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Marina El-Alamein: Excavations 1998

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MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

EXCAVATIONS 1998

Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski

A month long campaign¹ was carried out in the Western Necropolis of the town (Fig. 1; see also general plan of the site on p. 52), in and around the hypogea identified and partly excavated during previous seasons.² The investigation of the tombs was conducted in such a way as to gather maximum information and to prepare a detailed documentation while protecting the structures against further decay and preparing them for eventual full scale consolidation. Whenever viable, we have proceeded with a partial anastylosis of the walls; where necessary, we have left a protective layer of sand covering the structures.

¹ The present campaign, sponsored as usual by the Polish Center of Archaeology, Warsaw University, lasted from March 4 until April 2. The team directed by Prof. Dr. Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski, comprised Mrs. Iwona Zych and Mr. Mikołaj Budzanowski, archaeologists; Ms Teresa Kaczor, architect; Mr. Waldemar Jerke, photographer. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was effectively represented by Mr. Abdel Latif el-Wakil, Chief Inspector of Marina, to whom we are very grateful for his daily assistance during our work.

The Mission would also like to express its gratitude to the Authorities of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, especially to Prof. Dr. Gaballa Ali Gaballa and to Mr. Abdel Salam Bakr, for their continuous help, encouragement and interest in our work.

² Cf. *PAM IX, Reports 1997 (1998)*, pp. 61-71.

po przerobieniu

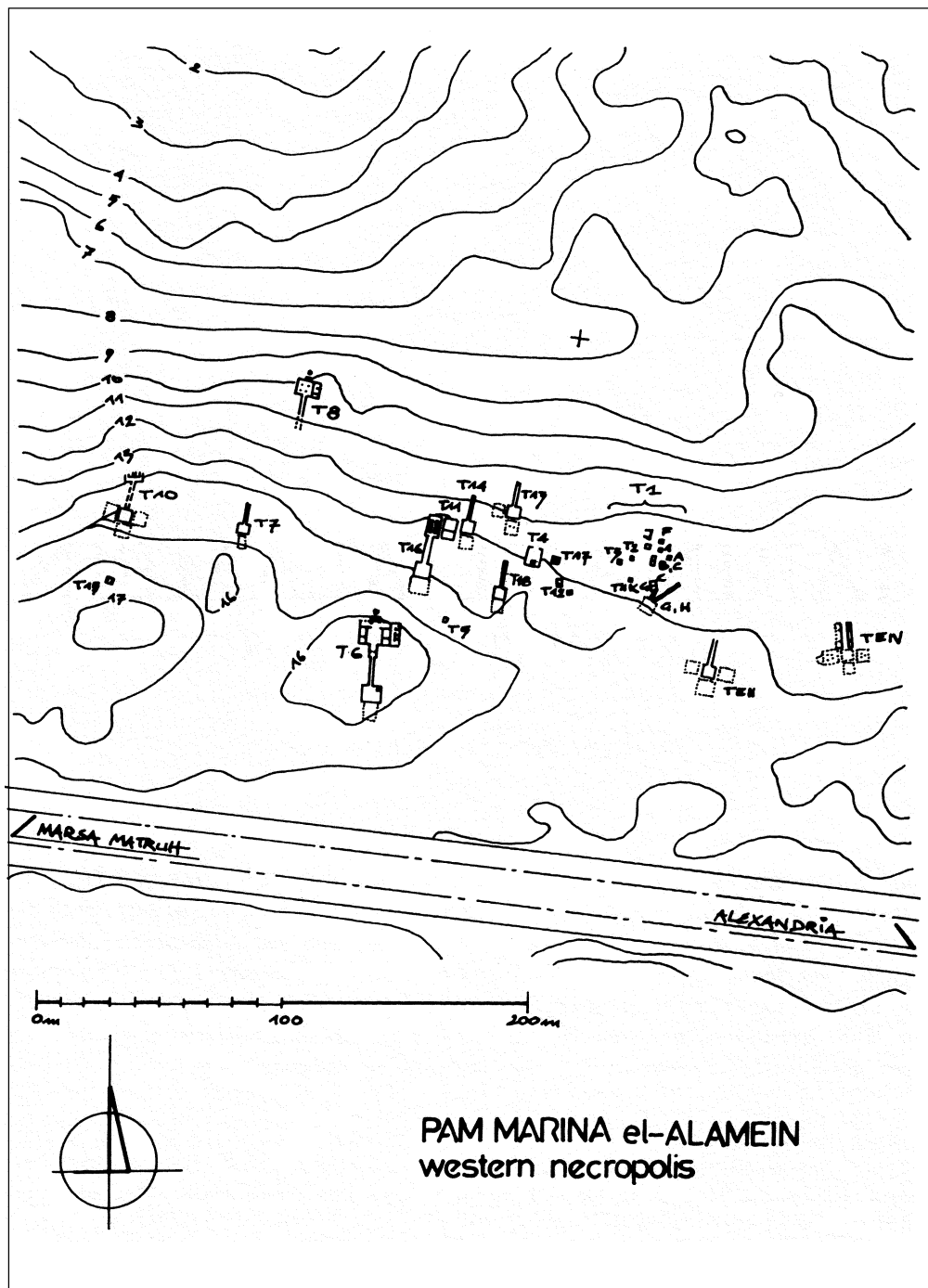


Fig. 1. General plan of the Western Necropolis
(Drawing Polish Archaeological Mission: J. Dobrowolski et al.)

TOMB 6

Hypogeum tomb T (=S) 6 and its aboveground mausoleum had been identified and partly excavated in 1988, 1990-1992, 1996.³

Aboveground and subterranean parts combined, the tomb constitutes the largest of the private funerary structures so far uncovered in Marina (44 m long). From its position on the coastal ridge, the tomb overlooked the ancient city site. Its Ionian colonnaded portico must have made the mausoleum a real highlight of the necropolis.

In the current season, investigations were concentrated on the north and south sides of the mausoleum [Fig. 2].

To the north, the portico floor was cleared in its entirety. A series of five monumental steps made of limestone blocks was found to lead up from the ancient ground level to the central (biggest) intercolumnium of the portico. The stairs were 2.50 m wide. Each step was 0.30 m deep with individual height differing slightly, from 20 cm in the case of the lowest one to 10 cm for the next four and 15 cm for the threshold. Bordering the steps on either side were stepped walls some 26 cm wide. The stylobate, projecting some 80-90 cm above the original ground level, was set upon deep foundations made up of semi-dressed limestone blocks that reached bedrock at a depth of about 1.50 m below the ancient surface.

In front of the steps, at a distance of 2.47 m to the north and set at a depth some 20 cm

below the level of the lowest step, an altar was found [Fig. 3], situated slightly off the main tomb axis (N-S). It was almost square in shape (0.91 x 0.87 m) and 0.45 m high, constructed of two layers of interlocking ashlar blocks and a central core filled with small irregular chips of stone imbedded in hard lime mortar.⁴ The layers corresponding to the use of the altar yielded the ashes of burned offerings. Potsherds date the earliest use of the burial complex to the second half of the 1st century AD.

On the south of the mausoleum, a small compartment was uncovered in the outside corner of the south wall of the structure and the east wall of the corridor leading to the subterranean part. The space was 2.10 m long (E-W) and 1.20 m wide (N-S). It was found filled with skeletons (10). Some of the bodies had originally been mummified, but the bitumized bandages were completely disintegrated due to weathering and humidity. The bodies had been placed in different positions, some of them lying face down (!), a few with heads to the east, others to the west. Apparently, the corpses and the mummies had been put in this place as an emergency solution, as a sort of secondary burial. Close to one of the mummified bodies, a small golden medallion was found; the front was decorated with a star-like ornament, while a loop attached to the back served to fix the ornament probably to a narrow diadem of the type worn by the persons shown in some of the mummy portraits.

³ Cf. W.A. Daszewski *et al.*, *MDAIK* 46 (1990), p. 32ff.; also *id.*, *PAM II, Reports 1989-1990* (1991), p. 31ff.; *PAM III, Reports 1991* (1992), p. 29ff.; *PAM IV, Reports 1992* (1993), p. 28ff.; *PAM VIII, Reports 1996* (1997), p. 37ff.

⁴ This is exactly the same technique which was used in the erection of the pillar tombs T1B, T1J and T1K, cf. *PAM III, Reports 1991* (1992), p. 41ff. and fig. 2; *PAM V, Reports 1993* (1994), p. 26 and *PAM VI, Reports 1994* (1995), p. 31.

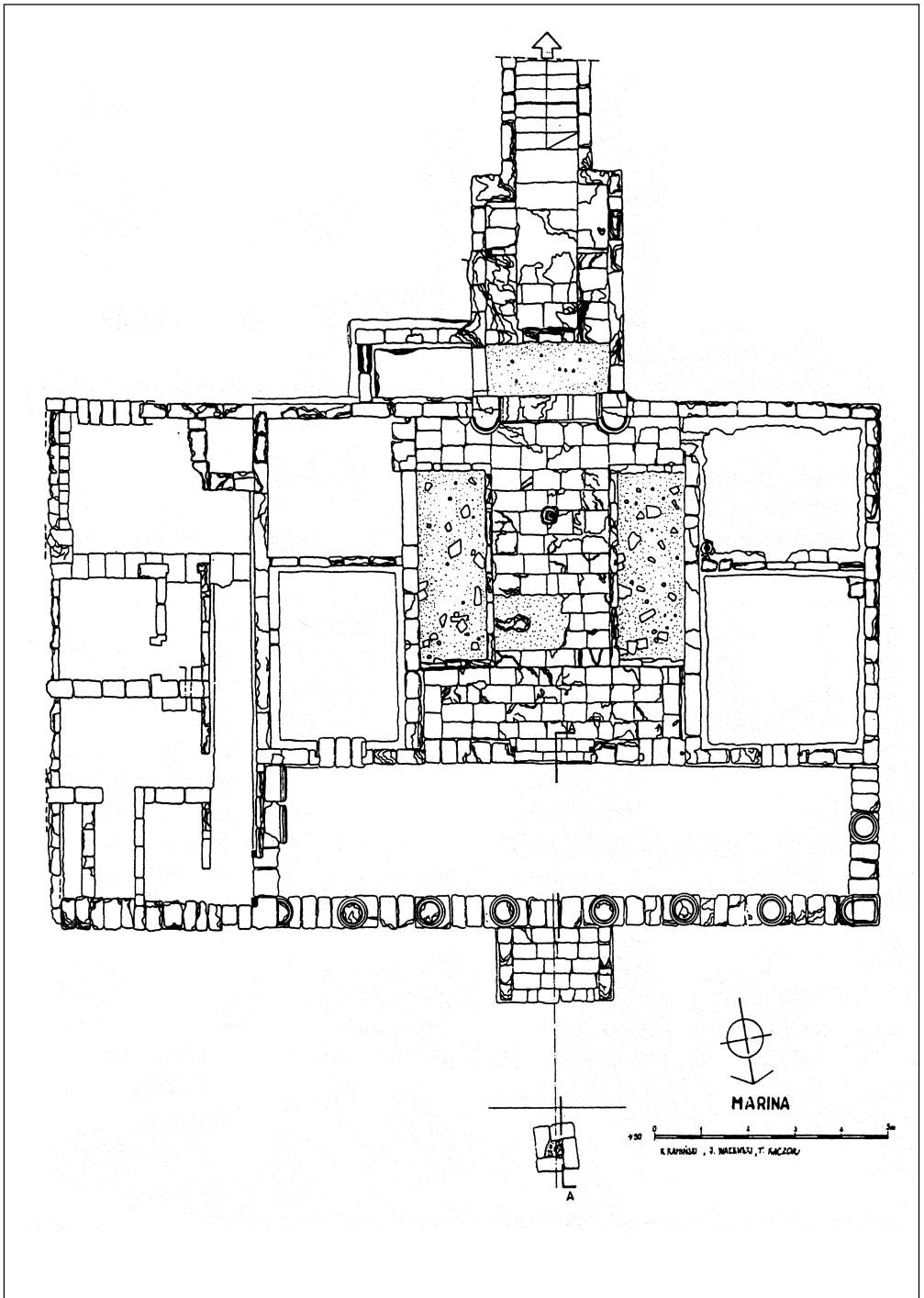


Fig. 2. Mausoleum T 6
(Drawing Polish Archaeological Mission: K. Kamiński et al.)

The presence of this secondary burial, characterized by an obvious negligence in the packing of the bodies, seems to prove the standing hypothesis that at least the mummified corpses had been kept elsewhere for quite a time (probably in the side rooms of the mausoleum), and, at least in this case, brought to the compartment already when the main funerary chamber had been filled in with sand. That some corpses had been mummified and others had not corroborates observations made in other tombs where only some, apparently very important (or the richest) members of the fam-

ily were accorded this costly treatment. The mummies were eventually buried next to the not mummified bodies which were wrapped in simple shrouds only and put inside the loculi in the funerary chambers. To summarize our latest investigations in T 6, it should be emphasized that the aboveground mausoleum of this tomb now appears to be the most spectacular funerary monument of this type and quite exceptional in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Its special importance lies in the fact that it most likely reflects what such mausolea-heroa in Ptolemaic-Roman Alexandria must have looked like [Fig. 4].



Fig. 3. *Altar and monumental steps leading to mausoleum T 6*
(Photo W.A. Daszewski)

TOMB 8

Excavations were carried out in front of the aboveground heroon.⁵ Here, too, the arrangement recalls what was found in T 6, but on a smaller scale. The steps – three of them, each about 30 cm deep (15; 16; 21 cm high), and the threshold (24 cm high) – were found to lead up to the main

building. The combined width of the flight of steps and side walls is 2.13 m. A square altar (0.80 x 0.80 m) was found in front of the steps, 1.10 m away. The pottery assemblage (amphorae sherds) points to the 2nd and 3rd century AD as the main period of use for this tomb.

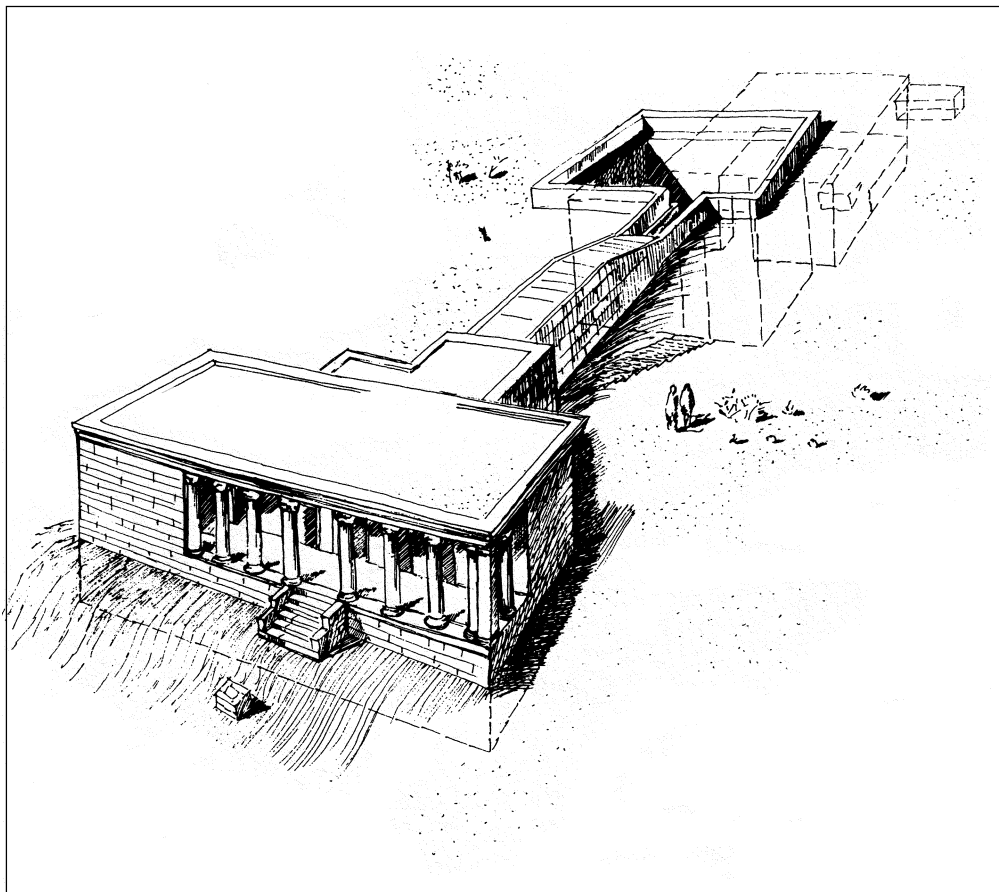


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of mausoleum T 6
(Drawing J. Dobrowolski, T. Kaczor)

⁵ Cf. PAM III, Reports 1991 (1992), p. 36 (T 7 = T 8); PAM IV, Reports 1992 (1993), p. 29.

TOMB 18

The most extensive excavation was carried out in Tomb 18, which had been identified in the past season.⁶

The tomb is of the hypogeum type, provided with a vaulted staircase leading to an open air court and a funerary chamber with loculi [Fig. 5]. The total length of the structure is 25 m. The open air court (5.20 x 5.25 m) is 6.28 m deep, including the protective wall of ashlar blocks, built on bedrock on all four sides. The part hewn in bedrock is itself 5 m deep. The staircase comprised a short, once roofed corridor (1.75 m in length, 1.40 m in width) provided with an en-

trance door, 0.95 m wide, at the northern end. The steps of the staircase (28 in all) were on average 0.16-0.18 m high and 0.30-0.42 m deep.

A square rock-cut altar (0.89 x 0.89 m) occupied the center of the court, rising to a height of about 0.70-0.80 m. Approximately in the middle of the west wall, 1.65 m above the floor of the court, a loculus, almost square in section (0.70 m wide, 0.80 m high), was cut into the rock. It is 2.08 m long. Inside, three skeletons had been laid with heads to the east.

The south side of the court consists of a wall cut in bedrock, approximately

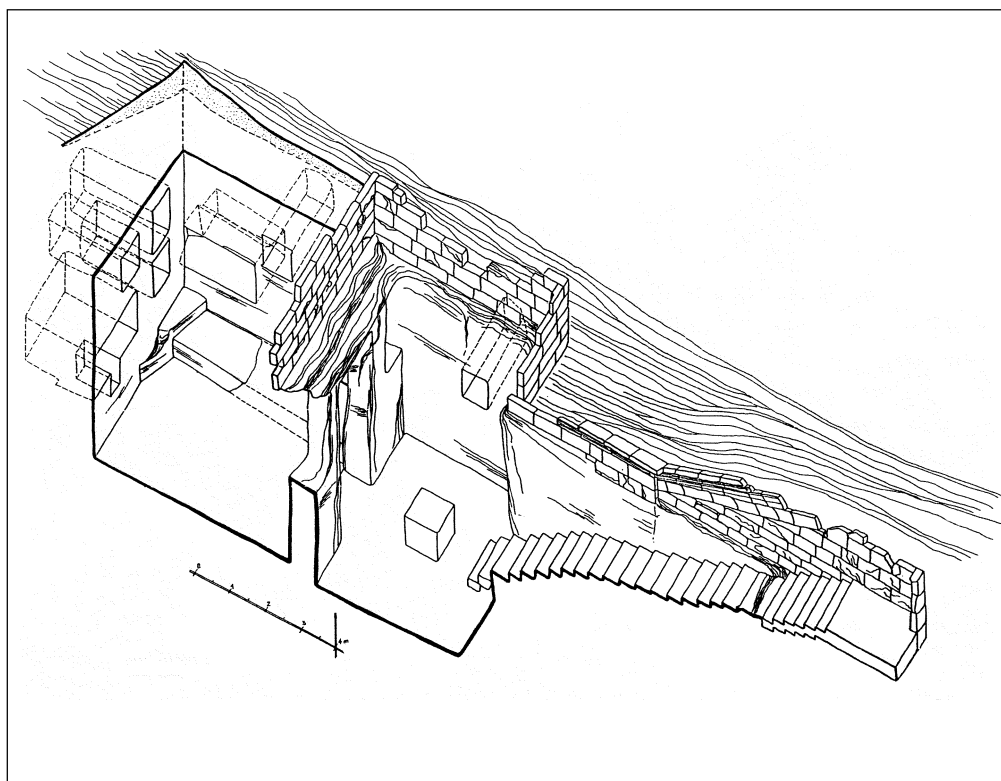


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of Tomb 18
(Drawing T. Kaczor)

⁶ PAM IX, Reports 1997 (1998), p. 70.

0.60-0.90 m thick, separating the court from the funerary chamber. Access to the chamber is through a central doorway, which is 4.05 m high and 1.20 m wide at the bottom (1.40 m wide about mid-height and 1.25 m at the top). Flanking the entrance are two window-like openings, the eastern one 2.25 m above floor level, the western one 2.40 m. The openings are 1.78 m and 1.85 m high and 0.75 m and 0.72 m wide respectively.

The funerary chamber is rectangular in plan, 5.40-5.50 m long (N-S), and 4.40 m wide. On the west side, it was provided with a rock-cut bench, which was 1.06 m wide and 0.40 m high. At the south end, where the bench meets the south wall of the chamber, there is a narrow shelf – 1.50 m long and 0.25 m high, which extends well beyond the width of the bench.

Nine loculi were hewn in the three sides of the chamber. Two loculi on the west wall contained altogether six burials. The four burial niches, arranged in two rows on the south wall, comprised 11 burials of men, women and children. On the east, there were three loculi, including an empty one, set in a single row high up on the wall; the remaining two contained six and three burials respectively. Traces of wooden biers or coffins were identified in two of the loculi, while pieces of bitumized bandages (of mummies) were found in four loculi.

In one of the loculi on the east wall, two piriform glass bottles (unguentaria)

accompanied the original burials, while a third glass bottle, tubular in shape, was found on the floor of the chamber, below one of the loculi in the south wall. From a loculus in the west wall comes a magnificent twin-nozzled oil lamp with volutes decorated with horse heads [Fig. 6]. Similar examples are known, for instance, from Isthmia, Cyprus, the Agora in Athens and Corinth to mention only a few.⁷ The lamp from Marina is one of the best preserved. Such lamps are usually dated to the second and third quarter of the 1st century AD.

In the southeastern corner of the chamber, a set of three pairs of vertically set ashlar blocks (0.68; 0.62; 0.56 m high)

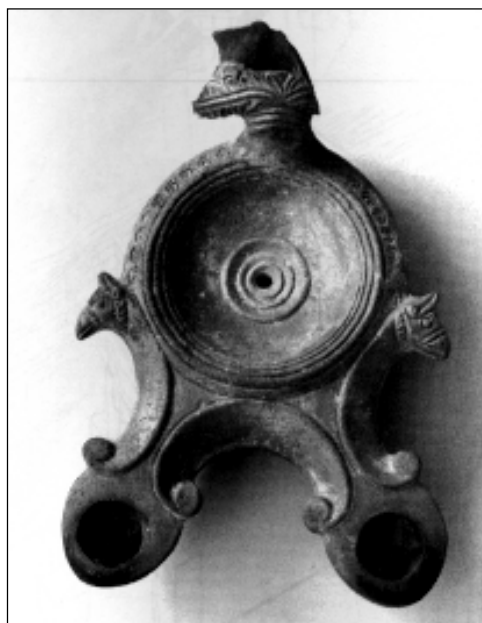


Fig. 6. Terracotta lamp from Tomb 18
(Photo W.A. Daszewski)

⁷ Isthmia: O. Broneer, *Isthmia III, Terracotta Lamps* (Princeton 1977), PL. 27, no. 2341a and Pl. 39d; p. 54; Cyprus: Th. Oziol, *Salamine de Chypre VII, Les lampes du Musée de Chypre* (Paris 1977), Pl. 30, No. 536, p. 176; Agora: J. Perlzweig, *The Athenian Agora VII, Lamps of the Roman Period* (Princeton 1961), p. 80, no. 96, Pl. 4, AD 50-115; Corinth: O. Broneer, *Corinth IV, ii, Terracotta Lamps* (Harvard 1930), no. 409; Pompeii (?), now Berlin: G. Heres, *Die römischen Bildlampen der Berliner Antiken-Sammlung* (Berlin 1972), p. 14, no. 14, Taf. 4 (complete, with triangular handle decorated with large leaf).

seem to have served as a support for an offering table (?). In between the blocks, a rectangular stone container (0.46 m long, 0.26 m wide, 0.12 m high) was discovered. Yet another similar but slightly less deep container was found near the entrance to the funerary chamber. Similar containers were previously found in several other hypogea in Marina. They recall such containers used as flower pots and represented on some Roman mosaics.⁸ Just inside the entrance to the chamber and to the right a shallow cavity cut in the floor was used as a stand for amphorae.

To judge from the pottery assemblage, Tomb 18, like most of the other hypogea, had been erected in the course of the 1st century AD, possibly in the second half of the century. This confirms our earlier observations that the apogeeum of the ancient town, to which this necropolis belongs, should be placed in the 1st and 2nd century AD. However, most of the large hypogea appear to have stayed in use well into the 3rd century and perhaps later.

In many of the loculi in Tomb 18, as was also the case in other tombs, burials from different periods were found side by side. Usually, the early (primary) burials had been pushed aside pell-mell to make place for successive burials. It seems that the tombs were used as burial places for a least two, but probably more generations. One should distinguish, however, between the use of the tombs for burial and as places for commemoration of the dead ancestors. Ample evidence has been found of offerings having been made for extended periods of time, even once the underground part of the tomb had already been filled with sand, making new

burials extremely difficult if not impossible. When the principal altar in the middle of the court had disappeared under a layer of sand, flat stones were laid above it in the same position and offerings continued to be made in the place. This process of adding new "altars" at a higher level was repeated a number of times. Traces of other types of offerings, such as fragmentary or complete amphorae with dedicatory inscriptions, were found in the sand fill of the court on different levels.

The small finds from Tomb 18, aside from what has been described above, consisted of three small lamps of early 2nd-century AD types, found in the sand fill of the chamber, and of two very large lamps of the 1st century AD – one with twin nozzles and decorated with a bust of Apollo on the handle – both placed on the parapet of the west window opening. In the sand fill by the south wall of the chamber, some 50 cm above the bedrock floor, a piriform jug of Cypriot sigillata was also found.

Other work at the site, in addition to the excavations in Tombs 6, 8 and 18, included the removal of sand, which the recent heavy winter rains had brought into some of the earlier investigated tombs, and of digging drains to prevent water from penetrating into the tombs in the future.

Documentation of decorated architectural elements found during rescue excavations in houses of the ancient town was also continued. Of special interest was a Corinthian capital of Early Roman date from House no. 31 in the northwestern part of the town near the lagoon. The capital was made of three plain limestone

⁸ Cf. W. A. Daszewski, *Dionysos der Erlöser* (Mainz 1985), Taf. 4 and 18, and Abb. 3.

drums set one upon another and decorated on the outside with acanthus leaves, volutes and rosettes molded in stucco and fixed on rectangular wooden wedges inserted in the drums.⁹ This particular

technique reminds us of the procedures used in Hellenistic sculpture in Alexandria. Many marble heads were completed with stucco in a similar way, especially with regard to the hair and back part of the head.¹⁰

⁹ I would like to thank conservator Mr. Piotr Zambrzycki for his valuable remarks on the technical aspects of the execution.

¹⁰ Cf. for instance the head of a Late Ptolemaic king [in:] H. Kyrieleis, *Bildnisse der Ptolemaer* (Berlin 1975), pp. 71 and 175, Taf. 64.