

MARINA 1990

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The 1990 season of excavations at Marina el-Alamein was carried out by an archaeological mission sponsored by the PCMA and lasted from 20 February until 22 March.¹ Work continued in the same area as in previous seasons, on the site of an ancient settlement where today a large tourist centre is under construction. Envisioned for a clientele in the thousands, the modern centre will include, beside a developed living complex consisting of villas, apartment houses and hotels, a yacht marina located inside the lagoon, the same which in Antiquity must have served as a harbor for coastal navigation between Alexandria and Cyrenaica.²

Polish excavations are concentrated on the necropolis in the southwestern part of the ancient settlement. To the extent allowed by circumstances the area covered by the ancient city was surveyed again and the monuments discovered accidentally in the course of construction works in 1986-1987 continued to be recorded.

¹ Prof. W.A. Daszewski was in charge of the mission, which included Prof. Zofia Sztetyło, archaeologist and epigraphist, Dr. Maria Kaczmarek, anthropologist, Mr. Grzegorz Majcherek and Miss Iwona Zych, archaeologists, Mr. Jarosław Dobrowolski, architect and Mr. Stefan Sadowski, photographer. Mr. Kazimierz Błaszczuk participated in the work periodically. Following the excavations Messrs J. Dobrowolski and K. Błaszczuk, working under the terms of an agreement with the EAO, completed a full anastylosis of one of the tombs (T 1) and reinforced parts of the others. See J. Dobrowolski, p. 44ff.

The EAO was represented by an inspector, Mr. Ramadan Musa. The mission would like to express its sincere gratitude for help received in the course of the work to Dr. Ali el-Kholy, Director General of the EAO for the Western Delta, Mr. Faisal Ashmawy, Director General of the Inspectorate of Marsa Matruh, and Mr. Ezzat el-Hammahmy, General Inspector of the EAO in el-Hammam.

² For the identification of the ancient centre on the basis of ancient literary sources, see W.A. Daszewski *et alii*, *MDAIK* 46, 1990.

On the necropolis the mission continued the exploration of a complex of tombs located closest to the limits of the settlement. This complex was discovered and partly cleared during the previous seasons. The tombs were constructed on ground level and were made of dressed limestone blocks. As a rule they took on the form of large rectangular "boxes", around 2.80 x 2.50 m, equipped with two, three or four loculi for the dead. Crowning the structures was a kind of stylobate of two or three steps, constituting a base of sorts for the architectural monument built on top of the tomb – a massive column in the case of Tomb T 1, a pillar with corner pilasters in tomb T 1B, and finally a pillar with engaged columns in tomb T 1D. The capitals which topped the column as well as the pilasters were of a specific type recalling so-called Nabatean capitals.³

The loculi in the tombs were very much the same in size (about 2 m long, 0.60 m wide and from 0.90 to 1 m high), but they differed substantially in the number of dead laid to rest in them. This varied from one to several. During this season three loculi were investigated thoroughly: the northern loculus of T 1B and the middle and northern loculi of T 1D. In the loculus of Tomb 1B 13 skeletons were found. Anthropological examinations identified three males in the age groups 35-40(1) and 38-47 (2) and two females, 16-18 and 25-55 years old. The remaining skeletons belonged to one newborn and seven children from 18 months to five years of age.

The disposition of human remains in tomb T 1D constitutes an interesting case. The central loculus, which had been discovered intact, closed with a slab decorated with a relief representation of the serpent Agathodaimon (see earlier report), was found to contain just one skeleton, that of a male 20-30 years old. In contrast, the adjacent northern loculus (the southern was not investigated this year) yielded remains of 22 persons including 5 males in the 35-55 age group, 2 females (40-50 years) and 15 children.

³ See W.A. Daszewski, *EtTrav* 15 (1991).

Reconstruction work proceeding on Tomb 1 (excavated in the 1987/88 season) uncovered a third loculus beside the two already known, which had contained 11 and 16 burials respectively. This new loculus, discovered in the central part of the box-like tomb structure which served as a proper base for the columnar monument decorating the tomb, was found to contain two skeletons; the bottom one had been laid in a shallow pit scooped out in bedrock, while the upper one lay some 0.20 m above the first, on a layer of sand. It should be assumed that these two burials were the earliest, the tomb being literally built on top of them.

A similar situation was encountered in tomb T 1B where beside the two side loculi there was a central one, originally just a trench in bedrock. The box-like structure of the tomb with its 5 m-high monumental pillar was built over this trench burial.

The unidentifiable part of a tomb structure which was discovered last year joining at an angle the southeastern corner of Tomb 1D, upon closer investigation turned out to be a part of a different type of tomb in which the superstructure is connected with an underground burial chamber (Fig. 1). The part discovered at the end

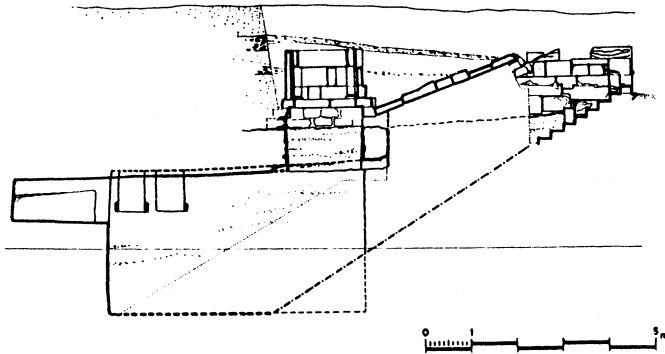


Fig. 1. Tomb T 1GH.

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of the previous season belonged to a monumental entrance which opened on a vaulted staircase leading to the hypogeum. The gate which was decorated with dentils and framed with relief pillars, was constructed of limestone blocks, as were the vault and upper section of the stairs. The lower steps were cut in bedrock. The underground chamber had nine loculi cut in the walls. Eight of the loculi were intended for burials, while the ninth was a shallow niche for grave furnishings. At the spot where the staircase opened into the chamber there was a square ventilation and lighting shaft (1.20 m to the side) cut from the surface. On ground level, this shaft was built up with limestone blocks (preserved height 1.20 m) and decorated with pilasters on the inside corners and half-sections of small Nabatean capitals on the outside. The full length of the tomb from gateway to the far wall of the chamber is 13 m; the hypogeum measures about 7 x 5.50 m. Particular loculi in the hypogeum contained from two to six burials. The finest burial was that of a male about 45-55 years of age whose remains had been placed in a rectangular lead coffin (1.83 m long, 0.34-0.42 m wide, 0.24 m high). Similar undecorated lead coffins are known from the Hellenistic necropolis of Hadra in Alexandria. The gifts that accompanied the man buried in the coffin included two terracotta unguentaria and

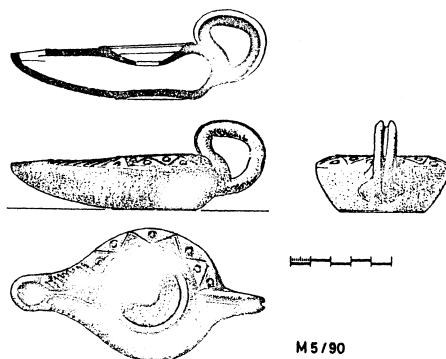


Fig. 2. Terracotta oil lamp found in Tomb T 1GH.

a glass bottle of excellent quality set next to the head. The glass receptacle still contained the dried remnants of some substance, presumably fragrant oils. At head and hip level, large holes had been ripped out of the coffin cover; apparently the tomb robbers expected to find jewelry on the head or neck and fingers of the buried man. This violation must have occurred relatively shortly after the burial itself. Evidence supplied by the finds from particular loculi – sherds, glass vessels and a terracotta oil lamp (Fig. 2) – indicated that the tomb was in use from the second half (or end) of the 1st century BC until the middle of the 1st century AD. After that it was filled completely with sand and remained untouched till the present day. A definitely more monumental burial structure was discovered in the western part of the necropolis, at some distance from the settlement. Its aboveground part was excavated in the course of previous seasons (Fig. 3). Built on a rectangular plan (17.60 x 10.80 m), the building had an Ionian column portico decorating its northern seaward facade and a large reception hall in the centre, furnished with two banquet couches of masonry. The rest of the building contained storerooms, lodgings and rooms for preparing banquets. This superstructure was connected integrally with an underground part. A monumental entrance framed by half columns and topped with an arch led from the southern end of the banquet hall to a small vestibule and a monumental staircase 17 m long descending 7 m into the rock. At the end of the steps there was a vertical shaft (6 x 5.50 m) which functioned as a sort of inner open court. On the surface the shaft was surrounded by a wall of limestone blocks which served as protection against sand. A rectangular opening in the southern side of the shaft led to an underground chamber measuring 7.25 x 6 m. Inside, the chamber had benches running along three sides and an altar set in the middle. It would appear that the chamber was never completed. Only one loculus was found, cut in the southwestern upper corner of the chamber. Tracing lines preserved on the ceiling of the chamber indicate where other loculi

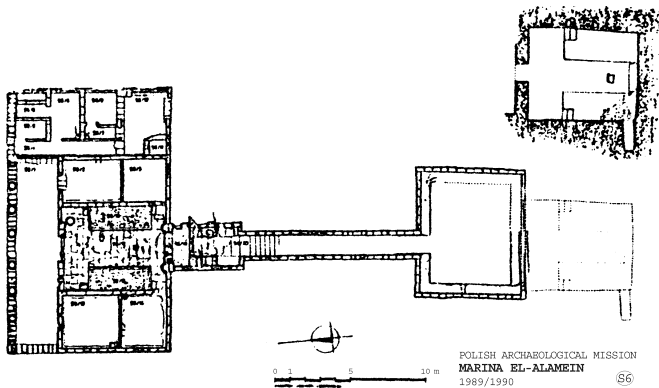


Fig. 3. Funerary monument S 6 in the southwestern part of the necropolis.

were to be cut. Two burials were found in the loculus. Three other skeletons lay on a heap of debris in the corner of the room and on the bench nearby.

The eastern part of the shaft has not been explored as yet. One cannot exclude that another chamber will be found here. The monumental scale of this complex is striking. The fineness of the superstructure and the dimensions of the underground part contrast with the unfinished state of the chamber, which was presumably intended as the main one, lying as it is on the main axis of the tomb. The total length of this tomb, taking together the superstructure and the underground part, is 42 m. It is undoubtedly one of the largest burial complexes of the Early Roman period in Egypt. Presumably, it was constructed in the 1st century AD and existed till the beginning of the 2nd century AD. At this time, it was apparently destroyed to some extent, the ruins subsequently serving as a place for various more or less accidental burials.

Gifts accompanying the burials mentioned in this report were by custom extremely modest, remaining in contrast with the monumental character of the architectural complexes. Nevertheless, the

few objects that were recovered are of value for they supply dating evidence. The box-like tomb structures may be dated on the basis of some terracotta oil lamps and glass vessels (mainly unguentaria and balsamaria) to the period from the end of the 1st century BC to the second half of the 1st century AD. A similar date can be assigned to hypogeum T 1GH.

The monumental nature of the tombs on the southwestern necropolis at Marina el-Alamein corresponds to a peak in the development of the ancient town. At present some extensive living complexes are being excavated by the EAO in the area of the settlement. These are large prosperous houses with inner peristyle courts and reception halls. The rich architectural decoration of these houses is executed with great care as are murals, fragments of which have been preserved in situ.

The first results of anthropological examinations draw an interesting picture of the population of this ancient centre. The sample collected in the necropolis is constituted by 78 skeletons. The mortality rate of children in the age group of 0-7 years is high (36%), typical of ancient societies. The mortality rate is almost identical for men and women in the age groups 20-35 (33%) and over 55 years (2.5% and 1.5%). However, in the age group 35-55 the mortality rate of males was six times that of females. The average age at death of males was about 40 years, of females around 35. It should be noted though that the sample is too small to permit any more general conclusions. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the average number of children borne to the women in this sample was three to five. Detailed findings concerning the morphological picture as well as pathology will be published separately by Dr. Maria Kaczmarek.