

Dakhleh Oasis Project
Columbia University
Excavations at Amheida 2006
Topographic Work

The topographical survey in Amheida started at the beginning of January 2006 with the check of the grid set up in 2005. The work proceeded at the beginning of February and for the whole month with the survey of the extant structures to enlarge and update the general planimetry of the site.

After a careful check of the whole area, it was clear that almost all the sticks placed during the previous season were still in place, except for some in area 4 and others in area 2, where they had been removed due to excavation purposes and their replacement was therefore impossible. For this reason, the very first interventions on the site have been related to the repositioning of the sticks and the enlargement of the existing grid in area 4. In this area, the grid was extended to cover a larger sector North and West of what investigated during the previous seasons. Such enlargement was mainly due to the need of opening new test trenches in correspondence with two sizable areas where limestone material and big block fragments, already noticed in 2005, were visible.

The topographical work *per se* started only after the mapping had been completed. The main aim for this season was to fill up the gaps between the various areas that are now under archeological investigation in order to achieve a more complete mapping of the site and have firmer basis onto which articulate theories for its urbanization. The mapping tasks, performed with a Total Station Leica TCR705, started in the area between the South-West end of area 1 and the North-East end of area 2. By cleaning the top surface of the extant walls, it was possible to identify at least two new sets of dwellings oriented North/North-West, South/South-East. Those dwellings seem to be intrinsically connected with the urban grid of area 1.

The surface cleaning of the dune North-East of area 2, has allowed to identify an interesting building. This building is a rectangular structure partially preserved above ground and oriented East/West. The structure is characterized by columns, the bases of which are still preserved on the long flanks especially on the South one, and by the scanty rests of semi-columns located at the center of the short East flank, and at the Eastern ends of the long flanks where such semi-columns are doubled. White plaster is still visible on all walls preserved above ground level, and fragments of painted plaster and several pottery shards are scattered in the vicinities. This building seems to face onto a North/South oriented street that crosses at its northern end a main avenue. This avenue reaches the buildings in area 1 via a sharp turn toward North/East. The main interesting features in the location of this edifice are its closeness to two other sizable colonnade buildings located in the western proximities, and the nearby villa in area 2. Further interesting elements implementing our knowledge of the urbanism of the site are its dominant and

isolated position in relation with the closest nearby inhabited areas, and its almost perfect alignment with the temenos of area 4 and therefore the main temple of the city.

As for area 4, the main aim of the season was to define the outline of the temenos, already partially identified last year. The cleaning of the extant walls' surfaces, has allowed for the individuation of the North/West and South/West ends of the large enclosure wall. Moreover, it has become clear that the perimeter of such wall did not have a regular shape but rather a polygonal one. Despite the fact that numerous new data have been acquired, the definition of a general plan is still made difficult by the poor state of preservation of the structures still in place along the Eastern and Northern side of the hill, and by the peculiar shape of the temenos walls.

The top surface of the walls in area 4 has been cleaned in order to define with a higher degree of precision the relation between the temple area and the lower urban grid. Although the structures' state of preservation is lacking, it was nonetheless possible to identify the dense grid of intertwined rooms connoting the lower settlement. Unfortunately, none of the streets that must have been connecting the dwelling region with the temple have been detected yet.

Three new streets, two of which are oriented East/West, and the third one North/South, became visible after the cleaning of the sector immediately South/South-East of area 4. These streets probably defined the eastern corner of an *insula* where at least one major dwelling characterized by fine stucco decorations, niches, and large pilasters is visible.

The updating of the general plan of the site reached the area South/East of the so-called 'Pyramid'. Here, the profile of some dried-out channels, and the outline of a pottery kiln and its dump have been surveyed. During this survey, several burials partly damaged by the water channels have been identified as well. Ten of them are clearly visible and still preserved in their structures.

The topographical work of the season was also aimed at the collaboration with the different excavation areas, mainly with the daily update of the planimetries and the plotting of the most relevant findings with the system of UTM coordinates.

In area 2 and area 4 ground photogrammetry has implemented the knowledge of the extant archeological situations. As for area 4, the ground photogrammetry involved the shooting of the North/West stretch of the southern side of the temenos wall for about 23 meter in length. As for area 2, photographs of the painted plaster decorations in room 1, of the inscriptions on the East and West walls and of the complex ceiling collapse, both in room 15, will provide the basis for the proper photogrammetric restitution.

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