

Emanuela Kulicka

The Moslem Cemeteries on Kom El-Dikka in Alexandria : Excavation Season 2004

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 17, 35-39

2007

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

THE MOSLEM CEMETERIES ON KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA EXCAVATION SEASON 2004/2005

Emanuela Kulicka

Excavation in the 2004/2005 season was concentrated in Sector E in the northern part of the Theater Portico, Sector G covering a series of newly discovered lecture halls, and Sector AS, where the portico stylobate is being uncovered.¹ All three phases of the necropolis, known from earlier

investigations, were identified in the course of the excavations: Upper, dated to the end of the 11th and 12th centuries; Middle, from the end of the 9th and 10th century, and Lower, in use before the earthquake of AD 792, that is, from the 7th and 8th centuries.²

SECTOR E

Work begun in 2002³ was continued in this sector. In the Theater Portico, 15 graves of the Upper Necropolis were excavated [*Fig. 1*]. The tombs were set in a layer that was 0.70 m thick, positioned about 9 m a.s.l.

Two of the surviving tombs (E 55, E 56) had limestone slabs in upright position encasing the grave. Of the various kinds of tomb markers used in the Upper Necropolis this appears to be the oldest form.

The remaining 13 funerary monuments, most of which adjoined one another, were constructed of small dressed stones; their entire surface, including the floor inside the

superstructure, was plastered. They were uniform in size, all of them being 2.00 m long and 1.30 m wide. Occasionally, the form became quite elaborate, the finest examples having a *mibrab* niche executed in the plaster. These ornamental funerary superstructures had small channels worked into the design with the purpose of draining water from the inside.

Tombs E 65 and E 64 had chambers built of three courses of small stones, plastered on the inside and covered on top with limestone slabs.⁴ The remaining burials were placed straight in the ground and have mostly suffered from the de-

1 For previous work on the necropolis: G. Majcherek, "Kom el-Dikka, Excavations and preservation work 2003/2004", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), and earlier reports. For the current season of excavations, see G. Majcherek's contribution in the present volume.

2 Id., *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 25-34.

3 Id., *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 19-31.

4 The difference between these built tombs and Ancient Egyptian funerary structures is in the building material alone, cf. A.J. Spencer, *Brick Architecture in Ancient Egypt* (Warminster 1979), 29-59.



Fig. 1. General view of the tombs from the Upper Necropolis phase of the Islamic cemetery discovered in Sector E (Photo E. Kulicka)

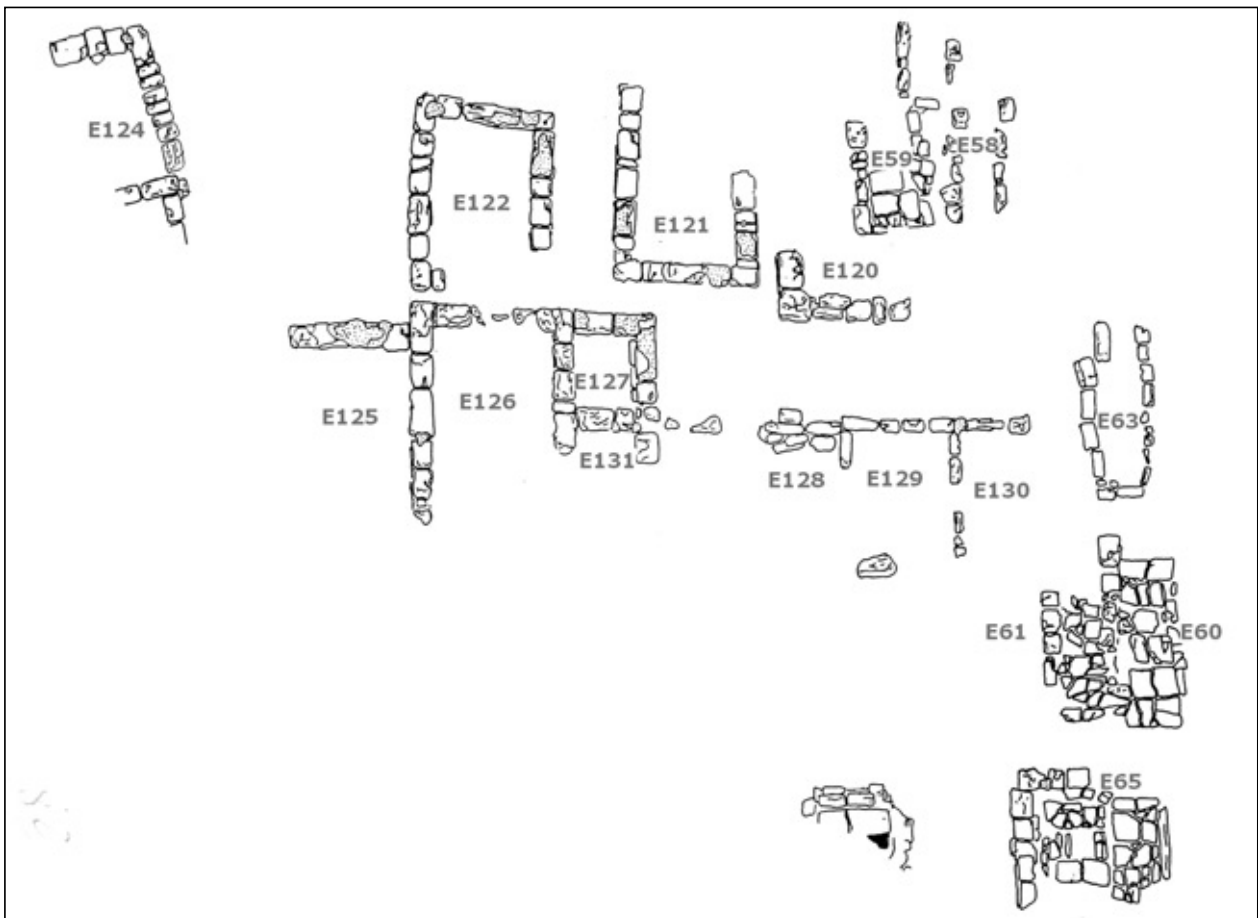


Fig. 2. Plan of graves from the Middle Necropolis phase of the cemetery in Sector E (Drawing M. Woźniak)

position conditions.⁵ Most of the box tombs from the Upper Necropolis contained multiple burials with successively made internments. A shaft constructed at the eastern end facilitated reuse. To make space, the earlier burials were consistently pushed to the west side.

Part of the necropolis in the northern part of sector E proved to be delimited by a low wall. It is believed to mark a family enclosure.

Once the Upper Necropolis tombs had been cleared, two phases of the Middle Necropolis were uncovered. The later layer with ten graves (E 120-E 124, E 127-E 131) was located half a meter above the eight graves from the earlier phase (E 125, E 126,

E 132-E 137), which were recorded at a depth from 8.90 to 9.10 m a.s.l. [Fig. 2]. The extent of the cemetery in the two phases was the same, but individual tombs did not overlap, hence the division into two phases seems justifiable. The superstructures of these graves measured mostly 2.00-2.20 by 2.50 m (hence they were obviously larger than the monuments of the Upper Necropolis described above) and they were constructed of one or two courses of regular stone blocks. Occasionally, the superstructures were plastered.

All the burials were made straight in the ground. Virtually nothing of the skeletal material has been preserved owing to the poor conditions of deposition on Kom el-Dikka.

SECTOR G

Eleven graves of the same type, belonging to the Middle Necropolis, were discovered in an adjoining section of Sector G (G 203-G 213). The tomb superstructures in these cases were also constructed of big regular

stones. The skeletal material from the grave pits has not survived.

The same division of the Middle Necropolis into two phases of use was observed.⁶ Three later graves were recorded



Fig. 3. Graves of the Lower Necropolis discovered inside auditorium G in Sector G (Photo E. Kulicka)

⁵ For an anthropological analysis, see report by R. Mahler in this volume.

⁶ More on the stratigraphy: H. Meyza, "Sector G, stratigraphy of the Arab necropolis", in: Z. Kiss et al., *Fouilles polonaises à Kom el-Dikka 1986-1987, Alexandrie VII* (Warszawa 2000), 35ff.

at 10.40 m a.s.l. and five other graves from the earlier period at 10.15 m a.s.l. An Arab stela in marble (reg. no. 5097) was discovered *in situ* by tomb G 201, belonging to the younger phase of the Middle Necropolis.

Tombs of the Lower Necropolis were cleared inside auditorium G in sector G. They lay immediately above the floor of the lecture hall, at 8.50 m a.s.l.. Altogether, eight graves were explored (G 300-G 307) [Fig. 3]. The construction of these tombs is fairly primitive: large limestone blocks forming the walls, the top covered with limestone slabs. The chamber was frequently cut into the underlying ancient ruins and only covered with limestone slabs. Even simpler pit graves and pit graves with

covering of limestone slabs characterized the Lower Necropolis. These graves typically had no superstructures of any kind.

Two of the graves from the cluster of graves inside locus (=lecture hall) G were simple pits in the ground without a preserved stone casing (G 301 and G 303), one grave was excavated into a bench of the auditorium (G 305) and five others had been cut into the Late Antique pavement and covered with slabs. Two (G 305 and G 306) were children's graves. Adult burials followed a standard size: 1.60 by 0.88 m, while the children's graves measured 1.30 by 0.45 m each. The condition of bones, both in the grave pits and in the stone tombs, was comparably poor.⁷



Fig. 4. Stela (reg. no. 5111) giving the deceased woman's date of death as 247 AH/AD 861 (Photo E. Kulicka)

⁷ For previous anthropological study of human remains from the Moslem cemeteries on Kom el-Dikka, see E. Promińska, *Investigations of the Population of Muslim Alexandria* (Warszawa 1972).

SECTOR AS

Clearing of the Portico stylobate in Sector AS revealed four chamber tombs of the Upper Necropolis (AS 144-AS 147). Three of these had altogether five funerary stelae of marble mounted on them. Two of the tombstones were in very poor condition, the marble crumbling and deteriorating. One appears unfinished, showing merely summary dressing and rough tracing of the letters. The remaining two monuments present more or less the same selection from the Quran. The date of death of a woman, appearing

atypically on one of the stela (reg. no. 5111), is given as 247 AH of the month of Rabi' al-Awwal according to the Muslim calendar, which is calculated as May/June 861 [*Fig. 4*].⁸

Very seldom was anything found inside the graves. Most of the objects originated from the fill in which the graves were dug. These were mostly fragmentary glass and pottery vessels, including glazed Islamic wares, frequently glass weights, glazed oil lamps and bronze coins, as well as pieces of bronze objects.

8 I am indebted to Ms Dorota Malarczyk of Jagiellonian University in Kraków for reading the date.