



## The Roman Kiosk (Hathor's Chapel) at Naga: A Reflection of Alexandrian Hellenistic Architecture

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Article info	Abstract
<p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Alexandrian art, Hellenistic architecture, Roman architecture, ancient Alexandria, Naga, Nubian architecture.</i></p> <p><b>(IJTHS), O6U</b> Vol.7, No.2, October 2024, pp. 136 - 149</p> <p>Received: 8/9/2024 Accepted: 30/9/2024 Published: 6/10/2024</p>	<p>The Roman Kiosk at Naga, Sudan is a masterpiece of Hellenistic architecture. The architectural elements from the buildings reflect the Hellenistic nature and fusion of the ancient Egyptian architectural style and the iconic architectural innovations from ancient Alexandria under the Ptolemies. Dating to around the age of Augustus, the kiosk is proof of how the Nubian culture had adapted much from the far- north city of Alexandria and the total comprehension of the ideology of the Hellenistic age, resulting in a building that reflects the two dominant cultures in Egypt at that period of time. The style and location of the kiosk reflect the range of artistic influences inspired by the ancient city of Alexandria across Egypt and neighbouring countries. Regardless of the non-canonical Hellenistic architectural styles in Ptolemaic Egypt, Alexandria has deeply imbedded its artistic roots across both Egyptian- controlled and Egyptian- influenced territories within and without its borders.</p>

### 1. Introduction

Naga (or Naqa) in Sudan is a Classic Meroitic site of the Kushite Kingdom, dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The site lies NW of Khartoum city. Mostly, the site focuses on the Temple of Amun and the Lion Gate, both executed in ancient Egyptian style, and a smaller temple, executed in a Hellenistic manner, known as the Roman Kiosk or the Chapel of Hathor (Figure 1 & Figure 2). The latter is of an exceptional architectural design that reflects the Hellenistic influence of Ptolemaic Alexandria (Wildung & Kroeper, 2016, pp. 1, 6; Wolf and Nowotnick, 2020, pp. 524, 531; Wildung, 2001, p. 137.)



*Figure 1: NW and Southern sides of the Roman Kiosk (Naga Project)<sup>1</sup>*



*Figure 2: Southern and SE sides of the Roman Kiosk (UNESCO)<sup>2</sup>*

Regarding the architecture of the Roman Kiosk, it shares features from the independent architectural style of the city of Alexandria, as well as the Hellenistic fusion of both Alexandrian and ancient Egyptian styles. It is both unique and interesting how the Alexandrian style had travelled far south – almost beyond the Ptolemaic borders, and during the early period of Roman existence in Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> <https://naga-project.com/der-fundplatz/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/114987>

The answer to that question lies in the Augustan period, after the annexation of Egypt. First, Queen Amanitore (mid. 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) had conquered southern territories in Egypt, including Elephantine and Thebes. Second, extended Ptolemaic influences within these southern territories by 25 BC – artistic dominance remained during the early Roman/Augustan period, especially Elephantine, can be noticed; a fusion of both Hellenic and Egyptian cultures. Third, the Romans continued the same practice of creating Hellenistic constructions; *i.e.* The Temple of Augustus at Philae. Last, Meroe is very familiar with Egyptian influences, deducing that the Kushites were building in the Ancient Egyptian architectural style, and such gradual shift from pure Egyptian into Hellenistic had influenced the mentality of the Kushite architect. Therefore, it is possible to conclude the strong Hellenistic presence at the borders between Egypt and Nubia, of which such territory had exchanged hands until it was secured by Augustus (Wolf & Nowotnick, 2020, p. 525)

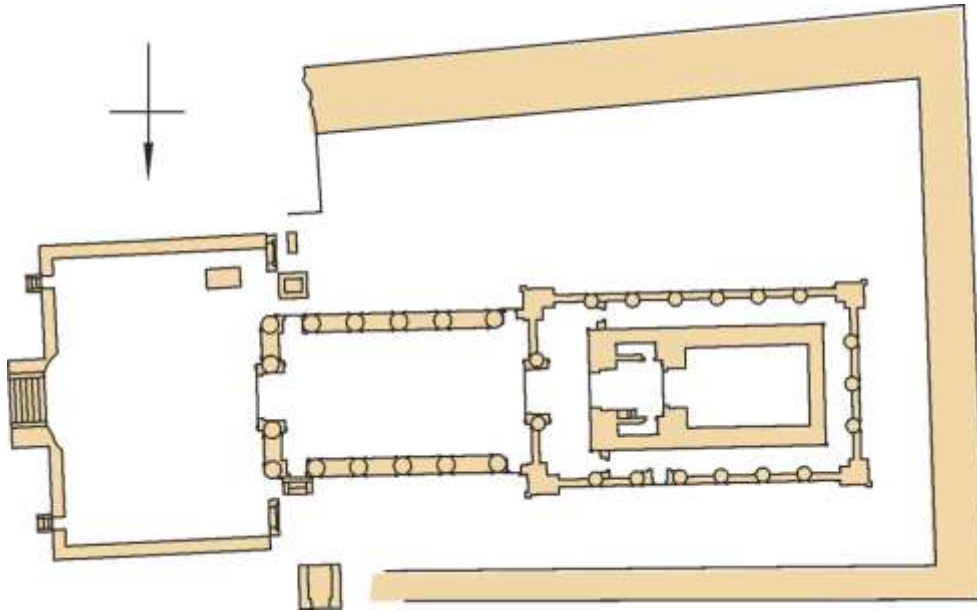
## **2. Architectural Elements and their Hellenistic Origin**

### **2.1 Plan of the Kiosk**

The design and planning of the Roman Kiosk were adapted after the invading Nubian forces took control of Egypt, establishing Dynasty XXV. The Kiosk is considered a “transitional shrine” placed on the side of the processional way towards the Temple of Amun. Stationary shrines were built to host the arriving statue of the deity; hosting the statue and presenting offerings by the public.

The Roman Kiosk as Naga is an exceptional copy of Egyptian-planned kiosks from the New Kingdom up to the Augustan period. Since Nubian kiosks are usually based on Egyptian plans but altered to suit the Nubian character, the kiosk at Naga is different, being purely Late Hellenistic.

The plan of the kiosk resembles that of a *mammisi* or a house of birth; a Late Period type of buildings added to temple complexes, where they function as birth houses and symbolizes the birth of a divine child related to the triad of the Nome where the *mammisi* is built. *Mammisis* are always built on one of the sides of the main dromos leading to the main temple, perpendicular on the dromos' axis (Figure 3). The *mammisi* is usually built of one or more kiosks in a rectangular form, acting as a small shrine. However, in the Ptolemaic period, *mammisi* developed into a fully-functioning temple. Ptolemaic *mammisi*, like that in Edfu (Figure 4), was built with colonnaded walls, surmounted by papyrus capitals carrying a beam-like entablature with a sun disk. The walls of the *mammisi* are usually short; low screen walls as part of an inter-columnar wall (Kockelmann, 2011, pp. 1-3).



*Figure 3: Plan of the Edfu Mammisi (U. Bartels, D. Budde; JGU<sup>3</sup>)*



*Figure 4: Southern side of the Edfu Mammisi (Sarrazin; UChicago<sup>4</sup>)*

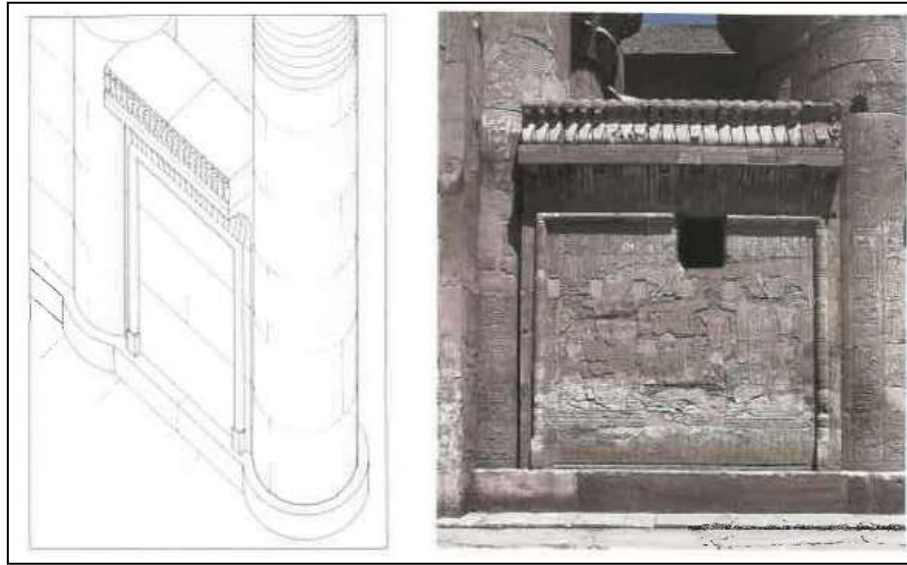
The plan forms a four-sided building; two short sides and two long sides. The corners of the kiosk are decorated with double, heart-shaped columns on the exterior. The sides of the kiosk resemble Egyptian screen walls, surmounted by windows of different sizes and designs. The door on the western shorter side and the central windows on the longer sides resemble Egyptian doorway with Uraei-decorated frieze; an ancient Egyptian motif adapted in the Ptolemaic period by implying protection against evil, and is used for decorating pylons and screen walls, like the Ptolemaic pronaos wall screens at Kom Ombo (Figure 5) (Arnold, 1999, pp. 151, 303, 351 note 17; Arnold, 2003, pp. 94-95). The flanking windows on all four sides and the door on the eastern shorter side are lower, with carved entablatures surmounted by dental lintels. Both longer sides have half-columns on their exterior. All columns are mounted by Type III

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aegyptologie.uni-mainz.de/das-mammisi-von-edfu-2/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/projects/tell-edfu/mammisi>



Alexandrian Corinthian capitals in a simplified manner. The capitals carry a cavetto cornice with dental motifs (Török, 2011, pp. 301-308).



*Figure 5: Screen wall with frieze of uraei from the Ptolemaic Pronaos at Kom Ombo (Arnold, 1999, fig. 264)*

## 2.2 Corner Columns' Design

By analyzing the plan and the architectural styles of the Kiosk, we can notice the strong influences from Alexandria, on the one hand, and Hellenistic Egypt, on the other hand. Regarding the ground plan of the Kiosk, the corners have double semi-columns projected outwards in a heart-shaped form. The heart-shaped column is an early Alexandrian innovation by having two semi-columns attached to a square block (both the semi-columns and the square block are monolithic) at the corner of the construction – for more see Chantier Finney in Alexandria, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Adriani, 1940, 46) (Figure 6). Several early models were discovered in Alexandria where it first appeared – *i.e.* Chantier Finney, Mostafa Kamel tombs & El-Shatby tombs in court I of Tomb I – late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, then in the rest of Egypt; *i.e.* The Ptolemaic Hall “*La sala Tolemaica*” – *c.* 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC – overlooking the Dromos at Tebtynis in Fayoum (Figure 6) (Pensabene, 1993, pp. 123-127, 240-241 tav. 113 cat. no. 1-12).

One is from Chantier Finney (Figure 6) – 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, where the heart-shaped column is part of the construction's wall; same applicable to the double column at the corner of Court I of Tomb I at Mostafa Pasha – early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Figure 12) (Adriani 1966, p. 127, Tav. 47, figs. 178-179). Other examples are from Mina El-Basal district (Figure 7) – *c.* 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and the so-called Temple of Venus at Cape Zephyrium – *c.* 280 BC (Figure 10) (Tkaczow 1993, p. 208 cat. No. 53), where the heart-shaped column is separate from the construction's wall or freely standing; all belong to the Ptolemaic period. The only difference between the heart-shaped columns of both Naga and Alexandria is that the prior has two more projected rectangle-like supports; an extension of the column towards both adjacent walls. It is more like a fusion of the heart-shaped Alexandria column (Figure 8, Figure 11) on the exterior and the L-shaped Pharaonic corner column (Figure 8) (Arnold, 1999, pp. 151, 152, Figure 103).

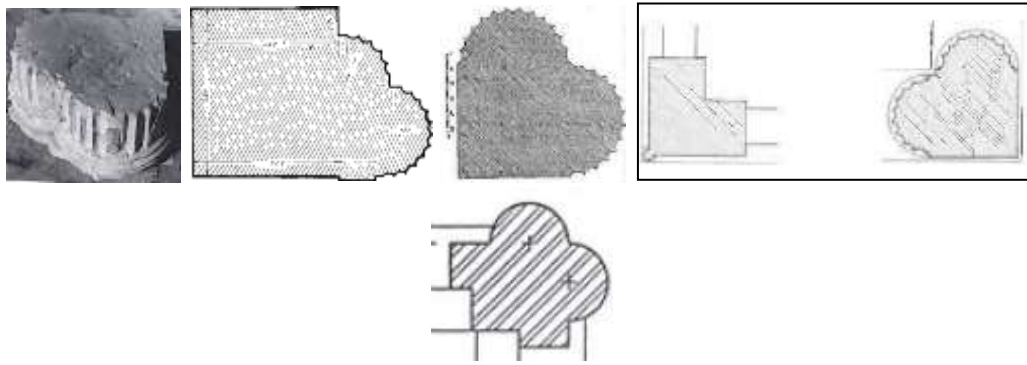


Figure 6: A heart-shaped base from the "Ptolemaic Hall" in Tebtynis (Pensabene, 1993, tav. 113, n. 1)

Figure 6: An architectural fragment of a heart-shaped column from Chantier Finney, Alexandria; currently at GRM (Adriani, 1940, fig. 16)

Figure 7: A heart-shaped drum of a column from Mina El-Basal District, Alexandria; currently at GRM (Tkaczow, 1993, obj. 53)

Figure 8: A comparison between the Alexandrian heart-shaped column and the Ancient Egyptian L-shaped column (Arnold, 1999, fig. 103)

Figure 9: Composite base (L-shaped & Heart-shaped) from the Roman Kiosk (Török, 2011, pl. 151)

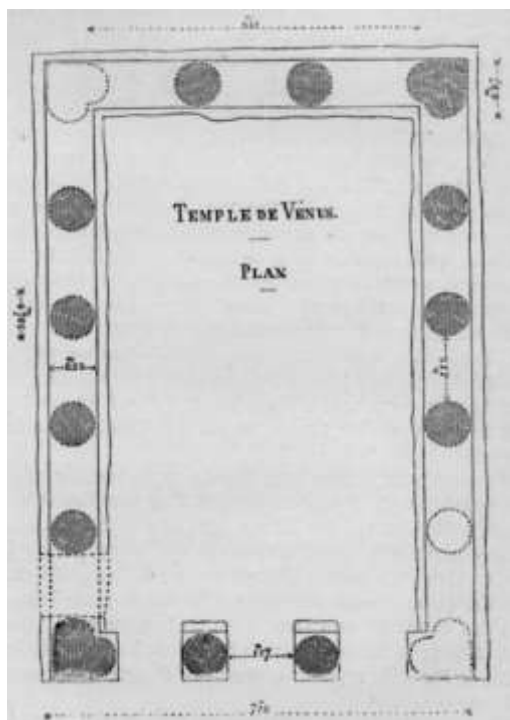


Figure 10: Plan of the so-called Temple of Venus at Cape Zephyrium, Stanley Bey, Alexandria (Ceccedi, 1869, p. 270)

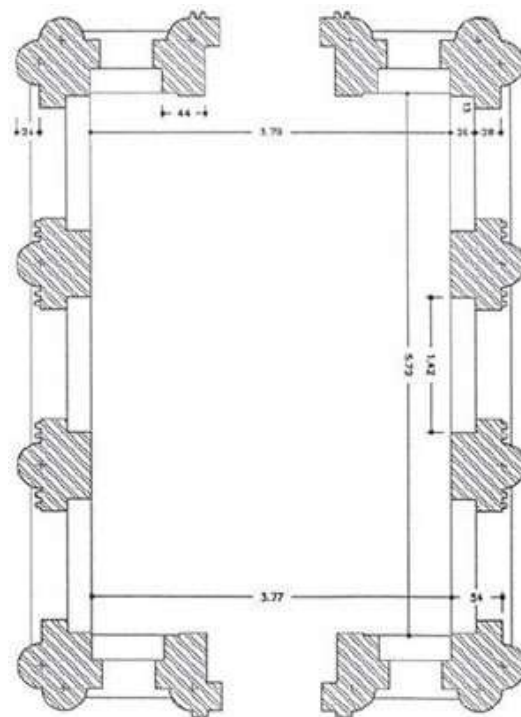
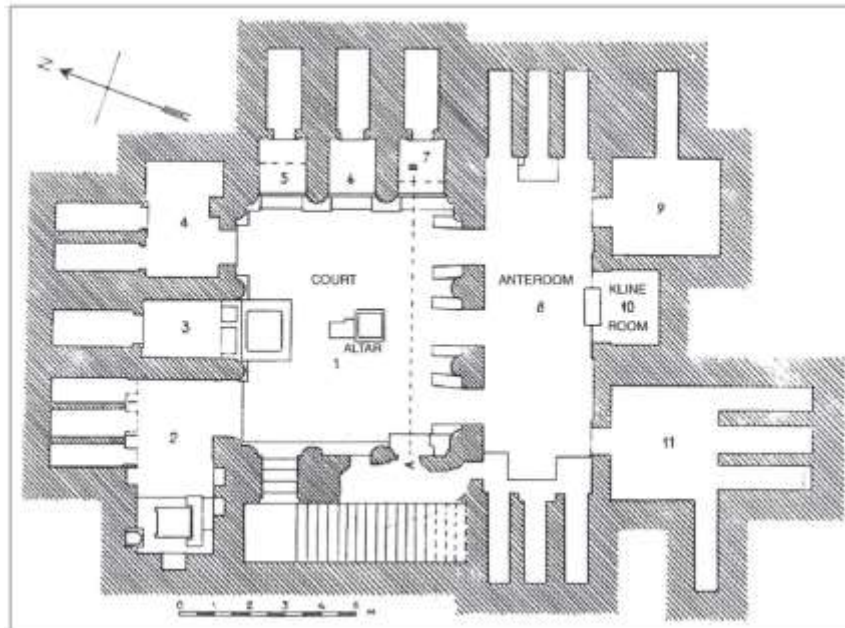


Figure 11: Plan of the Roman Kiosk, Naga (Török, 2011, pl. 151)



**Figure 12: Court 1 of Tomb I, Mostafa Pasha Necropolis, Alexandria (Adriani, 1936, pt. XXV)**

By observing the plan of the Roman Kiosk at Naga, we can conclude that the heart-shaped column was embedded into the L-shaped Ancient Egyptian column to produce such fusion of columns. Also, the design of the heart-shaped column is placed to be seen on the exterior of the kiosk, opposite to its Alexandrian counterpart, where the heart-shaped side is placed to face the interior. Since such designs were used in Alexandrian necropoleis, it is obvious that such columns were already found underground, embedded into the walls of the tombs, where it probably faced the interior court or the inner of the burial chambers; *i.e.* the court of Tomb 1 at Mostafa Pasha Necropolis (Adriani, 1966, pp. 127, 130-134, tav. 47, 48 Fig. 178, 179, 181; McKenzie, 2010, pp. 71-74).

### 2.3 The Egyptian Gateway, Entablature and Windows

The Kiosk has two entrance gateways: the frontal gate at the NW side is a typical Ancient Egyptian temple pylon; and another at the SE side, with a curved entablature. Regarding the NW gate, the entablature is divided into four sections: a frieze of cobras at the top, surmounting three cavetto cornices with winged sun disks. A similar design of the pylon is repeated for the northern and southern sides of the Kiosk, but rather in form of central windows; one on each side, flanked with two niches which will be discussed later.

Although the design of the pylon is basically Egyptian, the triple repetition of the winged sun disk on the entablature is not common in Ancient Egyptian architecture. Usually, the entablature is presented with one architrave, hosting a single winged sun disk. Although the Ptolemies, like the Ancient Egyptians, used the single cavetto cornice, the dental-decorated, cavetto cornice with the frieze of cobras was carved for the gate of Alexander the Great at Luxor in dedication to Amun. The latter gateway (Figure 14) consisted of two friezes of cobras and three cavetto cornices. By analysing the gateway at the Kiosk (Figure 15), we can notice

an almost identical representation, replacing the second frieze of cobras with dental motifs, which is a Hellenic innovation altered through Alexandrian art (Arnold, 1999, pp. 138, 139 fig. 93). Same theory applies to the two central windows at the northern and southern central windows.

Basically, the idea behind the triple gateway with the repeated sun disk is to imitate the repetition of gateways from Egyptian temples. So instead of constructing three gateways on a massive scale, with their courtyards, this representation from the Ptolemaic period is basically a virtual illusion and imitation that saves both space and construction materials, while delivering the same function from the temples. Such visualization can also be noticed at the Ptolemaic Anfushi cemetery in Alexandria (Figure 13).



*Figure 13: Anfushi Tombs, Hypogeum 2, Chamber 2 (Adriani, 1950, pt. XXXVI, fig. 2)*

*Figure 14: Sketching of the Gateway of Alexander the Great to Amun, Luxor (Arnold, 1999, fig. 93)*

*Figure 15: Triple architrave from the Roman Kiosk, Naga (Naga Project Guide<sup>5</sup>)*

## 2.4 The Alexandrian Corinthian Capitals

By observing the rest of the Kiosk, it is noticeable that the other SE gateway and all eight niche-like, flanking windows follow the same design; a curved entablature supported by two capitals. The main NW side and both the northern and southern sides of the Kiosk are decorated in the same manner. Flanking the Egyptian gate and two windows are two niche-like windows on each side of the Kiosk. The niche-like windows are decorated with two Corinthian capitals supporting a curved entablature.

Regarding the Corinthian capitals, there are three different sets of Corinthian capitals; the Corinthian capitals supporting the main entablature of the Kiosk, the decorative Corinthian capitals of the niche-like windows flanking the Egyptian door and windows, and the Corinthian capitals supporting the SE gate and its flanking niche-like windows.

<sup>5</sup> <https://naga-project.com/naga-online/>



The first set of capitals (Figure 18) are the ones supporting the entire entablature of the building; four double capitals at the corners and four pairs of capitals on each side of the Kiosk. The double capitals by the corners rest on the heart-shaped pillars discussed above. These capitals adapt the Type I Alexandrian Corinthian capitals, identified by the face-to-face helices (Figures 16). The volutes are enlarged in size, while the helices are reduced. The acanthus collar is replaced with a band of three circles and dental motifs. Only two carved acanthi leaves are presented by the volutes, supporting them. These capitals also adapt the trait of the Composite capitals, where the egg-and-dart motif is presented between the enlarged volutes underneath the abacus.

The other capital design (Figure Figure 19) presented in pairs throughout the rest of the upper part of the building adapt the Type III Alexandrian Corinthian capitals (Figures 16). These capitals are more Corinthian than their hybrid (Corinthian and Composite) counterparts by the corners. The broken volutes seem to be of the same size from the previous capitals, while the central helices are of correct Alexandrian proportions in relation to the rest of the capital. Also, the helices are presented back- to-back, separated by an acanthus leaf. The volutes are also supported by one acanthus each (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 86; Bassioni, 2022, pp. 32-33, 39-40).



*Figures 16: Type I Alexandrian Corinthian capital (McKenzie, 2010, fig. 125a)*

*Figures 17: Type III Alexandrian Corinthian capital (McKenzie, 2010, fig. 125c)*

*Figure 18: Type-I-like Corinthian capital supporting the Kiosk's entablature (Naga Project)*

*Figure 19: Type-III-like Corinthian capital supporting the Kiosk's entablature (Naga Project)*

The second sets of capital (Figures 21 & 23 *Figures 21*) are the ones from the niche-like windows flanking the Egyptian gate and windows. They are hybrids of two Alexandrian Corinthian capitals; Type I Alexandrian and Type IV Alexandrian (Figure 20). Most of the capitals are represented in a simplified form (Figures 21) except for a couple of capitals (Figures 21) where the volutes are presented in a detailed form. The hybrid capital (Figures 21) consists of four volutes adapted from the two previously mentioned Alexandrian types. The lower part of the capital has two S-shaped volutes, adapted from the Type IV Alexandrian Corinthian capital (Figure 20). The S-volutes occupy the lower half and upper volutes of the capital; the latter originally supports the abacus. The central helices at the upper part of the capital emerge from behind the S-volutes, coiling inwards face-to-face (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 84-86; Bassioni, 2022, pp. 32, 41). Between the helices is a lotus-bud, diamond-shaped motif.



*Figure 20: Type IV Alexandrian Corinthian Capital (McKenzie, 2010, fig. 126)*

*Figures 21: A hybrid Corinthian capital from the niche-like windows (Naga Project)*

*Figures 22: A hybrid Corinthian capital from the niche-like windows with more decorated volutes (Naga Project)*

The third set of capitals (Figures 24 Figures 24) are mostly an adaptation from the Type IV Alexandrian Corinthian capitals (Figure 20) and the Moulded capital from Petra (Figure 23).



*Figure 23: Moulded Capital model from Petra (McKenzie, 1990, Diagram 14.1)*

*Figures 24: Moulded Capital with dental motifs from the gateway and niche-like windows at the SE side (Naga Project)*

*Figures 25: Moulded Capital from the gateway and niche-like windows at the SE side (Naga Project)*

## 2.5 The Curved Cornices

The curved entablature is a repeated motif at the Kiosk. The curved or arched entablature is an Alexandrian innovation. It appeared in Alexandrian necropoleis like Gabbari around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. It became an Alexandrian trait used across the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, like in Villa Hadrian at Tivoli. The decoration motifs of the curved entablature are adapted from Egyptian art, where lotus flowers and lotus buds are used respectively, with a central, more detailed lotus flower at the center of the entablature. Moreover, by observing the curved entablatures at the SE side, we can notice a hybrid entablature of both the Egyptian lotus (Figures 26) and the Hellenic dental motifs (Figures 26), modified in the Alexandrian Hellenistic manner identified by their thickness and height, and the space separating those dentals. The entablature is decorated with a row of wide tongue motifs (Figures 26) between two rows of dental motifs; motifs adapted from Alexandrian architecture (Figures 26 & 31) (Pensabene, 1993, pp. 509, cat. no. 895; 916; McKenzie, 2010, p. 93).



*Figures 26: Curved entablature of the right-hand window at the SW side (Project Naga)*

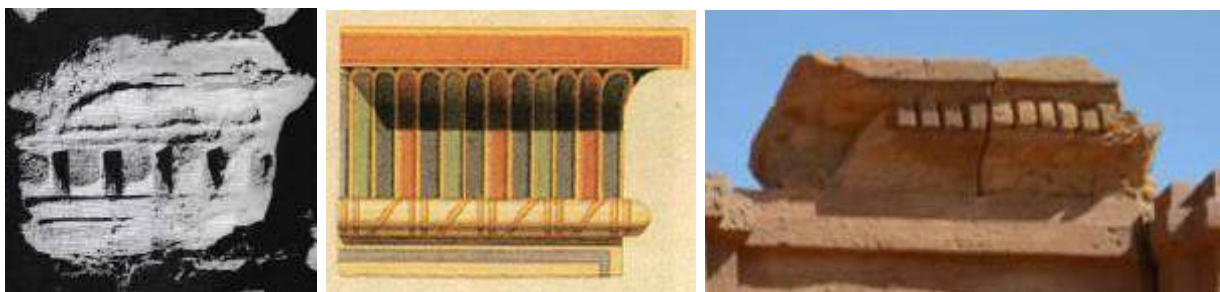
*Figures 27: Curved entablature of the entrance at the SE side (Project Naga)*

*Figures 28: Curved entablature of the right-hand window at the SE side (Project Naga)*

*Figure 29: A late 2<sup>nd</sup>-early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC fragment of an Alexandrian dental curved entablature from Gabbari; currently at the GRM (Pensabene, 1993, tav. 96, fig. 916)*

## 2.6 The Entablature of the Kiosk

Regarding the main entablature, only a couple of fragments remain. The main entablature's design is a perfect example of Hellenistic architecture; the usage of a cavetto cornice (Figure 31) with dental motifs (Figure 30) surmounting the Corinthian capitals (Figure 32). Although the Corinthian order had gained a variety of styles regarding the entablature, the earliest models from Alexandria are a combination of the Doric or Ionic frieze with the Corinthian capitals. The addition of dental motifs was mostly associated with the Doric frieze in Alexandria, and can be noticed all over the kiosk as previously mentioned (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 89, 92-94).



*Figure 30: A late 1<sup>st</sup> century fragment of an Alexandrian dental entablature from Alexandria; currently at the GRM (Pensabene, 1993, tav. 85, fig. 895)*

*Figure 31: A reconstruction of a tongue-decorated cornice (d'Avennes, 2000, p. 55)*

*Figure 32 Part of the Dental cavetto cornice of the Roman Kiosk (Naga Project)*

### **3. Conclusion**

Therefore, we can deduce that the Roman Kiosk matches the Alexandrian styles of architecture and planning. By observing the ground plan, we can notice its close matching with the temple and necropolis from Alexandria, using the heart-shaped corner columns. The other architectural elements, with focus on the capitals and entablatures, we can see the Hellenistic style; a hybrid of the Alexandrian Corinthian capital variations, the Doric style of entablatures, the dental motifs, as well as the usage of the multi-doored Egyptian temple gate, in addition to the winged sun disk and the frieze of cobras. The usage of Hellenic elements reflects the innovation adapted from Alexandria, and not just an imitation of the Classical styles from Mainland Greece.

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## جوسق حتحور بالنقعة نموذجاً للتأثير المعماري الهلينستي السكندري

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### ملخص البحث:

يعد جوسق حتحور بمنطقة النقعة بالسواند إحدى التحف المعمارية المتأثرة بأساليب بالعمارة الهلينستية، حيث يجمع الجوسق بين الفن المعماري المصري القديم والأساليب الفنية الخاصة بمدينة الإسكندرية تحت حكم البطالمة. يرجع تاريخ الجوسق إلي ما يوازي فترة حكم الإمبراطور الروماني أوغسطس وكونه دليلاً علي إنتشار وإقتباس الفكر الهلينستي السكندري المهيمن في أقصى شمال مصر والممزوج بالفن المصري القديم علي الحضارة النوبية. يعكس الجوسق التأثير القوي لمدينة الإسكندرية في العصر الهلينستي علي عمارة الدول والحضارات المجاورة واللذان تأثرا بالفن السكندري، فمدينة الإسكندرية كان لها دور وثيق في نشر وترسيخ الفن السكندري لدي كلا من الدول الخاضعة لمصر سياسياً أو ثقافياً، وبالرغم من عدم وجود قوانين حاسمة للفن السكندري آن ذاك، فكان للفن السكندري تأثيراً قوياً علي الفنون الأخرى والتي رسخ من خلالها الفنان السكندري فنه وأفكاره علي الحضارات الأخرى والتي ظل لها تأثير وثيق وقوي حتي بعد انتهاء حكم البطالمة وتولي الرومان قرابة قرنين آخرين من الزمان في ذلك الوقت، فكان الفن السكندري مهيمن في جميع أرجاء الجدود المصرية وخارجها.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الفن السكندري - الفن الهلينستي - العمارة الرومانية - إسكندرية القديمة - النقعة - العمارة النوبية