

New York University

Amheida / Trimithis 2014 season report

Directed by Roger S. Bagnall

Excavations at Amheida for 2014 began on January 9 and ended on February 13. The team consisted of Roger S. Bagnall (director, papyrologist); Paola Davoli (archaeological field director); Olaf Kaper (associate director for Egyptology); Roberta Casagrande-Kim and Silvia Prell (senior archaeologists); Valentina Liuzzi, Borna Scognamiglio, Brooke Norton (archaeologists); Pascale Ballet, Clementina Caputo, Julie Marchand, Irene Soto (ceramicists); Marina Nuovo (registrars); Bruno Bazzani (database management and computer operations); Raffaella Cribiore (Papyrologist); Rodney Ast (papyrologist and archaeologist); Thomas Faucher (numismatist); Rikst Dieuwke Ponjee (Egyptologist); Jean Paul Bravard (Geomorphologist); Christopher Kleihege (Photographer); Dorothea Schulz (paintings conservator and artist); Mohamed Ahmed Sayed Mustafa and Mahmoud Samir Hussein, Azzaz Nasr Mohamed, Mohammed Hassan Khedr (conservators); Ashraf Barakat (assistant to the director); Gaber Murad (house manager). The MSA inspector was Hosny Mohamed Bashendi Said.

The main body of work took place in two areas, Area 2.2 (Building 6, the large pillared hall and adjacent rooms), and Area 4.1 (the Temple of Thoth). Besides the excavation, work continued on the arrangement of the decorated blocks from the temple in the magazine built for that purpose (see report on Egyptian epigraphy); on the decoration of the replica of the House of Serenos (Building 1) (see separate report below); and on the conservation and study of objects found in previous seasons, particularly the large hoard of tetradrachms excavated in 2012, on which substantial progress was made. In addition, substantial work was done on two volumes of the final publication *Amheida* and on a book for a general audience.

Area 2.2: Building 6

Paola Davoli, Silvia Prell

The excavation continued in the area east of the main pillared hall (R24), where a round room-pool (R39) was found in the 2013 season. The investigated area extends for about 18.60 m North-South and 10.50 m East-West and it is confined by mud brick walls. All the walls and rooms found are made in baked bricks and have been heavily spoliated in the past to recover good building material for new buildings. There is no evidence to date this destruction phase. The remains were covered by a thick layer of rubble deriving from the demolition and by about 2 m of wind blown sand.

The kinds of rooms and features found clearly indicate that they were parts of a *thermae* building (bathhouse) of Roman typology, modified in the 4th century.

In the center of the area is a room with a hypocaust below the floor (R40) (4.50 x 4.70 m). The floor and the room have disappeared, and only some of the pillars sustaining the former floor survived. This underground room served as a passage for hot air that heated the upper room. Its floor and walls are all blackened by soot. This hypocaust is connected to the south with a second one (R42, 4.45 x 4.75 m) by means of five channels covered by vaults. Also in this case, the room above the hypocaust has been demolished, only two of the channels still showing their original vault, and only a small part of a single bath-tub, oriented north-south, survived from the above floor. It was probably provided with water manually. This room was thus heated by means of hot air below floor and was a dry hot room with a bath-tub. It was connected with the main pillared room R24 through R32. This last room (2.50 x 2.50 m) is the best preserved one, up to a height of about 3 meters. It was covered by a barrel vault. A reused sandstone lintel with a scene representing seven goddesses was used as a lintel on the door leading to R24. For security reasons the lintel has been removed and

transferred to the blockhouse on site. Another reused stela with the representation of the god Seth was found in the rubble in R42 (for both see below in the report of O. Kaper on epigraphy).

R32 was the only passage from R24 –and the west dry area of Building 6– to its east side, in which bathing took place. North of this room is a pool (R38) already excavated in 2013. Its walls have been badly demolished, and the central pool is no longer measurable. This pool probably opened toward R24 but was perhaps accessed from R40. The water was probably hot and flowed into it from a pipe in the north wall. It was probably heated in a boiler originally located in R41. Water flowed out through a sewer channel located at a lower level in the north wall and connected with the *latrina* R33.

The round room R39 is a central feature in the bath: it was a pool with a surrounding bench on the inside, in which water entered from a pipe from the south and flowed out by means of a pipe to the East. The entrance to this room is on the west, and it was connected with R40 by means of 4 steps descending into R39, nowadays completely cut out. Both rooms R40 and R42 were probably dry, as the suspended floor (*suspensura*) was too thin (ca. 8 cm thick) to support water.

The furnace to heat air and water was probably located to the north or below R41. This area has not been fully excavated, but a great quantity of ash has been reached. The lower chamber in R41 is connected with the hypocaust R40 by means of two vaulted channels.

All of Building 6 can be considered as the last phase of the Roman *thermae* already found to the south below B5 and B1. It was abandoned during restoration work: the pillars of the two hypocausts were restored as well as the boiler room, in which the new white mortar has never been smoothed. A batch of that mortar was left on the floor of R42. Also the pillared hall R24 was under restoration as well as the floor in R30. The mosaic tesserae found

in R30 in 2012 were prepared and never used. This is probably the reason for the lack of objects found in the building.

Outside the bathhouse, to the south, there was a closed alley used as dump by Serenos' family (see below for a report on the ostraka). Below this dump, other walls and floors from the *thermae* were demolished in antiquity.

Area 4.1: Temple area

Paola Davoli, Roberta Casagrande-Kim

The 2014 excavations on the temple hill focused once again on squares AR48 (10x10 meters) and AR49 (10x10 meters), as the investigation of the features and stratigraphic layers was only partially completed during the 2013 season. Digging continued in four pits already uncovered in 2013 (F114, F122, F123, and F124) and in another nine newly discovered ones (F132, F133, F135, F136, F137, F138, F145, F147, and F148). During the 2014 season, with the exception of F132, F136, and F148, where portions of the fills at the lower elevations were left untouched, all pits were entirely excavated to reach their bottoms. Moreover, at the northwestern corner of square AR48 the eastern edge of another pit (F152) was identified, extending further to the west in square AS48. This pit was not excavated.

The pits already dug during the 2013 season were cleaned from the natural windblown sand to reach the layers of their fills. For the newly uncovered ones the same stratigraphic unit number was assigned for the surface layer as in 2013 (DSU 189). This layer is characterized by wind blown sand, pottery sherds, medium and small fragments of temple blocks, and fragmentary grinding stones, consistent with what has been observed during the previous seasons. The upper edges, interfaces, and bottoms of the pits are also consistent with those of pits previously excavated in other squares. They are mostly cut in a series of roughly horizontal layers alternating clay rich soil, ash strata mixed with pottery sherds, and dark

brown soils with very numerous lime inclusions. All pits are filled by layers of sand and complete or fragmentary temple blocks. The blocks are either concentrated toward the bottom of the pit (as in pit F138) or arranged in clusters sloping down from the top toward the bottom (as in pit F148), maintaining the overall orientation of the moment when they first collapsed inside.

Excavations resumed also at pit F124, where in 2013 the remaining evidence of what has been interpreted as the north-south oriented back wall of the temple was discovered. Below a rather thin layer of sand, numerous temple blocks were uncovered, arranged in three separate clusters. Among these blocks were also found a large sized stela of Seti II and its pedestal (FN10 and FN46). The cluster of blocks closer to the pit's bottom was covered by a layer of medium sized mudbrick debris, suggesting that a nearby wall collapsed sometime after these blocks fell inside. Once this pit and the neighboring one F114 were emptied, traces of two preexistent floors (F150 and F155) and two sets of walls (F134 and F154 oriented east-west in pit F124, and F151 and F153 forming the northwestern corner of a room in pit F114) revealed the presence, possibly during the Second Intermediate Period (as confirmed by ceramic evidence), of at least two rooms pertinent to two different and consecutive phases of habitation in the area. This dating is consistent with the data collected in the 2012 and 2013 seasons. In general, the evidence collected from the brickwork of the remaining walls confirms the presence of at least four phases of construction predating the Roman period temple.

In pit F138, the presence of five complete and fragmentary column drums, similar to those found in pit F124 in 2013, confirms the presence of columns along the southeastern quadrant of square AR48.

In square AR49 new measurements were taken for kiln F125. It was ascertained that the kiln is not semicircular in shape, as originally supposed, but rather rectangular, with traces of

three of its perimetral walls still in situ. The kiln was possibly used for baking bread, as attested by the very numerous fragmentary and complete ceramic single, double, and tubular bread molds in the surrounding pits' interfaces.

The blocks found and removed in this season numbered about 500, of which 121 were decorated (see the section on Egyptian epigraphy).

Egyptian epigraphy and temple decoration

Olaf E. Kaper

In total 121 building blocks and fragments with relief decoration were found in the temple area, 4.1, and two blocks with relief were found reused in building B6. All fragments were cleaned, recorded, photographed and drawn. There are now some 1400 blocks in the storage facility on site, which were arranged chronologically in the course of this season, and the plans for the display of reconstructed scenes were updated.

Most blocks found in this season are from the temple of Amasis, while only two blocks are Roman, a few are of the Persian period, and two blocks date to the New Kingdom. The reliefs included three previously unknown names of temple builders at Amheida: Seti II, Ramesses IX and Pedubastis III. In addition, even though Hadrian's name has not been found, a part of a large bark stand from the Roman period temple may be ascribed to his reign because of a parallel at Deir el-Hagar. It depicts the king supporting the sky on the front of the stand, which was once gilded.

Two stelae from the temple were found; one appeared in the excavations in B6; the lower half of this had been found previously in 2004 on the slope of the temple hill. It is an image of Seth from the Ptolemaic or early Roman period, depicting the god with wings and a spear, with which he defeats the serpent Apophis at his feet. The stela provides evidence for a

debate about this god, because the name written in the hieroglyphic legend with the god is that of Harendotes (Horus).

The second stela is dated to the reign of Seti II (19th Dynasty) and is carved with four offering scenes to the individual gods Thoth, Horus, Seshat and an unidentified male divinity. At the bottom of the stela is a painted inscription of four lines, which records building works at the temple. This inscription is largely destroyed by the numerous gouges made by pilgrims to the temple, who were eager to obtain some powder from the sandstone stela. The powder was ascribed magical properties, a practice attested at many temples throughout Egypt. The stela had been reused as a building stone in the Roman period temple.

Another fragment of relief from the New Kingdom is dated to Ramesses IX, constituting the first occurrence of his name in the oases. A new royal name was also found dating from the Late Period. Three blocks of a gateway erected by king Petubastis III were found, joining two blocks found in previous seasons. The reliefs now contain four of the five names of this Pharaoh, who was leading an insurgency against Persian occupation in the reign of Cambyses and perhaps into that of Darius I.

Many blocks join with others and enable scenes to be reconstructed. The reconstruction of one wall of the Amasis temple in particular, probably its façade, has been complemented by blocks from every part, including its central doorway. The wall to the right of the doorway included an image of Seth that was larger than life-size, and which is comparable to the image found on the stela from B6 mentioned above. The name of Seth was found inscribed upon this image, and several demotic graffiti attest to its popularity with the public.

The excavations in B6 have provided another temple relief in the form of a stone lintel set in a doorway made of baked bricks; this was a reused block from the temple. The lintel depicts seven goddesses in two symmetrical scenes, to the left of which is the goddess Nekhbet, the tutelary goddess of Upper Egypt. The right end of the scene is broken off, and

would probably have contained Wadjet, the goddess of Lower Egypt. There is no king mentioned in its decoration, but the lintel may date from the Third Intermediate Period (Libyan Period), because of its relief style and because it does not fit with the relief work of the Late Period from the temple that we now know so well.

The lower half of a Horus stela was found in area 4.1; it is remarkable because it does not depict crocodiles, which are consistently included on such stelae in the Nile Valley.

Ostraka

Rodney Ast and Roger S. Bagnall

The excavations in 2014 uncovered about 60 ostraka, of which two-thirds were Greek and one-third Demotic or hieratic, a higher percentage of the latter than in any earlier season. Area 4 produced mainly Egyptian-language texts, while the Greek ones came almost entirely from Area 2.2. The bulk of the Greek texts in fact came from a single stratigraphic unit, DSU 160, a dump with a close connection to individuals already known from texts found in B1, the house of Serenos. Because our Demotist was not in the field this year, the Egyptian texts have not yet been studied.

Document types among the Greek texts were largely those well known from earlier seasons: a few well tags, and many more small memoranda, labels, orders, and accounts. Few of these are particularly notable, but one receipt in the handwriting of Serenos (inv. 16494) stood out both for his involvement and for the large amount of hay (660 bundles) mentioned. One account mentioned a distribution of wine to the *praepositus*, the commander of the garrison (inv. 16583). An account of wine (inv. 16596) included 6 *keramia* (about 55 liters) given to “father Ammonios,” probably a religious figure and attested in another ostrakon; right above his name is a distribution “for Sunday”, i. e., presumably for use in church services. A list of names that includes Faustianus, presumably the important landlord resident

in Hibis for whose estates the Kellis Agricultural Account Book was drawn up, also mentions men named Synesios and Panaitios (inv. 16600). The well-known Nikokles signs a receipt for barley given to Ninos (inv. 16581). In general, the presence of a number of names of men from Serenos's circle helps to give a better sense of the interconnections of that circle.

The reconstruction of Serenos' house

Dorothea Schulz

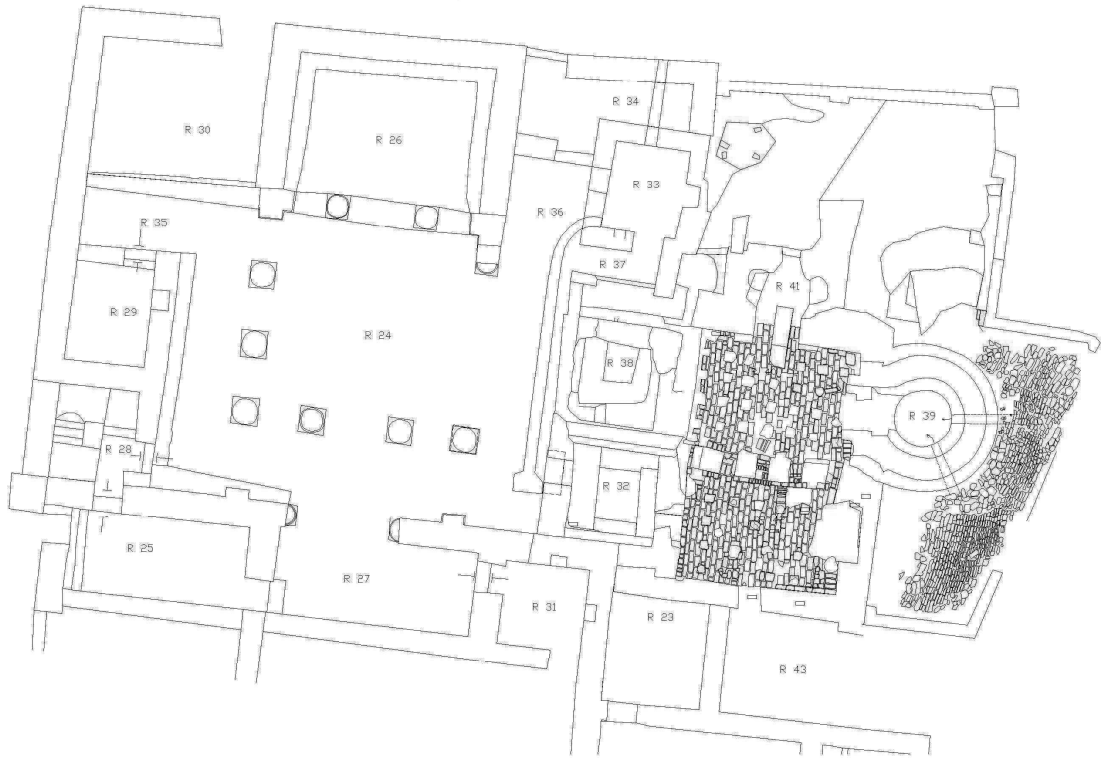
This season the decoration of the domed room in the reconstructed house of Serenos was completed. After the last details of the dome were finished, the scaffolding could be removed and work could start on the figurative scenes. To reconstruct them as faithfully as possible, photographs of the original paintings were projected on the walls and traced with pencil. The work then continued to follow the steps of the original painters: a sketch in red paint was done first, and then the figures were colored. This was done while constantly checking the photographs of the original.

Small damages and cracks of the original could be filled in and the colors could be reconstructed to their former beauty (green for instance changes to gray over time). Some of the scenes could even be completed. A nice example is the second register of the east wall, where the horse and the figures could be completed using parallels found on fragments from the house. By decorating the doorjambs the decoration of the domed room is finished. Everything that was still on the walls of the original house at the time of first discovery in 1979 is now present in the reconstruction.

In a future season, after more research, it may be possible to complete the decoration even further by reconstructing more scenes from the numerous fragments found in the house.



AMHEIDA 2014
AREA 2,2
BUILDING 6

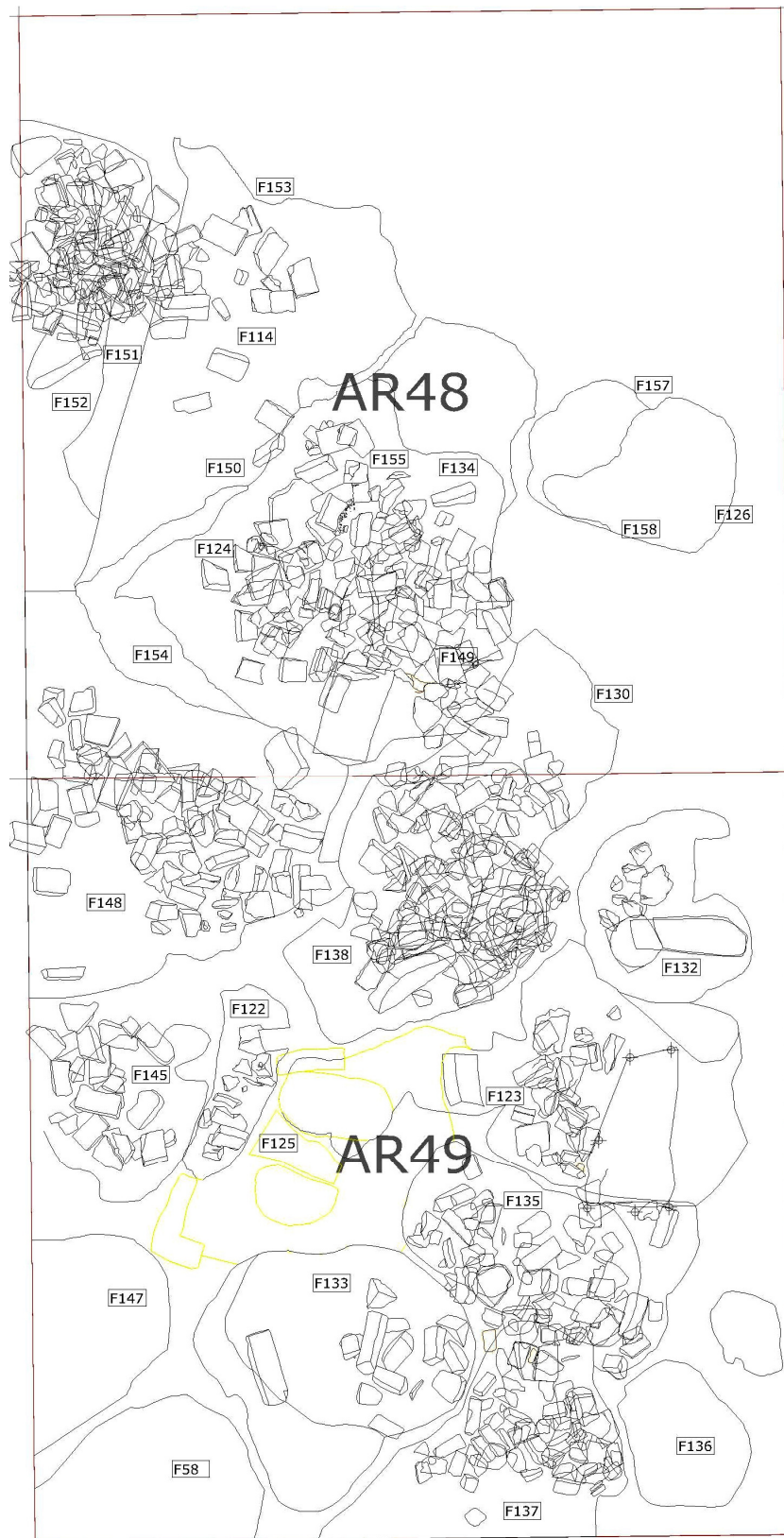




Building 6 in area 2.2: Roman bath



Hypocaust in Building 6 (area 2.2)



The excavated squares in area 4.1



Temple area 4.1: pits dug by sebbakhin



Stela of Seti II from area 4.1



Stela of Seth from Building 6



The Banquet scene: the original and the replica



The domed room in the replica of Serenos' house