

## EXCAVATIONS IN ALEXANDRIA IN 1990-91

### Grzegorz Majcherek

Archaeological investigations at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, sponsored by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, continued with varied intensity throughout the period from November 1990 till June 1991<sup>1</sup> and concentrated in three separate areas of the site:

- cisterns (sector L)
- area west of the Theatre Portico (sector U)
- habitation quarter east of R4 street (sector W<sub>1</sub>N)

#### SECTOR L (CISTERNS)

Archaeological research carried out in this area was basically conditioned by the current restoration program of the Mission. In order to obtain additional data, necessary for the progress of restoration work, two deep trenches were dug along the western facade of the edifice. The excavations resulted in new determinations, shedding more light on the hitherto disputed problems of the phasing and chronology of the complex.

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<sup>1</sup> The mission was directed by Dr. Wojciech Kołataj and Mr. Grzegorz Majcherek was in charge of the archaeological research. Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski co-directed the excavations in sector U. The mission included the following: Dr. Jolanta Młynarczyk, Dr. Barbara Tkaczow, Miss Kamila Baturo, Mrs. Renata Kucharczyk, Miss Joanna Sawicka, Mr. Włodzimierz Bogusz, archaeologists, and Messrs Bogdan Okupny and Waldemar Jerke, photographers. The architectural structures were surveyed and mapped by Dr. Wojciech Kołataj and Mr. Jarosław Dobrowolski. As in previous campaigns, the EAO was represented by Mr. Ala'a ed-Din Mahrous. The progress of this campaign owes much to the efficiency and friendly support of the Authorities of the EAO, particularly to Mrs. Doreya Said, Director of the Greco-Roman Museum, to whom we wish to express our sincere thanks.

The first of the two trenches was opened at the supposed location of the southernmost buttress (no. 4). The buttress as well as extensive sections of the adjacent wall facing had been dismantled almost entirely in the Medieval period. Several pieces of Egyptian Monochromatic and Splashed Glazed Wares (Fayumi), found in the fill of the stripping pit, pointed to the 10th-11th century AD as the most probable date for this operation. The Late Roman stratum into which the stripping pit was sunk, was composed almost entirely of broken amphorae sherds. Most of them belonged to imported Late Roman Amphorae 1 and 4 (manufactured in Cilicia, Cyprus and the Gaza region) and to Egyptian Late Roman Amphorae class 7. The pottery was found alternating with layers of ashes, most probably originating from the furnaces of the nearby baths. The amphorae and associated finds of Cypriote Red Slip and Phocaean Wares provide a deposition date for this stratum: the 6th century AD. Underneath, at a level 9.60 m deep, a well preserved paved floor appeared. An identical floor had been cleared previously in the trenches located near buttresses nos 2 and 3 and it presumably covered the entire surface along the facade. This area had apparently served as a large hall filling the span between the cisterns and a huge wall (aqueduct) built on the western border of street R4.<sup>2</sup> The hall was 6.50 m wide and almost 4.50 m high as shown by a row of holes left in the cistern's wall by wooden roof beams.

Preserved foundations of buttress no. 4 were reached at a level of 5.25 m, i.e., some 10.75 m below the extant top of the cisterns. Six courses of masonry were found partially preserved, the lowermost forming a sort of pedestal (0.95 x 1.20 m) on which the buttress was erected.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Rodziewicz, *Alexandrie III, Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*, Varsovie 1984, pp. 259-263.

Another large trench was dug in the northeastern corner of the edifice. Results here confirmed once again that apart from heavy damages caused by earthquakes, large sections of the wall facing were removed in the early Middle Ages. However, the stratigraphic context recognized here proved to be substantially different. The cistern foundations were found at a level of 8.40 m (i.e. approximately 3.15 m higher than in the former case). They were apparently built directly upon the remains of constructions previously existing in this place.

This structure consisted of at least two basins. Both were built of flat red bricks with inner surfaces lined with water-proof plaster. Destroyed, they were filled tightly with small irregular stones, to form a handy substructure for buttress no. 1 and the adjacent section of the cistern wall. Unfortunately, most of the stratigraphic context was seriously disturbed. No safe dating material has come to light and the chronology of the discovered structure is yet to be determined. The surprisingly high elevation of the preserved remains (corresponding with the level of the 6th century pavement of street R4) would indicate the possibility of a large water tank predating the Late Roman cisterns. This assumption calls for further research as well as for a reconsideration of previous stratigraphic evidence concerning this part of the site.

## SECTOR U

The excavated area extending west of the so called Theatre Portico measured roughly 30 x 40 m. Investigations in this part of the site were initiated back in the 1980-81 season.<sup>3</sup> A large number of Moslem tombs belonging to the Upper and Lower Necropolis located there was then explored and the whole area

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Rodziewicz, Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria 1980-81 (preliminary report), *ASAE* 70 (1984-85), pp. 241-242.

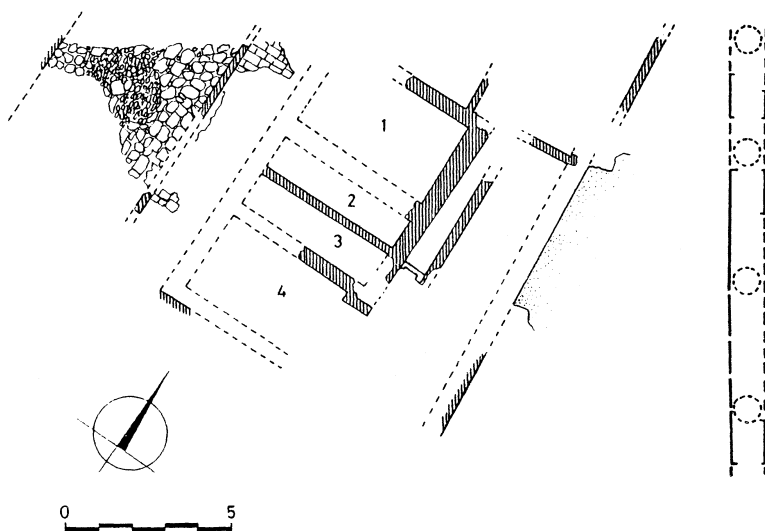


Fig. 1. Early Roman structures in sector U.

excavated down to the level of numerous large limestone blocks covering the central part of the sector. These blocks were now surveyed, numbered, and removed to a prepared flat area nearby where they will be stored for restoration in the future.

Upon examination these blocks, some of them even retaining mortar in the joints, proved to belong to a large enclosure wall. It was 0.60 m thick, whereas its height can be calculated at almost 6 m. Poorly preserved remains of what appears to be its foundations were found close to the eastern edge of the area. The wall was built of isodomic courses of masonry, each course varying in height. Several architectural elements, column drums and moldings were found reused in this structure. Pottery material from immediately below the fallen blocks dates the destruction of this wall to the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 4th century AD. Running nearly exactly N-S, the

wall seems to form the eastern limit of the Early Roman structures uncovered nearby.

These structures were built parallel to the street, of which a small but well preserved section was uncovered in the westernmost corner of the excavated area. The street was c. 5.70 m wide (its western limit was reached only in a small trench) and was paved with large blocks of dolomite, some of them measuring up to 0.70 m across. Minor damages of the surface were repaired already in antiquity with small irregular stones. The street is markedly convex in cross-section and provided with gutters along the edges. The eastern one emptied into a large sewage channel running below the sidewalk. The sidewalk, originally 2.70 m wide, was paved with large rectangular limestone slabs.

The structures located between the street and the huge enclosure wall described above were unfortunately damaged quite substantially. Their plan is therefore mostly conjectural (Fig. 1). It seems that they formed a complex of separate units, although their general layout was slightly modified during a long period of occupation. Three rooms located in the northern part of the excavated area share the same length (c. 5.50 m), while varying in width. Room no. 1 (the largest one) is 3.30 m wide, while rooms nos 2 and 3 are markedly smaller, their width not exceeding 1.60 m. The southern portion of the complex was most probably occupied by a single, almost square room, approximately 5 x 5.50 m. The floor in each room was invariably made of tamped earth. The foundations were built rather hastily of small stones set in clay mortar. One can assume that these rooms served as *tabernae* since no domestic installations of any kind were found inside.

The construction of the whole complex and the initial phase of occupation can be safely dated in the first half of the

1st century AD. The *terminus post quem* is provided by a particularly rich collection of well dated finds found in the underfloor layers, comprising numerous lamps and sherds of tablewares, both Egyptian and foreign. The latter included examples of Eastern Sigillata A and B, as well as some items of Italian origin. Italian tablewares were represented by locally made Red Slip wares, some of them closely imitating common sigillata shapes.

The complex was abandoned and deliberately dismantled not before the end of the 3rd century AD. All reusable building material must have been removed, since no associated destruction level was found.

In the southern part of the excavated area remains of yet another earlier structure were explored. It was built in an unusual way: pillars of regular blocks with vertically set slabs filling the intervals. They were apparently of Late Ptolemaic age as evidenced by accompanying finds.

Perhaps the most interesting of the discoveries in this sector is the unexpected orientation of the uncovered structures. All of them follow a nearly exact geographical orientation (N-S), differing in this respect from the ancient street network and other monuments of Early Roman age previously discovered at Kom el-Dikka as well as in other districts of Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> The cause of this unusual orientation within the *insulae* is yet unclear; further research will certainly provide more evidence to answer this question.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of research on the street network of ancient Alexandria, see *supra*, note 2, pp. 17-33.

<sup>5</sup> This area was in the past considered as the presumed location of the Sema, cf. A. Adriani, *Repertorio d'Arte dell'Egitto Greco-Romano*, serie C, vol. II, pp. 242ff.

## SECTOR W<sub>1</sub>N

The excavations in this sector were planned as a continuation of a program started in 1988.<sup>6</sup> Our work during this season was focused on the partly excavated Late Roman house H (Fig. 2). Three contiguous rooms forming the eastern extension of this large house which served both domestic and commercial purposes were explored. They are located close to a narrow alley running along its southern facade. This part of the building was extensively damaged by Medieval building activity; its plan could be reconstructed only approximately.

Room H-9 measured approximately 5 x 3.30 m. Only its eastern and part of the northern wall are still preserved. The walls were built in a technique typical of this period consisting of pillars made of large blocks with spaces in between filled with smaller stones and ashy mortar. The central part of the room was occupied by a large L-shaped sewage tank, c. 3 m long, 0.95 m wide and 1.30 m deep. It was constructed of large, most probably reused blocks (on one of them a large red painted *crux ansata* has survived). The tank had a gabled roof made of large slabs. Apart from typical food remains (fish and animal bones and shells) the fill contained numerous pottery sherds pointing to the second half of the 6th-first half of the 7th century AD as the period of use. Immediately below, a sizeable fragment of well preserved pavement made of regular limestone slabs was found. The pavement as well as the adjacent section of wall decorated in the so-called *opus alexandrinum* style (rectangular panels painted red and yellow and framed with black and green bands) belonged to the initial phase

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<sup>6</sup> For the results of previous campaigns, cf. G. Majcherek, Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria in the 1989 season, *PAM* I, 1988-89, (1990), pp. 75-83; Excavations in Alexandria in 1990, *PAM* II, 1989-90, (1991), pp. 19-24.

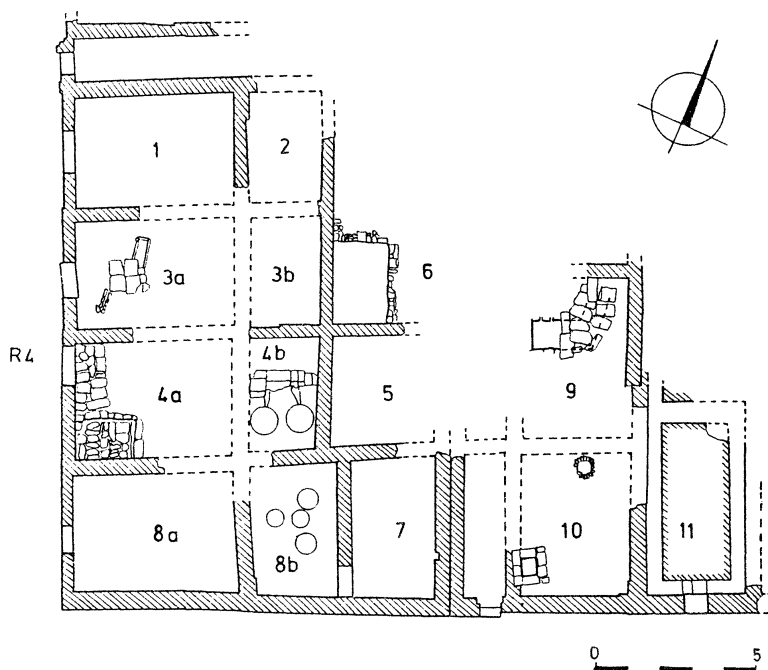


Fig. 2. Plan of Late Roman house H.

of the occupation of the Late Roman house H, most probably dating back to the early 4th century AD.

Room H-10 located immediately next to the alley was smaller in size (4.50 x 3.60 m). Its walls were also almost completely demolished. A glass workshop was located here. Remains of a small glass kiln were uncovered in the northern part of the room. The kiln was roughly circular (c. 0.45 m in diameter), built of small bricks in clay mortar. The inner surfaces of the chamber were found partly vitrified due to prolonged use and high temperature. The remainder of at least two furnaces heating the chamber were also uncovered, as well as some



accompanying installations. A considerable amount of broken glass vessels, semi-products and several slate moulds used for bead production were found in associated debris. The workshop operated in the 6th century AD as indicated by accompanying finds, comprising sherds of Cypriote Red Slip and Egyptian Red Slip, of both the A and B variety. In the southeastern corner of the room a large and completely preserved well was located. While it was used later (most probably in the 10th-11th centuries AD), its lower part is apparently of earlier date.

Room H-11 located further to the east was also much destroyed, and only small sections of its southern and western walls have survived. A medium-sized storage bin lined with stones was uncovered in its southern part. Pottery recovered from the fill proved that this installation was used in the 6th-7th century AD.

In the previous period, however, room H-11 served entirely different purposes. Immediately below the last-phase floor a large well preserved brick structure was cleared. Upon further examination, it proved to be a sizeable latrine occupying the entire space of the room (5.30 x 3 m). The floor of the latrine, a large fragment of which was found in the northern section of the room, was made of small bricks set on end in a herring-bone pattern. An U-shaped channel (0.50 m wide), built along presently ghost walls emptied into the sewage channel in the alley, running parallel to the southern facade of the house. The latrine was obviously accessible from the street as indicated by the position of two large slabs covering the channel on this side. Several fragments of recovered pottery give evidence of its long use, at least from the 5th century onward. Both the proximity of the street and the considerable dimensions speak in favor of a public rather than domestic purpose.

The Late Roman occupation phase is separated from earlier levels by a thick stratum of debris containing numerous

fragments of colored plastering (painted red and black), mosaics and some pieces of architectural decoration, of which a semicircular finely cut cornice is the best example.

The presence of Early Roman structures belonging to a large urban villa was ascertained underneath. Research will be continued in the next season.