UNDERSTANDING EGYPT IN EGYPT AND BEYOND

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We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term “game” to the various games; whereas games form a family the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap.¹

Introduction

The use of Egyptian styles, symbols and motives outside the land of the Nile proper is well known in Antiquity from a very early period onwards.² The Phoenicians were probably the first to use the Egyptian language of forms systematically and on a large scale within their own repertoire of material culture (see below) and it is only logical that the meaning of these elements changed when they were used outside their proper context. The well-known Phoenician ivory carvings, for instance, display a wide range of Egyptian motifs but are, at the same time, characterized by misunderstandings and reinterpretations of these motives.³ A fundamental question for the understanding of L’Égypte hors d’Égypte throughout Antiquity and in all later periods, immediately becomes

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² From Bronze Age Minoan Crete, for instance, for which see now the interpretation and catalogue by J. Phillips, Aegyptiaca on the island of Crete in their chronological context: a critical review I/II (Vienna 2008).

³ For the Phoenician ivory carvings, see the introduction by A. Caubet et al., L’Âge de l’ivoire, in the exhibition catalogue La Méditerranée des Phéniciens de Tyr à Carthage (Paris 2007) 204–215. For Aegyptiaca in that period in the Mediterranean more in general, see the work by G. Hölbl, for instance his Ägyptisches Kulturgut auf den Inseln Malta und Gozo in phönikischer und punischer Zeit (Wien 1989).
apparent here: do we have to reason, in principle, from a general (or perhaps even complete) lack of understanding of these old forms in their new context, or was there some kind of deeper acquaintance. In other words: how much of the original meaning was preserved?

It is interesting to note that already in the IIIrd Intermediate Period (from the 11th century BC to the mid-7th century BC) mistakes and reinterpretations of well-known Egyptian motifs occur in contemporary Egypt itself, amongst other things in hieroglyphic writing. Moreover, in the following Late Period (i.e. the mid-7th century BC to the beginning of the Hellenistic period)—and in the 26th dynasty Saite period most in particular—Egyptian culture in general can be characterized as a ‘renaissance’ that actively engages with the Pharaonic heydays of the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the 18th dynasty.4 A closer look soon reveals that these ‘Pharaonic heydays’ in themselves are, of course, equally not a single coherent cultural unit. The Middle Kingdom, for instance, appropriated Old Kingdom forms like the pyramid, while at the same time the Old Kingdom Memphite tradition apparently deemed so important was modernized by very different (and untraditional) Middle Kingdom, Theban innovations. In their turn, these Middle Kingdom innovations—which actively used Old Kingdom styles, symbols and motives—would in themselves become ‘classical’ for later Egyptian history.5

Obviously cultural renaissances not only include processes of selective remembering and discarding, but also practices of re-interpretation and issues of misunderstanding. So it is not only other people—like the Phoenicians—that do not seem to have fully understood ‘Egypt’ but also, at a certain point, the Egyptians themselves. This puzzling observation suggests that—especially as far as material culture and style are concerned—from the IIIrd Intermediate Period onwards a distinction has to be made between ‘Egyptian’ as an ethnic concept (made in Egypt in an Egyptian style, in the sense of being Egyptian) and ‘Egyptian’ as a cultural concept (made in Egypt after an Egyptian style, in the sense

4 For the archaism in the Saite period, see P. Der Manuelian, Living in the past. Studies in archaism of the Egyptian 26th dynasty (London 1994).
5 For processes of looking back and canon building in the Middle Kingdom see the work of D. Wildung, recently summarised in his article Looking back into the future: the Middle Kingdom as a bridge to the past, in J. Tait (ed.), ‘Never Had the Like Occurred’. Egypt’s view of its past (London 2003) 61–78. For the pyramid example, see pp. 74–75. Grundlegend still id., Sesostris und Amenemhet. Ägypten im mittleren Reich (Mainz 1984).
of doing Egyptian). In the second century BC this situation seems to have become almost standardized. Hieroglyphic writing, for instance, was now apparently only understood by a small group and in texts that have been preserved, hieroglyphs sometimes have become visual signs without a textual meaning. At the same time, however, there are, in this period, clear signs of knowledge of (and respect for) earlier periods: Egyptian temples had (and were themselves) extensive archives and some papyrus texts from the Hellenistic period, for instance, show an intimate understanding of Ramesside traditions and formulations.

‘Egypt’ as a Cultural Concept

When we want to understand the use of what I have just labeled ‘Egypt as a cultural concept’ there is an additional complicating factor in the Hellenistic and Roman periods: the presence of foreign rulers in Egypt coming from outside Egypt. How should we regard it if they (Persian and Ptolemaic kings or Roman emperors, for instance) use Egyptian styles, symbols or motives in Egypt. And what if the ‘native’ Egyptian population does so in a period when it is under foreign dominance? And for how long and when, exactly, is ‘foreign’ seen, felt and perceived as foreign?

In dealing with these questions, the reconstruction of the relation between the various newcomers (Persians, Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, etc.) and the indigenous Egyptians has most often been used to frame the answer. Regarding the cultural character of

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6 Lembke et al., Römer am Nil 44. For a general overview of the use and meaning of the Egyptian tradition in the Hellenistic period see R.S. Bianchi, The Pharaonic art of Ptolemaic Egypt, in: Cleopatra’s Egypt 55–81.

7 See R.S. Bianchi, Graeco-Roman uses and abuses of Ramesside traditions, in: E. Bleiberg, R. Freed (eds.) Fragments of a shattered visage: the proceedings of the international symposium of Ramesses the Great (Memphis, Tennessee 1993) 1–8. He distinguishes four categories in the perception of Ramesside monuments to Egyptians of the Hellenistic and Roman period: 1. usurpation and appropriation of actual Ramesside monuments (often for the sake of convenience), 2. Ramesside monuments which were transmitted in altered form through the agency of intervening dynasties (in which the 30th dynasty played an important role), 3. uses reflecting more intimate knowledge and respect, 4. uses that can be characterized as direct and accurate copies. A proper understanding of the original content goes from (very) low in category 1 to (very) high in category 4.

8 For a historical overview see the book by G. Vittmann, Ägypten und die Fremden im 1. vorchristlichen Jahrtausend (Mainz 2003).
the Ptolemaic period, the earliest scholars thought that after Alexander something of a mixed culture existed. This paradigm was soon replaced by one that opted for the contrary: scholars saw Greeks and Egyptians each living in their own domain with assimilation or integration being the exception. Nowadays most scholars think that although to a large degree Greeks and Egyptians each lived in their own domain, there could be an important overlap between the two ‘cultures’ in certain aspects or roles. Study of the abundantly rich textual record, in which all kinds of Egyptian and Greek names and persons are found, has provided a better understanding of how this overlap worked in social action and behaviour. It shows that native Egyptians could use Greek names (and behave as Hellenised) in some contexts while remaining Egyptian in others; and vice versa. The same person could have a Greek and an Egyptian name and hence nomenclature is an unreliable guide to establish ethnic identity. The implications of this observation are crucial, as they imply that ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Hellene’ are, in fact, (only) social definitions, and not ethnic ones. This ties in well with what has been concluded above about material culture and the differ-


11 For this debate see the many important studies by Willy Clarysse and Jan Quaegebeur; an overview of the discussion and its implications in R.S. Bagnall, *Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: sources and approaches* (Aldershot 2006). Even the often evoked dichotomy between the state (Ptolemaic, modern and ‘Greek’) on the one side, and the temples (Egyptian, traditional and ‘nationalistic’) on the other side has now been nuanced; cf. most recently G. Gorre, *Les relations du clergé égyptien et des lagides d’après des sources privées*, Studia Hellenistica 45 (Leuven 2009).

12 This is the main conclusion of K. Goudriaan, *Ethnic identity in Ptolemaic Egypt*, Dutch monographs on ancient history and archaeology 5 (Amsterdam 1988). There is an important difference here between the Hellenistic and the Roman period. In the Hellenistic period the term ‘Hellene’ indicated all non native Egyptians (Greeks, Syrians, Jews, Thracians, etc.). In the Roman period ethnic terms were used for administrative purposes: ‘Hellene’ then referred to the socially important people in the *chora* (who will often have been Egyptian) while in ethnic terms the population of the ‘Greek’ *metropoleis*, like Alexandria, will also have included native Egyptians. For a critical discussion of the ‘relativist perspective’ I favour here, see D.E. McCoskey, *Race Before Whiteness*. Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt, *Critical Sociology* 28 (2002) 13–39.
ence between ethnic and cultural understanding. Of course, in texts, ‘Egyptian’ could have an ethnic understanding (in the sense of being Egyptian), but, as with material culture, it could as well have a cultural understanding (in the sense of doing Egyptian). Rightly therefore, Marjorie Venit—in her study on material culture and cultural interplay in the Alexandrian tombs—understood the ‘ethnic’ categories as fluid ones. Applicable we are dealing—in text as well as in material culture—with a system in which a certain type of behaviour, with its specific style, was related to a certain context or role. Scholars often tend to perceive this as an inconsistent dichotomy; the inhabitants of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, probably, less so.

This book focuses on the understanding of Egyptian religion, text, and material culture in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. If this was really a society in which the choice for a specific god or goddess, language, or style of material culture did not necessarily depend on the ethnic or cultural background of the person concerned, but rather upon the specific circumstances of the case (context), we are in need of something of an alternative model where the relation between the various newcomers and the indigenous Egyptians—and ethnic understanding in general—is not the determinant for our understanding of this choice.

In the remainder of this Introduction I will—before introducing the individual papers—explore such a model. To do this properly the problem has to be approached from two sides: a Mediterranean, Hellenistic-Roman angle on the one hand and an Egyptian point of view on the other, as it is to be expected that these are the two approaches of dealing with style and identity we see coming together in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. First (in section I) I will, therefore, give some examples

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14 See also the important article by Alston, *Changing ethnicities*, who shows how ethnicity was used, especially by the Romans, to create what, in fact, are social categories.
16 Cf. J. Baines, Egyptian elite self-presentation in the context of Ptolemaic rule, in: W.V. Harris, G. Ruffini, *Ancient Alexandria between Egypt and Greece* (Leiden 2004) 33–61, 33: “It is desirable to move toward integrating Hellenistic and Egyptian perspectives (-)”. This is what this Introduction tries to underline (including the Roman perspective). It goes without saying that I cannot even give a proper overview of these debates in all aspects here and that referencing must remain selective: it is my
of how Egyptian themes, styles and motives were used as ‘cultural con-
cepts’ in the (wider) Mediterranean—from the Bronze Age up to the 
Hellenistic and Roman period—and discuss what they mean in those 
contexts. These historical case studies will not be dealt with in their own 
right, but will be used to try and summarize what the Egyptian element 
means or ‘does’ in a specific historical situation. As a conclusion to that 
overview I will focus on the Hellenistic-Roman world somewhat more 
in detail, as there a model for the understanding of specific styles and 
motives as ‘cultural concepts’ has already been explored and theorised. 
Secondly (in section II), I will provide some examples of how ‘Egypt’ 
could function as a cultural concept in Egypt itself, there also working 
from earlier periods towards the Roman era. Specifically interesting is 
the question if (and how) we see these two strands coming together. 
Lastly (in section III) the individual papers will be introduced and com-
mented upon, especially with regard to how the authors in their analys-
es deal with ‘Egypt’ as a cultural concept.

I. ‘Egypt’ as a Cultural Concept in the (Wider) Mediterranean

Already in the Bronze Age there existed something like “an international, 
helleno-semitic artistic koine of exotica and iconographica”17. The word 
koine is meant here in the sense of ‘an adopted set of shared cultural 
forms across cultural boundaries’.18 Egyptian elements and motives were 
an important constituent of this repertoire. Over the last decades the 
question how to describe this koine and how to understand its social 

intention to illustrate the wider (theoretical) background against which the individual 
papers in this volume can be understood. Exemplary, as far as the integration of these 
three different perspectives is concerned, is the exhibition catalogue Ägypten Griech-
enland Rom. Abwehr und Berührung (Frankfurt 2006) and the accompanying vol-
ume Ägypten Griechenland Rom. Most topics dealt with here can be found discussed 
in those rich volumes as well; I have therefore refrained from referencing to their 
individual papers. The same goes for the important recent monographs by Stanwick, 
Portraits of the Ptolemies, and Riggs, The beautiful burial.

17 To use the definition given by A.B. Knapp, Mediterranean bronze age trade: dis-
tance, power and place, in: E.H. Cline, D. Harris-Cline (eds.), The Aegean and the 
Orient in the second millennium. Proceedings of the 50th anniversary symposion, Cin-
cinnati, 18–20 April 1997, Aegaeum 18 (Liège, Austin 1998) 193–205, 198. This field 
was opened up by scholars like J.D.S. Pendlebury and by H. Kantor, who, in 1947, 
published The Aegean and the Orient.

18 Koine means ‘in common’ or ‘by common consent’ and was originally used to 
designate the form of Greek language written and spoken by populations around the 
Mediterranean during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Often, however, it is used 
in a wider sense as well, as it is here.
background has been intensively discussed. One outcome of this discussion was that the equation between a territory, a people and a style was “hopelessly inadequate”.

Ethnic relations and backgrounds cannot primarily be used to understand the different elements. Another outcome was the “active role” that foreign styles or elements were shown to have played in Bronze Age strategies of legitimization and power.

To quote Bernard Knapp:

At the crux of this matter is the active role that material culture plays in all societies, past or present. The objects entangled in long distance exchange were not arbitrary: their symbolism and contexts—and the very materials of which they were made—played key roles in the construction and elaboration of social strategies and especially in the conception of oppositional categories, otherness and the exotic. Whereas different artefact types will have specific meanings within their own historical and ideological contexts, the exchange of objects or decorative styles between different cultural groups—and the maintenance of boundaries, or otherness, between ethnic or social groups—will likely be based upon and manipulate such differences. Thus, objects acquire meaning as types or categories that may be opposed to other categories, and the social effect of exchanging such objects must be understood in relation to contextual differences of meaning, and to the ways in which the symbolism and/or iconography of the objects supports and legitimizes power strategies.

The iconographic *koine* and the hybrid forms of elite art that developed in the late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean must be seen in this light, and must be understood in the context of a constant tension between connectedness and otherness that motivates and is mediated by this *koine*.

For the Bronze Age the eclectic style with its foreign elements is now generally interpreted as elite art. As such it has *not* to be connected with a specific culture but with specific social groups around the Mediterranean that actively used it in the conception of oppositional categories. In her definition and characterisation of the ‘international style’ Annie Caubet is even more explicit about how this *koine* would have functioned in specific social contexts:

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21 A. Caubet, The international style: a point of view from the Levant and Syria, in: *The Aegean and the Orient in the second millennium* 105–111, 110. For a critical view on the concept of an ‘international style’ in the late Bronze Age, see now M.H. Feldman, *Diplomacy by design. Luxury arts and an ‘International Style’ in the ancient Near*
Materials, techniques, artefacts, artists, professionals and thoughts circulated throughout the second millennium in an area which encompasses not only the Aegean, the Syro-Anatolian world, and Egypt, but also the Euphrates area all the way to Mari. Egypt, comfortable in its cultural identity, offered a greater resistance to international culture; the kingdoms of inner Syria seem to have been more open to the outer world, more avid for exotic style, more anxious to show their superiority by a display of cosmopolitism while contributing their share of ideology and technology to the Mediterranean *koine*.

Caubet suggests that in the second millennium BC the kingdoms of inner Syria used a foreign, eclectic style with Egyptian elements in the formation of their own identity as cosmopolite.

Another example of what has often been described as an eclectic style with an important Egyptian constituent is Phoenician material culture. One only has to think about the royal necropoleis at Sidon, or the famous metalwork found all over the Mediterranean to get an impression of the importance of the Egyptian element. The well known anthropoid sarcophagi clearly show Egyptian inspiration. The first examples from Sidon—belonging to king Tabnit and his son Eshmunzanor—are imported from Egypt and made from Egyptian stone, and though the subsequent tradition developing from the appropriation of Egyptian elements is characterised by the use of marble and by Greek sculptural influences, it never loses its (strong) Egyptian connotation. How can we validate the meaning, functioning and circulation of such styles or elements? Here, in general, what could be called the ‘commercial interpretation’ seems to prevail: we have Phoenician traders going everywhere and hence finding Aegyptiaca everywhere. True as this may be, these interpretations necessarily remain descriptive as they do not really explain why certain elements and types were wanted, used and distributed, and others not. Katja Lembke has recently enlarged and theorised this framework in a study that describes and explains

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*East, 1400–1200 BCE* (2006) who argues that an ‘international’ style presupposes the existence of ‘national’ styles, that would be an anomaly for the period.

22 See for illustrations of both categories the exhibition catalogue *La Méditerranée des Phéniciens*. A recent, theoretically informed general introduction on the Phoenicians with an annotated bibliography is provided by M. Sommer, *Die Phönizier. Handelsherren zwischen Orient und Okzident* (Stuttgart 2005).


the different cultural influences visible in the well-known sanctuary at Amrit (Maabed). The anthropomorphic sarcophagi are initially symbols of prestige for the royal family, Lembke argues, and become more widespread later for reasons of elite emulation. In this process Greek artisans play an important role: in Phoenicia, it is Greek sculptors that create a new category and style of material culture on the basis of an Egyptian tradition. In *Kleinkunst*, however, a different form and process of appropriation takes place. There we see an immense amount and variety of Egyptian subjects, clearly serving as a visualisation of Phoenician religious values and deities. In that domain the Egyptian visual imagery thus functions as a symbol—cut loose from original meanings—to communicate Phoenician (religious) values.

After having shortly indicated the use (and possible meaning) of Egyptian elements in the so-called ‘international’ style of the Bronze Age and in cosmopolitan Phoenicia, I would like to leave the important and difficult case of Greece and Greek culture aside here and move on directly to Imperial Rome. The examples so far have served to underline the fact that the cultural concept of Egypt—or, in other words, the appropriation of distinct (Pharaonic) Egyptian elements or styles in a new context and thus not necessarily having a direct relation with the original meaning of these elements—had a long (cultural) history in itself.

The meaning, provenance and dating of the many Egyptian style artefacts (*Aegyptiaca*) that have been preserved from the Roman world is heavily contested, as is the term *Aegyptiaca* itself. Egyptian-style...
material culture from the Roman world is most often divided into two categories: Egyptian (coming from the Nile valley, sometimes already centuries old and ‘authentic’) and Egyptianising (made outside Egypt after the Egyptian style and ‘less authentic’). As a consequence stylistic, art-historical judgments are used to determine the use of Aegyptiaca. ‘Authentic’, Egyptian material would largely have been religious; while ‘less authentic’, egyptianising material could also have had other associations and have been used, for instance, to create an exotic atmosphere. These analyses are seriously handicapped by the fact that in many cases the (archaeological) context of the Aegyptiaca is unknown or not sufficiently taken into account. The goddess Isis has always been, directly or indirectly, central to the study of Egyptian artefacts found in the Roman world, especially when it concerned the ‘real Egyptian’ material. As a result many things Egyptian were automatically associated with Isis; but such monolithic interpretations have now been challenged and refined.28 Research on Roman written sources on Egypt and Egyptians shows similar traits. A lot of scholarly attention has focussed on particular texts that deal with Isis (like Apuleius’ Metamorphoses)—but there still exists no integrated approach or synthesis. Some attempts have been made to challenge the religious interpretation here as well and to consider, for instance, the use of Egypt in Roman written sources as intellectual display.29 It is striking that provisional hypotheses on the nature of the Roman literary discourse on Egypt so far suggest the existence of an almost exclusively negative perception. In the Imperial period Roman written sources often mention the same stereotypes, like Cleopatra—female and Oriental opponent to Roman power—, the Egyptian worship of

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28 See Nile into Tiber for an introduction to and an overview of the different strands of interpretation. In her review of this book U. Rothe [JRS 98 (2008) 217–219] concludes: “The various discussions break once and for all with the idea that Aegyptiaca must necessarily be linked to the presence of Alexandrian cults”.

animals and erotic aspects of the cult of Isis.\(^{30}\) At the same time, however, Roman society actively uses aspects from Egypt and its civilisation in material culture.

Most studies dealing with the meaning of Roman Aegyptiaca have always been (implicitly) reasoning from the concept of **diffusion**; a kind of core-periphery model in which the original meaning at the Nile was brought overseas in successive ‘waves’.\(^{31}\) Although this certainly is true to a certain extent, one of the main problems with this model, so it seems, is the question of agency. Understanding the popularity of Egypt and the Egyptian gods in the Mediterranean as a uniform (chronological) development of diffusion—from core (and original meaning) to periphery (and possible misunderstanding)—provides little room for processes of selection and appropriation. The former Isis conference (Leiden 2005) already had tried to deconstruct this somewhat monolithic image and the second part of its proceedings—called *Understanding the cults of Isis in their local context*—clearly shows that indeed ‘Isis’ or ‘Egypt’ meant very different things in different contexts. Here I would like to even go one step further, as for the Hellenistic-Roman tradition in particular it is possible to set the established framework upside-down.

We know that, in cultural respects, Rome was a specific successor-culture that built up its cultural repertoire in an eclectic way from all kinds of cultures-styles found in the Mediterranean, most notably Greek, Etruscan, ‘Oriental’ and… Egyptian.\(^{32}\) What do we make of the

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\(^{30}\) See Versluis, *Aegyptiaca Romana* 422–434 (with earlier literature) and now, for the late Republican and early Imperial material, P.H. Schrijvers, A literary view on the Nile mosaic at Praeneste, in: *Nile into Tiber* 223–239. For a compelling interpretation and discourse analysis of Roman literary sources on India and Indians, see now G. Parker, *The making of Roman India* (Cambridge 2008).

\(^{31}\) Exemplary is the use of the words *pénétration* and *diffusion* in the study by M. Malaise, *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie* (Leiden 1972); this model is the *colonne vertébrale* of the *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques* (L. Bricault, Paris 2001).

meaning of Roman Aegyptiaca when we emphasize Roman selection criteria and put the process of Roman cultural appropriation central? This perspective is likely to provide new horizons as it has the potential to transcend and dissolve the traditional categories we are wrestling with. In case of Egypt in the Roman world dichotomies have been created between Egyptian and egyptianising; between Pharaonica, Isiaca and Nilotica; between fashion and exotic Otherness; etc. In establishing these categories, the ‘original’ Egyptian background and meaning (‘core’) and its relation to reinterpretations and misunderstandings (‘periphery’) has always played a central role. This dualism will undoubtedly also have something to do with the fact that the study of Roman Aegyptiaca (outside and inside Egypt) has been monopolised by Egyptologists. Taking a Roman point of view and reasoning in terms of Roman cultural appropriation and eclecticism—in which Egypt was part of the cultural repertoire available—puts rather different questions to the fore. Could it, for instance, have been their specific style or subject matter that made Egyptian objects popular? ‘Egyptian’ in the Roman world could be associated with, for instance, elite luxury and a statue of an Egyptian pharaoh in basalt could have been placed in a Roman villa for that reason, irrespective, perhaps, of who it actually was or what kind of meaning such a statue had in Pharaonic Egypt. It could thus have been the ‘materiality’ of the object that was primarily deemed important. In a similar vein there also seems to have existed an association between ‘Egyptian’ and the funerary domain. An important characteristic of this approach, I believe, is that it focuses on function and meaning in social life, and thus secures a more active role for material culture in the ancient context. From this perspective it is much more obvious that Egyptian style not only reflects ‘original’ meanings but also is something itself. What, then, does Egyptian style do in the

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34 For a discussion of these categories and their meaning, see Malaise, Terminologie.
Roman context? I shortly indicate four—context dependent—examples to illustrate the approach I am advocating: 38

- It evokes, by its forms and material, a world of exotic, elite luxury (‘social exoticism’).
- It evokes imperial connotations and monumentality: obelisks are (and remain) symbols of the sun after having been transported to Rome but they develop into a most spectacular symbol of imperial power (fig. 1). 39
- It evokes Actium, conquered Egypt, and with that the Augustan cultural revolution and *aurea aetas*.
- It evokes Egypt (and the East) that now was Rome: it accepts and accommodates the cultural diversity of the Empire.

In the study of how Roman cultural appropriation works as a system, it has almost exclusively been the Greek visual language that got attention. Seminal is this respect is the work by Tonio Hölscher who developed something of a model for the understanding of specific Greek styles and motives as ‘cultural concepts’. 40 He describes the Roman use of Greek styles as a semantic system in which specific themes and styles were used to evoke specific associations. The so-called ‘altar’ of Domitius Ahenobarbus’ (in fact a monumental base, dating around 100–80 BC) may serve to illustrate this principle (fig. 2). 41 It consists of several pieces of relief sculpture. Three pieces show a marine *thiasos* with the wedding of Poseidon and Amphitrite; the other two a historical scene that is generally interpreted as the public Roman ceremony of the *census*. The style and subject matter of these reliefs seem to bear no relationship to each other yet they belonged to the same monument: for a marine *thiasos* a ‘Hellenistic baroque’ style was used, while the ‘historical event’ of the *census* asked for display in ‘a Roman veristic style’. Trying to account for a contamination of styles here in ethnic terms seems unlikely—although

40 He summarised his approach in *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System* from 1987; now available in English as *The language of images in Roman art* (Cambridge 2004).
it has been suggested to see the *thiasos* plates as a re-used *spolia* from Greece—and calling the monument ‘hybrid’ seems to say more about the scholarly problems we have with understanding eclecticism than ancient perceptions. Also with regard to the use of these Greek elements and styles we could ask ourselves how much of their ‘original’ meaning had been preserved in the new context. Hölscher’s answer on this question is clear: the historical origins of the various Greek styles played no essential role in their semantic communication. And with this insight—that the historical origins of styles appropriated do not necessarily play an important role in the semantic communication of material culture—it is worthwhile to return to Egypt.

II. ‘Egypt’ as a Cultural Concept in Egypt

The impressive *thalamegos* that Ptolemy IV (Philopator) had himself built at the end of the third century BC had, according to the rhetor Athenaios, a dining room “in the Egyptian style.” A text from 196 BC in which the Egyptian priests give their affirmation to the (child) Pharaoh Ptolemy V and his politics—inscribed on a decree in hieroglyphs, demotic and Greek—mentions that statues for the gods and the king are to be set up in temples all over the country “in the Egyptian manner.” These examples underline the importance of looking at the Egyptian visual language as a cultural concept also in Egypt itself. This also counts for later centuries. In his analysis of the role pagan Egyptian statues and images played in Late Antique (Christian) Egypt, David Frankfurter suggests that Christian iconoclasts perceived a difference between those objects in a traditional Egyptian style and those in a Graeco-Roman ‘Hellenistic’ style. In Egyptian society statues were not just images of the gods, but were perceived as the gods themselves. The potency of tra-

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tional Egyptian divine images was strong—sometimes even centuries after the establishment of Christianity—but what is interesting in his case is that this potency seems to have been relatively stronger when the god or goddess not only was Egyptian but also looked Egyptian.46

As has shortly been illustrated above, Egypt began reflecting on its own historical culture early on.47 Through Egyptian history this ‘archaism’ could have many functions; an important one was the political need for legitimation.48 Jan Assmann has argued, however, that there is a difference between these earlier uses of the past and what happens in the Late Period, when the Egyptian temple would become a kind of (what he calls) meta-text of ‘Egyptianess’.49 Like other cultures in the Mediterranean and Near East around the 6th century BC, Egypt created a canon as a normative instrument of ‘being Egyptian’, part of which was an intense and intensive dealing with its own Egyptian past.
The Egyptian temple was the embodiment and symbol of this canon *par excellence*. This makes the questions posed at the beginning of this Introduction on the use and meaning of ‘Egypt’ as a cultural concept in the country in the Hellenistic and Roman period even more pressing, as apparently two centuries before Alexander’s conquest there had been a successful attempt to create a coherent cultural memory.

If we want to properly understand the use of Egypt as a cultural concept in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt itself, we have to take into account two traditions of dealing with cultural concepts that come together at the Nile in this period: the one Graeco-Roman, the second Egyptian. The first is the Hellenistic and Roman semantic system in which styles and themes relate to specific associations and domains and actively *include* other influences, styles and traditions without their historical meaning having particular relevance for their contextual understanding. The second is the Egyptian system, which is also semantic, but in an antithetical way.50 In Egypt, not only had the canon already been defined and demarcated (shortly) before, but this had been done on the basis of its own tradition alone, in principle *excluding* other influences, styles, and traditions. This canon, moreover, was even *more* than semantic, as the Egyptian system of pictorial and iconographic decorum—what is known as the hieroglyphic nature of Egyptian art and material culture—served to maintain cosmological order. For both traditions, I would argue that the history of the cultural scenario ‘Egypt’ that had been developing in the (wider) Mediterranean and in Egypt itself before the Hellenistic and Roman period is of importance.

What does all this imply for our understanding of Egyptian and Greek elements in the Hellenistic and Roman period?

The first important point here is that we should not reason too simplistically in terms of a coming together of cultures with their distinct culture-styles. It seems of little use to value material culture in terms of relative degrees of ‘Greekness’ or ‘Egyptianess’ and relate the outcome to the social make-up of society. In second century BC Edfu, one and the same person commissioned two funerary stelae: one in a Greek,

Hellenistic style and the other in Egyptian, Pharaonic idiom.\(^{51}\) This example, alone, clearly shows the existence of different semantic values attached to different styles of material culture and underlines how much the categories ‘Greek’ and ‘Egyptian’ we are using are social.

Until recently, scholarly understanding of the meaning of Isis and Sarapis in the Hellenistic period was illustrative for, what could be called, static ethnic interpretations. As Isis and Sarapis (and their images) appear to be Egyptian and Greek at the same time, it was argued that they had been ‘invented’ to accommodate Greeks and Egyptians. Recent analyses, however, have suggested more differentiated (and convincing) interpretations.\(^{52}\) There are, for instance, no indications for an early popularity of Sarapis amongst native Egyptians at all and no real initiatives of the Ptolemies to disseminate the god outside Alexandria are known. On the contrary, Sarapis largely seems to have been a dynastic god venerated in court circles and only from the Roman period onwards he really can be designated as an Alexandrian city god.\(^{53}\) Concurrently, the hellenisation of Isis can perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to popularise this important and traditional Egyptian goddess with the new rulers and inhabitants of Egypt; as an ‘indigenous’ attempt to adjust to a changing world. Be that as it may, both cases show a blending of Egyptian and Greek traditions but neither was directly created to facilitate integration between Egyptians and Greeks. With Sarapis the initiative was with the court and the deity’s ‘creation’ had to serve dynastic interests. With Isis, on the contrary, the initiative might have been on the Egyptian side with the intention to keep up with current Mediterranean cultural trends. To say, therefore, that we are dealing here with a coming together of cultures or ‘blending’ is certainly true but explains nothing.


\(^{53}\) At the conference W. Clarysse and M.C.D. Paganini presented their research on the diffusion and interpretation of (theophoric) Sarapis names: they are not attested before 250 BC and rare before the last quarter of the third century. This work has now been published: W. Clarysse, M.C.D. Paganini, Theophoric personal names in Graeco-Roman Egypt. The case of Sarapis, Archiv für Papyrusforschung 55(1) (2009) 68–89.
This point is underlined by the much discussed Dioskourides sarcophagus, dating to the mid second century BC and now in the Louvre, Paris. Here we have a member of the ruling elite who was onomastically Hellenic, but thoroughly Egyptian as far as self-presentation in the mortuary sphere was concerned. John Baines concluded on the basis of this example that “Egyptian sarcophagi may therefore have contained mummies of people who had played a largely Hellenic role in life” and calls this process ethnic manoeuvring. Seeing both concepts (Egyptian and Hellenic) as cultural scenarios, as Baines does, makes the first part of his definition (“ethnic”) perhaps even superfluous. Could we also imagine a person of Syrian descent (for instance) try to play these roles? I think we could, as there is no real reason to assume that the use of ethnic (culture-) styles for social manoeuvring is restricted to people from the ethnic groups those styles originally belonged to. This will become particularly clear in the Roman period, when a Roman official in Alexandria could use the Greek cultural scenario in the cultural sphere, while applying the Egyptian one in the mortuary domain.

The second important point is that in terms of artisans and craftsmanship, too, we should perhaps not be too static in “ethnic understandings” of material culture. The kind of culture-style we see displayed says little about the ethnic identity of the person who commissioned the work—as has been argued above—and it perhaps also says less than we often tend to think about the person(s) who made it. An important consideration here, of course, is the canonical tradition in Egyptian art that has already been mentioned: stylistic development and individual expression were not a goal in itself. But recent research and new finds also suggest that it is not only a matter of Egyptians making Egyptian objects and styles (in their canonical tradition and from Egyptian material) and Greeks making the Greek ones.

A statue of Darius I that has been found at Susa probably originates from an Egyptian workshop—with clear Egyptian hieroglyphs and elements on the base—but the king is depicted purely in a Persian form. In the early Ptolemaic period, the Petosiris tomb shows Egyptian craftsmen engaging with Hellenistic visual language (or perhaps Greeks trying to make an Egyptian tomb(?), as R.S. Bianchi sug-

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55 Tait, 'Never had the like occurred’ 5.
gested at the conference), while Hellenistic monuments adopting the Egyptian visual language are well known—for instance the portraits of the Ptolemies. In these cases too the (ethnic) categories we use to describe material culture are blurring when it comes to understanding social context. This point is underlined by some of the recent underwater discoveries in and around Alexandria. How can we understand the conception, in artistic terms, of a black granite statue of a queen (?) that looks like an Aphrodite in all respects but for the Egyptian pose (fig. 3)?

Were this statue to date to the third century BC, it would show something close to the fusion of two culture-styles—that is: going beyond the borrowing of key elements—way before the Roman period and, moreover, stress the inadequacy of thinking about ‘ethnic artisans and workshops doing their own ethnic styles’ for the Hellenistic period. For the second century AD, Robert R.R. Smith has characterised the Alexandrian ateliers as follows:

(they) catered to a sophisticated clientele in Delta communities as well as in Rome and central Italy. These workshops made purely Pharaonic-looking statuary and figures in ‘mixed’ Greek-Egyptian style as well as figures (-) in purely classical style but of dark stone.

This conclusion—devoid of any ethnic categories in maker or clientele whatsoever—might thus perhaps be valid for earlier (Hellenistic) periods as well and, for that matter, not be restricted to Alexandrian ateliers alone.

From a different angle, and using other source material, this picture is underlined by Jacco Dieleman’s book on some ‘magical’ manuscripts from the Imperial era and processes of continuity and innovation in

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56 For which see S.A. Ashton, *Ptolemaic royal sculpture from Egypt. The interaction between Greek and Egyptian tradition*, BAR 923 (Oxford 2001) and Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies*.

57 As is also illustrated by a recent essay from R.S. Bianchi, *The Nahman Alexander*, JARCE 43 (2007) 29–42. For the rare example of a hieroglyphic inscription on a Greek style object, see Malaise, *Questions d'iconographie* 373–383.

58 For which see the overview provided by the exhibition catalogue *Egypt’s sunken treasures*.

59 Crucial for the interpretation is, of course, the head of the statue—which is missing. The catalogue entry by Jean Yoyotte (*Egypt’s sunken treasures* 172–175) talks about an “Egyptian master” (probably to account for the material and pose) and “Alexandrian ateliers” (to account for the ‘Greek’ aspect).

60 *Egypt’s sunken treasures* 41: a catalogue entry on a greywacke bust of the Nile god found at the temple site at Canopus.
Dieleman discusses a library of magical texts from Thebes that have a ‘bilingual character’; in fact the texts use seven different kinds of script, thus drawing on an international range of sources. Who was able to make sense of the variety of scripts and languages? Why were Demotic and Greek spells combined in a single manuscript? And what does this say about the (ethnic or cultural) identity of the owner? In his analysis Dieleman takes the bilingual nature of his material as a point of departure and tries to establish how the cultural character of Roman Egypt can be reconstructed from that point of view, going beyond the now ubiquitous characterisation “multicultural”. His conclusion (288) is clear: “(-) an Egyptian’s choice of language did not necessarily depend on his or her ethnic or cultural background, but rather upon the specific circumstances of the case (-)”. The Demotic used in the texts, for instance, shows Greek loan words. In this case the Greek was chosen, Dieleman argues, for the ritual power it possessed as a foreign language. Yet another meaning of the cultural scenario that was ‘Greek’ in Roman Egypt. Dieleman’s reconstruction of the coming together of the concept of ‘Greece’ and ‘Egypt’ in the Theban region in the second and third century AD well illustrates the approach advocated in this Introduction. In his opinion the Greek spells originated in an environment where Egyptian and Hellenistic culture intertwined in a productive way and where a Hellenised clientele was to be found, as in Alexandria. The Demotic spells might date later than the Greek ones and, if so, were not following a Pharaonic tradition but were written, probably even by the same priests, with the Greek spells as an example. In sum we have a Hellenistic tradition of magic that results in a new type of spells, written in Greek, in Hellenistic Alexandria. There, in the early Roman period, this tradition is taken up by Theban priests. They read these spells in Greek, study and rework them, thereby adding elements from the Egyptian tradition. Hence, the Demotic spells resulting from this development are the Egyptian reinvention of a Hellenistic, Greco-Egyptian tradition in the Roman period. These are the kind of analyses we need for styles of material culture as well.

So, if we encounter in Tuna el-Gebel tombs where the entrance is decorated with an embrasure of Graeco-Roman relief sculpture, while on opening the building we find a sarcophagus with Pharaonic style

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understanding egypt in egypt and beyond 27

decoration we need not to be surprised (fig. 4). 62 To impress, and for reasons of cultural distinction, an expensive doorframe after the latest Mediterranean fashion was selected while for the realm of the dead an Egyptian style was used, as ‘Egypt’ owned the afterlife. It is not primarily important to try and understand such a tomb in terms of the ethnicity of the craftsmen or ask if it held a Graeco-Roman person or an Egyptian. But ‘Egypt’ as a cultural concept in Egypt could have had other associations in different contexts. The early Macedonians kings of Egypt used the Egyptian visual language to affiliate themselves with the native Pharaohs—and thus dismissing the Persian kings of Egypt. 63

A few centuries later Augustus would use the Egyptian canon and its traditional visual language to make the cosmological order continue and to show that he was the righteous pharaoh. 64

‘Egypt’ thus sometimes seems to have had a ring of conceptual distance, even in Egypt itself. And conceptual distance, in general, is often used as a resource for socio-political power or identity building, as it probably will have been here. 65 From that perspective the large differences that one observes—in quality and quantity—between the use of Egyptian style objects in places that were only kilometres apart can well be explained. 66

Clearly, every context got the Egypt it deserved.

III. The Cults of Isis in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt

Against the general background discussed above, our conference focussed on what Michel Malaise has coined “la religion égyptienne isiaque”. 67

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63 See recently, on the basis of a discussion of the large statues of the early Ptolemies as Pharaoh that perhaps were displayed at the Pharos in Alexandria, the article by Guimier-Sorbets, L’image de Ptolémée.

64 For Augustus in Egypt see most recently the overview provided by F. Herklotz, Prinzeeps und Pharao. Der Kult des Augustus in Ägypten (Frankfurt a/M 2007).


66 See K. Lembke, Dimeh. Römische Repräsentationskunst im Fayum, Jahrbuch des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts 113 (1998) 109–137 who highlights in her conclusion the large difference in this respect between Dimeh and nearby Karanis, something that goes against the dichotomy Hellenised Delta versus Egyptian (traditional) Upper Egypt.

67 Malaise, Terminologie.
Most articles, therefore, discuss how the theology, iconography and understanding of *la famille isiaque* in Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman period develop, and how those developments relate to what happens in the Mediterranean at large. The intention of the present volume, therefore, is twofold. It hopes to add to the important debate on the understanding of *l’Égypte en Égypte* and the ‘cultural character’ of Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman period; and it wants to do so, moreover, on the basis of a specific case study concerning the Isiac gods—dealt with in detail and from different points of view.

To elaborate and better fill in the perspectives and points of discussion from this Introduction, the first part of the book provides three papers that deal with the role of Egyptian religion and tradition in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt more in general. The second part of the book is devoted to the case study proper and presents eight papers that provide something of an overview, not only of Isis in different roles and contexts (Alexandria/tombs, Thebes/temples, Dakhleh, Alexandria/coinage and Koptos/terracotta’s), but also of some of the main gods associated with this deity (Anubis, Bes and Souchos). Missing from this *tableau de la troupe* is Sarapis. Although Sarapis plays a role in many contributions, and although the god is one of the most prominent members of the *famille isiaque*, it was a deliberate editorial choice not to include him in our overview. Where there has been a considerable amount of recent research and published new data on, for instance, Isis and Harpocrates in Egypt, this is not the case for Sarapis. This situation, in combination with his prominence and the extraordinary ‘genesis’ of the god, has made us decide that it would be better not to treat aspects of the problem in this conference, but to plan another expert meeting exclusively dedicated to Sarapis alone.68

Part 1 (Introductions: the role of Egyptian religion and tradition in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt) starts with an article by Françoise Dunand (*Culte d’Isis ou religion isiaque?*) which raises a fundamental issue. Dunand argues that it is impossible, in fact, to talk about a “religion isiaque”—as most of us commonly do—as with Isis and her consort we do not deal with a coherent symbolic and religious system. We know that the goddess was very important in Egypt in

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the Late Period—an outsider like Herodotos (II, 42) stated that Isis and Osiris were the only gods venerated in the whole of Egypt in the same way—but that would testify to a “pieté isiaque” alone. Dunand provides an overview of the different categories of evidence available and concludes on that basis: “(-) rien ne permet de penser qu’Isis, dans l’Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine, occupe une place différente de celle des autres dieux.” Against the background of questions on style and identity as discussed above, it is important to note what Dunand says on the hellenisation of Isis “qui me paraît être dans une large mesure un faux problème”. Against the background of questions on style and identity as discussed above, it is important to note what Dunand says on the hellenisation of Isis “qui me paraît être dans une large mesure un faux problème”. In the multicultural Egyptian society of the 3rd century BC, she argues, it is only logical that symbolic attributes were borrowed from the Greek world, as they were borrowed from the oriental world (gods like Horus or Sobek wearing the radiate crown of the eastern Sun Gods, for instance). I line with what has been said above, Dunand argues against ‘ethnic interpretations’ to understand these borrowings:

Qu’il y ait, dans une société “multiculturelle”, coexistence d’images diverses d’une même divinité n’est pas en soi quelque chose de surprenant. De toutes façons, en Égypte même, et de longue date, on pouvait figurer un dieu, sur un même monument, sous des formes plurielles (humaine, animale, hybride) qui n’étaient manifestement pas senties comme contradictoires. Que certaines images d’Isis se rapprochent plutôt de celles d’une Déméter grecque ou d’une Aphrodite orientalisante ne signifie pas qu’on a affaire à une déesse nouvelle, “syncrétiste” …

This point—how to explain the *bricolage* of (elements from) different culture-styles—is taken up by Frederick G. Naerebout on the basis of the example of the ‘Galjub hoard’ (How Do You Want Your Goddess? From the Galjub Hoard to a General Vision on Religious Choice in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt), that seems to illustrate the process almost literally. The ‘Galjub hoard’ refers to the find, somewhere at the beginning of the 20th century, of an amount of more than a hundred bronzes that most probably served as the models (or stock in trade) of a Hellenistic goldsmith. The casts in bronze were found sealed in a big vessel, together with a set of tools, and are now in the Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim. Naerebout focuses on the ‘cultural character’ of this and other, comparable material—that includes Egyptian and Greco-Roman subjects and styles alike—to ask some pertinent questions on relations between style

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and identity in the period, and on the functioning of ancient religion. This illustrates that in 2nd century BC Egypt there were (what he calls) ‘one stop shops’; that is places where Greek and Egyptian styles were to be obtained indiscriminately and where the question “How do you want your goddess” will have been asked to customers many times a day. This observation forms the point of departure for a mediation on religious choice in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt that, together with the article by Dunand and this Introduction, provides the theoretical framework of the present study.

The new discoveries of the last decades in and around Alexandria have dramatically altered our picture of the cultural make-up of the city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods—and with it of the various cultural responses to Egypt that took place in Egypt, where, after all, Alexandria is located geographically. While a detailed publication and interpretation of all this material is still in process, an important general conclusion seems to be that Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria looked much more Egyptian than we had always thought. A recent essay by Jean Yoyotte tries to come to an understanding of all these Pharaonica.70 Some of his conclusions are, firstly, that the majority of Pharaonica come from Heliopolis. This site does not seem to have been used as an inexhaustible source of spolia over time; it rather seems to have concerned “wholesale transfers”.71 A second point is that this material seems to have been associated almost everywhere with Greek-looking, Hellenic style material. In that respect there seems to be a large difference between the Hellenistic period and the Roman one. For our interpretation the dating of the re-use, of course, is crucial. Be that as it may, it was exciting to have part of this work—and with it new discoveries made by the underwater survey in Alexandria carried out by the Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies (HIAMAS)—presented at our conference by Kyriakos Savvopoulos. In his essay (Alexandria in Aegypto. The Use and Meaning of Egyptian Elements in Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria) Savvopoulos outlines his work on the ‘Egyptian’ face of Alexandria, in which he tries to provide

70 Egypt’s sunken treasures 370–383 (together with David Fabre and Frank Goddio).
71 A terminology reminiscent of transfers like those of the 5th century temple of Ares to the new centre of Athens under Roman rule, for which see S.E. Alcock, Archaeologies of the Greek past: landscape, monuments and memories (Cambridge 2002) 55–58 (and her Chapter 2 entitled Old Greece within the Empire for these questions on understanding Greece in Greece more in general).
a general overview of the occurrence, use and meaning of the Egyptian element in the city on the basis of a catalogue of archaeological material. Well aware of the (methodological and practical) problems of such an undertaking, his chronological overview of Aegyptiaca in different time periods and/or different contexts nevertheless suggests interesting and very differing interpretations; also (again) underlining the crucial difference between the Hellenistic and Roman periods in this respect.

Part 2 (Case studies: Cults of Isis in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt) begins with five articles on the role and function of Isis in different contexts and domains of life.

Building on her earlier work, Marjorie S. Venit (Referencing Isis in Tombs of Graeco-Roman Egypt: Tradition and Innovation) provides an overview of the way Isis can be seen used and displayed in tombs. In Roman-period tombs of both Alexandria and the chora, with few exceptions, Isis plays a minor role and, for the most part, one that can be traced to her appearance on tomb walls of pharaonic Egypt. It is interesting to note her suggestion that this traditionalism seems to have been even stronger in Alexandria than in the chora “because Alexandrians intentionally strove to emulate the antiquity of Egypt in their mortuary programs”. The few exceptions that challenge this norm, however, are remarkable. Some, for example, hint at the celestial aspect of Isis. Most notable, however, are representations in the Alexandrian Tigrane Tomb and in a tomb discovered in 1897 by Bissing at Achmim because, in both cases, the appearance of Isis suggests that the tombs are those of initiates into the mysteries of Isis, which otherwise find only scarce reference in Roman-period Egypt. For the Achmim tomb Venit presents a novel interpretation of its remarkable wall paintings and suggests a dating in the mid third century AD. We would deal here with a tomb owner who had himself displayed as an initiated in the mysteries of Isis and moreover, according to Venit, these paintings “would indicate in bi-cultural terms the fate of the non-initiated”.

In his article on Isis in Karnak, Laurent Coulon (Les formes d’Isis à Karnak à travers la prosopographie sacerdotale de l’époque Ptolémaïque) discusses the development of the goddess in the Theban region in the Ptolemaic period, adding to this question new prosopographical evidence concerning the Theban priests. In this period Isis is closely connected to Osiris, although, also in and around Thebes, the goddess
has many local forms: different ‘forms’ of Isis were even worshipped in the same sanctuary. In her role as the sister and wife of Osiris, at Thebes especially the role of Isis as the mother of Horus seems to have been stressed. Is does not surprise that in a traditionally highly important religious place like Thebes, Pharaonic traditions play an important role. In the Ptolemaic period the Greeks at Thebes seem to have adopted the traditional forms of religion, but in the Roman period also the ‘hellenised’ Isis becomes visible. Coulon discusses in detail the role and function of a group of priestesses who played an important role with the Khoiak festivities; in his opinion as ‘the sisters of Osiris’. In the final part of his paper he provides an overview of the different, specific forms of Isis as they can be found in the priestly prosopography and concludes: “(-) la figure d’Isis apparaît d’une complexité presque inextricable”. This phenomenon—interpreted by Coulon as the “(-) parcellisation de la divinité égyptienne en des multiple formes spécifiques (-)”—is also illustrated by the next regional analysis.

Here, Olaf Kaper (Isis in Roman Dakhleh: Goddess of the Village, the Province, and the Country) provides a contextualised picture of the occurrence and roles of Isis in the Dakhleh oasis. Presenting a wealth of (sometimes unpublished) material it becomes clear that Isis was really everywhere in the oasis in the Roman period, from the temples and cemeteries to the private sphere and coinage. His study underlines an important point that was made by various participants of the conference on our central theme: the need for synchronic and localised views of Isis for a single region at a time. Kaper has now provided this for Dakhleh—remarking: “The evidence from the provinces of Roman Egypt should be studied individually (-) and without recourse either to the pharaonic past or to material from regions or town outside the focus area”—; other such local overviews remain an important desideratum. In Dakhleh Isis is most often seen depicted or referred to in relation to Osiris (cf. Coulon’s conclusions on the Theban region); which is different from her traditional role. There are, however, quite some local idiosyncrasies and in conclusion Kaper describes her function and identity as pluriform and multi-layered.

The article by Angelo Geissen (Mythologie grecque ou mystère d’Isis-Déméter?) deals with numismatic evidence from Roman Alexandria where under Antoninus Pius a series of coins was struck showing the works of Hercules and some other mythological themes. These mythological subjects were displayed in a distinctly Hellenistic style. Geissen firstly suggests a correspondence between particular moments of significance for the royal family and the use of specific mythological
motives. Subsequently he investigates if there could have been an *interpretatio aegyptiaca* for these conspicuously Greek representations. Following Reinhold Merkelbach in his (not undisputed) interpretation of ancient novels like those of Achilles Tatius often having a coded message for initiates in mystery cults, he argues that it is possible that these representations were related to the mysteries of Isis-Demeter and reminiscent of immortality. These Greek pictures, then, were the Graeco-Roman part of the ‘double-style’ that was common in Roman Egypt, as witnessed by the famous example of the Persephone tomb.72 Where in case of the Persephone tomb the Egyptian counterpart was displayed directly below, the coins only show the Graeco-Roman part of the bilingual style, but—and that is the crucial point—for the contemporary viewer the *interpretatio aegyptiaca* was almost inherent with it.

Pascale Ballet and Geneviève Galliano (*Les isiaques et la petite plastique dans l’Égypte hellénistique et romaine*) deal with *Kleinkunst*, mainly terracotta’s. Ballet builds on her earlier work to give an overview of the occurrence of the Isiac gods. One of her interesting conclusions is that Harpocrates—who on the basis of his massive occurrence in museum collections is always deemed by far the most popular in this medium—is totally absent from sites as Buto and Tell el-Herr. She tentatively suggests a difference in representation between religious themes and profane ones, and underlines the difficulty of ascribing ethnic categories to such a division. At the same time, however, Ballet reminds us that the use of a specific style also might have had *practical* reasons: specific types of material were deemed appropriate for specific iconographic subjects. Galliano presents unstudied material from Koptos, unearthed at the beginning of the 20th century and now in the collections of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon. Here Harpocrates is popular and Galliano convincingly brings him in connection with the funerary rites played out at Koptos.

The following set of three articles opens with an essay by Klaus Parlasca (*Anubis mit dem Schlüssel in der kaiserzeitlichen Grabkunst Ägyptens*) who gives an overview of the occurrence of a specific iconographic theme from Roman Egypt: Anubis holding a key. Parlasca sees this Egyptian-Roman iconographic formula as the creation of (probably) a Theban priest who wanted to modernise the underworld symbolism of Anubis with an element of the classical world. Stressing the

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72 For which see Guimier-Sorbets/Seif el-Din, *Tombes* and id., *Peintures*. 
large regional differences there were in Egypt itself, Parlasca adds an interesting case study to what he himself calls the “intellektuelle Differenzierung der Symbolsprache” that is necessary to understand the new symbols and motives emerging in Roman Egypt from the 2nd to the 4th century AD. Also in his case this Symbolsprache cannot be understood in ethnic terms anymore.

Youri Volokhine (Quelques aspects de Bès dans les temples égyptiens de l’époque Gréco-Romaine) deals with the form and meaning of Bes in temples from the Graeco-Roman period, specifically focussing on the relations between the theology of the temples and so-called ‘popular’ religion. ‘Bes’ is, in fact, a generic name that originally applies to very differing figures with only some common characteristics. It is from the Ptolemaic period onwards that this name is associated with one specific image. Volokhine first provides an overview of the occurrence of ‘Bes’ before the Hellenistic period, before discussing the specific image Bes in the Greco-Roman period as it has been preserved in mammisis and complexes related to Hathor (like Philae, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Ermant and Dendera). As far as the image of Bes in the latter period is concerned, Volokhine suggests that temples and ‘popular religion’ both had their own grammar of representation. He then deals in depth with the so-called chambres de Bès found in Saqqara at the beginning of the 20th century (and now totally gone) before asking a question highly relevant to the overarching subject of these proceedings: how was this figure actually understood in the Greco-Roman period? In his answer Volkhine convincingly shows that the figure of Bes might very well have been understood as a Satyr or Silene and hence as part of the circle of Dionysos. And for Romans who saw a depiction of such a dancing, grotesque figure? “On pourrait admettre qu’ils n’eurent pas besoin de connaître son nom d’origine, car, finalement, il est for probable qu’ils y voyaient simplement un Silène égyptien”.

Pierre Koemoth (Couronner Souchos pour fêter le retour de la crue), lastly, presents a very rich dossier on this quintessentially Egyptian god. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods crocodiles—being Souchos (or Sobek)—were crowned at the beginning of the inundation, a tradition going back to the Middle Kingdom. In Greco-Roman iconography the Nile would dramatically change in appearance and become an older, reclining man, but his (vegetal) wreath then still recalls the original tradition. “Ici, à nouveau les symboliques grecque et égyptienne se rencontraient au point de rendre palmes et couronnes végétales interchangeables”, Koemoth concludes. But there is more
coming-together of Egyptian, Greek and Roman symbols and understanding with Souchos. An example Koemoth deals with at length are the well known *dupondii* from Nîmes displaying a crocodile in combination with the inscription AEGYPTO CAPTA: here a subtle relation between the *Nemausus* fountain and the sources of the Nile would be hinted at, with the crocodile being the animal/god to be celebrated for the abundance.

There are several trends in recent scholarship on Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, the importance of which was underlined at this conference. A first one is the need for local, contextual analyses of individual regions within Egypt (see above). A second one is the great difference that exists between the Hellenistic era and the Roman period in how the Egyptian tradition is treated, interacted with and developed. Talking about Hellenistic-Roman Egypt, as is customary in general, scholarly literature seems, in fact, not right from that perspective. A third one is the need to study what happens in Egypt in the Hellenistic and in the Roman period as part of a wider, Mediterranean development. The use of Aegyptiaca in Alexandria, for instance, must be studied in connection with what happens in Rome in the same period. Both cities are very different but in the highly interconnected Roman Mediterranean they are also part of the same context. It is in that way that this conference on *L’Égypte en Égypte* has once again shown that the study of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds should be undertaken on a local and ‘global’ level simultaneously; something Michel Malaise was well aware of from his first publications onwards.

I would like to conclude with an example: very different in time and character but very alike in structural terms concerning the use of different ‘styles’ within a single object. It concerns a large (almost 3 metres high) screen from carved, painted and gilded teak which was intended for the council room of the fort of the governor-general in Batavia (now Jakarta, Java, Indonesia) in the period 1700–1720.

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73 See, for instance, already S.A. Ashton, *Petrie’s Ptolemaic and Roman Memphis* (London 2003) who, in her Chapter 3 entitled *The mixing of traditions?*, argues that the Hellenistic period would see a complex borrowing of key elements while only in the Roman period there would come into being something of a Romano-Egyptian art. This latter category as a whole could be called ‘egyptianising’ and was popular in and outside Egypt alike. Can we perhaps talk about tradition versus innovation?

It was made by Chinese craftsmen from Java, in the vegetal style characteristic of the Baroque, while also displaying typically European-style iconographic elements. These include the figure of Perseus, carrying the shield of Medusa; the shields of the different cities that were participating in the East India Company (VOC) under the royal crown; and (at the bottom) Chinese lions. The bold scrolling acanthus leaves around the frame are common to Batavian furniture, but here they show a blending of Chinese and European styles. The form of the screen itself, lastly, is typically Indonesian. The figure of Perseus will certainly have played a role in communicating intellectual display from the part of the governors. At the same time, the Medusa, in particular, suggests that the screen was intended to repel evil spirits; as such an object would do in a traditional Chinese context. This object and its interpretation clearly illustrate how careful we should be with the ethnic interpretations of styles because, in fact, none of the ethnic denominators makes sense as far as their relation with style and identity is concerned. We have Chinese craftsmen (living on Java, however, most of them already for generations) making a combination of typically European style elements and a global style like the Baroque within a single, Indonesian form object, even adding Chinese lions (though seemingly as a European element). Most interesting in this case is the fact that the reading of the Perseus and Medusa-emblema is probably double, functioning in a European discourse (social distinct)ion and a Chinese discourse (the repelling of evil spirits) at the same time. To characterise the screen, however, it seems that we can use neither term, as it is the Indonesian context that makes this double reading possible.

For the Egyptian gods, and especially la famille isiaque, the work of Michel Malaise has done a lot to bring these kinds of complexities in sharper focus, inside Egypt, and outside. We hope that this volume is a worthy contribution to that project.


76 Compare the analysis by F.G. Naerebout of the 2nd century AD Egyptian Ras el-Soda temple: Naerebout, The temple at Ras el-Soda 506–554. This Introduction owes a great deal to that important article.