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Egypt and the Augustan Cultural Revolution : an interpretative archaeological overview

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OVERVIEW

EGYPT IN AUGUSTAN ROME

3. OVERVIEW: EGYPT IN AUGUSTAN ROME

3.1. The Augustan Residence on the Palatine Hill

In either 43 or 42 BCE, shortly after his official appointment as heir of Gaius Julius Caesar, Octavian purchased a *domus* on the Palatine Hill.¹⁵⁶ The house, previously owned by the orator Hortensius, is described by Suetonius as ‘not remarkable in terms of size or decoration’.¹⁵⁷ Rather than the house itself, however, its location implies a remarkable choice. Situated on the South side of the Palatine Hill, it overlooked the Circus Maximus and was farthest removed from the Forum Romanum – a stark contrast with the *domus* of most patricians and politicians that generally demonstrated their status through the close vicinity of their houses to the political heart of the Roman Republic, the Forum Romanum, at the North side of the Palatine.¹⁵⁸ Various criteria will have been relevant for Octavian’s choice: its vicinity to the temple of Victoria being one¹⁵⁹, and its association with Romulus being another.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, by choosing a *domus* farthest removed from the heart of Republican politics, the Forum, Octavian made a significant political statement: his choice for a house facing and overlooking the Circus Maximus, the most important gathering place of the citizens of Rome for both games and ceremonies, seems to reflect his long-term strategic intentions. Following his initial purchase of Hortensius’ *domus*, Octavian announces plans in 36 BCE to expand his property on the Palatine, by incorporating various other *domus*, and vows to build the Apollo Palatinus temple, with library and terraces, directly neighbouring his own house.¹⁶¹ His residence on the Palatine began as a flexible framework that could be adapted to many different additions, expansions and modifications: as such, the Augustan Palatine complex

¹⁵⁶ The date is given by Velleius Paterculus (*Hist.* II,81) and Cassius Dio (49.15.5). See also: Carettoni 1983, 7; Iacopi 2007, 21; Meyboom 2005; Carandini 2010, 165; Wiseman 2012, 665.

¹⁵⁷ Suet. *Div. Aug.* LXXII, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Galinsky 1996, 215.

¹⁵⁹ Carettoni 1983, 9; Wiseman 1984, 123-128; Hölscher 1985, 89-97; Galinsky 1995, 214-215; Meyboom 2005, 257.

¹⁶⁰ Cassius Dio (53.16.5) points out: ‘[Augustus’ house] gained fame from the Palatine Hill because Romulus had lived there once.’

¹⁶¹ In 36 BCE Augustus announces he is to build the Apollo Palatinus temple and expand his own house complex on the Palatine: ‘Caesar returned victorious to the city [after defeating Sextus Pompeius in 36 BCE] and announced that he was going to mark out a number of houses that he had purchased together through agents in order to create more space for his own house, and he promised to build a temple for Apollo with porticos around it.’ Velleius Paterculus 2.81.3. See also Cassius Dio 49.15.5. The Apollo temple and terraces are further explored in paragraph 3.3.

‘exemplifies the spirit not of the pinnacle of Augustus’ reign, but of its beginning’.¹⁶² In comparison, the final paragraph of this chronological overview (3.11) will reflect on how the Forum of Augustus, built thirty-four years later, seems to represent the resulting height and unity of Augustus’ political rise instead.

This initial flexibility of Octavian’s growing Palatine complex by no means diminished its status or visual impact, however. The visual magnificence of the complex is emphasised by a significant number of authors, including Augustan contemporaries such as Propertius and Ovid.¹⁶³ Especially in Ovid’s description the Palatine as a whole has become the Princeps’ accommodation, and the once prominent North side, overlooking the Forum Romanum, has simply become the gateway to the Augustan complex.¹⁶⁴ In many ways, the flexibility of the Augustan Palatine residence can be seen as the first example –or prototype even– of what was to mark Augustus’ political career and, especially, the way he expressed this throughout the material culture of Rome. Even from the initial developments of the complex we can recognise what one might call typical Augustan characteristics, such as its complexity, its ‘evolution’ of different forms and styles according to certain (shifting) contextual needs, and the merging of both ‘dynastic and public objectives’.¹⁶⁵ Starting with the purchase of a not particularly noteworthy domus on the South side of the hill, Octavian here truly begins to set things in motion. The expansions, innovations, visual impact and throughout flexibility of his henceforth growing Palatine residence not only illustrate the ‘cultural revolution’ that was to follow throughout the city, but in fact seem to have formed the initial enabling factor for it to occur in the first place.

The archaeological site of the Augustan Palatine residence is immensely complex. Its chronological layers –even its basic plan– are very difficult to reconstruct.¹⁶⁶ A main reason for this is the nature of the site’s original excavations; the Italian topographer and architect Pietro Rosa was the first to lead a large-scale excavation campaign on the Palatine Hill between 1861-1870.¹⁶⁷ Contextual documentation from this excavation has been virtually non-existent; finds were stored in depositories while their original in situ

¹⁶² Galinsky 1996, 213.

¹⁶³ Propertius 2.31.1-16; Ovid *Tr.* 3.1.59-60. See also: Velleius Paterculus *Hist.* II.81.3; Josephus *BJ* II.6.81.

¹⁶⁴ Ovid *Tr.* 3.1.59-60.

¹⁶⁵ Galinsky 1996, 213.

¹⁶⁶ For an overview of scholarship on the archaeological site of the House of Augustus, see: Richmond 1914; Lugli 1951; Id. 1965; Carettoni 1966; Id. 1983; Tomei 2000; Id. 2004; Zanker 2002; Hoffmann & Wulf 2004; Meyboom 2005, 219-274; Carandini 2010, 151-225; Wiseman 2012, 656-672.

¹⁶⁷ Rosa (1810-1891) worked on behalf of Napoleon III. On his Palatine campaign and remaining records, see now: Tomei 1999.

contexts were not recorded.¹⁶⁸ In 1912 Giacomo Boni ‘rediscovered’ the Imperial Palatine with his *Domus Flavia* campaign, followed by studies of the site currently known as the House of Augustus on the Palatine’s south side was not officially recognised and studied as such until further excavations by the *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma* from the 1960s onwards led by Gianfilippo Carettoni.¹⁶⁹ The complexity of the site is also due to the many changes, deconstructions, reconstructions and expansions inflicted upon the domus by Augustus himself; most likely, early foundations of the initial domus were later used as foundation for the *Apollo Palatinus* temple, terraces and the library complex, and the so-called House of Augustus itself was rebuilt, perhaps even several times.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the subsequent phases of Imperial residency on the Palatine, continuing from the Julian-Claudian emperors to the Flavians up to the Severian emperors, all continued to expand the residential, ceremonial and administrative functions of the growing palatial complex, as a whole, and the intermixed foundations and remains of these buildings have all come to leave their mark on the site.¹⁷¹ As the oldest layer of this Imperial Palatine complex, the Augustan residence became, quite literally, the most deeply buried; hypothetical reconstructions of its original plan, by result, are often the most convoluted and as such remain hotly debated. For example, Zanker suggests that Octavian deliberately chose to build his Palatine residence according to the traditional and rather more modest standards of the Republican domus – especially a non-remarkable one like Hortensius’ domus that he purchased – in order to express the ‘classical austerity’ of his political propaganda programme and convey the identity of an elected Republican politician rather than that of a monarch or dictator.¹⁷² In reaction, Tomei points out that Augustus’ expanding entourage would have required significantly more space, on a practical level, than an austere Republican domus would have allowed.¹⁷³ According to Tomei, Octavian is more likely to have continued purchasing existing Republican domus on the Palatine (especially ones on the South side, such as the so-called House of Livia), and to have incorporated them into an expanding complex to accommodate his equally expanding entourage of family and allies – while at the same time, and especially at first, maintaining an air of Republican (residential) modesty in the style of the residence.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Tomei 1999, 346.

¹⁶⁹ For records of these campaigns, see: Boni 1912-13; Richmond 1914, 193-226; Carettoni 1966; Iacopi 1997.

¹⁷⁰ Lugli 1951; 53-54; Haselberger 2003, 151-197; Iacopi & Tedone 2005 351-378; Zink 2008, 47-63; Id. 2012, 388-402; Wiseman 2012, 657-672.

¹⁷¹ Darwall-Smith 1991, 211-220; Krause 2004, 47; Sojc 2006, 349; Hoffman & Wulf 2004.

¹⁷² Zanker 2002, 105-106.

¹⁷³ Tomei 2004, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Tomei 1998, 31-53; Id. 2004, 7-8.

As opposed to restricting the Augustan residence to the sites referred to as the House of Augustus and the House of Livia neighbouring the area of the Apollo Palatinus temple area, recent finds support the hypothesis that the Augustan complex in fact stretched from the House of Augustus and the Augustan libraries at the South side much farther way to the North of the Palatine, up until the current site of the Flavian Basilica (see fig 4).¹⁷⁵ These finds include sections of marble floors, wall painting fragments, furniture remains and terracotta figurines that can be dated, based on stylistic comparisons as well as pigment and material analysis, to the final decades of the first century BCE, and that were discovered at the areas on the Palatine generally known as Domus Tiberiana and Domus Transitorium; moreover, building remains and foundations, recognisable as from this same period by their opus reticulatum brickwork, were discovered underneath the ‘Lararium’ of the Domus Flavia.¹⁷⁶



Fig. 4. Palatine Hill excavations. The red circle indicates the generally accepted Augustan area. The green circle indicates a hypothetical wider range of the Augustan complex. The yellow dots indicate recent finds (a reappraisal of finds) that may be dated to the Augustan period. Plan (detail) used with kind permission from: Sojc & Rheeder 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Ovid also mentions this site as the gateway to the Augustan Palatine (*Tr.* 3.1.59-60.); by association, it is therefore not unlikely that the actual property of the Augustan residence reached this far too. See also: Meyboom 2005, 262.

¹⁷⁶ Tomei 2004, 8-9, figs. 7, 8, 11, 17; Id. Tomei 2000, 7-9.

The likelihood of this hypothesis was already observed by Paul Meyboom based on building context and literary sources; he reflects on how Octavian created ‘the new symbolic centre of power of the Roman Empire’ by ways of ‘a royal residence in the Hellenistic style’ with a highly visible presence that would have spread across a large section of the south-west Palatine area.¹⁷⁷

Important here, despite the uncertainties and (technical) difficulties regarding the reconstruction of the site itself, is the fact that the Palatine residence as purchased and expanded by Octavian represents the first known chronological context wherein Egyptian manifestations appear in the material culture of Augustan Rome. More precisely, certain Egyptian elements can be recognised in the decorative wall paintings recovered from the sites now known as the House of Augustus and the House of Livia.

These wall paintings remain central in the ongoing debate about the dating of the layers of the Augustan Palatine complex as well as in the study of Roman wall painting according to the so-called Pompeian styles. Together with examples from the villa of Agrippa (often referred to as the ‘Villa della Farnesina’, see section 3.5) and the paintings found inside the pyramid tomb of Gaius Cestius (section 3.6), these wall paintings appear unique to the Augustan period, specifically in the city of Rome and – very briefly summarised – seem to mark a transition from the late second Pompeian style of wall paintings to the early third style.¹⁷⁸ Similar paintings are also found at the site misleadingly known as ‘Aula Isiaca’, also on the Palatine and hypothetically part of the wider Augustan complex, a study of which is included below in this chapter. Rather than intended to contribute a certain angle to the Roman wall painting debate in general, this paragraph highlights and examines the particular Egyptian manifestations as part of the decorative wall paintings of the Augustan Palatine residence, and places these in the context – in this case at the very beginning – of the wider Augustan cultural revolution. The sections of the Augustan residence treated here are the sites known as the ‘House of Augustus’ (which was originally purchased by Octavian in 43-42 BCE and significantly changes since), its subsequent expansion into the ‘House of Livia’ (most likely dated from around 36 BCE) and parts of the site known as ‘Aula Isiaca’.

¹⁷⁷ Meyboom 2005, 247 ff. See also 262: “The ancient visitor who entered Rome from the south or west could not fail to see on top of the Palatine the residence of Augustus, as it consisted of a complex of sanctuaries and secular buildings and rose above the Circus Maximus like a royal Hellenistic acropolis.” See also, in particular on architectural details of on the Augustan Palatine and its (possible) expansion: Gros 1996, 234-239.

¹⁷⁸ Interpretations generally include the late second Pompeian style (especially in case of the House of Augustus) and a development into the early third style (especially in regard to the House of Livia and the ‘Aula Isiaca’). See: Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 42-44, 97; Ling 1991, 31-47; Iacopi 1997, 8-9; Id. 2008, 5-7, 76; Mielsch 2001, 54-66; Meyboom 2005, 219-274. Recently there is also the suggestion that there existed a separate Augustan wall painting ‘sub-genre’, to be placed in between the second and third Pompeian style as a unique manifestation. See: Mols & Moormann 2008, 80.

3.1.1. The House of Augustus

Based on the current remains of the site known as the House of Augustus, the different chronological phases of its original state and subsequent deconstruction and changes are extremely difficult to reconstruct with certainty. The earliest phases from the house that Octavian purchased in 43-42 BCE, still during the period of his triumvirate, have been buried beneath the later constructed terraces and libraries accompanying the Apollo Palatinus temple, which was finished in 28 BCE; most of these remains have collapsed beyond recovery, while other parts were deliberately recycled between 36 BCE–28 BCE to be used as foundation for the Apollo temple and terraces.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, while very hard to demonstrate, it is not unthinkable that certain sections of original domus from 43-42 BCE remained intact in the reconstructed, expanded house alongside the Apollo temple.¹⁸⁰ The plan below shows one of the most recent hypothetical reconstructions and accurate representation of the current remaining phases of the House of Augustus.

As indicated in fig. 5, certain Egyptian manifestations in the decorative wall paintings were found in situ in the current spaces known as ‘oecus’, ‘studium’ and the ‘upper cubiculum’, and –the earliest example– was recovered from the scattered remains of the foundations beneath the temple terraces (the lower dot on the plan). This discovery of this earliest example is only briefly mentioned by Carettoni, and so far it has only been published by De Vos, who mistakes it for fragments of terracotta, without any specific analysis or contextualisation.¹⁸¹ Its whereabouts have been undocumented since De Vos’ publication, but the piece has been recovered in 2011 from the Magazzino dell’Antiquarium del Palatino, and in collaboration with Cinzia Conti, curator of wall paintings at the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, a new study was possible.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ During the 2011 excavation campaign at the Domus Flavia on the Palatine Hill, under supervision of Natasha Sojc, access was granted beneath the Apollo Palatinus temple and terraces; as part of the temple foundations remains of wall types that may be dated to the late Republican era could be recognised, which seem to indicate an earlier phase from the domus originally purchased by Octavian. Most remarkably, remains of decorative wall paintings were discovered among these foundations, with red backgrounds and small ornamental floral patterns. Although small, these do hint at the second Pompeian style that is also featured at the site currently known as the House of Augustus. See also: Lugli 1951; 53-54; Haselberger 2003, 151-197; Meyboom 2005, 219-274; Zink 2008, 47-63; Wiseman 2012, 657-672.

¹⁸⁰ Meyboom 2005, 219-274; Carandini 2010, 151-225; Wiseman 2012, 665-670.

¹⁸¹ Carettoni 1969, 4; De Vos 1980, 13, Tav X, nr. 120.

¹⁸² While participating on the 2011 Palatine campaign under supervision of Natasha Sojc, I was able to track down the piece with the help of Dr. Maurizio Rullo from the Palatine office of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and was able to do a preliminary analysis of the paint layers and pigments of the fragments together with Dr. Conti at the Palazzo Altemps laboratory.

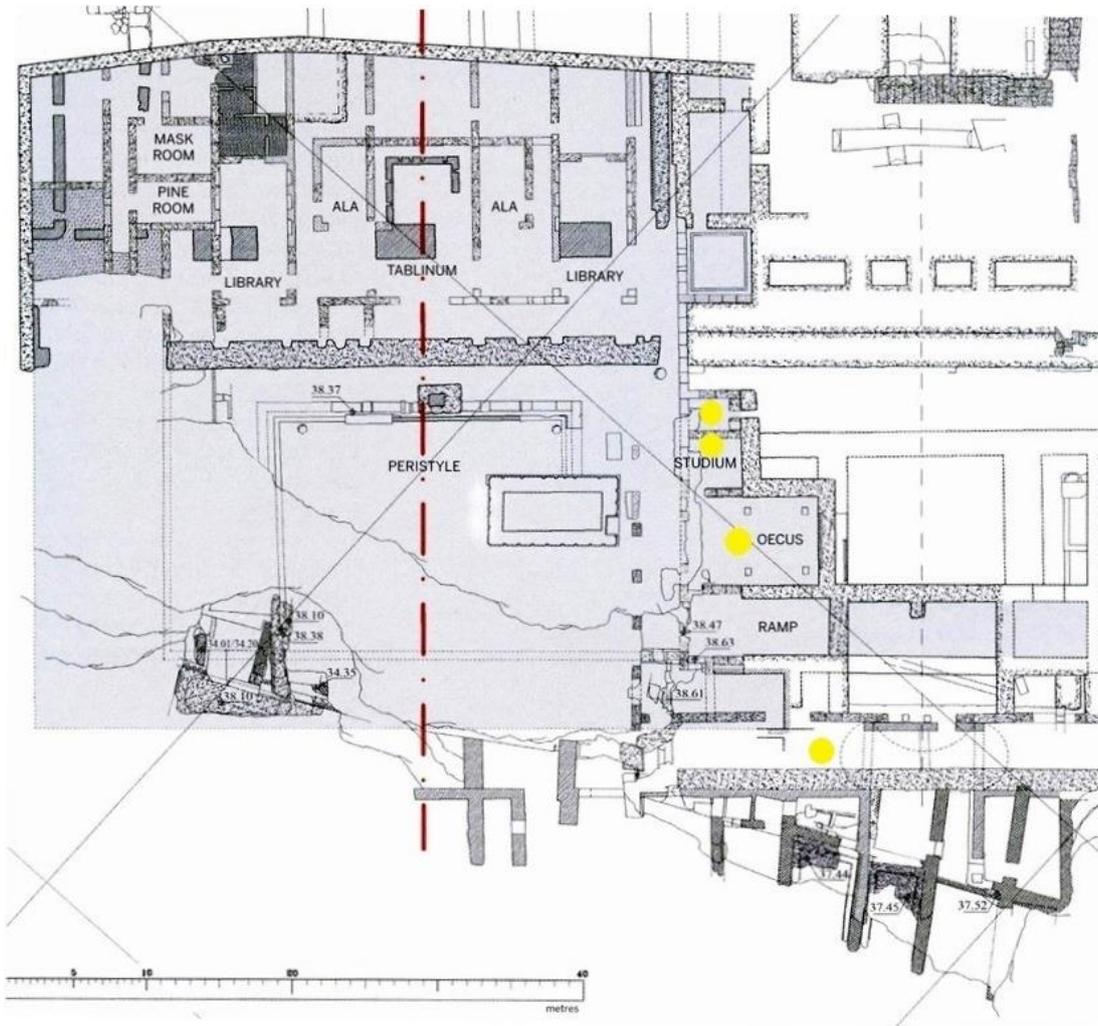


Fig. 5. Plan and hypothetical reconstruction of the House of Augustus on the Palatine. Copyright 2008, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Yellow dots have been added to indicate the findspots of Egyptian manifestation in wall painting decoration.

The archive records moreover confirmed its findspot from the early foundations of the House of Augustus, situated now beneath the temple terraces.¹⁸³ Naturally uncertainty remains; it is not unthinkable that the piece could have dated from a later period and simply ended up among the foundations of the Palatine at some point of time, especially seeing the unusual conditions of its paint scheme as will be explored below. On the other hand, the foundations beneath the terraces do not appear to have been exposed until their nineteenth century excavation, during which time this wall painting fragment likewise appears to have been discovered, though not initially documented.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Personal communication with Cinzia Conti, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Cf. Lugli 1951, 34; Carettoni 1969, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Pietro Rosa initiated excavations of the site of the Apollo Palatinus temple and its surrounding area in 1865. On his method of excavation, interpretation and documentation, see: Lugli 1951, 34; Tomei 1990, 70-77, 88-89; Zink 2008 47-51. Also personal communication on site with Stephan Zink, 2011 and 2012.

Moreover, the pigments used in the paint scheme of the piece, as analysed by Conti, can be identified as pigments that were in use during the late 1st Century BCE, which is another argument in favour of its provenance as part of the early phases of the domus purchased by Octavian in 42-42 BCE, as also indicated by its originally documented findspot.¹⁸⁵

The only existing photograph of the piece, presented by De Vos, shows one large and two smaller fragments belonging to one painted scene (fig.6); only the large fragment and one smaller have been recovered at the Soprintendenza archives (fig.7); the whereabouts of the third fragment are currently unknown.

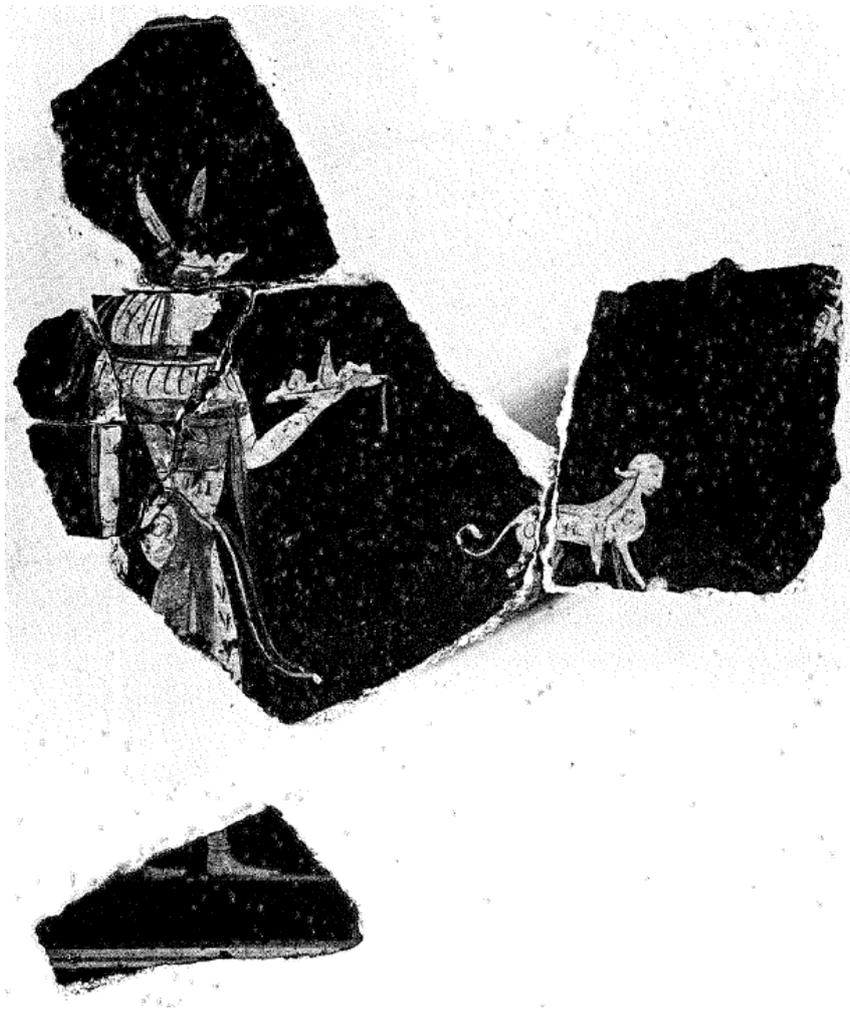


Fig. 6. Wall painting fragments from the House of Augustus on the Palatine.
Source: De Vos 1980, 13, Tav X.

¹⁸⁵ Personal communication with Conti at Palazzo Altemps, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Further analyses of the fragment, among others, are yet to be published. Conti, forthcoming.



Fig. 7. Wall painting fragments from the House of Augustus on the Palatine. Photo: M. van Aerde, with kind permission of the Soprintendenza Archaeologia di Roma.

The piece is not strictly a fresco; the figurative scene depicted on it has been painted on top of the black background, as additional paint layers, and not according to fresco techniques. Only the black background has been applied according to the common Roman method of fresco painting: by applying the water-based pigments directly to a wet background (*tectorium*).¹⁸⁶ The smaller black dots visible on the background are caused by poor preservation conditions, mainly organic influence, and not by specific paint techniques. The paint layers added to the background are characterised by specific brushstrokes and the density of the paint on top of the fresco background. At several places of the figurative scene ‘liquid paint’ can be observed (visible through transparent brushstrokes), for example at the left feather of the figure’s headgear. Most of the figurative scene is characterised by ‘dense paint’ (a thick layer of paint with small blots and dots on the surface); for example at the waist of the figure’s dress. A preliminary sequence of the added paint layers, categorised by colour, can be reconstructed

¹⁸⁶ This method is described by Vitruvius and Pliny the Elder: *Vitr.* 7.5; *Plin. Nat. Hist.* 35.

based on the texture of the brushstrokes and the nature of the known pigments used¹⁸⁷. First layer: white/light yellow (the figure's skin). Second layer: darker yellow (parts of figure's clothing and headgear, as well as sphinx and sistrum). Third layer: bright red (figure's clothing). Fourth layer: darker purple/lilac (parts of the figure's clothing and sphinx). Fifth layer: brown lines (for highlighting details and crude shadow effects).

The larger fragment of the two (fig. 7) features a tall human figure in a static profile pose slightly to the left side of the fragment, with only its left arm partly raised. It is unclear whether the figure is male or female. The figure wears a traditional headcloth with *uraeus* and crowned by two tall feathers which seem to refer to the traditional headgear of Egyptian priests. Two ribbons/garlands with yellow and purple colours matching the two feathers are attached to the back of the *nemes*, at the lower end of the feathers, and reach down to the figure's shoulders. The figure wears a tight-fitting dress decorated with v-shaped and singular lines that may indicate an embroidered pattern. At the waist several ribbons and a larger garland are attached to the dress, in yellow, red and purple colours. The broad collar combined with the *uraeus* crown on the forehead is specifically reminiscent of a traditional Egyptian priest's attire.¹⁸⁸ The figure carries a platter in its partially raised left hand, with what may be pieces of bread or fruit, of which one is conical-shaped; or perhaps it can be identified as a conical vessel. It can be recognised as an offering scene according to traditional Egyptian iconography.¹⁸⁹ In the right lower corner of the fragment the curling tail and hind leg of the sphinx from the second fragment is visible in yellow paints, with details added in purple and brown paint.

The second surviving fragment is considerably smaller (detail, fig. 8 A). The left lower corner of the fragment shows the body of a sphinx –lioness body with human head– in a basic, almost crude rendering in profile, with a colour scheme dominated by yellow and only details in purple and brown paint. The human face of the sphinx is rendered with just a few quick brushstrokes in brown. The purple layer that runs down from the human head across the lioness' back may be meant to represent human hair, with a small bun at the nape of the neck, which indicates it as a Hellenistic version of the traditional Egyptian resting sphinx. The position of the paws is upright and static, with no movement indicated. Especially

¹⁸⁷ This preliminary analysis was done in collaboration with Cinzia Conti at Palazzo Altemps in 2011; Conti has since continued her work on the piece and more details of the study are to be published in following years. Conti, forthcoming.

¹⁸⁸ Kaper 2014, personal communication.

¹⁸⁹ See: Gilula 1974, 43-44; Mu-Chou Poo 1995; Shaw 2003; Brown 2010, 103-114. In addition, as noted by Kaper (personal communications 2014), the image of the human figure holding a platter with food offerings in this posture is directly reminiscent of the traditional hieroglyph for such a gift. Three loaves of bread would be offered, two round and one triangular.

noteworthy is the *sistrum* that is still partially visible in the top-right corner of this smaller panel, recognisable as the traditional attribute of the Egyptian Isiac cults.

In the top right corner of the same fragment a human hand can be recognised, rendered in light yellow paint, holding an instrument that is only partly preserved but that can be clearly identified as the lower end of a *sistrum* (detail, fig. 8B), the typical instrument associated with the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis.¹⁹⁰ The presence of the *sistrum* in this scene, moreover, adds to its traditional sacrificial implication. The entire figure is rendered in yellow paint, with minute details added to the hand and the sistrum in brown brushstrokes.



Fig. 8 A: detail of sphinx. B: detail of sistrum. Photos: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archaeologia di Roma.

The third small fragment as photographed by De Vos (see fig. 6), which is currently unrecovered, appears to represent the human figure's feet, and as such would have aligned with the figure's static in profile posture.¹⁹¹

A possible comparative example for this wall painting fragment is found in the triclinium of the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii, depicting a sphinx flanked by two Egyptian deities (Thoth and Ra); especially the figure of the sphinx is similar in style and posture to the one seen here.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ For a thorough documentation of the Isis cult and its reach throughout the Mediterranean, see: Bricault, L. 2001. *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques*. Paris. See also: Naerebout 2004, 55-73; Malaise 2007, 19-39; Gasparro 2007, 40-72.

¹⁹¹ De Vos 1980, 13, 120, Tav X. This fragment is currently undergoing research and conservation at the Soprintendenza. Cinzia Conti opts that the third fragment, with the feet, may not have belonged with this particular figure, but that it was part of a larger set of frescoes with manifestations of Egypt on black background from the Augustan Palatine. However, until more examples are found or recovered, this remains a hypothesis.

¹⁹² De Vos 1980, 120. Another possible comparative example are the Egyptian-themed scenes found in the 'black room' of the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase (currently at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York); small figurative scenes

The wall paintings found at the current remains of the House of Augustus are of a remarkably different type and quality. They may date from a later phase of the house, after 36BCE, when Octavian deliberately altered and expanded his original domus. All paintings known from this site are frescoes; water-based pigments directly applied to a wet *tectorium* background. The substrate consisted of three layers of ‘arriccio’ (a type of mortar made of lime, sand and pozzolane) followed by several additional layers of plaster (constructed of lime, sand and marble dust).¹⁹³

The Egyptian manifestations found here are all of ornamental character: stylistic elements as part of floral friezes or highly stylised individual decorative features. These include acanthus or palm leaves, pitcher-shaped motifs with *uraeus* handles, stylised *uraeus* and/or paratactic cobra motifs and stylistic *atef* crowns with spikes or pens, often emerging from leaves and branches. The majority of these are found in the space currently known as the ‘upper cubiculum’: here we find several elaborate stylised lotus decorative features (fig. 9), as well as numerous small and larger friezes and panels with lotus, *uraeus* and papyri motifs, also as part of the stucco ceiling decorations (fig. 9 and 10). In the spaces known as ‘oecus’ and ‘studium’ we find similar friezes with lotus and *uraeus* motifs, but these are remarkably small and subtle, even delicate, in execution; some only visible at a close inspection of the walls (fig. 11).

An interpretation for the style of these ornamental friezes in the ‘oecus’ and ‘studium’ may be that these elements features less prominently in the late second Pompeian style, to which the paintings from these currently known remains of the House of Augustus are generally categorised. The more elaborate features, panels and friezes in the ‘upper cubiculum’ may hint at a later date, especially compared to their similarity to the style of paintings from the House of Livia and ‘Aula Isiaca’ (see below).

The specific stylised Egyptian elements, such as the *uraeus* and *atef* motifs, became prominent in the Ptolemaic capital of Alexandria, and have been known to Roman material culture since 331 BCE.¹⁹⁴

in panels on a yellow background. The painting technique used here is different however; but as it concerns the villa attributed to the son of Marcus Agrippa, Augustus’ right hand man, there may at least be a connection in the choice for these scenes with manifestations of Egypt. See: Ehrhardt 1987, 145-148; Barbet 1985, 109-116; Ling 1991, 53-56.

¹⁹³ Carettoni 1983, 9-16; Iacopi 1997, 43.

¹⁹⁴ On the incorporation of Alexandrian elements in the wider Hellenistic repertoire throughout the Mediterranean World, including its influence on Rome, see: Brown 1957, 84-88; Fraser 1972; Tybout 1985, 175; Iacopi 1997, 29; Zanker 2007, 38; Versluys 2010, 9-12. Especially in regard to (Roman) paintings contexts, see: Venit 2002, 1-3, 10-11, 186; Baines & Whitehouse 2005, 404-415.



Fig. 9 A: detail of wall painting from the upper cubiculum of the House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, with large stylised lotus decorative features and (below left) a frieze with lotus, papyri and uraeus motifs. B: detail of four layers of ornamental friezes, panels and features. Photos: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archaeologia di Roma.



Fig. 10: two details of wall painting sections featuring lotus and papyrus friezes from the stucco ceiling of the upper cubiculum of the House of Augustus, Palatine Hill. Original photos: Carettoni 1985.



Fig. 11: detail of small horizontal and vertical frieze with lotus, papyri and uraeus motifs from oecus of the House of Augustus, Palatine Hill. Photo: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archaeologia di Roma.

Soon after its founding the city of Alexandria became a major consumer and producer of the so-called Hellenistic material culture repertoire that left a distinct mark on the development of Roman material culture throughout the centuries that followed. These ornamental motifs are sometimes categorised as part of a specific ‘Alexandrian style’, in this case incorporated into the late second and early third Pompeian styles of Roman wall painting.¹⁹⁵ Rather than singling these elements out and superimposing additional separate categories, it seems more effective to observe that these elements became an integral part of Roman wall painting designs from the late second Pompeian and early third style, and that they, in that capacity, are found in house contexts especially from Augustan Rome. The villa of Marcus Agrippa in Rome (Villa della Farnesina) provides the most comprehensive overview of how such ‘Alexandrian’ elements functioned as integral part of these wall painting design schemes (see paragraph 3.5); the House of Augustus, throughout its different phases, seems to represent earlier stages of the popularity of these elements.

These specific ornamental elements could become an integral part of Roman wall paintings style because they already belonged to the Roman material culture repertoire, since their emergence in Alexandria and subsequent exchange and ‘evolution’ throughout the Mediterranean. Simply put, they were part of the wider Hellenistic repertoire – and it is through their different appearances here in the different phases from Octavian’s Palatine domus that an indication may be deduced of why (besides

¹⁹⁵ As previously mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis (note 24), most important similarities are wall paintings from Alexandrian funerary contexts and festival pavilions. A thorough analysis is provided by Marjorie Venit: Venit 2002, 10, 94, 118, 165, 186. See also: Brown 1957, 93; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 18; Hanfmann 1984, 242-255; Ling 1991, 59. Most recently, Rickert et al 2014 has provided noteworthy insight into the Egyptian background of these friezes and decorative styles (2014, vol.2). In this volume, on Hellenistic decorative styles as developed in (Ptolemaic and Roman) Egypt, see especially: Dils 2014, 877-964.

already having become part of the late second Pompeian style) these elements in particular were taken from that repertoire to feature in these specific wall paintings.

When we look at these paintings in terms of their material form, the first example with a figurative scene recovered from the foundations of the early phase of the domus was made with a technique remarkably different from the frescoes known from the current site of the House of Augustus on the Palatine. Also decidedly fewer pigments were used in the execution of the figurative scene: five different colour pigments as opposed to a very large number of different colours in the later frescoes. In terms of style, the difference is even more striking.

The first example does not only represent a distinct figurative scene as opposed to the ornamental elements in the later frescoes, but the stylistic execution shows a great difference in quality. The figurative scene is rendered in a simple, almost casual style, with economic and at times seemingly ‘offhand’ brushstrokes and rigid poses. This latter may indicate a reference to the traditional profile postures known from pre-Ptolemaic Egyptian figurative scenes; but that does not diminish the elementary, crude execution of the figure and attributes. In contrast, the execution of the ornamental features from the later phases of the house is marked by nuance and finesse. Even the smaller friezes demonstrate great attention to detail, perspective and shadow and are rich in colour. Here there seem to be no references to pre-Ptolemaic Egyptian styles; rather, these ornamental features seem to represent a prime example of Hellenistic style in terms of naturalistic detail and fluidity of execution. A similar distinct difference can be found in terms of these examples’ theme of content; the first fragment depicts a figurative scene that may be identified as a typical offering scene recognisable as being of a religious Egyptian nature because of the specific dress and offering attributes of the human figure and the additional figure of the sphinx and the fragment of the sistrum.

The ornamental wall paintings from the current site of the House of Augustus, however, do not depict any clearly recognisable themes of content, other than highly stylised references to lotus flowers, papyri and uraeus motifs. As mentioned above, while originally appearing in Alexandria centuries earlier, these elements had long become embedded in the visual repertoire of the wider Hellenistic world – and as such became incorporated into Roman wall painting design. Within that specific wall painting design scheme, these ornamental friezes and features as such do not seem to express any specific Egyptian topics or implied meanings.

As part of the wider repertoire, however, they can still be called manifestations of Egypt in terms of their empirical appearance, even when their implied meanings in this particular context were not likely to have held any stress on Egypt as a theme or topic. Moreover, the context of Octavian's Palatine domus, and its development through many alterations from 43-42 BCE until 28 BCE, is of course a crucial factor for any interpretation regarding the possible choice(s) (political, cultural, social, economic etc.) that may have underlined the appearance of these specific elements to feature in the wall paintings of this house. This is irrevocably linked with the question of what these Egyptian elements, as part of these Roman wall paintings, may have signified or concretely *did* within this unique Palatine context, as will be further explored in paragraph 3.1.4.

3.1.2. The House of Livia

The so-called House of Livia on the Palatine can be dated to the last decades of the first century BCE through brick analysis of its remaining walls, the interconnectedness of its foundations with the House of Augustus, as well as through the inscriptions on lead water pipes recovered from the site.¹⁹⁶ Also the style of the wall paintings recovered from the site, which are generally categorised as belonging to the late second Pompeian style and the early third style, have been an important factor in its late Republican and specifically Augustan dating.¹⁹⁷

Situated in the direct vicinity of the House of Augustus, this site is likely to have been included in the expansion of Octavian's domus, such as he announced in 36BCE, and it may have been purchased for that purpose, altered and re-decorated, at that time.¹⁹⁸ Apart from a peristyle garden, the current site contains a large atrium courtyard faced by three long rectangular alae wherein the wall paintings have remained intact (see fig. 12). Most of these paintings have been preserved in situ, but a number of them have been transferred to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples.

¹⁹⁶ Carettoni 1957, 72-119; Id. 1967, 287-319.

¹⁹⁷ Rizzo 1936; Carettoni 1957, 70-119; Bragantini and De Vos 1982, 22-24; Barbet 1985, 42, 46-47; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 19-22; Mielsch 2001, 54-60.

¹⁹⁸ Octavian's plans for expanding his Palatine complex are recorded in: Velleius Paterculus 2.81.3. (See also note 167).

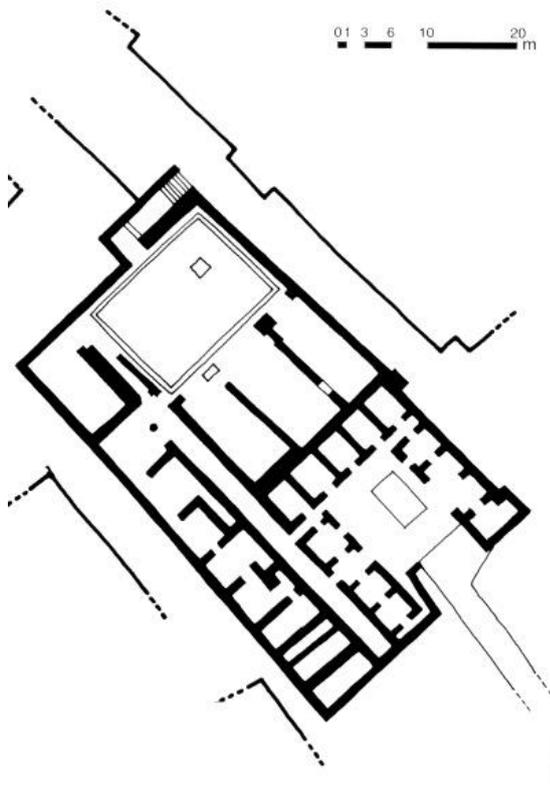


Fig. 12. Plan of the House of Livia on the Palatine. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

The type of fresco found here is similar to that at the current site of the House of Augustus; water-based pigments applied to a *tectorium* surface. The overall design of the wall paintings found here follows an ornamental architectural scheme with theatrical facades and archways at its top corners, and semi-opened panels situated around arched central niches, flanked by fantastical decorative friezes and columns.¹⁹⁹ The Egyptian manifestations found here are of a more diverse character than those from the House of Augustus. Various types of ornamental motifs can be found throughout the fantastical architectural design scheme of the paintings in the *alae*, featuring floral friezes, pitcher-shaped motifs, and stylised *uraeus* and *atef* crowns motifs (see fig.13).

But here we also find a more specific figurative element: the depictions of Egyptian (often specifically Hellenistic) deities and/or mythical personages in decorative panels as part of the painted architecture, or depicted as standing on painted statuary bases surrounded by entwining floral branches.

¹⁹⁹ The design scheme of the House of Livia paintings can be described as more detailed and elaborate than the overall designs at the House of Augustus. This observation is often used as an argument to group the House of Livia paintings to the early third Pompeian style, and the House of Augustus paintings to the late second Pompeian style – or alternatively to categorise both as two subsequent phases of a transitional style between the second and third Pompeian styles. See: Bragantini and De Vos 1982, 22–24; Barbet 1985, 42, 46–47; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 19–22; Mielsch 2001, 54–60; Meyboom 2005, 219–274; Mols & Moormann 2008, 80.



Fig. 13. Detail of the fantastical architectural design scheme in the alae from the House Livia in situ on the Palatine, featuring several friezes with stylised uraeus and lotus motifs. Photo: M. van Aerde. (Copyright Soprintendenza Archaeologia di Roma).

One striking example of this type is the depiction of an Isiac figure, currently at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (see fig. 14). This particular detail features a female figure standing on a statuary base, as part of the architectural design scheme divided in separate panels across the wall. She wears a light-coloured *chiton* dress with loose folds and holds a staff in her right hand, slightly raised, and a pitcher in her half-raised left hand. Her hair falls in ringlet curls down her shoulders and she wears a lotus flower on the crown of her head. The figure's posture is motionless and frontal, but especially the attention to detail, shadow and perspective in the execution of the painting, the facial features, clothing and attributes, can be recognised as widespread characteristic of Hellenistic painting styles: a realistic portrayal with at the same time a sense of heightened, more dramatic reality implied. The figure has often been described as a caryatid figure with Isiac attributes, as part of the design scheme of the wall painting.²⁰⁰ Moreover, the features of the lotus crown, *chiton* dress and ringlet curls came to be among the most recognisable canonic features of depictions of Isis (or Isiac figures) from the Ptolemaic period onwards; the goddess Isis in the Roman world is characterised by these features and attributes.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Rizzo 1936; Caretonni 1957, 70–119; Bastet and De Vos 1979, 19–22; Bragantini and De Vos 1982, 22–24; and Söldner 2000, 383–93; Van Aerde 2013, 6–8, 20.

²⁰¹ Eingartner 1991, 121–22; Bricault 2001, 167; Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 40–72; Van Aerde 2013, 6.

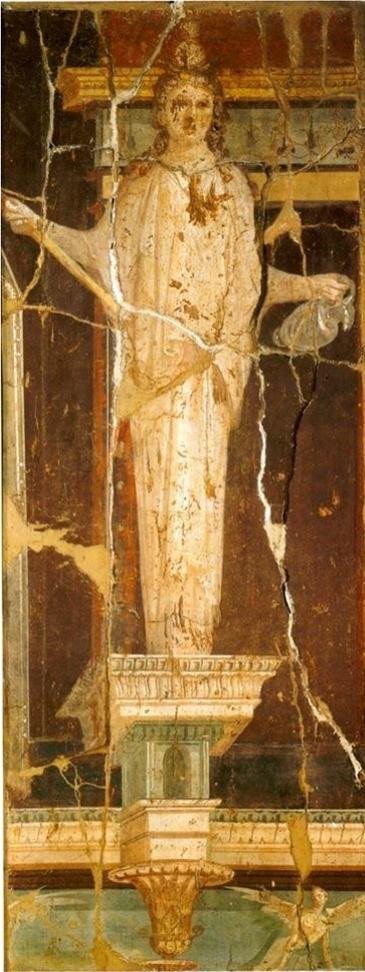


Fig. 14. Isiac figure from the House of Livia. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

Another Egyptian manifestation found in the House of Livia comes in the form of a Nilotic landscape: a scene in a large or small panel depicting a reference to the river Nile by means of specific flora and fauna (such as hippopotami, scarabs, crocodiles, palms, lotus flowers, reeds), or landscapes that depict temple scenes along the river Nile, recognisable by similar flora and fauna as well as the depiction of typical Egyptian temple architecture.²⁰²

In the top frieze of the left alae a particularly remarkable Nilotic scene stands out (see fig. 15): it is only partially preserved and painted in mainly shades of ochre yellow, white, purple and grey pigments.²⁰³ The scene depicts a temple site along the Nile banks, with a bustle of human figures surrounding it. At the bottom right two figures arrive at the bank on a small Egyptian reed boat; the middle figure appears to wear a long gown and head gear with feather and pens, which may indicate a temple official (perhaps a priest or priestess; note the similarity with the figure on the fragment found among the earlier foundations of the House of Augustus on the Palatine, discussed in the paragraph above). The temple itself, marked by two pylons facing outward to the left, is

depicted in the middle of the panel. One human figure to the right can be seen walking across a hillock along the river. At the bottom left a camel with rider seem to depart from the temple.

When we look at the paintings from the House of Livia in terms of their material form, the execution of the frescoes is similar in the use of pigments and painting techniques to the frescoes from the current site of the House of Augustus on the Palatine. They are rich in colour, and show finesse and detailed craftsmanship. The attention to naturalistic detail, perspective, shadow and fluidity of execution once again can be recognised as characteristic of Hellenistic style, such as known from Roman wall painting from the late second Pompeian and early third styles.

²⁰² For a highlighted focus on Nilotic landscapes in Roman wall paintings, reliefs and mosaics, see especially: Ibrahim & Scranton & Brill 1976, 120-141; Meyboom 1995; Versluys 2002, 28, 58-89 (esp. Nilotic scenes in Rome), 246-247.

²⁰³ Rizzo mentions more Nilotic scenes depicted in this yellow frieze, but in their current state these have become undetectable, and no drawings or photographs appear to exist of the frieze in a better state of preservation. See: Rizzo 1936, 46 ff.



Fig. 15. Nilotic scene from the House of Livia. Photo: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

The depiction of the Isiac figure, in particular, shows the type of Hellenistic style of portrayal that had become embedded in the wider Hellenistic repertoire throughout the Mediterranean since its development in Ptolemaic Alexandria – and which would thus become the predominant style of Isiac depiction in the Roman Empire.²⁰⁴ In terms of the themes and topics that can be recognised from these examples, the choice of an Isiac figure and a Nilotic landscape seem to imply a more conscious indication of Egypt at least in terms of content compared to the strictly ornamental features found in the current site of the House of Augustus – on the other hand, the appearance and execution of these Isiac and Nilotic elements are likewise recognisable specifically as part of the wider Hellenistic repertoire mentioned above. Moreover, it should be noted that they are part of the architectural scheme of the paintings (as caryatid on a base, and at the top of the frieze); no manifestations of Egyptian feature in any of the larger panels reserved for prominent mythical scenes. The physical context of these paintings, most likely created somewhere between 36-28 BCE as part of the larger Augustan complex on the Palatine, is a crucial factor for the interpretation of the possible meanings and functionality of these styles and themes of content as part of that specific context, as will be explored in paragraph 3.1.4.

²⁰⁴ On Isiac attributes in the Hellenistic and Roman world see: Eingartner 1991, 121–22; Bricault 2001, 167; Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 40–72.

3.1.3. The ‘Aula Isiaca’

The so-called ‘Aula Isiaca’ is a small but complicated site. It was first discovered underneath the Domus Flavia ‘Basilica’ site during Francesco Bianchini’s excavations between 1720 and 1730.²⁰⁵ But from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards the site was reburied and became inaccessible until 1912, when it was once again excavated by Giacomo Boni, who gave it the name ‘Aula Isiaca’ because of the Egyptian-themed components in the wall paintings.²⁰⁶ The main focus of scholarship since the site’s (re)discovery has revolved around the interpretation of its diverse types of wall paintings.²⁰⁷ The new plan below (fig. 16) represents the ‘Aula Isiaca’ in situ beneath the Flavian Basilica: the subterranean room measures 12.5 meter in length and 4.7 meter in width, and is cut along its full length by a large part of a brick wall cistern that has been dated to have belonged to Nero’s Domus Transitoria complex on the Palatine.²⁰⁸

Three different types of wall paintings can be found at the ‘Aula Isiaca’ site. The earliest type is recognisable as early second Pompeian style and appears to date from the Republican era on the Palatine and may have been part of a Republican domus; the latter type is found on the ceiling decorations, representative of the late third Pompeian style, and appears to date from the later Julian-Claudian period, generally dated to the reign of Caligula.²⁰⁹ The majority of the surviving walls contain paintings that are recognisable as late second Pompeian style to early third style, with a clear visual similarity to the wall paintings from especially the House of Livia on the Palatine and the Villa of Agrippa (‘Villa della Farnesina’, see section 3.1.5.); moreover, analyses of the original brick walls of these painting sections demonstrate that they can, within reasonable doubt, be dated to the late first century BCE – and as such,

²⁰⁵ The first record of the wall paintings from the ‘Aula Isiaca’ date from this time, aquarelles by Bartoli and Piccini. Moreover, in 1744 George Turnbull was the first to render a stylistic description of the paintings in his treatises on ancient painting: Turnbull 1744, 12, 14-15, 19. See also: Lanciani 1882, 211; Boni 1913, 247; Iacopi 1997, 8.

²⁰⁶ Boni 1913, 247; Iacopi 1997, 9.

²⁰⁷ The subterranean conditions underneath the Domus Flavia deteriorated large sections of the various walls; for this reason the remaining paintings were removed from their original context in 1955. Additional restorations were completed in the 1980s, which consisted of cleaning and preservation, but no reconstructions. Iacopi 1997, 6, 44.

²⁰⁸ Until now only three plans/reconstructions of the ‘Aula Isiaca’ were done: Lugli 1946, fig. 148; Carettoni 1971, fig. 29; Iacopi 1997, fig. 1. This new plan was based on data and measurements from Boni’s original excavation as well as additional in situ explorations on the Palatine as part of the 2011 Domus Flavia campaign under supervision of Natasha Sojc. See also: Rizzo 1936, 3-5; Borda 1958, 51; Carettoni 1971, 31, 325-326; Malaise 1972, 215.

²⁰⁹ There is much debate on the dating of the ‘Aula Isiaca’; based on the identification of the different wall paintings, dating options vary from late Republican to early Augustan to late Julian-Claudian. For an overview of the debate see chronologically: Rizzo 1936, 2-38; Beyen 1938, 22; Id. 1968, 65; Schefold 1962, 47, 87; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 97; Ling 1991, 31-47; Iacopi 1997, 8-9; Mielsch 2001, 54, 68, 94; Mols & Moormann 2008, 80.

especially based on the similarity of the paintings, they are likely to have been part of a house complex that became incorporated into Augustus' larger Palatine complex following his building plans in 36 BCE.²¹⁰

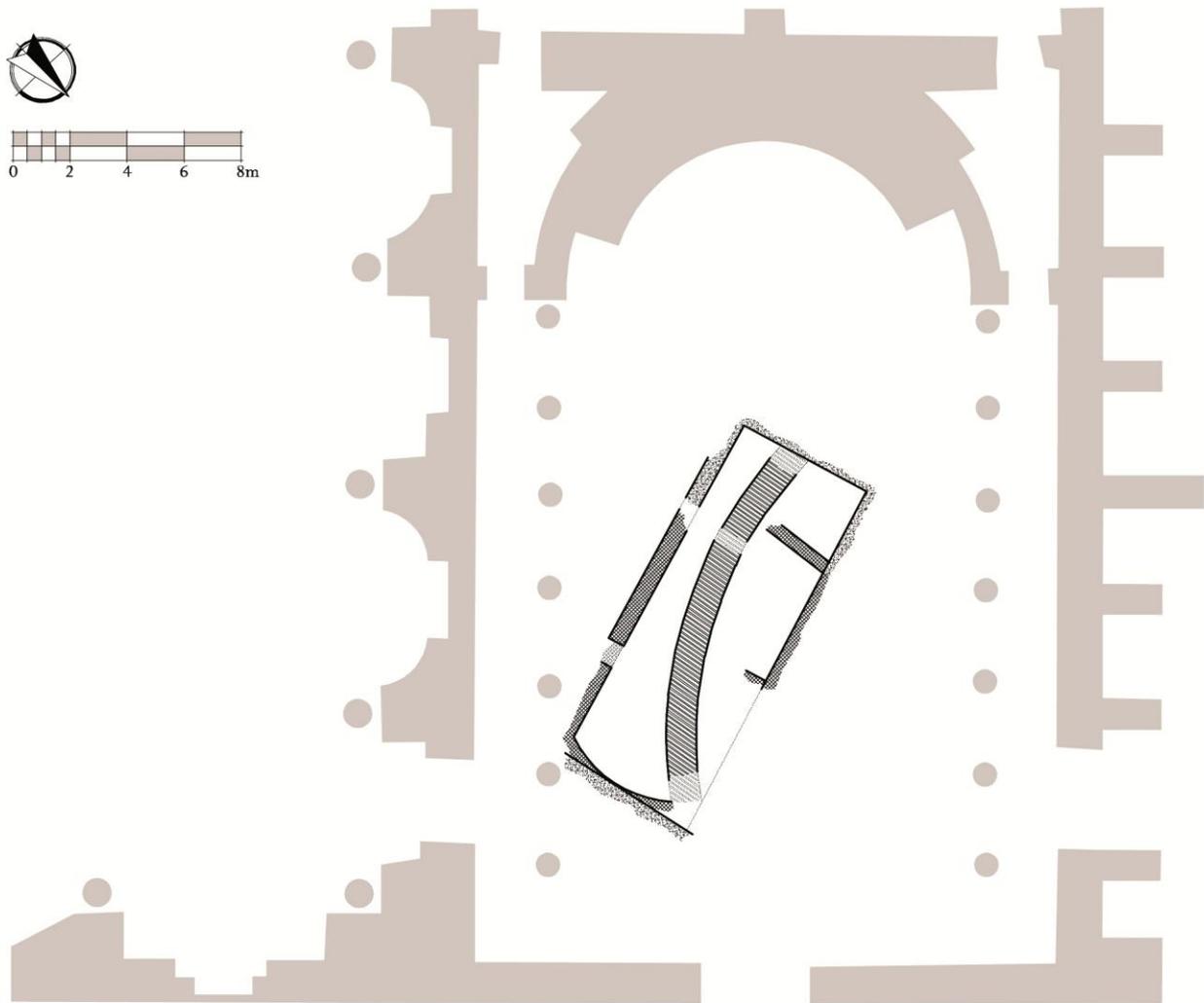


Fig. 16. Plan of the Aula Isiaca complex in situ underneath the Flavian Basilica. Copyright 2011 Van Aerde & Rheeder; Flavian plan after: Sojc 2009.

It is also especially in these paintings that manifestations of Egypt occur. Early interpretations of the 'Aula Isiaca' –as implied by its misleading name– had a tendency to imply a connection with this room and the Isis cult in Rome because of the 'egyptianising' elements in its ornamental decorations.²¹¹

²¹⁰ For a new reappraisal and interpretation of the different wall types and wall painting styles of the 'Aula Isiaca' site (with an approach that dates the different phases of the site to three different periods rather than opting for one dating choice), see: Van Aerde & Sojc, forthcoming.

²¹¹ Boni 1913, 247; Rizzo 1936, 2. For opposing views on this interpretation, see: Malaise 1972, 218 (Nr. 395); Versluys 2002, 359.

However, as explored above, the Hellenistic visual repertoire wherefrom Roman wall painting styles derived many components had featured these kind of ornamental elements since the first two centuries BCE, following their popularity in Alexandria –even including figurative depictions of Isiac figures and other Ptolemaic Egyptian deities– without any direct contextual links with either the Isis cult or even any specific notion of ‘Egypt’ *an sich*.²¹² Therefore, the appearance of these ornamental motifs here do not refer to any direct associations with the Isis cult; rather, the appearance of these ornamental features demonstrates how such motifs constituted an integral part of Roman wall painting styles, in general – and how, in this specific Palatine and Augustan context, they may have held specific contextual meaning(s).

The Egyptian manifestations treated here all feature on the three sections of the ‘Aula Isiaca’ site (see fig. 17, sections A, B and C), which can be dated based on fresco style and wall analysis to the final few decades BCE –from 36 BCE onwards– and as such they are here regarded as likely (if hypothetical) part of the Augustan Palatine residence complex.

The fresco technique used on these three sections is comparable to that of the current House of Augustus site and the House of Livia on the Palatine. The original brick walls measured 8 to 4 cm thick, with up to four layers of *arriccio* and one of additional plaster;²¹³ this multi-layered structure protected the paintings from subterranean humidity until their removal from the site.²¹⁴

The design scheme of the walls, as best evident from the long wall (marked red in fig. 17), is divided in semi-opened panel sections with pictorial scenes and ornamental features. Comparable to the design of the House of Livia paintings, there are theatrical facades with archways at the top corners. Immediately striking among these is the large ornamental frieze that runs, unbroken in design, along the top layer of all three sections with highly detailed and naturalistic renderings of papyri, lotus flower designs, pitchers and paratactic (uraeus) cobras crowned with pens and feathers (see fig. 18). Throughout the design scheme of these three wall sections numerous smaller ornamental friezes with stylised lotus and uraeus motifs appear at regular intervals, in separate panels as well as along the full length of the preserved walls (see fig. 19).

²¹² See especially: Venit 2002, 10, 94, 118, 165, 186. See also the references in notes 24 and 197 in this dissertation.

²¹³ Data from Istituto Centrale per il Restauro, SAR (1955-1965). See also: Iacopi 1997, 44.

²¹⁴ Iacopi 1997, 43.

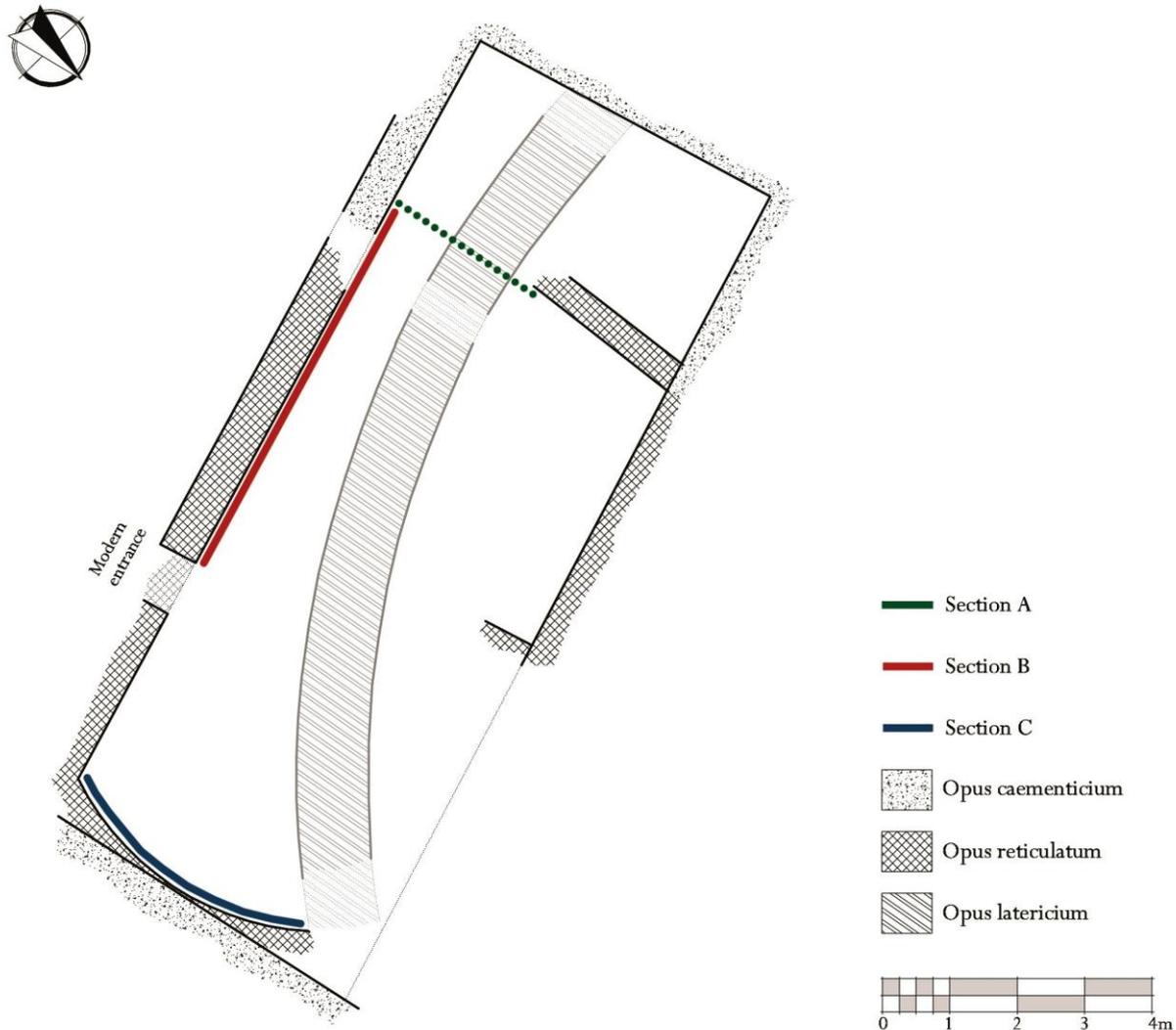


Fig. 17. Plan of the 'Aula Isiaca' site, detailing wall types and sections (A, B and C) with wall paintings in situ that can be dated to the Augustan period (late second Pompeian style to early third Pompeian style) and that feature manifestations of Egypt.

Copyright 2011 Van Aerde & Rheeder. (Basic plan after: Carettoni 1971, Iacopi 1997).

These are comparable to the smaller ornamental friezes such as found at the current site of the House of Augustus on the Palatine; however, the ones found here are larger and more lavish in detail and execution.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ This ornamental character of the 'Aula Isiaca' painting designs is often used as an argument to categorise it with the early third Pompeian style. An argument likewise brought against this lies in the fact that the 'Aula Isiaca' panel sections are only semi-opened by means of pictorial scenes and ornamental features, and thus do not yet attain the wholly open character of the type of wall panels attributed to the third Pompeian style. See: Beyen 1968, 65; Schefold 1962, 47, 87; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 97; Ling 1991, 31-47; Mielsch 2001, 54, 68, 94; Mols & Moormann 2008, 80.



Fig. 18. Detail of ornamental frieze on the top layer of sections A, B and C at the 'Aula Isiaca' site. Photo: M. van Aerde. Currently at the Loggia Mattei on the Palatine. Copyright Soprintendenza



Fig. 19. Two layers of ornamental friezes on the long wall (marked red in fig. 17) of the 'Aula Isiaca' site. Photo: A. Rheeder. Currently at the Loggia Mattei on the Palatine, copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

On the partially preserved apsidal wall (marked blue in fig. 17) we possibly find another kind of manifestation of Egypt. Though much of the scene has faded due to humidity, on the lower section a river landscape can be recognised, with long reeds situated along a riverbank, with yellowish sand or rocks, among which a creature lurks that can be identified as a scarab or a scorpion (see fig. 20). The combination of the river landscape with reeds and the appearance of a creature associated with the Nile and Egypt does seem to fit basic criteria for a Nilotic landscape.²¹⁶ However, due to lack of further details (such as found on the Nilotic scene from the House of Livia discussed above) this scene may simply be a river landscape that is not necessarily intended as Nilotic in character. In their initial descriptions of the 'Aula Isiaca' wall paintings, Rizzo and Lugli attribute many more Egyptian features especially to the long wall (marked red in fig. 17); they mention Egyptian situlas and garlands with 'Isiac roses', and have marked these on their reconstruction drawings of the paintings, while these features are not at all visible on the actual frescoes today, nor on the archive photographs of the frescoes in situ from before their removal from the site in 1955.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Versluys 2002, 28, 246-247.

²¹⁷ Rizzo 1936, 1-38; Lugli 1946, 495-496, fig. 150 (reconstruction drawing); Borda 1958, 51 (archived photographs).

Lugli, moreover, speaks of figurative Egyptian elements: he identifies a veiled female figure wearing long white robes, painted in an in profile posture, as an 'Isis priestess' standing either among stylised foliage or in a boat on the right middle panel of the long wall (see fig. 21 and fig. 22).²¹⁸



Fig. 20. Detail of a possible Nilotic scene on the apsidal wall (marked blue in fig. 19) of the 'Aula Isiaca' site. Photo: A. Rheeder. Currently at the Loggia Mattei on the Palatine, copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

A second and only partially preserved human figure can be seen standing directly behind the veiled female figure, holding a lotus bud up to the height of the veiled figure's head. From the fresco itself it is very hard to make out whether this really can be identified as a lotus, or whether it might be the top end of a small (ornamental) staff. Moreover, apart from this possible lotus, the scene displays no other specific attributes, such as Isiac headdress or sistrum, that would support its identification it as an Isiac figure²¹⁹; nor is there any thematic context from the surrounding scene or panel in either older documentation of the painting or on the actual walls as they remain today. The identification of the figurative scene in this panel remains inconclusive.

Lugli also identifies the statuary figure at the right top of the long wall as a 'classic type of Pharaoh statue'.²²⁰ In Rizzo's accompanying reconstruction drawing, made in 1936, this figure is represented

²¹⁸ Lugli 1946, 494. Cf. Iacopi 1997, 9.

²¹⁹ See: Naerebout 2004, 55-73; Malaise 2007, 19-39; Gasparro 2007, 40-72.

²²⁰ Lugli 1946, 496.

wearing an *atef* crown and *shendit* kilt (see fig. 22).²²¹ The fresco itself, however, was already greatly deteriorated, with its colouring and details faded, at its time of discovery in 1912, ‘thus calling for the need of drawn reconstructions’.²²²



Fig. 21. Panel with veiled female figure identified as Isis priestess, on the long wall (marked red in fig. 19) at the ‘Aula Isiaca’ site. Photo: A. Rheeder. Currently at the Loggia Mattei on the Palatine, copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archeologica di Roma.

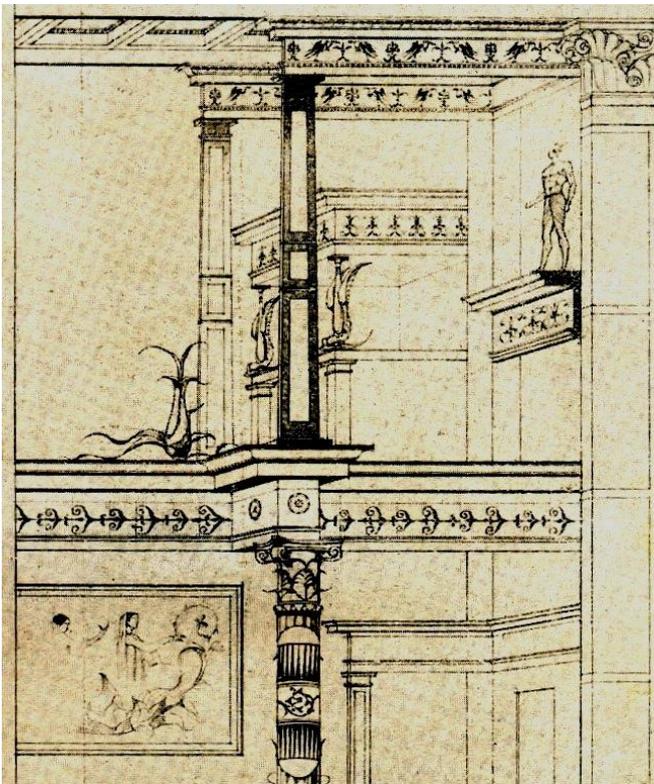


Fig. 22. Detail from Rizzo’s 1936 reconstruction of the long wall of the ‘Aula Isiaca’. Below left (panel): veiled female figure among foliage identified as Isis priestess. Top right: figure identified as Pharaoh statue wearing shendit and atef crown. Source: Iugli 1946, fig. 150.

²²¹ Rizzo 1936, fig. 150 (cf. Lugli 1946, 494). Also in Moretti’s 1912 drawing from Boni’s excavations, this same statuary figure at the top right corner of the long wall is depicted in a *shendit* kilt and wearing an *atef* crown.

²²² Boni 1913, 247.

The actual remains of the fresco, such as they were documented in 1912 as well as in their current preserved condition, do not visibly feature any of these Egyptian attributes or characteristics (see fig. 23);



Fig. 23. The actual state of the figure identified by Lugli as 'Pharaoh statue', on the long wall (marked red in fig. 17) at the 'Aula Isiaca' site. Photo: A. Rheeder. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Lugli's interpretation and Rizzo's reconstruction seem to rely on creative licence rather than on the actual state of the wall paintings such as they encountered them. The only visible detail, the figure's pose, is also far less erect and straight than suggested in the drawing; instead it is reminiscent of a *contrapposto* pose. Figures in *contrapposto* as part of the architectural design is a very common feature of Roman wall paintings, usually in the form of caryatids or ornamental mythical figures, especially from the so-called third Pompeian style onwards, and as such are cannot be associated with any specific manifestation of Egypt, or any at all.²²³

When exploring these wall paintings sections of the 'Aula Isiaca' site in terms of material form, it is noteworthy that the type of fresco technique used is comparable to the use of pigments and painting techniques from both the current site of the House of Augustus and the House of Livia on the Palatine. On an additional note, it is interesting that in these 'Aula Isiaca' paintings a specific Egyptian blue pigment has been used.²²⁴ This pigment was widely used throughout the Mediterranean since its synthetic creation in 4th Dynasty Egypt, during the 'golden age' of the Old Kingdom, circa 2613 to 2494 BCE.²²⁵ Vitruvius and Pliny the Elder recount how a Roman craftsman by name of Vestorius manufactured a similar *caeruleum* blue pigment in Puteoli, in order to rival the popularity of the

²²³ For an overview of the characteristics of the third Pompeian style see, among others: Barbet 1985, 97; Ling 1991, 31-47; Mielsch 2001, 54, 68.

²²⁴ Data from Istituto Centrale per il Restauro, SAR (1965). Cf. Carettoni 1971, 31, 325-326; Iacopi 1997, 44.

²²⁵ The 'Egyptian blue' pigment (*caeruleum*) is the oldest known synthetic pigment; it was widely used in the ancient Mediterranean world, from 4th Dynasty Egypt until the fall of the Roman Empire in Europe. Eastaugh et. al. 2005, 147-148. See also: Shaw 2000, 480. On the technical and applied characteristics of the Egyptian blue pigment, see: Tite 1980, 297-301; Id. 2007, 75-92; Boschetti 2011, 59-91.

Egyptian blue (caeruleum) pigment export from Alexandria.²²⁶ Therefore it seems that the appearance of this caeruleum pigment –whether Vestorian or Egyptian– would not have indicated any specific Egyptian reference in this particular Roman context. These types of blue pigment were already part of the visual repertoire available to the wider Mediterranean world, wherefrom Roman wall painting designs derived various kinds of stylistic elements and technical features. This is a process similar to the so-called ‘Alexandrian’ style features such as the ornamental friezes with lotus, papyri and uraeus motifs prominently represented in the ‘Aula Isiaca’ paintings; these specific ornamental styles had already become incorporated as integral parts of painting styles throughout the Mediterranean from the Ptolemaic period in Egypt onward.²²⁷ As such, these motifs likewise became integral parts of the late second Pompeian style and the early third style of Roman wall painting. In terms of specific choices for Egyptian themes of content, we here mainly find the ornamental features as part of the fantastical architectural design scheme of the walls, such as found on a smaller scale in the current site of the House of Augustus and, in similar lavish fashion, in the design scheme of the House of Livia paintings. Because of the inconclusive state of the possible Nilotic scene and the debated ‘Isis priestess’ figurative panel, these should not be referred to as concrete examples of a distinctly chosen and recognisable Egyptian theme; however, it is noteworthy that the two more distinctly themed (non-ornamental) examples from the House of Livia wall paintings were also a Nilotic scene and the depiction of an Isiac figure. The physical context of these ‘Aula Isiaca’ paintings –apart from the complexity of their current multi-layered Palatine site– can provide interesting insight into the development of the Augustan Palatine residence as a whole. The notable visible similarities of these paintings especially to those from the House of Livia, along with the argument of the brick analysis of these particular wall sections, do seem to support the possibility that the ‘Aula Isiaca’ site (during the phase wherefrom these walls and paintings date) had become part of the Augustan Palatine residence as, following Octavian’s announced plans in 36BCE, it stretched out from the original domus on the south slopes of the Palatine farther north, thus incorporating –and reconstructing and redecorating– various already existing domus in the process.

²²⁶ The ‘Vestorian blue’ caeruleum pigment is described by Vitruvius (7.11.1) and Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* 33.161-163). The composition of ‘Vestorian blue’, however, is directly similar to that of the Egyptian caeruleum pigment: calcium copper silicate. See: Eastaugh et. al. 2005, 388-389; Siddall 2006, 18-23.

²²⁷ See notes 24, 197 and 212 in this dissertation.

3.1.4. Interpretation

Having explored these various manifestations of Egypt in the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine residence in terms of their material form, stylistic characteristics and themes of content, the question that follows revolves around what these wall paintings did in their specific contexts. Why were these particular Egyptian styles or themes or material forms chosen for these specific contexts? What can this reveal about the workings of the Roman material culture repertoire, and the way that Egyptian elements functioned within it?

Political motivation is still a predominant interpretation for the appearance of Egyptian motifs and themes as part of the Augustan residence. By choosing Egyptian decorative styles to be part of his interior design, Augustus would thus (albeit with nuance) refer to his victory at Actium and the subsequent political incorporation of Egypt as Roman province: ‘die ägyptischen Motive dürften ein Hinweis auf Augustus als neuen Pharaoh sein, der das Land am Nil als Privatbesitz innehatte, getrennt von seiner Funktion als erster Bürger des Imperium Romanum.’²²⁸ But the known dates of the building process of the (expanding) Augustan Palatine residence do not align with such a strictly political motivation revolving around Actium victory. It is very likely, as supported by the fragment recovered from the early domus discussed in paragraph 3.1.1., that Egyptian manifestations were already part of the wall paintings of Octavian’s originally purchased domus, as early as 43-42. Moreover, Octavian began planning and constructing his larger Palatine complex as of 36 BCE, at a time when the victory at Actium and the conquest of Egypt were not set in stone; on the contrary, at this time Egypt, led by Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony, was an official enemy of Rome. We know that the Apollo Palatinus temple, with terraces and library, was completed in 28 BCE, when Octavian’s victory was secure (see paragraph 3. 3); but there is no concrete data to suggest that the Egyptian manifestations in the wall paintings of the House of Augustus, House of Livia and ‘Aula Isiaca’ on the Palatine –as part of the larger Augustan complex– were added to the overall designs specifically after the Actium victory and, as such, would have been chosen as direct political references. In fact, looking at the stylistic chronology of the so-called Pompeian wall painting styles, and the fact that most wall paintings at the Augustan Palatine seem to represent the late

²²⁸ Mielsch 2001, 57. See also: Carettoni 1983, 7-15, 86-93; Mielsch 2001, 54-58; Caradini 2010, 197-198.

second and especially early third styles, this would argue for a dating closer to ca. 20 BCE instead, a whole decade following the Actium victory.²²⁹

As will become evident especially from the discussions on the Apollo Palatinus temple complex (section 3.3, below), political motivation always, and at least at some level, seems to underline Octavian's deliberate choices, as expressed in material culture. Egypt did indeed become an important theme on the Palatine, connected to the Augustan complex as a whole, in particular through the combination of Egyptian elements as part of the Apollo Palatinus temple, the erection of the obelisk from Heliopolis at Circus Maximus in its close vicinity and the neighbouring Augustan residence visibly besides it – but this larger Palatine complex gradually grew into being and was constructed over a time span of more than two decades (see paragraphs 3.3. and 3.9). The wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine residence – based on wall analysis of their physical context, pigments, painting techniques and stylistic comparisons – date from the earliest phases of this gradual process, and in some cases (like the fragment from the early domus foundations) even seem to predate Octavian's 36 BCE plan entirely.²³⁰

The Egyptian manifestations found as part of these wall paintings demonstrate typical examples of Hellenistic wall painting tradition (ornamental designs, Nilotic landscape scenes and Isiac figurative scenes), and as such also have roots in Ptolemaic Alexandria.²³¹ But especially the flexibility with which these elements could be chosen in diverse contexts illustrates the workings of the overall Hellenistic repertoire wherein cultural categories were fluid, and where a variety of (stylistic) choices was available for the accommodation of a wide variety of contexts.²³² Another link may be found in Roman authors such as Didorus Siculus (60-56 BCE) and Josephus (1st century CE) who refer to Egypt as the 'primeval paradise', the land where the gods first lived, thus emphasising the Roman association of Egypt with ancient divinity and wisdom; the choice for Nilotic landscapes or specific Egyptian ornaments in Roman decoration may be an allusion to such overall qualities.²³³ But the main question here is whether such thematic qualities would simply have become part of the luxurious atmosphere conveyed by Roman wall paintings, and their appearance in first century BCE Roman domus decorations indicates 'that the

²²⁹ For the main discussion on dating of the Pompeian wall painting styles, see notes 206 and 212 above.

²³⁰ For data, analyses and debate on these datings, see: Lugli 1951; 53-54; Tomei 2000, 7-9; Id. 2004, 8-9; Haselberger 2003, 151-197; Iacopi & Tedone 2005 351-378; Meyboom 2005, 219-274; Zink 2008, 47-63; Id. 2012, 388-402; Carandini 2010, 151-225; Wiseman 2012, 656-672.

²³¹ Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186. See also: Brown 1957, 93; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 18; Hanfmann 1984, 242-255; Ling 1991, 59.

²³² Venit 2002, 10; Versluys 2010, 11.

²³³ McKenzie 2007, 98-115. McKenzie points out that Egyptian stylistic genres such as Nilotic scenes and ornaments continued to refer to ancient divinity and concepts of paradise in Byzantine and Islamic material culture. On the association of Egypt with ancient (hidden) wisdom and divinity, see: Assmann 1999, 2004, 2010; Versluys 2013 (II).

Romans simply wanted the latest fashion in interior decoration and the luxury that it conveyed'²³⁴ – while not any particular manifestation of Egypt per se.

We do know that the Egyptian elements that appear in the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine residence would already have been part of the Roman material culture repertoire since more than a century; Octavian may have chosen them simply to follow current trends and convey a sense of wealth and luxury. On the other hand, especially in the case of the House of Livia and parts of the 'Aula Isiaca' which were most likely incorporated into the Augustan complex after 36 BCE and possibly completed only around 28 BCE, these elements may have been chosen with underlying reference to Egypt from a political perspective, too. If that would be the case, it would be a matter of an additional layer of meaning – rather than that such a choice needed to be either political or strictly decorative. This, indeed, seems to be a case of 'bundling', demonstrating the interconnectedness of the multiple possible meanings inherent in these particular manifestations of Egyptian in Roman wall painting, while their relative significance and relevance shifted with each different context that they were part of: dependent on specific moments in time (for example, before or after Actium) and on the interpretation and perspective of different human observers of the paintings in question.²³⁵

The multi-layered nature of these manifestations of Egypt reflects the flexible character of the available material culture repertoire wherefrom they were chosen for these specific Palatine contexts. We must not neglect that these particular Egyptian styles and themes constituted a relatively small part of the overall decorative design of the wall paintings of these house complexes: the larger paintings and figurative panels contained depictions of classical Graeco-Roman myths and deities.²³⁶ But it is significant to note that these Egyptian styles and themes featured as integrally incorporated into the overall design scheme of these paintings, especially as part of the fantastical architectural designs and ornamental friezes – and most decidedly not as exotic 'outside' additions to Roman paintings. Rather than this referring on a political level to the incorporation of Egypt as Roman province following in 30 BCE, this instead demonstrates how Egyptian styles and themes had already become part of Roman wall painting designs long before their appearance here on the Palatine; because these styles and themes were already part the Hellenistic material culture repertoire available to the wider Roman world, and

²³⁴ McKenzie 2007, 113.

²³⁵ Keane 2003 (II), 414-415. See also paragraph 2.3.

²³⁶ On (Graeco-Roman) mythological scenes in late second Pompeian style and early third style wall painting, see: Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 42-44, 96-105; Ling 1991, 31-47; Mielsch 2001, 54-66; Mols & Moormann 2008, 60-66, 80.

could as such be incorporated within Roman contexts without superimposed political significance or exotic whim of fashion.

The interpretation of these contexts, of course, relied heavily on the perspective of the individuals that had access to the Augustan residence. Even if these Egyptian styles and themes, as part of the overall painting design of the residence, were chosen originally (around 36 BCE or earlier) for decorative and fashionable purposes before the Actium victory, their existence after 30 BCE may nonetheless have conveyed a certain political significance to Augustus' political allies and friends that would have had access to the Palatine residence. The possible meaning(s) of these particular manifestations of Egypt, therefore, would not have been set in stone at their initial creation – rather, they became part of various 'cultural scenarios' depending on the continuing growth and flexibility of the Augustan Palatine as a whole, as well as on the perspectives of the people that actually laid eyes on the paintings. These perspectives will have relied, moreover, on various different periods in time (referring, on a political level, to the different phases of Octavian's gradual rise to power), on individuals' affiliations and also, on a more practical level, personal taste.

Over a span of more than twenty years, the Augustan Palatine residence became part of a complex and multi-layered example of visual propaganda, gradually constructed as such at the political and historical heart of the city of Rome, the Palatine Hill. Manifestations of Egypt certainly played a role in the propagandistic significance of this Augustan Palatine complex, as will be further explored in paragraphs 3.3. and 3.9. The relatively few noteworthy Egyptian elements found in the Augustan residence wall painting designs present the first manifestations of Egypt from the Augustan Palatine. As such they mark the beginning of the growth and development of the Augustan Palatine complex as a whole – but they likewise, and perhaps above anything, demonstrate the flexible nature of the material culture repertoire that had made these elements available to Roman decorative designs long before Octavian's rise to power, with their continuous multi-layered meanings that seem to have changed along with the continuous changes of the Augustan Palatine.

In Augustan culture 'previous traditions served as vehicle for innovation'.²³⁷ These included very ancient traditions, such as allusions to Rome's foundation mythology, but also contemporary political traditions, such as the influence of the Senate and the Republican process of law-making. Augustus not only

²³⁷ Galinsky 1997, 219.

incorporated these into his political programme to serve as propaganda and justification of his newly gained power; they became practical tools for the political and cultural changes he set into motion – as such, indeed, vehicles for innovation. Likewise, certain concepts of Egypt became visual, cultural tools as part of these ‘revolutionary’ changes that shaped Augustan Rome.

The process of how multiple different manifestations, expressions and notions of the cultural concept ‘Egypt’ became Augustan vehicles for cultural change and innovation in the city of Rome began, in more ways than one, on the Palatine. Egyptian manifestations such as ornamental designs, Nilotic landscapes and Isiac figurative scenes as part of wall paintings were already known to Roman material culture long before Octavian purchased his first domus on the South slope of the hill – but it is exactly the way in which he continues to make use of these already existing elements, as part of his expanding and increasingly politically significant residence complex, that shows the flexibility and strength of this specifically Augustan process of (cultural) change. Moreover, this illustrates the fluidity of the Augustan cultural revolution in a nutshell: long-term planning by means of making the most efficient use of what is already there – and by doing so, creating something new.

Following the appearance of manifestations of Egypt at the Augustan Palatine, a wider variety of manifestations begin to appear on and near the Palatine; at the Apollo Palatinus temple and terrace complex (see paragraph 3.3) and, eventually, in the form of the obelisk from Heliopolis erected at the Circus Maximus in direct vicinity of the Augustan residence and temple complex (see paragraph 3.9). From then on, the already existing Egyptian manifestations in the wall paintings from the House of Augustus, House of Livia and ‘Aula Isiaca’ site, would have gained a touch of the same significance, by association. Moreover, in response to this flexible and visually potent process where different manifestations of Egyptian styles and themes increasingly became part of, various types of material culture, such as glass work, vessels and jewellery, began to emulate such concepts of Egypt throughout the city; mainly in elite circles at first, but gradually this became a more widespread phenomenon (see paragraphs 3.8 and 3.10). All this was instigated by what Augustus chose to do with the manifestations of Egypt as part of his Palatine complex: making different concepts of Egypt into specific Augustan concepts, including those manifestations of Egypt that already existed there and were not deliberately created for that purpose. As the Egyptian elements from the wall paintings discussed above show, this specifically Augustan concept of Egypt was above anything a flexible and multi-layered concept, not only on a political but also, if not especially, on a much wider (and flexible) cultural scale.

In summary, main points that can be observed here are (1) various elements that originated from a Hellenistic tradition of wall painting (ornamental designs, Nilotic landscapes and Isiac figurative scenes) were already well known to Roman material culture and as such would have appeared without any specific political or even distinctly Egyptian association in these interior decorative designs on the Palatine, especially at the time prior to Octavian's Actium victory. (2) Once Octavian deliberately begins to expand his Palatine complex by incorporating other domus, such as the House of Livia and part of the current 'Aula Isiaca' site, and especially after his planning of the large-scale Apollo Palatinus temple complex with terraces and libraries, a more deliberate and political emphasis seems to have been associated with Egyptian manifestations in particular, including those already present; namely as specifically Augustan concepts. This shows their potentially multi-layered character, as physical objects and as cultural concepts, and the bundling of different inherent meanings of which the interpretation depends on specific contextual criteria. (3) Augustan material culture derived a variety of elements from the wider Hellenistic visual repertoire whereof certain Egyptian material forms, styles and topics had already become integral parts – not only as part of wall painting designs already known throughout the Mediterranean at the time, but also as part of the development of deliberately conceived (political) Augustan concepts expressed through material culture that began around 36-31 BCE. In both cases, the Augustan Palatine provides insightful examples from the archaeological record and, especially in the latter case, can be regarded as the initial focus point for the process of (political and cultural) change that Augustus' reign was to bring about in the city of Rome.

3.2. Victory Coins

In 29 BCE Octavian returns to Rome from Egypt to celebrate a triple triumph for his victories at Actium, Alexandria and in Illyricum. On this occasion denarii were minted to mark, in particular, the success of Octavian's Egyptian campaign: in effect, the conquest of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt 'removed the last obstacle to Octavian's achievement of supreme power in the Roman world'.²³⁸ Following that year, a significant amount of denarii that pictured Octavian along with the image of a crocodile and carried the inscription 'AEGVPTO CAPTA' were minted in Rome. This marked the first manifestation of Egypt that was deliberately instigated to take central stage as part of Octavian's political propaganda, and that confirmed, in a concrete and visual way, the arrival of the Augustan Principate.²³⁹

The appearance of these victory coins occurred at a time when the Augustan Palatine complex was still in the process of expanding. The message of Octavian's victory and conquest of Egypt that became publically known by means of these denarii officialised for the first time the political significance of Egypt as integral part of Octavian's propagandist 'visual language': the significance of the Egyptian elements manifest at the Apollo Palatinus temple complex from 28 BCE onwards, therefore, seem to have relied on this pre-existing awareness of Egypt as part of Octavian's propaganda in order to successfully convey its deliberate political message. Naturally, Octavian's triumph in 29 BCE expressed this message with pomp and circumstance: but the tangible reminder of the fact, in the small-scale form of a denarius that people would carry around, exchange and see on a daily basis, will have incited the public awareness of Octavian's newly won *auctoritas* even more lastingly and as such effectively.²⁴⁰

3.2.1. Two types of victory coins

There are many known examples of the 'AEGVPTO CAPTA' denarius, of which the majority were minted in Italy. Rome is recorded as the findspot of ten well-preserved denarii of this type currently at The

²³⁸ Augustus' *Res Gestae* confirm this in direct terms, stating that Octavian, at the age of thirty-two, following the defeat of Mark Anthony and the conquest of Egypt was 'in possession of all power': *Res Gestae* 34.1. On the political significance of the victory denarii, see: Sutherland & Carson 1984, 86; Galinsky 2012, 62.

²³⁹ See: Grueber 1970; Mattingly 1976; Sutherland & Carson 1984, 61.

²⁴⁰ Galinsky 2012, 61-63.

British Museum in London.²⁴¹ While there are discernible varieties in the style of different mints of this denarius, the depictions and inscriptions are virtually identical for all known examples of this type (see fig. 24 for three variations of the type). These denarii are silver coins. The ten examples at The British Museum weighed between 3.6 and 3.9 grams, with die-axes varying from 5 o'clock to 12 o'clock. They all depict the head of Octavian on obverse, facing to the right in nine out of ten examples and one facing to the left (fig. 24C), and with the image of a crocodile on reverse, depicted in all examples standing in profile and in full length, facing to the right, with its tail in a downwards curve on the left. The obverse inscription reads 'CAESAR COS VI' in most cases (fig. 24A) but there are also variations reading 'CAESAR DIVI [F C]OS VI' (fig. 24B), and the reverse inscription reads in all cases 'AEGVPTO CAPTA', which can be translated as 'Egypt has been conquered' and/or 'Egypt has been incorporated'.



24. A



24. B

²⁴¹ Sutherland & Carson 1984, 86. See also: curator records and notes at The British Museum online catalogue entries: 2002,0102.5021; 2002,0102.5023; 2002,0102.5022; R.6175; 1866,1201.4189; 1860,0328.114; 2002,0102.5461; 2002,0102.5023.a; 1860,0328.115; R.6176.



24. C

Fig 24. A: image ref. AN631314001. B: image ref. AN631315001. C: image ref. AN633014001.
Copyright: the Trustees of the British Museum.

As briefly mentioned already in the Introduction chapter, the Latin verb ‘capere’ from the ‘AEGVPTO CAPTA’ inscription does not exclusively mean ‘to capture’ or ‘to seize’ in military sense. It also implies the meaning ‘to assume’ and ‘appropriate’ and, literally, ‘to incorporate’.²⁴² These multiple readings are known as inherent to the verb, but the only direct comparison available for its usage and political implication on Roman coins is the commemorative denarius and sestertius coins issued by Vespasian in 71 CE in celebration of his son Titus’ conquest of Judea, which feature the inscription ‘IVDAEA CAPTA’ on reverse.²⁴³ Minted almost a century after the Augustan denarius, the ‘IVDAEA CAPTA’ coins may have been a direct reference to the Augustan ‘AEGVPTO CAPTA’ to stress the political significance of Titus’ conquest and to put him on par with Augustus, which would be in line with political symbolism implied with the erection of and reliefs portrayed on the Arch of Titus.²⁴⁴ It is nonetheless noteworthy that no other Roman emperor since Titus has apparently issued coins with a similar ‘CAPTA’ inscription to commemorate a conquest, and no earlier comparable examples are known from before Augustus’ reign either.

The ‘AEGVPTO CAPTA’ denarius is one of the best-known Augustan coins; much rarer is the type of aureus coin that likewise commemorates Octavian’s 29BCE triumph. Only two known examples exist of this type, one currently at The British Museum in London and the other at the Blackburn Museum in Lancashire (archived).²⁴⁵ These coins were found in Turkey, and were most likely also minted in Asia

²⁴² See note 56.

²⁴³ Mattingly 1976, 185; Carradice 2007, 71.

²⁴⁴ On the (political) symbolism of the Arch of Titus, see: Kleiner 1962, 42-43; Norman 2009, 41-53.

²⁴⁵ Galinsky 2012, 62: this is the first publication to mention this aureus type. See also: The British Museum online catalogue entry 1995,0401.1.

Minor (perhaps Ephesus) in 28 BCE. The example at The British Museum is a gold coin with a diameter of 18 millimetres and a weight of 7.95 grams. The head of Octavian is depicted on obverse, facing to the right. Octavian is also pictured on reverse, wearing a toga while sitting on a bench, facing to the left, and holding a scroll in his right hand. On the left side, by his feet, stands a scroll-box. The obverse inscription reads 'IMP CAESAR DIVI F COS VI' and the reverse inscription 'LEGES ET IVRA P[OPVLO] R[OMANVS] RESTITVIT', which can be translated as 'He [Octavian] has restored the laws and rights to the people [of Rome]' (see fig. 25). There is no mention or depiction of Egypt on this aureus type.



Fig 25. Ref. 1995,0401.1. Copyright: the Trustees of the British Museum.

3.2.2. Interpretation

As reflected on above, the multiple meanings of the 'AEGVPTO CAPTA' inscription do not only imply conquest, but also incorporation. This accurately reflects the multiple roles that Egypt came to fulfil following 31 BCE, as part of Octavian's political programme and, in specific, the material culture that was used to express these politics. Even if originally marked as such in Octavian's 29 BCE triumph, Egypt's role was, from the start, not merely the role of a conquered foreign entity or military trophy. In the same year as these victory denarii were minted and spread throughout the city of Rome, Egyptian styles and topics were incorporated into Octavian's expanding Palatine complex – which, in term, during the coming years would initiate an even wider spread of Egyptian manifestations throughout the city, both as intentional parts of Augustus' propaganda and as a more 'naturally evolved' result of the public

exposure to these styles and topics and hence their increase in popularity. The implied meaning of these denarii, in a straightforward way, already reflects this process. The image of the crocodile may seem to represent a sense of the exotic, of a wild and faraway land. But the accompanying ‘AEGVPTO CAPTA’ inscription in fact turns this around entirely: the crocodile does no longer seem to represent a faraway land here, now that it has become part of Rome, and therefore it now appears to represent Rome. A recent study by Jane Draycott links the ‘sudden appearance of the image of a crocodile’ on this coin to a reference to Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony.²⁴⁶ But other than visual parallels with non-Roman coins that also feature crocodiles, Draycott can provide no evidence or arguments to suggest why Augustus would choose to make a reference to the daughter of his enemies whose defeat, moreover, this particular coin is meant to commemorate. More important here is the question of whether or not the Roman people to whom the coin was intended to be issued would have recognised the image of the crocodile as a specific reference to Egypt. We already find images of a crocodile on the Palestrina Nile mosaic, which has been dated to ca. 100 BCE by Paul Meyboom and should be interpreted, as he has demonstrated, not only as a coherent landscape composition depicting the river Nile in Egypt during its flood season, but also as a source of information on life in Egypt as well as the religious practices along the Nile delta.²⁴⁷ The appearance of crocodiles on this Roman mosaic would thus have been received as a direct link with Egypt and the river Nile; similarly, crocodiles continue to feature on Nilotic scenes in Roman mosaics and paintings from the 1st Century BCE onwards.²⁴⁸ As such, the connection of the image of the crocodile and Egypt was already known in Rome in 28 BCE, when Augustus issued his denarius. The combination of the inscription ‘AEGVPTO CAPTA’ and the crocodile would therefore have presented quite a strong and unambiguous message: this coin referred to Egypt, an Egypt that Augustus had conquered and subsequently incorporated. And as such, any reference to Egypt, by name or associated image, likewise referred right back to Augustus himself.

The manifestations of Egypt in Rome that followed the issuing of this denarius not only refer likewise to Octavian’s military victory, but they also and perhaps especially refer to the fact that Egypt had

²⁴⁶ Draycott reflects on how the image of the crocodile was specifically selected for Cleopatra Selene by Cleopatra VII, intended to commemorate a significant event at the foundation of the Ptolemaic dynasty, thus ‘comprising part of a wider strategy of reconstituting the empire of Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphos’. She concludes that ‘the image was subsequently utilised on Octavian’s gold and silver AEGVPTO CAPTA coinage’ to either allude to or directly refer to Cleopatra Selene. She offers the bronze Nemausus coinage and the coinage of Juba II of Mauretania, which also feature a crocodile, as parallel and therefore as argument for this interpretation of the Augustan coin. Draycott 2012, 43-56.

²⁴⁷ Meyboom 1995, 80-81.

²⁴⁸ On Nilotic scenes in Rome, see especially: Versluys 2002, 58-89. See also: Swetnam-Burland 2004, 482-482.

become part of Rome; it had become one of the ‘components’ that made up Rome, and wherefrom Rome, at will, could take such manifestations in order to express itself, as Rome. In that light, the minting of these denarii marked an important step in the process of Octavian’s political and cultural revolution: because of the clarity with which they communicated their meaning –setting the scene, as it were, for what was to come– and not in the least because of the very nature of coins. There are, after all, few material objects that get handled and exchanged among people, partaking in human activity on a daily and self-evident basis, in the way physical money does.

An interesting note in relation to Octavian’s 29 BCE triumph, is the fact that the *Res Gestae* in particular emphasises Octavian’s acquired *auctoritas*, and stresses this in contrast to the fact that his *potestas* never exceeded that of his magistrate colleagues: ‘During this time I excelled in *auctoritas*, but possessed no more *potestas* than those who were my fellow magistrates in office’.²⁴⁹ As already touched upon in the first chapter, the concept of *auctoritas* was crucial to Octavian’s policies: namely, the constant confirmation of his authority, as part of a continuous and ever-increasing process – as opposed to the concept of *potestas*, whereby official power is claimed by means of a singular moment of conquest.²⁵⁰ Octavian’s *auctoritas*, as represented by these denarii, relies strongly on his service to the Roman people: concretely, by incorporating Egypt into Rome for the sake of the Roman people. The message of the coin does not directly mention the end of the civil war: even though this would have been the one service of Octavian’s victory that would have been most felt by the people of Rome. Instead, the conquest of Egypt becomes a symbolic reference: the conquest of Egypt is not only direct proof that Rome is flourishing and expanding, but also, indirectly, it proves that the civil war is officially at an end. But rather than reflecting back on such a disgraceful part of recent Roman history –war and conflict among Romans– it is here implied only indirectly by means of a positive message: Rome has grown. This emphasis, consequently, makes Octavian’s newly gained *auctoritas* part of the very same positive message and thus, by direct association, effectively defuses negative response to his power before it even might arise.

The example of the aureus coin, especially because it is not from Rome, demonstrates how Octavian’s political message spread throughout the entirety of the Roman world immediately following his 29 BCE

²⁴⁹ *Res Gestae* 34.1: ‘Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistrato conlegae fuerunt’. The text here clearly marks the contrast between *auctoritate* and *potestatis* (by means of *autem*) and stresses the equal status of the magistrates by the expression *mihi quoque* (implying Octavian here is simply one of many).

²⁵⁰ Galinsky 1996, 10–20. See also: Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 239, 453. See also note 43.

triumph in Rome. This aureus openly shows ‘the Republican-spirited façade of the Augustan Principate’.²⁵¹ The depiction of Octavian as a civilian magistrate in toga, surrounded by scrolls that directly refer to the laws and right (‘leges et iura’) from the accompanying inscription, seems to illustrate the above mentioned *Res Gestae* passage to the letter. Whereas the denarii from Rome emphasise Octavian’s victory and the incorporation of Egypt, this aureus confirms Octavian’s *auctoritas* (authority he earned because he returned laws and right to the people) while at the same time defusing any possible claims of *potestas* by means of his portrayal as civilian magistrate. The fact that the conquest of Egypt appears entirely absent here is certainly noteworthy: political references to Egypt apparently featured exclusively on coins minted in (or in the close vicinity of) Rome at this time. Perhaps this was a deliberate choice, because manifestations of Egypt were to become an important visual political tool for Octavian especially in the city of Rome, and not (yet) in the greater expanse of the Roman world during this time.

In brief, these denarii coins with direct reference to Egypt, in the context of the city of Rome 29-28 BCE, actively convey a message that celebrates Octavian’s victory by means of the conquest of Egypt, and as such they subsequently set the scene for future manifestations of Egypt as part of Rome; namely, as manifestations referring to Rome and Octavian’s (soon to be Augustus’) Rome in particular. Moreover, the reference to Egypt on these coins marks the end of civil war by focusing on a positive public message: by celebrating the flourish and expansion of Rome that Octavian caused and henceforth would put to effect.

The concept of Egypt that we find here, although at first seemingly obvious, is not merely the concept of a conquered land that has become incorporated by Rome. These denarii, for the first time, seem to express Egypt as a specifically Roman concept: we might say that the Egyptian crocodile here has become, in effect, a Roman crocodile. And more than anything, Egypt here seems to become an Augustan concept: it concretely marks Octavian’s military victory and, at the same time, it symbolises the flourish and growth of Rome that Octavian’s policies set in motion. The military victory enabled Octavian’s political set-up: but it is the long-term plan of these politics that are conveyed with the most emphasis. And Egypt here illustrates both.

Therefore, at this point in the overview, with also the House of Augustus on the Palatine in mind, the evidence so far seems to suggest that manifestations of Egypt known up to 28 BCE were indirect (and

²⁵¹ Curator’s notes at: The British Museum online catalogue entry 1995.0401.1.

sometimes quite direct) references to Augustus himself and his newly gained status in Rome, rather than to the strictly military conquest of the country Egypt. The following case studies will explore whether or not this implication was strengthened and expanded upon as such, and, importantly, whether or not (and if so, how) manifestations of Egypt hence began to develop throughout a wider sphere of Augustan Rome as a consequence.

3.3. The Apollo Palatinus Temple Complex

When Octavian vowed to build the Apollo Palatinus temple in 36 BCE, following his defeat of Sextus Pompeius, his choice for its location directly neighbouring his own domus was supported by the claim that the deity Apollo himself had singled out this area: said location was allegedly struck by lightning, and that story was effectively propagandised as a sign that Octavian's soothsayers read as the god's wish for a temple.²⁵² The temple was dedicated in 28 BCE, closely following Octavian's defeat of Mark Antony and the incorporation of Egypt, and came to fulfil a crucial role not only as landmark of the Augustan Palatine complex, but also as a key component of Rome's political, religious and intellectual history.²⁵³ The entire complex entailed a large terrace with public library and so-called 'Danaid portico' that encircled it, which was completed in 25 BCE (fig. 26 represents a recent hypothetical reconstruction of the site). Although the Apollo Palatinus temple was an important step in the development of Augustan temple architecture – which marked a significant change from Republican times and set the scene for Roman Imperial temple architecture to come – there is only a small amount of concrete data known about its construction, and (consequently) all the more debate about its reconstruction.²⁵⁴ Based on the archaeological evidence from the Palatine site itself, which has recently been revisited and thoroughly documented by Stephan Zink, the south-west orientation of the temple seems beyond doubt²⁵⁵; also the monumental character of the temple, as described by ancient authors such as Propertius and Velleius Paterculus.²⁵⁶

²⁵² This is recorded in: Velleius Paterculus 2.81.3; Cass. Dio 49.15.5; Suet. Aug. 29.

²⁵³ Zink 2008, 47. About the symbolism of the lightning bolt and the politics surrounding the dedication of the temple, see also: Hekster 2006, 149-168; Gros LTUR 1.54.

²⁵⁴ Most recently, see the debate about the orientation of the temple in JRA 25 2012, with Wiseman (371-387) arguing for a northeast orientation based on reappraisal of textual sources, and with Zink (288-402) arguing for the more widely accepted south-west orientation based on existing as well as the latest on site archaeological evidence. For a chronological overview of discussion about the Apollo Palatinus temple site, including the accompanying terrace and library, see: Pinza 1913, 199-224; Richmond 1914, 196; Colini 1941, 9-40; Lugli 1951, 26-55, 258-90; Carettoni 1967, 55-75; Id. 1983, 8-16, 17; Bauer 1969, 183-204; Von Hesberg 1980; Zanker 1987, 59-60, 91, 265-267; Lefèvre, 1989; Roccas 1989, 571-588; Strazzulla 1990; Adam 1994; Viscogliosi 1996; Royo 1999, 146-148; De Nuccio & Ungaro 2002, 437-442; Haselberger 2003, 151-197; Iacopi & Tedone 2005, 351-378; Meyboom 2005, 238-239; Stamper 2005, 105-129; Quenemoen 2006, 229-250; Zink 2008, 47-63; Id. 2012, 388-402; Zink & Piening 2009, 109-122; Claridge 2010, 142-143; Wiseman 2012, 371-387.

²⁵⁵ Zink 2008, 55-60 (preliminary ground plan); Id. 2012, 392-399 (detailed study of ground plan and site reconstruction); personal communication on site with Stephan Zink in 2011 and 2012, and further discussion with Professor Christopher Smith at the British School in Rome in 2012.

²⁵⁶ The temple is described as monumental and eye-catching, golden of colour and clad in white marble. Propertius especially writes with some detail about the temple's marble entablature being decorated in gold. See: Prop. 2.31; Vell. Pat. 2.81.3.

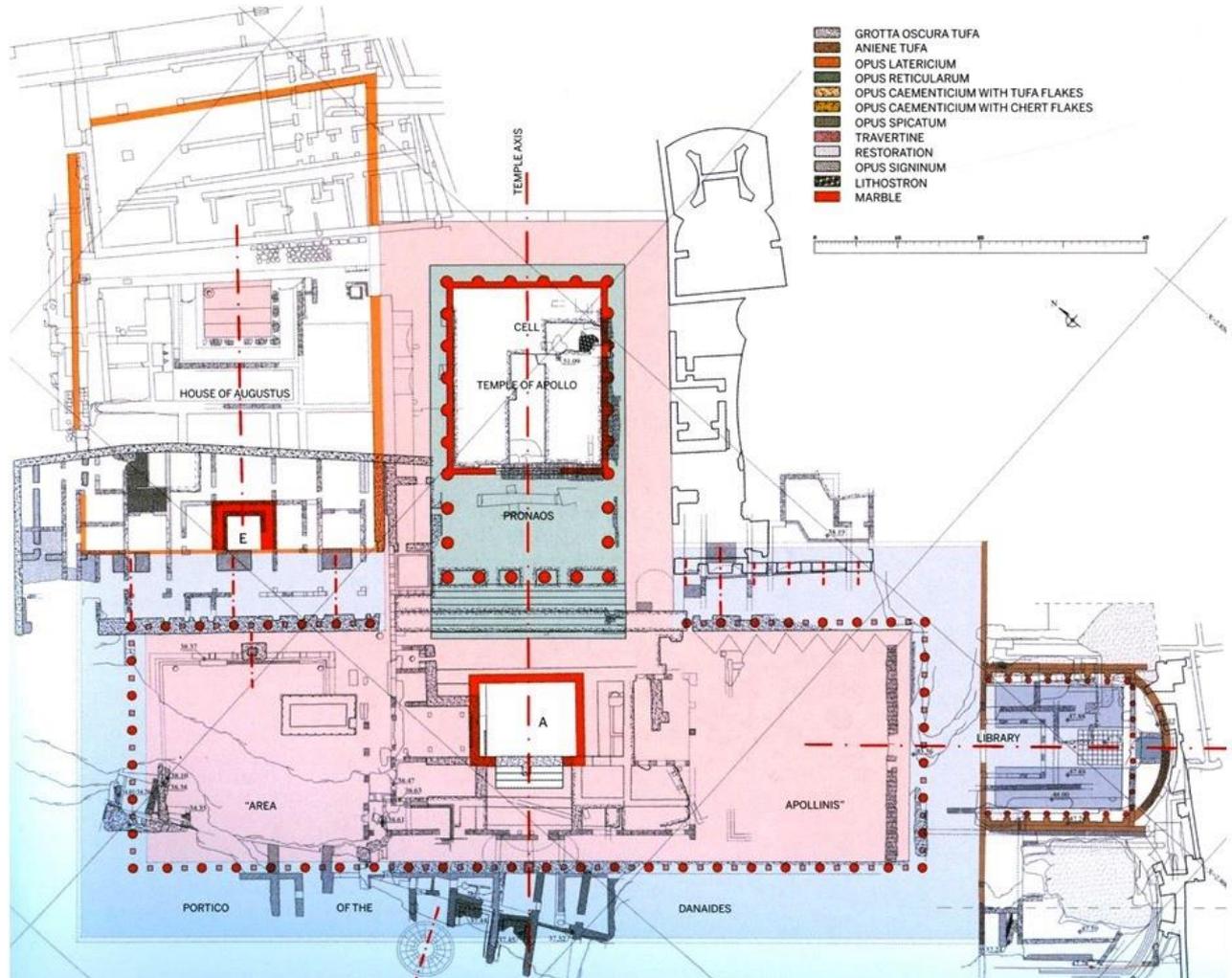


Fig. 26. Hypothetical plan of the Augustan Palatine complex, including the House of Augustus and House of Livia, the Apollo Palatinus temple and accompanying terrace and library. Copyright 2008, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

It is with the completion of this elaborate expansion of Octavian's original (and likewise expanding set of) Palatine domus in 28 BCE, that the 'Augustan Palatine' truly gains its 'palatial' character, in fact reminiscent of the palace complexes of Hellenistic kings.²⁵⁷

From the elite Republican neighbourhood facing the Forum Romanum, the Palatine here takes its first step towards the all-encompassing Imperial palace complex that it will grow into for centuries to come. While politically emphasising the Republican values of Roman government, with due moderation and reverence for *res publica* and the people of Rome, Octavian simultaneously marks the beginnings of

²⁵⁷ On residential Hellenistic architecture in the Roman world, see: Winter 2006, 282-290. On the palatial character of the House of Augustus on the Palatine, see: Meyboom 2005, 219-274.

Empire expressed through monumental material culture, of which the Augustan Palatine complex was the first and perhaps remained the most striking and influential example. And in order to do so, Octavian seems to have quite deliberately deviated from the then known Republican houses on the Palatine, and instead placed himself in a Hellenistic tradition of kingly palace complexes, of which the Apollo Palatinus temple was an important component.

A variety of manifestations of Egypt are found as part of this temple complex. These include its terrace and accompanying library, constitute several terra cotta reliefs and roof antefixes recovered from the Palatine temple site, a possible thematic and material connection with the black marble Danaid statues recovered from the site of the terrace, and a selection of polished Aswan granite blocks recovered at the temple site that remain currently unpublished and of which the interpretation is uncertain. These examples are explored in the following paragraphs.

3.3.1. The Apollo Palatinus temple

Augustus states to have rebuilt no less than eighty-two temples in the city of Rome during his consulate of 28 BCE, the same year as the completion and dedication of the Apollo Palatinus temple; the number itself, no doubt, being a case political propaganda.²⁵⁸ But we do know that at least several temples were renovated under Augustus; Pliny the Elder records that the concept of ‘golden temples’ (*aurea templa*) was introduced to Rome during the final phases of the Roman Republic.²⁵⁹ The remains of the Apollo Palatinus temple are currently ‘the only archaeologically attested example of such an *aureum templum*’, and seeing its dating and location, it is plausible that Octavian’s Palatine temple served as a model for the reconstruction (and redecoration) of other temples throughout the city at the time.²⁶⁰

According to the most recent analyses of the on-site archaeological evidence, the basic ground plan of the Apollo Palatinus temple can be reconstructed in terms of its foundations, podium, colonnade facade, pronaos and cella (see fig. 27).

²⁵⁸ Dio Cass. 53.1.3.

²⁵⁹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 33.18; 34.13. See also: Zanker 1987, 110-115.

²⁶⁰ Zink & Piening 2009, 116.

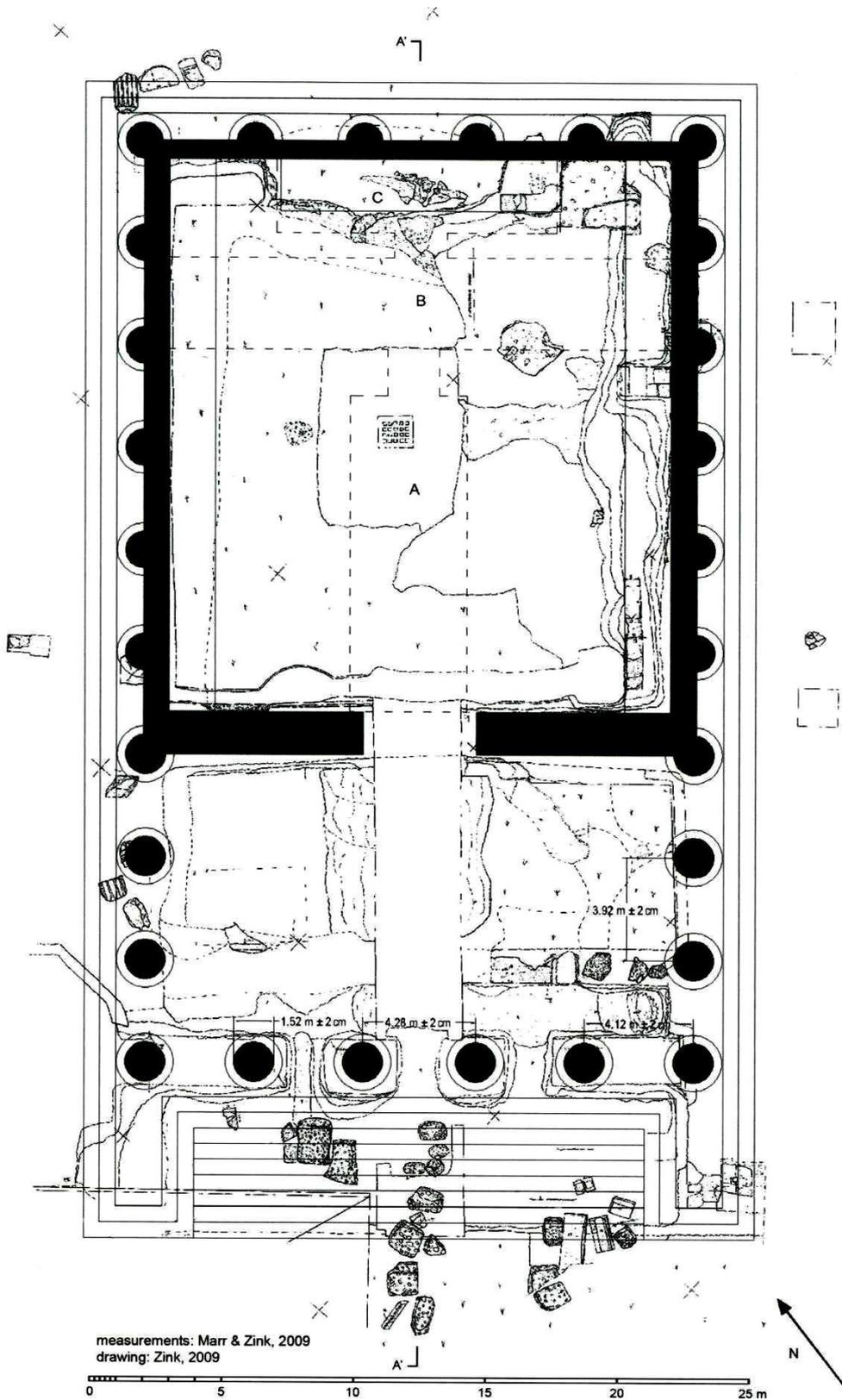


Fig. 27. Most recent ground plan of the Apollo Palatinus temple. With kind permission of S. Zink. (Copyright 2009; published in JRA 25, 2012).

Architectural comparisons are often made with the Apollo Sosianus temple (also known as ‘Apollo in Circo’ or ‘Apollo Medicus’) located near the theatre of Marcellus in Rome; also stylistically, in terms of decorative patterns of the capitals and friezes, these two contemporary Apollo temples show many similarities.²⁶¹

Certain decorative features from the Apollo Sosianus temple have sometimes been identified in reference to Egypt: there are snake motifs and acanthus designs that occasionally appear to incorporate lotus buds.²⁶² The snake motifs, however, are not visually comparable to uraeus motifs such as found in the wall painting designs from the House of Augustus, House of Livia and the ‘Aula Isiaca’ site, as discussed in paragraph 3.1.²⁶³ For instance, the snakes here can be interpreted as related to a Herculean myth: snakes feature throughout Mediterranean material culture and as such, without any specific reference to the paratactic cobra posture associated with uraeus, or accompanying attributes such as *atef* crowns, should not be associated with Egypt necessarily.²⁶⁴ The appearance of especially the candelabra and acanthus designs from the Apollo Sosianus temple shows remarkable similarity with those from the Apollo Palatinus temple – but it is only among the decorative designs of the Apollo Palatinus temple that manifestations of Egypt stand out.

Nine terracotta panels have been recovered from the temple site on the Palatine, depicting a figurative scene with the goddess Isis flanked by two sphinxes (see fig. 28).

²⁶¹ First known record of the Apollo Sosianus temple is in Livy 4.25, where its 431 BCE inauguration as temple of Apollo Medicus by the consul Iulius Mento is described. The building was subsequently restored in 353 BCE and in 179 BCE. In 32 BCE the consul Gaius Sosius rebuilt the temple officially following his victories in Judea (37 and 34 BCE). Although the temple carried Sosius’ name from this moment onwards, it is often suggested that his commission was highly influenced, if not wholly initiated, by Octavian, especially seeing the many stylistic and architectural similarities between this temple and Apollo Palatinus temple which was already under construction since 36 BCE. See: La Rocca 1988, 122; Viscogliosi 1988, 136. For an overview of scholarship on the Apollo Sosianus temple, especially in relation to the Apollo Palatinus temple, see: Kellum 1985, 169-176; Viscogliosi 1988, 136-149; La Rocca 1988; Strazzulla 1990; Viscogliosi 1996; Galinsky 1997, 22; Haselberger 2003, 151-197; Stamper 2005, 105-129; Zink 2008, 61-63.

²⁶² La Rocca 1985, 94; Zanker 1987, 94; Viscogliani 1996, 35.

²⁶³ Recorded in: Viscogliani 1996, 153, fig. 179, 180, 181, 182. Viscogliani interprets these snake motifs as referring to ‘Asian conquests’ in particular, but provides no further base for that claim.

²⁶⁴ Zanker compares the snake and acanthus motifs from the Sosianus temple, along with accompanying candelabra motifs, to similar designs on Augustan coins and candelabra designs in Augustan wall painting; these similarities certainly demonstrate the continuity of the Augustan ‘Bildersprache’, but seem to hold no specific reference to Egypt as such: Zanker 1987, 94. On uraeus motifs and paratactic cobra posture with original in Alexandrian wall painting, see: Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186, and paragraph 3.1.



Fig. 28. One of nine similar terracotta panels featuring Isis and sphinxes. Currently at the Palatine Museum, Rome. Photo: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Each of these nine terracotta panels measures approximately 30 cm by 45-50 cm and depicts the same scene, quite possibly made from a single mould. There are only some traces left of paint pigment, but enough to presume that these panels were richly painted in their entirety; of the surviving pigments the majority can be identified as Egyptian blue (*caeruleum*).²⁶⁵ Especially at the lower section of the panel depicted in fig. 28 visible traces of Egyptian blue paint can still be seen. The figure of Isis is positioned at the centre of the scene, rising up at the waist from a large open lotus. Her identity is recognisable through her lotus crown and her attributes: a sistrum in her right hand and a small platter with fruit in her left hand. She wears a *chiton* with loose folds, and long ringlet curls down her shoulders; these, too, are traditional marks of Isis depictions in the Hellenistic and Roman world.²⁶⁶ The figure of Isis is flanked by two sphinxes. The left sphinx is female, with a woman's breasts and a woman's head also crowned by a lotus bud and with typical Isiac ringlet curls, with an *uraeus* emerging from the lotus. The sphinx on the right is male, with a man's chest and a bearded man's head likewise crowned with a lotus bud. In existing scholarship these are not identified beyond the denomination of sphinx.²⁶⁷ In fact, parallels are difficult

²⁶⁵ See: Eastaugh et. al. 2005, 147-148; Tite 2007, 75-92; Zink & Piening 2009, 122; Boschetti 2011, 59-91.

²⁶⁶ Strazzulla 1990, 81-84. On Isiac attributes in the Hellenistic and Roman world see: Eingartner 1991, 121-22; Bricault 2001, 167; Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 40-72. See also: discussion of the Isiac figure at the House of Livia wall paintings, section 3.1.2.

²⁶⁷ Caretoni 192, 133; Strazzulla 1990, 81-84.

to find, especially for the male sphinx type. The similarity between especially the heads of the Isis figure and the female sphinx might indicate that the female sphinx in some way likewise represents an aspect of the goddess; by association, the male sphinx might indicate Isis' Hellenistic counterpart Serapis; the bearded features do align with the common appearance of the deity in Hellenistic and subsequently Roman material culture, although he is not usually crowned by a lotus.²⁶⁸ Another interpretation, based on the rendering of the male sphinx's hair and beard, is that of a stylistically Persian influence, as opposed to an Egyptian style.²⁶⁹ But both these interpretations, while not unlikely by association, are not necessarily supported by the scene and/or attributes depicted.

There is more uncertainty in regard to the identification of several roof terracotta antefixes that have likewise been recovered from the Apollo Palatinus temple site; among these a portrait interpreted as Jupiter-Ammon and depictions interpreted as the deity Bes might be identified as manifestations of Egypt.²⁷⁰



Fig. 29. Terracotta antefixes depicting Bes. Currently at the Palatine Museum, Rome. Photos (A and C): M. van Aerde. Reconstruction drawing: Anselmino 1977, XXIII (Antiquarium Comunale di Roma). Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

²⁶⁸ The deity Serapis became popular in Ptolemaic Egypt and the city of Alexandria in particular. Serapis can be regarded as representing a combination of Osiris-Apis, an anthropomorphic deity that was revered by Egyptians as the equal of Osiris, and by the Hellenistic rulers of Ptolemaic Egypt as an equal to Jupiter-Ammon, with bearded and muscular features similar to Zeus or Hades. See: Malaise 1972, 163-168; Roulet 1972, 39-40; Tran-tam Thin 1982, 101-117; Ladislav 1981, 121-150; Wild 1984, 1739-1851; Bourgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 37-76; Versluys 2002, 10-11, 11, 137; Minarčák 2007, 59-68; *LIMC* (1982-) sv. Serapis, (Clerc & Leclant).

²⁶⁹ Kaper 2014, personal communication.

²⁷⁰ Anselmino 1977, 135 ('Terrecotte architetoniche dell'Antiquarium Comunale di Roma'); Strazzulla 1990, 85-94.

The antefixes that may be identified as the Egyptian deity Bes (see fig. 29) appear to have functioned as corner pieces of either the roof of the temple itself or perhaps a passageway that directly connected the neighbouring House of Augustus with the temple.²⁷¹ They depict a portrait of a bearded male figure with a grinning or smiling expression and a beard, wearing a fan-shaped crown. The portrait is surrounded by stylised floral ornaments. These portraits have also been interpreted as depicting Silenus or theatre masks, which are more common features in Roman temple architecture.²⁷² Based solely on its iconographical elements, therefore, the figure is not a parallel for how Bes would be depicted according to Egyptian iconography, but rather would seem to be a mixture of different Hellenistic elements, as well. Nonetheless, an interesting comparison can be made with the so-called ‘Campana’ terracotta panel currently at the Antiquarium Comunale in Rome (see fig. 30).

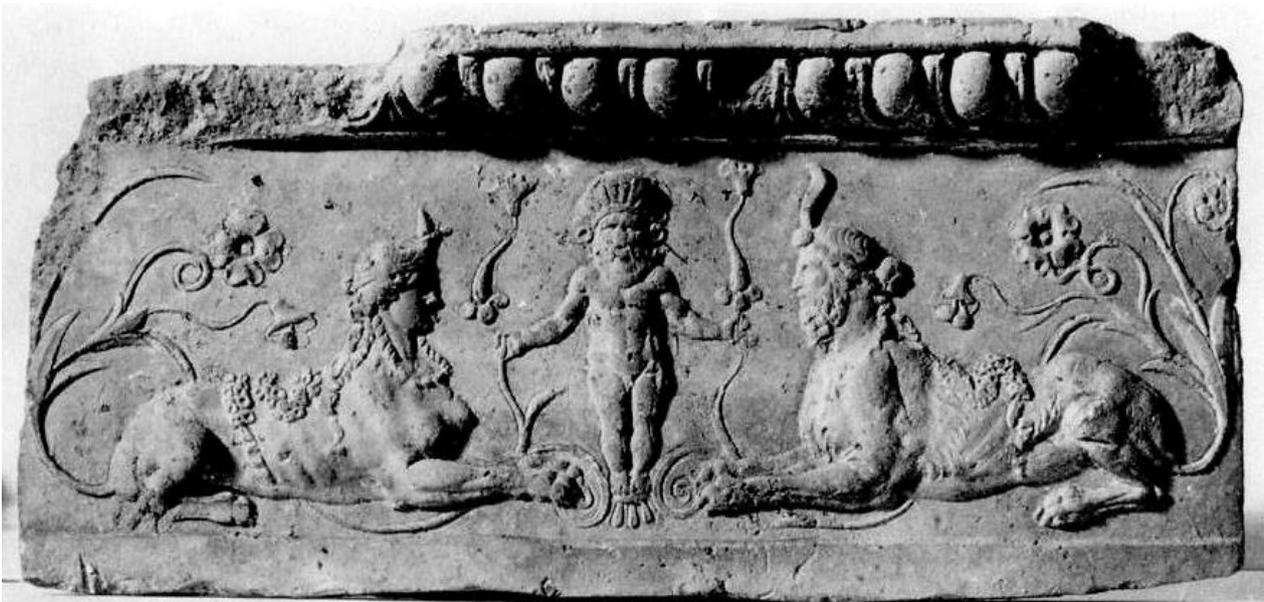


Fig. 30. Terracotta panel depicting the god Bes flanked by two sphinxes. Currently archived at the Antiquarium Comunale di Roma. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Little is known about this panel, except that it was recovered in Rome and can most likely be dated to the late first century BCE.²⁷³ The composition of the two sphinxes, the left female and the right male, positioned besides a central Egyptian deity, is directly similar to the composition of the nine terracotta

²⁷¹ Carettoni 1983, 17.

²⁷² Other antefixes found at the Apollo temple site depict acanthus floral designs and elephant heads; these have sometimes been associated with the god Dionysus, of whom Silenus is a follower. However, other interpretations connect these motifs with the ‘Orient’, and therefore rather with Bes than with Dionysus. For the interpretative debate, see: Carettoni 1972, 135; Lefèvre 1989, 22; Strazzula 1987, 178, 276, Nr. 346; Id. 1990, 77-80, 86-87.

²⁷³ Von Rohden 1912, 164-167; Anselmino 1977; Strazzulla 1987, 170, 276; Id. 1990, 87.

panels from the Apollo temple site on the Palatine, depicting Isis flanked by two sphinxes (see above, fig. 28). In both examples, a frieze of *ovuli* runs along the top width of the panel, and the central figure emerged from (stylised) foliage. In the ‘Campana’ panel the lion tails of the two sphinxes also transform into elaborate floral motifs, and only the female sphinx is crowned with a lotus bud, while the male sphinx wears a headband with a uraeus cobra. The central figure of Bes has the grinning face of a bearded man and wears a fan-shaped crown consisting of feathers; aspects directly similar to the portrait in the Palatine antefixes (see fig. 29). These stylistic comparisons do seem to indicate that there may have been a direct connection between the Isis panels from the Palatine and the ‘Campana’ panel; or at least that it was a certain type of depiction that was not strictly unique to the Palatine at that time, but rather already part of the available Roman material culture repertoire of the latter half of the first century BCE. Also the identification of Bes in the Palatine antefixes seems more plausible in comparison to the depiction of Bes from the ‘Campana’ relief; rather than a stylistic anomaly, this would indicate a certain type of Bes portrayal that was already part of the Hellenistic-Roman material culture repertoire.²⁷⁴ Another parallel for this panel is a fragment of a terracotta relief currently at The August Kestner Museum in Hannover (see fig. 31).²⁷⁵ The Bes figure displayed here is identical to the one on the ‘Campana’ relief, and the partially preserved male head to its right, bearded and wearing an *uraeus* headband, is likewise directly similar to the male sphinx on the ‘Campana’ piece. Also the decorative *ovuli* are recognisable from both the ‘Campana’ relief and the Palatine Isis relief.



Fig. 31. Fragment of terracotta panel depicting the god Bes and bearded male head. Source: Siebert 2011, fig. 171.

²⁷⁴ The portrayal of the god Bes has known much variety in ancient Egypt as well as in its continuation throughout the Roman Mediterranean. In the case of the latter, we usually see Bes depicted as either a hunchbacked dwarf-like creature with a beard and a fan-crown, or a muscular crude male figure with similar facial features and crown. See: Hölbl, 1981, 157-186; Barra Bagnasco 1992, 41-49.

²⁷⁵ Inv. Nr. 1396 at the August Kestner Museum, Hannover. See: Siebert 2011, 118-119, fig. 171.

Rome has been recorded as this fragments' provenance, but further details about its origin are unknown. Nonetheless, the similarity of these two Bes reliefs and the Isis relief from the Palatine is striking – and so far they appear to be the only known examples of reliefs depicting a scene featuring a female and male sphinx flanking an Egyptian figure (Isis or Bes). The similarity may also strengthen the likelihood of the presence of Bes antefixes as part of the temple complex.

A second type of terracotta antefix that has been recovered from the vicinity of the Palatine area, features a portrait of the deity Jupiter-Ammon (see fig 32 and 33 A and B).²⁷⁶ The measurements of fragment 33A have been recorded as 16x17cm, and of fragment 33B as 12.5x12cm. Measurements of fragment 32 not known, but similar dimensions would seem likely.

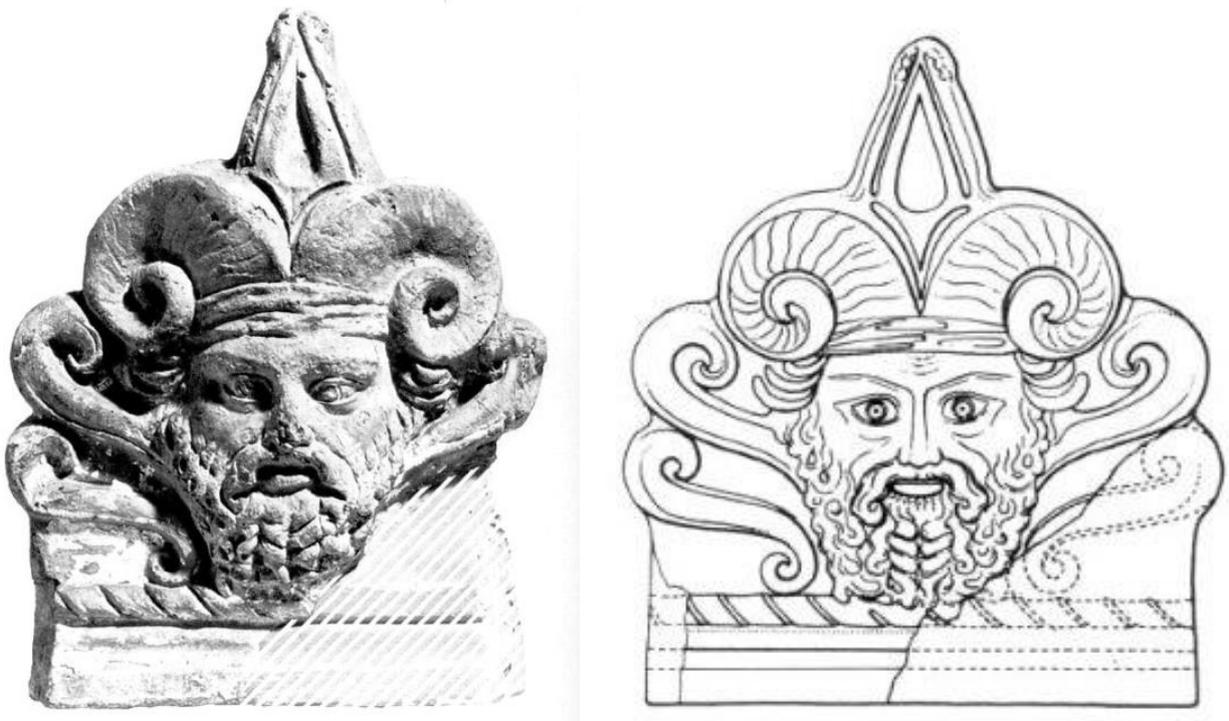


Fig. 32. Terracotta antefixes depicting Jupiter-Ammon. A: Antiquarium Comunale di Roma. Reconstruction drawing: Anselmino 1977, XII. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

²⁷⁶ The first fragment (fig. XXA) is currently archived at the Antiquarium Comunale di Roma; no further details are known about its provenance. See: Anselmino 1977, 135. The second fragment (fig. XXB) is currently at the August Kestner Museum in Hannover, Inv.Nr. 1351. See: Siebert 2011, 82, fig. 109. The third fragment (fig. XXC) has been categorised as part of the Flavian Palatine excavations directly besides the Apollo Palatinus temple, but the piece remained so far unstudied. It was encountered at the Magazzino a Fianco del Museo Palatino by Sander Müskens in 2013.



Fig. 33. A: B: August Kestner Museum, Hannover. Source: Siebert 2011, fig. 109. B: Terracotta antefix depicting Jupiter-Ammon, currently at the Magazzino a Fianco del Museo Palatino in Rome. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Jupiter-Ammon (known as Zeus-Ammon in Greek) was the favoured deity of Alexander the Great, who founded the city of Alexandria in Egypt in 332 BCE. As a combination of the Greek god Zeus and the Egyptian god Amon-Ra, Zeus-Ammon became known as a deity throughout Siwa and North Africa, and became particularly representative of the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt that succeeded Alexander. As Jupiter-Ammon, this deity also entered the Roman world typically recognisable by a bushy beard and the two large rams-horns protruding from the forehead, among the hair, displayed in a Hellenistic style with attention to detail, perspective and expression.²⁷⁷ All three examples have been recorded with 'Rome' as provenance, and from two of them we know that they appear to have been found in the vicinity of the Apollo Palatinus temple complex (see note 288), but any additional information about their discovery and possible origin is lacking. It is therefore not certain whether these antefixes featured as part of the Apollo temple complex on the Palatine. Although this of course also hints at the overall style of antefixes in Roman temple architecture, its appearance does coincide with other antefixes of which the provenance is better known; the stylised curling floral motif that surrounds the deity's head are remarkably similar in execution to the decorative floral motifs found on the Bes antefixes (fig. 31) and on several more antefixes featuring acanthus and elephants that have likewise been recovered from the

²⁷⁷ On the appearance of Jupiter-Ammon in Roman material culture, see: Hölbl 1981, 157-186; Zanker 1987, 232; La Rocca et al. 1995, 76-78; Schwentzel 2001, 469-507.



Fig. 34. Terracotta antefixes with elephant (A) and acanthus (B) motifs from the Apollo Palatinus site. Currently at the Palatine Museum, Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Palatine temple site (fig. 34). The thematic significance of Jupiter-Ammon, especially when featured besides similar Hellenistic style depictions of Isis, sphinxes and Bes, would certainly have held political relevance in relation to Octavian's Egyptian victory. And this victory, at the same time, implied that the Egyptian pantheon (as presented here in the visual Hellenistic style of the Ptolemies) was now incorporated into Rome – and as such, as integral part of Roman culture, would not make an unsuitable appearance as part of Roman temple architecture. The appearance here of Jupiter-Ammon as part of Octavian's expanding Palatine complex and thus at the very beginning of the cultural revolution to come, would be particularly interesting in relation to its reappearance in the decorative scheme of the Forum of Augustus in 2BCE, twenty-six years later, at the height and perhaps even the conclusion of Augustan material culture in the city of Rome (see paragraph 3.11). Interesting to note, moreover, is the fact that terracotta antefixes as part of temple architecture were a longstanding tradition in Etruscan architecture; however, no Egyptian topics or iconography appear to have been used until what seems to have been their introduction in Augustan Rome.²⁷⁸

Along with the appearance of manifestations of Egyptian in its decorative scheme, the architecture of the Apollo Palatinus temple marked change on more than one level. Ovid describes the radical changes that the Augustan architectural programme brought to the urban landscape of Rome: 'there was unspoilt

²⁷⁸ For an overview of Etruscan antefixes in Roman architecture: Andr n 1940; Brendel 1995.

simplicity before: now Rome is golden.²⁷⁹ While because of the literary nature of their texts these authors cannot be read as strictly historical sources, it is nonetheless noteworthy that other contemporary authors, such as Vergil and Propertius, likewise choose words such as *aureum* ('golden') and *clarus* ('bright') in their descriptions of Augustan monuments.²⁸⁰ As Zink and Piening point out, these descriptions seem to be not 'mere poetic rhetoric, but reflect a built reality'.²⁸¹ And this built reality seems to have been initiated by the Apollo Palatinus temple in 28 BCE. Zink and Piening base their conclusion on a thorough analysis of the pigment scheme from the remains of the Apollo Palatinus temple, which enabled them to reconstruct the temple as, indeed, bright and golden. Especially interesting is their sampling of several varieties of golden pigments from the temple capitals, architraves and cornices, confirming the visage of the *aureum templum* (see fig. 35).²⁸²



Fig. 35. Digital reconstruction of the golden pigments from the Apollo Palatinus temple. With kind permission of S. Zink (copyright 2009; published in JRA 22, 2009).

²⁷⁹ Ovid *Ars Am.* 3.113, 'simplicitas rudis ante fuit: nunc aurea Roma est'.

²⁸⁰ Verg. *Aen.* 8.720; Prop. 2.31.2; 2.31.9; 4.1.5.

²⁸¹ Zink & Piening 2009, 115.

²⁸² Four different shades of light gold and ochre pigments from Italian and Cypriot origin have been recovered. Zink & Piening 2009, 109-116, 122 (pigment samples); personal communication on site with Stephan Zink in 2011 and 2012.

Recovered among the pigment samples was also the Egyptian blue (caeruleum) pigment, but as mentioned above in relation to its appearance in the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine residence as well as the terracotta panels discussed above, this pigment was already common to Roman material culture.²⁸³ The golden appearance of the Apollo Palatinus temple does not represent a direct manifestation of Egypt an sich – but it will become significant in relation to the Egyptian obelisk from Heliopolis that Augustus has erected at the Circus Maximus in 10 BCE. This obelisk arrives in Rome no less than eighteen years later; but the visual impact of its placing in the direct vicinity and sightline of the golden Apollo Palatinus temple came to project such a (visual) strength that it implies a case of long-term planning. This is supported by the fact that we know that Augustus selected two obelisks to be taken from Heliopolis as early as 28 BCE, of which one was to be erected at Circus Maximus in 10 BCE.²⁸⁴ This connection between the Palatine temple and the Circus Maximus obelisk will be discussed at length, and according to its chronology, in paragraph 3.9.1. of this overview.

When looking at the different manifestations of Egypt that can be associated with Apollo Palatinus temple, the terracotta panels represent the most visually distinct example. In terms of their material form, the technique and pigments used, including the already widely known Egyptian blue are characteristic, even common for the then contemporary Roman material culture. The stylistic execution of the figurative scene shows much attention to naturalistic detail, perspective, muscle tone and subtleties such as the fluidity of clothing folds and texture of human hair; as such it is exemplary of Hellenistic style, such as had long been available to and incorporated into the Roman material culture repertoire. The depiction of the goddess Isis, especially, represents an early example of what was to become the predominant style of Isiac depiction in the Roman Empire.²⁸⁵ The thematic significance of these figurative scenes is less self-evident. Their original physical context has been recorded as in situ at the Apollo Palatinus temple area on the Palatine,²⁸⁶ but it is unknown whether these panels were part of the temple's interior or exterior decorations, or perhaps had been part of a passageway that led towards the temple or, perhaps, connected it to the neighbouring House of Augustus.²⁸⁷ The roof terracottas, on

²⁸³ Zink & Piening 2009, 122. On Egyptian blue in the Roman world, see notes 225 and 226.

²⁸⁴ Strabo *Geo.*17.1.27. See: Iversen 1968, 142-143; Curran et al. 2009, 37-38, 40-42. See also note 252 and paragraph 3.9.

²⁸⁵ See note 203.

²⁸⁶ Strazzulla 1990, 81; Anselmino 1977, 135.

²⁸⁷ Carettoni 1983, 17.

the other hand, do imply a connection with the temple;²⁸⁸ especially these antefixes have been recovered in considerable quantity from the temple area, and more of them are currently still being discovered.²⁸⁹

It is sometimes suggested that the mythical scenes depicted on several other terracotta panels recovered from the Apollo Palatinus site, showing a contest between Apollo and Hercules, may have been an indirect political reference to the confrontation between Augustus and Mark Antony at Actium.²⁹⁰ From that perspective, Augustus, the victor, can be identified in the form of his favoured deity Apollo; the representation of civilization and sunlight. Whereas Mark Antony, the defeated party, is shown in the image of Hercules, a brutish warrior dressed in animal skins, who must eventually bow to the civilised god Apollo. But apart from this interpretation, if correct, there are no stylistic hints or particular usage of material that indicate a visual connection with Egypt or Actium at all; nor is this mythical reference mentioned by Roman authors. Therefore, based on the materials used and the stylistic content of these panels themselves there is no reason to conclude that they thematically –and certainly not directly– would have been meant to refer to anything other than the myth of Apollo's contest against Hercules, as befitting for a temple dedicated to the god Apollo.

3.3.2. Terraces and temple complex

The terraces surrounding the Apollo Palatinus temple were completed in 25 BCE, following the dedication of the temple itself. From the site of these terraces a number of black marble statues have been recovered that, at first sight, have the appearance of early classical or even archaizing statuary features (see fig. 36).²⁹¹ Each statue depicts a young woman standing erect, almost rigid in pose reminiscent of Archaic Greek *kore* statues, with the left arm half-raised to hold up the folds of a traditional *peplos* dress, and they each wear a diadem headband on long hair with beaded curls.

²⁸⁸ On roof terracottas (antefixes) as part of Roman temple architecture in the time of Augustus, see: Stamper 2005, 105-129. Cf. Orlin 1997; Schollmeyer 2008.

²⁸⁹ Anselmino 1977, 135. Also: personal communication on site with Stephan Zink in 2011, who discovered another and previously unrecorded roof terracotta antefix of the acanthus type from the Apollo Palatinus site that year.

²⁹⁰ Carettoni 1971, 126; Zanker 1983, 34; Hekster 2011, 111-124. See also on this interpretation and discussion: Borbein 1968, 76; Kellum 1980, 169-171; Strazzulla 1990, 17-33.

²⁹¹ Three of the best preserved statues are displayed at the Palatine Museum in Rome. The complete number recovered is not currently archived, and the other more fragmentary statues from the site are not accessible for further study (personal communication with Dr. Maurizio Rulli from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Palatine department, 2011.)

Reconstructions have placed these statues in a portico encircling the temple terrace, in the traditional function of statuary either hermes or caryatids as part of the portico architectural scheme.²⁹²



Fig. 36. Black marble 'Danaid' statues from the Apollo Palatinus terraces. Currently at the Palatine Museum, Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

The connection with Egypt, in this case, relies on two aspects: the choice of material and the thematic content implied by these statues. The choice for the use of black marble is a remarkable one; at that point unparalleled in Rome.²⁹³ The rigid pose of these statues, portrayed in gleaming black marble, is visually reminiscent of traditional black basalt figurative statues from pre-Ptolemaic Egypt, even if the stylistic finesse of their execution resembles the style of Archaic Greek *kore* statues. This visual reference

²⁹² Royo 1999, 146-148, with hypothetical reconstructions in fig. III and IV; De Nuccio & Ungaro 2002, 437-442 with hypothetical reconstruction in fig. 2. See also: Balensiefen 2004, 100-111; Iacopi & Tedone 2005, 351-378; Meyboom 2005, 238-239.

²⁹³ Black marble was later also used for the famous 'Egyptian' statues from Hadrian's Villa Hadriana; which were likewise Roman sculptures (many of them modeled on Antinous) executed in a Hellenistic style but featuring recognizable Egyptian elements such as *nemes* headgear and *shendit* kilts. (See: Raeder 1983; Slavazzi 2002, 55-62; Salza Prina Ricotti 2003, 113-144) In Augustan times, however, this use of black marble was as yet unprecedented. The choice of black stone material, in both Augustan and Hadrianic examples, seems to imply a visual connection with black basalt associated with traditional (especially pre-Ptolemaic) Egyptian sculpture.

implied by the choice of black marble material, is rather more substantiated by the thematic connection that these statues held with Egypt. We know from ancient sources that the portico was known as the ‘portico of the Danaids’²⁹⁴; these black marble women represented the fifty daughters of the ancient Greek king Danaus, who were forced to marry the fifty sons of the king Aegyptus, in Egypt, and while feigning consent, murdered their husbands on their wedding night.²⁹⁵ The traditional mythical portrayal of the fifty Danaids is that of them doing penance for their act in the Underworld; but here on the Palatine the focus does not seem to be on punishment, but rather on the act itself; the murder of the Egyptian princes.²⁹⁶ This thematic reference to Egypt ‘could not be missed.’²⁹⁷ Seeing that the temple complex on the Palatine was dedicated in honour of Octavian’s victory at Actium against Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony, the portrayal here of the Danaids’ triumph against the princes of Egypt seems an overt visual political statement implying the Greek-Roman world triumphing over Egypt. It has been suggested that even the defilement of a Roman (Octavian) having to fight another Roman (Mark Antony, under the guise of Egypt) can also be seen reflected in the myth of the Danaids: although triumphant, the murder of their husbands remains a sin for which penance is required.²⁹⁸ While Octavian here overtly emphasises the Roman triumph over Egypt, the underlying ‘sin’ of Romans fighting Romans may also have been a deliberately choice as a layer of meaning implied by the portrayal of this particular myth, to stress due modesty as a civil war victor, even in the face of triumph.

An interesting comparison can be made with the bronze Danaid statues found at the Villa dei Papyri in Herculaneum; they were positioned along the villa’s peristyle and depicted in the act of their penance, carrying water in amphorae (now lost).²⁹⁹ They are dated to the 1st Century CE, and resemble the older Palatine Danaids especially in their archaic style as seen in their *peplos* dresses, facial rendering and erect postures (fig. 37), as well as their original positioning in a peristyle or gallery. The main difference lies in the material used, bronze instead of black marble, and the depiction of their punishment as opposed to the depiction of their murderous act on the Palatine, where they were placed side by side with the Egyptian princes that they killed.

²⁹⁴ Prop. 2.31.3-4; Ovid Trist. 3.1.61.

²⁹⁵ On the reconstruction and interpretation of the Danaid portico, see: Lugli 1952, 48-56; Sauron 1981, 286-294; Zanker 1983, 27; Kellum 1985, 173-175; Simon 1986, 20-24; Lefèvre 1989; Strazzulla, 1990, 101; Galinsky 1997, 220-221; Balensiefen 2004, 100-111.

²⁹⁶ Similar black marble statues depicting the murdered Egyptian princes would likewise have been placed in the portico, but of these no surviving examples remain. See: Strazzulla 1990, 101; Galinsky 1997, 220.

²⁹⁷ Galinsky 1997, 220.

²⁹⁸ See: Galinsky 1997, 221, based on ancient sources: Hor. *Ode* 3.11; Dio 50.4.3-5.

²⁹⁹ Sauron 1980, 277-299; Zarmakoupi 2010, 21-62.



Fig. 37. Bronze 'Danaid' statues from the Villa dei Papyri in Herculaneum. Photo: M. van Aerde.
(Copyright Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.)

The unusual choice for the use of black marble for the Palatine Danaid statues may have been used to evoke the visual appearance of bronze statues; however, there seems no apparent reason why actual bronze would not have been used instead. Perhaps the unusual choice of material was thematically linked. The visual appearance of Egyptian basalt statues would have been already familiar to Roman elite circles via the long-established trade networks between Rome and Alexandria. Some may, indeed, have recognised this particular style as a thematic reference expressed through its particular choice of material – especially because it was such an unusual choice in a Roman context. Interestingly, while the thematic content of these Danaid statues reflects upon Egypt as something that has been conquered and triumphed over, the choice to portray this particular statuary group by means of a choice of material visually reminiscent of Egyptian statuary, appears to reflect, more than anything, the fact that Egyptian (material) culture had now been fully incorporated into the Roman repertoire. Nevertheless, while the black hardstone character of the statues may reflect an Egyptian component, the overall archaic style of the statues, in terms of their hair, costuming and posture, is directly reminiscent of the Archaic Greek *kore* type, as mentioned above. These different layers of visual and thematic significance represented by the Danaid portico are in fact typical of Augustan culture – by making active use of overlap and even contradictions in order to achieve multi-layered meanings rather than heralding a singular message; this

likewise reflects the core of Octavian's political strategy set out from 30 BCE –which maintained the successful contradiction of restoring the *res publica* and gaining absolute power– and is thus likely to have found expression, too (and deliberately so) in the material culture that Octavian created on the Palatine. The thematic connection of these Danaids with (mythical) Egypt and their direct link with Augustan politics is hard to miss. The choice of their material may have likewise been connected to this, to emphasise the symbolism; however, this cannot be derived as a fact or placed in any case above a certain level of superimposed association. As said before, the black marble may have simply imitated the visual appearance of bronze statues. To most contemporary observers, probably, they would have appeared as such. But that does not mean that a visual connection to Egyptian black stone statues was not at all observed, either. The layered complexity typical of Augustan material culture, especially, seems to suggest that these need not necessarily exclude one and other.

Critical points, however, are the fact that the Danaid myth does not seem to feature in other known examples of (public) Augustan propaganda; moreover, the main issue herein would be the question whether or not this myth would have been so widely known among the people of Rome (just the educated elite, or also the citizen body?) to make any direct thematic association with Egypt. With this in mind, the Danaids at the Palatine present an interesting example of Augustan material culture wherein Egypt may or may not have been manifest – a question to which there could have been no single answer. It is also noteworthy that throughout this overview no parallels of the use of black stone for manifestation of Egypt in Augustan Rome were found, except for a single example in layered cameo glass, as will be discussed in section 3.7.1.3.

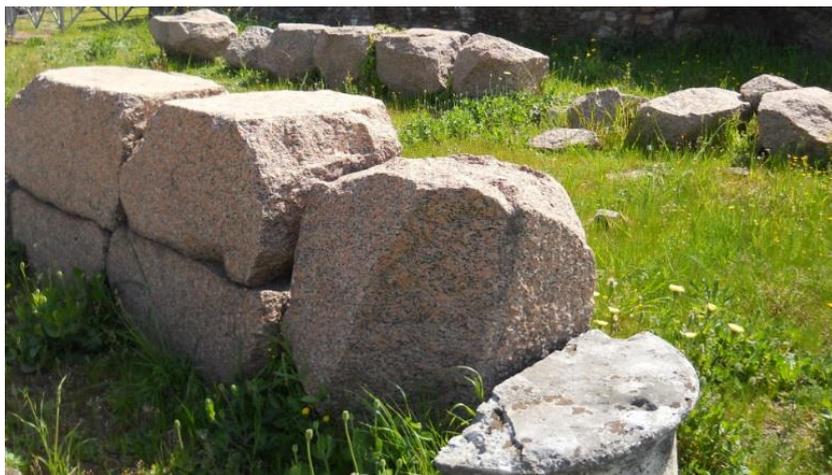
An even more puzzling feature found beside the Apollo Palatinus temple podium are the two rows of clearly identifiable Aswan granite blocks that currently still remain at the site (see fig. 38). There exists no record of their original excavation or any attempt of reconstruction to date. The blocks appear to have been connected at some point; they have smoothly polished rectangular sides and their connecting mechanism is still intact carved at the corners of several blocks – possibly of the type that used metal pins to unite the blocks. The location of the blocks may indicate that they were part of a possible corridor connecting the House of Augustus with the temple complex; especially seeing their close vicinity to the white marble pillar also currently still in situ at the far end of the temple podium (see fig. 38A), which has been interpreted as having been part of a portal or gateway to such a passage connecting the temple and

the House of Augustus;³⁰⁰ the blocks may have been imported from Egypt at a similar time as the Heliopolitan obelisks transported to Rome by Augustus' command.

Currently there is an absence of any interpretations or reconstructions of the blocks. Recent discussions with Natascha Sojc, Stephan Zink, and Sander Müskens have resulted in two preliminary hypotheses: (1) the possibility of a traditional Egyptian gate, transported in its entirety from Egypt to Rome, and (2) the possibility that these were simply building blocks incorporated into a Roman wall, whether or not this wall may have been part of the actual construction of the House of Augustus or not.³⁰¹ The dating of the arrival of these blocks at the temple site is also unclear; they appear to have remained in situ, but because of the lack of documentation it cannot be excluded that they derive from a much later date on the Palatine than the Augustan period.



A



B

Fig. 38. A and B: Aswan granite blocks at the Apollo Palatinus temple site, currently at the Palatine, Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde.

³⁰⁰ Carettoni 1983, 45-51; Zanker 1987, 110-115. It is interesting to note, however, that these granite blocks do not appear to have been drawn onto any of the (hypothetical) plans provided by Carettoni and Zanker.

³⁰¹ Personal communication at the Palatine 2011-2012. Additional discussion with staff at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) and the British School in Rome (BSR) in 2012-2013.

Due to the lack of research so far, little can be said with certainty about these Aswan granite blocks. Nonetheless, their appearance in situ at the remaining Augustan temple complex makes these granite blocks a remarkable feature. If anything, it raises the question of whether every object in Rome made of Aswan granite should be considered as a manifestation of Egypt. The material is quarried in Egypt, but is that where the Egyptian connection ends?

However, in the context of the Augustan Palatine in particular, we see that no manifestation of Egypt, whether in terms of style, theme or material, appears to have been a random choice or coincidence. These granite blocks thus may likewise have contributed, in some (perhaps Egyptian) way, to the Augustan Palatine complex and its multi-layered meanings.

3.3.3. Interpretation

The manifestations of Egypt at the Apollo Palatinus temple complex are, if anything, very diverse in character as well as form. When we look at what they each, specifically, did and (may have) signified in this particular context, it is first of all important to note that the combination of Isiac figurative decoration, as found in the terracotta frieze panels from the temple site, with the deity Apollo is most unusual. Isiac figurative elements also featured in decorative wall paintings from the Apollo Palatine complex (see paragraph 3.1.), but the appearance of these terracotta panels as part of the Apollo temple complex, or even the temple itself, would have suggested a significance beyond the strictly decorative. The majority of the terracotta panels recovered from the temple complex depict mythical scenes wherein Apollo himself plays a role; as mentioned above, most prominent are scenes of a contest between Apollo and Hercules.³⁰² The goddess Isis has no such mythical/thematic connection with the deity Apollo; the sphinxes depicted on all nine panels also do not have the visual appearance normally associated with Greek sphinxes.³⁰³ They are lying in the traditional position of Egyptian sphinxes that also feature in Hellenistic iconography, in profile with their front paws stretched, with lion bodies and only human torso or head figures and no wings. The appearances of the roof terracottas depicting Jupiter-Ammon and (possibly) Bes, combined with these Isiac panels, seem connected to the deity Apollo not as part of

³⁰² Carettoni 1971, 126; Zanker 1983, 34; Galinsky 1996, 187-188. See also note 282.

³⁰³ In Greek iconography sphinxes are generally seated in a crouched upright position and have half-lion half-female bodies with griffin wings. For example, the sphinxes at the Delphic Apollo sanctuary in Greece, see: Hoffmann 1994, 71-80.

actual Apollonian mythology or religious themes, but rather as elements that had, through the now official incorporation of Egypt into the Roman world, become legitimate elements of Roman material culture and could, as such, be incorporated into the decorative design of a Roman temple, in a Roman context. Therefore, the relevant thematic association here would be Octavian's victory and conquest of Egypt, in dedication of which the temple was after all erected, rather than any specific mythical or religious association. The association with Octavian's victory, however, was not expressed in the form of presenting Egypt as 'spoils of war' or a foreign entity on display – instead we find manifestations of Egypt incorporated as integral parts of the decorative designs of the temple complex. The examples of the terracotta panels with Isiac figures and sphinxes clearly demonstrate a fusion of recognisable elements of manifestations of Egypt as part of a wider range of Hellenistic iconography, including realism in perspective, human features and attributes, all put together within a single decorative panel of entirely Roman manufacture in terms of material and technique. This suggests that these different elements were known as part of the available material culture repertoire at the time, and could in this case be chosen to associate with Octavian's victory and the dedication of the temple.

We see something similar in the case of the Danaid statues: here it is especially the content conveyed by the statues, namely the use of the myth associated with them, which fits the overall allusions of the temple complex as a whole. Zanker has explored the effective use of myths in terms of material culture content throughout Augustan Rome; focusing thereby on classical Greek influences and their expression by means of examples of the Greek-based 'Augustan classicism'.³⁰⁴ In the case of the Danaids we also encounter a Greek myth; as such these statues certainly fit with the overall style and content of Augustan culture, wherein Greek influences are undeniably more numerous than any manifestations of Egypt. However, that does not imply that these manifestations of Egypt did not hold meaning in their own right as no less integral parts of what was soon to become specific Augustan material culture. The Danaid myth is a clear reference to Egypt, as explored above and often noted before, always in direct political reference to Octavian's victory over Egypt. However, the physical appearance of the statues, while likewise reminiscent of archaizing Greek sculpture, may indeed indicate yet another layer of implied meaning through the unusual choice of black marble. As observed above, it is unclear whether this was to create a sense of bronze or perhaps an allusion to black (basalt) Egyptian hardstone. It remains noteworthy that there seems no reason at all why no actual bronze could have been used instead, if the

³⁰⁴ Zanker 1987, 213.

latter would be the case. If the choice for black marble might indicate another allusion to Egypt, this, in itself, would be yet another typical characteristic the workings of Augustan material culture: the flexibility of many possible meaning that nonetheless remain interconnected within their specific Augustan contexts in Rome. The Apollo Palatinus complex on the Palatine seems to be quite a prime example of such a layered context.

As we saw in paragraph 3.1., the Augustan Palatine was not only the first but also remained the foremost public Augustan context in Rome of the period. This is where Augustus left his mark at the beginning of his reign, and would continue to maintain it throughout his reign – and well beyond it, in fact, as the on-going expansions of the Palatine Imperial palace complexes demonstrate. The Palatine is also one of the only actual geographical site contexts from Augustan Rome that has been (mostly) preserved and where manifestations of Egypt can be studied in situ or where at least the remains of the original site can be explored. The combination of the Augustan Palatine residence and the Apollo Palatinus complex makes for a very complex site, at that; one that, if anything, consisted of countless different layers both in literal building sense and in terms of (implied) meanings. Geographically speaking, the Palatine was the central hill of the Roman urban landscape, which was the main reason for its great political significance – and hence its great value for Augustus' visual propaganda.³⁰⁵ Visibility is perhaps the most crucial aspect here. The southside slope of the hill, exactly where the Augustan residence and Apollo Palatinus temple were positioned, was at the time fully visible from Circus Maximus, then already the largest gathering place for the people of Rome. Moreover, the terraces and library complex associated with the Apollo Palatinus temple were open to the citizens, and became a public space; therefore also smaller decorative elements such as the Danaid statues and possibly also the terracotta panels would have been publically visible even if not down from Circus Maximus. As such, Octavian's choice for his Palatine complex could not have been a more effective place for visual propaganda. As mentioned earlier, the complex deliberately transcended the concept of a *domus*, and continued to expand in a way more reminiscent of a Hellenistic palace complex.³⁰⁶

Because of this public visibility, moreover, it is no surprise that subsequently some of these visual elements were imitated, emulated and incorporated into the wider range of the material culture repertoire of Rome at the time. The use of manifestations of Egypt integrally incorporated into the design scheme of the Apollo Palatinus temple complex was certainly remarkable at the time: from 28 BCE

³⁰⁵ On the geographical significance of the Palatine hill, see: Vout 2012, 64-69.

³⁰⁶ As demonstrated clearly by Meyboom (2005, 219-274) See also paragraph 3.1.

onwards we see how they almost literally ‘descend’ from the central hilltop and spread out throughout the rest of the city; first reaching Augustus’ own inner circle of friends and the city elite (see paragraphs 3.4., 3.5., 3.6.), before spreading also into the wider spheres of smaller, personal objects throughout the city (see paragraph 3.7. and 3.9.). This ‘natural spread’ of material culture (especially from Augustus towards the city elite) was of course not unique to manifestations of Egypt; the phenomenon has been pointed out effectively by Zanker and Wallace-Hadrill in relation of the expansion and ‘evolution’ of the so-called ‘Augustan classicism’.³⁹⁷ However, as the above shows –and as especially the following paragraphs will demonstrate– manifestations of Egypt were no less part of that process, despite the tendency of Augustan scholarship to exclude them or regard them as isolated items instead.

Manifestations of Egypt not only came to be an integral part of the Augustan Palatine but also, in later years, a particularly prominent part. As will be explored further on this overview (paragraph 3.9.), in 10 BCE a large obelisk from Heliopolis was erected on the spina of Circus Maximus, in the direct line of sight of the Augustan complex. We know that Octavian already made plans for the obelisk to be brought to Rome in that capacity as early as 30-29 BCE, when he was likewise working on the finalising of his Palatine complex: the addition of the obelisk and its (visual) significance in relation to Palatine complex seems to have been a case of long-term planning. As a result of this planning and specially the public visibility of the Augustan Palatine, also the manifestations of Egypt at the Palatine quite literally took centre stage in Rome.

The Apollo Palatinus temple complex seemed to have constituted an important step towards the process wherein manifestations of Egypt began to spread from the Palatine throughout the wider range of the city. In the case of the Augustan Palatine residence (paragraph 3.1.) we saw exclusively examples of wall paintings, adapting styles that were already known to Roman material culture long before Octavian took up his residency there, or before Egypt became to play a crucial role in his political strategies. The example of the victory coins (paragraph 3.2.) was a case of openly distributed propaganda. But here, as part of the Apollo Palatinus temple, for the first time in Augustan Rome, we see how manifestations of Egypt become much more integrally incorporated and even fused within the decorative styles and types of architecture chosen – beyond how they were already part of the wider Hellenistic repertoire. Different from what we saw in the case of the wall paintings from the Houses of Augustus and Livia and the ‘Aula Isiaca’, at the Apollo temple complex we find examples of Egyptian topics and stylistic elements that

³⁹⁷ Zanker 1986, 264-283, 290-293; Idem. 1987, 312-318; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 435-440.

seem not only incorporated because of their political significance, but also seen deliberately presented as new features of specifically Augustan material culture. As the following overview will demonstrate, this had been in many ways the starting point for manifestations of Egypt, both similar and diverse, to ‘evolve’ throughout the city as increasingly integral parts of its material culture.

To refer back here to Hölscher’s semantics system, one could say that Augustus here deliberately chose certain manifestations of Egypt from the already available Hellenistic material culture repertoire, for a deliberate political purpose. However, in doing so, the manifestations themselves were incorporated into new shapes and new, often specifically Augustan meanings. Those were flexible and layered meanings that could include politics and propaganda in specific relation to Augustus, but also implications of ‘ancient wisdom’ and certain visual styles in relation to/as expression of certain Roman concepts of Egypt – and yes, this could also include forms of ‘exoticism’ or certain popular fashions among those layers of meaning for the citizens of Augustan Rome. However, the crucial factor herein is the fact that neither one of these layers can be presupposed as the only inherent meaning of these objects, monuments, or their contexts (such as ‘exoticism’ has frequently been interpreted). Depending on specific contexts, and depending on the viewpoints of the individuals that existed in the city and interacted with these objects and monuments within these contexts, these multiple layers of meaning could exist simultaneously. In relation to the Palatine in particular, being a vital context in regard to the political sphere as well as the publically visual scope of the city, the Augustan propaganda seems to have strongly communicated and influenced those that perceived and interacted with the objects and monuments perceived at that context. Because of the Palatine’s political importance and central location in the urban landscape, certain elements based on or inspired by these objects and monuments subsequently began to develop throughout Rome’s material culture; not as superimposed propaganda deliberately spread by Augustus as part of a rigid, one-sided political process, but rather evolving as a *result* of the (public) manifestation at the Augustan Palatine. Consequently, this only continued to expand the flexibility and layered nature of possible meanings inherent in Augustan material culture. This appears to have been highly characteristic of Augustan culture in general, not simply of the spread and possible meanings of manifestations of Egypt. But by demonstrating the development of spread and expansion of Egypt as part of the Augustan material culture repertoire, such as it was found to be incorporated in the Augustan Palatine in many different forms, it is made evident that Egypt, based on the archaeological data, cannot be excluded from this particular Augustan process at all, but was very much part of it.

3.4. The Gardens of Maecenas

The Horti Maecenatis (Gardens of Maecenas) were situated on the Esquiline Hill at the edges of Rome, near the Servian Wall. They were the property of Gaius Maecenas, the famous patron-of-the-arts associated especially with Augustan poets such as Horace and Vergil.³⁰⁸ It remains unclear when exactly they came into his property; based on literary sources and explorations of its current site in Rome the estimate is that there may already have been private garden from 40 BCE onwards, and that it can with some certainty be assumed that at least from 28 BCE onwards Maecenas was the owner and that these gardens, moreover, became an active scene for the Augustan arts, which contributed a significant propagandistic as well as artistic component to the development of Augustan culture.³⁰⁹ Especially the auditorium complex within the gardens, known from these literary sources, became famous for recitals and gatherings of Augustus' inner circle. While there is on-going debate about the exact location and original state of the auditorium itself, there is a good indication of the original site of the gardens themselves on the Esquiline; they are mentioned as such up until a twelfth century topographical guide to Rome written by the medieval scholar known as Magister Gregorius.³¹⁰ The current site associated with the auditorium was discovered in 1874 during major building works in the city; the creation of Largo Leopardi unearthed parts of Maecenas' garden complex, including a large pavilion that at the time was identified as the so-called Auditorium of Maecenas, but since then many alternative interpretations have been explored, including a suggested function as garden dining hall.³¹¹ These nineteenth century excavations focused on the retrieval of the many artefacts, mainly high quality sculptures, which were discovered in remarkable quantity at the site. In 1914 more remains of the garden complex were discovered during restoration works of the Teatro Brancaccio (see fig. 39), which led to new interpretations of the auditorium, including suggestions of a villa complex and various smaller garden pavilions.³¹² These findings were not published until 1982, leading to subsequent hypothetical reconstructions of mainly the auditorium (fig. 40), but the function of the site remains ambiguous today.

³⁰⁸ On the political associations of Gaius Maecenas as part of Augustus' inner circle and his influence on Augustan culture, see: Della Corte 1992, 119-135; Schollmeyer 2008, 29-39; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 415-416.

³⁰⁹ The Gardens of Maecenas are mentioned in a number of ancient texts: Hor. *Odes* 3.29.5-12 and *Satires* I.8.14; Fronto *ad M. Caesarem* 2.2; Cassius Dio. *LV* 7.6 On the findspot of the auditorium, see originally: Platner 1929, 269.

³¹⁰ A 13th century edition of this book, under the title *Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Romae*, has been preserved in a vellum compilation of brief excerpts and is currently at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. See: James 1917, 531-554.

³¹¹ For the records of the original excavations, see: Lanciani 1874, 137-186, Häuber *LTUR* I 123; Häuber 1983, 204-222.

³¹² Gatti 1982, 133-135. See also: Purcell 2007, 361-377.

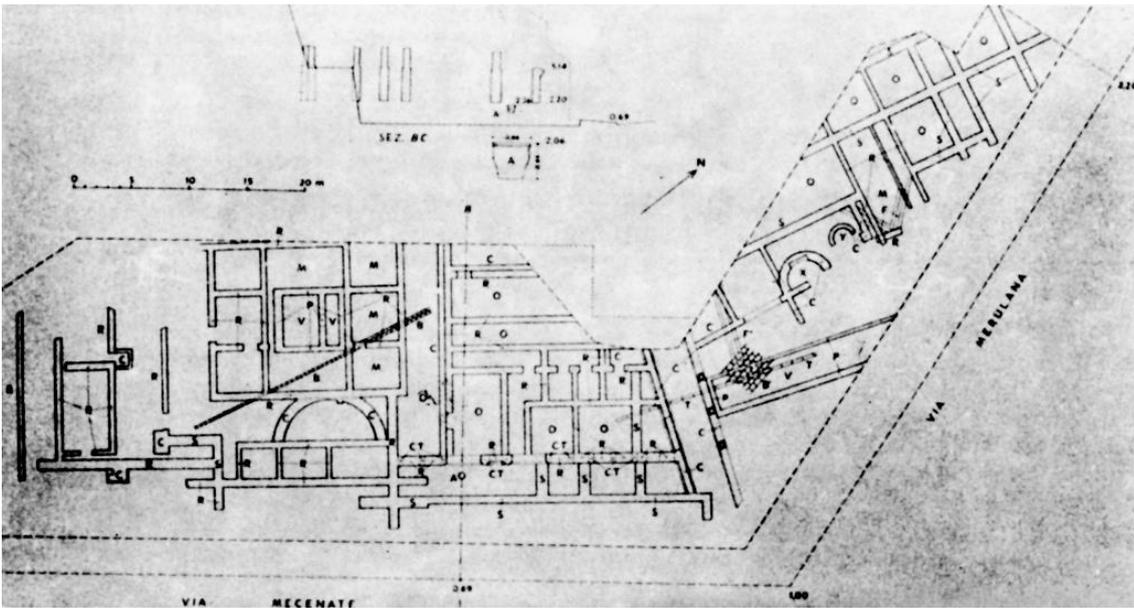


Fig.39. Plan of the Horti Maecenati excavations as discovered beneath the Teatro Brancaccio in 1914. Published in 1982 by Emanuele Gatti. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

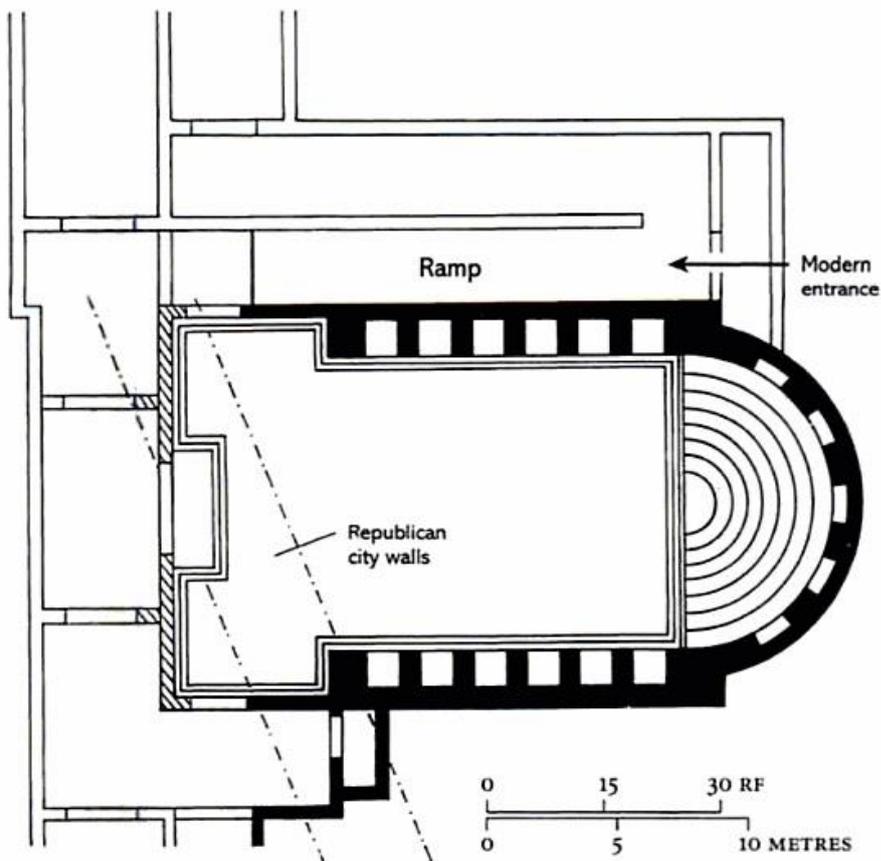


Fig.40. Reconstruction of the Auditorium of Maecenas. Source: Claridge 1998 (fig. 143).

Some remainders of wall paintings have been recovered from the site, which appear rather similar in execution and style to those known from the Augustan Palatine complex and the Villa della Farnesina; this, too, seems to indicate the role of Maecenas (and his gardens) as part of Augustus' inner circle.³¹³ No Egyptian ornamental, figurative or Nilotic features can be recognised from these remaining wall paintings, however. Instead, two very different manifestations of Egypt have been recovered from the site of the Horti Maecenatis: two large statues made of granite. They were excavated in the late nineteenth century at the site that is currently generally interpreted as the 28 BCE gardens, which makes their provenance from the original Horti Maecenatis very likely.³¹⁴ Zanker specifically mentions private gardens from the Augustan period, of which the Horti Maecenatis were the prime example, in relation to the increase private collections of luxury items and purchase of decorative statues; in that light, the appearance of these two statues from the Gardens of Maecenas would certainly suit the trend.³¹⁵

3.4.1. Manifestations of Egypt at the Gardens of Maecenas

The first example recorded from the Horti Maecenatis, is a large and partially preserved statue recognisable as an Apis bull (fig. 41).³¹⁶ Based on the actual remains of the statue we can make out that it measured circa 1.20m in height, and possibly double as much in length, as suggested by the reconstruction. Its large fragmentary remains, based on material properties and appearance, have generally been interpreted as having been made in Ptolemaic Egypt (the museum record suggests ca. the second century BCE), and hence imported to Rome where the statue was placed in the Gardens of Maecenas probably in the latter part of the first century BCE, at the peak of Augustus' reign.³¹⁷

³¹³ On wall paintings from the Gardens of Maecenas as part of the transitory late Second Pompeian Style and early Third Style from Augustan Rome, see: Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 42-44, 97; Ling 1991, 31-47; Iacopi 1997, 8-9; Id. 2008, 5-7, 76; Mielsch 2001, 54-66.

³¹⁴ This is documented in the records of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma at Palazzo, including the Altemps Museum records and nineteenth century excavation references.

³¹⁵ Zanker 1987, 141-142.

³¹⁶ Inventory Nr. 182594 at the Palazzo Altemps, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. The statue has been reconstructed and is currently on display at the Palazzo Altemps, Rome. See: Kater-Sibbes & Vermaseren 1975; Malaise 1972 REF NR; Rouillet 1972, 242, 267.

³¹⁷ As documented in museum records at Palazzo Altemps, Rome. Cf. Malaise 1972 REF NR.



Fig. 41. Apis bull, currently at Palazzo Altemps, Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Stylistically this Apis bull is indeed recognisable as part of traditional Egyptian iconography: the remaining section identifiable as solar disc confirms its identity as the Memphis bull deity, and the rendering of its features combines realism with a static, regal posture, as is characteristic of Apis bull statues known from especially Ptolemaic Egyptian examples.³¹⁸ The material it is made of has so far always been identified as diorite with pink crystalline inclusions; however recent archaeometrical research conducted by Sander Müskens in 2012 has shown that the material is almost certainly porphyritic granodiorite, known from specific quarries in Aswan, Egypt.³¹⁹ Types of diorite are also rare but can be quarried in various places in Europe, however porphyritic granodiorite can only be found in Egypt.³²⁰ This seems to support the hypothesis that the statue was originally manufactured in Egypt in the second century BCE and was subsequently transferred to Rome. The actual time of this transfer cannot be deduced from these data, however. Maecenas may well have purchased the bull in Rome, while the statue itself had been transferred to Italy as early as 150 BCE. Likewise, the possibility that the statue was shipped directly from Egypt during Maecenas' lifetime cannot be dismissed either.

The second manifestation of Egypt known from the gardens is also a stone statue, generally referred to

³¹⁸ See: Kater-Sibbes & Vermaseren 1975; Hölbl 1981, 157-186; Thompson 2012, 177-196.

³¹⁹ Müskens' archaeometrical research was conducted in collaboration with the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and the University of Leuven in order to effectively determine the mineral composition of Egyptian hardstone. Preliminary results were presented at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) in 2012. See: Müskens, forthcoming.

³²⁰ Blatt et al. 1996, 53; Nicholson & Shaw 2000, 37.

as ‘Egyptian hunting dog’. But apart from its recorded excavation from the site of Gardens of Maecenas virtually nothing is known about it (fig. 42A).³²¹ The statue measures 1.20m in height and 55 cm in width and is recognisable as a large hunting dog depicted with remarkable attention to anatomic detail. The dog sits upright, in an alert pose, facing directly forwards. The details of the creature’s strong muscles and fur are typical of lush and realistic Hellenistic animal portrayal.³²² The figure appears to have been carved out of a single block, and has been remarkably well-preserved.



A

B

Fig. 42. A: Egyptian hunting dog, made of granite hardstone, currently at Musei Capitolini, Rome. Photo: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. B: The ‘Jennings Dog’, copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

This statue was given the label ‘Egyptian hunting dog’ because of the stone material it is made of; although the current museum display lists it as a marble statue (‘marble imitating granite’), it seems clearly recognisable in terms of appearance and texture as a type of Egyptian granite rather than a type of

³²¹ The statue is currently on display at the Capitoline Musea in Rome, but it does not have an inventory number of museum record as such. It is mentioned only, including references to its excavation in: Stuart-Jones 1926, 145 Nr. 27a; Häuber 1983, 211-213 Nr. 2; Idem. 1991.

³²² Peled 1976, 51-53; Häuber 1983, 211-213.

marble.³²³ No detailed research has yet been done to its specific properties or possible quarries where the stone may have been derived from, but the granite has a greenish tinge. The statue itself has no additional features or attributes that seem to indicate a specific Egyptian theme connected with the dog. Based on its findspot it has been dated to the late first century BCE which would coincide with Maecenas' ownership of the garden.

There appear to be no criteria, apart from its material (green Egyptian granite), that would imply this statue to be a specific manifestations of Egypt – other than perhaps a visual similarity with upright seated hunting dogs found sometimes depicted in profile in Egypt, such as found on a wall relief at the Tuna el-Gebel necropolis.³²⁴ However, this type of two-dimensional profile depiction is quite different from the three-dimensional statue in Rome, which could be viewed from all angles, even though the upright posture is similar. Also, the Egyptian hunting dog is depicted wearing a collar, whereas the Roman dog is not.

On the other hand, there are a number of well-known parallels of Roman hunting dog statues that show a similarity to this particular one: for example, the marble dog statue currently at the Belvedere Court of the Vatican Musea in Rome,³²⁵ and the so-called 'Jennings dog' or 'dog of Alcibiades' currently at The British Museum (see fig. 42B), which shows a distinct similarity to the Vatican Musea dog. The 'Jennings dog' statue is dated to Rome between 1st–2nd Century CE, interpreted as 'a Roman copy of a Hellenistic bronze original' made from luna marble.³²⁶ The dog is seated in a very similar pose to the 'Egyptian hunting dog'; also the detailed rendering of its fur, paws, and muscle-tone is directly comparable. The 'Jennings dog' has a more dramatic head position, suggestion motion, whereas the 'Egyptian' dog holds its head in a straight, motionless pose. Other than that, only their material properties can be determined as distinctly different. This leads to the question, then, whether or not an object such as this hunting dog that lacks any stylistic, thematic or (known) contextual connections to Egypt can or should be regarded as a manifestation of Egyptian at all, when only the material it is made of can be identified as coming from Egypt.

The two large stone statues from the Horti Maecenatis discussed here each seem to call for very

³²³ Müskens 2012, personal communication.

³²⁴ Messiha & Elhitta 1979, 201, pl. 15.

³²⁵ The statue is listed, as part of the Vatican Musea Bevedere Court, as sculpture nr. 16. No additional records are known. The statue is very briefly mentioned, along with an unknown example from Florence, as a copy of a bronze original from Pergamon in: Breber 1983, 241.

³²⁶ BM. Cat. No. 2001,1010.1. The statue was acquired by The British Museum in 2001, with no publications to date apart from its museum record.

different interpretations. While the Apis bull statue indeed seems to be an example of an imported statue that was originally made in Egypt itself, the hunting dog seems more likely to have been made in Rome, based on comparisons with the ‘Jennings dog’ and the Vatcian Musea dog as mentioned above. In the latter case, only the granite material would have been imported from one of Egypt’s stone quarries, which were under Roman control the time.

3.4.2. Interpretation

With the rise of a new Augustan elite in Rome came a shift in Rome’s material culture. This became evident first within Augustus’ own inner circle and family, as we already saw in the Palatine complex discussed in the previous paragraphs, followed closely by similarities that can be observed among Augustus’ wider network of allies and friends. The Gardens of Maecenas seem to provide one of the earliest examples of this phenomenon (followed closely by Marcus Agrippa, whose villa is discussed in paragraph 3.5). The importance of Maecenas as a figurehead in this Augustan circle, in terms of his patronage of arts and poetry, is likely to have been connected to this: the gardens with their auditorium would have been a specifically important context for the development (as well as spread through exchange) of what, at this point, can still be considered deliberately incited cultural expressions to fit with Augustus increasing steps towards the transformation of Rome in terms of its urban landscape as well as its cultural expressions that would result in and enable the development of what would become specific Augustan material culture.

Different from the manifestations of Egypt we saw in the wall paintings from the Augustan residence on the Palatine or as part of the Apollo Palatinus temple complex, however, we here find a specifically ‘solid’ example of a recognisable Egyptian hardstone statue: the Apis bull. As mentioned above, it can indeed be considered as having been collected and brought to Rome, perhaps even especially now that Egypt had become an official province of Rome. Maecenas, as Augustus’ close friend and ally, would have been among the first of the city’s elite to give expression to this in terms of material culture, following the example of Augustus himself by incorporating manifestations of Egypt into his apparently (as described by literary sources) wealthy collection of artefacts. The choice for the Apis bull is nonetheless remarkable. During his own travels through Egypt Augustus famously refused to pay homage or even

visit the Apis bull sanctuary in Memphis, which may be seen as a result of to the Roman aversion against animal worship.³²⁷ However, the Apis bull was also associated with the deity Serapis, which had already gained popularity throughout the Roman world, unlike examples of Egyptian animal worship. When it is considered as a reference to Serapis rather than to the worship of the Memphis bull, the appearance of this bull statue may not have been so misplaced in a Roman context in terms of its religious meaning.³²⁸ As Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren have stated, in regard to the association of Serapis with other Egyptian deities: ‘The Apis bull represents the over-renewing force of Osiris; [the two] since the Ptolemies were united and combined into the new Hellenistic divinity Sarapis. But this does not imply that the own personalities of both Osiris and Apis completely disappeared’.³²⁹

On the other hand, religious meaning may not have been a factor in the appearance of this statue in a private garden context. It may have been chosen for decorative purposes, and as such there would have no qualms associated with an animal deity in the context of Rome. Most likely, in such a garden context it would have become disassociated with the religious cult in Memphis entirely, but instead would have taken on a decorative meaning, referring perhaps instead to the implied connection with Augustus’ conquest of Egypt and the subsequent peace and prosperity as a result of his civil war victory. However, the bull may also have been considered a valuable antiquity to be collected especially *because* of its implied religious meaning –whether referring to the Memphis Apis or by association to Serapis– similar to how we often see Greek antiquities depicting deities and myths collected by Romans in their villae or gardens.³³⁰ In either view, the statue’s context was crucial for what meaning it would have implied. In the Gardens of Maecenas this bull would not have referred to the sacred bull of Memphis the way it would have in Egypt – rather, knowledge of its original Egyptian meaning will have contributed to its value in Rome, where at this time manifestations of Egypt were starting to become integral part of the wider

³²⁷ As recorded by Suet. *Jul.* 52.1 and *Aug.* 93; Dio 51.16.5. It is remarkable that Germanicus does visit Apis in Memphis during his travels through Egypt, but the sacred bull refused to eat when he tried to feed him (as recorded in: Plin. *HN* 8.185; Amm. Marc. 22.14.8). The feeding of the Apis bull was seen in Egypt as an act of a new ruler, which means it would have been more fitting for Augustus to do. Regarding Augustus’ refusal to visit the Apis bull Weingärtner (1969, 144-145) argues: ‘Augustus wurde noch während seines Aufenthalts in Ägypten aufgefordert, den Apis aufzusuchen .. wobei diese ‘Begegnung’ von denjenigen, die sie betrieben, zweifellos nicht als eine Besichtigung im touristischen Sinne gemeint war, sondern als Hinführung des neuen Landesherrn.’ See also: Leemreize 2014, who reflects upon the meaning of literary passages describing (or omitting) certain stages of Germanicus’ travels through Egypt, including his visit to Apis in contrast to Augustus’ refusal to visit.

³²⁸ On Serapis in the Roman world, see: Malaise 1972, 163-168; Roulet 1972, 39-40; Tran-tam Thin 1982, 101-117; Ladislav 1981, 121-150; Wild 1984, 1739-1851; Bourgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 37-76; Versluys 2002, 10-11, 111, 137; Minarčák 2007, 59-68.

³²⁹ Kater-Sibbes & Vermaseren 1975, ii.

³³⁰ On property on display in Roman gardens, see: Purcell 2007, 361-377.

material culture repertoire available to and favoured by Augustus' elite circle.

As we will keep seeing throughout the development of Augustan material culture, this kind of 'bundling' of different interconnected meanings, as explored in chapter 2, becomes a specific element of Augustan material culture: namely, the flexibility of multiple layers of meanings that need not be singled out or isolated at all to be effective, even when they are not simultaneously implied within every specific context that they are part of.³³¹ Especially manifestations of Egypt such as this Apis bull present a good example of this. It comes with a particularly rich history of meaning from its original background (which we might call its cultural biography), namely from the ancient origin of Apis worship in Memphis to its manufacturing in Ptolemaic Egypt – but in the context of Rome from 28BCE onwards, especially in a private garden of an important member of Augustus' own inner circle, it gains new additional layers of meaning in reference to Augustus' victory and, as such, to transformation of Rome itself.

The 'Egyptian' hunting dog presents a different case. Based only on the use of Egyptian granite material has it been identified as such – but would this choice of material indeed be sufficient for it to really become a manifestation of Egypt within the context of the Gardens of Maecenas? If there are visual similarities with hunting dogs depicted on tomb reliefs in Egypt, which we can derive today, it seems unlikely that Roman citizens would be aware of this, or make such an association. Within its Roman context, perhaps, if the dog statue were placed in the vicinity of the Apis bull, it may have gained an Egyptian association based on the similarity of its granite material to the granite material of the Egyptian bull statue. The lack of specific Egyptian attributes related to the dog statue itself, then, would imply that such an interpretation would have relied solely on the choice of material. As we will see in the continuation of this overview, when manifestations of Egypt develop throughout Augustan material culture into the more personal sphere (see especially paragraphs 3.7. and 3.10), we see that it are especially specific traditional Egyptian attributes and stylistic elements that seem to mark manifestations of Egypt, while the chosen materials are never specifically Egyptian at all. However, this may be due strictly to practical reasons: as a rich and politically very well connected patrician, Maecenas of course had the means to attain Egyptian hardstone through expensive transport routes from Egypt – whereas smaller workshops in Rome would not.

At this point in the overview, these two statues from the Horti Maecenati provide two cases very different from what we have seen so far at the Palatine Hill. It is the first time we encounter an object

³³¹ Keane 2003 (II), 414-415.

originally made in and imported from Egypt. Likewise, it is the first time that we find an object that may only be linked to Egypt because of the material it is made of. The manifestations of Egypt we encountered at the Augustan Palatine complex could all be seen as direct references to Augustus himself – whereby references of Egypt, in effect of their context, became references to Augustus' political victories, rather than merely examples of Egypt as a conquered land. Egypt had become Rome, just as Augustus had become Rome. But in the Gardens of Maecenas we witness how manifestations of Egypt were becoming part of Rome's wider material culture – of course the link to Augustus is still strong here, Maecenas being among the most prominent of the new Augustan elite; but the manner of reference is quite different. Whereas the Palatine complex and also the Augustan victory coins seem indeed to have been manufactured with this connection between Augustus and Egypt in mind, the Apis bull may well have been in Rome for much longer, and would only have gained that connection to Augustus by Maecenas' choice to purchase it and display it at his garden complex. The statue itself was not made in Rome for that purpose; it was made in Egypt, where it would have held quite different religious meanings. Its new context in Maecenas' gardens would not have erased these original meanings, either – they, too, became part of the repertoire available to the Augustan elite. Thus the type of manifestations of Egypt available in Rome was significantly widened, initially here among the elite – and as a result these manifestations of Egypt were becoming integral components of Rome's material culture repertoire as a whole. Interestingly, in that light, the granite hunting dog may not have been considered a manifestation of Egypt at all, but simply part of the already much wider Hellenistic *koine*, wherein Egyptian hardstone combined with statues from Pergamon would not compose a strange image as part of Roman material culture at all. This, too, shows how suddenly a distinctly widening diversity seems to rise from Augustus' initial focus on and use of manifestations of Egypt – thus also raising questions of import, materials and the nature of the Roman material culture repertoire as a process, as will continue to be relevant throughout the overview below.

3.5. The Villa of Agrippa (Villa della Farnesina)

The Roman villa generally referred to as 'Villa della Farnesina' was discovered and partially excavated in the gardens of the Trastevere Renaissance Villa Farnesina in 1879 by Rodolfo Lanciani and Giuseppe Lugli.³³² It has been reconstructed as a portico villa facing North-East across the river Tiber. Its main architectural features that have been recovered suggest a symmetrical plan organised along a hemicyclical corridor at the riverside that gave access to a series of richly decorated rooms and a lateral garden. Further landwards a long horizontal cryptoportico has been partially recovered, which was divided in half by a line of columns and gave access to a series of small service rooms. This crypto portico has been interpreted as the entrance side of the villa.³³³ Fig. 43 shows the most current reconstructed map of the excavations at the Villa della Farnesina gardens.

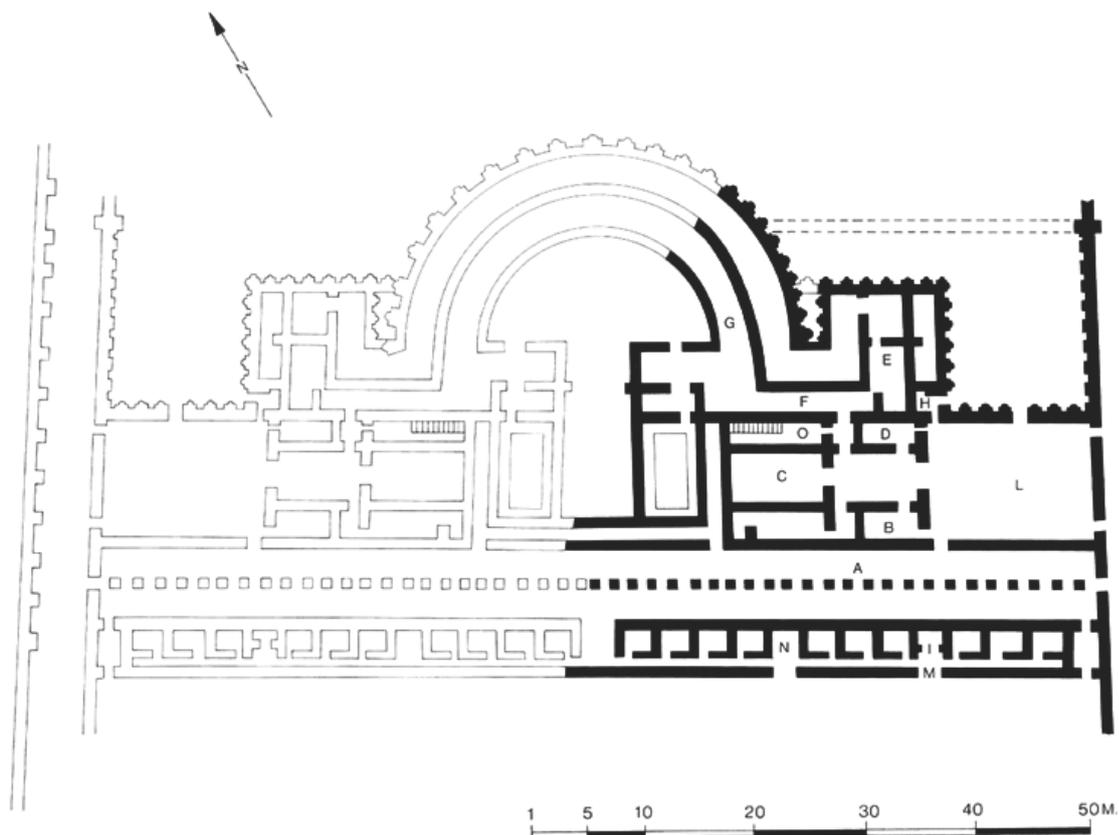


Fig.43 Plan of the excavations at Villa della Farnesina, with hypothetical reconstruction. (Reijnen, Mols & Moormann 2008.)

³³² The excavations were first published in Fiorelli, 1879. *Notizie degli scavi*. Roma.

³³³ Lugli 1938, 5-27; Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 69, 75; Richardson 1992, 73.

There has been and continues to be much debate about the dating and hypothetical ownership of the villa. Based on iconographical interpretations of the villa's wall painting a date near the late first Century BCE is generally suggested; with Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus' military right-hand and personal friend, as the villa's hypothetical owner.³³⁴ One interpretation is that Agrippa commissioned this urban villa during his first marriage to Augustus' cousin Claudia in 28 BCE.³³⁵ Another hypothesis is that Agrippa commissioned the villa as a wedding present for Marcus Claudius Marcellus and Augustus' daughter Iulia in 24-23 BCE, and that it became Agrippa's family house during his second marriage to Iulia after the death of Marcellus (in 21 BCE).³³⁶ Beyen has suggested that the spatial link between the Roman 'Farnesina' villa and the *Pons Agrippa* was meant to connect Agrippa's residence directly with the Campus Martius and Agrippa's building schemes in that area.³³⁷ Roddaz has suggested that Agrippa, specifically because he was part of Augustus' inner circle, would have built the Roman 'Farnesina' villa at the former location of the Horti Cassiani, after Cassius' condemnation for the murder of Caesar in 44 BCE.³³⁸ The interpretation of the villa as property of Marcus Agrippa is generally believed the most probable based on the (few) actual remaining data – with a dating between 28-24 BCE.

The wall paintings recovered from the villa excavation have been extensively studied and constitute a significant part of what is generally identified as early or pre-Third Pompeian Style Roman wall paintings. As already discussed in relation to the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine complex (paragraph 3.1.), there is on-going debate about the chronological placing of wall paintings from elite residences from Augustan-era Rome either as part of the so-called late Second Pompeian Style or as part of the early Third Pompeian Style.³³⁹ Alternatively, the wall paintings specifically from the Augustan period in Rome, including those from the Villa della Farnesina, have recently been suggested as a sub-style placed in between the traditional Second Style and Third Style.³⁴⁰ The Farnesia paintings feature a variety of

³³⁴ This dating was originally suggested by German archaeologist August Mau in 1882, who compared the stylistic characteristics of the wall paintings to wall paintings he had studied in Pompeii. Cf. De Vos 1979, 17-22, 25-25; Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 22-24; Ehrhardt 1987, 31-34; Zanker 1987, 281; Mols & Moormann 2008, 7 & 80.

³³⁵ Roddaz 1984, 235; Mols & Moormann 2008, 7.

³³⁶ Beyen 1948, 13.

³³⁷ Beyen 1948, 3-23. Cf. Von Blanckenhagen & Alexander 1962, 11; Idem. 1990, 47; Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 22-24; Mielsch 2001, 60; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 17-19; Ehrhardt 1987, 31-34; Krause 2000, 67-68; Mols & Moormann 2008, 77. For the connection between the Pons Agrippa and Campus Martius, see: Coarelli 1977, 824-826; Le Gall 1953, 210.

³³⁸ Roddaz 1984, 234-236. The location of the Horti Cassiani remains unknown. In literary sources these horti are only referred to by Cicero in his letter to Atticus (Cic. *Ad Att.* XII.21.2), where they are located on the Tiber bank. Cf. Grimal 1969, 110-11 & 115; Eck 1996, 56.

³³⁹ Bastet & De Vos 1979, 19-22; Barbet 1985, 96-97, 104; Ehrhardt 1987, 31-34; Von Blanckenhagen & Alexander 1990, 67; Ling 1991, 39-40.

³⁴⁰ Mols & Moormann 2008, 77, 80.

narrative and generic panels as well as a diversity of figurative elements as part of the predominant architectural scheme. And among these decorative elements, a relatively significant amount can be identified as manifestations of Egyptian styles and/or themes.

3.5.1. Manifestations of Egypt in the Villa della Farnesina wall paintings

The Farnesina wall paintings are often compared to and categorised along with those from other Augustan period contexts; the house of Augustus and the house of Livia on the Palatine hill, the auditorium of Maecenas and the pyramid tomb of Gaius Cestius Epulo in the city of Rome, as well as the villa of Livia at Primaporta and the so-called Villa of Agrippa Postumus in Boscotrecase, Campania.³⁴¹ Egyptian elements can be recognised in the decorative scheme of most of these contexts, with the Farnesina paintings constituting the largest surviving number of examples. The Farnesina paintings have been well preserved and do not seem to contain traces of antique alterations or restoration to their original designs.³⁴² The overall character of the paintings is one of a balanced and muted colour schemes in the corridors, garden area and most larger spaces. Two of the cubicula (B and D) and the dining room (C), however, display brightly coloured decorative designs with particular rich detail. Throughout the villa the wall paintings contain stylised ornamental friezes, painted columns that divide the walls in separate niches or panels and architraves and capitals of a fantasy architectural structure. Elements with recognisable Egyptian content can be found in the wall paintings of crypto portico A, cubiculum B, dining room C, cubiculum D, cubiculum E, corridor F, corridor G, passageway I-M and corridor F-G (see fig. 40).³⁴³ In order to explore the different types of Egyptian elements that can be seen in these wall paintings, I will refer to four categories from the available data that will be used for the analyses below, three of which were already featured in the discussion of the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine complex (paragraph 3.1).³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 22-24; Mols & Moormann 2008, 77, 80.

³⁴² Barbet 1985, 42-44; Ling 1991, 41-42; Mielsch 2001, 60-66; Mols & Moormann 2008, 7-8.

³⁴³ All preserved paintings have been recovered from their original site and are currently on display at Museo Nazionale Romano at Palazzo Massimo in Rome.

³⁴⁴ I chose to use this differentiation to allow for a more detailed exploration; generally Egyptian elements in wall painting are considered a category in itself, with the figurative, architectural, ornamental and landscape aspects of these elements being incorporated into that category as a whole and as specific characteristic contributed to the late Second Pompeian Style or

(1) *Figurative elements*: depictions of Egyptian deities. Especially figurative depictions of the goddess Isis are numerous, but also depictions of Jupiter-Ammon and the Ptolemaic deity Serapis are recurrent. These figures can be found in decorative panels as part of the painted architecture, or they are depicted as standing on painted statuary bases surrounded by entwining floral branches.

(2) *Architectural elements*: depictions of griffins and sphinxes placed on and among painted architectural features such as arches, pillars and capitals. Likewise architectural Egyptian elements can be found in the depiction of floral elements such as palms, acanthus and lotus flowers as part of columns (capital or base), or as incorporated into the fantastical architectural scheme.

(3) *Ornamental elements*: stylised elements as part of floral friezes. These elements include acanthus or palm leaves, pitcher-shaped motifs with *uraeus* handles, stylised *uraeus* and/or paratactic cobra motifs and stylistic *atef* crowns with spikes or pens, often emerging from leaves and branches.

(4) *Nilotic landscapes*: painted landscapes, in large or small panels, that depict scenes referring to the river Nile by means of specific flora and fauna (hippopotami, scarabs, crocodiles, palms, lotus flowers, reeds), or landscapes that depict temple scenes along the river Nile, recognisable by the flora and fauna mentioned above and the depiction of typical Egyptian temple architecture.

1. *Figurative elements*

Figurative depictions with recognisable Egyptian components are found in (as marked on the plan of fig. 43) crypto portico A, cubiculum B and cubiculum D.

In the crypto portico three male statuary figures on the top section of the wall can probably be identified as the deity Serapis (fig. 44 A-C). They are recognisable by the *modius* headgear (grain basket or beaker to mark his role as fertility dity, which is also worn by the Greek god of the Underworld, Hades), and a long beard, similar to depictions of Hellenic deities Zeus or Hades.³⁴⁵ The deity wears a long robe similar to an ancient Greek *chiton*, with generous folds and tied around the waist. The bearded figure depicted in fig. 44C holds a flat-shaped empty platter (*patera*) in its left hand. These figures are portrayed in a static upright pose.

early Third Pompeian Style. Cf. Bastet & De Vos 1979; Bragantini & De Vos 1982; Barbet 1985; Mols & Moormann 2008. Cf. for specific focus on Nilotic landscapes: Versluys 2002.

³⁴⁵ Serapis became specifically popular in Ptolemaic Egypt. For details and references, see note 179.



Fig. 44. A-C: Three different depictions of Serapis on the top sections of Criptoportico A. (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.) Photos: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

In cubiculum B several figures depicting Jupiter-Ammon (fig. 45A) and Isis (fig. 45B-C) are found. The figures of Jupiter-Ammon are painted on a cinnabar red background, depicted as if balancing on a narrow pillar base.³⁴⁶ Jupiter-Ammon is recognisable by his beard and two large rams-horns protruding from his forehead. The figures are depicted wearing a *chiton*-like robe with loose folds. One of the depictions shows the figure surrounded by entwining branches, with hands outstretched holding two of the thin surrounding branches. All figures are portrayed in a static upright pose.

³⁴⁶ On figurative depictions on pillar bases typical for the Villa della Farnesina paintings, in regard to frequency and stylistic characteristics, see: Moormann 1988, 233-236 & cat. 139.



Fig. 45. Photos: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

A similar style can be recognised in the depictions of Isis in cubiculum B, likewise painted as standing on a narrow pillar base, against a cinnabar red background. These figures each wear flowing gowns recognisable as a *chiton* with loose folds as well as Isiac headgear, of which several variations can be recognised.³⁴⁷ One of the larger Isis figures holds two large horns, one in each hand, and is flanked by two panthers at her feet (fig. 45C). The second Isis is portrayed holding two platters (*paterae*), one in each hand, from which the two flanking panthers are eating as they rise to the height of her waist (fig. 45B). In both examples Isis and the panthers are surrounded below by stylised branches that entwine the pillar base upon which the Isis figures are standing. Of the smaller depictions of Isis in this room, likewise clad in *chiton*, one shows the goddess holding a sistrum in her right hand and a staff in her left. She is flanked by two falcons that wear the double crown of Egypt, perched on stylised curling branches with leaves. The second smaller Isis figure stands on a small base surrounded by leaves, which make it appear as if

³⁴⁷ Early depictions of Isis' headdress were throne-shaped, reflecting the hieroglyphs used to write her name. Other Egyptian deities were likewise depicted with headwear in the shape of the objects described by the hieroglyphs of their names; for example Geb and Seshat. Towards the Ptolemaic period, Isis was often depicted with the crown of Hathor: a central sun-disk placed between Hathor's bull-horns. Usually this particular headgear is depicted with tall feather rising from it, and is known as *basileion*. Another variation of the Isiac crown is that of a lotus-bud coronet. See: De Caro 2006, 52-61. Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 40-72. Cf. Takács, 1995; Malaise 2004.

she rising from a bush; an effect emphasised by the entwining branches with leaves that continue around her. She holds two amphorae, one in each hand, dangling from string handles, and she wears a headdress similar to the three larger depictions of Isis in the room, although no further Isiac attributes such as panthers, falcons, sistra or staffs can be recognised. All Isis figures in this room are portrayed in a static upright pose similar to that of Jupiter-Ammon and Serapis in *crypto portico A*.

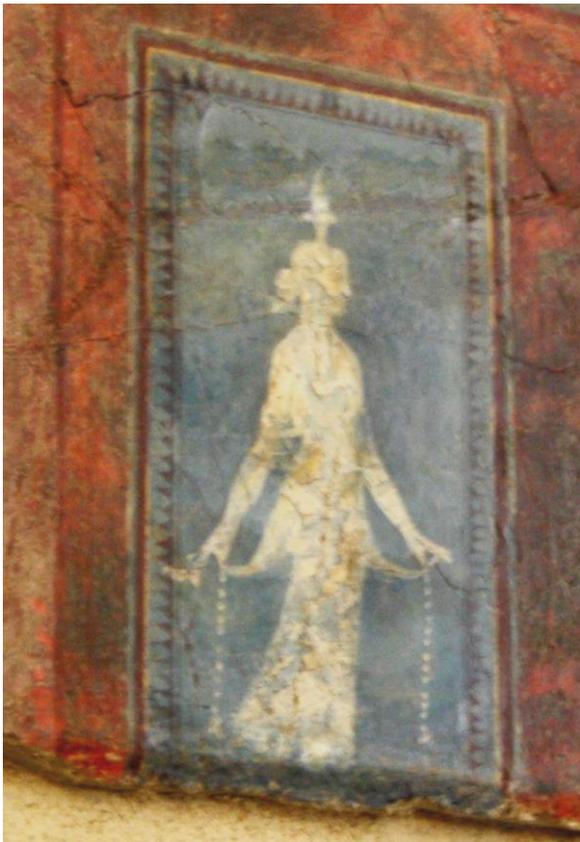


Fig. 46. Blue panel depicting an Isiac figure.
Photo: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

In *cubiculum D* there are traces of what may have been an Isis or Jupiter-Ammon figure on a cinnabar red background similar to those of *cubiculum B*, but these remains are faded and inconclusive. Of an entirely different style are the depictions of Isis (or Isiac figures) that can be recognised within several blue panels in this room (fig. 46). These figures are painted in a white silhouette style and wear a long *chiton* gown with beaded garlands at the waist and a lotus-bud coronet. The figure is portrayed in profile and in a contrapost pose. It is interesting that the pigment used for these blue panels can be identified as Egyptian blue (*caerulum*), which became popular throughout the Mediterranean world from the late Roman Republic period onwards.³⁴⁸ A variation of this pigment was developed in Roman workshops,

known as Vestorian blue.³⁴⁹ Moreover, it is interesting to note that these blue-and-white panels can be interpreted as imitations of blue cameo glass panels. Blue cameo glass constituted a typical Augustan genre of glasswork, as will be explored in section 3.7 in this overview, and is recognisable by its white

³⁴⁸ Fiorelli 1879 (*Notizie degli Scavi*); Ling 1999, 102-115; Bragantini & Pirelli 2007, 221-231.

³⁴⁹ Vitruvius (7.11.1) and Pliny the Elder (33.162) describe the Vestorian blue pigment. This pigment was based on Egyptian blue (*caerulum*) and adapted to a new recipe by Vestorius of Puteoli, and subsequently exported across the Roman world, in the transitional years between the late Republic and the early Augustan era. For scientific analyses of the 'Egyptian blue' pigment used in Roman wall paintings, see: Eastaugh et. al. 2005, 388-389; Siddall 2006, 18-23.

glass relief figurative scenes on translucent blue glass backgrounds.³⁵⁰ Roman wall painting, especially in the late Second and early Third Pompeian styles, frequently imitated objects and architectural features, for example bowls and vases or architraves and windows, including blue glass vessels.³⁵¹ These blue and white figurative panels likewise appear to be an emulation of the specific visual effect achieved by the manufacture of cameo glass, only transported into the context of a wall painting instead. Moreover, the depiction of an Isiac figure crowned by a lotus bud on this blue panel appears to be in line with the fact that many manifestations of Egypt (and in particular figurative scenes) can be found on Augustan blue cameo glass vessels, as will be explored in section 3.7. This parallel seems to indicate that Egyptian themes and figures may have been particularly associated with blue cameo glass as a material form, and that therefore the choice to portray an Isiac figure in a wall painting in this way would have seemed a logic choice, by association – i.e., the concept of an Egyptian theme and/or figure depicted in blue cameo glass seems to have been part of the painters' available repertoire, rather than an exotic exception.

2. *Architectural elements*

Architectural designs with recognisable Egyptian components are found in (as marked on the plan of fig. 43) crypto portico A, cubiculum B, cubiculum D, dining room C and cubiculum E. In the crypto portico several depictions of sphinxes are regularly placed on the arches and architraves of the top section of the wall (see fig. 47A), often flanking larger statuary figures such as the deity Serapis or (in fig. 47B) the unidentified figure with crown and staff that is likewise flanked by what seem to be depictions of the goddess Victoria.

These sphinxes are recognisable as an Egyptian type, with a female head attached to the body of a lion that is lying down with the front paws outstretched – this in contrast to Greek-Hellenistic type sphinxes, which are generally depicted sitting upright and with wings.³⁵² However, it is unusual that these sphinxes are clad in pink robes (as clearly visible in fig. 47B), whereas Egyptian type sphinxes do not commonly wear any clothing apart from typical royal headgear such as a *nemes*. The image of sphinxes or griffins added as guardians reclining on top of entrances or archways has been recognised as a feature typical of

³⁵⁰ See extensively section 3.7. Current main studies on Augustan cameo glass, are: Roberts et al. 2010; Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010; Van Aerde 2013.

³⁵¹ Ling 1991, 87 (regarding depictions of blue glass in Roman wall painting in particular); Meyboom 2014, personal communication.

³⁵² On Egyptian type sphinxes see: Picard 1958, 49-84; Malaise 1972, 238-240, 278; Roullet 1972, 132-140; Hölbl 1981, 157-186. On Greek-Hellenistic type sphinxes see: Brown 1958; Roullet 1972, 132-140; Hoffmann 1994, 71-80; Cooper 2008, 45-54.

Alexandrian architecture and wall painting in particular.³⁵³

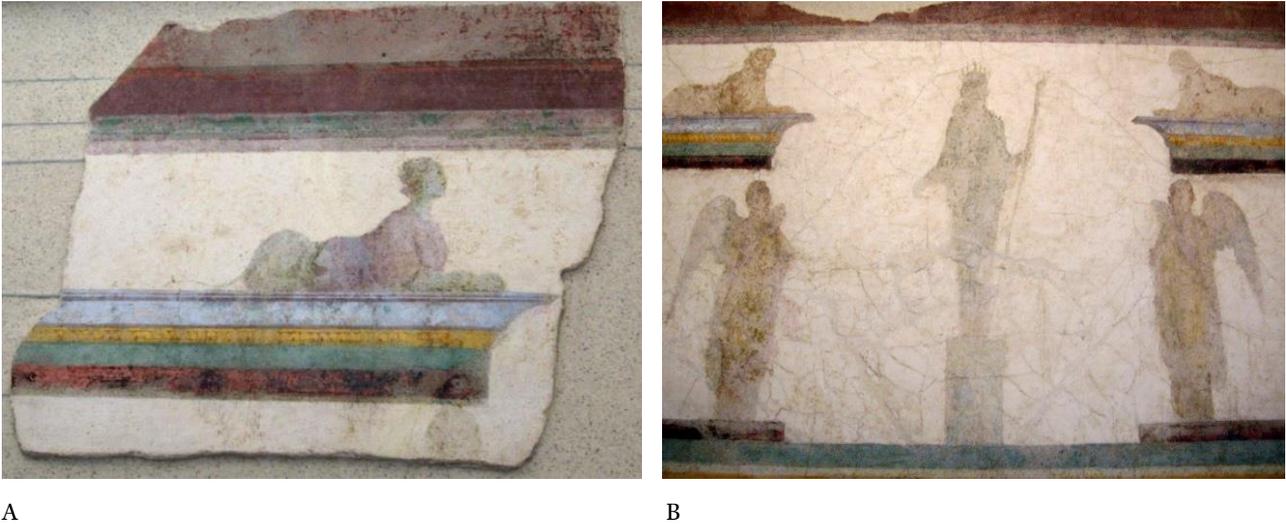


Fig. 47 A and B: details of crypto portico. Photos: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Other architectural Egyptian features in crypto portico A are the columns that appear at regular intervals along the wall. These provide the best preserved examples of columns throughout the Villa della Farnesina paintings. They are of a blue-green colour with yellow-golden bases and detailed architectural mouldings of stylised acanthus leaves and lotus flowers, some circled by a ring of golden ovuli, others standing on a bed of golden leaves (see fig. 48 A and C).

Where preserved, the columns have yellow-golden capitals decorated with acanthus leaves, griffins and uraeus-shaped motifs (see fig. 48D). Column bases with stylised lotus flowers and acanthus leaves have often been recognised as another typical component of Alexandrian architecture and painting styles, going back to third century BCE.³⁵⁴ Also, in the case of the column capitals, the uraeus-pitcher motif in combination with fantastical floral motifs of acanthus and palm leaves as well as the incorporation of griffins into this design has been identified as a specific feature of wall paintings from the city of Alexandria.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ On the relation between (Egyptian and Hellenistic) sphinxes and doorways, see: Brown 1958, 93; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 18; Kozloff 1993, 247-260; Stewart 1993, 231-246; Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186; Warmebol 2006 (esp. on Egyptian sphinxes and doorway); McKenzie 2007, 103.

³⁵⁴ Hanfmann 1984, 243-245; Stewart 1993, 231-246; McKenzie 2007, 103, fig. 136.

³⁵⁵ De Vos 1991, 123; Stewart 1993, 231-246.

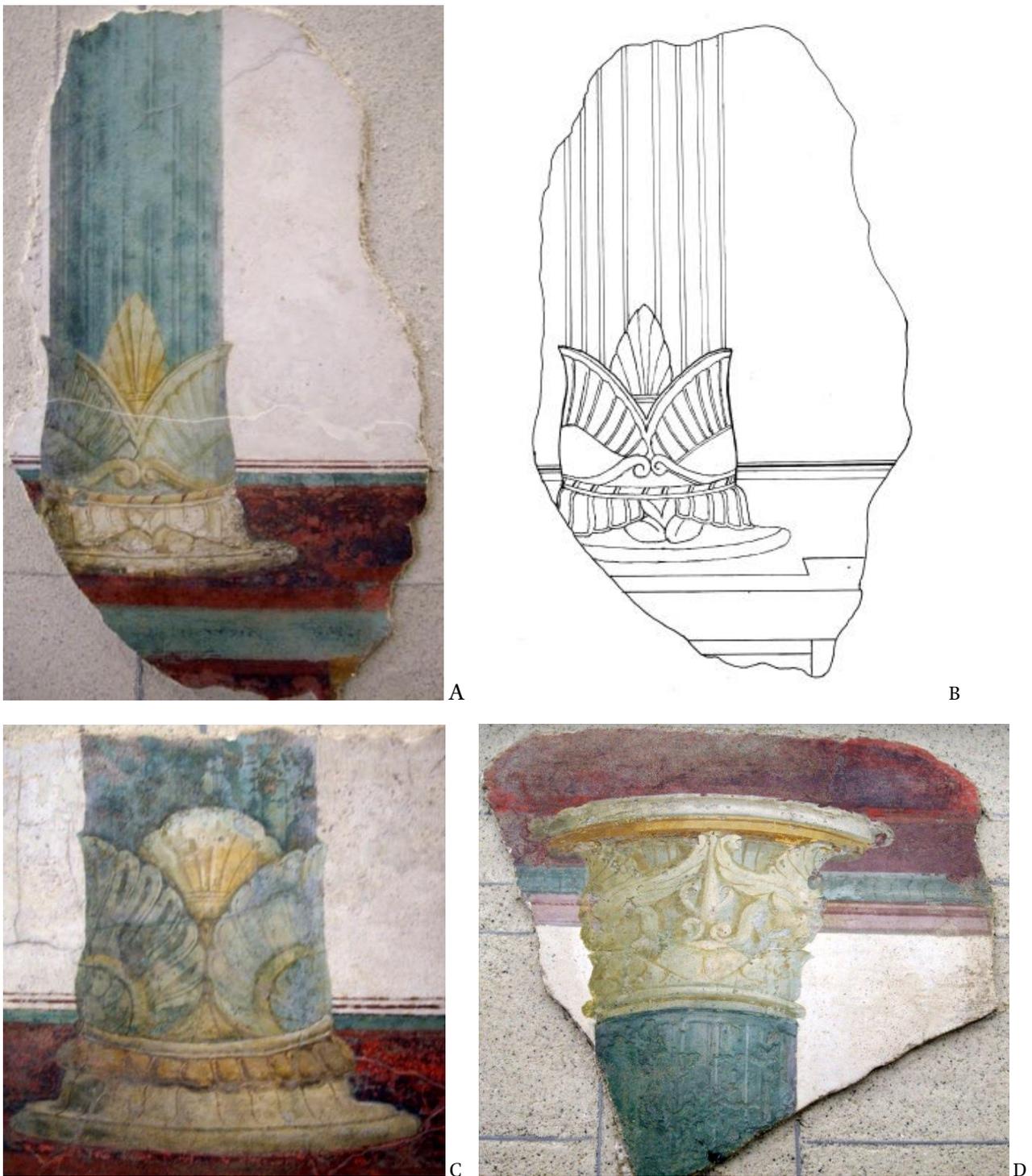


Fig. 48. A-C: Columns and bases from cryptoportico. D: Capital from cryptoportico. Photos A, C and D: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Drawing B: Nolan Thijs.

In cubicula B, D and E several slender columns are found with bases of stylised acanthus leaves and lotus flowers (fig. 49 A and B). Two lions, or griffins, lying with outstretched front paws can be found on top of the central panel of cubiculum B, accompanied by human figures (fig. 50A). In pose and position,



A

B

Fig. 49. Photos: M van Aerde.
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di Roma.

these appear similar to the sphinxes from the cryptoportico. In cubiculum E two winged sphinxes of the Greek type can be detected, sitting upright. They have female heads, lioness bodies and Isiac headgears with tall plumes and stylised headdresses that may be interpreted as Hathor-crowns (fig. 50B).³⁵⁶

Dining room C features columns of a particularly fantastical design; these are remarkably thin pillars, similar to candelabras, decorated with acanthus leaves, lotus flowers and uraeus-pitcher motifs at the capitals, bases and acanthus leaves and lotus buds along their narrow trunks (fig. 51 And B).



A

B

Fig. 50. A-B. Photos: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

³⁵⁶ Alternatively, these bird-like figures might be associated with an Egyptian parallel of bird-figures with human heads, an example of that type is found at the Museo Nazionale Romano (collezione egizie), Cat. No. 51801. (Manera & Mazza 2001, 103). Moreover, it should be noted at this point that, due to the great diversity of decorative elements featured in these wall paintings, which were readily interchangeable and adaptable to fit the specific design schemes of the paintings they were part of, interpretations such as presented here should not be regarded as absolutes. The flexibility of these different elements, especially, gave these wall paintings their unique character, and manifestations of Egypt were simply part of this diverse entity as a whole. Here these Egyptian elements are singled out only because manifestations of Egypt have remained underexplored in wall painting studies – not because such an isolated focus correctly reflects the nature of the wall paintings themselves.



Fig. 51. A-B.
Photos: M van Aerde.
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3. Ornamental elements

Ornamental elements, mainly floral friezes, with recognisable Egyptian components are found in all preserved spaces of the Villa della Farnesina. They come in a number of variations, explicit as well as subtle and against either dark or muted background colours. Clear examples of the more stylised type of floral friezes are found in crypto portico A, with designs of acanthus, lotus and palm leaves surrounding the panels of the wall in the spaces between the columns, both horizontally and vertically (fig. 52A-B).



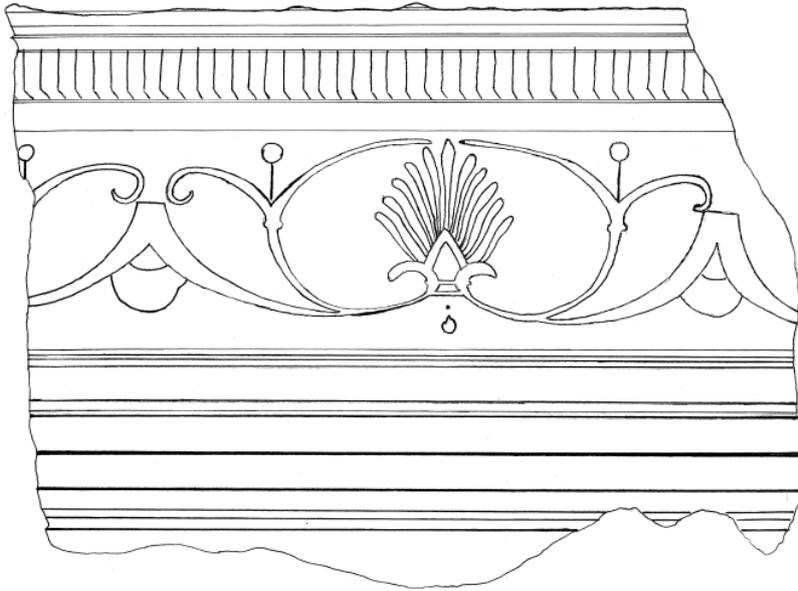


Fig. 52. Details from cryptoportico. Photos A-B: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Drawing C: Nolan Thijs.

C

Stylised uraeus-pitcher motifs can be recognised in the vertical friezes, and the horizontal friezes show stylised paratactic cobra designs among thin entwining branches that surround acanthus leaves. Stylised friezes of this type, which reappear throughout the painting schemes of the villa, have been identified as part of what has been called an Alexandrian decorative painting style that was known in the Roman world and, hypothetically, seems to have been popular especially during the last decade of the first Century BCE.³⁵⁷

Similar floral ornamental designs with stylised uraeus-motifs and lotus and acanthus leaves are numerous in cubicula B, D and E, surrounding panels in horizontal and vertical friezes against multiple colourful backgrounds (fig. 53 A-C). The level of detail in these decorative motifs is remarkable, as is the density of their portrayal in small rooms (cubiculum B, for example, measures 2,35m x 2,83m). In dining room C detailed panels and friezes are found on a dark background, which feature stylised uraeus-pitcher motifs and lotus buds as well as griffins incorporated among these stylised floral designs (fig. 54). In the other spaces of the villa panels and friezes of this kind appear regularly. Especially interesting are the floral friezes with naturalistically portrayed paratactic cobras among uraeus-motifs, stylised *atef* crowns with spikes or pens and acanthus leaves that appear in corridors F-G and passageways I-M (fig. 55).

³⁵⁷ Mols & Moormann 2008, 77. Cf. Ling 1991, 47; De Vos 1991, 123-124.



Fig. 53. Photos A-C: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.



Fig. 54. Photos: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

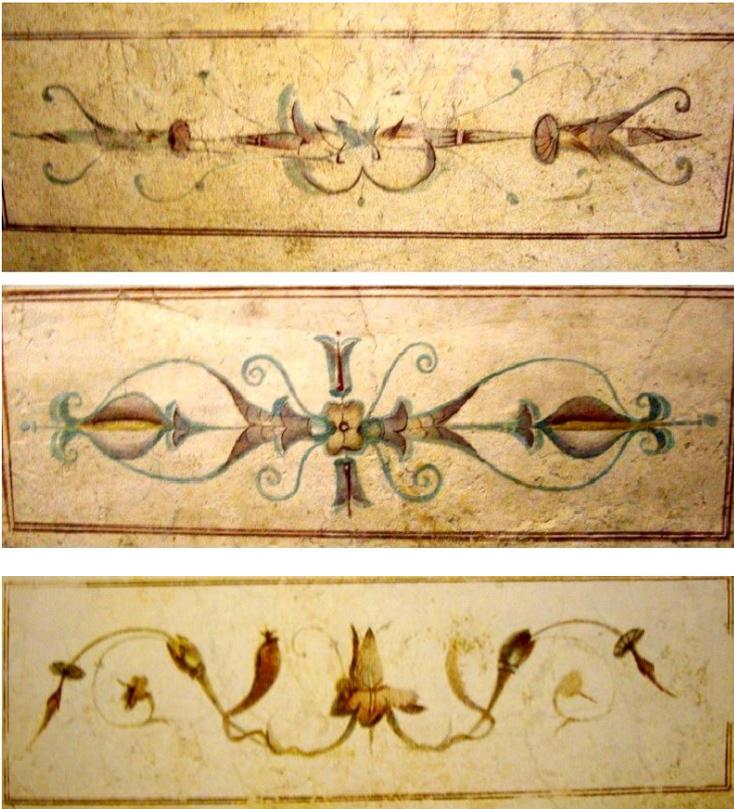


Fig. 55. Photos; M. van Aerde. Copyright: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

It is noteworthy that the floral frieze with the cobras (fig. 55, bottom panel) in particular shows a close similarity to the top frieze of the Aula Isiaca wall paintings on the Palatine Hill (see paragraph 3.1.3).

4. Nilotic landscapes

Many landscape scenes are featured in the Farnesina wall paintings, especially in passageway I-M, but none of these are as explicitly recognisable as Egyptian in style or subject-matter such as Nilotic scenes found at the House of Livia and the Aula Isiaca on the Palatine Hill. In dining room C one landscape panel could be interpreted as a river landscape reminiscent of the Nile, because of the temple architectural components that may be recognised as Egyptian, based mainly on the temple colonnade front and symmetry, reminiscent of pylon temple fronts, and the deity statue placed within it, which shows some parallels with, for example, the depiction of deity statues in the Osiris temple (possibly that of Canopus) on the Nile mosaic of Palestrina (see fig. 56).³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ On the architectural features of the painting, see: Spencer 2004, 8-12; Arnold 2003; Shaw 2003; Vörös 2007. On the depiction of the Osiris temple from the Palestrina mosaic, see: Meyboom 1995, 55.

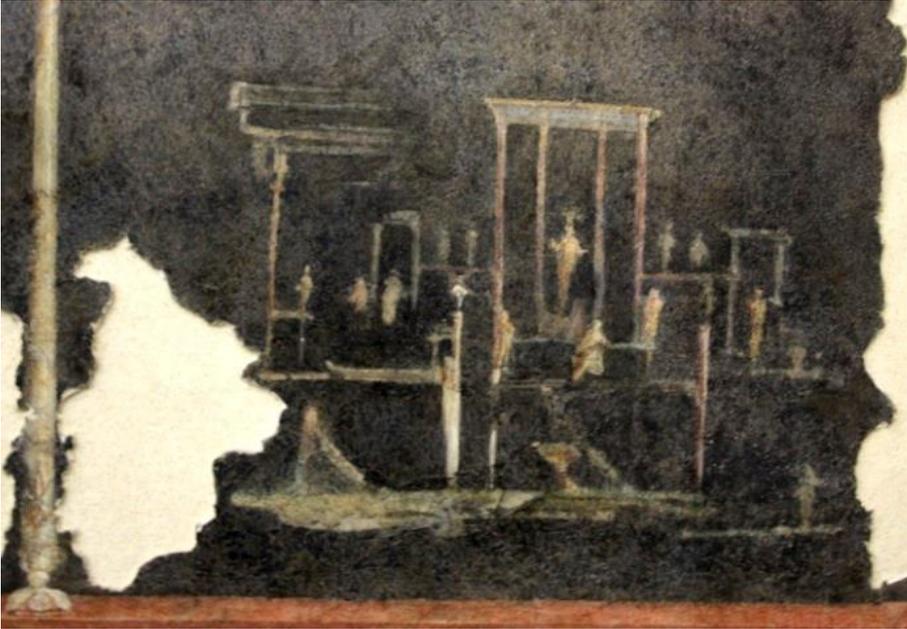


Fig. 56. Photo: M van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Dining room C, as a whole, evokes a sense of peacefulness and nature through its depiction of landscapes and richly subtle (fantastical) architectural features; this is often interpreted as a reference to Augustus' peace propaganda.³⁵⁹

The narrative frieze circling on the upper section of the dining room, among the middle and top zones, is generally interpreted likewise according to this political message; it shows scenes of captured men led before a king, scenes of bathing and domestic preparations, commotion around what appears to be the discovery of a dead man, deliberation among a king and his advisors, flanked by soldiers. The majority of scenes portrayed revolve around judgement; either a king observing and judging a commotion, or overseeing proceedings. One particular scene shows a king seated on a platform passing judgement over a case involving a small baby and two supplicating women (reminiscent of the Salomon judgement from the Old Testament to our eyes). Another suggestion is that the scene is meant to portray the Egyptian pharaoh Bocchoris (735-728 BCE), who was renowned for his wisdom and judgment.³⁶⁰ Another Egyptian interpretation of this scene is that it would concern the portrayal of the pharaoh Amasis (570-526 BCE), who is also mentioned in Herodotos (*Historiae* 2.172-174).³⁶¹ However, no visual attributes or specific references can be derived from the frieze panel itself that would hint that it was meant as a panel depicting an Egyptian narrative. This might be suggested only by association, in connection to the other

³⁵⁹ Mols & Moormann 2008, 44.

³⁶⁰ Andreae 1969, 445-446; Sanzi di Mino 1998, 218; Mazzoleni & Pappalardo 2004, 213.

³⁶¹ Mielsch 2001, 63-64; Mols & Moormann 2008, 44.

–and very different– references to Egypt in the villa’s wall paintings; a more likely interpretation is therefore that this frieze contains scenes intended to depict typically Roman examples of judgment and government.³⁶²

In addition to the above discussed wall paintings recovered from the Villa della Farnesina excavation, De Vos describes several more fresco fragments that she attributes to this site, even though currently the whereabouts of these particular fragments are unknown, and their provenance cannot be traced with any certainty (fig. 57A and B).³⁶³ It is not unlikely that separate fragments as these were recovered from the Farnesina excavation, as stated by Bragantini and De Vos, but because of the lack of data this cannot be presented as fact. The fragments, however, provide interesting examples of manifestations of Egypt in the form of figurative depictions.

The fragments contain six or seven figures, probably male, depicted in profile on a white background, in a rigid, straight pose that seems an iconographical reference to so-called pharaonic Egyptian styles.³⁶⁴ Four (possibly five) of the figures are turned to face left, the other two face right; these two figures are holding a situla, with both their arms lowered. As the actual fragments currently cannot be traced, and no colour photographs of them exist, De Vos’ description is the only source about their appearance: she describes that a purple colour is used for the figures’ complexion, which is reminiscent of the red ochre colour that is generally used for male figures in Egyptian paintings. All figures wear *nemes* headgear in the colours green, purple and yellow, as well as green *shendit* kilts with a yellow rim and a knot at the stomach. The fabrics of the clothes are decorated with simple motives.³⁶⁵ Four of the figures hold their heads lowered and are crowned with an *uraeus*; De Vos called the feathers reminiscent of the *andjety* crown with two feathers, and associated it with the god Horus and as a symbol of Lower Egypt.³⁶⁶

In her analysis, De Vos mentions that the style of these fragments is notably different from that of the ‘egyptianising frescoes’ from the House of Augustus on the Palatine: she describes these ‘Farnesina

³⁶² As argued by Gabelmann 1984, 151-152 (Nr. 63). See also: Bragantini & Pirelli 2006-2007, 76.

³⁶³ De Vos 1991, 121-124. De Vos, who studied these fragments in person, mentions that they are archived at the Museo Nazionale di Roma (Palazzo Massimo), but no current record appears to exist of them (personal communication with staff at the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma in 2011). The only other mentioning of these fragments as part of the Villa della Farnesina frescoes is in: Bragantini, I. & De Vos, M. 1982. *Museo Nazionale Romano. Le pitture II, 1. Le decorazione della villa romana della Farnesina*. Rome.

³⁶⁴ De Vos 1991, 124.

³⁶⁵ De Vos 1991, 123-124.

³⁶⁶ De Vos 1991, 122-123. De Vos’ interpretation of the *andjety* crown and its association with Horus do not seem founded on actual comparative sources, however, especially seeing the fact that no examples or parallels are given. (Kaper 2014, personal communication.)

images' as 'flatter, more linear, and apparently especially pharaonic'.³⁶⁷ However, there is a distinct similarity in style with the fresco fragment recovered and more recently studied from the foundation layers of the House of Augustus on the Palatine, which was discussed in paragraph 3.1.1. The rigid posture, in profile depiction and more traditional 'pharaonic' attributes and clothing, including similar headgear with uraeus and long feather, is visually very similar (see fig 58).

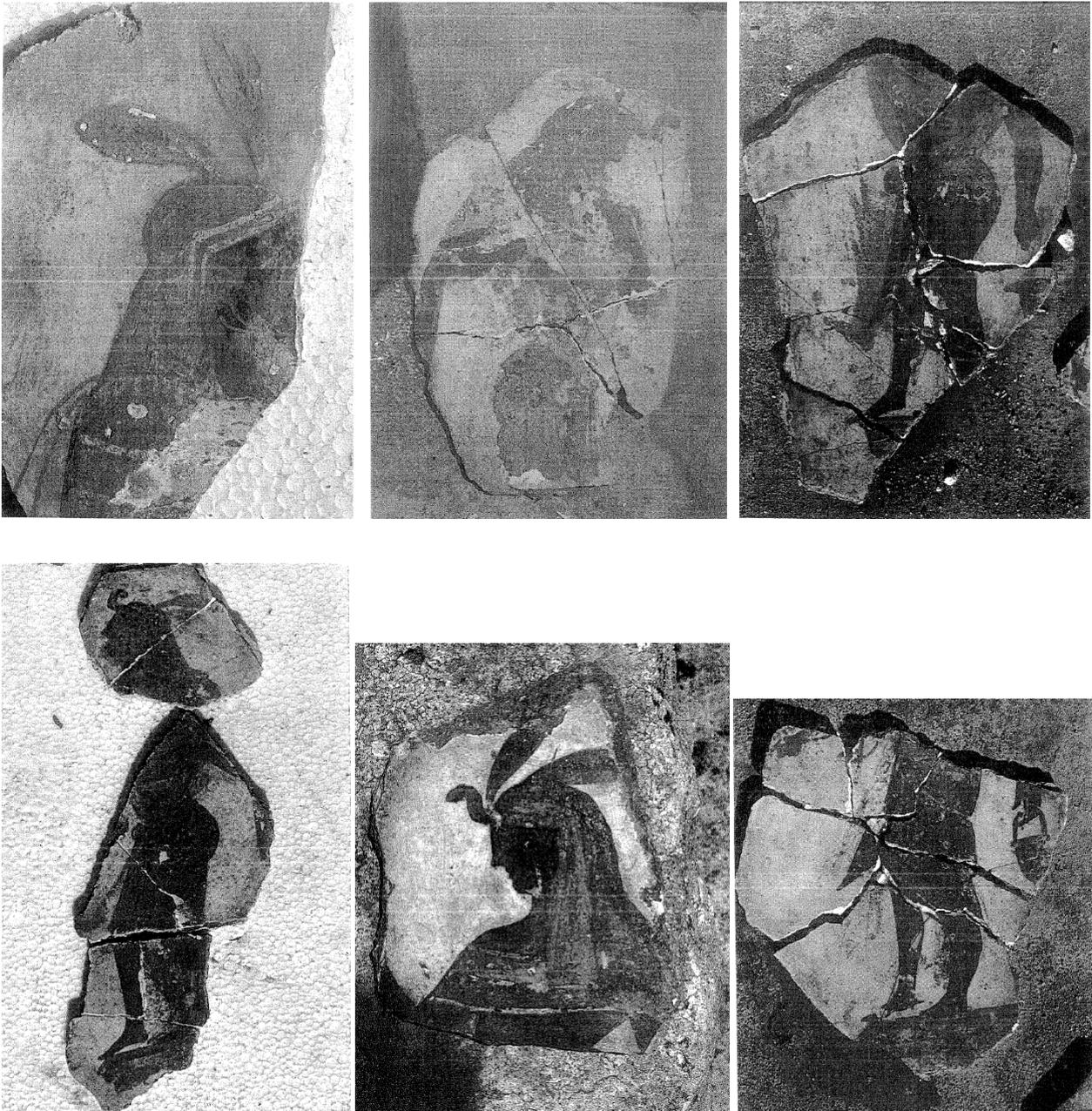


Fig. 57 A. Photographs of the six fragments. De Vos 1991.

³⁶⁷ De Vos 1991, 124.



Fig. 57B. Reconstruction drawings of the six fragments. De Vos 1991.

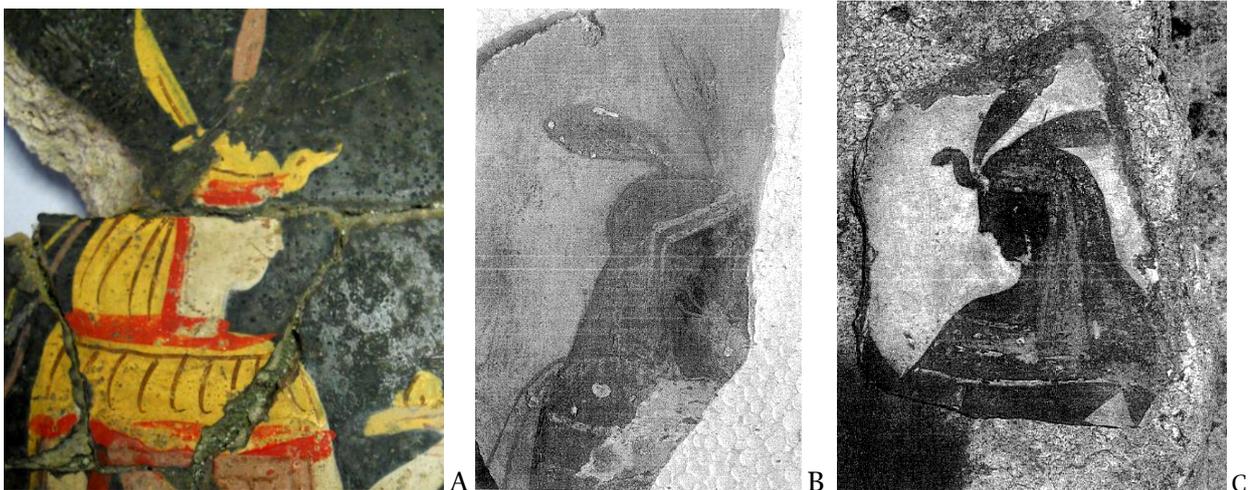


Fig. 58. A: Photo: M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Photos B and C: De Vos 1991.

This may indicate an earlier phase of wall painting (probably late Republican, at least 1st Century BCE) as part of the Farnesina complex, based on their comparison to the known fragment from the foundations of the House of Augustus. On the other hand, the majority of frescoes from crypto portico A of the known Farnesina site is missing; and here we also find figurative depictions of Serapis (see above, fig. 41) presented against a white background. Their style of presentation indeed seems different, as noted by De Vos; but the stylistic differences between the architectural decorations, painting panels and figurative

depictions in crypto portico A is one of its main criteria, to begin with.³⁶⁸ It is not unthinkable that these figures may have been part of some of the decorative panels of crypto portico A, based on its currently known colour scheme and thematic representations. Due to the lack of data, either of these interpretations must remain speculative – but they once again indicate the diversity that can be found in Augustan wall painting, as will be further explored below.

3.5.2. Interpretation

What is the meaning of Egyptian manifestations as part of these Farnesina paintings? What do they imply, what do they do in their (Augustan) context? When we look at the wide variety of manifestations of Egypt as part of the Farnesina wall paintings (figurative, architectural, ornamental and landscape), in terms of their material form, we here also find a frequent use of the Egyptian or Vestorian blue pigment; as mentioned in the analyses from the frescoes at the Augustan Palatine (section 3.1.), this pigment was widely used throughout the Mediterranean already since its creation in 4th Dynasty Egypt and as such was well-known to Roman painting already during Republican times.³⁶⁹ It is remarkable, however, that the pigment here appears to be used especially in ornamental friezes with uraeus and lotus motifs and in figurative panels of Isiac figures, such as found in cubicula B, D and E. Apart from this, the painting material and fresco technique used here is directly similar to the techniques used at the Augustan Palatine and as such typically Roman. Because of the Greek phrase ‘ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ’ inscribed on one of the painted columns in cubiculum D, which means ‘Seleukos has made this’, there have been speculations that the paintings were made by a Greek-named artist (and/or his workshop) from Ptolemaic Alexandria, or at least an ‘Eastern Hellenistic’ connection is suggested, especially linked with the numerous manifestations of Egypt featured in the paintings’ design scheme.³⁷⁰ But as we saw previously, these features, such as the ornamental friezes and architectural components prominent in the Farnesina paintings, had already become incorporated as integral parts of painting styles throughout the Mediterranean from the Ptolemaic period in Egypt onward, and as such had become incorporated

³⁶⁸ Mols & Moormann 2008, 53, 58. Cf. Mazzoleni & Pappalardo 2004, 212-213.

³⁶⁹ The ‘Egyptian blue’ pigment (caeruleum) was widely used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, from 4th Dynasty Egypt until the fall of the Roman Empire in Europe. Eastaugh et. al. 2005, 147-148. See also: Shaw 2000, 480.

³⁷⁰ Suggested by: Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 22; Grüner 2004, 213. This suggestion is discussed by: Croisille 2005, 67; Mols & Moormann 2008, 33, 64.

into the repertoire of the late second Pompeian style and the early third style of Roman wall painting.³⁷¹ The most prominent examples of this are the ornamental lotus motifs and uraeus designs that were part of Alexandrian funerary and pavilion wall paintings, and came to be integral parts of Roman wall painting also.³⁷² Perhaps because a relatively large amount of the Farnesina paintings have been preserved, compared to the remaining paintings from the Augustan Palatine, we here find manifestations of Egypt in all four categories: figurative, architectural, ornamental, and landscape. Apart from the more dubious and unrecorded fragments discussed at the end of the paragraph, all these features are presented in a style that reminds most of the paintings from the House of Livia and ‘Aula Isiaca’ from the Palatine, with attention to detail, perspective and artistic nuance characteristic for Roman wall painting from the late second Pompeian style and (especially) the early third style. Rather than as a specific style, standing out among the design scheme, Egypt is featured here mainly as a thematic component – a decorative theme, at that. The larger panels in crypto portico A and cubacula B and D all portray Greek mythological scenes. The depiction of Egyptian figures, such as Isis and Isiac figures, Serapis and Jupiter-Ammon, all feature as part of the decorative scheme, placed among the architectural designs, as part of fantasy columns or on top of friezes. Only the (single) Nilotic landscape scene from triclinium C is part of a series of nocturnal landscape panels; but these, too, are painted to enhance the effect of the architectural design of the room, evoking a sense of an outside terrace by night, with far-away views of delicate and somewhat idyllic landscape scenes. There is no specific emphasis on ‘Egypt’ here, in particular, other than the Nilotic landscape being categorised as such an idyllic scene alongside other rural Mediterranean landscapes.

In terms of the paintings’ physical context, if we assume the excavated villa was or at some point became the property of Marcus Agrippa, their stylistic correspondence with the paintings recovered from the House of Augustus, House of Livia and ‘Aula Isiaca’ on the Palatine hill does seem to indicate an interpretative connection as well. This may entail a deliberate (political) reference to Augustus’ residence, or rather the popularity of this particular style of painting due to Augustus’ example in regard to the elite of Rome. The interpretation that the villa was a wedding gift for Augustus’ daughter Julia and Marcellus, prior to it being passed on to Agrippa on the occasion of his wedding to Julia, would imply that Augustus, indeed, may have had a direct hand in commissioning the building process and

³⁷¹ See notes 24, 197 and 212 in this dissertation.

³⁷² These Alexandrian paintings have been thoroughly described and analysed by Marjorie Venit. See: Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186.

decorations. Moreover, if the commissioning of the villa would have come down to Agrippa himself, after all, then it is not at all unlikely that Augustus or someone from his direct circle may have recommended a certain artist or workshop to Agrippa for the decoration of his villa, seeing Agrippa's prominent status. The unique character of these paintings, especially in regard to their similarity and the fact that they have only been recovered from Rome, strongly suggests at least a chronological connection between the wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine complex and those from the Villa della Farnesina. The figurative, architectural, ornamental and landscape features that can be seen as manifestations of Egypt (and that can be traced back to Alexandrian Hellenistic styles that had already become part of the wider Mediterranean repertoire of painting styles) are among the stylistic components that make these type of Augustan paintings so unique. Their general design scheme (opening panels, fantasy architecture, floral ornaments) corresponds with the transition we see from the late Second Pompeian to the early Third Pompeian style – but the appearance of such prominent figurative, architectural, ornamental and landscape manifestations of Egypt is something we only see in these examples from the Augustan Palatine complex and the Villa della Farnesina. However, as said above, these manifestations of Egypt were already known and available to Roman material culture before the official Roman incorporation of Egypt in 30 BCE. They do seem to hold a relatively prominent place in these examples; this is what makes these Augustan paintings unique, but it does not necessary imply a strictly political context or propaganda message behind them. We here find depictions of deities, Nilotic landscapes and architectural elements that can, in effect, be identified as manifestations of Egypt taken from that part of the wider Hellenistic koine that recognisably refers to Egyptian imagery. As such, they are part of a very diverse decoration scheme full of mythological imagery and Hellenistic ornamental styles. The presence of manifestations of Egypt among these is therefore quite logical in itself – and it by no means implies that a categorisation is needed that labels these particular paintings as an entirely separate category of Augustan wall painting, such as recently suggested by Mols and Moormann. In fact, these paintings very effectively demonstrate the transition phase between the Second and Third Pompeian styles. The multi-layered nature of Augustan culture overall implies that while the presence of these manifestations of Egypt may rather be a visual expression of the Augustan elite at the time (to set themselves apart from prior Republic elite, perhaps, by means of different stylistic choices in their painting decorations), any political associations linked to Augustus' victory and incorporation of Egypt may also, simultaneously, have been implied – depending on the specific context and perspective of those that observed them. A

family friend from the same elite circle, or a visiting senate official, for example, is likely to have viewed these same paintings in a different light. This is exactly what makes culture so inherently resilient and effective, in general, and this seems to have worked especially well for Augustan material culture – namely, this ability to adapt to contextual criteria without having to opt for one specific aim exclusively. This flexibility in making meaning (and also in incorporating already available elements and making them part of new contexts and thus new interpretations) is what makes material culture an active component in Rome's cultural revolution, and not merely a backdrop to the politics. The unique character of the manifestations of Egypt such as featured in these wall paintings from both the Augustan Palatine and the Villa della Farnesina present a valuable example of exactly that process.

3.6. The pyramid of Gaius Cestius

Nowadays, if we were asked to name a manifestation of Egypt, most of us would name the pyramids of Egypt without hesitation. The image of a pyramid is not something that is generally associated with Rome – however, ancient Rome seems to have counted at least a small number of pyramid tombs. Currently only one of these remains: the tomb of Gaius Cestius on the Via Ostiensis, which is discussed here. But medieval sources also mention the so-called Pyramid of Romulus located near the Vatican; Poggio Bracciolini described such a Vatican pyramid at the Vatican in 1440 as ‘a large pyramid, without any ornaments’ and wrote that Petrarch had interpreted it as the tomb of either Romulus or Remus.³⁷³ In line with these descriptions, Pietro del Massaio drew this Vatican pyramid on a map of Rome in 1472 (see fig. 59). From the sixteenth century onwards, however, no remains or original site of this pyramid are known, and it is believed that it was destroyed around that time.³⁷⁴



Fig. 59. Detail of map by Pietro del Massaio (1472) featuring the Vatican pyramid. Digital scan of original. Copyright of the Vatican Library Collections.

Another Roman pyramid tomb is mentioned in the 12th century manuscript known as *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* ('Miracles of the city of Rome'), placing it near the Borgo of Sant'Angelo. A similar mention is

³⁷³ Braccioloni *De varietate fortunae*, 136. Original descriptive passage: 'Pyramis est praeterea in Vaticano grandis operis, instar molis, omni ornatu ablato.'

³⁷⁴ Claridge 1998, 59, 364–366; Di Meo, 2008.

made in the 15th century *Tractatus de rebus antiquis et situ urbis Romae* ('Tractatus on the antiquities and site of the city of Rome'), which describes the pyramid as 'very beautiful, covered as it was with marble slabs'.³⁷⁵ But no further records or remains of also this pyramid have been preserved. It is important in studying the pyramid of Cestius, however, to be aware that the image of a pyramid tomb will not have been as much a singularity as it seems to be in Rome today.

3.6.1. The pyramid as manifestation of Egypt

The tomb was built in 18 BCE, commissioned by Gaius Cestius, a Roman praetor who had been a magistrate in North Africa and could as such be counted among Octavian's political allies.³⁷⁶ The pyramid is constructed of a brick-based concrete base that is covered on the outer walls with rectangular slabs of white marble; the entire structure rests on a foundation of large travertine blocks, measuring 29.6 m square in base and reaching 37m in height (fig. 60).³⁷⁷

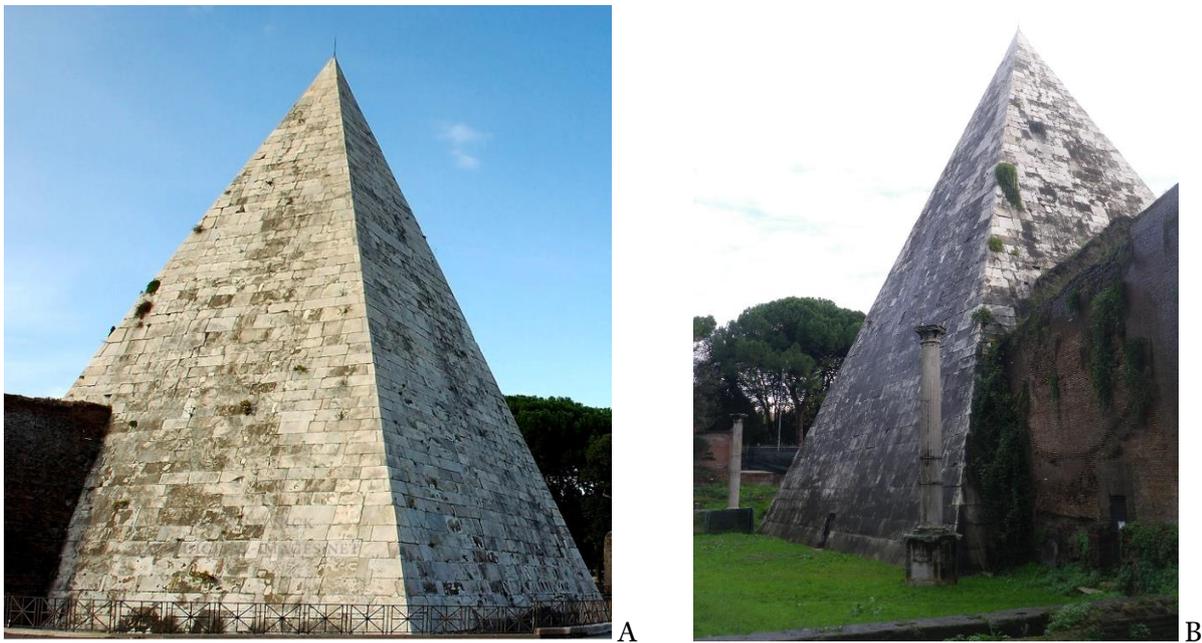


Fig. 60. The Pyramid of Cestius, A: front view, B: back view. Porta San Paolo, Rome. Photo A: M. van Aerde, B: C. van Galen.

³⁷⁵ Anonymous, *Tractatus de rebus antiquis et situ urbis Romae*: '(...) mirae pulchritudinis fuit in lapidibus marmoreis tabulata.' See: Visconti & Vespignani 1877, 187-190.

³⁷⁶ Bivona 1985, 97-100; Ridley 1992, 1-29.

³⁷⁷ On the Roman construction and archaeological discovery of the pyramid, see: Visconti & Vespignani 1877, 187-190; Claridge 1998, 59, 364-366; Neudecker 2004, 94-113; Di Meo, 2008. For an archaeometrical analysis of the materials used (especially the marble construction) see: Gorgoni 1998, 308-315.

The pyramid is mostly massif on the interior; there is one small burial chamber at the lower centre, partially reaching down into the base. It is a rectangular room, measuring 5.95 m x 4.10m, with a vaulted ceiling reaching 4.80m in height. The pyramid was sealed from the outside, without apparent entrance or gateway available to the burial chamber once it was closed off; however two tall columns on pedestals with composite volute capital were recovered beside it, and are currently positioned besides the modern entrance to the tomb, created for access to the burial chamber (see fig. 60B). Sometime during the middle ages a tunnel was cut through the marble plates and concrete massif of the pyramid to reach the chamber, presumably by plunderers: when the tomb was documented for the first time in 1660, the burial chamber was discovered entirely emptied, and a large part of the wall damaged by the hand-made tunnel (which is still visible today). The wall paintings on the ceiling and walls, although already for the most part faded, were documented by the famous engraver and painter Pietro Santi Bartoli; unfortunately less than half have been preserved since then.³⁷⁸ The style of the paintings, with large open panels with singular figures at the centre (unfortunately none of these have been preserved enough for identification) flanked by thin candelabras is recognisable as typical of the late Second-early third Pompeian style, and as such seems to be similar as well as contemporary to the paintings we saw at the Augustan Palatine and the Villa of Agrippa (see fig. 61).³⁷⁹



Fig. 61. Overview of wall paintings inside the burial chamber of the pyramid of Cestius.

Photo: M. van Aerde

³⁷⁸ In 2012 the Soprintendenza Speciale Per I Beni Archaeologici di Roma launched a large-scale restoration campaign of the pyramid of Cestius, aimed at restoring both the inner chamber and the outer walls for long-term on site conservation.

³⁷⁹ In most discussions of wall painting from Augustan Rome the Cestius paintings are only sporadically mentioned, no mention is made of any lotus motifs as part of their design scheme. See: Bastet & De Vos 1979, 22-23; Barbet 1985, 42-44, 97; Ehrhardt 1987, 53-54; Ling 1991, 31-47; Mielsch 2001, 54-66.

In several examples of better preserved candelabras, small stylised ornamental motifs can be recognised at various points along the thin stems depicting lotus buds (see fig. 62 A and B), comparable to some of the more obvious lotus designs from especially the ‘Aula Isiaca’ and Villa della Farnesina wall paintings discussed above. As far as can be told from the badly preserved remains, none of the figurative scenes in the panels seem to have featured any recognisable Egyptian attributes.



Fig.62. Candelabras with lotus motifs from the wall paintings inside the burial chamber of the pyramid of Cestius. Photos: M. van Aerde

On the pyramid’s outer marble east and west walls, two identical inscriptions were added . The larger texts reads (see fig. 63):

C · CESTIVS · L · F · POB · EPVLO · PR · TR · PL
VII · VIR · EPVLONVM

‘Gaius Cestius Epulo, son of Lucius, of the gens Poblia, praetor, tribune of the plebs, septemvir of the Epulones’³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Translation by Van Aerde. For transcription, see also: Visconti & Vespignani 1877, 187; Claridge 1998, 59.

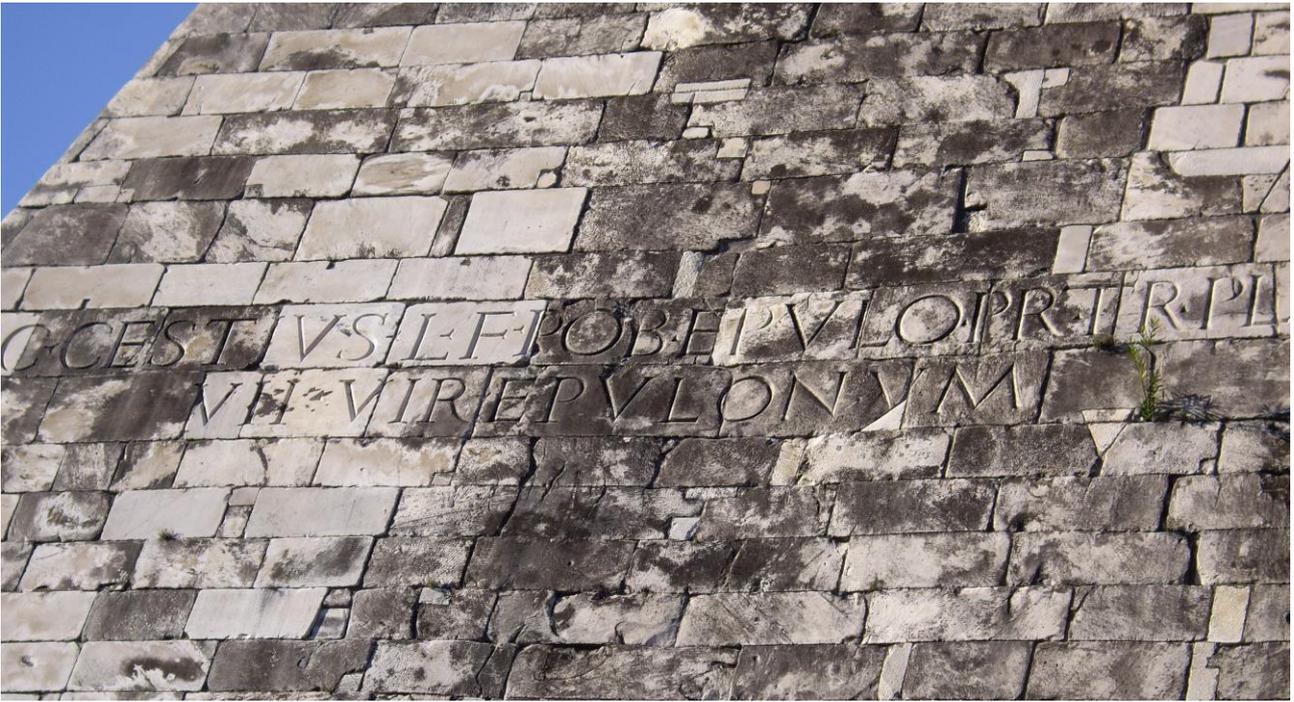


Fig. 63. Inscription naming Gaius Cestius on the west wall of the pyramid (identical on the east wall). Photo: M. van Aerde.

The smaller inscription, placed considerably lower on the walls, further defines the construction of the pyramid and translates as: ‘The construction was completed, in accordance with the planning, in 330 days, by the decision of the heir Pontus Mela, son of Publius of the Claudii, and Pothus, his freedman’.³⁸¹ As such the inscriptions appear typical of a large monumental Roman tomb, such as encountered frequently along especially the Via Appia during the late Republic,³⁸² and make no further reference to the pyramid shape of the tomb or any explicit references to Egypt.

Studies of the tomb as a whole have frequently noted that it seems remarkably ‘steep’ and narrow in comparison to the famous Egyptian pyramids, such as those at Giza; it is suggested that it might instead refer to a type of Nubian pyramid instead, thus leading to the suggestion that Gaius Cestius may have partaken in the Roman campaign against the Nubian kingdom of Meroe in 23 BCE and would have commissioned a similar pyramid as his monumental tomb in Rome to commemorate.³⁸³ But this remains speculation. It must be kept in mind that the larger, shallower pyramids as known from the Giza examples were not characteristic of all Egyptian pyramid tombs: there are, in fact, many examples of smaller, steeper pyramids throughout Egypt, especially during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, mainly

³⁸¹ Visconti & Vespignani 1877, 187; Claridge 1998, 59.

³⁸² The most famous example being the tomb of Caecilia Metella. For a recent study and overview, see: Gerding 2002.

³⁸³ Claridge 1998, 59, 364–366; Neudecker 2004, 94–113; Di Meo, 2008.

concerning private tombs.³⁸⁴ There is no reason to assume that the design for the pyramid of Cestius could not have directly referred to these Egyptian pyramids. Moreover, the descriptions of now lost pyramids provided by medieval sources, mentioned above, provide a very similar image of Roman pyramid tombs, namely as tall buildings clad in marble; moreover, the drawing by Del Massaio (fig. 59) actually shows an almost needle-like, narrow pyramid, with distinct similarity to the pyramid of Cestius as we know it.³⁸⁵

Despite this likelihood of similar tombs that may have been contemporary, the tomb of Cestius nonetheless appears to have been a relatively unique example of elaborate Roman monumental tomb design. It also seems to have been an ‘elaborate tomb monument’ in emphasis rather than that a specific Egyptian identification was implied in its design or decoration. Of course, the already striking pyramid shape was already a manifestation of Egypt in itself, and thus perhaps no additional emphasis may have seemed needed.



Fig. 64. Large unidentified (tomb) monument along the Via Appia, possibly a pyramid.

Photos: M. van Aerde

Another possible parallel, apart from the now lost pyramids mentioned above, may be found just along the outskirts of ancient Rome. On-going research of the University of Nijmegen along the Via Appia is currently exploring the possibility that a large so far unidentified (and partially preserved) tomb monument may have been a similar pyramid-shaped tomb, dating most likely also from the latter part of the first century BCE (fig. 64), making it a contemporary to the pyramid of Cestius.

Reconstructions and further research are being conducted, aiming to shed more light on the nature of the structure.³⁸⁶

The pyramid of Cestius appears to have been a remarkable, even if not singular kind of manifestation of Egypt within the context of Augustan Rome. We cannot tell whether any other pyramid tombs, such as

³⁸⁴ Lloyd 2003 (I), 369-394. Cf. Shaw 1995.

³⁸⁵ On medieval and Renaissance portrayals of the pyramid of Cestius and possible other Roman ‘narrow’ pyramids in Rome, see: Ridley 1992, 1-29; Di Meo 2008.

³⁸⁶ Personal communication with Eric Moormann and Rens de Hond from the Via Appia research team at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) in 2013. It is as yet unclear whether the structure likewise contained an inner burial chamber, but preliminary digital reconstructions made by the team do seem to indicate that a pyramidal architecture fits with the surviving remains.

mentioned in medieval sources, were built simultaneously to this one. They may have been built later after the example of Cestius' tomb; on the other hand, they may well have been part, together with Cestius pyramid, of a trend of ornamental pyramid-shaped tombs that became popular at this time in particular. This we cannot deduce with any certainty. Much more can be learned from the pyramid tomb itself, such as it has been preserved. Apart from the stylised lotus motifs in the surviving paintings (which by then were already an integrated part of the wall painting repertoire of the time – and which were not visible to anyone after the sealing of the burial chamber) there are no actual thematic or stylistic Egyptian references as part of the tomb. These stylised lotus motifs had already been part of the wider repertoire of Roman wall painting for a long time by the time the pyramid was built and decorated, and would be considered as such: regular elements of Roman wall painting rather than direct or indirect references to Egypt. The pyramid architecture of the tomb, however, may have been another matter. The inscription on the tomb seems to mark it rather a monumental Roman family tomb and not as a pyramid tomb specifically. Moreover, as will be explored in next paragraph, the pyramid of Cestius concretely presents the only as yet known record of a pyramid as manifestation of Egypt in Augustan Rome.

3.6.2. Interpretation

Later on in this overview (paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9) we will see how after the arrival of Egyptian obelisks in Rome, the image of the obelisks starts reappearing in both direct imitations and as part of the decorations of smaller objects from the personal sphere, such as glass vessels and gems. But apart from perhaps a handful of other examples of now lost similar pyramid tombs in Rome, the pyramid of Cestius does appear to be the only known manifestation of a pyramid throughout Augustan material culture. As we have seen so far, in decorative scenes from wall paintings we encounter Egyptian deities and pharaoh figures, obelisks, Nilotic scenes and ornamental motifs; as the next paragraph will demonstrate, we find very similar manifestations in glass vessels. But among all these examples there is no single image of a pyramid.

It is interesting to note that we *do* find references to pyramids in Roman literary sources from the Augustan period: the most famous example being the first lines of Horace's Ode 3.30, where he compares the immortality of his poetry with that of the pyramids of Egypt (and concludes that poetry outlives

pyramids).³⁸⁷ Propertius, also an Augustan poet, likewise puts the immortality of poetry on par with that of pyramids, naming the pyramids of Egypt alongside two other World Wonders from the Greek-Hellenistic world: the temple of Zeus in Olympia and the Mausoleum of king Mausolus of Halicarnassus.³⁸⁸ As recently explored by Maaïke Leemreize: ‘in Roman literature Egypt’s antiquities, pyramids most prominently, could be used to enhance the status of Roman achievement when these two were juxtaposed’.³⁸⁹ This seems to be quite the opposite of what we see in the material culture of Augustan Rome. Whereas we find a diversity of manifestations of Egypt being incorporated into the urban landscape of Rome and the wider material culture repertoire (thus likewise becoming means to give expression to specific Roman concepts of which Egyptian elements had become an integral part) in the form of figurative scenes, ornamental motifs, Nilotic scenes and especially the image of the obelisk, the pyramid is absent entirely, apart from Gaius Cestius’ tomb, even though the pyramid as Egyptian monument was evidently known at least among the educated elite, as can be made out from its references in above mentioned literary sources. Would this, then, suggest that the pyramid of Cestius – and possibly any other pyramid tombs from Roman times – should be considered to be pyramids only in form, without any direct or indirect association with Egypt implied?

It is interesting to note that from medieval times onwards, however, the pyramid of Cestius becomes the best-known example of an Egyptian pyramid in the Western world; in fact, prior to Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798-1801 the pyramid of Cestius in Rome is considered the ‘model’ of Egyptian pyramids and is featured in countless drawings, paintings and scholarly observations; the majority of modern scholarship about the pyramid of Cestius, because of this, is focused upon this reception through history, rather than on its initial Roman origin.³⁹⁰ But when we look at the tomb in its contemporary context of Augustan Rome, the pyramid of Cestius appears to have been a particularly rare manifestation of Egypt –perhaps even one of form alone –that did not take hold in the material culture repertoire, and as such presents an interesting contrast to the way pyramids, as we saw, were effectively used to make meaning in the context of Augustan poetry, wherein they evidently did become part of the available

³⁸⁷ Hor. Ode. 3.30, 1-5: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regaliq[ue] situ pyramidum altius / quod non imber edax, non aquilo impotens / possit diruere aut innumerabilis / annorum series et fuga temporum.* (I have built a monument more lasting than bronze / and higher than decaying royal pyramids, / [a monument] that cannot be subdued by lashing rain / nor by wild north wind, nor by the countless / processions of years and the flight of time). Translation: van Aerde.

³⁸⁸ Prop. 3.2.19-26. Cf. Suerbaum 1968, 326-327, on the ‘Pyramidenmotiv’ in Propertius’ poetry.

³⁸⁹ Leemreize 2014, 56-82.

³⁹⁰ For an overview of studies on the impact and ‘Afterlife’ of the pyramid of Cestius, see: Ridley 1992, 1-29; Curl 1991, 89-96; Idem. 1994; Curran 2007.

repertoire of literary topoi and references. This contrast, in itself, is certainly interesting. A suggestion might be that for a pyramid to hold such meanings of ‘immortality’ (even when referred to in order to enhance Roman comparisons), it needed to be an ancient pyramid in Egypt itself, thus comparable to World Wonders such as the temple of Zeus – magnificent structures far away from Rome that still could be used, as such, to make Rome appear even greater when compared to them. The pyramid of Cestius, however, was a contemporary tomb in Rome itself; as such, despite its recognisable shape as a pyramid, it would have lost most associations with ancient World Wonders, and hence the value of a similar comparison between ancient pyramids on the one hand and contemporary Rome on the other hand, as seen with Horace and Propertius, would have been greatly diminished or even impossible. Perhaps this is why, as part of the material culture repertoire of Augustan Rome, the pyramid did not take hold. While this seems not to have been the case with obelisks (as will be explored later on in paragraph 3.9), for a pyramid to hold true meaning as an Egyptian monument (and as such to be compared to Rome) perhaps it had to be something ancient and far away, something the educated elite would want to visit in a distant land – not simply glimpse at along the Via Ostiensis. Perhaps, this can be seen as a reason why pyramid designs and decorative motifs did not become an integral part of Augustan material culture: because a pyramid in contemporary Rome would lose the meaning of a pyramid that the Romans themselves had applied to it and made use of in literary references, rather than in more tangible examples of material culture readily available in their own local contexts.

3.7. Cameo glass vessels

Cameo glass vessels present a very interesting case study that appears to be unique for Augustan Rome. There is a remarkable appearance of manifestations of Egypt as part of the decorative repertoire available to cameo glass workshops, as will be explored at length below, thus marking what seems to be a distinctly new step in the development of manifestations of Egypt not only as integral part of Augustan material culture, but also as expanding now beyond Augustan elite circles into the wider spheres of the city. First the cameo glass type is explored in detail, followed by several in-depth individual case studies of manifestations of Egypt known from cameo glass vessels and fragments.

Cameo glass constitutes a relatively small percentage of Roman fine tableware; it is a unique type, visually immediately recognisable by its translucent blue or purple glass with opaque white glass relief decorations. Recent studies by Paul Roberts, William Gudenrath, Veronica Tatton-Brown and David Whitehouse of the British Museum, published in 2010, have effectively dated this specific glass technique to 15BCE-25CE, through a specific concentration of workshops in the city of Rome related to the rise of mould-blown glass techniques and the development of Arretine pottery in Rome.³⁹¹ The manufacturing process of cameo glass combined two significantly different techniques, lapidary work and glassblowing, at a time when core-forming and casting were the common practice in glass workshops.³⁹² Chronological contexts for cameo glass can, in most cases, be approached through a close study of the fragments themselves, in terms of their material form and decorative style. Comparative studies with Arretine pottery, silverware and other Roman glass productions have provided additional insight. As put forth by Von Saldern, influences between these different types –from manufacturing processes to style choices– will have interchanged with each other on a wide scale, thus creating a complex inherent relationship between glass, pottery, silver and hard stone.³⁹³ At circa 20–25 CE the rise of mould-blown and enamelled glass production coincided with the collapse of the Arretine pottery workshops in central Italy; this will

³⁹¹ Arretine pottery is of a red-slip type with glazed surface produced circa 30 BCE and 100 CE at Arretium (modern Arezzo in central Italy). Arretine pottery, either from plain or decorated moulds, was exported throughout the Roman world until the decline of its workshops. Cf. Roberts et al. 2010, 22 and 100; Kenrick, 2000; Paturzo 1996, 174-175; Brown 1968, 8; Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 844.

³⁹² Roberts 2010, 25-31. See on materials and technology of Roman glass vessels, Grose 1989, 109-125; on specifics of the core-forming process of cameo glass manufacturing, Tait 1991, 214-125; on the technique of overlay of blue and opaque white glass, Gudenrath & Whitehouse 1990, 137 and Whitehouse 2007, 60-73.

³⁹³ Von Saldern 1991, 118-119.

have been a time of change in terms of technical development and fashion taste in Roman glasswork, and is most likely to have also affected the production of cameo glass. Combining the currently known data on production, findspots and comparative arguments based on the close study of glass and hardstone materials and manufacturing techniques, there is indeed convincing evidence that places the beginning of the cameo glass industry at 15 BCE in the city of Rome, with ‘a cessation of the major workshop(s) in about 25 CE’.³⁹⁴ This puts the peak of cameo glass production in the middle of the Augustan era.

The innovative nature of the cameo glass’ manufacturing process (combining significantly different techniques in contrary to the then more common workshop practice) marks the historical significance of cameo glass in terms of its production technique as well as in terms of its unique stylistic characteristics. With both its innovative manufacturing process and unique visual character, cameo glass appears to have been a true product (and representative) of the Augustan cultural revolution. However, relatively few comprehensive studies of Roman cameo glass have been made, and the existing ones have focused on the material properties and iconographical interpretations of the glass fragments themselves.³⁹⁵ Zanker briefly mentions cameo glass vessels as part of Augustan material culture, interpreting one particular example of a fragment depicting a tripod and snake as Delphic content and thus referring to Augustus’ favourite deity Apollo.³⁹⁶ The best known and best preserved example of the cameo glass type, the so-called Portland Vase currently at The British Museum in London, has also been interpreted as a specific example of Augustan material culture, with myriad interpretations in regard to the meaning of its decorative scenes.³⁹⁷ One interpretation even opts that the decorative scenes on the vase refer (indirectly) to the love affair between Mark Antony and Cleopatra³⁹⁸; another interpretation regards these same depictions as referring (allegorically) to Octavian’s own rise to power.³⁹⁹ Apart from these

³⁹⁴ Roberts et al. 2010, 11; 23.

³⁹⁵ The 2010 study by Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton-Brown and Whitehouse is the most recent publication, providing an overview of all cameo glass fragments that are kept at The British Museum in London, with focus on their material properties and iconographical categories. The study provides a comprehensive bibliography of previous publications on cameo glass (Roberts et al. 2010, 103-105), also including an overview of private donations, vendors and auctions of cameo glass at The British Museum (109).

³⁹⁶ Zanker 1987, 59 fig. 39. See also Simon 1986, 153-154, for a brief reference to cameo glass as an example of ‘Augustan Classicism’ in personal objects.

³⁹⁷ Walters 1926, 376-378, no. 4036; Painter & Whitehouse 1990, 24-84; Walker 2004, 47; Whitestone 2007, 116-117, 121-133; Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 844; Roberts et al. 2010, 34-43.

³⁹⁸ It should be noted that there are no visually recognisable references to Egyptian styles or content in the Portland Vase’s decorative scenes; the interpretation referring to Mark Anthony and Cleopatra is entirely based on association with the ‘classical’ portrayal of these scenes. See: Roberts et al. 2010, 36; Walker 2004.

³⁹⁹ Painter & Whitehouse 1990, 130-136.

iconographical interpretations, no previous studies have comprehensively regarded cameo glass as part of Augustan visual language, or placed it in the context of the Augustan cultural revolution – while this specifically Augustan glass type provides a source par excellence for information on the workings and manifestations of the cultural transformations of the time.⁴⁰⁰ The currently known examples of cameo glass may be fragmentary on an individual scale, but as a specific type of glass work they present a remarkable insight into the interconnectedness underlying the cultural changes (and accompanying visual concepts) that shaped and were shaped by the Augustan cultural revolution as it spread through and transformed Rome.

The currently known pieces of Roman cameo glass are scattered around the world in musea, archives and private collections, in most cases with minimal data regarding findspots or original contexts.⁴⁰¹ The total estimate of currently known Roman cameo glass fragments/vessels amounts to 377, divided among open vessels (cups, bowls), closed vessels (amphorae, bottles) and plaques, and with a variety of decorative themes of which ‘floral/vegetal’ and ‘Bacchic’ scenes can be identified as the most frequent.⁴⁰² ‘Egypt’ is another prominent topic that keeps recurring.⁴⁰³ It is interesting to note that until fairly recently Alexandria was often regarded as the origin of cameo glass production; the diverse range of fine arts produced in Alexandria, in particular carved hardstone, has been an argument, but also the frequency of decorations with recognisable Egyptian scenes and topics as found on cameo glass fragments seems to have influenced this interpretation.⁴⁰⁴

As already mentioned in the Introduction chapter, Alexandria certainly played an important part in the development of the Hellenistic repertoire, and this has often led to misinterpretations of Roman-made objects as Alexandrian imports, as we see in this case. But by the time of cameo glass production these (often stylistic) Alexandrian influences were already so widespread as part of the repertoire throughout the Mediterranean, that there is no reason to suggest that cameo glass vessels must have

⁴⁰⁰ In their 2010 article, Wight and Swetnam-Burland do touch the surface on the Augustan context of cameo glass (in relation to the cameo glass flask from the J. Paul Getty Museum), but remain focused on the flask itself and the interpretation of its iconography. (Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 839-846; esp. 841-842). The 2013 article in the *British Museum Journal of Studies of Ancient Egypt and Sudan* (BMSAES), written during my research for this dissertation, for the first time dealt with cameo glass in the context of Augustan Rome specifically, by means of two specific case studies. See: Van Aerde 2013, 1-23.

⁴⁰¹ In the majority of cases catalogue data hold no record beyond the acquisition of pieces from 19th century auctions or donations from private collections of mainly Italian, British or American origin. The best available records are kept at The British Museum in London, the Gorga collection (Università la Sapienza) in Rome, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Boston Museum of Art, and the Corning Museum of Glass.

⁴⁰² Painter & Whitehouse 1990, 154-160; Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 839; Roberts et al. 2010, 12 & 97-99.

⁴⁰³ Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 839-846; Roberts et al. 2010, 54-55, 64, 77-79.

⁴⁰⁴ Cooney 1976, 36; Whitehouse 1991, 31-32; Roberts et al. 2010, 11.

been produced in Alexandria because of the appearance of ‘Alexandrian’ stylistic criteria.⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, there is no evidence at all to support the assumption that production of cameo glass would have occurred in Alexandria contemporary to a similar production in Rome or predating it.⁴⁰⁶ In contrast, the far more specific data on the existence of cameo glass workshops in Rome combined with the known findspot statistics provide much more convincing evidence that Rome was indeed the centre of cameo glass production, and likely the origin of most cameo glass vessels that are currently still preserved.⁴⁰⁷ The cameo glass collection of The British Museum is particularly numerous and diverse, and appears to present a reasonable impression of the cameo glass genre in general; the most recent statistics provided by Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton-Brown and Whitehouse show that by far the majority of known provenance is the city of Rome, and also that there are no known examples at all of objects originating from Alexandria.⁴⁰⁸

The statistics on cameo glass examples that contain manifestations of Egyptian are more challenging to assemble. The total amount of currently recorded examples amounts to 27. Virtually half of this number is kept at The British Museum in London (13 objects). The second largest collection is kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (7 objects). An additional 4 examples are at the Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen. One more example can be found at the Boston Museum of Art, also one at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and one at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. When gathering findspot statistics of the currently known pieces of cameo glass that feature manifestations of Egypt, 4 pieces can with certainty be traced back to Rome; 15 pieces come with only partial records but based on the available data are most likely to trace back to Rome; and of the other 8 pieces no data is available at all.⁴⁰⁹

It is interesting that Rome is the *only* known or likely findspot in the currently available data on cameo

⁴⁰⁵ On the Alexandrian debate, as quoted in the Introduction chapter, see: Tybout 1985, 177-178; Queyrel 2012, 237.

⁴⁰⁶ Whitehouse 1991, 31.

⁴⁰⁷ Roberts et al. 2010, 11-12.

⁴⁰⁸ Roberts et al. 2010, 98-99. The statistic provided by Robert’s comparative study show that the material properties and decorative categories of the cameo glass collection at The British Museum closely match the range of properties and categories of cameo glass worldwide. The lack of data on many of these worldwide fragments, however, implies that the resulting statistics can only represent a broad overview, rather than specific details.

⁴⁰⁹ When a fragment is considered to be ‘most likely from Rome’, this is in almost every case due to the fact that these pieces have been part of private collections, and were donated to museum collections in the nineteenth or early twentieth century: these private collections in question provided records that name Rome as the fragments’ provenance, but usually without specific details to ascertain their actual findspots. These data have been consulted at The British Museum archive records (also personal communication with curators 2011-2012. See also: Roberts et al. 2010, 110), The Metropolitan Museum of Art database records, the Thorvaldsens Museum database (also personal communication with curators, 2013), the J. Paul Getty Museum records, and the Toledo Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Art databases (recently updated, 2012).

glass that contains manifestations of Egypt. This, too, contradicts any interpretative theories on an Alexandrian provenance for Egyptian-themed cameo glass that was already argued against above.

An additionally strong argument for an origin from Rome is gained from comparative studies, as evident from recent comparisons between cameo glass fragments from the British Museum in London and pieces from the Gorga collection in Rome and from the Corning Museum of Glass: the findspot of the latter fragments has been securely documented as the Horti Sallustiani in Rome, and the distinct similarities found in the material properties and stylistic characteristics strongly suggest that the other fragments likewise date from the same period and a similar context in the city of Rome.⁴¹⁰ The context of such elite private (and later Imperially owned) gardens like the Horti Sallustiani also seems to support the argument that Roman cameo glass would have held a high market rating in Rome, and would have been a popular product within the higher social circles from the early Imperial period. Seen in this light, cameo glass will have peaked as exclusive vessel and tableware items that were manufactured, sold and purchased in the city of Rome during the peak of the Augustan period, from 15 BCE onwards.

Another argument for the popularity of cameo glass and its appearance specific for Augustan Rome may be found in the wall paintings of the Villa della Farnesina, as discussed in section 3.5.1. In one of the cubicula, several blue panels feature white Isiac figures crowned by lotus buds. The visual similarity with cameo glass is striking; these panels may appear to emulate of the specific visual effect achieved by the manufacture of cameo glass.⁴¹¹ This would indicate that cameo glass was well-known in Augustan Rome, and could, as such, become a visual concept as part of painters' repertoires. The fact that these painted cameo glass imitations depict Isiac figures, moreover, suggests that Egyptian themes and figures may even have become associated with blue cameo glass as a material form, in particular. As will be shown and explored below, Egyptian elements appear to have become incorporated into the repertoire of cameo glass workshops, which resulted in quite a variety of decorative and figurative scenes.

⁴¹⁰ The Gorga collection is in the possession of various blanks of cameo glass plaques, which have been compared for specific material properties and production templates with similar blanks from the Corning Museum of Glass. This has provided physical evidence for the manufacturing of cameo glass originating from Rome. For further details on this evidence, see: Whitehouse 1997, 31-32 and 43; Roberts et al. 2010, 11 and 33.

⁴¹¹ On the appearance of glass (in particular blue and cameo glass) in Roman paintings, see: Ling 1991, 87; Roberts et al. 2010, 14-17; Meyboom 2014, personal communication.

3.7.1. Manifestations of Egypt in cameo glass vessels

Among the 27 currently known cameo glass fragments that contain manifestations of Egypt, the majority (16 fragments) are made of translucent blue glass overlaid with opaque white glass for their decorative scenes. An additional 2 fragments are made of translucent purple glass overlaid with similar opaque white. In both cases the decorations are created by the process of carving into the upper (white) glass layer to reveal the lower (blue or purple) layer, thus shaping the upper layer into a decorative relief.⁴¹² The remaining 9 fragments, however, can be categorised as layered cameo glass and have been manufactured according to a different process: the lower layer is created first, onto which then different glass layers or (already cut and carved) separate glass elements are added, usually of a brightly coloured variety.⁴¹³

Based on the style and content of these fragments' decorations all known nine examples have been interpreted as possible Nilotic scenes; moreover, based on the known data, this particular layering technique seems to have been applied exclusively to vessels with this type of decorative designs – hence, in the few scholarly observations that have been made about them, they are usually referred to as 'egyptianizing layered glass'.⁴¹⁴ The provenance of most of these layered examples can be traced back to Rome, but their distinctly different manufacturing technique and appearance may suggest that they were made in different workshops; however, the similarity in the used material and basic glass manufacturing process would at least suggest that they were of a making contemporary to the more numerous blue and purple cameo glass examples that can be related to Roman workshops from 15 BCE onwards.⁴¹⁵

The following paragraph explores the known examples of manifestations of Egypt in cameo glass according to these different material types. Because the fragments display such a variety in the use of styles and content, and because they have been studied only sporadically so far, the best preserved examples will be analysed separately here, as well as in comparison to one and other and, finally, in the context of Rome's cultural revolution and the 'evolution' of Augustan material culture as a result.

⁴¹² Gudenrath & Whitehouse 1990, 137; Whitehouse 2007, 60-73; Roberts et al. 2010, 25-31.

⁴¹³ Seven of these layered fragments are at The British Museum, one at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and one at The Thorvaldsens Museum. See: Roberts et al. 2010, 77-79.

⁴¹⁴ Simon 1957, 19; Roberts et al. 2010, 77.

⁴¹⁵ The seven fragments at The British Museum were part of the Nesbitt collection, which has recorded their provenance. Personal communication with Roberts at The British Museum, 2011. See also: Roberts et al. 2010, 77.

3.7.1.1. Blue cameo glass

The largest group of cameo glass, of the blue type, presents a relatively wide variety in decorative themes. We find depictions of figurative scenes (possibly kings, queen and deities and/or offering scenes), Nilotic scenes and landscape features, and ornamental features.

One of the best preserved figurative examples is a fragment from a blue cameo glass vessel which has been interpreted as a kantharos drinking cup based on the dimensions and curvature of the glass, measuring 51 cm x 55 cm.⁴¹⁶ (fig. 65). The fragment shows on the right a human figure in a knelt position, depicted in a straight, rather rigid and in profile pose. The figure wears a headcloth and a richly decorated *wesekh* collar and similar decorative overlap on the upper sleeves of what appears to be a long, straight gown, with a single sash running down the centre. There are no attributes to determine the gender of the figure.



Fig. 65. Blue cameo glass fragment 17.194.2296. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁴¹⁶ Fragment nr. 17.194.2296 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. No existing publications feature this fragment, other than the catalogue entry of the Metropolitan Museum of Art database, which is accessible online: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/547812>. The scene is described in the catalogue only as 'egyptianizing', without further details or interpretations provided.

In his right hand, held aloft, he holds an oval-shaped vial with decorative lines across its body; it may be a conical vessel such as frequently used in traditional Egyptian offering scenes.⁴¹⁷ The right hand also holds a sizeable *ankh* attribute, below the conical vial. The left hand is bent upwards across the figure's body and holds a small object, possibly another attribute which may have been damaged. Another long, oval amulet hangs down from the left arm, by a bracelet. As a cameo glass fragment, the material and manufacturing technique of this piece is typically (Augustan) Roman, but the white glass figure here is depicted in a style that is immediately reminiscent of traditional Egyptian 'pharaonic' visuals; the erect, rigid in profile posture is very different from the at the time more common Hellenistic figurative styles, where the emphasis lies on detail, fluidity and perspective.⁴¹⁸ Also the traditional Egyptian attributes and clothing emphasis this effect.

On the left side of the same fragment, however, what seems to be a typical Roman image is partially preserved: a wreath of leaves, possibly laurels, with a large bird of which only the lower legs and wings are preserved (perhaps an eagle):⁴¹⁹ this is the widely used and uniform Roman symbol for victory. Moreover, especially the depiction of the wreath shows overlap and fluidity in the rendering of the ribbons and leaves, in accordance with a Hellenistic style. While the bird could perhaps refer to a dinner or offering scene instead, there seems to be no Egyptian parallel for its association with a laurel wreath of this type. Particularly placed directly beside the Egyptian figure, these thematic and stylistic differences are striking.

However, when we place this fragment next to the well-known blue cameo flask, usually referred to as the 'Getty flask', we find a similar combination of 'pharaonic' depictions for the Egyptian figures and obelisk monument alongside a recognisably Hellenistic style of depicting trees and a cherub (see fig. 66 A-C).⁴²⁰ Interestingly, this flask has been interpreted in the past as having been manufactured in Egypt, or even Roman Turkey, because of the Egyptian elements prominent in its decorative scheme, which would

⁴¹⁷ See for comparison the traditionally depicted offering scenes on the wall painting fragment from the foundation of the House of Augustus on the Palatine (paragraph 3.1.1.) and the offering scenes on the obelisk from Heliopolis that was placed at Circus Maximus (paragraph 3.9.1.).

⁴¹⁸ Compare, for example, with the Hellenistic-style depictions of Serapis, Jupiter-Ammon and Isis/Isiac figures from the wall paintings of the Augustan Palatine complex (paragraph 3.1.2.) and the Villa della Farnesina wall paintings (3.5.1.).

⁴¹⁹ The laurel wreath was originally the attribute of the Greek god Apollo, and was presented in ancient Greece to victorious athletes as well as poets. In Rome the laurel wreath became the symbol of military victory, worn by commanders during their triumph after successful campaigns. As such, the laurel wreath became a symbol of Roman Imperialism, marking the highest level of military and political power. See: Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, (OCD).

⁴²⁰ Inv. no. JPGM 85.AF.84. at The J. Paul Getty Museum. For the most recent overview and analysis of this flask, see Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010, 839-46. See also Whitehouse 2007, 120; Van Aerde 2013, 11-12.

have been considered ‘too exotic’ to have been manufactured in Rome.⁴²¹ However, with the recent analysis of cameo glass workshops in Rome (discussed above), it can be assumed with much plausibility that the Getty flask, similar to all other examples of cameo glass vessels, was indeed manufactured in Rome and that, as a result, the Egyptian elements of its decorative scheme were part of the repertoire available to these workshops, as will be further explored below.



Fig. 66. A-D: Details of the blue cameo glass ‘Getty Flask’. All images copyright The J. Paul Getty Foundation.

⁴²¹ Fazzini & Bianchi have opted that the Getty flask may have been manufactured in Turkey, based on its exotic decorative scheme. Fazzini & Bianchi 1988, 218.

The small flask measures 7.6cm in height and 4.2cm in width, and features a lush decorative scene with three determinable scenes, of which two feature a Cupid/cherub figure by a tree and two altars, while the third scene features a standing figure in a rigidly erect, in profile ‘pharaonic’ pose, wearing a *shendit* kilt, *nemes*, and double crown, holding a round-shaped object (possibly an offering vial or bread) in the left, upwards turned hand across the chest, and a long palm branch in the right hand, with arm outstretched, which symbolises rejuvenation.⁴²² The two altars are realistically rendered and seem reminiscent of Roman offering altars in terms of shape and size (one larger, and one a smaller *lares* altar). However, the figure on top of the smaller altar (besides the cherub figure) can be clearly identified as a baboon, and an ibis can be seen on the pedestal; as such, the altar refers to the Egyptian deity Toth, and presents a direct visual parallel for the marble Toth stele depicting a similar baboon and ibis-pedestal currently at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (see fig. 67), which has been dated around the first Century CE, with place of manufacture unknown.⁴²³



Fig. 67 Comparison of A: Toth stele (Allard Pierson Cat. No. APM07946) and, B: the Toth pedestal on the Getty flask. Copyright The Allard Pierson Museum & The J. Paul Getty Foundation.



Fig. 68 Detail of cobra with sundisc on the Getty flask. Copyright The J. Paul Getty Foundation.

⁴²² The palm branch is also featured in the Egyptian hieroglyph for ‘rejuvenation’ or ‘year’, and was carried by priests of the Roman Isis cult. Cf: Fazzini & Bianchi 1988, 218.

⁴²³ Allard Pierson Cat. No. APM07946. Described in: Hupperetz et al. 2014, 128

On the pedestal of the second, larger altar besides the pharaoh figure, moreover, the image of a cobra (*uraeus*) crowned with a solar disc can be clearly seen (fig. 68). Another clearly Egyptian element is found on the left side of the pharaoh figure: an obelisk is depicted on a square base, on which the hieroglyphs are clearly visible and recognisable; although they do not represent any readable words, they are ‘actual, and not fanciful, characters [that] appear to have been selected to be legible on a symbolic level’.⁴²⁴ There is no apparent separation between these three different scenes; despite the distinct difference in stylistic execution –with the Cupid, the tree, and altar scenes being particularly detailed and lavish in terms of perspective, overlap and fluidity (the Thoth stele is rendered in three-quarter perspective), as opposed to the more static depiction of the obelisk and Egyptian figure. But this does not match their thematic representations; simply put, Egypt does not equal ‘static’, as evident from the three-quarter depiction of the Thoth stele. As a result, the Egyptian elements cannot be compartmentalised, neither thematically nor stylistically, within the overall decorative scheme of the flask; rather, the Egyptian components seem fully incorporated. As decorative elements in this flask, they are created by means of the same typically Roman material and manufacturing, and are part of the same overall composition of the Hellenistic-styled elements. This would imply that these Egyptian (both stylistic and thematic) features were readily available in the overall repertoire that was at the artist’s/workshop’s disposal. The obelisk and altars/steles represent monumental features (with religious overtones and association with Egypt in that context); and the Egyptian figure, perhaps, would have been regarded as a visually logic accompaniment of these elements, or a fixed component of any Egyptian-themes offering or cult scene. The appearance of the Cupid and lavish tree, on the other hand, seems to add a rather more ‘Bacchic’ atmosphere to the decorative scene of the flask, which in the past has often been associated with Roman cameo glass (see above). The intent in the manufacture of this flask (if such a thing can even be speculated upon at all) does not seem to be to highlight or isolate Egypt in a particular way, but rather to incorporate it into monumental features-and-figures theme that makes up the flask’s decorative composition.

This very clearly demonstrates the incorporation of Egyptian elements –both in terms of content and visual style– into a typically Roman glass vessel, whereby these Egyptian elements go hand in hand with Hellenistic stylistic features and, moreover, have become an integral part of one decorative composition

⁴²⁴ Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010, 841. See also: Van Aerde 2013, 11. The symbolic nature of the hieroglyphs is evident from the two-fold orientation of the signs, which is not according to the rules of hieroglyph script. Kaper 2014, personal communication.

that makes use of both these styles while still aiming for visual unity, and while encompassing a single recurring theme (that of monuments/offering scene). In other words, what we find here would seem the opposite of the usual interpretation of Egypt as the ‘exotic Other’, standing apart or even deliberately kept apart in Roman material culture. This also seems to apply to the above discussed cameo fragment with the kneeling Egyptian figure and the Roman victory symbol. Although in this case the decorative composition of the entire vessel cannot be reconstructed, the close vicinity of these two (stylistically) distinctly different components is directly reminiscent of the Egyptian figure and obelisk on the Getty flask, side by side with Roman altars and Cupid figures.

The fact that the instantly recognisable Egyptian attributes and clothing types (as found on both above examples) indeed seem to have become integral parts in the repertoire available to these cameo glass workshops is strengthened by the noteworthy frequency of their occurrence and the similarity of these examples. We find the depiction of *wesekh* collars in three additional blue cameo glass fragments, visually very similar to the *wesekh* worn by the kneeling Egyptian figure discussed above. Even more remarkably is the fact that two virtually identical fragments can be identified, one kept at The British Museum, the other at the Thorvaldsens Museum, where the depiction of the *wesekh* collar and the positioning of the arms and gown are directly comparable: this may indicate a typical type of depicting Egyptian figures and clothing as part of the cameo glass workshops’ available decorative repertoire (see fig. 69 and 70).

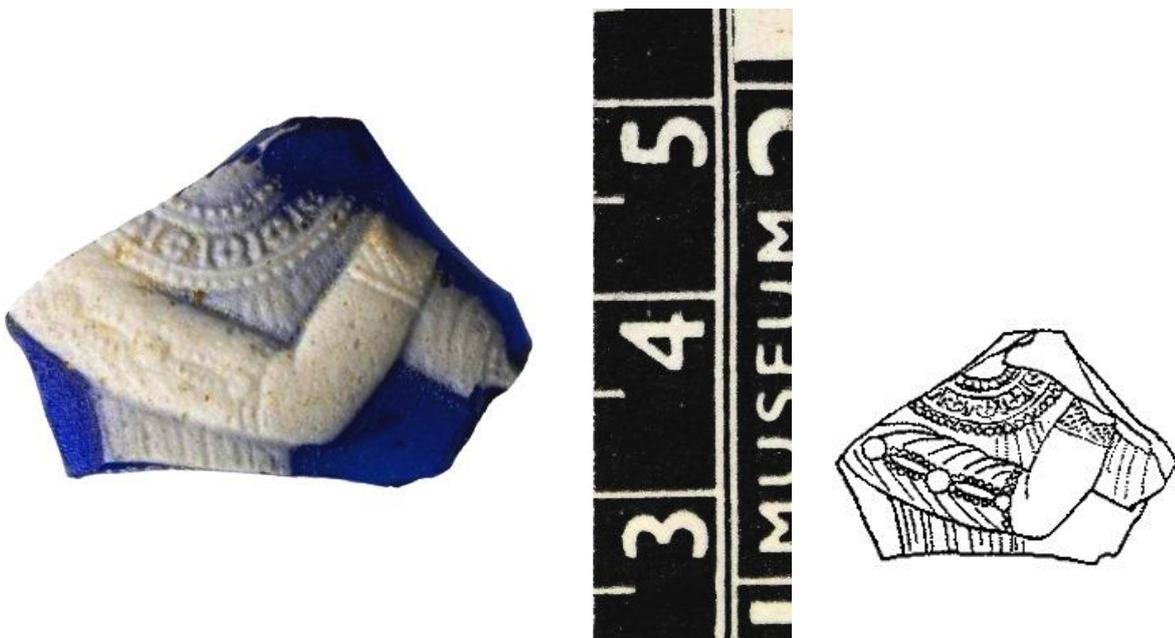


Fig. 69. Blue cameo glass fragment. Copyright The Trustees of The British Museum. Drawing: Roberts et al. 2010. 86, pl. 23.

The first example, the British Museum fragment, can be recognised as the remaining parts of a figure wearing a gown and richly decorated *wesekh*.⁴²⁵ The fragment measures 1.9cm x 2.8cm; its curvature suggests that it originally was part of the wall of a round vessel, possibly a drinking cup.⁴²⁶ The remaining relief, in opaque white glass, shows the neck, shoulders and parts of the arms and torso of the human figure in profile, with the left arm outstretched downwards and the right arm bent upwards in front of the chest. The figure wears what appears to be a ceremonial gown that falls down in vertical folds from the collar, which is decorated with beads and a rosette motif. On the right wrist a tight-fitted bracelet with an even pattern of either small beads or a carved relief can be seen. It is interesting to note that this particular fragment is the only example of the blue cameo glass type that is stored in The British Museum's Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan collection; all other fragments of this type are kept at the Department of Greece and Rome instead. This appears to be due to Cooney's original interpretation of the piece as Ptolemaic, describing the costume as 'elaborate and unusual' and belonging to a scene of a Ptolemaic king making a sacrifice.⁴²⁷ But as Roberts points out, the material and manufacturing method of this fragment is identical to the other blue glass type fragments for which a 15 BCE–25 CE dating has been determined, along with Roman provenance.⁴²⁸ This fragment has been compared to an early Imperial glass fragment (not of the cameo manufacturing type) found at Karlsruhe that depicts a female figure interpreted as Hathor or Isis that wears a similar *wesekh* collar; for this reason the cameo fragment has at times also been specifically categorised as an Isiac figure or depiction of Isis; but *wesekh* collars are prominently featured in traditional Egyptian scenes of deities as well as offering scenes or royal portraiture, and such a specific identification is hard to support based on the fragment's appearance and a comparison based on the figure's *wesekh* only.⁴²⁹

In terms of comparison, the second example of this type from The Thorvaldsens Museum (fig. 70) is remarkably similar to above described fragment EA 16600 from The British Museum.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁵ BM Cat. Nr. EA16600. See: Cooney 1976, 36, no. 330; Weiss and Schüssler 2001, 223, no. 93; and Roberts et al. 2010, 55, no. 23. The record for this fragment can be viewed on the Collections On-line Database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection> (last accessed November 2012).

⁴²⁶ Roberts et al. 2010, 55.

⁴²⁷ Cooney 1976, 36, no. 330.

⁴²⁸ Roberts et al. 2010, 55.

⁴²⁹ Simon 1957, 46, no. 4, pl. 14.1; Roberts et al. 2010, 55; Van Aerde 2013, 6.

⁴³⁰ Thorvaldsen Museum cat. nr. H338. No existing publications feature this fragment; it has never been studied in direct comparison to the British Museum fragment EA16600, despite the acute similarity. Personal communication with Lejsgaard Christensen 2013.



Fig. 70. Blue cameo glass fragment.
Copyright The Thorvaldsens
Museum Copenhagen.

The Thorvaldsens Museum records have so far identified their fragment as being of Egyptian origin based on the observations of the museum's first curator, Ludvig Müller, who in 1847 catalogued the fragment under the heading 'Egyptian Antiquities', without providing reason for this identification and only adding a very brief description of the piece itself: 'Fragment of a blue glass vase with white raised figures, of which remains a part of a nude woman with a neck ornament'.⁴³¹ In later years curators noted the similarity with the British Museum fragment EA16600, which at the time was also categorized as having an Egyptian provenance based on iconographical interpretations; however, as of the 2010 study by Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton-Brown and Whitehouse the British Museum has updated their record and now consider the piece to be part of the blue cameo glass type manufactured in workshops in Rome between 15 BCE–25 CE; there is no indication that the Thorvaldsens piece would not have been part of this same type, manufactured in Rome, likewise.⁴³² The piece measures 2,1cm x 2,5 cm, and the opaque white glass relief depicts the neck, shoulders and parts of the arms and torso of the human figure in profile; the posture is directly similar to the British Museum piece, with the left arm outstretched downwards and the right arm bent upwards in front of the chest. The wesekh collar is also richly decorated – but with a different motif: three layers of triangular and rectangular patterns in sequence.

⁴³¹ Translation from the Danish catalogue by current curator Julie Lejsgaard Christensen. Lejsgaard Christensen suspects that Müller based his interpretation of the piece solely on its iconography, namely the pose of the figure and the wesekh collar: personal communication with Lejsgaard Christensen in 2013.

⁴³² Roberts et al. 2010, 55; Van Aerde 2013, 5-6. Personal communication with Roberts 2011, and with Lejsgaard Christensen 2013.

There are no rosettes like in the British Museum fragment. Apart from the collar, there appears to be no discernible garment on the Thorvaldsens fragment: there are no traces of gown folds or bracelets, which does not seem due to damage, as the surface of the white opaque relief is still intact and mainly smooth. Only on the outstretched left arm are there some patches of damage that might be interpreted as remains of decorations, but unfortunately these are very unclear.

Whereas the directly comparable posture of the figures on these fragments immediately evokes the sense of a typical or even generic reoccurring type (and theme) as part of blue cameo glass design, the details of their decorative execution also reveal differences. It is first of all interesting that exactly the same upper sections of the figures' bodies have been preserved (perhaps because these wall sections of the original cups were made of the thickest glass layers) and that also the fragments' dimensions are very similar – this allows for a direct comparison. Other than the fact that the Thorvaldsen figure wears no discernible garment, contrary to the British Museum figure, there is also a difference in the decoration of the individual *wesekh* collars. The Thorvaldsen figure wears a detailed collar, with strictly geometrical patterns, while the most prominent decorative element of the *wesekh* on the British Museum fragment is the series of rosettes. Rosette patterns are a frequent and well-known decorative element in Roman art, but rosettes likewise featured prominently in decorative styles known from Phoenician and Egyptian examples.⁴³³

The execution of the gown of the British Museum's figure may indicate a rather more direct intermixing of Roman-Hellenistic and Egyptian stylistic components. The garment may be recognised as a Greek *chiton*, especially in terms of how the folds on the sleeves are attached with knots at regular intervals. There are numerous parallels from Roman material culture where especially *Isiac* figures are depicted wearing similar long *chiton* garments with many folds and knotted sleeves: the *Isiac* figure from the wall paintings of the House of Livia on the Palatine is a good example of this (see section 3.1.2, figure 14).⁴³⁴ Another parallel, even more closely related to cameo glass, are the *Isiac* figures of the imitated blue cameo panels found in the Villa della Farnesina wall paintings; these figures likewise wear Hellenistic style gowns, long *chitons*, and a recognisably Hellenistic hairstyle with a bun at the nape of the neck.⁴³⁵ From the early Imperial period onwards the *chiton* became a component typical of Hellenistic and

⁴³³ For a comparison of rosette decoration in Phoenician culture with rosette patterns from Seleucia (Tigris) Egypt, see: Invernizzi 1996, 801-111.

⁴³⁴ Rizzo 1936; Caretonni 1957, 70-119; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 19-22; Bragantini & De Vos 1982, 22-24; Söldner 2000, 383-93; Van Aerde 2013, 6 (the latter specifically on the *Isiac* figure from the House of Livia).

⁴³⁵ See section 3.5.1. for a discussion of these imitation blue cameo panels featuring *Isiac* figures.

Roman portrayals of the goddess Isis, and is often recognised as particularly characteristic of Roman Isiac iconography.⁴³⁶ A good example of this is an Isis sculpture from Rome dated to the 2nd century CE, currently at the Terme di Diocleziano, which wears a chiton with folds on the sleeves that are attached with knots at regular intervals very similar to those on the cameo fragment (see for comparison fig. 71 A and B).⁴³⁷



A



B

Fig. 71. A: Statue of Isis, Terme di Diocleziano, Rome (Photo: Sander Müskens, copyright Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma) here compared to B: blue cameo glass fragment. Copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

Based on these similarities, however, a specifically Isiac interpretation for this cameo fragment is not necessarily the next step. By association, the similarity is certainly noteworthy – but this likewise refers to the fact that these stylistic features were commonly known (and would develop to become even more commonly used) in the Roman material culture repertoire available to the cameo glass workshops in Rome at the time, from 15 BCE onwards. There appears no specific reason to assume that these blue cameo glass vessels would have been used for any religious applications; based on the variety of decorative designs featured on them, varying from Bacchic scenes to ornamental decorations, and based on comparisons with other known types of roman tableware, cameo glass seem to have served as a type

⁴³⁶ On the depiction of Isiac figures in the Hellenistic and Roman world see esp.: Eingartner 1991, 121–22; Bricault 2001, 167; Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 40–72.

⁴³⁷ Inv. Nr. 125412, Terme di Diocleziano. See also: Malaise 2004, 29, no. 433d.

of luxury tableware and collectible vessels (for instance as perfume vials).⁴³⁸

It is particularly interesting to note that the above discussed fragment displays a merging of Hellenistic stylistic features (the execution of the folded chiton garment) and Egyptian stylistic features (the erect in profile pose and *wesekh* collar) within a single figure depicted on this vessel. The earlier explored examples from the Metropolitan Museum and the Getty Museum showed how these different stylistic features coexisted upon a single vessel (such as the Egyptian figure and obelisk placed side by side with Hellenistic Cupids and Roman altars on the Getty flask).

But in the case of the above fragment both styles have been quite literally emulated into a single figure that, through this combination, can no longer be defined as referring to either an ‘Egyptian’ or ‘Hellenistic’ decorative stylistic execution.⁴³⁹ Through the combination of both, this figure has become, above anything, something specifically Roman. This provides a clear example of how the availability (and variety) of stylistic elements known to the repertoire of Roman material culture influenced the development of Roman material culture at the time, such as suggested by Hölscher’s visual semantics theory, as well as the flexibility of creative emulation at work within a single object – and even within a single figure upon such an object.⁴⁴⁰

The availability of what can be recognised as traditionally Egyptian attributes in cameo glass decorations is emphasised by several other examples. Two of the best preserved are a small blue cameo glass fragment from The British Museum displaying a scene wherein a *wesekh* collar is offered by one figure to another (fig. 72A),⁴⁴¹ and a larger fragment from The Metropolitan Museum featuring a figure wearing a traditional headcloth (fig. 72B).⁴⁴² The fragment from the British Museum with the offered *wesekh* measures 2cm x 1.4 cm, and is a rare example of incuse decoration on cameo glass; this technique, while similar to regular blue cameo glass, features three layers of glass placed on top of each other, whereby the decoration is revealed by cutting through the upper blue layer in order to reveal the middle

⁴³⁸ Roberts et al. 2010, 19-21. See also: Zanker 1987, 59.

⁴³⁹ Interestingly, this specific flexible characteristic can likewise be observed in Hellenistic Ptolemaic portraiture. See: Stanwick 1999.

⁴⁴⁰ See paragraph 2.2.2. on Hölscher’s visual semantics and creative emulation theory.

⁴⁴¹ BM Cat. Nr. 1999,0803.1. See: Sangiori 1941, 48 no. 156; Bailey, 2007; Christie’s (NY) Catalogue 1999, 61, lot no. 137; Roberts 2010, 54-55 no. 22. The record of this fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

⁴⁴² Fragment nr. 17.194.373 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. See: Froehner 1903, no. 575, pl. 60.2. The catalogue entry of the Metropolitan Museum of Art database, which is accessible online: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/249609>.

white layer.⁴⁴³ This adds a higher level of difficulty to the manufacturing process, and results in an (even) more detailed result for the incise white decorative relief. Only a small fraction of the vessels (deemed a skyphos based on the curvature of the glass) has survived, displaying parts of figurative scene that appear disjointed at first.

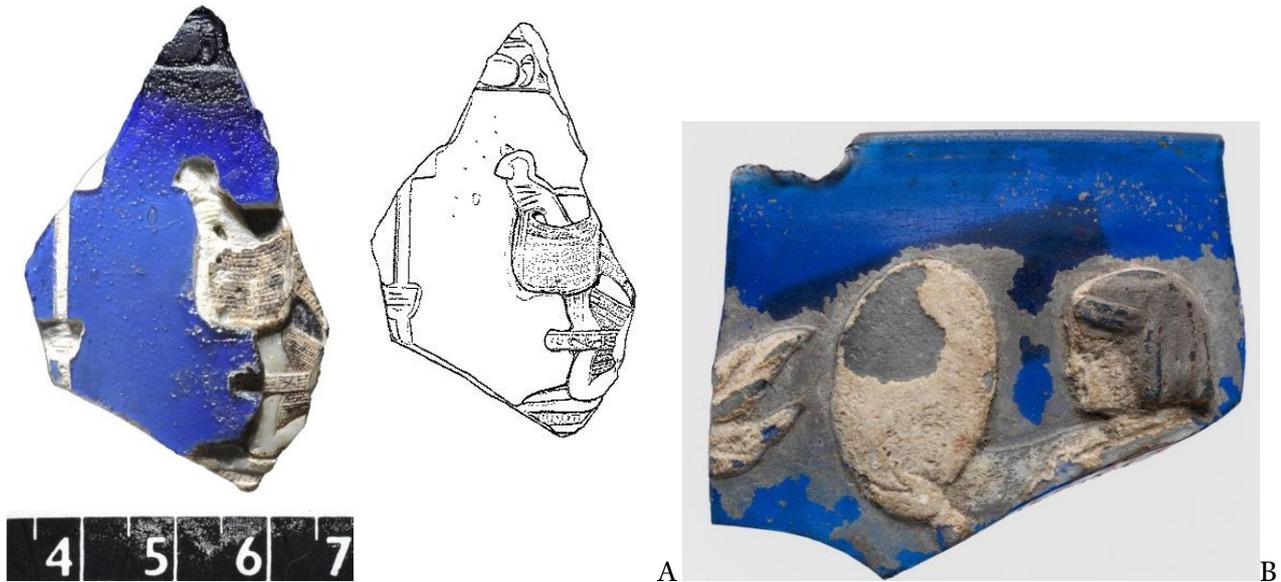


Fig.72 A. Blue cameo glass fragment. Drawing and photo: copyright The Trustees of The British Museum. B. Blue cameo glass fragment, copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York.

To the right a human figure kneels on a plinth (the bent knee is visible) while holding up a large U-shaped *wesekh* collar as if in the act of offering it to the human figure to the left, of which only a hand holding a long staff is visible, and which has been interpreted as a deity because of the scene's similarity to the traditional image of Egyptian offering scenes with a kneeling pharaoh offering to a standing god.⁴⁴⁴ The kneeling figure wears a folded kilt with richly detailed patterns, and strap upon which a small uraeus motif and a rosette can be made out (similar to the rosette motifs features in the above fragments). Likewise, the *wesekh* collar in the figure's hands is particularly detailed, with many rows of small decorative beads.

The second fragment from The Metropolitan Museum, measuring 3.2cm x 3.7 cm, shows much less detail, but most of the figure's head and shoulders have been preserved. The figure has been identified as

⁴⁴³ Roberts et al. 2010, 54.

⁴⁴⁴ Sangiorgi 1914, 48; Roberts et al. 2010, 55.

an ‘Egyptian female’ with thick hair holding a tambourine,⁴⁴⁵ but it is clear to see that this is a figure wearing a headcloth holding up an oval-shaped platter or bread according to traditional Egyptian offering iconography, such as seen in several of the above discussed examples. The positioning of the arms is similar to that of the figure on the British Museum fragment holding up the *wesekh* collar: with the right arm bent upwards across the chest. We saw this exact same pose also in the two comparative fragments from the Thorvaldsens Museum and British Museum above, as well as in the large offering scene at the beginning of this paragraph, from the Metropolitan Museum (where the left arm holds the upwards pose across the chest). This somewhat rigid offering pose appears as a typical stylistic component whenever an Egyptian offering scene is featured on one of these blue cameo glass vessels; this makes it plausible to assume that this particular stylistic element was not only a known part of the stylistic repertoire available to the cameo glass workshops, but also thematically linked to fit certain scenes (Egyptian offering scenes).

It is hard to identify the two flowing ribbons or feathers on the left side of the Metropolitan Museum fragment with the figure with the headcloth: as feathers or ribbons, they may be recognised as part of the outfit of the second figure in the offering scene: the standing deity often featured these elements in their outfits.⁴⁴⁶ On the other hand, they might also be regarded as leaves executed in a more life-like, flowing Hellenistic style (placed directly besides the more rigid Egyptian figure such as seen in several above examples). A third possibility is that they may have belonged to a bird and portray the tips of two wings, which would make for a direct parallel for fragment nr. 17.194.2269 from the Metropolitan Museum of art, discussed above. Because of the striking similarity between the two human figures on these two fragments, this option would seem plausible. Namely, they both depict an Egyptian figure holding an oval vessel, dressed in very similar attire, flanked by a bird (perhaps an eagle and wreath) on the left side. To go into even more detail, the rendering of the *wesekh* collar in both these fragments features nine strands, which is the correct rendering known throughout Egypt, whereas the depiction of the folded short kilt is unknown from Egypt itself, and seems to indicate a Roman interpretation of Egyptian iconography;⁴⁴⁷ as a result, the depiction of figure, by itself, seems to combine traditional Egyptian elements and Roman stylistic interpretation, as much as its placement besides the large bird as seen in

⁴⁴⁵ Froehner 1903, nr. 575.

⁴⁴⁶ See also: wall paintings from the House of Augustus and the Villa della Farnesina featuring such similar Egyptian clothing styles (paragraph 3.1.1. and 3.5.1.)

⁴⁴⁷ On the depiction of Egyptian *wesekh* collars (Greco-Roman period in particular), see: Riggs 2001, 57-68. Also: Kaper 2014, personal communication.

fragment nr. 17.194.2269 combines what appears to be an Egyptian offering scene with a typically Roman victory theme.

Another indication of possible recurring stylistic element, is found on another small blue cameo glass fragment at The British Museum, depicting what can be identified as an obelisk (fig. 73).⁴⁴⁸



Fig. 73. Blue cameo glass fragment. Drawing and photo: copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

The fragment measures 4cm x 2,5cm, and its shape suggests that it was part of the body of a small *modiolus*, a cylindrical drinking vessel similar to a mug.⁴⁴⁹ The surviving part of the fragment is almost entirely covered by the decorative white glass relief; only around the left edge and bottom is the blue glass underground visible on the front exterior side. The relief shows part of a vertical, decorated rectangular pillar standing on a large square base. Under the base indeterminate lines are visible, seemingly representing part of a plinth or indicating some type of surface. The decorations on the pillar have generally been interpreted as hieroglyphs on an obelisk.⁴⁵⁰ Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton- Brown and Whitehouse have recently suggested that the pillar might also represent a Nilometer, an instrument used to measure changes in the water levels of the Nile by means of horizontal lines on a vertical column, which could explain the markings on the cameo pillar's lower end.⁴⁵¹ However, the appearance of its base does not resemble any specific part of a Nilometer, but is instead remarkably similar to the column bases

⁴⁴⁸ BM Cat. Nr. 1982,0404.1. See: Simon 1957, pl. 18; Roberts 2010, 54 no. 20, Van Aerde 2013, 11-12. The record of this fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

⁴⁴⁹ Roberts et al. 2010, 54.

⁴⁵⁰ Simon 1957, no. 18; Whitehouse 2007, 120, fig. 30.

⁴⁵¹ Roberts et al. 2010, 54.

constructed by Augustus for both of the obelisks that he brought to Rome.⁴⁵² Therefore, the interpretation that this fragment depicts an obelisk still seems the most likely. This argument is strengthened by a comparison to the obelisk on the Getty flask, discussed above, where the obelisk's base features markings very similar to the horizontal lines on the lower part of the pillar of this smaller fragment from the British Museum.⁴⁵³ Another argument for the interpretation of this fragment as depicting an obelisk, is the fact that the image of obelisks would become widely known in the context of Augustan Rome –because of the two Heliopolis obelisk imported by Augustus in 10 BCE, only a few years after the establishment of cameo glass workshops in Rome– while the (much less fixed) visual appearance of Nilometers is far less likely to have been so widely recognisable during that time and in that specific context of the city of Rome.⁴⁵⁴

The final blue cameo glass fragment discussed here shows a scene rather different from the above examples; rather than a typical offering scene or the depiction of an obelisk, it appears to display a Nilotic scene (fig. 74).⁴⁵⁵

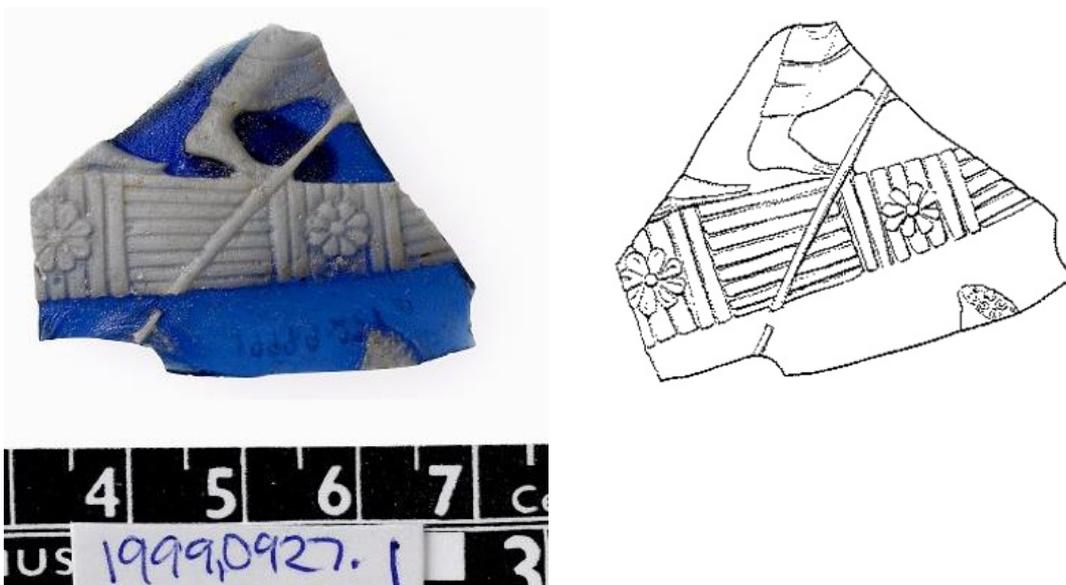


Fig. 74. Blue cameo glass fragment. Drawing and photo: copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

⁴⁵² On the appearance of Nilometers in Egypt and as represented in Roman material culture, see: Meyboom 1995, 244; Hachili 2009, 102.

⁴⁵³ Van Aerde 2013, 11.

⁴⁵⁴ This is mainly because Nilometers tend to be depicted in widely varying ways throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. Moreover, Nilometers became more better known in Rome with the rise of the Isis cult during the course of the second half of the 1st Century AD, during which time cameo glass was no longer produced in Rome (workshops ceased in 25 CE, when the Isis cult was still officially prohibited in Rome). See: Meyboom 1995, 244–45 notes 77, 78; Hachili 2009, 102–3.

⁴⁵⁵ Fragment BM cat. nr. 1999.0927.1 Cf. Sangiorgi 1914, 48 no. 156; Christie's (NY) Catalogue 1999, 61, lot no. 137; Roberts 2010, 55 no.24. The record of this fragment can be viewed, under its catalogue number, at The British Museum online database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

The fragment measures 3cm x 4cm, and displays part of a figurative scene featuring a reed boat and a human figure punting with a large pole (partially broken due to damage in the blue glass layer). On the left one partial foot of a second human figure is still discernible, and in the lower right corner a lotus bud gives the impressions of a river environment. The punting figure wears a long garment, reaching until the ankle, with several folds suggesting movement but no further decorations. The two feet are displayed in profile without overlap. The reed boat consists of two vertical and two horizontal sections, the former two decorated with a large single rosette. While not published widely, the fragment has been identified specifically as a Nilotic scene ‘in full Egyptian style’;⁴⁵⁶ Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton- Brown and Whitehouse specifically compare the scene to examples from well-known Roman Nilotic mosaics from Palestrina and Pompeii.⁴⁵⁷ Stylistically, we can here recognise rosettes very similar to those featured in the wesekh collar of British Museum fragment EA 16600 discussed above, a motif well-known from Roman as well as Phoenician and Egyptian examples.⁴⁵⁸ Even though the figures themselves have not survived, the stance in profile of the feet is reminiscent of a traditional Egyptian posture such as seen in many of the examples above. However, the slightly lifted heel, where the detail of the heel bone can be clearly made out in the relief, as well as the folds in the long gown likewise may evoke, at a closer look, a sense of fluidity more similar to Hellenistic style, especially because the relief reveals the shape of the leg underneath the garment, creating a sense of transparency. However, apart from these details, the overall placement and posture of the foot and gown truly seem conform to what, perhaps correctly, was identified previously as ‘full Egyptian style’.

In summary, when we look at these examples in the blue cameo glass category combined, several recurring themes and styles stand out. The manufacturing process and type of material used is similar in every example (dip-overlay with translucent blue and opaque white glass), except for fragment 1999,0803.1 from the British Museum, which was made by means of incuse decoration technique. The majority of figurative scenes, as far as can be reconstructed from the surviving fragments, appear to depict traditional Egyptian offering scenes where a kneeling figure offers an object (oval platter, vial, wesekh collar) up to a standing figure; this may refer to the typical scene of a kneeling pharaoh making

⁴⁵⁶ Roberts et al. 2010, 55. Cf. Sagiorgi 1914, 38.

⁴⁵⁷ Roberts et al. 2010, 55. See also: Dunbabin 1999, 50 (on Palaestrina comparison); De Caro 2006, 158 (on Pompeii comparison).

⁴⁵⁸ See: Grainger 1991; Invernizzi 1996, 801-111.

an offering to a deity. We also find depictions of obelisks (even with recognisable hieroglyphs) and a Nilotic river boat scene. In terms of stylistic elements, we find what may be called traditional Egyptian posturing (in profile, erect, rigid poses without overlap or perspective) side by side with fluid and detailed, hellenistically-styled figures, trees and monumental features. Moreover, in some examples these two different styles seem to coexist within singular figures as well: here the posture and attributes can be recognised as traditionally Egyptian, but the details of the garments, in terms of the fluidity of folds and clothing types, is evocative of Hellenistic style. This diversity within a single type of glass vessel is remarkable – but at the same time this level of flexibility is, if anything, characteristic of Augustan material culture in general. As such, blue cameo glass vessels provide quite a prime example of this flexibility in terms of content and finesse in terms of execution.

3.7.1.2. Purple cameo glass

Translucent purple glass overlaid with opaque white glass is a rare variation of cameo glass; only 13.5% of all currently recorded cameo glass vessels/fragments are of this type, in contrast to the 69.5% of the blue glass type – nonetheless, it is still the second largest category of cameo glass currently known.⁴⁵⁹ Only two known manifestations of Egypt have been preserved of this type, both of which currently at The British Museum.

The first fragment measures 2cm x 1.4cm and the curvature in the glass suggests it was part of open vessel (fig 75).⁴⁶⁰ Almost the entire fragment consist of the opaque white glass relief featuring the head of a figure, facing to the left in straight profile, wearing an Egyptian wig or with a beaded hair style recognisable from traditional Egyptian iconography. The figure wears a plain thin headband and part of the headgear is still visible on the top of the head, which can be identified as the base of a Hathor crown.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Roberts et al. 2010, 99.

⁴⁶⁰ BM Cat. Nr. 1868,0501.8. See: Slade 1871, 3 no. 8; Roberts 2010, 54 no. 21. The record of this fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

⁴⁶¹ Previously, comparisons have been made to the lower end of a crown, suggesting feathers or a solar disc might feature, which would identify the figure as at least a deity or royalty (Roberts et al. 2010, 54). The base of the crown, however, does seem to be typical for a Hathor crown, as worn by the goddess Isis (Shaw 2003; Wessetzky 1994, 491-492; Kaper 2014, personal communication).

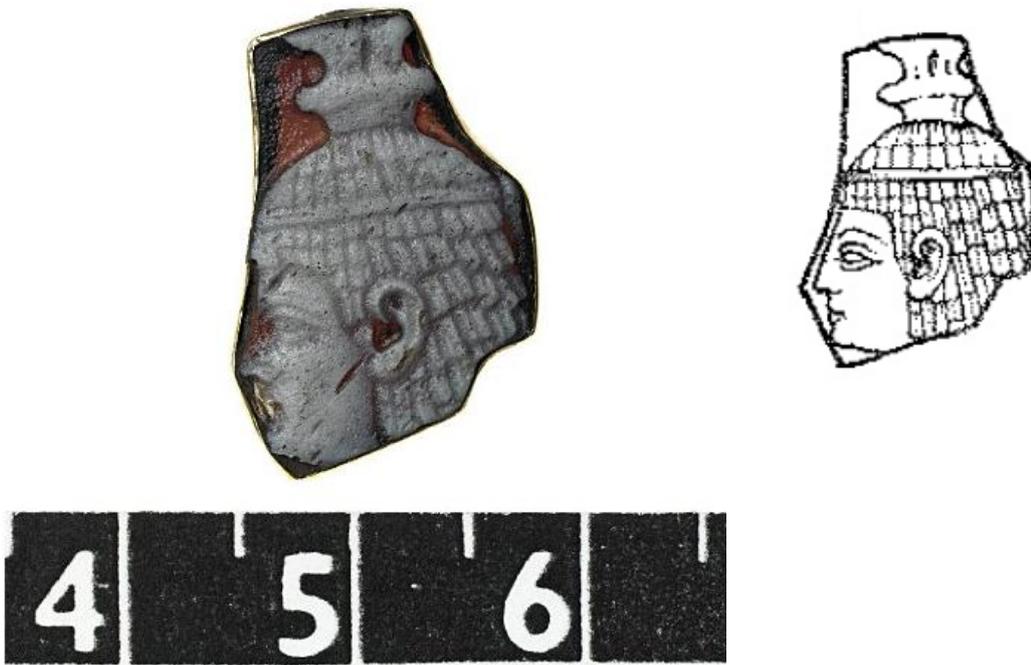


Fig. 75. Purple cameo glass fragment. Drawing and photo: copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

So far, the head has been recorded as that of a female, though no specific indications were given for this interpretation; moreover, wigs (or hairstyles) with thick layers of locks were also common for males in Egyptian iconography.⁴⁶² However, the Hathor crown base would imply a reference to the goddess Isis, and this may be an argument for the female identification of the head, namely as a portrait of Isis. Alternatively, the crown base shows visual similarity to the lower end of a lotus bud coronet, which is also a common feature in the depiction of Isiac figures, and in particular comparable to the lotus buds crowning by the Isiac figures on the imitation blue cameo panels found in the wall paintings of the Villa della Farnesina, as well as on the Isiac figures and sphinxes on the terracotta panels from the Apollo Palatinus complex, discussed above.⁴⁶³ However, in both these examples the lotus-crowned Isiac figures were fully rendered in Hellenistic style, wearing Greek chiton gowns and typical Hellenistic hairdos, and were even positioned in contrapost. The traditional Egyptian wig or beaded hairstyle and profile posture of this figure is quite a contrast. Perhaps, therefore, the interpretation of a (likewise more traditional) Hathor-crown would seem more logical by association.

⁴⁶² Slade 1871, 3; Roberts et al. 2010, 54.

⁴⁶³ See sections 3.3.1. (Apollo Palatinus terracottas) and 3.5.1. (imitation blue cameo wall paintings), where also the lotus bud as characteristic headgear for Isiac figures is discussed.

Noteworthy is also the execution of the figure's facial features; the eye is almond-shaped and combined with the long eyebrow and additional curved lines around the eye it is visually immediately evocative of traditional Egyptian profile portraiture. However, when observed closely, the naturalistic detail of the nose, the lips, and the ear may seem more reminiscent of Hellenistic style. This may suggest a merging of different styles within one single figure – however, this should of course not imply that traditional Egyptian objects could not contain any naturalistic elements. Rather, it may be a result of the Roman workshop aiming to manufacture traditional Egyptian iconography; after all, the naturalistic style of the by then already widespread Hellenistic repertoire would have been a given for artisans at this time and may not have been a distinct choice at all, as the categorisations of 'traditional Egyptian' and 'naturalistic Hellenistic' elements might seem to suggest.

The second purple glass fragment is one of the largest known; it measures 6.5 cm x 9.5 cm and can be identified as one corner of a larger cameo glass plaque (fig. 76).⁴⁶⁴ The scene depicted features the lower remaining part of a bull or cow,⁴⁶⁵ facing to the left, in profile, wearing a large sash around its neck with a lotus ornament attached to it. All four of the bull's legs are visible, but the middle two are partially blocked by the lower parts of two large human legs. Both the bull and the human figure stand on a thick line of white opaque glass, which seems to indicate a platform or road. The feet, too, face to the left and are shown in profile without overlap. The feet are bare and both knees are still partially visible. Because of the difference in size between this human figure and the smaller bull/cow, it has been generally interpreted that the animal is in fact a calf meant for sacrificial slaughter; this represents a typical sacrificial theme in Egyptian art, with parallels in stone sculpture particularly from in the early Ptolemaic period (fourth century BCE).⁴⁶⁶ Because of this parallel the fragment was long considered to have a Ptolemaic origin from Egypt and for this reason it is the second of two fragments kept at the British Museum Department of Egypt and Sudan, rather than at the Department of Greece and Rome like every other example of cameo glass at The British Museum.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ BM Cat. Nr. EA 16630. See: Cooney 1976, 36 no. 33; Tatton-Brown 1991, 65 fig. 78; Weiss & Schüssler 2001, 223 no. 93; Roberts 2010, 64 no. 41. The record of this fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

⁴⁶⁵ I agree with this identification (Roberts 2010, 64), based on the proportions of its legs, hoofs, and body, which would suggest it is not a goat, ibex, or gazelle, which were also common animals in Egyptian offerings.

⁴⁶⁶ Cooney 1976, 36. See also: Tatton-Brown 1991, 65; Roberts et al. 2010, 64.

⁴⁶⁷ Personal communication with curators Richard Parkinson and Paul Roberts at The British Museum in 2010 and 2011.

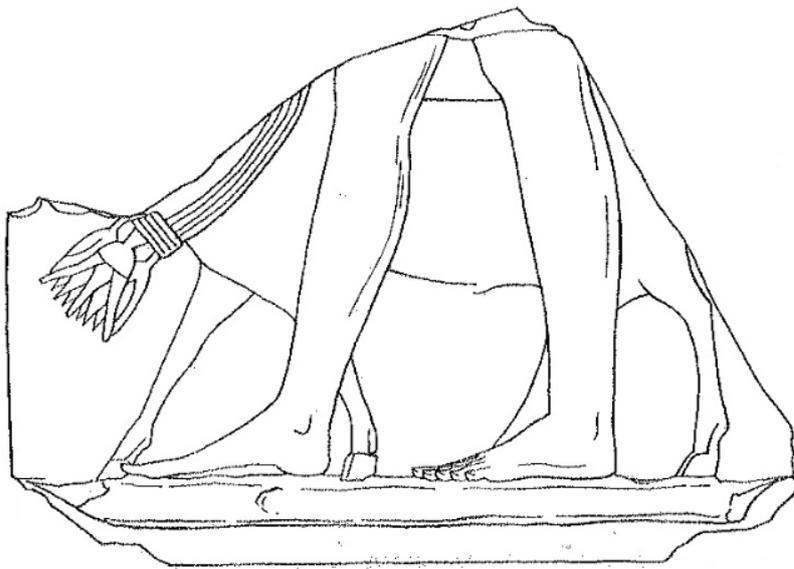


Fig. 76. Purple cameo glass fragment of a plaque. Drawing and photo: copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton- Brown and Whitehouse have effectively argued in their 2010 study, however, that there is no apparent reason to separate this cameo glass plaque from the cameo glass vessels known to have been manufactured in Roman workshops between 15 BCE and 25 CE; the material and technique of its production as well as the style of the figurative scene are similar and directly comparable to those of other blue and purple cameo glass plaques and vessel fragments currently on record.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁸ Roberts et al. 2010, 64.

Interestingly, a direct iconographical comparison of a sacrificial bull wearing a lotus ornament of the kind found on this plaque can be made with a Roman wall painting from Pompeii (in the so-called House of the Orchard), which has been interpreted in connection with Isiac sacrificial rites.⁴⁶⁹ Of course, such an interpretation cannot be based solely on the portrayal of a bull and lotus, which would be the only indications of any sacrificial association in this cameo fragment. If anything at all, this argues that the imagery of a bull and lotus ornaments was known beyond Egyptian iconography and, as such, is likely to have been incorporated into the Hellenistic and Roman repertoire that would have been available to the cameo glass workshops in Augustan Rome and, based on the Pompeian wall painting, remained available beyond that time. Stylistically, the depiction of the bull, with its notably thin legs and hooves, is certainly evocative of Egyptian (pharaonic and early Ptolemaic) iconography; but the naturalistic detailed displayed in the rendering of the human legs may be noteworthy. At close inspection, the curvature of the feet, toes, and heel bone and especially the anatomically detailed rendering of the leg muscles, especially the left leg's calf, are very realistically executed. Moreover, the overlap of the human legs hiding the two inner legs of the bull could also be seen as a subtle play of perspective. There are no other known cameo glass plaques that depict any manifestations of Egypt, but they all feature richly detailed and naturalistically portrayed figurative scenes.⁴⁷⁰ As argued above, this does not necessarily imply a consciously chosen merging of Hellenistic (naturalistic) styles with traditional Egyptian elements. But the fact remains that without the presence of the bull and lotus ornament on this plaque, the human legs portrayed here would not have been in any way reminiscent of a manifestation of Egypt; in fact, there are several parallels of Bacchic figurative scenes on cameo plaques where bare human legs are rendered similarly in profile and with comparable attention to anatomic detail.⁴⁷¹

In summary, these two examples of purple cameo glass present two figurative scenes: a traditionally Egyptian sacrificial scene and, in all likelihood, a deity or royal figure (which was perhaps also part of an offering scene). The material and manufacturing technique used is directly similar to the majority of blue cameo glass fragments, and indicates that these, too, were likely to have been manufactured in Roman workshops between 15 BCE and 25 CE. Here, too, we see how traditional Egyptian elements appear side-

⁴⁶⁹ Bragantini 2006, 166 fig. 6; Roberts et al. 2010, 64.

⁴⁷⁰ Roberts et al. 2010, 60-65. See also: Simon 1957; Dawson 1995; Walker 2004; Whitestone 2007, 116-117.

⁴⁷¹ The best example of this is a likewise purple cameo glass plaque depicting a scene interpreted as the legs of a satyr beside a tree. The placing of the feet and the rendering of the toes and leg muscles is recognisably similar to the feet on the plaque with the bull. See: Walters 1926, 379 no. 4038; Simon 1957 pl. 17; Roberts et al. 2010, 64 no. 42.

by-side with naturalistic elements reminiscent of Hellenistic iconography; this does not necessarily suggest a consciously chosen merging of these two different styles within single figure. Traditional Egyptian iconography does not automatically exclude naturalistic elements, and these cannot by definition be labelled as Hellenistic either. The combination is nonetheless interesting, and may simply be a result of the manufacturing Roman workshop aiming to create traditional Egyptian imagery, while unable to (consciously) deviate from the naturalistic style of the by then already widespread Hellenistic repertoire.

3.7.1.3. Layered cameo glass

As discussed at the beginning of this paragraph, the type that can be categorised as layered cameo glass has a visual appearance quite different from blue or purple cameo glass, and is manufactured according to a different process whereby multiple already carved and often brightly coloured layers of glass are added onto the lower layer; this is an incuse technique rarely used with blue or purple cameo glass vessels.⁴⁷² These fragments are generally referred to as ‘egyptianizing layered glass’ because of their iconography, and their provenance can in most cases be securely traced to Roman workshops.⁴⁷³

Five examples from The British Museum collection represent what can be described as ornamental themes; fragmentary parts of acanthus leaves, lotuses and (possibly) river scenes including fish (fig. 77).⁴⁷⁴ These fragments all measure circa 3cm x 4cm, and five different kind of coloured glass have been used in their manufacturing: opaque blue, opaque light green, opaque ochre yellow, opaque dark green and opaque brick red.⁴⁷⁵ The latter two colours (dark green and brick red) appear only on two fragments.⁴⁷⁶ Only sporadic details remain of most of the decorations, but the rendering of floral elements (leaves and lotus motifs) is quite rich and naturalistic in style, as usually associated with Hellenistic iconography.

⁴⁷² Roberts et al. 2010, 77-79.

⁴⁷³ The similarity in glass type used for the manufacturing, despite the difference in technique, would indicate that these workshops were similar to those manufacturing blue and purple cameo glass vessels, if not the same workshops altogether. See: Simon 1957, 19; Roberts et al. 2010, 77. Personal communication with Roberts at The British Museum, 2011.

⁴⁷⁴ BM Cat. Nr. 1886,1117.45; BM Cat. Nr. 1976,1003.12; BM Cat. Nr. 1886,1117.44; BM Cat. Nr. 1976,1003.11; BM Cat. Nr. 1886,1117.46; The records of these fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database <http://www.britishmuseum.org>. See: Simon 1957, pl. 17-19; Roberts et al. 2010, 78-79 nr. 77-81.

⁴⁷⁵ Roberts et al. 2010, 77-78.

⁴⁷⁶ Both are fragments from the British Museum: BM Cat. Nr. 1976,1003.12 and BM Cat. Nr. 1886,1117.44. See: Simon 1957, pl. 17, 19; Roberts et al. 2010, nr. 78, 79.



Fig. 77. Five fragments of layered cameo glass. Photos copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

As such, the appearance of acanthus leaves need not necessarily refer to a specific Egyptian manifestation; this interpretation seems mainly based on the unique use of coloured layers and the fact that the majority of this type contains some kind of ornamental feature that can be identified as either a river scene or a lotus design. Fragment 1976,1003.12 from The British Museum, however, shows a clearly recognisable lotus motif (reminiscent of a capital) very similar to lotus-shaped ornamental designs such as frequently found in wall paintings from the Augustan Palatine and the Villa della Farnesina (fig. 77 B).⁴⁷⁷

The three other known fragments of layered cameo glass display what can be identified as figurative scenes (fig. 78). The first two examples are likewise from The British Museum collection and show respectively the lower legs and arms of two figures of which the posture, as far as can be made out, is similar to the Egyptian figures seen on examples of blue cameo glass.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ As discussed in paragraphs 3.1.1. (Augustan Palatine) and 3.5.1. (Villa della Farnesina).

⁴⁷⁸ BM Cat. Nr. 1865,1214,104; BM Cat. Nr. 1868,0501.7. See: Simon 1957, pl. 19; Roberts et al. 2010, nr. 75, 76. The records of these fragment can be viewed at The British Museum online database <http://www.britishmuseum.org>



A



B



C

Fig. 78. Three fragments of layered cameo glass. A and B copyright The Trustees of The British Museum. C copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York.

The first fragment (fig. 78A) measures 2.6cm x 4.1cm and consists of three types of coloured glass: opaque blue, opaque white and opaque moss green. The legs are placed at an even space and partially in profile; the left leg is turned inwards and the left foot is shown foreshortened to create perspective. This foreshortening is uncommon in traditional Egyptian iconography and seems rather more typical of a Hellenistic style figure; the identification of this piece as being of a specific ‘Egyptian’ character is based solely on the similarities of its material and manufacturing technique with the other known examples of layered cameo glass. Because any other details or attributes are missing from this fragment it is impossible to effectively categorise it (thematically or stylistically).

The second fragment, however, presents a very interesting example (fig. 78B). It measures 2.8cm x 2.7cm and is made of opaque orange, opaque cobalt blue and opaque turquoise blue glass layers. Only a small section of the figure’s body remains, but the positioning of the arms is immediately recognisable. The right arm is bent upwards across the figure’s chest while the left arm is bent upwards and stretched out; we have already seen this directly similar pose in six other examples of blue cameo glass discussed above. The figure’s body (bare skin) is rendered in a layer of cobalt blue glass, while a small surviving part of a turquoise blue glass collar (possibly a *wesekh*) remains at the top of the fragment; apart from this attribute the figure is bare-chested.

The third figurative fragment, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, likewise shows only part of a

human body (fig. 78C).⁴⁷⁹ It measures 5.4cm x 4.3cm, and is made of opaque white, opaque cobalt blue and opaque turquoise glass layers. The human figure stands erect on the left side, incused entirely in the turquoise layer, and is partially damaged. The turquoise colour may be reminiscent of the famous Egyptian faience, but there is no real evidence to support this. The figure's posture, however, is certainly recognisable; the figure stands in profile, facing the right, with his left arm bent upwards across his chest; in the familiar pose discussed above. The figure is rendered with much detail in regard to its black (or very dark blue) face, rounded headcloth, and the ruler's sceptre held over its shoulder, although it has also been interpreted as a decorated shield.⁴⁸⁰ The kilt features a triangular apron, which strongly suggests the figure is meant to depict a king.⁴⁸¹ The partial object on the right side of the fragment may be identified as part of a bee hieroglyph, which is widely used in Egyptian iconography to indicate royalty.⁴⁸² Because of the use of (both symbolic and 'real') hieroglyphs on other cameo glass vessels, such as the Getty flask seen above, this suggestion would not seem implausible here. Particularly noteworthy is the figure's black face, especially seeing the fact that the figure's hand is rendered in green instead. Seeing the fact that recent analysis of Roman glass workshops (as discussed above) have strongly suggested a Roman manufacturing of these glass vessels, perhaps a parallel can be found in the likewise Roman-manufactured black marble statues that were found on the Augustan Palatine hill; the choice for black material to depict Egyptian figures (or, in the case of the Danaid statues, Egyptian-themed figures), may therefore be a specific Roman association of black (stone) material with Egypt – reminiscent of the traditional black basalt sculptures known from Egypt. In the Augustan era, the use of black stone/material is very rare; the black marble Danaid statues and black-faced rendering of the Egyptian royal figure on this cameo fragment seem to be the only known examples. However, in later times, especially during Hadrian's reign, we find more black marble and basalt Roman statues, famous from the Villa Hadriana in Tivoli, all of which depict Egyptian figures and/or Egyptian themes.⁴⁸³ Although the data is slim for the Augustan period, these appearances of black material used for Egyptian themes

⁴⁷⁹ Fragment Nr. 17.194.370 Metropolitan Museum of Art New York. See: Froehner 1903, no. 557 pl. 58.1. The record can be viewed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art online database: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/249606>.

⁴⁸⁰ The interpretation of the object as a shield 'shown at an oblique angle' is provided at The Metropolitan Museum of Art online database: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/249606>.

⁴⁸¹ Previously, the figure has been identified only as a male Egyptian figure, with no further description or interpretation of its garments and/or attributes (Froehner 1903, no. 557.). However, at closer inspection, its garments and attributes are clearly recognisable and detailed.

⁴⁸² Kaper 2014, personal communication.

⁴⁸³ See paragraph 3.3.2 above. On the statues from the Villa Hadriana, see: Slavazzi 2002, 55-62; Salza Prina Ricotti 2003, 113-144.

and/or figures can at least be identified as first occurrences of that kind in Rome – which, as such, might suggest that this Roman association of black material with Egypt may have originated from the Augustan era.

A fourth fragment of layered coloured glass can be found at The Thorvaldsens Museum (fig. 79).



Fig. 79. Unknown fragment of layered cameo glass. Copyright The Thorvaldsens Museum Copenhagen

This fragment is as yet unpublished and very little is known about its origin, apart from the fact that its type of glass and layered manufacturing technique similar to the other layered cameo glass examples above, which may indicate a similar origin in Roman workshops.⁴⁸⁴ Purely looking at the fragment itself, it may depict a feline creature, perhaps a panther or leopard in sitting posture with arched back, against a background of brick red glass (partially damaged at the top). The creature itself is richly decorated; the spotted fur is rendered by means of dark blue and white glass. The crouching hind legs can be recognised in sitting position while the upper part of the body is missing. However, the pattern of the creature's body consists of remarkably regular scales, which seems reminiscent of stylised patterns in Roman paintings and mosaics, but does not appear to be used for animal fur; at least, no parallels could be found.

At the top of the fragment, an indeterminable object is visible in a layer of bright turquoise glass; it is unclear whether this object was in any way attached to the creature's upper body. The figure may bring

⁴⁸⁴ Inventory number currently unknown, no records available on either provenance, specific measurements or interpretation. Personal communication with Paul Roberts at The British Museum in 2011 and with Julie Lejsgaard Christensen from the Thorvaldsens Museum in 2013.

to mind the spotted sphinx-like feline on the wall painting fragment found in the foundations of the House of Augustus on the Palatine; this was part of a traditional Egyptian offering scene, and seeing the frequent appearance of such scenes in other cameo glass fragment, the presence of such a spotted feline creature (perhaps also a sphinx) does not seem implausible. But this comparison holds only by association, and until more data can be found about its origin it cannot be interpreted with any certainty.

In summary, this rare type of layered cameo glass may not as exclusively feature manifestations of Egypt as suggested so far. Some of the ornamental features may well be interpreted as Bacchic or of general (Roman) decorative character. However, we do find examples of recognisable lotus motifs and, yet again, two examples of figures with upwards bent arms held across the chest in what appear to be typical Egyptian offering scenes. Both these examples are rendered in a rigid, in profile style – the fragment where only a figure's legs are visible, however, is clearly rendered in a Hellenistic style with foreshortening to create perspective. The unknown fragment with the spotted feline creature (possibly sphinx) provides a very interesting example, and so far unparalleled among cameo glass examples of the blue, purple or layered type; the possibility of it also having been part of an Egyptian offering scene is – although only by association – not unlikely.

3.7.2. Interpretation

In the light of the overview so far, cameo glass vessels present a remarkable new type of manifestation of Egypt in Augustan Rome: they are the first known evidence that manifestations of Egypt were becoming far more widespread throughout the city of Rome than the previously discussed examples suggested. Until the opening of these cameo glass workshops in Rome in 15 BCE, we find manifestations of Egypt in Augustan material culture only in the context of the Augustan Palatine (House and Apollo Palatinus temple complex), the context of Roman elite circles which were mainly allied to Augustus politically (Villa of Agrippa, pyramid of Cestius, gardens of Maecenas). But from 15 BCE onwards this changes: cameo glass vessels become a popular item that is specifically typical of Augustan Rome, and Egyptian themes and styles have become an integral part of the repertoire of themes and styles that was available to these workshops, often literally side by side with Bacchic, idyllic and ornamental themes generally

associated with Roman Hellenistic iconography. Based on the evidence from their workshops, manufacture and the number of known examples, it seems clear that these cameo vessels were not just a novelty product for the Augustan elite; these vessels were remarkably numerous throughout Augustan Rome. The cameo technique was used for luxury items such as perfume bottles, but there are also many fragments of simpler plates and cups – and while some decorative objects are famously elaborate (such as the ‘Portland Vase’), there are also many examples with more simplistic decorations. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of examples that feature manifestations of Egypt do appear of elaborate decorative quality; with the exception of the layered glass variety and the small fragment featuring the base of an obelisk, which seems more crudely executed.

Also interesting is the fact that this wider development of manifestations of Egypt in smaller objects throughout Augustan Rome seems to be parallel to the continuation of Augustus’ official public monuments. As we will see, the coming of obelisk in Rome in 10 BCE as well as the completion of the Forum of Augustus in 2 BCE are still to follow when cameo glass vessels already becomes widespread in the city. The appearance of obelisks follows almost directly – which may be a reason why we find such detailed rendering of obelisk also in examples of blue cameo glass vessels.

The incorporation of manifestations of Egypt as such an integral part of the stylistic and thematic repertoire available to Roman cameo glass emphasises what Galinsky called the ‘evolution’ as a result of the Augustan cultural revolution;⁴⁸⁵ namely, a rather more ‘organic’ and fluent development and spread of certain themes and styles in material culture (in this case Egyptian) that was not officially planned by Augustus, but rather a more natural response to people’s exposure to the type of material culture that he *did* deliberately introduce to the urban landscape of the city. The appearance of manifestations of Egypt in the elite circles of the cities and in politically charged contexts such as the Palatine gave way to such exposure, and subsequently gave way to wider-spread imitations, variations and emulations of these highly visible characteristics of elite and political material culture. Zanker likewise demonstrates how even the spread of recognisable Augustan material culture (‘Augustan classicism’) spread throughout the elite culture of Rome as a natural consequence rather than as preordained or specifically planned: he refers to the development of Augustan classicism in the city elite circles as a (continually expanding) reaction to Augustan visual propaganda, and not as official part of it.⁴⁸⁶ This certainly holds true for the development and popularity of cameo glass. Not only the 15 BCE – 25 CE dating of its Roman workshops,

⁴⁸⁵ Galinsky 1996, 3-9.

⁴⁸⁶ Zanker 1986, 264-283, 290-293; Idem. 1987, 312-318.

but especially the visual characteristics of these glass vessels, in terms of thematic topics and styles used to express them, can be regarded as typical of ‘Augustan classicism’.⁴⁸⁷ Wallace-Hadrill deals extensively with the ‘consumer revolution’ as a result of the rise in luxury and prosperity in Augustan Rome, referring to the increase of ‘cultural goods in transit’ as a socio-cultural phenomenon resulting from Rome cultural revolution as a whole.⁴⁸⁸ He likewise elaborates on the many different ‘waves of fashion’ that are introduced throughout the many different social circles of the city and thus became not only characteristic examples of Augustan material culture as a result of the peace and prosperity of the Augustan period, but especially as contributors to the development of Augustan culture as a whole.⁴⁸⁹ Cameo glass certainly fits these descriptions. In fact, cameo glass illustrates what Wallace-Hadrill called ‘consumer revolution’ par excellence. The popularity of these cameo vessels does not demonstrate them as products for a privileged niche or a fetish exclusive for the elite, but instead reflects the changes in the Augustan citizen body, with a large middle-class that began to consume on a more widespread and elaborate scale.⁴⁹⁰ It is therefore all the more surprising that cameo glass, as typical Augustan glass type, has not yet been part of more extensive studies on these developments in Augustan material culture.

Moreover, the incorporated appearance of manifestations of Egypt in the decorative scenes from cameo glass vessels proves wrong the predominant preconceptions that Egypt appeared only as exotic and elite novelty in these circles of Augustan material culture. The examples discussed above show that manifestations of Egypt functioned as integral parts of the repertoire of themes and styles available to these workshops. The featured Egyptian themes and styles were not simply highlighted or presented separately from the Hellenistic styles and Bacchic, idyllic or mythical themes that would better fit the ‘Augustan classicism’ paradigm – on the contrary, we find manifestations of Egypt side by side to Cupids or Roman victory symbols on a single vessel. Moreover, while the execution of the Egyptian figures and ornaments certainly includes rigid in profile postures and lack of perspective recognisable as traditional to Egyptian (‘pharaonic’) iconography, as well as typical attributes such as wesekh collars, shendit kilts, wigs and amulets, these elements instead seem added to figures that do not differ from the more ‘classical’ figurative scenes known from cameo glass in terms of anatomic detail or fluidity of movements or ornaments. Manifestations of Egypt in cameo glass would seem to have been a specific kind of genre

⁴⁸⁷ Zanker 1987, 59; Roberts et al. 11.

⁴⁸⁸ Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 319 (citing Kopytoff 1986).

⁴⁸⁹ Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 435-440.

⁴⁹⁰ On the changing citizen body in Augustan Rome, see: Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 443. See also Introduction chapter.

or theme, but not a distinctly separate category altogether in terms of either manufacturing or stylistic execution. A lot of the Egyptian motifs and attributes found on cameo glass examples were already known to Roman material culture via Alexandria, and can be recognised in Roman wall paintings as well – though there mainly in ornamental scenes and rendered in a more Hellenistic style.⁴⁹¹ The rising popularity of Egyptian motifs in Augustan Rome (as a result of the exposure to such motifs through the more official Augustan visual language), of course does not imply that all these Egyptian motifs needed to be entirely *new* to Roman material culture at the time; they simply became more wide-spread and began to feature in more types of objects also in the personal sphere, such as evident from cameo glass. The emulation of Egyptian stylistic features and attributes with the more general Hellenistic style of cameo glass decoration might indicate that some artisans from Alexandria came to work in these Roman workshops, who would be more familiar with the rendering of such elements: but this should not be assumed as a necessity either. Several specific Egyptian themes and stylistic components reoccur in cameo glass examples; they seem to have become integral parts of the repertoire available to the workshop at the time, hence the ethnicity of the artisans is in fact irrelevant – and the cultural context of Augustan Rome all the more relevant. These Egyptian elements on cameo glass, if anything, refer to Augustan Rome in specific, because they had come to ‘evolve’ and expand as integral parts of Augustan material culture, through the socio-cultural process as described by Wallace-Hadrill that both resulted from and shaped the city of Rome at the time.

When we look at the examples themselves, we can recognise a preference for Egyptian offering scenes portrayed on blue, purple and layered cameo glass vessels. The posturing and attributes of the human figures in these scenes (especially the pose with upwards bent arm across the chest, displaying the act of offering) is frequent and similar in each of the examples. Aside from offering scenes, there are also several examples that feature clearly recognisable obelisks, even with visible hieroglyphs, as well as Nilotic river scenes with boats and fish and ornamental floral motifs with lotuses that, too, seem to refer to a Nilotic or Egyptian theme. In all these examples, the Egyptian elements are never presented as something outside of the regular design of the vessels – rather than as something exotic or ‘Other’, these Egyptian elements are either presented alongside Hellenistic styles and themes, or can be recognised even within singular elements and figures. With that in mind, perhaps it is even a wrong perspective to single out these different Egyptian and Hellenistic elements (even though, ironically, this is necessary in

⁴⁹¹ On the influence of Alexandrian motifs on Roman wall paintings see previous sections 3.1.1.; 3.1.2.; 3.5.1.

order to prove the point of their inseparable emulation). Perhaps all it took to make a figure part of an Egyptian offering scene on a cameo glass vessel, was to portray it in a rigid in profile pose, with almond-shaped eye, and wearing a headcloth, kiltor *wesekh*. As such, especially when seen in the light of Hölscher's semantics theory, one could interpret that the depiction of an Egyptian offering scene *required* certain Egyptian elements that were available from a wider repertoire. But would this imply that one specific way to portray the concept of 'an offering' was to portray it as 'Egyptian'? Did 'Egyptian' imply 'offering' automatically in such cases? Might Egypt have referred herein perhaps to ancient and solemn qualities associated with religious offerings? Or were these Egyptian scenes only chosen to depict specifically Egyptian offering scenes? An argument against this latter interpretation would be the fact that we find these scenes literally side by side with specifically Roman iconography; the best example is the Getty flask, which features a traditional Egyptian figure and obelisk right beside a Roman altar and a Cupid figure. Also, the anatomical rendering and detail of most of these traditional Egyptian figures is directly comparable to figures featured in Bacchic or idyllic scenes on similar cameo vessels. Small details make this very clear, such as the fluidity of garment folds, the rendering of leg muscles and the naturalistic details of lips, ears and toes as found on several of the above discussed examples. The specific Egyptian components such as posture and attributes would have been available in the workshops' repertoire and as such could be chosen to suit certain themes or scenes, like offerings, Nilotic scenes or monumental features like obelisks. But they do not appear at all to have been crafted or presented as separate entities: these manifestations of Egypt in fact rarely featured exclusively on any vessels, for as far as the remaining examples seem to suggest. They literally coexisted upon single vessels with idyllic or Bacchic scenes that would generally be categorised as typical of 'Augustan classicism'. But instead, both these 'classical' and 'Egyptian' elements combined are what makes cameo glass such a typical Augustan type of vessel, in the first place. Would this, then, imply that these Egyptian elements were simply considered among the 'classical components' of the repertoire available to these Roman glass workshops? But perhaps to look for such a categorisation is an entirely wrong reflection of how these elements came together and coexisted in these cameo glass vessels.

The flexibility of the many different themes and styles, rendered through an innovative technique developed in Augustan Roman workshops, is in fact what makes the genre of cameo glass so unique. This flexibility is innate to Augustan material culture, as both instigated by Augustan propaganda and as more 'organically' evolved as a result of it – and Augustan cameo glass provides a prime example of this

process, even *more* so because Egyptian styles and themes had been so integrally incorporated into it. Exactly by featuring these many different themes and styles, all from diverse origins, united into a single vessels, something could be created that, above all things, was Roman – and Augustan. The Egyptian elements here, more than anything, refer to the way Augustan material culture had begun to incorporate Egyptian elements and thus began to refer no longer specifically to Egypt in a strictly ethnical or geographical sense– but rather to Rome itself, of which these Egyptian elements had become an integral part. At the same time, this did not imply that the Egyptian origin of these elements was erased to that purpose; rather, it could be emphasised and/or hinted at whenever a specific context would require it (such as, perhaps, a traditional offering scene on a glass vessel). And at the same time this, too, once again referred indirectly to Rome itself; the Rome that Augustus had so visibly expanded and changed.

In other words: if anything can effectively illustrate the workings of Augustan material culture, it is layers of opaque cameo glass.

3.8. The Ara Pacis

The Ara Pacis, the Augustan peace altar at the Campus Martius in Rome, is generally considered the foremost representation of Augustan material culture – but as rightly pointed out by Galinsky, while its prominent place in Augustan scholarship is conventional, ‘the monument itself is not’.⁴⁹² Perhaps for this reason, new explorations about its iconography, contextual meaning and socio-political impact continue to encourage new studies about the Ara Pacis. Recently such studies also have included the possible incorporation of manifestations of Egypt in the monument itself, which presents a perspective on the monument never before explored.⁴⁹³ This paragraph will first examine what can be derived from a close study of the altar itself in terms of what manifestations of Egypt are indeed discernible from the archaeological material. Secondly, a hypothetical exploration is raised that looks at the altar’s architectural design in comparison with several examples of Egyptian architecture. In the second paragraph these findings are considered and reviewed in the context of the wider Augustan cultural revolution, focused on in what way the Ara Pacis, indeed, seems a prime representation of the Augustan material culture that resulted from and enabled that revolution.

3.8.1. Manifestations of Egypt in the Ara Pacis

The Ara Pacis Augustae was erected at the Campus Martius in 13 BCE: in his ‘Res Gestae’ Augustus recounts that upon his return from Gaul and Spain, ‘after I had successfully arranged affairs in those provinces, the senate decreed that an altar of the Augustan Peace should be consecrated at the Campus Martius in honour of my return.’⁴⁹⁴ The original excavated remains measures 11.6m x 10.5m, and have been reconstructed to a hypothetical 6m in height (fig. 80).⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² Galinsky 1997, 141.

⁴⁹³ Trimble 2007, 1-46; Davies 2011, 354-372.

⁴⁹⁴ Res Gestae 12.2.

⁴⁹⁵ For an overview of scholarship on the Ara Pacis’ excavation and (mainly iconographical) interpretations, see: Moretti 1948; Rizzo 1926, 457-473; Galinsky 1966, 223; Idem. 1997, 141-155; Simon 1967; Richmond 1969, 205-217; Sauron 1982, 81-101; Refice 1985, 404-421; Zanker 1990, 121-123; Polacco 1992, 9-13; Castriota 1995; Conlin 1997; Galinsky 1997, 141-155; Laurence 2000, 442-455; Trimble 2007, 1-46; Rossini 2006; Idem. 2010, 20-25; La Rocca 2007; Bordignon 2010; Davies 2011, 354-372.



Fig. 8o. The Ara Pacis Augustae reconstructed front with view of altar (A) and back (B) view, as currently on display in Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde.

The majority of scholarship on the monument explores its particularly rich iconography: it is well-known for its variety in both style and themes. It contains highly allegorical decorative panels in a style with lush fluidity and lush positioning considered often as a highlight of the so-called ‘Augustan classicism’ paradigm; while at the side panels it likewise features procession friezes directly reminiscent of the more static, regal style of the friezes known from the Parthenon temple from Classical Athens; and the lower strictly decorative panels were decorated in their entirety in lavish ornamental floral designs that contain minute details of realism (such a lizards and cicadas among leaves) that are reminiscent of a

more baroque Hellenistic style; whereas the inner space where the altar proper can be found is reminiscent of the much more severe, plainer style from very early Roman temple architecture with, for example, imitation wooden panelling along the walls that seem to refer to Etruscan temple architecture.⁴⁹⁶ Recent experimentations with pigment reconstructions of the monument likewise seem to highlight this remarkable variety, while at the same time confirming that, above anything, the overall design of the Ara Pacis presented a distinct visual of unity.⁴⁹⁷

Among all these studies, however, there is no mention of Egyptian motifs or elements as part of the iconographical design; nor do any such elements appear on the outer walls of the monument. However, at a closer inspection ornamental stylised lotus motifs can be detected as part of the design scheme of the inner walls around the altar proper, in the form of an ornamental frieze and as part of a lotus bud motif among acanthus leaves as part of the half-columns capitals integrated at regular intervals in the design of the stone imitation of wooden panelling (see fig. 81 A and B).⁴⁹⁸



Fig. 81 A: Ornamental frieze featuring stylised lotus motifs. B: lotus bud motifs in capital design. Both from the inner walls of the Ara Pacis Augustae (partially reconstructed) on current display in Rome. Photo: M. van Aerde.

⁴⁹⁶ See: Rizzo 1926, 457-473; Simon 1967; Richmond 1969, 205-217; Sauron 1982, 81-101; Zanker 1990, 121-123; Castriota 1995; Galinsky 1997, 141-155; Laurence 2000, 442-455; Rossini 2006.

⁴⁹⁷ Rossini 2010, 20-25.

⁴⁹⁸ Penelope Davis has been the first, in her recent piece, to briefly allude to the Egyptian motifs as part of the inner ornamental frieze: Davies 2011, 354-372. Castriota extensively discusses the floral designs from the outer walls of the Ara Pacis, but never refers to the frieze from the inner chamber or any Egyptian motifs as part of the design. Castriota 1995, 58-86.

Especially the ornamental frieze is directly comparable to previously discussed examples featuring stylised lotus motifs from of Augustan wall painting: see the comparison below between the Ara Pacis frieze and decorative painting friezes from the Villa della Farnesina and the House of Augustus on the Palatine (see fig. 82 A, B and C).



A



B



C

Fig. 82. A : Ornamental frieze featuring stylised lotus motifs at the Ara Pacis. B: stylised ornamental frieze from the Villa della Farnesina (crypto portico). C: stylised lotus frieze from the House of Augustus on the Palatine (upper cubiculum). A and B: Photo M. van Aerde. C: Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

In comparison, especially the positioning of the out-stretching stylised lotus petals is strikingly similar in all three examples. The example from the Villa della Farnesina especially features a very similar stylised floral design within each interval of the frieze, embraced by the out-stretched lotus petals. These recognisable similarities seem to indicate that these stylistic elements by now had been integrally

incorporated into the visual repertoire of Augustan Rome – of which the Ara Pacis was indeed intended to be the prime example.⁴⁹⁹ In addition, it is interesting to note that they only appear on the inner walls of the altar; but whether this is because of any particular Egyptian associations of these elements cannot be said with any certainty – in fact, with the considerations above in mind, it is not likely. There appear side by side with features from early Roman and even Etruscan temple architecture: perhaps this combination is chosen to reflect upon the venerability of these more ‘ancient’ stylistic origins compared to those expressed on the more lavish outer panels. On the one hand, we should keep in mind that these ornamental elements may well have been so integrally incorporated into the stylistic repertoire available at the time of the construction of the Ara Pacis that they were not intended as specific manifestations of Egypt (or, indeed, interpreted at the time). On the other hand, however, there appears to be hardly any (visual) component of the Ara Pacis that does *not* express some manner of implied meaning or association. In that light, the incorporation of these ornamental manifestations of Egypt, rather than simply having become part of the Roman material culture repertoire, may in this case indeed be some kind of implication of ‘Egypt’ after all, no matter how subtle. That subtle character, especially, would make them fit well with the overall design of the Ara Pacis.

There have been other recent explorations of the Ara Pacis, however, that take another approach by opting for a comparison of the altar’s overall architectural design to traditional Egyptian architectural examples of Pharaonic jubilee chapels.⁵⁰⁰ Previous architectural and stylistic comparisons have looked exclusively at similarities and differences between the Ara Pacis and especially the Pergamum Altar alongside additional examples of monumental Hellenistic altars.⁵⁰¹ However, Jennifer Trimble suggests that despite the ‘Classical’ appearance of the Ara Pacis nonetheless pharaonic ideas and stylistic allusions held semantic force in Augustan Rome, namely to express religious solemnity and the implications of power, thus making the Ara Pacis ‘a layered and allusive monument to Rome’s incorporation of distant cultures, past times, and powerful traditions of political symbolism.’⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ As discussed earlier, these ornamental lotus motifs, along with uraeus designs, were originally part of Alexandrian funerary and pavilion designs and already known to Roman material culture during Republican times; it is however during the Augustan period that especially in wall painting these elements become particularly prominent. See: Brown 1957, 93; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 18; Hanfmann 1984, 242-255; Ling 1991, 59; Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186.

⁵⁰⁰ Jennifer Trimble presents an extensive hypothetical case study from this angle in the 2007 Stanford/Princeton Working Papers in Classics series. Trimble 2007, 1-46.

⁵⁰¹ For an overview of these, see: Castriota 1995, 13-57.

⁵⁰² Trimble 2007, 43.

There are interpretive problems with such a superimposed comparison; Trimble likewise points out that ‘any echoes of pharaonic chapels on the Ara Pacis’ are likely to have been of a strictly stylistic and semantic nature, ‘with no specific references intended or perceived’, and stresses that while the comparison holds merit by association, it is not a thesis that can effectively be demonstrated based on the actual archaeological material available.⁵⁰³

The jubilee chapel she refers to is the so-called White Chapel at Karnak, built for the jubilee celebrations of Senwosret I (1920–1875 BCE) and destroyed to become part of the foundations for the pylon of Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BCE), and finally once again reconstructed in the twentieth century (1938); meaning that it had already been demolished long before Roman times. Nonetheless, its visual similarity to the Ara Pacis is quite striking, as was noted by the French archaeologists upon its excavation at Karnak in 1938 (fig. 83A); in fact, the initial interpretations of the chapel revolved around the observation that it might well have relied on Greek influences that were recognised by scholars as remarkably ‘Classical’ in style (despite the much earlier dating).⁵⁰⁴

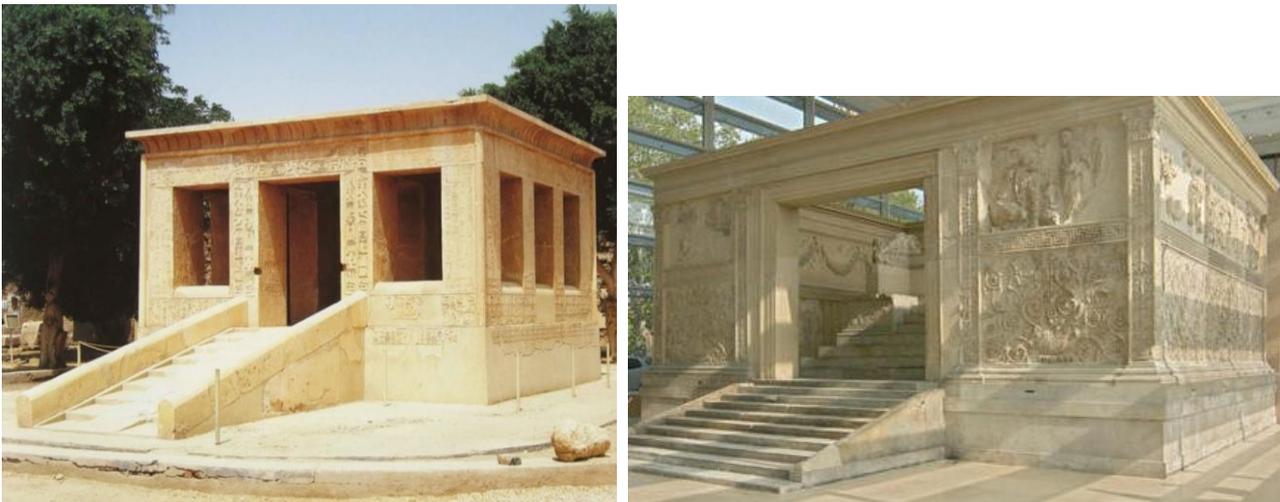


Fig. 83. A: The White Chapel at Karnak. Source: Perseus digital library. B: The Ara Pacis Augustae, as currently on display in Rome. Photo: M. van Aerde.

⁵⁰³ Trimble 2007, 41.

⁵⁰⁴ The excavation of the White Chapel at Karnak was first published in : Lacau, P. & Chevrier, H. 1956. *Une Chapelle de Sésostris Ier à Karnak*. Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale. For their observations on the chapel's visual similarity to 'Classical' Greek styles see: page 11, nr. 4. On the practical difficulties of the reconstruction of the chapel following excavation, see: page 3.

Trimble's comparison of the White Chapel and the Ara Pacis is as follows:

'As reconstructed, Senwosret's jubilee chapel is a freestanding limestone building standing on a low socle, with a rectangularity and overall proportions comparable to those of the Ara Pacis. It measures circa 6.54m on each side; the reconstructed Ara Pacis, with a footprint of 11.60 x 10.50m, is somewhat larger. Eight shallow steps with a central ramp lead up to two centrally placed doorways on opposite sides; these recall the axial doorways of the Ara Pacis and the low staircase on its western side. The White Chapel's design—credited to Senwosret's vizier Mentuhotep—is spare and rectilinear, with a flat stone roof and four piers along each side. The White Chapel was genuinely peripteral, while the Ara Pacis was surrounded by solid enclosure walls, visually punctuated by pilasters at the four corners and on either side of the entryways. Still, especially on the front and back, the White Chapel's piers recall the four pilasters on the east and west sides of the Ara Pacis.'⁵⁰⁵

When pursuing, hypothetically, this line of an architectural comparison, it is interesting to note that based on the original excavations in 1903 of the Ara Pacis (based on the fact that the greater part of the original foundations were not preserved), in 1926 Rizzo drew a far more peripteral reconstruction for the Ara Pacis that featured a back stairway and entrance (see fig. 84A).⁵⁰⁶ Visually, the similarity between the Ara Pacis and the White Chapel is indeed noteworthy – even if strictly in the realm of speculation. And Trimble's test case, despite interpretative difficulties, is based on a premise that certainly has merit: scholarship has so far extensively explored Greek, Hellenistic, Etruscan and early Roman influences in the context of the Ara Pacis, (especially in the light of the development of so-called 'Augustan classicism'), thereby excluding any other kind of cultural influences altogether. We saw above that possibly certain manifestations of Egypt in the form of stylised ornamental elements had indeed been added, as integral components, to the decorative design of the Ara Pacis – similar to how these elements likewise came to feature more and more frequently throughout Augustan material culture, as this overview has been exploring so far. Therefore the suggestion that manifestations of Egypt in the form of certain architectural features would likewise have become at least partially have been incorporated into the Ara Pacis' overall design scheme seems not entirely off base, either. Moreover, in the light of his visual semantics theory, Tonio Hölscher has observed about the Ara Pacis that not every Roman citizen needed to recognise the procession friezes as direct references to their classical Athenian inspirations for

⁵⁰⁵ Trimble 2007, 14.

⁵⁰⁶ Rizzo 1926, nr.8, 457-473.

them to be effective means for what Augustus intended to convey by means of their emulation.⁵⁰⁷ There appears to be no reason to assume that a direct recognition *would* be necessary for Egyptian inspirations to take effect as integral part of the same typically Augustan monument, while not for Greek ones.

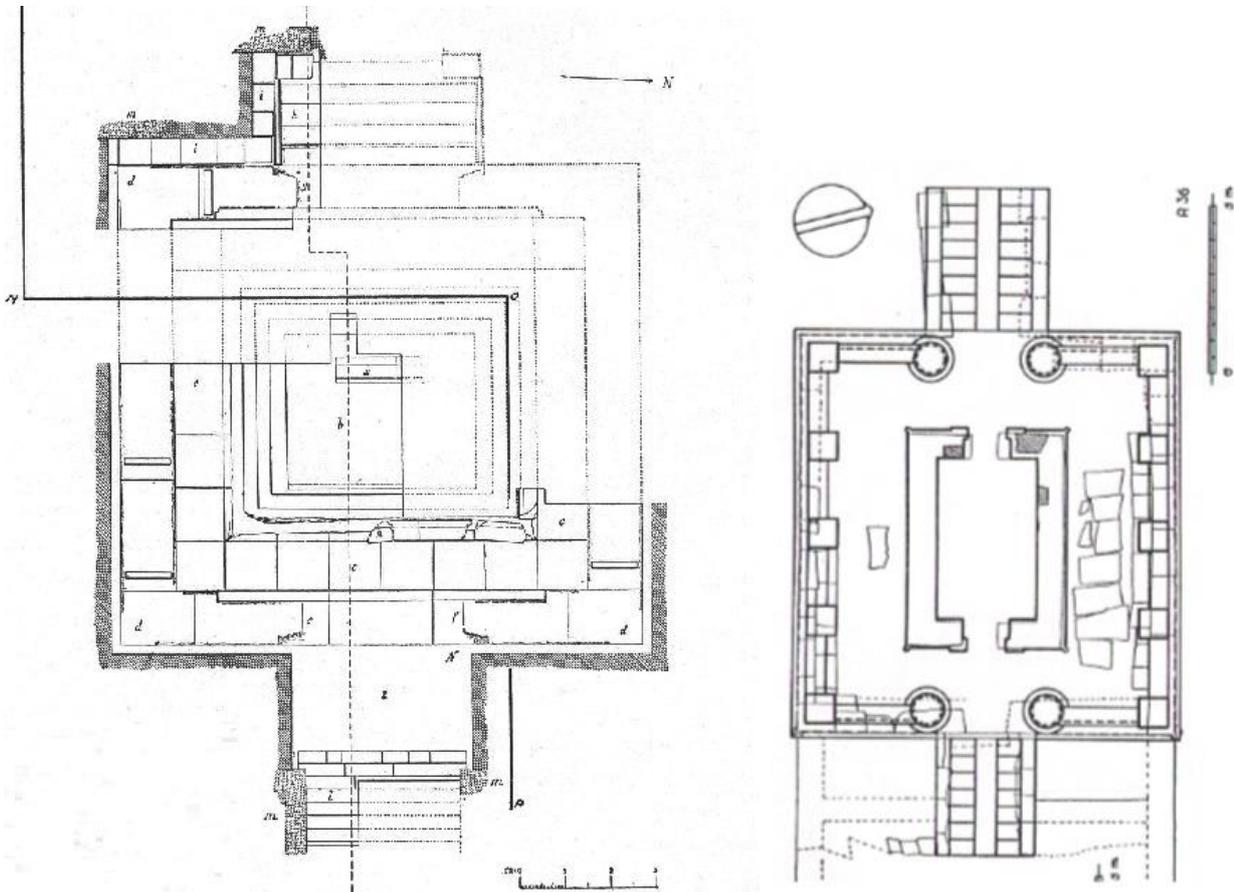


Fig. 84. A: Reconstruction drawing of the Ara Pacis Augustae (Rizzo 1926). B: plan of the peripteral chapel of Amenhotep III at Kuban. (Borchardt 1938).

When this particular reconstruction is placed next to plans of traditional Egyptian jubilee chapels (the specific example here represents the peripteral chapel of Amenhotep III at Kuban, see fig. 84B), the resemblance suddenly becomes quite striking.⁵⁰⁸ Rizzo's reconstruction was disregarded in later years; however the Ara Pacis' actual reconstructed remains as still known today *do* feature an open portal at both the east and west sides of the outer structure (on display at the Ara Pacis museum in Rome), even if most modern plans choose to present it as frontal design with only one entrance; it remains a fact that

⁵⁰⁷ Hölscher 2006, 237-269. See also: Osborne 1987, 98-105.

⁵⁰⁸ Borchardt 1938, pl. 22.

the altar itself, on the inside, has only one frontal positioning, of which only the solid back would be visible from the outer ‘back entrance’.

In summary, the Ara Pacis is by all means a unique and unusual altar. As such, it certainly stood out in Augustan Rome, and it is no wonder that it likewise stands out in scholarship concerned with Augustan material culture. At the same time, the unusual character of the altar seems to invite a wider search for parallels, such as the ones suggested by Trimble. However, the only concrete reference to manifestations of Egypt that can be recognised as part of the decorative design of the Ara Pacis are the ornamental frieze and lotus bud capitals on the inner walls of the altar, as discussed above. Nonetheless, hypothetical comparative explorations between the overall architectural scheme of the Ara Pacis to examples of traditional Egyptian jubilee chapels certainly provide an interesting case: the possibility in itself indicates that the Ara Pacis can be regarded as a remarkably complex and at the same time flexible monument that as such is indeed especially representative of Augustan culture and its many different layers – manifestations of Egypt included.

3.8.2. Interpretation

The passage from Augustus' *Res Gestae* cited above, however concise, reflects the significance of the Ara Pacis in its entirety: ‘After I had successfully arranged affairs in those provinces [Gaul and Spain], the senate decreed that an altar of the Augustan Peace should be consecrated at the Campus Martius in honour of my return.’⁵⁰⁹ The implication is that not Augustus himself came up with idea for the altar, but that the senate decreed it because he, Augustus, had earned the honour through righteous and successful actions; thus, by not claiming the commission of the altar himself while at the same having it directly connected to his own success and status, the Ara Pacis in fact became a pinnacle of Augustus' *auctoritas*.⁵¹⁰ By constantly confirming his status through empirical actions that are worthy of public honouring, the Ara Pacis Augustae became a monument that exuded more authority for Augustus himself than any self-built potentate monument could have done.

This is further enhanced through the nature of the monument itself. It is, in fact, a prime example of

⁵⁰⁹ *Res Gestae* 12.2.

⁵¹⁰ Galinsky 1997, 141-142.

how ‘the political transformation of the Roman world is integrally connected to its cultural transformation.’⁵¹¹ As we saw above, the decorative design of the Ara Pacis contains a diversity of stylistic and thematic elements varying from Classical Athenian influence to early Etruscan characteristics, and even perhaps to manifestations of Egypt in the form of ornamental designs. And it is through the combination of these different elements, resulting not in a mish-mash of styles but rather in a striking whole, that the Ara Pacis gained such specifically Augustan significance. As such, the Ara Pacis was not only something specifically Augustan, but also something altogether new in Rome. The flexibility of the way in which diverse components were successfully merged together to create such a ‘new’ monument meant to express a strong sense of unity, is directly reflective of Augustus’ political strategies: layer upon layer of carefully made steps towards a solid whole of *imperium* that was based not on a potentate’s power but on the *auctoritas* of a leader who had to (and openly wanted to) earn his power by serving the people of Rome, even if he were in fact the descendant of Romulus himself. This mythical background was rather used as a means to emphasise why he felt he had to earn his authority – a combination of mythical background and solid Roman *mores* reflected likewise in the combination of the Ara Pacis’ allegorical relief panels and the more down-to-earth, solemn Roman procession friezes.

Moreover, the transformation of the city that he aimed for (and which was already well on its way by now, in 13 BCE) found expression especially in the flexible and innovative uses of the wide variety of especially thematic and stylistic elements available to Rome’s material culture repertoire at the time: this, too, can be recognised especially in the design of the Ara Pacis. This becomes evident not by singling out and categorising these different components (‘Etruscan’, ‘Greek’, ‘Hellenistic’, ‘Egyptian’), but by observing how they, combined, constituted a monument as a whole. If anything at all, that monument should be categorised as ‘Augustan’ – and all its different stylistic and thematic components as contributors to both its Augustan appearance and the political message it expressed through that appearance. This has been mentioned about the Ara Pacis many times before: influential works by Zanker, Galinsky and Hölscher, among others, rightly emphasised the significance of the Ara Pacis as perhaps *the* foremost representation of Augustan material culture.⁵¹² Manifestations of Egypt, however, never had any part in any of these interpretations. Nonetheless, by 13 BCE Egyptian stylistic and thematic elements had already become integral parts of the material culture repertoire of the city of Rome. As such they found expression not only in the contexts of public monuments referring to Augustan politic,

⁵¹¹ Wallace-Hadrill 2008, xix.

⁵¹² Galinsky 1966, 223; Idem. 1997, 141-155; Zanker 1990, 121-123; Hölscher 2006, 237-269.

but also in objects from wider personal spheres, such as cameo glass vessels as discussed in the previous paragraph. Hence, the appearance of such manifestations of Egypt –even if only in subtle ornamental details– had become something that would have been a natural component of Augustan material culture. In fact, we might expect that if manifestations of Egypt, no matter how subtle, would have been lacking from a representation of overall Augustan culture such as the Ara Pacis aimed to be, that representation may well have seemed incomplete.

Whether or not specific architectural influences can or should be considered part of the Ara Pacis design (in any case such comparison must remain speculative) – any manifestation of Egypt from the Augustan repertoire that became part of the Ara Pacis design would have, right alongside the more numerous Greek, Hellenistic and Etruscan influences, directly referred to Augustus above anything. Trying to identify and isolate these many different components (Greek, Etruscan, Egyptian etc.) that constitutes the Ara Pacis overall would in fact be the opposite of the Ara Pacis as a monument. However, it is certainly worthwhile, even necessary, to single out all these different components of the Ara Pacis in order to point out that they, combined, made up what can be called Augustan material culture, and as such marked the visual transformation of the city Rome, parallel to its socio-political change, both of which the Ara Pacis became the prime representation. And, in that light, manifestations of Egypt were an integral part of it. We should keep in mind that they were not nearly as numerous as Greek or Hellenistic influences (this is something we also saw in the examples of cameo glass), and as such their more subtle appearance on the Ara Pacis inner walls is actually very representative of manifestations of Egypt as part of Augustan material culture as a whole. At the same time we should keep in mind that being less numerous does not mean that they were less integrally part of it.

3.9. Obelisks

‘Even in their exile, when uprooted and deposed as guardians of the temples of Egypt, when dragged as booty or trophies of war to distant regions by foreign conquerors as monuments of their vanity or their gods, the obelisks never lost their Egyptian identity.’⁵¹³ This phrasing by Erik Iversen illustrates the perspective that has dominated the academic perspective on the obelisks of Rome for a long time. And, as pointed out more recently by Grant Parker, this perspective has remained the starting point for the lion’s share of research concerning the obelisks of Rome, and beyond.⁵¹⁴ However, by taking the notion of ‘exile’ as a starting point, implications of meaning are automatically superimposed prior to any exploration of the actual obelisks as they became inseparable parts of their Roman contexts. In this paragraph the obelisks that –in remarkably different ways– became such landmark components of Augustan Rome will be analysed first from an object-focused approach, and consequently in regard to their contextual role and meaning(s) as active and integral parts of the city of Rome. The diversity of the five obelisks in questions is an important and complex source of information on the workings of Augustan visual language and, in particular, the significance that manifestations and concepts of Egypt contributed to it. In 10 BCE, with the arrival of Egyptian obelisks in her squares Rome gained a radically different appearance during Augustus’ reign (the shift from Republic to Empire) and the city’s visual language needed to adapt and adjust to such changes, in order to remain Rome – albeit a new Rome.⁵¹⁵ Especially Egypt and Egypt’s subsequent own Hellenistic culture from the Ptolemaic period played a crucial role in this transformation, of which the Augustan obelisks provide some of the most striking examples, as explored in this chapter.⁵¹⁶ Below a brief introduction is presented, followed by separate paragraphs each dealing with each of the obelisks in depth, and finally with a concluding paragraph reflecting on them all in their Augustan context.

Throughout history one thing seems certain: ‘obelisks seem to connote some very special sort of power’.⁵¹⁷

In ancient Egypt, obelisks were traditionally dedicated to deities associated with the sun. They were

⁵¹³ Iversen 1968, 11.

⁵¹⁴ Parker, 2007, 209.

⁵¹⁵ Osborne & Vout 2010, 242.

⁵¹⁶ Bowman 2000, 173–87; Osborne & Vout 2010, 242–243.

⁵¹⁷ Curran et al. 2009, 7.

erected to mark temple complexes, but also to allude to important historical events related to reigning pharaohs.⁵¹⁸ Traditionally carved as rectangular pillars from single blocks of Aswan granite (varying from colossal blocks to small stones), an obelisk generally featured hieroglyphic inscriptions on all four sides, while the top was shaped as a small pyramid (*pyramidion*), which created its needle-like shape. Obelisks may have been intended as symbolic representation of the rays of the sun, as suggested by Pliny the Elder when reporting on the received wisdom of his own age.⁵¹⁹ In ancient Egypt obelisks were called *tekhnū* (singular: *tekhen*), derived from a verb meaning ‘to pierce’; this may have alluded to the monuments ‘piercing’ the sky like a ray of the sun.⁵²⁰ The Greek term *obeliskos* is a lesser evocation of this, literally meaning ‘skewer’.⁵²¹ But despite the implied diminutive in the word ‘obelisk’, the monuments themselves maintained their powerful associations well beyond ancient Egypt. Ever since obelisks became incorporated into the urban landscape of Rome, they spread throughout history as symbols of power in cities of power; from Constantinople to New York. All this was initiated by Augustus, when in 10 BCE he became the first person of power to import obelisks from Egypt into his city of power – and saw them become part of that city.

Twenty years after his defeat of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony, Augustus succeeded in transporting two monoliths from the Egyptian city of Heliopolis to the heart of Rome. One was erected on the Campus Martius, the other –the larger obelisk of the two– was placed on the *spina* of the Circus Maximus race course at the south side of the Palatine Hill. This latter obelisk’s construction was initiated in Heliopolis by Seti I and completed by Ramses II; there are dedications of both pharaohs in the hieroglyph inscription and the stylistic characteristics of the hieroglyphic text and the figurative scenes are recognisable as manufactured according to the style of the XIXth Dynasty (1298–1187 BCE) in Egypt.⁵²² After transporting it to Rome, Augustus had a new Latin inscription carved into the base on which the obelisk (discussed at length in section 3.9.1.) was placed when it was erected at the Circus Maximus; a dedication that presents the obelisk as a gift to the god Sol.⁵²³ Exactly the same inscription was carved into the base of the second obelisk that was imported from Heliopolis and erected on the Campus

⁵¹⁸ Shaw 2003, 561-564; Curran et al. 2009, 14.

⁵¹⁹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.14.64.

⁵²⁰ Iversen 1968, 11-15; Habachi 1977, 3-6; Curran et al. 2009, 13-15.

⁵²¹ Curran et al. 2009, 14.

⁵²² Shaw 2003, 220-38; Curran et al. 2009, 23. On the nature of the hieroglyphs and dedications in the name of the pharaohs: Iversen 1987, 65-66; Davies 1987, 6-14; Baines 2004, 152-89; Parker 2007, 216.

⁵²³ Iversen 1968, 65-66; Versluys 2004, 244-253; Curran et al. 2009, 37.

Martius as *gnomon* (pointer) of a meridian device that Augustus set up in the vicinity of his own Mausoleum and the Ara Pacis Augustae (altar of the Augustan peace); this meridian device is generally referred to as the Augustan Horologium.⁵²⁴ The obelisk was originally erected and dedicated in Heliopolis by the pharaoh Psammetichos II (595-589 BCE).⁵²⁵ We know that the Circus Maximus obelisk remained at the race course for centuries, until it was damaged during the medieval period when the Forum and Palatine area were gradually transformed into meadows for grazing cattle; the Horologium obelisk, likewise, was recorded in situ until circa 800 CE, after which period it was badly damaged and its whereabouts no longer known.⁵²⁶ From the Renaissance onwards, obelisks once again took central stage parallel to the renewed interest in antiquity and the growing interest in mysticism and the occult.⁵²⁷ Moreover, the Vatican became interested in obelisks as symbols of church power and the superiority of Christianity over the pagan past of Rome.⁵²⁸ In 1587 the Circus Maximus obelisk was excavated and restored under the reign of Pope Sixtus V and re-erected at Piazza del Popolo with a crucifix at its top, where it still stands today.⁵²⁹ The Horologium obelisk was likewise re-discovered in the late 16th century, but it was not yet excavated; it remained buried until 1792, when Pope Pius VI had it restored and re-erected in front of Palazzo Montecitorio, which is still its current location.⁵³⁰

Pliny the Elder also writes about the importance of the technical achievement associated with the transport of the obelisk from Heliopolis to Alexandria and to Rome per ship; the fact that Augustus was able to bring two monoliths to Rome appears to have been considered at least equally impressive as their actual erection in the city, and their arrival by ship in Puteoli was duly emphasised in that light.⁵³¹ Following the arrival of the two Heliopolitan obelisks, we then find three other obelisks that may not only have been part of Augustus' Rome, but might actually have been created in order to be part of its

⁵²⁴ Schütz 1990, 432-457; Curran et al. 2009, 40; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 135-153. Cf. Buchner 1982, 'Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus'.

⁵²⁵ D'Onofrio 1965, 280-291; Versluys 2002, 57-58, 363; Iversen 1968, 142-160; Rouillet 1972, 78-82; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 140-143; *LTUR* III, 35-37.

⁵²⁶ Curran et al. 2009, 62. Cf. Iversen 1968, 59; *Codice topografico della città di Roma* II, 180-181, 186; Parker 2007, 217; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 138.

⁵²⁷ 17th century Jesuit polymath, collector and 'Renaissance man' Athanasius Kircher presents the most prominent example of the 'rediscovery' of the obelisks of Rome. He elaborately studied their hieroglyphs and wrote wide-ranging analyses of their iconography and 'mystic' and symbolic significance. See: Schmidt-Biggeman, W. 2001, 67-88; Findlen 2004, 1-48. Cf. Curran 2007, 283-87; Idem. 2009, 161-164.

⁵²⁸ Iversen 1968, 38-40; Curran et al. 2009, 141-151, 162.

⁵²⁹ D'Onofrio 1965, 173-177; Iversen 1968, 65-75, 136-139; Sette, 1992 (*L'arte a Roma al tempo di Sisto V*).

⁵³⁰ Curran et al. 2009, 62; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 138.

⁵³¹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 35.14. Pliny here describes to the Circus Maximus obelisk, however the transport he alludes to was in fact that of the obelisk that Augustus erected on the Campus Martius in the same year.

urban landscape. The first of these, which was recovered from the Horti Sallustiani, a private elite garden complex on the Pincio Hill in Rome,⁵³² appears to have been intended as a copy of the Circus Maximus obelisk; it can currently be found at the top of the Trinità dei Monti stairs in Rome, where it was re-erected in 1786 by commission of pope Pius VI.⁵³³ The dating of this particular obelisk remains a challenge. Nothing is known about a possible pre-Roman history for this obelisk and there is no reason to assume that it would have been made in and imported from Egypt, other than the fact that it is carved from Aswan granite, a material that, indeed, must at least have been imported from the Aswan quarries in Egypt.⁵³⁴ The often preferred post-Augustan dating for this obelisk is based solely on its occurrence –or lack thereof– in literary sources, and cannot be regarded as conclusive.⁵³⁵ When observing the obelisk itself, its visual connection to the Circus Maximus obelisk is instantly recognisable. Noteworthy is the fact that it is mentioned in a medieval pilgrim's guide to Rome specifically as the 'Sallustianus' obelisk, and a Roman copy of the Circus Maximus obelisk.⁵³⁶

The second and third obelisks to appear as part of the Roman urban landscape are generally considered to have been erected at the western side of the Mausoleum of Augustus on the Campus Martius during the early first century CE, but there continues to be debate about their dating and origin.⁵³⁷ These two obelisks lack any hieroglyphic inscriptions, which makes their dating more difficult. Iversen suggested that they may be an imitation of the pair of obelisks that Augustus erected at the Caesarium in Alexandria, and although scholarship has long favoured a Claudian or Domitian dating for these obelisks in the past, the likelihood that they were commissioned by Augustus himself meets with

⁵³² The Horti Sallustiani became Imperial property in 20 CE, shortly after Augustus' death. For the archaeological record on the Horti Sallustiani (finds and topography) see: Castagnoli 1972, 383-396; Cipriani 1982; Ferrini 1994, 85-108; Innocenti 2004, 149-196; Purcell 2007, 361-377; Macaulay 2006, 517-520; Maschek 2010, 79-119. See also paragraph 4.5 in this chapter.

⁵³³ D'Onofrio 1965, 268-79; Iversen 1968, 128-41; Coarelli 1984, 461-75; Iversen 1968, 128-144; Malaise 1972, 182, no. 338, 184-87; Roulet 1972, 71-72, nr. 71, fig. 84; Versluys 2002, 350; Curran et al. 2009, 194-96.

⁵³⁴ 'In many respects curious and enigmatical, we know absolutely nothing [about this obelisk], except that it undoubtedly was quarried in Egypt.' Iversen 1968, 128.

⁵³⁵ The hypothetical dating is generally placed between 79 CE (the death of Pliny the Elder, who does not mention the Horti Sallustiani obelisk in his treatment on Egyptian obelisks in Rome) and 360 CE, when Ammianus Marcellinus is the first source to mention the obelisk (Amm. Marc. 18.4.16.). However, the fact that Pliny did not mention the obelisk may likewise be due to the fact that it was not regarded as an originally Egyptian obelisk because it was made in Rome from Aswan granite imported from Egypt. Another reason for its absence in Pliny could be that the obelisk, unlike the others described by Pliny, was not publically accessible but part of a private elite (if Augustan) or private Imperial (if early 1st Century CE) garden pavilion. Cf. D'Onofrio 1965, 268-69; Iversen 1968, 128-29; Roulet 1972, 71-72; Curran et al. 2009, 195-96.

⁵³⁶ The *Codex Einsidlensis* (*Einsiedeln Itinerary*) pilgrim's guide dates from the later eighth century CE; it appears to be a Roman itinerary, a written guide or plan of the city of Rome (the manuscript was edited and reconstructed by Christian Hülsen in 1907, 'La pianta di Roma dell'anonimo einsidlense'). Cf. *Codice topografico della città di Roma* II 180-181, 186; Iversen 1968, 59; Curran et al. 2009, 62.

⁵³⁷ Iversen 1968, 47-54 and 115-127; D'Onofrio 1965, 154-159 and 256-267; Versluys 2002, 326-327, 357; De Vos 1980, 74; *LTUR* III, 234-237; Buchner 1996, 27 'Ein Kanal für Obelisk: Neues vom Mausoleum des Augustus in Rom'.

increasing support and accumulating arguments recently.⁵³⁸ Both obelisks fell and were broken during the Middle Ages and were re-discovered in 1527, but only one of them was restored and erected by Pope Sixtus V in 1587, on Piazza dell'Esquilino; the second obelisk remained in neglect until the much later date of 1786, when it was erected at Piazza del Quirinale by Pope Pius VI as part of a fountain that also included the Dioscuri sculptures from the Baths of Constantine.⁵³⁹ Even regardless of the specific date of their addition to the structure, these two obelisks were part of the architectural scheme of the mausoleum as a building, and as such their significance – as obelisks incorporated into a Roman building and even constructed specifically to be part of that building as a whole – is yet another step in the 'evolution' of the obelisk as part of the city of Rome, a process initiated by Augustus' import of the two Heliopolitan obelisks in 10 BCE.

The following paragraphs explore the obelisks from Augustan Rome as integral parts of the city of Rome. This includes a brief description per obelisk, followed by an analysis of their characteristic criteria in terms of their material form, stylistic characteristics, theme/subject-matter, and what we know of their original physical context as part of the urban landscape of Augustan Rome. The final paragraph looks at what these obelisks did within these contexts, and what meanings they could express as part of the Augustan cultural revolution.

3.9.1. The Circus Maximus obelisk

The Heliopolitan obelisk that was erected at Rome's Circus Maximus measures 24 metres tall and is constructed entirely of rose-coloured Aswan granite (fig. 85).⁵⁴⁰ The granite surface is polished and smooth, with homogeneous colouring and finesse of the carvings of the hieroglyphs and figurative scenes at all four sides. The top is shaped as a traditional pyramidion. All four sides measure meticulously straight and rectangular. There is some damage at the lower end of the obelisk, just above the Roman

⁵³⁸ Iversen 1968, 47. Cf. D'Onofrio 1965, 85-95; Riccomini 1996, 40-48; Buchner 1996, 161-168; Collins 1997, 187-225; Curran et al. 2009, 46. The first mentioning of the Mausoleum obelisks in literary sources was in the fourth century CE, by Ammianus Marcellinus (17.14.16). For the more recent interpretations of an Augustan dating for the obelisks see: Zanker 1988, 76; Buchner 1996, 161-168; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 135-136.

⁵³⁹ Iversen 1968, 126; D'Onofrio 1965, 260; Curran et al. 2009, 46.

⁵⁴⁰ For an overview of interpretative scholarship on the obelisk at Circus Maximus: D'Onofrio 1965, 173-177; Iversen 1968, 65-75; Versluys 2002, 6-7, 362-363; Idem. 2004, 244-253; LTUR III, 355-356; Parker 2007, 216-218; Curran et al. 2009, 35-61.

base, consisting mainly of crumbled patches along the edges, of which some have been restored under Sixtus V (fig. 83B).

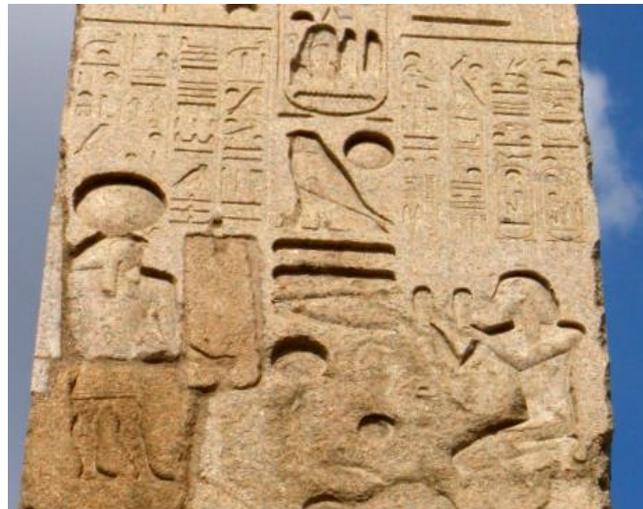


Fig. 85 A. Heliopolitan obelisk from Circus Maximus, currently at Piazza del Popolo, Rome. B. Red line: restored. Dotted line: damaged. Photos and image analysis: M. van Aerde.

The lower section of all four sides feature figurative scenes. There are two different scenes, each depicted twice. The first scene is featured on the north and south sides, the second scene on the east and west sides. Although these two scenes are similar qua topic and basic portrayal in these north-south and east-west parallels, they do not appear to be literal copies of each other. On the current north and south sides of the obelisk the scene depicts a kneeling pharaoh, to be identified as Seti I through the hieroglyphic inscription, portrayed in profile while raising his hands in the act of offering two jars of ointments with rounded lids to a deity who wears a kilt and a *nemes* headcloth, and who can be recognised as one of the forms of Ra; based on his falcon-head and solar disc, the god may be identified as Ra-Harakhti (also written as Re-Horakhty), which is the particular incarnation of Ra merged with Horus (fig. 86 A and B).⁵⁴¹



A



B

Fig. 86 A. North side of obelisk from Circus Maximus. B. South side of obelisk from Circus Maximus. Currently at Piazza del Popolo, Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde.

On the north side Ra-Harakhti is depicted in profile as a tall male figure standing upright with a falcon head. He wears a solar disc crown and a kilt. On the south side, it is hard to determine whether the Ra deity is portrayed as a seated or standing male figure, due to damage to that section of the granite, but he is clearly recognisable here with a falcon-head, and likewise crowned by solar disc, and wearing a kilt. The legs of the deity on this south side seem to have been restored during the time of Sixtus V;⁵⁴² it is therefore possible that the figure had indeed been standing upright in the originally carved scene, similar

⁵⁴¹ The falcon-headed deity has often been identified as Amon-Ra, or simply Ra, in Classical/Roman scholarship on the Circus Maximus obelisk, cf.: Iversen 1968, 47. Cf. D'Onofrio 1965, 85-95; Riccomini 1996, 40-48. For the specific attributes of Ra-Harakhti, see: Hart 2005, 133-135; Shaw 2003; Kaper 2014, personal communication.

⁵⁴² D'Onofrio 1965, 176. Cf. Sette, 1992 (*L'arte a Roma al tempo di Sisto V*).

to the Ra-Harakhti figure on the north side. The fact that the space between Ra-Harakhti and the kneeling pharaoh can be measured as similar (a distance of two heads between both figures at face-height) is an argument supporting this possibility.⁵⁴³ However, there are visual parallels for depictions of Ra-Harakhti seated, with similar posture and attributes, such as on the stele of Djed-Khonsu-Iufankh (XXI dynasty), currently at the Louvre.⁵⁴⁴ The figure of the pharaoh is fully preserved, and is depicted kneeling on both the north and south sides, although on the south side he is placed at the right section of the panel, and on the north side he is placed at the left section of the panel. All four figures on the north and south sides are portrayed in profile, and without added perspective or curtailment in the placing of arms and legs.

On the east and west sides a similar pharaoh is portrayed, kneeling while making an offering. There is damage to the lower end of the west panel, parts of which have been restored in a rather crude manner (fig. 87 A and B), but unfortunately no record remains of when exactly and how these restorations were executed.



A



B

Fig. 87 A. West side of obelisk from Circus Maximus. B. East side of obelisk from Circus Maximus. Currently at Piazza del Popolo, Rome. Photo A: C. van Galen. Photo B: M. van Aerde

⁵⁴³ Iversen briefly mentions Fontana's repairs to the obelisk before its erection at Piazza del Popolo (Iversen 1968, 72), but does not further explore the measurements and placing of the figurative scenes due to these repairs, nor does any subsequent scholarship on the obelisk. Mercati thoroughly described the shapes and sizes of the obelisks in Rome in his 1589 book *Gli obelisch di Roma*, but his focus was on interpretation and literary descriptions, rather than on any specific characteristics of the repairs or the material properties of the obelisks.

⁵⁴⁴ Ra-Harakhti stele, Cat. No. N 3795, The Louvre, Paris.

.The lower part of the east panel has also been damaged, but has not been restored. On the west side the pharaoh offers a single large vial to the deity, and wears a short wig with *uraeus*. Due to the damage, the kilt has been lost and it has not been restored. The figure of the pharaoh is placed at the right section of the panel, and the deity is placed on the left side. The deity figure seems entirely recarved in this section; it resembles the deity on the east panel, described below, but the remnants of a solar disc still hovering (unconnected) above its head may be an indication that this panel also originally features Ra-Harakhti, crowned by solar disc. Alternatively, the solar disc may simply have been added, in error, during the recarving; as no record remains of the original form of the figurative scene, we cannot know for sure. The deity figure on the east panel is still intact, and is depicted as a tall male figure standing upright, wearing a kilt and a double feathered *pschent* crown, holding an *ankh* attribute in his right hand, and can be identified as either Amun or Atum, which are both incarnations of the deity Ra. The recarved deity on the west panel seems intended to copy this Amun-Atum deity; however, the addition of the (unconnected) solar disc on the west panel, as previously mentioned, does not match the original scene of the east panel. The pharaoh figure on the east panel has also been fully preserved, and is placed at the left section of the scene, wearing a short wig. He does not hold a vial for offering even though he is portrayed in the supplicant pose of an offering. Both figures on the east side are depicted in a rudimentary style that is in contrast with the portrayal of the similar scene on the west side.

At the very top of each side of the obelisk, directly below the pyramidion, four more figurative scenes can be found in correspondence with the scenes on the lower sections of each specific side. Unlike the scenes at the lower sections these have remained entirely intact, and can therefore maybe inform us about the original scenes below: the deities to whom the offerings are made correspond – Ra-Harakhti at the north and south sides and Amun-Atumon the west and east sides – but they are all portrayed in a seated position instead of standing upright. This may be an argument for the fact that Ra-Harakhti on the lower scene on the obelisk's south side may indeed have originally been standing upright, prior to the restoration of the panel, so that the lower scenes would all feature standing deities, and the top scenes would feature seated deities.

The original hieroglyphic inscriptions of this obelisk are virtually intact, and have been carved deeply and with meticulous precision into the granite. However, Iversen noted that a difference can be deduced between 'the elegant and carefully cut' hieroglyphs inscribed to relate to Seti I, and the 'rough and badly executed' hieroglyphs that were added to relate to Ramses II when he appropriated the obelisk in

Heliopolis after his succession.⁵⁴⁵ This is visible at the lower part of the four sides; however, the hieroglyphs added by Ramses II are still perfectly readable, and Iversen may indeed have exaggerated his description of their ‘rough execution’.⁵⁴⁶ An interesting fact is that Ammianus Marcellinus included a fairly accurate Greek translation of the hieroglyphic text of the obelisk to his description of the monolith at Circus Maximus.⁵⁴⁷ Furthermore, the focus on the hieroglyphic inscription as an actual text rather than only as part of the obelisks’ visual characteristics, is interesting in the light of the complexity of perception of hieroglyphs as part of the material culture of Rome.⁵⁴⁸

The Latin inscription commissioned by Augustus on the new base of the obelisk at Circus Maximus offers the monolith in its entirety as gift to the deity Sol:

IMP. CAESAR. DIVI. F. AVGVSTVS. PONTIFEX. MAXIMVS.

IMP. XII. COS. XI. TRIB. POP. XIV. AEGVPTO. IN. POTESTATEM.

POPVLI. ROMANI. REDACTA. SOLI. DONVM. DEDIT.

*Imperator Augustus, son of the Divine Caesar, Pontifex Maximus, when Imperator for the 12th time, consul for the 11th time and bestowed with the tribunicial potestas for the 14th time, when Egypt had been brought under the rule of the Roman people, has presented [this obelisk] as gift to Sol.*⁵⁴⁹

Tertullian writes how the Circus Maximus had always been associated with the cult of the sun; the chariots racing around the *spina* taking on the role of celestial bodies circling around the sun.⁵⁵⁰ This would have made the racecourse an appropriate location for the installation of the obelisk (Egyptian symbol for ray of the sun) in the urban context of Rome. The description of a gilded solar sphere on the top of the pyramidion likewise adds to this picture.⁵⁵¹

The original position in the Circus Maximus where Augustus had the obelisk placed can only be

⁵⁴⁵ Iversen 1968, 65 (note 1).

⁵⁴⁶ As pointed out by Kaper 2014, personal communication. On the perception of hieroglyphs in Rome, see especially: Baines & Whitehouse 2005, 404-415.

⁵⁴⁷ XVII, 4, 17. Despite its philological and interpretative problems, this passage remains the only existing ancient translation of Egyptian hieroglyphs into Greek.

⁵⁴⁸ Wight & Swetnam-Burland 2010, 841; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 140-153. See also: paragraph 4.1.1.b. and chapter 6 of this dissertation for more exploration of the usage and interpretation of hieroglyphs as part of material culture in Rome.

⁵⁴⁹ CIL VI, 701. English translation by Van Aerde, 2012. Cf. Iversen 1968, 65-66; Versluys 2004, 244-253; Curran et al. 2009, 37.

⁵⁵⁰ Tert. *De Spec.* VII. Cf. D’Onofrio 1965, 176; Iversen 1968, 65.

⁵⁵¹ Tert. *De Spec.* VII; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum* XVII, 4, 17. Cf. Maruchi 1898, 51-90; D’Onofrio 1965, 177.

hypothetically reconstructed from depictions of the circus on coins, reliefs and mosaics from contemporary periods; on these, the obelisk appears to have been situated closer to the hemicycle of the circus, rather than the central *carceres*.⁵⁵² It has sometimes been suggested that Augustus originally placed the obelisk at the centre of the *spina*, and that Constantius II removed it and re-erected it at one of the sides of the *spina* in 357, so that the obelisk transported from Karnak by Constantine the Great could be erected at the centre of the *spina* instead – but there are no actual data to support this assumption and it therefore remains speculation.⁵⁵³ Although it has been documented that the Augustan obelisk was the only one still standing erect at Circus Maximus at the time of the initial excavations under Sixtus V (the Constantine obelisk had fallen from its base at the centre of the *spina*) there are no data on whether the Augustan obelisk stood at the west or east side of the circus.⁵⁵⁴ An indication may lie in the fact that the Augustan complex on the south slopes of the Palatine hill directly overlooked the west side of Circus Maximus; the placing of the obelisk in such a direct line with Augustus' residence as well as the Apollo Palatinus temple (see paragraph 3.3.2) would suggest a favourable hypothesis for the obelisk's placing at the west side of the *spina*. Recent studies of the Apollo Palatinus temple point towards a strong solar component in the portrayal of the deity; the analysis of golden pigment recovered from the columns of the Apollo Palatinus temple has for the first time presented a material basis for Augustus' innovative use of gold in the decoration of this temple, which seems to emphasise the significance of the close vicinity of the obelisk, another object of strong solar symbolism.⁵⁵⁵ This possibility will be further discussed below in the interpretative section (see fig.97).

The lion's share of interpretative scholarship focuses on the significance of the Circus Maximus obelisk as a political symbol in the capacity of war trophy, symbolising Augustus' victory over Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony, and subsequently as means of Augustan propaganda in Rome.⁵⁵⁶ Curran points out that, with the resources of the newly expanded empire available to him, Augustus "immediately began

⁵⁵² An initial overview of this material was collected by K. Zangemeister (1870, Vol. 42, 232 ff.) Good examples are the mosaic from Piazza Armerina (Nash, *Bildlexicon* II, 137) and several coins showing the circus after its extension by Trajan (eg. The British Museum Coin catalogue, 1936 Vol. III, no. 853, pl. 32.2) Cf. Iversen 1968, 65-66.

⁵⁵³ D'Onofrio 1965, 176-177, 197; Iversen 1968, 56.

⁵⁵⁴ *Codice Topografico* I, 69 (Notitia); Iversen 1968, 59, note 8.

⁵⁵⁵ Zink & Piening 2009, 109–22. This solar interpretation of the Apollo Palatinus temple likewise aligns with hypothetical reconstructions of the golden statue of Apollo in his solar chariot that would have topped the temple roof according to literary sources and depictions of the southern Palatine on Roman coins. See paragraph 3.3.2. and the concluding paragraph of this obelisk section 3.9.5.

⁵⁵⁶ D'Onofrio 1965, 176; Iversen 1968, 65; Parker 2007, 218; Curran et al. 2009, 35-37; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 137-138 and 150-153.

behaving just like the pharaohs he had succeeded”.⁵⁵⁷ This would indeed have been an important aspect of the obelisk’s significance within its new Roman context, as monument *an sich*. And, as mentioned above, Augustus’ ability to have an obelisk transported all the way from Egypt to Rome was likewise a major signifier of (political) power and triumph as well as the vast capacity of the Empire that was being expanded and pacified by Augustus. Iversen’s quotation at the beginning of this paragraph reflects the significance of obelisks as both trophies from conquered lands and as symbols of power in Rome itself; moreover, as “guardians of the temples of Egypt”, their religious significance cannot be neglected, either.⁵⁵⁸ The fact that Augustus dedicated an obelisk from the temple of Ra at Heliopolis to Apollo, provided not only a political statement, but likewise a direct link between the Egyptian religious sphere and the Roman pantheon; regardless whether or not that link was politically motivated.

The complexity of the Heliopolitan obelisk at the Circus Maximus, with its layers of significance within its context in Rome (and its coming *to* Rome), is not something that is readily analysed. Grant Parker has emphasised the importance of context in regard to Roman obelisks, and constructs his own studies centred around the question: “What do obelisks mean to Romans?”⁵⁵⁹ He opts for a reception studies approach in order to find answers; a choice which, in fact, changes his central question to: “What meaning of obelisks was seen/interpreted by Romans?” In order to comprehensively approach the meaning of obelisks in Rome and therefore to analyse the interdependence of the various components (contextual as well as material) that constituted to this meaning, a reception studies approach can only provide one particular portion of possible answers. The first step of any approach should be a consideration of the actual material object – because it is that object, in the first place, that is being received, observed, incorporated and interpreted, and thus can become a source of information about the physical and social environments wherein it was created and wherein it moved.

When observing the material form of the Circus Maximus obelisk, we see a large rectangular monolith carved out of rose Aswan granite; Aswan granite being the traditional material used for obelisks in the New Kingdom in Egypt, its specific colour and luminosity were generally associated with dedications to the Sungod in Egypt.⁵⁶⁰ In terms of its stylistic characteristics, we can recognise the hieroglyphic carvings and the execution of the figurative scenes on all four sides of the obelisk as characteristic of the stylistic

⁵⁵⁷ Curran et al. 2009, 36.

⁵⁵⁸ Iversen 1968, 11.

⁵⁵⁹ Parker 2007, 210.

⁵⁶⁰ On the significance and use of Aswan granite related to obelisks in Egypt, see: Kozloff 1992, 142-146; Karlhausen 2000, 42-29; Baines 2000, 29-41; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 140.

criteria (including the figures' clothing, posture and in profile placing) from the XIXth Dynasty (ca. 1298–1187 BCE) in Egypt, during the reigns of Seti I and Ramses II. These stylistic features can be recognised as typical New Kingdom 'pharaonic'.⁵⁶¹ In terms of its theme/subject-matter, the obelisk as object was created in reference to the solar deity Ra at Heliopolis, one of the most important places of solar worship in ancient Egypt.⁵⁶² Alongside this religious content, the erection of an obelisk at Heliopolis was likewise a political statement in reference to the then reigning pharaoh.⁵⁶³ By physically transporting the obelisk from Heliopolis to Rome, and by incorporating it into the Circus Maximus racecourse, Augustus aligns to this original religious and political content – while, simultaneously, altering it on an essential level. The erection of the obelisk in Rome, as a physical act and as implied significance, is a strong political statement by Augustus, emphasised likewise by his addition of the new Latin inscription. Moreover, as also expressed by the inscription, Augustus re-dedicates the obelisk to a solar deity (Sol) similar to the dedication of Seti I and Ramses II; which, in turn, corresponds with the cosmic theme of the Circus Maximus – and, as mentioned above, with the close vicinity of the Apollo Palatinus temple that likewise contained solar characteristics in its material and stylistic execution.⁵⁶⁴ This is where theme and physical context become irrevocably interwoven. The Circus Maximus is a very specific Roman environment; one of the most important public places in the city of Rome since early Republican times. By relocating and re-dedicating the obelisk in this particular environment, its theme and content would become automatically reliant on the significance implied by that environment. Therefore, the inherent significance of this XIXth Dynasty Egyptian obelisk as part of the Circus Maximus in Rome became directly interdependent with its new physical context – and this interdependence, in turn, reinforced the political significance of Augustus' act of bringing this particular obelisk to Rome and, moreover, placing it in a Roman context that corresponded with its original (thematic) significance in Heliopolis.

To summarise, what we find here is an obelisk that is XIXth Dynasty Egyptian in terms of its material form and style, but that gained significantly altered (if deliberately corresponding) theme and subject-matter through its new physical context in Rome. The fusion of Roman and Egyptian components, in this example, relies on the carefully constructed interdependence of theme and physical context, whereby the obelisk as material object (with its Egyptian form and style) gets physically *and* thematically

⁵⁶¹ Iversen 1968, 65-66; Curran et al. 2009, 37.

⁵⁶² Helck 1984, 67-72.

⁵⁶³ Shaw 2003, 561-564.

⁵⁶⁴ See sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3.

transported to the Roman context that was deliberately instigated as such by Augustus.

3.9.2. The Horologium obelisk

The Heliopolitan obelisk that was erected at Rome's Circus Maximus measures 21.79 metres tall and is constructed entirely of rose-coloured Aswan granite, its top shaped as a traditional pyramidion (fig. 88).⁵⁶⁵ It has been badly damaged, but the original granite surface that still remains is remarkably smooth and polished, and the hieroglyphic carvings are executed with meticulous finesse and homogeneity in style. On the south side of the obelisk the majority of original carvings have been preserved; on the north side only several damaged panels with hieroglyphs remain, and barely any fragments are preserved on the east and west sides.

A drawing by Da Bandini from 1748 shows more remaining hieroglyphs on the north side of the obelisk, which are now lost (fig. 86B). At this time the lower sections of the obelisk were already completely ruined, therefore no reconstruction of possible figurative scenes can be suggested; as decorative scenes do not appear often on Egyptian obelisks (the Circus Maximus obelisk seems to be one of the exceptions), it would be plausible to assume that the Horologium obelisk may not have featured any figurative scenes originally.

Pliny the Elder writes that the mathematician Novius Facundus placed a gilded ball on top of the obelisk when he constructed the meridian device at Campus Martius.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, Pliny writes about the hieroglyphic inscriptions of the obelisk, identifying it as a text: '[the obelisk] itself was inscribed, and those figures and representations we see on them are actually Egyptian letters'.⁵⁶⁷ He goes on to describe the subject-matter of the text as expressing 'the Egyptian philosophy of the natural world',⁵⁶⁸ and likewise describes the working of the obelisk as part of the meridian device in Campus Martius, noting that it

⁵⁶⁵ For an overview of interpretative scholarship on the Horologium obelisk: D'Onofrio 1965, 280-291; Iversen 1968, 142-160; Roulet 1972, 78-82; *LTUR* III, 35-37; Rodriguez-Almeida 1978, 195-212; Buchner 1982; Schütz 1990, 432-457; Versluys 2002, 57-58, 363; Parker 2007, 216; Curran et al. 2009, 40-42; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 135-153; Van Aerde 2014, 93-101.

⁵⁶⁶ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.15.

⁵⁶⁷ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.14: 'hoc ipsum inscriptum in eo, etenim sculpturae illae effigiesque quas videmus Aegyptiae sunt litterae'. English translation Van Aerde 2012.

⁵⁶⁸ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.14: 'inscripti ambo rerum naturae interpretationem Aegyptiorum philosophia continent'. This passage is meant to refer to both Heliopolitan obelisks that were imported by Augustus to Rome. English translation Van Aerde 2012.

used to measure days and nights and seasons, but that it had not been measuring accurately for the past thirty years.⁵⁶⁹



Fig. 88. South side of Horologium obelisk. Currently in front of Palazzo Montecitorio, Rome. A. Photo: M. van Aerde. B: Da Bandini Drawing by Da Bandini from 1748 (L'obelisco di Cesare Augusto), depicting the obelisk's damaged state at the time. From: D'Onofrio (1965), plate 167.

On the south side of the pyramidion (partially visible in fig. 89) a depiction of the pharaoh Psammetichos II can be recognised; he is portrayed in the form of a sphinx while making an offering of *ma'at* to Atum

⁵⁶⁹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.15. Pliny's encyclopaedia was completed circa 77-79 CE, which would imply that the meridian device stopped functioning correctly forty-odd years after Augustus' death in 14 CE.

and Re-Harakhti (the Sungod of Heliopolis in the form of Re-Horus), two deities from traditional Egyptian creation myths.⁵⁷⁰



Fig. 89. Partially visible pyramidion of the Horologium obelisk. Currently in front of Palazzo Montecitorio, Rome. Photo: M. van Aerde.

Molly Swetnam-Burland recently provided a thorough analysis of the Horologium obelisk's Egyptian characteristics and hieroglyphic inscription, emphasising its significance in relation to Psammetichos II's political achievements as pharaoh.⁵⁷¹ The obelisk was erected at Heliopolis as symbol of the reunited Upper and Lower Egypt, deliberately recalling the Pharaonic past; the so-called Late Period marked a revival of traditional obelisks in Egypt, of which Psammetichos II's contribution presents a typical example.⁵⁷² Moreover, the portrayal of the pharaoh in the form of a sphinx traditionally symbolised the pharaoh's capability of protecting the land of the Nile, and the offering of *ma'at* likewise symbolised the natural order of the cosmos, thus emphasising the unity of Egypt under Psammetichos II's reign.⁵⁷³ The obelisk's original hieroglyphic inscription, especially combined with the pharaoh's portrayal on the pyramidion, shows some similarity to how the Latin inscription that was added to the obelisk's new base in Campus Martius expressed the unity in the Roman world (now including Egypt) that was achieved by Augustus.⁵⁷⁴ While mainly the importance of the act of transporting the obelisks to Rome is emphasised

⁵⁷⁰ Swetnam-Burland 2010, 139. Cf. for a translation of the hieroglyphs that name the depicted deities: Ciampini 2004, 143-149 ('Gli obelischi iscritti di Roma', Nr. 6).

⁵⁷¹ Swetnam-Burland 2010, 135-153.

⁵⁷² On the revival of the archaic Egyptian past during the Late Period (twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth dynasties), see: Spalinger 1978, 21-36; Arnold 1999, 74-79; Cooney 2000, 14-17; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 140.

⁵⁷³ Swetnam-Burland 2010, 141.

⁵⁷⁴ The Latin inscription of the Horologium obelisk is identical to the inscription added to the Circus Maximus obelisk, as explored above in paragraph 4.1.1.a.

in literary sources,⁵⁷⁵ it is equally noteworthy that the original hieroglyphic inscriptions of the obelisk were actually identified by (elite and literate) Romans such as Pliny the Elder and Ammianus Marcellinus as text – regardless of whether or not they (much less the larger populace of the city) could read such a text correctly.

From this angle, the reception approach explored by Parker and Swetnam-Burland does indeed raise interesting questions. Which, if any at all, of the many different kinds and classes of people that inhabited Augustan Rome would have been aware of this obelisk's original Egyptian (political) significance and the similarity to its role as part of the Augustan city of Rome – such as those expressed by its stylistic characteristics, physical context and its original hieroglyphic as well as new Latin inscriptions? Would the Roman elite be aware of Psammetichos II's history and significance as pharaoh? Then again, perhaps such a complexly layered similarity is a step of interpretation too far. After all, as suggested by the Greek geographer Strabo, Augustus' agents in Egypt may simply have chosen to take the specific obelisks of Ramses II (Circus Maximus) and Psammetichos II (Horologium) from Heliopolis because these were among the only ones that 'were still standing' at that site.⁵⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the handful of literary passages that mention obelisks in Rome do seem to imply that these Augustan obelisks were not one-dimensionally regarded as symbols of a foreign land conquered by Rome; but the question whether or not the inhabitants of Rome would have known or understood the obelisk's significance in regard to its original Egyptian context is not directly relevant. The actual question is what significance(s) the Egyptian origin of the monument's form, style and subject-matter constituted as part of its Roman context.⁵⁷⁷ Literary references such as provided by post-Augustan authors like Pliny the Elder and Ammianus Marcellinus might grant us a glimpse of how the obelisk was regarded by (an elite few) Romans.

But when we look at the obelisk itself, in terms of its material form, we see the (reconstructed) remains of a large rectangular monolith carved out of rose Aswan granite, the traditional material used for

⁵⁷⁵ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 35.14; Amm. Marc. 17.4.

⁵⁷⁶ Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.27. Strabo does emphasise the significance of Heliopolis itself as a site symbolising the bygone glory of Pharaonic Egypt, but he does not dwell on the possible significance of the specific obelisks that Augustus took from there; he describes the other individual obelisks at the site as 'eaten by fire' or as 'cast down on the ground', indicating that the Ramses II and Psammetichos II obelisks may indeed have been the last two standing at the time. Cf. Iversen 1968, 142-143; Curran et al. 2009, 40-41.

⁵⁷⁷ Swetnam-Burland (2010, 143) asks a similar question from the reception perspective: 'The question is not whether Roman audiences grasped an obelisk's Egyptian significance as a resident of late Period Egypt would have but, rather, whether the Egyptian content of the monument, as Romans understood it, was significant to them.'

obelisks and associated with dedications to Egyptian solar deities.⁵⁷⁸ In regard to the obelisk's stylistic characteristics, we can recognise the finesse of execution of the remaining hieroglyphic carvings and figurative scenes on the pyramidion as typical of the Egyptian Late Period, which saw a revival of ancient traditions, buildings and sculptures, including traditional obelisks; especially the meticulous hieroglyphic style is reminiscent of archaic Egypt's by then already legendary ancient past.⁵⁷⁹ The Augustan additions of the granite base with Latin inscription and the gilded solar ball on top of the pyramidion did align with the traditional stylistic characteristics of obelisks; it was not uncommon for Egyptian obelisks to have a pyramidion sheathed in bronze or gold to reflect sunbeams, similarly to how the gilded ball on top of the Horologium obelisk would have done in Campus Martius.⁵⁸⁰ It is in regard to the obelisk's theme or subject-matter that its role as part of Augustan Rome becomes emphasised. Originally erected at Heliopolis, the obelisk's inscription lists Psammetichos II's achievements as pharaoh and demonstrates a revival of archaic Egyptian styles and themes, as well as functioning as a religious dedication to Atum and the solar deity Re-Harakhti (Re-Horus) that held specific importance at Heliopolis.⁵⁸¹ After the physical transportation of the obelisk from Heliopolis to Rome, Augustus still aligns to the original solar symbolism of the obelisk, like in the case of the Circus Maximus obelisk – however, the chosen expression of that solar symbolism as part of a typically Roman meridian device is quite a far cry from its original religious and political content. The obelisk was given an entirely new functional layer as object within Rome, which marked a change from its function as religious and political monument to an incorporated part of a meridian device. However, the political implications of the obelisk – the fact of bringing the obelisk to Rome from Egypt and subsequently making it part of Rome – dwell no less heavily on Augustus' achievements as the Heliopolitan obelisk originally dwelt on Psammetichos II's achievements. And, as typical for Augustan culture, also a layer of religious meaning remained connected with the obelisk in this new Campus Martius context. Hence, the original Egyptian status of the obelisk had simply become one layer of its new status as part of the urban landscape of Rome.

⁵⁷⁸ See Curran et. al 2007, 7-14.

⁵⁷⁹ Comparisons are often made between the hieroglyphic style and finesse of the Heliopolitan obelisk dedicated by Ramses II (Circus Maximus) and the Psammetichos II's Heliopolitan obelisk (Horologium), whereby the former obelisk's carvings appear notably less meticulous in execution – a point generally used to emphasise the Late Period revival of traditional archaic hieroglyphic style such as can be recognised on the latter obelisk. See: Spalinger 1978, 21-36; Arnold 1999, 74-79; Cooney 2000, 14-17; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 140.

⁵⁸⁰ Iversen 1968, 11-15; Habachi 1977, 3-6; Shaw 2003, 561-564; Curran et al. 2009, 14.

⁵⁸¹ Helck 1984, 67-72; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 139.

As implied by that latter statement, the physical context of the obelisk, once brought to Rome, is crucially linked to its newly gained significance as part of Rome. The close vicinity of the meridian device to Augustus' Mausoleum and the Ara Pacis is an obvious feat of urban planning.⁵⁸² The obelisks' shadow as meridian pointer literally touched the Campus Martius – a physical symbol, perhaps, of the promise of the Augustan peace programme as well as a physical reminder of Augustus' victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII that ended the civil war and made peace possible in the first place.⁵⁸³

To summarise, we have here a typical Late Period Egyptian obelisk in terms of its material form and style. Its theme of solar symbolism was an important component for its new physical Roman context, but it gained a remarkably altered content as physical part of the meridian device in Campus Martius; thus likewise gaining a specifically Augustan political significance, which was strongly emphasised because of its physical vicinity to other noteworthy elements of Augustus' urban planning programme, like the Mausoleum and Ara Pacis. The fusion of Roman and Egyptian elements in the example of this obelisk is less a case of interdependence, such as we saw in the case of the Circus Maximus obelisk, and more a case of altered function and significance of an original form. But the Horologium obelisk as a material object in itself, with its original Egyptian form and style and its new Roman function and context implied no less significance than its counterpart at the Circus Maximus as a physical symbol of Egypt that had not merely been brought to Rome as a foreign conquest, but that had deliberately been made part of Rome.

It is interesting to note that scholarship on the Horologium obelisk has first and foremost been concerned with the obelisk as part of the meridian device in Campus Martius and thus as a tool within Augustus' propaganda programme, often regarding it as reference to Egypt to serve that specifically Augustan purpose, at best.⁵⁸⁴ Several recent studies show a tendency of regarding the Horologium obelisk as a generic symbol for Egypt,⁵⁸⁵ or as a fully 'Romanised' symbol for a solar deity identifiable with Apollo in his capacity of Sungod based on native Italian solar cults and as part of a specific cosmic design for the

⁵⁸² Favro 1993, 230-259; Haselberger & Thein 2007, 169-179.

⁵⁸³ It has been argued that the obelisk's shadow would touch the Ara Pacis exactly on the day of Augustus' birthday, although this remains impossible to reconstruct. The mathematical details of the meridian device are subject to continuous academic debate; however, the (political) significance of the device's construction at Campus Martius, in itself, is fixed beyond any such specific details. See: Rodriguez-Almeida 1978, 195-212; Buchner 1982, 37; Schütz 1990, 432-457; Heslin 2007, 1-20; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 136.

⁵⁸⁴ Swetnam-Burland (2010, 138-150) mentions the lack of academic attention to the obelisk's Egyptian origin. It is true that the main bulk of existing scholarship is focused on the Campus Martius Horologium, while only briefly mentioning the obelisk's Egyptian context and history. Cf. D'Onofrio 1965, 280-291; Iversen 1968, 142-160; Rouillet 1972, 78-82; Buchner 1982; Schütz 1990, 432-457.

⁵⁸⁵ Kleiner 2005, 162-164 ('*Cleopatra and Rome*').

Augustan Campus Martius.⁵⁸⁶

However, the obelisk's Egyptian properties should not be so readily disregarded simply because of its Roman context and its altered function within that context. In fact, an awareness of the obelisk's material, stylistic and contextual origin is crucial in order to even approach its role as part of the urban landscape of Augustan Rome. Whether or not the many different kinds of people within Augustan Rome would have been aware of that specific Egyptian origin, and whether a deliberate connection between Augustus' and Psammetichos II's political achievements would be a viable hypothesis or a case of too much interpretation, the fact remains that the obelisk, as an object in itself, became part of Rome because of its Heliopolitan origin. Therefore, even more crucial is the fact that one cannot regard this obelisk solely as an Egyptian obelisk that has been 'exiled' to Rome, nor as a 'Romanised' object that still only held significance by being incorporated into Augustus' Rome. Its significance lies in the combined fact that it was Egyptian and that it became part of Rome.

3.9.3. The Horti Sallustiani obelisk

The obelisk that was recovered from the Horti Sallustiani measures 14 metres tall, and is carved from light rose Aswan granite (fig. 90).⁵⁸⁷ The execution and finish of the masonry is remarkably rough and unpolished. Despite its smaller size, the hieroglyphic inscriptions and figurative scenes on the obelisk are recognisable at least as an attempt to directly imitate the Heliopolitan obelisk that was erected at Circus Maximus in 10 BCE.

However, the execution of these hieroglyphs and figurative scenes is remarkably crude in comparison to the Heliopolitan original, and the carvings much less deep into the stone (fig. 91). Some of the hieroglyphs can be read as genuine characters and are indeed similar to those of the Circus Maximus, but that is certainly not the case for all. Quite a number of the hieroglyphic characters on this obelisk have the appearance as if a sculptor had simply copied them without understanding them.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Rehak 2006, 90-93 (*Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius*).

⁵⁸⁷ For an overview of interpretative scholarship on the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, see: D'Onofrio 1965, 268-79; Iversen 1968, 128-41; Coarelli 1984, 461-75; Iversen 1968, 128-144; Malaise 1972, 182, no. 338, 184-87; Roulet 1972, 71-72, nr. 71, fig. 84; Versluys 2002, 350; Curran et al. 2009, 194-96.

⁵⁸⁸ Malaise 1972, 182-183; Coarelli 1984, 463.



Fig. 90. Horti Sallustiani obelisk.
Currently at Trinità dei Monti,
Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde.

The figurative scenes on the lower sections of the obelisk's four sides provide an even more interesting case of comparison. First of all, the sequencing of the scenes is different and not symmetrical. The scene depicting the pharaoh offering to Amon that was found on the east and west sides of the Circus Maximus obelisk, is here placed on the north and east sides. And the scene that shows the pharaoh offering to Ra-Harakhti, which was found on the north and south sides of the Heliopolitan original, are here found on the west and south sides.

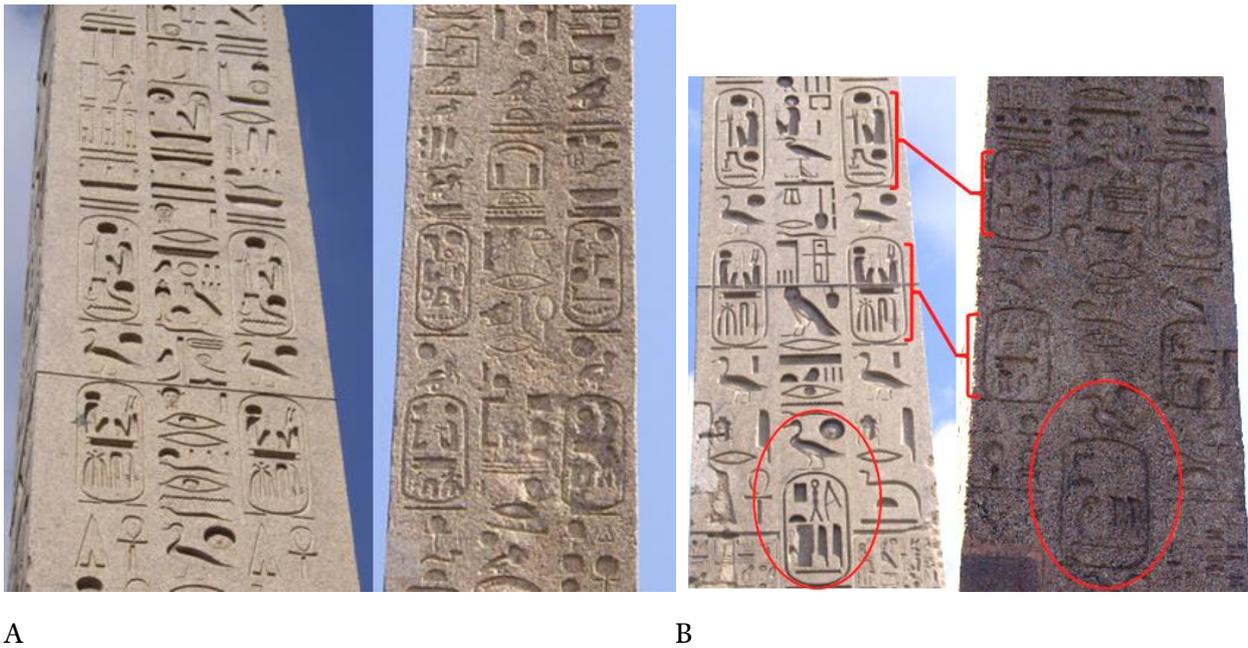


Fig. 91. Comparison of texture and hieroglyphs of the Heliopolis obelisk from Circus Maximus (left) (Piazza del Popolo, South side) and the Horti Sallustiani obelisk (Trinità dei Monti, North side). Photos and image analysis: M. van Aerde.

The scenes featuring of the pharaoh's offering to Amon on the north and east side are badly preserved and unfortunately they have not been documented in scholarship; nothing of the scene has survived on the east panel, and only fragmentarily remains on the north side, reducing the figures to barely more than silhouettes. The depictions of the pharaoh offering to Ra-Harakhti on the south and west sides of the obelisk, on the other hand, have either been fully preserved or significantly restored. The obelisk appears to have been well-known among Roman antiquarians during the Renaissance period; it is reported to have been lying in a ditch at the Porta Pinciana, the location of the Horti Sallustiani in ancient times, and easily accessible to observe.⁵⁸⁹ But despite this apparent visibility no records have been preserved that report any specific repairs or restorations done to this obelisk when it was initially moved by pope Clement XII in 1730 or when it was finally erected at the Trinità dei Monti by Pius VI in 1786.⁵⁹⁰ That leaves the obelisk itself as actual data – and when its remaining figurative scenes are studied more closely, especially compared to those of the Circus Maximus obelisk, the observations are remarkable.

On the west side of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, both the pharaoh and Ra-Harakhti are portrayed with Egyptian attributes and attire that are recognisable from those of their counterparts on the Circus

⁵⁸⁹ This is mentioned in the *Codex Einsidlensis* (Hülse, 1907); the 'Sallustianus' obelisk was known as a smaller Roman-period copy of the Circus Maximus obelisk. Cf. Iversen 1968, 59; Curran et al. 2009, 62.

⁵⁹⁰ Curran et al. 2009, 195.

Maximus obelisk (see fig. 92). Both figures are shown in profile and wear kilts. The pharaoh wears a *nemes* with *uraeus*, while offering two conical-shaped vials to a deity with a falcon-head, recognisable as Ra-Harakhti, portrayed as a tall male figure standing upright, crowned by a solar disc, and holding a staff in his right hand (which is not visible on the Circus Maximus obelisk in its current state) and a circular item in his left hand, which may be meant as an *ankh* attribute but cannot visually be recognised as such.



A

B

Fig. 92. A: Horti Sallustiani west side and Circus Maximus north side .B: Analysis of contrapposto. Photos: M. van Aerde.

In comparison to the Circus Maximus original, such as it remains today, these figures on the Horti Sallustiani obelisk are executed with more attention to detail and finesse. Interesting is the fact that these figures are portrayed in a manner that suggests a ‘three-dimensional’ effect, by means of perspective and posturing: the arms and legs of the kneeling pharaoh overlap in order to create this effect of perspective – a technique that is not applied in any examples of the XIXth dynasty Egyptian stylistic canon of the Circus Maximus original.⁵⁹¹ Moreover, the stance of Ra-Harakhti is clearly recognisable as a contrapposto, with the figure’s weight shifted entirely to its left leg, which places the line of its hips in a counter-parallel with the line of its shoulders (see fig 90b). This is a particular stylistic characteristic of Greek (Classical and Hellenistic) and Roman visual style in sculpture and relief.⁵⁹² Although instantly recognisable, the applied perspective is quite minimal and the in profile depiction of both figures seems to suggest that the artisan made an effort here to (re)create an appearance similar to that of the Circus

⁵⁹¹ Shaw 2003, 230-238; Schultz 2011, 313-344.

⁵⁹² For a comprehensive overview on the contrapposto from antiquity to Renaissance, see: Summers 1977, 336-361. On Hellenistic aesthetics of sculpture and relief, see most recently: Schultz 2011, 313-344; Porter 2011, 271-273.

Maximus obelisk. Another noteworthy detail in this vein is the remarkably naturalistic depiction of the deity's bare torso; the muscles and bone structure are clearly visible, depicted with a realistic and detailed anatomy, a style that cannot be recognised in sculpture or relief from New Kingdom Egypt.⁵⁹³ To summarise, in the case of this west figurative panel, the artisan appears to have tried to recreate the New Kingdom 'pharaonic' style of the Heliopolitan obelisk while reliant upon Roman-Hellenistic techniques to execute that style.

The depiction of the figurative scene on the south side of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, however, takes this fusion of styles, techniques and (thematic) attributes yet another step further (fig. 93).



A

B

Fig. 93. A: South side of Horti Sallustiani obelisk, depicting standing Ra-Harakhti and kneeling Pharaoh. B: South side of Circus Maximus obelisk, depicting seated [possibly originally standing, see 3.9.1.] Ra-Harakhti and kneeling Pharaoh. Photos: M. van Aerde.

The visual differences between the Heliopolitan original and its recreation are instantly striking. In terms of positioning, the standing Ra-Harakhti figure on the Horti Sallustiani obelisk may be another argument to propose that the deity on the Circus Maximus obelisk's south panel originally was standing, as well. Due to reconstruction work done on the Circus Maximus obelisk in 1587, as mentioned above, there is unfortunately no conclusive data available.⁵⁹⁴ Both the pharaoh and Ra-Harakhti are portrayed on the Horti Sallustiani obelisk according to what appears to be a Hellenistic style similar to the one on the west side of the obelisk in term of perspective and posturing; however, the technique used to execute this style

⁵⁹³ Iversen 1968, 65-66; Curran et al. 2009, 37.

⁵⁹⁴ D'Onofrio 1965, 173-177; Iversen 1968, 65-75, 136-139.s

is far more rudimentary than on the west panel. Ra-Harakhti's pose also seems to hint at a contrapposto, with the weight on the left leg, although the effect is considerably less successful than on the west side. In terms of attire and attributes, the deity has a falcon-head with solar disc and seems to be wearing a *shendit* kilt, but its shape is more similar to a Roman (military) kilt – an impression that is especially evoked in combination with the figure's tall boots, which also seem particularly Roman in appearance. The figure of the kneeling pharaoh evokes an even more Roman appearance, by means of its obviously Roman military kilt, and the fact that the *nemes* with uraeus, such as portrayed on the Circus Maximus obelisk, is here depicted in the shape of a Roman legionnaire's or centurion's helmet – complete with plume – with a paratactic cobra attached to its front. The arms and legs of the pharaoh overlap in order to create the effect of perspective, but the actual placing of the kneeling figure seems to have been miscalculated – with as result that a diagonal line, by way of an altered surface, has been carved underneath the Pharaoh's knees in order to still evoke the sense of kneeling. The strange placing and outwardly Roman attributes of this pharaoh figure may be due to reconstructions done to the obelisk in 1730 or 1786, as there is a difference in the colouring of the granite around the figure of the pharaoh, but there is no record of such reconstructions or alterations; there is no conclusive solution to whether the granite section with the 'Roman pharaoh' has been re-attached as reconstruction of the original Horti Sallustiani obelisk, or whether it was actually added as such in the eighteenth century to replace the original panel.⁵⁹⁵ In summary, on this south side of the obelisk we find a figurative scene that makes use of Hellenistic techniques (in a rudimentary manner) as well as specifically Roman attributes that appear to 'stand in' for the typically Egyptian attributes on the Heliopolitan original, such as the kilt and *nemes* and the figure's footwear.

When we place the figurative scenes from the Horti Sallustiani obelisk's west and south sides side by side for a comparison (fig. 94), the obvious visual difference seems to suggest that each has been carved by different artisans; there is a distinct variation in the quality of execution, even though there are stylistic similarities such as the use of contrapposto and perspective through overlap. The lack of data on both the obelisk's original manufacturing and its subsequent restoration in the eighteenth century, however, leaves us only speculation as to whether we might here concretely speak of separate artisans working on the same obelisk in Roman times or whether multiple alterations in later times has left us with this current impression.

⁵⁹⁵ D'Onofrio 1965, 268–79; Iversen 1968, 128–41; Curran et al. 2009, 195.

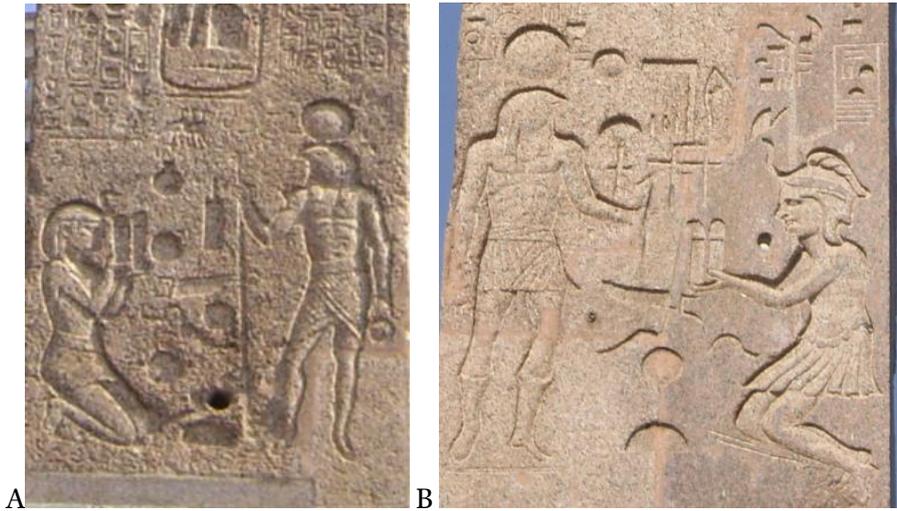


Fig. 94. A: West side of Horti Sallustiani obelisk.
B: South side of Horti Sallustiani obelisk. Photos: M. van Aerde.

Taking the above explored details into account, when we look at the material form of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, we find an obelisk carved from Aswan granite, the traditional material for Egyptian obelisks; albeit the finesse of the carving is of noticeably rougher quality as can be recognised from the obelisk's Heliopolitan example, as well as the originally Egyptian obelisk incorporated into Augustus' meridian device in Campus Martius. This implies the import of Egyptian material (Aswan granite) and perhaps an attempt to imitate or at least emulate a style reminiscent of Egyptian craftsmanship. In terms of the stylistic characteristics of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, we can recognise a similar attempt to imitate the New Kingdom Egyptian iconography of the original Heliopolitan obelisk at Circus Maximus; the positioning and attributes of the Pharaoh and Ra-Harakhti in the figurative scenes match the figurative scenes on the Circus Maximus original in a basic fashion – but they have the appearance of a Roman expression of these specific attributes. The use of *contrapposto* and overlap on both panels and the distinctly Roman clothing (military kilts, boots and legionnaire helmet) on the south panel are perhaps best described as a Roman emulation – or, at least, an attempted imitation – of specific Egyptian iconography and stylistic attributes. This links directly to the theme and content of the obelisk; which, first and foremost, appears to have been the imitation of the Heliopolitan obelisk at Circus Maximus. There is no concrete reason to state that the Roman attributes that can be recognised on the southern figurative scene might have indicated a deliberate Roman emulation of the Egyptian content of the Heliopolitan original; especially seeing that the figurative scene on the west side of the obelisk features all the Egyptian attributes and clothing as found on the original example, and seeing that the north and east sides have not been preserved at all. Several explanations spring to the interpreting mind; the artisan

who carved the scene on the south panel may simply have been less skilled in imitating the Circus Maximus original than the artisan who carved the scene on the west panel; or perhaps the inclusion of Roman attributes was intentional on several panels of the obelisk, which would make it into an emulation rather than an imitation of the Heliopolitan original (and, subsequently raise interesting questions of reception, namely whether or not it would indeed have mattered at all to –any or specific– viewers in Rome whether a depicted Pharaoh wore a military helmet with uraeus or a *nemes* with uraeus); or, alternatively, the Roman attributes on the south panel were added in the eighteenth century and the Horti Sallustiani would have featured only the imitated Egyptian attributes such a featured on the west panel (albeit expressed in a Roman-Hellenistic contrapposto and overlapping style). All these possible explanations, however, must remain in the realm of speculation due to our lack of data – while all three possibilities, even to regard them as such, offer a decidedly interesting perspective on the obelisk itself, and its hypothetical shifts of appearance and thus expressed content throughout time. When we, finally, look at the physical context of the obelisk, however, there are no grounds for refuting the fact that this obelisk was part of an entirely Roman context. The imported Aswan granite was shaped into an obelisk most likely in Rome (or its close vicinity) and its placement in the Horti Sallustiani, where we know that it remained until the eighteenth century, places it at the heart of elite Roman life – be that during the late Republican era or early Imperial times. The archaeological finds recovered from the Horti Sallustiani include four Egyptian sculptures as well as the obelisk; because of this ‘Egyptian set’ there have been interpretations of an Egyptian pavilion in the gardens,⁵⁹⁶ or the existence of a small Isis sanctuary on the Pincio hill.⁵⁹⁷ There is no data or even indication to support the latter interpretation, and even the suggestion of a specifically Egyptian-themed pavilion is not a necessary conclusion. It is not at all unlikely that the sculptures as well as the obelisk simply could have been part of any pavilion within these gardens, which also would have included Greek and Roman artworks. In terms of the problematic dating of this garden context, if the obelisk would have been part of a private elite garden pavilion during the Augustan period,⁵⁹⁸ this could be regarded as a reference to Augustus and as political statement – while simultaneously an alignment with the then current interest in Egyptian material culture introduced to Rome through the Egyptian components in Augustus’ visual culture. If the obelisk

⁵⁹⁶ Malaise 1971, 182–183, Nr. 338.

⁵⁹⁷ Coarelli 1982, 59.

⁵⁹⁸ Iversen 1968, 128–129; Roulet 1972, 71–72; Curran et al. 2009, 195–196.

were indeed part of a later Imperial garden pavilion⁵⁹⁹ –whether late Julian–Claudian or post–Severan– the political reference to the obelisk Augustus brought to Circus Maximus would have remained strong as such. Instead of directly referring to Augustus’ contemporary political programme, the obelisk would have referred to Augustus’ status as first Roman Emperor. Moreover, especially in later Imperial times, the obelisk at Circus Maximus would have already become a known visual concept as part of the Roman urban landscape – and therefore it would have been recognisable as a specifically Roman visual reference in the equally Roman context of an Imperial garden pavilion on the Pincio Hill. Because of the appearance of the obelisk in Circus Maximus, after all, the image of an obelisk had already become a specifically Roman –and specifically Augustan – component of Rome’s urban landscape.

Additionally, a comparison might be made with the examples from the Gardens of Maecenas discussed in section 3.4. There we encountered two statues made of Egyptian granite, of which we know one was imported from Egypt (the Apis bull), while the other is recognisable as a known Hellenistic type statue (the hunting dog). In the case of this obelisk, also part of a garden complex, we likewise see a use of granite imported from Egypt, but here combined with a manufacturing process in Rome, as opposed to an import, that attempted to replicate a more traditionallyc Egyptian kind of iconography, contrary to the manufacture of the hunting dog.

3.9.4. The Mausoleum obelisks

The first obelisk that is generally believed to have come from the western flank of the Mausoleum of Augustus stands 14.75 metres tall (without base), and can currently be found at Piazza dell’Esquilino in Rome (fig. 95A). The second obelisk stands 14.63 metres tall (without base), and is currently found at Piazza del Quirinale in Rome (fig 95B).

Both obelisks are entirely constructed of Aswan granite, but it is immediately evident that the granite surface of these obelisks has a rough and crude finesse and surface polish, comparable to the Horti Sallustiani obelisk and in contrast to the two Heliopolitan obelisks at Circus Maximus and the Campus Martius.

⁵⁹⁹ D’Onofrio 1965, 268–279; Iversen 1968, 128–129.



Fig. 95. A: Mausoleum obelisk, currently at Piazza dell'Esquilino in Rome.. B: Mausoleum obelisk, currently at Piazza del Quirinale in Rome. Photos: M. van Aerde.

Like in the case of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk this roughness does not appear to be a sign of later imposed damage or a lesser quality of granite, but rather the application of less meticulous polish and carving techniques. Especially because of the lack of any inscriptions (hieroglyphic or Latin) or figurative scenes on either of these two obelisks, the dull matted appearance and structure of the granite surface stands out.⁶⁰⁰ We know that when the Esquiline obelisk was rediscovered in 1527 it was damaged especially along its top side edges, but apart from several patches and blocks that seem to have been cut off at the base and that were reconstructed when Pope Sixtus V erected it on Piazza dell'Esquilino, the obelisk remains intact.⁶⁰¹ Whether or not caused by these damages at the top edges, it is remarkable that the obelisk's top has no pyramidion, but rather seems to have been cut off in a straight horizontal line. There is no data about whether this may have been done after its rediscovery in 1527, or whether this was part of its original design as part of the Mausoleum. The fact that the Quirinal obelisk has a directly similar flat top, without pyramidion, would seem to imply that the latter might have been the case, and the flat horizontal top would have been part of the Mausoleum's architectural design. There is even less

⁶⁰⁰ D'Onofrio 1965, 154-159; Iversen 1968, 47-54; De Vos 1980, 74. On the overall architecture of the Augustan Mausoleum, see extensively: Von Hesberg & Panciera 1994.

⁶⁰¹ D'Onofrio 1965, 260; Iversen 1968, 126; Curran et al. 2009, 46.

information available that can tell us about any possible restorations or alterations done to the Quirinal obelisk in later time; only that this obelisk was damaged mainly at the base and was thus reconstructed by Pope Pius VI.⁶⁰² However, the similarity of the two obelisks, in the finesse of their material and their lack of pyramidion, seems to indicate a connection between the two that is likely to have derived from such an architectural scheme.

The Mausoleum of Augustus is a much-debated topic; there are many different interpretations about its reconstruction while, in fact, we have very little actual information about this remarkable building. While completed in 28 BCE, Augustus commenced its construction already years prior to his civil war victory in 30 BCE. It is often argued that its shape and size were meant to evoke the tombs of great Hellenistic kings, such as the original ‘Mausoleum’, the tomb of Mausolos at Halicarnassus, and especially Alexander’s tomb in Alexandria (which, to date, has never been found).⁶⁰³ Other comparisons are made with ancient Greek or even Mycenaean *tholoi* tombs,⁶⁰⁴ as well as references to local Etruscan funerary customs.⁶⁰⁵ The significance of the two obelisks has been linked to Alexandria and subsequently Alexander’s tomb; although, as mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, there is no certainty whether the obelisks were originally added during the Augustan construction of the Mausoleum in 28 BCE. As is currently being argued more frequently, however, the inclusion of the obelisks in the original design of the Mausoleum under Augustus’ own reign does appear to be a very likely interpretation; based on studies of the actual building itself rather than the handful references in literary sources.⁶⁰⁶ In that case, the addition of obelisks from imported Aswan granite might have referred to Alexander’s tomb in Alexandria –which would also align with the tumulus design of the building. Yet, we know nothing concretely about the nature of Alexander’s tomb; hence any suggested association of these obelisks with that tomb can for now add nothing more than a general association with Alexandria and hence Egypt.

⁶⁰² Curran et al. 2009, 46

⁶⁰³ Comparisons and parallels between Augustus and Hellenistic kingship, in specific the Ptolemies and Alexander the Great, have been a recurring theme in scholarship that studies Augustan visual language; for example, at the Forum of Augustus (which includes several depictions of –conquered– Hellenistic kings) and in relation to the Hellenistic origins of Augustus’ mausoleum in the Campus Martius. Cf. Richard 1970, 370-388; Von Hesberg et al. 1994; Buchner 1996, 27 & 161-168; De Vos 1980, 74; Houby-Nielsen 1988, 116-128; Huzar 1988, 342-382; Zanker 1988, 76; Wallace-Hadrill 1998, 79-91; Idem. 1999, 283-313; Versluys 2002, 326-327, 357; Curran et al. 2009, 46; Erskine & Llewellyn-Jones 2011; Colvin 2011, 31-46.

⁶⁰⁴ On the *tholos* interpretation, see: Reeder, J.C., 1992. ‘Typology and ideology in the mausoleum of Augustus. Tumulus and tholos’, in: *Classical Antiquity* 11, 265-307.

⁶⁰⁵ On Etruscan architectural influences, see: Johnson, M. J. 1996. ‘The mausoleum of Augustus. Etruscan and other influences on its design’, in: Hall, J. F. (ed). *Etruscan Italy: Etruscan influences on the civilizations of Italy from antiquity to the modern era.* 216-239.

⁶⁰⁶ Zanker 1988, 76; Buchner 1996, 161-168; Swetnam-Burland 2010, 135-136.

Moreover, one cannot ignore the significance of the visual concept of the obelisks themselves, purely as *obelisks*. As mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, the erection of Egyptian obelisks in the squares of Rome had much impact on the appearance of the city during Augustus' reign, and the city's visual language was thus set to adapt to these changes, in order to remain Rome and become a new Rome at the same time. Egypt played a crucial role in this urban transformation, and the inclusion of obelisks –*especially* the inclusion of obelisks– was perhaps the most powerful visual reference that could be made to this new Augustan Rome; a Rome that contained tombs that could match those of Hellenistic kings, that perhaps even referred to local Etruscan customs, and that likewise included a very visual Egyptian component. These different elements can therefore not be regarded as closed-off 'cultural containers' that were put on display by Augustus within Rome – one by one, these were all significant (visual and material) components *as part of* Augustus' newly transformed city.

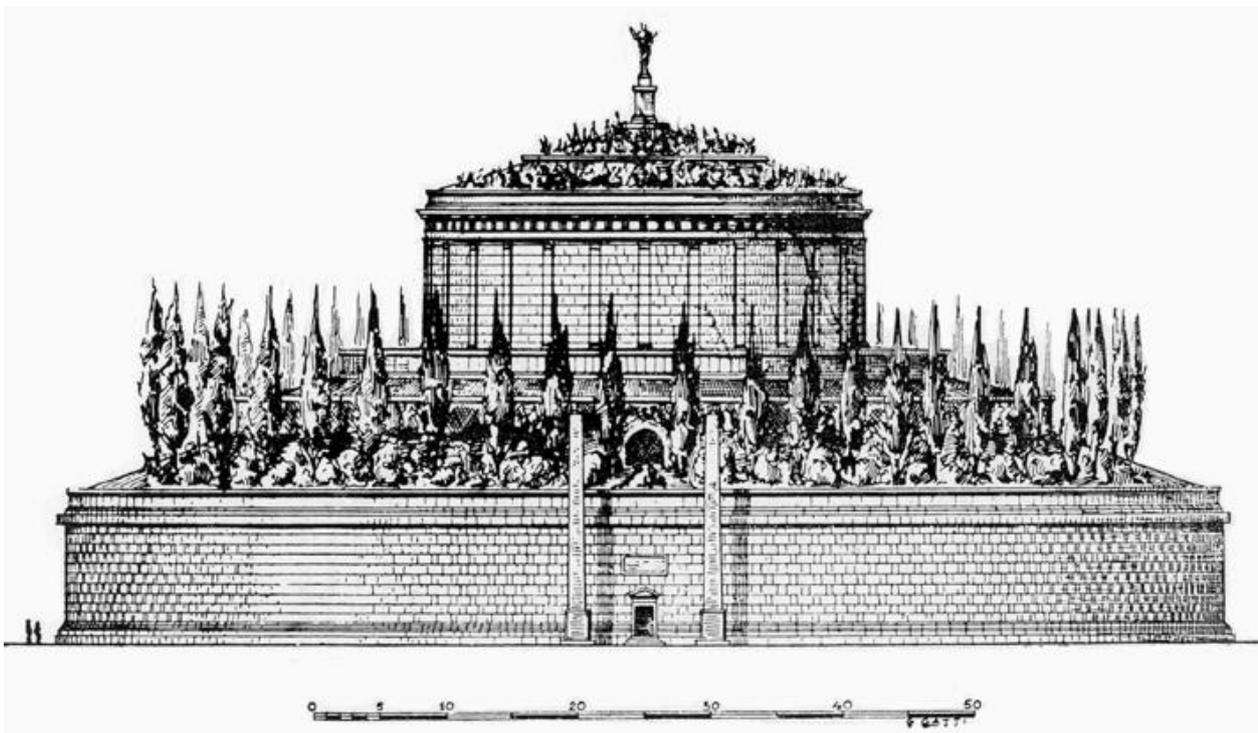


Fig. 96. Reconstructuon of the Mausoleum of Augustus. Source: Gatti 1938.

As such, we cannot really separate these two obelisks from the Mausoleum itself (see fig. 96.) In terms of their material form, they are sculptures of Aswan granite, however, with their flattened tops without pyramidion they do not have the traditional Egyptian shape. In terms of their stylistic characteristics, they may therefore be described as a Roman adaptation of the Egyptian obelisk form; this may have been

due to the fact that they were created as part of the Mausoleum building as a whole and not as obelisks per se, like the Horti Sallustiani obelisk. The lack of inscriptions and any kind of decoration or figurative depictions is likewise a deviation from the Egyptian stylistic criteria generally associated with obelisks, even in Augustan Rome itself (be it imported Egyptian obelisks or imitated ones).

This, too, may well be an architectural requirement of the Mausoleum building. This of course raises a similar question of reception, such as mentioned in regard to the figurative scenes of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk: would these ‘bare’ obelisks have appeared any less like obelisks at all to (any or specific) Roman eyes? Literary sources such as Ammianus Marcellinus,⁶⁰⁷ do describe them as obelisks, without any obvious strangeness. With that in mind, in terms of theme and content, the Egyptian significance of these obelisks does seem to be crucial. If they were indeed included into the original building programme of the Mausoleum during Augustus’ own reign (which I would deem the most likely), they will have strongly evoked the theme of Augustan visual language to which Egyptian forms and styles contributed a very important part – they would not have featured specifically in this Mausoleum’s architectural scheme as mere exotic additions to a mainly Hellenistic tomb, not while prominent parts of the urban landscape of Augustan Rome were being marked by obelisks in such a significant way, as discussed above, namely as contributing to Augustus’ newly transformed Rome rather than introducing exotic eccentricities to it.

If, on the other hand, these two obelisks were added to the Mausoleum in post-Augustan times, as some interpretations still maintain, that likewise suggests nonetheless that obelisks held a prominent significance as part of the visual language initiated by and associated throughout Imperial Roman history with Augustus – and their addition to the Mausoleum should thus be regarded as following that visual language after Augustus’ example even in later times. The significance of the context of these obelisks, therefore, does not change with the different datings that scholarship has argued for. As part of (or later added to) a building of obvious political importance to Augustus’ policies and ambitions – and appearing side by side with references to Hellenistic and perhaps even Etruscan traditions – the physical context of these two ‘bare’ obelisks is the entire Mausoleum as a whole, as well as the Mausoleum’s prominent context within the Campus Martius. And, as such, these two obelisks provide perhaps the most striking example of how both the physical form and the concept of obelisks, as obelisks, not only had become incorporated into but had become an actual (and important) *part* of the new Rome that Augustus

⁶⁰⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus 17.14.16.

initiated, with their own new variety of styles, themes and urban contexts. The obelisk, as obelisk, indeed, had its origin in ancient Egypt, but gained new workings and significance as part of Augustan Rome.

3.9.5. Interpretation

The above paragraphs have looked closely at the possible origins and characteristics of the five obelisks that appeared in the urban landscape of Augustan Rome. The remaining question in all cases is what these obelisks did as part of the city of Rome. Because this question is inseparably tied with the properties and (stylistic) characteristics of the obelisks and their physical contexts in Rome as discussed above in each individual case, this final paragraph will look at how these obelisks seen in context can shed further light upon the workings of the material culture within the Augustan cultural revolution as a whole: and more specifically, on the role of manifestations of Egypt as part of the at the time already thriving process of cultural change that Rome had undergone and was still undergoing with the arrival of these monoliths in the city.

In summary of the above, in Augustan Rome we find two Aswan granite obelisks that were originally from Egypt, Heliopolis, and were imported to Rome by order of Octavian, where they were erected at Circus Maximus and Campus Martius respectively. We find one obelisk that was made as an imitation of the imported Circus Maximus obelisk, from Aswan granite that was imported from Egypt most likely in raw form. And we find two more obelisks that were incorporated into the architectural scheme of the Mausoleum of Augustus, likewise of Roman manufacture but made of Aswan granite that, too, was most likely imported to Rome in raw format. The two examples of directly imported, originally Egyptian obelisks were both made part not only of specifically Roman contexts, but specifically Augustan contexts at that: the obelisk at Circus Maximus was placed in the direct sight of the Augustan Palatine complex, and the obelisk at Campus Martius was incorporated into the meridian device, or Horologium, that was constructed at Augustus' commission and left a specific Augustan mark on the Campus Martius as well. The two obelisks that were incorporated as part of the Mausoleum likewise, although not imported, became publically visible landmarks that specifically referred to Augustus. The Horti Sallustiani obelisk, however, created as imitation of one of these landmarks, was part of an elite private garden complex and

therefore not publically visible at all, but only accessible for an elite few. Within that elite private context it would still have been a strong reference to the original Circus Maximus obelisk, and thus indirectly also to Augustus – but as such it was rather an expanding result of Augustus' propaganda than a superimposed part of it.

This expansion, on the other hand, does seem to mark the actual success of that propaganda; if it would not have been incorporated into the repertoire of the city's elite circles –and henceforth into the wider spheres of Rome's material culture repertoire– the message, so to speak, would not have come across. As such, in all five examples presented here, the 'Augustan obelisk' became the foremost manifestations of Egypt that deliberately and directly could be associated with Augustus' principate and political success especially *because* these obelisk became integral parts of the city of Rome from the moment they arrived. It is interesting to note that the two obelisks from Heliopolis are the only known examples of manifestations of Egypt in Augustan Rome that were originally made in Egypt and directly imported from Egypt to Rome, apart from the Apis bull discovered at the Horti Maecenatis (paragraph 3.4.). And yet, neither of these obelisks is presented as 'import' upon arrival in Rome. Quite the contrary, they are deliberately made into integral parts of noteworthy public and (specifically Augustan) landmarks in the city.

Of course, as mentioned above, the act of bringing obelisks to Rome was in itself a very important component of their significance, in the first place. By accomplishing this feat, which no one in the known world had managed to achieve until then, Augustus demonstrates his surpassing power – which he presents to Rome as a demonstration of the power of Rome that he is serving and enabling. This act of transportation is naturally also crucial on a practical level; only because Augustus was able to achieve it could these obelisks effectively become part of his visual language and, subsequently, become incorporated into Rome's material culture repertoire as they did.

In terms of meaning, as explored above, especially in the case of the two Heliopolitan obelisks, here we once again find the layered flexibility so characteristic of Augustan material culture: while the obelisks become incorporated into a Roman race course or a meridian device, they are chosen for those contexts specifically because of their original Egyptian association with the sun. As part of the meridian device, the obelisk maintained at least by association the core of its original identity as physical personification of a sunbeam: in that capacity it was specifically fit to become part of Augustus' Horologium, effectively based on its original religious meaning from its context in Heliopolis, while at

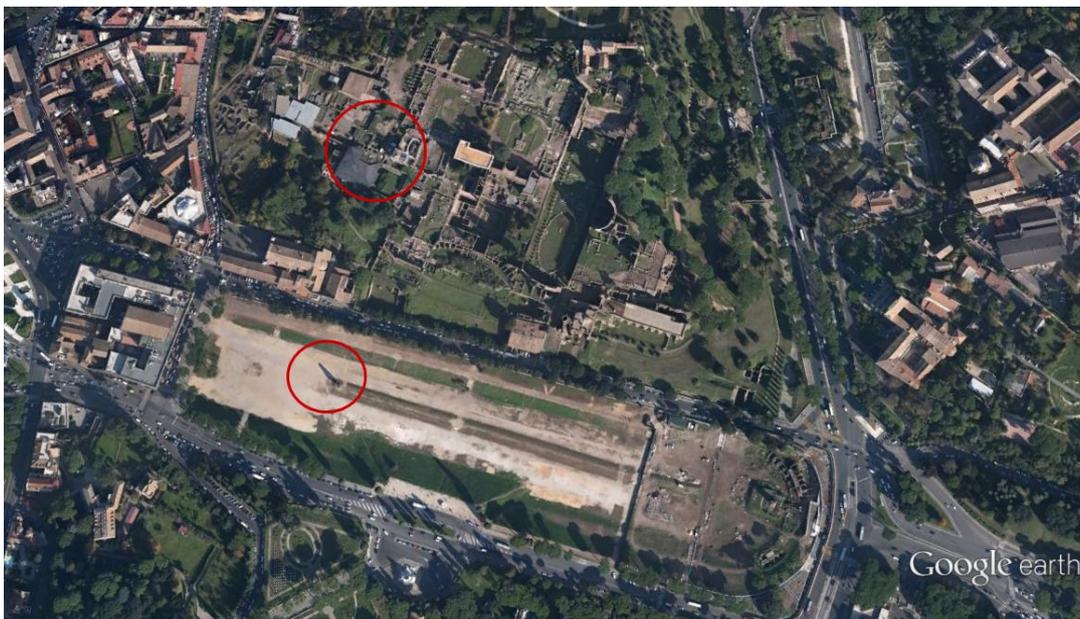
the same time considerably changing that meaning into something Roman, and fit especially for its new Roman context. As part of the Circus Maximus *spina*, the larger Heliopolitan obelisk likewise became one of the personifications of heavenly bodies (as befitted the traditionally Roman concept of a race course); this, too, had been its original identity in Egypt, as part of a very different religious context. But that was not its only association in that particular context. This obelisk's vicinity and visual association with the Apollo Palatinus temple, which was dedicated to Apollo in his capacity as Sungod, also alluded to that religious capacity it originally held (see fig. 97): albeit now connected to its new Roman context rather than to its Egyptian past.

As discussed above in relation to the obelisk's placing on the *spina* (paragraph 3.9.1.), there is plausible indication that it was placed on the west side in direct line of the Apollo Palatinus temple; placing the golden sphere on the obelisk in direct line of sight with the golden Sungod statue on the temple roof, for all to see from Circus Maximus. And if the obelisk would have been placed at the centre of the *spina* this would still be in sight of the Augustan Palatine and especially the Apollo temple, which at that time was the most prominent feature on the south slope. Moreover, as we saw above, the dedication on both obelisks' new pedestals present them 'as a gift' to the deity Sol, the Sungod. In the case of the Circus Maximus obelisk, especially, this presents a direct link to the Apollo Palatinus temple – most likely enhanced even more by the visual association of the golden temple and the golden solar sphere on the obelisk⁶⁰⁸ – adding yet another layer of meaning to the obelisk that could only hold sway because of its new physical context of Circus Maximus.

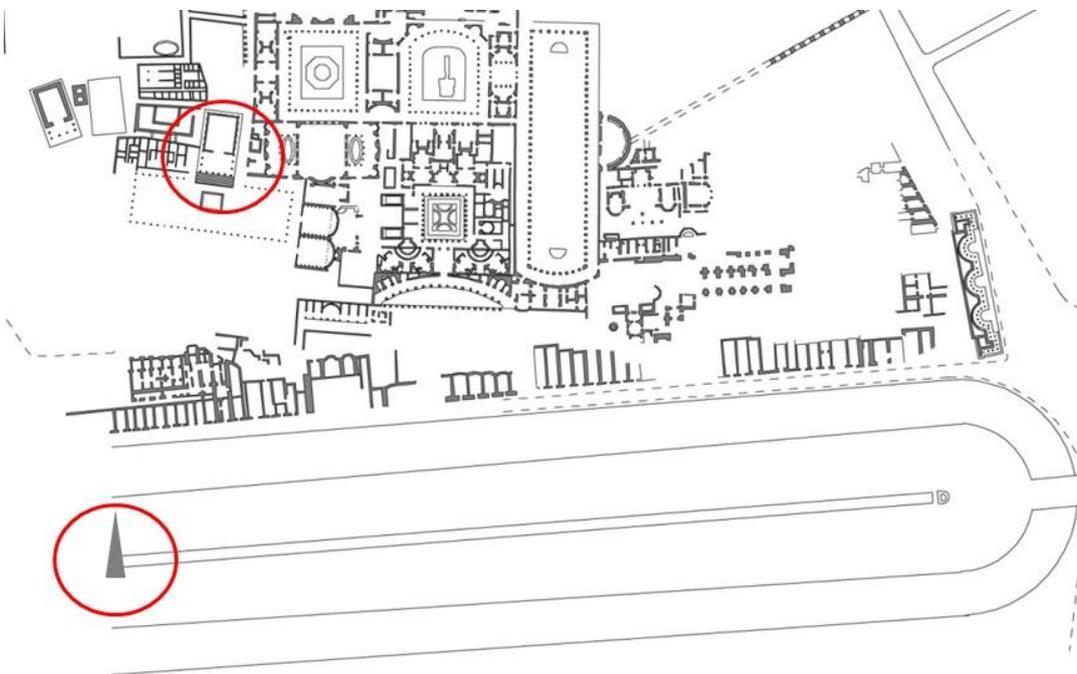
In other words, what these obelisks *did* as part of these public Augustan landmarks cannot be referred to in a single allusion. They alluded to Augustus' achievement of bringing them to Rome in the first place. They alluded to the victory over Egypt (and by association the end of the civil war) because of which manifestations of Egypt had become integral parts of Augustan material culture, and by 10 BCE were readily known throughout the city's available repertoire. As such, these obelisks referred to Egypt as a means to refer to Augustan Rome specifically. But at the same time they referred back to their original identity as Egyptian obelisks from Heliopolis, as personifications of the Sun – moreover, it was because that original identity that they were able to become part of these specific Roman contexts of the meridian

⁶⁰⁸ As discussed in paragraph 3.3.3. The visual vicinity (possibly even in the direct line of sight) of the golden temple's capitals and golden Sungod statue with the obelisk's golden solar sphere would have enhanced the meaning implied of the obelisk in connection to the temple of the Sungod. Now that the golden pigment of the temple design is confirmed (Zink & Piening 2009, see paragraph 3.3.2.) this adds another layer to the implications of the obelisk in that particular context of Circus Maximus, in direct sight of the Augustan Palatine.

device, the Circus' spina and the association with Apollo Palatinus temple, in the first place. This in fact makes them prime examples of the layered character of Augustan material culture: these obelisk actively shaped specifically Augustan contexts in Rome not merely as spoils of war, but as integrally incorporated into the urban landscape, by design and because of their inherent identity. They were not merely exhibited as something 'foreign' or 'Other'.



A



B

Fig. 97. Hypothetical location of the obelisk in Circus Maximus, in line of sight of Apollo Palatinus temple. A: Satellite image: Google Earth. B: Plan based on Sojc & Rheeder 2012. Analysis additions: M. van Aerde.

Not only does this become evident from a close study of these obelisks and what we can reconstruct about them in their Augustan contexts, but it is demonstrated more than anything by the fact that we see the image of obelisks appear in the wider spheres of material culture in Rome, shortly following their arrival. The first example of this is, of course, the (attempted) imitation of the Circus Maximus in the form of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk, discussed above. Moreover, the examples of obelisk depictions in cameo glass, as discussed in section 3.8.1., were made in glass workshops active in Rome from 15 BCE until 25 CE; this is quite closely connected, in terms of contemporaneity, with the arrival of the Heliopolitan obelisks in Rome in 10 BCE. We saw that obelisks in cameo glass could appear side by side with traditional Roman monuments such as altars on a single vessels;⁶⁰⁹ moreover, each example featured decorations recognisable (and sometimes even readable) as actual hieroglyphs.⁶¹⁰ This shows that they were considered suitable material for a typical type of Roman-made glassware, while at the same time their original appearance and characteristics were preserved to become part of the available repertoire; most likely especially because their Egyptian origin enabled them to imply meaning(s) as part of Rome's urban landscape. As we will see in the next section 3.10., the significance of this physical context likewise seems to have struck a chord. A sardonyx gem (discussed below in section 3.10.1.), shows us a recognisable obelisk with hieroglyphs that is surrounded by three race chariots. This combination was an entirely alien concept before the arrival of the Heliopolitan obelisk in Circus Maximus in 10 BCE. We know that the gem most likely dates from 10 BCE onwards, as well; as such, this seems to indicate that the visual concept of an Egyptian obelisk as part of the Circus Maximus –namely, an obelisk as integral part of a crucial landmark from Rome's urban landscape– had become part of the material cultural repertoire quickly following the arrival of the obelisk in Rome.⁶¹¹

Chronologically, this may paint an interesting picture: we know that Augustus had already planned the import of the two Heliopolitan obelisks at the same time as the construction of his Palatine complex, circa 28 BCE. Perhaps partially for this reason manifestations of Egypt, such as the Isiac and sphinx panels, and the golden façade were already chosen as part of the Apollo Palatinus temple complex – because as such they would match with the obelisk that was to follow (albeit many years later) in its close vicinity on the spina of Circus Maximus. Next, when the Heliopolitan obelisks actually arrive in 10

⁶⁰⁹ The so-called blue cameo glass Getty flask presents the most striking example of this; it is extensively discussed in paragraph 3.7.1.

⁶¹⁰ Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010, 841. See also: Van Aerde 2013, 11.

⁶¹¹ See: Van Aerde 2013, 11-12. This sardonyx gem, currently at The British Museum, is extensively discussed in paragraph 3.10.1.

BCE, we can see how their image, even specifically the image of the obelisk in the context of Circus Maximus, becomes incorporated into the then available material culture repertoire, spreading through typical Roman glass vessels and gems. Interestingly, if these two obelisks would have arrived in Rome in 28 BCE, the ‘evolution’ of their visual concept may not have been so successful so soon – at that time we only still find manifestations of Egypt as part of Augustus’ Palatine complex. But by 10 BCE manifestations of Egypt have become not only more numerous but also incorporated into the wider material culture repertoire. By this time we already find them as part of material culture associated with the city’s elite, in private gardens and villae; moreover, manifestations of Egypt can be recognised as integral parts of the repertoire available to Roman glass workshops by this time, and following those soon also as part of gems and jewellery. Because of this, it seems, the visual concept of obelisks as part of Rome (and specific Augustan landmarks in the city) was likewise readily incorporated into the material culture repertoire. The ‘evolution’ of this concept throughout the wider spheres of the city’s material culture (imitations in private gardens, appearance on glass vessels and on gem stones) was in fact enabled because of the delay of their arrival. By the time the Heliopolitan obelisks made it to Rome, manifestations of Egypt were already part of Rome – in other words, Rome was quite ready for them.

In the examples of the Horologium and especially the Circus Maximus obelisks we saw how they were incorporated into specific Roman contexts. In the example of the Horti Sallustiani obelisk we see how an original Egyptian obelisk was imitated, and how stylistically this resulted in remarkable differences, especially in the figurative scenes and ‘errors’ in the rendering of the hieroglyphs. However, in the examples from cameo glass we see that hieroglyphs, by 10 BCE and later, were rendered quite precisely. This may indicate a lack of skill or perhaps a lack of familiarity with these elements, which at least in the case of the cameo glass examples seemed part of the regularly available repertoire. The literal copying of an obelisk, however, would have been another matter also seeing the fact that instead of typical Roman glass techniques, this would have required working with Aswan granite, a material that was most likely not (yet) familiar to Roman workshops shortly after 10 BCE.

In the example from the Mausoleum obelisks, we see another form of emulation, rather than imitation. Whereas the image of obelisks gets adopted onto cameo glass side by side with Hellenistic scenes and typical Roman monuments, the obelisks here are changed themselves, devoid of hieroglyphs, before (and most likely because) they are incorporated into the architectural scheme of a single monumental building. This demonstrates yet another way in which the concept of ‘obelisk’ was

introduced to Rome, and what it could imply in terms of meaning. The imported obelisks became integral parts of specifically Augustan contexts (Circus Maximus associated with the Augustan Palatine, and the Campus Martius); the Horti Sallustiani obelisk marked the transference of the concept ‘obelisk’ into elite circles; the Mausoleum obelisks marked the emulation of the physical form ‘obelisk’ as part of a specific architectural scheme, not as singular monument. And finally, the appearance of obelisks in cameo glass vessels and gem stones, marked the incorporation of the ‘obelisk’ into the wider material culture repertoire of Rome, where it could find expression either in its traditional form while side by side with typically Roman iconography (cameo glass), or in specific reference to the obelisk as part of the Augustan urban landscape – as part of the Roman race course (sardonyx gem).

The Egyptian obelisk, so it seems, became a visual concept in Roman material culture that could be adopted into different spheres and contexts, wherein it could give expression to political as well as decorative manifestations of Egypt – or both simultaneously. Iversen spoke of obelisks in exile; but even though the two Heliopolitan obelisks were taken away from Egypt, from the moment of their arrival in Rome their image became such an integral part of the city’s urban landscape and subsequently a significant component as part of the Roman material culture repertoire, that it would appear that rather than being exiled to Rome, they continued to ‘evolve’ as part of Rome instead.

3.10. Gems and Jewellery

The majority of studies about Augustan material culture in relation to Rome's cultural revolution focus mainly and often exclusively on the large monuments that significantly transformed the city's appearance during this period. Studies by Zanker and Wallace-Hadrill, for example, mention smaller luxury items from the personal sphere only in reference to this wider process; as a factor of and result from the spread of material culture as part of Augustan policy.⁶¹² The objects themselves, mainly glass pastes and gems and small jewellery, are usually documented only in museum records and catalogues,⁶¹³ which present descriptions of their iconography but generally no interpretations regarding the objects' physical and/or socio-cultural contexts. The main reason for this is the fact that in almost all cases the provenance of these objects is simply unknown and impossible to deduce. Datings suggested are usually based solely on iconographical comparisons, and thus hypothetical and ambiguous. Many of the Roman gems and pieces of jewellery known today originate from funerary contexts; in such cases provenance can be reconstructed based on the data provided by human remains from these gravesites.⁶¹⁴ However, in the majority of cases the data about their original findspots no longer exist; most gems and jewellery have been auctioned, collected and exchanged numerous times since their discovery –with first records of trade often dating back as far as the Renaissance– and with only marginal information accompanying them on this route.⁶¹⁵

The examples of Roman cameo glass vessels that were discussed in paragraph 3.7. presented a particularly unique case, where the objects' provenance and dating could be traced back to Augustan Rome based on clear evidence. In the case of gems and jewellery, however, there is virtually no clear evidence available; when objects are linked to Augustan Rome this is generally by stylistic comparison only, and therefore cannot be categorised as such with any certainty. Nonetheless, gems and jewellery

⁶¹² Zanker 1986, 264-283, 290-293; Idem. 1987, 312-318; Galinsky 1996, 3-9; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 435-440.

⁶¹³ For example, catalogues and overviews on Roman fine glass and gems such as Froehner 1903; Cooney 1976; Richter 2006; Roberts et al. 2010.

⁶¹⁴ The dating of human remains, by means of carbon dating and/or isotope studies often leads to specific results; the material objects accompanying the remains can then be dated accordingly. Recent studies on the appearance and significance of jewellery and gems in Roman graves usually feature grave sites discovered in Roman provinces, such as Germany, Britain and the Balkan. See: Puttock 2002; Gulobović 2003, 79-90; Grasselt 2009, 167-188.

⁶¹⁵ Nowadays most of the information that is still known is accessible in museum records and databases. The ones consulted for this research were from The British Museum, The Thorvaldsens Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and additional records and archival material from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

are often suggested as having constituted a considerable part of material culture in the private sphere of Rome during the time of Augustus; Augustan glass gems in particular are often singled out because of their rich decoration, often with mythical and idyllic themes, and as such often presented in scholarship as illustrations of ‘Augustan classicism’ and private luxury of Rome’s elite circles.⁶¹⁶ However, herein examples of manifestations of Egypt are often lacking entirely or mentioned without any further exploration at all.

An overview of Egyptian iconography as part of Roman gems and jewellery was presented for the first time by Richard Veymiers in 2009.⁶¹⁷ Prior to his studies, only 150 examples were known of gems, cameos, seals and jewellery that featured Egyptian elements, but now 1218 of such objects have been catalogued. The most numerous examples were depictions of Serapis, Isis, Jupiter-Ammon and Harpocrates; with Serapis as by far the most prominent, constituting 75% of all objects.⁶¹⁸ But only in 20% of all cases is any information available about the objects’ provenance, which then usually relates to a funerary context.⁶¹⁹ Even less is known about their place of production; Veymiers suggests that the majority may have been produced in Alexandrian workshops based on the spread of these type of objects that was already prominent in Egypt, the Near East and the Cimmerian Bosphorus from the early 1st Century BCE, with a subsequent expansion and acceleration throughout the Roman Empire from the 1st Century CE onwards.⁶²⁰ However, as mentioned several times above, while Alexandria was certainly an important factor in and contributor to the Hellenistic material culture repertoire that was already widespread in the 1st Century BCE, this by no means implies that an object would necessarily have been *made* in Alexandria when it featured elements from this Hellenistic repertoire that may have once originated from Alexandria.⁶²¹ Especially from the late 1st Century BCE onwards there is no reason, based on manufacturing process or materials used, to suggest that these types of gems and jewellery could not have been manufactured in Roman workshops. The popularity of these types of small luxury items among the Augustan elite is frequently mentioned, hence it would not seem unlikely that this demand would have given rise to the production of these items in Rome as well – as we know from the case of cameo glass workshops in Rome, at least the technical knowledge to manufacture glass pasts and gems

⁶¹⁶ For example, Simon 1957; Idem. 1986, 153-154; Richter, 2006. See also: Zanker 1987, 141-143 (on private luxury as part of ‘Augustan classicism’).

⁶¹⁷ Veymiers 2009. See also: Veymiers 2006, 187-214.

⁶¹⁸ Veymiers 2009, 201-203.

⁶¹⁹ Veymiers 2009, 213.

⁶²⁰ Veymiers 2006, 187-188; Veymiers 2009, 213-215.

⁶²¹ Tybout 1985, 177-178; Queyrel 2012, 235-255. See also note 37.

was already available at this time.⁶²²

Although issues of provenance and production remain ambiguous, Veymiers' overview certainly demonstrates the variety of gems and jewellery with manifestations of Egypt that became widespread throughout the Hellenistic Mediterranean, and that became particularly popular in Roman circles from the late 1st Century BCE onwards. The two examples in fig. 98 give an impression of this variety; in both cases the provenance is unknown, while museum records suggest ca. early 1st Century CE Rome, based on stylistic criteria; in particular the style of portrayal of these deities that is considered typically Hellenistic in terms of attributes (Jupiter-Ammon's ramshorns and beard, Isis' gown, lotus crown and sistrum) and in terms of the naturalistic qualities (especially noted for Isis' contrapost pose, folded gown and attention to perspective).⁶²³ These type of attributes and naturalistic stylistic features can also be noted in the vast majority of Veymiers' overview; representative indeed, it seems, of a widespread Hellenistic repertoire spanning the Mediterranean, including both Rome and Egypt, from the 1st Century BCE onwards. Based on these stylistic characteristics, gems and jewellery such as these two examples in fig. 98 certainly would not look out of place in Augustan Rome, as their museum records suggest – but it is important to be aware that these characteristics alone cannot be regarded as sufficient criteria to name Augustan Rome as their province with any kind of certainty.



Fig. 98 A: glass paste featuring the head of Jupiter-Ammon. Copyright The Thorvaldsens Museum Copenhagen.
B: golden finger ring featuring Isis with lotus crown and sistrum. Copyright The Trustess of the British Museum.

⁶²² Robert et al. 2010, 25-31. See at length paragraph 3.7.

⁶²³ Gem: Cat. Nr. I1214 at The Thorvaldsens Museum of Art. Ring: BM Cat. Nr. 1772,0314.25. See: Marshall 1907, nr. 240; Walker & Higgs 2001, 321 nr. 339.

With the above in mind, this paragraph singles out three examples to discuss; two gems and one ring. The reason why these objects were selected is because they have so far not been studied or discussed before, and because they each present a case that deviates from the Hellenistic depictions of Isis, Serapis and Jupiter-Ammon that by far dominate the known repertoire of manifestations of Egypt in gems and jewellery. Museum records for each of these objects suggest Rome from the late 1st Century BCE–1st Century CE as possible provenance, but due to the lack of information in all three cases this remains a strictly hypothetical dating.

3.10.1. Obelisk gem

The first example discussed is a sardonyx gem from The British Museum collection, measuring 1.6cm x 1.3cm (fig. 99); the original gem was mounted into a golden ring during the nineteenth century, and it was purchased by the museum from the Charles Townley Collection in 1814.⁶²⁴ There is no information available about what may have been its original context, but the gem may have been part of a ring, or perhaps a pendant or part of an earring. The engraved decoration of the gem depicts an obelisk with a remarkable similarity to the obelisk featured on the blue cameo glass ‘Getty flask’, (discussed in section 3.7.1.1), which would imply a direct stylistic similarity with the Augustan cameo glass genre, and perhaps a connection to its manufacturing workshops.⁶²⁵ Humphrey’s description of the engraved scene, the only one in existence outside the museum catalogue, identifies it plainly as ‘three chariots (*bigae*) racing in a circle around a very large obelisk’.⁶²⁶ Although the gem is very small in size, the symbols on the obelisk are clearly visible and recognisable as (from the top) a *sistrum* rattle, a snake, and an ibis. Humphrey notes that the appearance of these images, depicted ‘as if they were hieroglyphs’, is unique among other gems depicting chariot scenes throughout the Roman world.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ BM Cat. Nr. G&R 1814,0704.1541 (gem 2129). This gem was listed in Walters 1926 (no.2129), and was shown and mentioned in Humphrey 1986 (204-207, fig. 104), but in neither cases a detailed description of the obelisk or chariots was given, nor is there any additional information about its manufacture or findspot. My recent article in The British Museum Journal of Studies of Ancient Egypt and Sudan (BMSAES vol. 20, 2013) attempted a more detailed interpretation of the iconography and possible context of the depicted scene. See: Van Aerde 2013, 12-13, fig. 10.

⁶²⁵ On the appearance of the obelisk and hieroglyphs on the Getty flask, see: see Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010, 839–46; Whitehouse 2007, 120; Van Aerde 2013, 11.

⁶²⁶ Humphrey 1986, 204.

⁶²⁷ Humphrey 1986, 207. In addition, Humphrey notes that there may be some similarity to a gem listed in Vollenweider 1976, (no. 410, pl. 112.4), but does not provide further details about the visual similarity beyond the depiction of an obelisk.



Fig. 99. Sardonyx gem featuring an obelisk and three racing chariots. Copyright the Trustees of the British Museum. Drawing of figurative scene: M. van Aerde.

Like on the Getty flask, these images appear to convey the traditional hieroglyphic inscription of an obelisk and seem to be presented as such, legible in a ‘symbolic’ manner.⁶²⁸ The most interesting aspect of this gem’s decoration is of course the fact that the obelisk is surrounded by three clearly distinguishable figures of racing chariots, each with a charioteer holding a whip and the chariot pulled by two galloping horses. The figures are depicted in the act of circling the obelisk, two chariots on the left side and one on the right, thus creating the illusion of a continuing chariot race around the monument. This presents a direct visual parallel for the Heliopolis obelisk that Augustus erected on the *Circus Maximus spina*, around which charioteers and horses would have raced on a regular basis (paragraphs 3.9.1. and 3.9.5). This particular visual impression, of chariots racing around an obelisk, became a distinct element of the urban landscape of Rome ever since its erection at Circus Maximus in 10 BCE. As such, this visual concept of an Egyptian obelisk entered Roman material culture via its introduction by Augustus as a public monument with prominent political significance (because of its direct vicinity to the Augustan Palatine complex as well as because of the role of the Circus Maximus as central gathering place for the people of Rome). As we saw with the example of the so-called Horti Sallustiani obelisk (section 3.9.3.) this visual image of the obelisk was directly imitated by a Roman manufacturer in the

⁶²⁸ Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010, 841; Van Aerde 2013, 11.

form of a copied obelisk. The image of an obelisk was incorporated, rather than separately copied, into two known examples of blue cameo glass vessels (as discussed in paragraph 3.7.1.1.), where it appeared side by side with Hellenistic decorative styles and Cupid figures. Likewise, this sardonyx gem displays the obelisk as an incorporated part of Roman fine arts: not only does it show an obelisk as part of a typically Roman gem, but it displays an obelisk *specifically* as part of a race course. As we saw in paragraph 3.9.1., before the placing of the obelisk in Circus Maximus obelisks had never been associated with chariot races at all: the combined image of obelisk and chariot was entirely unknown before 10 BCE (while after that it, in fact, came to be *the* image for Roman chariot races; as we saw in paragraph 3.9, obelisk became an actual requirement for a race course in response to Circus Maximus). On a practical level, this indicates that this gem can indeed effectively be dated after 10 BCE (coinciding with the popularity of glass and gem manufacturing in Rome). But the greatest value of it is the fact that it clearly demonstrates how the visual concept of the obelisk in Circus Maximus had, indeed, become a well-known component of Roman material culture – expressing here not an obelisk as monument *an sich*, but an obelisk as integral part of a specifically *Roman* (a specifically Augustan) urban context.

3.10.2. Nila gem

A second, remarkable gem can be found in The Thorvaldsens Museum of Art in Copenhagen Collection: a glass paste featuring the word 'NILA' (fig. 100).⁶²⁹ The piece measures 0.8cm x 1.0cm and is made of opaque cobalt blue glass. It was categorised in the museum records under the label 'thunderbolt' only. The piece was part of a larger selection categorised as Roman gems and pastes by the museum's first curator, Ludvig Müller, who oversaw the cataloguing of the pieces in 1847.⁶³⁰

Interestingly, the opque blue glass used in the production of this gem is the exact same type used for the blue cameo glass vessels discussed in section 3.7.1.1. This type is considered to be a specifically Roman type of glass, linked to specific manufacturing techniques that we know from studies about Roman workshops.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ Cat. Nr. I110 at The Thorvaldsens Museum of Art database. So far unpublished.

⁶³⁰ Most museum records on these pieces still date back to Müller's interpretations and descriptions. Personal communication with Julie Lejsgaard Chistensen, curator at The Thorvaldsens Museum.

⁶³¹ On material properties of Roman opque blue glass and its manufacturing processes, see: Grose 1989, 109-125; Roberts et al. 2010, 25-31. See more at length, paragraph 3.7.



Fig. 100 A and B: Glass paste featuring a scarab/thunderbolt and the word NILA. Copyright The Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen. Drawing by M. van Aerde.

This glass types is not widely known from Egypt, if at all; moreover, with Veymiers' argument for an Alexandrian provenance of these kind of gems in mind, no Alexandrian workshops are known that used similar manufacturing techniques.⁶³² Considering the typically Augustan production of blue cameo glass, it is not implausible to suggest that, perhaps, this opaque blue glass gem was made in a similar workshop – and that it therefore is not unlikely to date from Augustan Rome sometime between 15 BCE and 25 CE, during which time we know that these cameo glass workshops were active.⁶³³

The pieces' decorative elements, however, are highly different from what we saw in the cameo glass examples – and they likewise deviate remarkably from the overview of Egyptian gems as collected by Veymiers, mentioned above. Müller interpreted the scene as depicting a 'thunderbolt' in 1874, but gave no further description. The middle section of the gem might be identified as a visual rendering of a thunderbolt; the middle part being a 'handle', and the four pointed arrows represented an abstracts rendering of lightning. However, the same figure might also represent a scarab, albeit somewhat flattened and abstracted, with the four 'handles' depicting the insect's legs and the middle part its body. At the top of the fragment clearly the Latin inscription NILA can be made out, which refers to the river Nile. This might suggest that a connection with the image of a scarab, rather than a thunderbolt, in light of the gem's possible Egyptian theme as expressed mainly by the Nile reference. The lower inscription,

⁶³² Whitehouse 1991, 31; Roberts et al. 2010, 98-99. See also paragraph 3.7.

⁶³³ Roberts et al. 2010, 11; 23.

however, consists of the Greek capital letters gamma Γ, lambda Λ, and eta Η. The meaning of this combination is so far unknown. The interpretation of this piece certainly problematic, but especially the NILA inscription is noteworthy and, as far as we can tell at this point, unparalleled in Hellenistic gems of this kind. Could it have been a cheaper alternative for the ‘Egyptian gems’ with more elaborate decorations that became popular in Rome from this time onwards? If it can indeed be connected to the cameo glass workshops in Rome between 15 BCE and 25 CE, such as at least its material properties seem to suggest, this may not be an implausible interpretation.

3.10.3. Deities ring

The third example is a finger ring from The British Museum collection (fig.101). The piece measures 1.5cm in inner diameter, 1.8cm in outer diameter, and is made entirely of leaf gold.⁶³⁴



Fig. 101 A and B: Golden finger ring featuring three Egyptian figures. Copyright The Trustees of The British Museum.

The ring was bequeathed to The British Museum by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks in 1897, and hardly any information is known about it; the museum record dates it between the late 1st Century BCE and the early 1st Century CE, and categorises it among Roman jewellery. No additional explanations, studies or descriptions are provided.

⁶³⁴ BM Cat. Nr. 1917,0501.171. So far unpublished.

The ring itself is constructed out of three separate golden hoops with a slight curvature, separated by two inner sections consisting of a thin plain line flanked by two twisting, plaited patterns. The three hoops are joined at the back of the ring. Each loop comes with a flattened oval bezel engraved with a decorative figure rendered in a rather simple and crude style. But they are recognisable as three Egyptian deities or possibly pharaoh figures because of the added attributes and their in profile postures.⁶³⁵ However simply, each figure has been rendered in such a way that the feet and arms are presented visibly in profile, with poses reminiscent of traditional Egyptian iconography (comparable in terms of basic posture to several examples from blue cameo glass vessels discussed in paragraph 3.7.1.1.). The first figure, on the outer left hoop facing to the right wears a long garment and a crown or headgear with two long upright feather or pens; it is hard to derive if they are meant to refer to an *atef* crown, a *basileion*, or double crown (*pschent*). The right arm is lowered and the right hand holds an undefinable item, perhaps an *ankh* attribute. The left arm is slightly raised and the right hand holds a long staff recognisable as a traditional Egyptian *was* sceptre by its crossed bar at the top, which refers to a stylised animal head and could be carried by deities.⁶³⁶ The middle figure also wears a long garment and a crown or headgear with three upright pens or feathers; which may perhaps here be interpreted as *basileion*, in combination with the long gown, to refer to the goddess Isis (such as also featured in the wall painting from the Villa della Farnesina, section 3.5.1.). Both arms are raised at shoulder level; the right hand holds an undefinable object, and the left hand holds what, judging by its shape, might be identified as a *sistrum* rattle, also a typical Isiac attribute. While the arms are rendered in profile, it is unclear whether the figure faces to the right or left. The figure on the right outer hoop, however, clearly faces to the left. Based on the recognisable short kilt, this figure seems to be a male. He wears a crown or headgear with two long upright feathers similar to the figure on the left hoop; the positioning of his arms is also a direct mirror image of the left figure. He carries a reversed *was* sceptre in his right hand, and a smaller slightly triangular amulet in his left hand that is hard to identify.

Very different from the golden ring shown in fig.98, which represents the majority of rings known that display Egyptian elements,⁶³⁷ the style used here for the rendering of these minute figures is certainly recognisable as at least attempting to recreate the rigid erect pose and in profile positioning of traditional Egyptian iconography – such as also seen in the traditional offering scenes in blue cameo glass vessels

⁶³⁵ Personal communication with British Museum curators Richard Parkinson and Paul Roberts in 2011, London.

⁶³⁶ Gilula 1974, 43-44; Brown 2010, 103-114.

⁶³⁷ Veymiers 2009, 205.

(paragraph 3.7.1.1.). The type of leaf gold used is directly comparable to the two above examples, however, and especially the way the different hoops and twisted bands in between are joined together is very similar to how the gold wires were joined in the example with the Isiac cobra explored above. This suggests that the ring was no different in terms of material and manufacture, and that the difference in style seems related rather to a specific choices from the repertoire of stylistic variations available to jewellers at the time, such as also seen above with the stylistic variety in glass pastes and gems. Could it be that the depiction of deities that became popular especially in Ptolemaic Egypt, like Isis and Serapis, required a Hellenistic style from that repertoire, such as the bulk of Veymiers' overview has shown, while more traditional offering scenes and Egyptian deities were instead rendered in attempts to imitate rigid and profile posturing from traditional iconography, combined with traditional attributes such as the *was* sceptres, as featured here? If the middle figure of this piece, however, can also be interpreted as an Isiac figure based on headgear and possibly sistrum, it would indicate that this is a rendering of Isis as part of the more traditional Egyptian pantheon, because here she is flanked by likewise traditional deities/pharaohs with *was* sceptre. This would present a very interesting example of the flexibility of the available stylistic elements and the reasons why they are chosen or not, in relation to different themes of depictions that are nonetheless similar in terms of material, manufacturing and original context. It is noteworthy, moreover, that in Egypt itself jewellery depicting deities or pharaohs is extremely rare, even during Roman times; virtually no parallels can be found. This may be an additional argument for the fact that this ring was, indeed, of Roman manufacture, and that the Roman material culture repertoire, including its specific jewellery repertoire, featured Egyptian deity scenes, such as found here.

3.10.4. Interpretation

As mentioned above, due to insufficient information about the dating and provenance of most known examples of Roman gems and jewellery, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive conclusion about manifestations of Egypt in relation to these kind of objects. As Veymiers' studies have shown, however, we do know that the vast majority of known examples feature deity portraits, especially Serapis, Isis and Jupiter-Ammon, usually presented in a realistic portraiture style known recognisable as Hellenistic. The three examples highlighted in this paragraph each deviate from this overall image. The sardonyx gem

from The British Museum presents a seemingly unique case in displaying a specific obelisk that had become a well-known part of the urban landscape of Augustan Rome. So far, no direct parallels are known. Secondly, the NILA gem may be linked to Roman workshops through its material properties and manufacturing, but its decoration presents a cryptic case. The main question it raises is whether the word 'Nila' in itself would have been regarded as a manifestation of Egypt. And if the figurative element can be interpreted as a lightning bolt, usually depicted as the attribute of Jupiter, why would any association with Egypt be chosen here? Also in this case no parallels are as yet known. The third example, the deities ring, raises a question similar to the ones we saw in the case of several cameo glass vessels: when can we speak of traditional Egyptian scenes and when of Hellenistic renderings? Is the context of a deity scene, which may be the case here, important in such a differentiation? In the case of cameo glass it seemed to be – more traditional Egyptian iconography and attributes (such as *nemes*, kilts, and *was* sceptres) were chosen in relation to deity scenes. At the same time, these scenes were nonetheless placed side by side on the same vessel with wholly unrelated ornamental and Hellenistic features, too.

While these individual cases cannot result in comprehensive conclusions, they nonetheless show the apparent diversity of manifestations of Egypt available to the repertoire of such smaller objects, similar to what we saw in the case of cameo glass. As explored by Zanker and Wallace-Hadrill, personal luxury items like gems and jewellery appear to have been a result of the general rise in prosperity (and lack of civil conflict) that came with Augustus' political programme.⁶³⁸ This is also what Galinsky refers to in his point about the Augustan 'evolution'; the ability of the wider citizen body to produce, trade, emulate and change these kind of fashion objects outside of (even if initially inspired by) a public political sphere.⁶³⁹ At the same time, while not deliberately instigated to that purpose, such small personal objects could become enabling factors for public monuments (like the Augustan Palatine and the Ara Pacis) to continue to hold meaning within that urban landscape.⁶⁴⁰ The gem with the obelisk surrounded by chariots is a prime example of this: the visual concept of the obelisk as part of Circus Maximus gets incorporated into a small personal object, referring to a landmark of Rome's urban landscape, thus while it is in fact a response to it, it likewise *enables* the meaning of that landmark to be expressed and emphasised. As we have seen, manifestations of Egypt were not unknown to Roman material culture

⁶³⁸ Zanker 1986, 264-283, 290-293; Idem. 1987, 312-318; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 435-440.

⁶³⁹ Galinsky 1996, 3.

⁶⁴⁰ Favro 1996, 2-19, 79-142.

prior to their incorporation in Augustus' propaganda; but a lot of them *were* new as part of the material culture of the city of Rome itself (think of the impact of the imported obelisks, as discussed in paragraph 3.9.). Hence their appearance such as we saw in cameo glass vessels and now also in this sardonyx gem, indicates that these manifestations of Egypt had, in fact, become representations of the city of Rome itself.

Even from as few as examples as these, it becomes evident that at least those manifestations of Egypt known from Augustan gems and jewellery cannot be regarded at all as so-called 'exotic outsiders' based on their actual material properties and stylistic execution. As we saw, the manufacturing techniques and types of glass, gemstone and metals used in these examples is similar to what we encounter in the more frequent examples with Augustan gems and jewellery. This indicates that there is no reason to suggest that these gems and pieces of jewellery would not have originated from the same glass and jewellery workshops from Rome at the time – quite on the contrary, it seems to indicate that they did.

Even from the few examples explored above, it becomes clear that different styles appear to have been used to fit specifically with different kinds of topics depicted: Hellenistic renderings of anatomy, posture, clothing and attributes in the depictions of the deities Serapis, Isis and Jupiter-Ammon that subsequently became well-known in the Roman world, while for traditional offering scenes featuring (other) ancient Egyptian deities we find at least attempts to approach more traditional Egyptian iconography, with erect poses in profile and recognisable traditional Egyptian attributes and clothing. All these elements had apparently become part of the repertoire that was available to the Roman workshops that crafted these gems and pieces of jewellery – similar to the cameo glass workshops discussed in paragraph 3.7. The examples of the sardonyx gem and the deities ring seem to indicate that these elements were not chosen at random. In each example they represented a specific reference; the (very specific) Circus Maximus landmark in Rome in the case of the gem, and what appears to be a traditional offering scene that required traditional Egyptian components, in the case of the ring. However, the example of the NILA gem seems to indicate the opposite: a combination of unrelated and perhaps even entirely nonsensical elements. And this especially seems to be a sign of the 'evolution' of material culture: when these manifestations of Egypt developed beyond deliberate (public) propaganda, this appeared to mainly lead to certain specific types of reoccurring decorative scenes (Hellenistic Egyptian deity portraits, obelisks, traditional Egyptian offering scenes), but at the same time it is likely to have opened the door for less specific or even quite random manifestations of Egypt (like the NILA gem), too.

3.11. The Forum of Augustus

Completed and dedicated in 2 BCE, the Forum of Augustus is often considered the culmination of Augustan *auctoritas* expressed through material culture, exuding a true ‘grandeur of empire’.⁶⁴¹ Pliny the Elder describes its ‘architectural miracles’ and is particularly generous in his praise, referring to the Augustan Forum as one of the most beautiful buildings of the known world.⁶⁴² Plans for the Forum were probably made sometime between 29 – 20 BCE, even though construction began much later, intending it to align with the Forum of Julius Caesar as well as the Forum Romanum itself which, in terms of size and sheer grandeur, the Forum of Augustus came to rival immediately upon completion (fig. 102).⁶⁴³

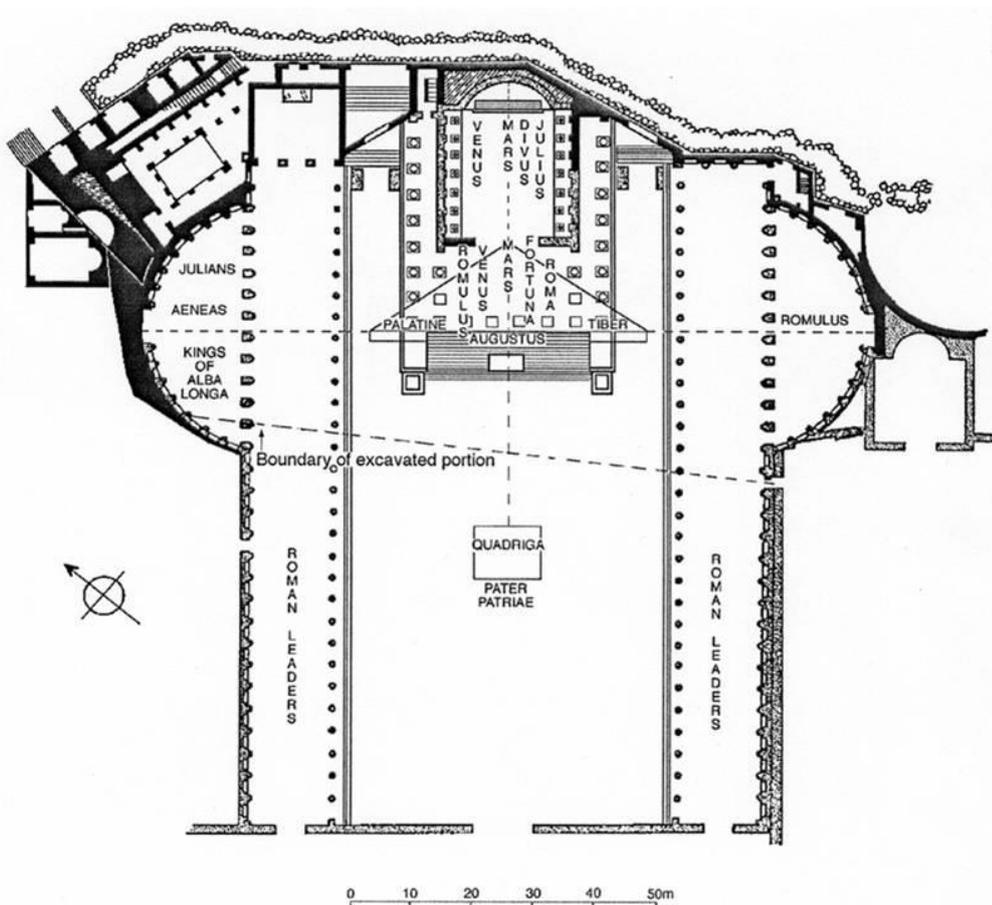


Fig. 102. Plan of the Forum of Augustus. Source: Galinsky 1997, 198 pl. 111.

⁶⁴¹ Galinsky 1997, 197.

⁶⁴² Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.101-102.

⁶⁴³ For an overview of scholarship of the political and architectural importance of the Forum of Augustus in the context of Rome's urban landscape, see: Earl 1967, 44ff; Wiseman 1971, 107ff; Ganzert 1985, 201-219; Idem. 1990, 538-541; Simon 1986, 46-51; Hölscher 1989, 327-333; Luce 1990, 123-138; La Rocca et al. 1995; Galinsky 1997, 197-213; Spannagel 1999; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 239.

In discussing the concept of the Forum, scholarship has focused extensively on Greek influences in terms of architectural style as well as decorative choices, and the meanings implied by imitating, emulating and surpassing Greek examples in the context of Augustus' political propaganda.⁶⁴⁴ As marked in fig.102, the statues and reliefs from the Forum portray Augustus' claimed mythical lineage, with reference to Mars, Venus and Romulus, while at the same time the solidity of Roman *mores* would be emphasised through the 'Classical scarcity' of the overall design and through the depictions of conquered barbarian (Hellenistic) kings in the colonnades in complete contrast to Augustus' projected self-image of a *auctoritas* opposed to *potestas* (the barbaric kings' absolute potency in contrast to Augustus' Senate-decreed and self-earned powers), not to mention the contrast of Augustus' absolute military and political success as opposed to the defeat of these barbaric kings: in this light, the Forum of Augustus as a whole deliberately marks the end of such traditional Hellenistic-style kingship while at the same time expressing the (grandeur and) beginning of a different kind of *imperium* altogether: namely that of Augustus' Principate.⁶⁴⁵

Ganzert points out how 'Occidental' elements are effectively used to this effect (in order to enhance the image of Augustus himself) in the decorative scheme of the Forum, referring mainly to the depictions of Hellenistic kings.⁶⁴⁶ Reference to manifestations of Egypt, however, are barely if at all mentioned in studies so far. But they can certainly be recognised, in the form of manifestation quite similar to what we saw at the Ara Pacis and, much earlier, the Apollo Palatinus temple complex, as will be explored in this paragraph.

3.11.1. Manifestations of Egypt at the Forum of Augustus

The first manifestation of Egypt has the form of several large decorative shield reliefs cut entirely from *luna* marble from the upper portico of the Forum, depicting the head of Jupiter-Ammon (fig. 103). Only one of the portraits has been preserved mostly intact, as part of the shield measuring circa half a meter in diameter; but there are numerous fragments of other examples, all very similar and recognisable by the

⁶⁴⁴ Hölscher 1989, 327-333.

⁶⁴⁵ See esp: Simon 1986, 46-51; Luce 1990, 123-138; Galinsky 1997, 197-213.

⁶⁴⁶ Ganzert 1990, 538-541.

bushy beard and hair, and the rams-horns protruding from the brown and hair, rendered in a realistic style with much attention to anatomic detail and a quite lush evocation of movement in the hair and the wrinkles of the brow and face.⁶⁴⁷ In the examples (such as fig. 103B) only fragmentary remains of the horns are still visible, at the side of the brow, recognisable by their rough texture.

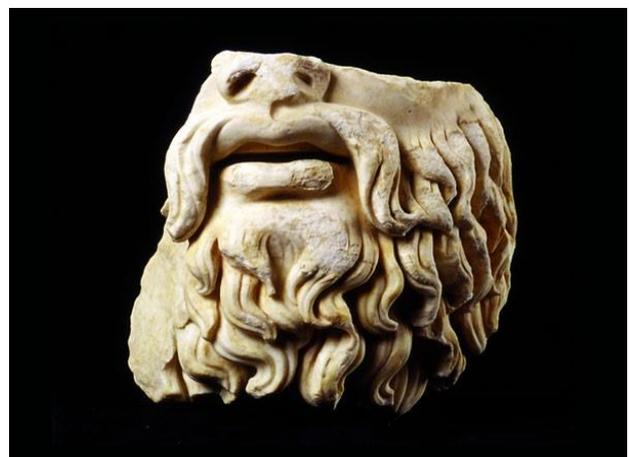


A

Fig. 103 A: Partially reconstructed shield relief featuring Jupiter-Ammon. B: fragments of Jupiter-Ammon portrait (upper part). C: fragments of Jupiter-Ammon portrait (lower part) exhibition. All images copyright Soprintendeza Archeologica di Roma. (B and C: La rocca et al. Cat. 42-43).



B



C

In above mentioned studies the appearance of Jupiter-Ammon at the Forum of Augustus is generally seen as a reference to Alexander the Great, who chose Jupiter-Ammon as his personal deity upon his arrival in Egypt; the parallel with Augustus would be used to enhance his elevated status above other

⁶⁴⁷ La Rocca et al. 1995, 46-47, 77. Inventory Nr. FA 2513; FA 3201a; FC 4673; Catalogue ref. 42-43.

Hellenistic kings, depicted in reliefs nearby.⁶⁴⁸ As also mentioned above, the deity Jupiter-Ammon was revered throughout North Africa and Siwa, so a specific identification with Egypt (apart from the Alexandrian association) should be regarded with some nuance.⁶⁴⁹ Especially seeing the fact that any reference to its appearance as a manifestation of Egypt is lacking: the combination of the portraits' recognisable detailed Hellenistic stylistic rendering and the association with Alexander appears to be the predominant interpretation. However, the appearance of Jupiter-Ammon here is comparable to the terracotta antefixes that were recovered from the Apollo Palatinus temple complex, discussed in section 3.3.1., which were featured alongside depictions of relief panels featuring Isiac figures and sphinxes and possible also Bes antefixes (see fig. 104A). At the Forum of Augustus there seem to be no other recognisable figurative elements in the vicinity of Jupiter-Ammon's portrait.



Fig. 104 A: Terracotta antefix depicting Jupiter-Ammon. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

B: Glass paste featuring the head of Jupiter-Ammon. Copyright The Thorvaldsens Museum Copenhagen.

However, as we saw in section 3.10.1., from around 10 BCE onwards, depictions of Jupiter-Ammon became well-known topics for objects from the personal sphere, like gems and ring stones, often paired with Isiac and Serapis figures (fig. 104B). By 2 BCE, when the Forum of Augustus became a public space in the city, the image of Jupiter-Ammon depicted in a detailed Hellenistic style would already have been a

⁶⁴⁸ Ganzert 1990, 538-541; Galinsky 1997, 207-208.

⁶⁴⁹ See section 3.3.2.

familiar and integral part of the material culture repertoire of the city of Rome at that time, and as such perhaps also in association with other manifestations of Egypt, such as we saw at the Palatine. Even though at the Forum it was not accompanied by other recognisable Egyptian figures, it is possible that the portrait of Jupiter-Ammon would have been recognised (at least at some level) as a manifestation of Egypt based on its already existing manifestations throughout very different spheres of the city's material culture. Alternatively, it is likewise possible that the image of Jupiter-Ammon had already become such an integral part of the material culture repertoire available to Rome at that time, that its presence may not have been remarked as anything out of the ordinary at all. However, the prominent place of these shield reliefs at the Forum of Augustus suggests a deliberately chosen significance rather than a merely decorative purpose, as befits the political momentum of the Forum as a whole. But whether also any specific Egyptian association was connected to that significance here, is far less certain.

The second kind of manifestations of Egypt is comparable to what we encountered in the design scheme of the Ara Pacis; there are several preserved examples from the Forum of Augustus, all from Luna marble, especially from what can be reconstructed as along the central colonnade around the main square, that are recognisable as ornamental stylised lotus and uraeus pitcher motifs as part of friezes and small lotus bud motifs depicted among acanthus leaves as part of the large capitals of the columns that stood spaced around the main square, facing the temple of Mars Ultor (fig. 105).⁶⁵⁰



105 A



105 B

Fig. 105 A: Frieze featuring lotus motifs among acanthus leaves. B: capital featuring lotus bud among acanthus leaves.

Copyright Soprintendeza Archeologica di Roma. (A-C: La Rocca et al. Cat. 78-79. D: photo M. van Aerde).

⁶⁵⁰ La Rocca et al. 1995, 78-79; 226-227. Inventory nr. FA 26, FA 499, FA 696 (friezes); FA 75 (capital).



Fig. 105 C and D: small, upper frieze bands featuring stylised lotus and uraeus pitchers motifs. Copyright Soprintendeza Archeologica di Roma. (A-C: La Rocca et al. Cat. 78-79, D: photo M. van Aerde).

It is interesting to note that the small ornamental frieze with lotus and uraeus pitcher motifs (small lower band in fig. 105C and D) is comparable to several ornamental friezes encountered as part of the wall paintings of the upper cubiculum at the House of Augustus on the Palatine as discussed in section 3.1.1. (see fig.106). In other examples of comparable panels, also from the Forum of Augustus, ovuli or rosette patterns are chosen instead, but these smaller friezes likewise feature throughout the decorative scheme.



Fig. 106. Detail of ornamental frieze with lotus and uraeus pitcher motifs, House of Augustus on the Palatine. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Rather than a specifically highlighted manifestation of Egypt, these motifs here appear as fully integrated elements (and often remarkably subtly rendered as such) representative especially of the Augustan material culture repertoire which found its peak in the construction of the Forum of Augustus. As such, these examples are very similar to the ornamental motifs from the inner wall of the Ara Pacis, as discussed in section 3.8.1). In addition to these, fragmentary examples of wall painting have also been

recovered from what may have been the interior of the temple of Mars Ultor (fig. 107).⁶⁵¹

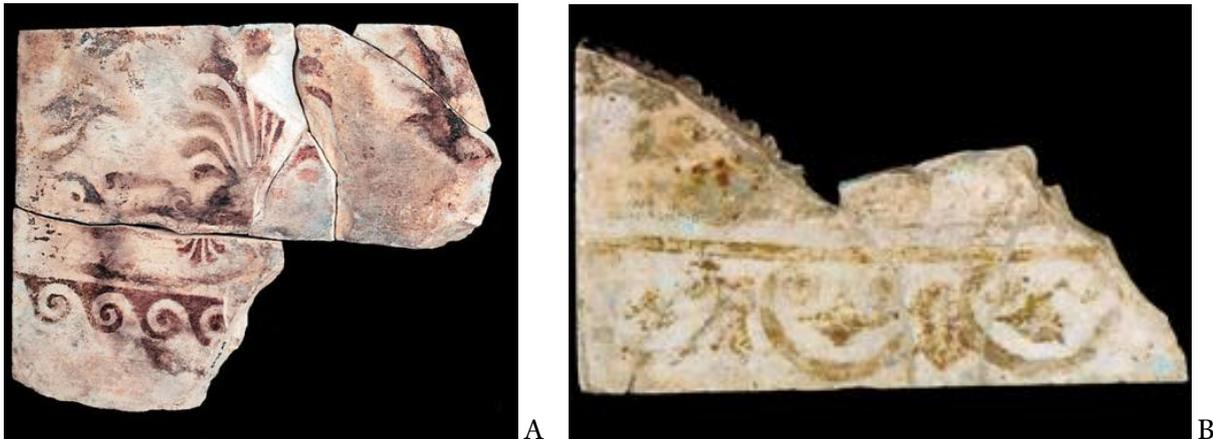


Fig. 107A and B: fragments of wall painting recovered from the Forum of Augustus, featuring ornamental lotus motifs. All images copyright Soprintendeza Archeologica di Roma. (La Rocca et al. Cat. Ref. 96-97.)

Although only fragmentarily preserved, here we find another motif that has recurred throughout examples in this overview; the rendering of stylised lotus with out-stretching (this) petals surrounding a stylised floral design within each interval of the frieze, such as encountered in the wall paintings from the Villa della Farnesina (3.5.1.) and the ornamental frieze on the inner walls of the Ara Pacis (3.8.1.), see fig. 108.⁶⁵²



Fig. 108A: Stylised ornamental frieze from the Villa della Farnesina (crypto portico). B: Ornamental frieze from the inner wall of the Ara Pacis. A and B: photo M. van Aerde. Copyright Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

⁶⁵¹ Inventory nr. (reconstructed fragment from fig. 105 A) FA 2011-2012-2013-2014-2015; (reconstructed fragment from fig. 105 B) FA 2016, FA 1504a-b-c-d. La Rocca et al. 1995 Cat. Ref. 96-97.

⁶⁵² As discussed at various places throughout this overview, ornamental lotus and uraeus motifs were originally part of Alexandrian funerary and pavilion designs and already known to Roman material culture during Republican times, while it is during the Augustan period that especially in wall painting these elements become particularly prominent. See: Brown 1957, 93; Bastet & De Vos 1979, 18; Hanfmann 1984, 242-255; Ling 1991, 59; Venit 2002, 94, 118, 165, 186. See also paragraph 3.1.1. ; 3.5.1. ; 3.8.1.

However fragmentary or subtle, these ornamental examples as part of the marble architectural design and wall painting decorations indicate that such ornamental manifestations of Egypt had become integrally incorporated into the material culture repertoire of Augustan Rome by the completion of the Forum of Augustus in 2 BCE, and as such were representative of Augustan material culture in specific – and should not be seen as isolated examples referring to Egypt in a sense that would exclude it from its obviously Roman context. The same accounts for the representation of Jupiter-Ammon; the familiarity of this image, often linked with other Egyptian figurative depictions, does in no way diminish the political references to Alexander the Great such as often interpreted. Rather, it could be used to such a purpose especially because the image was familiar and an integral part of the available material culture repertoire that both reflected and enabled the transformation of Rome. Similar to what we saw with the Ara Pacis, likewise a prominent example of Augustan public and monumental architecture, we do not encounter very numerous manifestations of Egypt as part of the Forum of Augustus; but those that can be recognised are particularly noteworthy because they are such an integral part of the Forum's design as a whole. To single them out, therefore, is strictly for the purpose of in fact pointing out the opposite.

3.11.2. Interpretation

In many ways, the Forum of Augustus may be regarded as the final demonstration, the conclusion even, of Augustan public visual language. Finalised in 2BCE, it marked the pinnacle of Augustus' principate. Whereas the Palatine had been effectively transformed into an Augustan complex from the very beginning of Octavian's political career, the completion of the Augustan Forum was the final confirmation of his established principate, which by then had come to thrive and had (made sure to emphasise how it) made Rome thrive along with it. The way manifestations of Egypt were incorporated into the Augustan Palatine was in many ways a stage of beginning –still very near the actual military victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII– and it was as such also an exploration of what kind of manifestations of Egypt would fit best with the whole of material culture that, from then onwards, was to become particular of Augustan Rome. The Hellenistic-style depictions of Isiac figures and Jupiter-Ammon such as encountered at the Apollo Palatinus complex, for example, we see reoccurring throughout wall paintings of the city's elite in years to come, and moreover they start becoming relatively

frequent themes in the decorative repertoire of smaller objects from the private sphere, as seen in the examples of cameo glass vessels, gems and jewellery in previous paragraphs. However, the indirect mythical reference implied by the Danaid statues on the Palatine, combined possibly with a specific choice of black hardstone material, is something that does not seem to reoccur at all after its initial appearance; it does not appear to have been incorporated into the repertoire, such as the figurative scenes featuring Hellenistic Egyptian deities did. In 28 BCE, when these manifestations of Egypt appeared on the Palatine, the specifically Augustan material culture repertoire was still to be formed. Of course, such a repertoire is not something that is ever ‘finished’ or ‘complete’; it is not something that suddenly became fixed at the peak of Augustus’ reign. Nonetheless, by the time the Forum of Augustus was built and completed, certain manifestations of Egypt had become a familiar and integral part of the repertoire such as it was available to the city at the time. This, too, is reflected in how they appear as part of the decorative schemes of the Forum of Augustus – which is quite different from how they initially appeared as part of the Augustan Palatine. The manifestations of Egypt at the Augustan Forum are not very numerous, and most of them presented in a subtle way, as small decorative friezes in stone reliefs and wall paintings; but all of them are very much integrally incorporated of the design of the Forum as a whole. They certainly do not stand out, or seem in any way intended to be regarded as isolated or highlighted manifestation of Egypt. Instead, these ornamental and decorative motifs are presented as having by now become innately integral parts of a specifically Augustan Roman visual repertoire.

However, the portrayal of Jupiter-Ammon may still imply a reference to Egypt, in a sense of expressing a power and authority originally Egyptian that had by now become fully (Augustan) Roman. Also, as mentioned above, the reference to Alexander the Great is another important layer of meaning in this. Jupiter-Ammon referred to the Hellenised Ptolemaic Egypt that Rome had incorporated; through this reference it likewise referred indirectly to the ancient origins of the deity Amon, who could be put on par with Jupiter himself. Moreover, the association of Alexander and Egypt confirms this in a twofold way: Augustan Rome has equalled and in fact surpassed both the ancient realms of Egypt and the might of Alexander the Great, who likewise sought to refer to and surpass ancient Egypt. As such, the depictions of Jupiter-Ammon at the Augustan Forum are very much a manifestation of Egypt: without the instilled significance of ancient Egypt, the image would not have held these layers of meaning that made it so fitting with the Augustan repertoire to begin with. As we saw above, portrayals of Jupiter-Ammon had by 2 BCE already become well-known throughout wider spheres of the city’s material culture. Their

appearance in small personal objects such as gemstones and jewellery will not have expressed these specific political layers of meaning as the image of the deity would have done in the context of the Augustan Forum: however, because of the familiarity of the image throughout the city's material culture at the time, it will have been better recognised in that more politically charged context, too. This familiarity from the wider and more personal spheres of material culture, similar to what we saw with the arrival of the obelisks in 10 BCE, may well have enhanced the effectiveness of the layered meaning implied by the manifestations of Egypt that were part of the likewise on-going public Augustan monuments. While the Augustan public visual language continued from the Palatine complex onwards, and the incorporation of manifestations of Egypt into the wider and personal spheres of the city's material culture seemed to 'evolve', subsequently, in a parallel to it, these two different 'branches' appear to have been very much interconnected. The latter, although taking on a life of its own, resulted from the former and at the same time continued to enable it, thus enhancing it in a way that it could not have achieved on its own during its initial stages. The Forum of Augustus shows the accumulation of this in combining strictly decorative ornamental manifestations of Egypt with the by then well-known image of Jupiter-Ammon, which through this specific context (re)gained a significant layer of political meaning – not by disregarding its 'evolution' in the personal sphere, but in fact enabled because of its familiarity through the personal sphere.

This flexibility, these innate layers of meaning, are the leading thread in every example of material culture from Augustan Rome, whether part of a deliberate public visual language, or as part of the more naturally evolved personal sphere. In public monuments such as obelisks, the Ara Pacis and the Augustan Forum we find this level of flexibility, closely connected with their deliberately chosen physical contexts as part of the transforming cityscape of Rome – it is through that flexibility that these public monuments could, in fact, become something that could only be defined, each in their entirety, as 'Augustan'. The Forum of Augustus, in its entirety, indeed seems to have been the accumulation of this. The manifestations of Egypt discussed above have also confirmed this: they, too, were part of an overall specifically Augustan character that previously was only alluded to through examples of Greek and Hellenistic influences. As we saw before, the manifestations of Egypt here were singled out in order to show the opposite: namely, that certainly by 2 BCE they were integrally part of the Augustan material culture repertoire and contributed valuable meaning as such. This was not as reference to an 'exotic' or 'conquered' Egypt, but as reference to an Egypt that had become, above anything, a significant part of the

Rome that Augustus had transformed and thus had enabled to evolve as a result of that cultural revolution – and this evolution, in itself, was a process that continued to enable the success of that revolution, in return. This truly seems to reflect what Wallace-Hadrill describes as the constant incorporation, reworking and redistributing of (political) ideas and (material) culture that shaped and were shaped by Rome as the metaphorical image of the city of Rome as a heart, an organ drawing blood and pumping it back through the wide-ranging arteries of its entire body.⁶⁵³ In this light, the exclusion of manifestations of Egypt as integral part of this picture would plainly diminish our understanding of its overall character, such as it can be derived from the actual archaeological record of material culture from Augustan Rome. In his reflections upon the Forum of Augustus, Ganzert perhaps words it best: 'What is typical of the Augustan age seems to be that it was not the end of a fixed line of development, but that it comprises several of these and produces appropriate new formulations.'⁶⁵⁴ Egypt was certainly one of these lines of developments, leading to new formulations as an integral part of Augustan Rome as a whole.

⁶⁵³ Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 37.

⁶⁵⁴ Ganzert 1985, 215-216.