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Trois figurines d'ivoire de site prédynastique de Tell el-Farkha

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Dorota Gorzelany

Burial form vs. *ideologia funeraria*. Formation of monumental tombs in Macedonia in the Classical and Hellenistic periods and their impact on the funerary complexes of Alexandria[1]

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The dissertation analyzes the dependence between the construction of the Macedonian rock-cut and chamber tombs and the Alexandrian funerary complexes, gives a comparative analysis of ornamental motifs and themes decorating the tombs, and reconstructs (wherever possible as most of these tombs have been plundered) the grave goods of Macedonian and Alexandrian sepulchers.

In the late 1970s, spectacular discoveries of unplundered royal tombs in Macedonian Vergina generated new interest in the form of these sepulchers known until then from just a few monuments. Although intensive archaeological research later led to the discovery of several other tombs, their publication, mostly as reports in Greek-language periodicals, a catalogue of tombs published by B. Gossel in 1980 and the rare monograph are insufficient in the case of such elaborate and important funerary complexes.

The other area under consideration, Alexandria, was settled by Macedonians, who included soldiers, as well as members of the wealthier elites governing the newly founded town and Egypt. The question is to what extent did they practice native burial customs in new conditions and did the Macedonian tombs have any observable impact on Alexandrian hypogea in the sphere of ideologia funeraria. Contrary to the discoveries in Macedonia which are of relatively recent date, the Alexandrian complexes have been known and studied since the end of the 19th and early 20th century. Their state of preservation is steadily deteriorating and many exist only in old excavation reports. Consequently, a comparison of these apparently different types of funerary complexes, Macedonian on one hand and Alexandrian on the other, which at least in the Early Hellenistic period were

[1] Dissertation defence in 2005.

constructed by the same population group, permits a synthetic presentation coupled with an analysis of the conception conditioning their form and decoration, as well as the religious assumptions, thus filling the gap that exists in relevant literature in both mentioned fields.

The time horizon of the present study covers the development of the Macedonian kingdom in the times of Philip II and Alexander the Great, taking into consideration data on earlier cemeteries with tombs which could have influenced the formation of the Macedonian kind of tomb and related ideology, through the 3rd century BC, when the monumental Alexandrian complexes appeared. Closing the study are tombs of the first half of the 2nd century BC: in Macedonia this borderline date is represented by architecturally simple tombs with modest equipment, erected and furnished during a period of economic decline that terminated in the kingdom's defeat at the battle of Pydna in 168 BC; in Alexandria the caesura is marked by Egyptianizing elements in the decoration of the hypogea, appearing in ever growing number as Ptolemaic authority weakened irreversibly.

Cist-graves and Macedonian tombs were constructed in earlier cemeteries near the towns of Aigai (Vergina), Mieza, Thessalonike, Dion, Pydna, Amphipolis, where they occur together with other forms of tombs: later rock-cut and the common pit ones. The necropolis of Aigai was a royal burial ground which continued to function even after Archelaos moved the capital to Pella at the end of the 5th century BC. One observable trend was for Macedonian tombs to be located by roads; another is the preponderance of tombs with dromos in eastern Macedonia (Amphipolis).

The traditional cist-tombs from Macedonia (e.g. Derveni, the necropolis of ancient Lete) were decorated with painted ornament imitating marble revetment, garlands on the walls, wreaths, objects referring to the deceased and mythological scenes (Persephone's Tomb at Vergina with a representation of the rape of Persephone, painted by an artist believed to be from the workshop of Nikomachos; tomb at Pella with a depiction of the philosophers). Rich grave goods have survived in some of the tombs, including metal and glass vessels, black-glazed wares, wreaths, terracotta figurines.

Growing size and the introduction of an entrance on one of the shorter sides effected a gradual transformation of the grave into a subterranean complex hidden under a tumulus. This form has come to be known as the Macedonian tomb. These were built chamber tombs, erected below ground level of blocks of local poros stone and marble, the latter, however, solely for emphasizing architectural features like doorframes and the doors themselves. The weight of the earth mound above the tomb ensured stability of the underground structure erected without mortar bonding, metal anchors of any kind or pegs, and only seldom applying anathyrosis. A tomb comprised an antechamber and chamber lined up together, although more modest single-chamber tombs existed as well. The interiors, whether one or more, were covered with a barrel-vault of purely Macedonian invention, created in response to the need for roofing an underground structure hidden under an earth mound.

The architecturally developed facade was derived from private and palace architecture, giving the tomb a monumental appearance (Fig. 1). The facade was adorned with Doric (e.g. Pella, tomb D) or Ionic (e.g. Anthemion Tomb at Lefkadia) elements, painted with ornamental patterns and rarely figural representations (Anthemion Tomb at Lefkadia: married couple in the tympanum; Tomb of Judgment: the deceased, Hermes, Ajax and Radamantys in the intercolumnar

spaces and the centauromachy in the metopes, horsemen fighting infantry [Macedonians vs. Persians] in the frieze, and finally a poorly preserved scene of battle in the tympanum; Great Tumulus at Vergina [tomb II]: hunting scene in the attic executed by a student of Nikomachos, one Philoxenos of Eretria; Aghios Athanasios, symposium scene). The doors were of wood or of marble, in the latter case imitating in every detail regular wooden doors. In some cases, the entrance was preceded by a dromos; the front of the tomb then remained undecorated.

The decoration of the interior, painted in the structural and architectural styles (Fig. 2), imitated living interiors. Plant motifs referred to an actual custom of hanging wreaths on walls during symposia or the *prothesis* of the dead, but they were equally imbued with symbolic sepulchral meaning. A richer version of the painted decoration is rare in these tomb interiors (Lefkadia: elements of armor and weaponry; Vergina, tomb III: frieze with a chariot race in the antechamber; Eurydice's Tomb Ionic facade on the back wall of the chamber).

Stone and wooden couches were placed inside the chambers, recreating the arrangement in ordinary living rooms. The stone *kline* corresponded to the real wooden beds in structure and decoration; of the wooden ones little remains in the tombs except for some pieces of inlay. Vegetal ornaments enriched figural scenes of mythological, Dionysiac character. Also present were chests, thrones, massive benches used as offering tables and altars. The few thrones were decorated with motifs drawn from a similar repertoire (Vergina, Eurydice's Tomb). In the Macedonian tombs, burials were made as inhumations, the bodies laid out on the *kline* and in sarcophagi, or as cremations, the ashes placed inside an urn, for which purpose a hydria and more seldom a larnax could have been used.

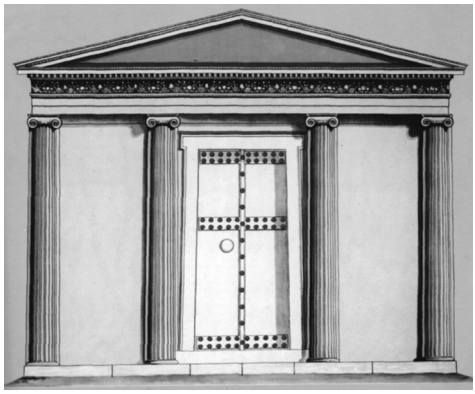

Fig. 1. After Rhomaios 1951, pl. A

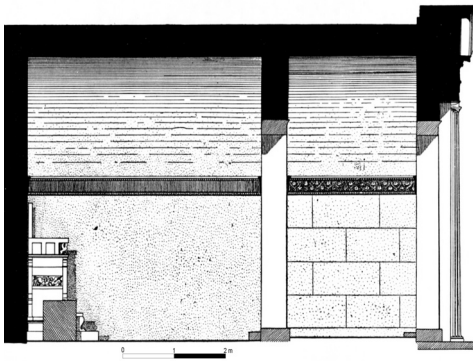

Fig. 2. After Rhomaios 1951, fig. 6

In a sepulchral context, the trend of "stronger overcoming weaker" visible in the friezes of animals and armed men hunting animals, refers to the irreversibility of natural processes and inevitable death. Hunting was connected with an offering ritual designed to ensure sufficient game and to legitimize the act of killing. As an encounter with death, it was considered an essential element of education, introducing a young boy to the world of men and preparing him for battle. Hunting, the act of killing, beliefs concerning death and offerings form a unity analogous to the sphere of fighting. A hunt, for a lion in the central part, is depicted on the attic of tomb II in the Great Tumulus at

Vergina. The scene has symbolic meaning in connection with royal representation; in the Oriental tradition lion hunting was the privilege of rulers and legitimized royal power when combined with an offering scene, and in Macedonian custom boar hunting was a symbol of manhood. Hunting on horseback was by tradition a royal pursuit, while the men on foot were royal boys (*philoi*), and bodyguards (*somatophylakes*). Macedonian hunting was of social and political importance also with regard to earlier rulers, referring as it did to Oriental traditions, especially in the rivalry for the throne. The leader was possessed of high social rank and was referred to the hunting tradition of mythical heroes believed to be his ancestors. The setting is always a rocky landscape which suggests the mountainous landscape of the Pierian ridge or else is a reference to the sacral and heroic aspects of hunting.

Grave goods included the personal belongings of the dead, reflecting their either real or ideological social roles, and objects used during the burial ceremony or when making offerings, i.e., jewelry, weapons, metal and pottery vessels, wreaths. Certain objects are difficult to classify in any one of these categories. For the sake of an example, the small toilet vessels called unguentaria, not to mention other vases and terracotta figurines, are dual in function and missing a specific context, they can easily be considered either as everyday or as sepulchral.

The formation of the monumental Macedonian tomb was grounded in Greek ideology adapted to the different social conditions of the Macedonian kingdom. The ruler emphasized his divine origins rooted in Homeric tradition. An elite close to the throne, distinguished from among the aristocracy, was entitled to emphasize its position through the construction of monumental tombs. These ultimately drew from the cults practiced by the Macedonians, their beliefs and eschatological ideas.

Members of less influential aristocratic families were buried presumably in big and richly furnished cist-tombs or, in a later age, in rock-cut chamber tombs. The latter form became popular due to its more monumental character which could be achieved with lesser effort and financial resources, both important factors in the context of Macedonia's plunging economy. These tombs were cut in the limestone bedrock around the more important towns, like Pella and Beroia. Regardless of whether there were one, two or three chambers, the division into the antechamber and chamber proper no longer existed. Facades were seldom decorated and if so, it was a simple architectural form, a tympanum, for example, or pilasters framing the entrance, which was blocked with stone. Inside the chamber there were simple rock-cut couches arranged as a biklinium or triklinium and masonry larnaxes; burials were also made in niches cut in the couches and walls. The rock-cut tombs were family graves, constantly accessible, hence furnished in considerably poorer style, although corresponding to the objects left in the Macedonian tombs or cist-graves.

The rock-cut and Macedonian tombs share features like the architectural elements in the facades, double-chambered interior (but differing in function in the Macedonian tombs), dromos occurring in some built tombs, the manner of closing of the entrance, barrel vault, kline inside the chambers for the bodies. The principal difference is the quality and grandeur of these elements, much richer decoration of the facade and interior in the built tombs and the actual place of burial. This difference draws from the relation between the Macedonian tomb, which is the original, and the rockcut tomb, which is a poorer imitation.

The form of the tomb in Macedonia was shaped by Macedonian religious ideas concerning eschatology and the mystery cults connected with Dionysus and Demeter, meant to ensure good fortune to the dead in the Underworld. Participation in the mysteries is confirmed by gold plaques found with the dead. These plaques bear inscribed sentences which the dead needed to know on their way to Persephone and which were supposed to ensure that they would be accepted among the blessed. Particular elements of the grave goods, such as pieces of tableware, connote the common hope of the living for Dionysus' protection and collective feasting. Their presence in burials of women, who were not traditionally among the banqueters at symposia, testifies to their participation in the Dionysiac mysteries. These objects are like the wreaths deposited in chamber tombs furnished with couches proof of women's status as initiates in the mysteries. The grand form of the tomb emphasizes the high social rank of the dead, at the same time bearing connotations of mythical hero status.

The banquet situation with the participation of the deceased, which is predominant in the form of the tomb, was rooted in Oriental culture and was introduced into Greek iconography in sepulchral contexts in the 7th century BC. The burial itself, either as cremation with the ashes placed in vessels (e.g. hydriae) or as inhumation, was of no importance with respect to the further existence of the deceased. What is observable is a trend conditioned by social transformation, aiming at replacing tombs with single burials (*heroon*) with family tombs used twice or even thrice. Covering the tomb with a tumulus meant that the monumental sepulcher was erected more for the dead than for posterity.

Certain characteristic elements of the Macedonian *ideologia funeraria* were adopted in the funerary complexes of Alexandria. The Ptolemies who derived their roots from the Argead tradition and their state elite which comprised, beside the Greeks, a group of Macedonian "companions" (*hetaires*) fighting at the side of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy, influenced the sepulchral art of the new polis. The Greeks' important contribution to this process is evidenced in the earliest of Alexandria's necropolises by a considerable number of simple tombs compared to the relatively rare monumental hypogea. Other evidence includes typical Greek stelae occurring in combination with painted stelae demonstrating northern Greek influence, connected with the burials of Ptolemy's soldiers of lower rank, and finally terracotta figurines pressed in Greek molds. In the early period, the citizens of the polis included Greek-speaking soldiers settled in Alexandria and settlers brought specially to the town. The Greek inhabitants of Alexandria included *xenoi* originating from specific poleis or *ethne*, who did not have citizen status. Egyptians who were the most numerous group in Alexandria were lower in the hierarchy than even the non-Greek *xenoi*.

The form of Alexandrian tombs was impacted undoubtedly by geologic conditions (dune sandstone) and by the town's location on a narrow coastal strip. At first, the cemeteries extended east of the town – the tombs of Sidi Gaber, Chatby, Hadra, Mustapha Pasha were located there; in the 3rd century BC, the dead started to be buried also to the west of Alexandria, where the oldest tombs are those of Suk el-Wardian, Minet el-Bassal, and the successively established complexes in Gabbari. Last but not least, there are the hypogea of Anfushi on Pharos. The hypogea were entered via "staircases" with landings and the interiors followed the schematic plan of an *oikos* with all of the chambers in line, passing from the courtyard through an

antechamber into the chamber proper, the back wall of which featured a richly decorated rectangular niche with stone couch (Suk el-Wardian, fig. 3). The other type of interior arrangement was a pseudoperistyle (Mustapha Pasha, fig. 4) with an open courtyard surrounded by Doric engaged columns crowned with a triglyph-and-metope frieze and attic on top. Chambers and niches were placed off this courtyard. The main chamber was emphasized with a richer decoration of the entrance and couches inside it. In all the chambers *loculi* were cut successively for new burials throughout the functioning of the complex. These niches were sealed with stone slabs adorned most often with carved representations of doors.

The alabaster tomb located today inside the modern Latin Cemetery, in the vicinity of the eastern fortifications of Alexandria, is entirely unique in form. The surviving fragment of the structure was erected of alabaster slabs left undressed on the outside and comprises a flat-roofed antechamber that gave into a chamber. The floor slabs are supported on a substructure of limestone blocks. A reconstruction of the front shows a facade with Doric-style framing of the doorway consisting of two pilasters supporting the architrave and tympanum. The rough, unworked outer surface of the walls indicate the existence of a tumulus. However, the tomb is apparently not *in situ*, as indicated by a well just next to it, which is lower than the level of the tomb and which is dated in all likelihood to the Byzantine age.

Alexandrian tombs combined Macedonian and Egyptian elements in their form. Derived from the Macedonian tradition were the illusionist arrangements, both emphasizing the "facade" on one wall of the courtyard (Mustapha Pasha I, fig. 5) and shaping the interiors in imitation of domestic architecture with its structural and architectural styles (Suk el Wardian, Sidi Gaber).

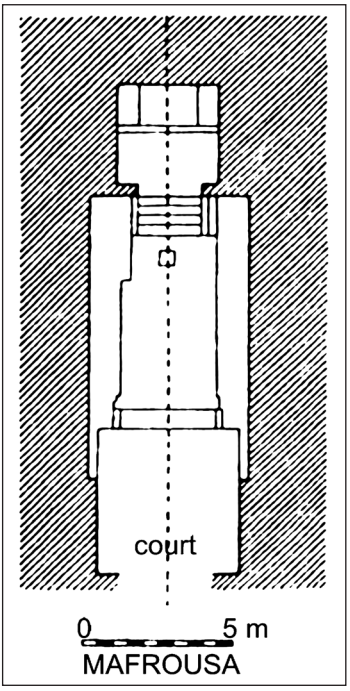

Fig. 3. After Adriani 1966, fig. 230

Plant ornaments and garlands adorned the walls occasionally, although not as often as in Macedonia (Sidi Gaber). The decoration of the vaults imitates coffered ceilings or the characteristic textile motifs that are a reminiscence of tent roofs (Sidi Gaber, Gabbari B2.3). The decoration was Egyptianized through the introduction of imitation faience plaques, imitation of alabaster common in the zone of the orthostats, certain iconographical motifs (Anfushi II), doorways and niches rendered as a naiskos (Anfushi II). Slabs sealing the burial niches feature decoration in the form of relief doors (Shatbi A.e), referring in style, execution and symbolism to both the Greek and the Egyptian tradition.

The few surviving couches as well as some that can be reconstructed are also comparable (Mustapha Pasha 2.5; 3.5). The chamber with couch is the most important

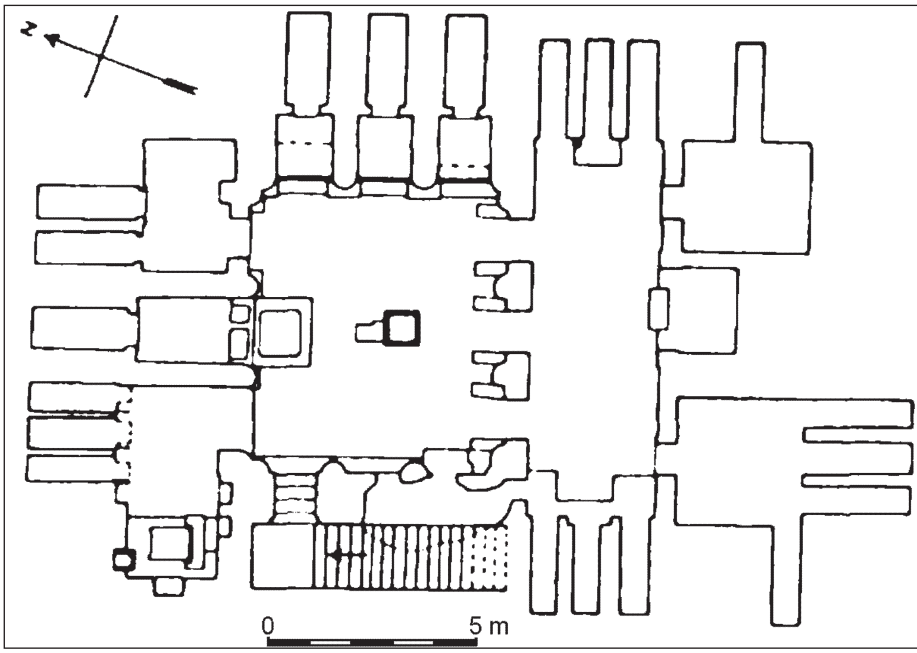

Fig. 4. After Adriani 1966, fig. 181

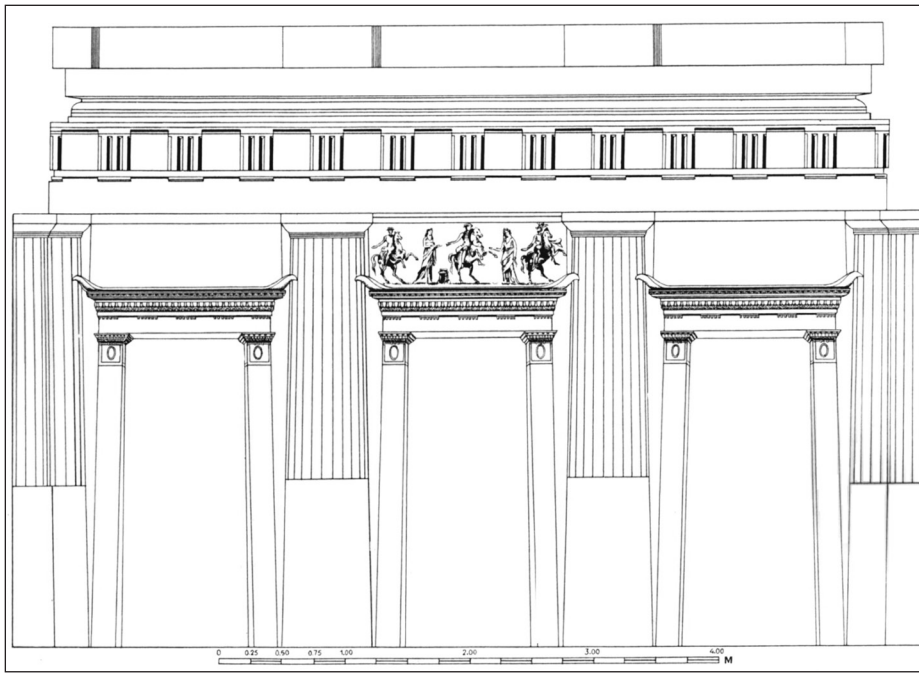

Fig. 5. After Adriani 1966, fig. 186

place inside the tomb, emphasizing the importance of the deceased. With the exception of the two beds cut in the rock on a Γ plan in the chamber of hypogeum A in Chatby, single couches usually line the back wall of a chamber, completely filling the available space. Their form refers to the *klinai* known from the region of Macedonia, in the type of the legs decorated with volutes and palmettes, the glass inlays, Dionysian connotations, plant motifs and phialai, not to mention the presence of footstools.

Similarly as in Macedonia, the accepted form of burial next to inhumation was cremation, the ashes in this case being placed in, among others, hydriae of the Hadra type, decorated with artificial wreaths placed around the neck of the vessel or imitation wreaths painted on the shoulders.

The occasional grave goods preserved in the hypogea exclude a full comparative analysis of the tombs in this respect, whether for individual social groups or on a broader, Macedonian-Alexandrian scale. The objects that have been recorded include black-glazed wares, vessels of faience, glass and alabaster, oil lamps, terracotta figurines. Metal objects, including jewelry, are seldom found.

The principal difference is in the tomb's function: in Macedonia, at least at first, it was a kind of *heroon*, in Alexandria a family affair from the start. The interiors were differently arranged in Alexandria. They constituted open complexes with a linear axial layout, comprising a separate main chamber (seldom two) furnished with couches for the more notable of the dead. These chambers were usually of small size. Since they were not closed in any way, the burials could not have been left in full view, hence the popular form of sarcophagus-*kline*, which is analogous to the cist (*theke*) of Macedonia. The other form was to remove the bones, after a suitable period of *prothesis*, to a burial niche, similarly as in the Macedonian rock-cut tombs. The antechamber was enlarged and took over the function of a burial chamber, the walls being cut successively with niches for new burials. The antechamber of the rock-cut chamber tombs from Macedonia served the same function. The presence of benches and an altar is proof that this room was also used for ritual practices, but the custom of making offerings in the antechamber of Macedonian tombs is seldom evidenced. In the Alexandrian hypogea, the courtyard was assigned a similar function, often as the main place of worship. Water was supplied to this place to serve ritual needs, beside being used for strictly utilitarian purposes, assuming that plants were cultivated there as well.

At least part of the funeral ceremony could have taken place inside the tomb, too. Such was Egyptian custom in this respect, but no evidence of anything of the sort has ever been found in those of the Macedonian and rock-cut tombs which had a dromos. In a few cases, traces of a funerary pyre or a place for making offerings was recorded in the vicinity of the tombs.

In this sense, Alexandrian tombs resemble Egyptian funerary complexes from the Late Period, fulfilling the triple function of depository for the body, cultivation of the memory of the dead and worship of the guardian deities. These complexes developed as a synthesis of Greek domestic architecture, Macedonian chamber tombs in terms of layout and architectural decoration, and Egyptian sepulchers. The typically Macedonian illusionist architectural approach applied to tombs created yet another form of eternal lodgings for the dead. Egyptian motifs were not introduced in the decoration before the end of the 3rd century BC, but their appearance at that time indicated progressing changes in native *ideologia*

funeraria taking place in Egypt ever since the arrival of the Greeks.

Different geographical conditions were one reason for this. The absence of rock made it impossible to build tombs to be hidden under a tumulus, while the limestone bedrock of the Egyptian coast was conducive to the quick and economic execution of large rock-cut hypogea.

Their form is the effect of drawing on Egyptian tradition, which the Greeks absorbed during the first several dozens of years after the founding of Alexandria, presumably while cooperating with Egyptian craftsmen specialized in excavating hypogea in the rock. Monumental tombs may have been commissioned by high-ranking *hetaires* from the armies of Alexander the Great, who still had in fond memory the funerary structures of Macedonia. Through a gradual assimilation of ideas and the gradual forgetting of the Macedonian tradition among Macedonians cut off from close contacts with their homeland, more and more Egyptian motifs were introduced into the architectural and painted decoration of the tombs which were designed on Greek-Egyptian plans and arranged inside in Greek-Macedonian style.

The social makeup of the city, comprising on one hand a small elite group of Macedonian origin capable of building chamber tombs (which even in Macedonia was a fairly young form of sepulcher without a long tradition behind it) and on the other the population boom in Alexandria coupled with a dearth of suitable areas for the cemeteries, led to the emergence of first family, and then collective tombs.

Greek mystery religions which were largely responsible for the form of the Macedonian tomb played a lesser role in Alexandria. Despite considerable differences, Egyptian beliefs strongly influenced Greek religion, the syncretism of deities being a good example in point. Practicing rituals appropriate for Eleusian and Dionysian mysteries became more difficult; apart from testimonies of the cult of Demeter and Isis, Dionysus and Sarapis, there is no certain indication of participation in mysteries. In the eschatological sphere, Egyptian beliefs met the expectations of Greek *mistae* without requiring participation in mysteries of any kind. Indeed, mysteries as a ritual did not appear in Egypt in Greek form until the Late Hellenistic period. Egyptian funerary cult ensured immortality and this would explain why elements derived from Egyptian ritual, such as courtyards with gardens and later also mummification, were introduced into the accepted tomb form.

Alexandrian tombs are therefore an example of Macedonian and Egyptian tradition in formal and religious synthesis, a process that was favored by expectations with regard to life in the Underworld, which led to similar architectural and ideological solutions despite existing cultural differences. The monumental tomb of Macedonian elites, derived from the idea of a chamber tomb as a palatial *andron* for the banquet in the Blessed Isles promised in the mysteries, was abandoned in favor of rock-cut hypogea, which were continuously enlarged over time. Undoubtedly family tombs in the social aspect, these structures reflected the heroic aspect in the minimized form of the burial chamber with *kline* and in the worship of the dead. The idea of the tomb as a house for the dead is exemplified not only by the layout of most complexes and the interior decoration, but also by the slabs with carved representations of doors sealing the burial niches, which were at the same time a reference to the same type of Egyptian tombs. Thus, one is entitled to think that the assimilation of elements of the Egyptian tradition as far as form is concerned must have been linked to some extent with the

adopting of eschatological ideas and aspects of cult ensuring the deceased good fortune in the Underworld, something that was fulfilled in Greece by the mysteries.

Formally, the process depended on a constantly growing number of Egyptian motifs being introduced into the architectural and painted decoration of tombs that featured Greek-Egyptian plans and were arranged in Greek-Macedonian style. Successive generations of Macedonians continued the process, being cut off from their homeland and deprived of the opportunity to preserve their tradition in a foreign and culturally differentiated land and in the face of progressing social and religious transformation.

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