

Das Fayyûm in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit

Fallstudien zu multikulturellem Leben in der Antike

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Soknopaiou Nesos Project 2007–2010

New Archaeological Discoveries

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The Soknopaiou Nesos Project of Salento University has made substantial discoveries¹ in the last four seasons of investigation at Dîmâ as-Sibâ^c/Soknopaiou Nesos. These significantly improved our knowledge of the site, the temple and their chronology.

Besides the excavation, the territorial survey continued with topographical and ceramological investigations that will continue in the future, too.² In these last four years the excavations were carried out in two areas, one inside the *temenos*, in the temple labelled ST 20, and the second one west of the sacred precinct, in an area already excavated by F. Zucker in 1910.

The excavation in the *temenos*

The limestone block temple (ST 20) of Soknopaios has been under excavation during the seasons 2004–2010, but its exploration has not yet been completed. Its outer west and north sides are still to be investigated as well as its foundations (fig. 1).

Since the beginning of our project, we assumed that the original Ptolemaic temple ST 18 lost its function after the new, bigger temple ST 20 was built north of it; at that time a new door was opened in the rear wall of the *naos* (ST 18A) and the building became a monumental passageway.³ Between the two sanctuaries there is a paved courtyard (C1) closed by two auxiliary buildings on its east and west sides. During the 2009 season a trench (5.2 x 2.6 m) was opened in the central part of the floor of the courtyard and this hypothesis has been confirmed. The stratigraphy found below the floor of the courtyard is 3 m deep and testifies to the presence of other buildings in this area that were demolished to build ST 20. A mud-brick building, labelled ST 204, was built abutting the outer north wall of ST 18. Its function is still uncertain, but the investigation will be extended towards east in the next seasons. The building was partially demolished up to a height of 1.4 m and filled with its own debris when the building yard for the new temple ST 20 was created. Parts of two rooms have been explored within the trench; they were coated with a thick gypsum plaster painted in yellow and red ochre. During a renovation phase a wall was built in room A and the original floor in limestone slabs was covered with a new one in limestone blocks.

1 Soknopaiou Nesos Project is directed by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli. The annual reports are available at: www.museopapirologico.eu/snp. I would like to express my gratitude to Nicola Aravecchia (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University) for having improved my English and for suggestions and advice on early churches in Egypt.

2 The topographical survey is carried on by Simone Occhi from Ars/Archeosistemi company of Reggio Emilia; the ceramological survey is directed by Sylvie Marchand from IFAO, Cairo.

3 DAVOLI, in: *Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos*, 34–35. DAVOLI, in: *New Archaeological and Papyrological Researches on the Fayyum*, 101–103.

The only interesting objects found in the debris that filled the demolished structure were some *dipinti* or sketches on plaster, some of which bear Demotic inscriptions and a rough representation of an ibis, now under study by M. Stadler and C. Arlt.

The stratigraphy revealed other important details that clarify the sequence of the building phases in this area. After the demolition and the filling of ST 204 this area was flattened with sand and paved with mud bricks. The north door in the *naos* ST 18A was cut only after the building works were completed when ST 20 was ready to host the gods and their ceremonies. In fact, the foundation trench of the door cuts the debris that filled ST 204 and the rear mud brick wall of ST 18. Another important discovery concerns the original floor level in ST 18, which must have been lower and probably similar to that of ST 204, about 1.4 m below the floor of the courtyard.

The bottom of the stratigraphy coincides with the top surface of the *gebel* located at about 22.7 m above sea level, which is 6.7 m higher than the top surface of the *gebel* found by the University of Michigan in the west sector of their excavation.⁴ This proves that the temple was built originally on a natural hill, in which the foundations of ST 18 were cut. Unexpectedly, we found that ST 18 foundations cut a previous mud-brick wall that is very poorly preserved. Up to now, we have not found any evidence that can date this previous phase but it is certainly something that needs to be investigated further.

When the extension and renovation of the temple were carried out is still a matter of discussion, even if the relief found inside ST 20 temple depicts a Ptolemaic ruling couple. ST 20 (27.4 x 19.4 m) looks very similar in dimensions and ground floor plan to the Dionysias temple, and in both cases the decoration was never completed. Only some of the gates (into rooms ST 20F, M and S) were surrounded by complete decorative panels, partially preserved, and by cavetto cornices and urei freezes.⁵ One unfinished wall register survived in room F. Some blocks from the same wall had been previously taken apart and were recovered in room O, where they were collected with several other plain blocks and fragments of stone furniture. The reconstructed scene shows a royal couple walking towards the door with an empty cartouche for the queen; at their back the relief is divided into two scenes in which the standing king is making offerings to a standing male god, and again the king is in front of four male standing gods. Two further representations of the king walking are on the cornice of the *naos* gate.⁶

At present, the temple survives to a maximum height of 1.4 m, having being largely dismantled to reuse limestone blocks, probably starting from Late Antiquity until fairly recent times. On the ground floor there are 17 rooms, two staircases going up to upper floors, four small staircases hidden in the walls leading to subterranean crypts and the so-called mysterious corridor. Another two crypts are hidden under the floor of the eastern staircase. The floors in the central rooms of the sanctuary were found in good condition, but following the revolution of January 2011 they were badly crashed in search for treasures. The *naos* (M, S) is different from the one at Dionysias, with a mysterious corridor surrounding the *naos* building and two inner rooms, both badly damaged by the collapse of

4 Cf. BOAK, *Soknopaiou Nesos*, Pls. XIII–XIV.

5 WINTER, in: *NAWG* 3, 59–80; VITTMANN, in: *Enchoria* 28, 106–136; STADLER, in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 379–386.

6 CAPASSO, DAVOLI, *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, Tav. 15.

heavy lintels and architraves that broke the floors. The pavement in the first room M was very nicely built using a sort of *opus sectile* technique, with a chessboard design made of squared tiles⁷ in black basalt and yellow limestone framed by a cornice. The same kind of pavement has been found on the *dromos*. The *naos* S is very narrow and severely damaged. It measures 2 m north-south and 3.6 m east-west. If we consider that the double leaf door opened inside the room, the space left for a *naos* is very small. The *naos* proper was probably made of stone and abutted the rear wall in its centre, where an area of 1.6 m was not smoothed. Thus, the *naos* for the image of the god must have been about 1.6 m wide and 1.3 m deep. It is evident that these dimensions do not fit those of a crocodile mummy and the *naos* differs from those already known from other Fayyûm temples. Many fragments of stone and wooden furniture were found during our investigation. Among them are several statues, *naoi* in limestone and in wood that are currently under restoration and study.⁸ We are confident that the analysis of these objects and their context will allow us to recover a significant amount of data concerning the original furniture of the temple and its use, even if rooms and crypts have been dug out several times in the past and the original stratigraphy has been destroyed almost everywhere.

Despite the highly disturbed stratigraphy, patches of residual anthropic sediments, rich in organic materials and potsherds, were found on some floors. These testify to the presence of people living in the temple until the 6th–7th century AD. Two Coptic *ostraka*, a Coptic papyrus fragment and a number of Late Roman amphorae and potsherds were found in this context. Greek and Demotic papyri and *ostraka*, wooden furniture and broken statues were also found in this late context and bear clear signs of reuse.

An intact stratigraphy survived in front of the lateral door of the temple, on its west side (fig. 2). A thick and very compacted deposit of debris and gypsum mortar, which derived from the demolition of the temple, sealed this interesting and undisturbed context. A floor (2.03 x 2.57 m) made of reused slabs, fragments of statues and pieces of architectural elements was set in front of the door, on a sandy layer with abundant organic material. A considerable amount of different animals' coprolites and of some features used possibly as mangers suggests the presence of an organized community with access to fresh water and not only of overnight stays. Two reused blocks, probably to prevent animals from entering the temple, which most probably was not used as a pagan temple anymore but was transformed into something else, blocked the lateral door.

Two other inner doors were found blocked at the bottom with reused stones and bricks: a small, dried mud brick wall was probably built in the door space between rooms F and L, but previous excavators destroyed it and the mud bricks were found scattered in F. The second door gave access to the western mysterious corridor and was closed up to a height of 62 cm. Thus, it is evident that in this late occupation phase the doors had already lost their wooden leaves and it became necessary to prevent animals from entering into some of these spaces. The floors found still *in situ* in some rooms in the west half of the building show signs of restorations made with reused blocks or mud bricks that can be ascribed to Late Antique use of the building, when the original furniture was no longer in use. In fact,

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

8 On the wooden furniture see CERVI, in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003-2009)*, 269–314. DAVOLI in: *Studies in Honor of F. Dunand*.

the new floors and walls were made out of pieces of the original furniture of the temple, like smashed statues and parts of chapels built inside the *temenos*, or reused bricks. Thus, we can argue that after its closure, the temple was partly damaged but not demolished until it was reoccupied and restored in Late Antiquity. The demolition of ST 20 must have begun some time afterwards.

Given the remoteness of the site and the fact that the settlement was probably deserted, the more obvious assumption about the kind of reuse of the temple is its transformation into a church or more probably into a monastery or a cell.⁹ However, no clear evidence of Christian cults has been found so far. There is only a detail that may suggest such a use: two symmetric cuts in the north and south walls in the east side of room F, which are located in front of room G. These indentations may have been cut to hold a feature 9 cm thick that crossed the room and divided it into two spaces. The thickness could be suitable for a wooden panel or a wooden frame. This may not mean anything, especially about the date of the use of this feature, but the fact that this supposed panel was erected in front of room G, which is the only isolated room and is oriented to the east, suggests that it may have been used as a screen wall or a frame to hold a curtain in front of the sanctuary of a church.¹⁰ This is only one possible interpretation under the presupposition of the temple's late use,¹¹ and more investigations are needed to understand if there has been any continuity in the use of the area enclosed by the *temenos* and, if so, what kind of activities this community performed.¹²

The original floor was reached below the Late Antique floor set in front of the lateral door of the temple. It was still complete and well preserved and made of two different materials: the same kind of grey fossiliferous limestone slabs as those used in the courtyard C1 on the side of the temple proper, while mud bricks were employed next to ST 23. This last floor is apparently well preserved but it was not possible to clean it completely because of the very poor condition of ST23's west wall. A recent dump made by previous excavators has been removed in this area. Its formation is clearly similar to that of the dump found in 2003 on the east side of the courtyard. It consists of sand and mud brick debris dug out of building ST 23 by careless diggers. Indeed, like in the other dump, 132 demotic *ostraka* were left behind, scattered in the debris. They are small potsherds with short and simple text written with black ink, of the same typology of those already found in room D of ST

9 There is a well attested tradition according to which the old, abandoned pagan temples are abodes of demons and in this respect a useful place for monks who had to form themselves: BRAKKE, in: *From Temple to Church*, 98f.

10 For a picture of the reuse of Egyptian temples as churches see GROSSMANN, in: *From Temple to Church*, 299–334. Isis' temple at Aswan was used for different purposes after its closure. In Late Antiquity its pillared hall was transformed into a church and the *naos* with the side chapels were used by the priests as service rooms: cf. V. PILGRIM, et al., in: *MDAIK* 62, 215–277. On the use of screen walls and curtains in Early Byzantine churches see BOLMAN, in: *Threshold of the Sacred*, 76–88, 103.

11 The north shore of Lake Qarûn hosted monastic communities, churches and hermitages still not well known and studied. Deir Abu Lifa and the Kinisa peninsula are only two of the sites of the area.

12 After these discoveries we should reconsider the provenance of some papyri and other documents dated later than the mid-3rd cent. AD and supposed to have been found in Dime. Their late date led some scholars to reject the possibility that they were found in Dime. On this debate see: CLARKE, in: *The Freer Biblical Manuscript: Fresh Studies of an American Treasure Trove*, 17–73; CAPASSO, in: *Tebtynis und Soknopaiu Nesos*, 2–6, with previous bibliography.

23. It is possible that they formed an archive or a consistent group originally stored in ST 23, possibly in room D.¹³

An interesting Roman period stela (ST10/731/3533, 23 x 23 x 9.3 cm) has been recovered lying on the limestone floor (fig. 3). Only its upper part is preserved, with the figural scene and parts of three lines of Greek text mentioning an emperor. The imperial name is not complete but its initial sequence with Kaisaro[s] Autokrato[ros] Sebastou points to the reign of Augustus.¹⁴ The scene in the lunette is very simple and in some way unusual, without the solar winged disk and the offering scene. Two hawks with the double crown of Egypt are looking at the main god represented in the centre, sitting on a throne and wearing a long robe and the *pshent* crown. The god has three heads: human, crocodile and falcon. We do not have the name of the god, but the identification with Soknopaios is plausible. The three heads seem to allude to a god with different natures or to a syncretistic god, in which we can recognise Horus, Sobek and possibly Prammarres. The frontal face is well known in the Fayyûm on some stelae of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods and it has been identified with Prammarres, Mestasytmis (“the ears who listen”) or Pnepheros.¹⁵ However, in these cases the god wears the *nemes* and not the *pshent* and is characterized by prominent ears. On the stela the double crown occurs three times, twice on the head of the falcon Horus, suggesting a strong reference to the kingship and possibly to the divine kingship. According to E. Bresciani, the gods Pnepheros, Mestasytmis and Prammarres, in their shape of “regal busts”, were the hypostasis of the divine kingship that was identified with “Sobek-Horus who lives in Shedet” in Fayyûm.¹⁶ The few representations of Soknopaios from Dime show the god in the shape of a crocodile with a falcon head or as a man with a crocodile head, very often crowned by the *pshent* crown, which is very deformed on the Roman period stela of the ram breeders.¹⁷

The loss of the god’s name forces us to speculate about his iconography in order to find a possible identification. The presence of the *pshent* as crown for the frontal face instead of the *nemes* and the lack of the ears – the two elements that mark the iconography of Mestasytmis and the listening gods – can be interpreted as variants probably determined by the need to represent the two animal heads strictly connected with Soknopaios’ iconography. Despite these anomalies, it seems probable that the god represented on the Dime stela

13 See Carolin Arlt’s chapter in this volume.

14 Another stela from Dime (BERNAND, *Recueil des Inscriptions grecques du Fayoum I*, no. 73) bears the same inversed name and it is dated to 24 BC. See also a stela from Narmouthis dated to 10/11 AD: BERNAND, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum, III*, no. 166.

15 WAGNER, QUAEGBEUR, in: *BIFAO* 73, 41–61. BRESCIANI, in: *EVO* 9, 53.

16 The cult of Prammarres is mentioned on a stela from Soknopaiou Nesos, together with Isis Sonona and Arpocrates (RÜBSAM, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum während der griechisch-römisch-byzantinischen Zeit*, 161), while Sobek-Horus from Shedet is still not attested in Dime. The frontal face, the royal and divine powers are traditionally connected. On the New Kingdom epithet *nfr-ḥr* attributed to the king with the double crown and the god see VOLOKHINE, in: *BIFAO* 101, 378–379.

17 BERNAND, *Recueil des Inscriptions grecques du Fayoum I*, no. 73. A different crown is on the stela *op. cit.*, no. 76, where Soknopaios is sitting on a throne and wears a crown with double feather. Unfortunately, his face is badly damaged. Both crowns are common to representations of the god Sobek/Suchos. See also RÜBSAM, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum während der griechisch-römisch-byzantinischen Zeit*, 162. A crocodile with a falcon head crowned by a *pshent* is on a clay sealing still on papyrus (ST05/251/1092, a fiscal account of the 5th year of Tiberius), found in room ST 20E.

should be identified as Soknopaios in his function of 'Soknopaios who listens to the prayers'. The oracular function of Soknopaios is well known from a number of Greek and Demotic oracular questions on papyri of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The presence inside the *temenos* of a chapel of 'Soknopaios who listens to the prayers' with a monumental gate has been supposed by Stadler, who suggests its possible location at the rear of ST 20, in the columned building ST 203 still to be excavated.¹⁸

The east side of the temple has been completely exposed during the 2010 season. Unfortunately, the slabs of the original floor also on this side have been removed completely during the demolition phase of the building. The external face of the east wall was decorated and protected by a revetment made of 6 courses (1.5 m high) of grey-reddish fossiliferous limestone blocks, slightly tapering and polished, still partly *in situ*. The uppermost course is made of round topped rectangular blocks. The revetment certainly had a decorative purpose, but probably was made to protect the bottom of the wall which was already eroded at that time. It is a peculiar feature, not common to other temples and not present on the west side of the building. A considerable number of interesting architectural elements, originally belonging to ST 20, were collected in this area. They give an important contribution to the virtual reconstruction of the temple, which must have been very similar to the temple at Dionysias. Three roof gutters with their supporting blocks were found with pieces of lions' statues, all made in the same grey limestone. It is probable that these statues decorated the gutters, like in Dionysias and in Upper Egyptian temples.

The survey

The survey continued inside and outside the settlement with three the main goals during the last four seasons: the detailed documentation of the *dromos*, the study of the surface of the site in order to understand the cause of its degradation, and the territorial survey.

After careful cleaning, the pavement of the *dromos* has been fully documented with photogrammetry, from which a detailed 1:20 scale drawing was generated.¹⁹ The *dromos* is still visible on the ground surface for a length of 329 m starting from its south gate, which consisted of a short flight of eight steps flanked by two massive walls or pillars. The total length of the *dromos* should have been 397 m from the south end to the gate in the *temenos*; its width is comprised between 5.9 and 6.9 m. The pavement, which is not well preserved anywhere, turned out to be made of three sectors in which different kinds of limestone slabs were used. The evidence suggests that the *dromos* might have been expanded towards the south in different periods, possibly following the expansion of the settlement. However, this hypothesis needs to be verified by test trenches in some key points along the road. The first sector from the south is 160 m long and reaches a raised platform, slightly larger than the road, that is part of the second sector, in which a better quality of limestone slabs are employed. The platform is preceded by five steps and by five scattered drums of columns. No traces of walls or columns' bases are on the pavement, but it is possible that this platform marked the beginning of the *dromos*, possibly with a kiosk, in a certain period. The third

18 STADLER, in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 382–384 The divine face was strictly associated to the processions and to the oracular activity of the god already during the New Kingdom: VOLOKHINE, in: *BIFAO* 101, 382–383.

19 MINAYA, in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 83–110.

sector seems to have a double pavement, one on top of the other, of which the most ancient is made of yellow limestone slabs. The second one is made of grey slabs similar to those employed in the first sector. A special area is marked by a peculiar paving made in *opus sectile*, with alternate square tiles in black basalt and in yellow/brown limestone surrounded by a cornice. The same kind of pavement has been found inside ST 20M, the *naos* of Soknopaios' temple. This kind of decoration is not at all common in temple buildings and on *dromoi* and thus must have had a special meaning.²⁰ Probably they were made²¹ at the same time and were connected with the ritual structure of the temple/*dromos* system.²² Significantly, the *opus sectile* floor on the *dromos* is located at the end of the third sector (counting from south to north), which was the most ancient one in our reconstruction. In this perspective, the two *opus sectile* pavements are placed at the start and at the end of the procession's set course, possibly in the second half of the Ptolemaic period.

The Dime *dromos* was not a simple paved road, but a real monument consisting of a stone pavement set on a substructure made of two parallel stonewalls at least 3 m deep. The filling in between these walls is made mainly of sand, on top of which the floor slabs are placed. This substructure was not a buried foundation, but it was conceived as a long on view "podium" for a suspended *dromos*. In fact, two roads run parallel on both sides of it, but 3 meters below. Thus, we can consider the *dromos* as a road used only for ceremonial purposes and not for daily life use; it was a sort of high architectonic barrier that divided the settlement into two parts and on which spectacular processions were organised in different months of the year. Some devices connected the east with the west quarters: in the southernmost sector of the *dromos* two stairs have been identified on both sides of the road, while two tunnels passing below the processional road and inside the substructure are located in its northernmost half. This *dromos* with its complex structure is unique in Egypt and needs more investigations to clarify its function and the relationship with the side buildings in the different occupational periods of the settlement.

On the east side of the *dromos*, a smashed statue of a lion was found not far from the *opus sectile* floor. It is one of the probably numerous statues, like sphinxes, that characterised the settlement until recent times and gave it the modern name of Dîmâ as-Sibâc, or "Dime of the lions". Other fragments of similar statues have been collected in front of the *temenos* gate, in an area 70 m long where the *dromos* disappears under heaps of sand and rubble created by the destruction of a building of limestone blocks provided with columns. It was probably a kiosk built on the *dromos* and in front of the main gate in the *temenos*.

The survey of the site benefited from several modern sources like descriptions, drawings and photographs made by previous excavators and visitors collected so far by the Project.²³ Their comparative study and analysis were crucial for the comprehension of the

20 A similar floor was found at Pelusium in a completely different context. It decorated the western end of the nave of the medieval 'Round Church' at Farama West: GROSSMANN, HAFIZ, in: *MDAIK* 54, 182 Pl. 16,b.

21 They have similar dimensions: 3.5 x 7.07 m on the *dromos* and 3.6 x 6.3 m in ST 20M.

22 The *opus sectile* floor on the *dromos* can possibly also be related to a small mud brick temple (SO 136), whose date is yet unknown, located west of the processional road. Some crocodile bones with mummification treatment have been collected on the surface inside this building. The presence of mummified crocodiles in the temple suggests that it was dedicated to a form of Sobek.

23 CAPASSO, DAVOLI, *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 11–22.

recent events that shaped the site. The various results, like the localisation of the trenches dug by F. Zucker and W. Schubart in 1909–1910, the discovery of ancient dumps made of rubble discarded during the building of the temple ST 20, and the major causes of destruction of some mud-brick buildings disappeared or badly damaged in the last seventy years, cannot be fully illustrated in a short article.²⁴ Two dumps created in 1910 by Zucker's excavations west of the *temenos* were identified, too. In the 2009 season, two test trenches were cut in these dumps and in the stratigraphy below them to verify the possible presence of missing objects and *ostraka* and to understand the origin of the high dune surrounding the settlement, which was not excavated in that occasion or afterwards. A considerable number of demotic *ostraka* were found in 1910 and have been published by S. Lippert and M. Schentuleit in the first volume of the series *Demotische Dokumente aus Dime*.²⁵ 24 Demotic *ostraka* coming from the same excavation were left behind in one of Zucker's dumps (Saggio 2), which is at least 1.80 m deep. They are under study by C. Arlt and will complete the series of the already published documents. The second dump (Saggio 3) was near the western perimeter wall of a house, one of those partially excavated by Zucker's team, and consisted of collected stones. The stratigraphy found in the test trench below this dump was undisturbed and shows a natural thick sand deposit in its upper part, and a thick organic sediment at the bottom, rich of ash, charcoals, straw and animal coprolites (1.70 m thick), probably originated from frequent dumping of waste material from courtyards. Such sediments were accumulated on horizontal layers abutting the west walls of two houses (SN 29 and 33) that have been exposed in the trench for a maximum of 4.5 meters. The walls continue deeper and were made of local rough stones. Only the top of the walls was built in mud bricks, of which just three courses are preserved. The presence of a small window and the height of the walls suggest that one storey, possibly the ground floor, of these houses is completely preserved. Their floor should have been at an elevation of about 24 m above sea level, that is 1.5 m lower than the floor of the temple ST 20 and the same elevation of the first-phase floor of the demolished Ptolemaic period building (ST 204) mentioned above. The foundations of the buildings were not reached and no external floor surface has been identified. Therefore, it is possible that west of these buildings there was an open space where waste materials were dumped and flattened by winds. Wind blown sand from the desert was also deposited in horizontal layers, mixed with very fine organic dust and freshwater shells. Hopefully, the future analysis of these organic inclusions will contribute to the comprehension of the environment. The objects coming from the organic sediments excavated in this trench are still under study, but they can be dated to the Ptolemaic period.

The pottery survey carried out in 2010 by Sylvie Marchand (IFAO) inside and outside the settlement, allowed us to date these areas, and thus also the buildings inside them, opening impressive new perspectives from an historical point of view.²⁶ The area around Dime is rich in tombs, funerary buildings and other features that belong to a long time span, from the Neolithic to the Islamic periods. The pottery survey examined thirty-five areas, where the surface potsherds were collected and catalogued in order to establish their chronology.

24 They are fully published in CHIESI, et al., in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 23–82.

25 LIPPERT, SCHENTULEIT, *Ostraka*.

26 DAVOLI, MARCHAND, in: *BCE* 23.

Parts of the necropolis, some interesting features, such as the palaeolake's shores west of Dime, the so-called "watch towers", the "dykes" were examined. New chronological periods were identified: some pottery dated to the Old Kingdom (4th Dynasty, namely near the so-called quays of Qasr el-Sagha), others to the New Kingdom and to the Late Period. Ptolemaic and Roman pottery was also present in great quantities in the surveyed areas. New Kingdom and Late Period are of particular interest, being very scarcely represented in the history of the Fayyûm.²⁷ Moreover, the pre-Ptolemaic evidence may be connected with the building found below the foundations of the temple ST 18.

The stratigraphic and ceramic analysis carried out on the north and northeast sides of Dime allowed the identification of a phase of dismantlement in a circumscribed area of the settlement. This discovery raises a question about the interpretation of the settlement's plan as documented by the topographic survey. In fact, in this area there are several features and buildings that differ in nature, orientation and construction materials from the others visible on the surface south of the *temenos*. The pottery collected shows a great concentration, the highest found so far, of Hellenistic period sherds. This circumstance suggests that the upper and more recent layers disappeared in this area, possibly removed by the *sebbakhin*. However, the period and the reasons of this action are unclear, especially if we consider that the visible buildings are the same documented by Sir J.G. Wilkinson in a plan drawn during his visit at the ruins in 1824, and then confirmed by K.R. Lepsius in 1843.²⁸ G.B. Belzoni depicted a different situation in a 1819 watercolour. A high hill surmounted by an imposing building is represented east of the *temenos*. It is not clear if this view is highly influenced by a distorted perspective or if it represents a real situation. If this was the case, we should imagine that a massive dismantling of buildings and stratigraphy occurred between 1819 and 1824. *Sebbakhin* activity would be the most obvious cause, but it would predate the work of *sebbakhin* in other Fayyûm sites.²⁹

27 The existence of a New Kingdom settlement at Dime was supposed by K. Lembke on the basis of the Sobekhotep statue, now in Berlin Ägyptisches Museum (inv. 11635). It was found by Ali Farag in 1890 and bought by the Museum in 1892: LEMBKE, in: *JDAI* 113, 110 n. 5.

28 CHIESI, et al., in: *Soknopaiou Nesos Project I (2003–2009)*, 36 Fig. 17, 41 Fig. 24.

29 DAVOLI, in: *Atene e Roma NS Seconda* 1–2, 100–124.

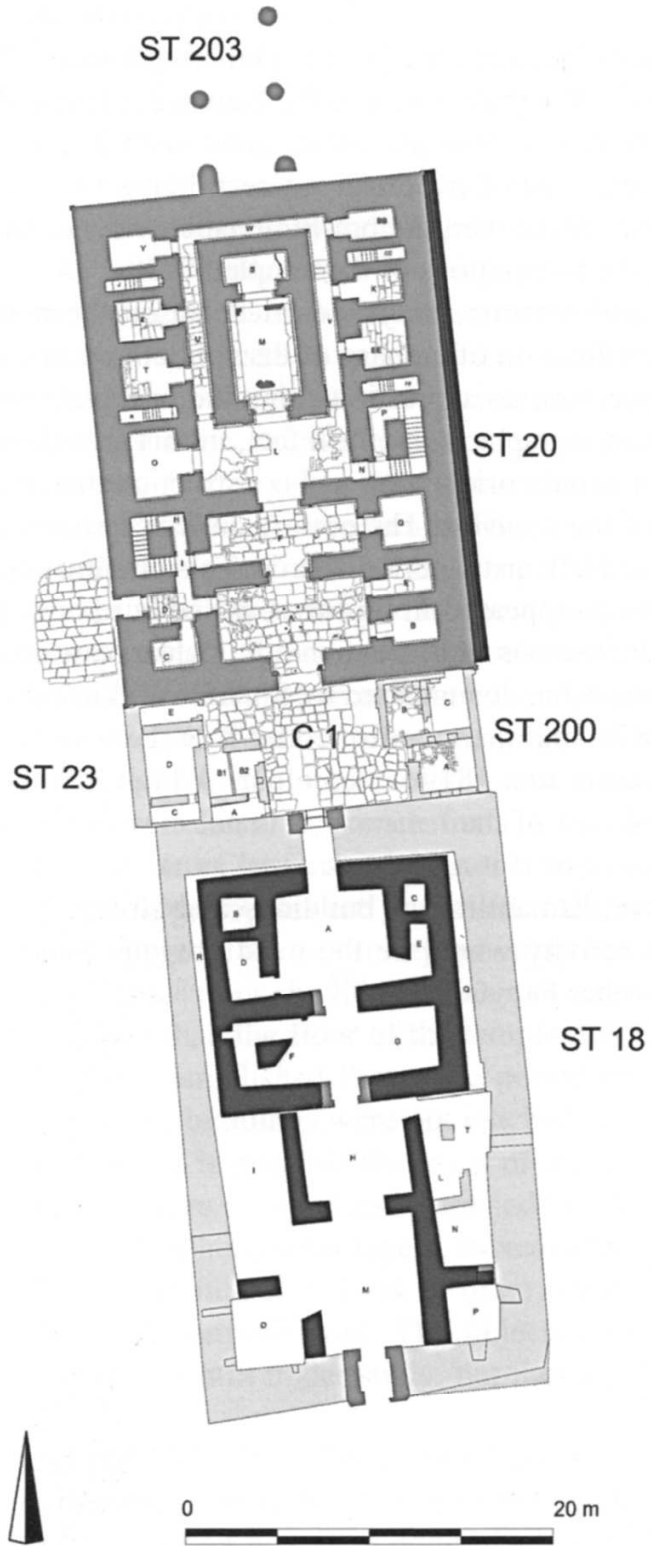


Fig. 1 The temple of Soknopaios.



Fig. 2 Late Antique floor in front of the west door in ST 20.

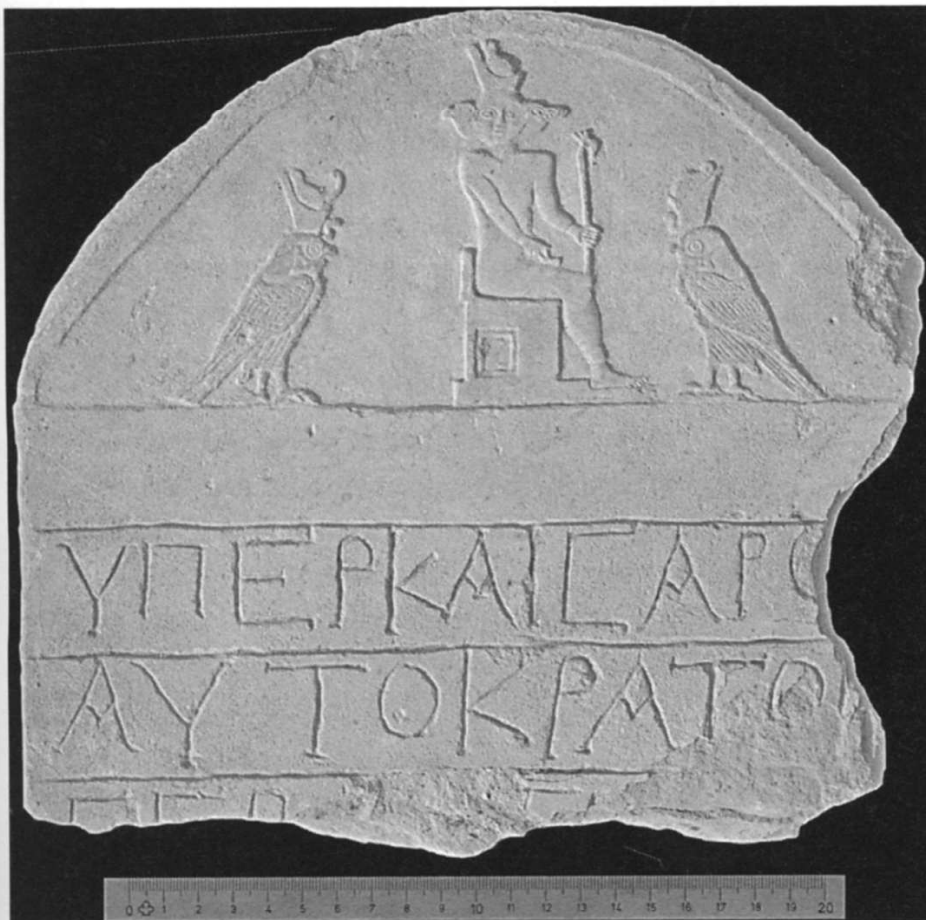


Fig. 3 The Roman-period stela found in 2010.