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GRAECO-ROMAN TOWN AND NECROPOLIS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

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Abstract: The article sums up the state of research on the ancient Graeco-Roman harbor town as for the year 2005. It presents the remains of the main town square and the district of private houses, as well as early church, which have been investigated and preserved by a double archaeological and conservation and preservation mission ever since the site's discovery in the late 1980s. The description of the cemetery covers all the main tomb types, including unique pillar tombs and huge hypogea with aboveground mausolea, and discusses the different mortuary traditions manifested in the architecture, decoration, nature of the burials and grave accompaniments.

Keywords: Marina el-Alamein, Graeco-Roman period, town, harbor, necropolis, church, hypogeum, tomb, mummies

Investigating in 1986 some ancient wall remains, unearthed by modern building development for the purposes of the tourist industry on the coast, about 5 km east of the small town of El-Alamein, 96 km west of Alexandria, the present author discovered an ancient Graeco-Roman harbor town [Fig. 1]. Impromptu recording led to rescue excavations, authorized by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization (now the Supreme Council of Antiquities). The work was concentrated especially on the central part of the site, which was threatened directly by the landscaping works in progress. Preliminary architectural documentation of all the identifiable building ruins was undertaken by a team under the author's direction from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology. It was followed shortly by regular exploration of the necropolis and in

due course also of the town (Daszewski *et alii* 1990; also Daszewski annually, in *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean. Reports*, from 1991 onward; also 1993a; 1995b).

This part of the Mediterranean coast, briefly mentioned in modern literature (de Cosson 1935: 125–126), had not been investigated before in any detail. Only sporadic research had been conducted in the area of Taposiris Magna and Plinthine in the coastal belt between Alexandria and El-Alamein. Meanwhile large sections of the Gebel Maryut belt and the Shammama ridge running along the shore were destroyed by limestone quarries (de Cosson 1935: 125–126; Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 15–17) [Fig. 2]. From the beginning it was evident that the site, extending some 1.6 km from east to west and approximately 0.6 km inland from the shore of



*Fig. 1. The site of Marina el-Alamein in 1986
(All photos W.A. Daszewski unless otherwise indicated)*



Fig. 2. Modern quarry in the limestone ridge; note rectangular burial niches from a destroyed tomb on the right

the lagoon, abounded in private and public buildings [Fig. 3].

The necropolis proved to be of particular interest, preserving in relatively good condition an extraordinary variety of tomb forms, many of which either had never been represented in other parts of Egypt or had suffered destruction (Daszewski 1998a). The picture established over about twenty years of research is one of a prosperous town and small commercial harbor, obviously well planned and brilliantly organized from the start. It

appears to have been inhabited from the late Hellenistic age (2nd century BC) through the 6th century AD, by wealthy local landowners and merchants trading with centers situated in the region especially around Alexandria, but also abroad, in the islands of Cyprus and Crete, the Levant, Knidos, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy and North Africa. The prosperity of the town depended upon its position on the main overland and maritime routes connecting different lands, but especially Cyrenaica, with Alexandria in Egypt.

THE TOWN

In the town proper excavations uncovered fragments of a large square (so-called Forum or Agora), measuring 15 m (N-S) by

16.40 m (E-W), regularly paved with limestone slabs (Daszewski 2002: 74, 80–86; 2003: 59– 65; 2005: 86–92; 2006: 77–83;

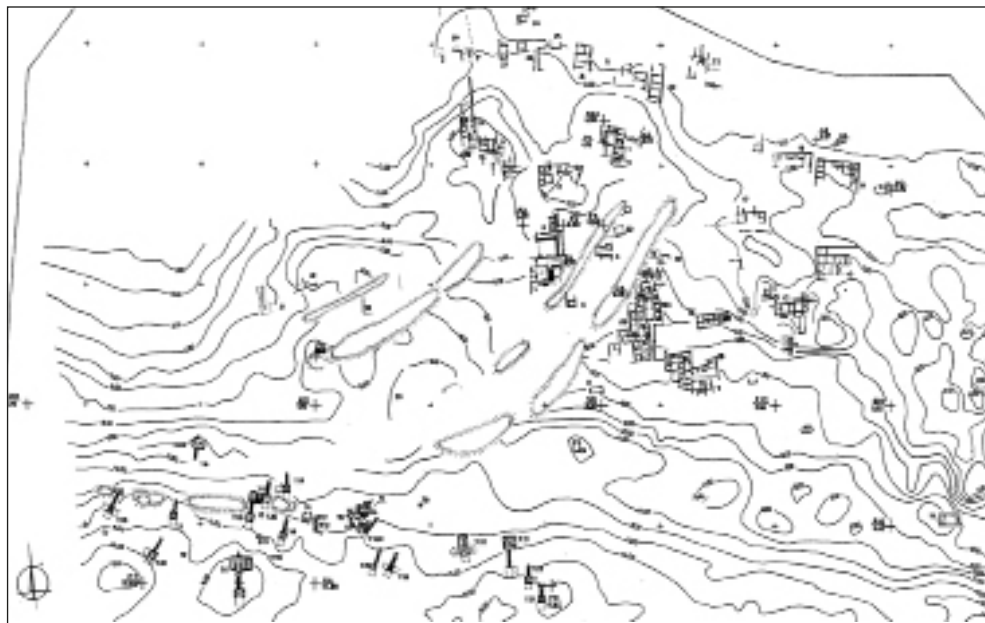


Fig. 3. Plan of the ancient town at Marina el-Alamein, regularly updated by the PCMA archaeological and conservation teams (PCMA archives)

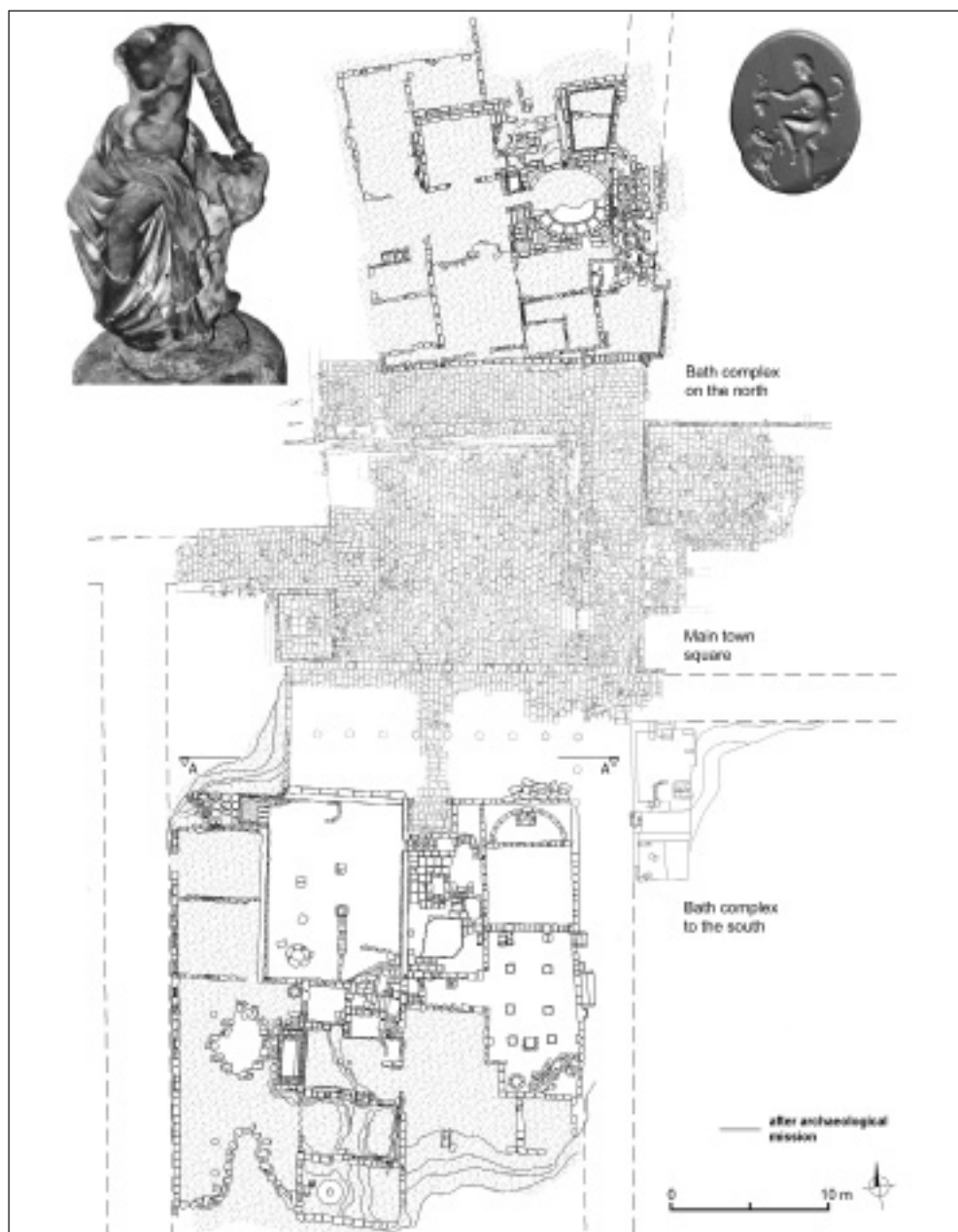


Fig. 4. Plan of the main square and surrounding buildings, updated for 2011; insets, marble statue of a nymph seated on a rock (left) and gem with image of satyr in sunken relief (Plan J. Dobrowolski, A. Błaszczuk, M. Krawczyk-Szczerbińska, updated, PCMA archives)

Medeksza *et alii* 2008: 76; 2010: 88–94; Zych 2008) [Figs 4, 5, 6]. The north and east sides had colonnaded porticoes, 3.60 m and 3.20 m wide respectively. The northern wing of the portico was angled in imperceptibly, giving the square an overall slightly trapezoid form in order to accommodate its plan to standing bath architecture on the north. The south side of the square featured a portico formed of a double colonnade, 18.50 m long (E–W) and 8.40 m wide (N–S), with a porch entrance from the square consisting of three steps, 2.33 m wide, accentuating the central axis of the south portico which ended in an exedra in the south back wall [Fig. 5]. This exedra,

2.80 m wide and 2.20 m deep, was furnished with benches on three sides. Minute fragments of wall frescoes were found during the excavations. The benches, all supported on lion's paws carved in limestone blocks, lined the back wall of the portico on either side of the exedra.¹ Remains of gilded plaster and broken fragments of a marble inscription dedicated to either Trajan or, more likely, Hadrian were discovered in the portico next to the entrance to this exedra (Daszewski 2005: 86 and Fig. 18). All the columns bordering the square were in the pseudo-Ionic order. A paved street led into the square from the west. A small rectangular hall with a pedestal for a statue by



Fig. 5. Exedra in the south portico (in the background, on the axis of the steps on the left) and benches lining the back wall of the portico, looking south, state in 2001, before restoration

¹ For a view of the reconstructed benches, see Fig. 8 on page 115 in this volume. The appearance of the square after the most recent conservation effort, see Fig. 10 on page 116, in this volume.

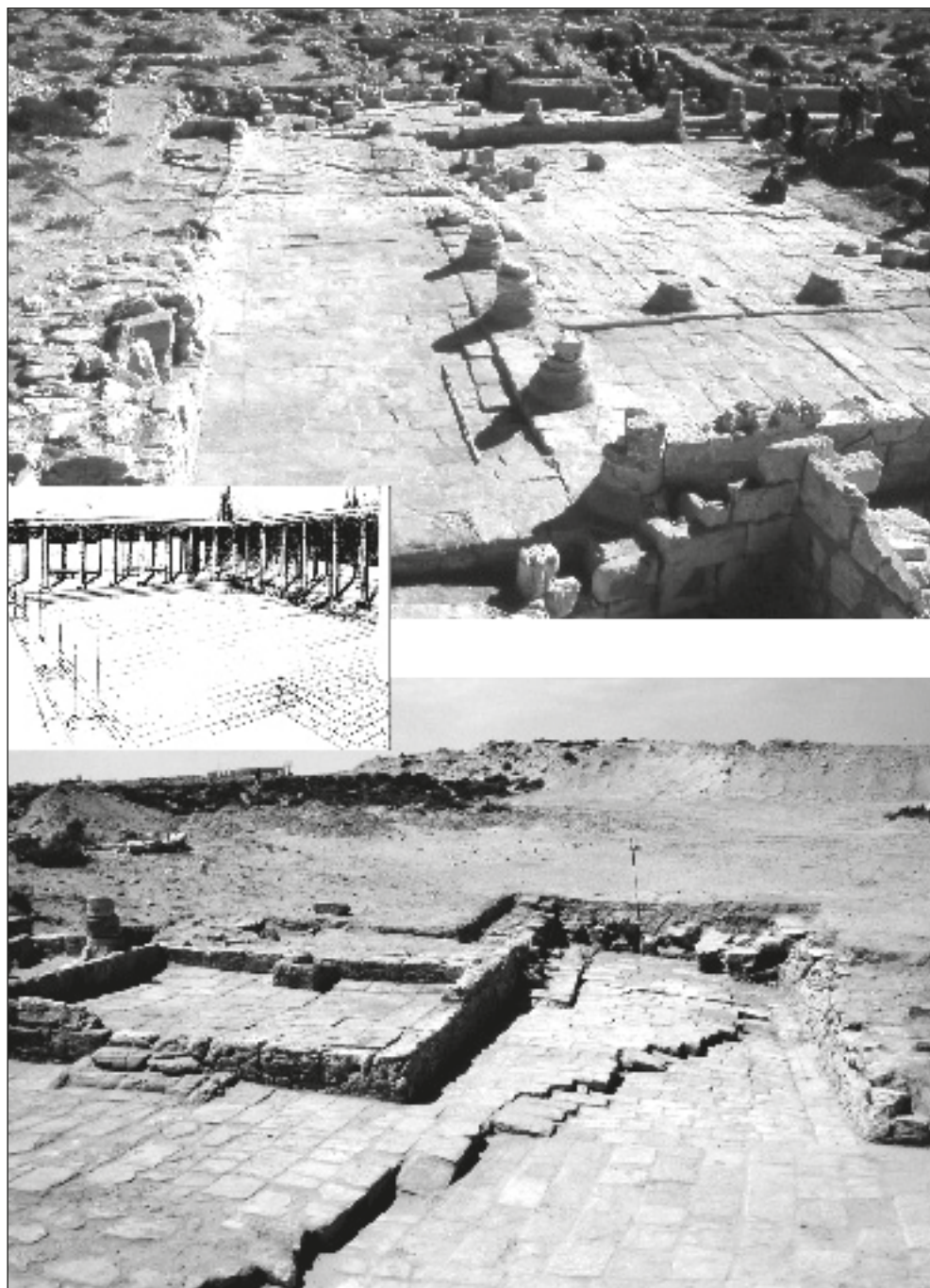




Fig. 6. (centerfold) The main square in four views recording various stages of the excavation of this feature: (clockwise from top left) east wing looking south; north wing looking east; south wing looking east; west side of square looking west; inset, reconstruction view of the square with the eastern and southern porticos in the background (Reconstruction drawing Artur Błaszczuk)



Fig. 7. Shopping units forming the northwestern corner of the insula to the southeast of the Main Square, looking south, state following discovery in 2005



Fig. 8. Civic basilica in the complex south of the central square, view from the south after excavation in 2005

the back wall occupied the southwestern corner of the square (Daszewski 2003: 63).

The south portico opened at the eastern end into a perpendicular street aligned with the east portico of the square and into another street proceeding eastward (Daszewski 2001b: 58–61). Units with kitchen and storage installations, presumably related to some form of shopping activities, were situated in the corner between these two streets (Daszewski 2005: 89–92) [Fig. 7]. The insula back of the south portico, against which the portico had been constructed, contained a large civic basilica (5.58 m wide and 15.56 m long) with two rows of four columns and a statue base in an apse at the northern end (Daszewski 2007: 79–83; also 1995b: 19, Figs 5, 6, 7) [Fig. 8]. It was entered from the street and gave passage into a big complex, now identified as a bath (see Daszewski 1995b: 18–19, Figs 3–6). A masonry pedestal standing against the north wall in this passage, opposite the entrance to what now appears to be the frigidarium of the bath, preserved an inscription still immured in its front (Daszewski 2007: 83, Fig. 8). The text contained the hammered out name of a Prefect of Egypt, identified as Titus Flavius Titianus (Łajtar 2005: 99–108) thanks to the date: 14th year of the Emperor Hadrian, that is to say, AD 129, included in the inscription.

The building standing to the north of the square, which the construction of the portico had to accommodate, was another, earlier bath furnished with a *tholos* room (Daszewski 1995b: Figs 3, 4). It had been cleared provisionally in the course of rescue excavations in 1987.

The early salvage excavations also uncovered a number of private houses in a residential quarter that was later fully

explored and restored by the Polish conservation team [Fig. 9]. These buildings represented the Greek type of Hellenistic and Early Roman private house (Medek-sza 1999b), as exemplified by House 9 (Daszewski 1995b: 20–21; Figs 9–12, 14). It stood some 150 m southeast of the main square and was of average size as far as houses in Marina go (approximately 38 m E–W by 24 m S–N). An earlier building stage from the late 1st century BC used broken limestone bonded in clay and lime mortar. A later stage from the late 1st century AD demonstrated repairs to the stone walls and additions raised of mud brick in clay mortar. Further exploration of the area showed that several other houses in the neighborhood demonstrated a similar process of development by agglutination in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD [see plan in Fig. 9]. The street network between these houses was a maze of narrow alleys following no orderly grid.

Coming back to House 9, it was entered from a winding alley to the west of it, the wooden doorway nestling in a corner of walls, next to a large stable (T) with separate entrance from the street, which may have been used for donkeys. Four stone steps led up to the threshold, passing a bench by the side of the entrance (such seats were quite common in this part of the town). From the vestibule (1) one passed into a long corridor (4) that led to the porticoed courtyard at the heart of the house. A latrine (2) with seats for several users was situated to the right of this passage; the installation was flushed by water brought from the main house cistern and discharged into a circular settling tank already outside the house wall. On the opposite side of the passage there was a small storeroom (3), still full of completely preserved amphorae.

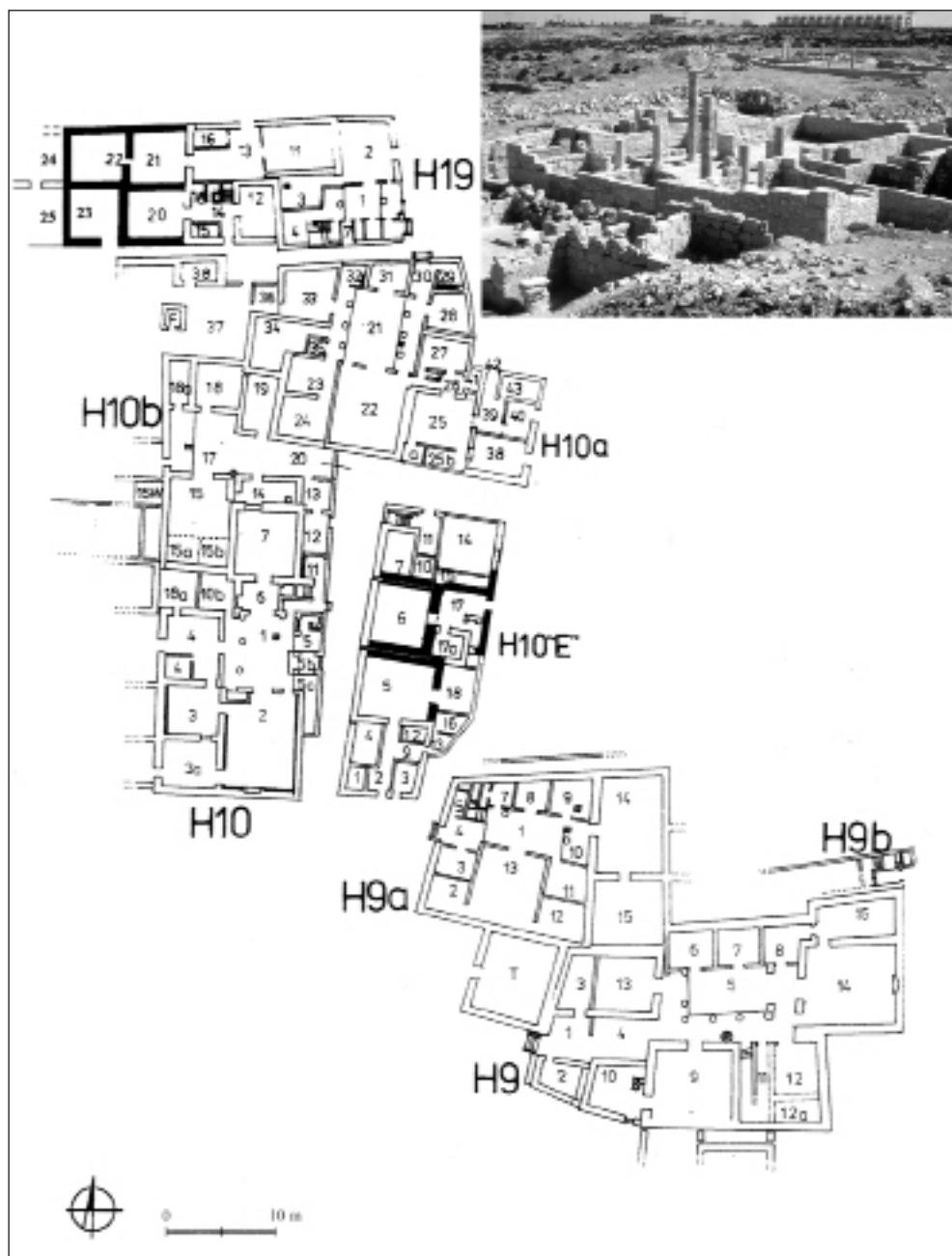


Fig. 9. Plan of private houses to the southeast of the main square (S. Medeksza, PCMA archives); inset, view looking southeast, state in 2001

The western and southern sides of the courtyard were shadowed with porticoes. The diurnal life of the inhabitants ran its course in a room (13) west of the portico, the kitchen (6) and living rooms (7, 8, 15) in the north wing of the house, as well as room (12) to the south of the courtyard. A well-shaft leading to an underground water cistern was located in the middle of the southern portico. Room (9), south-west of the courtyard, was an *andron*, that is, a room for men, while room (14) was an *oikos* preceded with a *prostas*. The full and engaged columns and pilasters of the porticoes were decorated in the pseudo-Ionic style, while those in the entrance to the *prostas* and *oikos* were of the pseudo-Corinthian type. The back wall of the *oikos* was decorated in the fashion of Marina with an architectural aedicule with pseudo-Corinthian capitals (Czerner 2009: 82, Fig. 64). Situated between the *oikos* and the *andron*, in the southeastern corner of the courtyard, was a staircase leading up to the roof and the presumed rooms of the upper floor. Fragments of panels with geometric patterns painted in blue, red, yellow, white and purple were recorded in this house. House wall painting decoration is also known to have included figural representations, such as, among others, the heads of Helios, Harpocrates and Serapis preserved in the aedicule of the *oikos* (2) of House 10 (Medeksza 1999a: 57–59 and Figs 4, 5).

Of several other houses discovered in Marina two deserve note. One was House H1 located north of the central part of the town, on a rise overlooking the harbor in the lagoon [Fig. 10, bottom]. Cleared provisionally in the early rescue exploration stage (in 1986–1987 by the EAO), it has recently undergone extensive study and conservation (Daszewski 1995b: Fig. 8;

Medeksza 2007: 101–104; 2008: 71–73, 78–81; 2010: 83–86, 94). The building measured approximately 27.95 m (N–S) by 22.25 m (E–W) and was erected most probably in the beginning of the 1st century AD. The measure of its importance in the urban fabric of the town is signified by extensive and repeated repairs and enlarging in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries AD. In its later stage it was rectangular in plan, centered around a courtyard with four porticoes and columns on the west, north and east side. Room (4) apparently the largest, situated on the south side of the house, seems to have been the reception room. A kitchen was located in the south-western corner, a latrine in the northwestern one, while the wings of the house were filled with separate rooms, most probably with more rooms on an upper floor entered from a gallery over the ground-floor porticoes. Two large water cisterns under the courtyard were fed from a water supply system associated also with a pool in the northeastern part. Early salvage operations uncovered pottery, lamps, amphorae sherds, and coins of the 4th and 5th century AD, as well as a pedestal of a life-size bronze statue in room (7). Several capitals of the pseudo-Ionic type, painted partly red and green, were also discovered.

The second important house (H21), comprising two parts, was also partly cleared in 1989–1991 by inspectors from the EAO and has been restored in recent years by the Polish team (Medeksza 2003: 89–92; Medeksza *et alii* 2004: Fig. 3). It was situated in the northwestern part of the town, siding a major street running toward the harbor in the lagoon. The higher-lying part to the south (H21c) was a rectangular block, 27.60 m long (N–S) and 16.70 m wide (E–W) [Fig. 11, plan]. The lower-



Fig. 10. Plan of House 1 in the central northern part of the town (S. Medeksza, PCMA archives) and view of the ruins looking north, state in 1986; inset, marble head of goddess(?), surface find

lying part to the north (H21N) was in fact a large hall, measuring 16.06 m (N–S) by 16.70 m (E–W). The upper house (H21c) had a courtyard entered up a few steps from the street, furnished with four porticoes, of which only the opposite ones on the eastern and western sides had colonnades consisting of three columns each. Doorways in the south portico, a central larger one and two lateral ones, led to the largest room (2), obviously a reception area which turned out to contain — instead of the aedicule on the rear wall as expected in an *oikos* of the Greek type — a curious structure inbuilt against the west wall.

A small monolithic niche of limestone with pseudo-Corinthian engaged columns, measuring 68.5 cm by 39.5 cm, and 20 cm deep, which had been found on the floor of

Room 2, must have been attached to a wall, either the one in the back or the west one (see Medeksza 2001: 73, Fig. 10).

The curious structure, erected on a raised podium, incorporated a marble slab top with an inscription running along the side edges fronting the room. The text referred to Emperor Caesar Marcus Antoninus Commodus and gave a date interpreted most probably as between 29 August 182 and 28 August 183 (Łajtar 2001; 2003: 177–179). This coincides with the date of the conspiracy against Commodus and his cruel retributions against those who had conspired against him. Had the owner of the house or at least the founder of the monument been connected somehow with these events and desired to underscore his friendship

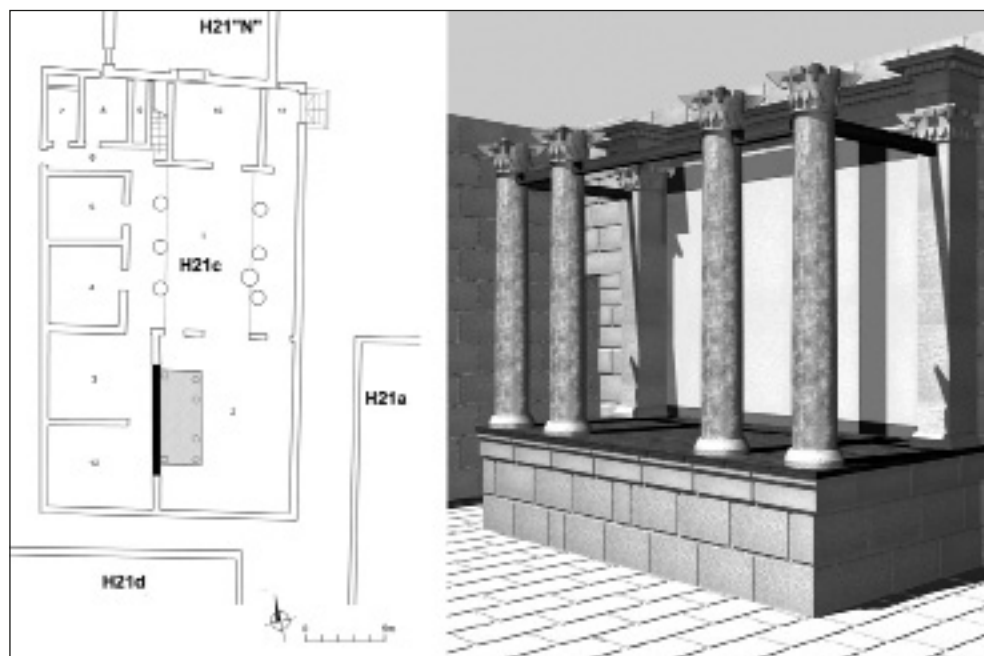


Fig. 11. Plan of House H21c-N in the northern part of the town and reconstruction of the Commodus monument from the *oikos* (After Czerner, Medeksza 2010: 98, Fig. 1, plan, 103, Fig. 7)

and support for Commodus? It may be that this man, probably involved with religious practices of some kind, had been worshipping Commodus as an incarnation of “Romanus Hercules”, an idea created by the Emperor himself in Rome and spread to the provinces of the Empire, including Egypt (see huge head of this Emperor found in the Nile Delta, Collection Loukaniouff in Cairo, Kiss 1984: 167, Fig. 163). This monument has now undergone anastylosis and partial restoration; the theoretical reconstruction based on finds from old and current excavations is convincing (Czerner, Medeksza 2010: 103–112) [Fig. 11, reconstruction on right]. Four columns in line with two lateral

pilasters, all in the pseudo-Corinthian type of Marina capitals, formed a small portico elevated to approximately waist level. The inscription on the side edge of a marble plinth ran around the top of this platform, which created space for a statue presumably of bronze(?) (small fragments of a bronze statue had been found in 1987 in the nearby ruins of house H2 just on the opposite side of the street from house H21c).

The northern part of this house (H21N) comprised a huge independent hall that was entered through a monumental doorway from the north and which had a large aedicule centrally on the south wall opposite the entrance (for a recon-

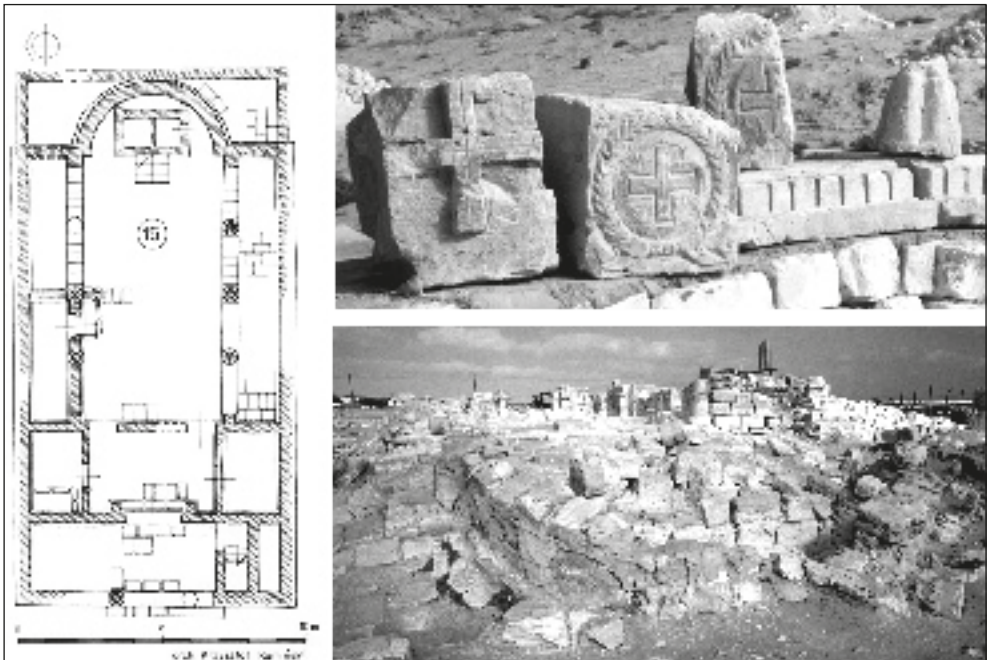


Fig. 12. (clockwise from bottom right) Ruins of a church viewed from the east, state in 1987; plan of the church and blocks bearing decoration in the form of typical Egyptian crosses (Plan K. Kamiński, PCMA archives)

struction of this niche, see Czerner 2005: 129, Fig. 9). It seems to have been an open space, perhaps an assembly place of either municipal or religious character.

Finally, one should mention a church situated on the southeastern fringes of the ancient town. It was about 19 m long and 10 m wide, built of well dressed limestone blocks and comprising a large central nave and narrower side aisles (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 36; Grossmann 2002: 392–393) [Fig. 12]. The church was oriented canonically from east to west with a narthex at the western end, provided with a large entrance between columns (*tribelon*). There was a narrow staircase leading up (to the roof probably) in the southern corner of the narthex. From the narthex a wide entrance opened into a vestibule set between two side rooms. Two doors channeled entry into the main part of the church, which was divided into a wide nave and narrow aisles by two rows of three columns each. The apse at the eastern end contained a *synthronon*. Two irregular rooms, a *prothesis* and a *diaconicon*, were entered from the aisles.

Evidence of a rectangular altar was found in the middle of the church. The structure was raised probably in the end of the 4th or early 5th century (based on numismatic evidence). At some point several tombs were installed in the northern aisle of the building. A small cemetery of child graves with the skeletons placed in amphorae was found to the northwest of the church.

This type of basilica finds more parallels in Syria (Donceel-Voûte 1988: 78) and Cyrenaica than in Egypt, where the best parallel is a small church from the 5th century situated in Abu Mina (Grossmann 1981).

Last but not least, one should mention two huge water cisterns, one located approximately 300 m southeast and the other 600 m southwest of the lagoon. The eastern installation is slightly smaller, measuring 20 m N–S by 19 m S–W; its roof is supported on four massive piers (Bentkowski 1991: 36–37). The other cistern is about 50 m by 40 m, the huge interior supported on several stone piers. Both were cut in bedrock, like the underground tombs.

THE NECROPOLIS

This coastal town of obvious importance had an equally remarkable necropolis situated mostly to the east, south and west of the town [Fig. 15, centerfold]. The significance of this relatively well preserved burial ground, covering a chronological range from the late 2nd century BC to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, has already been mentioned in the introduction. Consequently, regular excavations have concentrated on clearing successive tombs, contributing to the extensive repertoire of types already known from this cemetery.

Altogether, in the course of long excavations, nearly 50 tombs of different types have been uncovered and many of them restored.

The simplest kind of grave was an E–W oriented trench about 2 m long and 0.60–0.70 m wide on the average, hewn in bedrock to a depth of 0.50–0.60 m. The grave was usually covered with flat limestone slabs and contained a single inhumation burial without grave goods. No special effort was made to preserve the body of the deceased. On top of the covering



Fig. 13. Pillar tombs and attached prism graves, toppled monument in the foreground

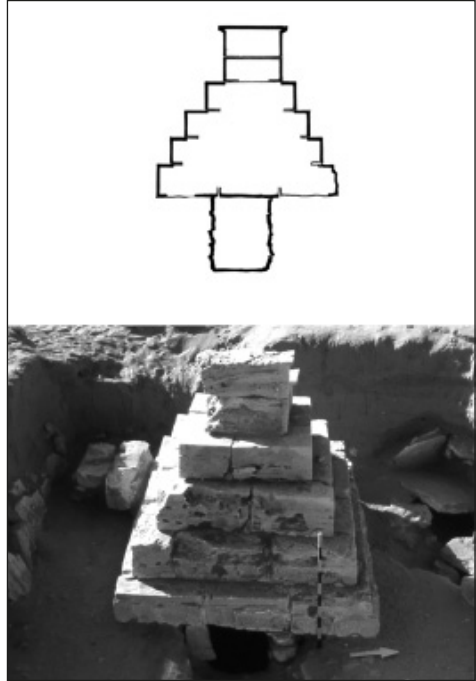


Fig. 14. Stepped pyramidal tomb superstructure (T2) and section (above)

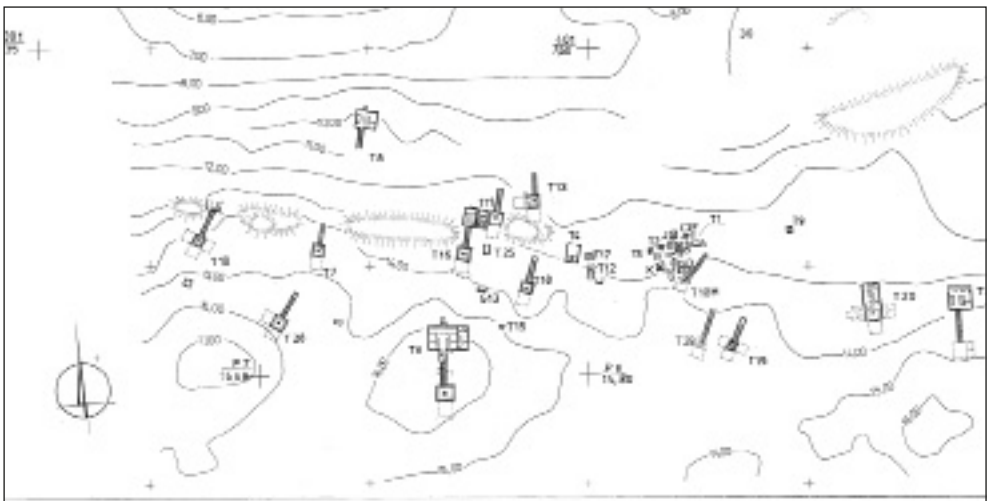


Fig. 15. (centerfold) Plan of the necropolis, state for 2005
(PCMA archives, updated 2006)



slabs a roughly rectangular prism of sand and stones was piled, inside a perimeter casing of up-ended limestone slabs (0.50–0.60 m high). In one case (G13), a kind of gable roof of oblong blocks of stone appeared on top of the rock-hewn trench with the burial, and was then covered with a sand prism (Daszewski 2001b: 51; 2002: 78 and Fig. 4). Such graves were often set together forming groups of two, three or

four, attached to bigger tombs, such as the so-called pillar or column tombs of the 1st century AD [Figs 13, 16]. The prism-graves seem to be roughly contemporary with the rich tombs. Pot burials of infants have also been recorded in between the prism graves and pillar tombs (e.g. Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 28, Fig. 13b) and outside the T6 grave mausoleum. Together they give the impression of family groupings with accentuated social stratification, suggesting the presence of either impoverished relatives or servants buried next to their masters or the more fortunate members of a given family.

Simple pit graves were sometimes provided with more elaborate decorative structures aboveground. In the late second century BC, these structures assumed the form of “stepped pyramids” some 2 m high [Fig. 14], crowned with funerary sculpture, possibly a statue, like the Horus-falcon image retrieved from the sand nearby (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 21, Figs 11a,

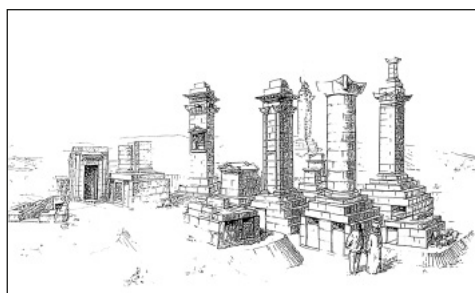
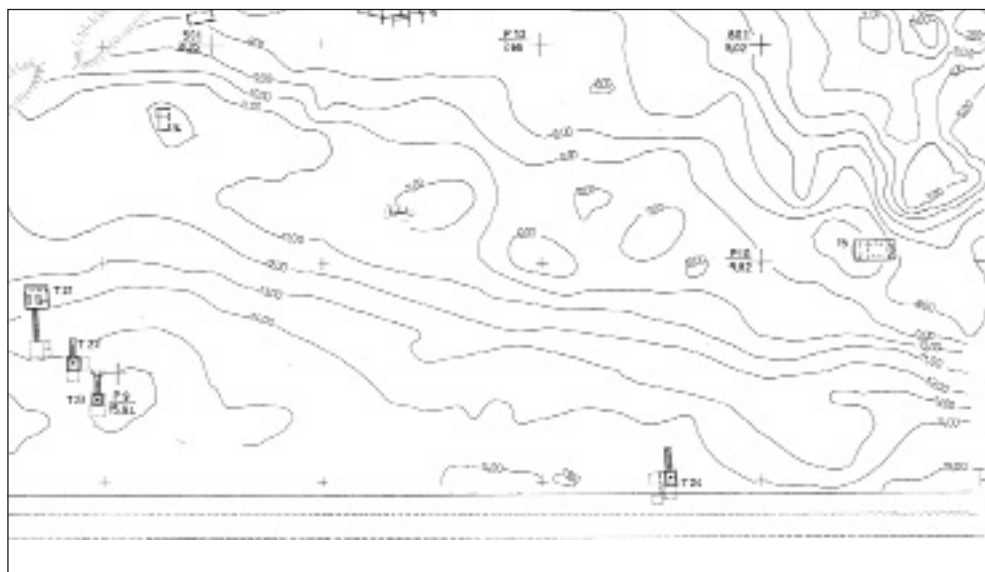


Fig. 16. Artist's view of the pillar-and column-tombs from the 1st century AD (Drawing J. Dobrowolski, PCMA archives)



b) [see *Fig. 17*, inset];² Egyptian double crowns of limestone, which usually decorated the heads of sculptures of this kind, were found near these tombs, i.e., in T12.

Yet a different type, apparently of the early 1st century AD, comprised tombs consisting of a trench provided with a square stepped base aboveground, supporting either a plain decorative sarcophagus with gable roof or a huge pillar [*Figs 13, 17*], plain or with relief decoration showing the deceased reclining on a couch (Daszewski 1995a: 31, *Fig. 3*) [*Fig. 20*]. Other tombs of the 1st century AD consisted solely of

aboveground structures of various types. Some had cube-like boxes with two or three loculi, each niche averaging approximately 1.85–2.10 m in length, 0.40–0.70 m in width and 0.90–1.10 m in height. The loculi were closed with slabs which were occasionally decorated with reliefs, for example of Agathos Daimon coiling around a globe (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 28–30, Pl. 14a) [*Fig. 18*]. A stepped base was constructed on top of the masonry box structures and on top of it a column or pillar was erected, decorated with an elaborate cornice and one or two superimposed capitals. These capitals

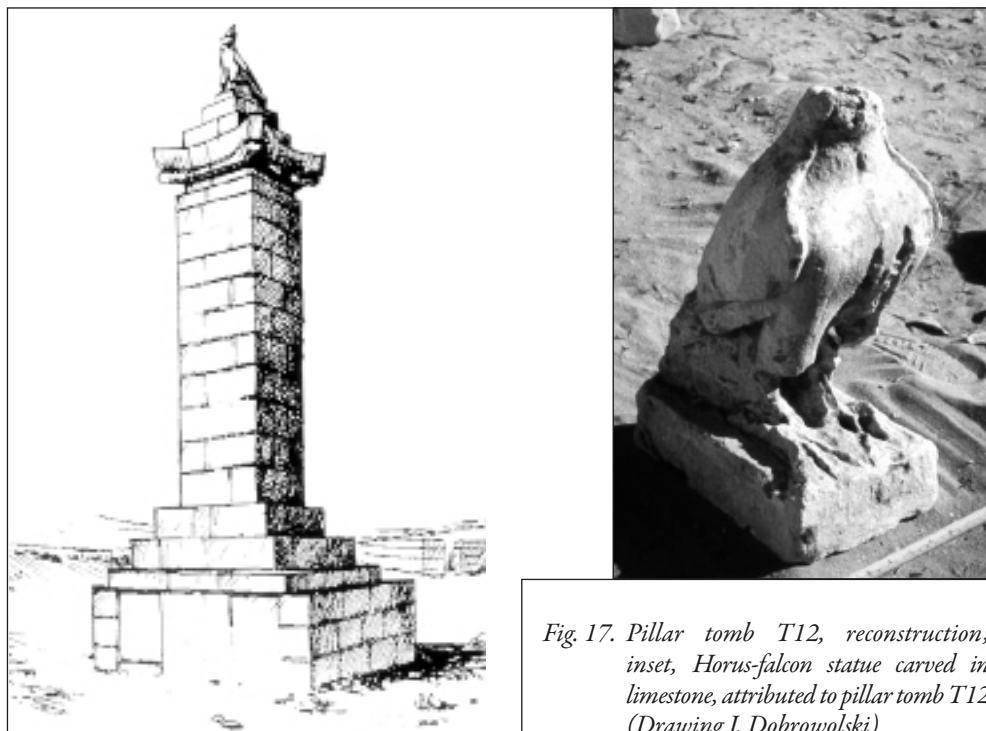


Fig. 17. Pillar tomb T12, reconstruction; inset, Horus-falcon statue carved in limestone, attributed to pillar tomb T12 (Drawing J. Dobrowolski)

² Such stepped pyramid tombs are well known from the Hellenistic cemeteries of Chatby and Hadra in Alexandria. There they were crowned with stelae. The tradition of stepped bases for grave stelae can be traced back to Classical Athens, as proved by the tombs in the Kerameikos necropolis. For Alexandria, see Breccia 1912: LIV, *Fig. 17*, Pls XVI, 13–15, XVII; also Adriani 1940: 65ff., Pl. XXVII.



Fig. 18. Slab with relief depiction of Agathos Daimon sealing the central loculus in tomb T1D



Fig. 19. Funerary offering table from tomb T1GH bearing relief decoration: bread, vegetables and water jar, carved on the top



Fig. 20. Funerary relief with banquet scene from pillar tomb T1K



Fig. 21. Funerary statue of a woman from tomb T30

recall the “Nabatean” type, which should rather be called the “Marina el-Alamein type” (Daszewski 1990b; see also Czerner 2009). Such capitals were of Egyptian origin. The tops of these pillars could have been decorated with sculpture, like the Horus statue found next to a fallen pillar; other putative statues include seated or standing lions found near two such tombs (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 38, Figs 14b, c). It is not certain, however, whether they were placed on top of the pillar or on the corners of the stepped base. One pillar (T1B) bore an inscription commemorating Ptolemaios (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: 27, Fig. 13d) on its east-facing side. The paleography is suggestive of the late 1st century BC or the early 1st century AD. Another inscription was found on Tomb T12, giving the names: Prota and Archonides (Łajtar 2005). The pillar and column tombs rose to a height of about 7 m, the box and pillar (column) inclusive. Their orientation was E–W. In front of all tombs, on the east side, there were small square altars made of flat stones, bearing evidence of burned offerings.

The origin of the pillar and column tombs is not easily explained. There is no such local tradition identifiable in Egypt, at least no traces of tombs of this type have been preserved anywhere in the Nile Valley. Theoretically speaking, however, they might have been represented in Hellenistic Alexandria. Some stepped bases

found there could have belonged to this type of tomb, which was not recognized because the upper structures had been lost, either destroyed or dismantled for building material. There come to mind the pillar tombs of ancient Lycia and the columns on some late Classical (*peribolos*) tombs in Attica.³ Honorific monuments in the form of pillars decorated with sculptures could have been another source of inspiration.⁴ The burials inside the loculi were simple inhumations with modest grave goods, such as unguentaria and/or small glass bottles. No coffins were used. In two cases, golden leaves were uncovered near the skull, most probably fallen out of the mouth of the deceased as attested by other finds of the kind in Marina in tombs of different type.⁵

The number of inhumations within a tomb comprising two or three loculi varied from one (male) in one (central) loculus, to seventeen or more individuals, men, women and children, interred together in the side loculi of the same tomb. Had all the dead belonged to a single family? It is a likely scenario, but without any inscriptions whatsoever that could help to identify the dead, only DNA analyses could provide an answer. The presence of so many corpses packed into relatively small loculi in one tomb may indicate that the tomb was in use for more than a generation.

³ For example, the late Classical tomb of Isocrates in Athens or a tomb in Ikaria (Attika), see Scholl 1994: 242ff.; for Lycia, see Kolb, Kupke 1992: 47, 6th–5th century BC, with one example of the 4th century BC, Figs 60–62. For sarcophagus tombs, see Kolb, Kupke 1992: 53ff. and Figs.

⁴ E.g., the pillar-like monument of Aemilius Paulus in Delphi and other monuments of the kind there, see for example, Pollit 1986: 155–157.

⁵ A golden leaf in the mouth of the deceased was found in a tomb in Kerameikos, see Stroszeck 2000: 455ff., esp. 471, No. 4. In Marina, such leaves in the mouth of mummies were also found in two hypogea, see Daszewski 1997b: 59ff., Pl. 6,3–4. More finds of the like were made in 2001 and 2004 (T30), see Daszewski 2005: 75–80.

The pillar (column) and “stepped pyramid” tombs were all located close to one another with the prism graves adjacent to some of them. Taken together they made an impressive picture close to the town border, imbuing the necropolis with a unique character [Fig. 16]. One thing is certain — virtually from the start there were two different traditions in force shaping the mortuary practices of the town inhabitants: Greek (possibly with a smattering of more exotic foreign influences) and Egyptian, and the two intermixed freely. The Greek tradition is reflected in the architectural form; the local, Egyptian tradition influenced the decoration and the burial itself, since practically almost no evidence of incineration has been found.⁶

Another tomb of the box type (T30) comprising five loculi, constructed and used in the 1st/2nd century AD, contributed the first evidence in Marina of figurative sculpture in the form of a female statue carved in a block of limestone [Fig. 21]. It is safe to assume that this statue and the presumed superstructure in the shape of a naos, which had once housed it, had toppled from the top of the central loculus of the main part of the tomb (Daszewski 2005: 75–80).

Larger tombs in the area of the south-western necropolis appeared to have been in use even longer, in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. They consisted of four or six loculi disposed in two or three superimposed rows. The box with loculi oriented N–S was usually enclosed within a temenos wall and provided with altars set in the court on the front, northern

side (Daszewski *et alii* 1990: Pl. 15,h; also Daszewski 1995a: 34) [Fig. 22, top and bottom]. The largest tombs of this type excavated at Marina el-Alamein had been in use from the early 1st through the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Little effort was made apparently to remove encroaching sand, which gradually engulfed the courtyards; instead, new altars were introduced on consistently higher levels. Three consecutive layers of such altars were found in tomb T11, accompanied by pottery which made the dating possible. The practice of setting new altars well above the old ones, already covered by a thick layer of sand, was observed in other tombs of this kind (i.e., T25, T27 and T30, see Daszewski 2001b: 48–53), as well as in the open-air courts of hypogeum tombs. There can be no doubt as to the existence of an old tradition of making offerings to the dead over a long period of time, well after the initial burials had taken place.

The largest and the most spectacular of the Marina sepulchers were the hypogeum tombs. There were two types of them, one elaborate (e.g. T6, T19), the other one simpler [Figs 23, 24], both sufficiently exclusive to suggest an elitist character. First constructed apparently in the late 1st century BC, tombs of this type became more frequent in the course of the 1st century AD and later. They were all oriented N–S, the entrance being always on the north side facing the sea. A standard tomb of this type, T6 (but also the equally spectacular tomb T21, as well as others, like T8, T10, T16, T20), consisted

⁶ Cremation was frequently practised in Alexandria, the urns being placed in trenches under the aboveground structures, which had the form of stepped bases with stelae on top. In Marina, traces of cremation burials were found in two hypogea only (T13 and T28). Ashes were packed into a faience vase and placed in a shallow loculus. In both cases the urns had been broken into pieces and the ashes scattered.



Fig. 22. Funerary enclosures with box tombs comprising loculi in superimposed tiers: top, tomb T4; bottom, tomb T11, in both cases view from the north

of an aboveground pavilion, which acted as a kind of mausoleum [Fig. 24].⁷ It was provided with a colonnaded portico and a square free-standing altar in front of the structure. Banquet rooms with couches constituted a characteristic feature of these pavilions [Fig. 25]. At its rear, a roofed corridor and a vaulted or flat-roofed staircase hewn in bedrock led downwards to an open-air court [Fig. 26]. The court, entirely hewn in bedrock, was usually about six or seven meters deep, almost square or rectangular in shape (e.g., 5.35 x 6.70; 5.45 x 4.80; 4.20 x 4.25 m). A parapet wall approximately 1.5–2 m high was erected around the well of the court on ground level to protect the tomb from wind-blown sand. In the middle of the court, there was always a square altar (approximately 1 m high and 0.60 m to the side) [see, e.g., Fig. 26, top right]. In one case (tomb T6) a water well, 10 m deep, was hewn in bedrock in the corner of the court.

Adjoining the court were burial chambers, either one, two or three, usually provided with rock-cut benches (1.50–1.90 m wide and 4–5 m long) [Figs 28, 29] on the sides and rectangular niches cut into the rock above them. A narrower bench (approximately 0.50–0.60 m.) or an offering table or altar could also be cut in bedrock or attached to the rear wall [Fig. 28, top; see also the relief offering table from hypogeum tomb T1GH, Fig. 19]. A small offering table could have been placed in the middle of the chamber next to an amphora set upright in the floor. The main funerary chamber was always found south of the court, i.e., on the N–S axis of the tomb.

In some large funerary chambers, two or four columns of Doric order supported the ceiling (T20, Fig. 29, top).

The loculi in the center of the rear wall, i.e., on the main axis, were sometimes closed with slabs bearing a representa-

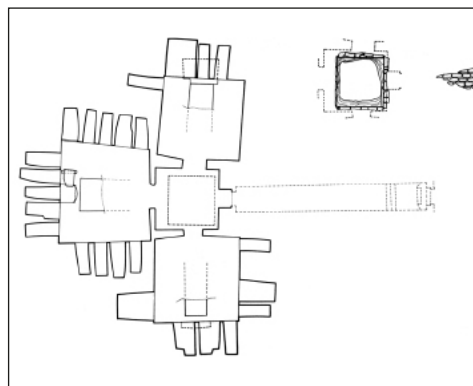


Fig. 23. Plan of one of the most elaborate hypogeum tombs, T19 (PCMA archives)

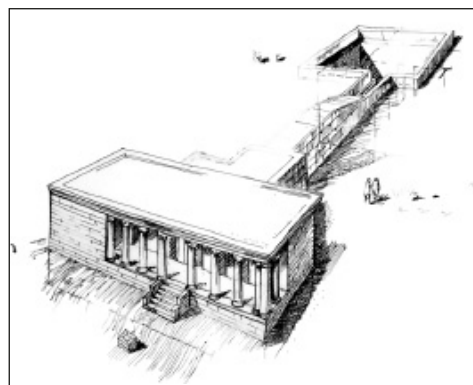


Fig. 24. Hypogeum tomb T6: artist's reconstruction of the appearance of the mausoleum (Drawing J. Dobrowolski, updating T. Kaczor)

⁷ Structures of this kind attached to hypogea might have existed in Alexandria, but have not been preserved. Remains which could be interpreted as aboveground mausolea were reported by the excavators, see Adriani 1966: 31 and 151 No. 100, 162 No. 118, esp. 166ff.



Fig. 25. Banquet rooms in tomb mausolea: top, T16; bottom, T21, in both cases view from the north



Fig. 26. Corridor-staircases leading down into the courts (counterclockwise from top left): tomb T1GH, double staircase, viewed from the south; tomb T6, viewed from the north; tomb T18 with wall surrounding court well, viewed from the north; T10 with altar in the court seen at the bottom of the staircase, viewed from the north

tion of false doors in relief, recalling such, usually painted, closing slabs in Alexandria. Other loculi were closed with plain slabs or with shrouds hanging on pegs (T7 and T20). Some loculi were probably left open. On several occasions, the loculi, especially those opening lengthwise towards the chamber were completely walled up with limestone blocks (like the main locus in the western chamber of tomb T28, see Daszewski 2002: 76, Fig. 2).

The presence of benches, altars or offering tables and amphorae suggests that the chamber was regarded as a cult space besides having a funerary character. It seems that at least some visitors had access to the underground part of the tomb as well as the aboveground pavilion (mausoleum), thus combining two different functions, that of a funerary temple and of an eternal resting place for the dead. This particular idea, well illustrated in the Hellenistic tombs of Alexandria, is clearly to be linked with local Egyptian tradition (see Daszewski 1994b).

The court itself may have solid walls on all sides with centrally situated doorways opening directly into the funerary chambers. Alternately, pairs of pillars could have been cut in bedrock on one, two or three sides, or else two large window-like openings cut in the wall on either side of the entrance to the chamber, as in T18 [Fig. 27]. Such courts recall the peristyle and pseudo-peristyle courts of Hellenistic tombs in Alexandria (Adriani 1966) and in Nea Paphos in Cyprus (Nicolaou 1966).

The aboveground pavilions were sometimes provided with a colonnaded portico in front, e.g. T6 [see Fig. 24] and T 20, with pseudo-Ionic columns set upon a tall stylobate that was accessible by means of monumental steps in the middle. Of particular interest was Tomb 21 with a colon-

naded portico (14.35 m long) furnished with the so-called Marina el-Alamein type of capitals in the center and pseudo-Ionic ones on the outside (Daszewski 2005: 83, Fig. 11). In the pavilion there were also additional rooms located to the sides of the banquet hall, probably serving as temporary dormitories and storerooms for food and beverages. It may well be that in the side rooms mummies of the deceased relatives were stored for quite some time before final burial, so that they could be easily



Fig. 25. Burial chamber façade walls: right, windows flanking central doorway, tomb T18; bottom, peristyle and two side doors flanking a central higher one, tomb T10

exhibited and symbolically accompany the living members of the family in commemorative banquets and feasts organized on anniversaries.⁸ In one case (T6), a double latrine, presumably reflecting gender separation, was arranged in the corner of the pavilion building. Another latrine, well organized for users of the funeral banquet, was found in T21 (Daszewski 2005: 85 and Fig. 13). Such funerary complexes, including aboveground and underground parts, could reach a length of 30 m to 44 m (for example, T6, 42 m; T8, probably 35 m; T10, 36.50 m preserved, but really 40 m counting the damaged front; T16, 32.20 m; T20, about 33 m; T21, 44 m).

The simpler type of hypogeum, which is usually a bit smaller (T1GH, one staircase 13.20 m, the other staircase 22.50 m; T7, 22 m; T13, 23.80 m plus side chamber 7.10 m; T14, 24 m; T18, 25 m; T19, 25.50 m; T28, 26 m; T29, 23.70 m), consisted of an aboveground kiosk or roofed vestibule giving access to a vaulted or flat-roofed staircase that led to the open-air court and funerary chamber(s) [Fig. 26]. In one case (T1GH, see Daszewski 1993b:

23ff., Fig. 2),⁹ instead of the court there was a large, square opening in the ceiling of the funerary chamber, protected on the surface by a parapet wall; it had the same function of joining the underground (i.e., underworld) with the world outside (i.e., sky, celestial sphere). An altar was placed directly under the opening on the floor of the chamber. A very similar hypogeum of late Hellenistic date was found in Alexandria (Wardian area, Adriani 1966: No. 105). In the Marina tomb, an oblong offering table was found bearing representations in relief of fruits, vegetables, bread and a round receptacle for liquids [see Fig. 19]; it was situated directly below a loculus containing a lead coffin with the body of the deceased. Such offering tables, also known from Hellenistic tombs in Plinthine (Adriani 1952: 148ff.), reflect an old Egyptian tradition of tables painted with offerings for eternity.

Inside the funerary chambers, corpses were placed inside niches (*loculi*). On several occasions remains of wooden planks were uncovered, indicating the use of coffins or biers. One tomb (T29)

⁸ Lucian, *De Luctu* 21: "The Egyptians salt down their dead and after drying the dead man...they drink and dine in his company". This mention refers to the mummification of the corpse and the subsequent presence of the mummy at the banquet. For this and other ancient sources, see remarks of Montserrat 1997. Montserrat was of the opinion that the mummies, before final burial "were kept propped up in tomb chapels", "the relatives paid them visits as part of the ancestor cult and sometimes feasted in their presence". Barbara Borg thinks that the mummies were kept rather in the house of their relatives and were present at the banquets there. The deceased "is regarded not just as a pictorial representation substituting for reality, but as actually present", see Borg 1997. She discusses her views more extensively in a more recent publication (Borg 1998: 77–79). The finds in Marina seem to corroborate and contribute to Montserrat's suggestions. The proximity of hypogea in Marina to the houses of the living in the town, and the presence of funerary pavilions are, in my understanding, arguments against the old, but still persisting assumption that the mummies were actually kept at home. See also Daszewski 1997b, esp. 64; also 1999: 43–44. In hypogeum T6, a small compartment next to the banquet hall was found filled with decayed mummified bodies. This was obviously a secondary burial. Most probably, the mummies were kept for quite a time in the side rooms of the pavilion, before being stacked up in the compartment. In the case of simpler hypogea without aboveground pavilions, the mummies could have been exposed in the open-air courts or even on benches in funerary chambers. The family had easy access to them and the arrangements in the tombs indicate that banquets could have taken place either in the pavilion or inside the funerary chambers.

⁹ The two staircases of the tomb were made in different periods.



Fig. 28. Rock-cut benches, altars and offering tables inside the burial chambers: top, tomb T6; bottom, tomb T10

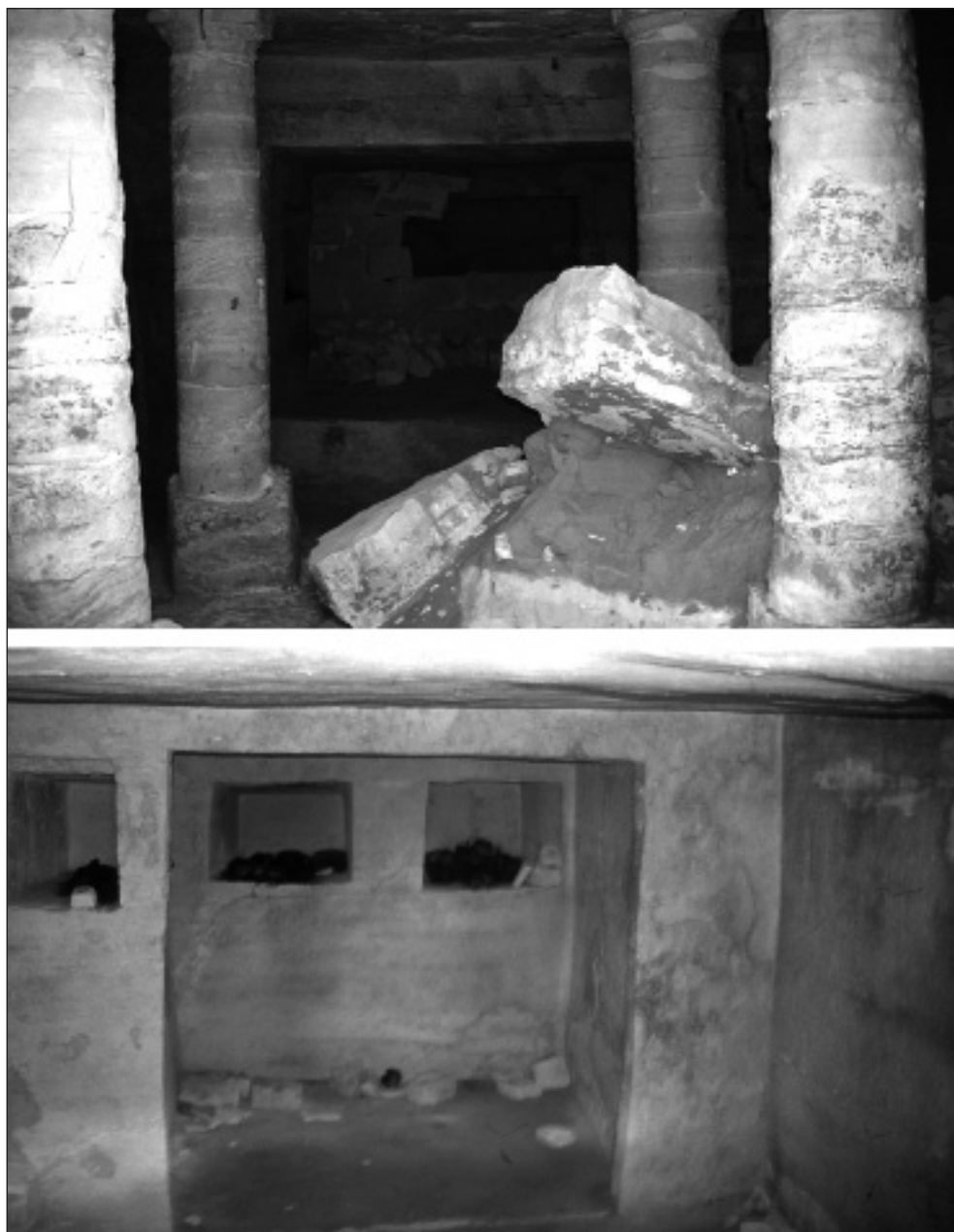


Fig. 29. Western funerary chamber in T20 with a burial niche in the back wall and ceiling supported on Doric columns cut in the rock, and bottom, exedra-like niche with burial loculi in the back wall of the main funerary chamber of tomb T21

is of special interest. It was relatively well preserved except for the entrance kiosk, part of the curtain wall aboveground and some plundering inside the main chamber. The open-air court, which measured 3.90 x 3.70 m, had an overhanging roof and a rock-cut altar dominating the center of the courtyard, right underneath the roof opening. A monumental entrance situated centrally in the south wall and flanked by rock-hewn pilasters with capitals supporting a lintel led to the funerary chamber. Several loculi were cut in the east, south and west walls. On the rear wall of one of the main, southern loculi, there were two symmetric cobra heads painted on either side of a sun disc. Two adults, laid to rest with heads in opposite directions, were placed in a wooden coffin (Daszewski 2003: 51–56, esp. Figs 5, 7; Zych 2003: 72–80). Wooden planks (from coffins and biers) were also found in some other loculi.

Two ships were drawn in black charcoal on the east wall. One of them was probably a large cargo vessel. The other one seems to have been a faster galley. It has a pointed prow, curving back at the top. Along the sides there was a row of oars. Such galley ships were in use both in Hellenistic and Early Imperial times (Daszewski 2003: Fig. 6 and page 54).

Three offering tables were placed in front of the loculi. The best one was a rectangular table in the middle of the south wall. Slabs that had once closed some of the loculi were found broken. One of them was decorated in the form of a bird

represented frontally, probably a Horus-falcon. A large terracotta sarcophagus of tubular shape was found lying along the western wall.

Three undecorated lead coffins were also found in three different hypogea in the necropolis (Zych 2003: 81–83).

Many corpses, although not all by far, were mummified. Several corpses retained traces of resinated or bituminized rhombic wrappings, sometimes gilded (Corcoran 1995: 82ff.), or clothes. Some mummies were provided with a portrait,¹⁰ others were given a portrait and were stuccoed and decorated with appropriate scenes. The body was first wrapped in coarse linen, then the wrappings were stuccoed on the front, painted with a reddish undercoating and gilded. Remnants of gilded stucco were found in T16 (Daszewski 1998b: 66). A complete mummy with such decoration was documented in T28 (Daszewski 2002: 77–78, Fig. 3). The stucco body field was decorated with impressed ornamentation divided into horizontal registers, each containing a mythological scene: in one register the goddess Nephthys with spread wings, in another a jackal-headed Anubis depicted standing, lustrating the mummy of the deceased lying on the bier. The register above showed a goddess with outstretched wings.¹¹

It is to be noted that the kinds of burial and the grave goods from a single hypogeum (for example, T28, T6, T20 and T21), a single funerary chamber and sometimes even a single loculus demonstrated con-

¹⁰ Mummies with portraits, well-known from the Fayum and Upper Egypt, were found for the first time in Northern Egypt in the necropolis of Marina el-Alamein, see Daszewski 1997b: 63ff., Pl. 6,3–4, and 28–29; also 1992: 34ff., Fig. 3. More portraits were found in 2005 in T21, but unfortunately they were in completely degraded condition due to the humidity in the tomb.

¹¹ For such decoration in general, also with instructive drawings, see Corcoran 1995.

siderable variety.¹² Apparently, burial varied depending on the status of the deceased, the wealth of the family, and, in some cases perhaps also ethnic origin and/or personal preference. The age of the deceased was an important factor. Burials of children were usually (but not always) very simple. Outside the hypogea, infants were often interred in an amphora with broken-off neck or inside two lower halves of amphorae put together. Neither should one forget that in a hypogeum a single funerary chamber could contain over a hundred corpses. Here again, in view of the collective character of the burials, the question arises whether they all belonged

to one family or whether parts of the tomb were sold or rented to strangers; perhaps the tomb had belonged to a group of families or to an association.¹³

Who were the people buried in the hypogea? They certainly belonged to the local elite, since the cost of such large tombs and of mummification must have been considerable. One can observe, however, that even within this group only some were correctly mummified. All the mummies or fragments of them were found in the largest hypogea only, and usually these tombs had aboveground structures. Only very few mummies had portraits. It is also true that our evidence is very incomplete.



Fig. 30. Mummies from a cache burial in T6 (left) and the only fully preserved painted portrait on a wooden panel, from this burial

¹² For instance, in T13, a few thin transparent sheets of mica were found on the chest of one body. The deceased was accompanied by a hollow molded figurine made of lime mortar, representing a woman in long robes or nude. A figurine of a standing naked female molded in lime mortar accompanied another corpse. There were also terracotta oil lamps, small leaves of gold, a faience figurine of the Aphrodite *Anadyomene* type, imitations of pearls in lime plaster, see Daszewski 1999: 67–69. This abundance of grave goods in T13 was fairly unique. Burials in other hypogea produced little beyond small glass bottles and terracotta unguentaria.

¹³ With regard to cult associations in Egypt of the Late Period, see Zeidler 1994: 270–288, esp. 280, 7, and his notes with references to written sources.

Most of the tombs were plundered and the corpses destroyed. In one case (T28), the heads of four mummies had been chopped off by robbers (Daszewski 2001b: 56–58 and Fig. 9). Climatic conditions in the coastal area contributed to further decay. In one hypogeum (T14), traces of Greek inscriptions in red paint, giving the names of the dead, were found under several of the loculi. Only one could be read: *Apollo*s, a theophoric Greek name. Like most other people buried in the tomb, he must have belonged to the group, which in Roman Egypt was identified as “Hellenes”. The term does not refer to Greeks, but rather to “foreign settlers” (Bagnall 1997: 8).¹⁴ In the Marina necropolis one can follow a phenomenon, which may be described as a gradual mixing of Greek and Egyptian funerary practices, culminating in internment in the hypogea. In a different study, I have proposed that these large tombs combining underground and aboveground structures were not Greek inventions, but rather *interpretatio graeca* of Egyptian hypogea of the Late Period (Daszewski 1994b). The population in Marina was either Greek-speaking or bilingual. All the fragmentary inscriptions uncovered hitherto in the town and in the necropolis are in Greek. Citing Roger Bagnall, who spoke of the inhabitants of the Fayum, but his remarks fit well with the situation in Marina, “it seems reasonable to conclude that most of the Greek-speaking inhabitants of the region saw themselves as both Greek and Egyptian. And it is these people who commissioned the mummy portraits with their striking combination of Graeco-Roman fashions” (Bagnall 1997: esp. 10).

The only well-preserved funerary portrait from Marina [Fig. 30, left] is of very fine artistic quality. The discovery of such portraits for the first time in northern Egypt indicates that the actual distribution of funerary portraits throughout the country must have been different than hitherto admitted, i.e., not limited to the Fayum and a few sites in Upper Egypt. One may assume that such paintings existed also in Alexandria, but were destroyed due to the humidity resulting from the proximity of the sea and heavy winter rains.

Corpses were not locally mummified in Marina, but sent to relatively distant centers for embalming. One such place may have been Taposiris Magna, where thousands of animal mummies were found deposited in an underground necropolis near the temple of Sarapis-Osiris; another one was Alexandria with its many embalming ateliers (as reported by Strabo, *Geographica* 17.1.10).

Alexandria is of particular importance, since ateliers of painters must have existed there with roots reaching far back to the Ptolemaic period and the traditional school of portraiture. None of these early portraits have survived to our days except for literary mentions of their existence and several magnificent representations on mosaics, which attest to the quality of the original paintings, in imitation of which they were made (Daszewski 1985: Cat. nos 38 and 39, Pls A, B; 2001a). Marina el-Alamein has thus not only provided important new evidence with regard to funerary architecture and burial practices, but has also opened a new page in the history of painting in Graeco-Roman Egypt.

¹⁴ Native Egyptian women could become Hellenes through marriage.

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