

POLISH CENTRE OF MEDITERRANEAN
ARCHAEOLOGY IN CAIRO

WARSAW UNIVERSITY

Newsletter

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This issue covers the activities of the Polish Centre in the past winter and spring. Work has already been resumed in the new season, starting in August, but we shall leave it to be covered in the next Newsletter. While digs and restoration work in Egypt naturally constitute a lion's share of what we do, the Centre is also responsible for projects going on in a few other countries of the Middle East. We have deemed it useful to report here briefly on these activities abroad as well.

More substantial reports on all these projects appear regularly in our annual *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*. Volume 12, covering the year 2000, is in the press and should be out by November/December.

The Centre has continued its lecture series in the first half of this year. Also, the lecture on the 20th of February was honoured with the presence of Dr. Gaballa Ali Gaballa, Secretary General of the SCA, to whom we had the pleasure to present on behalf of the Rector Magnificus of Warsaw University an University medal bestowed in recognition of Dr. Gaballa's contribution to the development of the archaeological partnership between Egypt and Poland.

Excavations and Restoration in Egypt

ALEXANDRIA

The joint Polish-Egyptian mission under the direction of Wojciech Kołataj worked on Kom el-Dikka uninterruptedly from October 2000 until June 2001. Excavations carried out concurrently were supervised by Grzegorz Majcherek.

A top priority was the completion of the first stage of the Kom el-Dikka Preservation Project. While the centre of the site still awaits excavation, a massive effort to remove topsoil and modern debris has already opened up the area of the Theatre Portico. The plans for the near future are to restore in part the section of this colonnade running northward of a recently installed modern stage in front of the Roman Theatre. Meanwhile, the vaults over the underground service chambers bordering the Baths on the south are undergoing consolidation and partial reconstruction in order to permit tourist flow.

Excavations were focused mostly on the well-preserved remains of a Roman villa in front of the Theatre, found well below the ancient portico floor. Four more rooms belonging to the west wing of this house were cleared, the eastern end having been destroyed by the massive stylobate of the

Theatre Portico. The walls, standing up to 2 m high, are still plastered and painted in what is a typical example of the First Pompeian Style. Rectangular panels bear figural motifs, such as a theatrical mask or a running dog. Geometric black and white mosaics on the floors of two rooms go back to the founding of the building, that is, to the 1st century BC or the beginning of the next century at the latest. In the remaining rooms *opus sectile* floors of coloured marble chips can be dated in late 2nd-3rd century AD, when the building was thoroughly rebuilt and divided into two separate houses.

Work in the Theater Portico moved northward as planned with another series of Moslem graves belonging to the so-called Upper Necropolis (11th-12th century AD) being explored in the upper layers. Simple inhumation burials appear side by side with gabled stone cysts surmounted by flat markers modelled in plaster. The usual range of finds includes stone stelae inscribed with Quranic verses, lamp and glass vessel fragments, and a substantial collection of potsherds, representing ceramics of both Egyptian origin and imported from all over the Mediterranean.

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

More tombs and a public square

In March 2001 Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski conducted excavations at Marina el-Alamein. The mission worked in two locations: the necropolis and the centre of the ancient town.

Tombs 27 and 28 were added to the long line of funerary monuments explored and partly restored along the southern limit of the site. One of them is a box-like structure containing two loculi, the other consists of an underground courtyard opening on two chambers with loculi, one still walled-up and surviving intact since Antiquity.

Anthropologist Maria Kaczmarek examined the human remains, including mummies wrapped in resinated cloth and occasionally provided with a plaster cartonnage decorated with scenes reminiscent of ancient Egyptian funerary rituals.

In the middle of the ancient town the mission put in a second season of work in a public space of yet uncertain function. It is a quadrilateral area measuring 14.50 m by 16.50 m, paved with assorted flagstones and surrounded on three sides with Ionic porticoes reached by steps. The southern of these porticoes was of a double depth and featured an arched rectangular exedra in the middle of its back wall. The exedra with its benches and the entire south wall were provided with plaster decoration in the First

Pompeian Style. The adjoining buildings still await excavation.

The numismatic finds and pottery suggest the square was laid out in the times of Augustus and remained in use until the late 3rd century.

Restoring the Roman town

Throughout April and May 2001 the Polish-Egyptian restoration mission headed by Stanisław Medeksza was busy restoring eight peristyle houses and one tomb. Most of the buildings concerned form a cluster some 100 m south-east of the public square described above, while one house is situated 70 m north-west of it. Once the intervening space has been excavated, these locations should form a continuous monumental area open to tourists.

All the houses now being restored were excavated several years ago by an Egyptian team. The chief problem facing restorers today is the rapidly progressing weather-related disintegration of the excavated substance. Nonetheless, walls have been protected and restored to the height preserved when dug up. Columns were raised whenever extant, and stone pavements consolidated or completed with gravel. Thus a landscape of stabilised ruins is gradually taking shape.

Limited excavation work in areas left untouched by previous work in the houses has brought to light fragments of mural

ings with grotesque themes and a fine marble head of a female statuette, not to mention a fragmentary inscription dated to the times of Commodus. An assortment of lamps, pottery and coins confirms the 1st-3rd century date of the houses under restoration. There is no evidence for any later occupation in this part of the town.

DENDERA

In February, the Centre participated for the third time in the IFAO project in Dendera. Our team, under François Leclère and Adam Łukaszewicz, was busy excavating the remains of workshops and houses situated east of the Hathor temple and dating to the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. One of the buildings has been tentatively interpreted as a bakery. An interesting pottery assemblage has been recovered, but more digging is needed for a better understanding of the architecture to be achieved.

THE HATSHEPSUT TEMPLE AT DEIR EL-BAHARI

Members of the Polish-Egyptian conservation mission spent six weeks in Deir el-Bahari in February and March 2001, mainly preparing for the upcoming work on the lateral annexes of the Upper Court. The restoration of the court itself has already

been completed last season, but it was essential to check on the condition of the restored parts and to introduce some minor retouches, particularly in connection with the stone pavement that had replaced the originally installed gravel already after the previous season had come to a close.

The next season starting in November should address the Solar Cult complex, which consists of two open spaces to the north of the Upper Court: a vestibule and a small courtyard with a monumental altar in the middle. In the course of preparations for the rebuilding of their walls elements of at least one niche in the wall separating the two have been found.

The Royal Cult complex on the opposite, southern side of the Upper Courtyard consists of several rooms including the chapels of Hatshepsut and of Tuthmosis I. The walls here bear splendid painted reliefs of Old Kingdom inspiration, some of them cleaned during the season. The consolidation of standing walls and the rebuilding of destroyed parts with original blocks and fragments of such is a painstaking task, which should become the object of a special project to be submitted at a later date.

TELL FARKHA

In April-May 2001 a new season on this Delta site was conducted by a team led

jointly by Marek Chłodnicki and Krzysztof Ciałowicz, from the Poznań Prehistoric Society and Jagellonian University in Cracow respectively. The three hillocks in the fields of Ghazala village are situated some 120 km north-east of Cairo and contain remains of settlements dating from the middle of the 4th millennium down to the Fourth Dynasty, when the site was finally abandoned following one thousand years of continuous occupation.

Of greatest interest is the Nagada-period settlement, featuring a well preserved brewery and a huge mudbrick building containing many clay bullae and abundant Palestinian pottery, all suggestive of a residence occupied by a local chieftain engaged in trade with Asia.

The Early Dynastic period has left a cemetery with several intact burials and a building, which could have been a temple. A marked decline and final abandonment occurred during the Old Kingdom.

PETROGLYPHS IN DAKHLEH OASIS

A team headed by Lech Krzyżaniak has been

participating in the Dakhleh Oasis Project for several years now. The project is a multinational and multidisciplinary effort directed by Anthony J. Mills. The specific goal of our team is to locate and record prehistoric rock drawings in the area.

Last winter, seven new sites were discovered and fully documented. Two of them are Old Kingdom in date, five are prehistoric. The Old Kingdom petroglyphs represent mostly domestic animals, such as cattle, donkeys, and dogs, but also game (oryx, lion), a lizard, and even a female dancer. Older engravings contain scenes involving women figures (so-called „goddesses”) in association with giraffes, both adult and young, or with antelopes.

Elsewhere in the oasis a number of petroglyph sites had been discovered over sixty years ago. Though a major discovery at the time, they were never properly recorded. The team has located successfully all these sites and is busy photographing, tracing, and cataloguing them. In some cases it was deemed necessary to bury movable artifacts in order to protect them from theft by increasingly numerous visitors to the area.

Activities of the Centre in Sudan

DONGOLA

In January-February 2001 Włodzimierz Godlewski continued his work on the fortifications of Old Dongola. These first ramparts and acropolis from the 5th century appear to have been reinforced in the 14th and 15th centuries, in the face of a Mamluk threat to Christian Makuria.

In the 7th century, two monumental buildings were erected against the defence walls: the so-called Ecclesiastics House (excavation completed this season) and a palace of King Qalidurut, exploration of which has just started. The palace occupied over 1000 m² and included a monumental staircase leading from the river-gate directly up to the first floor of the building. Many amphorae imported from Aswan, Middle Egypt, and Mareotis testify to supplies of wine being sent by Muslim authorities in compliance with the *baqt* of AD 652.

A small cruciform building in front of the palace entrance is a putative tomb. The interior walls bear two layers of paintings, dated provisionally to the 7th-8th and 13th centuries. The earlier murals are notable for the landscape background with plants and flowers, entirely novel in Nubian painting. With no conservation opportunities this season, the excavator had the trench backfilled in order to protect the murals for now.

BANGANARTI

In February 2001 the Southern Dongola Reach Survey headed by Bogdan Żurawski proceeded to dig probes on a *kom* called Sinada situated in the right-bank village of Banganarti, halfway between the Fourth and Third Cataract. A mudbrick enclosure was revealed, about 80 by 100 m, provided with round towers and a tower-gate opening to the south. The enclosure is to be dated to the 5-6th century AD.

A church of red-brick had been built inside these fortifications. It displays a plan reminiscent of some Byzantine commemorative churches, with seven apses in the east wall and several chapels along the other walls. It was decorated with mural paintings, first in the 8th century apparently and then in the late 10th-11th centuries.

A trial pit in the eastern part of the church revealed parts of four murals. The apostles in the central apse constitute the latest addition, dated to the 11th century by many graffiti in Greek and Old Nubian. Definitely older is a superb portrait of a Nubian king, depicted in the protection of an archangel, surrounded by saints. The king holds in his right hand a gold column-shaped sceptre with a figure of Christ sitting on the capital. This attribute recalls the title of *archistylos* borne by archbishop Georgios of Dongola in the 11th century.

Activities of the Centre in Syria

PALMYRA

In May 2001, Michał Gawlikowski directed the 40th season of Polish excavations in Palmyra. Though this desert city is best known as a flourishing caravan centre of the Early Roman period, we have been engaged for several years now in uncovering later remains, mainly a complex of churches built in the 5th-6th centuries and abandoned early in the 9th. In all likelihood, we are dealing with an *episcopion*, that is a cathedral with accompanying buildings, such as subsidiary churches, baptistery, *martyrion*, bishop's residence, and more.

The season brought the clearing of a paved courtyard surrounded with columns in front of the main church, as well as the better part of the church itself. An interesting find consisted of a hoard of silver *dirhams*, mostly Sassanian but including some Arab-Sassanian issues of 7th-century date.

HAWARTE

In April-May, Michał Gawlikowski and Grzegorz Majcherek continued excavating a mithraeum under a church in the village of Hawarte, 15 km north of Apamea in Syria. The mithraeum had been installed in a cave divided into three rooms, all its walls once covered with paintings. Enough

of the murals survives to demonstrate the uniqueness of this ensemble of 4th century religious painting. It features illustrations of the Mithras myth that are well-known from other parts of the Roman Empire, but also brings some entirely new scenes that are unparalleled elsewhere.

The original entrance to the cave has been excavated, but parts of the mithraeum, and probably more painted walls, still await discovery. The exposed paintings are being treated immediately by a team of restorers led by Ewa Parandowska, known in Egypt for her work in Alexandria, Naqlun, Wadi Natrun, and on other sites.

TELL QARAMEL

This tell situated 25 km north of Aleppo, in the valley of the Qoueiq river, was excavated in April-May 2001 for the third consecutive season by a Syrian-Polish team directed by Ryszard Mazurowski and Thaer Yartah.

While the mound itself contains important Early Bronze Age layers, a large area at its foot is scattered with surface finds of Pre-Pottery Neolithic date. In a trench opened this year to locate corresponding strata, remains of round houses of PPNA date were uncovered under fairly thick Early Bronze IV layers (late 4th/early 3rd millennium). One of the structures (about half of

which could be excavated) has walls up to 2 m thick, made of broken stone. It was interpreted by the excavators as a tower.

The building apparently measures over 6 m in diameter. Its immediate architectural context remains to be explored.

Lectures held in the Polish Centre in 2001

Józef Wójcicki, Vice-Chairman of the Polish-Egyptian Society, Warsaw
Polish-Egyptian relations in historical perspective (15th-20th century), in Polish (2nd of February)

Grzegorz Majcherek, Director of excavations at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria
„Villa of the Birds”. A mosaic restoration Project in Alexandria (20th of February)

Maria Kaczmarek, Professor of Anthropology at Poznań University
What bones can tell us about the ancient Egyptians? A review of methodology (13th of March)

Adam Łukaszewicz, Professor of Papyrology at Warsaw University
After Cleopatra: some aspects of Roman Egypt (20th of March)

Bogdan Żurawski, Researcher at the Polish Academy of Sciences
Looking for Kushite Temples in Upper Nubia. A survey in the Southern Dongola Reach (27th of March)

Lectures by members of the Centre held in other institutions in Egypt

Michał Gawlikowski, *Les nouvelles peintures mithraïques découvertes à Huarte (Syrie)*
(Séminaire de l'IFAO, 26th of November, 2000)

Grzegorz Majcherek, *Discovering Alexandria: recent Polish excavations at Kom el-Dikka*
(Egypt Exploration Society, 11th of December, 2000)

Michał Gawlikowski, *Mystery Paintings in a Cave in Syria*
(Société archéologique d'Alexandrie, 25th of February, 2001)

Wiktor A. Daszewski, *The Dead and the Living: a cross-section through a Graeco-Roman town – excavations in Marina el-Alamein*
(Egypt Exploration Society, 26th of February, 2001)

Michał Gawlikowski, *The Mithraeum at Hawarte. New Late Antique Paintings from Syria*
(Netherlands-Flemish Institute, 15th of March, 2001)

Obituary

We have just learned that Barbara Ruszczyc, retired Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities in the National Museum in Warsaw, passed away on the 11th of September. Dr. Ruszczyc had taken part in various excavations in Egypt from 1957 to 1998, and had directed the excavations in Tell Atrib from 1969 to 1984. She witnessed the beginnings of our activities in Egypt after World War II and was by far the longest active member of our expeditions. She will be remembered by many of us as an archaeologist deeply committed to her work and a good colleague.