research and restoration
season 2007
Report on research and restoration activities
Season 2007

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

The sixth season of the Qasr Dakhleh Project (QPD) has been specially devoted to restoration. Although there was some delay in finalising administrative matters with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), we could start work officially on January 20th. Thanks to an additional generous grant of the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo the workforce could be much larger than in previous seasons. This made it possible to work on the restoration and partial reconstruction of more than one building simultaneously. Thanks to the training programme of the previous five seasons, a sufficient number of experienced masters and workmen was available. Thus buildings both to the south and to the north of the original focus of the project could be completed. Plans to introduce modern sanitary facilities into the quarter, which will not jeopardize the historical mud brick buildings, were also prepared.

At the same time the study of the material that was found in previous seasons as well as the drawing of the plan of the quarter and study of the history of al-Qasr continued. The research activities were mainly funded by the University of Groningen. The contributions of both the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo and the University of Groningen are very gratefully acknowledged.

As usual, the activities of the 2007 season of the QDP were subdivided into the two distinct, but not completely separate parts of research and restoration/reconstruction.
Research.

The research activities consisted of three parts: Continuation of the drawing of an accurate ground plan of the Shihabiyya quarter, study of the material found in the rubble of Bayt al-Qurashi and surroundings and research into the early history of al-Qasr.

1. **Continuation of the drawing of an accurate ground plan of the Shihabiyya quarter.**

Dr. Wolf Schijns carried on measuring and drawing the ground plan of the whole Shihabiyya quarter as well as the plan of the upper floors of the quarter. This survey is now complete and the official drawings will be prepared and completed after the 2007 season.

2. **Study of the material found in the rubble of Bayt al-Qurashi and surroundings.**

During the 2007 season, Anetta Lyzwa-Piber MA and Szymon Maslak MA continued the study of the pre-modern Islamic pottery that has been retrieved from rubble deposits in Bayt al-Qurashi. A set of the best-preserved vessels as well as the pots or shards with red painted or incised decoration was recorded (drawings, photos, descriptions). This catalogue, which was created on the basis of the finds, is the first typology of plain domestic local pottery from al-Qasr. The description of this collection,
which dates dated from the Ottoman period until the Thirties of the XXth century, was completed.

Prof. dr. Sandor Fodor pursued the study of the magical documents found in Bayt al-Qurashi and Prof. Dr. Rudolf Peters continued the study of the legal documents among the papers found in al-Qasr during the campaigns of 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. He has now identified about 180 complete or nearly complete legal documents. In addition, the collection contains numerous fragments of such documents that may also yield useful information. Some of them might be combined to complete documents. So far he has read and edited 102 complete (or nearly complete) documents and created a database, listing, among other data, the names of the persons mentioned in them.

In the course of clearing out some of the houses that were being restored a number of fragments of documents were found yet again, especially in the rubble of the collapsed roofs of Bayt Abu Yahya. These were rehydrated and put between glass. They were of the usual types, in particular fragments of letters and legal documents.

3. Research into the early history of al-Qasr.
In the collapsed house to the east of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi remains of walls, which looked like the remains of the foundation of a house from the Ottoman period, were laid bare. On clearing out the rubble, however, it became clear that they were the walls of a structure from before that period. Wall niches and the upper part of a door opening were discovered. It was cleared out to a depth of about 1,5 m. The rubble con-
sisted nearly entirely of broken mud brick and nothing of archaeological relevance was found. However it is likely that further down this may be different. It was decided to postpone the further excavation till next season. Judging from the place of the niche and the height of the door, the original floor will be about one meter lower. The floor of the room in question thus will be about 2.5 m below the present street level and is as such another clear indication of a habitation phase from before the Ottoman period and of the tell-like character of al-Qasr.

4. Remains of a pre-Ottoman structure to the east of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi.

In the northern part of the quarter a lintel was discovered which had been reinserted face down above its original place from which it had been removed after sawing it off from the right-hand end, which still was inserted in the wall in its original place. The lintel was carefully taken out, reinserted and fixed, but now with the inscription facing the street. It is a beautifully executed, early lintel inscribed with a bold carefully executed *thuluth* calligraphy. It has the same quotation from the Koran, Sūrat Al-‘Imrān (3): 37, as QV 3 which dates from 942 AH/1535 AD. The name of the builder/owner of the house is al-Qurashi Masʿud, son of the judge Ahmad al-Sibaʿi, a person until now unknown. The date of the lintel is somewhat damaged, but it is probable that it was made in 971 AH/1563\(\frac{3}{4}\) AD.

5. Newly discovered lintel, reinserted above its original place.
Restoration and reconstruction.

As was the case in the previous season, the production of mud bricks needed for the reconstruction and restoration already could be started from mid-December 2006. Thanks to the large amount of mud bricks that were ready when the season proper began, the reconstruction and restoration work on four houses could proceed as efficiently as possible. Besides the actual reconstruction and restoration the adjacent parts of the restored/reconstructed houses on the east side were cleared out to prepare the space for the projected sanitary units for which the plans to be approved by the SCA were also made. Moreover the collapsed roof of the mosque of Shaykh Nasr al-Din was repaired.


7. Successive reconstruction stages in the Shihabiyya quarter of al-Qasr.

8. Row of completed houses in the Shihabiyya quarter of al-Qasr (composite photograph).
1. Completion of the reconstruction of Bayt al-Qurashi.
With the completion of the stairs in BQur 6, the building of the first and second floors of BQur 8b, the roof of BQur 11 and the stairs of BQur 12, the reconstruction of Bayt al-Qurashi is now finished. The outside of the eastern part has been plastered and also the remaining walls on the inside. Where appropriate hasira mats of the traditional type have been put in some of the rooms.

2. Reconstruction of the collapsed Bayt Al `Uthman.
The ground floor of Bayt Al `Uthman had been reconstructed during last season. It appeared from the remains that the space, which in the previous season was labeled BA1Uth 4, did not belong to the Bayt Al `Uthman, but to the neighbouring house.

This season, all four floors of this relatively small house, including the stairs have been reconstructed. The remaining part of the northern wall of the inner part appeared to be rather dilapidated. Before restoration wooden braces were applied on the inside and outside. The braces on the inside were removed after the floor beams were put in place. Those on the outside will remain in place till next season, to be removed when the mud bricks and mortar have settled.

3. Restoration and reconstruction of the partially collapsed Bayt Abu Yahya.
The first and second floors of the house to the north of Bayt Al `Uthman, which is locally known as Bayt Abu Yahya, had either collapsed or were in such a bad state that they had to be removed and reconstructed. Large cracks in some of the walls were
mended. The extension of Bayt Abu Yahya above the street was reconstructed to its original height, which could be ascertained from an old photograph. In the rubble of the collapsed roofs some fragments of documents were found. As usual, these were re-hydrated and put between glass by Vreni Leemhuis-Obrecht.

4. Restoration and reconstruction of the partially collapsed annex to Bayt al-Qurashi. After careful examination it became clear that, at least in a later stage, the room which was originally labelled BQur 9 did in fact belong to the annex to the south of Bayt al-Qurashi and therefore was relabelled as aBQur 1. This annex constitutes actually a complete house which was restored and partially reconstructed. It now has again its original two floors.

11. Bayt Al `Uthman and Bayt Abu Yahya from the southeast during reconstruction.
12. View to the south on the roof of Bayt Abu Yahya after reconstruction.
13. Successive stages in the restoration/reconstruction of the annex to Bayt al-Qurashi.

* See the 2005 QDP Report p. 3.
5. Clearing out of the adjacent parts of the restored/reconstructed houses on the east side and preparation of the plans for sanitary units.

In order to prepare for the proposed sanitary units in the open spaces to the east of the restored/reconstructed houses, these open spaces were cleared out. The rubble that was cleared out appeared to be relatively recent and apart from fragments of documents, which were rehydrated and put between glass, nothing of archaeological interest was found.

Dr. Wolf Schijns prepared plans for the projected sanitary units which will be necessary to give the now restored/reconstructed houses a useful function in the future. Permission to build these units next to, but separate from the houses has been asked from the SCA to be approved by the Permanent Committee for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities in its meeting of last April.

14. Plan and sections of the proposed sanitary units.

Ir. George Dekker explored the different aspects of their incorporation in the local sewage system of Al-Qasr. In two meetings with Engineer Mohammed Imam Nayel, president of the local unit of al-Qasr, and with Engineer Zahr Bashendi, executive engineer of the local unit of the town of al-Dakhla the method of connecting these
15. Location of the proposed sanitary units.

units to the sewage system of al-Qasr was discussed. A report about the best way to re-
alise this connection will be prepared.

6. Repairs to the roof of mosque of Shaykh Nasr al-Din.
Although not part of the project proper it was decided to replace the collapsed part of
the roof of the mosque of the mausoleum of Shaykh Nasr al-Din as a service to the
community of al-Qasr.

16. Replacing part of the roof of the mosque of Shaykh Nasr al-Din.
In the 2007 season which lasted from 18 January till 30 March the QDP-team consisted of Ir. George Dekker (10 – 17 March), Prof. dr. Alexander Fodor (28 February – 13 March), Prof. dr. Frederik Leemhuis (12 January – 25 March), Mrs. Anetta I. Lyzwa-Piber MA (16 February – 22 March), Mr. Szymon Maslak MA (11 - 16 March), Mrs. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht (20 February – 25 March), Prof. dr. Rudolf Peters (20 February – 9 March) and Dr. ir. Wolf Schijns (30 January - 19 February). The activities with respect to restoration, reconstruction and excavation were executed in close cooperation with the local collaborators of the QDP-team. These local collaborators consisted in 2007 of a group of some 90 workmen from al-Qasr and surroundings. Many of those have worked with the project for three or more seasons and clearly have gained experience and skills that proved very useful. 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 and the newly appointed Mr. Ahmad Mohammad Sanusi who all have worked on the project before. In the 2007 season they were joined by four other masters, Mr. Mohammed Sayyid `Ali, Mr. Mohammed Sayyid Ahmad, Mr. Wa`il `Abd al-Wahhab and Mr. Zaki Sa`d Abu Masri. Apart from the fact that the collaboration and the experience of these masters is crucial with regard to the complex matter of the construction of high-rise buildings in mud brick they also have guaranteed over the last years the transmission of their traditional expertise.

17. Some of the local collaborators of the al-Qasr team at the start of the 2007 season.

The very skilful, experienced and indispensable Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad, chief restorer for Islamic Antiquities of the SCA in Dakhla, yet again was charged with
the day-to-day management and coordination of the restoration and reconstruction. Especially his knowledge of traditional expertise and its local availability continues to be invaluable to the project. He was assisted by his younger colleague the restorer Mr. Yasir Sayyid `Ali.

The supervision on behalf of the SCA was entrusted to the supervising inspector Mr Sayyid Salih Sayyid. The support of Mr. Hamdi ʿUthman, director for Coptic and Islamic Antiquities of the SCA for West Dakhla, Mr. Kamil Bayyumi, director for Coptic and Islamic Antiquities of the SCA for East Dakhla and Mr. Magdi Mohammed ʿAbdallah, inspector for al-Qasr of the SCA must also be mentioned. As always, the active interest and support of the director for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the SCA in the New Valley, Mr. Ahmad Salim is gratefully acknowledged.

Special thanks are due to Mrs. Jannie Kuperus and Mr. Joost van Schendel for their assistance during their visit to the project.

The QDP owes much gratitude to the various people mentioned in this report. Their dedication, especially that of the local collaborators of the team, has also made this latest phase of the restoration and reconstruction of mud brick houses in al-Qasr a success, which, as I have each season more reasons to hope, will eventually lead to the reconstruction of this unique historical little town.

Groningen, 7 July 2007
Fred Leemhuis,
Field Director QDP