Lepcis Magna excavation season 1997

Interim Report

By

Hafed Walda

Dear Sir,
I would like to thank the Society for Libyan Studies for the support that has made the excavation successful.

We received a warm welcome from the Department of Antiquities in Tripoli, and enthusiastic support from the Controller of Lebdah (Lepcis Magna). They were all pleased to see us representing the Society for Libyan Studies in conducting field work in Tripolitania.

This year's activities were the beginning of phase 3 (study season) of the project. Resources were directed towards cataloguing and conserving finds, combined with an assessment of the material recovered from all three years of excavation (both artefactual and biological) to establish its archaeological potential. We have, however, completed the project archive for the excavations carried out and are in the process of making copies of all record sheets, plans, drawings, and reference collections of the various classes of finds to remain in Britain.

1. Team Members:

The following people comprised the British part of the excavation team:

Lindsay Allason-Jones	Finds Co-ordinator	Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle
Carrie Matthews	Architectural Reg.	King's College London
Adrian Miles	Site Co-ordinator	Museum of London Archaeology Service
Catherine MacLaughlin	Conservator	Conservation Consultant
Philip Frickers	Archaeologist	Pre-Construct Archaeology
Farideh Fekrsanati	Conservator	Germany University of Frankfurt
Michael Halliwell	Photographer	University College London
Susan Bird	Artist	The British Museum
Yukari Inoue	Student	King's College London
James Banks	Student	King's College London
Lisa Humphrey	Student	King's College London
Dr. Paul Reynolds	Pottery Specialist	Archaeological Consultant
Isabella W. Sjöström	Pottery Co-ordinator	Archaeological Consultant
George Wilson	Surveyor	RCHM(E)
Dr. Hafed Walda	Director	King's College London

In addition we employed one local foreman and four workmen to deal with the heavy aspects of site work and various museum employees who assisted with the finds work .

2. Archaeology

The objectives for the 1997 excavation season were to concentrate on the areas of the $4^{th}/5^{th}$ century house which had not been completed in 1996 and to determine the occupational sequence, particularly with regard to the water supply within the house. It was also hoped that this information could be gathered without producing large quantities of finds, to allow the backlogs from previous seasons to be cleared.

A small excavation team concentrated on three main areas; the atrium, the surfaces around the eastern cistern and the northern street.

a. The atrium

The primary aim in this area was the removal of the flagstone floor surface to reveal any earlier surfaces present.

On removal, solid surfaces only remained in the southern part of the room, mainly around the cistern and the well. A series of drains were revealed, which further illustrated the importance of the water supply within the house. The stone cistern heads recorded previously were related to the flagstone floor and when removed clear evidence of the length of use of the cistern and well was seen. The western cistern had been relined at least once after construction, this also lines the access foot holes and an inlet channel. A meandering plastered drain ran from the cistern across the atrium, which exited into the street. This was later blocked and replaced by the north-south drain partially recorded in previous seasons, which runs below the toilet area. The original top of the cistern was a plaster area, roughly square and slightly sunken, formed of the same material as the latest lining of the cistern. The inlet channel to the cistern had been relined and tiled over while the collection point for the water coming from the roof had also been reconstructed on more than one occasion.

No drains or inlets appear to run to or from the well, the top of which is also formed from a mortar surface, in which rope marks can clearly be seen.

Traces of at least three mortar floors were found in this area, which had been truncated over the majority of the atrium area. These had presumably been removed prior to the laying of the flagstone floor, as make-up layers were excavated in the rest of the area, it being these which the atrium column bases were sat on.

A sondage was excavated through the make up layers, which revealed a complex series of earlier beaten earth surfaces relating to the earliest phases of the house.

b. The eastern cistern area

In this area a series of mortar floors were removed around the top of the cistern, revealing a number of phases of water supply to it. Most of the solid mortar floors were plastered up to the final stone cistern head, many of these surfaces showing signs of frequent repair.

The water collection bath recorded and removed in 1996, which drained straight into the cistern, was seen to have been preceded by four earlier phases, one of which contained a complete, although broken, ceramic pipe with an L-shaped section at its

northern end. This cistern also had a mortar edge originally, which in this case was level with the floor surface.

To the south of this area a further section of mud brick wall was found, relating to the early phase of the house. This wall was not below any later stone walls and formed a link with deposits excavated to the south during 1996.

c. The street

The trench was extended around 2m to the west to cover the full width of the house, revealing a possible man-hole, probably not in-situ. The removal of layers within the street revealed a north-south aligned drain, running to the presumed central street drain. This was the extension of the drain running through the atrium from the western cistern and was built in two phases, the later phase having been plastered, rather than the coarser mortar used in the first phase.

Further to the west a large block was removed which revealed the outlet from the latrine excavated in 1995, along with a further drain which seems to be the north-south drain running from the western cistern. This plastered drain ran under an area of slumping in the street flagstones, again presumably into a central drain.

3. Finds and Conservation

The small finds were sorted and cataloguing is in progress under the control of Lindsay Allason-Jones of the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle.

The pottery was studied by Dr. Paul Reynolds and Ms. Isabella W Sjöström. All the contexts have been spot dated, and Dr. Reynolds has effectively finished cataloguing the fine wares and the amphorae. There is, however, still a considerable backlog of coarse ware feature sherds. In 1998 it will be necessary for Ms. Sjöström to spend time at Lepcis cataloguing and drawing the feature sherds.. In addition, there is also the type series from the previous years to review and possibly revise with the aid of research carried out since 1994.

The glass, coins and lamps from the site need specialist attention during next season.

4. Potential future areas of study

The results of our studies in 1997 suggest the following areas of future research

- The relative chronology of site is of sufficient quality to allow a use of the sites ceramic sequence as a regional type sequence.
- Water supply and storage containers are well represented on the site, and their study presents a unique opportunity for understanding how hydrological resources were used in Lepcis Magna.
- The dating of different types of pottery within the building will allow a chronology for construction and abandonment to be developed.

_ Data from palaeoenvironmental samples and the study of animal bones has provided a so far unique opportunity for studying the economy of Lepcis Magna, particularly with the discovery this season of the first waterlogged remains of Roman date to be found in North Africa.

5. Other Activities

The other main activity on site this year was the production of a series of QuickTime VR (360_ photographic panorama) of all the rooms within the house. It is hoped that these can be used to construct a three-dimensional reconstruction of the excavations for use on the Lepcis web-site and on CD ROM.