

One Final Message: The Painted Programs of Alexandrian Tombs

Rachel Witt

College of Arts and Science, Vanderbilt University

Art historical analysis of the Greco-Roman tombs in Alexandria suggests that the tomb owners' synthesized iconographic elements belonging to Greek, Roman, and Egyptian artistic styles. Classical decorative motifs and figures reflect the tombs owners' understanding and acceptance of Greco-Roman practices. Tomb owners incorporate Egyptian figures into the funerary spaces, yet the compositions lack the homogeneity and religious connotations present in previous Egyptian painted programs. The seeming defiance of representation indicates that the tomb owners were not interested in correctly rendering Egyptian ideology; rather, the tomb owners were interested in painting Egyptian figures for the sake of each figure's supernatural and protective meaning. Synthesis of the Classical and Egyptian funerary elements demonstrate the tomb owners' decorative predilections and desires to communicate one final message concerning beauty, political allegiance, and religious identity.

The Greco-Roman tombs in Alexandria synthesize iconographic elements and create funerary programs unique to the Ancient World. The cultural fusion of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian style is demonstrated in the painted programs of Alexandrian tombs dating to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The visual evidence from within the tombs indicates that the tombs' owners were familiar with and understood the symbolic meaning of Egyptian figures; yet, the funerary figures rendered are problematic because they lack the homogeneity and religious connotations that are present in previous Egyptian painted programs. Egyptian ideology remained potent and powerful as it was maintained in the correct and standardized portrayal of religious figures; however the painted Egyptian figures in the Ptolemaic and Roman tombs are not rendered in a homogeneous manner. Instead they are superficial and mannered versions of their previous selves. Moreover, Egyptian funerary figures showed the rites necessary for the deceased to reach the afterlife while the figures dating to after the dynastic period do not. The apparent defiance of representation indicates that the tomb owners were not interested in correctly rendering Egyptian ideology; instead, they were interested in painting figures for the sake of each figure's supernatural and protective meaning.

The painted images within each tomb also display the creative license and agenda of the deceased. The Egyptian-styled figures are compositionally symmetrical and compliment the corresponding Classical paintings that are frequently present in the same tombs. The Classical images are rendered in a manner that

demonstrates the tomb owner's understanding and acceptance of Classical tradition and practices. Together, the Classical and Egyptian images demonstrate the tomb owner's desire to communicate one final message concerning humanity, political allegiance, or cult worship. In ensemble, the paintings create unique, beautiful, and luxurious places, infusing each tomb with a final message to surround the deceased for all eternity.

First, I will provide historical background of Alexandria, beginning with Alexander the Great's conquest and subsequent Greek occupation and ending with Roman rule over Egypt. I will also comment on the appeal of Egyptian culture, literature, iconography, and architecture to Greeks and Romans. My visual analysis will focus on the painted programs of Alexandrian tombs dating from the second century BC to the second century AD: the Saqiya Tomb at the Wadrian complex, the Nebengrab Tomb, the Seiglin Tomb, and the Main Tomb of the Kom el-Shoqafa complex, and the Tigrane Pasha Street Tomb. I have selected painted programs from these tombs because they are well preserved or have published drawings of their interiors. Despite the preservation, the photographs of the paintings are sometimes of poor quality. For my analysis, I occasionally have to rely on the visual analysis provided by the authors and art historians. Specifically, I rely heavily on the visual analyses by Marjorie S. Venit, an art historian and archaeologist interested in the intersections of cultures and ethnicities in the ancient Mediterranean world. In my analysis, I discuss the artistic conventions of three separate cultures: Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. For the purpose of the paper I refer to all Egyptian elements as

“Egyptian” or “Dynastic.” I refer to Graeco-Roman decorations as “Classical” unless the literature, publications, or mythology I cite refers to a particular element as “Greek” or “Roman.”

Historically, Alexandria was a strategic city in the Mediterranean world. Before Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, the social identity of the Egyptians had been expressed institutionally in the native religious cult. Egyptian political and economic power was severely curtailed by the Ptolemies who succeeded Alexander and developed his royal city into an international center and even more so by the Romans (Bowman 1986, 122). The Greeks of Alexandria were interested in maintaining Greek social organization as a means of control. Not all residents were entitled to claim the privileges of free citizens as Greek elites modeled Alexandria on their Greek cities (Bowman 1986, 122). Peoples from all areas of the Mediterranean world and other parts of Egypt flocked to Alexandria to seize the opportunities offered by trade and commerce (Bowman 1986, 209). In Alexandria, the privileges enjoyed by the members of the Greek citizen body were clearly substantial and jealously guarded. Rights and statuses were quite restricted for non-Greeks, including Egyptians (Bowman 1986, 209-210). These actions demonstrate that the occupying Greeks wanted to maintain their political and social ideologies.

Though they held their homeland's traditions and culture in high esteem, the Greeks were fascinated by the Egyptian culture. Popular Greek writings, for example, demonstrate that the Greeks were aware of and delighted by Egyptian tales that differed from the heroic legends of Classical literature and tradition. For instance, in the second book of Herodotus there is the tale of Rhampsinitus. The name Rhampsinitus might be a pseudonym for the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II (Fraser 1972, 675). The Greeks also had an interest in the demotic Egyptian writings such as the *Book of the Dead*, which greatly influenced the Greek folk-literature of the period (Fraser 1972, 675-676). The long and detailed hieratic illustrates various stages and processes in the journey of the deceased to the afterlife. The Greeks could not read the texts, but the visual illustrations appeared to be fictional and fantastical. Plato also exposed Greeks to Egyptian iconography through his writing. He wrote extensively about Egyptian climate, geography, military, teaching, and monarchy (Davis 1979, 121). Plato's writings about Egyptian art are not just descriptions, but are evaluations. He, as a philosopher, moralist, social theorist, approved of Egyptian art and believed that it is intrinsically, naturally correct in its proper proportioning, aesthetic quality, and penetrating

a reality beyond appearance (Davis 1979, 126). Plato's writings on Egyptian art were evaluations and critiques on the quality and technique of the images; the meanings of the imagery in Egyptian ideology were not part of the discussion. The Greeks did not express interest in the sacred or religious meanings of Egyptian texts and divinities' roles; rather, they were more drawn to the texts' exotic, romantic, and aesthetically pleasing imagery.

There was an even greater degree of social direction and control in the Roman period (Bowman 1986, 123). Roman rule in Egypt began in 30 BC when Octavian made it a Roman province after defeating Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BC (McKenzie 2007, 148). Under Roman rule, laws and practices shaped and controlled the social structure (Bowman 1986, 127). Roman citizenship was granted to the privileged group of veteran soldiers on discharge, and even to Egyptians who served in the military. Obtaining Roman citizenship meant the individual enjoyed special privileges and obligations. Despite these benefits, the individual was still obligated to follow Roman law in all social, legal, and economic situations (Bowman 1986, 127). Roman regulations differed slightly from the Greek policies and greatly from the dynastic rulers of ancient Egypt.

Such dramatic political and social changes are likely to have caused unrest among the Egyptian inhabitants of Alexandria. Occupying forces must adopt ways to proclaim their authority over the population. The Ptolemaic and Roman rulers were concerned with maintaining the social cohesion and control utilized in their Greek and Roman homelands, respectively. They had to gain the confidence of the public. Architecture is one public art form that was used by the elite to assert and reinforce their power and influence. The architecture of Hellenistic-Roman Alexandria is largely Classical and exhibits Egyptian influence (McKenzie 2007, 3). Support for the Egyptian temples by the Ptolemaic kings and first few Roman emperors was essential for fulfilling their local role as pharaoh in order to maintain the loyalty of the native population. Through the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Egyptian architecture was renovated to include Classical styles distinct from the architecture of the Dynastic period (McKenzie 2007, 117). By the end of the Roman period, Egyptian and Roman architecture coexisted in Alexandria (McKenzie 2007, 227-228). The architecture of Alexandria demonstrates it was a Classical city interested in earlier Egyptian traditions. In conclusion, the textual and architectural evidence suggests that the Greeks and Romans were concerned with bringing their own heritage in Alexandria. But the appeal of Egyptian culture

simply was too difficult to resist.

The conflation of Egyptian and Classical elements calls into question the extent to which Dynastic Egypt influenced their ideology and identity. The cemeteries around the city offer a possible answer to this question. It is arguable that the elite tombs contained the physical and cultural remains that are able to distinguish the ethnicity of the tombs' owners. In Alexandria, names, language, and even worship of certain deities no longer served as ethnic signifiers (Venit 2002, 10). Though Alexandria's cemeteries embraced its diverse population, the Egyptian names are conspicuously absent (Venit 2002, 10). Egyptians and Greeks, despite official censure, did intermarry, and resourceful Egyptians adopted Greek names and learned to read and write Greek. Neither disposition of the dead, nor grave goods, nor topography, however, helps discriminate ethnicity or cultural background in Alexandria.¹ Therefore, it appears that the Egyptians were attempting to immerse into the Greek culture while Greeks were intent on maintain their Greek roots.

Wall paintings in the Alexandrian tombs do not accidentally portray Egyptian figures or Classical imagery. The owners of the tombs intentionally selected the figures and motifs. During the Ptolemaic and late Republic and throughout the Empire, tombs contain artistic themes that suggest the deceased desired to reach a richer, happier, and more ideal afterlife (Toynbee 1971, 38). Vegetal elements, Classical mythological figures, and idyllic landscapes are examples of decorative imagery that create a beautiful resting place as well as hopes for idealized afterlife. The Egyptian imagery is incorrect in relation to religion and not strictly adhering to Dynastic images; it is rendered in a Classical and heterogeneous manner that suggests the deceased wanted to convey a personal message.

The paintings in Alexandrian tombs indicate that the deceased is interested in maintaining his or her Classical identity while also incorporating Egyptian elements found in other dynastic funerary texts and imagery. The first example is the Sakiya Tomb at the Wardian complex, dating to the second century BCE and continued to be in use through Roman period (Venit 1988, 71-72). The Classical decoration of the tomb includes three idealized landscapes. The idealized and lush landscapes are consistent among the images and seem almost interchangeable from wall to wall. Each scene differs in the figure depicted: the saqiya, or waterwheel (fig. 1), the herm (fig. 2), and the shepherd (fig. 3). These figures in the scenes repre-

sent separate aspects of humanity (Venit 1988, 74, Venit 2002, 117). The newly invented saqiya is an agricultural machine that exemplifies the human intellect and permits human mastery of the environment. The herm represents the wild realm of Pan and other hedonistic creatures of blameless nature, embodying the sensual component of human temperament. The herdsman is a man of judgment and human intellect capable of guarding his flock from marauders, such as the wild jackal in the lower part of the painting. His pastoral land is the intermediate between the cultivated and the undomesticated, for it is beneficial to mankind since it supports his flocks and yet uncultivated by humans (Venit 2002, 117-118, Venit 1988, 74-75). The paintings support the complete cycle of the natural world. During the second century BCE, the Greek bucolic poetry flourished, and the Sakiya Tomb presents a coherent iconographic program that corresponds to the poems. It is a truism that those who most romanticize country life are those who suffer it the least, a predisposition intrinsic to elite Alexandrians interred in the elaborate tombs (Venit 2002, 116). An epitaph dated to the second century BC reflects this bucolic reverie:

*Although you are cowherds, you who pass
by this road, and shepherds who pas-
tures your flocks of sheep, but you, pass-
ing, nourished by the works of the Muses
restrain your step, and do not go away
without having greeted the tomb of Aline.²*

The Sakiya Tomb seems to echo this veneration of country life and connects it to a metaphor of everlasting life (Venit 2002, 116). The deceased wanted to surround himself with beautiful, idealized scenes of country landscapes in the hopes that his afterlife too would be as carefree and blessed.

The tomb exhibits one Egyptian element, the *ba*-bird, which is not woven into the painted wall narrative (fig. 4). The image is on the sarcophagus and is separated from the wall scenes. In the background hangs a garland swag, an element symbolic of everlasting life, as seen in wall paintings in the Classical world. The *ba*-bird is an Egyptian representation of the soul's journey from the living world into the afterlife. The bird is considered to be a figure that is the intermediate between the worlds of the living and dead (Ben-Tor 1997, Wilkinson 1994). After death, the *ba*, or soul, of an individual had the freedom to move between the realms of the living and the dead and was expected to leave the tomb during the day and return at night (Ben-Tor 1997, 130). In Egyptian art, the location, action, and gestures of an element are dictated by

1 Certain foreigners and peoples who international set themselves apart of the Jews and Christians

2 Alexandria 24023 (Bernard 1969, 173, no. 34)

symbolic concerns (Wilkinson 1994, 16); therefore, elements must demonstrate the correct physical comportment to retain its symbolic power.

The depiction of the soul-bird on the sarcophagus does not adhere to the traditional form. In Egyptian iconography, the *ba*-bird in a funerary context is shown either standing over flying over the deceased. The *nemes* headdress that is worn by the *ba*-bird is stylistically different from the traditional headdress; it uncharacteristically conforms to the contours of the head and neck. The face of the *ba*-bird is traditionally a standardized and anonymous Egyptian face. In the Saquiya Tomb, the *ba*-bird differs. It has a large nose, an accentuated chin, and there is even a slight shadow cast from the chin onto the neck. Venit (1988, 79) believes that the bird's un-Egyptian style suggests that a Classical artist unfamiliar with Egyptian style painted it. The tomb owners seem not to have been concerned with the correct portrayal of the Egyptian funerary rites. The stylistic interpretation of the *ba*-bird is meant to be an exotic element that compliments the tomb's theme desiring a blessed afterlife. The Egyptian element is chosen based on its exotic meaning and manipulated to function with the tombs Classical program.

In tombs of the Kom el-Shoqafa complex, Egyptian divinities are not arranged to enact any narratives; rather, the Egyptian figures are organized in a complementary, symmetrical style. The lack of traditional Egyptian elements and the Classicizing style indicate that the program does not have ideological connotations. The Nebengrab Tomb of the Kom el-Shoqafa complex dating to the first or second century CE (fig. 5) depicts Egyptian-style figures rendered in a compositionally balanced style. Two pilasters surround a sarcophagus. The pilasters carry a net-like pattern on their lower part that Botti believe is a Roman building method called *opus reticulatum*.³ Above the net-like pattern of the pilasters stands an Egyptian-styled male deity with a solar disc and *uraeus* headdress, a short kilt and pectoral, holds a scepter in his right hand, and stands atop a papyrus bloom (Venit 2002, 123). A *ba*-bird is depicted on the lateral wall of the right pilaster and a seated deity is shown on the right and left-lateral walls of the tomb. The images on those walls are too damaged for analysis; therefore, I will focus on the image above the sarcophagus. Above the sarcophagus on the back wall is a painted program. The background is a white plane with garland swags. Two females and two males are shown in profile. Venit identifies the two female figures as Isis and

Nephthys based on their headdresses of discs and horns (Venit 2002, 123). Behind the female deities are two male figures, each holding a scepter in their outstretched hand. The female deities face and gesture to one another with outstretched wings. The goddesses typically enact this traditional pose when facing a funerary bier (Venit 2002, 123). In this particular program, the funerary bier is absent.

The female figure on the right points her right wing to the upper frame and points her left towards the lower frame. The opposite figure enacts the same gesture: her left wing points up while her right wing points down. The wings create the illusion of a vertical line and mark an axis of symmetry to which the male and female figures face. The line separates the figures into two sets of two: each grouping has one female and male figure. The opposing pairs are identical in size, shape, and style. Thus, their placement and identical features are perfect reflections of one another.

The divinities are traditionally associated with a funerary context where they perform the proper rites to ensure the deceased reaches the afterlife; however, the program of the Nebengrab tomb does not depict a cohesive narrative. The figures can be roughly identified as Egyptian funerary divinities even though they are rendered in their most generic form. The program overall lacks any suggestion of narrative and any specificity to imply a true understanding of the figures' function within a mortuary context (Venit 2002, 122). As Ancient Egyptian religion provided the pharaohs with unquestionable authority (Robins 2008, 14-16), the deceased could also want to surround himself with similar status symbols. In this case, the deceased was not accepting Egyptian ideology; instead he or she was adopting imagery and connotations of authority. The exchanges of cultural images allowed tomb owners to adopt images from outside their culture and manipulate what he or she wanted to display.

A similar program from the Sieglin Tomb of the Kom el-Shoqafa (fig. 6) complex demonstrates the conflation of Egyptian and Classical icons. Only a drawing of the tomb exists and only the central niche is shown retaining decoration (Venit 2002, 124). The scene on the back wall is strikingly similar to that of the Nebengrab tomb. Four figures show in profile and face the central axis of the image. Two additional figures shown in profile as well as a forward-facing central figure whom Venit has identified as the Egyptian funerary god Osiris (Venit 2002, 124). Osiris confronts the mortal viewer with a direct gaze. Such familiarity between divinities and mortals is absent in Egyptian funerary art (Robins 2008, 15-17). The lay peo-

³ Roman decorative device using small, square slabs of stone embedded into a regular, tightly knit diamond pattern, used in 55 BC in the Theatre of Pompey, Rome (Schreiber 1908)

ple did not have direct access to the Egyptian gods, and it was only during rituals that the ordinary people were offered direct access to the images. The rites were the institutional way in which the laity was made conscious of the celebration of its gods while reinforcing the priests roles as intermediaries between the laymen and his god (Bowman 1986, 183). The frontal view of gaze of Osiris does not reflect the particulars of the Egyptian religious institution; thus the program in the niche rather strikingly diverges from Egyptian ideology.

The walls surrounding the niche bear a striding Apis bull, a crouching griffin, and a recumbent Apis shown vertically stacked upon delicate floral stands. The stands greatly resemble the candelabra of Third Style Pompeian painting (Venit 2002, 124); however, the stands are constructed with Egyptian icons. Such a conflation of Egyptian imagery and Classical decorative motifs is the basis for the emerging iconography in Roman Alexandria: it is an iconography that combines two cultures into a decorative narrative fitting for a funerary context.

The Main Tomb of the Kom el-Shoqafa (fig. 7) has an extensive program of Egyptian icons that likewise depart from Egyptian ideology. The main chamber has a *triclinium* plan and dates the tomb to the Roman period (Venit 2002, 132). The *triclinium* form of construction probably stems from the funerary banquet that formed an integral part of Roman funerary rites, the *silicernium*, a meal to commemorate the dead (Venit 2002, 132-133). The architectural structure of the tomb directly adheres to the funerary ideology of Rome. Furthermore, the *triclinium* is a room in which Roman elites expressed their status. The owners of grand villas clearly wished to record themes connected with their public statue and their private pleasure, as well as those exhibiting learning, literary pretensions, or allegory (Kondoleon 1995, 111). According to Kondoleon (1995, 111), the location of domestic decoration in the *triclinium* conveyed the homeowners' public status and private pleasures. As the *triclinium* of the Roman-era tombs would be revisiting by the living, the decoration meant to convey the statue and learning continued even in death.

The sarcophagi in the central niche of the Main Tomb replicate Roman style (fig. 8). On the façade theatrical masks of the apotropaic Medusa and a satyr, both presented frontally, hang from a luxuriously fruited swag that is pinned above them. A woman reclines atop the central garland and Venit (2002, 134-135) identifies her as a Roman matron at a banquet. The sarcophagi in the left and right niches also conform to Roman style with garlands falling into two pendant swags, grapes dangling

from each swag, and the Medusa head peering out from each of the interstices above the swags.

In striking contrast, the image on the back wall of the central niche (fig. 9) depicts a traditionally Egyptian scene of deities lustrating or ritually embalming the individual. The deities Anubis and Horus frame the individual. Even here there seems to be a misunderstanding of Egyptian practices or perhaps the artists was only interested in the figures' decorative quality. Underneath the lion bier are three of the normal four canopic jars.⁴ The mummy wears an elaborate Egyptian cartonage mask and a beard. The beard is an attribute of pharaohs in dynastic art; elite males were not allowed to wear it (Robins 2008, 44-45). The lion wears the *atef* crown of Osiris on its head and supports the feather of truth with its paw. The feather appears in judgment scenes, during which the heart of the deceased is weighted against the feather of the goddess Ma'at, the personification of truth (Robins 2008, 208). Anubis wears a high-belted wrapped garment with a short mangle caught across his crest and thrown over his shoulder. He does not mirror the traditional dynastic garments worn by Horus or Thoth. Furthermore, his garment is neither properly Greek nor Roman. Rather, it is a generic costume worn by contemporary Alexandrians (Venit 2002, 137). Thus, the scene is an uncanonical rendering of Egyptian iconography. The artist looked to previous images of Egyptian lustration scenes. The missing canopic jar, the attributes of the lion, and the dress of Anubis suggest that the artist did not adhere to the traditional Egyptian ideology. Instead the Classical artists looked to Egyptian visual representations for the exotic and aesthetic quality.

The Main Tomb also contains six carved and painted niche scenes each with two funerary figures. A strong symmetrical structure underlies the entire program of the niches of the tomb: a large scene on the back wall of each niche is flanked to the left and right with smaller niches decorated with one human figure facing a divinity or priest (fig. 10, 11 and 12). In the central niche (fig. 10 and 11), both scenes depict a male or female facing a priest across an altar. Each mortal male and female figure is shown wearing a sun disk and the garments associated with Isis and her cult (Venit 2002, 138-139). The scene on the left wall of the central niche, the male stands in profile and faces a priest (fig. 10). His right hand grasps the linen strips that mortuary figures often hold and his left palm

4 Traditionally, the four canopic jars depict the sons of Horus: the jackle-headed Duamutef, who guards the stomach; human-headed Imsety, who guards the liver; falcon-headed Qebehsenuef, guardian of the intestines; and Hapy, who guards the lungs. Hapy is missing in this image (Venit, 2002, 135).

is turned towards his face in a male gesture of mourning (Venit 2002, 138, Holst-Warhaft 1992, 103). In the opposite scene (fig. 11), the female figure wears a layered wig and a long, slinging garment similar to the mantle worn by Isis and her cult initiates (Arslan 1997, 138).

Isis is an Egyptian goddess, and the cult of Isis flourished in the Roman Republic and became part of the Roman state religion during the Julio-Claudian period (Turcan 1989, 143). The initiation into the cult seen here seems to include an encounter with the gods. As noted before, only Egyptian priests and pharaohs could view a deity face to face, but in the Graeco-Roman world this prescription seems to no longer apply (Venit 2002, 142). Greek and Romans citizens imitated the divinities in dress and participate in the cult societies. Membership in the mystery-cults inherited by Roman from Classical and Hellenistic Greece and the East advertises a richer, happier, and more godlike afterlife (Toynbee 1971, 38). The cults incorporate the exotic icons and attributes, but overrule the exclusive dynastic ideology of Ancient Egypt. Thus, the Isiac attributes in this tomb suggest the mortal figures are initiates into the Cult of Isis.

The left niche contains one carving of a mummified form of Osiris (fig. 12). He wears a false beard, is crowned with a sun disk and stands in Egyptian composite stance with his face and feet in profile and upper body frontal (Venit 2002, 140). The lines of his arms are visible underneath his garment. Such a realistic depictions of the bodily lines of a mummified body are completely absent in Egyptian dynastic painting.

The figure opposite Osiris is wearing a short shirt that reveals his torso and legs. The artist went to great lengths to rendering this figure in anatomical correctness. His abdomen is well defined and muscular, while his legs are shapely. The figure also wears a *nemes* topped with a *hem-hem* crown and holds the Feather of Truth to the face of Osiris. The figure is given a considerable amount of symbolic power in the image as he is given an attribute associated with Ma'at, the goddess featured in the Judgment scene, discussed above, who maintains the order and balance of the universe. Here, she weighs the pharaoh's heart to test whether he has demonstrated correct behavior during life (Robins 2008, 208).

Venit (2002, 141) identifies the male opposite Osiris as a Roman emperor and pharaoh (Venit 2002, 141). Such an inclusion would suggest that the Roman emperor is charged with maintaining the balance and order of the Roman world. Venit believes that the Roman emperor represents Vespasian who was proclaimed

emperor of Alexandria by the Roman troops in Egypt.⁵ His presence was a momentous event in the social and political history of the city (Venit 2002, 143). As the Alexandrian tomb surely does not belong to Vespasian, his presence suggests the tomb owners had a relationship with the emperor. In Roman society, individuals convey their personal and social identification in official documents with reference to status groups such as ethnicity, rank, bureaucratic or magisterial position, or occupation (Bowman 1986, 137-138). It can be conceived that the tomb owners wanted to identify themselves by means of the wall paintings. The deceased was not concerned with the correct representation of Egyptian ideology. Rather, he seemed to have wanted to demonstrate his allegiance to the Roman emperor even in death. Thus, the tomb owners adopted and manipulate the Egyptian imagery not only to honor the deceased, but also to glorify the Roman emperor and his rule.

Last in my study, the Tigrane Pasha Street Tomb, dating to the Roman period, combines dynastic and Classical imagery to portray the tomb owner's cult affiliation. The tomb is furnished with three sarcophagi set in *triclinium* form and incorporates Roman and Egyptianizing elements into its pictorial program (Venit 1997, 702-703). Piers painted at the four corners of the room capped with schematic and highly abbreviated composite Roman capitals carrying on the *tromp l'oeil* tradition seen in Greek zone-style walls, later perfected in Pompeian Second Style painting (Venit 2002, 147-148).

The ceiling of the tomb is a rock-cut dome painted to resemble built architecture (fig. 13). A central oculus bears an apotropaic gorgonian. Four stalks radiate from the central oculus to each corner of the chamber. The stalks serve as painted architecture, and act as the ribs of the dome. Floral decoration, vegetative motifs, and wild animals occupy the negative space between the architectonic ribs. The ceiling's painted groined vaults emphasize the diagonals of the ceilings, a style that was introduced in Rome during the Hadrianic period (Venit 1997, 718). The back wall of the central niche depicts a scene unique to funerary images of Alexandria (fig. 14). In the center is an ornate bier attended by two female figures that Venit identifies as Isis and Nephthys (Venit 2002, 151). Behind each deity a falcon perches on a pedestal. Above the scene a winged disk holds out a garland, grasped in its talons by ribbons that appear to wave, or flutter, against the background. The bier resembles a couch of Late Greek or Roman type with turned knob-legs, similar to those of bronze furniture found at the Vesuvian sites

5 Tacitus, *Histories* II. 79

(Venit 2002, 151). The top of the platform is shown in orthogonal perspective while the legs are rendered in one-point perspective. The bier does not imitate any Dynastic funerary platforms; lines and shadow convey perspective and attempts to create a three-dimensional form in space (Venit 2002, 151). Beneath the feet of the bier are darker patches of color, or shadows. The bier is hung with a cloth that is attached at either end of the long side and caught in the middle in a knot with additional swag folds. Venit (2002, 151) identifies the treatment of the cloth as distinctly Hellenistic. The furniture therefore is a remarkable innovation and completely distinct from Egyptian painted tradition.

The mummy resting on the bier and lacks a cartonnage or mummy portrait. It is wrapped in a rhombic wrapping that is typical of Roman-period Egypt. The mummy's presence in the tomb presents a dilemma because mummification is a practice largely associated with Egyptian ideology. One could argue that mummification is an example of the Greek and Roman adoption of Egyptian ideology. In the Roman world, both cremation and inhumation existed together in simple burials as well as in elaborate sarcophagi: the interred bone and burnt bone did not represent competing ideologies (Toynbee 1971, 40). In Alexandria, the cremations are present in simpler and less expensive interments compared to inhumations and mummification (Venit 2002, 11). Although a wealthy Greek and Roman imitated the traditional practice in the Tigrane Pasha tomb, the mummy is not accompanied by the traditional attributes; Anubis is not present in the scene; and all canopic jars are also missing. It is, therefore, an assertively Roman mummy, laid on a Roman couch, in a Roman tomb (Venit 2002, 152).

The female figure at the foot of the bier stands in the traditional Egyptian pose with a frontal torso, the remainder of her body seen in profile (Venit 1997, 712). Unlike her female companion, the female figure at the head of the bier stands in an awkward three-quarter view. Only her left foot is shown in profile, the right foot appears to point to the viewer. The tight fitting garment renders the contours of her right leg and knee. The displacement of the garment suggests that the female is slightly bending her knee in a relaxed, almost *contrapposto* pose. She does not adhere to the traditional Egyptian pictorial language; instead she is rendered in a Classical stance.

The back wall of each niche in the tomb illustrates a separate, crucial moment in the Isiac initiation. According to Venit, the tomb's decorative program is ruled by Isis and Isiac initiation. The Egyptian and Graeco-Roman style and motifs act in concert to reveal the ceremony

of the syncretic goddess (Venit 2002, 146). As previous discussed, participation in the cults in the ancient world served to provide people with the opportunity to achieve a richer, happier, and more godlike afterlife (Toynbee 1971, 38). The scene in the central niche is a crucial moment in the Isiac initiation when the initiate is symbolically mummified. After the ceremony, the individual is unwrapped and reborn again into his or her new cult (Venit 2002, 152-153, Venit 1997, 728-729). For Greek and Egyptians, the arrangement and expenses of burial might be met by the funds of a guild or religious association to which they belonged (Bowman 1986, 137). This suggests that the tomb owners wanted to maintain their association with the cult even in death. In the Tigrane tomb, the Classical and Egyptian decoration merge to create a beautiful as well as symbolically significant place to rest for eternity.

The painted tombs of Alexandria demonstrate the decorative predilections of the deceased. The images do not adhere to the ideology of Dynastic Egypt; rather, the conflation of Classical and Egyptian imagery suggests that paintings reflect the preferences of the patron. In these tombs, a *ba*-bird is rendered as a decorative motif and no longer transports the soul of the deceased. Suddenly, Egyptian divinities are not arranged to enact funerary narratives, but are organized into symmetrical, balanced compositions. The tombs owners' exchange the stiff and flat figures of dynastic Egyptian in favor of candelabras, vegetal motifs, and realistic human figures. Infused with these images, the painted programs surround the deceased with scenes of ideal landscapes, symbolic references to their political allegiance, and cult memberships. It is in death that the deceased express their desire to communicate their imaginations, loyalties, and identities in one final message.

Figures



Fig. 1: *Sqiya and oxen*, Sqiya Tomb at the Wardian Complex, Alexandria, 2nd cent. BCE



Fig 2: *Herm*, Sqiya Tomb at the Wardian Complex, Alexandria, 2nd cent. BCE



Fig 3: *Shepherd and flock*, Sqiya Tomb at the Wardian Complex, Alexandria, 2nd cent. BCE



Fig 4: *The painted sarcophagus with the ba-bird*, Sqiya Tomb at the Wardian Complex, Alexandria, 2nd cent. BCE

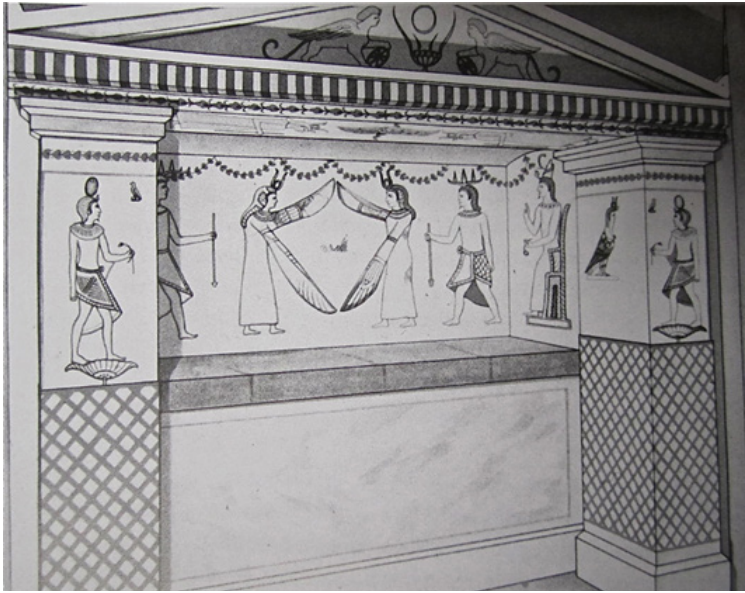


Fig. 5: *Nebengrab, Tomb H, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE*

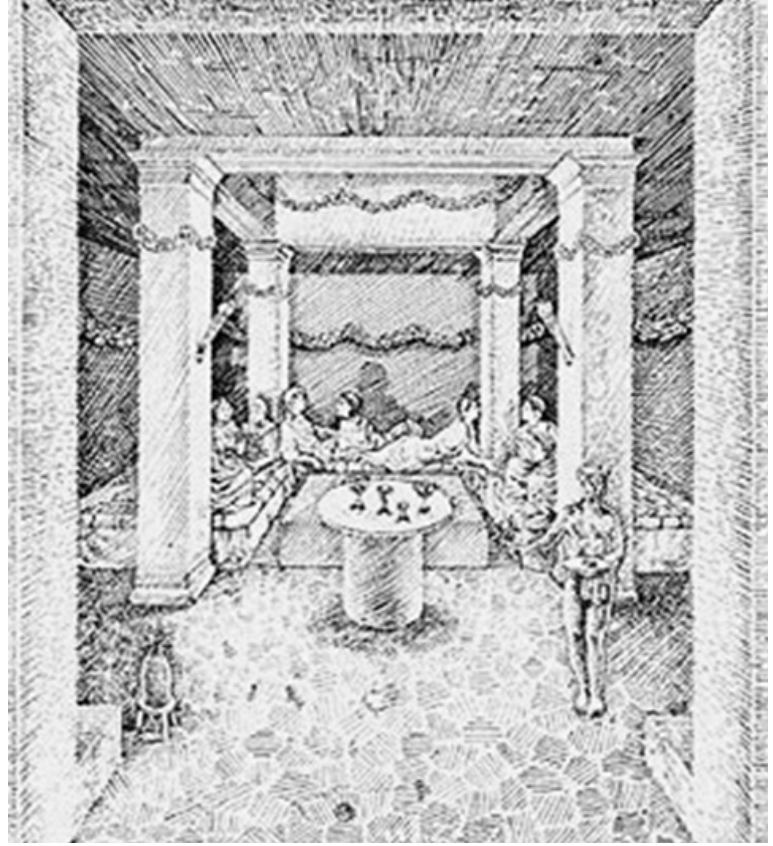


Fig 7: Reconstruction drawing of the triclinium, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, (Rowe 1942, pl. I)

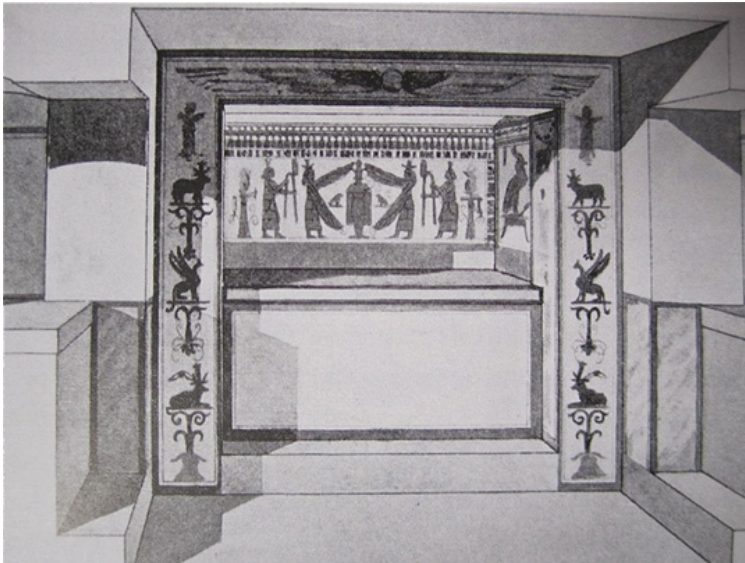


Fig. 6: *Sieglin Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE*

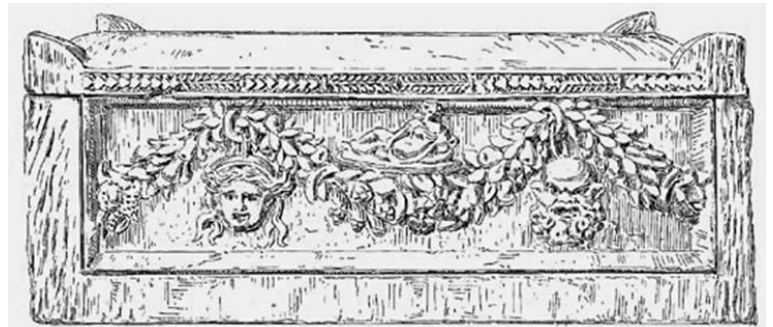


Fig. 8: *Sarcophagus of the central niche carved with a garland, two frontal faces (or masks), and a reclining woman, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE*



Fig. 9: *The lustration of the mummy*, back wall of the central niche, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE



Fig. 10: *Lector priest facing a male initiate*, carved left wall of central niche, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE



Fig. 11: *Pterophoros facing a female initiate*, carved right wall of the central niche, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE



Fig. 12: *An emperor crowned with a hem-hem crown holds out the feather of truth to Osiris*, Main Tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa Complex, Alexandria, 1st and 2nd cent. CE



Fig. 13: Dome with its central gorgoneion, architectonic format, and floral and faunal elements, Tigrane Pasha Street Tomb, Alexandria, 1st cent. CE



Fig. 14: Back wall of central niche, Tigrane Pasha Street Tomb, Alexandria, 1st cent. CE

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