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*Statues and Statuettes from an Ancient Town
in Modern Marina el-Alamein in Egypt*

A new tourist town, Marina el-Alamein, started to be built in 1985/6 on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, around a lagoon lying 96km west of Alexandria. The tracing of new roads and development of sites under the tourist infrastructure destroyed ancient ruins, both houses and tombs. It dawned upon me when I investigated the area in 1986 that what I had before me were the remains of a town from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. A project was initiated to document these ruins and a year later excavations began, of the necropolis and eventually of the town.¹

A second century AD description of the region by a Graeco-Egyptian geographer Claudios Ptolemaios mentions Leucaspsis, a small town built just south of the lagoon, shielded from the open sea by a strip of incredibly white sand. The site looked to be the very place. It consisted of extensive urban architecture and a vast necropolis of tombs, both hypogea cut in the rock and aboveground masonry structures topped by monumental pillars or columns, six to seven meters high, crowned with images, like that of a Horus falcon or a lion. The tomb architecture revealed true professionalism on the part of the builders, who can be presumed to have been pure Greeks or, more likely, Graeco-Egyptians, and undoubtedly men of substance as only the rich could afford the elaborate funerary structures and the mummification rites, as well as the painted and sculpted images that have been attested in the excavations.

Sculpted images of the deceased were found in the context of aboveground masonry tombs consisting of a number of plain burial niches, crowned with a column or pillar on top, or not. Two were images of men reclining on a couch, set into the side of a monumental pillar or column marker on top of the tomb (**Fig. 1**). A third representation was a statuette of a standing woman, found on top of a masonry tomb composed of a number of plain burial niches, but without a column or pillar marker. These representations, all relatively simple, appear to have been made by local artisans working for the families from the town. Unfortunately, there is little inscribed evidence from the town and none on the painted portraits and sculptures by which to identify these people. Their elite social position is only implied by the tombs in which they were buried, extending over a period from the late second century BC to at least the fourth century AD. Since the poor people were interred in small individual graves without any apparent decoration, the present article will concentrate on the sculptures of the elite.

The first of these is the figure of a man dressed in a long tunic and a veil drawn over his head. It was found in tomb T 1D.² He was depicted reclining on his left side, his body supported on his left elbow, the other arm stretched alongside the body (**Figs 2, 3**). The face is roundish with fleshy cheeks and a forehead with well-modeled temples. Traces of a beard, a sort of artificial 'Egyptian beard' recalling that of the god Osiris or priests of different gods, frame the face.³ The hair under the veil was rendered as tightly packed curls. The rear of the figure was left plain. Poor workmanship and the porosity of the stone

¹ W.A. DASZEWSKI *et al.*, Excavations at Marina el-Alamein 1987–1988, *MDAIK* 46, 1990, pp. 15–51, Figs 10–17.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29, Fig. 14a-e.

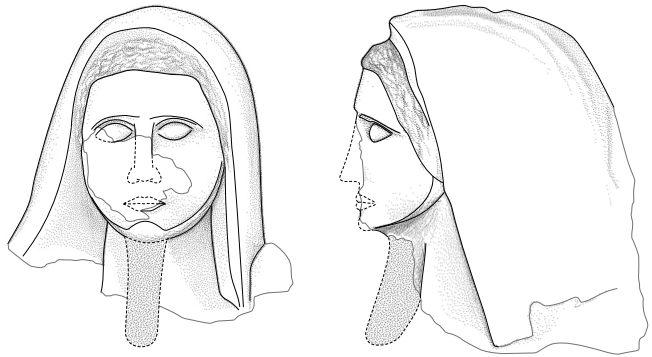
³ S. WALKER, M. BIERBRIER, *Ancient Faces. Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, London 1997, pp. 29–30.



1. View of the great, above-ground tombs in the southwestern part of the necropolis in modern Marina el-Alamein (Phot. W.A. Daszewski).



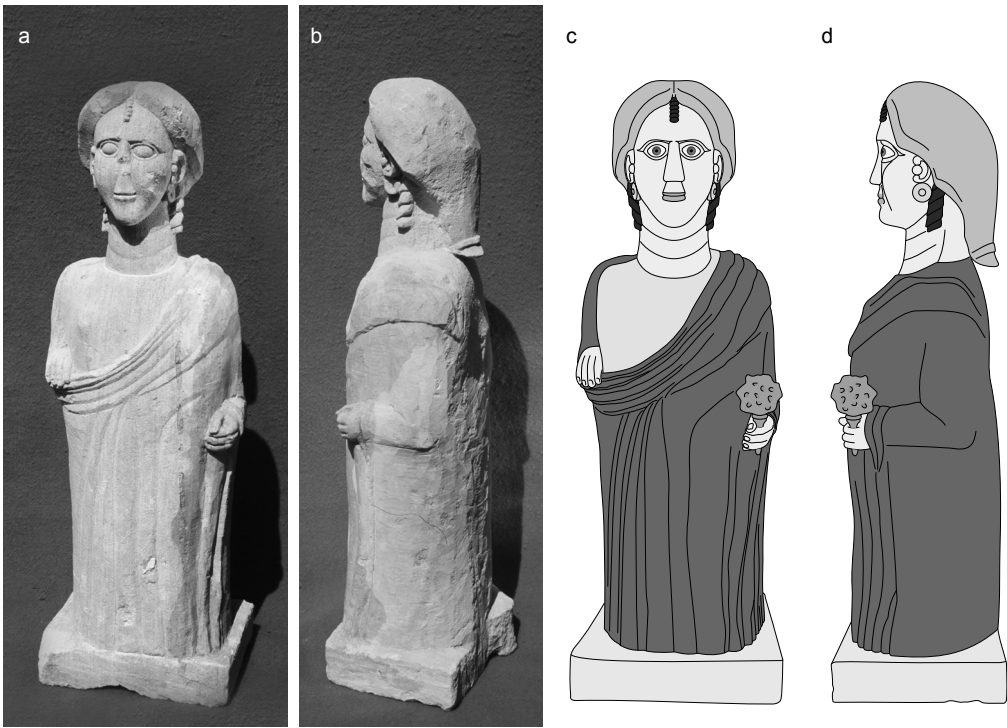
2. Limestone statuette of a priest (?), originally plastered and painted, from Tomb 1 D (Phot. W.A. Daszewski).



3. Head of a priest (?) from T 1 D (Phot. W.A. Daszewski, Drawing M. Momot, W.A. Daszewski).

suggest that the sculpture had once been plastered and painted. Indeed, the relief (L. 0.66m; W. 0.20m) may have represented a priest of some local god. One should keep in mind, however, that a splendid relief of Agathodaimon, a snake god connected with widespread Graeco-Egyptian religious ideas of the period, was found in the same tomb. The sculpture was dated like the tomb, to the late first century BC or early first century AD.

Another limestone relief of a man reclining on a couch-bed was found incorporated into the eastern face of the pillar, rising approximately 6.50m high on the masonry substructure



4. Front and side view of the statue of a woman from T 30 (Phot. W.A. Daszewski, Drawing M. Momot, W.A. Daszewski).

of tomb T 1K.⁴ The carving was set inside a fine naos positioned at about mid height of the pillar, which was crowned with one of the ‘Nabatean’ capitals that are typical of Marina el-Alamein.⁵ The stone had weathered completely in the place of the head and especially the face of the figure. The tomb was either of the late first century BC or the beginning of the first century AD.

A funerary statue of a woman was found toppled from its position on top of a large tomb, T 30, composed of a row of masonry burial niches. It seems to have stood once inside a naos on top of the central loculus.⁶ The statue (0.708m high, including the narrow base) was carved from one block of limestone (**Fig. 4a-b**). Depicted frontally, the woman stands with arms pressed to her sides. Her originally light brown mantle reveals part of a simple tunic with traces of blue pigment to suggest the original painting palette. The right

⁴ W.A. DASZEWSKI, Marina el-Alamein 1994, *PAM VI* (Reports 1994), 1995, pp. 31–32, Fig. 3.

⁵ R. CZERNER, The Architectural Decoration of Marina el-Alamein, *BAR IS* 1942, 2009, pp. 101–107; see also in: W.A. DASZEWSKI, À la recherche d’une Égypte peu connue: Travaux sur la Côté-Nord-Ouest, à Marina el-Alamein, *CRAI*, avril-juin 1993, pp. 401–418, esp. 416.

⁶ W.A. DASZEWSKI *et al.*, Marina el-Alamein, Excavation Report 2004, *PAM XVI* (Reports 2004), 2005, pp. 75–80, Figs 2, 3, 5–7.

shoulder, small pointed breasts and the right hand are distinct. The left hand is bent at the elbow to support the end of a mantle passing across the left shoulder. The clenched left fist and the square hole in its top indicate an object held in hand, apparently a flowering branch. The back of the body is plain, with only the hint of a mantle.

Contrasting to a degree with the block-like form of the short and square body is the long neck and disproportionately big head. The long face is broadest near the cheekbones, narrowing to a triangular chin. The mouth is small with thin lips raised at the corners, perhaps smiling. The nose is short, straight, partly damaged. The almond-shaped eyes are prominent, with distinctly marked lids and the long brows at the ends, the right one higher than the left one. The triangular high forehead is plain. The hair is covered smoothly with a kerchief and gathered together with a fillet behind the head and neck. A short partition in the middle of the forehead and a corkscrew lock in the center complete the decoration. Two corkscrew locks descend from behind the ears of the figure on either side of the neck which features two fleshy folds. In each ear there is a round loop earring (**Fig. 4c-d**). Who was this presumably rich woman whose image graced the main loculus in the center of a very large tomb? She may have been worshipped or adored by her extended family, most likely as the mother of many children. The statue was the product of a provincial workshop operating on the northwestern coast of Egypt and can be dated by the chronology of the tomb with which it was associated and which was raised in the late first century AD and enlarged partly in the second century AD. A similar statue of a woman was found in 2003 by an inspector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt, Omar Mahmoud Zaky, at Burtubat el-Gabal, a few kilometers north of ancient Oxyrynchos (unpublished).

The limestone funerary statuettes and statues from Marina, although of interest, represent a primitive variant of art produced by local craftsmen. On the other hand, the marble statues and statuettes found in the houses of this ancient town were of fine quality, most probably the work of workshops operating in Alexandria or the Nile Delta. These were Roman copies of Hellenistic statuettes from different periods. Of interest are the small-scale figures: a standing Alexandrian god Priapos; fragments of a nude female figure of alabaster (Aphrodite?),⁷ small or big heads of goddesses, and finally, a slender, sub-Aphrodite marble body, unfortunately without head and neck.

A statuette (0.55m high), soot-stained to some extent, was uncovered in 1990 in the ruins of a large house (later known as H 19) during salvage excavations carried out in Marina by SCA inspector Ezzat el-Hammahny. I was allowed to photograph this sculpture with permission to mention it in publication.⁸ The female figure is seated on a rock, her body turning sideways, as if to look at something, possibly the baby Eros climbing up the rock towards her left hand (**Fig. 5**). A statue of a young woman seated on a rock, from the Musée du Cinquantaire in Brussels (Inv. A3785), cannot be compared with ours. The figure appears to have been a nymph looking perhaps at a Satyr inviting her

⁷ W.A. DASZEWSKI, The gods of the North-West coast of Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period, *MEFRA Antiquite* 103/1, 1991, pp. 91–104, Figs 5, 9.

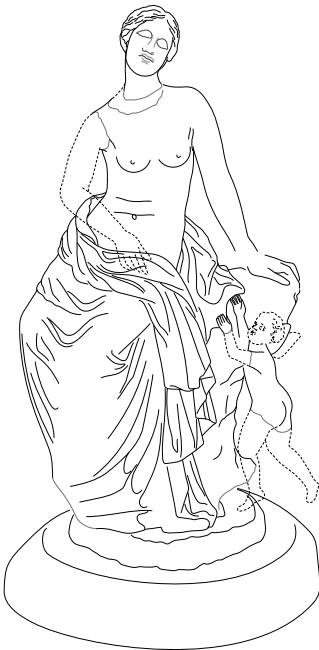
⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102, n. 34.



5. Marble statue of a goddess (Aphrodite?), from house H19 (Phot. W.A. Daszewski).



6. Marble head of a young woman, from H 19, before and after cleaning the soot (Phot. S. Medeksza).



7. Reconstruction of the Aphrodite statue (Drawing M. Momot, W.A. Daszewski).



8. Back of the Aphrodite statue, cut flat to stand against a wall (Phot. W.A. Daszewski).

to dance with him.⁹ To find parallels for the Marina statuette we need to look elsewhere, first in Rhodos (Museum 13614), then Priene in Asia Minor (Istanbul Arch.Mus.746), and especially in Egypt (now in Stuttgart, Wurt.Landesmus.1.18[10]).¹⁰ The three goddesses in marble mentioned here all have a long mantle covering their legs like the figure from Marina. Moreover, the statue from Egypt is accompanied by a small Eros, more or less like the one from Marina, but holding a small boat. The heels of the Marina statuette rest on a round lead-lined base. Even so, without the head, it is still a moot point which goddess the figure represented.

Conservation works carried out in the same House 19 in the spring of 2001 uncovered a small head of a young woman, carved in whitish marble, lying among the collapsed walls of the house destroyed in a fire.¹¹ Soot had stained the head, especially the face with nose, lips and chin. The head with neck was 0.11m long, the face alone 0.065m. It was published recently by G. Bąkowska-Czerner in *Classica Orientalia*.¹² The head, which is inclined slightly to the left, must have fitted a special kind of statuette, no doubt either standing or seated (**Fig 6**). Numerous types of a standing Aphrodite can be mentioned as parallels, for example, the already mentioned Aphrodite found in Priene, a seated image of the goddess from Amisos, now in Paris, (Louvre CA 1970)¹³ and many others. A detailed analysis of the head from H 19 has convinced me that this piece of sculpture belonged to the so-called ‘Aphroditi su roccia’ type and specifically to the above-described statue discovered in House 19 twelve years earlier. The soft and delicate modeling of the head, especially its face, recalls a characteristic sculptural style introduced in Greece by Praxiteles and continued in Greco-Egyptian workshops of the third–second and first century BC in Alexandria and the Nile Delta. The Marina statuette must have been produced in one of these workshops, perhaps in Athribis or Thmuis.¹⁴ To my mind, the type of Aphrodite seated on a rock with an Eros climbing up the rock was the creation of a Greco-Egyptian artist in the second part of the Second or the beginning of the first century BC. The composition of the statuette suggests a freely seated goddess (**Fig. 7**). The statuette must have been brought later to the ancient town located at the site of modern Marina, where it found its place in House 19, probably in the first century AD. The original free-standing statue was now set up frontally, probably in a naos or against a wall in room 11 of the building. Placing the statue against a wall would explain why its back had been hacked so roughly (**Fig. 8**).

⁹ A. STAHLI, *Die Verweigerung der Luste*, Berlin 1999, pp. 416–421, esp. 419; see also, in: R.R.R. SMITH, *Hellenistic Sculptures*, London 1991, Fig. 157.3.

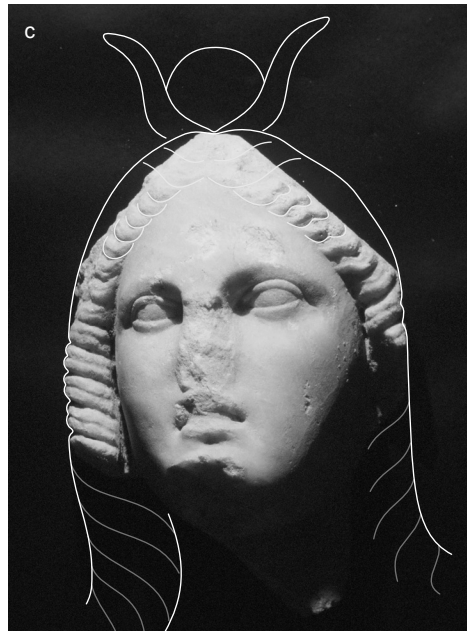
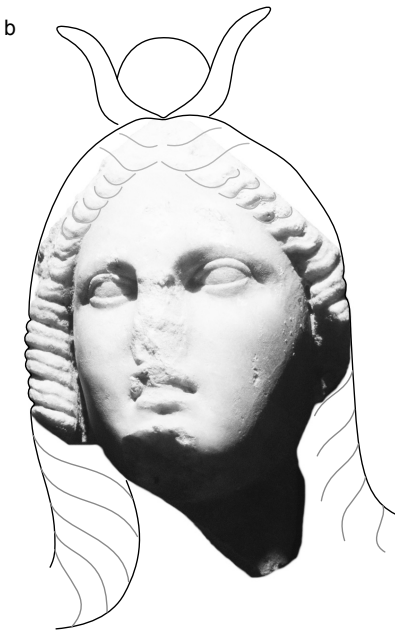
¹⁰ A. DELIVORRIAS, G. BERGER-DOER, A. KOSSATZ-DEISSMANN, s.v. Aphrodite, *LIMC II* [= Aphrodite], 94, 879, 880, 881, Pl. 87, Figs 878, 880, 881.

¹¹ S. MEDEKSZA, Marina el-Alamein, Conservation Work 2001, *PAM XIII* (Reports 2001), 2002, p. 103, Fig. 15.

¹² G. BĄKOWSKA-CZERNER, Aphrodite in Egypt. Images of the goddess from Marina el-Alamein, [*in:*] *Classica Orientalia*, Essays presented to Wiktor-Andrzej Daszewski on his 75th Birthday, Warsaw 2011, pp. 97–100, Fig. 1.

¹³ DELIVORRIAS, BERGER-DOER, KOSSATZ-DEISSMANN, Aphrodite, 93, Pl. 86, Fig. 871.

¹⁴ K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Contexte archéologique*, [*in:*] Id., A. KRZYŻANOWSKA, *Tell Atrib 1985–1995 II*, Varsovie 2009, p. 43, nn. 70–71, Fig. 1.



9a. Marble head of the goddess, most probably Isis(?), and b–c. its tentative restoration (Phot. W.A. Daszewski, Drawing M. Momot).

Several other sculptures were also found in the ancient town, some already mentioned here, others including a marble Dionysos and small pieces of a bronze statue uncovered during salvage work in 1987. Yet another marble head was discovered accidentally in 1993, when a violent sandstorm uncovered it among the ancient ruins. It was a fairly large-sized (about 20cm high) head of a woman with a hairdo of 'Libyan locks' (**Fig. 9a-c**), carved of grayish-white Proconessian marble. The nose, part of the upper lip and lower part of the chin are broken off. It was a broad face at the cheekbones, tapering toward the chin, with prominent almond-shaped eyes under heavy lids. A shock of characteristic 'Libyan locks' frames a triangular forehead and the face on either side. The locks are gathered in the middle of the forehead. On the top of the head there is a narrow slot for fixing a disk set between horns, like the disk with cow's horns on a relief of Isis, now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 47108).¹⁵ The 'Libyan locks' hairdo of the head from Marina can be compared with extremely similar locks on the head of a limestone statue of Isis (from Antinoe), now in Berlin (Staatl. Mus. Dahlen Mus.), dated to the fourth century, and the hairdo of a serpentine statuette of Isis from Mata'na el-Asfur, now in Munich (ÄS 4201).¹⁶ The head found in Marina el-Alamein seems to belong to a statue of the goddess Isis. The style of this head is strongly suggestive of Egyptian art of the late second and third century AD in Egypt. The statue or rather the head from Marina el-Alamein can be dated to the late third century in all likelihood.

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¹⁵ V. TRAN TAM TINH, s.v. Isis, *LIMC* V/1, 761–796; *LIMC* V/2, 510, Fig. 174.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 515 (Isis 231; Isis 230).