

## MEDINET MADI, the town of Amenemhat III:

### Its new life as archaeological park in Fayum

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The history of Medinet Madi “*The city of the past*” starts in the Middle Kingdom, in the beginning of the II millennium BCE, with the foundation, within an agricultural project in the Fayoum region, of a town called Dja, and the construction of a temple by *Amenemhat III* and *Amenemhat IV* dedicated to the cobra goddess *Renenetet* and the crocodile god “*Sobek of Shedet*” - patron of the entire region and its capital *Shedet* – “*Horus who resides in Shedet*”.

The small temple was build following a very simple but very original architectural design: a court and a portico with two columns, an atrium and a sanctuary with three niches; the scenes on the western side of the temple are named after *Amenemhat III*, those on the east side after *Amenemhat IV*, his son and successor. On the East wall of the atrium the king is portrayed performing the ritual “tightening of the rope” to found the temple; on the West wall the gods *Sobek* and *Anubis* purify ritually the pharaoh. During the Ptolemaic period, when the Fayum has been object of an agricultural recovery, the village Dja – now called Narmouthis - a Greek name meaning “*the city of (Isis)-Renenetet-Hermouthis*”- and its old temple, “discovered” under the sand, has been restored and consolidated, a high temenos was build and more monuments were built in North and South of the Middle Kingdom temple.

In his beloved Fayum, in Ptolemaic and roman time, *Amenemhat III* was worshipped as a god with the name of Porramanres, Pramarrres or Premarres, phonetically transcriptions of the Egyptian name *Per-aa Nymaatre*, i.e. Pharaoh *Nymaatre*; the fundamental role of Narmouthis in the development and strengthening of his cult is explicitly confirmed by Isidoros’s IV hymn, the last of the four hymns composed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE by the Hellenized Egyptian Isidoros; the four hymns had been graved on the enjambments of the entrance to the vestibule of Heracleodoros in the Ptolemaic temple of Medinet Madi.

In 1935-1939 the Italian archaeologist Achille Vogliano discovered the *Amenemhat's* temple “Temple A”, the vestibule with the four hymns of Isidoros, the North Ptolemaic Temple “Temple B” and the great square, the “Isis chapel”, the courts and part of the dromos with a kiosk. Till now the temple of *Amenemhat III* is the only worship temple of the Middle Kingdom - with texts and engraved scenes – still remaining in Egypt, and its discovery is one of the greatest discoveries in Egypt during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the Roman times, the town is still living, and only at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. the area of the temples was gradually abandoned, and a mantle of sand and debris drain covers the ancient sacred area. The people was moving more and more towards the south of the town, partly occupying the oldest houses

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abandoned. In the era of *Diocletian* (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries) was built the castrum Narmoutheos (50 x 50 m) in the extreme of the town, East side, equipped with a cistern and connected with a system of canals, for the military Cohors IV Numidarum. The castrum Narmoutheos has been discovered by the archaeological Mission of Pisa University in 2006-2007; a methodical topographical survey, a photo-interpretation of the Site and a geophysical exploration has contributed, in recent years, to understand the urban tissue of the ancient village, in its chronological stratification, until the Late Byzantine Age, and to discover the Castrum Narmoutheos.

In Christian era (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries) many churches have been built, discovered by the Pisa University; perhaps the name of the town was then *Terenûde*; probably the town was also an important center of Manichaeism. From 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries; finally occur a partial Arab occupation, and the place is then named Medinet Madi, the name that can be read on Fayum map in the "*Description de l' Egypte*". The new life of Medinet Madi is the current one, as an archaeological park (connected with the protected area of Wadi el Rayan and Wadi el Hetan), carried out by the Italian Cooperation Project ISSEMM (2005-2010); the park with its Visitor Centre has been officially inaugurated in May 2011. The works of the Project "sand removal" have brought to light, in addition to the already known parts of the temple discovered by Achille Vogliano, a large southern area, archaeologically new, completely unexpected and remarkable for the richness and the novelty of archaeological data.

The symmetrical and monumental access from the south, discovered in 2008, started with a large axial altar (149 x 148 cm, high 54 cm) in limestone blocks, for holocaust or sacrifice; northward, on the dromos, we discovered two statues of lions (long. m. 1.80, on a plinth built with blocks) providing with two identical Greek inscriptions, engraved on the base of the twin statues, under the front legs (the gaps in the texts can be integrated with each other): "For the Queen Cleopatra and King Ptolemy, and Philometor Soter, Protarcos son of Herod, his wife and his children (consecrated the lions) as a votive offering to the goddess Hermouthis the great". It is remarkable that for Protarcos is not indicated any function or title; this man was not necessarily resident in the Fayum, maybe it was tied at Medinet Madi by his wife, who on the other inscription discovered in 2009 at the base of the podium of the first "kiosk", is named *Tamestasytmis*, an Egyptian woman with a name typically of Fayum which contains the name of the god *Mestasytmis*. This Greek inscription, dated to the 54<sup>th</sup> year of a king not named but who is certainly Ptolemy VIII (116 BCE), proofs that the same Protarcos consecrated fifty cubits of the dromos to *Isis Hermouthis* and to *Sokonopis*. The ramp with the dedicatory inscription of Protarcos enters to a structure of Hellenistic style (a "baldacchino") which has been transformed into a kiosk. Even further north of the dromos, after another couple of lions, we discovered, at the side East of the kiosk found by Vogliano, a large statue of a lioness (the base measures 192 x 55 cm), standing on stubby legs, which seems to protect the entrance to the kiosk; the lioness of Medinet Madi bears the lion's mane, but in the same time she has four breasts and is feeding a little lion; the parallel of a lioness with mane can be the lioness *Tefnout* represented on the temple of *Dakka*. According to the restorers who cleaned the surface of the statue from the layer of salt and sand that covered it, it was originally painted in red; type and realistic style of the lioness statue are original, maybe it's the work of a

local craftsman perhaps on a Greek model, possible in social and cultural bilingual mix. However we cannot exclude that the statue is a work of Roman sculpture, decorative addition dromos made a remake of a phase probably of the Augustan age. The chapel of *Isis* with a stone stela of the half snake goddess *Termouthis*, the Ptolemaic Temple B, the large square with porticus, the houses along the dromos, have been restored by the Cooperation Project; on the North-West side of the square, we made a very important discovery: a large shaft for water, a sacred pit for the pure water necessary to the rites of the temple.

We must say some explications about the ISSEMM Project of Cooperation italo-egyptian. This project ISSEMM (acronym of "Institutional Support to Supreme Council of Antiquities for Environmental Monitoring and Management of cultural heritage site: application to Fayoum Oasis and North Saqqara Necropolis") is a multidisciplinary program funded by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2005-2011) - General Directorate for Development Cooperation (DGDC). Today, the ongoing project (2013 - 2016) is funded by the "Italian - Egyptian Debt Swap Program for Development". The SCA (Supreme Council of Antiquities) in addition to being the beneficiary is the Implementing Agency of the program in conjunction with the University of Tuscia - Viterbo. The University of Pisa has followed the project until May 2011. Scientific management is entrusted to *Edda Bresciani*, Technical Director is Antonio Giammarusti who with Hisham Elleithy and Roberto Buongarzone is also the manager of the project. The project has as one of its main objectives to minimize the anthropic risk in archaeological areas, and to promote the socio-economic development of the people who gravitate in the archaeological sites enhancing cultural tourism.

ISSEMM is therefore a pilot program to support the development of cultural tourism and to involve large segments of the Egyptian population in the use and management of their cultural heritage. Cultural tourism in Egypt is developing in parallel with the mass tourism that door millions of visitors in Upper Egypt along the Nile Valley and the Red Sea tourist resorts. Recent political events have unfortunately slowed sightseeing in Egypt but the slowdown in tourism can't compromise the whole process, which started more than a decade, for socio-economic development of the population. The programs of cultural cooperation between Italy and Egypt continue without slowdowns and even today are due the recovery of the Greek-Roman Museum of Alexandria. When, soon, international tourism will restart, the Faculty of Archaeology, Fayoum University will be ready to welcome visitors and to promote cultural Identity: the oasis to the Egyptian people and to the school-age population.

The socio-cultural development of Fayoum, in this context, see the first goal in the short term, with the creation of a protected area of significant landscape values that includes and connects the Wadi Hitan "*the valley of whale fossils*", Wadi El Rayan "*the area of the two lakes*" and Medinet Madi "*archaeological site*". This first phase has now been completed in terms that could be called "hardware" in the sense that they were carried all the facilities necessary to accommodate the national and international public and now the program will continue supporting and promoting cultural tourism in these areas. Programs have been initiated by collaboration between the University of Fayoum and University of Tuscia (Viterbo), the management of the visitor center and routine maintenance and the preparation of a management plan that will regulate the life of the

archaeological park during the next 5 years. Achieving this goal means also put in a position to exploit the population of Fayoum in a sustainable manner their cultural heritage composed of an environment unspoiled put at risk by the human action, often devastating, to be able to make positive use of the rich monumental heritage, largely still to be recovered, which was developed by the ancient Kingdom until the Hellenistic and Roman periods and then continue with interesting examples of agricultural vernacular architecture that is not protected if an urgent danger of being replaced by improbable buildings concrete made with the remittances of emigrants. Finally use the assets for sustainable development consists of a fauna and flora subject of study and interest of naturalists from around the world.

All this makes the Fayoum, -just 90 km away from Cairo-, a green oasis with a very high cultural and tourist potential that if promoted will surely be the driving force behind the development of the whole "*the land of the lake*" as it was called.

The project ISSEMM, Wadi El Rayan and Wadi Hitan already included in the list of UNESCO world heritage testify to the great effort of the Italian Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has done in the past decade to support the environment and the cultural heritage of Fayoum. In particular, the activities of the University of Pisa, after an initial period dedicated to the organization and retraining of officials of the SCA, 2009-2011 has focused on two areas: North Saqqara and Medinet Madi in the Fayoum. The Fayoum and Medinet Madi, at this stage, were the center of attention and commitment of the project that, during 2001 – 2003, had drawn up the GIS and the risk map of North Saqqara and now has focused primarily, as we have already said to contribute methodological and practical development of cultural tourism in the Fayoum. The center of the project ISSEMM was recovered in the whole area temple of Medinet Madi setting up the first archaeological park; the archaeological site is connected with the protected area of Wadi el Rayan. Outside the archaeological area, at the base of the West Kom, was built a visitor center, respecting the landscape that integrates into the dunes with forms and local materials. The raw and cooked bricks, limestone and wood provide a thermal insulation compatible with the environment and the orientation of buildings, following the example and the studies and research carried out in Gurnah - Luxor - by Hassan Fathy, allow a conditioning natural in the traditional Egyptian architecture.

The purpose of the Visitor Centre at Medinet Madi is to provide the visitor with appropriate information on the history and nature of the archaeological and architectural features of the monuments that are going to visit, in an exhibition space, made more accessible through scale models of monuments, reproductions graphics, photographs and information panels. The property consists of two buildings with a floor covered in vaults supported by wooden ribs, are lodged in the first building the toilets, the place of tourist police, the offices of the SCA and the ticket office. The second building houses the exhibition space; didactics have been exposed here with models of the temples of the city and some replicas of statues and stelae relieved by the laser scanner by Massimo Bergamasco, director of PERCRO - Perceptual Robotics Laboratory, under the FIRB program University of Pisa. Mahmoud Farouk relieved first the monuments in three-dimensional model and then contour lines every 2 mm which made it possible to control a two-dimensional laser cutting plotter that has materialized in perplex white

section planes that gave rise to the re-assembled model of the statues. So it is possible to admire a model of the temple, at 1:20 scale, with the walls covered by the inscriptions and scenes of the Middle Kingdom (recognized in 1996 by Flora Lucia Grassi and Flora Silvano of Pisa University). After the space for the audiovisual and the copy of the statue has been exposed *Merenptah* the reconstruction of the wooden votive chariot of *Amenemhat III* found by Achille Vogliano in the courtyards of the temple A.

At the end of the museum was located a bookshop that will also sell typical products of Fayoum, a cafeteria and a small restaurant. In the courtyard between the two buildings has been converted into an auditorium that can be used for lectures and conferences outdoors. The area of the Eco-lodge, in the desert area near the visitor center, considers the possibility of installing a score of simple tents with beds and electricity, which do not create impact on the environment, when the structure reaches out to a limited number of visitors. The visitor center is located in the vicinity of the end point of the track overview, designed and built the project ISSEMM, which connects Medinet Madi with the protected natural area of Wadi el Rayan. This track, 28 km long, designed by Francesca V. Rubattu and Shady Salem, allows the visitor to enjoy some of the views offered by the western desert, and to visit the ruin of Kom Medinet Ghoran and admire a prehistoric lake which testimonies of the chalky underwater formations.

The entrance to the ruins of Medinet Madi is done, from the visitor center, along a stretch of track with wooden floor simply resting on the archaeological area not yet investigated. A platform equipped with stone benches and a large map of the temple is located at the southern end of the dromos. To create the archaeological site of Medinet Madi has been necessary, employing 180 workers for two years, remove 35 thousand cubic meters of sand that had now, after the excavations made by Achille Vogliano; the removal of sand had to be done with attention and care, just as in the archaeological excavations and was followed by a team of archaeologists Roberto Buongarzone, Said M. Mostafa Sayed A. M. Shouip who have followed all the daily operations documenting in detail all the work stages and all archaeological structures. The western front of the dromos has been excavated and documented in detail; and finally has been completed the cleaning of the large square of the Roman era, already only partially investigated by the archaeological mission of Pisa, after Achille Vogliano. The shaft of the Ptolemaic Temple, discovered in 2010, will be investigated by the archaeological mission in the next ISSEMM phase.

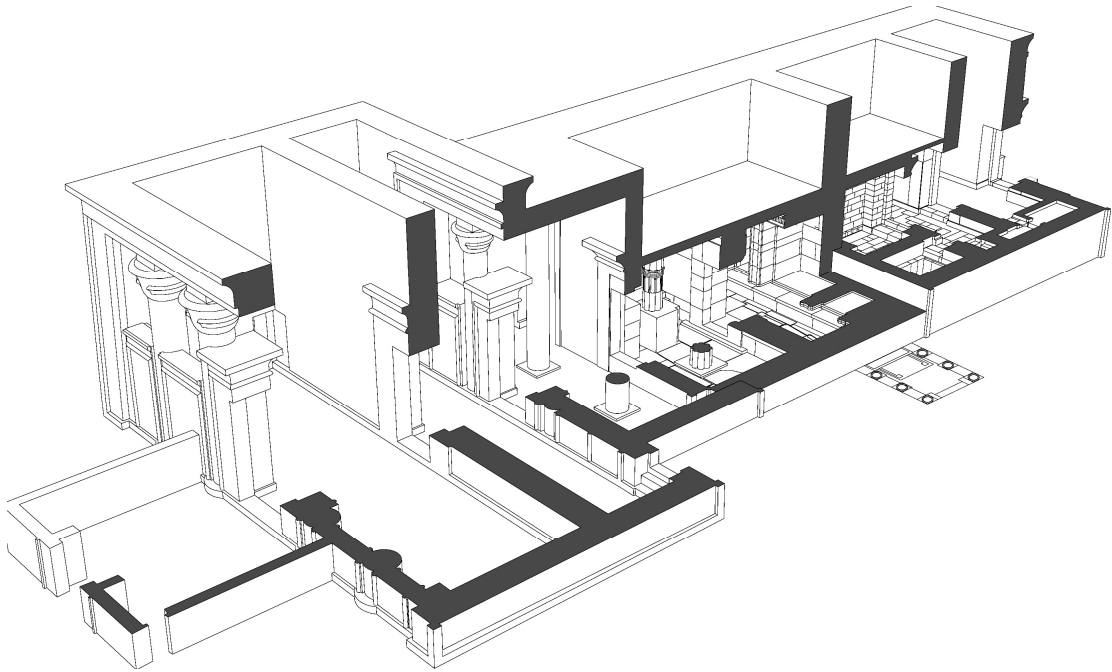
Complete the survey of the structures has been realized and this activity has employed 90 skilled workers with a team of restorers of the SCA directed by Mohamed Salah; has been used over a million new mud bricks and more than a thousand limestone blocks. The restoration has not only served to protect and conserve the archaeological structures but also to allow the reading of the urban texture of the city. The consolidation of painted walls has imposed careful and delicate “surgery” interventions.



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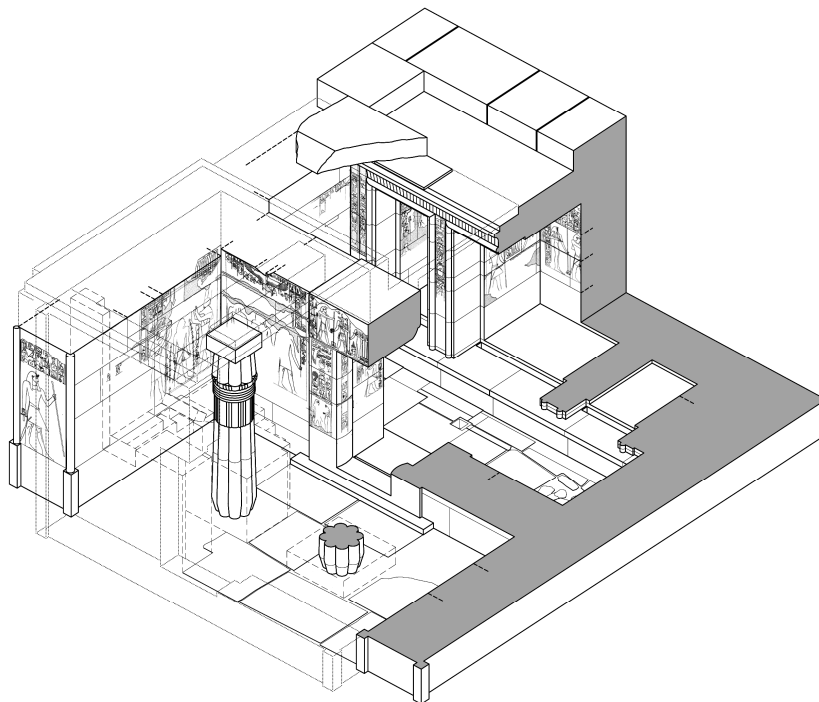


*MEDINET MADI General assonometry of temples ridotta*





*MEDINET MADI School in Visitor Centre*



*MEDINET MADI: Assonometry of Middle Kingdom Temple ridotta.*