

EXCAVATIONS AT TELL EL-AMARNA (EGYPT)

A progress report on work at Kom el-Nana
supported by

The McDonald Institute

(Spring 1990)

under the direction of

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Egypt Exploration Society, London
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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The accompanying report is a preliminary account of excavations undertaken in the first quarter of 1990 as fieldwork supported by the McDonald Institute in Egypt at the ancient capital city of Tell el-Amarna, built c. 1350 B.C. by the Pharaoh Akhenaten. As in the previous season the target of excavation was the royal enclosure locally called Kom el-Nana, evidently a major religious and ceremonial centre. The work supported by the McDonald Institute covered two parts of the site, one a building where excavation was begun last year, the other an entirely new area. The former is what we have called the Central Platform, two thirds of which has now been exposed, planned, and studied. The new area lies immediately to the south and covers a strip of ground running between the Central Platform and the southern enclosure wall of Kom el-Nana. Within this strip the foundations of part of a further brick structure of formal layout were uncovered and planned. We have called it the South House. It had both a roofed area and an open court containing a sunken garden. Further to the south the excavation strip took in part of a large pylon-flanked entrance in the enclosure wall which provided a grand ceremonial approach to the South House.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Excavation report: the Central Platform
Chapter 3	Excavation report: the South House
Chapter 4	Excavation report: the South Pylon

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Kom el-Nana is the last unexcavated royal enclosure of the Amarna Period at Amarna itself. It contains a range of ceremonial and religious structures, as well as service buildings, including a substantial combined bakery and brewery. The site is a large one, but is now under threat from extension of the agricultural land which now surrounds it on all four sides. There is, therefore, an element of rescue archaeology in our strategy, although it seems that for so long as we work the site regularly no further attempt will be made to bring it under cultivation. However, the proximity of new fields is rapidly causing moisture to penetrate deeply into the site, and this in turn brings vegetation so that, even without further human intervention, much of Kom el-Nana is now doomed to serious degradation.

The McDonald-sponsored fieldwork is centred on a large open area where the principal shrines and ceremonial buildings are situated. These are parts of the site particularly vulnerable to the spreading groundwater. In 1989 sample areas of the two shrines were excavated, and a start was made on a conspicuous mound which turned out to cover a brick platform which supported a pavilion. From the shrine excavations came four thousand fragments of decorated stonework the housing and recording of which have become major tasks. Two members of the 1990 team were assigned to record the fragments at the expedition house and made good progress. One of them, Margaret Serpico (University College, London) has devised a general indexing system and a more detailed analytical one for the architectural fragments which are currently being computerized to facilitate groupings of similar fragments. To cover her costs whilst doing this in England I have obtained a modest British Academy research grant, and will be applying for another for the coming year. Until this work is completed it seems unwise to excavate further over the shrines where it is likely that several times the number of pieces so far found lie buried. However, having already drawn local attention to these areas they are more vulnerable than before to illicit digging. To guard against this we surrounded both of them with a barbed-wire fence during the 1990 season.

The 1990 excavations continued the clearance of the Central Platform, two thirds of which has now been exposed. Its surface seems to have been divided into two parts: a building on the east and a columned structure on the west. This year the excavation of the former was completed. At the same time two site supervisors were assigned to an entirely new piece of ground running south from the Platform to the southern edge of Kom el-Nana. Within a strip made up of a block of 21 five-metre excavation squares the beginnings of another ceremonial complex were discovered, namely a brick building (which we have called the South House) which had been approached through an entrance in the southern enclosure wall between a pair of pylons originally of massive proportions. This difference in orientation (the shrines and Central Platform seem to have faced west) is unexpected, and raises the question of where a southern access route would have come from, given that the southern side of Kom el-Nana (as far as we know) originally looked out over an expanse of blank desert.

It is the aim of the current work steadily to expand the excavation so that individual buildings are completely exposed, and the various elements are linked up, including the housing block previously dug by the expedition in 1988 and 1989, so that as complete and continuous a picture as possible is gained of this part of the site.

1.2 The Kom el-Nana team

The 1990 Amarna expedition worked at the site between 6 March and 19 April. The expedition personnel for Kom el-Nana were B. Kemp (director), Susan Cole, Imogen Grundon, Wendy Horton, (site supervisors), Ian Mathieson (resistivity survey), Pamela Rose and Paul Nicholson (pottery), Margaret Serpico and Gavin Kitchingham (decorated stones registration), Joanna Boyd (registrar), Andrew Boyce (artist), Delwen Samuel (archaeobotany), Dr Rosemary Luff (bones), Ann Cornwell (organics registrar), Gwilym Owen (photographer), and Eiman Mohammed Sadiq (EAO inspector).

1.3 Acknowledgements

To Eiman Mohammed Sadiq, and to his colleagues at el-Minia and Mallawi, especially Mahmoud Hamza, Adel Hassan, and Yahya Zakaria, and to Dr Ali Hassan and Kamal Fahmy and members of the Permanent Committee in Cairo, an expression of gratitude is due for much assistance, and for permission to carry out the work. Much help was provided by the British Council in Cairo, and by Rosalind Haddon of the Hongkong Egyptian Bank, and it is a pleasure to record the hospitality of H.E. the British Amabassador to Cairo and Mrs Donatella Adams.

The excavations are under the auspices of and basically funded by The Egypt Exploration Society, with substantial support from the British Academy and from additional sources. The University of Cambridge, however, provides a home for much of the concomitant research, writing up, and archiving via the Faculty of Oriental Studies, the Department of Archaeology, and now, through the provision of an Amarna project room, the McDonald Institute itself. Through the good offices of Professor A. Colin Renfrew the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Fieldwork and Research also made a major contribution to the Amarna expedition in 1990, partly to enable the excavation of the ceremonial area to be continued, and partly to support a research assistant, Pamela Rose. It is again hard to acknowledge adequately generosity on this scale.

The present report does not provide coverage of all of the recent Amarna fieldwork. Apart from what is necessary to appreciate the general character of the site the reporting is confined to the ceremonial area which gave to Kom el-Nana its particular character and which was the focus of the work specifically funded by the McDonald Institute. An account of the full range of the expedition's recent work is being prepared for *Amarna Reports* VI, to be published by the Egypt Exploration Society.

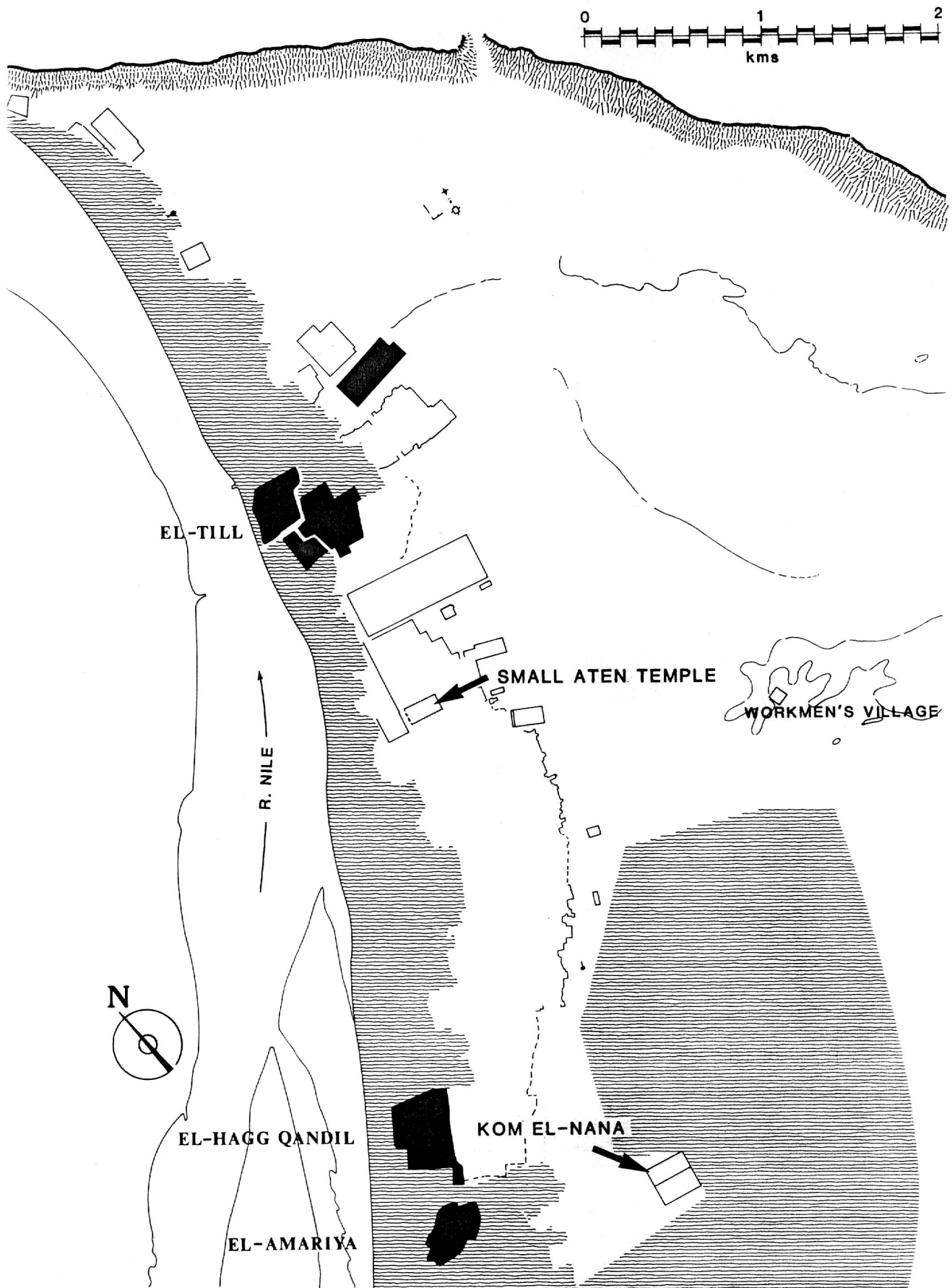


Figure 1.1. Outline map of Amarna showing areas of current fieldwork.

