

DENDARA

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Dendara (Tentyra, Iunet) is one of the major archaeological sites north of the Theban region and the ancient capital of the sixth nome of Upper Egypt, *Iqer*, the Crocodile nome. The site is located 55 km (34 mi) north of the Luxor area and 5 km (3 mi) south of the modern town of Qena. Situated on the “West Bank” from an ancient Egyptian perspective, Dendara lies south of the river, in a curving bend of the Nile, the only part of the valley where the river runs from the east to the west (fig. 1). Today the site is positioned along the desert fringe of the Nile valley floodplain. It seems quite likely that the river — currently situated 2 km to the north — flowed much closer to the site in ancient times.

Well known by its sanctuary complex of the goddess Hathor, which dates back to the late Ptolemaic and early Roman periods (fig. 2), the main temple is one of the most iconic and the best preserved, with the Ptolemaic temple at Edfu-Behedet. Those two sanctuaries, the temple of Hathor at Dendara and the temple of Horus in Edfu, were always considered as sister-sites sharing a close religious connection. The triad of Edfu (Horus, Hathor, Harsomtut/Ihy) was honored in both temples and every year in the month of Epiphi (Season of Shemu), when the Nile waters were at the lowest level, the “Feast of the Beautiful Reunion” was celebrated. The statue of Hathor left its temple and traveled upstream by boat to the south in order to join her consort Horus in Edfu. But this highly spiritual relationship between the two sites can also be found in a more historical and archaeological aspect, with a very similar evolution of both sanctuaries and urban settlements. The new project of the Oriental Institute at Dendara is therefore narrowly interconnected to the ongoing work conducted by Nadine Moeller at Edfu, which — since 2001 — focuses on the extensive urban remains founded on the tell, directly next to the Ptolemaic temple (see *Tell Edfu* report).

By combining these two complementary urban excavations and two sister sites, the Oriental Institute has a unique opportunity to examine on a deeply comparative level the archaeological data from two provincial capitals with the aim to better characterize the multiple facets of the urban phenomenon in addition to the process and dynamics of the development of the agglomerations of Upper Egypt over more than three thousand years, from their Pre-dynastic origins to the end of the pharaonic times.

Originally engaged in 2012 with two preliminary seasons of reconnaissance survey (2012 and 2014), the Oriental Institute (OI) reached an agreement with the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology (IFAO) last fall, 2015, in order to work on its archaeological concession, investigated since the 1930s. The specific focus of the OI project lies in the study of the very poorly known settlement remains, covering the periods from the origins to the Christian period, as well as the interconnections between the civic and administrative spaces with the religious structures. In addition, as have been investigated in Edfu for a couple of years now, the various phases of enclosure and town walls, which mark the phases of extension and contraction of the site, will be under investigation as well at Dendara.

The Oriental Institute program is a part of a collaborative venture that regroups the projects of three major institutions in Egyptology, the Institut français ancien orientale (IFAO),

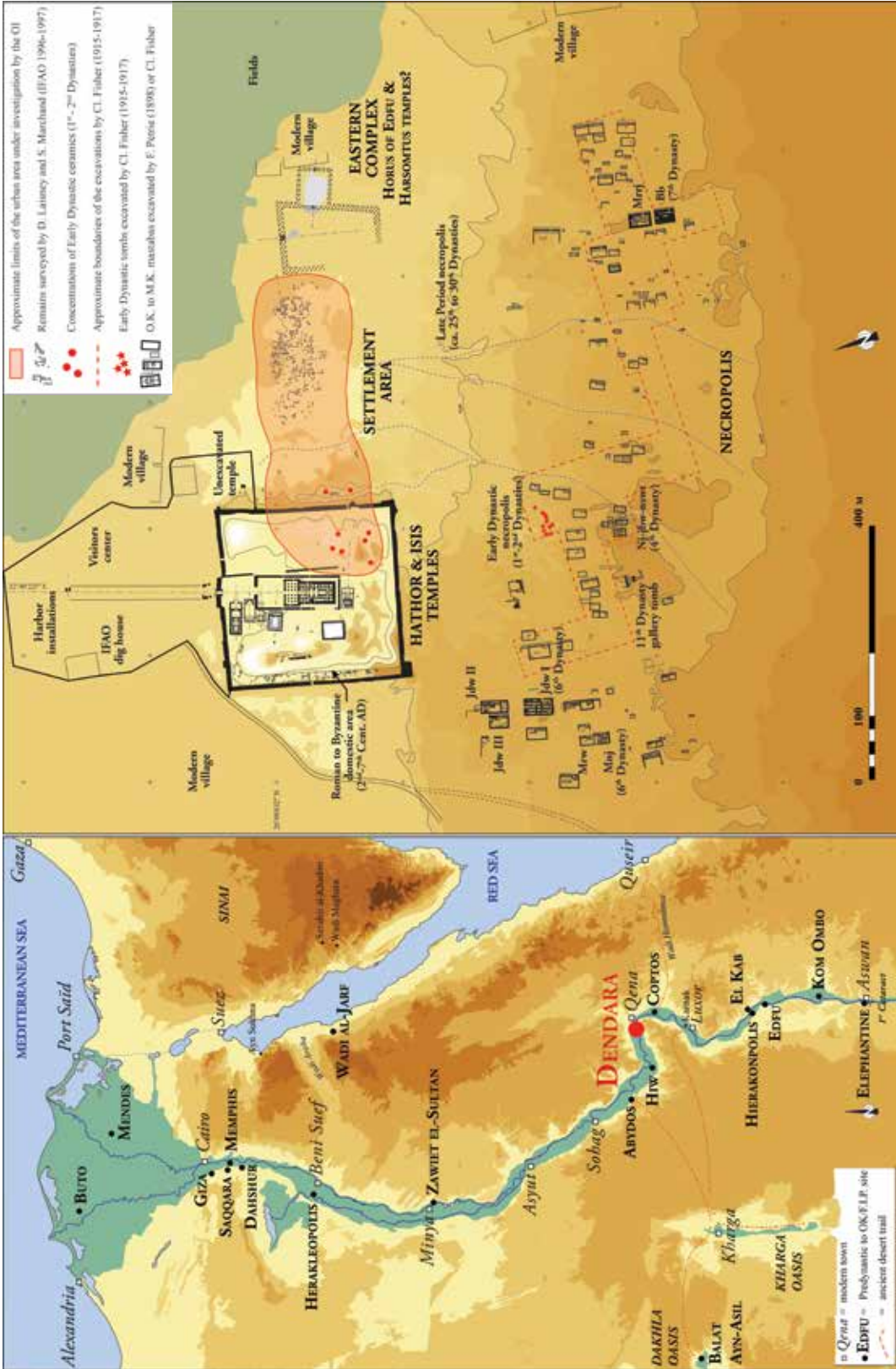


Figure 1. Dendara on the general map of Egypt and plan of Hathor and Isis sanctuaries with the surrounding archaeological area (plan: G. Marouard after P. Zignani and D. Laisney, "Cartographie de Dendara, remarques sur l'urbanisme du site," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 101 (2001): fig. 1)

the Oriental Institute, and the Macquarie University in Sydney (<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/archeologie/Dendara/>). The IFAO mission is directed by Pierre Zignani since the 1990s. Pierre is an architect at the CNRS who focused his work on the study of the religious spaces and conducted an extensive examination of the Roman Hathor temple, particularly considering the relation between lighting provisions and the internal spaces of the temple. Since 2012 he has been involved with the architectural study of the Roman *mammisi*, which had



Figure 2. The façade of the pronaos of Hathor's temple, achieved during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius (ca. AD 32–38) (photo: G. Marouard)

never been properly recorded with a detailed plan, and he also conducts archaeometric investigations on building materials (masonry and stone cutting techniques, analysis of the metallic elements used in construction, etc.).

This mission of the Macquarie University in Sydney, directed by Yann Tristant, focuses on the archaeological and anthropological re-examination of the various phases of the large necropolis which is located on the southern side of the Hathor and Isis sanctuaries (fig. 1).

The first season took place between mid-November and mid-December 2015. The team consisted of Gregory Marouard (Director), Nadine Moeller (Co-director), and three NELC students in Egyptian archaeology: Émilie Sarrazin, Oren Siegel (PhD candidate), and Sasha Rohret. An overview of the site and ancient work there and a preliminary introduction of the 2015 season have been recently presented in last spring's issue of the *Oriental Institute News & Notes* 229 (pp. 4–16).

In order to answer the questions about the origins of the settlement, the first campaign mostly focused on the area within the large enclosure wall, next to the Hathor temple and the small Isis temple. Except for the major stone monuments (fig. 3), this part of the site still preserves some of the oldest remains of the town, which date from the middle of the third millennium BC, but it was really exposed to severe destructions after multiple cleaning attempts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The intra-mural part of the site was under excavation since the time of Mahomet Ali, who gave the order in 1845 to cut an access to the notorious *pronaos* of the Temple of Hathor through the vestiges of the Late Byzantine period. Until the end of the 1920s, the work of the Antiquities Service, supervised by Pierre Lacau and Émile Baraize but executed by hundreds of *sebbakhin*, was focused on the expeditious clearance of the sanctuaries from the mudbrick constructions, especially the Greco-Roman town that extended east of the temple with a thickness of over 12 m and which is today entirely destroyed (fig. 4).



Figure 3. General plan of the intra-mural archaeological area at Dendara with the location of the Oriental Institute operations in 2015 in red and green (plan: G. Marouard after P. Zignani, and D. Laisney, "Cartographie de Dendara, remarques sur l'urbanisme du site," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 101 (2001): fig. 24)

Excavations on the West Side of the Isis Temple

The Isis temple, dedicated to the birth of this major divinity, is located on the southern side of the main temple of the goddess Hathor (fig. 3, nos. 5–6). In the early 1990s, during the epigraphic work undertaken on the monument by Sylvie Cauville, this area had been cleaned and all in situ paving elements drawn. The badly damaged remains of a wide mudbrick wall in an L-shape had been spotted on the eastern edge of the sanctuary and were attributed to an earlier phase of the main temple *temenos* (P. Zignani and D. Laisney, “Cartographie de Dendara, remarques sur l’urbanisme du site,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 101 [2001]: 429–30, figs. 26–28). The existence here of a possible religious precinct from the third millennium therefore motivated a resumption of the work, this time using an archaeological and stratigraphic approach in order to better determine its chronology and



Figure 4. View of the pronaos of Hathor’s temple before (ca. 1870) and after (ca. 1930) the clearance work conducted by the Antiquities Service and sebbakhin (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 5. View of the eastern side of the Isis’s temple at the end of the 2015 season (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 6. Pottery sherds from the Naqada II C–D contexts found under the foundation of the temple of Isis (photo: G. Marouard)

perhaps a cultic building that has now disappeared. The systematic cleaning of the previous excavation trenches revealed a sequence of totally new installations. The mudbrick wall does not correspond in fact to an enclosure wall but to the southwest corner of a large building, using both mudbrick and limestone, which corresponds to a monumental phase significantly older than the four phases previously known for the temple of Isis (one from Nectanebo I, two from Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy X, one from Augustus).

Although quite destroyed, the brick walls are massive and traces of the use and occupation on the floors include ceramic assemblages characteristic for the end of the Eleventh Dynasty and the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty. Those remains, together with traces of an ancient limestone pavement and multiple reused decorated limestone blocks which bear the name of Amenemhat I could demonstrate here the existence of an underlying temple foreshadowed by earlier work that would date from the early Middle Kingdom. Except for a few isolated reused blocks in later structures, no archaeological evidence for a cultic installation of the New Kingdom has so far been exposed; however, a systematic archaeological exploration of the building will be conducted in the future to clarify this chronological hiatus.

More exceptional, the levels from the early Middle Kingdom are constructed directly on the surface of stratified occupation layers — floors, ashes, fireplaces — which the ceramics allow us to date from the Nagada IIc–d culture (ca. 3450–3225 BC; fig. 6). This occupation is set on the natural sand and no remains were noted below after verification by using deep drill core. To date, those remains are the oldest archaeological evidence ever discovered at Dendara. The settling of this area had been previously assumed to begin only with the Protodynastic times (First and Second Dynasties, ca. 3150–2650), as evidenced by a dozen tombs excavated in 1915–1917 by Clarence Fisher in the necropolis and by some ceramic assemblages recently discovered in 2014 during our preliminary survey in the southwest intra-mural area.

Despite the fact that the chronology of the early occupation at the site has been pushed back more than 500 years earlier, the discovery of Nagada IIc–d layers is in fact not really a surprise. Dendara is situated in the cradle of the Egyptian Predynastic cultures, halfway between Abydos and the Nagada-Nubt-Ballas area. At Taramsa Hill, located 2.5 km south of the Hathor and Isis complex, the oldest modern human of Egypt — possibly Africa’s oldest burial — was discovered in the early 1990s and attributed to the Middle Paleolithic period with a possible age between 50,000 to 80,000 years ago (mean age ca. 55,000 years ago). A few kilometers to the west, at Maghar Dendera 2, rescue excavations revealed some occupations from the Badarian culture (Early Predynastic Period, ca. 4500–4000 BC) and, on the opposite side of the

to confirm — or not — the presumed function of this construction.

The work was extended to areas which have never been touched since the ancient clearance work undertaken by the Antiquities Service ca. 1910–1920. A set of four lime kilns, clearly dating from the early Byzantine period (fifth century AD) but seriously leveled to the ground by former excavations, marked the surface of the wide mudbrick wall (fig. 5). These kilns are good evidence for the dismantling operations and calcination of limestone blocks from a nearby structure,

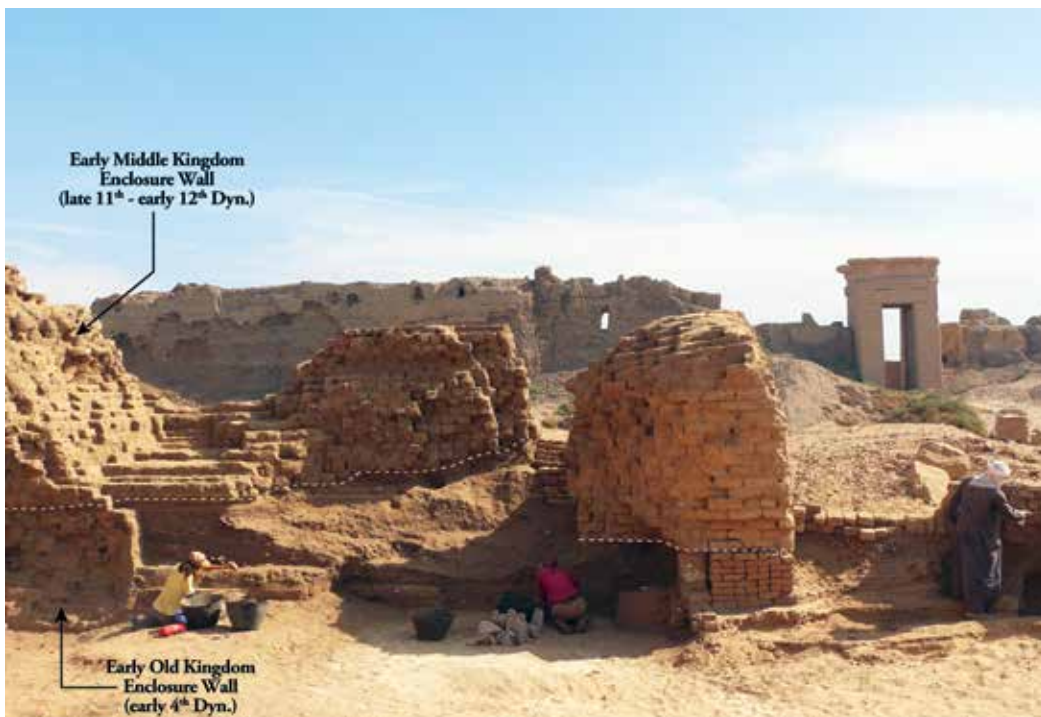


Figure 7. Ongoing excavations on the western face of the early Middle Kingdom enclosure wall that sealed Predynastic layers and Old Kingdom settlement contexts (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 8: The Third Dynasty pig-pen under the early Fourth Dynasty wall, floors and occupations (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 9. Ongoing cleaning operation on the eastern face of the early Middle Kingdom enclosure wall with the Hathor's temple in the background (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 10. Stratigraphic profile on the eastern side of the early Middle Kingdom enclosure wall with the underlying Fourth Dynasty settlement remains (photo G. Marouard)

Nile river, a Predynastic (Badarian to Nagada IA?) and Early Old Kingdom cemetery (late Third and Fourth Dynasty mastabas) should be mentioned at El-Gozeriya.

With this new evidence, the occupation at Dendara seems to really emerge in the landscape in the second half of the fourth millennium, ca. 3500 BC, but it starts to take form with a major local sanctuary and a provincial capital only 800 years later at the beginning of the Old Kingdom, ca. 2600 BC.

At that point, the worship of Hathor, probably strong since the very first dynasties, seems to have grown in importance at the turning point of the early Fourth Dynasty. According to François Daumas, one of the inscriptions of the third western crypt of the Roman temple could be interpreted as a proof for the creation of a shrine dedicated to Hathor and the establishment of a liturgical ritual under the reign of king Khufu.

A stela found in 1952 at Dahshur mentions a son of king Snofru, *Ntr-'pr.f*, priest of

the Bent Pyramid, who was also a high ranking provincial administrator, entitled “Overseer of Commissions of Coptos, Hiu, and Dendara,” a position that points out the agglomeration already existed at the very beginning of the Fourth Dynasty as a nome capital with a hierarchical and fully functional administration attached to the central power at Memphis. These hypotheses also constitute the main questions for the settlement excavation engaged in the area east of the main temple of Hathor.



Figure 11. Typical bread molds of the Fourth Dynasty with standard modules (right) and unusual large modules (left) (photo: G. Marouard)

Study of the Enclosure Walls and Town Remains

East of the Hathor temple stands a lengthy north–south section of a massive mudbrick wall (fig. 3, no. 18), renovated on several occasions (maybe by king Shabaka, Twenty-fifth Dynasty?), and which seems to have marked an ancient boundary of the Hathor sanctuary.

Several cleaning operations and stratigraphic trenches have been carried out this season which have clearly confirmed a construction corresponding to the early Middle Kingdom, at end of the Eleventh or the early Twelfth Dynasties (ca. 2000–1900 BC), a period that roughly



Figure 12. Mud jar stopper with the imprint of a royal serekh (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 13. Stratigraphic profile showing the late Old Kingdom and early First Intermediate Period settlement remains cut by the foundation trench of the early Middle Kingdom enclosure wall (photo: O. Siegel)

corresponds to the construction of a chapel of Mentuhotep II (now dismantled and exposed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), or to the lost monuments of Amenemhat I and Senwosret I. This enclosure wall probably corresponds to a new extended *temenos* which encompasses the temple of Hathor and the possible Middle Kingdom building discovered this season under the temple of Isis.

Along the western side of this enclosure wall, an area 18 m in length and 10 m wide has been cleaned from thick *sebbakhin* dumps, revealing multiple levels that predate the wall (fig. 7). Again, this sector revealed in the lowest sandy levels an important Predynastic occupation that a deep coring has evaluated to measure between 1.20 m and 1.50 m in thickness. A test trench of 3 × 3 m, resulted in the collection of abundant ceramic and lithic materials, significant organic residues (charcoal and seeds), as well as many fragments of clay firedogs that indicate in this area was an artisanal kind of occupation devoted to beer production which can be dated according to the ceramic and lithic tools, especially in comparison with the excavations at Adaima, to the Naqada IIIc–d period (ca. 3450–3225 BC).



Figure 14. Kite aerial view of the Roman mammisi with the Byzantine well and fountain excavated in the 2015 trench (upper left) (photo: G. Marouard)

After the abandonment of those levels and several phases of windblown sand deposits making a significant chronological hiatus, this area was reoccupied by a close succession of mud floors and light mudbrick walls regularly separated by sand deposits. This sequence ends with a well-preserved level of a pig-pen, with still-fresh feet imprints of *suidae* on the floor (fig. 8), which can be dated to the Third Dynasty according to the pottery assemblages.

If those levels were still characterized by the occasional and “rural” type of occupation, this area shows, probably at the turn of the Fourth Dynasty, a radical change in its function with the appearance of a very massive mudbrick wall, forming a right angle and marking the southern and western boundaries of a large enclosed space (fig. 8). If further investigations are needed, this large wall might correspond to the most ancient and the very first *temenos* wall that thus confirms both the existence of a sanctuary of Hathor at this early phase and the consistency in the path of the temple precinct, as suggested by the Middle Kingdom wall (and its many subsequent reconstructions), which has been resettled in this same area and exactly on the same north-south axis.

Along the east side, a vast cleaning operation for removing the excavation debris dumped here by the *sebbakhin* (fig. 9) allowed us to completely uncover the in situ levels from the Old Kingdom that had been preliminarily observed in 2014 (see *Supplement to the Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 115: 127, fig. 86). A linear stratigraphic profile about 30 m in length and 1.40 m to 2.30 m in thickness was established in order to better determine the nature of the contexts and chronology of the occupation in this area (fig. 10). All levels excavated here this season correspond to the Fourth Dynasty, later than the Fifth Dynasty, and at least three successive phases of buildings appear.

The first phase, and conspicuously the most important one, is located directly on top of the windblown sand levels that sealed the Predynastic and Protodynastic phases on the western side of the Middle Kingdom enclosure wall. The care used in the construction process and the importance of the walls discovered, as well as the nature of the archaeological material,



Figure 15. The deep trench on the northwestern corner of the Roman mammisi, showing the foundation techniques and the previous Late Period enclosure wall cut by the foundation trench (photo: G. Marouard)



Figure 16. The eastern face of the Byzantine fountain flanked by two half-columns and, on the left, the foundation system of the Roman mammisi built on the previous Late Period enclosure wall (photo: G. Marouard)

indicate here again a significant change in the function of this area at the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty. The archaeological levels in situ that sealed this phase, characterized by a thick and stratified trash disposal, have yielded large quantities and equivalent proportions of beer jars and bread molds, both in standard modules and in unusually large modules (fig. 11). Dozens of fragments of mud jar stoppers and clay sealings have been discovered, some showing cylinder-seal imprints. One of these jar stoppers revealed a *serekh*, an early form of royal cartouche, containing the Horus name of a king who is not identified so far due to the erosion of this impression (fig. 12). This discovery emphasizes here both the administrative character of this area and the control of these activities by the central government.

Under the supervision of Oren Siegel, an additional trench 4.0 m wide has been dug to the north, which has revealed a significant stratigraphy especially for the end of the Old Kingdom and the early First Intermediate period (fig. 13). Here, the urban settlement levels are quite deeply cut by the foundation trench of the enclosure of the Middle Kingdom (fig. 16), which seems to settle into the landscape at the beginning of this period, probably at the same time that a new monument appears farther south below the present temple of Isis. This area has also allowed to confirm a gradual thickening of the archaeological levels northward and to observe that the foundations of the enclosure are neither homogeneous nor horizontal, the wall was adapted directly onto the sloping topography formed by the surface of the ancient tell (town hill) from the Old Kingdom.

Excavations on the Roman *mammisi* Area

In close collaboration with the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale team, two excavation areas have been opened on the northwestern and northeastern corners of the Roman *mammisi* (fig. 3, no. 9). These operations are beneficial for both partners to the extent that the question here is twofold.



Figure 17. Kite aerial view of the extra-mural area with extensive Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement remains to be excavated in 2016 (photo: G. Marouard)

In order to complete the architectural study of the *mammisi* and to document the foundation, deep trenches are necessary (fig. 14). These trenches revealed for example a complex system of foundations, set on a mudbrick case filled with 55 cm of yellow thin sand from the desert. On this strong and incompressible layer, five different levels of blocks have been disposed in order to compose the floor on which the construction of the building itself starts (fig. 15).

These two operations have also had the objective to confirm an earlier phase of the massive mudbrick enclosure

wall that actually surrounds the entire sanctuary. Our hypothesis is that this precinct was not built only in one single phase, as suggested previously, but in two very different phases, a solution that would explain many of the irregularities and inconsistencies of its plan and multiple stratigraphic or chronological contradictions observed elsewhere on the site. In both excavations a wide mudbrick wall is visible which seems to have been voluntarily dismantled right under the *mammisi* foundation system and was clearly cut by its foundation trench.



Figure 18. The 2015 Oriental Institute first team at Dendara. From the left: Inspector Mohamed, Gregory, Nadine, Sasha, and Oren; Émilie is taking the picture.

This discovery confirms a first enclosure wall here, probably constructed at the end of the Late Period according to the technique used, and maybe under the reign of Nectanebo I, like the enclosure walls at Karnak temple or at El-Kab. This enclosure was partially demolished at the very beginning of the Roman period when Nectanebo's *mammisi* was condemned, which probably influenced the decision to build a new one at this position. After the completion of the Roman *mammisi*, at least of the main structure but not the decoration, a new section of enclosure wall was then reconstructed farther north, all along the northwestern and western sides of the sanctuary (fig. 3). This operation was commemorated by an inscribed stela, discovered during the *sebbakhin* excavations and published in 1926, which mentions the completion during the Year 9 of Tiberius, ca. year AD 23, which has always been systematically and paradoxically mentioned prior to the recent fieldwork to emphasize the only possible Roman date for the entire enclosure wall.

Untouched since the 1950s, the area of the operation led in 2015 on the northeast corner of the *mammisi* also revealed a wide installation of red bricks and lime mortar, with a large well about 3.5 m in diameter, and the flat surface of a wide basin. The latter was used to hold and conduct water from the well to a semicircular fountain installation set on the eastern face flanked by two half-columns (fig. 16). This original construction can be dated in the current state of the study to the fifth to seventh centuries AD. It probably served as a fountain or maybe a baptistery installation in relation to a second Coptic church in brick, which was built onto the dismantled entrance terrace of the Roman *mammisi*.

An extension of the trench eastward is planned for the next season in order to recover the remains of the original main gate of the complex dating to the first Late Period phase of the enclosure wall that was replaced later by the actual Hathor Gate.

Further Ongoing Projects

As part of our ongoing questions about the long-term evolution of the ancient town and settlement during the third millennium, aerial photographic coverage assisted by a kite was undertaken in 2015 on the extramural urban area (fig. 17) in order to plan an extensive excavation of the residential neighborhoods for the next season, which date from the end of the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. Identifiable over an area measuring 350 m in length and covering nearly 20 acres, this sector was barely touched by archaeologists, only between 1999 and 2002 by a French-Polish team conducted by François Leclère, which focused on a single domestic unit.

To better define the northern margins of the extramural urban area and possibly to find some of the boundaries of the eastern sanctuary that are now partly under the cultivated fields, an extensive geomagnetic survey will be launched in 2016. This initiative will be conducted simultaneously with some geomorphological operations and attempts at landscape reconstruction across the Dendara territory, extending into the floodplain in order to track the capricious developments of the Nile River and with a more targeted and geo-archaeological approach for the settlement areas.

In order to protect the entire extra-mural area — town, necropolis and also a very rare example of an animal necropolis — which is seriously exposed to the encroachments of new constructions, the extension of modern cemeteries, the large trash deposits, or the very occasional looting attempts (the site is well guarded), an accurate mapping and a clear delimitation of the archaeological site with new visible and lasting boundary markers should be considered in the short term. In addition to the priority of accurately redefining the areas that need to be protected, it should be possible to include in that project a more extensive trail for future visitors while maintaining the area open for the locals, such as the children who have to cross this part of the site every day to go to school.

An important site management operation also needs to be done on the intra-mural area, especially in the area of the Roman *mammisi*, in order to reorganize, sort, store, protect and study the hundreds of decorated blocks in red granite, sandstone and limestone carelessly piled up for decades on the northern side of the building.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Gil Stein, Director of the Oriental Institute, for his confidence and the strong support that he has placed in this new project, and the extreme generosity of all the Oriental Institute donors, whose support is essential for all our fieldwork. A very special thank you also goes to the French Institute partners and the Egyptian Antiquities authorities at Dendara especially our inspector of this season, Mohamed.
