

**Tell Timai Winter 2022-23
Nottingham Trent University
and
University of Hawaii
Excavation Report
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt**



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Excavations at Tell Timai Winter 2022-23

Introduction

An archaeological team sponsored by Nottingham Trent, United Kingdom, and the University of Hawaii, United States led by Dr. Jay Silverstein conducted excavations from 19 December 2022 until 8 January 2023. The archaeological team consisted of 10 archaeologists from England, America, Australia, and Egypt. The archaeological study focused on a distinct circular feature and large wall visible on satellite imagery located in an area of the northwest tell with extensive temple architecture (Figure 1). A total of 6 adjacent excavation units were used to explore the features. These units are located in 50m-Grid squares K7 and L7.

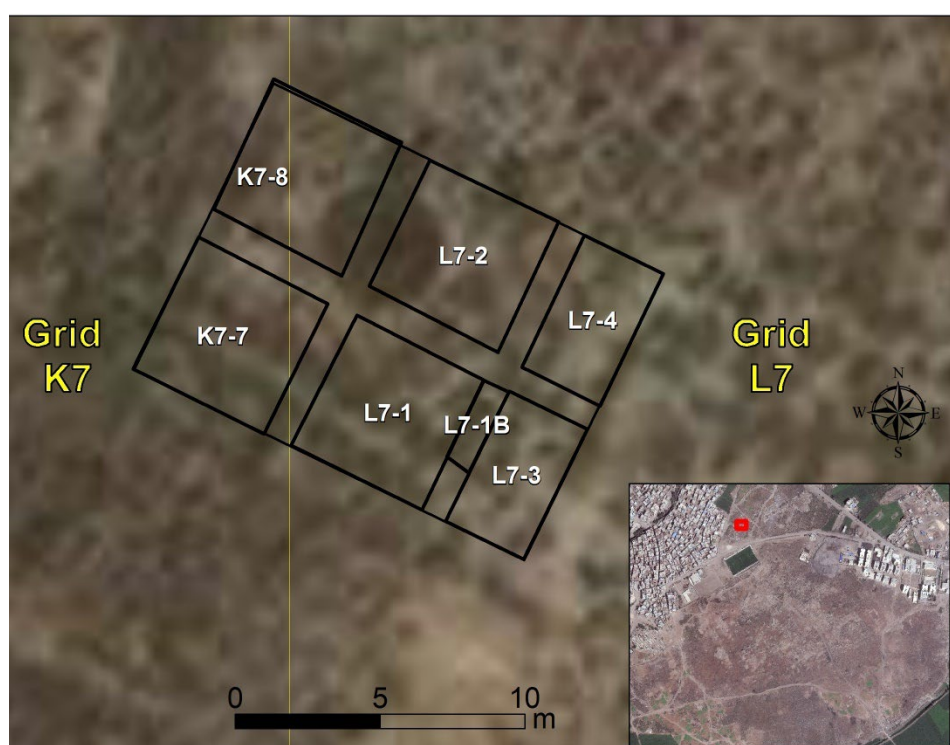


Figure 1. The Winter 2022-23 Excavation units superimposed over the satellite imagery. The circular feature is visible in Units K7-8 and L7-2.

Team

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Acknowledgments

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Spatial Controls

Unit Grids are based on the 2007 University of Hawaii 50m-grid system using alphabet characters from west to east and numbered grids from north to south. During the Tell Timai 2018 Winter Season, an Emlid RTK GPS was used to control unit elevations and conduct surface and unit feature mapping following the base datums established in previous seasons of work. Excavations were conducted by context—individual features were documented and sampled to establish form, function, history, and date. Walls and structures are identified by the Grid in which they were first identified and then given a sequential number (i.e., Wall K7.003).

Research Objectives

The principal objective of the research this season was to fill in the gap between the northwest excavations where excavations have revealed significant temple architecture in the Late Period and the Ptolemaic Period. On the western boundary of this section of the tell is a wall that separates the tell from the modern town of Kfir el Amir. It is believed that this is a temenos wall demarking a temple complex. Large long walls and a circular structure were visible in satellite imagery indicating the presence of large and significant architectural features and this was used as a guide to select the specific excavation location. Since the circular structure appeared similar in outline to the other nilometer found at Tell Timai (Silverstein et al 2022), there was a possibility that the circular was also nilometer or other sacred hydraulic structure. The walls and circular features were shown to be accurate interpretations of the satellite imagery based on the structural features found during excavation, although the structure appears to be an intrusive Roman bath that is unrelated to the earlier temples.

Key Features

The surface layers consisted of a mix of modern debris and Roman and Ptolemaic ceramics. After 10-20 cm, the soils appeared to consist of only ancient contexts although plant roots penetrated more than 50 cm below the surface. Four significant architectural features were identified during the excavation. Two distinct artifact assemblages were associated with these features allowing secure dating and some use analysis to be inferred for 3 of the features. (Figure 2 Map of Structures).

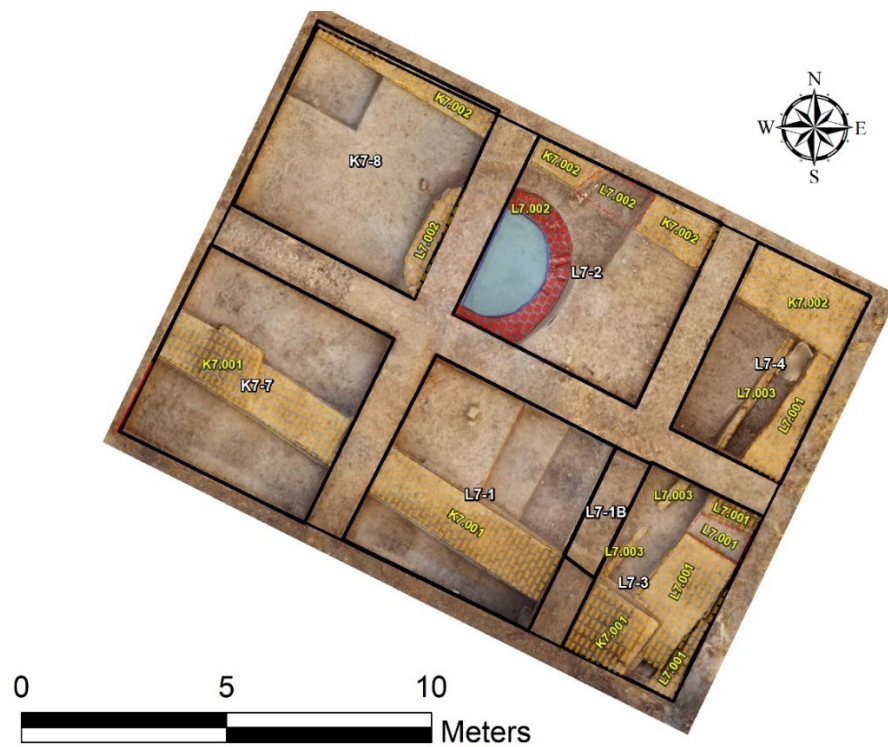
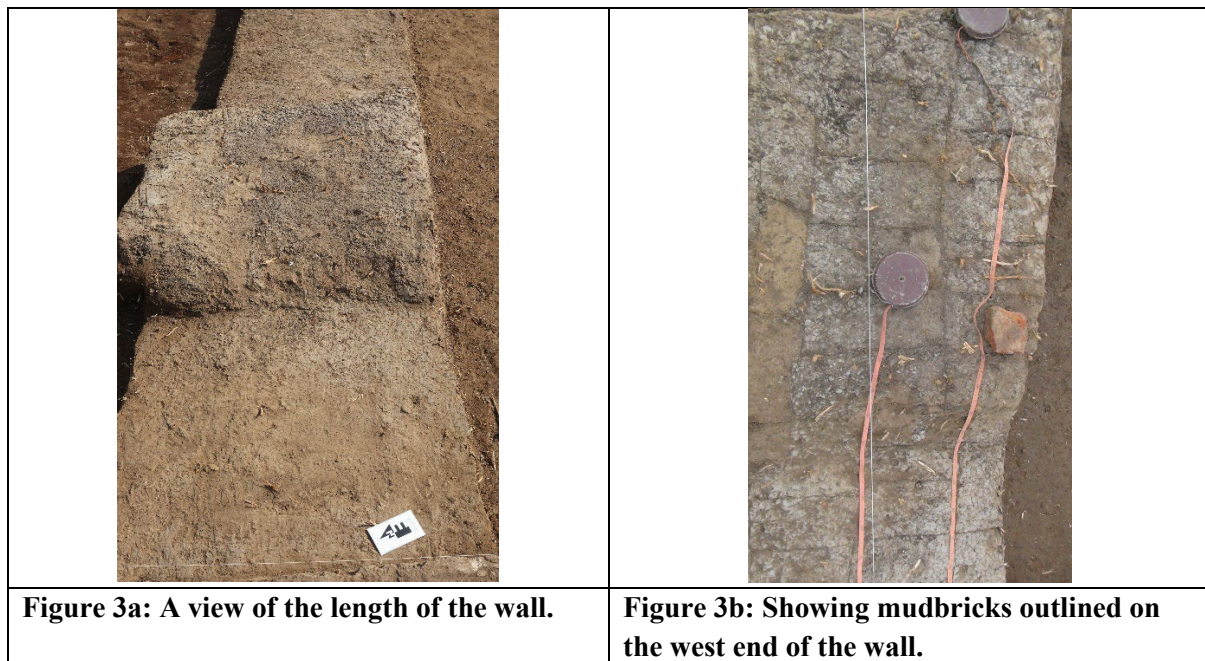


Figure 2: Map of wall structures.

Wall K7.001

Wall K7.001 is a mudbrick wall 1.4-meter thick first encountered in unit K7-7 running East-West Figure 3a-b. It extends through Units L7-1 and L7-3 with an elevation from 0.742 to 1.084 meters above mean sea level. The wall runs more than 13.5 meters continuously where it terminates at a junction with the northwest Wall L7-3. The wall is intact to 3 to 4 courses of bricks and the upper layers had been destroyed by sebakheen.



Wall K7.002

Wall K7.002 is parallel and similar in construction, preservation, and elevation (0.75-.0.90 meters above means sea level) to Wall K7.001. The wall protrudes from the north balk of K7-8 and continues in an east-by-southeast direction through L7-2 and L7-4 where it meets Wall L7.001. The wall is 15 meters long and is broken by an intrusive cut in the middle section of the wall in L7-2. The north-south cut appears to be part of the construction of Roman Bath L7.002, perhaps an entrance or aqueduct passage (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Showing the location of the Roman Bath before excavation and the wall cut on the north side with a redbrick and 2 Roman amphorae visible near the surface.

Wall L7.001

Wall L7.001 runs in a north-south direction nearly perpendicular to K7.001 and K7.002 and it meets both of those walls at their eastern extent. The wall is 11 meters long and is situated below Wall K7.001 and K7.002. A foundation cut and a slight digression from a right-angle connection indicates that L7.001 was in place and therefore older than the east-west walls K7.001 and K7.002. In L7-3, there is a cut in the wall that may have been a doorway or later intrusive cut, perhaps contemporary to Wall K7.001.

Wall L7.002

Wall L7.002 appears in Units L7-3 and L7-4. It is oriented north-south nearly parallel to Wall L7.001; however, the wall appears to be set below the foundation of Wall L7.001 indicating that it is from an older structure (0.421 m abmsl). The wall has a width of a single mudbrick laid lengthwise suggesting that it was an interior dividing wall rather than a weight-bearing wall. A void in the wall may indicate a doorway in Unit L7-3.

Bath K7.003

In Unit K7-8, the west edge of a circular feature aligning with the circle observed in the satellite imagery was found. The majority of the feature extends into Unit L7-2 and this larger portion was excavated this season. At -0.465 meters above mean sea level a well-constructed red brick circular structure was found (Figure 4). The profile on the west wall that bisects the feature has a

distinct domed shape suggesting an inward collapse of a superstructure (Figure 5). The upper levels showed evidence of burning including charcoal and slag. Structurally, the main pool is framed by a well-made circular red brick wall. The floor was not found and the water level and end of the season precluded further excavation. Fragmentary architectural materials including thick smooth concrete, finished marble slabs, and red brick, often with mortar adhering to the fragments, suggests that when in use it was an elaborate structure.



Figure 4. Overhead shot of Bath K7.0003.

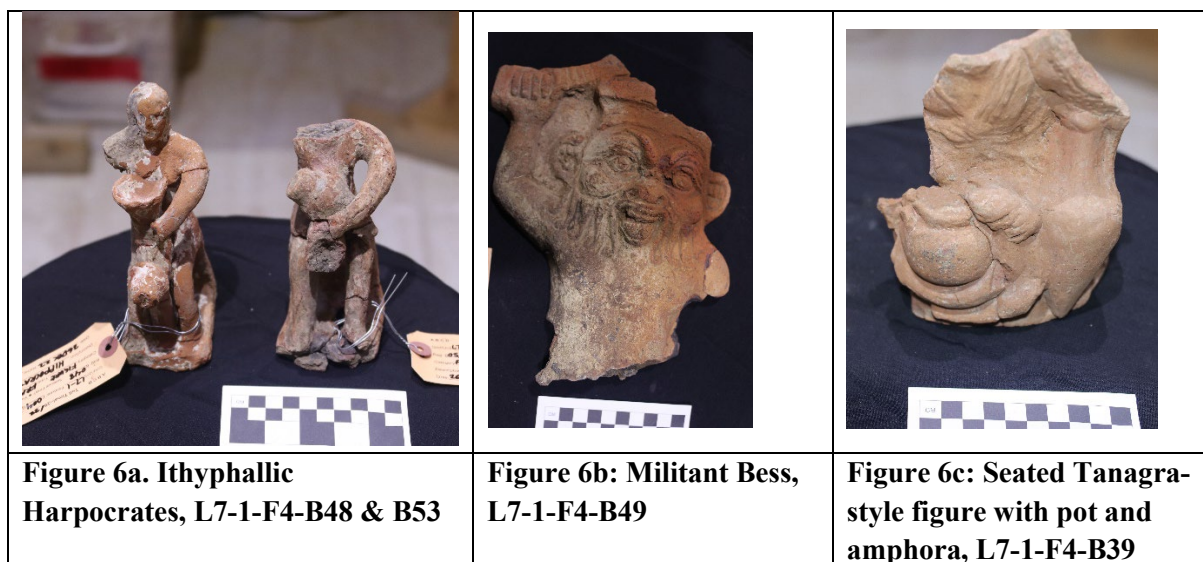
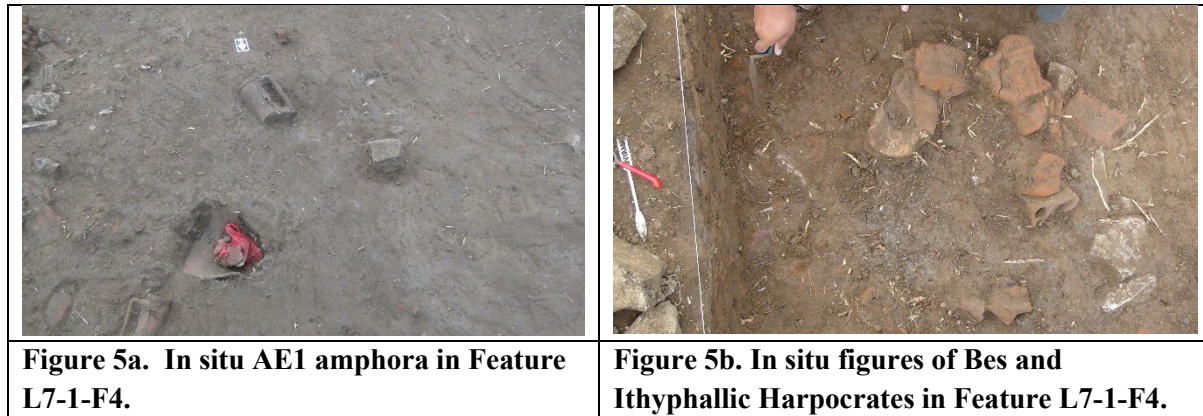


Figure 5. Profile view of the west wall of Unit L7-2.

Phasing

Three cultural-temporal phases were identified related to the architectural features. Between Walls K7.001 and K7.002, large Ancient Egyptian 2 (AE2) style amphorae and incurved drinking cups indicate a Ptolemaic Phase (Figure 5a). In the east half of L7-1 in Feature L7-1-F4, there was a large collection of broken figurines, the vast majority being large Bes plaques and smaller Bes figurines and Ithyphallic Harpocrates figures, seated usually holding a bowl or other pottery (Figure 5

and Figure 6). Approximately 31 figurines of Bes and 15 of Ithyphallic Harpocrates were present in the concentration. The nature and quantity of figures found suggests a ritual fertility function. Tanagra figurines and the continuation of Ptolemaic incurved bowls and AE2 amphorae likewise support a 3rd-2nd century BC phasing for the collection of ceramics vessels and terracotta figurines (Bennett et al 2016). Feature L7-1-F4 is stratigraphically equal to the lower half of Wall K7.001 providing a date for Walls K7.001 and K7.002 as Ptolemaic.



The space between the two large East-West walls consisted of collapsed mudbrick with evidence of burning including charcoal, occasionally in large pieces (circa 5 cm) to suggest burned wooden architecture. A number of rounded stones were found intermixed in L7-1-F4 that are consistent with siege engine projectiles. This suggests that this area was subject to the violent destruction of the Great Rebellion (207-185 BC) visible across north Tell Timai (Silverstein et al 2022).

Bath K7.003 can be phased by an extensive and consistent assemblage of ceramics and by the presence of a cut through Wall K7.002 and a foundation excavation cut through the collapsed mudbrick that makes up the main part of Unit L7-2 that outlines the main structure of the bath. There was a high density of ceramics including painted wares including banded long-necked jars, various ridged pots, ridged small-handled amphorae as well as imported wares and fragments of glass bottles (Figure 7). The painted wares and style suggest a preliminary dating of the feature from the 5th to 7th century AD (Egloff 1977).

		
Figure 7a: Painted bottle, L7-2-F13-B54	Figure 7b: White slip Pitcher, L7-2-F15-B82	Figure 7c: Small ribbed amphora L7-2-F13-B55

Preliminary Conclusions

Based on stratigraphic relationships and ceramic and figurine dating, three periods of occupation are discernable. The large parallel walls K7.001 and K7.002 appear to date to the 3rd-2nd century BC and may have been involved in the wider destruction at Tell Timai in the early 2nd century BC. The size and area covered by these walls suggest that they were for a large public, likely religious building. Wall L7.001 appears to predate the walls and thus likely dates to the Late Period or Early Ptolemaic. The thin wall in Units L7-3 and L7-4 (Wall L7.002) appears to predate Wall L7.001 and is also likely dated to the Late Period or Early Ptolemaic Period. The ceramics associated with Walls L7.001 and L7.002 are fragmented and sparse and analysis has not provided sufficient data to use the ceramics to date the walls.

Bath K8.003 is an intrusive feature that was dug through walls and the earlier Ptolemaic Collapse. Ceramics firmly date the feature to the Late Roman, although an earlier Roman date is also possible. While the feature is not yet confirmed to be a bath, it seems the most likely conclusion is based on form and situation. It is similar to other small circular tholos baths found in the Fayoum and Delta (Redon 2017). The elevation suggests that it was dug deep into the earlier deposits so that aqueducts could supply water.

The excavation was stopped on 7 January 2023 due to time limitations (Figure 8). Future excavation will complete and confirm the function of Bath K7.003 as a Tholos Bath and investigate if there are additional related structures. Other objectives for this area are to determine the phase and function of the structures.

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