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## **Late Predynastic - Early Dynastic cemetery of Beni Amir (Eastern Delta)**

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The cemetery at Beni Amir occupies a small area of about three feddans. Thirty six tombs were excavated besides which some finds were made by the native residents of the area which also date, as do the graves, to the Late Predynastic-Early Dynastic period. The tombs of this period were found only in the high parts of the western area of the tell; they were found at a higher level than the surrounding farmlands and as a second stratum (stratum B) under the Roman stratum (stratum A; see the same author, this volume).

Most tomb types of this cemetery show little differences from those at other cemeteries of the same period especially in Lower Egypt. It is clear that the tomb types are in line with the main features of Late Predynastic-Early Dynastic tombs in Egypt.

The tombs found were mainly pit graves and tombs of one, two, three, eight or nine compartments built with mud-bricks. The superstructures were not found, probably because of their exposure to weathering and surface denudation. It is possible that they were mostly grave-mounds or small two-niched mastabas of mud-bricks (Reisner 1936: 237 ff.; Montet 1938: pl. 8; Mackramallah 1940: 8, fig. 11; Vandier 1952: 690 ff.). According to the types of the pottery found in the tombs (same author, this volume), the cemetery of Beni Amir was dated to Naqada II/III - Early Dynastic period. This indicates that it was contemporaneous with the cemetery of Minshat Abu Omar.

### **1. Simple pit graves**

This type consists of a pit in the sand just large enough for the body and a few funerary objects, mostly vessels. These graves were not roofed, since no remains of wooden beams or any other material for roofing was found. Most probably, after the interment, it was filled with earth. The skeleton is in a contracted position. Many examples of this class were found. This type of small grave is the poorest and earliest form to appear in Egypt. It was the prevailing type of the Predynastic period and it continued down to the latest times for the

poor burials (Spencer 1982: 217; Engelbach 1961: 244). This class is of the same type described by Reisner (1936: 42ff.) and Klasens (1957: 66, pl. XII.2; 1959: 42; 1960: 72).

Similar grave-forms were found in many Protodynastic sites in the Delta such as Tell Basta (Bakr 1982: 156), Kufur Nigm (Leclant 1964: 341; 1985: 344f; 1986: 244ff.; 1987: 302f.), Tell el-Rub'a (Hansen 1965: 31ff.; 1967: 16), Tell Fara'on (Kamel 1985: 328f.; Mostafa 1988: 73ff.), Minshat Abu Omar (Wildung 1981: 26ff.; Kroeper & Wildung 1985: 28f.), Tura (Junker 1912: 11f.) and Abu-Roash; also the Protodynastic sites of Upper Egypt especially in El-Kab, Naqadah and Ballas, Naga-ed-Der, El-Amrah, Abydos, Tarkhan (Reisner 1936: 42ff.). Graves of those later sites were in many cases roofed with wood.

## **2. Brick tomb with one compartment**

### **2.1. Oval brick tomb**

The grave is an oval pit in the sand just large enough for one interment and a few pots, lined with mud-bricks, mostly without roof; it was filled up with earth after the interment and sometimes covered with a layer of mud-bricks (Fig. 6, 8-B). Six examples of this class were found. They range from about 1.50 x 0.94 x 0.43 m to 2.0 x 1.40 x 0.10 m (length/width/depth). The body was laid in a contracted position. Sometimes only remains of bones were found. This type of graves developed from the small oval grave of the Predynastic Period which was afterwards lined with mud-bricks. Such a type was found in Masaeed in Upper Egypt (Reisner 1936: 372).

### **2.2. Rectangular brick tomb**

This type is a small rectangular pit lined with mud-bricks (Fig. 8A). It was filled with earth and covered with a layer of mud-bricks after the interment. Eight examples were found. They range from 2.25 x 0.85 x 0.28 m to 0.80 x 0.43 x 0.18 m (length/width/depth). The body was laid in a contracted position. In one case the head pointed to the west, in another to the south, in a third to the east and in two other cases to the north. In one case only remains of bones and eight rough pottery vessels were found.

This type of grave developed from the simple open-pit grave and continued throughout all periods. It is the commonest type already known in the Protodynastic period (Badawy 1954: 38). This type is sometimes called massive grave, or mud-brick coffin in tombs of later periods (Spencer 1982: 218; Moneim 1989). Many examples of this type were found in most of the archaic necropolis: at El-Kab, Naqada and Ballas, Abydos, El-Amrah, Naga-ed-Der, El-Ahawaih, Tarkhan, Saqqara, Tura, Zawiyet-el-Aryan (Reisner 1936: 45-49) and Abu-Roash (Klasens 1957: 67), and also in the Delta at Wardan (Larsen 1956: 3-11), Kufur Nigm (Leclant 1985: 344f; 1986: 244f.; 1987: 302f.), Tell Fara'on (Mostafa 1988: 73f.) and Tell Hassan Dawud (Mohammed Salim El-Hangory 1992).



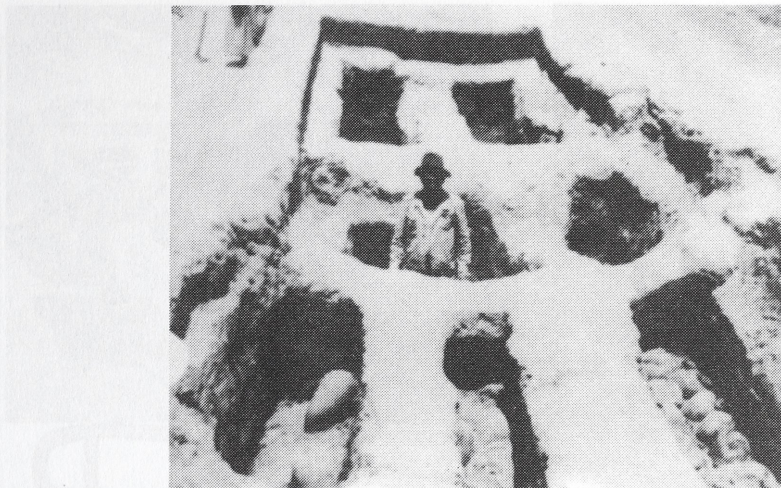


Fig. 1.

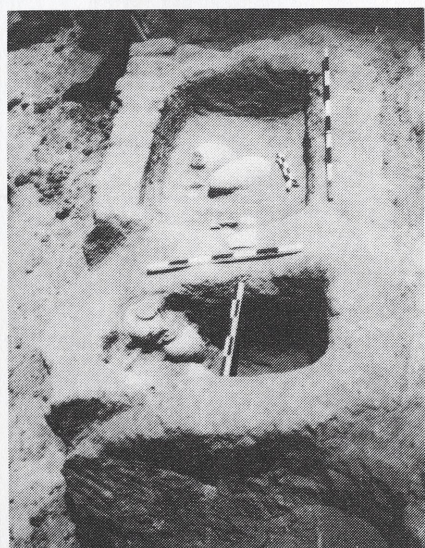


Fig. 2.

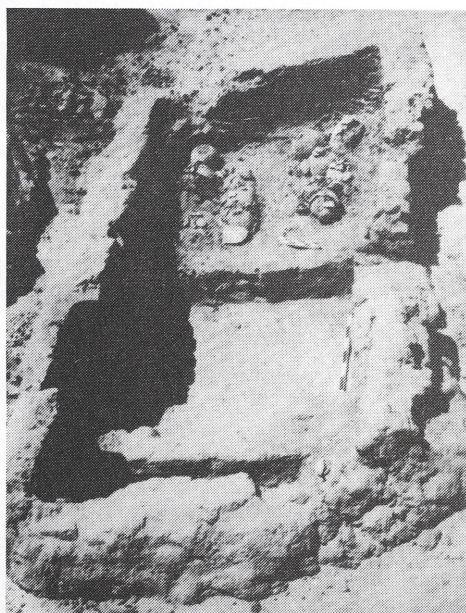


Fig. 3.



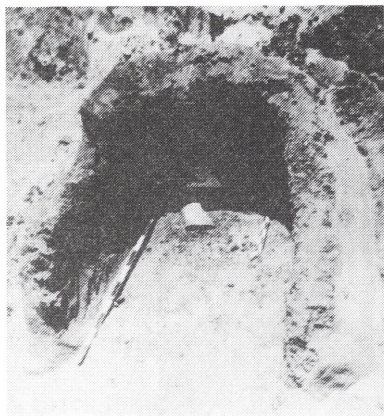


Fig. 4.

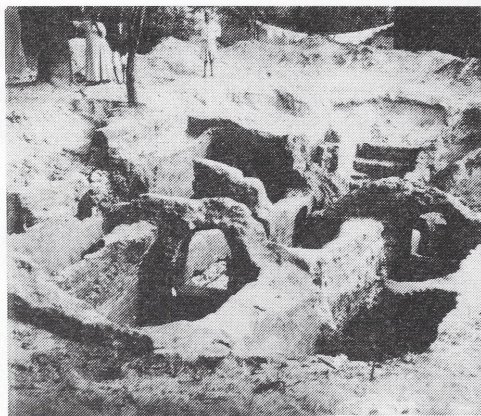


Fig. 5.

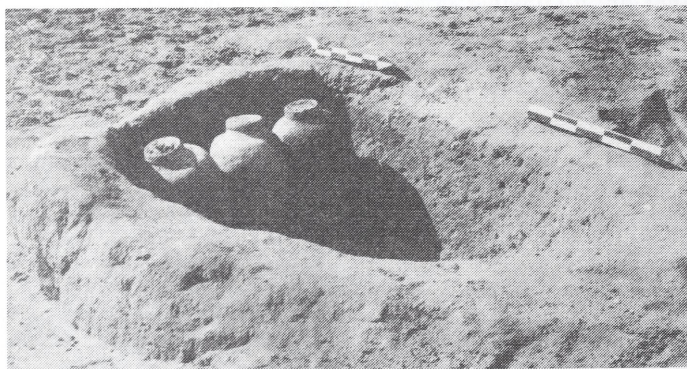


Fig. 6.

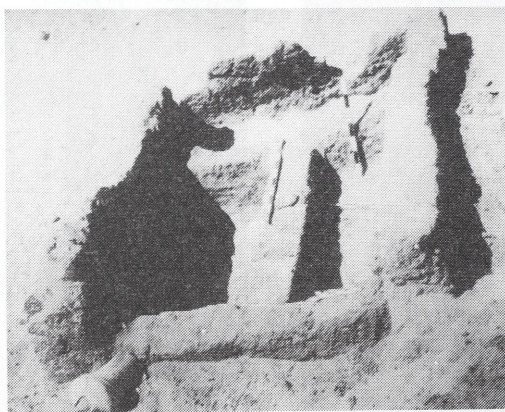
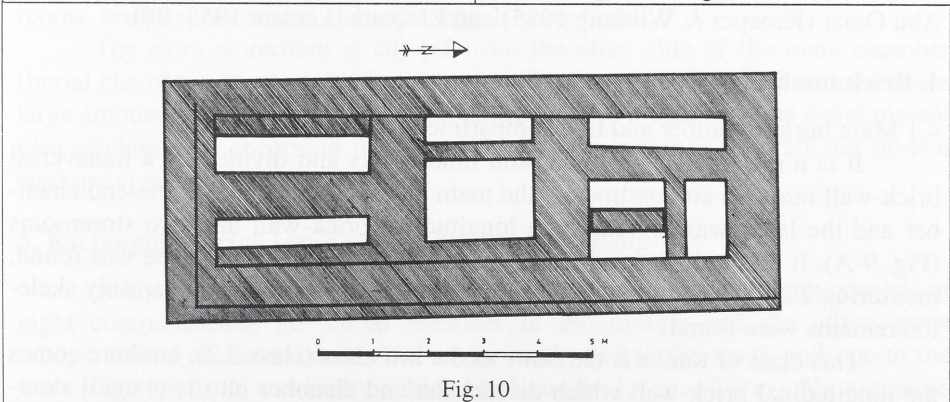
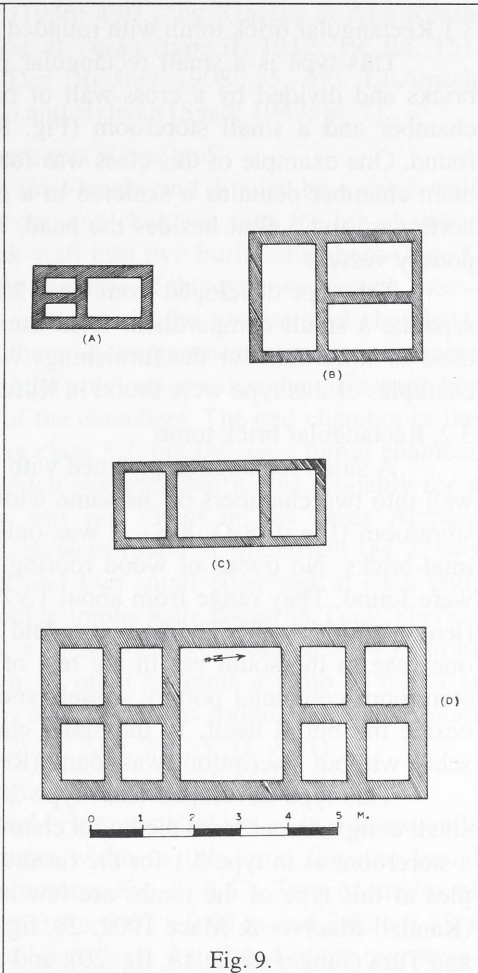
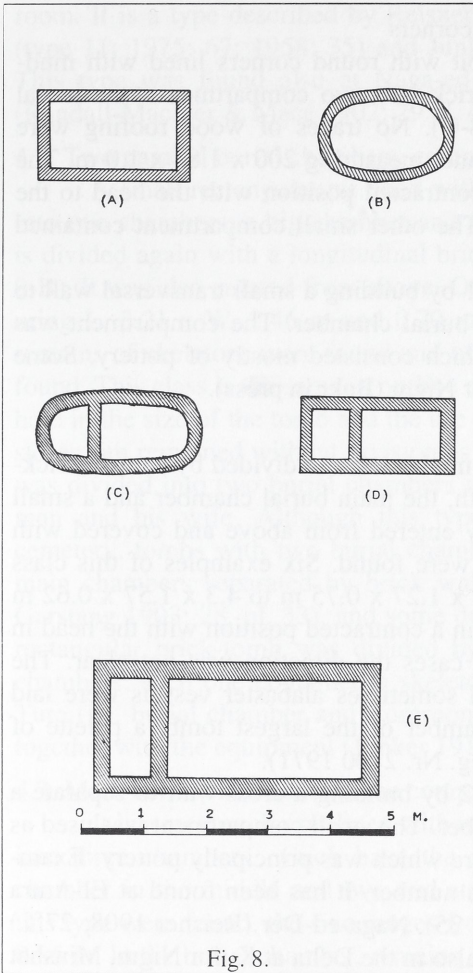


Fig. 7.







### 3. Brick tomb with two compartments

#### 3.1 Rectangular brick tomb with rounded corners

This type is a small rectangular pit with round corners lined with mud-bricks and divided by a cross-wall of brick into two compartments: the burial chamber and a small storeroom (Fig. 8-C). No traces of wood roofing were found. One example of this class was found, measuring 200 x 1.84 x 1.0 m. The main chamber contains a skeleton in a contracted position with the head to the north-east and a flint besides the head. The other small compartment contained pottery vessels.

This type developed from class 2.1 by building a small transversal wall to separate a small compartment from the burial chamber. The compartment was used as storeroom for the furnishings which consisted mostly of pottery. Some examples of this type were found in Kufur Nigm (Bakr in press).

#### 3.2. Rectangular brick tomb

A small rectangular pit lined with mud-brick and divided by a cross brick-wall into two chambers of the same width, the main burial chamber and a small storeroom (Fig 2, 8-D, 8-E). It was only entered from above and covered with mud-bricks. No traces of wood roofing were found. Six examples of this class were found. They range from about 1.97 x 1.27 x 0,75 m to 4.3 x 1.57 x 0.62 m (length/width/depth). The body was laid in a contracted position with the head in one case to the south but in the rest of cases the direction was not clear. The storeroom contained pottery vessels and sometimes alabaster vessels were laid beside the burial itself. In the small chamber of the largest tomb, a palette of schist without inscriptions was found (Reg. Nr. 2700 1971).

This type developed from type 2.2 by building a cross-wall to separate a small compartment from the burial chamber. The small compartment was used as a storeroom as in type 3.1 for the furniture which was principally pottery. Examples of this type of the tombs are few in number. It has been found at El-Amra (Randall-Maciver & Mace 1902: 28, fig. 35), Naga-ed-Der (Reisner 1908: 27ff.) and Tura (Junker 1912: 18, fig. 20), and also in the Delta at Kufur Nigm, Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper & Wildung 1985) and El-Qatta (Leclant 1953: 98).

### 4. Brick tomb with three compartments

#### 4.1 Main burial chamber and two compartments at one end

It is a rectangular pit lined with mud-bricks and divided by a transversal brick-wall into two compartments; the main burial chamber and a one-end chamber and the latter was divided by a longitudinal brick-wall into two storerooms (Fig. 9-A). It was only entered from above. One example of this type was found, measuring 2.20 x 1.17 m, and 0.60 m in depth. In the burial chamber only skeleton remains were found.

This class of tombs is the same as the last class (class 3.2), but here comes the longitudinal brick-wall which divides the end chamber into two small store-



rooms, probably due to the wish for depositing special equipment in each storeroom. It is a type described by Reisner (1936: 49ff.), by Klasens at Abu Roash (type 11; 1975: 67; 1958: 35) and Junker at Turah (type II; 1912: 19, fig. 15). This type was found also at Naga-ed-Der (Reisner 1908: 35, 69), El-Amrah (Randall-Maciver & Mace 1902: 29 pl. 4) and Helwan (Saad: 1947: pl. 7).

#### 4.2. Two parallel burial chambers, compartment at one end

A small rectangular pit lined with mud-bricks and divided by a cross-wall into two chambers; a big chamber and a one-end chamber, then the big chamber is divided again with a longitudinal brick-wall into two burial chambers (Fig. 7, 9-B). It was also entered from above. One example of this type was found, measuring L. 3.21 x W. 2.46 m and 0.70 m in depth. In the two parallel chambers, remains of skeletons were found and in the end compartment some vessels were found. This class is the same in outline as the previous one, but the difference lies here in the size of the tomb and the use of the chambers. The end chamber or the storeroom remained without division as in class 3.2, but the main burial chamber was divided into two burial chambers which suggests that it was probably for a man and his wife. Although this type was not found in any other Archaic cemetery, tombs with two burial chambers were found at Mahasnah (M 2, two main chambers separated by brick wall and two small chambers at each end; Garstang 1903: 28, pl. 33), and some double-tombs were found in Tura. There a rectangular brick-tomb was divided by a cross-wall of bricks into two burial chambers, each one contained a skeleton. In other example a tomb of type I at Tura (i.e. burial chamber and storeroom) a skeleton was found in the storeroom together with the equipment (Junker 1912: 20, Abb. 24, 25, Tf. XVI).

#### 4.3. Main burial chamber and one compartment at each end

It is a rectangular pit lined with mud-bricks and divided by two cross-walls into three chambers, which have the same width as the tomb (i.e. the burial chamber in the middle and two end storerooms Fig. 3, 9-C). Two examples of this type were found, the size ranges from 3.5 x 1.67 x 0.49 m and 3.92 x 1.58 x 0.85 m. In the burial chamber, remains of bones were found and in the two storerooms, broken pottery and alabaster vessels were found.

The extra storeroom is cut off from the other side of the main chamber (burial chamber). Most probably it was added because of the fact that there was a large amount of funeral equipment. At the same time it has the same development idea of class 4.1 concerning the need for two storerooms to separate the funeral equipment according to their kinds.

### 5. Rectangular brick tomb with eight compartments

A big rectangular brick tomb built in a very large pit. The tomb consists of eight compartments, the burial chamber in the middle and the other seven compartments are storerooms, four to the north, two to the south and one to the west (Fig. 1, 10). It was built of thick brick-walls (1.4 m - 0.8 m). No entrances



were found which suggests that it was entered from above. No wooden remains or such materials for roofing were found, but according to the remains of the tomb-building it is clear that every chamber was roofed by brick vault, then some brick layers were built above all the vaults so that the tomb would look like a mastaba. No superstructure was found. One example of this type was found. Its size was about 11 (N-S) x 3.85 (E-W) x 2.0 m in depth.

The inner measurements and contents were:

Room 1: L. 280 x W. 70 x D. 180 cm; five broken pottery vessels and alabaster fragments of vessels were found.

Room 2: L. 280 x W. 55 x D. 200 cm; fragments of pottery and alabaster vessels were found.

Room 3: L. 200 x W. 50 x D. 163 cm; fragments of pottery vessels were found.

Room 4: Burial chamber: L. 200 x W. 150 D. x D. 168 cm; only remains of bones were found.

Room 5: L. 250 x W. 55 x D. 163 cm; it was full with broken rough pottery vessels.

Room 6: L. 137 x W. 55 cm; five pottery vessels.

Room 7: L. 137 x W. 50 cm; four pottery vessels.

Room 8: L. 70 x W. 145 x D. 90 cm; some rough pottery vessels.

This tomb is the only one of this type and the biggest one found in the Delta from the Protodynastic period. It probably belonged to the ruler of the settlement. This tomb followed the same main-line of the Protodynastic large tombs in that the substructure included the burial chamber in the middle surrounded by the storerooms which contain the funeral equipment. At other sites at the beginning of the First Dynasty, the royal and the private tombs of the courtiers and the nobles consisted of a group of compartments built of mud-bricks in a great open pit with wooden roof where the middle large chamber was assigned for the interment while the others for the valuable funereal equipment (see Emery 1963: 130ff.; Badawy 1954: 37 ff.; Vandier 1952: 644 ff.). The tomb of Beni Amir differed in its construction and its multiple storerooms of the substructure from the other private tombs of the same period at the other sites.

Apart from the size of the tomb of Beni Amir which occupies an area of about 42.35 sq. m, it is comparable with the royal tombs at Abydos of type RT I-2 described by Reisner (i.e. great wooden chamber divided into rooms and surrounded by mud-brick compartments; Reisner 1936: 7, 21ff.), according to the number of the chambers, such as the tomb of Zer where the space of the four sides between the lining wall and the wooden burial chamber was divided by cross-walls into about 21 irregular compartments, and the tomb of Zet which is similar to Zer but the 19 compartments of which were only on three sides of the burial chamber (Petrie 1901: 8-10; pl. 40-41), and also the tomb of type RT I-3 (double wall with compartments between the two, at higher level than main chamber; described by Reisner (1936) such as the tomb of Merneith where the wooden burial chamber is surrounded by eight long narrow compartments.

The brick vaults were used in the tomb of Beni Amir for roofing the main burial chamber and the storerooms as a substitution of wood which was commonly used in the tombs of this period (Emery 1963). The simple arch of one stretcher ring of bricks (type d1, Spencer 1979: 123) was in common use from the First Dynasty down to the Coptic period. The use of vaults for roofing was known from the First Dynasty where it occurs in the small mastabas 2039 and 2040 at Tarkhan (Petrie 1914: 5) and in the subsidiary graves of the tomb 3500 at Saqqara (Emery 1958: 102, pl. 116, 120), other examples also occur in some tombs at Bêit Khallaf and Reqâqnah (Garstang 1904: 21ff., pl. 4, 14; Garstang 1903: 11ff., pl. 17, 18, 25).

## 6. Rectangular brick tomb with nine compartments

A big rectangular brick tomb in a large pit. The tomb consists of nine compartments, the burial chamber in the middle and the other eight compartments are storerooms, four compartments at each end of the burial chamber (Fig. 4, 5, 9-D). No entrances were found which suggests that it was entered from above. Remains of brick arches of one or half brick thickness above some chambers were found (Fig. 4, 5) which suggests that each chamber was roofed by an arch. No superstructure was found. One example of this type was found. The size is about l. 7.7 m x W. 2.3 m x D. 0.50 m to 0.67 m. The burial chamber is ca. L. 2.3 m x W. 1.9 m and the other small compartments to the north and to the south of the burial chamber are l. 1.05 m x W. 0.8 m in size. Remains of bones were found in the north rooms, and cylindrical alabaster vessel and some alabaster and schist plates were found in the south east room of the south group.

This tomb is the only one of this type found from the Protodynastic period. It probably belonged to an important person. This type of tomb is unique, but comparable with type IB (2) described by Reisner such as the big tombs of Naga-ed-Der 1533, 1532, 1506, 1621 and 1608 which consist of two paired chambers at each end of the burial chamber (Reisner 1908, 35ff.), and also the tombs of Abu Roash (Klasens 1958, 35 fig. 10, 12, 62; 1961, 110, pl. 21). The difference between the tomb of Beni Amir and the others is that two more compartments have been placed at each end of the tomb of Beni Amir. Also the tomb of Beni Amer is bigger than those of Naga-ed-Der. It covers 17.71 m<sup>2</sup>, while the tombs of Naga-ed-Der range from about 6.7 m<sup>2</sup> to 13.3 m<sup>2</sup> (Reisner 1908: I, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35.; 1936: 35-37, 50f.).

Concerning the use of brick vaults for roofing the chambers of the tomb, it was noticed from the remains of the tomb that two types of vaults were used. One of them is composed of inclined rings, each ring is half a brick in thickness; this vault is of form d1 described by Spencer (1973: 10, 11, 123, pl. 18). It was used in the First Dynasty in the tomb 3500 at Saqqara (Emery 1958: 102, pl. 116). The second form of vault is composed of rings, each of one brick in thickness. This is form a1 as described by Spencer (1973: pl. 17).



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