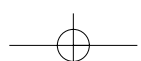
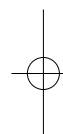
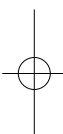
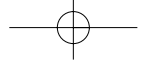


Wiktor A. Daszewski
with contribution of
Iwona Zych



MARINA EL-ALAMEIN





It was 1986 when Chinese workers leveling a stretch of coast some 96 km west of Alexandria started uncovering fragments of ruined buildings. They were preparing a place previously known as El-Bahreïn to be developed as a tourist village called Marina, one of the first to be built on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, just 6 km away from el-Alamein. Preliminary identification and documentation of what seemed to be a complete ancient town of the Hellenistic and Roman period was undertaken by the present author, while the official Egyptian authorities embarked on rescue excavations. Starting from 1987 the author has directed regular explorations carried out by a mission of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology.

The excavations were practically the first such comprehensive investigations conducted in this archaeologically little known region and it was plain from the start that the site abounded in architectural remains. Excavations brought to light several private houses of different type, public buildings, two baths, warehouses, a pier, a small temple, and a 5th-century church. Of particular interest, however, was the necropolis. The extraordinary richness of tomb forms surpassed the boldest expect-

tations. It soon became clear that the ancient town owed its prosperity to its position on the main overland and maritime routes. The finds reflected widespread trade contacts both locally (Alexandria and the rest of Egypt) and abroad, especially North Africa (Cyrenaica, etc.), Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Crete. Descriptions and mentions in ancient written sources speak of villages, towns and harbors on the northern coast of Egypt, but none appears to fit Marina. The site remains nameless even as archaeologists hope for a fortuitous discovery that will finally betray its identity.

The buildings in the town center as they stand today were built in the 1st century AD. Excavations have already uncovered a large paved square, probably a forum or agora, surrounded by colonnaded porticoes on three sides. These columns and the buildings around the square collapsed in a devastating earthquake and were never rebuilt, even though the square remained in use until the end of the 5th or even early 6th century. Archaeologists were able on the basis of the uncovered remains to reconstruct the height and appearance of these porticoes which featured capitals in a simplified Ionic order, once painted a vivid red and green to judge by the traces pre-

served on the plaster render, drums with stucco fluting and simple, plain bases which were painted black. The back wall and exedra of the southern double portico was lined with benches supported on lion's paws. At least one marble slab with a dedication to a Roman emperor, either Trajan or Hadrian, had once been displayed in this portico. Arranged in the southwestern corner of the square was a small sanctuary entered up a few steps; a base for a statue stood in the rear of this cella. On the opposite side, behind the eastern portico, there was a monumental building (temple ?) with its own paved peristyle court. Blocks of the architrave, most of them with mason's marks in the form of Greek letters cut on the underside, were found scattered all over the floor here. A rotunda (?) of some kind, c. 2.90 m in diameter, stood in the center of the open court. From the square one could also enter an earlier bathing complex with a *tholos* furnished with small tubs for individual bathers.

Excavations have concentrated so far on the southeastern corner of the square where two paved streets, each of them about 3.50 m wide, led off into the town. The building at the corner of the streets consisted of several rooms; the corner unit with doorways opening into the two streets, presumably a shop or tavern of some kind, was furnished with stone shelves. In due time a kitchen was installed in one of the doorways which was first blocked.

On the other side of the southbound street, opposite these presumed shops and extending behind the South Portico, there was a large public building, probably of the late 1st century AD. It consisted of a series of rooms, a bath, water tank, open courtyard, and a number of colonnades. Included in

this complex was a civic basilica entered from a side street. It was furnished with a semicircular apse provided with a high podium, the raised roof of the central part supported on two rows of four columns. A passage led from the basilica inside the complex, past a masonry pedestal, presumably intended for a marble statue. Part of the dedicatory marble inscription was still in place, mentioning a prefect of Egypt in the 14th year of Hadrian, on Hathyr the 20th (= 15 November 129). The name of the prefect had been hammered out, but it was possible to identify him as Titius Flavius Titianus.

From the start Marina had drawn scholarly attention by the quality of the architectural decoration found throughout the town and the rich, even luxurious character of some of the finds. This was most certainly a town of merchants and landowners accustomed to a prosperous and comfortable lifestyle, men and women who indulged in fine, richly decorated surroundings. Several houses uncovered by Egyptian archaeologists in the southeastern and northwestern parts of the town, now under restoration by a Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission directed by Stanisław Medeksza (see contribution below), are proof of this. A typical example is House H9. The entrance led almost directly into a small, three-sided peristyle with a more or less axial view to the main reception room. A splendid niche decorated the back wall of the room. Framed between engaged columns and pilasters with pseudo-Corinthian capitals of a type recently recognized as being specific to Marina, was a statue or painting (a partly preserved mural depicting a triad of divinities was found in a similar but larger niche unearthed in nearby House H10). Some

walls still preserved the mural decoration, composed typically of plain circles, bichrome bands of tangent and intersecting circles and squares of red, yellow, green and black colors. Water was supplied from a well arranged in the peristyle, connected with a deep cistern under the court. The house was furnished with a toilet, and included chambers of domestic and storage use, as well as an animal pen. The northernmost of the buildings explored so far, House H1 is also by far the largest. It had a long peristyle court with rooms arranged around it, and two water cisterns constructed below the floor. Colonnades ran around the court except for the southern side where there were no columns in the middle, opposite the entrance to the huge reception room. In smaller houses, like H2 or H19, there were only one or two columns (one on each side) in the court and only one reception room on the north or west of the court.

Located between two parallel longitudinal streets in the northwestern part of the town was a presumed public edifice, House H21c. The reception (?) room of this building featured a masonry platform built along one side wall. Four small columns on the front and an inscription to the emperor Commodus on the marble revetment of a sill topping the platform identified this structure as a commemorative monument. A foundation deposit in the form of an amphora with a bronze statuette of Aphrodite mounted on a small bronze altar was found in the western portico of the peristyle. A separate hall, again presumably of public use, stood to the north of this building. A major feature in the decoration of this hall was an exceptionally large and richly decorated aedicule, intended for a statue

(perhaps of bronze ?) or a mural, recently restored by architect Rafał Czerner. The hall may have served as a temple or general assembly place.

The close to 50 tombs of different types unearthed by our mission in the main necropolis reflect the town's history better than does the town architecture. The earliest tombs date from the late 2nd century BC, while the latest were still in use in the late 3rd century AD. The simplest form was an inhumation burial made in a rock-cut trench hewn in bedrock and covered either with flat limestone slabs or a gable roof. Markers on top of these graves included mounds of sand and stones encased by upright limestone slabs. Such modest graves often appeared side by side in sets, connected with one of the 1st century pillar tombs. They give the impression of family groupings with accentuated social stratification, suggesting the presence of impoverished relatives or servants buried next to their masters. Other tombs assumed more elaborate aboveground structures in the form of stepped pyramids, rising 2 m high, a sarcophagus with gable roof and pillar, either plain or decorated (a funerary banquet scene in relief in a niche has been preserved *in situ* on one of the monuments), standing on square stepped bases. Another form of tomb was a masonry cuboidal structure containing two or three loculi (sometimes even in tiers), sealed with slabs that occasionally bore decoration in relief, like a splendid Agathos Daimon coiling around a globe. Topping these about 7 m high box-tombs were the pillar monuments that have become Marina's landmark today. These monuments are decorated with "Nabatean" capitals of the specifically Marina el-Alamein type, decorative entabla-

tures and statues mounted at the very top – Horus falcons in Egyptian doublecrowns and sitting or standing lions have been recorded in the excavations. Another recent find is a limestone statue of a finely dressed woman which once stood in a naos on a large box-tomb; it is dated to the 1st century AD. Loculi packed with corpses are proof that tombs were in use for more than one generation. Extensive deposits of pottery and lamps near small altars located always in front of these tombs, on the east side, also testify to a long-lasting tradition of burnt offerings for the dead.

The most spectacular tombs in Marina were the hypogea belonging to the local elite. The earliest such tombs seem to have been erected in the 1st century BC and became frequent in the course of the 1st century AD and later. Standard tombs (30 to 42 m long) of the first type (T6, T8, T10, T16, T20, and T21) were furnished with an aboveground pavilion that functioned as a mausoleum. A colonnaded portico with capitals either in the Ionic or the specifically Marina type of architectural order gave entry into a large banquet room furnished with couches and a battery of rooms of household use, including kitchens and latrines, on either side. Outside the mausoleum and in front of the portico, there was always a big, square altar. A corridor with vaulted or flat-roofed staircase hewn in bedrock, descended from the back of the mausoleum to an open-air square court, usually about 6 m deep. Cut in the center of the court was a monolithic altar and in the case of one of the biggest tombs, also a well 10 m deep supplying water for funerary rituals. Burial chambers – one, two or three – often with rock-cut benches along the walls, opened off the side walls; the niches for the ac-

tual burials were cut into the walls in tiered rows and sealed in a variety of ways – one such form of closing were slabs decorated with false doors in relief, recalling similar closing slabs from Hellenistic Alexandria.

The simpler type of hypogean tomb (T1GH, T7, T13, T14, T28, T29), usually smaller (22 to 26 m long), had, instead of a mausoleum, an aboveground kiosk or roofed vestibule giving access to the staircase that led down to the open-air court and funerary chamber(s). In one such chamber an offering table was found bearing representations of fruits, vegetables, bread and a round receptacle for liquids.

While lead and wooden coffins or biers are in evidence, many of the corpses found in the hypogea were mummified. A portrait painted on a thin wooden panel (so-called Fayum portrait) attached to one of the mummies was a fortuitous discovery in the climatic conditions of the site and indeed, it was the first time that such a portrait was found in the north of Egypt. This particular portrait has been compared to a life portrait of the dead man, reconstructed from a cast of the skull by Caroline Wilkinson, then of Manchester University, and a strong resemblance was affirmed. Fragments of several other portraits of men, women and children, unfortunately severely deteriorated, have confirmed the commonness of this custom in the town.

Who were the people of Marina? The tombs have yielded extensive anthropological material that, once it has been studied, will provide a picture of this sedentary and prosperous population. They have also provided a few tantalizing hints as to the identity of these people: carved Greek names on the pillar tombs – one Ptolemaios and a married couple Prota and

Archonides, and a theophoric Greek name, Apollos, painted under one of the loculi in an underground tomb. It seems that these particular residents of Marina, like many others who commissioned portraits to be placed on their mummies in the great hypogea, had been settled in the region for centuries and had thought of themselves as

being of mixed Greek and Egyptian origin, being either Greek-speaking or bilingual. Further studies should tell us more about the origins of this population and its decline, and draw a picture of what everyday life was like in a small harbor town on the Egyptian Mediterranean coast in Hellenistic and Roman times.

Restoration in Marina el-Alamein

by Iwona Zych

To receive that second lease on life that comes with a presentation to the general public the ruins of the Marina el-Alamein site have to depend on accomplished architects and restorers. Two decades of concerted documentation, preservation and restoration effort by the Polish Centre, following in the wake of successive archaeological discoveries, have changed the site into an attractive historic location, catering to a rapidly growing vacation and tourist industry on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt.

The first years of the work were marked by architectural inventorying and studies of the uncovered remains, as well as experiments with conservation materials and technologies in the difficult climatic conditions of the site. Designs were prepared for the protection of the most important remains and plans were drawn up for gradually restoring extensive sectors of this veritable Egyptian Pompeii, concealed under sand instead of lava. This conservation effort, from the start conceived of as a Polish-Egyptian project, started with a season of intensive documentation and inventorying work by a team from the Centre's then partner, the State Ateliers for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, directed by Włodzimierz Bentkowski. Once architect Jarosław Do-

browski took over in 1990, his team from the Polish Centre made short work of raising the first three pillar tombs uncovered by archaeologists in the preceding years. These pillars have become a veritable landmark of the Marina site, dominating the ruins today and beckoning to passers-by, just as they had done in Antiquity. Another two pillar tombs have been restored in recent years, making this view of the ancient town still more attractive.

After another change of guard in 1995, when architect Stanisław Medeksza from the Wrocław University of Technology took over the direction of the Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission, the focus of the conservation work moved to the ruins of the ancient town. A decade in the field has resulted in the protection and restoration of a large integrated quarter of private houses, as well as selected buildings uncovered in other parts of the city center. The objectives of this restoration project, apart from the obvious protection and consolidation of uncovered remains, was to make a whole section of the ancient town open to tourists, clarifying house plans, emphasizing elements of architectural interior decoration, and presenting the narrow winding alleys and small squares between buildings that imparted

a Mediterranean picturesqueness onto this town in its heyday. Most recently, the mission completed the restoration of a rare kind of commemorative monument, dedicated to the emperor Commodus, located in one of the buildings of the town near the harbor and commercial quarters.

Currently, the team has moved restoration activities into the town center, stepping in the wake of the archaeological mission

which has been digging a large space surrounded by porticoes and various public buildings. Concurrently with the major projects described above, the restorers continue to carry out required preservation and maintenance conservation in all parts of the site. The effect of their work will be an archaeological park which the Supreme Council of Antiquities plans to open to the general public in the near future.

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*General view of the main town square in Marina el-Alamein during excavations
(Photo W.A. Daszewski)*





Ruins of a civic basilica with a view of the explored part of the town center in the background and the lagoon and sandbar with modern tourist-village architecture in the distance. 2004 (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

Pedestal with remains of an inscription recording the Prefect of Egypt Titus Flavius Titianus (AD 129) (Photo W.A. Daszewski)





House no.1 in the northern part of Marina, view from the south with the modern tourist village in the background (Photo S. Medeksza)

Reassembled aedicule from one of the houses in Marina. 1988 (Photo W.A. Daszewski)





Reconstructed commemorative monument to Commodus from House H21c. AD 197 (Photo R. Czerner)

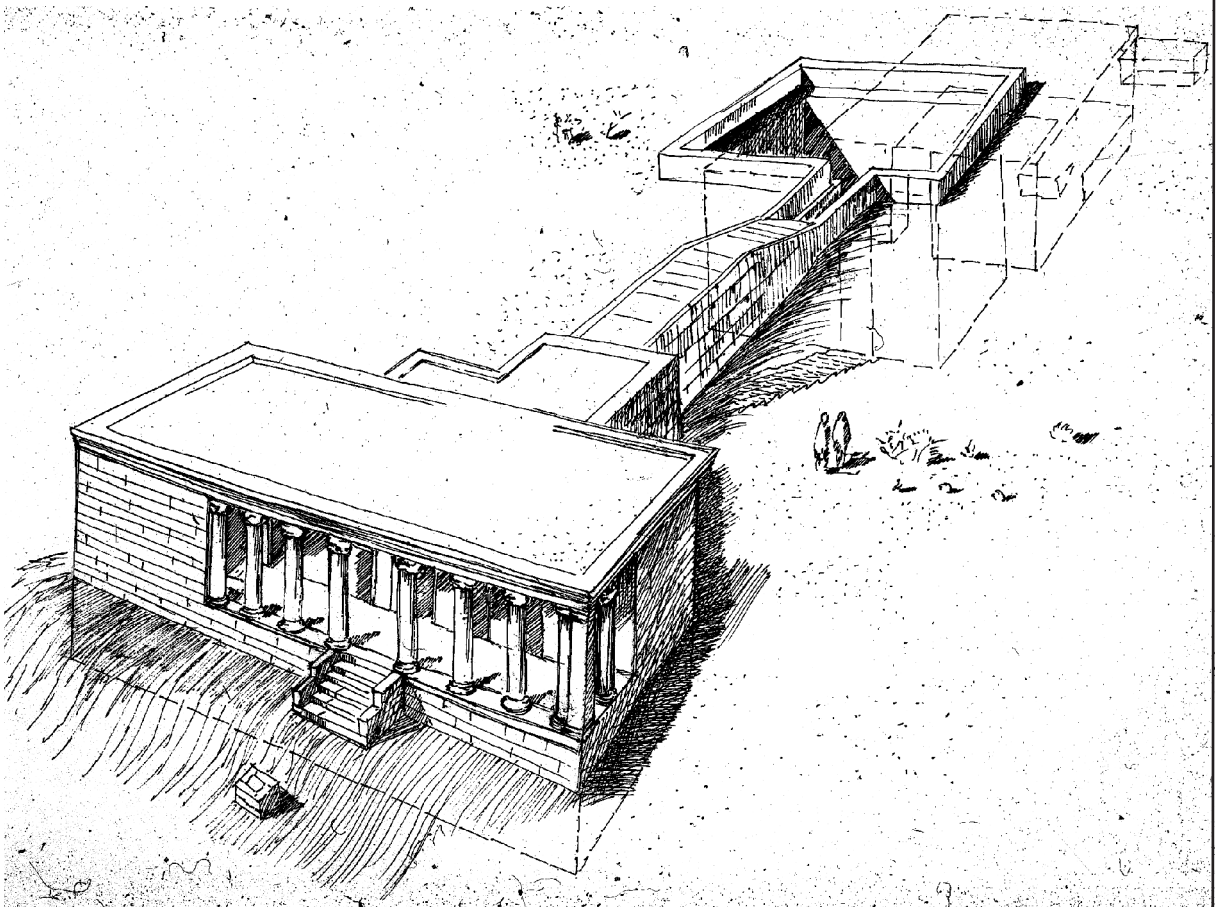
The pillar tombs of Marina. In this already historical photo, three of the pillars have been reconstructed, the remains of another one lie in the foreground, toppled by an earthquake (Photo W.A. Daszewski)





*Restored columns in the façade portico
of the mausoleum of Tomb T6
(Photo S. Medeksza)*

*Theoretical reconstruction of
mausoleum-hypogeum Tomb T6 presenting
all the constituent parts of these huge tombs
(Drawing J. Dobrowolski, T. Kaczor)*





Funerary statue of a woman. Limestone. 1st century AD
(Photo W.A. Daszewski)

Funerary portrait on a wooden panel, early 2nd century AD,
and on the left, life portrait reconstruction based on the man's skull
(Photo W.A. Daszewski (right), C. Wilkinson)

