

“Tabbet Metawh, a suburb in the Mareotis region, Alexandria

Excavation results (2018-2021)”

تبة مطوح، إحدى ضواحي إقليم مريوط، الإسكندرية:

نتائج حفائر (مواسم من ٢٠١٨ إلى ٢٠٢١)

“特巴梅塔瓦，亚历山大马里乌特地区的郊区：挖掘结果（2018年至2021年）”

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ملخص

يقع موقع تبة مطوح الأثري خارج نطاق الإسكندرية القديمة ضمن إقليم مريوط، على بعد ٤٥ كم جنوب غرب الإسكندرية بمنطقة العامرية بداخل أسوار شركة العامرية للغزل والنسيج، الجدير بالذكر أن الموقع قد تعرض لحفر خلسة؛ وعليه قامت وزارة السياحة والآثار مُتمثلة في منطقة آثار الإسكندرية بجوائز إنقاذ للموقع حيث تم تحديد مساحة الموقع وحدود الموقع الأثري بمنطقة مطوح، وهو عبارة عن تبتين غربية وشرقية، وتم تحديد العمل بتنظيم الحفائر في الجزء القبلي من التبة الشرقية حيث تبين نبش في صالات الدفن ١ و ٢، وفي أنحاء أخرى متفرقة. سجلت حفائر الإنقاذ على مدار أربعة مواسم امتدت من ٢٠١٨ م.، وحتى ٢٠٢١ م. تم خلالها الكشف عن مجموعة من العناصر المعمارية تنتمي للعصرين البطلمي والروماني المبكر، وهي عبارة عن جبانة مكونة من صالتين منحوتتين في الصخر، وبها فتحات دفن حائطية "loculi" وقد تم الكشف عن وجود عشرة فتحات دفن في صالة ١، تسعة فتحات دفن في صالة ٢، كذلك تم الكشف عن ما يُعتقد أنها معصرة للنبذ، كما تم الكشف عن مجموعة من المطابخ تشمل عدد من الأفران والمواقد تحميها جدران مترابطة، وكذلك الكشف عن صهريج لإمداد النشاطات المختلفة بالمنطقة باحتياجاتها من المياه. هذا وقد استخدم الموقع في العصور الحديثة كجبانة من قبل البدو القاطنين بالقرب من المنطقة الأثرية.

الكلمات الدالة:

بطلمي، روماني مبكر، جبانة، لوكولي، معصرة، درج، صهريج، ملاط، فخار، جدران، أفران، طعام سريع التحضير، إعادة الاستخدام.

Abstract

The site of Tabbet Metawh is located outside the scope of ancient Alexandria within the province of Mareotis, approximately 45 km to the southwest of Alexandria in the Ameriya area, inside Misrameriya Company for textile. The site was surreptitiously dug, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, represented in the Alexandria Antiquities area conducted salvage excavations in the site, where the area of the site and the boundaries of the archaeological site were determined in the Metawh area. It consists of western and eastern hills, the eastern hill where the surreptitiously dug, salvage excavations were occurred for four seasons, that extended from the year 2018 to 2021. The excavations have discovered some archaeological elements from the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods. These elements consist of a Cemetery, carved into rock, has two halls; hall 1, which has ten loculi, however, hall 2 has nine loculi. A wine press? Was also discovered. The excavations also have revealed Kitchens with group of ovens protected by interconnected walls.

The discoveries are also including a cistern to supply the different activities in the site with water. The site of Tabbet Metawh was reused in the modern times as a Cemetery by Bedouins.

Keywords: Ptolemaic, Early roman, cemetery, luculi, Wine press, staircase, cistern, mortar, pottery, walls, ovens, Fast food, reuse.

Introduction

The site is located outside the scope of ancient Alexandria within the Mareotis region, near of Marea city, an important locality mentioned in many ancient sources¹⁰, was suggested by the 19th century Mahmud Al- Falaki, author of a map of Alexandria and vicinity that was published in 1872¹¹. He pointed to the only larger concentration of ruins that existed on the southern shore of the lake, close to the village of Huwariya, approximately 45 km to the southwest of Alexandria. However, despite substantial inscriptional evidence discovered to date, none of the texts have indicated or even suggested the real name of this site¹².

The site of Tabbet Metawh is located outside the scope of ancient Alexandria within the province of Mareotis, approximately 45 km to the southwest of Alexandria in the Ameriya area, inside Misrameriya Company for textile (Pic. 1).

¹⁰ Herodotus (1920), Vol. I, Loeb Classical Library edition, p. 297:19.

¹¹ McKenzie, J. (2007), the Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt 300 B.C.--A.D. 700, New Haven, London, p. 19.

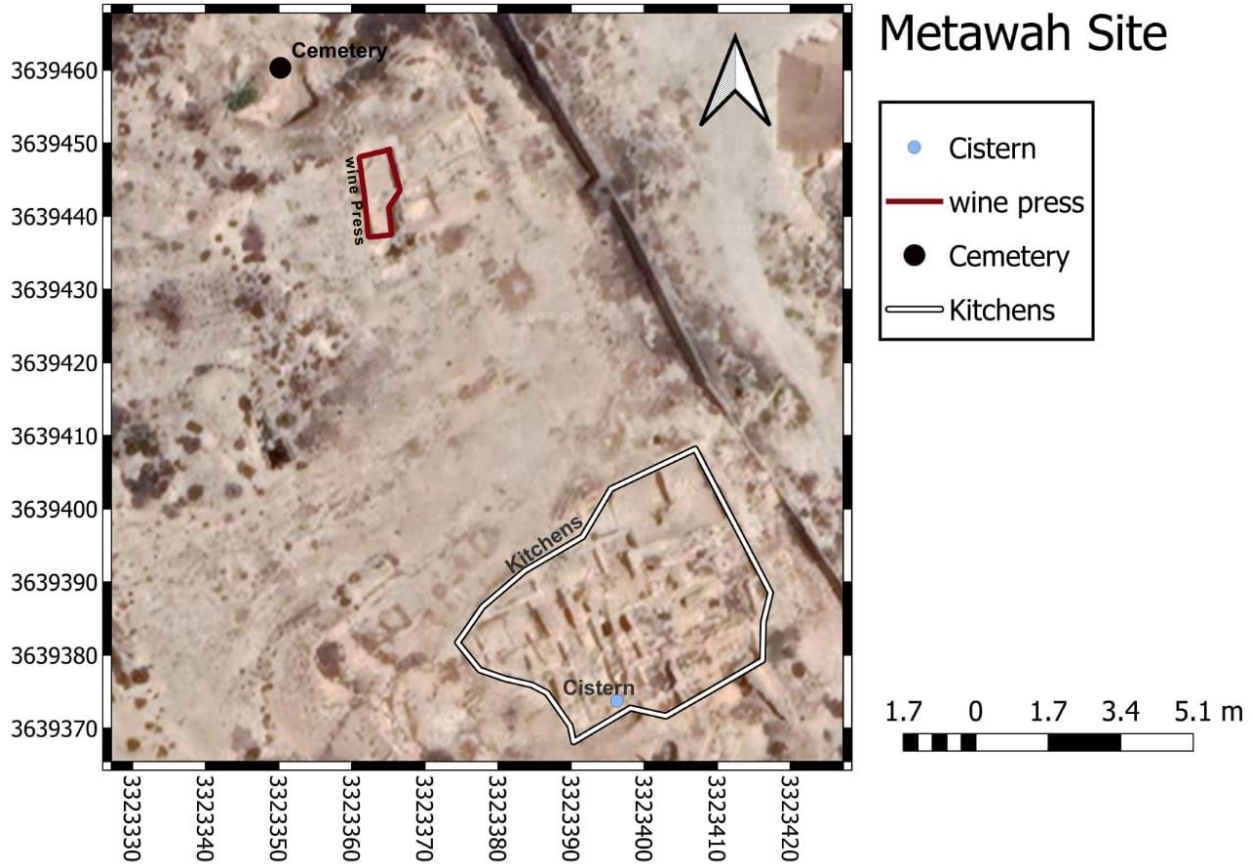
¹² Babraj, K., Szymańska, H., (2010), Eleventh season of excavations at Marea, PAM, p. 22, 55–78 ; Grossmann, P. (2003), Nochmals zu Marea und Philoxenite, BSAC, p. 42, 13–23.



Pic. 1. The location of the site of Tabet Metawh.

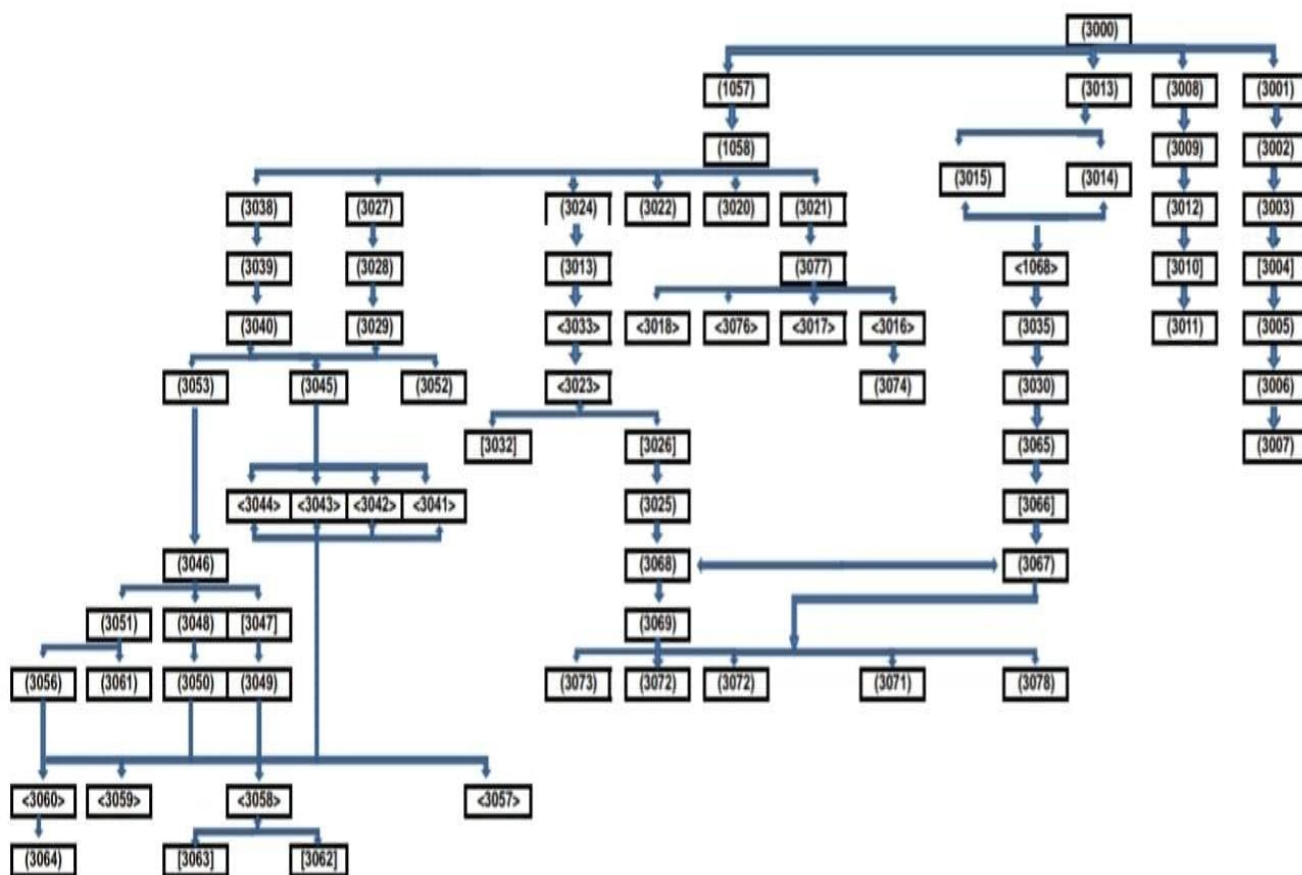
The site was, surreptitiously dug, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, represented in the Alexandria Antiquities area conducted salvage excavations for the site, where the area of the archaeological site and its boundaries were determined in the Metawh area. It consists of two hills. The eastern hill where the surreptitiously dug, salvage excavations were conducted for four seasons, that extended from the year 2018 to 2021, : First season from 22/ 4 to 31/ 7/ 2018, Second season from 17/ 10 to 27/ 12/ 2018, Third season from 11/ 11/ 2019 to 27/ 3/ 2020, Fourth season from 1/ 11/ 2020 to 26/ 4/ 2021, the most important discoveries during these four seasons include the followings (Pic. 2):

1. Wine press? At the East side, from the late Ptolemaic and early Roman periods.
2. Cistern at the Southeast side, probably belong to the late Ptolemaic period.
3. Kitchens, consist of some ovens and stoves protected by walls, at the Western side, belong to the late Ptolemaic to Early Roman period.
2. Cemetery, Consists of two halls, at the north-west side, belong to the early Roman period.

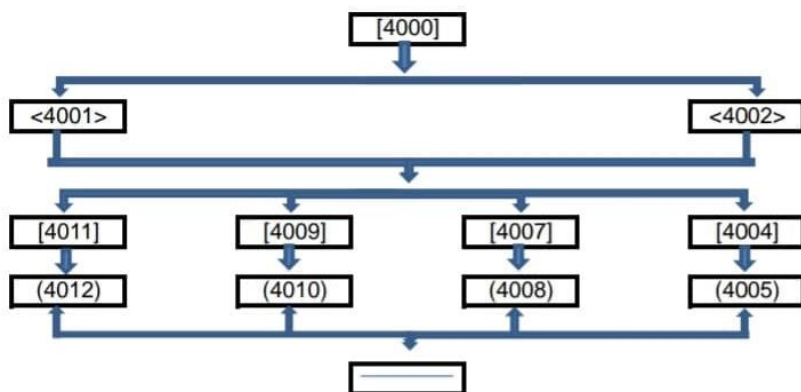


Pic. 2. Eastern hill of Tabbet Metawah.

It was difficult to order the archaeological features according to Harris Matrix especially in area I and II, where, the Cemetery and the wine press are located, because of surreptitiously dug. On the other side, area III where are the kitchens and area IV where is Cistern were recorded and ordered (Pl.1, nos.1.2).



No.1 area III (kitchens)



No.2 area IV (Cistern)

Pl.1. Archaeological features of Areas III and IV.

Architectural Elements

1. The wine press?

A wine press was discovered at the Eastern side of Tabet Metawh (Pic. 3). It consists of two basins, the first one is rectangular and elevated, and it was used for squeezing. It has a hole in its eastern wall that leads to a deeper basin, which used to collect grape juice. Three holes, appear in this basin that were used to install pots containing flavors to be added to the juice (Pic. 4). It should be noted that, the inner walls of the basins were covered with a layer of mortar. At the end of the collection basin there is also a staircase used to go down to the basin to fill the juice in preparation for its fermentation (Pic. 4). This architectural form of wine press was often used for contemporary construction especially in the Mareotis region (Pic.5).



Pic.3. A wine press? Photo by: Ibrahim Mustafa Ibrahim.



Pic.4. Three holes, and staircase used to go down to the basin.



Pic.5. A wine press in the vicinity of Marea,

Photo by Nicola Aravecchia (2007)¹³.

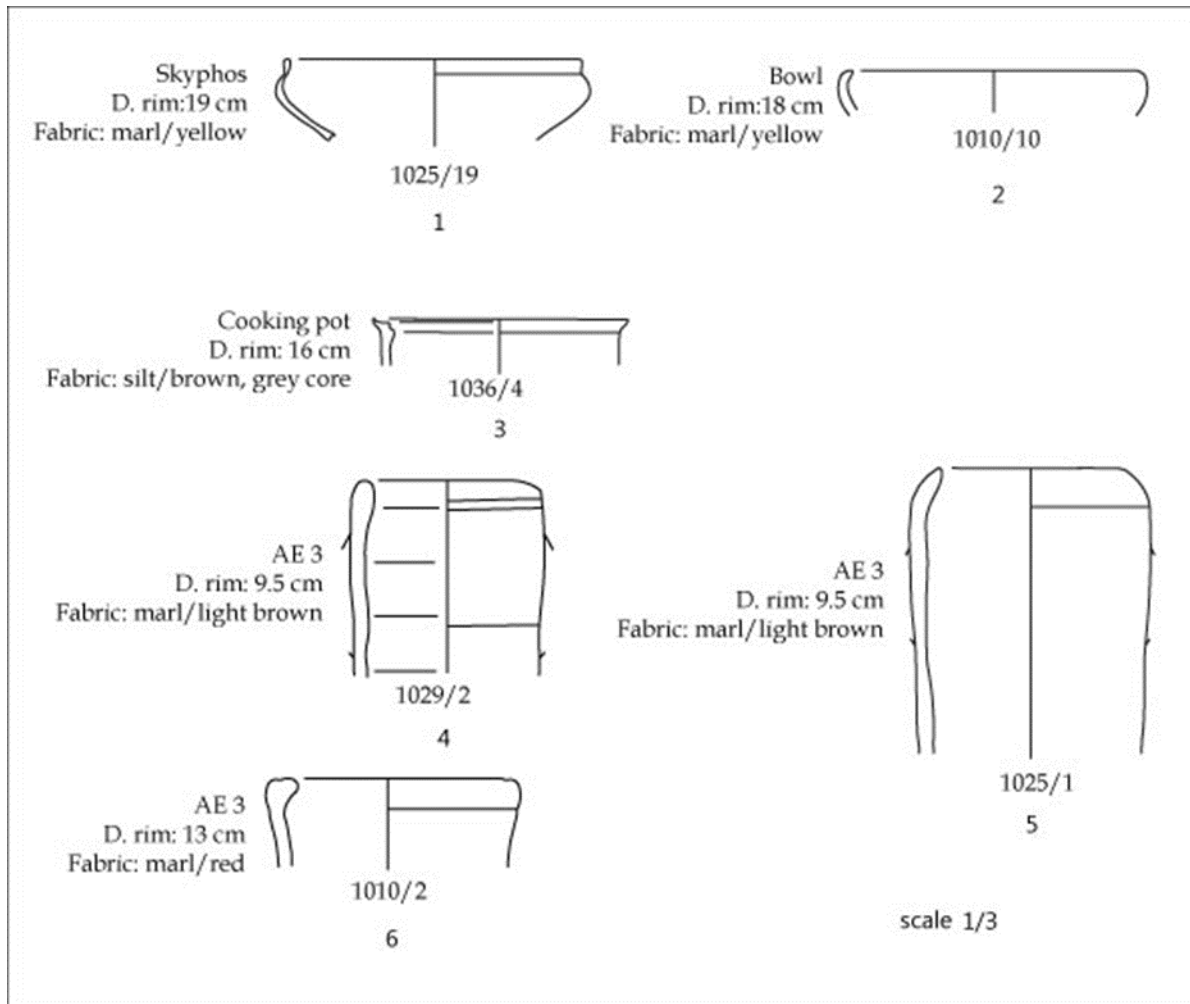
¹³ [File:Ancient Egyptian wine press.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#) Accessed on 30/ 11/ 2022.

Group of pottery fragments were discovered in the basins of the wine press, mostly belong to the late Ptolemaic period, probably the 1st century BC, they were found associated with other group of pottery shards from early Roman period. Skyphos¹⁴ with horizontal- recurved handles, in yellow marl fabric, traces of black slip coated the interior and the upper of exterior (Pl. 2, no. 1). Convex bowl with incurved rim in yellow marl fabric (Pl. 2, no. 2). Cooking pot with everted, deep-grooved inner face rim, short neck in brown silt fabric, this type is characterized to the late Ptolemaic period¹⁵ and attested widely in the wine press (Pl. 2, no. 3). Group of early Roman amphorae type AE 3¹⁶, the production of Mareotis region, also occurred widely in the wine press (Pl.2, nos. 4-6).

¹⁴ Élaigne, S. (2012). La vaisselle fine de l'habitat alexandrine. Contribution à la connaissance de la mobilité des techniques et des produits céramiques en Méditerranée du II^e siècle av. J. C. à l'époque claudienne, ÉtAlex 21, le Caire, IFAO, fig. 57, p. 186-187.

¹⁵ Similar shapes from Alexandria, Harlaut, C., Hayes, J. W. (2018) « Hellenistic pottery deposits from Alexandria » in Harlaut, C., Hayes, J. W. Pottery in Hellenistic Alexandria, Aux origins d'Alexandrie et de sa production céramique, Hellenistic pottery deposits from Alexandria, ÉtAlex 45, Alexandrie, (from deposit H dated to c. 200-180 BC), pl. 30, no. H29, pl. 31, no. H30, p. 197, 202 (from deposit J dated to mid-2nd century BC), pl. 44, no. J17, pl. 45, no. J18. P. 213, 216-217.

¹⁶ Dixneuf, D. (2011). Amphores égyptiennes. production, typologie contenu et diffusion (III^e siècle avant J. C. – IX^e siècle après J.C.) ÉtAlex 22, Le Caire, figs. 83, 89, 90, p. 107,109.



Pl. 2. Pottery from the wine press basins.

2 The cistern

The cistern is located at the Southeast of the hill. It consists of a deep shaft carved into rock in a conical shape for receiving the rainwater (Pics. 6-7), ending with irregular-shape floor. There is an irregular pit carved in that floor nearby the eastern wall of the shaft to collect the mud, which is rested from the water during the cleaning process. The walls of the cistern are covered with three layers of mortars; the base is a local mortar, which contains sand and lime (feature <4005>). The other two layers are (features <4001> and <4002> clay and natural hydraulic lime mortars) (Pl.1, no.2). Below the cistern nozzle, there were a group of holes carved into the walls of the shaft, probably they were used for going down for cleaning process. It is difficult to date the cistern, because of the surreptitiously dug, which destroyed all archaeological features inside the cistern's structures, but according to its mortar style and the need of water to serve the different activities in the site, It, probably dates back to the late Ptolemaic period.



Pic. 6. Shaft inside the cistern



Pic. 7. The nozzle of the shaft for receiving rainwater.

3. The kitchens

It is located at the west of the hill. It seems to be that, there were different activities in the site of Tabbet Metawh and preparing food units were necessary to supply the workers with their need of cooked food. The presence of a group of small ovens and stoves inside the spaces between walls at the southern side of eastern hill (Pic.8, 10, 11, 12.), and the remains of fish and birds bones (Pic.9.) especially in feature (1058) (Pl. 3.), in addition, a rectangular limestone table (Pic. 8.), probably for preparing food, was lying in the middle of the kitchens area. All of these probably prove that, this area was used as kitchens. The kitchen s consist of two main elements; the ovens and stoves together with walls for protecting them from wind.

Ovens in the Ptolemaic-Roman era were distinguished by their construction, mostly made of stones or brick slabs, and both were detected on the site (Pic.8.) Group of ovens were discovered, belonging to the Ptolemaic-early Roman periods, which had a variety of forms and uses. The first form was a pit surrounded by blocks of stone and protected by walls built by blocks of rows of stones in medium-sized, some are straight, trimmed, polished, and most are irregularly cut then connected by a layer of local mortar which contains sand and lime. It was used as reactive mud¹⁷. However, the walls were built to keep the fire burning from the wind, it seems to use for long time because of many ashes features were left (Pics.10, 11).

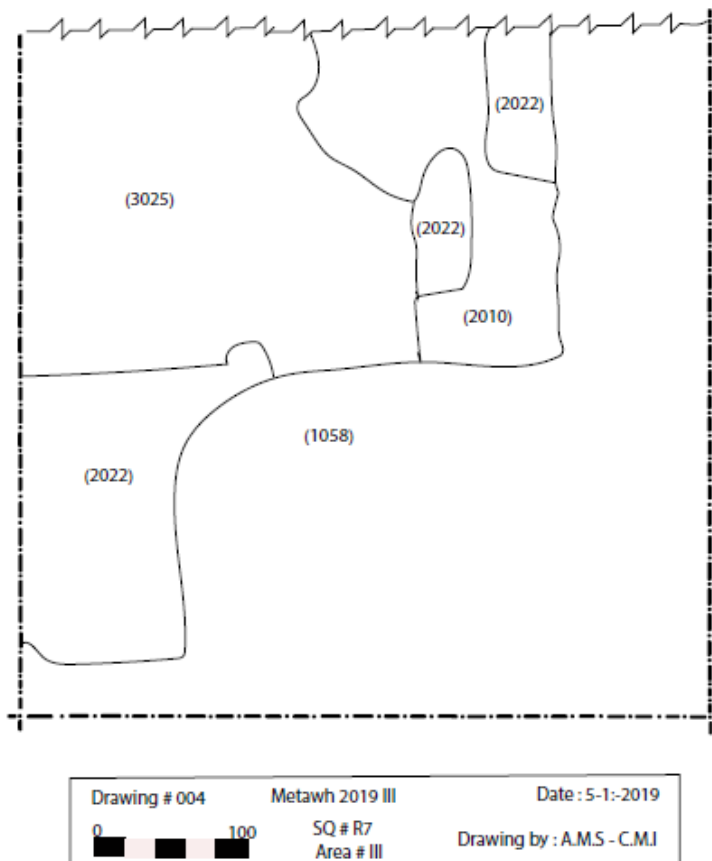


Pic.8. Unit of kitchens , A. An oven B. Table for preparing food.

¹⁷ Sayed, H. (2013), Laser induced breakdown spectroscopy and other analytical techniques applied on construction materials at Kom El-Dikka, Alexandria, Egypt, Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry magazine, p.1- 20.



Pic.9. Fish and birds remains.



Pl.3. Plan for feature (1058) where a lot of fish and birds remains



Pic.10. Ash.



Pic. 11. Oven.

The second form relied on reuse, using broken vessels and fixed them, as in feature (3005), and set fires inside them, this method is known as “kanun” as a stove and this explains the filling with ash and leftover coal, which take feature number (3006), and perhaps this way was for cooking fast food (Pic. 12, table 1).



Pic.12. Stoves.



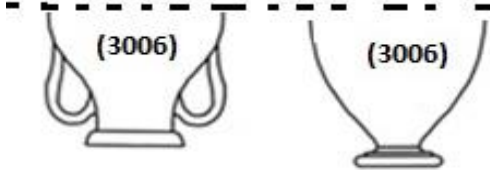
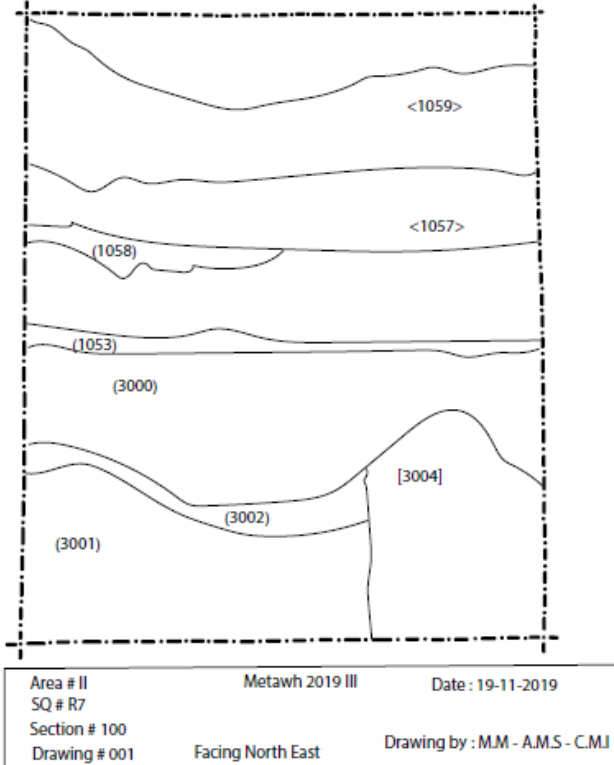
 <p>amphora</p> <p>No.1</p>	 <p>No.2</p>	 <p>(3006)</p> <p>(3006)</p> <p>(3005)</p> <p>No.3</p>
<p>Vessel during use</p>	<p>After being broken</p>	<p>after recycling and reuse as a stove (3005): the number of feature which was silty sand, compact and its color was grayish yellow. (3006): Ashes inside the broken vessels.</p>

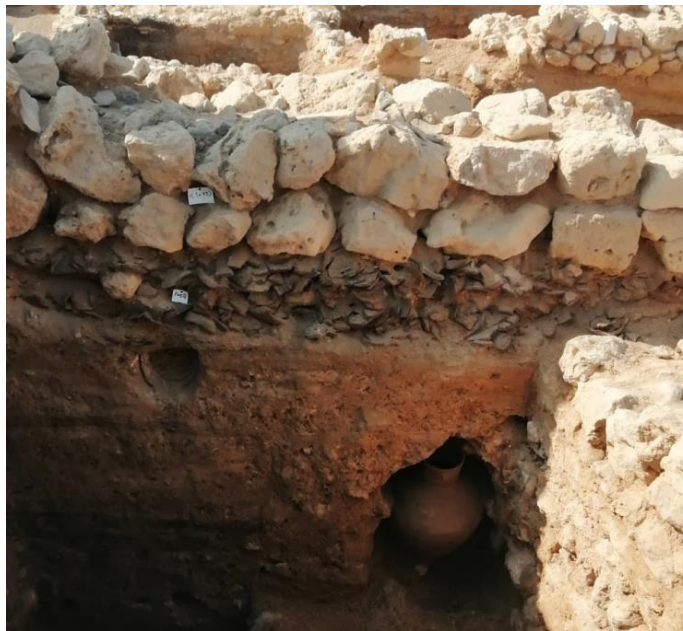
Table 1. The reuse of pottery vessels as stoves.

This method of reusing broken vessels as stoves for preparing food was not his only method. Also used pottery sherds to form layer that support the construction of some walls that protect

the ovens. The citizen of this region has lived a sustainable life and practiced it in his environment. (Pl. 4, Pic.13.)



Pl. 4. Section of Feature <1057> consist of pottery sherds, Feature <1059> consist of stones.



Pic.13. Wall consist of pottery sherds layer and stones layer.

4. Cemeteries

A Cemetery from early Roman period and some burials from modern times were discovered at Tabbet Metawh.

The Cemetery from the early Roman period

Cemetery consists of two halls were discovered at the north-west side of the site of Tabbet Metwah, carved into rock with wall burial holes "loculi", each Loculi width 60 cm, height 76 cm, depth 204 cm.

Burial hall 1; It is in a square-shape, it has an entrance at the western side, it also has ten loculi in two rows, all of them were found opened and empty, that was by the monuments' thieves in the previous times (Pic. 14).

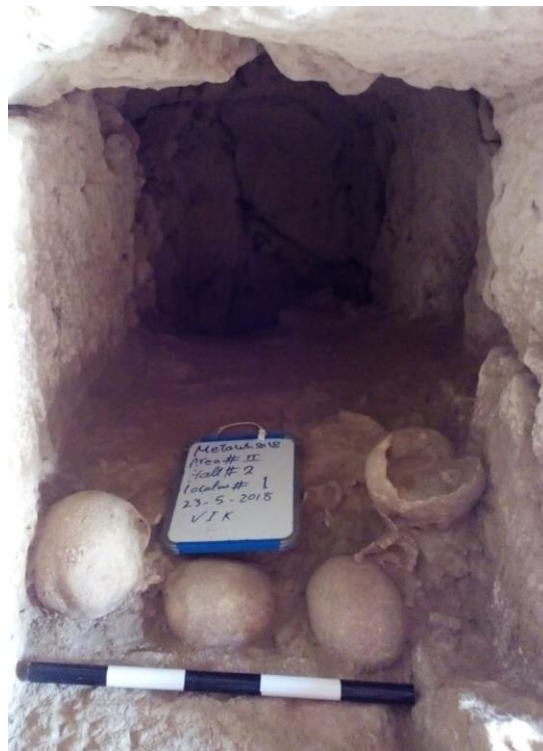


Pic. 14. Burial hall 1.

Burial hall 2; It is in a half-circle shape, it has an entrance at the eastern side, opposite the entrance of hall 1, it also has nine loculi in one row, all were found opened as well as loculi in hall 1, but fortunately, some skeletal remains together with few of pottery shards were found in some loculi (Pic.15). As for the loculi in Hall 2, they have been dug by thieves, so it is difficult to determine if a single burial hole contained one or more skeletons, except for loculus 1 in which a number of lying skeletons were found, which makes it likely that they were buried like this before decomposition (Pic.16.)



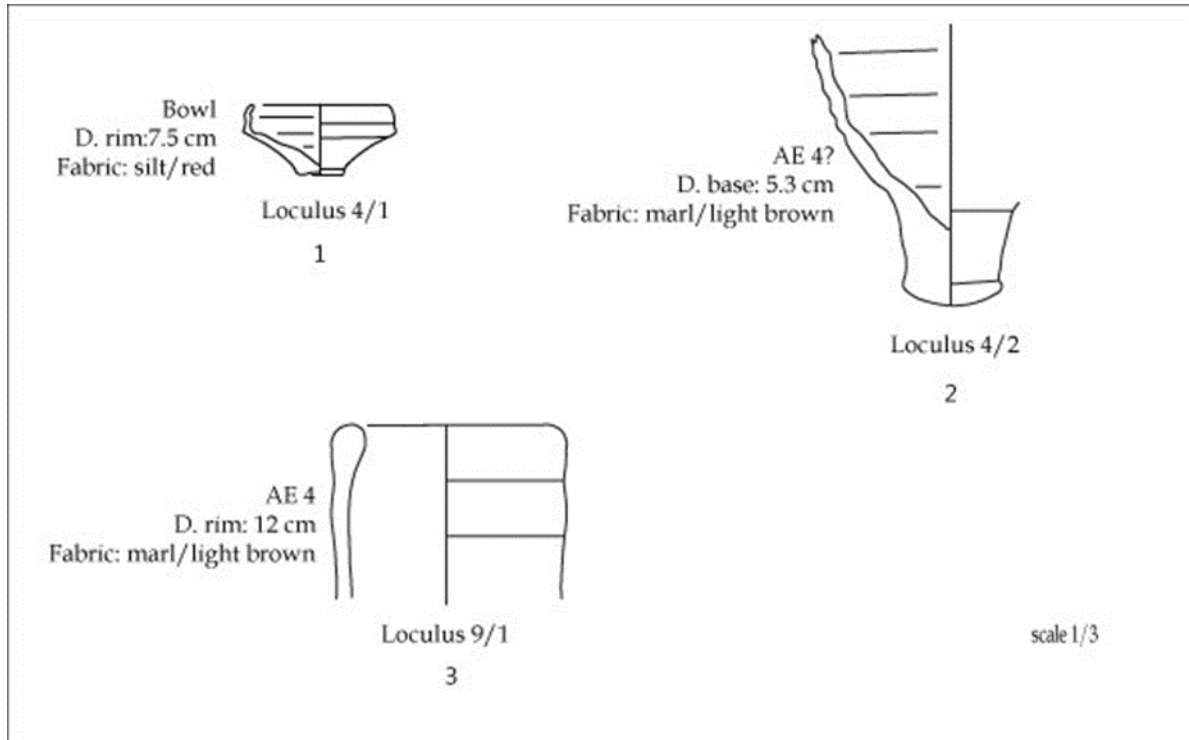
Pic. 15. Burial hall 2.



Pic. 16. Loculus 1

Unfortunately, only few pottery shards were discovered associated with the skeletal remains in some loculi in hall 2, however, the majority of tombs were found empty. All these fragments belong to the early Roman period. Flanged bowl from loculus 4 in red silt fabric, this type occurred in some contexts in Alexandria, it was recorded in deposit B in Cricket ground, which

was dated to the end of the 1st century AD¹⁸, this type also attested in the 2nd century AD contexts in the Cemetery of Gabbari¹⁹(Pl. 5, no 1). Egyptian amphora type AE 4? Base, the production of Mareotis region, in light brown marl fabric also was discovered in locus 4, similar shape attested in Mons Claudianus from Trajanic+²⁰ (Pl. 5, no. 2). Egyptian amphora type AE 4 rim in light brown marl fabric was discovered in locus 9 and this shape is dated to the end of the 1st to mid-2nd century AD or even later²¹ (Pl. 5, no. 3).



Pl. 5. Pottery from the Cemetery's hall 2.

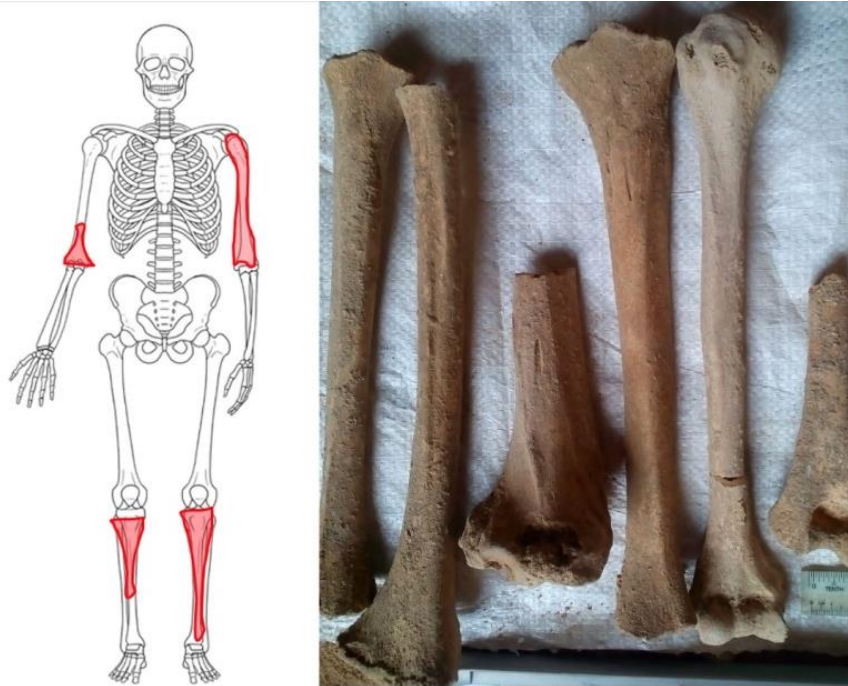
The preliminary study of skeletal remains from burial hall 2 yielded that, most of them came to muscular young men (Figs. 17, 18, table 2).

¹⁸ Hayes, J. W., Harlaut, C. (2002) « Ptolemaic and Roman pottery deposits from Alexandria in Empereur, J.-Y. (éd.), Alexandrina 2, ÉtAlex 6, le Caire, IFAO, figs. 36-41, p. 99, 107, 108.

¹⁹ Ballet, P., Harlaut, C. (2001) « Introduction à la céramique de Gabbari », in Empereur, J.-Y., Nenna, M.-D. (éd.), Nécropolis 1, ÉtAlex 5, Le Caire, IFAO, figs. 9.86-89, p. 319, 321.

²⁰ Maxfield, V. A., Peacock, D. P. S. (2006). Survey and Excavation Mons Claudianus 1987-1999 ceramic, vessels and related object vol. III, fouilles de l' IFAO 54, le Caire, fig. 1,60 type 28-904, p. 153-155.

²¹ Dixneuf (2011), fig. 116, p. 132-133.



Pic. 17. skeletal remains from hall 2



Pic. 18. Skull for young man²² from loculus 1 Of hall 2.

²² White, Tim D., Black, Michael T., Folkens, Pieter A. (2012), Human Osteology, China, p.51- 55.

Burial No.	Burial position	Head orientation	Hand placement	Feet placement	Notes
1	flexed burial, lying on back	other	hands on pelvis , femur	other	An adult
2	flexed burial , lying on back	other	other	other	An adult
3	flexed burial , lying on back	other	hands on pelvis ,femur	other	An adult In the third decade Of life.

Table 2. The preliminary study of skeletal remains from hall 2.

Bedouin Burials

It is located at the west of the hill. Some modern burials belong to the inhabitants, who live nearby the site of Tabbet Metawh were scattered in the vicinity of the kitchens structure (Pic. 19). Among these burials, there was only a rectangular grave, which was built with irregular bricks (Pic. 20.).



Pic. 19. skeletal remains from Bedouin burials.



Pic 20. Rectangular grave, Bedouin burials.

The preliminary study of skeletal remains from these modern burials yielded that, almost forty burials were found in the middle of the kitchens' structure (area III, It goes back to a late era as a kind of reuse of the site at a late stage after a long period of a abandonments, It is evident from the layers that were revealed. The reuse came as a Cemetery through a Bedouin community, that embraced Islam, and this was evident from the direction of the head in the burial, it is noted that 90% of burials were children; perhaps this is due to the habit of some communities, choosing the best or highest place in the Cemetery to bury their dead children. The burials were simple, consisting of cuts in the layer (A hole). The diversity of burial places whether in the middle of

layer or next to an archeological wall and sometimes cutting in the wall and burring the dead specially if it was an infant, This is a kind of protection for the burial (Table 3).

Burial No.	Burial position	Head orientation	Hand placement	Feet placement	Notes
1	single inhumation (one skeleton) flexed burial, lying on back	southwest facing right	left hand on pelvis, right hand extended	feet missing from the knees	It looks like a child from the length of burial, bone and tooth growth
2	single inhumation (one skeleton) Tightly flexed, lying on right side.	Southwest facing right.	hands on pelvis, Femur.	Both feet pointing right.	-Probably female -She had extracted molars that recovered while she was a live.
3	single inhumation (one skeleton) flexed burial, lying on back	Southwest facing right.	Hands on pelvis.	Extended feet.	-She was adult female. -She was buried next to a Potoimaic wall.

Table 3 the preliminary study of skeletal remains from the modern burials.

Conclusion

حفظ الترجمة

Tabbet Metawh which is located outside the scope of ancient Alexandria within the province of Mareotis, approximately 45 km to the southwest of Alexandria. The site was surreptitiously dug, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities conducted salvage excavations. The site consists of western and eastern hills, the eastern hill where the surreptitiously dug, salvage excavations were occurred for four seasons, that extended from the year 2018 to 2021. The excavations have discovered some archaeological elements from the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods. These elements consist of a Cemetery, carved into rock, has two halls; hall 1, which has ten loculi, however, hall 2 has nine loculi. A wine press? was also discovered. The excavations also have revealed Kitchens with group of ovens protected by interconnected walls. The discoveries are also including a cistern to supply the different activities in the site with water. The site of Tabbet Metawh was reused in the modern times as a Cemetery by Bedouins.

The presence of a Cistern to supply the area with its water needs, as well as the presence of kitchens with multiple ovens and stoves, means that there are multiple activities on the site that require supplying workers with their needs of water and food. The wine press was one of the most important of these activities in the late Ptolemaic era, as well as the cemetery in the early Roman era, and perhaps future excavations will reveal to us other activities at the site.

The site in general showed us how people live in remote areas where relied on the method of reuse, whether in the construction of walls or the construction of ovens. This method also helped in the reuse of broken pottery as stoves for cooking fast food. Briefly the citizen of this region has lived a sustainable life.