

Deir el-Ballas Report for Qena Inspectorate Office

We began work at Deir el-Ballas on January 3, 2023 finishing on January 30, 2023. The restoration on the “South Palace” is now largely completed. It had suffered from looters emptying out some of the casemate foundations and digging holes beneath and through the façade of the eastern wall of the platform, which has caused significant parts of the brick facing to collapse. We re-built the façade which had served as a retaining wall for the structure that was largely composed of fill behind it, with modern, unbaked mud bricks stamped with an AUC logo and made in the same size as the original “South Palace” bricks [ca. 47 x 22 x 12 cm.] (Fig. 1), with the guidance of earthen architecture conservation specialist Anthony Crosby.

The structure is in fact not a royal residence, but served as sort of a watchtower with a platform reached by a broad staircase. The entire structure is built around the top of a natural hill enclosed by brick casemates to create the impression of a fortified hilltop building. During the cleaning to cap and stabilize the inner stairway wall, we discovered some wood fragments embedded in the mud-brick that are probably re-used ship timbers from the Theban fleet used to expel the Hyksos.

The actual royal residence, the North Palace, is an enormous structure over 200 meters wide by more than 350 meters long. This palace was situated in the approximate center of the ancient settlement. It was being encroached upon by the modern town to the south and modern cemetery to the north. We have begun rebuilding the palace’s casemate foundations and will re-fill them to prevent trash dumping there and to restore the original paving to make a platform for tourist visitation (Fig. 2). We are also rebuilding the original enclosure wall of the palace to act as a protective barrier for the structure and to demarcate the antiquities area. This is to be joined by a modern protective wall which we have begun building and hope to complete soon under the supervision of Ayman Demarani.

The Romano-Coptic additions to the North Palace were investigated by Gillian Pyke to gain a better understating of the later occupation of the structure. To the West of the North Palace were situated a number of houses that were partially destroyed by the expansion of the modern cemetery. To protect the remaining structures, we began re-clearing them and capping the mud brick walls with brick made to their more conventional size [33 cm x 15 cm x 10 cm]. The restoration of one structure designated “House D,” which appears to have functioned in part as a bakery, has already been completed this season. Two others Houses E and F await final cleaning and capping.

Ana Oliveira continued excavation work in House F tracing the outer extensions of the structure. Nicholas Brown, continued his work on House E and was joined by Matei Tichindelean to explore the periphery areas of this house and what ancient activities may have taken place outside in the courtyard areas. We hope to be finished with the recording of these two houses next season and to begin their reconstruction.

In addition, new mud bricks are being made out of the back dirt from the old excavations and will be left to dry on site for use in reconstruction for the next season. All the works shall be carried out under the supervision of the inspection and projects sector in accordance with the decision of the Permanent Committee for Egyptian Antiquities.

Another group of dwellings to the North of the North Palace was investigated in 2023 by Victoria Shakespeare. This new settlement area of the site was previously excavated by George Reisner in 1900, but never properly mapped or documented. Over the course of two weeks, the Expedition cleaned the surface of three buildings (North Structure.1, North Structure.2, and the South Structure) in order to delineate their walls and properly document and map them.

To help visitors to the site in understanding its importance and to promote tourist visitation, two informational signs were created for the North Palace and "South Palace", which were recently approved by Dr. Bassem Ibrihim. These provide information in English and Arabic about the history of the site and its importance. Hopefully, these will be installed on-site shortly (Fig. 3). We have also begun planning for an additional guard house near the North Palace next season and looking at ways a lighting system could be devised to illuminate the structure at night.

We look forward to future collaboration with the Antiquities Inspectorate in Qena and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to find additional ways to protect and preserve this important site. We would like to thank Ahmed Issa, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Mostafa Waziri, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Dr. Nashwa Gaber, Supervisor of the Permanent Committee of the Antiquities Department, Mostafa Hassan, General Director for the Egyptian Committee, Dr. Ayman Ashmawy, Head of the Egyptian Antiquities Sector, Dr. Mohamed Abdel Badie, Director of the Central Administration of Upper Egypt, Dr. Fathi Yasen, General Manager of Upper Egypt, Ayman Hindy, General Director of Qena Antiquities, Maryanne Danielle, Director of Qena Area, Abdallah Mohamed, Director of West Bank Antiquities of Qena, Amr Gad el Rab, Head of Foreign Missions and Excavations of Qena, Sayed Abed, General Director of Conservator of the Qena Area, and our Inspectors, Mohammed Mohammedin Osman, Mohammed Shahat Shamrouk.

We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of the expedition staff of both seasons, Piet Collet, Nicholas R. Brown, Bettina Bader, Amr Shahat, Claire Malleson, Matei Tichindelean, Sarah Ahmed Aziz, Hassan Elzawy, Ana Oliveira, Victoria Shakespeare and Gillian Pyke. Their efforts were greatly facilitated in every way by Hassaan Mohamed Ali.

We would also like to thank Dr. Salima Ikram, Mr. Magdy Aly and the American University in Cairo for their help and support and to Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman and the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition for their kind and generous hospitality.



Fig. 1 Restored "South Palace" in 2023. (Photograph by Peter Lacovara)



Fig. 2 Capping the casemate foundations of the North Palace in 2023. (Photograph by Peter Lacovara)

دير البلاص: القصر الشمالي

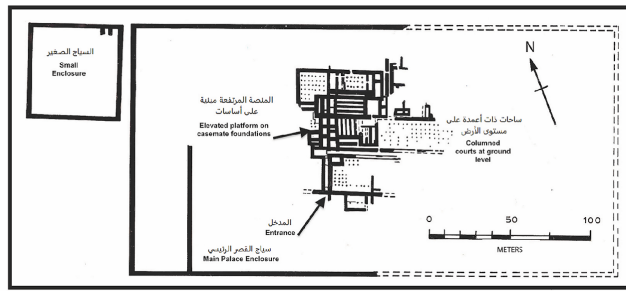
تعتبر دير البلاص واحدة من المدن المصرية القديمة التي تم الحفاظ عليها، وتعد نموذجًا مهمًا عن حياة المصريين القدماء، فضلًا عن كونها مدينة ذات أهمية استراتيجية عالية. حكم شمال مصر شعب من أصل شرقي هم الهكسوس خلال عصر الانتقال الثاني، وكانت دير البلاص مركز قيادة ملوك الأسرة السابعة عشر في طيبة (حوالي 1550-1580 ق.م) للحرب ضدهم.

كان القصر الشمالي في دير البلاص عبارة عن مقر لانطلاق الحملات العسكرية، ربما بناه الملك سنن رع (حوالي 1560-1555 ق.م) في حربه ضد الهكسوس واستخدمه أيضًا خلفاؤه كامس (1550-1555 ق.م) وأحمس (حوالي 1550-1525 ق.م).

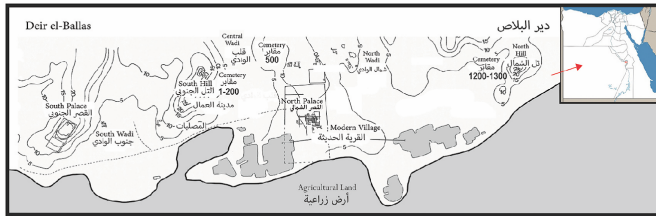
كان القصر بأكمله محاطًا بسور كبير يعرض 150 مترًا وبطول 300 متر أو أكثر. تم بناء المقر "القصر" على مستويين، المستوى العلوي مبني على أساسات مستطيلة من الطوب اللبن تحتوي على صخور وورل وحصى، ولكن لسوء الحظ بقيت الأساسات فقط، بينما الطابق السفلي كان يحتوي على سلسلة من قواعد أعمدة الحجر الجيري التي تشير إلى وجود العديد من القاعات ذات الأعمدة.

كما كان مركزًا للبلدة تضم منازل لمستوحي المحكمة، وقرية عدال، ومقاصير للعبادة، ومركز إداري، ومقابر. هُجر الموقع إلى حد كبير بعد الانتصار على الهكسوس، ولكن بعد ذلك بكثير، تم بناء كنيسة على أنقاض القصر الشمالي.

للمزيد من المعلومات



Ground plan of the North Palace
مخطط للقصر الشمالي



Map of the site of Deir el-Ballas
خريطة موقع دير البلاص

Deir el-Ballas: The North Palace

Deir el-Ballas is an important site, both as one of the few preserved pharaonic Egyptian settlements as well as the forward capital for the Theban kings during the Hyksos expulsion (around 1576-1550 BCE). It stretched out on the desert edge of the Nile floodplains for a distance of about 2 kilometers and at its center was the North Palace, built by King Seqemnefer as his campaign palace and also used by Kamose and Ahmose. The palace was built on two levels, the upper one was built on casemate foundations- rectangular boxes for mud brick that contained rocks, sand and gravel that were paved over with mud brick to form a level surface. Unfortunately, only the foundations remained when it was excavated, but the lower level had a series of limestone column bases indicating that there were a number of columned halls.

The entire palace was surrounded by a large walled enclosure 150 meters wide by 300 or more meters long. The palace was the center of a town that included houses for the court officials, a workmen's village, chapels, an administrative center and cemeteries. The site was largely abandoned after the defeat of the Hyksos but during the Christian Period a Coptic church was built on top of the ruins of the North Palace.

The site was first excavated in 1900-1901 by George Andrew Reisner and the Hearst Expedition of the University of California. It has been restored thanks to the American University in Cairo and the American Research Center in Egypt.

For more information:

Fig. 3 Sign being prepared for installation at the North Palace.