



ANTINOUPOLIS

A Hadrianic Reinterpretation of the Abydos Sacred Landscape

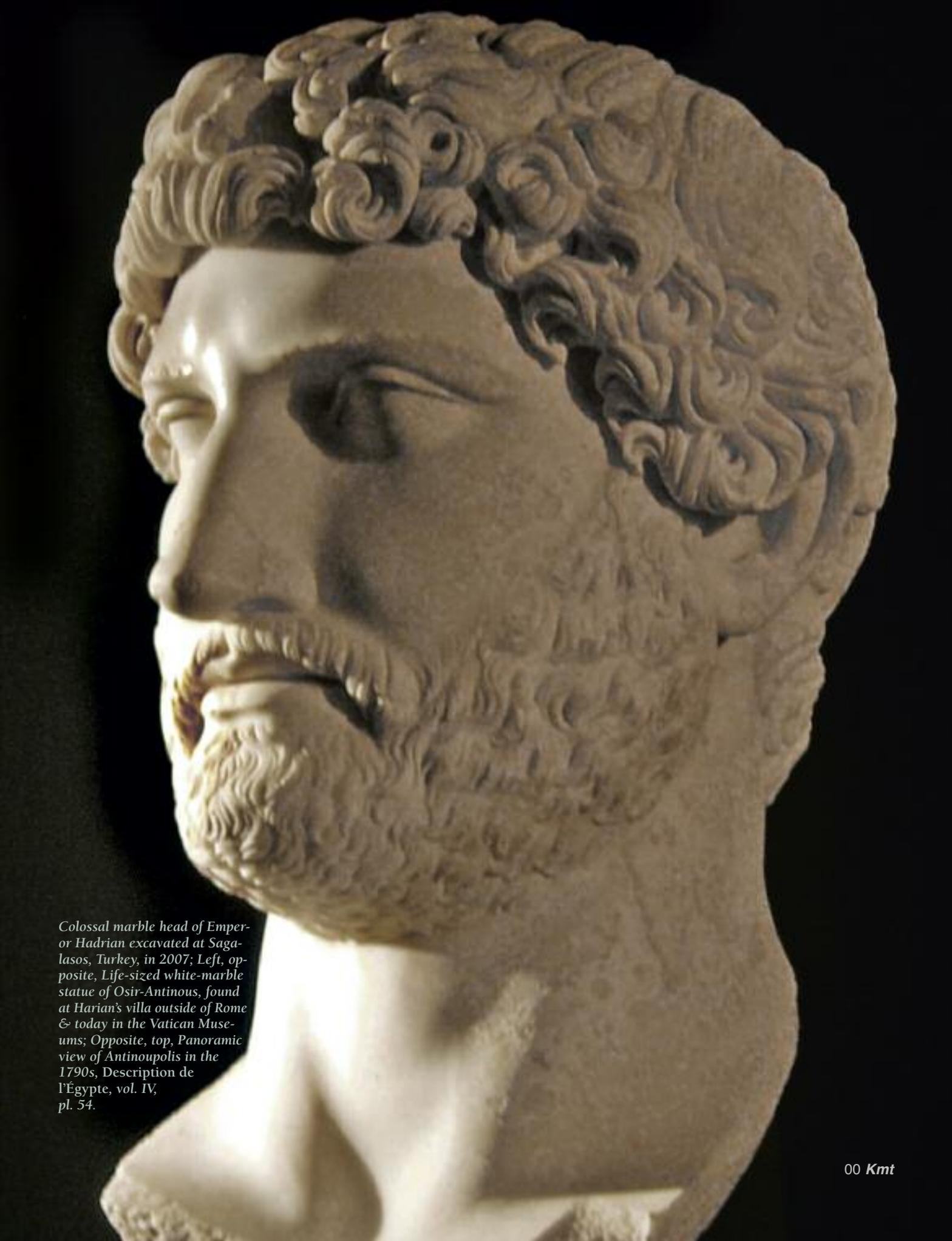
by **James B. (Jay) Heidal**

Photos by Author, unless otherwise credited

The Roman-period city of Antinoupolis is located on the east bank of the Nile about eighteen kilometers north of El Amarna and eleven kilometers south of Beni Hassan. Unlike many ancient cities, Antinoupolis has a firm start-date: it was founded by the Roman Emperor Hadrian on his imperial tour of Egypt in October of 130 AD. There are very few earlier remains on the site, but they include a temple of about 1250 BC from the reign of Rameses II. The city which Hadrian built incorporated this already ancient structure into his gridded Greek-style city; and the emperor dedicated the place to the worship of a young Greek in Hadrian's entourage named Antinous — by most accounts Hadrian's male lover — who had drowned in the Nile nearby.

Following long-established Egyptian custom, by dying in the Nile Antinous underwent an apotheosis and became joined with Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, whose cult was still active in Egypt at that time. The city of Antinoupolis was created to be the last Egyptian god's (the compound deity Osir-Antinous) cult center.

New work at the site is beginning to indicate that the city was intentionally modeled after the form of the sacred landscape of the already ancient site of Abydos, the pharaonic cult-center of Osiris, located on the Nile's west bank 210 kilometers to the south of Antinoupolis. The cult center for the new Osiris,



Colossal marble head of Emperor Hadrian excavated at Sagalassos, Turkey, in 2007; Left, opposite, Life-sized white-marble statue of Osir-Antinous, found at Harian's villa outside of Rome & today in the Vatican Museums; Opposite, top, Panoramic view of Antinoupolis in the 1790s, Description de l'Égypte, vol. IV, pl. 54.



Satellite view of Antinoupolis (Nile at lower left), showing geophysical survey test-areas completed in January 2012. Image montage by Kris Strutt



View of the ruins of the theater entrance at Antinopolis in the 1790s, from *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquities Plates, vol. IV, pl. 55*. It was estimated by Edme Jomard (the French architect in charge of its documentation) that, when complete to the top of its pediment, it was 20.7 meters tall.

Antinopolis was lavishly endowed by Hadrian's designers and engineers with elaborate monuments in both Egyptian and classical architectural styles in celebration of the new god. Some of these monuments were still extant at the end of the Eighteenth Century, were documented by the French at that time and were published by them in the *Description de l'Égypte*. As it turned out, Osir-Antinous may well have been the last god to be added to the ancient Egyptian pantheon — and indeed to the Graeco-Roman pantheon — before Egypt and the rest of the Roman Empire was Christianized, largely in the Fourth Century.

Antinopolis continued to be the cult center of Osir-Antinous into at least the middle of the Third Century AD, inasmuch as the Megala Antinoeia, the Olympic-style games in honor of the god, are attested until that date. Subsequently the city did not vanish, but became an active Christian center, continuing well into the Medieval period, comprised of dozens of churches and monasteries, many still visitable on the site. Early travelers' accounts from this time detail the features of the city, including scores of monasteries and churches and many impressive Roman monuments from the era of the city's foundation, some remaining in use. The city's population finally suffered a severe decline at some time in the late Medieval period, dwindling to the small Moslem village on the riverbank existing today. Most of the ancient city has no current occupation on top of it, and travelers' accounts continue to tell of the impressive ruins visible above ground until the early Nineteenth Century, just after the French documentation, when all of the major limestone monuments above ground were burned in kilns to produce quicklime (calcium oxide) for mortar used in building sugar factories — as Egypt joined the industrial revolution.

Today the circuit of the city walls (visible as linear hills) enclose about 279 acres or about 113 hectares (forming a rough trapezoid about 1.5 km by 0.75 km.), and this area is largely covered with tumbled architectural fragments



Above, View of the ruins of the triumphal arch at Antinopolis in the 1790s, from *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquities Plates, vol. IV, pl. 57*. Jomard measured the total height of this monument as 18.75 meters. Below, Montage of architectural drawing of one the columns of the northern tetrakionion (four-columned crossroad) inscribed for Alexander Severus at Antinopolis in the 1790's from *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquities Plates, vol. IV, pl. 60*.





View looking west of the ruins of the 19th Dynasty Rameses II temple at Antinoupolis.

and enormous mounds of pottery and debris. In addition to the central city within these walls, the outlying associated features are extensive and include cemeteries, monasteries, quarries and other ancient remains. In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, the city's surface was well turned and pitted, both by locals (looking for treasure and fertilizer from the silt-rich mud brick) and by early excavators, such as Albert Gayet and J. de M. Johnson, (looking for inscribed papyrus fragments and mummies). These early efforts were not scientific, or archaeological in the modern sense; and, although some interesting bits of papyrus were recovered, the work recorded little information about the city's inhabitants or its urban form.

From 1935 the concession (permission from the Egyptian government) to do work at the site has been held by the Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli" from the University of Florence, Italy. In its early years, the mission's focus was on the city's later Christian- and Byzantine-period remains. However, Dr. Rosario Pintaudi, the mission's field director, has expanded its focus since 2003, to include all periods of occupation on the site, with a special focus on understand-

ing the urban form of the Roman city at the period of its founding by Hadrian. The Antinoupolis Foundation (see sidebar) was created in 2011 in the United States to help the Istituto fulfill this goal. Today the Istituto, with assistance from the Foundation for certain specific projects, seeks to create a complete archaeological picture of the ancient city and its inhabitants from its Hadrianic beginnings to its abandonment in the Medieval period.

Current Work of the Antinoupolis Foundation

An ongoing, open-ended project of the Foundation, begun in 2010, is an attempt to survey and collect information about the literally thousands of architectural fragments from the original Roman city scattered across the site. Many are damaged, moved or stolen every year, and most have never been photographed or measured. The aim is to create a comprehensive database, with information about each fragment, including material, dimensions, photographs and drawings of any moldings or features. Each fragment is also given a positive location on the map with the use of a hand-held GPS device, so that even if it is moved or stolen, a permanent record of what was where is available for the use of scholars in the future. The ultimate aim of the project is not

merely a database, but also to reconstruct fragments which join either on paper or, even better, physical reconstruction of the fragments on site. In many cases joins are apparent by size, material and/or proximity; and these fragments go back together to form building assemblies, most commonly colonnades and entablatures.

This work will allow strides to be made towards understanding the architectural vocabulary of the Roman city, even in its fragmentary state. As progress is made with the archaeology of the city, these assemblages may find permanent homes for re-erection — on stylobates or podia revealed by future excavation. In addition, all information from the fragment database is supplied to Prof. Marcello Spanu of the University of Viterbo, Italy, who is the mission's topographer and who is creating a master plan of the site in AutoCAD, combining and reflecting each new discovery on the site made by the various teams working there, thus creating a continuously altering image of our understanding of the city's urban form. The statistical distribution of fragments, their size, etc., will allow the team to begin to posit the locations of monumental building precincts versus residential quarters around the city.

In January of 2012, the Antinoupolis Foundation launched its first funded project at Antinoupolis: a thorough geophysical survey aimed at revealing the urban plan of the city in the 130s AD, at the time of its founding during the reign of Hadrian. This foundation level is, in almost every location, obscured by desert sands and overtopping Christian- and Byzantine-period remains. The non-invasive techniques of geophysical survey — magnetometry, electri-

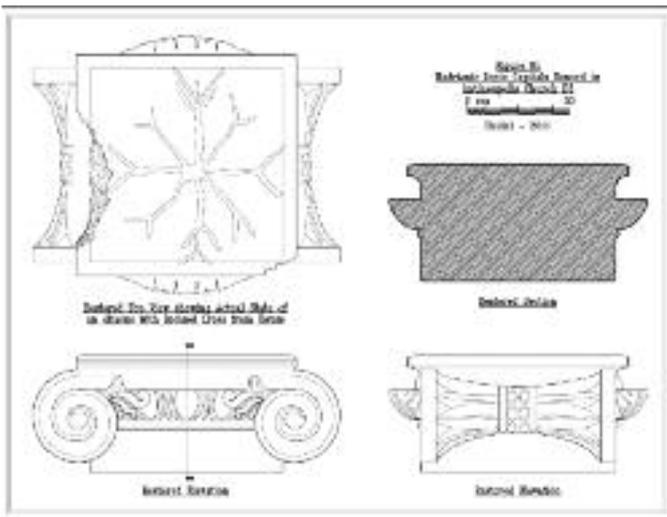
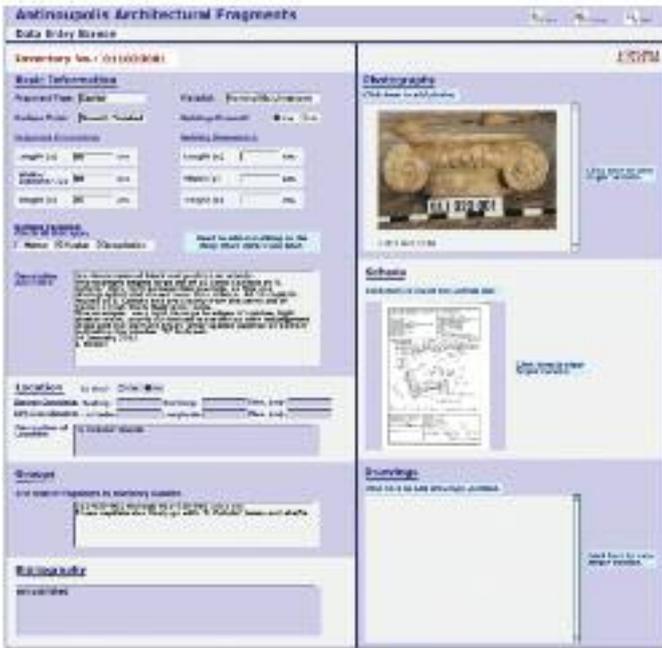
cal resistivity tomography (ERT) and ground penetrating radar — allow the team to look below the current surface of the site, to see buried archaeological remains without any digging. Once a multi-year geophysical survey has taken place, covering as much of the site as possible, priorities can be determined for which areas require more traditional archaeological investigation. These priorities will be based on two factors: the indication by the geophysical survey that subsurface architectural features are indeed present; and the level of threat a given area is under, from encroachment by modern houses, cemeteries and agriculture. In all such subsequent work, the first priority will be to protect and preserve the site; and the second, to understand and publish its architectural and archaeological features.

Our first season of geophysical survey was a one-week test season carried out in January of 2012 by our geophysical engineer, Kris Strutt of the University of Southampton, UK, and it produced impressive results. We laid three lines of ERT in areas of the city where we hoped to reveal underlying foundations of Roman urban-infrastructure; and in the first area we discovered that the apparent Nile quayside revealed in a pit next to the site dig-house in the 1990s (and approximately 140 meters from the current Nile edge) was indeed the ancient stone-lined Nile quay, inasmuch as ERT revealed no further subsurface architectural features to the west of it.

The second ERT line was laid along the city's *cardo* — its main north south street — at the point where it crosses the wadi, to determine whether there are subsurface foundations for a bridge emplacement. In addition to sub-



Satellite photo of the Antinoupolis hippodrome, with north & modern cemetery at top & depressions in ground where the starting gates were at lower left. City wall is visible at extreme left.



Top, Fragment 011-020-001: Hadrianic Ionic limestone column-capital reused in Church D3, a Fifth Century structure in the southeast area of the city. Middle, The Antinopolis Project database page for fragment 011-020-001. Bottom, The Author's architectural rendering of Fragment 011-020-001.

surface areas of high resistivity indicating architecture to either side of the wadi, we found an area of high resistivity centered at the bottom of the wadi, likely indicating foundations for supporting a bridge pier. This supposition may be tested by more traditional archaeological techniques in the future. In the third ERT line, we discovered that the hippodrome (whose superstructure stone-seating and walls were carried away in the Nineteenth Century) likely has its foundations intact underneath, which still support the mounds of rubble on which the seating was constructed.

The four test-areas chosen for magnetometry also yielded impressive results. Areas 1, 3 and 4 all revealed walls which are oriented to the city grid from the period of the city's foundation in the 130s AD. Walls oriented to the city grid are interesting, since they are more likely to be from the period of the city's foundation than walls which are not on the grid. This indicates that the foundation layer in these locations is likely less than two meters below the current surface, since magnetometry only penetrates about one to two meters below ground.

Of the areas just mentioned, Test Area 4 was the most exciting. The extent of the magnetometry test itself was approximately ninety by 130 meters and it revealed part of an extremely large series of monumental courts and gates at the east entrance to the city. This is very significant for the city's urban-plan, since — in addition to being the primary cult-center of Osir-Antinous — Antinoupolis was designed to function as a trading entrepôt, with goods arriving from the Far East over the Via Hadriana in the Eastern Desert and, by necessity, trans-shipped — and taxed — as they made their way to the Nile and ultimately to Rome. The complex partly revealed by Test Area 4 seems to be not only a grandiose entryway to the city from the east, but also a secure zone, where these arriving goods from the east could be inventoried and where customs could be collected before the goods were allowed to enter the city and go on their way.

Test Area 2 is located in a wadi north of the city and was chosen because surface finds — large numbers of Second-Third Century amphorae and pottery, along with about a dozen despoiled tombs of a similar date — indicated this area may contain the earliest cemetery yet discovered on the site, as well the field of offering jars (amphorae) which were mentioned over 115 years ago by Albert Gayet, in his excavation reports. If Gayet's account is correct, these vessels were intentionally buried in the wadi, likely at the time of the city's founding, as an act of veneration of Osiris, following the tradition well-established at Abydos thousands of years before. The results of the magnetometry in Test Area 2 revealed a tight collection of haphazardly organized rectangular chambers immediately below the surface — almost certainly a dense Second-Third Century cemetery, as suggested by the surface finds nearby. If, indeed, this is a private cemetery of many of the city's earliest citizens — perhaps overlaying a field of offering jars in association with the veneration of Osir-Antinous, this location must be an area of importance to the early worship of the deity on the site.



Left, Results of magnetometry of Antinoupolis Test Area 4.

Image: Kris Strutt



The Antinoupolis Foundation

Based in Chicago, Illinois, the Antinoupolis Foundation, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to revealing and preserving the ancient City of Antinous through archaeology, conservation and education.

The Foundation fulfills this goal by funding specific, targeted archaeological field projects at Antinoupolis under the umbrella of the Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” of the University of Florence, Italy. The present article focuses on work at the site being funded by the Antinoupolis Foundation; but for more information on the many decades of the Istituto’s work at the site before the creation of the Foundation, please see the URL <http://vitelli.ifnet.it/home.htm?Lang=EN>, and choose “Research Activity” then “The excavations” from the side menu.

All Foundation and Istituto projects are conducted under the direction of Dr. Rosario Pintaudi of the Istituto Papirologico and with the cooperation of the Egyptian government’s Ministry of State for Antiquities Affairs. The Foundation produces a semiannual newsletter, *The Antinoupolis Oracle*, to keep friends and contributors abreast of our projects, of our goals and of the results of our work. *The Oracle* is available in both electronic or print format. Contact us by regular mail at The Antinoupolis Foundation, Inc., 4522 S. McDowell Ave., Chicago, IL 60609, U. S. A. or by email at info@antinoupolis.org; or find us on the web at <http://antinoupolis.org>. **JBH**

After our successful one-week test season, the Foundation is currently raising funds to conduct a full-month of geophysical survey at the site during January-February 2013; and we hope to continue one-month seasons of geophysical survey for three to five winters, in order to develop a much fuller picture of the features of the city’s urban ensemble. All features disclosed by the geophysical survey will also be shared with Prof. Spanu, for inclusion in the master electronic-map mentioned above. The results of the geophysical survey will also allow us to plan protection measures for the site around its edges, which are currently under threat from all sides by encroaching agriculture, modern cemeteries, gravel-and-sand mining and new — illegal — housing.

In addition to the upcoming Geophysical Survey and the ongoing Fragment Survey, the Foundation will be conducting archaeological *sondages* (test pits) in October/November 2012, in magnetometry Test Area 2 of the geophysical test-season described above. This project will be jointly funded by the Foundation and the Istituto Papirologico and will focus in the geophysical test area where the Second-Third Century cemetery seems to be. This “ground-truthing” will allow us not only to verify the existence and extent of the cemetery, but will also allow us to determine if the “Field of Offerings” mentioned above is present at a deeper level than magnetometry was able to capture. By the time the present issue of *Kmt* is off press, it is hoped that this work will be satisfactorily completed and that we will have more to report in the future.

About the Author James B. (Jay) Heidel is president of the Antinoupolis Foundation, Inc. He is architect for both the University of Florence, Italy’s archaeological mission to Antinoupolis, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago’s Epigraphic Survey, Chicago House, Luxor, Egypt.