

# KOM EL-DIKKA

## PRESERVATION WORK, 2000/2001

Wojciech Kołataj

*The mission proceeded with the program of preservation approved for the Kom el-Dikka site by the Supreme Council of Antiquities. The work was financed jointly by the Egyptian and Polish sides and lasted throughout the ten-month season.<sup>1)</sup>*

1) The Mission was staffed by: Dr. Wojciech Kołataj, eng. architect, director; Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologist; Mr. Wiesław Kuczewski, eng. conservator; Ms Joanna Lis, conservator. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ahmed Moussa, SCA site inspector.

## NEW AUDITORIUM

The abrupt decision of the Egyptian authorities, in August 2000, to build a new auditorium on the slope opposite the ancient theatre on the Kom el-Dikka site came as a total surprise. Within three weeks, during the summer break in archaeological work, a big part of the stone-built auditorium was erected (*Fig. 1*), as well as a showy staircase which extends the Roman street in front of the theatre to the south. Thus, an architectural conception that I had proposed several years ago has finally been given shape (see previous reports in PAM).

Even so, there remain several difficult questions awaiting solution:

- How to construct the new wooden stage-platform so that it does not inter-

ferre with the tourist flow (*Fig. 2: A*)?

- How to connect the newly excavated area and the future mosaic-floors display in this area with the modern structure (*Fig. 2: B*)?
- How to extend, if at all, the new auditorium to the north (*Fig. 2: C*)?
- How to drain away rainfall water?
- Why the material used in the new structure is not of appropriate quality?

I believe a solution will be found in all these areas. Yet it remains a puzzle to me as a restorer of the ancient theatre and supervisor of all the reconstruction work conducted in the area for the past 30 years, why no discussion of these issues was ever attempted.



*Fig. 1. New auditorium erected west of the ruins of the ancient theatre (back wall visible in the foreground) (Photo W. Kołtątaj)*

## BUILDING AND CONSERVATION WORKS

In keeping with the long-term programme for opening the excavated area to tourists, the following restoration and conservation works were carried out in different parts of the site.

In the bath, the southern outer wall of the complex in the western section was completed. Major parts of this wall were reconstructed using original blocks found during excavations (Figs. 3, 4). Nearby, one of the underground vaulted chambers (probably the eastern entrance to the underground service area) was protected and partially reconstructed. The work will be finished next season once the existing part of the outer wall has been cleaned and examined archaeologically. The cellar, fitted

with an opening in its vault and made out of original material, will usher tourists into the underground service complex.

Near this entrance, a ceramic tile roof constructed over the remains of a neighbouring Roman villa was dismantled after it had suffered damages at the hands of unruly trespassers; it will be replaced with a corrugated steel sheet covering.

In the southern section of the corridor of the underground service area, in its western part, a gateway arch was protected and partially rebuilt (Fig. 5).

A large kiln excavated between the baths and the cisterns and dated to the post-Roman period, was also provisionally protected.



Fig. 2. Area west of the ancient theatre: A, B, C problem areas requiring a solution in the future (Photo W. Kołataj)

In the cistern, the top of the north-eastern corner was completed along with the escarpment and casing wall next to the corner.

In the theatre portico, the planned anastylosis of the two newly uncovered columns took place (*Fig. 6*) and preparations were made to raise three other columns in the coming season (two of them in the northern wing of the portico). In the Villa of the Birds shelter, a new rainwater gutter at the southeastern corner was installed in order to better protect that part of the structure against rising damp.

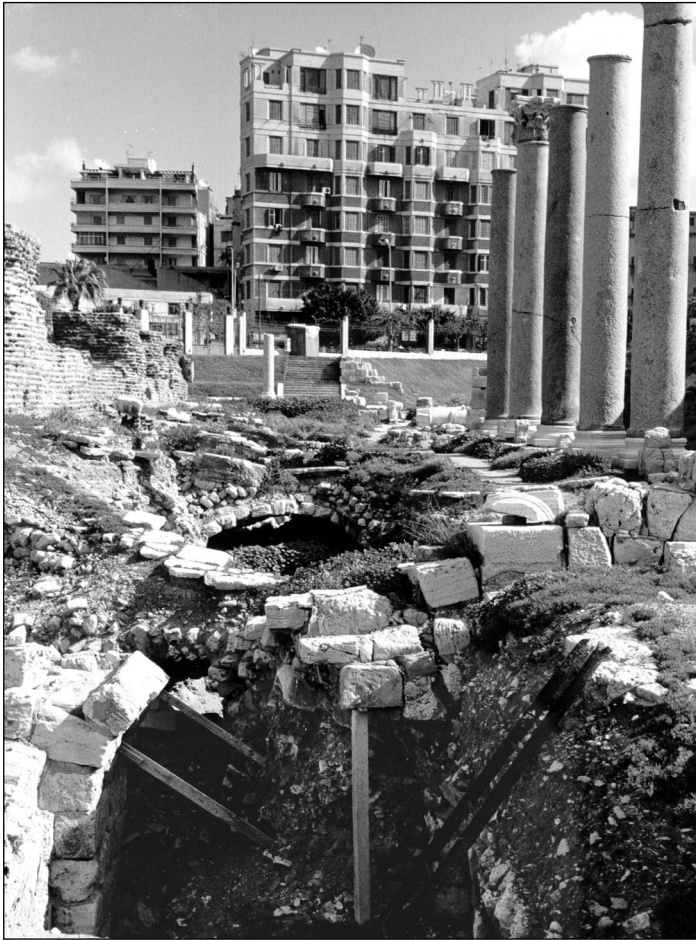


*Fig. 3. Roman baths. Western section of the southern outer wall before anastylosis (Photo W. Kotgatj)*

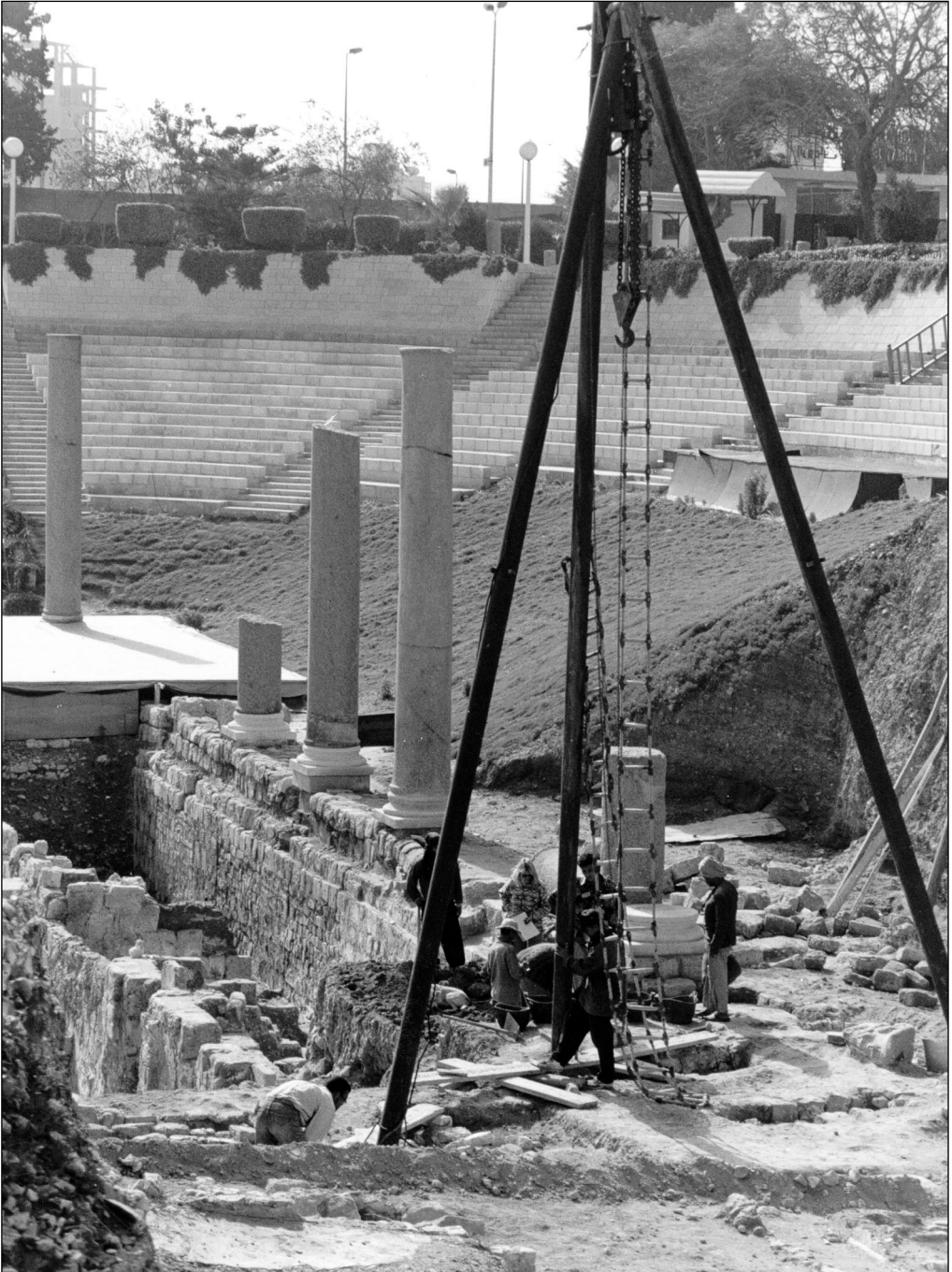


*Fig. 4. Roman baths. Western section of the southern outer wall after anastylosis (Photo W. Kotgatj)*





*Fig. 5. Roman Baths. Gateway arch of the southern section of the underground service area corridor before (left) and after reconstruction (Photo W. Kotłaj)*



*Fig. 6. Theater Portico. Raising another two columns discovered during excavations of the portico (Photo W. Kotqtaj)*

## THE “ZONA MONUMENTALE” PROJECT

The designing for the second stage of the “Zona Monumentale” Project, an archaeological park on Kom el-Dikka, was completed. The situation resulting from the erection of the new auditorium, when coupled with plans for a new gateway on the southern side plus a tourist restaurant

nearby, may add to the benefits of the “Zona” Project, but it does raise some serious doubts as to how, for instance, excavated soil should be removed from the central part of the site in the future and how the slope along the western border of the site should be landscaped.