

## POLISH-EGYPTIAN RESTORATION MISSION AT MARINA EL-ALAMEIN IN 1990

**Jarosław Dobrowolski**

The restoration mission<sup>1</sup> operated in the complex of tombs excavated by Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski,<sup>2</sup> dating from the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD (Fig. 1). All these monuments were built of soft local limestone and were discovered much destroyed, probably ruined by an earthquake and then damaged by extensive erosion. As the exposed stones are subject to further serious damage in the coastal climate of the site, it was found necessary to reassemble the excavated structures, thus also enhancing the touristic value of the site. A Polish-Egyptian mission sponsored by the EAO and PCMA was formed to perform the task.

The main objective of the 1990 season was to reassemble a tomb registered as T 1. The structure was excavated in 1987 and dated to the 1st century AD. A preliminary design for its restoration was prepared in 1988 by Dr. W. Bentkowski (see p. 41ff. above).

It was established, both by excavations in 1987 and by additional research occasioned by the restoration works, that the tomb had the form of a huge squat column resting on a stepped stylobate which was mounted in turn on a cubic pedestal (Fig. 2). This large base contained two burial chambers (loculi) with entrances blocked by stone slabs, inside which multiple burials were found. The central part formed a stone casket built over a pit hollowed in bedrock.

---

<sup>1</sup> From the PCMA: Jarosław Dobrowolski, architect (head of the mission) and Kazimierz Błaszczyk, building engineer. Representing the EAO were inspectors: Mr. Nader Ramadan Musa and Mr. Muhammad Abdel Hamid el Said. The photographic record was provided by Mr. Stefan Sadowski, a photographer in the PCMA.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 26ff.

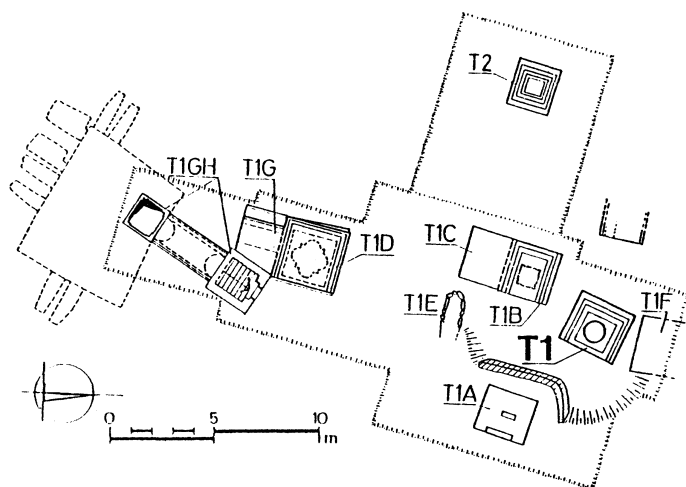


Fig. 1. Location of the restored tomb T1 within the complex excavated by the Polish Mission.

This compartment, which had been sealed by the construction of the superimposed pillar, was found to contain two skeletons (one in the pit and one above it). The column was a plain straight shaft, built of drums approximately 0.30 m high and consisting of four segments each, with a base and a capital of extremely simplified form. Lines traced on the upper surface of the capital suggest that a funerary monument (probably a statue) had once stood upon it, but no clues as to its form have been found. The column's simple base and capital were the only decorative elements of the tomb.

The base of the structure and a part of the stylobate were preserved *in situ*, although some stones were missing and the surfaces were badly eroded. The column had fallen and its blocks were found lying over a neighboring tomb.

In the first stage of restoration, these blocks (stored at the site since 1987) were gathered together and the drums were assembled on the ground according to their position recorded during the excavation; missing blocks were then added. Of the two surviving

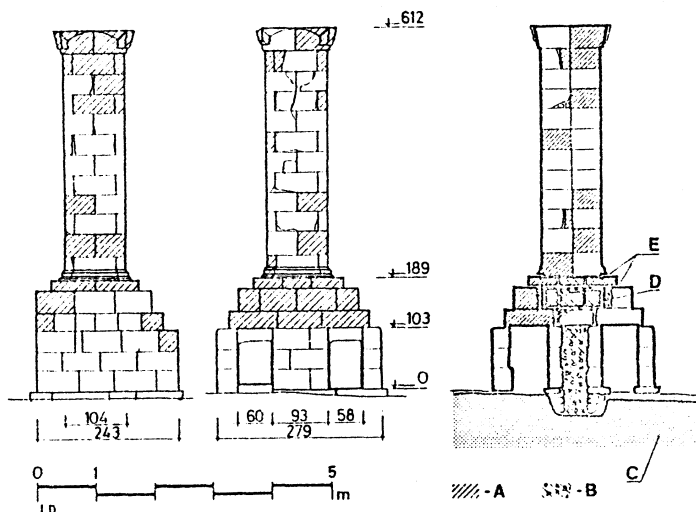


Fig. 2. Tomb T1 after restoration.

A – new blocks, R – limestone rubble and mortar,  
C – bedrock, D – cardboard separation inserts,  
E – empty joints around edges.

quarters of the column's capital one was discovered broken to pieces and was bound together with polyvinyl acetate in 1987. In 1990 the joints were found to be in satisfactory state and the block was classified fit for reinstallation; outer cracks were filled with mortar. Two missing quarters of the capital were supplemented by blocks cut at the site.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile eroded joints of the base of the monument were filled in with mortar, loose blocks adjusted and fixed, missing blocks restored. The interior of the central part of the base was cleared of the loose sand filling it down to bedrock and limestone rubble and mortar were put in its place, creating a solid foundation for the column. To prevent the weight of the column

<sup>3</sup> By Messrs T. Kołaczyński and J. Sternak of the PKZ's Polish-Egyptian Islamic Mission in Cairo.

from exerting pressure upon the much eroded outer walls, this concrete core was separated from the stone casing of the stylobate by board inserts and raked joints. Finally the column was reassembled using the simple method of wooden scaffolding and a pulley in a manner probably quite similar to the original construction. All the original blocks that could be installed were reintroduced into the structure. Newly added blocks amount to roughly 25% of all the stones. They were given a slightly different surface finish to distinguish them from the original ones. Total height of the monument after reconstruction is approximately 6.2 m, with the column itself 4.22 m high and 1.04 m in diameter.

Apart from this main task, restoration works were performed on a neighboring tomb T 1A, a much damaged structure originally comprising four loculi in two levels, of which only the lower part was preserved. This tomb was protected in its ruined state by filling in eroded joints, adjusting and fixing loose stones, and supplementing a few missing blocks. A sand-retaining wall was built as a support for this tomb's foundation; it lies approximately 1 m higher than the neighboring T 1. Some protective work was also performed on two other tombs, the full restoration of which is planned for the next season.