

THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF BAKCHIAS

A TOWN OF THE FAYYŪM FROM THE PTOLEMAIC-ROMAN PERIOD TO LATE ANTIQUITY

Paola Buzi and Enrico Giorgi



ARCHAEOPRESS ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY 66

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ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-567-0
ISBN 978-1-78969-568-7 (e-Pdf)

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Cover image: General view of Bakchias from the west

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Printed in England by Severn, Gloucester

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Preface

P. Buzi, E. Giorgi

This book aims to summarise the results of field research – as well as historical, historico-religious and papyrological studies – conducted on the archaeological site of Bakchias, located in the north-eastern part of the Fayyūm region. It represents a revised and re-arranged version of the book edited by the same Authors in 2014.

The pages that follow do not aim to be a detailed excavation report, given that many publications have already focused on the more technical aspects of the results of fieldwork carried out since 1993. Instead, they attempt to provide an overview of the rise and fall of the *kome* of Bakchias that will be both clear and as exhaustive as possible. There is now no doubt that this settlement was a thriving centre from at least the 26th Dynasty up until the ninth or tenth centuries CE, though with differing levels of economic prosperity and urban development.

On this occasion, we will give equal weight not only to the archaeological and topographical aspects but to the historical and religious aspects as well, whilst never forgetting the relationship between the urban settlement and other villages of the Arsinoite *nomos*, which is famously a peculiar exception in Egyptian geography.

The excavation licence for the archaeological site of Bakchias is currently held by a joint mission involving the University of Bologna (the DiSci, or Department of History and Cultures, previously known as the Department of Archaeology) and Rome's Sapienza University (the Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Art History, and Performing Arts, headed by the authors of this book).

We should, however, mention that the field research done from 1993 to 2004 was conducted by the University of Bologna directed by Sergio Pernigotti, in partnership with the University of Salento, represented by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli. From 2005 on, Sapienza University has worked alongside the University of Bologna, whilst later and for a limited period of time, the mission was also able to draw on the contribution of the Medea Norsa papyrological centre run by Silvia

Strassi, who was based at the University of Trieste at the time.

We would like to begin this book by expressing our gratitude to many people and institutions, starting with the original director of this mission, Sergio Pernigotti. We would also like to mention that the research project underway in Bakchias would never have taken hold, and this book would never have been possible, without the kind cooperation of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt or without the financial support provided by the Republic of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the University of Bologna and, more recently, Sapienza University's Grandi Scavi fund (2015). Our most heartfelt thanks also go to the directors of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo who have come and gone over the years, to the Italian Archaeological Centre in Cairo, originally directed by Maria Casini, followed by Rosanna Pirelli and finally Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi.

Amongst our many colleagues and friends, we would particularly like to thank Mohamed Ismail Khaled (from the SCA), Ettore Janulardo (from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Giuseppe Sassatelli, Elisabetta Govi and Gabriele Bitelli (from the University of Bologna), Teodoro Valente, Beatrice Alfonsetti and Alessandro Saggiaro (from Sapienza University, Rome).

Many colleagues over the years have made their contribution to the research project and we would like to thank them all. We limit ourselves to remembering our main collaborators in last years such as Ilaria Rossetti, Valentina Gasperini, Julian Bogdani and Alessandro Campedelli.

Last but not least, our sincerest gratitude goes to local colleagues, the people of Gorein and, above all, our dearest and most irreplaceable *rais*, Mohseen.

The archaeological and topographical research conducted on the site of Bakchias is ongoing and new results could inevitably force us to rethink what has been stated here in the future. However, those who work in the field know that this is a risk we inevitably run.

Introduction

Bakchias and its geographical context

P. Buzi, E. Giorgi

The Kōm Umm el-Athl archaeological area, which includes the remains of the Ptolemaic-Roman village of Bakchias, is located in the north-eastern part of the Fayyūm¹ (in the *markaz* of Tamiyya), approximately halfway between Kōm Awšīm and Darb Gerza, which correspond to the ancient towns of Karanis and Philadelphia respectively.²

The distance between Kōm Awšīm and Kōm Umm el-Athl is just short of 12 kms, more or less the same distance that we find in an interesting record: a papyrus letter (*P.Michigan* VIII 496) where an inhabitant of Karanis invites a resident of Bakchias to visit, specifying that the trip should take no more than two hours, clearly riding on a donkey or sailing along the canal.³

The road that still connects these sites runs along the Abdallah Wahbi canal, whose name already appears in a 1:25,000 Egyptian map of 1945. This waterway starts just after al-Lāhūn, where it detaches from a branch of the Bahr Youssef, a tributary of the Nile that supplies water to the entire region, and finally flows into Birket Qarūn, the large lake on the northern border of the Fayyūm. It is one of the main canals that mark the edge of the Fayyūm depression and therefore of cultivated land, even if vegetation is rapidly spreading and constantly claims land that was once desert.⁴

Despite the efforts made by the Egyptian authorities to protect the site of Bakchias so far, the gradual expansion of farmland is a problem that threatens the preservation of its archaeological remains. The increase in rising damp is proving extremely damaging for the preservation of clay mud-brick buildings, i.e. the majority of the ruins of the ancient village.⁵

On arrival at the modern-day village of Gorein, there is a small bridge that crosses the canal and connects the dirt road that starts in Kōm Awšīm to the northern part of the modern village and, subsequently, the archaeological area.⁶

Thus the ancient town of Bakchias was located on the edge of the region, on the verge of the plateau that marks the end of the depression. Since Sir Flinders Petrie and the English papyrologists Bernard P. Grenfell, David G. Hogarth and Arthur S. Hunt explored Kōm Umm el-Athl, our understanding of the urban settlement of Bakchias has made giant leaps forward, thanks to the systematic fieldwork conducted by Italian archaeologists and Egyptologists. Nevertheless, in recent years we have concentrated on studying and considering the information we have gleaned, due to the lack of funding and the difficulty of conducting research in the field given the extreme political instability that is now affecting Egypt. This is also being done through cooperation with other missions operating in the region.

This was the spirit that inspired the international roundtable organised by the University of Bologna on 25th May 2012,⁷ followed by a second, more extensive day of study organised in Rome on 20th April 2018,⁸ occasions that proved extremely useful for sharing various methodological aspects, as well as the results of research.

It is worth stressing that the focus on a far-reaching, systematic review of the site was an informed choice

¹ For publications about the Fayyūm region, see Morini 2004; Morini 2006; Morini 2009.

² Those who reach the Fayyūm from Cairo get to the site by leaving the main road at the first junction just after the Museum of Karanis and taking the first road on the left, approximately 100 m further on.

³ Pernigotti 2000, 61-62, with bibliography. The distance between the two sites cannot have changed much over time for historical and geographic reasons. Given that the old canal was generally similar to the modern version (even when it departs from the original route, it nevertheless stays close and parallel to it), the terrain has not changed to an extent that could alter its path to any significant degree (Morini 2006a; Mandanici 2007).

⁴ This waterway gives rise to many other secondary canals that are fed by hydraulic machines or by the natural slope of the terrain, creating the backbone of this region's irrigation system, which has now been supplemented with other reclamation work.

⁵ Mandanici 2011; Mandanici 2012; Buzi *et al.* 2011.

⁶ This bridge is undoubtedly the reconstruction of an older bridge called Kubri Umm el-Athl (the bridge of Umm el-Athl). In the abovementioned old Egyptian map, the northern corner stated the altitude '14.17 m a.s.l.' but recent restoration work has removed this label.

⁷ As well as the members of the ongoing mission in Bakchias, those who attended the roundtable held on 25th May 2012 included, among others, Willeke Wendrick, the then-director of UCLA's mission in Karanis, and Emanuele Papi, the director of the University of Siena's mission in Dionysias. Moreover, participants included Antonio Curci, the co-director of the Aswan-Kom Ombo joint mission of the University of Bologna and Yale University; Gianluca Miniaci, a member of the University of Pisa's mission in Luxor; and Giuseppe Lepore, previously a member of the joint mission of the Universities of Bologna and Lecce in Soknopaiou Nesos.

⁸ Apart from the members of the mission, those who attended the conference of 20th April 2018 included Dominic Rathbone, Cornelia Römer, Sergio Pernigotti, the original director of the mission in Bakchias, Antonio Giammarusti, Włodzimierz Godlewski, Gertrud van Loon, Dobrochna Zielińska, and Gabriella Carpentiero.

that was undoubtedly fostered (or influenced) by the abovementioned circumstances. Nevertheless it was long overdue. We believe we can now say that, following the season of ‘grand projects’, which particularly focused on acquiring new data and the accurate preliminary presentation of ongoing research, it is now necessary to invest our best resources in presenting our results to the scientific community, without concealing the problems faced and the goals that have yet to be achieved. We feel this choice is essential if we wish to plan and organise future project-based phases.

Years of research, like those conducted in Bakchias, involve changes not only to the circumstances in which one works, but also to the people that make up the team. Although we accept the responsibility of summarising the results of the research carried out up to now in Bakchias, we cannot forget the essential contribution made by all those who preceded us or who worked with us along the way, to whom we owe a profound debt of gratitude.⁹

This book particularly focuses on the most recent discoveries, without however neglecting to mention

what has been written in the past, which is now reinterpreted and reviewed in the light of new knowledge.

The presentation of the various areas is usually and consciously rather succinct. Previous preliminary reports and some more detailed publications have allowed us to be brief, referring the reader to existing publications for a more in-depth analysis.¹⁰ In addition, the book *Bakchias: Dall’Archeologia alla Storia*, edited by the authors of this book, remains essential reading, as it was the first systematic attempt to summarise what we know so far.¹¹ We refer the reader to that book for everything that concerns the cataloguing of the buildings of Bakchias¹² and the ceramics¹³ and stone artefacts¹⁴ unearthed since 2005.

For the same reasons, this book does not mention some classes of materials due to the many monographs – such as those discussing glass and timber, sculptures of all kinds and amulets¹⁵ – and extensive articles – such as those discussing coinage¹⁶ – which have allowed us to avoid repeating ourselves, ensuring that this book remains both exhaustive and as clear as possible.

⁹ Given the impossibility of mentioning all the Egyptian colleagues and friends who have worked in Bakchias, we will have to limit ourselves to mentioning the inspectors of the Fayyūm inspectorate who cooperated and collaborated in field research: inspectors Maghed Abd el-Hameed Abd el-Aal, Nahla Mohamed Ahmed Hassan, Mohamed Hamed Mohamed Ahmed and Mohamed Hamed Gabr Salama Nureddin.

¹⁰ For the preliminary reports, see Tassinari 2006a; Buzi and Tassinari 2007; Giorgi 2007; Giorgi 2009; Giorgi 2011c; Giorgi 2011a; as well as the various articles published in the RISE series (*Ricerche Italiane e Scavi in Egitto*), originally edited by Maria Casini and subsequently by Rosanna Pirelli and Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi. For definitive reports, see Rossetti 2008; Tassinari 2009; Giorgi 2012; Giorgi and Buzi 2014.

¹¹ Giorgi and Buzi 2014.

¹² Rossetti 2014b, 369-406.

¹³ Gasperini 2014, 243-368.

¹⁴ Tocci 2014, 213-242.

¹⁵ Pernigotti 2008; Gasperini, Paolucci and Tocci 2008; Nifosì 2009.

¹⁶ Parente 2004; Parente 2008.

Reshaping Bakchias

Paola Buzi

Chapter I

Bakchias: Its rediscovery, its cults

P. Buzi

The rediscovery of Ptolemaic-Roman village... which turned out to have had a much longer life than previously supposed¹

It could be argued that Bakchias returned to life and attracted the attention of the international scientific community following the explorations of Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth and, above all, after publication in 1900, of their work, *Fayûm Towns and Their Papyri*, a work which is still fundamental today to studies of the Arsinoite nome. In the brief report which they devoted to the excavations which they had carried out in the first weeks of 1896 for the *Egypt Exploration Fund* (now *Society*) in the Kôm Umm el-Athl site, where the Greek papyri placed the Greco-Roman Period village of Bakchias, they were unable to hide a certain amount of disappointment: the Greek papyri which they had brought to light were few in number and of little interest, apart from a few exceptions; from an archaeological point of view, no stone monument of any architectural value had been discovered.

It is therefore not surprising that the illustrious scholars concluded their summary in this way:

'Bacchias then was a village of mud-roofed brick dwellings, without architectural adornment or pretension, out of which rose a single massive brick temple, oblong, mud-roofed, and equally devoid of external adornment. Its main avenue lay north and south. It was entered from the desert by the still conspicuous depression between the mounds, which probably lay on the line of the Memphis road, and also from the south-west, the direction of Arsinoe'.²

The opinion of the distinguished British papyrologists did not however discourage the research of Italian scholars and in particular the University of Bologna. In 1992, during a surface survey to identify a site of the Fayyûm on which to conduct research and somewhere they could carry out annual excavation expeditions, the University of Bologna identified Bakchias as the ideal place.

As Sergio Pernigotti notes, at the time of the survey, excavations were already taking place in the Fayyûm.³ There was the University of Pisa expedition, led by Edda Bresciani, which was excavating in Narmouthis/Madīnat Māḏī and also the Franco-Italian expedition led by Claudio Gallazzi of the University of Milan which had recently recommenced excavations in Tebtynis in collaboration with the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale of Cairo.⁴

Although at first sight the appearance of Bakchias was not overly encouraging, because of the very evident damage which the archaeological area had suffered because of the *sebbakhin*, the hope was that the resources of the site, which was mentioned in many papyri but never systematically explored from an archaeological perspective, had not been completely exhausted.

The fact that a site, which preserved ruins that were after all impressive, had been neglected by studies and in earlier archaeological exploration of the Fayyûm, is probably due in large part to the weight of the harsh judgment of Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth.⁵ It may also be due, however, to the considerable focus on the two sites close by of Karanis and Philadelphia, which had always been far better known, the former because of the presence of well preserved stone temples and the latter for the stunning discoveries of papyri.

Its location almost halfway between Karanis and Philadelphia and on the northern edge of the Arsinoite nome, between cultivated land and desert, suggests however that the *kome* of Bakchias had had an important position in the road system between Memphis and the Fayyûm. The road crossed the desert, arrived in Bakchias and then branched off westwards reaching Karanis. From here it reached *Shedet*/Krokodilopolis/Madīnat al-Fayyûm right in the centre of the region, of which this large urban centre was the administrative and religious capital from the third millennium. Towards the east, the road led to Philadelphia, then to al-Lāhūn with its locks, and from there the Nile.

¹ This chapter largely relies upon Sergio Pernigotti's studies.

² Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900: 40.

³ Pernigotti 2014a: 17-38.

⁴ Bresciani *et al.* 2006; Gallazzi and Hadji-Minaglou 2000; .

⁵ Montserrat 1996: 133-176.

However, Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth were not the first scholars to be absorbed by Bakchias. The first brief description of the site was by Flinders Petrie. During a rapid review of the archaeological sites of the Fayyūm, from Ptolemais to Kōm Awšīm, continuing along the entire southeastern corner of the region then heading northwards, he wrote:

‘Kom el-Akl (*sic!*) is a large town, about half a mile across with high mounds. The surface pottery is of the IIIrd and IV cent. A.D. and it must have been founded some centuries before that to allow of such accumulation. As it is by the road into the Fayum this might well be an older town of the time before the lake was dried up. I noticed a mass of deep foundation of stone. The tombs east of it are visible for some distance; they are cut in a low cliff facing south; about six or eight chambers; no ornaments or inscriptions’.⁶

It is worth highlighting the uncertainty about the modern name of the place which has been erroneously stated as being Kom el-Akl, a place name which does not appear anywhere else. There is not even a variation of it in any study of place names in which uncertainties and problems still remain today. This is an approximate rendering of the modern name, something which we come across with other places which Petrie surveyed.⁷

The illustrious British archaeologist was the first to formulate the hypothesis that the Graeco-roman settlement grew up on the site of a more ancient city, which had been established before the (partial) shrinking of the lake, because of the fact that it was found on the road leading from the north to the Fayyūm. This hypothesis seems consistent with our current knowledge.⁸

Lastly, the mention of the presence of the ‘mass of deep foundation of stone’ is interesting. It can now be identified with what is known as Temple C, excavated and documented by our expedition but which, after Petrie’s visit, must have been partly demolished by the local inhabitants and therefore partly disappeared again.⁹

In 1894 and 1895, Grenfell and Hogarth – joined in January 1896, as papyrologist, by Hunt – retraced the road which Petrie had opened in 1888.¹⁰ Having obtained adequate funds from the Fund Committee, they decided to concentrate their efforts on an extensive expedition

at the site of Karanis/Kōm Awšīm and at the site of Kōm Umm el Athl, or the ‘the place of the tamerisk’. This is how it is shown in all the contemporary topographical maps, as Sergio Pernigotti has often remarked.

Initially, work focused on Kōm Awšīm and it lasted until the end of 1895. Then, the following year, on 5th January 1896, the expedition already mentioned took place, lasting for seven weeks. A somewhat cursory report of it was given in the *Archaeological Report* relating to work carried out in 1895-1896, an expedition which was characterised by ‘boisterous, inclement weather which will make the early part of 1896 long and evilly remembered in Egypt’.¹¹

As we said, the papyri were found, although not in the expected quantity, in a site which could still be described as unexcavated, and were almost exclusively in Greek. The near total lack of documents in the Demotic language has led to the formation of the conviction that the Graeco-Roman age Bakchias, which was the only one that could be spoken of at that time, was a deeply, if not totally, hellenized site. Future excavations would be responsible for modifying this way of assessing dates, including of papyri.¹²

The contents of the papyri discovered by the British expedition, indicated that the divinity to whom the principal temple of the *kome* was dedicated was the crocodile god, Soknobkonneus.

Only later would A. Bataille identify a second crocodile god, Soknobraisis, who was also a patron of Bakchias, in a few papyri which definitely came from Bakchias and were probably the result of digging carried out by the *sebbakhin*. They appeared on the antiquities market without any distinguishing marks which could enable identification of the precise location in which they were found in the topography of the village.¹³ This was a very important group of papyri because it presupposed the presence of a second large temple of which there was no trace of any remains on the ground but whose remains would be identified much later during the course of the excavations. Furthermore, another papyrus, *P. Berlin* 2215, published in 1976,¹⁴ proved the presence at Bakchias of some sort of religious diarchy because of the existence on the site of two *ierà lòghima*, or two ‘first class’¹⁵ temples, dedicated to these gods. This was an apparently unique case in the region although, according to Sergio Pernigotti amongst others, we have to rely on the abovementioned papyrus which contains a long list of Arsinoite villages mentioning,

⁶ Petrie 1891: 31-32.

⁷ An example is Kom Wesim for Kōm Awšīm (Petrie 1891: 32) and Kahun which, as is well known, is an invented toponym.

⁸ Morini 2006a; Morini 2006b; Morini 2008.

⁹ Rossetti 2008.

¹⁰ Hogarth and Grenfell 1896: 17-18.

¹¹ Hogarth and Grenfell 1896: 17.

¹² Pernigotti 1998: 27-39; Zecchi 2002: 22-26; Zecchi 2006: 101-106.

¹³ Bataille 1938: 197-205.

¹⁴ Brashear 1976: 6-11.

¹⁵ Rossetti 2017b: 543-548.

for each one, the principal temple and the divinity which was worshipped in it.¹⁶

The failure to find traces of foundations did not impede the British papyrologists in correctly dating the temple to the first Ptolemaic Period. The dating was correctly put forward on the basis of the papyri found in its interior and which is confirmed in numerous archaeological discussions relating above all to the layout and the construction techniques.¹⁷

The dating of the site to the Ptolemaic Period seemed to be confirmed by the continuous comparisons with Karanis/Kōm Awšīm, both on the urban planning and on the building structure and techniques, including those relating to individual dwellings. It should be noted that the description and layout of the temple by Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth are remarkably precise, although the excavation of the large mud brick building was somewhat superficial, as our excavations have enabled us to observe. According to Grenfell and Hogarth it constituted the ideal centre of the city and the houses were arranged all around it, apart from in the area opposite the entrance, where a wide space suggested the presence of the *agorā*, information which later excavations have undertaken to correct.

It must be emphasised however that the British scholars identified a single temple. The fact that others were not then visible on the land, creating some problems later in the interpretation of the papyri which seemed to suggest more places of worship, confirms that the *kom* was far more concealed than when the Italian expedition began their excavations. However, it should be noted that Grenfell and Hogarth, using both archaeological and papyrological data, had correctly narrowed down the chronology of the site to being between the beginning of the Ptolemaic Era and the Byzantine Era/beginning of the Arabic Era, which is clearly supported by comparisons with the situation in Karanis. There is no mention in their report, not even a negative one, of the Byzantine Period; nor would they have been able to make it, given the lack of any hint of this at that time.

The British scholars made no explicit comment on the origins of the village, but it seems clear that they did not think that there could have been any settlement on the site before the Ptolemaic Era when they stated that 'in the site cannot have been inhabited for more than a few centuries',¹⁸ which was certainly justified by the archaeological situation they were faced with.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Editio princeps* in Brashear 1976: 6-11.

¹⁷ Giorgi 1998: 57-78.

¹⁸ Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900: 35.

¹⁹ The original height of the *kom* is conserved in a long strip of land to the west and north where later the destruction by the *sebbakhin* ceased. This was first interpreted by the British expedition and also

The elements briefly mentioned in the *Report* are reprised and developed further, although still briefly, in a proper excavation report in the chapter devoted to Bakchias which can be found in the later 'Fayūm Towns and Their Papyri'.²⁰

With regard to the identification of the site, the papyrus evidence seems entirely convincing, even if it lacks the main proof for identifying an urban site, which is evidence from the inscriptions and from the *ostraka*: the only inscription which we have does not contain the name of the place but bears the name of one of the most important divinities of the site, Soknobjonneus, which can therefore be considered to be the equivalent of a direct mention of it.

It should be noted, with regard to this, that in one of the hieroglyphic inscriptions found on the site, inscribed on a fragment in quartzite, probably part of a votive *naos*, *Km-wr*, the name (or one of the possible names) of the Ptolemaic Bakchias, is conserved, the existence of which now seems certain.²¹ However, it is worth pointing out that, up until now, the Greek name of the site, Bakchias, is only known in documents written in Greek, whilst in Demotic documents (which are indeed few in number) it is never conserved, not even in the only bilingual Greek/Demotic papyrus from the site.²²

After Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth

From 1896, Bakchias was no longer the object of official archaeological excavations. Examining the inadequate bibliography relating to this site, one has the impression that not even the clandestine excavations and the activity of the *sebbakhin* unearthed objects as important as those in other sites of the Fayyūm. Apart from the discoveries made in excavations by Grenfell and Hogarth,²³ only a mirror conserved since 1921 in the Museum of Cairo (J.d.E. 47072), comes from Bakchias. It is evidently the result of a sporadic discovery because nothing in the '*Journal d'Entrée*' gives any hint of its origin.²⁴ Since then, no other object is documented as coming from Bakchias.²⁵

It should be mentioned, however, that a group of papyri undoubtedly from Bakchias and of major importance

by our own as proof of the existence of an 'upper Bakchias' (Pernigotti 1994: 11), as, for example, happened at Narmouthis/Madinat Mādi where it is also confirmed by textual evidence (Foraboschi 1976: 90) which does not exist at Bakchias.

²⁰ Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900: 35-42.

²¹ Pernigotti 2005a: 68-69; Zecchi 2006: 101.

²² Clarysse and Müller 2004

²³ Montserrat 1996: 133-176.

²⁴ Davoli 1994: 71-74.

²⁵ Amongst the discoveries on the surface and identified and published out of context at the beginning of our expedition, we should highlight a fragment of sphinx or lion in red granite discovered in the South Kom: cfr. Davoli 1994, 73-75. In the same area, a bronze coin dating to the first Arabic Era was also found. cfr. Pernigotti 2000a.

for the history of the site, appeared on the antiquities market during the 1930s. They were probably discovered during digging by the *sebbakhin*, which lasted on an industrial scale until the beginning of the 1930s, when their activity was drastically reduced following the intervention of the Egyptian government, on the initiative of the *Service des Antiquités*. Because of this, it is easy to understand the reason why the study of Bakchias was essentially limited to papyrological work.

Amongst work relating to the publication of the papyri, it is worth highlighting, also for its importance in determining the topography of the *kome*, that of K. Hanell, E.J. Knudtzon and E.H. Gilliam.²⁶ The last of these, in particular with the publication of the archive of Soknobraisis²⁷ laid the foundations for an understanding of the urban structure of Bakchias in the Ptolemaic and Roman Period and enabled, if not to resolve, at least, to set a new approach in handling sensitive issues of archaeology and cult.²⁸ The work of W. Rübsam,²⁹ in which there is a chapter devoted to the gods and cults of Bakchias, can be added to the publications of papyri.

The best summary, however, is that contained in the entry on 'Bakchias' in the *Dizionario Geografico* of Aristide Calderini.³⁰ Although it occupies a relatively limited space because of the structure set by the dictionary, the complete list of the data obtainable from the papyri known up to that moment (the remainder would make their appearance in the *Supplementi* of Sergio Daris) and from the poor quality archaeological information, is given in chronological order. That constituted substantial progress compared to the work by Wessely.³¹ It showed a chronological dateline of the site going from a papyrus dated 250 BCE to a papyrus which can probably be placed in around the fifth century CE. It should be observed, however, that Grenfell and Hogarth pushed the life of Bakchias further on up to the Arabic Era, on the basis of the evidence in the unpublished papyri.

If we accept this chronology, Bakchias must have been founded around 280, during the reign of Ptolemy II, while the second reclamation of the area was taking place or was about to take place.³² The toponymy also agrees with these judgments: Bakchias is a name which appears strictly linked to the Ptolemaic Dynasty and to its religious ideas focusing on the Dionysian cult, and it corresponds with other toponymies of the Fayyūm

(Dionysias, Philadelphia, Theadelphia etc.). This means that there was a coherent urban policy by the Ptolemaic sovereigns which was also manifested in the choice of names given to old and new settlements.³³

In short, all the available evidence, including archaeological, seemed to suggest that Bakchias had been established and named by Ptolemy II during the reclamation. It is worth noting however that, when the reclamation by Ptolemy II began, a small number of villages existed already and were simply re-established. They were given a new lease of life by the Graeco-Macedonian Dynasty, receiving a name very similar to the previous one or that was largely a hellenization of it, and corresponded to the new ideology of the royalty, as well as the religious convictions of the Ptolemaic sovereigns.

In the next few chapters, we will see how profoundly the analysis of the urban structure of the *kome*, its religious architecture – with at least five temples of different ages – and as a result the *pantheon* within them, changed. It went from a modest village made entirely from mud bricks, as Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth believed, to the large centre of the Arsinoite nome in the *meris* (division) of Herakleides. It was just as much a collector as Karanis, of enormous quantities of cereals which were transferred, in large boats, along the canal it faced to the south, towards Bahr Youssef, as far as the Nile and from there to Alexandria from where, at least in part, the road led to Rome.³⁴

P.Amh. II, 123³⁵ mentions two *epiplooi* from Bakchias. As is known, these officials were responsible for escorting the vessels, which transported the grain to Alexandria, first of all as armed escorts then, from the second century CE, as civil servants. As well as conducting the loads entrusted to them to their destination, they had to be present at the *paradosis* and at the *zygostasia* which took place in Neapolis, taking responsibility for the quantity of grain transported, while the dieticians were responsible for its quality.

As well as in a Graeco-Demotic papyrus (the only bilingual one up until that time), there is clear evidence for this from the second century BCE³⁶ in the great *thesauros*, the largest hitherto known in the whole of the Fayyūm, of which the definitive report was published.³⁷ In its role of grain city, Bakchias³⁸ appears yet again closely tied to Karanis whose granaries have been known and written about for a long time.³⁹

²⁶ Hanell 1938; Knudtzon 1946.

²⁷ Strassi and Ghiretti 2011, 122 (with the previous bibliography).

²⁸ Gilliam 1981.

²⁹ Rübsam 1974.

³⁰ Calderini and Daris 1935-2010: II. 1, 22-30.

³¹ Wessely 1904: 45-47.

³² Pernigotti 2009.

³³ Pernigotti 2000b.

³⁴ Pernigotti 1997b: 202-203.

³⁵ Grenfell and Hunt 1901, nr, 123, 148-149.

³⁶ Clarysse and Müller 2004 already quoted above.

³⁷ Tassinari 2009 (with the previous bibliography).

³⁸ The papyrological documentation in Nachtergaeel 2007.

³⁹ Tassinari 2007.

Although it is true that all the papyri found so far are in Greek (if an insignificant fragment in Demotic and the Graeco-Demotic one just mentioned are excluded), the image of a deeply hellenized *kome* has been diminished by the discovery of texts in Demotic (on *ostraka* and stone) and in hieroglyphic characters, something which is also fairly rare elsewhere in the Fayyūm.

The multiple names of Bakchias

The most important new features of the excavations of recent years are, without doubt, those concerning the chronology, which is now on a completely different basis compared to what we knew before.⁴⁰ Before excavations resumed and for some time after they restarted, the only dates available were those obtained from Greek papyri. There was no Demotic documentation, not to mention the hieroglyphic inscriptions, so the time limits shown above (c. 280 BCE– fifth century CE) could not be called into question, unless it was to give a more precise date to the individual buildings brought to light in the meantime. The textual and archaeological data seemed to agree without being forced.

The one discrepancy could be the name of the patron god, Soknobkonneus, also known only from Greek papyri, the probable significance of which is ‘Sobek-lord of *Ghenut*’. Giving Bakchias Egyptian name, *Ghenut*, was proof of its existence in the pre-Ptolemaic Period.

The co-existence of two place names (*Ghenut*/Bakchias, independent from a linguistic point of view) could only mean that one name followed the other – that is, that *Ghenut*, which was pre-existing, was succeeded by a new name, Bakchias, when the village was revived and perhaps also repopulated during the second reclamation of Fayyūm carried out in the reign of Ptolemy II. The *Book of the Fayyūm* also appears to associate a second place name, *Kem-ur*, with Bakchias. This is now reflected epigraphically in a hieroglyphic inscription which is a fragmentary but reliable addition and also purely Egyptian and before Bakchias. The name stems from the proximity of the site to a large stretch of water (*Kem-ur* means ‘big black’ a reference to stretches of water), which would certainly be Birket Qarūn, the big lake which today lies to the north of the region. It is no mere chance that it was called ‘the land of the lake’ in Egyptian sources.

In other words, the two place names *Ghenut*/*Kem-ur* must precede the name Bakchias, confirming the existence of the site in the Ptolemaic Period, whilst leaving open the problem of which of the two was the more ancient and which could be truly associated with Bakchias.

⁴⁰ Pernigotti 2005a: 37-72; in summary, Pernigotti 2009: 99-103.

Sergio Pernigotti clearly explained that the inspiration for his reflections on the origins of Bakchias was an important article by J. Yoyotte which takes as its cue ‘légendes pratiquement inédites de la procession de génie qui se déroule, au temple de Ptah memphite (Mit Rahineh), sur le mur situé au Sud de l’hypostile occidentale’.

When studying them, Yoyotte had ‘la surprise de constater que la partie conservée de cette procession énumérait une série de lieux du Fayoum’.⁴¹ This list, which can be dated to the reign of Ramses II although the original wording in all likelihood dates back to an even earlier period in history, was reproduced in other temples: in the one at Kom Ombo, during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor, in the Theban temple of Opet and again at Kom Ombo, in the Roman Period.

In the section of the article devoted to ‘villes anciennes du Fayoum’,⁴² J. Yoyotte observes that ‘l’ancienne procession de villes de Haute Egypte ... présente la plus ancienne liste détaillée de lieux du Fayoum qui soit connue’.⁴³ According to Sergio Pernigotti, it probably dates back to the time of the reclamation carried out in the region between Sesostri II, Amenemhat III and Amenemhat IV, when drainage work and the acquisition of new land taken from the desert by large irrigation projects, led to the establishment of new villages such as *Dja*/Narmouthis/Madīnat Mādī.

Amongst the localities mentioned in the geographical lists recorded above, there is one which takes the name of *Ghenut* (*gnwt*). According to Yoyotte it can be identified with the pre-Ptolemaic Bakchias.⁴⁴ The relative caption is intact in the Ptolemaic Period list of Kom Ombo, almost intact in the Memphis list and in the Theban one of Opet, whilst a passage is quoted in the Roman Period inscription of Kom Ombo: ‘He brings to you *Ghenut* (*gnwt*) in the land of the lake, your beautiful place in *Kem-wr* (*km-wr*). It is your *k3* which brings about the kingly annals (*gnwt*) as your work (*k3*)’.

According to Yoyotte, the toponym *Kem-ur* cannot refer to Birket Qarūn, but would be a designation of *Ghenut* itself. The passage cited above would then be translated as ‘your beautiful place which is (*m*) *Kem-ur*. In the ‘Book of the Fayyūm’ this toponym is mentioned in relation to the goddess Nekhbet who is called ‘the lady of *Kem-ur*’,⁴⁵ and who in the Late Period would have been the divine protectress of this location.

The identification between *Ghenut* and *Kem-ur* is supposedly fragile because it is based on the

⁴¹ Yoyotte 1962

⁴² Yoyotte 1962: 108.

⁴³ Yoyotte 1962: 108.

⁴⁴ Yoyotte 1962: 116-119.

⁴⁵ Yoyotte 1962: 117 and notes 2-3.

interpretation of the preposition *m* (preposition of place or *m* of identity). It cannot be denied *a priori*, that *Kem-ur* could be the name, if not of the lake, of a district which includes at least a stretch of water: ‘*Ghenut* which is in *Kem-ur*’. It should be observed also that, to date, there has been no proof that Nekhbet had a role of any importance in the *pantheon* of *Ghenut/Kem-ur/Bakchias*. On the contrary, the papyrological documents available demonstrate to us that the patron divinity of Bakchias was Soknobkonneus, a crocodile god, possibly accompanied from a certain period of time by a second crocodile god, Soknobraisis, while Nekhbet is not even mentioned.

From that, observes Sergio Pernigotti, it would follow that either *Kem-ur* cannot be identified with *Ghenut/Bakchias* or that the documents which have been available to us to date, have denied us the name of the main original divinity of the site. This is a difficult hypothesis to sustain but not, *per sé*, impossible.

To return to Yoyotte’s clear exposition, the name of *Ghenut*, not otherwise referred to except in the geographical lists, would however be preserved in the name of the principal god of the site, Soknobkonneus. He rightly interprets Soknobkonneus as *Sbk-nb-Gnwt* ‘Sobek lord of *Ghenut*’, according to a map also known elsewhere in the religious geography of the Fayyūm, in which *-koneus* would be the Greek transcription of *gnwt*, a name which was probably pronounced in the Ptolemaic Period as **konew*. This interpretation would show that, in the Ptolemaic Period, the site called Bakchias, in accordance with the dionysian ideology of the reigning dynasty, was in fact originally called *Ghenut* (perhaps also *Kem-ur*) and that it also existed in the pre-Ptolemaic Period.⁴⁶

We have to await H. Beinlich’s work on the *The Book of the Fayyūm*⁴⁷ for the question of Bakchias to be addressed again, this time in the context of a general reconsideration of the religious geography of the Fayyūm in light of such an important religious text. In Beinlich’s excellent publication, the passage relating to *Kem-ur*, already used by Yoyotte, is read as follows (r. 230):

‘This place of his, *Kem-ur*; is next to this lake to protect his (fem.) father (Ta)-Keeping in his lake for eternity. Nekhbet lady of *Kem-ur*’.

In his comment at this stage, Beinlich cites the identification of *Kem-ur* with *Ghenut*, and therefore with Bakchias, by Yoyotte and seems inclined to accept the identification between *Ghenut* and *Kem-ur*. In his general interpretation of the *Book of the Fayyūm*,

however, he locates it in the southern part of the region, thus denying the link with Bakchias. What is also quite surprising is that Beinlich hardly speaks at all of the god Soknobkonneus who, for Yoyotte, plays an important role in the discussion. Beinlich focuses rather on other crocodile god of Bakchias, Soknobraisis.⁴⁸

Yoyotte has intervened persuasively also in the discussion which has been taking place on the significance of the name of Soknobraisis since the moment of his identification in the Greek papyri which come from the archive of his temple. He believes that the name of the god after the two elements *Sbk-nb* easily identifiable as ‘Sobek-lord of / possessor of’, contains the mention of one of the god’s attributes, ‘Sobek-possessor-of-a-terrifying-throat’, *Sbk-nb-r3-hs3*.

Beinlich on the other hand returns to what had been one of the possibilities already stated in a study by Ch. Kuentz,⁴⁹ which is that Soknobraisis derives from *Sbk-nb-r3-hswy*, and suggests that *r3-hswy* was the ancient pre-Ptolemaic name of Bakchias.⁵⁰ However, according to the current state of the documentation in our possession, the principal patron divinity of Bakchias was Soknobkonneus, while Soknobraisis appears to be a more recent god, being mentioned only from the second century CE.

We cannot help observing however that all the hypotheses mentioned above may be called into question or, alternately, be confirmed if and when future excavations bring to light new documents with the names of Soknobkonneus and Soknobraisis written in any of the Egyptian scripts which will enable us to understand their real significance, without using Greek as an intermediary.

In his monograph on the religious geography of the Fayyūm.⁵¹ Marco Zecchi examines some of the problems outlined above. The scholar does not comment⁵² on the identification of the toponym *Ghenut* with the pre-Ptolemaic Bakchias but he does highlight what, in his opinion, is the weakness of the hypothesis formulated by Yoyotte because of the lack of objective archaeological data to confirm it. With regard to *Kem-ur*,⁵³ he deviates from the identification with *Ghenut*, and therefore with Bakchias, put forward by the French scholar, maintaining that the *m* which precedes *Kem-ur* is a preposition of place and not the *m* of identity. Therefore the relative passage should be interpreted as ‘*Ghenut* in the Land of the Lake, your beautiful place which is in *Kem-ur*’. Consequently this last toponym

⁴⁸ Beinlich 1991: 308-311.

⁴⁹ Kuentz 1938: 206-211.

⁵⁰ Beinlich 1991: 310.

⁵¹ Zecchi 2001.

⁵² Zecchi 2001: 197-198.

⁵³ Zecchi 2001: 220-221.

⁴⁶ Montet 1961: 217.

⁴⁷ Beinlich 1991; other fragments have been discovered and published following: Beinlich 1996; Beinlich 1999.

indicates either all of the Fayyūm or a part of it. The possibility of *Kem-ur* indicating all of the Fayyūm would appear to be confirmed in the interpretation which M. Lichtheim gives in a passage in *Teaching for Merikara* in which the mention of *Kem-ur* is linked with the Fayyūm and not with the Great Bitter Lake, as the majority of scholars believed.⁵⁴

In any case, if *Ghenut* is Bakchias – the future Bakchias – it is evident that the *kome* is much more ancient than could have been thought previously, and its existence may date back to the reclamation of Amenemhat III, when numerous ‘reclamation villages’ were established in the region, undoubtedly including *Dja/Narmouthis/Madinat Mādī* which has preserved a magnificent temple constructed by Amenemhat III and IV.

According to Pernigotti, also, the idea that the toponym *Ghenut* could be dated to an even earlier period (third millennium) is a possibility based on somewhat weak indications. However, it should not be dismissed out of hand if one thinks not of an urban centre but of a farm or an estate (royal or of court officials),⁵⁵ out of which an agricultural village developed. The village would have been built around a temple dedicated to a divinity, possibly one of the many forms of Sobek or the female divinity, Nekhbet mentioned in the ‘Book of the Fayyūm’ as patron of *Kem-ur*. For now, this attribution is not matched either in text or in anything else. However, it does present a certain logic because, as a protective divinity of the ancient royalty, it would find a precise match in the *Renenutet/Uadjet* of *Madinat Mādī*.

If this was not all guesswork, we would have to admit that Nekhbet lady of *Kem-ur* was the most ancient divinity of our *kome*, followed (or perhaps substituted) later (when?) by a new god, Sobek-lord of *Ghenut*, and then remained patron of the site from then on, even after the arrival of the Greeks, the new landlords, who replaced *Ghenut* with a new toponym, Bakchias.

For Pernigotti, in short, and erring on the side of caution, one could think of the following parallel series of divinities for the two villages – Narmouthis and Bakchias: for *Madinat Mādī*, Renenutet (*Uadjet*) lady of *Dja* – Sobek *paredra* divinity that is Narmouthis (Greek form of the name),⁵⁶ while for Bakchias, Nekhbet (lady of *Kem-ur*), Sobek (lord of *Ghenut* > Soknobkonneus) > Bakchias (Greek name).

All these hypotheses certainly seem plausible. However, as we have seen, they are based on arguments which are somewhat tenuous. The archaeological data, for all its value, allows us to date it with certainty to a period

before the Ptolemaic Age but not to much earlier historic periods.

A set of very old buildings was found below Temple A, established by Ptolemy II, which suggests the presence of an earlier temple (the last part of the dynastic age? maybe earlier?), in turn, possibly the evolution of an earlier one.

Furthermore, a Phoenician amphora imported from Tyre which can be dated to between eighth-sixth century BCE apparently lodged inside a ceramic kiln, was found beneath the north western corner of Temple A, proving the existence of artisan activity before the temple was built. All this is a fairly substantial indication of Bakchias’ existence being, at the latest, in the sixth century BCE.⁵⁷

This is apparently confirmed by fragments of two statues, one in black basalt and headless, featuring a kneeling person. It is rendered anonymous by the removal of the inscriptions during a later use but can be dated on the basis of its style to the 26th Dynasty (the reign of Psamtik II, 595-589 BCE).⁵⁸ The other, similarly headless, is in limestone featuring a seated individual and bears a hieroglyphic inscription which allows us to date it with certainty to the reign of Psamtik II. The inscription preserves the name and patronymic of the proprietor: Padibastet son of Paarkhonsu bears the ‘beautiful name’ of *Nefer-ib-Ra-sa-Sobek*, modelled on the enthronement name of Psamtik II. Padibastet bears the modest inscription ‘known by the king’.⁵⁹ A third fragment of the small head of a male statue in granite can be dated possibly to the same historic period.⁶⁰

This convergence of documents towards a precise historic moment, the sixth century BCE, is unlikely to be due to the archaeological case but it does perhaps show a particularly happy time in the history of Bakchias.⁶¹ Other discoveries, such as the base of a votive figurine with a hieroglyphic inscription on the base⁶² and a limestone fragment of a royal decree, also in hieroglyphic characters, of uncertain date,⁶³ can perhaps be placed, if not right in the 26th Dynasty, at least in a historical period not too far removed from it and, at any rate, in the Ptolemaic Period.

This accumulation of data and points of view in respect of the traditional chronology of the site is further strengthened by other documents relating to

⁵⁷ Tassinari 2004: 57-68.

⁵⁸ Pernigotti 2001a; Pernigotti 2008: 16-18 (with the remaining bibliography).

⁵⁹ *Editio princeps* in De Meulenaere 2004: 7-12; Pernigotti 2008: 18-21.

⁶⁰ Pernigotti 2008, 21-22.

⁶¹ Pernigotti 2011.

⁶² Pernigotti 2008, 15-16; Zecchi 2002: 25, no. 6 (the date of the Ptolemaic Period).

⁶³ Pernigotti 2008: 22-23, no. 5.

⁵⁴ Lichtheim 1973: 104, 108, note 16; Zecchi 2001: 221.

⁵⁵ Yoyotte 1962: 116; Pernigotti 2005a: 48, note 41. For the Fayyūm in the Ancient Kingdom cfr. Cwiek 1997; Piacentini 1997.

⁵⁶ Bresciani 2006: 1-2.

the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, both with regard to town-planning matters,⁶⁴ whose phases we can now reconstruct with sufficient precision, and the written documentation. Regarding the latter, we should highlight the discovery of a good number of papyri and *ostraka* in Greek, as well as one in Egyptian which had been completely lacking before. Amongst the other written sources, should be included several hieroglyphic inscriptions – a decree in limestone dated to year 9 of a sovereign whose name is lost,⁶⁵ as well as some inscriptions on wood, certainly fragments of ritual ornamentation; Demotic documentary *ostraca*,⁶⁶ to which should be added an inscription on the base of a statue or lion with a dedication tendered to the local god, the rarity of which makes it particularly important.

The coexistence of a figurative language of ancient Egyptian origin which is very widespread in sculptures in full relief and on flat surfaces, as well as on amulets⁶⁷ and decorative elements such as those included in *faïence*,⁶⁸ with one of a purely hellenistic tradition – amongst which is a terracotta flask with erotic scenes⁶⁹ and a small bronze statue featuring a dancing dwarf⁷⁰ – has enabled us to gain an insight into unknown aspects of life in this centre of the Fayyūm, which now appears much richer and more complex than we thought previously based on the partial documentation provided by the papyri.

Amongst the figurative elements on sculptures in full relief and on flat surface, amulets, parts of wooden furniture and inlay, there is a clear prevalence of Egyptian motifs compared to Greek ones which effectively only comprise the above mentioned flask and the small bronze statue of the dancing dwarf. The genuine innovation in the life of the village shown by the bilingualism in the Greek papyri and the Egyptian inscriptions is juxtaposed with continuity in the figurative arts which are entirely typical of a rural village with ancient dynastic traditions. The beetle in the ‘*Menkheperra*’ series, which can probably be dated to the eighth century BCE,⁷¹ can probably be interpreted principally as an antique object owned by an inhabitant of the *kome*.

The changes in the environment in the twentieth century and the lost *necropoleis* of Bakchias

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, and from the description contained in the *Fayūm Towns*, there has been a great change in the relationship between

the archaeological site and the surrounding landscape. There are currently new elements which in some way affect not so much the archaeological investigation of the site, as the problems of protecting the antiquities preserved there. The problems have come to the fore since the recent development of the region has reached an advanced stage and now constitutes a problem in terms of safeguarding the land.

The establishment of a village which did not exist at the time of the British expedition, other than in the form of some ‘*ezbah*’ arranged along the Abdallah Wahbi canal and which, although smaller and more to the south, follows the same route as the ancient route on which Karanis, Bakchias and Philadelphia were located, has changed many things.⁷² This is the village of Gorein whose name is simply the Arabic spelling, with a touch of imagination, reflecting the local dialect, of the English name, Green, who was probably the owner of a farm near the archaeological area, traces of which remain in the maps at the 25,000.⁷³

The toponym, Gorein, already existed in the area before the building of the village. A secondary canal which went from the Abdallah Wahbi canal mentioned above towards the west, almost parallel to the main one, was in fact drawn in the map at the 25,000 as *Bahr Green*, and *Ezbet Green* or *Ezbet Umm el-Athl* was the name of a factory located on it. It is a very modest and recently established settlement, because it does not appear on the 1945 maps. These show that there was only one big farm called *Mashalla Hanim* in the area, along a small road, almost a path which led off the agricultural road which coasted the canal, heading across the fields.

The actual village of Gorein shows respect for the ruins. However, the inevitable landfill sites which surround the private dwellings tend to spread out and threaten the South Kom, where there is also a modern Islamic cemetery which in turn causes a second problem as it is obviously untouchable and impinges on it to the east although it does not yet affect the historic area.⁷⁴

Obviously none of this appears in the report of the British scholars. For them, Bakchias stood in an area where there was no other man made presence. There is a clear distinction between a northern *kom* and a southern one, separated by what remained of the bed of the ancient canal. They are in a different state of preservation suggesting with some justification that the latter one (the South Kom) was less inhabited than the former in ancient times and only towards the end of the existence of the *kome*, as has also been demonstrated

⁶⁴ Giorgi 2004: 49-55; Giorgi 2011: 183-194.

⁶⁵ Pernigotti 2008: 22-23.

⁶⁶ Pernigotti 2001b: 65-74 (with the previous bibliography).

⁶⁷ Nifosì 2009.

⁶⁸ Gasperini, Paolucci and Tocci 2008.

⁶⁹ D’Andria 1995, 83-87; Seif el-Din 2006: 46-47, 185, no. 162, Taf.: 34, 5-6.

⁷⁰ De Maria 1999: 45-68.

⁷¹ Nifosì 2009: 105 (with the previous bibliography).

⁷² Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900, 35.

⁷³ Pernigotti 1994: 7.

⁷⁴ For matters relating to the conservation and protection of the ancient sites of the Fayyūm, in particular Bakchias, see Buzi *et al.* 2011, 86-95.

by the finding of papyri, none of which could be dated other than to the late Byzantine Period.⁷⁵

Environmental change and the human activities described above are the fundamental reasons for the disappearance of the necropoleis of Bakchias. Judging by the brief description afforded them by Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth, they must have occupied a vast area going from the vicinity of Karanis, where the most recent ones were found, to those which have been excavated two or three miles towards the east and are probably the same as the ones that Petrie had already seen and shown on his map.

There remains the interesting, but difficult to verify, fact of the assertion by the British scholars that some of the necropoleis could be traced back as far as the Pharaonic Period. Despite the vagueness of the report and the impossibility of verifying it, it does help to argue the case for the existence of an urban settlement earlier than that of the Ptolemaic Period such as the one we know by the name of Bakchias.⁷⁶ Finally, it is important to highlight the current state of the area once occupied by the *necropoleis*. The Egyptian authorities have been 'restoring' it for some time for agricultural use meaning that what remains of the necropoleis must definitively be considered lost.

A subject still to be still explored: the administrative relation between Bakchias and some neighbouring komai

Bakchias was probably the focal point for the numerous villages which gravitated around its immediate surroundings, the existence of which we know about thanks to papyri. For the majority of these, there remains only the name and there is nothing to indicate their location on the map, even approximately. The most important of these is Hephaistias, which is mentioned in several documents, always in close connection with Bakchias.⁷⁷ The two places were so close that they had one set of officials and could therefore be considered joined together as one single centre, at least from an administrative point of view, in the Roman Period.⁷⁸

At first, Sergio Pernigotti speculated that Hephaistias was only a new part of Bakchias, due to the natural urban expansion beyond the canal, thus coinciding with the South Kom. However, this hypothesis has not stood up to the study of the terrain and so the debate remains open. All we can say is that the village's name, Hephaistias, with its Dionysian ring, does appear closely connected to the even more Dionysian name of Bakchias. Both clearly reflect the religious ideas of

the Graeco-Macedonian Dynasty and can therefore be considered, to a degree, as twins. Furthermore, apparently, and still based on the evidence of the papyri, everything seems to suggest that they were of the same period,⁷⁹ which would reinforce still further their relationship in the area.

There is also another village which appears to be closely connected with Bakchias and Hephaistias and that is Nautus, which Sergio Daris was the first to draw attention to.⁸⁰ It is only mentioned in a small number of papyri but if we cite τα εργα απο Ηφαιστιαδος εως Ναυτων⁸¹ in one of the few papyri in which it is mentioned, it must have been located in the immediate vicinity of the other two.

Although the toponym is confirmation of the rich series of canals, the term *erga* is too vague for us to understand what were the economic ties between them. It is certain however that there was no other joint administration between them. The proximity reflected in the papyri is not borne out on the ground for the reasons widely explained above relating to the disruption of the soil in this part of the Herakleides *meris*.

On the northern bank of the present canal, there are no other archaeological sites beyond than that of Kōm Umm el-Athl. If Nautus was located to the north of the canal, as seems most likely, there is clearly no hope of finding any trace of it, nor of any of the other centres built in what, over the centuries, became agricultural land. There is however an interesting topographical fact, even if there is no evidence on the ground, which demonstrates that Bakchias was an important focal point for a series of inhabited centres which surrounded it. This was either because it was located at the end of the road from Memphis, or because of its position which could be described as strategic, being at the point of confluence of a number of canals.⁸²

The cults of Bakchias in the Ptolemaic-Roman Period...and before

In the last ten years, Sergio Pernigotti has written much on the cults practised at Bakchias and has recently brought together his thoughts in some chapters of *Bakchias. Dall'Archeologia alla Storia*.⁸³ They are taken widely into account in this paragraph, although with

⁷⁹ Calderini and Daris 1975: II/3, 229-230: the earliest mention is 258 BCE. and the most recent the third/fourth century CE. We do not know its specific divinity nor its temple. We know that it was surrounded by a large number of canals and that it looked directly over one of them. Overall, the countryside is therefore typical of the area with the addition of vine cultivation (also important) and obviously of palm trees.

⁸⁰ Calderini and Daris 1983: III/IV, 322.

⁸¹ *P.Petrie III*: 42 g 10.3.

⁸² Some are also known by the ancient names (Calderini and Daris 1935-2010, II/1, 26-27).

⁸³ Pernigotti 2014a: 17-38; Pernigotti 2014b: 39-52. Most of what is here exposed depends on Sergio Pernigotti's opinion on the matter.

some revisions as a result of more recent reflections on the evolution of Bakchias.

However, the study of the cults at Bakchias owes a great deal primarily to the work of Carl Wessely⁸⁴ – on which the wide-ranging and thorough *Dizionario* of Aristide Calderini⁸⁵ mentioned earlier is based – as well as W. Rübsam's book, *Götter und Kulte in Fajum während der griechisch-römisch-byzantinischen Zeit* 1974,⁸⁶ although the contribution of the latter has been partially downgraded by Quaegebeur.⁸⁷

As has already been seen, Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth, had been responsible for identifying the crocodile god, Soknobkonneus,⁸⁸ in the papyri as the patron divinity of Bakchias, in the site's main temple, the only one known at that time. He was the patron of the place of worship, together with an indeterminate number of *theoi synnaoi*, at least from the third century BCE until the beginning of the first century CE, a period in which, he would appear to have been flanked in this role by a second crocodile god, Soknobraisis. This historical religious feature seems to be found only at Bakchias within the region of the Fayyūm.

In 1938 A. Bataille⁸⁹ announced that, on the basis of the papyrus documentation, he had discovered a new god at Bakchias of which there had been no proof until that point. This was in fact Soknobraisis. The understanding of this new god was aided by the work of Ch. Kuentz and J. Černý,⁹⁰ which led in turn to the publication of a group of papyri which almost certainly originated from the archives of Soknobraisis.

It is clear that Soknobkonneus and Soknobraisis are none other than local manifestations of Sobek of Shedet. The theological and cultic relationship between the patron god of the capital of the *nomos* and the two divinities of Bakchias is yet to be clarified, as with the relationship with all the numerous crocodile divinities of the region.⁹¹

P.Berlin 2215, who is mentioned earlier, seems to think that every establishment was protected by a single Sobek – characterised or otherwise by a specific epithet – which could boast the title of 'patron' (*neb-/nob-* 'lord of').⁹² The only exception was always Bakchias, which was able to boast the presence, as yet unexplained, of two patrons.⁹³

⁸⁴ Wessely 1904.

⁸⁵ Calderini 1973: 22-30 and relative updates (by Sergio Daris).

⁸⁶ Rübsam 1974.

⁸⁷ Quaegebeur 1983: 303.

⁸⁸ Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900: 36-38; Bottigelli 1942: 185-185.

⁸⁹ Bataille 1938: 197-205.

⁹⁰ Kuentz 1938: 206-21.

⁹¹ On the several crocodile gods of the Fayyūm (Pernigotti 2014).

⁹² Brashear 1976: 6-11, no. 2215.

⁹³ It should be noted that *P.Berlin* 2215 is incomplete, something which leads one to a more cautious assessment.

The presence of two patron gods seemed as if it may have depended on another anomaly of Bakchias: the presence, as previously mentioned, of two *ierà loghima*, namely, 'first class' temples.⁹⁴

We can affirm with certainty that Soknobkonneus is a divinity who, at least in this form, is definitely Ptolemaic and precedes Soknobraisis. The latter, on the other hand, does not seem to exist before the Roman Period and makes his appearance, papyrologically speaking, during the reign of Augustus. He takes up residence in a new and very grand temple (Temple E), parallel with the new temple of Soknobkonneus (Temple C), which in turn takes the place of the Ptolemaic one (Temple A). Temples C and E would be those mentioned in *P.Berlin* 2215 (113/114 CE) Βακχιάδος ειρα Β Σοκνοβρεσιος [και] Σο]κανεβκενεος και των συνναων θεων (col. II. 7-8). In light of these considerations, the testimony of the papyri already known about before appears perfectly consistent with the newly acquired ones. In *P.Yale* 363, dated to 116 CE, reference is in fact made, in two different columns, to a temple of Soknobkonneus and a temple of Soknobraisis, which are both held unequivocally distinct. Furthermore, in *P.Yale* 902+906 the expression εν τοις ιεροις is initially used. Shortly afterwards it is further explained, distinguishing between a temple of Soknokonneus and a temple of Soknobraisis which can only be a reference to two different temple buildings.

When it comes to the period before the Ptolemaic Period at Bakchias,⁹⁵ we cannot be precise about anything. Taking the small amount of evidence mentioned above to marry the textual and archaeological data, we can only say that Temple A was preceded by a temple facing in a different direction (Temple B). We do not know which god who was worshipped in the latter but that it must have been almost certainly dedicated to another Sobek, as is suggested by the long, narrow form of the *naos*. As regards the previous period, on the other hand, there is nothing that can be considered as anything other than speculation.

In her chapter devoted to Bakchias, as throughout her monograph, W. Rübsam divides the cults which form its *pantheon* into two groups. The first, called *Ägyptischer Kult*, is the one in which the divinities mentioned in the Greek sources with an Egyptian name (their Egyptian name) are placed together, and the second, called *Griechischer Kult*, includes those gods (in reality only one⁹⁶ has been identified) which have Greek names in the same type of document.

It is abundantly clear, however, that in the majority of cases, behind the Greek or Greek style names

⁹⁴ Rossetti 2017b: 543-548.

⁹⁵ Zecchi 2010.

⁹⁶ Rübsam 1974: 77-78.

of divinities, lie Egyptian ones. J. Quaegebeur demonstrated⁹⁷ that there is only certainty that they are Greek divinities when they are mentioned as being so, with the name written in Egyptian spelling (Demotic or other). There are some doubtful cases, one of which, as we will see, is found in Bakchias and in some other centres of the Fayyūm. For example, worship of the god Thoth at Bakchias can be speculated, based on the mention of the god Hermes in papyrus SB 9321.⁹⁸ The same goes for worship of Hathor based on the mention of a *hieron Aphroditēs*⁹⁹ in SB 9321, 9.

It is possible to argue that the salient feature of the theology of Bakchias is the presence of a somewhat numerous group of crocodile divinities, a feature shared with almost all, if not all, the urban centres of the Fayyūm. Two of the divinities, Souchos and Pnepheros, are common to other centres in the region. When Souchos, in particular, is cited without any specification he can probably be identified with *Sbk sdy Hr hrj-ib Sdt* 'Sobek from Shedet, Horus who resides in Shedet', in which Horo is placed next to Sobek, the great patron divinity of the whole of the Fayyūm, whose principal centre of worship, from a much earlier period, was in *Shedet/Crocodilopolis*. Pnepheros was another crocodile divinity that Bakchias had in common with other centres in the Fayyūm such as Euhemeria and Theadelphia, where a temple dedicated to him has been found and, lastly, Karanis, where the temple to the south was equally reserved for worship of him and for that of another crocodile god, Petesouchos; these divinities are only known at Bakchias from papyri. There has been no trace found on the ground of the places of worship dedicated to them.

The other two crocodile gods, Soknobkonneus and Soknobraisis, who are the most important, seem to be specific to Bakchias. However, while there is no trace of any presence of the latter in other centres of the region, for the former, a stone was found by G. Lefebvre at Crocodilopolis¹⁰⁰ and a second, found a short distance from the Kiman Fares/Madinat al-Fayyūm, is dedicated to a Sokonnobchnoubi¹⁰¹ which may be a variant of Soknobkonneus.

Excavations have not greatly added to proof of the two divinities. In the new papyri found at Bakchias starting from the fourth excavation, the name Soknobkonneus appears only once and the writing is so incomplete as to make it uncertain. Soknobraisis, on the other hand, has not been found in any of the new written documents – which are quite numerous – found during the current excavations of Bakchias. The only possible exception is

the mention of a *Sbk-nb-r* [...],¹⁰² which is very likely Soknobraisis, in the imprint of a seal in hieroglyphic characters, although unfortunately incomplete.

Despite the clear omnipresence of the crocodile divinities in the Bakchias *pantheon*, depictions of them are, for the moment, missing on flat surfaces, unless one makes an exception of an example in vitreous paste intended to be part of a hieroglyphic inscription. Fragments of the head, divided in three, of a limestone statue of a crocodile have been found in the same area.¹⁰³ The absence of inscriptions means we cannot say to which of the above mentioned divinities it belongs. However, the fact that it has been found in front of Temple A suggests that it may be part of a statue of Soknobkonneus.

Furthermore, Demotic, hieratic, hieroglyphic and Greek documents which have emerged during recent excavations have had proper names, some of which are theophoric consisting of the name of the god Sobek. The onomatology in Demotic includes *P3-nfr-hr e P3-tj-Sbk*, whilst in Greek it shows the name, Petsuchos, which is quite frequent in Bakchias and elsewhere in the Fayyūm.

Other Egyptian divinities are intermittently recorded in papyri: Amon, Anubis, Bubastis, Hathor, Isis and Thoth. There is no certainty that there were temples or chapels specifically dedicated to any of these gods in the urban fabric of Bakchias. We can however speculate as to the existence of a temple or building of more modest proportions which later disappeared, or to the possibility of a cult combined with different divinities within the same temple such as σύνναοι θεοί.

Some objects brought to light during the excavations from 1993 to the present day do enhance our knowledge of the Bakchias *pantheon*.

Osiris is shown for the first time in a relief sculpture on a wooden panel found in the inner sanctum of the principal temple (Temple A).¹⁰⁴ It is part of the decoration of a wooden *naos* like those cited in the *graphai*, of which other fragments have been found in the area – which is actually a big landfill site – excavated in front of the temple. The fragment formed part of the decorative scheme of a *naos* which certainly included numerous other divinities so it cannot be considered proof of a specific cult amongst those practised in the temple within which it was found.

The base of a statue in greenish shale depicting Osiris himself near the pillar on the southern facade came to light on the outside of Temple A and points in this

⁹⁷ Quaegebeur 1983: 305-306.

⁹⁸ Rübsam 1974: 77.

⁹⁹ Rübsam 1974: 76.

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre 1907: 155-158.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre 1907: 161-162.

¹⁰² Pernigotti 2005a: 77-79; Zecchi 2006, 105-106.

¹⁰³ Pernigotti 2008: no. 21, 38-39.

¹⁰⁴ Pernigotti 2008: 33-34, no. 16.

direction. A hieroglyphic inscription around the base contains these words: *Wsir di 'nh (n) Irt-Hr-r:rw s3 Ssk*, 'Osiris may give life (to) Irethorru son of Sheskak'.¹⁰⁵ It is a votive statuette which can be dated possibly to between the 23rd Dynasty and the first Ptolemaic Period, which suggests that, inside the temple, there was a chapel for the worship of Osiris, as *synnaos theos* probably of Soknokonneus.

The *ogdoad* of Hermopolis was also part of the religious world of Bakchias. This is shown by the discovery of a fragment of painted and stuccoed canvas with the inscription of a figure of a feminine divinity on the head of a serpent turned towards the right. It must be one of the feminine divinities which made up the 'procession' of the *ogdoad* of Hermopolis. As she is followed by a brief vertical caption in hieroglyphic characters with the name of the god Heh, she cannot be other than the second divinity in the series, Naunet, the *paredra* of Nun.¹⁰⁶ *Ogdoad* worship is already known about in the region thanks to an explicit reference in the 'Book of the Fayyūm'.¹⁰⁷

Another divinity belonging to the greater *pantheon* of ancient Egypt, Ptah, the great Memphite god, makes his appearance in a fairly fragmentary hieroglyphic inscription from a small quartzite monument, possibly a fragment of a *naos*, bearing a regal name, now lost and apparently only written on three of the four sides. The name *Pth* is written in large hieroglyphic characters.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that the divine name re-entered in a context of the type *mry Pth* referring to the sovereign who was mentioned in the inscription. However, there is already evidence of the worship of Ptah in the Fayyūm.¹⁰⁹

Amongst the many amulets found, there is one of particular importance. It is a small statuette sculpted in wood, stuccoed and with traces of the original gilding, depicting Isis,¹¹⁰ as is shown by the crest which the goddess bears on her head. Part of a string is preserved in the back part which would have been used to hang it around the neck of the owner. Matching this amulet is a fragment of a statuette in terracotta, probably an *ex-voto*, depicting Isis(-Aphrodite) *αφροδιτη*. Both the amulet and the terracotta fragment are further confirmation of what we have shown earlier, the existence at Bakchias of worship of the goddess. Neither of the two however enables the question posed by Rübsam of which of the many Isis we are dealing with, to be answered: the presence of an *ex-voto* depicting Isis *αφροδιτη* is too weak an indication to take us any further in this direction.

¹⁰⁵ Pernigotti 2008: 15-16, no. 1; Zecchi 2002: 25, no. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Pernigotti 2008: 28-30, no. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Beinlich 1991: 312-314.

¹⁰⁸ Pernigotti 1998.

¹⁰⁹ Rübsam 1974: 55, 174; Zecchi 1999: 73-74, 111-113.

¹¹⁰ Nifosi 2009: 35-39.

Finally, in 1998, the front part of a sphinx portraying a sovereign with its head covered by the *nemes* came to light. Because it lacks inscriptions, it is not possible to make any precise claims as to who it portrayed.¹¹¹ However, the treatment of the face which is harsh to the point of brutality and the characteristic prognathism of the jaw, make one think immediately of Amenemhat III, or better still of the so-called Premarres/Porromanres, worship of whom was widespread throughout the Fayyūm in the late Period and who is known about through papyri and also iconographic sources.¹¹² This is a reasonably certain indication that worship of the pharaoh was also active in Bakchias, which also seems to be confirmed by the fact that the terracotta was found in the southern area immediately in front of Temple C, which would appear now to be proved to be the new temple of Soknokonneus, entirely constructed in stone.¹¹³

Some thought needs to be given in relation to the materials brought to light in the so-called 'eighth house'. A considerable quantity of objects¹¹⁴ has been found in a room in this building which is preserved from the cellars up to a height of about four metres. These include amulets, a Menkheperra type scarab,¹¹⁵ a bronze sistrum and a flask in terracotta, a pilgrim flask, with erotic depictions in relief on both sides.¹¹⁶ On one side is a nude woman with two youths in an embrace and on the other side is a second nude woman with an equally nude youth and an ass in an attitude which leaves no doubt as to its interpretation.¹¹⁷

The presence of the flask with erotic scenes is particularly interesting for its many possible implications, above all the subject of one of the scenes of the woman's embrace with the ass, a scene which requires a specific study involving purely Egyptian religious themes – the ass is the animal of Seth/Thyphon which is part of a well known Isiac and Dionysian ritual – with the role carried out by the priestess (?) who lived in 'House VIII'¹¹⁸ and might also enable the date of the object to be more precisely pinpointed.

It should be highlighted that, in the same place, two cowrie shells have been brought to light, two loom weights and two vases located underneath the floor, both empty but which were clearly intended to contain hoards of coins, some of which have been found scattered all round about. As well as Isiac rituals, the objects in question appear linked to female fertility, the presence of which is suggested by the numerous amulets of Bes,

¹¹¹ Pernigotti 2008: 32-33, no. 14.

¹¹² Bresciani 1986: 49-58.

¹¹³ Rossetti 2008.

¹¹⁴ Nifosi 2009: 53-58.

¹¹⁵ Nifosi 2009: 105, no. 34.

¹¹⁶ D'Andria 1995: 83-87.

¹¹⁷ Mervat Seif el-Din 2006: Taf. 34.

¹¹⁸ Zanetto 2010: 51-63.

by the double sided Bes/*udjat*, by the cowrie shells and by the statuette of Thoeris. We can perhaps speculate that the priestess's residence also accommodated mothers who had to perform purification rituals after giving birth. It is known that in the Egyptian Dynasty and later in the Graeco-Roman one, there were specific places to accommodate expectant mothers and those who had recently given birth.

The houses of birth and isolation have not been preserved archaeologically but they are shown on some *ostraka* and in some parietal paintings from the dwellings of Deir el-Medina.

Ultimately, the religious horizon of Bakchias is shown to be characterised by purely Egyptian elements, as is appropriate for a place which, for a long time, knew very local gods and beliefs. In summary, it can be said that only with the advent of the Graeco-Roman Period did a few elements of the Alexandrian world creep into the general panorama, until it constituted a *koinè* which, in the case of the Fayyūm, assumed a uniform colour, in which that of the local inhabitants remained prevalent, as compared to the newcomers, whatever their ethnicity.

The Urban Landscape of Bakchias

Enrico Giorgi

Chapter II

The genesis and urban development of Bakchias

E. Giorgi

As has already been observed, the investigations of the Italian Mission have helped to provide a picture of ancient Bakchias which is in many ways surprising and certainly very different from the initial, rather limited ideas associated with the early research.

The publication of the findings in the site now allows us to draw an overall picture of the problems of the genesis and development of this ancient township of the Fayyūm,¹ bearing in mind that these are problems, or rather open questions, which should be understood more as hypotheses and avenues of investigation rather than definitive interpretations. In attempting this reconstruction, reference will be made mainly to the work carried out in recent years by the University of Bologna together with the Sapienza University of Rome and, to a more limited degree, colleagues from the Centro Papirologico Medea Norsa. Recent research has led to the emergence of new, different elements which are useful to reflect on both the problem of the genesis and on the urban development of the *kome* (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4).

The pre-Ptolemaic village

Certain findings from the western sacred area and from the northern district had already posed questions about the periods before the foundation of the Ptolemaic township.

With regard to the sacred area, these concern the remains of statues which must have been part of the sacred furnishings of Temple A: a fragment of the head of a stone statue, possibly dated to the New Kingdom of Egypt or to the Late Period (750-342 BCE); a headless statue of a kneeling male figure with the inscription erased which can be dated, at the latest, to the reign of Psamtik II (26th Dynasty, 664-525 BCE); another headless statue with a hieroglyphic inscription of a figure called Padibastet, also dated to the reign of Psamtik II.²

¹ Gasperini 2014.

² These are a fragment of the head of a stone statue, which can be dated to the New Kingdom of Egypt or to the Late Period, a headless statue of a kneeling male figure (with the inscription erased) which can be dated at the latest to the reign of Psamtik II; a headless statue with a hieroglyphic inscription of a figure called Padibastet, which can be dated to the reign of Psamtik II (Pernigotti 2005a; Pernigotti 2005b: 99; Pernigotti 2007; Pernigotti 2008; Giorgi 2011: 184).

Excavations in the house of the Isiac priestess (BNO 360), where the beetle from the Menkheperra series was found, dated to the eighth century BCE, had already suggested a building phase before the Ptolemaic Period. Thanks to stratigraphic investigations carried out in an adjacent area, still within the northern district, we now know that the townships associated with the first Ptolemaic settlement give strong indications that it was inhabited before this and that – based on radiocarbon analysis of some remains of animal bones – we can trace it back to at least the middle of the sixth century BCE.³

Lastly, we should remember the kiln (BNO 415) brought to light under the enclosure of Temple B, where an amphora from Tyre, which can be dated to between the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, was found fixed in the ground near a kiln.⁴

If we previously had to consider the hypothesis that some of these portable finds could have been transported to Bakchias even from neighbouring places, the remains uncovered in reliable archaeological contexts, like the kiln and especially the remains of animal bones, suggest a real occupation of the site in a pre-Ptolemaic Period. Unfortunately it is not easy to pinpoint more accurately the chronology, even if we can observe considerable convergence of certain dates during the period of Psamtik II (26th Dynasty).

At this point we should remember that, on the basis of certain historical-topographical considerations, a dynastic period village was already thought to have existed in the location of the future Bakchias, which possibly dates back to the time of the first reclamation of the region, initiated by Sesostri II and carried out mainly by Amenemhat III and IV (12th Dynasty). This was the Egyptian village of *Kemur/Ghenut*, cited in a well known geographical list of Memphis.⁵

In fact, some geographical factors could already reveal the potential of this site from the time of the dynastic period. The township spread above the slope which

³ See the contribution on the northern district in this book.

⁴ See the list of ceramic finds in Gasperini 2014: 243-368 (no. 556). While its archaeological context may be secure, the amphora itself may be residual (Rossetti 2014a: 109-154, with related bibliography).

⁵ See the chapter on *Bakchias: Its rediscovery, its cults* in this book.

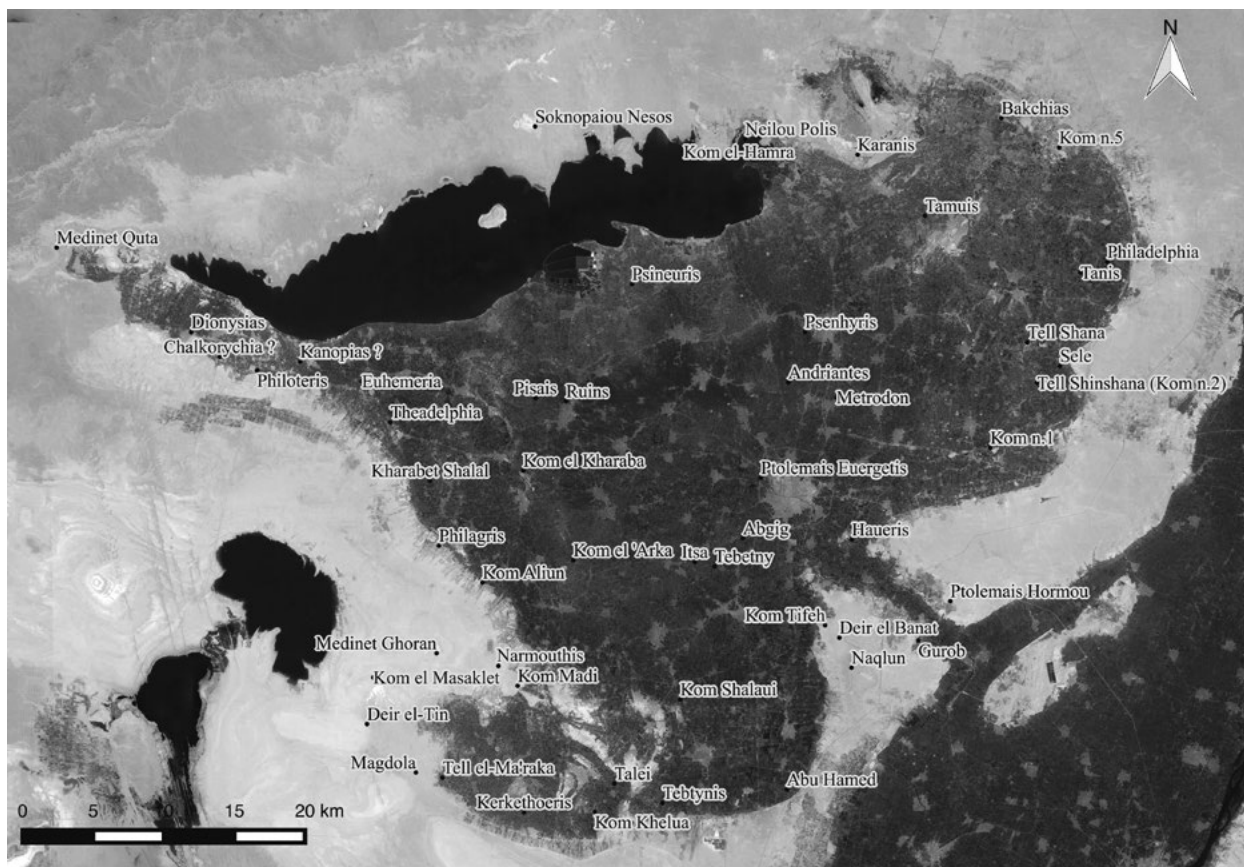


Figure 1. The Fayyūm with some of the main villages (Rossetti 2018 from Google Map).

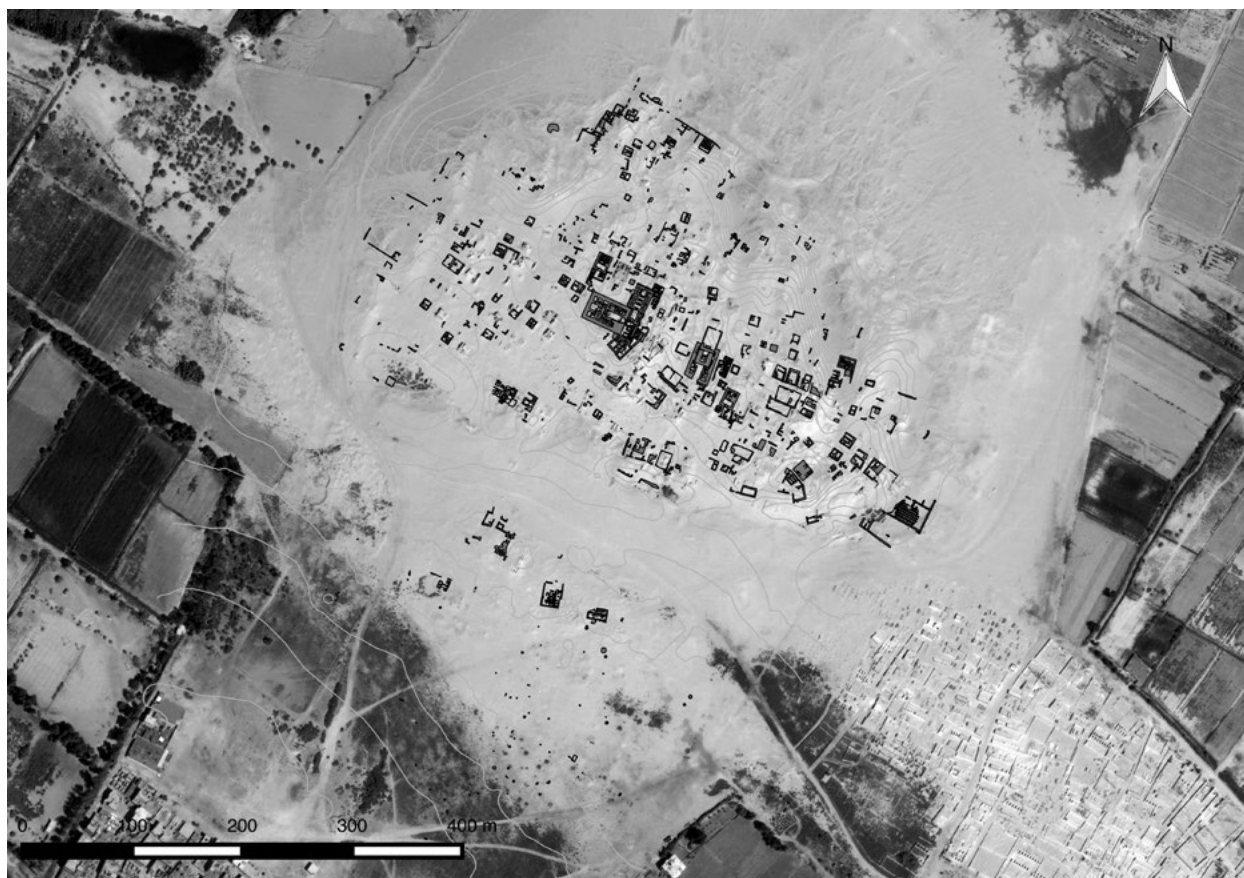
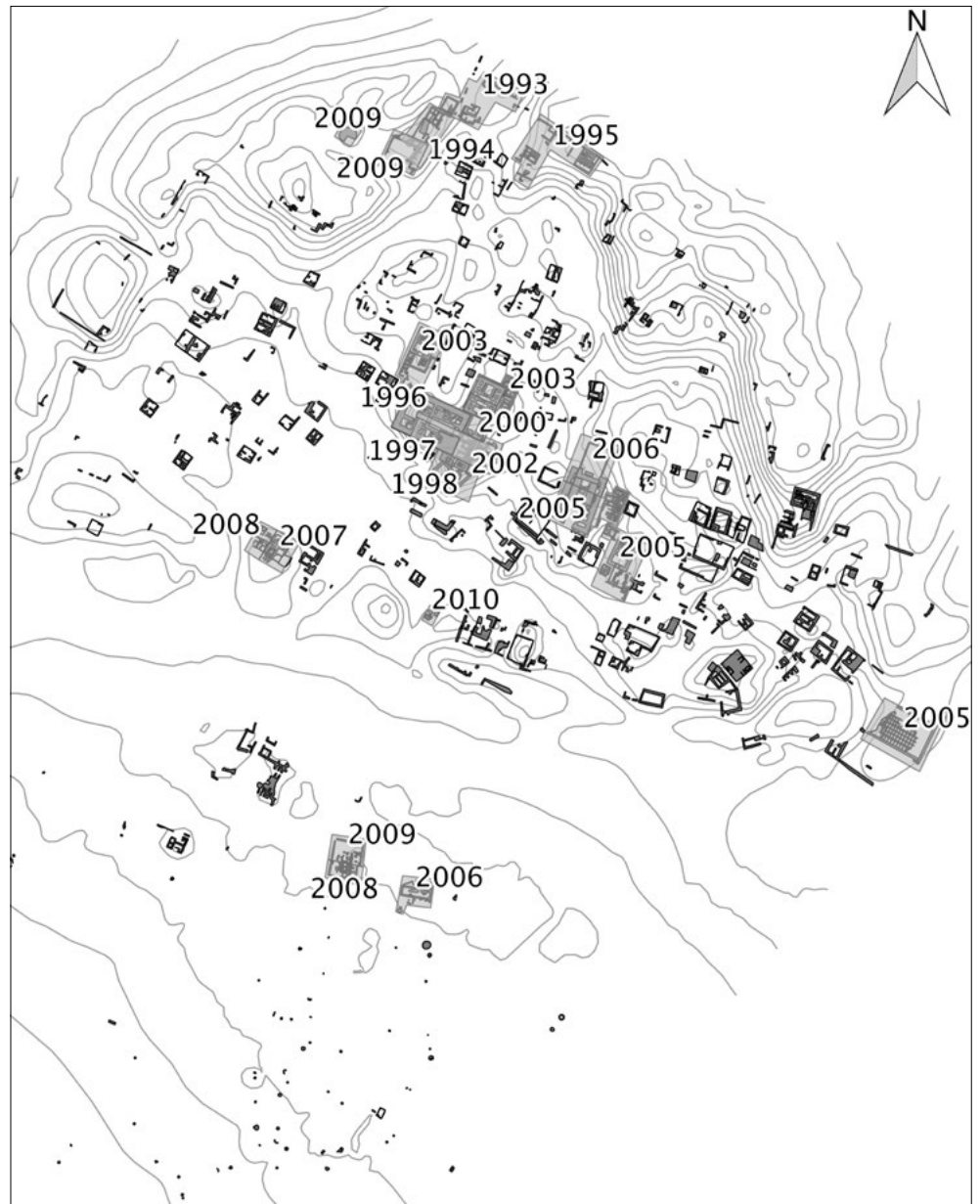


Figure 2. Plan of Bakchias with base Google Map (Rossetti 2018).

Figure 3. Bakchias plan with the locations of the excavation seasons (Rossetti 2018).



marks out the hollow of the Fayyūm (about 20 metres a.s.l.) to the north east, along what was the shore of the lake in the dynastic period, at the intersection with the northern slope which linked the region with the Nile Valley and Memphis (Figure 5). The location must therefore have been extremely attractive to the ancient population when choosing a site. In light of these historical-geographical considerations, it is not surprising that other centres in the region located on this raised plateau, such as Shedet (Madīnat al-Fayyūm), the future Arsinoe, or *Dja* (Madīnat Mādī), the future Narmouthis, and Tebtynis (Umm al-Burayḡāt), preserve important remains from the dynastic period (Figure 1).⁶

⁶ We will return to these topics in the next paragraph. For the evolution of the countryside in general, see Morini 2007a; Morini 2007b. For a general classification of the sites in question see Rathbone 1990; Rathbone 1996; Rathbone 1997; Davoli 1998; Carpentiero 2016; Römer 2018; Mueller 2006; Riggs 2012. For Tebtynis and Narmouthis

The Ptolemaic town

All the hypotheses which we have advanced so far do not refer so much to the history of Bakchias as to the events of certain phases of occupation of the dynastic period which would appear to have preceded the Ptolemaic town. While taking into account the existence of a

in particular, see Gallazzi 2001: 174, 179, 183; Bresciani and Giammarusti 2012: 23-25. At Soknopaïou Nesos, during the surface survey conducted in the surroundings of the town, pottery remains attributed to the New Kingdom of Egypt were found (Capasso and Davoli 2011). For Soknopaïou Nesos see also Capasso and Davoli 2012; Capasso and Davoli 2015; Davoli *et al.* 2018.

In the case of Soknopaïou Nesos, it has been speculated that a dynastic sanctuary existed on an island in the lake, in a different position from that of the Ptolemaic township, to where the cult would have later moved (Pernigotti 2006c: 17). On the question of the transfer of toponyms from the dynastic period to the Ptolemaic-Roman Period, see Pernigotti 2000b. For Dionysias see Cestari 2010; Papi *et al.* 2010; Carpentiero and Tessaro 2016.

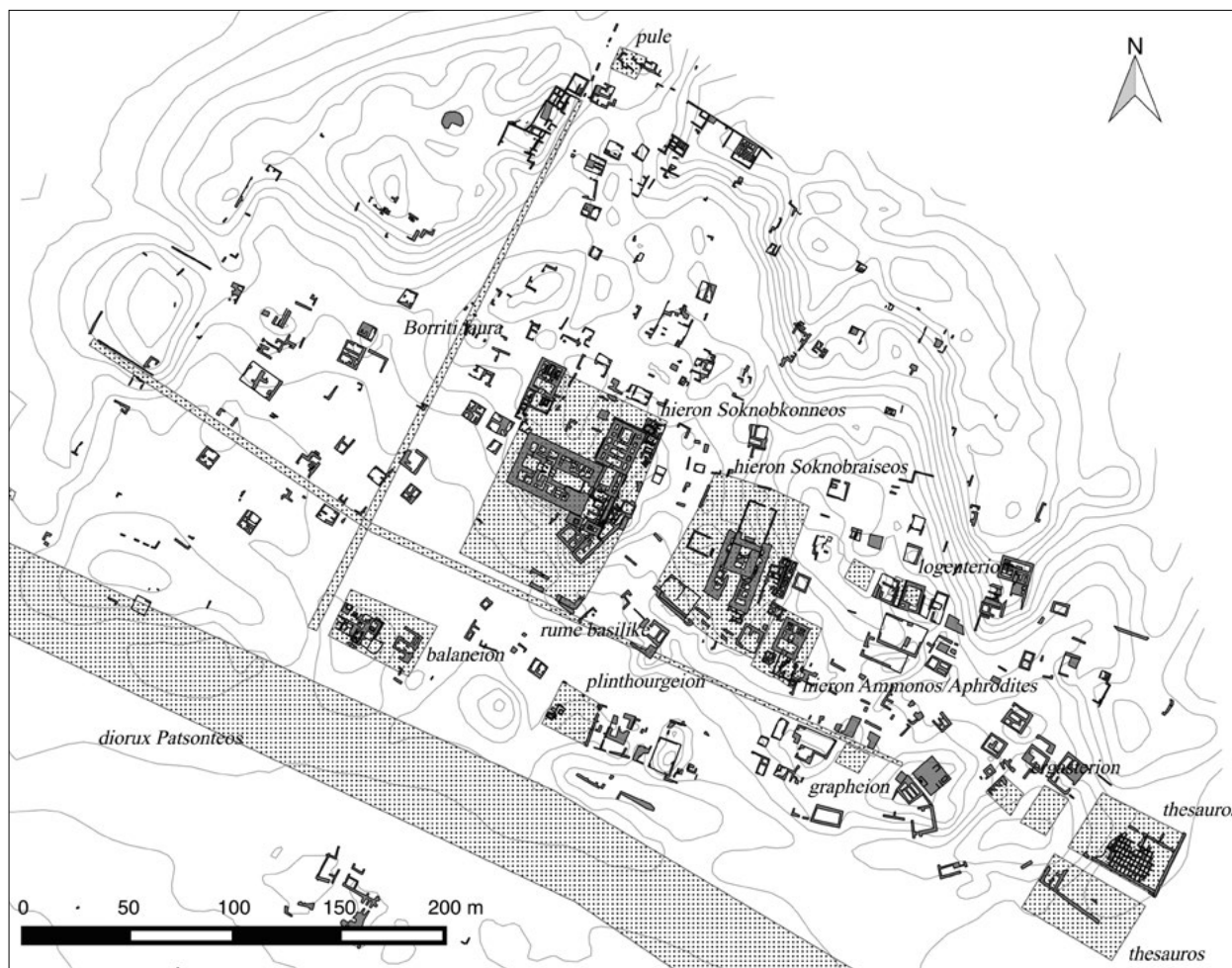


Figure 4. Bakchias plan with some of the edifices testified by papyri (Rossetti 2018).

pre-Ptolemaic Period settlement, it would appear that there was no continuity with the subsequent founding of Bakchias because there must have been a long intermediate period when it was abandoned, going from at least the sixth to third centuries BCE.⁷ For these reasons, we cannot speculate as to how long the site was occupied from one period to another and still less its continued settlement up to the first decades of the third century BCE. In this period a new urban centre was planned and constructed under the second land reclamation of the Fayyūm which took place at the time of Ptolemy II (280 BCE). Probably the construction of this new Ptolemaic town had already begun shortly before (during the late fourth BCE), with a village built at the very beginning of the land reclamation project started

by Ptolemy I Soter.⁸ This township, which arose on the north-eastern edge of Lake Moeris, was called Bakchias in reference to the cult of Dionysus who was very important to the reigning dynasty, almost mirroring Dionysias which was built on the other side of the lake basin (Figure 6).⁹ These settlements were established in the context of a wider programme of urbanisation or of urban regeneration, as in the case of Arsinoe, which reinforced a new urban geography in the region. In some cases, as at Bakchias, it may be that this project was achieved in stages, gradually developing an initial conglomeration of lesser dimensions, although still planned in an organic manner, later creating more fully its urban shape. Some of the archaeological remains for which we cannot establish the chronology should be read in this way but – at least on the level of the relative stratigraphy – would appear to prepare for the completion of the Ptolemaic settlement. These are, for

⁷ According to current research, no further pre-Ptolemaic archaeological remains are known beyond those already cited relating to the seventh-sixth centuries BCE. Other Ptolemaic centres located on the same plateau as Bakchias, such as Narmouthis/Gia, inhabited during the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, were also abandoned for a time before the establishment of the Ptolemaic town (Bresciani and Giammarusti 2012: 23-25). Conversely, there was significant continuity of settlement from the dynastic period until the Roman one at Shedet/Arsinoe or al-Lāhūn and Hawārah, located along the central road which connected the Nile Valley with the heart of the Fayyūm (see most recently Uytterhoeven 2009 with bibliography).

⁸ Thompson 1999; Manning 2003; Davoli 2012; Rossetti 2017b: 293; Rossetti 2018 : 218. Some remains of the material culture found in Bakchias, as a black-glazed oil-lamp imported from Attic and dated between the second half of the 4th and the first district of the 3rd century BCE, probably testifies an early presence of Greeks or at least the relationship with Greeks (Gasparini 2014: no. 529).

⁹ Also on these topics, see Pernigotti 2014a: 17-38.

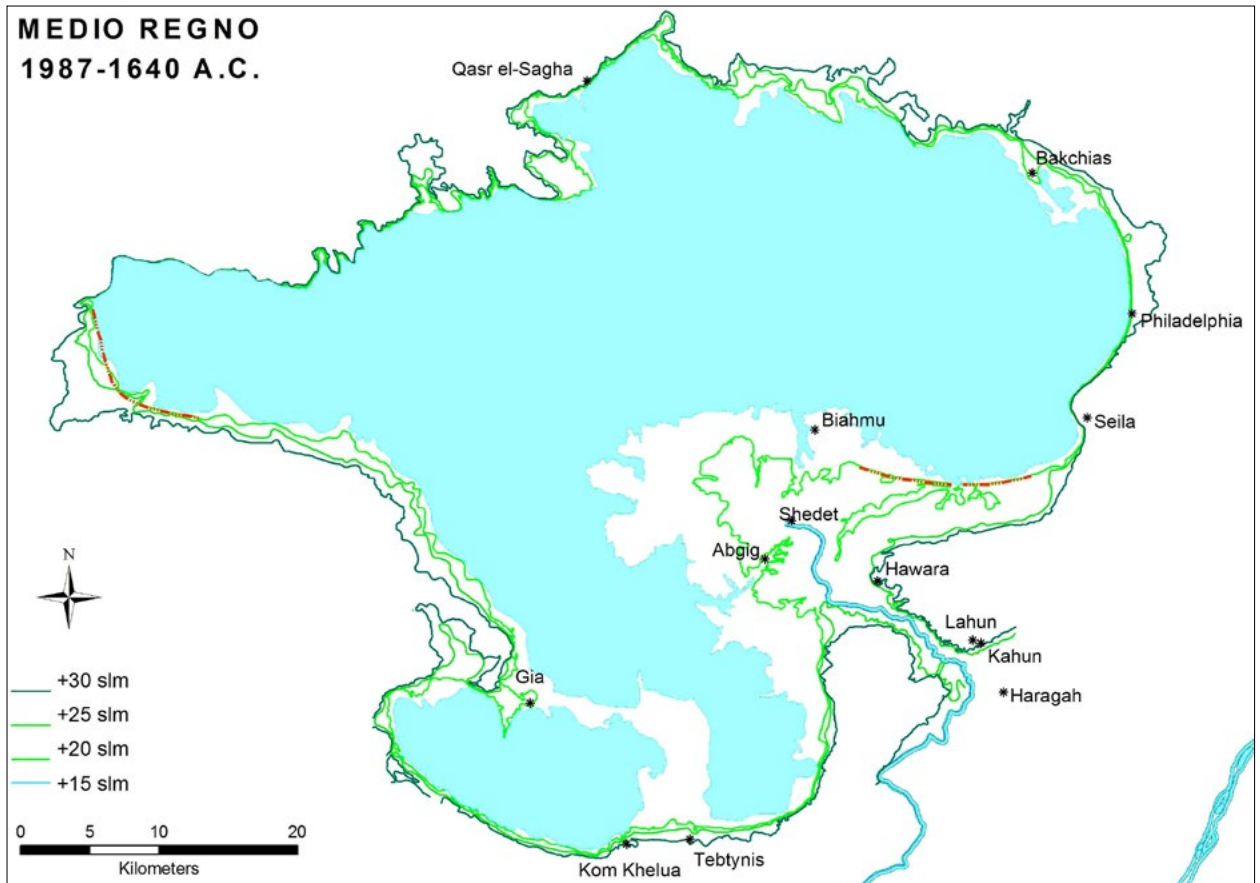


Figure 5. The Fayyūm with the expansion of the lake during the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, when the first reclamation of the region took place (Morini 2007b).

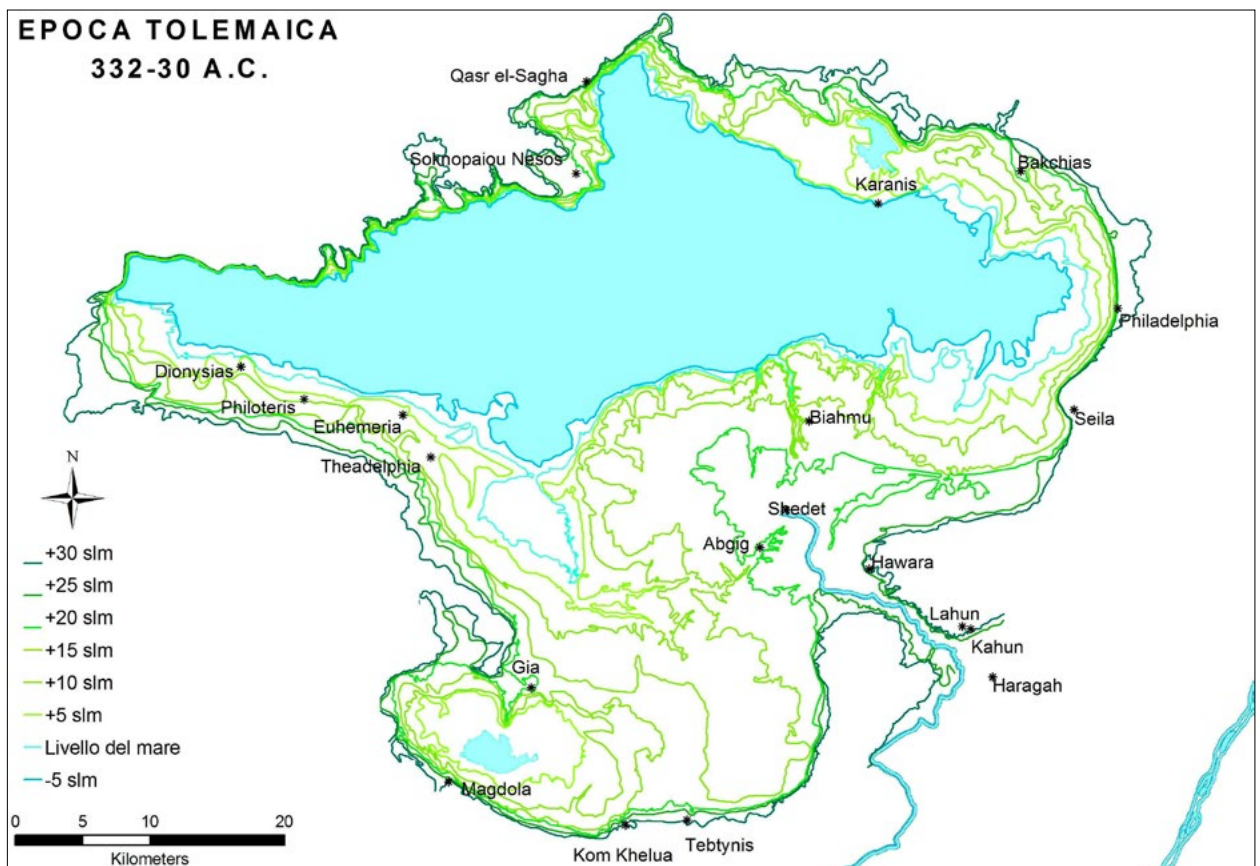


Figure 6. The Fayyūm in the Ptolemaic Period, when the second reclamation of the region took place (Morini 2007b).

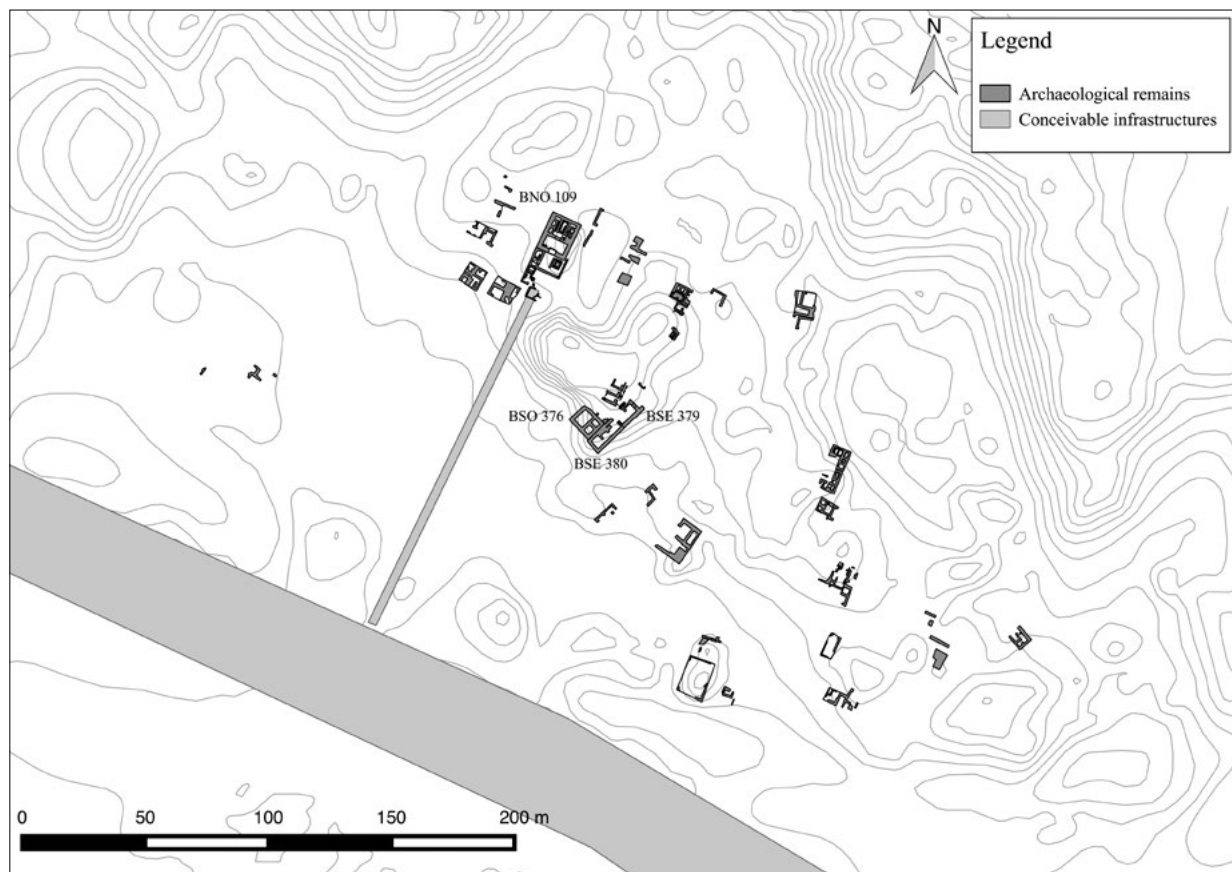


Figure 7. Bakchias plan during the early Ptolemaic Period (Rossetti 2017).

example, the oblique mud brick structures incorporated within the enclosure of Temple A and by the entrance pylon of Temple C and, probably by Temple B too, all in mud bricks.¹⁰ While it seems to us that Temple B should be ascribed to the first phases of the Ptolemaic Period township, the oblique structures, so called because their orientation diverges in respect of the rest of the town, are definitely more problematic (Figure 7).

Temple B (BNO 109), seems however to reflect the new urban orientation typical of the Ptolemaic town although with some variations. It was probably also affected by the big canal which runs along the southern edge of the township, which we have already identified as one of the main infrastructures of the Ptolemaic reclamation.¹¹ The cult of Soknobraisis, the crocodile god also worshipped in the regional capital and who was called by a specific epithet here,¹² probably first took place in this building.

¹⁰ In both cases, the buildings were mud brick and from the first Hellenistic Era.

¹¹ For a more detailed explanation about these buildings and for the observations that follow, cf. Rossetti 2014a: 109-154.

¹² A famous papyrus of the Roman Period (BGU XIII 2215), to which we will return, confirms the worship of two crocodile divinities at Bakchias, Soknokonneus and Soknobraisis. As we will see, the first was worshipped in Temple A. On the other hand, it has been speculated that Soknobraisis had already been worshipped at Bakchias before the construction of Temple E and the only other temple known is Temple B. For an overview of the problem in the

The oblique structures with different orientation (BSO 376, 379, 380), on the other hand, would appear not to take this new layout into account and, from what has been seen up until now, seem to have had much deeper foundations than the surrounding Ptolemaic structures (Figure 7). The question of their date therefore remains open and we are uncertain whether or not they are necessarily part of the first phases of the Ptolemaic settlement. We should also observe that, according to current research, no dateable remains have been uncovered previous to the context of their specific stratigraphy.¹³

In any case, in the first half of the third century BCE, the foundations were laid of the urban development that, during the same century, would see Bakchias spread around the large mass of Temple A (BSO 375. Figure 8). The temple was dedicated to Soknokonneus, the other crocodile god and one of the two patron gods of the characteristic pantheon of Bakchias.¹⁴ The new temple, however, was east facing and not towards the canal, like the earlier Temple B (Figure 9). We cannot rule

wider regional context from the dynastic period, see most recently Zecchi 2010, with related bibliography.

¹³ Rossetti 2014a: 109-154.

¹⁴ This is another form of the crocodile god, characteristic of Bakchias. The attribution of Temple A to Soknokonneus comes from the research of Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth which found some texts in papyrus there which explicitly cited this divinity.



Figure 8. Views of the North Kom with the main sacred area in the middle.

out the possibility that there was also a minor canal on that side. If this was the case, we would also have had a link between the canal and the processional route, towards the eastern side of the township, possibly related to the river bed and to the connection with the Nile, although across its canals.¹⁵ This would have had a special significance for the cult of the crocodile god. Of course, with the construction of Temple A, the principal urban sanctuary faced south east and that must have been the favoured access route to the town, or the side from which its monumental impact was the greatest. As we will see better later, during the history of the town, two circuits of the processional routes can be observed. Originally, Temple B was accessible from the south, crossing the canal. Temple A then faced east, so Temples C, D and E, would have looked towards the canal in the south west. Given that, with the possible exception of Temple D alone, these were buildings dedicated to various manifestations of the same divinity (Sobek). We can probably deduce that the different orientations were not linked to questions of worship, as indicated in other cases.¹⁶ It probably had

¹⁵ As has already been observed, it is possible that the processional routes of some of the temples at Bakchias were linked to the canal by a landing stage which could be used in the sacred processions associated with the worship of the crocodile god. In general, the orientation of the temples of the Fayyūm dedicated to the crocodile god is often connected to the presence of the water of the canal or lake (Morini 2008).

¹⁶ In the case of the bigger temples, they were both dedicated to two manifestations of Sobek (Soknobraisis and Soknobkonneus). In one case, it is the same god (Soknobkonneus) in the same sacred area in two different periods (Ptolemaic Temple A east facing and Ptolemaic-

more to do with changes in town planning, where the entrance to the town was sometimes chosen depending on the surrounding road system (Figure 10).

It would therefore appear that, over just a few decades, an important change was already taking place in the urban fabric, as was clearly shown by the construction of Temple A.

With regard to this, we should remember that, although we now find ourselves in a fairly restricted time frame, we are still not able to provide exact dates for the various stages of urban expansion and we continue to depend on the criteria of the relative chronology. For a more in-depth understanding of these dynamics, we should bear in mind that the genesis and development of Bakchias happened within a wider historical, geographical and environmental context.

The site of Bakchias, like the nearby Philadelphia, grew up on the edge of the natural plateau which constituted the north eastern shore of the Lake (Birkat Qarūn). The area was situated about 20 metres above sea level and largely developed at the same height as the central plateau, where the regional capital, Arsinoe (Madinat el Fayyūm) was located.¹⁷

Roman Temple C south facing). However, the temple of Dionysias orientated on the basis of careful astronomical observations, is a different example. I owe this information to the kind assistance of Emanuele Papi.

¹⁷ For an overview of town planning in the centres of the Fayyūm, cf. Davoli 1998.

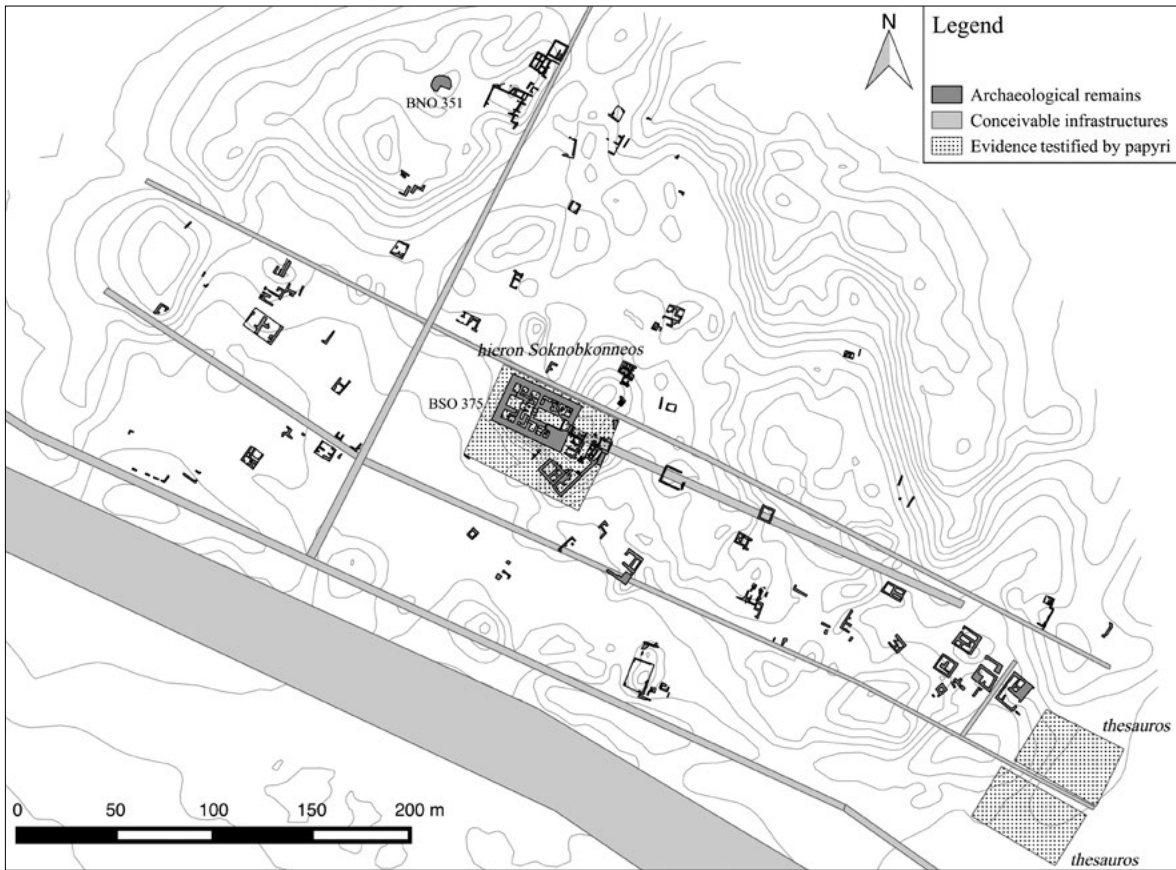


Figure 9. Bakchias plan during the Ptolemaic Period (Rossetti 2017).

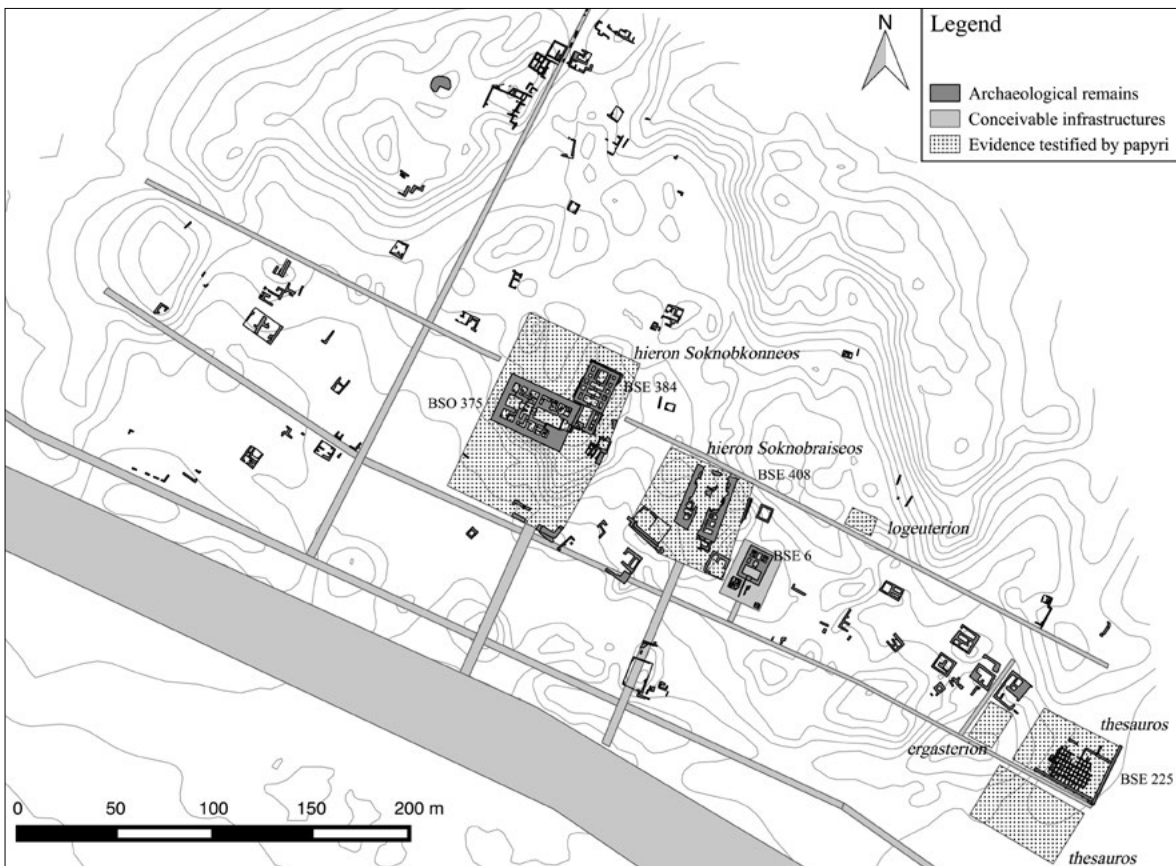


Figure 10. Bakchias plan during the Late Ptolemaic Period (Rossetti 2017).

Although there are some variations, the edge of this plateau outlines the hollow of the Fayyūm, which is affected by the expansion of the lake basin in the dynastic period.¹⁸ If we consider that, at the beginning of the second reclamation, the region was still called ‘*e limne*’ (the swamp), we can see how attractive these particular areas could have been for the population.¹⁹ At the same time, we know that before the reclamation, at least in this part of the Fayyūm, some regions were not desert and were served by canals.²⁰ The same principal canal which ran to the south of Bakchias, also significantly referred to as a river (*potamos*), utilised the riverbed of an already existing natural watercourse which was then re-used to feed the Ptolemaic canal system.²¹ Thanks to several roman papyri, we know that this channel was called *Patsonteos diorux* (Figure 4).²² As results of the reclamation, the level of water lowered substantially, allowing areas of land to emerge on which new urban centres could be built, such as Dionysias, mentioned earlier, or nearby Karanis, which is now along the lake shore.²³ However, this dynamic, with the related gradual reclamation of the available land, presumably took several decades to be realised in full. In some cases, such as Narmouthis, its effects seemed to be delayed more than elsewhere.²⁴ Meanwhile, in other places such as Tebtynis, where the temple was built by Ptolemy I, it seems that the origin (genesis) of the Hellenistic settlement happened early, between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century BCE.²⁵ This is hardly surprising if we think that

Tebtynis, like Bakchias, grew up near one of the natural watercourses from which the reclamation started. In the light of these considerations, we cannot exclude the possibility that the relatively slow pace of the reclamation also affected the development at Bakchias. The expansion of the agricultural basin must have also increased the economy and urban infrastructure enriching above all the coffers of the temples, which managed a significant proportion of the yield. The growth soon began and was completed within the span of a few decades. That would explain the early genesis, at the beginning of the third century BCE, of a first township at Bakchias around Temple B, which was soon expanded with the construction, or maybe reconstruction, of the large Temple A.²⁶ Furthermore, given that we have already seen that this area close to the neighbouring Philadelphia was probably not completely uninhabited before the presence of Ptolemy II. We could also speculate that the oblique buildings represent the remains of a very early phase of settlement commissioned (granted?) during the time of Ptolemy I, between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century BCE, as at Tebtynis.

Another important phase of urban development has been identified, probably at the beginning of the second century BCE, when the principal temple area was generally upgraded with the reconstruction of the entrance *dromos* at Temple A. The new processional route started from the eastern edge of the township, proceeding upwards to the temple. The road passed by a pavilion (BSE 314) and then, after about thirty metres, reached the portal (BSE 386). This resulted in the partial superelevation of the levels of use of Temple A and consequently the concealment of some of the surrounding structures, such as those located to the left of the entrance portal (BSE 382), as well as to that of Temple B to the rear. In parallel, there was also development of a new district at the sides of the big new processional route. This was the eastern district which would appear to be built on an area which had had little previous construction. Amongst the more important buildings of this section was the public granary (BSE 39, 225, the *thesauros*), one of the biggest in the region, as well as other complexes which were probably similar but have not yet been investigated stratigraphically (BSE 49, BNE 231). Yet again, therefore, urban evolution appears strictly linked to economic development, in this case resulting from the harvest of the wheat which is well known thanks to papyrus documents.²⁷

¹⁸ For a fuller reconstruction of the different states of expansion of the lake, see: Morini 2007a; Morini 2007b. For the Ptolemaic reclamation, see Manning 2003: 99-125. As is well known, before the reclamation of Amenemhat III, the region was used mainly as a hunting and fishing reserve. Later, the tumultuous events which led to the end of the Pharaonic Period had clear repercussions in the region, which also saw a regression in agriculture based on the efficiency of the canal system (Morini 2007a: 111).

¹⁹ This is a text dated to 159 BCE (Morini 2007a: 111, note 1).

²⁰ The papyri from the Zenon archive, on Apollonius' farm in nearby Philadelphia, testify to the existence of new and old canals, some dried up, which is a clear sign of earlier irrigation systems still partly functioning (Morini 2007a: 112).

²¹ The Bakchias canal was an offshoot of the principal one in the region (Bahr Yussef). These canals, established on natural watercourses, were also called rivers (*potamoi*; Morini 2007a: 117). The hollow of the Fayyūm corresponds with an ancient delta formed from an Oligocene Age river, when the coast of the Mediterranean Sea was much more to the south (*Gilf System*). When the Nile Valley was formed, a tributary fed the lake harnessing the old riverbed and other branches of the delta, such as the central one and the external ones which define the region to the south and north east (Issawi and McCauley 1993; Sampsell 2003: 141; Morini 2007b: 15; Mandanici 2007: 27).

²² Bakchias and its territory was watered by several other channels and some names are known (Calderini and Daris 1935-1910; Kraemer 2010).

²³ To these can also be added Philoteris, Euhemeria, Theadelphia, Soknopaiou Nesos (Davoli 1998).

²⁴ The reclamation began in 280 BCE and the lowering of the level of the lake ended under the reign of Ptolemy II, therefore within around a thirty year period (Morini 2007a:113). It appears that the effects of the Ptolemaic involvement in the region arrived later at Narmouthis, under Ptolemy VIII and IX (at the end of the second century BCE, Bresciani and Giammarusti 2012: 23).

²⁵ Gallazzi 2001: 183.

²⁶ This theory, supported by good arguments in the past (Tassinari 2006b), should not be completely rejected, although it merits some simplification (Giorgi 2010).

²⁷ The *thesauros* (BSE 39, 225) appears to have been founded around the second century BCE, in an area which had not been inhabited before. For more on this, see the chapter devoted to the buildings along the canal in this book.

However, this part of the town was not destined to last long. Towards the end of the century (second century BCE), a genuine revolution in the urban settlement was witnessed. As often happens at Bakchias, the history of the town ends up being a reflection of the evolution of its sanctuaries. At the end of the century, the construction of Temple D began in mud bricks (BSE 6), the only one which did not seem to be dedicated to a crocodile god but could have been dedicated to Isis,²⁸ and of Temple E (BSE 408), which inherited the cult of Soknobraisis who was maybe already worshipped in Temple B, by now inaccessible. Temple E, originally in mud bricks, was then completely rebuilt and transformed into stone structures (BSE 414), with the worship building being considerably enlarged between the end of the Ptolemaic Period and the beginning of the Augustan Age (first century BCE).

All these buildings interrupted the processional route and destroyed the pavilion of the big Temple A, the sanctuary dedicated to Soknobkonneus, which itself was also subject to a major reconstruction. At about the same time as the construction of the two new temples, D and E, the construction of the yard of Temple C (BSE 384) also began. It was a large stone temple, completed during the course of the following century in the Roman Era (end of the first century BCE- beginning of the first century CE), when the courtyards were completed and the pylon was built (BSE 378, 383).²⁹ The new Temple C hosted the cult of the other patron god, Soknobkonneus, so the old Ptolemaic Temple A was abandoned and relegated to a service building.

The vitality of the Ptolemaic township, which is so clearly shown in the development of the architecture of the temples, is also reflected in other less monumental aspects such as those associated with the building of private houses. Some dwellings which can be attributed to the late Ptolemaic Period have been identified around Temple E (second century BCE) and under the enclosure of Temple C (second-first century BCE). Above all, the organisation of the northern district, which was inhabited continuously throughout the entire life span of the town, was established in the initial phases of urban construction (third-second century BCE). The most well known of these dwellings is undoubtedly the one on which the Roman phase of the house of the Isiac priestess (BNO 360) was built. Nearby were also found remains of pottery (BNO 351) used between the third and second century BCE, which offer us an interesting glimpse of the daily life of this period. As well as findings attributable to daily life,

²⁸ It has already been assumed that another little *Iseum* was located in the northern district, at the house of the Isiac priestess. See the chapter devoted to the northern district in this book.

²⁹ In the foundation hole of the eastern tower of the pylon of Temple C there was an *ostrakon* which could be dated to the Augustan Period (Capasso 1999: 97).

a large number of wine amphorae have been found, some Egyptian (type AE 1 datable to the third-second century BCE) as well as some imported from Asia Minor, a sign of the extent of Hellenization of the site and of the presence of inhabitants of Greek culture, as shown by the amphora with the inscription of Eteark and Alexander.³⁰

Wider consideration of the remains of the material culture helps us to reconstruct the physiognomy of a place which was at the centre of an active trading system, with the consumption and trade both of local and imported products. If we analyse the remains of the transport containers we see right from the start (third-second century BCE) a predilection for wine from the eastern Aegean (from Thassos, Knidos and Ephesus),³¹ besides which are also products of Italian origin,³² following routes which later grew in importance (second-first century BCE). Amongst the containers of Italian provenance, there is an amphora for oil from Brindisi which is the only known such amphora imported to Bakchias in the Ptolemaic Period.³³ There are also Egyptian amphorae from the same period which testify to the strong economic ties with the Nile Valley.

As regards the imported amphorae, an interesting coincidence has been noticed between the evidence found at Bakchias and that found at Tebtynis, showing a concurrence of trading routes, of wine from the eastern Aegean and oil from Brindisi. This circumstance becomes all the more significant when we consider that both sites are located on the edge of the region where hubs operated sorting centres for the precious Aegean wine and Italian oil. Tebtynis, is associated with the caravan routes of the western desert and Bakchias with those in the north.

Other imported discoveries also relate to the second phase of the Ptolemaic Period (second-first century BCE) such as the black glazed pottery³⁴ and the Eastern Sigillata.³⁵ To these should be added a black glazed oil lamp of Greek provenance which can be dated to between the end of the fourth and the third century BCE, which, as well as being further evidence of the entrenchment of the Hellenistic world, also reinforces the hypothesis of how early the first Ptolemaic settlement was. This object could in fact have belonged to a first generation Greek individual living in Bakchias. The remains of Black Silt Ware,³⁶ some clearly inspired

³⁰ See Strassi 2014: 81-91 and the chapter devoted to the northern district in this book.

³¹ Gasperini 2014: 243-368, nos. 557-560.

³² Gasperini: nos. 562-666.

³³ Gasperini: no. 565.

³⁴ Gasperini: nos. 411-412.

³⁵ Gasperini: nos. 513-517.

³⁶ Gasperini: nos. 374-383, 388, 389, 525, 526 datable to the third-second century BCE, especially the second century BCE.

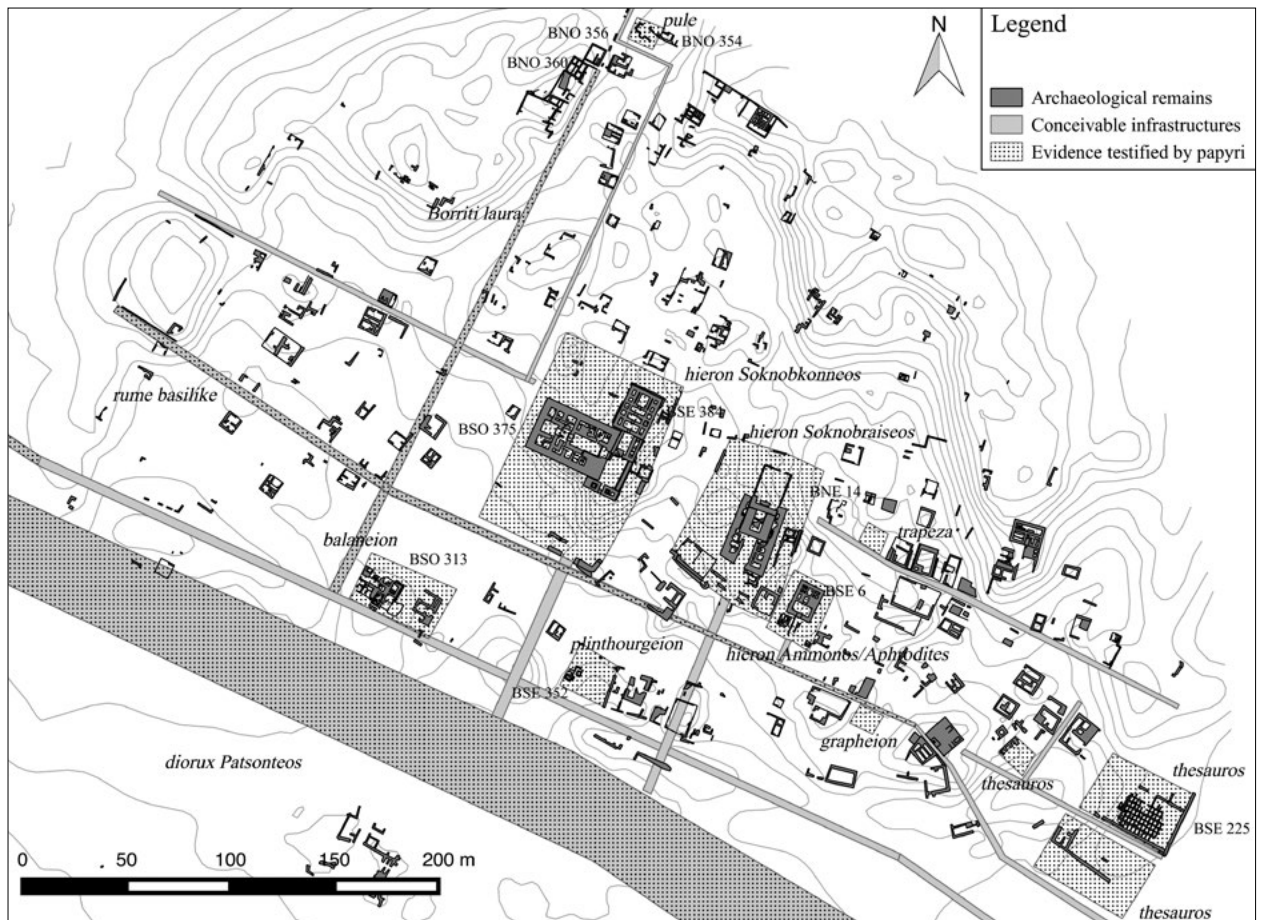


Figure 11. Bakchias plan during the Roman Period (Rossetti 2017).

by Hellenic models from the Athens area,³⁷ are also evidence of the Hellenic influence on the Egyptian township. Amongst these, we highlight two fragments of fish plate,³⁸ otherwise foreign to the Egyptian material culture. The remains of Red Silt Ware³⁹ of the same period (third-second century BCE), which are imitations of *Terra Sigillata* products from Asia Minor, are also part of the same cultural climate.

All this evidence, which is concentrated mainly in the second phase of the history of the Ptolemaic town, gives a better picture of a partly Hellenized community, which is also well known thanks to papyri documentation. It should not however be forgotten that these finds were used along with all the other items of common use and of local production. Amongst these, as well as the kitchen pottery which is often influenced by Hellenic models (*lopades, caccabai, chytrai*), it is worth mentioning the pottery for everyday use. There is a greater quantity of the latter and it is deeply connected to genuine Egyptian tradition, the same as that shown in the monumental forms of the architecture of temples where the relative religious practices are well

rooted in the history of the Egyptian Dynasty. As we will see, these very local traditions survived and indeed developed over the course of the Roman Age.

The Roman Age town

The new stone Temples C of Soknobkonneus and E of Soknobrais, and all the big building projects in general that started towards the end of the Ptolemaic Period (end of the second century BCE – beginning of the first century CE) and were completed at the beginning of the Roman Age (end of the first century BCE – beginning of the first century CE), completely redesigned the urban layout of the town, which ended up gravitating towards the southern canal (Figure 11). The processional routes of the big patron sanctuaries of temples C and E, both defined as first class temples (*iera logima*) in a papyrus note from the Roman Age (113-114 CE),⁴⁰ left from here. We also have a great deal of information from documents of this period which helps us to reconstruct the changes, not just on an architectural level but also with regard to the identification of the cults practised within the various sanctuaries.

³⁷ Gasperini: nos. 376, 381.

³⁸ Gasperini: nos. 388-389.

³⁹ Gasperini: nos. 394-402, 527, 528.

⁴⁰ Papyrus BGU XIII 2215.

The archive of the Temple of Soknobraisis (116-212 CE), which was evidently preserved within the enclosure of Temple E, relates to a period just after the one in the above mentioned papyrus. Meanwhile another interesting papyrus of the same period, which is an oracular demand written in Greek and datable to the first-second century CE, has led to speculation that, in the Roman Age, the cult of the two crocodile divinities may have been equated by the inhabitants of Hellenistic culture to that of the Dioscuri. If this interpretation is right, it would be interesting evidence of these two large sanctuaries being the principal monuments of the Roman Age town, with an architectural impact suggesting that they were almost perceived as twin temples.

In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the papyrus documentation also confirms a cult at Bakchias of Isis-Hathor-Aphrodite, who is often thought of as a maternal figure to that of the cult of Sobek in the regional pantheon. Some terracotta statuettes were found next to the sistrum and the erotic vial in the house of the Isiac priestess, where the presence of a small Isis temple is already assumed. In addition to this an amulet of Isis-Aphrodite, a clay ex voto and a counterweight of the *menat* necklace found in front of Temple A also relate to this feminine divinity. Three papyri attesting to the names of other Isiac priests also come from the archive of Temple E of Soknobraisis. On the basis of these findings, it is assumed that Isis was worshipped, along with others (*theoi synnaoi*), in specific chapels within the larger Temples C and E. At the same time, it is possible that the goddess also had her own independent sanctuary, identifiable in Temple D, which would have been located in the immediate vicinity of Temple E of Soknobraisis. From the point of view of the urban topography, it would also appear to respect the new uniform orientation set by late Hellenistic and Roman Age reconstruction.⁴¹

The smaller Temple D was also accessible from the same direction as the other two bigger buildings, even if it did not have a processional route with the same monumental impact. Given their extreme proximity, even if the two enclosures (*temene*) must have been independent, the possibility that the access route to Temple D also connected with the big processional route of Temple E cannot be excluded.

Town planning in the Roman Age at Bakchias would see a long evolutionary trajectory reach its conclusion, bestowing a distinctive appearance upon the town compared to that of the early Ptolemaic Period. The often fairly functional organisation of residential districts around the principal sanctuary and along the

sides of the long processional access route (*dromos*) to the temple is a feature of the majority of Ptolemaic townships in the region. As we have already seen, the Bakchias of the Ptolemaic Period likewise adhered to this scheme with a cluster of mud brick structures around Temple A. However, in the Roman Age, the town appeared to acquire its own appearance. The township now appeared to assume a more elongated and concentrated shape along the canal with two relatively brief processional routes which must have connected to the watercourse, also for reasons of worship.⁴²

In the light of these considerations, it has been speculated that this change in the hierarchy of the major roads must have been associated with the evolution of the surrounding road system which, in the Roman Age, prioritised the route going from Arsinoe towards Memphis, rather than the route parallel to the canal which came from Philadelphia and went to Karanis.⁴³ Thanks to the papyrus, we know that the route north to Memphis was to be called *Borriti laura*, while the route parallel to the main canal (*diorux Patsonteos*) was the royal road called *rume basilike* (Figure 4).⁴⁴

As the second route was a local connecting road (*rume basilike*), whereas the former was a major road (*Borriti laura*), this suggests a different perspective on the development of trade and the towns economy. In this regard, it is worth recalling that the link with Memphis also involves the connection with the port of Alexandria, which was especially busy and open to international routes in Roman times.

In some ways, the hypothesis of a greater predisposition to trade on a wider scale is partly confirmed by the analysis of the remains of material culture as well as in other buildings constructed in different parts of the town.⁴⁵ We have already mentioned the granary (BSE 39, 225, the *thesauros*) which was built at the end of the Ptolemaic Period (second-first century BCE) in the eastern area of the town, not far from the canal along which the wheat would have been transported. The building had an important development in middle imperial Roman Age (second century CE), which is confirmed both by archaeology and papyrus documentation.⁴⁶ Its dimensions which for now make

⁴² The importance of the canals and the shore of the lake for worship has already been mentioned, as the sacred processions of the crocodile god could leave from the canal, using a small jetty so, indirectly, from the Nile which was considered the natural environment for this divinity (Morini 2008).

⁴³ Giorgi 2012: 29-34.

⁴⁴ For *Borriti laura* see *P.Mich.* III 186 (TM 11989); *P.Mich.* III 187 (TM 11990) and probably *P.Mich.* XII 635 (TM 16060). For *rume basilike* see *P.Mich.* III 188 (TM 11991); *P.Mich.* III 189 (TM 11992); *P.Mich.* X 583 (TM 12270).

⁴⁵ For an analysis of the information resulting from a study of the material culture, see Gasperini 2014: 243-368.

⁴⁶ Two papyri, datable to the second-third centuries CE (*PLond* 315 of 150 CE; *PLond* 475 of 183/184) and an ostrakon (*O.Mich.* 901 of 296

⁴¹ Nifosi 2009: 37; Pernigotti 2009, Pernigotti 2014b and Rossetti 2014a: 109-154.

it the biggest known building in the Fayyūm, testify to Bakchias' economic importance in the Roman Age, when this region had one of the largest stocks of wheat of the Empire. Another important question relating to the importance of the township in the Roman Age is also connected with the granary, namely the administrative ties which seemed to unite Bakchias with nearby Hephastias. The latter would have been a minor centre, known about since the Hellenistic Age but never identified on the ground which, from at least the middle imperial Roman Age (second century CE) was administered by the same local officials as Bakchias.⁴⁷ Whilst bearing in mind the difficulties in interpretation, it should be pointed out that, according to well known documentation, the public granary united the two centres in this period. This information seems to be a significant indicator of Bakchias' importance in the Roman Age as an economic centre of gravity in a wider region than the one immediately surrounding it.

Bakchias's economic vigour is confirmed also in documents relating to the tariffs and customs which it is assumed were located at the northern port (BNO 354) of the town, built in this period (second century CE).⁴⁸ The production facility with the pottery kiln (BSE 352), discovered along the canal, can also be traced to the Roman Age and represents further evidence of the economic vigour of the urban centre.

The building of private dwellings also helps us to reconstruct a fairly significant middle imperial Roman Age phase. It is known that a large number of private houses existed at Bakchias in the Ptolemaic Period.⁴⁹ However, in the Roman Age (first-second century CE) there was an important development of the northern district, where the house of the Isiac priestess (BNO 360, second century CE), which may have also served as a house for expectant mothers to give birth, was built. Furthermore, in the eastern area, as we have already highlighted, from the end of the Ptolemaic Period (second-first century BCE) a new district was created which was developed mainly in the Roman Age (first-second century CE). This urban development was designed with a general raising of the height of the floor level of the Roman town, constructed on top of the Ptolemaic one. This raising of the level is shown not only in the fabric of the temples of the late Ptolemaic and Roman Age, which were constructed above the

earlier houses, but also in the northern district where the dwellings were built higher, relegating the early ground level to the height of the cellars.⁵⁰

The impression of a phase of intense urban development in the middle imperial Roman Age, most likely associated with parallel economic prosperity, would appear to be in line with the papyrus documentation since the majority of the texts. Such documentation is often evidence of the economic vitality of these communities and can be dated to the second century CE. With all due caution on account of the random nature of the findings, and the possibility that some large archives, such as that of the temple of Soknobrais, might influence their statistical validity, for now this Roman urban development remains something to bear in mind.⁵¹

At the time of the investigation it appears that, after the establishment (third century BCE) and the growth of the Ptolemaic Period (second century BCE), the Roman Age was a time of radical renewal with significant developments in the urban physiognomy and the town's economy.⁵²

A first phase of change must have been connected with the establishment of the Augustan province (first century BCE – first century CE).⁵³ During this epoch, the importance of the region as an imperial granary must have been a great boon to Bakchias. It is no coincidence therefore that, during this period, the most important building project was completed, namely Temple C and all its annexes, which was an imposing monument mainly in stone. A second phase of development was that of the middle imperial age (second century CE), when the two first class Temples, C and E, would appear to have flourished and the public granary established Bakchias' central role in the economy of the region.

If we broaden our perspective to the region as a whole, some significant comparisons can be reported for this period. We know that, in the Augustan Period, a policy

CE) explicitly confirm the *thesauros* of Bakchias. More generally, the presence of a public granary at Bakchias is confirmed by seventeen papyrus texts (including the two cited above) which are datable to between the middle of the third century BCE to the beginning of the third century CE at the latest. At least ten of these can be dated to the second century CE (Nachtergaele 2007).

⁴⁷ On this subject, cf. Strassi 2014: 81-91, who raises doubts about the traditional interpretation limiting the common administration only to the Roman Age.

⁴⁸ Ippolito 1999.

⁴⁹ On this point, cf. the final part of the preceding paragraph.

⁵⁰ On this subject, see the chapter on the northern district.

⁵¹ There are four archives known at Roman Age Bakchias and only one of the Ptolemaic Period of the town dietician (eight documents dating to 63-61 BCE). For the Roman Age, the archives are those of Apollonius (59-99 CE), Horos (71-131 CE), Petesucos (119-144 CE) and, lastly, the archive of the temple of Soknobrais which conserves 34 texts dating to between 116 and 216 CE. On these subjects, reference should also be made Strassi 2014: 81-91.

⁵² There are useful comparisons of this reconstruction in other urban centres of the Fayyūm, such as Karanis, Dionysias and Soknopaiou Nesos, for the Ptolemaic and Roman phases, as well as at Narmouthis and Tebtynis for the presence of settlements earlier than the Ptolemaic establishment with an intermediate phase when it was abandoned. See Davoli 1998; Wendrich, Bos and Pansire 2006; Cestari 2010; Papi *et al.* 2010; Camporeale 2011; Davoli 2011; Capasso and Davoli 2012. For an interesting summary of this subject, cf. also Menchetti 2008.

⁵³ The province was founded by Octavian in 30 BCE, before it was proclaimed Augustan (Geraci 1983).

of severe fiscal management operated, which removed direct management of their agricultural properties from the priests, along with other important handouts. Some confiscated land was in fact reallocated to the same priests to rent, or else they received a public grant, partly raised through taxation revenue (*iera ge*). Above all, Augustus did not skimp on utilising new resources to support important refurbishment/renovation of sacred building projects, either directly or through his local officials. These upgrades can be seen not just in the pillar and courtyard of Temple C of Bakchias but also in other sites in the Fayyūm, such as Tebtynis, where the *dromos* was rebuilt and the second cloister of the temple. Elsewhere, at Narmouthis, work was carried out on the *dromos* and the new chapel of Isis, dedicated to the health of Augustus, was built.⁵⁴

Projects which took place in the Antonine Age (second century CE), on the other hand, included the creation of the Hadrian courtyard of Temple B at Narmouthis and, at Karanis, the construction of the north temple as well as the restoration of the *propylon* of the sanctuary of Petesucos and Pnepheros (in 190 CE).⁵⁵

There is another building whose typology reflects the evolution of customs and daily life of the inhabitants of Bakchias which fits into this panorama. This is the public baths (BSO 313), already known about thanks to a papyrus document from the Age of Nero and now finally identified and investigated archaeologically.⁵⁶ The baths were constructed in brick in the Augustan Age (first century BCE- first century CE), close to the canal to the south west, and were rebuilt and enlarged in the Hadrianic Period (second century CE). Apart from the correlation with the phases of urban development already outlined, it is important to emphasise the importance of this complex. In fact this building follows the typology of Roman baths rather than Hellenistic ones, marked by a Roman style of life, and is probably a telltale sign of the presence of Roman citizens, maybe even soldiers, at Bakchias.

The cultural material of the Roman Age gives us other important considerations, especially regarding the trade in oil and wine, which we can reconstruct by studying imported amphorae.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The dedication of two altars, at Narmouthis in 19-18 and at Tebtynis in seventh-sixth century BCE, by two of the strategists of the Arsinoite nome is also dated to this period. For general information see: Wallace 1938: 240-241; Rondot 2004: 181-184; Bresciani *et al.* 2006: 59; Menchetti 2008: 32-33; Derda 2006: 25-59; Bresciani and Giammarusti 2012: 167. For the demographic aspect, see Bagnall, Frier 1994.

⁵⁵ Menchetti 2008: 34-35; Bresciani and Giammarusti 2012: 175-193.

⁵⁶ Papyrus BGU I 181, which can be dated to 57 CE (Nachtergaele 2003).

⁵⁷ As for the rest, we draw attention to a single fragment of a glass of Northern Italian Terra Sigillata from the Augustan Age (Gasparini 2014: 243-368, no. 418), probably belonging to a Roman citizen, which is the only finding of this type in the region. Invetriata pottery also appears in larger quantities in the period from the second half of the second - third century CE. For more on this and Roman Age cultural material in general, see Gasparini 2014: 243-368.

Locally produced amphorae (type AE 3) testify to a robust internal trade in Egyptian wine, especially with the southern part of the region in the second and third century CE and also with the Nile Valley area. This commercial activity must also have made use of local facilities for the production of amphorae but they have not as yet been traced.

At the same time, trade with the Aegean area continued, as confirmed by an amphora from the Augustan Age from Kos and there is also evidence of continued trade with the Italian coast. The most important change, however, was the development of contacts with North Africa, especially Tunisia, and with Leptis Magna and, at the same time, a growth of the trade in oil at the expense of the wine trade.⁵⁸

The abandonment of the North Kom and the development of the South Kom⁵⁹

Signs of decline in the economic system of the Roman town already begin to appear during the course of the third century CE, especially in the second half and towards the end of the century. For example, the number of priests at the two bigger Temples, C and E, diminished.⁶⁰ Both in the sacred areas and in the rest of the township, there was a rapid general deterioration of the standard of urban living. This is shown in papyrus documentation and by numismatic finds and is confirmed by archaeology and by material culture remains.⁶¹

At the same time as this downward trend of the North Kom, however, the construction of new buildings in what is known as the South Kom appeared to reflect a new organisation of the area. From the beginning, in fact, the decline of the township to the north of the canal did not mean that the site was definitively abandoned but rather that the urban centre of gravity shifted to the southern bank of the watercourse. This was a result of a retreat towards the south of the cultivated area and a general contraction of the region. According to the scattered remains on the surface, the uniformity of the techniques and consistency in the orientation of the buildings, the South Kom was subject to a rationally conceived settlement at the end of the Roman Age (Figures 12, 13).⁶² It remains to be understood whether this was some sort of urban

⁵⁸ Gasparini 2014: 243-368, no. 561.

⁵⁹ As regards the final phase of the life of the township, the intention in this paragraph is only to provide a brief historical-topographical snapshot. For a more detailed and comprehensive explanation, see the chapter by Paola Buzi.

⁶⁰ See the contribution by Ilaria Rossetti on this subject in this book, with relative bibliography.

⁶¹ The most recent papyrus found at Bakchias dates back to 313 CE (*P.Cairo Isis*. 12₂). Between the third and fourth centuries, there was a significant reduction in numismatic remains (Parente 2008: 165-181).

⁶² Giorgi 2007: 82-91. See also the chapter on the South Kom in this book.

Figure 12. Views of the South Kom.



Figure 13. A disused mill in the archaeological area.

addition or if this late settlement was provoked by needs not only connected to a residential function. Given the border position of the township, exposed to raids by robbers from the desert, it is possible that a military contingent played an important role defending the region, something which certainly happened in other centres of the Fayyūm. Both the archaeology and the written sources (particularly the *Notitia dignitatum*), confirm the existence of military contingents headquartered in the Fayyūm in the two encampments of Dionysias and Narmouthis in the middle part of the fourth century CE. However, it is plausible, and in some cases has been confirmed, that auxiliary troops could have been located also in other places, especially those along the border routes, such as Tebtynis and Bakchias.⁶³

⁶³ The examples of Narmouthis and Dionysias (Bresciani 2009; Carriè 1974), where there are known to have been real solid encampments

In any case, it seems that the area occupied by the Ptolemaic and Roman township was abandoned during the course of the fourth century CE. The big temple areas, which had by now lost their function as cultural and economic centres, fell into disuse. These buildings, associated with cults which were no longer practised, would no longer have been manned and would have been among the first to be destroyed to recoup the precious building material. This factor, which would have first impacted on public areas, would have also affected the private buildings which were likewise abandoned.

In the course of the fourth and sixth centuries CE, many dwellings which were by now disused were

(*castra*), are well known. For a more detailed description, see the chapter by Paola Buzi on Bakchias in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, with relative bibliography.

covered in sand and several tombs appeared in parts of the township. Later, on top of these little dunes which now covered the buildings of the ancient town, sheep pens or byres were built as shelter for the flocks or herds. These were wooden enclosures which made use of the still visible remains of the ruins, propping up against them. For example, a fence was unearthed above the block of the house of the Isiac priestess. Remains of various types lead us to think that a similar trend must have taken place around the ruins of the ancient urban sanctuaries.⁶⁴ The only exception in this general panorama may be represented by the baths, where there are later findings, some of which can be attributed to Islamic culture. It also seems that a new water supply system came into operation using *saqiya* vessels attached to water wheels (fourth-seventh century CE).⁶⁵

Slightly later, between the fifth and sixth centuries CE, there must have been a further evolution of the South Kom site as the late Roman structures disappeared and a Coptic monastery was built on top of them.

During this period, the temple areas were transformed into real borrow pits, as is shown by the presence of blocks from Temple C which were reused to construct a Coptic church in the South Kom (BS 500). The abandonment of the ancient urban area did not mean that the site was now completely abandoned. The plundering of buildings which were no longer in use by citizens is valuable evidence of renewed building activity more focused on the needs of daily life at that time.

Later on, the two Coptic ecclesiastic complexes were, in turn, supplanted by a township of Islamic culture. This last medieval Bakchias appears to have featured buildings which were connected with productive activity with evidence of remains of numerous millstones and presses. The churches were redesigned and transformed into functional buildings, with presses, tubs and *silos*.⁶⁶

The Modern Era

After the South Kom was abandoned, the migration southwards resulted in the current rural village of Gorein. Today, a new canal even further to the south now divides the modern village of Gorein from the archaeological area. In the course of the modern era, the record of the ancient township was almost lost to the extent that some of the illustrious researchers such as Giovanni Battista Belzoni from Padua confused it with Soknopaiou Nesos, whilst Flinders Petrie never identified it.⁶⁷ In the 1920s, the site suffered destruction on an industrial scale to recover the *sebbakh*, the fertile clay found in the archaeological area, as well as much clandestine excavation. In more recent times, the archaeological site has been placed under protection by the Egyptian authorities. In the meantime, the increase in the cultivated area which year after year reclaims space from the desert has affected the area which is now surrounded by vegetation. The humidity caused by this is a dangerous threat to the preservation of these buildings which are mainly constructed in mud bricks (Figure 14).⁶⁸

⁶⁴ This is the trend which in other geographical areas of the Mediterranean was described as ruralisation of the urban area but in this specific case was really desertification. In the shallower layers in the area in front of Temples A and C, several remains of sheep-goat dung have been found as well as the remains of an animal. See the chapters on the temple areas and on the northern district.

⁶⁵ See the section devoted to the baths in this book.

⁶⁶ On these topics, see the contribution by Paola Buzi in *Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* in this book.

⁶⁷ As Bakchias began to awaken the interest of archaeologists, they had to await the research by Grenfell, Hogarth and Hunt (*Egypt Exploration Fund*) in the last years of the nineteenth century (1896). For the history of the research, please refer to the chapter by Paola Buzi on the re-discovery of the site in this book.

⁶⁸ Mandanici 2007.



Figure 14. Stellite image taken in 1968, within the framework of American Corona project (Buzi *et al.* 2011).

Chapter III

The sacred areas of the town

E. Giorgi

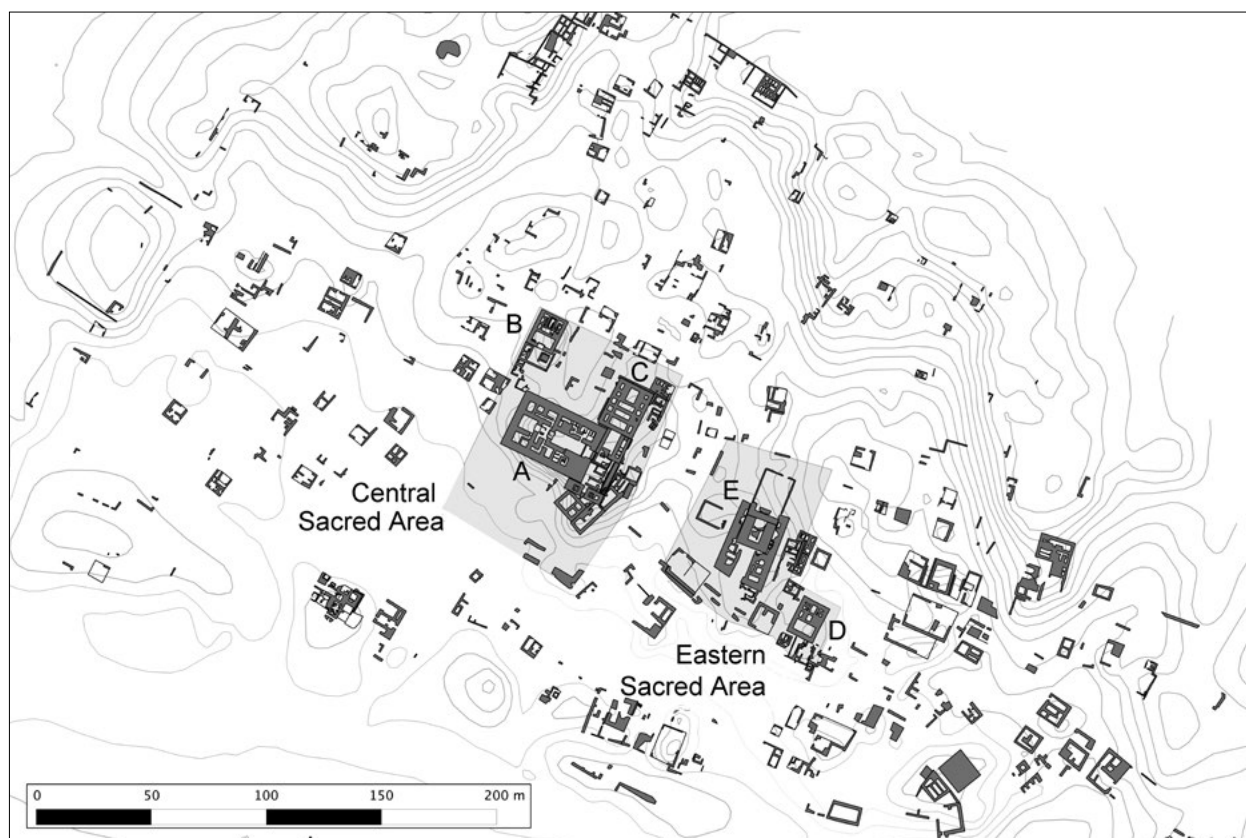


Figure 1. General plan of the two temple areas.

One of the most important results of archaeological research carried out in Bakchias in recent years is most certainly the discovery of no less than five temples located within two different sacred areas. Each of these areas was approximately seven hectares wide and is the result of a complex sequence of construction phases that represent the town's changing fortunes over time. An initial area, situated in the heart of the town, includes the large temple, Temple A, which has been known to us since the British excavations of 1896, small Temple B and Temple C, studied by Italian archaeologists from 1996 to 2003. A second area, unearthed in 2005 and 2006, lies just south-east of the first site and encompasses Temples D and E (Figure 1).¹

¹ Rossetti 2012; Rossetti 2014a; Rossetti 2017a; Rossetti 2017b; Rossetti 2018.

The central sacred area

Bakchias's main sacred area was located in the heart of the town, in an area that had already been built up at the time when Temple B, the smallest and oldest of the temples, was constructed, completed when the Ptolemaic town was founded in the third century BCE. The imposing structure that is Temple A was built during the same century in mud-brick, like the earlier temple. Lastly, the sacred area was thoroughly rearranged during the Roman Era, when Temple C was built in stone, to the detriment of much of the space that originally belonged to the older temple. After occasional instances of human occupation during Late Antiquity, the whole area was abandoned and reduced to a sporadic human presence in subsequent eras (at least up until the sixth century CE).

The oldest phases

The imposing mud-brick structure of Temple A – built very likely at the time the Ptolemaic town was founded, in the centre of the main sacred area – still dominates the remains of the ancient town and conceals the remnants of what we believe to be the oldest construction phase in Bakchias. Under the north-west corner of this large building, a tradesman’s district has been unearthed, an area that was mostly destroyed in order to build Temple A and to make room for the entrance portal to the *temenos* of Temple B behind it. A kiln and a tank, in particular, were unearthed near where an amphora, imported from Tyre and that can be dated to the seventh-sixth centuries BCE (BNO 415, Figures 2, 3, 4, 5) was found.² To the east of Temple A, moreover, there are other older buildings, located at a much lower ground level and at an oblique angle compared to the surrounding urban fabric. These buildings, which already existed when the temple was built, were converted into ancillary rooms or destroyed by subsequent construction work (BSO 376, 379 and 380, Figure 6).

Temple B

Temple B, which is smaller than the other temples found in this area, is located at a lower level compared to Temple A, nearer to those older phases described above (Figure 7). Its construction destroyed the kiln with the Tyrian amphora, while the *dromos* was blocked by the foundations of Temple A. As a result, we surmise that it was built during an intermediate period, probably when reclamation work began in the region that led to the foundation of the Ptolemaic town (third century BCE). Though we don’t know when exactly it was abandoned, it certainly was no longer visible during the Roman Era when Temple C was built. As regards the religion that was practiced there, the cella’s elongated shape suggests that of a crocodile god, perhaps a primordial Souchos, which was

² The foundations of Temple A are located at 22.14 m above sea level and cover the kiln that could have been part of an older sacred site, even though there is no proof to support this appealing theory as yet (Rossetti 2014a, with bibliography).

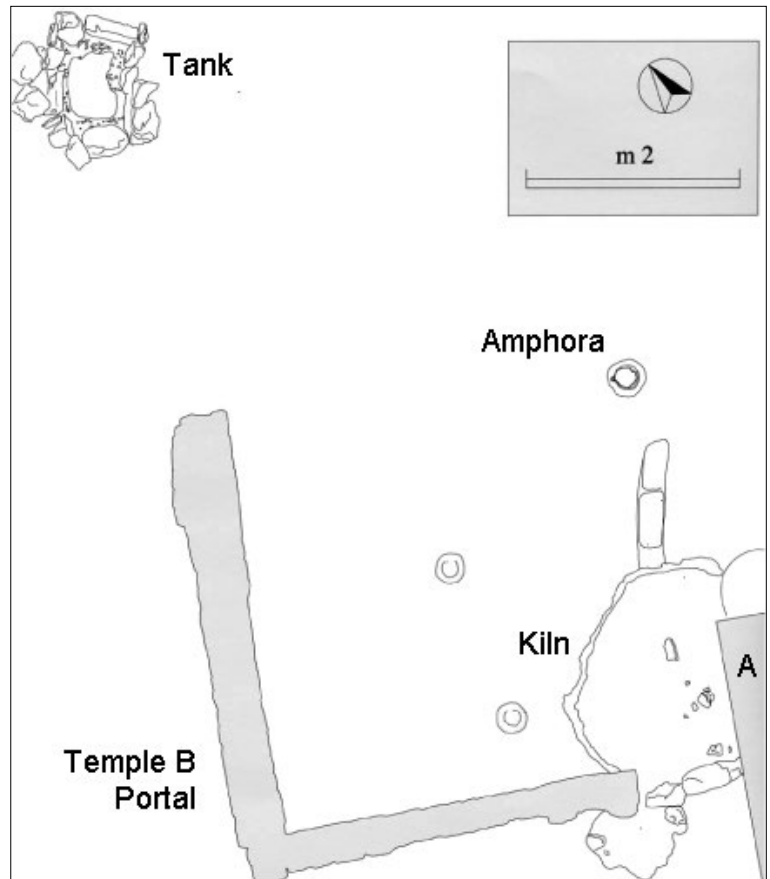


Figure 2. Plan of the area of the kiln.



Figure 3. View of the kiln (Tassinari 2004).

probably amalgamated into the cult of Soknobraisis, one of the two patron deities of Bakchias. The main building complex was located inside an enclosure that could be accessed from the south side thanks to a portal, of which only the foundation formwork survives (BNO 391). The portal allowed access to two successive courtyards that, in turn, split up into other rooms (BNO 388) (Figures 8). In the northernmost courtyard, there are the remains of a bath that was used for worshipping a crocodile god



Figure 4. The area with of the amphora near the kiln.

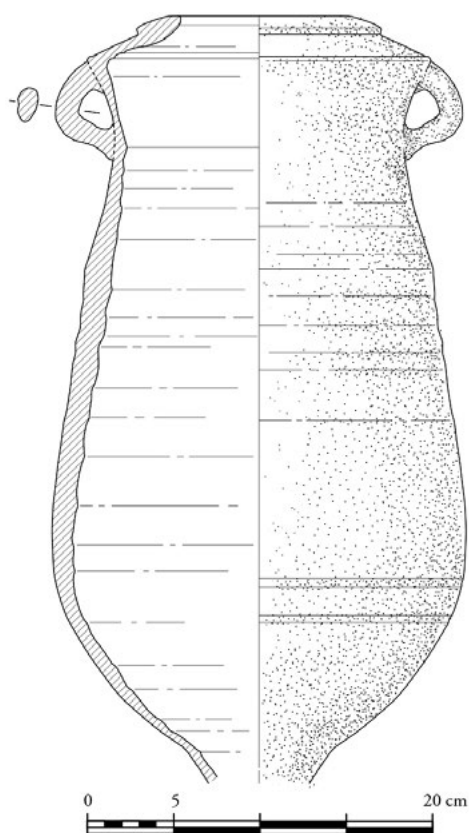


Figure 5. The amphora imported from Tyre, that can be dated to the seventh-sixth centuries BCE.

in this building (BNO 389). Like the rest of the structures described up to now, only the mud-brick foundation formwork of this building has survived. Nevertheless, due to its role, it contained a square bath that was three metres wide, made of brick and coated in a layer of hydraulic lime. Temple B (BNO 109), approximately 15 m wide and mostly made of mud-brick, was located at the end of a processional route (Figure 9).³ Thanks to surviving architectural fragments, we know that the

³ The building was identified in 1994 and surveyed in 2003 and 2010 (Pernigotti 1995: 6-7; Tassinari 2006b: 135).

entrance portal was decorated with torus moulding and an architrave featuring a solar disc and *uraeus* design in local sandstone. Vestibule N came next, an open-air courtyard which led to *pronaos* H and subsequently *naos* A. Vestibule N also led to the temple’s roof via staircase M. There were two corridors around *naos* A and a number of ancillary rooms, whilst inside there are still the foundations of an elongated aedicula that must have contained a crocodile mummy. This leads us to believe that the temple must have been dedicated to a manifestation of Sobek, the crocodile god, as shown by the discovery of a number of partially mummified scales and a stone block that bears an image of this sacred reptile. Perhaps it is ‘Sobek, master of *Shedet*’, which probably evolved into Soknobraisis, the town’s second patron deity. We cannot, however, totally rule out the possibility that other secondary cults were associated with the main divinity’s cult, as a terracotta *naos* and a ritual basin probably belonging to a secondary goddess would suggest.⁴

Temple A

In the late 1800s, Temple A (BSO 375) must have still been covered with sand in the middle of the great *kom* of Bakchias and was not as easy to identify as it is today. During that time, it was excavated by a Greek antiquities dealer from Sennuris in search of papyri and, towards the turn of the century, by Grenfell, Hogarth and Hunt. These British explorers were the first to identify it as a temple dedicated to Soknokonneus, the crocodile god and protector of the town, which was already well known thanks to two papyri that are very important for the history of Bakchias. One is an oracular question addressed to the god Soknokonneus, dated first century CE and unearthed in room A (*P.Bakchias* 26), while the other is a bank receipt, dated 109 or 73 BCE, unearthed in room I (*P.Bakchias* 4). It was only in the late 1990s that the building was finally explored and systematically surveyed and other papyri dating from the first and second centuries CE were unearthed, also dedicated to Soknokonneus and the Dioscuri (*P.Bakchias* 135, 27).⁵

The impression this large mud-brick mass makes today, approximately 10 m high and dominating the archaeological area from its centre, is due to the excavation work carried out in the mid-twentieth century in order to remove *sebbakh*, which isolated it from surrounding buildings (Figure 10). As far as this aspect is concerned, its modern-day appearance is largely misleading. This is particularly obvious on the western side, where you walk behind the temple at a

⁴ Pernigotti 2006b: 214-215; Rossetti 2014a, with bibliography.
⁵ The temple was excavated by the Italian Mission from 1996-1998 while the portal was not unearthed until 2002. Conservation work was done during the excavation work (Rossetti 2014a, with previous bibliography).



Figure 6. View of the Temple A, on the right, and of Temple B in the background.



Figure 7. View of the area of the Temple B from south.



Figure 8. A plan of the central sacred area.

much lower level so that a large proportion of the foundations that were originally covered in sand are visible. Apart from the damage caused by the *sebbakhin*, the temple was also excavated several times by clandestine groups, which explains the damaged state of the layers. The temple is no bigger than 30 x 40 m with

its main axis pointing east (Figure 11). The perimeter walls and foundations were built using the large bricks that are typical of the early Ptolemaic phase in Bakchias (type A). In contrast, the partition walls inside use various different bricks from different eras (types B, C and D), evidence of the many construction phases that

Figure 9. Temple B:
floor plan.

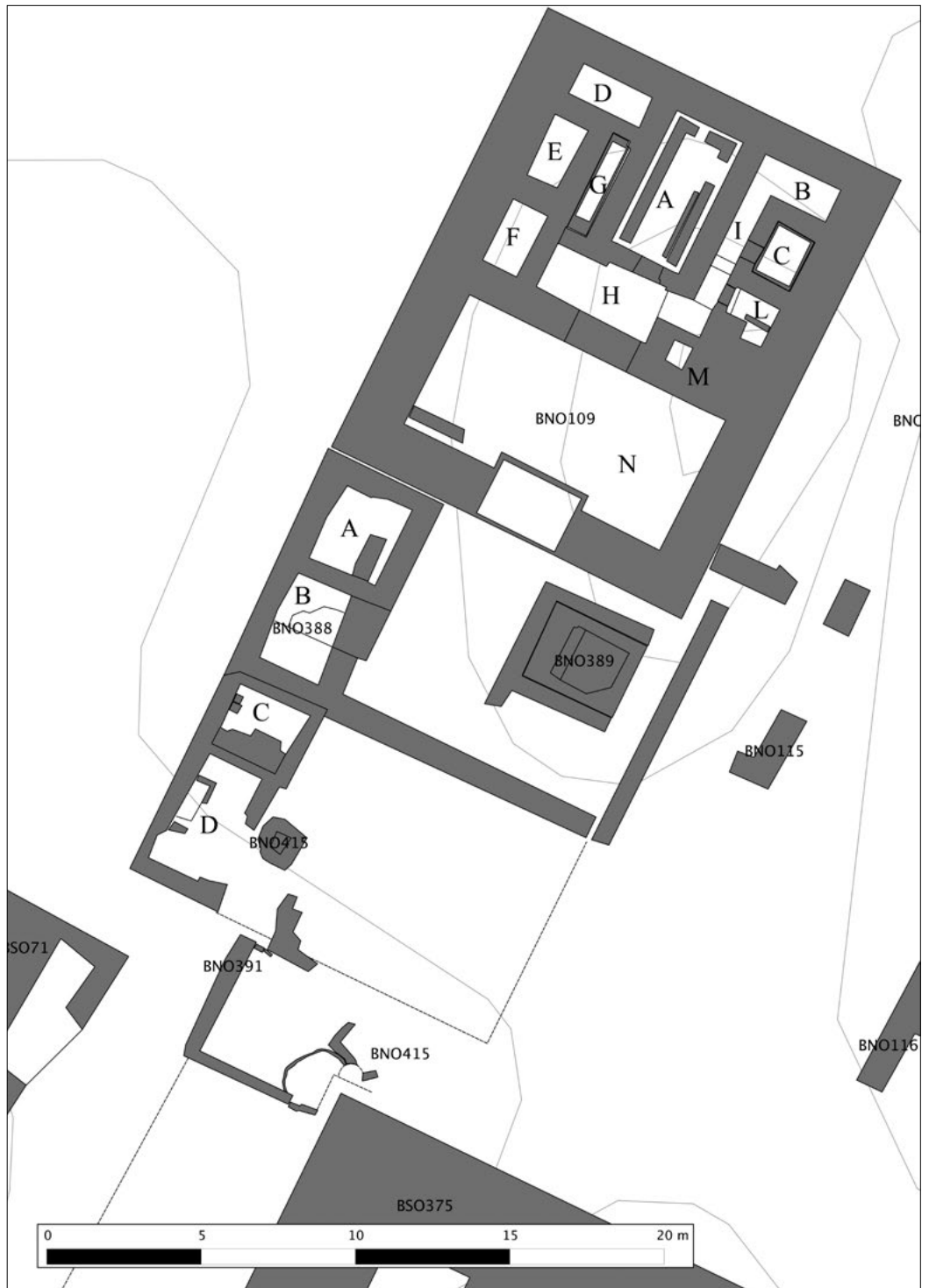


Figure 10. View of the Temple A from east.



Figure 11. Temple A: floor plan.

took place over time. Even if the main phases of the temple's use are dated from the first century BCE to the third-fourth centuries CE, the building was probably completed during the period between the late third

century and the early second century BCE and was often rearranged.⁶ As we shall see later, significant changes

⁶ The two oldest coins unearthed date from the reign of Ptolemy IV (221-205 BCE. Parente 2004: nos. 10-11).

were made during the Roman Era, when Temple C was built nearby, which occupied some of the space of the older complex to create cellars. Even if many rooms were turned into ancillary areas, the religious building was in use up until the third-fourth centuries CE when it was finally abandoned and became an occasional shelter (sixth-seventh centuries CE).

In front of Temple A, the kiosk (BSE 314), *propylon* and the portal that led to the *temenos* in front of the entrance (BSE 386, 385, Figures 12, 13) have all been identified. In terms of the layout, a series of stone

portals led to the courtyard followed by the temple's three main areas (A, B and C), aligned with the entrance and surrounded by other side rooms. The temple portal consists of mud-brick foundation formwork and large slabs of nummulitic limestone that were topped by at least two courses of white limestone blocks.

Thanks to the excavations, we are able to identify at least three construction phases: an initial entrance that is almost level with the foundation formwork, a subsequent raising of the level of the portal as it is today, followed by a rearrangement of the entrance

Figure 12. Temple A: a view of kiosk BSE 314, seen from the east, with the temple complex in the background.



Figure 13. View of the entrance to the Temple A, raised with stones in Roman times, with what remains of the *propylon* (BSE 385).



Figure 14. The statuette portraying Padibastet with a hieroglyphic inscription from the 26th Dynasty.

using finer material. One of the blocks used to raise the threshold bears a builder’s mark, probably a Latin ‘IV’, which would date this final phase to Roman times, when Temple C was built nearby. Subsequent excavations have unearthed the remains of the stone portal that led to *pronaos* B, a sandstone floor and phases of use datable to Roman times (first-second centuries CE), followed by remains of occasional bivouacs, hearths and other signs of late occupation (fourth century CE). Inside *pronaos* B, there was a ramp that provided access to the last stone portal that led to inner sancta C, where ceramic artefacts that can be dated to the second and third centuries CE were found, as well as fragments of *naoi* (a decorative wooden panel and a solar disc and uraeus frieze) and a statuette portraying a sitting man, Padibastet, that still bears a hieroglyphic inscription on the base from the 26th Dynasty (Figure 14).⁷ These particularly ancient finds are to be added to others found in the temple, such as the headless statue of a kneeling male figure with the inscription erased (Figure 15).⁸ The rooms lining the main halls are not as well preserved and often lack a floor, but they have rendered up ceramics and papyri, religious objects and other remains of the temple’s furnishings dating from Roman and Ptolemaic times, as well as later artefacts (sixth-seventh centuries CE), which could also be ascribed to occasional visitors. There were also underground cellars that were the result of later renovations (rooms R, S, X and W), ramps

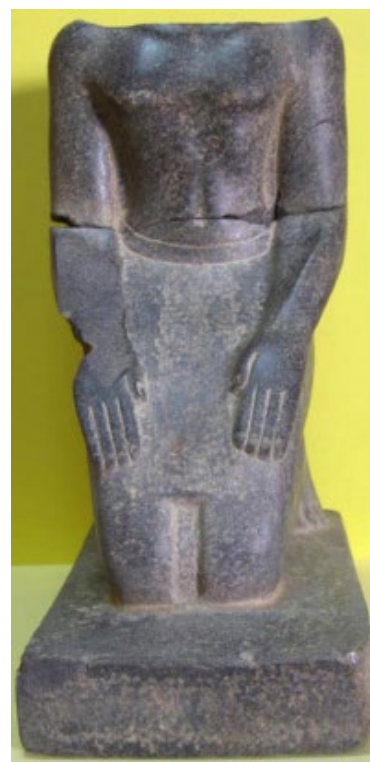


Figure 15. The headless statue of a kneeling male figure with the inscription erased.

providing access to the upper terrace (rooms I and H) and perhaps an archive for papyrus documents (room I).⁹ The temple’s eastern corner was reconstructed

⁷ De Meulnare 2004; Pernigotti 2008: no. 3.

⁸ See at the beginning of chapter 2.

⁹ Papyri generally consist of contracts loaning wheat, payment orders/receipts and private letters that can be dated from the first century BCE to the Roman Era (Grenfell, Hogarth and Hunt 1900, 38; Capasso 1995; Capasso 1997; Rossetti 2014a).



Figure 16. The base for a sphinx or lion that still bears part of the paws and a Demotic inscription.

a number of times during the Roman Era, probably when the adjacent Temple C was built. Room R in particular, which was rearranged many times, has rendered up baskets, wooden lids, a bronze vase, an ithyphallic statuette and the front of a base for a sphinx or lion that still bears part of the paws and a Demotic inscription (Figure 16).¹⁰ When the temple became a secondary building in the sacred area, the rooms nearest Temple C (L1, L2) were turned into cellars that could be entered from above and used to store foodstuffs such as locally-produced grain, wine and oil.¹¹ In contrast, on the other side opposite the entrance, instead of rooms there is a large mud-brick block, that was probably built to shore up structural damage that had occurred over time. Perhaps these problems arose when the entrance portal to Temple C's courtyard was built (Figure 13).¹²

Temple C

Between the late Ptolemaic Period and the beginning of the Roman Age, the central sacred area was extensively renovated as part of a more ambitious plan to entirely rearrange the urban fabric. The construction of Temple C (at least at the beginning of the first century BCE) was part of a new plan to upgrade the area, based on the widespread use of stone but that also involved the opening of a new processional route that ran at right-angles to the previous one (Figure 17). This new road upset the traditional hierarchy of urban roads dating from the mid-Ptolemaic Era, following the original access to small Temple B that had now

been abandoned.¹³ The new building inherited the cult of Soknobkonneus, the town's patron deity, and was built in blocks of local sandstone. It was over 50 m long by 15 m and encompassed Temple A as well, which became an integral part of it, serving the new religious complex. Unfortunately, the widespread looting of the building – which began in Late Antiquity (fourth century CE), continued during the Early Middle Ages (seventh century CE) and did not cease until the 1960s – has left us just a few rows of masonry at the foundations, preserved inside the mud-brick formwork (Figure 18). Due to the large-scale destruction of the original complex, these ancient layers have been seriously damaged and the entire area has been

devastated. That is why the stratigraphic dating of the building is not easy. Moreover, it would seem that a number of structures (such as the courtyard E) could have pre-dated the main structure by decades, i.e. the temple proper, was completed during the Augustan Era or in any case during the early Empire and featuring one single construction technique. The building was constructed using sandstone blocks that bear a series of quarry marks, rough hewn at the foundations with a rusticated exterior facade above.¹⁴

One entered the temple's first courtyard via a grand pillar with tapering towers whose interior contained a staircase that led to the rampart and terrace above. The same staircase led to an ancillary room hidden by tilting stone blocks. The pylon was built next to the corner of Temple A, using the surrounding buildings as foundation formwork (Figure 19). The temple's first courtyard was bordered to the west by the facade of Temple A, now clad in stone blocks, which therefore could only be accessed from this side, while its original entrance to the south was no longer accessible.¹⁵ The courtyard is missing its original flooring, instead there is a later one made with re-used bricks and covered by a thick succession of subsequent beaten earth floors that alternate with layers of sand associated with intermediate phases of neglect. These phases saw sporadic occupation of the North Kom, when the

¹³ Temple C was excavated from 1998 to 2001 (Rossetti 2008, with respective bibliography).

¹⁴ Giorgi 2008.

¹⁵ The stone wall that clad the facade of Temple A during the Roman Era was recognised despite having been plundered, on the east side of the facade where it touches Temple C. It is still unclear whether the stone cladding covered the rest of the temple's facade, which is probable. The foundation trench of this wall had a wide range of artefacts and had probably already been excavated by Grenfell, Hogarth and Hunt to recreate the temple's foundation deposits (Rossetti 2014a).

¹⁰ De Maria 1999; Pernigotti 2008.

¹¹ Davoli 2005, 135.

¹² A long crack crosses the perimeter wall of room R. A large patch is visible in corridor V. In room A, the original wall has new cladding, covering the floor and connected to the rest of the masonry using eight wooden poles (Rossetti 2014a, with previous bibliography).



Figure 17. Temple C: floor plan with the Temple A on the left.

now-abandoned temple was constantly looted and the space inside was used to shelter flocks of sheep, as shown by the presence of ovine coprolites. The many remnants of temple furnishings, cast aside during its destruction, demonstrate the presence of nothing

short of a worksite created to salvage the precious building materials and furnishings found there.¹⁶

¹⁶ The northernmost layers of sand that covered the entrance to Temple A also had a similar succession of layers but there were



Figure 18. Temple C: the inner sancta in sandstone blocks, where traces of structures are still visible.



Figure 19. Temple C: the pylon seen from the north-west.

Having crossed the first courtyard, a grand portal led to central room E, which probably originally featured

also a number of pigeon skeletons and many remnants of religious furnishings, what remained of the various times the building was plundered, such as the lower part of a Saitic statue, a fragment of bas-relief with a hieroglyphic inscription and a number of fragments of quartzite with hieroglyphic inscriptions.

a colonnaded *pronaos*. It seems that the column blocks that were taken and used in the church (BS 500) of the South Kom, bearing quarry marks similar to those found in the foundations of Temple C, came from this very place.¹⁷ In any case, room E was bordered

¹⁷ Giorgi 2008; Tocci 2014.

to the east by a series of small rooms (that are only preserved at the height of the cellars created in the foundations) and to the west of the corner of Temple A, clad in stone slabs and almost camouflaged inside the new architectural complex.¹⁸ Behind the courtyards, one came across the structure of the temple proper (BSE 384). Unfortunately, only small portions of its stone walls have survived, reduced to the level of the foundations, inside the mud-brick formwork.¹⁹ A coin dating from the Ottoman Period (A.H. 1255), unearthed amongst the remains of looting, shows how long the area was used as a temporary quarry. The building's poor state of conservation only permits us to speculate what the layout of the main floor could have been, comparing it to other buildings that are in a better state, such as the temple in nearby Dionysias, which is more or less contemporary with it.

The new temple of Soknobkonneus consists of four central rooms aligned with the entrance, which slowly narrow the closer they get to the inner sancta. The latter was long and narrow in order to enshrine a crocodile mummy and was lined with paved crypts (known as 'mysterious corridors'). The central rooms were lined by entrances to minor rooms and staircases that led to the temple's roof. The rooms set in the foundations often contained wind-driven sand banks (seventh century CE) that covered the lower layers, full of sandstone shards discarded at the time the stone blocks were carved on site before being laid down (second century BCE).²⁰

The building was surrounded by foundation formwork built in type B mud-brick (typical of the Roman Period) and plastered on the inside. The four corners of the temple's great foundation formwork featured the same number of small niches, only a few dozen centimetres wide (approx. 45 high, 20 wide and 33 cm deep). They were probably foundation deposits that were unfortunately violated and plundered while the rest of the building was ransacked. The total absence of remnants of foundation structures in the building's north-west corner allowed us to carry out a more in-depth stratigraphic survey in order to verify the thickness of lower layers. The lower rows of brick in the foundations had been laid inside the mud-brick foundation formwork plastered on the inside. In turn, the formwork was laid down on a 40 cm layer of sterile sand spread out over a layer of grey sand underneath,

only a few centimetres thick and levelled using another layer of plaster. Just as the surface of the mud-brick formwork had been plastered before the blocks of stone of the foundations were placed inside, so the lower layer of grey sand had been levelled with a layer of plaster. These must have been construction processes that were undoubtedly necessary to construct such an imposing building, but also part of a specific ritual that isolated the sacred building from the remains of previous construction phases.²¹

The eastern sacred area

The sacred area to the east lay along the canal that edged the ancient town to the south and that determined the processional routes that led to the two main temples: D and E (Figure 1). The religious complex where small mud-brick Temple D was located was constructed in the late Ptolemaic Period and was probably not dedicated to a crocodile deity. In contrast, the larger temple, Temple E, was probably dedicated to Soknobraisis, the other town patron deity that was worshipped together with the deity venerated in the central sacred area. The temple was originally built in brick during the Ptolemaic Era and was then destroyed and rebuilt in stone during the Roman Era when all the processional routes that led to the town's two sacred areas were similarly oriented south-east to north-west.

Temple D

Temple D (BSE 6) was located inside the eastern sacred area, near the *dromos* entering Temple A, even though its processional route was different and followed the southern canal only to turn north, like Temple B with which it also shares similar characteristics in terms of size, construction techniques and the way buildings inside the sacred perimeter are arranged (Figure 20). These topographical considerations, combined with other stratigraphic features, lead us to believe that the temple was completed sometime between the late Ptolemaic Era and the beginning of the Roman Period (second century BCE), when it underwent a number of repairs as shown by the type of brick used. The orientation of the *dromos*, which follows the direction that was to become dominant during the Roman Era with the construction of Temple C, and the layout of the religious complex on the remains of the older Hellenistic district, lead us to believe that its construction occurred after the Ptolemaic processional route that led to Temple A had been abandoned. It must have been abandoned at the same time as those of the other sacred areas (third-fourth centuries CE) and the buildings must have been used for other purposes and plundered until later periods (fifth-seventh centuries

¹⁸ The backfill found in the cellars, which were separate and could be accessed from above, contained ceramic artefacts that can be dated from the third to the fourth centuries CE.

¹⁹ Quarry and/or construction site marks were etched on many of these blocks, see Giorgi 2008.

²⁰ A number of vases used to carry mortar on the construction site were found in these layers. Moreover, the materials that are worth particular mention include: a stone feline paw, a fragment of painted terracotta and a few Greek *ostraka* that can be dated to the mid-second century BCE (Rossetti 2008).

²¹ See Rossetti 2014a and respective bibliography for a description of the ancillary buildings and the sacred perimeter.



Figure 20. Temple D: floor plan.



Figure 21. Temple D: the area outside the temple seen from the south-west. Clerical accommodation in the foreground (BSE 330) with storage rooms behind (BSE 404 – BSE 405).

CE).²² We do not even have clear information about the cult worshipped there. The size of the cella is not suited to housing a crocodile god mummy and is closer to the Isis-Thermuthis cella in the temple of Tebtynis.²³

The temple building was 17 m long in total and was mainly built in mud-brick, with few stone features such as the entrance portal, as shown by the few sandstone blocks that are still found inside the foundation formwork. As with Temple B, ancillary areas used for worship were all inside the perimeter of the *temenos* (Figure 21).²⁴ Among these, there was a building which could have accommodated the clergy (BSE 330). Unfortunately, here too, the architectural complex is badly preserved and all that remains are the foundations or cellars. That is why the reconstruction of the main floor's layout is so difficult. In any case, we can suppose that the entrance portal led to open courtyard A, used as a colonnaded vestibule. Another stone portal led to *pronaos* B and eventually allowed entrance to *naos* C.²⁵ The cellar floors of the side rooms

still exist though covered by layers that are fairly late (third century CE).²⁶

Temple E

Temple E was the main religious building in the eastern sacred area (Figure 22). It is difficult to interpret it, not only because of the usual phases of widespread looting, but also due to the building's complex architectural history, which is the result of two different construction phases, where one was planned to the detriment of the other.

Temple E's first construction phase (BSE 408) is thought to have taken place during the Ptolemaic Period, when the building existed alongside grand Temple A, in the centre of the other sacred area, for a period of time. As we shall see, papyrial sources dating from the Roman Era suggest that this is where Soknobraisis, the other

²² There are the remains of hearths and small ovens opposite the temple, perhaps used after it was abandoned.

²³ Gallazzi and Hadji-Minaglou 2000.

²⁴ The temple was excavated in 2005 (Rossetti 2014a, with its respective bibliography).

²⁵ Two illustrated *ostraka* were found in vestibule A: one shows the layout of two religious buildings on the convex side, while the other side depicts another building (Pernigotti 2006a: no. 5 and no. 6).

Ceramics that can be ascribed to a wide timespan encompassing the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods were found in cell C. Other artefacts were also found here: a complete oil lamp (Gasparini 2014: no. 509), which can be dated from the first century BCE to the first century CE; the base of a terracotta statuette, where the feet are recognisable; an *ostrakon* bearing a school exercise (B05/C-322/150) and one with geometric lines made in white chalk.

²⁶ In cellar 1, which features a vaulted roof and a vertical well with footholds, two clay seals were found. This was probably where the most precious objects were sealed and kept (Rossetti 2014a).



Figure 22. Temple E: floor plan.

patron god of the town, was worshipped. Though lacking evidence, it is possible that this was the cult worshipped in this part of the eastern sacred area since the Ptolemaic Era. It was a large mud-brick temple dating from the Hellenistic Period, almost 35 m wide and over 22 m long, with sandstone portals.²⁷ Out of all its main rooms, the only one that can still be recognised is central room A, just after the portal, while along the sides of the building there are only the remains of cellars that were extensively renovated in the Roman Era. An in-depth survey in the centre of the later temple has allowed us to unearth part of cell O. As regards the rest of the building's main section, it was destroyed to make room for the new temple during a second phase, while the remaining parts of the old cellars were converted into ancillary rooms.²⁸ Among the most significant finds unearthed in foundation room E was a stone *naos* depicting an animal with a Hathoric crown on top of head and two worshippers on the sides, as well as a clay seal bearing two crouching crocodiles facing each other.²⁹

During the Roman Era, perhaps when the urban layout was rearranged with the construction of the pylon and the courtyard of Temple C, the Ptolemaic building was replaced with a new temple in limestone (BSE 12). The temple's reconstruction in stone must have taken place before 113-114 CE, when papyrial sources tell us (BGU XIII 2215) that there were at least two first-class temples in Bakchias that

were probably dedicated to the patron crocodile gods Soknobraisis and Soknobkonneus.

The new stone temple was 14 m wide and its *pronaos* was built above the older temple's cella following a layout similar to Temple C's courtyard II, i.e. with a colonnaded courtyard and side rooms carved in the walls. This probably led to the temple proper, of which all that remains are two walls and the foundation formwork built with bricks salvaged from the destroyed Ptolemaic temple (BSE 14).

As well as a number of late-era houses that incorporate part of the old religious building (BSE 409), we can see storage rooms inside the *temenos*, as well as accommodation for the clergy and archives, where perhaps the famous archive of the temple of Soknobraisis was originally kept (BSE 8, 2, 1).³⁰ We can also make out the storage rooms (BSE 8).³¹ Last but not least, fragments of the *temenos* built using the usual construction technique of juxtaposed building sections, with mud-brick rows laid alternatively in convex and concave rows, were found (BSE 1, 68, 13, 9): BSE 1 (in the south-west corner), BNE 68 (to the west), BNE 13 (to the north) and BSE 9 (to the east). The *temenos* led to a long *dromos* that has been almost entirely destroyed, of which sandstone blocks scattered along the path of the sacred road remain, as well as a small fragment near the kiosk (BSE 52).

²⁷ The original layout was built using type A bricks (Hellenistic) and then repaired using type B bricks (Roman).

²⁸ A crocodile scale was found in the backfill of room A. A number of coins and other artefacts that can be dated up to the early first century CE were found in room B (Parente 2008)

²⁹ Rossetti 2014a (BK05/1079/147; BK05/1079/143).

³⁰ Gilliam 1947.

³¹ Tassinari 2006a: 97-98.

Chapter IV

The Northern District

E. Giorgi

The northern part of Bakchias was the first to be studied by Italian researchers, when the then-Joint Mission of the Universities of Bologna and Lecce embarked on a new campaign of systematic excavations that are still ongoing. Right from the first analyses of the site, various interesting features emerged in this part of the town, both due to the thick layer of settlement deposits found there and due to its topographic location. This is because the route from Memphis entered the town on this side, and entrance was regulated by the northern city gate and a customs house, of which we were already aware thanks to descriptions found in Roman Era papyri.¹ To the east and west of the gate, a residential district stretched out whose layers generally match those that cover the entire existence of the town, defined by the investigators of the site as the northern district and made up of a complex network of mud-brick buildings (Figure 1).²

The northern gate and adjacent buildings

It was in 1993, during the first excavation campaign carried out by Italian archaeologists, that the remains of the Memphis route were unearthed, as well as its path within the urban area and its entrance gate (BNO 354). At the time it was discovered, this building was attributed to the Roman Era (second century CE), with phases of use that continued until the late imperial period (third century CE). The last stretch of the northern road that reached the town was merely beaten earth. Where it reached the gate, the road widened slightly to the south-west and crossed an urban street with the same beaten earth floor at right angles. To the south of the northern gate, there was a square building (BNO 355) whose upper sections are still fairly well preserved, which was considered to be a tower used as a warehouse. To the west of it, there was a three-storey terraced complex that may have been the site of a small building that was perhaps dedicated to the cult

¹ Ippolito 1999. These precious documents actually describe the customs duties that were demanded of those who crossed the town. There is only direct reference to this particular town gate in the case of commerce involving the northern route.

² At the time of the 1995 excavation, the eastern part of this district was called the 'east sector', due to its eastern location compared to the buildings excavated during earlier campaigns (Davoli 1996). Nevertheless, it is clear that when considering the entire urban area, these buildings are considered to be part of the same northern district.

of Isis (BNO 356). These buildings, like those allowing entrance to the town, have been attributed to Roman times and were placed on a layer of sand that sealed off the previous phase.³

The house of the priestess of Isis and the surrounding city block

The identification of the terraced area as dedicated to Isis is inextricably linked to the interpretation of the building that is found just to the south (BNO 360, the so-called 'House VIII' or building VIII, excavated in 1994 and 1995).⁴ This is a square house of around 10 metres in height that was probably the home of a priestess of Isis during the Roman Era, as many artefacts that can be associated with the cult of Isis found inside it would suggest. In general, it is a building planned in the Ptolemaic Period (c. third-second centuries BCE), with at least one extensive renovation during the Roman Era (c. second-third centuries CE).

Coins datable to the reign of Ptolemy IV were found in the lower levels, thus attesting the use of such rooms up until at least the late second century CE.⁵ Moreover, the walls that can be dated to that phase were built using larger bricks than those of type A (approximately 40 x 20 x 13 cm), normally used in the Ptolemaic Era, while those laid in upper sections of masonry are type C (approximately 30 x 17 x 12 cm), certainly later and perhaps dating from Roman times.⁶ It was probably during this second construction phase that the number of storeys grew, with the upper floor now only partly preserved and mostly unearthed in a collapsed state.⁷ Various types of flooring were unearthed in all the rooms of the house, usually simple sand and lime beaten floors, that would both point to older phases and to the

³ During the 1993 excavation campaign, it was not possible to survey in depth and few artefacts were salvaged, which were only analysed in passing. Nevertheless, a whole jar was found still in its place between buildings III and IV (Piacentini 1994; Pernigotti 2005a: 46-47).

⁴ Piacentini 1995; Davoli 1996: 54-66; Pernigotti 2005a: 47-54; Paolucci 2009: 40-41.

⁵ Davoli 1996, 68.

⁶ Davoli 1995: 69; Campagnoli and Giorgi 2002; Giorgi 2007: 87.

⁷ As we shall see more clearly later, as regards more recent excavations in this area, we often see a rise in living heights between the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, with first floors that are closer to the level of the road outside and the original ground floors that become at least partially buried.

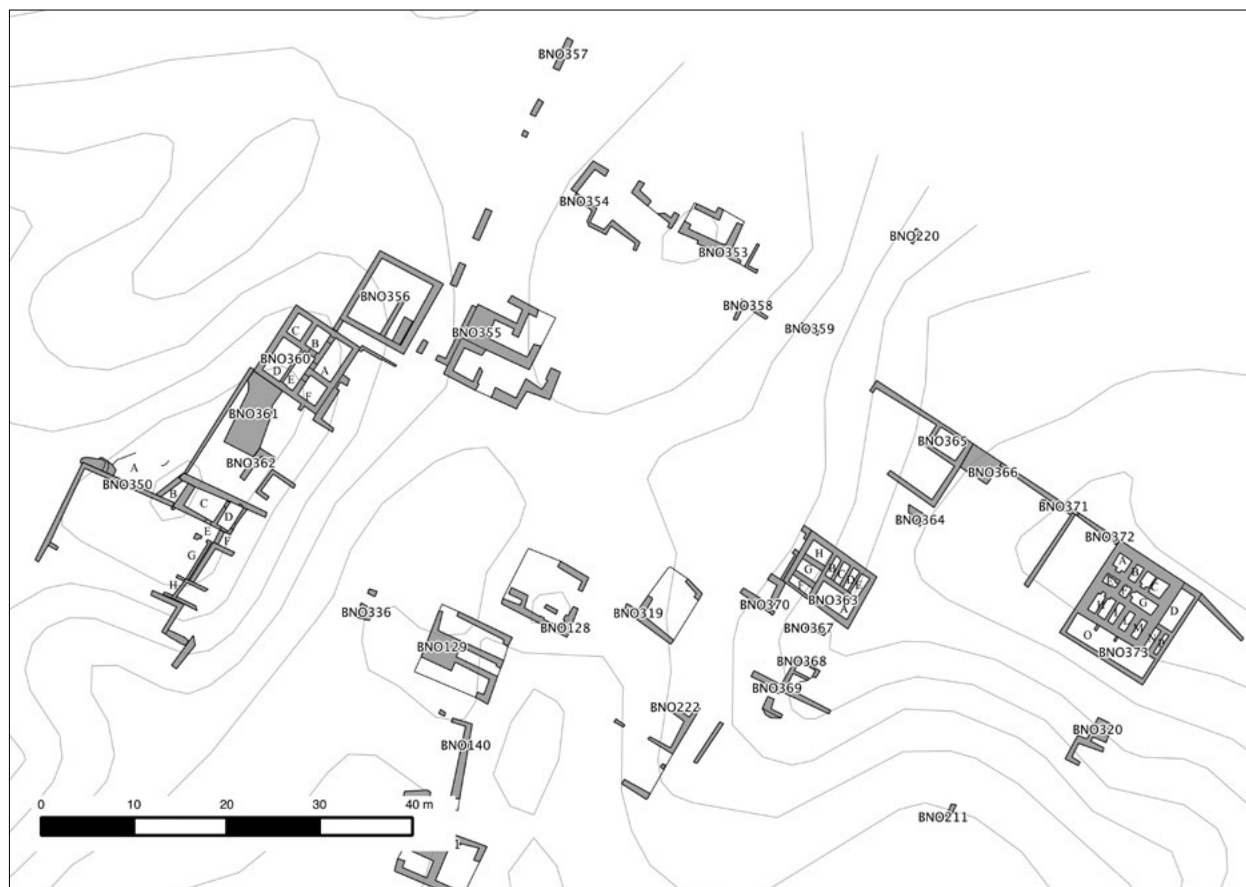


Figure 1. General plan of the northern district.

gradual increase in floor height from the Ptolemaic Period to the late Roman Era. Moreover, between the underground levels of the house, various different remnants of the collapsed ceiling made of wooden beams and rush matting were unearthed, which must have been used to support the Roman Era floor of the first storey, now lost (Figure 2). The presence of an upper floor is also confirmed by the stairwell (F), located in the southern corner of the building, with a central pillar that supports four short flights of four steps each and an equivalent number of landings.⁸ The layout of the Ptolemaic building is, in contrast, well preserved above and features a ground floor and an underground cellar floor that can be accessed from above using trapdoors that were originally fitted with wooden lids.

Underneath all the rooms, except for the entrance and the northern room (E, C), underground cellars were found that could be accessed from above via hatches with square vertical shafts, usually featuring footrests on the sides (except in room B). Where there are beaten earth floors, the hatches are edged at the top by a ring of mud-bricks, whilst elsewhere the doors simply sit in the floor itself, again mud-brick (rooms D, F). The cellars below are usually paved and covered with a mud-brick vaulted roof and the walls seem to

have been plastered white. Room B is the only one where the cellar lacks footrests and runs under the partition wall as well, making the most of the thickness of the wall with a small simply-fashioned underground room covered with a gable roof (between B and E). Apart from this exception, these underground storage rooms seem to have been created by leaning against perimeter walls that already existed. This could have been a simple construction measure that was common in Bakchias, however we can't rule out the possibility that they could be the result of later renovation work, when foundation rooms that originally were not entirely underground were turned into cellars. In any case, at some point during the house's history, the cellars were sanded over in order to raise the floor level above.

Where it proved possible to carry out in-depth stratigraphic surveys due to the absence of cellars (as in the southernmost parts of rooms A and D and in room C), an even older construction phase was detected. Moreover, it was noticed in several parts of the house that the Ptolemaic layout is placed over thicker, older masonry and often the transition between one construction phase and the other is sealed off by a layer of sand.⁹

⁸ The steps were supported by timber joists.

⁹ Davoli 1996.

Figure 2. The ceiling made of wooden beams and rush matting.



As a research hypothesis, we can therefore reconstruct an initial construction phase that is hard to date and that was later used to construct the Ptolemaic Era cellars (c. third-second centuries BCE) and which acted as the basis for the house built during the same phase. Finally, during the Roman Period, the partial interment of the original ground floor and sanding up of the cellars probably led to the creation of at least one other floor above and this situation would have continued for a few centuries (at least until the third century CE) when the house collapsed and was definitively abandoned (c. fourth century CE).

As regards the layout, the ground floor consisted of four rooms (A-D) and a stairwell (F) arranged around a southern corridor (E) that provided access to the house, as well as a hall and a passage leading to adjacent rooms, passing through doors with timber architraves or a mud-brick jack arch.¹⁰ In some cases (as in room A), there was still a stone threshold. Only the small square room in the northern corner of the building, approximately two metres wide, could only be accessed from the room in front (D), which in turn could be accessed from the entrance (E). The stairwell (F) has a hatch on the first landing that leads to an underground storage room, while the second entrance further south offers storage space under the stairs, which can also be accessed from the entrance (E).

At the back of the house, we can see a rectangular living room area (A) that led to two underground storage rooms accessed from two open hatches on the floor.¹¹

¹⁰ A terracotta representation of Isis was found in entrance E (Nifosi 2009: 53, with previous bibliography).

¹¹ Another storage room must have been located in the southernmost part of the room, as the room must have been divided into three parts

Another small room (B) with a hatch and storage room below was in front of the entrance. These last two rooms (A, B) were originally connected but later the door was blocked off. The south-west room (D) is the only one with a mud-brick floor at least in the northernmost two-thirds of the room, where two hatches lead to cellars below. A large niche that acted as domestic altar is on the southern wall, above two smaller side niches.

As mentioned earlier, the entrance faced south and there was a construction in front of it that is still not fully understood, probably annexed to the main house (BNO 361, 362). Initial studies point to a courtyard area that probably featured small covered areas as well, as sections of indoor masonry would lead us to believe. As we shall see in more detail later, houses in Bakchias were often single square blocks that were connected to other open-air enclosures with courtyards, storage rooms and other rooms, often to the side of the entrance. These extensions seem to have been later additions that enclosed residual space between houses and roads, densifying what was originally a more open urban fabric.¹² At the top of this courtyard area, there is a mud-brick floor laid over backfill sand layers that must have been added in later phases of use and of which other remains have been found slightly further south.¹³

matching three underground cellars, all more or less of the same size. Two *ostraka*, possibly dateable to the late Ptolemaic Era, were found in the cellars of room A (Pernigotti 2005a: 53-54, with previous bibliography).

¹² For a general description of the houses of Bakchias, see Paolucci 2009. For an overview of the problem and a comparison with other sites, see Nowicka 1969; van Minnen 1994; Alston and Alston 1997; Alston 2002: 44-127; Hadji and Minaglou 2007.

¹³ These were animal pens located above building BNO 350.

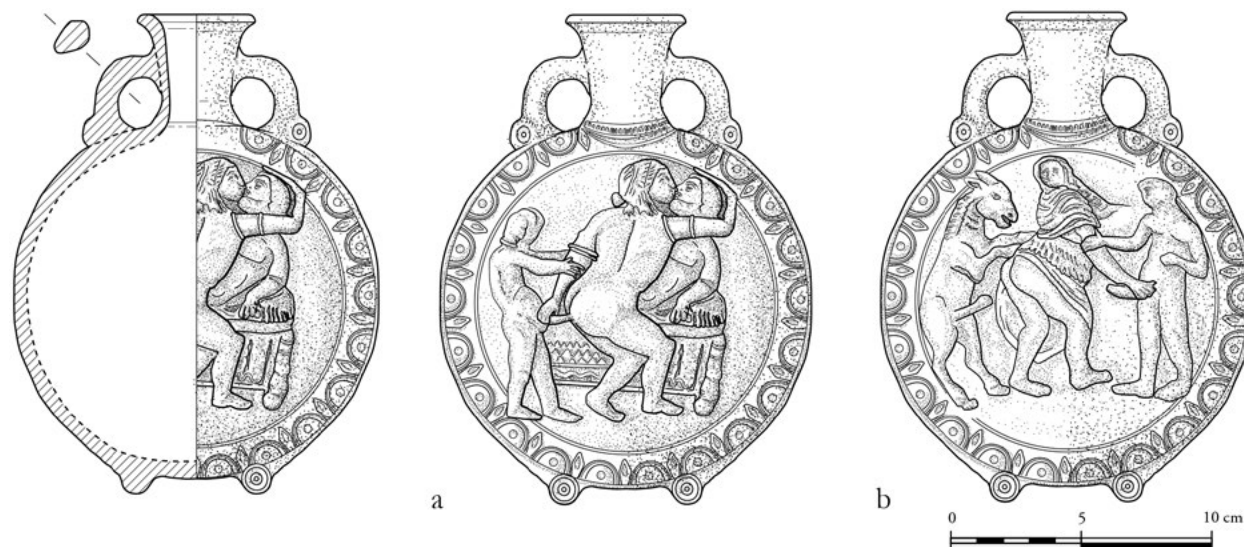


Figure 3. The flask decorated with erotic depictions.

A recent reinterpretation of this building complex, at least as regards its last Roman phase, has put forward a well-founded argument that connects the house of the priestess of Isis to the presence of a ‘birth house’ i.e. a place where women in labour and those who had just given birth were housed during the 40 days of purification that preceded their return to the community. This theory is supported by Bes amulets, cowry shells and a statuette of Thoreris, unearthed particularly in the western rooms (C, D), which can be associated with fertility rites.¹⁴ In one of these rooms (room C, the most inaccessible one), two objects were found that, together with others of lesser importance, could have been kept in the niche carved in the south-west corner of the room and must have been part of the objects of worship used by a priestess serving the goddess Isis. These two objects are the handle of a bronze sistrum, a musical instrument that was typically used in the cult of Hathor, and later that of Isis, and a flask decorated with erotic depictions, i.e. objects typical of the cult celebrated by the priestesses of Isis (Figure 3).¹⁵ Moreover, a scarab that can be dated

to the eighth century BCE, clearly an antique kept as a pendant on a necklace as a talisman, was among the most important artefacts found in this room.¹⁶

As well as a terracotta head of Harpocrates and the amulets, a number of loom weights and other bone tools used for weaving were found in the front room (D), which was probably set aside for domestic ritual. This has led us to believe that the priestess used this room to make sacred bandages. We can therefore surmise that the western wing of the house (with connecting rooms D and C) was the area reserved for the personal use of the house’s owner, while the other rooms could have been reserved for guests (women in labour or who had just given birth) or may have been used as passageways (rooms E, F).

We can make a last observation regarding the house’s urban surroundings. Should our interpretation of a ‘birth house’ be correct, the house’s peripheral position could confirm its isolating function. To that effect, the ‘House VIII’ would have been a marginal transitional space before women were returned to society, almost as if it acted as a sacred counterbalance to the profane, commercial border that was the nearby customs gate.

During the 2009 excavation campaign, work on the area south of the house of the priestess of Isis and the Terrace of Isis resumed with the intent of completing the analysis of this city block in the northern district (Figures 4, 5).¹⁷

the erotic depiction, wine (D’Andria 1995; Pernigotti 2005a, 52; Nifosi 2009: 54).

¹⁶ This is a *Menkheperra* scarab in white soapstone with a turquoise glaze (Nifosi 2009: 55, 105).

¹⁷ The south-west section of structure BNO 350 has not been investigated in its entirety but only using stratigraphic tests. For a more detailed description of the excavation of this building (BNO 350), see Giorgi 2011c: 29-44; Rossetti 2011a.

¹⁴ Nifosi 2009: 53-58.

¹⁵ Representations of both Isis and her priestesses holding a *sistrum* in one hand and a cruet in the other are well known. The *sistrum* found in Bakchias is of the bow type and features a depiction of Hathor’s twin face flanked by two *uraei* wearing red and white crowns respectively; on the slat above the goddess’s head, we can see a cat that recalls the merging of the goddess with Bastet. This object had already been restored in ancient times, highlighting its value and the need to preserve it (Davoli 1995: 46, no. 32; Pernigotti 2005a: 53; Nifosi 2009: 54). The erotic flask, which dates from Roman times (second – third centuries CE), is a flask portraying a sexual act that involves a female figure and two males on one side and a man, a woman and a donkey figure on the other side, possibly referring to an episode of metamorphosis, well known in ancient literature and cited by authors such as Apuleius and Lucian. The depiction refers to a cathartic rite of passage from the instinctive condition of sin, represented by the donkey, to the human state of spiritual purification, achieved thanks to the redeeming role of Isis. Cruets held by the priestesses of Isis could have contained milk or, as is more probable in our case given



Figure 4. A view of the southern end of the block where the house of the priestess of Isis is located.



Figure 5. A view of the southern end of the block with rooms A and B (BNO 360).

From what we currently know, therefore, the building complex includes, from north to south, the Terrace of Isis, the house of the priestess of Isis with its courtyard

in front and another dwelling further south (BSO 350) which, as mentioned earlier, has been the object of recent study.



Figure 6. The wooden fence built after the houses were abandoned.



Figure 7. The wooden fence.

In this area, just below the superficial wind-blown backfill, almost at the top of the dune and on the south-west side, two late sheep pens were unearthed, made up of a series of beaten earth floors enclosed by wooden fences, leaning against the remains of ancient masonry walls that still stood in the sand (Figures 6, 7).¹⁸ These arrangements should be considered contemporary with the brick flooring that covers part of the courtyard in front of the house of the priestess of Isis and are traces

¹⁸ The two enclosures, which generally date from the same period of time, are located near rooms A and C.

of the last phases of the town's occupation before it was definitively abandoned.¹⁹

Below these late levels, a building was unearthed (BSO 350) consisting of a number of rooms used as living space (rooms A-H) and other adjacent structures looking out over the road that led to the northern gate (Figures 8, 9, 10). The state of preservation is not always

¹⁹ The enclosures could be associated with the layout of the South Kom in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, when the North Kom was being abandoned.



Figure 8. A view of room C.



Figure 9. A view of room D.

ideal and therefore the general floor plan is incomplete. It doesn't seem to be another compact dwelling like the previous one, instead we seem to be in the presence of a complex system of covered rooms and open-air areas, perhaps belonging to an adjacent dwelling that was more consistent but is as yet unknown to us. It would therefore be a portion of another house, probably with its own independent purpose but one that dates from the same period. This building complex was laid out and used in the Ptolemaic Period (third-second centuries BCE) and, following a number of construction phases, was renovated in Roman times (late first century BCE – third century CE), when the floor level was raised considerably higher, to the point where the first floor of the older Ptolemaic phase was interred and only became accessible from above, in line with a practice that was common in Bakchias and similar to the nearby house of the priestess of Isis (which is placed at a similar height as well).²⁰

²⁰ Unlike the 'House VIII', which is a generally compact construction with perimeter walls and partitions all associated with a single unified layout, building BNO 350 features a more complex sequence of various different masonry layers.



Figure 10. A view of the inner corner of the room D.

Almost all the rooms seem to be arranged against the walls of an older house, almost two metres lower down, of which a large portion has been unearthed (rooms C-H).

Among the sections that date from the original Ptolemaic layout, there is a room whose upper part still stands for almost three metres, with a number of masonry layers that testify to its long and complex existence (room C). This room originally extended more towards the north-west and had at least two overlapping beaten earth floors dating from the Ptolemaic Period.²¹ These floors, which were covered by the rubble of its collapsed Roman ceilings, as well as by a number of levels of sand and detritus, rendered up vases that were almost undamaged, while traces of smoke lead us to believe that this space was open to the sky and was used to light small terracotta ovens for domestic use that were aligned along the perimeter walls. There is a niche with a vaulted summit in the western corner,

²¹ Room C also includes room A, while B is merely a very late extraneous cavity placed quite high up.

created when the original door was partly obliterated by the south-west perimeter, built in Roman times.²² At the same time, another passage to the south was blocked off (towards room E) whilst it remained connected to adjacent rooms to the east (room D).²³ Just in front of the threshold located in the southern corner of room C (between rooms C and E), a stratigraphic test was conducted that allowed us to detect the presence of a ritual store of ceramics and animal bones (Figure 11). The radiocarbon dating of a selection of these bones has led to surprises that have brought us to rethink our understanding of the timespan of the town's occupation. This particularly involved a fragment of goat bone and two pig bone fragments that can be dated with some reliability to the late sixth and mid-fourth centuries BCE, and therefore well before the supposed foundation of Bakchias in Ptolemaic times.²⁴ Whether these fragments date from a previous occupation or are in a secondary context, perhaps linked to a foundation ritual, these artefacts add another important piece to the puzzle of retracing the history of a settlement that predates the Ptolemaic Period.²⁵

Getting back to the buildings under scrutiny and in the light of what has just been stated, we can surmise that the building was constructed between the

late third and second centuries BCE in an area that had already been occupied earlier, and was significantly redeveloped in Roman times when the main level of use was raised higher. This change reduced what were ground floors to underground cellars that could only be accessed from above. During this phase, the doors were blocked off and new storeys were added.²⁶ Part of these have fortunately survived to the present day in one room (room G) where the remains of a ceiling consisting of small timber tubular joists were unearthed, which originally supported a layer of rush matting covered by layers of compacted lime and clay. The Roman Era construction (late first century BCE-

²² A second four-cornered niche is in the northern corner of this room.

²³ Room E is also connected to room F and, indeed, this opening was blocked off very late on and was done on top of a thick layer of sand.

²⁴ The analyses were conducted by Salento University's CEDAD centre for dating and diagnostics, headed by Lucio Calcagnile.

²⁵ For an overview of this subject, see Giorgi 2011b, with respective bibliography.

²⁶ Perhaps room C, originally open, was closed off (fragments of timber beams were found on the floor under the rubble of the perimeter walls).



Figure 11. The ritual store of ceramics and animal bones.

third century CE) must have been renovated several times subsequently, though not to any extreme degree, up until when it began to be covered in sand.²⁷ In the end, animal pens and other late structures were built on top of the remains of the ancient house.

The rubbish dump

Just south-west of the city block where the house of the priestess of Isis is located, a rubbish dump (BNO 351) was discovered during the 2009 excavations and only partially investigated. A number of ceramic fragments were found there, including large pieces, some inscribed and belonging to containers dating from the same chronological period. The artefacts date from the Ptolemaic Period and are mainly from the time between the third and second centuries BCE. There are many Egyptian amphorae, mainly of the AE 2 type, which can be dated to this period due to the type of material used to make them. We can also make out a number of jars, with or without garland decorations, a number of basins, large bowls, unguentaria, pots, pans, loom weights and even miniature vases.

From a typological point of view, these fragments were found to be very similar to contemporary ones

²⁷ The late walls located high up belong to this phase, like the blockage between E and F or the partition between A and B.

found in the Ptolemaic levels of the houses described earlier in the northern district. It is for this reason – and because of the presence of ceramics that range from containers for transport and storage to those more closely associated with daily life – that, although research work has not been completed, we believe this area was the rubbish dump used by the inhabitants of the surrounding district during the Ptolemaic Period. The presence of a large number of amphorae for storing wine, mainly locally-produced wine as well as wine from Asia Minor, must raise questions regarding the consumption of wine as an indicator of Hellenisation and the presence of inhabitants of Greek background. These assumptions are further confirmed by the two inscriptions found on an Egyptian amphora which features the date (the fifth year of the reign of a Ptolemaic sovereign) followed by other letters that have recently been interpreted as two names, perhaps a certain Etearcus and definitely an Alexander, both individuals with clearly Hellenistic names (Figure 12). At the same time, given the location of the dump within the urban layout near the northern gate and the road to Memphis, we cannot entirely rule out other theories, though limited by the orientation of future research or mere sensations. Some of these amphorae could be associated with a more organised wine trade that reached Bakchias, for example, from the great marketplace of Alexandria and was destined for local consumption. As regards this aspect, we

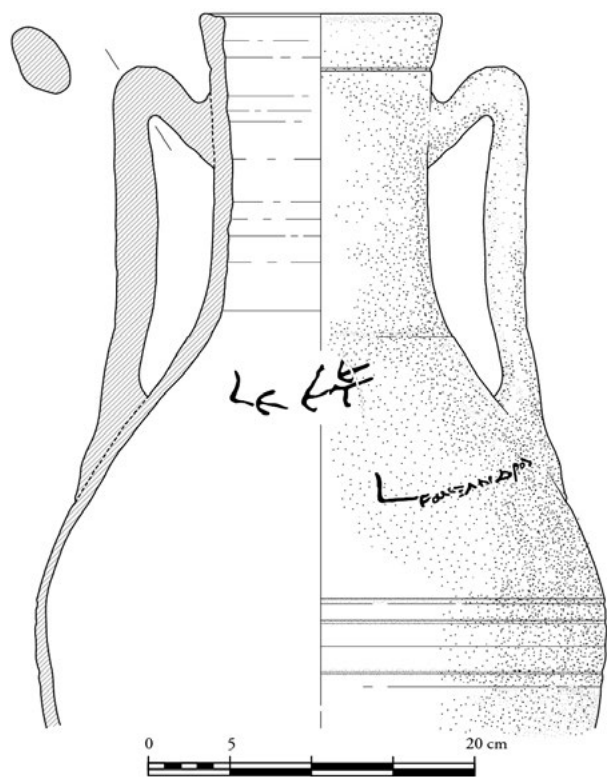


Figure 12. Egyptian amphora with inscription containing a date (the fifth year of the reign of a Ptolemaic sovereign) followed by other letters that have recently been interpreted as two names, perhaps a certain Etearcus and definitely an Alexander.

could imagine, for example, the presence of a wine distributor in this district who sold wine and then threw out old containers. In contrast, other amphorae could have found their way here on boats navigating the canals all the way to Bakchias, picking up the wine that was produced at a regional level once it got there and selling it elsewhere along the northern road. Having to continue via land, the amphorae that were no longer needed may have been thrown away in the dump.²⁸

The houses furthest east

In completing our examination of Bakchias's northern district, it is important to remember that the archaeological surveys that took place in 1995 investigated a number of buildings further east.²⁹ This was an actual block of private houses with their own courtyards, sometimes fitted with domestic ovens.³⁰ It was noted that, in some points, the entrances to the main floors were slightly higher than the road level

²⁸ As far as the rubbish tip artefacts are concerned, see Gasperini and Gioia 2011a: 164-201. For information regarding the inscription, see Bastianini 2011.

²⁹ Davoli 1995.

³⁰ BNO 367 and BNO 371 were interpreted as courtyards, for example, while BNO 363, BNO 366, BNO 368 and BNO 373 were interpreted as houses.

outside and the cellars were therefore only partially underground. To the north, this block was edged by a wall made up of different sections that also functioned as the town limit up until it reached the northern gate. In all, the state of the block was poor and the cellar levels were most visible, while the higher storeys are almost entirely lost. From a chronological point of view, it seems that the main construction phases detected in the rest of the district are also visible in this area: a Ptolemaic-Era layout built over a previous phase that was redeveloped in Roman times, raising the level of use.

When examining the buildings, it proved possible to understand the layout of one in particular (BNO 373).³¹ This was a private home and it has a similar shape and size to the house of the priestess of Isis (the so-called 'House VIII'). Even though its state of conservation has only allowed us to examine the cellar level, we can surmise that it originally had an entrance to the east along a corridor (room G-F) that was also used as a hallway for surrounding rooms. The poor state of preservation and the lack of a stairwell with central pillar prevent us from ascertaining whether there was an upper storey. All the rooms, which must originally have been foundation rooms, were accessible from above via cellars with hatch doors of the same type as those found in the house of the priestess. The house was subsequently extended approximately two metres to the east, with the addition of three rooms, one of which was a main room (D) and only one of which had a cellar below (Q). Lastly, the house was extended again to the south with the addition of an open-air courtyard equipped with a domestic oven on the eastern side, to the point where the final size of the complex, which was still square, ended up being approximately ten metres wide.

Another house located further to the south-west (BNO 363)³² is worthy of note, though in a poor state of conservation. Its proportions are similar but it only has three large foundation rooms that were later turned into cellars. The main feature of this building is the unusual orientation of its perimeter walls, as the two short sides are aligned north to south and are not at right angles compared to the rest of the house. This anomaly could be due to restrictions imposed by older buildings, or the need to adapt to the space available, which must have been limited by existing buildings, such as nearby constructions or surrounding roads. Another significant element is the presence of an older section of masonry that was covered and encompassed by the house's perimeter walls, crossing it north to south below the lower foundation level, further testifying to the deep urban layering of this part of the town.

³¹ Davoli 1996: 41-53; Paolucci 2009: 44-45.

³² Davoli 1996: 21-25; Paolucci 2009: 41-42.

Chapter V

The buildings along the canal and the South Kom

E. Giorgi

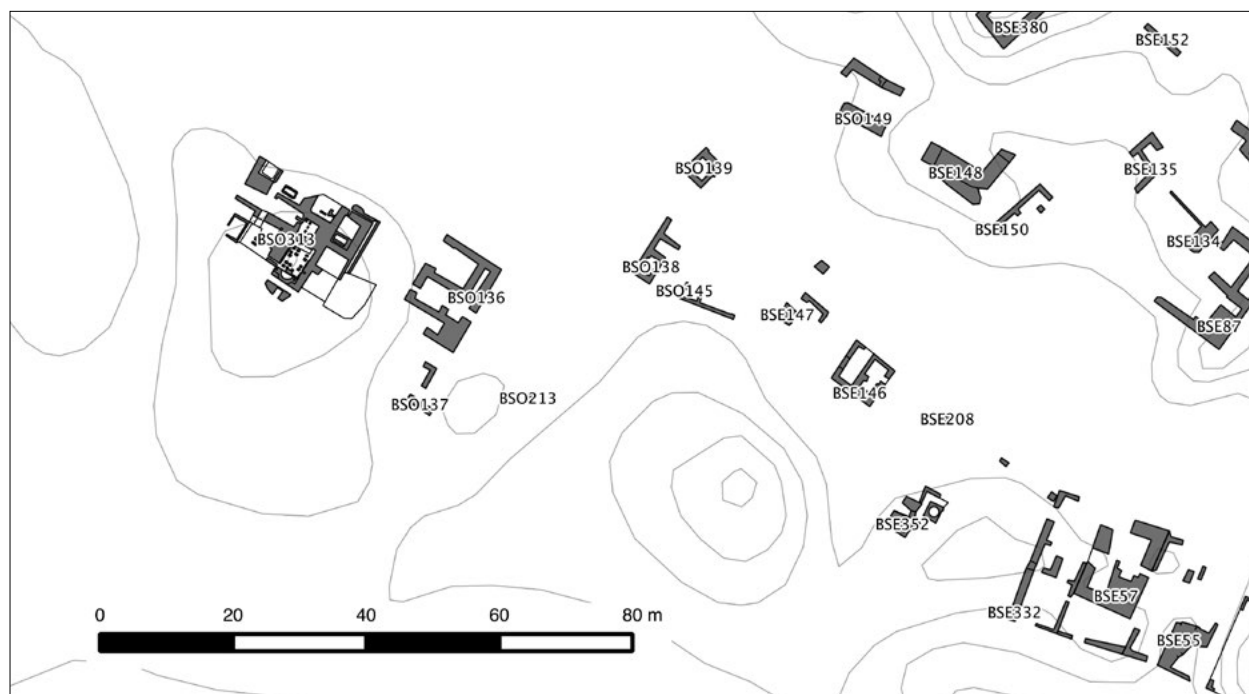


Figure 1. A section of the general plan including the baths and kiln.

Some of the most interesting archaeological discoveries concerning Bakchias have emerged thanks to recent excavation campaigns conducted in the southern part of the old city, where a number of buildings have been unearthed that are of seminal importance for understanding urban living standards in the past (Figures 1, 2). These buildings particularly include the baths, the kiln for making ceramics and the granary. We were already aware of the existence of these buildings thanks to the information that could be deduced from written records. However, it was only thanks to archaeological surveys that we were able to identify them beyond all reasonable doubt and have a clearer idea of the way they developed over time. Apart from the granary, which was built towards the end of the Ptolemaic Era, the other two buildings date from Roman times. If we consider that the granary's most important phase of use was during the second century CE, it becomes clear that all these buildings provide us with important information regarding the way the city developed in Roman times. Another aspect that they share is their location along the large southern canal, which can easily be explained if we take into account the need to supply water to the baths and kiln and the benefits to be gained from placing the granary near

a waterway. All these buildings, which have been the subject of recent articles, are discussed in brief below.¹

In order to have a complete understanding of the research conducted in recent years, it is also worth mentioning the surveys conducted on the other side of the canal, in what is known as the South Kom, where a settlement was founded during the late Roman Empire that, after having been abandoned, was to inherit the fate of Bakchias, with development that continued up until the Islamic Period.

The Roman baths

Despite the fact that baths (*balaneion*) in Bakchias are already mentioned in a papyrus that can be dated to the third year of the Emperor Nero's reign (57 CE), it was only thanks to the survey work, followed by the excavations done from 2006 to 2008, that we were finally able to identify them (Figures 3, 4).²

¹ For a detailed description, see Tassinari 2009; Giorgi 2012; Giorgi 2011a, with respective bibliography.

² This document (BGU I 181) mentions an episode that probably involved an attack and subsequent theft that took place in Bakchias's baths on 15th June 57 CE. The dating of the building and the absence



Figure 2. A section of the general plan including the baths and granary.

Indeed, we now know for a fact that the Roman baths in Bakchias were located along the canal in the southern part of the city, where there is a building mainly made of brick with a number of floors that are still well

preserved (Figure 2).³ In actual fact, the baths are unusual when compared to the archaeological area as a whole, which is mainly made up of mud-brick buildings

of other contemporary buildings led us to identify this complex as the one mentioned in the papyrus (Nachtergaeel 2003; Giorgi 2012, 36-37).

³ The excavation area is fairly large (20 x 25 m). For a more exhaustive description of this building complex, see Giorgi 2012 with respective bibliography.

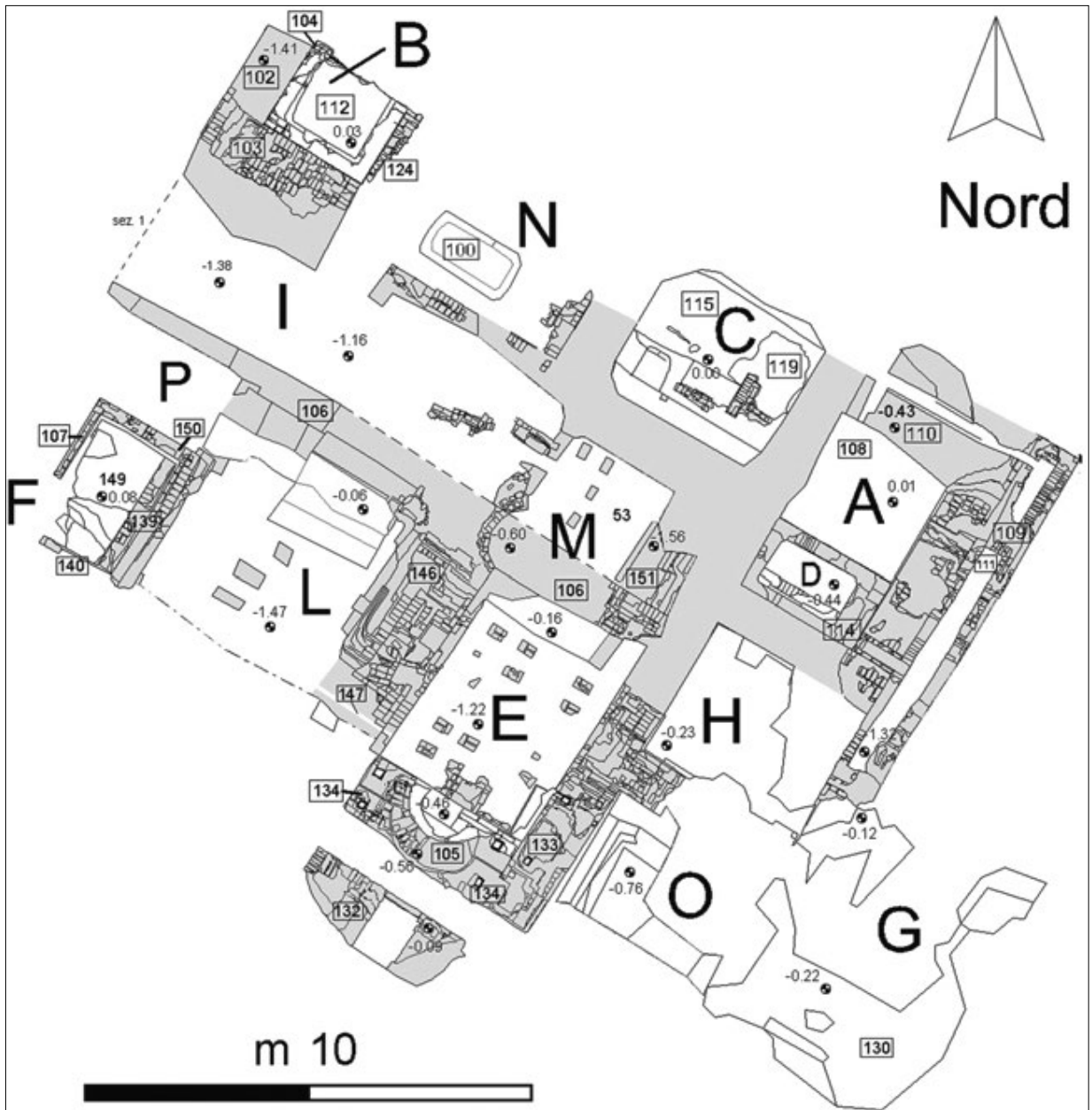


Figure 3. General plan of the baths.

as well as the remains of two stone temples. In contrast, the baths were mainly built in brick with cobbled or stone slab floors (Figure 5). The presence of more valuable construction materials, such as fired brick and stone slabs, soon turned the building into a quarry when it no longer performed its function. It is for this reason that the baths of Bakchias are an anomaly from a conservation point of view as well, because many floors are still clearly visible, such as the cobbled floors in the crawl space that clearly could not be reused, while almost all the brick walls have disappeared, unlike the many houses in mud-brick that generally still have visible masonry.⁴ Despite the incomplete state of the

⁴ The looting of stone features not always led to the destruction of the underlying lime base, and this is also the case as regards the stone slab floors, as in room H for example. In short, we can state that

remains, archaeological survey was able to clarify a number of aspects, though we were obliged to accept defeat when it came to understanding others.

The baths of Bakchias are clearly different from Hellenistic baths found in the region as regards their technical features; they belong to the Roman-Era urban redevelopment phase and, indeed, are an important element when assessing inhabitants' living standards at the time.⁵ From a chronological point of view, we

the floors of the baths have been lost where there were hypocausts because the looting of the construction materials of the pillars and the *suspensurae* necessarily led to the destruction of the floors above, as in rooms L, M and E.

⁵ The most relevant comparisons in the Fayyūm region are those with Karanis and the Roman phase of the baths of Tebtynis. Hellenistic baths renovated in Roman times are also known to us in Arsinoe and

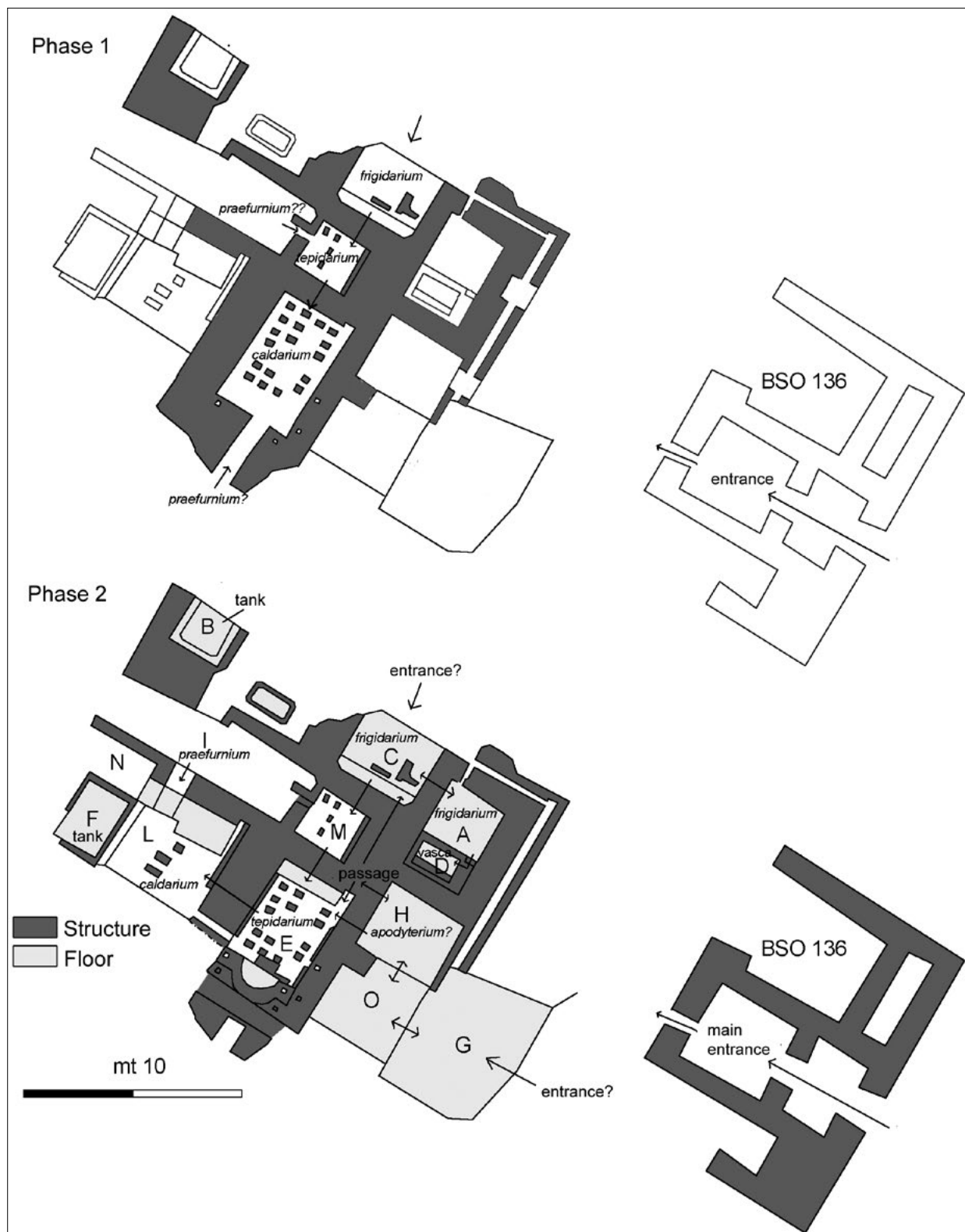


Figure 4. The plan of the baths during the reigns of Augustus (Phase 1) and Hadrian (Phase 2).

now know, thanks to recent stratigraphic excavations, that the baths were built during the early Roman Empire and were in use, with a number of renovation

Dionysias, while we only know of a Hellenistic phase in Euhemeria and Theadelphia (Giorgi 2012: 19-28).

phases, up until the dawn of Late Antiquity (third – fourth centuries CE). Some diagnostic artefacts that we were fortunate enough to find, particularly coins, unearthed in reliable stratigraphic locations, allow us to date the construction of the building to the Augustan age, whilst a thorough redevelopment of



Figure 5. A view of room C, with one of the most well-preserved floors.

the site took place during Hadrian's reign (Figures 4, 9).⁶ This second construction phase led to changes in how rooms were used to varying degrees and changed the route through the baths. A further renovation may have taken place in the late era (fourth century CE), before the site was definitively abandoned, which we surmise from the many remnants of *noria* or *saqyia* buckets (dateable to the fourth – fifth centuries CE). These were containers for drawing water that, in this phase, clearly was undertaken using wooden waterwheels to which these containers were tied to collect and transport water.⁷ Some artefacts dating from the early Middle Ages, such as late amphorae and Islamic glazed ceramics, lead us to believe that the area was continuously inhabited even in such a late period in the history of the northern

city.⁸ Nevertheless, we do not know if it was used in a less structured way or whether the building had fully or partly maintained its use as a bath house in these final phases. The theory that it may have been turned into a *hammam* is certainly appealing, but currently has no factual basis except for the existence of a handful of artefacts that certainly derive from Islamic culture.

In terms of its floor plan, the building complex has a fairly symmetrical layout that is in keeping with other surrounding Roman-Era buildings. Nevertheless, due to its poor state of conservation, a number of aspects still need clarifying. For example, the building's external perimeter is missing a number of sections, to the point where it almost appears like an island of fired brick saved from *sebbakh* quarrying.⁹ This digging activity, which was done to extract precious fertile soil (known

⁶ As well as the papyrus mentioned earlier that attests the use of baths during Nero's reign, we also have the following: an Augustan coin (that can be dated to the period after 19 BCE) found at the bottom of cistern B; two coins from Hadrian's reign (dateable to 128-129 CE), one of which was unearthed whilst attached to the floor in room A; a coin from Trajan's reign and one from Hadrian's reign found when filling tank D; and, almost melted into each other, a stash of 45 mid-Empire coins (c. mid second – early third centuries CE, Figure 29) which was found in the drains (Giorgi 2012: 44-45).

⁷ Giorgi 2012: 130-136.

⁸ As we shall see, late phases are well documented on the other bank of the canal, in the South Kom, where a settlement was founded during this era. As regards this aspect, see the chapters in this book on Coptic culture and the city's evolution.

⁹ As is well known, the archaeological area was used as a quarry for soil (*sebbakh*) during the early twentieth century, an activity that paid little attention to layers and ancient monuments.



Figure 6. A view of room H, with remains of the floors.

as *sebbakh*) or to remove brick from walls, isolated the mud-brick section of the baths from the other sections that were still part of the whole but constructed in a different way because they were not strictly linked to bathing purposes. For example, given the architectural uniformity of the mud-brick masonry that has survived just east of this (BSO 136), we could interpret it as a section that provided entrance to the building. Similarly, it is not clear whether the remains of the mouth of a brick oven placed in a fragment of mud-brick wall, found further north, could belong to this building.¹⁰ Despite these difficulties, we can still make out the functions of a number of rooms and the way they were connected, taking into account possible changes brought about during different reconstruction phases. When attempting to retrace the building's past, we must avoid the risk of attributing structures that belong to different phases to the same layout, as the Augustan floor plan was considerably altered, while the last construction phase dating from Hadrian's reign has survived in a more complete state (Figures 5, 6, 7).

The general decorative and architectural style of the building can only partly be understood thanks to a handful of surviving features, such as the marble slabs that clad the building, fragments of decorative stucco wall plaster, as well as fragments of window glass. The building's purpose as a bath house is, in contrast, quite clear thanks to the remains of ovens, hypocausts,



Figure 7. A view of room G, with remains of the mosaic.

¹⁰ Giorgi 2012: 104 and Figure 76.

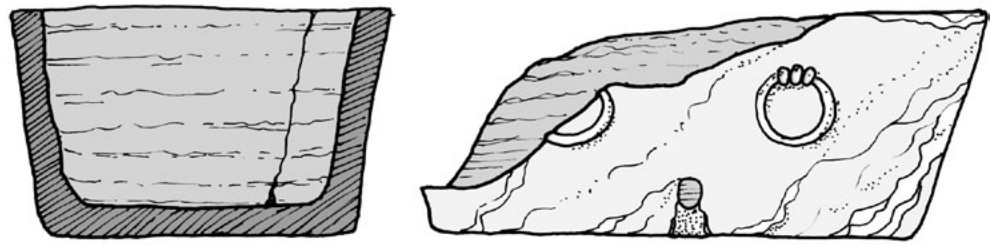


Figure 8. The tank found out of its original position.

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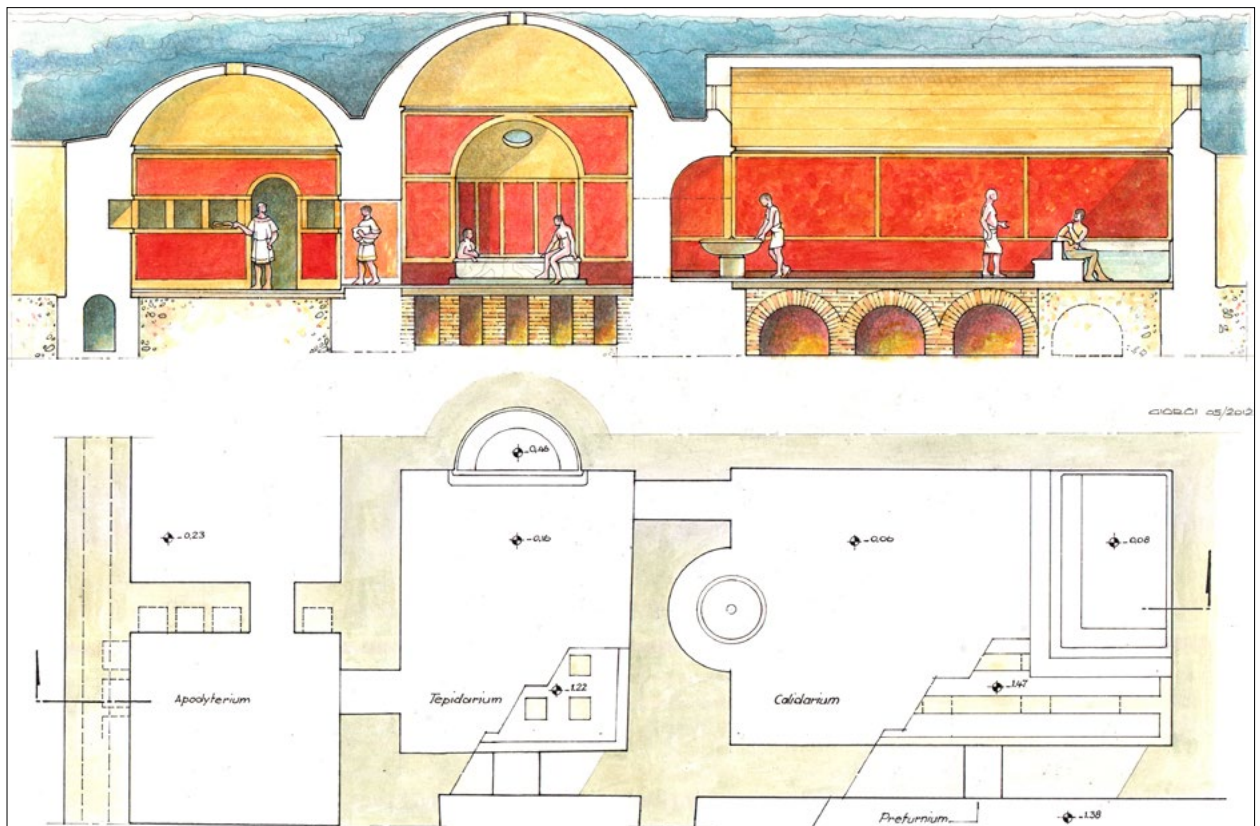
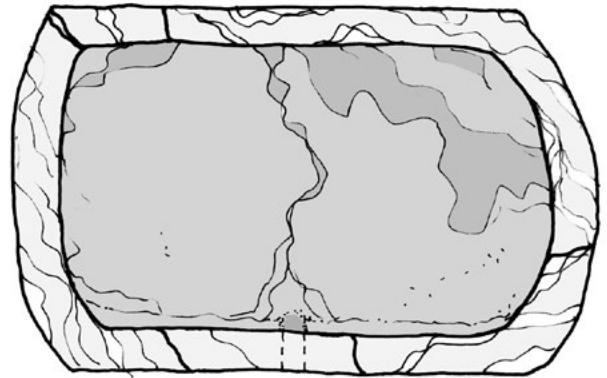
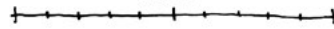


Figure 9. A possible reconstruction of the baths during Hadrian's reign.

tanks, cisterns and canals, as well as the presence of a number of items associated with the use of water, such as the single-section tank found out of its original position, which is very similar to the one found in the large baths of Karanis (Figures 8, 9).¹¹ Some particular

technical aspects, such as the conduits used to circulate heat and remove smoke (like the chimneys inside the perimeter wall of vaulted room E), are also typical of bath architecture.¹² The floors themselves, constructed

¹¹ Giorgi 2012: 25-26 and Fig. 12.

¹² These are chimneys that were necessary to remove hot air and residual smoke from the hypocaust.



Figure 10. A view of hypocaust L.

using waterproofing techniques, can be linked to the use of the rooms for bathing.

The floors in two rooms in particular (A, C), located in the north-east corner of the building, still survive almost intact. These were created using a 'mosaic' of small black and white pebbles. The easternmost of the two rooms led to a brick tank (D). It is hard to tell how rooms led to each other due to the removal of the perimeter walls.

All these structures were designed to use water and were therefore connected to a drain with a vaulted roof (located on the south-eastern side of room A) via specially made ducts. Another section of flooring similar to those above and located at the same floor height is found further south (room G). Despite being very fragmentary, there are still a number of black and white geometric decorations visible in this floor. Between this room (G) and those mentioned previously (A, C), there are other rooms that lead into each other (O, H). One in particular (H) still has a layer of foundation lime that lay under the original stone slab floor, which has almost entirely disappeared. Similar floor remnants that are, however, limited to isolated fragments are found in adjacent rooms (E, M). There

are also three hypocausts in the centre of the complex (M, E, L) and two other brick tanks (F, B. Figures 10, 11, 12). While two of these hypocausts (E, M) were built using *pilae* made of square bricks supporting a raised floor (*suspensurae*), the floor of the main hypocaust was supported by rows of brick arches. An ancillary room (I) was wedged in the heart of the building and made it possible to stoke the *praefurnium* of the main hypocausts that were connected to each other (L, E), as well as that of the smaller hypocaust (M). Residual smoke created by combustion was removed along chimneys dug inside the perimeter walls.

Though difficult, we can try to work out the order in which the rooms were used, whilst taking into account the changes that were made during various construction phases. In the first phase, during the Augustan Era, we can surmise that the baths were crossed from north to south, following a route that led from the *frigidarium* (C) to the *tepidarium* (M) and finally the *caldarium* (E).

During Hadrian's reign, renovation work made it so that the main entrance was probably on the east side (BSO 136). This probably led to a hall, now lost, that was connected to the paved room (G) and the changing room



Figure 11. A view of hypocaust E.

(*apodyterium* H).¹³ Perhaps the old *frigidarium* (M) was now used as a passageway leading to unheated rooms (C and then A). Then one could turn back towards the new *tepidarium* (E), which had been renovated with the addition of a small apse that probably featured a *labrum*, followed by the *caldarium* (L), which ended with a brick tank. Last but not least, it is important to note that in both construction phases, the presence of duplicate rooms (such as *frigidaria* A and C) make it reasonable to surmise that there were separate sections for men and women.

The craftsmen's district

Just south of the baths, a craftsmen's district dating from Roman times was found during the 2010 excavation

¹³ We are still uncertain as to the purpose of room O, which was paved with a layer of brick, as if it were a floor that had been partially extracted from the masonry.

campaign (Figures 13-15).¹⁴ As regards this aspect, it is worth keeping in mind that a Ptolemaic *ergasterion* is known to have existed in Bakchias. This term could also be related with a workshop for pottery or bricks production. Actually a brick kiln had to be present in Bakchias, considering the large amount of building material piles discovered in the nearby and according to a papyrus that testimonies a *plinthourgeion* in the town.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it does not seem to refer to this particular building, both because at least this part of the structure dates from a later period and because a recent study believes that this source refers to the existence of a public archive in Bakchias instead.¹⁶ It is a very complex building (BSE 352), mainly consisting of brick structures, even though there are sections in unfired clay masonry. There are the remains of a kiln and two tanks or cisterns for collecting water or perhaps clay, as well as a third, smaller tank that could have been used to draw on such reserves. Although the poor state of conservation does not allow us to interpret the building with any certainty, we cannot rule out that these three tanks were connected and could have been used as filtering tanks for clay that ended with the smallest tank where the

purest clay would have settled. The series of tanks could have been related to the preparation of the clay to fire pots or bricks in the nearby kiln. Waste liquid may have run into a channel that flowed into the nearby canal. An alternative hypothesis is to refer the tanks to a *fullonica*, located close to the brick kiln.

As things currently stand, research has recognised a badly damaged northern structure (C) near a reservoir (A), built in brick that has been sealed using lime mortar and plastered inside and out with layers of hydraulic lime. Just to the east, there is a miniscule tank (B) incorporated – using the same construction technique – in the same building section described earlier. In this

¹⁴ Giorgi 2011a; Rossetti 2011b; Tocci 2011.

¹⁵ P. Lund. 4 10 (TM 25645); Calderini 1924: 12-17; Rossetti 2018: 224, with bibliography.

¹⁶ In this case, the *ergasterion* may have been an office that recorded financial transactions from one or more public granaries in Bakchias (Clarysse and Müller 2004).



Figure 12. The tank D, on the left, with the channel on the right.

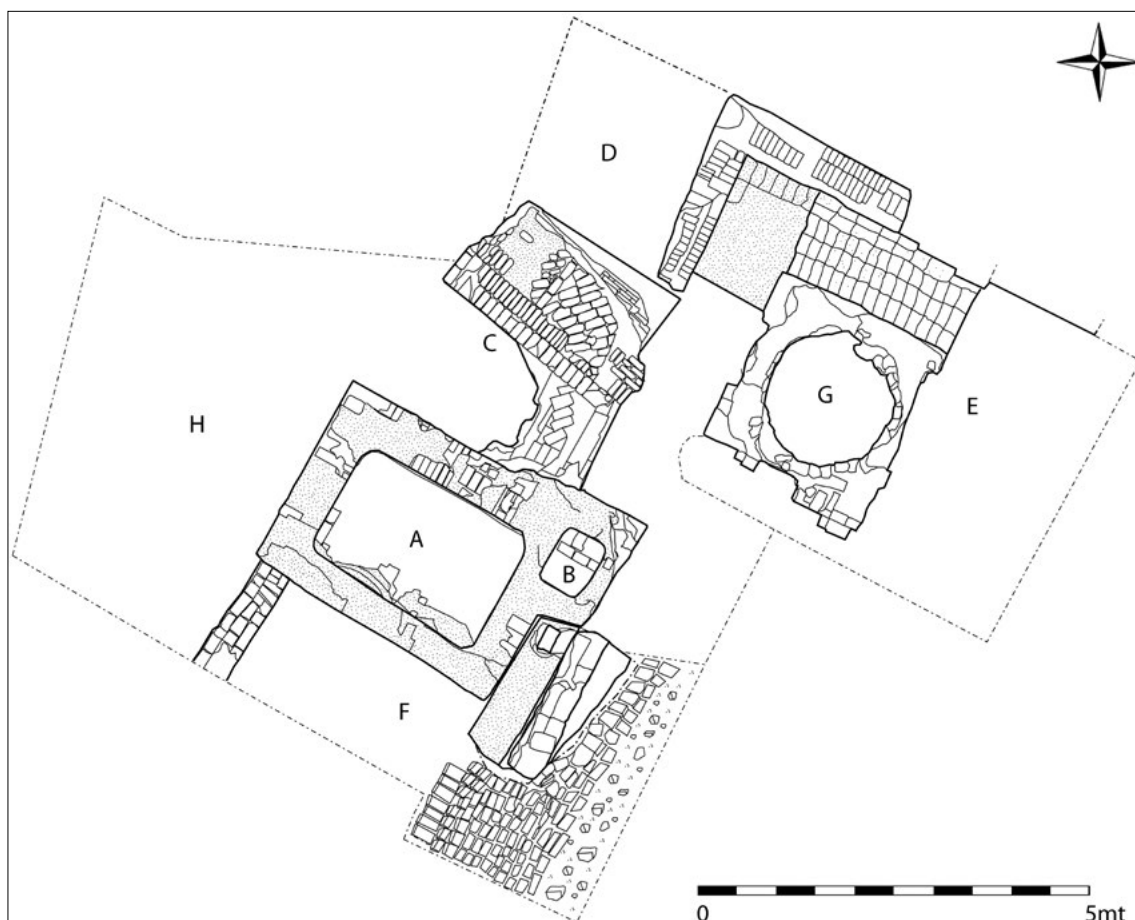


Figure 13. A plan of the craftsmen's district with kiln G.

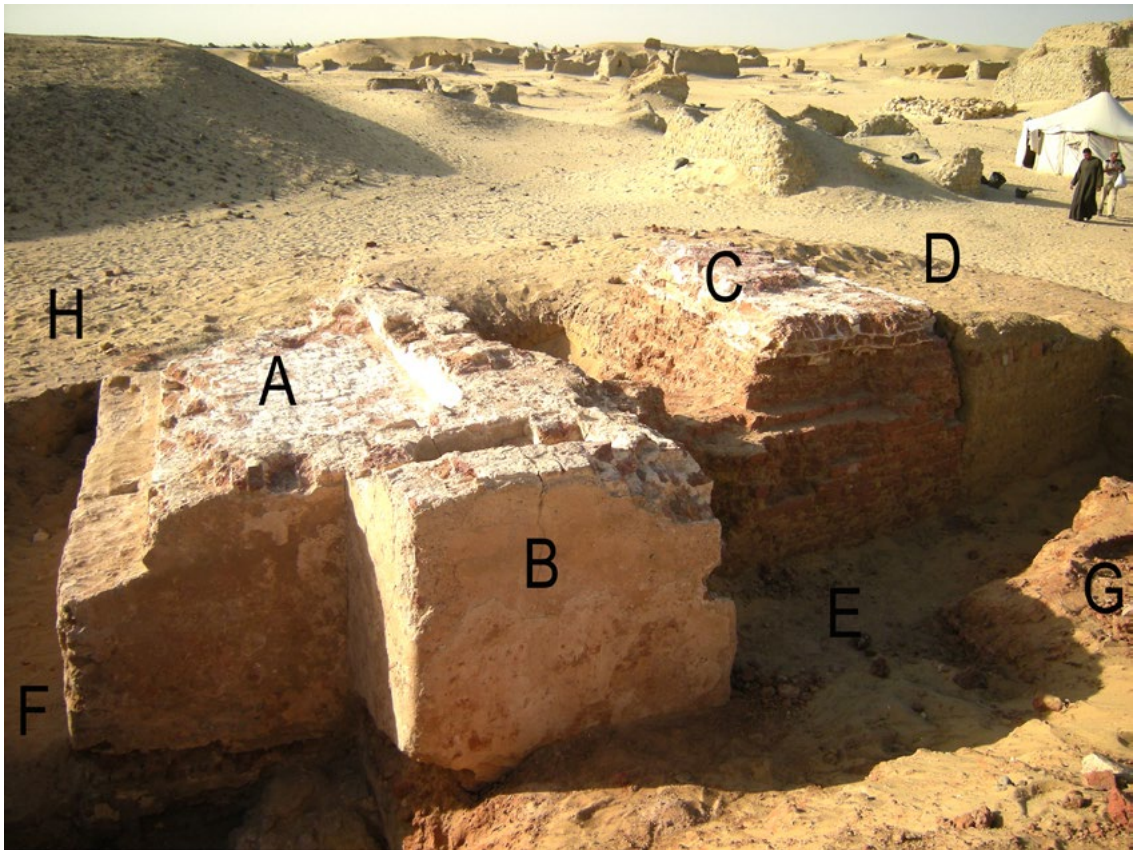


Figure 14. A view of tanks B and A in the craftsmen's district.



Figure 15. The kiln during excavation work.

tank, traces of a drain have survived at the southern end where it must have been connected to a channel discovered outside at a much lower height. In this very area, located to the south of the network of tanks described above (A, B), there was a thick succession of layers that we were able to survey in depth. Just below the wind-blown sand, a large amount of bricks were unearthed, which were perhaps piled up with a view to being used at a later date.

Last but not least, a structure built of unfired clay bricks, dating from a late phase of the area's use, was unearthed in the north-eastern part of the excavation site. It is an L-shaped wall that divides two rooms (D, E) and runs around the square kiln (G), almost two metres in size. It is a vertical structure with a ventilation opening placed above the kiln mouth. The arched opening is south-facing and is also covered by a smaller arched entrance that was probably used

to inspect the combustion chamber and to increase the amount of oxygen, so as to regulate and facilitate combustion. Unfortunately, the exterior has been heavily damaged, with few exceptions, by the looting tunnels that surround it. Despite that, it seems that there was a vaulted opening in front of the kiln mouth that was supported by two side parapets. The kiln's interior, which survives for over a metre and a half in height, generally corresponds to the combustion chamber and has a circular shape. Remnants of the perforated surface that would have supported the firing chamber have not been found. Nevertheless, there were a number of vitrified square bricks at the bottom of the kiln (similar to those used for the *pilae* in the baths), while nearby a perforated fragment of brick that was also vitrified and out of place was found. We can therefore surmise that the surface was built using perforated bricks arranged on top of the pillars.¹⁷ Given that a number of fragments of ceramic *tubuli*, blackened by soot inside, have been found in the looting layers around the kiln, we cannot rule out that they may have belonged to the kiln's structure. In this case, they may have been smoke conduits placed inside the perimeter masonry.¹⁸

Even though large-scale looting has left the kiln isolated from surrounding buildings, it must have leaned against other masonry structures in the past that would have thickened its perimeter, improving its level of insulation and making it easier to load from above. In contrast, the fuel may have been stoked at a lower level at the front, along the vaulted passageway described earlier.

Judging from its size, the kiln that has been unearthed seems most suited to firing ceramics, however the craftsmen's district undoubtedly extended towards the east, where other larger kilns for firing bricks could well be found.¹⁹

From a chronological point of view, the layout seems to be dateable to the Augustan Era (late first century BCE), based on the construction techniques detected and the analysis of ceramic artefacts. As well as common types of ceramics that were widespread in Bakchias, we have important confirmation from a fragment of a plate in eastern sigillata A, which can be traced back to the earliest phase of the building's use. The various changes made to the complex over time can only be surmised, due to the limited extent of testing.

¹⁷ The technique is similar to that of the hypocausts in the baths (BSO 313, room E).

¹⁸ We have come across an arrangement of this kind, though lacking in tubules, in the baths.

¹⁹ The large number of vitrified fragments scattered around the excavation area would certainly attest to the prolonged use of the kiln, but also support the theory that suggests that the craftsmen's district was much larger.

The granary and storerooms

Bakchias's public granary (*thesauros*), which was also already known to us thanks to two papyrus documents dating from the second century CE and an *ostrakon* from the third century CE,²⁰ was investigated in detail during the 2005 excavation campaign, which allowed us to detect a late-Ptolemaic layout with an important phase of use at the height of the Roman Empire (second century CE).²¹ Despite the fact that only part of it has survived and only in the lower section of the bottom of the storerooms, we can see that it was a large mud-brick building, so large that, to date, it can be considered the biggest building known to us in the Fayyūm region.²² The north-western part, which must have been where the offices were located, has unfortunately disappeared because it was destroyed by a large looting tunnel. The central part of the building (BSE 225), which is over 25 x 20 metres wide, is edged by thick perimeter walls with a large central spine wall that divided two strips with three rows of 13 quadrangular cells on each side (Figure 16). The southernmost row was edged by another large wall that divided it from a final series of 13 storerooms that were slightly larger.²³ Given the geometric structure of the building, we can imagine another row of 13 similar storerooms against the northern perimeter as well. All of these compartmentalised structures (*tamia*), which we have dubbed storerooms and cells, must have been inside a large courtyard. From a functional point of view, the thicker walls were probably also used as walkways to reach the storerooms below. However, given that this would have been more difficult in the rows of three cells, it is possible that inspections may have been carried out by walking over the removable covers that must have existed in any case.²⁴ As far as capacity is concerned, it has been estimated that the 78 smaller cells could store approximately 85 *artabae* of wheat each and that the granary must have been able to store at least 6,400 *artabae* of wheat in total, while the remaining 26 storerooms may have held around 2,600 *artabae* of barley.²⁵ This would amount to a total capacity of approximately 9,000 *artabae* of grain, the equivalent of 2,000 *modii*, i.e. a tenth of the entire

²⁰ Nachtergaele 2007.

²¹ The building was identified for the first time on the last day of the topographic survey campaign of 2000. Nevertheless, a problem with updating the records made it necessary to 'rediscover' the building in 2003. For a detailed and exhaustive description, see Tassinari 2009 with its respective bibliography.

²² In addition to the many public and private granaries in Karanis, similar buildings are known to us in Bubastis, Dionysias, Euhemeria, Nilopolis, Sinnuris, Tebtynis and Theadelphia (Tassinari 2009: 29-40).

²³ The perimeter walls are 135 cm thick, while the interior spine walls are slightly thinner. The smaller storerooms are 160 x 120 cm, while the larger ones are 153 x 256 cm.

²⁴ As has been noted with valid arguments, these storerooms could not have been open to the elements, at the very least so as to protect the grain inside from parasites or from becoming a food source for birds of all kinds (Tassinari 2009: 25).

²⁵ Barley was the second most abundant crop after wheat, while that of emmer wheat seems negligible (Tassinari 2009, 28).



Figure 16. A view of the public granary.

annual grain tribute paid by Egypt to Rome during the Augustan Era.²⁶

With the end of Antiquity, the granary must have lost its purpose and was used in different ways, even as housing, as shown by the discovery of artefacts that can be traced back to Coptic culture and the construction of a brick silo in the middle of the north perimeter wall.²⁷

We can also make out other buildings in Bakchias that could have been used as storerooms or public granaries. One case (BSE 39), just south-west of the granary described above (BSE 225), may have been another portion of the same building. A second building (BSE 49), whose structure has been damaged but can still be identified as a granary, is just to the north-west. Last but not least, a third building that is similar and better preserved is located even further north (BNE 231), where preliminary surveys were conducted in 2012. Initial analysis revealed that the top levels of this structure, which still has the floors with cellars below, may contain ceramic artefacts that can mainly be attributed to the mid-to-late Roman Empire.

Overall, the granaries of Bakchias seem to have appeared between the late Ptolemaic Era (second – third centuries BCE) and the Roman Period (first – second centuries CE) along the eastern edge of the city, in a peripheral area that was initially countryside, and probably linked to the development of an axis of communication on this side following a process not unlike the one we can note, for example, in nearby Karanis.²⁸

²⁶ Ancient tradition (*Epit. De Caes.* 1, 6) states that the total tribute paid by Egypt was 20,000 *modii* (Tassinari 2009: 28).

²⁷ Buzi 2009b; Tassinari 2009, 51.

²⁸ In-depth surveys of the granary showed that the area was originally used as a rubbish dump. The layout of the storerooms in

The South Kom

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in exploring the buildings preserved in the area south of Bakchias, traditionally known as the South Kom, despite the fact that it is, for the most part, a plain. In particular, following detailed reconnaissance work that involved geophysical surveys as well, excavation work was done from 2006 until 2009 that unearthed two major Coptic religious complexes (BS 412 and BS 500) that were built on top of structures dating from Late Antiquity and that continued to exist during the Islamic Period as well.²⁹

Here we are particularly interested in the first construction phase that seems to be common to all the buildings in this area (BS 500-505). Similar orientation and construction techniques and materials, as well as the chronological data that has emerged from the excavations and from the collection of artefacts scattered at the surface, would suggest that what we are dealing with is a planned urban development that took place during the Roman Era.³⁰ We can particularly note a mud-brick complex on the north-western corner (BS 501-503), where we can distinguish rooms oriented towards the north with the remains of what were probably storerooms in the southern part. Just to the south, there is a lime and brick building (BS 504) with the remains of its floors, vaulted rooms and channels lined in hydraulic lime, which may have been used for water storage and distribution.

The building that still exists in the centre of the South Kom, under the Coptic church further west (BS 500), may have had a similar purpose, even though this did not have to do with production. This is the lower part of two connecting tanks built in masonry lined in hydraulic lime, of which the bottom and a tiny part of the walls survive (approximately three rows of brick). The orientation and construction techniques and materials are the same as those of the late Roman buildings mentioned earlier.³¹

the eastern area could not only be attributed to the road network, but possibly to a branch of the canal as well. Public granaries in Karanis were also located in peripheral, eastern areas, probably for similar functional reasons (Tassinari 2009: 43).

²⁹ See Paola Buzi on late antique Bakchias in this book.

³⁰ Giorgi 2007: 82-91; Giorgi 2009: 52-73; Giorgi 2011c: 17-28.

³¹ Giorgi 2011c: 17-28.

The excavation of this complex has clarified the last phase of this urban area's existence as well. After the abandonment of the Christian building constructed on

top of the Roman tanks below, a craftsmen's district developed during the Islamic Period.³²

³² Giorgi 2009: 58-59.

Late Antique Bakchias

Paola Buzi

Chapter VI

Bakchias in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

P. Buzi

Christian Bakchias: archaeological and documentary evidence before the 2006 excavation campaign

As seen earlier, Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth already had a clear idea of how the village of Bakchias was divided into two different areas with distinct geo-morphological and town planning characteristics – the North Kom and the South Kom – which, at the time of their exploration, still seemed separate from what remained of an old canal whose route can only be retraced today thanks to the presence of a strip of land between the two areas that lacks buildings of any kind, as well as a mound of mud layers on the edge of what must once have been a pier.

The detailed report drafted by these three papyrologists demonstrates that the South Kom was already in a seriously damaged state, both due to the nature of the land and because of the proximity of the modern village of Gorein, whose houses and cemetery pressed against the edge of the archaeological area:

‘The southern mound appears to have been little inhabited until the Arab Period, and then by men engaged in burning the stones of the old town for lime. The house-remains on this part of the site are of the poorest quality, very shallow and very sparse, while neither in the great rubbish-heap in the centre nor in any of the chambers did we find any papyrus earlier than very late Byzantine. Indeed almost without exception the script upon these fragments was Arabic. Bacchias, therefore, may be taken to be represented only by the remains north of the well-defined watercourse which divides the mound. This northern mound attains a much higher elevation than the southern, rising, like Kôm Ushîm, gradually from the south, but falling steeply on the north’.¹

Before the 2006 campaign, there had been very few traces of a Christian presence on the site, both in the North and South Kom.² Some discoveries made in the North Kom, however, had provided clues regarding the final phase of Bakchias’s existence, demonstrating,

despite their sporadic nature, the continued occupation of the village in Late Antiquity. Among other discoveries, it is worth particularly mentioning a papyrus fragment with traces of Coptic writing on both sides, unearthed near the pylon of Temple A, an *ostrakon* bearing two rows of Coptic writing on the convex side of a brown-greyish amphora fragment, unearthed in February 2005 inside the *thesauros* – and, more specifically, in one of the small cells arranged in parallel rows that were designed to store grain³ – and a grave located above the late Roman layers of the northern part of the North Kom which, though it may not be enough to prove Christian occupation, at the very least demonstrates the extreme contraction of the urban site and, therefore, its continued use during Late Antiquity, partly as a burial ground.

The theory that the village was inhabited in post-Classical times seemed mostly supported, however, by the many, though meagre, discoveries that were made whilst examining the surface of the South Kom, which was surveyed in February 2004. Among these discoveries, there were fragments of pottery dating from Late Antiquity and the early Islamic Era, which particularly included examples of glazed ceramics and, above all, a ‘compartmentalised plate’ in African red slip ware, a form that is commonly found in Coptic monasteries and settlements and can be dated to a period within the fifth and eighth centuries,⁴ and two examples of an early Islamic coin issued during the Umayyad Dynasty and more precisely between 698 and 749, previously studied by Anna Rita Parente.⁵

Written records that can confirm the existence of a Christian phase in the life of the *kome* are even rarer. For example, there is a papyrus whose purported origin, Bakchias, is controversial, *P.Strass.* 154.11.⁶ Written in the fourth or fifth century by a professional hand, it refers to a deacon by the name of Paul, who was appointed the grain-tax collector, responsible for collecting taxes earmarked for military supplies. In the document, an attempt is made to exempt him

³ Tassinari 2006a: 68-75.

⁴ Winlock and Crum 1926: 87-89.

⁵ Winlock and Crum 1926: 87-89.

⁶ Naldini 1995: 342-344; Calderini and Daris 1935-2010: IV/2, 24; Horsley 1992: 140-143; Vanlauwe 1994: 163.

¹ Grenfell, Hunt and Hogarth 1900: 35.

² Pernigotti 1999: 11.

from the burden of a civil appointment by invoking the regulations established by Constantine (319) and Constantius (361), which exempted the clergy from such service. The author is perhaps the head of the religious community referred to in the text:

recto (first hand): ‘Paul, their deacon (?), whom you know, was asked to be grain collector in violation of imperial legislation, which you too know well: please ensure, brother, that he be exempted, so that he may find time to serve you’ (second hand) ‘I wish you good health’
verso (second hand): ‘To Ammonius.’

If this document does indeed come from Bakchias, given the highly probable presence of an organised Christian community in the *kome* – which is accounted for in the pages that follow – it would gain further importance.

The churches of Bakchias

The meagre proof we had of a Christian phase in Bakchias, listed earlier in the first part of this book, was considerably boosted by a series of excavation seasons that sporadically took place from 2006 to 2012. At the end of this research work we can assert that, despite the very poor condition of the walls in the South Kom, damaged by years of looting and by the recent expansion of the nearby village of Gorein,⁷ there is no doubt that the area was home to a Christian community that was organised to a greater or lesser extent, and that had probably set up a small monastic complex as early as the fifth century whose activity revolved around two churches.

It is worth highlighting the fact that, compared to the large number of Christian architectural remnants in the southern Fayyūm – particularly the urban churches of Narmouthis/Madīnat Māḍī and Tebtynis/Umm al-Burayḡāt,⁸ as well as Hawārah⁹ and the many monastic settlements of the region – the churches of Bakchias, partly due to the archaeological case in hand and partly due to the gradual abandonment of the northern strip of the Fayyūm region starting in Late Antiquity up until the Early Middle Ages, represent one of the few undisputed traces of a Christian presence in the northern part of the region, along with the peculiar monastery of Dayr

Abū Līfah,¹⁰ located on the northern bank of the lake at the foot of Gebel Qatrani, the Christian necropolis of Karanis¹¹ and the ruins of Christian buildings recently identified in Soknopaiou Nesos, which are even more important given the remote location of the *kome*.¹² The mission from Siena that recently worked on the site of the previously mentioned ‘small Christian chapel’ that Edward William Lane claimed he had identified in Dionysias/Qaṣr Qārūn in 1826¹³ found no trace of it,¹⁴ while in Karanis, despite the systematic work undertaken by the UCLA, no Christian religious building has been found as yet.¹⁵

The discovery of the Eastern Church

The Eastern Church (BS 412), the first of two religious buildings to be systematically studied in Bakchias,¹⁶ was identified before it was actually excavated thanks to the presence of a column that could be seen emerging from a mound of wind-blown sand, slightly higher than the average level of the South Kom.¹⁷

Once it had been examined,¹⁸ it proved possible to deduce that the building was what remained of a church which we could reasonably assume had three aisles of which only the one on the left, ending in a small apse, had partly survived (Figures 1, 2). The building, boasting an annex located north of the main church structure and built at the same time, had been abandoned fairly soon in order to be used as a craftsmen’s workshop, as shown by the presence of a press built inside this annex and a silo added just south of the church.

The removal of the wind-blown sand that covered the building and the resulting emergence of a number of other stone features as well as the column that

⁷ As regards the state of conservation of Bakchias and the hoped-for restoration programme, see Buzi *et al.* 2011: 86-92.

⁸ As well as the most well-known publications regarding the site’s Christian phase, see Boutros 2005, 119-131 and, above all, Grossmann 2005: 197-208.

⁹ Unlike other settlements dating from Late Antiquity in the Fayyūm, discussed in a fairly extensive number of publications, the discovery of a small church in Hawārah by Petrie is less well known. This was recently studied again by a mission from Belgium’s *Katolieke Universiteit Leuven*. See Petrie 1890: 21; Grossmann 2002: 427; Grimal and Adly 2003: 52-53. Not far away, there is also a small Christian cemetery where a wooden cross with inscription was found. Lefebvre 1907: 150, no. 775.

¹⁰ What we currently know about the monastic complex of Dayr Abū Līfah does not tell us whether it had a church as well as the oratory identified earlier, as we may reasonably assume. Meinardus 1967-1968: 177-181; Gallo 1993: 57-66; Pernigotti 1997a: 249-258.

¹¹ Buzi 2004: 97-106; Buzi 2006: 111-133.

¹² This information was kindly provided by Paola Davoli (8th February 2018).

¹³ It is probable that Lane had seen a small hermitage, rather than a religious building *per se*. Lane 2000: 244.

¹⁴ A personal letter written by the mission director, Emanuele Papi, for a roundtable on the Fayyūm held in Bologna on 25th May 2012.

¹⁵ UCLA’s excavations were headed by Willeke Wendrich and now conducted by Emily Cole and Bethany Simpson. However, during the excavations carried out by University of Michigan, what seemed to be a lectern for sacred texts was unearthed. Wainwright 1924: 97-107; Schmeltz 2004: 150, no. 33.

¹⁶ For a description of the first church unearthed in Bakchias (BS 412) and initial theories regarding its nature, which were not always confirmed by subsequent research, see Buzi and Tassinari 2007: 21-45; Buzi 2007a: 93-103; Buzi 2007b: 377-392. Although drafted in recent years, the latter already seems partly outdated, as often happens to archaeological papers that are not immediately published. As regards the numerical system used to catalogue the buildings of Bakchias, see Giorgi 2007: 48, no. 2 and Rossetti 2014b: 369-406.

¹⁷ Pernigotti, Franceschelli and Tassinari 2006: 283-289.

¹⁸ The 2006 excavation campaign and the topographical survey of 2007.

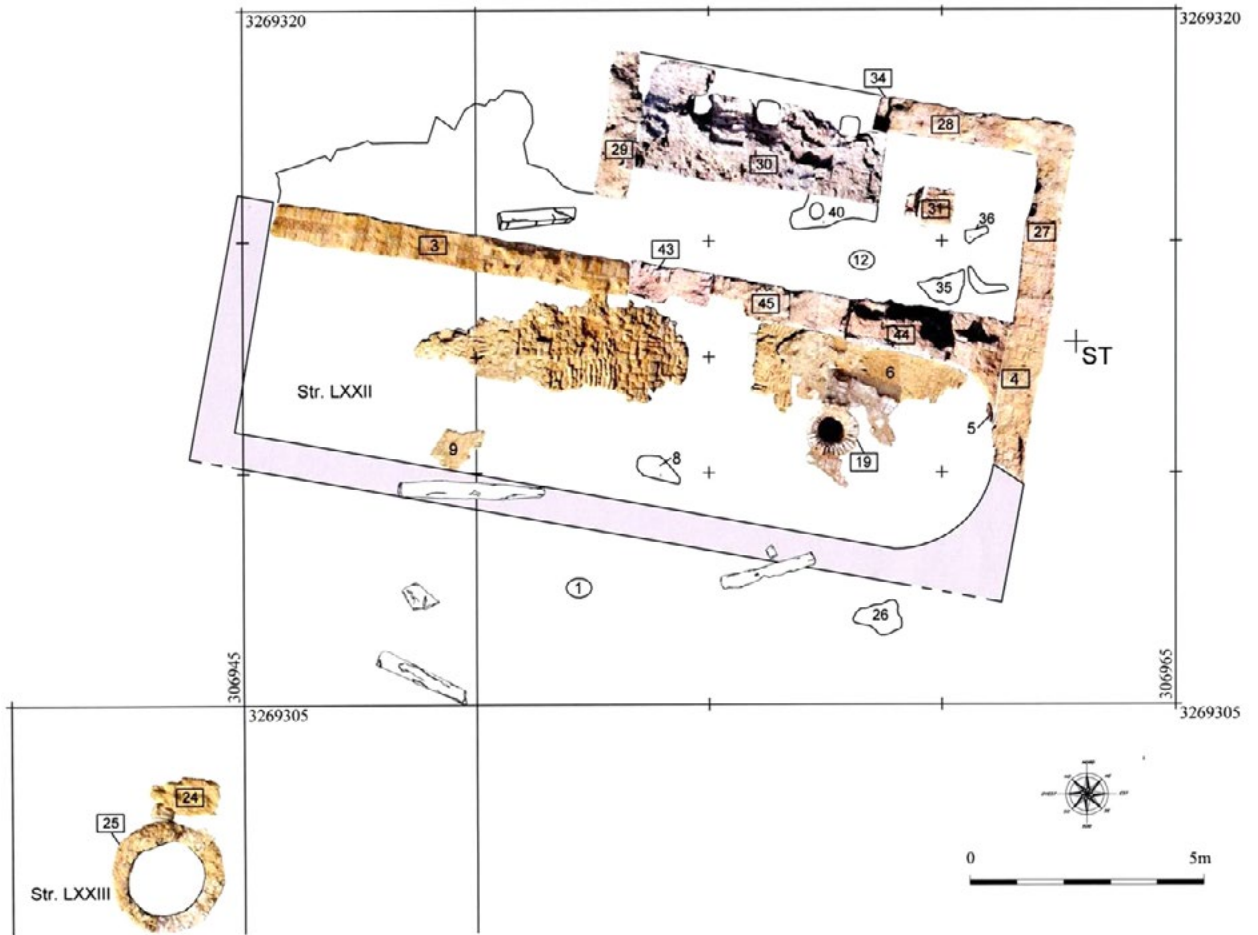


Figure 1. General plan of the Eastern church.



Figure 2. The Eastern church seen from east.

had attracted attention in the first place – including an architrave, another two large columns and one much smaller column¹⁹ – soon confirmed that these archaeological remnants belonged to a church, pointing in the canonically required east-west direction, and an apse that was not visible from the outside.

Its north and east perimeter walls were still in a good state, made out of beige-coloured mud-brick laid in a fairly irregular fashion. The wall that was in the best state particularly had a first row consisting of a short stretch of bricks placed in a header bond whilst the remaining part was made up of smaller bricks in a stretcher bond. Approximately three-fourths of the way down its length, the eastern jamb of a door that still had traces of its original plaster coating (3 cm thick) was identified. At the eastern end, a niche in the wall was detected, which had been walled up and blocked off with a piece of sandstone at a later date. On the south facade, cladding that dated from a later period was visible, consisting of three courses of fired brick.

The remaining masonry structures were almost completely destroyed due to looting that, starting from the church, demolished everything that was found between it and the modern village of Gorein, only a few hundred metres south of the South Kom.

Thanks to the excavation work carried out, we can surmise that, although its structure has not changed to any great extent over time, the church has been restored on a number of occasions. The paintings, in particular, were completed over two different phases, as we can deduce from the double layer of plaster found in the rubble *in situ*, in the apse area: a first decorative level featuring fine white plaster marked on the back by the signs of the woven reeds used to attach it to the wall, covered by a second layer of rougher beige-coloured plaster rich in sand and straw fibres. In terms of the iconographic motifs, if we go by the fragments dating from the second pictorial phase that have been unearthed, the decoration must have been mainly geometric and floral,²⁰ with a predominance of dark shades. The discovery of pictorial fragments bearing well-defined letters leads us to believe that there were originally human figures accompanied by inscriptions.

As regards the floor, it had been laid with a fair amount of care. A first level of stretcher bond mud-brick acted as a bed for a second level that was the actual floor, made of small limestone slabs. Both levels were created

¹⁹ The three large columns found in the church, all of which tapered, have a smooth shaft, traces of workmanship and a base that is 4 cm high. For a detailed description of them, see Tocci 2014: 213-242.

²⁰ The most commonly used floral motif reminds us – in terms of the images, style and colour – of a similar detail found in Madinat Māḍī. Bresciani *et al.* 2006: 246-247.

after the perimeter walls were completed, as suggested by the thin layer of white plaster that covered the interior masonry that acted as a base for both the mud-brick underfloor layer and the limestone slab floor (Figure 3).²¹

Once it lost its original purpose, the church seems to have gone through a second phase of use, as shown by alterations made to the north perimeter wall: a block of sandstone and three rows of brick blocked off what must have been a niche created in the west wall of the church, while another fragment of wall, also in brick, covered the top of the north perimeter wall.

A well certainly belonged to the building's second phase of use that, located in the eastern part of the only surviving aisle, near the apse, made it unusable. It is made out of red fired brick, laid in a very irregular fashion. Every four rows, hollows were left on the inside surface to act as footrests, each of which is approximately one row high.²² The well was examined down to a maximum depth of approximately 4 metres, a limit imposed by the water table (Figure 3).

The continuation of excavation work beyond the northern edge of the surviving aisle allowed us to identify an ancillary room enclosed by three walls,²³ with an entrance to the west. Inside this room, whose original purpose is not clear, there was a workshop that was almost certainly added after the church was no longer used for religious purposes. This consisted of a press made of brick and plastered on the south and east sides in pink hydraulic lime. What confirmed the purpose of this object were the pole holes that housed the press's *arbores*, two filtering tanks attached to the masonry itself²⁴ and fragments of a limestone pressing tank. To the east of the press, a kind of tank was unearthed that was still partly covered in the same lime that covered the press. In the middle of it, there was a pillar made with salvaged materials (brick, mud-brick, stone fragments and lime) laid in a particularly irregular fashion.²⁵

Further support for the theory that surmises the use of the Eastern Church as a workshop during the late Middle Ages came with the discovery of an underground

²¹ It seems we will have to discard the initial theory I first put forward that surmised that the mud-brick row placed in stretcher bond was a floor base, which was covered during a second phase by the limestone floor. This theory seems to be contradicted by the absence of traces of wear in the mud-brick level, which should therefore be considered an underfloor level to all intents and purposes.

²² The size of the footrests was as follows: 13-14 cm high, 15 cm wide and 10 cm deep. Fragments of wood and pitch were found between the bricks.

²³ For more details regarding the ancillary room's walls, see Buzi 2014: 179-212.

²⁴ The first filtering tank was rectangular while the other, bigger tank, had a more rounded shape.

²⁵ For more details regarding the pillar, see Buzi 2014, 179-212.



Figure 3. The floor composed of a first level of stretcher bond mud-brick acted as a bed for a second level that was the actual floor, made of small limestone slabs.

silo, only a few yards to the south-west of the church, which was probably designed to contain foodstuffs. It was made out of yellowish-white limestone slabs cut in irregular shapes, barely held together by a small amount of lime mortar (Figure 4). The construction technique, not to mention the ceramic material found inside (mostly kitchen pottery), made it possible to date it to the early Islamic phase.

Among the recognisable fragments found in the silo, the following are particularly worth noting: an ovoid amphora made in a red material of the Egloff 187 type,²⁶ a large plate of the Egloff 369 type,²⁷ a small bowl featuring a truncated cone body and a straight neck very similar to Antinoe type 18²⁸ and a spheroid-shaped saucepan without handles of the Egloff 107 type.²⁹ In all these cases,³⁰ we are dealing with forms that have been mainly traced to the period from the sixth to the eighth centuries. Nevertheless, it must be noted that part of

²⁶ See Ballet 1990: 42; Egloff 1977: I, 118.

²⁷ See Egloff 1977: I, 174.

²⁸ See Egloff 1977: I, 174.

²⁹ See Egloff 1977: I, 98.

³⁰ Only the Egloff 107 type does not seem to be typical of a specific era.

the ceramic material found in the silo did not match discoveries in the Coptic sites that have been studied in greater detail (the Monastery of Saint Epiphanius, Kellia, Antinoe, etc.); nevertheless, we should not rule out that this could be due to the lack of interest in Coptic and early Islamic undecorated pottery, apart from a few particular categories of ceramics.

The size of the church today, the result of the looting that we have mentioned several times and that, in all probability, must have destroyed the other two aisles, has a maximum surviving length of 16.78 m and we can estimate that the surviving aisle's original width must have been approximately 6 m.

As far as the church's main entrance is concerned, it was probably on the south side, given that the north side was occupied by the ancillary room mentioned earlier. A secondary entrance, however, must have provided direct access to the annex that would then have led to the church's aisle, as an architrave found out of place but probably near its original location would suggest, as well as traces of a threshold that was later blocked off, located in the church's north perimeter wall.



Figure 4. The silo located south-west of the church, made out of yellowish-white limestone slabs cut in irregular shapes, barely held together by a small amount of lime mortar.

The materials unearthed during excavation work, not many if truth be told, suggest that the church was in use during a fairly early period, sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries, though we cannot be more precise regarding the length of its various phases. Of these materials, it is worth mentioning fragments of a marble cross with pattée arms of equal size, a number of ceramic fragments³¹ and various limestone architectural features that are unfortunately out of place.

Towards the discovery of a second church

One of the aims of the topographic survey conducted in the South Kom during the second part of the 2007 excavation campaign was to re-evaluate some of the structural aspects of the church, which had already been excavated during the previous campaign. In particular, the goal was to identify the various construction phases that had taken place in greater detail.

Nevertheless, the main goal of the survey was to verify the state of the buildings that could be glimpsed emerging from the sand in the South Kom. The examination of the floor plan of the buildings that could be seen emerging from the sand, the study of the size and composition of the bricks that had been used, combined with the careful study of satellite images all made it possible to identify a number of other buildings in the South Kom

³¹ It is worth mentioning in particular a fragment of a red terracotta vase made of a porous material and decorated with an etched 'palm leaf' motif, which matches discoveries made in Antinoe/al-Šayḥ 'Ibādah and can be dated to the sixth-seventh centuries. Guidotti and Pesi 2004, 45-46.

which were arranged in at least three different nuclei. West of the Eastern Church in particular, researchers noted a large building whose south perimeter wall seemed perfectly aligned with the most well-preserved wall of the church described earlier, to the point where it seemed to be its continuation. The perimeter walls of this building, labelled BS 500, which generally had only survived in one single course, seemed to be made of the same bricks whose use had already been noted in the Eastern Church.

The architectural and stylistic resemblance between the new building and the church that had already been excavated, combined with the masonry technique employed and the orientation of its layout, seemed to be supported by the discovery of a fragment of column,³² which could be compared to those discovered during the previous campaign both in terms of material and construction technique, as well as a fragment of plaster that was very similar to the fragments found in the rubble inside the Eastern Church, in terms of both the material and the visual decoration used. The same area also rendered up a column capital fragment in limestone.³³

The Western Church

The building that had been discovered proved to be what remained of a church that probably also originally

³² This column fragment was 16 cm high and 8.5 cm thick; its diameter could be estimated as approximately 30 cm.

³³ The capital fragment was 18 x 6.3 cm x 17 cm high. Morini 2007c: 157, no. 128.

Figure 5. General plan of the Western church.

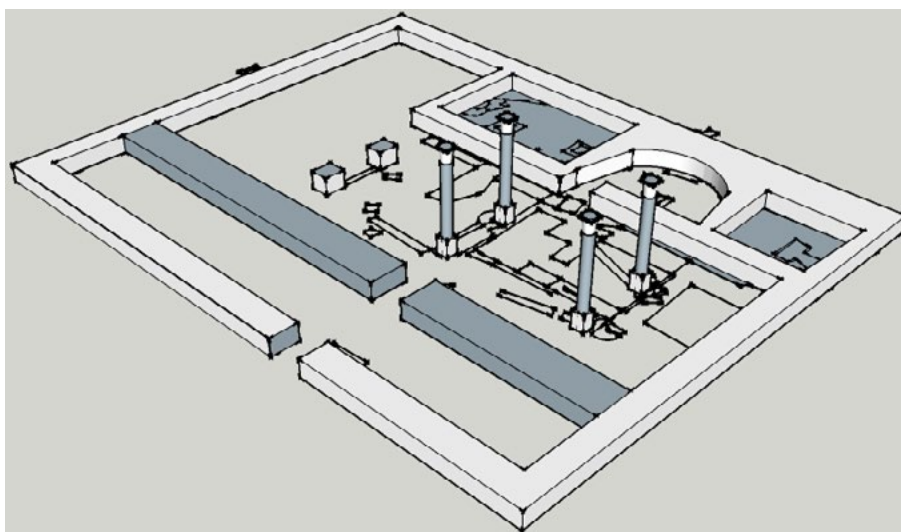
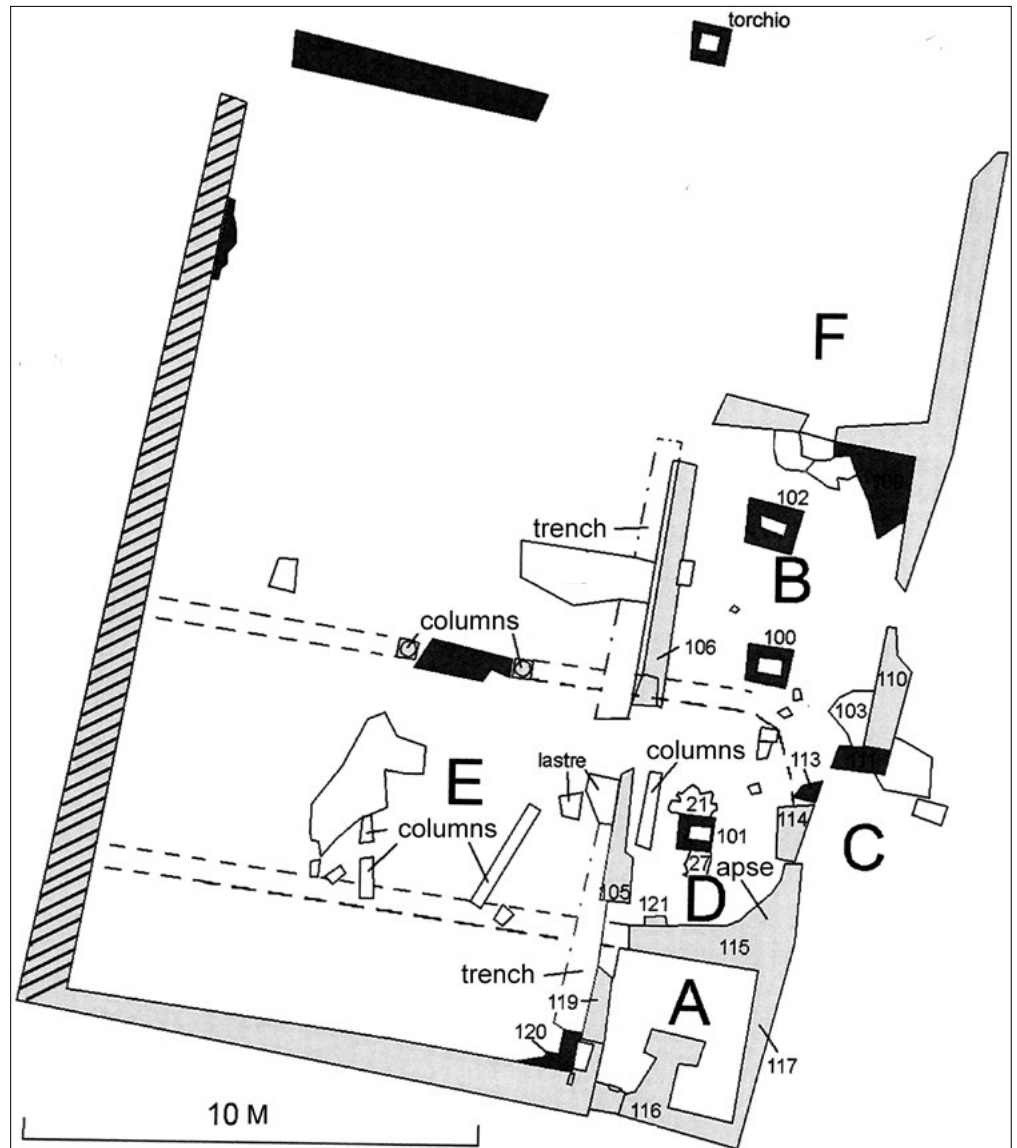


Figure 6. Hypothetical reconstruction of the Western Church.

had three aisles (Figures 5, 6). Investigation work particularly focused on the chancel area, which could still be identified, despite the extensive alterations

that had taken place over time, thanks to the survival of part of the apse, which still had traces of the first level of plaster, and a few parts of the rood screen that

closed off the space and originally consisted of vertical supports and panels,³⁴ allowing members of the clergy access to the choir from the aisle.

As regards the choir, the long foundation ditch and a few elements in brick and lime that had partially collapsed into the ditch were identifiable, allowing us to surmise that the rood screen was, at least in part, made of mud-brick. The floor rested on this barrier, of which a few fragments of limestone slabs were still found *in situ*. A relief decorated with plant motifs³⁵ found in the wind-blown sand may have belonged to this rood screen. What we have here is a fine object that has stylistic similarities with architectural reliefs in Egyptian religious buildings datable from approximately the sixth and seventh centuries.

A comparison with other Egyptian religious complexes, particularly with the 'Main Church' of the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah in Saqqāra,³⁶ leads us to believe that the colonnades of the nave were aligned with pillars attached to the walls, to which we could ascribe the capital of a lesene unearthed in 2007.

The fairly good level of artistry and the care with which Bakchias's second church had been decorated were confirmed by the discovery of a series of objects, including the fragment of a cross in nummulitic limestone,³⁷ a fragment of plaster depicting a man's face complete with moustache³⁸ and a number of architectural features (cornices and fragments of architraves, columns and column bases).

The use of stone fragments that undoubtedly came from the North Kom – such as a number of sandstone blocks featuring quarry marks similar to those of Temple C³⁹ – was also particularly interesting, as it led us to imagine that this area must have been partly abandoned at the time.

As regards the church's layout, it seemed to consist of a rectangular area of approximately 23 x 17 m (with the longest side aligned north to south) within which it was possible to identify a chancel area featuring an apse (room D) flanked by two *pastophoria* (rooms A and B),⁴⁰ of which the southernmost one (room A) had a

stairwell and could be accessed from both the inside and the outside.⁴¹

The apse area seemed to have been altered a great deal but was nevertheless still identifiable, having preserved part of the dome as well as some painted fragments. Moreover, many fragments of decorated plaster⁴² were found in two layers of sand that also contained a great deal of rubble that could be detected under the layer of wind-blown sand; these layers, in turn, covered a level of dark soil rich in plant fibres that may have got there when the roof collapsed.

Mud-brick pedestals that are hard to interpret but undoubtedly belong to the late phase of the building's use were found in both room D (the apse) and room B (the *pastophorium*) (Figure 7). A column that originally divided the two aisles also seems to date from that time. Re-used as, perhaps, a bench or support, it was located parallel to the chancel wall and covered in lime.

At an unspecified time, the Western Church, like the Eastern Church, must have lost its religious function. This new phase of use would have led to the demolition of most of its original walls and the construction of new ones so as to form an enclosure within which – in the chancel and adjacent to it (rooms B and E) – the three pieces of equipment mentioned earlier⁴³ that are so difficult to interpret (press doors? presses?) were installed. These can partly be compared to similar structures made in fired brick found in other parts of the South Kom, which unlike these were entirely built above ground. Furthermore, an intercolumn of the nave must have been blocked off during this phase, and a beaten earth floor consisting of stone and lime shards must have been created. The ceramic objects found in this phase of the excavations were few and fairly insignificant.⁴⁴

The second part of the 2009 excavation campaign concentrated on completing the survey of religious building BS 500, whose general layout had already been identified (rooms A, B, D and E) as well as the arrangement of rooms inside and the complex sequence of construction phases.⁴⁵ The excavation

³⁴ For the structure of rood screens and iconostases in Coptic churches, see Grossmann 1991a: 211-212; Grossmann and Severin 1991: 200-201. An example of a wooden rood screen has been found in the *église nord* of the Monastery of Bawit. See Rutschowskaya 2007: 313-315.

³⁵ Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 139-140.

³⁶ Quibell 1912; Grossmann 1981: 149-176; Severin 1981: 315-336; Pensabene 1993: 303-305.

³⁷ Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 139.

³⁸ Gasperini and Gioia: 137.

³⁹ Giorgi 2009: 56-57.

⁴⁰ For a description of the *pastophorium* (or *diakonikon*), see Leclercq 1907-1953: 2390-2391; Grossmann 1991b: 216-217.

⁴¹ The discovery of a number of limestone steps confirmed the presence of a staircase in this room.

⁴² Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 135-138.

⁴³ For a detailed description of these three pieces of equipment, see Giorgi 2009: 65.

⁴⁴ Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 104-105, 109, 111, 106, 119-120, 126-127, 130, 132-133.

⁴⁵ Buzi 2007a; Giorgi 2007: 47-92; Pernigotti, Giorgi and Buzi 2009; Pernigotti, Giorgi and Buzi 2010: 289-299; Buzi 2014, 178-21. A reconstruction of the church's appearance has been attempted by Mariangela Tocci using a vector plan and 3D modelling software (SketchUp). The height of the walls was obtained by summing the



Figure 7. One of the mud-brick pedestals that belonged to the late phase of the building's use and were found in both room D (the apse) and room B (the *pastophorium*).

work confirmed that the building must originally have consisted in a three-aisle basilica-type structure, with a chancel featuring an apse that could not be seen from the outside, flanked by two rooms, and that the church must have been structurally and architecturally connected to the Eastern Church.

Nevertheless, the previous stratigraphic excavation had already unearthed masonry structures under the church's levels of use that demonstrated how it was not built on top of sand, like the other, but that it had been constructed on top of an older building; excavations inside a trench parallel to what must have been the rood screen particularly highlighted a fragment of masonry that acted as a base for the walls of rooms A and D.

In short, the survey revealed the presence of a large, complex building that existed before the Western Church, consisting of at least three rooms and whose floors and interior walls had been coated in hydraulic lime, and that seemed to be wider than the church above. The type of plasterwork, the different floor levels and the slopes in some of the rooms made it reasonable to assume that the building was used as a workshop that handled liquids (Figure 8).⁴⁶

parts of the columns, even though we can reasonably assume that the perimeter walls must have been higher. The reconstruction is still entirely hypothetical due to the sections that are incomplete. Tocci 2011: no. 100, 101, g. 5. As regards the materials unearthed during the excavation campaign, see Tocci 2014: 213-242.

⁴⁶ For a detailed description of the building under the Western Church, see Tocci 2011: 102-105.

During excavation work on the second church, a number of stone features were unearthed, including the base of a half column in a good state and the base of a lesene, which may have been attached to pillars leaning against the walls, a column shaft fragment and the shaft of another column, as well as a series of grey-bluish veined marble fragments belonging to a 'sigma table'.

In the centre of the building, i.e. the area between the two collapsed columns, monochrome fragments of plaster (mainly painted red, black and light yellow) and other fragments of painted plaster decorated with geometric and floral motifs, as well as figures, were found. An incomplete face and what remained of an inscription are particularly worthy of note.⁴⁷ This stratigraphic level also rendered up a column capital fragment coated in dark grey stucco, the only survivor of a series of capitals that must have been part of the southern colonnade.⁴⁸

The western part of the nave was the area damaged most by looting, while in the south-western part of the nave, the top layer of rubble covered a piece of masonry made from fragments of sandstone blocks attached to other stone fragments with clay. This wall had a rectangular recess on the surface lined with lime, which was the housing for an object that was later

⁴⁷ Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 209 (no. 172).

⁴⁸ Gasperini and Gioia, 212 (no. 197).



Figure 8. The large, complex building located below the Western Church, whose floors and interior walls had been coated in hydraulic lime and that was used as a workshop that handled liquids.

removed. Its poor state of conservation, however, did not make it possible to understand clearly its structural links with other sections of masonry, even though we could see that the construction technique, based on the use of salvaged material, was similar to the one adopted to make the chancel wall.

Just to the north of this section of masonry and approximately 83 cm to the south of the western column base of the northern colonnade, a looters' tunnel was detected that was probably quite recent, in that it was only covered in wind-blown sand and had cut across the surrounding layers. Inside this tunnel, researchers found a third column base, a parallelepiped block in limestone that is very similar to those that make up the chancel wall skirting and a large rectangular sandstone block near the western perimeter wall that may originally have been a threshold.

The northern part of room E, edged to the south by the previously mentioned column bases, still in their original position, rendered up a number of architectural features of good artistic quality: in the north-western part of the area, a fragment of architectural relief

decorated with plant motifs was found in the wind-blown sand that can be compared, in terms of style, to the decorated stone block unearthed during the previous excavation season.⁴⁹ In the layer below, made up of sand mixed with shards of white limestone found throughout the northern area, two capitals could be glimpsed, one of which was still whole, while the other was slightly damaged, and a column shaft. Moreover, near the shaft, two other capital fragments made of stuccoed limestone that belonged to the damaged capital were also unearthed. Just to the north of these capitals, a third example was unearthed, featuring a quadrangular shape, prominent volutes and two side recesses.⁵⁰

The brief excavation season that took place in October 2012, the last to focus on the South Kom, had a two-fold aim: firstly, it aimed to review and complete the topographical survey of the North Kom and, secondly, it aimed to re-examine the South Kom, as in the previous three years it had seen a significant increase in the level of moisture due to rising damp,

⁴⁹ Gasperini and Gioia: 139-140.

⁵⁰ For a detailed description of the capitals, see Tocci 2014: 213-242.

with the resulting proliferation of hardy, damaging vegetation.⁵¹

One of the few advantages of the new hydrogeological situation in the South Kom became instantly clear when such rising damp highlighted a number of structures that had not been excavated. The case of a series of circular structures,⁵² all quite close to each other and mainly located south of the two religious complexes, was particularly extraordinary.

The decision was made to investigate the one that looked most interesting, also due to the considerable presence of stone fragments. It proved to be a well head⁵³ with an inside diameter of 125 cm,⁵⁴ featuring clear saline concretions and two masonry shutters (30 x 60 cm) that probably served as a base for an arched structure above. Inside the well, under a layer of yellow sand, a bottle filter – along with various fragments of glazed and unglazed Islamic pottery, the lower part of a *saqiya* vase and a glass oil lamp⁵⁵ – was unearthed that can be compared with a number of fragments displayed in Cairo's Museum of Islamic Art:⁵⁶ it is an item of 'unglazed earthenware, with pierced and incised decoration', dating from the Fatimid Dynasty and, in particular, from the mid-tenth century. It is worth noting that, under the layer containing the fragments of pottery, another layer of soil that gradually turned to rich loam was identified.

Chronological and stylistic considerations

At the end of a series of targeted and prolonged research programmes in the South Kom, which took place from 2006 to 2012, it is now certain that the two religious structures, the Eastern Church and the Western Church (BS 412 and BS 500), belonged to one single building complex, which was most probably a monastic settlement. The orientation of these buildings, the construction technique that they share, the wall proportions and the materials unearthed all convincingly suggest this possibility.⁵⁷

As mentioned earlier, the Western Church in particular has a very similar layout to the 'Main Church' of the

Monastery of Apa Jeremiah in Saqqara: in both cases, we are dealing with three-aisle buildings where the main body of the church is separated from the apse by a rood screen, beyond which, at the end of the nave, the actual apse is located, and is in turn flanked by two *pastophoria*, one of which certainly had a stairwell.⁵⁸

Apart from the structural similarities, further – and, I believe, decisive – proof of the decorative similarities between BS 500 and the main basilica of the monastery in Saqqara emerged over the course of the 2009 excavation campaign thanks to the discovery of three limestone capitals of two different types that, however, can both be compared to similar discoveries made in the 'Main Church'.⁵⁹

The first type, represented by two examples, could be described as Corinthian-inspired with closed, smooth leaves (Figure 9). Between the plant volutes of the stone block, there was the superficial and stylised carving of a stem, topped by a three-petalled lotus flower corolla. An example that is very similar to the two capitals of Bakchias and of a similar size (height: 43 cm; diameter: 32 cm) was found in the basilica of Saqqara.⁶⁰

The second type is also a Corinthian-inspired capital but boasts a large *kalathos* at the top, wrapped in four stylised acanthus leaves (Figure 10). In the middle of its long sides, one can see a large vertical recess created to house wooden or masonry structures.⁶¹ To the sides of the recesses, there are large volutes that terminate under the corner of the abacus, which instead of forming the usual spiral as normally found in this type of capital, creates a small curl. The abacus of this capital is enclosed in a rectangle that is also very similar to items unearthed in Apa Jeremiah's 'Main Church', one of which in particular – 23 cm high, 20 cm in diameter at the base and with an abacus of 48 x 35 cm – was kept for a time in the gardens of the Coptic Museum in Cairo.⁶²

In both cases, the date proposed by those who excavated them (J. Quibell) and those who studied them (P. Pensabene) can be narrowed down to the fifth and sixth centuries, which would allow us to backdate the monastic complex of Bakchias by approximately a century compared to the initial hypothesis.

⁵¹ *Zygophyllaceae* and common reeds, however, have begun to appear in the North Kom as well, both along the banks of the canal, where the vegetation is particularly luxuriant and, more sporadically, in the southern part of the *kom*, where the terrain lies lower.

⁵² Some damp patches looked like large circles, while others looked more like a kind of 'doughnut'. These circular features had already partly been identified in 2004.

⁵³ The well was dug down to a depth of 155 cm from its edge, and was then re-covered at the end of the mission for obvious safety reasons. Outside, it still had three courses of brick above ground.

⁵⁴ External diameter: 205 cm. It is worth noting that other circular damp patches seem to have approximately the same size.

⁵⁵ This is one of the artefacts found at the deepest level.

⁵⁶ Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. 6110/22 and 8577/98.

⁵⁷ Buzi 2009a: 82. Similar considerations have been also presented in Buzi forthcoming.

⁵⁸ For a comparison of the floor plan of BS 500 and that of the 'Main Church' of Saqqara, see Buzi 2009a: g. 7.

⁵⁹ Quibell 1912.

⁶⁰ Pensabene 1993: Table 73, no. 643; Quibell 1912: Tables 27.1 and 27.3.

⁶¹ Pensabene believes these recesses should rather be seen as housings for wooden windows.

⁶² Pensabene 1993: Table 66, no. 570. Those pictured in Tables 68 no. 587 and Table 34 no. 254, the latter in diorite and hailing from Luxor, are less similar but are in any case conceptually comparable to the capital of Bakchias. Last but not least, though possibly enclosed by a square rather than a rectangle, the capital classified with no. 606, Table 70, also has recesses. Quibell 1912: Table 27.1.



Figure 9. Two examples of a Corinthian-inspired capital with closed, smooth leaves (Bakchias' first type).



Figure 10. An example of a Corinthian-inspired capital with a large *kalathos* at the top, wrapped in four stylised acanthus leaves. (Bakchias's second type)

The similarity between the column bases found in the building in the Fayyūm and those of Saqqara is less surprising but equally worthy of note; although they are not all the same size⁶³ – something that is, in any case, quite common in Egyptian Christian architecture – these bases reveal a certain level of care in their creation.

⁶³ Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 212 (nos. 189, 190 and 200). Also see Tocci 2014: 213-242.

An inspection of the monastic complex of Dayr al Hammām, near Hawārah (October 2012), which is still ongoing and was recently the object of a general ‘clearing’, made it possible to notice for the first time⁶⁴ that in the church dedicated to the Virgin, a capital

⁶⁴ I visited the monastery for the first time in 2006, returning there several times over the following six years and noting a number of small ‘discoveries’ that had occurred in the meantime in the rooms of the complex during various restoration campaigns. See Buzi 2005: 279-296.

Figure 11. A capital – which is very similar to those that can be ascribed to the first type found in Bakchias – used as the base of a column in the church of Dayr al Hammām, near Hawārah.



was used as the base of a column which is very similar to those that can be ascribed to the first type found in Bakchias in terms of its size and decorations (Figure 11). Given that Dayr al Hammām is quite far from Bakchias, it is unlikely that this object was moved from one site to another. Instead, we can surmise the presence of a local workshop that specialised in the production of capitals, bases, columns and architectural reliefs, whose creations – inspired by one of the motifs that were popular in the fifth and sixth centuries and perhaps made elsewhere – were circulating in the Arsinoe area.

Another clue to the possible existence of a local craft workshop specialising in religious stone objects is the similarity between the fragment of a cross found in the Western Church and two similar sculptures walled in the *haikal*⁶⁵ of the main church of Dayr al-Naqlūn and in the external facade of the modern extension of Dayr al Hammām respectively: in this case too, the Bakchias artefact was probably a cross enclosed in a circle, as the traces of edging found on the excavated item would suggest.

The hypothesis of an early date for the monastic complex of Bakchias also seems supported by the many fragments of grey-veined marble found in the Western Church that can be associated with ‘sigma tables’.⁶⁶ These objects, which consist of slightly hollowed marble

tables in a horseshoe shape or, rather, a crescent-shaped sigma and whose purpose and position are still hotly debated – even though the theory that states they were altar tables is convincing and widely accepted – are of high quality, as the material used to make them would suggest, perhaps originating from workshops in Constantinople, which supplied them to religious buildings in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Greece. If the hypothesis of their centralised production were to prove correct, such a widespread commercial trade could only be traced back to the moment before Constantinople lost control of Egyptian territory, and therefore to the period before the Persian invasion (619-629) and Arab domination. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out that it may be an imitation that, though inspired by models from Constantinople, was made in regional workshops. In any case, it is further proof of the care taken over aesthetic details and the artistic quality found in the monastic complex of Bakchias.

Some examples of ‘sigma tables’ are particularly worthy of note and useful if we wish to compare and surmise the use of the fragments from Bakchias: the first and most important of them is still used as an altar table in the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in the monastery of that name in Ma^llūlā, Syria; the second, reused in the seventeenth century as a tombstone, is on display in Cairo’s Museum of Islamic Art;⁶⁷ last but not least, the third ‘sigma table’ was in the Fayyūm

⁶⁵ The term *haikal* refers to the *sanctum* of a Coptic church separated from the aisles by rood screens or iconostases.

⁶⁶ Tocci 2012: 113-135, with respective bibliography.

⁶⁷ Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. 3710.

region, placed in the floor of the left aisle of Church C in Tebtynis, near the chancel.⁶⁸

It was already clear back in 2008 that BS 500 featured a high level of decorative quality, thanks to the discovery of particularly fine stone features, such as the previously mentioned relief fragment⁶⁹ that may have originally been part of the rood screen.⁷⁰ This impression was confirmed by the discovery of a new fragment of architectural relief,⁷¹ which can be stylistically compared to the previously mentioned relief, which also features a stylised lanceolate leaf motif. Last but not least, as in church BS 412, the decorations in BS 500 must have included, at least initially, a series of frescoes bearing inscriptions, as demonstrated by a number of fragments found in the rubble.⁷²

Concluding reflections regarding the Christian phase of Bakchias

The presence of two churches⁷³ located near each other that, due to their similar orientation, construction technique and the materials found there,⁷⁴ can reasonably be assumed to be from the same era, clearly provides food for thought, particularly given the fact that the research carried out in the South Kom has shown how all the other surviving buildings, quite probably dating from the height of the Roman Era – except for the silos and the wells dating from the early Islamic Era – have a different orientation from BS 412 and BS 500. If we add the fact that there doesn't seem to be a large settlement near them, which would suggest the existence of a district that developed in Late Antiquity,⁷⁵ then we can reasonably surmise that the two religious buildings were part of a small monastic complex, where the presence of two churches in a relatively small area would not be surprising, given that we can find many similar examples in Egypt.

The results gained from 2006 to 2012, therefore, allow us to formulate theories regarding the final phase of Bakchias's existence, though we are entirely aware that much archaeological information has been irretrievably

⁶⁸ Grossmann 2005: 201–204. I was informed by Cornelia Römer that another example of 'sigma table' is to be found in Abu Mina (31st October 2018).

⁶⁹ Buzi 2009a: 79.

⁷⁰ Buzi 2009a: 77–78.

⁷¹ For a detailed description of the relief, see Mariangela Tocci's catalogue, no. 27. Tocci 2014: 231–242.

⁷² Gasperini and Gioia 2009: 136–138 (nos. 89–99).

⁷³ At the end of the 2010 and 2012 excavation seasons, both churches were covered over again in order to protect their masonry, which is already far too damaged.

⁷⁴ The pottery unearthed during the 2008 excavation campaign does not seem any older than the fifth century; we should then add to it the pottery found during the previous two campaigns, which can be attributed to a period that stretches from the fifth to the seventh centuries.

⁷⁵ Caution is however advisable, given the poor state of conditions in the South Kom, mentioned several times.

lost and that the lack of written evidence hampers our complete understanding of its history.

After the (re)-foundation of Bakchias by Ptolemy II,⁷⁶ the village enjoyed a long period of ever-increasing economic and demographic prosperity, which led it to take on the role of 'granary-city' from the late Ptolemaic Era to the time of the early Roman Empire.⁷⁷

From the third-fourth centuries on, in line with what happened in other settlements of the region, the *kome* suffered a gradual decline in population with the resulting contraction of the urban area, whose main cause should probably be attributed to water supply problems that affected the entire region at the time. It should not be forgotten that the last papyrus found in Bakchias that can be dated with any certainty is from 313 CE (*P.Cairo Isis*. 12₂) and that almost no coinage has been found dating from the third and fourth centuries.⁷⁸ Such a lack should, however, be judged with caution, given that the layers associated with the late Empire and Late Antiquity are, of course, those that have been most damaged by the work of the *sebbakhin*.⁷⁹

From the fifth century on, the town saw a revival, though this seems to have been limited to the area south of the canal that originally divided the two *kiman*, as the coinage unearthed would, again, lead us to believe. Take the bronze coin of uncertain mint issued by Theodosius II⁸⁰ and found on the surface and, above all, the Justinian *folles*,⁸¹ found in the ancillary rooms of the first church, or even the *dodecanummium* of Constans II.⁸²

It may well have been as early as the fifth century – as some stylistic observations mentioned in the previous section would suggest – that a small monastic complex including the two churches was founded. The early dating is not at all improbable if we consider that there are at least two documented cases of Egyptian churches that can even be dated to the fourth century. What emerges from all this is a complex Christian district that occupied a significant part of the South Kom in Late Antiquity whilst, in the meantime, the North Kom was gradually being abandoned and deserted, subsequently becoming nothing short of a quarry of construction materials for these new buildings.

⁷⁶ As regards the re-foundation of Bakchias by Ptolemy II and the now almost certain pre-Ptolemaic phase of the *kome*, see Pernigotti 2005a: 64–72; Pernigotti 2005b: 89–100; Pernigotti 2007: 13–26; Pernigotti 2014a: 17–38.

⁷⁷ Tassinari 2007: 27–44; Tassinari 2009: 23–57.

⁷⁸ Parente 2008: 165–181.

⁷⁹ For the caution with which we should interpret the lack of documentation from the late third century CE on, see Buzi 2009a, 88.

⁸⁰ Parente 2008: 166, 168, pl. 18 (no. 88). Rowe 1931, 3–84.

⁸¹ Parente 2008: 166, 168, pl. 18 (no. 112).

⁸² Parente 2008: 166, 168, pl. 18 (no. 113).



Figure 12. Stone materials that were probably taken from Temple C and used to make the foundations of the columns in the Western Church.

As we saw earlier, we can detect an important sign of such pillaging, which particularly affected the old stone temples that were now abandoned, in the use of salvaged stone materials that were probably taken from Temple C and used to make the foundations of the columns in the Western Church (Figure 12), as well as the reuse of other sandstone features in the foundations of that same church's western perimeter wall.

We can date the few but important clues of occupation of the North Kom to that same period, more or less, as demonstrated by the wooden fences found in the north-west district (BNO 350)⁸³ that may have been used to create animal pens, which should be considered together with the frequently mentioned sporadic discovery of material from Late Antiquity,⁸⁴ the fragments of *saqiya* found in the baths and datable to the period from the fourth to the seventh centuries⁸⁵ and, above all, the reuse of one of the cells of the *thesauros* as a storage room.⁸⁶

⁸³ Giorgi 2011c: 29-42; Rossetti 2011: 57-93.

⁸⁴ Buzi 2007b: 377-392; Buzi 2009a: 88.

⁸⁵ Gasperini 2014, 243-368. Only one example has been found in the South Kom.

⁸⁶ Buzi 2009a: 88. The abandonment of Karanis seems to have been slower. In the run-up to the publication of the results of the excavations

It is much harder to establish when the monastery lost its original purpose and both churches became the site for the activities of which there are obvious traces, such as changes to their structure and layout and the appearance of equipment whose function is not always entirely clear. What is certain, however, is that this could not have been done by Christian communities. On the contrary, when this occurred in Bakchias, there were probably no Christians left, or very few.

The discovery of Islamic pottery that can be dated to the sixth-eighth centuries in the silo and, above all, the Fatimid filter that can be dated to the tenth century, found in the well excavated in 2012, which perfectly matches a similar object displayed in Cairo's Museum of Islamic Art dated to the tenth century, leads us to believe that even the craft workshops that had invaded the monastic complex had begun to gradually wane at that time, probably due to the fact that the canal, the *kome's* main source of water, had shifted further south.

Thus the meagre evidence of the South Kom's continued occupation disappears at a time that it is

carried out by UCLA, in partnership with the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, headed by Willeke Wendrich, see Buzi 2006: 111-133.

difficult to pinpoint, even though we should keep in mind that many objects, particularly amphorae, have been found dating from throughout the seventh and eighth centuries and that there are a number of fragments of Islamic pottery that can be dated to the ninth and tenth centuries, facts that coincide with the papyrological records that attest a fairly lively trade in agricultural produce in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

The absolute lack of literary sources and documents in Coptic as regards the anonymous monastery of Bakchias would suggest that it did not play a decisive role in the theological and dogmatic events that affected the Fayyūm region from the fifth to the seventh centuries, a role which, on the contrary, the monasteries of Dayr al Hammām (or the Monastery of the Virgin), Dayr al-Naqlūn (or of the Archangel Gabriel) and Dayr al-Qalamūn (or the Monastery of St. Samuel) did play.⁸⁷ As we all know, the last two, in particular, were historical and literary strongholds of orthodoxy against the interference of Constantinople, which attempted to impose the Calcedonian creed, even in Egypt.⁸⁸

The only definite *terminus ante quem* for the abandonment of the site, though quite late, is still al-Nabūlsi's account,⁸⁹ who, as governor of the region at the height of the thirteenth century, drafted a list of the churches and monasteries that were still operating at the time, thus updating the brief and incomplete list drafted 50 years earlier by Abu Salih, which never mentions Bakchias. We shouldn't forget that we also owe to al-Nabūlsi the news that the Wardan canal that edged Bakchias had entirely dried up by the thirteenth century.

More recent evidence, which is no less important for that reason and not unlike that of al-Nabūlsi, is provided by the first modern-day Western travellers. Even Pococke,⁹⁰ the only one to mention monastic settlements that could be pinpointed to the northern part of the Fayyūm region – and more specifically Deir Harākat al-Ma', located north of the lake and another small mud-brick complex just south of Dionysias/Qaṣr Qārūn – says nothing of the fate of Bakchias.

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning the Egyptian map drafted by members of the Napoleonic expedition, published in the *Atlas Géographique* in 1826,⁹¹ which clearly shows the site of Bakchias surrounded by a large swathe of desert.

In any case, before the monastic complex was entirely covered over with sand, there must have been a succession of phases when the buildings lost their main features, first with the collapse of the roofs, then the perimeter walls and finally the columns and their trabeation.

It is not as yet possible to be more precise regarding the last days of Bakchias, nor can we know if the village's death was immediately followed by the revival of a small urban centre in the village of Gorein, which in any case represents a further shift of human habitation towards the south, attributable to the continuous and inevitable search for a reliable water supply, which has only been finally assured by recent work on the canal system.

In the meantime, Bakchias underwent a process of desertification that has only shown signs of a dangerous reversal in recent years.

⁸⁷ Buzi 2007c: 83-104.

⁸⁸ It should be kept in mind that the main literary texts in Coptic that originate from the Fayyūm should be dated from the fifth to the seventh-eighth centuries.

⁸⁹ Salmon 1901: 29-77. As regards the presence of Christian communities in the north of the Fayyūm region, see Buzi 2008: 107-112.

⁹⁰ Pococke 1743.

⁹¹ See also Jacotin 1897 (*f.11e 19, Faiōûm*).

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Plate 4. Plan of the Eastern Area of Bakchias.

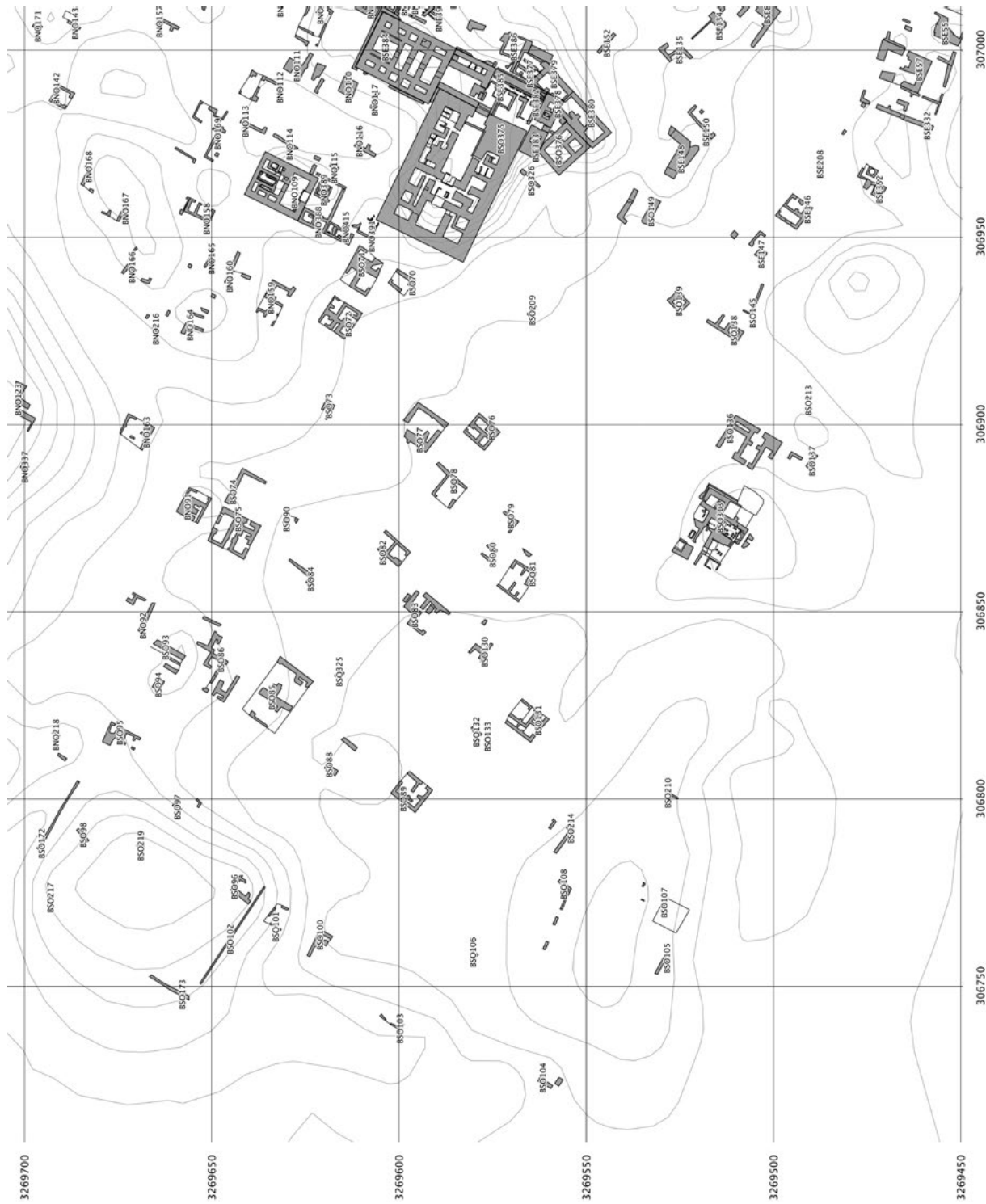


Plate 5. Plan of the Western Area of Bakchias.

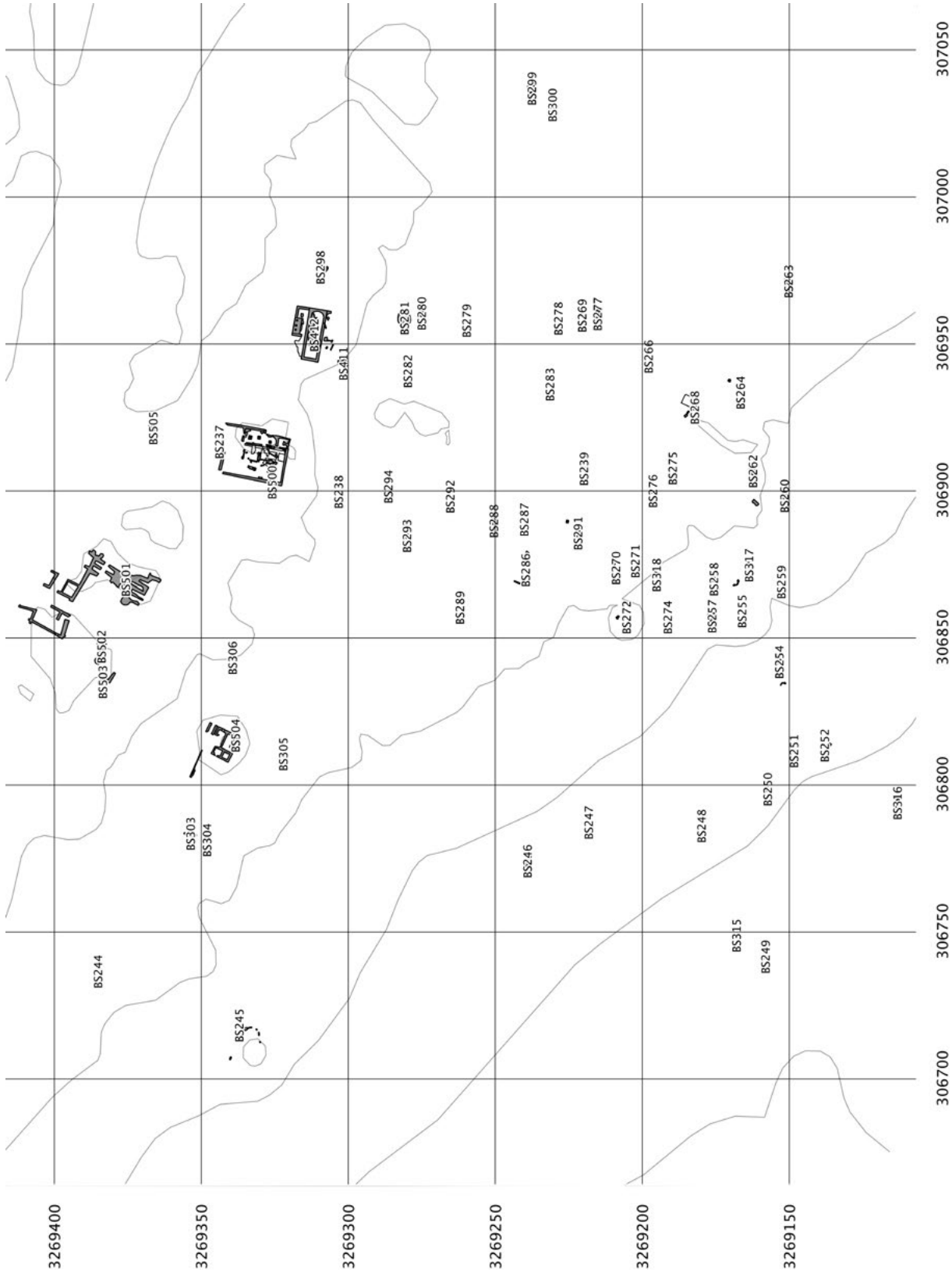


Plate 6. Plan of the Southern Area of Bakchias.

The Urban Landscape of Bakchias: A Town of the Fayyūm from the Ptolemaic-Roman Period to Late Antiquity summarises the results of field research conducted on the archaeological site of Bakchias, located in the north-eastern part of the Fayyūm region. Historical, historico-religious and papyrological studies are also presented. The book provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the rise and fall of the kome of Bakchias. The settlement was a thriving centre from at least the 26th dynasty up until the ninth or tenth centuries CE, although with differing levels of economic prosperity and urban development. Equal weight is given not only to the archaeological and topographical aspects but also to the historical and the religious, whilst never forgetting the relationship between the urban settlement and other villages of the Arsinoite nomos, which is famously a peculiar exception in Egyptian geography.

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ISBN 978-1-78969-567-0



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