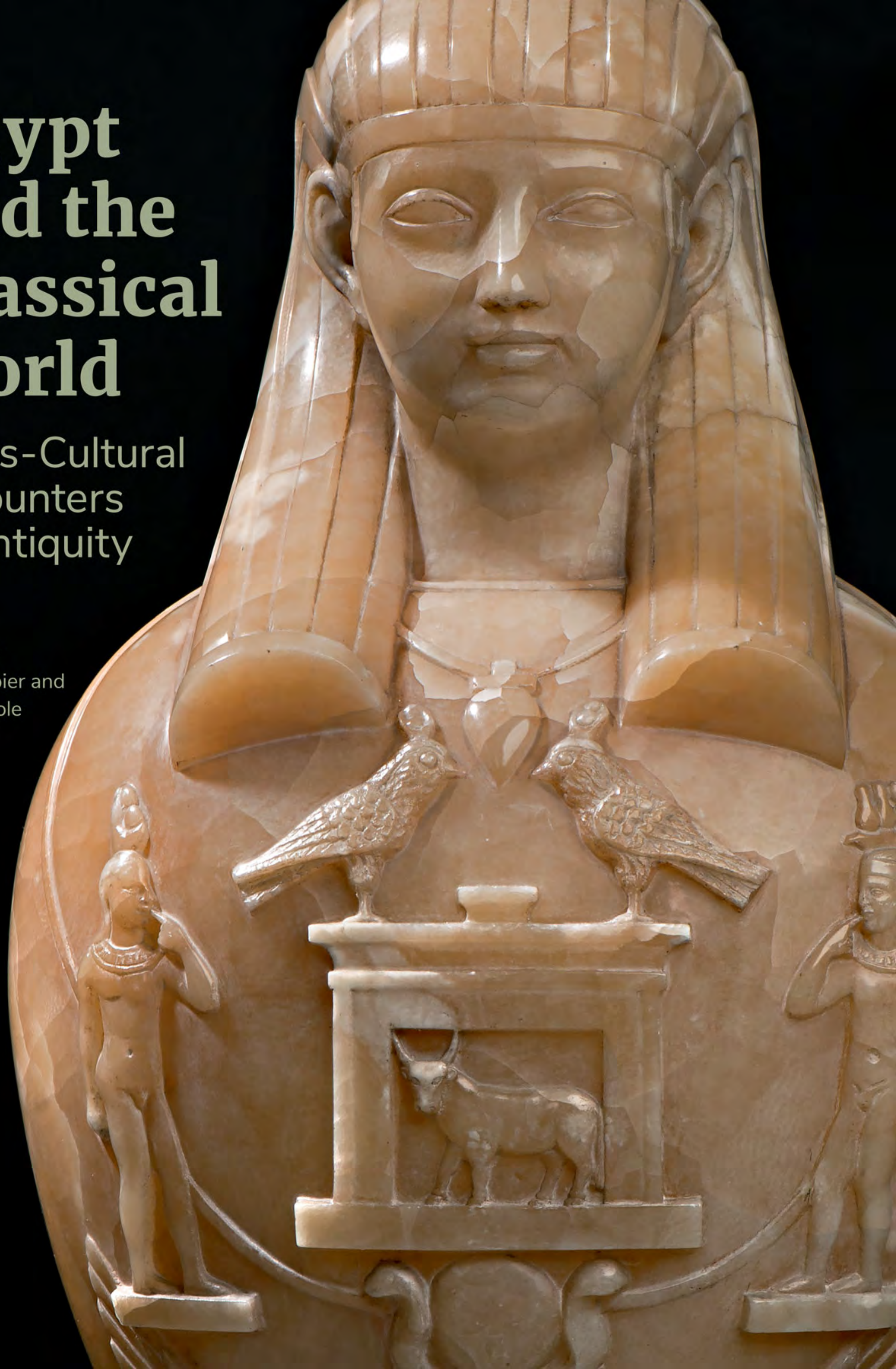


# Egypt and the Classical World

Cross-Cultural  
Encounters  
in Antiquity

Edited by  
Jeffrey Spier and  
Sara E. Cole





## **Egypt and the Classical World**



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**Cross-Cultural Encounters in Antiquity**

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J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

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# Introduction

Jeffrey Spier

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In 2018 the J. Paul Getty Museum presented the exhibition *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World*, curated by Jeffrey Spier, Timothy Potts, and Sara E. Cole. This was the first in a series of exhibitions and publications seeking to explore how Greece and Rome influenced and were influenced by neighboring cultures and civilizations in the Mediterranean and Near East over a period spanning nearly twenty-five hundred years. Providing an assemblage of objects rarely, if ever, displayed together, the exhibition invited viewers to move beyond a common perception of Egypt, Greece, and Rome as monolithic, static cultures; to think about the “classical world” beyond the confines of its traditional definition; and to contemplate the interconnectedness of the ancient Mediterranean.

*Egypt and the Classical World: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Antiquity* contains the proceedings of a scholars’ symposium held at the Getty on August 25–26, 2018, in association with *Beyond the Nile*. The event brought together an international group of scholars whose work relates to the cross-cultural themes of the exhibition. A number of the contributors (Bommas, Kaper, Kelder, Minas-Nerpel) had previously been in residence at the Getty Villa as part of the Getty Research Institute’s Scholars Program with the theme of “The Classical World in Context: Egypt” during the 2015–16 and 2017–18 fellowship years. Others were contributors to the

exhibition’s catalogue (Prada, Villing) or collaborated on the organization of the exhibition (Spyropoulos). All made valuable intellectual contributions to the shaping of *Beyond the Nile*.

The exhibition catalogue includes sixteen essays synthesizing the current state of knowledge in the field, as well as illustrations and discussions of the nearly two hundred objects in the exhibition. While the catalogue serves as an important reference work for scholars, students, and all interested members of the general public, the present collection of essays focuses more closely on current research projects and should be of value to specialists in the fields of classics, Egyptology, archaeology, art history, ancient history, and philology. The two publications—exhibition catalogue and symposium proceedings—complement each other by providing both a wider lens through which to view Egypt’s interactions with Greece and Rome over two and a half millennia and a focused look at the highly specialized, ongoing scholarship that is contributing to our understanding of that broader narrative.

Our eight authors present new, unpublished research on Egypt’s interactions with ancient Greece and Rome during four major time periods: the Bronze Age (ca. 2000–1200 BC), Egypt’s Late Period (ca. 664–332 BC), the Ptolemaic period (323–30 BC), and the Roman Empire (beginning in 30 BC). The papers cover a variety of materials—including

archaeological finds, artworks, and inscriptions—and add to a rapidly growing body of scholarship on cross-cultural exchange between Egypt and its Mediterranean neighbors in antiquity. For those who served as Getty scholars, these proceedings are an opportunity to publish the research projects they developed while on fellowship in Los Angeles. Additionally, several essays in this volume present in-depth analyses of objects that were highlights of *Beyond the Nile* (Kelder, Villing, and Prada).

Jorrit Kelder examines an underexplored aspect of the Bronze Age Mediterranean: the role of mercenaries in cross-cultural exchange. While numerous studies have focused on various aspects of the Late Bronze Age “world system” (such as the exchange of objects, raw materials, animals, and plants; the migration of specialist craftsmen and artists; and even diplomatic marriages), the role of the military in the exchange of technologies and ideas has remained remarkably neglected. By highlighting a number of artifacts that have been found throughout the eastern Mediterranean, including a remarkable wooden ship cart model that was displayed in the exhibition, this paper shows how soldiers were a conduit of knowledge and ideas in the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

In the Late Period, Greeks and Carians resident in Egypt continued to fuel various forms of exchange and interaction. Alexandra Villing discusses case studies relating to three key sites (Memphis, Naukratis, and Alexandria) that provide evidence for cross-cultural encounters from the sixth to the third century BC. Her first case study presents exciting new analysis of a “hybrid” grave stela from Memphis (displayed in the exhibition) combining Egyptian, Greek, and Carian elements in its carved figured decoration. Thanks to recent scientific examination, the painted patterns and color schemes now evident on the stela emphasize how Egyptian and foreign traditions were intertwined in the lives of foreign mercenaries and their families in Egypt. Villing’s other case studies look at a fourth-century BC Athenian vase found in a burial at the Greek trading hub of Naukratis and a group of Ptolemaic period cat sculptures also from Naukratis that appear to be associated with a sanctuary to the cat goddess Bastet/Boubastis. This deity was identified with the Ptolemaic queens Arsinoe II and Berenike II, and the sanctuary had a close counterpart in Alexandria. Taken together, the case studies paint a picture of a relationship in which religion and its expression in material culture constituted an important and fertile arena for cross-cultural negotiation—in the private as well as the public sphere, across social classes, and over many centuries.

Religion served as one of the major loci of cultural exchange, as seen in the case of the Egyptian goddess Isis, who came to function as a “hearing and healing” deity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and whose various roles are the subject of Martin Bommas’s essay. While the Late Period saw Isis transformed into a goddess “Great of Magic,” earlier periods had reduced her to a deity who communicated with other gods, including the dead transformed into Osiris. Within personal religious practice, however, Isis rarely was a recipient of prayers. It was after the increased focus on her role as maternal deity from the sixth century BC onward that she became a mediator between the living and the gods. Her popularity as a healing goddess would eventually be embraced by Hellenistic Greek and Roman religion. Supported by written and visual evidence, Bommas’s contribution traces the development of Isis’s sphere from exclusivity during the pharaonic period to popular accessibility and cult worship both in Egypt and throughout the Mediterranean, even into the Christian period.

Martina Minas-Nerpel continues her groundbreaking work on the role of Ptolemaic queens, particularly in connection with Isis and other Egyptian and Greek goddesses. When the Ptolemies gained sovereignty over Egypt (ca. 305 BC), they found themselves ruling not only as kings and queens of a Hellenic population but also as pharaohs of the Egyptian people. They faced the immense task of constructing an identity for their empire and their rule, for which they employed the ancient Egyptian past to create a powerful dynastic ideology. Together with their advisers, both Egyptian and Hellenic, they created spaces in which theological and political concepts could be imaginatively united. Minas-Nerpel focuses on the hybridizing exchange that resulted in new semantic dimensions and “cultural codes” in royal ideology. The dynamic interactions of the powerful Ptolemaic queens, especially Arsinoe II and Cleopatra VII, with Isis and other goddesses created new modes of self-representation in both Egyptian and Hellenic textual and visual sources of the ruler cult.

Many of the syncretic religious processes that began under the Ptolemies continued in Egypt under Roman rule. Olaf Kaper analyzes the unique sequence of Roman-era wall paintings discovered in a chapel in Egypt’s Dakhla Oasis. The second-century AD temple of the god Tutu in Ismant el-Kharab (ancient Kellis) comprises a small and badly preserved stone temple and a much larger mud-brick chapel with wall paintings. This chapel was a *mammisi*, or birth house, celebrating the periodic renewal of the god’s powers. Its wall paintings have been fully recovered and reconstructed, and they are

unparalleled in Egyptian temple decoration. Kaper here presents some of these images for the first time. Half of the shrine is decorated with panel paintings in Roman fashion, while the other half is in Egyptian style, with images of more than four hundred deities and hieroglyphic inscriptions. The mammisi shows how the perceptions of ancient Egyptian religion were changing under Roman domination and how practices might have further developed if the site had lived on.

The Egyptian imagery that was so popularly used throughout the Roman Empire, including in the domestic sphere, presents a rather different picture from what is found in Egypt itself. George Spyropoulos considers the villa of Herodes Atticus in Greece, a lavish residence built in the Arcadian countryside, which not only created a space of peace and solemnity but also displayed a wide array of cultural influences in a “New Style” based on the appropriation of the conquered world, carefully organized into a cultural hierarchy. In the time of Augustus, these eclectic inspirations—from Egypt, Classical and Hellenistic Greece, and Imperial Rome—penetrated the private sphere. Spyropoulos focuses on this syncretic blending in the second-century AD villa, where this cultural mixing of decorative Egyptianizing motifs alongside carefully selected traditional Greek and Roman themes resulted in a new visual language of empire. Such a cultural mixing reflected and supported not only the status but also the persona in general of the homeowner. The villa of Herodes Atticus provides an avenue for understanding representations of ancient

Egypt and their meaning in the domestic settings of the Roman elite.

Roman appropriation of Egyptian artworks and iconography, particularly the iconic form of the obelisk, has long intrigued scholars but has not been fully understood. Luigi Prada’s essay sheds new light on one of the exhibition’s most remarkable objects: a Romano-Egyptian obelisk from Benevento (ancient Beneventum), Italy, now in the collection of the Museo del Sannio, and its twin, which stands in the city’s Piazza Papiniano. It is striking that the emperor or individuals honoring him commissioned obelisks made of Egyptian granite and carved with hieroglyphic inscriptions and had them erected in Italy. Hieroglyphs were incomprehensible to virtually everybody in Rome, and even in Egypt only the most learned among the intelligentsia—typically priests—would have been able to read and write the archaic language and script. Why did the Romans choose such an esoteric writing system for some of their most splendid public monuments? Why record a message in an inaccessible script? Prada tackles these and related issues while also looking at the identity of those who composed and inscribed such “silent” hieroglyphic inscriptions. His study includes a definitive critical reedition of the inscriptions on both obelisks in Benevento, updating all previous scholarship.

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# From Thutmose III to Homer to Blackadder: Egypt, the Aegean, and the “Barbarian Periphery” of the Late Bronze Age World System

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Although numerous studies have focused on various aspects of Late Bronze Age interconnections (such as the exchange of objects, raw materials, animals and plants, specialist craftsmen, artists, and even diplomatic marriages), the role of the military in the exchange of technologies and ideas has remained remarkably understudied. By highlighting a number of artifacts that have been found throughout the eastern Mediterranean, this paper seeks to explore the role of the military and especially mercenaries as a conduit of knowledge and ideas in the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

## A Stone Mace-Head in the Age of Bronze

Few sites illustrate the close Bronze Age relations between the Aegean, Cyprus, the Levant, and Egypt as well as the Uluburun shipwreck.<sup>1</sup> The ship, measuring approximately twenty meters, was probably of Levantine build and on its way to the north when it sank soon after

1305 BC (if the dendrochronological data may be believed).<sup>2</sup> Its cargo was preserved at the bottom of the Gulf of Antalya (south of present-day Antalya Province, Turkey), providing a unique insight into the complexity of Late Bronze Age long-distance exchange and the sheer scale and variety of objects and materials that were transported (fig. 1.1). Apart from a whopping ten tons in copper oxhide, bun-shaped and oval ingots, the ship carried Canaanite vessels (containing pistacia resin among other things), glass ingots of uncertain (possibly Egyptian) origin, ebony and ivory, silver and gold jewelry from Egypt and the Levant, and a smaller group of objects that came from the Aegean world, including eighteen stirrup jars and a flask, two Mycenaean-type swords, razors, and two glass relief plaques, which are thought to have been part of two pectorals. Cemal Pulak, the excavator of the wreck, has proposed that these Aegean objects were the personal effects of two high-ranking Mycenaeans, who may have been acting as emissaries of a Mycenaean king.<sup>3</sup> Although this interpretation must remain conjecture, the cargo of the ship does indeed



Figure 1.1 Map of the eastern Mediterranean with the location of the Uluburun shipwreck

resemble many of the items that are listed in the Amarna Letters as part of diplomatic gift exchanges.<sup>4</sup>

What may lend further credibility to Pulak's suggestion is the presence of a remarkable diptych. The materials of this folded writing board—choice boxwood and ivory—suggest that it was not a mere trader's log but rather a diplomatic passport, perhaps including a list of the gifts that were to be presented at court (like those we know from the Amarna archive).<sup>5</sup> This does not necessarily require its bearer to be a Mycenaean, although Martien Dillo has observed that the signs engraved on the diptych's edges seem to represent Mycenaean numerals.<sup>6</sup> It thus seems reasonable to assume, with Pulak, that the Uluburun ship was indeed laden with diplomatic gifts destined for one of the palatial centers in the Mycenaean world and that at least two of its passengers were Mycenaean diplomats, escorting their precious cargo.

The voyage to and from the Levant (or even further south, to Egypt) was not without its risks, as indeed is demonstrated by the very fact that the Uluburun ship sank. But apart from bad weather, human factors could also imperil the Late Bronze Age traveler. There is ample evidence for this in contemporary texts, in which there are references to rulers detaining foreign diplomats, trade embargoes prohibiting ships from entering port (such as the so-called Sausgamuwa Treaty), and—more frequently—piracy.<sup>7</sup> The messengers on board the Uluburun ship may have prepared for such eventualities. Both appear to have carried swords, and they may have even had their own escort. These Mycenaean were not

the only conspicuous people on board. Pulak has suggested that a remarkable stone mace-head of a type known from the Carpathian-Pontic region found in the Uluburun wreck may have belonged to a—clearly important—northerner (fig. 1.2).<sup>8</sup> Several other objects—including a particular type of dress pin, a bronze sword with central Mediterranean (but also Balkan) parallels, and various spearheads of a type that was common in Macedonia—may also have belonged to this person (or perhaps even several “northerners”).<sup>9</sup> In view of the quantity of weapons, it is unlikely that this “northerner” was a merchant or envoy himself; instead he may have been on board as a member of the Mycenaean's cortege. Heavily armed, he could have served as their bodyguard, although the presence of the mace-head may point toward a more ceremonial task as “mace-bearer”—announcing the arrival of, and instilling awe for, his Mycenaean companions (in the manner of Amirullah the mace-bearer, employed by Josiah Harlan on his voyages through Afghanistan in the nineteenth century).<sup>10</sup>

## Mercenaries from the Edge of the World?

Could the “mace-bearer” have been a mercenary from the edges of the Mycenaean palatial world? Although the Bronze Age in the Balkans to a large extent remains an archaeological terra incognita, recent research suggests that the regions to the north of Greece—Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and especially the Carpathian basin—were involved in the Mediterranean world to a far greater



**Figure 1.2** Scepter-Mace, Late Bronze Age, ca. 1300 BC. Stone, 7.8 × 19.2 × 5.2 cm. Found in the Uluburun shipwreck. Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, 12.7.92 (KW 2742). Image: © Institute of Nautical Archaeology

extent than has hitherto been thought. Though the precise nature of the area's relations with the Mycenaean world remains unclear, one can be reasonably sure that Mycenaean demand for metals played an important role in these connections. The Carpathians were rich in gold, silver, and copper, and there is good evidence for extensive mining and metalworking (and related lead pollution) in the region during the Late Bronze Age and, indeed, even before that.<sup>11</sup> In exchange for metals and finished objects (for the skills of the Carpathian smiths were considerable), as well as objects and materials from regions further to the north, such as amber, Aegean traders provided their Carpathian neighbors with materials and objects from the Mediterranean, the Near East, and beyond.<sup>12</sup> In such a context of relatively close connections between the Mycenaean world and its northern neighbors, it is plausible to assume that Mycenaean elites employed foreign mercenaries from the Balkans.<sup>13</sup> The fact that a significant portion of the Mycenaean imports (or possible local imitations of them) in southern Bulgaria consist of swords and spearheads may further support such a scenario.<sup>14</sup>

The Mycenaean world would not have been alone in their practice of employing foreigners in their army, for the tradition was already well established throughout the Near East by the fourteenth century BC. There, too, mercenaries typically came from the “periphery”—regions that were perceived as uncivilized and dangerous—and it is precisely for those qualities that their inhabitants made such good soldiers. One of the earliest references to the recruitment of mercenaries is a text from the reign of Zimri-Lim (ca. 1779–1761 BC), king of the powerful city-state of Mari (in northern Mesopotamia), who recruited five thousand soldiers from the Hana, a generic term for nomads. These bedouin were clearly preferable as soldiers to the “civilized” people of

Mari itself, as contemporary texts emphasize their qualities as soldiers and their capacity to deal with wild animals such as lions.<sup>15</sup>

Egypt, too, had a long tradition of incorporating foreign specialists into its army. There, though, they appear to have been drawn mostly from conquered people, from territories that fell under pharaonic control. The best-known example for this practice is the inclusion of Nubian archers in the Egyptian army. But other specialist corps, such as the Medjay, were similarly relied on.<sup>16</sup> By the time of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1069 BC), Egyptian texts mention other foreigners in the Egyptian army, including Libyans, Canaanites, and Sherden—the last known mostly from texts dating to the end of the Bronze Age, in which they are part of the invading “Sea Peoples,” a collection of various peoples whose origins are still unclear but who seem to have coalesced, at least occasionally, into larger seaborne raiding parties. It remains unclear how most of these foreigners entered the Egyptian army, though in the case of the Sherden the texts indicate that they were forced into service following their defeat at the hands of the Egyptians.

## Faith and Technology

The Sherden are of particular interest as an example of how mercenaries served as a conduit for the introduction of military technologies. Though they are probably first mentioned in a letter in the Amarna archive (EA 122) from Rib-hadda, mayor of Gubla (Byblos), as *še-er-ta-an-nu*, they appear in Egyptian iconography only during the reign of Ramesses II, half a century or so later. They are shown wearing a distinctive type of horned helmet with a curious globular crest on top and carrying a circular shield with multiple (metal?) bosses while wielding a sword of an uncertain, though definitely un-Egyptian type, perhaps related to the Naue II sword, which originated in Europe in the fifteenth century BC. The Sherden ships were unlike anything the Egyptians had seen before. Like the “northerner” on the Uluburun ship, the Sherden were, after their defeat and incorporation into the Egyptian army, valued as bodyguards and accompanied Ramesses II at the Battle of Kadesh (fig. 1.3).<sup>17</sup>

Although the precise terms of their employment in Egypt are unknown, it is clear that many Sherden never left the land of the Nile. Instead they settled there, acquired land (presumably in payment for their military service), and Egyptianized to a remarkable extent. Nevertheless, there is evidence that they retained some of their own cultural characteristics and—a century after their first appearance



**Figure 1.3** Relief from Abu Simbel showing the Sherden bodyguards of Ramesses II at Kadesh (after Breasted 1906, vol. 1). Image: Reproduced with permission from Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

in Egypt, early in the reign of Ramesses II—still stood out from the Egyptians. Papyri from the reigns of Ramesses V (the Wilbour Papyrus) and Ramesses IX (the Adoption Papyrus) still identify Sherden among the Egyptian population, in particular at the site of Gurob.<sup>18</sup> There is some archaeological evidence to support this. W. M. Flinders Petrie, during his excavations at Gurob, was struck by the quantity of imports at the site, especially Mycenaean pottery, as well a number of peculiar features, notably various groups of burnt objects, which, he suggested, might indicate Aegean cremation customs.<sup>19</sup> This suggestion has recently been questioned,<sup>20</sup> and Petrie’s so-called Burnt Groups may be more plausibly identified as the remains of looted graves, probably dating to the Third Intermediate Period (the burning may be explained as a crude attempt by the looters to extract any metal). Although Petrie’s argument for a Mycenaean tradition of cremation at Gurob thus seems questionable, various other finds at Gurob do suggest a foreign presence at the site. They include the occurrence of non-Egyptian names on coffins, including a certain Anen-Tursha, who, despite his name, seems to have risen to prominence in the pharaonic administration, eventually attaining the position of deputy overseer of the royal harem.

Most significant and spectacular is a wooden ship-cart model (fig. 1.4a–b).<sup>21</sup> Petrie, when he discovered the remains of this model, assumed that it represented an Egyptian barge. A recent study by Shelley Wachsmann has now shown this to be wrong; instead, he notes, it “represents a land-based cultic ship (cart) that had been patterned after an actual ship, in this case a *pentakonter*. Put simply, the Gurob model is a copy of a copy. And while the Gurob model was thus twice removed from the original war galley that served as its prototype, the information that the model supplies regarding the transfer of cult in the seam between the Late Bronze and Iron Ages cannot be overemphasized.”<sup>22</sup> The ship, then, is a remarkable example of religious syncretism, for while in Egypt models of barges are known from religious processions, in which they were usually carried on long poles by priests, the example from Gurob is a novel, foreign type of ship that—in Egypt at least—was clearly associated with the Sea Peoples, in particular the Sherden. As such, the Gurob ship model not only serves as an example of religious syncretism but also demonstrates the role of foreigners in the transfer of military naval technology.

In a series of important publications, Jeffrey Emanuel has demonstrated the importance of the Sea Peoples as a



**Figure 1.4a**

Two views of a model of a ship cart, Egyptian, 19th–20th Dynasty, late 13th–early 12th century BC. Wood with pigment, 13.2 × 38.5 × 5.5 cm. Found in a tomb at Gurob, Egypt. University College London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UC16044. Images: Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology



**Figure 1.4b**

catalyst for maritime innovation.<sup>23</sup> While various novel features, such as the loose-footed, brailled sail and the top-mounted crow’s nest, were already known in the Levant from the fourteenth century BC onward, it appears that their full military potential, especially in combination with the new (Aegean?) type of war galley, like that represented by the ship model from Gurob, was first realized by groups such as the Sherden. It was only after encountering the first groups of Sea Peoples early in the reign of Ramesses II that Egyptian shipwrights took notice of the value of innovations and started implementing them in their own designs. The change can be traced, as Emanuel has shown, in various Egyptian reliefs of the 19th Dynasty. While Egyptian ships at the time of Ramesses II’s first encounters with the Sherden were typically Egyptian, those that were deployed by Ramesses III (as shown on the walls of his temple at Medinet Habu), although still based on Egyptian riverine ships rather than the Aegean galley, are otherwise remarkably similar to the ships of their foes, with a top-mounted crow’s nest and a loose-footed, brailled sail. Thus the arrival in Egypt of the Sea Peoples—despite the havoc they wrought—is also associated with a number of remarkable breakthroughs in ship design that, in many ways, influenced the shipbuilding traditions in Greece and Phoenicia in the millennium to come.<sup>24</sup>

## Traveling Soldiers, Traveling Tales

It seems reasonable to assume that mercenaries were important agents in the transfer of military technology, tying the peripheries of the ancient world to the centers of

urban societies. This process of transfer, however, extended both ways. Plate armor appeared in temperate Europe during the thirteenth century BC, at around the same time that the Naue II sword came to Greece.<sup>25</sup> It is quite likely that other, less tangible or archaeologically demonstrable know-how traveled with these new types of weapons, including, as N. K. Sandars has suggested,<sup>26</sup> foreign combat tactics, but one may also think of popular stories of love and war, the type of stories that would have been recited or sung around a traveler’s or military campfire. Indeed, the “northern mercenary” on board the Uluburun ship may have been one of those who brought new ideas from the Balkans to the Aegean.

Mycenaean Greece was dotted with palatial centers that were home to a literate elite. From Hittite texts, we know that Mycenaean rulers were involved in high-level diplomacy, participated in royal gift exchange, and personally knew highborn Hittite officers and probably even Hittite royalty.<sup>27</sup> Tawagalawa/Ete(w)okle(we)s, the brother of the king of Ahhiyawa, for example, reportedly rode together with the personal charioteer of the Hittite king. The Mycenaeans themselves may have served as foreign mercenaries.<sup>28</sup> A sword that was captured during a Hittite campaign against the Assuwa League of western Anatolia, for example, is of a clearly Aegean-inspired type (even though its dedicatory inscription indicates that it was used by a soldier of, and probably forged in, Assuwa<sup>29</sup>), and two texts from the Hittite vassal state of Ugarit suggest that, at least toward the end of the Bronze Age, the Hittites may have employed soldiers from the Mycenaean world (although the exact identification of the men from Hiyawa and the nature of the PAD.MEŠ [metal





Figure 1.5a

Egyptian and Mycenaean warriors, Egyptian, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1346–1332 BC. Painted papyrus, 10.3 × 10.5 cm. Found in the Chapel of the King's Statue, Tell el-Amarna (Akhetaten). London, British Museum, EA74100. (a) Papyrus. (b) Detail illustration. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License. Drawing: Martin Hense

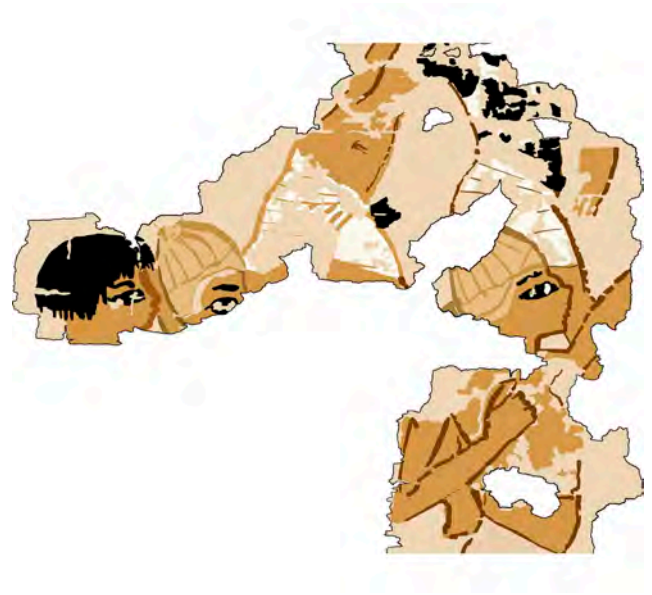


Figure 1.5b

supplies, payment, foodstuff?] they are expecting, is debated).<sup>30</sup> Similarly, there are indications that Mycenaean warriors served in the Egyptian pharaoh's armies from at least the Amarna period onward. The famous pictorial papyrus found at Akhetaten (Tell el-Amarna) offers a rare glimpse of these Aegeans, who wear boar's-tusk helmets but are otherwise dressed like Egyptians (fig. 1.5a–b).<sup>31</sup>

Archaeology offers some additional evidence in the form of a piece of just such a boar's-tusk helmet that was found at Pi-Ramesses, in the Nile Delta.<sup>32</sup> The Gurob ship model, moreover, may similarly hint at a Mycenaean presence, for even though the origins of the Sherden remain murky, the ship they used is clearly Aegean-inspired. In fact, its black and red paint is so idiosyncratic that both Wachsmann and Emanuel pointed out the similarity to the ships of the Achaeans in Homer's *Iliad*. Emanuel writes: "This preserved polychromatic schema not only makes the model unique among known representations of Helladic ships, but it aligns with—and helps us visually understand—both Homer's description of the Achaeans' ships as μέλας 'black,' his reference to Odysseus' ships specifically as μιλτοπάρηος 'red-cheeked.' Odysseus' ships are also referred to as φοινικοπάρηος 'purple-cheeked,' but most noteworthy is the fact that only Odysseus' ships are identified by the 'red-' and 'purple-cheeked' epithets."<sup>33</sup> It is likely that, like Odysseus, at least some of these Mycenaean mercenaries entered Egyptian service voluntarily or, at the very least, were able to leave Egypt after their period of service ended. A piece of scale armor

of a type worn by Near Eastern charioteers, stamped with the cartouche of Ramesses II—a rare find on the island of Salamis, off the coast of Athens—may have belonged to one of these returning soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

There can be no doubt that these returning warriors were held in high regard and had a special status in their communities. Apart from bringing souvenirs such as scale armor with them, they doubtless told stories about their experiences in distant lands. These stories, of course, were embellished with fantastic elements, hearsay, and pure fantasy that served as a conduit for literary topoi. The remarkable parallel between the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep II, who showed off his military prowess by shooting arrows through a copper ingot, and Odysseus's ability to shoot an arrow through a row of twelve ax-heads, may be understood through the prism of such storytelling, whereby an original Egyptian story was transferred to Greek epic.<sup>35</sup> Odysseus, in particular, seems to have had quite a few Egyptian-inspired tricks up his sleeve. Apart from his abilities with his bow, his famous trick with the Trojan horse is remarkably similar to the Egyptian story of the general Djehuty, who served under Thutmose III and is reported to have captured the enemy city of Joppa by concealing his soldiers in large baskets offered to the ruler of the city as tribute.<sup>36</sup>

Not all of these literary elements need to have come to Greece via returning mercenaries, of course, though it would make sense for precisely this type of adventurer to be familiar with heroic stories—having learned them,



Figure 1.6 Schematic representation of contacts and the transfer of ideas and literary topoi

perhaps, from foreign comrades at the campfire—and to integrate them into their own songs of glory and fame. The similarities between Near Eastern stories about Gilgamesh, Djehuty, Amenhotep II, the Greek epic cycle, and—eventually—northern European epics, such as the song of Beowulf, can be seen in the context of these Late Bronze Age military connections (see fig. 1.6). Elements of these shared topoi (perhaps even some sort of shared warrior ethos) are preserved even in contemporary culture. As such, we may perhaps be forgiven in considering Baldrick’s catchphrase in the BBC television series *Blackadder*, “My Lord, I have a cunning plan,” as a late twentieth-century (AD) reflection of a story that originated in early fourteenth-century (BC) Egypt and entered European lore through the Greek and Roman epic cycle.



I owe a debt of gratitude to Aaron Burke and Barry Molloy for their feedback and stimulating discussions on ancient mercenaries and ancient technology transfer between the Mycenaean world and the Balkans, and to Luigi Prada for his feedback regarding the Egyptian evidence presented here. I would also like to thank the organizers of the symposium “Egypt, Greece, Rome: Cross-Cultural Encounters

in Antiquity”—Jeffrey Spier, Sara E. Cole, and Timothy Potts—for their invitation to present this paper. All views presented here are, of course, my own. I am grateful to Grace Tsai of the Institute for Nautical Archaeology for her assistance in obtaining an image of the mace-head from the Uluburun shipwreck.

#### NOTES

1. See Bachhuber 2006; C. Pulak in Aruz, Benzel, and Evans 2008, 372–73, no. 237; C. Pulak in Aruz, Benzel, and Evans 2008, 374–75, no. 238a, b.
2. Pulak 1998, 214, based on Kuniholm et al. 1996, 782; but see Manning et al. 2001, 2535, for some caution regarding the reliability of this date.
3. C. Pulak in Aruz, Benzel, and Evans 2008, 374–75, no. 238a, b. Bachhuber 2006 reanalyzed and critiqued Pulak’s identification of “Mycenaeans” on board the ship. While Bachhuber (2006, 353) does indeed note that “we must tread carefully when discussing the personnel on board of the ship,” he also noted that “the pairing of several of the object-types of Aegean manufacture and the observation that many of the object types had not been identified beyond the Aegean prior to the ship’s excavation . . . is enough, for the purposes of this discussion, to suggest that individuals with greater affinity to the Aegean area

- (as opposed to the Near East or Egypt), may have owned the objects, and so I refer here to them as “individuals of possible Aegean origin.” In the end, much remains a question of weighing probabilities when it comes to reconstructing the ancient world: in this particular case, I feel that all the available evidence supports Pulak’s (and my own) identification of the passengers on board the ship, whereas alternative explanations require much more (circumstantial or special) pleading.
4. For example, letters EA 33 and 34, from the King of Cyprus, and letter EA 14, which includes an inventory of Egyptian gifts.
  5. Kelder 2016, 3–5.
  6. Reported in Waal 2021.
  7. For example, Amarna letter EA 38, which refers to raids on Cypriot towns.
  8. C. Pulak in Aruz, Benzel, and Evans 2008, 372–73, no. 237.
  9. I owe this suggestion, and the identification of at least six spearheads as of “northern” type, to Barry Molloy (personal communication, August 2, 2018).
  10. C. Pulak in Aruz, Benzel, and Evans 2008, 374–75, no. 238a, b; for Harlan, see McIntyre 2004.
  11. For evidence of early lead pollution, see Longman et al. 2018, with further references. See Harding 2000, 204–10 (esp. 210, with further references), for an overview of the available evidence for metal mining and metalworking.
  12. The trade route connecting the ancient Near East with northern Europe may be reconstructed on the basis of glass beads, produced in Mesopotamia and Egypt, throughout these regions. The Mycenaean world appears to have functioned as the nexus of a European and Mediterranean network. See, most recently, Varberg, Gratuze, and Kaul 2015 and Varberg et al. 2016. The distribution of Late Bronze Age swords in Europe (as proposed by Drews 2017) appears remarkably similar, suggesting close connections between three distinct regions (southern Sweden / northern Denmark, the Carpathians, and the Aegean; see Vandkilde 2014), whereas the distribution of amber almost exactly matches the “glass-map” (see Causey 2011, 89–90, with further references, for an overview of the distribution of amber).
  13. There may even be some linguistic evidence for military interaction between the Mycenaean world and the people living north of it. The Greek term *lawagetas*, though it does not survive the collapse of the Bronze Age in Greece itself, did survive into the Iron Age in Phrygian, as one of the titles of King Midas. Unlike the title *wanax*, for instance, which did survive as a royal and divine title in Homer, *lawagetas* cannot have been borrowed by the Phrygians from the Greeks in post-Mycenaean times. As a result, one must assume that it is a Phrygian cognate of the Mycenaean title (see Ruppenstein 2015) or, more likely, that the Phrygians adopted this term in Mycenaean palatial times, that is, before around 1200 BC (see also Morris 2003, 8). It is significant that this Mycenaean title, with its overtly military connotations (in Linear B, the title is thought to designate a local prince, as noted in Kelder 2010, or military commander; its literal meaning is “leader of the armed men”), survived in Phrygian.
  14. See Leshtakov 2011; Bouzek 2018, 128. See Bouzek 1994, 217–23, and Jung 2018 (esp. 242, maps 1 and 2) for an overview of the available evidence.
  15. Heimpel 2003, 29; Trimm 2017, 121.
  16. Originally a generic Egyptian term to designate groups in the Lower Nubian eastern desert, the term Medjay by the Middle Kingdom may have been adopted by some of these groups, whose members were drafted into the military to patrol the desert routes; see Litzka 2011.
  17. For an overview of their role in the military, see Abbas 2017.
  18. The Wilbour Papyrus is now in the Brooklyn Museum, 34.5596.4, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/152121>; Trismegistos no. 113892, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/113892>; see also Gardiner 1948. For the Adoption Papyrus, see Gardiner 1941. TEST
  19. Petrie 1891, 16.
  20. See Gasperini 2018.
  21. Petrie 1890, 36, 40–41.
  22. Wachsmann 2018; for an in-depth study of the ship model and its cultural context, see Wachsmann 2013. A digital supplement to Wachsmann 2013, including a 3-D reconstruction of the model, can be found at <http://www.vizin.org/Gurob/Gurob.html>.
  23. Emanuel 2014b; Emanuel 2017.
  24. Emanuel 2014b, 165, 173–74.
  25. For the origins of plate armor in the Aegean and Europe, see Molloy 2012; see Kristiansen and Suchowska-Ducke 2015 for the possible role of mercenaries in the networks of exchange.
  26. Sandars 1985, 96.
  27. The Tawagalawa Letter is a famous Hittite text detailing the exploits of a certain Piyamaradu and Tawagalawa: Taw.58, 59–62; see Kelder 2010, 28.
  28. Drews 2017, 206, proposes that the Mycenaean world may have initially arrived in the Aegean as small bands of mercenaries. He suggests that these early charioteers, around the latter part of the Middle Helladic II period, may possibly have been hired by the rulers of Crete, to keep strongholds on the Greek mainland in check. “These military professionals,” he writes, “would have brought back to their homeland [which Drews situates in southern Caucasia, most likely in what is now Armenia; see 217–28, esp. 222] tales about a metal-rich land that was ripe for a takeover.” They eventually turned on their former masters.

29. See, for example, Cline 1996.
30. See Singer 2006, 250–58; Bryce 2016.
31. Schofield and Parkinson 1994.
32. Pusch 1989, 254.
33. Emanuel 2014a, 17. See also S. Wachsmann in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 61–62, no. 47.
34. Whitley et al. 2005–6, 14.
35. Morris 2008, 439.
36. Papyrus: London, British Museum, EA10060, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA10060](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10060); Trismegistos no. 380901, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/380901>; Hansen 2002, 171–75.

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# Mediterranean Encounters: Greeks, Carians, and Egyptians in the First Millennium BC

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The Late Bronze Age was a time of vibrant contact and exchange between Egypt and the world of Mycenaean Greece. The collapse of the Aegean palace societies in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC and Egypt's political fragmentation after the end of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1069 BC) brought an end to nearly all direct interaction between the two regions. Centuries later, as part of wider power realignments in the ancient world, a new pharaonic dynasty once more united Egypt under its rule and forged links with emerging Greek city-states. The seventh century BC marks the start of what the historian Joseph Manning has termed “the Greek millennium” of Egyptian history, arguing that when Egypt fell under Greek rule with Alexander the Great's conquest in 332 BC, it was merely “the *consummation* and not the *beginning* of a long process of understanding and accommodation” between Egypt and Greece.<sup>1</sup>

In the discussion that follows, I use three case studies to examine what exactly “understanding and accommodation” entailed. They will take us from sixth-century BC cosmopolitan Memphis, with its international population including Greeks and Carians, down the Nile to the Egyptian-Greek trading port of Naukratis, and further to Alexandria, on the Mediterranean shore, newly

founded at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Drawing on new insights from recently uncovered or reevaluated archaeological evidence, all three case studies focus on the agents and contexts of cultural contact—that is, people, their actions, and their motivations.

Over the centuries, the framework for this contact was subject to fundamental change. Rule and conquest stood only at the very end. Instead, as in the Bronze Age, it was traders and mercenaries who moved between Egypt and the Greek world, the commerce of goods and labor driving intercultural exchange. Greeks had already begun to reengage in contact with peoples along the Mediterranean shores for trade and settlement by the eighth century BC. This at first largely excluded Egypt, whose Mediterranean trade at the time concentrated largely on the Levant. Egyptians, too, however, had closely experienced the foreign by this period, being ruled first by Libyan and then by Nubian dynasties and finally (664 BC) by a local dynasty established, however, by Assyria following its conquest of Egypt. When the pharaohs of this 26th (Saite) Dynasty (ca. 664–526 BC) finally renewed intensive contact with the Mediterranean world, partly it seems in a bid to shake off Assyrian rule, numerous

Greeks, Carians, and other foreigners came to Egypt as mercenaries or traders. Texts, archaeology, and epigraphy suggest that relations were not entirely unproblematic, and integration coexisted with segregation.<sup>2</sup> Foreigners served in a separate part of the army, might occupy their own town quarters, or were barred from certain religious spaces, but they also practiced intermarriage, and some rose to positions of prestige and importance.<sup>3</sup>

Close contact and exchange persisted throughout times of political change. Egypt's conquest by the Persian king Cambyses II (526 BC) ushered in two long periods of Achaemenid rule (526–404 and 343–332 BC), during which trade (not least of highly desirable Egyptian grain) flourished and we hear of occasional military alliances. Following Alexander's conquest, finally, the Ptolemaic period (332–30 BC) for the first time saw a Greek dynasty rule Egypt as pharaohs. For much of the history of Egyptian-Greek interaction then, commercial transactions, military assistance, and strategic alliances were based largely on exchange and reciprocity. Thus pharaohs hired Greek mercenaries to help defend Egypt's borders and to establish or secure a ruler's power internally and benefited from foreign traders' wide commercial networks, while traders in turn received privileged access to Egyptian commodities (and thus financial and social gain), and mercenaries (or at least their leaders) might obtain rich rewards for their services. Nonetheless, as much of the direct interaction, especially in the early years, took place on Egyptian soil, it was Egyptians, as well as the Egyptian administrative and cultural context, that dominated relations. This was true especially in the case of mercenaries in the pay of the pharaoh; Greek traders enjoyed a certain autonomy in the port city of Naukratis, on land granted to them by the pharaoh. It was only once Macedonian and Ptolemaic rule had been established that the power balance shifted substantially, with a Greek-dominated administration, the Greek language, and other Greek cultural elements gaining prominence.

This evolving dynamic of contact and exchange was based on a continuum of interactions on a local scale and in daily life. The case studies considered here repeatedly underscore the key role played by religion in mediating encounters. They also suggest that across time a wide range of social groups—including mercenaries, craftsmen, and, importantly, women—were carriers and active agents in the transfer of cultural knowledge. It is this aspect in particular that I want to emphasize, adjusting a picture that frequently takes for granted the prominent role of (male) elites in cross-cultural exchange.

## 1. Piabrm's Stela: Carians at Memphis

Memphis—the ancient capital city of Egypt, situated at the apex of the Nile Delta—had long been a center of trade and exchange within Egypt and was frequented also by foreigners. In the Late Period and Ptolemaic period its population included Phoenicians, Greeks (Hellenomemphites), Carians (Caro-Memphites), Syrians, Persians, and Jews, many probably originally garrisoned as mercenaries there, such as the Greeks and Carians said to have been installed by the pharaoh Ahmose (Amasis) II (r. ca. 570–527 BC).<sup>4</sup>

The most intriguing evidence left behind by these immigrants is a series of tombstones. Most of them were found in the Sacred Animal Necropolis of Saqqara, one of the burial grounds of the city of Memphis. While they had been reused in Hellenistic times, they must originally have come from substantial cemeteries that contained tombs of Persians, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Greeks, and especially Carians. Burial in the area of the Serapeum, where generations of holy Apis bulls were buried, seems to have been popular with foreigners and Egyptians alike seeking the particular protection of Apis, the herald, emanation, or embodiment of the god Ptah of Memphis, who became Osiris-Apis after his death. Part of the wider cult of Osiris, god of the underworld, and his wife and sister, Isis, Apis was a patron god for soldiers of Memphis and was clearly prominent also among resident foreigners and their families.<sup>5</sup>

Many examples of these Memphite stelae, notably early ones, tend to be plain or follow the early Egyptian “false door” model, no longer popular with Egyptians themselves in this period. More than a dozen stelae, mostly of the late sixth century BC, feature carved images, sometimes in several registers and often combining foreign and Egyptian elements.<sup>6</sup> Many of the stelae belonged to Carians from the wider region around Halikarnassos and the hinterland of southern Ionia. Renowned as warriors and sailors, Carians were close neighbors of the Ionian Greeks. With Greek settlements in western Anatolia having encroached on Carian territory, relations were not always peaceful; nonetheless, there were mixed populations and intensive cultural and artistic exchange.<sup>7</sup> The material culture of the Carians in Egypt confirms a high degree of shared cultural practice and visual language with Ionians but also close exchange with Egyptian (and possibly other foreign) cultures, including, as attested by the inscriptions, intermarriage.<sup>8</sup> One of the most splendid examples of the Caro-Memphite tombstones, today in the British Museum, London, is the





**Figure 2.1** Grave stela of Piabrm with Carian inscription, Caro-Egyptian, ca. 540–500 BC. Limestone, 63.5 × 31.3 × 10 cm. Found at Saqqara. London, British Museum, EA67235. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

stela of a Carian woman, Piabrm, dating to the late sixth century BC (fig. 2.1).<sup>9</sup>

The overall shape of the round-topped stela is Egyptian, as is its decoration in low relief with incised outlines, even if the engraving is shallower than what is common for Egyptian stelae from the Memphis region.<sup>10</sup> An inscription in Carian script (insofar as it can be read at present) names the deceased as Piabrm, daughter of Usold, with a toponym that most likely designates Usold's hometown as the Carian city of Mylasa.<sup>11</sup> Uniquely among the Caro-Memphite stelae, it names a woman as the deceased. (Even though other stelae represent a woman on the bier, they nonetheless seem to name a man as the deceased.) The stela's decoration consists of an Egyptian winged sun disc with two uraei above three figured registers, one fundamentally in Greek style, the other two

Egyptian. In the lowest register the deceased Piabrm is shown on a funerary bed, surrounded by mourners (that is, in the *prothesis*, the first stage in a traditional Greek burial rite). The way the scene is rendered broadly follows (Ionian) Greek iconographic and stylistic conventions, in keeping with the art of Mylasa, which is closely related to that of neighboring Ionia.<sup>12</sup> The top image, following a standard Egyptian format, shows a man (Usold or a servant?) worshipping the enthroned god Osiris, accompanied by Isis, Osiris's wife and sister. In the central register, again Egyptian, the ibis-headed god Thoth approaches the sacred Apis bull, who is protected by winged Isis, standing behind.

Besides the figures' outlines being incised in low relief, its excavators observed faint traces of paint on the stela: red on the cloth of the bier and in a few other places; some black on the faces, indicating the outlines of large eyes; and some faint traces of yellow. They assumed, however, that "the small scale doubtless also limited the amount of detail that could be shown."<sup>13</sup> Scientific examination carried out by Joanne Dyer of the British Museum's Department of Scientific Research now confirms that the stela was indeed originally stunningly colorful. What is more, the multispectral images acquired under different illumination conditions bring to light patterns that go well beyond what is indicated by the incised outlines, revealing a wealth of details hidden until now.<sup>14</sup> Even if their precise coloring could not always be identified—in the images color differences are rendered as shades of gray, with actual color information relying on scarce microscopic pigment traces and chemical data—this research for the first time conveys a far more complete idea of what the stela once looked like. The reconstruction drawings included here present a preliminary result of this work (fig. 2.2).<sup>15</sup> They show the observed patterns and areas where substantial color traces can be clearly identified, complemented by more hypothetical color reconstructions in areas where little or no pigment data was available, but where reasonable guesses could be made based on comparative data, primarily from other Egyptian painted stelae. Of course, any such reconstruction will inevitably misrepresent actual color hues and subtleties of shading, and currently ongoing scientific investigations may further modify the present picture.<sup>16</sup> The rich information already available today, however, provides vital new insights into the stela as a product and carrier of diverse cultural traditions.

What strikes one most perhaps about the ancient color scheme is the way it emphasizes the stela's overall Egyptian character. The four-colored band, hitherto entirely invisible, that frames the entire decorated area



**Figure 2.2** Color reconstruction of Piabrm's stela (London, British Museum, EA67235). Left: areas with substantial traces of identifiable color; right: hypothetical reconstruction using minor traces and comparative data. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License. Drawing: Kate Morton

and each register was ubiquitous in ancient Egyptian art.<sup>17</sup> It features black strokes separating larger blocks of color, which are here Egyptian blue, red, and possibly green and yellow. Numerous other elements and details of iconography, palette, and placement, too, correspond to Egyptian painterly traditions. On the Apis bull, patches of light and dark convey the bull's typical black-and-white patterning, and the rectangular rug placed on his back most likely would have been painted red.<sup>18</sup> In both the top and central registers, the goddess Isis wears a long dress with shoulder straps, as is common for her in Egyptian art (its color is not certain), and a vulture-wing

headdress (blue at least in the top register). The feathers of her wings were partly painted in Egyptian blue, separated by red outlines, similar to the wings of the sun disc above. The offering table (painted in Egyptian blue) that stands before Osiris in the top register carried the typical Egyptian offerings of lotus flowers, with multispectral imaging now revealing their multicolored leaves,<sup>19</sup> two very stylized representations of plucked geese, and three round bread loaves. Egyptian paintings often show such loaves as a white circle with a central yellow dot to represent the bread's central indentation,

and this seems to be the color scheme here too, even if further details are omitted.<sup>20</sup>

Very similar loaves of bread, geese, and lotus flowers also appear on fragments of another Caro-Memphite stela with a similar scene of worship that also preserves several letters of a Carian inscription (fig. 2.3).<sup>21</sup> Though long known, the piece has received little attention so far.<sup>22</sup> For us it is of interest primarily for the fact that pigment remains show that the skin of the worshipper behind the offering table was colored reddish brown, as was standard for Egyptian male figures; we may presume that the same was the case also for the male figures on Piabrm's stela.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 2.3** Fragments of a grave stela, Caro-Egyptian, ca. 540–500 BC. Limestone, 12 × 10.8 cm, 17.4 × 16.2 cm. Found at Saqqara. London, British Museum, EA67238, EA67239. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

Just as the paint enhanced the Egyptian appearance of Egyptian scenes, it was also used to embellish the Greek scene with further Greek details. Most striking is Piabrm's bed, which now emerges as richly decorated with patterns representing precious inlays: one can clearly see florals, rosettes, and the image of a large cat, presumably a lion, on the bed's side panels and large star patterns on the upper parts of the legs. Such decoration is well

paralleled in Late Archaic Greek imagery, such as on a Klazomenian sarcophagus from Akanthos, as well as on actual *klinai*.<sup>24</sup> Traces of decoration on the mattress suggest a painted meander pattern with red a dominant color.<sup>25</sup> On the table in front of the bed, colored red, the painted vertical lines and dots marking wooden joints are well known from other Greek images, as is the carved fretwork on the table's side.<sup>26</sup> Also Piabrm's jewelry—which includes two bracelets on the left arm, W-shaped earrings, and a large necklace with a double strand of beads and a pendant in the form of a bull's head—all find parallels in East Greek jewelry. The oversize bull's-head pendant, however, most likely also has an Egyptian significance; it might have designated the wearer as a particular devotee (or cult servant?) of Apis or at least placed her under the special protection of Osiris-Apis for the transition to the afterlife.<sup>27</sup>

Who were the craftsmen responsible for the stela? As other scholars have observed, the stela appears to have been carved by a single hand, but several deviations from Egyptian norms suggest this hand was not well trained in Egyptian traditions of style and iconography. For example, the kilt worn by the worshipper in the top register is shorter and more tightly wrapped than the kilt of most Egyptian images.<sup>28</sup> Osiris's offering table carries the typical Late Period Memphite bread loaves, geese, and large lotus bunch, but the table is unusually plain, sturdy, and linear, and the bread loaves are not symmetrically arranged.<sup>29</sup> Also unusual are the vulture wings on the shoulders and hindquarters of the Apis bull; they are common on bronze figurines but not in painted representations, and they do not appear, for example, on the Serapeum stelae.<sup>30</sup> Osiris's throne uniquely transforms the standard Egyptian angular cube design into an odd, organically rounded series of upturned *u* shapes that rise to form the throne's back.<sup>31</sup> And not only is Osiris's flail clumsily rendered, but he grasps the *was*-scepter rather than the usual *hekat*-scepter (though it has been suggested that this detail, rather than being a mistake, could go back to a special royal form of Osiris particularly revered in Memphis).<sup>32</sup> Most unusual of all perhaps is the figure of Thoth before the Apis bull. His appearance in the scene as such is not entirely unparalleled, as some Egyptian stelae also show him leading mortals before the gods, thus fulfilling the same role as the Greek Hermes, with whom he was equated by Greeks; his semicrouching posture of homage on our stela is, however, entirely foreign to Egyptian art.<sup>33</sup>

Several figures interrupting and overlapping the register borders complete the catalogue of unusual features, which, when taken together, make it highly implausible

for the stela to be the product of an Egyptian workshop. In contrast, it has been noted that features such as the use of a compass to draw sun discs would be commensurate with an Ionian or Carian craft tradition.<sup>34</sup> Yet there are also aspects that seem unusual from a Greek perspective. The scene in the lowest register overall corresponds well to Late Archaic Greek *prothesis* scenes and also displays some similarities—such as the cloth draped over the body—with the rare Ionian *ekphora* scene on an early Klazomenian sarcophagus.<sup>35</sup> Piabrm's strangely large feet somewhat recall Egyptian mummies. The woman at the head of the bier, dressed in an Ionian *chiton* and placing her hand on the deceased's head, is typical for Greek *prothesis* scenes, even if she, like other elements in the scene, also finds close parallels in Egyptian scenes of mourning, which have long been considered a source of inspiration for Greek funeral imagery. Indeed, in a similar composition on the Egyptian grave stela of the Persian Djedherbes, also from Saqqara, the same role is performed by the goddess Isis.<sup>36</sup>

It is the three mourners standing behind the bier, however, that are most intriguing. The figure at the front, wearing a long dress, tears her cheek in a gesture typical of Greek female mourning in the Archaic period.<sup>37</sup> Behind this figure are two others who wear slightly shorter garments, one holding a large, curved knife to the face, the other with arms raised to the head. They have generally been identified as male, as indeed the shorter dress through which the outlines of the legs are visible might suggest, and knives were generally not handled by women in Greek culture.<sup>38</sup> In the only known parallel, a Caro-Egyptian stela from the Memphite necropolis of Abusir, the knife is clearly held by a man.<sup>39</sup> Yet long hair in Caro-Memphite and Egyptian stela (though not necessarily in Late Archaic Greek art) and the gesture of raising both arms to the head in Greek art would be more typical for women.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately the figures' skin color, which might help clarify gender, cannot be deduced from the multispectral imaging.

Unusual, too, is the table in front of the bier, laden with food, including pyramidal cakes, pomegranates, and round cakes or other fruit.<sup>41</sup> In Archaic or early Classical Athenian imagery, such a table would be typical for a symposium of the living, but in an East Greek/Anatolian context, there may well also have been a tradition of such tables in funerary ritual, as suggested by their regular presence in later so-called Totenmahlreliefs.<sup>42</sup> On a closely related and roughly contemporary Greek-Egyptian funeral stela once in the Nahman collection, however, the presence of two plucked geese makes it clear that the

table is thought of as similar to an Egyptian offering table.<sup>43</sup>

Such complications highlight once more the limitations placed on us by the Athenian bias in our Greek evidence, but they are also instructive in themselves: the fact that few images of the *prothesis*, and indeed few grave stela, of the period are known from East Greece or Caria shows how cultural practice might differ not only between different parts of the eastern Aegean world but also between the Carians' homeland and their communities in Egypt.<sup>44</sup> The stela's position at the intersection of different cultural traditions is most clearly exemplified by the figure of the mourner holding a knife. According to Herodotus, the cutting of the forehead with a knife, manifesting intense grief, was carried out as a ritual gesture of mourning by Carians participating in the Egyptian festival of Osiris and Isis at Busiris.<sup>45</sup> Recent studies by Liviu Mihail Iancu and Jay McAnally have rightly noted the uniqueness of male self-mutilation as a mourning ritual in extant Aegean and Anatolian (contrary to its presence in Jewish) evidence.<sup>46</sup> Iancu's speculation about its possible adoption by Carians from West Semites among the multicultural community of Memphite mercenaries, however, seems perilously close to connecting two random dots in a field otherwise empty of evidence; for females, certainly, the violent laceration of the cheeks was well established in Archaic Greece.

With its mix of Egyptian, Ionian, Carian, and possibly other foreign elements, Piabrm's stela thus cannot be attributed to a single craft tradition or "ethnic identity," even if the carving betrays a hand trained in Ionian/Carian more than Egyptian conventions. How does the painted decoration fit into this picture? On the one hand, the added figured decoration of Piabrm's bier—drawn freehand without the help of incised outlines—suggests familiarity with current fashions of Late Archaic Greek *klinai* and perhaps experience with representing them. On the other hand, the addition of a striking painted frame and the coloring of the Egyptian scenes largely conform to Egyptian conventions. This applies also to some extent to the stunning pattern of Osiris's dress, though this, again, has some idiosyncrasies.

It is clear from the multispectral images that Osiris's dress was polychrome, even if Egyptian blue was the only of several pigments to be securely identifiable. It featured a rich pattern of chevrons as well as rosettes, probably arranged in three vertical panels on the dress or perhaps as a belt with rosettes above a dress with a chevron pattern. Egyptian art often depicts Osiris's dress as plain, but there are a number of representations of him in

patterned dress, mostly involving rosettes, scales, and especially diamond patterns—albeit seemingly not (at least as far as suggested by my limited survey) chevrons.<sup>47</sup> Though well attested in New Kingdom art, patterned garments are especially common for Osiris and other deities in later periods, with the best parallels coming from tombs and temples of the Roman period. Female deities in painted tombs at Tuna el-Gebel, for example, wear dresses with multicolored horizontal chevrons and/or vertical patterned panels, while at Dendera, the goddess Nut is dressed in a garment with vertical chevrons and a central panel with rosettes.<sup>48</sup> And even though these examples are not precise matches and are considerably later in date, individual elements such as multicolored chevrons are well attested on textiles and adornments from Tutankhamun’s tomb and in other New Kingdom art.<sup>49</sup>

In Greek art, in contrast, chevrons appear to be rarer. Richly patterned, even figured, garments are of course well attested in Archaic art, with both horizontal panels and a central vertical *paryphe* common in female dress; often designs such as colorful diamond patterns also derive inspiration from foreign, including Near Eastern, traditions.<sup>50</sup> Chevrons, though, seem confined to the dress of Eastern foreigners, such as Thracians and Scythians, and are often rather differently rendered.<sup>51</sup> Overall, then, Osiris’s dress seems somewhat exceptional with regard to both Egyptian and Greek painterly practice; it might have been designed specifically to highlight the god’s importance, perhaps drawing on traditions from both cultures for the purpose. Interestingly in this context, the Egyptian-Aramaic stela of Akhatabu an Abba from Saqqara, dating from Year 4 of Xerxes’s reign (482 BC), also features Osiris wearing a patterned dress, though here the pattern is carved in addition to, presumably, being painted and is different in detail from our stela.<sup>52</sup>

Akhatabu an Abba’s stela reminds us that Carians were not the only foreigners to have lived and died in Late Period Memphis. Indeed, it has been suggested that a workshop may have existed in Memphis that specialized in the manufacture of stelae for the city’s diverse ethnic groups.<sup>53</sup> Several of the Caro-Memphite stelae certainly could have been fashioned by the same hand, but whether works such as the roughly contemporary Greek-Egyptian Nahman stela and the (somewhat later) Achaemenid-Egyptian stelae emerge from the same workshop is difficult to judge; they display similar mixtures of cultural traditions but are stylistically different. Among Carians and Ionians, there was certainly a tradition of expert stone carving, and both were active as masons and sculptors abroad.<sup>54</sup> One could well

imagine them active at Memphis, perhaps collaborating with local craftsmen including painters. Such a multicultural environment—in which technical and cultural knowledge was shared, developed, and adapted—would have encouraged knowledge and ideas to radiate beyond the confines of Memphis, carried by migrants who returned home or moved on to other places in the Mediterranean world.<sup>55</sup> Similar arguments have been made also in relation to the transmission of knowledge, technical and otherwise, by Bronze Age mercenaries, whose impact may have been felt in shipbuilding as much as in storytelling,<sup>56</sup> underlining once more the fact that military mobility forms part of complex patterns of interaction that extended well beyond mere military matters.

Processes such as these are not necessarily straightforward and easy to grasp. For example, to date no monuments closely resembling the Caro-Egyptian stelae are known from outside Egypt. Nonetheless there are hints that beliefs about the afterlife and elements of funeral practice that were shared and developed in the multicultural communities of Memphis also left their mark elsewhere in Egypt and Asia Minor. The Carians’ preference for the otherwise largely obsolete Old Kingdom false-door iconography, for example, was probably rooted in a preexisting western Anatolian tradition of false doors in Carian, Lycian, and Lydian tomb monuments. Yet it is not entirely inconceivable that the motif’s enduring popularity in Asia Minor, as a symbolic threshold to the afterlife, was reinforced by Egyptian ideas;<sup>57</sup> it certainly seems to have been employed also by (East) Greeks living in the Greek-Egyptian port of Naukratis in the Nile Delta.<sup>58</sup> In much the same way, it has long been suspected that Egyptian ideas contributed to the growing popularity of sarcophagus burials, and inhumations in general, in many parts of the Archaic East Greek and especially Ionian world.<sup>59</sup> The evidence for the cultural “bilingualism,” or indeed multilingualism, of the eastern Mediterranean peoples in the sixth century BC is certainly a powerful argument for not discounting Egypt as one of the forces that shaped ideas and technologies in the eastern Mediterranean world.

## 2. Isis, Osiris, and the Adonia: Greeks at Naukratis

My second case study investigates some of the agents who may have shaped and transmitted new ideas and practices at a different site, the Egyptian-Greek trading port of Naukratis. Naukratis was a key node of commercial and cultural interchange between Egypt and

the (Greek) Mediterranean from the late seventh century BC onward. Excavations in the late nineteenth century here revealed a town in which Egyptians, Greeks, and other foreigners lived side by side for centuries, with rich finds coming especially from the town's sanctuaries.<sup>60</sup> The site's cemetery, in contrast, proved a disappointment for its excavators Ernest Gardner and W. M. Flinders Petrie, yielding only minor finds of mostly Hellenistic date.<sup>61</sup> The most substantial tomb monuments were found in secondary use, including a late sixth- to early fifth-century BC "false door" grave marker that remarkably fused Egyptian and Anatolian door iconography.<sup>62</sup> The tombs themselves did yield some interesting finds, however, even if their significance was overlooked both by the excavators and by later scholars. Two graves in particular are of interest, both of them among the earlier, Classical burials in the cemetery.

One of the tombs yielded a lamp dated to the fifth century BC, two small Attic palmette *lekythoi* of around 400 BC, and a miniature pottery bowl-cum-tray that had been placed beneath the deceased's head (fig. 2.4).<sup>63</sup> While lamps and especially *lekythoi* are standard grave offerings from the period, the tray is unusual. Gardner noted that several tombs at Naukratis contained such "curious minute saucers, sometimes with two handles," and a similar but not identical tray is also among David Hogarth's stray finds from Naukratis.<sup>64</sup> The closest parallels I am aware of are miniature offering trays that were found in the thousands in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at ancient Corinth. Attested from the end of the sixth to the third century BC, but especially popular in the fourth, they initially featured simplified versions of three or more different vessels on the "tray," which later all developed into shallow bowls.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 2.4** Tomb group, early 4th century BC. Left to right: Offering tray. Terracotta, 2.1 × 5 × 6.4 cm; *Lekythos*. Terracotta, 7.4 × 4.9 cm; *Lekythos*. Terracotta, H: 5.4 cm; Lamp. Terracotta, L: 7.6 cm. Found in the cemetery of Naukratis. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, RES.87.163, 11.46019, 2017.803, 88.819. Image: © 2022, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Although the Naukratis examples, with their single rather than triple bowl, are different from the Corinthian ones, a link with Corinthian practice might still be possible, not least as Corinthian imports, albeit limited, indicate a certain amount of contact between Naukratis and Corinth in the Classical period.<sup>66</sup> The Corinthian trays are generally considered specific to the cult of Demeter and Kore, however, and unlike other types of miniature pottery, are not attested in Corinthian tombs. Conversely, the cult of Demeter is not especially prominent in extant evidence at Naukratis, though this could merely be a result of the chance focus of excavation activity.<sup>67</sup> The appearance of such trays in Naukratite tombs is thus all the more unusual and, I suggest, warrants the seeking of an explanation in the particular cultural context of Naukratis. Greeks in Egypt had long recognized their Demeter as the equivalent of Egyptian Isis, who, along with Osiris, was associated with the underworld and rebirth;<sup>68</sup> the story of Demeter and Kore in some ways provided a parallel to that of Osiris and Isis. Indeed, already before the mid-sixth century BC, Ionians in Egyptian Karnak had equated the grain goddess Demeter with Isis as "mistress of vegetation," in a sanctuary later known as the Demetrium, which also housed a cult of Osiris as "master of nourishment," characterized by a strong focus on death and rebirth in its ritual practice.<sup>69</sup> As Dorothy J. Thompson has argued, it was through its link with the doctrine of the soul's immortality and its focus on personal well-being that the cult of Demeter, carried by women, transcended social and ethnic boundaries and became an integrative force in multicultural Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>70</sup> The finds from Naukratis suggest that it already had such a function earlier. It may well have been the familiarity with Egyptian beliefs that led Classical Naukratite women not only to equip their deceased with oil and light but also to place them under the particular protection of Demeter-Isis.

The second tomb of note contained a large *alabastron* and an Athenian red-figure acorn *lekythos* of the early fourth century BC (fig. 2.5).<sup>71</sup> The *lekythos*, showing Eros with an incense burner on a ladder flanked by women, is one of the rare known representations relating to the Adonia, a women's festival that was celebrated once a year and is best attested in Classical Athens.<sup>72</sup> As part of the ritual, women would plant seeds (texts mention lettuce, wheat, barley, and fennel) in pots called "gardens of Adonis." Once the seeds had sprouted, they carried the pots to the rooftops of their houses, where the plantings soon died in the heat. Symbolizing the death of Adonis, this was the signal for the women to lament Aphrodite's youthful lover, who was said to share his time between the underworld and the world of the living; the gardens were

then disposed of in the sea or a spring. The festival also involved dancing to the music of flute and tambourines, and it is possible that small images of Adonis were placed in the Adonis gardens.<sup>73</sup> Marcel Detienne's influential study of the Adonia has shown that it was centered on the domestic sphere, revolved around Aphrodite and the powers of seduction, counted *hetairai* among the celebrants, and involved the symbolic death of vegetation. It thus to some extent provided an antithesis to female civic roles. Recent scholarship has somewhat complicated this structural analysis, noting the existence of public processions (as in the fourth-century BC Adonia celebrated in the Piraeus, linked to Aphrodite Ourania) and arguing for a more central social position of the festival that articulated, but also subverted, women's roles in marriage and mourning.<sup>74</sup>

Most images of the ritual come from Classical Athens and typically feature an "Adonis garden" in a broken pot, a ladder leading up to the roof, and sometimes incense burners, as on our *lekythos*, as Adonis was closely linked with myrrh, the precious incense involved in the phoenix's rebirth and a popular scent with seductive powers.<sup>75</sup> Both the myth and the rite, however, have a long history in the Greek world and outside Athens. In a passage probably from the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, Adonis is the son of Alpheisiboea and Phoenix, the mythical ancestor of the Phoenicians but also the name of the Egyptian mythical bird.<sup>76</sup> The earliest references to the ritual lament for Adonis's death are found around 600 BC in a fragment by Sappho, suggesting that the Adonia was being celebrated by this time on Lesbos.<sup>77</sup>

Scholars have long noted the Adonia's links with Near Eastern, notably Babylonian and Phoenician, ideas and practices and have argued for a transmission of the cult from the Middle East to Greece, perhaps via Cyprus.<sup>78</sup> Just as striking, if not more so, however, are similarities with Egyptian ritual.<sup>79</sup> This applies especially to the Adonis garden rites, which have few parallels in Near Eastern cult but are strongly reminiscent of a key element of the Osirian mysteries, the Osirian corn mummies (Osiris-vegetans). The latter were composed in molds, troughs, and frames from earth, barley, and Nile water and then watered and tended like gardens for several days until they sprouted, symbolizing the renewal of life. A second figure, Osiris Sokar, was made from earth, spices, and other precious ingredients, left in the sun to dry, and then was mummified. During the creation of the figures, which typically took place in Osiris chapels on temple roofs, mourning rituals were performed by Osiris's sisters, Isis and Nephthys. Both figures were then buried and after a year were dug up and reburied or thrown into the



**Figure 2.5** Red-figure acorn *lekythos*, Greek, Athenian, early 4th century BC. Terracotta, 22 × 7.5 cm. Found in the cemetery at Naukratis. London, British Museum, 1888,0601.716. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

temple's sacred lake or the river.<sup>80</sup> Parallels between these rites and the Adonia have long been noted, but as they are especially evident in the description in Theocritus's *Idyll* 15 of an Adonia festival in the Alexandrian palace of Arsinoe II in 275 BC, they are generally considered late, part of the Ptolemaic policy of religious integration that linked Osiris with Adonis, as "another dying god whose chief function in ritual was to be lamented."<sup>81</sup> There are good arguments for suggesting that links between Adonis and Osiris go back much further, however, and that Ptolemaic instrumentalization represents only one stage

in an intercultural dialogue that dates back to the earliest days of the Greek Adonis ritual.

To begin with, the key elements of the ritual, including the lament and the gardens, clearly predate the Ptolemaic period. Moreover, there can be no doubt that from the later seventh century BC, Greek residents and visitors to Egypt would have been aware of, and perhaps participated in, Osirian festivals involving “corn mummies” in towns such as Memphis, Naukratis, Canopus, or the great Osirian shrine at Abydos.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, it can be no coincidence that we first hear about the Adonia ritual on Lesbos, an island that by around 600 BC was closely involved in trade with Egypt and that our informant is Sappho.<sup>83</sup> One of Sappho’s poems, only recently rediscovered, speaks of her longing for her brother Charaxos to return from a sea journey bringing riches, a trading voyage that might have involved the sale of wine in Egypt as well as visiting Naukratis, not least since Herodotus mentions Lesbians among the Greek traders represented at Naukratis.<sup>84</sup> Whether Charaxos is real or, as some believe,<sup>85</sup> part of a fictional cast of characters and events created by Sappho for the entertainment of symposiasts and their female companions, Lesbos’s seaborne trade with Egypt is amply borne out by archaeology, from finds of Lesbian amphorae in late seventh-to-sixth-century BC Naukratis and elsewhere in Egypt,<sup>86</sup> to sixth-century BC votive inscriptions by Mytileneans at Naukratis. Even Sappho’s references to Charaxos’s infatuation with the Naukratite *hetaira* Doricha (“she who yearns for gifts”), on whom he supposedly lavished much money, finds a plausible background in the inscriptional evidence for female dedicants in the late seventh-to-sixth-century BC (and later) sanctuary of Aphrodite at Naukratis: with names including Mikis, Archedike, and Aigyptis (“the Egyptian”), they most likely represent the town’s *hetairai*, whose fame and beauty are highlighted by Herodotus.<sup>87</sup>

It is precisely women like Doricha or Aigyptis, and the elite traders and travelers who were their clients and lovers, who would also have formed the audience for Sappho’s poems, with their emphasis on female beauty and seductiveness, rivalry, and “lesbian” erotic.<sup>88</sup> It is they, too, who are likely to have played a key role in adopting and adapting an Egyptian ritual centered on female love and mourning for themselves. At home in the world of Greece as well as Egypt (and perhaps the Near East), many of them were also internationally mobile, even if not always voluntarily. Herodotus tells the tale of how another supposed Naukratite *hetaira*, Rhodopis (“rosy face”), whom he and other later writers took to be identical to Sappho’s Doricha, had been brought as a slave

from Thrace to Samos and thence to Naukratis, where, her freedom having been bought by Charaxos, she eventually became wealthy enough to dedicate rich offerings in Delphi.<sup>89</sup> As Gregory Nagy rightly notes, while such rags-to-riches tales are hardly historical facts, they can be true, if symbolic, reflections of social realities, from the trafficking of women as slaves and prostitutes to a world characterized by geographic and social mobility.<sup>90</sup> It is *hetairai*, well attested as one of the key constituencies among Adonis worshippers,<sup>91</sup> but also the (Greek or Egyptian) wives or daughters of traders and mercenaries, who had the opportunity and the motivation to introduce to Greece elements of a ritual that fostered a female sense of community and afforded them a special degree of freedom, while staying within the traditional female social spheres of fertility, marriage, and mourning.<sup>92</sup>

Even if we cannot grasp the role of Adonis in Naukratis with any precision, there are other finds besides the Adonia *lekythos* that seem to belong in the same context. Two are related to the *iunx* (ἰυνξ), the magical wheel on a string that was said to have been invented by Aphrodite to enchant and attract lovers with its sound, including her own, Adonis.<sup>93</sup> One is a fourth-century BC gilded copper ring, again found in a tomb, that shows Eros playing with an *iunx* (fig. 2.6).<sup>94</sup> Another is a sixth-century BC votive inscription on a Chian chalice that can perhaps be read as a personal name, *Iunx*, a dedication perhaps by yet another of the port’s *hetairai*—*Iunx*, of course, would be a highly appropriate name for someone whose business it is to charm lovers.<sup>95</sup> A fourth-century BC terracotta group of Aphrodite and Eros, finally, is the most elaborate figurine to have emerged from the Naukratite cemetery, further underlining the significance of the love goddess at the site.<sup>96</sup>

The recurrence of the theme of love, magic, and notions of rebirth linked to Aphrodite, Adonis, and Demeter-Isis at Naukratis suggests that the port, with its central role in early Greek-Egyptian exchange, also provided fertile soil for the development of ritual practices that crossed cultural borders. Women, including *hetairai*, were prime agents in this process. The finds from Naukratis also underline that these processes were part of a long-term dialogue that involved different groups of people in different periods, with a focus on East Greeks in the Archaic period and mainland Greeks in the Classical. The surge in popularity, or at least visibility—not necessarily the same thing—of the Adonia in Classical Athens, of course, fundamentally reflects developments in Athenian society. Nonetheless, its wider background is formed by the fifth-century BC Athenian dialogue with, and *logos* about, the culture of Egypt, which included Athenian





**Figure 2.6** Finger ring showing Eros playing with an *iunx*, Greek, 4th century BC. Gilded copper, Diam: 1.8 cm. Found in the cemetery at Naukratis. London, British Museum, 1888,0601.1. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

political and military ties with, and presence in, Egypt as well as the presence of Egyptians, Egyptian goods, and Egyptian cults in Athens.<sup>97</sup>

That it was precisely ideas and rituals related to the cycle of life and death, mourning and rebirth, and magic that took center stage across time in this cross-cultural dialogue is hardly surprising. As is well attested in contemporary multifaith societies, crossover between communities happens most easily with regard to rites that promise to avert illness and suffering or attract wealth and good luck and that are located in the realm of more “personal” or private religion.<sup>98</sup> Notions of resurrection and eternal life, and the individual empowerment that lay in the prospect of manipulating one’s own fate through ritual and magic, would have appealed to Greeks all the more as this promise came from Egypt, a long-standing purveyor of amulets and potions to protect the living and the dead.<sup>99</sup> It would have been precisely the agency and ritual space offered by the Adonis ritual but also by the worship of Demeter to marginalized social groups such as women—playing on their key social spheres of birth, love, and death—that created some of its appeal.

### 3. Cats for Arsinoe: Hellenistic Encounters

My final case study again takes its departure from Naukratis. The cultural, political, and economic

transformations that affected Egypt following the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC also spelled change for the international river port. While the economic and political focus now firmly shifted to the Mediterranean Sea and to Alexandria, the first half of the third century BC still saw a great flourishing and much building activity in Naukratis. Among other things, the old Egyptian sanctuary of Amun-Re was enlarged and embellished, and new cults were instituted.<sup>100</sup> As has been argued recently by Ross Thomas and Peter Higgs, this also included the establishment of a sanctuary of the cat goddess Bastet/Boubastis, which flourished in the early part of the third century BC and yielded an extraordinary group of sculptures depicting cats. As noted by Thomas and Higgs, while the sculptures were bought by Flinders Petrie and the Egyptian Museum in Cairo from antiquities dealers, they almost certainly were originally found at the site of Naukratis.<sup>101</sup> The attractive, mostly life-size early Hellenistic cats, preserved in some twenty-two fragments, were carved from limestone or marble, partly in a lively, “naturalistic” Greek style, partly in a stiffer, less agile Egyptian tradition (fig. 2.7). Many of them, both female and male, are shown pawing birds. A limestone base for one of the cats carries the dedication ΓΑΛΑΤΕΙΑ:ΘΕΥΔΟΤΟΥ ΒΟΥΒΑΣΤΙ (Galatea daughter of Theodotos to Boubastis), indicating that the group came from a Bubasteion, a temple of Bastet, the feline goddess who was worshipped as a terrifying avenger in the period but also and especially as a nurturing mother concerned with fertility, childbirth, and infants.

The extraordinary group would be unique, were it not for the recent find of a large number of related sculptures in a Boubastis sanctuary at Kom el-Dikka, in Alexandria, which dates to around 300 BC and was rebuilt under Queen Berenike II (267/266–221 BC) for her husband, Ptolemy III (r. 246–221 BC), and their children.<sup>102</sup> The sanctuary yielded some 172 limestone and 384 terracotta figures of cats as well as images of children holding cats or birds, some of the cats bearing votive inscriptions by female and male dedicants with Greek names. The terracotta cats are shown crouching on a plinth, often seizing a bird, identified by the excavators as a small duck. The limestone cats sit calmly or alert or are standing; there are also large cats with kittens, as well as cats with kittens carried by children.

At first glance the sculptures from Naukratis and Alexandria might be no more than examples of offerings to the cat-goddess Bastet/Boubastis that depict the goddess’s sacred animal and alter ego in a new, Greek-inspired style, being fertile and caring for their offspring, or pursuing a characteristic feline pastime: catching and



**Figure 2.7** Figures of cats, Egyptian, early 3rd century BC. Marble and limestone, H: 4.5 to 30.5 cm. Probably from the Boubasteion at Naukratis. London, British Museum, 1905.0612.1-3, 4, 6, 7, 18. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

killing birds. The sculptures' religious context demands deeper probing, however. The elegant style and seeming lightheartedness of the images, I contend, conceal a deeper meaning, similar to that recently demonstrated for the Hellenistic sculptural type of the "goose wrestler," a young boy playfully fighting with a goose.<sup>103</sup> The varied renderings of this theme have traditionally been seen as charming "genre" scenes typical of Hellenistic Greek art, yet in an Egyptian context the image could carry a distinct religious and political meaning. A small silver group of a boy with a goose (fig. 2.8) found at Alexandria, for instance, once featured a sidelock and crown (now lost), making it clear that it represented a child god, most likely the god Horus-the-child, also known as Harpokrates.<sup>104</sup> The Nile goose he holds is not merely a plaything or pet animal but a sacrificial animal, which, as noted by Patrick Schollmeyer and Brunilde Ridgway,<sup>105</sup> frequently embodied Horus's evil adversary Seth. Such notions were prominent especially in Late Period and Ptolemaic Egyptian religion, when sacrificial animals, and especially geese and other birds, were thought to represent a god's enemies; we see them placed on offering tables, such as in the Carian stelae discussed above (see figs. 2.1-2.3).<sup>106</sup> In political ideology, with the pharaoh considered the reincarnation of Horus, their defeat and sacrifice mirrored the god defeating his enemy and thus also symbolized the pharaoh defeating the enemies of Egypt. Of course, as many scholars have noted, images like those of the boy with the goose often feature a playful interaction between boy and animal that almost seems affectionate and that appears to contradict an

interpretation of a cosmic struggle.<sup>107</sup> Yet a tension between religious meaning and playful form, drawing on Greek traditions of depicting children with pets, could also have been a stylistic device reflecting the sophisticated intercultural milieu of Hellenistic Alexandria.

Ubiquitous in Late Period and later Egypt, the symbolic meaning of birds as sacrificial animals would have been familiar also to Greeks from their contact with Egyptians. Indeed, that East Greeks were already aware of the notion by around 600 BC seems indicated by a pottery *oinochoe* made in Miletos and found in a tomb on Rhodes, both places that maintained close contact with Egypt in the period (fig. 2.9).<sup>108</sup> Its puzzling decoration, an image of a goose being strangled by a lion-sphinx, has meaning only when considered against a contemporary Egyptian background, with the sphinx as the embodiment of the pharaoh defeating his enemy. Beside the sphinx, its humble relative the cat, too, could take on a role as a divine avatar and a destroyer of enemies in Egypt. It is in the form of a great cat that the sun god Re, for example, slays the snake Apep in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. A similar symbolism is probably associated with images of cats chasing birds, such as those adorning the New Kingdom tomb of Nebamun and other scenes of fowling in the marshes; as noted, for instance, by Richard Parkinson and Daniel von Recklinghausen, such scenes carried strong connotations of hunting enemies, with the wild geese in the papyrus thicket embodying the enemies of Horus or the pharaoh (fig. 2.10).<sup>109</sup>



**Figure 2.8** Statuette of a boy and goose, Ptolemaic, ca. 240 BC. Silver, H: 9.2 cm. Found at Alexandria. London, British Museum, 1845,0705.1. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

Returning to our cat sculptures with this in mind, the playful scenes reveal themselves as part of a long tradition of animals as the avatars of both Egyptian gods and their enemies. As offerings to the cat goddess Bastet/Bubastis, the female cats would have embodied the goddess, with the male cats perhaps representing Horus. By extension, they also embodied the Ptolemaic queens and kings as protectors of the state, who ensured stability and prosperity through dynastic continuity. We know that most or all of the cat sculptures from Kom el-Dikka predate the sanctuary's rebuilding under Berenike II sometime between 246 and 222 BC, and it may be no coincidence that the Demotic dedication on one of the Naukratite cat sculptures, though much defaced, seems to record a date of 266/265 BC, shortly after the deification of Berenike's predecessor queen, Arsinoe II. The latter was the wife and sister of Ptolemy II (r. 285–246 BC), and her cult was disseminated after her death by the king. Ptolemy I (r. 305–282 BC) and Ptolemy II were



**Figure 2.9** Wild goat-style oinochoe showing a sphinx strangling a goose, Milesian, ca. 600 BC (after Jacopi 1931, plate VI). From Kameiros, Rhodes

instrumental in the rebuilding of the sanctuary of Amun-Re at Naukratis and in all likelihood also played key roles in the establishment or expansion of the sanctuaries of Bastet/Boubastis at Alexandria and at Naukratis. Here Arsinoe II would have been recognized in the cat goddess, but she may also have retained elements of maritime Aphrodite and Isis, with whom she was more commonly identified.<sup>110</sup> At least some of the small birds caught by the cats seem to be doves, traditionally associated with Greek Aphrodite; the sacrifice of birds (*ornea*) to deified Arsinoe II is attested also in a third-century BC text on the demes of Alexandria.<sup>111</sup> Similar to Arsinoe II's Adonia, the ruler-sponsored cults of Bastet/Bubastis would have been part of a wider policy aimed at consolidating Ptolemaic rule by fostering the assimilation of Greek and Egyptian religious practices and thus co-opting the diverse communities of Hellenistic Egypt into Ptolemaic ruler cults (a policy that, coincidentally, also involved the cult of Demeter and Kore). With their curious mixture of Greek and Egyptian styles, the cats from Alexandria and Naukratis played their part in this process as unique expressions of Egyptian religious concepts by and for culturally diverse audiences in Egypt.<sup>112</sup>



**Figure 2.10** Tomb painting, Egyptian, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1350 BC. Painted plaster, 98 × 115 × 22 cm. From the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes. London, British Museum, EA37977. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License

#### 4. Cross-Cultural Dialogues: The Question of Agents and Impact

The nature of the relationship between Egyptians and their neighbors along the Mediterranean's shores has long been a matter of debate. Examining interactions between Egyptians, Greeks, and Carians across the centuries, the case studies considered here paint a picture of an ongoing dialogue that involved a variety of different actors, places, and processes. Sustained episodes of close contact provided a platform for the development and transfer of practices, knowledge, and ideas that radiated out from their places of origin to tangibly shape both cultures, with the sphere of religion playing a key role.

These observations have wider ramifications. Scholars such as Walter Burkert or Albert Henrichs have long argued that elements of Egyptian, notably Osirian, religion appeared in Greek religion especially from the sixth century BC onward, with Dionysos, for example,

acquiring Orphic/Bacchic elements.<sup>113</sup> They have pointed to the myth of Osiris and Isis closely resembling the Dionysiac/Orphic myth of Dionysos Zagreus being torn to pieces by Titans and reassembled by Rhea/Demeter, a narrative that, though securely attested only from the early Hellenistic period, likely has earlier roots.<sup>114</sup> Ideas from the Egyptian Book of the Dead or related coffin spells have been recognized in Greek concepts of the afterlife from at least the early fifth century BC, and also Greek cosmogonic notions such as the separation of heaven and earth have been identified by Thomas Dousa as elaborations of Egyptian beliefs.<sup>115</sup> Most recently, Jan Bremmer has proposed that the colonial milieu of southern Italy around 400 BC played a major role for the incorporation of Egyptian ideas into Orphism;<sup>116</sup> many of the relevant notions, though, can be traced back already to the seventh to sixth centuries BC.<sup>117</sup> The Carian and Greek engagement with Osirian religion in the sixth century BC and the successive instances of the adoption

and adaptation of Osirian ritual in the Greek Adonia are further, and earlier, examples of such cross-cultural fertilization. They show that this was a dynamic process that from the late seventh century BC involved multiple episodes of interaction between different people in different parts of the ancient world, at different times. It was the encounter between Egypt and the intellectually vibrant and internationally engaged cities of the East Greek and Carian world that first established a framework of intercultural “translation.”<sup>118</sup> The intercultural discourse was further developed in wider Mediterranean circles—including Athenian, south Italian, and eventually Ptolemaic networks—which contributed new impulses to the ongoing evolution and transformation of cultural practices, from burial customs to religious rites.

Cultural change, notably in the Archaic Greek world, is often attributed primarily to (male) elites who had the political and economic power to fundamentally shape social practice.<sup>119</sup> Yet looking at interaction through the lens of religious practice allows us to also catch glimpses of otherwise less socially visible and marginal groups. The Greeks and Carians who arrived in Egypt from the late seventh century BC onward in all likelihood comprised a wide social spectrum, from aristocrats to slaves, and went on to occupy a variety of positions—not necessarily the same as at home—within Egyptian society and within immigrant or diaspora communities.<sup>120</sup> The relics they left behind suggest that it was not only narrow powerful groups in pursuit of status and engaged in conspicuous consumption that underpinned processes of exchange, innovation, and transformation. Rather, it was men and women from across a wider spectrum—mercenaries and traders, craftsmen or translators, priestesses and *hetairai*—who were carriers of culture, who engaged in, shaped, and transferred social and cultural practices from eschatological beliefs to technological know-how.

An observation recently made by Nathan Arrington concerning Early Iron Age burials at Lefkandi, in Greece, thus seems just as true for Late Period Egypt: “By unlinking intercultural exchange from a narrow elite, it is possible to recover multiple channels through which movement and communication occurred . . . and to restore agency to actors largely neglected from archaeological literature.”<sup>121</sup> At Lefkandi, Arrington observed children and what he termed “sub-elites”; the

present study has highlighted especially the agency of women, from the wives, daughters, and slaves of traders and mercenaries to the geographically (and sometimes socially) mobile *hetairai* who moved in their circles, and ultimately the women and queens of Ptolemaic Egypt. It was through them that new practices entered the social spheres in which they held key roles, such as funeral practice, love magic, or aspects of commensality and entertainment, driven by a quest for supernatural advantages or a desire for social prestige. While the role of women as mediators and cultural brokers notably in colonial situations has been noted for some time, the wider significance of women and of female mobility in cultural transmission remains underestimated.<sup>122</sup> Thompson has highlighted female agency in mystery religion related to Demeter in Late Period and Ptolemaic Egypt as an integrative force, noting the power of ideas such as that of the soul’s immortality in transcending boundaries.<sup>123</sup> I have argued for similar dynamics in relation to the spread of the Adonia, which proved successful perhaps precisely because it played to the key “public” social roles of women as well as promoting specifically female spaces and networks of interaction. It would have been neighborhood situations, such as existed among mixed populations at sites like Memphis or Naukratis, that especially fostered such “bottom-up” developments among a wide array of social groups. In antiquity as today, “sacred time and spaces transcend frontiers and social barriers, facilitating—and legitimating—contacts between individuals who would otherwise not meet in the public sphere.”<sup>124</sup> It is these developments that provided the fertile ground for state-sponsored “top-down” syncretistic developments of the Hellenistic period.<sup>125</sup>



I am grateful to Joanne Dyer for the detailed scientific examination of Piabrm’s stela and for allowing me to present preliminary results in this article; to Kate Morton for preparing the stela’s preliminary color reconstruction; to Alan Johnston for help and discussion during the preparation of the manuscript; to my colleagues at the British Museum for assistance with object study and photography; to the anonymous peer reviewer for helpful and constructive suggestions; and last but not least to Sara E. Cole, Jeffrey Spier, and the team at Getty Publications for all their work on this volume and the conference on which it was based and for kind assistance in the preparation of this article.

## NOTES

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1. Manning 2009, 27–28.
2. Vittmann 2003; Agut-Labordère 2013.
3. Vittmann 2003; Vittmann 2006; see also Villing 2018a; Villing 2018b.
4. Kaplan 2003; Vittmann 2003; Vittmann 2006; Schmitz 2010, 327–29; Thompson 2012; Jakobeit 2016; Colburn 2018, 83–85; Van Wees 2021.
5. Höckmann 2001; Devauchelle 2010; Jurman 2010; Thompson 2012, 178–92; Höckmann and Weiss 2017.
6. Carian stelae: Kammerzell 1993; Höckmann 2001; Kammerzell 2001; Adiego 2007. Greek stelae: Gallo and Masson 1993; Colburn 2018, 84–87. Aramaic stelae: Porten and Gee 2001; Wasmuth 2010; Vittmann 2017; Wasmuth 2017; see also Vittmann 2003; Vittmann 2006. The figured registers often show the worship of Osiris, Isis, and/or the Apis bull or Egyptian embalming scenes. Foreign imagery includes the deceased on a bier or an enthroned foreign dignitary. Of five Greek-style *prothesis* scenes, one belongs to a Greek, the rest to Carians; of the latter, three combine the *prothesis* with scenes of the worship of the Apis bull and of Isis and Osiris. One stela just shows a Carian couple wearing East Greek dress.
7. For example, Herda 2013; Rumscheid 2019.
8. Kammerzell 2001, 238; McAnally 2016, 204; cf. Vittmann 2003; Vittmann 2006.
9. London, British Museum, EA67235, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA67235](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA67235). The stela was excavated in 1968–69 at Saqqara, north cemetery, Baboon gallery. Published in Emery 1970; Martin and Nicholls 1978, 70–79, no. 4; Masson 1978, 22–23, no. 4; Kammerzell 1993, 139–45, no. M4; Höckmann 2001; Vittmann 2003, 170–74; G. Vittmann in Beck, Bol, and Bückling 2005, 484–85, no. 38; Adiego 2007, 44, 271–73, no. E.Me 12; A. Villing in Masson-Berghoff and Goddio 2016, 57; S. E. Cole in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 92–93, no. 59. Höckmann (2001, 224) argued for a date around 540/30 BC, while Martin and Nicholls (1978, 75) had suggested a slightly later date, around 520 BC. The parallels for the decorated *klinē* of Piabrm (see note 24 elow) might support the later date.
10. Munro 1973.
11. The identification of the toponym is not certain (an alternative site, Amyzon, had been suggested by McAnally 2016), but Mylasa (suggested by Descat 2008; cf. Adiego 2007, 227; Adiego 2013) is the most likely candidate, especially following the find of an inscribed seventh-century BC *oinochoe* at Hydai, near Mylasa, that uses an alphabet very similar to that used at Memphis: Adiego 2019, 25. Usold is taken to be Piabrm's father by Vittmann (in Beck, Bol, and Bückling 2005, 484–85, no. 38) but as her husband by Adiego 2007, 271–73.
12. See Rumscheid 2019, describing the material culture of Mylasa as “almost a facet” of East Greek production.
13. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 70, 72.
14. Dyer and Villing unpublished manuscript
15. The reconstruction drawing was prepared by Kate Morton based on the scientific research of Joanne Dyer and archaeological research on parallels by the author, Joanne Dyer, and Kate Morton with the help of Aurélia Masson-Berghoff. Egyptian stelae of the Late Period are discussed in Munro 1973.
16. The technical data and its interpretation will be discussed in more detail in the main publications of the results of this investigation: Dyer and Villing unpublished manuscript.
17. Cf., for example, Munro 1973. On Egyptian color symbolism, see, for example, Baines 1985; Vos 1998; Robins 2001.
18. See Malinine, Posener, and Vercoutter 1968; Vermaseren 1981; Vos 1998. For images featuring a red rug, compare, for example, a stela from Saqqara (Martin 1979, 54, no. 169) and a 25th–26th Dynasty coffin footboard (Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 201, no. 33).
19. For example, in the tomb paintings of Nebamun; see Parkinson 2008.
20. Flecks of yellow are visible under the microscope in the central area, where multispectral images show a clear dot. For similar round bread with a central yellow dot, see, for example, the painted limestone stela of Sobekhotep, 18th Dynasty, London, British Museum, EA1368, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA1368](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA1368). On Egyptian bread, see Wilson 1988, 13–16; see also Darby, Ghalioungui, and Grivetti 1977, 1:518–22 with fig. 12.13 (actual loaves), 523, fig. 12.14 (images of bakery).
21. London, British Museum, EA67238, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA67238](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA67238), and EA67239, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA67239](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA67239). The fragments were found in 1968–69 in the area of the Lower Baboon gallery. Published in Masson 1978, 22–23, no. 4; Martin 1979, 54, no. 180; Davies 2006, 97, no. BCO–48. It is unclear if the stela included further registers.
22. It is briefly noted by Kammerzell 1993, 144, 144n101, but not included in Adiego 2007.
23. Traces of red color on male skin were also noted as preserved on another Saqqara stela with an embalming scene and an Apis bull: Martin 1979, 54, no. 169.
24. The bed itself belongs to the *klinē* type “A,” Baughan 2013, 44–49; close parallels are the early fifth-century BC *klinai* from Duvanli and on the Polyxena sarcophagus, but the type is attested already earlier. For the Ionian sarcophagus from Akanthos, dated ca. 540–500 BC, see Kaltsas 1996–97. Compare also the animals and star patterns on Late Archaic Athenian vase images, for example, Baughan 2013, 16, fig. 3, 57, fig. 39.

25. Martin and Nicholls (1978, 72), suggest a key pattern above and meander below, executed in gold, but no clear pattern is easily distinguishable in multispectral imaging. Key or meander patterns often decorated the sides of mattresses in Athenian vase images; see, for example, Baughan 2013, 13, fig. 6.
26. Compare especially the Klazomenian sarcophagus from Akanthos (Kaltsas 1996–97) and a Chalcidian black-figure cup, Würzburg L 164, of around 530 BC: BAPD no. 18504.
27. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 72, with references; compare also the gold bull pendant from Kameiros (London, British Museum, 1860,0201.81, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1860-0201-81](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1860-0201-81)).
28. For a short, though less tight, kilt, see, for example, Munro 1973, figs. 115, 126, 142.
29. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 70; compare, for example, Munro 1973, plate 58.
30. See Malinine, Posener, and Vercoutter 1968; Vermaseren 1981; compare Höckmann 2001, 225. They may represent the adornment of the young Apis bull during his introduction into the temple.
31. For example, stelae from Memphis: Munro 1973, plates 58, 59. The design is somewhat reminiscent of some New Kingdom images, for example, in the 19th Dynasty Book of the Dead of Ani (London, British Museum, EA10470,4, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA10470-4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10470-4)).
32. Devauchelle 2010; Devauchelle 2012.
33. Höckmann 2001; Kammerzell 2001, 239. Thoth leads worshippers to the gods, for example, on a stela of the Third Intermediate Period (Paris, Musée du Louvre, N3662, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010014478>). Perhaps his prominence on the Carian stela is also linked to his nature as the divine inventor of writing and scribe of the gods, as some Caro-Memphites worked as translators; see, for example, Höckmann 2001, plate 42.1–2; Herda 2013, 467–71. For Thoth as inventor of writing, see Plato, *Phaidros* 59 [274e].
34. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 70–79, 82–83; Höckmann 2001, 222–23 (“Saqqara Master”).
35. Klazomenian sarcophagus of the late seventh century BC: Hürmüzlü 2010, esp. 123, fig. 46. Agelarakis 2015 has put forward the hypothesis, based on the skeletal evidence, that the sarcophagus’s occupant may have been a soldier, perhaps a mercenary.
36. Wasmuth 2017; for Egyptian elements on Greek mourning imagery, see Vermeule 1979; Marinatos and Anderson 2010, both somewhat overstating the case.
37. Huber 2001. It may be represented also on the East Greek Polyxena sarcophagus, dating to shortly after 500 BC; on the sarcophagus, see, for example, Draycott 2018. The four mourners on Piabrm’s and other Caro-Memphite stelae correspond to the maximum number of mourners on most Athenian fifth-century BC representations of the *prothesis*; Shapiro 1991.
38. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 73–74; Herda 2013, 445; McAnally 2016, 206–9.
39. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 64, 73–74, plate 30.
40. Shapiro 1991, 634–35; see also Huber 2001.
41. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 74–75.
42. Martin and Nicholls 1978, 77; Höckmann 2001, 221–22. For fourth-century BC Athenian funerary banquet images with similarly laden tables, see Closterman 2015. A Totenmahlrelief was also found at Naukratis: London, British Museum, 1888,0601.35, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1888-0601-35](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-35); Gardner 1888, 22–23.
43. Gallo and Masson 1993.
44. A point also made by McAnally 2016, discussing Carian funerary practice in Caria and abroad.
45. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.61.
46. McAnally 2016; Iancu 2017. McAnally’s suggestion that the practice might be connected with the “psychological stresses involved in maintaining a Carian identity in a new environment” is hardly convincing.
47. Examples include a painted wooden statue of Osiris from Thebes, 20th Dynasty (London, British Museum, EA20868, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA20868](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA20868)), and a painting of Osiris in the 19th Dynasty Book of the Dead of Ani (London, British Museum, EA10470,4, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA10470-4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10470-4)).
48. See Venit 2015, 109–56, esp. 117–18, figs. 4.8, 4.9 (Tuna el-Gebel House-Tomb 21), 140, fig. 4.33 (Siwa tomb of Siamun).
49. Among numerous examples that could be cited, some of the most stunning are painted ceiling patterns in Theban New Kingdom tombs, for example, TT31 and TT295.
50. For example, Brinkmann, Dreyfus, and Koch-Brinkmann 2017.
51. See Tsiafakis 2016. Athenian art sometimes shows chevrons on domestic textiles such as cushions; see Tsiafakis 2016, 268, fig. 3.
52. Vittmann 2003, 106–7, fig. 47; Wasmuth 2010, fig. 50.5.
53. Wasmuth 2010.
54. Herda 2013, 452–60.
55. Among them may be mercenaries returning home, sometimes perhaps via circuitous routes, such as the “Egyptian”—that is, quite possibly Ionian, or Ionian and Carian—mercenaries who, according to Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 6.2.9, 7.1.45), supported Lydia against Persia and who are probably the same

- mercenaries whom Cyrus, after Kroisos's defeat, settled at a site called Larissa, probably in Aeolia (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.1.7).
56. See Kelder in this volume.
  57. Roosevelt 2006. On votive doorways and a stela showing Osiris inside a doorway from Late Period Sais, see Wilson 2019.
  58. Villing 2015, 234–35.
  59. At sites such as Samos, Klazomenai, Teos, Ephesus, or Rhodes: Philipp 1981; Hitzl 1991, 27–28; Tsakos 1996, 126; Hürmüzlü 2010; Mohr 2015. For the influence of Osirian religion on Etruscan burials of the early sixth century BC, see Bubenheimer-Erhart 2004.
  60. See Villing et al. 2013–20 and the summaries in Villing 2015; Villing 2018a, 78–80.
  61. Gardner 1888, 21–29; Villing 2015, 234–36.
  62. Villing 2015, 234–35, fig. 12.5.
  63. All finds are today in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: P.5717 [= 88.819] (lamp), <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/182987>; P.5715 [= 11.46019] and Eg.Inv.7528 [= P.5716; RES.87.162] (*lekynthoi*), <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/409558/>; RES.87.163 [= Eg.Inv.2939; P.5718] (offering tray, marked in pencil “beneath head”), <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/344402>. Information that the objects were found together in a tomb comes from the Boston Museum's inventories, in turn based on the EES distribution list. On the lamp and its dating, see Thomas 2013–20b, 7, fig. 17.
  64. Gardner 1888, 29. Hogarth's tray, around 7 cm wide, was found in *sebakh* during the 1899 excavations and is today in the Cairo Museum, JE33570 (CG26357).
  65. Pemberton 2015. Rare elsewhere, examples from Nemea are also probably Corinthian: Pemberton 2015, 124.
  66. Classical period Corinthian finds at Naukratis include trade amphorae, mortaria, fine ware pottery, terracotta figures, and loom weights; see Villing et al. 2013–20.
  67. The main piece of evidence is an intriguing large limestone tray (perhaps used for grinding grain?) dedicated by a certain Dionysie to Demeter, dated to the second century BC: Cairo Museum, JE33597. Its findspot also yielded numerous fragments of terracotta figurines, leading Hogarth to conjecture that the site was a sanctuary of Demeter: Hogarth, Edgar, and Gutch 1898–99, 41–42.
  68. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.59, 123, 156, 171; cf. Bonnet and Bricault 2016, 164–65.
  69. Villing 2021.
  70. Thompson 1998, esp. 705.
  71. Gardner 1888, 27–28, grave D2: London, British Museum, 1888,0601.716 (Vase E721), [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1888-0601-716](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-716); Atallah 1966, 187–88 fig. 47; Wehgartner 1992, 287–88, plate 63.1–2; Di Filippo Balestrazzi 1999, 323, fig. 18; Reitzammer 2016, fig. 10. Di Filippo Balestrazzi (1999, 321–26) cites Near Eastern parallels for the use of a ladder, while Edwards (1984, 99n50) puts forward Egyptian links.
  72. Images related to the cult are collected in Servais-Soyez 1981; Cambitoglou 2018.
  73. Detienne 1977; Servais-Soyez 1981; Servais-Soyez 1983; Simms 1997–98; Reitzammer 2016. For the cult of Adonis in Etruria, see Meer 2012.
  74. Reitzammer 2016; cf. Rosenzweig 2004, 91.
  75. Detienne 1977; see also Servais-Soyez 1981; Edwards 1984; Simms 1997–98; Reitzammer 2016.
  76. Hesiod fr. 106, 107.
  77. Sappho fr. 140; see Reitzammer 2016, 12. Among later authors to refer to the ritual of the Adonia is Plato (Reitzammer 2016, 90–117).
  78. The summary in Lane Fox (2009, 240–54) is one of many examples that could be cited. Much of the evidence summoned by scholars, however, is Hellenistic or later, and some of it is problematic, as pointed out, for example, by Nardelli (2017, 230–32, 250–54), especially with regard to the supposed importance of Adonis's cult at Byblos, on which the key source is Lucian; see Lightfoot 2003, 305–28.
  79. Egyptian links are discussed by Reed 2000; Quack 2007, 235–38, both with further literature; cf. also Vaux 1933; Servais-Soyez 1983; Mettinger 2001, 175–79. Curiously, Lightfoot (2003, 312–13) recognizes the correspondence between the rites of Adonis and Osiris but still concludes that the Adonis gardens were “inherited by Greece from Syro-Palestine,” with reference to (largely irrelevant) biblical passages.
  80. Waitkus 1999; Coulon 2005; Quack 2007; cf. Reed 2000, 343, on lettuce in Egyptian cult. A closely related rite involved so-called Osiris bricks, whose Osiris-shaped recesses were filled with soil, sand, cereal grains, and linen, containing the figure like a coffin: Tooley 1996; cf. also Quack 2007, 329–30.
  81. Reed 2000, 327. Cf. Glotz 1920, who notes Adonia also in the Fayyum. The cult of Adonis at Canopus mentioned in the first century BC by Parthenius (fr. 42) might belong in the same context, as either an *interpretatio graeca* by the poet of local Osiris rites or a reference to an actual Adonis cult instituted there; cf. Reed 2000, 344.
  82. For example, Villing 2019.
  83. Also the frequent mention of *hetairai* from Samos as participants in the Adonia in Classical Athenian sources may point to the cult's East Greek derivation.



84. Bierl and Lardinois 2016; see also Ferrari 2014. On Charaxos and wine trade, see Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.33, 808c; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.596b; on Lesbians at Naukratis, see Herodotus, *Histories* 2.178–9.
85. For example, Lardinois 2016.
86. Johnston 2013–20a.
87. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.135. Coincidentally or not, Herodotus's list of famous Naukratite *hetairai* also features an Archidike, whom other ancient authors call Archedike, using the same spelling as the graffito. On the votive inscriptions, see Johnston 2013–20b, 43–45.
88. Bowie 2016. As argued by Schlesier 2014, the females mentioned in Sappho's poems are all likely to be *hetairai*.
89. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134–35.
90. Nagy 2015. On the legend that sprang up around the literary figure of Rhodopis/Doricha, see also Bing 2018.
91. Reitzammer 2016, 23, 158n79.
92. Reitzammer 2016.
93. Detienne 1977, 83–90; Faraone 1993; Johnston 1995. The late fifth-century BC Athenia hydria of the Meidias Painter depicts Himeros using the *iunx* in the company of Aphrodite and Adonis.
94. Gardner 1888, 28: London, British Museum, 1888,0601.1, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1888-0601-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-1); see Thomas and Acosta 2013–20, 5, fig. 7.
95. London, British Museum, 1924,1201.621, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1924-1201-621](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1924-1201-621); cf. Johnston 2013–20b, 44. If correctly supplemented, this would be the earliest textual evidence for the word *iunx*, otherwise attested from the time of Pindar and Aeschylus onward: Johnston 1995, 182n12.
96. London, British Museum, 1888,0601.125, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1888-0601-125](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-125): Gardner 1888, 29, plate 16.18; Thomas 2013–20a, 12, fig. 28.
97. On relations between Athens and Egypt, see Vasunia 2001; Sofia 2016 (with Nesselrath 2017); Villing 2019, 214; cf. Moyer 2011. Some Athenians and other Greeks would have come to Egypt as soldiers during the ill-fated Egyptian expedition to assist the revolt of Inaros against the Persian occupation, which ended in defeat in 454 BC. One likely Greek soldier who died in Egypt in (the second quarter of?) the fifth century BC was Kobon, for whom his comrades erected a grave marker in the eastern Nile Delta: Wagner 1973; Hansen 1983, 1:92, no. 171.
98. For modern examples, see Couroucli 2012; cf. also Thompson 1998 for Greco-Roman Egypt.
99. Burkert 2004, 88; on the spread of "*aegyptiaca*," see, for example, Arrington 2015.
100. Masson-Berghoff 2019; Recklinghausen 2019.
101. Discussed in detail by Thomas and Higgs 2013–20, 6–27.
102. Abd el-Maksoud, Abd el-Fattah, and Seif el-Din 2012; Abd el-Maksoud, Abd el-Fattah, and Seif el-Din 2015; Abd el-Maksoud, Abd el-Fattah, and Seif el-Din 2018; cf. also Bergmann 2019. A Boubasteia festival is mentioned in the Canopus decree of 238 BC; see Pfeiffer 2004, 128–30.
103. Schollmeyer 2003; Ridgway 2006; Schollmeyer 2007; Queyrel 2014, 150–57; see also Villing 2017.
104. London, British Museum, 1845,0705.1 (Silver 7), [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1845-0705-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1845-0705-1); Ridgway 2006, 645, fig. 1.
105. Schollmeyer 2003; Ridgway 2006; Schollmeyer 2007.
106. For example, Quack 2006.
107. Queyrel 2014, 150–57. A similar tension seems visible in a figure from Alexandria of a woman holding a goose while placing her foot on a hare (Queyrel 2014, 142, fig. 18). Both birds and hares appear to have been sacrificial animals at the Theadelphia festival at Alexandria, part of Ptolemaic ruler cult, as well as possibly in the cult of deified Arsinoe II (Caneva 2014, 99, 99n54), and while the Egyptian desert hare often carried positive connotations, it could also be a demonic creature, representative perhaps of the desert world of Seth.
108. Rhodes Museum, 13452: Jacopi 1931, 336–38, fig. 372, plate VI. No other finds were recovered from the cremation containing this vase. Winkler-Horaček (2015, 157–58 and fig. 109, with further literature) rightly dismisses interpretations of the scene as humorous. A rare Egyptian relief shows the pharaoh himself, Akhenaten, strangling a duck: Houlihan and Goodman 1986, 71, fig. 98.
109. Parkinson 2008, 132; Recklinghausen 2019, 346; cf. also Quack 2006, 75. Satirical images of cats herding water birds further underline the cat's danger to birds. We may note in this context also the exceptional scene of a feline attacking a goose on a sixth-century BC probably Chian vessel from Naukratis, part of an unusual group of vessels with white overpainted decoration: London, British Museum, 1888,0601.678.a, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1888-0601-678-a](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-678-a); cf. also 1888,0601.b–e, and 1965,0930.494. Gardner 1888, 47, notes "very few" examples of this "peculiar" class of pottery in the Aphrodite sanctuary.
110. On the associations between Arsinoe II, Aphrodite, and Isis, see Minas-Nerpel in this volume.
111. *P. Oxy.* 27 2465; Trismegistos no. 62718, [www.trismegistos.org/text/62718](http://www.trismegistos.org/text/62718); on the link with Isis (and Demeter), see Schorn 2001; Caneva 2012; Caneva 2014, 99–103; cf. Villing 2017.
112. This is also the context in which we must see a further significant find likely from Kom el-Dikka, discussed in Bergmann 2019. An early Hellenistic statue group, stylistically dated to the

decades around the mid-third century BC, shows an older girl and a younger boy with a goose, combining rich allusions to Greek and Egyptian cultural traditions. Bergmann suspects the children, each wearing a Hellenistic royal diadem, or *stephane*, to be the offspring of Berenike II and Ptolemy III, and takes the “family” scene as a votive to a kourotrophic, Artemis-like Boubastis (the equation is well attested already in Herodotus’s *Histories*, for example, 2.137, and also in the sanctuary itself: Abd el-Fattah, Abd el-Maksoud, and Carrez-Maratray 2014; Abd el-Maksoud, Abd el-Fattah, and Seif el-Din 2015) that petitions for the children’s well-being; the goose in this context is the children’s pet (the option of it being a sacrificial victim is considered less likely). While I have no profound alternative interpretation to offer, I would contend nonetheless that there must be more to the unusual and complex group in terms of a religious and maybe political meaning, involving allusions to royal legitimacy and dynastic continuity. And given the centrality of the goose in the scene, there can be no doubt that it had symbolic meaning well beyond that of a coincidental pet (the complexities behind choices of sacrificial animals in Ptolemaic ruler cult are discussed, for example, by Caneva 2014, 99–103). If the girl (her dress echoing that of images of children offered to Artemis at Brauron) seems to claim the goose for herself by shielding it from the clutches of the chubby, temple boy-like boy, could we perhaps take her to represent the female of the Ptolemaic royal house, equated with the likes of Aphrodite and Isis, for whom the goose was both a sacrificial and a sacred animal (cf. Villing 2017), confronting a sibling male, equated with Horus, for whom the goose represented an adversary? Indeed, perhaps the protagonists could be seen not so much as royal children but as allusions to adult royals as child gods, perhaps even Arsinoe II and Ptolemy II.

113. Burkert 2004, 71–98; Henrichs 2010; Henrichs 2011; cf. Dousa 2010; Bremmer 2016, esp. 39–40.
114. Henrichs 2010, 98–101; Henrichs 2011.
115. Dousa 2010, 164; see also Bremmer 2016, 39–40
116. Bremmer 2016, 41.
117. Burkert 2004, 88; Lieven 2016, 69.
118. Coulon 2013, 181.
119. For example, Raaflaub 2004; Bredow 2017; cf. Raaflaub 2016.
120. On the social status of Greek and Carian immigrants to Egypt, which remains debated, see Carty 2015, 149–74; Iancu 2016; Villing 2018b.
121. Arrington 2015, 24. The case for the importance of women and non-elites is made also by Sacks 2017 and Murray 2018.
122. For example, Zurbach and Esposito 2010; on Carian women at Miletos, see also Herda 2013.
123. Thompson 1998.
124. Couroucli 2012, 7.

125. Of course, as pointed out by Caneva 2016, Ptolemaic religious policy, too, was never merely a top-down development but a dynamic interplay between a central power and diverse other social agents, each with their own agendas. Caneva, like many other scholars, highlights the role played in this by elites, notably priestly elites; as I hope to have shown, however, they are just one part of a more complex picture.

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# “I Am Isis”: The Role of Speech in the Cult of Isis

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In ancient Egyptian texts, no deity speaks more than Isis. The goddess was depicted as interacting with other deities, as well as with her followers, through speech. Features unique to her were translated across cultural and linguistic boundaries as her expanding biography responded to Greek influences following Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt in 332 BC. One of these characteristics is her ability to engage in dialogue with others and to communicate effectively. Her verbal communication was a pivotal factor in the development of her cult as the world's first universal religion. This essay examines the oral patterns and performative speech acts of Isis in pharaonic texts from the Old Kingdom onward and how her role as a communicator was later a central feature of Greco-Roman versions of her cult. In the Hellenistic period, Isis became a universal deity as changes were made to both her textual and iconographic representations in order for her to appeal to non-Egyptian audiences across the Mediterranean and beyond for a period of more than six hundred years.

First, it will be crucial to understand with which deities Isis interacted in ancient Egypt and the various forms of oral practice that were in place. Next, we will look into the areas Isis defined through spoken language and the tangible data archaeology provides. Finally, the concept of

monotheism as revealed in Isis cults will be considered, which not only influenced the emergence of other universal divinities but also shaped religious thinking in late antiquity. It was not only mythical, narrative elements of the biography of Isis that were rewritten over time; her interactions with her pharaonic husband, Osiris, and later with her Hellenistic consort, Serapis, are indicative of her transition from a goddess who communicated only with other gods to a recipient of prayers—one who could both speak and listen—with universal appeal. In Egyptian religious texts, dialogues formed part of mythical narratives whose function it was to trigger actions through speech. These speech acts are performative, which means that by making an utterance, the speaker carries out actions.<sup>1</sup> Isis is a goddess who creates actions through words.

## Isis's Speech in Pharaonic Texts

Isis, companion of the god Osiris and mother of their child, Horus (fig. 3.1),<sup>2</sup> is a prime example of the eloquence of the Egyptian gods. No deity can be described in terms of character and cultic function better than Isis based on the texts that capture her direct speech. The abundance of sources in which she speaks can best be explained by the effectiveness of her words—no goddess

has more influence over mythical events than she does. This attribute may have had its beginning in the myth of Osiris, a narrative that the ancient Egyptians never told in a single, continuous story but imparted through a loose collection of references.<sup>3</sup> One of the main events this myth describes is the search for the murdered Osiris by his sisters, Isis and Nephthys. Eventually the goddesses find Osiris lying dead on his side, “because his brother Seth threw him to the ground in Nedit.”<sup>4</sup> Already in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, which were first canonized in writing around 2350 BC, the two sisters are assigned the role of weeping and lamenting mourners.<sup>5</sup> Around 2000 BC, in the Middle Kingdom, the speech of Isis is reproduced literally in a Coffin Text of a private individual, which suggests that the finding of Osiris and the subsequent lamentation for the dead was staged and ritually performed as part of Egyptian funerals:

*“Oh tired one, oh tired one, lying there!  
Tired in this place you did not know I knew.  
Behold, I have found you in this your place, great weary one.”*  
*“Sister,” Isis says to Nephthys, “our brother is this!  
Come, let’s lift his head,  
come, let’s join his bones together,  
come, let us tend his limbs!”*<sup>6</sup>

Already in the Old Kingdom texts about Isis include her lamentations but also her comfort and encouragement for the deceased Osiris. Throughout the myth, the dialogue between Isis and Osiris is one-sided because Osiris is already dead and must remain passive as a recipient of Isis’s words, as well as the entire set of death rituals. Isis addresses Osiris’s body, and what she says comes into being. So says a Coffin Text of the Middle Kingdom:

*Greetings, Osiris N here,<sup>7</sup>  
with what Isis, the mistress of the western deserts, says:  
In front be your seat in the tent of the god.  
May she pronounce your beautiful name in the barque  
(the sun-barque of Ra)  
on the day the characters are calculated (when the dead  
are summoned).*<sup>8</sup>

The following utterance, which belongs to a speech that is attested in the six Osiris liturgies of the Ptolemaic period, is a later example of Isis’s protective speech on behalf of Osiris.<sup>9</sup> Here Isis addresses the four sons of Horus:

*Isis says: “Come,  
you four Akh-spirits, who cross the cool heaven!  
Amset, Hapi, Duamutef, and Qebehsenuf:  
Protect your father Osiris!  
Subdue his enemies for him.*



**Figure 3.1** Statuette of Isis with Horus on her lap, Egyptian, Third Intermediate Period, ca. 1069–664 BC. Faience, 14.3 × 4 cm. Eton College, Myers Collection, ECM.1717-2010. Image: Reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College

*Take for him (Osiris) his (Seth’s) allies  
to the custody of the eastern execution site.”*<sup>10</sup>

While Osiris has been killed by his brother Seth and his limbs dispersed all over Egypt to make sure his body cannot be found and buried, his mourning sister-wife refuses to accept that Osiris is dead. In fact, no text ever described Osiris as a dead person; the word that describes him—*mwt*—is used exclusively for revenants who never received a burial in accordance with funerary rituals. Isis does not accept the killing of her brother-husband, and therefore her role is not limited to lamenting. Together with her sister, Nephthys, she searches for the body parts of the deceased Osiris, which the Nile has washed ashore all over Egypt,<sup>11</sup> and fends off the enemies of Osiris sent out by Seth. The early 18th Dynasty stela of Amunmose, a man who held the title “Chief of Amun’s Flocks,” contains the most complete pharaonic version of the Osiris myth:

*His sister has provided his defense,  
she has driven away the rebels and fended off the deeds*

*of the screamer (Seth)  
through the magic power of her mouth;  
the power of the tongue, whose words do not go astray,  
effective in commanding.*<sup>12</sup>

In joining together Osiris's limbs, Isis makes his death treatable, and it is through her speech that he receives his new status as ruler in the realm of the dead. This mythical sequence informed Egyptian funerary belief, for it is here that the interaction of linguistic and physical treatment of the body of Osiris becomes most evident, and the deceased, who is equated with Osiris, is not forgotten. In the process of mummification, which provides protection of the physical body, the associated linguistic utterances become social action aimed at introducing Osiris (the deceased) to the community of gods in the realm of the dead, which guarantees his eternal existence. By having his or her body symbolically collected and joined together just as Osiris's was, the deceased escapes eternal death. Death in ancient Egypt therefore is not something that can happen in isolation: it requires others to care for the body so that it can die successfully and enter a life in the beyond. Re-membering and remembering are the central aspects of mummification: the physical care for the dead and linguistic management of death. The ancient Egyptians had various terms for these procedures. One of the Egyptian expressions for addressing and healing the Osiris corpse is *hn.w* "jubilation," which, according to the Osiris hymn on the stela of Amunmose, begins with the rejuvenation of a dead body, that is, mummification:

*Isis, the magical powerful, the protector of her brother,  
who sought him tirelessly,  
who passed through this country in mourning  
and did not rest until she had found him,  
who gave shade with her feathers  
and breathed a breath of air with her wings,  
who rejoiced (literally: "made hn.w"), "mourner of her  
brother."<sup>13</sup>*

Through the power of her words, Isis also succeeds in conceiving a son, Horus, with Osiris after his death (fig. 3.2). With Horus's birth, the Osiris story enters a second phase, which is called the Horus myth. None of these myths would function without Isis; she is the link but also the mythical antecedent for what is told. The Horus myth revolves around Isis's son, whom the mother raises by herself in a hidden place in the papyrus thicket of the Nile Delta.<sup>14</sup> Isis's magic and healing powers are central to the themes of the Horus myth as well. Thus, a text from the New Kingdom Ramesside period (1295–1069 BC), known as the London Medical Papyrus, which can be assigned to the genre of magical discourse, preserved all the details

necessary to alter fate with the help of myth. The utterance consists of two parts, a recital and a manual. The text to be recited by the magician has some peculiarities, since it does not lay out the entire myth but mentions in a quotation only what is already known to the initiate, thus preventing the uninitiated from grasping the mythical secret and letting it slip out at the wrong opportunity. Not unlike the later texts of the so-called cippi of Horus, the "incantation of a cremation" is laid out as follows:

*Horus was a child inside his nest,  
A fire (fever) had fallen into his limbs,  
he did not know it, it did not know him.  
His mother was not there to conjure it,  
his father had gone for a walk  
(with) Haphap and Amset.  
The son was small, the fire strong,  
nobody was there to save him from it.  
Then Isis stepped out of the workhouse  
at the time she loosened her thread:  
"Come, my sister Nephthys, with me,  
accompany me.  
I was deaf, my thread surrounded (me).  
Clear my way that I may do what I understand,  
that I extinguish it (the fire) with my milk  
and with the healthy water that is between my thighs."<sup>15</sup>*

In this utterance, Isis not only appears as the mother who heals her son but also shares her concerns with her sister, Nephthys. This makes her one of the few deities of ancient Egypt who not only acts silently but also communicates with and confides in others. Apparently, already in the Ramesside period, religious texts attached importance to the fact that Isis could listen and take advice from others and could take action even in moments of imminent danger.

Whereas Isis's communication with Osiris went in one direction, with the child Horus (Greek: Harpokrates from Her-pa-khered, Horus-the-Child), a dialogue can be imagined, and indeed in one Demotic text it is probably Isis asking the divine child about the violation and restoration of the world order.<sup>16</sup> This text, which is difficult to understand, has no known parallel and is probably best understood as a narrative interpretation of the well-known Horus myth, perhaps in the context of an Isis oracle in a temple or in the field of domestic magic.<sup>17</sup> Much clearer is Spell 6 of the so-called Metternich Stela, a cippus of Horus from the reign of the 30th Dynasty pharaoh Nectanebo I (r. 360–342 BC).<sup>18</sup> This spell is introduced with the words "I am Isis"; it is not only Isis, however, who speaks. Isis is said to have left the spinning



**Figure 3.2** Amulet with the triad Isis-Harpokrates-Nephthys, Egyptian, Third Intermediate Period, ca. 1069–664 BC. Faience, 2.2 × 1.5 cm. Eton College, Myers Collection, ECM.1558-2010. Image: Reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College

mill where her brother Seth, the murderer of Osiris, sent her to work in the evening. It is there that she meets Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom. He reminds her of the fact that Horus is the heir of Osiris, who one day must be enthroned as the ruler of Egypt:

*Come, divine Isis!  
It is also good to hear (to others)  
and one lives when the other leads him.  
Why don't you hide with the young son?  
that he may come to us (the gods),  
once his limbs are firm  
and all his powers have been created,  
and you let him sit down on his throne,  
by granting him the office of ruler of the two countries.*<sup>19</sup>

The utterance continues and reports how Isis is joined by seven scorpions that gather together and, for somewhat obscure reasons, sting the daughter of a lady, who is then immediately inflicted with some sort of fever. Isis, who feels responsible, steps in and speaks:

*Come to me, come to me!  
Behold, my mouth has life.  
I am the daughter who is known in her city,  
because the worm gives way because of her utterance,  
after my father raised me to know.*<sup>20</sup>

Isis manages to save the child from death, but more is to come. Her next words, repeated twice, are meaningful: they equate the dangers of the scorpions' poison with the fate of Horus, who appears to be in a similar situation. Here, we are dealing with ritual language, which creates emphasis and meaning through repetition:

*Oh, may the child live and the poison die,  
may Ra live and the poison die,  
then Horus may (also) recover for his mother Isis,  
then the sick person may also recover.*<sup>21</sup>

This speech introduces Horus as the prototypical sick patient, who can be healed through the power of his mother's magic words<sup>22</sup> and thus becomes the model for every sick person. Moreover, it lays the foundation for the healing power of Isis, which was one of her cult's most celebrated qualities during its triumphal proliferation throughout the Mediterranean.

Spell 14 of the Metternich Stela makes clear where Isis's knowledge of healing and magic comes from. The power of Isis's language is probably most clearly expressed here, again in a self-description:

*I am Isis, the goddess, the owner of magic,  
who performs magic with powerful speech and with  
chosen words.*<sup>23</sup>

In this episode, Horus, hidden in a papyrus thicket, appears to have been tracked down by Seth's marauding gang, stabbed by a poison-bearing animal, and left to die. Isis was at first powerless. Although she asked her neighbors (the inhabitants of the Nile Delta) for help, no one could assist her. Even her sister, Nephthys, did not succeed in saving the young Horus until Isis as a last resort called upon the gods for help. The sun was interrupted in its course because of the violence of her calling.<sup>24</sup> Once again, it was Thoth who tried to calm Isis, but she called to him angrily:

*Oh, Thoth, how great is your thought,  
but how hesitant is (also) your behavior (. . .).  
Behold, Horus is in need because of the poison  
And his misfortune is such a bad one,  
that the very needy (child) will die.*<sup>25</sup>

It is because Isis is able to call upon others for assistance that Horus is saved.

## Speech in Lamentation and Burial

When investigating deities who interact with one another through speech in ancient Egypt, including Isis, cult hymns play an important role.<sup>26</sup> In Egypt these hymns take the form of monologues directed to three types of audiences: a deity who remains passive during the performance (hymns to the gods), a previously defined active group of believers to whom a god speaks (aretalogy),<sup>27</sup> and a deceased individual who recites the hymn for himself. A dialogue is not the intended outcome, although the hymns' basic function as a form of communication is beyond doubt.<sup>28</sup> As hymns aim at "involving an imaginary or actual reader,"<sup>29</sup> their purpose is not an exchange of words in the form of a response or even a dialogue; the speaker does not expect a spoken response, and the person addressed usually remains passive. In certain circumstances, a verbal act takes place separately, for instance, in the form of an offering ritual that follows the hymn. If, however, a hymn is intended to receive a response, the situation must be changed, for example, by introducing affirmative verbal forms such as the imperative, which we have seen above in Isis's address to the sons of Horus.

While in magical texts the individual performing the ritual appears in the role of a god to force a certain positive or negative turn against the background of mythical events, funerary texts are more complex. Here, we are dealing with literature for the dead, such as texts read by the deceased himself (the Book of the Dead),<sup>30</sup> recitations (performed by priests for the deceased in the roles of gods, such as the Nightly Vigil), wishes,<sup>31</sup> and prayers of the deceased,<sup>32</sup> and sometimes even personal testimonies representing individual opinions.<sup>33</sup> The recitation texts—including lamentations and mourning of the deceased, in which Isis sometimes appears as a speaker—fall into four categories: canonical lamentations, personal lamentations,<sup>34</sup> lamentations during the funeral procession, and the Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys.<sup>35</sup>

Recitation texts of the first category, the canonical lamentations, under which the lamentation for the deceased is subsumed, have their origin in transfiguration texts and were unified at an early date.<sup>36</sup> These recitations are referred to as glorification texts, which make up part of elaborate mortuary liturgies.<sup>37</sup> Their aim is to transform a dead person into an *ꜣḥ* (*akh*), a "glorified spirit," who receives the status of an Osiris N. These texts are at home both in the embalming hall and in the burial chamber and were canonized as early as the Old Kingdom, around 2350 BC, inside the pyramid of the 5th Dynasty pharaoh Unas at Saqqara. Minimally edited and

handed down from the Middle Kingdom at the latest until Roman times, these texts had a lifetime of more than twenty-four hundred years. Forming the largest corpus of funerary texts in ancient Egypt, the mortuary liturgies are also the oldest continuously used funerary texts in the world. They address primarily the transformation of the dead individual, a role that was traditionally performed by Isis, and the ascension of the dead to the sky in his transformation as an *akh*.

The dominant theme of the first of these main topics is the impressive description of the mourning of Osiris during mummification in the embalming hall. A Coffin Text of the Middle Kingdom describes the triple constellation of the active Isis and Nephthys and passive Osiris. The setting is the nocturnal hourly vigils, in the early morning hours before the funeral procession to the tomb begins:

*Trembling befalls the eastern land of light  
at the wailing from the wry.t.  
Isis is in great lamentation,  
Nephthys cries,  
this oldest god, the lord of gods (Osiris).*<sup>38</sup>

The second category, the personal lamentations, are individual compositions. Here no two texts are alike, and no actual reenactment of the myth of Osiris is envisaged by the speaker, as an example from the New Kingdom Theban Tomb 338 (Maia) shows. The mythical subject of this spell is, again, Isis mourning Osiris:

*His beloved (sister?) Tai-imentet, she says  
"My eyes are full of tears,  
my heart is full of sorrow,  
and my body is filled with pain for my good brother!  
If I (nevertheless) find out what hurts him (the body),  
I would command that he (the pain) leave him."*<sup>39</sup>

The third category contains lamentations during the funeral procession. We are informed of their existence mainly through indirect references, such as quotations and incipits of funeral songs, as well as by ritual references, such as that of the Papyrus Ramesseum E from the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 1950 BC), in which the agents of the funeral procession are listed:

*[proceeding of the mourners] and K[enut] women  
to all Reḥit-people while they mourn.*<sup>40</sup>

The fourth category contains the most extensive collection of mourning songs of Isis and Nephthys. The chants, known in scholarly literature as lamentations, reenact the myth of Osiris and accompanied the funeral procession. In these lamentations, Isis and Nephthys are recognizable as independent actors who want to awaken their dead

brother and prepare for his entrance into the underworld through their songs of mourning. Isis and Nephthys play almost interchangeable roles and ultimately serve the purpose of introducing Osiris to his mother, Nut, who—interpreted as a coffin—embraces him, as the Pyramid Texts state:

*Nephthys has embraced all your limbs  
in this her name “Seshat, Lady of the builders.”  
She has let you be healed by handing you over to your  
mother Nut  
in her name “burial.”  
She has embraced you in her name “coffin.”*<sup>41</sup>

According to the myth, restitution takes eight days, the time needed to reanimate Osiris to the point where he can even hear the lamentations and glorifications. According to Pyramid Text 670 and Coffin Text 754, this restitution takes place in two intervals of four days each, whose names contain plays on words: on the fourth day (*jfdw*) the evil was “wiped away” (*fd*), on the eighth day (*hmn.w*) Osiris “forgot” (*hmn*) what was done to him.<sup>42</sup> According to Coffin Text 345, these days are holidays on which the deceased is addressed:

*Oh Osiris N here,  
those who mourned Osiris shall mourn for you  
on that feast of the fourth day.  
Those who lamented Osiris shall lament you  
on that feast of the eighth day,  
on which the gods fainted.  
Oh Osiris N here,  
may Horus cleanse you in that lake of cooling!  
Oh Osiris N here,  
may Anubis, the embalmer, cover you.*<sup>43</sup>

In the funerary cult, the myth of Osiris is integrated with a cult calendar, which prescribes the duration of certain ritual processes in detail. In other words, myth is synchronized in order to receive authenticity.<sup>44</sup> Papyrus Berlin 3008—a Ptolemaic period document that records a later copy of the Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys, which were originally composed at an uncertain date—names the time and place of performance in detail: the fourth month of the flood, day 25, in all temples of Osiris Chontamenti.<sup>45</sup> Thus it becomes evident that the mourning is a nationwide, ambulant lamentation. Apart from the deadlines to be observed, the theatrical character of these performances is supported by the alternating speeches of the two participants, Isis and Nephthys, who address Osiris in quick succession:

*Nephthys speaks, she says:  
“Oh good king, come to your house,*

*Onnophris, justified, come to Djedet.  
Oh, passionate bull, come to Anpet,  
oh, lover of women, come to Hat-mechit,  
come to Djedet, to the place your Ba loves.  
The Bas of your fathers are your companions,  
your young son Horus, the child of your sister, is before  
you.  
I am the light that guides you every day,  
I will never leave you.”*

Turning to Osiris, Nephthys continues:

*Oh, you Heliopolitan, come to Sais,  
“Saite” is your name.  
Come to Sais to see your mother Neith (Isis),  
good child, you shall not move away from her.  
Come to the breasts that overflow,  
good brother, you shall not depart from her.*

Finally, speaking to the ritual recipient, the deceased, Neith (that is, Isis) says:

*Oh, my son, come to Sais,  
Osiris N.  
Come to Sais, your city,  
your place is in the palace,  
you will rest here beside your mother.  
She will protect your body, drive away your enemies,  
it will protect your body forever.  
Oh, good King, come to your house,  
Lord of Sais, come to Sais!*<sup>46</sup>

In this passage, Nephthys refers to the Osiris myth, which is intended as a model for the deceased. There follows a speech by Isis that begins with similar words but is more detailed and deals above all with the death rites themselves in order to reassure her husband of their reliability. The main theme is a review of the succession to the throne of Egypt. Isis, the “King Maker,”<sup>47</sup> uses the contact with Osiris to praise their son, Horus, the future king of Egypt:

*Isis speaks, she says:  
“Come to your house, come to your house,  
good king, come to your house.  
Come, see your son Horus  
as king of gods and men.  
He has conquered cities and regions  
with the greatness of his fame.  
Heaven and earth are in awe of him,  
the bow-land is in fear of him.  
Your court of gods and men belong to him  
in the Two Lands, performing your rites.  
Your two sisters with you libate for your Ka,*

*your son Horus brings you sacrifices  
in the form of bread, beer, oxen, and fowl.  
Thoth recites your liturgy  
and addresses you with his sayings.  
The sons of Horus guard your body  
and daily worship your Ka.  
Your son Horus stands up for your name and your  
shrine,  
and makes sacrifices to your Ka.  
The gods, with vessels of water in their hands,  
pour out water for your Ka.  
Come to your court, King our Lord,  
do not leave him.”*

This concluding speech of Isis makes it clear that the primary function of these lamentations is to introduce the deceased to both his earthly family and the gods in the afterlife through the reception of offerings.

Of great importance, however, is the postscript to the lamentations of Papyrus Berlin 3008. This passage explains the context of the performance in more detail, and although—as made clear by the designation of all temples of Osiris Chontamenti as the location of the events—the text is at home in temple ritual, it harks back to its original use in funerary rites. But this postscript is highly significant for another reason, namely the location of these rites. Even though there is no lack of evidence for the procession of the dead in ancient Egyptian texts and monuments, the textual sources are surprisingly silent about the events of the actual burial. There are, however, texts, again mortuary liturgies, as well as the book with the title “The God’s protection is around [me],”<sup>48</sup> whose recitation accompanied the lowering of the coffin into its chamber via the tomb shaft. It can be assumed that in the tombs of the Ramesside period a change in architectural practices made it possible for the closest family members to accompany the deceased to the door of the burial chamber. By means of winding descents underground, so-called sloping passages,<sup>49</sup> the living were able to accompany the deceased to the final resting place. The majority of Egyptian burial chambers, though, could be reached only via narrow vertical shafts,<sup>50</sup> with simple steps carved out of the rock, each of which offered space for only one person to ascend and descend, and were certainly not designed to cater to the elderly. Since in most cases the final rites could not be performed in front of the door of the burial chamber, they had to be carried out aboveground and at a time when only the closest relatives were still gathered.

The lamentations of Papyrus Berlin 3008 provide information about this event, which is also anchored in

ritual. Here the interaction given in the myth can be considered in comparison to actual conditions during the burial, since the persons appearing in it play the roles of gods. This unique text, which immediately follows the speech of Isis, describes the ritual:

*Now after this has been recited, the burial site must be completely sealed off so that it is not seen or heard of by anyone other than the recitation priest and the sem-priest. Bring two women with beautiful bodies. They are to be made to sit on the floor at the main entrance to the hall of appearance. On their arms the names of Isis and Nephthys are to be written. Vessels of faience filled with water shall be placed in their right hands, offering bread from Memphis in their left hands, and their heads shall be inclined. To be performed in the third hour of the day, as well as in the eighth hour of the day. You shall not be tired in reciting this book in the hour of the feast.<sup>51</sup>*

From this postscript it becomes clear that the lamentations of Papyrus Berlin 3008 were to be recited during the lowering of the coffin by two women who appeared in the mythical roles of Isis and Nephthys. At the end of column 5 of the papyrus manuscript, there is a sketchy drawing showing the two women, each holding a loaf of bread in one hand and a vessel in the other. One may assume that these vessels are the blue faience bowls, usually decorated with aquatic motifs, whose meaning in the funerary cult has not yet been fully explored.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the drawing on the papyrus manuscript itself, the unique ritual instruction of Papyrus Berlin 3008 can now be reconciled with a drawing on a New Kingdom ostrakon on which the coffin is depicted as a pictogram. This sherd, apparently from Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, is part of the former Gardiner Collection and is now in the Manchester Museum, University of Manchester (fig. 3.3). Though it has been published a number of times,<sup>53</sup> it has never been considered in its original context and associated with recitation texts performed, as depicted in the drawing. There can be no doubt that the structure shown on the ostrakon is a cross section of a tomb shaft in which a person is seen descending. Most probably a priest, this person uses steps that have been cut into two opposing shaft walls. Ancient Egyptian depictions of underground tombs of this kind have rarely survived, but a representation on the papyrus of Nebqed, from the reign of the 18th Dynasty pharaoh Amenhotep III (r. 1391–1353 BC), shows that the Egyptians were quite concerned with the question of what happened in the underground part of the tombs,<sup>54</sup> which was usually sealed off and therefore inaccessible. While the papyrus of Nebqed depicts only the supplies for the dead



individual's body provided by the Ba-bird, the ostracon from Manchester throws light on aboveground and underground funerary rites,<sup>55</sup> depicting various stages of the final burial.



**Figure 3.3** Ostracon with the representation of a typical shaft tomb in profile showing funerary rites in the burial chamber as well as at the mouth of the tomb shaft, Egyptian, ca. 1450 BC. Limestone, H: 16 cm. From Thebes. Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, 5886. Image: Reproduced with permission

As indicated in the ritual instruction of Papyrus Berlin 3008, a lector priest is indeed present during the rites at the mouth of the tomb shown on ostracon Manchester 5886. There, he is shown burning incense and pouring a libation. Next to him, four mourning women are shown. From left to right, one holds her hand in front of her face, the next two have both hands raised, and the fourth female has her arms and hair hanging down. There is nothing to suggest that two of the female figures represent Isis and Nephthys, but according to the information provided by Papyrus Berlin 3008, the mourning rites are to be expected here, together with lamentations, incense, and libation spells. The scene shown on the top of the Manchester ostracon depicts the closing chapter of the funerary ritual. The scene at the bottom is related to the final rites, which include the deposition of the coffin. Therefore, it seems that the ostracon describes the final funeral rites in chronological order: after the coffin is placed in the burial chamber and recitations of funerary spells have finished, the priest climbs up through the tomb shaft and conducts, together with mourners, the final rites. The standardized execution

of these rituals is marked by recitations of mortuary liturgies in the burial chamber and the Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys outside the tomb.

The activities of Isis in ancient Egyptian funerary cult suggest two different roles, which are at first glance closely connected. During the funerary rites, she helps to transform the deceased into Osiris and to introduce him to the other gods in the hereafter. The passive god Osiris is the “interlocutor,” who, while he does not speak, still reacts within the confines of the funerary rituals when he stands up to receive his offerings, ascends to the sky, and so on. These rites are located in the embalming hall or—insofar as they coincide with the offering rites—in the sphere of the tomb, accompanied by glorification texts known from mortuary liturgies. The second category includes the mourning rites,<sup>56</sup> in which Osiris is bid farewell, accompanied by lamentations. But what performances and speech precede these final rituals and how does Isis guarantee their success? An important part of the farewell takes place when the dead individual is embraced. According to a Coffin Text, the farewell occurs at the entrance of the tomb before the interment of the deceased, when his dead body descends to the burial chamber located at the end of the tomb shaft:

*Anubis, the lord of the mouth of the shaft, is awake,  
about this god, the son of the lord of gods.  
Isis has her arms around you,  
as she did for the Lord of All.*<sup>57</sup>

The mention of the Lord of All and the reference to the sunset<sup>58</sup> are both chosen deliberately.<sup>59</sup> In the cult of the sun, as in the funerary cult, the sky goddess Nut is usually the one with whom the idea of an embrace is associated. While relatives embrace the dead to bid a last farewell, Nut embraces him in a gesture of welcome. Within the mythical model of the death of Osiris, this concept is particularly attractive because Nut is in fact the mother of Osiris,<sup>60</sup> and the embrace of the dead by Nut became a central motif of funerary belief,<sup>61</sup> referring to rebirth. Nut welcomes and physically embraces Osiris, after Horus has ensured his father's well-being in the beyond. In a Coffin Text of the Middle Kingdom that discusses the attachment of the head during the process of mummification, the lector priest describes this process in the words of Osiris as follows:

*My mother (Nut) gave me her secret transfiguration spells,  
as my son spread his arms over me,  
to remove the injury that Seth did to me,  
in order to hide (or: heal) what he (Seth) did to me.*<sup>62</sup>

Isis, however, takes on her traditional mythical role as the wife and sister equipped with magical power. In the following text, Isis as goddess of the West (that is, the necropolis) explains this constellation in her own words, reassuring her husband of her love and protection:

*Oh Osiris N, welcome in peace!  
I unite myself with you, I embrace you with my arms,  
I bring life to your limbs;  
I remain as the protection of your body,  
I will wrap my arms around you for all eternity.*<sup>63</sup>

Apart from Isis's authority as a goddess of magic, her traditional roles within funerary texts are widely varied, with her responsibilities as supporter of rituals and orchestrator of lamentations being the most important. She is able to fulfill both duties only through her ability to interact with other gods and her eloquence, paired with her perseverance in protecting her family. Her success in changing the fate of those she cares for is based on the ancient Egyptian understanding that death is not final. Clinical death, to use a modern term, is only a disease, and as a result, an individual suffering from death can be healed. Just as Isis can save her young child from deadly fever with powerful and persuasive utterances, she can override the possibility of a person's second, and final, death through the application of myth played out in ritual. Or in other words, Isis's spoken words are the medicine that ultimately saves the patient, the ritual is the surgery, and finally myth functions as an operation theater. No other goddess in ancient Egypt had the healing powers of Isis or was able to perform the ritual and live the myth that enabled her authority.

## Hellenized Isis

For the ancient Greeks, Isis was particularly attractive because their own pantheon did not include a goddess who simultaneously possessed all these characteristics: a healer, a communicator, a protector, a fertility figure, a mother, and one who promised life after death. Individual female goddesses embodied some aspects of Isis, and the *interpretatio Graeca* (the Greek explanation and understanding of what was regarded as Egyptian religion) helped Isis worshippers to adjust her gradually to a new role in Greece as her cult was adopted. This development was significant enough to carry Isis via the island of Delos into Italy,<sup>64</sup> before she eventually returned to Egypt as a Hellenized goddess during the Roman period (fig. 3.4).<sup>65</sup>

While the healing power of Isis was certainly one of the features that attracted ancient Greeks to her the most, her role in the Osiris myth must have appeared as a paradox. To outsiders, it appeared that she had the power to



**Figure 3.4** Bust of Isis wearing a horned lunar headdress with side plumes, Romano-Egyptian, ca. 1st century BC–1st century AD. Bronze, 9.3 × 5.8 × 2.3 cm. Sydney, Macquarie University History Museum, MU4488. A 3D scan of this object is available for viewing at <https://objectbasedlearning.com/Macquarie-University-History-Museum/MU4488.html>.

awaken the dead, and while this may have appealed to some, this aspect of Isis was undoubtedly not regarded as useful. The Greeks did not worship dead gods,<sup>66</sup> and they may have had political reservations regarding the resurrection of previous kings or dead husbands, making the myth of Osiris as Isis's companion unappealing enough to have him written out of the role. When Isis reached foreign shores,<sup>67</sup> she had left Osiris behind, as his character was untranslatable into the Greek worldview.

As for the Hellenized Isis, her role in funerary cult had to give way just as her iconography and the architecture of sanctuaries dedicated to her changed from their pharaonic antecedents (fig. 3.5). Accordingly, Osiris cults are very rare outside of Egypt, and where they do appear—as, for example, in Delos—almost nothing is known about them, or they were completely redesigned to transform Osiris, previously the god of the dead, into a god of happiness and bacchanalia through his association with Dionysos.<sup>68</sup> In Ptolemaic Egypt and throughout the Mediterranean, Isis was given a new consort, the god Serapis, who combined aspects of Osiris and the sacred



**Figure 3.5** Sanctuary of Isis on the island of Delos (Serapeion C). The statue of Isis found in the cella was donated by the population of Athens in 128/127 BC.

Apis bull of Memphis. Isis's ability to listen to others and take advice was preserved when she appeared together with Serapis as a team of "hearing and healing gods."<sup>69</sup>

The role of Isis in relation to Osiris became limited to the finding of the sacred water of the Nile. The emergence of the sacred water, the sacramental interpretation of the bodily fluid of Osiris, was celebrated as an annual Isis festival called *inventio Osiridis* every year between October 29 and November 2 all across the Roman Empire.<sup>70</sup> The concept of the river as the embodiment of the bodily fluids of Osiris is not restricted to the Nile Valley. It is also present in Greek riverine landscapes, including the Inopos River, on the island of Delos, which was thought to flow underneath the ocean bed to take the floods of the Nile to Greece.<sup>71</sup> The finding of the sacred water is the central ritual of the Hellenistic Isis cult, and sanctuaries of Egyptian deities in the Aegean and Italy were without exception placed at natural or artificial water sources.<sup>72</sup>

In the Mediterranean, however, the interaction of the goddess with other deities is limited. Isis is not silent, but she lacks others with whom to communicate. Instead of

talking to other gods, she replaces them or shares sanctuaries with them, as in the cities of Kyme (in Asia Minor),<sup>73</sup> Pergamon,<sup>74</sup> and many others throughout the Aegean.<sup>75</sup> What is important to note, however, especially in view of her unprecedented success in the Mediterranean, is the eloquence and sophisticated rhetoric Isis was still known for:

Probably the most important self-testimony of the goddess, which was spread exclusively in the Aegean, was the Hellenistic Isis aretalogy.<sup>76</sup> Isis's transition from Egyptian to universal goddess is evident in this text, which opens with the statement "I am Isis."<sup>77</sup> Her ability to monologize, as she does in the aretalogy, is indeed not something new, as pharaonic texts demonstrate. Versions of the aretalogy have been discovered on inscriptions in sanctuaries dedicated to Egyptian gods in Kyme, Thessaloniki, Maroneia, Andros, Telmessos, and on the islands of Ios and Delos.<sup>78</sup> Later Roman authors quoted the aretalogy as well: Diodorus Siculus used a version of this text supposedly from Memphis in the first century BC. In his *Bibliotheca historica*, he not only refers to the aretalogy of Isis but also alludes to her parting from Egypt:

*I am Isis, the queen of every land, she who was instructed of Hermes, and whatsoever laws I have established, these can no man make void. I am the eldest daughter of the youngest god Cronus; I am the wife and sister of the king Osiris; I am she who first discovered fruits for mankind; I am the mother of Horus the king; I am she who riseth in the star that is in the Constellation of the Dog; by me was the city of Bubastus built. Farewell, farewell, oh Egypt that nurtured me.*<sup>79</sup>

These texts show striking similarities to the Isis hymn in the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius.<sup>80</sup> In this text, Isis speaks in the first person as well and describes her qualities, functions, and power of action. Although the content of the Isis aretalogy is primarily Greek in origin and addresses an exclusively Greek audience, it retains some knowledge of the Egyptian cult of the goddess. In the fifty-five lines of the fully preserved, stylized version of the text from Kyme,<sup>81</sup> twelve aspects of Isis mentioned are consistent with the pharaonic goddess. At first glance this seems to be a considerable number, but in view of the fact that the Isis aretalogy names a total of fifty areas of responsibility for Isis, this correspondence is rather low and raises doubts regarding genuine references to pharaonic Egypt.<sup>82</sup> Three-quarters of the new Isis's characteristics are Greek in origin and not Egyptian. In other words, the goddess Isis who arrived in the Aegean is essentially a product of Hellenistic religious thinking.

In the Hellenistic period, Isis was associated with not only spoken but also written language. In the Isis aretalogy, she claims to be the inventor of the Egyptian script:

*I am Isis, the mistress of every country. I was brought up by Hermes (Thoth), and with Hermes I invented the script, the hieroglyphs and the Demotic script, so that not everything would be written with the same characters.*<sup>83</sup>

Gods could communicate with one another through writing. We are indeed informed that the ancient Egyptian gods sometimes wrote to each other in the form of letters.<sup>84</sup> During the Hellenistic period, this practice did not cease: Serapis was known as a letter writer.<sup>85</sup> The majority of the gods' utterances were spoken, however, and not written. In Hellenistic times, Isis could apparently even bestow language itself. Thus, in a literary Isis aretalogy from the *Vita Aesopi*, a story has been preserved in which the mute slave Aesop meets the goddess Isis with the help of a priestess.<sup>86</sup> In her prayer, the priestess compares the absence of language to the absence of light: "At least give him language, for you are able to bring back what has fallen into darkness."<sup>87</sup> But Aesop, once he

regains his language, wonders: "Where did I get the language from? (. . .) Certainly in gratitude for the fact that I acted piously against the priestess. So it is good to be pious. I expect to receive from the gods the good hopes (for a better hereafter)."<sup>88</sup>

The relationship of Isis with her interlocutors has undergone a change. In Egypt, Isis spoke with gods but usually not with mortals,<sup>89</sup> in accordance with her mythical role. In the Aegean, she spoke with the cult community but not with the gods. The example of the god Serapis, her consort in the Aegean, may explain this circumstance: with him there is no linguistic interaction. Instead her pairing with Serapis involved more of a division of tasks between two self-reliant deities than a constructive cooperation. This approach helped believers to differentiate the sometimes specific functions of Isis and Serapis, but it also makes it difficult to understand how the gods were assigned to certain tasks. For example, Serapis was regarded as a god who liberates slaves, especially in Boeotia,<sup>90</sup> and Isis acted as a nurse for the sick and women in childbirth.<sup>91</sup> In the Peloponnese, in contrast, Serapis was equated with Asclepius, the god of salvation,<sup>92</sup> while in the name of Isis, it seems, a sanatorium was maintained in Philippi.<sup>93</sup> This diversity of functions makes it difficult to assign clear responsibilities to Isis and Serapis. The Hellenized Isis, who was invoked by cult communities as the "One of a Thousand Names" and at the same time as "the Only One," had successfully discarded the high degree of specialization of an ancient Egyptian deity and could be interpreted and worshipped in a wide variety of ways. These henotheistic traits, however, had their price—namely, her detachment, resulting in a lack of engagement with the other gods. Thus it is precisely the hymnal exclamation "I am Isis," already emerging toward the end of pharaonic culture, that describes the maturing of Isis into a universal goddess, while at the same time diminishing her powers of communication and interaction.

Interaction between gods is naturally possible only where other gods exist—that is, in polytheistic religions and not in monotheism. Isis is the example of a deity who mastered the transition from a polytheistic to a henotheistic deity, even if not permanently.<sup>94</sup> For the canonization of monotheism after polytheism, however, experiences with the autonomous rule of Isis were certainly groundbreaking, defining the renunciation of interaction with other divinities as desirable, since it proved that other gods no longer existed.

Inscriptions dating to 100 BC in the temple of Horus at Edfu (room E), written in hieroglyphs, have Isis say, "I am

the only one.”<sup>95</sup> Three hundred years later, a Latin inscription discovered in the Mithraeum of Santa Maria Capua Vetere addresses Isis as “una quae est omnia” (the one who is all),<sup>96</sup> thus identifying her claim for exclusivity within the respective pantheons. Once again Isis is defined by language. The Romans were particularly aware of the fact that the boundary of thought formed by the Judeo-Christian God simultaneously draws the decisive language boundary; all other boundaries of the human language have only the character of demarcations. In the dialogue *Octavius*, authored by the early Latin apologist Marcus Minucius Felix (d. AD 250), a point is made that one God cannot be defined or described by any other name: “If I call him father, you will think of him earthly; if I call him king, you may consider him corporeal; if I call him lord, you will consider him mortal in the end (. . .). Remove the attachment from names, and you will see him in his glory!”<sup>97</sup> Monotheistic religions trust in the authoritative communications of one God, and the first divinity who brought things into being with words was Isis.

#### NOTES

1. Austin 1962.
2. The abundance of popular literature on pharaonic Isis is matched only by a few reliable monographs, such as the fundamental work of Münster 1968 and the work of Dunand 2000, which also deals with the expansion of Isis into the Mediterranean.
3. The earliest examples of the myth of Osiris as a consistent narrative appear only in the work of later Greek historians: Diodorus Siculus in the first century AD (*Bibliotheca historica* 1.21) and Plutarch in the early second century AD (*De Iside et Osiride*; see Griffiths 1970).
4. Sethe 1910, PT 532=Pyr. §1256b; PT 701=Pyr. §2188a.
5. Sethe 1910, PT 535=Pyr. §1281a–1282a; PT 701=Pyr. §2192b.
6. De Buck 1935, CT 74=I 306a–f.
7. The abbreviation *N* denotes the individual deceased person who is ritually transformed into an Osiris, not the god Osiris.
8. CT 48 = I.211d–212a.
9. For example, on Papyrus Louvre N 3129 L/37.13–15, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010378546>; Trismegistos no. 56940, <https://www.trismegistos.org/hhp/detail.php?tm=56940>; see Assmann 2008, 49–50 (including other sources).
10. Assmann 2008, 49–50. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of ancient texts are the author’s own.
11. Münster 1968, 2–3.
12. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes, C 286, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010026515>; translation in Assmann 1999, 479.
13. Lines 14–15, after Moret 1930, 714.
14. Last reviewed in a monograph by Forgeau 2010, esp. 45–56.
15. pMed. London XIV, 8–14; translated, for example, in Assmann 2004, 43. London, British Museum, EA10059; Trismegistos no. 380900, <https://www.trismegistos.org/hhp/detail.php?tm=380900&i=2676>.
16. Papyrus Wien D. 12006; see Stadler 2004. On the question of the identity of the interlocutors, see also Dieleman 2009, 227–28. Vienna, Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek.
17. Stadler 2004, 272–73.
18. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 50.85, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/546037>; Sander-Hansen 1956, 35–43.
19. Sander-Hansen 1956, 41.
20. Sander-Hansen 1956, 41.
21. Sander-Hansen 1956, 41–42.
22. For Isis as a magician who uses language, see Ritner 1993, 33–34.
23. Sander-Hansen 1956, 38; Ritner 1993, 34.
24. Sander-Hansen 1956, 72.
25. Sander-Hansen 1956, 72.
26. Baruq and Daumas 1980; Assmann 1999.
27. In hymns to the gods, priests or believers name and address a deity and proclaim its power to work. In contrast, in the Isis aretalogy, the deity herself addresses believers and functions as a confessional hymn. Assmann (1975, 425) has applied the concept of aretalogy also to the texts of so-called personal piety, which he understood as “proclaiming the power of a deity.” Only a few texts take on the character of a miracle story, for example, the “Dream Revelation of Hathor” (see Assmann 1978). The term *aretalogy* has not become generally accepted for this genre of text, though.
28. Knigge 2006, 16, 31–35.
29. Knigge 2006, 35. The term *audience* may be more appropriate.
30. Probably the most important collection of texts is the so-called Book of the Dead, in which the majority of the sayings are neither used liturgically nor recited individually by priests but “read” by the dead themselves.
31. This is probably the largest group; see Assmann 2002, 31.

32. Particularly noteworthy here are the widespread Nut spells, which go back to models from the Old Kingdom and became more prominent, especially from the New Kingdom onward; see Falck 2001, 49–74; Bommas 2010, 53, fig. 37.
33. These are mainly ceiling texts in tombs of the New Kingdom; see Assmann 2005b, 347–88; Bommas 2015, 562–64.
34. Lamentations by children are described by Assmann as “self-claims”; see Assmann and Kucharek 2008, 878.
35. Smith 2009, 67–166, esp. texts 1, 2, 4–6.
36. For example, the sequence of lamentations in Coffin Text proverbs CT 51–59 (Assmann 2002, 269) and CT 74 as well as Totenbuch chapter Tb 172 (Assmann 2002, 53). These compilations must be distinguished from individual creations; see Assmann and Kucharek 2008, 865.
37. Assmann 2005a.
38. Beginning of De Buck 1935, CT 49=I.215a–d; Assmann 2002, 266.
39. Assmann and Kucharek 2008, 585.
40. Díaz Hernández 2014, 27 (col. 83–84). For the performance of this ritual, see Bommas 2020.
41. Sethe 1910, PT 364=Pyr. §616a–e.
42. Assmann 2002, 436.
43. De Buck 1951, CT 345; Assmann 2002, 436.
44. Bommas 1999, 137.
45. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, P. 3008; Trismegistos no. 57089, <https://www.trismegistos.org/hhp/detail.php?tm=57089>.
46. For Papyrus Berlin 3008, see Lichtheim 2006, 116–21; Smith 2009, 129–34.
47. Bommas 2011a.
48. Altenmüller 1975, 762.
49. Assmann 1984, 284–86.
50. It is hard to imagine that the recently reexcavated but still unpublished shaft of the tomb of the governor of Beni Hassan, Baqet II (BH33), dating to the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000 BC), was accessed by family members, given its depth of twenty-four meters; Naguib Kanawati, Macquarie University, Sydney, communication with the author, November 15, 2019.
51. Smith 2009, 133–34. Perhaps the final sentence refers to the long recitations during the burial ritual?
52. For the meaning of these bowls in the cult of the dead, see the approach of Strauss-Seeber 1974.
53. Gardiner 1913; Steindorff and Wolf 1936, 47, fig. 11; David 2007, 186.
54. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes, N 3068, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010003125>; D’Auria, Lacovara, and Roehrig 1992, 44.
55. University of Manchester, Manchester Museum, 5886, <http://harbour.man.ac.uk/mmcustom/Display.php?irn=100351.php>. I would like to thank Campbell Price, curator of Egypt and Sudan, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, for the generously granted rights of use.
56. Kucharek 2005, 342–58.
57. De Buck 1935, CT 50 = I.228b–c; see Assmann 2002, 279.
58. Is this to be understood as the time for the final rites at the tomb shaft?
59. On the connection between the course of the sun and the fate of the dead, which is particularly tangible in this passage, see Assmann 1990, chap. 6.
60. This myth is cited in pLeiden I 346 (see Bommas 1999, 15–17) and in the fragments pBologna KS 3359 (to be discussed by the author in a forthcoming publication); pLeiden I 346, Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, AMS 23a vel 1, <https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=170923>; Trismegistos no. 34724, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/34724>; pBologna KS 3359: Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, 3359; Trismegistos no. 110258, <https://www.trismegistos.org/hhp/detail.php?tm=110258>.
61. See Rusch 1922, n. 20.
62. De Buck 1956, CT 532 = VI.126i–l; translated in Assmann 2002, 245.
63. Davies and Gardiner 1915, plate X.
64. Malaise 1972.
65. Bommas 2006, 221–39.
66. Bommas 2005a, 25.
67. She is first attested in Piraeus in 333/332 BC; see Bommas 2005a, 33–34.
68. Bommas 2013, 100–101.
69. Witt 1997, 185–97; Bommas 2005a, 14.
70. Bommas 2011b, 85–91.
71. Bommas 2005a, 58.
72. Wild 1981.
73. Bommas 2005a, 52.
74. Mania 2001; Bommas 2005b.
75. Bommas 2005a.

76. Totti 1985, 1–4; translated in Merkelbach 2001, 115–18. Where the text actually comes from is the subject of a heated debate that cannot be discussed in detail here. Basically, two camps have formed (Stadler 2005, 7–9), one of which believes that this text, written in Greek, is—as the text itself claims—of Egyptian origin. (Quack 2003 translated the Greek text into a fictitious Demotic. This is a questionable procedure without probative value.) The other considers the text to be Greek and its self-referential character to be secondary due to stylistic investigations and nongenuine functional descriptions of Isis.
77. On the concept of aretalogy in ancient Egypt, see Assmann 1975. The incipit of this text was used by Jan Bergmann as the title of his book (Bergmann 1968).
78. Merkelbach 2001, 113; Bommas 2005a, 52–53; see also Mazurek 2018, 635n126.
79. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.27; translated in Oldfather 1933–67, 1:86–89.
80. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI.5. See Kenney 2004; Mazurek 2018, 622–23.
81. Bommas 2004, 142n15.
82. Müller (1961, 89–90, including the texts in hieroglyphs) drew attention to the Isis hymns on both sides of the entrance to the central chapel of the temple of Isis at Aswan; see the more recent (and sometimes deviating) copy by Bresciani (1978, 102, 104). Another example for the self-portrayal of a deity is the stela of Amenhotep III, found behind the Colossi of Memnon, in which Amun-Re speaks in the first person.
83. Translated in Merkelbach 2001, 115.
84. Thus in the “Narrative of Horus and Seth”; Lichtheim 1976, 215. On the subject of the celestial letters, or *Himmelsbriefe*, see Merkelbach 2001, 126–27, with an example of the introduction of the Serapis cult in Opus; Bommas 2005a, 90.
85. In addition to celestial letters, invitations to cult banquets should also be mentioned, which have been documented only in Egypt—but there in large numbers; Bommas 2005a, 99–100, fig. 120; Sharp 2010, 97–98, fig. 90.
86. Possibly this text originates from the Artemis cult; see Merkelbach 2001, 222.
87. Merkelbach 2001, 223.
88. Merkelbach 2001, 223.
89. The only early exception known to me is an oracle scene from the Ramesside period, in which a colonel of the security authority named Pa-en-Ra during a barque procession first addresses Isis hymnally before receiving her oracle’s message (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1894/106; Frood 2007, 192–95, no. 37, fig. 11).
90. Bommas 2005a, 69–70.
91. Bommas 2005a, 34.
92. Bommas 2011b, 82–83.
93. Bommas 2002, 134–35.
94. For a definition of henotheism in relation to prophetic monotheism, see Lang 1998, 152.
95. Junker 1910, 59 (ad 51), 117 (ad 66).
96. Merkelbach 2001, 98.
97. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 18.10. For an English translation of the entire chapter, see [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-04/anf04-34.htm#P5633\\_859358](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-04/anf04-34.htm#P5633_859358).

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# The Creation of New “Cultural Codes”: The Ptolemaic Queens and Their Syncretic Processes with Isis, Hathor, and Aphrodite

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The fourth century BC was a period of widespread transformation, marked by the transition from the ancient Near Eastern empires to the Hellenistic kingdoms, in which Egypt played a central role. Through the conquests of Alexander the Great, the known world became more intensively interconnected than ever before. Egypt was already a millennia-old civilization with a rich intellectual, artistic, and cultural tradition, and the foundation of Alexandria (331 BC) in the context of the rise of the Hellenistic kingdoms provided a new way in which the land by the Nile was centralized, one that invited even greater cross-cultural interaction. For the Ptolemies (305/4–30 BC), the Greco-Macedonian rulers of Hellenistic Egypt, the use of the past was crucial to constructing an identity for their multicultural empire. To achieve this, they used different identities in different circumstances, connecting themselves to existing Egyptian traditions, modifying them, or creating new ones.

On the basis of two case studies, this contribution highlights the cross-cultural exchange that influenced Ptolemaic royal ideology, in particular the Ptolemaic royal women, resulting in new modes of (self-)presentation. These new modes also had a large impact on the

goddesses with whom the queens were associated, first and foremost Isis, Hathor, and Aphrodite. I concentrate on two highly exceptional queens: Arsinoe II (ca. 316–270 BC), with whom the Ptolemaic ruler cult began in the Egyptian temples, and Cleopatra VII (69–30 BC), with whom the Ptolemaic dynasty perished after almost three centuries.

These two case studies illuminate the creation of intricate patterns of Ptolemaic queenship connected to the divine world. Arsinoe II set the example in many respects, which led to the Ptolemaic queens' increased status and prestige. This was expressed in various ways, visually and textually. For the purpose of this contribution, I concentrate in Arsinoe's case mainly on textual evidence, which spans from references in the classical literature to epithets in Egyptian temple inscriptions. Once created, these epithets were used throughout the Ptolemaic period, including in the reign of Cleopatra VII, not only for the queens but also for the goddess Isis, emphasizing their close association.

Motivated by different political circumstances, Cleopatra VII developed additional modes of presentation, analyzed in the second case study mainly through architectural

evidence, reaching from Alexandria to Meroe, in Nubia. The last Ptolemaic queen connected herself to the centuries-old Ptolemaic patterns but was not afraid to break with existing traditions if necessary, for instance, by not being laid to rest in the Sema, where Alexander and the previous Ptolemies were buried. By having her own separate tomb built, she created a new role for herself, emphasizing the beginning of a new era. According to Appian and Cassius Dio, Caesar had a gold statue of the Ptolemaic queen placed in the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome, right next to the statue of the goddess herself.<sup>1</sup> Thus Caesar not only associated Cleopatra with the ancestral mother of his own family but also publicly acknowledged her divinity in Rome. The Julian Venus Genetrix could be assimilated to Isis-Aphrodite and Isis Regina.<sup>2</sup> Cleopatra VII, as the mother of Caesar's only biological son, Caesarion, probably intended to style herself as the *genetrix* of a new dynasty, which drew on Julian and Ptolemaic origins.<sup>3</sup> With Marc Antony and his children, she also tried ambitiously to secure the once dominant Ptolemaic position in the East, but she failed in the end.

## Ideological Framework

Egyptian kingship, a demonstration of the power of the creator god, was assumed by a mortal ruler who needed divine legitimation. According to the Myth of the Divine Birth,<sup>4</sup> the pharaoh was the bodily offspring of the gods and thus their deputy. Such myths were mobilized politically and used to establish and reinforce the king's and the dynasty's claim to the throne.<sup>5</sup> The numerous women surrounding the king, whose role was defined by their relationship to him, were intended to support him, while he relied on them, notably for the transmission of the office from father to son. The king's mother was the protector of this transition, a role filled in the divine world by Isis, who conceived Horus, the son of Osiris. A feminine element is necessary in all creative and generative acts, ensuring renewal and continuity.<sup>6</sup>

The king's wife was considered to be a manifestation of Hathor, the female prototype of creation, a goddess who received specific attention in the Ptolemaic period. For example, in the temple of Hathor at Dendera the goddess can be depicted with the *w3s*-scepter (𓏏), which is normally attributed to male gods, rather than the *w3d*-scepter (𓏏), which is usually held by goddesses. Together with epithets that describe her as the creator god (such as *nb.t r dr*, "Lady of All"), this scepter confirms Hathor's androgynous characteristics.<sup>7</sup> As the queen was the manifestation of Hathor on earth, this concept also

applied to her, further defining her role within the dynasty as a creator.

In theory, female power did not compete with kingship, which was predominantly male, but women with political power were not isolated cases, and some rulers had a female identity, such as Hatshepsut in the 18th Dynasty. On the one hand, Hellenistic royal women generally gained prestige and power by giving birth to a child, especially the heir. On the other hand, knowledge acquired through their role as priestesses also set these royal women apart and marked them as active participants in the cult, as is described below for Arsinoe II. The more symbolic disposition of prestige is rather difficult to measure but can be translated into political power. The Ptolemaic queens, especially Arsinoe II and Cleopatra VII, and their advisers and supporters must have been very much aware of the possibilities that were created by establishing new roles and modes of presentation for royal women, including the interactions with the divine world. As Lana Troy has described, the analogy between kingship and the androgyny of the creator enables the female monarch to manifest herself in the masculine role: "The female Horus provides a shift in emphasis in the character of the king but remains consistent with the basic worldview of the Egyptian."<sup>8</sup> The Egyptian priests of the Ptolemaic period played not only with the modes of iconographic expression in temple reliefs, stelae, and statues<sup>9</sup> but also—or especially—with hieroglyphs and designations that were applied to both queens and goddesses. This is illuminated below by specific epithets, which were applied to the Ptolemaic queens and the goddesses alike.

## Case Study 1: Arsinoe II

Arsinoe II was the daughter of Ptolemy I Soter (r. 305–282 BC), the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty. She was married three times to three different kings, first to Lysimachus, king of Thrace. Her second husband was Ptolemy Ceraunus, her half brother and the usurper of the Thracian throne after Lysimachus's death. When he killed her two sons, she fled to Egypt and married her third husband, her full brother Ptolemy II (r. 285/82–246 BC).<sup>10</sup> Even before Arsinoe II became queen of Egypt, she had been powerful, controlling entire cities and thus possessing vast wealth.<sup>11</sup> That she married her half brother and subsequently her full brother was sensational and changed the position and perception of Ptolemaic queens fundamentally. When Ptolemy II married his sister, it was not to her benefit only but also to his, since the siblings could thus consolidate their power and strengthen Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. Already during

her lifetime, Arsinoe became critical to the projection of the image of the Ptolemaic dynasty, including in regard to its maritime politics.<sup>12</sup>

Arsinoe II was associated with female members of the Greco-Egyptian pantheon, such as Aphrodite, Isis, and Hathor. She received temples of her own while sharing others with these goddesses. One of the most extraordinary images of Arsinoe II must have been planned for her sanctuary at Cape Zephyrium, near Canopus, east of Alexandria, where she was worshipped as Aphrodite. According to Pliny, a statue suspended by magnetic fields was to be positioned in the temple's center, but this project was never completed.<sup>13</sup> The temple and its cult image, which are attested only through literary sources, were dedicated by Callicrates of Samos, the supreme commander of the Ptolemaic royal navy from the 270s to the 250s BC, who had a particular interest in promoting this aspect of Arsinoe during her lifetime. Callicrates apparently took an active part in founding a network of strategic ports, many of which were named after the queen, thus helping to spread Arsinoe's cult.<sup>14</sup> It seems that he sought to mediate between old Hellas and the new world of Ptolemaic Egypt by bridging the gap between the two: spreading his rulers' novel cultural policies abroad and at the same time bringing Greek tradition to bear on his Egyptian milieu.<sup>15</sup>

Aphrodite was known as a patron of the sea already from the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age.<sup>16</sup> Hellenic poets connected Arsinoe II to Aphrodite's narrative as a marine and saving sea goddess,<sup>17</sup> who both granted smooth sailing (*euploia*, which became one of Arsinoe's epithets) and was venerated as a protectress of harbors—two suitable and important aspects for the Ptolemaic navy, which were conferred onto the deified queen. Arsinoe's importance as a popular goddess of the Ptolemaic navy is also demonstrated by the numerous altars dedicated to Arsinoe Philadelphos throughout the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup>

Arsinoe's power as a divine personality and her iconography were enhanced by her association with goddesses such as Isis.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Arsinoe's lasting popularity as a deified queen and a divinity was particularly important in facilitating the broader development of Isis and her cult in the Mediterranean world.<sup>20</sup> Arsinoe and the later Ptolemaic queens were venerated as Isis, as female embodiments of Ptolemaic power, and this must have reinforced Isis's power in the minds of her followers and attracted even more worshippers to Isis generally. Thus Isis in her marine aspect, principally Greek in origin, was neither entirely Hellenic nor entirely

Egyptian but essentially what her Hellenistic period worshippers formed her to be. This development was driven by political and economic implications and especially the shared semantic dimension of polytheistic religion. Due to their interacting networks of power, both Arsinoe II and Isis became attractive as sea goddesses, in and far beyond Egypt, with Arsinoe having functioned as a kind of theological interface.

Another example of the transfer of characteristics between Ptolemaic queens and goddesses is the Egyptian designation of Arsinoe II as “the perfect one of the ram,” which she received at Mendes, in the Nile Delta. The Mendes Stela is a vital source for Arsinoe's deification and further events that took place under Ptolemy II. The text of the stela refers to several royal visits by Ptolemy II or the crown prince, who dedicated the temple in 264 BC and installed a new ram between 263 and 259.<sup>21</sup> The monument was probably created to celebrate one or both of these events, and one can assume that rituals were conducted during these occasions, as depicted, at least in the form of a conceptual idea if not a real event, in the lunette.<sup>22</sup> In line 11 Arsinoe is praised with the following epithets:

*Her titulary is established as princess, great of favor, possessor of kindness, sweet of love, beautiful of appearance, who has received the two uraei, who fills the palace with her perfection, beloved of the ram, the whole one (= the perfect one) of the ram, sister of the king, great wife of the king, whom he loves, mistress of the two lands, Arsinoe.*<sup>23</sup>

After being designated “beloved of the ram” (*mrj(.t) bꜣ*), Arsinoe is called “the whole one (= the perfect one) of the ram” (*wꜣꜣ(.t) bꜣ*). This epithet is very rarely attested in Egyptian texts, usually as a designation of Isis:<sup>24</sup> in the Ptolemaic temple at Aswan, the goddess is praised in a hymn dating to Ptolemy IV Philopator (r. 221–205 BC). One of Isis's epithets is identical to Arsinoe's on the Mendes Stela: “beloved of the ram, the perfect one of the ram.”<sup>25</sup> In the temple of Kalabsha, dating to the time of Augustus (r. 30/27 BC–AD 14), an exact copy of this Aswan hymn can be found, with one exception: Isis is called “beloved of the ram, the perfect one of Khnum” *mrj(.t) bꜣ wꜣꜣ(.t) ḥnm*, with Khnum replacing the Ram of Mendes as the local god in the second part.<sup>26</sup> In the *pronaos* of the temple of Hathor at Dendera, which dates to the end of the Ptolemaic period, the epithets *mrj(.t) bꜣ wꜣꜣ(.t) bꜣ/ḥnm mrj(.t)* are repeated twice in a hymn to Isis and its corresponding inscription.<sup>27</sup> Cleopatra VII herself is praised there as “the female Horus, daughter of a ruler, adornment of the Ram/Khnum” (*ḥr:t sꜣ:t ḥqꜣḥkr bꜣ/ḥnm*).<sup>28</sup>

These attestations of the epithet “perfect one of the ram” in Aswan, Kalabsha, and Dendera appear in basically the same text but in different versions, with Kalabsha and Aswan preserving extended ones. Both Arsinoe II and Isis receive the epithets. Arsinoe’s title is, at least so far, first attested on the Mendes Stela, which was created under Ptolemy II. It is not until two generations later that Isis is attested with this title in her temple of Aswan, dating to Ptolemy IV. On present evidence it thus appears as if Arsinoe received this specific title first, but a series of connected epithets is known from the queens’ titularies in the Old Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> The use of “the perfect one of the ram” for Isis was probably meant to strengthen the goddess’s role as a queen by assigning her an epithet of Arsinoe, the dynastically powerful queen par excellence, rather than the other way around.<sup>30</sup> Isis’s universal rulership is described in Dendera, for example, where she is identified as “the Queen of Upper and Lower Egypt, the female sovereign of the sovereigns, the excellent female ruler who rules the rulers, mistress of lifetimes, female regent of years, who performs perfectness in the circuit of the sun disc.”<sup>31</sup> In addition, Isis is described as “the queen of the *rekhyt*-people” (*nb.tj rhyt*), which also evokes her royal power. This explains why her name is written in a cartouche when she is designated *nb.tj rhyt*, but she remains also a mother who guarantees her son Harsiese’s ascent to the throne.<sup>32</sup>

The priority of Arsinoe as “the perfect one of the ram,” in contrast to Isis, could perhaps be compared with the transfer of the epithet Euploia (she of fair sailing) from Aphrodite to Isis via Arsinoe, as suggested by Laurent Bricault.<sup>33</sup> The dynastic importance of the ram had a long-standing tradition, as expressed, for example, in the “Blessings of Ptah” text from the reigns of Ramesses II (r. 1279–1213 BC) and Ramesses III (r. 1184–1153 BC), which outlines how Ptah begot the king by taking on the form of the Ram, the lord of Mendes.<sup>34</sup> This divine procreation has affinities with the birth legend of the king, in which a supreme deity personally begets the king. Even if Arsinoe II was not the crown prince’s biological mother (Ptolemy III was born to Ptolemy II and his first wife, Arsinoe I), she was his ascriptive mother, and her presence emphasized his divine legitimation.

The queen was elevated by her connection with the sacred Ram of Mendes, whose ancient cult was, according to Manetho, initiated by a king of the 2nd Dynasty, dating it to the third millennium BC.<sup>35</sup> It might go back even further since an image of a ram in a temple enclosure on a 1st Dynasty tag from Abydos may show the Ram of Mendes.<sup>36</sup> The divine birth legend, well attested for the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC),<sup>37</sup> also goes back much

further, being attested by an Old Kingdom fragment found in the pyramid complex of Djedkare (r. 2380–2342 BC) in Abusir.<sup>38</sup> We know that Egyptian priests of the first millennium BC were very learned about remote times. That they were very much aware of the ram’s significance is demonstrated in a liturgical papyrus of the late fourth century BC in which it is stated that the Ram of Mendes is the true manifestation of Re, hidden in the house of the Ram (*hw.t-bnbn*), the lord of Mendes.<sup>39</sup> If the title “perfect one of the ram” describes a specific royal relation with the ram, possibly as a priestess, Arsinoe was most likely initiated and thus had access to secret locations and restricted knowledge. Being initiated supported her claim for legitimacy.<sup>40</sup> Especially under rulers of foreign origin, it was important to uphold the proper order, which was reinforced by demarcations, and in the Egyptian ideology decorum demarcates the significant world of the king and the gods from the supportive role of humanity.<sup>41</sup> By being a priestess and thus being initiated, Arsinoe could overcome some of these demarcations and hence claim legitimacy, not only for herself but also for the royal house.

The epithet “perfect one of the ram” for Arsinoe originated, it seems, in the Nile Delta, with a strong emphasis on the Ram of Mendes. The cultural center in the 30th Dynasty (380–343 BC) and the Ptolemaic period was in the north, and the most creative regions were probably in the Memphite area and the Delta. But it was not only in the Delta that Arsinoe received specific attention. The temple of Isis at Philae, just south of the First Cataract, was considerably enlarged under Ptolemy II. As a *synnaos thea*, his sister-wife shared the temple with Isis and participated in her veneration, as demonstrated by the hymns to Isis in her temple at Philae.<sup>42</sup> In this temple, Arsinoe II was also incorporated into the reliefs of both the sanctuary and the so-called gate of Philadelphus.<sup>43</sup> How much the Delta traditions might have influenced the theological development of the temple of Isis at Philae is demonstrated by one of the goddess’s epithets in the Demotic *proskynema* of a Meroitic envoy in Philae. All recorded embassies indicate that in the second half of the third century AD the estates of the temples of the Dodekaschoinos (Greek for “twelve-mile land,” referring to the northern part of Lower Nubia, which formed a cultural and political border between Nubia and Egypt) were controlled by a group of priests in Philae, which also comprised high officials as representatives of the Meroitic king.<sup>44</sup> The Demotic graffito 416, dating to the mid-third century AD and carved in twenty-six lines on the gateway of Hadrian (r. AD 117–38) (thus being the longest of all Demotic graffiti at Philae),<sup>45</sup> provides various cult-topographical and historical details. Isis, the main

mistress of Philae, who is praised with various epithets in this graffito,<sup>46</sup> is designated in lines 1 and 2 as “the beautiful libationer in the place of offering,”<sup>47</sup> a designation that is otherwise attested only in a hieroglyphic variant at Behbeit el-Hagar, in the Delta (*qbh.t nfr:t m s.t n.t wꜥh jh.t*).<sup>48</sup> Ian Rutherford raises in his discussion of Philae’s religious history “that the sanctuary looks south, and is not linked in to the network of Egyptian religion.”<sup>49</sup>

This interpretation might be justified in some respects, but it has correctly been contested by Jeremy Pope, based on his analysis of the abovementioned Philae graffito 416. Arsinoe’s cult presence roughly five hundred years before the graffito supports Pope’s idea of a “shared cult practice and theological vocabulary which stretched from Behbeit el-Hagar *through* Philae,” not only as late as the “final centuries of Demotic literacy,” as he puts it, but also as early as the substantial building and decoration initiative under Ptolemy II.<sup>50</sup> Philae was not detached from Egyptian religious practices, as Rutherford claims. On the contrary, it was well connected with other temples and their priests along the Nile, for instance, with the temple of Horus at Edfu, as one example demonstrates: during the construction and decoration of the *pronaos* under Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (r. 170–163 BC, 145–116 BC), Horus of Edfu and Hathor of Dendera appear in the temple of Isis at Philae.<sup>51</sup>

Arsinoe II functioned as a kind of theological interface in an interacting network of power, so that both she and Isis became attractive as sea goddesses, not only in Egypt but also far beyond, attested in textual sources such as Posidippus’s epigrams and the description of the temple at Cape Zephyrium, once a very powerful visual statement. These aspects, which were part of the multifaceted layers of interaction between the Ptolemaic queens and the goddesses, help to demonstrate that an important role was created for Arsinoe II, who was not only presented as the protectress of Ptolemaic rule but also perceived as a vehicle to promote the dynasty. In combining ancient Egyptian traditions with the new requirements of the early Ptolemaic dynasty, female royal power became indispensable and was projected back onto the divine world, for example, by emphasizing Isis’s role as a queen. This also found its way into Egyptian temple inscriptions, attested from Kalabsha to the Delta through the entire Ptolemaic period.

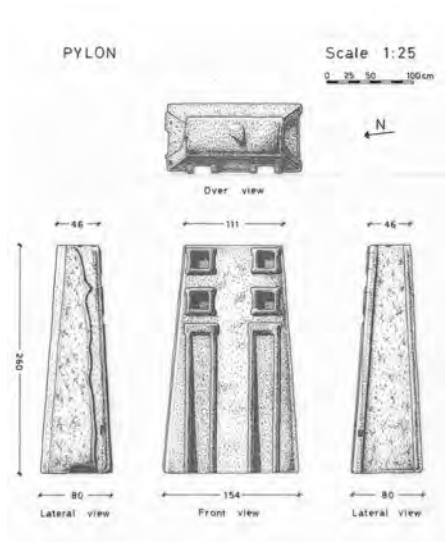
## Case Study 2: Cleopatra VII

Kara Cooney calls Cleopatra a “drama queen” and further writes: “This woman didn’t hide from her sensual nature or procreative abilities.”<sup>52</sup> Cooney’s book was written for

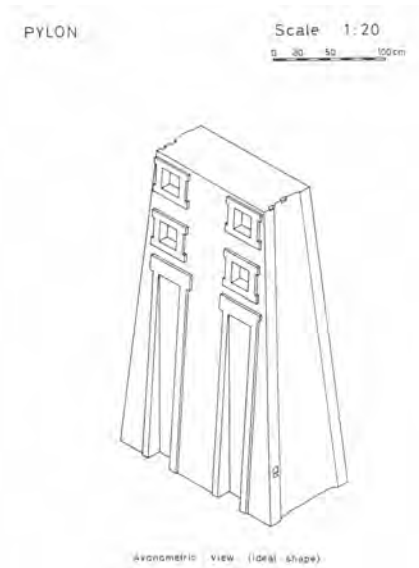
the general public and not with the intent to reduce a powerful ruler to a woman with sexual rather than political power. Indeed, the last Ptolemaic queen did use dramatic entrances and captured the attention of two of the most powerful Roman generals, Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, and she did bear their children. At the same time, she managed to preserve her kingdom, at least for a time, using these men and their power to strengthen her position as ruler of Egypt until Octavian, who would later become the emperor Augustus, conquered Egypt in 30 BC. While Arsinoe II was engaged in actively creating a new ideological framework for Ptolemaic queenship, Cleopatra VII, on the one hand, continued—more than two hundred years later—to build on precedents set by Arsinoe and other Ptolemaic queens. Like Arsinoe II, who was designated *wꜥꜥ(.t) bꜥ*, she was connected with Khnum and praised as “the adornment of the Ram/Khnum” (*hkr bꜥ/hnm*), as discussed above. On the other hand, challenged by changing political situations, the last female Ptolemaic ruler also developed new modes of expression, using architectural sources and their cultural backgrounds to connect herself to Isis.

Acra Lochias, the ancient promontory in Alexandria, near present-day Cape Silsileh, was part of the inner *basileia*, or royal quarter, as described by Strabo in the time of Augustus.<sup>53</sup> Cape Silsileh exists now only because there was from medieval times until the beginning of the twentieth century a constant filling of this subsiding narrow strip of land in an attempt to protect the Eastern Harbor with a sort of breakwater. Ancient remains, gathered from the neighboring shores, were dumped as filling material. In the Hellenistic period, the domestic part of the royal palace as well as a prison were on and near this promontory. In 1993, during the excavations for the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which is placed on the mainland near the entry to the cape, the remains of a massive gate were found, which suggest that the Acra was closed off by a wall, at least until this gate went out of use in the late Ptolemaic period.<sup>54</sup>

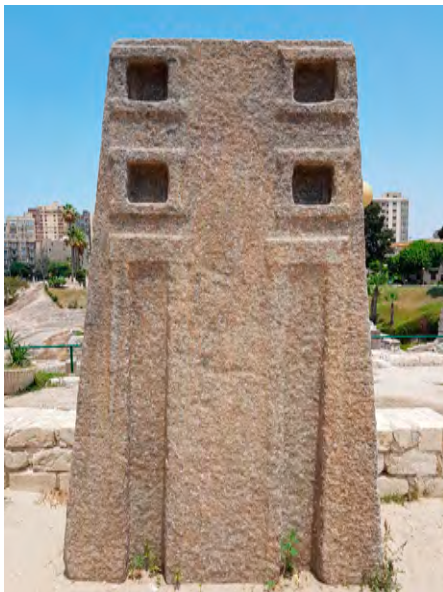
According to Harry Tzalas, the director of the Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies (HIAMAS) missions from 1998 to 2014, the surveys conducted east of Silsileh revealed some four hundred architectural elements in the site Chatby 1. Among the largest is the tower of a monolithic diminutive pylon of red granite, 2.6 meters high, 1.54 meters wide, and weighing about seven tons.<sup>55</sup> Tzalas generously shared information with me, stating that the tower of this diminutive pylon was first found and photographed by the divers of the Greek mission in November 2000, lying on the seabed east of the tip of the Silsileh promontory, at



**Figure 4.1** Pylon tower, excavated by the HIAMAS underwater mission at Alexandria in 2003. Image: © Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies, Athens. Drawing: Silvana Gargiulo



**Figure 4.2** Axonometric view of the pylon tower excavated by the HIAMAS underwater mission at Alexandria in 2003. Image: © Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies, Athens. Drawing: Silvana Gargiulo



**Figure 4.3** Frontal view of the diminutive pylon tower, exhibited in the Open-Air Museum in Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria, since 2009

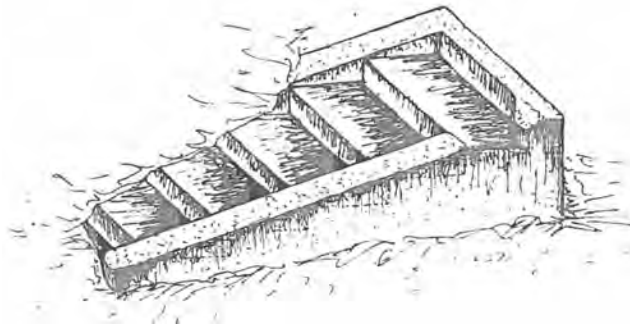


**Figure 4.4** Lateral view of the diminutive pylon tower, Kom el-Dikka

a depth of some 9 meters. It was first raised, photographed, drawn, and studied in May 2003 (figs. 4.1 and 4.2) and then placed again on the sea bottom. When permission for its transportation, conservation, and exhibition was obtained in December 2009, it was lifted again and transported to the Kom el-Dikka laboratory for desalination and conservation. It has since been exhibited in the Open-Air Museum at Kom el-Dikka (figs. 4.3 and 4.4).

During the October 2002 campaign, a monolithic flight of five steps,<sup>56</sup> also made of red granite, was spotted some 400 meters south of the pylon tower location. The steps are around 1.7 meters long and 80 centimeters wide. When they were raised, photographed, and drawn, the mission realized that they may have formed an integral part of the pylon entrance. After being studied, they were placed back on the seafloor until permission was granted in October 2014 to place them in the desalination basin of





**Figure 4.5** Sketch of the monolithic flight of steps as found on the seabed. Image: © Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies, Athens. Drawing: Silvana Gargiulo

Kom el-Dikka. They are now exhibited next to the pylon tower in the Open-Air Museum at Kom el-Dikka (fig. 4.5).

The excavator also found the architrave or threshold of a monumental door, again made of red granite and of an estimated weight of eleven tons. According to Tzalas,<sup>57</sup> it may have once belonged to the tomb of Cleopatra VII, located in the temple's vicinity. The cavities of the threshold where the huge door rested have retained the brass supports and the lead fillings. Due to lack of space for a permanent exhibition, this architectural element was placed again on the seafloor.

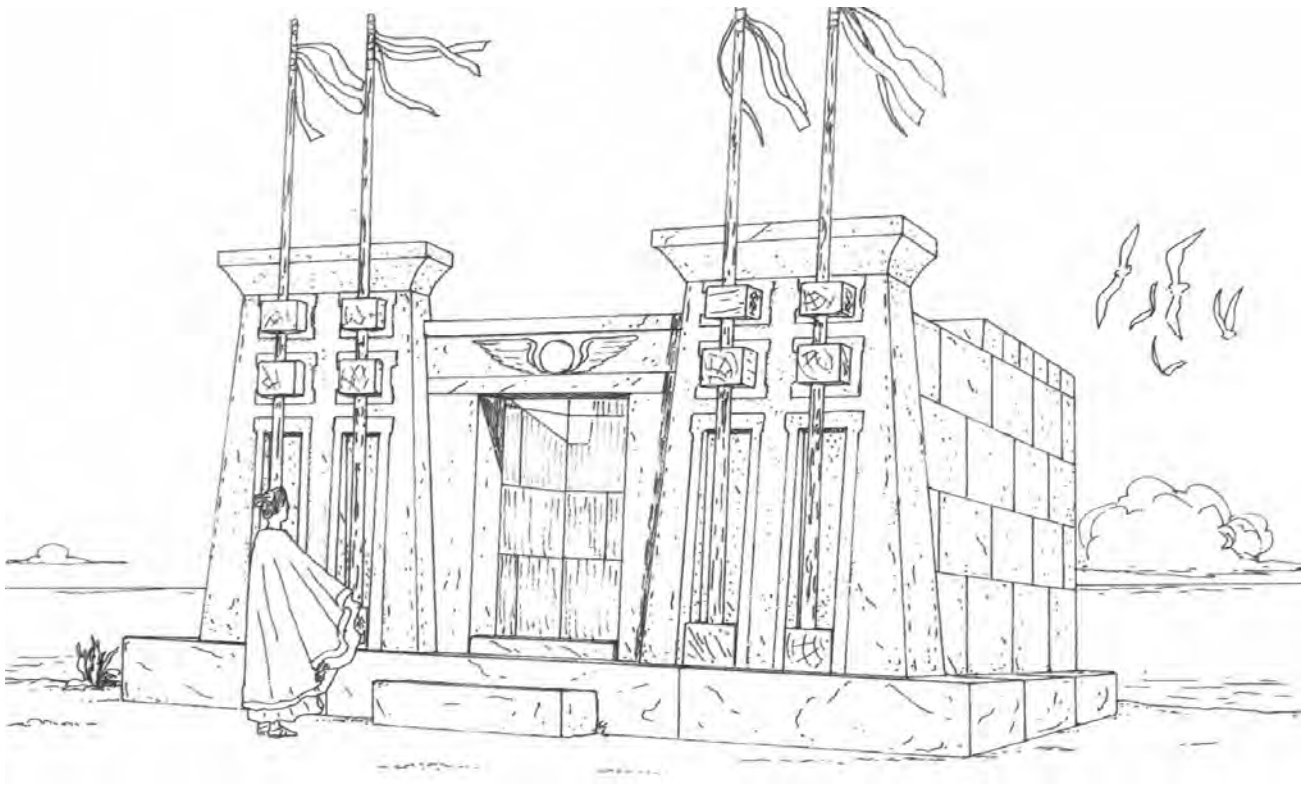
Because of the weight of these monolithic elements and their distance from the shore, the excavators assume that they had not been transferred and reused as buttress; nor can these heavy pieces be considerably moved by the action of the waves.<sup>58</sup> They considered them as being roughly in situ, marking the site of specific buildings. Plutarch recorded that Cleopatra VII “had a tomb and monuments built surpassingly lofty and beautiful, which she had erected near the temple of Isis.”<sup>59</sup> Cleopatra broke with the Ptolemaic tradition of being buried in the Sema, where Alexander and the previous Ptolemies were laid to rest, and had her tomb built separately.<sup>60</sup> Acra Lochias was the least accessible part of the royal quarter, a fortified retreat for the Ptolemies, with very restricted access, as demonstrated by the massive gate mentioned above.

The diminutive pylon tower and the steps found underwater must have once been part of an Egyptian pylon, a typical architectural expression of Egyptian civilization from the New Kingdom onward, with precursors and roots reaching back to the Old Kingdom.<sup>61</sup> But the pylon tower excavated in Alexandria is pretty much unique in its diminutive form.<sup>62</sup> Together with a second tower, it would have once flanked a central portal or gate, to which the flight of steps, now exhibited near the tower, probably would have led. Like its monumental

equivalents, the tower has a typical form with a rectangular foundation and sloping walls (see figs. 4.1–4.4). Its front contains large vertical recesses for wooden flagstaffs, from which pennants flew above the level of the top of the pylon.<sup>63</sup> Above each recess were two rectangular slots, which, in monumental pylons such as the one at Edfu, were meant as light slots.<sup>64</sup> Laetitia Martzolff calculates a height of 1.8 meters for the gate of the diminutive pylon tower, which she thinks is too low for it to be considered the monumental entrance to the temple.<sup>65</sup> If the pylon and the steps are indeed parts of the Isis temple attested by Plutarch, it was a small temple or at least a temple with a small pylon, whose towers were in my opinion just high enough to allow for a gate that one could walk through. Since it may have been a rather private temple for the queen, this is entirely possible (see fig. 4.6 for a hypothetical reconstruction by Harry Tzalas).

No real parallel for such a diminutive pylon is known so far, but a rather smallish pylon—at least in comparison to the monumental ones from the New Kingdom onward—is located in Karnak: on the east side of the courtyard between the seventh and the eighth pylons, a gate opens to the barque shrine of Thutmose III (r. 1479–1425 BC) at the sacred lake (figs. 4.7 and 4.8).<sup>66</sup> The small pylon comprises two towers, inscribed on their western face, and a gate in the middle, to which a flight of steps leads from the east. The towers are not preserved to their full height but do retain their full width: the north one is 3.87 meters wide, the south one 3.75 meters, and the gate in the middle 2.33 meters; in sum, the pylon is 9.95 meters wide. At 1.54 meters, the pylon tower in Alexandria measures less than half that width, so the gate to the Isis temple would have been very small indeed but wide enough for access.

Three further finds worth noting in the context of the diminutive pylon might shed some light on the existence of (very) small or even miniature forms in an architectural context. First, a pylon-shaped block of sandstone was found among the stones used in the Christian period to fill in the north doorway of the enclosure wall of the temple of Hibis in the Kharga Oasis.<sup>67</sup> Its counterpart was discovered in the northwest corner of the corridor formed around the temple by this wall. The blocks are 95 to 100 centimeters long and 66 to 67.5 centimeters high. As with a temple pylon, the outer ends and the fronts slope inward; on each face was a pair of slots for wooden flagstaffs. Herbert Winlock calculated that they probably formed the front of a temple-shaped shrine about 2.25 meters wide, with the interior chamber measuring 1.3 by 1.3 meters. Based on the taper of the pylon ends, Winlock estimated that it would have been



**Figure 4.6** Hypothetical reconstruction of the Isis temple on Acra Lochias, Alexandria. Image: © Hellenic Institute of Ancient and Medieval Alexandrian Studies, Athens. Drawing: Yiannis Nakas, after a proposal by Harry Tzalas before the excavation of the flight of steps (see fig. 4.5)



**Figure 4.7** Karnak, pylon gate on the eastern side of the courtyard between the seventh and eighth pylons, opening to the barque shrine of Thutmose III at the sacred lake. Image: René Preys with agreement of CFEETK (French-Egyptian Centre for the Study of Karnak Temples)



**Figure 4.8** Karnak, external side of pylon gate on the eastern side of the courtyard between the seventh and eighth pylons, opening to the barque shrine of Thutmose III at the sacred lake. Image: Martina Minas-Nerpel with agreement of CFEETK (French-Egyptian Centre for the Study of Karnak Temples)

only 90 centimeters high, but the shrine probably stood on a pedestal, which could also have been inscribed.<sup>68</sup> No inscription that would reveal its date, purpose, or dedicator was found. The blocks' original location is uncertain, but Winlock opined that they possibly came from hypostyle hall M or N.

Second, a quartzite base of a wooden *naos*, once part of a sanctuary in Heliopolis, attests to a pylon-shaped facade that is now lost, but the indentation on the base's upper face shows the outlines of a pylon. This object, originally excavated by Joseph Hekekyan in 1851, was once misunderstood as the base for an obelisk,<sup>69</sup> but the temple-shaped shrine found in the temple of Hibis illuminates its original purpose.

Third, two altars in the forms of pylon towers were erected under Ptolemy IV in the temple of Montu at Tôd.<sup>70</sup> Each is inscribed with hymns and stands around 1.35 meters high, so that offerings could easily be placed on them (fig. 4.9).<sup>71</sup> The small pylon found underwater in Alexandria is, however, too large for an altar and does not seem to fit into the context of a *naos*, so the interpretation of it as belonging to a small temple is preferable.



Figure 4.9 The altar at Tôd. Image: Christophe Thiers

According to Arrian,<sup>72</sup> Alexander the Great himself founded a temple for Isis in Alexandria, but its exact location is not attested. Whether this temple is identical to the Isis sanctuary discussed above or was the one in which the priestly synods met at least twice, as attested in the Alexandria decree (243 BC)<sup>73</sup> and in Philensis II (186 BC),<sup>74</sup> is also unclear. Judith McKenzie, in her seminal work on Alexandria, expressed the view that the Isis temple, already founded in the Ptolemaic period, was probably the Egyptian one depicted on Roman coins minted in Alexandria.<sup>75</sup> These coins date to the reigns of Trajan (r. AD 98–117) and Hadrian (r. AD 117–38) and show a pylon that corresponds in its architectural form to an Egyptian temple entrance. This could suggest that it was built from the start in Egyptian style. On the roof of the gate between the two pylon towers appears a figure of Isis.<sup>76</sup> These coins could possibly be linked to the small Egyptian pylon found underwater, which could have once belonged to a temple of Isis of rather small dimensions. This small Isis temple must have been different from the one in which the priestly synods reportedly met, because they could have assembled only in a larger compound.

From the literary evidence—now perhaps supported by architectural finds—it is clear that a temple for Isis once stood in (or near) the *basileia*, with Cleopatra's tomb being built in its direct vicinity, thus participating in the sacred

surroundings. Since the temple is connected to Acra Lochias, Tzalas and others assigned the epithet Lochia (midwife) to Isis and her temple in this specific case, assuming that it refers to the nurturing aspect of Isis, the mother of Horus.<sup>77</sup> Michel Malaise has argued, however, that Lochia as an epiclesis for Isis is attested in Macedonia only.<sup>78</sup> Svenja Nagel, who published a detailed study on Isis in the Roman Empire in 2019, agrees with Malaise and thinks that the temple was probably dedicated to the marine Isis, who was created in Alexandria on the basis of her association with Aphrodite.<sup>79</sup> This would relate back to Arsinoe II, so it seems a tempting possibility, but it remains unclear with which epiclesis Isis was venerated at Acra Lochias and her temple—either as Soteira, Euploia, or perhaps, but rather unlikely, as Lochia(s)—but once again Cleopatra VII employed the well-established relation between Ptolemaic queens and Isis.<sup>80</sup> Marc Antony was celebrated as Neos Dionysos and Cleopatra as Nea Isis.<sup>81</sup> Publicly they appeared in the guise of this divine couple. Although the title of a “New Isis” is not attested for Cleopatra VII in contemporary literary sources or inscriptions, it was projected onto her by Cassius Dio and Plutarch.<sup>82</sup> In these classical sources, heavily influenced by the Roman worldview, Cleopatra is shown as a kind of catalyzer who was used to effect Marc Antony's change in character,<sup>83</sup> but this negates to a large extent the extraordinary role she played in the last years of the Ptolemaic Empire and the self-presentation she orchestrated, which was based on the traditions of the Ptolemaic queens and combined with new elements.

Regarding the size of the pylon tower, a different interpretation comes to mind, leading us to a location to the far south of Alexandria and Egypt, to the royal cemeteries of Meroe with their pyramids and funerary chapels. Pyramids first appear as part of Nubian royal burial practices in the seventh century BC. In the 25th (Nubian) Dynasty, Taharqa (r. 690–664 BC) began the tradition of placing pyramids over the tombs of the rulers and members of the royal family. With an estimated height of 50 meters, his pyramid at Nuri—north of the Fourth Cataract of the Nile near the temples of Gebel Barkal, the sacral center of the Kushite Empire—is the largest such structure in Sudan.<sup>84</sup> In the Meroitic period (third century BC to the fourth century AD), the royal cemetery was relocated from the region around Gebel Barkal to the south into the region of Meroe: at Begrawiya, north of the Sixth Cataract, 147 royal pyramid chapels survive.<sup>85</sup> Pyramid Beg. S10, dedicated to the ruling queen Bartare (r. 284–275 BC), is located in the southern cemetery, the earliest and largest part of the Begrawiya necropolis.<sup>86</sup> In front of a pyramid with stepped sloping-face courses and a lateral length of 10.45



**Figure 4.10** Pyramid and pylon of tomb Beg. N19 of King Tarekeniwal (second century BC) at the royal pyramid cemetery of Begrawiya North (Meroe/Sudan). Image: Pawel Wolf, © DAI/QMPS

meters, stands a chapel made of sandstone masonry with a small, rather elongated pylon and recessed doorway.<sup>87</sup> The southern pylon tower is largely destroyed, but the northern one is partly preserved, so that a width of about 2 meters and a height of about 3.4 meters can be reconstructed,<sup>88</sup> slightly larger than the Alexandrian monolithic one, which is 1.54 meters wide and 2.6 meters high. The pylon of Pyramid Beg. N19 of King Tarekeniwal (second century AD) at the royal pyramid cemetery of Begrawiya North,<sup>89</sup> which is almost completely preserved (fig. 4.10), is marginally higher than that of Beg. S10 and even more elongated: its pylon towers are about 1.7 meters wide and about 3.7 meters high, with a gate in the middle of about 1.8 meters high—a height that Martzloff calculated also for the Alexandrian gate but dismissed as too small.<sup>90</sup>

Even if both Meroitic examples are slightly bigger than the Alexandrian pylon tower and even if the Meroitic pylon towers were not monolithic, this comparison demonstrates that the size of the Alexandrian tower was sufficient to allow access to a building. This could very well have been a temple for Isis, as discussed above, but one could also wonder whether the diminutive pylon

decorated Cleopatra's funerary chapel and not the temple of Isis. We do not know what her tomb once looked like, but the Meroitic examples show the possibility of chapels accessible through small pylons. This comparison does not necessarily seek to insinuate that the Meroitic pylons provided inspiration for the Alexandrian pylon tower, but it might be a possibility, even if only a remote one. A friendship between Cleopatra VII and the *kandake* Amanishakheto is assumed.<sup>91</sup> The Sudanese queen was buried in the northern cemetery of Begrawiya in tomb Beg. N6, which comprises a pyramid, a funerary chapel, and a small pylon as described above for other burials at this site.<sup>92</sup>

It has been suggested that Cleopatra's activities as a queen could have been inspired by the role of the Meroitic *kandake*.<sup>93</sup> The title *kandake*, whose meaning is still not entirely clear, probably designated the mother of the ruling king, and several *kandakes* were crowned as queens, but their exact status remains unclear, namely whether they ruled in tandem with the king or held power alone.<sup>94</sup> Like the Ptolemaic queen, the Meroitic *kandake* was closely connected with Isis, the mother of Horus and thus of the living king. Isis became the most important female goddess in the Meroitic kingdom, not only as the king's protectress.<sup>95</sup> Dietrich Wildung mentions in this context the exceptional position of women in the societies of the middle Nile, which may have influenced Egyptian architecture already in the New Kingdom, at a time when Egypt colonized the Nile Valley south of the First Cataract.<sup>96</sup> Two Nubian temples substantiate the importance of Tiye, the wife of Amenhotep III of the 18th Dynasty. At Soleb, near the Third Nile Cataract in present-day Sudan, a large temple was dedicated to Amun-Re and Nebmaatira, a deified form of this king. Amenhotep III, who was given the status of a moon good complementary to his solar aspects, built a temple to his wife as a pendant to his own, a few kilometers to the north at Sedeinga.<sup>97</sup> There the focus was on the "King's Great Wife," presumably as the deified solar eye of Re, Hathor, or Tefnut. The rituals at Sedeinga turned the angry eye of Re, which had fled Egypt from the violent leonine nature of Tefnut, into the appeased and loving form of Hathor and thus reestablished world order. The deified Tiye became Hathor, the perfect consort of the king. In the colonial land of Nubia, which was potentially violent, the temples of Tiye and Amenhotep III enacted cosmic order.<sup>98</sup> The construction of these two Nubian temples for Amenhotep III and Tiye was followed a century later by the temples for Ramesses II at Abu Simbel, where the larger temple was dedicated to the king and the smaller one to his wife, Nefertari, as Hathor. In this temple, the queen is shown conducting rituals jointly

with her husband but also alone. She acts as Hathor, who is also the protectress of the newborn king, as depicted in the birth chamber or southern chapel.<sup>99</sup> In Egypt itself, no such temples for the queens Tiye or Nefertari exist, so one could assume that Nubian traditions were more encouraging for the elevation of a living queen's status.

It is not necessary to base Ptolemaic female power on Kushite or Meroitic patterns in order to explain Cleopatra's prestige and status. It is, nonetheless, an alluring option—given the importance of Meroitic queens—that Cleopatra might *additionally* have been inspired by the powerful female rulers from Egypt's neighbor to the south. She may even have visited Nubia briefly, and according to Adam Łukaszewicz, we may assume that she “had a detailed knowledge of geography and a perfect orientation in the realities of the Kushite kingdom.”<sup>100</sup> Based on buildings, statuary, reliefs, and decorated pottery preserved from the last two centuries BC, László Török referred not only to the continuity of trade between Egypt and Meroe but also to the diplomatic contacts or royal gift exchange and the connection between sanctuaries, resulting in the adoption of Egyptian technologies and decorative styles.<sup>101</sup> Analysis of the diminutive pylon from Alexandria might contribute to a new area of inquiry into the roles and (self-)presentations of the queens of both the Ptolemaic and the Meroitic kingdoms, with attention to the possible influence of ancient Sudan on Ptolemaic ideas of queenship and vice versa.

The underwater excavations in Alexandria substantiate the literary sources, which refer to the tomb of Cleopatra VII next to a temple of Isis. Like Arsinoe II and her supporters, who designed the extraordinary temple at Cape Zephyrium, the last Ptolemaic queen and her advisers created new modes of expression for female Ptolemaic power. They built on existing patterns but did not hesitate also to break with centuries-old Ptolemaic traditions—for example, of being buried together with Alexander the Great. The creation of Cleopatra's separate tomb shifted the emphasis away from Alexander and the Ptolemaic dynasty to a new beginning. The queen was still closely associated with the goddess Isis, as was Arsinoe II, whose newly created epithet “the perfect one of the ram” was transferred to the goddess herself two generations later and used for both royal and divine women for more than two and a half centuries. The royal connection with Isis was also emphasized further south, in the Nubian kingdom, which had been influenced by Egypt and vice versa over a long period. Whether the Meroitic architectural elements, such as the small pylons, (re)influenced tomb or temple buildings in Egypt, needs to

be further researched, but it is one alluring option for analyzing the exceptional monolithic pylon tower found underwater in Alexandria. Both Arsinoe II and Cleopatra VII shaped the royal Ptolemaic ideology, Arsinoe more lastingly than Cleopatra because the Hellenistic period in Egypt came to an end with Cleopatra's death and the emerging Roman Empire.



Using very different examples from diverse backgrounds and places across Egypt and Meroe, I have tried to illuminate the complex interrelations between two powerful Ptolemaic queens—Arsinoe II and Cleopatra VII—and Isis, Hathor, and Aphrodite. In the queens' relations with these goddesses, old traditions were used and innovative ideas employed, a process that ultimately led to the creation of new understandings of the queens and goddesses and new “cultural codes.” In the Hellenistic period, both Arsinoe II and Isis became popular as sea goddesses, in and far beyond Egypt, with Arsinoe having functioned as a kind of theological interface in the interacting networks of power. The ideas of the admiral Callicrates, which led to the creation of a temple of Arsinoe-Aphrodite at Cape Zephyrium, were most probably influenced by the Ptolemaic court, as were the temple buildings along the Nile, for example, the one for Isis at Philae, which also highlights the importance of Arsinoe II for the dynasty. Posidippus and other Hellenistic poets, such as Theocritus and Callimachus, who praised the dynasty in their poems, were supported by the king, so we can also expect that they were influenced by the court. Whether by poetry, cults, architecture, or other means, the Ptolemaic officials and dependents experimented with a variety of symbols and formats to promote their royal house, from the beginning of the dynasty right until the end. Cleopatra VII built on these processes and erected her tomb next to a temple for Isis near the sea. Whether the diminutive pylon tower excavated in the sea belonged to her tomb or to the Isis temple, it attests to the architectural modes of expression used by and for the Ptolemaic queen. The question of whether she was inspired by Meroitic ideas, themselves resulting from long-standing connections between Egypt and Meroe, needs to be further investigated.

These brief case studies demonstrate the intricate patterns that were created to interweave queenship in the royal and divine worlds, which influenced each other. The associations of the Ptolemaic queens and goddesses need to be further illuminated in more detail. For these studies of the Ptolemaic royal women, we need to trace the diachronic continuities and discontinuities that overlap in different layers, which have not all been recognized so far.

Ancient Egyptian culture also has an analytical advantage in terms of mnemohistory, since it forms the past to which the Ptolemies, the Mediterranean rulers of Egypt with Macedonian ancestry, referred in different ways.<sup>102</sup> Hence they were challenged to self-reflection. For the Ptolemies, Egypt became part of their own origin, into which they incorporated Greco-Macedonian and other elements. In contrast, when Octavian conquered Egypt, it developed into an icon of subjugated power, and this created the need for different cultural concepts and codes.<sup>103</sup>



Dedicated to the memory of Judith McKenzie, who passed away far too early, in 2019.

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## NOTES

1. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.102: "He placed a beautiful image of Cleopatra by the side of the goddess, which stands there to this day" (cited after [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Appian/Civil\\_Wars/2\\*.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Appian/Civil_Wars/2*.html)). Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae* 51.22.3: "Thus Cleopatra . . . she herself is seen in gold in the shrine of Venus" (cited after [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius\\_Dio/51\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/51*.html)).
2. Hölbl 2001, 290.
3. Heinen 2009, 294.
4. The divine birth is attested from the Old Kingdom onward; see Megahed and Vymazalová 2011, 155–64; Oppenheim 2011, 171–88. A full version of the myth is known from the reign of Hatshepsut in the 18th Dynasty; see Brunner 1991. For the Old and Middle Kingdom traditions in Hatshepsut's temple, see Ćwiek 2014, 61–93 (esp. 78–80 for the birth cycle).
5. For the context, see Goebis and Baines 2018, 653–57.
6. Troy 2002, 1–24.
7. Preys 2002a, 197–211.
8. Troy 1986, 132, 150. For the queen as female Horus, see Hölbl 2003, 88–97; Eldamaty 2011, 24–57; Cassor-Pfeiffer and Pfeiffer 2019, 199–238.
9. See, for example, Minas-Nerpel 2014 and Preys 2015.
10. Hölbl 2001, 35–36.
11. Pomeroy 1991, 14; Carney 2013, 36–40.
12. Hauben 1983, 99–127.
13. Pliny, *Natural History* 34, 148. For a reconstruction, see Pfrommer 2002, 61–69. For a Hellenistic hymn to Arsinoe-Aphrodite, see Barbantani 2005, 135–65.
14. Hauben 1970, 41–46; Hauben 2013, 52. See also Nagel 2019, 1221.
15. Bing 2002–3, 243–66 (esp. 244).
16. Eckert 2016. See also Demetriou 2010.
17. For a short summary and discussion of the different poetic sources, see Müller 2009, 215–16. In his epigrams 116 and 119, the Hellenistic poet Posidippus, generally placed before Arsinoe's death in 270 BC, celebrated her temple at Cape Zephyrium, and Arsinoe is promoted as a marine goddess. For a translation of these epigrams, see Nisetich 2005, 43–44. See also Stephens 2005, 245–48.
18. Schreiber 2011, 187–201; see also Pfeiffer 2021, 97.
19. See, for example, Plantzos 2011, who discusses the iconography of assimilation in the case of Isis and the royal imagery of Ptolemaic seal impressions. See also J. Spier in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 192, no. 130.
20. For the Egyptian and Hellenized Isis and her cults in the Greco-Roman world, see also Bommas in this volume.
21. Schäfer 2011, 257–60.
22. I have already analyzed the lunette and both the divine and royal aspects of the depiction of Arsinoe II; see Minas-Nerpel 2019a, 151–57; Minas-Nerpel 2019b.
23. Sethe 1904, II 39,12–40,4. For a detailed discussion of Arsinoe II's epithets, see Minas-Nerpel 2019a, 151–57.
24. According to Leitz 2002, 2:649b, s.v. *wḏꜣ.t bꜣ*: "Die Pflegerin (?) des Ba" refers to Isis only, not Arsinoe II.
25. Bresciani and Pernigotti 1978, 80–81, C11: between *wḏꜣ.(t)* and *bꜣ* there is a lacuna. For a translation and a discussion, see Nagel 2019, 122 (esp. n. 566), where she translates "die Pflegerin des [Chnu]m(?)."
  26. Gauthier 1911, 15–16.
  27. Frieze inscription on the west wall of the *pronaos* (Cauville 2011b, 146, 8) and in the western part of the *soubassement* of

- the southern exterior wall of the *naos* (Cauville 2007a, pt. 2, 6); Cauville 2011b, 199, translates “l’aimée du Béliér, qui prend soin de Khnum.”
28. Cauville 2007a, pt. 1, 5. The head of the seated god is destroyed, but the epithet *hkr bꜣ/hnm* is repeated on the western side (Cauville 2007a, pt. 2, 10) with the same ram-headed seated god as in *wꜣꜣ:(t) bꜣ*.
  29. See Payraudeau 2015; Minas-Nerpel 2019a, 153, 164.
  30. On Isis’s role as a queen, see Merkelbach 1995; Hoffmann 2015, 146–47; Nagel 2019, 267 (with n. 1337).
  31. Cauville 2007b, 110, 6–7 (= Cauville 2011a, 144–45).
  32. Preys 2002b, 327–51, esp. 331. To a much lesser extent, Hathor could also be designated as *nb.tj rhyt* in the temple of Hathor at Dendera but only where she took the place of Isis. For Isis and Hathor being adored by the *rekhyt*- and *pat*-people, see, for example, Griffin 2018, 33, 50–51, 95–96.
  33. See Bricault 2020, 23–42.
  34. For the “Ptah-Dekret,” see Schlögl 1989, 64–66; Goelet 1991, 28–37 (esp. 30–44); Minas-Nerpel 2019a, 155–56.
  35. Manetho, fragment 9: Waddell 1940, 37. See also De Meulenaere 1976, 178–80.
  36. Petrie 1901, 25–26, plate VII. See also Baines 1991, 29–46 (esp. 35, fig. 4).
  37. For the evidence, see Brunner 1991.
  38. Megahed and Vymazalová 2015, 275–87.
  39. P. BM EA10252, col. 4, 16–20: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA10252-4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10252-4); Gill 2019, 217. For the context of the hieratic ritual books of Pawerem attested on P. BM EA10252 and other papyri, see also Altmann 2010, 11, and Gill 2015, 133–42. For P. BM EA10252 in general, see Trismegistos no. 57226: <https://www.trismegistos.org/hhp/detail.php?tm=57226>.
  40. See Kákosy 1994, 165–73.
  41. Baines 1990, 21.
  42. See Žabkar 1988, 12–15, 89–90.
  43. Žabkar 1988, 3, 12. For detailed references, see also Minas-Nerpel 2019a, 151.
  44. For the situation of Philae and Lower Nubia in Roman times, see Török 2009, 443–73 (esp. 468–69).
  45. Philae 416 = Griffith 1937, 1:111, 114–19, 2: plate lxiv.
  46. See Nagel 2019, 677–78.
  47. Pope 2008–9, 75, commentary B.
  48. Leitz 2002, 7:184b.
  49. Rutherford 1998, 236.
  50. Pope 2008–9, 103.
  51. Beinlich 2008, 7–15.
  52. Cooney 2018, 253, 255.
  53. Strabo, *Geography* 17,1,9. For a recent interpretation of the ancient sources and a discussion of the single monuments located in the *basileia*, see Riedel 2020, 53–61, 123–324.
  54. McKenzie 2007, 12–13, 18, 26, 39, 66.
  55. Tzalas 2013, 327–28, 341, fig. 6, 342, fig. 9; Tzalas 2018. Tzalas 2003, 76, previously stated a weight of four tons. See also Riedel 2020, 320–21 (with fig. 163).
  56. Tzalas 2013, 327–28, 341, fig. 6, 342, fig. 9.
  57. Tzalas 2013, 328, 342, fig. 8; see also Tzalas 2018, 19, fig. 8.
  58. Tzalas 2013, 328, 341, fig. 7.
  59. Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 74, 1–2. Cited from [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Antony\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Antony*.html). For Cleopatra’s tomb in the royal quarters, see also Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae* 51.8: [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius\\_Dio/51\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/51*.html).
  60. Grimm 1999, 126–36.
  61. Gabolde 1992, 17–60. See also Sourouzian 1981, 141–51; Shubert 1981, 135–64.
  62. The wooden pylon model from the tomb of Tutankhamun is a cult object (Carter 1933, 87, plate 53A; see Graefe 1983, 55–79) and cannot be compared in its size to the diminutive one in Alexandria.
  63. For an ancient Egyptian depiction of a pylon with flagstaves and pennants, see Gabolde 1992, 57, fig. 27 (tomb of Panehsy).
  64. Fauerbach 2018, 75 (see Taf. 6a for an illustration of the slots’ function).
  65. Martzloff 2012, 139, 155. See in contrast Riedel 2020, 320, who assumes that “der kleine Tempel vermutlich eher den Charakter eine [*sic*] Kapelle gehabt haben dürfte und wohl kaum zu den bedeutenden und somit und somit erwähnenswerten Heiligtümern der Stadt gezählt haben wird.”
  66. Porter and Moss 1972, 173 (509)–(511). Barguet 1962, 266: “un pylône en miniature.” I am grateful to Luc Gabolde for drawing my attention to this pylon in March 2019 and for granting me permission to take photographs.
  67. Winlock 1941, 40, plate LI.
  68. Winlock 1941, 40. The corners of the blocks had a torus molding, which indicated that on top of each there was originally a cavetto cornice.

69. See Gabolde and Laisney 2017, 119–21, figs. 18, 19; Raue 1999, 392, no. xviii–xx–1.1 (“Naosbasis, Matariya *in situ*”), 477 (1966–1972): Raue gives only the measurement for the entire base (415 × 320 cm), not the traces of the *naos*, which is far smaller, judging from fig. 19 of Gabolde and Laisney 2017, not even less than half the size, which would be smaller than the temple-shaped shrine in Hibis (see notes 67 and 68 above).
70. Bisson de la Roque 1941, 36–42. See also Larché 2018, 99. For the context, see also Minas-Nerpel and Preys forthcoming, chapter 4.3.8.
71. I am very grateful to Christophe Thiers for his photographs of these altars and his comments.
72. Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 3.1.5.
73. El-Masry, Altenmüller, and Thissen 2012, 76–83.
74. See Recklinghausen 2018, 240–46.
75. McKenzie 2007, 39, fig. 39, 78; Savvopoulos 2010, 86, also presumes that the pylon dates to the Greco-Roman period “since Egyptian temples would never have had such a monolithic piece in such small dimensions.”
76. Naster 1968, 181–90; Handler 1971, 61, plate 11.4. See Graefe 1983, 72–75, for an interpretation of the figure above the gate, which he and Naster (1968, 186–87) interpret as the epiphany of the respective goddess.
77. According to Dunand 1973, 111, it is the temple of Isis Soteira, with which Bommas 2013, 136, agrees. Spencer 2004, 25, calls her Isis Lochias.
78. Malaise 2005, 149–51.
79. Nagel 2019, 714–15, who also mentions Isis Pharia as another possibility.
80. Coins of Cleopatra VII with Hathor’s typical crown and Isis’s epithets are attested after the birth of Ptolemy XV Caesarion from 47/46; see Hölbl 2001, 290; Albersmeier 2002, 222. See also Nagel 2019, 318, who refers to the Hathor temple in Dendera, where Cleopatra VII and Isis (Cauville 2007a, pt. 2, 212) correspond to each other, Cleopatra as the queen on earth and Isis as the queen in the divine realm.
81. Brenk 1992; Hölbl 2001, 291 (with references to the classical sources). See also Nagel 2014, 134–35; Nagel 2019, 348.
82. Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 54, 6: “Cleopatra, indeed, both then and at other times when she appeared in public, assumed a robe sacred to Isis, and was addressed as the New Isis” (cited from [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Antony\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Antony*.html)). Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae* 50, 5, 3: “He posed with her for portrait paintings and statues, he representing Osiris or Dionysus and she Selene or Isis” (cited from [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius\\_Dio/50\\*.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/50*.html)).
83. See also Pfeiffer 2017, 208.
84. Hinkel 2000, 12. See also Hinkel 1981, 91–98, for a discussion of the different heights of the pyramids; Lohwasser 2004, 207–14.
85. Hinkel and Yellin 1998, 555; Zibelius-Chen 2006, 297. For reconstruction drawings of parts of the northern cemetery with pyramids, chapels, and pylons, see Hinkel 1996, 411, fig. 68, 415, fig. 73. For a summary of the funerary architecture in Meroe, including the pylons, see Helmbold-Doyé 2019, 789–94.
86. Queens and other royal family members were first buried in Begrawiya. Beginning with Ergamenes I (or Araqamani I), a contemporary of Ptolemy II, the Meroitic kings were also laid to rest at Begrawiya. From Ergamenes II onward, a contemporary of Ptolemy IV Philopator, the tomb chapels at Begrawiya were decorated in more intricate ways, including the introduction of Osirian themes (for references, see Wenig 2015, 22, 109; Ashby 2020, 188–92). When Ergamenes II gained control over the Dodekaschoinos, he was actively involved in the extension and decoration of the Nubian temples at Philae and Dakka, also by using texts and epithets developed by and for the Ptolemies (for a discussion, see Minas-Nerpel and Preys forthcoming, chap. 4), thus inserting himself further into Egyptian traditions. These correlations warrant further investigation.
87. Dunham 1957, 6, 46–47, with fig. 22; Hinkel 2000, 15, fig. 3, plates x–xii. See Hinkel and Yellin 1998, 560, fig. 3, for a discussion of the queen’s title or name.
88. I am grateful to Alexandra Riedel and Pawel Wolf of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) / Qatari Mission for the Pyramids of Sudan (QMPS), who kindly supplied information and plans for Beg. S10 and N19 as well as fig. 4.10.
89. Dunham 1957, 7, 142–45, with fig. 93 (Dunham referred to the king as Amanitenmemide).
90. See Martzloff 2012, 155 (see note 65 above).
91. Łukaszewicz 2016, 694.
92. Amanishakheto’s vast collection of gold jewelry was discovered in her tomb in 1837; see Wildung 1996, 302–40; Lohwasser 2001, 285.
93. Łukaszewicz 2016, 694. See also Lohwasser 2021, 68: at least nine ruling queens are known by their tombs in Meroe, dating to the period between the end of the second century BC and the beginning of the fourth century AD.
94. For the *kandake* in general, see Wildung 2008, 200–205. For the *kandake* Amanishakheto, see Lohwasser 1994, 30–31; Török 1997, 456–59; Wenig 2015, 99–102.
95. Lohwasser 2001, 292.
96. Wildung 2008, 203.
97. Bryan 1992, 106–10.



98. Bryan 1992, 110. For a discussion within the context of female rulers in Egypt, see Minas-Nerpel 2021, 27–28.
99. Gundlach 1995, 57–60, 68–69, figs. 7, 8.
100. Łukaszewicz 2016, 695.
101. Török 1997, 447–48, 516–30. See also the decoration of the Meroitic tomb chapels from Ergamenes II onward with extended Egyptian topics and his interests in decorating the Nubian temples of Philae and Dakka (see note 86 above).
102. Ebling 2018, 6.
103. See, for example, Busch and Versluys 2015, 7–15, and Versluys 2018, 230–37, for the concept of “inventing traditions” and Rome as a “successor culture” that was constantly looking back and around, trying to formulate its own identity vis-à-vis the Mediterranean, the Near East, Egypt, and Europe.

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# The Kellis Mammisi: A Painted Chapel from the Final Centuries of the Ancient Egyptian Religion

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The mammisi of Kellis is one of the major archaeological finds in Egypt from the past forty years (fig. 5.1). (A mammisi is a birth house in the form of a subsidiary chapel belonging to a larger temple.) Its significance lies in its wall paintings, which offer a radical new perspective on the religion of Roman Egypt. It overturns the established notion that the temples in the south of Egypt followed traditional patterns and that true innovation of religious ideas took place in major cult centers but not in the countryside. This article presents some of the most important paintings in this shrine for the first time.

Kellis is a village situated in the center of Dakhla Oasis, one of the large oases of the Western Desert, which was administered in combination with the neighboring Kharga Oasis.<sup>1</sup> The village was abandoned before the end of the fourth century AD, and it has been under excavation since 1986 under the direction of Colin Hope. Its remains include a large temple enclosure, houses, workshops, three remarkably large villas with wall paintings,<sup>2</sup> a bathhouse, three churches, several cemeteries, and possibly a *nymphaeum*.<sup>3</sup>

The village temple was dedicated to a relatively new Egyptian god: Tutu, designated in Greek as Totoes or Tithoes. This god first emerged as a local deity of the town of Sais in the 26th Dynasty,<sup>4</sup> after which his cult spread throughout the country. Despite the god's wide popularity, the Kellis temple is the only known example that was dedicated primarily to Tutu. It is worth speculating as to why Tutu did not feature more prominently in the Egyptian religious landscape. It is not because he was merely a minor god, in the manner of the god Bes, who did not receive a temple cult anywhere in the country until late Roman times.<sup>5</sup> Tutu, in contrast, did receive a cult in many temples as an associated deity, even when he was not the primary focus of the cult. Examples are the temples at Esna and Koptos.<sup>6</sup> There are several priests of Tutu known from inscriptions, also outside of Kellis,<sup>7</sup> and the temple calendar at Esna records two festival dates for Tutu.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the reason why the Kellis temple remained exceptional is to be sought in the date of its foundation in the early Roman period, at which time very few new temples were built in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The increasing popularity of Tutu was elsewhere incorporated into existing cults, and there were not many occasions when a new temple could be dedicated to the god. There may well have been other

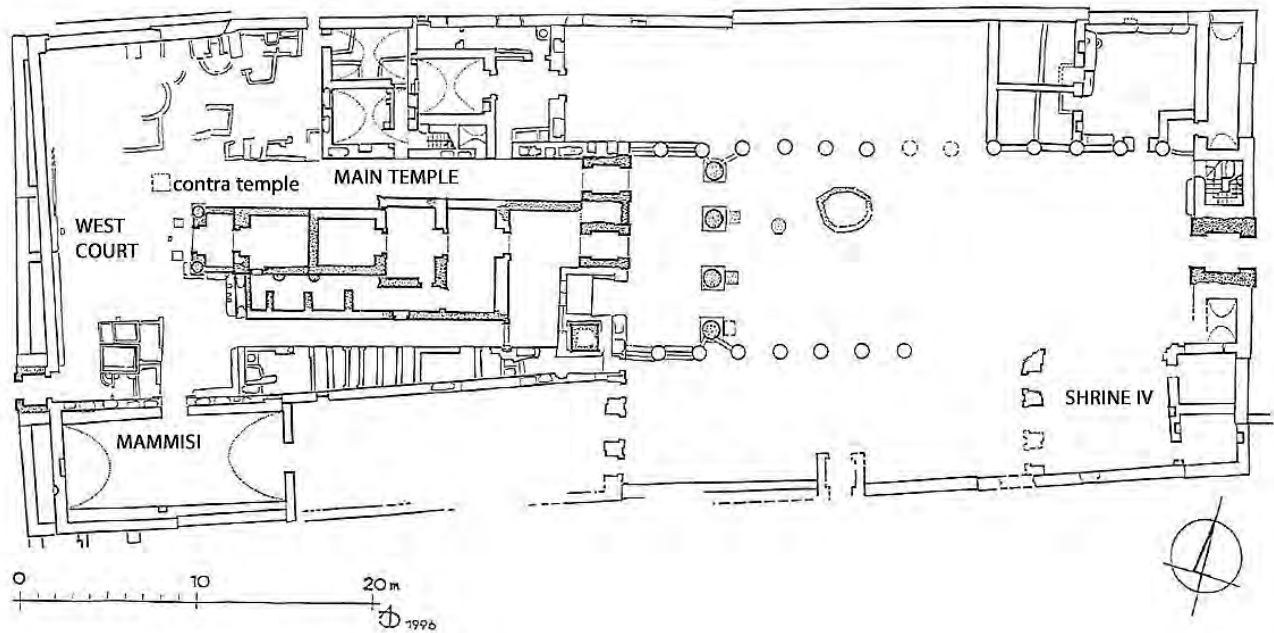


Figure 5.1 Plan of the Kellis main temple with its mammisi. Adapted from a drawing by Jarosław Dobrowolski (1996)

temples dedicated primarily to Tutu, but at this moment the Kellis temple is the only one known.

Several images of the god were found carved on stelae and depicted on the walls of the Kellis temple. Tutu is often depicted in Roman Egypt as a striding sphinx with a cobra as a tail, but on the temple walls he usually appears in fully human form.<sup>10</sup> The god was in control of fate, and that is why his image could be combined with that of the Greek goddess Nemesis.<sup>11</sup> He provided divine protection against illness and other misfortunes, which explains his popular appeal. His consort in Kellis was called Tapsais. She is not known from other sites, because she was probably a local woman who became a goddess after death.<sup>12</sup> Like Tutu, she was in control of fate, and like Isis, she was depicted wearing a queen's crown.<sup>13</sup>

The temple stopped functioning in the course of the fourth century AD,<sup>14</sup> and the building was robbed of its stone subsequently, at an unknown date. Only a few blocks with relief decoration remained in situ. From these it is clear that building works at the Kellis temple started in the first century AD; the earliest inscriptional evidence dates to the time of Nero (r. AD 54–68).<sup>15</sup> A fragmentary cartouche from the entrance gateway dates perhaps to Hadrian (r. AD 117–38), and other work was carried out under Antoninus Pius (r. AD 138–61) and Pertinax (r. AD 193).<sup>16</sup> Finding Pertinax here is remarkable, because there are no other monuments in Egypt on which his name appears in hieroglyphs. Pertinax ruled for only three months in AD 193, and the relief therefore shows

how essential the role of the pharaoh was still considered to be at this time. In this remote region at the border of the Roman Empire, knowing the identity of the emperor was still vital for the proper form of decoration on the walls of a village temple. Nevertheless, in Dakhla and Kharga the priests deviated from the practices in the Nile Valley, because they consistently reversed the order of the names of the emperor in the two cartouches.<sup>17</sup> This remarkable show of independence may be explained by the local attachment to rules of decorum set under the last Ptolemies.<sup>18</sup> The temple decoration in the oases was thus provided with a reference to the Hellenistic kings, which must have enhanced the religious significance of the temple decoration with a historical dimension in accordance with local tradition.

The Kellis temple is one of the smallest temples known in Egypt, with only a few tiny rooms. Its small size may be explained by a scarcity of local funds in this village, which could not procure large amounts of stone from the local quarries and pay for the necessary stonemasons. The financing of local temple buildings in the villages of Roman Egypt probably did not involve the central government at all, despite the practice of inscribing the name of the emperor on its walls.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, this small temple was set within a large enclosure that contained a wide array of buildings associated with the temple cult. Not much of this enclosure and its various subdivisions has been excavated, so its purpose remains subject to speculation.



Next to the stone temple, on a parallel axis, stands the mammisi. This building consists of an inner room measuring 4.8 meters in width and 12 meters in depth, with a slightly larger forecourt.<sup>20</sup> This makes the mammisi much larger than any room of the stone temple, but it was built of mud brick, which made its construction much less costly. In contrast to the stone temple, the mammisi is preserved in its entirety, even though the vaulted roof collapsed in antiquity. The inner room of the building was excavated between 1991 and 2004, and the fragments of its former painted plaster decoration were retrieved. The conservation and reconstruction of the paintings continued between 2004 and 2011, after which work at the site had to be interrupted.<sup>21</sup>

The walls of the mammisi still stand up to 3.5 meters in its southwest corner (fig. 5.2). Its decoration consists of paintings on a thin layer of plaster, which is still attached to the walls. The entire vaulted ceiling, which contains most of the figurative decoration, had become fragmented, and only small parts remained attached to clusters of bricks from the collapsed vault. In order to conserve and reconstruct the decoration, a system was devised by the conservators Michelle Berry and Laurence Blondaux by which the thin layer of plaster could be removed from its brick support and united with the loose fragments that had been found in its surroundings.<sup>22</sup> Reconstructed scenes could be glued together and fixed on a wooden support, which allows handling and will ultimately make it possible to display the scenes.<sup>23</sup> The illustrations in the present essay show some of the results to date.

The building is remarkable, and two aspects of the decoration make it unique. First, it is completely painted using two different systems of representation (styles). A dado of classical paneling is painted below, surrounded by vines and with a series of different birds depicted within each panel, which also includes a (mostly vandalized) Medusa head in its center.<sup>24</sup> Its dating is probably early second century AD, based on the style and colors of the paintings,<sup>25</sup> which resemble those of the richer houses at Kellis from the early second century.<sup>26</sup> The Medusa heads are a known feature of classical panel decoration and are also present in Roman temples in Italy of the first century.<sup>27</sup>

Greek influence was important in the oases already from an early time, and it is one of the distinguishing features of the local culture, where it is more dominant than in the Nile Valley.<sup>28</sup> The clearest indication in archaeology is the widespread adoption of Greek ceramic forms in the oasis during the Ptolemaic period.<sup>29</sup> The adoption of Roman-

style wall paintings should not be a surprise, therefore, even though their appearance in an Egyptian temple is totally unexpected.

Above the classical paneling are four registers of Egyptian-style images and hieroglyphs. The reconstruction of the vault is now largely completed, and nearly every detail can be reconstructed from fragments (fig. 5.3). This twofold scheme is unconventional in an Egyptian temple, and it requires an explanation. I have argued elsewhere that there was a greater freedom from decorum in the oases,<sup>30</sup> which may have fostered the creation of this original shrine, but I am now convinced of a more specific motivation for its conception.

A cultic niche situated in the back wall of the mammisi resembles the *lararium* niches, or aediculae, found in Roman houses in Egypt as well as in Italy,<sup>31</sup> even though no examples of such niches are as yet known from the houses of Kellis.<sup>32</sup> The niche in the mammisi had modeled pilasters on either side and a plaster conch shell within its arched upper part. This domestic element is striking and unparalleled within an Egyptian temple context.<sup>33</sup> Beneath the niche was an apron, a console with a projecting platform on which divine statues and other objects could be placed. This element had originally been attached to the wall using wooden pegs, but it became detached during the collapse of the vaulted roof, and its remnants were found on the floor underneath the niche. The apron was reconstructed from fragments, and its decoration is striking (fig. 5.4). It is known to have been symmetrical in shape and decoration, even though the left end of the apron is lost. The decoration shows a large central calyx of an acanthus leaf on a white background, with floral extensions on either side combined with the figure of a winged naked youth (Eros) holding bunches of grapes. The presence of these putti has a parallel on the apron of a domestic aedicula found in a late Roman house in Amheida, Dakhla Oasis.<sup>34</sup> The parallel has two seated Eros figures facing each other, and their presence in a private house indicates that the Eros figures were not specifically selected for the mammisi but belong to the architectural form and general significance of the aedicula. Only the Eros on the right has been preserved on the Kellis apron. The grapes in his hands echo the vines surrounding the dado panels on the same wall. On either side of the central acanthus leaf, open lotus flowers are depicted, an Egyptian element that probably refers to the statues to be placed on top of the platform. In accordance with the cultic function of the mammisi, it is likely that statues in Egyptian style of both Tutu and his mother, Neith, were present, placed above the two lotus flowers depicted on the apron.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 5.2 View of the rear wall of the mammisi after excavation



Figure 5.3 Reconstruction of the northwestern corner of the mammisi, showing the niche in the rear wall and the Seven Hathors in the upper register of the vault. Drawing: Martin Hense



**Figure 5.4** Painted apron from the aedicula niche in the back wall of the mammisi. Restoration: Edwige Brida

The combination of lotus flowers with classical-style decoration is also found at the bottom of the walls of the mammisi, where a series of broad, elongated panels were painted, each separated by lotus flowers. Evidently the painters of these elements were familiar with Egyptian iconography. This familiarity is even more apparent from the paintings on the highest part of the vault of the mammisi, a wide band that spanned the length of the room and that was decorated largely with paintings in the Roman tradition. The three large patterns on this band are familiar from the classical repertoire as known from the walls of houses and public buildings,<sup>36</sup> but the central element is more complicated. This pattern was constructed around a large circular element of radiating scales or feathers, which is more familiar from mosaic floors.<sup>37</sup> At the heart of this circular feature was probably a painted bust of Isis-Demeter, of which only a part remains. The circle is surrounded in the four corners of the pattern by four seated goddesses set amid a sprinkle of white flowers on a green ground that visually suggests a sky with stars (fig. 5.5). One of these corner figures has been reconstructed from fragments (fig. 5.6).<sup>38</sup> The appearance and system of representation (style) of the goddesses is purely Egyptian, with tight red dresses and long black hair, but the circular part of the painting is in the Roman system of representation, even when it includes Isis as its central image.

The most remarkable aspect of this painting is the way that the ancient artist(s) took two familiar designs from two different artistic traditions and merged them into a new, powerful image. The juxtaposition of the two styles has added a new layer of meaning to the circular mosaic pattern by turning it into an image of the sky held up by the four supports of heaven. The latter are well known from circular images of the zodiac in Egypt, such as the one from Dendera now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris,<sup>39</sup> and the ceilings of two painted tombs in Qarat el-Muzawwaqa, in Dakhla Oasis.<sup>40</sup> One of the latter, in the tomb of Petubastis, has the goddesses in the same posture



**Figure 5.5** Reconstruction of the entire central pattern of the vaulted ceiling (colors not calibrated). Drawing: Martin Hense



**Figure 5.6** Ceiling pattern from the northern half of the shrine with a goddess supporting the sky. Restoration set on a background of sand, in preparation for a final layer of plaster. Restoration: Laurence Blondaux

as in the Kellis painting and set against a background of stars, but the circular zodiac they are supporting is rendered according to the Egyptian system of representation.<sup>41</sup>

The Kellis painting demonstrates a high level of artistic freedom and an originality of design that is unparalleled in Egyptian temples. The combination of two systems of representation, the Egyptian and the Hellenistic or Roman, is familiar from tomb decoration in Roman Egypt,<sup>42</sup> in which the religious content of the tomb or an item of tomb equipment, such as a shroud or a coffin, was made according to Egyptian conventions, whereas the individual who was the focal point of the tomb's decoration was rendered in the more contemporary Hellenistic or Roman style. In this context, I employ the term *style* in a technical sense, as a system of representation in which the Egyptian artist worked according to a strict canon of proportions and with frontal, or "aspective," images.<sup>43</sup> In this respect the Egyptian artists differed from those of other cultures, and it was a difference that was consciously applied on funerary items and tomb walls in the Roman period. Only in the Kellis mammisi were the two styles equally divided over the walls and ceiling of a shrine.

The integration of the two systems of representation in a single painting, as on the Kellis chapel ceiling, may indicate that the same painters were versed in two different styles, especially since there are also other locations in the mammisi where the styles are found juxtaposed in a minor way. Unfortunately there is no way to be certain about this. We do not know anything about the persons responsible for the design of the mammisi paintings or about the painters themselves. In general we do not know much about the organization of the work of decorating temple walls. Each temple was different, and designing the layout and contents of each wall could involve much intricate planning, in ways that we are only beginning to understand.<sup>44</sup>

The Egyptian-style paintings of the mammisi focus on religious themes with only little attention to cultic or historical information. The majority of scenes refer to the cyclical rejuvenation of the gods through depictions of the subdivisions of time. The scenes include divine personifications of the years, the twelve months of the year, the thirty days of the month, the twelve hours of the day, and those of the night.<sup>45</sup> Other scenes relate to the birth of the god Tutu, with images of the gods Ptah and Khnum seated at potter's wheels,<sup>46</sup> and of the Seven Hathors and Meskhenet goddesses.<sup>47</sup> The scene of the Seven Hathors has been reconstructed from fragments

(fig. 5.7), and a part of it is shown separately in detail here in order to demonstrate the high quality of the Egyptian-style paintings (fig. 5.8).<sup>48</sup> Each figure was rendered with the use of each of the seven colors available to the painters in this style: yellow, red, blue, green, pink, black, and white. Each of the Hathors wears a different elaborate crown, and they hold objects in their hands as offerings to Tapsais, consisting of mirrors, floral collars, sistra, and menats. The same objects are also shown on top of small tables set in front of each goddess. The amount of detail and the expert way of drawing each image are remarkable, and it places the decoration of this mammisi on a par with the best relief work in the temples in the Nile Valley, notably that of Dendera from the reigns of Nero (r. AD 54–68) and Trajan (r. AD 98–117).<sup>49</sup>

The second unique aspect of the decoration of the mammisi is the way in which the role of the pharaoh is minimized within the decorative program. In total, there were more than four hundred gods depicted inside the mammisi, the name and titles of each designated in the accompanying hieroglyphic legends. Remarkably and in another divergence from regular practice, the gods are shown interacting among themselves, and there is no king represented serving them or rendering them homage. Only a single representation of a nameless king appears at the entrance to the shrine, on the inner face of the south doorjamb, a generic image of a king consecrating food offerings to the gods inside the mammisi. This is the only occurrence of a representation of the conventional role of the pharaoh, interacting with the gods on behalf of humankind.

The Kellis mammisi has suppressed the role of the king, and instead various minor gods play his part in the decorative program, presenting offerings to the major gods. At the same time, two scenes contain groups of priests performing offering rituals in front of the local deities. On the north and south walls of the shrine, twenty-seven and thirty-seven priests, respectively, are shown bringing cultic items to the gods of the temple: Tutu, Neith, and Tapsais.<sup>50</sup> The first group of priests from the southern series is shown performing the daily ritual for Tutu, opening the shrine and bringing incense and libations (fig. 5.9). One of them is pouring oil on the floor from a situla, which is a ritual familiar from the archaeological remains of the Dakhla temples.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 5.7** The Seven Hathors, preceded by a figure of the goddess Meret, and facing a seated Tapsais followed by Neith. Restoration set upon a background of sand, in preparation for a final layer of plaster. Restoration: Laurence Blondaux; Image: © Fotografie Christien Boeles



**Figure 5.8** Detail of the first four of the Seven Hathors. Image: © Fotografie Christien Boeles



**Figure 5.9** The first five priests on the southern wall. Their feet as well as the shrine on the right end have been copied from the part of the painting still on the wall. Restoration: Laurence Blondaux. Image: © Fotografie Christien Boeles

One factor that has to play a role in this exceptional shift of emphasis away from the human king can be found in the particular emphasis placed on the royal aspects of Tutu in the mammisi. There are many references to kingship in the god's titles and iconography. Tutu's name may be preceded by the title King of Upper and Lower Egypt or by the title King of the Gods, which he shares with Amun-Re.<sup>52</sup> In his iconography, Tutu often wears the Double Crown, and he may be depicted subjugating the enemies of Egypt in the form of the Nine Bows.<sup>53</sup> The emphasis on the royal traits of the god is a standard theological feature of the mammisi in general.<sup>54</sup>

It is not surprising that the king has been replaced by minor gods at Kellis, because mammisis always placed an emphasis on divine interaction in the scenes depicting the divine birth and its associated mythology.<sup>55</sup> It would certainly be a mistake to conclude that the omission of the emperor's name was intended as some kind of subversive political statement. We need only recall that the stone temple of Kellis mentions Pertinax among its cartouches. It is fair to say that the Kellis priests were highly loyal to the imperial authorities.

The real significance of the Kellis mammisi is that it shows a long-overdue modernization of the content of Egyptian temple decoration, which better reflects current practices and ideas. The role of the pharaoh had already diminished under the Ptolemies, but in Roman times the head of state lived not in Egypt but in Rome, and he took no active part in Egyptian religion and its cults.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, the gods themselves took on more of the aspects of kingship. Already before the arrival of Alexander the Great, the gods could be shown wearing royal garments and with their names written in cartouches,<sup>57</sup> but this tendency became more pronounced in Roman times.

The omission of the pharaoh and his replacement by representations of priests is exactly what can be observed

in the temples of Isis and Serapis built outside Egypt. These temples, such as the one in Pompeii, had taken the step of suppressing the role of the pharaoh earlier in the Roman period.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the temples to Egyptian gods outside Egypt included images of priests in their depictions of ritual activities. At the same time, the gods had taken on a distinct royal role, such as Isis in her role as Isis Regina.<sup>59</sup> The Kellis mammisi adopted some of these new developments seen in the temples of Isis outside Egypt, combining Egyptian and foreign concepts of a temple. This was a big step, involving a rethinking of tradition with a revolutionary intent. We can appreciate the logic of the Kellis mammisi design because it reflects a new world in which there were no longer active pharaohs.

Just like the temples outside Egypt, those in the oases had more freedom to experiment. Experimentation is apparent also from the way the names of the Roman emperors were written, in the reverse order from the rest of Egypt. The Kellis mammisi upended age-old traditions, reflecting the essence of Egyptian religion in these changing times. The early second century AD was still a time of temple building and artistic investment in religious institutions, but in the course of the century a decline would set in. If the indigenous religion had continued to thrive, it is likely that comparable temple decoration would have appeared also in the Nile Valley. As it was, Egyptian religion became gradually more marginalized, and such a daring step could no longer be taken by the priests of a religion that was under severe pressure. Political and economic measures taken by the Roman state had impoverished the temples by removing their land and closely monitoring their assets.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the economic crisis of the third century AD had an enormous impact on the temples, which could, as a consequence, no longer be maintained. Some rare temple-building projects in the Nile Valley, such as that at Esna, were continued in accordance with tradition, even as late as the reign of Decius (r. AD 249–51), but the priests and artists were no longer capable of innovative and creative designs.<sup>61</sup> The Kellis mammisi was a brave attempt at innovation of the ancient religion, but the times proved to be unfavorable for the continuation of these ideas.



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#### NOTES

1. On the Southern Oasis, see Bagnall and Tallet 2019.

2. Hope and Whitehouse 2006; Hope 2009; Hope 2015.
3. On Kellis, see the references in Hope 2013. On the *nymphaeum*, see G. E. Bowen in Bowen et al. 2007, 29–33.
4. Kaper 2003a, 139, 264 [R–41].
5. On the various forms of Bes, see Volokhine 2017. There is no evidence for a temple cult for Bes, and also the evidence found in Bahariya Oasis, as reported in Hawass (2000, 168–73) is not conclusive. Only in late Roman times was Bes venerated at Abydos (Frankfurter 1998, 169–79; Effland and Effland 2013, 120–29; Effland 2014), and in Antinoupolis the god was assimilated to the divinized Antinous (Kákosy 1995, 2921).
6. Kaper 2003a, 129–39
7. Kaper 2003a, 147.
8. Kaper 2003a, 152, 235.
9. Kaper 1998.
10. On Tutu's iconography in general, see Kaper 2003a, 33–52; on the Kellis images specifically, see Kaper 2003b.
11. On Nemesis in Egypt, see Lichocka 2004.
12. On this phenomenon in general, see Lieven 2010.
13. Kaper and Worp 1995; Kaper 2003a, 107–10.
14. Priests of Tutu are attested in the papyri into the AD 330s; Kaper 2003a, 148–50; Hope 2004, 11–13.
15. Bagnall and Worp 2002, 49–51.
16. Kaper 1997, 28–31. The Pertinax block is shown in Hölbl 2005, 90, fig. 133; Kaper 2012b, 143, 162, fig. 4.
17. Kaper 2012b, 143.
18. Kaper 2012c, 724–25.
19. On private involvement in temple building in name of the Roman emperor, see Kockelmann and Pfeiffer 2009, 93–104.
20. On the architecture of the temple and the mammisi, see Dobrowski 2002.
21. Funding for the conservation effort since 2004, directed by the present writer, was provided mainly by the Mellon Foundation through a Distinguished Achievement Award to R. S. Bagnall. One season was funded by an excavation grant of the Egypt Exploration Society.
22. The conservation of the painted plaster was initiated by Michelle Berry, and the system was developed further by Laurence Blondaux, who worked for fourteen seasons on the material; described in Blondaux 2002; Blondaux 2008; Blondaux 2020.
23. The choice for wooden panels is explained in Blondaux 2020, 53–55.
24. Whitehouse 2012, 385; Whitehouse 2015, 248–50. The paintings in classical style are being studied by Helen Whitehouse, who will participate in the publication of the mammisi.
25. This dating was initially proposed in Kaper 2002, 221–22, and confirmed in Moormann 2011, 117. On the identification of the pigments used in the shrine, see Berry 2002.
26. Whitehouse 2012. Medusa heads are also found in the paneling of a large Roman villa in Kellis: H. Whitehouse in Hope and Whitehouse 2006, 319–20; Whitehouse 2015, 248–49.
27. Moormann (2011, 68), describes the sanctuary of Bona Dea at Ostia, from the first quarter of the first century AD; in its cella is a black dado with paneling in which Medusa heads are one of the motifs.
28. Kaper 2012c, 729–30.
29. Gill 2016.
30. Kaper 2010, 181–201; Kaper 2012c, 723–25, 729–30.
31. As in the houses of Karanis: Husselman 1979, 47–48, plates 72–74. For examples of aediculae outside Egypt, see Clarke 2003, 75–81; Sofroniew 2015, 30–33.
32. A good parallel is found in the house tomb M13/SS in Tuna el-Gebel: Gabra et al. 1941, plate 43.2. Another parallel, with a tympanon, is found in Marina el-Alamein: Medeksza 1999, 57–58, fig. 5; Medeksza 2000, 52–53, fig. 5–6; Medeksza 2001, 68–69, fig. 5.
33. A niche in the rear wall is known from several temple sanctuaries, but these always have the architectural form of an Egyptian *naos* shrine. Examples are the temple of Qasr Zayan (Hölbl 2005, 59, fig. 86), the temple of Isis at Tebtynis (Gallazzi and Hadji-Minaglou 2000, 43–51, 142, photo 47), the contra temple at Medinet Madi (Bresciani and Giammarusti 2015, 161–63, 166), and the northern temple of Taffeh (Schneider 1979, 95, fig. 101, 97, fig. 104).
34. McFadden 2014, 365.
35. On the symbolism of the god emerging from the lotus, see Schlögl 1977. This theme is central to the theology of the mammisi; see Kaper forthcoming.
36. As confirmed for the painted decoration of temples in the classical world by Moormann (2011, 206): “As in private dwellings, figural elements were decorative and did not necessarily serve to emphasize the religious atmosphere. . . . Wall decorations in temples are akin to those in houses and public buildings.”
37. See Guimier-Sorbets 1998, 120–22; Whitehouse 2010, 1018–20.
38. The restoration of this piece is illustrated in Kaper 2009, 7.
39. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes, D 38 (E 13482), <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:>

/53355/cl010028871; Cauville 1997. On the supports of heaven, see Kurth 2016.

40. Osing et al. 1982, plates 36, 38–44.
41. Osing et al. 1982, plates 36, 42b.
42. Castiglione 1961, 211.
43. With Riggs 2005, 8–9. On aspective, see Baines 1974, xvi–xvii; Brunner-Traut 1974; Hartwig 2015, 49.
44. The potential levels of complexity are well illustrated by the inner sanctuary of the Dendera temple, as studied in Leitz 2001. A papyrus from Tanis is the only preserved document that contains rules and templates for creating temple decoration: Quack 2014; Quack 2016, 103.
45. Kaper 2002, 217–23; Kaper forthcoming.
46. Bettles and Kaper 2011, 215–51.
47. On the Seven Hathors, see Rochholz 2002, 44–49, 64–92; on the Meskhenet goddesses, see Spieser 2011, 63–92. On the significance of the scene in the Kellis mammisi, see Kaper forthcoming.
48. The restoration of this panel is illustrated in Kaper 2012a, 10–21; on the use of color in this scene, see Bettles 2020, 26.
49. On the quality of these reliefs, see Hölbl 2000, 80, 86.
50. Kaper 1997, 87–137.
51. Ross 2002.
52. Kaper 2003a, 59; Kaper 2003b, 319–20.
53. Kaper 2003a, 59–60; Kaper 2003b, 314–15.
54. Kaper forthcoming.
55. Kockelmann 2011, 5.
56. Hölbl 2000, 14–46.
57. Kaper 2019, 37–39.
58. Hölbl 2005, 93; Moormann 2016, 105–11, 115–18.
59. Nagel 2019, 1178.
60. Frankfurter 1998, 27–30.
61. The Esna temple was finished only under Decius, but Sauneron (1959, 43–44) remarks on the marked deterioration of skill and inspiration that is apparent already during the second century AD and progressively after that.

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## Appropriation and Synthesis in the Villa of Herodes Atticus at Eva (Loukou), Greece

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A syncretic blending of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman features can be found in varying degrees in Roman villas throughout the empire, including at the Villa Farnesina and the House of Augustus in Rome, Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, and the villa of Herodes Atticus (AD 103–177), the noted Greek intellectual and cultural leader of Athenian ancestry, in Eva (Loukou), Greece (fig. 6.1). Recent scholarship recognizes that the cultural mixing of what could be considered typical Greek or Roman motifs with decorative Egyptianizing motifs “serve[d] as a stylistic reflection of an appropriation of . . . conquered cultures by means of integration” into a new imperial visual language.<sup>1</sup> This paper will argue that what Jennifer Trimble described as “a sophisticated and imperializing Augustan engagement with pharaonic visual culture,” referring specifically to the Ara Pacis Augustae in light of the Egyptianizing of Rome's urban landscape achieved by the two obelisks Augustus brought from Egypt to Rome, continued under Hadrian and is found in the splendid but subtle decorative elements in Herodes Atticus's villa.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Nelson characterized the appropriation of art and ideas across time and space as anything but neutral: “appropriation is not passive, objective, or disinterested, but active, subjective, and motivated.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Trimble

has observed, “Analyzing appropriation . . . means looking not only at the movement of artistic ideas, but asking why certain forms or motifs were taken up for a new purpose, what happened to them in that transformation, and what resonance and significance they had in their new settings.”<sup>4</sup> In considering the visual semantic program of the villa of Herodes Atticus, these questions must be considered. What does the varied, eclectic composition of the villa's architecture and decorative program mean?

The appropriation and recombination of multiple cultural influences appear frequently in Roman wall painting. Frescoes in Roman houses inspired by diverse civilizations developed a style of their own that reflected and supported not only social status but also the persona of the homeowner. Because of this, they can be viewed as “playfully allusive to contemporary cultural and political concerns. . . . It was at this moment in Western culture that art began to look back on itself with humor and intelligence rather than awe and that a native Roman secularism produced a culture tied to the forms of the past but also wedded to the great future of the Empire.”<sup>5</sup> As Megan Farlow has discussed, “The public interests of the Augustan age in globalization, a return to tradition, religion, and piety, and the revival of the *mos*

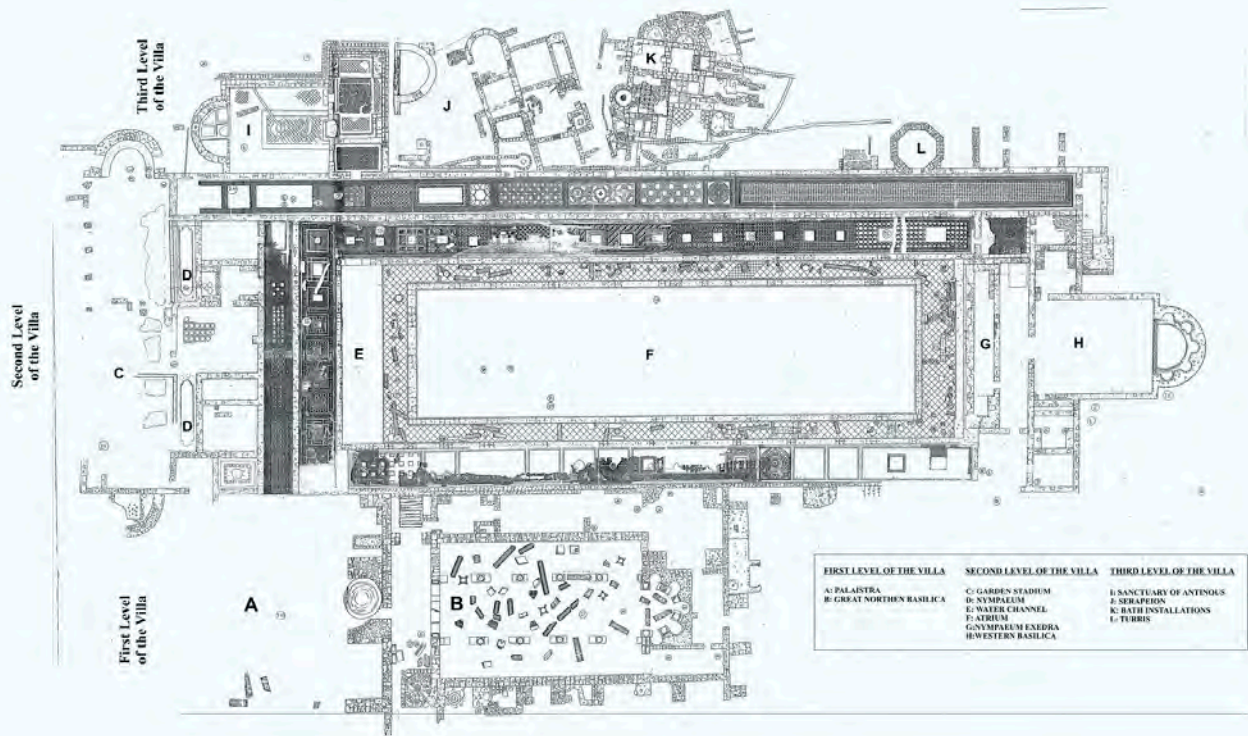


Figure 6.1 Plan of the villa of Herodes Atticus. Drawing: Anna Pantelakaki (from a plan provided by G. Spyropoulos)

*maiorum* (customs of the ancestors) intersect in the wall paintings of two houses in Rome associated with the imperial family: the House of Augustus on the Palatine (ca. 27 BCE) and the Villa Farnesina in the Campus Martius (ca. 21 BCE).<sup>6</sup> These themes are also prominent in Trimble’s study of the Ara Pacis, a monument that offers a “rich and carefully constructed synthesis of Egyptian, Hellenizing and Italic ideas and traditions, a layered and allusive monument to Rome’s incorporation of distant cultures, past times, and powerful traditions of political symbolism.”<sup>7</sup> Trimble argues that the Egyptianizing allusions found in the Ara Pacis might best be understood through comparison with Egyptian precedents like the White Chapel of Senwosret I at Karnak (with which it shares architectural similarities); the Temple of Hathor at Dendera; and the Ptolemaic *pronaos* at Kom Ombo, where one might easily detect the Egyptian practice of decorating a structure’s exterior walls with registers of figural scenes above and a plant zone below.<sup>8</sup> In contrast with the Augustan villas, where, among other motifs, Egyptianizing allusions comment on Augustus’s power, the villa of Herodes Atticus combines a synthesis of past styles with a variety of intentional allusions to create a synthetic program of decoration that had specific meaning for its patron.

Before excavation the villa of Herodes Atticus at Eva (Loukou) rose as a mound amid the hollows and ravines

of the site. A kiln in operation from around 1950 had burned many ancient finds for lime, and innumerable marble chips covered the uncultivated area in heaps. The entire area was expropriated and secured, and plowing and the cultivation of olive trees were prohibited in order to protect the villa from further damage. In 1979 systematic excavation began under the supervision of Theodore Spyropoulos.

Many parts of the villa were covered by thick bushes, the roots of which had grown deep into the ancient remains and caused, in some cases, serious damage to the mosaic pavements. As was reported by the excavator, modern agricultural activity and the exploitation of the arable strips of land around the villa had moved several antiquities as far as hundreds of meters to the north and to the south. Some portrait heads, now in the Archaeological Museum of Astros, were found mutilated by plowing on the lower level to the north of the villa.

The villa is arranged on three levels.<sup>9</sup> The first part to be excavated was the monumental staircase that leads to the entrance of the Great Hall toward the northern end of the villa. The steps of the staircase are now covered by tiles but were originally revetted with schist plaques, fragments of which have been found either in situ or around the base of the staircase. The staircase leads somewhat steeply to the north, having as its starting point

the mosaic pavements that form the surface of the villa's upper level.

## First Level of the Villa

The first level was deeper than the others due to natural land formation and was adapted to accept the heavy construction of a large hypostyle hall (Great Northern Basilica), a typical *hypostylos aethousa* with two rows of internal colonnades supporting the roof. The walls of the hall were constructed from rectangular ashlar blocks interrupted at regular intervals by courses of strips of flat bricks. Externally these were covered by a thick layer of plaster to which marble panels were attached, some of which are still in situ. The entrance to the hall contains a large marble lintel, its sides decorated with semicolumns. Stratigraphically the various parts of the monument present a divergent picture. The thick layer of debris of the destruction level, which covers the ruins, consists of reddish soil filled with small stones, tiles, and fragments of schist and marble slabs, as well as bricks and plaster from the walls, including the mural decorations and the pavements of the villa. Inside the Great Hall this layer measures up to 3.5 meters high, a huge mass of rubble, which was kept in place thanks to the preservation of the strong walls of the building. This layer has not been removed since it fell and covered the hall, which occurred after it was found plundered and ransacked. The columns and the capitals were found at different levels of the layer of destruction, testifying to a gradual collapse of the deserted villa. Vandalism should not be excluded as the first and main destructive agent, and this might reasonably be attributed to the invasion of the Visigoths in the Peloponnese at the end of the fourth century AD.

The axiality of the basilica was enhanced by the addition of an apse on the west side with five niches for statuary and columns of Cipollino marble projecting between them. The surface of the mass of the walls was enlivened by reflected light and shadow in much the same style as the illusions of recesses and projections in the wall paintings of the villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, “an exceptional example of late Second Style decoration, teasing the eye with perspectival recession” and encouraging viewers to look above the barrier of the socle “and out into fantastic panoramas or architectural confections.”<sup>10</sup> The columns of the main core of the basilica are also unfluted monoliths of gray-green Cipollino marble. The capitals, which are composite, are of Pentelic marble and date from the Flavian period, while those of the apse are Hadrianic. Building work on the basilica seems therefore to have been carried out in two phases. The first phase provided Herodes with the

main core of the basilica, built by his father, Tiberius Claudius Atticus, or even his grandfather Hipparchus, who might have purchased the land when the family fled to Sparta after Hipparchus had been accused of tyranny. In the second phase, during the lifetime of Herodes, the initial plan of the basilica was expanded by the addition of the apse on the west side, a palaestra on the east, and a *turrus* (observation tower) on the northeast, while at the same time construction of the villa was nearing completion. The eastern part of the great hypostyle hall was transformed into a basilica during the early Christian era judging by the closing of the two narrower arched entrances at the east wall and the thick layer of lime on the inside of the same wall, on which two illegible inscriptions of this period were traced.

Among the sculptural decorations of the basilica is a colossal statue of Athena placed in one of the niches of the apse.<sup>11</sup> Also discovered there were portraits of Herodes and his family,<sup>12</sup> grave reliefs, and an inscribed stela of the Erechtheis tribe with the names of those who died at the Battle of Marathon, a monument to the heroized dead from the grave of the Athenians at Marathon. It is probably because of the importance of the battle to the Athenians that Herodes Atticus decided to integrate the stela into his villa, in accordance with the funerary tone and memorializing aspects of the site.<sup>13</sup>

## Second, Upper Level of the Villa

The second, upper level includes a garden terrace (belvedere), well defined by two walls running from east to west and overlooking the Argolic Gulf. Moving to the west, next to the garden terrace is a structure with a hairpin-shaped plan, identified as the Garden-Stadion of the villa, comprising two *nymphaea* on the west side and two symmetrical rooms, while in the middle there was a court on a higher level, which served as a *triclinium* (large dining hall). The most important sculptures found in the Garden-Stadion are those belonging to the Dionysian *thiasos*—a statue of Dionysos, a statuette of Pan, and others—which clearly indicate that, as with Hadrian's Villa, some parts of the villa evoked a bucolic landscape peopled with Dionysian figures that symbolized a carefree life.<sup>14</sup> Two statues of Herakles were conceived as pendants, displayed as a symmetrical pair. A left hand of the hero holding the apples of the Hesperides was found, showing that the statue was probably a copy of the so-called Farnese Herakles, attributed to the fourth-century BC sculptor Lysippos. A headless statue holding the lion skin in his left hand and most probably a club in his now missing right hand is similar in both style and execution to the so-called Lansdowne Herakles, a Hadrianic copy of

an original of the fourth century BC, clearly associated with the style of Skopas, currently on display at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup>

On the same level, west of the Garden-Stadion and above the Great Northern Basilica, is the heart of the villa: the atrium and an open garden—skillfully adapted to the landscape—surrounded by a rectangular peristyle running from east to west.<sup>16</sup> The second and main cluster of buildings was accommodated by an extensive artificial terrace. As William L. MacDonald has correctly remarked: “Of course making a terrace meant making level ground, but leveling alone would not produce one. A terrace must be elevated, its platform a level stretch, set well above an area or vista, whose existence was part of the terrace’s definition. Terrace building, a prime Roman occupation, invited the incorporated construction of *cryptoportici*, simultaneously lessening the amount of fill required and providing useful space.”<sup>17</sup> *Cryptoportici* have not been found at Eva, although one probably lies under the floor of the south stoa. This upper part of the villa has suffered severely from the effects of cultivation, and its upper part was completely erased and planted with olive trees. Some trial trenches opened there have indicated that the space was plowed and cleaned and everything was removed and dispersed or embedded in modern retaining walls around the area.

The admirable adaptation of the residential and other buildings of the villa into the landscape of the site of Eva is apparent, a practice that has a long tradition in the Hellenistic world starting with Pergamon. It continued with the Delian house plans, framed in the Hellenistic urban architecture known also from Pella, Vergina, and elsewhere and followed by the aristocratic inhabitants of Pompeii and the cities of the Greco-Roman world. Planning was impacted by the topographic requirements of the site, but certain features are typical. There is usually a peristyle court with colonnades on all four sides, one of them sometimes equipped with an upper gallery (the so-called Rhodian portico). There is always a cistern beneath the court as well as mosaic pavements in the court, the passages, and the entrance lobbies and formal reception rooms that opened onto the colonnade. From the middle of the first century AD, Roman villas of wealthy citizens presented an internal court framed by colonnades on three sides only, judging by villas in Campania, Apulia, and Rome itself.<sup>18</sup> Two basic architectural types emerged, both with origins in the East. The peristyle villas, direct descendants of Hellenistic palaces, are frequently reflected in Campanian wall paintings, though the *porticus* villas, according to Karl

Swoboda, evolved from a long, narrow row of rooms opening onto a road or court.<sup>19</sup>

The planning of the villa of Herodes Atticus at Eva was in accordance with the architectural tradition of the Hellenistic metropolis and its survival or circumstantial alterations, which were introduced to suit the taste and the needs of the Roman aristocracy. From this point of view, Herodes Atticus is shown to be a citizen of two worlds and an heir of two cultural traditions, a fact that is underlined by the mosaic pavements as well as the sculptural groups discussed below. The villa of Herodes Atticus at Eva is, properly speaking, a *villa maritima*, lying about five kilometers from the coastal site of Thyrea. As Alexander McKay remarks, “Coastal estates were eagerly sought after with the advent of Hellenistic luxury to Italy after the wars of conquest abroad.” Such villas gradually became “the paradigm of luxury and an habitual topic for moralists and poets.”<sup>20</sup>

To imagine what the villa was like at the time of Herodes Atticus requires the reconstruction of the surviving elements. One may reasonably suppose that it was surrounded by a brick-built wall faced in marble and fronted by a fine peristyle. The floor consisted of a mosaic pavement, like the *peridromos* outside it. All around the peristyle a deep channel measuring 170 meters in length was constructed. First, a wide trench was cut in the native soil. The trench was smoothed externally and then covered by a retaining wall made of baked bricks, which were in turn plastered and painted red and blue. The pavement of the trench was also revetted with large orthogonal bricks, also plastered and painted. This artificial pool—an ingenious *impluvium*—was filled with water to create an allusion to a Nilotic setting (figs. 6.2, 6.3), like the channels in Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli.<sup>21</sup> An aqueduct brought water from a local spring in the mountains. Remains of this construction are still visible, comprising walls and columns and an intact bridge of the Roman imperial period.<sup>22</sup> It is exactly there in the hollow ditch that most of the villa’s remarkable sculptures were found. The ditch was filled with rubble and soil, bricks, tiles, bases, columns, and capitals, as well as sculptures either from the atrium or from the *peridromos* and the stoas that run all around it. The filling of the ditch elucidates some details of the fortunes of the villa. In its upper layers, it contains brown soil, pebbles, and small stones from the arable estates, fragments of bricks and tiles from the atrium and the stoa, and chips and fragments of marble and schist slabs and even of sculpture. The debris below contained columns, capitals, fragments of statues, marble reliefs, and some pottery



**Figure 6.2** View of the atrium of the villa of Herodes Atticus and the artificial pool from the southwest



**Figure 6.3** View of the southern stoa with mosaics and the artificial pool from the southwest

fragments of lamps of the Roman imperial and early Christian periods.

Three sides of the atrium were expanded to stoas decorated with mosaic pavements. The mosaics of the villa testify to excellent skill in their execution and to a high artistic standard in their conception and composition. One can see here the devices of foreshortening and chiaroscuro and the three-dimensional quality of the famous compositions at Delos, Pompeii, and Sparta.<sup>23</sup> The mosaics at Eva are highly decorative, enlivened in many cases by small rectangular panels representing women, most of them muses or nymphs, shown as either busts or figures in conventional gestures and poses, such as the nymph Arethusa, from the southern part of the *peridromos*. Their voluminous upper bodies resemble statues of the second century AD (like the Tragoedia from Pergamon), and their faces are rendered in a classicizing, eclectic style.<sup>24</sup> The rich and densely woven geometric patterns are skillfully executed and endlessly repeated in a continuous, tapestry-like surface, which undeniably imitated the carpets that covered the corridors of the houses from Hellenistic Delos to Greco-Roman Pompeii and Sparta. Yet this continuity is only the result of the skillful juxtaposition of larger squares decorated with exactly the same repertory. They are impressive and enhance the effect of luxury and delicacy of the decorative components of the rich villa.

This impressive and thick peristyle enhanced the symmetry of the atrium and the ditch and opened the scenery to the stoas behind it. The columns of the stoas were, as in the Great Northern Basilica, of unfluted Cipollino marble with Corinthian capitals of white Pentelic marble like those of the main core of the basilica, which were fluted and elegantly carved with abundant use of a drill. The rear wall of the stoas has been only partly preserved. It was made of small stones, and its inner face was thickly plastered and then revetted with marble slabs, some of which were preserved in situ. The roof inclined inward and reached the edge of the ditch where the rain fell in. Many large fragments of roof tiles were uncovered in the relevant places. As to the shape of the stoas, some relics suggest a low wall base in the middle to bridge their relatively large depth. The rear walls were undeniably the place where the fine reliefs found in the excavation were attached. The west side of the atrium was occupied by a *nymphaeum* and an exedra erected upon it, an architectural construction ingeniously adapted to the setting of the villa's main compartments, which can be restored as having a facade of rows of niches decorated with portraits of Herodes Atticus, his friends and companions, and the imperial family. Portraits include those of Hadrian (fig. 6.4), Septimius Severus, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Publius Vadius Antoninus, an unknown man dressed in a Greek mantle,



an unknown woman (probably Elpiniki, daughter of Herodes Atticus), and Herodes Atticus himself.<sup>25</sup> In the villa of Herodes Atticus, the portraits displayed in the exedra and the atrium were meant to act as companions for the visitors, recalling the memory of the dead. Some are posthumous commemorations of his wife, children, and adopted students, who all died very young, but it was a commemoration that had the primary purpose of placing an emphasis on Herodes Atticus himself.



**Figure 6.4** Bust of Emperor Hadrian. The usual image of the mythical gorgon Medusa decorating the emperor's breastplate has been replaced by a portrait of Antinous. The bust was found on the western side of the river, close to the exedra on which it stood, along with many other portraits.

Below the portraits, the front side of the *nymphaeum* is pierced with six niches in which six statues of young girls in windblown drapery were originally placed. The young girls, of which one is almost fully preserved, have been identified as the Dancing Caryatids by the sculptor Kallimachos, a work of the last decade of the fifth century BC. Opposite and in exact correspondence with the Dancing Caryatids stood, instead of columns, six caryatids supporting the roof of the east stoa of the atrium,

overlooking the river, and seven columns behind the caryatids, thus creating a small pavilion. It is hard not to see here the influence of Herodes Atticus himself and his close involvement in the architectural genesis of the site, which, as Trimble writes of the Ara Pacis, “is understood to embody multi-layered appropriations of the past, recombined in sophisticated and innovative ways to meet the needs of the present.”<sup>26</sup> Everything indicates his propensity for assigning complex meanings to architectural forms and associating himself with the cosmos. Cosmic imagery was particularly popular in Roman architecture, as seen at the Pantheon in Rome and in Hadrian's sprawling residence at Tivoli. Nowhere was there a better opportunity for cosmic expression than in imperial, and especially residential, architecture.<sup>27</sup> One of the buildings at Hadrian's villa—known as the Teatro Marittimo, or Island Enclosure—is very similar to one at the villa of Herodes Atticus. It consists of a colonnaded portico, within which is a circular canal with an island at its center.<sup>28</sup> As far as the rest of the sculptural decoration of the main core of the villa is concerned, it should be noted that another statue of Dionysos indicates that this part of the villa, like the Garden-Stadion, also resembled a bucolic landscape inhabited by Dionysian figures. Portrait galleries abounded, statues of athletes evoked a Greek gymnasium, and decorative landscape and votive reliefs were attached to the rear walls of the three stoas.

At the north and south stoas of the villa, respectively, stood the famous Hellenistic sculptural groups: the Pasquino (Menelaus holding the body of Patroclus) and the group of Achilles with Penthesilea, with whom he fell in love after having mortally wounded her. Both are Roman copies of lost originals of the Hellenistic age. The Achilles and Penthesilea group has been found and reconstructed, but the Pasquino is lost. The discovery, however, of two mosaic pavements from the south and north stoas representing the groups prove that the Pasquino once stood there.

To the west, the border of the villa is designated by a large hall with an apse on the west side and five niches for statuary. This building has been identified as the Western Basilica. The two suites of rooms to the north and south of the basilica are likely *sacella* or *lararia*, since dedicatory inscriptions, as well as portraits, of a type often placed in *lararia* were discovered there.<sup>29</sup> One of the side rooms of the basilica must have served as a sanctuary of Isis, judging by the discovery of the head and bust of Artemis Ephesia (fig. 6.5)<sup>30</sup> and the portrait of a youth whose hairstyle is associated with followers of Isis.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 6.5** Bust of Artemis Ephesia. This bust represents a copy of the cult statue of Artemis, known mainly from coins. On her head she wears a *polos* decorated with rosettes, sphinxes, and deer, one of her companion animals. From the sides of the *polos* emerges a disc decorated with a star on the proper right side. The upper part of her breastplate is decorated with a necklace, from which acorns hang. The lower part of her breast supports, up to its point of preservation, two rows of breasts as a fertility symbol or, as other scholars have suggested, gourds, also a fertility symbol.

## South Side of the Villa, Third Level

The third level of the villa contains some very interesting installations. Starting from east to west and along the main axis, one encounters the Temple-Sanctuary of Antinous-Dionysos (fig. 6.6). The initial plan had the shape of a basilica with an apse on the east side. In the middle of the apse there was an impluvium revetted with large marble plaques, fragments of which have been preserved. The floor was lavishly decorated with polychrome marbles in a technique known as *opus sectile*. An orthogonal pedestal was found on the northwest corner of the building. A statue of Antinous-Dionysos (fig. 6.7) originally stood on a podium in the apse of the building.<sup>32</sup> A head of Polydeukion (a pupil of Herodes who died young) and a headless female statue, probably Herodes's

wife, Regilla, were also found in the sanctuary. Next to the Temple-Sanctuary of Antinous was an apsidal building, the Serapeion, similar to the one at Hadrian's Villa. The identification of the building as a Serapeion has been confirmed by the discovery of both complete and fragmentary statues of river gods (figs. 6.8, 6.9), similar to those depicted on the mosaic pavements at the adjacent southern stoa. A statue of Osiris (fig. 6.10) was also found in the Serapeion, while a marble sphinx, now in the storage rooms of the National Museum in Athens, might also come from this place. Once again, the use of Dionysiac themes, operating alongside Egyptianizing motifs, serves as a stylistic embodiment of an appropriation of conquered cultures.

Next to the Serapeion is a bath complex,<sup>33</sup> while an octagonal structure attached to the external wall of the southern corridor has been identified as a *turris*.<sup>34</sup> It is preserved to a maximum height of 1.4 meters, but it was certainly built much higher, to either one or two stories. In its interior, innumerable fragments of polychrome marble pieces were collected; their various shapes indicate their use as components of a pavement in *opus sectile*, while larger fragments may have belonged to a revetment decoration. The elegant kiosk lies opposite the high pedestal on which the sculptural group of Achilles and Penthesilea stood, while two openings in the walls of the southern stoa and the long corridor ensured easy access to it. It must be underlined that these portals were at some point closed and plastered, probably during the last stages of the villa's use, a fact implying general rearrangement of its original plan, perhaps during the barbarian invasions of the later third century AD. It is tempting to connect the exquisitely adorned octagonal building with a potential cult to the heroized group during Herodes's lifetime and to speculate a later transformation of it into a tower during the troubled years of the late third century AD. Excavation in the Great Northern Basilica confirms a gradual change of the villa into a *castrum*-like palace, like Diocletian's residence at Split, where such octagonal towers also exist, or like the Piazza Armerina imperial villa in Sicily of the late third to early fourth century. After Herodes Atticus's death in AD 179, the villa at Eva was most probably bequeathed to the Roman imperial family, following a precedent that had been set centuries before by Attalus III, who also left the kingdom of Pergamon to Rome after his death in 133 BC. Emperors of Rome, from Hadrian to Septimius Severus, whose portraits have been found at Eva, made it their temporary residence. Septimius Severus at least may be credited with some extensions, ameliorations, and transformations of the villa to suit the fashion and spirit prevailing during the Severan dynasty.



**Figure 6.6** The Temple-Sanctuary of Antinous-Dionysos, view from the west



**Figure 6.7** Statue of Antinous-Dionysos. The statue, which originally stood on a podium in the apse of the building, was removed when the sanctuary was transformed into a mausoleum and placed on a pedestal on the northwest corner of the building, where it was found. Antinous was worshipped here as Dionysos, as also verified by the inscriptions (ΘΕΩ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΩ) found in situ.

## The Villa after AD 165–70: Religious Monumentality and Immortalization

In the years between AD 165 and 170, Herodes repeatedly suffered the loss of members of his family, including his wife and beloved foster sons. Overwhelmed with grief on each of their deaths and deeply and self-consciously aware of the power of memory as well as of its fragility, he commissioned statues and portraits to memorialize them, declaring them heroes. He even acted like a Homeric hero himself: he organized and founded games and had his villa transformed into a monumental mausoleum.<sup>35</sup> Herodes Atticus, according to the ancient sources, always displayed his disapproval of the Stoics for their lack of feeling. He challenged them with the argument that humans need strong emotions.<sup>36</sup> He showed a kind of recklessness before the authority of Marcus Aurelius that is reminiscent of the fearlessness of a philosopher before a tyrant.<sup>37</sup> This type of careless audacity and excessive emotion is characteristic of yet another rhetorical figure, the hero, and is exemplified by mythical individuals such as Achilles and Menelaus.<sup>38</sup> Indeed Herodes Atticus's grief and his habit of stepping outside the social norms because of it are two of his most characteristic traits.<sup>39</sup> This extreme emotionalism had an impact on the sculptural decoration of various parts of the villa but mainly on the sculptural program of the exedra



Figure 6.8 Statue of a river god, found in the Serapeion of the villa



Figure 6.9 Head of a statue of a river god, probably a personification of the Nile River, found in the Serapeion of the villa



Figure 6.10 Fragmentary statue of Osiris, found in the Serapeion of the villa

and the Temple-Sanctuary of Antinous-Dionysos. As far as the exedra is concerned, the six niches in which the Dancing Caryatids of Kallimachos, a masterpiece of Greek art, once stood were replaced by *arcosolia* in which marble *klinai* with reclining figures, representing members of Herodes's family, were placed. As to the

temple-sanctuary, the initial plan of the building was expanded to the west by the addition of a structure with three rectangular niches, in which marble *klinai* were placed, again with reclining figures representing members of Herodes's family.<sup>40</sup> A large amount of pottery used to perform rituals came to light during the excavation of the area. Votive and banquet reliefs—as well as a beautiful relief with funerary connotations, which was part of a monument placed within the sanctuary—replaced the original sculptural decoration of the Antinoeum. The new decoration was a conscious departure from the fresco style that initially decorated the Antinoeum, which as an official style shuns emotion and seems to seek an iconographic vocabulary that would allow Herodes to depict the despair associated with the most immediate and intimate reaction to a loved one's death. Antinous was worshipped as Dionysos, as also verified by the inscriptions (ΘΕΩΔΙΟΝΥΣΩ), and like his closest equivalent in the Egyptian pantheon, the god Osiris, he also suffered, died, and was resurrected, thus serving as a symbol of death and rebirth. The meaning of the display is clear: the reclining figures on the *klinai* of the temple-sanctuary would undergo the same transformation as the god Dionysos (Osiris) and would also be reborn.<sup>41</sup>

The original significance of the villa, its *otium*, which for the Romans meant indulging in philosophical speculation and time well spent and which was instinctively felt by anyone who entered the grounds, dissolved as the entire site was transformed into a mausoleum. The funerary, banqueting, and heroic reliefs; the proliferation of heroic art; the *klinai* with full-length portraits of the deceased; the introduction of feasts for the dead according to the requirements of the hero cult; and the incorporation of a

memorial to the fallen of Marathon signaled the meaning of this vast mausoleum. Herodes Atticus forced the stela into the role of honoring the dead with all the glorious traditions of the Marathonomachoi (veterans of the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC). This, added to the transformation of the Temple-Sanctuary of Antinous-Dionysos into a mausoleum and the introduction of feasts for the dead according to the requirements of the hero cult and the proliferation of heroic art, suggests that Herodes Atticus was constructing a kind of commemorative monument of heroic virtue for himself and his deceased family.<sup>42</sup> Even a reinstallation of the Menelaus and Achilles groups was incorporated into the plan. In the new display, the group, which had originally faced east (as clearly indicated by the accompanying mosaics), faced west—judging from the shape of the plinth, the pedestal, and the cuttings—toward the exedra that had been transformed into a mausoleum, thus becoming a place to mourn.

The exedra—a long wall pierced with niches for portrait display—did not look like the Western Wall in Jerusalem, which Herod the Great erected in his expansion of the Second Temple, but it certainly functioned like it. It was endowed with everlasting sanctity: “And I will make your sanctuaries desolate,” meaning that the sanctuaries retain their sanctity even when they are desolate, and they became the symbol of both devastation and hope.<sup>43</sup> Herodes expressed his pain for the loss of his family members by reinstalling the dramatic Hellenistic sculptural groups and transforming the exedra into a sort of memorial monument and the temple-sanctuary into a mausoleum. The symbolic comparison of the exedra of the villa to the Western Wall in Jerusalem does have an evidentiary basis, and Jewish mourning practices and behaviors in the Roman period are attested.<sup>44</sup> The presence of Tiberius Claudius Atticus, Herodes’s father, in Judaea is attested by the Christian chronicler Hegesippus, who records that he served as a *legatus* of Judaea from AD 99/100 to 102/103, as well as suffect consul.<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Graetz argued that Atticus was the Roman governor mentioned in rabbinic traditions by the name of Agnitus.<sup>46</sup> Richard Bauckham and E. Mary Smallwood make clear reference to Herodes’s father’s governorship in Judaea in the years AD 99/100–103,<sup>47</sup> a date that coincides with the birth of Herodes. The family would have been familiar with Jewish ritual practices.

Trimble describes the Ara Pacis as a “richly layered, culturally allusive and semantically complex visual monument,” containing references that “could only have been directed toward the most knowledgeable people in Rome.”<sup>48</sup> And the same can be said of the Villa Farnesina, the imperial villa at Boscotrecase, the House of Augustus,

and Hadrian’s villa. Herodes Atticus, in contrast, built magnificently on private land to create a rich synthesis of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Jewish ideas and traditions.<sup>49</sup> The transformation of the villa into a monument commemorating the deceased members of Herodes’s family must be interpreted as a reflection of his extreme grief, which compelled him to create a site of remembrance, one that is of a particular time but that also incorporates varied cultural and historical references.

#### NOTES

1. Farlow 2016, 34. See also Anderson 1987–88; Trimble 2007.
2. Trimble 2007, 6.
3. Nelson 1996, 118. See also Trimble 2007, 5–6
4. Trimble 2007, 5.
5. Anderson 1987–88, 54.
6. Farlow 2016, 2.
7. Thompson 1952, 79–82; Castriota 1995; Trimble 2007, 43.
8. Trimble 2007, 26. Trimble (2007, 40–41), also writes: “In the wall paintings from the Black Room of the Augustan villa of Boscotrecase, Egyptianizing images are found in particular places within the painted architectural framework. They do not appear, as is the case with the Ara Pacis, in the central spaces, which are reserved for sacro-idyllic landscapes and mythological scenes in a comparatively Hellenizing style, but are pictorial framing devices and evocative ancillary elements.” The yellow panels surmounting a central candelabrum recall Egyptian motifs, and the swans, which seem to appear in an arrangement similar to that in the Ara Pacis, could represent Augustus and his family: Trimble 2007, 40–42. See also Anderson 1987–88; Clarke 1991; Farlow 2016, with relevant bibliography.
9. On the villa of Herodes Atticus, see G. Spyropoulos 1995; T. Spyropoulos 1996–97, 34–38; G. Spyropoulos 2001; T. Spyropoulos 2003; G. Spyropoulos 2006a; G. Spyropoulos 2006b; G. Spyropoulos 2009; M. E. Gorrini in Calandra and Adembri 2014, 64–70, nos. 43–47; Neudecker 2014; G. Spyropoulos 2015a, 392–95, with additional bibliography; G. Spyropoulos 2015b, 432–36; Rogers 2021, 98–108.
10. See Anderson 1987–88, 7.
11. G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 48–49.
12. G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 34–58.
13. G. Spyropoulos 2009, 23–33; Strazdins 2012; Montalto 2013; Butz 2015, 82–97.
14. Oppen 2008.

15. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, 70.AA.109, <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/6549/unknown-maker-statue-of-hercules-lansdowne-herakles-roman-about-ad-125/>. On Skopas, see also G. Spyropoulos 2010.
16. Corridors and porticoes are found among the villas of Campania destroyed by the eruption of AD 79. Both types are also represented in wall paintings of the same period. Some villas have two wings at right angles, or even three, like the villa at Eva (Loukou), when they begin to resemble the old peristyle type again; see Robertson 1959, 312.
17. MacDonald 1986, 114, 135.
18. See McKay 1977; MacDonald 1986, 135, 172.
19. Swoboda 1924.
20. McKay 1977, 115.
21. Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli comprised "palaces, large and small, a guest hostel, basilica, pavilion, dining-rooms, baths, a library, porticoes, . . . pools, servants' quarters, a stadium, *cryptoportici*, a palaestra, a vaulted temple of Serapis, and a complex of elongated pool and *triclinia* intended to recall Alexandria's Canopus with overtones of Antinous, his lost beloved" (McKay 1977, 132). The villa of Nero at Sublaqueum (Subiaco) seems to be a bold forerunner of this scheme. It was designed as an inland *villa maritima*, and the river was dammed to create an artificial lake; see Blake 1959, 41–42.
22. Rogers (2018, 173–92) rightly argues that there were similarities in the use of fountains among the two villa structures, especially in large, open-air spaces, courtyards, gardens, and dining spaces.
23. See Bruneau 1972; Charbonneaux, Martin, and Villard 1973.
24. See the statues from Lykosura; Kavvadias 1893; Dickins 1905–6, 109–36; Dickins 1906–7, 357–404, plates XII–XIV, figs. 1–25.
25. A *nymphaeum* that featured two layers of eleven niches arranged in a semicircle was also built by Herodes Atticus at Olympia. The lower niches featured sculptures of the imperial family, and the upper contained sculptures of Herodes's family in a slightly smaller scale. See Bol 1984; Gleason 2010, 131–32. On the portraits, see G. Spyropoulos 2006a; G. Spyropoulos 2015b, 432–36.
26. Trimble 2007, 11.
27. See G. Spyropoulos 2016, in which the villa of Herodes Atticus is used as a point of departure to examine the presence and influence of the cosmos in the architectural design and decorative details of Greco-Roman residential architecture.
28. For a plan of the island enclosure at Hadrian's Villa, see MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 82, fig. 95; Davies 2000, 91, fig. 71. Of the enclosure, MacDonald and Pinto (1995, 89), state: "It is hard to resist the notion that some overriding meaning is expressed here symbolically. . . . We leave questions of possible cosmological references to others, but observe that this ingenious geometrical web and its circular government, with powers of implied radial expansion, could have had ideal connotations, could carry within it those strong implications of celestial shapes and paths found in other Roman art and architecture." According to Davies (2000, 90), "Some scholars disagree over the building's function and prototype. Some characterize it as the emperor's retreat from the world, with a prototype in Plato's description of Atlantis . . . or Herod the Great's circular palace at Herodium."
29. Here was found the portrait of Lucius Ceionius Commodus, whom Hadrian publicly adopted as his chosen successor and was introduced into the Domus Augusta with the official title Aelius Caesar; see Galli 2017; see also G. Spyropoulos 2006b, 28.
30. G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 129–30, fig. 33; G. Spyropoulos 2015b, 436.
31. G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 129. The best parallel is a portrait of Severus Alexander in Seville; see Goette 1989, 203; Leon 2001, 26, fig. 3.
32. G. Spyropoulos 2006b, 89–130. In Hadrian's Villa, archaeologists found the remains of a substantial structure consisting of two small facing temple buildings in front of a large semicircular exedra. Fragments of Egyptian-like sculptures, as well as remnants of the outer walls of the temples with hieroglyphic inscriptions, leave no doubt that this was a sanctuary for Antinous himself; see Oppen 2008, 181, fig. 160.
33. It presents small rooms, paved and decorated with marble slabs. The luxury and wealth of the installation are to be seen in the abundant use of materials such as white marble slabs, onyx, *lapis lazuli*, and *rosso antico*; the more valuable and costly materials were probably used only as fillets between the marble slabs, which covered the pavements and walls of the various parts of the bath complex; see G. Spyropoulos 1995.
34. See G. Spyropoulos 2006b; G. Spyropoulos 2009.
35. I discussed Herodes's extravagant grief in detail in my lecture at the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene, on December 8, 2017, "The Emergence of the Multifarious, Highly-Gifted, Intellectually Curious, Intertextual, Self-Ironizing and Destructive, yet Romanticised Personality of Herodes Atticus from the Subtle Echoes of His Estate at Eva/Loukou Kynourias." See also G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 183–222; G. Spyropoulos 2009, 20; Strazdins 2012, 190.
36. Tobin 1997, 248–49; on Herodes's extravagant mourning, see also Gleason 2010, 157–62.
37. Strazdins 2012, 105.
38. In the *Iliad*, for example, Achilles, having been overwhelmed with grief upon the death of Patroclus, lies down in the dirt, tears at his hair, and wails a terrible cry. An angry grief that surrounds the death of Hektor is also demonstrated by Priam himself. Kramer-Hajos 2015, 638–49; see also T. Spyropoulos

1974, 9–33, and G. Spyropoulos 2018, 197–201, with the relevant bibliography. Emotions being displayed through exaggeratedly expressive faces and gestures are best evidenced in the Hellenistic period, in such works as the sculptural groups of Menelaus and Achilles, both of which decorated the villa of Herodes Atticus. On the groups, see Havelock 1971, 116–44; Pollitt 1986; Smith 1991.

39. Strazdins 2012, 105.
40. G. Spyropoulos 2006a; G. Spyropoulos 2006b; G. Spyropoulos 2009; G. Spyropoulos 2015b; Strazdins 2012, 187. A detailed comparison with the *nymphaeum* of Herodes at Olympia, where changes to the statues and the addition of the *monopteron* (*monopteroi*) in the basin occurred, boost the argument for the transformation of the exedra into a commemorative family monument; see also G. Spyropoulos 2006a; G. Spyropoulos 2006b; on the Heroon of Antinous, see Papaioannou 2018, 346–48.
41. See G. Spyropoulos 2006a; G. Spyropoulos 2006b; Lambert 1984, 1–7. For the appearance of the Antinoeum, see Kaehler 1958, 248–50.
42. G. Spyropoulos 2006a, 183–222; Strazdins 2012, 184–91.
43. Leviticus 26:31.
44. Jews mourning the Roman victory in Judaea (as well as other conquered peoples) are depicted on coins. See Meshorer 1982; Brin 1986; Foss 1990; Cody 2003, 103–23; Levick 2005; Rosso 2005.
45. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.32, 3, 6; Smallwood 1962, 131–33; Eck, Holder, and Pangerl 2010, 194.
46. Graetz 1885, 22–23.
47. Smallwood 1962, 131–33; Bauckham 2015, 92–94.
48. Trimble 2007, 46.
49. Trimble 2007, 43.

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# “To Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento”: Privately Dedicated Egyptian Obelisks in Imperial Rome and the Twin Obelisks of Benevento Reedited

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*[...] sunt enim gemini obelisci beneventani [...] magno in pretio habendi.*

—Luigi Maria Ungarelli, 1842

When we think of Egyptian obelisks and ancient Rome, what immediately comes to mind are the large monoliths, inscribed with hieroglyphs, that the Romans relocated from Egypt to their imperial capital city, monuments that were already ancient at the time of their removal, having originally been erected by Egyptian pharaohs in the second and first millennia BC.<sup>1</sup> But besides these ancient monuments, obelisks of two other kinds were erected by Roman emperors. The first type consists of uninscribed obelisks, valued for their mass and devoid of any kind of hieroglyphic inscriptions, with the most renowned example being the Vatican obelisk, now standing at the center of Piazza San Pietro.<sup>2</sup> The other, and probably the most intriguing kind, comprises obelisks with

hieroglyphic inscriptions expressly commissioned and dedicated by Roman emperors, sporting texts composed for the occasion in Middle Egyptian—that is, the archaic, classical phase of the Egyptian language, which had fallen out of common use already in the second millennium BC but was traditionally still employed in Egypt, on account of its historical prestige, for monumental hieroglyphic inscriptions. Two such inscribed Roman obelisks are known today:<sup>3</sup> the Pamphili obelisk, erected by Domitian (r. AD 81–96) and now in Piazza Navona, with texts celebrating the emperor and the Flavian dynasty, and the Barberini obelisk, carved by order of Hadrian (r. AD 117–38) and now located in the Monte Pincio gardens, with inscriptions focused on the life, death, and deification of his companion Antinous.<sup>4</sup> Egyptian hieroglyphs could therefore be used—albeit exceptionally—in official inscriptions ordered by imperial authority, as an alternative to the two mainstream scripts

(and languages) in which official texts were normally issued across the Roman Empire: Latin and Greek.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps less well known that the erection of obelisks in the Roman Empire did not occur exclusively at the behest of the emperor. Some, of more reduced size than their royally ordered counterparts, were in fact commissioned by influential private citizens with sufficient financial means. Thus, in the year AD 166, under the joint rule of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, a centurion named Titus Aurelius Restitutus dedicated a pair of obelisks in Aswan, at the southern frontier of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Neither of them survives, hence we do not know what these obelisks looked like and whether they were uninscribed or displayed any hieroglyphic texts.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the Latin inscription carved on the base of one of the two—which is all that survives of these monuments—makes it clear that these two obelisks (*oboliscos duos*, l. 4) were erected by Restitutus to Jupiter and at least another deity (the text is lacunose, but this must have been either Juno—as is most likely—or Isis) “[for] the health and victory of our emperors” (*[pro] salute et victoria imp(eratorum) n(ostrorum)*, l. 2), seemingly a reference to their recent victory in the Parthian war.<sup>8</sup>

Luckily, there are also cases in which privately commissioned obelisks, and not just their pedestals, have survived into our times. In some instances they could be decorated with so-called pseudo-hieroglyphic inscriptions. Examples include a small obelisk now in Florence,<sup>9</sup> which carries an incomprehensible text formed by a patchwork of phrases and individual hieroglyphic signs in most cases inspired by genuine earlier Egyptian inscriptions, and a fragment of another obelisk, this time in Benevento,<sup>10</sup> in which the carvings intended to represent hieroglyphs are purely fanciful signs, having no actual direct resemblance or connection to the ancient Egyptian script.<sup>11</sup> Less frequently, however, these private obelisks could also be decorated with meaningful hieroglyphic inscriptions, bearing texts expressly commissioned for the occasion, as a nonroyal counterpart to imperial commissions such as the Pamphili and Barberini obelisks cited above. The fragmentary Borgia and Albani obelisks and the much better preserved twin obelisks of Benevento belong to this remarkable category, and it is on these monuments that the present paper will focus.<sup>12</sup> Before delving into a closer analysis of these monuments, however, a methodological issue needs to be addressed.

When it comes to ancient Rome’s interest in all things Egyptian, modern scholarship has typically traced a clear line between actual “Egyptian” antiquities that the

Romans imported from Egypt (be they statues, reliefs, obelisks, or other artifacts) and “Egyptianizing” objects produced in Italy to emulate Egyptian products. Running in parallel to this classification, a similar distinction has also been drawn between those monuments that bear legible, meaningful hieroglyphic inscriptions and those that sport illegible pseudo-hieroglyphs. This is a classification imposed by modern scholars upon the ancient evidence, however, and would not have been necessarily valid in the eyes of the Romans. Recently Molly Swetnam-Burland has convincingly argued that such a rigid taxonomy can actually be misleading when trying to understand Roman interest in and approaches to ancient Egyptian culture and its artistic production, since it risks uprooting the objects from their historical context and therefore fails to grasp their cultural biographies.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when dealing with Roman obelisks, we should not necessarily assume that monuments inscribed with legible hieroglyphic texts such as those of Benevento appeared intrinsically more Egyptian to a Roman audience than those covered in pseudo-hieroglyphs, like the Florentine specimen. No Roman citizen—and very few native Egyptians, to be sure—would have been able to read a hieroglyphic inscription, be it genuine or “gibberish,” and thus its value would have been primarily symbolic, through the connection that (pseudo-)hieroglyphs established with ancient Egypt and its traditions, real or perceived. It is therefore only apt that, when referring to a hieroglyphic text written on a papyrus scroll, Apuleius should use the phrase *litterae ignorabiles*, or “unknown characters,” in his novel of Isiac salvation.<sup>14</sup>

While accepting this framework, I would, however, argue that Roman obelisks inscribed with legible hieroglyphic texts—be they imperial or private commissions—still occupy a distinct place in the study of Roman *aegyptiaca*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, they invite us to push our criticism even further and to question the common equivalences often implicitly traced in modern scholarship between: (a) original Egyptian imports = legible hieroglyphs and (b) Egyptianizing monuments = pseudo-hieroglyphs. Since they were commissioned by Roman patrons and, at least in some cases, were carved in Italy (likely examples include the Borgia and Albani obelisks, discussed below, but also Domitian’s Pamphili obelisk),<sup>16</sup> they have generally been regarded as Egyptianizing artifacts. Yet, rather than being covered in pseudo-hieroglyphs, they make a creative use of the ancient Egyptian language and script and thus attest to the evolution of Roman as much as of Egyptian royal ideology and religious thought: for the Roman emperor was ultimately also Egypt’s pharaoh, and the only individuals able to produce hieroglyphic

inscriptions at the time were members of the Egyptian priesthood. These monuments thus operated simultaneously on two levels. Surely they held an immediate symbolic function associating them with Egypt and the perceived lore of its ancient traditions, as did any other Egyptianizing artifact. But on top of this they also communicated a specific, programmatic message in their inscriptions. In them, to quote Swetnam-Burland, there is no dichotomy between an Egyptian “creation” and a Roman “reuse”; nor is there a competition between a “symbolic” and a “literal” meaning: for their creation was simultaneously Egyptian and Roman, and their meaning was intended from the start to work on both a symbolic and a literal level.<sup>17</sup>

We must also remember that these obelisks’ inscriptions were not written purely according to the whimsy of Egyptian priests. Far from it, they were prepared following the instructions of their powerful dedicators, based at least in part on original drafts in Greek or Latin, and their preparation surely must have entailed a serious investment of money and time, which was bound to be much bigger than anything required for comparable *aegyptiaca* that were instead covered in gibberish inscriptions. Necessarily, the Roman sponsors of such inscribed monuments were therefore fully conscious of the specific meaning of the hieroglyphic carvings incorporated into their dedications and would have had an interest in advertising it. In fact, I even wonder whether the hieroglyphic inscriptions of these novel obelisks would have been made accessible to the Roman public, at least in some cases, by means of Latin translations. These need not necessarily have been published as accompanying epigraphs to the obelisks—something of which we have no evidence—but could have been easily circulated in other, more perishable forms, perhaps as opuscula. To be sure, we do know that at least one Greek version of the hieroglyphic inscriptions of an Egyptian obelisk dating to pharaonic antiquity and reerected in Rome by Augustus (r. 27 BC–AD 14)—the Flaminio obelisk—existed and was read in antiquity.<sup>18</sup> If translations of the inscriptions of ancient pharaonic obelisks reerected in Roman Italy could be published and disseminated, mostly as an erudite curiosity, would it not make all the more sense to suppose that something alike was done for obelisks containing custom-made inscriptions immortalizing living figures—be they the reigning emperor and/or a private dedicator—who had an active interest in having the details of their Egyptian architectural feats known? After all, modesty and subtlety were not virtues in which the Romans of the imperial age excelled.

All of the above is what makes these artifacts both Roman and Egyptian from the very moment of their conception and thus objects worthy of investigation for the Roman historian and the Egyptologist alike. It is thus no surprise that inscribed Roman obelisks should attract special attention among scholars and that the detailed study of their inscriptions and the information carried therein should be a key component in their historical assessment. This is why I feel justified in singling out these artifacts as pertaining to a specific and indeed important class among *aegyptiaca* and in devoting a study to a particular subgroup among them—that of inscribed Roman obelisks dedicated by private individuals. So let us now discuss the actual specimens of this corpus, that is, the Borgia, Albani, and, in special detail, Benevento obelisks.

## The Borgia and Albani Obelisks

These two red granite obelisks, of which only fragments survive, are preserved in museum collections in Palestrina and Naples (Borgia)<sup>19</sup> and in Munich (Albani).<sup>20</sup> According to their inscriptions—which, as expected, were drawn up in Middle Egyptian—they were both dedicated by the same individual, a Titus Sextius Africanus,<sup>21</sup> but the badly damaged state in which they survive means that we can hardly say anything more about them, apart from the fact that they were probably erected in the first century AD in honor of an emperor whose name and titles partly survive in fragmentary cartouches. Scholars normally recognize this emperor as Claudius (r. AD 41–54), but this remains uncertain, as can immediately be seen from the transliterations and translations of the inscriptions.<sup>22</sup>

### Borgia Obelisk

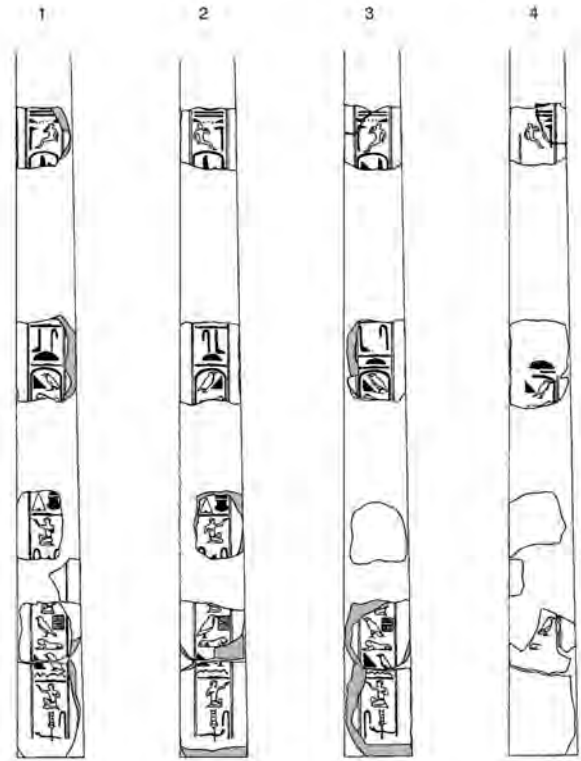
(Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Palestrina and Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 7.1** Borgia obelisk, the two upper fragments. 1st century AD. Granite, H: 0.63 and 0.47 m. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Palestrina, inv. 80548; E 19. Photograph courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Palestrina



**Figure 7.2** Borgia obelisk, the lower section. 1st century AD. Granite, H: 1.9 m. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 2317. Photograph courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



**Figure 7.3** Borgia obelisk, facsimile of the inscriptions (after Bove 2008, 89)



**Figure 7.4** Borgia obelisk, standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)

**Transliteration**

[. . .] 'nb` t3.wy s3 ntr 'KI [. . .] Sbsts  
 K3'R [. . .] Tits 'Sks [ts] 3prk3ns s'h<sup>c</sup>=f  
 <sw>

**Translation**

[...] the Lord of the Two Lands, the Son of the God, ... [...] the Augustus, ... [...].  
 (As for) Titus Sex[tius] Africanus, he erected <it> (sc., this obelisk).<sup>24</sup>

# Albani Obelisk

(Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich)

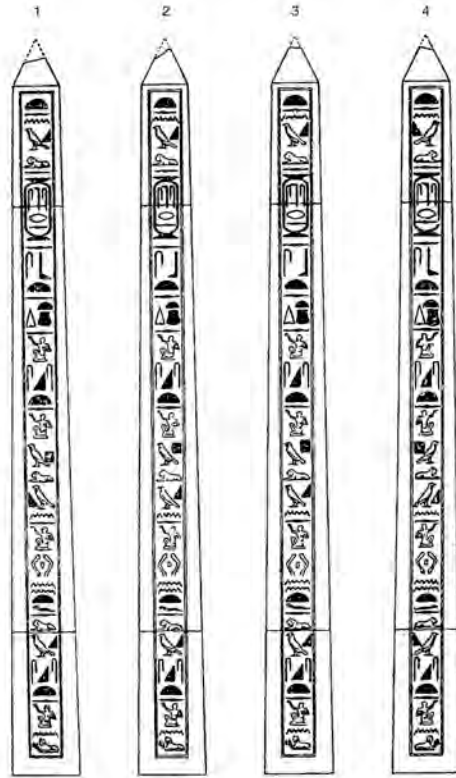


Figure 7.6 Albani obelisk, facsimile of the inscriptions (after Müller 1975, 16)

Figure 7.5 Albani obelisk. 1st century AD. Granite, H of ancient section: 3.2 m; H as restored: 5.5 m. Munich, Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, inv. Gl. WAF 39. Photograph courtesy of Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst







Figure 7.7 Albani obelisk, standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)


### Transliteration

[. . . K] YS`RS Sbts Tits Sksts 3prk3ns  
 shn.n{.t}=fs(w) r [. . .]

### Translation

[... C]AESAR, the Augustus. (As for) Titus Sextius Africanus, he dedicated it  
 (sc., this obelisk)<sup>25</sup> ... [...]

The name of Claudius has been reconstructed from the Borgia fragments, which bear at the beginning of their second cartouche the signs   K3`R [ . . . ]. In modern studies, these have typically been interpreted as K`L 3[ . . . ] (the sign of the recumbent lion  having both the phonetic value r and l), hence Claudius.<sup>26</sup> In parallel, scholars have read in the Borgia fragments' first cartouche only the sign  i, typically understanding this 7[ . . . ] to be the beginning of the title *autokrator* (i.e., emperor).<sup>27</sup>


It was only recently that Elisa Valeria Bove highlighted that the top part of a  k seemingly also survives in the first cartouche, which she thus read 7KI [ . . . ] and considered to be a writing of Caius (hence assigning the obelisks to the reign of Caligula—r. AD 37–41—rather than Claudius) or, alternatively, of the generic imperial title Caesar.<sup>28</sup> As for the second cartouche, she understood K3`R [ . . . ] as 3<WT>K`R [TR], that is, as part of a defective writing for *autokrator*.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Bove's new epigraphic record of the Borgia fragments held in Palestrina is correct: as a new inspection of the section has confirmed, the reading 7KI [ . . . ] in the first cartouche is indisputable.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, I find Bove's understanding of K3`R [ . . . ] as a heavily defective writing of *autokrator* to be deeply unlikely. For all we know, and on account of the peculiar forms that Egyptian royal titularies can take in Roman inscriptions such as this, K3`R [ . . . ] might, in fact, even pertain to an unusual writing of the title Germanicus.<sup>31</sup> Overall, I think it is impossible to state with any degree of certainty which emperor was originally named in these cartouches, which is why I leave their content unread in my translation.

Similar uncertainty has also affected the understanding of the private dedicator's name. Most interpreters agree on seeing in the inscriptions' *Tits Sksts 3prk3ns* a rendering of Latin Titus Sextius Africanus,<sup>32</sup> but others have suggested transliterating the *cognomen* as *P3Bkns* and reading in it Palicanus, a name already attested in the epigraphy of Palestrina.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, based on the order in which

the signs most frequently occur on both the Borgia and the Albani obelisks, I am of the opinion that Africanus remains the preferable reading.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps more remarkably, the very relationship between the two obelisks is uncertain. They were undoubtedly commissioned by the same patron (whose name appears, identically, on both monoliths) and carved in the same workshop (their epigraphy is the same). Since the fragments of the Borgia obelisk were unearthed in Palestrina (ancient Praeneste), however, while the Albani obelisk section is thought to originate from Rome, it has generally been assumed that they were not twin obelisks erected at the same site.<sup>35</sup> This may well be the case, but I believe it is also possible that both were originally a pair in Palestrina and that one of the two was moved, in antiquity or later, to nearby Rome.<sup>36</sup>

The discovery of the Palestrina fragments in the area of the sanctuary to Fortuna Primigenia (and the known assimilation between this goddess and Isis) has also led a number of scholars to suggest a connection between these two obelisks and the cult of Isis.<sup>37</sup> As attractive and plausible as this view is, it must remain, however, only a hypothesis, for sadly no mention of any Egyptian deity, let alone of Isis, survives in either of the obelisks' inscriptions.

To complete this brief overview of the Borgia and Albani obelisks, a few words ought to be devoted to the nature of their hieroglyphic inscriptions. From an epigraphic viewpoint, they present a number of idiosyncrasies (recurrent inversions of signs and awkwardly shaped hieroglyphs—note especially the unusual width of the  t sign in most of its occurrences) that are generally believed to be diagnostic of hieroglyphic inscriptions carved in Italy rather than in Egypt, by craftsmen who were not conversant with the traditional proportions of the signs that they were reproducing.<sup>38</sup> Also remarkable are some peculiarities in the text of the inscriptions, like the choice of the unusual phrase *s3 ntr* “the Son of the God” in lieu of the traditional pharaonic epithets used to introduce the

cartouches,<sup>39</sup> and some apparent syntactic oddities, such as the name of the dedicator being anticipated before a verb in the suffix-conjugation and (in the case of the Borgia obelisk) the absence of a direct object referring to the obelisk. In consideration of the poor condition in which both obelisks and their texts survive, it is hard to pass a firm judgment, and surely the perplexities of scholars who saw in these inscriptions a corrupt use of Middle Egyptian, influenced by the rules of Latin syntax, are in part justifiable. As I argued before, however, I do not share these perplexities,<sup>40</sup> and I still believe that the texts of both obelisks can be explained in terms of standard Egyptian grammar (even despite the seeming omission of the direct object in the Borgia obelisk). Whatever our judgment of the linguistic quality of these inscriptions, their texts must have been composed by an Egyptian priest, after some general instructions in Latin or Greek prepared according to Africanus's wishes. Said priest would have been the only available professional figure with a knowledge of Middle Egyptian, the archaic language phase traditionally used for such monumental inscriptions, and of the hieroglyphic script.<sup>41</sup> I would therefore be inclined to ascribe any issues found in the inscriptions to the Roman carver(s) and their potential misunderstandings (and/or omissions) of the signs that they were meant to reproduce on the stone rather than to the Egyptian priest's linguistic competence.

When it comes to the content of the texts of these obelisks, two defining elements stand out, despite their fragmentary condition. The first is the mention of the emperor, which almost certainly occurred in the context of a celebration of the reigning monarch.<sup>42</sup> The second is the identity of the private patron who dedicated the obelisks, that is, Titus Sextius Africanus. As we will see shortly, these two elements are essential components in the inscriptions of privately dedicated inscribed Roman obelisks, and they both feature prominently also in the more complex texts of the twin obelisks of Benevento.

## The Benevento Obelisks

These red granite twin obelisks probably stood in front of the Iseum of Benevento.<sup>43</sup> Compared to the sorry state of the Borgia and Albani obelisks, they are substantially better preserved. One of them, traditionally labeled obelisk A, survives almost in its entirety, missing only its pyramidion, and now stands in a public square of Benevento, Piazza Papiniano. Its full shaft has been reassembled from five fragments,<sup>44</sup> for a combined height of 4.12 meters; once its ancient stepped plinth (which is 0.77 meter high) and the modern pyramidion (0.5 meter) are also included, the total is 5.39 meters.<sup>45</sup> Its twin,

obelisk B, lacks the upper third of its shaft, including its pyramidion. The remainder has been reassembled from two fragments, reaching a combined height of 2.8 meters or, with the inclusion of its ancient plinth (which is 0.7 meter high), of 3.5 meters.<sup>46</sup> It is now preserved in Benevento's Museo del Sannio (inv. 1916).<sup>47</sup> Since the original bases of both obelisks are preserved, it is interesting to note that neither shows any kind of inscribed dedication in Latin (or Greek).<sup>48</sup> This is unlike the case of the Aswan obelisks dedicated by Titus Aurelius Restitutus, at least one of which bore a Latin inscription on its plinth, elucidating the reason for their dedication and the identity of their commissioner. The bases of the Borgia and Albani obelisks are not extant; hence we do not know how they would have compared.

From their Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions, we learn that the Benevento obelisks were erected as part of the construction of the city's Iseum by a local notable, whose name was Rutilius Lupus,<sup>49</sup> in the eighth year of the reign of Emperor Domitian, that is, in AD 88/89.<sup>50</sup> They were dedicated to Isis in celebration of the emperor, seemingly to commemorate his successful return from a military expedition, if we understand the text correctly (more on this in the following commentary, note 10 to side 2).

These twin obelisks, or fragments thereof, have been known to scholars since the early days of Egyptology.<sup>51</sup> The first full scientific treatment appeared shortly after the discovery, in 1892, of the top section of obelisk A, which finally restored this obelisk's inscription to its original length and provided a complete text for these twin monuments. Thus, in 1893 Adolf Erman and Ernesto Schiaparelli independently published two studies of the inscriptions.<sup>52</sup> The latter was unfortunately laden with mistakes both in the copying of the hieroglyphs and in the text's translation—as pointed out by Erman in a later, expanded study of the obelisks—and is hence completely superseded.<sup>53</sup> Instead Erman's work—especially his second study, from 1896—is still consulted with profit to this day and in fact remains the only full philological treatment of the inscriptions of both obelisks available to date. Other complete translations of the obelisks' texts have appeared since Erman's, but in these cases scholars have generally preferred simply to translate the complete inscriptions of obelisk A, noting the few passages that diverge from those of B.<sup>54</sup> Such translations have been produced by various authors, including Hans W. Müller,<sup>55</sup> Michel Malaise,<sup>56</sup> Erik Iversen,<sup>57</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer,<sup>58</sup> Vito A. Sirago,<sup>59</sup> Rosanna Pirelli,<sup>60</sup> Marina R. Torelli,<sup>61</sup> Laurent Bricault,<sup>62</sup> Kristine Bülow Clausen,<sup>63</sup> and the present writer.<sup>64</sup> In many cases, however, these and other





**Figure 7.8** Benevento obelisk A, view from the southeast. AD 88/89. Granite, H: 5.39 m. Benevento, Piazza Papiniano. Photograph by Luigi Prada (29 July 2020)



**Figure 7.9** Benevento obelisk B, following conservation in 2017–18. AD 88/89. Granite, H of ancient section: 3.5 m; H as restored: 5.2 m. Benevento, Museo del Sannio, inv. 1916. Photograph by Paul D. Wordsworth (29 July 2020)

authors—a number of whom were not Egyptologists but ancient historians—were unable or unwilling to engage directly with the original hieroglyphic texts and thus reproduced more or less verbatim earlier translations, relying mainly on those by Erman, Müller, Malaise, and Iversen, with varying degrees of success.<sup>65</sup> The resulting situation, with multiple and significantly divergent published translations, many of which depend on secondary literature, has—understandably—engendered confusion and many a misconception as to the exact content of the inscriptions, contributing to the problems that we are still facing in making sense of them.

Perhaps the clearest example of such a potential for confusion concerns a problematic phrase found in the inscriptions,  $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{w}d3 \text{ini}$ , the interpretation of which can radically change our understanding of the text.<sup>66</sup> Whereas Erman, Müller, and Malaise understand it as an allusion to the safe return of Domitian from a military expedition, Iversen instead sees in it a title of the obelisk's

dedicator, namely, an Egyptian rendering of the Latin word *legatus*. The two interpretations are mutually exclusive. Yet they can be found merged as if mutually compatible in later studies that depend on these scholars' publications, which results in a complete misrepresentation of the ancient evidence.<sup>67</sup> Nor is this the only problematic and disputed passage in the inscriptions: divergent readings, for instance, also impact the name of the dedicator, as we will see in the commentary below.

It is on account of such difficulties with the text and of the increasing interest that *aegyptiaca* (and *Isiaca*) like these obelisks are enjoying in present scholarship—among Egyptologists and scholars of the classical world alike—that I think it not only worthwhile but also necessary to offer a reedition of the inscriptions of these obelisks.<sup>68</sup> This reedition provides a new standardized copy of the hieroglyphic text, a new translation, and, for the first time, also a transliteration of the Egyptian original (for

the reader's convenience, the transliteration and translation are offered again, as a continuous text, in appendix A). It draws together more than a century of relevant scholarship and its often wildly divergent interpretations of the inscriptions, sieves through these different layers of understandings (and misunderstandings), and offers a commentary that intends to be relevant and accessible to scholars from both academic backgrounds—Egyptology and ancient history—trying to make crucial issues of Egyptian language and epigraphy that directly impinge on the meaning of the text understandable also to nonspecialists.<sup>69</sup> My ultimate aim is that such a study will clear the slate from a series of misconceptions about these monuments, present (and justify) the best possible readings, and clarify what we can understand for sure from the inscriptions and what instead remains problematic or hypothetical. Thus, it will hopefully become a platform for colleagues to engage with and from which to develop further studies on these unique obelisks.

Another contribution of this study is a new, improved epigraphic copy of the obelisks' inscriptions, combined with detailed photographic documentation (for which, see appendix C). Originally my research took as a starting point Erman's published facsimiles, which were derived from squeezes (paper molds) taken from the originals and had consequently always been assumed to be reliable epigraphic records.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, none of the intervening studies since Erman's time have ever looked again at the original epigraphy. In a good number of instances, however, it became apparent to me that his copies—albeit admirable for the time and circumstances in which they had been created—are inexact, something that I could definitively confirm when I inspected the obelisks in person. Thus, I have provided a new facsimile of the inscriptions (as an edited version of Erman's), following a study of newly captured digital images and, most importantly, a collation with the originals. Specifically, I inspected both obelisks during a visit to Benevento in July 2020, having previously already examined obelisk B in August 2018, on the occasion of the exhibition *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

While highlighting issues with Erman's copy, this new epigraphic study has simultaneously confirmed, however, how valuable his and other historic documentation of these obelisks remain. First, it revealed that some of the details inaccurately reproduced in Erman's facsimile—concerning both the inscriptions and the position of the fractures between the different obelisks' fragments—are

instead correctly registered in a much earlier copy, the first modern epigraphic record of the Benevento obelisks, which was published in 1842 by Luigi Ungarelli.<sup>71</sup> Though itself not exempt from mistakes, this earlier record turns out to be at times more faithful to the original and possibly also to preserve details of the inscriptions that had become damaged or lost half a century later, in Erman's time. Albeit long forgotten, Ungarelli's copy is therefore still worth consulting.<sup>72</sup> Second, this new epigraphic survey has also shown that both obelisks suffered considerable damage sometime during the twentieth century, I believe during World War II (through the heavy bombings to which Benevento was subjected and/or the occupation of the city by the Allies in 1943). Especially in the lower section of obelisk B (which, at the time, was standing outdoors in Piazza Papiniano, wrongly combined with the upper fragments of obelisk A), several and substantial parts of the inscriptions that were still extant in Erman's time are, sadly, now lost.<sup>73</sup> Nineteenth-century copies like Ungarelli's and Erman's therefore remain an irreplaceable asset to modern scholars.

To conclude, I offer here a few practical notes about the following reedition. Any particularly significant difference between Ungarelli's and Erman's copies and, more importantly, between Erman's facsimile and my own will be discussed individually in the textual commentary. The reader will also find a systematic overview of such differences in appendix B, which, on the one hand, compares Ungarelli's and Erman's copies and, on the other, highlights the points of Erman's facsimile that I was able to correct or improve upon. I made the conscious choice not to mark in my new facsimile damage that has occurred since the time of Erman, for this would have entailed the obliteration of a significant amount of epigraphic information, especially for obelisk B. My copy is therefore not a facsimile of the monuments in their present condition but rather a corrected and enhanced copy of Erman's, closely documenting these artifacts in their end-of-nineteenth-century state. Any modern damage, however, is fully recorded and can be observed in the photographic documentation published here, which was taken at the Getty in 2017 (obelisk B) and in Benevento in 2020 (obelisk A). Such damage is also flagged, whenever appropriate, in the textual commentary.

My standardized copy of the hieroglyphic texts is the first published since Erman's 1896 study. To assist the reader and intuitively show my interpretation of the inscription, the mutual positioning of some signs has been reordered, in those cases in which inversions or odd arrangements occur in the original. Whenever my standardized

hieroglyphic transcription significantly disagrees with Erman's, this is flagged in the commentary.

This reedition follows the traditional order in which the inscriptions have been numbered since Erman's first study, moving clockwise around the obelisks beginning from the side containing the royal titulary of Domitian.<sup>74</sup> This face is generally considered to come first, since its inscriptions are the only ones mirroring each other in terms of the orientation of their hieroglyphs, with obelisk A's signs facing right and B's signs facing left.<sup>75</sup> All other sides have their inscriptions facing right, according to the preferred direction of Egyptian indigenous scripts. Indeed, I believe we can suggest a further, in this case ideological, reason why side 1 must have taken pride of place and faced the visitors who approached the temple: for it is the only face of the monoliths that names and celebrates exclusively the emperor, Domitian, while making no mention of the private dedicator, whose name instead appears, repeatedly but less prominently, on the other three sides of each obelisk.

Finally, while obelisk B is located in a museum and its sides are therefore not permanently related to the

cardinal points, it is worth recording the approximate orientation of the faces of obelisk A, in its current setting in Piazza Papiniano. This is as follows: 1 = south side; 2 = west side; 3 = north side; 4 = east side.

## ***Commented reedition of the inscriptions on the Benevento obelisks***

### **Side 1**

#### ***Summary***

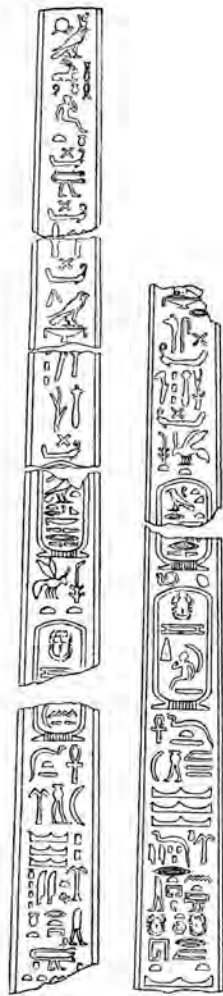
The focus is on the celebration of Emperor Domitian. It includes his full royal titulary in traditional Egyptian style, that is, his five names,<sup>76</sup> followed by a reference to his military might as displayed by the tributes gathered in Rome from all over the empire and even from beyond its borders. The mention of his military feats may be either generic praise or a precise allusion to the emperor's return from his Dacian and Germanic campaigns in AD 89.



**Figure 7.10** Benevento obelisk A, side 1 (orthophotograph). Photograph and imaging by Paul D. Wordsworth (2020)



**Figure 7.11** Benevento obelisk B, side 1 (photograph, prior to conservation). Photograph courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2017)



**Figure 7.12** Benevento obelisks, facsimile of inscriptions A/1 and B/1 (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)



**Figure 7.13** Benevento obelisks, synoptic standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions A/1 and B/1 (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)

### Obelisk A (Piazza Papiniano)<sup>77</sup>

↓→ Hr ḥwn n<ḥ>t(?) <nb.ty> itī 'm šhm' bik nbw 'wsr rnp.w(t)' ʕ3 nḥt  
<nsw.t bi.ty> ʕW TḲRTR KSRS nsw.t bi.ty T'M T]INS ʕnh d.t ḥbi  
in(.w) m t3.wy ḥ3s.wt m ntyy.w r iy.t=f n.t ḥnw [Hr]'m'

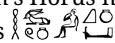



The Horus “Str<o>ng(?) Youth,” <the Two Ladies> “He Who Conquers through Might,” the Golden Falcon “Powerful of Years and Great of Triumph,” <the King of Upper and Lower Egypt> EMPEROR CAESAR, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt DOMI[T]IAN, ever-living, he who collects tribute from the Two Lands and the subjugated foreign countries to his sanctuary(?) of the capital city, [Ro]me.

### Obelisk B (Museo del Sannio)

←↓ [ . . ] 'bik' nbw wsr rnp.w(t) ʕ3 nḥt nsw.t bi.ty  
ʕW TḲRT[R] K'YS'RS s3 R'c TMTINS ʕnh d.t ḥbi in(.w)  
m t3.wy ḥ3s.wt m ndy.w r iy.t=f n.t ḥnw Hrm


[...] the Golden Falcon “Powerful of Years and Great of Triumph,” the King of Upper and Lower Egypt EMPERO[R] CAESAR, the Son of Re DOMITIAN, ever-living, he who collects tribute from the Two Lands and the subjugated foreign countries to his sanctuary(?) of the capital city, Rome.

## Notes


(1)  $n<h>t(?)$ : The text has *nt*, which makes no sense. As Domitian's Horus name appears in his Pamphili obelisk, side 1, as  *hwn kn* "Valorous Youth,"<sup>78</sup> most interpreters have quite radically emended our inscription's  $nt \triangle \circ$  into  $kn \circ \Delta$ ,<sup>79</sup> a reading that has the additional advantage of connecting Domitian's Horus name with that of earlier Ptolemaic rulers, confirming a link observed elsewhere in his titulary.<sup>80</sup> Overall, the royal titulary of Domitian as it appears in the Pamphili and Benevento obelisks is, however, significantly different; hence there is no reason to consider the Pamphili obelisk's version as a necessary parallel here. Neither is yet another variant to this Horus name, *hwn nfr* "Perfect Youth" (found in Domitian's titulary in the temple of Dush), particularly helpful.<sup>81</sup> Another reading proposed in earlier scholarship suggests understanding our *nt* as a writing of  $nt(r) <ntry>$  "Divine," but this must certainly be excluded on account of phonetic reasons and of the determinatives accompanying this word, , which clearly describe an adjective connected with the ideas of strength/conflict.<sup>82</sup> I therefore prefer tentatively to read these signs as  $n<h>t$ , for this has the advantage of being a substantially less invasive emendation than *kn*, while still matching the concept expressed in the determinatives (*kn* and *nht* are, in fact, virtual synonyms).<sup>83</sup> Note that elsewhere in these inscriptions, *nht* appears in the shorter writings  (below in both A/1 and B/1) and  (A/3).

To be sure, yet another reading could alternatively be proposed: *tn* ( $<tni>$ ), meaning "Distinguished/Honored (Youth)." This suggestion has the advantage of requiring hardly any emendation to the original text: the mutual position of the two signs would simply be inverted, *nt* in lieu of *tn*, and such accidental inversions can occur in these obelisks' inscriptions. The verb *tni* is not normally associated with the determinatives found here in our inscription, however, which is why I ultimately consider this interpretation unlikely.<sup>84</sup>

(2)  $<nb.ty>$ : An accidental omission in A, contra Jürgen von Beckerath, who considers the following *iti m shm* as still part of Domitian's Horus name, thus implying that his Two Ladies name was completely omitted from the inscription.<sup>85</sup>





(3) *iti 'm shm*: This phrase, "He Who Conquers through Might" (despite the damage, *m shm* is clearly recognizable in the writing ) is already found in the titulary of earlier sovereigns, both Ptolemaic (as in the Two Ladies name of Ptolemy I Soter and the Horus name of Ptolemy X Alexander) and Dynastic (as in the Golden Falcon name of


Amenhotep II).<sup>86</sup> In Roman times the preparation of the royal titulary of the ruling pharaoh would still have been the prerogative of members of the Egyptian priesthood.<sup>87</sup> It is thus unsurprising that its authors would often take inspiration from—or even reproduce—earlier titularies, be they of Ptolemaic or even Dynastic date (see also note 4 to this side below).

(4) *wsr rnp.w(t)*: Though damaged in A, the phrase is preserved in B, with a fuller writing of *wsr*. The same Golden Falcon name is attested for Ramesses II (*wsr rnp.wt* ).<sup>88</sup>






Note that a clear crack affects this section of obelisk A on all its four inscribed sides. This was left virtually unmarked in Erman's copy, no doubt due to an accidental omission, which also led him to erroneously state that obelisk A was broken into four, rather than the actual five, fragments.<sup>89</sup> The same crack is instead clearly marked in Ungarelli's earlier copy, though for only three out of the four sides, namely, A/2–4. This is the reason why his copy inaccurately renders *wsr rnp.w(t)* here in A/1 as if intact: surely this was not the case, as confirmed by Georg Zoëga's earlier copy, the first one ever published of the Benevento inscriptions, in 1797.




(5)  $<nsw.t bi.ty>$ : Another accidental omission in A (but correctly present in B). Certainly no text was lost in the lacuna caused by the crack affecting the obelisk at this point,<sup>90</sup> since the top curve of the cartouche is still preserved just above the crack itself, underneath the arm-with-stick determinative (as is partly visible in Erman's drawing and, much more clearly, on the original).

(6) *K'YS'RS*: While obelisk A writes *KSRS*, obelisk B must have used the alternative spelling *KYSRS*, as can be reconstructed despite the lacuna. Indeed B shows the bottom end of three vertical strokes here, on the lower edge of the crack. In Erman's facsimile only one such stroke is recorded, and there are none in Ungarelli's earlier copy. All three are certainly original and not the result of later damage, however, for they were already marked in Zoëga's copy. These three lines can only be the remainders of two reeds and a tall *s*, to the left of which would have stood the now missing final *r* of the preceding title *3WTKRT[R]*, probably as a mouth-seen-sideways sign or even as a small standard mouth, thus:  or  (in context:  or ). Given the space available in the crack, which is quite limited, the signs in this sequence *ys* must have been carved rather small and compact (similar but even somewhat smaller than they are in the writings of the name *Rwtl(y)ys* in A/2–3 and B/4). Curiously, apart from omitting the traces of the three vertical strokes,



Ungarelli's copy shows this title as if still fully preserved in his time, in the writing  *KSRS*. Clearly this cannot have been the case, and Ungarelli must have restored this passage based on A's version. This suspicion is confirmed by a number of other inaccuracies that affect his copy in this area; see, for example, the excessive width of *k* and the presence, above it, of the second *r* of *3WTKRTR*, which are both contradicted by the original.

(7) *nsw.t bi.ty*: Obelisk A wrongly inserts this phrase before Domitian's birth name, in lieu of the expected *s3 R'*, which is instead correctly given by B. Note also the modern damage to the *t* underneath the bee sign (absent from and likely postdating Erman's copy).

(8) *T M [T] INS*: Judging from the size of the lacuna in A, the lost sign was a flat one, namely  *di/ti* (as in A/3–4 and B/4). The child sign  was clearly absent, as suggested both by the lacuna's size, which is too small to accommodate it and, more importantly, by the fact that this is the sole occurrence in both obelisks in which *n* and *s* appear together in the cartouche as . In all other writings of Domitian's name in these obelisks, only one or the other sign appears in this plain form, and it does so always in combination with the child sign, that is, as  or .

The hieroglyphic rendering of Domitian's name as it appears in the Benevento obelisks is unparalleled.<sup>91</sup> The first part, *Tmti*, is unproblematic: it uses signs with values commonly attested in Ptolemaic and Roman times. As for the second half, the child sign is used interchangeably, with the phonetic value *n* (in A/4 and B/1–2) or *s* (in A/2–3, B/3 [with  above it lost in lacuna], and B/4), both of which are commonly attested for this sign.<sup>92</sup> Finally, the moon crescent sign  has troubled a number of interpreters of this writing of Domitian's name. Erman already considered it to stand for *i*,<sup>93</sup> which is indeed the correct reading (through association with Greco-Roman writings of the name for the lunar god Thoth as *i*, for example, ).<sup>94</sup>

(9) *hbi in(.w)*: Both the translations “he who collects” and “he who collected tribute” are possible. This phrase was misunderstood by the early editors of these obelisks; its correct reading was established only in later studies.<sup>95</sup>



(10) *t3.wy*: Written as two small squares in A, , the reading is elucidated by the clearer writing in B, . Iversen understands *ns.ty* “the two thrones,”<sup>96</sup> but this reading is to be excluded, also on account of another occurrence of these square signs here in A/1, in the noun

*hmnw* (written with the place name *Tti-t3.wy*: see note 13 to this side below).<sup>97</sup>

As observed in previous scholarship,<sup>98</sup> the mention of the Two Lands, a traditional name for Egypt in pharaonic inscriptions, can here be understood to designate not simply Egypt but also—from a Roman Weltanschauung—the entirety of the empire.

(11) *m ntyy.w/ndy.w*: Literally, “as subjects.” The standard spelling is *ndy*, but A shows a slightly different phonetic writing for it, *ntyy*, as well as an odd layout of the signs, with *n* placed at the end, rather than at the beginning, of the word (the word is much clearer in B, but problems with its writing clearly occurred here too, since the preposition follows the noun: literally, *ndy.w m*). This is a well-attested phrase, particularly in connection with *h3s.wt*, as in our obelisks.<sup>99</sup>




Traditionally designating the foreign, desert lands outside the Nile Valley—as opposed to *t3.wy*—in our case the subjugated *h3s.wt* can be reconceptualized as the territories beyond the Roman Empire's borders. A number of interpreters understand this mention of gathering tribute from the empire and the enemy territories outside it not as a generic formula celebrating Domitian but as a specific reference to his return from his Dacian and Germanic campaigns in his eighth year, the same year when the obelisks were dedicated.<sup>100</sup> As Frédéric Colin remarks, however, this must remain only a hypothesis, for this phrase concerning the gathering of tribute and the subjugation of foreign lands is a standard topos of pharaonic propaganda, which need not necessarily be tied to specific historical events.<sup>101</sup>


(12) *iy.t*: A problematic word, written consistently in both obelisks as , which past interpreters have either left untranslated<sup>102</sup> or generally understood as designating Domitian's imperial palace in Rome, mainly on account of the house determinative  and of the use of the possessive “his.”<sup>103</sup> In fact, a word *iy.t* is known from other sources to indicate not the royal residence but a sanctuary in the Egyptian city of Letopolis.<sup>104</sup> This sanctuary included a cult of Osiris-Apis, and its priesthood might have enjoyed close connections with that of the Serapeum in Memphis.<sup>105</sup> If this is the word intended in our obelisks, *iy.t* should therefore refer to a sanctuary here too, with the inscription perhaps alluding to a temple built or expanded by Domitian in Rome. It is tempting—but perhaps too far-fetched—to think of this sanctuary as the Iseum Campense, which in the ancient sources is associated with a Serapeum (it is simply labeled so, for

example, in the *Forma Urbis Romae*) and which Domitian reconstructed following a fire in the year AD 80.<sup>106</sup>

Alternatively, if *iy.t* does not refer to a temple, one may understand it as an aberrant writing of either: (a) the noun *iw(y).t/iw3(y).t* “house, city quarter” (also “sanctuary,” as the dwelling of a god), typically characterized by the house determinative both in hieroglyphs and in Demotic,<sup>107</sup> which could fit here if understood as a reference to Rome’s imperial quarter, that is, Domitian’s palace; or (b) the noun *ib.t* “mound, place,” though the meaning would instead point, in this case, to a funerary context (hardly fitting here), and the use of the house determinative with this word would also be unexpected, hence making this second option highly unlikely.<sup>108</sup>



Finally, note that Pirelli translates this passage as “fino al ritorno nella città di Roma.”<sup>109</sup> She must therefore understand *iy.t* as the infinitive of the verb “to come (back),” but such a translation does not account for the house determinative, ignores the possessive =*f*, and does not explain the following genitival preposition *n.t*. Thus it should be rejected.

(13) *hnw*: Taken sign by sign, the reading of this group should be *Iḫi-t3.wy*, with *t3.wy* written again with two small squares in A,  (see note 10 to this side above), and, in a clearer writing, with two scarab beetles in obelisk B, . *Iḫi-t3.wy* literally means “The Conqueror of the Two Lands”<sup>110</sup> and was originally the name of the Middle Kingdom royal residence established by Amenemhat I (12th Dynasty, twentieth century BC), probably near el-Lisht.<sup>111</sup> Its name became synonymous with capital city (Egyptian *hnw*), so that, in later and, most typically, Greco-Roman times, it could aptly be used to designate any royal residence, as is the case here, where it specifically refers to Rome. As a consequence, the hieroglyphic group used to write *Iḫi-t3.wy* can itself be a sportive writing for the word *hnw*<sup>112</sup> and thus be translated simply as “royal residence, capital city.”<sup>113</sup> Normally, when this sign group has such a value, its elements are encased by a wall, as in . Yet, even in the absence of a wall element around the signs, as in the case of our obelisks’ inscriptions, the reading *hnw* and the translation “capital city” (rather than the specific toponym *Iḫi-t3.wy*) are not in doubt.<sup>114</sup>

It is worth noting that the use of this hieroglyphic group in our obelisks also allows for a visual play linking Domitian and Rome, the emperor and his capital, under the shared concept of might. This is achieved by means of the hieroglyph , *itj* “to seize, to conquer,” which appears in a ring composition of sorts both in the

emperor’s Two Ladies name at the start of this side’s inscription (*itj m sḫm*) and, though not to be read phonetically, in the designation of the capital city here at its end (*hnw < Iḫi-t3.wy*).

In theory, to think of all possibilities, one could alternatively here understand *hnw* as an abridged writing of the preposition *m-hnw* “in.” If so, the preceding *n.t* would not be a genitival preposition, but a writing of the relative converter *nt(y)*. In this case, the whole phrase would translate somewhat differently, namely: “to his sanctuary(?), which is in Rome.”

(14) [*Hr*]’*m*: In A, only the very top part of an *m* in its ↑ shape and two *r*’s originally associated with the foreign-land determinative () survive, with the former sign being barely discernible and absent from Ungarelli’s copy. The original form and arrangement of the signs, given the size of the lacuna, was possibly . As is the case with Benevento’s name (see note 9 to side 2), that of Rome is also followed by the foreign-land determinative, since the Egyptian author of the inscription—irrespective of where he was actually based, in Italy or Egypt—conceptualized both cities as foreign, un-Egyptian places.

Concerning the writing of the name of Rome in hieroglyphs, a recent study has remarked on the presence of initial *h* in the Benevento obelisks and other Roman hieroglyphic inscription as if an oddity.<sup>115</sup> Far from it, this *h* is in fact a regular and integral element in any Egyptian transcription of Rome’s name, which is typically attested in either a shorter or a fuller writing (respectively, *Hrm*, as in our obelisks, or *Hrm3* and comparable spellings).<sup>116</sup> Its presence is not intrusive but is surely derived from a precise transliteration into Egyptian of the name of Rome in Greek (which, of course, would have been the first language through which knowledge of Rome would have come to Egypt). Specifically, it is the way in which Egyptian must have noted the aspiration attached to the letter *rho*, which, when in the word-initial position, has a rough breathing, appearing as ϱ: indeed, the Greek name of Rome is Ρώμη.

Note that in B the bottom right half of the inscription (the section containing the name of Rome), which was intact at the time of Erman, is now severely damaged.

## Side 2

### Summary

Following a celebration of Isis, the text records the erection of the obelisks in honor of her and of the gods of Benevento by a private dedicator, Rutilius Lupus. A



passage, the interpretation of which remains controversial (and which appears also in the texts of sides 3 and 4), potentially identifies the occasion for the

obelisks' dedication as the return of Domitian from his Dacian and Germanic campaigns. Good wishes, probably referring to the dedicator, conclude this side.



**Figure 7.14** Benevento obelisk A, side 2 (orthophotograph). Photograph and imaging by Paul D. Wordsworth (2020)



**Figure 7.15** Benevento obelisk B, side 2 (photograph, prior to conservation). Photograph courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2017)



**Figure 7.16** Benevento obelisks, facsimile of inscriptions A/2 and B/2 (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)




**Figure 7.17** Benevento obelisks, synoptic standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions A/2 and B/2 (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)

### Obelisk A (Piazza Papiniano)

↓→ 3s(.t) wr(.t) mw.t nt(r) Spd.t ḥk3.t ḥnh.w nb(.t) p(.t) t3 dw3.t sḥḥ=f n= 's' ḥn n inr m3t ḥnḥ ntr:w niw.t=f Bnmts (w)d3 ini n nb t3.wy TMTINS ḥnh d.t rn=f nfr R'wt 'l'y'ys Lpws di n=f ḥḥw k3i m ndm-ib

Isis the Great, the God's Mother, Sothis, Queen of the Stars, Lady of the Sky, the Earth, and the Netherworld: he erected an obelisk of granite stone to her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May a long lifetime in joy be granted to him.

### Notes

(1) nt(r): Note the phonetic writing, , which is found again in A/4 (and see also note 4 to side 3). As already

### Obelisk B (Museo del Sannio)

↓→ [ . . ] ḥn n inr m3t ḥnḥ ntr:w niw(.t)=f Bnmts 'wd3 ini' n nb t3.wy TMTINS ḥnh d.t rn=f nfr Rwtlys Lpws di n=f ḥḥw k3i

[...] an obelisk of granite stone [...] and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May a long lifetime be granted to him.

pointed out by Colin, the word is used here in the singular, as normally expected in this common epithet of Isis referring to her son Horus as "the god."<sup>117</sup> A translation in

the plural (“la mère des dieux”), given by Malaise and since repeated by various authors,<sup>118</sup> is incorrect.

(2) *Spd.t hk3.t*: Based on its position between the two words, the feminine ending  $\ominus t$  can be considered to be in zeugma, as applying to both. The *hk3* sign,  $\uparrow$ , is reproduced as damaged in Erman’s copy but is in fact fully preserved.

(3) *hk3.t nh.w*: Or, perhaps, to be transliterated with another word for “star,” for example, *hk3.t sb3.w*? The logographic writing,  $\star$ , leaves both options open, and while the star sign is used with the value *nh* in B/2–3, this is in the phrase *nh d.t*, in which the word’s meaning is a different one, “to live.” Svenja Nagel transliterates here *nb.t sb3.w/sw.w*, choosing *sb3* or, rather, the rendering of its contemporary pronunciation *sw* (compare Demotic *sw* and Coptic  $\sigma\omega\gamma$  “star”),<sup>119</sup> her *nb.t* in lieu of the expected *hk3.t* is certainly only an oversight, in that the reading of the crook sign is indisputable. Nonetheless, I believe the reading *nh.w* to be preferable, on account of parallels for this title of Isis/Isis-Sothis, in which the word is phonetically spelled out as such.<sup>120</sup>

Several other interpreters have read this phrase quite differently, namely, as *hk3.t ntr.w* “Queen of the Gods.”<sup>121</sup> This is, in theory, a possible reading, and such a title is indeed attested for Isis.<sup>122</sup> The epithet “Queen of the Stars” applied to Isis in her identification with the star Sothis is not only more fitting, however, but is also confirmed by parallels.<sup>123</sup> It should therefore be favored.

(4) *nb(.t)*: It is unclear why Iversen oddly translates the male “Lord,” rather than “Lady,” since this epithet refers to Isis (same in his translation of A/4).<sup>124</sup>

Erman wonders if *nb* may in fact stand for *nb(.w)* and refer not to Isis but to the previous word (which he reads as *ntr.w*), thus understanding the whole as “Queen of the Gods, the Lords of the Sky, the Earth, and the Netherworld.”<sup>125</sup> This, however, is surely not the case: the title still belongs to the list of epithets of Isis that opens the inscription on this side.

(5) *n=’s’*: The suffix pronoun, written with a small  $\text{—}$ , is marked as lost in Erman’s copy, but in fact largely survives, just on the edge of the lacuna.

(6) *’thn*: At the beginning of the surviving text in B, there is a damaged obelisk sign for *thn* and, to its left, the remainders of another sign (marked as undistinguished damage in Ungarelli’s copy), the nature of which is unclear. Its traces could match the shape of a granite bowl,  $\nabla$ , perhaps used as an ad hoc determinative for the word *thn* “obelisk.” Note, however, that in A (as well as in

B/3) *thn* has no determinative and, if a determinative were present after it, one would typically expect the plain stone sign,  $\square$ . Alternatively, the traces could perhaps belong to a *nw* pot sign: if so, this section of the text should be transcribed in a slightly different order than I have, as  $\nabla \square \square \square$ , and transliterated as *’thn n’ inr m m3t* (with *m* being the genitival *n*, transformed through anticipatory assimilation to the following *m3t*). The translation (literally, “an obelisk of stone of granite”) would remain largely unaffected.

(7) *n/m inr m3t*: The first stone sign in this passage is a logogram for *inr* “stone,” while the second is a determinative for *m3t* “granite”;<sup>126</sup> the signs are to be read, right to left, in this order:  $\square \nabla \square \square$  (A; the granite vase and the second stone signs are inverted in the original) and  $\square \nabla \square \square$  (B; this is according to my proposed reading, but see an alternative interpretation in note 6 to this side). In A, the writing of the preposition *m* as *n* is a late feature (compare Demotic *m > n*); B uses instead the expected Middle Egyptian writing, *m*. Note also that, in B/3, we read  $\nabla \uparrow \text{thn } m3t$ , with neither an intervening preposition nor the word *inr*, probably on account of the lack of space (alternatively—but less plausibly—one could read it as *thn inr m3t*, by positing an inversion of the last two signs, with the stone block for *inr* and the vase sign, with no determinative, for *m3t*). As already pointed out by Erman,<sup>127</sup> Domitian’s Pamphili obelisk in Rome is also described in its own inscriptions as made of the same material: it is another  $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \nabla \square \square \text{thn } m \text{ in}(r) m3t$  “obelisk of granite stone.”<sup>128</sup> Note also that, in his translation of the Benevento inscriptions, Erman freely renders the original text as “red granite,” since this is the stone of which the obelisks are made,<sup>129</sup> and this mention of “red granite” is still repeated in modern studies that closely depend on his translation.<sup>130</sup> Yet *m3t* does not indicate exclusively “red” granite, nor is such an adjective or explicit characterization of the stone’s color originally present in the inscriptions—neither here nor in B/3.

(8) *hn<sup>c</sup> ntr.w niw.t=f*: In A, note the inverted arrangement of the signs, with *ntr.w* coming before *hn<sup>c</sup>*, with another inversion affecting the *niw.t* sign and its *t* ending.

Mention of other, unspecified deities sharing with Isis the dedication of the obelisks (and of the Beneventan Iseum itself) appears again in A/4 and B/4 (both have “the gods of his [sc., the dedicator’s] city, Benevento,” as here on side 2) as well as in A/3 (recording “her [sc., Isis’s] Ennead”).<sup>131</sup> The identity of these *theoi synnaoi* of Isis in Benevento remains unknown, though it is possible—or

even likely—that they would have included other gods of Egyptian origin.<sup>132</sup>

(9) *Bnm̄ts*: Despite the crack in A and the damage recorded in Erman’s copy, the final *s* — is, in fact, fully preserved. The writing of the city’s name in Egyptian hieroglyphs is predictably a *hapax*, found only on these monuments. It is written consistently *Bnm̄ts* (or the phonetic equivalent *Bnm̄ts*) in both obelisks, except for A/3, where it appears in a fuller writing, as *Bnm̄ts* (this side is also notable for its more diversified choice of hieroglyphs, with A/3 having *Ⲑ* for *s*, and B/3 using *ⲃ* for *b*).<sup>133</sup> In theory, a transliteration *Bnb̄ts/Bnb̄ts/Bnb̄ts* might also be possible, as the interchange of *m(n)* and *b* is attested in texts from the time.<sup>134</sup>

The fact that the Egyptian rendering of the city’s name ends with the letter *s* points to an original Greek draft, rather than Latin, on the basis of which the Middle Egyptian text was composed.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, while the city is known in Latin only as *Beneventum*,<sup>136</sup> in Greek it is attested both as *Βενεουεντόν/Βενεουέντον* and as *Βενεβεντός/Βενεουεντός*, with final sigma.<sup>137</sup> The latter writing is clearly at the origin of the Egyptian rendition (compare especially the orthography *Βενεβεντός* with the full hieroglyphic writing of A/3, *Bnm̄ts/Bnb̄ts*). It should also be noted that the existence of a Greek and of a Latin draft are not mutually exclusive. Guidelines for the inscriptions may first have been prepared in Latin following the instructions of the Beneventan dedicator, then translated into Greek as an intermediary passage, and thence used as a draft outline for the final Middle Egyptian version. It should come as no surprise that an Egyptian priest (the only person able to compose a hieroglyphic Middle Egyptian text in the first century AD) would have been more familiar with Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Roman East, than with Latin.<sup>138</sup> Note also how the name of Benevento is consistently followed by a foreign-land determinative *Ⲛⲓ* (in association with a throw-stick sign, which also indicates foreignness, in B/3: *Ⲛⲓ*), as was the case with the name of Rome on side 1 (see note 14 to that side).




(10) *wd̄3 ini*: This phrase, which appears in the middle of the inscription on sides 2 and 4 and at the end of side 3 in both obelisks, constitutes a major problem in the interpretation of the text. Two radically different translations have been suggested to date. The first was proposed by Erman,<sup>139</sup> who understands the phrase as meaning “for the well-being and return” (of the emperor), with the two verbs used as nominalized infinitives, and sees in it a rendering of the Latin expression *pro salute et reditu*: “he erected an obelisk ... for the well-being and

return of the Lord of the Two Lands.” The obelisks would thus have been erected on the occasion of Domitian’s return to Rome after a military expedition. This interpretation has the advantage of connecting the date of the obelisks’ dedication (AD 88/89, based on the text of side 3) with that of Domitian’s Dacian and Germanic campaigns—that is, respectively, the war against Decebalus and the revolt of Saturninus—and his following return to Rome in AD 89 (see note 11 to side 1 above).

At least two serious problems affect this translation, however. First, the verb *ini* does not mean “to come (back)” but “to bring (back).” Erman’s proposed solution to this issue is far from convincing. He considers *ini* to be a very literal translation from Greek *κομίζειν*, active voice “to bring” / *κομίζεσθαι*, passive voice “to return,”<sup>140</sup> but the lexicon used throughout these inscriptions is overall the expected and correct Middle Egyptian vocabulary, and such an unidiomatic use of the Egyptian language at a crucial passage would be most surprising. Second, in none of its six occurrences is the phrase *wd̄3 ini* introduced by a preposition (the expected equivalent of Latin *pro*). This consistent absence of a preposition is all the more conspicuous when compared with the otherwise regular presence of the genitival preposition *n* after this phrase (in virtually all cases, *wd̄3 ini n nb t̄3.wy* “the *wd̄3 ini* of the Lord of the Two Lands” / *wd̄3 ini n s̄3 R<sup>c</sup>* “the *wd̄3 ini* of the Son of Re,” with the sole exception of A/4), especially when considering that the genitival *n* is otherwise one of the most commonly omitted prepositions in Egyptian texts as a whole. For his part, Erman remarks that the omission of a preposition before *wd̄3 ini* is no big issue. In his support, he points out that the datival preposition *n* (the one which, in his opinion, he would expect before *wd̄3 ini*) is generally omitted in the Benevento inscriptions.<sup>141</sup> Close scrutiny proves him wrong, however, showing that in both obelisks the datival preposition is correctly employed and written eight times, and only once (in B/3, before *ⲓs.t*) is it omitted. Erman’s interpretation and his proposed solutions to the issues that it raises thus fall short of convincing.

A second and entirely different interpretation of the phrase was offered by Iversen.<sup>142</sup> His premise is the same as Erman’s, for Iversen also thinks that *wd̄3 ini* must be the rendering of a Latin expression. In his case, however, he considers it an Egyptian neologism translating the Latin title *legatus (Augusti)*. To justify his proposal, he understands *wd̄3* not as the verb “to be well, prosperous,” but as the verb “to proceed, to travel,” notwithstanding the lack of the walking-legs determinative *Ⲛ* that one would typically expect after this verb (though such an


omission might perhaps be justified on account of the walking legs already present within the following sign, *ini*). He thus translates *wd3 ini* as “the one who travels and brings (back)” > “the legate” (or even, still according to Iversen, “he who goes forth and returns,” supposing that *ini* may here be an—unparalleled—writing of ʕn “to return”). The chief advantage of his solution is that *wd3 ini* would thus fit perfectly in the syntax of the text, being another reference to the grammatical subject of the sentence, the monument’s dedicator: “he erected an obelisk ..., (namely) the legate of the Lord of the Two Lands ..., whose good name is ...” Further, prosopographical evidence would also seem to invite such a translation, as we know of the existence of an individual of Beneventan origin, Marcus Rutilius Lupus (for more on the dedicator’s name, see notes 14 and 15 to this side below), who indeed bore the title of *legatus Augusti*.<sup>143</sup>

Even with Iversen’s proposal, however, there are serious issues. One is the unexpected presence of a unique neologism in a text that otherwise uses standard Middle Egyptian lexicon (except, of course, for rendering Roman personal and geographic names). The other is the lack of any determinative following this phrase to help the reader (including the ancient reader, given the supposed neologism!) understand its meaning. After *wd3 ini*, one would at least have expected a seated-man determinative, , ideally even combined with a foreign-land determinative,  or  (as is the case with the personal name of the dedicator—see notes 14 and 15 to this side).

Despite the interest of Iversen’s proposal and the obvious advantage that it does not require any emendation or supplement to the ancient text, his suggestion remains too far-fetched. Between the two, Erman’s view remains preferable,<sup>144</sup> though—as we saw already—it is still not convincing. Let us examine again its two main weaknesses. One concerns the verb *ini*. Erman believes that this transitive verb, normally meaning “to bring (back),” is here used in lieu of an expected intransitive verb “to come (back),” owing to a slavishly literal translation of a Greek draft, but such an explanation is quite implausible. In my view, a simpler reason can be found for the use of *ini*, one that explains the choice of this verb as deliberate, far from an accident of translation, and its meaning as straightforward. The implied logical subject of *ini* would, in this case, be Isis, to whom the obelisks are dedicated for taking care of “the well-being and the bringing back” (i.e., the restitution, the return—but, nota bene, a “return” intended in a transitive meaning!) of the emperor. So much for the meaning of *ini*. The other issue with Erman’s interpretation concerns the lack of a preposition before *wd3 ini*, but this is a problem

that, unlike the former, I do not think can be overcome. Whether we conceive this missing preposition as a dative *n*, as did Erman (which I think anyway unlikely, for the obelisks are dedicated to Isis and not to an event), or as a preposition expressing causality, such as *hr* (with the obelisks being dedicated to Isis “on account of the well-being and return of the Lord of the Two Lands,” i.e., in celebration and thanksgiving for the event), the total and consistent lack of any written preposition before the key phrase *wd3 ini* cannot be credibly justified.

We must therefore look beyond both Iversen and Erman’s suggestions and try to come up with a new understanding of this phrase. Undoubtedly the best solution would be to make sense of the text as it is, without supplying or emending it (versus Erman), but also to understand it in the context of a normal use of hieroglyphic orthography and Middle Egyptian vocabulary (versus Iversen). And indeed, once we abandon the postulate that this problematic phrase should be the rendering of a Latin expression (be that *pro salute et reditu* or *legatus*), the text can make sense and be understood as plain Middle Egyptian, without any need to edit it. I propose here two options:

(a) to transliterate  as *wd3 ini.n* and understand *wd3* “to be well, prosperous” as an optative and *ini.n* “to bring (back)” as a perfect relative form functioning as its subject, in turn followed by Domitian’s titles and name as its own subject: “may what the Lord of the Two Lands ... brought (back) be prosperous”; note that *wd3* could equally begin a new main clause, as translated above, or be understood as a subjunctive expressing purpose within a subordinate clause: “(he erected an obelisk ...) so that what the Lord of the Two Lands ... brought (back) might be prosperous”; or

(b) to maintain the transliteration *wd3 ini n* and understand *wd3* as an optative, while still considering *ini n* as a nominalized infinitive (“the bringing back > the return,” here operating as the subject of *wd3*) followed by the genitival preposition: “may the return of the Lord of the Two Lands ... be prosperous” (with *wd3* as a main clause optative), or “(he erected an obelisk ...) so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands ... might be prosperous” (with *wd3* as a subjunctive introducing a subordinate clause expressing purpose).

A number of arguments can be produced in favor of either of the above options. Eventually, however, it seems to me that the overall meaning of the sentence is here the decisive factor and that this speaks in favor of the second proposal. In the case of (a), at the center of the wish would

be “what the Lord of the Two Lands ... brought,” that is, Domitian’s war booty. Now it is unclear what one should understand by means of a wish for prosperity for a booty. Much more straightforward is the understanding of option (b), in which the stress is placed directly on the emperor’s return (again, “return” in the sense of “restitution” by Isis) and on its happy outcome. Indeed, the reference to a prosperous return would be particularly fitting to describe the celebrations of an imperial triumph, which it is understood Domitian was granted upon his return to Rome in AD 89.<sup>145</sup> This is therefore how I suggest this troublesome passage of the inscriptions be understood and how I offer it above, in my main translation.

If this section indeed contains a reference to Domitian’s return from his military campaigns, it should be noted that such a celebration of a specific martial enterprise of the king in an obelisk’s inscription could be understood as a Roman innovation, dictated by the way in which the Romans reconceptualized such Egyptian monuments. Indeed, the inscriptions of earlier pharaonic obelisks did not typically memorialize particular events but celebrated the king in more general, universal terms.<sup>146</sup> References to the king’s military might would have appeared as part of standard formulas but not in connection with specific campaigns or battles.<sup>147</sup> A classical writer like Strabo, however, who visited Egypt at the beginning of Roman rule, mistakenly believed that the hieroglyphic inscriptions of the pharaonic obelisks that he saw in Thebes focused primarily on the celebration of past kings’ “dominion [...], the amounts of tributes they received, and the size of the army they had” (τὴν ἐπικράτειαν [...] καὶ φόρων πλῆθος καὶ στρατιᾶς),<sup>148</sup> that is, that the Egyptian obelisks’ main aim was the celebration of the pharaoh’s martial achievements.

An understanding of Egyptian obelisks as also—but not exclusively—celebratory monuments for military triumph is further reflected in the text of the Latin inscriptions on the bases of the Flaminio and Montecitorio obelisks in Rome (respectively, 19th and 26th Dynasty, thirteenth and sixth century BC), which were dedicated to the Sun god (Latin *Sol*) in 10 BC by Augustus. Here the occasion for which the obelisks were relocated and reerected in Rome is identified in a specific military victory, namely, the takeover of the Ptolemaic kingdom—in the inscriptions’ words, “Egypt having been placed under the power of the Roman people” (*Aegypto in potestatem populi Romani redacta*).<sup>149</sup> And, as we saw at the start of this article when presenting the Aswan obelisks erected in the late second century AD by Aurelius Restitutus, those privately dedicated monuments too had been offered “[for] the

health and victory” of the emperors—hence, again, with a distinctive martial theme in mind, probably the Roman victory over the Parthians in AD 166. Seen in this context, the possible reference to Domitian’s campaigns in the Benevento obelisks would therefore make perfect sense from the point of view of the Roman reinterpretation of the functions of Egyptian obelisks.

(11) *n nb ʔ.wy*: In Erman’s copy of A, the crack in the obelisk is misplaced: inspection of the original—as well as Ungarelli’s copy—shows that this runs not after *nb* but between the determinative of *ʔ.wy* and the following cartouche. As for B, note that the genitival *n* is fully preserved, contra both Erman’s copy, which gives it as damaged, and Ungarelli’s, which completely omits it (due, in this case, to an accidental mix-up between different sections of the obelisk).<sup>150</sup>

(12) *ʕnh d.t*: In B, note the precious choice of writing *ʕnh* with the star sign ✨ (only here and in B/3), rather than with the standard ʔ that follows Domitian’s cartouche on all other sides.

In modern times the left-hand side of the obelisk has suffered serious damage in this area, which appears still intact in Erman’s copy.

(13) *rn=f nfr*: This phrase surely alludes to the dedicator’s name, and not to the emperor’s, as instead proposed by Iversen (“the augustus with the beautiful name of immortal Domitian”):<sup>151</sup> the possessive =*f* refers back to the subject of the sentence (*sʕhʕ=f*), namely, the individual who commissioned the obelisk (“*he* erected an obelisk ... *his* good name ...”). Yet, though the overall sense of this passage is clear, its grammar and precise meaning have puzzled interpreters past and present. Here I will therefore justify my translation choice.


To begin with, one can definitely exclude that *rn=f nfr* is either a rendering of a Latin title or an idiom for “the (individual) named” (let alone “the aforementioned”), as instead supposed by a large number of interpreters. This phrase is well attested in the Egyptian language, and there is no need to turn to Latin to explain it; nor should any translation leave the adjective *nfr* “good, perfect” unaccounted for.<sup>152</sup> Even more baseless is Edda Bresciani’s claim that this is a special phrase purposefully used in Roman times to introduce the name of notable Roman citizens in hieroglyphic texts.<sup>153</sup>













Confusion among scholars has been augmented by the different uses in which the phrase *rn=f nfr* “his good name” (and its female counterpart *rn=s nfr* “her good name”) is attested over the long history of the Egyptian

language. Particularly in the Old Kingdom, and then again during the Third Intermediate and Late Periods (respectively, ca. twenty-seventh to twenty-second century BC and eleventh to fourth century BC), *rn=f nfr* was specifically used as a technical expression to introduce a man's second or nickname (PN<sub>2</sub>) after his main name (PN<sub>1</sub>), following the format *PN<sub>1</sub> rn=f nfr PN<sub>2</sub>* "PN<sub>1</sub> (with) his good name PN<sub>2</sub>."<sup>154</sup> But this is clearly not the idiom in question here, since only one name is given for the obelisks' dedicator, and this is evidently his actual Latin name, the only one available, and not some sort of nickname.<sup>155</sup> Alternatively, *rn=f nfr* can also be found in Egyptian texts used independently, that is, not necessarily to introduce a personal name, but in its literal meaning of someone's "good/perfect name," to positively qualify one's name and therefore identity.<sup>156</sup> Such a plain use of this phrase is attested diachronically, but it became particularly common in Ptolemaic and Roman times, not so much in hieroglyphic Middle Egyptian texts but in Demotic and specifically in ritual graffiti. To be sure, such graffiti typically employ the wording (*p3*) *rn nfr (n) PN* "(the) good name of PN," without the suffix pronoun =*f* "his," which we instead see in our obelisks. Whenever the suffix pronoun is used in such graffiti, the formula typically runs only as *rn=f . . . PN* "his name ... (namely) PN," omitting the adjective *nfr*: the two—suffix pronoun and adjective—appear to be mutually exclusive.<sup>157</sup> There are, however, exceptions, in which the suffix pronoun and the adjective appear in combination.<sup>158</sup> And even when we leave aside graffiti and Demotic, and look back at formal texts in Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs from the Ptolemaic period, the phrase *rn=f nfr* can again be observed in a number of inscriptions, sometimes on its own (as in earlier, Dynastic material)<sup>159</sup> and sometimes specifically introducing the beneficiary's name (as in the Benevento obelisks).<sup>160</sup>







In view of all the above, it seems best to me to understand the use of *rn=f nfr* in our inscriptions in the same way, that is, as a straightforward phrase that positively characterizes the dedicator's name (and hence the dedicator himself). Its inclusion in the text of our obelisks is dictated primarily not by urgent onomastic or religious reasons but by the inscription's syntax, in order to reestablish a connection with the grammatical subject (*sꜥꜥ=f* "he erected") that occurs before the lengthy clause beginning with *wd3 ini* and continuing with Domitian's titles and cartouche: "he erected an obelisk ... (he) whose good name is PN," or, less clumsily in English, "he erected an obelisk ... his good name is PN."<sup>161</sup> This is the case on side 4 too, where the syntax is the same and the dedicator's name is also introduced by *rn=f nfr*. On side 3,

















in contrast, the structure of the sentence is completely different and, rather tellingly, *rn=f nfr* does not feature before the name of the dedicator, for it is not syntactically necessary (see note 13 to side 3 below). Overall, though the flow of the sentence here on side 2 (and side 4) may appear somewhat convoluted and interpreters have widely disagreed in translating it, I still do not see in it so serious an issue as to blame the inscriptions' translator of incompetence in his use of Middle Egyptian.<sup>162</sup>

As a curiosity, note that the phrase *rn=f nfr* makes another appearance in a much later set of twin "Roman" obelisks, in whose inscriptions it is also employed to refer to the name of the private dedicator. In this case the obelisk pair is a nineteenth-century product of early European Egyptomania: the obelisks erected in honor of Camillo Borghese, sixth Prince of Sulmona, in the park of his famous Roman mansion, Villa Borghese. Their inscriptions were composed in 1827 by the English antiquarian Sir William Gell, who, for this purpose, relied on the studies of contemporary pioneers of Egyptology, first and foremost Jean-François Champollion, with whom he was personally acquainted. Undoubtedly he included in his text the expression *rn=f nfr* based on the example of the Benevento obelisks, of which he even reproduced the exact spelling, .<sup>163</sup>

(14) *Rꜥwt lꜥyꜥys/Rwtlyys*: Alongside the phrase *wd3 ini*, the reading of the name (compounded by *nomen* and *cognomen*) of the obelisk's dedicator is the other major problem in our understanding of these inscriptions. At least since the time of Erman, the text has repeatedly been accused of rendering the *nomen* inconsistently in hieroglyphs, with at least three different spellings, namely:  *Rwtlyys* (A/3–4 and B/3),  *Rwtlyls* (B/2), and  *Rwtlyys* (A/2 and B/4).<sup>164</sup> In fact, I think it is both possible and preferable to understand its spelling as quite uniform, simply as *Rwtlyys*, with the occasional minor graphic variant *Rwtlyys*. Indeed, the group  (as it appears in the original inscriptions of A/2, B/2, and B/4) is best read not as *yl*, but as *ly* (the *y* does not precede the *l*, being above it, but follows it, being further to the left). Thus, the writing of B/2 should be transcribed as  *Rwtlyys* (note also how this is the only writing of the name using  instead of  for *s*, a preference for short signs that also justifies the absence of  in it), being identical in spelling to A/3–4 and B/3. And the writings of A/2 and B/4 should both be understood as  *Rwtlyys* (for another word showing this  // *yy* sequence, compare  *nty.y.w* for  *ndy.w* in A/1).





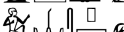
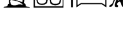
Moving past the order of the hieroglyphic signs, note how in all its occurrences on both obelisks the *nomen* of the dedicator (as well as his *cognomen*) is followed by a foreign-land determinative,  (usually paired with a seated-man determinative, , except in A/4 and B/3), to denote explicitly that this is the Egyptian rendering of a foreign—that is, non-Egyptian—name. But what is this name? Traditionally scholars have understood it in one of two ways. Some saw in it a supposed rendering of the Latin name Lucilius and thus offered a rather different transliteration from that given above, namely, *Lwglys* (transliterating the initial liquid  as *l*, rather than *r*).<sup>165</sup> Others proposed instead the same reading as the one above, *Rwtlyys*, to be understood as a hieroglyphic transliteration for the Latin name Rutilius.<sup>166</sup> The supporters of Lucilius base their argument on the presence in the name of a hieroglyphic sign, , which closely resembles the common monoliteral sign for the guttural *g*, . The proposers of the reading Rutilius generally assume, however, that the use of this *g* sign is an oddity (or a plain mistake) imputable to the obelisks' carver(s), who used it in lieu of the expected .<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, they highlight that a *gens Rutilia* is well attested and prominent in Roman Benevento and that it would thus make perfect sense to see its name recorded in such peculiar and high-profile monuments as these obelisks.<sup>168</sup>





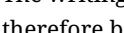
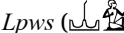


In fact, an additional—and conclusive—argument in support of the reading Rutilius can be given even from an epigraphic viewpoint, when we look back at the Borgia and Albani obelisks discussed earlier in this paper. There, the *praenomen* of the dedicator, Titus, appears in the writings   *Tits* and   *Tits*.<sup>169</sup> As can be seen, one of its *t*'s was spelled not with the expected  sign alone but in association with exactly the same *g*-like sign found in the Benevento obelisks: . The only explanation for this shared epigraphic oddity, in my opinion, is that both in the Borgia and Albani and in the Benevento obelisks we must understand this  sign as a most peculiar execution of the kiln sign  *t*(*3*), above which the carver of the Borgia and Albani obelisks also added, for clarity,  as a phonetic complement.<sup>170</sup> It is difficult to say how the exchange of  (originally, a variant of ) for  came about. One possibility is that it may have arisen from a misunderstanding of a draft hieratic version of the inscription: for the hieratic writings of the  and  signs are very similar indeed  and , respectively), their main difference being the presence of one extra vertical stroke in *g*.<sup>171</sup> My suggestion postulates that the inscription's Middle Egyptian version was first written in the hieratic script on a papyrus and only later transcribed

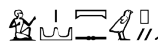
into hieroglyphs to be carved on the obelisks. This might well have been the usual procedure and undoubtedly can be proven to have been the case for other Roman monuments inscribed with hieroglyphs. The best such example is Hadrian's Barberini obelisk, some of whose signs were accidentally carved on the monolith itself in their hieratic form and not, as expected, in their hieroglyphic counterpart.<sup>172</sup> Be that as it may, I trust that the reading of the Beneventan dedicator's name with *t* (hence, Rutilius) is incontrovertible, while a reading with *g* (Lucilius) must, once and for all, be dismissed.

For the sake of completeness, I should mention that a third interpretation of the dedicator's name was offered by Bresciani, who read in this passage both a *praenomen* and a *nomen*, namely *T Ywlyys* for T(itus) Iulius.<sup>173</sup> Her suggestion is completely untenable, however, for both paleographic reasons (her view that the *r* is not the name's first letter, but a phonetic complement of the preceding *nfr*, is unsustainable, especially when looking at the obelisks' side 3, where *nfr* does not occur, and yet this *r* is still very much present) and prosopographical evidence.<sup>174</sup>





(15) *Lpws*: Even more problematic is the reading of the dedicator's *cognomen*, to the point that no conclusive solution has yet been reached by scholars as to what Latin writing the hieroglyphic text is meant to reflect. Its hieroglyphic spelling seems to vary widely, if we are to read the signs mechanically in the order in which they appear, as indeed past interpreters tended to do:<sup>175</sup>

 *Lpws* (A/2, B/2, and B/4),<sup>176</sup>  
 *Lpywps* (A/3),<sup>177</sup>  *Lpys* (A/4),  
 *Lpps* (B/3).



As in the case of the *nomen* Rutilius, however, our writings are in fact much more consistent than they may seem at first sight, especially with regard to the use of the letter *p*. Indeed, we should understand the group  (B/3) not as *pp* but as a sportive writing for a single *p*, a writing obtained from the phonetic value of the word that those two signs can write together—that is, *p(.t)* “sky” (Coptic  $\pi\epsilon$ ).<sup>178</sup> With this in mind, all other spellings of this name also fall in line, as indicating the same, single consonant—in this case, with the addition of one or two signs to mark semivocalic additions, probably to reflect the original Latin vocalization. We can thus read  *pw* (A/2, B/2, and B/4) and  *pyw* (A/3), both of which are phonetically equivalent to the straightforward writing  of A/4.<sup>179</sup> The writings of the *cognomen* on the obelisks must therefore be transliterated as simply *Lps* () , *Lpws* () , *Lpys* () , and *Lpyws* ()


, all intended to express a Latin name—as we will see shortly—whose consonants were just L-p-s.

When it comes to identifying what Latin name hides underneath these hieroglyphic renditions, Egyptologists have, here too, largely been in disagreement. Early scholars read in these writings the name Rufus.<sup>180</sup> As for Erman, he proposed the odd *Mpups* (*vel sim.*) as the likely transliteration intended by the author of the Egyptian inscription, but he was understandably at a loss when having to suggest what Latin name may be behind such a peculiar-looking Egyptian rendering and thus refrained from offering any proposal.<sup>181</sup> Another suggestion was finally made by Müller, who thought the first sign could possibly be read as *l* and wondered whether the obelisks' dedicator might have been a Rutilius Lupus.<sup>182</sup> His proposal has since been favored by most scholars,<sup>183</sup> and I also espouse it.<sup>184</sup>

Admittedly, there is still one issue with this proposal, and it lies in the first sign, the striding lion . Unlike its recumbent counterpart, , for which the basic reading is *r(w)* or *l* (as found in the *l* of Rutilius), the striding lion would typically read *m* in hieroglyphs (hence Erman's reading *Mpups*), and not *r/l*. This impasse, however, is hardly a major one, and I offer here a couple of suggestions to overcome it.<sup>185</sup> Perhaps, since the striding lion sign can have the logographic value *rw* for the word "lion,"<sup>186</sup> we might have here a thus far unparalleled use of it not as a logogram but as a phonogram with the value *r/l*. Admittedly, this would be quite unusual, and one would have to ascribe such a peculiar use of this sign to the whimsy of our scribe. Another possible explanation, in fact a rather more straightforward one, is to consider this use of  with the value *r/l* (a value typically pertaining to ) as a case of a hieroglyphic sign being replaced by a different one (striding instead of recumbent pose), which still belongs, however, to the same category (lions). Such swaps are a well-known phenomenon in Greco-Roman hieroglyphic texts.<sup>187</sup> We may therefore have here an otherwise unparalleled application of this principle to these two lion signs.

Further to all these epigraphic and linguistic observations, the reading *Lupus* for our dedicator's *cognomen* can also be supported by external evidence, namely, by the fact that several members of the *gens Rutilia* named Rutilius Lupus are attested by Roman sources in connection with Benevento.<sup>188</sup> In conclusion, despite the initial difficulties involved in the hieroglyphic writings discussed above, I therefore believe that the reading of the name of the obelisks' dedicator as Rutilius Lupus is quite certain.

For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that yet another proposal for the dedicator's *cognomen* was advanced by Auguste Baillet, welcomed by Orazio Marucchi, and revived by Tadeusz Zawadzki, namely, that this should be transliterated as *Lbywns* (reading  as *b* and  as *n*), an Egyptian rendering for Labienus.<sup>189</sup> This suggestion, however, should be rejected, on account both of its lack of onomastic and prosopographical links with other Beneventan material and of the highly dubious nature of its hieroglyphic transliteration.<sup>190</sup>

(16) *di n=f*: It is not clear who the beneficiary of this final wish is. Due to the immediately preceding mention of the dedicator's name, it seems reasonable that the wish of a long life should refer to him, as understood by the majority of modern interpreters.<sup>191</sup> A similar wish is inscribed at the end of side 4, where it also includes the common formula  *nh (w)d3 s(nb)* "life, prosperity, health." Iversen considers this formula to be a prerogative of royalty, however, and thus understands the wishes of sides 2 and 4 as both addressed to Domitian.<sup>192</sup> Though it is true that the phrase *nh wd3 snb* is best known for following the name of the pharaoh, this is not its exclusive use. It can equally be found in nonroyal contexts, for example, as an auspicious interjection or as a wish. For instance, it is particularly recurrent in epistolography, specifically in letters sent by subordinates to superiors.<sup>193</sup> But mention of the gift of "life, prosperity, health" also occurs in (nonroyal) votive inscriptions, which bear texts of a religious nature, closer in nature to those of our obelisks.<sup>194</sup> On account of the above, I am of the opinion that Iversen's objection can be dismissed and that the wishes found here and on side 4 of our obelisks both refer, most likely, to Rutilius Lupus.

This being said, I appreciate why Iversen doubted that the final wishes on sides 2 and 4 could refer to the private dedicator. Indeed, the erection of a monument such as an obelisk, which is quintessentially associated with pharaonic kingship (and indeed features the emperor's name on all its sides), may understandably suggest the idea that all auspicious wishes expressed in it should be for the good of the king. Reasons of both cultic and political propriety would also seem to point in this direction. We ought to remember that the type of monument with which we are dealing here is essentially a private dedication, however, not a royal one, and it thus makes perfect sense that it should also include good wishes for the benefit of its own sponsor, Rutilius Lupus.

(17) *h'rw k3i m ndm-ib*: In B, there is not enough space to restore the phrase *m ndm-ib*, which is instead found at the end of A. As confirmed by Ungarelli's copy (and as already

suspected by Erman),<sup>195</sup> the text of B must have stopped with *ḳꜣ*, due to lack of space. Note also that, counter to what is suggested in Erman's copy, the hieroglyphs at the bottom of B are fully preserved in their lower part, although modern damage—which clearly postdates Erman's facsimile—now affects other areas of this lower section of obelisk B.

## Side 3

### *Summary*

This side records the date when major works were carried out at the Iseum of Benevento, the eighth regnal

year of Domitian (AD 88/89). The texts of the two obelisks diverge slightly: A assigns to Rutilius Lupus the building of the sanctuary for Isis and her *theoi synnaoi*, while B records both the building of the sanctuary and the erection of the obelisks for Isis alone, no other gods being mentioned. It is unclear whether the construction of the entire temple or of just part of it ought to be ascribed to Rutilius Lupus, besides the erection of the two obelisks. The reason for these building works is again given as the return of Domitian from his campaigns (that is, if I understand the disputed passage correctly).



**Figure 7.18** Benevento obelisk A, side 3 (orthophotograph). Photograph and imaging by Paul D. Wordsworth (2020)



**Figure 7.19** Benevento obelisk B, side 3 (photograph, prior to conservation). Photograph courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2017)



**Figure 7.20** Benevento obelisks, facsimile of inscriptions A/3 and B/3 (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)



**Figure 7.21** Benevento obelisks, synoptic standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions A/3 and B/3 (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)

### Obelisk A (Piazza Papiniano)

↓ → *rnp(.t)-sp ḥmn.t ḥr ḥm Hr k3 nḥt nsw.t bi.ty nb t3.[wy] NTR S3 NTR MR(Y) NTR.W NB(.W) 's3' R<sup>c</sup> nb ḥ<sup>c</sup>.w TMT'I'N'S' 'nḥ d.t ḥwsi ḥ.t šps(.t) n 3s.t wr.t nb(.t) Bnmnts 'ḥ' n<sup>c</sup> Psd.t=s in Rwtlys Lpyws wd3 ini n 'nb t3.wy'*



Regnal year eight, under the majesty of the Horus “Strong Bull,” the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the [Two] Lands THE GOD, THE SON OF THE GOD, BELOVED OF ALL THE GODS, the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living: a splendid sanctuary was built to Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento, and her Ennead, by Rutilius Lupus, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands might be prosperous.

### Obelisk B (Museo del Sannio)

↓ → [ . . . ] 'NTR' S3 [NTR] MR(Y) NTR(.W) NB(.W) s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb ḥ<sup>c</sup>.w TMT'I' [N]'S' 'nḥ d.t ḥwsi ḥ(.t) šps(.t) <n> 3s.t wr(.t) nb(.t) Bnmnts s<sup>c</sup>ḥ<sup>c</sup> ṯhn m3t in Rwtlys Lps wd3 ini n nb t3.wy



[...] THE GOD, THE SON OF [THE GOD], BELOVED OF ALL THE GODS, the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIA[N], ever-living: a splendid sanctuary was built <to> Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento, (and) an obelisk of granite was erected by Rutilius Lupus, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands might be prosperous.


## Notes







(1) *hmn.t*: Note the elaborate choice of writing the number with the ibis sign, , “eight,” rather than with the plain numeral 8, that is, . The presence of a precise dating in an obelisk’s inscription is highly unusual, in earlier Egyptian and Roman inscribed obelisks alike. To be exact, pharaonic obelisks’ inscriptions could record the special occasion on which they had been erected—and therefore, indirectly, a king’s regnal year—as is the case, for instance, of Thutmose III’s Heliopolitan dedications for his third jubilee.<sup>196</sup> More exceptionally, the exact start and end dates of the quarrying works of an obelisk could also be immortalized in writing.<sup>197</sup> Overall, however, this remains a rather atypical feature and is exceptional in the format in which it appears here, as part of a proper dating formula that includes the titulary of the sovereign.




As previously discussed, the date recorded here as Domitian’s eighth regnal year corresponds to AD 88/89, halfway through his reign.<sup>198</sup>

(2) *t3.wy*: The second *t3* sign is completely lost in lacuna, in contrast with what is suggested by Erman’s copy, and was probably already gone in his time, given that Erman’s facsimile awkwardly draws it mostly over the lacuna itself.


Just below this crack in the obelisk, both Ungarelli’s copy and inspection of the original further reveal that the determinative is the one correctly expected after *t3.wy* and the same already found on side 2 of both obelisks, that is,  (in these obelisks—as in other Roman inscriptions—executed with angular shapes, more like , and not simply three dots, as mistakenly reproduced by Erman. It is indeed the case, however, as already noted by Erman, that further down on this side of A this same determinative unexpectedly follows *h<sup>c</sup>.w*, in the title “Lord of Crowns” (see note 6 to this side below).<sup>199</sup>

(3) *NTR S3 NTR*: There are multiple options for the reading of this epithet, most of which understand it as either assimilating Domitian to Horus or presenting him as Horus’s son. The group  has thus been differently interpreted as “Morning Star” by Erman (implying the transliteration *SB3 DW3*),<sup>200</sup> “the Son of the Lord of Life” by Müller (*S3 NB ʿNH*),<sup>201</sup> “Horus, the Son of the God” (*HR S3 NTR*) by Iversen,<sup>202</sup> “the Son of Horus” (*S3 HR*) by Jean-Claude Grenier,<sup>203</sup> and “Horus, the Son of Isis” (*HR S3 3S.T*) by von Beckerath.<sup>204</sup> Besides the proposals found in past scholarship, there are, in theory, yet more possible ways to read this group, such as *S3 HR ʿNH* “the Son of Horus



the Living” or *S3 NTR ʿNH* “the Son of the Living God.”<sup>205</sup> Among the published alternatives, Müller’s reading *S3 NB ʿNH* seems to me to be the preferable option, for two reasons. First, epigraphically, this is the only instance in the obelisks in which the falcon sign appears just as , that is, without a flail, as in . In the latter case, it reads either *Hr* “Horus” (see here above, in A/3), *bik* “falcon” (in combination with the gold sign, , when introducing the king’s Golden Falcon name; see A/1),<sup>206</sup> or *ntr* “god” (if resting on a standard, ; see A/4); it would therefore seem reasonable to read this plain falcon sign  differently, as *nb* “lord.” Secondly, in terms of religious associations, calling Domitian “the Son of the Lord of Life” would be rather fitting here, for the epithet “Lord of Life” is most commonly associated with Osiris, brother and spouse of Isis.<sup>207</sup> The emperor would thus be assimilated with their son Horus, of whom the pharaoh (that is, Domitian himself) was the incarnation on earth. This being said, all these arguments remain highly circumstantial: for instance, there is no stringent reason why we should assume that  must necessarily be used with a different value than other falcon-based signs found in these obelisks. In fact, the opposite can easily be true, with the author of the inscription choosing a slightly different form of the sign just for variety’s sake. Or perhaps the falcon here lacks the flail simply for reasons of space, due to the star sign already taking up the area to its top left.

With this in mind, I think a much better solution can be proposed, namely, that we should read  simply as *NTR S3 NTR* “the God, the Son of the God,” with both the falcon and the star signs as logograms for *ntr*.<sup>208</sup> The phrase *ntr s3 ntr* is typically used as a formula to introduce the cartouche containing the Caesar title (i.e., throne name) of a number of first-century AD Roman emperors, including Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero.<sup>209</sup> In our case we have instead a remarkable inclusion of it within the cartouche, as part of an elaborate throne name for Domitian. Typical writings for this formula in inscriptions from Roman Egypt are in the style : good examples can be found in the Roman reliefs of the temple of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos in Athribis, within the titulary of Emperor Tiberius (r. AD 14–37).<sup>210</sup> Remarkably, however, the same Athribis inscriptions also show this phrase in a writing that employs exactly the same combination of signs as our obelisk, that is, as .<sup>211</sup> I therefore choose to adopt the reading *NTR S3 NTR* in our Benevento inscriptions, with no query, as I consider it to be by far the best option, on account of its straightforwardness (in terms of both its writing and its meaning), of the other attestations of this phrase in the



context of Roman pharaonic titularies and of the perfect epigraphic parallel in the slightly earlier Roman inscription from Athribis mentioned above.<sup>212</sup>



With regard to content, the king's throne name here on side 3 stands out for its original wording and exclusive focus on Egyptian theology. This contrasts with the version of Domitian's throne name given on side 1, which just contains the standard titles "Emperor Caesar" (as customary for Egyptian titularies of Roman emperors). As observed by earlier scholars,<sup>213</sup> it is hardly a coincidence that a good comparison for such a complex throne name applied to a Roman ruler is found in another Roman obelisk, namely, within Hadrian's titulary on his Barberini obelisk, in which the emperor is called  [MRY] H<sup>c</sup>PY HN<sup>c</sup> NTR.W NB(.W) "[BELOVED] OF HAPY AND OF ALL THE GODS."<sup>214</sup>

Finally, concerning the inscription's epigraphy, note that Ungarelli's copy of B mistakenly adds, in the slightly damaged area underneath the falcon, a *nb* sign. No such hieroglyph was in fact ever there.



(4) *NTR(.W)*: B has a full phonetic writing, , which also marks *r*, in contrast with *nt(r)*, , in A/2 and A/4. The presence of *r* is per se a mark of the word's use in the plural (compare Coptic ⲛⲧⲏⲣ "gods"), as the plural ending (.w) is what allows for the phonetic preservation of an otherwise silent *r* in final position. Conversely, the aforementioned two instances of the writing *nt(r)*, with missing *r*, reproduce the pronunciation of the singular, with silent *r* at the word's end (Coptic ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ "god").

(5) *ʿsʿ R<sup>c</sup>*: On A, the duck sign was mistakenly reproduced by Erman as intact, but most of its body is in fact lost in lacuna, in one of the obelisk's cracks that existed already in Erman's time, but which he failed to mark.

(6) *nb h<sup>c</sup>.w*: The determinative following *h<sup>c</sup>.w* "Crowns" is the expected plural strokes in B () while A erroneously employs the determinative that is normally associated with *b.wy* "the Two Lands" (). This mix-up is possibly due to confusion between the writing of this title and the preceding *nb b.wy* (see note 2 to this side above).

(7) *TMT'N'S*: In A, note the extremely small size of *m*, , squeezed between the scarab beetle and the arm signs. This is most likely due to its insertion at a later phase, to correct an accidental omission. In B, the restoration of the missing *n* in the form of  is certain, based on the size of the lacuna.

(8) *h<sup>c</sup>ws<sup>i</sup>*: Read by Erman as *kd* (a verb with the same meaning),<sup>215</sup> it may be preferable to transliterate it as

*h<sup>c</sup>ws<sup>i</sup>*, a verb commonly used in Greco-Roman texts to describe the construction of temples.<sup>216</sup> The execution of the hieroglyphic sign is rather peculiar, showing what looks like a man operating a plumb line. It seems to be an original variation on the more canonic signs  (a man pounding in a mortar, typically used for *h<sup>c</sup>ws<sup>i</sup>*) and  (a man building a wall, commonly used for *kd*).


(9) *ʿh.t*: A word primarily meaning "palace," it can also be used with the meaning of "temple," "sanctuary," or even just "chapel."<sup>217</sup>

It is difficult to say whether we should take the text literally and understand that, besides erecting the obelisks, Rutilius Lupus built on his own initiative the entire Beneventan Iseum during the eighth year of Domitian's reign (granted, this is surely a possibility).<sup>218</sup> Perhaps one should understand that the construction of the temple (or even just the expansion of a previous sanctuary) was completed in that year, specifically through the erection of the two obelisks at the initiative of our private dedicator.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, the inscriptions credit Rutilius Lupus with only the erection of the obelisks on sides 2 and 4 (side 2 uses the word *thn* "obelisk," while side 4 speaks of *mnw pn* "this monument," where the reference to the obelisks is clear in the use of the demonstrative), and it is exclusively here, on side 3, that there is also mention of the construction of a sanctuary, almost as if this were of secondary importance—and this, in a passage in which A and B have somewhat divergent texts, with B further mentioning again the obelisks (see note 12 to this side below). It is understandable, nonetheless, that the primary focus of the obelisks' inscriptions should be on the obelisks themselves, rather than on other parts of the cultic complex, and that the silence of sides 2 and 4 about the temple is therefore not necessarily a telling indicator.

Distrusting our text, some scholars have in fact suggested that the whole construction of the Iseum, including the erection of the obelisks, must have taken place by direct order of Domitian in thanksgiving for his own return to Rome and that Rutilius Lupus was merely the appointed executor of the emperor's will.<sup>220</sup> I reject, however, such an extreme view: if this were the case, the prominence given to the agency and name of Rutilius Lupus on sides 2, 3, and 4 would be quite out of place (not to mention that, as we have seen, the Benevento obelisks are not the only privately dedicated Egyptian obelisks in existence in Roman Italy). Whether or not Domitian had been an active benefactor in the construction, expansion, or decoration of the Beneventan sanctuary, it is certain that, based on the explicit evidence of our obelisks'

inscriptions, the initiative and direct involvement of Rutilius Lupus in this architectural enterprise—first and foremost, in the erection of the obelisks—cannot be questioned.<sup>221</sup>

(10)  $\text{ḥ}(t) \text{šps}(t) <n> \text{šs.t wr}(t)$ : In B, the carver clearly experienced some issues. Thus, not only is the dative preposition missing, but the signs are placed in an unexpected order, namely,  $\text{ḥ}(t) <n> \text{šs.t wr}(t) \text{šps}(t)$  (potentially misleading into a translation of this sort: “a sanctuary <to> Isis the Great and Noble”). Undoubtedly, the intended order is the one given in A.

(11) *Bnmnts*: Concerning this full writing in A, see note 9 to side 2 above. The uniqueness of the phrase “Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento” needs little comment, with its surprising twist on a traditional combination of epithets for this goddess ( $\text{šs.t wr}(t) \text{nb}(t)$ ). It makes one wonder whether such a close connection between Isis and her centers of worship in the Roman world outside Egypt was here expressed in a Middle Egyptian text as a one-off innovation, imputable to the sole creativity of the author of the Benevento inscriptions, or if it was to be found in custom-made hieroglyphic inscriptions of other Roman Isea too. If the latter is a realistic scenario, then inscriptions from other Egyptian temples in the Roman Empire might have contained similar fascinating hieroglyphic renderings of Greco-Roman toponyms. For example, a Roman hieroglyphic relief now in Naples, which shows two facing uraei and part of a cartouche containing the text   $\text{šs.t wr}(t) \text{nb}(t) [ \dots ]$  (“Isis the Great, Lady of [...]”), might have continued not necessarily with the mention of a standard location associated with the goddess in her mainstream theology (be that an Egyptian toponym or, for instance, *p.t* “the sky”) but with the specific Italian locality where this relief and the contextual building originally stood.<sup>222</sup>

To be clear, while it is remarkable to find Isis explicitly associated with an Italian toponym in a Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription on a monument erected in Benevento, the connection between Isis and foreign (i.e., un-Egyptian) lands or cities is, surely, hardly surprising per se, being part and parcel of her cults as a universal goddess in the Greco-Roman world. Her association with places outside Egypt, including the Roman West, is mentioned and celebrated even in texts stemming from Egypt itself. The clearest example of this is perhaps the Greek aretology of P. Oxy. XI 1380, a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dating from the early second century AD, a few decades after the Benevento obelisks were erected.<sup>223</sup> Here Isis is celebrated through a list of the epithets said to be attributed to her in various localities, both within and

without Egypt, including ἐν Ῥώμῃ στρατίαν “in Rome, the Warlike” (l. 83) and ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ ἀ[γά]πην θεῶν “in Italy, the L[ove] of the Gods” (ll. 109–10). Significantly, the goddess is said to have founded sanctuaries for her own cult in “all cities,” that is, throughout the *oikoumene*; in the text’s words: Ἰσεῖα πάσαι[ς] πόλεσιν εἰς τὸν [ἅπαν]τα χρόνον κατ[έσ]τησας “you [est]ab[li]shed Isea in al[l] cities for [al]l tim[e]” (ll. 202–3). Overall, a perfect testimony to the universal theology of Isis, ideally connecting our Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription from Roman Italy with a Greek papyrus from Roman Egypt.

In obelisk B, note that substantial damage has affected the right-hand side of this section since Erman’s time.


(12)  $\text{ḥn}^c \text{Ps}d.t=f \text{s}^c \text{ḥ}^c \text{thn m}^c$ : The inscriptions on the two obelisks diverge at this point, with A reading “and her Ennead” (i.e., her *theoi synnaoi*, most likely the same deities referred to as “the gods of his city, Benevento” on sides 2 and 4) and B having “an obelisk of granite was erected” (to be compared with the similar phrase on side 2, “he erected an obelisk of granite stone”). The reason for this discrepancy, as well as whether it is deliberate or the result of a mistake, is unclear.

Note that some modern translations merge the two versions of this passage into one unique text, without warning the reader.<sup>224</sup> Also, Pirelli translates here in B/3 “un grande obelisco,”<sup>225</sup> adding an adjective that is not in the original inscription.

(13) *In Rwtlys*: On sides 2 and 4, the sentence is structured around a verb in the active voice with a pronominal subject (respectively,  $\text{s}^c \text{ḥ}^c=f$  “he erected” and  $\text{iri} <f>$  “he made”), back to which the full name of the dedicator later refers, by means of the phrase  $\text{rn}=f \text{nfr}$  “his good name” (see note 13 to side 2 above). Here on side 3, the sentence is instead constructed around a verb in the passive voice ( $\text{ḥwsi}$  “was built”). Rutilius’s name is therefore simply introduced by the preposition of agent (*in* “by”), with no need for the phrase  $\text{rn}=f \text{nfr}$ .

(14)  $\text{wd}^3 \text{ini}$ : Despite translating this phrase on sides 2 and 4 with “per la salvezza e il ritorno in patria,” in line with Erman’s original rendering, Pirelli renders it differently here on side 3, as “per la salvezza e la prosperità,” in what I suppose is a slip of the pen.<sup>226</sup>

In B, the right-hand side of this section (which appears intact in Erman’s copy) has been badly affected by modern damage.

(15) *nb B.wy*: Inscription A offers an extremely elaborate writing for this title, through the group .



In B, traces of the final determinative  $\Delta \circ \circ \Delta$  can still be discerned on the original, though they are recorded neither in Erman's nor in Ungarelli's copy.

## Side 4

### *Summary*

The text opens with another celebration of Isis, in whose honor, along with that of the gods of Benevento, Rutilius

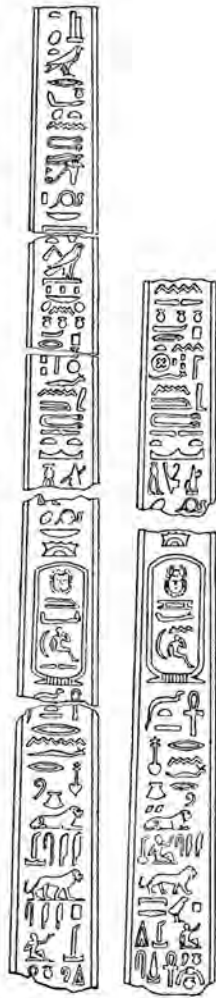
Lupus is said to have commissioned the obelisks. The occasion is given—again, if my interpretation of the text is correct—as the return of Domitian from his military campaigns. The inscriptions end with good wishes, likely for the dedicator's welfare.



**Figure 7.22** Benevento obelisk A, side 4 (orthophotograph). Photograph and imaging by Paul D. Wordsworth (2020)



**Figure 7.23** Benevento obelisk B, side 4 (photograph, prior to conservation). Photograph courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2017)



**Figure 7.24** Benevento obelisks, facsimile of inscriptions A/4 and B/4 (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)



**Figure 7.25** Benevento obelisks, synoptic standardized copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions A/4 and B/4 (prepared with JSesh hieroglyphic editor)

### Obelisk A (Piazza Papiniano)

↓→ 3s.t wr.t mw.t nt(r) ir(.t) R<sup>c</sup> nb(.t) p(.t) 'hnw.t' ntr:w nb(.w)  
 iri<=f> n=s <m>nw p'n' hn<sup>c</sup> 'ntr:w' niw(.t)=f Bnm<sup>t</sup>s 'wd3 ini' <n>  
 s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>(.w) TMTINS 'c<sup>n</sup>h d'.t rn=f nfr Rwtlyys Lpys diw n'=f' [. .  
 .]

Isis the Great, the God's Mother, the Sun's Eye, Lady of the Sky, Mistress of All the Gods: <he> made this <mo>nument to her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return <of> the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May [...] be granted to him.

### Obelisk B (Museo del Sannio)

↓→ [ . . ] n=s <m>nw pn hn<sup>c</sup> ntr:w niw.t=f Bnm<sup>t</sup>s wd3 ini  
 n s3 R<sup>c</sup> [nb] h<sup>c</sup>(.w) TMTINS 'c<sup>n</sup>h d'.t rn=f nfr Rwtlyys Lpws  
 di n=f'c<sup>n</sup>h (w)d3 s(nb) 3w(.t)-ib

[...] this <mo>nument to her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return of the Son of Re, [the Lord] of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May life, prosperity, health, and happiness be granted to him.

## Notes

- (1) *mw.t nt(r)*: Note again the phonetic writing of *nt(r)* in the singular, as in A/2 (see note 1 to side 2 above). It is unclear why Iversen translates this common epithet as “wife of the god,” which surely cannot be accepted.<sup>227</sup>
- (2) *ir(.t) R<sup>c</sup>*: Contra Katja Lembke, who reads *wḏ3.t R<sup>c</sup>* “the sound eye of Re.”<sup>228</sup>
- (3) *nb(.t) p(.t) ḥnw.t ntr.w nb(.w)*: Due to the crack in the obelisk, interpreters have been uncertain as to whether one should read *nb(.t) p(.t) ḥnw.t ntr.w nb(.w)* “Lady of the Sky and Mistress of All the Gods” (understanding the remainder of the sign below the crack, on the right-hand side, as the jar  $\square$  and assigning to it the  $\triangleleft$  ending)<sup>229</sup> or just *nb(.t) p.t ntr.w nb(.w)* “Lady of the Sky and of All the Gods” (seeing in that same damaged sign a diacritic stroke for *p.t*, to which the *t* would also pertain; in other words,  $\triangleleft$ ).<sup>230</sup> The first is the right reading, as confirmed by close inspection of the inscription, in which the damaged sign in question appears wider and more flared than in Erman’s (as well as Ungarelli’s) copy. Textual parallels also confirm such an interpretation, since the full formula, with the inclusion of *ḥnw.t*, is very commonly attested following the name of Isis and other goddesses.<sup>231</sup>
- (4) *iri<=f>*: The pronominal subject of the verb, “he,” was mistakenly left out. This is simply an accidental omission, of which we have seen a few other cases in these inscriptions and for which I see no need to censure the Egyptian translator and accuse him of linguistic incompetence.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, strictly speaking, the sentence would be grammatically correct even without *=f*, if one is to understand the verb as a passive (“this <mo>nument was made”), and this is perhaps precisely what led to the accidental omission. Such a construction would then leave the possessive in the following *rn=f* with no antecedent, however, making the text overall anacoluthic.
- (5) *<m>nw*: In both obelisks, note the unusually short writing of this word, as  $\circ\circ\circ$ , without a preceding sign for *mn*. Within its general meaning of “monument,” *mnw* can also be used specifically to indicate obelisks,<sup>233</sup> as in the present case.
- (6) *p<sup>c</sup>n<sup>c</sup>*: Erman reads this demonstrative as *pw* in both obelisks, noting the absence of *n* in A and assigning the  $\text{𓂏}$  *n* in B not to *pn*, but to what he thinks to be a hybrid writing of the following word, *ntr.w*, supposedly as  $\text{𓂏}$   $\text{𓂏}$ .<sup>234</sup> In fact, inspection of the original, as well as Ungarelli’s copy, reveals that A does include an *n*, which is written with the *nw* pot sign,  $\circ$ . This is missing from Erman’s copy,

which also shows other minor inaccuracies in this area of the inscription. Namely, the crack in the obelisk caused the loss of the top of the divine standard for *ntr* (which Erman shows intact but is clearly already missing in Zoëga’s much earlier copy) and of one of its following plural strokes (two of which are instead marked as lost by Erman). As for B, the sign for *n* clearly belongs to *pn*, the *t* above *niw.t* is this word’s feminine ending, and *ntr.w* is written simply with the standard sign, precisely as in A. In other words, the text that Erman understood as  $\text{𓂏}$   $\text{𓂏}$   $\text{𓂏}$  must instead be broken up as  $\text{𓂏}$   $\text{𓂏}$   $\text{𓂏}$ .

- (7) *<n> s3 R<sup>c</sup>*: In A, the genitival preposition *n* is missing (the only such omission following the phrase *wḏ3 ini* in both obelisks). Close inspection of the inscription, supported by Ungarelli’s copy, reveals traces of the feet of the *ini* sign below the crack (which are not recorded in Erman’s copy) and thus excludes the possibility that  $\text{𓂏}$  *n* was originally present and became lost in the lacuna.

- (8) *ḥnh d<sup>c</sup>.t*: In A, note that the *t* ending of *d.t*, which is now lost in the lacuna, was probably still extant in Erman’s time, for it is recorded in both his and Ungarelli’s copies.

- (9) *diw*: In A, an extra  $\vartheta$  *w* is marked in this passive *sdm=f* form with optative value, which is otherwise written merely as *di* in its three other occurrences (here in B/4 and on both A/2 and B/2).<sup>235</sup> This *w* should not be mistaken for a third-person plural suffix pronoun used in an impersonal passive (i.e., reading *di=w*), which is a construction of Late Egyptian that later became the norm for the passive in Demotic and Coptic. Not only is this unlikely in view of the language of our inscription, which is Middle Egyptian; it is also excluded by the writing of *w*, which lacks any plural strokes determinative.

- (10) *n<sup>c</sup>=f<sup>c</sup> [ . . ]*: Inspection of the original shows that the loop surviving on the left-hand side of the bottom edge of obelisk A is definitely the flesh sign  $\text{𓂏}$ , for *f*, and not the top part of an  $\text{ḥnh}$  sign,  $\text{𓂏}$ , which, while most likely the sign originally present next, must have been wholly lost in the final lacuna.<sup>236</sup> Note also that the *nw* pot used to write the preposition *n*, which appears to be intact in Erman’s copy, is now partly damaged.

- (11) *ḥnh (w)d3 s(nb) 3w(.t)-ib*: In B, all other interpreters read *3w(.t)-ib ḥnh (w)d3 s(nb)*, though I would expect *3w(.t)-ib* to come, more typically, last. As far as the layout of the inscription is concerned, both readings remain possible, as the signs for *3w(.t)-ib* sit lower than those for the other words (i.e., after them), but also to their right (that is, before them).

As for A, it is uncertain whether the text was here abridged and the inscription ended with a small  $\epsilon nh$  sign (perhaps crammed beneath the flesh sign), or if the surface lost at the bottom of the monolith was inscribed with a further level of hieroglyphs and the inscription thus continued as in B, with multiple direct objects, either fully as  $\epsilon nh (w) d3 s(nb) 3w(.t)-ib$  “life, prosperity, health, and happiness,” or perhaps simply as  $\epsilon nh (w) d3 s(nb)$  “life, prosperity, and health” (note that on side 2 the counterpart of this final wish is longer in A—“a long lifetime in joy”—and abridged in B—just “a long lifetime”—see note 17 to side 2). Concerning the identity of the beneficiary of this wish, whom I believe to be the dedicator, Rutilius Lupus, see note 16 to side 2 above.

The left section of obelisk B’s lower end is now lost but was still preserved in Erman’s time (note that modern damage also affected other parts of this face’s inscription in B, notably the right section of the cartouche).

## Privately Dedicated Inscribed Roman Obelisks: Comparing the Benevento and the Borgia and Albani Obelisks

Following my overview of the Borgia and Albani obelisks and the reedition of the Benevento twins, it is useful to draw now a comparison between these monuments in order to identify the shared features and differences between them, the sole surviving good specimens of privately dedicated Egyptian obelisks with original hieroglyphic inscriptions in Roman Italy, and thus try to achieve a better definition of this peculiar category of artifacts. One could object that the scope for such a comparison is limited, considering the fragmentary survival of the Borgia and Albani obelisks. I maintain, however, that even from such lacunose material enough useful data survives; in the case of the Albani obelisk, for example, its 3.2-meter-high original section probably preserves at the very least half of the original inscription, considering that such a monolith, with its narrow shaft, would hardly have been taller than 6 to 7 meters when complete. Thus, even within a limited corpus, there is still sufficient evidence to justify such a line of inquiry as the one that I propose.



From a material point of view, an immediately noticeable feature that these monuments share is their size. Though still monumental, privately dedicated obelisks are overall smaller than their imperially commissioned counterparts, something that makes good sense when considering the difference in the status (and means) of their dedicators.<sup>237</sup>


Their stone is also the same, red granite (most likely syenite originating from Egypt itself), a feature that they share with Roman imperial—and earlier Egyptian—obelisks too.<sup>238</sup> A question that for now must remain unanswered, however, is whether privately dedicated obelisks were normally produced in pairs. This was clearly the case for the Benevento monoliths (as well as for those erected in Aswan by Titus Aurelius Restitutus),<sup>239</sup> but it remains doubtful whether the same can be said about the Borgia and Albani obelisks.<sup>240</sup>

When it comes to their original location, it seems fair to believe that they all pertained to temple contexts. This is certain in the case of the obelisks of Benevento, which were erected as part of the city’s Iseum, as their inscriptions reveal. And it is also very likely in the case of the Borgia and Albani obelisks (again, if we think of them as a pair), given that the fragments of the Borgia obelisk are known to have been unearthed in Palestrina, in the proximity of the sanctuary to Fortuna Primigenia.




In terms of their textual content, they all give significant prominence to the identity of the private dedicator, with the difference that the Benevento obelisks each name Rutilius Lupus on only three of their four sides, while the Borgia and Albani ones record the name of Titus Sextius Africanus on each of their faces. Even the action attributed to the private patron, that is, the dedication of the obelisks, is similarly described between the two pairs: in fact, the same technical term,  $\epsilon h$  “to erect” (an obelisk), is found in both the Benevento inscriptions (in A/2, B/3, and originally also in B/2, though here now lost in lacuna) and in the Borgia ones (though not in the Albani obelisk). All monuments also feature the emperor under whom they were erected. The Benevento obelisks extensively celebrate him, especially on side 1, which is dedicated exclusively to Domitian. As for the Borgia and Albani ones, the surviving fragments do not allow us to say whether the emperor was only named or was also the explicit recipient of celebration. Most notably, while the Benevento obelisks clearly state that they are dedicated to Isis and her *theoi synnaoi*, the surviving texts of the Borgia and Albani ones include no mention of any deity. Yet it seems more than reasonable to suppose that they would have been monuments of a religious nature too, as is also suggested by the temple provenance of the Borgia fragments. Some scholars have even gone as far as to propose a possible link between their association with the sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia and the local cult of Isis (which would make them a perfect parallel to the Benevento twins in terms of the deity for whom they had been erected), though, as mentioned earlier in this paper, this must remain a pure hypothesis.<sup>241</sup> Note also that the



same three basic textual components observed in the Benevento obelisks' inscriptions (identity of the dedicator, good wishes for the benefit of the emperor, dedication to the gods) are reflected in the case of the obelisks erected in Aswan by the centurion Titus Aurelius Restitutus, though in his case we are dealing with the Latin inscription on one of their bases, rather than with hieroglyphic texts on the obelisks themselves.











At the textual level, however, there are also significant differences between the Benevento and the Borgia and Albani obelisks. Despite the repetition of some phrases (especially in the second half of sides 2 and 4), the Benevento twins essentially bear a different text on each of their sides, with their faces alternatively giving pride of place to the emperor (sides 1, with Domitian's full titulature, and 3, with his throne and birth names opening the inscription as part of a dating formula) and to Isis (with her name starting both sides 2 and 4). In contrast, the Borgia and Albani obelisks each carry the same inscription on their respective four sides. Differences appear only between the texts of the two obelisks. Most notably, the name of the dedicator features closer to the center of the inscription in the Albani monolith, while it is near its end in the Borgia one, and the verbs referring to the obelisk's dedication are also different, in one case  *shn* "to dedicate" (Albani), in the other  *s'h<sup>c</sup>* "to erect" (Borgia). It looks as if the two texts were conceptually the same but rather differently worded and ordered—a factor that, understandably, may contribute to the reluctance to think of them as a pair expressed by several scholars. The textual differences between the two Benevento obelisks are, instead, not as striking (as seen in detail in the commentary), being limited to relatively minor variants and in some cases consisting of simple omissions.


Moreover, what little text can be extracted from the Borgia and Albani obelisks also shows notable peculiarities. For example, the Borgia inscriptions introduce the royal cartouches with  *nb t3.wy s3 ntr* "the Lord of the Two Lands, the Son of the God," which is not a standard combination of epithets in the display of a king's hieroglyphic titulature.<sup>242</sup> On the contrary, the Benevento obelisks make use of a completely standard Egyptian phraseology, be that in the references to the emperor (despite the accidental omission and inversion of titles found in obelisk A/1) or to Isis. More than that, in their choice of names for the pharaonic titulature of Domitian, the Benevento inscriptions are also a real tour de force. By referencing much earlier royal titulatures (be they Ptolemaic or even more ancient), they testify to the deep knowledge of Egyptian traditions that the hieroglyphic inscriptions' author must have had.

Linguistically, the inscriptions of both sets of obelisks are written in the archaic phase of the Egyptian language that was typically chosen for monumental hieroglyphic inscriptions, Middle Egyptian. What can be said about the Borgia and Albani obelisks is rather limited, as most of the preserved text is taken up by the dedicator's name and royal epithets and cartouches, with hardly any proper sentences. As already remarked, what little syntax their inscriptions contain presents a number of peculiarities, such as the anticipation of the subject before a suffix-conjugation form of the verb, or the lack of a direct object following the verb (in the Borgia obelisk only). The former can be explained within the expected behavior of Middle Egyptian grammar, however, and the latter is probably no more than an accidental omission. The Benevento inscriptions offer instead much more material for the study of their command of Middle Egyptian grammar, as discussed in the commentary. One does observe occasionally convoluted turns of phrase or omissions, but as already argued, I do not consider these enough reason to imply that the author of the Egyptian inscriptions had a poor knowledge of Middle Egyptian or that he created a slavish and awkward text by choosing to stick too closely to the letter of an original Greek draft of the text.<sup>243</sup>

Let us now come to the epigraphy of these obelisks. The inscriptions of the Borgia and Albani and of the Benevento monoliths are in both cases inscribed on all faces as a single column of text, vertically delimited on either side by a carved double line. This carved double line is a typical feature of inscribed obelisks of the Roman period,<sup>244</sup> including a royal commission like the Pamphili obelisk (but not the Barberini). Apart from this shared element, however, epigraphy is probably the domain in which some of the most striking differences between our two sets of obelisks emerge already at first glance. As pointed out earlier in this article, the Borgia and Albani inscriptions are rather peculiar in the design and arrangement of their hieroglyphs: the individual signs are sparsely distributed, often quite awkward in shape, frequently inverted with respect to their expected orientation, and quite large in size. For instance, the seated man sign alone, , always takes up the whole width of the inscription, and there are never more than two signs combined horizontally, except for the combination of three narrow ones in  *sks* (part of the name Sextus) or for the superimposed sequence  writing *s'h<sup>c</sup>=f* "he erected." Note that these oversized hieroglyphs are the reason why the Borgia and Albani obelisks carry a more limited amount of text compared to the Benevento obelisks (that is, even accounting for their incomplete preservation), which pack much more information on their shafts, thanks to their smaller signs.

The detail that the carver(s) of the Borgia and Albani obelisks put into the execution of some signs, such as the seated man  or the stool sign , also appears to be manneristic more than genuinely Egyptian. Overall, these features seem to suggest an execution of the carving in Italy rather than Egypt, as is the case with Domitian's Pamphili obelisk, which is also characterized by awkwardly shaped and elongated glyphs.<sup>245</sup>

In contrast, the Benevento obelisks are undoubtedly the work of a much more skilled hand. The look of their hieroglyphs falls in no way short of the standards found on temple inscriptions in contemporary Egypt, and despite their occasionally odd arrangement, one does not find any major problem with them. Indeed, contrary perhaps to the scholarly *communis opinio*, I am inclined to believe that they were carved directly in Egypt, before the finished lot was shipped to Italy.<sup>246</sup> The choice of hieroglyphic signs too is quite remarkable, employing writings that are distinctly typical of Ptolemaic and Roman times, from the fairly common ones (the flesh sign  for *f* or the eye-pupil  for *iri*) to more elaborate and self-consciously complex variants (the ibis  for the number *hmn* “eight” in the dating formula or the group  for *hnw* “royal residence, capital”).<sup>247</sup> Even the choice of determinatives is more elaborate in the Benevento obelisks. Thus, in most cases, the Roman name of the dedicator is followed not only by the seated man, , but also by the foreign-land-and-throw-stick determinative, . The Borgia and Albani inscriptions instead make exclusive use of the plain seated man sign. Moreover, the author of the Benevento inscriptions came up with some highly creative writings. The spelling of the *cognomen* Lupus is a particular case in point. Not only does it surprisingly employ the striding lion  with a phonetic value normally pertaining to its recumbent counterpart,  (perhaps as a means to vary and establish a graphic play between the two leonine signs, given that  already occurs just above, in the dedicator's *nomen*), it also uses a complex writing for marking the *p* of Lupus, , which is derived from a writing of the word for *p(.t)* “sky.”

Bearing in mind the stark differences between their epigraphy, it is all the more surprising that both the Borgia and Albani and the Benevento obelisks should in fact share a most unusual feature in the idiosyncratic use of the sign  for *t(3)*, in both cases used only within the writing of their dedicators' Roman names (see my commentary above, note 14 to side 2). It is hard to think that such a peculiar trait would independently have arisen in their inscriptions; indeed, it is precisely through similar shared idiosyncrasies that artifacts can normally

be ascribed to the same scribal hand or epigraphic workshop. At the same time, though, it is equally hard to imagine a common source for monuments like ours, whose epigraphy is otherwise so strongly different. Clearly the present study is only the beginning, and much remains to be understood about these monuments and the way in which they were commissioned and prepared, from both a textual and a material point of view.

To sum up, a good number of differences can be observed between the Benevento and the Borgia and Albani obelisks. Especially when it comes to their radically different epigraphy, such differences clearly point at the Benevento twins being a product of significantly higher craftsmanship. Nonetheless, despite all their dissimilarities, the two sets of obelisks also show many common features, which we can therefore use to better define the category of privately dedicated inscribed Roman obelisks. They all are of relatively contained size, smaller on average than royally commissioned obelisks. They are carved out of the same material, granite, most probably syenite from Egyptian quarries. They most likely belonged to the same context, that is, as part of a temple or sanctuary. The language in which their hieroglyphic inscriptions are written is the same, Middle Egyptian. And finally the key elements of their texts are fundamentally the same, that is, honoring the reigning emperor and immortalizing the name of the private dedicator. A third element, which is the dedication to a deity (and the associated celebration of a specific occasion connected with said deity's cult) is at the center of the Benevento inscriptions, with their dedication to Isis and celebration of the erection of the obelisks and Iseum. This third element was likely present in the Borgia and Albani inscriptions, but, unless more fragments of them are discovered, this must remain an educated guess.

## Epilogue

When I first planned to write this paper, my intention was to focus on the characteristics and functions of inscribed Roman obelisks dedicated by private citizens. The text of the Benevento obelisks was intended to be included in a brief appendix, purely for convenience and ease of reference. But early on in my work, it became clear that a rigorous survey of all previous scholarship and, most importantly, a new documentation and edition of these obelisks were a priority and ought to sit at the heart of my new study: for the Benevento obelisks had somehow become some of the most misrepresented artifacts in the field of Romano-Egyptian antiquity, their understanding buried at the bottom of a dense stratigraphy of conflicting interpretations, misconceptions, and sometimes plain

myths that had piled up at the crossroads of ancient history and Egyptology.

Undeniably, multiple approaches can be used as a valid means of furthering our understanding of these extraordinary monuments: some may study them as witnesses of the spreading of Egyptian cults and the hunger for *aegyptiaca* in the Roman Empire, others as unique products of the cultural and religious agenda of a specific emperor's reign, others as some of the latest original textual products created by the Egyptian priestly intelligentsia, and others yet as examples of Roman adoption of the Egyptian sacred language and script in an early instance of cultural appropriation. But these obelisks can and should also be studied for their own value, as a rare category of monuments bearing extraordinary inscriptions, which transcend the boundaries between Egyptian and classical civilizations. More importantly, a close study of the obelisks themselves is a *sine qua non* that must lie at the foundation of any other study. No real advancement in their modern interpretation is possible—whatever its methods are and whatever we may think of them, groundbreaking approaches or scholarly fads—if it does not rely on a solid analysis of the primary sources as its cornerstone. This is therefore what I have tried to provide in the present paper, as a resource intended for Egyptologists and ancient historians alike.

It is perhaps an ironic testament to the importance of autopsy in scholarly practice and the need for collating old epigraphic copies—even in the case of supposedly well-known, fully accessible, and well-published monuments—that this article has had to offer a new, emended copy of the Benevento obelisks' inscriptions. For more than a century these monuments have been published and republished based on the facsimiles first produced by Erman in 1893. Not once have the original inscriptions been revisited or has the accuracy of this old copy been questioned, even though the original monuments remained easily accessible: one displayed in a museum, the other standing in the middle of a lovely

Italian piazza. Almost two hundred years ago, in 1826, Jean-François Champollion was lamenting the quality of Zoëga's 1797 engraving of the Benevento inscriptions—back then, the only available reproduction—and expressed his resolve to replace it by publishing a more faithful copy.<sup>248</sup> With the epigraphic documentation made available in this study, further and long-overdue steps have been taken in the direction in which he first pointed.

In conclusion, the majestic Pamphili and Barberini obelisks, with their hieroglyphic inscriptions commissioned directly by the emperor (Domitian and Hadrian, respectively), still make for some of ancient Rome's most impressive monuments. It is, however, even more extraordinary to conceive that private citizens based in Italy could themselves commission obelisks with original hieroglyphic inscriptions containing newly composed Middle Egyptian texts—whether motivated by genuine devotion or by alignment with imperial tastes. Indeed, one wonders whether Rutilius Lupus took the inspiration for commissioning his twin monuments from the obelisk that Domitian had erected a few years earlier in Rome.

As public monuments, yet ones covered in a script that was hardly accessible to the public, these Egyptian monoliths erected in Roman Italy may appear absurdly contradictory in nature. Ironically, however, it was precisely here, in Roman Italy, that the archaic and inaccessible nature of the hieroglyphic script served its original purpose best: preserving the name of its beneficiary for eternity. Following Domitian's assassination in AD 96, the senate "passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated" (*eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret*).<sup>249</sup> Yet the name of Domitian, encased by protective cartouches, survived proudly and in plain view both in Rome, on the Pamphili obelisk, and in Benevento, on the Iseum's twin obelisks. What the main languages of power in Rome, Latin and Greek, could not do was successfully accomplished by the power of Egyptian hieroglyphs.<sup>250</sup>



## Appendix A

### Continuous Transliteration and Translation of the Benevento Obelisks' Inscriptions

The text reproduces the one given in the edition, with the same conventions (for example, underlined text marks points in which the inscriptions of the two obelisks diverge from one another).

#### Side 1

	Transliteration	Translation
A	<p>↓→ Hr hwn n&lt;h&gt;t(?) &lt;nb.ty&gt; iti            'm shm` bik nbw `wsr rnp.w(t)` ʕ3            nht &lt;nsw.t bi.ty&gt; ʕWTKRTR KSRS            nsw.t bi.ty T'M[T]INS ʕnh d.t hbi            in(.w) m B.wy h3s.wt m ntyy.w r            iy.t=f n.t hnw [Hr]'m'</p>	<p>The Horus “Str&lt;o&gt;ng(?) Youth,” &lt;the Two Ladies&gt; “He Who Conquers through            Might,” the Golden Falcon “Powerful of Years and Great of Triumph,” &lt;the            King of Upper and Lower Egypt&gt; EMPEROR CAESAR, <u>the King of Upper and            Lower Egypt</u> DOMITIAN, ever-living, he who collects tribute from the Two            Lands and the subjugated foreign countries to his sanctuary(?) of the capital            city, [Ro]me.</p>
B	<p>←↓ [. . .] `bik` nbw wsr rnp.w(t) ʕ3            nht nsw.t bi.ty ʕWTKRT[R] K`YS`RS            s3 R` TMTINS ʕnh d.t hbi in(.w) m            B.wy h3s.wt m ndy.w r iy.t=f n.t hnw            Hrm</p>	<p>[...] the Golden Falcon “Powerful of Years and Great of Triumph,” <u>the King of            Upper and Lower Egypt</u> EMPERO[R] CAESAR, <u>the Son of Re</u> DOMITIAN, ever-            living, he who collects tribute from the Two Lands and the subjugated foreign            countries to his sanctuary(?) of the capital city, Rome.</p>

#### Side 2

	Transliteration	Translation
A	<p>↓→ 3s(.t) wr(.t) mw.t nt(r) Spd.t hk3.t            ʕnh.w nb(.t) p(.t) B dw3.t sʕhʕ=f n= `s`            thn n inr m3t hnʕ ntr:w niw.t=f Bnmts            (w)d3 ini n nb B.wy TMTINS ʕnh d.t            rn=f nfr R`wt`l`y`ys Lpws di n=fʕhʕw            k3i m ndm-ib</p>	<p>Isis the Great, the God's Mother, Sothis, Queen of the Stars, Lady of the Sky,            the Earth, and the Netherworld: he erected an obelisk of granite stone to            her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return of the Lord of the            Two Lands DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is            Rutilius Lupus. May a long lifetime <u>in joy</u> be granted to him.</p>
B	<p>↓→ [. . .] `thn` m inr m3t hnʕ ntr:w            niw(.t)=f Bnmts `wd3 ini` n nb B.wy            TMTINS ʕnh d.t rn=f nfr Rwtlys Lpws            di n=fʕhʕw k3i</p>	<p>[...] an obelisk of granite stone [...] and the gods of his city, Benevento, so            that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands DOMITIAN, ever-living, might            be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May a long lifetime be            granted to him.</p>

## Side 3

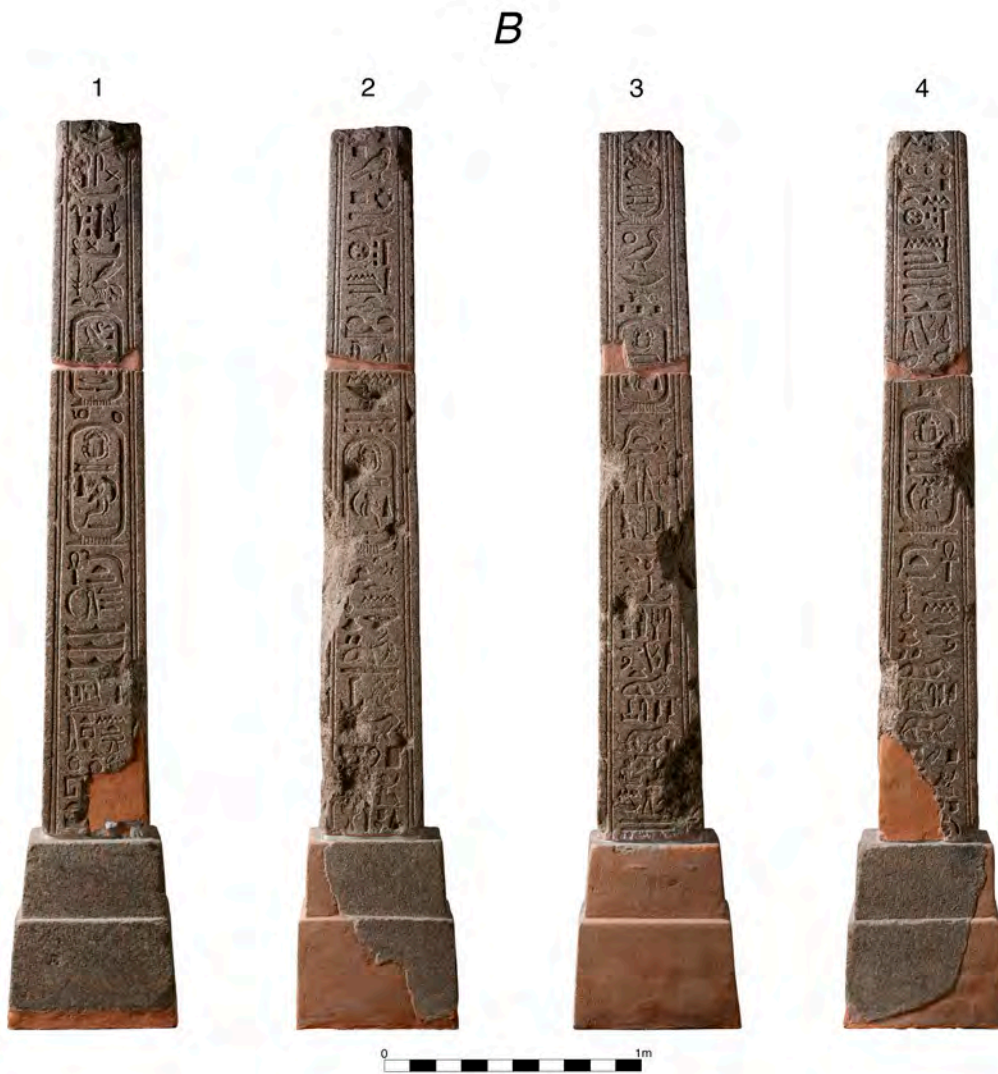
Transliteration	Translation
<p>A ↓→ <i>rnp(.t)-sp hmn.t hr hm Hr k3 nht</i>  <i>nsw.t bi.ty nb t3.[wy] NTR S3 NTR</i>  <i>MR(Y) NTR.W NB(.W) 's3' R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>.w</i>  <i>TMT'T'N'S' 'nh d.t hysi 'h.t šps(.t) n</i>  <i>3s.t wr.t nb(.t) Bnmnts 'h n<sup>c</sup> Psd.t=s</i>  <i>in Rwtlys Lpyws wd3 ini n 'nb t3.wy'</i></p>	<p>Regnal year eight, under the majesty of the Horus “Strong Bull,” the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the [Two] Lands THE GOD, THE SON OF THE GOD, BELOVED OF ALL THE GODS, the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living: a splendid sanctuary was built <u>to</u> Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento, <u>and her Ennead</u>, by Rutilius Lupus, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands might be prosperous.</p>
<p>B ↓→ [. . .] 'NTR' S3 [NTR] MR(Y)  <i>NTR(.W) NB(.W) s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>.w</i>  <i>TMT'T'[N]'S' 'nh d.t hysi 'h(.t)</i>  <i>šps(.t) &lt;n&gt; 3s.t wr(.t) nb(.t) Bnmnts</i>  <i>s'h<sup>c</sup> thn m3t in Rwtlys Lps wd3 ini n</i>  <i>nb t3.wy</i></p>	<p>[...] THE GOD, THE SON OF [THE GOD], BELOVED OF ALL THE GODS, the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIA[N], ever-living: a splendid sanctuary was built &lt;to&gt; Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento, <u>(and) an obelisk of granite was erected</u> by Rutilius Lupus, so that the return of the Lord of the Two Lands might be prosperous.</p>

## Side 4

Transliteration	Translation
<p>A ↓→ <i>3s.t wr.t mw.t nt(r) ir(.t) R<sup>c</sup> nb(.t) p(.t)</i>  <i>'hnw.t' ntr:w nb(.w) iri&lt;=f&gt; n=s &lt;m&gt;nw</i>  <i>p'n' hn<sup>c</sup> 'ntr:w' niw(.t)=f Bnmnts 'wd3 ini'</i>  <i>&lt;n&gt; s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>(.w) TMTINS 'nh d'.t</i>  <i>rn=f nfr Rwtlys Lpys diw n'=f' [. . .]</i></p>	<p>Isis the Great, the God's Mother, the Sun's Eye, Lady of the Sky, Mistress of All the Gods: &lt;he&gt; made this &lt;mo&gt;nument to her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return &lt;of&gt; the Son of Re, the Lord of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May [...] be granted to him.</p>
<p>B ↓→ [. . .] n=s &lt;m&gt;nw pn hn<sup>c</sup> ntr:w niw.t=f  <i>Bnmnts wd3 ini n s3 R<sup>c</sup> [nb] h<sup>c</sup>(.w) TMTINS</i>  <i>'nh d.t rn=f nfr Rwtlyys Lpws di n=f'nh</i>  <i>(w)d3 s(nb) 3w(.t)-ib</i></p>	<p>[...] this &lt;mo&gt;nument to her and the gods of his city, Benevento, so that the return of the Son of Re, [the Lord] of Crowns DOMITIAN, ever-living, might be prosperous. His good name is Rutilius Lupus. May life, prosperity, health, and happiness be granted to him.</p>



Figure 7.26 Benevento obelisk A, combined orthophotographs of all sides. Photograph and imaging by Paul D. Wordsworth (2020)



**Figure 7.27** Benevento obelisk B, combined photographs of all sides (prior to conservation). Photographs courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2017)

## Appendix B

### Past Epigraphic Copies of the Benevento Obelisks and Their Differences

This appendix brings together the historical epigraphic copies of the Benevento obelisks' inscriptions, that is, Zoëga's, Ungarelli's, and Erman's.<sup>251</sup> This is to allow for an easy consultation and comparison of their main differences, which have already been individually discussed in the commentary accompanying the text edition.

Zoëga's copy documents the obelisk as it appeared in the eighteenth century, standing in front of Benevento's cathedral before its later relocation to Piazza Papiniano. At the time (and, in fact, up until the twentieth century),<sup>252</sup> the obelisk was reassembled out of four fragments, with the upper three being what are now the middle fragments of obelisk A, and the bottom one actually being the lower section of obelisk B. Zoëga, who could not read the hieroglyphs, therefore documented the inscriptions as they looked in real life rather than trying to reorder them correctly at least on paper, as Ungarelli and Erman do. Namely, looking at the fragments in his copy from bottom to top, Zoëga's side 1 = Erman's (and my) sides B/2+A/4, his side 2 = B/4+A/2, his side 3 = B/1+A/3, and his side 4 = B/3+A/1. In terms of its epigraphic value to modern studies of the obelisks, Zoëga's copy is nowadays of little use, though far from unimportant. In fact, it makes a direct contribution to my analysis concerning a damaged passage in the bottom fragment of B/1, for which see my commentary (note 6 to side 1).

As for Ungarelli's copy,<sup>253</sup> the following points must be noted:

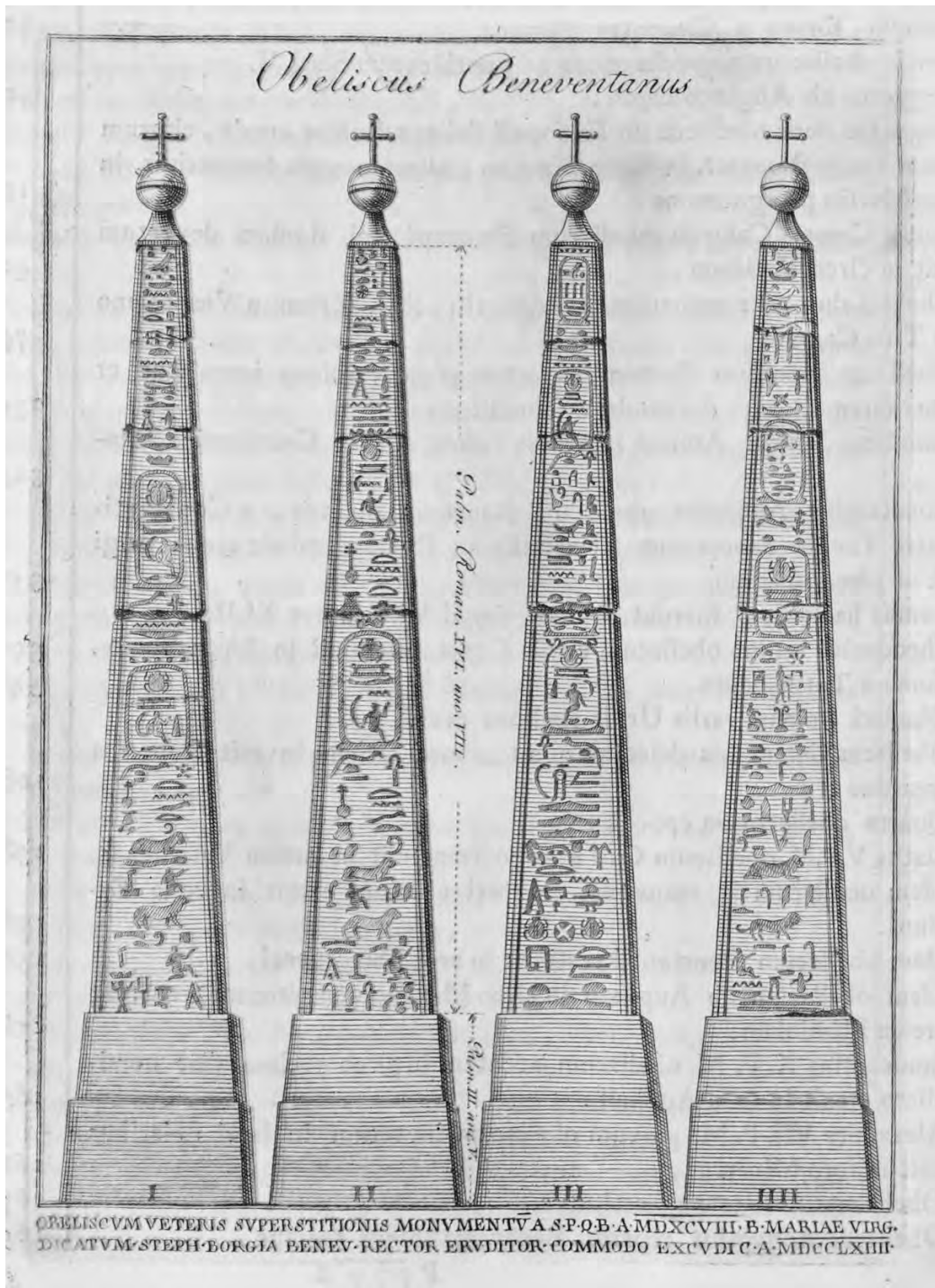
(1) the top fragment of obelisk A was yet undiscovered in Ungarelli's time and is thus missing from his copy;

(2) Ungarelli orders the obelisks' sides differently from later scholars: thus, Erman's (and my) sides 1-2-3-4 = Ungarelli's 1-3-2-4;

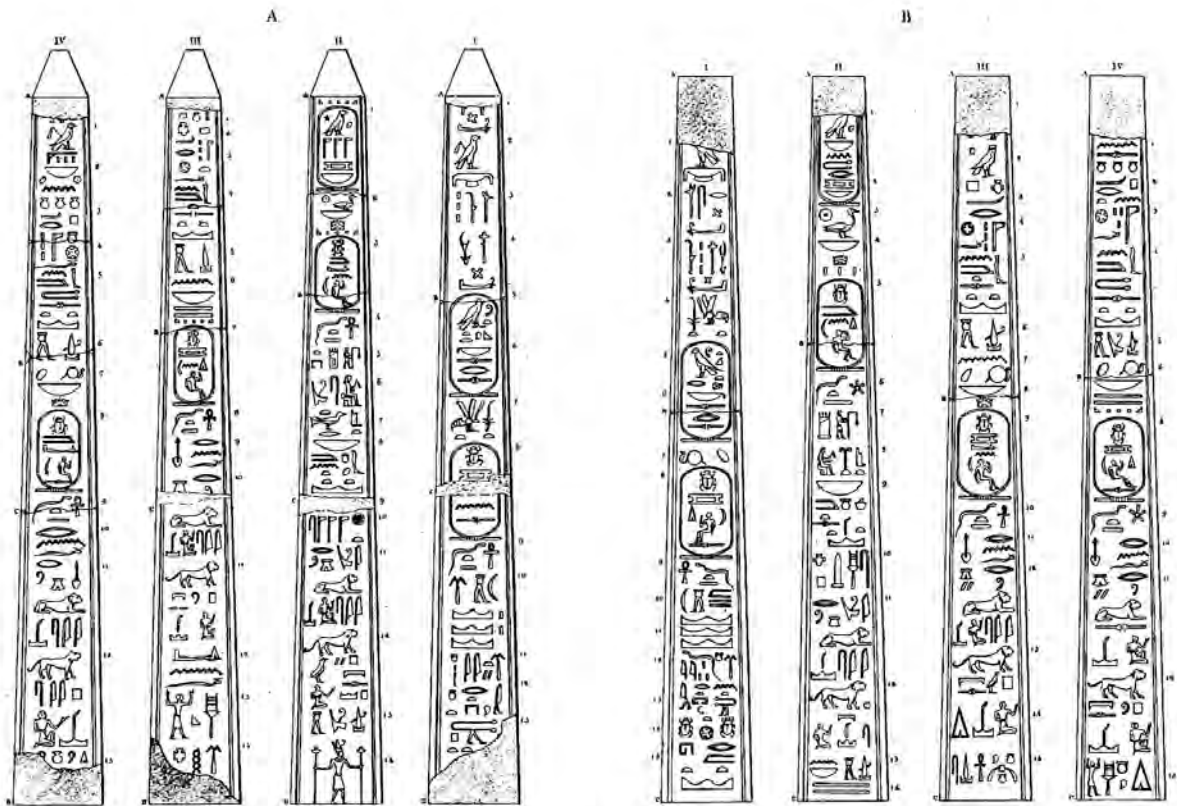
(3) in Ungarelli's copy of B/3 and B/4 (= Erman's B/2 and B/4), the two fragments from which the obelisk is reconstructed are mistakenly swapped, with the lower fragment of his side B/3 pertaining in fact to side B/4, and vice versa. Further errors are also introduced here as a consequence of this mix-up.

For ease of consultation, I have gathered in two tables all the significant divergences between Ungarelli's and Erman's copies, since there are good a number of them and not all are obvious at first sight. Note that, by "significant divergences," I intend differences that entail, for instance, omitted, misplaced, and wrongly added hieroglyphs. Minor differences, such as signs reproduced with different degrees of damage or slightly different appearances, are not listed.

As regards Erman's copy, I offer it here also for immediate comparison with my own facsimiles. In this case, I do not list all changes in a dedicated table as I have done for Ungarelli's, since discussion in my edition's commentary, as well as comparison with the photographs published in this article, already clarify what my improvements are. To help the reader spot all significant differences, I have simply marked their position in the inscriptions by inserting into Erman's original copy curly brackets next to the relevant passages.

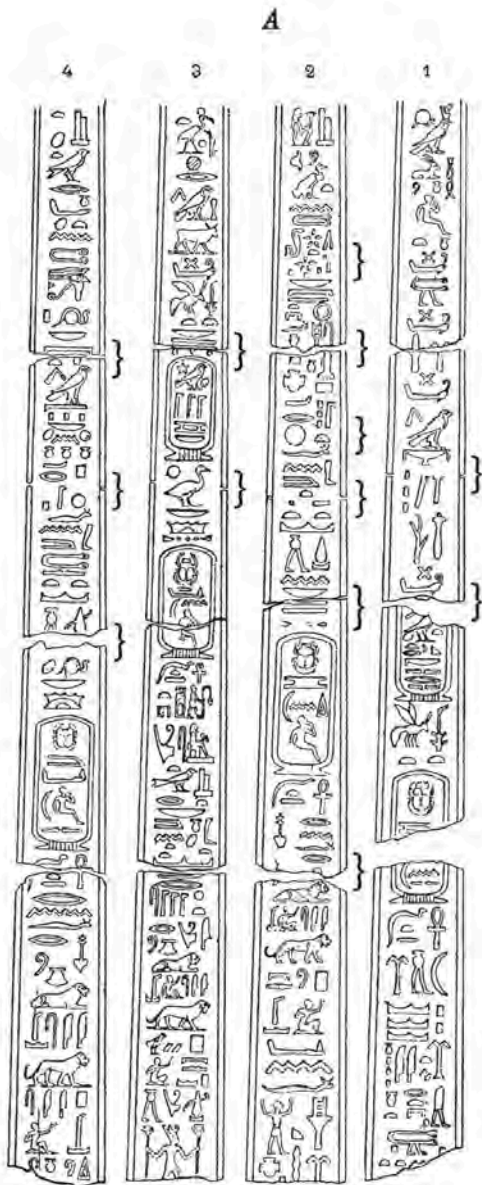


**Figure 7.28** The first published copy of the Benevento obelisk(s), by Georg Zoëga, as a single monument recomposed from a number of fragments pertaining to both obelisks A and B (from Zoega 1797, 644)

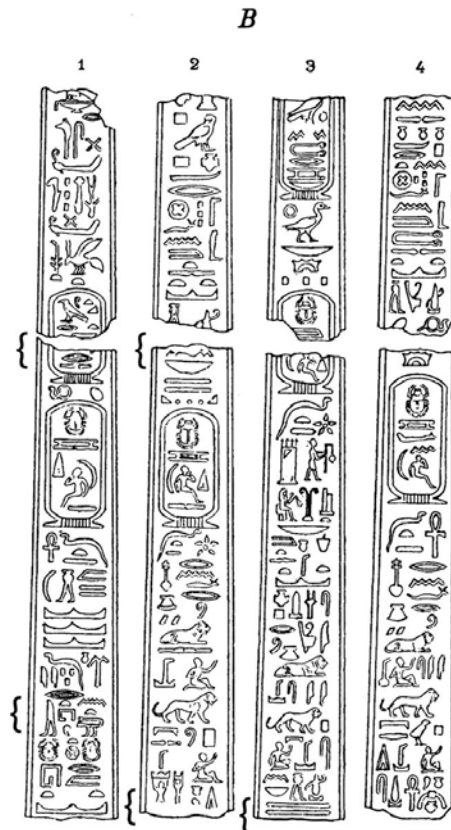


*Obelisci Beneventani*

Figure 7.29 Copy of the Benevento obelisks by Luigi Ungarelli, based on original work by Jean-François Champollion, prior to the rediscovery of the top fragment of obelisk A (from Ungarellus 1842, 2: plate v)



**Figure 7.30** Facsimile of Benevento obelisk A by Adolf Erman (from Erman 1896, plate viii). The curly brackets have been edited in, to mark differences between Erman's facsimile and mine

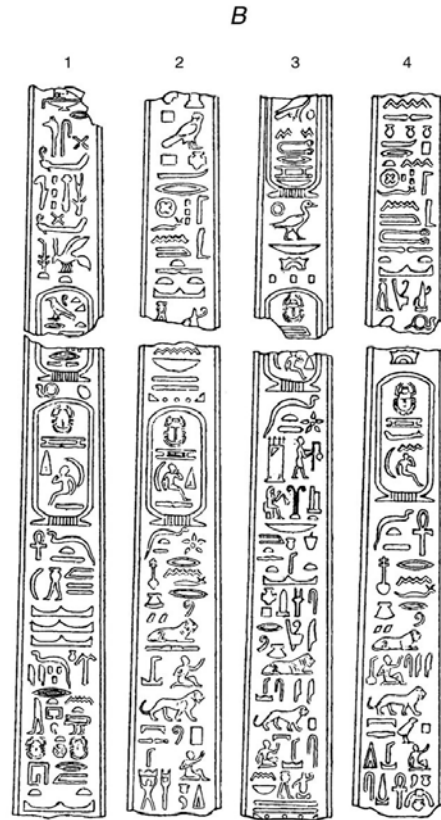


**Figure 7.31** Facsimile of Benevento obelisk B by Adolf Erman (from Erman 1896, plate viii). The curly brackets have been edited in, to mark differences between Erman's facsimile and mine













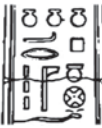
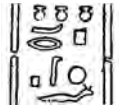


**Figure 7.32** Facsimile of Benevento obelisk A (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)















**Figure 7.33** Facsimile of Benevento obelisk B (edited and improved version of Erman 1896, plate viii)

## Obelisk A: differences between Ungarelli's and Erman's copies

Side	Ungarelli (U)	Erman (E)	Notes
1			Incorrect swap of $\text{𓂏}$ $\beta$ and $\text{𓂐}$ $w$ in U.
1			Incorrect omission of $\text{𓂏}$ $i$ in U.
1			Incorrect omission of top of $\text{𓂏}$ $m$ in U.
2 (= U 3)	n/a	n/a	n/a
3 (= U 2)			Incorrect rendering of $\text{𓂏} \circ \circ \Delta$ determinative in E.
3 (= U 2)			Incorrect omission of $\text{𓂏}$ $hn^c$ in U.
4			Incorrect omissions of $\text{𓂏}$ $nw$ and, partially, of $\text{𓂏}$ determinative in E.

## Obelisk B: differences between Ungarelli's and Erman's copies

Side	Ungarelli (U)	Erman (E)	Notes
1			Incorrect inclusion of $\text{𓂏}$ $r$ atop $\text{𓂏}$ $k$ in U.  Incorrect inversion of $\text{𓂏}$ $k$ in U.  The first $\text{𓂏}$ $s$ in U (absent in lacuna in E) is an unmarked restoration, not only epigraphically inaccurate but also wrong (as confirmed by Zoëga's copy).

Side	Ungarelli (U)	Erman (E)	Notes
2 (= U 3)			Unspecified damage signaled left of $\text{𓂏}$ <i>thn</i> in U versus specific traces of sign (perhaps $\text{𓂏}$ ) in E.
2 (= U 3)			Fully preserved $\text{𓂏}$ $\text{𓂏}$ <i>wd3 ini</i> group in U is an unmarked restoration, epigraphically inaccurate.  The following signs in U, $\text{𓂏}$ <i>n s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb</i> , are inexistent, included by mistake.
2 (= U 3)			Incorrect omission of $\text{𓂏}$ <i>n</i> in U (NB: due to a mix-up, the second fragment of U's B/3 is incorrectly shown as part of B/4).
3 (= U 2)			Incorrect inclusion of $\text{𓂏}$ <i>nb</i> below $\text{𓂏}$ <i>ntr</i> in U.
3 (= U 2)			Presence of $\text{𓂏}$ <i>n</i> in U (lost in lacuna in E) may be an unmarked restoration (albeit undoubtedly correct) and epigraphically inaccurate (also considering how the layout of other signs in his cartouche is clearly unfaithful to the original).
4	n/a	n/a	n/a (NB: due to a mix-up, the second fragment of B/4 is incorrectly shown as part of U's B/3).

## Appendix C: Documenting Benevento's Obelisk A (by Paul D. Wordsworth)

In spite of the apparently diminutive size of the obelisk standing in Benevento's Piazza Papiniano, as well as its excellent preservation, the three-dimensional recording of the monument and its inscriptions was not a straightforward procedure. The major obstacles to photogrammetric or laser modeling of obelisks relate not only to their size and shape but also to the materials they are made from and, most critically, to their positioning in the surrounding environment. Considering the latter, the Benevento obelisk is placed outdoors in a small urban public square, which precluded documentation using an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV, or drone) unless substantial safety measures could be ensured. The tall buildings on all sides, meanwhile, greatly affect the direction and intensity of the lighting of the obelisk at different times of day and in varying weather conditions, having a substantial bearing on the legibility of the

inscriptions. Hard granite masonry may have ensured the longevity of the carved outlines against erosion, but the camouflaging variegation of the dark stone results in many signs being almost invisible unless in the correct raking light. As the obelisk is placed on cardinal directions outdoors, this will necessarily mean that each side must ideally be recorded at a different time of day, and that the north side (A/3), for example, will always be difficult to capture adequately, given that it always stands against the light.

The approach adopted here to document the Benevento obelisk was to use photogrammetry to generate a series of three-dimensional orthophotographs of each face. Orthographic projection of photographs onto an accurate three-dimensional model permits a full-color scaled digital output, allowing direct copying and comparison with historical facsimiles. The photographs in this instance were captured using a nine-meter telescopic monopod pole, onto which was mounted a 24.3-megapixel digital SLR camera, with a fixed focal-length lens. Photographs were taken on an automated interval setting

and the camera raised between exposures, and then lowered in the same pattern, to create an average overlap of 50 percent. In order to achieve good resolution and adequate light balance while ensuring a safe distance, camera positions were kept at a distance of one meter from the obelisk, positioned at three angles per side (face-on and two oblique angles at the same distance). In theory, it would have been possible to model the complete obelisk from the photograph coverage obtained, but as mentioned above, the optimal lighting for each side was at different times of day, when the difference in shadows makes accurate photo-matching between the sides more difficult. Furthermore, the objective at this stage was to be able to represent for the first time an accurate scaled image of each face. The photographs were captured in summer, on a dry, cloudless day (July 29, 2020, morning through early afternoon), at points when the direct raking light cast strong contrasting shadows across the relief.

The resulting orthophotographs, published in this article, represent the first systematic detailed documentation of the obelisk since Adolf Erman's recording of the stone's surface using squeezes in the late nineteenth century. Each side is represented with sufficient detail that, even without digital tracing, it is possible to assess each individual sign, its form, and placement, and at the same time produce a comprehensive record of any damage the monument has accrued over time (which was only partially noted in the historical squeezes). With an unlimited budget it would be possible to capture yet further detail under controlled lighting conditions (erecting a scaffolding shelter and artificial light) or to use laser scanning on a suitable surrounding scaffolding. For the time being, however, it is anticipated that these orthophotographs and the resulting facsimiles will form the new primary reference for Benevento's obelisk A and its inscriptions.<sup>254</sup>



**Figure 7.34** Paul D. Wordsworth documenting Benevento obelisk A. Photograph by Luigi Prada (29 July 2020)



**Figure 7.35** Detail of telescopic pole rig for photographic documentation of Benevento obelisk A. Photograph by Luigi Prada (29 July 2020)



I am indebted to a good number of people and institutions for facilitating my research. The J. Paul Getty Museum invited me in 2017 to assist in the conservation project of the Benevento obelisk to be exhibited in Los Angeles (obelisk B of the pair) and, in August 2018, to present at the colloquium *Egypt, Greece, Rome: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Antiquity*: for their generosity and enthusiasm, I am especially grateful to Jeffrey Spier, Timothy Potts, Sara E. Cole, and Erik Risser. Mark Smith (University of Oxford) and Jenny Cromwell (Manchester Metropolitan University) kindly read a draft of this paper and suggested a number of improvements. Several insightful conversations with Maria Cristina White-da Cruz (London) helped me put in order my ideas on Roman Benevento. The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford, and the British Academy, London (from which, at the time, I held an Early Career Fellowship), funded research trips to inspect much of the material described in this study (Munich, Albani obelisk; Palestrina, Borgia obelisk; and Benevento). The Landmark Trust awarded me a grant from its Landmark Futures scheme, which enabled me to write part of this paper during a research stay at the Egyptian House in Penzance, Cornwall, in May 2019, in the fine Egyptological company of the “Griffith Ladies” (Cat Warsi, Elizabeth Fleming, and Jenni Navratil, University of Oxford). Thanks are also due to those individuals who assisted me in procuring new images—either for study or publication—of the obelisks discussed in this article. Namely, I am obliged to Laura Forte and Anna Pizza (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli), for images of the Naples fragments of the Borgia obelisk; Marina Cogotti (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Palestrina), Nicola Barbagli (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), and Elisa V. Bove (Rome), for images of the Palestrina fragments of the same obelisk; Sylvia Schoske and Roxane Bicker (Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich), for images of the Albani obelisk; Gabriella Gomma (Museo del Sannio di Benevento), for permission to publish the photographs of Benevento’s obelisk B, taken during its conservation at the Getty; Nicodemo Abate (Naples), for sharing with me his photographs and 3-D model of the obelisk in Piazza Papiniano (obelisk A), long before I could visit Benevento in person (his model can be accessed online on the Sketchfab platform, at <https://skfb.ly/6WCRs>); and Irene Soto Marín (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), for photographs of the same obelisk. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Paul D. Wordsworth (University of Oxford). Not only did he assist with the preparation of all the illustrations published in this study, but he also took care of documenting the obelisks’ inscriptions in Palestrina (with further logistical assistance from Massimo Giuseppetti, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, and Sahba Shayani, University of Oxford) and in Benevento, devising—in summer 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—the ingenious system used to record the epigraphy of obelisk A, which he illustrates here in appendix C. The writing of this paper was completed at Uppsala University, after I took up my post there.

Epigraph: Ungarellius 1842, 1:160n46.

## NOTES

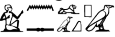




1. The oldest Egyptian obelisk from the Dynastic period to be found in Rome is also the largest: that of Thutmose III and IV

now in Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano (18th Dynasty, fifteenth–fourteenth century BC). The most recent is the Minerveo obelisk, from the reign of Apries (26th Dynasty, sixth century BC). The bibliography on Egyptian obelisks in Rome is vast. It suffices here to mention Iversen 1968–72, vol. 1; Ciampini 2004; for shorter overviews, see Habachi 2000, 67–85; Parker 2007.

2. Though without hieroglyphs, this obelisk bears a short dedicatory inscription in Latin (see, for example, Schneider 2004, 156–61; Pfeiffer 2015, 205–8, no. 43). Brief inscriptions in Greek and Latin to celebrate an obelisk’s (re-)dedication, carved directly on the lower end of the monolith—as in this case—or on its plinth or, at times, even on bronze supports used to prop up the obelisk, are well attested and are found in connection with both uninscribed and inscribed (sc., with Egyptian hieroglyphs) obelisks: see, for instance, Pfeiffer 2015, 217–19, no. 46, 225–31, nos. 48, 49.
3. I do not take into consideration here the Sallustiano obelisk at Trinità dei Monti, since its inscriptions (possibly executed at some point in the third century AD) are a mechanical copy of those on the Flaminio obelisk (19th Dynasty, thirteenth century BC). See Habachi 2000, 81–82.
4. For the former, see Grenier 1987. For the latter, see the studies in Meyer 1994 (still the best work available on its inscriptions) and Grenier 2008. It remains debated whether the original location of Hadrian’s obelisk was in Italy (in Rome or at the emperor’s villa in Tivoli) or in Egypt, at Antinoupolis (see Grenier 2008, 37–45). Even if the latter was the case (which seems, in fact, unlikely), the obelisk would still have been moved to Rome in antiquity, under one of Hadrian’s successors.
5. See Baines and Whitehouse 2005, 405.
6. See Zawadzki 1969.
7. They must have been, however, relatively sizable obelisks—larger than the Benevento obelisks discussed later in this article—likely over 5 meters in height. This estimate can be obtained by comparing the surface of the partly surviving base of one of the Aswan obelisks (0.97 × 1 meter; see Zawadzki 1969, 106) with that of the Benevento obelisks (0.63 × 0.63 meter). Given that the original height of the Benevento obelisks must have been around 4.5 meters, the height one might reasonably expect from Aurelius Restitutus’s obelisks seems to be, at the very least, 5 meters (on his part, Zawadzki 1969, 111–12n5, suggests anywhere between 4 and 7 meters).
8. The inscription is in Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum, JE 21790. For a recent treatment, see Pfeiffer 2015, 307–9, no. 70.
9. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, inv. 3686. See Rouillet 1972, 83, no. 88, figs. 104–10; J. Baines and H. Whitehouse in Beck, Bol, and Bückling 2005, 728–30, no. 343.
10. Benevento, Museo del Sannio, inv. 265. See Müller 1969, 64, plate xxi.2.

11. Admittedly, in both the Florence and the Benevento cases one cannot positively prove that these obelisks were private commissions: since neither artifact bears a legible inscription or comes from a documented original context, it goes without saying that their dedicators remain unknown. It seems, however, wholly unlikely that such small items—as far as obelisks go—could have been expressly commissioned by an emperor (the Florentine obelisk is only 1.73 meters high, and the Benevento one was even smaller, based on what can be judged from its surviving fragment). For a similar opinion (specifically about the Florentine monolith), see Baines and Whitehouse 2005, 413. Another interesting example of a small, privately dedicated monument inscribed with pseudo-hieroglyphs—an obelisk or perhaps a stela?—comes from Roman Dacia (modern Romania) and is a reminder that similar artifacts were not limited to Italy: Cluj-Napoca, National Museum of Transylvanian History, inv. 25484, published in Deac 2014 (its height is 1.19 meters). More sizable obelisks with pseudo-hieroglyphic inscriptions are more difficult to categorize, however, for their dimensions alone may suggest the possibility of a commission from a public—if not necessarily imperial—authority. Examples include the obelisks of Catania, with the one in Piazza del Duomo being around 3.5 meters high (see Sfameni Gasparro 1973, 207–9, nos. 136–38, figs. 22, 23—here classified as “colonna”), and the obelisk—categorized by some as an elongated stela—of the Tiber Island, in Rome, which, in all likelihood, was originally more than 6 meters high (see Roulet 1972, 79–82, no. 85, figs. 95–102).
12. In the case of other material pertaining to Roman obelisks inscribed with meaningful hieroglyphic inscriptions, such as the fragment now in the Musei Capitolini in Rome preserving a few hieroglyphs with the name of the god Osiris (inv. 2935/S), unfortunately too little survives to tell whether we are dealing with a royal or a private commission (on this fragment, see Roulet 1972, 83, no. 87, fig. 103; most recently, Müskens 2017, 200, no. 094). They will therefore be left out of my discussion.
13. See Swetnam-Burland (2015, 7–14, 18–19), where we read at 10: “we must refrain from prioritizing the object’s [Egyptian] creation over its [Roman] reuse or favoring literal meaning over symbolic [i.e., that which a hieroglyphic inscription—or even pseudo-hieroglyphic—could have held also for those who could not read it].” On cultural and object biographies, particularly applied to obelisks, see now the recent discussion in Barrett 2019, 38–40; to this, add several of the essays in Versluys 2020, which revisit so-called Egyptomania (in ancient Rome and beyond) through the lens of mnemohistory, materiality, and agency.
14. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.22 (after Hanson 1989, 336–37).
15. On matters of terminology (and the pros and cons in the use of words such as *aegyptiaca*, Egyptianizing, etc.), I refer the reader to Swetnam-Burland (2007, 113–19), whose points I need not reiterate here. Most recently, Gasparini and Gordon (2018, 578–87) have less convincingly argued for the concept of “Egyptianism(s)” as a new “heuristic device” to be employed in the field. Surprisingly, when discussing artifacts from Roman Italy inscribed with hieroglyphic texts, their study traces a simple dichotomy between imported earlier Egyptian antiquities with genuine hieroglyphic texts versus Roman imitations with gibberish inscriptions (see Gasparini and Gordon 2018, 588–93). The category of newly composed and grammatically legible hieroglyphic inscriptions, as in the case of the obelisks discussed in the present paper, goes unmentioned.
16. See note 245 below.
17. See note 13 above.
18. And it was still circulating in the fourth century AD, when the historian Ammianus Marcellinus cited from it in his *Res Gestae*; see Benaissa 2013. Based on a passage by Pliny the Elder, Swetnam-Burland (2010, 142–43) suggests that perhaps even the other obelisk brought to Rome by Augustus—the Montecitorio one—might have received a Latin or Greek translation of its hieroglyphic inscriptions (on these obelisks of Augustus, see also note 149 below).
19. Two fragments are in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Palestrina, inv. 80548; E 19 (0.63 and 0.47 meter in height); see Agnoli (2002, 284–87, no. III.23), who lists three fragments (the third one has since been rejoined with the top one of the two larger fragments, as visible in Bove 2008, 89). Four more fragments (now restored together into a single, 1.9-meter-high, piece constituting the obelisk’s bottom section) are in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 2317; see Pozzi 1989, 39, plate ii, no. 7; Giustozzi 2016, 168, no. 14. In much past scholarship, the fragments in Palestrina and those in Naples were considered to belong to two separate twin obelisks (see, for example, Zawadzki 1969, 110), but today’s consensus is that they belong to one and the same monolith (see Bove 2008, 88).
20. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, inv. Gl. WAF 39; see Wildung 1976, 1–3; Schlüter 2014. Note that only the central section of the Albani obelisk is original: its bottom and top parts are fanciful restorations from the eighteenth century. The ancient section measures 3.2 meters in height, while the whole obelisk has now a height of 5.5 meters (Schlüter 2014, 90).
21. For the uncertainties involved in the reading of his name, see the discussion below.
22. All four faces of each obelisk preserve the same inscription (with different degrees of damage on each face and occasional minor differences in the arrangement of the hieroglyphic signs), so I offer a single transcription per obelisk. This reflects the preservation state of no specific individual side but rather gathers the epigraphic data available from all four. The same is the case with my standardized hieroglyphic transcriptions, which therefore do not signal a specific right-to-left or left-to-right reading direction, nor do they mark a sign as damaged, unless this is the case on all four faces. Save for this exception, note that all other hieroglyphic transcriptions provided in this article either mark or directly reproduce the orientation of the

original inscriptions. All hieroglyphic transcriptions were prepared with the JSesh hieroglyphic editor.

23. Throughout this article, text in all caps in the transliteration and small caps in the translation indicates text in cartouches.
24. In my translation I try to account for the syntax of the inscription as best as I can, based on the surviving morsels of text. The Naples fragments include the bottom of the obelisk and the inscription's conclusion, giving the identity of the dedicator. Syntactically the left dislocation of Africanus's name is unproblematic: it can be explained within the boundaries of Egyptian grammar as an emphatic means to make his name stand out rather than be interpreted as an influence of Latin word order, that is, subject first and verb second (contra Iversen 1973, 23). More surprising is the lack of a direct object referring to the obelisk, which I supply with the dependent pronoun *sw*, based on comparison with the inscription of the Albani obelisk (see note 25 below). As regards other translations of this inscription, note that the one recently offered in Giustozzi (2016, 168: "[e]rected by the The Lord of the Two Lands, Caesar (or Caius) ... Augustus Emperor ... Titus Sextus Africanus"), is, in fact, a bizarre rewriting that betrays the original text, assigning the agency of the obelisk's dedication to the emperor, rather than the private dedicator. As for Capriotti Vittozzi (2009, 85), her transliteration of the *cognomen* as *ʒprikʰns* is incorrect, for the inscription reads , and thus contains neither *i* nor *ʿ* (the latter being in fact an *ʒ*).
25. On the translation of *shn* as "to install," "to introduce" (in a temple), hence, tentatively, "to dedicate," see Müller 1975, 15; to this, add Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 3:469; Wilson 1997, 906. Regarding the following  *s*, I take it as the direct object referring to the obelisk (such a short writing of the dependent pronoun *sw*—masculine singular, implying a word like *thn* "obelisk" or *mnw* "monument"—is well attested in this period; see Kurth 2007–15, 2:603). I withhold instead judgment on the final  *r(w)* sign. One would welcome here the preposition of motion *r*, as this is found in combination with *shn* ("to introduce into"). The writing of the preposition *r* with the recumbent lion sign would be completely aberrant, however, and, to the best of my knowledge, unparalleled.
26. See Müller 1975, 15–18; most recently, Nagel 2019, 2:1121.
27. See Müller 1975, 15. For hieroglyphic writings of this title beginning with Egyptian *i*, see Beckerath 1999, 251.
28. First announced in Bove (2008, 88), her improved reading is already welcomed in two subsequent studies (Capriotti Vittozzi 2009, 85; Nagel 2019, 2:1121), which both opt to restore *ʿKIʿSRS* . . . ] for the title Caesar.
29. For details of her epigraphic study, see Bove (2008, 88, 90n11, claiming that traces of this previously unrecorded *k* survive on three sides of the fragment), and Bove (2009, 373–74, now stating that *k* is partly extant on two sides only). Besides the presence of *k* in one of the Palestrina fragments, other differences appear between the copies of the Naples section of the Borgia obelisk published in Bove (2008, 89) and in Müller (1975, 17, which, in turn, is clearly based on that of Zoega 1797, 192, as far the Naples fragments go). These differences show how the obelisk must have suffered further, modern damage to its side 4 (as also highlighted in Bove 2009, 373). When comparing the two copies, note that, numbering the obelisk's faces from left to right, Bove's (and my) faces 1-2-3-4 correspond to Müller's (and Zoëga's) 3-2-1-4 (Bove moves clockwise around the obelisk, Müller anticlockwise).
30. To be exact, Bove's published hand drawing marks the very top of *k* as still visible on faces 1 and 2, but in none of the published photographs of these sides of the fragments are the remainders of such a sign apparent, nor was I able to positively identify them at the time of my own inspection of the artifact (though this may have been due to the display in the Palestrina museum, which partly obscures the fragment's bottom edge). According to the same facsimile, the presence of the *k* sign is instead much more evident on side 3 (of which there are no published photographs), with more of it surviving on this face, where traces of another sign to the left of *i* were also marked in Müller's copy. My own recent collation has indeed confirmed the presence of a substantial angular shape here on side 3, surely the upper half of a  *k*.
31. A suggestion independently advanced also by Capriotti Vittozzi (2009, 87), who proposes to identify the emperor of the Borgia and Albani obelisks in Nero (r. AD 54–68). See also Nagel 2019, 2:1121n2067. For examples of hieroglyphic writings of Germanicus, see Beckerath 1999, 252–59 (in the titularies of Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Domitian, and Trajan).
32. As first argued by Spiegelberg (1920), though note that the reading was already anticipated by Lepsius (1867) as part of the diatribe between Lauth (1866, 1867) and Lepsius (1866a, 1866b). With regards to the issues involved in the reading of the *praenomen* Titus, I refer to my discussion below, within my commentary to the inscriptions of the Benevento obelisks (note 14 to side 2). As for the writing of Africanus, the rendering of Latin *f* with Egyptian *p* ought not to surprise; a parallel occurs, for instance, in the Pamphili obelisk, where the name of the dynasty of the Flavii is rendered as  *Plwyi* (see Grenier 1987, 939–40, fig. 1; the copy of the hieroglyphic text in Ciampini 2004, 158, H.7, is incomplete).
33. See Zawadzki (1969, 110), who did not come up with this suggestion (as believed by Bove 2009, 375) but derived it from Marucchi (1904b, 256).
34. On his possible identification with homonymous Roman citizens known from other sources, see Heil and Wachtel 2006, 253–55, nos. 659, 664.
35. See, for example, Müller 1975, 18–20; Bove 2008, 88–90; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 43.

36. A view held, for instance, also by Malaise 1972b, 96–97, no. 5; Gatti 1997, 333–34; Agnoli 2002, 286. It is important to note that we have no information about the discovery of the Albani obelisk (contra Swetnam-Burland 2015, 43, who misunderstands her sources). All we have is a Renaissance drawing proving that it was already in Rome in the year 1510 (see Müller 1975, 12–14).
37. See Malaise 1972b, 97, no. 5; Rouillet 1972, 2n9; Coarelli 1994, 124; Lembke 1994, 58; Gatti 1997, 333; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 43. While noting that the cults of Fortuna Primigenia and Isis in Palestrina may have merged as early as the second century BC, Nagel (2019, 2:1119–22) remains instead more cautious about assuming any direct connection between these obelisks and the worship of Isis.
38. For more on this, see note 245 below.
39. See note 242 below.
40. See note 24 above.
41. Whether Egyptian priests with such a technical knowledge were present in Roman Italy or their services had to be requested over a distance directly from Egypt remains to this day a much-contended topic, a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of the present paper. Some evidence (such as the well-known inscription from Aquileia dedicated by Harnouphis, an Egyptian *hierogrammateus* living in Italy—see Bricault 2005, 648; more recently, Pfeiffer 2015, 309–11, no. 71) would seem to support the former view but remains far from conclusive. On this problem, see also Swetnam-Burland 2011; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 45–53. Newly published material, however, may help clarify this issue and seems, in fact, to be pointing in the direction of Egypt. Most recently, a hieratic text in honor of Osiris-Antinous with passages closely resembling or identical to the inscriptions of Hadrian's Barberini obelisk has been identified in a fragmentary papyrus from Tebtunis, in Egypt (first announcement in Kucharek 2019, 79). This extraordinary material sheds new light on the textual history of such inscriptions, revealing direct links between an obelisk commissioned by a Roman emperor in the second century AD and cultic texts used in Egypt by Egyptian priests specifically to celebrate the novel cult established for the emperor's favorite.
42. To be sure, alternative explanations are also possible, albeit much less probable. For example, the royal cartouches may in theory have occurred simply as part of a dating formula (as is the case on side 3 of the Benevento obelisks, for which see the edition in the next section).
43. For a hypothetical plan of the Iseum of Benevento (hypothetical in that none of its foundations have been identified and excavated to this day), see, for example, Pirelli 2006, 136. See also Erman (1893, 211) and his very plausible suggestion—based on the orientation of the hieroglyphic inscriptions on side 1—that obelisk A originally stood to the left and obelisk B to the right of the sanctuary's entrance, when facing it. As pointed out by Zawadzki (1969, 112–13), a scene from the famous Nile mosaic of Palestrina, showing a small temple in classical style in front of which stand two small obelisks, may give us a good approximation of what a similar complex might have looked like. Most recently on the Beneventan Iseum, see Bragantini 2018.
44. Not four, as instead stated by Erman 1896, 149.
45. All measurements are from Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 424, fig. 30. While the plinth is original, the pyramidion (the cusp of the obelisk) is a modern restoration dating to the nineteenth century. Moreover, the whole monument (obelisk and ancient plinth) now sits on an inscribed modern pedestal, also dating from the nineteenth century (see Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 392–93 and 390, respectively).
46. Measurements from L. Prada in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 262, no. 164.
47. Inventory number given as 278 in Müller 1969, 82.
48. Note, to be exact, that the base of obelisk B is significantly damaged, and one of its original faces (that pertaining to side 3) is in fact completely lost.
49. This reading will be discussed in detail below, in the edition's commentary (see notes 14 and 15 to side 2). For the wider picture regarding Isiac dedications by local authorities and dignitaries in Roman Italy, see Gasparini 2014.
50. See Colin (1993, 253–57) regarding the exact start and end dates of this regnal year, depending on which calendar the author of the inscription followed (if following the Egyptian use, August 29, 88, to August 28, 89; if following the Roman tradition based on the emperor's accession to the *tribunicia potestas*, September 14, 88, to September 13, 89).
51. The first copy of the hieroglyphic inscriptions of these obelisks was published in Zoega 1797, 644 (see appendix B). This was, however, a rather approximate and incomplete copy—albeit, for its time, still remarkable—since, back then, fewer fragments from both obelisks were known than are today. Additionally, these fragments had been erroneously combined into one single obelisk, which had been reerected in the city precisely two centuries before, in 1597. I shall not discuss here the modern history of the obelisks, the odyssey of the gradual rediscovery and reassembling of their fragments, and the chronicle of the first studies carried out about them by pioneers of Egyptology such as, among others, Georg Zoëga, Jean-François Champollion, Ippolito Rosellini, and Luigi Ungarelli (studies that, with the exception of Ungarelli's—see note 72 below—are now of more interest for the history of the discipline than for the actual epigraphic analysis of the inscriptions). The interested reader will find a full account of these matters in the comprehensive study by Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020. Worth mentioning is also Iasiello (2006, 51–61), in which the reception of modern scholarship concerning the obelisks in the local community of twentieth-century Benevento is discussed from a microhistorical perspective.








52. Erman 1893; Schiaparelli 1893, 269–74. Erman's study includes an epigraphic copy of the inscriptions, while Schiaparelli's gives only a standardized transcription of the hieroglyphic texts.
53. See Erman 1896, 150. Schiaparelli's study has since fallen into oblivion—deservedly so, it must be said—but for a few bizarre exceptions. Thus, his translation of the obelisks' side 1 is inexplicably reproduced in Capponi (2017, 131), while a partial translation of the inscriptions published in Marucchi (1904a, 119) and itself derived from Schiaparelli's has made its way into Swetnam-Burland (2007, 128n33).
54. In addition to these complete translations, several studies give only excerpts or discuss single problematic passages of the inscriptions. I do not list those here but will refer to them below, whenever relevant, in the commentary to my reedition.
55. Müller 1969, 10. Note that Müller merges the texts of the obelisks wherever they diverge, without pointing out which lessons pertain to A and which to B.
56. Malaise 1972b, 297–98.
57. Iversen 1973, 26–27.
58. Stauffer 1984, 1481–84.
59. Sirago 1992, 73–75.
60. R. Pirelli in Arslan 1997, 503, no. v.187 (in fact, a translation focused on obelisk B); Pirelli 2006, 132; Pirelli 2007, 13 (the last two publications reproduce an incomplete translation, in which the second part of the text of side 1 is accidentally omitted).
61. Torelli 2002, 186–87.
62. Bricault 2005, 618 (reproduced in Bricault 2013, 105–6).
63. Bülow Clausen 2015, 87–88.
64. L. Prada in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 264, no. 164. The translation I offered in this extended catalogue entry should be considered superseded by the present article, in which I advocate several alternative readings.
65. An example of the issues observed among treatments by ancient historians is, for instance, Takács (1995, 100n113), who quotes part of the inscriptions directly from Erman (1893), seemingly unaware of the existence of any intervening study. She also speaks of the Benevento monuments as if they were one single obelisk, a misunderstanding also found in other publications, such as Luke (2010, 90n74) and Capponi (2017, 131). As for Luke (2010, 90n74), the radical issues with his study do not end there, for he claims that on the “obelisk” of Benevento “Isis is depicted crowning Domitian,” blindly following a garbled passage in Liebeschuetz (1979, 181), where the original discussion clearly referred to the scenes on the pyramidion of the Pamphili obelisk (which Liebeschuetz misassigned, through a slip of the pen, to Benevento; on these scenes, see Grenier 1987, 955–58, figs. 5–8). Such issues, however, are not a prerogative of treatments by ancient historians. Even in the domain of Egyptology, it is striking how some of the latest scholarship often still depends almost exclusively on the earliest studies on the inscriptions of the Benevento obelisks. Examples of this are in the treatments by Sperveslage (2017, 84), and Morenz and Sperveslage (2020, 37–39), which closely follow Erman's translation.
66. A full discussion will follow in the commentary (note 10 to side 2).
67. See, for instance, Swetnam-Burland (2015, 44–45), who points out that “the obelisk [is] a gift honoring Domitian, giving thanks for his safe return from a military campaign,” but then, when quoting from one of the obelisk's inscriptions, relies on Iversen's translation, mentioning the “legate of the Augustus [...] Domitian.”
68. For an example of the renewed interest and discussion about obelisks in Rome, see, for example, Parker 2007; Parker 2018. For the most recent studies on the Benevento obelisks and Isiac cults in Roman Italy, see Nagel 2019, 2:1163–64; Morenz and Sperveslage 2020, 37–39.
69. Thus Egyptologists will have to be lenient if they find some of the remarks in my commentary to be too basic or obvious. Conversely, given that my commentary intends to be exhaustive, ancient historians will, I hope, not mind if the linguistic discussion on a number of points of lesser import is more technical, being targeted at readers with a knowledge of ancient Egyptian and the hieroglyphic script.
70. See Erman 1893, 211n1; Erman 1896, 150. Note that Erman never saw the obelisks in person but had the squeezes sent to him in Germany.
71. Ungarelli 1842, 2: plate v (see appendix B). His copy does not include the top fragment of obelisk A, which, as mentioned before, was discovered only later, in 1892. When comparing this copy with Erman's, note that Ungarelli's sides 1-2-3-4 = Erman's 1-3-2-4 and that, in Ungarelli's copy of obelisk B's sides 3 and 4 (henceforth, B/3 and B/4)—corresponding to Erman's B/2 and B/4—the two fragments from which the obelisk is reconstructed are incorrectly swapped, while part of their copy is plainly wrong (more details about this are given in appendix B). Incidentally, more than thirty years after Erman's edition, Budge (1926, 248–49) appeared to be unaware of his study and still reprinted Ungarelli's copy of obelisk A—to the best of my knowledge, an extreme case of outdated referencing in the scholarship on these monuments.
72. The story of Ungarelli's copy and study of the Benevento obelisks would by itself deserve a dedicated essay. His work was based on a previous, unpublished copy, whose original dated back to 1826 and had been produced by Jean-François Champollion (see Ungarelli 1842, I:iii–iv: “Champollionus [...] aestate anni MDCCCXXVI [...] inuisit Beneuentum, ubi duos obeliscos recognovit eorumque inscriptiones manu sua exaravit”). After the Frenchman's premature death in 1832, his unpublished manuscripts had fallen victim to plunder and

plagiarism by some of his contemporaries, and his study of the Benevento obelisks also became entangled in this awkward episode in the history of the newborn discipline of Egyptology. What follows are the facts as briefly sketched by Ungarelli in his book. On the one hand, he clearly states that his copy is based on the work that Champollion had carried out on the twin obelisks, beginning in 1826, but ultimately never published (see, for example, Ungarelli 1842, 1:155n1: “fragmenta [...] delineata [...] curante Equite Champolliono”). On the other hand, though he admits to having never seen the obelisks in person (unlike Champollion), Ungarelli claims to have received squeezes of them from Benevento (Ungarelli 1842, 1:x: “ectypa decerpta accuratissime e saxis ipsis [...] accepi”) and, on the basis of these, to have significantly improved the Frenchman’s earlier copy (see Ungarelli 1842, 1:160n46: “[p]rior utriusque obelisci delineatio [sc., Champollion’s] cum variis in locis tum in hoc falsa erat; sed quum imago ectypa ex ipsis saxis nuperrime Beneventi decerpta fuerit, tabulam hanc emendandam curavi”). To this day, it remains unclear to what extent Ungarelli’s publication is a product of plagiarism. The strongest *jacce* against him was launched by Champollion’s elder brother Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac already in 1842, the year in which Ungarelli’s book appeared. Champollion-Figeac’s review is understandably virulent (see Champollion-Figeac 1842, 662–64, in particular: “[j]e revendique aussi pour mon frère la partie la plus importante du travail sur les obélisques de Bénévent”), though at times his indignation leads him to misrepresent Ungarelli’s words and to level excessive charges against him. For example, his accusation that Ungarelli’s claim of having received “copies” of the twin obelisks from Benevento is ludicrous (Champollion-Figeac 1842, 664: “à moins que le corps municipal de Bénévent ne soit composé de savans archéologues, capables de reconstruire deux obélisques avec les debris épars qu’ils possédaient dans leur commune”) is wide of the mark, for Ungarelli states that he received not drawn copies of the inscriptions but squeezes (“ectypa”), the production of which requires no special knowledge, being hardly rocket science (and we now also have independent archival evidence confirming his commission of said squeezes; see Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 403). Be that as it may, Ungarelli’s debt to Champollion was certainly much larger than he ever cared to openly acknowledge in his book, particularly so with regard to his text and translations of the inscriptions (as Champollion-Figeac himself stresses), rather than the plates and epigraphic copies themselves. Based on the accounts of both Ungarelli and Champollion-Figeac, it seems that the notorious Francesco Salvolini—the pupil of Champollion responsible for stealing many of his teacher’s papers—did not play any part in how the Frenchman’s copies of the Benevento obelisks made their way into Ungarelli’s hands (on Salvolini, see Einaudi 2017; Bierbrier 2019, 410). This is perhaps surprising, given that, among Salvolini’s papers now held in Turin, there is a set of manuscript copies of the Benevento inscriptions. These are partly reproduced in Pirelli (2016, 90; now also in Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 401, fig. 8), but their caption (“[f]acsimile dell’obelisco eseguito da Francesco Salvolini nell’agosto 1826”) is

mistaken. Salvolini was seventeen in 1826, and he was to meet Champollion and begin his Egyptological studies only in 1830. As mentioned above, it was Champollion himself who had inspected and transcribed the Benevento inscriptions in 1826, establishing the correct order of the fragments, so that Salvolini’s copy (clearly his own, given that the accompanying notes are in Italian) must be later and derived from his master’s. As an epilogue to this muddled and sad story, it should be noted that later nineteenth-century studies, such as Stern (1884, 296; misdated to 1883 in Erman 1893, 210), are unaware of Champollion-Figeac’s (1842) review and, consequently, of the existence of Champollion’s original copies. Hence they wholly and wrongly attribute the merit of the correct epigraphic reassembling of the obelisk’s fragments to Ungarelli’s ingenuity rather than Champollion’s (at the time, the obelisk that now stands in Piazza Papiniano was indeed a Frankenstein’s monster, made up of four fragments from both obelisks A and B, and it was only in the twentieth century, after World War II, that the two obelisks were correctly reassembled, under the guidance of Erman’s facsimile; see appendix B and Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 413–17, figs. 18–21). This time the record was set straight, in sternly brief terms, by Adolf Erman, who was informed about Champollion-Figeac’s review and the claims of plagiarism against Ungarelli (see Erman 1896, 150: “[w]as UNGARELLI über die Beneventaner Obelisken giebt, verdankt er wohl nur CHAMPOLLION’S Notizen”).

73. Cole, Risser, and Shelley (2020, 391, 427) point out that the damage on the fragment is compatible with the impact of projectiles (could it also be shrapnel?) and wonder if the damage occurred around 1865, at the time of the obelisk’s transfer from its original location, near the cathedral, to Piazza Papiniano, during which period it was temporarily deposited in the courtyard of a school. We can surely rule out that the damage occurred at this time, however, for the fragment and its inscriptions still appear intact in Erman’s copy, and as I mentioned, this had been prepared based on squeezes made on the original in either 1892 or 1893, well after the obelisk’s reerection in Piazza Papiniano in 1872. Whether the result of bullets fired by soldiers or of shrapnel from air raids, this scarring seems best accounted for by the events of World War II.
74. An exception is Iversen (1973, 16, 26–27), who prefers to read the inscription in the order 1-3-2-4, following a thematic criterion that combines sides 1 and 3, whose texts he believes to be focused on the emperor, and sides 2 and 4, centered on Isis (on this dualism, see also Colin 1993, 258). I think it is best, however, not to trace too clear-cut an opposition between these two supposed pairs. While side 1 is undoubtedly centered on the emperor, containing his full titulary and no mention of Isis (or of the private dedicator), side 3 deals equally with the emperor (in its first half, containing a dating formula that includes Domitian’s throne and birth name) and with Isis (in its second half, concerning the building of her temple). Surely, pride of place is given to Domitian, whose names open the inscription on this side; but this is not to say that the whole of

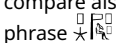






100. See, for instance, Iversen 1973, 22; Colin 1993, 256–57; Bülow Clausen 2012, 105–6. It is supposed that the same campaigns may be alluded to in the inscriptions of sides 2–4, this time in a particularly problematic passage, about which, see note 10 to side 2.
101. Compare the textual parallel offered in Colin 1993, 257n55.
102. See Colin 1993, 254.
103. For example, see Erman 1896, 150, 152–53; Iversen 1973, 22n30; Grenier and Coarelli 1986, 227.
104. See Wilson 1997, 41; most recently, Meeks 2006, 47–49n28.
105. See Meeks 2006, 48.
106. See, for example, Malaise 1972a, 415; Malaise 1972b, 213; Lembke 1994, 69–70; more recently, Nagel 2014, 140. Specifically on the disputed scale of Domitian’s intervention (reconstruction rather than restoration), see now Lembke 2018, 31–35, 38.
107. See Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 1:49; Meeks 1998, 12, no. 79.0123. For its Demotic counterpart, see Erichsen 1954, 23; Johnson 2001–14, Letter 7, 60–62.
108. See Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 1:26. In a few instances, the word can show the house determinative in Demotic (see Johnson 2001–14, Letter 3, 103–4; specifically, Möller 1913, 1\*, no. 8), but this is also quite exceptional.
109. R. Pirelli in Arslan 1997, 503, no. v.187.
110. See Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 1:150.
111. Hardly a name for Memphis itself, contra Iversen 1973, 22n31.
112. See Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 3:369; Wilson 1997, 766. On the Middle Kingdom origins of the interchangeability between the words *ḥt-t3.wy* and *ḥnw*, see Hayes 1953, 34–35. Remarkably, this sportive writing can even be taken one step further, so that the original sign group for *ḥt-t3.wy* can be used not only to write the noun *ḥnw* “royal residence” but also, through an additional pun, as part of the compound preposition *m-ḥnw* “in”; see Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 3:370; Fairman 1945, 105; Wilson 1997, 767. Early examples of such a writing, dating from the New Kingdom, are included as cryptographies in the Book of Nut (see Lieven 2007, 1:32, and 403, 405, §§ 55–56, 61).
113. A particularly clear example of this is in a passage of the Mendes Stela (from the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos), in which this hieroglyphic group is combined with the suffix pronoun, so: . The sequence reads *ḥnw=f* “his royal residence,” and clearly not *ḥt-t3.wy=f* (see Sethe 1904–16, 39), referring in this case to the Ptolemaic capital, Alexandria (on this passage, see already Erman 1896, 153, who, however, still prefers the literal translation “Landerobrerin”).
114. This translation is chosen, for instance, also by Müller (1969, 10) and Iversen (1973, 21, 26).
115. Morenz and Sperveslage 2020, 38–39: “[v]ielleicht handelt es sich hierbei um ein intrusives *h*.”
116. Compare already the first known attestation of the name of Rome in Egyptian, which occurs not in hieroglyphic Middle Egyptian but in Demotic, and is written *Hrm3*. This is found in the archive of Hor, text 3 verso, l. 22; dating to the first half of the second century BC, it by far predates any hieroglyphic attestation from Roman Egypt or Italy. See Ray 1976, 22, 25 n. cc, 26, 29 n. u, plates iv.a, iv.
117. Colin 1993, 258n57. On such defective late writings of *ntr*, see De Meulenaere 1994, 65–69, 71.
118. See Malaise 1972b, 297–98. Among his followers are Torelli (2002, 187) and Bricault (2005, 618).
119. Nagel 2019, 2:1164.
120. Compare  *ḥk3(.t) ntr.w* as a title of Isis-Hesat-Sothis (Cairo Museum, Ptolemaic stela CG 22180) and  *ḥk3.t ntr.w* as a title of Isis (Dendera, Roman mammisi); for references, see Leitz 2002–3, 5:540.
121. For example, Erman 1896, 153; Iversen 1973, 26; Lembke 1994, 118. They are also followed by Leitz 2002–3, 5:545.
122. See  *ḥk3.t ntr.w* “Queen of the Gods” (Behbeit el-Hagara, temple of Isis, Ptolemaic decoration) and  *ḥk3.t n ntr.w ḥmw.t n ntr:wt* “Queen of the Gods and Mistress of the Goddesses” (Philae, mammisi, Roman decoration); for references, see Leitz 2002–3 5:545. In the latter example, note the use of the star sign with the value *ntr*, as unambiguously confirmed by the pairing with the following *ntr:wt*.
123. Compare the case of Isis-Hesat-Sothis in stela CG 22180 (see note 120 above; full copy in Sethe 1904–16, 159–60).
124. Iversen 1973, 26; a mistake still surviving in recent scholarship that depends on his translation (see Pfeiffer 2018, 186).
125. Erman 1896, 154.
126. For the phrase *inr (n) m3t*, see Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 2:34.
127. Erman 1896, 154.
128. See Grenier 1987, 939–40, fig. 1. The copy of the hieroglyphic text in Ciampini (2004, 158, H.4) is erroneous.
129. Erman 1893, 213; Erman 1896, 153, 156.
130. See, for instance, Stauffer 1984, 1483; Pfeiffer 2010a, 283.
131. This mention of the Ennead (originally a group of nine deities, best known in its Heliopolitan version, which included Isis) is here meant to indicate not nine specific deities but, more generally, all those gods and goddesses who shared the temple with Isis, regardless of their number (for a comparable use in


- the Ptolemaic temple of Edfu, here with regard to Horus's Ennead, see Wilson 1997, 376).
132. See, for example, Pirelli 2006, 134. More generally on Isis's *theoi synnaoi* in the Roman world, see Malaise 1972a, 135–36.
133. On the absence of the second *n* in virtually all the occurrences of this name, and the possible connection between such *mi*-writings—with unmarked nasalization—and their phonetic renderings as ⲙⲛⲧ in Coptic, see Erman 1896, 154.
134. See, for example, Kurth 2007–15, 1:512, no. 16.4, 513, no. 16.6.
135. Pace Iversen (1973, 16), though his criticisms of the other arguments offered in Erman (1893, 214n1) and Erman (1896, 155n3)—arguments still repeated by later interpreters, such as Malaise (1927b, 299)—remain legitimate. Incidentally, it is also important to remind ourselves that the concept of a Greek (or Latin) draft should not be pushed too far and that what we are discussing here was probably closer to a rough outline or sketch of the essential contents of the Egyptian inscriptions-to-be. In other words, while the core elements of the inscriptions of these and similar obelisks clearly came from the Roman dedicators, it is also undeniable that the Egyptian priests had a significant degree of leeway, and even original input, in the final preparation of the Middle Egyptian texts. Thus, for example, there is no doubt that the full pharaonic titulary of Domitian listed on side 1 of the Benevento obelisks was composed directly in Egyptian and could hardly have had an original Greek or Latin model (on this, see also note 2 to side 1 above).
136. And not as *Beneventus*, despite the claim in Iversen (1973, 16n8).
137. See Montanari 2004, 423.
138. On this, see also Capponi 2017, 130.
139. In Erman 1893, 215–16; Erman 1896, 154–55, 158.
140. See Erman 1893, 215; Erman 1896, 155n3. One can sense a certain hesitation in Erman's offer of his own interpretation, since, while he always holds the view that the meaning of *ini* is “to return,” in Erman (1893, 213–14) he cautiously renders it plainly as “Bringen” in his main translation. He does the same again in Erman (1896, 153, 156–57) but, from an inconsistency with his own commentary (Erman 1896, 154: “so müssen wir [...] mit »Heil und Rückkehr des Herrschers« übertragen”), it is clear that he intended to update his translation to “return.”
141. See Erman 1893, 212, 213 n. c. In Erman (1896, 154–55) he maintains the same view, though he no longer classifies the preposition allegedly omitted before *wḏḏ ini* as “datival”; instead, he generally (and less pertinently) remarks on the omission of prepositions of all sorts in Egyptian texts.
142. In Iversen 1973, 24–26.
143. See Iversen 1973, 26; Pirelli and Iasiello 1997, 379.
144. Contra L. Prada in Spier, Potts, and Cole 2018, 264, no. 164.
145. On the date of this triumph, see, for instance, Colin 1993, 255; Bülow Clausen 2012, 106; most recently, Smith 2015, 168.
146. See, for example, Ciampini 2004, 40.
147. See, for instance, the reference to Levantine nomads and Nubians in Thutmose III and Thutmose IV's Lateran obelisk (Ciampini 2004, 82, A.93).
148. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.46 (after Jones 1959, 124–25). Discussing this passage, Klotz (2012, 18) completely misunderstands it: he miscopies the Greek text (to the point of making it unintelligible) and misapprehends the meaning of Strabo's words (which refer to inscriptions—ἀναγραφαί—as written records, not as pictorial reliefs), eventually accusing Strabo of erroneously mixing up his memories of obelisks with the warfare scenes carved on temple pylons.
149. See Pfeiffer 2015, 225–31, nos. 48, 49.
150. See note 71 above and appendix B.
151. Iversen 1973, 25–26.
152. Contra, for example, Erman 1896, 155 (“einen Ehrentitel (wie »der wohlberühmte«)”; Malaise 1972b, 298 (“le nommé”) and 298n2 (“une épithète comme *egregius* ou [...] l'équivalent de «le nommé»”); Schiaparelli 1893, 270 (“il nominato”); Bricault 2005, 618 (“le nommé”).
153. Bresciani 1989, 95 (“*rn=f nfr* per introdurre nomi di cittadini notabili romani su monumenti scritti in geroglifico”); a fantasy repeated in Bresciani 1992, 102. The supposed parallel given by Bresciani does not exist, being a wrong restoration in a lacunose passage of the trilingual stela of Cornelius Gallus (as proved in Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, and Pfeiffer 2009, 32).
154. See De Meulenaere 1966, 1–2, 24–31. This use can also be observed in early Middle Kingdom (ca. twentieth–nineteenth century BC) inscriptions, see Vernus 1986, 78–81.
155. Cases are observed in earlier times too, when only one name is given for an individual, and this is introduced as their *rn=f nfr*. These are, however, rare occurrences, which scholars understand as exceptions in which only the person's second name was given, the main one being omitted: see Vernus 1986, 79, 80n9.
156. For example, see the Middle Kingdom stela of Montuhotep (Cairo Museum, CG 20539; 12th Dynasty, twentieth–nineteenth century BC), verso, l. 21: *sh3.t(y)=f(y) rn=y nfr* “one who shall remember my good name” (recently reedited in Landgráfová 2011, 179). This is not a reference to a second or nickname, as Montuhotep is known only by this one name in his stela.
157. See Vleeming 2001, 256.
158. See, for example, the graffiti in Vleeming 2015, 81, no. 1385 (*rn=f nfr mn* “his good name endures”), and 227, no. 1710b (l. 2: *rn=f nfr mn* “his good name endures”; the editor reads *nfr* with a query, but the reading appears correct). For another, even more

- unusual exception, see the hieratic-Demotic graffito Philae 68, l. 1 (already singled out in Burkhardt 1985, 28, no. 3.3.3): *mn rn=f pn nfr* “may this good name of his endure.” Incidentally, the concerted use of suffix pronoun and adjective is observed even in an extraordinary Ptolemaic Demotic graffito from Karnak, which plays on a surprising reversal of the *rn nfr*-concept and puts a curse on an individual by recording *p3y=k rn bn* “your bad name” (see Widmer and Devauchelle 2017, 418–19).
159. Compare the case of the Middle Kingdom stela discussed at note 156 above. Ptolemaic examples include: the stela of Heriew in Paris, Musée du Louvre, C 124 (= N 275; Panov 2015, 1:303–4 [l. 5], 2:140–41): *rn=f nfr mn* “his good name endures” (exactly the same wording is found in the ensuing Demotic text, l. 9); the stela of Tadimhotep in London, British Museum, EA387 (Panov 2015, 1:376–77 [l. 7], 2:188–89; referring, in this case, to a female deceased): *rn=s nfr mn w3h sp-2* “her good name does endure and last”; and the stela of Ankhmaatire called Hor in Paris, Musée du Louvre, E 13074 (Panov 2015, 1:371–74 [l. 6a], 2:185–87; see also Moje 2013, 235–36, 240, 242, 248): *rn=f nfr w3h sp-2 mn sp-2* “his good name does last and does endure” (the Demotic parallel, l. 12, has only *rn=f mn* “his name endures,” omitting *nfr*, but an earlier section of the Demotic text, ll. 9–10, has a wording similar to the hieroglyphic one: *rn=f nfr iw=f w3h iw=f mn* “(as for) his good name, it lasts and it endures”). Regarding this last inscription, note that Ankhmaatire was known by a second name too, Hor, but this is always introduced by the phrase *d(d) n=f* “called” in the hieroglyphic and Demotic texts alike (ll. 4, 9, 12) and should not be mistaken for a *rn nfr* of the kind previously discussed (see note 154 above). On the unclear relationship between names introduced by *rn=f nfr* and by *d(d) n=f*, see De Meulenaere 1966, 25–26.
160. See, for instance: the already mentioned stela of Tadimhotep, British Museum, EA387 (Panov 2015, 1:376–77 [l. 6], 2:188–89; in this case, referring to the deceased’s husband): *rn=f nfr Iy-m-htp* “(he) whose good name is Imhotep”; and the sarcophagus of Horemakhet, Leiden AMT 3-c (Panov 2015, 1:140–41 [col. bI.4], 2:36): *rn=f nfr Hr-m-3h.t* “(he) whose good name is Horemakhet.” Note that both men are known by these names only—neither bears a second one.
161. This syntactical motivation was also suggested in Malaise 1972b, 298n2.
162. Pace Erman 1893, 214–15; Erman 1896, 155.
163. On the Villa Borghese obelisks and their inscriptions, see Donadoni 1992, 29–30, fig. 2. It is likely that Gell was inspired by the Benevento obelisks even in the choice of the expression that he used to refer to the erection of the monuments, that is,  $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{||} \\ \text{||} \\ \text{||} \end{smallmatrix} \text{||}$  *s<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup> thn.wy* “(he who) erected two obelisks” (compare Benevento’s B/3,  $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{||} \\ \text{||} \end{smallmatrix} \text{||}$  *s<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup> thn* “an obelisk was erected”). Although this phrase is not uncommon, being attested also in the inscriptions of other obelisks, Gell must have had the text of the Benevento monoliths especially fresh in his mind, as he was composing his own text for the Prince of Sulmona in 1827. Indeed, it had been only a few months since he had accompanied Champollion on his epigraphic reconnaissance to Benevento, in the summer of 1826 (on this, see Champollion-Figeac 1842, 662, quoting from a letter by his brother: “[j]e viens d’enrichir mon portefeuille hiéroglyphique d’une copie exacte de l’obélisque de Benevent. J’en ai fait le voyage avec le chevalier Gell”).
164. See Erman 1893, 217; Erman 1896, 153, 156–57. Here I focus on the order of the signs, but, nota bene, Erman also transliterates some of these hieroglyphs differently; on this issue, see the following discussion.
165. See, among others, Erman 1893, 217; Erman 1896, 153; Müller 1969, 10–11; Stauffer 1984, 1483.
166. See, for example, Müller 1969, 11; Malaise 1972b, 298; Iversen 1973, 17; Colin 1993, 253; Bricault 2005, 618. The reading Rutilius had in fact already been offered in Lepsius (1866b, 79) but only en passant, within an article not specifically discussing the Benevento obelisks and for this reason overlooked by later scholarship.
167. See, for example, Müller 1969, 11.
168. On the *gens Rutilia*, see the discussion and references in Torelli 2002, 98n100, 187–88nn67–71, 199n110.
169. The former in Borgia, side 1, and Albani, sides 1–3; the latter in Borgia, side 2, and Albani, side 4. It is likely that just *Tits* was intended by the author of the hieroglyphic inscription, in view of how often signs are oriented inconsistently in these two obelisks. See also Iversen 1973, 17n15.
170. A similar hypothesis was already advanced in Spiegelberg (1920, 103), with regard to the Borgia obelisk’s inscription. Still concerning the Borgia obelisk, one must instead surely reject the suggestion made in Bove (2008, 90n13)—and repeated in Bove (2009, 375)—according to which  $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{||} \\ \text{||} \end{smallmatrix}$  should here be read as *ti.t*, with “the sign of the vase used as a determinative” (*ti.t* is an extremely rare word for a type of vessel attested, to the best of my knowledge, only in the Old Kingdom).
171. See Möller 1912, 37–38, nos. 393, 385; Verhoeven 2001, 190–91, 200–201, nos. U30, W11. The hieratic samples in my text are reproduced from Möller’s specimens for P. Berlin P 3030 (ca. first–second century AD).
172. See, for example, the sign for *im(y)*, whose shape is  $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{||} \\ \text{||} \end{smallmatrix}$  *vel sim.*, that is, based on its hieratic appearance, rather than on its standard hieroglyphic aspect, which is instead  $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{||} \\ \text{||} \end{smallmatrix}$  (images in Meyer 1994, 42, 48, 52, 60, 62, plates 10, 9, 15, 22, 23, respectively).
173. Bresciani 1986, 84; repeated in Bresciani 1989, 95, 97n9; and republished yet again (with hardly any changes from the latter) in Bresciani 1992, 102. Also mentioned in Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, and Pfeiffer 2009, 32.

174. On the latter, see Adamo Muscettola 1994, 98n39.
175. See, for example, Erman 1893, 217; Erman 1896, 156 (in which, however, the first sign is transliterated as *m*, not as *l*, as I will discuss next).
176. The second *p* is obtained from the phonetic value of *p(.t)*, from the sky sign
177. The sign next to the foreign-land determinative looks like a chunky diacritic stroke; it may be a poor execution of the throw-stick sign, displaced within the original inscription to the right of the foreign-land sign for lack of space above it (the place where it normally belongs).
178. A suggestion originally made in Iversen 1973, 17. For an actual example of this same writing, being used to write the word for “sky,” see Wilson 1997, 378. Another sportive writing playing on the sky sign and its phonetic value as *p* is found in the contemporary inscriptions of Domitian’s Pamphili obelisk, in the rendering of the emperor’s Two Ladies name on side 1. The name is *wr pḥ.ty* “Great of Strength,” which appears here in the remarkable writing ; see Grenier 1987, 940, fig. 1 (and the remarks in Erman 1917, 18).
179. Note that even actual writings of the word *p.t* “sky” are attested, which contain additional, semivocalic signs. For example, a writing is attested in Edfu (see Wilson 1997, 378).
180. See, for instance, Schiaparelli 1893, 274. This reading had originally been proposed by Champollion, according to whom the dedicator’s *nomen* and *cognomen* were to be understood as Lucilius Rufus (see references in Erman 1896, 149, 156, and Müller 1969, 29n13, contra what is stated in Iversen 1973, 17). Despite being completely superseded, this reading is questionably still offered, at least as a possible alternative, in some modern literature: see, for example, Mora 1990, 523, no. 3; Rosso 2018, 559.
181. See Erman 1893, 217 (with the even unlikelier alternative that the name’s first sign should be understood as *V* rather than *M*); Erman 1896, 156.
182. See Müller 1969, 11.
183. See, for example, Malaise 1972b, 298; Iversen 1973, 17–20; Colin 1993, 253; Bricault 2005, 618.
184. Note that Müller was still troubled by the supposed double *p* in the Egyptian writing of *Lupus*. He tried to justify it by referring to secondary Greek spellings of this name that can show double π, suggesting that this might have been how such a double consonant had entered the Egyptian version (see Müller 1969, 30n17). As we have seen, the hieroglyphic text writes only one *p*; hence Müller’s concerns are unnecessary.
185. Previous scholars also tried to explain this value of as *l*, but their suggestions can hardly be accepted. To be exact, Müller (1969, 11, 30n16) proposed that the reading of the striding lion sign as *l* might have been suggested by the initial of this animal’s name in Greek, λέων. Iversen (1973, 20) instead argued that this hieroglyph was not meant to represent a striding lion but, rather, a wolf (= Latin *lupus*), as a pun to reproduce the dedicator’s *cognomen*. Both ideas are exceedingly fanciful.
186. See Kurth 2007–15, 1:200, no. 46a.
187. A typical application of it is observed, for instance, with regard to signs depicting snakes, as exemplified in Fairman 1945, 65. Note that such a swap between our two lion signs in phonetic writings is possibly already attested, albeit in the other direction, that is, with (typically standing for *r/l*) used to write *m* (the value associated with ); see Kurth 2007–15, 1:201, no. 54. When looking at the original manuscript in Herbin (1984, 256n10, plate lv, col. 6), however, I wonder whether the sign here is indeed a recumbent lion or simply a cat, for which the value *m(i)* is completely common. The latter is surely the case in writings of *mi* “like” in the late Ptolemaic stelae of Taimhotep and Pasherentpah in London, British Museum, inv. EA147 and EA886, as confirmed by the visibly pointy ears of the feline, which are incompatible with the depiction of a lion (see images in Panov 2015, 2:61 [l. 7], 71 [l. 5], respectively).
188. See Camodeca 1982, 138–39; Torelli 2002, 187n67.
189. See, respectively, Baillet 1902–3, 148; Marucchi 1904a, 119; Zawadzki 1969, 111. They propose to identify the dedicator in a Lucilius Labienus.
190. Indeed, while offering no alternative solution to the issue of the initial lion sign, the reading *Lbymws* overcomplicates matters, for it also requires transliterating the sky sign as *n*, which is a very uncommon value for this hieroglyph, albeit not an unparalleled one (see Kurth 2007–15, 1:318, no. 1). Nor is the idea of an accidental confusion between the signs and credible, not even on account of a possible hieratic draft, since the two signs have significantly distinct shapes in hieroglyphs as much as in hieratic (contra Baillet 1902–3, 148).
191. Beginning with Erman 1896, 156.
192. See Iversen 1973, 23n36, 24n39, 27.
193. For a quick survey of the occurrence of this phrase in Egyptian letters across the centuries, see the examples in Wente 1990, 63, no. 71 (Middle Kingdom, ca. twentieth century BC), 90, no. 113, 118, no. 140, 167, no. 282 (New Kingdom, ca. fifteenth–twelfth century BC), 209, no. 339 (Third Intermediate Period, ca. eleventh–tenth century BC).
194. A good example is a Demotic inscription on a Greco-Roman stela of Horus on the Crocodiles in the Cairo Museum (CG 9406), reedited in Vleeming 2001, 83, no. 121. Note that the divine agent interceding in favor of this stela’s human beneficiary—a certain Petosiris—is Isis, who is addressed by means of the same epithets that appear at the beginning of our obelisks’ inscription, on side 3: [3s.t] *wr(.t) mw.t ntr ti ḥnh wd3 snb . . . n . . .*

- P3-ti-Wsir* “[Isis] the Great, the God’s Mother, gives life, prosperity, health ... to ... Petosiris.”
195. See Erman 1896, 153, 156.
196. An example is his obelisk now in London, one of the so-called Cleopatra’s Needles. See Iversen 1968–72, 2:90; Habachi 2000, 94.
197. So does the “small print” inscription at the bottom of the obelisk of Hatshepsut (18th Dynasty, fifteenth century BC) that still stands in Karnak, an obelisk erected—as in the case of the previous example—to celebrate the sovereign’s (first) jubilee: see Habachi (2000, 41–43) and, for a full running translation of the original, Lichtheim (2006, 26, 28).
198. See note 50 above.
199. See Erman 1893, 213; Erman 1896, 157.
200. Erman 1896, 156 (“der Morgenstern”); already offered—albeit, in this case, with a query—in Erman 1893, 213. I suppose he suspected a sportive writing, with the egg and the falcon signs in their respective phonetic values of *s* and *b*.
201. Müller 1969, 10. He was followed by R. Pirelli in Arslan (1997, 503, no. v.187), who, however, later switched to Grenier’s interpretation: see “figlio di Horus” in Pirelli 2006, 132 (= Pirelli 2007, 13); Pirelli 2016, 90.
202. Iversen 1973, 26.
203. Grenier 1989, 44. This is the weakest of all published proposals, as it simply does not account for the star sign.
204. Beckerath 1999, 256. He probably follows an alternative suggestion given in Iversen (1973, 16n9), in which the star sign is interpreted as the star Sothis and hence, by association, as Isis.
205. In the latter case, Domitian would be identified directly with Horus, since the epithet “Living God” can be applied to his father, Osiris (see Leitz 2002–3, 4:417–18).
206. That is, of course, if we choose to read this title as *bik nbw* “Golden Falcon,” as I have. Other Egyptologists prefer to read it as *Hr nbw* “Golden Horus.” Most recently on this title, see Spalinger 2015.
207. See Leitz 2002–3, 3:596–99.
208. Note how the variation in the use of the signs thus concerns not only the falcon but also the star, which—here used in its value *ntr*—is otherwise found in our obelisk only as *ḥntr* (on this, see note 3 to side 2).
209. See the examples collected in Grenier 1989, 20, 28, 33. But compare also writings from the time of Augustus, such as the phrase  included in one of his cartouches in the Kalabsha gate (see Winter 1977, 67, fig. 13), for *P3 NTR P3 S3* (alternatively, *ŠRT) P3 NTR* “the God, the Son of the God.” Note here, on the one hand, the influence of Demotic in the intrusion of the article and, perhaps, in the value of the child sign, if this is to be read as *šri* (compare the same title, *p3 ntr p3 šr p3 ntr*, being used for Augustus in contemporary Demotic documents; see Grenier 1989, 14); on the other hand, note the remarkable inclusion of this phrase inside the cartouche, as is the case with its occurrence in the Benevento inscriptions.
210. See, for instance, Leitz and Mendel 2017, 1:188, 2: plate 222 (L 3, 88).
211. See Leitz and Mendel 2017, 1:2, 2: plate 138 (L 2, 13). With further regard to this group of inscriptions in Athribis, note that the falcon sign in both its variants (i.e., with and without the flail) is employed to write the word *ntr* here too, as it is in our obelisks: compare the epithet  with the beginning of this same inscription, L 2, 13, in which the sentence *ḥntr ntr nfr* “may the Perfect God live” is written .
212. Following the completion of this article, I was alerted to the fact that Kurth (2007-15, 2:1036) also independently advanced the suggestion that  here in the Benevento obelisks could read *NTR S3 NTR* (information courtesy of Nicola Barbagli). He was, however, unaware of the—then still unpublished—parallel from Athribis that I offer, which provides a definite confirmation of his and my reading. Note also that the text from the temple of Deir el-Hagar reproduced in Kurth (2007-15, 2:1035; left side, l. 3) shows another example of the *ntr s3 ntr* phrase employed in the titulary of Domitian. In this case, though, it occurs in its more common use, that is, in a plain orthography of the  type and inserted before, rather than within, the cartouche (for which, see note 209 above).
213. For example, Erman 1896, 157; Grenier 2008, 31 n. c.
214. See Meyer 1994, 32–33, plates 4, 5.
215. See Erman 1896, 157.
216. See, for example, Wilson 1997, 712.
217. See Wilson 1997, 169.
218. In this respect, note that Swetnam-Burland (2007, 128n33) understands this as a reconstruction (rather than the original construction) of the Beneventan Iseum, following a fire that occurred earlier in the reign of Domitian. This is, however, completely unfounded; we know of no fire or other destruction affecting the temple in Benevento. Swetnam-Burland is probably here confusing the Beneventan Iseum with the Iseum Campense in Rome, which was indeed damaged by a fire in AD 80, leading to Domitian’s restoration of it (on this, see also my commentary above, in note 12 to side 1).
219. On this issue, see Colin 1993, 255–56; Pirelli 2006, 134. The latter suggests a possible direct involvement of the emperor in the construction of such an extensive Iseum, as that of Benevento supposedly was (on similar views, see also further below and notes 220 and 221).



220. See Malaise 1972b, 299; followed by Grenier 1987, 960n47. This view, which takes away all agency from Rutilius Lupus, has recently been repeated by Bricault and Gasparini (2018, 134; incidentally, note that the obelisk at 132, fig. 8.1, is misidentified as Domitian's Pamphili obelisk but is in fact Hadrian's Barberini obelisk) and further supported by Bragantini (2018, 246), who stresses the special connection that Domitian had with Benevento, the city where he had first met his father, Vespasian, following the latter's proclamation as emperor and return from Egypt.
221. For a similar opinion, in this case excluding any kind of direct imperial intervention in the construction of the temple, see Quack 2005, 402; Pfeiffer 2010b, 129; Pfeiffer 2018, 186–87 (especially this last study). Recently, Lembke (2018, 36) has argued that the obelisks' dedication to the emperor (which she too understands on the basis of Erman's diehard interpretation of *wḏ3 ini* as *pro salute et reditu*), along with the large number of Egyptian sculptures originally decorating Benevento's Iseum, speaks against a private dedication by Rutilius Lupus. Frankly, I fail to see how a dedication to the emperor can be incompatible with said dedication being by a private citizen, or how the presence of several imported Egyptian antiquities must imply a direct involvement of the emperor. This being said, mention of the temple's construction in our inscriptions need not be taken in absolute terms, as I have already remarked; in other words, Rutilius Lupus's contribution to the construction or decoration of the local Iseum and a possible imperial involvement have no reason to be mutually exclusive, though the obelisks are undoubtedly Lupus's own commission and his own alone.
222. The relief is in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 1029 (provenance unknown, but surely from an Isiac cultic building in Italy, perhaps from Rome itself). See Roulet 1972, 65, no. 53, fig. 69.
223. For a recent discussion of this papyrus and the aretology that it contains, see Nagel 2019, 1:600–635.
224. See, for example, Müller 1969, 10.
225. R. Pirelli in Arslan 1997, 503, no. v.187.
226. A slip, however, consistently repeated in R. Pirelli in Arslan 1997, 503, no. v.187; Pirelli 2006, 132 (= Pirelli 2007, 13); Pirelli 2016, 90.
227. Iversen 1973, 24, 27 (already picked up by Colin 1993, 258n57).
228. Lembke 1994, 118. Nagel (2019, 2:1164) considers both readings equally possible, but regarding my preference for *ir:t*, see references below, in note 231.
229. As does, for example, Erman 1896, 157.
230. As do, for instance, Iversen (1973, 27) and, most recently, Nagel (2019, 2:1164). In fact, Iversen here oddly translates “Lord” rather than “Lady” (see note 4 to side 2 above).
231. For instance, as one of innumerable examples, see the Ptolemaic decoration of the temple of Deir el-Medina, with Isis labeled as  *3s.t wr:t mw(.t) ntr ir(.t) R<sup>c</sup> nb(.t) p.t hmw.t ntr:w* “Isis the Great, the God's Mother, the Sun's Eye, Lady of the Sky, Mistress of the Gods” (Du Bourguet 2002, 78, 312, fig. 86). Incidentally, note here the unambiguous writing of “eye” with *ir:t* (about which, see note 2 to this side above). Concerning Isiac epithets, see also the useful repertoire in Nagel 2019, 1:530–33.
232. Contra, for example, Erman 1893, 214; Erman 1896, 157–58; Iversen 1973, 23n37.
233. See Erman and Grapow 1926–31, 2:70.
234. Erman 1896, 157–58.
235. On this verbal form, see Kurth 2007–15, 2:902–3.
236. Contra Erman 1896, 157.
237. The Pamphili and Barberini obelisks are, respectively, 16.54 and 9.25 meters high (Ciampini 2004, 157, 169). Benevento's obelisk A, which is the only private obelisk to have its shaft fully preserved, for a height of 4.12 meters, was probably originally no taller than 4.5 meters, when its ancient pyramidion was still preserved.
238. On the materiality of *aegyptiaca*, including obelisks, see Müskens 2017, xxvii, 68–76.
239. See note 6 above.
240. See more on this above, in the section devoted to these obelisks. My view—which I cannot prove incontrovertibly—is that they were a pair, but scholarly opinion remains divided as to whether they both originally stood in Palestrina or if only one was in Palestrina and the other was in Rome.
241. See note 37 above.
242. Indeed, the epithet *s3 ntr* “the Son of the God,” not traditional on its own before a cartouche, is more typically attested in hieroglyphic royal titularies from Roman Egypt in the combination *ntr s3 ntr* “the God, the Son of the God,” which we also find incorporated in one of the names of Domitian in the Benevento obelisks (see note 3 to side 3 in the commentary and note 209 above). The supposed parallels for the shortened epithet *s3 ntr* invoked by Müller (1975, 18, 22n33) are misleading, for in fact they also pertain to renderings of the fuller phrase *ntr s3 ntr*, and in its Demotic version at that—namely, *p3 ntr p3 šr p3 ntr* “the God, the Son of the God” (see references in Grenier 1989, 99).
243. Contra, for instance, Erman (1893, 212, 214–15) and Erman (1896, 158), who classifies the language as “barbarisch” and the Egyptian priest's knowledge of it as “dürftig.” Unjustly harsh, Erman's low opinion of the Egyptian author's linguistic skills at times verges on mockery, as he states that the supposedly confused syntax of these inscriptions would have been as

- evident to an “ancient” (i.e., in his mind, Dynastic, pre-Greco-Roman) Egyptian as it is to “us” modern scholars (“[d]er seltsam konfuse Satzbau dieser Inschriften, der für einen alten Aegypter ebenso auffallend gewesen wäre, wie er es für uns ist, erklärt sich ohne Zweifel aus den mangelhaften Sprachkenntnissen ihres Verfassers”). Erman’s words betray the same rigid attitude to Egyptian philology for which he was lambasted by some of his contemporaries, as exemplified by a famous tongue-in-cheek anecdote recorded by Gardiner (1986, 23): “[o]n reception of the collation [of a passage of the Pyramid Texts] Erman wrote to Maspero: ‘What a pity it is that even at this early period the Egyptians could not write correctly!’ on which Maspero’s caustic comment—not communicated to Erman, needless to say—was: ‘What a pity that the Egyptians of the old Kingdom had not read M. Erman’s grammar!’”
244. See Bosticco 1952, 25, no. 3.
245. See, for example, Erman 1917, 7–8; Grenier 1987, 937.
246. As also believed by Schiaparelli (1893, 274) and, most recently, suggested by Morenz and Sperveslage (2020, 38–39); the latter suggest specifically a production in Alexandria, but this is no more than a guess, which I do not find particularly convincing. It is ironic that these two privately dedicated obelisks erected in a southern Italian city in celebration of Domitian should be much better works of craftsmanship, from an epigraphic viewpoint, than the contemporary Pamphili obelisk, which had been erected in Rome by direct order of Domitian (a contrast already noted in Ungarellius 1842, 1:155n1; Erman 1893, 211; Iversen 1961, 54). The more competent epigraphy of the Beneventan monuments also means that they are mostly free from mistakes in their choice of signs, which is not the case with the Pamphili obelisk (see Erman 1917, 8). It should still be stressed, however, that from a specifically linguistic point of view the Pamphili obelisk contains a remarkable Middle Egyptian text, surely composed by very learned Egyptian priests. One can still note in it the odd interference from later phases of the Egyptian language, for example, the use of the definite article within the title *p3 ntr* “the god” (= Latin *divus*) in the cartouches of Vespasian and Titus (respectively, written  $\star // \square$  and  $\star \square$ ; see Grenier 1987, 942–43, fig. 3). Far from a slip of the pen, however, this is likely an intentional homage to tradition, for the title *p3 ntr*, with the article, is commonly included already in Ptolemaic cartouches (for example, see some of the royal names of Ptolemy IX Philometor Soter and Ptolemy X Alexander in Beckerath 1999, 242–43).
247. With regard to the choice of signs, the remarks by Iversen (1973, 27), according to whom some among them are unique “inventions by the hierogrammate,” seem somewhat exaggerated and, at times, are just wrong. For instance, the group  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏}$  for *nb t3.wy* “Lord of the Two Lands” (at the bottom of A/3) is undoubtedly very rare but not unknown; it is found, for example, at Hibis temple (where the human figure, however, does not wear the double crown; see Davies 1953, plate 71, just above the king’s cartouche). In the case of another sign, that for *k3i* at the end of B/2, Iversen mistakenly believes that the standing man ( $\text{𓆎}$ ) is holding between his hands a foreign-land sign ( $\text{𓆏}$ ) and understands their combination as a supposedly unique invention. In fact, the latter sign is not part of *k3i*, which is here written in its plain logographic fashion, but belongs to the determinative denoting foreignness that follows the name of the dedicator ( $\text{𓆏}$ ), occurring just before in the text.
248. See Champollion-Figeac (1842, 656), quoting a letter from his brother in which he discusses work on his envisaged study on Egyptian obelisks in Italy: “[J]e suis bien aise que ces beaux monumens [sc., the obelisks of Rome] paraissent enfin fidèlement reproduits [...]. J’y joindrai l’obélisque de Bénévènt, et comme il n’en existe qu’une mauvaise gravure de six pouces, je vais faire exprès le voyage pour le dessiner moi-même.” At the time Champollion had yet to discover that the fragments in Benevento belonged to two obelisks rather than just one, hence his use of the singular here. Compare this with another, slightly later letter, which follows his inspection of the inscriptions: “J’ai dessiné moi-même l’obélisque sur les lieux et vérifié ce que je supçonnais, même d’après la mauvaise gravure de Zoëga, c’est-à-dire que l’obélisque existant était fait des morceaux de deux obélisques” (cited in Champollion-Figeac 1842, 662). On this topic, and on Zoëga’s illustration, see also Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 400–402 and 386–88, respectively.
249. Suetonius, *Life of Domitian* 23 (after Rolfe 1914, 384–85).
250. In contrast, it is worth comparing the fate of the original Latin inscription on the Vatican obelisk (see note 2 above), which recorded the name of Cornelius Gallus and was later recarved. Note, however, that it remains deeply disputed whether Gallus’s inscription was actually erased deliberately, as an act of *damnatio memoriae* following his fall from grace with Augustus and subsequent suicide in 26 BC, or if it was replaced due to the obelisk’s later move and repurposing, thus being the consequence of an act devoid of any political intention. Undoubtedly, views that overlay Gallus’s supposed hubris and consequent *damnatio memoriae* should be treated with caution, as they clearly force the epigraphic evidence; see, for example, Iversen 1968–72, 1:20 (“the inscription makes it a monument to Gallus rather than to the Emperor”); Swetnam-Burland 2015, 76 (“Gallus did [...] commission two victory monuments”). On this, see also the detailed discussion in Alföldy (1990, 21–27, 78–81), and the recent summary in Pfeiffer (2015, 205–8, no. 43).
251. Respectively published in Zoega 1797, 644; Ungarellius 1842, 2: plate v; Erman 1893, plates vii, viii = Erman 1896, plate viii.
252. See note 72 above.
253. On the origins of this copy, which are rooted in Champollion’s work, see note 72 above.
254. As regards the high-resolution images of obelisk B published in this article, these are not orthophotographs but studio photographs produced in optimal artificial light conditions by the staff of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, in June 2017, ahead of the obelisk’s conservation. Note that the conservation

process did not entail any restoration of the hieroglyphic inscriptions themselves, hence pre- and post-restoration images do not differ in terms of the analysis of the original epigraphy. On the conservation of obelisk B, see the study in Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2020, 426–29 (with a series of related blog posts: Cole 2017a; Cole 2017b; Cole, Risser, and Shelley 2018; Cole and Risser 2020).

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