

**DISCOVERY OF THE WELL OF THE HOLY FAMILY IN THE GREAT TEMPLE  
AT TELL BASTA EXCAVATION SCIENTIFIC REPORT (1)**

Selim, M.

*Prof. of Archeology and Ancient Egyptian Civilization, Ancient Egyptian Civilization dept. Higher  
Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations, Zagazig Univ., Egypt*

*E-mail address: [m.o.selim@hotmail.com](mailto:m.o.selim@hotmail.com)*

**Article info.**

EJARS – Vol. 12 (1) – June. 2022: 1-5

**Article history:**

Received: 13-4-2022

Accepted: 31-5-2022

Doi: 10.21608/ejars.2022.246572

**1. Introduction**

Several ministries in Egypt, led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Local Government, have implemented several development works for the archaeological area of "**Tell Basta**", which is located to the northeast of Zagazig city, where the directional signs indicating access to Tell Basta were implemented and the roads connecting to the site were modernized. There exist corridors inside the archaeological area, halls and an open theater to receive visitors to the well of the great temple of Tell Basta, located in the heart of the Per Bast Temple, which became famous for its beauty throughout the ages of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Although it was built in the era of the pyramid builders<sup>(a)</sup> [1], there exist some traces of its temple, including the two stone stellas [2]: One bears the name of King Khufu and the other denotes the name of King Khafre as indications to their affiliation to the Temple of Bubastis in the era of the two kings [2]. Majority of the kings of Egypt pursued their arc-hitectural works in the temple. Egypt's efforts were concluded by holding huge celebrations, where plaque was placed to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of the well. As

a culmination of these preparations, the first official state ceremony was held jointly with Zagazig University and the Christian cathedral in El Abbasih at Tell Basta on June 31. Subsequently, in Zagazig on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021 and at the headquarter of Zagazig University on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021. This celebration is held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2021. These celebrations were repeated at the same time by the state, the Zagazig University and the Christian cathedral around this well, which witnessed the visit of Jesus and his mother the Virgin Mary, peace be upon them. Their entry to East Per Bast (Tell Basta) on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Bashans represents an important memory for the Eastern Orthodox churches that remained throughout the ages around the world. People celebrate and pray the day the Holy Family entered the temple and drank from the well on Bashans 24, which corresponds to June 1<sup>st</sup> each year. They also talk about this well and the miracles of Jesus in his city without being a trace. Many sources, among them "Mimer Anba Zacharias", record that at the gates of the great city, the Holy Family rested under the shade of a large tree, waiting to be greeted by the "good man Klum," who took them to his house,

so blessings showered his wife, the city and Egypt [3] Numerous sources, including "Pope Theophelus", illustrate the details of this visit to the city. For example, there exists a manuscript in Arabic and has three copies: One is in Vatican church, the other is in the National library in Paris, and the third is in the manuscripts library of the Muharraq Monastery in Egypt [4]. It is a sermon, saying, or biography written by Pope Theophilus, the twenty-third of the Popes of Alexandria in the late fourth century (384-412 AD.). The Holy Family escaped from Palestine through the desert of Sinai, and entered Egypt, where Tell Basta is located at the entrance of the land of Goshen. The discovery of this important well was targeted not only to be a reminder of the Holy Family's entry into Tell Basta, but to become a symbol of their passage from the golden desert land and their entry into this Fertile black land and the heart of the Goshen region (Jashan)<sup>(b)</sup> [5]. Moreover, it is located in Egypt and the Holy Family intended because of its antiquity and fame as one of the most important cities in the eastern Delta and past as an important fortress of the eastern entrance to Egypt. Accordingly, the divine order of the Holy Family was to go to Egypt with the child and his mother, where Per Bast remained in their eyes and hope until they entered it searching for their safety from the brutality of the Roman ruler Herod. They fled from Palestine to escape from his soldiers' pursuit. They killed all the children under three for fear of the prophecy that warned him from this Prophet child.

## 2. Discovery of the Well

From 1887 to 1889, the Swiss scientist Edouard Naville conducted his excavations which focused on the area of the Great temple [2]. Certainly, he did not excavate the location of the well, which he ignored due to the lack of large density of stone blocks for the remains of the temple in its place. In March 1939,

Labib Habashi focused on the area of the Temple of King Pepi I, which is located west of the Great temple. The name of King Pipi I<sup>(c)</sup> [1] stands in front of the goddess Bast, who gives him life and behind her stands the goddess Hathor [6]. Thus, he discovered this temple and did not reach the location of this well. Although he analyzed the stones of the great temple remaining after Naville, he did not make any excavations in the place of the well [6]. He also indicated that the excavations of 1991 AD. were the first in the place whose traces appeared above the place of the well, proving that I was the first to drill in the place. After these long centuries, I was lucky during these excavations to discover this well, which had its beginnings on Sunday, November 3, 1991. My studies had been finished in October 1997 and announced the results on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997 on the first page of Al-Ahram newspaper, No. 40477. This asserted that the well was the one that witnessed the visit of the Holy Family to the city when the Holy Family Jesus and mother came to Egypt. This was the result of a long period of archaeological excavations and investigations after realizing the importance of the place that had not been excavated because it was in the northern area of the temple and so formed a high strip. The beginnings were by raising layers of rubble, making sensors, and recording its layers, then the northern wall of the temple appeared. The effect of burning and some pottery vessels were also found above this place before reaching the depth of the well, fig. (1-a & b).





Figure (1) Shows **a.** & **b.** remains, burning and some pottery vessels above the well

The first indications of a well appeared on the pits, where a group of burnt bricks appeared, fig. (2-a). The excavations of the first and second seasons provided important material, including various forms of burnt brick molds of different sizes and shapes that were made to match the construction of the well and the terrace that surrounds it, which are the molds shown in fig. (2-b). Because of the concentration of work during the 1996 and 1997 seasons, the well extracted a lot of information that was produced by the debris inside. Work required great caution and accuracy to extract all the information that has remained over different ages.



Figure (2) Shows **a.** group of burnt bricks, **b.** various forms, sizes and shapes of burnt brick molds.

Figure (3); A scene of action inside the well. I was keen to use the best means of Egyptology to analyze the charred wood that was part of this well, which is the radioactive carbon 14 analysis method known to archaeologists to prepare a time scale to estimate the relative ages of decomposing organic materials, such as wooden slates, bones, textiles and other archaeological materials. During excavation, the age can be roughly estimated in years. It is a very expensive method because it required the destruction and annihilation of the tested organic matter by burning, so its use is limited to the material that can be dispensed with. The results of this analysis of the various samples brought it back to the first period of the Gregorian date. I stopped in front of a large number of pottery vessels (hoppers) that came out from inside the well. Some of them were in good condition, while others were broken, see an example in fig. (4).

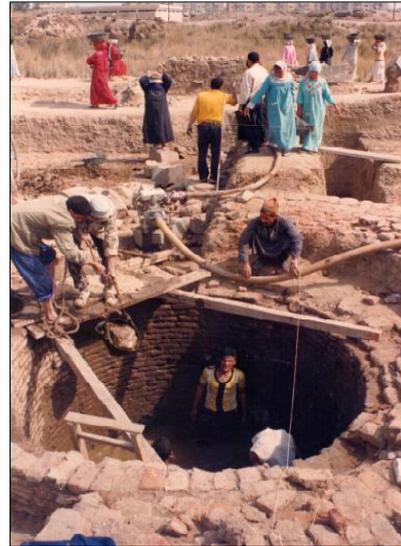


Figure (3) Shows **a** scene of action inside the well.



Figure (4) Shows pottery vessels (*hoppers*) came out from inside the well.

They date back to different eras proving the presence of a water wheel inside the well to extract water from it. Remains of the charred wooden pillars were found; one of them is in good condition, complete, 205 cm long and 17 cm thick, and in the middle of a depression cut in the breadth of its width to install another pedestal crossed with it across this dip. It is on display in the Antiquities Museum. This well bears the style known to this Roman period, including the “Waterwheel in Armant – Bochum<sup>(d)</sup> [7], which dates back to the year 275-395 AD. It turns out that the well contains hoppers of different models that show the different times of their use or installation, and then the different models [8]. The same phenomenon exists between the hoppers of the well of Tell Basta and its hoppers show the effect of rotating the pottery maker wheel, which rises and falls to form circular ripples at equal distances. Among the relics that were found in the well are the bones of various animals and the utensils that were used to drink water from the well. They were also thrown into it for blessing. All of which date back to the beginning of Christianity in Egypt. Conservation work and scientific recording of the excavations were carried out day by day. They are important records for the archaeologist to retrieve the scientific wealth that had remained throughout the ages. Moreover, this can be kept after the disappearance of all the layers that were removed from the beginning until it resulted in identifying the shape of the general well when it was completed. Drilling in the entire well was possible to reach its measurements in 1997, fig. (5-a & b).

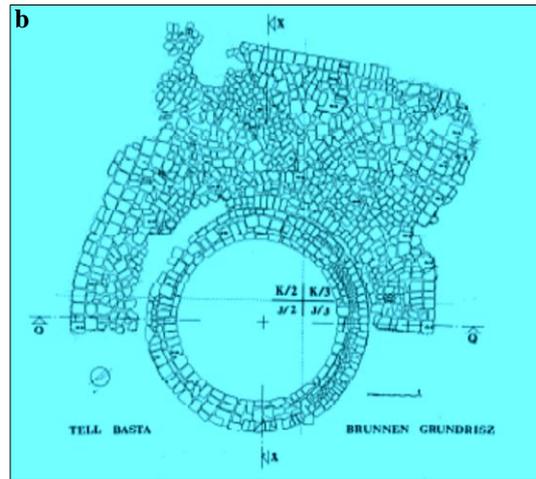
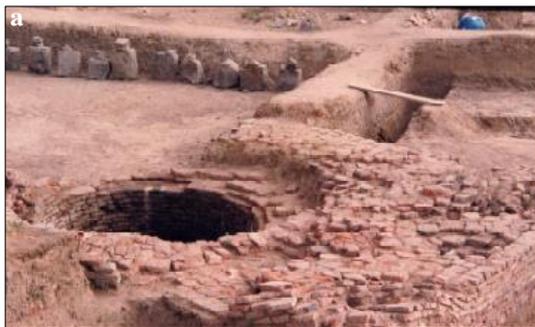


Figure (5) Shows **a.** & **b.** drilling in the entire well to define its measurements.

Thickness of the circular wall is between 60 and 64 cm. The wall consists of two and a half blocks of burnt bricks. The diameter of the well from the inside is 294 cm. and thickness of the wall of the well is 64 cm. from the eastern side and 56 cm from the western side. Depth of the well, from the surface of the building until it was paved from the bottom, was 660 cm. Water flooded the well when it was cleaned on November 12, 1997, to a depth of 211 cm from the top of its nozzle. On the inner sides of the well, there exist three to four stages of construction, suggesting the presence of holes at a regular distance. The distance between them is about 80 cm. These gaps assert climbing the well using a rope. The well captured the Egyptians' attention after many religious sources addressed it by recording, including the Mayamer and the Synaksara, where it remained until Egypt entered a stage of deterioration until the French campaign, whose scientists did not record any talk about this well. Among what Zagazig University has done is to add examples of what has been found to the exhibits of a new hall that has been added to the museum halls. My studies, which I published in my book, in Arabic and entitled (The Well of the Holy Family in Tell Basta), proved the reliance on the discovered archaeological material and the time limit set by the discoveries and linking

it to the sources that covered the great temple in Tell Basta. Consequently, a chapter tackles the impact of the visit of the Holy Family and the presence of this well in it and the occurrence of the miracles of Jesus in Zagazig, including treating the wife of the good man Klum. This made the city of Bubastis an important place for the Coptic Christian in Egypt and the ancient world during the first centuries of Christianity and for a long time.

### 3. Conclusion

*This report illustrates the discovery of the well that the churches of the world kept praying for the memory of the drink of the Prophet of God Jesus. It also has remained a symbol of Egypt's entry into the land of safety to come out with much archaeological evidence that I presented in my books about him. I published it in 2000 AD. to present an important page that explains some of the evidence and information that the historical sources mentioned about Per Bast. Its ruins make Tell Basta rich with its treasures, including this well and its history. It represents an important treasure in Egypt as part of the human heritage and an important page of the grace established by Egypt to be added on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Bashans Coptic Calendar (the first of June).*

### Endnotes

- (a) King Khufu and Khafre are the first and second kings of the Fourth dynasty, which ruled Egypt during the period from 2600 to 2475 BC.
- (b) It is a manuscript written in the Coptic language, and its original is missing, and look at his comparison with other sources related to the visit of the Holy Family
- (c) He is the third king of the Sixth dynasty that ruled Egypt during the period from 2345 until 2195 BC.
- (d) Armant is a city on the western bank of the Nile, south of Luxor, 747 km from Cairo. It was the capital of the fourth province of Upper Egypt. Many temples were found in it that were built in different eras since the Middle Kingdom

for the god Monto, and they regained their importance after the fall of Thebes, and wrote their name in Greek Hermonthis, and Cleopatra built a temple for her and her son Cesarion, and it seems that this temple was large in size. Since the Thirtieth dynasty, a cemetery has been dedicated to burying the sacred calf Buchis, which Armant was an important center for his cult, and this cemetery was called Yochhum or Bochium, derived from his name Buchis, whom they worshiped alive in that city and lived in a special place attached to the temple. It is the cemetery discovered by R.L. Mond in 1927, six kilometers away on the edge of the desert, west of Armant.

### References

- [1] Beckearth, J. (1984). *Handbuch der ägyptischen königsnamen*, Series MÄS 20, Deutscher Kunstverlag, Berlin.
- [2] Naville, E. (1891). *Bubastis* (1887-1889), K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, London.
- [3] Bassili, W. (1968) *The flight into Egypt*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dar Memphis Press, Cairo.
- [4] Gabra, G. (1999). Über die flucht der heiligen familie nach koptischen traditionen, BSAC, Vol. 38, pp. 29-50.
- [5] Naville, E. (1889). *The historical results of the excavations at Bubastis*, a paper read before the Victoria Institute, London, 21 p.
- [6] Hhabashi, L. (1957). *Tell Basta*, l'Institut français d'archéologie, Egypt.
- [7] Eggebrecht, A. (1975). Armant, in: Helck, W. & Otto, E. (eds.) *Bibliographie de la préhistoire et de la protohistoire de l'Égypte et du Nord du Soudan*, Wiesbaden, pp. 435-441
- [8] Kelley, A. (1976). *The pottery of ancient Egypt, dynasty I to Roman times*, Royal Ontario Museum, Canada.