

## SCHEDIA (KOM EL-GIZAH AND KOM EL-HAMAM, DEPARTMENT OF BEHEIRA)

REPORT ON THE DOCUMENTATION AND EXCAVATION SEASON 18 MARCH-18 APRIL 2003

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### Localisation and identification of Schedia

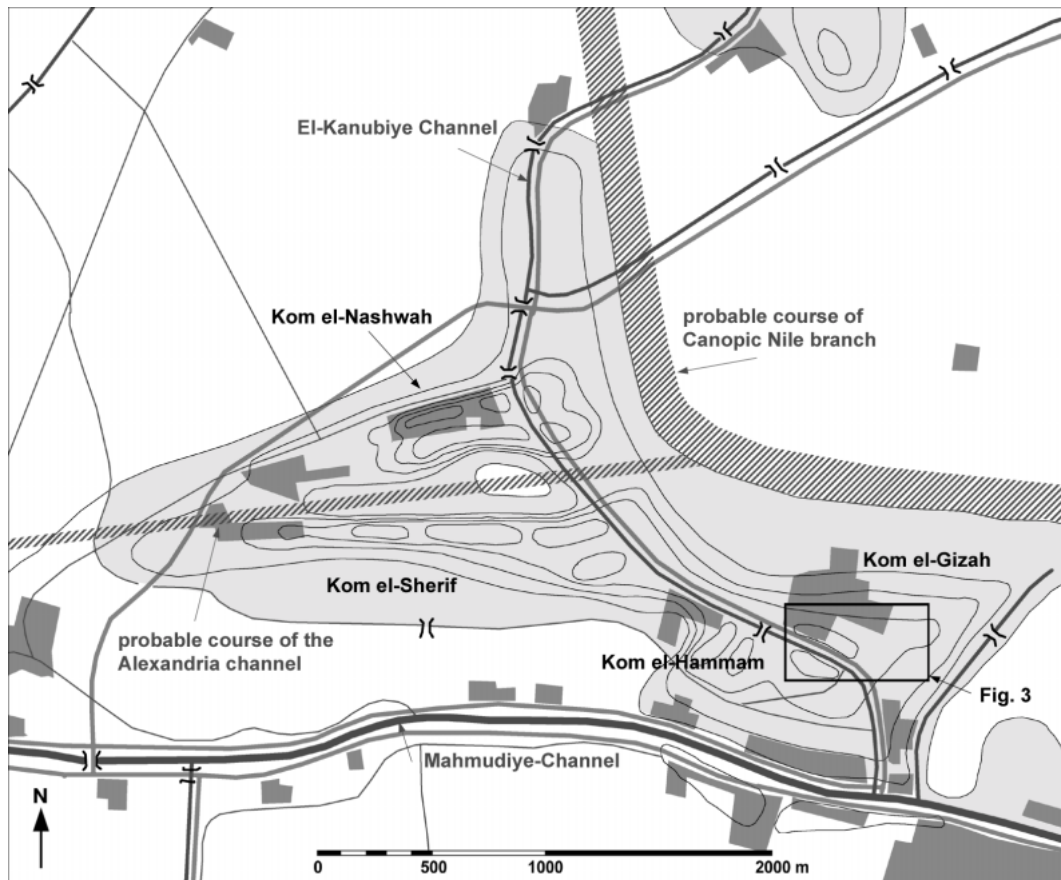
Thanks to the friendly authorization of the Egyptian Antiquities Service the Institutes of Classical Archaeology of the Universities of Göttingen and Darmstadt were able to undertake a first five-week season of excavation and documentation at Kom el Giza and Kom el Hamam, the Ptolemaic-Roman city of Schedia.<sup>1</sup> The settlement was located about 28 km southeast of Alexandria on a branch of the canal joining the Ptolemaic capital with the Canopic Nile (Fig. 1. 2).



Fig. 1: Alexandria and its hinterland in 1925, *Survey of Egypt*, sheet 4 (detail)

<sup>1</sup> The project is carried out jointly by the Institut für Klassische Archäologie der Universität Göttingen and the Fachgebiet für Klassische Archäologie der Technischen Universität Darmstadt (Germany) in cooperation with the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Kairo. Further support came from the Centre d'Études Alexandrines under its director Jean-Yves Empeur, whom we thank gratefully. The Fritz Thyssen Stiftung (Köln) provided the funding. The directors of the season were Prof. Marianne Bergmann and Dr. Michael Heinzelmann. Further participants were: Alessandro Colantoni (sondage supervisor), Dorothee Heinzelmann (graphic documentation) and Ralph Rosenbauer (surveying and photography). We would like to thank the Director General of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, Dr. Zahi Hawass, as well as the director of the Antiquities Service in the Delta, Dr. Mohamed Abd el-Maqsoud, for the permission to work at Schedia. For their help and support we also thank the head of the conservation service in Alexandria, Ahmed Abd el-Fattah, and the head of the Antiquities Service for the Department of Beheira, Fawzi el Choulani. We thank the two inspectors, Bassem Ibrahim (Alexandria) and Ashraf Abd El-Rahman (Damanhur), for their varied and competent support. The season began on 19 March 2003. The material discovered was taken to the storeroom of the Egyptian Antiquities Service at Kom el Firin on 16 April 2003. On 17 April all the sondages were covered with sand and earth for better conservation. The season ended on 18 April 2003.

Schedia, which was also known as Chaireou in late antiquity, was established according to the written sources around a large river harbour in which all goods that were destined to go downstream to Alexandria had to go through customs and be loaded on to flat canal barges.<sup>2</sup> Both the Canopic Nile and the canal have become completely filled with sand since antiquity and cannot be recognized visually today. Schedia itself was still a prominent hill at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a length of about 2.5 km and a width of 1.5 km (Fig. 2).



*Fig. 2: Topography of Schedia based on EGSA 1995, sheet NH 36-M1a.  
White: alluvial land (0-1 meters above sea level);  
grey: approximate extension of the settlement  
(1-5 meters above sea level)*

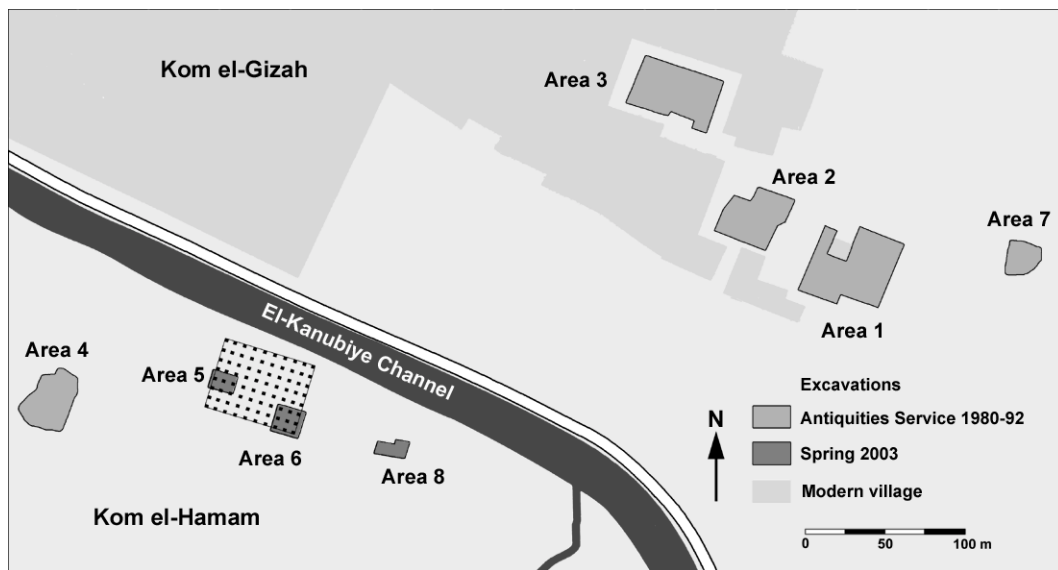
Intensive sebah extraction and the increasing encroachment on the ancient settlement site by the villages of Kom el-Giza, Kom el-Hamam and Kom el-Nashwah have, however, made the topography so unclear in the meantime that the place is hardly to be noticed in the landscape. Only in a few places are the flat remains of the hill and single structures to be recognized. The greatest height in the territory of Kom el Hamam is occupied by the present cemetery.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo 17,1,16; Procop Aed. 6,1. See in general: RE II A 2 (1921) 401 ss. s.v. Schedia (Zwicke) and RE I 1 (1897) 2030 s.v. Χαίρειον (Sethe).

The identification of the settlement with Schedia, which is known from written sources, is made certain by various inscriptions discovered in the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the surroundings of Kom el Giza.<sup>3</sup> They also indicate that the place had a large garrison, various temples, a synagogue and one of the oldest episcopal sees of Egypt and therefore evidently an urban character. In Schedia the possibility exists of investigating an important Ptolemaic-Roman emporium and a significant regional centre with all the long-term development processes from the early Ptolemaic period until its abandonment in Byzantine times.

### Cleaning and Documentation Work in 2003

Because of the growing threat to the ancient site through modern construction the Egyptian Antiquities Service carried out rescue excavations from 1981 to 1992 in the eastern part of the ancient settlement under the direction of Ahmed Abd el Fattah and reported on them in various publications.<sup>4</sup> Five areas of varying size (Fig. 3; Areas 1-3, 7, 9) were investigated on the eastern edge of Kom el Giza and another in the territory of Kom el Hamam (Fig. 3; Area 4).



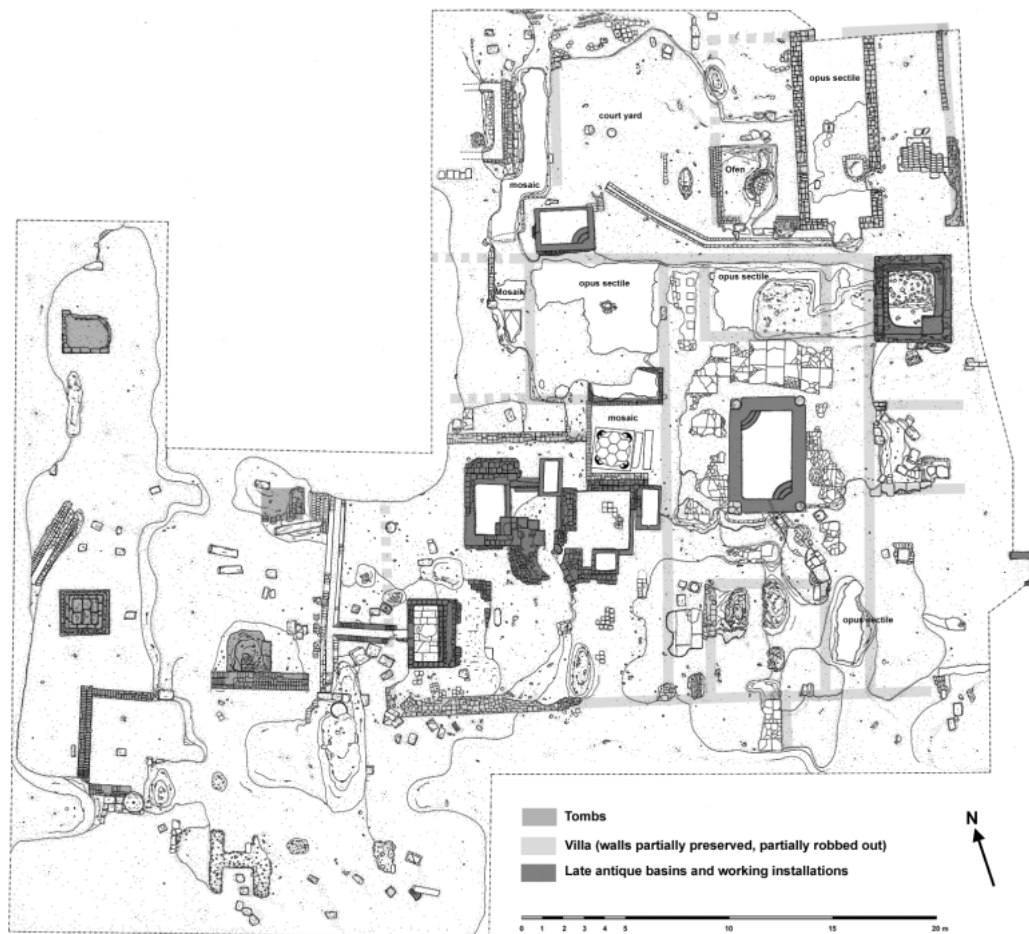
*Fig. 3: Schedia. Part of the southeastern settlement (cf. fig. 2).  
Excavation areas 1980-92 and 2003*

Numerous structures of the early and late imperial period were uncovered, among which stand out a large number of basin installations. The areas uncovered were restored and protected by the Egyptian Antiquities Service. In the spring of 2003 five of these old excavation areas were cleaned. Another

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. D. G. Botti, *Studio sul III° nomo dell’Egitt o inferiore*, *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologique d’Alexandrie*, 4, 1902, 48 sowie A. Bernand, *Alexandrie la Grande* (1966) 45 ff.; ders., *Le delta égyptien d’après les textes grecs I* (1970) 329 ff.

<sup>4</sup> A. Abd el Fattah - Abdel Latif el Wakeel, *Brief report on excavations carried on at Kom el Giza during the season 1989*, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte*, 76, 2000-2001, 9 ss.; A. Abd el Fattah - D. Kassab Tezgör, *Quelques nouveaux moules alexandrins à Kom Giza*, in: A. Abd el-Fattah - P. Gallo (ed.), *Aegyptiaca Alexandrina. Monuments pharaoniques découverts récemment à Alexandrie*, *Alexandrina* 1, 1998, 65 ss.; A. Abd el Fattah, *Recent discoveries in Alexandria and the Chora*, in: J.Y. Empereur (ed.), *Commerce et artisanat* (1998) 47 ss.

sector, in which the excavations uncovered two round baths of a Hellenistic type, was inaccessible because of high groundwater (Fig. 3; Area 3). The other areas were drawn at 1:50 and photographed systematically after cleaning (Fig. 4-7). All the areas and structures were surveyed with a tachymeter and included on an AutoCAD-based plan, which however for now takes in only the territories of Kom el Giza and Kom el Hamam. Because of the lack of reliable cartographic bases it was necessary to establish a local surveying network, which was integrated into the world system of coordinates with the technical assistance of the French Centre d'Études Alexandrines and provided with absolute heights above sea level.<sup>5</sup> This offers a reliable point of departure for all further work.



*Fig. 4: Schedia. Plan of area 1. Excavation between 1980-1992, cleaning 2003*

After a provisional examination of the structures the following picture appears. In the west, i.e. the excavation area closest to the former city centre (Area 3), baths are found, in the form of two large round baths with sitting tubs of a Hellenistic type as part of a larger complex,

<sup>5</sup> The geographical coordinates of the main fixed point at Kom el-Hamam are in the WGS84 datum: N 31°08'19.2874"; E 30°11'19.2686"; the plane coordinates in the KILO system are: 537 464.14; 936 499.33; the height is 6.50 m above sea level.



perhaps a gymnasium. The two areas farther to the east, 1 and 2, show a completely different structure of use.



*Fig. 5: Schedia. Area 1 after cleaning 2003*

In both areas the earliest traces of use were numerous constructions that are possibly to be interpreted as funerary monuments that date on typological grounds to the Roman period. Between them there appear to be numerous simple inhumations. The excavations carried out here are therefore in a suburban cemetery. At a somewhat later time an isolated villa suburbana was built apparently in the midst of the sparse graves of Area 1, while simple burials continued to take place (Fig. 4-6).

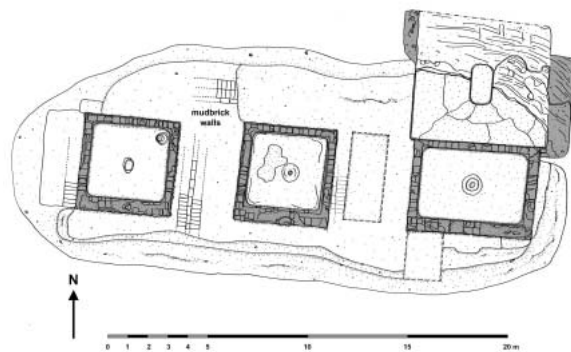


*Fig. 5: Schedia. Area 1 after cleaning 2003*



*Fig. 6: Schedia. Area 1. Atrium of the villa, later transformed in a basin*

The villa of the imperial period was furnished with rich floors. It was in use for a long time and often rebuilt and renovated. In late antiquity the building was abandoned, and over its ruins and the neighbouring graves numerous basins were installed, in some cases with furnaces nearby. Undoubtedly, these were production units that were used intensively and were repaired repeatedly. Most of the basins consist of a massive nucleus of fired brick and were lined on the inside with impermeable plaster. Outside most were surrounded by mud-brick walls, the impressions of which are recognizable in part on the preserved basins. The typology of the basins is not uniform, so that they may have served various purposes. Some have the characteristic arrangement for wine production with a higher platform for treading and a lower catchment basin (Fig. 8. 9). Others are isolated and appear to have served other productive processes that cannot be identified at present. Further investigations are necessary to clarify this question; chemical analyses of the residues in the basins could resolve it. Aside from their function, the basins testify to an intensive agricultural use of the territory in late antiquity.



*Fig. 8: Schedia. Plan of area 8*



*Fig. 9: Schedia. Eastern basin of area 8, looking south*

### **Excavation work in the 2003 season**

Parallel to the cleaning and graphic documentation of the old excavation, the excavation of another building in the territory of Kom el Hamam was begun. It is a large structure measuring 65 x 40 m. It consists of 10 x 8 rows of massive brick pillars, which emerge in part from the hill of Kom el Hamam (Fig. 3. 10-11). Two stratigraphic sondages (Areas 5 and 6) were carried out down to the foundations of the building. They showed that this building,

probably to be dated to the early Roman imperial period, was erected over earlier buildings, which could not be investigated more closely, that were demolished for the purpose. The brick pillar building was originally open on all sides and had massive cross vaults of opus caementicium, collapsed fragments of which were found. It represents one of the largest fired-brick buildings in Egypt outside Alexandria. Unfortunately its original function cannot be explained unambiguously on the basis of the sondages carried out so far. Perhaps it was a large storage or production facility. Later there were at least fourteen phases of use and renovation. First it was used residentially after mud-brick walls were introduced, until in late antiquity it was transformed at a higher level into a granary with a system for keeping the grain dry (Fig. 10).

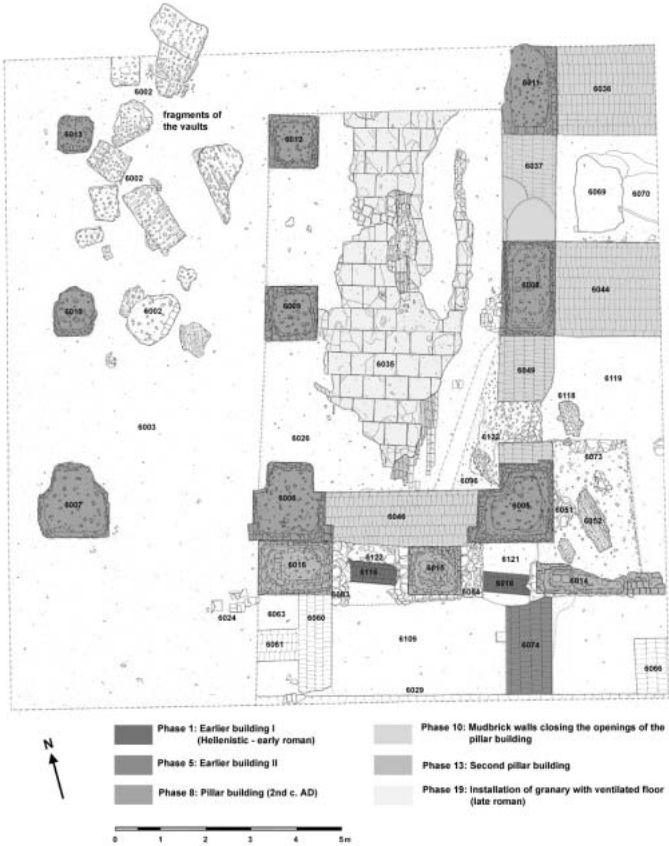


Fig. 10: Schedia. Plan of Area 6. Roman pillar building with earlier structures and later alterations

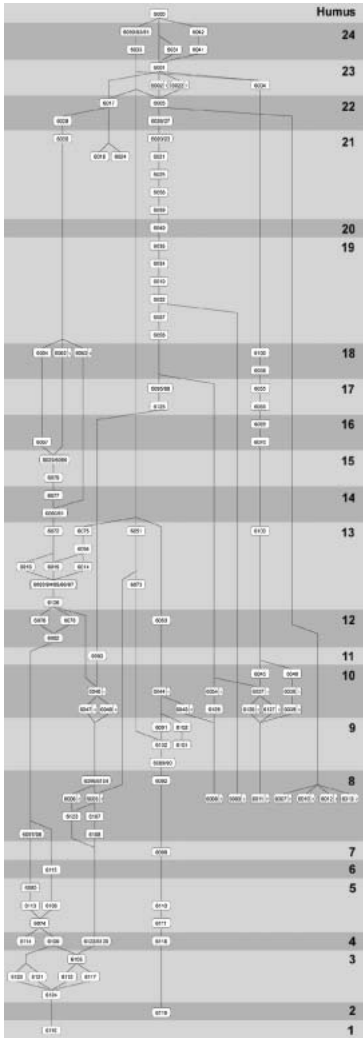


Fig. 11: Schedia. Harris Matrix and phasing of area 6

After a complete destruction by fire, simple housing of an agricultural nature grew up on its ruins in the early Byzantine period. It will be possible to date all the phases well through rich ceramic and coin finds, the analysis of which is not yet completed. Most of the pottery consists of amphorae and other utilitarian ware. Among the sporadic finds, a small limestone stele discovered during cleaning Area 2 should be mentioned (Fig. 12). On it is a clothed bust on a globe comparable to Sarapis busts.<sup>6</sup> The lost head was worked separately, probably in a more precious material, and inserted.



*Fig. 12: Schedia. Area 2. Fragment of a bust of Sarapis*

### **Provisional Interpretation of the Finds**

If one attempts to regard the results obtained so far in connection with those of the older excavations, the present state of knowledge allows the following working hypothesis on the development of Schedia to be postulated. After a Hellenistic phase attested by isolated finds going back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, which is still to be clarified, the place appears to expand greatly in the course of the Roman imperial period. In this connection luxurious residences for a prosperous upper class penetrate the periphery previously used only for burials. At the same time large production or storage facilities arise, apparently as a consequence of massive investments, on the south side of the city away from the river. On one hand, they attest to the economic attractiveness of Schedia in the imperial period, and, on the other, they suggest that

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<sup>6</sup> See W. Hornbostel, *Sarapis*. EPRO 32 (Leiden 1973) pl. 154-157.



the more favourable zones near the river were already completely built up. That the brick-pillar building investigated here was transformed for residential purposes contrary to its original destination can be considered a further indication of population pressure and of an increasing process of urbanization. In late antiquity this tendency appears to reverse, although the new transformation of the building into a large granary points to the still uninterrupted importance of the city as a supply base. In the late Roman/Byzantine period the part of the settlement excavated seems to lose a large part of its urban character with the abandonment of the older buildings and to undergo a strong process of ruralization. It changes into a centre for agricultural production that possibly still has regional importance in supplying Alexandria but appears to a large extent to lose its role as an emporium, perhaps because of the overall decrease in trade. This hypothesis, which for now can take only the Roman settlement of Schedia into account, needs to be checked by further investigation and especially to be complemented by a greater consideration of the Ptolemaic phases.

## **Outlook**

In spite of the extensive destruction of the ancient site caused by modern village construction, further investigation of Schedia promises to give interesting information on the development of a Ptolemaic-Roman commercial settlement in the area of Alexandria. Various tasks would be necessary for a continuation of the project. First, the entire settlement area of the ancient site of Schedia must be mapped in collaboration with surveyors. Second, the areas still not built up offer favourable prospects for large-scale investigation with geophysical surveying. Finally, stratigraphic sondages should be carried out in order to obtain dates for the development of Schedia.