

An Oasis City

1. Trimithis: The city and its gods

[opening slide]

The subject of these three lectures is a city in a part of the western desert of Egypt that in ancient times was considered the western or Inner part of the Great Oasis and is today the Dakhla Oasis. Then the city was called Trimithis; today the site is called Amheida. It has been the subject of a field project that I have directed during the past ten years, with seven years of excavation to date. We owe almost all of our knowledge of Trimithis to archaeology and to documents discovered through excavation, both at the site itself and from the work of the Dakhleh Oasis Project at Kellis, the archaeological site of Ismant el-Kharab, since 1986.

The decision to begin a field project at Amheida had multiple reasons. Among them was a sense, shared with some other papyrologists, and eloquently articulated by Claudio Gallazzi in 1992 at the Copenhagen congress of papyrology, that our generation might be the last one with significant opportunities to find ancient texts written in ink on papyrus, pottery, and wood in Egypt, where settlement expansion and the rising ground-water levels that are the result of the High Dam and agricultural development and population growth more generally are rapidly destroying the dry conditions that preserved hundreds of thousands of papyri and ostraka until the last century. Another motive was a more general assessment that there are few high-quality sustained projects in the archaeology of Graeco-Roman Egypt, especially linking texts to their archaeological contexts, and more would be beneficial to the development of a more archaeologically grounded history of this society; a third motive was the need for Columbia

University, where I was then teaching, to have a means for teaching archaeological fieldwork methods to its students.

The choice of a site came more specifically from a combination of opportunity and my own research interests. Editing the *Kellis Agricultural Account Book* in the mid-1990s had brought me for the first time to the Dakhla oasis. **[map, image 2]** This region is located about 850 km by road from Cairo, and nearly 500 km from the area of Luxor in the Nile Valley; it is thus deep into the western desert. Like the other major oases of Egypt, Dakhla is a depression in the desert plateau **[image 3]**, bounded by a high scarp on its north. **[image 4]** Amheida is located in the northwestern part of this oasis and for most of antiquity was the dominant town of this part of the oasis, second overall only to the ancient and modern capital of the oasis, Mothis or Mut. **[map, image 5]**. The most important town of medieval, Ottoman, and modern northwestern Dakhla, the wonderful Islamic mud-brick settlement of El-Qasr, lies a few kilometers away from Amheida and was part of its territory in antiquity. **[image 6]**

We know quite a lot about this oasis by now, because it has been the object of regional survey for the last three decades by the Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP), directed by Tony Mills, and because there has been for more than twenty years an excavation within the framework of the DOP at ancient Kellis, by an Australian team directed by Colin Hope. **[image 7: large E. church]** At Kellis have been found many papyri, ostraka, and wooden tablets, perhaps most famously its trove of Manichaean literary texts and family letters, but also a rich array of both documents and literary texts. It is from these documents that we get most of the information that we had about Trimithis before our excavations began. For my own scholarly purposes, the fact that Kellis was abandoned around 400, coupled with the concentration of the excavations there on areas belonging to the third to fourth-century occupation of the village, means that its

archaeological and documentary finds have been heavily concentrated in late antiquity, a period to which I was first drawn 35 years ago and continue to find of compelling interest.

The Great Oasis is a distinctive and remarkable part of Egypt. Because of its great distance from the valley, it posed challenges for travel and transportation not otherwise present in a country bound together and given cheap transport by a great river. In the second lecture I shall say more about these geographical constraints. The oasis was nonetheless occupied already in prehistoric times, when underground fossil water came to the surface in artesian springs, the mounds from which are still visible today, **[image 8]** even as the surroundings were turning from savanna into desert in the fourth millennium BC. The oases probably led Egypt into the Neolithic revolution. Dakhla was explored and then occupied by the Egyptians of the valley under the Old Kingdom pharaohs, already to some degree in the 4th dynasty under Khufu, the builder of the Great Pyramid, then most extensively under the 6th dynasty. The French Institute in Cairo began the exploration of the most important Old Kingdom site, Ain Asil near the village of Balat, where the governors had their seat and their tombs **[image 9]**, near the other end of the oasis from Amheida, just before the start of the Dakhleh Oasis Project. Their work has produced important results: a palace, tombs, many striking objects, and written materials—Egyptian texts quite exceptionally written on clay tablets. Amheida and Mut also have Old Kingdom remains, and at Ain el-Gezareen, a few kilometers south of Amheida, a large Old Kingdom site has been partially excavated **[image 10, plan]**.

We know much less about the oasis, and even less about the other part of the Great Oasis, what is today the Kharga oasis, for the next millennium and a half, although there was certainly a New Kingdom temple at Mut, where the sequence is fairly complete, and almost certainly one at Amheida, to judge from surface finds of pottery and the discovery of a hieratic text that must

originate in a New Kingdom temple school. Identifiable habitation sites, however, are not very numerous until they increase exponentially under the Romans. In late antiquity, there was a moderate decline in numbers of sites, followed by a dramatic falling-off of the extent of habitation for quite a few centuries—although never any actual abandonment of the oasis, it must be said. But it is fair to say that at many sites we tend to find the last documents, or the last major horizon of documentation, to be the 360s, the period of the Kellis Account Book [**image 11**], and Kellis itself seems to have been abandoned around 400. Other sites probably continue later, but little has been excavated so far from the last 250 years of Roman rule.

Amheida, with pottery of all periods from Neolithic to Late Roman visible in surface survey, is potentially a diachronic key to the history of the oasis. Mut also has a long range in time, even longer than Amheida's, from early pharaonic into early Islamic, but only a tiny part of that site has survived the building of the modern city over it and concomitant destruction of what little escaped that fate; the site was largely ruined even before the modern expansion of the city. Amheida, in contrast, has never been reoccupied, and only in a few spots—one of them very serious, as we'll see—has treasure-hunting or stone-robbing done any significant damage to the site. We have therefore the possibility of studying a Graeco-Roman Egyptian town site at its full extent, something only rarely possible. That full extent is very considerable, with the Roman city stretched out on a terrace that wraps around the foot of the hill on which stood the temple of Thoth. [**image 12: site plan, and image 13, site plan habitation area**] Including cemetery areas, the site extends over an area of about two and a half by one and a half kilometers. [**images 14-15: overviews**]

In launching the excavation, I saw Amheida not only as the set of opportunities mentioned earlier but also as a chance to look at a number of historical issues of longstanding

interest to me. None of these is limited to late antiquity, but all—at least in my view of Egypt in late antiquity—reach a kind of fulfillment in this period and are thus well approached through Amheida and other sites of its chronological horizon. One is economic growth in antiquity, for which the rapid development of the Dakhla Oasis in the early Roman period and its later virtual collapse raise all sorts of interesting issues relevant to contemporary debates about whether Roman economic growth was only extensive or also intensive—that is, whether it represented growth in per capita GDP. The degree to which the development of remote areas was constrained by the cost of land transportation is an obvious factor here, but many other issues like demand for products, technological change, and legal systems come into play as well. Another area of interest is urbanism in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, particularly the nature of diachronic change. Here in Dakhla if anywhere we should be able to see the Roman impact, the changes from classical to late antique, and a genuine decline, probably based on locally contingent factors. Because Trimithis changed its status from a village to a city, it should be particularly interesting in this respect. Finally, the cultural mix of the oases and its change over time is open to our gaze. An Egyptian village and religious center with many pre-Roman centuries becomes a Roman city. Kellis, which was evidently a new foundation in the Graeco-Roman period and never a city, offers us a handy basis for comparison and contrast close at home. How similar is Trimithis to Kellis? What distinctions between village and city and within the region would we find?

Before proceeding, I must note that like any large archaeological project, Amheida is a collaborative effort. The team is an international one, with members from as many as eleven countries at any moment. I owe much of what you will hear about the site to my colleagues in the project, particularly the archaeological field director, Paola Davoli [**image 16**], our Egyptologist,

Olaf Kaper [**image 17**], and my papyrological colleague Raffaella Cribiore [**image 18**]. For the comparative material concerning the site of Ain el-Gedida, I am indebted to its field director, Nicola Aravecchia [**image 19**]. I shall signal some of their contributions in due course.

The very small amount of documentary material concerning Trimithis known before excavation belonged to the period down to the fourth century, mainly references in papyri and tablets found at Kellis by the excavations there, and stray references from much longer-known material, including the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which tells us that it was the base of the Ala I Quadorum. A tax assessment for the oases in a Leipzig papyrus of the late 360s also comes from much the same period and shows Trimithis as the center of an area with a substantial tax base.

The Roman city of Trimithis stood, as I have said, on a terrace wrapped around a hill [**image 20: plan redux**]. Its layout and appearance did not much resemble the Roman cities with which you are likely to be familiar, built of stone and organized around a regular armature of avenues with public monuments at key junctures. At Trimithis, there is just one broad and straight street identifiable, in the northern part of the town [**image 21**], but most of the others that we can identify are relatively narrow, and they make a lot of dog's legs. We now know that the alleys on either side of the large house that has yielded much of what I shall be presenting were covered with light roofs, or even vaults in some places, just as streets in El-Qasr are to this day. [**image 22**] There too, the basic grid layout, which derives ultimately from the Roman camp, has been tweaked to avoid long, straight routes. [**image 23**] The use of roofing, with carefully placed openings, is designed not only to protect people from the oasis sunshine but also to promote air circulation, causing hot air to rise and cooler air to descend. In the intense heat of the oases during most of the year, with summer temperatures consistently over 40 degrees Celsius, this is highly adaptive architecture.

On the hill once stood the Temple of Thoth, which we can trace back to 800 BC with certainty, to the New Kingdom with probability, and perhaps even earlier. Geophysical investigation has indicated the presence of a large structure on this hill at a depth of 5-10 meters and resembling the Old Kingdom complex at Ain el-Gezareen in shape. **[image 24]** A Ramesside ostrakon, as I have mentioned, indicates the presence of an educational establishment in that period, almost certainly connected with a temple. **[image 25]** I will say more about this in the third lecture. Parts of a Late Period animal necropolis, with Osiris pendants, coffins full of bird bones, and miniature offering bowls also point to a sacred precinct. **[images 26-27-28]**

We were not surprised to find that the temple site was disturbed, because blocks, and even an entire doorway, from it built into houses in El-Qasr suggested that stone-robbing in the early modern period must have been extensive. Professor Davoli had also observed many evident pits on the satellite imagery of the site, pointing to digging. But even though we knew that there were pits, we were not quite prepared for the virtual chaos that we encountered. Many pits large and small have been found. Actually, pits might well be said to be the most noteworthy feature of the area **[images 29-31, plan and 2 shots]**, with many dozens of them excavated so far. They have different shapes and measures; sometimes they are round or elongated. In the deepest one, a rough staircase was organized by the treasure hunters to reach its bottom. **[image 32]**. In and around these pits, hundreds of pieces of stone have been scattered in apparently complete disorder.

In fact, no in situ remains of the temple itself were found, because the area has been so severely disturbed by later human activity. Two phases of stone-robbing seem to be involved: one that quarried away most of the Roman period temple, leaving only the lower courses of the stonework, and a later phase of destruction that removed the remaining traces of the original

walls. To this was added extensive treasure-hunting—hence most of the pits—and a fierce north wind that has removed something like a meter and a half of deposit since the end of occupation, including the entirety of the foundations of the temple.

Our excavations have now uncovered over eight hundred decorated or inscribed temple blocks, when fragments are included. They come mostly from temple decoration under Titus [**images 33-34**] and Domitian [**images 35-36**]. It seems that under Titus a new chapel was built, and that this was then incorporated into a larger temple built under Domitian. At this time, some of the older structures on the site were demolished, and their blocks reused inside the walls of the Domitianic temple.

The interpretation of these blocks has progressed substantially in the past season, as fragments have been arranged, and I quote from Olaf Kaper's report on the 2010 season: "Minor building activities are recorded for Pedubast I, Necho II and Psammetik II [**image 37**]. Under Amasis a larger chapel with a vaulted ceiling was built close to the older temple [**images 38-39**]. Under Darius I, a new chapel with a vaulted ceiling was built alongside the chapel of Amasis. This chapel incorporated the blocks of a decorated temple doorway from the time of Psammetik II. The rear wall of the sanctuary of Darius was executed in raised relief with images of the baboon form of Thoth divided over two registers [**image 40**]. The remaining walls were cut in sunk relief." [**images 41-42**].

Among the reused blocks in the Roman period temple, thus, are blocks from an earlier temple dated to the reign of king Pedubast of the Theban 23rd dynasty but which could have incorporated work under other pharaohs of this period. It is the first time that a cartouche of this king has been found in any temple relief. King Pedubast ruled from Thebes at the time of the later 22nd dynasty (around 800 BC) and not long before the Nubian king Piy conquered Egypt at

the start of the 25th dynasty. These dynasties belong to the little-known Third Intermediate Period. It was not known before now that the Theban 23rd dynasty controlled the oases of the Western Desert.

The dominance of the Theban 23rd dynasty in Dakhleh was further confirmed by the text upon an intact hieratic stela, also found among the remains of the temple. **[image 43]** This monument is dated to the 10th year of one of the Libyan kings called Takelot of the same 23rd dynasty. Probably this is Takelot III, who ruled at the end of the dynasty, not long before the reign of Piy and the start of the 25th dynasty. The stela mentions the chief of the Libyan tribe who held sway in the oasis at that time, called the Shamin tribe, who bears the same name Nesdjehuty as the chief depicted upon a previously known stela from Dakhleh from the reign of Piy. The new stela records a donation to the temple of Thoth of Amheida, and it records the names of several priests from the temple of Thoth. This stela was certainly one the most important finds from the temple, as it confirms that a temple for Thoth was already in existence during the Third Intermediate Period, and that the Libyan rulers of the oasis had a particular interest in this temple.

The temenos wall **[image 44]** is the only identifiable structure of the Roman temple visible on the surface, surviving only in small sections barely visible at ground level or just below. We have gradually worked to trace its course, and we excavated a complex foundation structure of stone and mud brick that seems likely to have been the substructure of the North Gate of the temple complex. There are a few other clues that will in time help us to piece together the picture of the temple, including column drums from the hypostyle hall mentioned above **[slide 45]**, not in situ but probably not far from their original locations, as they are clustered in one part of the excavated area. Another notable point is a collapsed wall, which

should be more or less where it fell and thus help to determine its original placement. A cornice stone found exactly where Professor Davoli thought the doorway to the temple ought to be helps to confirm this judgment.

The temple of Thoth at Trimithis is only one of about twenty temples known in the oasis, where we have probably the most extensive surviving network of Egyptian local temples, both in stone and in mud brick. The extensively preserved temples of Amun, Mut, and Chonsu at Deir el-Hagar [**image 46**] and of Amon-Nakht and Hathor at Ain Birbiyeh [**image 47**] are decorated like that of Thoth at Amheida; indeed, the same stonecarvers seem to have worked at Deir el-Hagar and at Trimithis. The major temple of Kellis was dedicated to Tutu, [**image 48**] and a smaller one to his consort Tapshai and his mother Neith. The Tutu temple contains an extraordinary mud-brick mammisi, decorated in the second century with paintings of hundreds of Egyptian gods. The collapsed plaster has been lovingly collected and over many years reassembled by Olaf Kaper and his team. [**image 49, 7 Hathors**]

Apart from the temples, we have another route to studying the religious commitments of the oasis population in the Roman period, their names. For to a large extent the names in the papyri and ostraka are directly or indirectly theophoric, referring to Egyptian divinities and often specifically to local cults. Such names dominate the documents found in the Great Oasis about as much as they do any other region. Because these texts come mainly from the period between the middle of the third century and the beginning of the fifth century of our era, the picture is somewhat different from what we might have found in the first two centuries of Roman rule or even earlier, and it will continue to develop as the Ptolemaic ostraka from Mut are studied by Günter Vittmann. Many traditional names started to go out of use in this period, and the range of divinities after whom parents named their children was significantly narrowed, among other

things. But faced with regiments of people named Horos, Tithoes (i.e., Tutu), Psais (the Shai), and Psenamounis (the son of Amun) even in texts of the middle of the fourth century, we face an onomastic scene not altogether different from what we would expect to find in the Nile valley, where the impression of a millennium and a half of the influence of the Theban priesthoods is still noticeable and characteristic demon-taming popular gods of the late period like Shai—the Agathos Daimon—and Tutu are strongly represented. But while Amun is extremely common, the junior member of the Theban triad, Chonsu, is invisible at Kellis. Bes and Sarapis make an appearance. Oddly, Tapsais, Tutu's consort, is rare at Kellis, and Neith, his mother, is invisible. Seth, the chief god of Mut, is apparently absent from oasis onomastics.

At Trimithis, the onomastic repertory is dominated by Amun, Horus, and Shai. Thoth, the city's principal god, is only modestly present in the fourth-century texts. Many other gods appear a few times, but even Isis, Tutu, and Bes are not common. Even though the names of Trimithitans are not to any great degree Christianized yet in this period, neither do they reflect much continuing investment in most of the large range of cults known in the oasis in previous centuries. The monotony may point to inertia, the tendency to pass names on from generation to generation in the absence of any reason to do otherwise.

To come back to the temple of Thoth, it would be agreeable to know something of its end, to see when the cult ceased to be active. Knowing this would help clarify the reasons for the onomastic patterns we see. For few Egyptian temples of this period do we have a stratigraphic excavation record to help us understand its abandonment and any possible reuse of the site. Alas, at Trimithis, not one stone of the temple was left upon another, as we have seen. In the unstratified mess that remained, however, we have found a few traces of interest, which show that Christianity was not absent from the hill in the fourth century.

Although we have not yet certainly identified a church at Trimithis, there is adequate evidence for Christianity in the city, including the titles of members of the clergy and a number of Christian personal names. Priests, presbyteroi, occur in two ostraka, and deacons in five. Christian names include Martyrios, Makarios, Paulos, Timotheos, Psenpnouthes, and also no doubt Moses, Ephrem, Jonas, and Joseph. Most of these are not common, however, and the direct evidence for Christianity from the ostraka would best be described as modest rather than abundant.

One striking find from the hill is an ostrakon **[image 50]** found in the temple area in 2008, with a list of names including Jacob and Abraham, and headed with \square πατ \square ρ, “the father” (or “our father”). The other names, however, are not distinctively Christian, and fading or breakage has taken away any amounts that may have stood at the right side if this was in fact an account.

A graffito of Horigenes son of Ioannes on one stone **[image 51]** is also probably Christian. Even though Horigenes is a theophoric name derived from Horos, it was the name of the famous early third-century Alexandrian theologian and scholar Origen. More importantly for our purposes, Ioannes is distinctively Christian.

But most striking of all is a block, inv. 3053, in the middle of which someone had written a Greek verse. **[image 52]** This comes either from an altar (as Paola Davoli has suggested) or from the base of a statue (as Olaf Kaper thinks). The gouging on the block was presumably made by pilgrims for amuletic or medicinal reasons. The ink is quite faded in parts and demands persistent and prolonged autopsy, because natural color photographs are almost illegible. **[image 53, left; 54, center; 55, right]** These processed infrared images may give you an idea of how difficult this was to make out. The text reads **[image 56]**

ανθρωπων βιοτοιο κυβερνητης μεγας Αμμων.

□νθρ□πων βι□τοιο κυβερν□της μ□γας □μμων.

“Great Ammon is the pilot of the life of men.” This is a perfect hexameter verse with an Epic ring that shows various literary reminiscences. It is in a way a kind of pastiche that represents well the religious and cultural syncretism of Egypt.

The concept of steering oneself through life occurs once in a Ptolemaic letter, *P.Lond.* 1.42 (*UPZ* I 59), where the verb διακυβερνω was used. The metaphorical use of the verb “to pilot” and the noun “pilot” becomes more frequent in literary attestations of the Roman period. In the second century it is noteworthy that Dio Chrysostom in *Or.* 63.7.8 writes that “Tyche governs a man’s life,” using the verb with a sense very similar to the line on the block. What makes Dio’s attestation notable is the fact that he refers to a deity as the pilot of mortal life. Generally, in fact, man is presented as his own pilot, while life and troubles are regarded as the waves of a tempest. Thus the Cappadocian fathers, who frequently employ the phrase, encourage man to overcome the waves of trouble, becoming safe pilots of their life, e.g., Basil, *Hom. in principium proverbiorum* or Gregory of Nyssa, in his *On Virginitate* (*De virginitate* 23.6.8), who says that the good man “like a good pilot with his boat, looks only up to heaven in guiding his life.” Like Dio, however, John Chrysostom, in his *On Genesis* (*In Genesim* 53.118.16), regards God as the pilot: “We navigate through the sea of our present life, led by the great pilot, God.”

Ammon, the Greek form of the name of the Egyptian god Amun, was the dominant traditional god of the oases (*SB* V 8440, Wagner 1987: 329-34). The hellenized Ammon had his main sanctuary in the Siwa Oasis, which Alexander the Great famously visited in early 331; from this visit originated the claim that Alexander was Ammon’s son. Ammon appears as the μ□γας θε□ς, the great god, in the *Historia Alexandri Magni* (recensio byzantine) l. 1261.

If the concept that the gods and one god in particular give life to men is uncommon in Greek literature, it is a commonplace in Egypt from as early as the Old Kingdom. Amun was regularly seen as the source of life, but more interesting are the remarkably direct invocations of Amun as the pilot of life found in New Kingdom prayers discussed by Jan Assmann. One describes him as “Pilot who knows the water, rudder that does not lead astray.”¹ “You are Amun who comes to him, who calls unto him, the pilot who knows the water, the rudder that does not lead astray” says another.² “If a man’s tongue is the boat’s rudder, the Lord of All is its pilot,” says still a third.³ If the expression here is Greek, then, the sentiment is deeply rooted in Egyptian religion. Although Amun was not the god to whom the temple of Amheida was dedicated, he was certainly the principal god of the western oases. Olaf Kaper has kindly told us that there is an image of Amun-Re of Hibis (Amenebis) on the gateway of Ain Birbiyeh, decorated under Augustus, which gives the following titles: "Amun-Re Lord of Hibis, the Great God, strong of might, King of the Gods, who gives [this verb is uncertain – OEK] the breath of life, who lets the constricted throat breathe, who causes all that exists to live."

A nice pagan hexameter verse, then, Greek in expression but deeply rooted in Egyptian thought, written on a stone in the temple of Thoth. Now, above this line of writing there are some rather faint traces of additional writing in a much smaller hand. I believe that at the top right it is possible to make out *ete pnoute*, which I take to be a Coptic gloss on the whole, putting forward the view that it is God, *pnoute*, who is the governor of life, not Ammon. A bit of not entirely friendly religious dialogue in late antiquity, it appears.

¹ J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, London and New York 1995, 175-85 on Amun as the source of life; 193-95 on Amun as pilot. This passage is quoted by Assmann, 194, from his *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebeten* (Zurich 1975, 2nd ed. Freiburg-Göttingen 1999) no. 177, from P.Anastasi II, 9.2.

² Assmann 194, citing his *ÄHG* no. 188.

³ Assmann 194, citing his *ÄHG* 190, from Tab. BM 5656.

These graffiti certainly indicate that by the last period of occupation of Amheida, which on present evidence appears to be the last quarter of the fourth century, the temple was no longer in use as such, but was accessible to Christians who wished to leave a mark of their own religion on the structure and its contents. That is hardly surprising, and we have no means of saying at what date that became possible. It is to be observed that the excavations in the temple area also found a considerable number of tags from jars of the same type found in the large fourth-century house designated B1. At least one of these is from the fourth century, *O.Trim.* 127, of year 33, which is to be assigned to Constantius II, thus 356/7. There are two other indications that activity on the hill was continuing in the fourth century, the occurrence of Psais the deacon (known from two other ostraka of that period) in *O.Trim.* 383 and the co-occurrence of Nikokles and Philippos in *O.Trim.* 286. Both of these are well known from the final phase of occupation of House B1, which I shall be describing in the coming lectures, in the 350s and 360s. We cannot, however, be certain from these ostraka whether the activity in question consisted simply of dumping trash from House B1 and its outbuildings on an abandoned hill, or if there was habitation on the hill itself. Nor do the graffiti tell us the answer to that question, as their presence is consistent with either hypothesis.

A slight hint might be drawn from the list or account that I mentioned earlier, headed by “the father” (or “our father”). A similar text [image 57] was found in 2008 in Gillian Bowen’s excavations of Deir Abu Matta, a church and perhaps monastic site located between Mut and Amheida. The meaning of “father” in both cases is not transparent, but we do not know of similar texts of this period in which it refers to any secular office in local or imperial government; the institution of the $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\ \pi\alpha\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ (“father of the city”) does not occur in Egypt before the second half of the fifth century. If the reference is to some kind of religious

community, this would certainly be consonant with the excavators' hypothesis at Deir Abu Matta that that church was attached to a community of some kind, with the adjacent building perhaps a monastic keep.

There is nothing found at Amheida so far to indicate with certainty the presence there of any monastic establishment. But given the condition of the top of the hill today, it is impossible to exclude any hypothesis—and that includes the hypothesis that it was merely a dump for debris from adjacent areas of the city that were still in full activity. Still, the fact that even the extremely extensive topographic survey of Amheida carried out so far has not turned up any building remains that can be identified as a church, one might well wonder if the temple compound was an early example of a temple turned into a church.

It is, in any case, hard to imagine that Trimithis did not have a church. During the 2010 season we began excavation of a large columned hall, located north of House B1 and formed out of a reused part of the Roman baths. It had benches on its west wall and in a side room to the north of the main room. But we have not finished excavating the east end, and it is too soon to pronounce on its character.

Dakhla in fact, however, presents the densest accumulation of churches known from the fourth century in Egypt or anywhere else. The first to be excavated were at Kellis, where a two-church complex at the east side of the site has attracted a fair amount of attention. The smaller east church, dated by the excavator to the Constantinian period, is particularly interesting as an instance of an earlier domestic structure refitted with an apse in the fourth century. It was therefore all the more striking to find a similar church at Ain el-Gedida, a small settlement about the nature of which I shall say something in my second lecture. **[image 58 view, 59 plan]** Some of this was cleared by the Egyptian inspectorate in the 1990s, including what appeared to be an

assembly hall. Our work there, directed by Nicola Aravecchia, revealed next to this hall a church, the apse of which had been slapped onto an existing building and protrudes into the street. **[image 60 plan; image 61 view]** Between the assembly hall and the church proper there had been an opening with a raised platform from which one could address both rooms; this was subsequently bricked up. **[image 62 comparative plans]** To the north were additional rooms, including a kitchen, that formed part of the church complex. **[image 63 photogrammetric view from above]**

Nor are even these two isolated instances. In 2009 the SCA began clearance of Ain es-Sabil, a dependency of Kellis, I would judge. **[image 64, of columbarium]** There also, a church has been found, but not yet excavated. Ostraka from one of the houses come from the same chronological horizon as the latest material from Area 2 at Amheida or from Ain el-Gedida, that is, from about the 360s. The church at Deir Abu Matta, long known because parts stand to a considerable height **[image 65]**, and dated by Peter Grossmann on typological grounds to the sixth century, is now known to be of the later fourth century also, from the coins and ostrakon found there, although occupation probably continued down to the sixth century. The ostrakon in question is the account full of Christian names and headed by someone called *ho pater*, which I showed earlier in connection with its counterpart from the hill at Amheida. It will take more excavation, however, to determine if the building adjacent to the church is, as the excavators believe, a monastic keep. The 2010 season showed that its internal walls were later additions, and the excavators see the original structure as a simple tower.

Overall, it appears that Dakhla had by the 360s a network of rural churches, including in some quite small settlements, the building of which goes back to the time of Constantine and to some extent depended on retrofitting existing buildings; whether these had already been used as

churches before this time we cannot say, but the consistency of approach taken in this rural church-building is striking. More work will be needed to allow us to appreciate fully the implications of this picture; and of course we really need to find the church, or churches, at Amheida—unless, that is, there was one church, built on the top of the hill, and it is gone with the wind.