

THE EXPLORATION OF TELL BELIM, 1999-2002

By JEFFREY SPENCER

The site of Tell Belim in the northern part of Sharqiya Governorate was one of the less familiar Lower Egyptian sites to have been subject to investigation by the Society's Delta Survey. This article describes the EES survey of the site, carried out in September 2000, and the subsequent excavation of the temple area by the British Museum in the spring of 2002. Although almost completely destroyed, a temple of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty has been identified, within an enclosure of mud brick.

RECENT investigation of the town site at Tell Belim¹ in Sharqiya Governorate has been an example of prompt response to an urgent case of rescue archaeology. This has been achieved through the combined efforts of the Egypt Exploration Society's Delta Survey and the ongoing field excavations in Lower Egypt of the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, The British Museum. The site, remote and little-known in a region of former marshland on the southern fringes of Lake Menzala, was visited by Patricia and Jeffrey Spencer in December 1999 as part of the Society's programme of site inspections for the Delta Survey.² It was found to lie in the middle of a zone of modern land reclamation, where the marshland over a vast area was being converted into lagoons intended to serve as fish-farms. The edges of the ancient site have been cut by earth-moving machinery during these operations, a practice which had only recently been stopped by the Supreme Council for Antiquities. The danger to the site was clear, as was the fact that the most low-lying area at greatest risk seemed to contain a pharaonic temple site at the western side of the mound. An additional visit in April 2000 confirmed the identification of the temple area and in September of the same year, the Society sent an expedition to map the site as part of the Delta Survey (see fig. 1). This project, described briefly in a previous issue of the *Journal*,³ was directed by Penelope Wilson, assisted by the writer and Inspector Ismail Abdel Raziq. The information gained through this work was then used as a basis for excavations in the temple area, carried out by the writer and Patricia Spencer in the Spring of 2002 under the auspices of the British Museum. For assistance in carrying out this excavation thanks are due to Gaballa Ali Gaballa, former Secretary-General of the SCA, Mohamed Abdel Maksud, Director of the Delta, Ibrahim Soliman, Director of Sharqiya and Ahmed El-Said, Inspector with the excavation.

¹ For previous literature on the site, see G. Daressy, 'Les Branches du Nil sous la XVIIIe dynastie', in *Bulletin de la Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte* 16 (1929), 293–329; F. Gomaa, 'Herakleopolis Parva', *LÄ*, 2, 1127–8; A.L. Fontaine, 'La localisation d'Heracleopolis Parva et les canaux péluviaques de nord de l'isthme de Suez', *Bulletin de la Société d'Études Historiques et Géographiques de l'isthme de Suez* 2 (1948): 55–79; S. Timm, *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients. Das christlicher-Koptischer Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, Teil 6 (Wiesbaden, 1992), 2980–5.

² [A.] J. and P. Spencer, 'The EES Delta Survey', *EA* 16 (Spring 2000), 25–7.

³ [A.] J. Spencer, *JEA* 87 (2000), 9–11. The map and some colour photographs of the work at Tell Belim will be published in due course on the Internet through the websites of the Society and the British Museum.

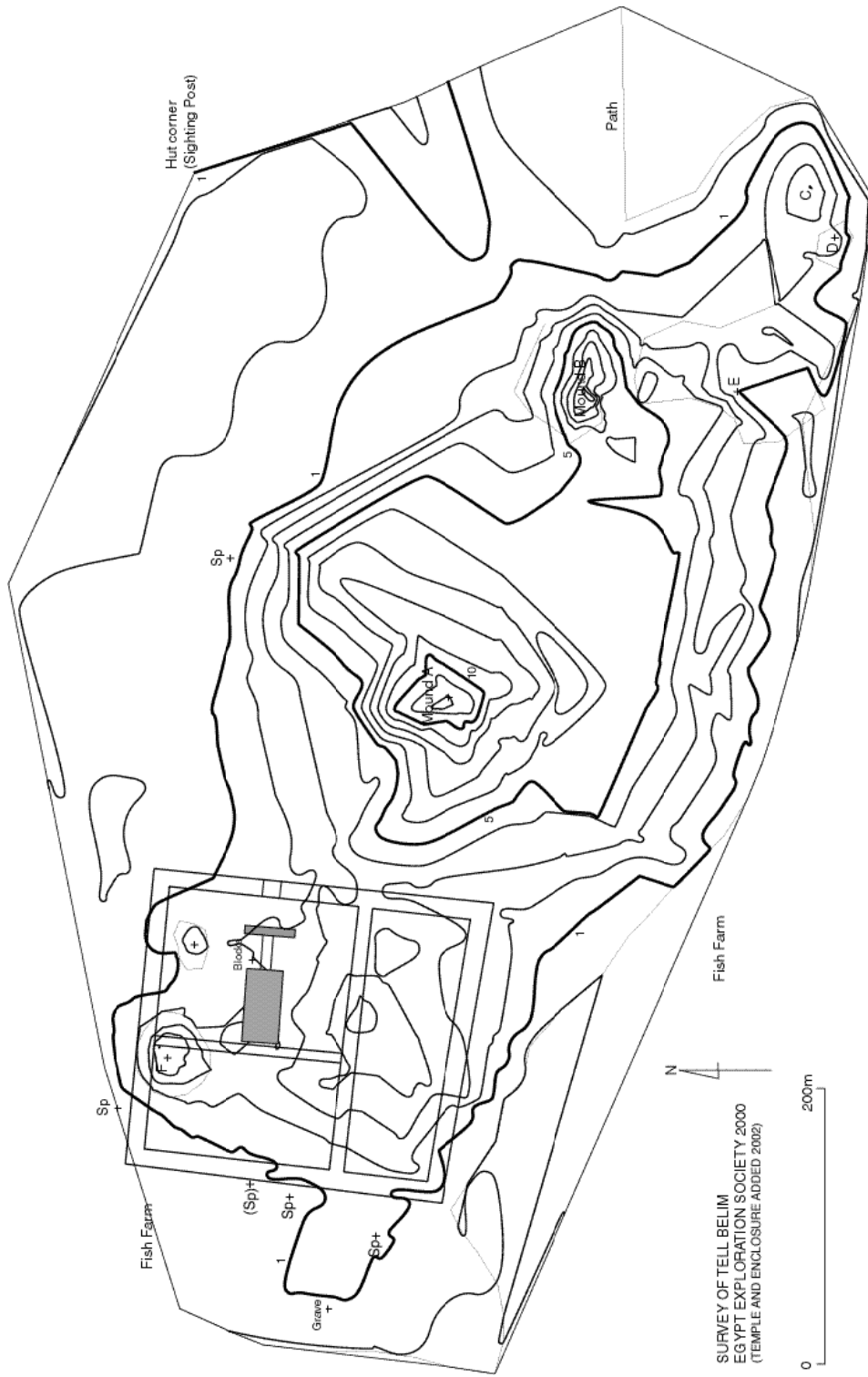


FIG. 1. Map of Tell Belim showing the position of the temple enclosure.

I would also like to thank the Director of the SCA Centre at Qantara East, Said es-Sawi, and the Chief Inspector for North Sinai, Mohammed Kamal, for permitting the storage of expedition equipment at the Centre.

The site

Details of the location of the site and its probable identification with the ancient Herakleopolis Parva have been given in the brief report cited above (see n. 3), together with a description of the some of the main features of the mound and the work achieved by the survey of September 2000. The production of the first surveyed map of Tell Belim has been possible thanks to the skill of Penelope Wilson in the use of Electronic Distance Measurement and computer mapping software. The present overall size of the mound has been confirmed by the survey to be 1000 metres from east to west and 569 metres from north to south, but it was certainly once larger. The main areas of attrition seem to have been at the west and north-west, where low-lying parts have been taken under cultivation. This has resulted in the loss of the north-west corner of the temple enclosure, which is shown reconstructed on figures 1 and 3. The profile of the mound is generally long and low with gradual slopes, but there are two main high areas (Mounds A and B on the map) which rise to heights above sea level of 12 and 9.3 metres respectively. All heights are relative to a datum point at the west corner of a modern hut on the track which leads to the eastern edge of the site. This point approximates closely to 1 m ASL. The points marked 'Sp' on the map in figure 1 denote lengths of lightweight angle-iron driven into the ground on the instruction of the SCA, in an attempt to define a perimeter against incursion from agriculture. Between the completion of the survey in September 2000 and the excavations of March 2002, one of these markers had been moved from its original position as the northernmost of a cluster of three by the western side of the enclosure and replaced at the north edge of the mound. The former location of this spike is marked '(Sp)'.

The basic division of the site into Roman settlement mounds at the east and a lower-lying dynastic area at the west, noted previously, was reconfirmed on subsequent inspection. The ceramic slag, observed on the surface of the Late Roman town in 2000, is probably the result of pottery manufacture or brick-firing. Earlier remains begin to be encountered on the western slope of Mound A, where there are extensive deposits of refuse which was thrown down from above. The pottery in this material dates from the Ptolemaic to Roman Periods, but is not so late as the ceramics noted further east. From the top of Mound A, surface traces of a range of mud-brick buildings can be seen along the exterior of the east side of the temple enclosure. These have not been investigated, but are probably dynastic. The entire region around the temple enclosure itself exhibits surface deposits dating from the Third Intermediate Period to Late Period, with isolated higher mounds of Ptolemaic and Roman material, created during the quarrying of the temple. One of the more substantial of these mounds is the one at the north-west of the temple site, marked 'F' on the map in figure 1. It is from the slopes of this mound that some of the Ptolemaic pottery shown in figure 2 was derived. The Ptolemaic stratum, however, seems to be limited to the higher part of this mound, since one of the cross-walls of the temple enclosure (Cross-Wall B), with its associated dynastic deposits, is preserved within the mound at a high level. Eighty metres to the east of Mound F is a lower mound with a surface cover of Roman fired brick and slag, on the west slope of which are several large blocks of basalt. When these were first seen during the visit of spring 2000, one example was observed to bear remains of a hieroglyphic

inscription consisting of the title *nšw-bitī* followed by the beginning of a cartouche, the first sign in which was *R*^c and the second almost certainly *wšr*. The range of possible rulers is very extensive. By March 2002 this block had been moved by persons unknown more than 200 metres to the east and left lying on the low ground at the north edge of the site, with the inscribed surface against the ground.

Ceramics from the south slope of Mound F near the temple

Rim and upper body from a coarse siltware cooking-vessel. From traces on the exterior it seems that this vessel originally had been equipped with double-bow handles, but insufficient was preserved of these to add them to the drawing (fig. 2, no. 1).

Shallow casserole in a hard red fabric. This is a form very characteristic of the Ptolemaic Period⁴ (fig. 2, no. 2).

Red siltware plate with a ring-base and grooved rim (fig. 2, no. 3). Numerous Ptolemaic examples of similar plates have been found at Tell el-Balamun.⁵

Sherds from the sides of two incurved red-slipped bowls. These are very common Ptolemaic products.⁶

The neck from a green glass bottle, 4 cm diameter at the top, with an applied strip of glass around the neck.

Ceramics from the west slope of Mound A

Fine red-ware bowl with carinated sides and a ring-base (fig. 2, no. 4). Again, this is a common Ptolemaic form in both red and black fabrics.⁷

Upper part of a shouldered jar of coarse red siltware (fig. 2, no. 5).

Fragment of a plain rim from a green glass dish with a diameter of about 5.5 cm.

Ceramics from the southern slope of the site between Mounds A and B

African Red Slip Ware plate with a thin external ledge-rim⁸ (fig. 2, no. 6).

The western end of the site and the Roman cemetery

The whole of the western part of the site is littered with fragments of hard stones, especially quartzite, which must have been quarried from the temple. Most pieces were reworked into saddle querns during the post-pharaonic period. A few examples of Ptolemaic so-called 'Theban mills' were also seen, consisting of dark grey tufa and probably imported from Thera.⁹ The cemetery at the extreme western edge of the site, mentioned in the report cited in note 3, proved to be of Roman date, with burials in pottery coffins or jars, which have been cut into the pharaonic levels. Many of these graves have been exposed through

⁴ Cf. A.J. Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, (London, 1996), pl. 54, no. 1; P. Brissaud, 'Repertoire préliminaire de la poterie trouvée à San el-Hagar (1er. partie)', *CCE* 1 (1990), pl. viii, 78–9.

⁵ Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, pl. 51, no. 1; pl. 53, nos 4–6; Brissaud, *CCE* 1 (1990), pl. vi, 23.

⁶ Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, pls. 45, nos 2–8; 51, nos. 27–30; 53, nos 7–9; 59, no. 4; Brissaud, *Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne* 1 (1990), pl. ix, 115–17; V. Seton-Williams, 'The Tell el-Farain Expedition, 1967', *JEA* 53 (1967), 153, fig. 2, no. 1.

⁷ Spencer, *op. cit.*, pl. 51, nos 7, 20–3, with additional references on p. 73.

⁸ J. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972), 96–100, Form 59 B.

⁹ See the references on this kind of mill in A.J. Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1995–1998* (London, 1999), 75–6.

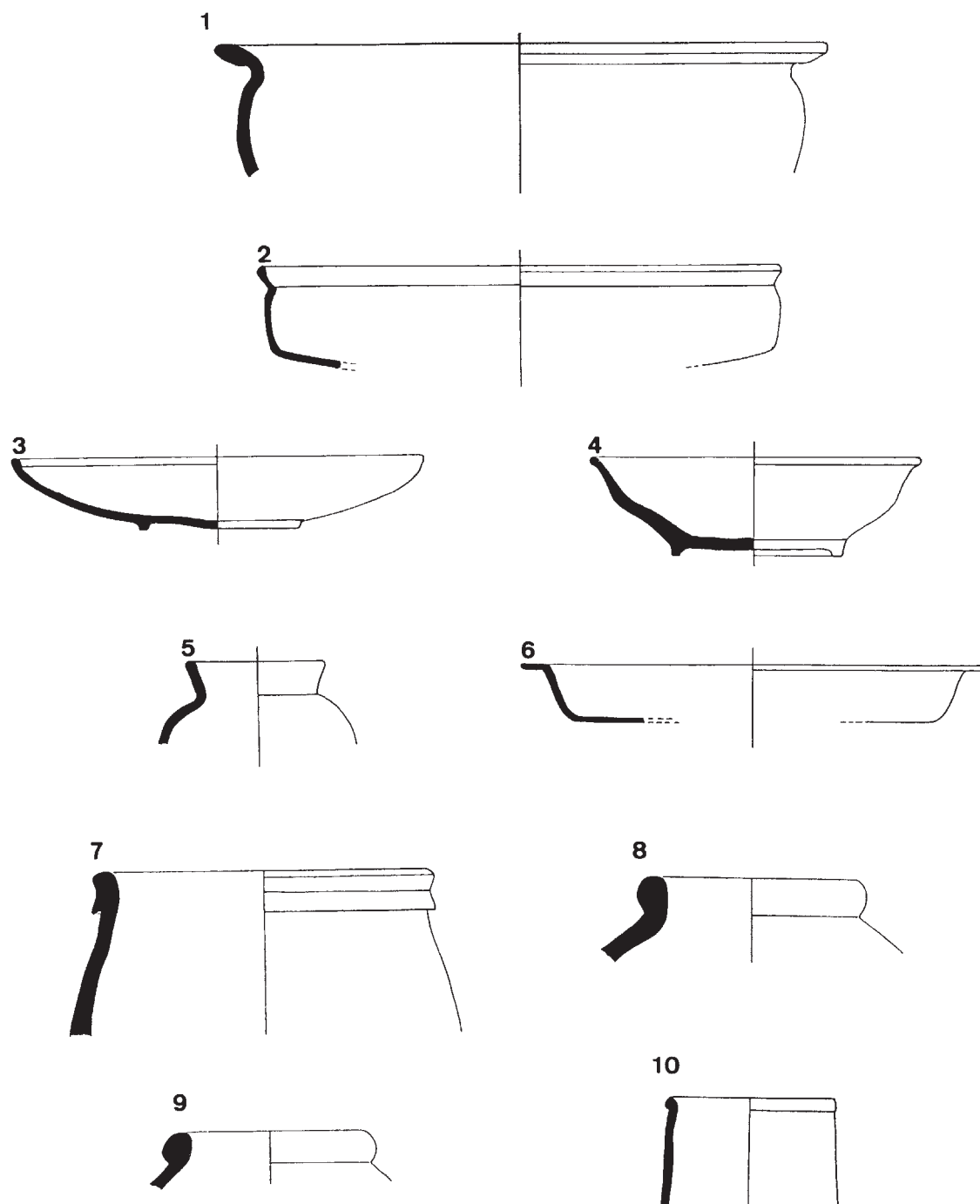


FIG. 2. Pottery from the surface of the mound and from the original ground beside the Roman grave (1–3 from hill F; 4–5 from hill A; 6 from south slope of the mound between hills A and B; 7–10 from intact ground into which the Roman graves are cut).

erosion and, once visible on the surface, have been vandalised. Confirmation of the dating was obtained during the excavations of 2002, through the investigation of a sample grave and of the surrounding ground. The selected grave is shown in plate VII, 1. It consisted of two large pottery jars placed with their mouths together, within a pit whose limits could be seen clearly in the ground. Although the jars in this grave were of a rounded shape, others in the cemetery were observed to be straight-sided bucket-shaped vessels more typical of Roman burials.¹⁰ The upper parts of the jars had already been destroyed by their having been exposed above the surface. Each jar had convex sides and narrowed to a small flat base. The combined length of the two jars was 1.89 m, with a maximum width of 0.8 m. The grave was orientated east-west, in common with the majority of burials in the cemetery. Within the jars only a few scattered fragments of bone remained, but more valuable dating evidence was gathered from an investigation of the ground into which the grave-pit had been cut. Although the highly saline nature of the ground had destroyed much of the pottery, sufficient sherds were found to date the surface level to between the seventh and fifth centuries BC, showing that the burial had to be of later date. This pottery, illustrated on figure 2, nos 7–10, corresponds to Types C.4.20, C.6.32, C.6.4 and D.3.5 from Tell el-Balamun.¹¹ There were also a few fragments which their fabrics show came from Levantine jars, but none of these included the rims, shoulders or other useful diagnostic features. Further examination of the region revealed evidence of fragments of Roman glass scattered about the graves and the presence of fired-brick structures further west, almost in the water of the adjacent fish-farm, so a Roman date for the burials seems most likely. Their orientation might even indicate that they are Christian, this area on the fringe of the older pharaonic temple area perhaps having been adopted as the cemetery of the Late Romano-Coptic town on the eastern part of the mound. Certainly the possibility that the burials might date from the late Ramesside Period and belong to a style of late New Kingdom interments known at Tanis and Tell el-Yahudiya has been eliminated.¹² The pottery fragments of Ramesside date mentioned in the report in *JEA* 87 as having been seen in the area of the cemetery during the survey work actually came from a deeper level in the ground, exposed around the western fringe of the site by the mechanised levelling of the area as part of the preparation of the adjacent fish-farm. The presence of these sherds would seem to indicate that a New Kingdom level is present below the Late Period stratum through which the graves have been sunk. The bulk of any New Kingdom remains, however, are almost certainly below the present water-table.

The Temple Enclosure

The enclosure walls of the pharaonic temple were traced in the spring of 2002. This work proceeded rapidly as much of the enclosure was visible as surface traces and only modest cleaning was required to plan the whole complex (pl. VII, 2). Small inspection cuts were made at intervals along the lengths of the walls, and particularly at corners and intersections, to determine the exact lengths and thicknesses of the different walls. The plan of the enclosure so acquired is shown in figure 3, and its position on the site is indicated on

¹⁰ C. Harlant, 'Une nécropole populaire sur le Tell San el-Hagar - Tanis', *CCE* 6 (2000), 149–70.

¹¹ Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, pls. 65, 66, 69.

¹² P. Brissaud and C. Zivie-Coche, *Tanis: Travaux récents sur le Tell San el-Hagar*, MMAF 1987–1997, (Paris, 1998), 304–315; F.L. Griffith, *The Antiquities of Tell el Yahudiya*, in E. Naville, *The Mound of the Jew and the City of Onias*, (MEEF 7, London, 1890), 42–9 and pl. xiii.

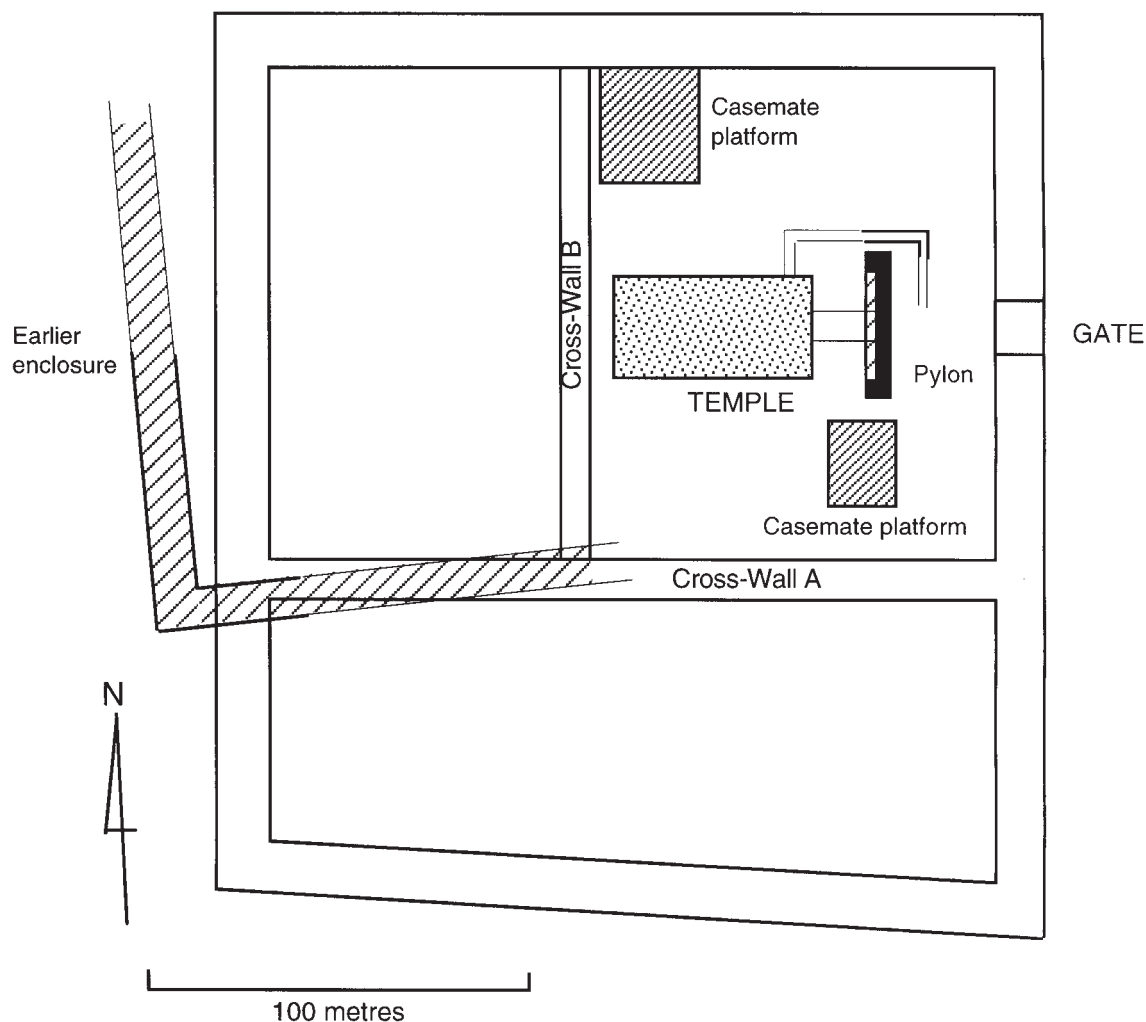


FIG. 3. Plan of the temple enclosure.

Penelope Wilson's contour map (fig. 1). As these illustrations show, the enclosure consists of a basic quadrilateral with two interior cross-walls. An aerial photograph of the site, taken in 1936, on which most of the walls can be seen clearly (pl. VII, 3) was of great assistance in the plotting of the enclosure.¹³ The most frequently encountered bricks in all parts of the enclosure are $38 \times 18 \times 12$ cm in size, although the general range of variation in length extends from 36 to 40 cm, with a few very large examples in the east wall, up to 52 cm long. Both mud-bricks and yellow sandy bricks were used, mixed randomly in the construction. The enclosure was configured to suit the position of the temple, which, from stratigraphic considerations can be dated to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (see below). Nothing was found in the excavations around the wall to suggest that the same date should not apply to the enclosure itself.

¹³ I am grateful to Alison Gascoigne for pointing out to me the existence of this photograph.

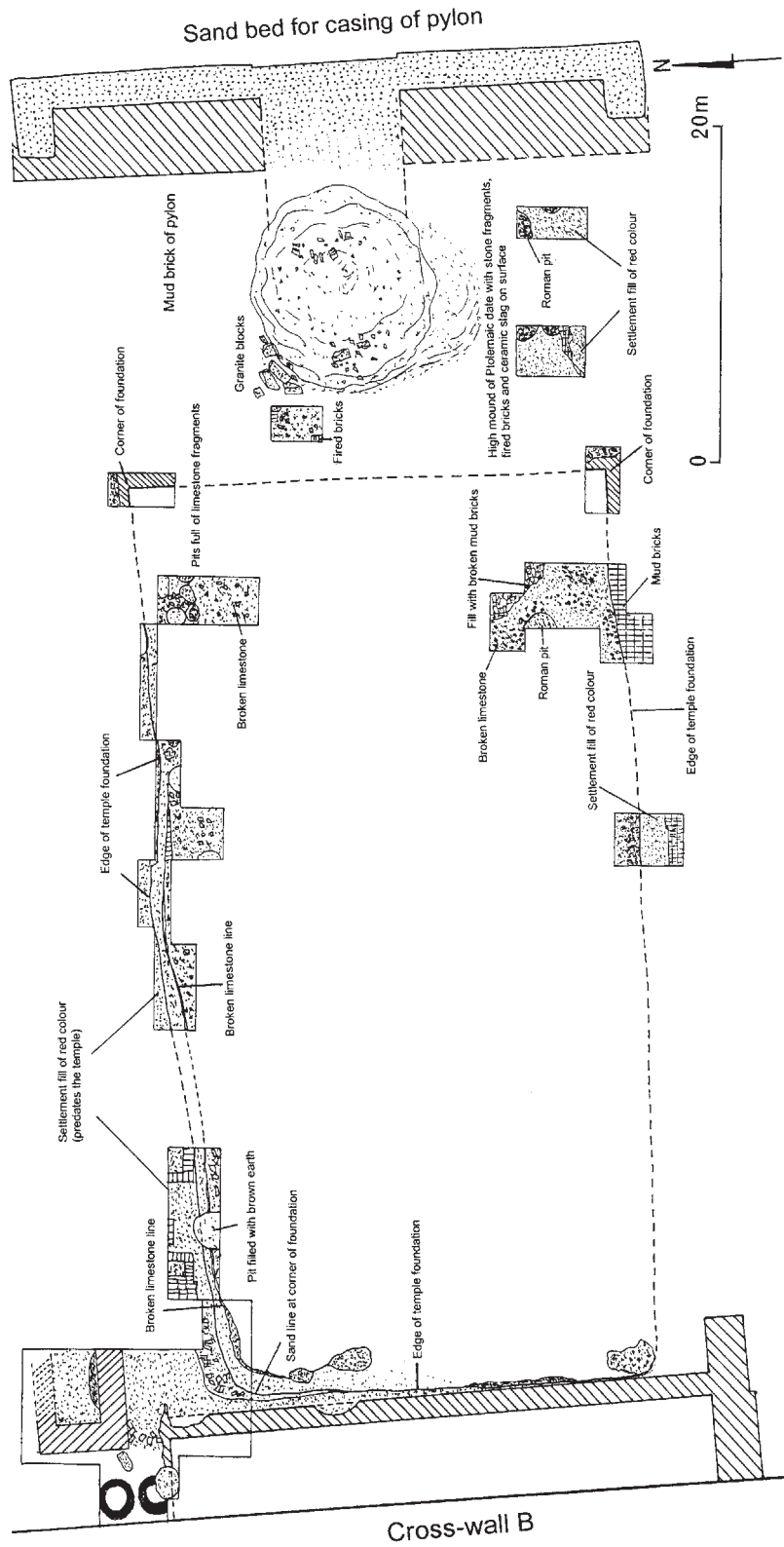


FIG. 4. Plan of the actual remains of the temple foundation.

The exterior lengths of the outer walls of the enclosure measure 216 m (north), 242 m (east), 231 m (west) and 217 m (south). Cross-Wall A is 192 m long and is parallel to the north wall. The south wall of the enclosure, however, runs at a slight angle as shown in figure 3, because the interior space between the south wall and Cross-Wall A is irregular, being 62.3 m wide at the west end but 10 m wider at the east. The entrance to the enclosure lay in the east wall in the axis of the temple. The gate is 12.9 m wide and situated 21 m east of the front of the temple pylon. The site of the gate was buried in a dump of redeposited fill, containing a considerable quantity of sand and broken limestone from the destruction of the temple, but there was no remaining evidence for there ever having been a stone gateway in the enclosure wall. The broken limestone found above it had been brought from elsewhere, probably from the temple pylon, since there were layers of mud between it and the brick jambs of the gate (pl. VIII, 1).

The thicknesses of the walls exhibit some differences: the north and west walls are 13 m thick, the east 12 m and the south 13.5 m. Of the two interior cross-walls, that running east-west (Cross-Wall A) is 9.6 m thick, and the lesser cross-wall (B) is 7 m thick. Where they pass through some of the higher mounds on the site the walls have been protected from erosion and are preserved to some considerable height, but parts of the west and north walls, in areas of low ground, have been eroded away completely. The subsidiary cross-wall (B), which extends from the main cross-wall (A) to the north wall of the enclosure and delimits an area at the back of the temple, is linked to the rear of the temple itself by thinner brick walls which surrounded the back of the temple foundation (see fig. 4). The north end of the Cross-Wall B, where it connects to the outer north wall of the enclosure, is embedded within the high mound (F) which stands at the north edge of the site. In the angle at the junction of the walls, on the east side of the subsidiary wall, lies a casemate foundation platform (see fig. 3) which was investigated briefly by clearing the external corners. The building measures 32.1 × 27 m, but the final 3.9 m of the latter dimension is composed of a kind of buttress on the west side of the structure. Between this buttress and Cross-Wall B is a gap of 1.8 m, filled with collapsed brickwork. Visible surface traces show that the interior of the platform contains numerous compartments, but these, which would all have been in the substructure of the building, were not investigated further. The distance between this casemate platform and the temple is around 24 m.

During work on the western wall of the enclosure, portions of the brickwork close to the exterior face were found to have been eroded away completely. The slope of the ground from east to west means that much of the latter side has been reduced to the final layer of bricks, which erosion is still removing so that the original ground below the wall foundation is exposed. Under the wall was a thin stratum of occupation fill of reddish colour, below which was more brickwork. This lower brick construction proved to be much more substantial than anticipated. Instead of lightweight domestic brick walls of a settlement area, we found part of the corner of an earlier temple enclosure, comprising elements of its western and southern walls (pl. VIII, 2). The southern wall passed beneath the later enclosure wall, projecting beyond it towards the west before turning to the north as shown on figure 3. The older wall was constructed of large bricks measuring 52 × 26 × 13 cm (one cubit × half a cubit). The thickness of the wall was 12.8 m at the south and 12.65 m at the west. The west side of this early enclosure was traced for a distance of over forty metres towards the north, before it disappeared into the agricultural land at the edge of the site. Pottery found in fill which had accumulated against the ruins of this wall dated from the seventh century BC and included the following:

Red siltware carinated jar-neck (fig. 5, no. 8).

Rims from two red siltware jars (fig. 5, no. 9).

Siltware jar neck with external rim (fig. 5, no. 10).

Siltware jar neck with an external pink-red slip (fig. 5, no. 11). Probably from a Levantine jar.

Fragment of a bowl with an internal rim.¹⁴

Shoulder from a Levantine jar of hard pale buff fabric. The angle of the shoulder would suggest a date around 600 BC.¹⁵

Part of the side from a coarse siltware bread platter.¹⁶

Fragment of a red siltware vessel with a restricted mouth, same form as Type C.5.56 from Tell el-Balamun.¹⁷

The date of this older temple enclosure is uncertain, but it must pre-date the Saite Period when the later enclosure was constructed above it. The fill containing the pottery (noted above) was continuous with the stratum sandwiched between the foundation of the later enclosure and the top of the older one, showing that the older wall was in ruins by the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, or was deliberately levelled. As the base of the older wall lies deep in the subsoil water, it was not possible to search for dating evidence below it. The only possible dates are New Kingdom or Third Intermediate Period, of which the latter seems the more likely.

The temple

The position of the temple was identified during the survey of September 2000 from surface indications. The objective of the excavation was to reveal the limits of the foundation pit of the temple as a means of determining the plan of the building. Given that all the masonry above floor level had been removed in antiquity, this was the only option to recover details of the extent and design of the monument. It is a technique which has been employed over many years, with considerable success, in the British Museum's excavations at Tell el-Balamun. Excavation at Tell Belim began at the north side of the temple area, where the edge of the foundation of the building was soon identified, lined with a few courses of mud-bricks. Tracing the edge of the foundation from this point necessitated the excavation of numerous trenches around the sides of the temple. Figure 4 shows the positions of these and the features revealed within them at a depth of between 25 and 40 cm, that is, just below the loose surface dust. This depth was sufficient to expose the discontinuity in the ground which marked the cut of the temple foundation into the older deposits. All the trenches around the foundation perimeter exhibited similar remains on either side of the discontinuity: pre-temple occupation fill on the exterior of the line and redeposited fill inside. In places, the pre-temple fill contained mud-brick features, hearths and pits from the earlier occupation of the site. Gradually, the limit of the building was followed to the north-west back corner of the temple and then right across the back of the building to the south-west corner. Both of the corners were excavated to greater depth to search for any remaining sand filling or foundation deposits, but the interior of the foundation was found to contain redeposited material, introduced after the destruction of the monument (pl. VIII, 3). This filling

¹⁴ Cf. Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1995–1998*, pls. 71, no. 1; 72, nos. 8–10.

¹⁵ P. Paice, 'A Preliminary Analysis of some Elements of the Saite and Pesian Period Pottery at Tell el-Maskhuta', *BES* 8 (1987–8), 98, 104 and fig. 1.

¹⁶ Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, pl. 61, Type A.1.32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pl. 66.

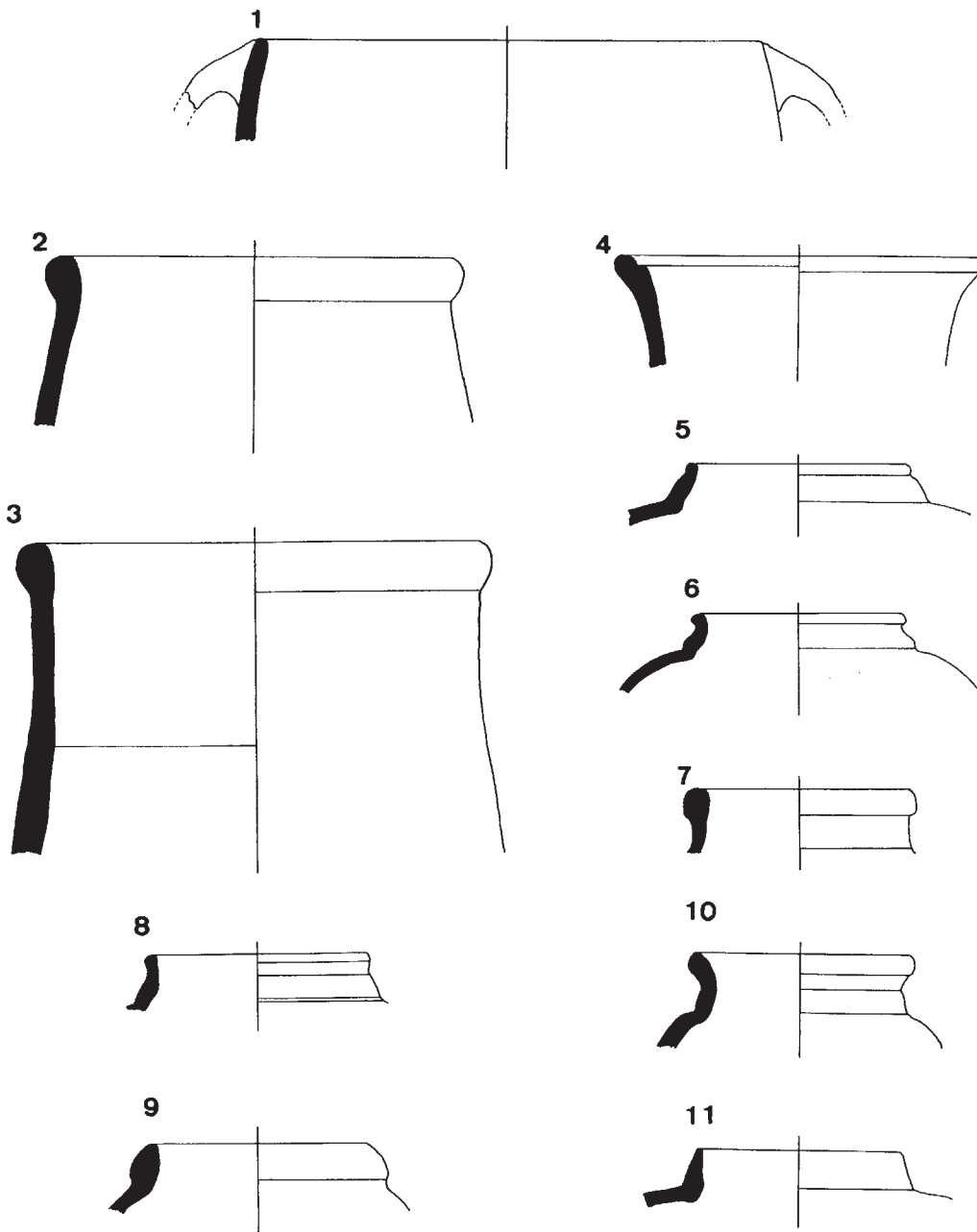


FIG. 5. Pottery from the pre-temple ground around the temple foundation (1–7 from pre-temple fill north of the pylon; 8–11 from angle of the pre-Saite enclosure).

consisted of a mixture of dumps of fill and rubble, moved around during the exploitation of the temple as a quarry, together with deposits of dust and mud brought in by wind and rain. This is the classic content of a destroyed temple foundation of the Nile Delta. The original

sand filling was probably quarried out for use in pottery manufacture and other industrial processes. The side of the north-west corner of the foundation pit retained a thin coating of yellow sand all down the cut surface of the earth, evidence that the foundation had been constructed in the traditional manner of the Late Period, as a large rectangular pit in the ground originally filled with clean sand as a base for the stone platform of the temple. In the work around the north-west corner it was noted that the original edge of the foundation was marked by the sand line, a short distance within which was a line of broken limestone. These two roughly parallel discontinuities extended from the corner along much of the north side of the temple, as indicated on Figure 4 and plate IX, 1. There is no doubt that it is the outer line which marks the true limit of the foundation, the inner one having been created during the quarrying of the sand during the late Roman Period. After the edge of the foundation pit had been identified on the north, west and south, the front corners at the eastern end were discovered, lined with mud-brick at the top (pl. IX, 2–3). The north-east corner still retained a small patch of yellow sand in the angle as evidence of its purpose. In the deeper levels of this corner the brick lining disappeared and the sides of the pit consisted simply of pre-temple ground containing occupation debris. The other front corner of the foundation, at the south-east, possessed a slightly deeper brick lining and had become filled with collapsed brickwork after the destruction of the temple.

The discovery of the front corners showed that the foundation pit was of roughly rectangular shape and measured 53 × 26 m (100 × 50 cubits). The relatively small size of this foundation was explained when it became apparent that it had served only for the inner part of the temple, from the pronaos or hypostyle hall as far as the rear of the building, but excluding the front pylon and first court, which were found to have separate foundations. The foundations of Late Period temples in the Delta are never very regular, and this one was no exception. Its depth varied from 0.80 m at the front to 1.3 m at the back. Neither of these measurements is particularly great so it seems that the usual rule of preparing a sand-bed foundation down to the subsoil water-level was not followed at Belim. The original thickness of the sand-bed would have been greater before surface erosion reduced the height of the ground over the whole of the temple site. The present day surface of the area is relatively flat, rising only towards the south in the direction of Cross-Wall A of the enclosure. This rise shows between the rear corners of the temple as an increase in elevation of only 0.44 m at the south. The south end of Cross-Wall B then rises an additional 0.42 m. At the front of the temple, the additional height of the south end of the pylon over the northern edge is 0.50 m.

Across the back of the temple was a wall of black bricks, 1.4 m thick but with only two surviving courses of depth, which marked the limit of the building. The brick size was 36 × 18 × 10 cm. In the middle of the temple the outer edge of the foundation pit lay right next to this brick wall, but, owing to the irregularity of the rear corners of the foundation, the space between the pit and the wall increased at the ends. This suggests that the bricks might have been laid against the stone masonry of the temple platform, which would have been set in a straight line, ignoring the irregular nature of the substructure. This brick wall was connected to a larger one at the south side, which in turn connected with Cross-Wall B of the temple enclosure, running behind the temple at a distance of some 5 m from it (fig. 4). A check was made at the north end for a similar arrangement, but the traces here were found to have been seriously eroded. A small patch of black brick showing turns to both west and east might indicate that the layout matched that at the south. Any connection to Cross-Wall

B had been destroyed by pitting associated with the construction of two pottery kilns in the area. The lower parts of these kilns stood close to the inner face of Cross-Wall B. They had diameters of 2.4 and 1.9 m and the sides of each consisted of three rings of mud-bricks, burnt red on the interior. The rectangular structure of mud-brick just to the east of these kilns was a pre-temple building, probably domestic, embedded in reddish-coloured occupation fill of the same character as that which surrounds the temple foundation. Its position was merely defined for insertion on the plan, but it was not otherwise investigated.

Work was later moved to the front of the temple, at the east end. The sand foundation bed for the stone casing of the north wing of the entrance pylon was found to be well-preserved. (pl. X, 1–2). On the south side, although the edge of the foundation of the pylon could be traced, the sand had all been replaced by redeposited fill containing fragments of Ptolemaic and Roman pottery. This pylon at the entrance of the monument had a total width of 36.80 m, placing 18.40 m on either side of the axis. The configuration of the sand-bed showed that it had extended all along the facade of the pylon and around either end. Across the front it was only 2.25 m wide but where it turned around the ends of the pylon the width expanded to 2.70 m. The stone masonry which had once stood on this sand would have concealed the mud-brick core of the pylon. The thickness of the pylon including the brick part was 6.20 m. Surprisingly, the depth of the sand in the foundation was only about 30 cm, below which was the original pre-temple ground, although it is not clear just how much height has been lost to surface erosion. The temple foundation in many areas had been cut through settlements of the Third Intermediate Period, dated by the pottery, which shows that the temple must have been built at a later date. The most likely date for construction is the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, especially as there is no indication of any Thirtieth Dynasty work on the temple complex. Behind the pylon there seems to have been a narrow corridor approach into the temple, leading to the main part of the building about 25 m further west. The dimensions of the different parts of the temple fit well into ancient cubit measurements: a total length of 78 m (150 cubits), width of 26 m (50 cubits) and 53 m for the length of the rear part of the building (100 cubits).

Close to the south side of the pylon is a brick casemate foundation platform measuring 23 × 18.30 m, which probably formed the elevated foundation of a subsidiary building at the side of the main temple (fig. 3). The presence of this structure was visible on the ground surface, but small areas were cleaned to allow a plan to be made. The substructure contained eight internal compartments which would have been filled up with earth to create a platform for the building above. This would probably have been a peripteral chapel or ‘pure storehouse’ and have been approached by a stairway or ramp, as noted in other examples at Tanis, ElKab and Diospolis Parva.¹⁸

On the north side of the temple in the area next to the pylon, part of a mud-brick wall, 4.50 m thick, was traced over a length of just over 14 m. It was found to run parallel with the temple axis and extend forward of the pylon by 7.25 m, where it met a foundation trench running at right angles (pl. X, 3). The most probable interpretation of this is that there was a porch in front of the pylon, the front wall of which consisted of stone masonry, built on the foundation-trench, linked to the temple by the mud-brick wall at the side. It was not possible to determine where the wall connected with the temple building owing to the brickwork

¹⁸ J.L. Fougerousse, in P. Montet, *Les nouvelles fouilles de Tanis* (Paris, 1933), 76–88, pls 25–6; J. Capart, *Fouilles de El-Kab: Documents* (Brussels 1940–54), 35, pl. 37; W.M.F. Petrie, *Diospolis Parva* (MEEF 20, London, 1901), 55–6, pl. xxiv.

having been cut away by deep pits of Ptolemaic date, but it might have connected to the side of the pronaos (fig. 3). The construction of the wall was unusual in that not only had the bricks been mortared with mud containing a high proportion of crushed siltware pottery, but more of the same temper was included in the bricks themselves, giving the whole area a reddish colour.¹⁹ The bricks were of a mixture of sizes, including small examples measuring 34 × 17 × 10 cm and larger ones in the range 38–40 × 19–20 × 12 cm. In the space between the wall and the north edge of the pylon foundation was a strip of untouched pre-temple ground about 2.8 metres wide, from which some ceramics of the Third Intermediate Period were recovered (nos 1–7 on fig. 5). A search on the southern side of the pylon failed to reveal a counterpart to the wall at the north, owing to the area having been considerably disturbed by pitting in the Ptolemaic Period.

Pottery from the pre-temple fill north of the pylon

- Wide-mouthed siltware jar with two handles (fig. 5, no. 1).
- Several examples of wide-mouthed jars in red siltware (fig. 5, no. 2)
- Wide-mouthed jar rim in red siltware (fig. 5, no. 3)
- Upper part of an open vessel with flared sides (fig. 5, no. 4)
- Red siltware shouldered jar with a carinated rim (fig. 5, no. 5)
- Red siltware shouldered jar with an external, carinated rim (fig. 5, no. 6)
- Red siltware jar neck with a rounded external rim (fig. 5, no. 7)
- Neck from a siltware jar with an external rim.²⁰

Conclusions

That the Twenty-sixth Dynasty temple at Tell Belim was a monument of modest proportions, constructed economically, is clear from the details of its construction which have been recovered. Among these are the shallowness and limited extent of the foundation and the use of a mud-brick entrance pylon, cased with stone only on the more visible surfaces at the front and sides. One reason for the absence of a more substantial temple might have been the remote location of the town, far from quarry sites and close to the north-eastern frontier of Egypt proper. It is curious, however, that there is such a great quantity of hard stone lying around on the site, since this suggests lavish temple building at some period. Whether this material was used in the Saite temple, possibly to compensate for its modest dimensions, or whether it came from an earlier monument is unclear. The presence of basalt blocks on the site recalls the use of this material at Tell el-Balamun, where it was employed originally in the Ramesside temple, then re-used in later phases of reconstruction. It is interesting that the temple at Tell Belim should have been redeveloped in the Saite Period in view of the proximity of the site to Tell Defenna, situated 10 km to the south, where a major building programme was initiated by Psamtik I.

The discovery of part of a temple enclosure older than that of the Saite Period at Tell Belim is evidence for a temple having existed at the site before the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. Pottery from the site shows that the area around the temple was once occupied by substantial

¹⁹ This use of red ceramic temper in brickwork was noted in Saite structures at Tell el-Balamun, probably dating from the reign of Psamtik I. See Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991–1994*, 30, 60–61.

²⁰ Spencer, *Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1995–1998*, pl. 55 (b), no. 3.

settlements which extended back from the Late Period to Ramesside times. These remains of a dynastic history for the town strengthen the suggestion that it is to be identified with Herakleopolis Parva, in preference to Tell Ayid, a smaller mound formerly situated some 4 km east of Belim but now totally destroyed.²¹

²¹ See the references in n.1 above.

Note: The original publication of this article contained only greyscale plates. these have been replaced on the following pages by the equivalent colour versions.

1. Grave in the Roman cemetery



2. Surface trace of the south wall of the temple enclosure



3. Air-view of Tell Belim from the north-west, with the temple enclosure in the foreground
(Crown copyright, 1936/MOD)

PLATE VIII



1. North jamb of the gate in the east wall of the temple enclosure

2. Interior south-west corner of pre-Saite enclosure



3. North-west corner of the temple foundation. Note the sand line (right) and the broken stone line (left)

1. Discontinuities marking the edge of the temple foundation, north side



2. Front north-east angle of the temple foundation, with a trace of sand in the corner

3. Front south-east angle of the temple foundation



PLATE X



1. Sand-bed of the north end of the pylon casing , from the west

2. View along the pylon foundation from the north



3. Angle of the brick wall and foundation trench in front of the north side of the pylon