

Text and Context
in the Archive of Tiberianus
(Karanis, Egypt; 2nd Century AD)¹
(Plates 5-7)

ABSTRACT

The archive of Tiberianus consists of sixteen texts, in Greek and Latin, which were found under a stairway in a house in Karanis, Egypt. All of the texts are personal letters, the majority of them from Claudius Terentianus to Claudius Tiberianus. The archive of Tiberianus has received much scholarly attention, largely focused on the Latin letters contained within it, and particularly those with information related to the lives of Roman soldiers and veterans in the Egyptian countryside.

In this paper we discuss the documents collected by Tiberianus as an archive. These texts can be identified as an archive through internal references and historical cohesion; additionally, all of the documents were discovered in the same archaeological context. Why were the texts placed together in the location in which they were found? Who were the texts' senders and addressees and how are they related to one another? How does the archaeological record support or refute the information provided by the texts?

The re-analysis of these documents is necessitated by a recent re-examination of the excavation records from Karanis, which showed that there are approximately a dozen more texts from the same locus as the published archive of Tiberianus. These texts include letters that were

¹ The authors would like to thank the organizers and discussants of the AIA/ASP session in Boston for their valuable comments and remarks. Thanks are also due to Robin Woodruff-Meadow and Sebastián Encina of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan, for their permission to work on the material from House C/B167, and their invaluable help in accessing the records of the Karanis excavations, and to Prof. Traianos Gagos of the Papyrus Collection of the University of Michigan, for his permission to publish the documents found in House C/B167. The conservators of the Kelsey Museum, Suzanne Davis, and the Papyrus Collection, Leyla Lau-Lamb, have done valuable work on the artifacts and documents currently kept in Ann Arbor and have facilitated our work immensely. Permission to publish the figures was graciously granted by the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan.

not addressed to Tiberianus, a fragment of court proceedings and a petition. The newly associated texts shed further light on the archive of Tiberianus and prompt a restudy of the group of texts as a whole.

The archive of Tiberianus is one of the most important sources for the life of active soldiers and veterans of the Roman army in Egypt.² The archive consists of letters to Claudius Tiberianus, both during his period of active service and after his retirement from the Roman army. The senders of the letters vary, although most were written by Claudius Terentianus, who identifies himself as the son of Tiberianus.

In this paper, we will sketch the circumstances that led to the discovery of the papyri belonging to Tiberianus' archive at the site of Karanis and re-associate the documentary texts with their archaeological context. As was the case with many of the papyri unearthed from the Egyptian town of Karanis, the data related to the discovery of the documents, which was recorded in the Karanis *Record of Objects*, was not published in *P.Mich.* VIII (1951). Only a brief account appears in the introduction. This information succinctly appears in the introduction: "(the papyri) were discovered under a stairway in a house on the second level from the top of the mound."³ No further attempt was made to relate the papyri to the house where they were found or to the associated artifacts. The re-consideration of these papyri within their archaeological context reveals that their findspot offers a broader framework for interpretation, one that takes into account not only the nature of their contents, but also the relationship of the documents to other artifacts.

The recontextualization of papyri from Karanis has its problems, as it is often difficult to reconstruct relationships between artifacts from the same findspot.⁴ In this approach, the archaeological

² E.g. R.A. Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: A Social History* (London and New York 1985).

³ *P.Mich.* VIII (1951) 16.

⁴ For previous exercises in re-contextualization, see P. Van Minnen, "House-to-House Enquiries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Roman Karanis," *ZPE* 100 (1994) 227-51.

records should be studied afresh and with an open mind.⁵ In the case of the archive of Tiberianus there is even more reason to take this approach, because the study of the original excavation notes by one of the authors revealed that there were sixteen additional papyri discovered in the same house, many of which were from the same locus as the papyri belonging to the archive of Tiberianus. These new papyri—their publication is in progress—shed further light on the archive, adding to its external context.⁶

Architecture

The papyri that came to be known as the archive of Tiberianus were found in house B167, that is, in the "B" level of house 167. (Plate 5) The excavators of Karanis distinguished five levels, with the A-Level being the uppermost, and B-Level through E-Level below. Excavators believed that these levels were persistent over the entirety of the site. Van Minnen has demonstrated some of the problems with this approach, as it does not account for the development of individual houses, streets, and blocks.⁷ Reconstruction of the occupation phases of each house should instead be predicated on the individual structure; we can read the history of a single house through its successive layers.

House B167, and its predecessor, House C167, are well documented in the excavation records currently held at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan. These documents include numerous photographs of both the architecture and finds, as well as semi-detailed floor-plans. Smaller scale maps of house B167 permit it to be viewed in relation to the entire site, and profile maps connect the house to the vertical stratigraphy of Karanis as a whole, allowing stratigraphical comparison with neighboring structures.

⁵ Cf. N. Pollard, "The Chronology and Economic Condition of Late Roman Karanis: An Archaeological Reassessment," *JARCE* 35 (1998) 147-62.

⁶ A. Verhoogt and R.P. Stephan, *The House of Claudius Tiberianus. Text and Artifact from House C/B167 in Roman Karanis* (forthcoming).

⁷ See van Minnen, *op.cit.* (above, n. 4)

The excavators associated structure B167 with the second stratigraphic level beneath the modern surface. The house reused earlier materials, and was constructed on the ruined walls of house C167, the earliest occupational level in this particular part of the site. Such re-use was a well-established practice at Karanis, and in this way, the ruined walls and extant bricks from the previous house could be recycled in the new construction. Likewise, structure A154 was later built above structure B167, using building materials from the earlier construction. Over this period of time, while the exterior appearance of the house changed very little, there were numerous alterations in the interior structure of the building.⁸

C-Level

House C167 was originally constructed as part of an insula block that also contained structures C146, C168, C5034, and C5036. (Plate 6) This insula is located near center of the town, approximately one block west of the north-south thoroughfare CS210. Houses along this street were dated to the late first or early second century AD by recovered papyri, ostraca, and coins. The proximity of C167 to this firmly dated area should allow it to be included within this date range.

The arrangement of the house can be reconstructed using the detailed floor plan created by the excavators. (Plate 7) Structure C165 was imposing in size; measuring from the outside of the exterior walls, the area of C167 was approximately 165m², roughly equal to the combined size of the two houses to the north, C5036 and 5034. The walls, themselves, were in the area of two-thirds of a meter thick. The courtyard (including loci C167K, L, M, and N) is located to the east of the living quarters, and encompasses over half of the interior space, about 75m². The courtyard is connected to the living quarters through a doorway in room E. This area was used for cooking and general storage, as well as housing for domestic animals; the plan reveals an oven (which nearly blocks the entrance

⁸ E.M. Husselman, *Karanis Excavations of the University of Michigan in Egypt 1928-1935: A Summary of the Reports of the Director, Enoch E. Peterson* (Ann Arbor 1979) 22.

to the courtyard), storage bins, pens and mangers.⁹ The walls, made of mudbrick and uncut stone, were approximately two-thirds of a meter thick and were probably low, as they do not appear in the B-Level.¹⁰

The main part of the house was comprised of at least two stories; the lower story is divided into five different rooms. Originally this area would have been roofed, but no remains were preserved.¹¹ A door in the west wall of Room A provides access to the north-south street CS145. This street runs parallel to the main thoroughfare CS210 and, at three meters wide, is one of the larger streets in Karanis.

Room A likely functioned as an *atrium*, a public place where family members would meet and interact with their daily visitors. This room also served to restrict access to the more private areas of the house; the interior of the house was accessible through two doors in room A.¹² One door in the southeast corner of the room led to room E, another large room which was connected to the courtyard. Another door in the north wall of room A led to spaces B and D. B is the staircase that led to the second floor while D¹⁻³ were three ground floor recesses or niches beneath this staircase. These niches would have been accessible only through trap doors in the stairs.

D², one of these niches, is listed as the primary findspot for many of the papyri and moveable artifacts that were discovered in structure C167, including most of the documents from the Tiberianus archive.

B-Level

The B-Level at Karanis is typically dated to the end of the second century; at this time, the excavators have supposed partial

⁹ A.E. Boak, *Topographical and Architectural Report of Excavations during the Seasons 1924-1928* (Ann Arbor 1931) 392.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Husselman, *op. cit.* (above, n. 8) 37.

¹² Cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *PBSR* 56 (1988) 43-97.

abandonment of the site due to a small economic recession and a subsequent reconstruction.¹³ Total abandonment throughout the site is unlikely, and it seems that in many areas, B- and C-Level structures were in contemporary use.¹⁴

Although it is not certain that structure 167 was completely abandoned, changes in the internal structure and the accumulation of debris suggest that some areas of the house had fallen out of use.¹⁵ The nearby houses 5036 and 5034 were abandoned and replaced by B156 and B157. In the courtyard, which was not roofed, there was an accumulation of debris, and the low walls that had previously delineated bins and other structures were covered during the B-Level. Three new storage bins, Y¹⁻³, were constructed in the northwest corner, built over an oven.¹⁶ The south wall of the courtyard was also partially reconstructed, this time with a passageway connecting B167Y with the courtyard of the adjacent house to the south, B168K.¹⁷ Along with the reconstruction of a small section of the northern wall, these were the only renovations to the exterior of the house.

The interior of the house remained relatively unaltered with only a few minor modifications. A *mastaba* was constructed directly in front of the doorway, and was perhaps built on the remains of a previous *mastaba*.¹⁸ The staircase (B) was no longer in use during the B-Level. Whether or not this reflects the elimination of the upper floor(s) is not certain. A ladder may have been used to access the second floor, but it is also possible that this area was abandoned during this time. The absence of the stairway was significant, as it

¹³ Husselman, *op.cit.* (above, n. 8) 21.

¹⁴ van Minnen, *op. cit.* (above, n. 4) 229.

¹⁵ Boak, *op. cit.* (above, n. 9) 391.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 393.

¹⁷ That this passageway existed, suggests that there were strong ties between the inhabitants of house B167 and house B168. The possible consequences of this will be discussed in Verhoogt and Stephan, *op.cit.* (above, n. 6)

¹⁸ Boak, *op.cit.* (above, n. 9) 392.

exposed the ground floor niches, previously only accessible by trap door.¹⁹

A-Level

The A-Level at Karanis—the most recent strata beneath the surface, approximately 5th century AD—is identified as the final occupation phase. There appears to have been a significant break or change in occupation between the late B-Level and the A-Level. While houses and streets may still have been oriented in the same direction, pre-existing walls were no longer incorporated into new buildings. On average, A-Level houses were typically three meters above their B-Level predecessors.²⁰ Damage by the *sebakkhin* also resulted in poorly preserved materials from the occupation phase.

House C/B167 was eventually abandoned and covered with debris, and none of the original walls are reused in the A-Level. Three new houses were constructed in the space previously occupied by C/B167: House 154 has been built over part of what was previously the courtyard of B167. At 60m², this structure is less than half the size of its predecessor. It is oriented in essentially the same way as B167, with the main area of the house to the west, and the courtyard to the east. The living area can only be identified as one room, 154B, and the courtyard is labeled as 154A.

The courtyard of house 154 is of particular interest due to the six ovens, A¹⁻⁶, that were discovered there. Three of these, A¹⁻³, were discovered along the south wall of the courtyard, where they were actually built on top of three previous ovens, A⁴⁻⁶, built in an earlier part of the A-Level phase. The size of the ovens is also quite intriguing since they take up almost half the area of the courtyard, and it appears as though part of the wall that divided the courtyard from the rest of the house had to be removed to make room for the westernmost oven.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Husselman, *op.cit.* (above, n. 8) 26.

²¹ Boak, *op.cit.* (above, n. 9) 644-45

Two open areas occupy the remainder of the space where C/B167 previously stood. Area 413 lies above the northwestern part of the house, mainly rooms A, B, C, and D, while Area 408 covers the southern half of the house B167's courtyard and room E.

Archaeological finds

The stratigraphy suggested by the architecture is complicated by the artifacts attributed to the house. Each year, finds were recorded as they were excavated in the *Records of Objects*, so that A-Level is recorded in the 1924-1925 Record of Objects; B-Level in the 1928 and C-Level in the 1929 volume. These records indicate that only B-Level yielded artifacts. No items are recorded for the A-Level or the C-Level. While there probably was a substantial amount of material that was simply not recorded—mostly fragmentary ceramic sherds—it remains strange that only the B-Level produced moveable objects.²² A-Level and C-Level produced nothing, or at least nothing deemed sufficiently interesting to record. The apparent absence of finds from the C-Level is especially troubling when compared to the detail and precision evidenced in other aspects of the excavations in 1929. In comparison with previous years, the 1929 season produced significantly more detailed maps, and by this point in the excavations, the Michigan team had established a definitive system for recording finds.

The fact that there is nothing recorded for the C-Level can have two possible explanations: either there really was nothing of interest there (apart from unrecorded potsherds), or the moveable objects from the C-Level had been mistakenly excavated in an earlier season and recorded as part of the B-Level. The latter explanation, perhaps, is the most likely.

We may suggest that in 1928, the Michigan team excavated House 167 as a single stratum. After the 1929 season, they may have recognized two separate strata in the architecture; this may have led them to propose two different occupation phases for the

²² E. Peterson, Karanis Record of Objects, 1928 (Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor) 410-19. On not recording some of the ceramics, see Pollard, *op.cit.* (above, n. 5) 149 n. 9.

structure: C167 and B167. Typically, as noted above, there was no dramatic architectural change between the B-Level and the C-Level; these two occupation phases may represent a later reassessment based on the finds and architecture. In addition, the interest and quantity of the finds themselves could have induced the excavators to mistakenly excavate both levels during the 1928 season.

Furthermore, discrepancies between recorded find spots and published plans, and, more importantly, the location of the papyri suggest the mixing of the B-Level and the C-Level. Apart from the uneven division of moveable objects over the levels, it is notable that a number of the findspots recorded for the objects in the B-Level do not correspond with the plans for that level, but refer instead to locations in the C-Level. A case in point is the largest group of papyri, which was attributed to locus D². D² is only attested for the C-Level, and is not indicated on the drawing for the B-Level. Similarly, one of the papyri from the B-Level was recorded as coming from locus L (inv. 5417). Again, this locus is not accounted for in the B-Level, but only in the C-Level. It seems likely that the excavators mapped the B-Level artifacts into the C-Level plan.

Further evidence for the hypothetical blending of levels is found in the papyri that are associated with the house; these documents can be dated to two distinct periods. While some of the papyri can be palaeographically attributed to the beginning of the second century AD (the C-Level for this part of Karanis), other texts date to the late second and early third century AD (ca. 200-325 AD, the B-Level).²³ The chronological diversity of the texts is mirrored in their find spots within the house. Twenty-four of the papyri (P.Mich. inv. 5389-5412) were found in one locus (D²), together with a significant number of artifacts. These papyri—including the texts from the archive of Tiberianus—date from the beginning of the second century

²³ The B-Level in this block may even go beyond the early fourth century, because one of the texts found in the adjacent house B168 contained a Coptic text (inv. 5421; published in G.M. Browne, *Michigan Coptic Texts*. Papyrologica Castroctaviana 7 [Chicago 1979] #2). For the redating of Karanis' last phases into the fifth century, thus allowing extending earlier phases as well, see Pollard, *op.cit.* (above, n. 5).

AD to the late second century AD (e.g. P.Mich. inv. 5409, court proceedings mentioning the epistrategos Claudius Xenophon, active between 1979 and 192 AD). The remaining seven papyri can be associated with different rooms in the house:

D1	inv. 5388 (discovered in pot)
E	inv. 5387
A	inv. 5386, 5413 (Thucydides, <i>Hist.</i> II, 62, 5f.), and 5414
K	inv. 5415
L	inv. 5417

In addition, there were four ostraca were discovered in room A. Three of these were dated on paleographic grounds to the third century AD, while one was dated to the third/fourth century AD.

The moveable objects recorded in the 1928 *Record of Objects* for the B-Level likely include objects and documents from the earlier level. While it was possible to associate the architectural remains with two distinct phases, a comparable re-assessment was not possible for the moveable objects.

We suggest that it is possible to attribute the artifacts from locus D², the storage niche under the staircase, to the C-Level of occupation. All papyri discovered in this unit date to the period which coincides with C-Level in this part of Karanis. Furthermore, the staircase associated with this niche was no longer in use during the B-Level occupation. We propose that the artifacts discovered in the niche were materials that were cleared from the C-Level and stored away when structural modifications were made to house C167. During the B-Level, these artifacts were forgotten and not removed from storage; they were discovered still *in situ* nearly two millennia later.

Prosopographic connections between the documents support this possibility. One document was discovered "high in the fill" of locus L, one of the loci that is attested for only the C-Level. This sender and recipient named in this document are known from the papyri associated with the storage niche. It seems likely that this papyrus became part of the fill when the transition from C-Level to

B-Level took place, and therefore should be associated with the C-Level. Possibly the fact that the objects that were also found in the niche were largely made of wood (including architectural elements and furniture parts) could suggest that what we have here is a storage place that was no longer actively used.

Therefore, the papyri and objects found in the storage niche under the staircase can be associated with an earlier phase of habitation; we can suggest two different occupation phases for structure C167, discernable in both the architecture and movable objects. We can now move from the analysis of the objects to the individuals in the past who used and owned these artifacts. While it is not possible to demonstrate conclusively that the same individuals lived in the house during both phases, it seems likely that there may have been some continuity, as the earlier (C-Level) documents were not removed during the B-Level. We can be certain, however, that the family living in the house during the B-Level was literate; we can recognize a fragment of Thucydides among the unpublished documents.

The Inhabitants of House C/B167

In the final part of this paper we will discuss what we can glean from the papyri and artifacts about the family, or families who lived in the house during C- and B-Levels. This work is ongoing, and may change as more information becomes available from texts currently kept in Cairo for which we still have no photographic evidence.

We can suggest that the family of Tiberianus occupied the house during the second century AD (the excavators' level C-Level). Most of the papyri from the storage niche have been published as the archive of Tiberianus in the eighth volume of *Michigan Papyri* (1951), and these papyri received much scholarly attention. The documents detail the early second century AD life and deeds of Tiberianus and Terentianus, probably Tiberianus' son. Both men were soldiers in the Roman army, and our documents also recount Tiberianus' life as a veteran.²⁴ Various family members and military colleagues also appear in the texts.

²⁴ Alston, *op.cit.* (above, n. 2) 135-37.

The unpublished texts from the niche (which are currently under study) add more individuals to the family, probably among later generations. In an undated letter, we find a Didumarion and her children, greeted by her daughters Heros and Tolis, who apparently were residing elsewhere at that time. This pattern is known from the archive of Tiberianus; Tiberianus' daughter resides elsewhere when she writes to her father. The unpublished documents also include a petition from a certain Sansneus to the assistant (*boethos*) of Aelius (papyrus damaged).

It remains unclear whether Tiberianus ever lived in the house at Karanis. The argument for Tiberianus' residence is bolstered by the discovery of his archive in the niche. However, a text from the Cornell collection complicates matters. In *SB VI 9636*, dated to 136 AD, Valerius Paulinus introduces a new veteran, Terentianus, to his friend Valerius Apolinarius; Valerius Paulinus rents his house and field to Terentianus. Naphtali Lewis, the original editor, suggested that the Terentianus named in the Paulinus letter is the same individual as the sender of the letters to Tiberianus.²⁵ This arrangement would suggest that the family would not already have had a house in the village, or else it would not have been necessary for a stranger to introduce Terentianus. Tiberianus would not have settled at Karanis.

This arrangement would necessitate the conclusion that Terentianus settled in Karanis and brought his family papers, among which were letters from him received by his father (and then somehow returned to Terentianus). In our opinion, this is an unlikely hypothesis. Rather, we are inclined not to accept the proposed identification for the Terentianus in *SB VI 9636* with the Terentianus who features in the texts from House B167.²⁶

Research on the objects attributed to the B-Level is currently underway. There is as yet no identification of the agents of the archaeological record in this level, because we are still waiting for images from Cairo of the unpublished texts. Here, however, the ar-

²⁵ N. Lewis, "A Veteran in Quest of a Home," *TAPA* 90 (1959) 139-46.

²⁶ See further S. Strassi, *L'archivio di Tiberianus e Terentianus: P.Mich. VIII 467-481 + P.Mich. VIII 51* (forthcoming).

chaeological remains offer interesting insights about the inhabitants of the house. The archaeological record suggests that the residents, presumably a family, were fairly well-to-do. P.Mich. inv. 5413, discovered in room A, is a fragment of Thucydides (*Histories*, Book 2); this suggests that at least one resident was literate.²⁷ Other objects, including four fragments of faience vessels, discovered in Room A, show remarkable craftsmanship, and their quality is among the highest of comparable faience vessels found in Karanis. High quality glass objects were also found in the house.²⁸

Conclusion

In the course of the twentieth century, the archive of Tiberianus has been studied extensively using various approaches. A number of studies have looked at the Latin of the letters, the variant uses of Latin and Greek in the archive, and the social status of Roman soldiers and veterans. With the recovery further documents and artifacts from the archive of Tiberianus, it is necessary to re-assess each of these studies. Our work has focused on re-associating the documents with their archaeological context in order to allow future studies to fully assess all aspects of the evidence. Although the stratigraphic record of Karanis is problematic, we feel that the papyri allow us new avenues to approach this data. Our current tasks are clear: to analyze archaeological data, edit the new papyri, and re-assess those papyri that were previously published. Only by evaluating the texts, artifacts and architecture in tandem will we be able to fully reconstruct the life, work and documents of Tiberianus and Terentianus.

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²⁷ See J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge 2003).

²⁸ D.L. Harden, *Roman Glass from Karanis Found by the University of Michigan Archaeological Expedition in Egypt 1924-29* (Ann Arbor 1936).

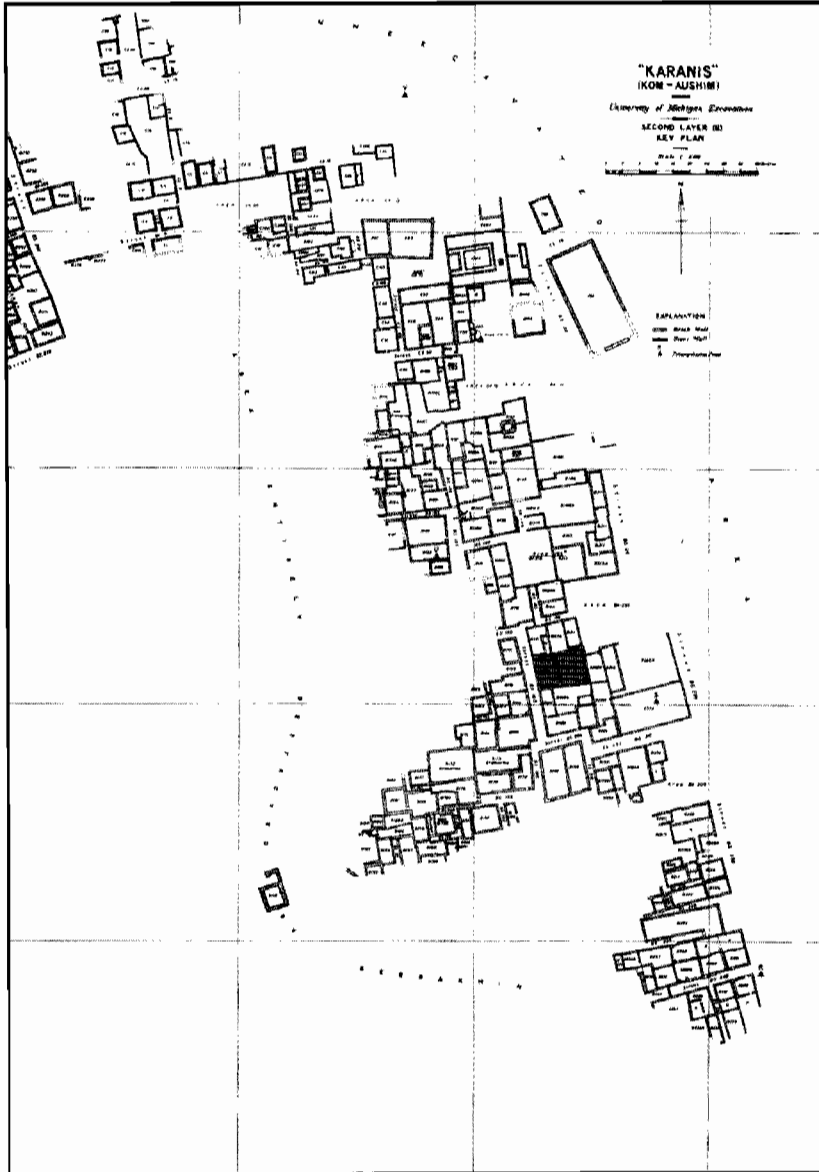


Plate 5: Map of Karanis, showing location of House B167



Plate 6: Insula containing houses C167, C168, C5034, and C5036

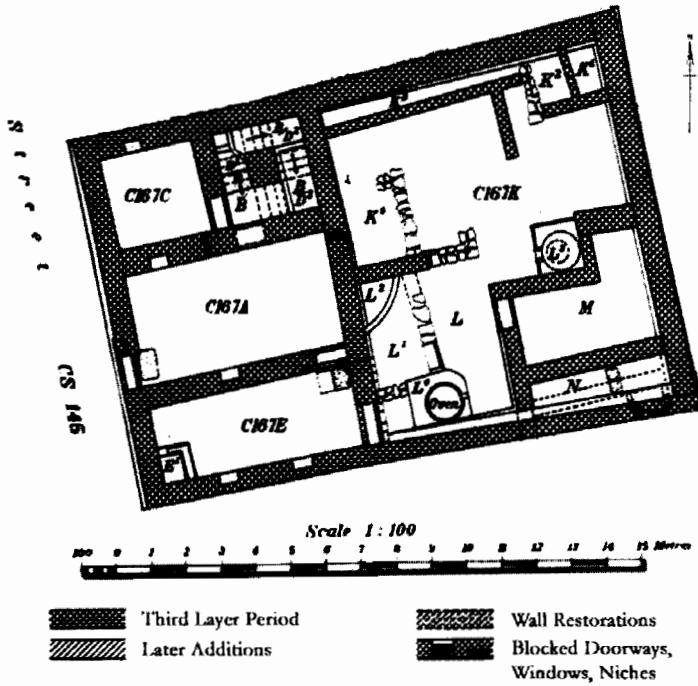


Plate 7: Floorplan of C167