

Ειδική Ενότητα

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THE HELLENISTIC NECROPOLEIS OF ALEXANDRIA

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Collective Burial in Hellenistic Alexandria and Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

Collective burial structures –tomb complexes built for the purpose of interring multiple individuals– are one of the most important aspects of the funerary landscape of Alexandria. These structures first appear in the earliest cemetery of Alexandria, Shatby, with the tomb known as Hypogeum A. Some similar structures in Cyprus are usually considered to have been constructed as a result of Alexandrian influence, in particular the Tombs of the Kings. While the architectural influence is undeniable, the nuances of practice and meaning of collective burial were different in each place. In Cyprus, though the Hellenistic period saw some definitive changes in tomb architecture, collective burial itself as a mortuary practice had been the norm across the island since late Neolithic. This paper considers collective burial as a practice in general, while also examining specific Hellenistic tombs in Alexandria and Cyprus, taking into account both architectural form and the nature of collective burial itself. In both Alexandria and Cyprus, there is a clear distinction between two levels of collective burial: inclusion in a communal tomb such as a hypogeum, and multiple burial within a specific context, one that might result in comingled remains. The specific meaning behind each choice, however, remains particularly Alexandrian and Cypriot.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of collective burial during the Hellenistic period is interesting for two reasons, one more broadly archaeological, and the other related to the specific culture-history of the Ptolemaic Eastern Mediterranean. On the one hand, collective burials are difficult to study: most theoretical approaches to mortuary archaeology, especially in the processual tradition (e.g., O’Shea 1984, 1996) have focused on individual burials and grave assemblages, while collective tombs overall have been under-theorized. There is work to be done in determining the limits of what social information is possible to extract from a collective burial context. As to culture-history, Hellenistic-era material of areas under Ptolemaic rule has usually been treated solely as part of distinct regional archaeological histories (e.g., of Cyprus, Crete, etc.) or, in the case of Egypt itself, as part of a distinct discipline. But it is also possible to consider the Ptolemaic empire as a whole. Is there such a thing as a specifically Ptolemaic material culture? What material can be called simply Hellenistic as opposed to Ptolemaic? There are some commonalities in material culture and practice across regions during the Ptolemaic period, so perhaps it is worth treating the area and time period more holistically.

This paper compares collective burial practices in Alexandria and Cyprus during the Ptolemaic-period as a way to begin to address both these questions. Cyprus was the most important Ptolemaic possession outside of Egypt, and as such provides the most natural region to investigate potential pan-Ptolemaic practices. Ptolemy

killed the king of Kition in 312 BCE, and while the island was seized by Demetrius Poliorketes in 306 BCE, Ptolemy recaptured it for good in 294, until it was ceded to Rome in 58 BCE. By the time of Ptolemy's conquest, Cypriots across the island had long been practicing burial in communal burial structures, while in Alexandria communal burial structures developed organically within the first decades of the city's founding. This paper will look at just a few tombs in detail: two *hypogea* in Alexandria (Hypogeum A in Shatby and Hypogeum A in Manara); the Tombs of the Kings near Nea Paphos; and a Hellenistic tomb excavated at Pegeia. I argue that in both Cyprus and Alexandria there is a distinction between inclusion in a communal burial structure and interment in a truly mixed burial context, which has implications for our understanding of how identity is articulated in both places. However, before delving into the specifics of the Cypriot and Alexandrian practices, I am going to discuss collective burials generally and theoretical approaches to them.

COLLECTIVE TOMBS

A collective tomb is defined by three variables: number of burials, duration of time, and continuity of space. To be a collective tomb, it must contain multiple interments; the interments must have been deposited successively over time, rather than all at once as in a mass grave; and the interments must be in the same location or structure (Dédérrix et al. 2018). This terminology is necessarily broad, and encompasses a large number of tombs that we might otherwise consider distinct. For example, this definition makes no presumption as to the relationship between people buried in a given tomb. This definition thus lumps together family tombs, where inclusion is based on kinship, and tombs managed by non-kinship based groups such as burial clubs or associations. For most archaeological cases, we do not have textual information that definitively states the organizing principle of a given collective tomb. Collective tombs were common in many places in many periods, and the reasons that people favored this type of practice must have been particularly locally situated. The specific architecture of a communal tomb structure, which can vary widely, does not figure in this definition, but rather the tomb's use as a place of multiple burial.

Outside of the problem of definition, the very nature of a collective tomb makes it difficult to study. In the processualist tradition of mortuary analysis, beginning with Binford (1971) and Brown (1971) and continued through O'Shea (1984, 1996), the strength of mortuary evidence for answering social questions comes from the nature of the burial as an archaeological deposit. Funerary practices are generally conservative, and are conducted according to certain rules and rituals that tend to change slowly over time. Since every individual interment is done according to these certain rules, and since funerary rites are performed and enacted by the living, the treatment of each individual interment must be related in some respect to an identity associated with the deceased: the deceased is being treated in a way that is deemed appropriate for them by the living (O'Shea 1996). The intentional and purposeful nature of mortuary treatment means that patterns we find in mortuary evidence must reflect real distinctions recognized by the living society. This does not mean that we can assume a one-to-one correlation between patterns in mortuary data and the structure of the living society, as some early processualist attempts at mortuary analysis assumed (e.g., Tainter 1975) and which post-processualists rightly criticized (e.g., Hodder 1980). However, this does mean that patterns recognized in mortuary data are real distinctions recognized by the living society in some capacity.

With collective tombs, this type of mortuary analysis is far more difficult to do. Each individual interment in a collective tomb remains the result of intentional ritual action done according to specific rules; but the reality of multiple depositions in a single context makes interpretation far more complicated. In a collective tomb, a given context is no longer the result of a single archaeological depositional event, but rather the accumulation of multiple events over generations or even hundreds of years. In attempting to do mortuary analysis along the lines outlined above, this fact presents several problems. First, there is the difficulty in determining the rate of deposition in a collective tomb: were burials made at a steady rate, or were there long interruptions between

depositions (Dederix et al. 2018)? The answer has implications not just for the chronology of the tomb, but for determining the group actually using the tomb (one extended family over time, another group usurping it later, etc.). Second, there is the issue of the grave assemblage. Depending on the nature of deposition within the tomb, it may be impossible to confidently associate any particular grave goods with any specific individual.

This difficulty in associating specific grave goods with specific interments is demonstrative of the problems for mortuary analysis in the processualist (or at least processual-ish) tradition when it comes to communal burial. Proper mortuary analysis relies on finding patterns in the relationship between variables of a given archaeologically attested burial context. These variables can be defined as (1) bioarchaeological data; (2) the treatment of the body, including cremation vs. inhumation vs. mummification, positioning of the body, etc.; (3) the quantity and variety of grave goods associated with the interment; (4) grave architecture, including the size and elaborateness of the tomb, both internal and outwardly accessible/visible; and (5) the placement of the grave within the larger cemetery landscape. Given this, the potential disturbance of earlier burials that is inherent in each subsequent burial in a collective tomb is a real problem for interpretation: once grave goods can no longer be associated with a particular interment, the ability to recognize patterns becomes difficult, and hence the ability to extract meaningful social information is impeded.

We can, however, analyse collective burial and collective tombs to some degree as a variable within a system of mortuary practice. Collective burial relates to two of the variables outlined above. First, the choice of collective versus individual interment can be categorized as a type of body treatment; and second, there is the collective tomb itself, which relates to grave architecture. While these are often conflated, I am particularly interested in the role that the *act* of collective burial played as opposed to the development of collective burial structures. This is where a comparison of Alexandria and Cyprus can be fruitful: in the former, collective tombs and collective burial developed in tandem under new social conditions, while in Cyprus collective burial had long been normative practice, but tomb architecture developed under Ptolemaic influence. We also have to consider the difference between interment in a collective burial structure, and burial in a space that results in comingled remains; the two are not necessarily coterminous. This dynamic is worth interrogating, to get at the potential roles and meanings of collective burial in different parts of the Ptolemaic empire.

COLLECTIVE TOMBS IN ALEXANDRIA

Collective tomb structures are present from the very foundation of Alexandria. Shatby, the earliest attested cemetery of the Hellenistic city, consists of a combination of cist tombs, with and without burial monuments, as well as more elaborate underground chambers approached via a *dromos* (Breccia 1905, 1912). Most crucially, Shatby includes Hypogeum A, the earliest attested, purpose-built collective burial structure in the city. The recent excavations carried out by the Archaeological Society of Alexandria and its associates have revealed the full extent of the structure, while the work of Stefan Schmidt has been critical in reassessing the nature of the structure itself (Schmidt 2010; Rummel et al. 2019). Hypogeum A consists of an open court meant as a communal gathering space, along with several galleries containing multiple *loculi*, including the main chamber (room “h” in Breccia’s original plan) centered on the burials contained within two elaborate, stone-cut *klinai* sarcophagi. This sets the pattern for later iterations of the *hypogeum* type in Alexandria: a central communal chamber with rooms branching off that contain *loculi* for individual interments, either cremations or inhumations.

For the purposes of this paper, however, I will largely set Shatby aside and focus on the Hadra cemetery, and in particular the Manara section. While Hypogeum A in Shatby is critically important for understanding the development of mortuary practice in Alexandria, very few tomb assemblages from Shatby can be reconstructed due to Breccia’s recording methods. The Hadra cemetery is better recorded, excavated largely by Achille Adriani over the course of many years and multiple rescue excavation projects.

The Manara section of Hadra is particularly important: excavated in 1940 by Achille Adriani, initially only a selection of tombs was published in the fourth volume of the Graeco-Roman Museum's *Annuaire* (Adriani 1952). However, Marie-Dominique Nenna's publication (Nenna 2012) of the raw data from Adriani's notebooks from the Manara area excavations enables us to get the fullest picture of Alexandrian mortuary practice in the eastern necropoleis. While a full analysis of the Manara material is beyond the scope of this paper, we can use the material from Manara to better define what collective burial looks like in Alexandria. There is also, definitively, a distinction between the act of collective burial within in a single *loculus*, and the inclusion of a burial in a communal structure. These are two separate iterations of collective burial, which may or may not co-occur.

Some basic statistics from Manara cemetery are presented in Table 1. In terms of grave architecture, the cemetery overall was similar to Shatby with cist (*fossa*) graves with and without monuments, and underground *hypogea* meant for multiple interments. Some significant differences were the presence of single *loculi* accessed via *dromoi* or a shaft, as well as *loculi* directly cut into a rock face without any associated structure. There were 69 individual burials found at Manara, four of which were cremations, and 16 of which (all inhumations) were individual burials within a communal burial structure. Twenty-five of these burials had grave goods, and inclusion in a collective *hypogeum* structure (or not) appears to have had no bearing on whether an individual received grave goods (or not). There are 13 burial contexts that contained multiple burials, only four of which were in communal *hypogea*. Just over half ($n = 7$) of these multiple burial contexts contained only two individuals; three individuals were present in five contexts, and one context contained four. Of these 13 burial contexts, eight were mixed cremation-inhumation contexts, four contained only inhumations, and only one of which consisted solely of cremations. It may be the case that there is a certain preference for a mixed burial if an individual is cremated, since cremations on their own are quite rare.

Table 1. Summary of basic information from Manara cemetery. Derived from Nenna 2012.

Individual Burials	Multiple Interment Contexts
Total: 69	Total: 13
16 burials in hypogea	4 in hypogea
4 cremations	8 mixed inhumation/cremation
	4 inhumation only
	1 cremation only

Just this quick overview of the material indicates how there is a difference between inclusion in a *hypogeum*, and collective burial itself, which can occur in any burial structure. For instance, the single context with the most interments (three cremation and one inhumation), burial 127 in Manara section C (Nenna 2012, 141), was a single *loculus* accessed via a shaft, not a *loculus* in a larger *hypogeum* structure. Hence, it seems that there were two different types of collectivity being enacted in Alexandria. It is worth taking a look at Hypogeum A in Manara (*not* the Hypogeum A in Shatby) to see how this plays out in more detail.

Hypogeum A, in area B of the Manara section of the Hadra necropolis (Fig. 1; Table 2), contained 13 *loculi*, 12 of which were accessed directly for a central, communal space. *Loculus* 13 was an apparent later addition, carved out of and extending perpendicular to the south wall of *loculus* eight. All of the *loculi* in the Hypogeum were occupied, with three multiple interment contexts: *loculi* 10, 11, and 12. *Loculus* 10 contained two inhumations, *loculus* 11 three inhumations, and *loculus* 12 two inhumations and one cremation. Only five *loculi* had any grave goods, four of which were single interment graves.

Though our evidence is sparse, this *hypogeum* can give us some interesting insight into the relationship between the two types of collective burial: within a communal structure, and then a multiple burial within a single *loculus*. What seems clear in Manara Hypogeum A is that the decision to be buried collectively in a single

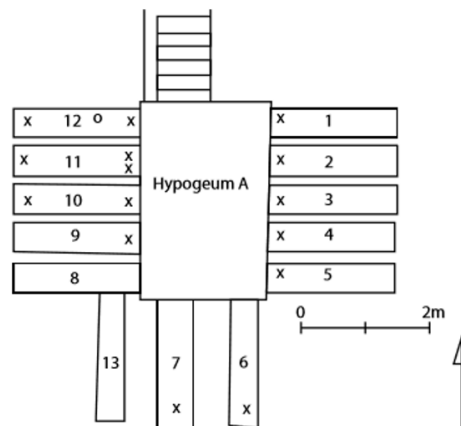


Fig. 1. Hypogeum A, Manara, after Fig. 6a in Nenna 2012. X = position of inhumation, if known; O = position of cremation.

Table 1. Summary of basic information from Manara cemetery. Derived from Nenna 2012.

Loculus #	Total individuals interred	No. of cremations	No. of inhumations	Single or Multiple Interment? (S/M)	Mixed Cremation/Inhumation? (Y/N)	Grave goods? (Y/N)
HypA.1	1	0	1	S	N	N
HypA.2	1	0	1	S	N	Y
HypA.3	1	0	1	S	N	N
HypA.4	1	0	1	S	N	N
HypA.5	1	0	1	S	N	Y
HypA.6	1	0	1	S	N	N
HypA.7	1	0	1	S	N	Y
HypA.8	1	0	1	S	N	N
HypA.9	1	0	1	S	N	Y
HypA.10	2	0	2	M	N	N
HypA.11	3	0	3	M	N	N
HypA.12	3	1	2	M	Y	Y
HypA.13	1	0	1	S	N	N
Totals	18	1	17	15 sg.; 3 m.	1	5

loculus exists as a variable independent of any other aspect of that burial. For instance, with respect to the grave assemblage, the multiple-interment *loculi* in Hypogeum A could include grave goods, as could single-interment *loculi*, while the multiple-interment *loculi* could include all inhumations, or mixed inhumation-cremation burials.

What is most telling is the organization of the burials within Hypogeum A. As stated above, only three of the 13 *loculi* have more than one interment (numbers 10, 11, and 12), located on the west side of the *hypogeum* nearest the entrance. While one could argue that these specific contexts were the result of a lack of space—every other *loculus* was full, so multiple interment was necessary—it is just as likely that this was an intentional choice, and not one made out of necessity. Proof of this is *Loculus 13*: this *loculus* was clearly added later, and contains only one interment. Since the construction of new *loculi* was an option even in a cramped space such as Hypogeum A, it seems that the use of *loculi* for multiple burials was not, or at least was not solely, due to practical constraints of space. To be buried in a communal structure was one choice; to be buried in a *loculus* with more than one burial was another.

It is, I think, crucial to consider the meaning of collective burial in a single *loculus* and collective burial in a purpose-built communal structure as distinct. The development of the communal burial structure in Alexandria, beginning in Shatby with Hypogeum A, is intertwined with the development of Alexandria's social fabric. Stefan Schmidt (2010) proposed that Hypogeum A in Shatby was a structure built to serve the needs of a "burial club", or association of non-blood related individuals, who combined resources to cover funerary expenses and rituals. This makes sense as a response to the diverse, immigrant social fabric of the early city: old social ties would have been severed and new ones, not necessarily familial, would have to be constructed in their place to fulfil normal funerary obligations. Since that proposal, however, Schmidt has become more convinced that Shatby's Hypogeum A served a family tomb rather than for a burial club, though he admits there would be no structural difference between a family tomb and one for a burial club (Rummel et al. 2019, 139). Both a tomb for a burial club and one for a family would fulfil a similar need in Schmidt's eyes for a kind of social integration in the new, cosmopolitan social environment of Alexandria.

What is so interesting about these new collective burial structures, of which both Hypogeum A at Shatby and Hypogeum A at Manara are representative, is that though they are focused on the collective they are simultaneously, as Schmidt points out, clearly very focused on the visibility of the individual within that collective (Rummel et al. 2019, 140–41). The use of the individual *loculus* allows for the articulation of an individual identity within a collective one, whether that collective is an extended family unit or a burial organization, such that the individual still remains identifiable. The burial of multiple individuals in a single *loculus* defeats this purpose, however, as remains become comingled. Mixed burial in a single *loculus* clearly has a different motivation, independent of inclusion in the collective burial structure overall.

COLLECTIVE TOMBS IN CYPRUS

Unlike in Alexandria, where collective burial and collective burial structures can be called an innovation, in Cyprus during the Hellenistic period collective burial was nothing new. Inhumation interment of multiple individuals in a rock-cut, subterranean chamber tomb had been normal on Cyprus since the late Chalcolithic, becoming widespread during the Early Bronze Age Philia culture (Keswani 2004, 55). Up to the Hellenistic period, most of these tombs could be classified as either "cave-like", with a single usually irregularly cut chamber, or as regularly-cut, with one or more usually rectangular chambers (Parks 1999; Carstens 2006). Beginning in the late Cypro-Archaic period, there is a preference for regularly-cut chamber tombs over cave-like ones, but cave-like tombs persisted and were in use for the duration of the Hellenistic period. Unlike in Alexandria, then, we encounter a long-standing tradition of communal burial on the island, but one in which for the most part there is not clear emphasis on individuality within a collective. Most burials were made in a single chamber, emphasizing the collective over the individual, as individuals became easily comingled. But what changes during the period of Ptolemaic rule?

For the Hellenistic period, most attention has been focused on the so-called "Tombs of the Kings" near Nea Paphos, which were largely excavated by Sophocles Hadjisavvas in the 1970s and 1980s (Hadjisavvas 2014). The most important monuments at the site are eight rock-cut communal tombs, with associated *loculi* and cist graves, which range from more simple chamber tombs (tombs 1 and 2) to elaborate structures centered on an open-air, columned atrium (tombs 3, 4, 5, 6 7). The Tombs of the Kings are usually discussed as examples of Alexandrian influence in Hellenistic Cypriot architecture, and the similarities between the atrium tombs and the early communal tombs of Alexandria, especially those of Mustafa Kamel, have long been a subject of discussion (Guimier-Sorbets and Michaelides 2009). The atrium-style chamber tomb does not have a clear Cypriot precedent, and so some influence from Alexandria seems clear.

But it is also clear that the Tombs of the Kings are not a direct copy of an Alexandrian type: there are key differences between the atrium-type as it appears in Cyprus and in Alexandria. In Cyprus, freestanding columns

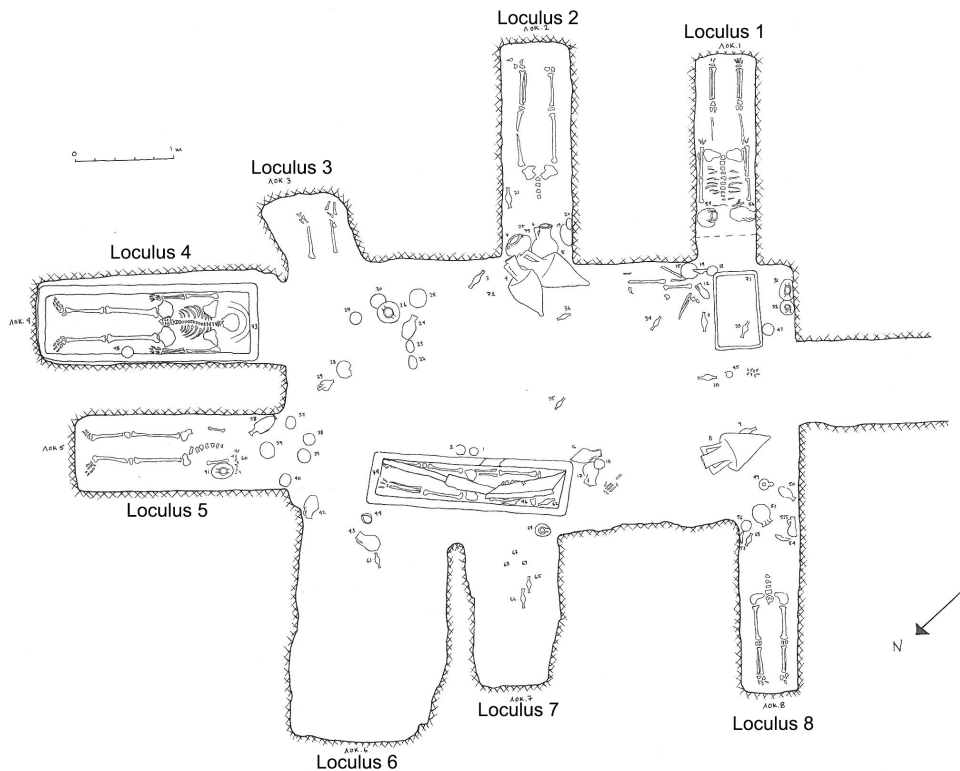


Fig. 2. Plan of Tomb P.M. 3534 (after Raptou et al. 2002: Fig. 1).

are used in the atrium tombs, while the best-preserved tomb at Mustafa Kamel, Tomb 1, has instead engaged columns. In fact, only Mustafa Kamel Tomb 4 has a courtyard with a true peristyle courtyard, and it is poorly preserved. The Cypriot tombs have wells in courtyards, like Alexandria, but not altars, unlike Alexandria (Guimier-Sorbets and Michaelides 2009, 221–24). In fact, the tomb with the clearest Egyptian influence is Tomb 8 of the Tombs of Kings, which has no architectural parallel in Alexandria at all; however, two limestone falcons, now in the Paphos District Archaeological Museum, were found associated with this tomb, and appear to be Egyptian-style Horus falcons. Thus, in many ways, the Tombs of the Kings *feel* Alexandrian, rather than are truly Alexandrian. The most important innovation for the Cypriot tombs, from a functional perspective, was the inclusion of an open court that provided for continuous access, rather the solely at the time of burial (Guimier-Sorbets and Michaelides 2009, 231). But of course, plenty of Alexandrian tombs did not in fact have this feature either.

So, what are we to make of these structures, and the people buried in them? What does collective burial *do* for them? While the Tombs of the Kings are usually attributed to officials from Alexandria based in Nea Paphos (Guimier-Sorbets and Michaelides 2009, 231–32), this does not have to be the case and is in fact unlikely that they solely are for them. There are a few examples of atrium types found outside of Nea Paphos, which means that it is not solely restricted to Paphian Ptolemaic elite. In a place where collective burial has been the norm for thousands of years, what does it mean for a Cypriot to be buried in collective tomb that takes as its inspiration a foreign, Alexandrian form? I do not have an answer yet, but the work that collective burial is doing in Cyprus must be different in some respect from what it is doing in Alexandria.

Though the majority of attention has been paid to the Tombs of the Kings, there is great architectural variety in tomb architecture across Hellenistic Cyprus. One innovation that appears, it seems, during the Hellenistic period, is the addition of *loculi* to some Cypriot-style chamber tombs (on dating see Parks 1999, 211, *contra* Carstens 2006, 152). An exhaustive overview of these types is beyond the scope of this article, but we can see this in a well-excavated and published chamber tomb from Pegeia (Fig. 2; Raptou et al. 2002), which is entirely

Hellenistic in date. The tomb was able to be mapped properly, with all grave goods recorded. Some objects were solely funerary (e.g., bronze wreaths and gold leaves) or were perishable (e.g., egg offerings), most were middle-quality ceramics, including amphorae, plates, bowls, jugs, and unguentaria (Raptou et al. 2002, 217). Individual interments could not be dated with enough accuracy to reconstruct the full use-history of this chamber tomb, even though the context is near-perfectly preserved.

It is, however, worthwhile to consider the use of space in this tomb, as above with Hypogeum A in Manara. The eleven burials in the Pegeia tomb were distributed across seven different *loculi* (*Loculi* 1–5, 7–8), two sarcophagi (Sarcophagus A and C), and one area (Area A) (Raptou et al. 2002, 224–26). Interestingly, for the most part each interred individual was buried in a discrete place. All of the *loculi* contained only one interment each; one individual was buried in Area A; and sarcophagus A contained one individual. Only sarcophagus C contained comingled remains, one male and one female. Like in Hypogeum A in Alexandria, it seems that inclusion in the collective tomb marked one thing – probably family affiliation, though one cannot be sure, especially since collective burial structures were normative practice in Cyprus – while burial together within in a single burial context, as with sarcophagus C, signals something else. The presence of *loculi* in this tomb make it much easier to clearly separate individuals from the collective. This is not the case in every Hellenistic Cypriot tomb, of course. The Hellenistic and Roman period tombs of at Mağara Tepeşi in the Malloura valley (T25–28), for instance, included far more individuals in a tomb, ranging from 25 to 42 individuals, with most remains being found comingled – though some of this was undoubtedly due to later looting (Harper and Tung 2012). But the use of *loculi* and the adoption of other clear discrete spaces for burial in Cypriot tombs (e.g., *arcosolia*, as in Tsambres tomb 15; see Dray and du Plat Taylor 1951) can be seen as a potential innovation, and which has implications for our understanding of collective burial and its meaning on Cyprus in the Hellenistic period.

CONCLUSION

So, what can we conclude, if anything, about communal burial in both Alexandria and Cyprus during the Hellenistic period? The work represented in this paper is all quite preliminary, but we can begin to think about what kind of social work communal burial is doing in both Cyprus and Alexandria. In Alexandria, I believe we can think largely in terms of innovation. The large *hypogea* were created to fulfil a specific social purpose, namely fostering social integration and creating social ties, whether that was via a burial association or in an extended family unit (Rummel et al. 2019). But burial in a *hypogeum* is a distinct thing in and of itself, as opposed to multiple interment in a single burial context. The structure of Alexandrian *hypogea* allows for the articulation of a kind of individuality within the collective (Rummel and Schmidt 2019), but the actual practice of multiple interment within a specific burial context (e.g., in a single *loculus*) is a clear negation of that individuality. The reason for that choice, and the identity it signals, is clearly distinct.

In Cyprus, there are clear introductions of certain tomb elements from Alexandria, in particular the open, accessible court and (to a certain extent) the peristyle tombs. But these types are restricted where they are found, and while they are innovative to an extent, they can also be seen as a development of indigenous Cypriot tomb types as opposed to a direct adoption of an Alexandrian type. The use of the *loculus* (a feature found in tombs well beyond Alexandria and Cyprus) is a development that perhaps also indicates an interest in articulating a sort of individual identity in burial that was not emphasized in prior periods. Since burial in communal structures was the norm on Cyprus, the meaning behind burial in a communal structure must have some different significance compared to Alexandria. But the occasional focus on the individual in death, as opposed to solely the collective, may signal a more significant influence from the wider Ptolemaic, and Hellenistic, world than the architectural innovations favored by elites around Nea Paphos.

Collective burials are difficult to approach, but are a potentially very interesting avenue of further research. In particular, it is important to consider these tombs both in their particular local context, and in conversation

with other sites across the Ptolemaic Mediterranean. It is clear of course that there is more work to be done, and we cannot as of yet fully interrogate systems of mortuary behavior that underlies the communal tombs of the Hellenistic period. Comparisons, however, can yield potentially fruitful results, in particular between Alexandria and Cyprus.

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