# MARINA EL-ALAMEIN
## CONSERVATION WORK 1996
**Stanisław Medeksza**

A Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission comprising staff mostly from the Wroclaw University of Technology continued in its second season at Marina el-Alamein from February 22 until May 31, 1996.[1]

The object of conservation is a complex of two houses from the Graeco-Roman period, explored in rescue excavations by an Egyptian team directed by Mohammed Ali Abd el-Razek, arbitrarily designated as H9 and H9a and provisionally dated to the late 1st and the 2nd centuries AD.[2] The town itself was inhabited from the 2nd century BC to the early 7th century AD[3] and later. Two terracotta lamps dated to the 1st century

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[1] The Mission comprised Prof. Stanisław Medeksza, director; Dr. Rafał Czerner, Dr. Ewa Łużyniecka, and, for the first two weeks, Dr. Maciej Małachowicz, architects; Dr. Józef Adamowski, constructor; Mirosław Koper and Mieczysław Zygadło, stonecutters. Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek from the Polish-Egyptian Archaeological Mission in Alexandria worked with the team for two days as ceramologist. The photographer was Mr. Waldemar Jerke from the Polish Centre of Archaeology. The Egyptian side was represented by Mr. Mohammed Ali Abd el-Razek, chief of the archaeologists and head of the group of inspectors comprising Messrs Mahmoud Roshdy Embaby, Ahmed Abd el-Wahab, Abd el-Hay Shahata. On behalf of the mission I would like to express my gratitude to representatives of the SCA in Cairo and Alexandria, especially Prof. Dr. Mohammed Abd el-Halim Nur ed-Din, SCA General Secretary; Prof. Dr. Ali Hassan, Technical General Director; Mr. Abd el-Halim Rizq, Western Delta General Director; Mr. Ahmed Abd el-Fatah, Mr. Hassan Shehata and Mr. Ali Abd el-Razek, SCA directors in Alexandria. Without their cooperation and comprehensive help in matters of organization, it would have been impossible to complete the mission's program.

[2] S. Medeksza, Marina el Alamein. Conservation Work 1995, *PAM* VII, pp. 42-52.

[3] W.A. Daszewski, Marina el Alamein. The site of an unknown Graeco-Roman Settlement on the Mediterranean Coast of Egypt, in: *Marina El Alamein. Archaeological*



 

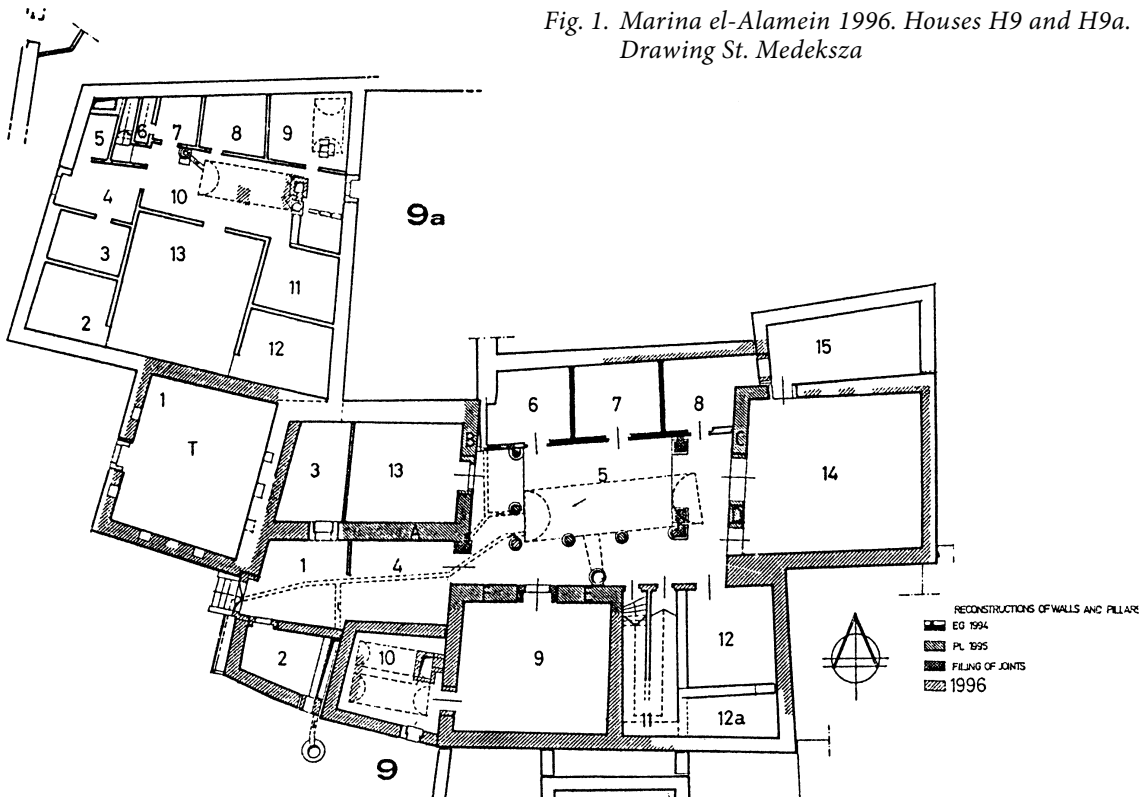


*Fig. 1. Marina el-Alamein 1996. Houses H9 and H9a. Drawing St. Medeksza*

AD came to light in 1996, during the cleaning of a mud-brick wall between rooms 4 and 13, which obviously belonged to a phase of rebuilding of House H9.[4] A third lamp (H9/96/3), which was found during the cleaning of room 12a, is also dated to the 1st century AD. The houses underwent rebuilding probably because of damages suffered in an earthquake. The condition of the remains indicates that the houses were destroyed a number of times, presumably also as a result of earthquakes. After the first cataclysm the houses were completely rebuilt. After the second tremor not all the walls were raised and only parts of the houses remained in use. The archaeological evidence is insufficient as yet to date these cataclysms.

**HOUSE H9**

In 1996, the main conservation effort was placed on house H9, while inventory and building documentation were carried out in H9a in order to verify earlier records of 1988 and 1993, which had become invalid because of progressing erosion caused by weather conditions.

A study of the building's architectural stratigraphy revealed clear evidence of two building stages. In the first stage, the house comprised walls made of broken stone in a lime or clay-and-lime mortar. The second stage consisted of repairs and enlargements made of mud-brick in a clay mortar. The original house probably comprised two kinds of walls, in similarity to the late houses at Abu Mina.[5] Stone blocks were used for the lower parts, while the upper floors, presumably from the first floor up, were of mud brick.

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*Background and Conservation Problems. The Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission at Marina 1988. The Polish Excavation Mission at Marina 1987-1989*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1991, p. 12.

[4] I would like to thank Prof. Dr. W.A. Daszewski and Dr. G. Majcherek for their help in dating the lamps: H9/96/4 was dated to the second quarter of the 1st century AD, H9/96/5 to the second half of the 1st century AD.

[5] Oral communication from Prof. Dr. P. Grossman.



 

What is certain is that in house H9 a mud-brick wall did not always constitute the upper part of a stone one. In many places mud-brick walls enclosed and reinforced the remains of stone walls that had been damaged in an earthquake, e.g. mud-brick walls erected directly upon the earlier stone floors in rooms 4, 13, 6 and 7. In rooms 11, 12, 12a these mud-brick walls were introduced as secondary partition walls. In room 15 no mud-brick sections were noted in the preserved stone walls which exceed 2 m here. In room 14 there is clear evidence for a bricking-up in *opus africanum* bond of the space between the pillars, equal to half the width of the wall; thus, this section is not even with the northern face of the southern wall of room 13.

Additional reparations and additions to the stone walls are also in evidence. Some preceded the house's "mudbrick" phase; others are proof of subsequent destructions and repairs, as well as enlargements carried out in later periods. It is currently impossible to date all these works.

The stone floors, walls and vicinity of the house were cleared and an effort was made to landscape the surrounding area appropriately. It was also necessary to move many of the stone blocks stored in particular rooms in order to check the wall faces and floors which had been unavailable for inspection so far. The main task was to trace all remains of wall paintings that were still visible.

An effort was made to stop the corrosive processes attacking the uncovered parts of the structure exposed to the direct operation of the elements: wall tops, column shafts and architectural elements stored in the open outside the excavation area. Dismantling and mechanical cleaning of wall faces and joints were necessary in order to get rid of the crumbling limestone and mortar. This was done section by section in order not to leave any cleaned parts of walls unprotected until the next year. The tops of the walls were dismantled, sometimes right down to the foundations as in corner 4-10, until the first sound courses were



 

reached. In the area of the courtyard walls did not exceed 0.70 m in height and were often lowered substantially in the clearing process: the western wall to 0.45 m, the eastern one to 0.20 m. In rooms 9, 10, 2 and 14 the walls were better preserved and lost no more than two top courses of corroded layers, that is, no more than 0.30 m. For reasons of display, it was necessary to raise all the walls to at least 1 m in height, making sure, however, that the western and northern walls were higher in order to protect the structure against prevailing erosive winds.

In the first stage, the walls closing off the courtyard on the south were raised. The stonecutters spent the season cutting new door jambs and column shafts. The new jambs are supposed to fill in the losses in original blocks with the assumption that as many of the original door jambs are used as possible, especially those that were found lying in the vicinity of House H9 and were obviously once part of the structure. As a result the exposition of the courtyard has practically been completed.

All the restored walls required fine jointing. The reason for this was the extensive corrosion of wall tops and joints. The crumbling of the mortar from the joints was preceded by pieces of plaster peeling off the wall in a longlasting process. Photographs taken during excavations reveal that all the walls that were uncovered then were in good technical condition. It o can be assumed that the destruction started in 1986/87. Following eight years of exposure there is no way now that the ancient substance of the walls can be preserved in its original condition.

In 1996 work in courtyard 5 concerned the anastylosis of columns and a reconstruction of the entrance to the *prostas* and *oikos* 14. Four column bases have been preserved in the courtyard along with two bases of engaged columns, one on the north wall and the other on the eastern side of the southeastern pillar. The remains of two pillars flanking the passage from the courtyard to the *prostas* leading to the *oikos* have been preserved in the



 

courtyard. It was possible to reconstruct one full and three incomplete columns, none exceeding 1.50 m in height. The northern engaged column and the southern pillar in the entrance to the *prostas* were also supplemented with new blocks.

The technique of building walls in ancient Marina at the time when House H9 was erected was simple enough. The facing blocks were laid without mortar and the core of the wall was filled in with rubble and a thin mortar poured on top of it. The mortar filled the empty spaces inside the wall and the joints between particular blocks. Once the walls were raised to their planned height and the room was roofed over, the walls were plastered. The layers of plaster started with a coarse plaster containing sizable grains of pebbles and stone debris. On the outside this layer entered deeply into the cracks between stones, thus bonding also the exterior face of a wall. The next layers of plaster, from one to three, were consistently finer. The last facing layer of plaster was smoothened and constituted a ground for wall paintings.



 