

# THE POLYVALENT NATURE OF THE ALEXANDRIAN ELITE *HYPOGEA*: A CASE STUDY IN THE GRECO-EGYPTIAN CULTURAL INTERACTION IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIODS

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**Abstract:** *Alexandria, the capital of Egypt during the Hellenistic and Roman periods is often hailed as the ancient cosmopolitan center of Mediterranean par excellence. Since the foundation of the city by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., several traditions – along with their representatives, mainly Greek and Egyptian – coexisted and interacted with each other, resulting in the most advanced – by any definition – multicultural society. Underground tombs, known also as Hypogea, constitute the most well preserved archaeological discipline of material remains, which reflects such phenomenon. There are several structures of extensive architecture and decoration, which can shed light on funerary customs, religion, arts, and more importantly, the multicultural identity of their «inhabitants», as developed during a period of more than six centuries. Within this context, Greek-ness and Egypt-ness seem not represent absolute ethnic values, but rather gradually become flexible characterizations dependent on the context in which coexist and interact with each other.*

Alexandrian Necropolis owes its name<sup>1</sup> – City of the Dead – to its extensive size, monumentality as well as function, aspects falling outside the customary Greek funerary context especially in relation to the world of the living. It is comprised by an extensive network of

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<sup>1</sup> The term «necropolis» is mentioned by Strabo who visited the western cemeteries of the city (XVII.1.10).

underground corridors, rooms and galleries – catacombs – of great variety, all corresponding to Alexandria’s multicultural character and social diversity. Monumental funerary structures, also known as *hypogea* for the Alexandrian elite, represent not only the most distinct feature of the Alexandrian Necropolis, but also the most well preserved type of the ancient city’s material evidence. Due to their monumental architecture and extensive decoration, consisting of both Greek and Egyptian elements, they can trigger fruitful discussion on various topics, such as art, architecture, religion, funerary customs, as well as social status and cultural identity of the Alexandrian society. In this text several cases are examined representing greatly the inconsistency in tombs’ architecture, decoration and funerary practices, while corresponding to different aspects and periods of Alexandria’s social and cultural history.

In any case, Alexandrian *hypogea* had a common functional characteristic; they represented both the last residence of the dead and, at the same time, a meeting point between the world of the living and that of the dead – a relationship preserved through extensive funerary and post-funerary rites. Even though both Greek and Egyptian funerary practices and styles were applied, the epithet Alexandrian should also be introduced since varying elements from the aforementioned multicultural structures were used in order to fulfill the diverse needs of the cosmopolitan Alexandrian society over time and place.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE ALEXANDRIAN *HYPOGEA* RECONSIDERED IN THE LIGHT OF NEW EVIDENCE

Most scholars have emphasized the Greek character of these tombs, which reflects the Hellenic identity of their inhabitants and displays their elite social class. Pagenstecher established the «Oikos» model for Alexandrian tombs<sup>2</sup>.

He emphasised their Macedonian origin, reflected in the sequence of rooms from vestibule to the main burial chamber, and assumed that their structural type derived from the form of houses in Northern Greece and elsewhere. Concerning the court of the Alexandrian structures, Pagenstecher suggested that their only function was to host visitors and to provide the inner part with fresh air and light. Adriani, on the other hand, rejected the Macedonian origin of Alexandrian structures based on several differences, and claimed, among others, that Macedonian tombs’ character is more introverted, as result of their covering by a tumulus and lack of court, and more «individual» when compared to the more «collective» Alexandrian *hypogea*. He also pointed out that these were covered with soil and were left abandoned until the time to reuse them would come. Alexandrian tombs, on the

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<sup>2</sup> PAGENSTECHEER, 1919.

contrary, were open to the deceased's family, friends and priests as reflected by the court with the altar, benches and funerary offering tables in the inner chambers such as those found at Mustapha Kamel necropolis<sup>3</sup>. He also, though, suggested an origin from Greek houses<sup>4</sup>.

Yet, the origin of these new structural elements and functions has never been discussed in detail concerning their relation to the Egyptian tradition. Adriani did not accept any kind of relation and identified these unique elements as «eastern» in general<sup>5</sup>.

The first to examine the possibility of Egyptian influence in the Alexandrian elite *hypogea* was El-Atta, who suggested that the Alexandrian peristyle *hypogea* are comparable to noble tombs from the Late Period (25th and 26th Dynasties) necropolis of Assasif in Thebes<sup>6</sup>. In his paper, he discussed in general terms the similarities between the Sidi Gaber Tomb and the Antoniadis Tomb, and Egyptian tombs from the Old Kingdom to 3rd century B.C. Among other things, he compared the Ptolemaic *hypogea* to the tomb of Thyi from the Valley of the Queens and the tomb of Ramosi, a high official from Thebes, both dated to the New Kingdom. An aspect similar to the Alexandrian *hypogea* is the court with rooms opened at three sides. In New Kingdom tombs, the court consists of a hall, sometimes a hypostyle, while in Alexandria the court is open to the air. Finally, both cases are rock-cut structures<sup>7</sup>.

A much more elaborate hypothesis concerning the relation between Alexandrian tombs and the Egyptian funerary tradition was offered by Daszewski. The latter assumed that several structural and functional elements mentioned by many scholars would have been more comprehensible if were seen through the prism of the Egyptian funerary tradition, namely; the adoption of an underground complex with emphasis on the structure's axis, the peristyle, pseudo-peristyle or without peristyle courts and the sequence of rooms ending to a niche. Hence for Daszewski, the Hellenistic *hypogea* of Alexandria seem to have been an *Interpretatio Graeca* of the old funerary traditions developed in the syncretic atmosphere of the Ptolemaic capital<sup>8</sup>.

Daszewski's point of view offered a whole new perspective concerning the origins and nature of Alexandrian *hypogea*, but his argument needs further elaboration. He compared Alexandrian tombs to a specific group of Egyptian Theban tombs in Assasif (Fig. 1), and this was not done directly, but through an intermediate discussion on the *hypogea* of Marina el-Alamein. In addition, there is a chronological break to his discussion i.e. between

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<sup>3</sup> ADRIANI, 1936: 75; 1966: 31.

<sup>4</sup> ADRIANI, 1966: 76, 169-171.

<sup>5</sup> ADRIANI, 1966: 169. This picture is preserved until today, for instance in the monumental work of Venit on Alexandrian tombs (2002), who remains close to the models of Pagenstecher and Adriani.

<sup>6</sup> EL-ATTA, 1992: 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> EL-ATTA, 1992: 15.

<sup>8</sup> DASZEWSKI, 1994: 57-59.

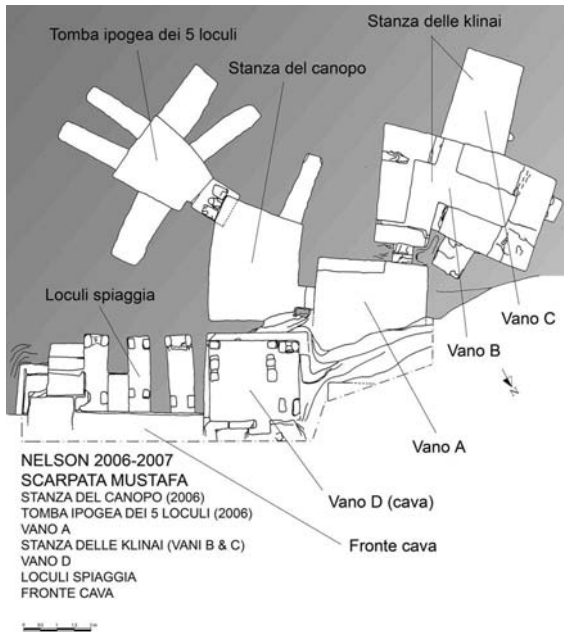


Fig. 1: Plan of the Mustapha Section in the Nelson Island. After Paolo Gallo, Turin University.

later<sup>9</sup>. In the Mustapha Section of the excavation a collective tomb was uncovered consisting of three subsequent rooms (Fig. 1). At the innermost one, the main burial chamber, mummies were discovered dating to the 30th Dynasty or slightly later at the last quarter of the 4th century B.C. The mummies were placed in *loculi* cut into the three walls of the room. Another section was discovered in 2007 laying to the right of the Egyptian funerary complex. This though was a *kline*-room in the Greek-Macedonian style, similar to those found in Alexandrian tombs as for example in the case of the late-4th century/early-3rd century B.C. funerary structure of Hypogeum A in Shatby (Fig. 2). Having said this, it needs to be mentioned that Gallo found a coin of Ptolemy I. The appealing evidence could, thus, raise more questions concerning the origin of Alexandrian tombs. In our case a comparison to Hypogeum A in Shatby, point out striking similarities as a sequence of rectangular-shaped spaces (the Alexandrian tomb is better shaped) ultimately lead to a burial chamber with radiate-like arrangement.

The necropolis at Nelson Island is therefore a unique example of underground gallery with *loculi* for Egyptian, dating just a few decades before the construction of the Alexandrian necropolis (or even at its very beginning). After the *kline*-room discovery, it could be

the 26th Dynasty (about 525 B.C.) and the early stage of the Alexandrian tombs, while the several stages in the development of the latter that may correspond to the gradual process of their assimilation have been largely neglected. We need to look in further detail at the several types of Egyptian influence in Alexandrian tombs, not necessarily in relation to a specific group of Egyptian tombs, but to the broader Egyptian religious tradition as well.

In 2006 the excavations carried out by the University of Turin at the suburb of Nelson Island in Alexandria brought some new evidence to light concerning the influence of Egyptian funerary tradition on the Alexandrian *hypogea*: an Egyptian necropolis dating to the 30th Dynasty (380-343 B.C.) or slightly

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the Nelson Island necropolis see GALLO, 2009: 48-54.

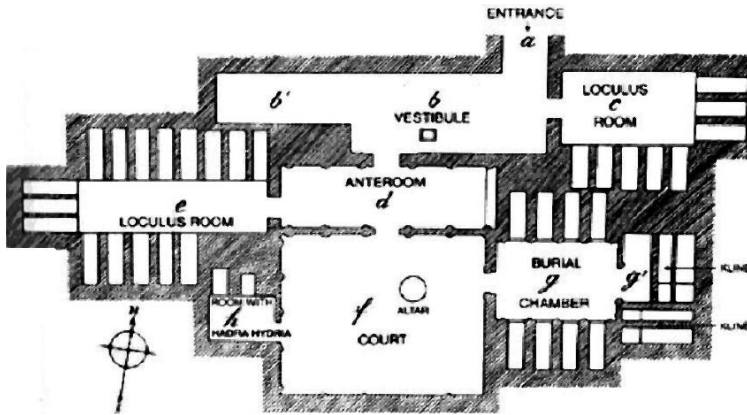


Fig. 2: *Necropolis of Shatby*. Plan of Hypogeum A.

argued that not only the model of underground *loculi* tombs was available in the surrounding area of Alexandria, but also that the Greeks were aware of such structures having a first-hand experience already from the period of Alexander the Great. Nonetheless, the room's exact use and timespan of use are still unclear. However, the similarity of the Nelson Island *kline*-room to the *kline*-room of the Alexandrian *Hypogeum A* and the fact that it is almost attached to an underground tomb, would entail a funerary use.

## THE MUSTAPHA KAMEL<sup>10</sup> TOMB I: A FUNERARY MANSION DEDICATED TO HEYDAY OF HELLENISM IN AEGYPTO<sup>11</sup>

Several tombs of the 3rd century B.C. reflect a monumental Greek style, while Egyptian elements become visible in the form of direct adoptions or adaptations to Hellenised versions. The most representative example is Mustapha Kamel Tomb I. The tomb is situated in the Eastern necropolis and dates to the middle of the 3rd century B.C. onwards – almost a century after the arrival of the first Greeks in Alexandria. It consists of a rock-cut underground structure with a court and three side-rooms with *loculi*. The latter were covered either with a closing slab representing a funerary stele, or with a funerary *kline* as in the case of the central burial at the south façade (Fig. 3).

In terms of architectural decoration, the tomb reflects a profound Hellenic character.

<sup>10</sup> This is an elite funerary complex, situated in the eastern cemeteries of Alexandria, dating from the mid 3rd century B.C. and beyond. Adriani found six collective tombs, of which only three survive today. All of them have similarities of scale and construction. Tomb I will be discussed in this article. For detailed description of the whole complex see ADRIANI, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> The latin expression *in Aegypto* is used in this text in order to emphasize the provenance of those people, who belong to the 2nd or even 3rd generation of Greeks in Egypt.



Fig. 3: The South façade of the Mustapha Kamel Tomb I.

The use of Doric rhythm in funerary monumental structures is reminiscent of several architectural features in Macedonian tombs such as those of Rhomeos and «Phillip II» in Vergina as well as in other areas<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, there are also various elements not related to the Greek funerary tradition. Such a discussion should begin with the pseudo-peristyle court itself. In Alexandria, courts host several rituals and visitors, as implied by the altar and the water supply. In Greece, on the contrary, courts are not attested in tombs because they would not have been of any use. In Alexandrian tombs, visitors would follow the rituals, which could take place in the court related to funerary or post funerary rites, as implied by altar in the middle of it.

In Mustapha Kamel Tomb I, the court's south façade is at the focal point. It is arranged in a tripartite opening (doors), symbolically guarded by six sphinxes. Above the doorframes provision was made for rectangular openings the most central of which is covered by a wall-painting made in an illusion-effect manner over the rock-cut *kline* and standing aligned with the altar. It depicts five of the tomb's inhabitants each of them in a libation act. Their Macedonian origin and elite status are manifested in the painting's style. Men are represented as equestrians dressed in the typical Macedonian fashion while this is even more

<sup>12</sup> For a reconstruction of the Rhomeos and Philip II Tombs façades see DROUGOU, SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI, 1999: 47, fig. 60 and 63, fig. 87.

emphasized by the depiction of the *causia*, the traditional Macedonian hat. Female figures, on the other hand, follow the style of the Greek-origin Alexandrian elite of the Hellenistic Period represented also in other types of evidence such as terracotta figurines<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, these figures are displayed within a «cornice» composed by Greek, Egyptian and Egyptianising elements.

Multi-doorway façades and illusionistic elements have been featured in the Egyptian temple and funerary architecture since the third millennium B.C. and throughout the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman periods<sup>14</sup>. In both Egyptian structures and Mustapha Kamel Tomb I, doorways give access to the focal point of the structure, which in the case of Alexandria is the *kline* at the centre of the wall. The reason for such an arrangement is to bring the cult interest out in the court, while the inner part retains a more «private» sacred character. In the Egyptian tombs the purpose of openings in the form of niches, doors and the like apart from being primary functional was also symbolic i.e. as mental passages through which the deceased might have returned to the world of the living. A similar interpretation however could be suggested for certain architectural features found in the Alexandrian tombs under discussion. Last but not least, the Egyptian influence is also indicated by the Egyptianising style of the doorframes themselves each one conceived as a Hellenised translation of a heavy monumental Egyptian doorframe, with an equally heavy lintel. At any rate, these elements indicate how complex, sophisticated and eclectic the assimilation of Greek and Egyptian elements can be in the context of Hellenistic Period elite tombs reflecting evidently the varying sociopolitical, economic, religious and cultural endeavors of the Alexandrian society in the Hellenistic Period.

The case of Mustapha Pasha tombs concerns Greek elites of Alexandria that are proud to promote their origin, identity and current elite social status, but at the same time they belong to a generation born, raised and eventually dying in Egypt. Compared to their «compatriots» in the «old» Greek world, the Greeks buried in Alexandrian *hypogea* such as those at Mustapha Kamel Necropolis, had their own – local – cultural language as this was formed by the interaction between the Greek and Egyptian art and architecture<sup>15</sup>, religion<sup>16</sup> and royal ideology<sup>17</sup>. In other words, they were Greek Alexandrians or Greeks from Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> See BRECCIA, 1930: plates I-XV.

<sup>14</sup> See ARNOLD, 1999: 149-152. An early example is the chapel of tomb of Meresankh III in Giza (4th Dynasty), where statues of her are situated at the back wall. See SMITH, 1958: 55, fig. 101. A characteristic example of the Roman period is the Taffeh Temple dating to the Augustan Period.

<sup>15</sup> See MCKENZIE, 2007: 80-95.

<sup>16</sup> Such as Sarapis, Isis, Harpocrates. A terracotta statuette of the latter was found in Mustapha necropolis and it is considered to be the earliest of its kind, that has been discovered in Alexandria. See ADRIANI, 1936: 154, fig. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Both Greek and Egyptian royal statues have been discovered in the Serapeum of the Ptolemaic Period, the most important sanctuary of the city. Interestingly some of the Egyptian statues were dedicated by Greek elites, such as the statue base of Arsinoe, dedicated, by Thestor son of Satyros (in situ. TKACZOW, 1993, no. 37). For further discussion see SAVVOPOULOS, 2010.

## THE ANFUSHI NECROPOLIS: AN ELITE EGYPTIAN-ALEXANDRIAN OPTION FOR A BLESSED AFTERLIFE<sup>18</sup>

Major political, cultural and social developments occurred in Alexandria during the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. The Ptolemaic Empire seems to have entered a rather turbulent period partly due to the continuous wars among the Hellenistic kingdoms and partly to the various intramural conflicts among members of the Ptolemaic family. Meanwhile, the Greco-Egyptian interaction – both physical<sup>19</sup> and cultural – reached unprecedented levels. The different ethnic groups went through an intensive course of cross-cultural exchange and interaction, sometimes even fusing the cores of their funerary customs. Hence, Greeks were gradually initiated deeply into Egyptian practices and customs, while Egyptians could now climb up the social ladder often acquire positions of high esteem in state administration and the army after though they had been through an intensive Hellenization process in terms of lifestyle, name and education. This process often resulted in composite cultural expressions and people with double names and flexible identities.

Anfushi II represents a parallel world to the «Hellenic» version of Alexandrian tombs, which seems to have emerged from the 2nd century B.C. onwards. It shows an Egyptian version of Alexandrian elite funerals within though the Alexandrian context of Greco-Egyptian interaction. This means that the tomb apart from being a place where the world of the living and that of the dead closely engaged, also served another important role: it was the proper place for the mummified body to be preserved and resurrected, according to the Egyptian tradition<sup>20</sup>. Such functional capacities are new in Alexandria, and are reflected in tomb structure. In spite of the Egyptian funerary and religious atmosphere however, hieroglyphs are missing from the walls.

As in the case of the Mustapha Kamel necropolis, the cemetery consists of monumental underground burial units arranged around an open-air court. Yet, in Anfushi tomb II a quite different atmosphere becomes apparent already from the moment one begins descending the stairs from the ground level to the underground court. On the first landing

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<sup>18</sup> Anfushi necropolis is situated on the Pharos Island, southeast of the Ras el Tin Palace, dating to the 2nd-1st centuries B.C. Five underground elite tombs are preserved today, which are distinctive for their extensive references to Egyptian tradition – unfortunately in a terrible state – indicating Egyptian funerary practices. According to Botti, mummies were found at the site. Moreover, several Greek decorative elements can be detected in the decoration, implying the cosmopolitan character of Alexandrian society in the late Hellenistic city. The most distinctive representatives of the complex are Tombs I, II and V. For a detailed description see ADRIANI, 1952: 52-128.

<sup>19</sup> There was advance physical interaction in between Greeks and Egyptian of the low and middle level classes, already since the middle of the 3rd century B.C. (FRASER, 1972: 71-72, and 75-76), which continued in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. (LA'DA, 2003: 166-167; GOUDRIAAN, 1988: 118).

<sup>20</sup> Traces of mummies were discovered in Anfushi as well as in the neighbour necropolis of Ras el Tin. See BOTTI, 1902: 14; BRECCIA, 1914: 9; 1921: 67; ADRIANI, 1952: 54.



of the stairs there is the following Egyptian-style wall scene (Fig. 4). The dead man, dressed as Egyptian priest, is depicted between Horus – the falcon-headed god – and a Pharaonic couple (or possibly a Ptolemaic royal couple<sup>21</sup>) with the latter offering him a jar. On the second landing, however, it is the dead man, accompanied again by Horus, which stands in front of the enthroned Osiris and offers him a jar. Hence, entering the tomb one realises that he is passing from the kingdom of the Ptolemies and realm of the living, to the kingdom of Osiris and the realm of the dead.

Two monumental gates at the courtyard, each guarded by two sphinxes<sup>22</sup>, lead to the vestibule of each burial unit. Each gate carries an Egyptian style segmental pediment. Entering to the burial unit Rooms 1 and 2, the visitors stand in the vestibule of the tomb, which preserves elaborate wall decoration, in two different phases and two different styles (Fig. 5). The walls' lower part is decorated with a painted imitation of alabaster orthostats. In the upper half two different phases can be detected; the earliest one, imitating Greek style isodomic blocks, was later covered by an Egyptian-style wall decoration of three checkerboard-style horizontal bands. The latter were constituted by three rows of black and white



Fig. 4: *Anfushi II*. The Upper landing of the stairs.



Fig. 5: *Anfushi II*. Rooms 1 and 2, towards the *naiskos* on the back wall of the burial chamber.

<sup>21</sup> Adriani identified the male figure as Osiris (1952: 64) even though he lacks all the typical Osiris' attributes such as the atef crown, while Botti as a king (1902: 13). It seems that Botti's assumption is safer, since the male figure does not preserved any of the characteristic attributes of Osiris, which are attested in the Egyptian funerary art. Instead, the discovery of several Ptolemaic statues in Pharaonic dress such as those found in the Pharos lighthouse water area, indicate that it was common for the Ptolemies and their queens to be displayed in Pharaonic and Isis dress respectively. See catalogues of ASHTON, 2001b and STANWICK, 2002.

imitations of tiles separated by narrow yellow-blue horizontal bands imitating alabaster. Egyptian *pschent*-crown, *hemhemet*-headdress and feather-crowns are depicted on white large tiles set within the middle checkerboard zone of the wall. Yellow octagons and small black squares were apparently decorating the ceiling vault of the room<sup>23</sup>. It can thus be ascertained that the decoration of the tomb's inner-structure adheres to the Egyptian conception of the realm of the dead; the realm where Osiris is the king and whose crowns are depicted on the wall<sup>24</sup>.

From the anteroom, an elaborate Egyptian style doorframe leads us to the burial chamber. It is composed by segmental pediment, papyriform column and an Egyptian broken lintel, typical feature of the Egyptian temple architecture<sup>25</sup>. In front of the posts that form the uprights of the doorframe, two high bases, painted to imitate alabaster, supported sphinxes with their heads turned toward the vestibule (Room 1). The bases were probably added during the redecoration of the room in Egyptian style<sup>26</sup>. As in the anteroom, the burial chamber's walls are also decorated with the Egyptian checkerboard motif interrupted by larger tiles with painted Egyptian crowns. The Egyptian double *naiskos* carved on the chamber's back wall apart from alluding, admittedly rather convincingly, to additional spaces laying beyond the innermost – sacred – area of the tomb, it also pointed to where the dead was supposed to spend his afterlife and where the realm of the dead, ruled by Osiris, was located<sup>27</sup>.

The only actual Greek-style decorative element is the «Trellis and Tapestry» painted decoration of the vaulted room once decorated with multi-figure scenes from Greek mythology as well<sup>28</sup>. Even though it does not seem to have been involved in the main funer-

<sup>22</sup> They are preserved only in the archaeological records.

<sup>23</sup> For detailed description see VENIT 2002: 82. Zones of tiles in Anfushi Tombs could be characterised as archaizing. Such decoration is attested both in religious and funerary structures of Egypt, since the 12th Dynasty like in the case of the funerary chapel of Amenemhat in Beni Hassan, which interiors seemed to imitate elite houses. See in detail SMITH, 1958: 93-94, fig. 165. According to Venit the Alexandrian tiles imitate Egyptian palatial decoration (2002: 75) such as those of the palace of Amenhotep III at Malkata (HAYES, 1959: 245-257), the palace of Akhenaten at Amarna (HAYES, 1959: 290) the Palace of Ramses II at Qantir (Ibid: 332-338), and the palace of Ramses III in Medinet Habu and Tel el Yahudieh (Ibid: 367).

<sup>24</sup> Kákosy further states that the popularity of the crowns in funerary structures and terracotta figurines in the Hellenistic and Roman periods is probably due to the emphasis on the royal aspect of Osiris, the prototype of the deceased, characteristic of that era (1983: 56-60).

<sup>25</sup> Doorways of Egyptian temples are often adorned with a broken lintel for symbolic and practical reasons, for example in order the statue of the god, sometimes on a sacred boat, to be carried out to the public during the annual celebration. Accordingly, the use of the broken lintel in Alexandrian tombs can be interpreted as a funerary version of the same concept concerning the resurrection of the dead and his communication with the world of the living. For discussion on the Broken lintel see LARKIN, 1994; VENIT, 2002: 94.

<sup>26</sup> ADRIANI, 1966: 193; VENIT, 2002: 82.

<sup>27</sup> This idea is further confirmed in Anfushi V, room 4 where a similar elaborate *naiskos* is depicted on the wall, this time serving as slab for a loculus that used to host a mummy. See ADRIANI, 1952: pl. XXXVIII, fig. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Adriani (1952: 72-79; 111-112) interpreted these scenes as Dionysiac, which would be unique among Alexandrian tombs. However, the poor preservation of those scenes does not allow such interpretations.

ary practice, the character of which remains largely Egyptian, it enhances the burial expenditure and indicates that the deceased was member of a cosmopolitan elite with Greek inspirations.

We should also be aware of the fact that the cemetery was situated in a district where the vast majority of the population was Egyptian. In addition, Anfushi II represents the only case of a Ptolemaic Alexandrian tomb with Egyptian-style scenes, such as the priest depicted in the wall painting of the stairs leading to the court. A comparison with other types of material evidence indicates the important role of Egyptian priesthood throughout the Ptolemaic Period<sup>29</sup>. Priests had quite an active role both in royal and in religious matters in Alexandria. Therefore, the special Egyptian character of Anfushi Tomb II might have been in accordance to the Egyptian origin of the tomb's owners of which, at least, one was of priestly status. Be that as it may, the fact that a Royal couple is depicted in the same wall scene suggests that the deceased were people of high status whilst an assumption that these were actually involved in royal affairs is rather attractive. The fact that Greek names were inscribed on the walls and grave goods of the tomb does not in itself argue for the Greek provenance of the tomb's owners. As has already been mentioned above Egyptians desiring to ascent socially in the Ptolemaic state machinery were required to pass through a Hellenization process in terms of their name, education and several aspects of public life. In their private life however they could have preserved their Egyptian identity and name relatively intact<sup>30</sup>.

Gabbari's today lost Ghirgis Tomb represents a more composite/balanced version of bilingual visual vocabulary in the late-Ptolemaic *hypogea* (Fig. 6). A funerary *kline* and a *naiskos* are carved on the back wall of the chamber tomb. On both the left and right sides of the *naiskos* there is an Egyptian-style zone with small square tiles. As in Anfushi II,

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<sup>29</sup> Three statues of the *Naophoros* priest type have been discovered in the Serapeum, dating to the 3rd century B.C. They belong to Memphite high priests of Ptah, indicating the important role of the Memphis priesthood in the royal house of Alexandria, throughout the Ptolemaic Period. Two statues are dedicated to Pshenptah (Greco-Roman Museum 17533, 17534), while the third one belongs to Petobastis (Greco-Roman museum 27806). Priests of Memphis contributed considerably to the formation and development of the Ptolemaic ideology, the connection of the Ptolemaic family with the Egyptian religion, notably in the cases of Arsinoe II and Berenike II, who are also represented in the Serapeum of Alexandria, while they served as advisors at the royal court. Later during Ptolemaic Period, it was the priesthood of Memphis that supported the recovery of the Alexandrian royal house after the rebellion in Thebes, while there must even have been intermarriage with members of the royal court (HÖLBL, 2001: 222). Also, the statue of Hor son of Hor, priest of Thoth during the reign of Cleopatra VII, was found in the city centre. In contrast to other statues of priests, the statue of Hor represents a totally different case. The priest is depicted with Greek style portrait characteristics and Egyptian style dress, while the rendering is also in Egyptian style. It seems that the statue aimed to promote both aspects of Egyptian identity combined with partially Greek lifestyle, and elite social status, and not exclusively the priestly identity of Hor. For Hor see BORCHHARDT, 1930: 39-40, pl. 128; POULSEN, 1938: 31; GRAINDOR, 1939: 138, no. 74; SNIJDER, 1939: 262-269; BOTHMER, 1960: 170-173; GRIMM *et al.*, 1975: 19, no. 16; BIANCHI, 1988: 55-56; TKACZOW, 1993, no. 179; WALKER, HIGGS, 2001: 182-183, no. 190.

<sup>30</sup> For the process of Hellenisation of the Egyptian elites see LA'DA, 2003: 166-167. Also for the case of people with double names see CLARYSSE, 1985, 57-66.



Fig. 6: The Back wall of the burial chamber with the *kline*, the *naiskos* and the armature carved on the wall.

Girghis' Tomb provides evidence for the deceased's profession and his travel to the afterlife. An armature, probably of the deceased, depicted on either side of the *naiskos* makes it very tempting to assume that he may have been a military of rather elevated status implied also by the tomb's general appearance. If we had a picture of the transition to the afterlife, we would have been able to assume that the dead, like in Anfushi, have to pass through the gates en route to resurrection: a series of archi-

tecturally defined passages given symbolic meaning as evocations of the path of the deceased toward resurrection.

In symbolic terms, the deceased should have presented himself in front of the gates to the other world as a military man. This was the chosen image from his life to represent him in his liminal stage between the world of the living and the underworld. After his transition, there was no further need for the armature, so it was left behind. In this case, the actual structure of the tomb still partially belongs to the world of the living: there is space for including elements concerning the lifetime of the dead. The most sacred area, the new house of the dead, is implied to be behind the *naiskos* at the back wall, as illusionistically represented by the «double»-style *naiskos*. The funerary bed in front of the *naiskos* must have represented the liminal stage of the deceased, between the world of the living and that of the dead; his last stop before getting in. This could be the moment of the *prothesis* rite during the funeral. In addition, it can also imply the point of timeless rest for the dead on (in fact, in) his final *kline*.

The dead in Ghirgis' tombs might share similar multicultural identity with those of Anfushi. He can be a Hellenised Egyptian Alexandrian, but it could represent also the opposite a Greek or even mixed Alexandrian that attended an Egyptian style funeral. Yet emphasis was placed on the promotion of an elite social status, the prestigious profession of the deceased as well as religious and funerary preferences. Thus, it may be supposed that the deceased possibly was a Hellenised Egyptian of relatively high rank in the Ptolemaic army<sup>31</sup>. Literary sources are often quite illuminating on such cases. Nonetheless, an opposite

<sup>31</sup> See ADRIANI, 1952: 52-128.

assumption could also stand: he may have been a Greek Alexandrian initiated into the Egyptian religion. Both assumptions however are placed in a common frame: at least from the middle Ptolemaic Period onwards, the correspondence between style and ethnic identity is not clear-cut. Consequently, the scholar of Alexandrian funerary customs should be rather flexible in interpreting identity within the polyvalent nature of the Alexandrian multicultural society.

## ***LIVING AS ALEXANDRIAN, DYING AS AN EGYPTIAN, FACING THE ROMAN: REFLECTIONS OF ADVANCED MULTICULTURALISM IN THE ELITE HYPOGEA OF ROMAN ALEXANDRIA***

The end of political independence for Alexandria and Egypt did not mark the end of the cultural developments initiated in the Hellenistic Period. Instead, cultural interaction seems to have been more intense than ever, resulting in a quite advanced level of multiculturalism. After hundreds of years of ethnic and cultural encounters, the Romans faced a very complicated social situation in an already deeply integrated community. They tried, however, to make social distinctions based on ethnic criteria. At the top of the Roman social order in Egypt were those who held Roman citizenship. Then followed the *Astoi*, in other words the inhabitants of the three major «Hellenic» cities of Egypt i.e. Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemais. These cities had a more Greek character than the rest of the Egyptian *chora*, even if their population was composite. It worths noting that among them, Alexandrian citizens seemed to have had the highest prestige<sup>32</sup>.

In Roman Alexandria Egyptian funerary customs were widely applied, indicating the desire of the dead to achieve a blessed afterlife according to the Egyptian tradition. Nevertheless, a funerary program is rarely represented in the traditional Egyptian idiom while a combination of Greek and Egyptian themes and forms, either in juxtaposition or in more hybrid forms is usually favored<sup>33</sup>.

Several Roman funerary slabs resemble a conclusive and rather composite version of Alexandrian *loculi* slabs and funerary *stelae*, composed by the Egyptian *naiskos*, as known from Anfushi and Ras el Tin necropoleis<sup>3</sup>, and the *stèle*-style slabs with self-presentation, known already from the 4th century B.C., for instance, at the Soldier's tomb<sup>34</sup>. Returning to

<sup>32</sup> LA'DA, 2003: 168-174.

<sup>33</sup> Apart from the examples examined in this paper see the cases of Trigrane Tomb, Stagni Tomb, Persephone Tombs in the Hall of Caracalla. See VENIT, 1997: 701-729; 1999: 641-649; 2002: 145-167; GUIMIER-SORBETS, 1999: 180-182; 2003: 533-575, 589-631; GUIMIER-SORBETS, SEIF EL DIN, 1997: 355-410; 2001: 129-136.

<sup>34</sup> See BLANCHE-BROWN, 1957.



Fig. 7: *The Gabbari Stele*. Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum 3215.

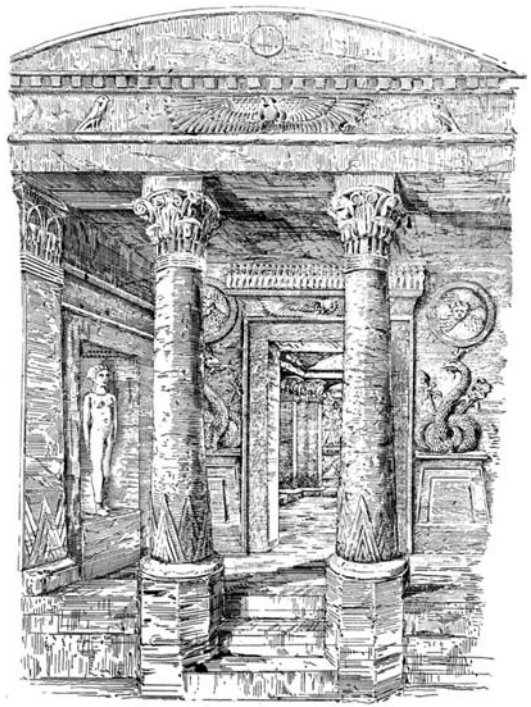


Fig. 8: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The façade of the Main Tomb. Rowe 1942, Pl. V.

the Egyptian *naiskos*-style slab this is intended to host the image of the dead, usually depicted in a Greek-style dress, in accordance to their public lifestyle, education and cultural identity. Still, it is important to sustain our interpretation within the Egyptian religious environment. A Greek-Alexandrian style deceased could choose to follow such a religious life, and moreover such a manner of funerary practice that could result in a proper afterlife according to the Egyptian tradition as it was perceived in Alexandria since the Ptolemaic Period. Therefore, Alexandrians are depicted within their new, afterlife house, the realm of the dead, architecturally represented with an Egyptian chapel. A characteristic example of this picture is the so-called Gabbari Stele, dating to the 1st century A.D. (Fig. 7)<sup>35</sup>. The image of the dead clearly reflects a Greek-Alexandrian public lifestyle, Greek education and so forth. Yet, this Greek-Alexandrian figure is displayed within an Egyptian «cornice» – an Egyptian style *naiskos* – which clearly indicates that this elite Alexandrian followed the Egyptian funerary tradition, in order to achieve the desired afterlife<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum 3215. See PAGENSTECHEER, 1919: 123, fig. 73; PENSABENE, 1983, no. 9, pl. XI, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Similar examples have been found in Abusir el-Meleq, where figure-shaped coffin lids present the dead in Greek dress, while mummified. As in Alexandria, it was the image of the deceased with which he would pass into the realm of the dead, and this image was a matter of choice in terms of available options of portraying the dead. See RIGGS, 2006: 139-174.



Figs. 9 and 10: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The Male and female statues in the *pronaos* of the Main Tomb.

Regarding the elite *hypogea* of the Roman Period, the Main Tomb at *Kom el-Shogafa* is the most notable representing a category on its own. It is the most well-preserved and luxurious tomb in ancient Alexandria. It is also the most monumental funerary structure in Alexandria illustrating in the best way the development of the tomb-funerary temple idea, as this had begun been attested in the Hellenistic Period, into a funerary mansion with distinctive Egyptian architectural and decorative elements. The façade of the tomb is shaped in the form of an Egyptian *naos* i.e. with two columns between two pilasters-form *antae* (Fig. 9). The whole decorative program of the façade is explicitly Egyptian. The two pilasters are carved with papyrus at their feet and crowned with anta capitals in the Egyptian composite form. The columns rise from disc bases and follow the scheme of the pilasters. They carry a heavy impost block and an architrave with a plain epistyle, a torus moulding, a continuous frieze centered on a winged sun-disc that is flanked by Horus-Falcons and capped by a row of dentils, and a segmental pediment with a disc centred in the tympanum. Still, it could be identified as Egyptian only within the Alexandrian context. Hieroglyphs are lacking as usual, while several Hellenistic and Roman elements have been inserted in various areas of the inner structure.

Moving into the *pronaos*, in front of the façade, the «visitor» stands between two statues, which are placed in niches in Egyptian style on the two lateral walls (Figs. 10 and 11).



Fig. 11: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The central wall scene of the burial chamber. Rowe 1942, Pl. V, Fig. 1.

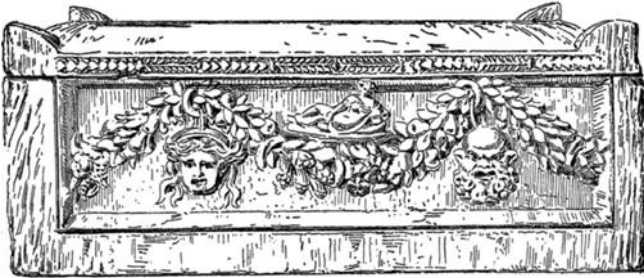


Fig. 12: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The central sarcophagus of the burial chamber. Rowe 1942, Pl. V, Fig. 2.

out the different social strata of the middle class. Therefore, the role of such tomb images, whether presented in statues or wall scenes, was part of various rituals such as the Opening-of-the-mouth ceremony<sup>39</sup>. After the performance of the ceremony the mummy, or statue, would have been «able» to eat, breathe, see, hear and enjoy the offerings and provisions brought to them by the priests and officials, in other words to sustain the Ka (living spirit). In the case of the Main Tomb the ritual would have obtained a distinctive Alexandrian form. Unfortunately, there has been no evidence, so far, that could add more to our knowledge on the ritual. Given the possibility that the Alexandrian statues functioned like Ka-statues there might have been an added poignancy. By emerging from their niches/false doors they greet the living accompanied by the recently departed. Hence, the entire design of the *pronaos* becomes liminal scene. Last but not least, the reason for the portrait-body

These statues represent two of the tomb's owners, combining an Egyptian-style body with naturalistic individual portrait characteristics. According to these characteristics, they date to the Flavian Period, most probably from Vespasian's reign (69-79 A.D.)<sup>37</sup>. Since the Old Kingdom statues of the deceased pharaoh are attested in funerary complexes such as the statue group of Menkaure (Mycerinus) and his queen from the Valley Temple in Giza<sup>38</sup>. The surprising similarity of the dresses the Alexandrian and Giza statues' are in has indicated that the Kom el-Shogafa statues are dressed in the archaic Egyptian fashion. Gradually, the practice spread down into society while by the era of the Middle Kingdom it was widespread through-

<sup>37</sup> VENIT, 2002: 129.

<sup>38</sup> See in detail SMITH, 1958: 59.

<sup>39</sup> DAVID, 1999: 154.



combination has been extensively discussed in similar cases outside Alexandria such as the Fayum portraits as well as other provincial burials of the Roman Period. The use of naturalistic portraits has been interpreted from a funerary point of view as choice of the dead in order for them to enter the process after death in such an image<sup>40</sup>, while reflecting, at the same time, a higher elite status promoting their education and Roman life-style. Similarly, the Alexandrian portraits promote the high social status of the dead – and their relatives – in Alexandria, following the trends of the Roman Period<sup>41</sup>.

The back wall of the ante-room forms the façade of the burial chamber, which opens into the chamber through an Egyptian style doorway. The doorframe is bound by a torus moulding and supports a cavetto cornice decorated with a winged sun disc and crowned with a frieze of rampant *uraei*-cobra; those at the centre are presented frontally, whereas those at either side turn slightly outward. The doorway is flanked at each side by an Agathos Daimon, standing on an Egyptian style basis, representing the guardian of burial chamber's entrance. Each wears the *pschent*-crown, but it also supports a Thyrsus and Kerykeion in its coils.

The burial chamber hosts three niches in cruciform arrangement, which contain typical Roman stone sarcophagi with garlands and masks, while the upper part of the niches is decorated with an Egyptian style scene (Figs. 11-13). The back wall of the central niche presents the funeral of Osiris, who is laid on his royal lion-shaped bed, surmounted by Thoth, Horus and Anubis in the role of the priest. This scene is quite a typical theme

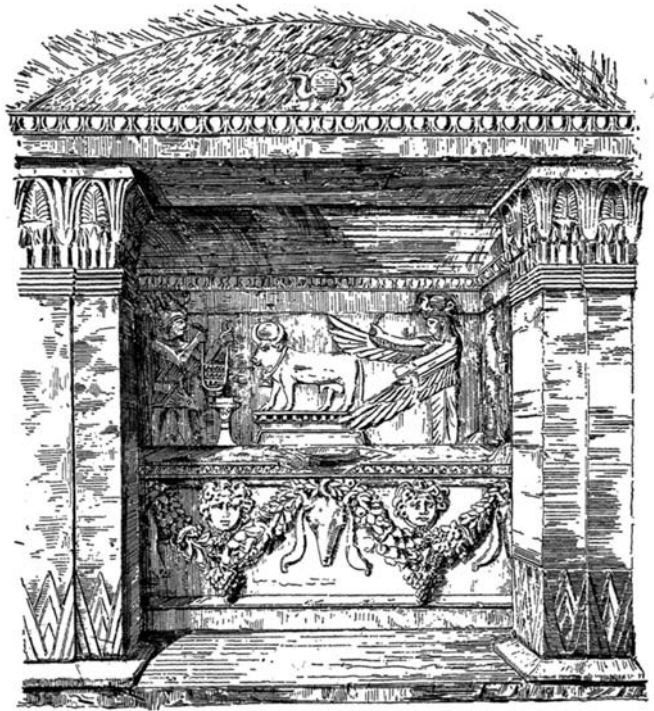


Fig. 13: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The right niche of the burial chamber. Rowe 1942, Pl. V, Pl. VIII.

<sup>40</sup> RIGGS, 2006: 174.

<sup>41</sup> More portraits in sculpture have been discovered in Western Necropolis: a female bust in white marble (Greco-Roman Museum no. 3516), which was found in Kom el-Shogafa; a bust of a young male also in white marble (Greco-Roman Museum no. 3339); and another bust of a youth male in plaster, which was found over a sarcophagus along with another one. All of them date to the 2nd century A.D. For the two male busts see BRECCIA, 1922: 182-183; for the female bust, *ibid*: 192-192.

throughout the history of Egyptian funerary tradition, and also in Alexandria<sup>42</sup>. Interestingly, scholars have observed «mistakes» in the scene such as the depiction of three Canopic jars instead of four. Yet, by the time the Main Tomb was designed, the use of Canopic jars had long disappeared from the canonical panoply of funerary equipment, since are absent from the Egyptian burials already since the Late Period onwards. What is being represented here is not a detailed picture of a canonical Pharaonic Egyptian burial, but rather an evocation of the same by means of the appointment of the vignettes with elements that are reminiscent of the Pharaonic funerary ambiance. In other words, the importance lays on the meaning of the narrative rather than the pictorial detail, while the central theme remains the same. If nothing else, such scenes imply a more punctual approach as well as a deeper penetration of the Alexandrian society into the Egyptian funerary tradition. This becomes clearer in the less projected scenes on the lateral walls of the three niches<sup>43</sup>.

On the back walls of each of the two lateral niches, an imagined scene of a Pharaoh venerating the Apis-bull is presented. Apis stands on a podium, while Isis, on the right, embraces the god with her open-winged arms. The bull figure seems to represent a statue on a base, like this discovered in the Alexandrian Serapeum, rather than an actual bull<sup>44</sup>. Taking into account the exceptional monumentality and precise dating of the tomb, the participation of «Pharaohs» in the scenes can lead us to a series of questions. Who were the owners of the most monumental tomb that has been preserved in Alexandria? What could their role have been in the public life of Alexandria? Would it be possible that the wall scenes on the back walls of the two lateral niches to represent the Roman Period Alexandrian cult of Apis? Is there a political-ideological symbolism behind these scenes?

Indeed, the monumentality and high quality of the architectural and sculptural decoration indicate that these people were of the highest social status. The depiction of pharaohs and the statue forms of the Apis-bull could be examined in relation to Roman acts of ideology and socio-political propaganda. During his visit to Egypt, Vespasian, whose reign corresponds with the date of the tomb, participated in rites for the Apis-bull in Alexandria<sup>45</sup>. If the tomb's residents were indeed of the highest social rank, they should have

<sup>42</sup> For a Pharaonic parallel see the tomb of Sennedjem, dating to the 19th Dynasty. SMITH, 1958: 220, fig. 373.

<sup>43</sup> In the six lateral scenes of the niches are related to the various stages of the process of qualification of the dead for rebirth after death. These scenes bring a series of further thoughts concerning funerary beliefs in Alexandria. Among other things, it is the most detailed case with a detailed reference to Egyptian style rituals, known mostly from the Egyptian chora. They are often reproduced on the surface of mummies or on panels of funerary stelae, like the one from Saqqara, now in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden (no. 33): the dead is presented between two mummified divinities that are ready to start mummifying him with bands of linen. The position at the areas of the tomb that were less visible for the audience (relatives and other non-priestly people, who would stand in the Pronaos) is related to their strictly funerary function, dealing with the process after death exclusively, and having no actual message to transfer onto the visitors of the tombs.

<sup>44</sup> See BOTTI, 1987: 120; 1898: 319-320; BRECCIA, 1914: 99, fig. 23; 1922: 115, 142; KATER-SIBBES, VERMASEREN, 1978: 25, no. 89, TKACZOW, 1993, no. 161; ASHTON, 2005: 9.

<sup>45</sup> According to Venit, the Pharaoh of the Main Tomb represents Vespasian (2002: 143).

been involved in Roman Alexandria's public affairs such as the relation with the Emperor. Of course, for Alexandria and Egypt, the idea of royal authority was often manifested in the Pharaonic image since the Ptolemaic Period and continued to be preserved in temples of the *chora* in the Roman Period<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, these Pharaonic figures might have conveyed propagandistic ideological and socio-political messages related to, but not only, the desire of the Main Tomb's owners (and possibly of their relatives too) to forge a relationship with the Roman «pharaohs» of Egypt in order to display their own high status in Alexandrian society. The two images of Anubis – one with a snake tail – depicting him as guard on the back side of the entrance wall dressed in a typical Roman military costume, thus corroborating in a way the Roman elements of the tomb, concerns not only the owners of the tomb, but also Egyptian gods that could participate in the funerary program.

## HELLENIZATION, EGYPTIANIZATION AND ROMANIZATION TOWARDS *ALEXANDRIANIZATION*

The above brief case study attempted to show that during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods there was a continuous process of incorporating and adaptating Greek, Egyptian and Roman cultural elements into the life and afterlife of Alexandria. The overall picture corresponds well to the concept of acculturation, in terms of cultural change, emerging as the outcome of the contact between different cultures and people. It becomes also clear that this process of change is multidimensional and multidirectional, in the words of Naerebout, multidimensional because «it regards both observable (dress, language use, food etc) and unobservable (beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings) characteristics», and multidirectional because «the changes occur on all sides: all parties involved in the contact are affected»<sup>47</sup>. This process could be further illustrated with more specific terminology concerning our case study in an attempt to make the Alexandrian multiculturalism rise to prominence even further.

Hence, *Alexandrianization* could be described as the process of perception and further adaptation of Greek, Egyptian and Roman cultural elements in the life of Alexandria, within the cultural, political and social context of the city, as it was developed during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. In other words, Alexandrianization could refer to the process of Greco-Egyptian interaction from an «Alexandrian» point of view. What is, therefore, implied by the term Alexandrianization is a continuous process and not so much a specific moment, task or outcome.

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<sup>46</sup> ASHTON, 2005: 8-10.

<sup>47</sup> NAEREBOUT, 2005: 542.



Fig. 14: *Kom el-Shogafa*. The images of Anubis in Roman military dress. Rowe 1942, Pl. V, Pl. X, figs 1 and 2.

Therefore, the most basic concept of Alexandrianization concerning the perception and adaptation of the idea of the tomb structure, at least the elite one, is both as last residence of the dead and as a funerary temple, and a meeting place of the living with the dead. This must have been an inspiration originally deriving from the Egyptian tradition that was later adapted on the needs of the Greek Alexandrians such as those buried in Shatby tomb A and Mustapha Pasha tomb I.

In the late Ptolemaic Period, Alexandrianization facilitated a wider gamut of funerary needs. The Egyptian mummification was applied whereas the Egyptian religious elements became dominant in terms of funerary religion and more visually detectable in the tombs' architecture and decoration as opposed to earlier examples. However, Egyptian funerary practices were applied within an Alexandrian context, acknowledging the Greek aspect of the city and regardless if these were applied on burials of Egyptian, Greek or mixed Alexandrians.

The bicultural character of the Late Ptolemaic elite *hypogea* display the composite and flexible «texture» of the multicultural Alexandrian «dress», including messages about the profession and social status, religious preferences, and lifestyle. Direct messages about ethnic identity are missing, since after the long process of Greco-Egyptian interaction and the great socio-political developments of the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., boundaries between the different ethnic and social groups of Alexandria seemed no longer impenetrable. Within this flexible

picture, Egyptian funerary tradition represents the common ground for a large part of the late Ptolemaic Period elite in Alexandria, which might have consisted of Greeks, mixed, Hellenised or Egyptians. Besides, all the aforementioned ethnic distinctions seem to have lost their actual meaning since, within this context at least, they had all become Alexandrians. Of course the proportion of Greek or Egyptian people, structures and customs varied enormously. It is from this period onwards though that these terms will depend on each other as far as their meaning is concerned within this advanced Greco-Egyptian interaction.

During the Roman Period the Egyptian funerary elements become more popular by means of the systematic Alexandrianization of the Egyptian funerary repertoire. On the one hand, there is a much wider repertoire of Egyptian elements in terms of content, styles and combination with Greek elements such as juxtaposition and/or the merging of styles and themes, while Roman aspects were also gradually adapting in the Alexandrian cultural *modus vivendi*. Hence, it seems to be clear that after three centuries or more of cross-cultural interaction, both Greek and Egyptian repertoires were considered as integral components of the Alexandrian cultural expression. In sum although terms like «Greek» and «Egyptian» could well be referring to ethnically distinct groups, in certain contexts they often merged and permitted the «Alexandrian» to emerge. It seems clear now that the long course of Greco-Egyptian interaction in Alexandria was culminated by the emergence of the «Alexandrian identity». The latter had its own hybrid cultural language and expressive means making sometimes the search for Greek or Egyptian *comparanda* a rather unnecessary process.