THE NECROPOLIS OF CYRENE

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF EXPLORATION
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JAMES COPLAND THORN
The Necropolis of Cyrene: two hundred Years of Exploration
In fact, the whole of the existing remains of this ancient and once beautiful city are at present little more than a mass of ruins; and the tombs afford the most perfect examples of Grecian art now remaining in Cyrene. To give plans of half these would be impossible, unless whole years of labour were devoted to the task; but we really believe, that any zealous antiquary, any person with tolerable feeling for the arts, would with pleasure devote every day to such employment should he find himself stationed for years in their neighbourhood.

Frederick and Henry Beechey 1828, pages 549-550
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The Catalogue of Artifacts, with its Abbreviations and Bibliography, appears separately.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to those who co-operated by giving help, advice and general support.

Sponsors: Dr. Joyce Reynolds; Prof. Donald White

The Society for Libyan Studies Committee

Publishers ‘L’ERMA’ DI BRETSCHNEIDER and the Giuria Scientifica
who awarded me the 11th Bretschneider Premio 2002

Prof. Nicola Bonacasa; Francesco Buranelli; Prof. Giovanni Colonna; Domenico Faccenna; Prof. Francesca Ghedini; Pietro Giovanni Guzzo; Eugenio La Rocca; Dieter Mertens; Prof. Letizia Pani Ermini; André Vauche; Andrew Wallace Hadrill.

The editorial team: Dr. Roberto Marcucci; Annie Olsen; Giovanni Portieri.

The Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Republic Jamahiriya

Department of Antiquities
Tripoli: Dr. Ali Khedoury for permission to study Rowe’s material in the Jamahiriya Museum; Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah al Mahmoud; Juma Garsa; Ramadan Gedidah
Benghazi: Ibrahim Twahni; Ali Letrek
Cyrene: Fadel Ali Mohamed for permission to study Rowe’s material and excavations; Hadj Breiek Attiyah el Jitoury; Abdulhamid Abdussaid; Abdulkader al Muzzeini; Ramadan al Gwaider; Saleh Wansis; Daoud Halag; Ali Hassuna; Ahmed Hassan; Younis Hassan; Mohamed Musa; Mohammed Ali Abd Sharef; Mahmoud; Abdulghaman Abdulhamed; Abdulrhoom Saed Mabrouk Shariff; Faraj Abdul-Atti Hamd; Naser Said Abdul Jalil; Issa Na’aas; Babir Jibrin
Apollonia: Hadj Fadallah Abdussalam
Tolmeita: Abdussalam Bazama
Shahat landowners: Abderrahim Mohammed Larbid; Ali Mahmoudy Mohammed
Rowe’s excavation workmen: The Hasa tribe of Cyrenaica; Jumaa al Hawal; Husein Bu Hjezha; Mohammed Ali; Ali Basheer; Mustafa Abd-rabbon; Mahmoud Abd-Al Malik; Hamad; Areef ash-Shareef; Abd-Ot Ali Hamid; Ibraheem la Khwani; Majeed Shagluf; Mohammed Bu Tbiligiyah; Saleh Mjawer; Ali Lattrik; Faraj Abd-Allah

Museums:
British Museum:
Conservation: Fleur Shearman
Egyptian Antiquities: Maurice Bierbrier; Alan Spencer
Greek and Roman Antiquities: Dr. Susan Walker; Dr. Donald Bailey; Dr. Ian Jenkins; Dr. Lucilla Burn; Paul Roberts; Lloyd Gallimore; Emma Cox; Elizabeth Cummings; Kim Overend; Kenneth Evans; Susan Smith; Valerie Smith; Richard Abdy; Janet McNeil, Paul Higgs, Roger Flint, Bernard Jackson
Medieval and Later: Neil Stratford; John Cherry; Paul and Lisa Reardon; Peter Stringer; Christine Bard; Barry Ager
Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities: Karen Hughes
Western Asiatic Antiquities: Annie Searight
Central Archives: Janet Wallace; Christopher Date; Cathleen Marsh; Stephen Curry
Ashmolean: Prof. Sir John Boardman; Dr. Don-
na Kurtz; Michael Vickers *Fitzwilliam*: Prof. Ted Buttrey *Great Orme Copper Mine*: Frank Jowett *Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria*: Madame Doria; Laila Halim; Osman Mohammed; Farallah Osman Mohammed *Manchester*: Dr. John Prag; T. Burton Brown *National Museum of Wales*: Dr. Mary Seddon *National Museums of Scotland*: Dr. Elizabeth Goring

**Universities:**

*Aberdeen*: Prof. John Gray *Benghazi*: Faraj Elrashedy *Birmingham*: Prof. Richard Tomlinson *Chieti*: Prof.ssa Emanuela Fabricotti; Dr. Oliva Menozzi; Luca Cherstich; Igor Cherstich; Eugenio di Valerio; Angela Cinalli *Firenze*: Prof. Luigi Beschi *Leicester*: Dr. David Mattingley; Dr. Graham Morgan *Liverpool*: Dr. S.R. Snape; Pat Winker *London*: David Dixon *King’s College, London*: Dr. Hafed Walda *Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, London*: Prof. John Healy *Manchester*: Prof. Barri Jones; Charles Burney; Prof. Anthony Birley; Dr. Derek Buttle; W.C. Brice; Sheila Ord; Sylvia Hazlehurst; Pat Faulkner; Keith Maude; John Riley; Dr. Paul Holder; Albert Curtis; Mark Woolstencroft *Newcastle*: Prof. Charles Daniels; John Dore; Sandra Rowntree *College of New Paltz*: Prof. Jaimee Uhlenbrock *Oberlin College, Ohio*: Dr. Susan Kane *Oxford*: Dr. John Lloyd; Dimitri Plantzos *Pennsylvania*: Prof. Donald White; Alessandro Pezzati; David Conwell *Sorbonne*: Prof. André Latonde; Prof. Jean-Jacques Maffre *Swansea*: Dr. David Gill *Urbino*: Prof. Sandro Stucchi; Prof. Lidiano Bacchielli

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**The Archives**

Documentation which has been presented to me has been invaluable in providing contemporary evidence in Chapters II and III. The reference applicable to each set of documents includes the name of the donor, without whose foresight they would not have survived. These are listed under Personal Archives, and are intended eventually to be lodged in the following institutions: Liverpool University, School of Archaeology, Classics and Oriental Studies for Rowe’s original site records and photographs, in order to complete the collection already held there, referred to here as the ‘Fairman.Arch’; Newcastle University, Department of Archaeology for personal archives, including my personal field notes, the new Register Catalogue and Record Sheets. Selected records relevant to Manchester Museum have been lodged there. Copies of the earlier versions of my work, on which this manuscript is based, are held in Cyrene Museum. Later draft copies, with corrections, will be found in Cyrene, in Tripoli, in the World Heritage Centre at UNESCO, Paris and in the offices of ‘L’Erma’ di Bretschneider in Rome, where the present edition is intended for publication. My original drawings are intended to be deposited with Chieti University, Dipartimento Scienze dell’Antichità.
PREFACE

In 1981, when I was employed as an archaeological illustrator at Ancient Monuments for England, I had the opportunity to work at Cyrene for seven weeks for Prof. Donald White of Pennsylvania University, recording architectural fragments discovered during excavation of the Demeter Sanctuary. It was just over a decade since the revolution, when Libya was still developing its identity within a changing world. New Shahat then consisted of one thoroughfare, with a lone petrol station situated at the Derna-Beida crossroads in the Southern Necropolis. While I was there, I witnessed the early stages of destruction of Cyrene’s necropolis by the building of a motorway from Apollonia to New Shahat, which destroyed large sections of the ancient Apollonia road and was said to have obliterated large numbers of unrecorded tombs as it approached Cyrene. It threatened the Northern Necropolis, but the Antiquities Department managed to get it diverted away from the most spectacular tombs by the cutting of an artificial cleft in the scarp of the hills to take the road through to New Shahat.

Then followed the dark period, turbulent times during which major destruction of the necropolis occurred. I was able to return in 1988 with Prof. Barri Jones of Manchester University on a sponsored project to study the excavations of Alan Rowe in the 1950s, and was confronted with the new town of Shahat which had been built on the Southern and Eastern Necropolis. What I had seen in this area seven years previously had been wiped away without trace and covered by a modern housing development.

During the following decade I had to study Rowe’s material and excavated tombs while becoming increasingly aware that I was in a nightmare situation where one of Libya’s greatest treasures from the ancient world was being destroyed, melting into oblivion before my eyes. My draughtsmanship skills were needed, as I knew that it was necessary to properly record the tombs which were rapidly disappearing like a desert mirage. The emphasis of my project had to change dramatically to include tombs which were under threat of destruction, punctuated since 1998 by an increase in tomb-robbing and vandalism, which is damaging so many of the surviving tombs. In March 2002 two aniconic half-figures, unprovenanced but obviously of Cyrenian origin, appeared secretly on the New York antiques market, and a stele fragment, also unprovenanced but with the Cyrene hallmark, is to feature in a Brussels antiques fair. Black-glazed and red figure ceramics and terracotta figurines, once removed from the country, disappear in the same way. This nightmare has been the driving force for my work, and also my own personal loyalty to the Antiquities Department in Cyrene, where I have always encountered the greatest assistance, support, hospitality and understanding. As the Controller said to me:

الكلاب تنبج والقافلة تسير

The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on
In 1983 I had bought Rowe's two books on his excavations in Cyrene, and came to the conclusion that I could rework the report by studying the material in Manchester. I approached Dr. Joyce Reynolds at a meeting of the Society for Libyan Studies to ask if, in her opinion, it was worth doing, and she agreed that it was. The following year I studied and drew the exchange items at Manchester, and on completion Dr. John Prag suggested that I should do the rest of the material in Cyrene, with the support of Prof. Barri Jones, who said: 'If you're going to do Alan Rowe, do it well', which has been my motto. At that time no written archaeological records had been found other than David Dixon's personal notes and the edited Object Register transcribed in Rowe II. My 1989 campaign was therefore to record all surviving artifacts to give a visual record, and to search for associated finds labels to enable the Register to be rebuilt, by filling the gaps in the assemblages, before studying the tombs and sarcophagi surveyed and excavated by Rowe. I worked in Cyrene, in the Museum and on the necropolis, for eighty-eight days. From 1989-1992 I studied all the burial artifacts in the Cyrene Museum reserve collections from Rowe's 1955-1957 campaigns. In 1994 additional pieces from the 1956 campaign were studied in Apollo-nia Museum, called here 'Sousa material'. The material from the 1952 campaign, moved to a new store in 1955, is still untraced, together with Burton Brown's 1947 burial artifacts. During this period I made enquiries about Rowe's duplicate Object Register mentioned by Dixon, but without success. This led to the programme of searching for original site labels, a large number of which were found in 1991 by clearing fallen plaster and sweeping away pigeon and rat droppings on the floor of an abandoned storeroom above the old Sculpture Gallery. A scatter of handwritten exhibition labels revealed that there had been a temporary display in the museum at the close of the 1957 campaign. In my 1994-1995 fieldwork I resurveyed and studied more fully all the tombs and sarcophagi where Rowe had been involved, noticing that he had clean methods of excavation, and care had been taken to backfill Tombs E.19, E.161 and S.81 with stones, which was one of the stipulations laid down in the contracts, but Tomb S.80 was the exception to this rule, and Cassels two years later was uncertain whether it had been dug by Rowe (Fig. 157). By chance, some of the original archaeological field records were found in May 1996, which led to others in Liverpool and are outlined more fully below. These necessitated a major revision of the text as it stood at that time by the inclusion of new material from Rowe's field notebooks. I went in February 1998 to the Acropolis Museum in Athens to study more closely the remains of the archaic Doric entablatures, and visited a small surviving part of the Athenian Necropolis at Kerameikos for comparison of burial practices relating to the large quantity of Attic artifacts found in Rowe's excavations. I visited the Sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis to study the two comparative 'Thea' inscriptions found there at the Plutonium which correspond to the only other known example scratched on the polos of Rowe's artifact M.1185 (Fig. 411). In April Rowe's personal secretary, Mrs Sheila Ord, met John Prag with documentation relating to the 1958 exchange exhibition held in the present Students' Room of Manchester Museum. In the following month I re-

---

1 Thorn (1994), 110-115 Figs. 7-9.
2 Rowe's Object Register items M. 175-364, M. 599-801, M. 823-1334.
3 Rowe's Object Register items M. 365-598, M. 802-822.
4 Rowe's Object Register items M. 1-174.
5 Display labels were written out in biro by Alan Rowe on pieces torn from a reporter's pad, with provisional descriptions, but without the Object Register number. On 20th May 2000 in the Controller's office I was asked by Abdulkader el Muzeiny: 'Have you seen this list?' 'What list?' I replied, and was presented with a letter book containing, among other things, 14 numbered folded pages comprising the unbound master copy of Rowe's 1955 Object Register. This involved me, at a late stage, in text adjustments to Chapter II and alterations to the Catalogue of Artifacts.
turned to Cyrene for twenty-three days, and took the opportunity to study more fully Rowe’s
tombs in the context of the Northern Necropolis. This clarified many anomalies which I realised
existed. I also spent five days in Alexandria, concentrating on the tomb morphology and the cata-
comb of Kôm el-Shukafa which Rowe had cleared and consolidated.

In April 1999 I went to the island of Rhodes and spent some time in studying the tomb mor-
phology and artifacts in the Archaeological Museum. However, that year saw two tragic losses,
that of my external examiner John Lloyd, followed within six weeks by my supervisor Professor
Barri Jones, two men who, with the Society for Libyan Studies, were the original sponsors of my
work. After this there was an abortive attempt to obtain a visa for a September return to Cyrene.

Since writing the above, I was able to return to Cyrene in May 2000. During my research I
was by chance confronted by fourteen pages of Rowe’s 1955 campaign Object Register, and a re-
cently robbed structure by Rowe’s Tomb M.15 which was important by revealing a naikos in situ
on its roof (Fig. 100). The building of a new slip road around New Shahat had put Tomb S.359
under threat of destruction (Fig.236), and as a result of a request by the Antiquities Department
had to be recorded at short notice in the midst of the pounding, reverberating tumult of hell itself
from the developers’steel chariots of destruction above and around, which were consuming and
obliterating all before them for ever. This new road is only a stone’s throw from Rowe’s Tombs
M.9-14 (Figs. 150, 163). At this very late stage in my work I decided to include these pieces of in-
formation, which entailed alterations to the already completed illustrations and accompanying
text. My most recent visit to Cyrene was in October 2002, when a great escalation in tomb-
robbing was noticed, with mechanical diggers doing some of the work, and hitherto undisturbed
tombs have been cleared of their contents. Each time a visit is made to Cyrene a further part of
the necropolis is being destroyed without being recorded, and this presents me with the dilemma
of whether it is more important to record, or to ignore new information and submit a limited
mockery of the true picture (Figs. 47, 207). Alan Rowe’s flawed archaeological work fifty years
ago, for which he was cruelly criticised by the academic fraternity, nevertheless opened the door
for further research which, if undertaken, would have saved the necropolis from its demise. Tragi-
cally, no British person excavated and published after Rowe, and through a series of unforeseen
events over a number of years I have fallen into being the last to record the necropolis in the final
decade of the twentieth century.

**Documentary Sources**

The presence of a headstone on Rowe’s grave proved that there had been an executor, who
could answer questions on the existence of personal belongings and the whereabouts of any ar-
chaeological papers relating to the excavations. Enquiries revealed a typed list of Rowe’s *ex libris*
books which described two large brown suitcases containing, amongst other things, his 1955 Day
Book and his master set of six boxes of photographic prints, which remained untraced by me for a
further seven years. A copy of Rowe’s typed manuscript on the life of Olga Rowe stated that he
had been involved in the 1943 report on war damage in the Cyrenaica. This report had to be traced
as he used photographs from it in his 1948 publication ‘New Light on Aegypto-Cyrenaean

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6 Professor Brice had saved Alan Rowe’s collection of printed tracts and had kept correspondence from the executor,
Linda Shepherd, whose list of effects included Rowe’s 1955 Day Book and the master set of prints; Thorn (1994), 110,
116 Appendix I-II; in May 2000 a copy of Rowe’s 1957 Photographic List was found in a Department of Antiquities let-
ter book, written on nine loose pages torn from a quarto exercise book, which had been sent to Richard Goodchild. It
gives the number of photographs taken, frames 80 to 225.
Relations', and this necessitated visits to the Public Record Office at Kew, London to trace its existence in the War Office files. Examination of these files, and also the corresponding Colonial and Foreign Office files, revealed such things as his application for the post of Controller of Antiquities in the Cyrenaica and the authorities' recognition of his good qualities, but, in their view, unsuitability for the job. A series of interviews with Rowe's friends and with people who had worked with him on his excavations in the Cyrenaica provided a substantial background. A cardboard box discovered in the home of the parents of Rowe's young friend and executor, Linda Burns, presented to me on 23rd May 1996, produced among other things his folders on the 1943 Commission to the Cyrenaica, 1955-1959 correspondence, contracts dealing with excavation and Rowe's 1956 Day Book, the first time I had been able to study his archaeological records. Also among these was a list of his effects and the names of people who had claimed items. After seven years the fate of the archaeological records was known, as these had been rescued by Professor Fairman and donated to Liverpool University. I eventually saw them on 15th October 1996, and the discovery of these records completely changed my assessment of Rowe's work and gave a more coherent picture of his excavations than can be gained from the published reports. Alan Rowe's friend and fellow Egyptologist, Herbert Fairman, wrote on 23rd July 1968 to the executor: 'I am deeply concerned about Rowe's field records. I assume that his Excavation Notebook start 3.9.55 is concerned with the records of his Cyrenaica excavations and have been published in his second volume. Nevertheless, even though published, these records are valuable and ought not to be thrown away. May I beg you at all costs to ensure that any field records of any of his excavations and all photographs and negatives of his excavations be deposited with some institution. For the Cyrenaica Expedition it seems to me Manchester University is the obvious place since it was a University excavation, but somehow or other all these records ought to be kept and ought to be retained where they can be looked after and be made available for consultation.'

Rowe was an Egyptologist, not a Classicist, and his wartime appointment in Alexandria gave him closer experience of Ptolemaic Egypt. The Italian military enclave around Cyrene ceased ca.1935, marked by the building of the Cyrene Hotel. Only then could the necropolis be seriously studied, but this was prevented by the war, and Rowe, through a series of circumstances, became the person to tackle this neglected subject in the only extensive British excavation in the twentieth century. Although today his final publications would be considered inadequate, they were based on the standard at the time. The second report was referred to by Mortimer Wheeler F.S.A. as a 'splendid volume', which implies the inadequate publications then available on the subject. Contemporary excavation practice was governed by post-war austerity, clearly demonstrated by the 1948 archaeological activities of Kathleen Kenyon F.S.A. in Southwark, where finds bags were reused from her earlier excavations at Jewry Wall Leicester, Jericho and Sabratha. Her small finds, like those of Rowe, were placed on cotton wool in cigarette packets, matchboxes and any other suitable small containers, as stationery and materials were limited. His excavation campaigns were probably affected by economies due to limited funds, and because of this meant a modest support staff. Rowe's standards are reflected in his need for a printed register, considered by some an unnecessary expense, but this was flawed by homogenous assemblages being selected

7 Rowe (1948), 1-3 PIs. V-XVI.
9 Burns Arch. Rowe's 1956 Day Book.
10 Eventually I hope the Rowe Arch. Manchester cache and Burns Arch. will be united with the Fairman archive.
11 Fairman Arch.correspondence.
12 Berenson (1938), 49-50 Pl. XI.
13 Burns Arch.Cyr.folder pt. 2 fol. 94.
for registration, unlike John Lloyd's recent excavations in Benghazi, where he was the first person to make a comprehensive analytical study of the burials, using scientific methods which were completely unappreciated by archaeologists half a century ago. The main problem was that Rowe had no ceramic specialist on site, and as for reference books, there was not the wealth of monographs and reports which exist today, demonstrated by John Cassels, who could only compare Rowe's lamps for dating with Broneer's 'Terracotta Lamps from Corinth', published in 1930. The lack of publications makes it appear that Rowe did not study his finds and could not make comparisons, which is vital as the origins of the artifacts give a glimpse of the burial practices connected with some of the tombs.

Since I wrote the above, Faraj Mohmoud Elrashedy has published a book which deals with pottery from Cyrenaica, mostly black-glazed and red figure wares, which are included below in Section II of the Artifacts where relevant.
INTRODUCTION

Cyrene was first surveyed by Frederick Beechey in May 1822, who showed the impressive necropolis in its entirety (Figs. 1-2). This was superseded briefly by the Huntings air survey of 1947 which tragically, being on nitrate film, has begun to decompose, a situation which was only discovered by the company when the author requested prints. The surviving film has now been copied, but only records part of the necropolis close to the city of Cyrene, and the area where New Shahat exists was too badly decomposed to save. There exists, however, an apparently complete set of prints in the Antiquities Department at Cyrene, which could be used for a photogrammetric plot of the necropolis, if it were made available.

John Cassels' compiled gazetteer of the more significant tombs was based on the Huntings survey, the positions of the tombs being plotted in the Department on a pencilled grid on sheets of tracing paper, now housed at Cyrene (Fig. 17). Rowe, who first foraged in the neglected Eastern and Southern Necropoleis in the 1952 campaign, recorded individual diagnostic tombs, and in 1956 Richard Tomlinson discovered additional tombs not seen by Cassels in the Eastern Necropolis (Fig. 47). All this study was carried out within ten years and laid the foundations for future research into tomb morphology.

There followed Professor Sandro Stucchi's work in the Southern Necropolis prior to its extensive destruction from 1981-1995, studying the architectural aspect of the tombs. Professor Bacchielli did a detailed study of the murals inside Cyrenaican tombs, those first seen by Beechey in 1822 and later by Pacho (Figs. 5, 6). My study from 1989-2000 has been concentrated on the tombs which Rowe studied and excavated, in which I was assisted by my wife Dorothy and members of the Antiquities Department.

The captions to the illustrations and plates incorporate in the bottom right-hand corner the relevant chapter and paragraph numbers, where the reader will find the figure or plate subject in more detail e.g. 'Fig. 118 Location plan: eastern slope of El Mawy Land, showing relationship of Tombs N. 201-N. 202 II.8.1'. Finding Chapter II, section 8, paragraph 1 is the link which will take the reader to the main background history. This is followed by paragraph II.8.2 which contains the archaeology and the relevant assemblage number, in this case Assemblage V which will be found on Fig. 3 in Volume II, with the artifacts listed below. Paragraph II.8.3 deals with the architecture and paragraph II.8.4 is the observations. This pattern is repeated throughout all the volumes, but each individual glossary should be consulted for further and deeper information. The chapters, which should be read in conjunction with the illustrations and artifacts, are designed in the following order:

Background Chapter I (Figs. 1-46)

In this chapter I describe research into the archive material relating to the publications of earlier pioneers, in some cases doing additional drawing of plans and elevations of tombs they described. This was to form a much-needed basis for comparison, providing the background to
Rowe's excavations and setting his work against these already well-known tombs when assessing them in Chapters IV-V.

**Rowe's excavations** Chapters II-III (Figs. 47-206)

Within these chapters I aim to study and evaluate the original excavations by re-measuring and recording more fully the tombs which Rowe selected for survey, clearance and excavation, and to place them in their immediate surroundings, but in Chapter III adding those tombs and sarcophagi he omitted, in order to complete the study.

**Evaluation** Chapter IV (Figs. 207-238)

I compare in this chapter Rowe's contribution to the study of rock-cut tombs with the explorations of the earlier pioneers, in the process making an assessment of tomb morphology in the necropolis.

**Evaluation** Chapter V (Figs. 239-263)

This chapter follows the same pattern as the previous one, but deals with built monuments, sarcophagi, stelai and other grave furniture.

**Discussion** Chapter VI (Figs. 264-286)

I consider in this chapter evidence of the impact of historical events affecting colonization, culture and trade contacts around the Mediterranean, with special reference to Cyrenaica, reflected in regional and provincial tomb morphology and related architecture, together with various forms of funerary practices.

**Catalogue of Burial Accoutrements** Chapter VII (Figs. 287-305)

This chapter presents the more significant architectural elements, burial furniture and burial practices.

**Architectural Terms**

The terms used throughout the text are based on the glossaries of Dinsmoor (1975), 387-397, Robertson (1974), 379-393 and McKenzie (1990), 181-195.
CHAPTER I

PREVIOUS EXPLORATIONS
I.1.0 Introduction

The awakening of antiquarian interest in ancient classical sites in North Africa involved exploration at Cyrene near the coast of modern Libya, both by nineteenth century travellers and explorers who recorded what they saw at that time (I.2.0; Figs. 3-16) and by antiquarians who gathered statuary for foreign collections (I.3.0; Figs. 18-30). Following this, in the twentieth century some archaeological excavation was carried out, mainly in the Northern Necropolis (I.4.0; Figs. 17, 31-46). Cyrene possesses several natural advantages, located on the crest of an upper plateau where it overlooks the plain of the lower plateau and the Mediterranean Sea beyond. The existence of a natural spring with constant running sweet water, a favourable climate for vegetation and a rich soil cover, beneath which is a ready supply of accessible limestone for building, were the combination of factors which caused Cyrene to germinate like the native silphium and to flourish into splendour. The testimony of its prosperity and greatness is provided by the vast necropolis where the steep plateau escarpment overlooking the sea is dramatically honeycombed by the activities of man, who had created rock-cut and built tombs and sarcophagi cut into the slopes of the wadis on the northern and western sides. In contrast, the Southern and Eastern Necropoleis on the upper plateau behind the city extended for many kilometres on the undulating carpet of the plain, the great variety of ruined tombs with their magnificent façades sunk into the terrain, half-buried in hillwash and partly concealed by vegetation. Over the centuries most of the tombs and sarcophagi had suffered the inevitable robbing by the time the first explorers arrived.

EXPLORERS

I.2.0 Tomb Studies

There were two known visits to Cyrene in the eighteenth century by the French, one in 1706 by Consul Lemaire from Tripoli, who noted ‘un nombre infini des tombeaux’ and a sarcophagus with ‘deux griffons. qui tiennent un espece de flambeau’, perhaps that in Pacho’s Tomb A (Figs. 8, 234). He was followed in 1733 by the surgeon Granger, whose account was lost, and there was a failed attempt in 1766 by James Bruce, but true exploration there began with Agostino Cervelli’s brief visit in 1811-12, published much later in 1825 by Delaporte with inaccurate illustrations of the tombs. He was the first to record an inscription to Aristoteles in the Southern Necropolis, also the Archaic rock-cut chamber tombs in the Northern Necropolis and the decorative entrance in one of them (Figs. 74-75, 212, 290). He also recorded a nearby built temple tomb (Figs. 121, 124),

1 Lucas (1712), 116; Cumming (1969-70), 18.
2 Cervelli (1825), 26-28 Pls. I-III.