayoum Natural and Cultural Landscapes in the Fayoum:

The Safeguarding and Management of Archaeological Sites and Natural Environments

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to join you today in the International Colloquium on the Fayoum. I am confident that this important event will facilitate a rich discussion among the participating Egyptian and foreign institutions and scholars on important topics such as site management, eco-tourism, social and economic development based on the valorisation and proper management of the rich local heritage of Fayoum, all contributing to improving human development for the residents of the oasis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Environmental preservation is no longer a luxury. Indeed, it has become a necessity in order to avoid irreparable damage to the earth's increasingly fragile biodiversity and to better bring its benefits to people. Indeed, millions of the world's citizens depend on the ecosystems they inhabit for their livelihoods. Yet biodiversity, which is fundamental for the survival of these ecosystems, is being lost at an unprecedented pace as natural resources are used without sufficient consideration for their fragility and value. This is resulting in the undermining of ecosystems' capacities to sustain the delivery of these benefits, with a negative impact on peoples' livelihoods and ways of life.

Since the passage of Law 102/1983, a total of twenty-nine Protected Areas have been declared in Egypt. This forms an impressive network that presently covers almost 15% of the country's land and marine areas, and includes a wide range of habitats that are helping to protect much of Egypt's impressive biodiversity.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) is proud to be associated with Egypt's protected areas and to be supporting the Government in declaring two new Protectorates. The first is the lake area of Dahshour, where we are working with several Government entities and UN agencies, with funding from the Government of Spain. And the second is Madinet Madi, where we are cooperating with the Supreme Council of Antiquities, the Ministry of the Environment and the Italian Cooperation to get this site declared as a Protected Area before the end of this year, a step that would further strengthen the case for declaring Madinet Madi as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Understandably, Fayoum has been placed high on the agenda of the Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Programme, in partnership with UNDP. The special attention to Wadi Hitan, Wadi Rayan and Madinet Madi has encouraged eco-tourism and is contributing to improving the livelihoods of the local community by creating job opportunities and harnessing creative talents. For example, the recent construction of the Wadi Hitan Protected Area and ongoing building of the visitor center in Madinet Madi has generated jobs for local residents. Also, the gift shop at Wadi Hitan is a good opportunity for local artists to market their hand-made products to visitors.

I would also like to mention the archaeological work that is being undertaken in Gilf El Keber and Madinet Madi, under the leadership of Dr. Zahi Hawass, with funding from the Italian Cooperation with management support from UNDP. I fondly recall attending an event at the Italian Archaeological Centre in Cairo

six months ago when the Italian mission presented the outstanding work undertaken in Gilf El Kebir, and where Ambassador Pacifico displayed his impressive knowledge of archaeology and passion for this very special area of Egypt, which truly is of global significance. And allow me to pay tribute to the experts from the University of Pisa for their hard work in Madinet Madi.

Ladies and Gentleman

We in UNDP attach great importance to our long-standing partnership with the Italian Cooperation. Together, we have been working hand in hand for six years to support the efforts of the Egyptian authorities to link environmental conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources with efforts to improve the livelihoods of the residents of these areas, in partnership with NGOs and the private sector.

Success breeds success. Building on our partnership with Italy and Egypt, we have been seeking additional support to extend the achievements of the Environmental Programme. In this regard, I am delighted to announce that UNDP has recently signed a US\$18 million project with the Global Environment Facility Programme (GEF) and the Ministry of Environment to promote the financial sustainability of the protected areas in Egypt. The objective is to establish a sustainable protected area financing system with associated management structures and capacities to ensure that revenue generated from visitors' fees will be reinvested to address priority biodiversity conservation needs. The programme will start implementation soon in three protected areas, namely Wadi El Gemmal, Ras Mohamed and, of course, Wadi Rayan, and will hopefully be replicated in all protected areas in Egypt.

In closing, allow me to express my gratitude to the Italian Archaeological Centre for organizing this event under the patronage of the Italian Embassy, the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and the Governorate of the Fayoum, and Governor Dr. Galal Moustafa Said for his commitment to protecting this area's unique environmental and cultural riches for this and future generations, bearing in mind that heritage is a fundamental dimension of human development.

NEW DISCOVERIES AT SOKNOPAIU NESOS

The Centro di Studi Papirologici of Salento University¹ launched the Soknopaiou Nesos Project as an independent project in 2004. Since then it has completed eight annual archaeological seasons. The aim of the project is to study both the archaeology of the site and its papyri. The project benefits from the collaboration of specialists in different fields from international various institutions.

Dime es-Seba, the Graeco-Roman Soknopaiou Nesos *kome*, is well known to papyrologists as a site that yielded a great number of documents, both in Greek² and in Demotic. The Demotic documentation has received special attention in the last decade. Some collections of Demotic *ostraka* and papyri have been published very recently and others are on their way to publication.³ Until a few years ago we owed most of our knowledge of Soknopaiou Nesos to Greek and Demotic documents, which testify to a span of life for the settlement from the 3rd century BC to the mid 3rd century AD. The few archaeological investigations of the site carried out in the past were mainly aimed at the recovery of objects and papyri, since these were particularly well preserved by the arid environment.⁴ The archaeological knowledge of the site increased with the excavation of the University of Michigan (1931-32),⁵ which, for the first time, provided new significant stratigraphic data, comparable with those collected by the same mission in Karanis. According to Boak and Peterson, there are four habitation levels or phases, one on top of the other, and three abandonment phases, of which the last one is dated to the mid-3rd century AD.

The reconstruction and dates of these phases had never been discussed again, mainly because the objects and part of the papyri found in the excavation were never published. Moreover, since then no other scientific excavations had been undertaken at the site.

The Soknopaiou Nesos Project started the study of the site employing an interdisciplinary approach combining land investigations (topographical, geo-magnetic and geo-archaeological) with ceramics surveys, papyrological studies, and new excavations.⁶ We are also going through the results of previous excavations and other documentation to create an image archive that is very helpful for the interpretation of the present situation and our knowledge of the recent history of the site.

The preliminary reports on every single season are published online and in various journals.⁷ The present article offers a summary of the results achieved so far, especially from an archaeological perspective.

1 www.museopapirologico.eu; www.archeosistemi.it.

2 A number of articles have been published about papyri and topics related to them. Here I would like to mention the first and the latest publication of groups of Greek papyri from Dime: Wessely (1902) and Jördens 1998.

3 See among others: Clarysse (2005); Lippert-Schentuleit (2005; 2006 a; 2006 b and 2010); Lippert (2005); Schentuleit-Vittmann 2009; Stadler 2004; 2005 a; Stadler 2005 b and forthcoming); Widmer (1998; 2003; 2005 a and 2005 b).

4 Grenfell-Hunt (1901); Ahmed Kamal (1916); Müller (1971); Davoli (1998), pp. 39-71.

5 Boak (1935).

6 The surveys were carried out in collaboration with Archeosistemi (Reggio Emilia); M. Cremaschi (Milan University, Italy); D. Dixneuf (CNRS USR 3134 – Alexandrie, Égypte); S. Marchand (IFAO); and T. Smekalova (Aarhus University, Denmark).

7 www.museopapirologico.eu/snp.htm. Davoli (2005 a; 2005 b and 2008); Capasso-Davoli (2006 and 2009); Davoli, Chiesi, Occhi, Raimondi (2010).

Dime is located at the southern margin of a wide and undulated plateau originating at the base of Gebel Qatrani. It is bordered by the abrupt scarp facing the shore of the Birket Qarun. Lacustrine deposits are preserved in the most depressed areas of the plateau, west and north of Dime. Epipaleolithic, Early Neolithic, and Middle Neolithic archaeological sites, with clusters of fireplaces associated with lithics and pottery fragments, have been identified in the lake deposits and in several locations around their margins. Wild and domestic fauna remains have been observed in connection with these sites.

Deflation is particularly evident for geological eras, much less for historical periods. Abundant vestiges, such as tombs, “embankments”, and possibly an ancient road, are still quite well preserved, as is the main settlement itself. During our surface survey, we recognised clusters of pottery dated between the Old Kingdom and the Roman period, various types of tombs, and limestone quarries. We also identified a village of the Islamic period.⁸ The variety of periods attested by this evidence suggests the presence of people whose activities we will need to investigate, as well as their sources of fresh water and the extension of vegetation and agriculture.

We completed the topographic survey of the settlement in 2006, but every season more details are added to the general plan, such as the floor of the *dromos*, new excavated features, and other new features that come to light after strong winds. The study of the topography and the stratigraphy of the settlement is a work in progress. Every season new details are added and new interpretations are made possible thanks to constant research on archive materials – old photographs, drawings and descriptions of Dime – as well as in the field.

We have fully documented the floor of the *dromos* by means of photogrammetry, a 1:20 detailed drawing, and archaeological analysis.⁹ It is still visible on the ground for a length of 329 m, starting from its south gate, which consisted of a short 8-step staircase flanked by two massive walls or pillars. The total length of the *dromos* was presumably 397 m, from the south end to the gate in the *temenos*. Its width ranges between 5.9 and 6.9 m. The floor is not well preserved everywhere, and it turned out to be divided into three sectors, in each of which different kinds of limestone slabs were used. This evidence suggests that the *dromos* might have been extended southward in different periods, following the expansion of the settlement. However, this hypothesis needs to be verified by excavation at some key points along the road.

We have ascertained that the *dromos* has a substructure consisting of two parallel walls at least 3 m deep with a filling, primarily of sand, between them, on which the floor slabs are laid. This substructure is not simply a buried foundation, but was conceived as a “podium” for a raised *dromos*. Indeed, two roads run parallel to it on either side, but 3 meters below it. Thus we can consider the *dromos* as a road used only for ceremonial purposes, not for ordinary circulation. It was a sort of high barrier that divided the settlement into two parts, and on which spectacular processions were organised in different months of the year. The east and west sectors of the settlement separated by the *dromos* were connected by various means. In the southernmost stretch of the *dromos*, two stairs have been recognised on both sides of the road, indicating that here a staircase allowed one to go up from one side and down the other. In the northernmost stretch, instead, there are two tunnels running under the processional road, through the substructure (Fig. 1). As far

⁸ According with D. Dixneuf, the pottery on the surface of the site can be dated from the Fatimide to the Mamluk period.

⁹ Minaya (forthcoming).

as I know, this *dromos* with its complex structure is unique in Egypt. More investigations will be needed to shed light on its function and its relationship with the adjoining buildings in the different periods of occupation of the settlement.

Another unusual feature of the *dromos* is an *opus sectile* floor of black basalt square tiles alternating with yellow limestone, delimited by a frame. The same kind of floor has been found inside ST 20M, the *naos* of the temple of Soknopaios. Presumably the two floors were made around the same period, in the second half of the Ptolemaic Period. The reason for its presence on the *dromos* is still not clear, but can probably be related to the presence on the west side of the processional road of a small mud-brick temple, whose date is not known yet.¹⁰ On the east side of the *dromos*, not far from the *opus sectile* floor, a smashed statue of a lion was found. It is one of the probably originally numerous sphinxes visible on the settlement until recent times, and which gave it its modern name of Dime es-Seba, or “Dime of the lions”. We collected other fragments of similar statues in front of the *temenos* gate, in a 70-m long stretch where the *dromos* disappears under heaps of sand and rubble from the destruction of a limestone-block building with columns. This was probably a kiosk built on the *dromos* and placed in front of the main gate of the *temenos*.

The *temenos* (Fig. 2) is an irregular rectangular area, approximately 124 x 88 m. Its perimeter walls are quite well preserved to a maximum visible height of 13 m. They are made of mud-brick laid in concave and convex courses arranged in alternating self-standing sectors, bonded together with mortise-and-tenon joints. Some of the sectors collapsed, but several others are still standing. One of the causes of the collapse of some of the sectors was the presence of an empty space in the wall for what appears to have been narrow staircases going up inside the wall itself. We recognised two stairs for such a staircase in the western wall and one in the southern one, west of the main gate in the *temenos*. We found none in the north and east walls. The reason for the presence of these staircases and of high watch points on the *temenos* wall are still a matter of speculation.

The *temenos* area was plundered on a number of occasions, in some cases also very recently. It is well known that hundreds of papyri belonging to the temple archive appeared on the antiquities market in 1887, and that Ahmed Kamal excavated the temple for 15 days in 1916. Nonetheless, the buildings inside the *temenos* are still quite well preserved, enough to allow a reconstruction of the layout of the temple area. 28 buildings are visible, but many others are buried under sand and rubble. A series of mud-brick buildings – houses and small chapels – are arranged along the inner perimeter of the *temenos*, while the temples are in its centre. We labelled all these buildings with numbers. ST 18 is the best preserved one. It is located in the centre of the area, opposite the main gate in the *temenos*. It is a small temple built of rough stones (13.6 x 13.15 m), with a *temenos* and courtyards of mud-brick (32.5 x 18.6 m). It was built at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period and then transformed and restored in the second half of the Ptolemaic period, when a new and bigger temple, ST 20, was erected north of it. Our excavation focused on an area of 35 x 30 m located immediately north of ST 18, where the ruins of the new temple were barely visible.

ST 20 (27.4 x 19.4 m) was built by a Ptolemy, who is shown in some bas-reliefs, in one followed by a

¹⁰ Some crocodile bones with mummification treatment were collected on the ground surface inside this building. The presence of mummified crocodiles inside the temple suggests that it was dedicated to a form of Sobek.

queen (Fig. 3). The decoration of the temple was never finished, and apparently only some of the gates (to rooms F, M and S) were surrounded by complete decorative panels, only partially preserved. A description of the decoration was written on some papyri kept in the temple archive, of which two in Demotic are preserved.¹¹ At present the temple survives to a maximum height of 1.4 m, having been dismantled to recover limestone blocks, probably starting from the Late Antique period until quite recent times. On the ground floor there are 17 rooms, two staircases going up to upper floors, and four small staircases hidden in the walls leading to subterranean crypts and the so-called "mysterious corridor". A fifth crypt was hidden under the floor of the eastern staircase. The floors are well preserved only in the central rooms. The main entrance to the temple was in the middle of the south wall, while a second lateral entrance was on the west wall, through room D.

Rooms and crypts have been dug out several times and the original stratigraphy has been destroyed almost everywhere. However, residual anthropic sediments on some floors testify to the presence of people living in the temple during the 6th-7th century AD. Here we found two Coptic *ostraka*, a Coptic papyrus fragment, and a number of Late Roman amphorae and potsherds. We also found Greek and Demotic papyri and *ostraka*, wooden furniture and broken statues in considerable number, scattered all over the area, sometimes with clear signs of reuse.

An intact stratigraphy survived in front of the lateral door of the temple, thanks to a thick and hard layer of debris and gypsum mortar from the demolition of the temple itself that had not been removed by previous diggers. A floor made of reused slabs and fragments of statues and architectural elements was set in front of the door, on a sandy layer full of organic waste. A considerable amount of excrement of different animals and some structures possibly used as mangers suggests the presence of an organized community with access to fresh water rather than mere overnight stops. Two reused blocks, probably to keep the animals from entering the temple, which of course was not used as a pagan temple anymore but had been transformed into something else, blocked the lateral door. Up to now no evidence of Christian cults have been found, but these features and the Late Antique pottery found inside the *temenos* suggest that after the end of the settlement, probably in the mid-3rd century AD, the site was not completely abandoned. More investigations are needed to understand if there was any continuity in the use of the temple area and what kind of activities this community engaged in.¹²

We dug down to the original floor level along the east and west sides of the sanctuary. On both sides there was a floor of grey limestone slabs, like the floors in the courtyard (C1) and the central rooms. However, only the floor on the west side survives. The base of the eastern wall had an unusual revetment of grey-violet limestone blocks with smooth and upward tapering faces, laid in six courses, with the upper course ending in a slightly convex surface. This facing was undoubtedly decorative, but it also protected the lower part of the wall, which was exposed to erosion.

In the area between temples ST 18 and ST 20, we found a paved courtyard (C1) and two lateral mud-brick

¹¹ Winter (1967); Vittmann (2002/2003); Stadler (forthcoming).

¹² After these discoveries we should reconsider the provenance of some papyri and other documents dated to centuries later than the mid 3rd AD, for which many scholars ruled out that they could have been found in Dime. On this debate see: Clarke (2006); Capasso (2005), with previous bibliography.

buildings – ST23 and ST 200 – dating back to the Roman period. These buildings contained one or more archives of the temple. They were completely dug out at the end of the 19th century, but in the two dumps left by the diggers we found many objects, *ostraka* and papyri. The two buildings were part of the temple complex and were entered only from the courtyard. Moreover, they were built on the two sides of the courtyard, blocking the access from east and west. Thus, in the Roman period one could enter temple ST 20 from the south, passing through ST 18 and the courtyard, or by the west lateral entrance (room D).

A trial trench dug in the middle of this courtyard (C1) revealed some earlier phases. At least one mud brick building (ST 204), partly demolished to make room for the new temple, ST 20, was built abutting the rear *temenos* wall of ST 18 and can be regarded as contemporary to it. Both were erected at the top of a mound on which an earlier building once stood. Unfortunately only a few courses of a mud-brick wall survive from this pre-Hellenistic phase. ST 204 was demolished to a height of about 1.5 m and filled up with its own debris. Its rooms were lime plastered, painted in red, yellow and white; on some plaster fragments there are Demotic inscriptions mentioning the god Soknopaios. We dug down to the foundation trench of the rear *temenos* wall of ST 18, which allowed us to determine in which phase the north gateway in this wall was made. It was cut into the *temenos* wall, and thus also in the rear wall of room ST 18A (the *naos*), after the new temple had been completed and opened to cult. The foundation trench of the door was cut into the debris that filled ST 204 and then covered by the courtyard floor.

In conclusion, after eight seasons of investigation we have reached a much clearer understanding of the site's layout and of the main temple. However, it will take time and a lot of interdisciplinary work before solid conclusions can be reached about the many still open questions about the settlement and its surroundings.

The archaeological evidence indicates that the area was inhabited with a certain degree of continuity from the Neolithic to the Islamic period. Over this wide time span there were major changes in the climate that influenced the landscape and the available resources. Understanding these variations and the degree of availability of fresh water over time is one of the main objectives of the Soknopaiou Nesos Project for the future.

The continuity of human presence in the area does not mean that Soknopaiou Nesos was founded before the Ptolemaic period and was still an organized settlement in the Late Roman period.¹³ We can continue to consider the mid-third century as the period during which the settlement was abandoned, but we have also to bear in mind that people continued to pass by the ruins of the temple of Soknopaios and even lived among them. The north shore of lake Qarun was hence not completely deserted at the time.

All these new finds open new perspectives on the history of the temple, the settlement, and the area in general, but further multidisciplinary research will be needed before we reach a comprehensive picture of Soknopaiou Nesos.

The area north of Birket Qarun is now under serious threat due to the Governorate's recent plan to build a new settlement and paved road here to develop tourism. It is also threatened by the expansion of cultivated fields and of the industrial area of Kom Aushim, and by the creation of new salt works. This development is modifying the landscape and the ecology of the area, and destroying part of a heritage that has survived

¹³ The pottery survey will continue in the coming seasons in collaboration with IFAO, as will the geo-archaeological survey in collaboration with Milan University.

for thousands of year. Besides, for several years gangs of looters have been devastating archaeological remains in the Fayoum, especially those far into the desert, and Dime has not been spared.

In this difficult time of population growth and economic development, the preservation of the archaeological sites and heritage of Egypt must be regarded as a duty for politicians, scholars, and common people alike. On this crucial problem and possible "solutions", a vast debate was raised during this Conference. In this paper, focusing on a small part of the Fayoum region, I intended to highlight, once again, the richness and importance of the north shore of Qarun Lake, and stress how important it is to preserve it. The geology and history of this wonderful region deserve much more attention by researchers and politicians. I hope that we will be able to all work together to preserve it for future generations.

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Fig. 1. West view of the Dromos

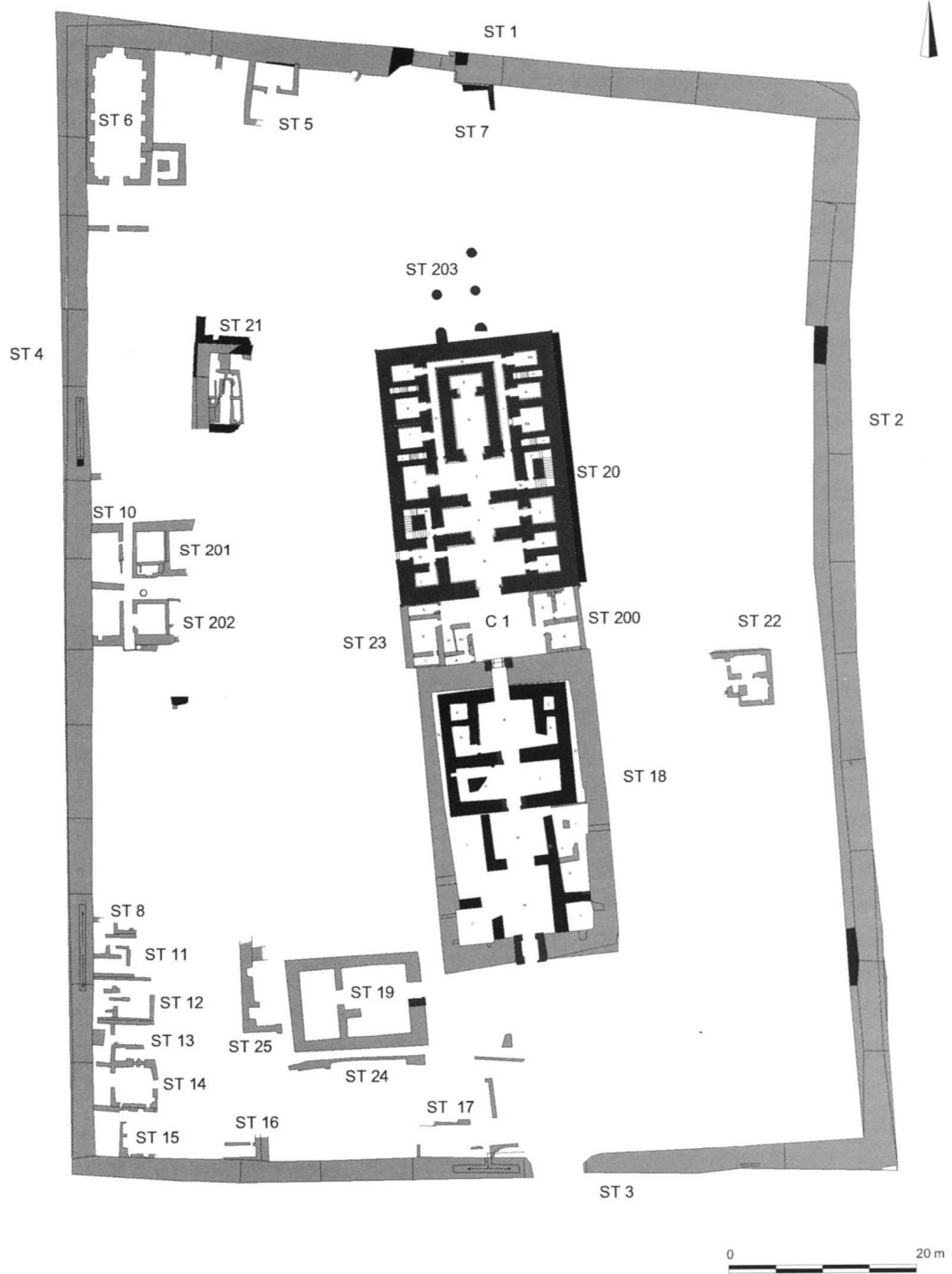


Fig. 2: Plan of the temenos area (2010)



Fig. 3. Relief with a Ptolemaic couple inside Room F in temple ST 20

