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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE DISCOVERY OF LEAVES FROM A
MANICHAEAN CODEX

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The fragmentary documents which are published above were found during excavations conducted in 1988 and 1992 at Ismant el-Kharab, the ancient village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis of Egypt, which was occupied during the first four centuries of the common era only.¹ The documents were found in three structures within the south-central, residential part of the village, termed Area A. This is located due south of the presumed administrative complex of Area B, Structure 1, and east of the Main Temple complex within Area D. From surface indications it seems to contain primarily houses set within their own compounds; all of the structures are of mud brick. The three buildings with which we are concerned here are on the northern edge of this residential area and are termed House 1, House 3 and the North Building (Fig. 1). For discussions of the excavations within these structures and at the site in general the reader is referred to the published reports.² Only the contexts from which the fragments come will be discussed here; based upon this some remarks concerning the dispersal of the documents will be offered. The fragments are referred to by the document numbers employed by Gardner and Worp in their discussion.

The Find Contexts Documents A.I, A.II and B.II: The North Building

This structure, of uncertain original function, lies due north of the courtyards of Houses 1 and 2; it was originally designated Structure 4 and is labelled as such in the accompanying figures. It was in existence before the building of Houses 1-2. The North Building comprises an open court with a block of three rooms on the east and two rooms on the west. Excavations have only been conducted within the rooms and not in the court.

The rooms on the west lie north/south of each other, with Room 1 on the south and 2 on the north (Pl. XI,1). Access to Room 2 is only via Room 1. The latter originally opened into both the court to the east and the street to the west. However, the doorway to the street was blocked at some stage with wedge-shaped, baked bricks. Such bricks were originally employed in the construction of columns as found in the colonnaded court of the administrative building due north of this building (Fig. 1) and in the Main Temple complex. Thus, the blocking of this door only occurred after the buildings which contained such columns had fallen into disrepair. Excavations within the large administrative building showed this to have been the case there by at least the fourth century, and this is the likely source of the bricks used to block the door into the North Building from the west. The latest occupation in the administrative building is represented by a floor surface laid over considerable wall and column collapse.

¹ The dating criteria available for determining the length of occupation at Ismant el-Kharab are reviewed by the writer in Mills, A. J. and M. Marlow (eds), *Papers of the First International Dakhleh Oasis Project Conference* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph #-, Oxford 199-).

² See: Hope, C. A., *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (JSSEA)* XV (1985), 114-25; XVI (1986), 74-91; XVII (1987), 157-76; *Mediterranean Archaeology* 1 (1988), 160-78; *Bulletin of the Australian Centre of Egyptology (BACE)* 1 (1990), 43-54; 2 (1991), 41-50; 5 (1994), 37-42; 6 (1995), 51-8. Hope, C. A. et alii, *JSSEA* XIX (1989), 1-25; *BACE* 3 (1992), 41-9; 4 (1993), 17-28; Hope, C. A. and J. McKenzie, and Whitehouse, H. and C. A. Hope, forthcoming in Mills, A. J. and C. A. Hope (eds), *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1993-1994 Seasons* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph #-, Oxford 199-). For a report on the work conducted during the surface survey of the site see Knudstad, J. E. and R. A. Frey, in A. J. Mills and C. S. Churcher (eds), *Reports from the Survey of the Dakhleh Oasis 1977-1987* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph #-, Oxford 199-).



Fig. 1 Ismant el-Kharab: location of Houses 1-3 and the North Building (Structure 4) in Area A, and Area B, Structure 1.
Plan by J. E. Knudstad

Both of the western rooms contained deposits of dumped material which virtually filled each one. This material consisted mainly of fine, powdery ash interlayered with lenses of sand and straw. The ash deposits contained numerous artefacts, predominantly pottery. Distinguishing different episodes of dumping from sand and straw accumulation proved impossible. The dumps in both rooms mounded up

against the south and east walls where they were encountered from surface level, and they tapered to the north and west where they became thin coverings upon the floors before reaching the walls. The dumped material in Room 1 fills the doorway into the court to the east and extends into the court. Sand built up around the dumped material; this contained far fewer objects than the dumped material. It is assumed that the two types of material, the dump and its surrounding sand, accumulated simultaneously but not necessarily at the same rate. The dumped material was probably introduced into the rooms from the west and thrown into the south-east corner of each room. This is indicated for Room 1 by the mounding of the dump into the east doorway and the lack of dump in front of the west doorway.

Room 2 produced the single fragment of document **B.II**, find registration no. 31/420-D6-1/A/3/24,³ and the uppermost of the two pieces which make up document **A.II**, registration no. 31/420-D6-1/A/3/25.⁴ The former was in deposit 2, which comprised the lower build up of sand around the dumped material; this deposit was identical in composition to deposit 1 and was created 0.80m below the surface. It had a depth of 0.32m and formed over deposit 5. The fragment from document **A.II** was found in deposit 5 which consisted of a thin layer of brown powdered earth material of irregular depth across the entire room. It underlay both the dumped material of deposits 3 and 4 and the sand accumulations of deposits 1 and 2. It occurred at 1.12m below the surface. This deposit represents eroded mud floor and lay directly above the original surface of the site. Unlike all but the exterior wall of Houses 1 and 2, the walls of the western part of the North Building were all built upon the original surface, as were those of the administrative building (Fig. 2).

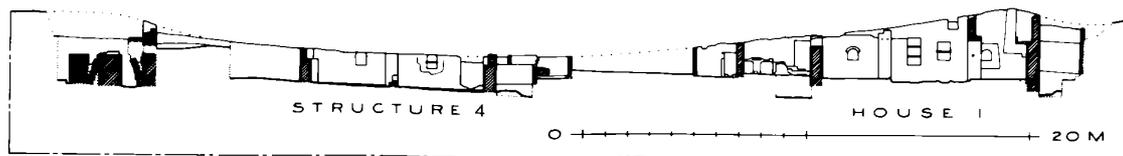


Fig. 2 Ismant el-Kharab: section A-A as indicated in Fig. 1 by J. E. Knudstad

The three rooms at the eastern end of the North Building (Pl. XI,2) appear to be later additions. The walls of Room 5 were constructed upon mud-brick rubble and its east wall overlies the remains of an earlier wall. Rooms 5 and 6 are to the north of Room 4 and contain no internal features. Room 4 has an oven, an animal manger and a feeding trough. Rooms 4 and 6 contained deposits of sand overlying the earth floors, while 5 contained some brick collapse on the floor. None of these rooms contained dumped material. The two fragments which constitute document **A.I**, registration no. 31/420-D6-1/A/3/31, were found together in the sand of deposit 2 upon the floor of Room 6 in the north-east corner. This deposit represents that sand which lay directly upon the floor, but was otherwise indistinguishable from the sand above.

³ Such numbers present the following information: 31/420-D6-1 is the map reference to the location of the site ascribed by the Dakhleh Oasis Project during its survey of the oasis; A/1 indicates the area of the site and the structure or excavation area, while the final number is the individual object registration number. In the case of papyrus fragments found together only one registration number was allocated to the group. This system was employed until the 1991 season after which all finds of papyrus were given separate papyrus deposit numbers, and a single object registration number was given to all of the papyrus from one building. Papyrus deposit numbers have the prefix P followed by a reference to the year of the find and an individual number, e.g., P. 92.12.

⁴ The North Building was the third structure to be excavated and thus objects from it are identified by A/3 prefixes. House 3 was excavated after the North Building and a trench within the street which separates this building from Structure 1 in Area B (figs 1-2). Objects from the street carry the prefix A/4 and from House 3 the prefix A/5.

Document A.II: House 3

House 3 lies to the east of House 1 and 2. It is the largest in the block and the first to have been built. The house contains eight rooms opening off a central room, accessed from an entrance chamber and corridor, which also leads to a courtyard with animal mangers and an oven (not indicated in Fig. 1). This house yielded an abundance of artefactual material, including a large quantity of inscribed material upon papyrus, wooden boards and a little parchment.⁵

The fragment which makes up the lower part of document A.II, a piece from papyrus deposit no. P92.12,⁶ was found in the entrance chamber, Room 1. This room contained sand to a depth of 1.50m on the south and 1.70m on the north at the entrance to the corridor. It was low in this deposit that the group of papyrus fragments designated P92.12 was found. They did not form a discreet deposit but were scattered within the sand. This sand was labelled deposit 1; it covered deposit 2 which occurred across most of the room. Deposit 2 was the uppermost of a series of compacted sand and earth floors which descended to a depth of 0.70m maximum on the south. All but the lowest of these deposits were missing to varying extents against the west wall and in the south-west corner (Pl. XII,2). In the north-east corner of the room, on deposit 2, was the remains of a group of pottery vessels (Pl. XII,2) of fourth century date. Deposit 2 extended to the north into the corridor, again forming the uppermost of the floor levels there.

The accumulation of floor levels in Room 1 was subsequent to a major modification to the entrance system of House 3. Presumably due to the rising level of the street to the south of the house, it was necessary to raise the height of the door sill by 1.00m above its original position. Prior to this a curved wall had been built against the exterior of the south wall of the house to prevent sand obstructing the entrance. The raising of the door sill necessitated the building of a flight of three steps within the entrance room (Pls. XI,3–4). These steps were built upon the original floor of the room and during the course of their use the other floors accumulated, gradually burying the steps until deposit 2 was finally formed at the same level as the base of the wooden door sill (Pl. XI,3). Deposit 2 was, therefore, the last occupation surface of the house.

Similar, probably contemporary, increases in the level of the streets were encountered due south of the administrative building. During the later stages of use of Room 1 of that building the sill of the door in its south wall was raised again by approximately 1.00m, bringing it level with the present surface of the site (Figs. 1–2). At the same time the floor surface within the room which was laid over collapse, referred to above, was added. This rise of surface level was documented in the excavations within the street south of this building, adjacent to the exterior north-west corner of the North Building. At its maximum this rise would have buried the lower part of the North Building, and it is as a result of this that the door in the west wall of Room 1 was blocked. It is of interest to note that no such increases in ground level have been documented in the vicinity of the doors into Houses 1 and 2.

Documents B.I and B.III: House 1

This building comprises 11 rooms opening off a corridor which provides access also to a stairway which led to the roof and a courtyard on the north, containing animal mangers (Pl. XI,1). Within the north-west corner of the courtyard there was what at first appeared to be a small, narrow, rectangular chamber built against a larger one to its south. Clearance and finds within showed this to be a feeding trough for animals kept within the south room (Pl. XII,1). Below the floor of the feeding trough there was a deposit of sand which had been laid to raise the level of the trough above that of the floor of the manger. The three fragments from document group B.I and the single piece of B.III were found within this sand fill, termed deposit 4; they have the registration numbers 31/420-D6-1/A/1/106 and 107.

⁵ See footnote 2 of Gardner and Worp's discussion for references to publications of this material.

⁶ See footnote 3 for an explanation of this numbering system.

Excavations through the floor of the animal manger revealed the existence of other walls showing that the manger had undergone three modifications of layout. The earliest, consisting of two rooms of equal size, was not built upon the original surface of the site. In each of these phases it seems that the area was used for the stabling of animals. The feeding trough formed part of the latest modification (Fig. 2).

The Dispersal of the Documents

It is suggested in the discussion of the documents that, in all probability, they originate from a single codex. If this is so then the find contexts of the fragments present an interesting pattern of dispersal. It is evident that those pieces retrieved to date were not discarded uniformly, by which I mean that the codex was neither accidentally nor intentionally dismantled and discarded at one time and the pieces deposited where they were found. If this was the case then more of the original would have been found rather than the meagre scraps discussed herein, unless it is to be supposed that they were intentionally removed. The codex may have been used by occupants of the area in which the fragments were found, but it cannot be proved that they were resident in any of Houses 1–3.

The find contexts indicate a dispersal which took place over some indeterminable length of time. This is most clearly illustrated by the two fragments of document A.II. 31/420-D6-1/A/3/25 was abandoned either before the west rooms of the North Building were used as a dump or at the beginning of this process. On practical grounds it appears likely that Room 2 was filled before Room 1. Artefacts found within the material dumped in both rooms are identical to those which were used by the occupants of Houses 1–3 and elsewhere on the site during the late third to late fourth centuries C.E.⁷ Hence its use as such was contemporary with the occupation of the nearby houses and presumably also of the eastern rooms of the same building. However, this use of the North Building was well before the abandonment of the village in the last decade of the fourth century as is shown by the blocking of its west doorway before the surface of the street to the west reached its maximum height. How long it took for the deposit in Room 2 to form cannot be determined precisely. It certainly does not represent one episode of dumping; this is indicated by the sand lenses between the ash and artefact deposits. Coin finds provide some useful indications that we are dealing with several decades for the build up. On the floor of Room 2 a coin of Licinius was found (308-24) while in upper sand fill, that is in a deposit extending from surface level to a depth of 0.80m, a coin of Constantius II, datable to the period 347-58, was retrieved.

The other fragment from this document, from papyrus deposit P. 92.12 in Room 1 of House 3, was deposited in its find spot after the abandonment of House 3 when sand had begun to accumulate within the house. It would appear to have arrived in Room 1 as a result of wind action, whereas the other piece from the document was deposited by human action. The evidence from House 3 indicates that it was occupied until the end of the life of the village. Hence, it is not possible that the P92.12 fragment originated in the dump of Room 2 in the North Building along with its pair from document A.II and was carried from there by wind. It is, however, conceivable that it was amongst rubbish dumped into the North Building but later than the other fragment and wind action subsequent to abandonment deposited it in House 3.

Wind action probably also accounts for the deposition of the fragments of document A.I on the floor of Room 6 of the North Building. Like the piece of document A.II from House 3 it was deposited soon after the abandonment of the site and may derive from the upper levels of the dumps in the west rooms of the North Building.⁸

⁷ See discussion by Hope cited in note 1.

⁸ It is perhaps futile to attempt to determine the processes whereby all fragments from single documents were dispersed. In some cases, such as the majority of those from House 3 discussed by Worp in the introduction to *Greek Papyri from Kellis I*, the dispersal was largely the result of a mixture of human and animal agency and wind action on a local level. However, in

The deposition of the fragments from documents **B.I-III** appears to be the result of human activity. The context of the **B.II** fragment resembles that of the **A.II** fragment; it is from Room 2 in the North Building, but in this case from sand which formed around the lower part of the dumped material and not from the floor or low dump. It was retrieved in a deposit which commenced 0.80m below surface and extended 1.12m below the surface to floor level. While it is possible that it was dropped there by wind action, it is more probable to suppose that it was amongst material being dumped into the room and that when discarded it simply moved from the ash deposit laterally into sand. The boundaries between the dumped material and the surrounding sand in both Rooms 1 and 2 of the North Building were not precise. The **B.II** fragment was clearly deposited after the **A.II** fragment. If the **A.II** fragment from House 3 and the **A.I** fragments from Room 6 of the North Building were originally amongst material dumped into Room 1 or 2 of the North Building then they were deposited there after the **B.II** fragment.

The pieces from **B.I** and **B.III** were found in fill below the floor of the animal trough in the north-west corner of the courtyard of House 1, which is immediately due south of Room 1 of the North Building. It is tempting to see some significance in this and to link the deposition of the **B.I-III** and **A.II** document fragments. It is conceivable that the **B.I** and **B.III** pieces were once deposited within sand in Room 2 of the North Building (in the same way as the **B.II** piece had been?) and this was the source of the sand used to raise the level of the animal trough. Appealing though this suggestion may be it cannot be proved. Wherever it was obtained, by the time the sand was used in the last construction phase of the animal mangers of House 1 it contained fragments from the codex.

From what has been said above the contexts in which the fragments of the codex were found show deposition of part of **A.II** and all of **B.I-III** during the life of the village in the fourth century and probably at various times within its second and third quarters, while **A.I** and part of **A.II** were deposited sometime after the early 390s when it had been abandoned.⁹ All of the fragments may once have been contained within material dumped into the west rooms of the North Building at different times and this in itself may indicate that they originated elsewhere on the site.

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the case of P. Kell. 3 the find spots of the two constituent pieces are less easy to account for. The majority of the document was found in one piece carefully folded and directly upon the floor of the entrance room of House 1, but a small section was found in Room 1 of House 3, again in sand over deposit 2, the last of the floor surfaces. It forms part of papyrus deposit P. 92.12 also.

⁹ Although only relatively small areas of the site have been excavated evidence accumulated to date indicates a uniform abandonment. The latest dated Greek documents and coins are all of the beginning of the 390s and both of these categories of evidence are scarce for the 380s.



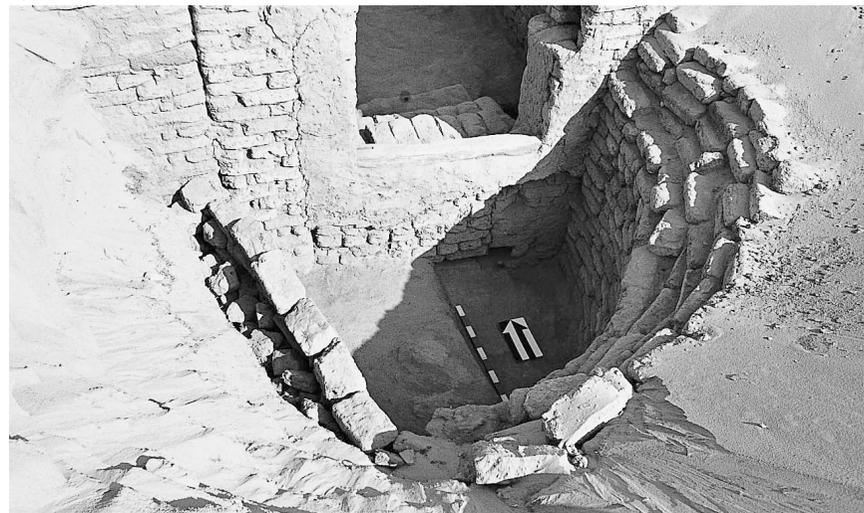
1)



2)



3)



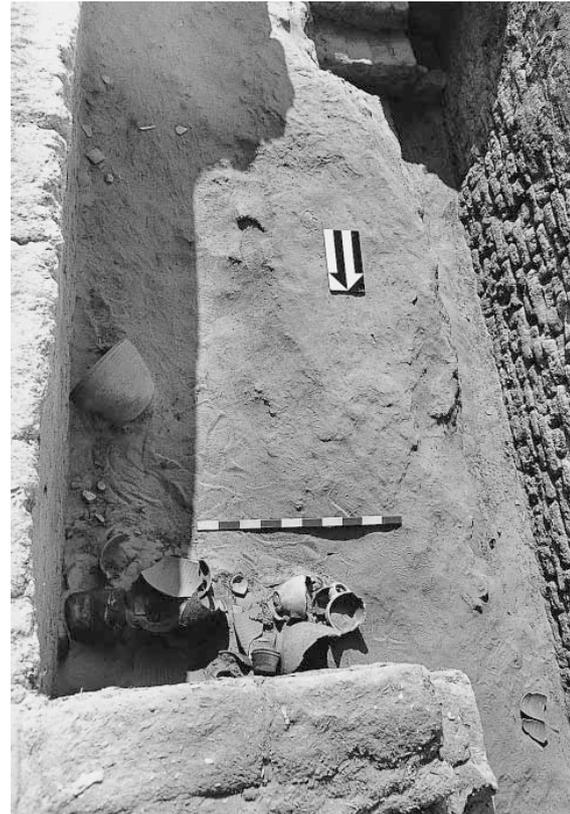
4)

1) Ismant el-Kharab: View of the west end of the North Building and House 1 looking south; 2) Rooms 4-6 of the North Building after excavation to floor level and House 3 before excavation, looking south-east; 3) Steps to the door into Room 1 of House 3, looking south; 4) View looking north of the exterior of the door into Room 1 of House 3. The original protective curved wall comprises all courses except the uppermost five, which were roughly laid during the excavation; the section of wall on the right was also built during the excavation.

TAFEL XII



1)



2)

1) Ismant el-Kharab: Feeding trough and animal manger in the north-west corner of the courtyard of House 1, looking east; 2) Room 1 of House 3 showing surface of deposit 2, looking south.