

TELL FARAMA
(PELUSIUM)
PRELIMINARY REPORT
AFTER THE FIFTH SEASON OF FIELDWORK

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The fifth season of fieldwork at the site of Tell Farama, ancient Pelusium, carried out by a team from the Polish Centre of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, lasted from July 5 to August 8.¹ Activities were focused on further exploration of the trench with the mosaic floor unearthed last season in Sector 2 (Jakubiak 2007: 133-135 and Figs 7-10).

¹ Team participants included beside the present author, Szymon Maślak, Olga Wasilewska, archaeologists; Zofia Zakrzewska, archaeologist-restorer. Representing the SCA was Sayed Abdel Aleem Abdel Rahman. The team is indebted to Dr. Muhammad Abdel Samia for his assistance and to SCA authorities for making available the very comfortable accommodations at the SCA camp at Qantara East.

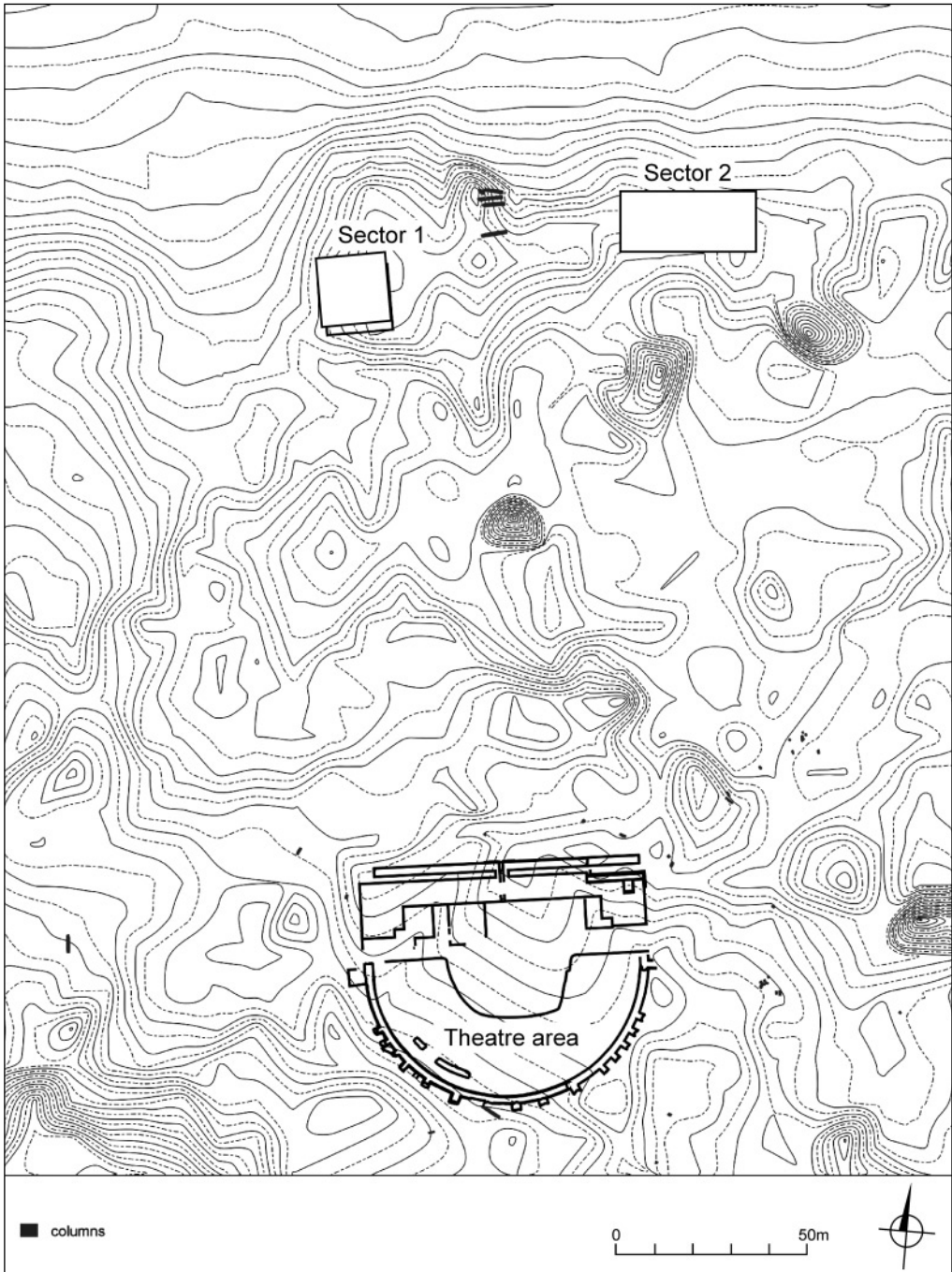


Fig. 1. General site plan with position of sectors, 2006
(Drawing J. Iwaszczuk, A. Chabiera, U. Wicenciak)

SECTOR 2

After the necessary cleaning and preparatory work, explorations in last year's trench [Fig. 1] started with removing of the remains of a baked brick substructure of the mosaic floor discovered there. Coins from the first half of the 4th century AD found in the context of this bedding provided a *post quem* date for the mosaic, confirming dating by style. A study of the bedding layers also verified previous conclusions concerning building techniques in the conditions of a marshy site like Pelusium (cf. Maślak 2007), that is,

putting in a bedding of burnt bricks thickly covered with mud and mud brick mixed with potsherds, ashes, pieces of lime plaster and stones, this followed by lime plaster, more mud and mud brick, next a layer of red bricks spread with lime and ashy mortar on top to provide the surface for laying the mosaic floor.

Extension of the sector to the west was aimed at tracing the architectural plan of the house with the mosaic floor. Unfortunately, the remains proved to be severely damaged by later digging and



Fig. 2. Plan of the architectural remains uncovered in Sector 2
(Photo O. Wasilewska)

retrieval of stone for other buildings. In many cases nothing but the substructure of floors remained in place.

In the end effect, a large part of a rich private house was uncovered (the eastern end still awaits excavation), verifying data provided by a geomagnetic survey in 2005 and information from fieldwalking of the surrounding area, which had revealed a latitudinal colonnaded street. The area with its characteristic architectural features, located near the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, has been already signaled by

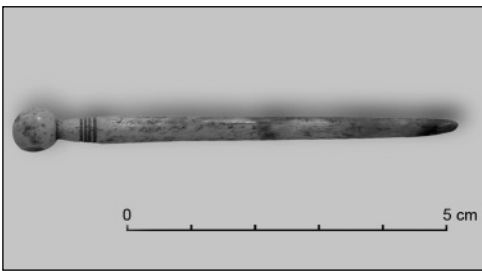


Fig. 3. Bone pin
(Photo O. Wasilewska)



Fig. 4. Amphora stopper of lime mortar
(Photo O. Wasilewska)

J. Clédat (1913: 79-85) Other relatively rich private residences must have stood here, blending well into the ancient urban layout which can still be occasionally discerned on the ground surface, especially east of the mosaic trench.

The most characteristic element of the excavated structure is a long corridor running from the west entrance directly into what may have been the house's main room with the mosaic floor. Just behind the door from the street there was a transversal room from which another corridor led to two or three small rooms, as well as two side rooms located opposite one another. There could have been another entrance to the house through a small room at the southern end of the corridor, directly from the latitudinal street passing by the south façade of the structure.

Remains of a kitchen with a large quantity of cooking pots and an oval oven located in the southwestern corner of the room were found at the intersection of the two corridors in the center of the house. Two more rooms lay on the opposite side of the corridor which runs directly from the side entrance to the room with the mosaic. At least one of them may have been used for storage. A passage may have separated the two units, leading off to the northern, unpreserved part of the dwelling. A sewage facility was recorded in the eastern part of the house, under the remains of a wall dividing the main room with the mosaic from another room north of it. It may have carried waste from the kitchen, but it is too damaged for us to be sure about this. Remains of different color marble found in the fill suggest that the western part of the house had interiors fitted with *opus sectile* floors.

The room to the north of the mosaic chamber appears to have been used as

storage. Several Gaza IV amphorae were found fixed in low and shallow clay benches discovered in the southeastern corner. Another oval-shaped oven with relatively large deposits of ashes was discovered there, immediately back of the wall separating the room from the main chamber. The unlikely positioning of this facility in relation to the main room lends support for the idea that this room was used for storage by squatters who occupied an abandoned and partly ruined structure. It also seems possible that parts of the dwelling were still used by the builders of the adjacent church which partly destroyed the southern end of the house.

Further work on a wall of baked brick discovered last year in the southern part of the trench established its dating as later than the mosaic house. The pottery material from below the foundations of this wall turned up Gaza 4 and LR 7 (Peacock, Williams type 53) amphorae. Testing beside the brick wall identified a layer of gray clay associated with this late pottery assemblage, below which was a layer of red clay with material dated even into the Late Hellenistic period.

An extension of the trench to the southeast focused on understanding the function of this brick wall. Limited excavations in this part revealed remains which can be identified tentatively as those of a church. They consisted of some baked bricks making up the floor in the purported northern aisle and some fragments of grey marble flagstones in the heavily ruined *diakonicon*. The building was erected not earlier than in the 5th century, possibly even in the beginning of the 6th century AD, as appears from pottery analysis and stratigraphical observations, but without more work these conclusions must remain tentative.

Among the small finds one should mention a fragmentary stone stele inscribed in Greek on both sides (poorly preserved) and three amphorae stoppers of lime mortar with stamped Latin inscription. Two of those stoppers give the name Valerius in the genitive plural: *Valeriorum*, arranged in a circle around the chrism in the center [Fig. 4]. The inscription on the third stopper proved illegible. There is also a rather large set of small bronze coins from the 4th century AD to be studied.

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