

# Wiktor A. Daszewski

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## Marina El-Alamein 1992

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## MARINA EL-ALAMEIN 1992

### Wiktor A. Daszewski

The season began on March 1 and lasted four weeks. Fieldwork was followed by a few study days devoted to completing the documentation.<sup>1</sup>

Excavations were concentrated in the area of the main necropolis located southwest of the city. Concurrently with this work, the mission undertook, in answer to a request made by Egyptian colleagues, the recording of monuments partly uncovered during earlier salvage excavations by the EAO.<sup>2</sup>

At the necropolis site work was carried out on the hypogeum T1GH. Moreover, two loculi in Tomb T1D were excavated, the mausoleum-hypogeum S6 continued to be uncovered, excavations proceeded in T7 and in the mausoleum-hypogeum T8. Also the exploration of the T10A structure was started (see Fig. 1).

The hypogeum T1GH is located in the eastern part of the necropolis, i.e., closer to the city. In past seasons the vaulted corridor-staircase which led to the underground chamber was uncovered along with the hypogeum itself, provided with numerous loculi. (Fig. 2) All the steps and the lower parts of the side walls of the staircase were cut in bedrock, while the upper

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<sup>1</sup> The Mission included Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski, Prof. Zofia Sztetyło, Dr. Tomasz Scholl, Mr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologists; Mr. Adam Dolot, architect; and Mr. Waldemar Jerke, photographer. The EAO was represented by Mr. Ezzat El-Hamahmy, Chief Inspector for the El-Hammam region. The Mission is indebted to him and Mr. Kamal Fahmy, Director for the Western Delta, for their generous help during fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> This concerned two tombs uncovered in part by Mr. Abdel Aziz Shennawy.

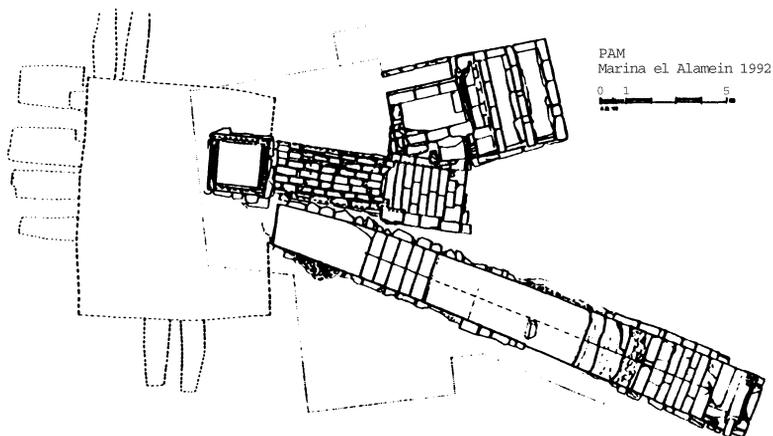


parts were constructed of ashlar limestone blocks. A monumental gateway led from the ground level into the staircase. The gateway was decorated with pilasters and a dentil lintel. A large square opening was cut in the ceiling of the hypogeum; aboveground it was surrounded by walls, which created a sort of light and ventilation shaft. For reasons of safety, the staircase-corridor could not be excavated completely before the necessary preservation work was completed.<sup>3</sup> Only afterwards was the lower part of the staircase cleared of the remaining sand. As it turned out, the steps stopped sharply about 1.20 m above the floor level of the hypogeum. Traces preserved on the last step, which is twice as wide as the other steps,<sup>4</sup> indicate that the builders of the tomb had originally intended to continue the staircase downward. However, a mistake in the calculation of the angle of decline must have occurred, causing the work to be stopped. Most likely the cutting of the underground chamber must have been carried out through the shaft, independently of the staircase which seem to have been started at a later stage in the tomb's construction. Owing to the mistake, the steps ended too high, and consequently the staircase remained unused for a long period. Instead, another more monumental corridor and staircase were hewn to the east of the first one. The task of the present season was to investigate the lower part of the unfinished staircase and the other corridor. The latter enters the hypogeum through a large rectangular opening c. 3 m high and 1.20 m wide, completely cut in bedrock. Over a distance of

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<sup>3</sup> See J. Dobrowolski, *PAM III* (1991), 1992, p. 45ff.

<sup>4</sup> J. Dobrowolski thought the steps had been completed inside the hypogeum and simply removed at a later date; see id., *PAM III* (1991), 1992, p. 47. Present finds exclude this hypothesis.



*Fig. 2. Tombs T1GH and T1D after cleaning of the secondary staircase. Plan J. Dobrowolski and A. Dolot.*

2.80 m the corridor runs flush with the hypogeum floor, then it rises forming an impressive 15 m long staircase (Fig. 2). It was cut in bedrock with only the uppermost steps (the last 4 m) and the top parts of the side walls being constructed of limestone blocks. On ground level, a threshold c. 1.10m wide has been preserved. The corridor is widest at the top, c. 1.80 m, while at the bottom it measures only 1.20 m. Openings preserved in regular intervals on top of the walls could have served as mortices for wooden beams, suggesting a flat roof over the staircase. The pottery found in the fill of the corridor, on the floor and the lowest steps includes a stamped amphora handle belonging to a Cnidian amphora of the late 1st century BC and a triangular lamp handle datable to the first half of the 1st century AD, decorated with a palmette. All these finds suggest that the second staircase was constructed and used at the turn of the era. In the top parts of the fill the finds were definitely later,

from the latter part of the 1st and the 2nd century AD. It would seem that for some reason this corridor soon stopped being accessible, having suffered damage especially in the central part and being filled with sand. The old vaulted staircase was reopened then. To facilitate access to the underground chamber two large limestone blocks (1.03 x 0.54 x 0.24 m and 1.20 x 0.54 x 0.20 m) were set below the threshold on a thick bed of sand (0.60 m). The bottom step and the sand bed reached a rectangular altar (1.00 x 0.98; height 0.37 m) which was cut in bedrock on the floor of the hypogeum. On the altar and spread around it were large quantities of ash from burnt offerings. The altar was cut directly under the shaft in the roof, letting smoke escape through it. The vaulted western staircase and the hypogeum remained in use until the second half of the 1st century AD. The tomb with its double entrance is unique in Egyptian sepulchral architecture of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The plan encompassing a hypogeum with a light and ventilation shaft above an altar finds close analogies in the Late Hellenistic hypogea of Alexandria.

**T1D.** Two loculi were investigated. They are set longitudinally to the south of the three main loculi, which have an E-W orientation and constituted the oldest part of the tomb (Fig. 2). The larger of the two explored loculi was placed directly on the N-S axis of the older part of the tomb. On the east it made use of the western wall of the hypogeum T1GH. The western wall of the loculus stood directly upon sand. Inside the loculi there were numerous burials in three layers. Their total number was 16, including seven adults and nine children. The lowest layer contained three fragments of lamps, of which two were presumably from the late 1st century BC and one from

the mid 1st century AD. The smaller loculus lay to the west alongside the larger one and was built onto it at a later date in rather haphazard fashion. Inside there were the scant remains of one skeleton without any accompanying finds to date this inhumation.

**S6.** It is the largest of the tombs discovered as yet by the Polish mission. The aboveground heroon-mausoleum and parts of the underground hypogeum (staircase, inner court, funerary chamber) had been uncovered earlier. This year the objective was to complete the clearing of the entrance to the chamber. This necessitated the removal of a great amount of sand and limestone blocks fallen from the retaining wall which had once protected the court from blown sand. The entrance to the chamber turned out to be 3.60 m high and 1.15 m wide, with a threshold 0.19 higher than the level of the court. The threshold presumably protected the chamber from rainwater; the winter months are very rainy in this region.

Also the western burial chamber was reopened this season in order to remove the mummy portrait previously found there.<sup>5</sup> The object was then transported to the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.

**T7.** The clearing of the staircase leading to the inner court was completed this season. It was mostly cut in bedrock. Only in the part above ground level were the walls built up with limestone ashlar blocks to a height of 1.60 m. The original roof of stone beams laid flat and supported on the side walls has been preserved in places. The full length of the staircase is 12 m. A well preserved bowl of red clay was discovered near the

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<sup>5</sup> See W.A. Daszewski *PAM III* (1991), 1992, pp. 34f.

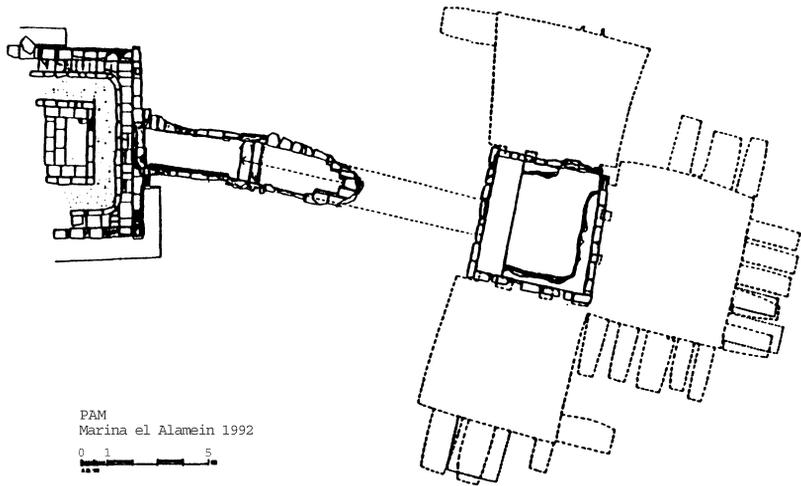
lowest step; it can be dated to the early 1st century AD. The inner court is at a depth of 6.90 m below ground level.

**T8.** The aboveground part of this tomb was excavated in the previous season.<sup>6</sup> It was a rectangular pavilion with a banquet hall equipped with two wide benches (couches) and several storage and domestic rooms. The uncovering of the staircase presently undertaken, regardless of the fallen in walls and roof along its length, brought some 14 m of it to light; however, no trace was uncovered as yet of the inner court and of the hypogeum. It would seem that the size of this complex is considerable and it should probably be placed among the most monumental of the tombs found at the site.

**T10A.** Interesting work was carried out in a stone complex lying far to the west of the necropolis (Fig. 3). The complex is preserved to the extent that the tops of the walls are visible on the surface; unfortunately, this has also been the cause of its destruction in modern times. The northern part of the structure was cut off and destroyed irretrievably by a bulldozer tracing an access road to the tourist village being constructed at Marina. Investigations of the preserved southern part indicated yet another aboveground mausoleum consisting of a rectangular banquet hall with benches (couches) to judge by the remains. Its width was 6.90 m from east to west, while about 4.50 m of the length has survived. Adjacent to the mausoleum on the south, on its central axis, there is a slightly crooked corridor which is 1.35 m wide. The first part of this corridor, 3.50 m long, is flat; then it turns into a vaulted staircase leading down to an inner court cut in bedrock at a considerable depth. The

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<sup>6</sup> Id., *PAM III* (1991), p. 36.



*Fig. 3. Tomb T10A.  
Plan A. Dolot.*

full length of the corridor and steps is 13.50 m. On three sides of the court (east, west and south), there are large funerary chambers with numerous loculi in the walls. Particular chambers are separated from the court each by two pillars cut in the rock, making it in reality a peristyle court. (Fig. 3) This architectural solution follows the tradition represented by the Hellenistic tombs in Alexandria (the Mustafa Pasha necropolis, for example) and in Nea Paphos. However, neither in Alexandria nor on Cyprus, were there any sufficient traces of above-ground structures preserved. The discoveries at Marina are therefore of utmost importance for the proper interpretation of the tombs in Alexandria. The preserved aboveground and underground structures found at Marina made it possible to analyze their functioning in a more comprehensive manner. Furthermore, they bring to mind analogies, in respect to structure

as well as function, in the form of the Egyptian tombs of the Late Period from the regions of Assasif and Deir el-Bahari, for instance. A full interpretation of the tombs, which will be possible only after they have been completely excavated, will probably help not only understand more fully the genesis of the Hellenistic tombs in Alexandria, but perhaps also lead to their reinterpretation.