

## EEG Meeting Report – January 2026

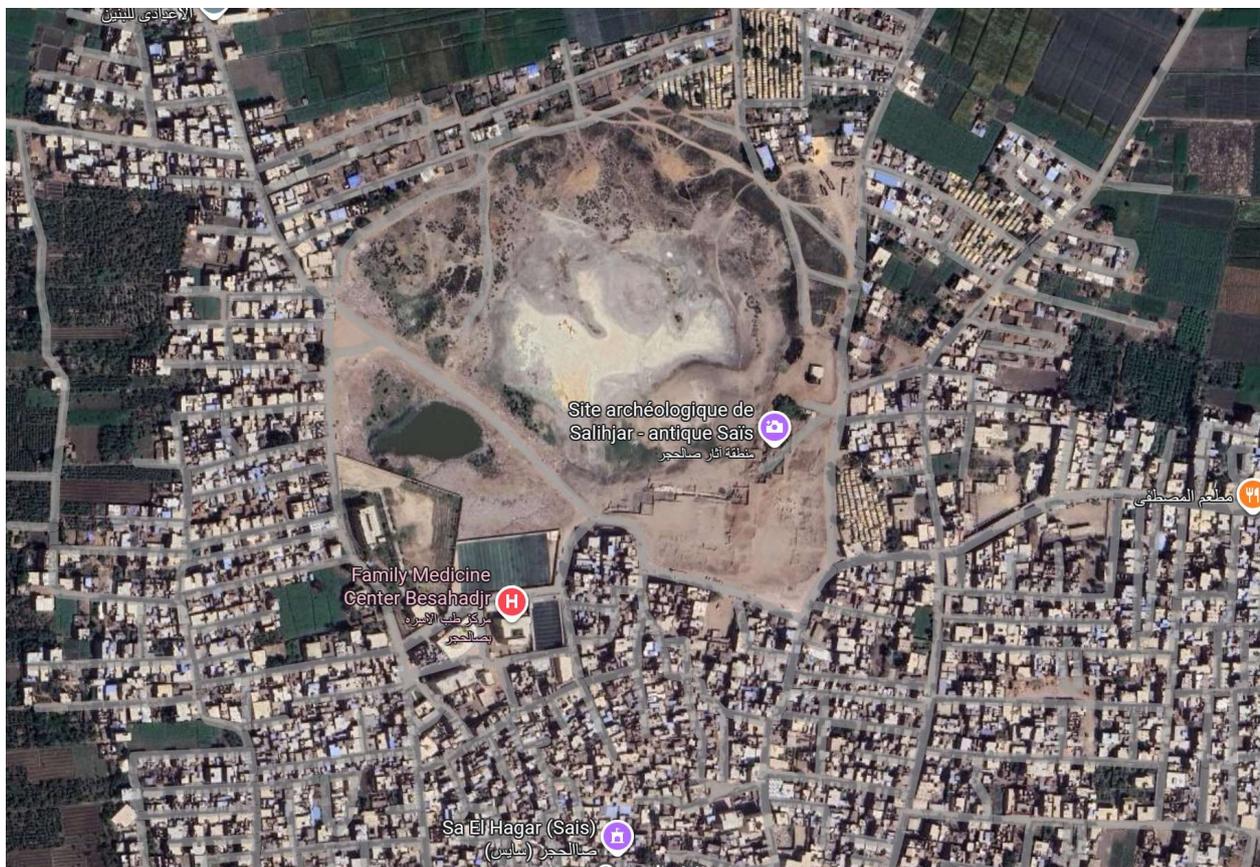
Dr Penny Wilson

### All the King's Men and Women: putting the people into Sais

In January we welcomed Dr Penny Wilson who, for many years, has been Field Director of the joint Durham University/Egypt Exploration Society/Supreme Council of Antiquities project at Sais (Sa el-Hagar). She last spoke to us nine years ago about the myths and beliefs of the Delta region. Many of the factors which make it difficult to know about the people of Sais also apply to the beliefs of the Delta and you can read Margaret Patterson's account of Dr Wilson's 2017 talk here:

<https://writeups.talesfromthetwolands.org/2017/12/30/delta-myths-and-legends-penny-wilson-eeg-meeting-talk/>

Sais (modern Sa el-Hagar) lies on the Canopic branch of the Nile in the western Delta. There are no monuments at the site (though there were a lot more remains in the nineteenth century) though smaller objects are still being found. The area is rich agriculturally and the modern village lies over much of the ancient site. Sais was a seat of power in the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> dynasties.



How is it possible to learn about the lives of the people living there when there is so little material evidence? There are classical accounts of the archeological features from Herodotus, Objects from the site found their way into museums across the world in earlier times so tracking them can provide information, though the items often arrived in the nineteenth century when records of provenance were sketchy or non-existent. Neith was the goddess of Sais so representations of her on objects can provide a link with Sais.

There are fifteen known statues of the fourth ruler of the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Wahibra. One example, which was found in Lake Mareotis, can be seen in the British Museum. These statues provide a long list of his religious and military titles. He is also described as being in charge of the customs and excise regulations in the area and in other regions. All this information leaves us with questions: how did he become so important? Does the existence of so many statues mean that he had a cult?

Statues of other individuals often show them holding buildings or have references to the restoration of buildings. Wedjahoresne restored the temple of Neith, restored the medical school at Sais and removed settlers. There are also fragmentary references to women being connected to the 'mansion of Neith' or being a sistrum player of Neith.

It is possible to reconstruct some ideas of what the city was like. There was a temple of with a north-south alignment, a palace and a sacred lake. Remains of monumental structures have been found but no evidence of the dwellings of ordinary people. Votive offerings from ordinary people have been found including lamps which could be part of a festival of lights referred to by Herodotus. Greek transport amphora have been found at the site which could mean that the elite were enjoying imported wine or their presence could suggest that Greek people were present. Could there be a link with the customs responsibilities referred to on Wahibra's statues?

Other items discovered at the site give us glimpses of the lives of the people living there. There are flint knives and worked bones. The presence of ostrich bones gives us ideas about what people were eating. There is evidence of local pottery production with the pot marks of individual potters and finger prints. One item might be a trap for animals or a 'cage' for keeping animals. There are small amulets, child figures and Bes figures. More luxurious items have also been found: glass beads, faience beads and beads made from gold wire.

A few burials have burials have been found though they are usually in poor conditions because of the wet soil conditions. One intriguing burial included a pot which had been placed over the skull resulting in the preservation of the skull. Another burial had pottery from different places on the body. There were items from upper Egypt, Cyprus and Syria which suggest that the person was well connected.