

ALEXANDRIA

KOM EL-DIKKA PRESERVATION WORK 1995-1996

Wojciech Kołątaj

Between 15 October 1995 and 30 May 1996, the joint Polish-Egyptian Mission continued preservation of monuments excavated at the Kom el-Dikka site, following guidelines set down in the Programme approved by the SCA High Committee on 25 May 1995. In accordance with these guidelines, the mission focused its work not only on regular conservation and restoration of the ancient architecture, but also on developing the site in order to open it to the public by the end of 1997.¹

On the occasion of the visit of the President of France in spring 1996, the central part of the site was cleared and a display of architectural elements and sculpture raised from the sea by the French Mission was arranged by the Graeco-Roman Museum in the southwestern part of the area. Meanwhile, some 1,500 m³ of earth and modern debris from the former military area was removed, accounting, however, only for some 10% of all the earthwork envisaged in this area by the decision of the High Committee as a prerequisite for future restoration of the Theatre Portico. Conservation activities covered the following areas:

THEATER

Some of the seriously deteriorated seats were removed (seven blocks), and a large section of the uppermost row of seats

¹ The Mission comprised: Dr. eng. Wojciech Kołątaj, director; Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologist; Dr. Janusz Smaza, sculptor-conservator; eng. Wiesław Kuczewski, conservator. The Egyptian side was represented by SCA inspectors of antiquities: Messrs Ahmed Mousa, Al'a Ed-Din Mahrous, Ashraf Abd El-Raouf Ragab, and Mrs Mona Said.

(northern part of the auditorium) was replaced with new ones made in Helwan limestone (12 seats). According to observations made over an extended period of time, this kind of stone is best suited to the climatic conditions in Alexandria. It is a cohesive limestone, containing relatively small amounts of loam, usually the principal cause of rapid stone deterioration in a humid climate.

A base of Helwan limestone was prepared and the anastylosis of two big pieces of columns in the Portico was completed. Two separate sections of one of these columns were assembled using an epoxy-based putty with granite filler (crystalline fraction), since the losses in joint surfaces made proper, stable connections impossible. The whole operation was carried out manually following a method described in previous reports.

BATHS

The full reconstruction of the third buttress of the southern outer wall of the baths was carried out. A fragment of ancient wall previously dismantled for safety reasons was reassembled in its original position. Large portions of the foundations (removed in the Middle Ages) as well as walls of the vaulted entrance to the underground service area were reconstructed. The missing fragment of the vault will be restored in the next season in preparation for arranging a tourist walkway leading to the underground area from a lower level in the future.

A fragment of the foundations of the main gate opening off the southern passage was reconstructed, thus protecting the remains of the gate and the adjacent vaults of the underground service area.

A single big piece of the column flanking the eastern entrance of the southern passage was re-erected. The column was

mounted on a base that had been prepared in the last season.

Losses in the small column decorating the latrine were filled with artificial stone. The column itself will be re-erected in the coming season.

CISTERNS

The consolidation of the southern extremity of the eastern facade was completed. This work included restoration of some 22 m² of the wall facing.

Consolidation and restoration of the eastern face of the corridor wall was initiated. Some 50 m² of the facing was restored. This work will be continued in the coming season, following removal of fill from the corridor (c. 40 m³) and the securing of leaning wall remains.

A huge wall running along street R4 was partially restored. A section of wall facing and wall coping comprised between buttresses nos. 2 and 3 was reconstructed, while another section (between buttresses 3 and 4) was cleared and prepared for restoration.

SECTOR F

Protection and safeguarding (insulation and drainage) of vaults in the Early Roman villa was completed. A seriously endangered section of the outer wall next to the entrance was restored. This overhanging fragment of the structure included a ventilation shaft leading to the underground chambers of the villa. An overhanging section of the outer wall of the baths was secured with steel ropes. Conservation work in this area will be carried out in the next season.

LANDSCAPING AND DEVELOPING WORK

Some 40 m of the revetment wall along the southern facade of the cistern was built. This wall supports the escarpment and encases the staircase leading from the cisterns to the Roman street

R4. The staircase is to be constructed during the next season and the material (basalt slabs) has already been assembled at the site.

The stores housing the finds from the excavations have been relocated. New stores were arranged in adapted garages in the former military area.

The problem of rebuilding the perimeter wall bordering the site on the south (Fire Brigade) and east (Saphia Zaghloul street) remains unresolved.

In view of planned performances to be held in the theatre, both the design of the stairs at the southern end of the Theater Portico and the design of the new auditorium must be thoroughly reconsidered and reassessed.