research and restoration
season 2009
Report on research and restoration activities
Season 2009

- Research and excavation in al-Qasr.
- Conservation, restoration and reconstruction of private houses in al-Qasr.

As in the previous season of the Qasr Dakhleh Project (QDP), the special focus of the eighth season was on the excavation of the rediscovered Roman fortress; its main goal being to gain a better understanding of the occupation of the site between the Roman/Byzantine and pre-Ottoman periods. But also the restoration and reconstruction work continued, with as its main aim the installation of water pipes and sewers and the introduction of electricity in the restored and reconstructed houses in the Shihabiyya quarter of al-Qasr, in agreement with the revised proposal that was approved by the Permanent Committee for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities last year.

Because of delays in the issue of the military security clearances, the field activities of the 2009 season could only begin on January 24th.

The generous funding of the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo, directly and through the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, and a contribution of the University of Groningen are gratefully acknowledged.

As usual, the activities of the 2009 season of the QDP were subdivided into the two distinct, but not completely separate parts of research and restoration/reconstruction.

Research.
The archaeological field activities of the 2009 season focussed on the history of al-Qasr before modern times. For the pre-modern period this was done by clearing and testing in the Shihabiyya quarter as part of the restoration and reconstruction activities. For the earlier periods the focus was on excavations in the wider surroundings of the Shihabiyya quarter nearer to the old source and ruined old mosque.

The study of the documents that were found in the ruined Bayt al-Qurashi continued. It is an important contribution to the research into the history of al-Qasr in pre-modern times.
1. Clearing, testing and excavation in the Shihabiyya quarter and its wider surroundings, especially in the neighbourhood of the old source and ruined old mosque.

a. In the Shihabiyya quarter.
During the further clearing out of Bayt Abu Yahya, in preparation for the completion of the reconstruction of the eastern part of the house, nothing of note was discovered, except for a small ostracon with Arabic writing (ill. 1). This ostracon was found in BAYah 4 next to the remnants of the base of the central pillar. The ostracon is difficult to date precisely, but on the basis of the script it would seem to belong to the Ottoman period. Apart from the basmala, the inscription contains a fragment of Surat Ibrahim (14): 13 “Surely we shall drive you from our land”. The last word is uncertain. It is probably an apotropaic amulet.

![Ostracon with Arabic writing](image1.png)

1. Ostracon with Arabic writing.  
2. Stone implement.

In one of the pits for mud brick making a black stone implement, probably a hand axe or chisel (ill. 2), of about 10 x 5,8 cm, was found.

b. Excavation of a part of the western wall of the castrum.
In view of the results of the excavations of last season we decided to excavate an area inside a ruined house which probably would be near to the southern part of the putative western wall of the castrum. The excavations were coordinated and executed by Mr. Paul Kucera and Mrs. Anetta Łyżwa-Piber. This is their report:

Our 2009 field season began on 9/2/2009 and ended on 10/3/2009. Excavation at al-Qasr commenced on 10 February and ceased on 26 February. A period of approximately one and a half weeks after this was dedicated to processing the artefactual material
which derived from the excavation, undertaken at the Dakhleh Oasis Project House at Ayn al-Gindi. The primary objective of this fieldwork was to attain a stratigraphical record that could assist in gaining a better understanding of the occupation of the site between the Roman and pre-Ottoman periods. An area of interest in the eastern sector of al-Qasr, west of the old well source and directly east of the Shihabiyya quarter was surveyed, and subsequently a ruined house located several meters southeast of the Reception Hall was selected for excavation (Ill. 3). The entire upper storey of this house, apart from the upper walls, is missing. Its ground plan indicates spaces for three rooms, a stairwell and a central hallway. Trench 4 (3.4 m x 3.6 m) was positioned in the south-easternmost of these rooms (defined by the room’s interior space), which offered the lowest level of surface debris found amongst the ruins in this area. The decision to excavate here was also influenced by the potential of locating the western wall of the Roman castrum. Examination and planning of the fort walls during the previous season provided an invaluable projection of the ground plan of the structure. In consideration of this, it was expected that the location of Trench 4 would be within the vicinity of the southwest corner of the fort and perhaps reveal some part of it (Ill. 4).

3. Satellite image of al-Qasr showing the location of Trench 4.
The room (i.e. Trench 4) contained much rubble fill which consisted primarily of bricks and roofing material. Shortly after the clearance of this debris began, a large mastaba (0.95 m x 3.4 m) was located along the eastern wall of the room. The mastaba appears to have been a secondary addition to the room and may have related to a doorway (now blocked) in the eastern wall of the room at its south end. Approximately 1.15 m of rubble fill and ash-effected sand fill occupied the room. Below this, an intact mud-plastered floor across the whole room was revealed. Ceramics from the above floor deposit included a wide variety of Islamic period wares and also late Roman types. It is possible that some of these ceramics once derived from deposits beneath the floor; in one case a match was made between the fragment of a vessel found above the floor and another fragment located at some depth below it (see below). Three ostraca were also discovered just above the floor level. Two of these are Coptic, whilst the third which contains a cursive script may be Arabic, Coptic or Greek.

After the floor was reached it was decided to set up another trench (Sondage A) in order to excavate below the floor and investigate earlier occupational activity in this location. Sondage A measured 2.4 m x 3.5 m and was positioned in the centre of the room across the floor. Almost directly below the floor at the western end of the room, an earlier structure was exposed (Structure A, ill. 5). It appears to be the corner of a structure which was constructed in part with mud bricks (26 cm x 12 cm x 6 cm) and it
featured stone foundations. The use of stone for wall foundations is visible in many of the older houses at al-Qasr, although this method of building was discontinued some time ago. Thus, it is highly probable that this structure belongs to the pre-modern era. The orientation of this structure also differs considerably from that of the building in which Trench 4 was located. It seems that this earlier structure lies parallel to another significant structure which was found at the eastern end of Sondage A below the floor. Along this end of the sondage, a large wall, oriented north-south, was exposed (Structure B, ill. 5). This wall appears to be of Roman date; the average brick size measures 34 cm x 17 cm x 8-9 cm and the bricking compares very closely in colour and texture to that of the other Roman wall remains at the site. Further to this, ceramics collected from within a portion of this wall which seems to have shifted or collapsed, and for which it became necessary to remove during the excavation, are all indicative of Roman types. It is possible that this segment of wall belongs to the perimeter wall of the Roman castrum; however, as only a relatively small portion of this was exposed and without an indication of its width, it could also pertain to an interior structure.

5. Photo of Sondage A, looking south.

Between both of these early structural features, predominantly rubble (approximately 1 m in depth) had been used to fill the gap and create a level surface for the floor of the room. The ceramics collected from this fill was mixed, containing early and
late Islamic material as well as late Roman diagnostic pieces. Three Coptic ostraca were also found within this deposit. Beneath the rubble, sand and soil deposits were encountered. Plastic shreds from large hessian bags were found at this level, mainly along Structure A and partly under its stone foundations (visible in the section profile). The ceramics continued to be of a mixed variety and two Coptic ostraca were located. In consideration of the following sand and soil deposits which were then excavated and which appeared to contain more homogeneous material of Roman date, it is suspected that at some recent point in time, perhaps during floor/structural repairs, the gap between Structures A and B had been dug down to a depth (approximately 1.45 m below floor level) exposing the foundations of Structure A. Sand and soil was then re-deposited along with mixed ceramic material and plastic shreds within its content. Some of the removed material then appears to have been re-deposited above the sealed floor amongst the rubble fill that occupied the room, post-occupation. This suggests that it may have been used in the building material or flooring of the upper storey.


Sand and soil deposits containing charcoal and ash continued below the plastic level, yet most importantly, the ceramic material became distinctly homogeneous and
of apparent Roman date. Also at these levels, five Coptic ostraca were found; three in situ (ill. 6), one of these directly beneath the portion of wall which had to be removed for the excavation to progress (see above). As the excavation continued beyond this point, deposits of compacted soil/mud containing charcoal and with large stones and blocks embedded were encountered. More of Structure B was also exposed and the ceramics from these levels remained consistent with a Roman date, predominantly late Roman. It may be the case that these compacted deposits represent backfill associated with the construction of Structure B, but this is unclear as the foundations of the wall were not reached during this season of excavation (ill. 7). The excavation ceased at approximately 2.4 m below floor level of the room. In order to preserve the excavated state of the room, clean sand was used to backfill Sondage A.

7. Plan of Trench 4, showing Sondage A at the end of excavation.

Note on the Roman ceramics from the 2008 excavations and the castrum walls (P. Kucera):
The ceramic material originating from “Pottery Dump A” was sorted and reduced to
diagnostic pieces only. Examples of Roman types were extracted from the collection, recorded and drawn, and amounted to approximately 10% of the total sherd count. The majority of the material is clearly a mix of early and late Islamic period types. The Roman material primarily consisted of types which derive from the fourth century and fifth to eighth centuries CE. The forms represented include cooking pots, O and K wares, one Oasis Red Slip fragment, mixing bowls and shallow bowls. Several fragments of Late Roman Amphora 7 were also noted present. Roman period ceramics from surface areas of the site and from Trench 1 were also extracted, recorded and drawn. Most of these pieces again indicate dates of the fourth century and fifth to eighth centuries CE. Some of the forms are also similar to those from Pottery Dump A.

A very small sample of ceramics that were visible within sections of the castrum walls was collected. Several of the sherds appear to derive from cooking pots (including two diagnostic rims) and some belong to bowls and dishes. All indicate a Roman date, although more precise dating cannot yet be attributed to the forms.

Note on the ‘Islamic’ ceramics from the 2009 (A. Łyżwa-Piber):
The examined ceramic material (only diagnostic pieces) came from the Trenches 1, 2 (excavated in 2008) and 4 (excavated this year; see above). Examples of ‘Islamic’ types were recorded and drawn. ‘Islamic’ pottery comprised approximately 75-80% of the total amount of pottery collected from these three trenches. The material is undoubtedly a mix of early and late ‘Islamic’ period types. The locally made, modern types, preliminary dated to the late Ottoman period (they can be dated from the second half of the eighteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century) predominate over other periods. The forms represent a variety of types and include: water jars and kegs, bottles (representing ‘gulla types’), jugs, mixing bowls, bowls (mostly with red painted decoration), but also the ceramic tops of water pipes.

The pieces of glazed pottery, all originating from Fustat, are represented mainly by the semi-painted semi-sgraffito type of Mamluk bowls and can be dated to the fourteenth-fifteenth century (all originated from disturbed archaeological contexts).

In this season I also continued a comparative study of the modern pottery at al-Qasr. New types of pottery were recognised according to their names and functions; for example: masfa – the filter (which resembles a lid but has holes in the bottom) and was primarily used for covering the bowl called tisht – used as a basin to gather water during the washing of hands. The masfa was simply used for concealing the dirty water that was collected in the tisht.

To sum up, in this season the typology of the plain, local pottery from the small town of al-Qasr was enlarged by new, previously unknown types. All the basic ac-
tivities of the inhabitants of al-Qasr can now be related to specific pottery types. It is possible therefore to better understand the daily life of the inhabitants in the ‘Islamic’ period.

Based on the knowledge of the modern pottery from al-Qasr, I was able to distinguish some early types of pottery and recognise the evolution of some types which occur later in the period; for instance, cooking pots and ceramic bottles representing ‘gulla’ types.

Unfortunately, due to the disturbed stratigraphy encountered during excavations it is not yet possible to precisely date many forms and hence prove which of the vessels belong to the early ‘Islamic’ period.

2. Study of the documents which were found in the ruined Bayt al-Qurashi.

Prof. Rudolf Peters continued his study of the legal documents. This is his report:

From 9 February till 7 March 2009 I stayed in the Centre of the DOP, at Ayn al-Gindi, to continue my study of the Ottoman documents found during the restoration activities of Bayt al-Qadi in al-Qasr.

I have summarily catalogued all complete or nearly complete legal and financial documents found so far, in total 216 pieces. These documents consist mainly of contracts, often notarised in court, of receipts of payment of taxes, IOUs, appointment of attorneys and notes or lists regarding debts or expenses. In addition I have found a few waqfiyyas, judicial sentences and fatwas. A substantial part of the documents are related to agricultural activities: lease or sale of land or of water rights, sharecropping or the payment of taxes on land or springs and wells. (See table 2) In addition there are some documents regarding the maintenance of springs and lists made by individual farmers recording those from whom they leased water rights. Very few documents deal with trade. My assumption is that the dates and other crops, to the extent that they were produced for the market, were sold for cash to traders who would come to al-Qasr and that no written contracts were drawn up. In the nineteenth century some family members traded in cloth.

The oldest document of the collection is a waqfiyya with a length of more than one meter and dated 987 H. Unfortunately, the first lines are missing, so we do not know the name of the founder. The most recent document is a tax receipt from 1937. The following table shows the distribution of the documents over the Hijri centuries:
Table 1. Chronological distribution of the legal and financial documents in Hijri years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of the documents</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>(37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undated or not datable</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>(14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Types of documents and transactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF DOCUMENTS AND TRANSACTIONS</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transactions regarding land, palm trees and water</td>
<td>70 (32%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of land and/or trees</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of water rights</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease of land and/or trees</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease of water rights</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharecropping (ja`ala)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactions regarding buildings (all in al Qasr)</td>
<td>9 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other transactions</td>
<td>39 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements of debts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of agents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial settlements</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to family matters (marriage, succession, waqfs, guardianship)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts</td>
<td>41 (19%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For taxes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts and lists</td>
<td>37 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists (creditors, expenses)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>20 (9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of legal and financial documents</td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first stage of this sub-project of the QDP is the edition of the material. For this edition I will in general discard documents that are not dated or offer great difficulties in reading and understanding. This will apply mainly to the lists and accounts.
As yet I have edited 145 documents and there are 10 to 15 more to be done. The aim is an edition of all documents that are dated and readable with an introduction.

In the meantime I have written three analytical articles on legal history, using the material. One has been published, two more are in the pipeline. In November 2007 I participated in a Turkish-Egyptian conference in Cairo on the history of Ottoman Egypt and gave a paper presenting the material to Egyptian historians.

**Publications:**


**In the press:**

“New sources for the history of the Dakhla Oasis in the Ottoman period” Published papers of the conference on the Ottoman history of Egypt. To be published by IRCICA, Istanbul.

“Body and Spirit of Islamic Law: Legal Diversity in Ottoman Documents from the Dakhla Oasis, Egypt” *Festschrift Bernard Weiss.*
Restoration and reconstruction.

1. Conservation, restoration and reconstruction of the Shihabiyya quarter and surroundings.

The main aim of this season was to start work on the installation of sewers and water pipes in the kitchens and bathrooms and the introduction of electricity in the restored and reconstructed houses in the Shihabiyya quarter of al-Qasr in agreement with the revised proposal which was presented to the Permanent Committee on 29 January 2008 and which was approved by the members of the Permanent Committee on 2 March 2008. This was confirmed in the approval for the 2009 season by the Permanent Committee in its meeting on 18 September 2008. At the beginning of the season the supervising engineer of the SCA, Mr. Samir Shahin, approved of the intended manner of execution.

The following parts of the ongoing restoration and reconstruction were executed:

a. Continuation of the restoration and reconstruction.

In order to complete the row of houses that were chosen for restoration and reconstruction, the kitchen and bathroom behind Bayt al-Qadi were roofed over.

The main restoration and reconstruction work of this season, however, was executed in Bayt Abu Yahya, where most of the eastern part of the house had to be reconstructed. After the intended reconstruction was begun, information from a (former?) owner of an adjacent property led to some modifications. The large hall with a column supporting part of the floor of the first floor was reconstructed. Such a column had been assumed, but its location had been uncertain. After the last remains of the rubble had been cleared out, the remnants of the base of a column were found, which made a sound reconstruction possible.

8. Two early stages in the reconstruction of the eastern part of Bayt Abu Yahya.
The original location of the stairs to the first floor was problematic, because no traces of them had been found and the traces of the latest stairs that were visible clearly were not original, because they started more than 1.5 m. above the original floor level. We were helped by the memory of the grandmother of one of the master craftsmen, who had lived in the house when she was young. In her memory the stairs had been in the northeastern corner. So there they were built. On the basis of the documented remains, the rest of the reconstruction and the placing of the beams supporting the floor of the first floor posed no problems. However, the first floor and the terrace of the second floor still remain to be done.

9. Completion of the floor of Bayt Abu Yahya’s first floor.

b. Introduction of electricity.
In accordance with the above-mentioned approval of the Permanent Committee, electrical wiring was installed inside plastic isolation tubes which were sunk into the walls and concealed (Ill. 10). Sockets, switches and lamps were installed in all rooms and on all floors in Bayt al-Qadi, Bayt al-Qurashi and the northern part of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi (see plan below, ill. 11). The connection to the local grid will have to take place during the next season.

10. Electrical wiring installed and concealed.
11. Electrical installations and channels for water pipes and sewers (plan).

12. Trenches for water pipes and sewers.
c. Installation of sewers and water pipes in the kitchens and bathrooms.
Although the supervising engineer of the SCA had approved our proposed way of execution of the sewers and water pipes, the local SCA authorities expressed objections to details of the implementation. This caused serious delays. After consultation with the president of the Islamic and Coptic Sector of the SCA, Mr. Farag Fada, and the above-mentioned supervising engineer, some minor changes were agreed upon so that the work could continue. A trench of concrete covered with bitumen was made according to the finally agreed upon course (see plan above, ill. 11 and ill. 12). Because of the delays, the laying of the pipes themselves will have to wait till next season. The trench connects to a similar trench in the street which will connect to the municipal system.

d. Plastering
Inside and outside plastering of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi was completed as well as a large part of Bayt Al `Uthman. After the installation of electricity in Bayt al-Qadi, Bayt al-Qurashi and the northern part of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi all the insulation tubes were covered and replastered in order to preserve the original visual aspect of the buildings.

e. Replacement of a wooden lintel in the place of the stolen lintel of Bayt al-Qurashi.
In agreement with the guidelines expressed in the decree of the Permanent Committee of 12 November 2008 a lintel of acacia wood was made to fill the space of the missing lintel of Bayt al-Qurashi. The text on this new is the same as the recorded text of the missing lintel. On a smaller piece of the same acacia wood mention is made of the reconstruction and its date. The local SCA authorities still objected to the placing, but after consultation with the president of the Islamic and Coptic Sector of the SCA the lintel was put in place on the 12th of March with the piece mentioning the reconstruction underneath (ill. 13).
13. Replacing the lintel.
In the 2009 season which lasted from 10 January till 19 March the QDP team consisted of Mrs. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht (15 January – 19 March), Mrs. Anetta Łyżwa-Piber MA (6 February – 10 March), Mr. Paul Kucera MA (7 February – 10 March), prof. dr. Frederik Leemhuis (15 January – 19 March), prof. dr. Rudolf Peters (9 February – 7 March) and prof. dr. Manfred Woidich (20 February – 7 March) and was completed by our Egyptian colleague, Mr. Rizq AbdelHay Ahmad (15 January - 19 March).

The activities with respect to restoration, reconstruction and excavation were executed with the help of and in close cooperation with the local collaborators of the QDP-team. These local collaborators consisted in 2009 of some 35 (average) workmen from al-Qasr and surroundings. Many of those have worked with the project for four or more seasons and have become very experienced. Their restoration and reconstruction work was executed under supervision of and in cooperation with the master craftsmen Mr. Ahmad Salih Mohammed, Mr. `Abd-al-Ghaffar Mohammed, Mr. Mus’ad Faris Mohammed, Mr. Ahmad `Ali Mahdi, who all have worked on the project before and whose experience is crucial with regard to the complex matter of the construction of high-rise buildings in mud brick. They also have guaranteed the transmission of their traditional expertise over the last years.

As in all previous seasons, the above mentioned very skilful, experienced and indispensable Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad, director of restoration for Islamic Antiquities of the SCA in Dakhla, was charged with the day-to-day management and coordination of the restoration and reconstruction. His knowledge of traditional expertise and its local availability continues to be invaluable to the project.

The supervising inspector of the SCA was Mrs. Afaf Sa`d Husayn. The encouragement and assistance of Mr. Hamdi `Uthman, director for Coptic and Islamic Antiquities of the SCA for West Dakhla, is gratefully acknowledged, as is the support of Mr. Kamil Bayyumi, director for Coptic and Islamic Antiquities of the SCA for East Dakhla and Mr. Magdi Mohammed `Abdallah, inspector for al-Qasr of the SCA. As always, the interest and involvement of the general director for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the SCA in the New Valley, Mr. Ahmad Salim, has to be acknowledged.

The QDP owes much gratitude to the various above-mentioned people. Their dedication, especially of the local collaborators of the team, has made that the work of this season, as always, has been such an interesting and enjoyable experience.

Groningen, 2 May 2009

Fred Leemhuis
Field director QDP