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HOUSE H9 FROM MARINA EL-ALAMEIN – A RESEARCH SUMMARY

ABSTRACT

Studies on the relics of the Hellenistic-Roman town at the site of Marina el-Alamein in Egypt have been carried out since 1986. House H9 was one of the first buildings to be excavated, investigated, and preserved through conservation. Successive research has supplemented the previous studies. The house is one of the largest and earliest features at the site. In the context of Marina, it is more firmly embedded in the Greek-Hellenistic tradition, yet also refers to Roman solutions. It is a house of the *oikos*

type, featuring a courtyard with two porticoes situated asymmetrically perpendicular to each other. Elements referring to the Greek systems of *prostas* and *pastas* can be discerned in the layout. The research focused on domestic cult as well as elements and character of the decor, including painted interior decoration. Architecture and home furnishings document civilisational changes at the cultural touchpoint between the Greek and Roman traditions.

Keywords: Marina el-Alamein, Graeco-Roman Egypt, residential architecture, decoration, domestic cult

Research on the Marina el-Alamein site (Matrouh Governorate/ET) on the northern coast of Egypt has been conducted since 1986, when relics of the ancient town were discovered during the construction of a modern tourist resort. Excavations were then undertaken by researchers from a mission of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) directed by Professor W.A. Daszewski along with Egyptian archaeologists. Soon, work on the site was undertaken by conservation missions directed by W. Bentkowski (from the State Studios for Conservation of Cultural Property from Zamość), then by J. Dobrowolski, and since 1995 by S. Medeksza (from Wrocław University of Science and Technology). The relics discovered during this research testify to the existence of a Hellenistic and Roman port, town, and necropolis

between the 2nd century BC and the 6th century AD. The ancient town and port were located on the shores of a lagoon which still exists today, 96 km west of the metropolis of Alexandria and under its influence.

The examined archaeological features include some significant remains of quarters of residential buildings and houses, including a few of considerable size. These relics come from the second half of the 1st century, almost in their entirety. However, rich tomb monuments from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD testify to the existence of a city already developed in the previous period. The few relics of the walls from these times indicate that the majority of the buildings whose remains are currently known repeated the layout of older systems.¹

¹ Czerner 2017, 42–46.

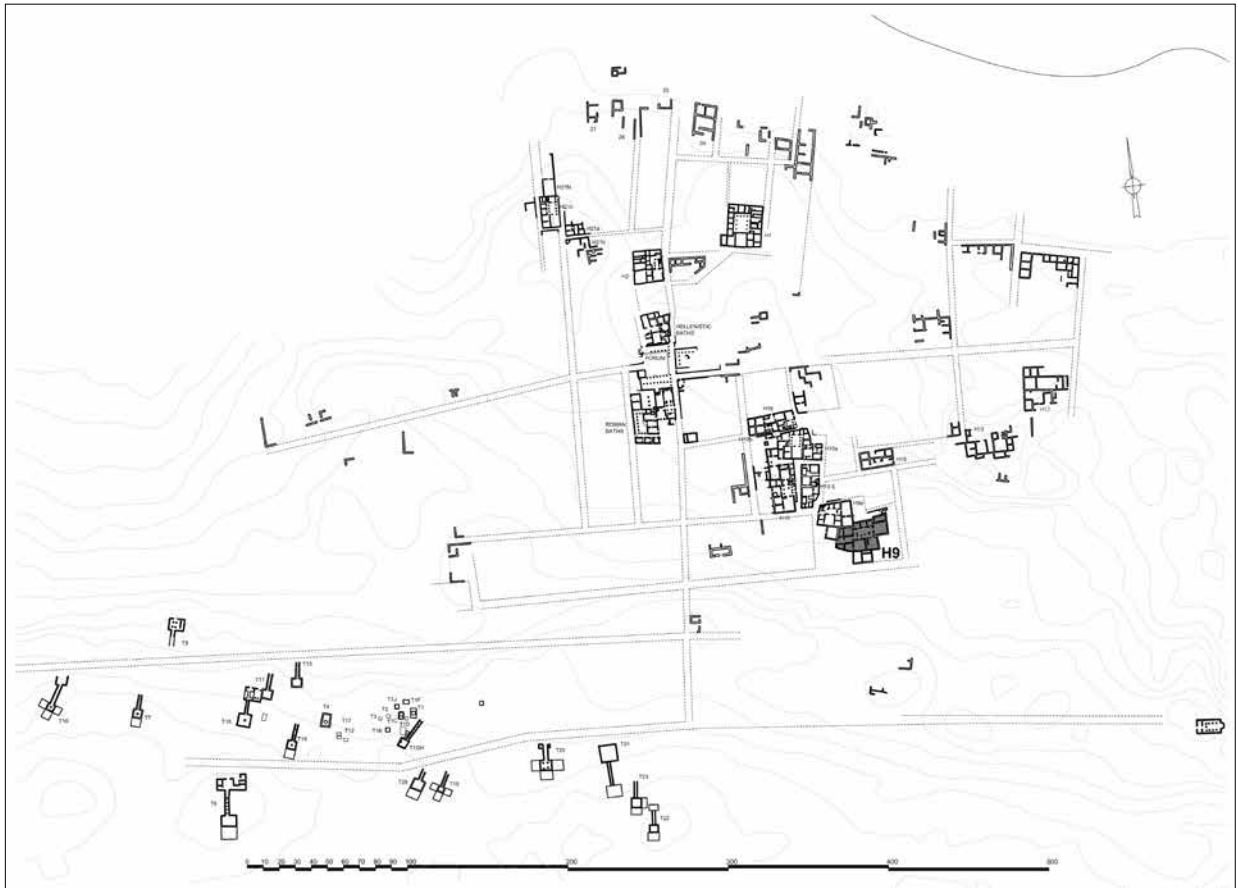


Fig. 1. Plan of the site at Marina el-Alamein showing the excavated structures and the reconstructed street grid with the location of House H9 (after S. Medeksza; compiled by K. Majdzik).

The town plan is not strictly regular, but the streets run latitudinally (main streets) and meridially (roads leading toward the wharf), with only minor deviations.² This determines the orientation of the residential houses (Fig. 1).

In terms of spatial arrangements, these are *oikos* houses with main reception rooms and courtyards on one axis. The courtyards were asymmetric, with one or two porticoes, or symmetric, some with incomplete peristyles. The latter are more similar to Roman concepts, while the former follow the traditions of Greek housing.³

Among Marina's houses, the one marked as H9 (Fig. 2) shows the strongest inspiration by the functionality of Greek residential architecture. It is an edifice whose relics were among the first to be examined and the first for which a preservation and conservation project was developed. This was completed in subsequent seasons.

House H9 is located in the south-eastern residential area of the ancient town, away from its centre. It was excavated by Egyptian archaeologists in 1987, shortly after the discovery of the town. Research aimed at developing a conservation project was carried out by architects from the conservation mission from Zamość and, since 1995, the Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission has been run by specialists from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. The results of the studies of the building's architecture were published by Włodzimierz Bentkowski,⁴ Urszula Fidecka,⁵ Jan Radzik,⁶ and Wiktor A. Daszewski (who discovered the site and directed the Polish Archaeological Mission of the PCMA until 2006).⁷ Stanisław Medeksza (head of the Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission, 1995–2011) provided the most comprehensive presentation of the results of research on

² Medeksza 1999, 120–122; Pensabene 2010, 202; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1741.

³ Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1745.

⁴ Bentkowski 1990; 1991.

⁵ Fidecka 1991.

⁶ Radzik 1991.

⁷ Daszewski 1995, 19–25, figs 9, 10, 14; 2011, 429–431.

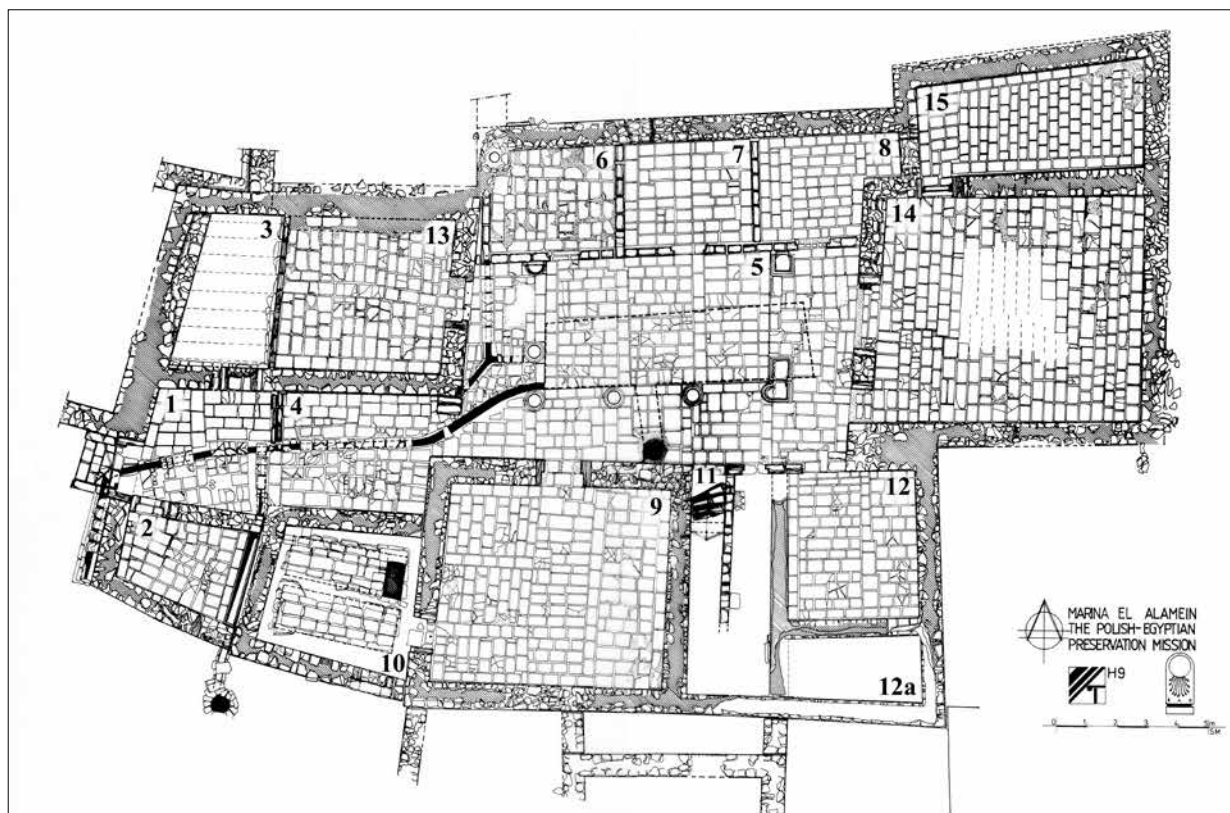


Fig. 2. Inventory plan of House H9 from Marina el-Alamein (compiled by S. Medeksza).

House H9 against the background of his studies of the residential architecture in Marina el-Alamein.⁸

The edifice underwent conservation with anastylosis of the portico elements between 1995 and 1998 (Fig. 3), and the preservation efforts were later repeated. This gave the opportunity for additional observations. The relics were extensively researched. Interpretations of the edifice, however meticulous they might be, left unexplained issues, some of which can be answered today. It is precisely what we wish to focus on in the present paper.

House H9 is located in a part of the town where the streets run relatively irregularly, due to the limitations imposed by the lay of the land. Therefore, its layout along the E-W axis, which occupies a space 40 m long and 24 m wide, deviates from a regular rectangle in its outline. In the centre of the house, however, there is a more or less rectangular courtyard (Fig. 4), and the two largest rooms to the east and south of it, as well as the third largest on the western side, are almost regularly rectangular. Most of the walls were made of rubble masonry cemented in the core

with clay and plastered with lime mortar, which was also constructional and cemented the rubble on the façade.

It is an *oikos* house, which was the prevailing type in the town. The courtyard (5) and the main room, *oikos* (14), east of it, preceded by a *prostas* vestibule, are located along the same axis and organise the main space of the house.⁹ The presence of both neighbouring rooms connected with the courtyard refers to the tradition of Greek houses.

Two column porticoes open onto the courtyard from the west and south. The southern portico extends eastward, creating a communication tract for the rooms on the south side of the house, referring to the layout of *pastas*, also known from the tradition of Greek houses.¹⁰ A second large hall (9) dominates the southern rooms, with a width equal to the size of the courtyard. This was probably an *andron*, which became a Roman-style *triclinium*¹¹ in the following exploitation phase. The neighbouring kitchen area (10) with two vaulted cellars would certainly testify to this. They were accessible through

⁸ Medeksza 1999, 125–126, figs 3–7; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1745.

⁹ Daszewski 2011, 431; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1745.

¹⁰ Medeksza 1999, 125; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1745; see also Hoepfner, Schwander 1994, 99, fig. 321.

¹¹ Medeksza 1999, 125; Daszewski 2011, 431.



Fig. 3. Archival photo of House H9 during the conservation works in 1996, a view from the south-west (Archive of the Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission).



Fig. 4. Courtyard of House H9, a view from the north-west (photo by R. Czerner).

a hatch closed with a stone slab. Amphorae were discovered inside.¹²

From the east, a stairwell (11) rose adjacent to the *andron/triclinium*. Further to the east were located two rectangular rooms occupying the south-eastern part of the house. One of them (12a) had secondary partition walls – to the north and west – made of dried brick. The ground floor room located further to the east and occupying the south-eastern corner of the building was not functionally connected with the household, and it was impossible to enter it from the inside. Its eastern and southern walls are only partially preserved. A narrow room (15) was located in the north-eastern corner of the house, north of the *oikos*.

The courtyard was asymmetrical, and there was no portico on the northern side. Three small rooms were located there. Researchers have suggested that one of them, the western one (6) in the original phase, could have been a kitchen. A stove relic was found there in the thickness of the western wall, in the north-western corner. The investigation in 1997 showed that the thickening of the stove wall was built secondarily on the existing floor. The function of the hearth reveals that there was no wall above it. All this indicates that the stove came from the late period, when the abandoned and ruined house was re-used. The aforementioned three rooms, the only ones in the whole house, were walled on the side of the courtyard and separated by regular limestone ashlar. Portico columns, as well as pillars flanking the entrance from the courtyard to the *prostas*, were also built from regular elements.

The corridor – divided in a later phase into two parts (1 and 4) – leading eastward from the entrance to the southern portico of the courtyard (albeit with an axis nudged slightly southward in relation to that of the portico) organised the western part of the house. Two rooms were located to the north and south of the corridor. The south-western room (2) housed a latrine, whereas the north-western (3) was a warehouse, which the excavation discovered to be filled with amphorae.¹³ In the south-eastern room (10) was located the aforementioned kitchen adjacent to the *andron/triclinium*, and the north-eastern (13) was a living room entered from the east via the courtyard. It was located exactly opposite the *oikos*, which was on the other side of the courtyard, on the same axis. The intercolumniation of the portico in front of it was prominent and wider than the others.

The courtyard and rooms were paved with limestone slabs. Under the courtyard, there was a vaulted tank with a well located in the southern portico. Two downspouts in the western and northern walls of the courtyard supplied water to the tank. However, water from the central part of the courtyard was drained by a sewer under the floor of the entrance corridor to the latrine and through it to the cesspool well located on the street to the south of the house. This street was later built up by structures adjacent to the house. A further, western section of the sewer, under the corridor floor, also supplied water to a trough located outside the house, by the western wall next to the entrance.

In the above-described manner, researchers were able to functionally interpret the layout of the relics excavated from the house.¹⁴ Likewise, they noted several additions to the walls.¹⁵ Having interpreted them, they reached the conclusion that the eastern part of the house had been extended westward from a line demarcated in the north by the western edge of the courtyard and in the south by the western wall of the *andron/triclinium* (9).¹⁶ They explained the extension as a second construction and exploitation phase, but the question of its function was left untouched by researchers, and subsequent observations and analyses raised doubts as to the justification for separating these two phases. Undoubtedly, the late phase of reconstruction or repairs after a disaster was executed with the use of dried brick.¹⁷

When analysing the possibility of the existence of the two functional phases and the extension of the house, it should be noted that there must have been a wall on the western side of the western portico of the courtyard and that it probably belonged to some room, including in the first assumed phase. In the western part of the house, there are relics of a latrine, fed by the sewer from the central part of the courtyard, formed in the floor of its western portico. This floor does not bear any traces of transformation and, therefore, most likely comes from the original phase. Analogies from other houses in Marina show that latrines located next to the entrance were mandatory elements of even the smallest households. Therefore, a latrine should be expected to exist in House H9 from the beginning as well, and it was also presumably located on the western side.

The described modification, if it did ever take place at all, was therefore not an extension to the west, where no structures had previously stood. Instead, it could have

¹² Bentkowski 1991, 10.

¹³ Bentkowski 1991, 25.

¹⁴ Bentkowski 1990, 40–42; 1991, 23–28; Fidecka 1991; Medeksza 1999, 125–126; Daszewski 2011, 429–431; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1745.

¹⁵ Fidecka 1991, fig. 1.

¹⁶ Fidecka 1991, 33, 35; Medeksza 1999, 125.

¹⁷ Described in detail by Medeksza; see Medeksza 1999, 126; Daszewski 1995, 427.

been a major reconstruction, perhaps an enlargement of the earlier western part, during which some walls were adapted, although not necessarily all of them.

However, a general reconstruction, and particularly of the western part of the house, which it affected, need not have taken place at all. Indeed, besides the above-mentioned functional issues, it is worth noting that there were no breaks or extensions between the outer northern walls of the eastern and western parts along the line of the aforementioned division. The connection and continuity in this zone were clearly demonstrated by the first investigators¹⁸ and confirmed by later studies.¹⁹ However, the addition of individual walls and rooms in the southern part could have been merely a result of construction phases.

Thus, the house could have generally been built in a single phase, as an extension to House H9a located to the north, which had been erected earlier along with a tavern adjoining it from the south. The irregularity of the external outline of House H9 resulted both from this extension, as well as from the irregular course of the streets from the other sides, mainly from the south. However, the main, largest rooms of the *oikos*, *andron/triclinium* and Room 13, were arranged as regularly as possible and almost rectangular. What tied the layout of the house together was the rectangular courtyard complex with porticoes and three rooms from the north. It has a very regular layout, albeit running parallel to the long northern wall of the house and thus slightly twisted in relation to the major axis of the three main rooms. The courtyard complex is made up of regular large limestone elements, including walls made of ashlar masonry, using different technology and is much more meticulous than the other walls of the house. It was made by different craftsmen and probably at a later stage of construction.

Form of the roofs

S. Medeksza's observations and considerations²⁰ regarding buildings from Marina, though general, are indeed pertinent to the subject of roofing: whether they were surface (sloping) roofs covered with tiles, or flat roofs or terraces covered with clay daubing or lime mortar. The tradition of Greek and Roman houses in this region allows both, as well as gable roofs over the highest reception rooms and flat roofs covering the other rooms. On the other hand, the lack of *tegula* roof tile relics, with the exception of a single specimen in the whole site, would tend to suggest flat roofs and terraces.

In the Hellenistic baths located in the centre of the ancient town, a relic of a clay structure of a roof (or a floor) from palm beams was discovered.²¹ Therefore, flat roof technology is known to have been used.

Upper level

On the southern side of the house, to the east of the *andron/triclinium*, were stairs (11). Researchers explain their presence by positing that they led to roof terraces or upper-level rooms. The latter option would have facilitated a functional division into the part of the house for men (*andronitis*) on the ground floor and for women (*gynaecoonitis*) on the upper floor. It was similar in other houses, where stairwell relics were usually also preserved. However, in the absence of any remains of the upper parts of this and other houses (with the exception of the columns of the portico floor in House H1),²² it is difficult to explain more precisely whether there were indeed rooms on the first floor and whether they covered the whole house or just a part of it. However, an answer may be found based on a functional analysis and the applied building techniques.

The *oikos* (14), the largest reception room, due to its size and grandeur had to be higher than the neighbouring ones (whose height can be reconstructed at about 3.20 m). It featured an *aedicula* in the eastern wall, whose finial rose to at least 3.50 m, which, together with the necessary space above, required a considerable height. The entrance from the courtyard to the *prostas*, preceding the hall, was flanked by pillars whose height can be reconstructed at 3.75 m, based on proportions. The *andron/triclinium* (9) located in the south had similar dimensions to the *oikos*. The considerable span of the beams with their low load capacity could have also precluded any functional space above the room. However, this is not certain. These rooms, and in any case the *oikos*, were covered directly by a roof, whether flat or sloping, placed much higher than the floor of the upper level.

It is unlikely that the upper level – a terrace or rooms – accessible by stairs, would have been restricted only to the space limited by the aforementioned two rooms: the *oikos* (14), higher than the other ground floor rooms, and possibly the equally high *andron/triclinium* (9). This space (where the stairwell was located), above rooms 12 and 12a, and maybe over the interior to the east of them, which was inaccessible from the house, would be relatively small and not worth building developed stairs. Thus, probably the roofs of the southern and

¹⁸ Fidecka 1991, fig. 1.

¹⁹ Medeksza 1997, figs 2, 3; 1999, il. 3; Medeksza *et al.* 2015, fig. 4.

²⁰ Medeksza 1999, 124.

²¹ Bąkowska-Czerner 2016, 173.

²² Czerner 2011, 133–140, figs 4, 5.

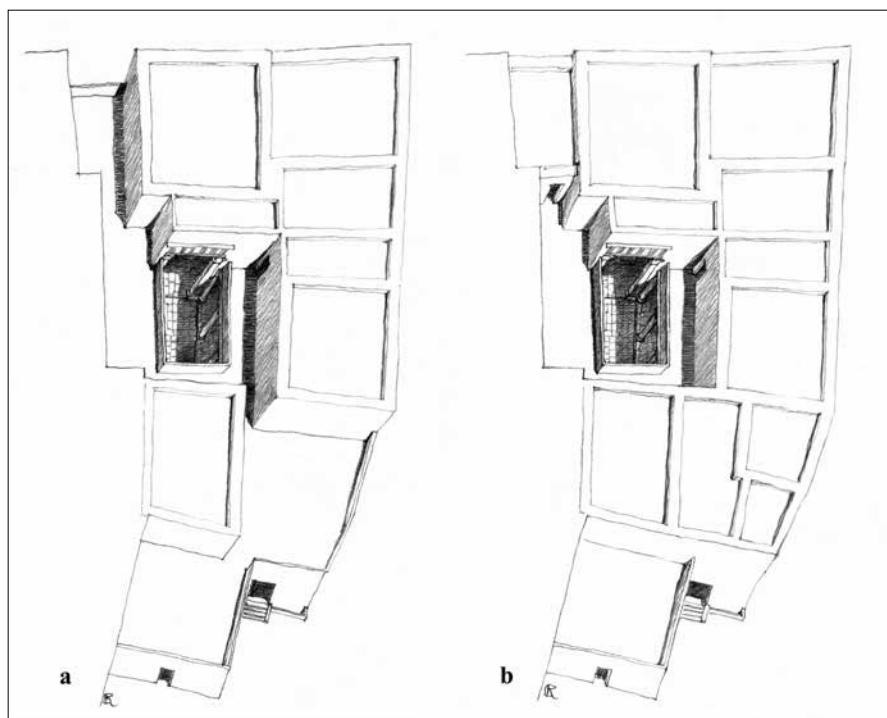


Fig. 5. House H9. An attempt at a reconstruction of the form of the roofs and upper floor:
 a. Upper floor minimally developed with rooms; b. Upper floor maximally developed with rooms (compiled by R. Czerner).

western portico of the courtyard served as communication galleries and provided access to the floor located above the farther parts of the house, especially over the western one.

The question of the height of the buildings located north of the courtyard is significant. Their thin walls indicate that they could have only supported a small load and, therefore, that this part of the buildings remained one-storey and was covered with a terrace. An analogy to a gallery above porticoes is unknown in Marina. No relics of balustrades remain, but they could have been made of wood or just simple walls. Nevertheless, such a solution is known to have been commonly applied in other towns and is therefore very likely.

The question remains as to what part of the floor was occupied by the rooms and what was the terrace like. The stairwell consisted of two flights, while the slope of the preserved relic of the stairs shows that one flight of a known length would have been enough to reach the level above the portico, or around 3.20–3.30 m (with the reconstructed height of the portico columns standing at 3.06 m). The flights could have been shorter or the eastern one could have lacked any stairs and instead served as a corridor on the upper level, leading from the end of the stairs in the south northward, to the gallery. In any case, two flights would only be needed, if indeed there

was a room to the east of the stairwell on the upper floor. Therefore, this part of the upper floor could not have been an exposed terrace (Fig. 5a).

Apart from this part, above the raised terrace there were the walls and roofs of the *oikos* (14) and probably the *andron/triclinium* (9), and maybe also the western Room 13. In addition to this minimum, upper floor rooms can be expected above all or part of the western section of the house. Over the three rooms north of the courtyard, as mentioned, there was probably a terrace. There could have also been an upper floor room north of the *oikos* (Fig. 5b). One might even consider the existence of a room above the *andron/triclinium*.

Wall niches

In the northern wall of the kitchen (10), two niches preserved only in the lower parts were found, and their upper part was reconstructed (Fig. 2). They are located at the same height and are more or less of the same size. Their function is not certain, but they may have been used in the kitchen as shelves. However, looking at similar niches preserved in Pompeii, one can assume that they were *lararia*. These types of niches were also found in other houses in Marina, and some of them performed such function.²³ Domestic shrines were also found in

²³ Bałkowska-Czerner, Czerner 2017, 142–144.



Fig. 6. Niches in the southern wall of Room 12a (photo by S. Medeksza).

several sites in Egypt, including Karanis.²⁴ In Pompeii, a greater number of *lavaria* were found in the kitchens, near the hearths.²⁵ There are also examples of several *lavaria* located in a single wall.²⁶ Unfortunately, in the described kitchen in Marina there are no traces of painting which could help identify the niches.

There are also niches in the southern wall of Room 12a (Fig. 6). They are situated relatively low, more or less at the same height, and were probably of the same size. It was noticed that in the second half of the 1st century, when the room was reconstructed and the walls of dried brick were built in there, the niches were also walled up with bricks. The room's function changed. Perhaps in the first phase, when there were *lavaria*, it could have been a *sacrarium*. Likewise with Room 15, connected with the *oikos*, its location may indicate that it was a *sacrarium*, also by analogy to the layout of the rooms in House H10.²⁷ Unfortunately, there is no evidence for this; it remains a mere conjecture.

Interior décor

Some elements of the interior décor, sculptural and painted, are known (relics preserved during the excavations and described by the researchers).²⁸ The porticoes featured columns with simplified pseudo-Ionic forms of the Marina type.²⁹ The bases of the columns were also

simplified, with a conical profile supported by a band, characteristic of Marina arrangements. Wooden beams must have been laid on the columns, as no relics of stone architraves, even the smallest, were preserved whatsoever. The situation is typical for the entire town, even its grandest buildings. There were probably stone cornices on the beams, along the length of the ceilings. On both sides of the entrance, from the courtyard to the *prostas*, there were pillars in a square layout, connected to the



Fig. 7. Pseudo-Corinthian capital of the pillar framing the entrance from the courtyard to the *prostas* (photo by R. Czerner).

²⁴ Fennelly 1968, 317–334; Frankfurter 1998, 34–136.

²⁵ Giacobello 2008, 60.

²⁶ Giacobello 2008, 64, 134; Van Andringa 2011, 91–98.

²⁷ Bąkowska-Czerner, Czerner 2017, 142, fig. 3. For more on the *sacrarium*, see Sfameni 2014, 16–22.

²⁸ Fidecka 1991, fig. 3; Radzik 1991.

²⁹ Thus named according to the suggestion of the discoverer of the site; see Czerner 2009, 20–24; Daszewski 2011, 440.



Fig. 8. Pediment element found during the excavations in House H9 (Archive of the Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission).

wall. They had simplified bases with a profile similar to the columns and geometricised pseudo-Corinthian capitals of the Marina type (Fig. 7).³⁰ The lintel, which was almost 3.00 m long, was probably also wooden. It cannot be ruled out that this is the origin of a surviving relic of a triglyph-metope frieze.³¹ Two relics of dentil cornices with small-scale decoration, originating from

both sides of the triangular pediment, were also found (Fig. 8). Each of them was about 0.50 m long, and there must have been at least an equally long central element between them. Thus, the length of the pediment corresponded to the lintel above the door.

An *aedicula* was located in the *oikos* in the middle of its eastern wall.³² This solution is typical of Marina, and similar *aediculae* are known from the reception rooms of houses H10, H21c, and H21 'N'. Stone elements consisting of one side and the pediment of the niche were preserved and known at the time of the excavations (Fig. 9). Its form is noteworthy, with semi-columns and pilasters on the sides and a pediment, which did not form a closed tympanum, but whose bottom cornice was pulled back and circled the side and rear walls of the niche.³³ This peculiar baroque form is repeated in the other known niches and is typical of the site. The niche was polychrome. There are remnants of red paint on the pilaster, head, and dentils of the lower cornice.



Fig. 9. Remains of the *aedicula* assembled by W.A. Daszewski (photo by W.A. Daszewski; after Czerner 2009, fig. 64).

Polychrome

The house featured rich painting decoration. The interior walls were covered with multilayer plaster and polychrome on the top layer. Unfortunately, only descriptions, photos, and tracings have been preserved.³⁴ When the ruins of the building were excavated, fragments of painted plaster were still visible on the walls,

³⁰ Czerner 2009, 5–16; Daszewski 2011, 440.

³¹ Fidecka 1991, fig. 3.

³² Bentkowski 1990, 41, fig. 3; 1991, 27, figs 11, 12; Radzik 1991; Czerner 2005, 125, fig. 1; 2009, 40, fig. 64; Daszewski 2011, 431.

³³ Pensabene 2010, 206; Czerner 2017, 52.

³⁴ The research on painting was conducted by M. Małachowicz (1995) and E. Łużyńska (1996).



Fig. 10. Remains of the polychrome on the southern wall of the *oikos* (photo by W.A. Daszewski; after Czerner 2009, fig. 75).

the bases of the columns, semi-columns, and pillars. The column shafts, made of drums, were plastered and painted white. However, the bases of the columns, semi-columns, pillars, and the socles of the walls were black, as in other houses in Marina.³⁵ Numerous shards of monochromatic and multi-coloured plaster were found in the rubble. Some featured marbling, geometrical patterns, and stripes, while just a few were decorated with plant motifs. Black, red, blue, white, yellow, and brown were the dominant colours, while green was featured less often. On the plasters, shallow engraving for rustication and shallow pilasters could be observed.³⁶

The best-preserved polychromy was in the *oikos*³⁷ on the southern wall (a preserved fragment of dado about 4.00 m long and about 1.50–1.55 m high) (Fig. 10) and on its extension, on the eastern wall of the courtyard (about 1.60 m in length), closing the southern portico. Above the black socle, in separate square fields, separated from each other by wide, coloured stripes, the *oikos* featured multi-coloured circles. One of them was painted inside with colourful patterns. At the end of the wall, above the socle, there is another decoration, a vertical rectangle. Something similar is also found on the eastern wall of the courtyard. Probably a pilaster was painted over the rectangles. Similar dado decoration can be found in the *tablinum* at *Casa della Caccia Antica* in Pompeii.³⁸ Blue, red, yellow, white, and purple were used.³⁹ In the *oikos*, only a few fragments of blue plaster were preserved in the

rubble. Unfortunately, the painting decoration of the room might be only approximately reconstructed (Fig. 11). The above-mentioned, richly-decorated *aedicula* was mounted on the eastern wall. It seems that in the *oikos*, plaster was applied on the wall covered with a layer of clay. Another technique was used in the room north of the *oikos* (15), where technological layers have survived.⁴⁰ Coarse plaster was applied to the façade of the rubble masonry wall, roughly sanded, and then fine-grained plaster was applied, which was then painted. Unfortunately, there are no traces of paintings in this room.

Two layers of plaster are observable in places exposed to destruction: on the bases of the columns, semi-columns, pillars, and socles of the walls and on the northern wall of the courtyard. Above the socle, whose height reached 0.48 m, traces of yellow from the first phase were visible, which was covered with plaster with traces of red preserved up to the height of 1.33 m. It seems that the walls of the rooms were only painted once. Some of them bear traces of black socles (nos. 1, 4, 13, 14, 15, and 12 – where the black socle ends at the height of 0.22 m with a red belt 0.02 m wide, and above in the corner a black plaster was visible up to the height of 0.35 m).

Mention should be made here of one more important, albeit small, fragment of plaster (about 0.15 × 0.13 m) with figural decoration (Fig. 12).⁴¹ It is not known, however, whether it definitely comes from this house.⁴² On the dark brown background that fades into

³⁵ Medeksza *et al.* 2015, 1753–1754.

³⁶ Medeksza 1999, 128.

³⁷ Daszewski 1995, 24, fig. 3.

³⁸ Strocka 1987, 37, pl. IV, fig. 1.

³⁹ Daszewski 2011, 431.

⁴⁰ Medeksza 1996, 8.

⁴¹ Medeksza 1999, 129, il. 17.

⁴² The described fragment was found near the house, to the south of it.



Fig. 11. An attempt at a partial reconstruction of the interior decoration of the *oikos* (compiled by R. Czerner).

black in places, a dimly visible bust of probably a seated male figure remains. The body is covered with a robe in light ochre, probably a *himation*. The left arm appears bent at the elbow and raised. Long, slightly wavy hair covers the ears. On the head, surrounded by a yellow nimbus, lies a wreath of fine leaves, maybe laurel, ivy, or vine. The eyes, lips, and nose are proportional.

Many elements indicate that it might be a representation of Dionysus, whose images are relatively often found in Marina.⁴³ In representations of the wine god, the nimbus – usually blue or gold-yellow – started to appear in the middle of the second century in Syria.⁴⁴ Its gold-yellow colour indicates a relationship with the sun. With such a nimbus, Dionysus most often appears, for instance, in scenes of his meeting with Ariadne,⁴⁵ and later on Coptic textiles.⁴⁶ Both on mosaics and textiles, he is presented with a nimbus and a wreath on the head.⁴⁷

The god of vine, regeneration, connected to immortality, a cosmocrat, popular in Egypt, was associated with the royal power of Ptolemy, and later with that of the Roman Empire. Most of Dionysus' representations with a nimbus were discovered in residential buildings.⁴⁸ Sometimes, the visualisations painted in a house were related to the activity, cult, authority, and preferences of its owner. The large number of amphorae found in the warehouse, possibly meant for wine, and the cellar of the discussed house, as well as its connection with the neighbouring House H9a and the tavern there, might suggest that the owner was an entrepreneur, perhaps a seller or wine producer, in which case his patron could have well

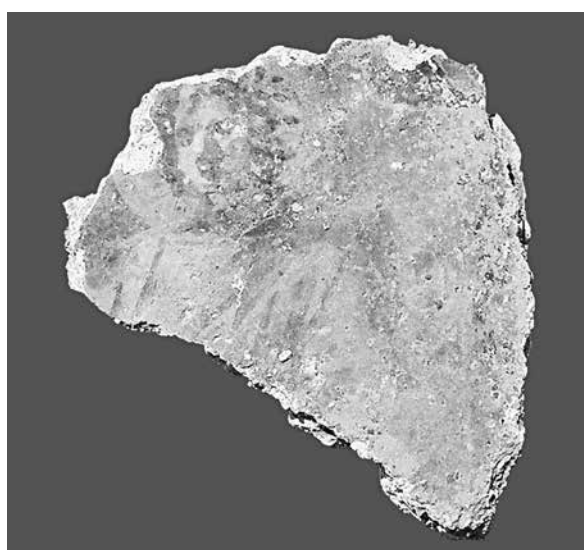


Fig. 12. Fragment of plaster with painted figural decoration (Archive of the Polish-Egyptian Conservation Mission).

been Dionysus. It should also be emphasised that House H9 belonged among the larger and wealthier houses in Marina. It is not known yet what was in the south-eastern part of the building. Maybe it was a room belonging to House H9 with an entrance from the outside and some commercial and service-related purposes.

The dimensions of the described painting may suggest that it adorned a *lararium*. Niches devoted to Dionysus have also been found in Pompeii,⁴⁹ probably also in Karanis.⁵⁰

⁴³ Bąkowska-Czerner 2014, 318, fig. 7; Bąkowska-Czerner, Czerner 2017, 144, 145.

⁴⁴ Cecconi 2016, 19.

⁴⁵ Cecconi 2016, 5, 53, fig. 3 (Zeugma, *Casa di Dionisio e Arianna*, 2nd–3rd century AD).

⁴⁶ Cecconi 2016, 18; above all in the Syrian territory (between the 2nd and 3rd century) and in Egypt from the mid-4th century.

⁴⁷ Cecconi 2016, 5, 53, fig. 4 (Zeugma, *Maison d'Okéanos*, 2nd–3rd century AD), fig. 36 (Brooklyn Museum inv. no. 71.132, 5th century AD).

⁴⁸ Cecconi 2016, 38.

⁴⁹ Giacobello 2008, 64, 233.

⁵⁰ Fennelly 1968, 333–334.

Usually, an altar was placed in front of a *lararium*. From the pictures taken in the 1980s,⁵¹ it appears that the round marble altar currently standing in the portico of the inspectorate office in Marina could have come from House H9 (Fig. 13). Unfortunately, the altar is damaged; its upper part was not preserved. On the profiled round pedestal there is a column of a smaller diameter, and on the upper edge of the pedestal, bare feet of three figures are visible. Two pairs are parted, and one is joined at the heel. The figures were represented facing forward and leaning back against the column. Above them must have been the finial of the column with a place intended for offering sacrifices. Round altars of this type may be encountered at other sites⁵² and are also depicted in the paintings from Pompeii.⁵³

Final remarks

We do not have much information about artefacts excavated in House H9. In addition to the amphorae, which were only mentioned in the earlier studies, three lamps were published.⁵⁴ Two of them were found in the dried brick wall between rooms 4 and 13, which undoubtedly came from the first phase of the reconstruction, and the third during the cleaning of Room 12a. All are dated to the 1st century AD.⁵⁵

The first stage of the construction of the house took place at the end of the 1st century BC, while the reconstruction is dated to the second half of the 1st century AD. Researchers noted that the doors in some rooms were walled up.⁵⁶ This situation, and the hearth installed in the wall of Room 6, show that the house had been partially damaged, probably after the earthquake in the year 365. Similar reconstructions, room divisions, and blocking of doors in other houses in Marina also come from this period.⁵⁷

The results of recent studies indicate that House H9 could have been built within a single construction phase. The interior was rebuilt and probably used until the end of the 4th century. There is a question mark over the existence of a kitchen in the early phase in Room 6, and the dating of the hearth was moved forward. From the



Fig. 13. Relic of a round marble altar (photo by R. Czerner).

beginning, the kitchen was located in Room 10. An attempt was made to reconstruct the floor, with rooms, terraces, and galleries above the portico. The layout is inspired by a Greek house, but some elements preserved there can be encountered in the Roman tradition, including the large number of niches. There are also features characteristic of Marina itself, visible in the architectural details. The *aedicula* in the *oikos*, and perhaps also the niches in rooms 10 and 12a, indicate the existence of a domestic cult. The house was adapted to the cultural changes taking place in Egypt. Its size, along with the architectural and painting decoration, testify to the standard of living of the inhabitants of Marina as well as their traditions and cults.

⁵¹ Pensabene 2010, fig. 6(d).

⁵² Abbiati Brida 1997, 102.

⁵³ Fröhlich 1991, L20, 258, pl. 3.2; L24, 258–259, pl. 4.2; L37, 264, pl. 9.1; L98, 292, pl. 10.2.

⁵⁴ Medeksza 1996, 2, figs 11–13.

⁵⁵ Medeksza 1996, 2, no. 4.

⁵⁶ Bentkowski 1991, 25.

⁵⁷ Bąkowska-Czerner 2014, 312–321.

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