

Kom al-Ahmer – Kom Wasit III



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**The Archaeology of Two Ptolemaic
Districts in the Western Nile Delta, Egypt**

Edited by
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Front cover photo: Overview of Kom al-Ahmer Unit 6, two silver coins of Alexander the Great, and part of the Map of Egypt by Ibn Hawqal c. AD 977

Back cover: View of part of the *tholoi* bath complex at Kom Wasit during the 2017 season

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List of Abbreviations

B#: 'Bag' + the bag number
BIFAO: *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*
F#: 'Feature' + the feature number
JEA: *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JSSEA: *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
KWO #: Kom Wasit Object + the number of the object in the Catalogue
KWC #: Kom Wasit Coin + the number of the coin in the Catalogue
KWP #: Kom Wasit Pottery + the number of the sherd in the Catalogue
KAO #: Kom al-Ahmer Object + the number of the object in the Catalogue
KAC #: Kom al-Ahmer Coin + the number of the coin in the Catalogue
KAP #: Kom al-Ahmer Pottery + the number of the sherd in the Catalogue
LGG: *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*
SCA: Supreme Council of Antiquities
UTM: Universal Transverse Mercator (coordinate system)
WGS84: World Geodetic System 1984

Preface

The excavation results and historical studies presented in this volume are the outcome of an intensive research programme involving two archaeological sites, the dig laboratory, and the researchers' home universities between 2017 and 2023.

The team is grateful to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities for granting us the necessary permissions to work on the sites and facilitating our work with our Egyptian colleagues under Ministers Khaled Anani and Ahmed Eisa. The Department of Foreign Missions provided the necessary paperwork and much support, and we particularly thank Mohamed Ismail and Nashwa Gaber for their help. At the Damanhour office, Khaled Farahat provided the necessary paperwork.

During the 2017 field seasons, we were accompanied by the following inspectors who also provided much assistance: Alaa al-Nahas, Shahawi Beltagi, Adel Ahmed, and Mahmoud Nada between the April and June excavation season; we thank inspectors Mohamed Elsiedi and Ahmed Hassan for their work during the September and October study season. The conservator inspector who worked with the mission was al-Tahara Mohamed. We would also like to thank Mr Khamis from the projects department of MoTA in Alexandria for his help during the restoration of the symbolic wall, and Mohamed Abdella for his assistance during the drill auger survey and for the transportation of the soil samples to Cairo (2017).

We thank inspectors Mohamed Ahmed Hussien and Amir Azouz Saeed, the training inspectors Heba Alla Mahmoud Salem and Mustafa Mahmoud Mohamed Mejahed, and conservator Tasnim Othman Hamed for their work and support during April and May 2018. We also thank inspectors Mustafa Mahmoud Mohamed Mejahed and Jehan Shehata for their work during our field season in October.

In 2019, the mission carried out two work seasons. We would like to thank inspectors Alaa al-Nahas, Ahmed Naem, and Meiada Elsayed for their work between March and May; and inspectors Adel Hussein, Mohamed Shahawi, Tamer Khamis, and Wafa Hassan for their great help during September and October.

Despite the difficult situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the mission was able to carry out a short pottery study season with a small team, accompanied by the inspector Dr Fawzyia Naseif. She assisted the team and helped the work go smoothly. We are grateful for her hard work with the mission.

We rented our houses monthly from Nazih, Abdel Baset, and Mohamed Ratib. We also received much help from several people in the village, including Masry (an electrician), Ahmed (a plumber), and Nousa and Um Ahmed (housekeepers). We are especially grateful to our cook, Mohsen Ahmed Gad Zagloul, who provided two meals every day for all mission members, including the inspectors and police officers.

Thanks are due to the Department of Tourism Police in Damanhour for their efforts to secure our stay. Many specialists came from Quft, including al-Shazli Ali (foreman), Abdu Ahmed Ali, Bakri Badri Mahmoud, Yeyia Farouk, Mohamed Hussein, and Mohamed Abdel Aziz. We would also like to thank the dozens of workers who excavated with the *Qufti* and the team members. The mission also wishes to thank several people who contributed indirectly in different ways, such as videographer and graphic designer Essam Barakat and drivers like Ahmed Qenawi and Ashraf Fawzi.

In 2017, the mission, led by Mohamed Kenawi, Cristina Mondin, and Giorgia Marchiori, worked for two seasons (an excavation season during April–May and a pottery study season during September–October), and included the following team members: Giorgia Marchiori, Parker Berger, and Anna Buchardt Larsen worked on the excavation of Unit 4 at Kom al-Ahmer; Ole Herslund, Urška Furlan, Megan Kumorek, Morten Lundbye, and Haythem Mahdi worked on the excavation of Units 11 and 12 at Kom Wasit; Nunzia Larosa, Bianca Badalucco, Audrey Eller, Daniel Teilmann, and Giulia Raimondi worked on the excavation of Unit 10 at Kom Wasit; Marcus Müller, Erika Cunsolo, Andrea D'Amico, and Graziana Zisa worked on the excavation of Unit 8 at Kom Wasit (see Volume 1 of this monograph series); Israel Hinojosa Baliño worked as a geographic information system specialist, surveyor, and archaeologist at both Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit (see Volume 1 of this monograph series); and Benjamin Pennington continued the drill auger survey (see Volume 1 of this monograph series). In the laboratory, Cristina Mondin led the study of the pottery finds aided by Maria Lucia Patanè; Federica Faro documented the glass finds; Urška Furlan and Amy Wilson collaborated in the cataloguing, photographic documentation, and study of the finds; Louise Bertini studied the faunal remains; Samantha Tistoni

(artist and first aider) drew some of the finds; Luciana Carvalho conserved some finds and managed the construction of the symbolic wall; and the numismatists Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli studied the coin finds.

In 2018, the mission, led by Mohamed Kenawi, Cristina Mondin, and Giorgia Marchiori, worked for two seasons (April–May and October). The April–May excavation team included the following members: Giorgia Marchiori, Bianca Badalucco, Bente Bladsgaard, and Peter Baškovč Lap worked on the excavation of Unit 4 at Kom al-Ahmer; and Marcus Müller, Ole Herslund, Anna Buchardt Larsen, Erik Christensen, Urška Furlan, Ilaria Lunetta, Haythem Mahdi, and Mattia Quartarone worked on the excavation of Unit 6 at Kom al-Ahmer. Nunzia Larosa worked as a surveyor and archaeologist. The October excavation team included the following members: Giorgia Marchiori, Anna Buchardt Larsen, and Federica Faro, who worked on the excavation of Unit 4 at Kom al-Ahmer. In the laboratory, Cristina Mondin led the study of the pottery finds aided by Maria Lucia Patanè, Maria Imbrenda, and Chiara Angenica; Federica Faro documented the glass finds; Urška Furlan worked on the cataloguing, photographic documentation, and study of the finds; Louise Bertini studied the faunal remains; and Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli studied the coin finds.

In 2019, the mission, led by Mohamed Kenawi, Cristina Mondin, and Giorgia Marchiori, worked for two seasons (April–May and September–October). The April–May excavation team included the following members: Giorgia Marchiori, Bianca Badalucco, and Cristina Díez Para worked on the excavation of Unit 4 at Kom al-Ahmer; and Nunzia Larosa and Haythem Mahdi worked on the excavation of Unit 10 at Kom Wasit. The September–October excavation team included the following members: Marcus Müller, Ole Herslund, Vera Michel, Alja Žorž, Bianca Badalucco, Urška Furlan, Roberto Aiello, Hannah Bryant, Chiara Bonanno, Alessandro Cattaneo, Ida Christensen, Alessia Emiliani, Thomas Greiner, Micaela Reale, Mohamed Salah, and Myriam Vaccaro worked on the excavation of Units 6, 7, 8, and 9 at Kom al-Ahmer. Giorgia Marchiori worked as a surveyor and archaeologist. In the laboratory, Cristina Mondin led the study of the pottery finds in collaboration with Maria Lucia Patanè, Maria Imbrenda, Hannah Ringheim, and Chiara Angenica; Urška Furlan worked on the cataloguing, photographic documentation, and study of the finds; Louise Bertini studied the faunal remains with the assistance of Shreen Morsi; and Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli continued to study the numismatic finds.

Giorgia Marchiori, Israel Hinojosa Baliño, and Nunzia Larosa carried out the two-dimensional, and three-dimensional digital registration, and collaborated on the project's geographic information system. Silvia Tinazzo of the University of Padua drew and digitised all the drawings of the small finds and some of the coins. Carmen Rac carried out the digitisation of the mudbrick buildings and features of Kom al-Ahmer Unit 6.

Mohamed Kenawi and Giorgia Marchiori edited and reviewed the chapters in this volume. Tiffany Chezum-Ahmad, Manuela Lehmann, and Andy Reyes proofread the latest drafts of the manuscript.

Finally, thanks are due to the many institutions that supported us, including the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian Embassy in Cairo and its archaeological section, the University of Padua, the Italian–Egyptian Archaeological Centre, and the Egypt Exploration Society (in 2017). Special thanks are due to Davide Scalmani, director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo; Cecile Safwat, secretary and administrator of the Italian Archaeological Centre; Carmen Giradi of the Plastipak SRL Company who donated plastic bags;¹ and Maurizio Marchiori and Norma De Rossi, who donated T-shirts. Private donations were greatly helpful for research and for the production of this volume. Special thanks are due to Frank Blair for his generous support.

Mohamed Kenawi and Giorgia Marchiori

Leicester, March 2025

¹ Plastipak. <http://plastipak.it/azienda/>

Introduction

The Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit Archaeological Project Second Phase: 2017–2020 The Ptolemaic Contexts

Mohamed Kenawi and Giorgia Marchiori

Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit are the two largest sites (after Kom al-Ghoraf) in the western Nile Delta. They are located 6 km west of the Rosetta branch of the Nile, 35 km south of Rosetta, 40 km southeast of the port of Thonis-Heracleion, and 52 km southeast of the port of Alexandria (Figure i). Given their well-connected location with respect to these Mediterranean and Nile ports, it was assumed that a substantial volume of commercial traffic moved through these sites. These suppositions were partially confirmed by the regional surveys undertaken by Wilson and Grigoropoulos¹ as part of the Egypt Exploration Society Delta Survey project and Kenawi² as part of the Beheira Survey. In 2012, the Kom al-Ahmer-Kom Wasit Archaeological Project undertook its first excavation season at the sites to start investigating them intensively and reveal their significance.

Historical sources and Hellenistic and Roman geographers located the capital of the Metelite *nome* in this region, and our research has made it possible to identify the likely location of the *nome* capital, Metelis, at Kom al-Ahmer, at least during the Roman, Late Roman, and Early Arab Periods.³ This introduction discusses the methods used in recent years to demonstrate the vast quantity of information that can be gathered from a Delta site.

The project has continued its investigations at both sites building on the work of the first two volumes published in 2019,⁴ which presented the results of the first phase of the Italian-Egyptian mission at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit (2012–2016). This ongoing commitment to research is driven by the desire to deepen our understanding of the Western Delta and the wider region in general. Few excavations in the Western Delta have physically reached Ptolemaic and pre-Ptolemaic layers, and scholars often over-rely on the data from Naukratis as well as sporadic and out-of-context finds when referencing the early Greek presence in this region. Therefore, we decided to take the opportunity to concentrate on the earlier phases at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit. This volume focuses on

data related to Ptolemaic and pre-Ptolemaic evidence at both sites: the first phase of the project revealed that the Hellenistic layers of Kom Wasit are easily accessible due to the activities of the *sebakheen* in the early 20th century.⁵ Moreover, the exploratory excavation and cleaning undertaken in 2014 and 2015 revealed Ptolemaic layers in one of the lowest areas at Kom al-Ahmer (Unit 5).

Despite the popularity of the subject, there is little archaeological data on the Ptolemaic Period in the Nile Delta. Many publications on Ptolemaic Egypt rely on written and historical sources,⁶ and such sources are almost entirely silent with respect to the Delta. The archaeological evidence for the Ptolemaic Period in the province of Beheira is characterised by finds recovered mainly by the *sebakheen*, salvage excavations by Egyptian inspectors, large-scale site surveys, and excavations in a few sites. Nevertheless, concrete data and information beyond dating a site to the Ptolemaic or pre-Ptolemaic Periods are rare, as data collected sporadically cannot provide an in-depth overview of the ancient landscape nor of the life and daily activities of the sites' inhabitants. Furthermore, the lack of surviving written materials from most sites only adds to the need for thorough, long-term archaeological investigations in the province.

The exceptional case of Schedia (Kom al-Giza and Kom al-Hamam), for which information from ancient sources exists, and where modern excavations were conducted in addition to the *sebakheen* digs, has yielded a comprehensive understanding of the commercial movements passing through the settlement based on the volume of exports and imports, and revealed the importance of the settlement in relation to the nearby Alexandria.⁷ The Roman and Late Roman excavated buildings with their associated material culture still await full publication.

Finds from *sebakheen* activities and recent surveys confirmed the presence of Ptolemaic cultural materials

¹ See Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009: 179–81.

² See Kenawi 2011: 187–200.

³ Eller and Kenawi 2019.

⁴ See Kenawi 2019; Asolati, Crisafulli, and Mondin 2019.

⁵ Habachi 1947: 285–87; Müller and Kenawi 2019: 122–24.

⁶ Bingen, J. 2007; Molson 2012; Del Corso and Ricciardetto 2024.

⁷ Martin 2008: 268, Martin 2010, 945–49.



Figure i: Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit within their regional context (Background Images Esri and OpenStreetMap)

at the following sites (see Figure ii): Kom Abu Mandour, Kom al-Qadi, Kom Ganady, Kom Barsiq, Kom al-Nakhla, Kedwet Hasan, Kom Abu Ismail, Kom Abu al-Gudour, Kom Abu Afrita, Kom Difshuo, Dibi, Kom Firin, Kom al-Mahar, Kom al-Akhdar, Kom al-Bakara, Kom Tukala, Kom Kamha, Kom al-Baroud, Kom al-Dahab, Kom Kortas, Kom Abu Homar, Kom al-Ahmer III, Kom Umm al-Laban, al-Barnugi, Tell Kanayes, Kom al-Ahmer II, and Kom Truga.⁸ At Kom al-Debba, the Japanese mission conducted a geophysical survey and recently began excavating sondages. Early Roman materials and a probable Hellenistic phase are confirmed, but no accurate dating has yet been presented.⁹

Nonetheless, the lack of further investigations does not allow us to say much about these settlements' social, urban, and economic realities. The rest of the sites in Beheira might also fall within a broader unknown landscape of settlements that formed a rich and active Delta before the traditionally suggested boom of sites related to the arrival of the Greeks in the

Early Ptolemaic Period or during the Roman Period. Pre-Ptolemaic presence has been identified at Kom al-Qanater,¹⁰ al-Barnugi,¹¹ Kom Firin,¹² al-Abqaeen,¹³ and at Kom Aziza.¹⁴ Reused materials from Dynastic temples were recorded at Dairout and Dibi.¹⁵ Kom Aziza produced Dynastic, Ptolemaic, and Roman materials recovered from emergency excavations before the site was released in 2024; they demonstrate the case of a site mainly considered a Ptolemaic and Roman settlement¹⁶ that turned out to have been occupied much earlier.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the excavation reports have not been published or disseminated, making the interpretation and analysis of the region even more difficult.

¹⁰ Breccia 1923b: 152.

¹¹ Edgar 1911: 277–78.

¹² Spencer 2009.

¹³ In 1995, the University of Liverpool conducted an excavation that confirmed the presence of a New Kingdom fort dating back to Ramses II. Between 2018 and 2022, the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities conducted intensive excavations at the site. The reports provide further evidence of a large settlement dating back to the New Kingdom. See al-Kharadly, Yehyia, and Ahmed 2020: 3–24.

¹⁴ Ebrahim, Naem, and Fayd 2022.

¹⁵ <https://eyonelmagles.media/archives/16250>

¹⁶ Abdel Fatah 2004: 17–24.

¹⁷ Ebrahim, Naem, and Fayd 2022: 54.

⁸ See Coulson and Leonard 1981; Coulson and Wilkie 1986; Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009; Kenawi 2011; Kenawi 2014.

⁹ Hasegawa and Nishimoto 2022: 63.

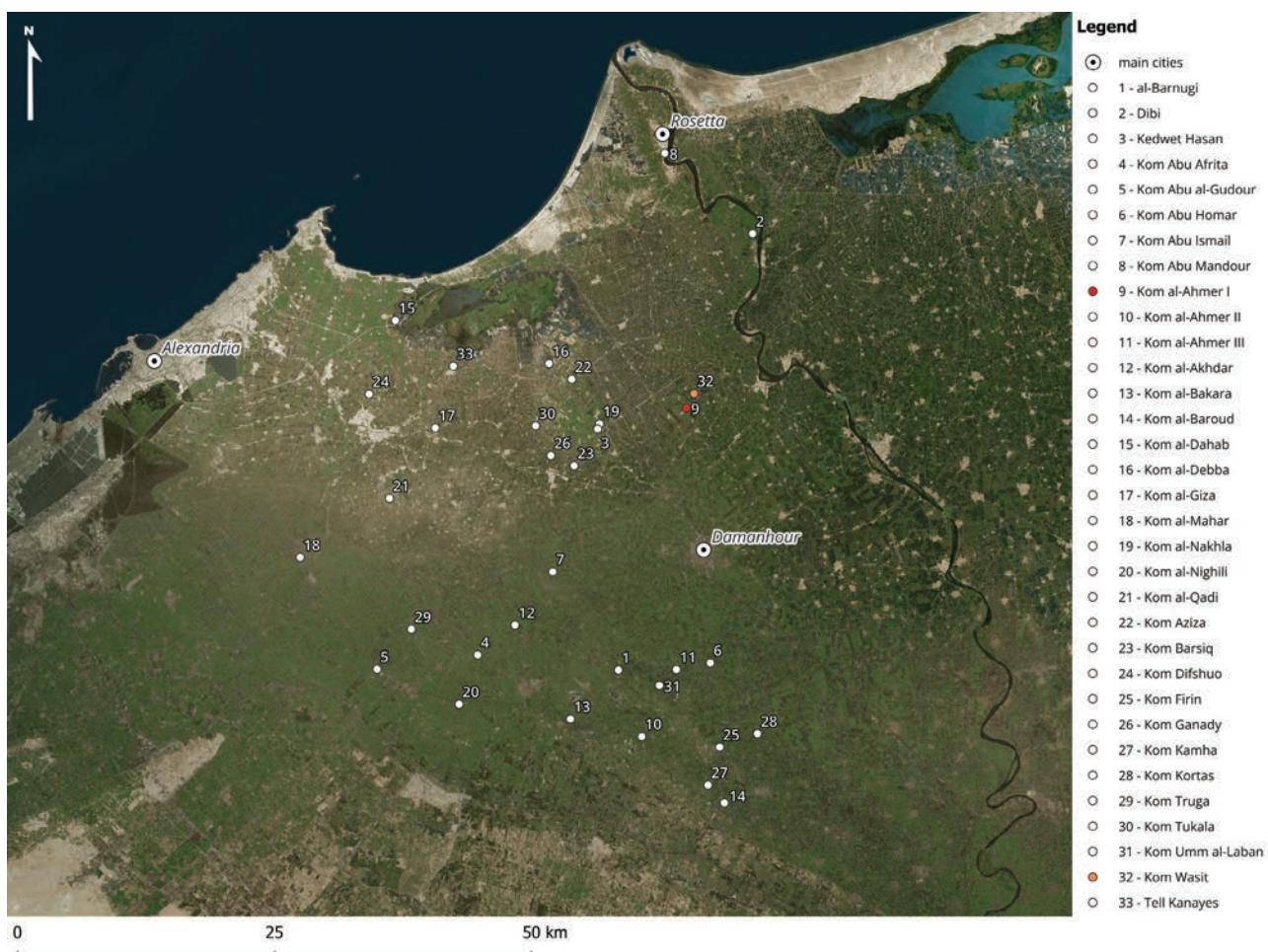


Figure ii: Map of sites in Beheira with Ptolemaic archaeological evidence (Background Image Bing Maps)

In the case of Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, the Delta Survey and Beheira Survey visited Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit in 2004 and 2008, respectively. The preliminary results of the surface pottery analysis at Kom Wasit of the former survey indicated that the pottery sherds were predominantly Ptolemaic in date, with only a few specimens dating to the Late Dynastic, Early Roman, and Late Roman Periods.¹⁸ The Beheira Survey noted the conspicuous presence of Hellenistic pottery sherds, including imported amphorae from the Aegean, but found no sherd dateable beyond the 1st century AD.¹⁹ At Kom al-Ahmer, most of the pottery sherds analysed by the Delta Survey were Ptolemaic and Late Roman in date, with some Early Islamic sherds.²⁰ The pottery collected by the Beheira Survey, mostly amphora sherds, dated to the 2nd–8th centuries AD.²¹ The excavations at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit have demonstrated the accuracy

of these preliminary results, though they also revealed how the occupation of these sites began earlier than previously thought: Kom Wasit shows evidence dating back to the mid-6th century BC as well as the Roman and Late Roman phases, and the earliest reachable phases of Kom al-Ahmer show a date earlier than that inferred from the surface surveys. The results presented in this volume demonstrate the need to expand on the surface survey results to corroborate or broaden our current understanding of the role of the Delta during the transition periods between the Late Dynastic Period and the arrival of the early Greek settlers and the Ptolemaic Kingdom.

To conclude, this volume presents several different private and public buildings from the Ptolemaic Period at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, following long-term excavations carried out in recent years. Their study provides details on the Ptolemaic phases of occupation, as well as glimpses of phases that existed before the foundation of Alexandria. Traces of the pre-Ptolemaic presence are also found in the material culture retrieved

¹⁸ Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009: 177.

¹⁹ Kenawi 2014: 104.

²⁰ Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009: 181.

²¹ Kenawi 2014: 121–22.

from the foundations of Early Ptolemaic buildings. More investigations like this at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit will reveal more data on the history and archaeology of the Western Nile Delta.

Archaeological Research at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit

As discussed in the introduction to Volume I, the Italian-Egyptian Archaeological Project in the Western Nile Delta began its investigation of the region with an intensive historical study of the province.²² From the very beginning, when fieldwork commenced at the two sites, we worked to apply the highest standards possible for a mission with a medium amount of funding. Work was organised on a large scale at both sites with a sizable number of archaeologists and local workers. In addition to traditional approaches of excavating areas, photographing features, and studying materials, the mission conducted aerial photography in 2014 to obtain a better view of the sites and to create high-quality orthophotos of the entire sites. Aerial photography and photographs taken with a 12m-long metal stick revealed the urban layout of an entire settlement (discussed in detail in Chapter 1 by **Kenawi**). A drill auger survey was performed in 2016 and 2017, with augers placed within and beyond the sites' boundaries.²³ The study of pottery concentrated on vessels from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit. All pottery sherds have been collected, cleaned, weighed, and studied. The pottery finds from the post-2016 seasons will be published in a forthcoming volume.

In 2017, the project at Kom Wasit focused on three areas previously identified as pertaining to the Ptolemaic phases of occupation: the south wall of the temple enclosure, the Hellenistic *tholoi* baths, and a non-elite mudbrick tower house. In 2018, excavations resumed in the lowest part of Kom al-Ahmer to investigate the earliest reachable stratigraphy. The large Ptolemaic district of Kom al-Ahmer (Unit 6) excavated in 2018 and 2019 pushed back the dating of the site to at least the 6th century BC, as early as the neighbouring site of Kom Wasit. The investigated area in 2018 was opened as a 15m x 15m unit that was later expanded to 36m x 32m. The extension in 2019 resulted in the identification of the remains of at least 15 Early and Middle Ptolemaic buildings, predominantly vernacular, that composed a small district of the ancient town (discussed in Chapter 2 by **Marchiori, Müller, and Kenawi**). The decision to expand the original limits of the excavation unit to a considerably larger unit provided the archaeologists with a challenge when dealing with a higher number of contexts and features; a large unit also means that deeper levels will not be reached easily if not over the course of several excavation seasons. Nonetheless,

the advantage gained from tackling a unit with large dimensions is the exposure of a wider context that allows for the investigation of individual buildings whose data can be directly correlated. In this case, we could infer information on the multiple building phases of this section of the residential sector, which adds to our general knowledge as to how the urban plan of *tell* settlements evolved throughout time. This is particularly significant for the archaeology of the Delta, as large portions of settlements have mostly been investigated through non-destructive means (i.e., magnetometric survey), which do not permit the identification of distinct phases of construction. The excavation of Unit 6 exposed different types of houses, among which was an Early Ptolemaic tower house (discussed in detail by **Badalucco** in Chapter 3). Badalucco analysed information on the construction methods, preferences and specific architectural choices, and the management of the immediate surroundings by the inhabitants.

In 2017, a second tower house was investigated at Kom Wasit, in one of the lowest areas, towards its east limit. We aimed to obtain information on the urban extension of the site and investigate a second vernacular structure in Kom Wasit that dates back to the early 4th century BC (discussed by **Herslund** in Chapter 5). Herslund examines the architectural remains and material culture, contextualising them within the current knowledge framework on tower houses of the Late Dynastic and Ptolemaic Periods.

The study of these houses adds to the corpus of domestic buildings investigated at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, particularly for the Late Dynastic and Early Ptolemaic Periods.²⁴ The two tower houses at Kom Wasit²⁵ are individual buildings possibly pertaining to two distinct residential sectors, given the distance (roughly 130m) and elevation difference (approximately 6m in elevation) (Figure iii). These factors and the contemporaneity of the two domestic units provide important insights into the evolution of the *tell* settlement, not to mention the discernment of two households pertaining to different socioeconomic backgrounds. The close examination of two Early Ptolemaic houses from the same district at Kom al-Ahmer offers further evidence regarding the architectural preferences and individual household usages of the buildings they inhabited (Figure iv).

Excavation of the *tholoi* bath complex at Kom Wasit (Unit 10) began in 2016 and continued in 2017 and 2019 to investigate its complicated structural layout; this has revealed unique data on such bath types in the

²² Kenawi 2019: xvii–xxviii; Eller and Kenawi 2019: 1–18.

²³ Pennington 2019: 56–66.

²⁴ For information on the Late Roman house excavated at Kom al-Ahmer, see Marchiori 2019.

²⁵ See Herslund 2019 for the chapter on the House of the Horses, the first tower house excavated at Kom Wasit.

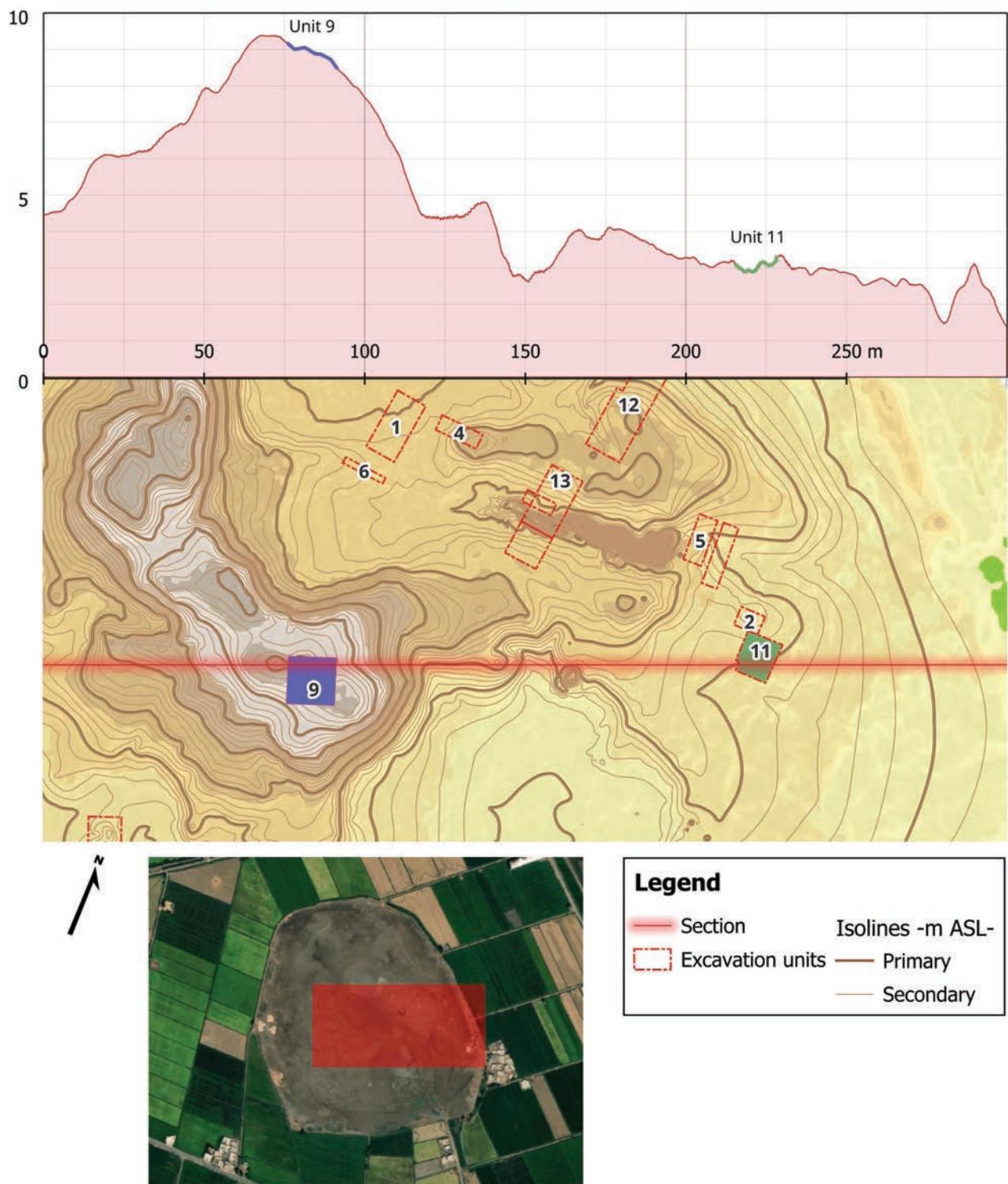


Figure iii: Kom Wasit, cross-section of the kom's topography exhibiting the differences in elevation

Delta.²⁶ Furthermore, the investigation revealed that the baths area was reused as a cemetery in the mid-Roman Period (discussed by Larosa in Chapter 6). In the Western Nile Delta, particularly the province of Beheira,

which is considered Alexandria's hinterland, four *tholoi* baths complexes are recorded (Figure v). The first was identified at Kom al-Nighili, but it was never excavated and now seems to have vanished.²⁷ The second was

²⁶ Kenawi and Larosa 2017: 41–50; Mondin, Kenawi, Larosa and Patané 2021: 575–84.

²⁷ Breccia 1923a: 142–51; Kenawi 2014: 37–37.

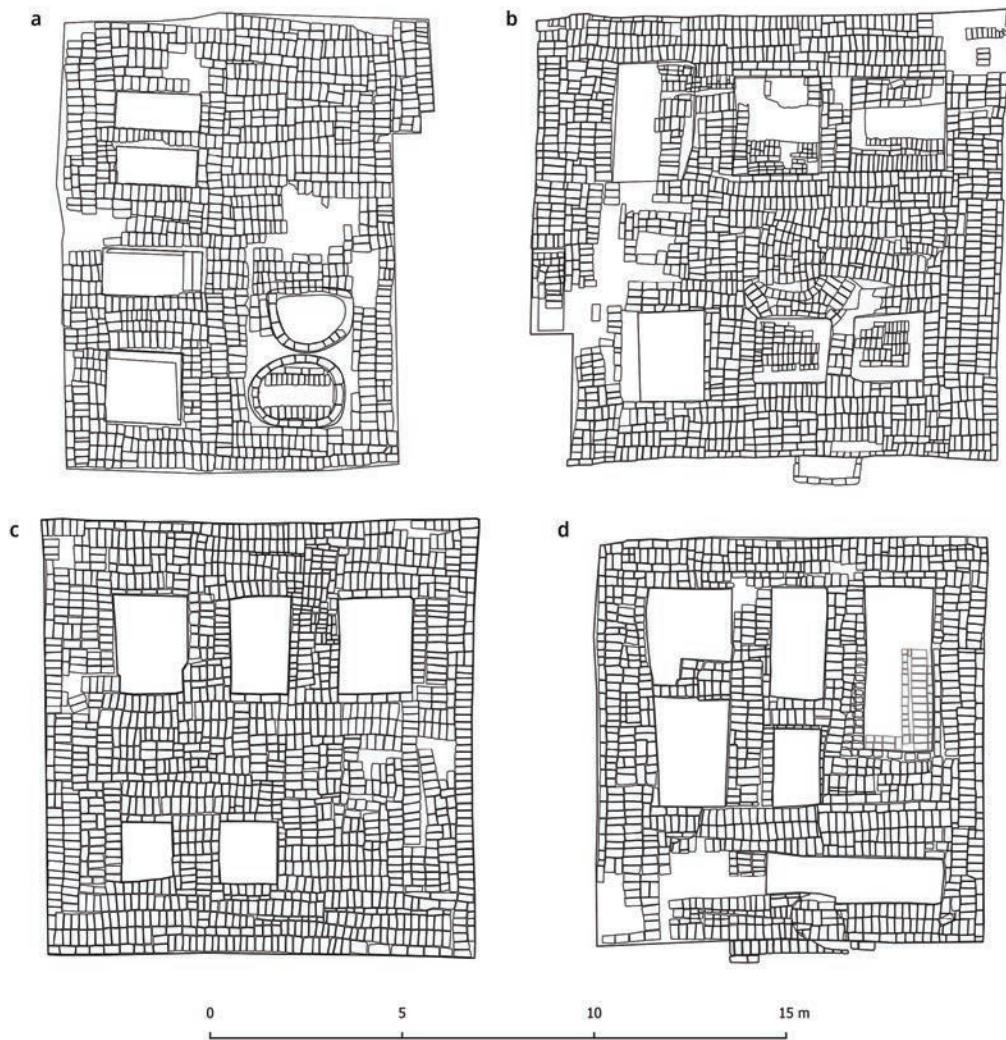


Figure iv: Plans of the Late Dynastic and Early Ptolemaic tower houses excavated at the sites: the tower house of Unit 11 at Kom Wasit (a), the House of the Horses at Kom Wasit (b), the tower house in Unit 9 at Kom al-Ahmer (House 1) (c), and House 2, one of the tower houses in Unit 6 at Kom al-Ahmer (d)

located at Kom Ganady. It was excavated in ten days, and there are now no traces of it left.²⁸ The third is at Kom al-Giza, a complex excavated in the 1980s and 1990s, with some conservation works being carried out;²⁹ it was also partially excavated by the Schedia Project.³⁰ In all three cases, stratigraphic information accurate enough to date the structures was not obtained. The fourth *tholoi* bath complex in Beheira province is the one at Kom Wasit. It is the only fully excavated example in Beheira and the second in the Western Delta alongside the complex found at Buto.³¹ The *tholos* bath style represents an important Greek cultural trend of Egyptian Hellenised societies. The introduction of this trend started in Alexandria, and its rapid spread towards the Delta, the Fayoum, and the rest

of Egypt confirms the fact that its diffusion was welcomed. The first Greeks that reached the Egyptian towns and villages in the Delta before the foundation of Alexandria did not solely contribute to the commercial exchange but also introduced new architectural features that the Egyptians adopted. At the Kom Wasit bath complex, the discovery inside a water basin of a sealed pottery dump consisting of imported and local imitations of fine *unguentaria* help not only to confirm the chronology of the use of the baths suggested by the coins (between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC)³² but also to understand the origin of the users of such baths.³³ The bath complex at Kom Wasit went out of use by the end of the 1st century BC and suffered from spoliation sometime between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD, and the area that it occupied was reused as a Roman cemetery. In Chapter 6, Larosa

²⁸ Sedky 1968, pp. 223–25; Kenawi 2014: 70–71.

²⁹ Abdel Fatah 1998: 47.

³⁰ Bergmann and Heinzelmann, 2009: 87–100.

³¹ Abd el-Rafa Fadl et al. 2017.

³² Asolati and Crisafulli 2019.

³³ Mondin et al. 2022: 583.

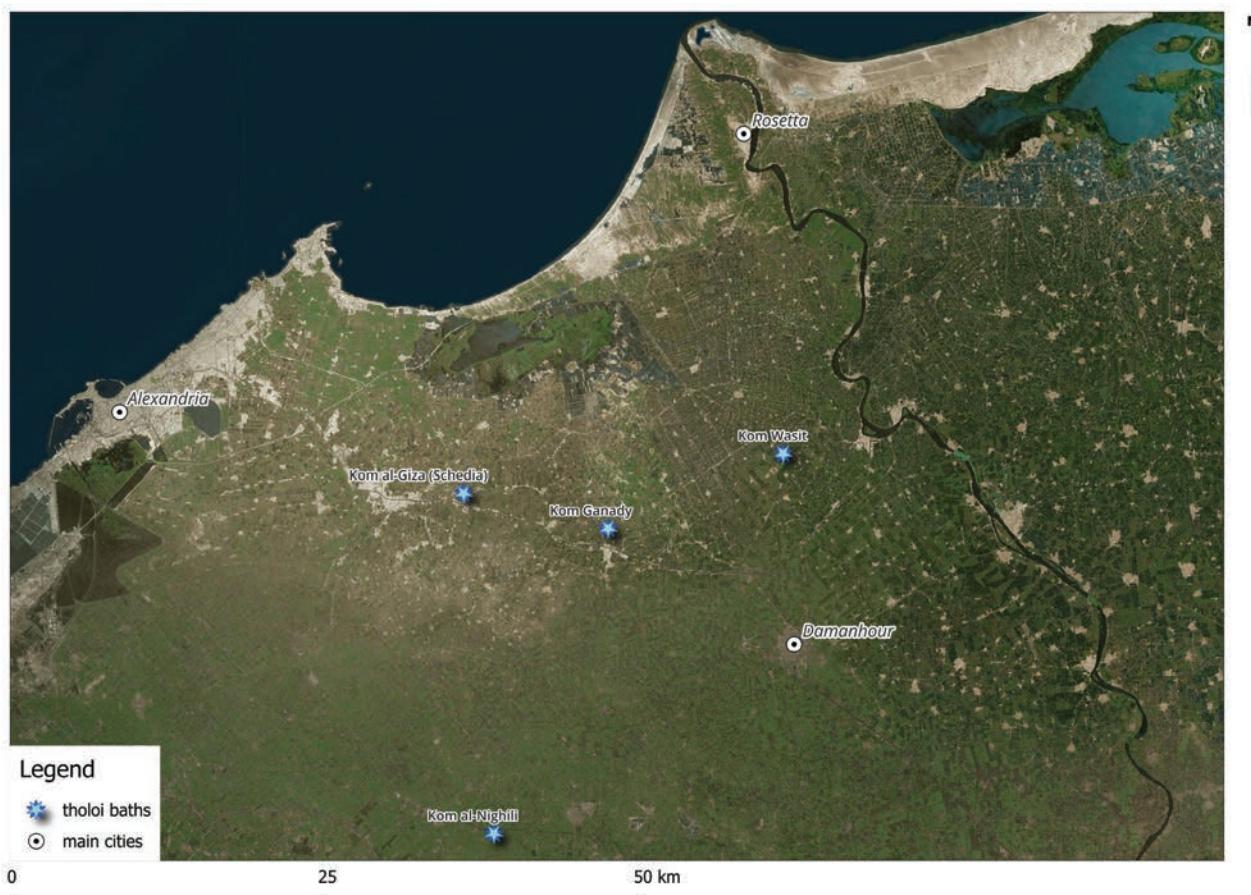


Figure v: Location of recorded *tholoi* baths in the province of Beheira (Background Image Bing Maps)

reports in detail on the excavation of the bath complex, the complex's phases of occupation and abandonment, and the architectural features associated with it.

The small finds were cleaned, measured, and described (presented thoroughly by **Furlan** in Chapters 4 and 7); and detailed photographs of all small finds were taken on a daily basis by Amy Wilson (2017) and Urška Furlan (2017–2022). These chapters add to the catalogue of Hellenistic and Ptolemaic findings from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, and provide fresh data from current excavations in the Western Nile Delta.

In 2014, we retrieved Greek pottery sherds on the surface of Unit 5 at Kom al-Ahmer, but it was only after the excavation of Unit 6 in 2018 that we were able to ascertain with certainty the presence of an extensive Early Ptolemaic phase at Kom al-Ahmer for the first time. The discovery of imported Greek pottery at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit required us to carry out a specialised pottery study (discussed by **Ringheim** in Chapter 8), which is a fundamental step towards expanding the current understanding of the extent of

the Greek presence and influence in the Western Nile Delta. It is particularly relevant to point out that these Greek materials are among the first from the Western Nile Delta to be published (following those uncovered at Naukratis). Their recovery indicates that there is a good chance of encountering similar findings at other Western Delta sites; if this were the case, our understanding of the integration of the Greek presence in northern Egypt would be reshaped.

We published 1006 coins from Kom al-Ahmer and 72 coins from Kom Wasit in Volume I;³⁴ in this volume, we present 410 coins from Kom al-Ahmer and 37 coins from Kom Wasit (discussed by **Asolati** and **Crisafulli** in Chapter 9). The coins in this catalogue include finds from the 2022 and 2023 campaigns (from Unit 4 at Kom al-Ahmer and Unit 12 at Kom Wasit, respectively), which will be included in the next volumes of this monograph series. These results bring the total number of coins unearthed by our mission to 1,416 from Kom al-Ahmer and 109 from Kom Wasit, an unusually large number of

³⁴ Asolati and Crisafulli 2019: 1–60.

coins to be retrieved by a modern excavation in the Nile Delta. The coins ranged from the first series of Ptolemaic coins bearing the bust of Alexander the Great to those of Emperor Justin II/Maurice Tiberius, dating to AD 565–602. The variety of coins found proves that the sites were occupied for a very long time. Two particularly important numismatic finds are two silver coins, both portraying Alexander the Great: a drachma dating to c. 325–323 BC and minted in Miletus/Ionia, and a tetradrachm dating to c. 306–300 BC and minted in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy I (Figure vi).

The last chapter of this volume offers a thorough reflection on the widespread theory that several settlements in the Delta were abandoned abruptly following the arrival of the Arab troops in Egypt in AD 641, instead proposing the continuation of their occupation as evidenced by archaeological, cartographic, and historical sources (presented by Kenawi in Chapter 10). Kenawi uses his experience in survey and excavation, not to mention the data acquired from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, to advocate for the necessity of specialised experts (for instance, in Islamic pottery) to be included in field projects in order to define chronologies better.

The study of pottery concentrated on vessels from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit. All pottery sherds have been collected, cleaned, weighed, and studied. The pottery finds from the post-2016 seasons will be published in a forthcoming volume.

Excavating Units

The locations of the excavation units were selected based on various research questions, as well as the results of the geophysical, topographical, and aerial surveys.³⁵ In the field, archaeologists recorded information about each feature on the field feature forms devised by Sarah Chapman and Hal Bonnette, former members of the Tell Timai Project. All stratigraphic and architectural features were recorded photographically before and after excavation, and mapped with a total station; the position of material culture found *in situ* was also registered. When necessary, more detailed photographs, as well as photographs suitable for photogrammetric modelling, were taken of particular elements of features during excavation and of whole units.

The surface finds from each unit were noted and collected, but the surface soil was not sieved due to the possibility of finding modern waste material; the other layers were sieved when possible. Each find was collected separately in a bag made of plastic or other appropriate material and provided with an identification number, while pottery, glass, bones, and charcoal from each feature were assigned one number per bag for the entire feature.

Each bag's identification information was provided twice: once written on a paper tag and inserted inside the bag, and once on the bag itself using permanent markers, using the following format:

Kom al-Ahmer 2018
Unit 6
Feature 6027
Bag number: 207
Material: silver coin

All finds were collected and kept at the mission storage facility, which we have been renting from a local farmer since 2012; they were sorted, cleaned or washed, photographed, measured, weighed as necessary, and studied daily. At the end of each campaign, objects selected by the mission and the main inspectors were registered and transported to the state storage facilities in Buto. Per the request of the local inspectorate in Beheira, most of the unregistered finds are buried back at the site in a designated area after they have been studied.

In this volume, the ID numbers of the individual objects, coins, and pottery continue the numeration of the finds published in Volumes I and II of this monograph series; therefore, the numbering starts from KAO 295, KWO 360, KAC 1007, KWC 73, KAP 1321, and KWP 1 and increases progressively.

Miscellaneous

In 2017, Luciana Carvalho supervised the maintenance of the symbolic 10m-long wall that she had designed and built out of used plastic water bottles at Kom al-Ahmer the previous year; and Samantha Tistoni decorated it with paintings.

In May 2018, Cristina Mondin curated a photographic exhibition at the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, Cairo; the exhibition showcased photographs and posters related to the work carried out by the mission at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit; photographs of and information on the work of the German mission in Athribis (Sohag) were also present. The month-long exhibition was a unique occasion for archaeologists and visitors to see the metal oracle device unearthed at Kom Wasit by Labib Habachi in the 1940s³⁶ and displayed for the first time.

To commemorate the project's 10-year anniversary, a workshop was organised at the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo on 4 November 2021. The presenters discussed recent fieldwork results from a variety of sites, from the Delta to Aswan. The workshop was conceived in relation to the mission's work at the two Delta sites, and its purpose was to encourage and inspire collaboration and the exchange of information among local and

³⁵ Hinojosa Baliño 2019: 41–55.

³⁶ Habachi 1947: 285–87; Kenawi 2019: xx.

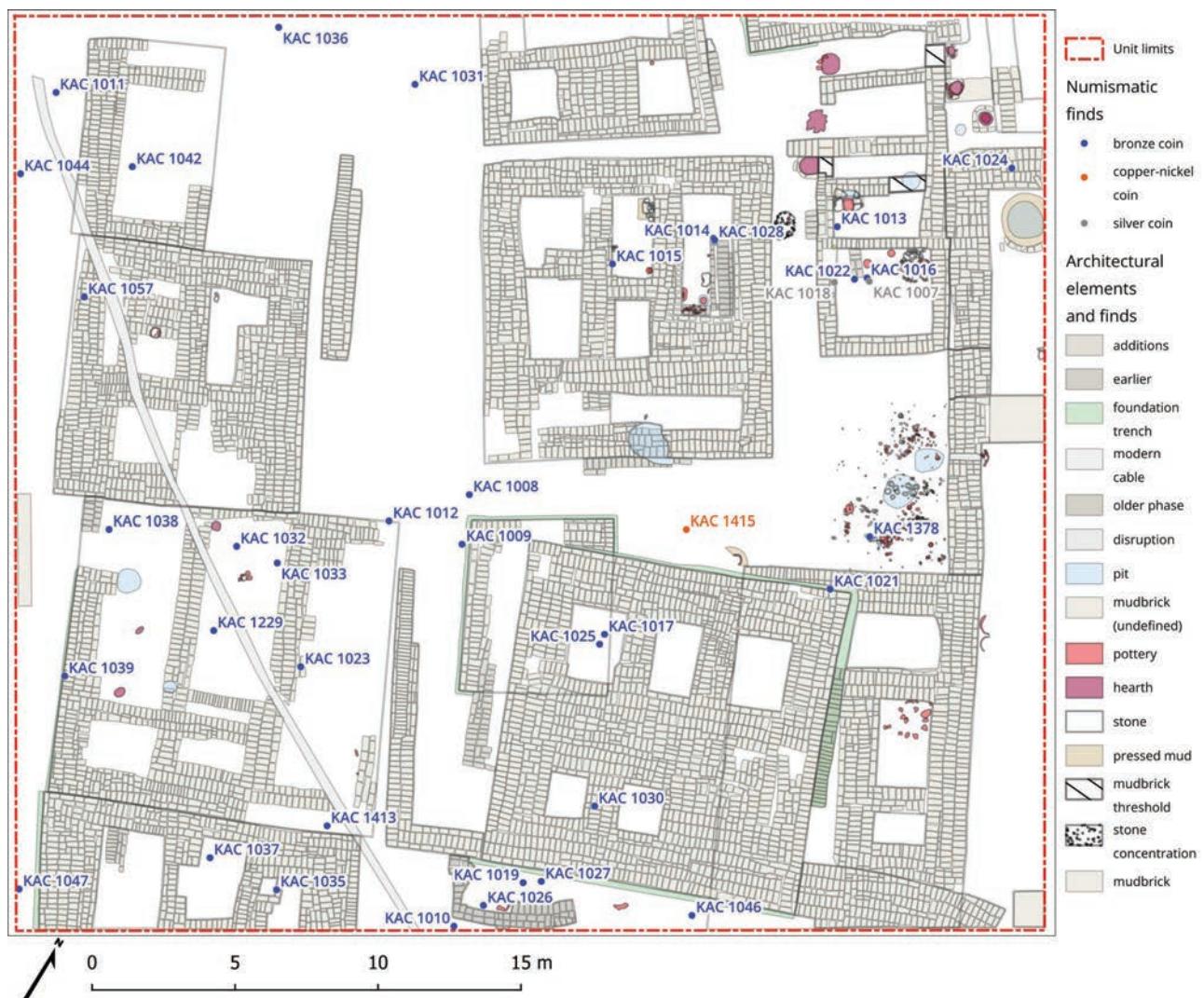


Figure vi: Kom al-Ahmer, Unit 6, distribution of coin finds

foreign archaeological projects operating throughout the country.

Concluding Remarks

The surveys undertaken in the Delta, especially those in the Western Nile Delta (the EES and British Academy Delta Survey, the Beheira survey, the American regional survey in the southwestern Delta, and the Regional Survey Buto) presented preliminary dating of the visited sites based mostly on surface finds and occasionally on materials retrieved from augers.³⁷ These results have depicted the Delta as a very homogeneous region, characterised by the frequent presence of Roman and Late Roman sites that, in many cases, are considered as having been founded during the Roman Period, unless Ptolemaic materials

were found on the surface, in which cases a Ptolemaic foundation is presumed. The excavations at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, which targeted various locations within the sites and areas of different elevations, as well as other recent excavations at Kom Aziza, carried out by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, have demonstrated solid evidence for earlier occupations often preceding the Ptolemaic Period, something that could not be inferred from the surface surveys. Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit were initially regarded as Ptolemaic and Roman by the EES survey and the Beheira survey.³⁸ After 12 years of excavations and the study of all materials, including the most fragmented, we uncovered phases of occupation dating back to the 6th and 4th centuries BC, as well as traces of even earlier occupation. These cases call for caution regarding the way in which sites are dated, and encourage us to reconsider our current knowledge of both earlier and later Delta occupations.

³⁷ Coulson and Leonard 1981; Coulson and Wilkie 1986; Mason-Berghoff and Thomas 2023; Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009; Kenawi 2014; Schiestl 2022: 91.

³⁸ Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009: 176–83; Kenawi 2014: 187–200.

They are a thoughtful reminder of the preliminary nature of survey data as well as the obligation of researchers to continue to challenge our current knowledge on the ancient landscape of the Delta. There is thus a clear need for projects to undertake investigations with long-term goals and involving finds experts such as numismatists and ceramologists specialised in the different time periods. There is a strong possibility that more Delta sites than we know were founded during Ptolemaic or earlier times. The same reasoning can be applied to the length of occupation of the sites, which were probably inhabited long after the arrival of the Arab troops rather than abandoned at that time (see Kenawi in Chapter 10).

To conclude, the archaeological materials at Kom al-Ahmer currently enable us to date the site's occupation from the 5th century BC to the 11th century AD, a very long time for a site in the Delta. At Kom Wasit, the earliest date of occupation remains the mid-6th BC, as discussed in Volume I,³⁹ while the investigation of Unit 10 and Unit 12 (the latter is not discussed in this volume) confirmed a sporadic reoccupation of Kom Wasit in later periods, as shown by a mid-Roman cemetery overlapping the *tholoi* baths complex in the southern part of the site and

Byzantine frequentation over the temple complex in the north-central part of the site.

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³⁹ Müller and Kenawi 2019: 161; Furlan 2019: 173–74.

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