

Essay

A Look at the Purpose of the Serapeum at Alexandria

HISTORY & MATERIAL CULTURE
This paper was submitted January
28th, 2019, and written under the
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'King Ptolemy [III], son of Ptolemy [II] and Arsinoe, the Brother-gods, [dedicates] to Serapis the Temple and the Sacred Enclosure' (inscribed on a foundation plaque within the Serapeum).¹

When people pray, hoping to receive rewards for sacrifices proudly made, they wish the temple walls' ears listen—but, when under the impression that mere whispers would still make too loud a confession of their transgressions, they anxiously pray for those ears to remain deaf. The ancient Jews for one, had conceived the idea of 'ears dwelling' in their holy sites, seeing how they would have described a temple as a—loosely translated from Hebrew, *Beit Adonai*—'House of the Lord'. During ancient times, seeing a certified shrink would not have been an option. 'The' temple however, would have been the most likely place to go to for people who sought to be absolved of unvented desires, regrets or struggles with their inner 'daemons'. In fact, people would have had all sorts of reasons to

visit the temple dedicated to their deity of preference. Alternative perceptions of the need for any such sanctuary to be in existence, might have been held by, say, the clerical classes, ambitious architects or, as one might imagine, local rulers vying for power and influence. There is, in other words, an apparent plurality to the meaning or purpose any one sacred structure would have had. I will however be focusing on a long-standing topic of conversation about the purpose of one temple site in particular, found in the form of Alexandria's Serapeum (Greek: *Sarapeion*). All the aforementioned groups of people would have had different takes on the meaning of said Serapeum. What is, for example, perceived to be its meaning by its Ptolemaic commissioners or by its various audiences over time? Plenty to ponder—but first, an introduction.

The Serapeum at Alexandria is not one of a kind, as the ancient Alexandrians were not the only ones to subscribe to Serapis' patronage. The veneration and worship of the deity Serapis, to which any such 'Serapeum' would have been primarily dedicated, was shared in by various peoples across the greater

¹ Alan Rowe and Brinley R. Rees, "A Contribution to the Archaeology of the Western Desert: IV," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39, no. 2 (University of Manchester, 1957): 509.

Mediterranean area. The *Cult of Serapis* had followers amongst different ethnicities and in different cities—take, for example, the Serapeum at Memphis (before Alexandria, Ptolemaic Egypt’s capital) or the later *Iseum et Serapeum* in second triumvirate-Rome. What *did* make Serapis one of the more unique deities of his time is the fact that he didn’t emerge ‘naturally’. In effect, Serapis just seemingly ‘popped up’ out of nowhere²—no Greek authors of the classical period care to mention him, nor are there ancient myths that tell us of his origins; he was, as Hanges puts it, ‘rootless’.³ What we do know about his nature is that it’s complex, as he has been identified with a myriad of other deities, making him somewhat of an amalgam of godly qualities and personifications. Serapis has been considered to mean many things to different worshipers. Some, for example, saw him as a deity of fertility and others as a god who answers people’s prayers⁴ and, also even, as a ‘chthonic’ god (*Pluto*, in fact)—presiding over the realm of the dead⁵. According to Stambaugh, ‘court theologians, speculative writers and lay worshipers’ from the 1st Ptolemaic era simply ascribed to Serapis the qualities for which they would have the most need, making him, unlike most other deities, more of an ‘identity-fluid’ and flexible deity that could speak to anyone.⁶ So you could, if

you will, say that the diversity in what people perceived him to represent was due to—as mentioned earlier—the fact that, through the many qualities ascribed to him, he was a scrambled-together embodiment of parts of other deities that people revered. One such deity is Apollo (to Egyptians, *Horus*), whose identity as a god of healing most clearly spilled over on the forming of Serapis’ nature and divine ‘purpose’, seeing how his most prominent quality was described as a ‘personal god’ who, much like Christ really, would appear to people and ‘heal’ them in some form or other—mentally or physically⁷. It is because of that, that there’s a strong soteriological connection to be considered between Apollo and Serapis—‘sōtēr-’, alluding to the ‘savior’-aspect of their identities. And this brings us to another god that the figure of Serapis seems to draw from or, even, may be referred to interchangeably: Osiris-Apis.⁸ Osiris-Apis ‘itself’ is a hybridized version of Osiris (known to be often depicted as *anthropomorphic*) and Apis (described as being *theriomorphic*—a bull-god). As you might already guess, Osiris and Apis too, were considered deities representing fertility and life. The basis for Osiris-Apis and Serapis being ‘one and the same’ can be looked for in Ulrich Wilcken’s demonstration of how the name ‘Serapis’ is etymologically speaking, a nigh-exact transliteration of the Egyptian *Wsir-Hḥ*, meaning ‘Osiris-Apis’.⁹ Rowe attests to this, writing that the term ‘Osiris-Apis’ is commonly used in hieroglyphs to refer to

² John E. Stambaugh, *Sarapis Under the Early Ptolemies. Études Préliminaires Aux Religions Orientales Dans L’empire Romain* (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1972), 1.

³ James C. Hanges, *Paul, Founder of Churches: A Study in Light of the Evidence for the Role of “Founder-Figures” in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 182.

⁴ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 3.

⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 361^F.

⁶ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 5.

⁷ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 2.

⁸ Hanges, *Paul*, 183, Clement, *Protrepticus* IV.

⁹ Ulrich Wilcken, *Urkunden Der Ptolemäerzeit: ältere Funde* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927), 77-89.

Serapis.¹⁰ What we can take away from Serapis' genesis' connections with the other deities and the soteriological aspect therein is that, as Hanges submits, one way of describing the deity is as a 'savior god without a myth'—one that, Stambaugh adds, was introduced to the Greco-Egyptian world by the Ptolemies and was, understandably, to become very popular.¹¹ It was in fact one of those Ptolemies who imported the Serapean cult to Alexandria specifically—Ptolemy III Euergetes I, to be the least inaccurate.¹² Serapis' supposedly Hellenistically conceived 'syncretic divinity', as often asserted to have been 'invented' by said Ptolemies, is most commonly—with exceptions as is for example the case for the *Memphite Serapeum*, where Serapis was portrayed as being more theriomorphic than anthropomorphic—portrayed as a seated god, reflecting the Hellenic syncretism through his more classically Greek rather than Egyptian looks (main markers being curly beard, tunic and *modius*, or *calathus*—a cylindrical basket-shaped crown), entirely human appearance and in his resemblance of neither Osiris or Apis.¹³ Many have theorized about why and how Serapis was introduced in this form by the Ptolemies and with what purpose(s) he was imported to the later-Ptolemaic capital of Alexandria. The ancient scholars that all wrote about and mentioned sources offering

explanations for Serapis' origins and identity are, amongst others, Plutarch¹⁴ (ca. 46—129 AD), Tacitus¹⁵ (56—117 AD) and Clement¹⁶ (ca. 150—215 AD). In whatever shape or form Serapis was made to appear to its namesake cult, his 'real identity' and genesis was as contested and uncertain as it is to this day.¹⁷ What *is* for certain however, is that the main structures—the 'new' *Temple of Serapis*, or *Temple and the Sacred Enclosure for Serapis*—in the Serapeum that were built for Alexandria's Serapean cultists, were commissioned by Ptolemy III somewhere during his reign between 247 and 221 BC, just like the cited foundation plaque-inscription at the beginning of this piece indicates.

When I speak of the Serapeum in its *entirety*, I can't however ascribe to it a date of when 'it' was built or a specification of who exactly lay the 'first' stone. As I say some sentences back, the main temples dedicated to Serapis in the Serapeum and the other structures found before and during most recent excavations by Rowe during WWII¹⁸, are referred to as 'new'. What can be argued for according to Rowe is the presence of foundations within the Serapeum that are even older than the ruins 'we' have come to regard as the earliest *datable* structures and, thus, truly the 'first'.¹⁹ The only reason that I or anyone might make use of the word 'new' is to separate the foundations of the Serapeum as we

¹⁰ Alan Rowe and Étienne Drioton, "Discovery of the Famous Temple and Enclosure of Serapis at Alexandria," *Annales Du Service Des Antiquités De L'égypte*. Supplément, Cahier no. 2 (Le Caire: Service des antiquités, 1946): 1-10, 51-53, 59.

¹¹ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 5.

¹² Jean-Philippe Lauer and Charles Picard, *Les Statues Ptolémaïques Du Sarapieion De Memphis* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 30-47.

¹³ Hanges, *Paul*, 185.

¹⁴ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 361^F-362^A.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Historiae* IV, 83-84.

¹⁶ Clement, *Protrepticus* IV.

¹⁷ Hanges, *Paul*, 182.

¹⁸ Rowe and Rees, "A Contribution," 485-486.

¹⁹ Rowe and Rees, "A Contribution," 491.

can observe them in current day Alexandria from the foundations of a supposed ‘early great temple of Serapis’ that may once have stood on that same spot in Alexandria in some shape or form. This older temple is shrouded in question marks, as we don’t know for certain what it looked like, what parts of the greater Serapeum grounds it covered, when it was built and by who. What we do know about it—some have credited Ptolemy I with these older foundations—is mythically vague and, as such, I will mostly omit it in this essay’s examination of the Serapeum as founded by Ptolemy III Euergetes I. ‘Mostly’, because the pre-Ptolemy III foundations *are* relevant in explaining what we have come to know as the ‘daughter library’—the foundation for which Ptolemy II is supposedly to be credited with, confirming that there must’ve indeed been ‘a’ Serapeum in some form or other *before* Ptolemy III’s reign.²⁰

Then there’s a second reason a single date or period can’t be ascribed to the construction of the buildings within the Alexandrian Serapeum. The Serapeum at Alexandria has been an on-going construction site; from the moment Ptolemy III in the 3rd century BC built his Serapeum *over* and temple of Serapis *next* to the ‘old’ foundations, to relatively minor (re)building done later in both the Ptolemaic era and during the early and late Roman period all the way until the Serapeum’s closing and on-and-off destruction

from around 392 AD.²¹

As mentioned, the Serapeum’s main features would be Ptolemy III’s ‘contribution’, in the form of the great Enclosure itself and the (‘his’) Temple of Serapis. To paint an accurate picture of the Serapeum at Alexandria I will examine the aforementioned features according to the *Prownian Analysis* of description, deduction and speculation.²² First off, the Serapeum is located in the old southwestern district of Rhacotis, which supposedly had already been there before it was integrated into the new city of Alexandria. The foundation blocks at the Serapean site at Rhacotis as used by Ptolemy III, were deep and predominantly made out of limestone, often bearing the marks of masons and quarrymen.²³ The Serapeum’s enclosure itself was an approximate 174 meters in length and 77 meters in width. Both around the interior as well as the exterior of the enclosure ran multiple colonnades—the columns of which varied from 710 to 715 centimeters in height, having been made out of grey granite. Some of these colonnades’ capitals were Ionic, date back to the early Roman period and are made out of white marble. If you take a look at *fig. 1*²⁴, you’ll see the Serapeum depicted, including those colonnades, but also the old temple foundations in the middle and, on the right,

²¹ Troels Myrup Christensen, “Religious Conflict in Late Antique Alexandria: Christian Responses to “Pagan” Statues in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries CE,” in *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*, eds. George Hinge, Per Bilde and Minna Skafta Jensen (Santa Barbara: Aarhus University Press, 2010), 162.

²² Jules Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (The University of Chicago Press, 1982): 7-10.

²³ Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 487.

²⁴ Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 492.

²⁰ Heinrich Keil, “Ioannis Tzetzae Scholiorum in Aristophanem Prolegomena,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 6 (Universität zu Köln, 1848): 117.

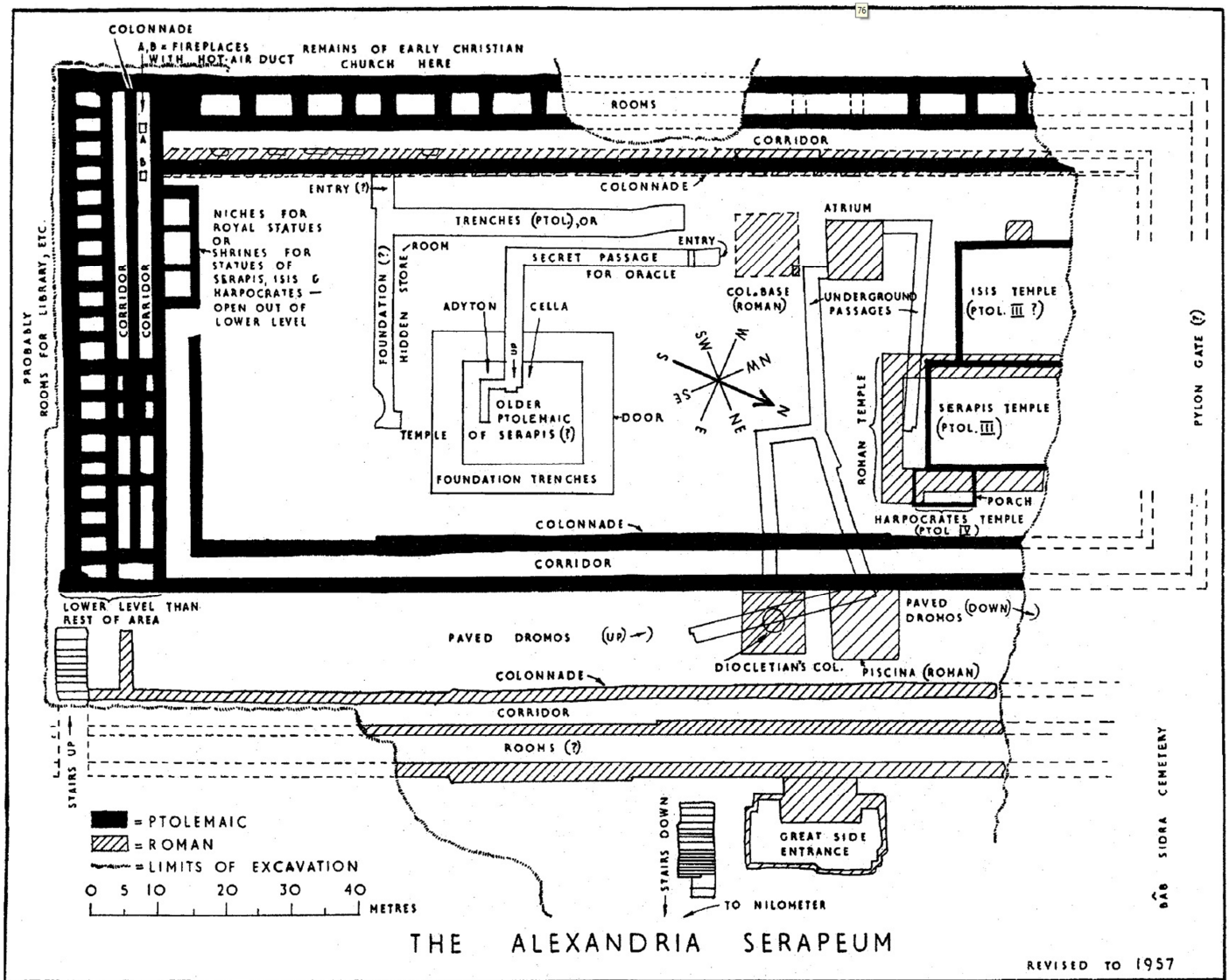


Fig 1. Serapeum at Alexandria according to Alan Rowe's final 1957 plan of excavations.

the ruins of the Serapeum's biggest attraction: Ptolemy III's new Temple of Serapis and an Iseum (temple to the popular Egyptian cult-goddess Isis). Supposedly, the three niches depicted in the upper-left corner, may have been reserved for the statues of what is known as the 'divine triad' of Alexandria's Serapeum—chief, patron deity Serapis, Isis and, the fruit of their marriage: the god of hope, Harpocrates. The Serapeum could be entered through various entrances, one of

which having been a grand 'pylon' (a two-tower gateway) serving as the main entrance to the enclosure. As depicted in *fig. 1* too, in the very back of the Serapeum as well as on the right side of the main entrance were situated multiple corridors with a row of rooms attached to them. It's Rowe's guess the rooms in the back were reserved for priests and other members of the clergy, and the rooms to the right side (upper side of *fig. 1*) reserved for the books that were supposedly stored there due to

a lack of space in the *Great Library of Alexandria*—explaining the aforementioned name *daughter library*.²⁵ This ‘daughter library’ supposedly held the volumes that were in excess at the main Royal Library of Alexandria, which, according to generous approximations, was comprised of 400.000 to 700.000 volumes of books and scrolls, supposedly of ‘Greek, Roman, Jewish, Persian and, even, Ethiopian, Babylonian, Phoenician and Indian’ origins.^{26,27} Though these quantities are still contested (some say much less works of writing were stored there^{28,29}) it *is* considered likely that the Royal Library would have been able to store these amounts of books, as much as the Serapeum’s southwest-side rooms would have been able to house a relatively ‘small’ (supposedly, a tenth)³⁰ amount of literary works in proportion with the aforementioned estimated quantities. At any rate, apart from the pre-Ptolemy III library area, further structures can be found scattered across the Serapeum, amongst which are those from later Roman periods, namely an *atrium* (open air or sky-lit, with glass covered space enclosed by a building—an interior courtyard, of sorts),

various underground passages, Diocletian’s Column as well as a *piscina* (shallow basin used for disposing of sacramental water) wherein were found 58 bronze and 3 silver coins. Even later Roman architectural presence can be accounted for in the Serapeum, considering the presence of church foundations adjacent to the Serapeum’s library rooms. Over at the pylon gate stood a large marble statue of Serapis himself and somewhere south of there, were supposedly underground passages situated, reserved for what Rowe calls ‘oracular activities’—resembling the same kind of passages that would have led to the oracular shrine at Apollo’s temple in Delphi.³¹ The Serapeum’s main building, Ptolemy III’s temple of Serapis, was—to give you an idea of the space it occupied within the enclosure—27,5 meters in length and a 24,6 meters in width, standing upon foundations of a 4,4 meters thick. Who lay which foundations, made repairs, when so and with what intention can here and there be derived from the presence of various loose inscriptions and ‘foundation plaques’ scattered across the Serapeum (43 plaques in total, made of gold, silver, bronze and turquoise-green glazed terracotta). The plaques confirm Ptolemy III is responsible for the discussed *new* temple of Serapis as well as the enclosure itself. Other plaques mention Ptolemy IV to have made his contribution to the building of the Serapeum, as well as other Ptolemaic-era individuals having added marble statues, too. According to Rowe, sphinxes found elsewhere in the

²⁵ Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 488, Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, 53^c.

²⁶ Ad Meskens, “Alexandria ad Aegyptum,” *Travelling Mathematics - The Fate of Diophantos’ Arithmetic*. Science Networks. Historical Studies 41 (Basel: Springer, 2010): 30.

²⁷ Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, 52^c-52^d, Tertullian, *Apologeticum* XVIII, 57.

²⁸ Roger Bagnall, “Alexandria: Library of Dreams,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 146, no. 4 (American Philosophical Society: The Open University, December 2002): 351-356.

²⁹ For example Epiphanius speaks of just 54.800 ‘volumes’ stored at the Great Library, while Ammianus Marcellinus refers to a total of 70.000 volumes in *just* the daughter library alone. See Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, 52^c and Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXII, 16, 13.

³⁰ Thomas Hendrickson, “The Serapeum: Dreams of the Daughter Library,” *Classical Philology* 111, no. 4 (October 2016): 454.

³¹ Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 491.

Rhacotis area once stood near the ‘dromos’ (plural: *dromoi*—meaning pathway or road) leading to the Serapeum. Lastly, worth mentioning is the *nilometer* present in the Serapeum—a structure that would have measured the Nile’s clarity and water level.

What one may deduce from the plaques and foundations made of different materials (as mentioned; granite, limestone and marble), according to Rowe³², is that the ‘Ptolemaic Serapeum’ (the Serapeum in its form as the Ptolemies created it—which was, by the way, architecturally more Greek than it was Egyptian in style³³) was in part destroyed during a Jewish revolt under Trajan in 116 AD³⁴, meaning that ‘buildings added later on’ were really, in part, often replacement structures rather than purely restorations (for which supposedly Hadrian was largely responsible³⁵—making it a... ‘Hadrianean Serapeum’?). This also means that one might call the ‘post-116 AD’ Serapeum a ‘Roman’ one rather than just a Ptolemaic one, synchronous to the lapse of the Ptolemaic era into the early and late Roman period. Further deductions about Alexandria’s Serapeum might be made on the basis of the thick foundations under Ptolemy III’s temple of Serapis, implying it may very well have been a, what you call, *peristyle* temple—a continuously ‘colonnaded’ porch surrounding the covered,

inner sanctuary. Also, the plaque-‘nomenclology’, if you will, indicates that the ancients during the Ptolemaic era spoke of the Serapeum as ‘The Temple and Sacred Enclosure of Serapis’ or ‘The Temple of Serapis in Rhacotis’. The latter one implies that some thought of the name of the Rhacotis district as reflecting the temple’s unicity better, being more geographically accurate or, perhaps, of it being more in line with the locals’ identity and thus more fit to be used to specify which Serapeum one meant, rather than to refer to the Serapeum as the ‘Alexandrian one’. But if so, why? Seeing how from the beginning of the Hellenistic period in Egypt the Serapean cult gradually became more and more popular to, eventually, the point of making the Serapeum home to ‘late antiquity’s prime deity’³⁶, as well as the connection to the Royal Library would have surely made it more of a point of pride to refer to the Serapeum as the ‘Serapeum at the capital of Alexandria’—encapsulating just how prominent a feature it was in Egypt, rather than referring to some district’s name that would have been of less or no meaning to ‘tourists’ from, say, Hellas; and thus being less effective in spreading word of ‘the’ Serapeum’s grandeur and renown. The first name however (‘The Temple and Sacred Enclosure of Serapis’), does the opposite and ‘acts’ as though really, only one Serapeum in all of the greater Mediterranean region mattered and was, apparently ‘obviously’, in Alexandria. One can only speculate as to why people would give different names to the same temple site, but it

³² Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 495.

³³ Judith S. McKenzie, Sheila Gibson and A. T. Reyes, “Reconstructing the Serapeum in Alexandria from the Archeological Evidence,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 94 (Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 2004): 74.

³⁴ Joseph Grafton Milne, *A history of Egypt under Roman rule* (London: Methuen & Co, 1898), 52.

³⁵ Rowe and Rees, “A Contribution,” 496.

³⁶ Hanges, *Paul*, 130.

does suggest that whatever ‘legendary’ status we ascribe to, again, *the* Serapeum today, wasn’t necessarily shared in by all peoples at the time. At any rate, it takes little more analysis to understand why the Serapeum would have been so prominent a feature in Alexandria, seeing how its size coincidentally turned out to be a prelude to its cultural gravitational pull—allowing for people to choose to visit it not just for religious reasons but, also, to marvel at its architecture and feats of engineering or visit solely with the purpose of pursuing academic activities in the Serapeum’s Royal Library’s ‘satellite facility’.

As is clear by now, many different people will have assigned to the Serapeum different meanings or purposes. It might be best to elaborate on the purpose or different meanings of the Serapeum by use of Latour’s *Actor-Network-Theory* (or, ‘sociology of translation’)³⁷ in the way Guggenheim applied it to the field of architecture, when referring to the ‘type’ of building that the Serapeum is, as a ‘mutable immobile’³⁸—a building (or buildings) Guggenheim calls *building types* which, according to him, don’t rely on ‘being’ a *technology* (house, bridge, wall) but rather on being of *meaning*, whereby this meaning may, 1) *vary* to different social segments and 2) *change* over time without the building itself being physically altered. Case in point: a house or bridge serves the same purpose to everyone;

a building like the Serapeum does not. During the Ptolemaic era the Serapeum must have had the tactical purpose of trying to contribute to a uniting factor in ruling over both Greeks and indigenous Egyptians.³⁹ As Stambaugh puts it: the ‘Ptolemaic theologians had intended to endow Serapis with appeal’ to both socio-cultural segments. Besides that, the Serapeum was to function as one of the things that would convey to the people its meaning as being a sign of legitimacy to the Ptolemies’ reign—much like, say, a scepter or a *globus cruciger* would have to later European royalty.⁴⁰ Serapis was presented to the people of Alexandria as their patron, a ‘Greek father god’,⁴¹ in the same sort of way the Jews would refer to themselves as ‘children’ of their God—which would have made the Serapeum, in a way, a house of the people or a paternal home. Often it was such that the Greeks who had settled in Alexandria had left behind, along with their former homes, their old Greek pantheon.⁴² In a way, they would arrive as religious *tabulae rasae*, looking for a new god they could call their ‘protector’. As such, the Serapeum would have predominantly played an important role for the Greeks amongst the Alexandrian population. It may very well have been the case that for those people during that time, the Serapeum meant a place of peace, calm and safety—and not just for those people, but as mentioned earlier on, also for visitors who’d come from near and afar to visit the Serapeum.

³⁷ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2005), 106.

³⁸ Michael Guggenheim, “Im/Mutable Im/Mobiles. From the Socio-Materiality of Cities towards a Differential Cosmopolitics,” in *Urban Cosmopolitics. Agencements, Assemblies, Atmosphere*, eds. Anders Blok and Ignacio Farias (London: Routledge, 2016), 8-11.

³⁹ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 36.

⁴⁰ McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes, *Reconstructing*, 81.

⁴¹ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 88.

⁴² Peter Marshall Fraser, *Two Studies on the Cult of Sarapis in the Hellenistic World* (C.W.K. Gleerup, 1960), 8.

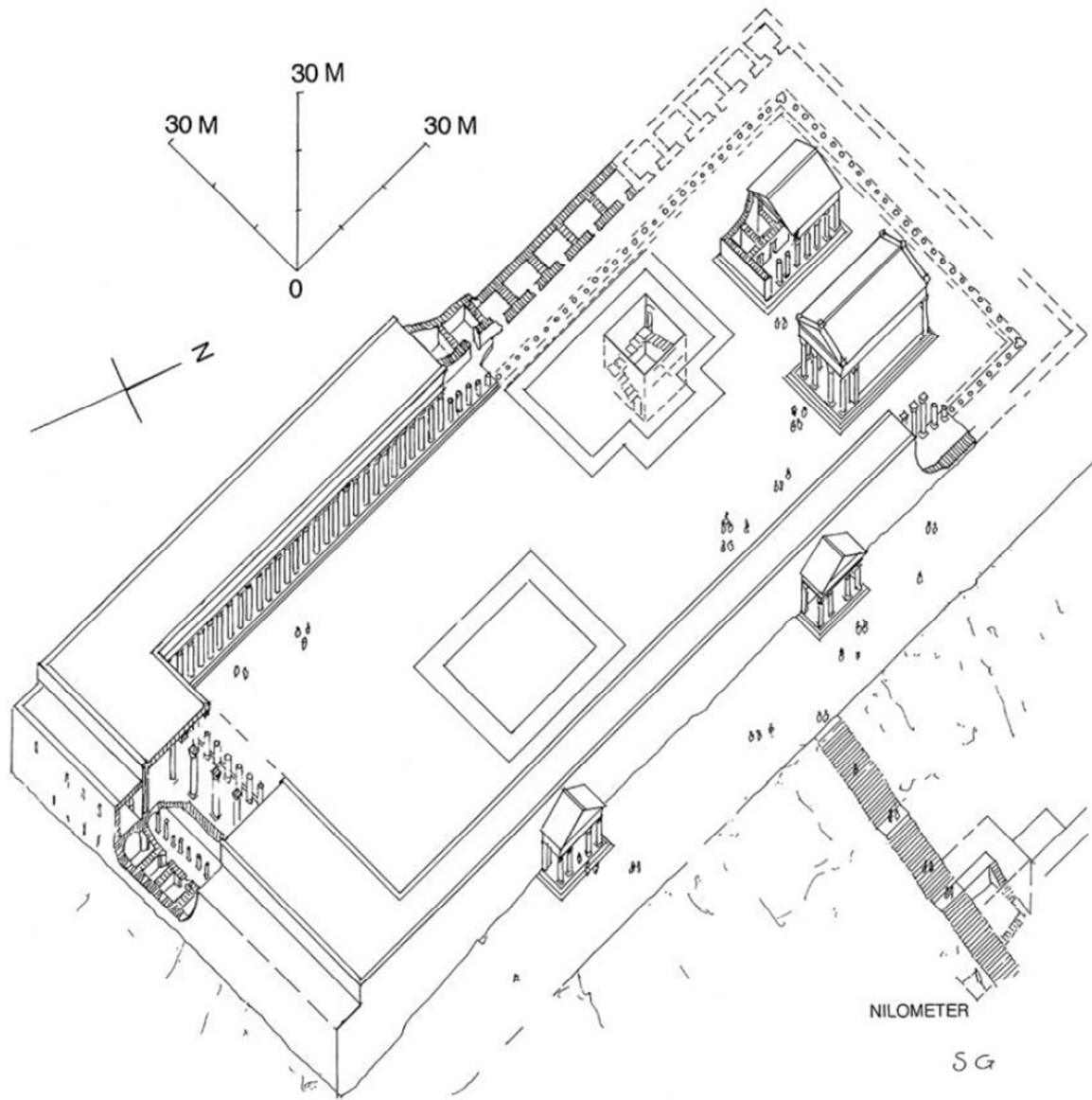


Fig 2. The Ptolemaic, pre-Roman Serapeum at Alexandria.⁴³

They would come to see the sights about which they had heard so many tales, as well as offer prayers for their friends and relatives.⁴⁴ Moreover, the Serapeum could have been viewed by the people during the Ptolemaic period as Alexandria's socio-cultural cornerstone, as it was not only the *city's*

patron's temple, but more and more *Egypt's* cardinal shrine—seeing that while at the *end* of the Ptolemaic era the Memphite Serapeum's importance was in decline, that of the Serapeum in Alexandria would grow. This shows in how Serapis and his sanctuary at Alexandria weren't just of great meaning to the Ptolemies and the clergy—he was of importance to all: 'commoners, merchants,

⁴³ McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes, *Reconstructing*, 88.

⁴⁴ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 90.

slaves, Orientals, men, women and children' alike.⁴⁵

In the early Roman period the Serapeum had lost in importance due to a decline in interest in Serapis' cult in Alexandria while simultaneously in Rome, interest in the cult increased. As in Alexandria native Egyptian gods were once again gaining more popularity⁴⁶, the Serapeum might have started to become somewhat of an 'obstacle' to be ignored. At least, that's what we might think the people would have considered it to be, seeing how Strabo (64 BC—ca. 24 AD) in 20-30 BC wrote that the Serapeum had been all but 'abandoned'.⁴⁷

But this supposed period of decay was relatively short-lived, as in the later Roman period in Alexandria too, Serapis and his Serapeum regained status amongst the populace. It was the perception of Athanasius (295—373 AD), Patriarch of Alexandria, that the cult's 'vitality' was as 'unbroken' as ever and that despite the ever more dominant Christianity, the Serapeum in Alexandria was of 'immense religious and architectural importance' to the people.⁴⁸ Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus seems to attest to this, as he said of the Serapeum that it was 'so superbly decorated, that next to the Capitol, of which the ever-venerable Rome boasts, the whole world has nothing worthier of

admiration'.⁴⁹ It was however at the end of that same late Roman period, that the once schism between Greeks and Egyptians—for which the Serapeum had been a unifier—had now become a schism between now-'pagans' and Christians. And this time, the Serapean cult couldn't offer common ground. The Serapeum had become a symbol of resistance to one, and of heresy to the other. Turbulence ensued, as the Serapeum was plundered and ravaged and thereafter supposedly used by the pagans as a last refuge from the fighting on the streets between pagans and Christians.⁵⁰ In retaliation, 'pagan' violence in defense of all the Serapeum stood for, lead to the 'excuse' the Christians had needed to 'storm' and, finally, lay waste to the Serapeum⁵¹ in 392 AD⁵²—leaving cult statues demolished, temples torn down and, as a reminder of the diversity in purpose the Serapeum had had, supposedly only Alexandria's daughter library in use for the general public.⁵³ And so our 'building type' Serapeum had remained immobile but, as Guggenheim would likely have pointed out, become 'mutated'. With the 'destruction of the material basis for pagan worship', as Hahn puts it⁵⁴—the Serapeum's statues and temples having been turned into crosses and a church—it had kept its purpose but, after six hundred years, gained new meaning to new audiences.

⁴⁵ Stambaugh, *Serapis*, 98.

⁴⁶ Hanges, *Paul*, 181.

⁴⁷ Strabo, *Geographica* XVII, 10.

⁴⁸ Johannes Hahn, "Chapter Twelve. The Conversion of the cult statues: the destruction of the Serapeum 392 A.D. and the transformation of Alexandria into the 'Christ-loving' city," in *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, eds. Johannes Hahn and Ulrich Gotter (Brill, 2008), 336.

⁴⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXII, 16, 12.

⁵⁰ Hahn, *The Conversion*, 348.

⁵¹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V, 16-17.

⁵² Christensen, *Religious*, 162.

⁵³ Rowe and Rees, "A Contribution," 496 and 511, on the basis of Alan J.B. Wace, "Greek Inscriptions from the Serapeum," in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts 2* (Alexandria: al-Iskandriyah, 1944), 17-26.

⁵⁴ Hahn, *The Conversion*, 355.

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