

An Oasis City

3. The culture of a late antique provincial city

Now that we have seen something of the religious and economic life of Roman Trimitis, what today is the site of Amheida in the Dakhla Oasis, it is time to turn to its culture. The cultural character of the city was, you may recall, one of the original research questions driving the project. We did not approach this question entirely naively, because when we began to excavate in 2004 we intentionally started with a Roman house (designated B1) in the center of the site [**city plan image 2**], where paintings had been discovered by the first survey of the site by the DOP 25 years earlier. [**house plan image 3**] The house formed a 15-meter square residential core, with the addition of a large area, to which I shall come later, on the north side. [**image 4**] A twin house, with a shared wall, stands just to its south, and is also accompanied by comparable working spaces on its south. The house was originally entered through three entrances, two on the east and one on the west. One of the east entrances was later walled up. [**image 5**] The other eastern entrance brought one through a small, partly-vaulted entry, off which there was access to a smaller room used for food preparation on the north. Straight ahead lay the central room, probably lightly roofed, that was the central hub of the house [**image 6-room 2 as reconstructed**]. Another kitchen stood to its north, along with a staircase to the roof and an entrance to a large domed room; to the east was a large, flat-roofed room. On the west was a series of four rooms, with the west entryway south of the northernmost room.

The details of the house's construction are in general those familiar from the houses of Area A at Kellis, with vaults used in most rooms, flat roofing with beams and palm ribs with mud in others, many wall niches, extensive whitewashing of some rooms and more limited

whitewashing around the niches in others. The original emplacements of wooden lintels over doors and niches, and of shelves inside the niches, are clearly visible, but all usable wood was removed from the house at the time of its abandonment or afterward. Indeed, apart from the kitchens, the house was left all too clean for our taste. Departure was clearly a well-organized and planned business. Nothing has been found so far to indicate that the stairs [image 7] led to anything more than the roof, but this may well, like the houses at El-Qasr, have had partial walls creating private open-air spaces for warm-weather use, particularly night sleeping. If there had been a second story, some evidence of it would probably have been found on top of the collapsed vaults and flat roofs from the first floor, but no such remains have been found so far.

Exit housecleaning wasn't quite perfect, fortunately. For example, a couple of hundred coins were left behind, invaluable clues—where readable—to the history of the house's construction and alteration. Almost all had suffered badly from corrosion, some to the point of exploding the coins in the middle. The legible coins tell us that the house was constructed in the fourth century; coins from the period before the 330s all seem to belong to the pre-construction debris, while those from the late 330s on belong to the period of occupation. A major renovation seems to have taken place at least once, probably around 350. The material from the final occupation phase all dates to the 350s and 360s. A few semi-legible small coins may come from the 370s or 380s, but they do not come from habitation levels and may have blown in later. The coins thus give the impression that the house went out of use around the end of the 360s or soon after. Nothing in the contents or the handwriting of the ostraka from the house or in the character of the pottery found suggests a date any later than that indicated by the coins. Two ostraka found in the latest habitation level help to confirm this date by giving prices at a level that must date from the decade of the 350s, certainly not before 351 and probably not much after 360.

We know from the Leipzig papyrus that I mentioned in the first lecture that Trimithis was still an active center of a prosperous region in the late 360s and was perhaps occupied later still. This house may therefore not be characteristic of the site as a whole. But surface finds of coins across the site have yielded so far nothing securely datable later than the 380s, and even those not yet assigned seem to belong to the small modules characteristic of the last couple of decades of the fourth century. We therefore cannot say at this point that Trimithis lasted any longer than Kellis, which seems to have been abandoned around 400 but where little of the evidence comes from the last two decades of the fourth century.

Obviously the house was a substantial one. I have discussed the implications of the ostraka found in it for the social and economic standing of the owners in the second lecture. This position in society had cultural dimensions as well, and it is these that we shall look at today. I shall take these aspects not in the order we excavated them, but in a more logocentric fashion. From that point of view, the most remarkable discovery was a rectangular room (2.7 x 6.8 m), located just north of the northwest corner of the house proper, which before excavation looked to be without significant features. When emptied of its sand, however, **[image 8]** it turned out to have inscriptions in red paint on one wall, with some faint traces on the facing wall, along which ran a bench. The phase in which these inscriptions were written was an early one in the history of this room, which at the time of their writing was not part of the house. When it was later joined to it, the room was equipped with a new floor, about a meter above the old one, supported on brick pillars. The space underneath was apparently used for storage—many pottery vessels were found there—and the space above perhaps also for storage. **[image 9]** With all of this remodeling, and the apparent lack of any roof on the upper part of the room at this time, it is perhaps surprising that any of the inscriptions survived. Some parts of the inscription, indeed,

were deliberately erased in antiquity. But there are signs that the owners of the house deliberately kept the inscription in place over most of its extent, for reasons we cannot recover.

In modern terms, the wall was a teacher's whiteboard. **[image 10]** In ancient terms, it might better be described as the largest wooden tablet ever found. For what was written on it is unmistakably a teacher's model for students, Greek elegiac couplets written in a careful hand and equipped with accents, breathings, macrons, marginal symbols, and high dots for caesura. **[image 11]** The poems themselves are all addressed by the teacher to his students, sometimes with explicit headings, using terms like *paides* and *scholastikoi* to refer to them. They are urged to deep from the fountain of the muses, to emulate Herakles in their labors, and to follow Hermes, the god of rhetoric—who was also, as Thoth, the patron divinity of Trimithis. Raffaella Cribiore and Paola Davoli, in collaboration with David Ratzan, have published these verses in *JRA* 2008. Raffaella describes them as a kind of Himerius in verse. That may not thrill everyone, but the discovery that versified rhetorical composition was being taught in this remote town in the fourth century is of enormous importance for the history of ancient education.

This is far from being the only poetry on the wall at Trimithis. When we extended excavations further to the north, beyond the rhetoric classroom and its adjacent courtyards, we found at first what looked simply like a large area full of rooms used for some kind of processing of farm produce—exactly what, we do not yet know. **[image 12, overview]** But that area **[image 13, plan]** was only a reworking of a space created earlier, at the same time the house and the rhetoric classroom were built, and that space turned out to contain at least two more schoolrooms, with the tell-tale benches used by the students along the sides. **[images 14, 15]** On the wall of one of them was a passage from book 4 of the *Odyssey*, where Helen is making a potion to make Telemachus and his party forget all their woes—the fact that Odysseus had still

not come home from Troy, most of all. This was written in a small, rapid handwriting that would be at home on papyrus, not on a wall. **[image 16]** Above that was another passage, badly damaged but coming probably from a work that does not survive to us, evidently an anecdote closely related to one in a work of pseudo-Plutarch. **[image 17, detail]** If you come to the papyrology congress in Geneva, you will hear Raffaella discuss it. The entire school was of quite some size, but its life was evidently short, and it was turned entirely into work space, its function in the last stage of house's existence.

Also from that period is a sign that the closure of the school is not to be taken as a sign that the owner during the last years of the house, Serenos, was an uncultivated sort. In the northernmost of the chambers on the west side of the house, at the top of a panel painting, someone wrote an awkwardly scrawled graffito. **[image 18]** This may be, depending on the reading of one letter, turn out to be a line from Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, otherwise preserved only fragmentarily in an Oxyrhynchos papyrus; Geneva, again, should bring more light on this. So the level of education here apparently sufficed to acquaint a member of the upper class with plays of Euripides.

This is also not all. In another house, not yet excavated, several surface fragments have come to light, some already in the 1970s but one since we started to work, with Greek poems in epic dialect written on the walls and molded plaster Ionic capitals. **[image 19]** The large letters across the top of this fragment read SARP, which I think may be safely restored as Sarp[edon]. A room with a series of poems about different mythological figures would be a nice discovery. We know where the fragment was picked up by a local boy, and someday we will excavate it.

Myth was not limited to words. The undoubted center of attention in this house, and I confess that I have been teasing you until now, is neither the coins nor the ostraka, not even all of

this splendid text, but the central painted room [image 20], with some scenes still in place on the wall, others preserved in fragments of collapsed wall from the upper registers. Among the scenes present on these walls, now or originally, are Ares and Aphrodite taken in adultery [images 21 and 22], with a whole squadron of gods and a figure representing City, the Greek Polis, looking on; the washing of the feet of Odysseus by Eurykleia when she recognizes him upon his return to Ithaca [image 23]; Perseus and Andromeda; Orpheus charming the animals [image 24]; and a satyr pursuing a not-too-reluctant maenad [image 25]. More fragments have been assembled to show Europa and the bull [image 26]. Some clues found in working with the fragments suggest that a Judgment of Paris may have figured to the right of the Ares and Aphrodite scene. There are several scenes not identified with inscriptions (as Ares, Aphrodite, and their audience are) and not yet recognized by their iconography [image 27]. Detailed studies have suggested that the upper figural register may represent not mythological scenes but historical or civic themes. Below the figural scenes run non-figural designs, originally intended to suggest stonework, as can be seen on earlier slides. The original standard of artistic quality in the painting was mostly rather high, although not of the level one would find in upper-class dwellings in a major city. The same cannot be said, regrettably, of the technical quality of the plastering and paints, which used thin layers of wash and soon began to deteriorate. As a result, there were at least two phases of touching up or repainting, in which the room was “restored” to a more pristine condition. This work has affected different areas to different degrees, with the lower and most easily touched areas the most completely redone. In some places there are three layers. The plaster has numerous enemies: cohesion is poor, adhesion to the underlying mud plaster rich in straw also weak, and the site is full of straw-eating insects.

Three of the four rooms along the west side of the house were painted with elaborate decorative schemes. The northernmost room, where the Hypsipyle graffito was found, was painted in purplish panels with small depictions of birds and, for reasons that escape us in their current state of preservation, the names of various gods inscribed on them [**image 28**]. To the south were rooms with geometric and floral designs, which we have come to call the green room (**images 29-30**) and the red room (**image 31**). One might describe these as classical wallpaper. Amheida as a whole is absolutely full of rooms where plaster is still on the walls. What you have seen is only a foretaste of what must be under the ground. The time and expense of dealing with wall paintings is great, and they can pose severe ethical dilemmas for the conservator. But they are very alluring. We are hoping to excavate the matching house to the south starting in 2012.

The presence of classical culture in the Dakhla Oasis was in fact widespread, not limited to the house of Serenos or even to Trimithis. It manifests itself as well in a phenomenon barely detectable in the face of the mass of Egyptian theophoric names that I discussed in the first lecture. This is something that might easily escape attention unless one has had repeatedly the experience of being brought up short by a totally unexpected name in the midst of the banal. Now Greek names are not in themselves uncommon in the texts from Egypt, and Kysis, Ain Waqfa, Kellis, and Trimithis, which make up most of our documentary material from the oases, do not differ from most places in the Nile valley in this respect. The phenomenon I wish to discuss is limited to masculine names, a point worth bearing in mind. Guy Wagner described it briefly in his great work on the oases (224-26), mentioning the presence of a number of “classical” Greek names. In this group, however, he combined names that are commonplace in Roman Egypt, like Polydeukes, Leonides, Agathos Daimon (not very classical, that—it is a transparent calque of the Egyptian Shai), Timotheos, Agathon, Eros, and the like, with a number

that are unique or rare in Roman Egypt. It is this latter group that interests me and suggests some broader reflections on Greek culture in the oases and more generally in Egypt.

First, there is a small Homeric cluster. Since Achilleus is common in the papyri, the few examples in the Kellis ostraca are not very consequential. More striking is his father Peleus, a name that appears in a graffito in the Gebel Teir, the range north of Kharga where stone was cut for local use; there is not a single example elsewhere in the papyri of this name. Odysseus is lacking so far (the name is extremely rare in the papyri), but the names of both his father Laertes and his son Telemachos appear in ostraca from Kysis, modern Douch. Telemachos is known from a couple of Ptolemaic papyri and then two people in an Oxyrhynchos papyrus of the mid-third century CE; Laertes otherwise appears in first-century CE Philadelphia in the Fayyum and nowhere else. Eumelos—perhaps alluding to the son of Admetos and Alkestis—also turns up as a signer in one ostrakon from our excavations at Trimithis, but this name is not as rare as the others, even though the attestations are heavily Ptolemaic in character. I am inclined to include here also Alektor, again from a Douch ostrakon, who might seem a relatively obscure allusion as the son of Pelops. Although cocks are occasionally mentioned in papyrus accounts, the name has not shown up before in the papyri. Alas, a Tisamenos that Wagner claims to find in one of the papyri of the nekrotaphoi of Kysis is a ghost, invented by Crönert in a faulty emendation.

With the archaic period, things pick up. The sage Kleoboulos is represented by a curator civitatis of that name in a Kellis papyrus, a councilman of the oasis in a couple of papyri from the 370s, and a host of ostraca from Douch and Ain Waqfa. There is only a single other attestation of the name in the papyri, and that fossilized in a toponym, thus probably referring to a settler of the Hellenistic period. Empedocles is probably preserved in a graffito from Gebel Teir—a name found in the papyri only in two Ptolemaic texts. (It is, to be sure, an emendation by

Jean Bingen, but the editor's text had Themistokles, who would be welcome too.) Pisistratos is found at Kellis, Ain Waqfa, and Kysis, in a profusion that contrasts with only a handful of Roman instances elsewhere.

There seems to be some affection for Spartan names: Pausanias is common, but it is not at all rare in the papyri generally. Agis occurs in one Kellis text, and Agesilaos in an Amheida ostrakon. Agis is otherwise missing from the papyri, and Agesilaos found only in Ptolemaic texts. It is worth noting that the Agis of Kellis is the son of a man named Oueib, the Egyptian word for priest. Nothing Greek about the cultural identity of the father. Classical Athenian history, by contrast to Sparta, has little distinctive to offer, once the ghostly Themistokles is expunged; we do find Perikles, however, which is not common in the papyri but hardly such a rarity as Agis and Agesilaos.

Perhaps most telling is the extraordinary popularity of the name Isocrates at Douch and Ain Waqfa (although it is unknown at Kellis so far). The name is not at all common in Roman Egypt—a few examples from the first century, then a blank except an instance in the Marmarica in the late second century. I believe that we must associate with this the occurrence of Nikokles, who was an estate manager at Trimithis in the fourth century and signs a number of receipts. The name appears only in Ptolemaic papyri otherwise. Demosthenes is also well attested, but at Kellis. Perhaps there was a rivalry between the oases, with Isocrates beloved in Kharga and Demosthenes in Dakhla; but more likely this is just a matter of chance. The great orator's name is not rare in the papyri, but the instances are mainly Ptolemaic, from the Great Oasis, or from the fourth century on.

Theophrastos (known only from Ptolemaic papyri) and Polybios (rare) help to round out the scene on the literary front, and Rhoimetalkas on the historical—although it is hard in that

case not to suspect a Thracian settler's name from an earlier period—early Ptolemaic, I would imagine, somehow transmitted to fourth-century Trimithis without ever having been attested in Egypt at any earlier point, except in one graffito from the Valley of the Kings.

What are we to make of this? First, there are two axes of analysis to keep in mind. One is chronological: most of these names, although not quite all, appear principally in the papyri of the Ptolemaic period, when Greeks coming from all over the Hellenic world were settling in Egypt: soldiers from Alexander the Great's army, Cyrenaeans who entered Ptolemaic service, mercenaries from all over the Aegean and Greek mainland, economic immigrants from many regions. The ranks of Hellenized Egyptians, with their heavy use of theophoric or dynastic names, were not yet so large. Over time, it is my general impression, the Greek onomastic repertory in Egypt becomes impoverished; the most popular names occupy a larger share of the total—the power law takes over, in mathematical terms. To a large degree this is probably the result of the vast popularity of Greek names that could be seen as calques of Egyptian theophoric names (Kronion for Pakoibis, for instance) or as sound-alikes for them (Sokrates for Sobek-names in the Fayyum). No doubt the loss of a sense of connection to the original homelands of the immigrants played a part as well, with those names that had a locally distinctive flavor disappearing in favor of more familiar ones. This process has never been studied, as far as I am aware, but it would be worth the trouble to do so. It is part of the formation of a Graeco-Egyptian identity shared by the descendants of immigrants and those of the Egyptians who had taken positions in the royal system of Ptolemaic Egypt. The last vestiges of the old names can be seen in the first century CE. By the second century, the Graeco-Egyptian synthesis is complete.

But then some of the old names came back. That happens only after the middle of the third century, and in the period of the Tetrarchy and the fourth century we find more of the old

Greek names than appear in the second century papyri and those of the early third century. Still, only part of the repertory returns. It is not as if the ancestral names had been found in papers in the attic and revived for a newer generation, as if an American today were to find a 1794 ancestor named Elnathan and stick that name on an unsuspecting infant. The source must be elsewhere.

The second axis is the geographical. Because we do not have more than a trivial number of documents from the first 250 years of Roman rule in the oases, there is little to go on there. We do not know what was going on in Kharga and Dakhla in the period from Augustus to the Gordians. But when the revival of classical onomastics comes, it is far more marked in the Great Oasis than anywhere else. The percentage of attestations of many of these names that belong to the oasite documentation is far out of proportion to the place of this documentation in the total volume of the Egyptian papyri and ostraca. Both Kharga and Dakhla participate, and many of the names appear in the texts from both oases. We have no documents to speak of from Siwa, alas, and not much from Bahariya, although recent Czech excavations have found ostraca and my hopes are beginning to rise. Those names that do not occur in both Dakhla and Kharga may be flukes; our textual corpora from the oases are still very limited in geographical and chronological extent.

I should also acknowledge a third axis, mentioned earlier, that of gender. We know that the repertory of women's names in the papyri tends to be dominated by Egyptian names even more than the men's is, and that inside the same family we will find more of the men with Greek names than of the women, no matter how high their social standing. The situation with the oasis texts, where none of the names I have mentioned are those of women may be nothing more than another instantiation of this rule. But perhaps it is a bit more than that.

Even if Kellis residents did not tend to name their children Isocrates, the works of the orator were read there, as we see above all from one of the earliest finds at that site, the wooden codex with three of the Cyprian orations that was found together with the agricultural account book. This, as became clear from a close examination, is likely to have belonged to a teacher. But, most strikingly, it is in its first part written in a hand either identical to or at any rate nearly indistinguishable from the hand of the agricultural account book. This is a precious witness to the connections between literary education and the cadre of estate managers and tax collectors who actually ran Roman Egypt, the same stratum to which the now-famous Socrates of Karanis belonged.

A gigantic house at Kellis, more than 400 square meters in area, has been under excavation in recent years, and part of its paintings were published in JRA by Colin Hope and Helen Whitehouse. Some of these are similar to the designs of the green and red rooms at Amheida [**image 32**], others to the panel paintings [**image 33**]; still others represent types of decoration so far unparalleled at Amheida [**image 34**]. In the corner of one of these painted rooms, fragments of book 1 of the *Odyssey* were found. This may not be terribly impressive, as Homer papyri are commonplace, but it is hard not to be struck by the Homeric parody on wooden tablets also found at Kellis.

Finally, another site in Dakhla brings us original Greek poetry roughly cut onto one of the gateways of the temple of Amon-Nakht at Ain Birbiyeh. Apart from the temple, this site is barely explored, in part because heavy cultivation around the site and over parts of it has left it a rather nightmarish field of melted mud brick. But geophysical survey has now shown that it was a large village, comparable perhaps even to Kellis in size and wealth. Because of the moisture, we will

never have from it the kind of texts or wall decorations we have at Kellis, but there is no doubt that they existed; the inscription is just a taste of what once existed.

Culture is much more than poetry and painting. This season we were able to have an anthropologist specializing in faunal remains examine all of the bones found at Amheida over the past six seasons. Pamela Crabtree reported that the house of Serenos was full of pig and chicken bones, the signatures of a Roman-style diet. A smaller house in Area 1, House B2, was by contrast full of goat, donkey, and cattle bones, along with some wild gazelle—a thoroughly Egyptian assemblage. The same house [**image 35**], which was excavated by Anna Boozer as a dissertation project, had yielded emmer wheat, another characteristically Egyptian foodstuff alien to the Greek and Roman diet and almost entirely missing from the papyrological documentation after the early Roman period. Other indices, too, confirm the differences between the two houses. That is not because B2 was occupied by the lower classes; it is about 120 square meters, located on a main street, and probably the home of someone involved in mid-level estate management or in transportation. [**image 36, plan; 37 pottery; 38 tablet**]

But it is clear that there was a significant gulf between the entire way of life of the occupants of these two houses. Even if walking along the covered alleys of Trimithis toward the house of Serenos one would not feel that one had left the Egyptian oasis environment, once one stepped inside the door the whole feeling changed, just as it did inside the mansions of Kellis. The décor of the reception room told the visitor at a glance that the occupants belonged to a part of society formed by traditional Greek paideia and specifically by the Roman imperial version of that cultural formation. When dinner was served, it would have included standard Mediterranean ingredients and meats to suit a Roman palate. It would probably have been served on a stibadium [**image 39**], like the one that the family built in the adjacent street in the second phase of the

house, a form characteristic of the Roman world in the third century and later. Wine was the beverage. The landlord who was the host could match poetic quotations with his guests and perhaps tease them that he was going to serve Helen's potion to them after the meal.

Five minutes walk away, the household was much more distinctively Egyptian; adjacent to the house was a large courtyard with the animals essential to the owner's daily livelihood. He kept his records in Greek, but the walls were unadorned except for some whitewash, and neither classical mythology in artistic representation nor classical literature greeted the visitor, who ate bread of emmer wheat and perhaps a saddle of goat or, as a special treat, some freshly-caught gazelle. Probably they drank wine. This house was far from unmarked by Greek and Roman rule of Egypt for six hundred years, but it is a strong reminder of just how varied and individual the integration of the population of a remote city like Trimithis into the Roman Empire was.

A couple of hundred years earlier, a much more distinctive Egyptian tradition was being maintained, the pyramid. Far from being only a feature of the Old Kingdom or limited to royalty, pyramids were a pervasive part of Egyptian funerary culture through the ages. Those of the Roman period have not generally survived to a level at which we can form any visual impression of them, but at Trimithis we have the only standing mud-brick pyramid of the Roman period. When we began work at Amheida, much of its masonry still stood, but undermined at the corners by treasure-seeking and then split in the middle, probably as a result of this destabilization **[image 40]**. Our architect, Nicholas Warner, directed a multi-year program of investigation, cleaning, reinforcing, and partial reconstruction. You see it here first with corner support added **[image 41]** and then with more extensive rebuilding **[image 42]**. At the conclusion of the work, the surviving masses, although still visible, were fully supported by new brickwork to protect them from further erosion **[image 43; from the air, image 44]**.

There were in fact other pyramids in the oasis. We have another one in the necropolis south of the city, not as well preserved, and a row of them stood in the cemetery of Mut, the oasis capital. Several of these have been excavated in recent years by the Egyptian archaeologists, and these have proven to have burial chambers under the pyramids, decorated in a traditional Egyptian style. As far as we can see, our pyramid rests on solid gebel rather than on underground chambers, but it is surrounded by subsidiary structures that may include the chapels. The pyramids at Mut have another characteristic that hints at the cultural hybridity of the early Roman culture of the oases: the areas outside the entrance to the chapels were decorated in a Roman panel style, just as the outer courtyard of the temple at Deir el-Haggar was. Egyptian décor was mandatory inside religious structures, both temples and tombs, but it was already perceived as a special cultural inheritance and nearly quarantined to these inner spaces. Outside it, the aesthetic was Graeco-Roman.

The public dominance of the metropolitan culture is also shown by the Roman baths of Trimithis, which we have gradually been uncovering. These had been destroyed before the building of house B1, and it was therefore only in those places where we were able to go below its floor level that we could find the vestiges of the baths. The first discovery, at a point when we were not at all thinking about the possibility of a bath complex, was a laconicum, a dry room constructed of mud bricks and with only a thin plaster [image 45], heated with hypocausts. Under the rhetoric classroom another rectangular space, a cistern, came to light [image 46]. Adjacent was the latrine, with its drain [image 47], in another part of the northern court. A lined bath was found a bit further to the north [image 48]. The baths had at least two phases, as a more elegantly paved level, with a column base, was uncovered in the large schoolroom below the later bath level [image 49]. The overall plan is only gradually coming into view [image 50], and

we will probably never be able to see more than a partial view. We know that the bath structure extends further under the house and under the street to the east of the house. It also continues to the north, where in 2010 we began to excavate a large columned hall. It seems to have been altered and reused in the period contemporary with house B1, rather than having been demolished and covered over for new construction, but the building history and the nature of its reuse are far from clear. **[image 51]**

We know that the cultural history of Trimithis goes far back in time before the Roman period. We have not yet excavated enough of the earlier periods to offer a coherent account, and what we have found from the pharaonic past has been out of context. Most notably, a fragment of a work taught to budding scribes in Egyptian temple schools, dating to the New Kingdom, was found in the unstratified debris on the temple hill. This ostrakon, which will be published by Olaf Kaper, shows the traces of a kind of national curriculum in this era. We can only guess at how much more we may have to discover from the oasis of these earlier periods.

In the Roman period, even with our limited work to date we can see both Egyptian and Graeco-Roman cultural elements. That is not in itself surprising to anyone familiar with the culture of Egypt under Roman rule. I would, however, stress two important points. First, in the early Roman period we can see that pharaonic visual culture and decoration are restricted to specific areas of public and private space—the interiors of temples and of tomb chapels. Broader traces of traditional Egyptian cultural practices, however, clearly remained in place in many households down to the fourth century. Second, although the proportion of the population participating in high Greek culture may have been limited, it can be said both that the cultivated elite had far more than a superficial acquaintance with that high culture, and that some of its manifestations were distributed far more broadly in society.

I shall close with some reflections on the presentation of Amheida to future visitors. Not all of our colleagues believe that this is a good idea, but in my view it is inevitable. More tourists are coming to the oasis, and a visitor center has been built by the tombs at Muzawwaka to accommodate them; several relatively luxurious hotels have opened in the last few years. When we are not on the site, the guards are at present instructed not to allow visitors, but we know that those official orders are not obeyed. We believe that interpreting the site, both for tourists and for the present-day population of the oasis, is part of our obligation. And yet mud-brick sites are highly fragile, easily wrecked. The wall paintings we cherish would vanish in a couple of years if left exposed to the elements and to the fingers of tourists.

So far, we have taken two steps to prepare the site for visitors. The first is the enclosure in which the temple blocks described in the first lecture have been collected. Olaf Kaper is in the process of gathering these in their original arrangement and designing a display that will give the visitor a sense of how some of the decorated walls of the ancient chapels would have looked. The second is an adjacent recreation of house B1, also a product of Dr. Warner's collaboration with the archaeological leadership of the project and based on a computer reconstruction by our topographers [**image 52**]. Obviously construction requires one to make choices that can be left open in a scholarly report: the house is built as a single-story structure [**image 53**], the now-lost windows are located and sized, the hypothetical flat roof is created according to parallels, doorways are reconstructed [**image 54**], niches are given their wood [**image 55**].

With the building in place, attention turns to the painted decoration, essential to recreate the experience of living in or visiting this house in the 350s and 360s. Dorothea Schulz has, working with student assistants, so far painted the green room [**images 56-57**] and the red room, not yet finished—here you see a student helping to lay out the baseline grid [**images 58**]. The

purple room's panels lie ahead, and beyond them the vast and only partially known pictorial program of the central room, with its dome. We look forward to opening the house in 2012 and making it and the temple reconstruction the center of our attempts to introduce all visitors to the multifaceted culture of Roman Trimithis.