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Egypt and the Augustan Cultural Revolution : an interpretative archaeological overview

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Citation

Aerde, M. E. J. J. van. (2015, April 23). *Egypt and the Augustan Cultural Revolution : an interpretative archaeological overview*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/32818>

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Title: Egypt and the Augustan Cultural Revolution : an interpretative archaeological overview

Issue Date: 2015-04-23

EGYPT AND THE AUGUSTAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION
An interpretative archaeological overview

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op donderdag 23 april 2015
klokke 13.45 uur

door

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in 1983

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Afdeling Klassieke en Mediterrane Archeologie

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i. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this doctoral thesis has proven to be a rite of passage in many different ways. It has especially brought home to me that no PhD research can be undertaken without supervision, encouragement, and a great deal of practical support. I have been fortunate on all these accounts, with the continuous feedback and camaraderie of my research team as well as with an international network of academic support from which I have greatly benefited during these past years.

More than anyone I wish to thank my thesis supervisor Miguel John Versluys, for envisioning the topic of this dissertation and entrusting it into my care. Five years on from our initial meeting, Versluys has become a true mentor without whom this PhD would never have found its feet. I am truly grateful to have been welcomed as part of his research project *Cultural innovation in a globalising society: Egypt in the Roman World* and am proud that my work, albeit for a small part, has been able to contribute to Versluys' continuing research on the workings of Roman material culture.

I am likewise indebted to my fellow team members Maaïke Leemreize, Eva Mol, and Sander Müskens, who have become dear friends as well as respected colleagues. Their feedback and friendship have been invaluable for the development of my PhD on both professional and personal levels.

I also wish to thank Natascha Sojc, my promotor, for her interest in my progress and her always astute feedback. By taking me on board her Domus Flavia excavation campaign in Rome, she allowed me to get first-hand acquainted with the Augustan Palatine contexts and introduced me to many valuable contacts on the subject.

Over the past five years I have been able to perform my research and write up my dissertation in stimulating academic environments in Italy, the UK and the Netherlands along with the support of expert scholars, many of whom have become friends in the process. Versluys' VIDI project at Leiden University has been the main support of my work, but this PhD would not have been possible without the continuing support that I was fortunate to receive from the Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut Rome (KNIR). By granting me their research scholarship for a successive four years they enabled my access to the Roman contexts and objects discussed in this thesis, as well as to their outstanding academic facilities and hospitality during my time in Rome. Special thanks go to Gert-Jan Burgers, who supervised my progress at KNIR. I would also like to thank Marieke van den Doel for her interest in our research project and for the pleasant collaboration during the 'Egypt in Rome' MA courses that we organised together at KNIR.

In Rome, my research was further enabled by Maurizio Rulli from the Soprintendenza Archeologia di Roma (Palatine office), and Cinzia Conti, curator of wall paintings at the Palazzo Altemps Museo Nazionale Romano. I am grateful to Stefan Zink of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) for sharing his new insights on the Apollo Palatinus temple and for generously allowing me to use his plans and digital models. I also wish to thank Christopher Smith, director of The British School in Rome, and Richard Neudecker of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome (DAI), for their interest and feedback.

In London I was fortunate to be introduced to Richard Parkinson, then curator of The British Museum Department of Egypt and Sudan and currently Professor of Egyptology at Oxford University, who welcomed me to The British Museum collection and archives with great hospitality. My thanks also go to Paul Roberts, curator of The British Museum Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, who assisted me in my analysis of Roman cameo glass fragments. I am likewise indebted to Andrew Ritchie CBE and Roger Llewellyn, Director and Dean of Goodenough College London respectively, who have supported and promoted my research in London and helped me gain valuable academic contacts.

Special thanks go to Laurent Bricault, Professor of Roman History at Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, and the 'Isiaci' research group, including Richard Veymiers, Valentino Gasparini and Marion Casaux, for their collaboration, feedback and friendship. Especially Veymiers' extensive work on gems has been of great value to my studies. I also wish to thank Julie Lejsgaard Christensen from the Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen for her help with my glass and gem analysis.

I am grateful to Olaf Kaper for his valuable insights and corrections regarding the egyptological content of this thesis, and to Alex Geurds for his advice on 'bundling' and anthropological theory. I wish to thank Caroline Vout and Frits Naerebout for their very helpful methodological insights and feedback. I am indebted to Paul Meyboom for his constant encouragement and expertise throughout these five years. Special thanks go to Hanna Stöger for her support and hospitality. Furthermore, I wish to thank Caroline van Eck, David Fontijn, and Ineke Sluiter for their support and feedback. Special thanks go to Eric Moormann for introducing me to Classical Archaeology and the approach of 'creative emulation' during my student years.

The final year of this research was partially funded by a scholarship from the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. I especially wish to thank Alida Beekman for generously contributing her Beekman Fonds to this scholarship.

I am grateful to Nolan Thijs for the wonderful drawings he provided for this thesis. I furthermore wish to thank Annalize Rheeder, Coen van Galen, Maarten van Deventer, Lennart Kruijer, Raphael Hunsucker, Leon Coret, Lisa Götz, Chiara Piccoli, Marleen Termeer, Puck Wildschut, Erin Downey, Martin Georgiev, Jorge Balça, Jessica Cottis, Rosie Hinchliffe, Catherine Wilson, Olaf de Groot, and Fedor van Rijn for their ongoing friendship, support, and feedback. Special thanks go to Nathan Lea and Heather Lea for their friendship and hospitality to me in London, and to my sister, Thessa van Aerde, for her support and hospitality throughout my (many) nomadic years.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my parents for their support and interest throughout my academic trials and tribulations. I wish to thank them for encouraging, and sharing, my life-long curiosity about the world.

ii. THESIS SUMMARY

As part of the VIDI project 'Cultural innovation in a globalising society: Egypt in the Roman world' at Leiden University, this PhD research explores manifestations of Egypt in the material culture of the city of Rome during the Augustan period. This period was a crucial turning point for the urban landscape of Rome, which was characterised by cultural diversity. Previous studies focus primarily on Greek influences on the development of Augustan material culture, while Egypt remains neglected or simply categorised as exoticism or Egyptomania. This research, in contrast, set out to investigate whether or not 'Egypt' constituted an integral part of Augustan material culture during this period. By comprising for the first time a comprehensive and interpretative overview of manifestations of Egypt in Augustan Rome – including public monuments, paintings, and architectural elements as well as pottery, gems, and jewellery from private contexts– a wide variety of case studies could be conducted, among which object reappraisals as well as new finds and contextual analyses were featured. By focusing on the archaeological data, this study demonstrates that Egypt was not an exotic Outsider in Rome, but constituted a remarkably diverse part of Roman material culture and the Augustan urban landscape, and played an integral role in the inherently flexible Augustan material culture repertoire.

iii. RESEARCH PROJECT

This doctoral thesis is part of the project ‘*Cultural innovation in a globalising society. Egypt in the Roman world*’, initiated by Miguel John Versluys. Taking archaeological, textual-historical and archaeometric perspectives, this interdisciplinary project aims to gain more insight into the functioning of Roman (material) culture by means of research on the appropriation of Egypt. Studies on the Roman perception of Egypt, concerning both textual and archaeological sources, generally approach Egypt from fixated and normative concepts. For example, Aegyptiaca have traditionally been interpreted within a framework of ‘*culti orientali*’ or Egyptomania. This research project, in contrast, demonstrates that Egypt is a constituent of what we call ‘Roman’. This implies that the dichotomy Rome versus Egypt should be approached with care. Briefly put: Egypt is not merely the stereotypical Other, but also the Self.

This dissertation contributes to the project by examining the role of Egyptian material culture in Augustan Rome in particular. The Augustan period was a crucial turning point for the urban landscape of Rome, which was characterised by cultural diversity. The majority of studies tend to focus on Greek influences on the development of Augustan material culture, while Egypt remains neglected or simply categorised as exoticism or Egyptomania. This research, in contrast, set out to investigate whether manifestations of Egyptian were in fact an integral and diverse part of the Augustan urban landscape.¹

Of the other three doctoral studies in the project, Maaike Leemreize studies the Roman representation of Egypt in the literary discourse. By emphasising the diversity of Roman perceptions of Egypt, she demonstrates how Egypt had both a positive and negative effect on Roman self-representation.² Eva Mol examines Egyptian objects from Roman house contexts in Pompeii. She analyses how so-called Aegyptiaca could integrate in a Roman context and how these objects were subsequently used and experienced in a much wider scope than that which we call ‘Egypt’.³ Sander Müskens investigates the material properties of Egyptian objects in Rome. In contrast to previous research, he does not emphasise the representative aspect of objects but rather their material aspects, and to this purpose he has set up a comprehensive characterisation of materials used for Aegyptiaca in Rome.⁴

Over the past years, in the framework of the project ‘*Cultural innovation in a globalising society. Egypt in the Roman world*’, Miguel John Versluys has developed a new approach towards understanding Egypt and Egyptian material culture in the Roman world, as explored throughout a number of recently published

¹ See also: Van Aerde, M.E.J.J. 2013. ‘Concepts of Egypt in Augustan Rome: Two case studies of cameo glass from The British Museum’, in: *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* (BMSAES) 20: 1-23.

² See also: Leemreize, M.E.C. 2014. ‘The Egyptian Past in the Roman Present’, in: J. Ker & C. Pieper (eds.) *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World*. Leiden/Boston: 56-82.

³ See also: Mol, E.M. & M.J. Versluys, 2014. ‘Material culture and imagined communities in the Roman world: group dynamics and the cults of Isis’, in: R. Raja, J. Rüpke (eds.), *A companion to the archaeology of lived religion*. Malden & Oxford, in press.

⁴ See also: Müskens, S. 2014. ‘A New Fragment of an Architectonic Hathor-Support from Rome: Aegyptiaca Romana Reconsidered’, in: L. Bricault, R. Veymiers (eds.), *Bibliotheca Isiaca* III. Toulouse, in press.

articles.⁵ In summary: by analysing the main (conceptual) problems, Versluys argues that ‘Egypt’ is not so much an ethnic or geographical concept, but rather a cultural concept that develops over time all across the Mediterranean and Near East: in other words, every context got the ‘Egypt’ it needed. Building on that perspective, Versluys furthermore focuses on the Roman world in particular, and demonstrates that Egypt was (made) part of the Roman *koine*, through case studies provided from the Flavian and Hadrianic periods. Through this it becomes clear that Egypt had already gained strength as a concept in both the Hellenistic *and* Roman world, with one of the characteristics of the concept of Egypt being its inherent Orientalism. Versluys shows how this was used and functioned –in specific contexts and for specific reasons– in relation to the cults of Isis and the Egyptian gods, and demonstrates how Egypt functioned as a frame within the Roman world in terms of on material culture. Subsequently, the concept of the invention of tradition becomes a point of departure in Versluys’ conclusion that, besides an invented tradition Egypt was also an important haunting tradition within the Roman world, and that material culture played a crucially important role in that process.

⁵ Versluys, M.J. 2010. ‘Understanding Egypt in Egypt and beyond’, in: L. Bricault, M.J. Versluys (eds.), *Isis on the Nile. Egyptian gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Leiden & Boston: 7-36.

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iv. **AUGUSTAN CHRONOLOGY**

Main sources: Syme 1939, Wallace-Hadrill 1993, Galinsky 1996, Galinsky 2012.

BCE

- 63 Gaius Octavius is born in Rome or Velitrae.
- 58 His father Octavius dies. His mother Atia, niece of Gaius Julius Caesar, re-marries Lucius Marcius Philippus.
- 44 Gaius Julius Caesar is assassinated in Rome. Gaius Octavius is posthumously named Caesar's heir, inheriting his property and name: Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Octavian).
Octavian leads Caesar's veterans against the consul Mark Antony, who was to be Caesar's heir until Caesar's final appointment of Octavian.
- 43 Octavian defeats Antony at Munda. A new alliance is made: the triumvirate of Octavian, Antony and Lepidus.
- 42 Brutus and Cassius are defeated at Philippi. Octavian is set to govern the West of the Roman world, Antony the East, and Lepidus Africa.
- 41 Antony meets Cleopatra in Tarsus. Octavian distributes land to the Caesarian veterans.
- 40 Antony marries Octavian's sister Octavia. Octavian marries Scribonia, sister of Sextus Pompeius, to appease Pompeius' threat to the food-supplies of Rome.
- 39 Octavian and Scribonia's daughter Julia is born.
- 37 Octavian divorces Scribonia to marry the young Livia Drusilla. Livia had been married to Tiberius Claudius Nero, a supporter of Antony. She already had his child Tiberius, and was still pregnant with Drusus.
- 36 Octavian and Marcus Agrippa defeat Sextus Pompeius at Naulochus. Lepidus' role in the campaign is considered dubious. Antony invades Parthia with Cleopatra's support, but fails. Octavian takes residency on the Palatine Hill.
- 35-34 Antony and Cleopatra claim the East and name their sons kings. The 'propaganda war' between Antony and Octavian begins. Octavian and Marcus Agrippa are on campaign in Illyria.
- 32 Antony divorces Octavia.

- 31 Antony prepares an invasion fleet, but Octavian defeats them at Actium (Sept. 2). Antony and Cleopatra flee back to Egypt.
- 30 Octavian enters Alexandria (Aug. 1). Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide. Egypt becomes an official province of Rome, albeit with unique status.
- 29 Octavian celebrates a triple triumph in Rome for Actium Alexandria and Illyria (Aug. 13-15).
- 28 Octavian restores many temples in Rome, and builds his Mausoleum at the Campus Martius. The Apollo Palatinus temple is completed and dedicated on the Palatine Hill, situated besides Octavian's house.
- 27 An official Senate meeting (Jan. 13) confirms Octavian's 'restoration of power to the Senate and the people of Rome' and celebrates the return of the institutional government. Octavian is named 'Augustus'.
- 27-24 Augustus campaigns in Gaul and Spain. Marcellus, son of Octavia, marries Augustus' daughter Julia.
- 23 Augustus resigns his consulship and reorganises his influence to tribunician power and an *imperium veto*. Marcellus dies.
- 22 Augustus campaigns in Sicily and the East.
- 21 Julia re-marries Marcus Agrippa.
- 20 Augustus' victory over the Parthians.
- 19 Augustus returns to Rome and celebrates his victories by means of building an altar and triumphal arch. Death of Vergil and publication of the *Aeneid*.
- 18 Passing of *leges Juliae*, Augustus' new laws on marriage and conduct.
- 17 Augustus adopts his grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar as heirs.
- 16-13 Augustus campaigns in Gaul and Germany. Upon victory and return he celebrates by means of building the Ara Pacis Augustae, an altar of peace.
- 13 Augustus has two obelisks erected at the Caesarium in Alexandria.
- 12 Augustus becomes Pontifex Maximus. Lepidus and Marcus Agrippa die.
- 11-10 Augustus returns to Gaul. Julia re-marries Augustus' stepson Tiberius.
- 10 Augustus has two obelisks from Heliopolis transported to Rome, to be erected at the Circus Maximus and as part of the Horologium on the Campus Martius.
- 8 Reorganisation of the city of Rome into fourteen Regions.

- 6 Tiberius is made to share in Augustus' tribunician power after his victories in Germany, but leaves for Rhodes without Augustus' permission and falls out of favour.
- 2 Augustus is named *pater patriae*. The Forum of Augustus is inaugurated. Julia is exiled because of adultery.

CE

- 2 Tiberius returns from Rhodes. Lucius Caesar dies.
- 4 Gaius Caesar dies. Tiberius is named Augustus' heir and regains tribunician power.
- 6-9 Banishment of Marcus Agrippa' son Agrippa Postumus. Rebellion in Pannonia, which Tiberius strikes down.
- 9 Three legions are lost in Germany. Augustus revises his marriage laws.
- 10-12 Tiberius campaigns in Germany.
- 14 Augustus dies (Aug. 19). He is decreed *Divus Augustus* by the Senate (Sept. 17). Tiberius is appointed as Augustus' successor.