

# Wiktor A. Daszewski

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## Marina El-Alamein: Excavations 1997

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## MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

### EXCAVATIONS 1997

Wiktor A. Daszewski

The month-long campaign lasted from March 4 until April 5.<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork was concentrated on the Western Necropolis of the ancient site (fig. 1). The investigation of the tombs was conducted in such a way as to have a full and detailed documentation prepared, while leaving the preserved structures protected as much as possible and ready for future consolidation and conservation work. This method of work assumes that parts of the tombs are left deliberately covered with sand, thus assuring the best temporary protection of the preserved ancient substance. Wherever possible, the Mission proceeded with a partial rebuilding of the walls.

#### TOMB 16

Tomb 16 (total length 32.20 m, figs 2 and 3) had been identified during the past season, but had not been excavated except for the northern part of the aboveground banquet chamber of the hypogeum, abutting the western wall of the temenos of Tomb 11.<sup>2</sup> It is located on the same line as T 13, T 14 and T 11. The banquet chamber, oriented northwest, had a two-step entrance (L. 1.08 m) in the northern wall. The room was rectangular in plan (8.45 x 5.72m) and contained two long banquet beds (*klinai*)

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<sup>1</sup> The team directed by the author comprised Mrs. I. Zych and Mr T. Witzcak, archaeologists; Mr Z. Solarewicz, architect; Prof. Dr. M. Kaczmarek, physical anthropologist; Mr W. Jerke, photographer. The SCA was efficiently represented by Mr. Mohammed Ali Abd el Razek, Chief Inspector of Marina, assisted by inspectors, Messrs. Mahmoud Roshdy Embaby and Mamduh Mahmoud Mohammed. The Mission would like to express its gratitude to the respective Authorities of SCA and especially to Mr. Ahmed Abd el Fatah, Director General of the Graeco-Roman Museum and the Alexandria Inspectorate.

<sup>2</sup> *PAM* VIII, p. 80.

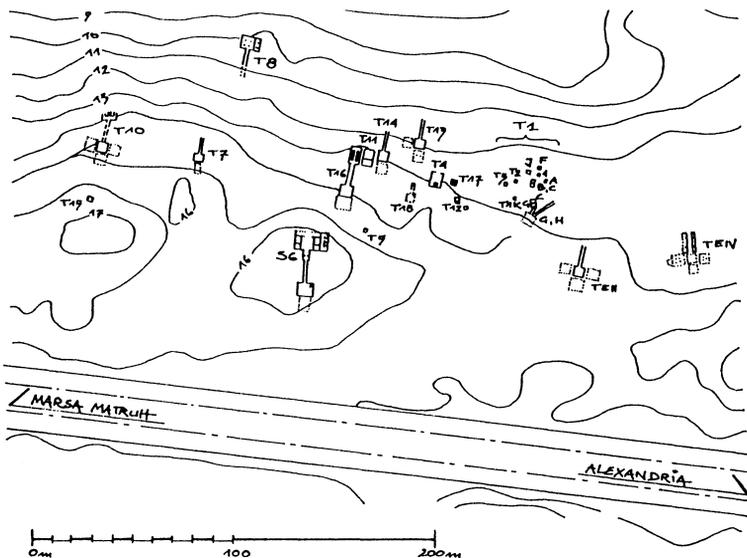


Fig. 1. Marina el-Alamein. Western Necropolis.

set longitudinally along the east and west walls of the room, at a distance of 0.36 m and 0.41 m from them respectively. Both beds (L. 5.12 m, W. 1.45 m, H. 0.81 m) were originally provided with headrests (H. 0.23 m at bottom 0.31 m) at their southern end. The one from the eastern kline was found lying on the floor of the chamber and has been restored to its original position. The bed fronts reveal corner moldings imitating a simple wooden construction. On the inside upper edge of both beds, square mortises were found (W. 0.10 m, H. 0.08 m) cut transversally through the blocks at regular intervals. Measuring from the north end, the first mortise in the east bed was found at 1.82 m of the length, the second 1.38 m further south, and the third 1.27 m away from the previous one and 0.30 m from the bed's southern end. The mortises of the east bed correspond exactly to those in the western couch. They were apparently intended for wooden (?)

tenons. While it is impossible to be absolutely certain about the purpose of this arrangement, it could be argued that the tenons were part of a lamp-stand structure that was used during banquets or supported trays. Nonetheless, the proof for such a hypothesis is lacking.

A door in the rear (southern) wall of the banquet-room (1.10 m across) gave access to a corridor (L. 1.60 m; W. 1.30 m) which led to staircase (L. 9.00 m) that was roofed over with long limestone blocks. Some of these beam-like blocks are still preserved in place. Others, mostly broken, were found in the fill inside and outside the corridor's wall. Yet another door was found, opening off the east wall of the corridor just behind the south wall of the banquet-room. This side door (W. 0.80 m) was blocked with blocks, both rough and dressed, at a later point in the tomb's use.

The staircase, which is hewn in bedrock with the upper parts made of masonry, leads down to a rectangular open-air court (L. 5.45 m; W. 4.80 m; H. c. 7 m) that was also cut in the rock in the lower parts. A protective masonry shaft of an estimated height of 3 m encircled the courtyard, rising some 1.50 m above the ground level of the time. The walls of this shaft, set upon bedrock, were supposed to prevent sand from filling the court below. Sand which had accumulated against the walls of this shaft over the ages eventually led to parts of the structure collapsing into the courtyard. A section of the wall which was found lying to the south of the tomb was knocked down presumably during an earth tremor. It may be taken for granted that a square altar is found in the middle of the court, as was the case in the other tombs of this type, but the lower part of the court was left unexcavated, covered with sand to protect the structure.

A huge rock-cut funerary chamber is entered through a high rectangular opening in the south wall of the courtyard (1.60 m). The chamber is rectangular (L. 6.30 m; W. 5.70 m; H. 4.50 m). A large transversal loculus was cut in the center of the south

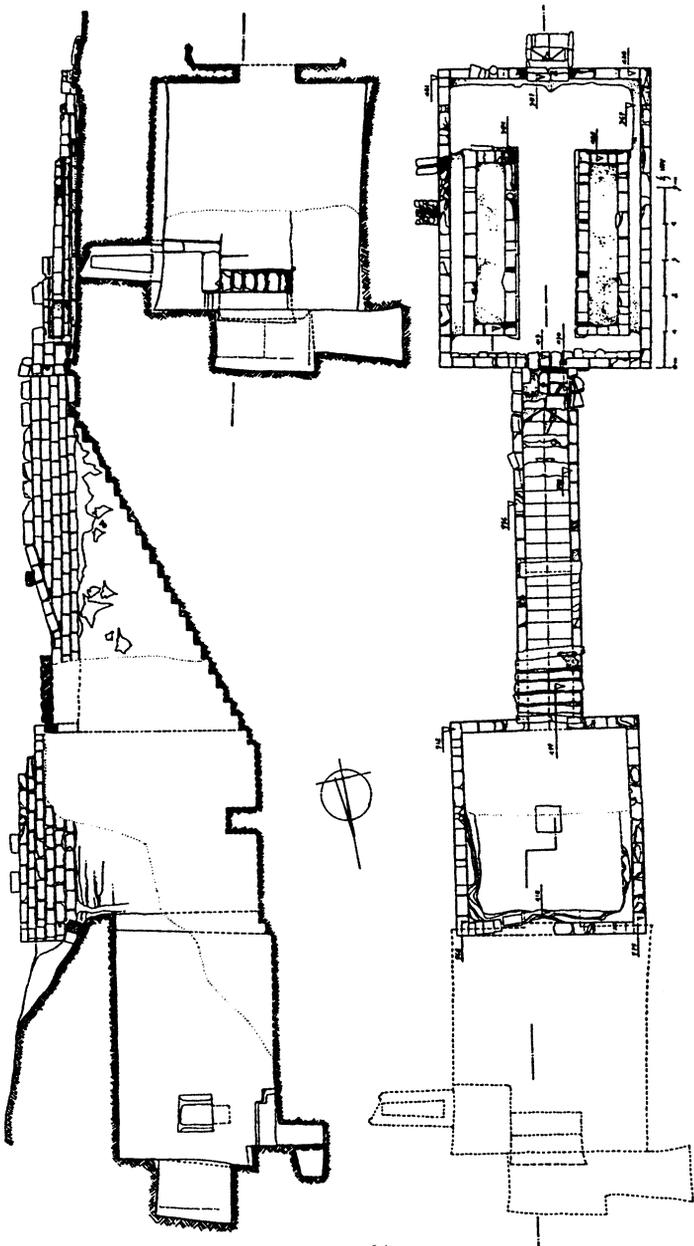
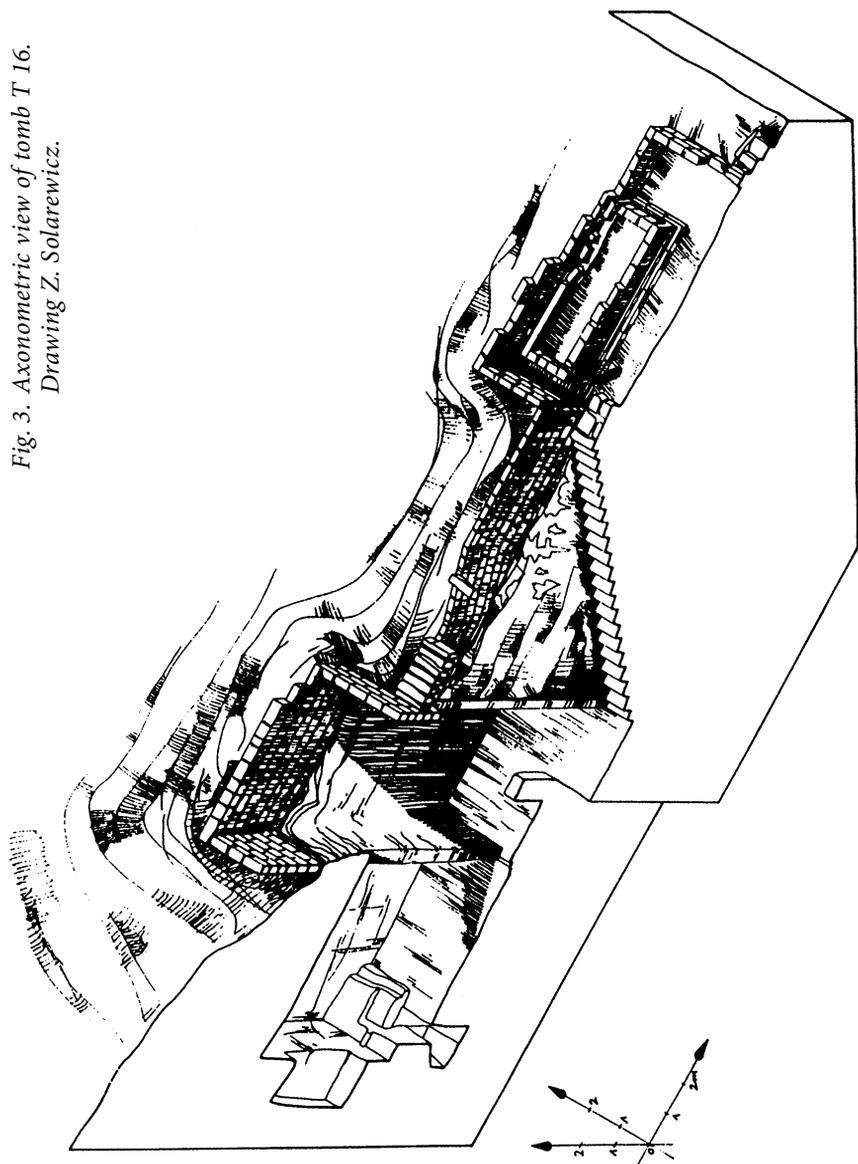


Fig. 2. Plan and section of tomb T 16.  
Drawing Z. Solarewicz.

Fig. 3. Axonometric view of tomb T 16.  
Drawing Z. Solarewicz.



wall and preceded by an offering table cut in the rock directly below it (L. 2.05 m; W. 0.60 m; H. 0.77 m). Another lower and recessed loculus extends from the central one toward the east; it seems to have been cut at a later time. A longitudinal loculus with a sort of sarcophagus cut into the floor and once closed with slabs of limestone, was hewn near the southwestern corner of the west wall.

The central loculus contained thirteen burials of adults of both sexes, and seven children (from newborn to the age of 10). There is distinct evidence of at least some of the bodies having been mummified. Testifying to this are traces of several layers of bandages and gilded plaster. These remains, as well as bronze nails, fragments of glass vessels and wooden planks were found scattered all over, indicating that this rich tomb had been plundered thoroughly already in antiquity. A limestone incense burner in the form of a horned altar was found standing on the floor near the offering table. Distinct traces of a green patina on the upper part of the rear wall of the main loculus are suggestive of some metal stand (candelabrum!) that had once stood there, leaning against the wall for an extended period of time. A fragmentarily preserved lamp found nearby, probably of the first half of the 1st century AD, with two nozzles and a handle for suspending, may have once been part of such a stand.

The sarcophagus in the loculus in the western wall contained only one skeleton of a man (aged 50-54), Another three skeletons: male aged 40-44, another male aged 35-39 and a female 25-29 years old, were discovered in the sand filling the chamber. Apparently, they constituted secondary burials.

Upon close inspection, yet another loculus was identified in the floor directly under the offering table. A vertical shaft, measuring 2.00 x 0.61 m and 1.36 m deep, was cut in the floor in front of the table; it opened on a small loculus (L. 2.00 m; W. 0.99 m; H. 0.77 m in the front part to c. 0.50 m in the back) cut in bedrock 0.56 m below the floor level of the chamber. The entrance to the

loculus had been concealed very carefully with stonework and mortar, and the shaft had been filled with limestone detritus; the slabs closing the shaft were set even with the floor and equally well disguised.

The single burial in the loculus was that of a male (45-49 years of age). Curiously, there were no traces of mummification, nor was there any evidence of the body having been wrapped in a shroud or placed on a wooden bier, or inside a coffin. No funerary offerings were discovered. It is clear, however, that the deceased must have been a man of standing, otherwise why the special effort undertaken to assure his eternal rest?

Tomb 16 appears to have been built sometime in the 1st century AD and was reused for simple burials at a much later date, although it is difficult to determine exactly when. In each of the cases, these secondary burials took place when the funerary chamber had already been filled substantially with sand.

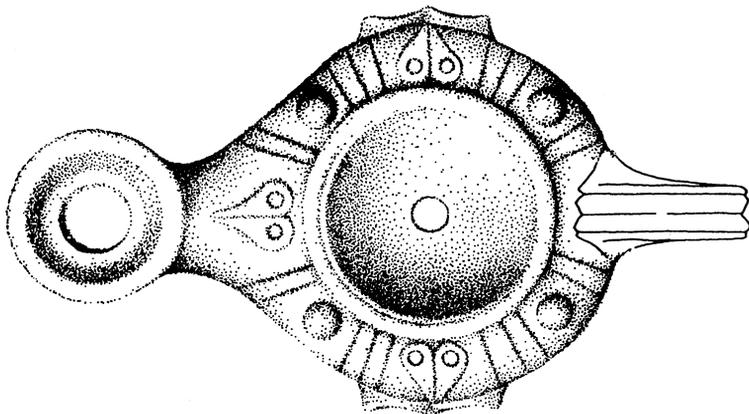
#### **TOMBS 13 AND 14**

Both tombs had been excavated and their architecture documented in the previous season.<sup>3</sup> There remained for investigation the burials in the loculi. During the current season a detailed anthropological examination of the skeletons was carried out, while the contents of the loculi was surveyed archeologically. Tomb 14 contained 18 loculi with burials. Altogether, there were thirty-eight bodies in the original burials and seventy-three in the secondary ones. It should be noted, however, that in at least five loculi the original and secondary burials were mixed together.

In Tomb 13, in the west chamber, there were eighteen original burials set in four loculi. In the southern chamber of the tomb, there were seventy original and fourteen secondary burials in nineteen loculi. Men, women and children were buried together. In T 13, two loculi (loc. 4 in the west chamber and loc. 2 in the south chamber)

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<sup>3</sup> PAM VIII, 1997 (1997), pp. 75-79.



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*Fig. 4. Terracotta oil lamp found during the excavations.  
Drawing T. Witczak.*

contained children alone, four and one respectively.<sup>4</sup> In one shallow loculus in the south wall of the southern chamber, fragments of a broken faience vase were found and a few burnt bones indicating incineration.

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<sup>4</sup> A separate report concerning the anthropological findings is in preparation by Prof. Dr. M. Kaczmarek.

Again, the presence of mummies was confirmed in both tombs (remains of resinated or bitumized bandages). Offerings included a few sherds of tableware, two terracotta oil lamps (fig. 4), three small thin leaves of gold of the type usually placed on the mouth of the deceased. Numerous bronze nails and pieces of wooden beams and planks testify to the presence of wooden coffins (biers?). In the main loculus (no. 3), in the western chamber of Tomb 13, a hollow molded figurine of lime mortar was discovered in the context of a male burial (fig. 5). It represented a standing woman in a long robe, with low neckline, fastened on the shoulders. Several dozens of small balls made of lime mortar (dia. 0.45-1 cm) were uncovered nearby. Yet another figurine of lime mortar of a standing naked female ("bride of the dead") was found in loculus no. 1 of the tomb's southern chamber, also accompanied by a few lime mortar balls. Upon completing the investigations, the funerary chambers in both tombs were closed.



Fig. 5. Hollow molded figurine of lime mortar.  
Drawing T. Witczak.

**PILLAR TOMB AREA**

Further excavations were carried out in the area of the pillar tombs in the eastern sector of the Western Necropolis. Yet another pillar tomb (Tomb 17) was uncovered a few meters to the north of Tomb 12. To judge by the position of the two loculi,

this newly discovered tomb (3.10 x 2.60 m at the base) seems to have been oriented latitudinally. The height of the box with loculi was about 1.75 m. The pillar was destroyed in antiquity. A few blocks from its structure were found scattered nearby the tomb.

Only the northern loculus was investigated. Finds consisted of some sherds of Roman amphorae of local origin. Anthropological examination of the skeletons revealed them to belong to two adults (a man and a woman) and a child aged 4. All the bones found were in very poor condition.

Several simple graves (G.9, G.10, G.11, G.12) were uncovered east of Tomb 1K and south of T1D. These graves were of a type already known from previous seasons: small, roughly oblong enclosures (L. 2.10 m; W. 0.90 m) made of limestone slabs that are set up vertically all around to form walls, with heaps of small stones and sand about 0.40-0.50 m high thrown inside upon the slabs that were used to cover the rock-cut trenches containing single burials.

Three amphorae were found in the vicinity of graves G.9, G.10 and G.11, either lying flat or set up vertically in the sand. None was complete; all were missing the neck and top of body, indicating deliberate breaking. The amphorae were filled with sand and small stones. Were these amphorae grave offerings or were they used for burials of newborn children whose bones usually disintegrate completely?

Excavations of grave T1E (L. 2.38 m; W. max. 0.99 m) of the above mentioned type revealed a cracked amphora lying on the slabs covering the box burial. The vessel was filled with sand, too.

In the area approximately 13 m west of temenos tomb 4, a new hypogeum tomb, oriented N-S, was found (Tomb 18). An entrance led from the north to a short corridor and a long vaulted staircase which is presently filled with sand. At a distance of 12.30 m from the door, a transversal wall was uncovered indicating the position of the southern edge of the open-air court.

Small finds from the area of the necropolis included sherds of broken amphorae, mostly of Mareotis origin (1st-3rd centuries AD).

There were also many pieces of imported amphorae from Crete and a few from Cilicia (2nd century AD), as well as an occasional sherd from as far away as Italy.<sup>5</sup> The few cooking pots that were found originated mainly from the Nile Valley and Palestine. Tableware was represented by different forms of Cypriot Sigillata, and by single sherds of ESA and ESB. Also found were fragments of glass bottles and plates, as well as a limestone bowl. Unstratified surface finds included two CS jugs, and the neck and handles of Tripolitanian amphorae with the Latin stamp of a potter (?): PROCUL.

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<sup>5</sup> The amphorae were identified by Dr. G. Majcherek, who is preparing a publication of this material from our excavations.