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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 17, 125-135

2007

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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TELL FARAMA (PELUSIUM)

REPORT ON THE THIRD AND FOURTH SEASONS

Krzysztof Jakubiak

At the initiative of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, a team from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University undertook the third and fourth campaign of excavations on the site of the theater at Tell Farama (ancient Pelusium).¹ The goal was to complete the investigations of the theater and underlying structures; consequently, the foundations and related deposits of these earlier buildings were studied during the short spring season. A reconstruction project of the stage building was completed and presented to the SCA authorities for approval. The first stage of work on the preservation, restoration and limited reconstruction of the Roman theater proceeded in the summer season. The outline of the stage building was marked out with a single course of red bricks, introducing corrections to the original reconstruction project wherever necessary in order to give future visitors a better understanding of the architecture. The next stage of the reconstruction is planned for upcoming seasons.

A contour map of the area under investigation, theater included, was accomplished in the summer season. Testing began in other parts of the ancient town (sectors 1 and 2). The most important find in the second sector was a fragmentary Late Roman mosaic floor.

1 The seasons took place respectively from February 24 to March 10 and from July 3 to August 10, 2005. The work of the Polish-Egyptian expedition was directed by Prof. Dr. Michał Gawlikowski. Beside the present writer, the team comprised, in the third season: Mr. Szymon Maślak, archaeologist; Mrs. Anna Ośnicka-Smoła, Mr. Michał Smoła, architects; and Mr. Mahmoud Ahmed Helal, representing the SCA; and in the fourth season: Mr. Szymon Maślak, Ms Aleksandra Chabiera, Ms Jadwiga Iwaszczuk and Ms Urszula Wicenciak, archaeologists; and Mr. Mahmud El-Dib representing the SCA. The team was accommodated on both occasions at the SCA camp in Qantara East and enjoyed the helpful assistance of its employees.

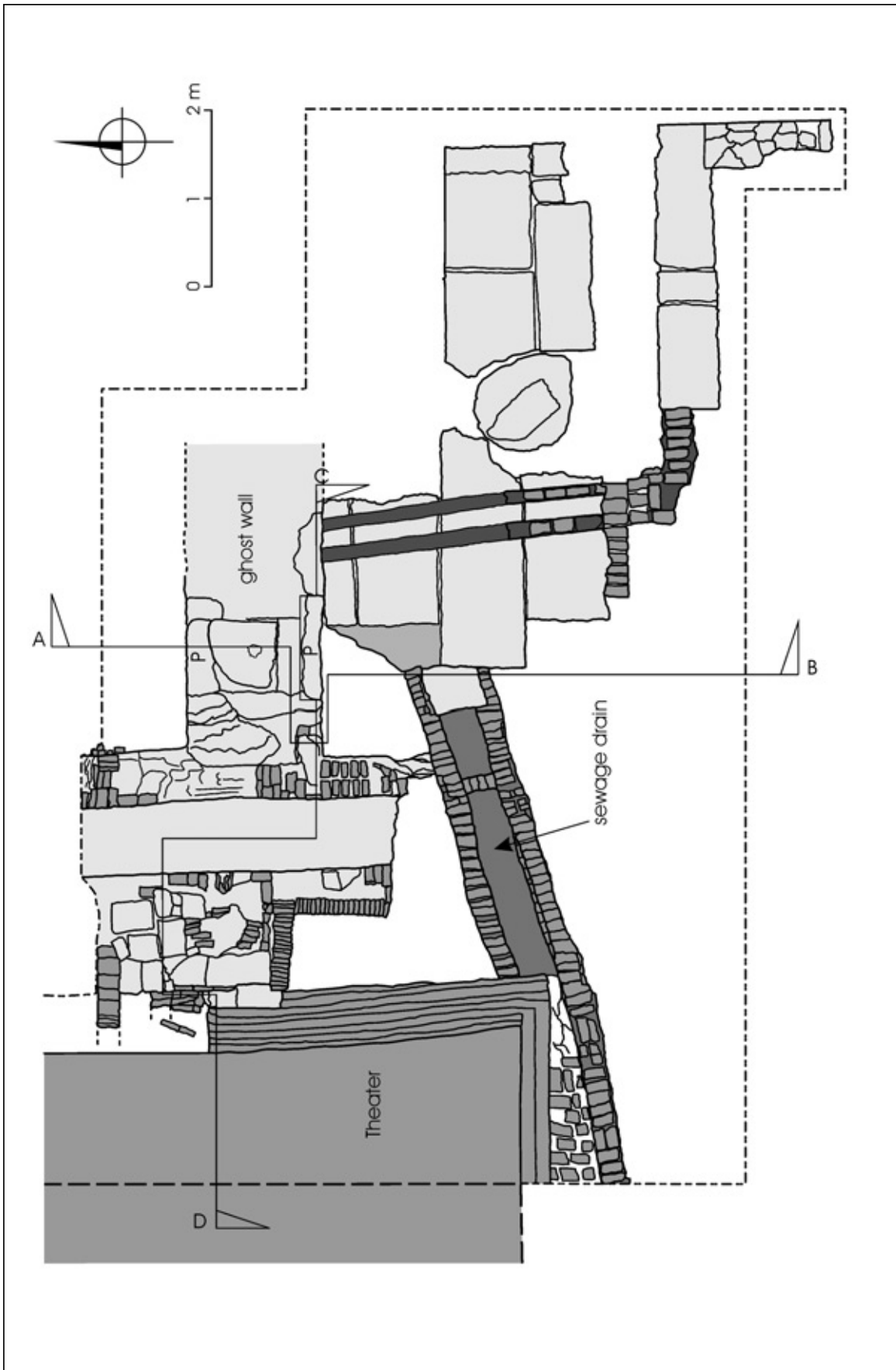


Fig. 1. Plan of the trench adjoining the eastern entrance of the theater
(Drawing K. Jakubiak, S. Maślak)

WORK IN THE THEATER AREA

Final investigations conducted in the spring of 2005 concentrated on the areas adjoining both entrances to the theater and a spot by the northern façade. The objective was to investigate the layers and buildings preceding the construction of the theater in this area and the character of the neighborhood at the time of the theater's existence.

A test trench adjoining the western *parodos* yielded further information on the structure preceding the theater. It had been of red brick bonded in clay mortar, founded

in a compacted layer of brown clay identified as a Hellenistic rubbish dump. The fill included painted fragments of Hellenistic pottery and terracotta figurines.

The trench traced east of the eastern *parodos*, that is, already outside the building of the theater, permitted the local stratigraphic sequence to be studied in full [Figs 1,3]. The lowermost layer here (3 in the section drawing) was found to be brown compacted clay yielding Hellenistic pottery (and the only pottery stamp found this year!). The oldest structures on this spot



Fig. 2. Trench adjoining the eastern entrance to the theater, view from the west. Main sewage channel in the center (Photo K. Jakubiak)

were dated on archeological grounds to the Hellenistic period as well; they are represented in the section by brown earth mixed with lime and powdered brick (layer 4) and the ghost wall located south of this layer. It belonged to an apparently monumental building evidently preceding the construction of the theater. This edifice had its own sewage system connected with the main sewage drain (cf. *Fig. 3*) running E-W through the town (only one of the slabs covering this channel has been preserved *in situ*) [*Fig. 2*]. The two drains appear to be contemporary, but all joining channels between the two were destroyed when the building itself was dismantled immediately prior to or during the construction of the theater.

Superimposed on top of the main drain were two separate layers of flagstones, presumably marking the street levels already of the Roman period and associated with the theater entrance. The paving could have actually belonged not so much to a street as to a small square siding the

theater structure. After the theater was abandoned, the entire district was turned into an industrial area. The limestone flagging was partly looted and destroyed. A big pit was dug in the center, the fill containing a big slab of limestone. Traces of ashy gray mortar on the surface of the remaining flagstones and some pieces of red brick constitute the sole surviving evidence of some kind of masonry channel installations presumably contemporaneous with the devastation and dismantling of the theater.

Upon investigation, an accumulation of red bricks spotted 5 m west of the entrance in the north wall of the theater proved to be part of a sewage system constructed together with the theater [*Fig. 4*] and apparently destroyed and taken apart at the same time as the theater. The flagstones covering it (none of which have survived *in situ*, must have been part of the northern peristyle. The pottery from this trench was relatively late, indicating that the destruction of the pavement and drainage

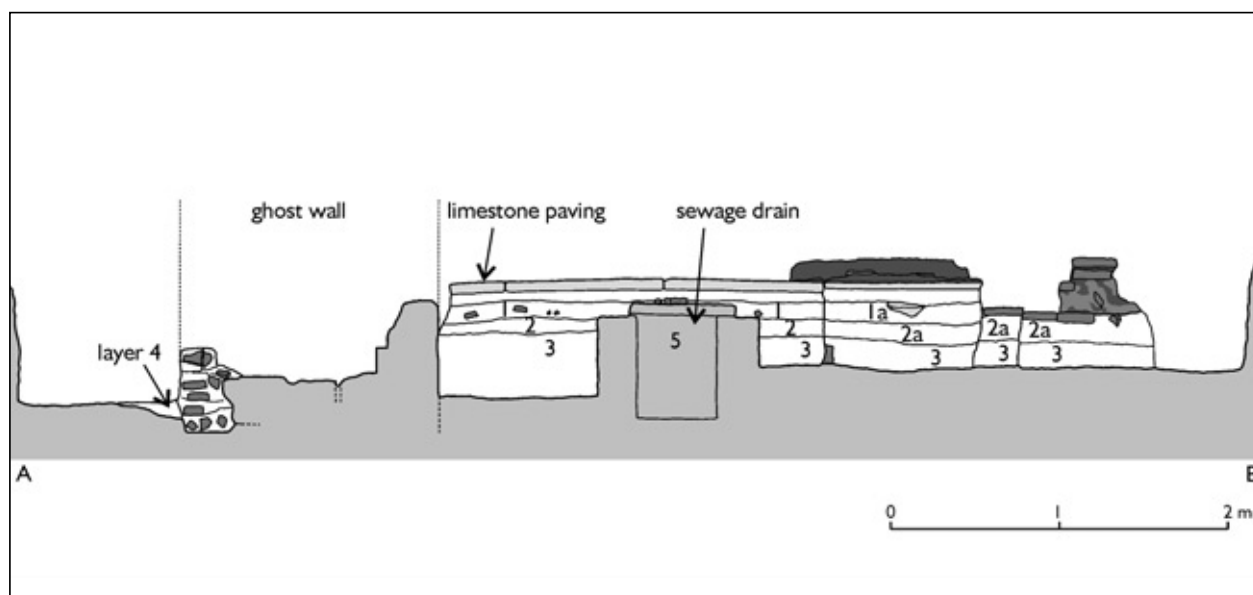


Fig. 3. N-S section (AB) looking north through the trench adjoining the eastern entrance to the theater (Drawing S. Mašlak)

could have occurred in the last phases of the dismantling of the theater building. Evidence of burning was found nearby, but

the presence of a blue-glazed oil lamp points to a very late date, even in the 12th century, for this activity.

SECTOR 1

The mound chosen for testing in the summer season of excavations was located 180 m north of the theater. The architecture uncovered in a trench 18 by 18 m proved to be heavily destroyed by numerous pits, as well as an obviously planned dismantling of the walls [Figs 5-6]. The suddenly increased demand for red brick as construction material can only be associated with the rapid building of the Late Roman

legionary camp west of the excavated area, presumably in response to threatening military circumstances, such as the Persian army of Chosroes II invading Egypt in AD 619. Further work may help to confirm this theory.

The architecture in Sector 1 has been interpreted as a line of shops with a house in back. Considering the modest information on Late Antique urban planning in



Fig. 4. Sewage channel discovered by the north façade of the theater. View from the west (Photo K. Jakubiak)

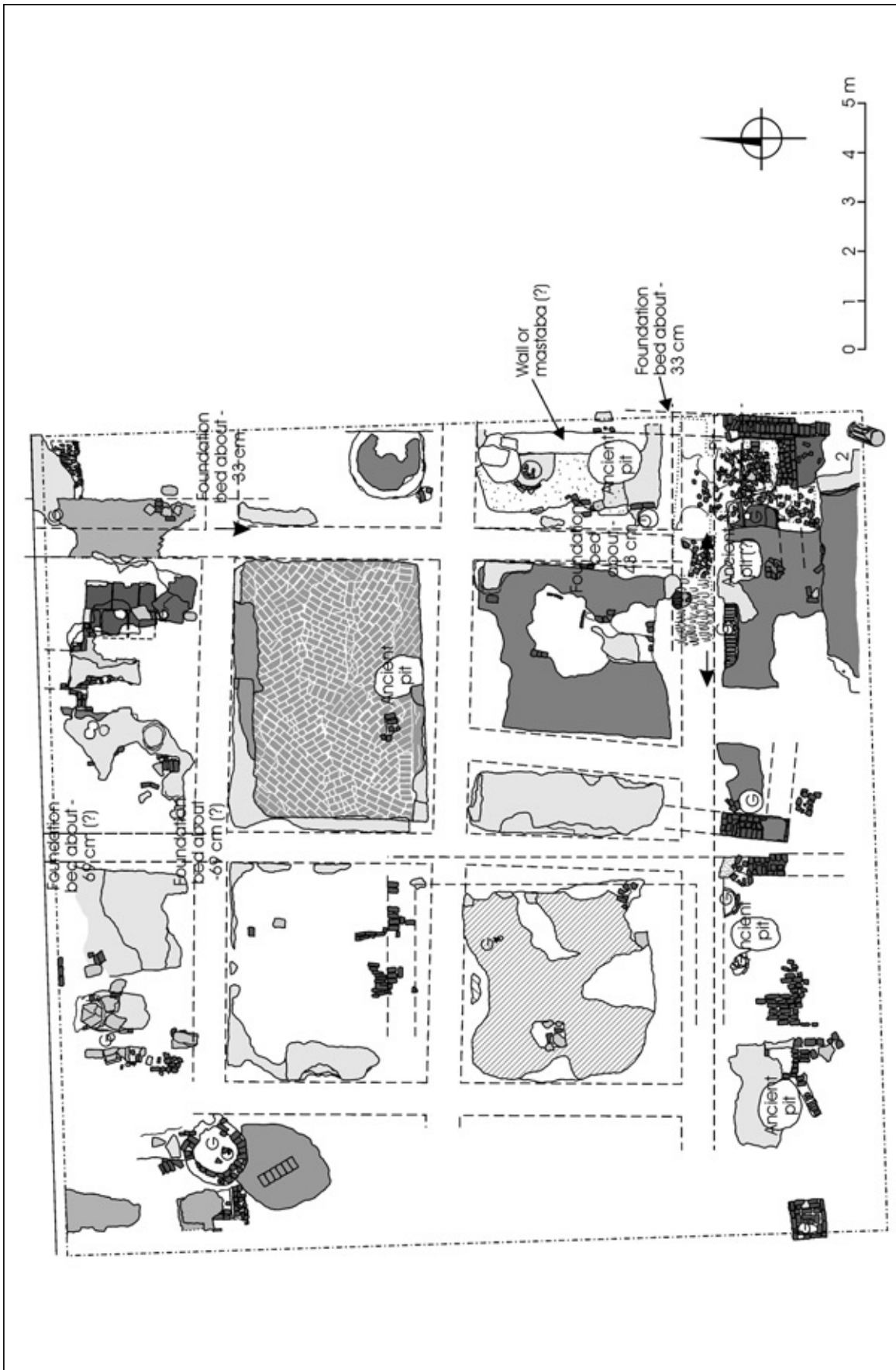


Fig. 5. Plan of the excavated part of Sector 1
(Drawing S. Maslák)

Pelusium, the excavated buildings constitute an interesting contribution. Flat ground to the west of the excavated area is suggestive of a rectangular square, but so far the excavations have revealed no evidence of an open market space in this part of the town. The building behind the shops was part of a big house where domestic economic activities were carried out on the ground floor. The two recognized phases of architectural development of this structure should be dated to the end of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It was abandoned in the

5th century, after which some kind of industrial activity requiring the use of several furnaces took place in the ruins. At least six different furnaces were located in the eastern part of the excavated area. They were of oval shape, the firing chamber separated from the hearth below by typical clay grates. Ashes and bones were found in the fill, but unfortunately no diagnostic pottery which could precise the dating. They may have served the purposes of pottery manufacture, but there is not a shred of evidence in support of this idea.



Fig. 6. Southeastern corner of the excavated trench in Sector 1, looking south (Photo K. Jakubiak)

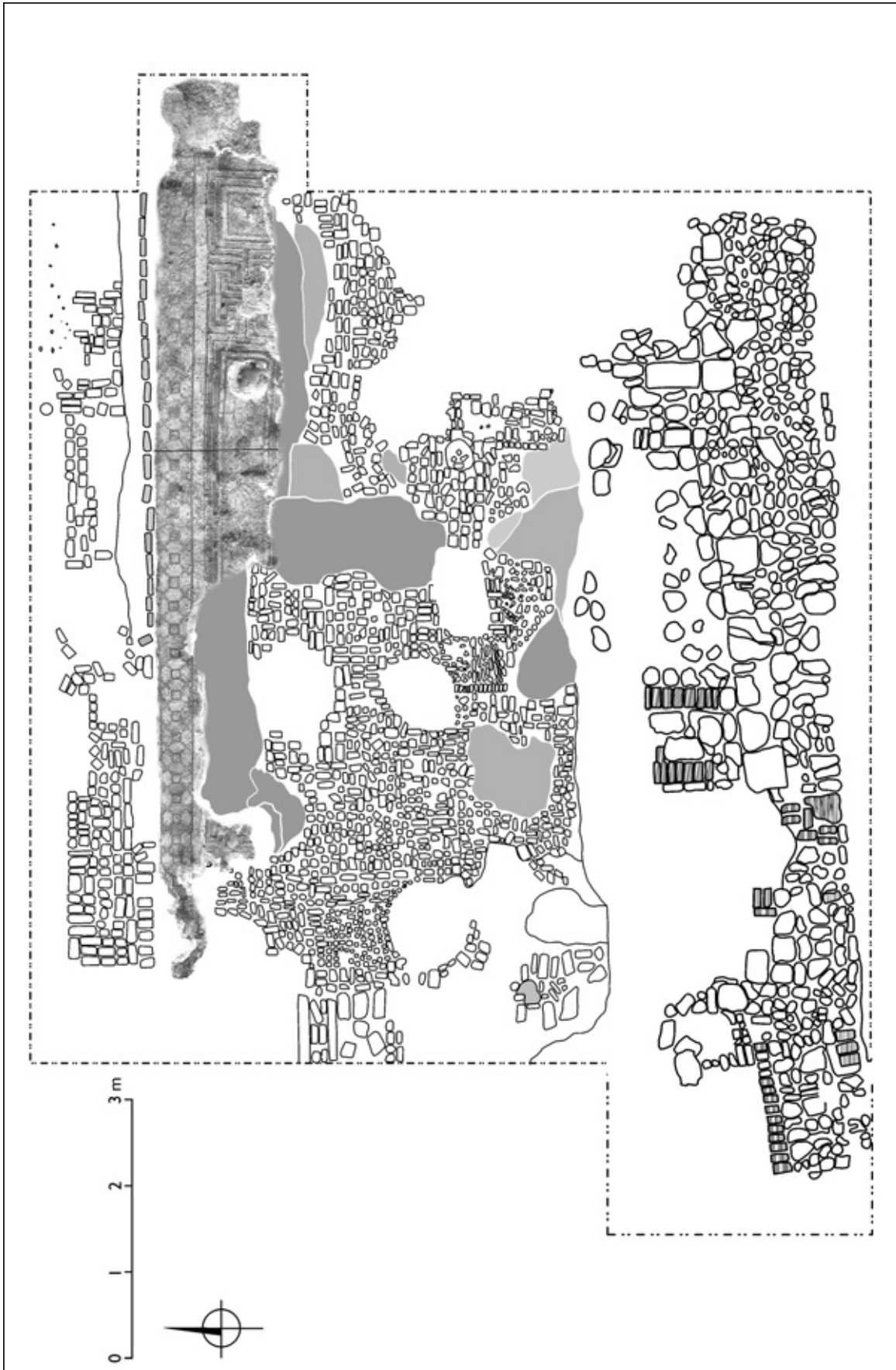


Fig. 7. Plan of Sector 2
(Drawing S. Maslak)

Based on the stratigraphy² and pottery from the vicinity, the complex was used

apparently in the 6th and early 7th century.

SECTOR 2

Sector 2 was located 75 m east of the first trench, in a spot where the lie of the land suggested the presence of remains of red-brick architecture. Directly below the surface, at a depth of 10-20 cm, fragments of a mosaic floor were discovered, obviously belonging to a rich house or villa, of which nothing but a severely damaged wall of red brick running along the northern edge of the mosaic has been discovered so far [Fig. 7]. The preserved part of the mosaic measures 10.20 m in length and from 0.35-

0.40 to 1.50 m in width. The cubes were set in an ashy lime mortar resting on top of a red-brick substructure, which was raised on a layer of lime that was evidently intended as insulation. Heavily damaged and eroded fragments of a similar red-brick pavement were discovered immediately to the south of the mosaic remains [Fig. 8].

The mosaic floor consisted of a central panel comprising smaller panels with bird representations alternating with an illusionist meander appearing symmetri-



Fig. 8. Red-brick pavement substructure in the central part of Sector 2. View from the west (Photo K. Jakubiak)

2 For preliminary remarks on the stratigraphy of Sector 1, see report by S. Maślak in this volume, pp. 136-141.



Fig. 9. Panel with duck and illusionist meander ornament from the northeastern corner of a central mosaic paneau (Photo M. Gawlikowski)



Fig. 10. Panel with ibis and pomegranate tree from the northern edge of a central mosaic paneau (Photo M. Gawlikowski)

cally on the eastern and western sides of the composition. One of the smaller square panels in the northeastern corner of the mosaic contained a very well preserved representation of a duck [Fig. 9]. The colors of the tesserae include red, green, light green, gray and white. Stone, faience and glass (especially orange glass for the beak of the duck) were used to make the cubes. The other preserved panel, long and rectangular, depicted two ibises turned in opposite directions on either side of a central pomegranate tree [Fig. 10]. The contours of the birds were drawn with gray tesserae, while the bodies were filled with green cubes. The legs and bills were made of green faience tesserae and the wing outlines of blue glass. The illusionist meander was made of red, white, black, green, and pink cubes. A wide border framed the mosaic

panel on the northern side. It consisted of a series of red open squares with cross-like bird-step motifs at the corners. The background of the frame was a creamy color.

Based on style and an analysis of local stratigraphy, the mosaic floor can be dated tentatively to the middle of the 3rd century AD at the earliest. It could equally well be of 5th century date. After its abandonment, the building was devastated, the many pits dug into the mosaic floor testifying to the intensity of the last phase of occupation in the area.

Excavations in the southern part of the area revealed walls of red brick and stone, representing an earlier phase in the development of this sector. This provides a good opportunity for the study of early urban planning in Pelusium, assuming the project will be continued.