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Armant

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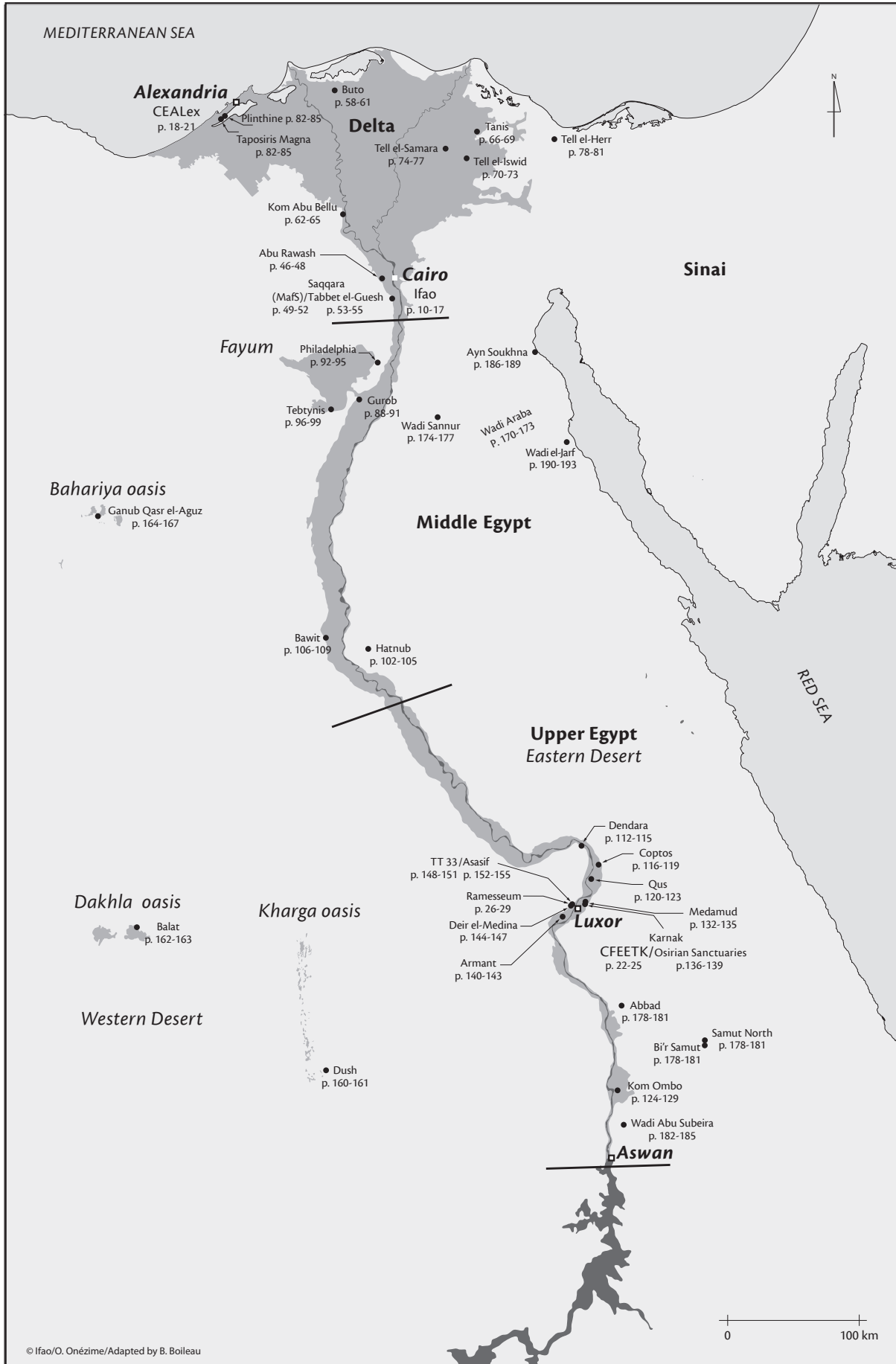
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Armant

The temple of Armant-Hermonthis in Upper Egypt, the ancient Southern Heliopolis, was the most ancient cornerstone of the “Theban Palladium”, a theoretical fortification devised by theologians to protect the City of Amun-Ra. If temples in the city of the god Montu have largely been destroyed, the substantial ruins still provide a diversity of ground-breaking information.



During the years 1930-1940, the first archaeological investigations at Armant were led by Robert Mond and Oliver Humphrys Myers under the auspices of the Egypt Exploration Society. They were conducted both at the Bucheum (the catacombs of sacred bulls) and at the site of the main temple of Montu-Ra. Behind the New Kingdom pylon, they excavated a Coptic village and partially exposed a vast foundation platform of the Ptolemaic temple, the remains which followed the massive removal of the

1. General view of the site of Armant.
© C. Thiers.

2. Façade of the “pronaos” during excavation. © C. Thiers.





3. Foundation layers of the Ptolemaic naos, at the back of the temple. © C. Thiers.

structure's stonework from the 5th century. Work there was conducted intermittently by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) in the 1980s and 1990s, exposing in particular a set of crypts. In 2003 and 2004, under the auspices of the IFAO, the two short seasons led by Christophe Thiers and Youri Volokhine enabled the texts of these crypts, which date to Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos (80-51 BC), to be copied and published. It was only after 2004-2005 that work was undertaken to attempt to understand the scattered remains in the city in their entirety and to propose an architectural, topographic and epigraphic analysis of the ruins of the main temple of the god Montu. At the same time an inventory of blocks scattered over the site and a programme of restoration and conservation was initiated.

Principal results

The most striking feature of the Ptolemaic part of the Armant temple (the naos) is that it reveals the foundational level where subterranean activities took place. These areas (rooms, crypts, a corridor around the holy of the holies and the foundations of now vanished temple rooms) and main walls enable us to gain an idea of the temple's layout. After producing a general topographic plan, an analysis of the foundation platform of the Ptolemaic and Roman structure was then carried out. A long process of removing debris enabled Pierre Zignani to produce the first plan of the temple and an analysis in the framework of the general construction layout of the last great temples of Upper Egypt. The plan, as well as temple dimensions, are astonishingly similar to those at the temple of Dendara.

Excavation of the levels of destruction and removal of stone led also to the discovery of numerous inscribed blocks and fragments of royal and



4. Movement of blocks in the central area of the temple. © C. Thiers.



5. Royal and private statues after restoration. © J. Maucor.

private statuary reused in the foundations. Numerous stones belonging to Middle Kingdom temples (being studied by Lilian Postel) were brought to light. Dating principally to Amenemhat I, they comprise the most important inscribed assemblage with the name of this ruler. Many blocks cast light on the architectural and theological developments at the site at the end of the 17th Dynasty (e.g. a stela with the name Kamose) and during the New Kingdom (being studied by Sébastien Biston-Moulin). These include monuments of Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut (chiselled out), an Annales text, Osirian pillars of Tuthmosis III and Seti II, private statuary from the end of the Amarna period to the beginning of the Ramesside period, and a restoration inscription of the New Kingdom pylon under Ramesses I. Blocks with the names of Roman emperors (Augustus, Nero, Vespasian and Hadrian) have also been uncovered.

Archaeological levels reached at the base of foundation pits relating to the naos and to the “pronaos” revealed the presence of mud-brick structures and dwellings which were mostly damaged during the digging of foundations in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The ceramic assemblages date this occupation to the Old Kingdom (4th-6th Dynasties). At the edge of the temple, Middle Kingdom layers have similarly been located.

Outside the modern extent of the site, work is being conducted at the gateway of Anoninus Pius (“Bab el-Maganin”) and the numerous blocks in its vicinity, and an archival analysis of the mammisi (destroyed in 1861-1862) with the names of Caesarion and Cleopatra VII is being carried out.

Perspectives

The study of a site which survived so long, from the Old Kingdom to the Roman-Byzantine period (nearly three millennia) constitutes an important opportunity for comprehending the topographic, architectural and theological evolution of a major Egyptian temple in the Theban region. The very thought-provoking results reached during the last few years have encouraged us to continue the Armant programme, whose objectives are as follows:

- A better understanding of the history of a major temple in Upper Egypt and its surrounding area will be achieved through excavation. Architectural, epigraphic and ceramic analyses will produce essential data concerning the evolution of the site;
- The epigraphic items already recovered, and those that will undoubtedly be revealed during further excavations, will ensure the production and publication of new hieroglyphic texts which will benefit studies on Theban history and theologies, prosopography etc.;
- The project relating to the site of Armant is undoubtedly set within a geographical context, at a local but also regional level, as it is linked with neighbouring sites in the Theban region, in particular with Tod, Karnak and Medamud, three other major sites dedicated to the god Montu-Ra;
- Finally, the epigraphic and archaeological research is closely connected to the preservation and enhancement of the site. The programme of restoration of scattered blocks and structures *in situ* will continue, focusing on specific projects relating to the reconstruction of sets of blocks.

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