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THE SARCOPHAGUS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT?

By ANDREW CHUGG

Vivant Denon, Edward Daniel Clarke, and the Tomb of Alexander

In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte led a French expedition in the conquest of Egypt. His troops were landed on the beaches on the 1st and 2nd July and the general speedily assaulted and captured nearby Alexandria. At that time the great Hellenistic city had shrunk to a population of barely 6000, most of whom lived on an isthmus of land that had been formed by the accumulation of sand and silt against the ancient Heptastadion causeway, which once joined the mainland with the sometime island of Pharos, now a peninsula. Behind this 'new town' the circuit of the massive walls of the medieval old city was still largely complete, though ruinous in many places. The area they enclosed was, however, largely deserted except for a handful of ancient monuments and a few dilapidated mosques. Most prominent among the latter was a building on the north side of the principal street and close to the centre of the old city known as the Attarine Mosque (Fig. 1). The French *savants* who accompanied Napoleon were especially fascinated by this mosque, which it was suggested had been built on the site of the late Roman church of St Athanasius, a famous fourth-century Patriarch of the city: five of the twelve plates on Alexandria in the Antiquities section of their monumental record of the country, the *Description de l'Egypte*, show plans and views of this mosque and its contents. Vivant Denon, a leading scholar in the team, described these contents glowingly in his subsequent travelogue:

> In the court, plants which have grown into trees, have forced up the marble pavement. In the center of this court, a little octagon temple incloses a cistern of Egyptian workmanship, and incomparable beauty, both on account of its form, and of innumerable hieroglyphics with which it is covered, inside and out. This monument, which appears to be a sarcophagus of antient Egypt, may perhaps be illustrated by volumes of dissertations. It would require a month to draw all its parts.[1]

[1] Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* (London, 1802); this is the English edition of the French original.

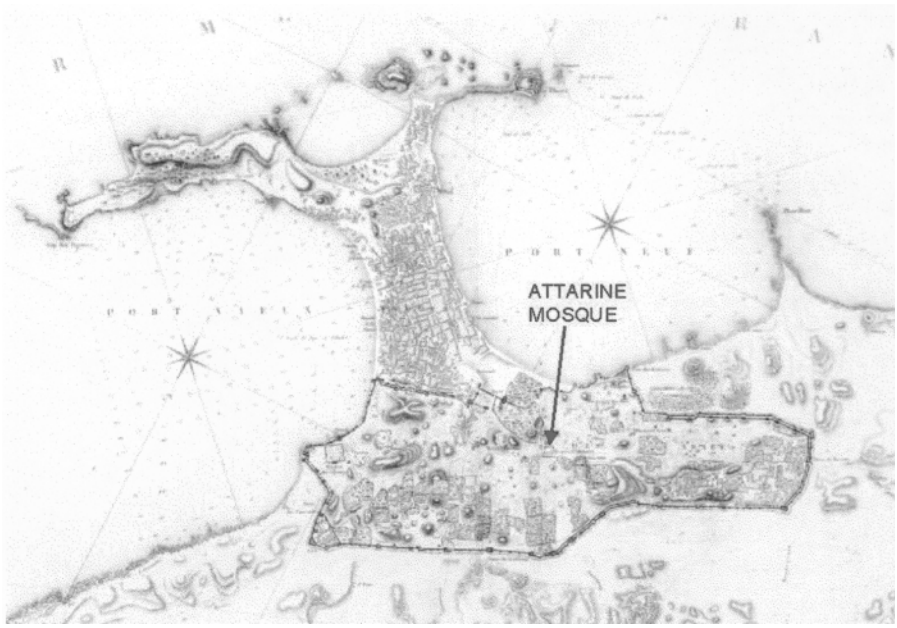

Fig. 1: An accurate map of Alexandria in 1800 from the *Description de l'Egypte* (Etat Moderne, Vol. 2, Plate 84).

Napoleon's fleet was virtually annihilated by Nelson in the Battle of the Nile whilst it lay at anchor in Aboukir Bay on 1st August. Napoleon later escaped back to France. However, the English were content to leave the French army marooned for several years until their eventual capitulation at Alexandria in 1801. As a condition of the treaty of surrender the French were required to hand over the antiquities they had garnered in the interim. Chief among these were the Rosetta Stone and the 7-tonne sarcophagus (Fig. 2) from the chapel in the courtyard of the Attarine Mosque (Fig. 3). Lord Hutchinson, the English commander, arranged for Edward Daniel Clarke of Cambridge University to secure these relics. His account of the recovery of the sarcophagus in Alexandria was as follows:

We had scarcely reached the house in which we were to reside, when a party of the merchants of the place, who had heard the nature of our errand, came to congratulate us on the capture of Alexandria, and to express their anxiety to serve the English. As soon as the room was clear of other visitants, speaking with great circumspection and in a low voice, they asked if our business in Alexandria related to the antiquities collected by the French? Upon being answered in the affirmative, and, in proof of it, the copy of the

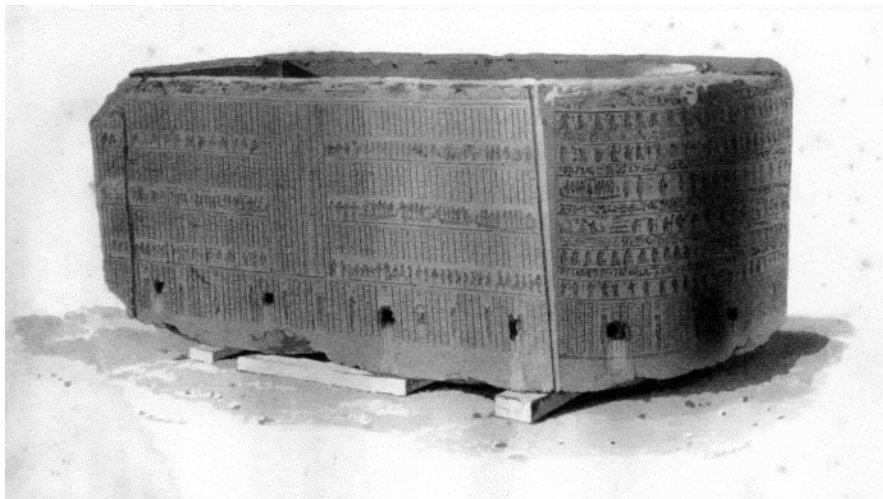

Fig. 2: The sarcophagus in an engraving from E. D. Clarke, *The Tomb of Alexander* (Cambridge, 1805).

Rosetta Stone being produced, the principal of them said, 'Does your Commander in Chief know that they have the Tomb of Alexander?' We desired them to describe it; upon which they said it was a *beautiful green stone*, taken from the mosque of St Athanasius; which, among the inhabitants, had always borne that appellation. Our letter and instructions from Caïro evidently referred to the same monument. 'It is the object,' they continued, 'of our present visit; and we will shew you where they have concealed it.' They then related the measures used by the French; the extraordinary care they had observed to prevent any intelligence of it; the indignation shewn by the Mahometans at its removal; the veneration in which they held it; and the tradition familiar to all of them respecting its origin. I conversed afterwards with several of the Mahometans, both Arabs and Turks, on the same subject; not only those who were natives and inhabitants of the city, but also dervises and pilgrims; persons from Constantinople, Smyrna, and Aleppo, who had visited, or who resided in Alexandria; and they all agreed in one uniform tradition, namely, ITS BEING THE TOMB OF ISCANDER (Alexander), THE FOUNDER OF THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA. We were then told it was in the hold of an hospital ship, in the inner harbour; and being provided with a boat, we there found it, half filled with filth, and covered with the rags of the sick people on board.[2]

This excerpt is taken from Clarke's treatise entitled *The Tomb of Alexander*, which he published in 1805 after he had brought the sarcophagus back to England, where it is still exhibited in the British Museum. In this book Clarke reproduced a drawing by Vivant Denon showing Moslem pilgrims worshipping the chapel containing the

[2] E. D. Clarke, *The Tomb of Alexander, a dissertation on the sarcophagus from Alexandria and now in the British Museum* (Cambridge, 1805).

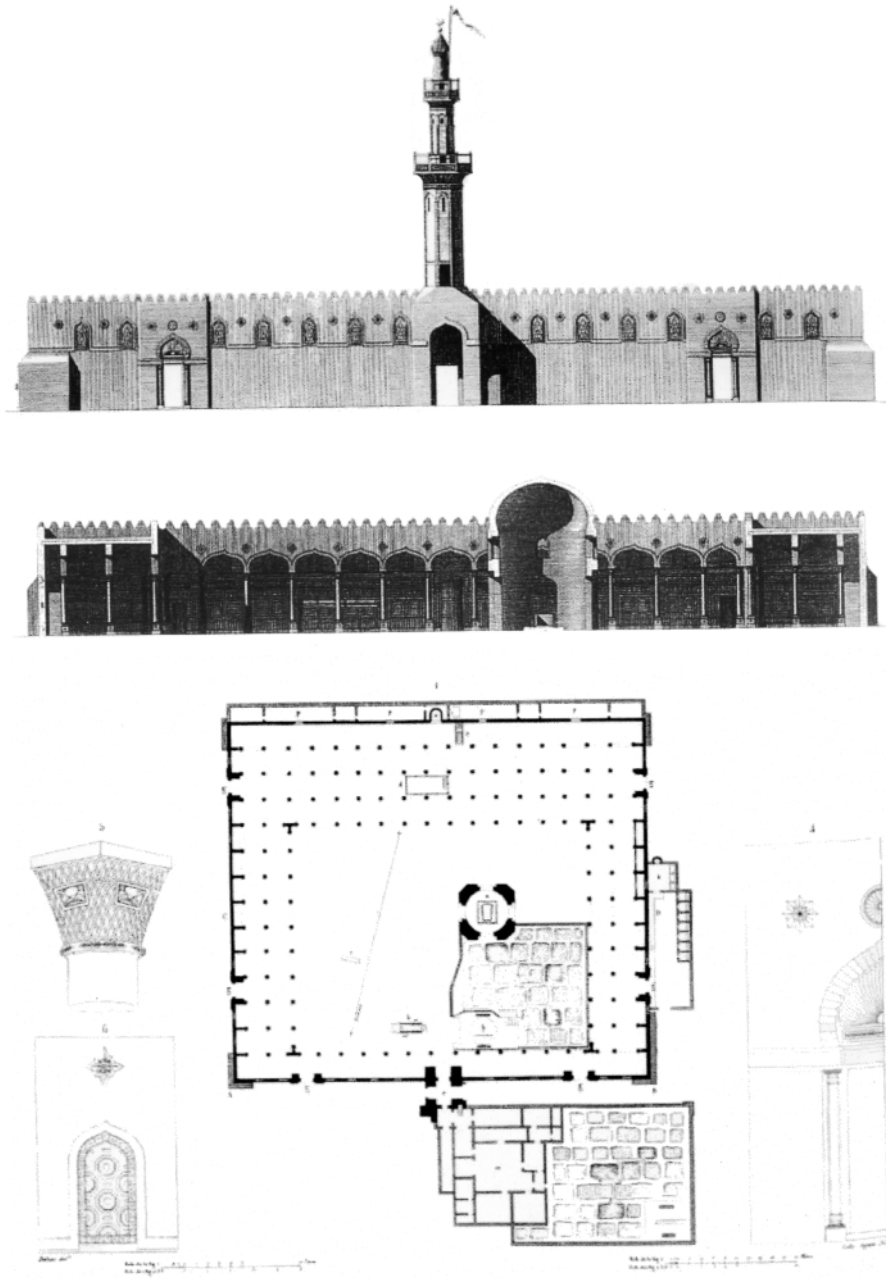

Fig. 3: Elevation, section and plan of the Attarine Mosque from the *Description de l'Egypte* (Antiquités, Vol. 5, Plate 38) showing the sarcophagus within the small chapel in the courtyard.

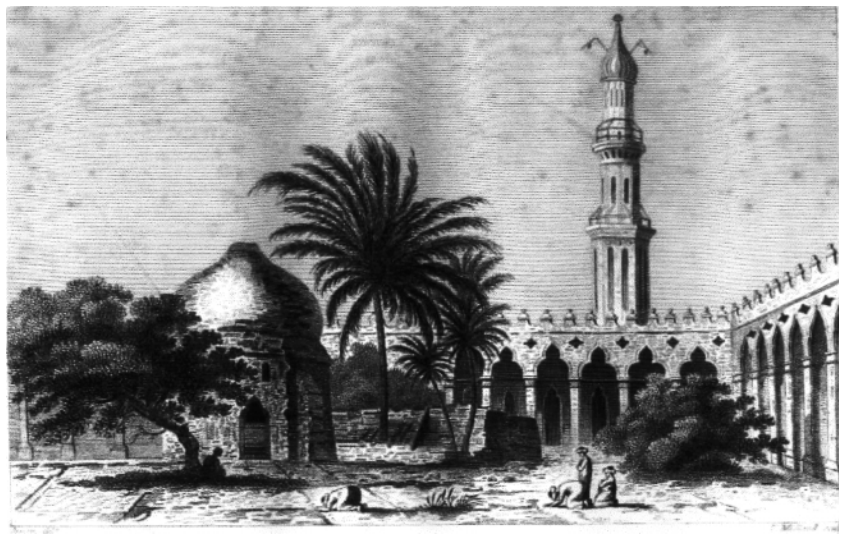

Fig. 4: The small chapel in the courtyard of the Attarine Mosque being venerated by Moslems circa 1798, based on a drawing by Vivant Denon from E. D. Clarke, *The Tomb of Alexander* (Cambridge, 1805).

sarcophagus (Fig. 4). He also discussed a large variety of ancient and modern accounts regarding Alexander's tomb in Alexandria, but he scarcely managed to add any further significant evidence to authenticate the use of the sarcophagus for Alexander's corpse. Nevertheless he did succeed in showing that this same relic had been worshipped in the Attarine Mosque throughout the eighteenth century by quoting the accounts of earlier European visitors.[3]

Decipherment, Obscurity, and an Abortive Resurrection

In 1822 J.-F. Champollion used the trilingual inscription on the Rosetta stone to decipher hieroglyphics. It soon became clear that the Alexandrian sarcophagus is inscribed with sections from the ancient Egyptian 'Book of What is in the Underworld' liberally interspersed with the cartouches of the Pharaoh Nectanebo II, for whom it was undoubtedly made. Not surprisingly this revelation was seen as completely undermining the

[3] Richard Pococke, *Description of the East* (London, 1743), i.4; A. Van Egmont and John Heyman, *Travels through part of Europe, Asia Minor, . . .* (London, 1759), ii.133; Eyles Irwin, *Series of Adventures*, i (London, 1780), 367; C. S. Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* (London, 1800), i.67; W. G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt and Syria* (London, 1799), 6.

association of the sarcophagus with Alexander and most modern works have cited its attribution as a sufficient reason to dismiss the possibility of a connection with the Macedonian King. Nonetheless P. M. Fraser, perhaps the leading sceptic, has admitted that 'the presence of this mighty sarcophagus in Alexandria is surprising'.[4]

In the mid-twentieth century a solitary challenge was made to the sceptical orthodoxy. In 1948 A. J. B. Wace published a flawed, but nevertheless intriguing, argument that the sarcophagus might have come from Alexander's tomb after all.[5] Essentially, his case rested on three pillars:

(i) Nectanebo II was the last Pharaoh of the 30th dynasty and the final native Pharaoh of Egypt. He was defeated by a Persian invasion in 343 B.C. and according to Diodorus he eventually fled south to Ethiopia in about 341 B.C.[6] He probably died in exile, so it is unlikely that he ever occupied his sarcophagus. Apart from a native uprising in about 338–6 B.C., Persian rule continued for the next decade until Alexander's arrival in 332 B.C. It is likely that the sarcophagus still lay unused when Ptolemy brought Alexander's corpse back to Egypt in 321 B.C., since it would have been sacrilegious to entomb a lesser mortal in a pharaonic sarcophagus.

(ii) Nectanebo II has a prominent role in a legendary account of Alexander's career, now known as the *Alexander Romance* or sometimes 'Pseudo-Callisthenes', since some manuscripts implausibly attributed it to Alexander's court historian Callisthenes. It appears to have been compiled in Alexandria in the third century A.D. from an agglomeration of earlier stories about the King. The *Romance* tells how Nectanebo employed magical powers to take on the persona of Ammon, thus seducing Olympias and fathering Alexander on her.[7] Scholars have been moved to try to explain what could have inspired such an extraordinary legend. For example, Philippe Derchain,[8] has suggested that the story was disseminated by the early Ptolemies to legitimize Macedonian rule in Egypt. However, Wace pointed out that the use of Nectanebo's

[4] P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972), Section 2 of Note 86 to Chapter 1.
[5] A. J. B. Wace, *Farouk I University, Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts 4* (Alexandria, 1948), 1–11.
[6] Diodorus Siculus 16.51.
[7] Richard Stoneman (translator), *The Greek Alexander Romance* (London, 1991), Book I, Sections 1–12.
[8] Philippe Derchain (ed. Pierre Grimal), *Hellenism and the Rise of Rome* (London, 1968), 208.

sarcophagus for Alexander's body would have provided a conducive stimulus for the legend.

(iii) Finally, Wace proposed that an Egyptian town called Rhakotis, which had pre-existed on the site of Alexandria, had incorporated a major pharaonic necropolis, which included the intended tomb of Nectanebo and contained his sarcophagus.

The first two of these points are well made and of some significance for the issue, but the argument falls down badly on the third. In the first place, there appears to be no real evidence for a major necropolis of the 30th dynasty at Alexandria. Nor is there any persuasive archaeological evidence for a very significant Egyptian port on the site prior to Alexandria's foundation.[9] Conversely, there are reports by the ancient writers, which indicate that the site was occupied by nothing more than a few Egyptian fishing villages, when Alexander arrived.[10] Finally, there is overwhelming evidence that Alexander's initial entombment in Egypt was not located at Alexandria.

The Memphite Tomb of Alexander

Aelian, Strabo, and Diodorus all state that Alexander was entombed at Alexandria when his body was diverted to Egypt by Ptolemy, but Pausanias, Curtius, and the *Alexander Romance* indicate that the King was initially laid to rest at Memphis and only later moved to Alexandria.[11] In particular, Pausanias states explicitly that it was Ptolemy's son and successor, Philadelphus, who was responsible for the transfer to Alexandria. The question is decided in favour of a Memphite entombment by an entry on a Ptolemaic chronology sculpted on the island of Paros, whilst it was ruled by Philadelphus, in 263–2 B.C. The Parian Marble[12] unambiguously asserts that 'Alexander was laid to rest in Memphis' under the year 321–20 B.C. It also gives the year of Philadelphus' birth as 309–8 B.C., but makes no mention of any transfer to Alexandria up to the

[9] The remains of a sea wall to the north and west of the island of Pharos are sometimes identified as pharaonic, but their date is actually very uncertain.

[10] The main Alexander historians imply that the site was empty in speaking of the marking of the street plan with barley – Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.2; Diodorus 17.52; Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 26; Curtius 4.8.1–6; the *Alexander Romance* (probably compiled in Alexandria) speaks explicitly of twelve Egyptian villages on the site, stating that Rhakotis was the largest of them (Section 31 of Book I); Strabo 17.1.6, states that Rhakotis had been a κώμη, which is an unwalled village or country town.

[11] Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.64; Diodorus Siculus 18.28.3; Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.8; Pausanias 1.6.3; Curtius 10.10.20; Stoneman (n. 7 above), Book III, 34.

[12] Jacoby, *FGrH* 239.

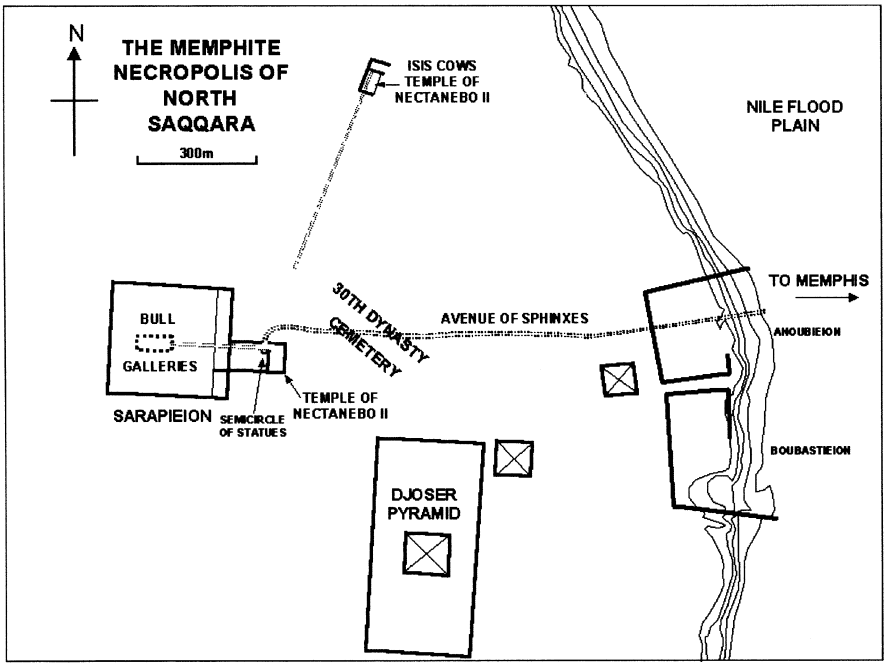

Fig. 5: The Sarapieion and the Temples of Nectanebo II in the Memphite necropolis at Saqqara.

last surviving entries around 300 B.C. At the time it was sculpted, the body almost certainly lay at Alexandria, so the sculptor would have perplexed his intended readership had he omitted to mention a transfer prior to 300 B.C. It is therefore overwhelmingly probable that Pausanias' account is true and that the Memphite entombment lasted 30 or 40 years with the relocation eventually taking place around 290–80 B.C.[13]

Where then was Nectanebo's sarcophagus likely to have been when Alexander was 'laid to rest at Memphis'? The location of his intended tomb is not known. However, under the 30th dynasty Memphis was the capital and it retained this status some years into the rule of Ptolemy, until it was eventually superseded by Alexandria. There is also a substantial 30th-dynasty cemetery in the Memphite necropolis at Saqqara.[14] This cemetery is adjacent to the Avenue of Sphinxes (see Fig. 5) leading from

[13] Fraser (n. 4 above), has argued for an early transfer to Alexandria on the basis of Curtius' remark that the transfer took place 'after a few years', but 30 or 40 years are few on a timescale of centuries, so the remark is really too vague to have any evidential value.

[14] E.g. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1995), 252 under 'Saqqara'.

the sanctuary of the living Apis bull near Memphis in the Nile flood plain up into the Memphite Sarapieion complex.[15] Nectanebo added a temple to this complex and also to the Sacred Animal Necropolis adjoining the Sanctuary of the Mother Cows of the Apis Bulls.[16] He also inaugurated his reign by officiating at the funeral of the Apis bull at this sanctuary,[17] just as Alexander subsequently showed his respect for Egyptian sensibilities by sacrificing to the Apis.[18] Given the special significance of Apis bull worship for Nectanebo, it is possible he intended to associate his tomb with his Sarapieion temple.

Late Period pharaohs in general tended to be buried in tombs in the courtyards of major temple complexes, typically in a vault beneath a cult-chapel. Examples are the 26th-dynasty tombs at Sais and those of the 29th dynasty at Mendes. This type of tomb was one element of a Late Period revival of Old Kingdom styles and traditions.[19] The Sarapieion has independently been a favourite candidate for the location of the Memphite tomb of Alexander, because it was the most prominent temple at Saqqara at this time and because the Ptolemies set up a rather incongruous semi-circle of eleven marble statues of Greek sages and poets before the entrance of the Nectanebo temple (Fig. 6). Dorothy Thompson has speculated that they may have 'guarded a shrine of some importance – the site once perhaps of Alexander's tomb'.[20] If so, then the shrine almost certainly lay within the Nectanebo temple, as can be seen from Auguste Mariette's detailed plan (Fig. 7).[21] Some authorities prefer to date these sculptures to the late third century B.C. many decades after the transfer of Alexander's tomb.[22] However, the analysis of this group by J.-P. Lauer & Ch. Picard[23] suggested that the era of the first Ptolemy is most probable, mainly because one of the statues may be Demetrios of Phaleron,[24] the

[15] The sphinxes are believed to have been created under Nectanebo I; two others found at the entrance to the Nectanebo temple are attributed to Nectanebo II.

[16] Jean-Philippe Lauer, *Saqqara, The Royal Cemetery of Memphis, Excavations and Discoveries since 1850* (New York, 1976), 18 and 220.

[17] Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (English paperback edition, Oxford, 1994), 379.

[18] Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.1.4.

[19] B. G. Trigger, B. J. Kemp, D. O'Connor and A. B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge, 1983), 321.

[20] Dorothy Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (Princeton, 1988), 212.

[21] Ulrich Wilcken, 'Die griechischen Denkmäler vom Dromos des Serapeums von Memphis', JDAI 32, 1917, pp. 149–203.

[22] E.g. F. Matz, 'Review of J.-P. Lauer & Ch. Picard; Les statues Ptolémaiques du Sarapieion de Memphis', *Gnomon* 29, 84–93; Fraser (n. 4 above), Note 512 to Chapter 5, says an early date is not impossible, but prefers a later one, as does Dorothy Thompson (n. 20 above).

[23] J.-P. Lauer & Ch. Picard, *Les statues Ptolémaiques du Sarapieion de Memphis* (Paris, 1955).

[24] So too Ulrich Wilcken, based on Demetrios' association with the foundation of the Sarapis cult and the herm of Sarapis on which this figure leans.

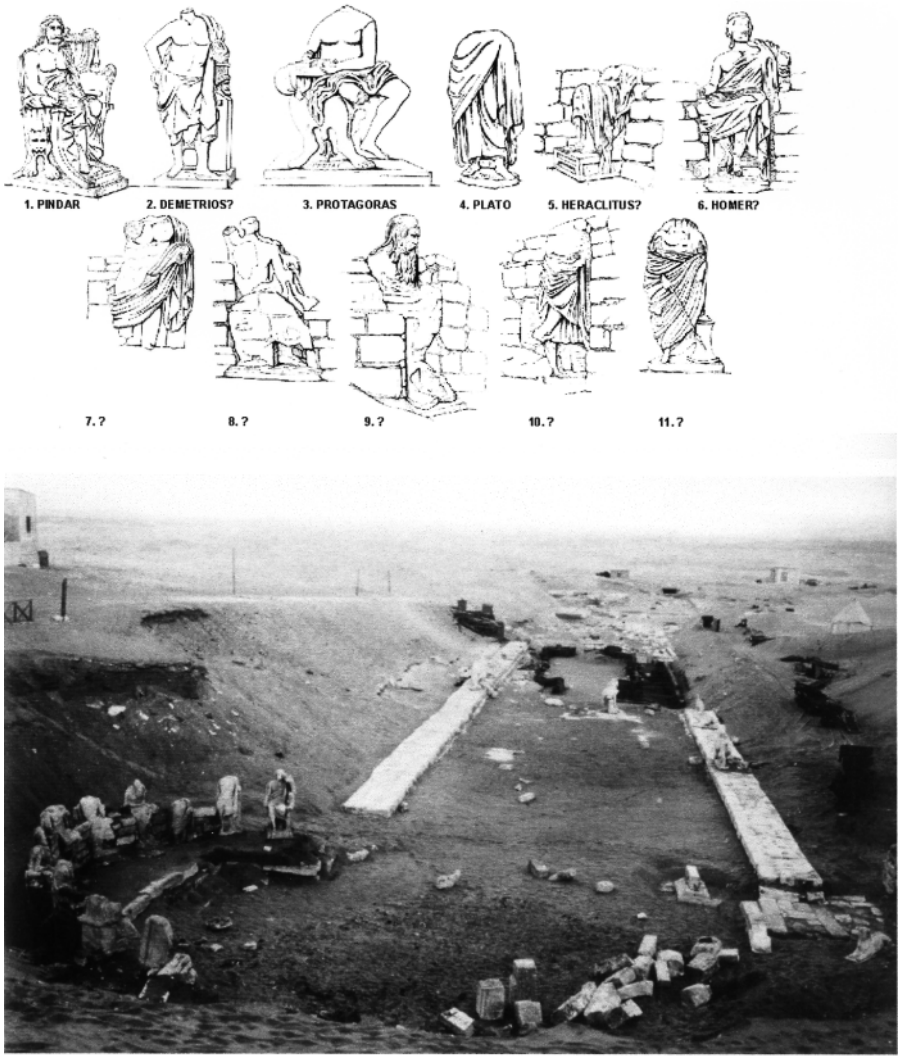

Fig. 6: Ptolemaic statues of 11 Greek poets and sages arranged in a semicircle at the end of the Avenue of Sphinxes adjacent to the Nectanebo temple – drawings from Auguste Mariette ed. Gaston Maspero, *Le Sérapéum de Memphis, Appended Atlas* (Paris, 1882) – photo of the excavations in 1851 taken from the mound partially covering the Nectanebo temple.

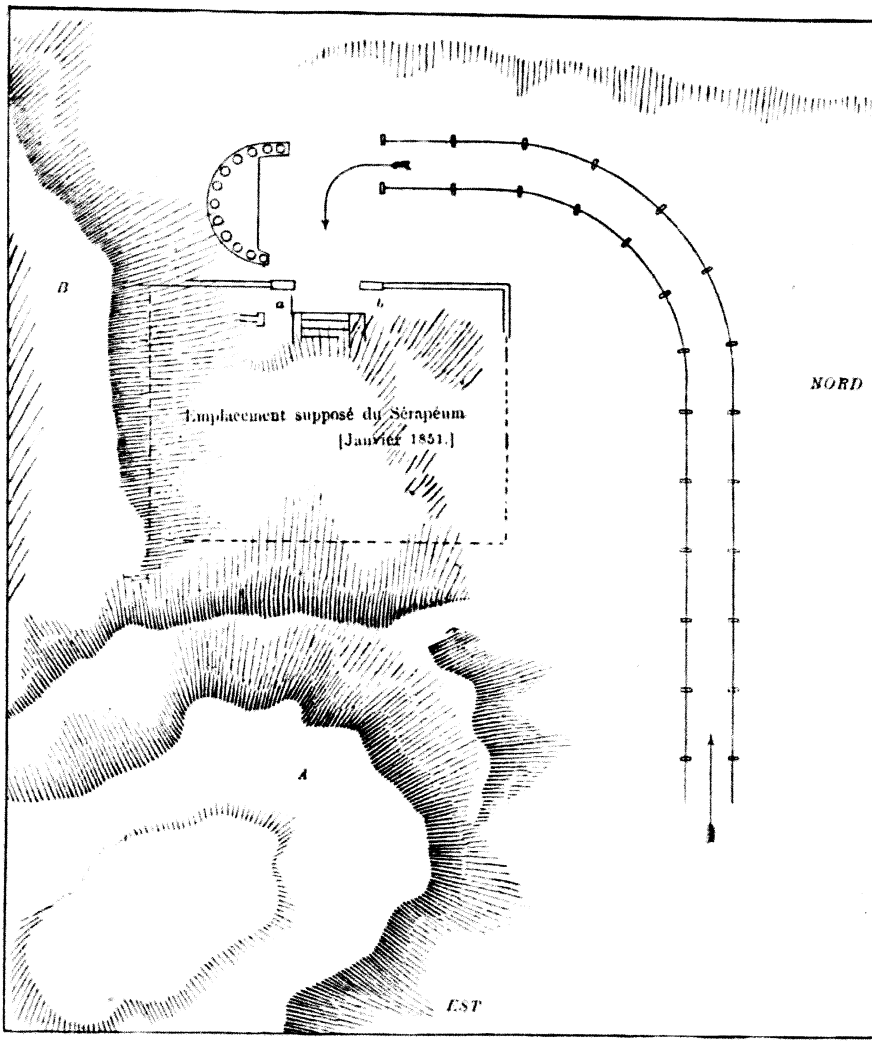

Fig. 7: Mariette's plan of the arrangement of the Ptolemaic statues at the end of the Avenue of Sphinxes (1851).

foremost philosopher at Ptolemy I's court, who was banished at the start of Philadelphus' reign.[25] It would therefore seem that a date contemporary with the Memphite tomb of Alexander is not impossible. For these reasons Memphis and more specifically the Sarapieion complex is the most likely location of the sarcophagus at the time Ptolemy entombed Alexander

[25] Diogenes Laertius, *Demetrios* 5.76; Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Postumo* 23.

there.[26] An obvious explanation for the subsequent appearance of the sarcophagus in Alexandria is therefore that it accompanied Alexander's body, when Philadelphus brought it to his capital probably in the second decade of the third century B.C.

Among reputable authorities Fraser in particular has doubted whether Ptolemy would have considered using a sarcophagus made for Nectanebo and emblazoned with his cartouches for his Memphite tomb of Alexander.[27] However, there are several lines of argument which support the opposite view:

(i) Ptolemy could hardly have made any open preparations for Alexander's tomb prior to his hijack of the catafalque in Syria, since such preparations might have alerted the Regent Perdiccas as to his intentions. He would therefore have been driven by circumstances to improvise a Memphite tomb from available material.

(ii) Ptolemy was keen to ingratiate himself with the native Egyptians at the time he brought Alexander's body back to Egypt in order to bolster his position in the civil wars that were about to break out. There is a clear example of this policy at work in an inscription set up by Ptolemy and known as the Satrap Stele. In this case Ptolemy seeks to associate himself with the mysterious pseudo-pharaoh, Khabbash,[28] leader of the Egyptian rebellion against the Persians in about 338–6 B.C. Use of the sarcophagus of the preceding pharaoh for Alexander would potentially have helped to fix the association in the minds of the native population.

(iii) If a scholar such as Philippe Derchain has found it credible that Ptolemy should have spread a rumour that Nectanebo had been Alexander's father, then it is a much smaller step to believe Ptolemy would have used the vacant sarcophagus.

(iv) There is an enormous amount of literary and archaeological evidence that the Ptolemies were very active in the re-use of pharaonic material to embellish Alexandria and its temples and shrines. Large numbers of obelisks and sphinxes from Heliopolis have been found in the harbour area. Cleopatra's needles are obelisks from Heliopolis,

[26] Sebbenytos is a secondary possibility, since this was the native city of Nectanebo I, the founder of the 30th dynasty.

[27] Fraser, (n. 4 above), Section 2 of Note 86 to Chapter 1.

[28] E.g. '. . .The land in its full extent which had been given by the king, the lord of the two lands, the image of Tanen, chosen by Ptah, son of the Sun, Khabbash living forever, the donation thereof has been renewed by this great Viceroy of Egypt, Ptolemy, to the gods of Pe and Tep forever. . .'(311 B.C.); see also Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs* (softcover edition, London, 1986), Chapter 2, p. 22.

> which may have been brought to Alexandria by Cleopatra, but were set up by Augustus. Pliny has recorded that Philadelphus used an uninscribed obelisk quarried by Nectanebo in a shrine to his sister-wife Arsinoe.[29]

These observations strongly refute the idea that Ptolemy would have harboured any aesthetic, religious, or cultural prejudices against using an empty pharaonic sarcophagus for Alexander.

It is possible that Ptolemy took over a tomb site prepared for Nectanebo together with his sarcophagus, either at the Sarapieion or elsewhere. As we have seen, a site associated with the Nectanebo temple in the Sarapieion complex has the attraction of directly connecting the sarcophagus with previously unrelated academic speculation concerning the location of the Memphite tomb of Alexander.

Alternatively, a site in Memphis proper remains feasible. In particular there are some hints of an association between Alexander's Memphite tomb and the god Ammon. For example, Alexander wore the ram's horns of Ammon on Ptolemy's elephant-scalp tetradrachms and he is reported to have requested that his body should be taken to Ammon or the Temple of Ammon on his deathbed.[30] In fact an Imensthotieion or Temple of Ammon and Thoth (Sun and Moon gods respectively) is mentioned as being located in the Hellenion or Greek Quarter of Memphis,[31] so this provides another possible context for the Memphite tomb.

Leo Africanus and the Domus Alexandri Magni

Are there any records of the sarcophagus that associate it with Alexander's tomb prior to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt? The various eighteenth-century travelogues, which mention the Attarine Mosque and its contents, are muted on this point. However, there is a group of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century accounts beginning with the *Description of Africa* by Leo Africanus, which report a tomb of Alexander in the city:

> It should not be omitted, that in the middle of the city amongst the ruins may be seen a little house in the form of a chapel, in which is a tomb much honoured by the Mahometans; since it is asserted that within it is kept the corpse of Alexander the Great, grand prophet

[29] Pliny, *Natural History* 36.14.67.
[30] Curtius 10.5.4; Justin 12.15.7.
[31] British Museum Catalogue, Papyrus 50; Claire Préaux, *L'Économie Royale des Lagides* (Brussels, 1939), 298–9.

and King, as may be read in the Koran. And many strangers come from distant lands to see and venerate this tomb, leaving at this spot great and frequent alms.[32]

Leo Africanus appears to have visited Alexandria several times between about 1515 and 1520. The Spanish traveller Marmol visited Alexandria in 1546 and appears to have plagiarized Leo's account: most notably they both use *casa* (i.e. house) for the tomb building in the oldest surviving manuscripts.[33] A very similar account was also given by George Sandys following his visit in 1610:

There is yet to be seene a little Chappell: within, a tombe, much honoured and visited by the Mahometans, where they bestow their alms; supposing his [Alexander's] body to lie in that place: Himselfe reputed a great Prophet, and informed thereof by their Alcoran.[34]

Clearly these descriptions are highly reminiscent of the small building in the courtyard of the Attarine Mosque. However, this obvious inference has been obscured by a much later legend, which located the tomb beneath the Nabi Daniel Mosque half a kilometre away. This story may not be any older than about 1850 when a dragoman from the Russian embassy claimed to have seen Alexander's sarcophagus in an old Roman cistern, which lies beneath some Arab tombs in the basement of the mosque.[35] Extensive excavations in the twentieth century have virtually proved this tale to be apocryphal.[36] Nevertheless, many authorities still cite Leo as a possible early reference to the Nabi Daniel tomb.

However, an important piece of evidence, which strongly suggests that Leo's tomb of Alexander was indeed the Attarine sarcophagus, appears until now to have been overlooked. At the exact centre of Braun & Hogenberg's lovely map of Alexandria[37] (Fig. 8), which was engraved in about 1573, there is a small domed building beside the minaret of a mosque, which is labelled *Domus Alexandri Magni* or 'House of Alexander the Great' in English (Fig. 9). It is believed that Braun & Hogenberg obtained their information from a Cologne merchant by the

[32] Leo Africanus, ed. Ramusio, *Descrizione dell'Africa* (Rome, 1550), f. 89^{r}; Leo Africanus, trans. John Pory, ed. Dr Robert Brown, *Description of Africa* (London, 1896), vol. iii, 8th book.

[33] Perrot (translator into French), *L'Afrique de Marmol* (Paris, 1677), Tom. III, liv. xi, c. 14, p. 276.

[34] George Sandys, *Relation of a Journey begun in A.D. 1610* (London, 1617), 112.

[35] Evaristo Breccia, *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum* (Bergamo, 1922), 99; A. M. de Zogheb, *Etudes sur l'ancienne Alexandrie* (Paris, 1910); this theory was first given written form by Mahmoud Bey, *Mémoire sur l'antique Alexandrie, ses faubourgs et environs découverts. . .* (Copenhagen, 1872).

[36] Fraser (n. 4 above), Note 88 to Chapter 1; M. Rodziewicz, *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie, Centre d'archéologie mediterranéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences* (Warsaw, 1984); the Nabi Daniel Mosque was built in 1823 by Mohammad Ali over some older Arab tombs.

[37] George Braun and Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (Cologne, 1572–1618).

Fig. 8: Braun & Hogenberg's map of Alexandria, engraved circa 1573, based on information from circa 1530.

Fig. 9: The *Domus Alexandri Magni* at the exact centre of Braun & Hogenberg's map.

name of Conrad von Lyskirchen. He in turn is supposed to have drawn either on older Portuguese plans or upon information obtained by Charles V's spies, who gathered cartographic data on southern Mediterranean ports for the Holy Roman Emperor in around 1530 preparatory to his abortive invasions of North Africa.[38] Certainly the internal evidence of the map would date it to the first half of the sixteenth century.[39] Although the topography is somewhat distorted in places and there are a few minor errors, such as transposing the names of the Pharos and the Pharillon, overall the map is quite authentic. In particular the *Domus Alexandri Magni* is correctly situated for the Attarine Mosque (cf. the *Description de l'Egypte* map in Fig. 1). The Nabi Daniel Mosque was built at the foot of a hill called Kom el Dikka, which may be identified with the hillock halfway across the city from the Attarine Mosque in the top left of the Braun & Hogenberg view.

It is very likely that the *Domus Alexandri Magni*, Leo's Tomb of Alexander and the small domed building in the courtyard of the Attarine Mosque are one and the same. The traditional association of the Nectanebo sarcophagus with Alexander's tomb therefore dates back at least five centuries. It is probably much older still: in the ninth century Ibn Abdel Hakim recorded a Mosque of Dulkarnein (i.e. Alexander[40]) in Alexandria[41] and a century later Massoudi (943–4 A.D.) mentioned the existence of a modest building called the 'Tomb of the Prophet and King Eskender'.[42]

[38] Constantin von Lyskirchen was a Hanse merchant located in Cologne, where also Braun and Hogenberg worked. He supplied views of many towns in Asia and Africa to Braun and Hogenberg including Alexandria. Braun & Hogenberg may have used other sources as well. According to Oscar Norwich (ed. J. Stone), *Norwich's Maps of Africa, an illustrated and annotated carto-bibliography* (Norwich, Vermont, 1997), 380: 'in the Hanse merchant Constantin von Lyskirchen of Cologne the editors found a willing agent, who supplied views of the towns of India, Asia, Africa, and Persia never portrayed before.' According to Norwich, 'Lyskirchen obtained these views from the manuscript produced by an unknown Portuguese illustrator.' He goes on to say that 'apart from these Portuguese views, some of the African illustrations were taken from military plans concerned with the expeditions of the Emperor Charles V in 1535 and 1541 to Tunis and Algeria.' Braun's & Hogenberg's plates subsequently passed to Jansson, so the Alexandria map was republished in his famous Atlas of 1619.

[39] It depicts Qaid Bey fortress, built in the 1480's, but shows few buildings on the Pharos isthmus, which started to be developed under the Ottomans in the late sixteenth century.

[40] Dulkarnein means the 'two-horned lord' in Arabic, which alludes to the representations of Alexander wearing a pair of ram's horns or bull's horns on the coins of his successors, especially the tetradrachms of Lysimachos; Alexander appears in this guise in Surah 18 of the Koran.

[41] Fraser (n. 4 above), Section 1 of Note 86 to Chapter 1.

[42] Maçoudi trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, *Les Prairies d'Or* (Paris, 1869), t. II, p. 259.

The Church of St Athanasius

There is yet one other coincidence between the history of the Soma mausoleum of Alexander in Alexandria and the provenance of the Nectanebo sarcophagus. The Soma is last mentioned by Herodian,[43] who wrote in about A.D. 240 concerning Caracalla's visit in A.D. 215. Alexandria was peaceful until the early 260's, so it is very likely that the building survived at least until the later part of the third century, when the city became embroiled in three successive civil wars. In the early 260's the Roman governor was acclaimed as a rival emperor by his troops in a rebellion that was bloodily extinguished following a siege of the fortified Bruchium quarter.[44] In the early 270's Aurelian subdued the city after a rebellion by Firmus, an Alexandrian supporter of Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra. Finally, Diocletian crushed a major revolt in A.D. 298 by capturing the city after a long siege and his troops indulged in an orgy of retribution.[45]

Strabo states that the Soma enclosure was part of the Ptolemaic Royal Quarter.[46] The Roman fortress called the Bruchium was formed when Caracalla walled in the region of the city that had previously contained the Royal Palaces. Consequently, Ammianus Marcellinus' statement that Aurelian laid waste to the Bruchium[47] has been cited as the most likely explanation for the destruction of the Soma. However, the issue is very unclear, since Strabo also says that his Royal Quarter constituted between a quarter and a third of the entire city, whereas the Roman Bruchium fortress was barely half that size.[48]

Ammianus also refers to a temple of the Genius of Alexandria in a passage describing the antagonism between the Patriarch Georgius and the Alexandrian mob in about A.D. 361:

> And, among other matters, it was said that [Georgius] maliciously informed Constantius also of this, namely, that all the edifices standing on the soil of the said city [Alexandria] had been built by its founder, Alexander, at great public cost, and ought justly to be a source of profit to the treasury. To these evil deeds he added still another, which soon after drove him headlong to destruction. As he was returning from the emperor's court

[43] Herodian 4.12 (and the Introduction to the Loeb edition by C. R. Whittaker).
[44] John Marlowe, *The Golden Age of Alexandria* (London, 1971), Chapter 10, p. 220.
[45] Stephen Williams, *Diocletian and The Roman Recovery* (New York, 1985).
[46] Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.8.
[47] Ammianus Marcellinus 22.16.15.
[48] The Bruchium seems to have been the area adjoining the eastern coastline of the Great Harbour that lay outside the medieval walls (see Fig. 1).

and passed by the splendid temple of the Genius [*speciosum Genii templum*], attended as usual by a large crowd, he turned his eyes straight at the temple, and said: 'How long shall this tomb [*sepulcrum*] stand?' On hearing this, many were struck as if by a thunderbolt, and fearing that he might try to overthrow that building also, they devised secret plots to destroy him in whatever way they could.[49]

D. G. Hogarth thought that this mention of a tomb of the Genius of Alexandria in a splendid temple might well refer to the Soma mausoleum.[50] However, Fraser has argued that it is the Agathos Daimon that is meant and that the use of the word *sepulcrum* is rhetorical.[51] Alternatively, Christopher Haas[52] has claimed that it is the female personification of the Tyche of Alexandria that is meant. However, there appear to be explicit representations of Alexander in the guise of the Genius of Alexandria on several Alexandrian coin types of Hadrian,[53] which strengthens the view that Georgius is indeed referring to Alexander's Mausoleum. If so, this building survived until at least A.D. 361. Given that John Chrysostom asserted that Alexander's tomb was 'unknown to his own people' a few decades later,[54] the most likely occasion of the destruction of the Soma mausoleum was the earthquake and tidal wave, which devastated Alexandria in A.D. 365.[55] The relevant point here is that Athanasius was Patriarch of Alexandria in A.D. 365, which may help to explain how the sarcophagus ended up in a mosque on the site of a late Roman church dedicated to his memory.

Conclusions

The established fact that the sarcophagus was originally sculpted for Nectanebo II has for nearly two centuries been assumed to discredit the Alexandrian tradition that it had once contained Alexander's remains. However, as we have seen, this fact actually seems to place the sarcophagus in the right place at the right time in a vacant condition. It also connects the sarcophagus with a previously unrelated line of

[49] Ammianus Marcellinus 22.11.7.
[50] 'Report on Prospects for Research in Alexandria', *Egypt Exploration Fund* 1894–5, n. 3, p. 23.
[51] (n. 4 above), Note 84 to Chapter 1.
[52] *Alexandria in Late Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1997), 287.
[53] A. M. Chugg, 'An Unrecognised Representation of Alexander the Great on Hadrian's Alexandrian Coinage', *The Celator Journal* 15.2 (February, 2001).
[54] *Homily XXVI on the second epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, *c.*A.D. 400.
[55] Ammianus Marcellinus 26.10.15–19; Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.2.

academic reasoning, which has associated the Nectanebo temple at the Sarapieion with the Memphite tomb of Alexander. It is therefore more properly recognized as the best single reason to believe in the authenticity of the tradition. Furthermore, the use of the sarcophagus for the Memphite tomb provides a straightforward explanation as to how it found its way to Alexandria. Even those who have doubted its authenticity have conceded that it is otherwise difficult to account for its presence there.

In addition it is now possible to make a strong case that it is this same sarcophagus housed within its own little chapel that Leo Africanus saw during his visits to Alexandria around 1517. This takes the tradition regarding the sarcophagus back at least five centuries and in all probability it is far older.

Starting from the premise that this tomb is a forgery, either the perpetrators were extraordinarily lucky in their choice of a pharaonic sarcophagus which really was available to Ptolemy, when he entombed Alexander at Memphis, or they were able to recognize that this was the sarcophagus made for Nectanebo. For the latter purpose, they probably needed to be able to read hieroglyphics. However, the latest hieroglyphic inscriptions date from the late fourth century A.D.[56] Even from a sceptical stance it would therefore appear likely that the sarcophagus was associated with Alexander within a few centuries of the disappearance of the Soma mausoleum.

The evidence presented in this article falls short of absolute proof (as do nearly all historical arguments). Nevertheless, there appears to be no substantive contrary evidence and the coincidences are sufficiently numerous and striking as to make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that this relic is in all probability the genuine sarcophagus of Alexander the Great.

[56] The last known hieroglyphic inscription, on the island of Philae, is dated to August 24th A.D. 394. Presumably the closure of the temples by Theodosius following his decrees '*contra paganos*' of A.D. 391 was the immediate cause of the disappearance of this form of writing.