

# Iconographical and iconological study of the snake-footed Anubis in Alexandria: connections and new creations

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The image of the snake-footed Anubis found in the Alexandrian catacombs of Kom el-Shoqafa (von Sieglin and Schreiber 1908) stands out as a remarkable example of syncretism. Its analysis should be carried out from an interdisciplinary point of view, studying both the Egyptian and the Greek and Roman implications in the Alexandrian context. This poster aims to make an iconographic and iconological analysis of this figure while considering the Alexandrian realities and creations within the Mediterranean dynamics.

## Representations of the anquiped Anubis

The Roman catacombs of Kom el-Shoqafa, created in the Second Century AD, have several passages with niches and the 'Main Tomb', where the principal depictions are located. On one inner doorjamb is represented a snake-footed Anubis, who is dressed as a legionary, with a mantle that he holds with his left arm while with his right arm he leans on a spear. He wears an *atef*-crown and its lower half is represented as a serpent with eight-shaped twists.

Up to date, there are two interesting parallels for this image, consisting of two bronze figurines of unknown provenance (Cairo CG 32371 and Warsaw MNW 148140) and dated to the Ptolemaic period. Both have lost the crown and they hold an *ankh* in their left hand. They seem to have held a spear in the right arm. They also show a tripartite wig and wear a *shendyt*-kilt.

	Spear, shield	Shendyt-kilt	Cuirass, pteryges, chiton	Short cloak	Atef-crown	Standing	Trip. wig	ankh	Necklace
Kom el-Shoqafa	●		●	●	●	●			
Warsaw	?	●			?	●	●	?	
Cairo	?	●			?	●	●	●	●

## Roles of the anquiped Anubis

Grenier (1977: 37-39) has interpreted the anquiped Anubis as a warrior and tomb's centinel, comparing him with the serpent guardians of the doorways of the Egyptian traditions and the *agathodaimons* of other Alexandrian tombs. This combative aspect would already appear in the *Papyrus Jumilhac* (13.19-20 and 14.2-3), where Anubis transforms into a serpent to fight Seth, Osiris' murderer.

Other scholars (e. g. Venit 2002: 144-145; 2016: 71) vaguely link the guardian role with the Alexandrian *agathodaimon*. In that sense, Majewska (2012: 219-223) points out that it also appears in Kom el-Shoqafa and that this form would reflect the syncretism of Greek and Egyptian chthonic conceptions. She also resembles them morphologically to some serpentiform forms of Isis-Thermuthis and Serapis-Agathodaimon and the total god, earthly and celestial, mentioned by Plutarch.

As Grenier (1977) himself recognizes, the military character of this form of Anubis in Kom el-Shoqafa does not appear in all his anquiped representations. Thus, it can be understood that its core meaning should be another. Besides, although Venit (2002) and Majewska (2012) have compared this image with some serpentiform elements of Graeco-Roman deities, they have only stated their possible parallels, such as the Alexandrian *agathodaimon* in his guardian role. In that sense, these should be presented in a more critical way, attending to a more nuanced iconological analysis.



Figures 1 & 2. Entrance of the Main Tomb and the inner representations of Anubis at both sides. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

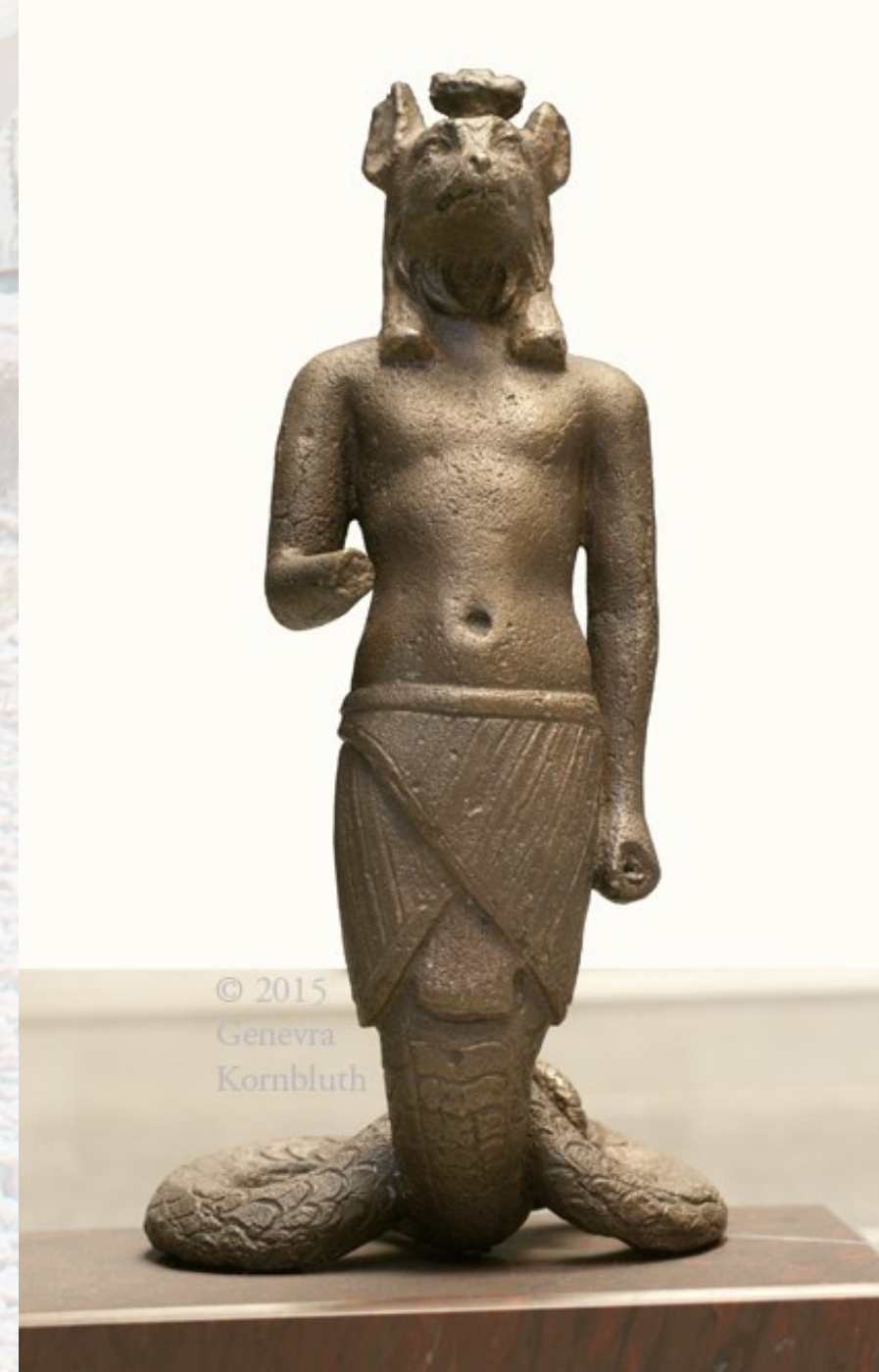


Figure 3. Bronze figurine (Warsaw MNW 148140). Source: www.kornbluthphoto.com



Figure 4. Bronze figurine (CG 32371). Source: Edgar 1904.



Figure 5. Snake-footed deities of the Graeco-Roman period: a) Dionysos (British Museum); b) Isis-Thermuthis (Musée du Louvre); c) Pantheistic Abraxas (private collection). Sources: www.britishmuseum.org (a); Wikimedia Commons (b); www.christies.com (c).

The anquiped image of Anubis has been connected with Alexandrian deities, such as Serapis-Agathodaimon and Isis-Thermuthis (Venit 2002: 143). However, in the first case, his form is not strictly equivalent to that of Anubis, as he has an ophiomorphic body and only a human head or a full ophiomorphic figure with beard and *kalathos* (Boutantin 2014: 494). In the case of Isis-Thermuthis, chthonic and promoter of regeneration and fertility (D'Ascoli 2015), her close connections with Anubis (Venit 2002: 145; Majewska 2012: 220) have led to link her with his snake-footed image. In this case, terracottas from the 2nd-3rd century AD show her with her legs in the shape of a serpent's body (fig. 5b) (Boutantin 2014: 494). Other contemporary anquiped deities not previously related to this form of Anubis are Dionysos (fig. 5a) (Bailey 2007), with a markedly chthonic character, and one later form of Abraxas (fig. 5c).

## Discussion and final remarks

This analysis allows us to hypothesise that the anquiped form of Anubis should have been the result of the convergence of Egyptian traditions with Graeco-Roman elements, especially concerning his snake-shaped legs. The most suitable environment for its creation seems to have been Alexandria itself, where anquiped deities are commonly represented. In that sense, its relationship with the two figures of the Alexandrian *agathodaimon* in the 'Main Tomb' of Kom el-Shoqafa seems to be very relevant. Placed on both sides of the entrance on the façade, their axial position with respect to the two figures of Anubis in the interior, its orientation looking towards the opening, and the placement of the four figures on a *naos* invites us to understand that Anubis performs analogous functions in the interior to those of the *agathodaimons* in the exterior. Not surprisingly, a similar exterior-interior arrangement can be seen in the tomb of Tigrane (Venit 1997, fig. 2).

Thus, in addition to highlighting its earthly and regenerative character, typical of chthonic deities such as Isis-Thermuthis and Dionysos, its close contextual relationship in Kom el-Shoqafa and other tombs in the city with the Alexandrian *agathodaimon* suggests that this form of Anubis could be understood as the funerary correspondent of this local deity, that is, as the protector of the necropolis of Alexandria. It would thus be a properly Alexandrian Anubis.

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