

# Stanisław Medeksza

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## Marina El-Alamein: Conservation Work, 2000

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# MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

## CONSERVATION WORK, 2000

Stanisław Medeksza

*The Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission continued its sixth season at Marina el-Alamein from March 28 to May 30, 2000.<sup>1)</sup> As before, the object of the preservation and conservation work is a complex of private residences: H 9 and H 9a, H 10, H 10a and H 10b, as well as H 21c. Additionally, this year the mission carried out some work in Tomb-hypogeum 6 (Fig. 1).*

1) The Mission headed by Prof. Dr. Stanisław Medeksza, architect, was staffed by: Dr. Rafał Czerner, architect; Mr. Wiesław Grzegorek, architect-constructor; Dr. Józef Adamowski, constructor; Dr. Andrzej B. Biernacki, archaeologist, Mr. Piotr Zambrzycki, sculptor, conservator of stone; Ms Małgorzata Ujma, architectural painting conservator. The Egyptian side was represented by Site Director, Mr. Abdel Latif el-Wakil, to whom we are indebted for his continuous efficient assistance at every step.

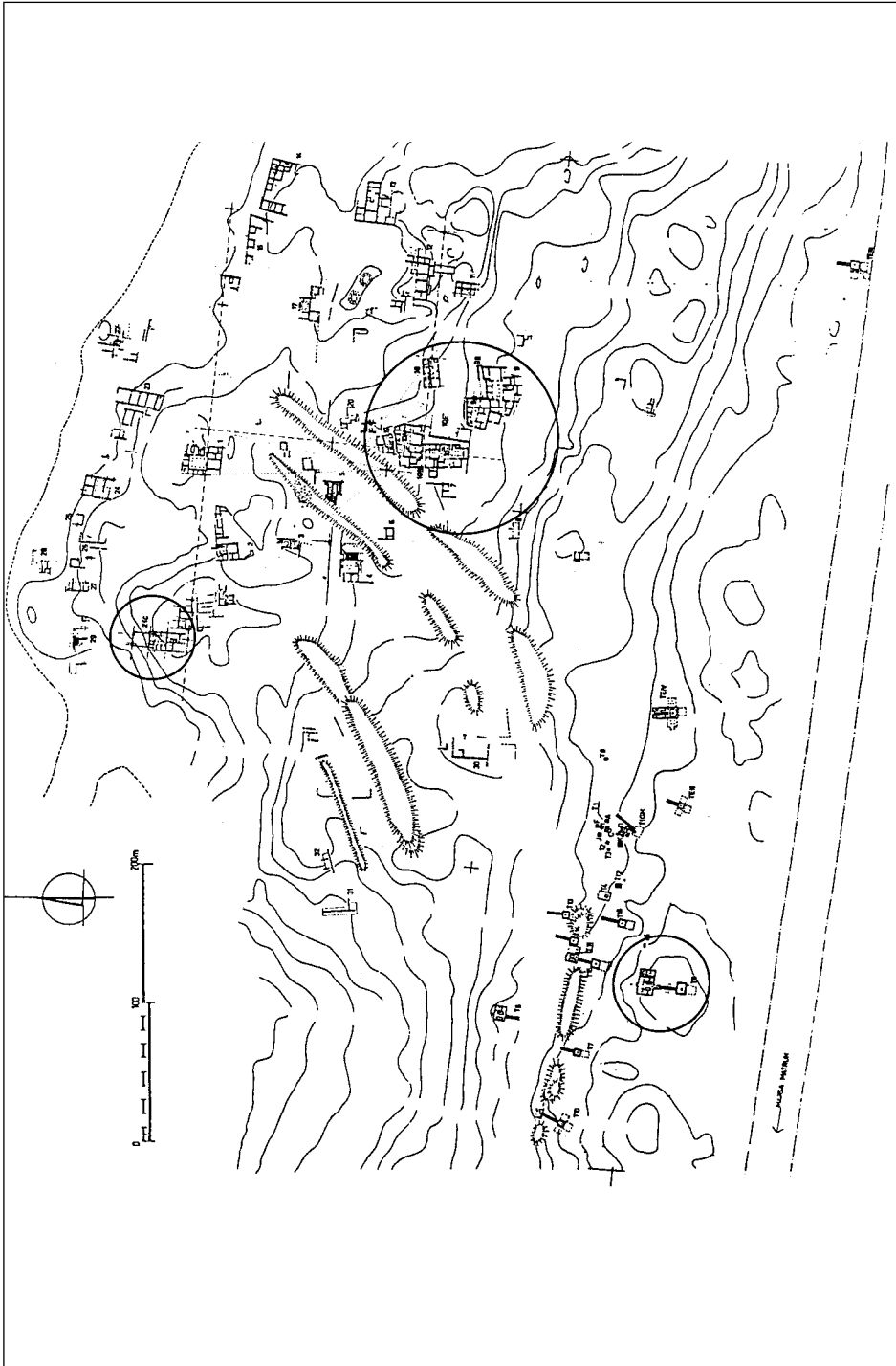


Fig. 1. Plan of the town showing the location of the reconstructed complexes in 2000 (After Polish Archaeological Mission: K. Kamiński, A. & J. Dobrowolski, T. Kaczor)

## GENERAL REMARKS

Architectural studies and archaeological investigations in the past years<sup>2)</sup> have led us to believe that the houses under reconstruction originate from the late 1st and 2nd cent. AD. Later, they were renovated and rebuilt a number of times. The structural form, which is currently undergoing reconstruction, is dated to the last quarter of the 2nd and the early 3rd cent. AD.<sup>3)</sup> The houses survived in practically unchanged state at least into the 4th cent. Evidence is mounting for a cataclysmic destruction of the town – layers of ash, collapsed walls and toppled columns, lying in undisturbed architectural order, where they had fallen.

The initial habitation level has been identified in a few places in H 10a and H 9b, and, recently, in the street in front of the entrance to H 10. It was apparently

from 0.76 to 1.00 m below the level of the stone flagging in the houses of the 2nd through 4th centuries.

The principles and methods of conservation applied in previous seasons have remained unchanged. Damaged wall plastering was not restored for technical and aesthetic reasons. In the future, every effort will be made to preserve in place fragments of the original plastering together with the ground (e.g. in room 3a of H 10).<sup>4)</sup> The tops of walls raised in a broken-stone bond were protected with a layer of more tightly laid stones and an inclined capping of lime mortar mixed with some white cement, designed to run off excess rainwater. The remaining walls, however, will have the last layer made of regular slabs or blocks, in similarity to the rest of the wall.

2) For previous work, cf. reports by S. Medeksza in previous volumes of this series: *PAM VII, Reports 1995* (1996), 42-52; *PAM VIII, Reports 1996* (1997), 82-88; *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), 72-76; *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 51-62; *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 47-57. Also: E. Łużyńska, "Architektura wczesnochrześcijańskiej bazyliki w Marina el-Alamein", *Architectus*, 1-2 (1997), 47-58; id., "Dom perystylowy w Marina el-Alamein", *Architectus*, 1-2 (3-4) (1998), 28-37; R. Czerner, S. Medeksza, "Konservacja grecko-rzymskiej osady w Marina el-Alamein", *Architectus*, 2 (6) (1999), 13-20; S. Medeksza, "Marina el-Alamein, grecko-rzymskie miasto w Egipcie. Badania architektoniczno-urbanistyczne i restauracja relikwów architektury mieszkalnej", in: *Conservatio est aeterna creatio*. In Hommage to Prof. Jan Tajchman (Toruń 1999), 117-154; id., "Konservacja relikwów architektury i malarstwa ściennego w Marina el-Alamein", *Architectus*, 1 (6) (2000), 5-18; id., "Prace badawcze i konserwatorskie w grecko-rzymskim mieście w Marina el-Alamein w Egipcie", KRAKÓW 2000 International Symposium on Architectural Intervention in Historical Complexes, November 21-23, 1999 (Cracow 2000), 145-147; R. Czerner, S. Medeksza, "Marina el-Alamein. A Graeco-Roman Town in Egypt and its Restoration", 1st International Conference on Restoration and Conservation of Antiquities, University of Cairo, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo, April 12-14, 1999 (in print); R. Czerner, "Aedicula z domu H 10 w Marina el-Alamein w Egipcie. Analiza architektoniczna, rekonstrukcja", *Architectus*, 2 (7) (2000) (in print).

3) Dr. Adam Łajtar, Warsaw University, has kindly commented upon the inscription from H 21c, dedicated to Commodus, which he dates to AD 180-183 (see below). The wall paintings from H 10 have been dated by Z. Kiss to the 2nd-3rd cent. AD, cf. Medeksza, "Marina el-Alamein...", In Hommage to Prof. Jan Tajchman, op. cit., 117-154; id., *Konservacja...*, op. cit., 5-18.

4) It was found, however, that progressing powdering of ancient rock surfaces in already protected sections of the wall, and the subsequent falling out of the original lime mortar, required building work and new pointing. Hence, the difference between the old and new parts of the walls has been obliterated to some extent. Still, the walls are original in 80%, only newly pointed.

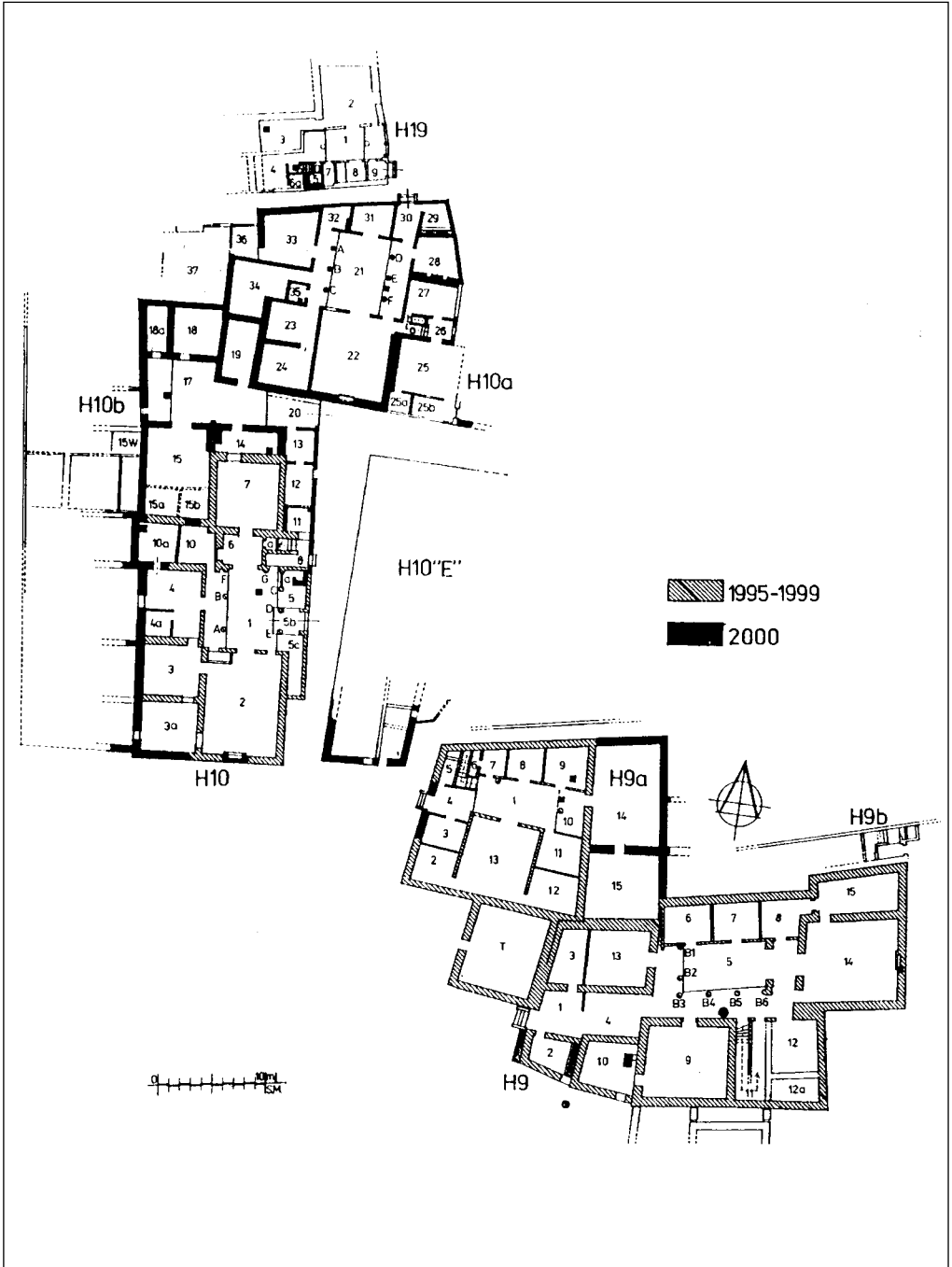


Fig. 2. Houses H 9 and H 10 with H 19 and H 10 "E". Plan showing extent of work in 2000 (Drawing S. Medeksza)

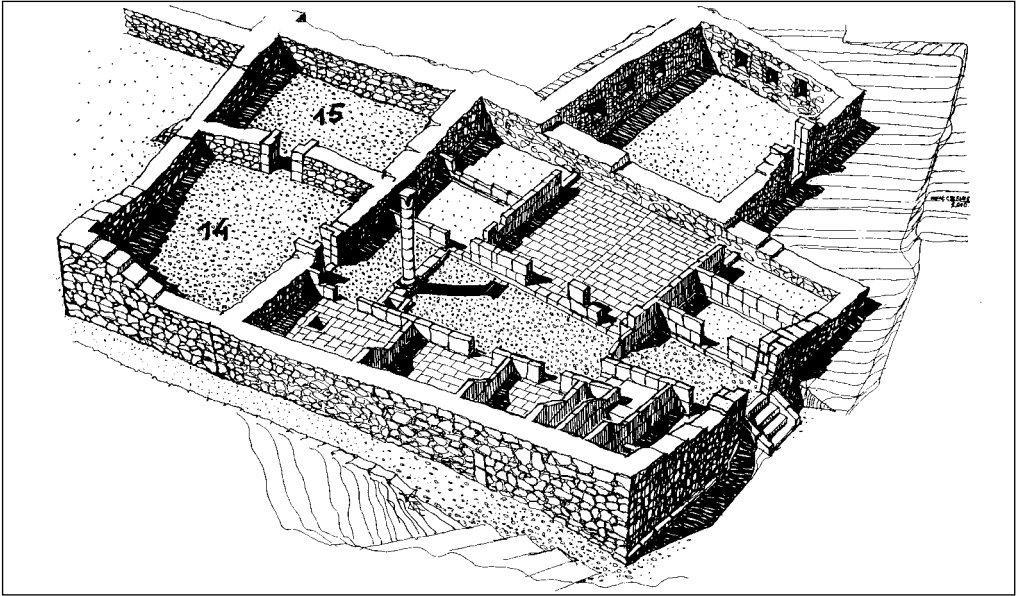


Fig. 3. House 9a. Axonometry after the 2000 season, extended to include rooms 14 and 15 (Drawing R. Czerner)

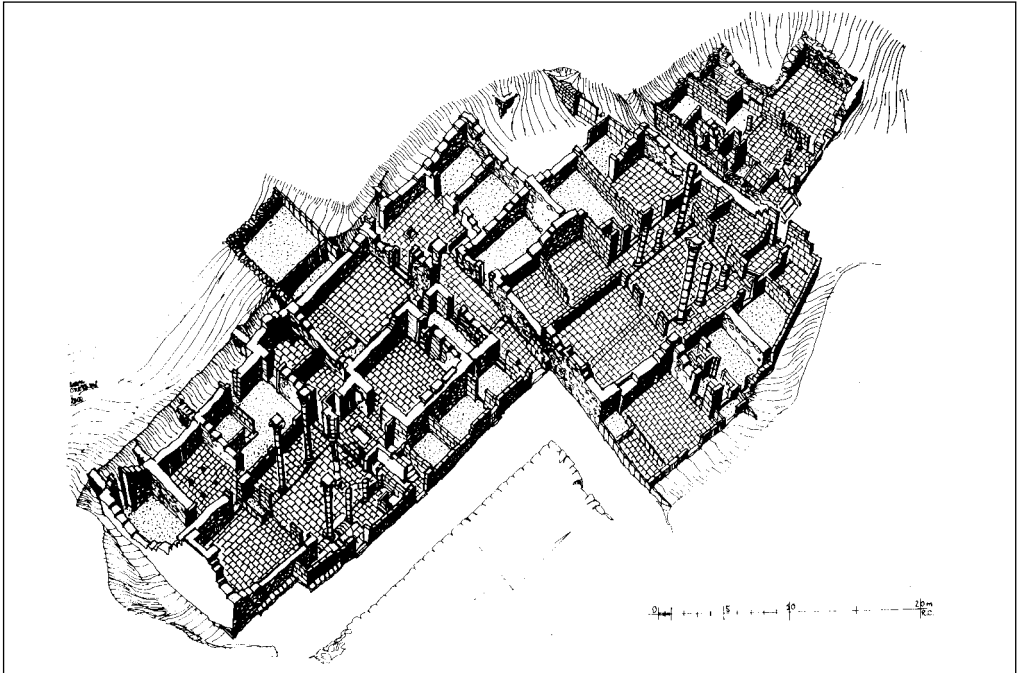


Fig. 4. Houses H 10 and H 19. Axonometry after the 2000 season (Drawing R. Czerner)

## CONSERVATION WORK

HOUSE H 9 (*Fig. 2*)

Some additional finishing work was carried out on the niche in room 14, which had been re-arranged provisionally in 1999. The original northern column was now put together and the southern one reconstructed, including a new capital.<sup>5)</sup> Engaged column B1 was raised further still to a height of 1.50 m, improving from the aesthetic point the view of the portico courtyard.

It was necessary to intervene wherever abundant rainfall in the winter of 2000 had led to cracking of the already treated walls and disintegration of the lime mortar. In the so-called *taberna* ("T" on the plan in *Fig. 2*) new wall tops had to be executed and the pointing of both the outside and inside of the walls repeated. Peeling plaster in room 15 had to be re-attached and the gaps restored, taking care not to disturb the appearance of the wall, which is covered to a great measure with original plaster of uniform color.

HOUSE H 9a (*Figs. 2, 3*)

As in H 9, damage control was required after the winter rains. Debris was cleared from around the building and a protective zone was landscaped in order to drain excess water away from the reconstructed walls.

The walls of rooms 14 and 15 were raised a few courses, to a height of 1.00-1.60 m. To judge by the wall structure (these rooms had never been investigated thoroughly), room 15 should be considered as a closed unit, measuring 6.00 by 6.50 m with walls 0.79 m thick and a doorway, 0.95 m wide (with jambs 30x30x60 cm), positioned centrally in the northern wall.

This room could be accessed from room 14, which also opened onto the portico courtyard 1/10. Room 14 was fairly big (9.00 by 7.00 m) and was surrounded with walls not exceeding 0.54 m in thickness. It may have been intended as a yard for domestic activities.

## HOUSES H 10, H 10a and H 10b

The chief objective of work in 2000 (*Figs. 2, 4*) was to clear completely the walls of the western row of rooms in H 10 and H 10a. The architectural remains between these two buildings have been designated provisionally as H 10b. In order to clarify the course of passage 20/17, clearing work proceeded on the walls of rooms 18, 18a and 19, as well as west of rooms 15 and 15a.

Previous architectural analyses, carried out since 1997, had given reason to suppose that the three peristyle houses (H 10, H 10a, H 10b) and a smaller, incompletely excavated one (H 19) actually extended further to the west. Clearing work in this area has confirmed the presence of units of a domestic nature and infrastructure, which could possibly belong to the known complex of houses or could be part of other residences in this urban block.

A wall constituting the perimeter of this particular block of houses has been observed running for 23 m, at a distance of 12.50 m west of the west walls of H 10, H 10a and H 10b. Current work on the reconstruction of the eastern wall of H 10a has confirmed the agglutination principle, according to which urban blocks in the southern part of the town had developed. Yet another room was discovered east of

5) Carved by P. Zambrzycki based on technical drawings prepared by R. Czerner.

rooms 26 and 27, changing substantially the known form of this building. (This new room had undergone considerable rebuilding and reuse quite recently, during World War II.)

Further clearing of the eastern street in front of the facade of H 10 has revealed the secondary character of this facade. It was rebuilt substantially, apparently after some cataclysm, which took place no earlier than the 3rd/4th cent. AD. Initially, this wall was one-block thick, that is, half a royal cubit. In order to rebuild this wall directly on the occupational level, a wall was erected that was 0.53 m thick (typical length of stone blocks used in the construction of houses at Marina). It blocked the entrance leading to the small unit no. 8 that had been a vestibule connecting the peristyle courtyard with staircase 8a. This entrance was presumably earlier than the entry complex 5, but should still be connected with the late occupational level of the street, dated to the 4th cent. AD at the earliest. Other clearing work included the *ambitus* between houses H 10a and H 19, the northeastern corner of H 10a, including the combined eastern wall of rooms 29, 28, 27, 26, 25 and 25b. In all these trenches a layer of ashes, 8 cm thick, was discovered, providing clear evidence of the conflagration that had destroyed the buildings.

An analysis of the stratigraphy and the walking levels on the street in the area of the main entrance to H 10 indicates that in the first two stages of the existence of this complex the entrance was in line with room 8, which abuts the staircase that had led up to the putative terrace-roof or upper floor.

Finishing work was carried out on the niche in room 2 of H 10, the anastylosis of which had been undertaken last year. The

architectural decoration of the niche had survived in 90%; now the missing parts of the cornice and shell tympanum were restored, including fragmentary remains of painted coloring. Some new elements were prepared and part of the missing stuccowork (dentils) was restored (Fig. 5).

The wall with the niche was raised to 4 m in height, while the remaining walls in this complex, after reconstruction, vary from 0.70 to 2.60 m. The actual height is dependent on the original condition of the walls and their context in particular rooms. At the junction of houses H 10 and H 10b, in passage 17, an Ionic column with capital was re-erected. It rises to a height of 3.51 m now. It was hollow inside and



Fig. 5. House 10. Niche in room 2, after conservation and partial reconstruction in 2000  
(Photo S. Medeksza)



served as a drain (0.15 m in diameter) for rainwater, bringing it down from the roof and emptying into a cistern under the floor of rooms 14, 15 and 17.

In H 10a the anastylosis of columns of the peristyle (21) was carried out (Fig. 6).

The wall painting from room 5c, representing a deity with a cornucopia,

which had been treated in previous seasons,<sup>6</sup> was found to be covered with heavy salt efflorescence following a year in storage. This proved that the only sure way of protecting wall painting from the site is to transfer them to a new ground.<sup>7</sup> This was done this year. Paraloid B72 in toluene was used to re-attach the peeling

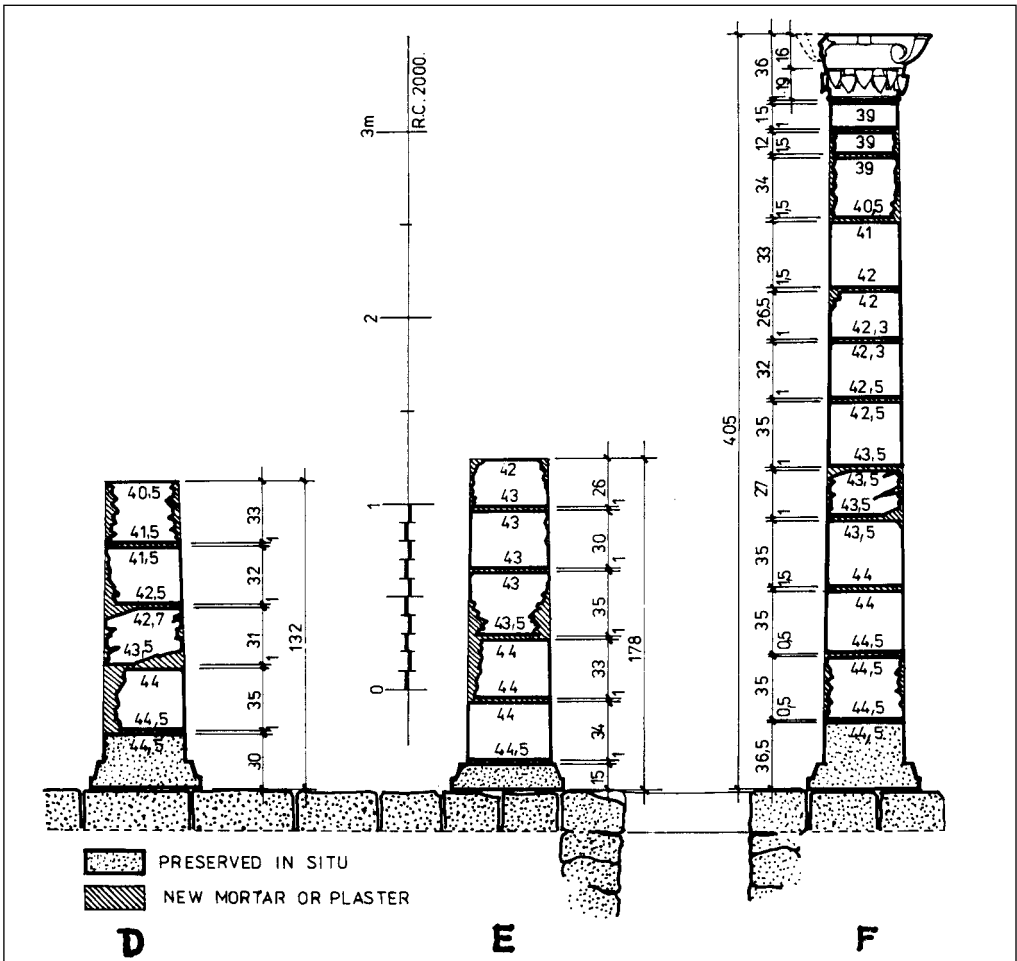


Fig. 6. House 10a. Anastylosis of columns from the eastern portico of peristyle 21. Corinthian column F was restored completely to a height of 18 modules including the capital (Drawing R. Czerner)

6) Cf. S. Medeksza, *PAM XI, Reports 1999*, op. cit., 53-54.

7) Method developed and implemented by Małgorzata Ujma.

painted layer, and a water dispersion of Primal AC33 and dry pigments for retouching.

Further pieces of figural wall painting were discovered in the street outside room 5c. The stratigraphic position on the last occupational level of the street and above it would suggest that the blocks were dropped while being plundered from the ruins. The uncovered pieces represent, one, the upper body of a woman presumably

and a part of an arm, the other, a female head crowned with the prow of a ship (Fig. 7).<sup>8)</sup> As paintings of a geometric nature appear to survive in good condition on the walls of room 3a in H 10, the excavation of the space was left until the next season when the presence of a conservator will ensure immediate preservation of the uncovered plaster. For now the edges of the plaster were protected and the walls raised a few courses.

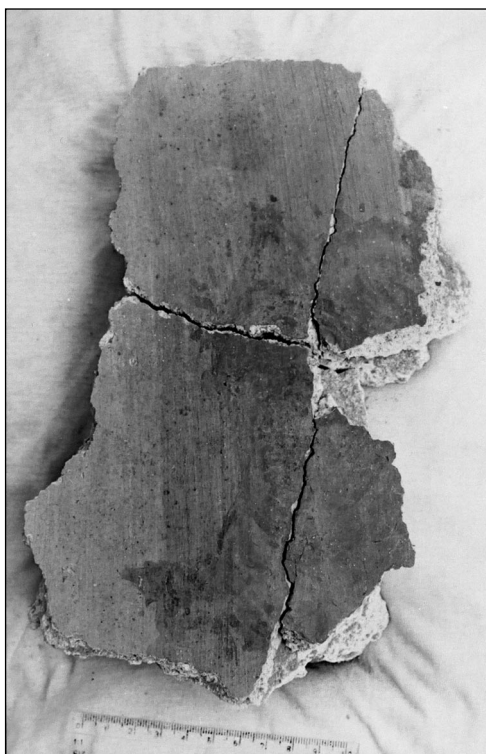


Fig. 7. House H 10“E”. Fragment of wall painting depicting a female head crowned with the prow of a ship (Photo P. Zambrzycki)

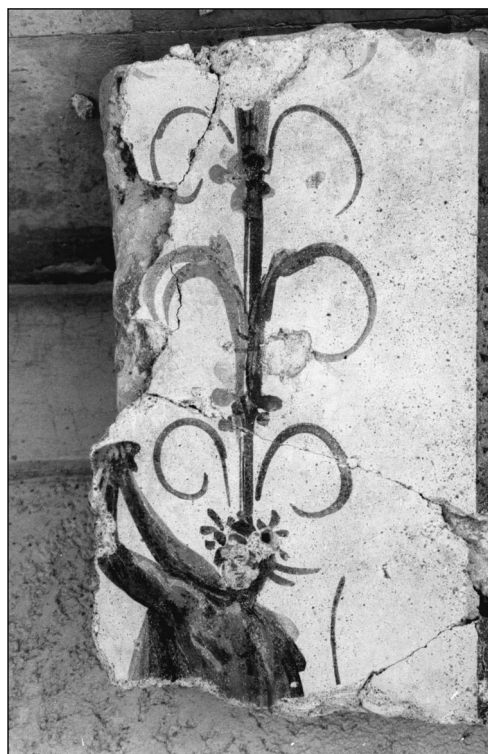


Fig. 8. House 10a, room 25. Fragment of a wall painting of the “grotesque” type (Photo S. Medeksza)

8) Cf. e.g. M.-O. Jentel, s.v. Alexandria, *LIMC* I, 492, nos. 73-74, mosaic from Thmouis; W.A. Daszewski, “Le personification de Tyche d’Alexandrie: Réinterprétation des certains monuments”, in: *Iconographie classique et identités régionales. Actes du Colloque International du CNRS no. 619, Paris, 26-27 mai 1983, BCH Supp. 14 (1986), 299-309; id., Corpus of Mosaics from Egypt, I, Hellenistic and Roman Period, AegTrev III, 142-160, cat. nos. 38-39. Also, M. Ostrowski, Les personifications des provinces dans l’art romain (Warsaw 1990).*

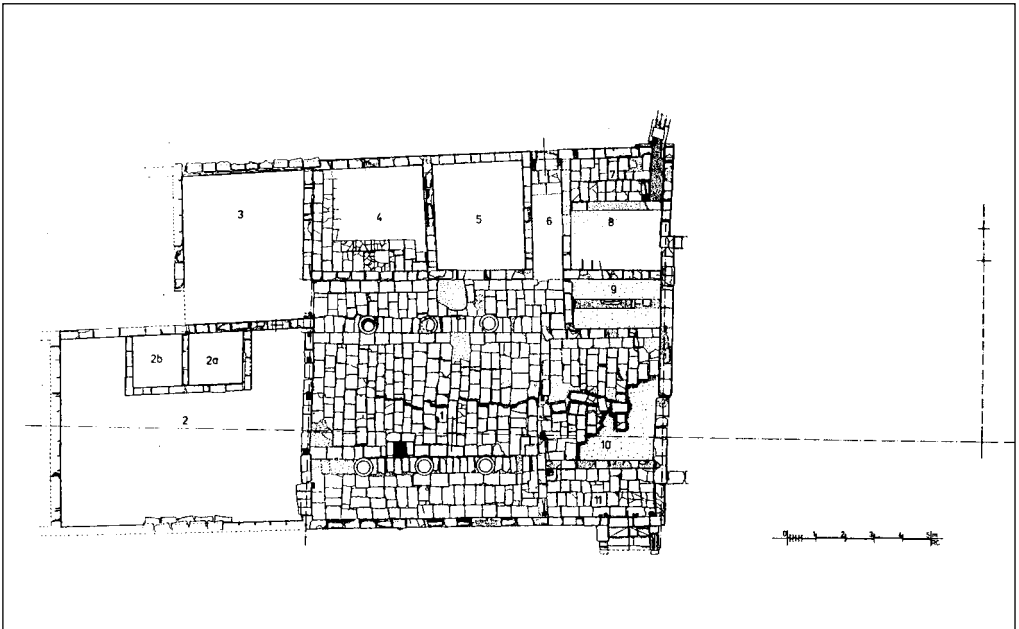
New finds of wall painting include big fragments of plaster with plant and figural motifs, found on blocks lying inside room 25 in H 10a. The blocks measure 0.69 x 0.41 x 0.17 m and 0.55 x 0.43 x 0.17 m, and are evidently part of a typical vertical frame separating rectangular panels of different colors. On one of the panels there is a standing male figure with a chlamys around his shoulders and holding a bowl in his uplifted hands (*Fig. 8*). From his wreathed head rises the vertical stalk of a plant with long downturned leaves. These pieces of painting were provisionally protected to await full treatment in the coming season.

#### HOUSE H 21c (*Fig. 9*)

The house, which only this year began to be prepared for future preservation work, is situated in the northern part of the town,

near the ancient harbor and business districts. The zone of public buildings in the town center begins just a short distance away to the south. The house stood between two parallel longitudinal streets that ran toward the harbor. The building to the north of the house, to judge by the monumental architectural decoration of the walls and fragments of a finely executed niche, must have been of an official nature, perhaps serving some trading purposes.

House H 21c is a typical peristyle complex with a courtyard (no. 1 in *Fig. 9*) that had two porticoes, one on the east and the other on the west. The main entrance led from the northeastern corner of the courtyard, while another, presumably domestic entrance was situated on the opposite side, via passage no. 6. This passage also gave access to a latrine (7) and



*Fig. 9. House H 21c. State in 2000*  
(Drawing R. Czerner, S. Medeksza)

two cubicules (8, 9). Opening onto the western peristyle were two rooms (4, 5). To the north of the courtyard there was room 10 and to the south room 2, which must have been the main room, measuring 8.05 m in length and a maximum of 6.50 m in width (narrowing to 6.30 m in the south). This room was entered from the courtyard via a tripartite entrance with the central doorway being 2.10 m wide and the lateral ones 1.05 m each. The arrangement is disturbed by two square cubicules (2a – 1.80 x 1.80 m; 2b – 1.70 x 1.70 m) introduced alongside the western wall.

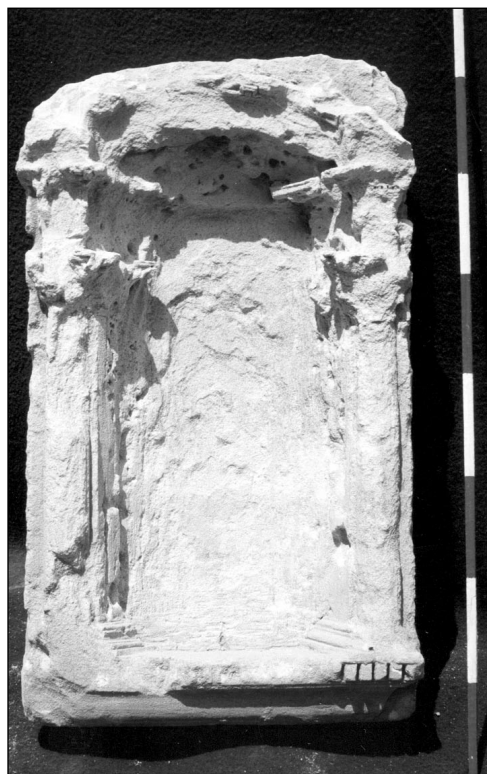
The house was investigated in the 1990s by SCA Inspector Mohammed Ali, but the exploration was never completed. Now the mission has finished clearing the southern part of room 2 along with the annexes 2a and 2b.

The Corinthian capitals of the peristyle are of stone with stucco decoration. One of these capitals was preserved provisionally in 1998.<sup>9)</sup> This year the mission uncovered more of the stuccowork from this capital and a second one.

In the southwestern corner of the vestibule (11), the bottom part of a square (0.20 x 0.20 m) drainage pipe plastered with waterproof mortar was uncovered. The pipe drained water from the roof to a cistern situated under the courtyard and room 10. All the rooms except the cubicules 8 and 9 have stone flagging. To judge by the wall structure, the building was rebuilt at least twice. The construction of the house can be dated provisionally to the 2nd/3rd cent. AD. It was destroyed presumably in the same conflagration that put an end to rest of the town. A layer of burning, some 0.09 m thick, was recorded

on all of the floors inside the house; it is presumably evidence of the burning roof collapsing into the building.

Finds from inside the house include a small decorated niche (*Fig. 10*) carved from a single piece of stone, measuring 0.685 x 0.395 x 0.20 m. The decoration is in the Corinthian-Nabatean order, resembling in character the niche from House H 10. It was found directly on the floor of room 2, as was also a rare find – a fragment of a Greek inscription running along the side edges of a marble slab:



*Fig. 10. House H 21c, room 2. Small monolithic niche of limestone (Photo S. Medeksza)*

9) A preliminary reconstruction of the form and a graphic reconstruction of the capital had been prepared earlier by W.A. Daszewski.

[---]ΟΥΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟΥ ΚΟΜΜΟ[ΔΟΥ  
 ---Κ]ΑΙΤΗΝΣ[Κ]ΟΥΤΛΩΣΙΝ  
 ΤΩΝΣΤΙΒΑΔΩΝ

A. Łajtar reads this as follows:

[---] of Marcus Antoninus Commodus [---(has  
 built or have built)---] and the chequered-  
 work of stibades.

The inscription is apparently a dedication commemorating the completion of some kind of architectural-decoration work. Based on the imperial titles in the text, Łajtar believes the inscription should be dated to AD 180-183.

#### TOMB-HYPOGEUM T 6 (Fig. 11)

In 2000, a limited program of restoration work was commenced in the mid-1st cent. AD tomb, which had been explored in previous years by the Polish Archaeological

Mission.<sup>10</sup> The first task was to protect the courtyard. The ancient walls that had once prevented sand from being blown into the courtyards were now raised to a height of six courses of stone blocks, equaling 1.60 m in height. A sand slope was landscaped outside the restored walls, providing runoff for excess rainwater.

The walls of the aboveground mausoleum were also raised wherever no specialist stonecutting work was required. By the end of the season two bases of the engaged columns flanking the descent from the banquet hall into the underground part of the tomb had been carved and put in place. Other elements of the architectural decoration, like the columns and engaged columns of the portico, will be executed in the future.

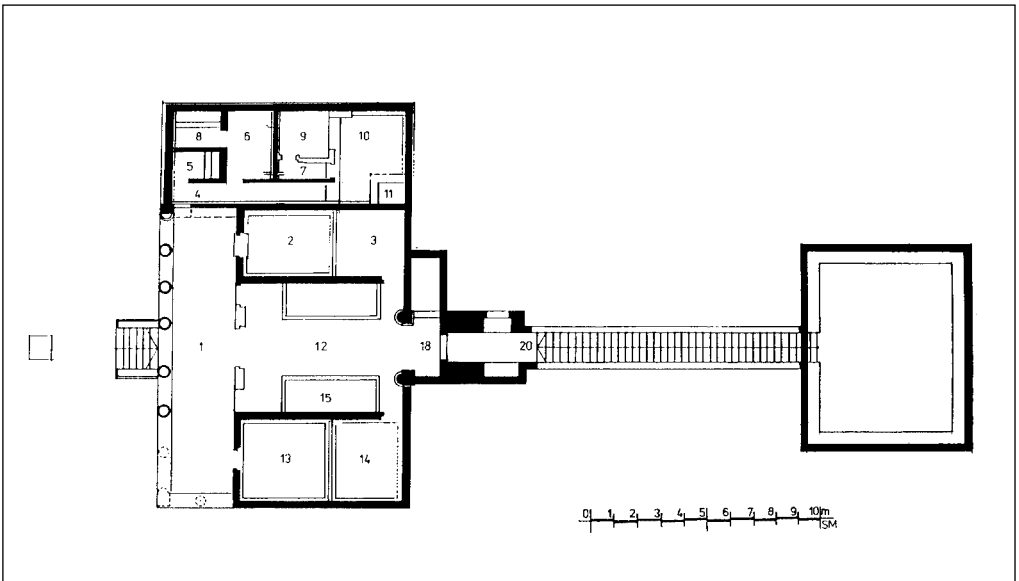


Fig. 11. Tomb-hypogeum T 6. Extent of conservation-reconstruction work in 2000  
 (Drawing S. Medeksza, after K. Kamiński et al., PAM X, Reports 1998 (1999), 44)

10) In 1988, 1990-1992, 1996-1998 and 2000, cf. W.A. Daszewski, PAM X, Reports 1998 (1999), 41-50 and esp. notes 3 and 4 for earlier research.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESCUE WORK

As clearing work is essential to prepare the buildings for preservation and restoration, and since there is little archaeological documentation of the structures uncovered during Egyptian rescue excavations in the late 1980s, it is necessary to provide archaeological supervision for all earthworks carried out at the site for the purposes of the restoration mission.

During the clearing of the western wall of houses H 10 and H 10b, remains of seven rooms were excavated. Room 15W was found to contain broken amphorae. Upon mending, three of these were identified as typical wine amphorae. Other finds included an oil lamp and a frying pan, the latter with a Greek inscription and producer's stamps impressed on the underside. The stamp is in retrograde and consists of two elements:  $\gamma\rho$  and the name of the producer in the genitive: *Ερμιππου* ([work] of *Hermippos*).<sup>11)</sup>

During the clearing of the longitudinal street east of houses H 10, the south eastern corner of H 10 was uncovered, as well as a few rooms abutting this street on the east. This new house has been designated as H 10"E". In its southwestern room, two limestone incense burners were discovered, along with a complete

amphora and fragments of others, which are probably Cyrenaican in origin.

Probes in H 10a (rooms 25, 28, 32, 33) were dug to check on the stratigraphy of this complex. A lime floor from the first phase in the occupation of these houses, putatively of the 1st and 2nd cent. AD was recorded 0.75 m below the top stone flagging. In this earlier stage the walls were covered with an uniform pale gray-to-yellowish plaster. With regard to rooms 31-32, there is every reason to assume that their proportions were changed during the rebuilding. In a probe excavated in a small niche in the eastern wall of room 25, at least three occupational levels were recorded: 0.50 m below the stone flagging, 0.83-0.85 m and 1.00 m below it. The niche should be connected with the first phase of H 10a. Evidence of use during World War II was also discovered while clearing the eastern wall of room 25.

A probe in the street directly east of the latrine (29) of H 10a revealed an oval tank, presumably piriform in section, made of broken stone.

Small finds included two oil lamps, a bone spoon, bronze ring "gem" with engraved male figure, a glass vessel, two complete clay vessels and six bronze coins.

11) A. Lajtar has kindly read both inscription and stamp (his remarks are to be published in an upcoming volume of the *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*).