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## A painted residence at Ismant el-Kharab (Kellis) in the Dakhleh Oasis

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Since 1986, a major component of the research conducted in the Dakhleh Oasis (Egypt's Western Desert) has been the exploration of the site of Ismant el-Kharab (fig. 1). This village, ancient *Kellis*, appears to have been founded in the late 1st c. B.C. and to have been occupied until the end of the 4th c. A.D.<sup>1</sup> Occupying an area of  $c.3/4$  km<sup>2</sup>, it comprises a settlement and associated cemeteries (fig. 2). Excavations have revealed a temple complex (area D) dedicated to the god Tutu (Greek: Tithoes),<sup>2</sup> his consort Tapshay (Greek: Tapsais),<sup>3</sup> and mother Neith, at the W end of the site, surrounded by ancillary structures, a bath-house to its south-east, and an extensive residential sector in the N part of the site (areas B-C), the development of which can be ascribed to the first three centuries A.D. Contemporary cemeteries lie on the S and NW perimeters of the settlement and in a chain of low hills further to the north-west.

In the late 3rd-4th c. many of the earlier sectors of the site were either abandoned or experienced a major change in function: a new residential sector was developed east of the temple compound (area A) with a complex of churches erected on the S side, and a cemetery north of the site came into use.<sup>4</sup> Substantial quantities of inscribed material have been found in area A in the form of papyrus documents written in Greek and Coptic, with some Latin and Syriac, inscribed wooden boards, and intact wooden codices and ostraka, which illuminate every aspect of life in the village.<sup>5</sup> Artefacts are abundant and well preserved.

Although a diverse range of structures and material covering four centuries has been unearthed, the excavations have undoubtedly revealed more about *Kellis* of the 3rd-4th c. than of earlier stages of its development. To rectify this, fieldwork since January 2005 has been focused on residential sectors that were known to have been developed during the first three centuries A.D., namely areas B and C. Excavations in 2005-6 revealed an important residence at the north of the site in area B (fig. 2).

### The residence B/3/1, by C. A. Hope

#### *Description* (fig. 3)

At its N end, area B comprises a series of large residential complexes (B/3), several with traces of decorated wall-plaster, separated from an imposing two-level complex of more than 200 rooms to the south (B/1) by less-formally laid out structures (B/2). On the east, it is contiguous with Area C, which comprises a residential and light-industrial sector in which activity can be dated by documentary papyri to the 2nd-3rd c. A.D.

1 C. A. Hope, "Observations on the dating of the occupation at Ismant el-Kharab," in id. and A. J. Mills (edd.), *The Oasis papers I* (Oxford 2001) 43-59; "Excavations in the settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," in Hope and G. E. Bowen (edd.), *Dakhleh Oasis Project: preliminary reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 field season* (Oxford 2002) 167-208; "The excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," in G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (edd.), *The Oasis papers 3* (Oxford 2003) 207-89.

2 Cf. O. E. Kaper, *The Egyptian god Tutu* (Leuven 2003).

3 Cf. O. E. Kaper and K. A. Worp, "A bronze representing Tapsais of Kellis," *REg* 46 (1995) 107-18.

4 See, e.g., J. E. Knudstad and R. A. Frey, "Kellis: the architectural survey of the Romano-Byzantine town at Ismant el-Kharab," in C. S. Churcher and A. J. Mills (edd.), *Reports from the survey of Dakhleh Oasis, Western Desert of Egypt 1977-1987* (Oxford 1996) 189-214, with further references at [www.arts.monash.edu.au/archaeology](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/archaeology)

5 Cf. R. S. Bagnall, *The Kellis agricultural account book* (Oxford 1997); I. Gardner, *Kellis literary texts* vol. 1 (Oxford 1996); I. Gardner, A. Alcock and W.-P. Funk, *Coptic documentary texts* vol. 1 (Oxford 1999); K. A. Worp, *Greek papyri from Kellis* (Oxford 1995); id., *Greek ostraka from Kellis* (Oxford 2004); and K. A. Worp and A. Rijksbaron, *The Kellis Isocrates codex* (Oxford 1997).