

Papyrologica Lupiensia

14/2005

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND PAPYROLOGICAL RESEARCHES
ON THE FAYYUM
PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING
OF EGYPTOLOGY AND PAPYROLOGY

Lecce, June 8th - 10th 2005

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THE TEMPLE AREA OF SOKNOPAIYOU NESOS

The archaeological area of Dime measures – on its top – 640 m from north to south and 320 m from east to west. The whole surface is about 200.000 m², of which about 5% is occupied by the main temple area surrounded by a *temenos* (fig. 1). This enclosure wall has an irregular perimeter: the north side measures about 81 m; the south side 85.70 m; the east side 112.60 m and the west side 118.85 m (fig. 2). The thickness of the enclosure wall is about 3.40 m. Inside the enclosure there are several buildings, either standing or slightly visible above the sand that covers the area, and many architectural elements are scattered throughout the surface (fig. 6). The *temenos* is not well known from an archaeological point of view, even though hundreds of Demotic and Greek papyri were found at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century¹.

In 2001-2002, the Joint Archaeological Mission of Bologna and Lecce Universities surveyed the site² and identified and recorded about twenty

¹ For the history of the excavations see P. DAVOLI, *L'archeologia urbana nel Fayyum di epoca ellenistica e romana*, Napoli 1998, pp. 39-54; C. WESSELY, *Karanis und Soknopaiou Nesos*, Wien 1902; E.A.E. REYMOND, *Studies in the Late Egyptian Documents Preserved in the John Rylands Library. II. Dimê and Its Papyri: an Introduction*, «BJRL» 48 (1965-66), pp. 433-466; EAD., *Studies in the Late Egyptian Documents Preserved in the John Rylands Library. III. Dimê and Its Papyri: Demotic Contracts of the 1st Century A.D.*, «BJRL» 49 (1966-1967), pp. 464-496; EAD., *Studies in the Late Egyptian Documents Preserved in the John Rylands Library. IV. Dimê and Its Papyri: Demotic Contracts of the 1st Century A.D.*, «BJRL» 52 (1969), pp. 218-230; E. BRESCIANI, *L'archivio demotico del tempio di Soknopaiou Nesos nel Griffith Insitut di Oxford*, Milano 1975; A. JÖRDENS, *Griechische Papyri aus Soknopaiou Nesos (P.Louvre I)*, Bonn 1998.

² The survey of Dime took place in 2001 and 2002. It was carried out by the Joint Archaeological Mission of Bologna and Lecce Universities, directed by S. Pernigotti, M. Capasso and by the author of this article as field director. Beginning from the 2004 season, the concession was taken over by the Centro di Studi Papirologici of Lecce University. The expedition is part of the Soknopaiou Nesos Project and is directed by M. Capasso and P. Davoli. For a summary of the results see: P. DAVOLI, *New Excavations at Soknopaiou Nesos: the 2003 Season*, in S.L. LIPPERT-M. SCHENTULEIT (Hgg.), *Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos. Leben im römerzeitlichen Fajum. Akten des Internationalen Symposions vom 11. bis 13. Dezember 2003 in Sommerhausen bei Würzburg*, Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 29-39; EAD., *Soknopaiou Nesos: i nuovi scavi dell'Università di Lecce, risultati e prospettive*, in F. CREVATIN-G. TEDESCHI (edd.), *Scrivere Leggere Interpretare. Studi di antichità in onore di Sergio Daris*, Trieste 2005, on-line publication [www.sslmit.units.it/crevatin/franco_crevatin_homepage.htm]; EAD., *Examples of Town Planning in the Fayyum*, «BASP» 42 (2005), pp. 213-233, Pls. 8-18;

buildings inside the *temenos*; the enclosure wall itself was accurately examined. This imposing enclosure is composed of 39 sections built next to each other as single walls, but joined together with mortises and tenons for better stability and to avoid the collapse of the entire structure (fig. 9). The joints are vertical and not slanting as in Late Period enclosures; there is also a bayonet shaped one. Indeed, thanks to this system some walls still survive to a height of about 12 m, and only a few of them have almost completely collapsed. The same system was adopted during the construction of the *temenos* in the north temple at Karanis, dated to the 1st or 2nd century A.D.

Each side of the *temenos* has been recorded: 8 walls or sections composed the north side, 10 the east side, 8 the south side and 13 the west side (fig. 7). They were built with mudbricks of different colours and fabrics, used randomly in the walls. The colour of the mud is determined by the origin of the clay itself; we have identified four main colours: light grey, dark grey, beige, and ochre³. The majority of the bricks used in the *temenos* walls are made of light grey clay, locally available in the desert north of Lake Qarun. The average brick size ranges from 30 x 15 x 11 cm to 26 x 13 x 11 cm.

The outer faces of the walls are built following the so-called *English bond* schema, with alternate courses of headers and stretchers, but with alternate concave and convex courses for each section of wall (fig. 8). The core of the walls consists normally of header courses. The top of the *temenos* was probably plain and the faces were not covered by plaster or mortar⁴. Furthermore, we have to point out that there are no putlog holes for scaffolding used during the construction process.

The entrance to the *temenos* area is in the middle of the south side, at the end of the *dromos* (fig. 10), but it is possible that a second gateway was located in the middle of the north side, where a break in the wall is visible today. We cannot be sure of the presence of such a gateway because of the very poor state of preservation of this sector of the *temenos*. The south gateway is completely missing, as it was probably built with sandstone blocks later removed by the stone-hunters like most of the blocks of the other buildings. The present space for the gate is 4.60 m wide; on its west side a staircase (fig. 11) was built within the *temenos* wall, probably to reach the top of the wall or a high window, in order to observe and control the area outside the gateway without opening it⁵. The same system of staircases is always

P. DAVOLI-M. CAPASSO, *Soknopaiou Nesos Project. Archaeological Expedition of Lecce University at Dime (El-Fayyum). Report on 2004 Season*, «RISE» 2 (2006), pp. 93-114.

³ *Munsell soil color charts*, New York 2000: light grey (10YR 8/2), dark grey (10YR 6/1), beige (10 YR 7/3), ochre (10YR 6/6).

⁴ In some cases the walls were topped by merlons: J-CL. GOLVIN/J.-CL. GOYON, *Les bâtisseurs de Karnak*, Paris 1987, pp. 80-83.

⁵ No staircase is present in the north side of the *temenos*.

present in the pylons, the traditional monumental gateway of Egyptian temple architecture. We do not know yet how deep the foundations of the *temenos* are.

Twenty four features have been recognized inside the area (fig. 2). The most important are three temples (ST 18, 19, 20) located in the middle of the area; the other structures are mainly located along the western and southern sides of the *temenos* and apparently are subsidiary buildings (ST 8-15, 201-202; 16-17). At least one chapel in classical style, with small columns, abuts to the north side of the *temenos* (ST 7). Building ST 5 might have been a chapel in Egyptian style, with architectonic decoration in sandstone. Only one building is visible in the eastern half of the area (ST 22) (fig. 15). All these features are partially destroyed and covered with sand or rubble and collapsed walls; they are mainly built with mudbricks of the same colours and sizes of those used in the *temenos* walls. Only a few buildings are built with rough stones (*i.e.* ST 21).

ST 6 is a fairly wide structure, only partially preserved; it is composed of a square staircase and at least two rooms, one particularly well preserved (figs. 12-13). It is built against the north-west corner of the *temenos* and is oriented north-south. This room is 12.35 x 4.70 m wide and it is preserved to a height of about 10 m. In the walls, there are 13 niches: the biggest one (1.33 m) is in the middle of the north wall, in front of the entrance; two are on each side of the entrance, five are located on the east wall and five on the west one, facing each other, all rectangular in shape. Four windows with sloping sills 70 cm wide are above four of them along the east side. The shape and the dimension of this room are exceptional and difficult to interpret⁶. The presence of such a large number of niches and the general dimensions of the structure might suggest a public function, such as an archive or a library.

To the south of this building, there is an area covered with mounds of rubble (fig. 12). These mounds lie where a wide break is recognizable in the wall of the *temenos* and the same kind of rubble is present inside and outside the wall. The mounds are characterized by a significant density of basalt chips suggesting the presence of a workshop of a sculptor inside or outside the *temenos*. Basalt statues from Soknopaiou Nesos are well known⁷ and nu-

⁶ Smaller sized rooms with windows over niches were found in some houses of the Roman period in Karanis by the University of Michigan. Cf., for example, houses C119, C62, C50 (level C, about 1st-2nd century A.D.): E.M. HUSSELMAN, *Karanis. Topography and Architecture*, Ann Arbor 1979, Plan 40, Pls. 19 a, 59 a and b.

⁷ Statues of the Roman period (1st century A.D.) number about 20 and were found by Ali Farag, an antiquities dealer who got the permission to dig in Dime for two seasons in 1890-91. The statues were divided between the dealer and Cairo Egyptian Museum according to the law. The majority of these are in basalt: cf. R.S. BIANCHI, *The Cultural Transformation of Egypt as*

merous architectural and decorative elements in basalt were found during the 2003-2005 excavation seasons⁸.

Continuing to the south, a group of mud-brick features is built against the *temenos* that functions as a perimeter wall for them (fig. 14). These seem to be auxiliary buildings, with cellars covered with barrel vaults; objects of daily use, such as a conical stone mortar (in ST 201) and cooking pots are scattered about. A cooking place was probably in or near building ST 8, where several carbonized bones and fragments of cooking pots are. These buildings seem to have been built in the same period and with the same materials and techniques, as, for example, the use of alternating channels full of mud in the thickness of the walls. Niches and staircases are still visible in some of them.

ST 7, instead, was a chapel abutted to the north *temenos* wall. Only the base of the north and east walls are preserved and what is now visible suggests a square shape with one small column on each side and intercolumnar screen walls (fig. 16). The columns are not in place, but one of their bases is still in the northeastern corner and a second one has been found nearby. They are in sandstone and carved in imperial Attic style (ø 35 cm, ø base 45 cm, h 20 cm). The intercolumnar walls are 1.20 m long and were built using single blocks in local marlstone, set one upon the other. Six similar blocks were found spread in different layers north of ST 18 temple during the 2003 season, but their sizes do not match. In the centre of the *temenos*, south of ST 7, a large mound of rubble (60 x 30 m ca.), sand and stone architectural elements that were labelled ST 20 (fig. 6) begins. It is not clear if we are in the presence of one or more monumental buildings, because there are few visible walls and the rubble seems to be continuous; however, there are architectural elements in Classical and Egyptian style scattered throughout the area, such as fragments of a Ionic-Corinthian style cornice with rosettes⁹, a

Suggested by a Group of Enthroned Male Figures from the Fayyum, in J.H. JOHNSON (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and beyond*, Chicago 1992, pp. 15-26; K. LEMBKE, *Dimeh. Römische Repräsentationskunst im Fayyum*, «JDAI» 113 (1998), pp. 109-137 (with a complete list of statues and stelae from Dime). E. BERNAND, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum*, I, Leiden 1975, nos. 77, 78, 80 (Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria cat. 123, 124, 125); the inscriptions on statues BERNAND, *Recueil cit.*, no. 79 (Cairo Museum CG 1190) and no. 80 contain the names of the sculptors, respectively Tesenouphis and Petesis (*contra* BIANCHI, *The Cultural Transformation cit.*, p. 24).

⁸ These include a piece of a Hathoric capital belonging to a small column (ST03/1/62), blocks (ST03/40/274; ST03/48/329; ST03/45/363, 369, 370), a semicolumn (ST05/206/963), cavetto cornices (ST03/20/22; ST03/40/371).

⁹ Inv. nos. ST03/42/344, ST05/214/919, ST05/205/947. A similar cornice was found in Theadelphia and is now preserved in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (inv. 19910): P. PENSABENE, *Elementi architettonici di Alessandria e di altri siti egiziani*, Roma 1993, cat. no. 924, p. 510, tav. 97.

Doric frieze¹⁰, part of a Corinthian capital¹¹, a lintel with an unfinished solar disk¹², friezes of *uraei*¹³, a cavetto cornice with a solar disk flanked by two *uraei*¹⁴, torus, and cavetto cornices¹⁵.

Temple ST 20 is oriented north-south and was built with squared sandstone blocks and with lintels in local marlstone (now all collapsed). At present, only a few walls and five columns in two rows are visible under a layer of sand and rubble of an estimated height of about 1.5 m. The columns are located along the north end and were built with sandstone quarter sectors with a diameter of 1.20 m. In this area, several fragments of architectural elements in basalt are still *in situ*. At the south end, the front of the building was brought to light during the 2003 season (fig. 17). The wall measures 19.30 m in length, 1.80 m in width and it is preserved to a maximum height of 1.53 m, or 7 courses of isodomic blocks (67-77 x 40 x 20 cm), bonded with white and pinkish mortar. Its southern face is quite rough, with blocks showing bosses (*rustica* masonry). Some Greek letters are engraved on the bosses of some blocks as mason's marks. The masonry, similar to that of other Fayyum temples, suggests it was constructed in the Roman period. The entrance to the sanctuary is 2.35 m wide and it is on the same axis as the gateway opened in the rear wall of ST 18.

Between the two temples, there is a paved courtyard¹⁶ (labelled C1) of about 19 x 6.5 m, occupied on the east and west sides by two subsidiary mud-brick buildings (ST 200 and ST 23) (figs. 17-18). This area and a nearby rubble mound, created by previous excavators, were dug during the 2003 and 2004 seasons.

Temple ST 18 is a small building (13.56 x 13.15 m) in rough local marlstone, preserved to a height of at least 7 m, and surrounded by a close-by *temenos* in mud-brick (32.92 x 18.62 m) (fig. 19). The stone walls were originally covered with a thick layer of white plaster, only partially preserved. The plan (fig. 3) of the building is very similar to those of small Egyptian temples of the Ptolemaic period, enclosed by a *temenos*, with two storeys, a staircase, a courtyard, and a *vestibulus*. Fourteen rooms are still

¹⁰ Inv. no. ST04/100/517 (35 x 65, h 13-16.5 cm): cf. PENSABENE, *Elementi architettonici* cit., cat. no. 946, pp. 79-83, tav. 99.

¹¹ Inv. no. ST04/100/699 (10 x 11.5 x 11 cm).

¹² Inv. no. ST03/23/428 (201 x 41, h 27 cm).

¹³ Inv. nos. ST03/1/26; ST05/206/961, 980; ST05/219/1006, 1011.

¹⁴ Inv. no. ST03/15/13.

¹⁵ Cavetto cornices: inv. nos. ST03/1/383; ST03/15/13; ST03/23/118, 237; ST03/40/371; ST03/45/363; ST04/110/756, 757; ST05/241/1030. Cavetto cornices with torus: inv. nos. ST03/20/22; ST05/-/1015. Fragments of torus: inv. nos. ST03/23/229; ST05/200/882; ST05/223/1150.

¹⁶ The surface of the floor is at an average of 25.60 m above sea level.

preserved on the two storeys. Nevertheless, their identification is complicated by the presence of an unusual gateway on the rear wall of the *naos* (fig. 20). It leads to the courtyard C1 in front of ST 20 and is on the same axis as the main entrance. The building has never been excavated using a scientific approach and it is full of sand and collapsed walls: thus, it is not easy to understand which parts are original and which are restorations or additions of later periods. In my opinion, the original building was a Ptolemaic-period temple¹⁷ that was converted into a sort of monumental passageway¹⁸, perhaps in the Roman period, at the time of the construction of the new temple ST 20. This interpretation explains the presence of the north gateway.

Indeed, the original plan of ST 18 is quite similar to other small Ptolemaic temples in the Fayyum, as for example temple XL in Bakchias, temple C in Medinet Madi and the one in Philadelphia¹⁹. Another similar mud-brick building in Soknopaiou Nesos is SO 136, along the west side of the *dromos*.

The temple proper or the *naos* was completely built with rough slabs of local brown limestone. The slabs are laid in horizontal courses joined together with little or no mortar (fig. 21). The same technique was used in building SE 120 east of the *dromos* and in the ground floor of the two houses of the Fourth Level (IV 401 and IV 402, dated to the beginning of the Hellenistic period) found by the Michigan excavations in their west sector²⁰. This kind of masonry was used both in Hellenistic and Roman periods in desert places where stones were freely available in the surroundings, as for example in some other settlements in the Fayyum and in the eastern desert²¹. Some stone walls in the courtyards M and H have extensions in mud-brick

¹⁷ During the 2003 season a piece of wooden furniture, probably a *naos*, with the *serekh* of Ptolemy III was found in the passage of the north gate: S. PERNIGOTTI, *Ptolemy III at Soknopaiou Nesos*, «SEP» 1 (2004), pp. 119-120 and Pl. I.

¹⁸ It became *propylaea*, following the terminology of A.M. BADAWY, *The Approach to the Egyptian Temple in the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods*, «ZÄS» 102 (1975), p. 81.

¹⁹ P. DAVOLI, *Oggetti in argilla dall'area templare di Bakchias (El-Fayyum, Egitto). Catalogo dei rinvenimenti delle Campagne di Scavo 1996-2002*, Pisa-Roma 2005, figs. 5, 29; E. BRESCIANI, *Rapporto sulle missioni archeologiche nel Fayyum nel 1998. Il nuovo tempio di Medinet Madi*, «EVO» 20-21 (1997-1998), p. 96, fig. 1 b; DAVOLI, *L'archeologia urbana cit.*, p. 148, figs. 64-65.

²⁰ A.E.R. BOAK, *Soknopaiou Nesos. The University of Michigan Excavations at Dimê in 1931-32*, Ann Arbor 1935, pp. 17-18.

²¹ In the Fayyum there are examples in Qasr Qarun, Medinet Ghoran and Kom Aushim: D.P.S. PEACOCK-V.A. MAXFIELD, *Survey and Excavation. Mons Claudianus*, Le Caire 1997; pp. 26-32; R.E. ZITTERKOPF, *Roman Construction Techniques in the Eastern Desert*, in O.E. KAPER (ed.), *Life on the Fringe. Proceedings of a Colloquium Held on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies in Cairo, 9-12 December 1996*, Leiden 1998, pp. 271-286.

that seem to be restorations instead of part of the original walls as it occurs in other features²².

In front of the *naos* and inside the small *temenos*, there are two courtyards, M and H, and some smaller rooms on both sides and in different state of preservation (P, N, L, O, I). The courtyards were not built at the same time as the temple, but later. Their walls abutted to the façade originally coated with a thick white plaster that covered the rough surfaces of the stone walls (fig. 22). The plaster is still preserved in some spots on the original façade and in some rooms of the temple. The plaster is plain except in room G and on the façade where it was moulded to resemble rows of isodomic blocks about 30 cm high. The gypsum plaster is about 6 cm thick and it is composed of five layers applied on a preparatory brush spreading. It is similar to the first Roman style, but here the moulded cornices are very deep and V-shaped.

Room A was the original *sancta sanctorum* and its walls were covered with plain and white gypsum plaster 5 cm thick, originally painted yellow and dark red, as several painted fragments scattered in the collapse suggest. The roofs of all the rooms are missing but it is clear that there was a second floor. Only one room of the second floor is preserved in the north-west corner (B), and it is completely plastered. The pillared stairway was in room F, but no steps are visible any longer. On the north-south axis of the temple there are five gateways three of which are internal, all built with sandstone blocks. The north doorway opens in the rear wall of the *naos* and the mud-brick *temenos*. It is 1.32 m wide (passageway 1.62 m x 3.50 m) and probably had two wooden leaves. The threshold or floor is in local stone. The gateway was not built with the usual Greek Π shaped jambs. The sandstone blocks jambs are simple pillars set in the mud-brick walls outside the passageway (fig. 23). There are two squared holes for the door bolt on both jambs and inside the door.

Enlargements of temples are common in Egypt, but with addition of rooms and courtyards on the front side. The opening of a gateway in the rear wall of temples or chapels to enlarge them occurred during the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, as for example in Philae in the *mammisi* of Isis, the temple of Arsenouphis and the temple of Hathor²³. Thus, it is also possible that the original temple of Soknopaios had been similarly enlarged to the north in the Ptolemaic period or that this project had just been undertaken at

²² It is quite common that only the lower part of walls or buildings was built with stones and the upper part with mud-brick. In this case, all the walls of the inner part of the temple are in stone up to the roof level.

²³ D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, New York 1999, pp. 202-204, figs. 120, 127, 141.

that time. If this is the case, it became a passageway only after the new re-arrangement of the temple area in the Roman period.

Near the south-western corner of ST 18 there is a small mud-brick temple facing east (14.30 x 9.96 m), and labelled ST 19 (fig. 24). It is in a very poor state of preservation and there are only three rooms visible inside. Few limestone blocks of the gateway survive; these are joined with wooden dovetail cramps. A very similar building, with respect to its dimensions (13.5 x 8 m), plan and position (in front of the main temple, facing east) is structure 17 inside the first courtyard of the temple of Soknebtynis at Tebtynis. It was interpreted by C. Anti as a *deipneterion* and more recently as a chapel by Rondot²⁴.

We have only a vague idea about the many excavations carried out by papyrologists and antiquity hunters inside the area of the *temenos*. Many pits and mounds visible on the surface are certainly due to these excavations. A look at the bibliography and old photographs allows for a partial reconstruction of what happened²⁵. Heavy spoliation of the stone features damaged and altered the original architecture and landscape of the site, but we do not know when it occurred. Despite the lack of information and the general poor condition of most of the features inside the *temenos*, we can attempt to provide an interpretation of this area and its buildings, which should be verified with excavations, through a comparative study with other temples and data collected from written sources. Mud-brick buildings, used for different purposes and built along the *temenos* walls, are common inside the enclosure of Egyptian temples²⁶. In the Fayyum, a similar temple area recently reinvestigated and well published is that of the temple of Soknebtynis at Tebtynis²⁷. Its *temenos*, the temple, and a first *dromos* with a mud-brick kiosk were built during the reign of Ptolemy I. The *temenos*, made of mud-bricks of 38 x 19 x 13 cm, is composed of numerous sections with concave and convex courses, and measures 113 x 63 m by 4.75 m in thickness. The temple itself is no longer extant, but several buildings around it were excavated by an Italian expedition in 1931-33. The general disposition of

²⁴ V. RONDOT, *Tebtynis II. Le temple de Soknebtynis et son dromos*, Le Caire 2004, Plan 2, pp. 19-20.

²⁵ G.B. Belzoni visited the temple in 1819 and K.R. Lepsius in 1843. The antiquities dealer Farag had a permission to excavate the site in 1890 and a Coptic dealer in 1894. F. Zucker excavated in the *temenos* in 1910 and Ahmed Bey Kamal in the winter 1915-16: DAVOLI, *L'archeologia urbana* cit., pp. 40-45. Some objects entered the Cairo Egyptian Museum in 1887 and 1893. One of them is an incense burner from the temple equipment (JE 30700).

²⁶ The most complex situation preserved is that of Amon-Ra temple in Karnak: GOLVIN-GOYON, *Les bâtisseurs* cit., pp. 78-80.

²⁷ RONDOT, *Tebtynis II* cit.

the features resembles that in the temple of Soknopaios: in front of the main building, there is a courtyard, with a small secondary temple facing east and located near a corner of the main temple (ST 19 in Dime; building 17 in Tebtynis). In Tebtynis, other important buildings are concentrated in this first courtyard, such as a second chapel (labelled 20D) and a big house (labelled 7). Around the *temenos*, and abutted to it, there are small houses generally composed of two rooms and with underground cellars, named *pastophoria* in some papyri²⁸. What we can see in Soknopaiou Nesos is a series of similar buildings, especially those visible on the western side, which might be interpreted in the same way. Two workshops were recognised at Tebtynis – but not recorded on the plan –, one for the manufacturing of glass inlays for furniture and a much later one for the melting of coins. The famous collection of papyri from the library of the temple of Soknebtynis was found in two cellars of a small house, but the temple library was not identified. In both Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtynis, an open space is left between the temples and the auxiliary buildings. The presence of a contra-temple has been supposed for the temple of Soknebtynis.

Another interesting comparison can be made with the temple of Narmouthis/Medinet Madi (temple A), in which some mud-brick buildings and houses abutted to the east and west sides of the *temenos* were found by A. Vogliano. Along the eastern wall of the *temenos* a small chapel of Isis-Thermouthis for the health of Augustus was also found²⁹, and it seems similar to Dime ST 7. Unfortunately, neither plans nor detailed descriptions of the *temenos* complex were published, even if an archive of 1555 *ostraka* was found in one of the buildings³⁰.

The research on the written sources concerning the collection of topographical data is still at an early stage because the majority of the published papyri and *ostraka* are Greek. Different aspects of the life, economy and religion of Soknopaiou Nesos have been studied but almost exclusively on the basis of Greek sources. The importance and the contents of the Demotic papyri that are still unpublished are summarized by E.A.E. Reymond and, according to her, the temple archives of Dime are one of the most important archives of any Egyptian temple³¹.

²⁸ RONDOT, *Tebtynis II* cit., p. 22 and note 44.

²⁹ A. VOGLIANO, *Rapporto Preliminare della IV^a Campagna di Scavo a Madînet Mâdi* (R. Università di Milano), «ASAE» 38 (1938), pp. 536-537, 543.

³⁰ E. BRESCIANI, *Achille Vogliano a Medînet Mâdi. Le grandi scoperte archeologiche*, in C. GALLAZZI-L. LEHNUS (edd.), *Achille Vogliano cinquant'anni dopo. I*, Quaderni di Acme, 59, Milano 2003, pp. 197-230.

³¹ REYMOND, *Studies. II* cit., p. 446. See also E.A.E. REYMOND, *Demotic Literary Works of Graeco-Roman Date in the Rainer Collection of Papyri in Vienna*, in *Papyrus Erzherzog*

The main god of the town was undoubtedly Soknopaios³², and many Greek and Demotic sources of Ptolemaic and Roman periods attest that the local triad included Isis Nepherses³³, and Soknopiais³⁴. The temple of Soknopaios was considered as a first rank temple in the Roman period³⁵. Other temples, dedicated to different gods and goddesses, are mentioned³⁶: a temple for Isis Sonona, Harpocrates and Premarres (105 B.C.)³⁷; probably a temple with *peribolos*, *dromos*, and *komasterion* of Isis Esenchabis in (68 B.C.); a temple of Harpsenesis (Ptolemaic period)³⁸; a temple of Thoth-Hermes (A.D. 164); a temple of Pakysis (Roman period); a temple or a chapel of Suchos (Roman period); probably a temple or a chapel of Thoth-Hermes (Roman period); and finally a chapel on a hill of Isis Nephremmis³⁹ (2nd cent. B.C.).

It is quite striking that in the calendar of the feasts on PLouvre I 4 of the 2nd century A.D. five feasts that celebrate the foundation of buildings are mentioned: two of these were for the foundation of the Soknopaios *naos*, one for the foundation of the temple (generic), one for the foundation of the *peribolos*, and one for the foundation of the Isis Nephremmis *naos*⁴⁰. I am

Rainer (P. Rainer Cent.). *Festschrift zum 100-Jährigen bestehen der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, Wien 1983, pp. 42-60.

³² *Sbk-n-P3-iv*: CH. LEITZ (Hgg.), *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, VI, Leuven 2002, p. 261.

³³ L. BRICAULT, *Isis Néphersès*, in W. CLARYSSE et alii (eds.), *Egyptian Religion. The Last Thousand Years*, I, Leuven 1998, pp. 521-528.

³⁴ Soknopiais is named Ammon-Soknopiais in some oracular papyri: G. BASTIANINI, *Una domanda oracolare da Soknopaiou Nesos (P. Vindob. G 298)*, in *Paideia Cristiana. Studi in onore di Mario Naldini*, Roma 1994, pp. 189-197.

³⁵ PLouvre I 2, A.D. 133.

³⁶ P. BOTTIGELLI, *Repertorio topografico dei templi e dei sacerdoti dell'Egitto tolemaico*. II, «Aegyptus» 22 (1942), pp. 188-196; W.J.R. RÜBSAM, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum während der griechisch-römisch-byzantinischen Zeit*, Bonn 1974, pp. 154-172; E. BERNAND, *Epigraphie et histoire des cultes au Fayoum*, in *Hommages à la mémoire de S. Sauneron 1927-1976*, II, Le Caire 1979, pp. 57-76.

³⁷ The temple of Isis Sonona, Harpocrates and Premarres was placed on the street to Nabla, but we do not know where this place was: RÜBSAM, *Götter und Kulte* cit., p. 160 (d); GH. WIDMER, *Pharaoh Maâ-Rê, Pharaoh Amenemhat and Sesostri: three Figures from Egypt's Past as seen in Sources of the Graeco-Roman Period*, in K. RYHOLT (ed.), *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies, Copenhagen, 23-27 August 1999*, Copenhagen 2002, p. 383 note 33.

³⁸ M. SCHENTULEIT, *Dime online. Eine Datenbank zur Prosopographie des Fajumortes Soknopaiou Nesos*, «GM» 209 (2006), p. 110; S.L. LIPPERT, *Die Abmachungen der Priester-Einblicke in das Leben und Arbeiten in Soknopaiou Nesos*, in this volume, p. 153.

³⁹ On the Nephremmis chapel cf. H. CUVIGNY, *Une prétendue taxe sur les autels: Le ΘΟΡΟΣ ΒΩΜΩΝ*, «BIFAO» 86 (1986), pp. 107-133.

⁴⁰ JÖRDENS, *Griechische Papyri* cit., pp. 19-45; see also GH. WIDMER, *Les fêtes en l'honneur de Sobek dans le Fayoum à l'époque gréco-romaine*, «Égypte. Afrique & Orient» 23 (2003), pp. 5-6.

tempted to think that the two or three feasts for the foundation of the Soknopaios temple might be referred to different construction phases of the building, two of which might be identified with ST 18 and ST 20 foundations. Another source mentions a *peribolos* in honour of Soknopaios: a stela, found by H. Brugsch in the ruins of the temple⁴¹ and dated to 24 B.C., celebrates the construction of the wall sponsored by the breeders of rams from Niloupolis. It is possible that the *peribolos* mentioned in the stela is in fact the present *temenos* wall⁴².

Works in the temple of Soknopaios are mentioned in one Demotic contract of 153 or 142 B.C. (reign of Ptolemy VI or VIII)⁴³. The nature or the entity of the works is not specified, but a north gateway of the temple is recorded. Indirect mentions of works are in two Demotic papyri⁴⁴ dated to 144 B.C. (reign of Ptolemy VIII), in which 10,000 bricks and 70 beams are donated to the priests of the Soknopaios temple.

A papyrus in hieroglyph in the Vienna collection (Coll. Rainer, PAeg 9976)⁴⁵ is a copy of inscriptions to be written on a door or *naos*. Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III are mentioned together with Soknopaios, Sobek of Shedet and other dynastic gods. The papyrus seems to be a Roman copy. Another Demotic papyrus of the 1st-2nd cent. A.D., now in the Vienna collection (PWien D 10100)⁴⁶, has been recently published by G. Vittmann, and provides us with a description of the internal decoration, in Egyptian style, of the temple of Soknopaios. It seems to be a copy of a Ptolemaic project concerning the ornamentation of the temple interior, subdivided into registers, and with an unspecified Ptolemy as the offering king. The available archaeological evidence does not allow us to establish with certainty which structure this project may refer to. Building ST 20 seems to be datable to the Roman period on the basis of some masonry features. Nevertheless, it would be extremely interesting to compare the ruins of the Roman temple with this description⁴⁷. In the 2005 excavation season we hope to begin the investiga-

⁴¹ Cairo CG 9202: BERNAND, *Recueil* cit., no. 73.

⁴² Contra cf. F. KREBS, *Griechische Steininschriften aus Aegypten*, «NKGW» 15 (1892), p. 536.

⁴³ BRESCIANI, *L'archivio demotico* cit., no. 58.

⁴⁴ BRESCIANI, *L'archivio demotico* cit., nos. 50-51.

⁴⁵ E. WINTER, *Der Entwurf für eine Türinschrift auf einem ägyptischen Papyrus*, «NAWG» 3 (1967), pp. 59-80.

⁴⁶ G. VITTMANN, *Ein Entwurf zur Dekoration eines Heiligtums in Soknopaiu Nesos* (pWien D 101000), «Enchoria» 28 (2002/3), pp. 106-136, Taf. 14-21.

⁴⁷ I cannot exclude the possibility that the decoration described on the papyrus might have been painted on the plaster inside ST 18. A plastered and painted *naos* of the XXVII dynasty is still preserved in Qasr el-Ghueita temple (Kharga Oasis). A fragment of a relief in Egyptian style on a sandstone block was found on the surface in area ST 20 during the 2003 season: PERNIGOTTI, *Ptolemy III* cit., Pl. II.

tion inside ST 20 and to find new evidence that could be compared with the data coming from papyri.

Other demotists are studying some Demotic papyri from the temple archives and their preliminary publications point out how rich they are. Several papyri from the 1st to the beginning of the 3rd cent. A.D. are copies of an earlier text with the Daily Ritual of Soknopaiou Nesos⁴⁸. According to this text the priests had to pass five gates in a state of purity and then enter a broad hall and, finally, into the *naos*. Therefore, the five gates might belong to a *propylon* and a *pronaos* that can be identified provisionally with ST 18 and the paved courtyard C1 between ST 18 and ST 20.

The Demotic papyrus Berlin P 6750, studied by Gh. Widmer⁴⁹, is an interesting compendium of religious liturgical texts of the 2nd cent. A.D. It refers to rituals connected with the death of Osiris and the birth of Horus. It had to be used in celebrations during the month of Hathyr, when the *genesia* took place (7-25 Hathyr). Following Widmer, it is possible that Osiris and Horus are identified here with two forms of Sobek worshipped in Soknopaiou Nesos, respectively Soknopiais with Osiris and Soknopaios, the crocodile with a falcon head, with Horus.

Among the subsidiary buildings, we have recognized some chapels, but so far we cannot say for which gods they were erected. The small temple ST 19 can be attributed to a number of gods and goddesses of the local pantheon, but its position and orientation toward the east suggest that it might have been a so-called *mammisi*⁵⁰. If this is the case, we can suppose that the hathoric capital found and described by Ahmed Kamal in 1916 was part of this building⁵¹ and that the ritual of PBerlin 6750 may have a connection with it.

An overview of all the Greek sources that refer to buildings, private and public, and streets has carried out by S. Daris⁵². Some Greek papyri mention buildings related to the temple as houses for priests (*pastophoria*), a *thesauros* (PAmh II 41, 2nd cent. B.C.), and a bakery, but the latter are not visible now and probably were part of the deepest layer of the Ptolemaic period. PRyl II 161 (A.D. 81) is of particular interest, in which a *pastophorion* with a courtyard and two stories is placed in the eastern part of the *temenos* and

⁴⁸ See in this volume the contribution by M.A. STADLER, Abb. 4, p. 301.

⁴⁹ GH. WIDMER, *On Egyptian Religion at Soknopaiou Nesos in the Roman Period (P.Berlin P 6750)*, in LIPPERT-SCHENTULEIT (Hgg.), *Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos* cit., pp. 171-184.

⁵⁰ ARNOLD, *Temples* cit., pp. 285-288.

⁵¹ A. KAMAL, *Quelques jours de fouilles à Dimeh es-Sebaâ*, «ASAE» 16 (1916), pp. 183-186.

⁵² See in this volume S. DARIS, *Strutture urbanistiche di Soknopaiou Nesos nei papiri greci*, pp. 84-94.

abutted to the wall. The description of the house is quite accurate. It was near another house belonging to Stotoetis and some private and templar open spaces. Bernand assumed that the bakery had been attached to the temple of Soknopaios since the Berlin stela of Apollonios⁵³ (97-96 B.C.) states that an offering of 182 and half artabs of grain was given every year to the bakery for the bread destined to Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses.

B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt identified the two temples placed in the centre of the *temenos* as dedicated to Soknopaios and Isis Nepherses in one case, and to Isis Sonona, Harpocrates, and Premarres in the other⁵⁴. Gh. Widmer, on the other hand, proposed to identify the two buildings as being dedicated respectively to Soknopaios and Soknopiais⁵⁵. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the first building (ST 18) cannot be interpreted as a temple after a second gate was opened on the rear wall of the former *naos*.

With what we know at present we can assume that building ST 18 was the earliest temple of Soknopaios, probably built at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, restored and modified in different moments. The three Demotic papyri (POxf Griffith 50, 51, 58)⁵⁶ mentioned above might refer to one of these restorations. The construction of the new temple ST 20 might be contemporary to that of the *temenos*, since it is in the centre of the enclosed area and also because of practical reasons related to the building yard. Therefore, the subsidiary buildings abutting to the *temenos* were built later. If we consider the dimensions of the mud-bricks from the *temenos* and the features inside it, we will come to the conclusion that only one size was used (30 x 15 x 10 cm). This kind of mud-brick is attested in late Ptolemaic-early Roman period buildings⁵⁷. The date of 25 B.C. of the foundation stela of the *peribolos* matches this indication of date very well.

⁵³ Inv. no. 11634: BERNAND, *Recueil cit.*, no. 70.

⁵⁴ B.P. GRENFELL-A.S. HUNT, *Egypt Exploration Fund. Archaeological Report 1900-1901, Excavations in the Fayûm*, London 1901, p. 5.

⁵⁵ WIDMER, *On Egyptian Religion at Soknopaiou Nesos cit.*, p. 183.

⁵⁶ BRESCIANI, *L'archivio demotico cit.*, nos. 50-51, 58.

⁵⁷ This size seems to be very common in buildings dated from Late Ptolemaic period to the Roman period: A.J. SPENCER, *Brick Architecture in Ancient Egypt*, Warminster 1979, pp. 82, 147, Pl. 42. Bricks of the same size were used in the Roman period house II 201: BOAK, *Soknopaiou Nesos cit.*, p. 11. The *temenos* of the South temple in Karanis (1st cent. A.D.) was built in sections of different length, from 4 to 12 m long, and with bricks of 31 x 14.5 x 9.5 cm: A.E.R. BOAK, *Karanis. The Temples, Coin Hoards, Botanical and Zoölogical Reports Seasons 1924-31*, Ann Arbor 1933, p. 31. Unfortunately this kind of data have not been systematically recorded in the past during the excavations of temples complexes in the Fayyum, often completely lost now. The *temenos* of the Tebtynis temple was built during the reign of Ptolemy I with bricks of 38 x 19 x 13 and 36 x 17 x 11 cm: RONDOT, *Tebtynis II cit.*, pp. 10, 191; G. HADJI-MINAGLOU, *La mise en oeuvre de la brique à Tebtynis*, in B. MATHIEU-D.

In conclusion, what we can say with certainty about the Soknopaios *temenos* is that it is a very interesting area, still rich in information. It will take many years to explore the entire area and understand it in its whole context, both from archaeological and papyrological points of view. For these reasons, it is necessary to pursue the study of the area using an interdisciplinary⁵⁸ approach in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the life of a Graeco-Roman temple in the western desert of Egypt.

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MEEKS-M. WISSA (éds.), *L'apport de l'Égypte à l'histoire des techniques*, Le Caire 2006, p. 120. At Bakchias we can see bricks of 35-37 x 15-19 x 10-13 cm in buildings of the Ptolemaic period (*i.e.* Str. XXXIV, XXVIII, XLVII), and bricks of 28-31 x 14-15 x 10 cm in those built in the Roman period (*i.e.* Str. XLV, XXXVIII): DAVOLI, *Oggetti in argilla* cit., pp. 28-53. The two Ptolemaic period temples (XXVII and XL) are built with bricks of 36-40 x 18-20 x 10-14 cm: E. GIORGI, *I materiali da costruzione e le tecniche edilizie del tempio di Soknopionneus*, in S. PERNIGOTTI-M. CAPASSO (edd.), *Bakchias V. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna di Scavo del 1997*, Pisa-Roma 1998, p. 58. The second Ptolemaic temple is still unpublished. The mud-bricks in the foundation walls of the Roman period temple are of 31-36 x 15-18 x 10-13 cm: P. DAVOLI, *Lo scavo 2001. Relazione preliminare*, in S. PERNIGOTTI-M. CAPASSO-P. DAVOLI (edd.), *Bakchias IX. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna di Scavo del 2001*, Imola 2002, p. 30.

⁵⁸ New data coming from recently published Demotic texts cast light upon the economy of the temple: S.L. LIPPERT-M. SCHENTULEIT, *Die Tempelökonomie nach den demotischen Texten aus Soknopaiu Nesos*, in LIPPERT-SCHENTULEIT (Hgg.), *Tebtynis und Soknopaiu Nesos* cit., pp. 70-78.

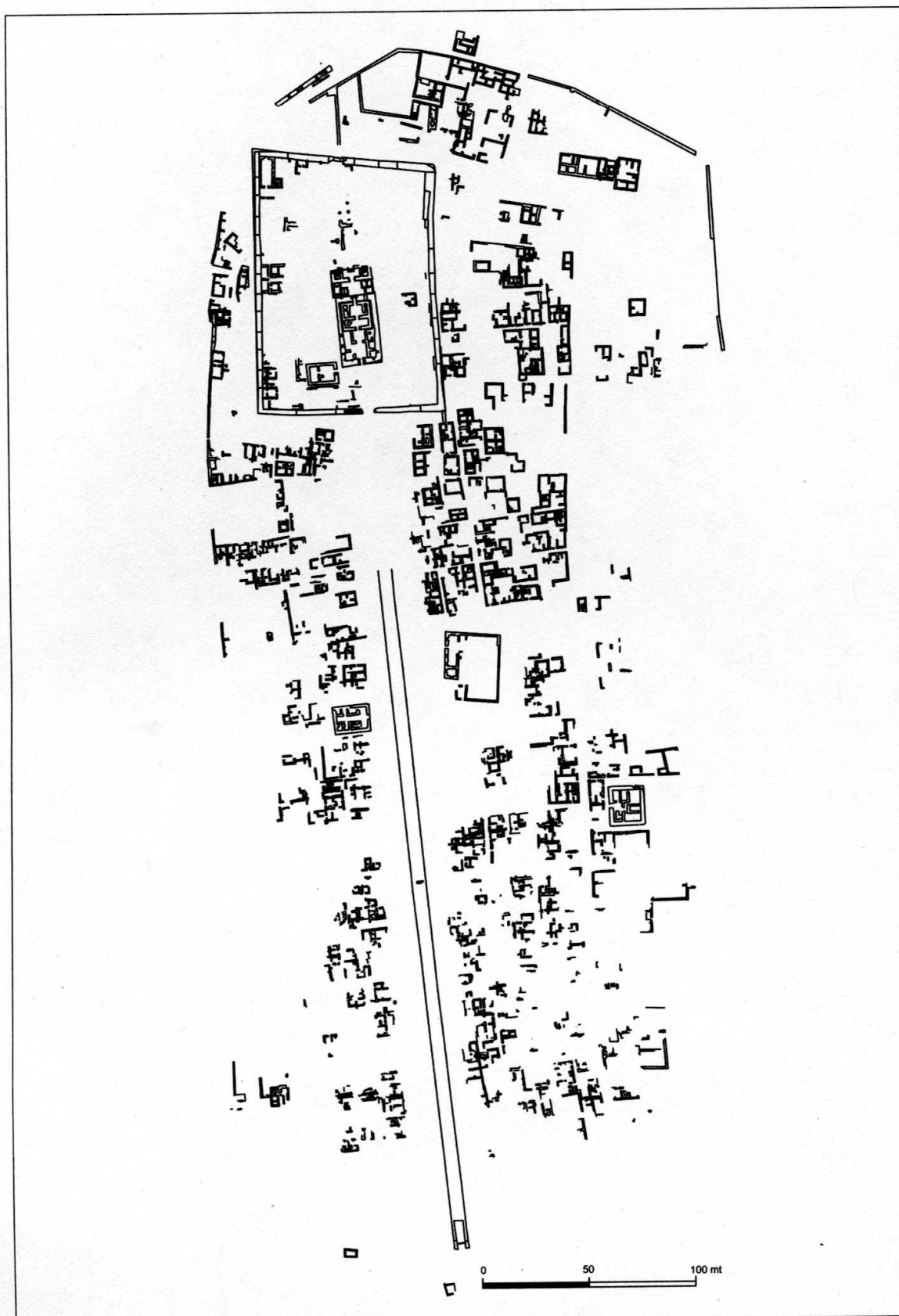


Fig. 1. General plan of the town, 2005 (Archeosistemi).

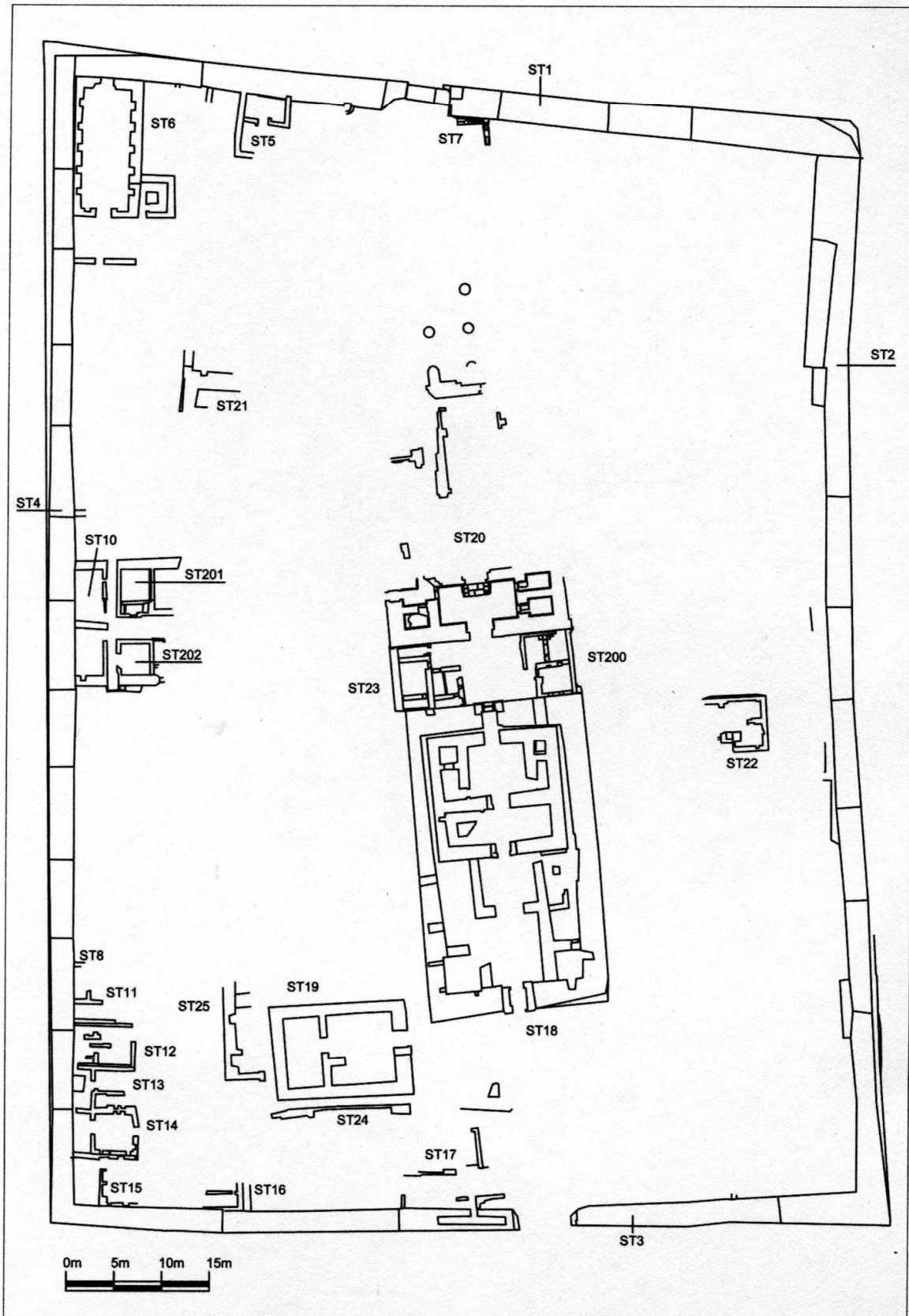


Fig. 2. General plan of the *temenos*, 2005 (Archeosistemi).



Fig. 4. View of the town and *temenos* looking north-west.

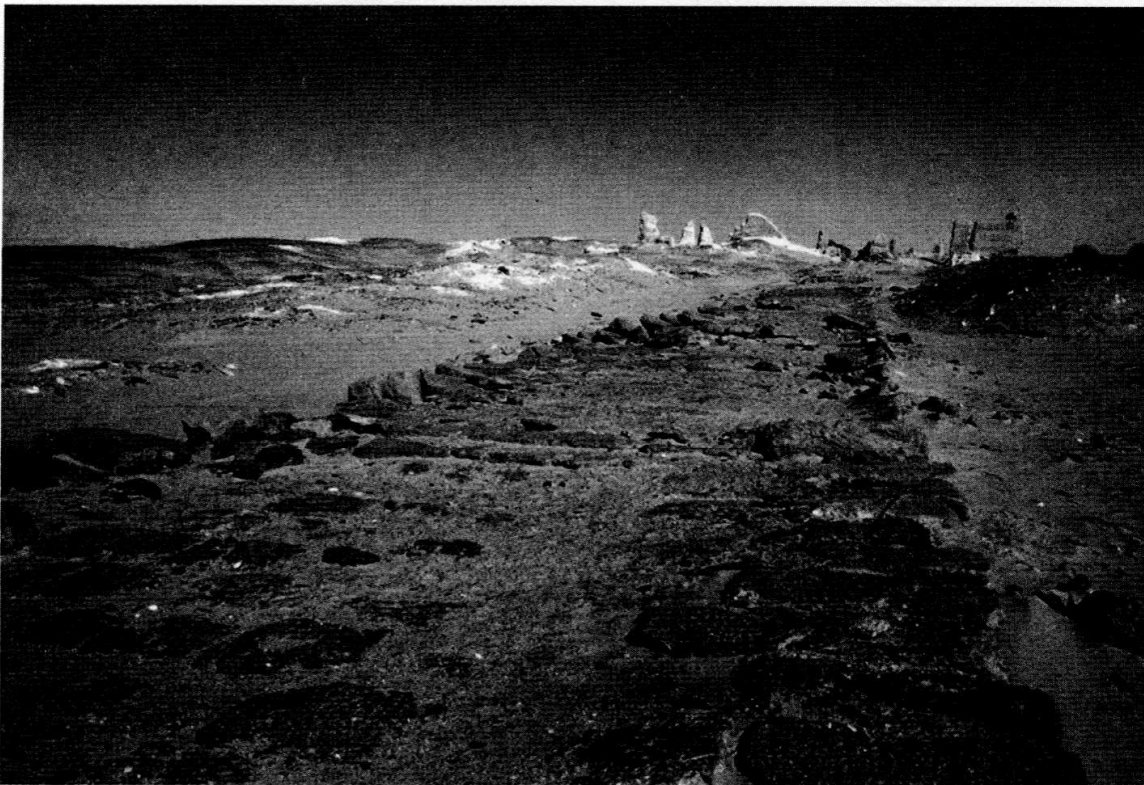


Fig. 5. The paved *dromos*, looking north.

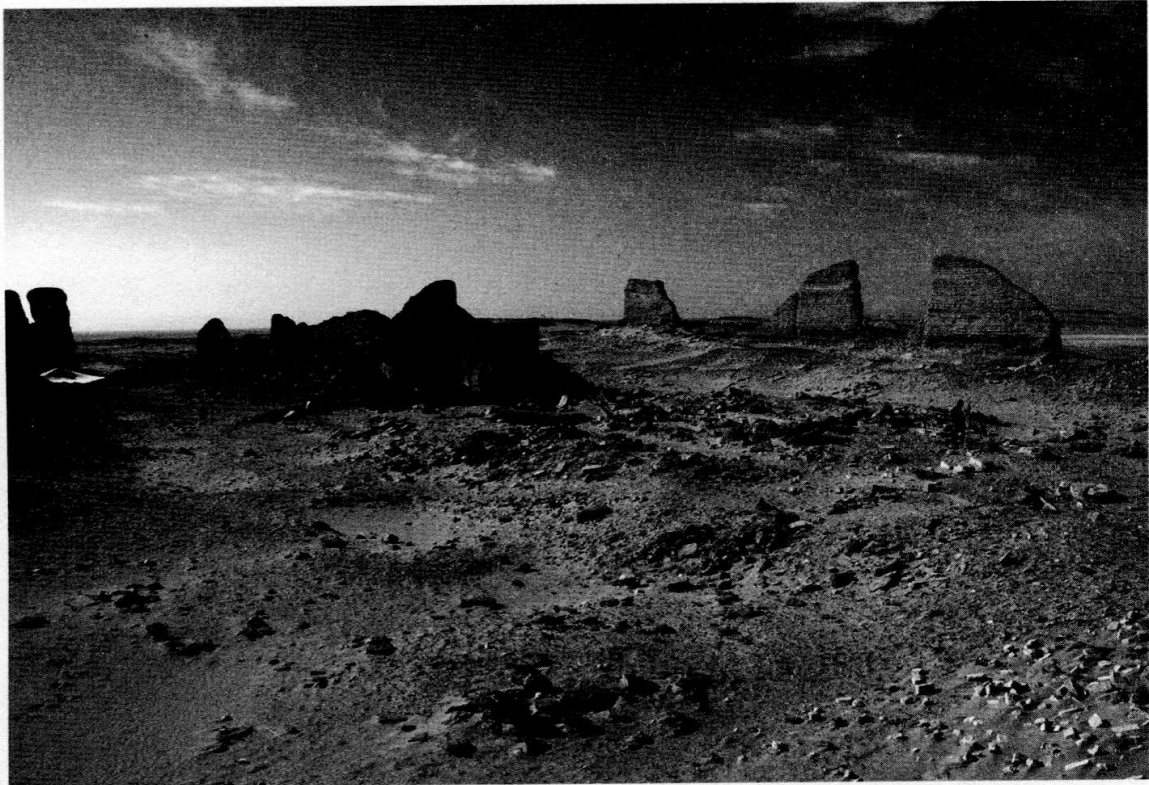


Fig. 6. Inside the *temenos*, looking south-west.

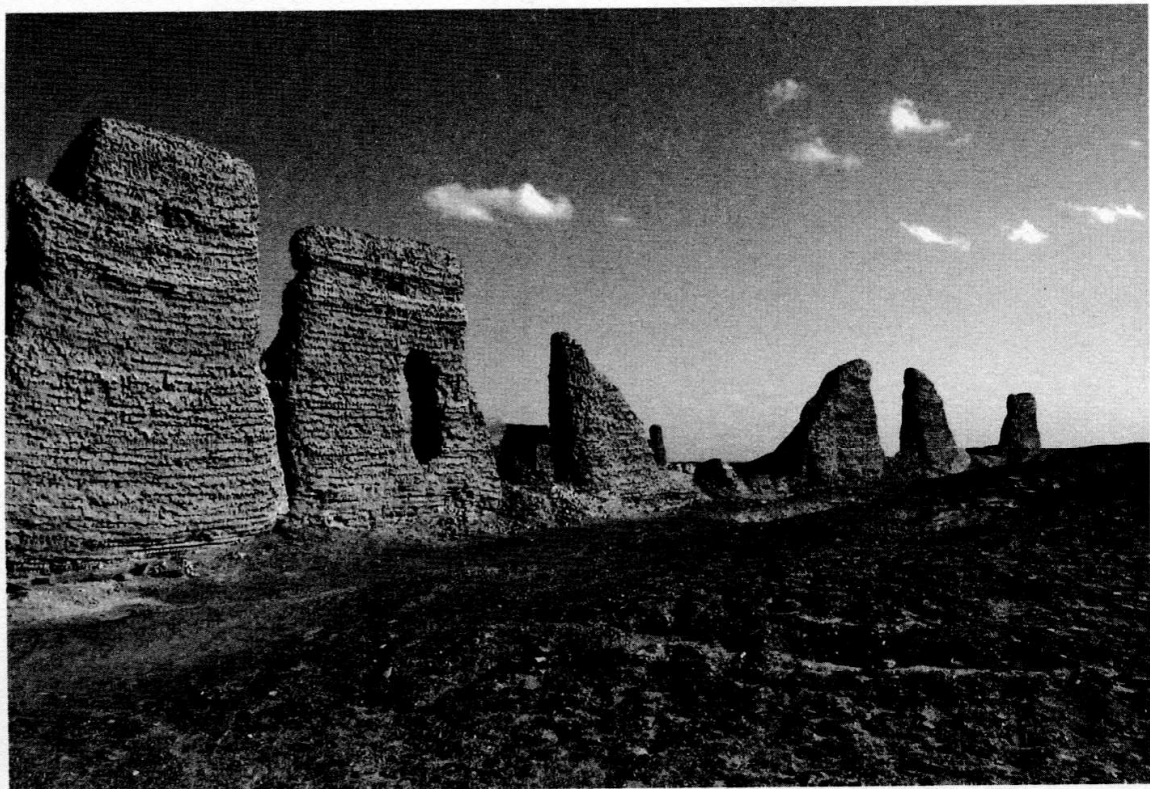


Fig. 7. West side of the *temenos*.

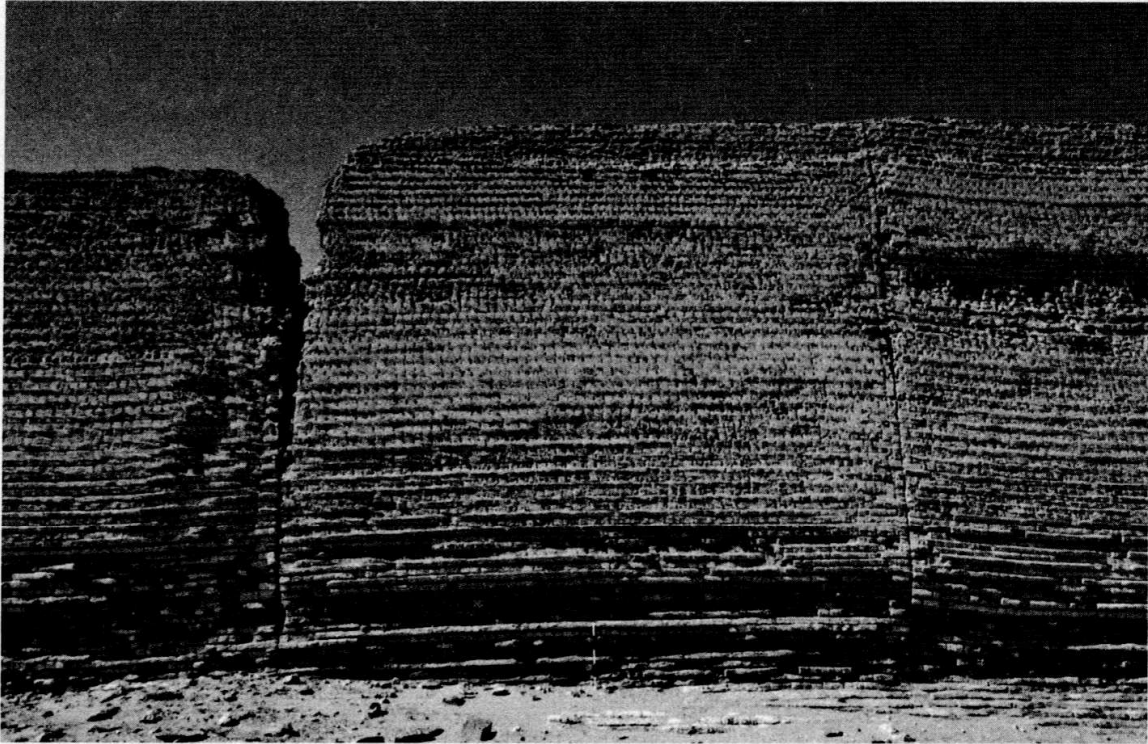


Fig. 8. Sections of the east side of the *temenos*.

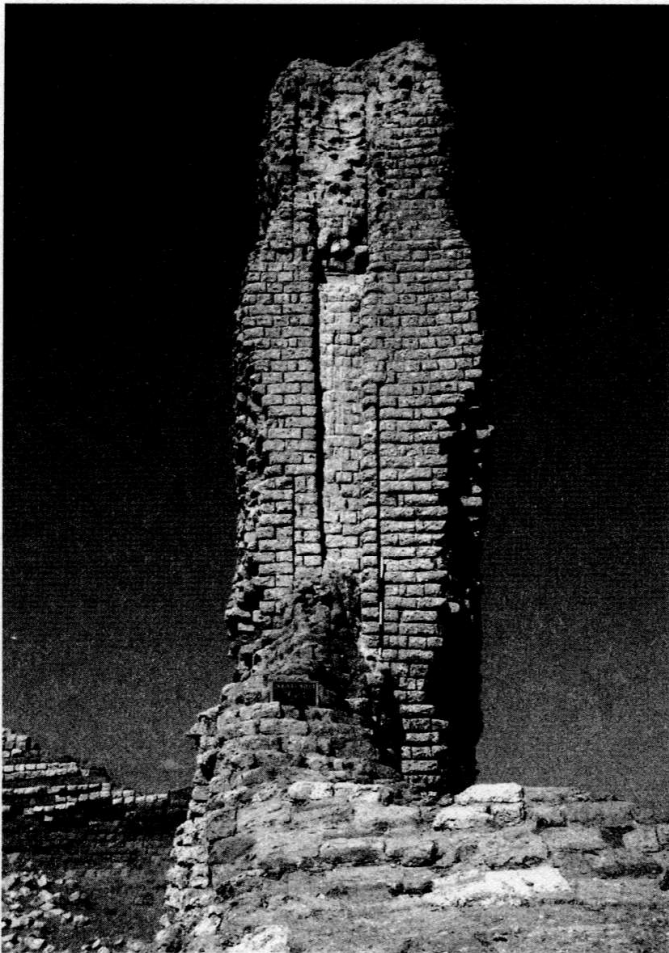


Fig. 9. Joint with mortise in a section of the east side of the *temenos*.

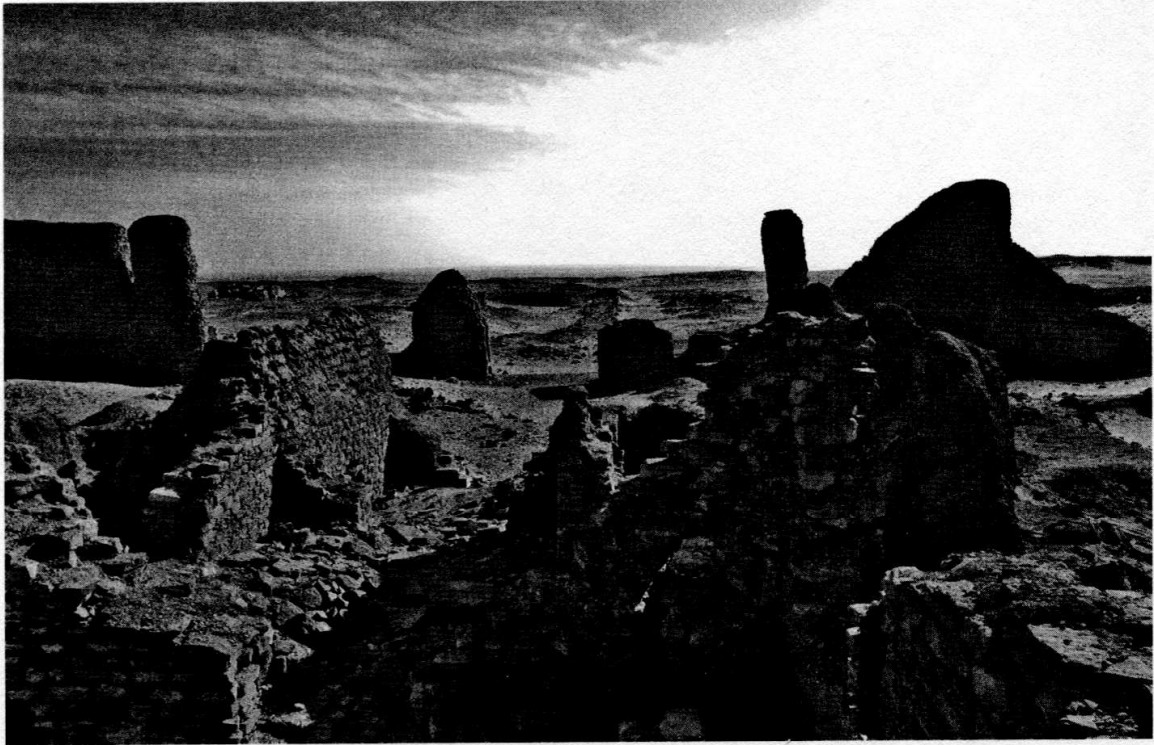


Fig. 10. Temple ST 18, the south entrance in the *temenos* and the *dromos*, looking south.

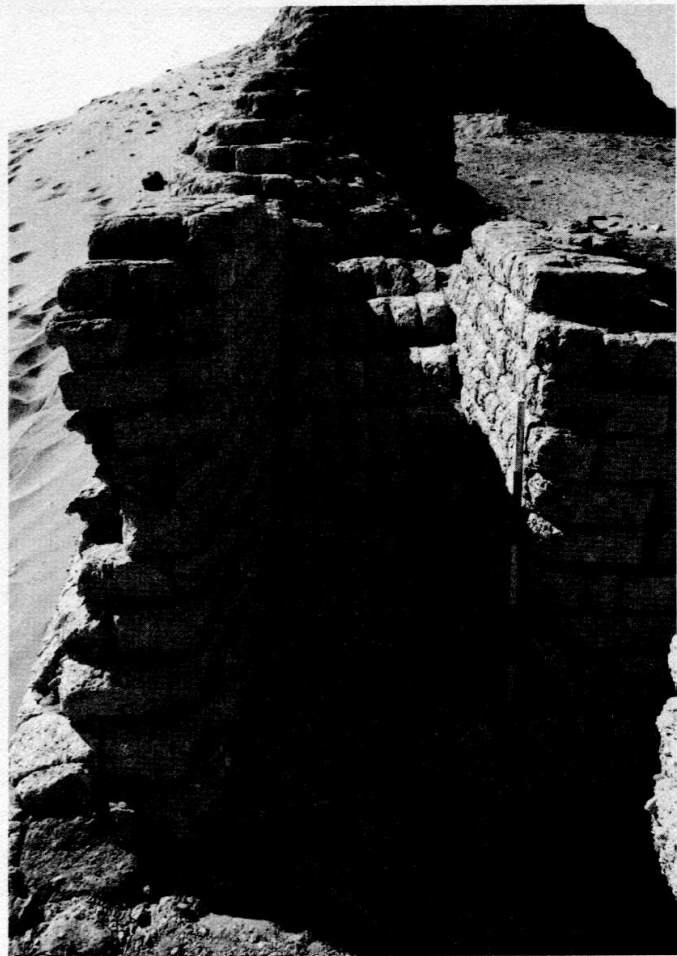


Fig. 11. Staircase in the *temenos*, west of the original gate.



Fig. 12. Building ST 6 in the north-west corner of the *temenos*.

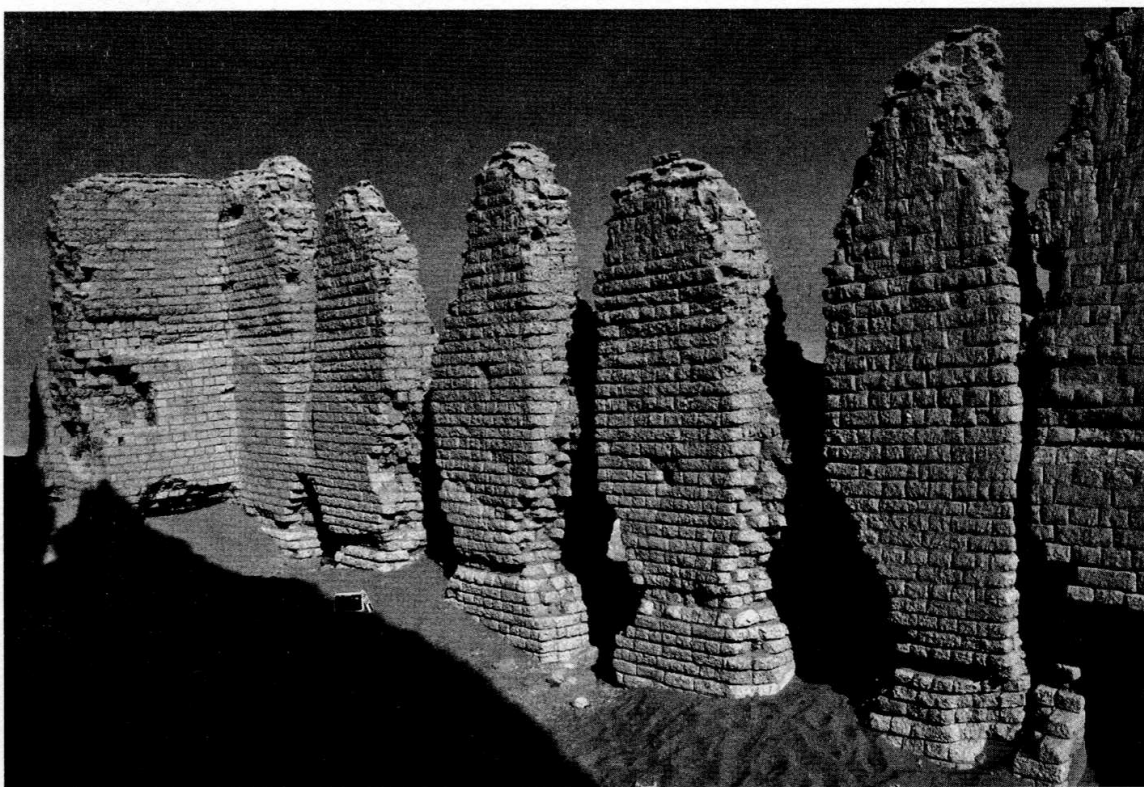


Fig. 13. The main room in ST 6, east wall.

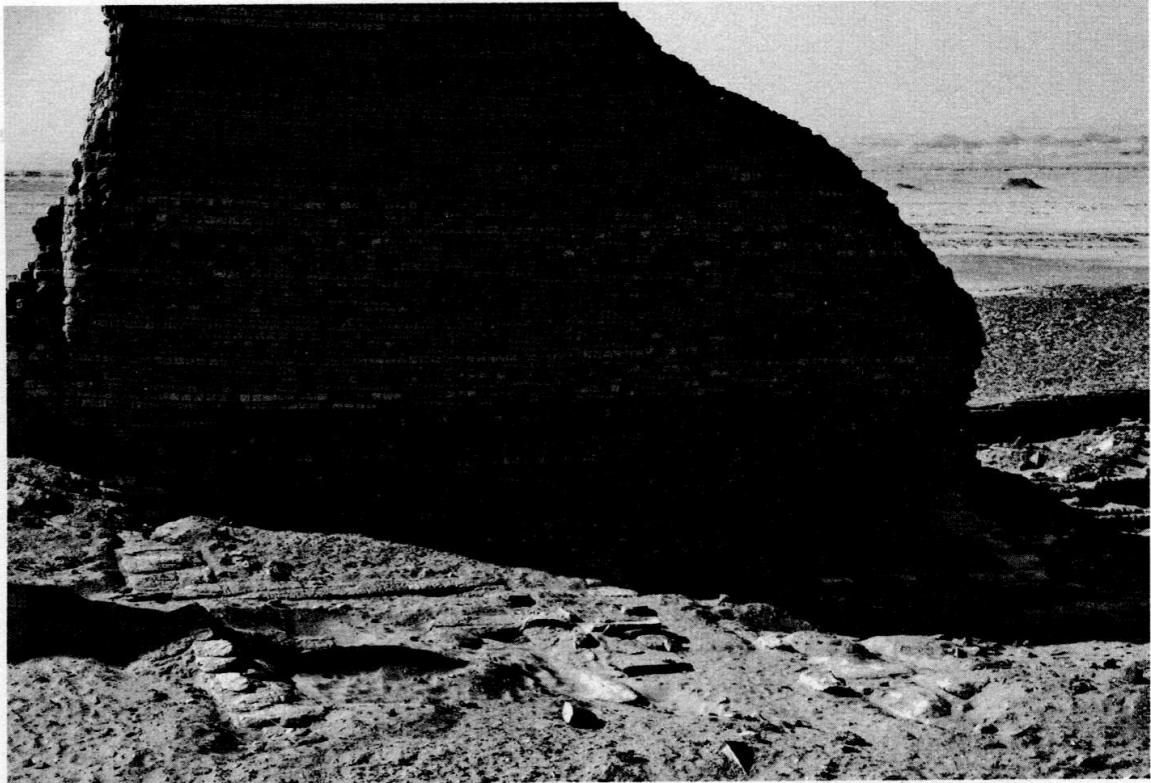


Fig. 14. Subsidiary buildings along the west side of the *temenos*.



Fig. 15. Building ST 22 in the east area of the *temenos*.



Fig. 16. Chapel ST 7, looking north.



Fig. 17. Façade of temple ST 20 and courtyard C 1, looking north.



Fig. 18. North wall and gate of ST 18; courtyard C 1, looking south.

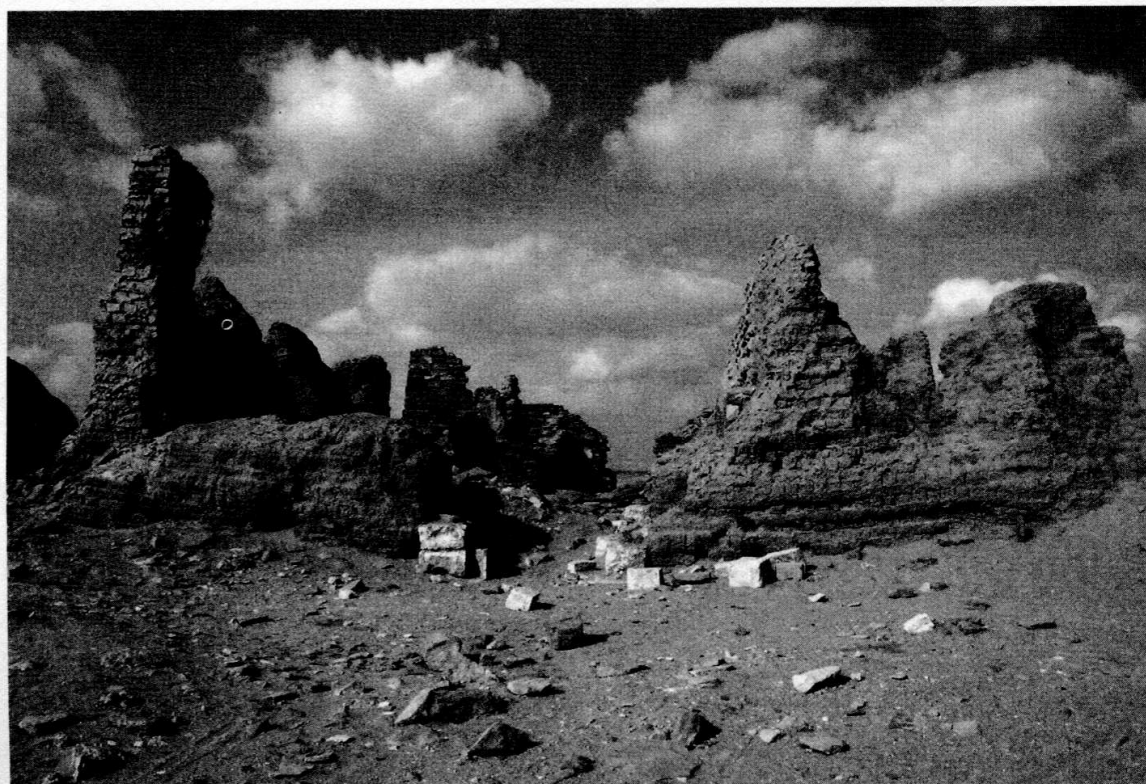


Fig. 19. South wall and gate of building ST 18, looking north.



Fig. 20. *Sancta sanctorum* in ST 18 and the gate in the rear wall.

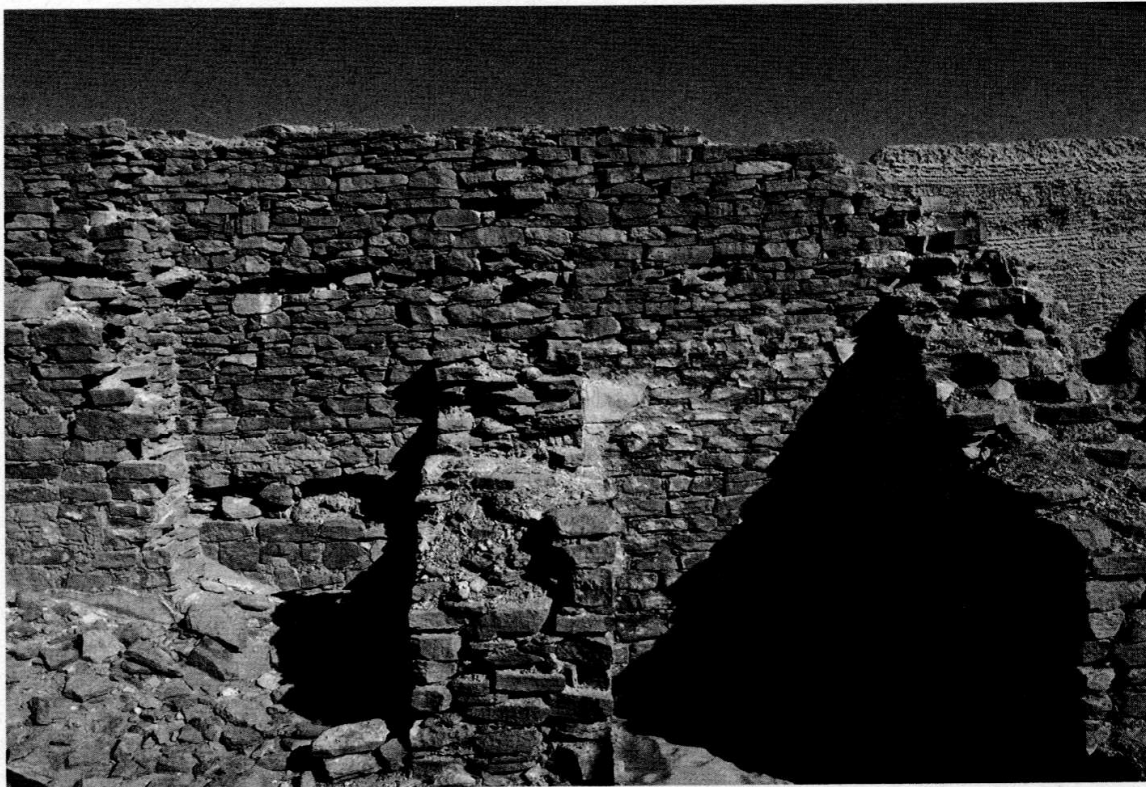


Fig. 21. Rooms E and G inside ST 18.



Fig. 22. Detail of the plaster on the original façade of temple ST 18.

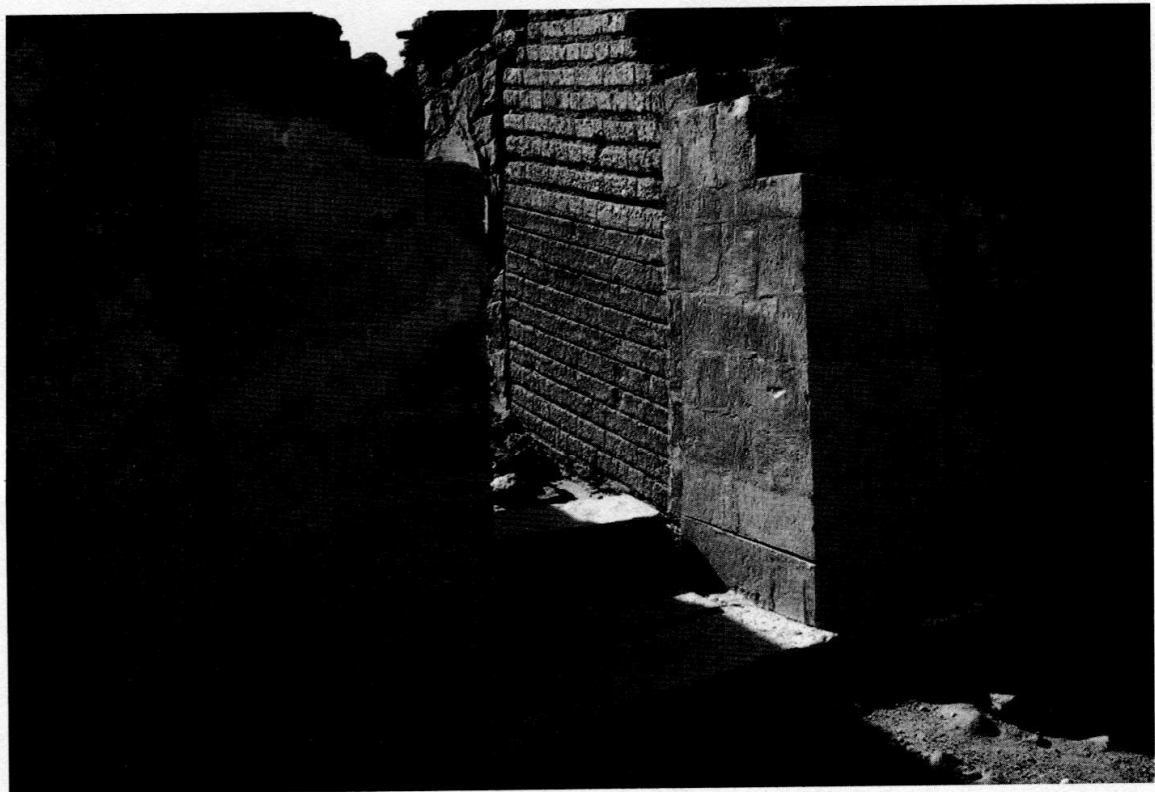


Fig. 23. North gate of ST 18.



Fig. 24. Temple ST 19, looking west.