Kellis was a village in the Dakhleh Oasis in the Egyptian Western Desert, inhabited continuously from the first to the late fourth century CE. Previously unexcavated, it has in recent decades yielded a wealth of data unsurpassed by most sites of the period due to the excellent state of preservation. We know the layout of the village with its temples, churches, residential sectors and cemeteries, and the excavators have retrieved vast quantities of artefacts, including a wealth of documents. The study of this material yields an integrated picture of life in the village, including the transition from ancient religious beliefs to various branches of Christianity. This volume provides accounts of the lived-in environment and its material culture, social structure and economy, religious beliefs and practices, and burial traditions. The topics are covered by an international team of specialists, culminating in an inter-disciplinary approach that will illuminate life in Roman Egypt.

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This fragmentary document in Greek was the first to be discovered that provided the ancient name of the site as Kellis of the Mothite nome (top line). The document is apparently an order, referring to a petition before the praeses or dux of the Thebaid, and concerns the transfer or transport of water. The claimants refer to themselves as ‘these poor and wretched ones’, and there is a tantalising reference to banishment. It is witnessed by a considerable number of people, which may indicate that it was issued at a local, village level.
Kellis

A Roman-Period Village in Egypt’s Dakhleh Oasis

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It is with great pleasure that we offer a double dedication of this volume:

To all of the Egyptian antiquities inspectors who participated in the excavation team and without whom our work would not have been possible, and especially Maher Bashendi Amin, Ashraf Tarboushi and Kamil Bayoumi.

To the memory of James E. Knudstad, who revealed the potential of Kellis through his detailed architectural survey, drawings and notes, and insightful advice on site.

The Editors on behalf of all contributors.
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In 1977 the Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) was formed as a consortium of archaeologists and environmentalists, designed to study the history of Dakhleh Oasis, Western Desert of Egypt. Our self-imposed remit is to investigate the history of human activity and development and the history and development of the landscape and resources of the oasis during the period of human presence, which has turned out to mean a span of some 400,000 years. Various investigators of the team have been responsible for the recovery and study of all the many aspects of this oasis area.

Dakhleh Oasis is about 2,000 sq km in area, centred on 25° 30’ N and 29° 07’ E, with a largely agricultural population. The flat oasis bottom land is watered only from underground sources in the sealed sandstone aquifers, which are not replenished from elsewhere, but which were filled with rainwater thousands of years ago during a recent Saharan wet phase. The population is distributed in villages, each village being surrounded by its farmland. The crops grown are basic food crops – cereals, vegetables and some fruits. Animal husbandry includes cattle, goats and sheep, poultry and rabbits, kept for meat, eggs and milk. The donkey is the main beast of burden, now being replaced by mechanical transport.

The Project began its study with a walking survey during which were recorded all ancient remains, all environmental evidence, as well as the present-day oasis landscape and settlement. In all, some 450 ancient ‘sites’ were recorded during the five years of the main part of the survey, as well as geological, zoological and botanical information. During this period, the Project staff expanded annually as more specialists were added to the group. Sometimes, DOP fielded over a hundred people each season from many different countries around the world.

During the walking survey of the oasis in 1980 and 1981, the large site known as Ismant al-Kharab was examined by several members of the field team. Our testing here demonstrated the size and depth of the site, the quality of its extant mud-brick architecture, and the general dating, principally from the ceramics found. Prior to this fieldwork, the site had been visited by several early travellers, each of whom made note of the mud-brick ruins and the remains of a sandstone temple and chapel.
structures, but none of whom made any significant archaeological observations.

Ismant al-Kharab (‘Ismant the Ruin’) lies south of the paved road on somewhat higher ground, and a couple of kilometres east of the modern town of Ismant. It is situated at 25° 31’ 38” N and 29° 04’ E. The site has been indexed as 31/420-D6-1 in the DOP system. Throughout the Roman and Late Roman periods it was known as Kellis.

The DOP, following the completion of the walking survey of the oasis, decided to excavate in a number of sites in order to further expose the quality and size of occupation in the oasis at various periods. One of the periods of greater occupation was during the centuries around the turn of the millennium when the Romans occupied Egypt, and thus it was decided to investigate one of the major sites of this period. I invited Colin Hope to direct this and, of the three large settlements in Dakhleh – Ismant al-Kharab, Mut al-Kharab and Amhida – chose Ismant al-Kharab, the one showing the greatest promise of return of information, judging from the results of the preceding survey. The site appeared to hold temple structures, churches, many mud-brick houses, industrial areas and cemeteries of considerable size. It would be a microcosm of the entire Roman period occupation in the Western Desert.

Colin Hope has functioned as the ceramics expert of the DOP since its beginnings in 1978, when he joined the Project. His contributions have been a most important aspect of our study in an area where every site since the Bashendi has a quantity of ceramic materials as a major factor in its artefact composition. Throughout the survey (1978–82) he had studied the pottery industry of the oasis in all its history. Included were the Neolithic assemblages, pharaonic settlement sites and cemeteries, Ptolemaic and Roman periods, and the succeeding Christian and medieval Islamic centuries. All of this was Colin’s interest and provided him with a long sweep of development of the technology and the style of ceramics. Pottery, being ubiquitous on archaeological sites in Egypt, provides an open window to many aspects of ancient cultures. Interconnections between oasis sites, between oases, and between the oasis and other regions of NW Africa and the Mediterranean world, developments in both time and space, and cultural influences are but a few of the types of information provided by ceramics studies.

Excavation of Kellis has provided much more than the great benefits of ceramics studies. Here is a complex site that has yielded hard information on the economy of Dakhleh Oasis over a period of four hundred years, on domestic architecture of several social groups, on three distinctive religions,
on oasis agricultural practices, on trade and export, and on industrial processes. These and all other aspects of daily life at Kellis are the product of this painstaking excavation. Over the past seasons Colin’s archaeological expertise has produced a large and detailed understanding of life in the oasis during the several centuries after the time of Christ, in particular at the town of Kellis.

The work of Colin Hope is a model of practice. He has always brought a number of his students into the Project. Several of these have now completed Ph.D. degrees on aspects of the site and the period and are actively pursuing independent research. Among these is Gillian Bowen, now a specialist on the Christian period of Dakhleh and a major contributor to each field season; she is the assistant director of the excavations at Kellis and has studied many of the other Christian sites in the oasis. Many of the Project’s senior investigators have also participated in the study of the site. Colin and Gillian have developed a basic approach to the fieldwork which allows assistants to work without continual supervision, but which allows them to keep current with everything being done on site and which ensures that recording of the excavation is complete and up to date before returning to Melbourne at the end. Numerous publications of the field seasons and results at Kellis have appeared; seven volumes on the texts have been published and two on the excavations are in preparation. The present volume presents a survey of the results of the excavations and illustrates well the important contribution Kellis makes to the study of not only Dakhleh but also Roman Egypt at large.

ANTHONY J. MILLS
The work at Ismant al-Kharab and the study of the material discovered there has benefited from support at a wide variety of levels, and only the most significant can be acknowledged here. First and foremost, without the approval of the Egyptian antiquities authorities at all levels and the continuous assistance of a number of its representatives we could not have undertaken the excavations, and our gratitude is expressed here. This is extended especially to the officers of the Dakhleh-Farafran Inspectorate, past and present. The excavations are a part of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, all members of which are thanked for their interest and assistance, particularly, of course, the founding director, Anthony J. Mills. Logistical support in Egypt was provided first by the Canadian Institute in Egypt then the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo.

Funding has been multinational. The initial survey of the site was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in grants to Anthony J. Mills, administered by the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, Toronto. This society and the Royal Ontario Museum were the original sponsors of the Dakhleh Oasis Project. The excavations were enabled by financial support from: the Australian Research Council Discovery Projects Scheme, first to C. A. Hope and R. G. Jenkins, administered by The University of Melbourne and Monash University, and then to C. A. Hope and I. Gardner, administered by Monash University; R. S. Bagnall from his Mellon Foundation award; the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; Australians Studying Abroad; the Egyptology Society of Victoria and the
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The team working at Ismant al-Kharab has been extensive, and all field and office staff are acknowledged, especially: M. Birrell, W. Dolling, M. Eccleston, K. Hickson, P. Kucera, L. F. Mills, M. Rowney, A. Stevens and D. Tuck, site supervisors; M. Berry and L. Blondaux, conservation; J. and A. Dobrowolski and B. Rowney, architects; J. C. R. Gill, J. C. Howell, J. Leinart, C. Marchini, B. E. Parr and L. Pinch-Brock, draughtspersons; A. Dunsmore, N. Hope, A. Jamieson and S. F. Patten, ceramics recorders/analysts; and R. Colvin, photography. All have been most excellently tended by our house staff led by Mansour Bayoumi and co-ordinated by R. A. Frey and L. F. Mills.

K. A. Worp most generously handed over his drafts for the contributions on Administration and Literacy to Andrew Connor, who then worked them into the final forms presented here. A. Boozer and F. Dunand kindly commented upon several of the chapters; the comments of two anonymous reviewers were most insightful.

Last but not least, Cambridge University Press is to be thanked for undertaking the publication of this volume. Michael Sharp proposed the volume and supported it throughout its protracted period of production, for which all contributors are most grateful. We are also grateful to Natasha Burton and Katie Idle for their assistance in various ways, and Jane Burkowski for her diligence in copy-editing. Monash University assisted with the costs of production.
Editorial Note

It has been necessary to place some of the illustrations used to accompany the text of this volume online in the website for the volume. Readers should consult these in conjunction with the volume at: www.cambridge.org. Such illustrations are indicated by an asterisk, e.g., Figure *1.1. We hope this does not prove inconvenient.

A selection of the Kellis texts is provided in translation in the Appendix and they are referred to in the text where appropriate with a sequential document number given in bold.
Referencing Texts from Kellis

Texts from Kellis are found in a variety of languages and on a variety of material. These are referenced according to a standardised, abbreviated system for papyri, ostraka, and tablets from Graeco-Roman Egypt. In the case of Kellis, texts are generally referenced by their object type (P = papyrus, O = ostrakon, T = tablet), publication series (Papyri from Kellis), language (Greek, e.g.) and publication number. The twelfth Greek papyrus document published in the Papyri from Kellis series, therefore, would be P.Kellis Gr. 12. Because texts in multiple languages are published within the same volume of Kellis papyri, the use of volume numbers can introduce confusion and has been omitted. The following concordance gives the volume and title of, and in which volume a particular text might be found, according to its abbreviated reference. The aforementioned P.Kellis Gr. 12, for instance, is found in Papyri from Kellis I: Greek Papyri from Kellis I. Some additional texts have been published elsewhere. These are cited by a separate abbreviated reference or, when in an academic journal, in the conventional reference style. All volumes in the Papyri from Kellis series are published by Oxbow Books.

Abbreviated Reference: Found in Volume:

 Abbreviated Reference: Found in Volume:


When a particular line is referred to, it follows the text number with a comma, as in this example:

- **P.Kellis Gr. 89, 2**.

In referencing the commentary following a text, as is standard for papyrological publications, it follows the text number with a comma and the letter n, as in this example:

- **P.Kellis Gr. 29, n. 7**.

When reference is made to other material from a volume, such as the preliminary discussion, introductions, etc., it is referred to by the volume editor and year of publication in the style of a modern publication, as in this example:


ANDREW CONNOR
Chronology

With list of rulers/emperors mentioned in the volume

PHARAONIC PERIOD
EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD  circa 3000–2686 BCE
OLD KINGDOM 2686–2160 BCE
FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 2160–2055 BCE
MIDDLE KINGDOM 2055–1650 BCE
SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 1650–1550 BCE
NEW KINGDOM 1550–1069 BCE
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 1069–664 BCE
LATE PERIOD 664–332 BCE

PTOLEMAIC PERIOD 332–30 BCE
Ptolemy VIII, Euergetes II 170–116 BCE
Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos (Aulites) 80–51 BCE

ROMAN PERIOD
Augustan era 30 BCE – 68 CE
Claudius 41–54
Nero 54–68
Flavian era 69–96
Trajan 98–117
Hadrian 117–138
Antoninus Pius 138–161
Marcus Aurelius 161–180
Lucius Verus 161–169
Pertinax 193
Septimius Severus 193–211
Caracalla 198–217
Maximinus 235–238
Probus 276–282
Numerian 283–284
Diocletian 284–305
Maximianus 286–305
LATE ROMAN PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galerius</td>
<td>305–311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine I</td>
<td>306–337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxentius</td>
<td>306–312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licinius</td>
<td>308–324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine II</td>
<td>337–340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constans</td>
<td>337–350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantius II</td>
<td>337–361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian the Apostate</td>
<td>361–363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jovian</td>
<td>363–364</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valentinian I</td>
<td>364–375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gratian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theodosius I</td>
<td>379–395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentinian II</td>
<td>383–392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadius</td>
<td>395–408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorius</td>
<td>398–423</td>
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Maps

Map 2. Map of the Great Oasis showing sites mentioned in the text.
When travelling the largely deserted stretch of land between Balat and Ismant in Dakhleh Oasis, the observant visitor, or anyone armed with a guidebook including the oases of the Egyptian Western Desert, will note substantial mud-brick ruins to the south of the road. Further, if visiting it would become obvious they are the remains of a sizeable site with a range of structures quite well preserved (Figure *1.1) and others badly deflated. Most might stay in the area of these structures, but the more curious could venture further and note extensive traces of buildings extending to the north-east. The area covered by the remains is 1,050 by 650 metres, so almost ¾ sq km. The site is known locally as Ismant al-Kharab, ‘Ismant the ruined’, to distinguish it from the still occupied village of Ismant nearby; its ancient name is Kellis. While never ‘lost’ to those living in the region, and mentioned by travellers during the early nineteenth to twentieth centuries (Kaper 1997b; Boozer 2013a), generally little was reported about the site. The most extensive observations were made by Herbert Winlock, who visited in 1908 (Winlock 1936), but these amount to only a few pages. Archaeological interest in Dakhleh was triggered by the work of Ahmed Fakhry in the mid-twentieth century, which brought attention to the remains of the Old Kingdom capital at ‘Ain Aseel with its associated mastaba tombs near Balat, and other locations within the oasis (Osing et alii 1982). Fakhry visited Ismant al-Kharab but did not work there. His pioneering efforts not only in Dakhleh but also in the other oases were the catalyst for two large-scale projects that commenced in 1977: l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale au Caire excavations at the Balat sites, and the Dakhleh Oasis Project. Both are still operating 40 years later, indicating the significance of the discoveries. The study of Ismant al-Kharab forms part of the latter. This introduction places the site within the context of the Project and the archaeology of Dakhleh, questions it raised about the level of exploitation during Roman rule, and provides a short overview of the site.

The Dakhleh Oasis Project was formed by Anthony J. Mills in 1977 with the aim of studying human adaptation to life in a semi-arid environment across the millennia (Mills 1979; 1999). It has become a
large multi-disciplinary team with participants from institutions worldwide, and its concession was all of Dakhleh excluding those areas being studied by the French teams. The oasis is some 800 km SSW of Cairo (Map 1) and includes an area of 2,000 sq km bounded on the north by an escarpment 300+ m in height. The elevation of the depression is 100–30 ASL; the topography varies from cultivated flat plains of clay to gravel surfaces and terraces, and areas of Aeolian sand activity. The basin floor has remains of extensive playas and numerous fossil spring mounds. Many areas are affected by salt encrustation, a result of over-exploitation and poor water management. In 1978 rainfall was 0.7 mm, with humidity rarely above 50 per cent and temperatures varied from a maximum in January of 21.5 to 39°C in July. These conditions will approximate those when Kellis was occupied, though rainfall may have been even less as also the salination. The population stood at 35,000; it has now risen considerably. Dakhleh was accessible by a variety of main routes from the other oases and the Nile valley (Paprocki 2019, 218–33; Riemer 2020): one via Farafra in the north (Darb Farafra), three from Kharga on the east (Darb al-Ghubari; Darb al-'Ain Amur; route from Dush), itself connected by several to the valley in the vicinity of Luxor and nearby Farshut, and one directly from Asyut (Darb al-Tawil). Many additional small tracks were used, as until recently, across the escarpment in all directions. Travel was anciently on foot or by donkey, and later, at least from the Persian period, by camel (Bagnall 2015, 151; Agut-Labordère 2018). Today, there are checkpoints along the roads and the same may have applied in antiquity, for a border is mentioned in Coptic letters in relation to travel to and from the valley.

The Project commenced with a walking survey of the oasis (Map 2), starting in the west, and during the period 1978–87 recorded hundreds of localities with evidence of human activity from the Early Stone Age to medieval period (Churcher and Mills 1999). The discovery of sites continues. The range of historic-period sites includes large and small settlements, isolated structures and cemeteries of various sizes. Interaction is well documented with neighbouring regions, especially Kharga Oasis to the east, and both the nascent pharaonic state and its fully developed form, and the ensuing Ptolemaic and Roman regimes, though with varying degrees of detail and intensity (Bowen and Hope 2019 passim). The survey, of course, was largely restricted to the recording of surface remains, and minimal excavation was undertaken. Thus, in most cases the exact size, nature, date, cultural affiliation and character of the sites can only be estimated based on what ended up on the surface, and this represents a
variety of formation, abandonment and environmental processes, and must be treated as an indication only of what lies beneath. Data from excavated trenches or graves are more reliable and can be dated with more precision; they assist in the analysis of the surface finds as does comparison with well-dated contexts elsewhere in Egypt. The latter process poses its own problems: can the same date be automatically assigned to, for example, a collection of ceramics from a grave in Dakhleh as that determined for similar material found in the Nile valley with its mostly reliable chronology? Was the material used for the same time period as in the valley, for the same purposes? While answers appear to be in the affirmative it became clear that local chronological sequences should be determined and then comparison undertaken, otherwise the process becomes circular.

To rectify this situation the second phase of the Dakhleh Oasis Project has involved the more detailed study of a small number of sites specifically chosen to enable the survey data to be better contextualised and the cultural evolution documented with greater certainty (Map 2). Understanding the demography of the oasis required obtaining a reliably dated collection of human remains, so excavations commenced at the cemetery of ‘Ain Tirghi, south-west of Balat. Unfortunately, many of the graves had been used during different periods, from the Middle Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period, and few interments were intact (Hope 2019a). Thus, the study shifted to two cemeteries at Ismant al-Kharab, one of which has proved especially productive (Chapter 15). Two temples have been investigated because of their significance as large stone monuments and the light they shed on religious practices: Dayr al-Hagar in western Dakhleh, well known to early visitors as the only accessible standing temple, and ‘Ain Birbiyya in the east near Bashendi, which is the opposite, a temple buried to roof level. Both can be dated by the occurrence of royal name rings (cartouches) to the Roman period, though the latter was commenced in the late Ptolemaic period. Lately the source of stone used in temple construction in central Dakhleh has been documented. The periods of greatest activity in the oasis as indicated by the survey data are the Old Kingdom and, on a much larger scale, the Roman to Late Roman periods. ‘Ain al-Gazzareen in the west near Amhida was selected for the study of the former and Ismant al-Kharab for the latter. Ismant al-Kharab is the focus of this volume, but all of the other sites except ‘Ain al-Gazzareen contribute to the picture presented of Roman Dakhleh.

The survey data and subsequent surface planning by James Knudstad (Knudstad and Frey 1999) indicated that Ismant al-Kharab flourished
Figure 1.1. Plan of Kellis.
during the Roman and Late Roman periods. Two temple complexes, a bath house, various residential sectors and monumental tombs were identified (Figure 1.1). Furthermore, two churches were located on the east of the site and another on the west, and artefacts indicated a date within the fourth century for the eastern churches. The state of preservation was found to be good despite wind erosion; conditions are such that a wide variety of fragile categories of material survive, including papyrus, textiles, wood and bone, alongside the durable ceramic, glass and metal. A plan of the site could be easily achieved because structures are visible at surface level and the delineation of walls can be done simply with a brush! And many buildings in the central part of the site preserve their roofs. Two other possibilities for study of the Roman and Late Roman periods were indicated by the survey data: Mut al-Kharab in central Dakhleh and Amhida in the west (Map 2). While the Temple of Seth, Lord of Oasis, was known to have existed at Mut al-Kharab throughout the first millennium BCE and surface sherds indicated a long span of activity into the medieval period, it is badly deflated, and much of the site lies under cultivation and modern structures. Amhida, though extensive and with a range of building types indicative of a major settlement, and ceramics again covering a long duration, is badly affected by termites because of surrounding cultivation, and this impacts the survival of the fragile materials known to be present at Ismant al-Kharab. This site was therefore the obvious choice with which to commence the study of Roman settlement in the oasis. Subsequently, both Mut al-Kharab (Bowen and Hope 2019 passim) and Amhida (Bagnall et alii 2015) have become the focus of investigation and both complement significantly information from Ismant al-Kharab.

It has been indicated that the Roman period, defined here as the first century to third quarter of the third century CE, witnessed considerable activity in Dakhleh; this is an understatement. Dating, primarily based on ceramics, implied a major increase of sites possibly by tenfold compared to the preceding Ptolemaic period. This was believed to be the result of a deliberate policy by the central administration of Egypt to exploit the agricultural potential of the region in keeping with Rome’s attitude to the country in general. More recent study as a result of excavations at Mut al-Kharab has enabled a better understanding of Ptolemaic ceramics in Dakhleh, and the number of sites at which activity occurred during that period is now estimated to be at least 50 (Hope 2019b) and possibly more (Gill 2016; 2019). Even the lower number is a significant increase on the preceding Late Period (Hubschmann 2019), itself far better attested than those before (Long 2019a; 2019b). Excavations at Ismant al-Kharab have
yielded securely contexted and dated ceramic assemblages of the second to third centuries and of the late third to fourth centuries, and so these can be used to assess the dating of sites assigned to the Roman and Late Roman periods during the survey. It can now be seen that the increase in sites, reflecting increase in human activity, was gradual during the first millennium, accelerating in the Ptolemaic period, but in the three centuries of the Roman period site numbers almost quadrupled, and in the Late Roman period they reduced to double the scale of the Ptolemaic period (Hope 2019b). The number of sites within each century of the Late Roman period, as with those of the Roman period, cannot yet be determined. How far into the Late Roman period the sites extend is yet to be determined also, but certainly, there is ample evidence for the sixth to seventh centuries, especially at Mut al-Kharab.

Many questions remain unresolved. The numbers of sites during the periods we are concerned with here indicate substantial variation in population, but it is not possible to estimate actual sizes. We do not know either from where the people came who occupied the many new sites. Was there a redistribution of population already in Dakhleh? Were people from the valley and other oases encouraged to take up residence, and if so, were incentives offered as in the recent past? Does the latter scenario account for the close connections between Kellis and various valley sites seen in the documents and the knowledge of classical painting (Chapters 3 and 10) and architecture that the wealthier Kellis residents adopted (Chapter 2)? The interest in Dakhleh has been attributed to investment in its agricultural potential (Bagnall 2015) and especially the production of certain crops and their products for which there was demand in the Nile valley: olive oil, dates, figs, jujubes and cotton, along with alum. These commodities could be transported relatively inexpensively by camel, but the costs involved would have been factored into the viability of the trade. The environment in the valley was also not suitable for growing cotton. While the data on which this is based are mostly fourth century, it is believed to reflect the situation also in preceding centuries. Trade with regions both to the south and north along well-established routes will also have been a factor. The general statements about settlement numbers must be treated with caution as they do not take into consideration the size and nature of sites: some are single buildings, some small and some large settlements; the size of cemeteries is an estimate only. In addition, it must be remembered that, undoubtedly, not all sites have been identified; some are under sand dunes, others under cultivation, while more have been completely lost as a result of wind erosion and a combination of these factors.
The picture now emerging of the settlement pattern and history in Roman and Late Roman Dakhleh can be summarised (Hope 2019b). The principal foci of activity were four large sites. From west to east they are: Amhida, now known to have been called Trimithis in Greek, derived from the Egyptian name for the site, possibly to be equated with the ‘town of sawehat’ in earlier inscriptions (Kaper 2012a, 271); Mut al-Kharab, the Mothis of the Kellis texts and Mut in earlier inscriptions (Kaper 1992, 130–2); Ismant al-Kharab; and ‘Ain Birbiyya, ancient ‘Imrt in Egyptian and possibly the Mesobe of the Kellis texts (Kaper 1992, 122–4; 2012a, 270). Mothis and Trimithis had been occupied since the Old Kingdom, and Mothis was the capital of Dakhleh in the Late Roman period and undoubtedly the largest settlement, though today only the huge temple enclosure, the largest in the Western Desert, survives. The settlements at the others were approximately the same size. Each of these sites has stone temples, a mark of their significance, and all but ‘Ain Birbiyya have closely associated large cemeteries. Another stone temple is located at ‘Ain al-Azizi, south-west of Ismant al-Kharab, around which there is a sizeable settlement; its ancient name is unknown. Settlements, isolated structures and cemeteries cluster around the four main sites but are also scattered between them (Hope 2019b, figure 1). Today the area due west of Balat for some 15 km is largely deserted; this is on the whole reflected in the survey data. Roman activity otherwise occurs throughout the oasis. In general, the distribution coincides with areas of contemporary cultivation, showing that the same regions were fertile and exploitable two millennia ago; some occur beyond this on the west and east. An estimated total of 245 sites is known; 196 were active in the Roman period and 112 in the Late Roman period, with 62 being occupied in both (Table *1.1). Gross figures show an even distribution of sites in the major sections of the oasis: west from Dayr al-Hagar to Amhida, centre from south-east of Dayr Abu Matta to Ismant al-Kharab, and east from south-west of Balat to Teneida. The isolated buildings are often associated with wells and were clearly farmsteads, and major earth works occur near Dayr al-Hagar to enhance water supply to cultivation. This was greatly improved by the digging of many wells, use of the water wheel (saqiyya) and in the east near Teneida by underground water reservoirs (qanats).

Two particular types of structures deserve comment for the information on economic and religious activity that they provide: pigeon lofts and mud-brick temples. Either singly or in groups, pigeon lofts, or columbaria, occur throughout the oasis (Mills 1993); they seem to date to the Roman period, but whether later also is not known. They are characterised by
two vaulted rooms at ground level with an upper storey arranged to accommodate ceramic nesting pots set into walls and/or pillars. Often there are hundreds of these vessels or their emplacements; in Kharga Oasis one is estimated to have had 700 recesses (Warner 2018, 381–2). The pigeons would have provided protein but also guano for fertiliser. The number of such buildings is uncertain due to issues of preservation and lack of excavation, but there are at least 42, and possibly 47. They are on average quite small, from 6 x 7 m to 10 x 8 m, though some are far larger; one in the west is part of a complex 17.5 x 23 x 7 m with a central court 12 m square, and another possesses three storeys with 10 rooms. Approximately 30 of these lofts occur in the west around Dayr al-Hagar, clearly indicating significant agricultural activity in the region. There are five in the centre of the oasis, including one at Kellis (Chapter 2; Figure 2.5), and at least six in the east, with two in the barren area south-west of Balat.

The temples are of two plans (Figure *1.2; Mills 1982b, 129; Kaper 1997b, 7). Type 1 is elongated with a large outer room, which may have niches in its walls, giving access to 2–3 smaller inner rooms all on one axis. Type 2 possess 2–3 rooms axially arranged that may be preceded by other rooms, but they lack the elongated outer room. There are 11 examples of Type 1 and four examples of Type 2. The distribution pattern is interesting as they generally occur in rather isolated locations, some with small settlements and some without, often on the perimeter of the oasis, and a few are on the low terraces beyond the cultivation. Type 2 is attested in the west near Dayr al-Hagar and due east of Amhida, in the centre south-west of ‘Ain al-Gedida and in the east at Bashendi. Examples of Type 1 do not occur in the west, but are known in the centre at ‘Ain al-Gedida (Aravecchia 2018) and Qasr al-Halakah east of Kellis, while the remainder are in the east, including two in the barren area south-west of Balat. Only one has been fully excavated, at ‘Ain al-Gedida, so their date is largely unknown, but they undoubtedly functioned during the Roman period. Whether any were active before this cannot be determined yet, though some Ptolemaic ceramics have been identified at four, including examples of both types. Choosing the location of such important structures would have been carefully deliberated and should reflect local perceptions of the significance of landscape and specific topographic features. Fifteen mud-brick temples are reported in Kharga (Ikram 2018a).

A brief description now of Kellis will serve as an introduction to discussions throughout this volume. Excavations commenced in 1986 and continued to 2010; more work is planned. The research objectives of the
excavations were many, especially as it was the first large site of the Roman–Late Roman period to be explored in Dakhleh. They relate to both the individual site, such as its date of occupation, nature of activity at the site, religious beliefs, economic basis and interconnections locally and nationally, and specifically obtaining data that might cast light upon the expansion discussed above. Most of these themes are examined throughout this work. First the name. Its origin is uncertain. It is found in hieroglyphs in Shrine I of the Main Temple complex (Chapter 9), in the titles of the goddess Neith, who is called Mistress of Qylt (�� ), and this renders the pronunciation of the Greek name Kellis quite accurately (Kaper 2010a, 197). The Greek kappa (κ) is generally rendered in Egyptian as q. Remarkably, when the name is written in Coptic Egyptian sources from the fourth century the spellings, which are varied, mostly commence with ง (g), derived from Demotic Egyptian. The -is ending of the name occurs regularly in Greek renderings of Egyptian words or names. A possible non-Egyptian origin of the name Kellis may be the Latin cella, ‘storeroom’, written as kella in Greek. This might explain the hieroglyphic writing with its final sign of a house. The main objection to this etymology is that the term kella has not been found in Egypt from the early Roman period, when the village of Kellis received its name. Until more data are available, the meaning of the name and its derivation must remain
uncertain. It is of great interest to note that another Dakhleh toponym, Trimithis, once supposed to be of Greek derivation, has been shown to be Egyptian with the name meaning ‘the northern storehouse’ or something similar (Gardner, Alcock and Funk 1999, 276). It seems relevant that \( t-\text{ri} \) and \( kella \) have the same meaning that clearly relates to agricultural activity.

Kellis is located in the centre of the Dakhleh Oasis, on the eastern edge of an extensive area of modern cultivation (Map 2). It carries the Dakhleh Oasis Project site number 31/420-D6-1. These site numbers identify location by reference to the region of the oasis (e.g., map 31/420) and gridded 1 sq km areas (e.g., D6), and give the site number within that location; numbers were assigned on primacy of discovery. In addition to the \( \frac{3}{4} \) sq km covered by the settlement there are extensive cemeteries that extend considerably the size of the ancient activity zone (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Adjacent on the north-west is the North Tomb Group, on the west are the West Tombs and on the south the South Tomb Group (Chapter 13). At a slight distance on the north lies the crowded Kellis 2 cemetery (31/420-C5-2; Chapters 14 and 15) and in the low hills to the west the Kellis 1 cemetery (31/420-C5-1; Chapter 13). While it is defined as a village (\( kome \)) in the texts, Davoli (2011, 70) has suggested that Kellis is to be included with a group that ‘should be thought of as towns or small towns, settlements of a third rank in the Egyptian hierarchical government of the country’ because of their architectural complexity. First rank is accorded to the capital, Alexandria, and second rank to the provincial/ nome administrative capitals, the metropoleis; at the bottom of the ranking are the normal villages. Throughout the fourth century Kellis is said to belong to the nome of Mothis (Chapter 7) with its capital at Mothis/Mut al-Kharab.

The site (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) sits upon a low clay terrace with dried-up water courses (wadis) on either side. To the south there is another terrace that shows no trace of occupation, while on the west the chain of hills containing the Kellis 1 cemetery extends for some distance both north and south. Beyond lies the modern cultivation, and this may give an indication where the fields cultivated by the ancient occupants lay. These were presumably extensive, as the mainstay of the economy was agriculture (Chapters 6.1 and 6.2). Four wells have been identified in the two wadis that provided water for the fields, and one south of the east churches still has moisture. Another ancient well is located in the north-west of the Main Temple complex that may have provided water primarily for cultic use. Smaller hamlets with wells are distributed around the general vicinity of Kellis and are mentioned in the texts from the site; they were probably
dependent upon it, as for example ‘Ain al-Sabil about 1 km to the south (Bayoumy and Masoud 2019).

Occupation can be divided into two phases without any hiatus in activity: the Roman period, and the Late Roman period, from the late third to late fourth centuries. It is not possible to determine the size of the population during either, but 1,000–1,500 may not be far off the mark, as proposed by Bagnall and Frier (1994, 55) for rural villages in Egypt. During the former period the northern two-thirds of the site (Areas B to D) were occupied; the North and South Tomb Groups and the Kellis 1 cemetery were in use. Area D on the west of the site contains the Main Temple complex and the West Temple (Chapters 9 and 10) in which the village’s main deities, Tutu/Tithoes, Neith and Tapsais were venerated. While the temples are small they contain elaborate decoration of both pharaonic and classical style. The Main Temple complex contains four additional structures designated Shrines I to IV; Shrine I is the elaborate mammisi or birth house (Chapter 9). At some stage, the Main Temple complex was incorporated within Enclosure 1, which contains numerous structures to the east of the temple also, on either side of a processional route or dromos.

On the north of Enclosure 1 are three other enclosures (Figures 1.1 and *1.3). The first to be built was Enclosure 2 on the east. Amongst structures in this enclosure, which seem to have been formally laid out, two on the west are of significance (Knudstad and Frey 1999, 201). The first measures 32 x 36 m; it originally stood two storeys high, and has rooms arranged on three sides of an 11 x 28 m court oriented on a north–south axis. At the northern end of the court there is a room with a double-pier entrance that has a niche flanked by attached columns in the north wall. This is the largest architectural unit identified on the site to date, surpassing in size the colonnaded hall of B/1/2 mentioned below. It may have communicated with Enclosure 1 via a door at the southern end of the court. The second smaller structure, which lies to the west, again comprises rooms arranged on three sides of a court, here aligned east–west, that has an elaborate niche in the centre of its east wall. It covers 14 x 18 m and stood two storeys high; the niche is flanked by attached columns, has a half-dome ceiling and its floor is raised above that in the court. It is large enough to have contained a life-size statue. Another series of rooms with similar details is located to the east of the Main Temple in Enclosure 1. The function of these structures has yet to be determined; the scale of the largest is truly impressive and indicates it was of considerable significance. Enclosure 3, which was added after 2, displays few remains at surface level. Enclosure 4 was added in the fourth century around West Tombs 1
and 2 (Chapter 13), and contains the West Church and an associated
cemetery (Chapters 11 and 14). A fifth enclosure was constructed to the
east of Enclosure 1 and 2, but when is uncertain. It is separated from the
others by a laneway that might have been covered. Its function is also
unknown. On the extreme west lies the West Temple, dedicated to Tapsais
and Neith (Chapter 9).

From the Main Temple the dromos led through to the exterior of
Enclosure 1 on the east, where there may have been an open area. The
residential areas are situated in Areas B and C, forming one continuous
zone, and it may have extended west towards the North Tombs. No formal
network of streets or lanes has been detected here, but this may be the
result of incomplete planning, as some are obvious on the surface. It
certainly appears that both areas were developed with a degree of control,
as there are numerous adjacent buildings sharing walls that form blocks,
such as in Area B/3, some very large, as with B/1/1–3 (Chapter 2). Some
structures in Area B have elaborate painted classical decoration (Chapter
3) and architectural forms indicating the wealth of their occupants and
interconnections with the wider Roman world. Area C contains large and
medium-size structures with some regularity of size and layout that reflect
formal planning, and there is also evidence for a variety of crafts: pottery
manufacture, spinning and metalworking (Chapters 2 and 4).

From the mid-third century the focus of occupation appears to have
moved to the southern section of the central part of the site, Area A, due
east of the Main Temple complex. Whether there had been any occupation
here prior to this is unknown; none has been found below the excavated
structures, which are built on the original surface of the site. Areas B–D
were either abandoned or witnessed change of function. There is evidence
for formal layout along east–west streets or lanes and at least one north–
south (Figure 2.8), such as in contemporary Trimitthus (Davoli 2019). One
quite substantial street leads from the south-east corner of Enclosure 1 to
the eastern edge of the site. It is blocked by buildings at its eastern end
where the East Church complex was developed in the fourth century
(Chapter 11). Opening off the western end of the street is the bath house
(Knudstad and Frey 1999, 205). This has yet to be investigated, but a
magnetometer survey revealed traces of the structure (Figure *1.4), only
the second known in Dakhleh. The other is at Amhida (Davoli 2019, 63–
5). Documentary evidence shows that the Kellis bath house functioned
during the fourth century also (Chapter 2), but when it was constructed is
unknown. It possessed an entrance portico with columns fronting the road
and a series of vaulted rooms with hypocaust system below. The bath may
overlie another structure. The open space in front of the entrance to Enclosure 1 appears to have been filled with rather random constructions. Area A comprises well-preserved, domestic structures of medium size that are preserved to roof level, some again constructed in blocks but with diversity of room arrangements. Material remains survive in substantial quantities, including large numbers of documents. They provide a remarkable amount of detail on the village, administratively (Chapter 7), economically (Chapter 6), socially (Chapters 5 and 8) and concerning religious beliefs (Chapter 12). The survival of two intact, inscribed wooden books in House 2 (Figure 2.22) is especially significant. One showing economic ties to Kharga and preserving extensive data on local subsistence (P.Kellis Gr. 96: The Kellis Agricultural Account Book) is mentioned regularly throughout this volume; the other (P.Kellis Gr. 95: The Kellis Isocrates Codex) indicates the use of classical texts in education. As in Area C, there is evidence for craft activity: woodworking, including making wooden books, spinning and weaving, and possibly leatherworking (Chapters 2 and 4). The religious beliefs of the occupants were overwhelmingly Christian in its various early manifestations, with a significant Manichaean community (Chapter 12). The east churches and the West Church were constructed at this time. The Kellis 2 cemetery was now in use and may contain as many as 4,000 burials (Chapters 14); the study of the human remains has yielded a wealth of information on life at Kellis (Chapter 15). The Nymphaeum, a water feature possibly connected with the nymphs or Isis, was also constructed on the edge of Area A oriented towards the north-east to the line of the North Tombs (Chapter 9). Currently the area between the North Tombs and Area B seems largely empty, but it is probable that there were brick structures here that have been eroded by wind and sand. The appearance of this area forming a major approach route to the site is illusory because of this. Connections with numerous sites in the valley are attested during this period, from Alexandria to Antinoöpolis, the administrative capital of the region in which Dakhleh was incorporated, and such major centres as Hermopolis (el-Ashmunein), Lykopolis (Asyut) and Panopolis (Akhmim), as well as the Thebaid (Map 1). The site appears to have been abandoned by the end of the fourth century.

This volume provides the first comprehensive account of what the excavations have revealed on life in the village, its place within Dakhleh, and connections with surrounding regions and the Nile valley. Not everything can be covered; the primary aim is to present a synthesis of 25 years of excavation and analysis.
The study of the domestic context is invaluable for our understanding of life at Kellis, both in terms of its architecture that reflects the interplay of different cultural traditions and for what we can learn of the lived experiences of the occupants. Extensive parts of Kellis are devoted to residential sectors, and excavations have shown that they attest a variety of mud-brick architectural types that contribute significantly to the study of domestic architecture in Egypt throughout the period of the site’s occupation (Hope 2015). The excavated structures can be dated by associated artefacts, including a wide array of textual and numismatic data. This chapter describes architectural forms, what we know of the occupants, their activities and the material culture they used. While the data are abundant, the number of actual structures examined so far is small. From the second to third centuries there are parts of several in Area C, but only one has been completely examined, one in Area B and small parts of the extensive complex there. Of the late third to fourth century we have five houses and one associated structure in Area A and a single unit in Area D. The range of domestic facilities that they document is therefore not necessarily complete; this is shown by the details of one house mentioned in a document from House 2 quoted below. The location of the various buildings discussed here on the site is shown in Figure 1.1.

The significance of the Kellis structures has been noted by several scholars (e.g., Alston 1997; Nevett 2011), especially those of the fourth century in Area A, and takes on particular importance in light of the general paucity of information on domestic architecture in ancient Egypt. Its trajectory throughout the long history of the country is poorly documented, for settlements of various types have not been a major focus of exploration, despite some remarkable examples that have been well researched, and the vast majority have disappeared or are buried under modern occupation and ever-expanding cultivation. The situation is lamentable for much of the first millennium BCE. For the Roman period it is better as a result of excavations primarily in the Fayyum (Davoli 1998; 2015a), though now also at other sites throughout Egypt (Müller 2010a–b). The evolution was thought to be dominated by vernacular
Figure 2.1. Area B: plan of B/1 to B/3 structures.