

## THE CITY OF THE DEAD

MICHAL GAWLIKOWSKI

A visitor coming to Palmyra today meets first some rather derelict funerary towers of the South-West necropolis, standing to his left beside the highway from Damascus. Much more impressive was the sight awaiting the travelers until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when they usually arrived through a passage between the western hills, called Valley of Tombs (Wadi el-Qubur). Standing towers and heaps of carved stones marking the sites of other tombs make up a unique landscape marked with melancholy and abandonment (Fig. 1). In Antiquity, when the buildings were complete, it was a real city with high-rise towers and sumptuous palaces along the main thoroughfare coming in from Emesa (today Homs). A small rocky outcrop in the middle of the valley, known locally as Umm Belqis (to commemorate the Queen of Sheba, for whom Palmyra was allegedly built by Solomon), bears at mid-height a ring of towers (Fig. 2). The ancient road bifurcated around this hillock and entered the town as two streets of the earliest quarters that developed on a plateau south of the present ruins.<sup>1</sup> A rampart built under the Tetrarchy has not only condemned this part of the town, but also separated the western necropolis from its natural extension around the northern limit of the living city, using on its course some tombs incorporated as bastions, while some others remained inside the late defenses. This northern necropolis is today extremely dilapidated, but was once as dense and rich as the Valley of Tombs itself.

There are two other sepulchral areas in evidence, both south of the oasis: to the west, the already mentioned cluster of tombs along the present road, and at some distance to the east, a group mostly notable today by its excavated underground funerary galleries. A poorer cemetery consisting of individual graves existed under the modern town, but only some tombstones in the museum can be seen today.

Nearly all overground tombs have been mapped and numbered

---

<sup>1</sup> Current excavations of A. Schmidt-Colinet.

by the Wiegand expedition at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> A monography on the funerary monuments in Palmyra was published many years later; quite recently, a dissertation on funerary towers treated this particular class of tombs in more detail.<sup>3</sup> Besides, there exists a range of excavation reports covering mainly underground tombs.

The eldest tomb known in Palmyra has been discovered by the Swiss mission in the sanctuary of Baalshamin.<sup>4</sup> It goes back to the second century B.C. and appears to have been closed and purified in AD 11 in relation with the founding of the sanctuary. Other archaic monuments are towers standing in the Valley of Tombs and on the bordering hills; they belong to the first century B.C. During the first century AD and the first quarter of the next more towers filled the Valley, especially along its northern track and on the slope of Umm Belqis looking toward the city. Later on, several underground galleries and funerary caves found their place there, along with the so-called funerary temples. Of the latter, one has been recently excavated and comprehensively published.<sup>5</sup>

The southwest necropolis includes towers of the first century AD and many hypogea of the second century, of which about fifty have been excavated. Their inscriptions show the constant use of the underground tombs down to the end of the third century. The southeast necropolis seems to have been started at the very end of the first century. Several tombs have been excavated by Syrian, and more recently by Japanese archaeologists.<sup>6</sup>

The development of the funerary architecture in Palmyra starts in the late Hellenistic period and covers all three centuries of prosperity until the demise of the city after Zenobia. It is governed from the beginning by two constant principles: the use of loculi and the marking of the burial by an upright monument. Each can be traced back to a different tradition.

The perpendicular slots in the walls of underground chambers and galleries, flat, arched or gabled on top, seem to be of Alexandrine origin. In the Levant, the first known examples were found in

---

<sup>2</sup> Watzinger-Wulzinger 1932; on topography, Gawlikowski 1970a, pp. 147-166.

<sup>3</sup> Henning 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Fellmann 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt-Colinet 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Higuchi-Saito 1998.



Marissa, a Sidonian colony in southern Palestine, but such loculi became soon a standard form of burial throughout Syria and Palestine,<sup>7</sup> and remained so in Palmyra until the end of the third century, both hollowed out in the rock or built in masonry. On the other hand, raised tombstones and funerary stelae can be found in Syria from very early times, but the Arab migrations brought apparently with them the notion of the deceased being in some way present in the stone set up over the tomb and called for that reason *nefesh* or "soul".<sup>8</sup> Inscriptions prove this usage to be well established among the Nabataeans, Ituraeans and in other areas where nomads have settled in the later Hellenistic period, including Palmyra, where the *nefesh* took the form of a small arched stela, often with the standing figure of the dead in relief, to be set up on the grave and sometimes removed later to an underground tomb. More surprisingly, the term of *nefesh* applies occasionally to funerary towers. At the beginning, these were just masonry pillars built over a socle containing loculi burials, and could thus be conceived as collective monuments apt to house the souls of the deceased. Soon, the primitive notion faded away in the urban milieu, even more easily as the burials started to be installed in the higher part of the towers, becoming thus tombs and memorials in the same time.

The earliest known tomb, found behind the temple of Baalshamin, consisted originally of a mudbrick squarish socle 4,5 through 5 mt. with a grave pit in the middle containing the bones of a woman buried in mid-second century BC. The mudbrick structure was later extended to envelope a low corridor with lateral loculi, partly hollowed out in the bedrock, partly built in rough stones. All this was certainly surmounted by a standing monument in brick levelled by the founders of the sanctuary in the early first century AD.

Early funerary towers are found mostly on the hills right and left of the Emesa road. They are built in broken stone set in mortar around the central rubble core. Each has a square stepped socle 5 to 7 mt. each side in which there are reserved deep loculi, in some cases only four of them on two opposite sides, but sometimes up to twenty, opening on all four sides and on two levels (nos. 2, 4, 5, 6,

---

<sup>7</sup> Peters-Thiersch 1905. For Alexandria, see already Thiersch 1904; Pagenstecher 1919.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gawlikowski 1972.

10, 24, 29, 52). Above, the tower proper contains a winding staircase around the central core in which a few additional internal loculi are sometimes reserved. Tapering on the outside, these towers are never preserved up to the top. Apparently, they served as lofty stelae above the graves contained in the socle. Three such towers (nos. 25-27), lined up with smoothed stone revetment, are apparently solid. Standing on a high ridge north of the Valley of Tombs, they probably mark burials underneath.

Similar towers can be found at several sites on the Euphrates: Dura-Europos, Halabiyya, Baghuz. Unlike those of Palmyra, they are often adorned with plastered half-columns and pilasters. The dating is uncertain, but most are probably late Hellenistic.<sup>9</sup>

Only in Palmyra, however, appeared a device to install loculi inside the tower. There are two monuments containing narrow corridors with the lateral loculi (nos. 53 and 71a) and one containing a vaulted chamber with loculi above the socle which harbours other burials accessible from outside (no. 5). All three are neighbours on the southern slope of Umm Belqis. They should be considered as first attempts at increasing the number of loculi burials, the tendency that explains all subsequent development of funerary towers.

Soon, there appear towers containing several chambers one above the other, all linked by a winding staircase between them and the outer walls (e.g. nos. 11, 95, 170). The chambers are distinctly narrower on top than at floor level, their walls being strongly inclined inwards in order to reduce the width of horizontal slabs used for ceiling. On their long walls four or eight loculi open each side, on two levels, while the entrance is placed alternatively in a long or a short side of the chamber. Some isolated loculi are to be found on the staircase itself.

The earliest dated tower (Figs. 3-4, Tower of 'Atenatan), built in 9 BC by two sons of 'Atenatan Kohailu (no. 7)<sup>10</sup> displays two entrances on opposite sides, leading into two independent chambers contained in the socle one above the other. Each has lateral loculi set symmetrically on two levels. The upper chamber contains the beginning of stairs going up toward four superposed smaller chambers with irregular loculi, and toward single loculi still higher up,

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Will 1945/49 and Will 1945/49bis.

<sup>10</sup> Witecka 1994.



where there was a decorative frame inserted in the façade above a cornice running around the tower. The top of the tower is not preserved and we do not know whether the stairs ended blind or led to some sort of terrace. All together there were over 40 loculi, walled and plastered one by one when used. Those situated in the higher part of the tower have usually a slit to the outside, apparently left open after the burial. However, an intact burial (the only one discovered in a funerary tower in recorded excavations) was found entirely closed.

It seems sensible to admit that most towers with a less developed communication system, and even more those with external loculi, are older than the 'Atenatan tower, though some archaic looking tombs might be actually contemporary with more advanced forms. While typology cannot provide exact dating which can rest safely only on dated inscriptions, there is a good chance that most if not all archaic-looking towers go back to the first century BC, and some are possibly even earlier. On the other hand, among the towers similar to 'Atenatan's there are two monuments dated respectively to AD 33 (Hairan, no. 67) and AD 40 (Kitot, no. 44). Both display two opposite entrances, a winding staircase, and chambers with lateral loculi.

The tower of Hairan, situated on the steep northern slope of Umm Belqis, has even a third intermediary chamber in its socle, with an independent lateral entrance, while the ground floor extends into the bedrock with a hewn corridor provided with lateral loculi. All chambers are extremely narrow, and contain vertical slots, each once divided into four loculi by means of ceramic plates.

The Kitot tower (Fig. 5) is larger. It stands at the foot of a hill on the opposite side of the Valley of Tombs, and contains in its higher tapering part, above the regular chambers with lateral slots, two smaller rooms with built-in sarcophagi. At the far end of the ground floor there are steps leading down toward an underground gallery which could not be excavated. The tower apparently ended in a flat terrace. Its most conspicuous feature is an arcade adorned with vinescroll opening on the third floor in the side facing the town, containing a banqueting group of Kitot and his family (Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup>

Neither this or other contemporary and earlier towers, however,

<sup>11</sup> Will 1950.

contain rooms apt to receive a family gathering at a funerary meal. In spite of cramped space the towers were visited by relatives, who burned frankincense in little round plaster altars on the floor in front of some loculi. The burials were usually marked simply with inscriptions traced in wet plaster closing the loculi.

There is a gap in epigraphical record between AD 40 and 79 (the date of the tower no. 63). In the meantime a new device was introduced, which shall mark all later towers up to the last one dated in AD 128. The staircase of the later towers is built in one of the corners and consists of two parallel tracts between storeys. It takes thus much less place than the winding variety and makes possible bigger chambers, while the towers themselves are usually not larger than before. The chambers became identical in plan, so that the loculi slots are now uniform from foot to top of the tower, being divided only by slabs forming the loculi (e.g. tower no. 45, center of Fig. 5).

Soon, the rough and austere masonry of early towers was replaced by ashlar, the internal walls made vertical and often decorated with pilasters. We can find these fineries for the first time in the tower of Jamblichus (no. 51), built in AD 83 on the northern slope of Umm Belqis (far right on Fig. 2). The monument preserved five storeys of identical plan up to the height of 26 mt., but there was originally one more storey. The façade displays over the main entrance a tympanon and higher up an elaborate niche supported by two winged Victories, which most probably framed a banquet relief. Inside, Corinthian pilasters on the ground floor and simpler ornaments on higher storeys frame numerous symmetrical loculi reserved in the long walls. There are however small square rooms on two of the higher storeys replacing two slots each and intended for sculptures representing members of the family reclining on banqueting couches.

Similar is the tower of Elahbel and his brothers (no. 13), completed in AD 103 (Fig. 1). It is now most often visited and provides from its terrace a splendid panorama of the Valley of Tombs. The main difference from the Jamblichus tower consists in the presence of a vaulted crypt accessible from the back, being yet another chamber with lateral loculi. The far end wall on the ground floor above (Fig. 7) was decorated between pilasters with aligned half-figures of the family members alive at the time of the building and with a banqueting scene (now lost). In an arcade over the main entrance there still remains a slab with a couch in relief, but the family group having rested on it is gone.



The dead were wrapped in cloth, usually cut from discarded garments and soaked with resins. In the very stable and dry conditions which prevail inside towers the bodies could be well preserved, but unfortunately the looters have missed very few of them. They have, however, left behind many textile fragments which form today an astonishingly rich collection.<sup>12</sup>

The vertical loculi slots of later towers allowed for closing the burials not merely in masonry and plaster, as it was done earlier, but with rectangular plates bearing the image of the deceased in high relief. Typically, they represent half-figures from the waist up, with hands held close to the body. Men are usually draped in Greek fashion, some wear the cylindrical priestly hat and hold sacrifice vessels, others are bareheaded and hold often a scroll or a folded document, sometimes a palm or the pommel of a sword. The veil of ladies is always moved aside in order to show the face and the attributes of domestic virtues, such as spindle or a bunch of keys, later on increasingly rich assortments of jewels. Sometimes, young children accompany their mother, either standing behind her shoulder or being nursed on her lap.

The oldest known funerary bust is dated in AD 65/66 and represents a lady whose name is lost.<sup>13</sup> One apparently later sculpture of a lady and her child was found in the archaic tower of 'Atenatan,<sup>14</sup> but next to nothing survived in other towers throughout the site. However, a dated inscription from a tower with hypogeum of AD 56/57 found recently at the far end of the Valley of Tombs shows that an arched stele of a couple in the British Museum cannot be much younger.<sup>15</sup>

The development of the funerary tower in Palmyra can be described as a search to increase as much as possible the number of burial places: starting as an upright monument raised upon a socle with several individual loculi opening to the outside, the tower first received chambers with lateral loculi, then a real staircase and larger chambers with more loculi. While the tower of 'Atenatan was apt to receive about fifty burials, there was up to three hundred places in that of Elahbel. All towers were conceived as family tombs, but

---

<sup>12</sup> Schmidt-Colinet et al. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ingholt 1930a; Hvidberg-Hansen-Plough 1993, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Witecka 1994, pp. 85-86, pl. 12, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Gawlikowski 1998.

fashion and prosperity led often to build new monuments while the old ones still contained much free space. Apparently, no tower was ever fully used, even more so that many were provided with underground extensions. Galleries with lateral loculi hollowed out in the desert subsoil were usually supported by vaults in plaster. The access was by a staircase starting from the ground floor of some towers (e.g. no. 19, Figs. 8-9), or beneath smaller structures of which only faint traces remain here and there in the Valley of Tombs.

Towers built on a slope could be provided with caves extending into the rock on level with the ground floor chamber. Such is the case of the Hairan tower (AD 33) and some of its neighbors, while a similar grotto on the hill opposite was surmounted with an independent tower-like square monument.<sup>16</sup> Up to the end of the first century AD no underground tomb is known to exist without a surface monument, while many such monuments contained burials only within their stone structure and had no subterranean extension.

From the end of the first century, however, there appear independent hypogea apparently not marked by any standing structure (Fig. 10). The earliest one known is dated in AD 87, while the dates of over twenty others cover the whole span of Palmyrene civilisation, most of them founded during the second century. Some fifty such tombs were investigated in the 1930s in the SW necropolis, but published incompletely or not at all.<sup>17</sup> Many more can be located on surface but were never opened, especially in the northern necropolis, while only a few received the deserved attention. The excavation of underground tombs may be painstaking and sometimes dangerous, but they present the only chance of finding burials and funerary sculptures in place, undisturbed by robbers.<sup>18</sup>

Most of these tombs were hollowed out of the limestone strata which make up the subsoil of the desert plain. As this formation has often a loose structure, the ceilings had to be supported by arches and vaults made of plaster, sometimes with stone revetment. The entrance was always closed by a stone wall in which a stone door with one or two wings was set. This façade wall was built in an open trench provided with steps, either simply carved in the rock or cov-

<sup>16</sup> Sadurska 1976.

<sup>17</sup> Ingholt 1935; also Ingholt 1932; Ingholt 1938; 1962; 1966; 1970; 1974.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Seyrig-Amy 1936; Abdul-Hak 1952; Bounni-Saliby 1957; al-As'ad-Taha 1965; al-As'ad-Taha 1968.



ered with harder stone. The façade displayed usually foundation inscriptions on door-lintels or stone plates inserted above, and sometimes apotropaic figures like a magnificent Satyr head found recently by the Japanese expedition.<sup>19</sup> More inscriptions on door-frames could relate changes in property rights to the tomb.

Most excavated hypogea contain a single straight gallery 10 to 20 m long and 3-4 mt. wide, provided with many deep and narrow slots in all walls, each divided horizontally into several loculi. At the far end, an arch marks usually off a squarish space which is called *exedra* in the relevant inscriptions and was conceived as the best part of the tomb, often adorned with architectural elements such as pilasters and decorative niches, or with mural paintings. More *exedras* could open laterally just behind the entrance. The loculi could be provided with simple architectural frames and closed after burial with rectangular stone slabs bearing in high relief half-figures of the deceased. While most examples of this extremely rich and characteristic series of sculptures are found in various world collections and cannot be attributed at present to any particular tomb, their appearance in the 60s AD precedes only slightly, on the available evidence, that of independent hypogea and of towers with vertical inside walls about AD 80, and the two should be related. Some small tombstones, featuring frontal figures standing under an arch, were brought into family tombs apparently from earlier graves in the open, to be used as closing stones of loculi.

Some tombs are more developed, with lateral galleries right and left behind the entrance making up a plan in the form of an upturned T. They could of course accommodate many more burials than a single gallery. One tomb of this type is known as "Three Brothers' Tomb" (SW necropolis, near the Cham Hotel), and displays famous mural paintings in the far end *exedra*, including a group depicting Achilles at Scyros, shedding off his feminine disguise, and a Ganymedes being carried to heaven by the eagle of Zeus.<sup>20</sup> Both scenes, it is believed, symbolise the liberation of the human soul from earthly bonds.<sup>21</sup> The tomb was the first to be studied in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is today regularly visited. Other visitable hypogea can be seen farther afield, in the SE necropolis.

<sup>19</sup> Higuchi-Saito 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Strzygowski 1901; Kraeling 1961/62.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Parlasca 1989/90.

Some funerary grottoes were cut in the hard rock of a hill opposite Umm Belqis and behind the Diocletian's Camp (Fig. 11). They have no staircase and contain built-in loculi. One of them was excavated, to reveal at the far end burial places disposed in three layers to form a large flat surface on which some sarcophagi were set later.<sup>22</sup>

The manifest intention of the founders of all these underground tombs was to obtain the highest possible number of burial loculi at a cost lower than it would be inside funerary towers. Gradually, the monuments signaling them on surface disappear: apparently, there was no more need for collective memorial of the deceased. Instead, most burials in the underground galleries were marked by individual tombstones bearing the name and a likeness of the departed. It is not clear in what measure these stones were meant to represent their souls (*nefesh*).

While the underground tombs, just as the towers, were considered as hereditary "houses of eternity," they were not inalienable.<sup>23</sup> Parts of them, either rows of loculi or entire galleries, could be ceded to distant relatives or apparent strangers, and even resold several times. The contracts to this effect are often engraved in shortened form on the door frame. However, a fiction of perpetual and hereditary family property is maintained for each part of the tomb, and the sale is seldom expressly admitted. Several families could thus share the same tomb, in the manner of the Roman catacombs. It seems that this development reflects a fundamental social change: the appearance of a urban middle class and the gradual waning of the tribal society still predominant during the first century AD.

Many hypogea were in time provided with additional features meant to increase the splendor of the family burials. Starting from about AD 140, there appear stone slabs representing in relief dining beds (*klinai*), masking some of the loculi behind. Above them there stood in an architectural frame high relief sculptures of reclining figures, as for instance in a lateral gallery of "Three Brothers" or in a recently discovered tomb of Borrefa and Bolḥa (Higuchi-Saito 2001). The earliest dated example of this motive in Palmyra can be seen under the arcade high in the wall of the Kitot tower (AD 40).<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Sadurska 1977.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gawlikowski 1970a, pp. 167-176; Will 1990, pp. 433-440.

<sup>24</sup> Will 1951.



Another, nearly contemporary, has been found in the Hāiran tower.<sup>25</sup> Such sculptures are also known from some hypogea, representing either full figures (tomb of Zabda) or half-figures cup in hand, to be disposed perhaps on a couch.<sup>26</sup>

In the late second century appear sarcophagi, disguised as banqueting couches, with legs at front corners. Between the legs there could be medallions with busts of family members, or standing figures of young attendants, horses, and camels. On the front edge of the sarcophagus, an upright slab bears the effigies of men reclining on a mattress, often clad in ornate Persian dress (embroidered tunic and trousers), of their children or servants standing aligned behind them, and of their wives sitting in armchairs set incongruously on the mattress at the feet of their men.<sup>27</sup> In front of the entrance to the Palmyra Museum, there stands now a sarcophagus with an elaborate sacrificial scene between the front legs of the *kline*, and with a laden camel at its side, while at the feet of the reclining master a horse is being held ready by a groom standing on the couch.<sup>28</sup>

The sarcophagi were often disposed by three on a socle (called *thymele*), and formed together with the banqueters in high relief the image of a dining room at the far end of a gallery. In the tomb of 'Alaine the excavator proposed even to arrange five sarcophagi in a horse-shoe pattern, but usually classical triclinia were deemed sufficient.

Nearly all sarcophagi found in Palmyra fall within this rather peculiar category for which there are hardly any relevant parallels elsewhere. While the funerary banquet as such is a common Hellenistic motive, its association with sarcophagi seems to be a local concept invented in the second century. These monuments represent the entire family at their best, feasting in their luxurious clothes and surrounded with other status symbols they have cherished most.

The sarcophagi were by no means exclusive to underground tombs. They are also to be found among the ruins of the so-called funerary temples which have replaced the towers as above-ground monuments during the first half of the second century. The towers continued to be used, of course, but the latest dated was built in AD

---

<sup>25</sup> Gawlikowski 1970b, pp. 81-86.

<sup>26</sup> Michalowski 1960, pp. 139-204 (Zabda); Parlasca 1995, p. 314.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Will 1951.

<sup>28</sup> Schmidt-Colinet 1995, fig. 48, 50, 51; Parlasca 1995, p. 313.

128, while the earliest dated funerary temple is of AD 143. The chronological range suggested by these dates seems relevant, though new discoveries can obviously precise further the appearance of this new type of funerary monuments in Palmyra. Apparently, no other standing monuments were erected after 143 and up to the end of the Palmyrene civilisation.

Most funerary temples are extremely dilapidated and their internal disposition often unclear. Unlike towers, they are always built in dressed stones and presented a tempting quarry for later generations. Earthquakes must have taken their toll, too. The most conspicuous is the tomb no. 86, at the far end of the Great Colonnade (Fig. 12), thoroughly studied by C. Watzinger, who provided a graphic restoration.<sup>29</sup> The six column portico with its gable still stands, and can be seen through on engravings and older photographs; in the 1970s, two walls of the tomb have been raised, blocking the accustomed view without much profit for the understanding of the monument. Better inspired was the restoration of the tomb no. 150 on the northern necropolis (built by Julius Aurelius Marona in AD 236, Fig. 13), of which however only the outer walls subsist; a relief representing a sea-going ship, now in the Museum, comes from this monument. Another tomb, no. 36, has been recently excavated in the Valley of Tombs by a Syro-German mission and promptly published (Fig. 14).<sup>30</sup> Though not enough stones are preserved to allow an actual reconstruction, the restoration on paper is nearly complete and trustworthy. This cannot be claimed for the tomb no. 85b, built by the brothers A'ailami and Zebida in AD 149.<sup>31</sup>

While it seems obvious that builders of all these monuments were to a large extent inspired by Western (maybe only Western Syrian) models of funerary architecture, they remained nevertheless attached to the local school of decoration, and to local customs. Though outwardly very different from the funerary towers, the later monuments remain to be family tombs, using the same burial modes, and their architectural form is best understood when compared to other contemporary buildings of the city. They are no temples at all, in any sense of the word, but tombs of the rich, who were leaving the

---

<sup>29</sup> Watzinger-Wulzinger 1932, pp. 71-76, pl. 38-44.

<sup>30</sup> Schmidt-Colinet 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Cantineau 1929; Makowski 1983.



underground galleries to the less affluent, and considered the funerary towers as definitely obsolete.

A typical funerary temple was a square building raised on a podium, adorned with Corinthian pilasters at the four corners, and crowned with a Classical entablature. Some had a prostyle porch of six columns and a triangular pediment, making them resemble Roman temples, and changing the proportions of the plan (Fig. 15). The pediment, when there was one, remained however a mere make-believe, as there was never a gabled roof. Sidewise, there could be crowsteps standing on the cornice (no. 173c). Apparently, there was no terrace on the roof either, the exterior walls serving as a box-like receptacle for the actual tomb of much lesser height.

The angular pilasters are often decorated with vertical floral bands in sunk relief, and a similar horizontal band could run between the pilasters at one-third of their height. The higher part of the front wall above the entrance could also receive more elaborate decoration, as it was the case with the tomb no. 36: a complex system of niches with columns, pilasters, and triangular or rounded pediments could be graphically restored there from hundreds of scattered blocks (Fig. 14), some of which are arranged now around the monument, in the Valley of Tombs. A. Schmidt-Colinet was able to prove that the decorative motives used there were borrowed from the textile repertory, as exemplified by garments reproduced in sculpture and by actual cloth fragments found in some tombs. Such adapting of the local vestimentary fashion into stone is typical of the architecture of Palmyra in general. On the other hand, some figurative scenes used in the pediments of the façade of tomb 36, such as cupids riding on dolphins and holding umbrellas, are inspired by imported sarcophagi.

The interior of this tomb presented a square peristyle court in the middle, the roof around it resting on columns, four to a side. On all four sides there were vertical rows of loculi between pilasters and regularly disposed niches. The light-well of the peristyle reached an underground chamber supported by pillars, with more loculi. The whole structure was much lower than the exterior shell and so conceived that the outer walls could not be seen against the sky from any point inside.

The graphic restoration of the tomb no. 86 is less precise, but apparently the interior should have been very much like the just described monument but for the peristyle being smaller, two by two

columns only. In some other tombs low benches can be seen along the walls, containing loculi and providing the socle for sarcophagi or just upright slabs with reclining figures, as in the relatively early tomb no. 85b, which has been dubbed in French "tombeau-maison" because of the parallel with peristyle houses. The name, however, explains nothing and is not better than the more usual "funerary temple." Other smaller monuments could have no interior colonnades and contain only a square room with sarcophagi and banquet slabs along the walls (Fig. 16). A row of monuments of the latter variety can be seen north from the standing colonnade of tomb 86, incorporated into the rampart of Diocletian: they were not excavated and the more or less untouched ruins are accessible from inside the fortifications. The outside face of the rampart has been cleared, showing the podia of these tombs and lower parts of their walls. In one of them we can see Victories standing on globes either side of the entrance; broken sculptures and inscriptions can be spotted in others.

Another monument, tomb no. 3 at the far end of the Valley,<sup>32</sup> contains an oblong room with loculi, such as can be seen in some later towers (Fig. 17). The appearance of higher parts of this collapsed tomb remains uncertain.

Together with the lofty towers, the later temple-like monuments filled the desert all around the town and the oasis. The city of the dead should have been equally imposing than the great public monuments of the centre and certainly more so than the houses of the living.

---

<sup>32</sup> Parlasca 1990.



## APPENDIX

List of dated tombs<sup>33</sup>

	<i>Towers</i>		
'Atenatan and sons (no. 7)	VT	9 B.C.	PAT 0457
Ḥairan Belshuri (no. 67)	VT	AD 33	PAT 0462
Kitot Taimarṣu (no. 44)	VT	AD 40	PAT 0463
'Ogeilu 'Ogga (no. 194)	SE	AD 73	PAT 0549
Banai and brothers (no. 63)	VT	AD 79	PAT 0470
Malku Moqimu (no. 155)	N	AD 79/80	PAT 0471
Bani Ba'a (no. 68)	VT	AD 83	PAT 0474
Yamliku Moqimu (no. 51)	VT	AD 83	PAT 0472
Taimisha Taimisha (no. 169)	N	AD 89	Inv. VII 3 (Greek only)
Elahbel and brothers (no. 13)	VT	AD 103	PAT 0486
P. Aelius Obayhan (no. 164)	N	AD 118	PAT 0514
Nebozabad Nesha (no. 83a)	VT	AD 120	PAT 2726
Moqimu Zebida (no. 34)	VT	AD 128	PAT 0516

*Late use of some towers*

Tower 83	(VT)	in AD 215	PAT 0118
Tower 70	(VT)	in AD 234	PAT 0562
Tower 118	(N)	in AD 252	PAT 0568

*Independent dated hypogea*

Belḥazai Nurai	SE	AD 87	PAT 1784
Bolḥa Neboshuri	SE	AD 89	PAT 1867
Batmitrai and Batailid	SW	before AD 95	PAT 2727
'Abd'astor Nurbel	SW	AD 99	PAT 0094
'Atenatan Zabd'ateh	SW	AD 98	PAT 0023
Ḥairan Yaddai	SW	AD 106/107	PAT 0002
Yarḥai Bariki	VT	AD 108	PAT 2784
Julius Aurelius Male	SW	AD 109	PAT 0026
Zabd'ateh 'Ate'aqab	SW	AD 114	PAT 0511
Shim'on Fila	SW	AD 114/115	PAT 0512
Malku	SW	AD 121	PAT 1218
Shim'on Borrefa	SE	AD 118	PAT 1785
Yarḥibola and Taimo'amad	SW	AD 123	PAT 2728
Lishamshu Moqimu	SE	AD 123/124	PAT 1787
Borrefa and Bolḥa	SE	AD 128	Higuchi-Saito 1998, fig. 28'

<sup>33</sup> Abbreviations: VT = Valley of Tombs; N = Northern necropolis; SE = South-east necropolis; SW = Southwest necropolis.

Yarḥay, 'Atenuri, Zabdibol	SW	AD 133/134	PAT 0066
Ḥaddudan	SW	AD 138	PAT 0517
Ḥairan Nesha	SE	AD 138	PAT 1786
'Alaine Ḥairan	VT	AD 138	PAT 1949
"Three Brothers"	SW	before AD 142	PAT 2776
Naṣrallat Malku	SW	AD 142	PAT 0056
Nurbel Moqimu	VT	AD 144	PAT 1525
So'adu Bar'ateh (no. 82)	VT	AD 179	PAT 1143
Bar'a Bonnur	SW	AD 186	PAT 0059
Julius Aurelius Hermes	VT	AD 232	PAT 2725

*Dated funerary temples*

Lishamsh Nurbel (no. 188)	SE	AD 143	PAT 0519
A'ailami and Zebida (no. 85b)	VT	AD 149	PAT 1138
Zebida Moqimu (no. 38a)	VT	AD 150	PAT 0522
Taimarṣu Borrefa (no. 149)	N	AD 159	PAT 1154
Zabd'ateh Zabdila (no. 38)	VT	AD 171	PAT 0548
'Awida Yarḥai (no. 191)	SE	AD 184	PAT 0552
Zebida and Samuel (no.175)	N	AD 212	PAT 0557
Julius Aurelius Marona	N	AD 236	PAT 0565
(no. 150)			
Ḥaddudan and 'Alaisha	N	AD 253	PAT 0569
(no. 144)			



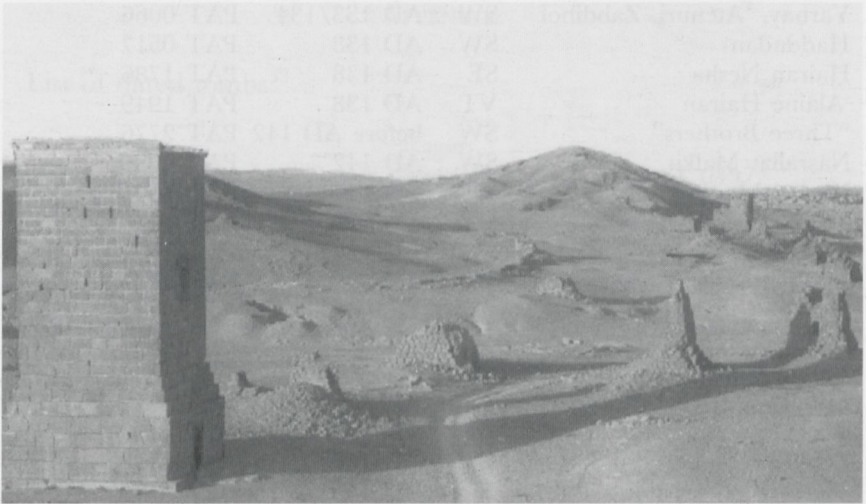


Fig. 1. A view of the Valley of Tombs from the West. In the foreground, the tower of Elahbel

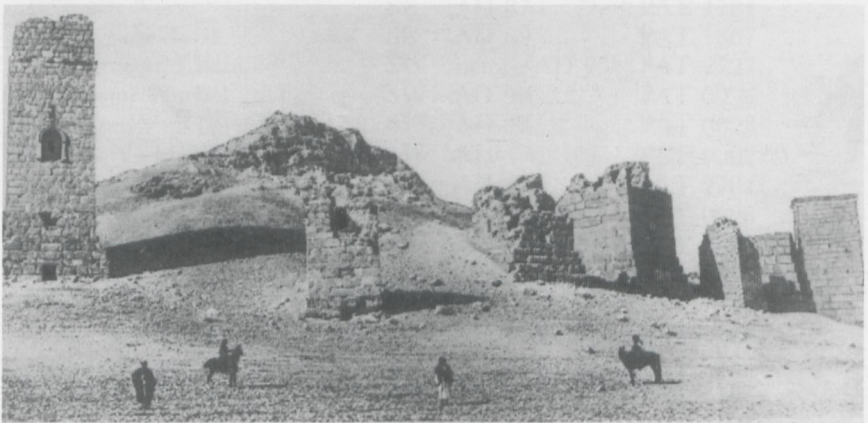


Fig. 2. The towers on Umm Belqis hillock, early 20<sup>th</sup> century (after Wiegand)



Fig. 3. *Tower of 'Atenatan (7 BC) and, behind, tower of Elahbel (AD 103)*



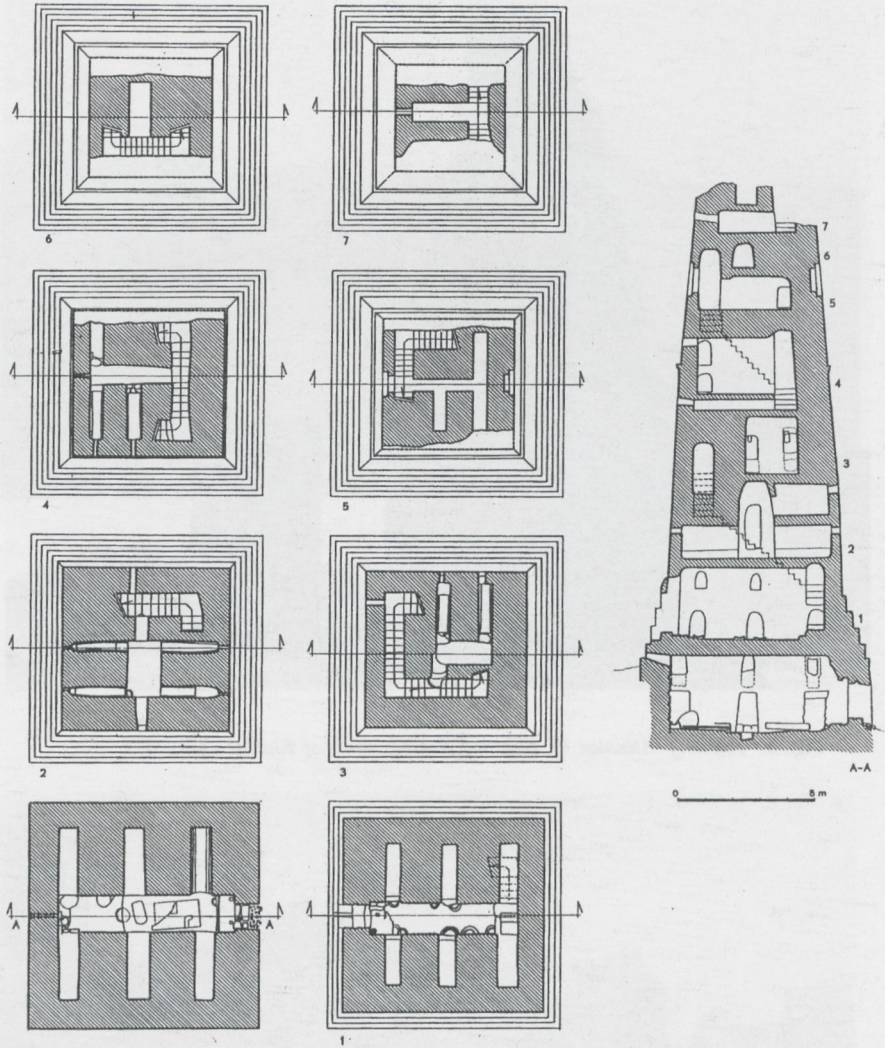


Fig. 4. Tower of 'Atenatan. Plans of storeys and section



*Fig. 5. Left, tower of Kitot (AD 40), in the middle the sectioned tower no. 45*





Fig. 6. *Kitot banqueting with his family. Relief in the niche of his tower*



*Fig. 7. Interior of the ground floor of Elahbel tower*



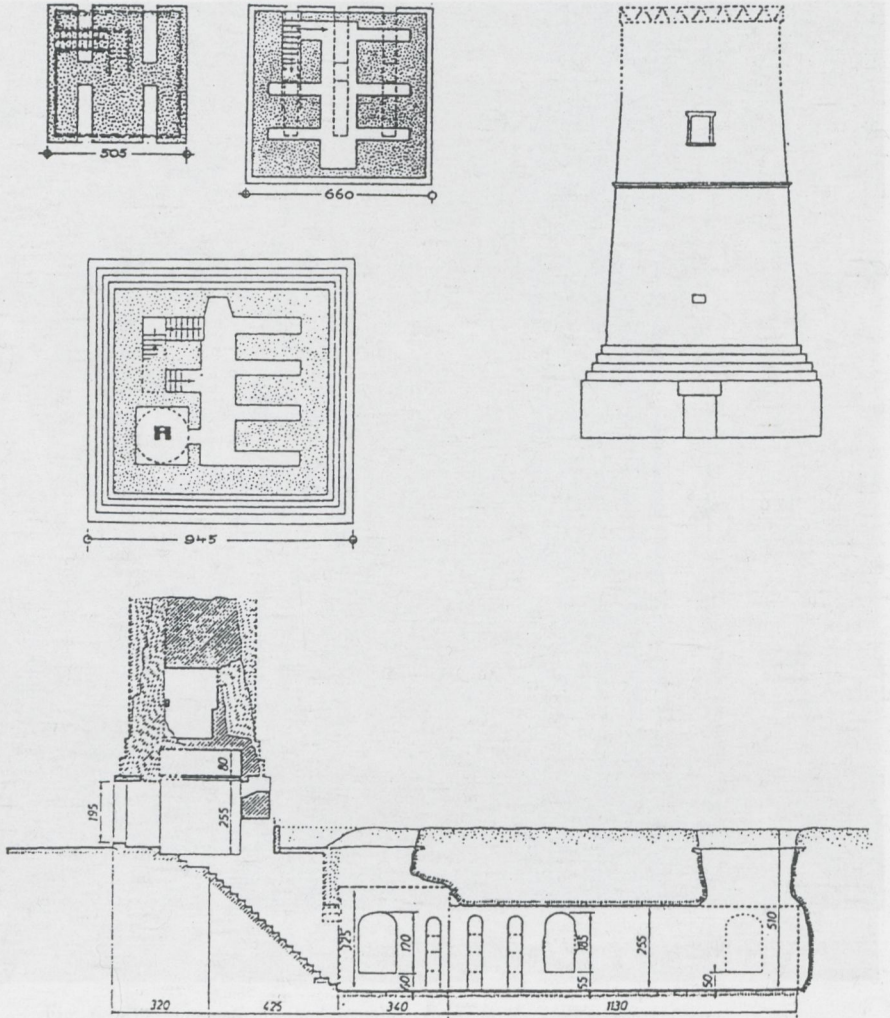


Fig. 8. Section through the tower no. 19 and its hypogeum

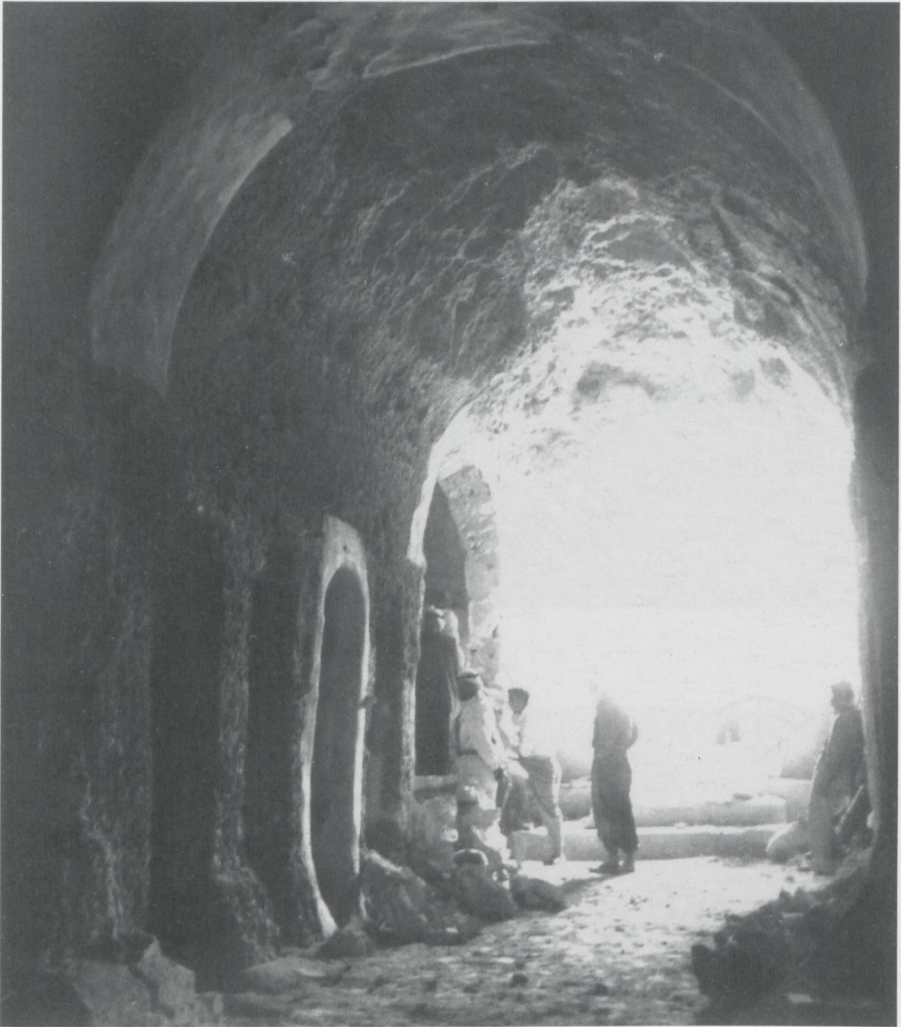


Fig. 9. *A view of the hypogeum under tower no. 19*



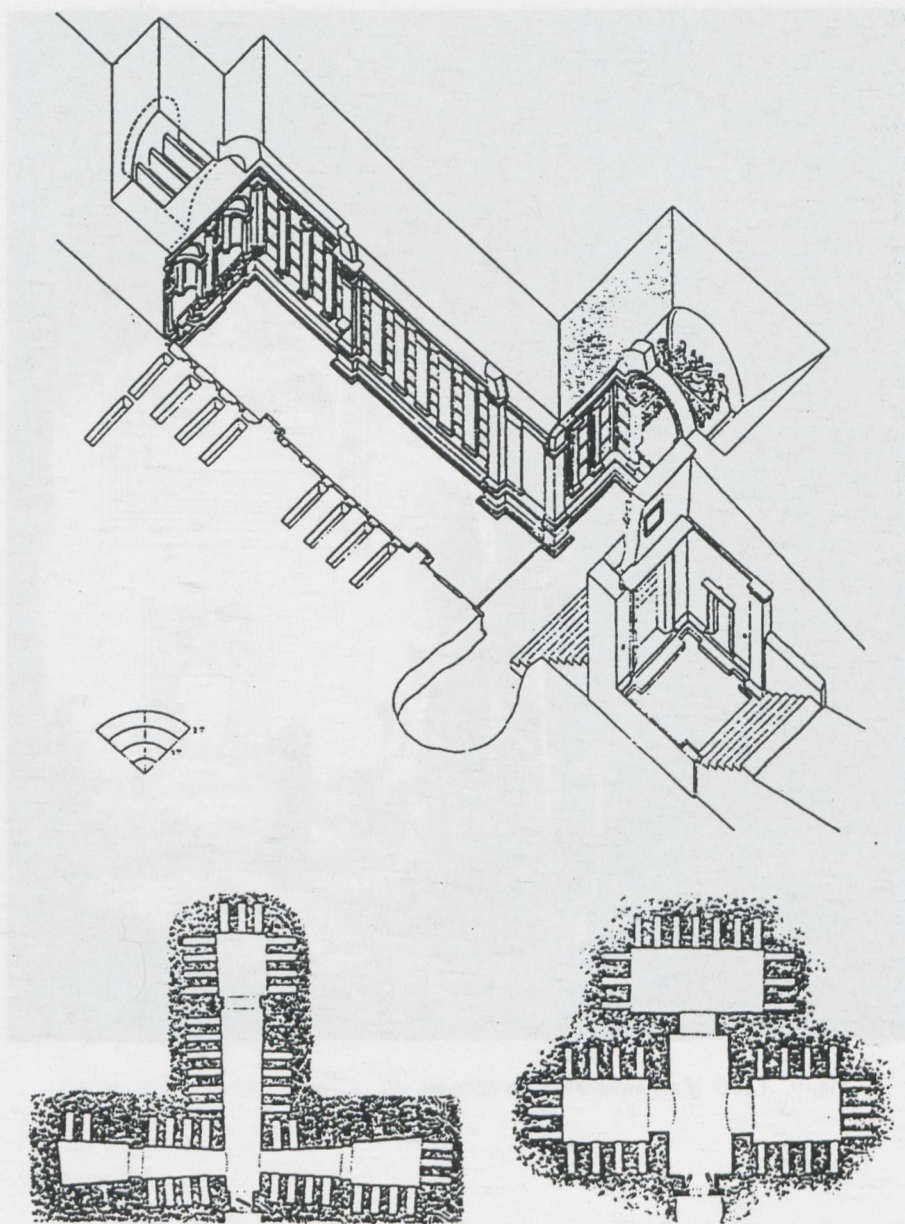


Fig. 10. A restored section through a typical hypogeum (Yarhai, AD108) and plans of two others (Lishamsh and Nasrallat)



Fig. 11. *Grotto no. 80 in a hillside*



Fig. 12. *The porch of the funerary temple no. 86 (before restoration)*



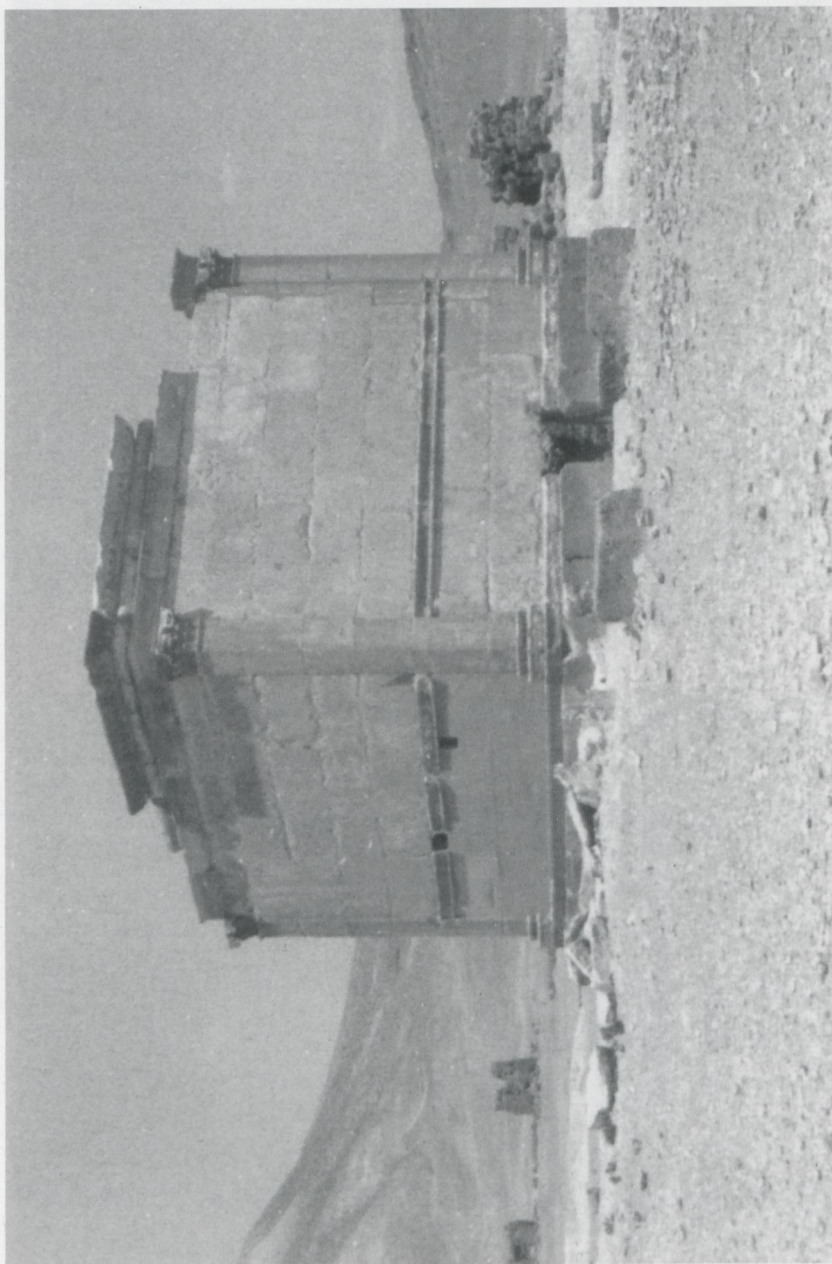


Fig. 13. *The tomb of Marona (AD 236)*

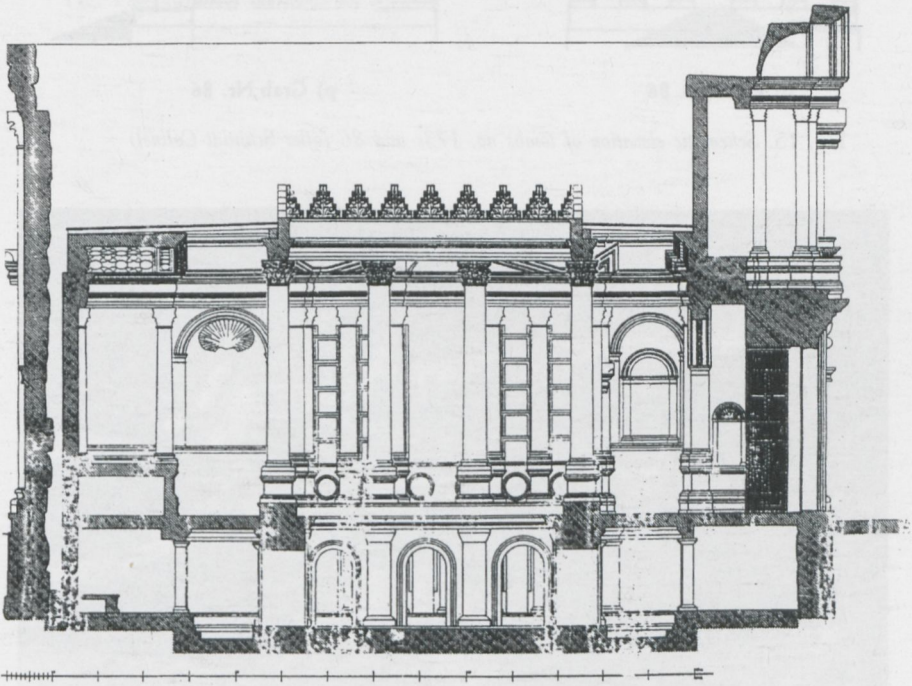
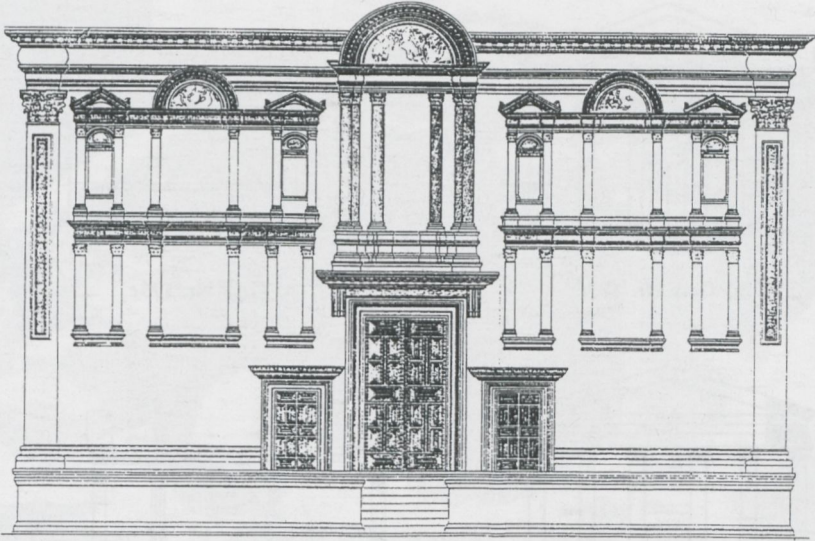
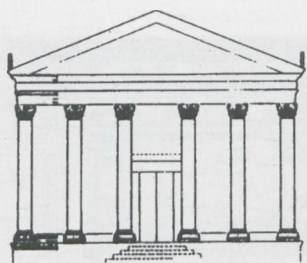
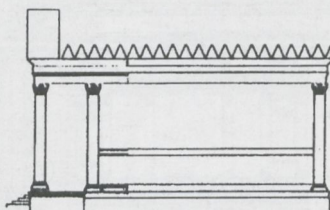


Fig. 14. Restored façade of tomb no. 36 (after Schmidt-Colinet)

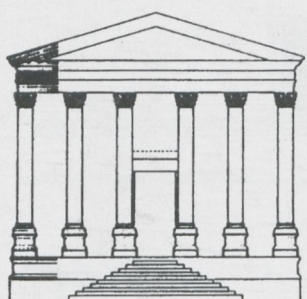




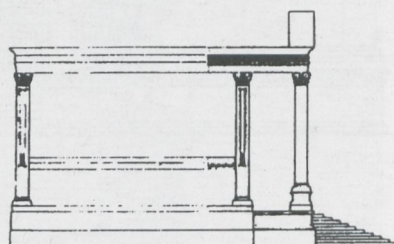
m) Grab Nr. 173c



n) Grab Nr. 173c



o) Grab Nr. 86



p) Grab Nr. 86

Fig. 15. Schematic elevation of tombs no. 173c and 86 (after Schmidt-Colinet)



Fig. 16. Remains of sarcophagi in the chamber of tomb no. 39d



Fig. 17. Interior of the tomb no. 3