

POLISH CENTRE OF MEDITERRANEAN  
ARCHAEOLOGY IN CAIRO

WARSAW UNIVERSITY

*Newsletter*

Number 6, February 2001

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In mid-August 2000, Michał Gawlikowski, Director of the Polish Centre of Archaeology since 1991, took a leave from Warsaw University to establish himself in Cairo with his wife Krystyna. At the same time, Tomasz Herbich, who served for five years as Secretary of the Centre with his wife Małgorzata, moved back to Warsaw. Tomasz is recovering, slowly but surely, from his serious accident last January. He is now presiding over the Michałowski Foundation in Warsaw, which supports various Polish archaeological projects in Egypt and the Middle East.

New residents at the Centre are Marek Lemiesz, acting as Assistant to the Director, his wife Edyta and their baby son Tytus. All three are living at 14 Nazih Khalifa Street (ex Baron Empain).

While our activities in Egypt are by far the most developed, the Centre is also conducting excavations in several other countries of the region: the Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. All are reported in detail in our yearly bulletin *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean (PAM)*, of which Number 11, covering 1999, has just appeared.

## Recent Excavation and Research in Egypt

### **The Polish-Egyptian Mission at Saqqara**

Excavation and conservation work continued west of the Djoser pyramid under the direction of Karol Myśliwiec, from late August to the end of October, 2000. The Late Old Kingdom necropolis, extending east and west of the mastaba of Merefnebef (also called Fefi, of early Sixth Dynasty date) has now been exposed at both its extremities, along, respectively, the western wall of the Djoser complex, and the alleged "dry moat" running parallel to it.

At the eastern extremity, a well-preserved bastion of the Djoser enclosure, built of white limestone blocks, was found, while excavation to the west brought to light a cliff ledge four meters high. Together with a parallel ledge located further eastwards, discovered during our previous campaign, it forms a terrace-like landscape that may have inspired the shape of the first "step pyramid", erected atop this natural structure.

Several rock tombs cut into the facade of the western ledge were discovered just below a protruding architrave about one meter high. There were tomb-shafts cut into the rock in front, some with burial chambers at the bottom.

Three rock tombs of different dimensions were excavated during this season. The southern tomb consisted of a 22 meter-long corridor terminating in a rectangular room. It was filled with debris almost up to the ceiling, and an unusual deposit of animal bones had been laid on top of the fill. It contained the front parts of, among other animals, an antelope, at least five large catfish and two wild pigs. In the fill was a well-preserved wooden harpoon 2,60 m long, decorated on both sides with a fine relief representing a snake. The harpoon was still in its cylindrical casing, also made of wood. At

the bottom of the fill was a deposit of pottery dating to the Late Old Kingdom. There is speculation that the structure may have been a cenotaph for a high official who died while hunting, or perhaps the subterranean foundation deposit for a building of which some remains were found above.

Further northwards, the tomb of Seshemnefer was discovered. It consists of two rooms hewn in the rock and a courtyard containing two pillars. The northernmost structure includes six funerary chapels cut into three sides of a four meter-high corridor. Some contain fragments of false doors and offering tables. A total of twenty-two tomb shafts were cut into the floors of the chapels, corridor and courtyard in front.

Finally, over 70 burials (skeletons and mummies, sometimes with cartonnage) were unearthed both above and below the sand which had accumulated in front of the cliff ledge. The pottery from these contexts suggests a date of the last centuries B.C.

Conservation work focused on the funerary chapel of the Vizier Meref-nebef, now enclosed by a shelter built in 1999. Conditions inside the shelter are now stabilized. A device registering daily changes of temperature and humidity year round has been installed in the chapel.

### **Cliff Mission, Deir el-Bahari**

For the second time, a mission led jointly by Professors Andrzej Niwiński (Warsaw) and Shafia Bedier (Ain Shams) investigated the area above the temples of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. The cliffs overhanging the temples are difficult of access and seem to have been rarely visited, both in antiquity and in modern times.

Many graffiti scribbled on the face of the rock were discovered last year. The search continued in 2000, from October 16<sup>th</sup> to December 14<sup>th</sup>. The investigation was carried out by Mikołaj Budzanowski, an alpinist as well as an Egyptologist. In the course of this and previous seasons he found 250 new inscriptions and drawings while suspended on a 50 meter-long rope dropped from the top of the *gebel*. As a result, he was able to make a substantial contribution to the *corpus de la montagne thébaine*. Perhaps the most significant were three contemporary graffiti, including a cartouche of King Merenre (VI Dynasty), found above Hatshepsut temple: they are the earliest rock inscriptions in Western Thebes known so far. Another remarkable find is a large graffito of the royal scribe Butehamun and his son, found some five meters above the Royal Cache, TT320, located in the neighbouring valley.

The mission also investigated whether a royal tomb may have been cut into the rock shelf above the New Kingdom temples, in places marked by inscriptions of Butehamun, but this possibility was not confirmed.

### Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka

The Polish-Egyptian Preservation and Archaeological Mission, directed by Dr. Wojciech Kołataj, resumed work on the 1st of October, 2000, and worked without interruption until the end of December. The archaeological excavations were headed by Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek.

The last season saw the completion of the Mosaic Conservation Project in the "Villa of the Birds," funded by USAID within the framework of ARCE's Egyptian Antiquities Project. The official opening, which took place on the 22th of January, 2000, was attended by the Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, the Governor of Alexandria, M. Abdel Salam Mahgub, and Prof. Gaballa Ali

Gaballa, the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. During the month of August 2000, the SCA built a stone auditorium on the slope opposite the ancient theatre.

The programme of our work was determined by the requirements of the long-term Conservation Project. Top priority was given to archaeological work as well as to landscaping the southern part of the site in order to open it to the public.

In the baths, the barrel vault over the entrance to the underground service area was partly restored. In the Early Roman villa located between the baths and cisterns, two granite columns were re-erected in the entrance to one of the reception halls. A ceramic tile roof was laid above the two surviving domes of the villa. These domes had been protected beforehand.

Other operations were carried out in the Theatre Portico, where two huge columns were re-erected on new limestone bases in their original locations.

Progress in the removal of soil and debris from the area of the Portico enabled us to step-up excavations in this sector. As elsewhere on the site, Medieval Muslim graves were found, belonging to the so-called Upper Necropolis (11th-12th centuries A.D.). A dozen or so were explored. Typologically they fall into two different categories; open boxes made of slabs mounted on end (apparently earlier), and later tombs built of small plastered limestone blocks. The slab covering of the tombs of both types was either flat or gable-roofed, the latter usually covering multiple burials.

Exploration of the corresponding layers yielded the usual spectrum of finds: lamp fragments, broken glass vessels and, most important, an extensive collection of both Egyptian and imported pottery shards representing production centres from all over the Mediterranean. These shards reflect the lively trade carried on from Alexandria during the Medieval period.

### A new project on Lake Mariut

A new Polish excavation began on the 22th of October and continued until the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2000, under the direction of Dr. Hanna Szymańska from the Archaeological Museum in Kraków. The work was mainly sponsored by private donors with a contribution from the Centre.

The site is located on the southern shore of Lake Mariut, near the village of Hawwariyyah, some 45 km west from Alexandria. The site is generally identified with ancient Marea, though this has been disputed. It served in Late Antiquity as the main port for inland communications with the capital. Along the shore, the piers, quays, and harbour basins are still very much in evidence. The ruins of the town itself can be dated by pottery finds to the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were explored from 1977-1981 by Fawzi el-Fakharani.

This season's goal was to prepare an archaeological grid of the whole site and make an inventory of the architectural remains visible on the surface. We planned over 80 ha, covering the entire built area. A plot measuring ca. 168 m<sup>2</sup> was subsequently chosen for excavation. This covers a small *kom* located 400 meters south of the lake, where some walls built of red brick could be seen. Immediately below the present topsoil a small Byzantine public bath was uncovered. It was composed of two units of varying size, each with a separate entrance. There are well-preserved pools lining the main chamber of the northern part. Of special interest is the hypocaust built under the floor, of which we were only able to clear down 80 cm. The cellar is vaulted and supported by a brick wall instead of the usual pillars. Rectangular pipes (*tubuli*) from the heating system were preserved in the eastern wall, and four smoke chimneys in the opposite wall. There is also a furnace for heating water in separate boilers, encircled by a casing wall, presumably serving as support for one or two

boilers. The approach to the furnace led from a very well-preserved vaulted brick cellar.

The general characteristics of the building suggest that the bath existed from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> century. This is supported by the discovery of an oil-lamp found in the hypocaust chamber, as well as datable pottery shards. Several phases of painted decoration can be observed on fragments of painted plaster. The destruction of the bath was presumably caused by an earthquake, as suggested by four fallen brick arches. A detailed reconstruction of spatial arrangement and functional circulation in this bath will be possible after the excavation is completed.

### The Monastery of Naqlun

Excavations in the monastic site of Naqlun (Fayyum), led by Włodzimierz Godlewski, lasted from September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000. They were concerned with the remains of an extensive building, most probably conventual, linked with a tower whose foundations were previously unearthed. There is ample evidence for the destruction of the building by fire some time in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. During the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, a church was built above the ruins.

Around the church was a cemetery, the densely packed graves dug into the fill over the ruins. Some hundred graves west of the church were explored, in addition to 134 graves found in 1986 and 1997-99, to the north and inside the already-ruined church. Only a few of the graves have preserved brick frames for earthen surface mounds. Most of the dead were laid to rest in coffins made of palm planks and covered with linen embroidered with decorative motifs and Arabic inscriptions. Others were simply wrapped in shrouds and covered with matts made from palm leaves. The dead were often provided with glass flasks and sometimes simple

jewellery. The textiles are generally well-preserved. They are mostly linen, ornamented with silk or wool of *tirazi* type, characteristic of the Fatimid period.

The cemetery apparently served the Christian population of the Fayyum over several centuries. No grave could be identified as belonging to a monk. While there is not enough evidence to fix the date of the cemetery, it was certainly contemporary with the church built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it continued on even after the latter's destruction some time in the 14th century, perhaps up until the modern times.

### **The mausoleum of Qurqumas**

The Polish-Egyptian Mission for Islamic Architecture continued its restoration of this mausoleum over the year 2000, allowing only for a summer break. The work was directed by Jerzy Kania, with the collaboration of Mrs Fatin Hassan el-Fayyez and architect Nazmi Daud. The main

accomplishment was the restoration of the *khanqah*, a block of apartments for the personnel of the funerary foundation and their families, built by Qurqumas himself shortly after 1500 A.D. and restored in late Ottoman times. This building is now consolidated as a "permanent ruin," and is prepared to receive visitors.

Opposite, on the other side of a narrow passage, the ruins of a mill were excavated. Their reuse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was carefully investigated before they were converted into restoration workshops.

In the main body of the funerary complex, the *qasr*, or residence of the owner, is now completely restored. The patterns of the *qammariyya*, or stained glass windows, were restored after the remains still in place. Stucco frames are now being prepared and will be filled with coloured glass and replaced in the windows located under the dome of the mausoleum. One is actually reproduced on our Season's Greetings card.

*We thank Lyla P. Brock for editing the English.*

Since last summer, several lectures were given by visiting scholars:

10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2000:

**Karol Myśliwiec**, Professor at the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University,  
Director of the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences  
**"Polish-Egyptian Excavations at Saqqara, 1999 Season."**

24<sup>th</sup> of October, 2000:

**Włodzimierz Godlewski**, Professor at the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University,  
**"Christianity on the Nile in Polish Research ."**  
(the last of our Anniversary Lectures)

12th of December, 2000:

**Lech Krzyżaniak**, Director of the Archaeological Museum in Poznań  
**"The Ancient Rock Art in the Dakhleh Oasis."**

23th of January 2001:

**Piotr Dyczek**, Professor at the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University,  
Director of Polish excavations at Novae, Bulgaria  
**"A unique Roman military hospital, discovered at Novae."**

30<sup>th</sup> of January, 2001:

**Zbigniew Szafranski**, Reader at the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University  
**"Recent restoration work at Deir el-Bahari."**

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