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PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE THIRTEENTH EXCAVATION SEASON OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO WAD BEN NAGA

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ABSTRACT: The thirteenth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga focused on archaeological exploration of the Typhonium (WBN 200) and the nearby cemetery WBN C200, as well as on conservation of structures located in Central Wad Ben Naga.

KEY WORDS: Nubia – Meroe – Wad Ben Naga – Meroitic culture – Meroitic architecture

The thirteenth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 1 November and 4 December 2016. Archaeological works were launched on 5 November 2016 and concluded on 30 November 2016. The season was carried out under the guidelines of archaeological excavations as defined by the Ordinance for the Protection of Antiquities of 1999 of the Republic of the Sudan.

The mission was led by Pavel Onderka (director), Vlastimil Vrtal (archaeologist), Alexander Gatzsche (conservator), and Juweriya Osman Mohamed Zain Babaker (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). It further consisted of Jiří Honzl (archaeologist), Gabriela Jungová (anthropologist), Irene Pamer (conservator and archaeologist) and Eric Spindler (archaeologist).

The works of the thirteenth season focused on [1] excavations of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200), i.e. the temple of Mut (squares T37, T38, T39, T41, T42); [2] excavations of the tumulus WBN C204 and its environs, and [3] the conservation of the Small and Eastern Temples (WBN 400 and 500). As the excavations of T37 were not completed during the thirteenth excavation season, the archaeological situation in the trench is going to be described as a following preliminary report.

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Typhonium and Kom H

The so-called Typhonium [Pl. 1] was a temple (or more precisely a temple complex) located in the western part of Central Wad Ben Naga. It was recently identified as a sanctuary of the goddess Mut (cf. Onderka – Vrtal *et al.* 2014: 164–167). Its architects were inspired by the hemispeos dedicated to Mut by Taharqo built at the foot of Jebel Barkal (B 300; Onderka 2015). The Typhonium began to be explored during the third excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga in 2011. The present season's works focused on several peripheries of the temple complex and the excavations within the so-called open courtyard (possibly a temple garden; WBN 203).

NOTE: Due to the complex archaeological situation uncovered in the area which made it impossible to treat the structures WBN 200, WBN 700 and WBN 800 separately, the numbering system for strata was adjusted during the season; re-numbering the strata from trenches T28 and T29 excavated in 2015 as follows: FEA 102 was substituted by FEA 1102, etc.

Trench T38

In the area between the Typhonium and kom H (cf. Cailliaud 1826), trench T38 (10 x 5 metres; [Pl. 1]) was set with the aim of establishing the relation between the proper temple and structures located immediately to the west of it, the sections of which were explored during previous seasons (cf. Onderka *et al.* 2016; Onderka – Vrtal 2016). A complex archaeological situation was uncovered in trench T38, with several phases of building activity and subsequent destruction, as well as traces of associated human activities [Pl. 2].

The earliest building phase is represented by a system of walls of a monumental building with a regular plan built directly on levelled bedrock [Fig. 1b, FEAs 441, 442, and 436]. Based on the materials used, i.e. the use of mudbricks with a high proportion of sand content, and on constructional features, namely the employment of foundation layer of bricks laid *ala seif*; a direct relation of these walls to structure WBN 700 could be established. Structure WBN 700 had been previously detected at several areas under the foundations of the Typhonium and identified also with the first phase of the building activity on kom H (Onderka *et al.* 2016: 106). At a later time, the structure was levelled almost to its foundations in trench T38; this phenomenon applies to excavated remains of the structure in the whole of the area. Remains of the original fill between the walls which are considered to function as a floor elevation (Onderka *et al.* 2016: 106; Onderka – Vrtal 2016: 110), were partly preserved [cf. Fig. 1a, FEA 438, and 462] and provided archaeological material well-comparable to that from other parts of WBN 700. Most notably; the pottery assemblage retrieved from the fill contained examples of *foncé sur claire* ware and conical vessels with a ring base (cf. Onderka *et al.* 2016: Fig. 2, SM15/276), datable to the 1st century BCE.

Following the levelling of structure WBN 700, a mudbrick wall with north-south orientation was built over its remains in trench T38 [Fig. 1c, FEAs 434 and 435]. Whitewashed mud plaster was partially preserved on its eastern face. Later still, this wall was overbuilt by a monumental structure with a fired brick casing, the south-eastern corner of which is preserved in the north-western part of the trench [Fig. 1c, FEA 402]. The building might be identical with phase II/III of the building activity on kom H, i.e. building WBN 800 (cf. Onderka *et al.* 2016: Fig. 1b), although only future research might validate this assumption.

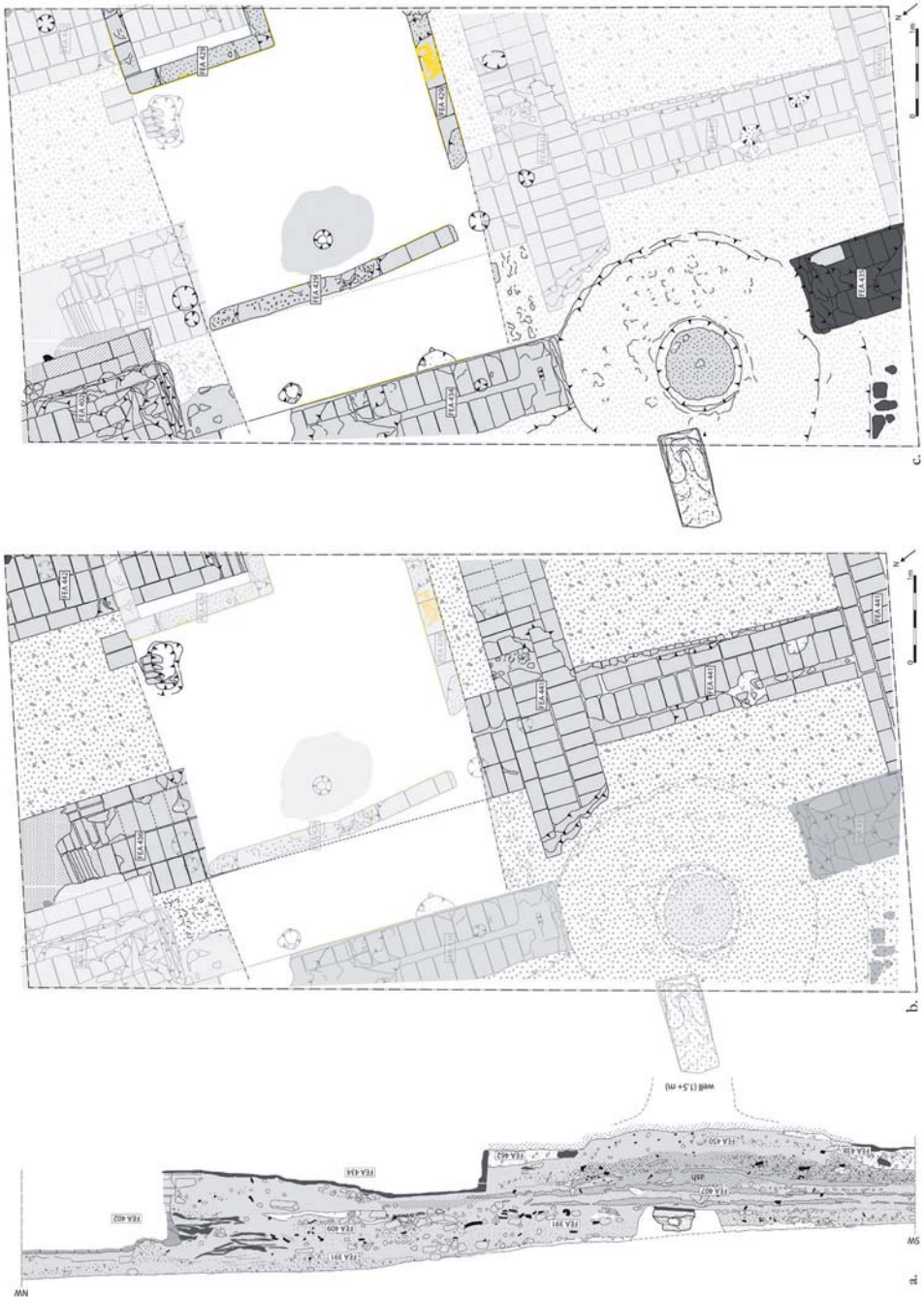


Fig. 1 Top plan of trench T38 at the completion of excavations. a. the section west; b. structure WBN 700; c. later phases of building activity (Drawing: Vlastimil Vrtal).

In the space between the latter building (WBN 800?) and the Typhonium, construction of which perhaps falls in the same period of building activity in the area, a solid trampled floor formed on the levelled remains of structure WBN 700. Over the floor, covered by a thin layer of coarse sand used for levelling, thin mudbrick walls were built at some

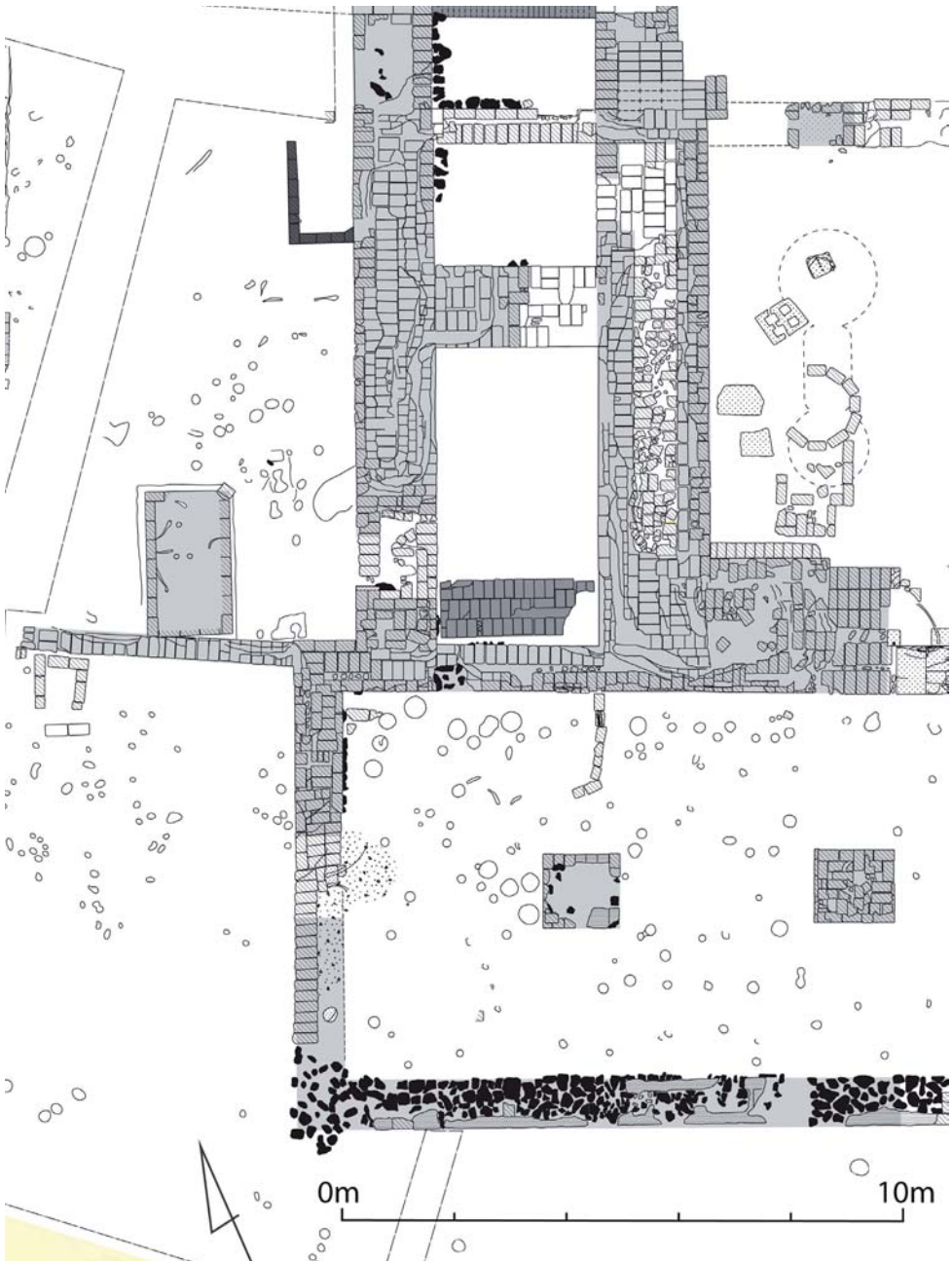


Fig. 2 Top plan of the southwestern part of the Typhonium showing area covered by trenches T39 and T41 (Drawing: Eric Spindler, Vlastimil Vrtal).

point of time, leaning against what was presumably the corner of the monumental building and the outer main wall of the Typhonium [Fig. 1c, FEA 429]. The walls were covered with mud plaster and whitewashed. In addition to this, some whitewashed plaster also covered the upper side of the walls that were generally preserved only to the height of one course of bricks; thus indicating the position of openings. The thin walls might have been further supplemented by a lightweight construction, evidenced by postholes scattered over the area. However, these might as well pertain to the scaffolding used during the construction of the Typhonium. We might speculate that the walls were used as a habitation or a shelter for some economic activity.

At some point of time, the structure WBN 700 and the later wall with north-south orientation were cut by a deep pit dug well into the bedrock, which perhaps served as a well or a tree pit? The actual depth of the pit could not be estimated, as its excavation had to be suspended at the depth of 1.5 m below the surface of the bedrock for safety reasons. The well became clogged with mud and after its operation was ceased, it served as a refuse pit. Particularly in its upper part [Fig. 1a, FEA 450], a large number of bovine bones were found, as well as numerous potsherds, including fragments of Meroitic fineware, the so-called candlesticks and an Aswan amphora (most probably belonging to the type Hofmann 18; cf. Hofmann 1994), and other objects; such as an iron nail (SM16/362), a faience tile (SM16/363), a faience vessel (SM16/358) and a cavetto cornice brick. The area was clearly used as a refuse pit for a considerable period of time, as is evidenced by thick deposits of ash [Fig. 1a, FEA 407] that formed previously to the final destruction of the monumental building in the north-west (WBN 800?). Similarly to the well, many potsherds were retrieved from the ash fill, including numerous pieces of stamped and painted Meroitic fineware, fragments of the Aswan amphora, as well as small finds such as fragments of a faience bowl (SM16/297), an *ankh*-shaped libation basin and another iron nail (SM 16/314). A badly preserved sandstone gargoyle (block S908) originating in the Typhonium was later deposited just above the refuse pit [Pl. 3]. The refuse area was later covered by debris from surrounding structures, mainly from the monumental building in the north-west [Fig. 1a, FEAs 409 and 391]. Small finds such as a drop-shaped white stone pendant (F16/007), a faience bead (SM16/271), fragment of a copper plate (SM16/270) and a spindle whorl (SM16/224) from the uppermost strata further illustrate activities that took place in this area in these ancient times.

Another large pit was clearly dug in a more modern time, in the south-eastern part of the trench. Debris from the digging consisting mainly of bedrock particles was deposited over the Meroitic remains. The pit also covered large areas of the surrounding trenches: T6, T9 and T37 and was later filled with a thick layer of wind-blown sand.

Trenches T39 & T41

Trench T39 covered an area that had been partly excavated in the past. Cleaning of the excavated parts was connected with the dismantling of the baulks. The trench covered six rooms (partly or entirely) in the middle-west section of the temple [Pl. 1]. The remaining four rooms formed a separate unit within the temple's structure. The unit consisted of a small open court (WBN 209) presumably with no roofing (as indicated by the exterior plaster and fired bricks used to cover its walls), a porch and a chamber (WBN 213). The fourth room was a narrow stairwell (WBN 210) leading to the temple's roof. The stairwell was identified within the massive dividing wall between

the open courtyard (WBN 203) and the system of rooms. The complex was entered either from the ambulatory WBN 205, or from outside of the temple through a doorway set into the west wall [Fig. 2].

Trench T 41 covered the western part of the extensive transverse room (WBN 204) which is the first preserved room from the entrance of the temple. Originally four pillars supported the roof of the room. However, we may only speculate if these pillars also bore depictions of the god Bes on their sides. Numerous late Meroitic storage jars were found inserted to the floor around the bases of the pillars [Fig. 3]. These were clearly re-used for cooking purposes in the late history of the temple's occupation. Economic activity in the area is further evidenced by the discovery of several quernstones. Further small finds include a fragment of a faience clasp (F16/008), copper alloy nails (SM16/365 and 383), fragments of faience vessels (SM16/298, 359, 381, 382 and 384), a faience bead (SM16/299), and a fragment of unguentarium (SM16/364). The front wall of the room is preserved only in its foundations.

Trench T42

Another trench was opened within the previously excavated open courtyard of the Typhonium (WBN 204). The aim of the excavations in the specified area was to clarify the nature of the circular structures made of fired bricks and excavated in the course of previous seasons (Onderka – Vrtal *et al.* 2013: Pl. 1). Originally it was believed that a pair of trees was planted in the open courtyard and that the structures in question served as tree protectors; the parallels to which may be found in the modern- as well as ancient- garden architecture in various parts of the Sudan. The archaeological situation documented in the previous seasons appeared to reflect a later archaeological phase in the temple's development. The preserved courses of the assumed tree protector in the

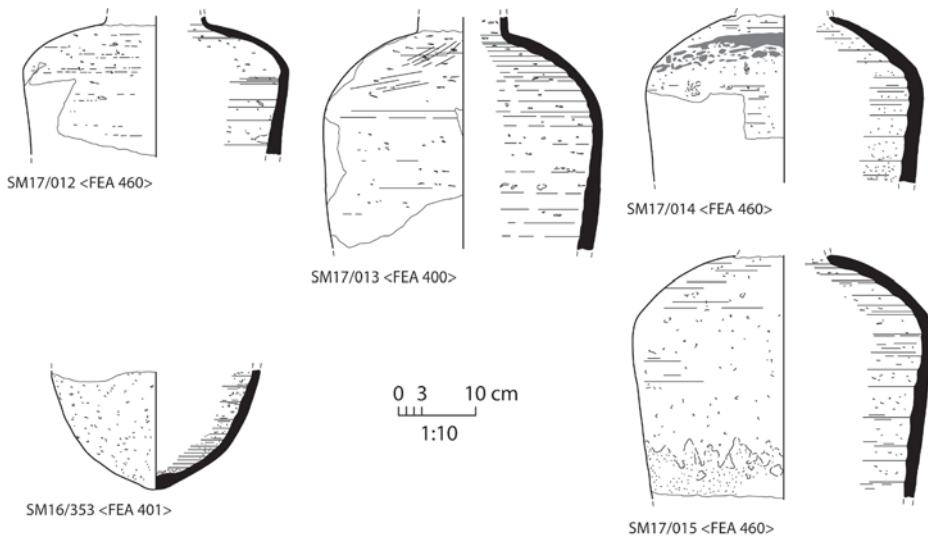


Fig. 3 Late Meroitic storage jars re-used for cooking purposes and found embedded in the floor in room WBN 204 (Drawing: Vlastimil Vrtal, Jiří Honzl).

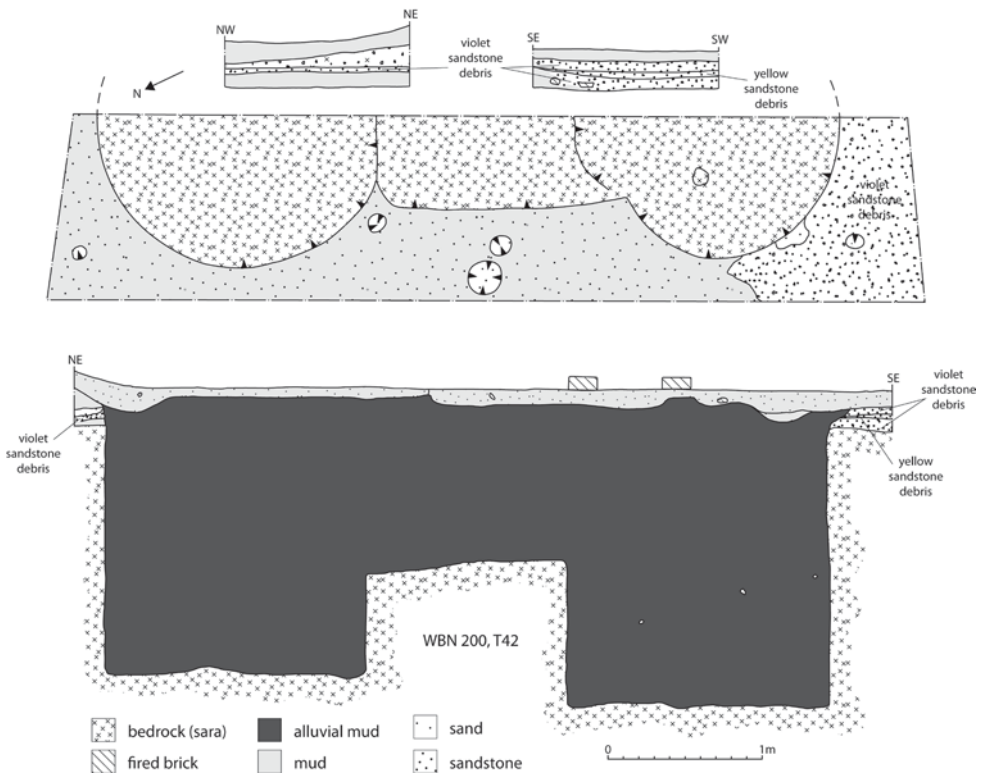


Fig. 4 Trench T42 showing part of the eastern pair of tree pits and section through the pit.

eastern half of the open courtyard were taken apart so that the excavations could approach earlier strata. A pair of tree pits set into the original floor of the open courtyard was identified and excavated (however; only the eastern pair was selected for trial excavation). The pits were 1.6–1.8 m in diameter and their depths almost 2.0 m [Fig. 4; Pl. 4]. Each pair of pits was connected by a trench approximately reaching a depth of 1.0 m below the level of the present-day surface. Their upper parts were hollowed in alluvial deposits, while their lower parts were cut into the bedrock. In their sizes and shapes, they resembled the tree pits discovered in the enclosure MS 117 at Musawwarat es-Sufra (Wolf 2009; Wenig – Wolf 1998a; Wenig – Wolf 1998b; Wenig – Wolf 1999). No floral remains or any significant anthropogenic material were detected in the soil fill of the pits. In fact, the open courtyard possibly served as a temple garden. Its closest parallel was the garden in the above-mentioned enclosure MS 117 at Musawwarat es-Sufra.

Cemetery C200 (Trench T40)

During the season, the excavation of the cemetery WBN C200 continued. The largest tumulus, WBN C204, was excavated. Its northeast quarter was taken apart as a trial dig. The size of the tumulus was set by a ring of large local stones and the superstructure mainly consisted of fragments of fired bricks. Even though the quarter was excavated to the bedrock, the shaft leading to the burial chamber which was anticipated in this section of the tumulus, was not reached.

Conservation

During the present excavation season, the conservation focused primarily on the Eastern Temple (WBN 500), the Small Temple (WBN 400) and Typhonium (WBN 200), and on preventive treatment of small finds. All the buildings are gradually being prepared to be presented to the visitors of the site.

The uncovered mud- and fired brick walls were stabilized against the annual heavy rains with a combined reversible cap of border layering geo-textiles, bricks and lime mortar. After the Small Temple (WBN 400) was consolidated in the same way in the 2016 Spring Season, some minor adjustments were carried out. The lime caps got a separate lime slip applied to close minor cracks in the surface and as a result this formed a solid layer on top of the mortar against the rain. Lost but reconstructable areas of the temple structure were remodeled with broken bricks to make it accessible for the public.

Due to the difficulty of damp soil in the western part of the site the uncovered walls of the Typhonium (WBN 200) were covered with bricks and refilled with soil. Preserved architectural elements like plastered areas on walls were first covered with geo-textile and encapsulated with bricks and soil.

One quarter of the structure (in the north-east) of the excavated tumulus WBN C204 was refilled with soil and covered with bricks to reform the optical view of the tumulus.

Conclusion

Archaeological works carried out during the thirteenth excavation season increased the understanding of the spatial and chronological relationship between the Typhonium and structures neighbouring the temple to the west. Significant traces of late economic activity were noted in this area. In the Typhonium; its original architectural form including two staircases leading both to the roof of the building and flanking the open courtyard was established. In the courtyard, new evidence was recorded on the adjustments of the plan in the course of the primary occupation of the temple, namely of the position and number of tree pits present.

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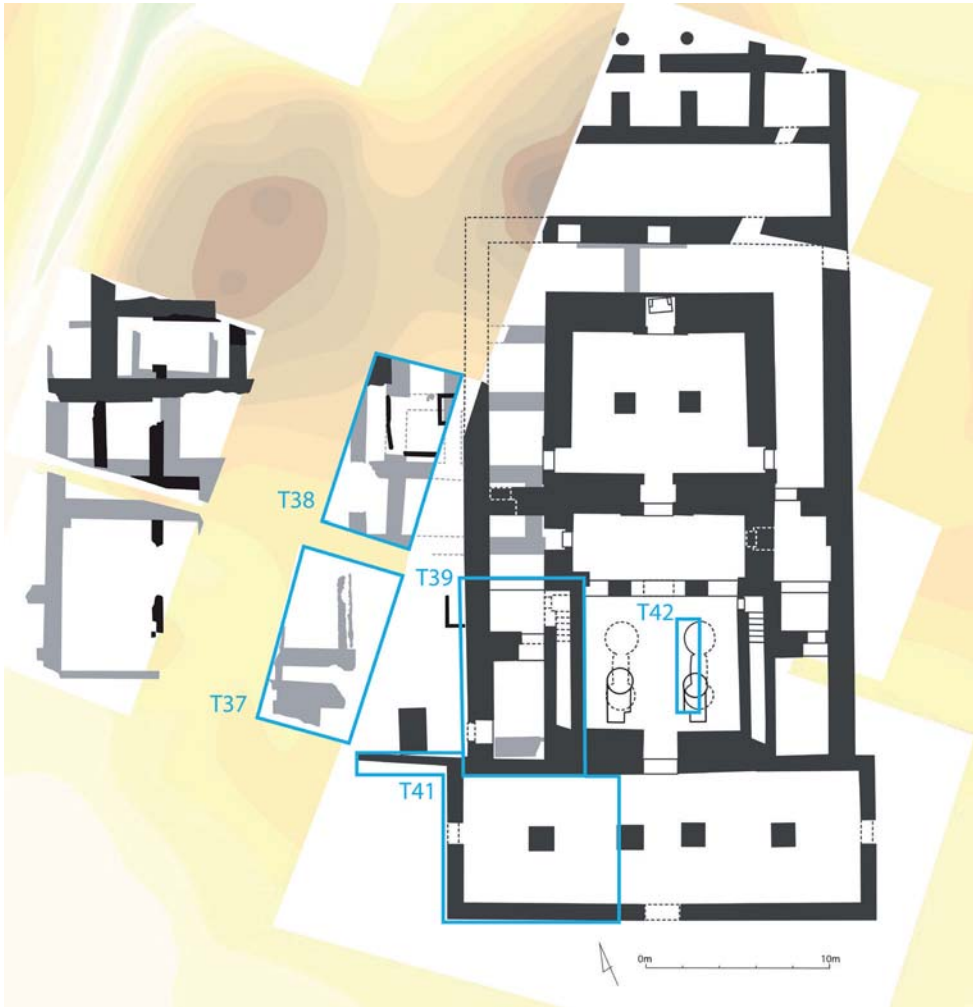
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Pl. 1 Plan of the Typhonium showing the position of trenches T37, T38, T39, T41 and T42 (Drawing: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 2 The trench T38 at the completion of the excavations; view from the north
(Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 3 The remains of a sandstone gargoyle from the refuse area to the west of the Typhonium
(Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 4 The eastern pair of tree pits; trench T42 (Photo: Alexander Gatzsche).