research and restoration
season 2011
Report on research and restoration activities
Season 2011

- Research and excavation in al-Qasr.
- Conservation, restoration and reconstruction of private houses in al-Qasr.

In its tenth season, the activities of the Qasr Dakhleh Project (QDP) were to focus especially on further excavations of the rediscovered Roman fortress. Other research-connected activities were also planned and an unfinished part of the restoration of Bayt Abu Yahya was to be completed.

There were no administrative delays from the part of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and the 2011 season started on January 24th. The supervising inspector and the restorer were promptly assigned. In the course of the restoration work it became clear that the permission for the completion of the restoration had a number of clauses originating from the SCA Dakhla office that were impractical, unclear or conflicting with former permissions. This confusing state of affairs coincided with the uncertainties of the initial period of what later became known as the January 25 revolution. Interventions of Mr. Mohammed Abd al-Rasul, General Director for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities (ICA) of the SCA for Middle Egypt, solved most of the problems.

The generous funding of the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo, through the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, is gratefully acknowledged.

As in the previous seasons, the activities of the 2010 season of the QDP were subdivided into the two distinct, but not completely separate parts of research and restoration/reconstruction. Due to the circumstances of the popular uprising only a small part of the intended work was executed.

Research.

The archaeological field activities of the tenth season of the QDP were to focus especially on further archaeological research in and around the castra with the primary
aim to collect data which could shed more light on the continuity of occupation of the castra and the immediate surroundings thereof. The work of the season started with the work of the preparation team on January 31.

However, after one week the preparations were suspended because of the uncertainty of the developments which prevailed in Egypt and especially in Cairo at the end of that week. It became obvious that the two archaeological collaborators of this season would not be able to participate. Maia Matkowski MA could not travel due to a negative French travel advice regarding Egypt and Paul Kucera MA had to return to Australia together with the team from Monash University.

We decided to stay, to wait and see whether a shortened season still could take place. The waiting time was used by starting to re-photograph the documents found in previous seasons. Unlike before, they could now, after conservation, be removed from the glass plates and thus be photographed without any annoying reflection. This makes the photographs fit for publication. Nearly two-thirds of the documents were thus re-photographed. Because of problems that were raised by the General Director for ICA of the SCA in Dakhla, Mr. Ahmad Salim, we were prevented from photographing some of the documents that are stored in the inspectorate building. At first these problems could be solved with the appointment of a second inspector, after an intervention by Mr. Mohammed Abd al-Rasul, General Director for ICA of the SCA in Middle Egypt. Shortly before the completion of the re-photographing of these documents Mr. Ahmad Salim withdrew his permission without a clear statement of reasons.

After the third week of February it became clear that the situation in Egypt still was such that even a shortened season with only one of the collaborators could not be realized, it was decided to cancel the excavations entirely.
**Restoration and reconstruction.**

The 2011 season was to be devoted to the conclusion of the work on conservation, restoration and reconstruction in the Shihabiyya quarter of al-Qasr. A small part of Bayt Abu Yahya which still had to be restored was completed: two rooms and the stairwell.

Plan of the first floor of the restored houses.

View to the east over the restored parts of Bayt Abu Yahya.
Other intended activities, such as necessary maintenance and plastering in some of the already restored buildings could not be executed. Bayt al-Qurashi was used for other purposes, namely as a gallery and therefore the QDP was not allowed to do any work inside the house to repair some of the damage of the occupation by others. Contrary to the practice of the past seasons, we were also not allowed to use the empty rooms of Bayt al-Qurashi as work rooms for the duration of the season. Eventually one of the rooms of Bayt al-Qadi could temporarily be used as a workroom, although at first this was not permitted either.

Difference of opinion on the placement of the lintels of Bayt al-Qurashi was finally solved by the intervention of Mr. Mohammed Abd al-Rasul, General Director ICA of the SCA for Middle Egypt. The space between the copy of the original lintel and the one that mentions the restoration and its date was made larger, so that both are quite clearly separated.

The new placement of the lintels of Bayt al-Qurashi. The QDP is not responsible for the addition of a foreign style element above the lintels.

Concluding remarks.
The 2011 season of the QDP was a difficult one. Although, on the whole, the working conditions in the Dakhla oasis were basically unproblematic during the January 25
revolution, circumstances from outside Dakhla prevented the participation of the QDP’s foreign archaeologists and so caused the cancellation of the planned excavations. As mentioned above, the intended completion of the restoration, on the other hand, was hampered for different reasons. The unwillingness of the General Director of the ICA of the SCA in Dakhla to cooperate with the QDP culminated on the last working day of the season in his refusal for the QDP to use the storage space which was built and payed for by the QDP itself for storing restoration and excavation equipment. Again the problem was only solved after the intervention of the General Director ICA of the SCA for Middle Egypt. On a more felicitous note however, the first volume of the edition of legal documents from al-Qasr, Documents of the town of al-Qasr in the Dakhla Oasis as a source for the history of the Egyptian Oases in the Ottoman period, by Prof. Dr. Rudolph Peters has been published by the Egyptian National Archives.

In the 2011 season, which lasted from 24 January till 4 March, the QDP team consisted only of Mrs. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht and Prof. Dr. Frederik Leemhuis in close co-operation with Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad. Prof. Dr. Rudolf Peters visited the project to complete the manuscript of the edition of legal documents from al-Qasr.

The activities with respect to excavation, restoration and reconstruction were executed with the help of and in close cooperation with the local collaborators of the QDP-team in 2011. These local collaborators amounted to some fifteen workmen from al-Qasr and surroundings. These have worked with the project for many seasons and have become very experienced. Their restoration and reconstruction work was executed under supervision of and in cooperation with the master craftsmen Mr. Ahmad Salih Mohammed and Mr. `Abd-al-Ghaffar Mohammed who both are old associates of the project and whose experience has been crucial, due to their expertise and their ability to share it.

*رودلف بيترس، وثائق مدينة القصر في الواحات الداخلة مصدرًا لتاريخ واحات مصر في العصر العثماني، القاهرة (دار الوثائق القومية) 2011 (سلسلة دراسات وثائقية رقم 1)
As in all previous seasons, the above mentioned very skilful, experienced and indispensable Mr. Rizq Abdalhay Ahmad, director of restoration for Islamic Antiquities of the SCA in Dakhla, was charged with the day-to-day management and coordination of the restoration and reconstruction.

The supervising inspectors of the SCA were Mr Mahmud Muhammad Mas’ud and Ahmad ‘Abdallah Sa’id For their advice and cooperation we are very grateful. The QDP is also grateful for the encouragement and assistance of Mr. Hamdi ‘Uthman, Director for ICA of the SCA for West Dakhla and for the support of Mr. Kamil Bayyumi, Director for ICA of the SCA for East Dakhla. The interest and involvement of the General Director for ICA of the SCA for Dakhla, Mr. Ahmad Salim, must be acknowledged.

The QDP is greatly indebted to Mr. Mohammed Abd al-Rasul, General Director ICA of the SCA for Middle Egypt. His interventions have mostly had a positive effect.

Finally, it is a pleasure to add a special word of thanks to the staff of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo. In the turbulent times experienced by Egypt this spring, we could always turn to them for information, advice and support, even during the closure of the institute. The QDP as well as several other members of the DOP are very grateful to them.

Groningen, 10 May 2011

Fred Leemhuis
Field director QDP