POLISH CENTRE OF
MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN CAIRO
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Newsletter

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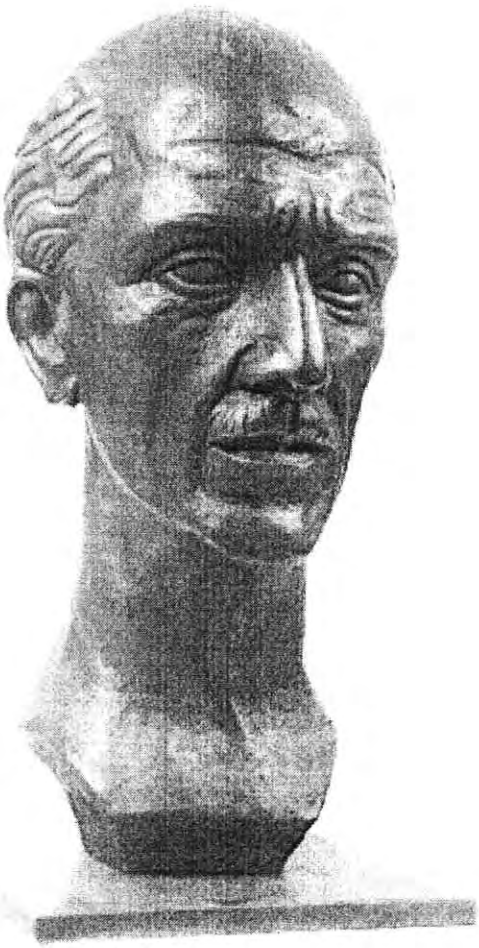
Since last March several missions have taken to the field in Egypt and Syria. In Egypt, the Kom el-Dikka project in Alexandria continued through the summer and is going on. The work in Marea and Naqlun has already been completed for the season, and the mission to Saqqara West is in progress. A short mission to Tell el Farama ((Pelusium) took place in August. Information on the work in Marina el-Alamein and Tell el Farkha last spring is also included, as these missions concluded their jobs already after our last Newsletter went to print. In Syria, the mission to Palmyra worked in May and June of this year. Three more, to Tell Arbid, to Tell Qaramel, and to Hawarte, were active in that country in September and October. We are able to report now on Palmyra and Hawarte.

The scholarship program of the Polish Ministry of Education is in full swing for the second year running. The new recipients are: Aleksandra Chabiera from Warsaw University, studying Graeco-Roman iconography in Egypt, Małgorzata Krawczyk from Wrocław, working on Graeco-Roman town planning, both for ten months, and, for five months, Dagmara Białek and Magdalena Włodarska, both Egyptologists just graduated from Warsaw University.

As every year, the Warsaw University Day on November 19th is about to be celebrated back home with a variety of events. One of them was an exhibition of photographs from Egypt by Bogdan Zurawski. We join the celebration with a lecture by Karol Myśliwiec, and by the installation in our library of a portrait of our founder Kazimierz Michałowski. The cast of a head by J. Broniewska (1946) has been done by Ewa Parandowska.



Excavations and Restoration in Egypt

Alexandria

During the summer of 2003 work on Kom el-Dikka focused mainly on the restoration of the vaults of the underground parts of the Imperial Baths. Excavation was resumed in October, under the direction of Grzegorz Majcherek. Digging concentrated on the Theatre Portico (which is in fact the eastern colonnade of a large public space in the centre of Late Antique Alexandria).

As several new columns of this portico had been discovered recently, Dr. Wojciech Kołątaj agreed to come out of retirement for the period necessary to raise them. We are very grateful for his willingness to put his expertise of many years once again in the service of the Kom el-Dikka antiquities.

Marea

Hanna Szymańska directed a fourth season in Marea in August-September 2003. The mission explored a sixth century funerary chapel with four underground chambers, situated close to the previously excavated baths.

The main effort, however, was targeted on unearthing a great basilica located near the highest elevation of the site, close to the port. As recorded by Peter Grossmann, the building measured 49 m in length and had a 47 m wide transept. While the floor of the church was laid in *opus sectile*, the walls were once covered with mosaic, of which many cubes, some of gilded glass, were retrieved from the fill.

The apse of the basilica could be cleared almost completely. There are two funerary crypts underneath, found undisturbed and containing several burials. They were dug into a huge pottery kiln, 8 m in diameter, breaking through the floor of the firing chamber. The apse of the church was founded on the walls of the kiln.

Pelusium

In collaboration with the SCA a team led by Michał Gawlikowski conducted a short mission on the site of a theatre at Tell el Farama (Pelusium West). The building was already investigated and recorded by Ahmad el Taba'i and Peter Grossmann, but never completely excavated.

Asked to help with the restoration of the monument, we soon discovered that a proper understanding of the architecture would not be possible without a clearing of the orchestra and the *pulpitum*, both apparently on the same level. The excavation will be continued.

Saqqara

The team of Karol Myśliwiec has been digging in Saqqara since late September and will continue until the Eid el Fitr. As usual, many late burials were found in the sand, over some more Old Kingdom tombs. More details will be reported after the end of the season.

Naqlun

Włodzimierz Godlewski's team worked at the site of the ancient monastery of the Archangel Gabriel (Deir el Malak) in September and early October of this year. The aim of the season was to complete the recording, restoration and study of textiles recovered last year from tombs of the Christian cemetery dating to the Fatimid and Ayyoubid periods (5th/11th – 7th/13th centuries). Over 340 textile fragments were studied. Some of them bear inscriptions, mostly Islamic religious formulae. Especially noteworthy are Fatimid *tiraz* fabrics with the names of three successive 5th/11th-century caliphs: al-Hakim, al-Zahir, and al-Mustansir.

Limited excavations around the ruins of Church A yielded, *inter alia*, some Arabic and Coptic documents on paper, and a female forehead adornment made of silver coins from the 2nd/8th century and some coin imitations.

Documents found in 1986-89 were inspected and studied on the premises of the Coptic Museum, Cairo, by Jacques van der Vliet (Coptic) and Tomasz Derda (Greek), in view of publication. This was possible, in spite of the current renovation of the Museum, thanks to the understanding and extreme kindness of the Director, Mr. Philip Halim.

Sheikh Abd el Qurna

A new project was started on the West Bank of Thebes by Tomasz Górecki. A small Coptic monastery was located in an ancient rock tomb about 400 m north from Deir el Medina and some 600 m from the monastery of St. Epiphanios. The gallery of the tomb was cleared and a mud brick tower standing in front of it partly explored. Some rooms between the two, kitchen included, were excavated.

Apart from some Ancient Egyptian material from the disturbed tomb, the finds consisted of an ample collection of pottery and nine Coptic ostraca. The hermitage was abandoned in the course of the seventh century. The work shall continue early next year.

Tell el-Farkha (Ghazala)

From April to mid June 2003 a joint team from Poznań and Kraków under the direction of Marek Chłodnicki and Krzysztof Ciałowicz worked again on Tell el-Farkha in the village of Ghazala (Daqahliya).

The excavation of the monumental building on the western *kom*, dated to the Nagada III period, was further extended. It may represent an early power centre that had strong commercial ties with Palestine, as shown by some ceramic vessels. Beneath there are remains of earlier structures, ascribed to Nagada I and II, and even to the Lower Egyptian Culture. One of the earliest buildings was a brewery, similar to the one found previously on the site.

On the eastern kom which is occupied by a cemetery, more graves of Pre-Dynastic and Early Dynastic periods were explored.

The site of Tell el-Farkha has considerable potential for the study of early periods in Lower Egypt.

Marina el-Alamein

A joint Polish-Egyptian mission under Stanisław Medeksza continued its restoration work on the site of a Graeco-Roman town in Marina el-Alamein.

While continuing the restoration of several houses excavated years ago and considerably degraded since, the mission undertook to restore some tombs in the necropolis. One pillar monument (T1K) was re-erected, a banqueting couch restored in the mausoleum above Tomb T6, and a vault replaced over the steps leading down into Tomb T19.

In the process of clearing debris and preparing the rebuilding of walls of Houses H10, H19, and H21, quite a collection of small finds came to light: lamps, figurines, nearly complete sigillata vessels, gems and coins. The houses themselves display interesting features, such as an arched aedicula in House 21. A significant part of the ancient town can now be better understood by visitors.

While the archaeological expedition did not work this year due to Prof. W.A. Daszewski's continued illness, a team member, Mrs. Iwona Zych, proceeded with the documentation of a number of terracotta oil lamps from earlier excavations on the site, now in the stores of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. The work was in preparation for a broader study of oil lamps from Marina el-Alamein.

Excavations in the Sudan

Banganarti

Only now can we report on new important discoveries made near Dongola from mid-January until mid-March. Bogdan Zurawski was able to discover there, under the royal commemorative chapels of the recently discovered church another, lower church preserved to the height of over 3 m with more wall paintings.

In the upper church, the mission has recorded some 450 inscriptions yielding much new information about the later history of the Makouria Kingdom. New paintings found this year include the figures of Saints Cosmas and Damianus, and Christ appearing to Thomas.

Excavations in the Levant

Palmyra (Syria)

The program of the last season, in May-June 2003, was settled in advance as we were about to uncover a mosaic pavement discovered in a few trial pits last year. The pavement now measures 11 by 5.50 m. Its original part, dated to the second half of the third century, was shorter; it has been preserved virtually intact.

There are two rectangular panels in the centre, one of them representing

Bellerophon slaying the Chimaera (photo), the other a rider hunting tigers. All around there are smaller panels featuring animals, especially fish, and fruit. It seems the room once containing this mosaic served as a banqueting hall. It was contemporary to King Odaynat who for a while was in effective control of Syria within the Roman Empire.

The pavement has been protected in place and should be displayed at a later stage when an appropriate shelter is built to house it.

Hawarte (Syria)

Another rescue season in the Mithraic grotto near Apamea was conducted in September-October under the direction of Grzegorz Majcherek. It appears that the excavation of the cave is now as complete as reasonably possible. While no new paintings were discovered this time, those found in previous seasons were inspected and treated as necessary under the guidance of Ewa Parandowska.

Wojciech Terlikowski, the architect of the mission, prepared a project for a shelter over the Mithraeum but under the Byzantine basilica. The collapsed grotto should be protected under a roof in such a way so as not to spoil the ruins of the church. Hopefully this shelter shall be built in the near future.

Members on the Polish Centre active with other missions in Egypt:

Tomasz Herbich (archaeologist-geophysicist):
Saqqara, mastabas SE of the Djoser complex (Louvre, Director Christiane Ziegler);

Anna Południkiewicz (ceramologist):
Tebtynis (IFAO – Università di Milano, Director Claudio Gallazzi).

Lectures held at the Polish Centre:

Hanna Szymańska, Marea 2000-2003: a Byzantine City on Lake Mariout (September 23rd)

Włodzimierz Godlewski, Coptic Fashion in the Fatimid and Ayyoubid Times (October 7th)

Karol Myśliwiec, Cultural Interaction between Egypt and Greece in the Ptolemaic Period (November 18th, to mark Warsaw University Day)

And at the Egyptian Museum, on the invitation of Dr. Zahi Hawass:

Michał Gawlikowski, From Edfu to Alexandria: Polish Archaeology in Egypt (April 6th)

Karol Myśliwiec, Polish-Egyptian Excavations in Saqqara West (October 8th)

In April, **Grzegorz Majcherek** gave a paper on *Discovering Alexandria: Progress in Excavations at the Kom el-Dikka Site* at a conference marking the Centenary of the Archaeological Society of Alexandria, held at the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina*.

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