PRELIMINARY REPORT. EXCAVATIONS IN HERAKLEOPOLIS MAGNA (Ihnasya el Medina, Beni Suef). Season 2014

by **M. Carmen Pérez Die**

and

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INTRODUCTION

The latest campaign of excavations in Herakleopolis Magna (Ihnasya el Medina, Beni Suef) took place from 14 April to 6 May 2014. This work was funded by the Ministery of Education and Culture. The project was carried out in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy in Cairo and with the help of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (Beni Suef delegation) and forms part of the scientific activities of the Egyptian Department of the National Archaeological Museum in collaboration with the Conservation Department.

The team was formed by:

M. Carmen Pérez Die, Director of the Excavation,
Gema Garrido, Archaeologist
José Javier Martínez, Archaeologist and Egyptologist,
Antonio Guio, Archaeologist and Draughtsman
Mª Antonia Moreno, Restorer
Sayed Kamal Nadi, Walid Mohamedin, Sayed Kamal Abdel Rasel, y Korani, Inspectors of the Antiquities Service of Beni Suef.
Reis Gamal and his team from Luxor and 40 workers from Ehnasya el Medina site.
Photos: M. Carmen Perez Die, Gema Garrido, Jose Javier Martinez, Antonia Moreno

The work carried out during this campaign was focused mainly on **HERYSHEF TEMPLE:**

The work in 2014 was undertaken in April – May, which proved more problematic than other years, due to the considerable quantity of water table present in the Temple of Heryshef, as a result of the opening of the Aswan Dam and therefore of the sluices and irrigation dykes in the area of Herakleopolis Magna which is completely

agricultural. On arrival at the site we found the monument flooded, with some zones completely inaccessible, such as the hypostyle hall and the sanctuary, and with nearly all the precincts covered with vegetation formed by tall stands of reeds (*Arundo donax.* Family :*Poaceae*). Thus, cleaning work had to be carried out at the start of the campaign to facilitate the access and mobility of the workers and machinery and improve visibility of the work zones

Heryshef Temple. Beginning of 2014 season and cleaning

It should be noted that the desiccation project started by the SCA has not yet been completed. The water in this season was extracted by water tractors

Extraction of water table in the Courtyard of the Temple

I. A EXCAVATION

The main aim was to excavate the SE area of the courtyard to define the limits of of Heryshef Temple in its East sector. The whole eastern zone was covered with earth and pottery fragments from earlier excavations, so that when these were partly removed we were able to have a clearer view of the monument.

Grid squares 31 and 39

Limited by the E profile. Part of the paving of the courtyard is located here which had not been previously discovered. This was uncovered, revealing 11 slabs of large dimensions.

Paving of the Courtyard

Grid squares 16 and 173

These were excavated with artificial levels collecting the most significant pottery fragments. The layers are formed by more or less uniform fills sloping to the W: abundant earth and pottery fragments, a small white layer composed of small fragments of rock and another which contains fragments of pottery vessels.

Square 16

In square 173, part of a rectangular adobe chamber roofed with a vault was found. Below the vault a very large pottery vessel was conserved. We have only explored one end of this possible chamber, as the rest has not yet been excavated.

Square 173

Grid squares 170-167-156-157-145-146

Here, squares 170 and 167 were excavated first, finding late chronology pottery fragments, notably small vases and Late Roman amphora 7 walls, an oil lamp decorated with a herringbone pattern on the side and an offering or votive plaque of a footprint these are very common in Roman chronology and are normally dedicated to a god, very often to Isis.

Inn 156, the contiguous square to the S, a brick wall was found from the Roman Period but it could not be defined as it continued under square 157 where the excavation is not complete

Square 156

Only a few centimetres of square 145 could be excavated as the access path cuts through part of it and for the moment priority was given to its use. Very abundant materials are present at the different levels. Most may fit into a late Roman chronology and the great majority of the pottery vessels are type LRA 7 (Late Roman amphora 7). These materials present the same typology and chronology independently of the different zones and levels at which they have appeared, indicating that these strata have been disturbed. All the materials collected in this excavation are therefore de-contextualised and can only provide incomplete or partial data.

I B. RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE

The project to restore the Temple of Heryshef started three years ago. The most important has been to safeguard as far as possible all the constructive elements which form the architecture of the building, protect them from climatic alterations, especially from the fluctuations in the water level, the ground salts and humidity. In the case of Herakleopolis Magna, as well as the destruction of the Temple and the displacement or removal of many of its stone elements, as can be seen from the documentation and publications of Petrie[1], there is also the constant presence of water and humidity in the whole area of the Temple and its surroundings, as already mentioned above.

The priority in the restoration work is to **move, relocate and protect** the stone blocks which form part of the construction or decoration of the Temple; the overall criterion followed here is known as *anastilosis*, a technique used to reconstruct a building from its original elements. The aim of recovering, at last partly, the original appearance of the Temple is gradually being achieved, but various campaigns will be needed to carry out this restoration and complete it fully. In 2014 Campaign we worked only on the Relocation and definitive or provisional installation of some stone blocks in the Portico, the base of red granite and some architraves.

The moving and relocation of the stone blocks were facilitated by the collaboration of a team of specialists who work in Luxor, under the direction of the *raiss* Gamal Mahmoud Ahmed el Gasap, who provided the means and expertise needed to carry out these tasks. The processes involved are documented in the relevant files, reports, photography and videos.

The materials used in the reinforcements and constructions to support and stabilize the great blocks of stone were those established by the SCA criteria; to this end the collaboration of the technical experts from the SCA[2] has been fundamental when

[1] W. M. Petrie: 1905. Petrie's publication includes photos showing the great quantity of blocks, columns, capitals, architraves, etc. which existed at the time when the Temple was excavated, but which have now disappeared from their original location, with some conserved in various museums outside Egypt. However, the current location of most of these is unknown.

[2] The Inspector for Restoration was Sayed Kamal, whom we would like to thank for his collaboration and efforts to facilitate the work of the team. We would also like to thank Mr

carrying out the tasks of cleaning, consolidation, reintegration of the material and chromatics of the original and additional materials.

The Methodology used was: Preparation, clearing of work areas and testing of mortars and hydraulic fill materials for the new supporting structures; Making new bases to support the blocks, with waste limestone fragments of different sizes, blocks of white building stone and mortars with mixtures of white cement, crushed limestone dust and natural pigments. Finally a mortar was chosen composed of 1 part white cement, 2 parts finely ground limestone dust and 0´5 % of burnt sienna, yellow ochre and raw umber pigments.

We present one exemple of work in the **WEST LATERAL PORTICO**
Blocks affected : Nº 14, 15, 16A-16B. These were replaced in their original position.
Situation in 2013:

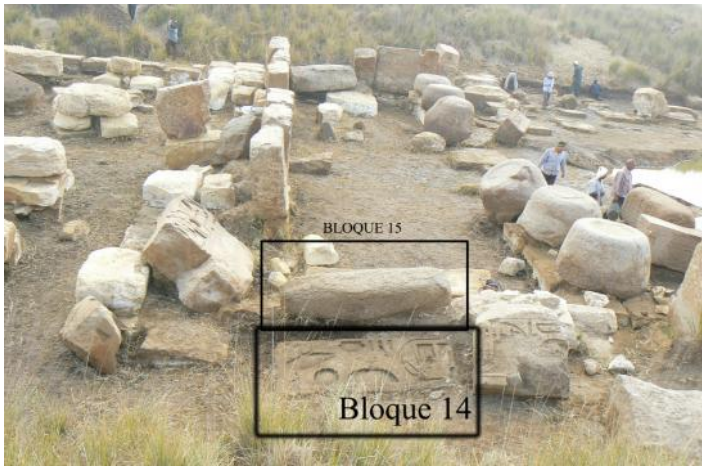
Block nº 14

This is half-buried in mud with only the inscription visible; this quartzite block is rectangular and presents thick layers of dried mud and calcareous concretions. To install it on top of block 15 it must be lifted out of the mud.

Block nº 15:

This is granite and may have been re-used; it is related to nº 14, for which it served as the base. Its current state of conservation is delicate as the stone has disintegrated on all sides with the resulting considerable loss of volume. In the coming campaign it will have to be consolidated, moved slightly forward and turned to position it horizontally, so that the inscription conserved on it can be seen.

Korani, restorer from the Ministry of State for Antiquities, for his criteria and opinions on the actions undertaken.



Block 14 and 15 in 2013

Action taken in 2014:

In the immediate vicinity of blocks 14 and 15 there is a hollow in the ground with a considerable accumulation of water; this year we found this zone very muddy and with abundant vegetation and refuse. To fill in this hole and before building a supporting wall for the ashlars of the W lateral portico, this zone was filled with a mixture of small and medium size pebbles, mud and sand to make the ground uniformly horizontal, so that it could be used as support for the architectonic complex. This hydraulic mortar, used in Egypt in other archaeological sites with similar problems of humidity, obtained a type of ground which provides strength and uniformity for the sub-soil

Fig. 33

Fabrication of hidraulic mortar

Block nº 14:

This block was removed from the mud, raised up and placed on ashlar nº 15. A supporting base had previously been prepared with brick and cement, and wooden wedges were inserted between the two stones to allow the aeration of the whole group.

Block nº 15**:**

The state of conservation of this block is delicate, with abundant loss of compositional material. It was turned over and placed on a similar base to those described above and nº 14 was placed on top of it; the zones where there were no points of union between the two ashlars were consolidated and filled with small fragments of limestone, small pebbles, wood and mortar, also used to render the exterior

Blocks 14 and 15 recolocated in 2014

Block 16A-16B:

In 2013 both was broken and fallen down

Blocks 16 A and B in 2013

The movement and relocation of the two fragments which form this block were carried out in a similar way to the rest. To place it at its original height in line with nº 14 which conserves hieroglyphic inscriptions required the provision of a supporting base to protect it from humidity. This support base is the continuation of the base corresponding to blocks nº 14 and 15. All the bloscks were in the same line

Blocs 16 A and B recolocated in 2014

Due to the enormous weight, to the instability of the zone behind it and to avoid future movements or displacements, vertical walls had to be built to act as buttresses to support and reinforce the inferior and posterior part of the whole group ; the system of production and the materials used were similar to that of the rest of the support walls of the portico.

West lateral portico in 2014. Front and back

Other works ON RESTORATION

by Reis Gamal el Gasap and his Team from
Luxor

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DSC_0096.jpg

DSC_0099.jpg

DSC_0110.jpg

DSC_0365.jpg

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Aereal photograph. End of season