Egypt beyond representation : materials and materiality of Aegyptiaca Romana

Müskens, S.W.G.

3. Corpus of Aegyptiaca Romana

In the following catalogue, a selection of 140 stone objects are presented, described, and illustrated. This corpus neither intends to replace existing inventories of so-called Aegyptiaca, nor does it claim to be exhaustive. It rather aims to give a representative overview of stone artefacts from Imperial Rome, which forms the material basis for the application of the novel approach to the objects that we call Aegyptiaca in Part IV below. This has a number of implications for this corpus' scope and lay-out. The previous definition of the category of Aegyptiaca as the totality of artefacts that would have something to do with Egypt was maintained for the current selection. While this categorisation is problematic,[344] rather than including or excluding objects on the basis of my personal understanding of what is and what is not deemed Egyptian, it provides a concrete starting point for an assessment of fundamental questions of how these objects were perceived in Roman society, and how and which object parameters influenced the way they were understood. Therefore, this study maintains the selection of objects included in previous overviews of Aegyptiaca, even when the interpretation of some of those objects as Aegyptiaca is disputed.

This study's focus on stone materials implies that so-called Aegyptiaca in other media like bronze, terracotta, or wall painting were not taken into account. Although stone is the largest material category among these objects, it is important to keep in mind that this research's selective focus does not intend to present a comprehensive analysis of 'Aegyptiaca' in general. Rome was selected as principal case study because this city provides an unsurpassed dataset both in terms of quantity and diversity. Also in practical terms this choice has advantages, since the relevant material from this city has been relatively well published in comparison with similar objects from other parts of the Roman world. At the same time, however, the focus on Rome impedes on the possibilities for a detailed archaeological contextual analysis.[345] Based on the complex biographies of so-called Aegyptiaca Romana, as well as the long history of Egyptian antiquity collections in Rome, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, objects that were present in Imperial Rome and, on the other hand, objects that only appeared in the city in later periods.[346] Therefore, in order to keep the catalogue as reliable as possible, it was decided to exclude all artefacts without solid archaeological provenance, and to focus instead on objects with known find locations.[347]

344. See *supra*, section I.2.5 and I.3.

345. For the intricate relationship between archaeological context and Imperial Roman use-context in Rome, with a particular focus on Aegyptiaca, see Müskens (2014a); on the problem of secondary archaeological contexts of Aegyptiaca Romana see also Alfano (1992) 41. For the correlation between (secondary) find locations of material culture and ancient use-contexts in Rome in general see the work of Christine Häuber: e.g., Häuber 1990, Häuber – Schütz 1999, Häuber – Schütz 2010, and Haüber 2014.

346. While mummies had been highly valued in European countries for medical purposes as early as the 12th century, the importation of Egyptian objects to the Western world really started from the late 16th century onwards. European visitors to Egypt usually did not travel further down south than Memphis, where the necropoleis provided fertile hunting grounds for antiquities. Consequently, the majority of Egyptian objects that reached Europe from the late 16th century onwards were small, easily transportable artefacts, especially from funerary contexts, such as shabtis, amulets, statuettes, and papyri. Occasionally also larger objects, such as mummies and mummy-cases, were transported; the two mummies from Saqqara bought by the Italian traveller Pietro della Valle in 1616 are a good case in point. On the early interest in Egypt and the importation of Egyptian antiquities to the Western world see Whitehouse (1989) and (1992) 66-68, and Curran (2007) 279-287, esp. 283-284. For an overview of the most important antiquities collections in Rome (with an emphasis on Egyptian objects) see *Le antichità egiziane* (1995) 93-127 (O. Lollio Barberi, M.P. Toti), and Grimm (2005c) with extensive bibliography.

347. Evidence from Reggio Emilia and Luni, where Egyptian objects were intentionally buried in the 19th century to increase their archaeological importance, indicates the importance of a careful analysis of the relation between archaeological context and ancient use-context (Gallo 1997a, 290 with bibliography; cf. Versluys 2002, 340: "The scholar searching for an explanatory model of the Egyptian and egyptianising artefacts found in Italian soil, is therefore warned"). No evidence for this practice has been reported in Rome.

The entries are principally organised by stone type. The largest material group, white marble, is presented first. Other stone types follow in descending order of frequency of occurrence. Within each material group, objects are organised according to object type, subject matter, dating, and dimensions/preservation. Objects with uncertain material classifications and/or provenance determinations are presented at the end of the corpus. For each entry a fixed set of data is given first:[348]

Material
Style
Object category
Subject matter
Date
Findspot / ancient context
(name of site or building of discovery, year of discovery if known, and proposed ancient context)
Dimensions
(H x W x D in cm, unless stated otherwise)
Preservation
(aimed at the recognisability of other parameters, particularly subject matter)
Current location
(city, museum, inventory number, etc.)

This data is followed by a general description of the object in question. In principle, a brief description of what the artefact represents and/or what is depicted is followed by a concise discussion of the object's date. Next, contextual attribution is briefly considered in relation to find location and year of discovery (if known). When inscriptions are present, the reader is referred to publications where more detailed information, like transcriptions, translations, and discussions, can be found. It is on purpose that object descriptions are kept brief and that they are explicitly based on the opinions of other scholars. As the analyses in Part IV will be principally guided by the object parameters defined in sections III.1 and III.2 above, I have endeavoured to chart the often conflicting opinions of previous scholars on aspects like subject matter, dating, and contextual attribution, in order to illustrate the numerous uncertainties that exist over this group of material culture. At the end of each entry a relevant bibliography is given. Since several artefacts have been repeatedly published without adding any new information or interpretations, cited references are selective in nature. If reliable and detailed descriptions of objects are available in previous literature, this is indicated and the reader is referred to the relevant publication. When it is evident that more than one fragment belong to a single object, the fragments are discussed as one catalogue entry. Illustrations are provided for all objects.

Considering the direct relationship between the classification of white marbles and the non-Egyptian provenance of these stones, the identification of the studied materials as white marble suffices for the present purposes, and therefore no minero-petrographic descriptions are given for these materials.[349] However, all non-white marbles in the studied sample require more detailed analysis due to existing uncertainties over these materials' classification and their geological provenance. Therefore, for all objects in naturally coloured stones, a separate page is included that focuses on their respective material characteristics. For each entry five material aspects are mentioned first:[350]

Classification
Provenance hypothesis
Colour
Magnetic attraction
Reference collection

Next, a macroscopic description of the stone in question is given on the basis of minero-petrographic criteria. This is followed by a brief discussion of the provenance hypothesis of the stone in question and relevant references. Whenever possible, scaled close-ups of representative sections of the studied materials are included, which form an integral part of the material descriptions.[351]

348. For explanations of selected parameters and definitions used see *supra*, section III.2.

349. Cf. *supra*, 73.

350. For explanations of selected parameters and definitions used see *supra*, section III.1.

351. The level of detail of the material descriptions is not always the same. This largely depends on the accessibility of the object in question. Unfortunately, it was not possible to study all objects included in this corpus in person. This particularly applies to selected objects in museums outside of Rome. Other objects were studied in person but could not be examined in detail due to practical limitations, like Rome's obelisks on their high bases. If this is the case, this is indicated in the material description of the relevant object. Moreover, it was not always possible to obtain (scaled) close-ups of the selected materials.