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EXCAVATION COINS AND STRAY FINDS

ANCIENT

Coin Finds from Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit,  
near Alexandria, Egypt (2012-2015)

*by*

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### Background

RESEARCH in the Nile Delta is of relatively recent date, if compared with the tradition of the great excavations at Pharaonic sites along the Nile valley. This new frontier of Egyptian archaeology is shedding light on a largely unexplored area which played a fundamental role in the ancient economy of the region. The Western Delta in particular is, from an archaeological point of view, a little-known area. As a result of the significant land reclamation projects that followed the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1971, it has finally been possible to access this land and commence archaeological investigations.

The sites of Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit are located 50 km southeast of Alexandria, 35 km south of Heracleion-Thonis, and 6 km west of the Rosetta branch of the Nile. Previous investigations by Achille Adriani<sup>1</sup> and the 1942 excavations of Abd el-Mohsen el-Khashab<sup>2</sup> at Kom al-Ahmer revealed a large Roman baths complex whose dimensions approached those of the largest Roman baths in Egypt at Kom el-Dikka, one of the most important sites in Alexandria. At Kom Wasit, an excavation conducted in 1944 by Labib Habachi<sup>3</sup> detected a small Hellenistic baths complex and other architectural elements consistent with an 'oracle device', that is, a bronze shaft allowing the transmission of speech from an underground chamber to the outside world.

More recently, in 2008 the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt carried out emergency archaeological investigations at Kom al-Ahmer, the results of which have remained largely unpublished.<sup>4</sup> Surveys<sup>5</sup> conducted at the two sites between 2008 and 2011 further highlighted their archaeological relevance and led to the creation of the *Kom al-Ahmer - Kom Wasit Archaeological Project* in 2012, a joint Italian - Egyptian mission.<sup>6</sup> The first results of this project, obtained through the analysis of aerial photographs, a geophysical survey, and the excavation of several units at the

<sup>1</sup> Adriani 1940, p. 163, Tab. LXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> El-Khashab 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Habachi 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Kenawi 2014, pp. 107-109.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009, pp. 176-183; Kenawi 2008; Kenawi 2012; Kenawi 2014, pp. 100-112.

<sup>6</sup> The mission is directed by Mohamed Kenawi (Alexandria Center for Hellenistic Studies-Bibliotheca Alexandrina, University of Catania), Giorgia Marchiori (Italian-Egyptian Archaeological Center [CAIE]), Cristina Mondin (University of Padova, CAIE), and the author of this paper (University of Padova). Since 2013, the University of Padova has focused on the study of the baths area and the numismatic finds in order to maximise the research potential of the two sites.

two sites, have suggested the interesting hypothesis that the ancient city of Metelis, the only *nomos* capital whose location has not yet been identified, is situated here.<sup>7</sup> This theory is based on the identification of complex urban structures in the *kom* (mound) at both sites, as well as on historical records.<sup>8</sup> At the heart of the settlement at Kom Wasit, a structure has been discovered whose dimensions can be compared with Hellenistic temples of the Ptolemaic period.

Kom al-Ahmer/Kom Wasit Archaeological Project aims to study all the coins found during the excavations and surveys.<sup>9</sup> The 2015 campaign analysed all the coin finds from the 2012-2015 excavations. Thus far, 600 ancient coins distributed unevenly among the Ptolemaic, Roman Provincial, Roman Imperial, and Byzantine periods, have been identified and documented.<sup>10</sup> Together with the numismatic data published by el-Khashab,<sup>11</sup> this material, especially that from Kom al-Ahmer, forms one of the most interesting groups of coins, in quantitative and qualitative terms, to have emerged thus far from the Delta and the whole of Egypt in general.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in light of the archaeological investigations planned in the next few years, the number of pieces found in only three years of excavations indicates that these two sites may have an extraordinary impact on the study of ancient coin finds in Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

Archaeological investigations have been conducted at various units opened at both sites at different levels of the *kom*. The varying levels at the sites, which are especially evident at Kom al-Ahmer, are largely due to the removal in previous decades of the rich Nile silt by the *sabakheen* (local peasants) for use as fertilizer. This resulted in the removal of entire phases in certain areas of the *kom* at both sites, which can impede the establishment of a chronological framework. The coin finds should be interpreted with these factors in mind; it is not always easy to compare the data from the two sites. Moreover, the finds described here come from the first investigations, on which detailed work has yet to be completed. The data presented in this article should thus be regarded as a preliminary report.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kenawi and Rossetti (in press); Kenawi 2014; Kenawi 2015, pp. 291-294; Marchiori 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Kenawi 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The work of the University of Padova, directed by the author of this paper, has received funding from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2014. It also benefits from the collaboration of Cristina Crisafulli, Curator of the Coin Cabinet of the Museo Correr in Venice.

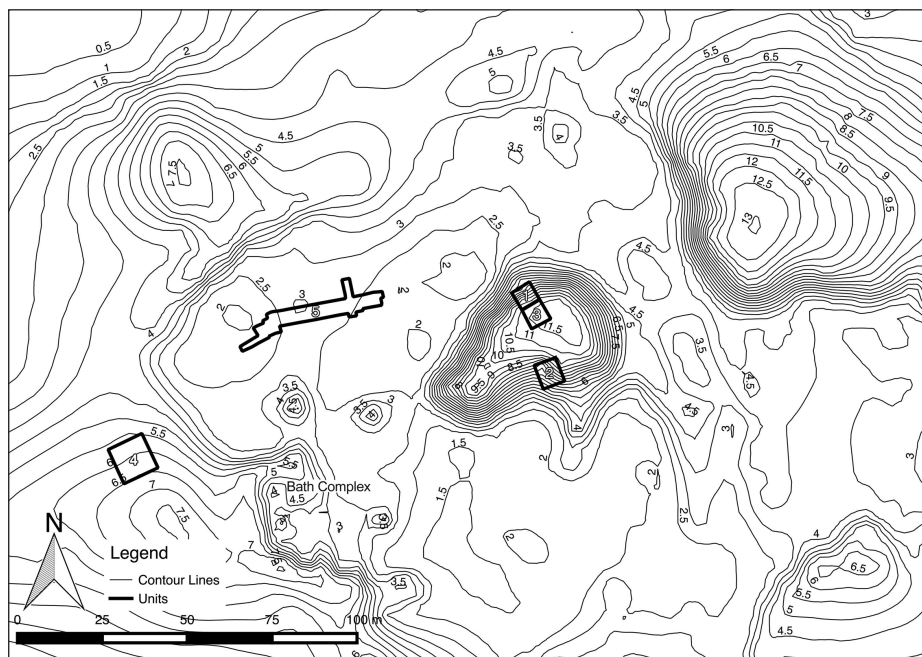
<sup>10</sup> Some preliminary observations can be found in Asolati 2015.

<sup>11</sup> El-Khashab 1949, pp. 83-106.

<sup>12</sup> Compare the data in Noeske 2000 and Faucher 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Other important unpublished material comes from Tell Timai (excavated by the University of Hawaii) in the Eastern Delta: see the archaeological reports on the website <http://www.telltimai.org/about-the-site/field-reports/>.

<sup>14</sup> Some preliminary observations can be found in the publications by Kenawi and Marchiori quoted in the notes of this paper. The following public lectures should be considered as well: C. Mondin and G. Marchiori, 'Four Years in the Western Delta of Egypt: Recent Discoveries and its Impact on Ancient Economy'; and A. Eller, 'Nomes during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods: The Case of the Metelite Nome' at the International Congress of Egyptologists XI, Florence, Italy 23-30 August 2015.



*Fig. 1.* Kom al-Ahmer, 2015: topographic map of the site with the location of excavated Units 1-5 (The Italian-Egyptian Mission in Beheira, Israel Hinojosa Baliño and Giorgia Marchiori, CAIE).

### Coin Finds at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit

The large disparity in the number of coins found at Kom Wasit and Kom al-Ahmer, despite the relatively similar dimensions of the units excavated so far, should be emphasised. At Kom Wasit, surveys and stratigraphic investigations have brought to light 36 coins, many of which are in a poor state of preservation. Conversely, about 570 pieces have been collected at Kom al-Ahmer, mostly from Unit 4 (*Fig. 1*), which is situated in the vicinity of the thermal baths excavated in 1942, and where a series of rooms of relatively small dimensions (perhaps used for commercial activities) was identified.

One of the most significant hypotheses emerging from the analysis of the numismatic finds relates to the different development of the human presence at the two sites, and supports Kom Wasit's chronological primacy, with Kom al-Ahmer as its continuation in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods. Other evidence indicates that the settlement of Kom Wasit dates back to the late Dynastic period, preceding that of Kom al-Ahmer, which dates back to the Hellenistic period. Due to a rising water table, which would have greatly undermined the stability of buildings made substantially of mud bricks, the former site was probably abandoned during the first century AD, while the latter was developed further and provided with the thermal baths mentioned above.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009, p. 177; Marchiori 2014, pp. 84-85; Kenawi 2014, pp. 112-113; Kenawi and Rossetti (in press).

*Table 1.* Ptolemaic and Roman Provincial coins until the closure of the provincial mint at Alexandria, found during the excavations at Kom Wasit and Kom al-Ahmer. Italics indicate coins from the 1942 excavations at the Roman baths, published in el-Khashab 1949. The notations Ser. 1 etc refer to the division into Series of the Ptolemaic bronze coinage proposed in several recent contributions and accepted in Faucher 2011, and Picard and Faucher 2012.

	<i>Kom Wasit</i>	<i>Kom al-Ahmer</i>
315/12-301 BC (Ser.1)		<i>1</i>
305-261 BC (Ser. 2)	4	<i>4+4</i>
261-c.240 BC (Ser. 3)	2	<i>3+1</i>
c.240-c.220 BC (Ser. 4)		<i>11</i>
c.220-197 BC (Ser. 5)		<i>18</i>
197-c.150 BC (Ser. 6)	2 (Ser. 6E)	<i>5 (A, C, D, Ex2)+1 (Ser. 6D)</i>
c.150-before 115 BC (Ser. 7)		<i>3 (B x 2, C)</i>
		51 (+ 2 not identified)
Augustus	-	1
Claudius	-	2
Nero	-	13
Galba	-	1
Vespasian	-	1
Trajan	-	1
Hadrian	-	4
Antoninus Pius	-	14
Gallienus	-	4
Claudius II	-	8
Aurelian	-	13
Probus	-	2+1
Carinus	-	1
Diocletian	-	2
Unidentified 1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> cent. AD	-	3 (AE)
Unid. 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of 3 <sup>rd</sup> cent. AD	-	7 (tetradr.)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>78</b>

Ptolemaic coins from the early phase of the late fourth-early third centuries BC were found at both sites (*Table 1*). This indicates that Kom al-Ahmer was already being developed in the first decades of the third century, rather than in the middle of the third century, as previously hypothesised.<sup>16</sup> These coins are more numerous at Kom al-Ahmer where the finds in the area of the thermal baths extend into the second half of the second century BC.<sup>17</sup> The finds at Kom Wasit do not go beyond the middle

<sup>16</sup> Kenawi 2014, p. 107; Marchiori 2014, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> El-Khashab 1949, pp. 83-92. Unfortunately, as noted by Naster (1949), El-Khashab's publication, in particular that of the coins, is not very accurate because the pieces listed are not numbered sequentially, and the quality of the photographs is poor. Furthermore, the relationship between the catalogue and the photographs is not always clear. These factors have caused much confusion for later scholars concerning, for example, the number of Ptolemaic coins published by el-Khashab. Naster (1949) recorded 42 pieces, Noeske (2000) 41, and Faucher (2011) as many as 96. Since it is not clear where

of the second century BC.<sup>18</sup> Thus, even if other, non-numismatic archaeological evidence suggests that the site was abandoned during the first century AD, as mentioned above, the circulation of coins seems to have ceased well before this time, not to resume until the end of the Roman period or perhaps the beginning of the Byzantine period (see below). This evidence leads us to reconsider the hypothetical abandonment date of Kom Wasit. The only documentation relating to the early Imperial phase consists of out-of-context pottery sherds, and recent stratigraphic excavations have not made any discoveries datable to the beginning of the Imperial period. Thus, an abandonment date in the first century BC, long before the Roman conquest, cannot be excluded, and the evidence datable after this event may indicate subsequent episodic frequentation until the first century AD.

Moreover, at Kom Wasit there is a general lack of coin finds across the entire chronological span from the formation of the province of Egypt through Late Antiquity. Even coins of the late fourth-fifth centuries AD are sporadic (see *Table 2* below), and in any case these may have been used well beyond the time of their issue. Indeed, it is even possible that all the coin finds here related to occupation during the Byzantine period, as documented by a burial containing a Byzantine dodecanummium of the second half of the sixth to the early decades of the seventh century AD. It appears most likely that these few pieces indicate occasional occupation of Kom Wasit probably for the purpose of looting and recovery of reusable building material.

In contrast, at Kom al-Ahmer not only are the latest attestations of the Ptolemaic period more recent, but significant numbers of locally-produced provincial coins are also found frequently. As *Table 1* shows, recent finds have mainly been from the last decades of the third century AD, but they include a bronze piece of Augustus minted during the first years of the first century AD. The coins excavated in the Roman baths in 1942 date to the first two centuries of the Imperial period from the reign of Claudius to that of Antoninus Pius and some phases of the third century.

These dates should be examined bearing in mind the question of the continuity of settlement at Kom al-Ahmer, where the finds indicate a long interruption spanning the entire first century BC and a substantial part of the first century AD until the end of Caligula's reign. Part of this gap can be explained by a trend visible at many other sites throughout Upper and Lower Egypt, where Series 8 (115-113 BC) is only rarely documented. Less understandable is the absence of the Ptolemaic Series 9 (first half of the first century BC) and 10 (37-30 BC), which are clearly attested at Alexandria and in the surrounding areas. However, it should be observed that in general the coins of Cleopatra VII are much less common than those of previous phases, other than Series 1 and 7. This may make their absence from Kom al-Ahmer less significant.<sup>19</sup>

the latter calculation comes from, the best estimate appears to be 45 Ptolemaic coins (see *Table 1*), to which two unidentifiable Ptolemaic coins should be added.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the pieces collected during the 2012-2015 Italian-Egyptian excavations, another bronze Ptolemaic coin found at Kom Wasit (reported in Wilson and Grigoropoulos 2009, p. 177, Fig. 17) should be mentioned. Although the coin's inscription is not legible on the photographs, its dimensions suggest a date from the second half of the third century to the second century BC.

<sup>19</sup> Faucher 2011, p. 442; Picard and Faucher 2012, p. 104.

In this context, the almost total absence of coins datable to the early decades of the Imperial era is much more noticeable. The recently published excavations at Alexandria have made it clear that, even in the capital of the province, the circulation of money was very strictly controlled and issues from outside Egypt were entirely banned, at least until Diocletian's reforms.<sup>20</sup> As for the coins uncovered by these urban excavations, Augustan and Tiberian currency accounts for about 40% of the finds from the first to the third centuries AD.<sup>21</sup> The contrast with the pattern at Kom al-Ahmer may be explained by considering the chronology of the archaeological stratigraphies investigated there between 2012 and 2015. Units 1-4 comprise late Antique and Byzantine phases, while Unit 5 uncovered layers from the Hellenistic period (see *Fig. 1*). As for the thermal baths, although the presence of Hellenistic coins is clearly attested, the baths' construction should be dated to the second century AD.

Thus, if we exclude this early Imperial period, the distribution of the remaining Imperial coins datable before the fourth century (see *Table 1*) is not so different from that at nearby Alexandria.<sup>22</sup> The second half of the first century and the second century up to Antoninus Pius are represented only by local currency. Alexandrian production began to decline under Marcus Aurelius and Commodus,<sup>23</sup> a state of affairs that worsened under the Severan dynasty<sup>24</sup> leading to the closure of the mint and its possible transfer to Syria.<sup>25</sup> This probably accounts for the absence of coins after the reign of Antoninus Pius. This situation can be seen clearly even at Alexandria, where only three coins, bearing the names of Marcus Aurelius, Diadumenianus, and Alexander Severus, date to 161-253 AD.<sup>26</sup> The reopening of the mint under Macrinus does not seem to have had a significant impact on circulation. The difficulties faced by the Alexandrian mint in supplying the Egyptian market can be seen, for example, during the reign of Alexander Severus, when a series was produced in Rome for circulation in this region. This series is characterised by typical Egyptian features but shows a clear 'Roman' style. On the other hand, an ample supply of coinage can be seen from the reign of Gallienus to that of Diocletian (see *Table 1*), a result of an extraordinary increase in production that reached its peak during the Tetrarchy.<sup>27</sup> In this period, Egyptian production not only had a huge effect at the local level, but also began to extend remarkably far beyond Egypt's borders.<sup>28</sup>

The coins produced during this period were found in clear phases both during the excavation of the thermal baths in the 1940s, and in Unit 4 in 2014. Given the

<sup>20</sup> On this question, see Savio 2007, pp. 26-27 with previous bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> Picard 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Picard 2012, pp. 143-169.

<sup>23</sup> Christiansen 2004, pp. 106-115.

<sup>24</sup> Christiansen 1988, I, pp. 285-304.

<sup>25</sup> Savio 2007, p. 112 with previous bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> Picard 2012, nos 1231-1232, 1236. Even in these circumstances, there were no external additions to the local currency in circulation. A single provincial coin from another mint is recorded in Marcellesi 2012, p. 191, no. 1347.

<sup>27</sup> Milne 1971, p. XXV; Callu 1968, p. 187 ss.; Christiansen 1976, pp. 243-252, Tab. IIIb; Christiansen 1985, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Asolati 1996; Asolati 2012; Amandry 2005; Gorini 2011, pp. 27-28; Savio and Marsura 2012.

condition of the area investigated, which has been heavily affected by the activity of the *sabakheen*, a tetradrachm of Carinus from Unit 4, as well as coins of the fourth and perhaps the fifth centuries found in Unit 5 (which is characterised by Hellenistic layers) should be considered residual.

*Table 2.* Late Roman and Byzantine coins from Kom Wasit, by units, and late Roman coins from Units 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Kom al-Ahmer. Late Roman coins from Unit 4 of Kom al-Ahmer are listed separately in *Table 3* below; Byzantine coins from all the units of Kom al-Ahmer site are listed in *Table 4*.

		Kom Wasit					Kom al-Ahmer				
		U1	U2	U3	U5	U6	U1	U2	U3	U5	
Licinius I	321-323						1				
Constantine I	335-337						1				
<i>Divus Constantinus</i>	337-351						2				
Constans	347-348						1				
Constantius II	347-348						1				
VICTORIAE DD AVGGQ NN	347-348						1				
Constantius II	350-361						4	2			
Constantius II/Julian	350-363	1					1				
Valentinian I/Valentinian II	364-388						1				
Gratianus	378-383									1	
SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE	364-375						2				
<i>Vota</i>	IV sec.									1	
VICTORIA AVG(GG)	383-395						1	1			
SALVS REIPVBLICAE	388-402						7	2			
Theodosius II/Valentinian III	425-435						1				
Marcian	450-457						2				
Anastasius	491-518	1									
Justin II/Maurice	565-602		1								
Unidentified	4 <sup>th</sup> c.				2		5	1		1	
	4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> c.	4	1		1	2	23	7	2	2	
	5 <sup>th</sup> c.	9				1	21	15	1	1	
	5 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> c.	1					1				
Oxidised	4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> c.?			2			7	2			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	

The coins datable to the last centuries of the Imperial period at Kom al-Ahmer come mainly from Units 1-4 (see *Fig. 1*), but there are some differences in their density and chronology. Units 1 and 3, which are very close to one another and located on the highest part of the central mound, were not affected by the *sabakheen* and contained late Antique and Byzantine coins dating to at least the end of the sixth century. As Unit 3 was only partially excavated, it has yielded few coins, of which the apparently oldest are unreadable AE4s. They may date to very late Roman phases or belong to the same proto-Byzantine period. Units 1 and 2 have yielded far more coins, and in both units the clearly identifiable types belong to the second half of the

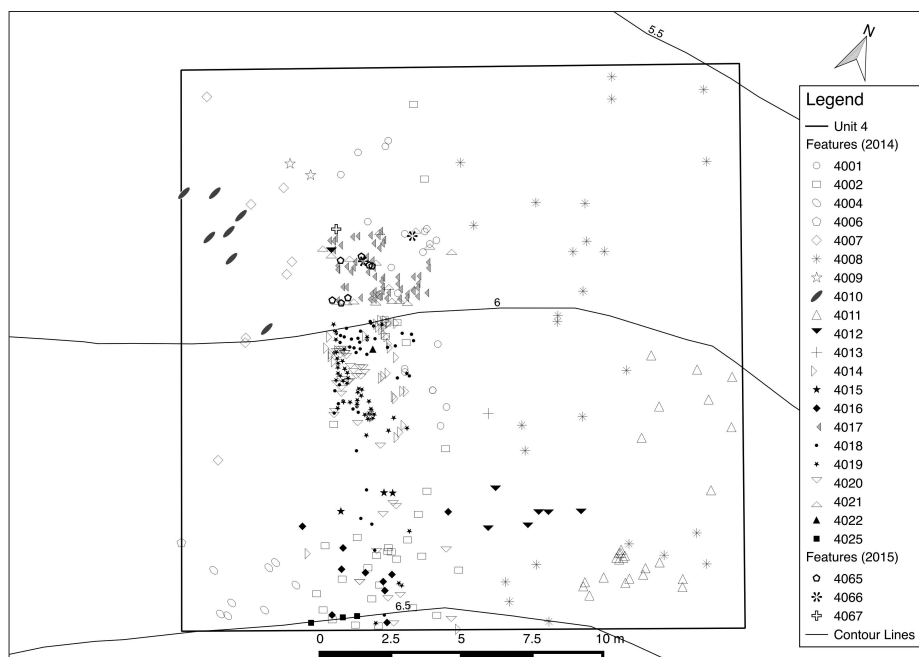
fourth to the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>29</sup> In Unit 1, two nummi of Marcian (450-457 AD) were also discovered. Nonetheless, although these two units may appear to indicate fourth-fifth century circulation, it cannot be excluded that these coins were all lost in the Byzantine phases, or even in the transition between the Byzantine period and the Arab conquest.

### The Late Imperial Coins from Unit 4

Table 3. Kom al-Ahmer, Unit 4: Late Imperial coins.

<i>Authority or type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of coins recovered</i>
Diocletian/Maximian/Constantius I	295-307	4
Licinius I	314-318	2
Constantine I	313-318	1
Constantine II	330-335	1
House of Constantine I	320-337	1
	335-347	2
Helena	324-330	1
<i>Divus Costantinus</i>	337-340	1
Costans/Costantius II	347-348	1
FEL TEMP REPARATIO/Fh AE3	350-361	12
SPES REIPVBLICE AE4	355-363	3
Julian	361-363	1
Valentinian I	364-375	2
Valens	364-378	2
GLORIA ROMANORVM 6-8	364-383	2
Procopius	365-366	1
Valentinian II	378-383	2
CONCORDIA AVGG/Rm/Con	378-383	1
<i>Vota</i>	378-388	5
Theodosius I	378-395	2
Arcadius	383-392	1
SALVS REIPVBLICAE	388-402	17
Arcadius/Honorius	395-401	2
Honorius	395-423	3
CONCORDIA AVG(GG)/cross	404-406	3
Theodosius II	430-435	1
Cross within wreath	425-435	6
Valentinian III	425-435	1
Unidentified	4th century	30
	5th century	123
	4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> century	145
Oxidised	4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> century?	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>389</b>

<sup>29</sup> Morrisson (2004, pp. 408-409) describes a similar situation with reference to the data collected by Noeske (2000).



*Fig. 2.* Kom al-Ahmer, Unit 4: Distribution of the georeferenced coins (The Italian-Egyptian mission in Beheira, G. Marchiori).

The case of Unit 4 is different and particularly interesting. The unit is 20 x 20 m and contains a series of small rooms, which in the first 60 cm alone have yielded about 400 coins, i.e., about 65% of the coin finds recovered so far. The dates of these coins show a continuity between the reign of Diocletian - Maximian Herculius and the 430s AD, with one extraordinary example of an AE4 coin as well as a very tiny coin. Each find has been georeferenced, and a distribution map created from these data shows apparently not random concentrations of coins; some of these accumulations are very significant because they are located in places where they could not be affected by natural phenomena, such as washing away by rain and water (see *Fig. 2*). Rather than suggesting hoarding, the patterns indicate that the area served as a base for money-changers or other business activities. This hypothesis requires further confirmation from the fieldwork and analysis of the archaeological evidence.

Issues datable later than the reigns of Theodosius II-Valentinian III have not been found in Unit 4, leading us to envisage an abandonment or a significant change in the use of the area around the second half of the fifth century. This date is much earlier than the documentation from Units 1-3. This possibility is also supported by the ceramic sherds found in the area, which do not date later than the fifth century AD, in clear accordance with the coin finds. This trend is interesting in the overall context of the *kom*, as Unit 4 is located at a short distance from the Roman baths (which show a continuity of use through the Byzantine period and perhaps even after the Arab conquest), and about 150 meters from Units 1-3. Unfortunately, the current state of research does not allow formulation of reliable hypotheses to explain the unique

patterns of the coin finds in Unit 4. It is hoped that a detailed comparison of the other archaeological finds and the stratigraphic development of the area with those of the other units will lead to firmer conclusions.

### The latest evidence

*Table 4.* Byzantine coins unearthed during the excavations at Kom al-Ahmer in 2012 - 2015 and at the Roman baths in 1942 (cf. el-Kashab 1949, pp. 104 - 106).

<i>Authority</i>	<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Found in 2012-2015 excavations</i>		<i>Roman bath</i>
Justin I or Justinian I	M			1
Justinian I	IB	Unit 2	1	
	nummus/lion	Unit 2	1	
	nummus/A	sporadic near Unit 2	1	
Justinian I/Maurice	S	Unit 2	1	
Justin II/Maurice	IB	Unit 1	1	
		Unit 2	1	
		Unit 3	1	
Tiberius II	IB			1
Justin I to time of Phocas	IB			2
Heraclius	IB	Unit 1	2	5
		Unit 2	1	
Justinian I/Heraclius	S	Unit 1	1	
		<b>TOTAL</b>	11	9

As mentioned above, the latest evidence from Kom al-Ahmer can be dated to the Byzantine period and is concentrated between the reigns of Justinian and Heraclius. This evidence essentially consists of dodecanummia and hexanummia from the Alexandrian mint, which are common in Egyptian contexts, but also includes two nummi of Justinian I from the mints of Carthage and Rome, respectively. The presence of these coins at this site is not surprising since Western nummi of these types have been found in large quantities at Abu Mina,<sup>30</sup> and more or less contemporary Italian nummi even appear at Antinoupolis.<sup>31</sup> These finds can be explained in the context of the Byzantine reconquest of Vandal Proconsular Africa and Ostrogothic Italy, and the subsequent return of Imperial troops to the East. Moreover, the circulation of bronze coins minted outside Byzantine Egypt was highlighted in the 1942 excavation of the thermal baths, where a follis of Justin I - Justinian I was discovered.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Noeske 2000, II, pp. 128-134, 192-195. The presence of Vandal nummi in Egypt may be compared with the presence of Western Byzantine nummi (pp. 96-97, 181-182).

<sup>31</sup> Castrizio 2010, p. 75, n. 2.

<sup>32</sup> The Byzantine coins found during the excavation of the thermal complex are considered in Noeske 2000, II, p. 217-18, nos 102-110, where they are dated on the basis of *DOC*. This differs a little from el-Khashab's work. In particular, Noeske attributes to Constans II (*DOC* II, 2, no. 105) one of the five dodecanummia of Heraclius, but there is no reason to do so. The descriptions provided by el-Khashab may refer only to issues of Heraclius (1 example of *DOC* II, 2, no. 191 = Domaszewicz, Bates 2002, Pl. I, no. 2; 1 example of no. 193 = Domaszewicz, Bates 2002, B2a; 1 example of no. 196 = Domaszewicz, Bates 2002, B3a; 2 examples of no. 197 = Domaszewicz, Bates 2002, B3b).

The sharp decline of Byzantine coins observable after the reign of Heraclius can be explained by the Arab conquest, as at many other sites in the region. However, it cannot be determined with certainty how long locally-produced Byzantine pieces remained in circulation. This is especially true in the case of the dodecanummia, which could have remained in use beyond the second half of the seventh century, alongside Arab-Byzantine imitations that, by reproducing this type of dodecanummia (IB), sustained the local Byzantine system of accounting.<sup>33</sup> However, this interruption is also documented at the nearby site of Kom el-Ghoraf where a hoard was found. Kom al-Ghoraf also had gold coins, the earliest of which can be dated to the end of Heraclius' reign. As the date range of these coins does not support a prolonged circulation, the impact of the Arab conquest, both here and at other Egyptian sites, including Kom al-Ahmer, should not be underestimated.

Although recent excavations have not revealed the presence of Islamic coins, it seems appropriate, as a closing remark, to note that the investigations conducted by el-Khashab at the baths complex led to the discovery of an anonymous fals dated after the reform of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (695-730s), and a dinar dated to the year 154 of the Hegira (771 AD).<sup>34</sup> These pieces, along with other archaeological evidence from the 2012-2015 excavations including Islamic pottery (not yet analysed in detail) and possible wall structures dating to the tenth century,<sup>35</sup> seem to support the hypothesis that the ancient capital of Metelis was located at Kom al-Ahmer, rather than at Kom al-Ghoraf, as hypothesised by certain scholars.<sup>36</sup>

Islamic and Coptic sources clearly record a continued settlement at Metelis after the Arab conquest,<sup>37</sup> while the excavations at Kom al-Ghoraf have not identified phases later than the mid-seventh century AD.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, the evidence from Kom al-Ahmer described above extends through the eighth, ninth, and perhaps the tenth century AD.<sup>39</sup> When considered together with the Hellenistic-Roman urban structures and the considerable dimensions of the baths complex, these elements produce a picture of a site that is uniquely extensive when compared with other sites in the region.

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<sup>33</sup> Domaszewicz, Bates 2002.

<sup>34</sup> El-Khashab 1949, p. 106. See also Noeske 2000, II, p. 218.

<sup>35</sup> Kenawi 2015, p. 292; Kenawi and Rossetti (in press).

<sup>36</sup> Sist 2011, pp. 152-153; Sist 2013a, p. 109; Sist 2013b, p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Marchiori 2014, p. 86; Kenawi 2014, p. 113; Kenawi 2015, p. 291.

<sup>38</sup> Sist 2011, p. 142; Sist 2013a, p. 109; Sist 2013b, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Marchiori 2014, p. 86; Kenawi and Rossetti (in press).

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