Funeral Houses in Greco-Roman Egypt

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Abstract:

The ideal Egyptian tomb comprised two basic elements: the actual burial place of the body and the offering place, where the worlds of the living and dead coincided, and where items of sustenance could be provided for the deceased. Architecturally and decoratively, the two elements were for much of Egyptian history distinct, and it is important to bear this in mind whenever analyzing a given funerary monument. Indeed, these elements could be separated by considerable distances; nevertheless, they still formed part of the same whole.

The research aims to study the structure or structures forming such a monument ideally lay in the desert on the western bank of the Nile, so that the progression from the entrance was towards the west, the home of the dead. The focus of the offering place would be on a western wall to provide for the optimum interface with the beyond. However, in some areas, topographical considerations meant that cemeteries had to be placed on the east bank. In some cases, the reversed orientation seems to have been simply ignored, but in others adjustments were made to normal plans to ensure that the cult could be carried out facing west, even if this resulted in a very awkwardly arranged monument [1] (e.g. at the Fraser Tombs at Tihna).

1- Introduction:

Topographic issues also influenced the overall form of the tomb. On ''flat'' sites in the Nile valley, the classic tomb-type was the brick- or stone-built bench-shaped mastaba (or – for kings and queens – the pyramid), with its offering place either against or within its eastern side.

Later, this was replaced by structures that were essentially freestanding chapels, often resembling miniature temples, albeit sometimes with elements that harked back to the mastaba prototype. Burial chambers would in both cases be cut in the bed-rock or compacted desert gravel – in the latter case usually lined and roofed with brick or sometimes stone.

At sites where foothills or cliff-faces dominated, the tomb would be largely or wholly rock-cut. Although, on occasion, the bedrock could be cut away to produce an apparently free-standing mastaba core (e.g. in the Central Field at Giza, or the Fraser Tombs), most such sites simply cut the offering place into the flank of the hill or cliff. The burial apartments remained in the bed-rock.

In the Delta, very different conditions prevailed from the Nile valley, with at best sandy mounds (gezira) rising above the alluvium, on which both settlements and cemeteries had to be placed. Rock-cut elements of any sort were thus out of the question, and burial chambers thus had to be built out of brick or stone and sunk as deep as practicable into the gezira, bearing in mind the proximity of the water table. A chapel would then be built above, using the substructure as a foundation. This approach was also used for intra-urban interments in the valley, for example within the city of Memphis.

1- Dodson, A. and Ikram, S. (2008). The Tomb in Ancient Egypt. London and New York 156 (7)

In all cases, however, the purpose of the tomb remained constant: to act as a magical machine to translate the dead person from this world to the next – and maintain them there, free from hunger, for eternity.

2- Funeral Houses and Architectural Patterns in Greco-Roman Egypt:

Funerary art and architecture in Greco-Roman Egypt were creations of the cultural syncretism experienced by the Egyptian and non-Egyptian peoples through religion, myth, and beliefs in the afterlife. Although differences in socio-economic status and traditions existed in this period due to the division of the different ethnic groups, funerary motifs show all groups shared with each other the belief that the dead were sacred.[2]

Society in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Early Roman Periods was made up of many different ethnic groups who each had their own traditions, institutions, and customs. However, because of administrative and political agendas, the people of Egypt were not looked upon as a truly unified society, but one that was plagued by barriers related to the many distinct peoples that lived there. Cultural integration between Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians has been at the forefront of new studies pertaining to this ancient time. Yet some scholars believe that even if such evidence were found to suggest cultural integration it would not accurately reflect the realities of a divided population. Through the archaeological evidence found within the funerary sphere such doubts can be put to rest, for artistic and religious motifs found in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian burial contexts clearly showcase that cultural interaction did indeed take place between these cultures living in Ancient Egypt.

The first indication of funerary cultural integration between Greek, Roman and Egyptian peoples come to us through the wide variety of artifacts that are directly connected to the burials of deceased persons who lived in Greco-Roman times. It should be noted that many of these artifacts come from the burial places of specifically Greek individuals, who lived in predominantly Greek populated cities in Egypt, such as Naucratis, Memphis, and Alexandria. [3]

The tombs of both Egyptian natives and Greeks living in Greco-Roman Egypt also shares features that tie them to a growing cultural interaction between the two cultures. [4]

Distinguishing between Thirtieth Dynasty and early Ptolemaic tombs is problematic, in the absence of direct dating material, while charting developments

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2- Bierbrier, M.L. (1997) Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt. London:
   British Museum Press.

3- Riggs, Christina. (2002) ''Facing the Dead: Recent Research on the Funerary Art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt." American Journal of Archaeology 106 (1), 85-101.

4- Lefebvre, Gustave. (1923) Le Tombeau de Petosiris. Cairo: Institute Francais d'Archeologie Orientale.

5- Venit, M. S. (2002). Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria: The Theater of the Dead.
   Cambridge.

during Ptolemaic times is difficult owing to the lack of dated data. However, it is clear that there are two basic approaches to be seen, the Egyptian and the Hellenistic, the latter particularly in evidence at Alexandria, where catacombs of an initially wholly Greek type were inaugurated. [5]

Two tombs from Alexandria also showcase a fusion of Greek and Egyptian deities said to be the protectors of the dead; the Stagnai Painted Tomb and the Tomb of Tigrane Pasha Street. In the Stagnai Painted Tomb two exterior piers which flank a sarcophagus niche show a small, naked, petal-winged boy who is assumed to represent the god Greek god Eros. Eros accompanies the Greek goddess Aphrodite, as well as the Egyptian god Anubis who, "stands garbed as a Roman soldier". [6]

 By using these two motifs the owner of the tomb harkened back to his Greek and Roman heritage as well as displaying his respect for Egyptian gods and funerary beliefs. The Tigrane Pasha Street Tomb similarly depicts Greco-Roman and Egyptian visual techniques in the form of a funeral procession.

Its central sarcophagi niche shows, "…a mummy wrapped in the Greco-Roman style with its head to the left, supine on a bier, attended by two female figures", who are again assumed to represent Isis and her sister Nephthys who commonly decorate Egyptian sarcophagi and tombs. [7]

The oases of the Western Desert went through a period of particular prosperity in the Middle to Late Roman Period. Probably they underwent intensive agricultural exploitation as the result of efficient organization and advanced hydraulic technology that made possible year-round irrigation, not dependent on the seasonal Nile flood, and, probably, two annual harvests. The oases were divided into three administrative regions: Ammoniake, with the Siwa Oasis; Oasis Minor, consisting of Bahria Oasis; and Oasis Maior, made up of Dakhla and Kharga. Caravan routes connected the oases with the Nile Valley and Siwa with the Mediterranean. At Hibis, the capital of Kharga, little remains besides the temple of Nadura and that dedicated to Amun Re. A series of solid mud-brick structures, perhaps late Roman,

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6- Venit, Marjorie Susan. (1999) "The Stagnai Painted Tomb: Cultural Interchange and Gender Differentiation in Roman Alexandria." American Journal of Archaeology 103 (4), 641-669.

7- Venit, Marjorie Susan. (1997) "The Tomb from Tigrane Pasha Street and the Iconography of Death in Roman Alexandria." American Journal of Archaeology 102 (4), 701-729.

is located north of Hibis, but the exact date and function remain unknown for the present. [8]

The Dakhla Oasis Project has identified about 250 sites datable to the first five centuries AD, among them large ones (such as Mothis/Mut, the capital; Trimithis/ Amheida, which became a polis in the fourth century AD; and the large town Kellis/ Ismant el-Kharab), along with small villages, individual farms, and industrial areas. [9]

Through each of the funeral homes discussed within this point, interpretations and conclusions can be made about how the funerary art produced in this period reflects upon this past multiethnic society.

- As a result, we can distinguish funerary architecture in the Greco-Roman period to following:

When it comes to the architecture of Greco-Roman Egypt, just as with artistic and artisan production, we encounter a cohabitation of different styles, ''classical'' and Egyptian. The former tends to be typical of building types that did not exist in the Pharaonic period, such as piazzas, porticoes streets, public baths, fountains, hippodromes, perhaps gymnasia, and temples dedicated to non-Egyptian deities and to the imperial cult. Egyptian style dominates temple architecture. From the second century BC there developed a third architectural style that one might characterize as ''Greco-Alexandrian,'' in which certain aspects of the Egyptian tradition were fused with aspects of the classical tradition[10]

This third style was employed particularly in funerary contexts and in sanctuaries dedicated to Serapis. Surviving buildings of ''classical'' style are few in number, although their former presence throughout all Egypt is shown by surviving stone architectural fragments and columns, largely re-used in buildings of the Byzantine and Islamic Periods.

Our reconstruction of Alexandria reveals a city built according to criteria, and in architectural styles, that were ''classical.'' To a great extent this image is the result of descriptions passed down by ancient authors and of discoveries that have been made at various times and in different parts of the modern city. However, the idea that, because Alexandria was inhabited by non-Egyptians, it reflected only Hellenistic culture in its styles and symbols of royal power and religion is one that must be reconsidered in the light of the recent underwater investigations in the Grand Harbor.

3- The Polychrome of Greek and Roman Art:

Arts was in debt service and human life in the afterlife this for ancient Egyptian, in the Greeks thought was a cause to humans Highness degrees to the ideal of beauty, while it was the way to the beauty of life and extravagance in the physical heirlooms at the Romans. As for the style of paining in the Greco-Roman period it

8-   Redde ´, M. 1999. Sites militaires romains de l'oasis de Kharga. BIFAO 99: 377–96.

9-   Mills, A. 1999. Dakhleh Oasis, Dynastic and Roman sites. In K. A. Bard (ed.), Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt. London and New York: 220–2.

10- Bailey, D. M. 1990. Classical architecture in Roman Egypt. In M. Henig (ed.), Architecture and Architectural Sculpture in the Roman Empire. Oxford: 121–37.

has been there at the beginning of the rule of the Ptolemies kind of exaggerated human emotions and to express them. (Ex: funeral houses in Tuna Al-Gebel which look like small temple) in this tomb appeared different arts one of them express Greek arts, but others were a mixture of Greek and Egyptian arts. [11]

For millennia, ancient Egyptian artists used pigment on their walls and statues to create lifelike portraits. Influenced by this custom, the Greeks utilized the same life-giving pigments and techniques, such as highlighting and under painting, to produce realistic yet idealized sculptures. Like the Egyptians, they knew that the addition of color to shallowly carved aspects of the statues made them more distinguishable and authentic. As the Greek historian Plutarch (46-120 C.E.) wrote in his text Moralia from the first century C.E., color was more visually stimulating than simple line because it created a lifelike illusion. It also set the statues themselves apart from each other, creating a group of distinct individuals rather than a homogenized assembly of white figures, thus adding a narrative element as the different sculptural characters interacted with one another.

Ancient Greek texts help reveal the colors and processes used by artists of that time. The earliest documents date back to the fifth century B.C.E. and describe the characteristics and theories of color. For example, the poetry of Alcmaeonid of Croton, a natural philosopher and medical theorist born around the year 510 B.C.E., describes the contrasting natures of black and white. In the later part of the century, Empedocles (490-430 B.C.E.), a pre-Socratic philosopher from Sicily, discusses color theory at greater length in his works. He followed a mathematical scheme of primary colors that consisted of black, white, and red and added an important hue called ōchron, which referred to a range of new colors from red, to yellow and green. As combining the four elements of nature (fire, water, air, and earth) creates differentiated experiences, so does the blending of these four primary colors, according to Empedocles. Democritus (460-370 B.C.E.), a philosopher from the same period, had his own theories on color. In his texts he mentions the same four hues as Empedocles, white, black, red, and ōchron, but relates them directly to natural forms. White referred to smoothness, black to roughness, red to heat, and ōchron to both solidity and emptiness. He believed that by mixing these pigments one could obtain an entire range of colors.

The color theories implemented by Empedocles and Democritus were further developed by the Classical philosopher Plato (424-348 B.C.E.) and his apprentice Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) in the fourth century B.C.E. Their approach became the initial point of all subsequent color systems until Isaac Newton (1642-1727) in the seventeenth century. Plato's poem on the creation of the earth, called Timaeus, offers the most extensive description of a coherent theory of colors. It describes the effects of light rays on the eye, stating that discerning the color white was the dilation of a ray propelled by the eye, whereas the color black was the ray's contraction. In other words, as light rays left one's eye after looking upon the color white, they expanded; after taking in the color black, they shrank. Plato passed on his theories to Aristotle who, because of his intense interest in development and

11- حسين محمد علي (د) : دراسة علاج الصور الجداريه وصيانتها بمنطقة اثار المنيا ، رسالة دكتوراه ، كلية الاداب (سوهاج) ، جامعة اسيوط ، 1993 ، ص 181

experimentation, produced a more complete account of color theory spread throughout several documents. In his treatise called On Sense and Sensible Objects he discusses the importance of intermediary colors, created by adding white and black to pigment mixtures. He identifies five of these transitional colors: crimson, violet, leek-green, deep blue, and grey and yellow. Aristotle's documents reveal that he was partial to a seven-color scale ranging between black and white because of its ties to musical theory.

Polychrome from tomb in Tigrane Pasha Street, Alexandria. Photograph Judith McKenzie

4- Funeral houses in Tuna Al-gebel:

Tuna el-Gebel is an important desert site which is well-known to both Egyptologists and tourists alike as it possesses some of the most impressive Pharaonic and post-Pharaonic monuments in Middle Egypt. However, those remains which are now generally held to be synonymous with the "Tuna el-Gebel site" the closely-packed complex of structures around the Late Period/Graeco-Roman necropolis -are only a closely grouped and immediately visible part of what is in fact a much larger archaeological area. This is a distance of approximately 7 kilometers,' making Tuna el-Gebel a very large site by any standards. This large site may, for convenience, be divided into three major regions: the celebrated southern site which is referred to in the present monograph as the Petosiris Necropolis, the central region which stretches from the Petosiris Necropolis to the

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cemetery of the modern village Tuna el-Gebel, and the northern Nazlet Tuna site which is the subject of the present survey. Tuna el-Gebel is best known as the necropolis of the important ancient Egyptian city of Hermopolis Magna (Ashmunein). The most obvious indication of this role is the series of tombs of high-ranking Hermopolite officials. Concentrated archaeological attention in this region was initiated by Lefebvre's excavation and publication of the super-and sub-structure of the most important, and probably the first, tomb in the group, that of the High-Priest of the god Thoth at Hermopolis[12]

This was inferred from the archaeological excavations in Tuna el-Gebel it has developed a type of houses in which merges the Pharaonic and Greco-Roman style has popularized the use of brick in the construction of these houses next to the stones.

The architectural style is different among the three major regions:

The first region: called tombs in the form of temples because the general planning similar to the layout of temples such as Petosiris cemetery,

It is from the inside, contain a courtyard leads to a room with a well buried and from the outside architecture is a mixture of Greek and Egyptian, while decorations have Egyptian pattern, This type of tombs built of limestone polished well.[13]

The second region: is tombs which containing mummies of ibis and it was excavated four catacombs dating ranges between the end Sawy age and Roman times, and found beside the coffins and mummies royal funerary temples which held on it the burial rituals ,and mummification chamber.

The third region: includes Roman tombs in the form of the houses were built of brick and covered with a layer of mortar, and it's refer to homes of the middle class, decorations of this funeral homes match with decorations of daily life homes. Funeral homes built beside each other these houses separated by streets, similar cities neighborhoods.[14]

Examples of these funeral houses:

The 'Egyptian House' (el Beit el-Masry) is one of 24 tombs **(no. 21)** discovered by Sami Gabra of Cairo University between 1931 and 1952 on the Greco-Roman necropolis in Tuna el-Gebel, situated about 14 km east of the ancient city of Hermopolis (modern Ashmunein) in Middle Egypt. The tomb lies in the southeastern part of the necropolis. It consists of four vaulted rooms above ground, three of them deployed in a row behind the facade with the entrance in the central one, and a fourth hall located in the back, standing above the burial chamber. The walls of the entrance hall and the back room were decorated with murals. [15]

The tomb was built of mud brick and only the doorjambs were of nummulithic limestone; the window lintels were reinforced with wooden beams. The walls were plastered with mud mortar tempered with chaff, and given a coat of lime-and-sand

12- إبراهيم سعد (د) : تونا الجبل دره في صحراء دروه ، قسم الاثار ، كلية الاداب ، جامعة المنيا ،2006 ص 16

13- محمود احمد درويش (د) : آثار المنيا عبر العصور ، مركز البحوث والدراسات الاثريه ، 2005 ، ص 81

14- حسين محمد علي (د) : مرجع سابق ص 167

15- محمود احمد درويش(د) مرجع سابق ص 89

plaster which acted as ground for the painted decoration. The outer coat of plaster was rusticated, imitating stone blocks. The inner coats were smoothed. The walls of the anteroom and sanctuary were painted. Paint was also observed on the outside plaster. The paints were based on an organic binder and traditional pigments (azurite, hematite, ochre, vegetable black). Neither preliminary sketches nor the drawing grid have been observed. The paintings inside the tomb comprise funeral scenes with ancient Egyptian gods, cartouches with hieroglyphic inscriptions and imitation of marble revetment. The figures painted in the anteroom are turned towards the sanctuary, emphasizing the importance of that room. The painting are executed in traditional Egyptian manner. Only the two long-haired figures in the anteroom are rendered in the convention and attire characteristic of Greco-Roman painting. While these paintings have not been specifically studied, the tombs from the Tuna el-Gebel necropolis are generally dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD.When the tomb was discovered in 1935, its vaults were destroyed. To reconstruct them, the inside of the tomb was filled with sand, the vaults were bricked-up and then the sand was removed. Some bricks with traces of color, coming presumably from the original vault, are still in store in one of the rooms of the tomb. Gabra's photographs of the conditions inside the tomb upon discovery reveal the murals inside and the facade plaster to be in very good condition.[16]

Interior of Tomb No. 21 (after S. Gabra, Rapport sur les fouilles
d'Hermoupolis Ouest
(Touna el Gebel, Le Caire 1941)

Betty Isis's house It was established by Aurelius Betis, a Roman soldier
Betty Isis means Isis's gift, it is funeral house **No. 13**
There is in front of this shrine there is a balcony where the visitor ascends with a ladder of sex steps
Its walls and pillars were built of mud brick covered with plaster
The visitor ascends to the main entrance 1.12 meters wide and reaches a large lobby (4.11 * 3.62 m) with its rear wall a door leading to another narrow room and the two side walls two domed compartments painted blue. The

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16- ريهام عدلي سالم (د) : ترميم الصور الجداريه بالعماره الجنائزيه بمنطقة تونا الجبل بالمنيا ، رسالة دكتوراه ،كلية الفنون الجميله ، جامعة المنيا ، 2010، ص 34

lower part of the walls is decorated with rectangular panels after being painted black and the frame is painted in various colors, including yellow, red, white and green.[17]

House No GB24:

The house consists of a room that is boarded in by five steps,

Its main entrance consists of a door with a crown, there are some remains colors on the right and left walls beside the door, there is a back door to that room leading to another room, pic (a), which was completely lost.

House made of mud brick covered by white wash layer.

The inside room there is remains of polychrome on walls was damaged by different damage factors.pic (b)

House No: GB24 photo by researcher

Pic (a): the back door   **Pic (b): polychrome inside the room**

5- Factors and manifestations of damage affecting the murals in funeral houses:

There is no doubt that clay buildings are most affected to damage and do not withstand the harmful effects of various factors and strong damage such as stone buildings, especially those constructed with good stones in their properties and multiple sources and are not characterized by strong natural bonding such as the bonding that combines the metal components of the stones, and therefore exposed many ruins of bricks is damaged when detected in different archaeological sites as the components of the bricks could not withstand the great difference between the environmental conditions in which the buildings lived before detection and in such cases the temperature of the air and the different rates of the most important factors that cause the evaporation Water inside the brick components.

It is known that the evaporation of water is done at a rapid rate on the surface of the adobe brick during the detection of this brick, while at a slow rate in the internal parts due to lack of pores inside the brick. The amount of evaporated water depends on the characteristic of the bricks of the internal spaces between its metal

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components, which over time lose absorbed water and adsorbed water.

  Temperature and evaporation rates also control the amount of water evaporated. In such circumstances, brick blocks are subjected to a difference in dimensions due to evaporation of water and shrinking of the size of the metal particles. This brick is also exposed to the most serious manifestations of damage of cracks and eventually turns into a material lack of cohesion as a result of crystallization of salts that were dissolved in water crystallization different sizes depends on the nature of salt and evaporation time and the amount of water containing these salts.

Due to the special nature of the physical composition of the mud brick, when exposed to any source of moisture, it absorbs some of this moisture or absorbs water. As a result, there is serious physiochemical damage inside the bricks where the bricks lose their mechanical strength due to the impact of some components with water. This moisture causes the decomposition of the organic materials bonded inside the bricks and turns them into materials suitable for the growth of microorganisms. This moisture also plays an effective role in dissolving crystalline salts and transporting them within different places, which leads to more manifestations of damage.[18]
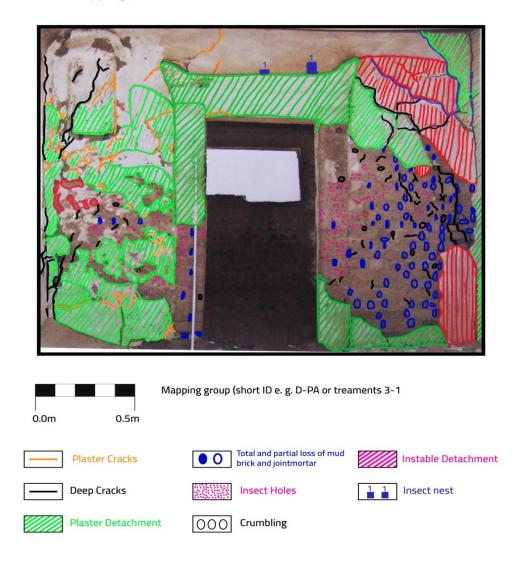
Manifestations of polychrome damage:

1. Surface fragmentation of the color layer
2. Hardening and separation of the color layer as a result of transformations of some components of the mural image such as gypsum in the form of peel
3. The presence of gaps, drilling and holes as a result of wind slaughter
4. The occurrence of large cracks vary in length, width and depth due to different weathering factors[19]

An example for manifestations of damage affecting the murals in funeral house no 24

18- محمد عبد الهادي محمد (د) : دراسات علميه في ترميم وصيانة الاثار غير العضويه ، كلية الاثار ، جامعة القاهره ،1997 ، ص 172

19- عزت زكي حامد قادوس (د) : علم المتاحف وفن الحفائر ، دار المعرفه الجامعيه ، الاسكندريه ، 2004 ، ص 250

ID : GB 24 /M09
Subobject : Antechamber , wall east
Hand mapping : Naira Mahmoud

Mapping group (short ID e. g. D-PA or treaments 3-1

0.0m   0.5m

Plaster Cracks	Total and partial loss of mud brick and jointmortar
Deep Cracks	Insect Holes
Plaster Detachment	Crumbling
	Instable Detachment
	Insect nest

Map of the facade of the funeral house

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المراجع

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