

Kom al-Ahmer – Kom Wasit II

Coin Finds 2012–2016

Late Roman and Early Islamic Pottery
from Kom al-Ahmer

Michele Asolati, Cristina Crisafulli and Cristina Mondin

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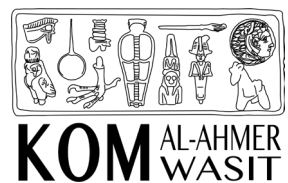
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Preface

The study results presented in this volume are the outcome of an intensive research programme involving two archaeological sites, the dig laboratory, and the researchers' home universities from 2012 to 2016.

The team is grateful to the Ministry of Antiquities for granting us the necessary permissions to work on the sites, and for facilitating our work with our Egyptian colleagues under the Ministers: Mohamed Ibrahim, Mamdouh al-Damaty, and Khaled Anani. The Department of Foreign Missions provided the necessary paperwork and much support, and we particularly thank Mohamed Ismail, Hany Abu Alazem, and Nashwa Gaber for their help.

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The conservator inspectors who worked with the mission were Zakaria Batisha (2014), Ahmed Amin (2015), and Akram Zakaria (2016). In addition, the engineer Basoni Mohamed Basoni helped us construct the symbolic perimeter wall at Kom al-Ahmer (2016).

Over the course of the five fieldwork seasons the mission trained the following inspectors: Ahmed al-Halawani and Ahmed Naem (2012); Samia Mohamed Faid, Omar Nabil Asabagh, Ahmed Naem, Essam Ragab Abdelgwad, Mohamed Younis Abozaid, Sahar Mohamed Shaat, Eman Mohamed Mashaly, and Shahawy Mohamed Shahawy (April–June 2014); Anter Abd El Rahman and Mohamed El Jammal (2015); and Amir Azoz and Ibrahim Naser Mohamed (2016). The mission also trained the following conservator inspectors: Mahmoud Khatab, Mohamed Khatab, Khalefa Abd Elmaged, and John Eskander (2014); and Nashwa Khalil Mohamed and Mayada Elsaid Rashad (2016).

Thanks are due to the Department of Tourism Police in Damanhour for their efforts to secure our stay. We would also like to thank the Generals Ashraf Mahrous, Ihab Lotfy, Ahmed al-Ganbihiy, Ahmed Efet, and Ihab Selim, and others who accompanied us, like Ayman, Shukri, and Karam, as well as many *ghafirs* on both sites.

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

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The mission team included various supervisors, excavators, and illustrators from many different countries. We began in 2012 with a small team consisting of Cristina Mondin, Giorgia Marchiori, Valentina Gasperini (ceramicist), Iliara Rosetti (archaeologist), Irene Cestari (laboratory), Barbara Rizzo (ceramicist), Virginia Fileccia (archaeologist), and Mohamed Kenawi. In 2013, a short survey took place with Amy Wilson and Natalie Marquez. In April–June 2014, the team expanded when the mission developed a large-scale archaeological dig. Thereafter, our team included many supervisors, including Cristina Mondin (Director), Marcus Müller, Giorgia Marchiori, Tiziana Prezio, and Mohamed Kenawi; and archaeologists who worked both at the sites and in the laboratory, including Maria Lucia Patanè, Giulia Marano, Monica Spaziani, Dionisia Pizzo, Carla Vallone, Barbara Cavallaro, Erika Cunsolo, Salvatrice Pantano, Luther Sousa, Sara Cole, Sarah Hitchens, Rim Saleh, Audrey Eller, Aude Simoney, Juliette Fayein (conservator), and Henrik Brahe (photographer). In September 2014, the mission continued its activities with Cristina Mondin, Giorgia Marchiori, Maria Lucia Patanè, Giulia Marano, Federica Faro, Jessica Distefano, Flavia di Grazia, Valentina Corsale, Enrico Catalano, Elisa Politano, Irene Cestari, Sarah Hitchens, and Amy Wilson. In 2014, Israel Hinojosa Baliño conducted a major topographic survey, and Gabriella Carpentiero conducted the geophysical survey of Kom Wasit.

In 2015, the team worked for two months and two weeks, and comprised a larger number of specialists as supervisors, including Cristina Mondin (Director), Giorgia Marchiori, Marcus Müller, Nunzia Larosa, Amy Wilson, Ole Herslund, and Mohamed Kenawi. The team also comprised many archaeologists and Egyptologists, including Audrey Eller, Maria Lucia Patanè, Carla Vallone, Caterina Codispoti, Barbara Cavallaro, Giulia Marano, Jessica Distefano, Mario La Rosa, Federica Faro, Federica D'Asero, Martina Maenza, Elisa Politano, Sara Cole, Mia Čančarević, Haythem Mahdi, Giulia Raimondi, and Graziana Zisa; as well as two architects, Giada Bertoldo and Elisa De Rossi. Henrik Brahe photographed the archaeological units and some of the objects, and Louise Bertini began working on the animal bones. The team also included two numismatists, Michele Asolati (Director) and Cristina Crisafulli, who cleaned and studied all coins found since 2012.

In 2016, the project continued with a large number of archaeologists and specialists in various sciences. Fieldwork took place on the sites over the course of two months. The team included Cristina Mondin, Giorgia Marchiori, Ole Herslund, Nunzia Larosa, and Audrey Eller as supervisors; several archaeologists, including Maria Lucia Patanè, Carla Vallone, Barbara Cavallaro, Haythem Mahdi, Bianca Badalucco, Andreas Valentin, Ellen Brzost-Andersen, Libbe Bjerknæs, Carolina Vedøe, Federica Faro, Giulia Raimondi, Roberta Colonna, Mette Lindbo Adamsen, Christian Albér Birkekvist, Christiane Maren Fisker, Sofie Amalie Breum, and Urška Furlan; and two architects, Anna Chodkowska and Marika Mielec. Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli continued studying the numismatic finds. Israel Hinojosa Baliño worked on the topography of the two sites and the photogrammetry of the units, while Amy Wilson worked in the laboratory and photographed many of the objects. Luciana Carvalho contributed to the mission by planning the construction of a protective wall around Kom al-Ahmer, and overseeing the construction of the first 10 metres of the wall. Louise Bertini continued her study of the animal bones, and Benjamin Pennington began conducting a drill auger on both sites.

Nunzia Larosa supervised the excavations of Units 3, 5, and 10 at Kom Wasit; coordinated the bi-dimensional and three-dimensional survey (photogrammetric elaborations); and collaborated in geo-spatial data management (geographic information system) with Giorgia Marchiori and Israel Hinojosa Baliño.

The mission also wishes to thank several people who contributed indirectly to the mission in different ways, such as Essam Barakat (videographer and graphic designer) for many of the object photographs presented in this volume as well as Nada Mahdi for working on some of the photographs and drivers like Ali Gohar, Ibrahim, Ahmed, and Ashraf Abu Taleb. Thanks, are also due to Hadir Mohamed who drew hundreds of pottery sherds with AutoCAD.

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Cristina Mondin, Michele Asolati, Giorgia Marchiori, and Mohamed Kenawi

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

Introduction

The Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit Archaeological Project II First Phase: 2012–2016

In 2012, fieldwork began at the two largest sites (after Kom al-Ghoraf) in Egypt's western Delta, Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, to investigate them intensively and reveal their importance. Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit 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 (Figures i–ii). Given their well-connected location with respect to these Mediterranean and Nile ports, it can be assumed that a significant volume of commercial traffic moved through these sites. 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. This short introduction discusses the results of the study of two cultural materials finds, coins and pottery that brought to light massive information that can be gathered from a Delta site.

In the 1940s, at Kom al-Ahmer, Abd el-Mohsen el-Khashab conducted an excavation that resulted in the discovery of a large Imperial Roman bath complex; Hellenistic, Roman, Late Roman, and Islamic coins, and various other objects, which he published in his book entitled *Ptolemaic and Roman Baths of Kom el-Ahmar*.²

The coin finds from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit provide valuable data for the circulation of coins in the region from the Early Ptolemaic to Late Roman and Byzantine periods. Over 1,400 coins have been collected during excavations, of which approximately 1,070 are presented and discussed in this volume. This large volume of coins, together with



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

² El-Khashab 1949.



Figure ii: Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit, location of the excavated units.

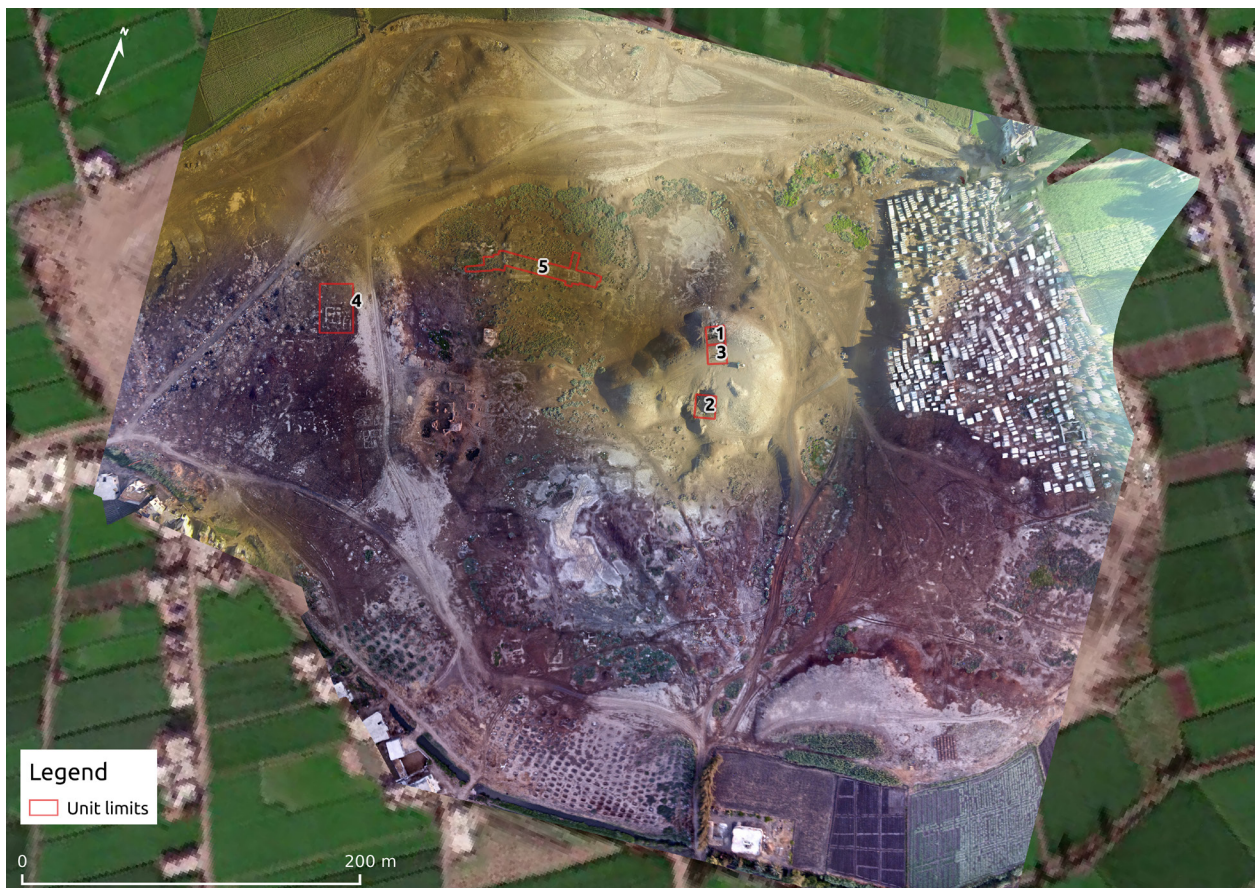


Figure iii: Kom al-Ahmer, excavated units between 2012 and 2016.

their related contexts, indicate a very active commercial site, which was well-connected with Alexandria and the Mediterranean. There can be no doubt that the meticulous excavation methods employed resulted to this high number of finds, in addition to the detailed conservation work conducted by experts Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli.

During the excavations, all pottery sherds were collected, cleaned, and studied in detail. This resulted in a huge number of pottery sherds from the excavated areas. The study of the pottery presented in this volume focuses only on Kom al-Ahmer and, in particular, on three of six excavated units. Due to the sheer quantity of pottery finds, this study presents only the pottery from two fully studied units (1 and 2), as well as sub set of the pottery from Unit 4. Over 40,000 sherds are presented in this volume, which comprise a catalogue of 1,320 types. This catalogue is the most comprehensive of its kind for the Egyptian Delta. The mission database contains over 100,000 studied sherds and over 3,000 identified types which will be discussed in future publications (Figure iii).

Alongside the Egyptian materials, hundreds of identified Eastern Mediterranean and North African pottery imports are discussed. Strong evidence for commercial exchange with a variety of ports confirms the importance of the site and its strategic location. An amphora storage building was discovered in Unit 4, and one of the five rooms of the storage building is presented in this volume.

The data acquired from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit since 2012 is huge and astonishing, and was entirely unanticipated from the survey data. Nevertheless, it represents, at the same time, the results of the excavation of less than 2% of the extent of the site. There are dozens of sites in the region which we would expect to provide similar data and information on the history of the Western Delta from the Late Dynastic to Early Islamic periods. It is hoped that this study will encourage other scholars to focus their attention on this under-studied region.

Mohamed Kenawi