

Ain el-Gedida 2009 Study Season

SCA Report

The 2009 study season at the site of Ain el-Gedida (Dakhleh Oasis Project site no. 31/405-N3-1) was carried out from 27 January to 5 February 2009 by a team sponsored by New York University, under the direction of Professor Roger Bagnall.

The DOP conducted a preliminary survey of the site in 1980, and the local Coptic and Islamic Inspectorate carried out three seasons of excavation between 1993 and 1995, under the direction of Ahmed Salem and Kamel Bayumi. The southern part of Mound I was the main object of archaeological investigation. Excavation was resumed in 2006 and continued until 2008, focusing on the northern half of the main hill and revealing several structures, among which were a church complex and a ceramic workshop.

The staff of the 2009 mission consisted of Prof. Roger Bagnall, project director in cooperation with Ahmed Salem; Nicola Aravecchia, archaeological field director; Delphine Dixneux, ceramicist; Fabrizio Pavia and Silvia Maggioni, topographers. The inspector was Sahar Habeb Farid of the local Coptic and Islamic Inspectorate.

An intensive work of documentation was carried out in the northern half of Mound I, involving most rooms that were excavated between 2006 and 2008 and several others that were surveyed since 2006 (pl. 1). Measurements of several features were taken and checked with the earlier records; new photographs were taken and sketches were drawn (pl. 2). Furthermore, notes were written on the architectural relations of some walls, with the aim of clarifying the architectural development of the rooms they belonged to.

Further documentation involved Area A in the south half of Mound I, which was the object of investigation by the SCA in the mid-1990s. Measurements were taken of architectural features, which were also described and photographed (pl. 3). All rooms, especially the relationships among its features and the patterns of access from one space

to the other, were checked in the field and compared with all data previously recorded on the topographical map.

All notes, measurements, and photographs taken in the field in 2009 were then processed and added to the database, which contains a full record of the documentation pertaining to the site and its archaeological investigation.

The architectural features that were visible above ground level on Mounds II-IV, to the south of the main hill, were cleaned and surveyed by the topographers with the help of a total station. The data were downloaded and processed in CAD and an updated topographical map was created for the entire site (pls. 4-5). Photographs were also taken of all visible remains (pls. 6-7).

The topographical survey revealed the existence, on Mound II, of several mud-brick buildings and a street oriented NW-SE. These structures, in most cases completely filled with windblown sand, showed a rather compact -and complex- organization of space, following a pattern already identified on Mound I. Also, the construction technique and the material of the surveyed architectural features (mostly walls laid in English bond, with grey-brown mud-bricks of standard size and rich in organic inclusions), seems to be quite similar to those investigated on the main hill.

Very little was identified on Mound III above ground level. Small, incomplete sections of mud-brick walls were noticed, making it hard to discern the layout of any structure on the mound without excavation. As noticed with regard to Mound II, the material and the construction technique used on Mound III correspond to those employed on the main hill and surrounding mounds.

Several structures were mapped on Mound IV. Most of the rooms were found almost completely filled with sand, but their layout could be identified, revealing a complex network of spaces often interconnected among them. On some of the walls remains of mud plaster and white wash were found. Parts of the vaults, originally covering at least

some of the rooms, were preserved. One rectangular room, with traces of plaster and a rounded niche, was found partially empty, possibly a test excavation carried out by the Egyptian team in the 1990s.

Furthermore, photographs were taken, with an infra-red camera, of all ostraka found during the 2006-2008 excavations and kept in the magazines of the local SCA inspectorate. The examination of the images allowed us to gather new, significant pieces of information on the content of several ostraka.

The ceramicist continued the study of the complete vessels and the large amount of pottery fragments that were found and collected during the 2008 excavation season. The diagnostics were drawn, photographed, and recorded and the general catalogue of forms and fabrics from Ain el-Gedida was updated.

The systematic study of all documentation from the 2006-2008 seasons, including the small finds, has continued in 2009 and its results will be published in collaboration with the SCA.

Prof. Roger Bagnall
Project Director

Nicola Aravecchia
Archaeological Field Director

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PLATES

Mound I (A-B)



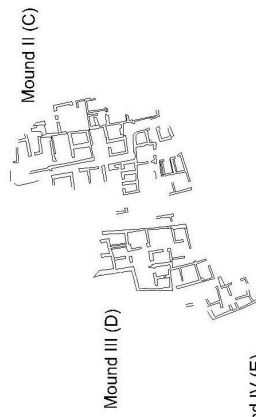
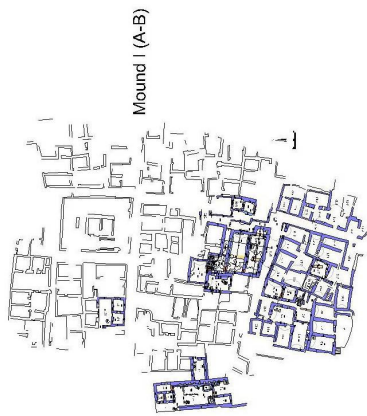
Plate 1: map of Mound I.



Plate 2: view of features visible above ground at the northern end of Mound I (to NE).



Plate 3: view of staircase in room A32 (to W).



Mound III (D)

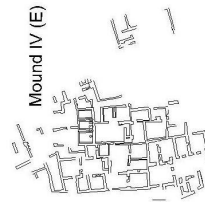


Plate 4: updated site map.

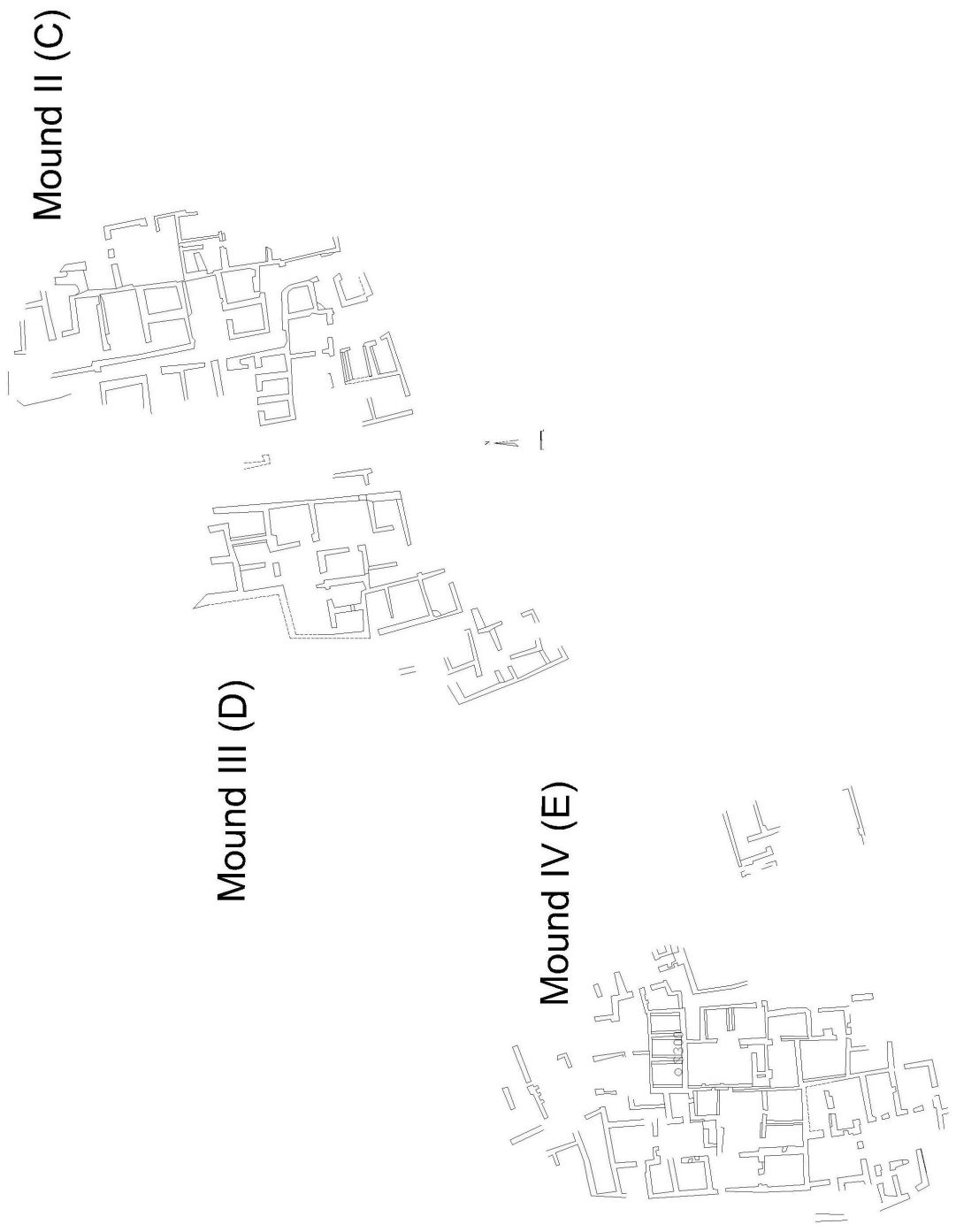


Plate 5: updated map of Mounds II-IV.



Plate 6: view of Mound II (to SW).



Plate 7: view of Mound IV to (SW).