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# **BULLETIN**

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**THE NECROPOLIS OF ANFUSHI: CULTURAL  
HERITAGE AND FUTURE**

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Alexandria owns the greatest concentration of Hellenistic-Roman Necropoleis in the Mediterranean region, and the subject of the Alexandrian necropoleis constitutes one of the more debated and complex issues of Graeco-Roman archaeology in Egypt.

In my view there are two basic questions of current significance, among the many problems still to be resolved in the field of Alexandrine archaeology: first, that of the topography of the ancient city and of the history of its town planning and monuments, a subject already considered by a number of distinguished scholars, including Mahmoud bey el-Falaki, Noack, Thiersch, Pagenstecher, Breccia, Adriani, and the Colleagues of the Polish Mission, and the French Colleagues of the Center of Alexandrian Studies; and second, that of the methodological reformulation of the problem of Alexandrian art in an extensive and profound re-examination of the vast phenomenon of the transplantation of Greek art into a country like Egypt that for millennia had expressed its own art forms, which were the antithesis of Greek art, as continued to be true throughout the Hellenistic-Roman age.

It is in this highly engaging context of data collection, scientific research and pondered critical revisions that the Repertorio d'arte dell' Egitto Greco-romano has always operated and intends to operate in the future, this great international enterprise founded in Palermo by Achille Adriani in which we of Archaeological Department of Palermo University continue to be interested.

With regard to the necropoleis at Alexandria we cannot forget the general work by Rudolf Pagenstecher (*Nekropolis*, Leipzig 1919), which was however immediately outdated by the extraordinary discoveries of Breccia and Adriani. But we must also point out that Adriani returned

many times to the great themes of the city's topography and layout and to the history of Alexandrine funerary architecture, each time with great success, culminating in, the presentation of the two extremely well received volumes of the Reportorio, Series C, I-II (Palermo 1963-1966), in which we find a collection of exhaustive and updated notes, detailed points of information on individual problems, and above all an irreplaceable documentation that he had collected and arranged for the study of one of the aspects of the archaeology of Graeco-Roman Egypt, with a view to reconstructing the appearance of Alexandria and the destiny that befell it. The impressive work of the Reportorio is now enriched by the collaboration of Patrizio Pensabene, the author of a long and scrupulous research work entitled "Elementi architettonici di Alexandria e di altri siti egiziani", Reportorio, Serie C, III, Rome 1993). To him we are obliged for what is one of the most ample and complete surveys of Hellenistic-Roman architectural decoration, yet regarding a fundamentally autonomous, provincial and almost unknown area like Egypt.

First of all we desire to signal that, since 1987, with the authoritative patronage of the embassy of Italy at Cairo, we have started and constantly renewed to the Italian State Department our project for an early programmed intervention concerning the conservative restoration for the most important and much more degraded complex of the western necropolis onward: the Graeco-Egyptians hypogeum of Anfushi (whose painted walls have suffered by now irreparable damages). Ourselves we participated in a joined mission - Institute of Archaeology in Palermo / Central Institute for the Restoration in Rome - exactly in September 1987, mission of which did part our friend Umberto Baldini and the results of the joined Baldini-Bonacasa report they were submitted in May 1988 to our State Department at Rome, at the Italian Embassy in Cairo and the Director of the Italian Institute of Culture, and, always at Cairo, at the Presidency of the Egyptian Organisation of Antiquities, as well as the General Director of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.

In this brief account, we will confine ourselves to few observations about the history of the Anfushi necropolis and some possible corrections and provisional interventions, partly performed just in the necropolis of Anfushi, where we have operated in the last years, without interfering with any future operations, when it will be known the system in which they **converge** at various range of physical data and chemical trials, environmental alterations and climatic variations of each necropolis.

### **ANFUSHI**

Book XVII of "Geographia" by Strabo, who was in Egypt in the years 25-24 B.C., is of fundamental importance for us. The geographer speaks of the position and form of Alexandria, the island of Pharos, the Heptastadium and the two ports; then following an itinerary that proceeds from east to west, as far as the western harbour, Strabo lists numerous monuments, from the Royal Palace of Lochiàs to the port of "Eunostos", and, in this, the little port called "Kibotòs" (The "box"), into which the canal that linked the Nile and the Mareotic marsh flowed to the sea. The well-known passage in Strabo XVII, 1, 10 very accurately indicates the existence of a Nekròpolis beyond a last brief stretch of the city extending past the canal and this description enables us to locate the suburb of Nekròpolis with certainty at the extreme western limit - beyond the city and the old quarter of Rhakotis with the great Serapeum.

To the necropoleis extending to the east (Antoniadis, Cleopatra les Bains, Ibrahimiyah, Hadra, Mustafa Pasha, Chatbi, Sidi Gaber, Sporting, el-Montazah, Tigrane Pasha, the alabaster tomb) and west of the city (Gabbari, Mafrusa, Kom eshogafa, Wardiyan, Suk el-Wardiyan, Forte Saleh, Thiersch hypogea nos. 1, 2, tomb of Dionysarion, necropolis of Minet el-Basal, Wescher catacomb) we must add those of the island of Pharos (Anfushi and Ras el-Tin).

The monumental-type Alexandrine Hellenistic hypogeum originated as a family tomb: it is organic and concentrated in architectural conception and possesses funerary couches ("klinai"), often finely

decorated, altars for sacrifices, basins, wells for lustral water, and painted walls. The Roman typology presents a greater size, intensive sepulchers with rows of superimposed loculi, and not much decoration which, when indeed present, is of limited quality. The style of contemporary houses certainly influenced the planimetry and the architectural decoration of these monumental hypogea. There are two main types: one with a central peristyle or pseudo-peristyle court (with an access stairway), around which the various rooms are distributed; and the other, in the so-called "oikos" style, with rooms arranged around a main axis at the end of which is the alcove with the funerary bed. There are many inventive variations on the two basic designs: peristyle hypogea, presenting highly significant differences in their layout (i.e. monoaxial-type hypogea, but so profoundly different that they present an almost theatrical appearance (a raised "loghèion" over the flat area of the court with a five-door façade - three real and two false). The one absolute exception is the el-Wardian hypogeum, which combines the single-axis type with the use of a peristyle.

It may be useful to point out some of the recurrent architectural features in the Alexandrine hypogea - the great façade with semi-columns abutting onto the walls, with doors, pseudo-doors or pseudo-windows between the intercolumniations; the more widespread preference for spectacular effect ("frons scenae"), or else limited to the focus of attention in the innermost part of the hypogeum (the chamber with a funerary couch and the circular rooms with three-chamber cells); and the use of curvilinear features - a constant practice in Alexandrian civil architecture - which recurs in numerous Hellenistic hypogea.

Starting from the first century B.C., a sarcophagus in the full sense of the term replaces the sarcophagus-bed in the funerary chamber, which is no longer just an alcove but a great niche for the sarcophagus. Later on, the sarcophagus' niches became three in number, one in the end wall and two in the side walls, while the rectangular room is converted into a three-chamber cell.

Decorative wall painting is well represented in the hypogea of the city, first in the parallel and polychrome "zone" style, which reproduces the structure of a real wall with slabs and blocks of coloured and variegated marble, the imitation of alabaster being extremely common (hypogea of Sidi Gaber, tomb no. 1 at Mustafa Pasha and Anfushi); also the upper parts of the walls later repeat the imitation of an isodomous work, and there will be what is called First Style (hypogeum of Mafrusa), which in Egypt lasted a very long time. Besides the above examples of First Style, there are in Alexandria clear testimonies of the illusionist open wall: in architecture (Chatbi), in wall decorations (Sidi Gaber), in painted loculus doors, offer attempts at a perspective effect (Alexandria, Hadra, Plinthine), or with a view through an imaginary door towards open space (Chatbi); not to mention the links between figurative elements of Alexandrian monuments and figurative elements of second-style walls in Campania. As for the Egyptianizing features of what is known as third style, these seems to be product of the exoticism and the Egyptian fashions that on many occasions affected Italy, rather than equivalents of any Alexandrian decorative system.

Of the two necropoleis at Pharos, Ras el-Tin and Anfushi, there is no doubt that the latter presents the more interesting solutions.

We will speak later of the Egyptianizing style that distinguishes it. Here it is necessary to clarify that the functional architectural features are few and simple: the two-ramp stairway, the open-air quadrangular court at the center of the hypogeum, the two or more subterranean corridors, which also contain the room for "prayer", and the little funerary chamber. The normal rule is that each hypogeum presents only two poorly articulated subterranean chambers. Only hypogea IV and VI at Anfushi differ from the traditional type, with the presence of subterranean chambers that we may define as a main and a secondary one, with the addition of niches and loculi at the end of the sides.

It is superfluous to speak of the court, which is extremely simple. It is nearly always open-air, except for one hypogeum at Anfushi, where it was partially covered. The court is decorated with painting only at



Anfushi 1 and 2. The court, in the overall concept of the plan and in the distribution of the space, does not therefore constitute a focus of attention but acts rather as a co-ordinating link between the irregularities of the groups of rooms and the multiplicity of the perpendiculars.

The Egyptianizing walls, as also - in part - the niches, present fairly refined decorative panels of somewhat limited repertoire. The traditional classical style is present in the courts, the pilaster strips in the niches, the passageways, and the cornices. In fact, at Anfushi, apart from some architectural overdoors, there is no façade of any importance.

Compared with the architectural forms of middle - or low - level stylistic level, the noblest part of Anfushi is to be seen in the system of painted decoration in the walls, the roofs, and the vaults.

The first-style decoration is prevalent, as also the pictorial imitation in the polychrome marble coverings and alabaster slabs.

The first simple style is to be seen in tombs 1, 2, 3, and 5 at Anfushi, while the examples imitating faïence tiles are present at Anfushi 1, 2, and 5.

The first style is derived from the simple transformation of the zone system, with the rich painting of the wainscot and the addition of isodomous apparatuses. The orthostats are highly coloured in imitation of alabaster and are often separated by an intermediate band.

The first-style covering, at Anfushi, represents the most important group of this type of wall decoration that we know in Alexandria; it is like the zone style at Mustafa Pasha. The later tile covering reflecting Egyptian taste and tradition is without any doubt of a later date and in fact is superimposed on the first style.

The vaults are nearly everywhere decorated with a network of lozenge-shaped or octagonal patterns, while the roofs imitate a spreading decorated carpet according to a tradition that is known at Mustafa Pasha and Forte Saleh, and there is no doubt that a link can be established with

some pictorial examples from tombs in southern Russia and Magna Graecia. This is an imitation of woven woolen carpets, of great interest owing to the repertoire but manufactured by a decorator with little care for detail. Between the two hypotheses of Pagenstecher and Rostovtzev, like Adriani, I prefer that of Rostovtzev, on the assumption that the decoration of the Anfushi vault presupposes direct knowledge of the ancient tapestries of which Alexandria was a renowned centre of production.

It should also be added that in Hypogeum II, chamber 2 at Anfushi, the decorative element is enriched with typical pictorial subjects of the Greek cyclic poems.

To the theme of Egyptianizing decoration destined to the inside of the hypogea, which is limited to niches, doors, surroundings of loculi, etc., we must add the three Egyptian pictorial subjects in the access stairway to hypogeum 2 at Anfushi: one of the paintings represents the deceased person before Osiris. This is clearly a common and conventional kind of painting, but its presence in a decorative first-style environment is evidence of a Graeco-Egyptian eclecticism that characterized the origin of the tombs.

With regard to dating, it was A. Schiff who first established the chronology of Hypogeum 2 as being between the years 220 and 210 B.C., and its reconstruction immediately afterwards, because of a fire, in the decade 190-180 B.C.

Recognizing the difficulty of establishing the relative chronology, R. Pagenstecher concluded with a partial chronological scheme of the whole complex. The Egyptianizing phase, emphasized by Pagenstecher with a dating that is perhaps too early, must clearly be later than 200 B.C.

On the basis of the decoration we can presume that Hypogea 1 and 2 are practically contemporary, although without any doubt Hypogeum 2 provides clearer evidence of Graeco-Egyptian eclecticism.

All things considered, and also bearing in mind the architectural features and pictorial decoration, the Anfushi hypogea can be dated between the second and the first century B.C.

1) The more ancient "zone" style, which is present at Chatbi and Mustafa Pasha, is not to be found at Anfushi; the origin of Anfushi must therefore be later than the late third-early second century B.C.

2) Graeco-Egyptian eclecticism fits the late Hellenistic period rather than the early period, and indeed certain details would suggest that it continued until the beginning of the Roman age.

3) Even if pottery items and other finds are extremely rare - because all the tombs were robbed - it still remains that they reconfirm the date of the end of Hellenism.

In the history of Hellenistic Egypt, the group of Hypogea at Anfushi occupies a particular position: on the one hand, owing to their pictorial decoration, as heirs of Hellenistic art; while, on the other hand, they represent a particular moment in the development of Alexandrian architecture and art, as an episode, a parenthesis, that reflects a particular ethno-anthropological area, with clear ethnic and social differences, and with profound cultural difference, but also showing marks of innovation. To conclude, in the scattering of Alexandrian testimonies, these late forms at Anfushi are an indirect confirmation of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism, a genuine phenomenon of osmosis between conservative Egyptian tradition and Graeco-Hellenistic renewal. The final outcome is a testimony of a composite figurative and possibly not linear but certainly living culture, in the phenomenon of the Hellenization of Egypt.

This important Graeco-Egyptian funerary complex on the Pharos Island in the western necropolis, whose exemplary architectural regularity has got married to the most refined in-relief and pictorial decoration of mixed style is devastated by the raising sea water, especially in the Tombs 3, 4, 5.

Whereas on the one hand it is necessary to intervene, at the boundaries of the complex, with a series of stable water-scooping machines, working in some seasons, throughout the phenomenon of tidal wave, on the other hand, today, we can face exclusively the necessary consolidation and the conservative restoration of the painted walls starting together the procedures for the drawing of the salty efflorescence on the walls, of which it still misses a suitable chemical analysis also proceeding to the elimination of the former interventions achieved in cement or with unsuitable mortars.

The real and definitive recovery of the more at risk sector of the necropolis of Anfushi (Tombs 3, 4, 5), in the periods of absence of water is tied to the detachment of the original floor of each hypogeum, to an operation of drain of waters and reclamation below the floor, to the creation of drain with external slope, and to a canalized collection for the quick out of the waters at their seasonal return. Subsequently, only the floor can be replaced *in situ*, having had care to protect and to preserve the linked to an impermeable resin support surface.

It is obvious that the definitive improvements of the building structures and the painted walls can take place only after having reached a constant equilibrium in the new state.

In the months of June-July of 1994 and 1995, and precisely in the necropolis of Anfushi, Tombs 1 and 2 - the only ones of the complex of the five hypogea uninjured by the above mentioned negative phenomenon - the Department of Archaeology in Palermo has started the first and the second campaign of restoration, that must be intended like sample campaign of conservative restoration. The necessary funds have been on purpose appropriated by the Office of the Foreign Affairs. We take the opportunity to thank for the precious collaboration and delicious hospitality reserve us, the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, today SCA, at Cairo, in the person of his former-President prof. Abd El Halim Nur El Din, and the Director of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, in the person of former-Director Mrs. Dorreya Said.

All the surfaces of the lithic structures (local sandstones of scarce cohesion), of the Tombs 1 and 2 of Anfushi, when distant from damp sources, and after accurate cleaning they have been submitted to a treatment with consolidator for sandstone RC/70 (ethyl silicate). The first result of the treatment, more times repeated at a distance of time, seems positive, but will need to wait some months in order to have guarantee the final result.

The whole surface of the painted walls has repeatedly been checked and when necessary we have proceeded with a calibrated fungicide treatment based on New-Desogen.

All the painted walls of the room 1 of the Tomb 1 and of the admittance staircase and of the room 2 of Grave 2 have been degreased with volatile substances and cleaned from the salty efflorescences by repeated applications of paper pulp and by use of the scalpel in some reciduiuous cases.

On the crackings and on the bulgings we have intervened with infiltrations of Primal AC 33, preferring this acrylic emulsion both at the pure state, and diluted at 40%-50% with entirely positive results.

Stringcourses and fillets have been worked with thin sand, pounded sandstone and seasoned mortar cream. As for the coloration, the mix foresaw: natural and burnt Siena earth, Pompeian red, titanium dioxide, Mars black, etc.

Every operation, the most negligible also, has been documented before and after the intervention.

The final restoration of the Anfushi necropolis, during periods when water is absent, depends on the detachment of the original floor in each hypogeum, drainage of the water and improvement of the subsoil beneath the floor, the creation of drainage channels with external outlets, and a system of channeling for the rapid outflow of water in the rainy season. Only then will it be possible to return the floor in situ, after the

surface has been protected and preserved by the application of a waterproof layer of resin.

What we wish to stress - and to do so we deliberately choose this context - is that since our restoration work to maintain the structures and after the fatiguing effort of scouring and totally cleaning the Egyptianizing paintings in hypogeum 2, it has unwisely been decided to whitewash the background and to touch up the outlines of the main figures in the representation of Osiris in the picture above the landing in the first flight of stairs. This is a serious but not isolated episode, since the magnificent little picture with horsemen and ladies that decorated the overdoor of hypogeum 1 at Mustafa Pasha has had the outline of the figures arbitrarily redone and painted over in carmine red. If, because of the passing of time (it is now some seventy years since the discovery) and the damaging effect of the weather, the strength of the artistic effect of the picture was lost, we now have a clumsy falsification covering the ancient form that has emptied of all meaning the bold procession of horsemen and ladies, which has always suggested to my mind certain water-coloured engravings by Pablo Picasso, from the series "Hidalgo y mulieres". I am one of the few lucky persons to possess one of these, of June 1960.

Alexandria, the moral capital of the Mediterranean, which with the refoundation of the New Alexandrine Library, intends to propose in modern terms the theme of universal culture, cannot remain insensible to the progressive deterioration and the certain loss of its monumental necropoleis.

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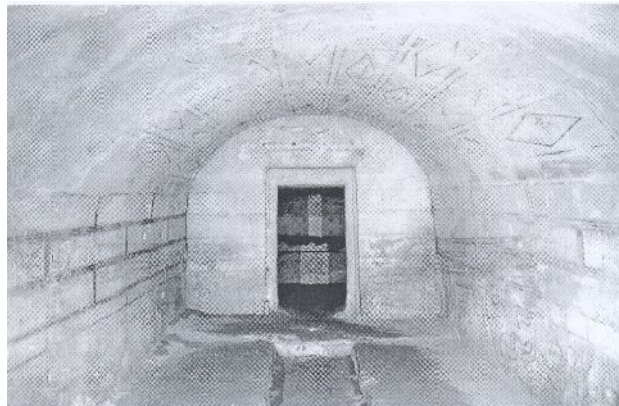
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1. Anfushi, Tomb 1



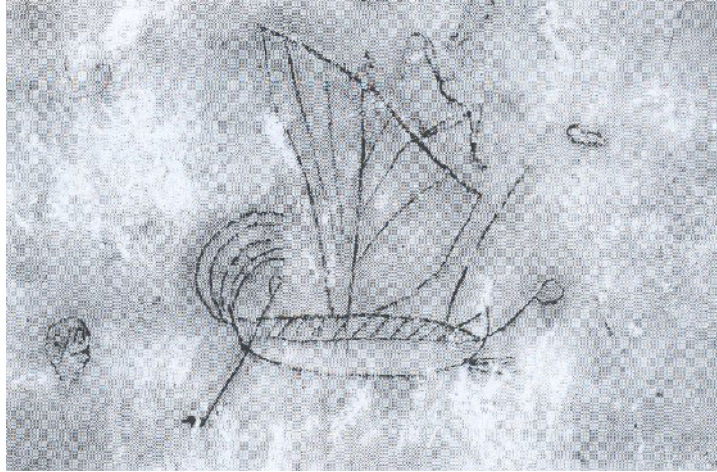
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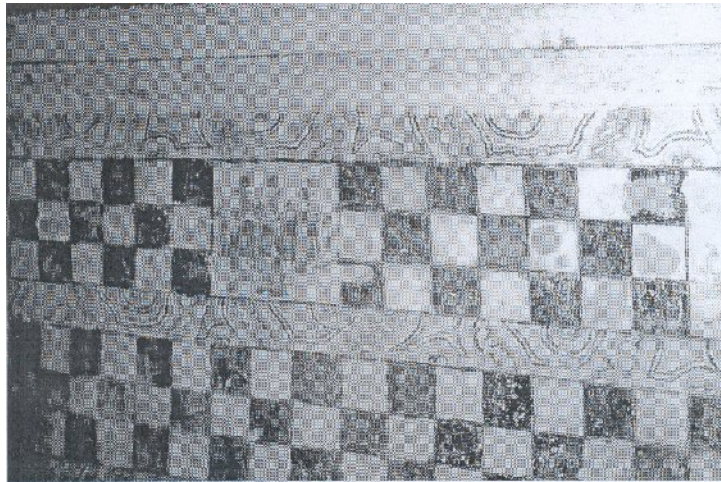
Anfushi, Tomb 1



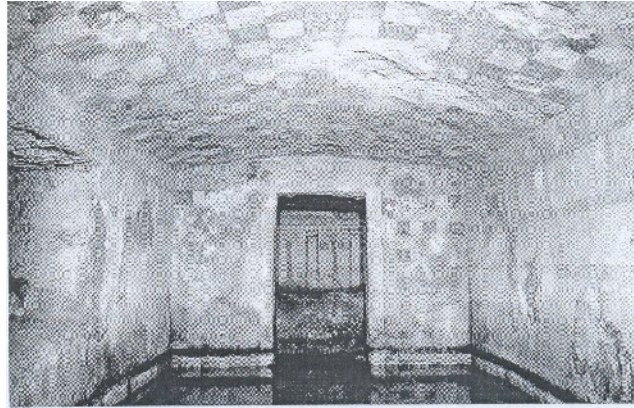
Anfushi, Tomb 2



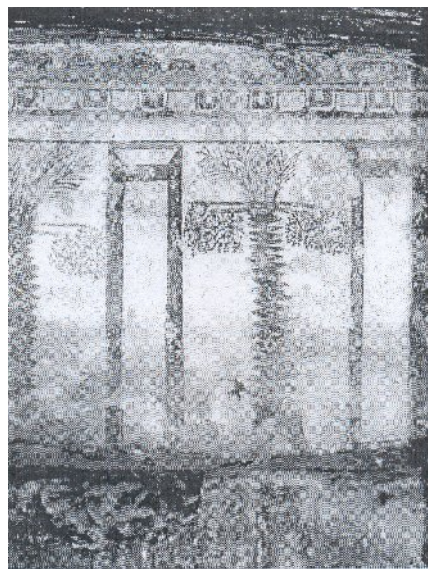
Anfushi, Tomb 2



Anfushi, Tomb 2



Anfushi, Tomb 5



Anfushi, Tomb 5