Ειδική Ενότητα

Special Section

FUNERARY ART IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: THE HELLENISTIC NECROPOLEIS OF ALEXANDRIA

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Styling social identity in Alexandrian funerary painting

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of social identity through the lens of funerary art in Hellenistic Alexandria, focusing on its fluid cultural, ethnic, and social constructs. Drawing upon a rich corpus of material, including painted funerary stelae, *it examines how Alexandrian tombs served as spaces for narrating personal and communal identities in a cosmopolitan society. The analysis situates these representations within the broader artistic tradition of* skiagraphia, *demonstrating how tonal shading and physiognomic features convey not only lifelike portraits but also the ethos and social roles of the deceased. By contextualising these visual narratives against administrative practices, legal statuses, and the city's multi-ethnic milieu, the paper argues that Alexandrian funerary art transcends mere mortuary function, reflecting ideological processes tied to identity, privilege, and memory. Through comparative perspectives drawn from Greek and Egyptian traditions, this research further reveals how artistry in funerary monuments articulated racial, cultural, and social hierarchies, embodying tensions between assimilation and differentiation. The study ultimately illustrates how Hellenistic Alexandria's funerary art offers critical insights into pre-modern identity politics and the interplay between art, culture, and society in the ancient world.*

We live in a world deeply shaped by social identities. We define ourselves through categories such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or even dietary choices. We may identify as Egyptian or Greek, Christian, Muslim, or agnostic, man, woman, or part of the diverse spectrum of gender identities. We can be pacifist vegetarians, militant vegans – or virtually anything else. For every possible label, there is likely a fraction of the population that aligns with it. We construct our singular, often exclusionary sense of "self" around these predefined clusters of physical and cultural traits, which we regard as expressions of our social and cultural identities. This process helps us navigate not only the challenges of our present world but also those posed by our own pasts. For, in the words of British sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 1990, 225).

And positioning ourselves is what we have learned to do best in late modernity. Assisted by information technology and its breathtaking advances in the last thirty years or so, we have learned to digitally manipulate our images, crafting our *selves* via the art of self-portraiture – both pictorial and literal. Our images describe us as culturally constructed subjects – national, gendered, embodied. We offer ourselves to ourselves and others as well-framed subjects, both identified and identifiable, as a way of explaining ourselves, or indeed as a way to tell (or even paint) our own stories with our own words: as suggested by Italian-born cultural theorist Teresa de Lauretis, identities are narratives constructed by the subject so that their experience acquires meaning (cf. de Lauretis 1984, 158–86).

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How feasible is it to trace such cultural politics in pre-modernity? Alexandria, like Rome, was one of the most "modern" cities of the classical world; it appears to have epitomized cosmopolitanism millennia before the concept even existed. Reflecting on this, one might consider Alexandria the youngest metropolis of the classical era. Yet, despite its modern characteristics, we are unlikely to find significant traces of a latent "modern" sensibility concerning social identities in a place like Hellenistic Alexandria. In the late 20th and early 21st century, national identity –often intertwined with the religious denomination assigned at birth– remains a crucial determinant of who we are. Whether Greek or Egyptian, Christian or Muslim, these labels shape our day-to-day experiences, offering a sense of belonging and meaning. Take the present author, for example: born in Alexandria to Greek parents, I was raised and educated as an "Egyptiot-Greek" – a term that, in those days, carried ambiguous significance. This identity, assigned at birth, was designed to define me as both unique and privileged. In our world, preserving those foundational traits, whether factual or imagined, continues to signify who we are – what we have always been, immutable and definitive.

Not so much in those days. Greeks and Macedonians seemed more ready to "go native" as soon as they emigrated to Egypt –or Syria, Persia and Babylonia for that matter– and what we understand today as predetermined and unchangeable cultural traits were in fact back then perceived as anything but. My favorite example of such fluidity comes from an early Hellenistic text, *Mime* I by Herodas, composed sometime in or about 270 BCE: in it, we find a young woman sitting in misery in some unnamed Greek town, waiting in vain for her fiancé's return. An elderly matchmaker visits her in order to suggest an alternative proposition, another man, more readily available. To make her case, she explains how the elusive boyfriend is not likely to return any time soon. For it has been "ten months […] since Mandris [the boy's name] departed for Egypt and he has not sent [his intended] a single line. The house of the Goddess Aphrodite is there [meaning "in Alexandria"]; everything, everything there is and which can be, is in Egypt: riches, palæstrae, power, happiness, glory, spectacles, philosophers, young boys, temples of the brother-loving gods, an excellent King, a museum, wine, all the good things one could desire, women without number – by Persephone, Mistress of Hades, the sky is not so glorified by bearing so many stars! […] how must you feel as you sit warming your chair?" (vv. 23–26; see the discussion in Lewis 1986, 10–4).

Admittedly, what Herodas's matchmaker is describing is a newly-found –a modern if you will– desire for sights, wonders, and earthly delights unbecoming of traditional Greek values; an overpowering need to taste all the new land had to offer, the city American papyrologist Naphtali Lewis once called "Eldorado on the Nile" (Lewis 1986, 8). The luring destination for every Hellenistic vagabond –Greek or otherwise– who wished to chase his fortune away from home. One is reminded of *Idyl* 14, penned by Theocritus at about the same time as the *Mime* by Herodas I just mentioned: a young man, Aischines, is in distress in the aftermath of his bitter betrayal by his mistress, who has gone off with another man. Aischines contemplates leaving his native land, and his friend Thyonichus, concurs: "if so be thy mind is made up to go thy ways abroad, I'll tell thee the best paymaster a freeman can have; King Ptolemy. […]: a kind heart, man of parts, a true gallant, and the top o' good-fellowship; knows well the color of a friend, and still better the look of a foe; like a true king, gives far and wide and says no man nay – albeit one should not be forever asking, Aischines. So if you are happy to clasp the warrior's cloak over your right shoulder, and dare to stride on both legs as a hardy foeman brandishing his shield, run off to Egypt tomorrow" (vv. 57–70).

I often think of those young men portrayed by Herodas and Theocritus – the faithless, absent drifter of the former and the cocky, heartbroken wanderer of the latter; of the lives they may have lived in their newly-found home and the deaths they may have died. And, as luck and archaeology would have it, it is about the latter we get to hear (or indeed *see*) more than about the former. Take for example one of the painted limestone slabs from Alexandria, today kept at the city's Graeco-Roman Museum (Fig. 1). It belongs to a type readily recognizable as Greek, with its simplified *naiskos* typology, and the characteristic pediment crowning it. It shows a cavalry man –no doubt the deceased– galloping to the left, chased by his footman. The horseman is suited in Graeco-Macedonian military gear – with a corselet over his tunic, a chlamys flying behind him, and high boots. The whole composition, paralleled by similar ones from Greece and the rest of the Hellenistic world (be they painted

Fig. 1. Alexandria, Egypt. Limestone grave slab; a horseman with groom. 3rd century BCE. Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum inv. no. 10228.

or sculpted) identifies the man as one of the original settlers or perhaps one of the first wave of emigrants – the likes of Mandris and Aischines we were just talking about.

The slab seems too early to be of a much later cavalry officer named Dryton, a Cretan whom we have come to know pretty well from surviving papyri archives. Dryton lived and served during the 2nd century BCE, first in the Greek-speaking town of Ptolemais and then in the native-populated town of Pathyris, where he was posted for the rest of his career. Indeed, he remarried there, a young wife from Cyrene (her name does not survive in the texts available to us), whose father was doubly named Ptolemy and Pamenos and was –like his own father and his father's brother before him– a foot-soldier serving in the Ptolemaic army at Pathyris (Lewis 1986, 88–104). Still, they all identify as something else than what they are – Cretans and Cyreneans two or three generations on.

Carrying both a native Egyptian and a Greek/Macedonian name is not uncommon in Ptolemaic Egypt (as it was not uncommon in Seleucid Babylonia). In papyri documents surviving from the 3rd and the 2nd century BCE, we find that settlers continued to identify as "Greek" or "Macedonian" until late, even though they tend to be bilingual more often than not, and carry mixed cultural backgrounds often enough: thus, in the year 158 BCE, a man called Ptolemy, son of Glaukias the Macedonian as he says, identifies himself as a "Greek" to claim his privileges against the natives (Lewis 1986, 69–87). On the other hand, and as time progresses, it is common to come across Ptolemaic subjects carrying two names – one Egyptian and one Greek, thus not always being able to tell which came first: this way, an Asklepiades we know from some papyri is also identified as Menkhes in some documents (and sometimes with both names: Lewis 1986, 104–7), a Polemon is also named Petesoukhous (Lewis 1986, 122–23). In other situations, we come across civilians with Greek names identified as siblings with civilians carrying native Egyptian names, and so on.

Fig. 2. Alexandria, Egypt. Limestone grave *stela*; soldier with daughters; Second half of the 3rd century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 04.17.4.

Fig. 3. Alexandria, Egypt. Limestone grave slab; soldier. Second half of the 3rd century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 04.17.5.

Does this mean the newcomers got along with those they perceived as the "natives"? Certainly not. Remember: identities are narratives active in the present, that is processes that help us overcome present experiences. What these experiences may have been, we can often tell from the way these men and women are portrayed on their funerary monuments. Young Aeschines, as described by Theocritus, would have experienced life in the barracks before dying a more or less honorable death surrounded by his comrades and perhaps family. The Ptolemaic rulers engaged a substantial number of soldiers and officials, granting land to specific military groups as a strategy to ensure their allegiance and augment land-based revenue. Immigrants constituted approximately 5% of the population, originating from regions such as Cyrenaica, Greece, the Aegean islands, Macedonia, the Balkans, Asia Minor, and Judea, along with smaller contingents from the Levant and the western Mediterranean (Fischer-Bovet 2018, 212). Ethnic denominations are often recorded on legal and fiscal documents as well as funerary stelae. A soldier in a blue cloak is shown bidding farewell to two young girls, presumably his daughters, on his own funerary slab from the second half of the 3rd century BCE (Fig. 2). He is identified as Isidorus, a Galatian; the slab comes from a large tomb in Alexandria, allegedly discovered in 1884. Another slab depicting a Galatian soldier comes apparently from the same tomb (Fig. 3). Here, we can also see the oval-shaped shield typically associated with Galatian mercenaries in that period, or perhaps the particular military unit as part of the Ptolemaic army.

Based on our modern notions of nation and ethnicity, we tend to identify these ethnic denominations as standardized state labels, like our own. Yet, there seem to be some crucial differences: the most extensive diversity in ethnic labelling from Ptolemaic Egypt is evident in legal contracts, petitions, and tax lists; additionally, official correspondence concerning land allotments to individual soldiers often specified their legal ethnic identity (Fischer-Bovet 2018, 212–20). The early Ptolemaic system of identification was formalized through a royal ordinance (*prostagma*) dated to around 275 BCE, which outlined how individuals were required to declare their official identity in various contexts, such as legal disputes and contractual agreements. Although the ordinance

itself has not survived, its content is partially reconstructed from two documents used by officials and notaries. These specify that individuals had to declare their identity according to one of three categories: soldiers, citizens, and others, with distinct requirements for each group. Soldiers, in particular, were obligated to state their ethnic origin (*patris*), which was instrumental in determining their legal or fiscal status – two concepts not always synonymous in Ptolemaic Egypt. Notably, from the Middle and Late Ptolemaic periods, ethnic labels often became conventional rather than strictly accurate, functioning as "legal ethnic labels" indicative of occupation or social rank, rather than true reflections of ethnicity. "Social status" is here understood as a matter of lifestyle, education, and hereditary or occupational prestige (Fischer-Bovet 2018, 221).

Administrative reasons may also lie behind the tendency to identify with ethnic designations the deceased on funerary *stelae* from other parts of the Hellenistic world, such as the important harbor-city of Demetrias in Thessaly (von Graeve and Preusser 1981; Helly 1992; Stamatopoulou 2016). As the effective capital of the Macedonian kingdom for a long stretch in Hellenistic history, and as an important port of trade, Demetrias attracted –like Alexandria– a diverse crowd of businessmen, entrepreneurs, and traders, as well as mercenaries and other military personnel. Their funerary slabs, like those of Alexandria, identify them as men (and women) of their class and social importance, advertising their wealth and social acceptance by their peers. The evocation of their ethnics on their funerary monuments –we hear of people from Amphipolis, from Thebes, Crete or from as far as Sicily and beyond– makes us wonder, based on the example of Alexandria, whether it might also serve an administrative or even bureaucratic purpose.

In Ptolemaic Alexandria at least, legal and fiscal status came with privileges –or lack thereof– and the meticulous classifications we find in our records seem to support that. The Ptolemies distinguished between Egypt's native population and their fellow-Greek and other newcomers, on whom they relied for military service among other things. This distinction was racial rather than ethnic. As has been well argued in the last thirty years or so, especially with reference to archaeological research into ancient, biologically defined cultures, race is a social construction involving a series of social decisions that not only privilege a rhetoric of biological essentialism in accounting for race, but also determine which biological features to privilege in assigning racial categories (e.g., skin color), the meanings that such features are presumed to signify (e.g., serving as signs of supposed social or intellectual inferiority) and the subsequent uses to which they are put (e.g., rationalizing forms of discrimination: see Mirza and Dungworth 1995; McCoskey 2002; cf. Plantzos 2023, 2024). Rather than considering race a static concept, one that holds the same connotations and consequences regardless of context, we may treat race as a dynamic formation, that is, as a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). According to this view, we may use the concept of race and racial distinction to denote the shifting organizational principles that establish identity, and structure its meanings and representations.

Returning to the funerary *stelae*, these seem to pay meticulous attention to representing their owners as persons framed by social and cultural processes: items of dress, household and sympotic paraphernalia, posturing and gesturing, Ptolemaic *stelae* proceed to portray their sitters through a sophisticated repertoire of strong cultural references. In this, they are fundamentally Greek: drawing from Greek art's ability to convey cultural context through subtle narrative allusions, the *stelae* create a pictorial world in which to place their recently deceased owners. If the *stela* with the soldier bidding farewell to his two daughters suggests a newly-founded home away from home –the privileged life of an emigrant and the family he built in and for the land of the opportunity– the repeated appearances of cavalry men on these *stelae* might suggest a systematic attempt to portray cultural as well as ethnic distinction, which in the Ptolemaic regime largely also meant privilege (Riggs 2002; Cole 2019).

And of course there is race. Alexandria may have become a cultural and ethnic melting pot upon its inception, racial tensions however were always present, even if not readily represented by contemporary art and literature (at least not in the art and literature of the Greeks). As far as the legal and fiscal policies of the Ptolemies suggest, there was a clear distinction between newcomers and natives (McCoskey 2002). A piece of literature often cited to document the tense relations between Greeks and Egyptians in Ptolemaic Alexandria

Fig. 4. Alexandria, Egypt. Limestone grave slab; soldier with servant boy. Second half of the 3rd century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 04.17.6.

comes from Theocritus once again: in *Idyll* 15, we follow the merry outing of two Greek Alexandrian women (albeit of Syracusan origins), Gorgo and Praxinoa, who are planning to attend the Greek festival of Adonis in the city's royal district. As the two women cross the crowded streets of Alexandria to get to their destination, Praxinoa is heard fuming against the city's local population: "Ye gods, what a crowd! How and when will we ever | Get through this mob? Ants without number or measure! | You've done many commendable things, Ptolemy, | Since your father has been among the immortals. No villain | Creeps up upon one in the street, Egyptian-wise, bent on mischief, | As in the past – a trick that pack of rogues used to play, | One as bad as the other, all of them scoundrels." (vv. 44–50; transl. Thelma Sargent).

Praxinoa's colonial arrogance, a harshly offensive narrative of imagined social and cultural superiority promoted by Theocritus himself, must be quite close to the true sentiments of the Greek settlers in the early 3rd century BCE, when the poem was written. The reference to the public order policies of Ptolemy Philadelphus seems to be confirming the racial tension revealed from the legal and fiscal papyri, as well as the various types of petitions we have in our disposal. And as papyrologists often observe, "occupations associated with Greek names within the Ptolemaic administration are generally of higher status than those attached to Egyptian names" (McCoskey 2002, 29; see also Fischer-Bovet 2018, 225).

Style, therefore, besides the overbearing presence of Greek lettering, may have been used to suggest race. Facial features and skin color were also demonstrably employed, as for example in a funerary slab showing yet another soldier in blue cloak, receiving a large, metallic-looking kantharos from a boy, who is also shown clasping his master's shield and spier (Fig. 4). Emphatically dark-skinned and crooked-nosed, the boy is racially defined as a native, next to his fair-skinned master, whose skin tones are carefully painted so that they suggest his prolonged, manly exposure to the sun rather than his racial make.

The slabs in question represent notable efforts in Hellenistic *skiagraphia*, the Greek term for creating images using tonal gradation rather than linear definition (Plantzos 2018, 129–31). The figural decorations on these *stelae* reveal repeated, layered brushstrokes that blend pigments intricately to develop and refine color values. This technique crafts an illusion of depth and contour, skilfully suggesting three-dimensionality on an inherently flat surface.

Skiagraphia was an elaborate painting technique based on tonal shading and color contouring, aiming at recreating the sense of volume and plasticity in skin, fabric, or metal and wooden surfaces. Rather than wishing to portray things (and figures) as they *were* –as Plato was complaining in the *Republic* and the rest of his works– *skiagraphia* succeeded in showing things are they *appeared* to our eyes, a proposition any idealist would find appalling, yet one any art enthusiast would applause; hence, *skiagraphia* and visual trickery in Greek painting soon became ends in themselves.

In the meantime, however, painterly styles were used to denote semblance, and indeed physiognomy. Notary documents from Egypt betray a certain bureaucratic anxiety to identify a contract's co-signatories or even witnesses. Individuals are often identified by means of the scars they may carry, or the tone of their skin. Thus, Dryton, whom we met earlier, identifies himself in his will as "of medium height, dark-skinned, with a scar on his right eyebrow, and bald" (which is rather odd if you think about it, considering that when his will would finally be read he would not be there to witness the proceedings or be identified by the parties concerned; see Lewis 1986, 89). Elsewhere, on a papyrus from 174 BCE, a man is described as light-skinned, with long hair worn brushed up, long-faced and hooked-nosed (Lewis 1986, 88).

Post-Aristotelian peripatetics deployed physiognomics as an apparatus by means of which to classify human characters. "Soul and body react on each other", we read in *Physiognomonics* (4), a text in antiquity believed to have been penned by Aristotle himself, and at any rate springing from a long theoretical tradition going back to the Babylonians (see Brekoulaki 2012). Skin complexion and eye color (as well as shape) were primarily thought to convey a person's abilities and weaknesses: a pale complexion and bright eyes were the sign of a charitable man, while pale and dull eyes were thought to betray a man's lack of sensitivity. A brave man, in comparison, was thought to have been endowed with a bright eye –neither too wide-opened nor half-closed– and a rather dry, not too moist skin; whereas a pale or pinkish complexion were thought to be tell-tale signs of intelligence. Regarding the depiction of the eyes, in particular, we are well aware of the attention paid by both painters and sculptors –notably Apelles and Lysippos– to representing Alexander's forceful character and "lion-like" qualities, an effort also evidenced in Hellenistic coinage and seal cutting. Recent studies have shown that although great care seems to have been taken in Late Classical and Hellenistic painting to produce believable images of the human body, especially in contexts such as those of the royal burials at ancient Aigai in Macedonia, it is not always possible to chart a clear, a one-to-one relation as it were of the images to the philosophical doctrines that may have inspired them (esp. Brekoulaki 2012). This is more prominent in the Frieze of the Hunt, from the so-called Philip's Tomb at present-day Vergina, where the pinkish complexion of the men portrayed seems to advertise those men's *tryphe* ("life in luxury") rather than their masculine bravery.

Be that as it may, although what we currently know from Alexandria pales in comparison to the far superior examples from Late Classical Macedon, it is evident that even less skilled artisans took great care to convey believable representations of the men and women they depicted. How much of this effort stems from Late Classical Greek painting's obsession with verisimilitude and lifelikeness, or whether it reflects a deeper engagement with physiognomics –the theory that physical appearances reveal personality traits and qualities– remains uncertain. Equally unclear is the extent to which the former is influenced by the latter, that is, to what degree the desire to produce faces true to life reflects a broader belief that nature itself embodies inherent truths. If nothing else, Alexandrian funerary paintings, even by modest means, demonstrate a deliberate effort to depict skin tone through the sophisticated layering of pigments and variations in color and hue. Shading is applied, naturally, to suggest volumes and contours, the intricacies of garment folds, and the plasticity of naked flesh. When depicting soldiers, a particularly notable effort is made to render tanned complexions – masculine bodies bronzed by long periods of exercise or battle under the sun, away from the comforts of home. This approach hearkens back to

Fig. 5. Alexandria, Egypt. Limestone grave *stela*; family scene. Late 4th – early 3rd century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 04.17.2.

traditions of Archaic and Classical painting. In such works, as in the partially surviving monumental funerary *stela* from Demetrias, which shows two soldiers standing side by side, tonal shading not only conveys physical form, but also serves to express character. It becomes a visible marker of identity, encapsulating the way they lived and how they died.

The contrast between a paler skin complexion reserved for females and a darker one featured by males is well illustrated by yet another funerary painted *stela* from Alexandria, depicting a darker-looking seated man bidding farewell to a standing woman (Fig. 5). Another dark-skinned man, wearing a dark violet himation, stands behind the seated man in the center. The pale yellow and violet tones of the garments, rendered quite diaphanous in some areas, especially on the standing female, betray expert command of *skiagraphia*, and so does the delicate rendering of the facial features, paler for the woman and decidedly darker for the men. Another intriguing feature of the *stela* in question is its *mise en scene*: the background of the scene is divided vertically into two areas, grey on the left and violet on the right. The painter has thus managed to convey the quiet, sombre tone of the scene, as well as suggest to the viewer the sense of a closed space, alluding to the oikos now mourning one of its prominent members. Once again, the point of the scene is not only to elaborate on the way these people lived their lives within their communities, but also the respect they receive from their social milieu now that their lives reach their biological completion.

This way of doing things, or reacting to things done to you, comes pretty close to what the Greeks –philosophers and laymen alike– understood as *ethos* – a fluid trope rather than a fixed trait. Painting –as any Greek philosopher would have it, from Plato and Aristotle to their followers down to the Imperial period– was all about depicting a soul's ethos, what most thinkers described as *ethographia* (see Brecoulaki 2015; cf. Plantzos 2018, 133–75). Pigment layering and tonal shading is evident in most painted faces from Alexandria,

Fig. 6. Amathus, Cyprus. Limestone grave *stela*; youth holding bird. 3rd or 2nd century BCE. London, The British Museum inv. no. 1894.1101.716.

Fig. 7. Thebes (Boeotia). Painted grave *stela*. Portrait of young man. Thebes, Archaeological Museum.

even if their state of preservation is not quite complete. We may be certain, however, that the best among the Alexandrian funerary *stelae* would depict their subjects with the delicacy we find elsewhere in the Greek world or the Ptolemaic realm itself for that matter: a good example is the limestone pedimental *stela* from Amathus in Cyprus, dating from the 3rd or 2nd century BCE, showing a youth in a sleeved red chiton, enveloped in a long, white himation, and holding a bird, presumably a dove, in his left hand (Fig. 6). The style is linear rather than painterly, with strong outlines, though in the face the artist seems to have tried to denote the boy by distinguishing his facial features (the shape of the eyes and mouth especially), as well as in the shape of the head, the short-cropped hair and so on. A much more accomplished example comes from Thebes, in central Greece (Fig. 7): the bust of a young man is portrayed in a slight three-quarters turn to his right, wearing an orange-red chiton and a creamy-white himation hanging over his left shoulder. He is named Theodoros, and is greeted – *CHAIRE* – as an esteemed member of his community. Dating from the later second or the early first centuries BCE, this example betrays expert use of *skiagraphia* and tonal gradation.

Did the painters of those funerary *stelae*, as those of the ones from Alexandria, try to represent not just their models' likenesses but their souls as well? Social identities, to be sure, were not limited to the person's role in society, his or her age, profession, family ties and community interactions. They also conveyed their religious beliefs and social values as it were –in a way portraiture in Hellenistic Alexandria, and one could argue in the Hellenistic world at large– was a gateway to the sitter's soul. Nowhere is this more evident, than in the so-called "Fayum portraits" from late Hellenistic and Imperial Egypt (Doxiadis 1995; cf. Plantzos 2018, 336–41). Egyptian mummy portraits of the Early Imperial period offer good examples for studying how Graeco-Roman painting sought to depict a man's or a woman's (or a boy's or girl's for that matter) *ethos*: as an overall outlook towards humanity and the human condition, society and communal living, to life itself and to death that constituted life's inevitable termination.

Funerary art from Alexandria, therefore, in many ways the Hellenistic city par excellence, affords us a generous glimpse into the ways we, ourselves, wish to represent the pasts we populate and the bodies we inhabit. As such, it is trying –iconographically as much as stylistically– to make sense of present experience.

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