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Dendera: Interim Communiqué

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DENDERA

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The team from the Polish Center is part of a French-Polish research project carried out in ancient Tentyris (Dendera) in Upper Egypt. Work started in 1999 following a geophysical survey in 1998 and has been continued annually for the past few seasons,¹⁾ concentrating in particular on the urban district east of the temple of Hathor and nearby the so-called Eastern temple.²⁾

1) The joint team from the Institut Francais d'Archaeologie Orientale and the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University in Cairo comprised: in the 2000 season (February) – Dr. François Leclère, Mrs. Sylvie Marchand, Prof. Adam Łukaszewicz, Dr. Hanna Szymańska; in the 2001 season (February) – Dr. François Leclère, Mrs. Sylvie Marchand, Prof. Adam Łukaszewicz, Dr. Tomasz Scholl, Ms Joanna Borowska; in the 2002 season (February) – Dr. François Leclère, Mrs. Sylvie Marchand, Ms Nadine Moeller, Ms Claire Newton, Prof. Adam Łukaszewicz, Ms Joanna Borowska, Ms Magdalena Gorzkowska. The IFAO kindly provided accommodations in the French dig house at Dendera.

2) The first communiqué appeared in *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 149-152.

Testing on the axis of the eastern *dromos* leading from the Hathor temple to the Eastern temple, where a mound of stone blocks and debris undoubtedly from some cult building is to be seen, revealed little of consequence. Hence the work was moved to the urban district situated to the east of the temple. Remains of domestic architecture of the First Intermediate Period and Roman times were uncovered.

The Roman-period ruins were located nearer the Hathor precinct and included two wells of baked brick and stone debris from the destruction of a sacral building of the 1st century AD. The blocks were covered with relief decoration and hieroglyphs, which corresponded in iconographic repertoire and textual content to the decoration of the main temple. Small finds from this chronological horizon included some Hellenistic and Roman terracotta figurines and a discouraging few (just two) more or less complete Greek ostraca.

The putative bakery of the First Intermediate Period discovered during the first season has duly been confirmed in its function.³⁾ The ceramic assemblage is interesting, especially the storage containers and numerous forms for baking bread, both the slender conical types and the flat-bottomed ones that are widened near the base. The building, of which the bakery was part, was enlarged repeatedly. It was also storied to judge by the remains of a staircase.

During the most recent season, in 2002, explorations cleared the main entrance to the building with a stone threshold, a stone-paved vestibule and another mud-brick staircase. Inside, a hearth was found. A silo filled with potsherds of the Twelfth Dynasty, recorded in the western part of the building, presumably reflects a later addition to the complex.

Perhaps of greatest interest were the remains of a "garden" adjoining the structure. It appears to have consisted of square "plots" where plants (trees ?) had been grown. Palaeobotanical research⁴⁾ on charred vegetal remains from the hearth inside the bakery led to the identification of several kinds of grain, a variety of *graminaceae* and flowers, including daisies. Faunal remains from the area have been identified as belonging to domestic animals.

The excavations at Dendera are providing insight into urban architecture of Pharaonic Egypt of which there are precious few testimonials. The complex, which will continue to be excavated in the coming seasons, originated sometime in late Old Kingdom times and functioned through the First Intermediate Period and into the Middle Kingdom. Detailed studies of the archaeological and architectural evidence should substantiate the ongoing discussion on the subject.⁵⁾

3) Parallels include the bakery excavated by a French expedition at Balat in Dakhlah Oasis and the bakery from the Old Kingdom discovered by M. Lehner in Giza in 1991.

4) Carried out by Claire Newton of the University of Montpellier.

5) On the Pharaonic origins of Dendera, cf. W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Dendereh* 1898 (London 1900); more recently, R.A. Slater, *The Archaeology of Denderah in the First Intermediate Period*, University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. (Ann Arbor 1974); B.J. Kemp, "The location of the early town at Dendera", *MDAIK* 41 (1985), 89-98.