Framing Egypt : Roman literary perceptions of Egypt from Cicero to Juvenal

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IV

Framing the Egyptian past: Tibullus 1.7

1. INTRODUCTION[363]

In the general introduction two 'traditional' fixated and normative concepts have been distinguished derived from previous scholarship: the concept of Egypt as the stereotypical Other and that of ancient Egypt. In chapter III it became clear that the concept of Egypt as the stereotypical Other, can function rather differently depending on the larger context. This fourth and last chapter focuses on the other 'traditional' concept of Egypt: ancient Egypt. In general the concept of ancient Egypt has been understood in opposition to negative Roman perceptions of contemporary Egypt. It is argued that the Romans generally embraced ancient Egypt and rejected contemporary Egypt. For instance, studying the literary discourse and Roman tourism in Egypt, Holger Sonnabend noticed a discrepancy between the Roman evaluation of the Egyptian past and that of the present: 'Das alte Ägypten und das aktuelle Ptolemäerreich waren für Rom zwei völlig verschiedene Bereiche. .. Die Idee des alten Ägypten lebte zwar auch in der Gegenwart fort, doch bedurfte man ihrer nicht, um sich über die aktuelle politisch relevante Einschätzung des Nillandes klar zu werden.'[364] This standard way of dealing with the Roman representation of ancient Egypt does not explain how these concepts function in the larger context nor why ancient authors wished to recall the associated feelings of admiration or rejection. In the previous chapter the notion of Roman self-representation appeared to be helpful in understanding the

[363] Passages in this chapter draw heavily on my chapter 'The Egyptian past in the Roman present' in Ker and Pieper 2014. For a more extensive analysis of my discussion of Hor. *Carm*. 3.30.1-5; Front. *Aq*. 1.16; Tac. *Ann*. 2.59-61, see pp. 167-168, I refer to this earlier publication.

[364] Sonnabend 1986, 300.

concept of Egypt as the Other. In this chapter I will explore whether this notion is also useful to explain Roman references to Egypt's antiquity.

To investigate this I will discuss a case-study that concerns a poem about a contemporary event in which Roman admiration for Egypt's antiquity plays an important role: Tibullus 1.7. This Augustan text celebrates Tibullus' patron Messalla's military victory over the Aquitanians in combination with his birthday. It also includes a lengthy hymn to the Egyptian god Osiris. First I shall present an overview of Roman texts in which the antiquity of Egypt is manifest, followed by a discussion about a possible interpretation of the concept of ancient Egypt in Roman discursive contexts.

1.1. *Overview of Roman literary sources on ancient Egypt and Roman touristic interest in Egypt: From the 1st century BCE until the first decades of the 2nd century CE*

Many Romans had an urge to see Egypt with their own eyes: according to Suetonius, Julius Caesar went on a trip with Cleopatra and Augustus traveled around, notoriously refusing to visit Apis.[365] Cicero never went, but expressed his wish to do so: 'Yes, I wish and have wished for a long time now to visit Alexandria and the rest of Egypt' (*cupio equidem et iam pridem cupio Alexandriam reliquamque Aegyptum visere*).[366] Passages from Propertius and Pliny the Younger suggest that Roman touristic preferences for sites of the East (Greece, Egypt and Asia Minor) over Roman ones is a literary topic.[367] Seneca's now lost treatise *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum*, probably a Roman version of the Hellenistic Greek books on Egypt, the *Aegyptiaca*, can be seen as evidence of Roman interest in Egypt. Likewise, the signatures that Roman

[365] Suet. *Aug*. 93: 'But on the other hand, he not only omitted to make a slight detour to visit Apis, when he was travelling through, but highly commended his grandson Gaius for not offering prayers at Jerusalem as he passed by Judaea,' tr. Rolfe 1920, *at contra non modo in peragranda Aegypto paulo deflectere ad visendum Apin supersedit sed et Gaium nepotem, quod Iudaeam praeteruehens apud Hierosolymam non supplicasset, conlaudavit*.

[366] Cic. *Att.* 2.5.1. For Caesar's and Augustus' visit to Egypt: Suet. *Jul*. 52.1 and *Aug*. 93. Vespasian, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Diocletian visited Egypt too; see Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1943: 'In descriptions of these visits to Egypt emphasis is always laid on the ancient monuments and the wisdom of Egypt as the motive for undertaking.'

[367] Plin. *Ep*. 8.20.2; Prop. 3.22.16-18.

travelers inscribed on tourist sites, such as the statue of Memnon, give evidence of the appeal of Egypt.[368]

Roman admiration for the monuments, the main tokens of ancient Egypt, was widespread in the literature. As we have seen in chapter one, Pliny the Elder considered them to be miracles that could only be surpassed by those found in Rome (see pp. 73-74). It is also apparent in several Augustan and Flavian texts. In Horace, *Ode* 3.30.1-5 the permanence of the pyramids is stressed:

> *exegi monumentum aere perennius*
> *regalique situ pyramidum altius,*
> *quod non imber edax, non aquilo impotens*
> *possit diruere aut innumerabilis*
>
> *annorum series et fuga temporum.* 5
>
> I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze
> and higher than the decaying pyramids of kings
> which cannot be destroyed by gnawing rain
> nor wild north wind, or by the unnumbered
>
> procession of the years and flight of time.
> Tr. West 2002

Horace's poem will always be more eminent than pyramids, because it will – in contrast to pyramids that were thought of as extremely old – never be affected by weather and time.[369] Frontinus, *Aq*. 1.16, also expresses admiration, be it indirectly, for this Egyptian monument:

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[368] See Bernand 1960. The statue of Memnon is one of the two seated colossi of Amenhotep III (fourteenth century BCE) in the necropolis of Thebes. If the reconstruction of the inscription in Bernand 1960, no. 1 is correct, the oldest graffiti can be dated to 20 CE, otherwise the earliest datable signature is 65 CE: Bernand 1960, no. 2. For discussion of Bernand: Weingärtner 1969, 156 n. 155. For general information about Roman tourism to Egypt, see Casson 1994, 257-261, 271-280; Foertmeyer 1989; Friedländer 1919, 421-444.

[369] For similar use of pyramids, see Prop. 3.2.19-26. Horace and Propertius used pyramids metaphorically to glorify their own poetic achievement. Cf. the epigrams of Pseudo-Seneca, Anth. Lat. (ed. Shackleton-Bailey) 415-416. See also Suerbaum 1968, 326-327, on the 'Pyramidenmotiv'.

> *tot aquarum tam multis necessariis molibus pyramidas videlicet otiosas compares aut cetera inertia sed fama celebrata opera Graecorum*.
>
> With such an array of indispensable massive structures carrying so many waters, compare, if you will, the idle pyramids or the useless, though famous, works of the Greeks!
> Tr. Bennett 1969, with modification.

The comparison with pyramids (and Greek monuments) clearly enhances the status of the Roman aqueducts. Both works are magnificent, but the aquaducts need to be preferred: they are indispensable (*necessariis*) in contrast to the 'idle' (*otiosas*) pyramids (and the 'useless' (*inertia*) Greek works).[370]

One of the reasons for the popularity of Egypt as a tourist destination and for Roman admiration for this region seems to be its profound antiquity. Tacitus' opening lines of his account of Germanicus' sight-seeing trip to Egypt, *Ann.* 2.59-61, for example, immediately underscores the connection between Roman interest in Egypt and its antiquity: 'In the consulate of Marcus Silanus and Lucius Norbanus (19 CE), Germanicus set out for Egypt to study antiquity' (*M. Silano L. Norbano consulibus Germanicus Aegyptum proficiscitur cognoscendae antiquitatis*, Tac. *Ann*. 2.59.1).[371] Like Greek literature, Roman literature generally praised Egypt for being ancient. Cicero, for example, shows his respect for Egypt by recalling its antiquity when he notes: '... in that well-known particularly authentic Egypt, which preserves written records of the events of countless ages ...' (*in illa incorrupta maxime gente Aegyptiorum, quae plurimorum saeculorum et eventorum memoriam litteris continet*, Cic. *Rep.* 3.14).[372]

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[370] Regarding the idleness, Frontinus is probably referring to Pliny the Elder, who described pyramids as 'a superfluous and foolish display of royal wealth' (*regum pecuniae otiosa ac stulta ostentatio*, Plin. *NH* 36.75). Cf. Mart. 8.36.1-4, pp. 1-2.

[371] Roman admiration of Egypt is also manifest in Roman material culture. Rome was studded with Egyptian and Egyptianizing artifacts of which the obelisks were merely the tip of the iceberg. Catalogs of Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects in Rome and Italy include: Arslan 1997; Roullet 1972; Malaise 1972; for an interpretation of these catalogs see Versluys 2002. For 'manifestations of Egypt in Augustan Rome', see Van Aerde 2015.

[372] For a discussion of this Ciceronian passage, see pp. 116-118.

1.2. *Understanding Roman admiration of Egypt in discursive contexts: the interpretative framework of self-representation*

Elsewhere I have argued that Roman literary references to ancient Egypt could function as a means to contribute constructively to Roman self-representation and in this chapter I shall elaborate upon that notion. In that earlier study I argued extensively that Roman passages concerning pyramids in texts of Horace, Propertius, Martial and Frontinus, showed how Egypt's antiquities could contribute to Rome's, or the author's own achievements. I showed that although these writers employed different literary modes – Horace and Propertius wrote poetry, Martial panegyrical epigrams, and Frontinus a technical treaty – their argumentative strategy is the same: their own achievement is compared with and thereby connected to something truly admirable, like the pyramids, establishing a status-enhancing effect.

In that same study, with respect to Tacitus' account of Germanicus' trip to Egypt (Tac. *Ann.* 2.59-61), I argued that Tacitus went out of his way – by expressing the admiration of ancient Egypt in various ways – to frame Egypt as a region likely to win Roman approval and understanding. This representation of Egypt can be explained in the larger context of the *Annals* and especially in reference to the relationship between Germanicus and Tiberius, as Tacitus' account of Germanicus' sightseeing begins with a conflict between them. Tiberius condemned Germanicus strongly for visiting Egypt without imperial consent by which Germanicus did not comply with a prescription of Augustus.[373] Egypt was important for Rome's corn supply and its strategic position made it easy to defend. Augustus, afraid that any Roman noble who had become influential in Egypt might become a serious threat to Rome and consequently to the position of the emperor, decided to turn Egypt into an imperial province managed by Roman knights after its annexation in 30 BCE.[374] By turning Germanicus into a visitor of the theme park Egypt that is distanced from the reality of the day, Tiberius' allegations seem to be out of place.[375] The admiration of ancient Egypt does in this example not only

[373] Tac. *Ann*. 2.59.2.
[374] See also Tac. *Hist.* 1.11.1.
[375] According to Tacitus, Germanicus only *pretended* solicitude for the province: his actual reason for visiting Egypt was its antiquities (*M. Silano L. Norbano consulibus Germanicus Aegyptum proficiscitur cognoscendae antiquitatis. Sed cura provinciae praetendebatur, Ann.* 2.59.1). This can be read as an excuse for Germanicus' illegal

function as an indirect defense against Tiberius' allegations, but it also contributes constructively to the representation of Germaniucs. The distinction between Tiberius' interest in present-day Egypt and Germanicus' focus on the past is consistent with their general portrayal in the *Annals* when the two are put in juxtaposition.[376] Christopher Pelling relates Tacitus' characterization of Tiberius – summarized by Pelling as 'diplomatic, modern, unglamorous, but highly effective' – to Tacitus' general attitude towards the present principate: 'a regrettable necessity'; Germanicus, on the other hand, stood for Tacitus' conception of the republican past: 'good to write about; but out of keeping with the real needs of the modern world'.[377] Thus, the Egypt visited by Germanicus reflects the way in which he himself is characterized in the Annals; both inspire awe, but belong to a different age.

2. TIBULLUS 1.7: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Tibullus' elegy 1.7 celebrates the birthday of Tibullus' patron, Messalla, in combination with Messalla's victory over the Gallic tribe of the Aquitanians. According to the *Fasti Capitolini*, Messalla earned a triumph for his victory over the Aquitanians on September 25th in the year 27 BCE. For that reason, this poem has generally been dated to 27 BCE. In this general introduction I shall first present a summary of this poem. Thereafter I will pay attention to

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presence in Egypt; it was not politics that interested him, but Egyptian heritage. For this explanation see Devillers 2003, 235. According to my argument, Tacitus' entire account of Germanicus' sightseeingtour supports this reading. Suetonius, *Tib.* 52.2, takes a stance different from Tacitus when indicating famine as Germanicus' sole reason for visiting Egypt. On the legality of Germanicus' presence in Egypt, see Hennig 1972; Weingärtner 1969, 46-63; Koestermann 1958. Another reason for Germanicus to visit Egypt may have been *aemulatio Alexandri*; see recently Kelly 2010 (*contra*); Gissel 2001.

[376] For the 'meaningful interaction between past and present' embodied by Germanicus in Tacitus see O'Gorman 2000, 47: 'The Tacitean Germanicus demonstrates that the past cannot be seen on its own terms; on the one hand he becomes recognised as the embryonic and unfulfilled princeps only when his son becomes emperor, and on the other he represents a past which becomes "the republican past" only when it is viewed from the present of the principate.' See also Williams 2009, 119, who argues that the Tacitean Germanicus is characterized 'as the figure who personifies the future ruler of Rome.'

[377] Pelling 1993, 77-78; also 72-74, on Germanicus' involvement with the past.

the historical context of this poem as its content has been interpreted as being a reaction on Augustan legislation concerning Isis. In the third place I will explore how Egyptian gods, particularly Isis, are generally framed in other Augustan poetry. Lastly, this general introduction will focus on previous scholarly interest in Tibullus 1.7.

2.1. *Tibullus 1.7: a summary*[378]

The poem can be summarized as follows:

A. ll. 1-8:

An introduction in which Messalla's birthday and his triumph coincide.

B. ll. 9-22:

An enumeration of geographic regions mainly indicated by their rivers: from the West (Gallia) to the East (Cilicia, Syria, Phoenicia, and finally Egypt). These geographical regions presumably refer to Messalla's foreign expeditions.

C. ll. 23-54:

Mention of Egypt and the Nile leads to a digression on Osiris: the hymn to Osiris. This section can be subdivided as follows:

ll. 23-28: The Nile's unknown source and its fertility are mentioned, and the river is identified as a manifestation of Osiris: *te canit utque suum pubes miratur Osirim / barbara, Memphiten plangere docta bovem*, 'You [the Nile] are sung and worshipped, as their own Osiris, by the barbarous folk taught to wail the ox of Memphis.'

ll. 29-38: Osiris is presented as the bringer of civilization by calling him the inventor of agriculture, arboriculture and viticulture.

ll. 39-48: The subject of wine paves the way to identifying Osiris with Bacchus as the one who cheers people up who are experiencing difficulties: *Bacchus et adflictis requiem mortalibus adfert*, 'Bacchus brings relief to mortals in distress.'

ll. 49-54: The reference to the Bacchic cult announces Messalla's birthday as Osiris/Bacchus is invited to this party and is summoned to honor the birthday spirit, the Genius.

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[378] The text edition used in this chapter is Maltby's 2002 and the translations of Tibullus 1.7 are my own.

D. ll. 55-64:

Finally, Messalla is addressed by expressing the wish that his progeny will emphasize the good works done by him by adding new ones and that they will be present in his final hour. Messalla's repair of the Via Latina is also stressed: a reparation financed with booty.[379] By referring to war booty, the poem returns to the topic of conquest and imperialism. It concludes with a proclamation to the Birthday-Spirit: *at tu, Natalis multos celebrande per annos, / candidor semper candidiorque veni*, 'But you, Birth-Spirit, come to your honors for many a year – come ever brighter and brighter still.'

2.2. *Historical context*

Tibullus 1.7 is generally dated to 27 BCE. Four years after Octavian's victory in the Battle of Actium, three years after his conquest of Alexandria and the annexation of Egypt as a Roman province, and two years after Augustus' triple triumph which he gained for his victory at Actium, the annexation of Egypt and the conquest of Illyria.[380] Hence, it is noted in modern literature that the memory of the Civil War and Egypt's collaborating role in this war must still have been fresh when Tibullus composed this poem.[381] The poem certainly concerns a political theme: it celebrates the triumph of Messalla over the Aquitanians; it seems to point at other military exploits of Messalla including an expedition to Egypt; and it also praises Messalla's public works. The combination of triumph and what seems to be an expedition to Egypt potentially evokes Augustus and his military actions against Egypt. In a similar vein, it is argued in modern literature that the prominence of the

[379] See Gaisser 1971, 228: 'It [Tib. 1.7] closes, however, not with festivity, but with a serious reference to Messalla's repairs of the Via Latina, a peacetime activity that balances the triumph at the beginning of the poem. And yet the road building itself, however emblematic of peace, cannot be completely dissociated from war, for it was paid for out of Messalla's booty (*opibus congesta suis*, 59). See also Lee-Stecum 1998, 222: 'the *via* has been described throughout the collection [Tibullus' *elegies* book one] as an instrument for the aggressive acquisition of power. It has always appeared as a channel for military and commercial ventures, directly opposed to the rural world (compare especially 1.1.25ff.).' See also Maltby 2002, *ad loc*.

[380] Scholars give different dates for the poem, most take it to be written after Messalla's triumph of 27 BCE, but Knox has argued for an earlier date in 29 BCE, see also p. 184, n. 409.

[381] As such an example of Assmann's 'communicative memory', see pp. 31-32.

Egyptian god Osiris in Tibullus 1.7 probably raised some Roman eyebrows as Augustus banned the cults of the Egyptian goddess Isis and her 'circle' to which Osiris belonged, from within the *pomerium* in 28 BCE, according to Dio Cassius (53.2.4).[382] In this section I will discuss how Augustus' legislation on the restriction of the cults of Isis should be interpreted.

According to Dio Cassius (53.2.4), Augustus banned the cults of Egyptian gods – which probably spread from Egypt via Delos and Sicily to Italy and were already clearly manifest in Rome in the Late Republic[383] – from within the *pomerium* in 28 BCE:

> καὶ τὰ μὲν ἱερὰ τὰ Αἰγύπτια οὐκ ἐσεδέξατο εἴσω τοῦ πωμηρίου, τῶν δὲ δὴ ναῶν πρόνοιαν ἐποιήσατο· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ὑπ᾽ ἰδιωτῶν τινων γεγενημένους τοῖς τε παισὶν αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐκγόνοις, εἴγε τινὲς περιῆσαν, ἐπισκευάσαι ἐκέλευσε, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς αὐτὸς ἀνεκτήσατο.

[382] The Roman cults of Isis were of Hellenistic origin and adapted to Roman needs and purposes. For this process of 'Romanizing' Isis, see Versluys 2013. The cults of the Hellenistic and Roman Isis differ in many aspects from the original Egyptian / pharaonic Isis. Whereas Isis in Pharaonic times is flanked by her brother and husband Osiris, in Ptolemaic times she is accompanied by Serapis. For the Ptolemaic 'invented tradition' of Isis' companion Sarapis see Pfeiffer 2008; Schmidt 2005; Borgeaud and Volokhine 2000. Cf. Bricault 2000, esp. table 1, who counted the appearances of names of the 'cercle isiaque' on the inscripions gathered in *RICIS*. Whereas Sarapis is mentioned 803 times (659 in Greek and 144 in Latin) and Isis 767 times (489 Greek and 287 Latin), Osiris' name only appears 35 times (30 Greek and 5 Latin). Osiris' was not simply replaced by Sarapis or identified with Sarapis. According to Stambaugh, 1972, it is context that determines the presence of Sarapis and Osiris. Cf. Bricault 2013, 65: 'Dans ce cercle divin, Osiris n'est pas réellement identifié à Sarapis et les rapports entre les deux dieux sont complexes et évolutifs.'

[383] An excellent introduction to the 'diffusion' and complexities of the cults of Isis is Bricault 2004. For overviews of this subject, see Bricault 2013; 2001; and Malaise 2005. For the *Status Qaestionis* of Isis Studies see especially the publications of the International Conferences of Isis Studies: Bricault and Versluys 2014; Bricault and Versluys 2010; Bricault, Meyboom and Versluys 2005; Bricault 2003 and 2000. For shifting paradigms in the studies of 'Oriental religion' and the role of 'Orientalisation', see Versluys 2013. On this subject see also Alvar 2008. For the introduction of Isis in the Roman world in the Late Republic, see Bricault 2004, 552. See also Takács 1995, 27-70; Malaise 1972a and b; Vidman 1970, 95-105; Tran Tam Tinh 1964.

> As for religious matters, he did not allow the Egyptian rites to be celebrated inside the *pomerium*, but made provision for the cult places; those which had been built by private individuals he ordered their sons and descendants, if any survived, to repair, and the rest he restored himself. Tr. Cary 1914.

This much debated passage of Dio Cassius is read and understood differently in modern studies. Some, in particular Malaise, have taken this passage to contain two Augustan measures concerning two different types of gods: the Egyptian versus the traditional Roman ones. Malaise reads this passage in the following manner: on the one hand (μέν), Augustus banned the cults of Isis from within the *pomerium* while, on the other hand (δέ), he took care of the sanctuaries (τῶν ναῶν) erected for the *traditional* Roman gods by individuals. Malaise bases this reading on Augustus' disrespect for the Egyptian religion as expressed most famously by Suetonius (*Aug*. 93, see p. 164, n. 365) and Augustan propaganda that stressed the foreignness of Egypt. The promotion of traditional religion is explained by Malaise by as part of Augustus' restoration program which can be derived from the *Res Gestae*.[384] Others, however, feel that the passage concerns two Augustan regulations for the cults of Isis only. They argue that although Augustus banned the cults of Isis from within the *pomerium*, at the same time, he restored them outside the *pomerium*. Most recently, Orlin, has interpreted this ambivalence as evidence of a two-way strategy to redefine Roman identity by banning Egyptian deities within the heart of the city while demonstrating the incorporation of Egypt within the Roman world by promoting the worship of these gods *outside* the *pomerium*.[385]

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[384] See Malaise 1972b, 380-384; 1993, 375 and 2011. Particularly in 2011, 168, he dismisses other interpretations of this passage like that of Orlin. For readings similar to that of Malaise: Rich 1990, 25; Scheid 2007, 59.

[385] Orlin 2008, 243: 'Octavian's actions in encouraging the worship of Egyptian deities outside the *pomerium* should be understood in this light: the significance of his action lies in the need for clear boundaries in order to establish and maintain group identity. The civil wars and Octavian's eventual victory over Antony and Cleopatra had marked the end of the traditional conception of Roman identity, a conception that had been gradually eroded since the Social War and even beyond, which needed to be reconstructed.' For the incorporation of foreign deities in Rome see Orlin 2010. Takács 1995, 75-76, emphasizes a distinction between public display of these cults like processions, and private rites that took place inside temple structures. According to her, Augustus prohibited the former within the *pomerium* and stimulated the latter (also within the *pomerium*). However, when D.C. 53.2.4-5 is compared to D.C.

The second reading seems more natural than the first, when this passage is compared to another one (D.C. 40.47.3-4), in which he relates how the *naoi* of Isis and Sarapis were destroyed at the Senate's command in 53 BCE:

> δοκεῖ δὲ ἔμοιγε καὶ ἐκεῖνο τὸ τῷ προτέρῳ ἔτει, ἐπ᾽ ἐξόδῳ αὐτοῦ, περί τε τὸν Σάραπιν καὶ περὶ τὴν Ἶσιν ψηφισθὲν τέρας οὐδενὸς ἧττον γενέσθαι· τοὺς γὰρ ναοὺς αὐτῶν, οὓς ἰδίᾳ τινὲς ἐπεποίηντο, καθελεῖν τῇ βουλῇ ἔδοξεν. οὐ γὰρ δὴ τοὺς θεοὺς τούτους ἐπὶ πολὺ ἐνόμισαν, καὶ ὅτε γε καὶ ἐξενίκησεν ὥστε καὶ δημοσίᾳ αὐτοὺς σέβεσθαι, ἔξω τοῦ πωμηρίου σφᾶς ἱδρύσαντο.
>
> But it seems to me that that decree passed the previous year, near its close, with regard to Serapis and Isis, was a portent equal to any; for the senate had decided to tear down their cult places, which some individuals had built on their own account. Indeed, for a long time they did not believe in these gods, and even when the rendering of public worship to them gained the day, they settled them outside the pomerium. Tr. Cary 1914.

The line 'they settled them outside the *pomerium*' (ἔξω τοῦ πωμηρίου σφᾶς ἱδρύσαντο) seems to anticipate the (kind of) measures taken by Augustus to remove the worship of Isis from within the *pomerium* mentioned in Dio 53.2.4. If the parallelism of these two passages of Dio Cassius is accepted, Augustus' second measure in 28 BCE, to take care of the *naoi*, refers to those located outside the *pomerium*. By pointing at *naoi* erected by private individuals D.C. 40.47.3-4 seems to suggest that *naoi* for Isis do not necessarily refer to large monumental structures as was also argued by Versluys.[386] Moreover, Dio 40.47.3-4 suggests that Isis and Sarapis were once worshipped as a matter of public cult (δημοσίᾳ), rather than just privately. This obviously does not mean that their cults were officially accepted by the Senate as, for instance, was the case for the cult of Mater Magna. But judging

40.47.3-4, Orlin is probably right is seeing a digression between inside and outside the *pomerium*.

[386] Versluys 2004, argues on account of literary, epigraphical and archeological sources, that Isis was worshipped on the Capitol, but that this did not consequently mean that also a monumental temple existed. Malaise 2011, seems to narrow down the cult places for Isis to monumental sanctuaries as he argues that the measure of Augustus concerning the restriction of the cults of Isis could have only been directed at the *Iseum Metellinum* 'pour autant que son édification soit bien antérieure à cete date, les autres constructions abritant les cultes égyptiens ayant déjà été, en principe, victimes de misis à bas' and does not include the possibility cult places other than 'sanctuaries' may have existed.

from D.C. 53.2.4, some cult places for Isis seem to have existed that were not privately instigated as this passages distinguishes between 'the ones who had been built by some individuals' (τοὺς μὲν … ὑπ᾽ ἰδιωτῶν τινων γεγενημένους) and 'the other *naoi*' (τοὺς δὲ λοιπούς). This suggests that there may have been *naoi* of a more public kind in the Augustan age.[387] There seems to be no reason then to connect *naoi* in D.C. 53.2.4 with anything other than *naoi* for Isis.

Roman attitudes towards the cults of Isis and Sarapis seem to have changed a couple of times in the late Republic. Literary sources mention at least three public, senate-orchestrated destructions of the cult places of these Egyptian gods in the decades before the Augustan regulation in 28 BCE. In 58 BCE the consul Gabinius decided to execute a senatorial ban on altars for the Egyptian gods Sarapis, Isis, Harpocrates and Anubis on the Capitol, according to Varro whose text is preserved by Tertullian (Tert. *Ad Nat.* 1.10.16-18). Apparently, the altars that were destroyed previously, after the Senate had decided to prohibit them on the Capitol, had been restored by the people. Gabinius, against the people's will, wished to adhere to the previous decision of the Senate on this matter and prohibited the erection of the altars. In 53 BCE the Senate decided to tear down the *naoi* of Isis and Sarapis (D.C. 40.47.3-4). And in 48 BCE the precincts (τεμενίσματα) of Isis and Sarapis were destroyed (D.C. 42.26.1-2).[388] In 43 BCE, however, the triumvirates – Octavian, Mark Antony and Lepidus – decide to erect a *naos* for Isis and Osiris.[389] And in 28 BCE, Augustus, as we have seen, decides to restrict and to promote the cults of Isis. These meandering and possible ambivalent attitudes indicate that the decisions involved probably cannot be understood from the angle of religious tenets, nor completely from the angle of Roman hostility towards Egypt.

[387] The existence of possible public cult places of Isis is not surprising as according to Dio Cassius the triumvirs in 43 BCE decided to construct a *naos* dedicated to Isis and Sarapis, Dio 47.15.4. For modern discussions about this passage including the questions of whether this temple has ever been built and why the triumvirs decided to do so, I refer to Malaise 2011, 14-16.

[388] Orlin 2008, 237 and n. 12, sees an increasing hostility in these three Roman actions against the cults of Isis and Sarapis: 'But perhaps the most striking feature about the Late Republican Snatorial actions is the progression of increasing severity against the Egyptian cults, from a ban on one location, to the destruction of all temples, to the destruction of the precincts in which those temples had been located.'

[389] Malaise 2011, 195, suggests that the decision was taken by Mark Antony because of his love of Egypt and that Augustus reacted to this decision in 28 BCE. Malaise, as already shown above, did not take the second measure of Augustus to be directed at the cults of Isis, but at the traditional Roman religion.

These decisions were probably first and foremost politically/pragmatically motivated. Some scholars see the decision of the triumvirate to vote for a cult place for Isis and Osiris as a gesture towards the *populares*, who are believed to have been dominant among the Isis worshippers.[390] Hence, we should beware of linking Augustus' restriction of the cults of Isis in 28 BCE as described by Dio Cassius too easily with Augustan propaganda against Egypt, or the hatred for Cleopatra who was also known as Isis Nea. Consequently, the relationship between Tibullus 1.7 and Augustan policy towards Egyptian gods or Augustan negative attitudes towards Egypt becomes highly speculative.

2.3. *Framing Isis in Augustan poetry*

Instead of taking a strict historical approach the role of Egypt and that of the Egyptian god Osiris in Tibullus 1.7 can better be understood by focusing on the literary context. At this point it is instructive to consider a literary topic strongly related to that of Osiris: Isis.[391] In modern studies on the cults of Isis, Roman literature is primarily used to obtain information that contributes to the reconstruction of the 'real' nature of the cults and the devotees.[392] Analyzing the references to Isis by focusing on the different discursive context in which Isis is portrayed may not bring us closer to the historical reality of the cults of Isis and her worshippers, but it does reveal some reactions and responses in Roman society to elements of foreign cultures.

Four frames of Isis

Many visions on Isis can be derived from Augustan literature, which I have divided into four groups for analytical purposes. 1) In three different poetical works by two different writers – an elegy by Tibullus and the *Metamorphoses* and the *Amores* of Ovid – Isis appears in the context of personal prayer. In Tibullus 1.3 the speaker who fell sick on the island of Phaeacia on a voyage

[390] For this explanation see Versluys 2004, 428 and 446 n. 89, also for references.
[391] For the relation between Osiris and Isis in the Roman world, see n. 171, n. 382.
[392] Some studies have taken the literary topos of sexual immorality of the cults of Isis as a truism and took the devotees of Isis as 'loose women', see Grimal 1967, but see Becher 1970 *contra*. Others have used Roman literature as containing information about the location and existence of Isea, but Syndikus 1984 has dismissed this particular topographical use of these kinds of texts by stressing the literary topoi.

to the East prays to Isis to cure him so that he can reunite with his beloved Cynthia again. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Isis fulfills the prayers of her devotee Telethusa and turns her daughter Iphis into a man (Ov. *Met*. 9.666-797), and in Ovid's *Amores* 2.13 the speaker prays to Isis to save his lover Corinna whose health was in danger after an attempted abortion. 2) Isis appears in the context of sexual frustration when the sexual abstinence of women during her rites is mentioned.[393] In most cases the reference to Isis in this context involves just a short comment, but Propertius in his elegy 2.33a takes 22 lines to express the inconvenience. 3) Isis is referred to in the context of sexual immorality when her temple is indicated in passing as a place for men to pick up women and vice versa, particularly in Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*. It is, however, disputable whether the nature of the cults of Isis is the determining factor making her temple a suitable meeting place, or whether any temple was a place where people would meet up in general.[394] 4) Isis is also alluded to when Cleopatra is identified as the *Nea Isis* in the political context of the Civil War. Virgil and Propertius do not explicitly identify Cleopatra as Isis like Dio Cassius does, for instance in Octavian's speech before the battle of Actium (50.25.2-4), but they do evoke this image of Cleopatra when they portray her as rattling the *sistrum* – one of Isis' attributes – and as accompanied by the usual animal gods.[395]

Different visions can imply different evaluations of Isis. Obviously, in the context of civil war as we have seen in previous chapters, Isis is a hostile, Oriental goddess fighting against Rome and threatening to conquer Rome. In the context of sexual frustration, Isis is portrayed as unfriendly as she prevents the speaker having sexual intercourse with his love. The context of personal sexual frustration and the context of political civil war are not two completely different categories as the context of sexual frustration hints at recent Roman politics with Egypt. To invigorate the image of Isis as a hostile goddess, Propertius in his elegy 2.33a threatens to drive her out of the city, because 'the Nile and the Tiber were never friends' (*cum Tiberi Nilo gratia nulla fuit*). This

[393] Ov. *Am*. 1.8.74; 3.9.33-34; Prop. 2.33a.1-2; 4.5.33-34; Tib. 1.3.25-26; For abstinence not (specifically) related to the rites of Isis: Ov. *Am*. 2.19.42; 3.10.2 (Ceres); *Fast*. 2.327-330 (Bacchus).
[394] Ov. *Am*. 2.2.25; *Ars.* 3.393; 3.463-464. For sexual immorality, see especially the story of Flavius Josephus, *AJ* 18.65-80. For a discussion of the relationship between the cults of Isis and sexual immorality, see n. 393.
[395] Virg. 8.696, Prop. 3.11.43.

is probably a reference to recent historical events of the Civil War and the Battle of Actium. However, where Isis/Cleopatra in the Battle of Actium is portrayed in a frightening or threatening way, the reference to recent war in this specific context of sexual frustration is of a more amusing kind. Besides being hostile to Romans, whether in a politically threatening way or in a personally annoying way, she is also portrayed as the salutary goddess in the context of personal prayer. Being beneficial to the prayer does not mean that she is imagined to be any less Oriental/exotic. Like Isis/Cleopatra she appears in these prayers with Oriental attributes, the *sistrum*, companied by Oriental animal gods. Tibullus makes it perfectly clear that Isis does not belong to the traditional Roman gods, when after having addressed Isis in prayer to cure him because his mistress has worshipped her faithfully, he adds 'and be it mine many times to stand before the shrine of my sires' Penates and offer incense, as the months come round, to the old Lar of my home' tr. Postgate 1988 (*at mihi contingat patrios celebrare Penates / reddere que antiquo menstrua tura Lari*, Tib. 1.3.31-32). Whereas Tibullus' mistress worships the Oriental goddess Isis, he worships the traditional ones. This distinction between traditional and non-traditional gods in Rome made by Tibullus can be understood as underlining the distance between the two lovers. The poet is at home offering to the Penates while his mistress spends her time elsewhere.

Isis identified as Io

The previous section placed emphasis on the multitude of Roman representations and evaluations of Isis depending on the specific context. Within these different contexts a general Roman response to Isis can be distinguished that is particular helpful to understand the role of Osiris in Tibullus 1.7: the identification of Isis as Io. In Greco-Roman literature Isis has many identifications. For instance, Diodorus Siculus notes in his discussion about the Greek appropriation of Egyptian heroes and gods (Dio 1.24.8-1.25.1):

> φασὶ δὲ καὶ τὸν Περσέα γεγονέναι κατ᾽ Αἴγυπτον, καὶ τῆς Ἴσιδος τὴν γένεσιν ὑπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἰς Ἄργος μεταφέρεσθαι, μυθολογούντων τὴν Ἰὼ τὴν εἰς βοὸς τύπον μεταμορφωθεῖσαν. καθόλου δὲ πολλή τίς ἐστι διαφωνία περὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν. τὴν αὐτὴν γὰρ οἱ μὲν Ἶσιν, οἱ δὲ Δήμητραν, οἱ δὲ Θεσμοφόρον, οἱ δὲ Σελήνην, οἱ δὲ Ἥραν, οἱ δὲ πάσαις ταῖς προσηγορίαις ὀνομάζουσι.

> And they say that Perseus also [like Heracles] was born in Egypt, and that the origin of Isis is transferred by the Greeks to Argos in the myth which tells of that Io who was changed in a heifer. In general, there is great disagreement over these gods. For the same goddess is called by some Isis, by others Demeter, by others Thesmophoros, by others Selene, by others Hera, while still others apply to her all these names. Tr. Oldfather 1933, with adaptation.

Diodorus Siculus was neither the first nor the last to identify Isis with many other goddesses.[396] Augustan poets and later imperial authors prefer, however, to identify her with Io, the daughter of Inachus.[397] This identification meant that the myth of Io was also part of the repertoire on which the Augustan poets could draw, besides the myth of Osiris, hymns to Isis or whatever else belonged to the cultural memory of her cult.[398] The transformation that Io

[396] Cf. Hdt. 2.59; 2.156 (Demeter). For Isis' epithets *polymorphos*, *polyônymos* and *myriônymos*, see Heyob 1975, 37, see also Prop. 2.33a: *quaecumque illa fuit*; and Apul. *Met*. 11.22: *deae multinominis*.

[397] For the identification of Isis as Io in Augustan literature: Prop. 2.28.17-18; 2.28.61-62; 2.33a; Ov. *Her*. 14.85-86; *Met*. 9.687; *Fasti* 1.453-154. See also Juv. 6.526; Stat. *Silv*. 3.2.101. According to ancient mythology Io was desired by Jupiter who turned her into a heifer in order to fool his jealous wife Hera. Hera could not be fooled and placed the heifer first under guard by the hundred-eyed Argus, but he was slain (or put to sleep) by Hermes who was sent by Jupiter. After Io's escape Hera forced her to wander the world hunted by a gadfly until she found rest in Egypt where she regained her original human form. For versions of the ancient myth of Io, see Aesch. *Prom*. 561-900; *Suppl*. 291-315; Ov. *Met*. 1.568-747.

[398] The traditional myth of Osiris and Isis' role in this myth was probably well-known in the Augustan period. Ovid alludes to this myth when he describes Osiris as *quaesitus*: 'the one who has been sought after', Ov. *Met*. 9.693: *quaesitus Osiris*. In the traditional myth Isis searches for the body parts of Osiris all over the world, after he is killed by Typhon. Versions of the traditional myth of Osiris can be found in the Greco-Roman writers Diodorus and Plutarch: Diod. 1.13-27; Plut. *De Is. et Os*. 12-20; 355d-358d. They present narrative versions of the myth of Osiris that include episodes that were displayed on ancient Egyptian monuments. The first testimony of the myth of Osiris can be found in Pyramid Texts at the end of the Fifth Kingdom and in New Kingdom sources such as the Shabaka stone. See Griffiths 1980, 1-40, for an analysis of the original myth. The versions of Diodorus and Plutarchus are they are not identical. Diodorus Siculus portrays Osiris, whom he identifies as Dionysos (Diod. 1.11.3; 1.13.5), as the bringer of cultivation to all the inhabited world, which he visited on his campaigns and as lawful king of Egypt (Diod. 1.14-20). He is murdered by his brother Typhon (identified as Seth) and dismembered into 26 pieces. These pieces are distributed by Typhon among the men who helped him murder Osiris (Diod. 1.21). Isis, the sister and wife of Osiris, together with her son Horus, avenges the murder of Osiris by killing Typhon and recovers all of his body parts except for his genitals.

underwent, from mortal maiden to cow to goddess, was a topic in Augustan literature. For instance in Propertius this transformation was an example of how a troubled life could become a pleasant one (Prop. 2.28.15-18):

> sed tibi vexatae post multa pericula vitae
> extremo veniat mollior hora die.
> Io versa caput primos mugiverat annos:
> nunc dea, quae Nili flumina vacca bibit.
>
> But after the many perils of a troubled life may a happier hour come to you at the close of day. Io in her early years lowed, her head transformed: now she who as a cow drank the Nile's waters is a goddess. Tr. Goold 1990.

In another poem of Propertius, 2.33a, in which the speaker wonders why Isis is so cruel to force him and his beloved Cynthia to sleep in different beds when she is performing the rites of this goddess, empathy is nonetheless shown for the goddess' motives: she was probably cruel because of her traumatic love-affair with Jupiter that caused her to wander the world in the shape of a cow; she was probably so arrogant because she changed from a cow into a

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Then in order to keep Osiris' burial place secret while ensuring that he is honored by all Egyptians, she constructs a body out of spices and wax around every single piece of Osiris' body and has these surrogate body parts buried throughout Egypt's districts. Consequently, there were many graves of Osiris, and funerary rites were performed in every district. Isis also made a likeness of Osiris' phallus which was to be honored (Typhon had thrown in the river as none of his accomplices wished to have it) (Diod. 1.22). According to Plutarch (Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 13-20), Typhon conspired against Osiris, who reigned over Egypt. Osiris is described as the bringer of civilization by inventing agriculture, establishing laws and teaching men to worship gods. Plutarch notes that the Greeks identified Osiris with Dionysus because Osiris conquered the world by using speech, song and poetry rather than weapons. Typhon together with 72 fellow conspirators and the Queen of Ethiopia trapped Osiris in a chest, which was floated downriver to Byblos where it ended up in a heath-tree that was used as a pillar to support the roof in the king's palace. Isis wandered everywhere in search of her husband while mourning him. She found his body and brought it to her son Horus. Typhon, upon seeing the recovered body, dismembered it into 14 pieces and scattered them. Isis went searching again, and every time she recovered a part, she buried it. According to Plutarch, this is the reason why so many tombs of Osiris are said to exist in Egypt. The only part of Osiris Isis could not find was his phallus, of which Isis made a replica and consecrated it. Horus avenged his father, helped by Osiris from the underworld, and waged war against Typhon, who was captured. Isis let him go, however, instead of killing him.

goddess.[399] However, Propertius' incomprehension is also clearly expressed: Why did she leave Egypt and take the long road to Rome? Weren't there enough swarthy worshippers? How does she benefit from letting girls sleep alone? [400] He concludes his apostrophe of Isis by threatening her: either she has to become a cow again or else she will be driven out of the city.[401]

It is evident that in both cases, Propertius' identification of Isis with Io is not merely *interpretatio Graeca* or *interpretatio Romana*: an 'identification among Greeks and Romans of a foreign godhead with a member of their own pantheons'. [402] It is true that there are all kinds of correspondences between Isis and Io, especially iconographical and mythological, that support the identification, but instead of a mere syncretism of two godheads, the identification adds another biographical phase to the mythology of Isis and Io: she was once mortal and now she is a goddess. It is especially this aspect of the transfiguration of Isis/Io that is used by Propertius, as we have already

[399] My paraphrased reading is based on Prop. 2.33a.5-14: *quae dea tam cupidos totiens divisit amantes, / quaecumque illa fuit, semper amara fuit. / tu certe Iovis occultis in amoribus, Io, / sensisti multas quid sit inire vias, / cum te iussit habere puellam cornua Iuno / et pecoris duro perdere verba sono. / a quotiens quernis laesisti frondibus ora, / mandisti <et> stabulis arbuta pasta tuis! / an, quoniam agrestem detraxit ab ore figuram / Iuppiter, idcirco facta superba dea es?* 'The goddess that has so often sundered ardent lovers, whoever she was, was always harsh. In your secret love of Jove, Io you certainly discovered what it means to travel on many paths. When Juno bade you, a human girl, put on horns and drown your speech in the hoarse lowing of a cow, ah, how often did you chafe your mouth with oak leaves and chew in your stall the arbute you had fed on! Is it because Jupiter has taken that wild shape from your features that you have become such a haughty goddess?' Tr. Goold 1990.

[400] Prop. 2.33a.11-17: *an tibi non satis est fuscis Aegyptus alumnis? / cur tibi tam longa Roma petita via? / quidve tibi prodest viduas dormire puellas?* 'Are the swarthy daughters of Egypt too few for your worship? Why did you take the long journey to Rome? What profit is it to you that girls should sleep alone?' Tr. Goold 1990.

[401] Prop. 2.33a.18-19: *sed tibi, crede mihi, cornua rursus erunt, / aut nos e nostra te, saeva, fugabimus urbe*, 'Take it from me, either you will have horns again or else, cruel creature, we will banish you from our city.' Tr. Goold 1990.

[402] Ando 2008, 43. Ando has problematized *interpretatio Graeca* and *interpretatio Romana* by discussing on what grounds an identification takes place. According to him we should not see this process as a mere translation in the linguistic field – Roman authors translating foreign gods for their Roman audience – but as revealing information about the 'epistemic and linguistic premises' of Roman religion. His study of Roman theory on *interpretation Romana* shows that for a positive identification iconography, semantics and etymology seem to be inconclusive.

seen. Thus, the identification of Isis as Io in Roman literature involves more than simply renaming her.

However, the Greek or Roman identification of a foreign god with a own god, of which the identification of Isis as Io is an example, are mainly understood in modern literature to have had a function in terms of translation: provincial gods being made understandable to the Roman public. An example of such a translation is a famous passage in Tacitus' *Germanicus* that contains the sole case in which *interpretatio Romana* is mentioned in an extant Roman work: *sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant*, 'but the gods commemorated there [among the Naharvali] are, according to *interpretatio Romana*, Castor and Pollux.'[403] Modern studies have emphasized especially the role of the Roman provinces here as many inscriptions found in the provinces witness the syncretism of local gods with traditional Roman ones. This has been interpreted as a conscious act of the provinces to deal with and benefit from Roman domination. The meaning and reasons for doing so has received less attention. When the identification of provincial gods as traditional Roman ones is instigated by Romans, such as in Tacitus, then it serves to help Romans understand foreign gods – and is thus believed to be based on unconscious identification. But when this act is instigated by provincials, the identification is thought to be deliberate to serve political, economic and social goals. Certainly, this identification and in a broader sense Hellenisation in Roman literary texts may reflect unconscious identification, but in some cases – such as in the examples of Propertius above – it can be understood to be a deliberate act of taking something from a foreign culture and making it your own to serve your own purposes, i.e. cultural appropriation.[404]

In Augustan literature concerning Isis the Greek appropriation of Isis as Io is dominant and it can be said that in Augustan texts, Isis is first and foremost understood as being of Greek origin, probably because the themes of the myth of Io were particularly useful for Roman poets. Nevertheless, she is still associated with the concept of Egypt as the stereotypical Other. For instance, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* she appears as an exotic goddess with her crescent

[403] Tac. *Germ.* 43.4. However, see Ando 2008, for emphasis on the 'art of identification' instead of the 'art of naming'.
[404] Cf. pp. 91-95 on the comparison of Cleopatra to four mythological women in Prop. 3.11.

horns, the rattles (*sistra*) and entourage consisting of animal gods and foreign animals (Ov. *Met*. 9.686-695):[405]

> *cum medio noctis spatio sub imagine somni*
> *Inachis ante torum pompa comitata sacrorum*
> *aut stetit aut visa est: inerant lunaria fronti*
> *cornua cum spicis nitido flaventibus auro*
> *et regale decus; cumqua latrator Anubis* 690
> *sanctaque Bubastis variusque coloribus Apis,*
> *quique premit vocem digitoque silentia suadet;*
> *sistraque erant, numquam que satis quaesitus Osiris*
> *plenaque somniferis serpens peregrina venenis.* 695
>
> … when at midnight, in a vision of her dreams, she [Telethusa] saw or seemed to see the daughter of Inachus standing before her bed, accompanied by a solemn train of sacred beings. She had crescent horns upon her forehead, and ears of corn yellow with bright gold about her head, a sight of regal beauty. Near her were seen the dog Anubis, sacred Bubastis, barking Apis, and the god who enjoins silence with his finger on his lips [Harpocrates]; there also were the sacred rattles, and Osiris, ceaseless object of his worshipper's desire, and the Egyptian serpent swelling with sleep-producing venom. Tr. Miller 1999.

Nevertheless, the general effect of the Roman appropriation of Isis as Io can be called 'domesticating', see pp. 93-94: her Greek origin makes her less foreign or less exotic. Even in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Isis' exoticism is tuned down by addressing her as Inachis, the daughter of Inachus.

2.4. *Tibullus 1.7: status quaestionis*

The poem has received much scholarly attention for various reasons. On the basis of their understanding of the use of Egypt in this poem, previous studies of Tibullus 1.7 can be divided into four different groups. Several scholars have related it to the historical context of the Battle of Actium and Egypt's annexation in the time of Augustus.[406] These studies have stressed the

[405] Ov. *Met*. 9.666-695, deals with the metamorphosis of the girl Iphis into the boy Iphis. A woman called Telethusa gives birth to the girl Iphis. She deceives her husband Ligdus, because he warned her that he would kill a girl baby and tells him that the baby is a boy. When Iphis is about to marry a girl, Telethusa prays to Isis and the goddess fulfills her wish and changes the Iphis into a man. Particularly line 690 (*latrator Anubis*) alludes to Virgil, Aen. 8.698 and Prop. 3.11.41. Cf. Rosati 2009, 286-287.

[406] General commentaries on Tib. 1.7 include: Putnam 1973; Murgatroyd 1980; Ball 1983; Maltby 2002. For the parallel between Osiris and Messalla, see Gaisser 1971;

discrepancy between the rather approving image of Egypt displayed by Tibullus 1.7 and the predominantly hostile Roman attitude towards Egypt in Augustan Rome evidenced in the works of other Augustan poets, such as Virgil, Horace and Propertius. Tibullus' image of Osiris in particular seems to clash with Augustus' policy of restricting the Egyptian cult of Isis. Tibullus' elegy is also curious for the absence of Augustus as Robert Ball notes in his commentary on this poem: '[t]he question also arises as to why Tibullus here ignores Augustus, especially when he describes a country subdued by the *princeps*.' Scholars have given different answers to that question, ranging from Tibullus expressing his aversion of Augustus to Tibullus' indifference toward Augustus as he is celebrating Messalla and not Augustus.[407]

Different solutions have been proposed to explain why Tibullus wrote such a positive story in contrast to the prevailing negativity. It has been suggested that Tibullus experimented with a mixture of different genres in order not to insult Augustus.[408] The poor fit between this poem and Augustus' regulations

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Bright 1975; Lee-Stecum 1998. For the characterization of Messalla, see Johnson 1990 ('Messalla is *Romanitas* incarnate', p. 95); Van Nortwick 1990, in his commentary on Johnson stresses the ambivalent characterization of Messalla. Lee-Stecum 1998, 205-226, and Lowell Bowditch 2011 emphasize the different 'moods' of the poem, e.g. peaceful versus violent. For the relation between Tibullus and Messalla, see Levy 1929; Moore 1986. For the relation between Augustan policies and Tib. 1.7: Della Corte 1966; Konstan 1978; Lambert 2003; Knox 2005. For Egyptian and Alexandrian elements in Tib. 1.7: Hunter 2006; Koenen 1976; Grimal 1969. Within these studies several reasons have been formulated for the inclusion of the Osiris episode: Messalla's interest in Egypt (e.g. Schuster 1930); Tibullus' interest in Egypt; historical and economic circumstances such as the suicide of Egypt's first prefect, Gallus, and Rome's dependence on the grain supply.

[407] Ball 1983, 124. Lambert 2003, 50, finds such a positive attitude to Egypt 'surprising' so soon after Octavian's triple triumph in 29 BCE, the last day of which was devoted to the subjugation of Egypt'; Konstan 1978, 179, after the describing the historical context of Augustus' hostile attitude towards the Egyptian religion, notes: 'Unexpected is the long and laudatory treatment of Egypt, her rivers and her gods in Tibullus' poem..'; Della Corta 1966, 133, argues that Tibullus deliberately presented a positive view of Egypt to annoy the emperor: 'Parlare di Osiride come di un [euergetes], quando ancora erra vivo il ricordo di un Antonio, noto per avere stretta una *hierogamia* con Cleopatra sotto il simbolo Iside-Osiride, appare per lo meno intenzionale e di una intenzione ostile ad Augusto'.

[408] In his abstract of his paper, Lambert 2003, 47, argues that 'Tibullus had to be very diplomatic about linking Messalla, his triumph and Egypt in 1.7. In order not to give offence to the *princeps* or to Messalla's republican sympathies, he experiments with a novel fusion of genres.'

concerning the temples of Isis in 28 BCE is also mentioned as one of the arguments to push back the date of the poem to 29 BCE instead of 28/27.[409] Others explain it as a way to argue for the rehabilitation of this region and for the integration of this new province into Roman culture.[410] Instead of approaching Tibullus 1.7 as a text deviating from normative Roman attitudes towards Egypt, I would like to approach it as a text that contains one of the many concepts of Egypt. This approach encourages us to decipher *which* 'Egypt' is evoked exactly and how this is done, instead of simply concluding that Tibullus 1.7 contains a positive view of Egypt.

Another group of scholars has more or less ignored the historical context and the evoked image of Egypt by focusing on the parallels between Osiris and Messalla. For them Tibullus wrote a eulogy addressing his patron Messalla in which Egypt serves to introduce Osiris who functions to praise Messalla.[411] By stressing the identification between Messalla and Osiris, the particular representation of Egypt in Tibullus 1.7 is less important than Osiris' divine status and his association with wine.[412] Instead of deciphering precisely

[409] Knox 2005, 214: 'In this context [Augustus' restrictions of the cults of Isis 28 BCE], we may well ask how likely it is that Tibullus penned a hymn to Osiris as the central component in his poem or praise for one of Augustus' right-hand men in the year 27, only one year after this cult was banned within the city? Once again, the circumstances of the poem suit better an earlier date in 29 BCE.'

[410] Konstan 1987, sees Tibullus' description of Egypt as a peaceful countryside as 'a deliberate, public statement on a highly controversial issue.' He feels the '[t]he highly controversial issue' is Tibullus' praise of Rome as a world empire to which Egypt belonged. See also Lowell Bowditch 2011, 119, who interprets Tibullus' poem in a post-colonial way. She notes Tibullus ambivalence – he is subtly orientalizing Egypt, but also assimilating it into the Roman world – and sees this as a reflection of 'Rome's simultaneous will to integrate and to dominate her new province, Egypt'.

[411] Johnson 1990, 105, calls Tib. 1.7 a 'gift to Messalla' and to Johnson the poem seems to 'chiefly concerned with defining the quality of Messalla's energies and force, of evoking what it is that shapes the extraordinary virtue of this exemplary life.' In his commentary on Johnson, however, Norwick 1990, 117-120, shows that Tib. 1.7 does not unambiguously praise Messalla. See also Lee-Stecum 1998, 205-226, and Lowell Bowditch 2011.

[412] See Gaisser 1971, 224 for the quote. She stresses the divine status of Osiris and interprets the mentioning of Messalla's triumph in the context of religion, not of imperial politics: 'the triumph itself is useful, as it establishes Messalla as a semi-divine figure, who is at least worthy to be compared with gods, if not on a par with them', *ib*, 228. See also Bright 1975 for the identification of Messalla as Osiris. She also argues that it is Tibullus' purpose to praise Messalla's intellect by using different genres and by referring to Callimachus.

what textual ingredients bring about the identification between Messalla and Osiris, I believe that the representation of Egypt should be given more prominence as the 'Egyptianness' of Osiris is more important for our understanding of this poem than has been considered hitherto. Furthermore, this group of scholars seemed to be right in arguing that Egypt/Osiris could have supportive effects on Messalla's status by positive association. I will, however, investigate whether this kind of positive association has other consequences than for the status of Messalla alone.

Thirdly, I would like to mention a thought-provoking study of Tibullus 1.7 by P. Lowell Bowditch. She uses examples of the application of post-colonial theory to ancient sources in recent literature to demonstrate the ambivalence of framing the unknown as the Other. Her application of post-colonial theory shows how the construction of foreign countries as the Other goes hand in hand with translating or assimilating the unfamiliar in one's own terms of which *Interpretatio Graeca* is an example. According to Lowell Bowditch, Osiris/Egypt becomes assimilated to Roman cultural views in Tibullus 1.7, but at the same time the image of Egypt in Tibullus 1.7 is subject to 'an overarching imperial theme'. By looking especially at 'elegiac gender differences' and relating them to the 'East/West opposition' of Orientalizing discourse, she demonstrates the complex imperial relationship between Rome and its new province of Egypt. In her interpretation, Osiris is first presented as embodying Roman values of masculinity (29-36), whereas he is later associated with effeminizing attributes and Eastern qualities (43-48). Allowing for the ambivalent Roman attitudes towards Egypt, Lowell Bowditch concludes: 'Ultimately, the alternation in Osiris' identity demonstrates the ambivalence of the text – reflecting Rome's simultaneous will to integrate and to dominate her new province, Egypt.' I agree with her that imperialism is thematically present in this poem. However, noticing that this poem is not just elegiac – it is notorious for its mixture of other genres – I will explore whether there are other ways of understanding the relation of Egypt and Rome than as 'elegiac gender differences'.

A fourth group of scholars explained passages in Tibullus 1.7 by looking at Egyptian/Hellenistic influences in this poem. Grimal and Koenen related Tibullus 1.7 to ancient Egyptian and Hellenistic concepts of the cults of Isis and Osiris, while Hunter looked specifically at the intertextuality of Tibullus

1.7 with hymns of Isis and texts of Callimachus.[413] Grimal and Koenen's expert readings of this poem are important as they show that Hellenistic elements found their way into Roman poetry, but they do not give an overall interpretation of the poem itself. Hunter's study does use Hellenistic texts to explain Tibullus' agenda in elegy 1.7. Focusing particularly on lines 9-22, a passage reflecting the motif of 'universal conquest' that was important for Hellenistic kingship, Hunter notes Tibullus' deviation from this rhetoric of extending boundaries in which the poet's observing role is highlighted: 'The mild fascination expressed by the touristic voice is in fact a strategy by which this poem's otherwise quite remarkable combination of the very conventionally Roman and the markedly 'eastern' is here naturalized; Tibullus 1.7 stands as a striking document of the Romans' negotiation of their own position in a world where other powers, spiritual and temporal, had travelled before. Dionysus' obvious familiarity and equally obvious 'foreignness' again proved a powerful framework with which to stake one's claim.'[414] I agree with Hunter that the key to understand Tibullus 1.7 lies in the literary tradition. I also agree with his suggestion that Tibullus 1.7 is reflecting on Rome's position in the world. However, by taking the conceptualization of Egypt as a vital part to understand the overall message of the whole poem, I will investigate how precisely 'Egypt' is used in order to establish Rome's position in the world.

To sum the general introduction to Tibullus 1.7 up, in contrast to previous scholarship my study of Tibullus 1.7 will focus on the representation of Egypt and the lengthy passage devoted to Egypt and Osiris (ll. 23-54) to explain this poem. I will explore whether that passage conveys a concept of Egypt that goes beyond the religious connotations and contemporary legislation concerning the gods Osiris and Isis. Recent scholarship (Hunter, Lowell Bowditch) has stressed the imperialistic undertones of this poem and, hence, the representation of Egypt as one of Rome's provinces should be given a prominent role. The previous chapters of my study have shown that 'Egypt' could be framed in many ways and in interpreting the conceptualization of Egypt in this poem, I will not automatically look for East/West oppositions between Rome and Egypt, but allow for other determinants of the Roman discourse on Egypt. In particular I will investigate whether the representation

[413] Grimal 1969; Koenen 1976; Hunter 2006.
[414] Hunter 2006, 67.

of Egypt in this poem is related to a Hellenistic/Roman concept of ancient Egypt and whether this concept can be explained in terms of self-representation.

3. TIBULLUS 1.7: FRAMING ANCIENT EGYPT

3.1. *An ethnographical frame*

Tibullus 1.7 is unique in its mixture of different genres as Georg Luck noticed: 'What makes it so unusual, is its combination of literary *genera*. It begins as a birthday poem, turns almost imperceptibly into a triumphal ode, then becomes a religious hymn, and ends, more conventionally, as a birthday poem. In the history of the elegy, we find parallels for each of these components ... What is new here is the combination of all these elements.'[415] Based on how Egypt is introduced in this poem, I will consider in this section the influence of yet another genre on Tibullus 1.7: ethnography.

The subject of Osiris is introduced in the following lines (21-28) that touch upon several Greco-Roman topoi connected to Egypt:

qualis et, arentes cum findit Sirius agros,
fertilis aestiva Nilus abundet aqua?
Nile pater, quanam possim te dicere causa
aut quibus in terris occuluisse caput?
te propter nullos tellus tua postulat imbres, 25
arida nec pluvio supplicat herba Iovi.
te canit atque suum pubes miratur Osirim
barbara, Memphiten plangere docta bovem.

Or [why should I recount] how, when Sirius cleaves the dry fields, the fertile Nile overflows with summer water? Father Nile, for what cause or in which lands may I say that you covered your head? Because of you your Egypt desires

[415] Luck 1969, 85-86, as quoted by Bright 1975, 39, who argues, partly on account of the mixture of genres, to see Tib. 1.7 as an 'epyllion'. Different reasons have been given to explain why Tibullus experimented with a mixture of genres ranging from political ones – Tibullus did not want to provoke Augustus by presenting Egypt without mentioning him, Lambert 2003 – to private ones - Tibullus wished to compliment Messalla not only on his military exploits but also for his 'literary acumen', Bright 1975, 46.

> no showers of rain, nor do the dry crops beg humbly to Jupiter the rain-giver. The barbarous people learned to wail the ox of Memphis, celebrates and admires you as their own Osiris.

Egypt is described by the wonders of the Nile; the ability of the Nile to inundate acres in times of extreme dryness and heat (21-22)[416]; the unknown source of the Nile; and speculations about the causes of the flooding (23-24), i.e. the regular furniture of Greek and Roman Nile digressions.[417] The comparison of the Nile to the rain (25-26) is also a standard expression.[418] The identification, however, of Osiris as a manifestation of the Nile (27-28) is a more learned observation that presupposes more profound knowledge of Egypt and its cults. In this respect the connection made in this poem between Apis and Osiris – Apis is also a manifestation of Osiris/Nile – underlines Tibullus' insight into the cult of Osiris.[419] The function of these lines is clear as they form the bridge between the description of geographical locations touched upon in the previous lines (9-20) and the Egyptian god Osiris.

Lines 27-28 in particular have received scholarly interest as they seem to combine two different concepts of Egypt: the Egyptian youth (*pubes)* is concurrently called 'barbarous' (*barbara*) and 'learned' (*docta*) at once. The meaning of *barbara* is explained differently. Some read it as a neutral qualification of something exotic.[420] Others believe that *barbara* does have hostile connotations, particularly because it appears in this elegy in connection with animal worship, a religious habit that generally received Roman disapproval, particularly in Augustan poetry.[421] Rhetorically, the use of

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[416] The rising of *Sirius*, the Dog-star, signified extreme summer heat, see also Tib. 1.1.27-28; 1.41-42. For the paradox between the inundation and extreme heat, and the ancient Egyptian myth which explained this connection, see Koenen 1976, 137.

[417] The most important Nile digressions are Hdt. 2.19ff.; Diod. 1.36ff.; Sen. *Q Nat.* 4a, *De Nilo* 2.1-16; Lucan *BC* 8.285-331; Plin. *NH* 5.51-54; Mela 1.9.50-60. For the discourse on the Nile, see Manolaraki 2013; Schrijvers 2007; Postl 1965.

[418] See Koenen 1976, 139, n. 42 for references.

[419] Klinger 1951, 123-128. Maltby 2002, *ad loc.*: 'T.'s knowledge of the cult could be connected with Delia's interest in Isis.'

[420] Dauge 1981, 162; Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1958.

[421] Lowell Bowditch 2011, 102-103: 'Despite the positive valence of *docta* ('knowing', 'taught', 'learned'), the reference to the ritual mourning at Memphis for the sacred bull Apis, avatar of Osiris, invokes the practice most regarded as strange and uncivilized by the Romans. Indeed, the fundamental ambivalence that characterized much Greco-Roman writing about Egypt – respect for the antiquity of its culture combined with a paradoxical sense of its religion and customs as different

barbara can easily be explained as *pubes barbara* forms a contrast with *pubes Romana* (5) and this parallel paves the way to identifying Messalla with Osiris.[422] *Docta* is generally understood as a positive attribute referring to the high and ancient culture of the Egyptians.[423] The appearance of *barbara* and *docta* can also reflect their allusion to other texts, such as the Isis aretalogies in which a distinction between Greek and non-Greek is drawn, and by Callimachus' *Aitia* 3.1 where, probably, Egyptian women are said to 'know how to cry laments for the white-marked bull.'[424] Referring to the observations in the field of 'imagology' as I have discussed on pp. 21-22, the existence of diametrically opposed stereotypes to describe other peoples appears to be a standard phenomenon in the literary characterization of foreigners. Below I will argue that Tibullus may have encouraged an ethnographical framing of Egypt with this binary image of Egypt.

To understand lines 27-28 I suggest considering them as a carefully prepared outcome of an 'introduction' that starts with a description of other eastern countries in lines 9-20:

non sine me est tibi partus honos: Tarbella Pyrene
testis et Oceani litora Santonici, 10
testis Arar Rhodanusque celer magnusque Garunna,
Carnutis et flavi caerula lympha Liger.
an te, Cydne, canam, tacitis qui leniter undis
Caeruleus placidis per vada serpis aquis,
quantus et aetherio contingens vertice nubes 15
frigidus intonsos Taurus alat Cilicas?

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and primitive – appears in the tension of these two adjectives describing the foreign, and implicitly primitive, as against the learned or civilized populace.' For the same kind of argument: Manolaraki 2013, 33-35.

[422] Maltby 2002, *ad loc.* 'looking back to *pubes Romana* (5) and drawing a parallel between Osiris and Messalla. Both are the centre of attention for their nation and both will have their praises sung, *te canit* looking forward to *te canat* of Messalla.' For the identification between Osiris and Messalla see Gaisser 1971 and Bright 1975.

[423] See Lowell Bowditch 2011, 102-103.

[424] Hunter 2006, 59: 'This [*barbara*] is a word generally avoided in high Alexandrian poetry, and it is not complimentary when Tibullus uses it elsewhere at 2.3.60. Here it presumably reinforces the almost outlandish exoticness of the Egyptian rite, but the division of the world into Greek and barbarian seems to have been an important element in Dionysiac ideas from an early date (cf. esp. Eur. *Ba.* 13-25), and it is a division, precisely with regard to language, that is a recurrent feature of the preserved 'Praises of Isis'. For Callimachean echos in Tib. 1.7: Hunter 2006; Bulloch 1973; Luck 1969, 83-99.

quid referam, ut volitet crebras intacta per urbes
alba Palaestino sancta columba Syro,
utque maris vastum prospectet turribus aequor
prima ratem ventis credere docta Tyros, 20

Not without me did you gain glory there: witness Tarbellian Pyrenees and the shores of Santones' Ocean; witness Saône and swift Rhône and great Garonne, and Loire, blue stream of the blonde Carnutes. Or, Cydnus, shall I sing of you, who blue-surfaced moves gently through peaceful waters with its silent waves. Or how chilling Taurus with its heavenly summit extending to the clouds, feeds the unshorn Cilicians? Why should I recount how the white dove, which is sacred in Syropalestine, flies unharmed through towns. And how Tyre, the first town that learned to entrust the ship to the wind, gazes out from her towers upon the immense sea-plain?

Lines 9-20 contain a geographic progression from the west to the (south)east through countries that were linked with Messalla's exploits: from Gallia in the west (11-12), to Cilicia in Asia Minor (15-16), to Syria at the eastern end of the Mediterranean (17-18), to Tyre, the capital of the Phoenicians (19-20), located south from Syra, to its final destination: Egypt (21-28).[425]

If we compare this passage with lines 21-28 in which Egypt is described in terms of its standard topoi, we notice the following parallels. Designating Egypt by the Nile and its characteristics (21-22) is already anticipated as Gallia is described by its rivers: four rivers – Saône (*Arar*), Rhône (*Rhodanus*), Garonne (*Garunna*) and Loire (*Liger*) – are mentioned in two lines (11-12). The two immediately following lines describe the characteristics of another river, the Cilician river Cydnus, creating a nice transition from the west to the east. The immeasurable length of the Nile touched upon by mentioning its unknown source (23-24) resonates with the lines addressed to Mount Taurus in Cilicia whose gigantic measurements are stressed by describing it as touching the clouds with its peak (15-16). The capacity of the Nile to bring fertility to scorched acres (25-26) can also be paralleled: Mount Taurus, while being cold (*frigidus*), is able to feed the local people.[426] Furthermore, the subject of foreign religious customs (27-28) has already been introduced by the white dove that was sacred to the Syrian goddess Astarte (17-18).

[425] Compare Valerius Flaccus 1.15-21, for a similar image of the Roman world in which east and west come together under Roman rule. Cf. Zissos 2008, 89-90; Manolaraki 2013, 134.
[426] See Moore 1989, 425-427 for 'juxtaposed opposites' in lines 9-28.

Regarding the juxtaposition of *barbara* and *docta* referring to Egyptian youth (28), it is important to note that *pubes barbara* is also a reference to the local people of Cilicia, who are called 'unshaved' (*intonsos*), with the connotation of unpolished or uncivilized. Furthermore, the adjective *doctus* (28) was used a couple of lines earlier (19-20) when the Phoenicians enter the scene through their invention of sea-faring. And the topic of the first inventor also foreshadows the role of Osiris as the bringer of civilization in lines 29-38. Thus, all topics touched upon in the description of Egypt (21-28) have already been introduced by previous lines, embedding Egypt in an ethnographical discourse where foreign people are described by their land, its climate and agriculture, and their customs.[427]

The ingredients of the catalogue of Messalla's foreign exploits (9-28) are analogous to formal characteristics of ancient ethnographies described in modern studies. These formal characteristics of ethnography are present in concise form in the information Tibullus supplies about Egypt: 1. the 'physical geography' of Egypt is represented by the Nile as its most important feature; 2. Egypt's 'climate' is referred to as warm and dry (*Sirius, arentes agros, nullos imbres, arida herba*); 3. the 'agricultural produce' of Egypt is explained by calling it a fertile land dependent on the inundation of the Nile (*fertilis aestiua Nilus abundet aqua*); 4. the 'features of the inhabitants' are touched upon by the adjective *barbara*; and finally 5. mentioning the religious customs of the Egyptians can be interpreted as a 'social institution'.[428] Although these kinds of ethnographies are mostly part of historiographies and geographies such as the work of Herodotus, Diodorus, Strabo, and to a lesser extent of the Elder Pliny, they can also be found in Roman poetry.[429]

Thus, Egypt in Tibullus 1.7 is introduced and approached ethnographically.[430] This realization has fundamental consequences for the

[427] Good introductions to the ancient ethnographic traditions are Murphy 2004, 77-87; Rives 1999, 11-21.

[428] In general ethnographies have five features: 1) physical geography, 2) climate, 3) agricultural produce or mineral resources etc., 4) origins and features of the inhabitants, 5) political, social and military organization, for this list see Thomas 1982, cf. Rives 1999. Not every ethnography contains all of these ingredients, cf. Murphy 2004, 80 ff.

[429] For ethnographies in Horace, Virgil and Lucan, see Thomas 1982.

[430] Previously, scholars have pointed to other models than ethnographies for lines 9-20. It is clear that the geographical pattern from west to east that these lines contain has parallels in other Roman literary works in which it is used as an organizing device

interpretation of this poem as the ethnographical framework activates concepts of Egypt that can be found in other works containing ethnographical elements such as Herodotus' second book, Strabo's 17th book, and particularly

to enumerate diverse geographical locations. It can also be employed to suggest universal coverage, see for instance Catullus 11.1-12 where an enumeration of lands ordered by the path of the sun demonstrates that Catullus' true friends Furius and Aurelius will follow him everywhere. For examples of this geographical pattern in Latin literature see Ball 1983, 111. Quinn 1972, 163, on Catullus 11: 'The three alternatives, Ia ('the Far East' represented by India), Ib ('the Middle East' represented by Hyrcania, Arabia, Scythia, Parthia and Egypt) and II (= 'the Far North' represented by the Alps, Gaul and Britain) represent the three main areas of what was for Catullus and his contemporaries the known world.' Furthermore, while lines 9-20 of Tibullus 1.7 are associated with the myths concerning Osiris in which he travels all around the globe and in which he conquers the entire inhabited world with the civilization he brings, they may also evoke universal dominion. According to Hunter 2006, the topic of universal dominion was (re)activated in the age of Alexander the Great's conquests and had been available for us ever since: '[f]rom the pharaohs and the Ptolemies and their poets (cf. Theocritus 17.86, Catullus 66.12), Roman leaders inherited a language of the extension of boundaries as a fundamental kingly duty and a guarantee of the safety of the land.' Although various scholars have argued that Tibullus 1.7 aims at an identification between Osiris and Messalla, the association between Osiris' travels and Messalla's foreign exploits does not seem to be strong. Hunter 2006, 66, has already showed that the identification between Messalla and Osiris remains vague: 'There are indeed suggestions here of the 'Osirian' language of universal conquest, but they remain muted hints: there is a bit of the western Ocean (v. 10), there is the east, but only the eastern Mediterranean, there are the Taurus mountains whose cold (v.16) suggests the northern wastes, though the range itself is in south central Turkey, and there is burning Egypt to suggest the south, although a much deeper south could in fact be imagined (cf. Theocritus 7.113-14, Virgil, Aeneid 6.794-7). There was, after all, room for only one living Osiris-Dionysus, and that was not (or was no longer) Messalla.' But even when a parallel is created between Osiris and Messalla in these lines, an association between these lines and military success seems unlikely. Comparison to Roman texts influenced by pharaonic and Ptolemaic rhetoric of a global empire – of which August's *Res Gestae* is the most prominent example – teaches us that Tibullus lines deviate significantly from them. In the first place, these lines do not include triumphal rhetoric. For instance, two other encomia addressed to Messalla do connect remote places with victory and military achievement, see *Catalepton* 9 and the *Panegyric of Messalla*. Secondly, these lines do not suggest that Messalla has extended the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Thirdly and most important, they stand out for their geographical and ethnographical information that goes beyond identifying regions by their rivers. It has already been argued with regard to these lines that Messalla is portrayed as a 'polished diplomat' who is 'studying scenic wonders, exploring foreign countries, and observing different customs', Ball 1983, 112.

Diodorus Siculus' first book. The guiding principle of their descriptions of Egypt was amazement. Egypt was a wondrous region in their eyes whose customs did not lead to rejection – nor always to approval – but were a cause for astonishment and wonder. In their study of the conception of Egypt in literary sources, Smelik and Hemelrijk conclude their treatment of Herodotus' second book as follows: 'Herodotus' attitude towards foreign nations is typical of ancient Greek ethnography in general, which is characterized to a large extent by curiosity for the unknown; possible feelings of superiority remain in the background. As distinct from their Roman contemporaries, Strabo and Aelian (both authors who worked in a Roman context, but wrote in the Greek tradition) show the same attitude to their writings. This indicates that ethnographic works such as these are a genre in its own right.'[431] Standard topoi of the ethnographical treatises of Egypt are: the extraordinary features of the Nile, Egypt's fertility and wealth, its remarkable animals and vegetation, its great monuments, its wisdom and antiquity. Although Egypt as presented in ethnographical works could have been used as a way to reflect on the Greek or Roman world, it was certainly not the foil that it became in Augustan poetry, employed to highlight Greek or Roman identities. Furthermore, presenting the general qualities of Egypt's land, climate, agriculture and customs equals placing it in a timeless vacuum. Hence, framed in an ethnographical tradition, Tibullus' image of Egypt was disconnected from the context of Actium and, thus, also from its function as a negative mirror of Rome.

3.2. *The literary tradition*

After a general ethnographical description of Egypt, one subject is elaborated further: Egypt's deity Osiris (ll. 29-48). By an in depth analysis of the full discursive and literary context – but covering different elements than previous studies, see pp. 182-187 – my study will address the question of what concept of Egypt is evoked by Tibullus' description of Osiris. Tibullus mentions three beneficial deeds of Osiris:

[431] Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1876.

primus aratra manu sollerti fecit Osiris
et teneram ferro sollicitavit humum,
primus inexpertae conmisit semina terrae
pomaque non notis legit ab arboribus.
hic docuit teneram palis adiungere vitem,
hic viridem dura caedere falce comam;
illi iucundos primum matura sapores
expressa incultis uva dedit pedibus.

Osiris was the first to make ploughs with his skilled hand and to disturbe the young earth with iron. He first entrusted seed to the untried land, and gathered fruits from unfamiliar trees. He taught to add the young grape-vine to the pole, he taught to prune green foliage with the solid sickle. For him the ripe grapes, squeezed by uncivilized feet, first produced their pleasant tastes.

Osiris is praised here as the discoverer and propagator of agriculture (29-30), arboriculture (31-32), and viticulture (33-36). In this passage the repetition of *primus* (29), *primus* (31) and *primum* (35) emphasizes the theme of the 'first inventor' (πρῶτος εὑρετής).[432] This theme together with the beneficence Osiris brought to mankind – he teaches (*docuit*, 33) the uncivilized people (here indicated by their *incultis pedibus*, 36) what he has discovered – are standard ingredients of hymns. Regarding the specific 'aretalogy' of Osiris in Tibullus 1.7, this was at least part of the Greco-Roman mythology of Osiris as Diodorus Siculus relates similar information in his narrated version of the hymn of Osiris. Considering Egyptian hymns to Osiris and hymns to the Nile – Osiris is being identified with the Nile after all in Tibullus 1.7 – the attribution of these kinds of benefactions to Osiris may have been grounded in ancient Egyptian conceptions.[433] It has also been argued that Tibullus' structure of this passage with the repetition of *primus* is modelled after the aretalogies of Isis and Osiris.[434] Hence, these lines may have been a direct reference to the cult practices of Isis and Osiris in the Roman world and may have had a religious connotation only. However, considering that an ethnographical frame formed the overture to the hymn to Osiris, another concept of Egypt – besides that of Egypt interpreted within a framework of

[432] For the theme of the first inventor, see p. 62, n. 172.
[433] See Koenen 1976, 142-144, for references to Egyptian sources.
[434] Koenen 1976, 146-147.

'culti orientali' – is activated. Diodorus Siculus' book one forms the key to understanding which concept Tibullus is probably aiming at in his poem.[435]

In Diodorus Siculus, Osiris is presented as a human being – he is one of the gods who was once mortal, but gained immortality because of his benefactions for mankind (Diod. 1.13) – of whom great deeds were known.[436] Diodorus specifies Osiris' benefactions. He was said to be the first to make mankind give up cannibalism, because he taught men the cultivation of wheat and barley: grains that were discovered by Isis (Diod. 1.14.1). Osiris also founded Thebes in Egypt and built a temple to his parents Zeus (Ammon) and Hera (Diod. 1.15.1-3). Apart from agriculture, Osiris also taught mankind how to cultivate wine (Diod. 1.15.8). Diodorus reports how Osiris gathered an army and visited every region of the world to propagate his knowledge of viticulture and agriculture in order to gain immortality for these great deeds. Thus, Diodorus Siculus' image of Osiris as the one who brought civilization to the world is very similar to Tibullus' representation of this Egyptian god.

Regarding the role Egypt plays in Diodorus Siculus' Universal History, Osiris embodies *the* qualities of Egypt that gave this region its prominent place – Diodorus starts with the history of Egypt – in this work that covers the origin of the world down to Diodorus' time in 40 books. Diodorus notes in the introduction that he chose to start with the antiquities of the barbarians not because he thought these peoples were older, but for narrative reasons: he did not wish to interrupt the history of Greece with tales of other peoples (Diod. 1.9.5). Egypt was for him the logical place to start since it 'is the region where mythology places the origin of the gods, where the earliest observations of the stars are said to have been made, and where, furthermore, many noteworthy deeds of great men are recorded' (ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον θεῶν τε γενέσεις ὑπάρξαι μυθολογοῦνται, αἵ τε τῶν ἄστρων ἀρχαιόταται παρατηρήσεις εὑρῆσθαι λέγονται, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις πράξεις ἀξιόλογοι καὶ πολλαὶ μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν ἱστοροῦνται, Diod. 1.9.6). Based on the parallel between Diodorus' image of Osiris and that of Tibullus' presentation of this god I suggest that the latter activates images of Egypt as a prominent region in world history, a

[435] Modern studies of Tib. 1.7 generally note the similarities between Diodorus Siculus' and Tibullus' description of Osiris. They, however, do not argue about the implications of such a resemblance.

[436] The mortal Osiris and Isis need to be contrasted with the gods Osiris and Isis that were believed to be eternal and first, Diod. 1.11.1.

pioneer of civilization. In the next couple of sections, I wish to discuss a possible effect of this image of Egypt on the interpretation of the poem.

3.3. *The relation between ancient Egypt and present Rome*

Considering the relation between Egypt and Rome in this poem two themes are equally present: domination and incorporation. The poem seems to present Egypt as one of the foreign countries subdued by Rome. At the end of the poem, when Messalla's construction works on the Via Latina are mentioned, a reference is made to Rome's conquest as *opibus .. tuis* (59) likely refers to booty (see p. 170, n. 379). Moreover, the Via Latina, a road to Rome, metonymically highlights Rome's central position in the world. In this context it can be argued that Egypt is represented as a province dominated by Rome. However, at the same time it is also depicted as an integral part of the Roman Empire. An analysis of lines 37 to 54, which convey a fusion of different addressees, will clarify this.[437]

Lines 37 to 54 follow directly after the lines in which Osiris is portrayed as the inventor of agriculture, arboriculture and viticulture. Tibullus dwells on Osiris' last invention, wine, which introduces Bacchus and his cult (37-48). Thereafter, the focus shifts to the birthday-party of Messalla (49-54):

ille liquor docuit voces inflectere cantu,
movit et ad certos nescia membra modos,
Bacchus et agricolae magno confecta labore
pectora tristitiae dissoluenda dedit.
Bacchus et adflictis requiem mortalibus adfert,
crura licet dura conpede pulsa sonent.
non tibi sunt tristes curae nec luctus, Osiri,
sed chorus et cantus et levis aptus amor,
sed varii flores et frons redimita corymbis,
fusa sed ad teneros lutea palla pedes
et Tyriae vestes et dulcis tibia cantu
et levis occultis conscia cista sacris.
huc ades et Genium ludis Geniumque choreis
concelebra et multo tempora funde mero:
illius et nitido stillent unguenta capillo,

[437] Regarding these lines, Lowell Bowditch 2011, 104-115, who focusses on gender specifics in love poetry argues for the importance of the theme of Roman domination over Egypt as Osiris is adorned here with female characteristics.

et capite et collo mollia serta gerat.
sic venias hodierne: tibi dem turis honores,
liba et Mopsopio dulcia melle feram.

> This liquor taught voices to modulate to the melody and moved ignorant limbs to certain rhythms. Bacchus causes the breast of the countryman when it is worn-out from heavy toil, to be relieved of sadness. Bacchus brings rest to shattered mortals, although harsh fetters clatter up their legs. Not associated with you are sad sorrows or grief, Osiris, but song and dance and light love, variegated flowers and a head encircled with ivy-berries, a saffron robe extended to soft feet, clothes of Tyrian purple, the sweet-sounding pipe, and light basket that shares the secret of holy rites. Hither come, and honor the Genius with games and dances, and drench his temples with plenty of wine: let perfumes drip from his bright hair, and let him carry soft garlands on head and neck carry. Come like this, spirit of the day [Genius]: and let me honor you with incense and bring you cake sweetened with Mopsopus' honey.

In this passage Osiris is first interpreted as Bacchus via his invention of wine (37-52), and thereafter Osiris/Bacchus is fused with the Genius. I will start by discussing the identification of Osiris as Bacchus, which is prepared by *ille liquor* (37). It is not clear, either grammatically or interpretatively, whether *ille liquor* refers to wine and takes up *iucundos .. sapores* (35) or whether it means 'he, as liquor' and refers to Osiris, who is said to be the first to have taught mankind to cultivate wine in previous lines.[438] Either way, *ille liquor* forms the bridge between Osiris and Bacchus. Pointing at the anaphora, Maltby argues: '*hic* (33), *hic* (34) and *illi* (35), all referring to Osiris, lead naturally to *ille liquor* (37) which prepares the way for the introduction of Bacchus.'[439] The identification of Osiris as Bacchus that goes back at least to Herodotus, stimulates perceptions of Bacchus as the *god* Osiris and not only as his invention wine, certainly when Osiris' name is mentioned again in line 43.[440] Regarding lines 43-48, Koenen draws our attention to the similarities

[438] See especially Murgatroyd 1980, *ad* 49-50.
[439] Maltby 2002, *ad loc*.
[440] Murgatroyd 1980, *ad* 49-50, discusses the meandering identity of Osiris/Bacchus as god and, by metonymy, as wine in lines 27-49. See also Hunter 2006, 68, who by focusing on metonymy as a tool to explore 'religious and poetic ideas' gives Tib. 1.7.35-42 as an example to argue 'the use of the name of the inventor for the thing invented (e.g.) *Bacchus* used for 'wine', *Ceres* for 'grain') is one of the most familiar types of metonymy.'

between the cults of Bacchus and that of Isis and Osiris.[441] This overlap stresses Osiris' Bacchic identity, but by literally mentioning Osiris again in the context of cult practices it also re-activates the myths of Osiris and his benefactions other than viticulture (29-36, see the previous section). Thus, formulating an answer to the question of who is invited to celebrate the birthday party of Messalla in line 49 (*huc ades*), the addressee is probably all three based on the combination of discursive context, literary tradition and possible references to cult practices: it is a hybrid of the god Osiris, the god Bacchus, and their discovery wine.[442]

In lines 49-52 Osiris/Bacchus/wine is summoned to come to the birth-day party of Messalla and to honor the Genius of Messalla in various ways. The Genius was a Roman god, associated with family cults such as that of the Lares, Penates and Vesta, which can be described as a guardian spirit. It accompanied a man from his birth to his death and was worshipped especially on his birthday.[443] In line 53 we read *sic venias hodierne*. This line is probably addressed to the Genius. *Hodierne* should probably be understood as the vocative of the adjective formed from *hodie* and thus, the translations of *sic venias hodierne* should be: Come like this, spirit of the day (= Genius). *Sic* refers, then, to lines 49-52 which list the circumstances of his coming.[444] However, this is the sole instance in Latin literature of the use of *hodierne* with reference to the Genius. We cannot assess how unusual the employment

[441] Koenen 1976, 152, points at the robe that both wore (Dionysus in Aristophanes and statues of Osiris in Plutarch), but he especially stressed the *cista* that in the cults of both gods was of extreme importantce. Koenen relates the parallels between the two cults to the god Sarapis: 'The god to whom Tibullus turns is really the god of the mysteries in whose person Dionysos and Osiris are united; his true name, it turned out before, is Sarapis.'

[442] Murgatroyd 1980, *ad* 49-50, wonders why 'Osiris, or indeed any god, should be summoned to a feast worshipping the Genius of Messalla', and argues for a personification of wine to stimulate the festivities. But, his wondering may not be justified, see Maltby, *ad loc*. who takes Osiris to be the addressee and interprets *huc ades* in the context of an invitation of a god which is 'a standand literary form, the cletic hymn' and provides parallels in Roman literature. See also Koenen 1976, 155, who also takes Osiris as the one invited and relates the presence of Osiris at a birthday party to the Egyptian ritual in which Osiris was 'at once guest and host' at parties that commemorate special occasions such as the 'birth of a child or a young man's coming of age'.

[443] See Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.187-189: *scit Genius, natale comes qui temperat astrum, / naturae deus humanae mortalis in unum / quodque caput.* See also Rose 1928.

[444] See Maltby 2002, *ad loc*., for a similar interpretation of *hodierne* and *sic*.

is of this word in this context for Tibullus' readers, and whether they would have linked it immediately to the Genius, but it may have been Tibullus aim to use an unusual word to confuse the identities of the gods. In the first place, it would take up the topic of mixing identities as he did before with Osiris and Bacchus. Secondly, the gifts for the god addressed by '*hodierne*' certainly do not clarify which god is honored. *Liba*, cakes offered to the gods, and incense are suitable gifts for the Genius as well as for Osiris in his role as Bacchus, certainly when the *liba* were sweetened with honey as is the case in our text.[445] Considering Bacchus' discovery of incense and honey, Osiris' identity as Bacchus may have been even more pronounced by mentioning these gifts. Thus, at this stage of the poem, Osiris in his role as Bacchus becomes confused with the Genius.[446] The poem does not give any further solutions to clarify the god addressed, because after line 52 Tibullus turns to another addressee, *at tibi*: Messalla himself, and leaves the topic of Osiris behind.

Recapitulating the appearance of Osiris from the moment he is introduced to the last reference to him, we can see that he is molded into a Roman frame. The first time Osiris is mentioned, he appears in an Egyptian context as a manifestation of the Nile (*te canit utque suum pubes miratur Osirim / barbara, Memphiten plangere docta bovem*, 'The barbarous people taught to bewail the ox of Memphis, celebrates and admires you as their own Osiris.').[447] Thereafter the Hellenized Osiris appears with his civilizing inventions, leading to an identification with Bacchus as we have seen above (29-52). Finally, Osiris in his role as Bacchus in the Roman homely context is merged with the Genius of Messalla (53-54). Thus, the Egyptian Osiris/Nile is domesticated into a Roman household god.

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[445] *Liba* sweetened with honey were offered to Dionysus (Liber) at the Liberalia, see Maltby 2002, *ad loc*. for references to Ovid. Incense and honey were offered to the Genius in Tib. 2.2.3ff.

[446] Koenen 1976, 155 draws a similar conclusion but on slightly different grounds. He interprets *hodierne* as *hodie* and translates it with 'today'. Based on the similarity of *huc ades* with *sic venias*, he argues that the latter is also addressed to Osiris. According to him *huc ades* already implicates a reference to an invitation of the Genius as similar words can be found, *ipse .. genius adsit*, in another poem of Tibullus: 2.2.5. According to him 'the two beings, Osiris-Dionysos alias Sarapis and the genius, have become very similar here. They belong together.' He draws a parallel with findings in Pompeii and Herculaneum where 'in the shrines of the lares we find the gods of the Isis mysteries in company with the traditional gods of the household. Sarapis, Harpokrates, and Anubis can even replace the traditional gods.'

[447] Here *suum .. Osirim* may be significant. It is not 'our' Osiris, but theirs.

It has been suggested that Tibullus' generally friendly portrayal of Egypt in this poem was a way to rehabilitate the region on the Nile after years of hostility.[448] The domestication of Osiris into a Roman household god seems to fit into this pattern of reappraisal, but this domestication is not a form of revaluing Egypt per se. In the first place, this kind of argumentation suggests that only one predominant image of Egypt existed at the time: that of Augustan negative stereotypes. Above I have argued that Tibullus did not invent a new image of Egypt as some kind of counter-reaction to Augustus' hostilities towards Egypt, but at best re-activated an image of Egypt with which the Romans were likely familiar. He presented Egypt in an ethnographic concept that was traditionally relatively void of negative cultural stereotypes. Secondly, domestication, certainly in an imperial context, is a form of subordination. Tibullus makes the 'strange', 'oriental' god Osiris (the Other), 'normal' (like the Self) and this process indicates that the former is thought to be subordinated to the latter.[449] Seen in this context, Tibullus is not revaluating or rehabilitating Egypt, but giving it a subordinated place in the Roman-centered world.

Thus, Tibullus presents us with an ethnocentric worldview. After all his poem takes Rome as the point of departure, travels all over the globe – from the west to the east (see p. 190) – and circles back to Rome. His poem shows how the Egyptian god, Osiris, ends up in Rome. Perhaps we may draw a comparison here with Pliny the Elder's image of Egypt in the *Natural History* (see the first chapter) in which all kinds of foreign things end up in Rome one way or another way. Zooming in on the representation of Egypt in Tibullus 1.7, the domestication of Osiris into the Genius of Messalla is probably flattering for Messalla: he becomes associated with the god's beneficial inventions. But on an imperial scale, the assimilation of Egypt in the Roman Empire is also beneficial for Rome's status: Rome becomes associated with a region that Tibullus has portrayed as being prominent in world history. Even more so, it becomes its ruler.

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[448] For the rehabilitation of Egypt as expressed by this poem, see Konstan 1976, 185, who by demonstrating that Egypt and the Egyptian gods are put on par with Roman gods and Rome (e.g. Osiris is analogous to Jupiter and Egypt is described as a peaceful, bucolic, countryside just as Rome's imagined antiquity) argues that Tibullus' message in this poem concerned Egypt's 'integration into the culure of Rome, and the beginning of a new age'.

[449] See also Rosati 2009, particularly 278, for similar arguments.

4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have focused on the representation of Egypt and the lengthy passage devoted to Egypt and Osiris to explain Tibullus 1.7, a poem known for its positive representation of Egypt. In contrast to previous scholarship that approached it mainly as deviating from normative Roman attitudes towards Egypt, i.e. negative stereotypes, I approached the text as containing one of the many concepts of Egypt. Comparing Tibullus' portrayal of Osiris with that of Augustan literary representation of Isis, it turns out that this representation of Egyptian gods is multidimensional: sometimes they are portrayed as unwanted gods and sometimes they are depicted as beneficial ones. Analysis of Roman historical sources concerning Roman regulation of Egyptian cults directs our attention to this miscellaneous picture too. Augustus restricted ánd promoted the cults of Isis at once. Apparently each context (whether historical or discursive) require a different rendering of Egyptian deities and Egypt in general.

In Tibullus 1.7 Osiris is a beneficial god, but more importantly, the representation of Osiris in the poem's framework of Roman imperialism likely recalls the Roman concept of ancient Egypt that is present in ancient sources from Cicero to Tacitus and beyond. As Tibullus 1.7 is unique in its mixture of different genres, I argued that the genre of ethnography was of vital importance to understand the poem. Because Egypt was framed ethnographically, a literary tradition that is manifest above all in Diodorus Siculus' treatment of Egypt comes to the fore. Egypt's prominent position in world history and its importance for cultural development are highlighted. Osiris is domesticated by identifying him with Bacchus and blurring him with the Genius. This process implicates Roman domination as Osiris is made secondary to his Roman variants. Likewise, *ancient* Egypt, which the Romans admired greatly, becomes dominated by Rome in this poem that starts and finishes with references to Rome's military power and central position in its Empire. The concept of ancient Egypt functions in Tibullus 1.7 in a similar way as in other Roman sources that touch upon its antiquity; it is used to contribute constructively to Roman self-representation. In Tibullus 1.7 it contributes positively to Messalla's ánd, on a larger scale, to Rome's image. Dominating a region with such an admirable ancient history and making this admired past beneficial for Rome's own position in the present world have status-enhancing effects on the latter.