

Dakhleh Oasis Project:
Preliminary Reports on the 1992–1993
and 1993–1994 Field Seasons

Edited by C. A. Hope and A. J. Mills

with contributions by

M. Birrell, G. E. Bowen, I. Gardner, C. A. Hope, O. E. Kaper, C. Marchini,
M. M. A. McDonald, J. McKenzie, A. J. Mills, S. F. Patten, U. Thanheiser,
K. Walker and H. Whitehouse



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*Front Cover: Painted panel of Isis from the Main Temple
at Ismant el-Kharab*

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Interim Report on the West Tombs

Colin A. Hope and Judith McKenzie¹

Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab between December 1992 and February 1993 (Bowen et al. 1993)² were again concentrated within the Main Temple of Tutu in Area D and the residential sector to their east, Area A.³ In Area A a fourth house unit was selected for excavation, situated due east of the entrance into the outer temenos of the Main Temple. In the Main Temple complex parts of the court immediately west of the temple were investigated and work continued in Shrine I. In addition, within Area D work was inaugurated in the most northerly of the three enclosures which abut the north side of the enclosure containing the Main Temple. Here, excavation revealed a small two-roomed, fourth-century church (the West Church) with an eight-roomed, adjacent structure, and, immediately to their east, the remains of two tombs, termed the West Tombs. While the 1993-4 season saw little in the way of excavation,⁴ study of the material from the previous season continued and it was possible to examine in detail the objects discovered in the West Tombs. This report will present a preliminary assessment of these two structures.

The Excavation and Tomb Contents

On the north side of the Main Temple enclosure (Enclosure 1) are located three other mud-brick enclosures (2-4). Two of these abut the north wall of the temple enclosure: Enclosure 2 lies on the east and Enclosure 3 on the west. The fourth contains an area to the north of Enclosure 3 but does not communicate directly with that enclosure. Visible at surface level within Enclosure 4 were the following: the small West Church and its associated structure, located in its north-east corner (Bowen et al. 1993, 23-5, 27) and, immediately to their east, the remains of two badly eroded stone platforms. East of these could be seen the outlines of small mud-brick rooms built against the north wall of the enclosure.⁵ From the dissimilarity in orientation of the remains of the stone structures to the walls of the enclosure, the church and its ancillary building, it would appear that the former originally stood in isolation.⁶

Other than for the Main Temple and West Temple, the

¹ The discussion of the architecture of the superstructure of Tomb 1 is largely the work of McKenzie. It relies upon the records of the excavation and discussions with the excavator (Hope) and is made without the benefit of first-hand examination of either the structure or of the architectural fragments. Hope has provided the discussion of the tomb chambers and their contents.

² The excavations were funded by a major grant from the Australian Research Council, administered by Monash University. Additional support was received in the form of a travel scholarship provided by Rosemary and Eric Cromby (Melbourne) to enable a senior student of the Department of Greek, Roman and Egyptian Studies at Monash University to participate in the excavations. For this the Dakhleh Oasis Project is most grateful.

³ Previous reports on the excavations by the present writer and colleagues can be found in Bowen et al. 1993; Hope 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991; Hope et al. 1989, 1992.

⁴ The season was made possible through funding received from the Egyptology Society of Victoria, private donations and a travel scholarship from Rosemary and Eric Cromby.

⁵ For a plan of these enclosures see Hope 1986, fig. 1. For a discussion of the site based upon the architectural remains visible upon the surface and as a result of testing during the course of the survey of the site see Knudstad and Frey, in press.

⁶ This was observed by J. E. Knudstad during the survey of the area.

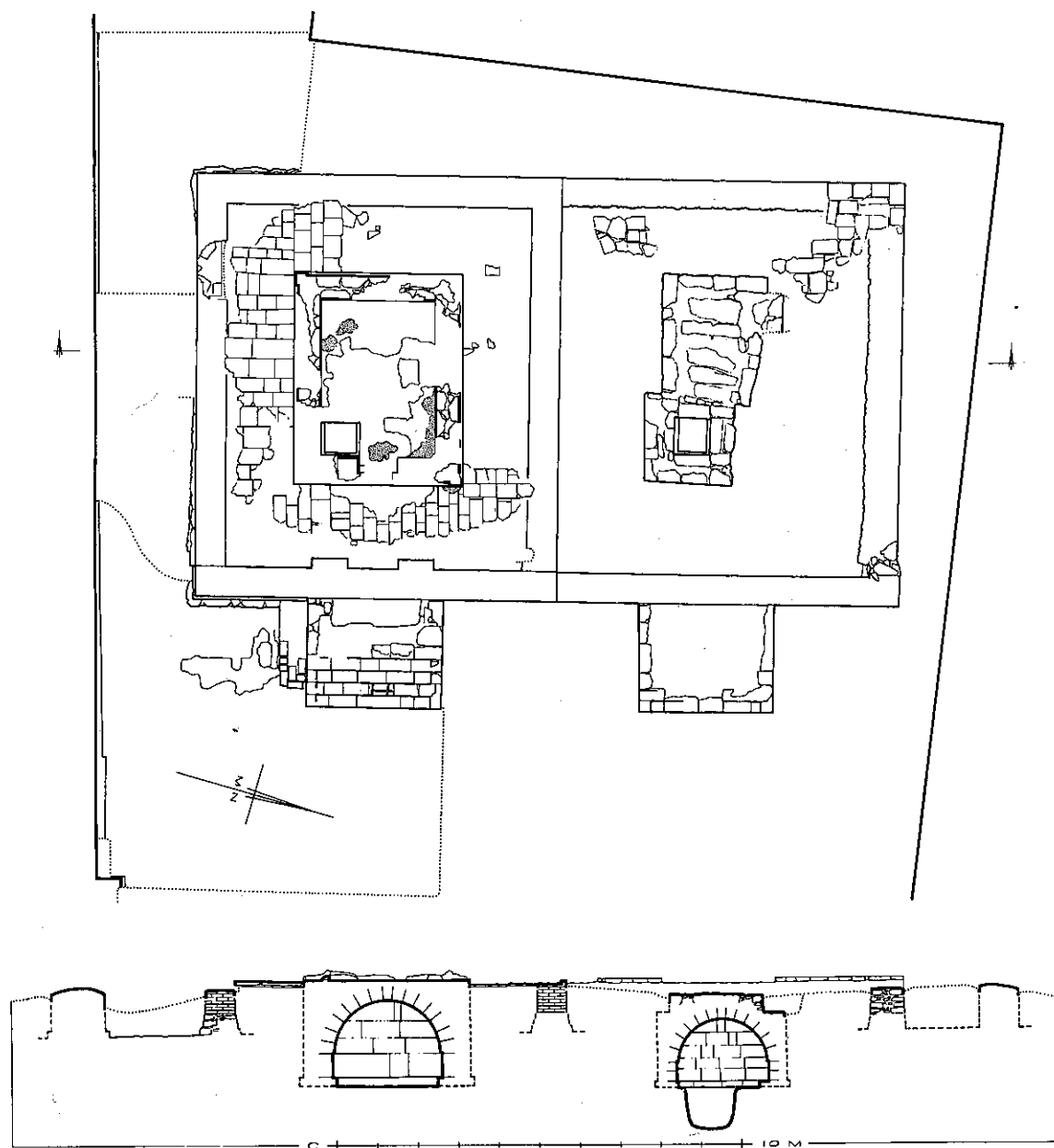


Figure 1 Plan and Section of the West Tombs (drawn by James E. Knudstad).

use of stone as a building material at Ismant el-Kharab appears to have been confined to the central chambers of two tombs in the North Tomb Group,⁷ which are now poorly preserved, and the two structures in Enclosure 4. The examination of the latter was, therefore, imperative.

On clearance of surface sand the structures were seen to comprise the remains of two contiguous sandstone pavements set upon baked-brick platforms approached by flights of sandstone steps. At the centre of each was once

a single stone chamber; all trace of this chamber has disappeared in the case of the northern structure, which is in a poorer state of preservation than the southern one (Figure 1 and Plate 1). The southern tomb is labelled West Tomb 1 and the northern one West Tomb 2; the latter is built against the northern wall of the former, and therefore may post-date it.

Excavation around the platforms was restricted to an area east of the steps to Tomb 1, extending along its

⁷ Tomb 1 here originally had painted reliefs applied to a plaster coating over the stone walls, see Winlock 1936, 21, pls XI–XII. The tomb chamber was actually cleared by B. Moritz who published an account of his work in 1900 in “Excursion aux Oasis du Désert Libyque”, *Bulletin de la Société Khédiviale de Géographie*, Ve Série No. 8, 449–75 (see pages 466–71). I am indebted to Olaf E. Kaper for this reference.

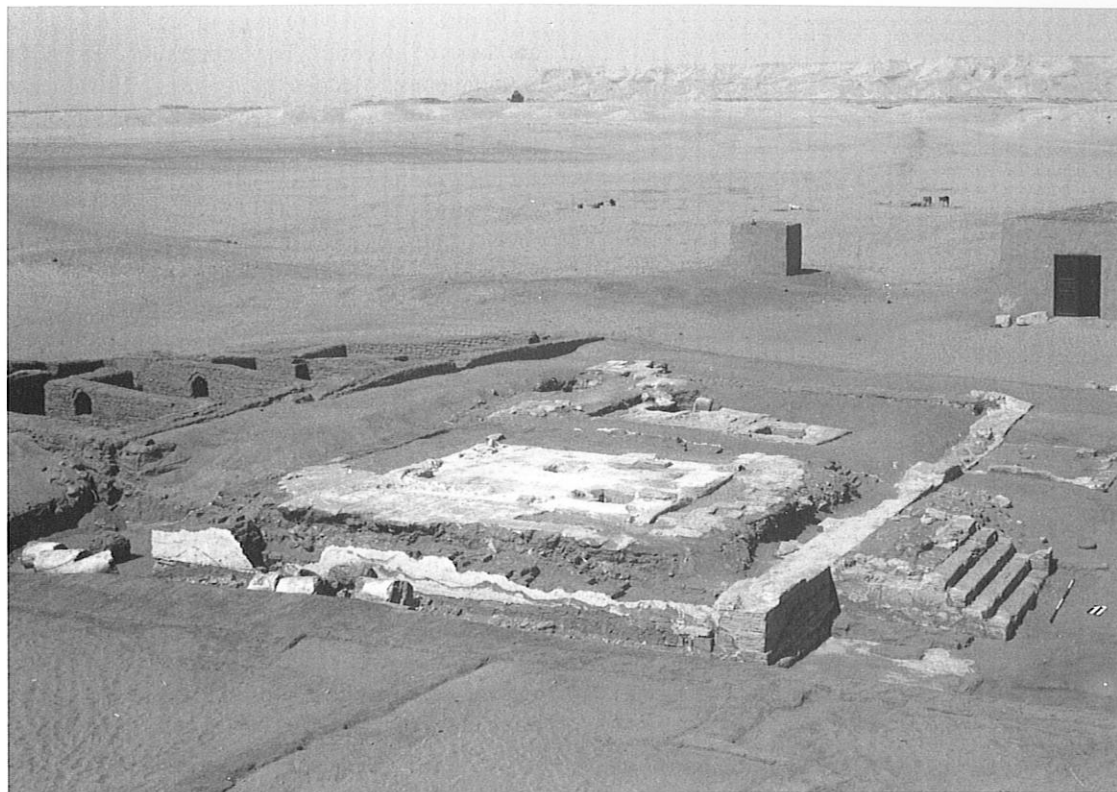


Plate 1 General view of the West Tombs and West Church, looking north-west.

southern side and to its south-west. This revealed fragments from a stone column and capitals, and a baked-brick capital, south-east of the tomb (Plate 10), and sections from baked-brick columns and a capital on its south and south-west (Plate 11). The fragments found to the south of the tomb derive from a single column, as do those from its south-west. Clearance of some surface sand on the west of the tomb revealed the existence of what may be three collapsed baked-brick columns there also. Thus the central chamber on the platform of Tomb 1, and presumably Tomb 2 also, would seem to have been surrounded by a peristyle colonnade. No remains of columns nor of the central chambers were found upon either platform, and it may be noted that no debris from the central chambers was discovered within the excavated area. This may indicate that they had been dismantled and the stone removed for reuse elsewhere, and that the columns had been pushed away from the structures during the course of dismantling. However, any fragments which remained or fell onto the platform could easily have disappeared through erosion by wind and sand if left exposed. This might then account for the fact that the remains of only one column were found from the south side of the tomb. The remains of the architecture of the superstructures is discussed below in more detail.

In the south-east corner of each of the central chambers

a stone-lined shaft gives access to a barrel-vaulted, stone-lined chamber. Each of these chambers has a rectangular recess at its north-east corner. The chamber of Tomb 2 was devoid of contents, other than a few human bones. Three pits had been dug into its floor, one at the base of the shaft, one in the recess and another in the south-eastern corner of the chamber. The clay from these pits was mounded into the chamber and held in place by a retaining wall roughly constructed from sandstone blocks and rubble. The dimensions of the floor of this tomb, including the shaft and recess, are 3.75 m east-west by 2.20 m north-south; the corners are not at right angles. It has a height of 1.90 m.

The situation in Tomb 1 was quite different. The burial chamber has a floor area, including shaft and recess, of 3.68–3.71 by 2.62–2.64 m and a height of 2.04 m. It is more carefully constructed than its neighbour, though no better finished. Here were found the remains of eleven interments, plus part of a possible twelfth,⁸ upon the clay floor of the chamber, oriented approximately east-west; all but two (burials 1 and 11) had their heads on the east (Figure 2). Bodies 1–8 were immediately visible on the removal of sand which filled the shaft and the south-eastern corner of the chamber, while 9 and 10 were found under bodies 3 and 8, and 11 was found under 6. Bodies 7 and 8 lay partly under bodies 2 and 3, and their eastern

⁸ The scant remains of this body were found with those of body 9.

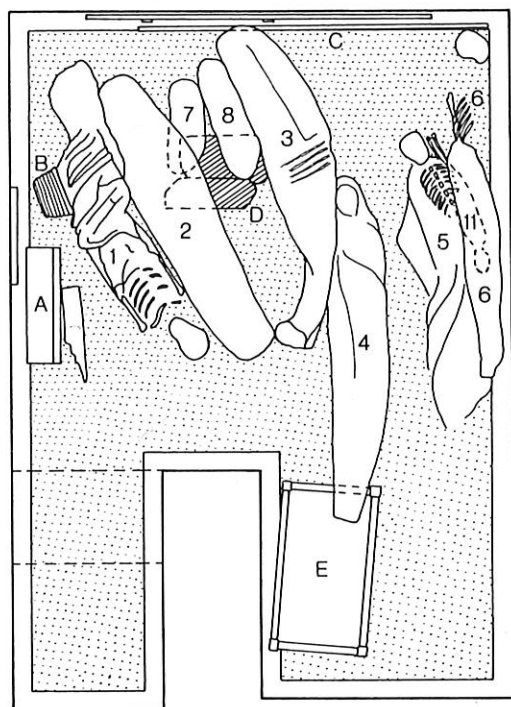


Figure 2 Plan of the burial chamber of West Tomb 1 showing location of interments 1–8 and 11, and contents. Scale 1:40

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| A wooden pulley | D two sandstone blocks; |
| B woven, fibre basket | E bed. |
| C two sections from wooden board | |

ends lay over the most westerly of two sandstone blocks. While the location of these blocks may be thought unusual, a similar placement has been noted in tombs excavated within the cemetery to the west of Ismant el-Kharab (31/420–C5–1) and which was used by its inhabitants (Birrell, herein).

The interments were in a fragile condition. This was partly the result of the activity of robbers who had rifled several of the bodies (Plate 2) and disturbed their original placement, most apparent in the case of body 4 whose legs had been raised to rest upon the edge of a small bed situated within the recess (Figure 2 and Plate 3). However, much damage has also been caused by the action of salts, especially in the north-western corner of the chamber, both to the bodies and the tomb walls.

Bodies 1–4 and 6 are those of adults, while 5 and 7–12 are those of juveniles. The impression created is that of a simultaneous, extended family burial. However, any such identifications must await the detailed examination of the remains by the team of physical anthropologists currently studying the human remains from the cemeteries of Ismant el-Kharab.⁹

The adults were well wrapped. Body 1 had at least 30 layers of wrappings and appears to have been covered with a shawl, as were the feet of body 3. Body 2 had a lozenge design created over the outer wrappings with thin strips of linen and may have been laid within a large linen sack. The quality of linen used varies, but some is extremely well woven and fine with fringed edges. The chest and abdomen regions of several of the bodies contained dark brown, hardened sand, which would appear to represent deliberate packing. Other evidence for mummification of the bodies must again await the detailed study of the remains.

Accompanying these burials were various objects. Against the southern wall of the tomb was part of a wooden pulley, 63.0 by 26.0 by 15.5 cm, (Figure 2.A, Plate 4), and against the western wall stood a wooden stretcher in fragments, 183.5 by 48.0 by 1.5 cm (Figure 2.C, Plate 2). Both of these items may have been used for lowering the bodies into the tomb. Also against the southern wall, and west of the pulley section, was a woven fibre basket (Figure 2.B, Plates 1b and 5) and in the recess was a small bed (Plate 3). The latter consists of a wooden frame with a woven fibre base; it measures 92.0 by 54.0 by 53.0 cm and is of the same design as examples found in Houses 1 and 2 in Area A of the site (Hope 1985, 118, Plates Va–b and 1987, 163). Thirty-five bouquets were distributed mainly around the edges of the chamber, with a concentration in the recess. One of these has been identified as comprising rosemary twigs with myrtle leaves (Thanheiser, herein). Accompanying the burials of bodies 5 and 6 were two pillows made of leaves wrapped in linen.

Ceramics were not abundant (Plate 6). A bowl (Plate 6, second row, centre) was found under the feet of body 1 and a blackened jar (Plate 6, rear left) under body 8. A small bowl which had been used to cover the mouth of a jar and which had been held in place by plaster (Plate 6 front) was found in the south-western corner. Fragments found at various places derive from another jar and two bowls (Plate 6, rear right, and centre row, left and right). Several glass vessels had been interred with these burials. Under body 8

⁹ Examination of these bodies subsequently has yielded the following identifications: body 1 is that of a female approximately 40 years at death, body 2 another female approximately 28 years at death, body 3 is that of a male approximately 25 years at death, body 4 another male of about 30–35 years at death, body 6 is possibly that of a male aged 22 years, and the remainder, whose sexes could not be determined, were aged 5–8 years at death. Several of the sub-adults were found to have been anemic; body 4 displayed evidence of arthritis in the neck and body 1 the same in the knees, body 3 had suffered a fractured left humerus, while body 2 may have died as a result of acute infection of the frontal sinus. The two adult females had both borne children. The adults were taller than the average of those found buried in the other cemeteries at the site. I am most grateful to P. Sheldrick and E. Molto for their analysis of these bodies.

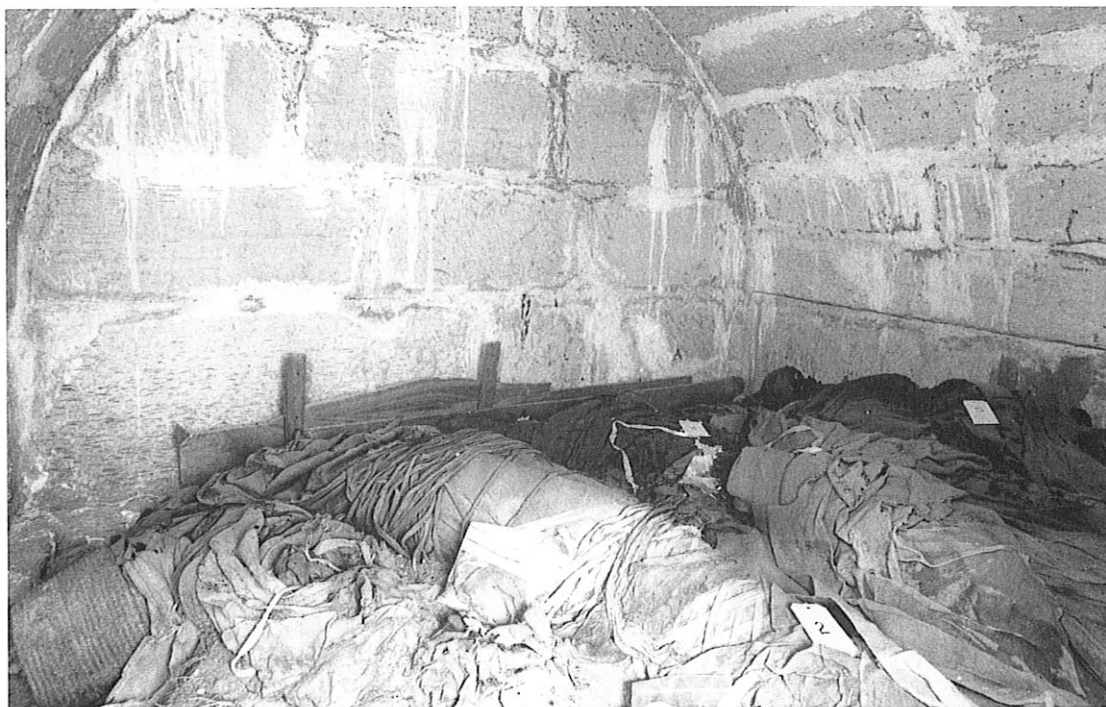


Plate 2 West Tomb 1: burial chamber, general view of interments looking west.



Plate 3 West Tomb 1: burial chamber, showing legs of body 4 on bed in recess.



Plate 4: West Tomb 1: wooden pulley.



Plate 5 West Tomb 1: woven basket.



Plate 6 West Tomb 1: ceramics from the burial chamber.



Plate 7 West Tomb 1: miniature lead sandals.

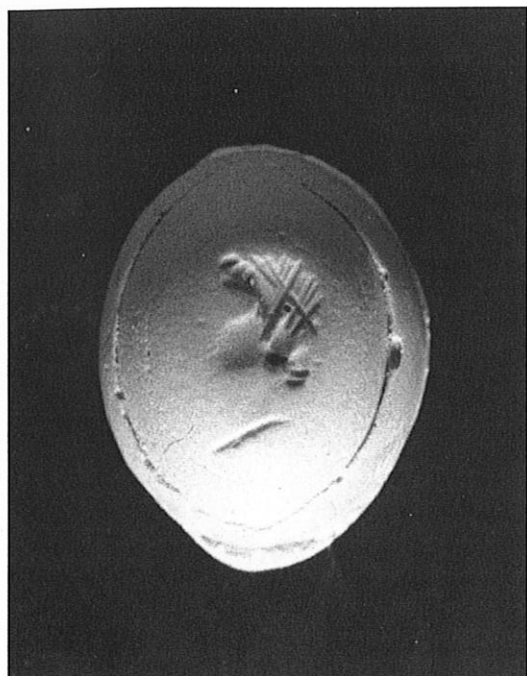


Plate 8 West Tomb 1: agate ring from body 3



Plate 9 West Tomb 1: carnelian ring from body 3

was found an intact vessel identified as an *ungentarium* or *lacrimarium*, near to which were fragments from a flask (Marchini, herein Figures 4b and 4c respectively). Sherds from the latter were found also under bodies 1 and 7. Fragments from three bowls/beakers were found in various locations (Marchini, herein Figures 4d–f).

A single amber bead was found under body 1. A finely-worked, silver cosmetic implement with a long, narrow shaft and a spatula-shaped end was found in several pieces in the fill of the tomb. Upon the footing of the north wall, due east of body 6, lay a pair of miniature lead sandals (Plate 7); one is damaged and the other measures 12.8 cm by a maximum of 5.2 cm. The soles are each made from a single piece, 0.1 cm thick; they have two straps attached by means of perforations at the front edge and at the side of the heel, and which were once soldered in place.

Other items of value comprise six gold finger rings. Three were found with body 3, the 25 year-old male, two with body 2, the 28 year-old female, and one against the north wall of the recess. The latter is a double ring, supporting small, blue glass stones; from body 2 one is a setting of a high-domed, oval agate and the other lacks its stone. These rings had been placed upon the right hand of the body. Of the three rings from body 3 one also lacks its stone. The remaining two consist of intact gems in their settings. One (Plate 8) is an oval agate preserving part of

a bust of a female (see below) in a much worn bezel. The other setting contains a carnelian cut with a finely executed bust of a female with elaborately braided hair (Plate 9). The mount is not original. Parallels to the hair style indicate a date within the Hadrianic Period (see below).

The ceramics, glass and rings from the tomb provide some indication of the date of the burials. The glass has been ascribed to the third century by Marchini (herein). The ceramic vessels resemble in general the shape, fabric and decoration of material excavated within a fourth century context in the houses of Area A. However, the details of the handled jar (Plate 6, rear right) might indicate a slightly earlier date for this piece, and all of the others could be ascribed equally to the second half of the third century as well as to the fourth. They do not resemble material of the second or early third century which has been excavated beneath the houses of Area A and in the Colonnaded Hall of Structure 1 in Area B (Patten, herein and Hope 1987, Figure 5, respectively).

The finger rings may confirm this dating. The mounts of the three rings from body 1 have tentatively been assigned a date from the third to fourth centuries (C. Johns, 1998, personal communication), although the two surviving gems appear to be earlier. I cite the comments of Donald Bailey (1998, personal communication)¹⁰ concerning these two:

¹⁰ I am indebted to Donald Bailey and Catherine Johns for their comments, which are based upon photographs and colour transparencies and not from examination of the originals.

The elaborate hairstyle of the female portrait bust is based upon that of the empress Sabina, wife of Hadrian, and a date of the first half of the second century AD is likely: hairstyles fashionable in Rome could well go on for much longer in the provinces. The comparanda given are included to date them to a more limited period than is certainly assignable. These include A. Krug, *Antike Gemmen in Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln*, Cologne, 1981, No. 201, a carnelian from the Rhineland, dated between AD 100 and 120, and No. 391, a carnelian given a date of the first quarter of the second century. Other examples are: G. M. A. Richter, *Engraved Gems of the Romans*, London, 1971, Nos 548–9, which are a carnelian in the Ashmolean Museum and a sard in the British Museum. The latter is H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos in the British Museum*, London, 1926, No 2002 (the black agate 2001 is similar).

The worn bust appears to have been engraved on a well domed stone which is probably BC rather than AD (of course it could have been remounted much later). The head probably is female, but a couple of the comparanda are regarded as Apollo. Similar busts (none is extremely close but most are very near) are found in U. Pannuti, *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, catalogo della collezione glittica*, Rome, 1983, No. 221, an onyx from Pompeii (hence before AD 79) and No. 223, a jacinth?, also from Pompeii, but coarse in execution; G. Platz-Horster, *Die antike Gemmen aus Xanten i*, Cologne, 1987, a burnt carnelian of the end of the first century AD; H. Guiraud, *Intailles et camées romaines*, Paris, 1996, an onyx from Saint Marcel (Indre), regarded as possibly Apollo and a bit more elaborate than yours; E. Zweirlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen ii*, Berlin, Munich, 1969, No. 357, a carnelian of about 90–60 BC, and regarded as Apollo.

The question which must be posed is whether the interments are those of the persons for whom the tomb was constructed. Here a combination factors may indicate that the building of the tomb had occurred much earlier. The architecture of West Tomb 1 (see below) is quite unlike that of any other tomb structure in Dakhleh or Kharga, and is largely non-Egyptian in character. In its considerable use of stone and baked brick it is only surpassed by the entirely stone-built tombs at Bashendi in Dakhleh (Mills 1983, 131; 1984, 83–5; Osing 1982). Elsewhere, elaborate architecture for tomb structures of the period occurs solely in mud brick, as, for example at Ismant el-Kharab in the North Tomb Group and South Tomb Group (Knudstad and Frey, in press), and other sites in both Dakhleh, such as at 'Beyout el-Quraysh' south of Ismant el-Kharab (Mills 1982, 98; Winlock 1936, 42), and in Kharga, at el-Bagawat (Fakhry 1951).¹¹ Clearly, those for whom West Tomb 1 was built were of some affluence and it might be wondered whether, despite looting, the style of burials found within it reflect a

comparable level. It is instructive to compare the burials in this tomb with those dating to the late first century BCE to third century CE found in the cemetery west of the site (31/420–C5–1), which, in the better-equipped cases, had gilded- and painted-cartonnage head and foot covers (Birrell, herein) despite being interred in small, poorly-cut tombs.

The mausolea in the other groups at Ismant el-Kharab were located at a distance from the settlement, and such would probably also have been the case with the West Tombs. The enclosure in which they now stand was erected with the building of the West Church in the mid-fourth century. Prior to this the construction of Enclosures 2 and 3 would have reduced the isolation of the tombs considerably. While none of the structures within either of these enclosures has been examined, it can be reasonably inferred that they were in existence throughout the third century and possibly earlier. The major development of the Main Temple complex in Enclosure 1 can be dated to the period from Hadrian, at the very latest, to the end of the second century, with only minor additions in the early third century (Hope, in press a). The construction technique of the Doric frieze of the entablature of the façade of West Tomb 1 has details in common with that once supported by the four large baked-brick columns of the portico in front of the Main Temple. In both cases the metopes had at their centres eight-petalled wooden rosettes; in the latter instance the metopes were made of stucco attached presumably to a wooden beam. The portico of the Main Temple was probably constructed before the end of the second century CE, and possibly much earlier (Hope, in press a).

The only close parallels to West Tomb 1 are found in Libya, at Ghirza and in Wadi Nfed, where there are two stone tombs with very similar architecture (see below), both dated to the third century CE (Brogan and Smith 1984, 121–5, 208, 264–5).

To conclude, evidence to date would indicate that West Tomb 1, and probably its neighbour, was built by the mid-third century and possibly in the second century, if not earlier, and the interments discovered in it were made in the late third century or very early fourth century. What state of preservation the tomb structure was in when these burials were made is difficult to ascertain. There are no signs of repair, such as replastering, to the surviving remains; given the nature of the materials which are used in its construction, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it stood substantially intact, support for which is presented by the current remarkable state of preservation of many mud-brick mausolea of similar date in both Dakhleh and Kharga.

¹¹ The majority of these structures are imprecisely dated. None of the tombs in the North Tomb Group or South Tomb Group at Ismant el-Kharab has been examined by the Dakhleh Oasis Project and all appear to have been plundered.

The Superstructures

West Tomb 1

Description of the Remains

In situ Remains (Figure 1 and Plate 1)

The structure consists of a podium (width 8.835 ± 0.065 m; length 10.38 ± 0.02 m; extant height 1.33 m at south-western corner) enclosing a tomb chamber. The podium is formed by a wall of baked brick upon a rough stone foundation which retains a brick- and stone-rubble fill. A sandstone paving is laid across the top of the retaining wall and the fill. The wall (average thickness 0.76 m) preserves much of its plastered exterior surface. The podium is approached by a flight of sandstone steps (total width 3.30 m; length 2.65 m) with a balustrade (width 0.265 m) along either side. There appear to have been eight, or possibly nine, steps (depth 0.30 m, height 0.15 m).

The podium supported a central chamber (width 4.165 ± 0.005 m; length 5.205 ± 0.005 m) as indicated by the remains of the base of a stone wall (thickness 0.69 m). The outlines of corner pilasters (width 0.35 m; depth 0.05 m) survive on the north-eastern and south-western corners and there are traces of an entrance in the centre of the eastern side. Fragments from a timber door frame were found in the vicinity of the tomb. The interior of this chamber (width 2.775 ± 0.005 m; length 3.83 ± 0.01 m) contains a shaft (width 0.925 ± 0.005 m; length 0.80 m) in the south-eastern corner leading to the vaulted stone chamber below (width 2.63 ± 0.01 m; length 3.695 \pm 0.015 m; height at centre 2.04 m). The chamber and shaft are constructed from ashlar blocks of sandstone.

Architectural Fragments

Two joining sections of one sandstone column shaft (surviving length 2.13 m; lower surviving diameter 0.475 ± 0.025 m, upper diameter 0.39 m) were found, apparently in their fall position, to the east of the south-eastern corner of the building (Plate 10). Fragments of white-plastered, baked-brick columns (one with upper diameter of 0.42 ± 0.02 m) were found along the south side of the building and in the cleared areas to the south-east and south-west (Plate 11). As mentioned above, clearance of surface sand revealed fragments from three baked-brick columns on the west of the tomb. As yet it is not possible to determine the height of the columns.

The baked-brick columns indicate a peristyle at the front and along the south and west sides. Presumably it would have continued around the whole structure. The stone column is of the correct proportions to have belonged to the same order as the baked brick columns and would appear to have come from the same peristyle, probably the corner. If stone columns were also used on either side at the top of the flight of the stairs it would explain the increased thickness of the wall at these points.

A baked-brick and plaster Corinthian capital (height 0.44 m; lower diameter 0.42 ± 0.02 m) was found attached to a section of column shaft (length 0.66 m) against the south wall of the tomb with other sections from the same column (Plates 11–12). The baked-brick core of the capital, which has several sherds plastered into the top of it, had a wide acanthus leaf of plaster under each corner volute with one acanthus leaf between. The corner volutes were formed of plaster on a wooden core. In the centre of



Plate 10 West Tomb 1: Stone column and baked-brick capital south of the tomb steps.



Plate 11 West Tomb 1: Sections from baked-brick column south of the tomb.



Plate 12 West Tomb 1: detail of capital from south of the tomb, showing the emplacement for a winged Medusa head in a tondo.

the area between the corner volutes there is a wooden peg held in place by plaster, and plaster around it from some element which was once attached (Plate. 12). Near to the capital an eroded plaster head was found. Other examples from this area were set within plaster bowls and applied by means of a wooden dowel and plaster to a larger object (Figure 3c). They are of the correct size to have been positioned on the capital in place of the helices, between the corner volutes. The better preserved heads enable them to be identified as winged Medusa heads. The use of Medusa heads on tombs occurs at sites such as Petra (McKenzie 1990, Plate 136b); they are also used in the Severan Forum at Leptis Magna (Lyttleton 1974, Plate 5).

Two sandstone corner volutes, with part of the abacus above and acanthus leaf below, broken off two separate Corinthian capitals were found south of the steps (Figure 4a–b). The shape of the acanthus leaf indicates that each capital tapers in sharply below the corner volutes. These fragments are similar to the volutes used upon the capitals of the baked-brick columns and so probably derive from the capitals of the stone columns used at the front of the peristyle. A pair of small sandstone animal heads, tentatively identified as lions (Figure 3a–b), were found in the same area as the stone capital fragments and possibly came from the bosses on the abaci of these capitals.

Four fragments from eight-petalled wooden rosettes (maximum diameter 0.155 ± 0.015 m) were found amongst the rubble. They are the correct size to have come from the metope of a Doric frieze of conventional proportions from the entablature above the baked brick capitals. No other indication of the order or details of the entablature were found in 1993.

The peristyle probably had four columns across the front and either four or five along the back and possibly five along the sides. As it is unlikely that the baked-brick columns could have supported the weight of a tiled roof, the tomb probably had a flat roof constructed of palm wood.

Dimensions

The building has been laid out with very precise measurements indicating that although it included more perishable building materials, such as baked brick and plaster, it was built with as much professional care as would have been taken with a more expensive, completely stone structure.

A long cubit of 0.5205 m appears to have been used for the basic design. The long cubit, or royal cubit of seven palms, in the Ptolemaic period is generally 0.523–0.525 m, but it does vary slightly. The importance is the precision of the measurements on the building itself (Figure 5): the podium has a length of 20 long cubits (10.41 m including plaster) and a width of 17 long cubits (8.85 m); the

thickness of the brick retaining wall is one and a half long cubits (including plaster 0.781 m); the central chamber is 10 long cubits in length (5.205 m) and eight long cubits wide (4.165 m). This then reveals that the width of the podium of 17 long cubits is not so surprising as it leaves three long cubits on either side of the central chamber between it and the retaining wall. The balustrade on the flight of stairs is half a long cubit wide (0.26 m).

The lowest course of the corner pilasters of the central chamber is 0.35 m wide, which is one Ptolemaic foot. The thickness of the wall of the central chamber at 0.69 m is approximately two Ptolemaic feet.

The width of the interior of the central chamber (2.78 m) is thus the exterior width of eight long cubits minus the wall thickness. This dimension is also used for the width of the staircase to which the balustrade of half a cubit is added on either side to give a total width of the flight of stairs of 3.30 m. When these steps are centrally placed it then leaves 2.735 m on either side. The length of the flight of steps (2.65 m) is approximately five long cubits (2.63 m). The height of the baked-brick capital 0.44 m is one short cubit of six palms.

West Tomb 2

Sometime after the construction of West Tomb 1, West Tomb 2 was erected against it, with its own platform, having a retaining wall only on its east, north and west sides. It is less well preserved than Tomb 1, but comprises a podium approached by a flight of sandstone steps; there was a central chamber with a vaulted burial chamber below also constructed of sandstone. It would thus appear to have been perhaps of a similar design to Tomb 1. Work on Tomb 2 was restricted to surface clearance and the excavation of the burial chamber. Until the area surrounding it has been excavated it is not possible to detail its architecture further.

Flat-Roofed Peripteral Structures

To summarize from the present evidence as indicated, West Tomb 1 appears to have had a podium, approached by a narrow flight of approximately eight steps, supporting a peristyle with Corinthian capitals, probably with four columns across the front and five along the sides. It perhaps had a Doric frieze on the entablature and probably had a flat roof. There is a vaulted tomb below the central chamber, reached by a shaft in the corner of the room.

West Tomb 1, and possibly the adjoining Tomb 2, are the only examples surviving in Egypt of structures of this design. However, a stone structure of very similar design survives at Wadi Ghirza in Libya (North Tomb A: Brogan and Smith 1984, 121–25).¹² This has in common the

¹² In the search for parallels to West Tomb 1 the assistance of Professor F. Sear, University of Melbourne, is gratefully acknowledged.

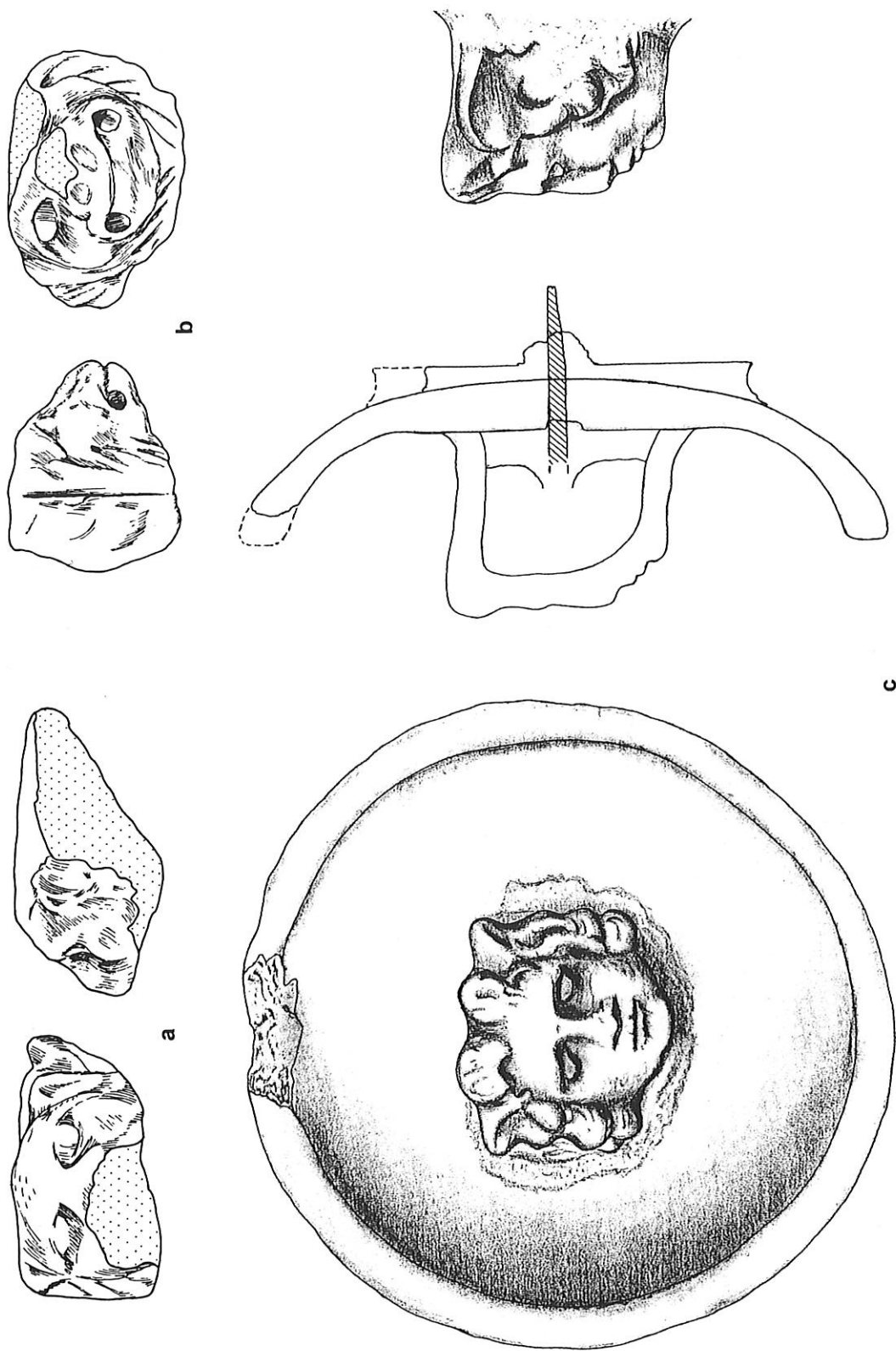


Figure 3 West Tomb 1: a-b fragmentary sandstone lions' heads, scale 1:2; c plaster winged Medusa head in a tondo. Scale 1:2

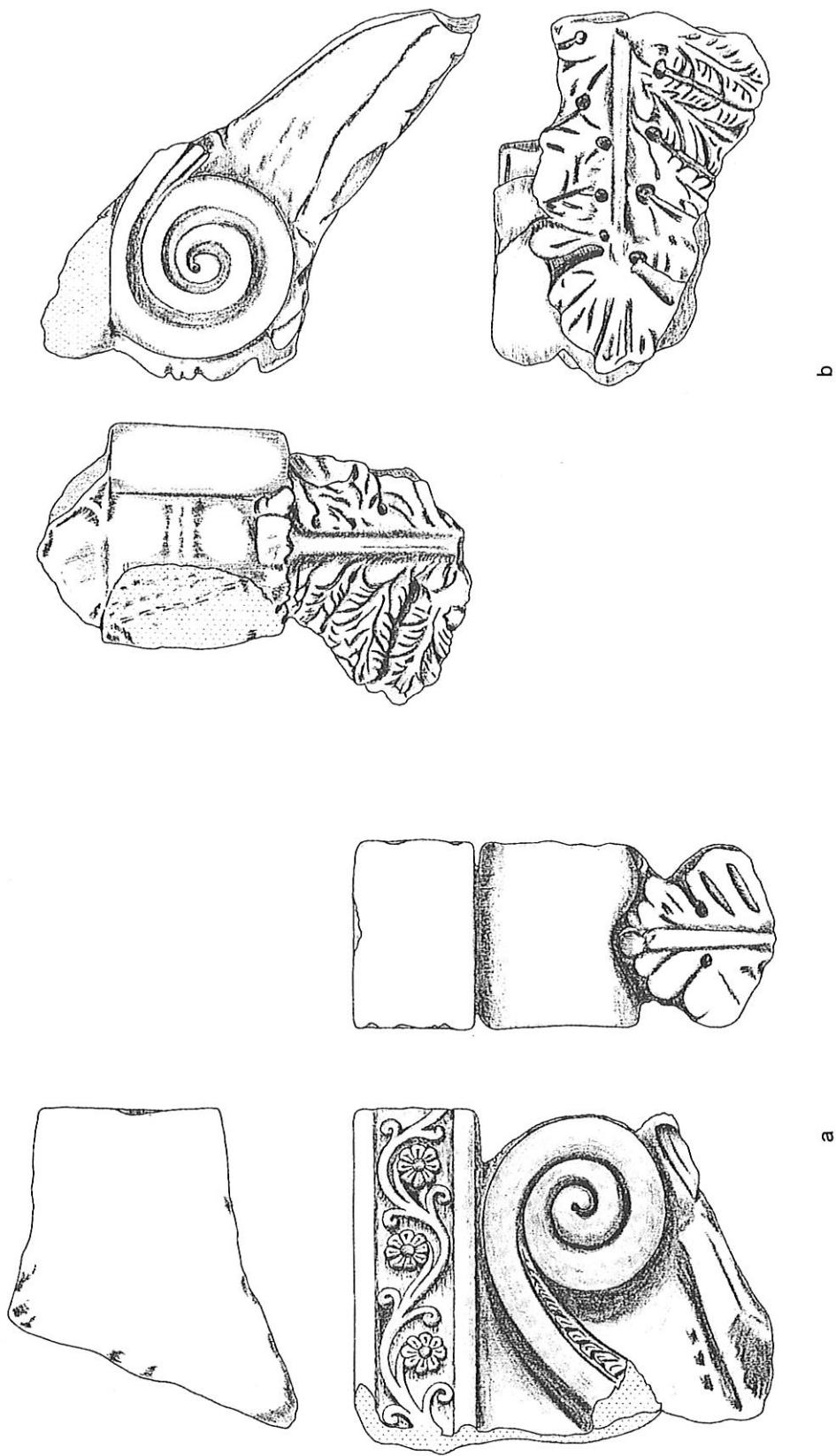


Figure 4 West Tomb 1: Fragments of two sandstone capitals found south of the steps. Scale 1:3.

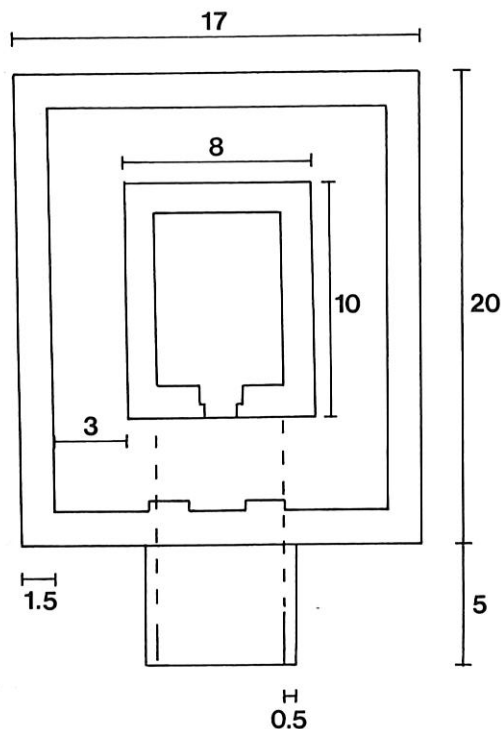


Figure 5 West Tomb 1 showing dimensions in long cubits.

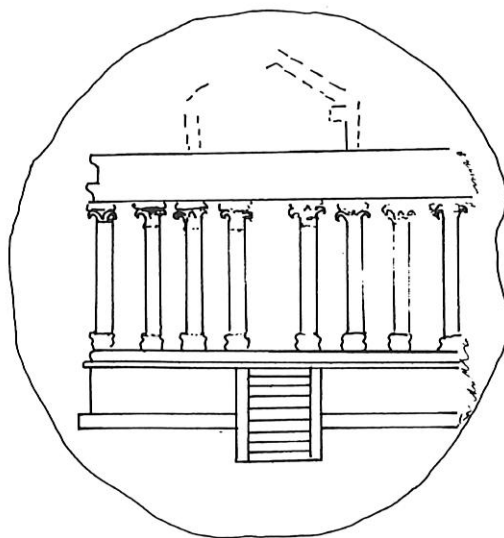


Figure 6 Sketch (after Price and Trell, Figure 508) of a coin of Juba I (60–46 BCE) of Mauretania, showing flat-roofed, peristyle structure on a podium approached by a flight of steps.

podium and flight of steps, a tomb below the central chamber and a peristyle of columns supporting an entablature with a Doric frieze. It also had four columns across the front and five along the sides. Notably, although constructed of stone, the Libyan example has a flat roof. The entablature has survived to its full height around all of this structure with a sima along the top at both the front and back, not only along the sides. Thus, it did not have a pediment. It has been dated to the third century CE. (Brogan and Smith 1984, 125, 212) as has another similar tomb in Wadi Nfed (Brogan and Smith 1984, 264–5).

The example from Ismant el-Kharab is of particular interest because not only are related structures depicted on North African coins from the first century CE (e.g. Figure 6) but also on Roman coins from Alexandria, an example of one of which has been found at the site (Plate 13). The Alexandrian examples are clearly of a major monument in the city which has never been satisfactorily identified. Poole (1892, xciii) interpreted it as one structure: a large altar which he suggested was part of the Kaisareion. More recent interpretations have been based upon two assumptions. First, that the image on the coins consists of more than one structure combined into the one image on the plane of the coin. Second, that when a



Plate 13 Bronze drachma of Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE) from House 3 showing flat-roofed, peristyle structure on a podium; diameter 32 mm.

peristyle structure with a classical entablature, but no pediment, is depicted it is either a peristyle court or a gate, but not a temple. Thus, Handler (1971, 69) suggests the Alexandrian coins depict an altar in a temenos with the flames depicted above the entablature of the temple enclosure. Price and Trell (1977, 21) interpret it as "a combination of gate and altar" "in which the flaming altar appears to form the top part of a columned portico. In fact, the figure of Tyche stands between the columns to identify the cult of the sanctuary, and the architrave of the 'gate' forms the top of a Near Eastern 'horned' altar".

However, West Tomb 1 at Ismant el-Kharab indicates the existence in Graeco-Roman Egypt of an architectural type consisting of a peristyle structure with a classical entablature, a flat roof and no pediment. It was supported by a podium and contained a chamber, which in a temple would have been the cella. This is precisely the basic building type depicted on the Alexandrian coins, which in addition would have had a statue in the cella and the roof used for the fire altar. The surviving Alexandrian coins all depict a fire on top of the structure. Fire altars are known in Egypt from the Ptolemaic Period (Quaegebeur 1993)¹³ and the use of temple roofs for various rituals and ceremonies is well known.

Conclusion

As a classical architectural form the idea of a peristyle structure on a podium with a cella and a flat roof and no pediment would not have appeared surprising as a result of local Egyptian or Near Eastern influence where flat roofs were so common. The absence of a pediment would have been no more noticeable than it is to the modern eye on the Lincoln Centre or the Lincoln Memorial or the National Library in Canberra where the allusion to classical architecture is achieved by the peristyle itself around the building.

Thus, West Tomb 1 would appear to be the only definite example surviving in Egypt of an otherwise 'lost' building type which was the form used for a major monument in Alexandria. Until the discovery of this tomb at Ismant el-Kharab it had not been possible to suggest that these coin depictions are a fairly accurate reflection of an Alexandrian building rather than a schematized drawing.

The precise laying out of West Tomb 1 indicates that high quality buildings were made of more transitory materials than stone. This suggests that far more good quality classical architecture has probably been lost in Egypt than has previously been indicated by the surviving remains of stone architecture (see Bailey 1990).

¹³ A graffito of two horned altars with a seated figure and another of a single altar are to be found incised into the pavement south of the central chamber of West Tomb 1.