

New York University
Excavations at Amheida 2011
Preliminary Report

The 2011 season started on the 1st of January, with work in the replica of the House of Serenos and the relocation of the dump in Area 2 from earlier seasons. Excavation began on the 26th of January and lasted only 4 days.

The team consisted of Roger S. Bagnall (director, papyrologist); Paola Davoli (archaeological field director); Olaf Kaper (associate director for Egyptology); Nicola Aravecchia (deputy field director), Roberta Casagrande-Kim, Ellen Morris, Sander Mueskens, Silvia Prell and Borna Scognamiglio (archaeologists); Clementina Caputo, Andrea Myers, and Irene Soto (ceramicists); Marina Nuovo, Lissette Jiménez (registrars); Fabrizio Pavia (topographer); Rodney Ast (papyrologist); Bruno Bazzani (database management and computer operations); Katherine Adelsberger (geologist); Sandra Ottens and Lisa Saladino (Egyptologists); Pamela Crabtree (paleozoologist); Susanna McFadden, Delphine Renaut, and Helen Whitehouse (art historians); Martin Hense, Sofia Cecchi, and Dorothea Schulz (artists); Sanchita Balachandran and Basem Fathy (conservators); Ashraf Barakat (assistant to the director); and a number of student assistants. The SCA inspector was Yasser Farouk.

Area 2.2 – Building 6

S. Prell, R. Ast and B. Scognamiglio

Building 6, located in Area 2.2 north-west of Building 4, was probably composed of 10 rooms of different sizes and planimetry. The excavation started in 2010 in rooms 24, 26, and 27, all filled up to the top of the remaining walls. The walls and columns of these rooms are well preserved to a considerable height (about 3.00 m) and are covered by a thick layer of undecorated mud plaster.

The floors were reached in R24 and R26 and in these two rooms we planned to open two test trenches to investigate the previous phases. During the few days of the 2011 campaign only one trench has been opened in the North-West corner of R26 (3.2 x 1.5 m, North-South oriented). Three floors made of compacted mud were laid one on top of the other, the middle one of whitish color due to ash and gypsum mixed to mud.

The lowest floor covered a layer of rubble (US 23) 42 cm thick, composed of mud brick debris, fragments of white plaster of different thickness and colored with red, green and yellow paint. Some fragments of architectonic decorative elements made with moulded gypsum were also present. The layer is very similar in composition to other stratigraphic units found below floor level

in R19, R4, R9 and in S2. It seems likely that this rubble belong to the same dump phase. Five Greek ostraka were found in the trench, of a character similar to those found in dumped material below floor level in R4, R9, and S2..

US 23 covers a hard uneven surface made of mud, which is cut by the foundation trench of wall F51. This wall is preserved only in its foundation and is North-East/South-West oriented, different from all other walls excavated. So far it is not possible to suggest an interpretation or a dating for this wall. More investigation is needed.

It has been established that the bench F19 along the north wall in R26 is made of three courses of mud brick and it was built on top of the lowest floor.

The excavation of R25 started. The room is oriented East-West, was covered by a barrel vault and had an entrance in its North-West corner. In the opposite corner there is another door connecting R25 with R27. Part of the collapsed vault lies in the eastern half of the room (still *in situ*) above a layer of wind blown sand that fills the room. The western half of R25 has been excavated to a dept of 1.7 m and part of the plaster has been exposed. It consists of two layers: the uppermost made of simple mud, damaged by termites, and smeared on a previous layer of white plaster. This one is very thin in the upper part of the walls and on the vault, and it is thicker in the lowest part of the walls. Originally white, it is now greyish. Several Greek graffiti are scratched on the North wall, and an inscription on three lines is painted in black charcoal on the West wall. The text mentions a personal name, Flavius --onius, and in the next line *Kastron Trimitheos*. It is likely that a title followed the name, thus “Flavius ---onius, (commander? of) the camp of Trimitthis.” From the appearance of the nomen Flavius, the date of the inscription must be 325 or later.

Area 4.1

R. Casagrande-Kim, S. Mueskens and E. Morris

Two squares have been opened. The first one (AO50) lies to the East of the squares investigated in the past years. It is characterized by the presence of a relevant quantity of mud brick debris and remains of mud brick walls damaged by the excavation of several spoliation pits. No temple blocks were found in these pits, except in the North-West area of the square, where the excavation of a pit full of sand and some white blocks just started. Worth noting is the presence of a block from a door jamb, clearly identifiable from a groove all along its length due to the rubbing of the door leaf during its rotation. This block can be related with a cavetto cornice from a gate that was found a few meters South-West (in square AP50). These evidence seems to support our hypothesis of the presence of the gate of the Roman temple in the middle of a forewall crossing squares AP50 and AP49.

Square AP48 shows the presence of a significant cluster of blocks and a section of a wall in the middle of its South side. They are part of the filling of one pit, which was not yet excavated. No decorated blocks were identified on the surface.

Two interesting blocks and a statue representing a baboon have been found by robbers digging on the hill since the 2010 season. The baboon statue is well preserved on its right side, with scanty remains of red paintings on the face and of part of the body. The upper part of the mane is chiselled and a mortise on top of the head suggests the presence of a crown made of a different material.

The other two blocks found by the robbers came from a pit dug West of the area 4.1. One is part of a screen-wall including a quarter-column; the other testifies to the practice of pilgrims' scratches.

Topographical and geological survey

The topographical survey continued in area 2 (North of sub-area 2.1) where many buildings are visible on the surface.

The geological survey has benefited of the presence of three geomorphologists from Lyon and Assyut Universities, members of the French mission to El Deir (Kharga), with which our mission has established a multi-year partnership. The geological stratigraphy of the site and of the surrounding areas has been studied, paying particular attention on deflation and its effects. The flat area immediately East of the site was identified as a deflated playa. The dark brown mounds East of the pyramid testify to the stratigraphy of the deposits originally present on this playa. Their date will help us to understand the height of the walking surface during different periods. The current hypothesis is that the uppermost surface of these mounds could be probably dated to the Old Kingdom. Very likely from the Old Kingdom to Late Roman Period there have been different phases of desertification, while the level of the aquifer changed considerably with a direct impact on agriculture and population. The comprehension of these climatic phases and the associated deflations would help us to interpret the modern landscape to formulate hypotheses about fields and settlement evolution in different periods. A systematic C14 dating of charcoal samples together with a ceramic survey of the entire site would be necessary to complete the picture.

An artificial well for field irrigation has been recognized at the South-West edge of the city.

Conservation and other work

The team of art historians worked together with the conservators on the fragments of the paintings from R1, stored at the mission house. Due to their fragile state it has been decided to recompose the scenes only with digital techniques instead of moving the fragments from their trays.

Pamela Crabtree continued the study of the bones collected in the past years.

The painting of the replica of the House of Serenos continued in January and most of the lowest part of R1 with geometrical panels has been painted.

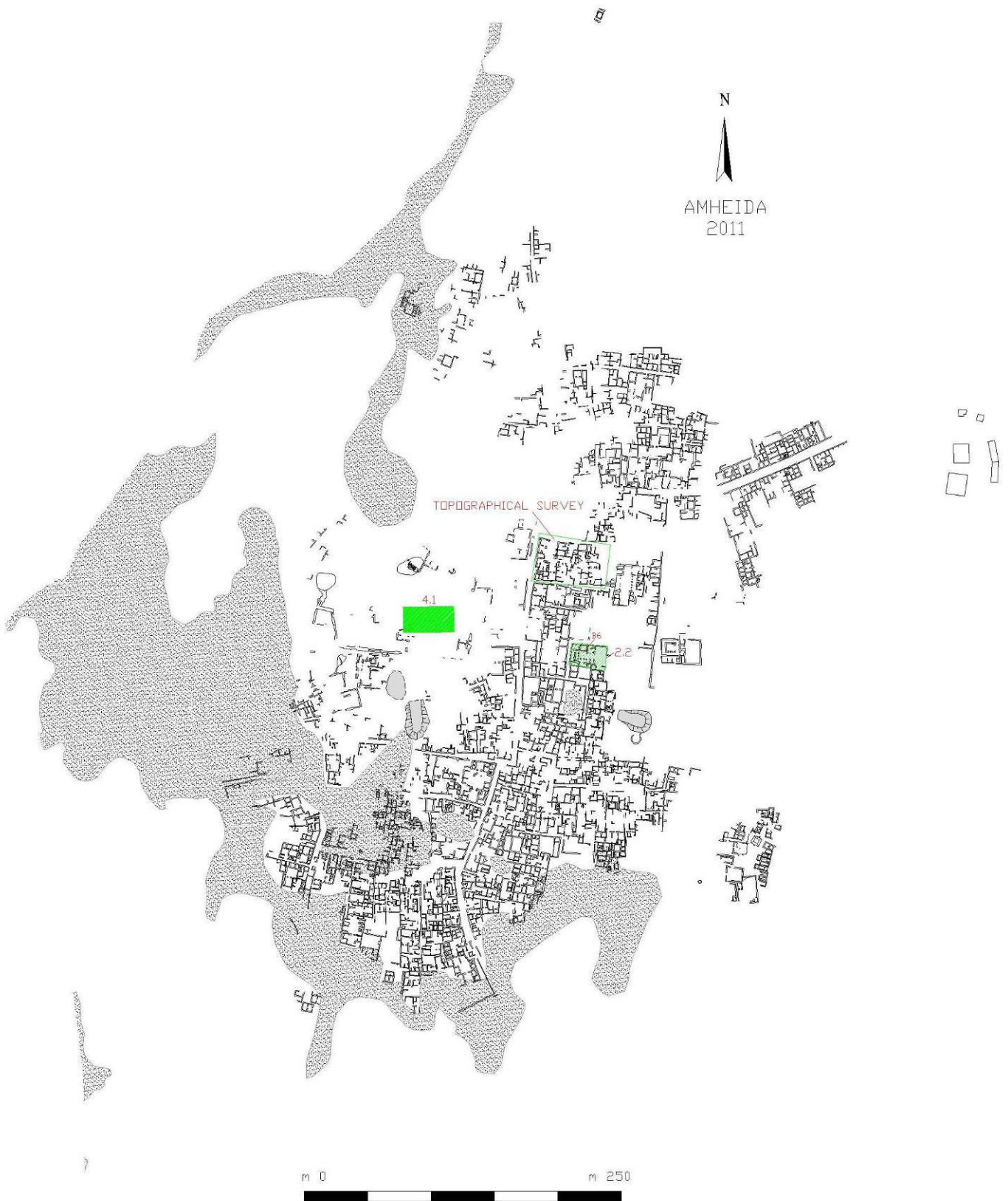


Fig.1: General plan of Trimithis.

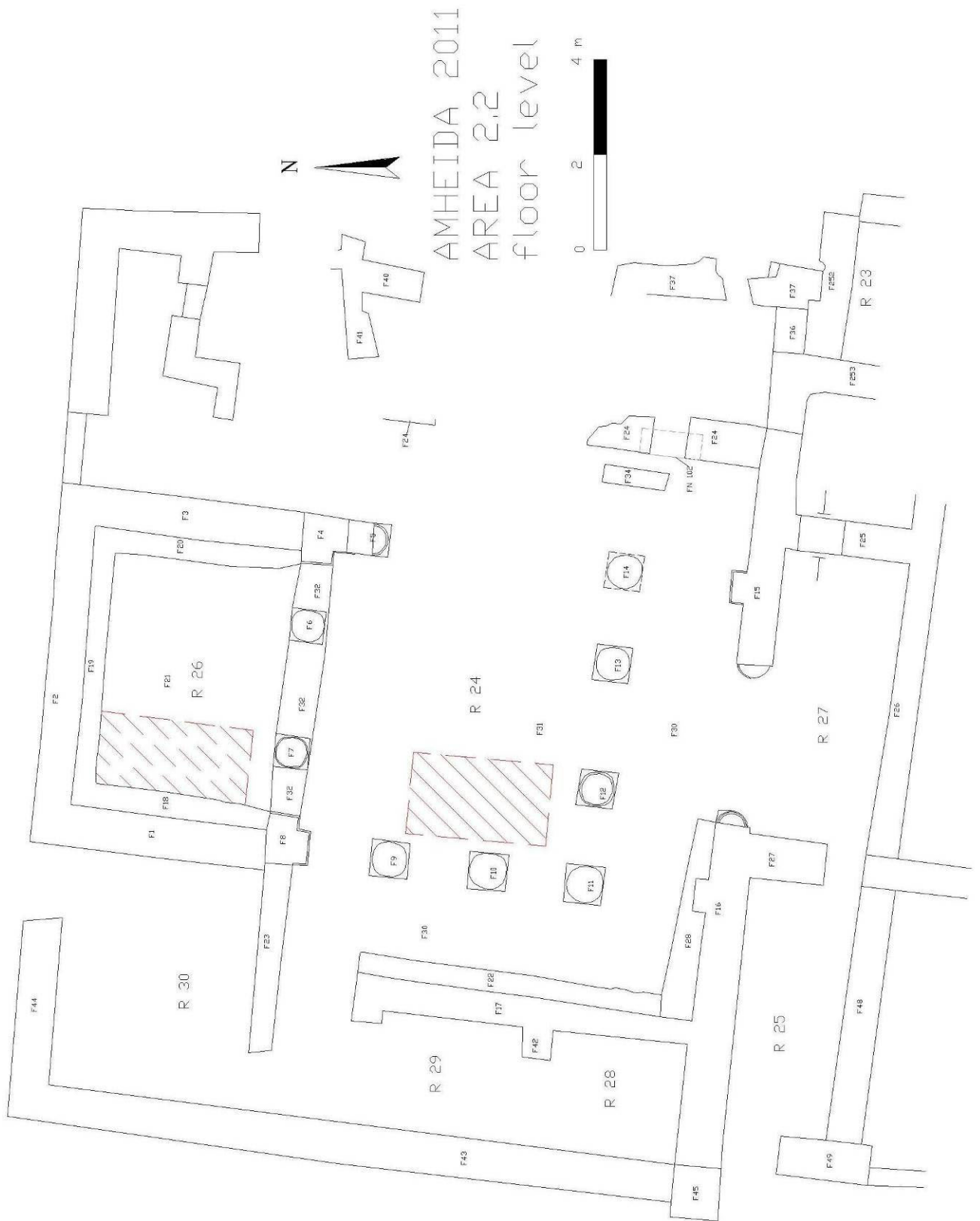


Fig. 2: Area 2.2, Building 6

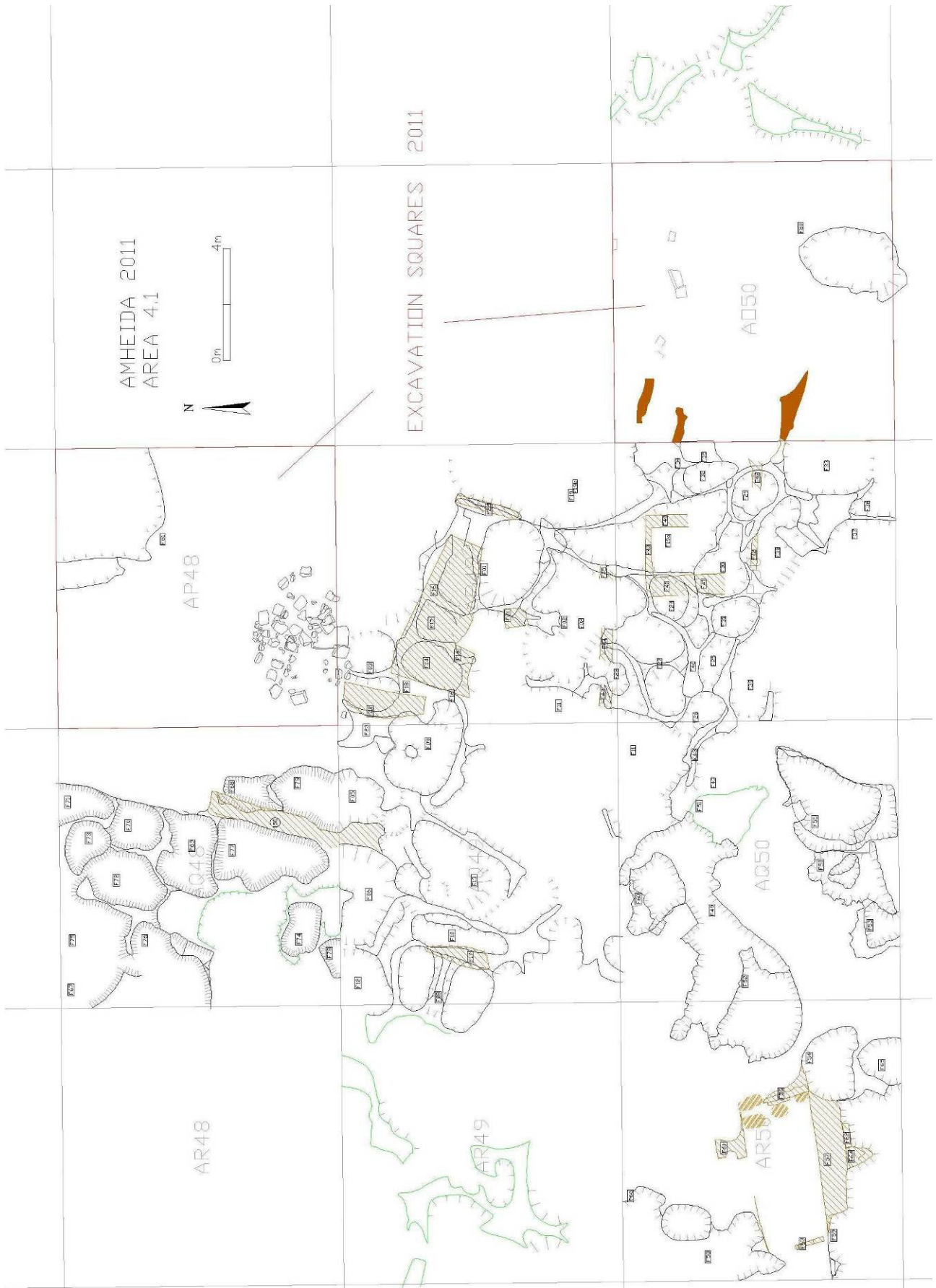


Fig.3: Area 4.1



Fig.4: Dipinto in B6