

QASR  
DAKHLEH  
PROJECT

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**research and excavation  
season 2015**

## **Report on research and restoration activities**

### **Season 2015**

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

In its fourteenth season, the activities of the Qasr Dakhleh Project (QDP) were limited again. A full, normal season could not take place because the Permanent Committee for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, after consulting the Director General of Dakhla, denied approval for conducting excavations. The leadership of the QDP, together with the director of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, Dr. Rudolf de Jong, raised this issue with Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Latif, the head of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Sector with the request to reconsider, because in our opinion, incorrect and incomplete information had been provided. Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Latif promised us to look into the matter.

On February 17, Mr. Kamil Bayyumi was appointed as the new Director General of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the New Valley. This was followed by the appointment of an ad hoc committee which was to investigate the situation on site regarding the implementation of excavations as well as other matters related to the operation and implementation of the other activities of the QDP. After completing its investigations the committee reported orally that it was entirely satisfied with the modus operandi of the QDP as regards excavations, restorations and reconstructions.

The QDP is very happy with this judgment, as it also opens the possibility of more and better cooperation and exchange of experiences related to excavations and restorations in al-Qasr. When submitting the application for the new season these matters will be taken into account.

Initially we could not carry out any work on restoration or maintenance either, due to delays in obtaining military security clearance for the work in al-Qasr. However, after his appointment as Director General of the New Valley, Mr. Kamil Bayyumi contacted the chief of police in Dakhla, who concluded that the restorations and excavations of the QDP take place in a residential area in al-Qasr and that the security clearance of the SCA was sufficient. So, at least some maintenance work could be organised.

However, due to the various circumstances most of the activities of the 2015 season, took place at the DOP house at Ayn al-Gindi. These activities consisted of the study, documentation and registration of finds from earlier seasons.

The funding of the University of Groningen is gratefully acknowledged.

## **Research.**

The 2015 season of the QDP lasted from the 5<sup>th</sup> of February till the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht continued the re-photographing of the paper documents found in previous seasons. Some further study of the documents was carried out by Fred Leemhuis. Paul Kucera continued drawing and documenting Roman and late Roman diagnostic ceramic pieces that were obtained from Trenches 4 and 7 during previous field seasons. His report is as follows:

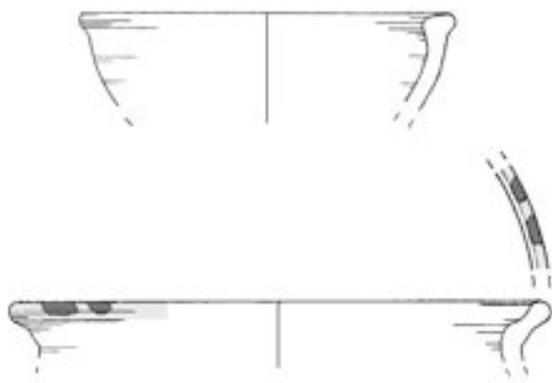
### **Brief Report on the Field Investigations.**

In light of the inability to excavate at al-Qasr this field season, the period between the 4<sup>th</sup> of February and 12<sup>th</sup> of March was instead wholly dedicated to research at the DOP house at Ayn al-Gindi. This time was spent drawing and documenting Roman and late Roman diagnostic ceramic pieces that were obtained from Trenches 4 and 7 during previous field seasons. Part of this recording was conducted in 2012, when approximately 50% of the documentation of such material that derived from important stratigraphical units of Trench 4 was completed. The primary objective of the field activity in 2015 was to continue this recording process and to also commence the same for those units identified as most important in connection with the Roman *castrum* that were discovered in Trench 7 and subsequently excavated during the field season of 2013.

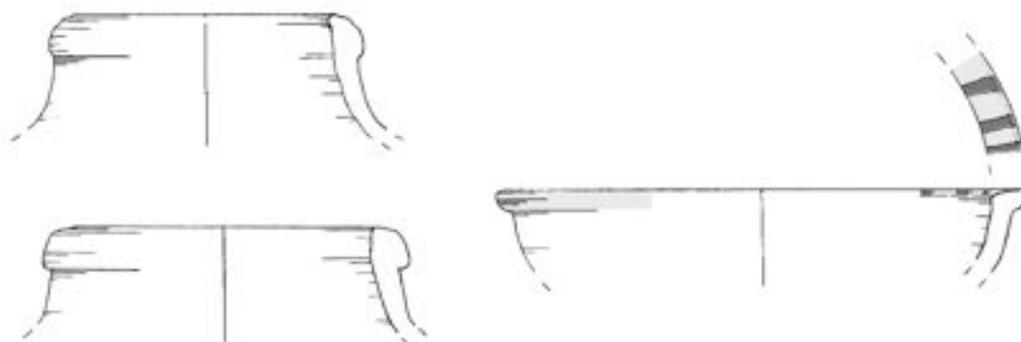
It was possible to complete all drawing and documentation of the remaining units selected from Trench 4 and those of Trench 7 in 2015. This group of material comprised units 44, 45, 46, 47, and 49 of Trench 4, and units 27, 41, and 44 of Trench 7, all of which are deposits associated with the foundation of the *castrum* walls and represent the earliest of cultural levels known from the site at present. Two additional small and opportunistic collections, one from an important cultural layer observed along the west section of the south foundation of the *castrum* and the other from a nearby associated surface area, were also documented. All illustrations were annotated with relevant dimensional and fabric/ware data, as well as other observations, so that all of this information may be added to the accompanying ceramic record at a later

stage. Fabric identification was undertaken with a 10x magnification loupe and in accordance with the DOP's fabric and ware classification system.

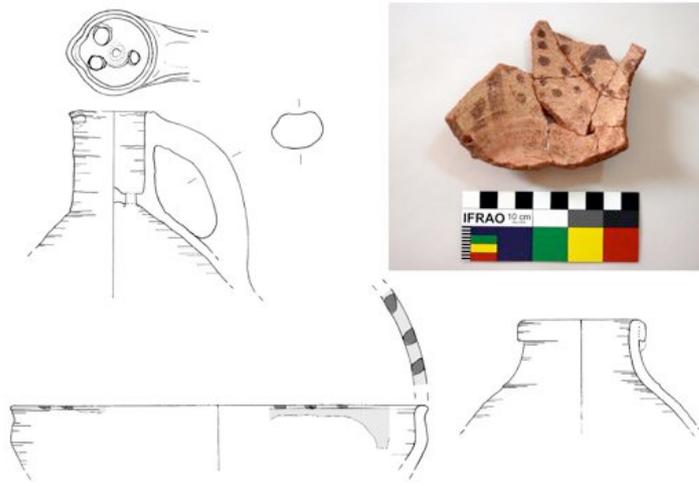
All of the forms recorded have been identified as types belonging to the Roman-to late-Roman period and those from the select units of Trenches 4 and 7 appear to date to between the second and fourth centuries CE (Figures 1-3). Certainly, many diagnostics, such as decorated bowls and single-handled, spouted flacons/jugs with neck filters, indicate a pre-fourth century date. Other pieces in the collection, namely storage jars and cooking pots, belong to the late-third to fourth century time span. This body of ceramic material now awaits some further analysis in order to refine, where possible, the dating of the ceramic forms. To facilitate this, the recorded pieces will be compared to other established corpuses of the Western Desert oases and the Nile Valley. It is expected that the results of further study will be presented at the next DOP international conference, which is to be held in Krakow, Poland, in July 2015.



**Fig. 1 - A bowl and decorated bowl from Trench 4 Unit 45, scale 1:2, drawn by P. Kucera**



**Fig. 2 - Jars and a decorated bowl from Trench 4 Unit 46, scale 1:2, drawn by P. Kucera**



**Fig. 3 - A single-handled, spouted flagon/jug, decorated bowls and a jar from Trench 7 Unit 27, scale 1:4, drawn and photographed by P. Kucera**

## **Restoration and reconstruction.**

### **Conservation, restoration and reconstruction of the Shihabiyya quarter and surroundings.**

As yet no decision has been taken by the relevant authorities about the use of the five restored and/or reconstructed houses of the south-western part of the Shihabiyya quarter. Because of the events concerning the problems with the permission and the misunderstanding concerning the security clearances, only some maintenance work was done from the 26<sup>th</sup> of February till the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March.

In line with previous decisions and also because of the time constraint we did not contemplate to continue with restoration and reconstruction work in al-Qasr pending a positive decision about the function of the houses. It remains important to note that if these houses have no viable function and are not used in a sensible way, they will most probably slowly fall to pieces again and the entire restoration will have been in vain.

Maintenance of these unique houses should be performed regularly, so that major maintenance problems can be avoided. Inhabitants of such houses are well placed to cope with small maintenance issues before they become big. In the 2013 season the QDP has started to perform this neglected maintenance task and it was continued in this short season.

Parts of the inside of the groundfloor of Bayt Al-`Uthman had to be re-plastered (Figure 4). Some large cracks were discovered in Bayt Abu Yahya (Figure 5), but there

was not enough time to mend them. On the inside a temporary support wall was built (Figure 6).



**Fig. 4 Replastering in Bayt Al `Uthman.**



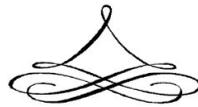
**Fig. 5 Cracks to be mended.**



**Fig. 6 Temporary support wall in Bayt Abu Yahya.**

For the time being we do not have to worry about unexpected maintenance problems, because of the excellent cooperation with the new Egyptian restoration project in al-Qasr. This project is executed under the direction of Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad, director of restoration for Islamic Antiquities of the SCA in Dakhla. of whose expertise the QDP has benefitted so much. He will take action if necessary.

As in the previous seasons we were prevented from doing maintenance work in the reconstructed Bayt al-Qurashi by Mr. Ahmad Salim, the former general director for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the SCA in the New Valley. We understand that this house is since recently administered again by the SCA so that in coming seasons overdue maintenance can finally be committed.



In the 2015 season, which lasted from the 4<sup>th</sup> of February till the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, the QDP team consisted of Dr. Paul Kucera (4 February - 12 March), Mrs. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht (18 February – 11 March), Dr. Frederik Leemhuis (4 February – 11 March).

The maintenance activities were executed with the help of and in close cooperation with the local collaborators of the QDP-team. In 2015 these local collaborators consisted of 10 workmen from al-Qasr. This team was overseen by the experienced and long lasting associate of the QDP Mr. `Abd-al-Ghaffar Mohammed. As always, the practical help and cooperation of Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad, chief restorer of the SCA in Dakhla is gratefully acknowledged.

The supervising inspector of the SCA was Mr. Mohammed Sulayman Sayyid. Mrs. Su'ad Faris Sa'id was assigned as a accompanying restorer. The QDP expresses its gratitude for the interest, encouragement and assistance of Mr. Kamil Bayyumi, Director General of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities of the SCA in the New Valley.

The QDP is particularly grateful for the positive involvement of Dr. Mohammed Abdel-Latif, the head of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Sector of the SCA, in the issue of the functioning of the QDP and the persistent differences of opinion in the past regarding the practice of restorations and excavations in al-Qasr. This gives us confidence in the future of our cooperation.

Groningen, 28 April 2015

Fred Leemhuis,

Field director QDP