

Tebtynis IV: Les Habitations à l'est du temple de Soknebtynis

By Gisèle Hadji-Minaglou (Fouilles Franco-Italiennes 4). Pp. xvi + 250, b&w figs. 219, color figs. 15. Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 2007. €49. ISBN 978-2-7247-0468-6 (paper).

This volume is the fourth of a series, published by the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO), on excavations carried out by a French-Italian mission at Kôm Umm el-Breigât (ancient Tebtynis), a settlement located along the southern edge of the Fayyum. Directed by Claudio Gallazzi of the University of Milan and, in the field, by Gisèle Hadji-Minaglou of the IFAO, the excavation has largely focused, since its beginnings in October 1988, on the area of the Temple of Soknebtynis, although other sectors of the kôm were investigated as well.

The new publication is a report of the excavations, carried out from 1989 to 1992, of an area located to the east of the temenos surrounding the Temple of Soknebtynis. This sector, which covers an area of approximately 1,250 m², is also defined to the north by an east-west oriented street, which was identified through papyrological evidence as the dromos of Tefresudj(ty?). The excavations revealed the significant remains of 18 houses built on different levels and datable, thanks to the analysis of their stratigraphy, to a chronological frame spanning from Ptolemaic to Roman times. More specifically, four houses were dated to the third century B.C.E., four to the second century B.C.E., and four to the first century B.C.E. Six houses were also excavated that are datable to the second century C.E.

Besides Tebtynis, the other—comparatively few—examples of Graeco-Roman houses that are known to us in Egypt come, in large part, from the Fayyum. Excavated by American and European missions since the first half of the 20th century (and partly still under investigation), sites such as Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Bakchias provide valuable archeological evidence on domestic architecture for the period under consideration. The available documen-

tation is not particularly abundant, but it has increased in recent years, thanks to the reports published by institutions such as the IFAO.

Hadji-Minaglou's work is a welcome addition and a valuable contribution to the study of domestic architecture in the Fayyum—and more broadly, in Egypt—in Graeco-Roman times (a forthcoming volume by the same author on other houses of Tebtynis will surely provide further information on this topic).

Content is structured into eight chapters. The first seven present and discuss the archaeological evidence collected for each house, while the eighth section consists of an overall analysis of the area; it brings forth main conclusions on the site's architectural development. The chapters are preceded by a preface by Gallazzi and Laure Pantalacci, director of the IFAO. Following the preface are a list of abbreviations of the main reference works, cited throughout the book, and an introduction contextualizing the author's work on the houses under consideration. A rich body of plans and sections accompany each relevant chapter, while all photographs (mostly in black-and-white) are grouped at the end of the volume. There is no final bibliography, but full references can be found within the footnotes.

Chapters 1–7 share a similar structure, with paragraphs to illustrate the layout and basic features of one or more buildings within each area. All rooms are analyzed according to their measurements, construction material/s, state of preservation, and relation to the other rooms of each building. Following is the analysis of excavated stratigraphical units (when still in situ), accompanied by sections helping the reader follow the discussion with relative ease, and the establishment of an absolute chronology, based largely on numismatic and ceramic

evidence. An in-depth study of the small finds, especially coins and pottery, in relation to the units in which they were found, would further enrich the discussion in this volume. All 18 houses are additionally discussed in chapter 8, the goal of which is to establish the process of urban development within the area under consideration. Two figures effectively summarize the conclusions reached by the author in her investigation of the chronology of these buildings (figs. 78, 79). Indeed, the different plans show how the topography of the area changed from the beginning of the third century B.C.E. to the end of the second century C.E., at times involving the reuse of earlier buildings but also including new constructions. Hadji-Minaglou analyzes this long and elaborate process, which substantially affected the urban landscape in this sector of Tebtynis. The first houses were built from the beginning of the third century B.C.E. in a fairly deserted area, and they were relatively distant from one another, with large spaces in between left as empty areas or used as passageways. In the following centuries—especially in Roman times—new and more numerous houses were built partly on virgin land and partly above older structures, creating a significantly more compact layout, with blocks separated by narrow passageways or even houses built against one another. In the Roman period, a *πύργος*, a considerably larger and more massive construction than the nearby houses, was added at the southeast end of the area, undoubtedly becoming one of the most prominent features of the urban environment (174). Furthermore, chapter 8 offers a detailed discussion of the plans of all houses, grouped together according to their construction periods. The differences and similarities of each group are highlighted, revealing their distinctive features. The analysis also includes, in several instances, comparative evidence from other Fayyumic sites, such as Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Bakchias, which provide datable examples from the Graeco-Roman period.

Significant architectural components, common to some or all houses under consideration, are also isolated and discussed; among them are main entrances, vestibules, staircases, courtyards, and cellars. Analysis reveals how the existence (or absence) and location of components within the layout of each building (varying according to the construction period) may have affected patterns of movement and the use of available space. Among the other features most commonly associated with the houses of Tebtynis, particularly in the court-

yards to the rear or—in a few cases—in front of the buildings, are ovens. They are mentioned in this volume, within the discussion of the overall archaeological evidence, and photographs are also available at the end of the book. The basic information provided here will be of certain value to anyone interested in identifying their typology, following the seminal work carried out by Yeivin (“Miscellanea Archaeologica. I, Ovens and Baking in Roman Egypt,” *ASAE* 34 [1934] 114–21) and the more recent classification, established by Depraetere (“A Comparative Study on the Construction and Use of the Domestic Bread Oven in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman and Late Antique/Early Byzantine Period,” *MDIK* 58 [2002] 119–56) of ovens in Graeco-Roman Egypt.

An attempt is made to establish the function of the excavated rooms, largely on the basis of their locations within each house (i.e., through the study of their spatial arrangement), their architectural features (such as storage bins or platforms), and the finds collected during their investigation. However, as the author points out, much caution is needed in assigning specific functions to certain rooms, as these might have once been—as was the case for large vestibules—multifunctional.

Hadji-Minaglou’s work is significant because it allows us to follow the development, within a relatively large area, of a residential quarter over a long period (several centuries) before its abandonment at the beginning of the third century C.E. This case study provides valuable information on how domestic architecture, its language and forms, and, more generally, the use of space changed over time, without major interruptions, in the context of an Egyptian settlement in the Graeco-Roman period.

The accuracy of the content and the overall quality of this work are unquestionably high, in line with the well-known standards of IFAO’s publications. The volume will be of certain interest to all scholars—particularly archaeologists and architectural historians—involved in the study of residential architecture in Egypt and, more broadly, throughout the Mediterranean region in classical antiquity. A wider, interested audience will also find the volume an accessible and fruitful read.

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