

## Introduction

The Ptolemaic-Roman city of Tell Timai (Classical: Thmuis) is located in the modern north eastern Egyptian Delta province of Daqaliyah, approximately 20 km to the south-east of the modern city of El-Mansoura, and around 500 m, to the south of the ancient city of Mendes (Tell el-Rub'a).<sup>1</sup> The mention of Thmuis in Herodotus [*Histories* II 66] and recent archaeological finds, demonstrates that Thmuis was already occupied by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>2</sup> It was however during the Ptolemaic and Roman Period when the city flourished,<sup>3</sup> subsequently becoming an important centre for early Christianity and an important episcopal See. Tell Timai was abandoned at some point during the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE after the suppression of a tax revolt in December 861 CE. Archaeological evidence from recent excavations by both the University of Hawaii from 2009–2020, and the Mission Canadienne de Thmouis in 2013<sup>4</sup> have recorded Late Roman structures in the south east of the city, and significant amounts of Late Roman pottery across the surface of the Tell such as Late Roman Amphora 7 (LRA 7) and Late Roman Amphora 4 (LRA 4) corresponding to the final occupation stages of the city into the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The surviving area of the ancient city has a circumference of 6 km, while the elevation of the city at its highest point is approximately 18.5 m ASL (Above Sea Level).<sup>5</sup> The ancient city is bordered on its eastern side by the modern village of Timai el-Amdid, and on its western side by the village of Kafr el-Amir Abdallah Sheikh Ibn es-Salaam (Kafr Amir). The village of Timai el-Amdid has encroached considerably upon the eastern portion of the tell with modern apartment buildings, a school, a butane distribution facility, and a large refuse dump, while the tell has also suffered from the extensive cutting by modern agricultural fields.<sup>6</sup> The village of Kafr Amir has also encroached heavily on to the western side of the ancient city with a considerable portion of the modern village now lying on top of the ancient city.

This monograph is divided into four chapters, each dealing with an area of excavation conducted by the author from 2009–2020. Chapter 1 documents the excavations undertaken by the University of Hawaii since 2009 until 2020 which have so far uncovered the remains of a temple

complex in the north west of the tell, with two main chronological phases dating to the Late Dynastic Period (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and Early Roman Period (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century CE/ca. 30 BCE), with some minor later activity in the Late Roman Period (4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century CE). A preliminary report on a limestone casemate foundation originally identified as a temple platform in 2009 was published in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* in 2019. Chapter 1 presents new observations on the limestone foundation pertaining to its function, and also presents the results of excavations carried out around the exterior of the limestone foundation. These included the discovery of a large 10m wide temenos wall associated with the limestone foundation and presents for the first time the excavations both to the west and east of the limestone foundation conducted between 2010 and 2020. These excavations included the discovery of a small Early Roman domestic house, and a multi roomed structure situated adjacent to the south west corner of the limestone foundation, and a cache of 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE ceramics.

Chapter 2 focuses on excavations carried out in grid square [M5], to the north west of the limestone foundation in [M6] and on the exterior of the temenos wall. The primary structure found in these excavations was that of an early Roman Period mud brick house [Phase 2]. This house was built upon the remains of an earlier mud brick structure which was associated with a refuse dump [Phase 1]. The refuse dump, based on ceramic evidence was in use from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> / early 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, then the Early Roman house was constructed on top of the refuse dump. The house preserved several rooms, of which only the foundation courses remained, while a well-preserved oven installation was found in the south west corner. Chapter 2 discusses and documents the deposits within the refuse pit and the early mud brick walls, and then goes on to describe the architecture of the house, and the main deposits from within the rooms, and focuses on the well-preserved kitchen installation.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the documentation of a Late Roman cemetery. Chapter 3 documents the associated burial architecture, the types of burials, the treatment of the human remains, the pathology of the skeletal remains, and an analysis of the material culture found in association with the graves, as well as observations in relation to funerary planning in disused city zones. Due to the overall lack of recorded Late Roman burials in the north eastern Nile Delta, the Late Roman cemetery at Thmuis provides an important new corpus of data for our understanding of the burial customs and funerary planning techniques of the Late Roman Period in the cities of the Nile Delta. The work conducted in 2017, 2018, and 2019 has begun to provide new data for the study of the Late Roman population and city scape in the north of the city. The discovery of the

<sup>1</sup> Ball, 1942: 138, 160–167, 172, 175; Bennett, 2014; 2019; Bennett et al., 2016; Blassius, 2015a; 2015b; Blouin, 2014; Daressy, 1913:181–4; De Meulenaere et al., 1976; De Rodrigo, 2000; Edgar, 1907: 154–7;1915a; Hudson, 2014a; 2014b; 2016; Johnson, Martin and Hunt, 1915; nos 213–22, 426–33; Kamal, 1966; Kambitsis, 1976a: 225–30; 1976b: 130–140; 1985; Langsdorff and Schott, 1930; Martin, 1967; Naville, 1892–1893: 1–5; Ochsenschlager, 1967; 1968; 1980: 25–6; Porter and Moss 1934: 35–7; Queyrel, 2003; Wenzel, 2015; Winter et al., 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Blouin, 2012, 2014: 71–103; Hudson 2014a: 16–17; 2014b.

<sup>3</sup> Blouin, 2014; Ochsenschlager, 1967; Redford, 2010: 188–210.

<sup>4</sup> Blouin et al., 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ochsenschlager, 1980: 25.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett et al., 2016: 2.

Late Roman cemetery is also vitally important as very few cemeteries of this date have been securely identified in the Delta.<sup>7</sup> The burials at Tell Timai are therefore an important contribution to our understanding of Late Roman funerary archaeology in the Nile Delta.

Finally, Chapter 4 is dedicated to the initial excavations conducted in grid squares [T13] and [T14], in which a 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Roman temple has been discovered. Chapter 4 documents six phases of monumental mud brick architecture and associated deposits datable from the Late Ptolemaic Period to the Late Roman Period. The earliest phases of occupation suggest some form of large elite residence with alleyways and rooms, and a kitchen. The residence subsequently went out of use, collapsed, or was abandoned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. The building was then used as a refuse area until the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (possibly in the reign of Hadrian) when a monumental new gypsum plaster floor was laid over the previous phases, and a new richly adorned structure, most likely identifiable as a temple was built over these remains. Little is known about the temple; however, the layout would suggest it was classical in appearance as opposed to the standard Egyptian style temple, and may have been a temple to the cult of the emperor. Later, based on an architectural analysis and stylistic analysis of building debris, the temple was probably reused as a church, until at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE when the building was eventually torn down, the walls smashed, and the floors ripped up, possibly in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, or the advent of Islam.

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<sup>7</sup> Hawwass, 1979; Majcherek 2015: 29–61; 2016, and Egypt as a whole see, Nováček et al., 2019; Godlewski, 1984; Grosskopf et al., 2017; Bakry, 1968; Jeffreys and Strouhal, 1980; Jeffreys, 1981; O’Connell, 2014: 7–9; Strouhal 1987; Griggs, 1990; Bowen, 2008; Austin, 2011; Burkard et al., 2015; Löscher et al., 2012.