

The 2017 Season at Deir el-Ballas

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As both one of the few substantially preserved pharaonic Egyptian settlements as well as the forward capital for the Theban kings during the Hyksos expulsion, the site of Deir el-Ballas is of great archaeological and historic importance. Strategically located at a bend in the Nile north of Thebes, Deir el-Ballas was the location of a short lived royal palace-city built by the Theban kings as a staging post for their campaign against the Hyksos. The builders of the city took advantage of the local topography to enhance the symbolism of their construction and positioned the royal residence, known as the North Palace, at the midpoint of a large semicircle formed by the limestone cliffs bordering the low desert. (fig. 1) Clusters of habitation are located north and south of the central palace at Deir el-Ballas, as they are at later royal cities such as Amenhotep III's Malkata and Tell el-Amarna.

The North Palace and its enclosures cover an area of 45,000+ square meters, the eastern end of the main enclosure extends into the cultivation and has never been traced (fig. 3). The palace itself was built of unusually large mud bricks averaging 54 x 27 x 18 cm. The building was made up of a series of columned courts and a long entrance corridor grouped around an elevated

central platform. This platform was constructed on casemate foundations: long mud brick chambers filled in with rubble and capped by a brick pavement. Some of these casemates are still preserved to a height of approximately five meters in places and would have supported the raised private apartments of the palace which would have given it the appearance of a fortified “Migdol” tower as in representations of other Egyptian New Kingdom palaces.

As at Amarna and Deir el-Medina, Deir el-Ballas also had a workmen’s village at that situated apart from the main settled area, beside it a series of roughly built structures, consisting of one or more courts connected by short flights of stairs and built of stones and mud brick and partially cut into the hillside which resemble quite closely in plan the chapels associated with the workman’s village at Amarna.

Elsewhere to the north and south were large houses belonging to court officials as well as what is thought to have been an administrative quarter.

The southern extent of the settlement at Deir el-Ballas was marked by a large, rectangular mudbrick platform that was called by Reisner, the “South Place.” (fig. 2) However, it is however, markedly non-residential in character and situated far from the rest of the settlement, at the top of tall hill. Its location did afford a commanding view of the Nile and surrounding countryside. The building consisted

of a wide terrace fronting an elevated platform measuring roughly 40 meters wide by 150 meters long, the top of which is reached by a broad flight of stairs. The top of the platform has been all but destroyed by centuries of looting, but what remains suggests that there may not have been an substantial construction on top of it, rather possibly just tents or reed structures. The design and situation of the 'South Palace' suggests that it must have served principally for observation of both the river and the southern approach to the settlement, in order to regulate traffic entering the settlement. It would also be an ideal post from which to monitor the movement of the Theban fleet. The site of Deir el-Ballas appears to have only had a brief life, the associated pottery and artifactual materials all indicate a Late Second Intermediate Period date. With the success of the Thebans, the palace-city at Deir el-Ballas was no longer necessary and quickly abandoned.

After the work of George A. Reisner in 1900-1901, the excavations were never published and the field notes were so brief that any in depth study of the excavation was impossible. In order to clarify the records of the expedition and enable publication of the site, Peter Lacovara undertook four seasons of survey and clearance there in 1980, 1983, 1984 and 1986 under the sponsorship of the American Research Center and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The results of these seasons were published in a Preliminary report by

the American Research Center in Egypt. At the request of Mr. Mustafa Waziri and the Qena Inspectorate of Antiquities, in response to damage at the site, a brief survey was conducted at the site by the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund under the auspices of the American University in Cairo from January 10th to the 24th 2017 to map, photograph and planning to assess the condition of the site, the perimeter of the antiquities area, and possible ways to protect and restore the standing structures.

Hopefully, future fieldwork will add even more information to this critical period in the history of Thebes. Through a grant from the American Research Center in Egypt much needed stabilization work on the 'South Place' will begin this coming winter along with additional restoration and site security measures.

Acknowledgements

We look forward to collaborating with the Antiquities Inspectorate in Qena and the Ministry of Antiquities, find additional ways to protect and preserve this important site. We would like to thank Dr. Khaled El-Enany, Minister of Antiquities and Heritage, Mahmoud Afifi, Director of the Antiquities Department, Dr. Mohamed Ismail Khaled, Supervisor of the Permanent Committee of the Antiquities Department, Madame Manal Ahmed Mostafa, General Director for the Egyptian Committee, Mohamed Mahmoud Hamed, General Director of Qena, Lyman Hindy, Director General of Qena Antiquities, Maryanne Danielle, Director of West Bank Antiquities of Qena, and our Inspector, Abdullah Mohamed Abdullah. We would also like to thank Dr. Salima Ikram, Mr. Magdy Aly and the American University in Cairo for their help and support and, in particular, Mr. Hassaan Mohamed Ali for all his invaluable help, efforts and kindness.

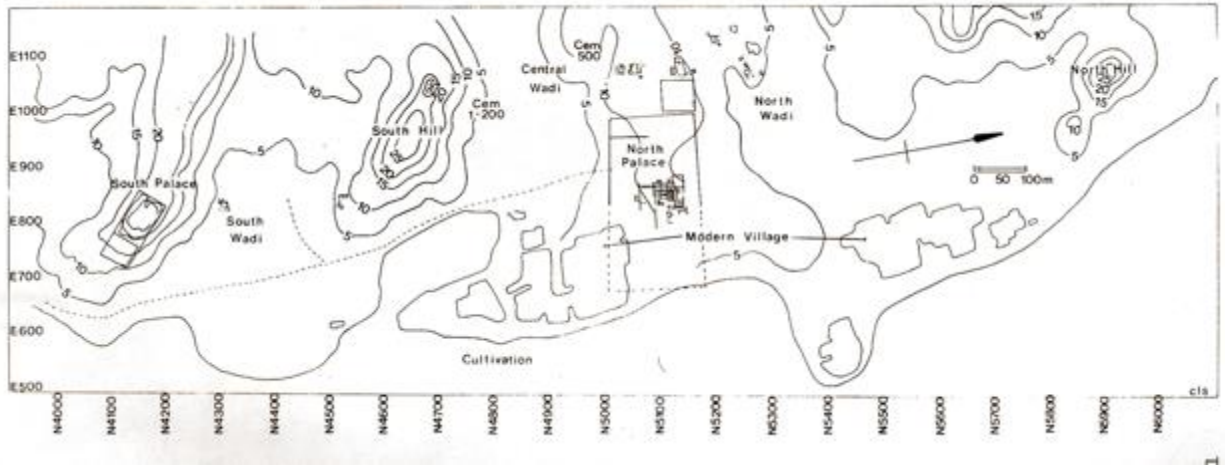
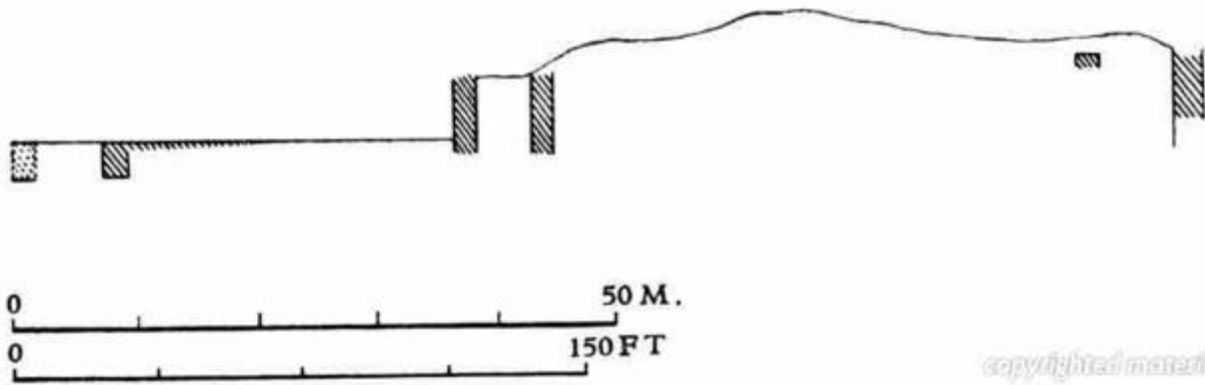
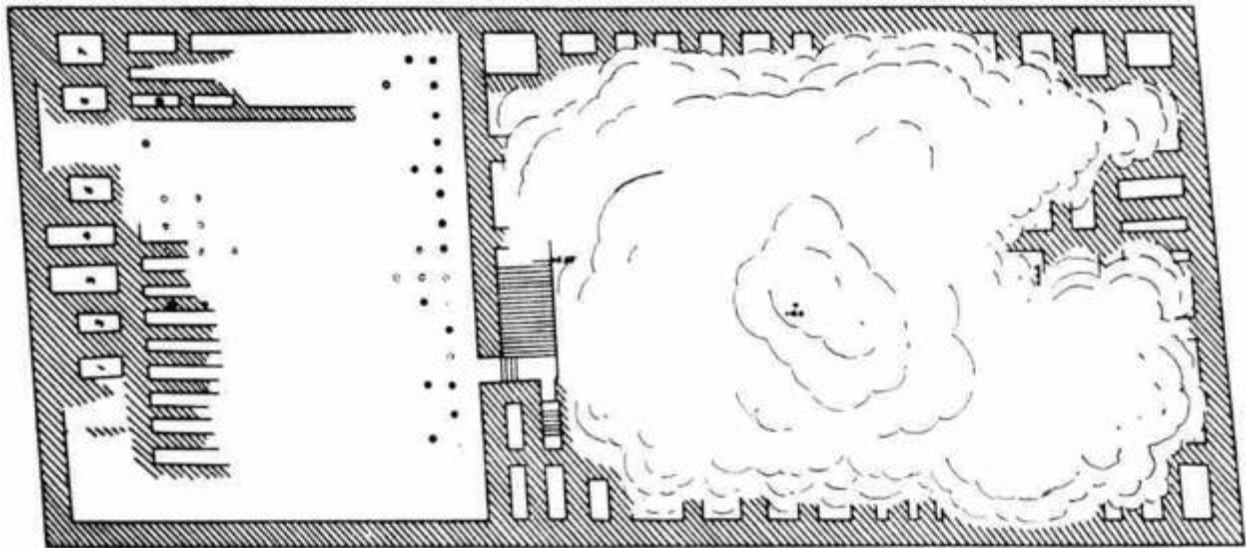


Fig. 1 Map of Der el Ballas



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Fig. 2 Plan of the "South Palace" showing casemate foundations.



Fig. 3 Plan of the North Palace by Reisner in 1900