

**The Dakhleh Oasis Project  
&  
The Dakhleh Trust**

**A brief report on the 2006-2007 season  
to our friends and supporters**

Once again we send greetings to our friends and supporters. The items that follow describe just a few of the activities of the teams who have been working at Dakhleh in a typically varied season.

### **Dakhleh Glass**

In our Newsletter of 2003-4 we described the evidence for some form of meteorite impact in the Oasis. It continues to be an intriguing subject. Further work this season has shown that the Dakhleh Glass may not necessarily have been formed by the impact that caused the bow wave but perhaps by a near miss, when a meteor has passed close enough to the surface to create the glass but has burnt up in the atmosphere. There are further complications arising from this study because we now seem to have two layers of the glass separated by a layer of sediment. Watch this space for further developments.

### **All the best gardens have one**

Near the temenos of Tutu is a large colonnaded room. In the centre of this room was a circular plastered basin into which water was fed by two channels. The structure, which dates from the third century, was modified in the fourth century when a small garden was added, in which are the remains of six date palms. The Monash team describe it as resembling the Nymphaea found elsewhere in the Mediterranean region. Water features are evidently not as new as we may think.

### **Amun-Humpty-Dumpty-Nakht**

The Roman Period temple of Amun-Nakht at Ain Birbiya is largely undecorated apart from the sanctuary where there is a fine relief of the god and his consort, royalty and other deities. Rather there *was* a fine relief. All the stone work at Ain Birbiya is in poor condition and exposed walls have to be shored up with timbering as excavation has progressed. In this instance the shoring up did not suffice and the team turned up for work one morning to find that almost the whole face of the wall had collapsed. Fortunately the recording had been completed but there is danger of further collapse and this part of the excavation has had to be abandoned.

Two sets of cartouches at the foot of the wall had been read but not recorded. They identify the emperor Servius Galba Caesar who reigned for only short period in 68 AD, and is otherwise known in Egypt only at Deir el-Shelwit in Luxor. Meanwhile a puzzling inscription on a buttress at the rear of the temple has now been read and the name of Domitian identified. This brings the score of emperors whose names appear at the temple to five: Augustus, Galba, Titus, Domitian and Hadrian.

Towards the end of the excavation Adam Zelinski noticed a block cut in such a way as to suggest a doorway. When this was followed up a small porch or perhaps a stele niche was

found at the north-east corner of the temple which will require some more work next season when Dr Tomasz Herbich will return to the site. He it was who found the eastern gateway and now will survey other areas in the vicinity of the temple to see if there are any more remains under the ground.

Apart from this, most of the temple is now recorded and has been filled in with clean sand to be left, hopefully undisturbed. This is the first Egyptian temple to be excavated for a hundred years and it is a pity that it cannot be completely exposed and left as a monument that can be visited but it would be too dangerous to visit, both for visitors and for the monument..

### **The Dakhleh Pyramid.**

Dominating the necropolis area of Amheida is a modest mud-brick pyramid which formed the focal point of a series of vaulted tombs. Over the years erosion had taken its toll but it has now been carefully conserved and consolidated. The work has been supervised by the architect Nicholas Warner, who has preserved the original face where possible. The local workmen celebrated completion of the work with an appropriate feast and there were enough bricks remaining to build an open-air mosque for their use.

In fact this pyramid does not stand alone. There are at least two others at Amheida – neither as well preserved or in such commanding positions as the largest one. There is yet another at the necropolis attached to Mut el-Kharab. Again in mudbrick it was also given a good coating of lime plaster and is well preserved.

### **Who's been digging in my hole?**

In the course of digging at Amheida the team found a precisely dug trench, apparently the work of some earlier archaeologist. It was not part of any work undertaken by the DOP and the search is now on to discover who may have been responsible for it. The site was well known to local residents as a place where antiquities could be “mined” but they are not likely to have left such a neat hole. It was also visited by several early travellers such as Drovetti and Hyde, many of whom had a keen interest in collecting but none of them has left any written record of having found pieces there.

### **Education, education, education.**

We have often noted examples of Hellenistic culture to be found in Dakhleh and more have been found this season. In addition to sophisticated patterned wall decorations one house has a wall inscribed with the first few lines of the *Iliad* while another wall records the names of Dionysos, Hephaistos, Polydeukes and Kairos.

This season has produced the largest number of ostraca found in any year so far, 187 in fact. Most come from the same area and several form an archive relating to one man, Domnion. He seems to have been involved in estate management for the texts relate to goods from various rural properties. A second batch of texts consists of exercises in writing and drawing and they may represent the contents of a waste paper basket of a nearby school. Graffiti, or more accurately dipinti, (that is painted not scratched) have turned up in several rooms. The walls of two in particular seem to have been used to write material for students to copy.

A more practical import is a number of water channels and a hypocaust which probably formed part of a bath-house.

### **A conservator's problem**

In one room in Amheida a cache of objects was found which presented the conservator with a real problem. When first exposed all that could be seen was an upside-down vessel of the type known as a *situla* with an oil lamp attached and another unidentifiable bronze object. After removing as much of the surrounding soil as possible the mass was treated with a consolidant to prevent it from collapsing. The soil beneath was then cut away and a sheet of metal inserted so that the mass could be removed in one piece. This was then taken to the conservation room where it was carefully dissected to reveal not one but two lamps fused with the *situla* by corrosion. The two lamps were cut away and the *situla* removed from supporting sand, whereupon two more objects were revealed. These consisted of a pewter plate, in 67 pieces, all of which had to be photographed as they were removed for later reassembling, and an ivory object. The excavator's and the conservator's reports both decline to name the ivory object, preferring to describe it as in a "very unstable condition". It seems to consist of rusted iron interleaving, a corroded bronze finial and an ivory element which had fractured and delaminated. It sounds as if someone is going to have a delicate job to do.

### **Recycling**

There are several blocks of stone visible at al-Qasr which have clearly been removed from some Pharaonic monument and reused as ready made building material. In one house two complete columns of hieroglyphic inscription are preserved on blocks taken from a temple doorway and reused in exactly the same order as in the original. Ahmed Fakhry, who first commented on these blocks, thought that they came from a temple somewhere in al-Qasr, but a number of the pieces found at al-Qasr bear the name of, or the image of Thoth who was the principal deity at Amheida and recent study of blocks at Amheida indicates that all the Pharaonic blocks at al-Qasr originate from that site.

Further confusion has been created by the discovery of Roman remains under the town of al-Qasr. These take the form of heavy defensive works and we now suspect that this is the site called *Castra* which, from lists elsewhere, is known to have been in Dakhleh.

There seems a fairly obvious link between Roman *castra* and Arabic *qasr*, and indeed English *Chester*.

### **Honourable Mentions**

There have been two kind mentions of the Dakhleh Oasis Project in the past year. Harry Thurston, author of *Island of the Blessed*, has written a book of poetry, *Broken Vessel* which he has dedicated to “Member of the DOP in admiration”.

Humphrey Davies, a translator of Arabic literature into English, translated a work with the English title *Pyramid Texts* while he was staying in the camp and has dedicated this volume also to the Project.