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The Octagon of Arsinoë IV in Ephesos

A Ptolemaic Queen's tomb at the transition
from a Hellenistic to a Roman Imperial city



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The Alexandrian Queen Arsinoë IV

The 12th Ptolemaios of Egypt, “called the new Dionysus”¹ (ca. 110–51 BC; “died of disease”; fig. 1),² had five children, three daughters³ and two sons (tab. 1):⁴

- Berenike IV (ca. 77–55 BC, killed on the order of her father at the age of 22 years),⁵
- Kleopatra VII (69–30 BC, died by suicide at the age of 39 years; fig. 2),⁶ and
- Arsinoë IV;
- Ptolemaios XIII (61–47 BC, “disappeared on the Nile” at the end of the ‘Alexandrian War’ at the age of 14 years),⁷ and
- Ptolemaios XIV (59–44 BC,⁸ poisoned on the order of Kleopatra VII at the age of 15 years).⁹

Ptolemaios XII was married to Kleopatra Tryphaina.¹⁰ According to Strabon, Berenike IV was the only legitimate female child of Ptolemaios XII.¹¹ Such a statement implies that Kleopatra Tryphaina was not the mother of Kleopatra VII and of Arsinoë IV.¹² In line with that, a stele at the British Museum mentions “the wives” of Ptolemaios XII.¹³ Since the stele, furthermore, indicates his “children” in its plural, the monument should date after the birth of Kleopatra VII at the earliest.¹⁴ However, another document dating to 69 BC addresses “the Queen” in its singular form next to Ptolemaios XII and “the children”.¹⁵ In 53/52 BC with Ptolemaios XII still alive, his children except Berenike IV having already been killed by then,¹⁶ are again mentioned in an inscription.¹⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea (3rd/4th c. AD) states that “when the new Dionysus [= Ptolemaios XII] died [in 51 BC], he left four children, two Ptolemaios, Kleopatra and Arsinoë”.¹⁸

Ancient sources provide the chronological ages of Kleopatra VII, Ptolemaios XIII, and of Ptolemaios XIV at certain historical events (tab. 1). Accordingly, Kleopatra VII was forty years of age minus one in 30 BC (i.e. born in 69 BC),¹⁹ Ptolemaios XIII thirteen years of age in 48 BC (i.e. born in 61 BC),²⁰ and Ptolemaios XIV fifteen years of age in 44 BC (i.e. born in 59 BC).²¹ Arsinoë’s “year of birth remains unclear”.²² Strabon calls the two sons of Ptolemaios XII “infants”²³ in 58 BC being then three and two years of age, respectively. Appianos addresses Kleopatra VII as a “child” in 56/55 BC being then 13/14 years of age,²⁴ a term, he also used to classify “the sovereigns” of Alexandria when reporting the incidents regarding the murder of Cn. Pompeius Magnus in 48 BC.²⁵ Since Kleopatra VII was already 21 years old at that time, this reference should characterise Ptolemaios XIII, Ptolemaios XIV, and Arsinoë IV. Accordingly, ancient sources repeatedly describe Ptolemaios XIII as *puer* or as “child” in 48 BC.²⁶

Arsinoë IV was a historical figure during the fading Ptolemaic dynasty which is why she is mentioned in ancient sources.

All five children of Ptolemaios XII figured as Queen or King in Alexandria during the last years of the declining Lagid rule over Egypt, some for a longer, some for a shorter time. In particular, Arsinoë IV played the role of an actual and potential counter-Queen to Kleopatra VII within the sixth decade of the 1st c. BC. For this reason, a set of ancient texts mainly report three episodes from her life, which took place in Alexandria, Rome, and finally Ephesos (tab. 1):

- Her short-lived reign as Queen of Alexandria in 48 BC;
- Her exposure at Caesar's Egyptian triumph in 46 BC, and
- Her murder in 41 BC within the precinct of the Ephesian Artemision.

Along with that, certain biographical details of Arsinoë IV are passed down within various ancient sources.²⁷

1. The youngest daughter of Pharaoh Ptolemaios XII

After the death of Ptolemaios XII in 51 BC, Kleopatra VII and Ptolemaios XIII, his oldest (surviving) daughter and his oldest son,²⁸ were declared co-regents of Egypt in accordance with his testament.²⁹ Already in 49/48 BC, the interest group using the 12/13-year-old Ptolemaios XIII³⁰ as figurehead expressed for the first time its aversion against Kleopatra VII³¹ and sent her together with Arsinoë IV into exile.³² After the Battle of Pharsalos in 48 BC, some Δαίμων³³ led Cn. Pompeius Magnus to the Egyptian shores precisely where Ptolemaios XIII had drawn up his army against that of Kleopatra VII. The famous counsel took place where the three tutors behind the sovereign Ptolemaios XIII, Pothinos, Achilles, and Theodotos,³⁴ decided to treacherously end the life of the Roman commander.³⁵

Shortly thereafter,³⁶ C. Iulius Caesar arrived in Alexandria in pursuit of Cn. Pompeius Magnus and was captured by the sight of Kleopatra VII,³⁷ who was then "in full bloom".³⁸ He reinstated her³⁹ and Ptolemaios XIII as co-regents,⁴⁰ thereby upholding the legacy of Ptolemaios XII.⁴¹ At the same time, C. Iulius Caesar went to great lengths in order to stabilise Ptolemaic Egypt. Probably with the intention of removing Arsinoë IV and Ptolemaios XIV from the Alexandrian court, he granted them Cyprus.⁴² This decision returned the island to Ptolemaic rule, which had already been annexed by Rome in 58 BC.⁴³

Various ancient sources address Arsinoë IV as *filia minor Ptolomaei regis*,⁴⁴ i.e. the younger daughter of Ptolemaios XII, in comparison to Kleopatra VII, and as such the

youngest daughter of Ptolemaios XII.⁴⁵ Accordingly, J. P. Mahaffy (1899) calls Arsinoë IV “a girl hardly grown up”,⁴⁶ A. E. P. Brome Weigall (1914) “little princess”,⁴⁷ P. Green “barely adolescent”,⁴⁸ H. J. Gehrke (2005) “a very young princess”,⁴⁹ C. Schäfer (2006) “young girl”⁵⁰ and J. Tyldesley (2008) “teenager”.⁵¹

Arsinoë IV was the youngest daughter of Ptolemaios XII.

According to ancient sources, Arsinoë IV was the youngest daughter of Ptolemaios XII and a rival to her siblings for the Lagid throne of Egypt.

2. A girl-Queen in the ‘Alexandrian War’

Caesar’s intervention did not calm the situation for long.⁵² Cassius Dio provides the cause that started the ‘Alexandrian War’.⁵³ According to him, the Alexandrians considered it “a shame to be ruled by a woman”,⁵⁴ because they suspected that C. Iulius Caesar would eventually hand over the kingdom to Kleopatra VII alone.⁵⁵ Yet, the Alexandrians’ discontent lacked “a representative from the Ptolemaic dynasty”,⁵⁶ since C. Iulius Caesar had kept all *proles Lagea*⁵⁷ isolated in the palace.⁵⁸ As logic as this caution appears, C. Iulius Caesar seems to have suffered from an incomplete understanding of the complex internal Ptolemaic dissent by reducing it to the one between Kleopatra VII and the interest group behind Ptolemaios XIII.⁵⁹ There is no other explanation for the fact that Caesar recognised the danger posed by Ptolemy XIII and had him closely guarded in the Alexandrian palace,⁶⁰ whereas Arsinoë IV escaped his attention.⁶¹ It was the eunuch Ganymedes, the tutor of Arsinoë IV, who took advantage of this mistake to strengthen his position in the conflict.⁶² Ganymedes secretly removed Arsinoë IV from the Alexandrian palace and brought her to the Egyptians, where she was declared Queen,⁶³ thus occupying the vacant throne.⁶⁴

With this background, Ganymedes was able to put Achillas, a partisan of Ptolemaios XIII and a “man of unique audacity”⁶⁵ to death.⁶⁶ Accordingly, pseudo-Caesar states that Ganymedes was the true power behind the throne;⁶⁷ he “exercised his reign in the name of Arsinoë” IV.⁶⁸ “Arsinoë [was] acting through the eunuch Ganymedes”,⁶⁹ but in fact there was a “cruel autocracy of Ganymedes”,⁷⁰ to whom “the kingdom was entrusted”.⁷¹ Like Ptolemaios XIII, Arsinoë IV was rather a Lagid figurehead in 48 BC.⁷²

Regarding Arsinoë’s stage of life at that time, Appianos addresses the offspring of Ptolemaios XII in general as “children” in 48 BC and most likely also Arsinoë IV.⁷³ Confirming that, pseudo-Caesar handed down a most important statement by saying that Arsinoë IV was a *puella* in 48 BC.⁷⁴ Such information is validated by a scholiast on Lucanus referring to Titus Livius.⁷⁵ Considering Arsinoë IV as a *puella* in 48 BC explains why she was under tutelage.⁷⁶ Similarly, the *puer*⁷⁷ Ptolemaios XIII

Phari,³⁷⁵ and *Phario tyranno*.³⁷⁶ He calls Kleopatra VII *Pharii proles clarissima Lagi*.³⁷⁷ Kleopatra VII says: "I am not the first woman to rule the cities of the Nile; for Pharos knows how to bear a Queen without distinction because of gender."³⁷⁸

Finally, it is worth noting that Arsinoë IV was placed next to an allegory of the Nile and an effigy of "the Pharos similarly burning flames"³⁷⁹ at Caesar's triumph of 46 BC in order to demonstrate the Alexandrian background of the *pompa*.³⁸⁰ In light of the statements above and considering the strategic importance of the Pharos Tower and of the Nile during the 'Alexandrian War',³⁸¹ such a presentation appears quite self-explanatory.

Within ancient sources, the Pharos Tower is used in order to illustrate an Alexandrian or Lagid-Egyptian background.

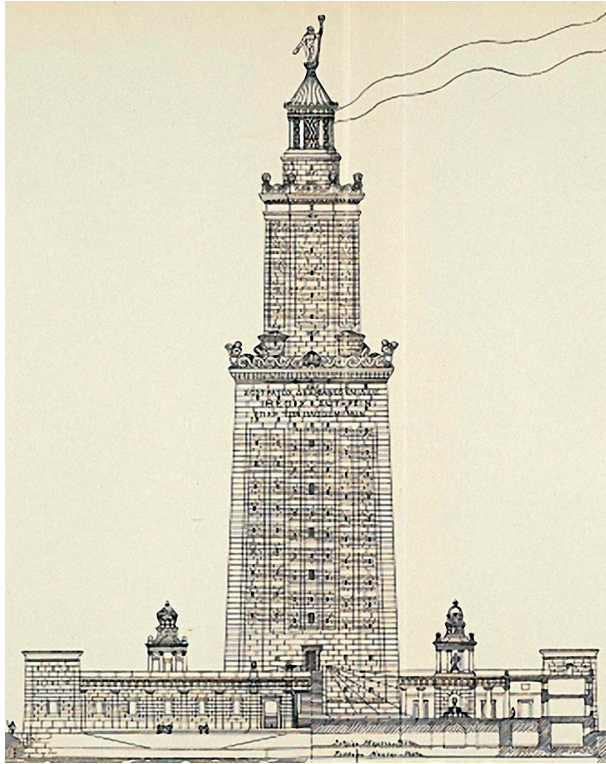
In conclusion, the Alexandrian Pharos Tower was indeed used to characterise an Egyptian or Alexandrian background within ancient sources.

IF THE PHAROS TOWER WAS TAKEN METONYMOUSLY FOR EGYPT AND ALEXANDRIA, THE QUESTION ARISES WHETHER THE EPHESIAN OCTAGON IS INDEED REMINISCENT OF IT.

6.4 The Octagon – a 'Pharian' edifice?

From the very beginning, Thür's logic whereby "the octagonal shape [...] symbolised the emblem of Alexandria and thus inevitably established the connection with the Ptolemaic princess" suffered from an obvious problem.³⁸³ The Ephesian mausoleum is by no means reminiscent of the *luminis mons*,³⁸⁴ no one would have drawn such an association merely from the appearance of the monument. Sostratos³⁸⁵ placed a huge polygon of about 30 m in height on top of a likewise gigantic pedestal of about 60 m, which in turn carried a circular canopy (fig. 13).³⁸⁶ In contrast to that, a viewer in antiquity who observed the Ephesian Octagon probably saw nothing more than the usual sequence of a socle, a *monopteros*³⁸⁷ with a polygonal *cella*-like core, the whole crowned by a stepped roof structure (figs. cover, 11a, 12).³⁸⁸ The fact that Arsinoë IV was presented next to a burning effigy of the Pharos tower at Caesar's *pompa* in 46 BC,³⁸⁹ hardly substantiates the connection of an octagonal mausoleum in Ephesos to Arsinoë IV.³⁹⁰

Accordingly, only a few authors support Thür in her reasoning.³⁹¹ Mostly, Thür's assumption has been met with disagreement.³⁹² C. Berns states, "one will hardly be able to assign such a precise meaning to the octagonal form".³⁹³ I. Kader denies a meaning of the octagonal shape altogether³⁹⁴ and rejects Thür's proposal with the interesting argument that the layout of the Octagon "speaks against a monar-



chic owner”,³⁹⁵ i.e. against a monarchic principal authority. W. Huß considers Thür’s connection of the grave to the Pharos octagon as “less likely”.³⁹⁶ R. Fleischer sees no sense in the “citation” of a functional building at a mausoleum.³⁹⁷ Anevlavi et al. call Thür’s comparison of the Octagon to the Pharos “not completely convincing”,³⁹⁸ and M. Spanu “estremamente fragile”.³⁹⁹ H. Schörner even says, “the desire to see a Ptolemaic princess in the dead woman seems to have been at the root of this thought”.⁴⁰⁰

*The Octagon does not reflect the Alexandrian Pharos Tower,
at least not directly.*

Still, the fact remains that the Ephesian mausoleum is one of only a few early edifices displaying an octagonal principle, a feature that, therefore, ought to have been selected with a certain intention.⁴⁰¹ Consequently, another reason has to be explored in order to explain the unusual layout. In this regard, the centrally planned, octagonal building with its multiple axes of symmetry suggests that a geometrical rationale was applied to the ground plan.

THÜR’S CONNECTION OF THE OCTAGON TO THE
ALEXANDRIAN PHAROS WAS MET WITH DOUBTS
SO THAT ANOTHER REASON FOR THE TOMB’S
EXCEPTIONAL LAYOUT HAS TO BE SOUGHT.

Fig. 13: a) The Ephesian mausoleum (figs. 11a, 12) by no means recalls the *mons luminis* of Alexandria; b) The view into a vault of the Qaitbāy citadel³⁸² from the 15th c. AD built on the site of the Pharos and echoing its threefold geometry

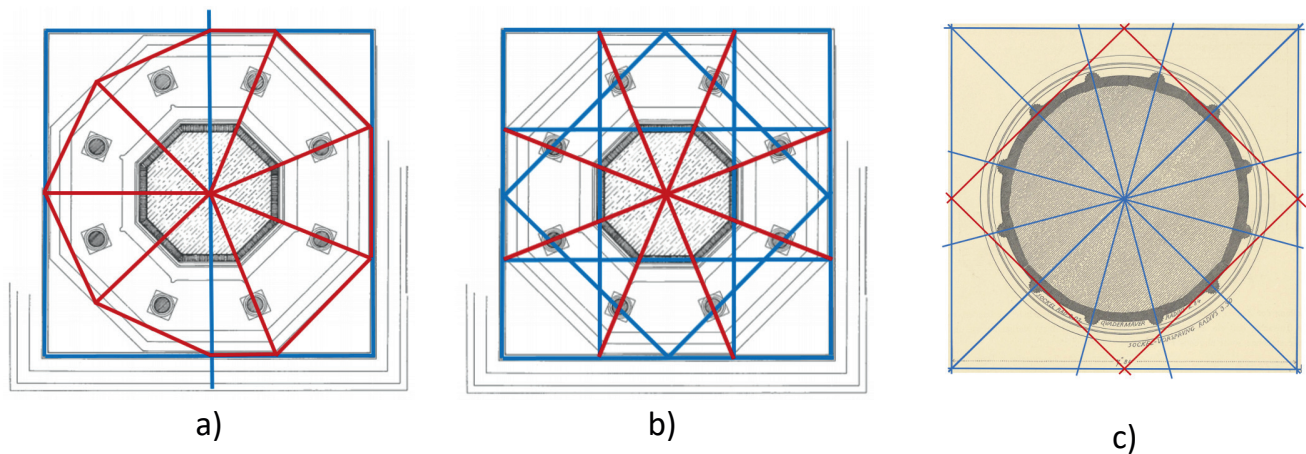


Fig. 14: a) The two main ways of inscribing a regular octagon into a reference square, from which the Octagons architect chose the version on the right side; b) The flights and points of the Octagon as resulting from the differentiation of a reference square into a certain geometrical pattern; c) The ground plan of the Round Monument on the Panayırdağ is based on the incircle radius of r^2 concentrically inscribed into the reference square (fig. 16a)

6.5 Geometry provides a lot of support to the architect

It has been generally accepted that ancient Greek architects utilised geometrical concepts to lay out the ground plan of buildings.⁴⁰² With regard to the Roman era, M. Tullius Cicero (1st c. BC) says: “Among them [i.e. the Greeks], geometry was held in the highest honour, and, therefore, no one was more distinguished among mathematicians. But we have limited the use of this art to the measurement and calculation of practical matters”.⁴⁰³ Sextus Iulius Frontinus (1st c. AD) even calls the “celebrated works of the Greeks pointless”.⁴⁰⁴ M. Vitruvius Pollio who wrote his “Ten Books on Architecture” at about the time when the Octagon was built, repeatedly refers to Greek architects⁴⁰⁵ and highlights the value of geometry in architecture.⁴⁰⁶ An architect should be, therefore, “versed in geometry”.⁴⁰⁷ In addition, Vitruvius emphasises the importance of *eurythmia*⁴⁰⁸ and *symmetria*⁴⁰⁹ in architecture, both terms that address the need of proportionality with regard to the relationship of the parts to the whole.

However, one should bear in mind that the main means available for constructing a plan at the time were the beam compass and the straight edge,⁴¹⁰ so that the Octagon’s ground plan should be considered as the result of ‘practical geometry’, and hardly any understanding of the analytical geometry involved would be required.⁴¹¹ Accordingly, the square⁴¹² and the circle⁴¹³ should form the basis of the construction plan. Vitruvius states that the proposal for a building was presented to the contracting authority by means of ground (*ichno-graphia*)⁴¹⁴ and elevation drawings (*ortho-graphia*).⁴¹⁵ Accordingly, an understanding of the Octagon’s rationale may commence from there.

The protector of Ephesos – Artemis and her sacred Triodos

The main street network of Ephesos is well known for the Roman imperial period. To facilitate orientation, a short introductory overview will be provided, even if one or the other points of argument regarding the precise course and date of certain streets will first be addressed in the course of the discussion.

Even if a city was newly planned, the layout with a persistent regular grid system was challenged by the topography, different needs of citizens and rulers, and the historical development.

Fig. 35: Candelabrum (2nd c. AD?), lighting the Embolos street in front of the Hypelaïos Fountain (in its last Late Antique usage)



At the border of the plain between Mts. Pion and Preon, more or less at the foot of the slope of Mt. Pion, the modern road leading to the Upper Entrance to the ruins (plan 1 no. 115) runs through the Magnesian Gate (plan 1 no. 10)¹ up to the State Agora; in so doing, within the ancient city area, this road follows almost exactly the old route of the *plateia*, named today the South Street. From Late Antiquity we know its designation as the street of the *hippoi* (horses' street), and we also know that this main thoroughfare, just like the Arkadiane (plan 1 no. 88) which connected the Roman harbour with the theatre, was artificially lit up at night.² Since two large candelabras were set up directly in front of the so-called Heroon of Androklos (plan 3 no. 9) in the Late Antique paving of the Curetes Street (fig. 35),³ one can reasonably assume that the entire street system from the Magnesian Gate in the east to the harbour – that is, the South Street

as far as the first neocorate temple (so-called Temple of Domitian; plan 1 no. 30), then the so-called Alley of Domitian, the Curetes Street at the Embolos (plan 1 near no. 36), the Marble Street along the Agora (plan 1 no. 61; fig. 36) as far as the theatre (plan 1 no. 75), and then the Arkadiane as far as the harbour – was not only continuously illuminated, but also constituted the main axes of Ephesos in the Roman imperial period up until the early 7th c. AD.



Additional significant streets were the connection from the former harbour settlement of Koressos near the stadium, leading through the Koressian Gate to the theatre (plan 1 no. 78), its continuation to the south as far as the Embolos constituting the Marble Street in the Roman period (figs. 36 and 37); and the physically unknown street that led, in a continuation of the Curetes Street south of the Tetragonos Agora, past the harbour and further to the city gate to Pygela. In addition, parallel to this in the north, a wide boulevard (the West Street; plan 1 no. 65) ran from the Tetragonos Agora as far as the Medusa Gate (plan 1 nos. 61. 65. 66); this, as proved by excavation results,⁴ dates back to the Hellenistic foundation phase and probably connected the two agoras with each other. Moreover, as shown above,⁵ in the Hellenistic period the entrance to the city through the Koressian Gate lay a city block to the west at that time below the later Agora North Gate (plan 1 no. 64; fig. 26 marked KT; fig. 33), at the eastern border of the Hellenistic commercial agora. Between the city gate and the agora another street leading to the harbour area in the west must have served for heavy transport and other commercial traffic.

Fig. 36: View of the Triodos, the Marble Street with the adjacent Neronian Hall and the Tetragonos Agora (seen from the south) as found in the excavations around 1904

A main reason for irregularities, especially of the course of main routes from the gates to the centre, was their function as processional streets with certain fixed spots, where important cult activities or political acts had their place.

Given these conditions, the South Gate – paid for by the freedmen Mazaïos and Mithridates – of the expanded Augustan Tetragonos Agora (plan 3 no. 2; figs. 33. 37. 41) lay fairly precisely at the original intersection, known as the Triodos, of the three old long distance roads that were in part used as streets of tombs in the Archaic-Classical periods (plan 2; fig. 27).⁶ Since the time of Lysimachos these func-

Fig. 37: View today of the Triodos, the Marble Street with the adjacent Neronian Hall and the Tetragonos Agora (seen from the south-east) after the excavations and reconstruction works in the later 20th c.



tioned as main axes of the city, and the city gates that were set up on them were named – as is still often common today – after the directions in which they led from Ephesos. Here, the roads that led to Koressos, Magnesia, and Pygela (Kuşadası) all met. Dieter Knibbe connected this last-mentioned road above all with the as yet undiscovered site of Ortygia, the mythical birthplace of Ephesian Artemis, and attempted to introduce the term “Ortygia Street” into the literature. Unfortunately, we know neither the exact location of the city gate, compellingly assumed to be in the west, nor its ancient name, so that the actual name of the street and of the gate remains obscure.⁷ According to Strabon, this Ortygia with its temple installations and eating houses nevertheless lay on the mountain of Solmissos, in such a manner that it could be seen from the boat journey between Pygela and Ephesos; Pausanias mentioned the location at the river Kenchrios.⁸ At Ortygia, after a great procession the Ephesians celebrated the annually recurring festival of the birth of their goddess, and the college of the Curetes carried out sacred rituals, probably during the bestowal of citizenship on the ephebes.⁹ The site has not yet been found today, but recently, without convincing arguments, it has been localised in the valley which is known today as Arvalya.¹⁰

The Triodos, until Augustan times directly in front of the South Gate (figs. 36f.) was laid out in its ultimate form in the second decade of the 2nd c. AD and the space was completely redesigned when the Library of Celsus (fig. 66; plan 1 no. 55),¹¹ and further to the west the so-called Serapeion (fig. 34; plan 1 no. 67),¹² were erected over the old coast road towards Pygela that up to this time ran immediately to the south of the agora. Now, with the so-called Hadrian’s Gate (probably erected already under Trajan in 114/115 AD; plan 4; fig. 49),¹³ a new intersection was marked at the end of the Marble Street and, to the south of the South Gate, an almost enclosed