

THE
EGYPTIAN
REVIVAL

Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West

James Stevens Curl



The Egyptian Revival

In this beautifully illustrated and closely argued book, a completely updated and much expanded third edition of his magisterial survey, Professor Curl describes in lively and stimulating prose the numerous revivals of the Egyptian style from Antiquity to the present day, drawing on a wealth of sources. His pioneering and definitive work analyses the remarkable and persistent influence of Ancient Egyptian culture on the West.

The author deftly develops his argument that the civilisation of Ancient Egypt is central, rather than peripheral, to the development of much of Western architecture, art, design, and religion. He charts the persistence of Egyptian motifs in design from Graeco-Roman Antiquity, through the Mediaeval, Baroque, and Neo-Classical periods, and goes on to trace the rise of Egyptology in the nineteenth century, twentieth-century manifestations of Egyptianisms prompted by the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, and various aspects of Egyptianising tendencies in the Art Deco style and afterwards.

For students of art, architectural and ancient history, and those interested in Western European culture generally, this book will be an inspiring and invaluable addition to the available literature.

James Stevens Curl, Professor Emeritus, has held Chairs in Architectural History at The Queen's University of Belfast and The School of Architecture, De Montfort University, Leicester. He is the author of many acclaimed books, including *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* (2005), *Classical Architecture* (1992 and 2002), and *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (2000 and 2004).

Since what unnumbered year
Hast thou kept watch and ward,
And o'er the buried Land of Fear
So grimly held thy guard?

HENRY HOWARD BROWNELL (1820–72):
The Sphinx, stanza ii, lines 1–4.

Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616):
Antony and Cleopatra (1606–7), Act III, Scene 9, lines 56–8.

The higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises: as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

Ibid.: Act II, Scene 7, lines 23–6.

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To us in western Europe today the Egypt of the Pharaohs is a strangely remote and lost land. The temples and pyramids, the creeds and cults of the Nile elude our understanding. A modern mind is easily baffled by the apparent confusions and illogicalities of Egyptian religion. For our western world to appreciate the civilization of the Nile is hard – the agricultural way of life instead of an industrialized society, the belief in the king's divinity instead of democracy, the worship of animals and gloating regard for the mummified dead instead of the far more spiritualized faith of Christianity. Factories and machines, swift strides in science and technology, space probes and now the treading of the Moon by astronauts all seem to cut us off from Egypt and its early achievements. Its culture and its gods, we tell ourselves, belong to a past we have long outgrown.

REGINALD ELDRED WITT (1903–1980):
Isis in the Graeco-Roman World
(London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1971), 13–14.

for

Stanisława Dorota

as a token of a decade

*te spectem suprema mihi cum venerit hora;
te teneam moriens deficiente manu . . .*

*Interea, dum Fata sinunt, iungamus amores:
iam veniet tenebris Mors adoperta caput;
iam subrepet iners ætas, neque amare decebit,
dicere nec cano blanditias capite.*

ALBIUS TIBULLUS (c.55–19 BC):
Elegies (c.27BC), i/1, lines 59–60 and 69–72.

Egypt! from whose all dateless tombs arose
Forgotten Pharaohs from their long repose,
And shook within their pyramids to hear
A new Cambyses thundering in their ear;
While the dark shades of forty ages stood
Like startled giants by Nile's famous flood.

GEORGE GORDON, 6TH LORD BYRON (1788–1824):
The Age of Bronze (1823), pt. v.

The mighty pyramids of stone
That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen, and better known,
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807–82):
The Ladder of St Augustine (1850),
No. 2 from *Flight the First* in *Birds of Passage*, stanza viii.

She has seen the mystery hid
Under Egypt's pyramid:
By those eyelids pale and close
Now she knows what Rhameses knows.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806–61):
Little Mattie (published in *Last Poems* [1862]), stanza ii, lines 9–12

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A good Memory is the best Monument. Others are subject to Casualty and Time, and we know that the Pyramids themselves dotting with age have forgotten the names of their Founders.

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Of Tombes, last paragraph, lines 1–4, in the 1647 edition (Cambridge: Roger Daniel).

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O'er Egypt's land of Memory floods are level
And they are thine, O Nile — and well thou knowest
That soul-sustaining airs and blasts of evil
And fruits and poisons spring where'er thou flowest.
Beware, O Man — for knowledge must to thee,
Like the great flood to Egypt, ever be.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792–1822):
Sonnet: *To the Nile* (1818), lines 9–14.

Sources for illustrations are given in parentheses in abbreviated form in italics after each caption. Those abbreviations give the publication and/or collection from which the illustration was derived, with the reference-number or shelf-mark where relevant. Publications listed in abbreviated form are given in full in the Select Bibliography. The key to abbreviations in captions is as follows:

<i>AF</i>	<i>Archivio Fotografico</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>Ägyptisches Museum</i>
<i>BAL</i>	Bridgeman Art Library
<i>BAV</i>	<i>Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana</i>
<i>BL</i>	By permission of The British Library, London
<i>BN</i>	<i>Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris</i>
<i>BROWN</i>	Richard BROWN (1842): <i>Domestic Architecture . . .</i>
<i>DENON</i>	Baron Dominique Vivant DENON (1802): <i>Voyage . . .</i>
<i>Description</i>	COMMISSION des Sciences et Arts d'Égypte (1809–28): <i>Description de l'Égypte . . .</i>
<i>DM</i>	Giovanni Battista PIRANESI (1769): <i>Diverse Maniere . . .</i>
<i>DTMFCZ-S</i>	<i>Deutsches Theatrumuseum, Munich: Clara Ziegler-Stiftung</i>
<i>GANDY</i>	Joseph Michael GANDY (1805 <i>b</i>): <i>The Rural Architect . . .</i>
<i>GB</i>	Jeremy Butler
<i>GG</i>	© Guy Gravett 1978
<i>GIR</i>	Giraudon
<i>GLCL</i>	Guildhall Library, Corporation of London
<i>GLPL</i>	Greater London Photographic Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Corporation of London
<i>GN</i>	Godfrey New Photographics
<i>HA</i>	Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
<i>HOPE</i>	Thomas HOPE (1807): <i>Household Furniture . . .</i>
<i>IK</i>	<i>Inventar-Kennziffer, Deutsches Theatrumuseum, Munich</i>
<i>JRULM</i>	John Rylands University Library of Manchester
<i>JSC</i>	The Author, or from his collection
<i>KuSdZ</i>	<i>Kupferstichkabinett und Sammlung der Zeichnungen</i>
<i>LANDI</i>	Gaetano LANDI (1810): <i>Architectural Decorations . . .</i>
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<i>MaCh</i>	Martin Charles
<i>MC</i>	The Mansell Collection, TimePix, New York

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>ME</i>	<i>Museo Egizio, Musei Vaticani</i> , Rome
<i>MONTFAUCON</i>	Bernard de MONTFAUCON (1719–24): <i>L'Antiquité . . .</i>
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<i>NORMAND</i>	Louis-Marie NORMAND (1832): <i>Monumens . . .</i>
<i>PAC</i>	Peter A. Clayton
<i>RCAHMS</i>	Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
<i>RIBA</i>	Royal Institute of British Architects Library
<i>RIBADC</i>	Royal Institute of British Architects Drawings Collection
<i>RPAGMB</i>	Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery, and Museums, Brighton
<i>SAL</i>	Society of Antiquaries of London
<i>SI</i>	Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Museum purchase through gift of various donors and from Eleanor G. Hewitt Fund, 1938–88–3950 and 3951
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Foreword

As northward, from its Nubian springs,
The Nile, for ever new and old,
Among the living and the dead,
Its mighty, mystic stream has rolled;
So, starting from its fountain-head
Under the lotus-leaves of Isis,
From the dead demigods of eld,
Through long, unbroken lines of kings
Its course the sacred art has held,
Unchecked, unchanged by man's devices.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807–82):
The Golden Legend (1851), Part I.

The myth of Ancient Egypt, her myriad gods and goddesses, magnificent monuments and, not least, her enigmatic and (until 1822) undeciphered pictorial script has held sway in the European imagination for over two millennia.

Perhaps the first iconographic contact may be identified in the posthumous portrait of Alexander III (the Great) of Macedon that appeared as the obverse type (head side) on the silver tetradrachms of his erstwhile general, Lysimachus (c.355–281 BC). Here Alexander is seen with the ram's horn of the god Amon featured as part of his head-dress (**Colour Plate I**), an allusion to the apparent recognition of Alexander as the god's son when he visited the deity's oracular shrine at the oasis of Siwa in Egypt in 332 BC. From that point, Europe has not looked back. In Antiquity the Egyptian influence reached its height after the defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BC and the entry of Octavian (later the emperor Augustus, 27 BC–AD 14) as conqueror into Alexandria on 1 August 30 BC. It was not long before Egyptian antiquities were making their way to Europe, and even massive obelisks were removed to grace circuses in Rome itself. The rediscovery of some of these obelisks, all tumbled save one (at the Vatican) in Late Antiquity, first by Pope Sixtus V (1585–90) (**Colour Plate II**) and then by other Popes, set a fashion that was not to diminish. The 'traffic' was not all one way as Roman emperors were themselves to appear in the guise of Egyptian pharaohs on temples in Egypt (**Plates 3 and 4**).

From the Middle Ages onwards the challenge of Egypt's mysterious script found many curious attempts at 'cracking the code' and, alongside that, Egypt crept into almost every aspect of European consciousness and art. It was never to disappear, only at times to diminish and then to find a potent revival as concepts changed, not least seen in public architecture and funerary monuments which, even if not

wholly in the Egyptian taste, often fused Egyptian with Classical motifs. In more recent times, the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 sparked off a widespread European revival, and repercussions of it in smaller vein when objects from the tomb were featured in Paris, and, most potently, in the British Museum in 1972 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery.

It is all these aspects of Ancient Egypt reflected in taste and style in Europe and America that Professor Curl has drawn superbly together. The value of his study can be immediately recognised and gauged when it is realised that the first edition was more than two decades ago, a second followed in 1994, and now, revised and brought fully up to date, charting the ever-present influence of the Land of the Pharaohs on Europe, comes this third edition. It is to be heartily welcomed and recommended to all with an interest in Ancient Egypt, Egyptology, and Egyptian themes in art, including their influence on so much of our lives in both their physical presence and their place in human consciousness.

PETER A. CLAYTON, FSA:

author of *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artists and Travellers in the 19th Century* and *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*
(see Select Bibliography).

Preface

Δεινοὶ πλέκειν τοὶ μηχανὰς Αἰγύπτιοι

(Truly at weaving wiles the Egyptians are clever).

ÆSCHYLUS (525–456 BC):
Fragments, Frag. 206 in the *Loeb Classical Library* edition,
translated by HERBERT WEIR SMYTH
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

Introduction

Many architectural styles have been the subjects of studies in recent years.¹ The Gothic Revival has spawned a not inconsiderable literature,² for example, and other aspects of Historicism (e.g. Neo–Classicism, the Greek Revival,³ the Italianate style, the Domestic Revival, and the so-called Queen Anne style⁴) have provided architectural historians with rich quarries from which to fashion their studies. There have also been forays into exoticism and the influence of the East on Western taste with studies of *Chinoiserie*⁵ and the craze for ‘Hindoo’ or Indian styles.⁶ Curiously, despite its widespread manifestations and longevity, the Egyptian Revival did not receive the attention it deserved until relatively recent times, when there was a tremendous surge of interest, further prompted by several important exhibitions and the publication of various books and papers.⁷ This study will attempt to outline the history of that Revival, tracing its origins in Antiquity, and chronicling its oddly stubborn and surprising persistence throughout the centuries.

It is a commonly held belief that the Egyptian Revival was a short-lived aberration in a period of eclectic revivals following the Napoleonic Campaigns in Egypt (1798–1801). Whilst it is true that there was indeed a marked increase of interest in the architecture and art of Ancient Egypt in the first decades of the nineteenth century (sparked partly by French publications, and partly by a desire in both England and France to allude to naval and military successes in Egypt and Egyptian waters), the history of the Revival spans a much greater swathe of time, and leads the student from the present age back to the

1 CROOK (1987).

2 See, for example, BROOKS (1999), EASTLAKE (1970), GERMANN (1972), MACAULAY (1975), and MCCARTHY (1987).

3 CROOK (1972).

4 GIROUARD (1977).

5 HONOUR (1961).

6 CONNER (1979).

7 See for example, CARROTT (1978), CLAYTON (1982), CONNER (*Ed.*) (1983), CURL (1994a), HUMBERT (1989a, 1998), HUMBERT (*Ed.*) (1996), HUMBERT, PANTAZZI, and ZIEGLER (*Eds*) (1994), SIEVERNICH and BUDDE (*Eds*) (1989), and other works cited in the Select Bibliography.

centuries that saw the rise of Hellenistic culture in the lands of the pharaohs and in those of Asia Minor.

The singular importance of the Alexandrian cults within the Roman Empire has been noted by many distinguished historians.⁸ No student of Taste acquainted with the great collections of antiquities in European museums (especially those of Rome itself) can fail to be aware of and impressed by the immense amount of material with an Egyptian flavour that survives today,⁹ although that must represent only part of what must have existed in the first three or four centuries of our era. Whilst many Egyptian antiquities first arrived in Europe because they were associated with the growing cults of the Nilotic deities, that was not the only reason why they were so prized. By Cicero's time (106–43 BC) many fabulous villas¹⁰ had been built in the landscape around the Bay of Naples, and several sumptuous interiors were decorated with mural paintings, some showing Nilotic landscapes, Isiac ceremonies, and Egyptian Mysteries. However, it would be dangerous to assume that such interior décor meant the fortunate owners of such villas were devotees of Isis, Serapis, or Nilotic religions, for Roman Egyptomania had a secular side, an equivalent, perhaps, of the eighteenth-century European fascination for *Chinoiserie*. Like Cathay to the gentry of Rococo Europe,¹¹ Egypt was exotic to Romans of the Late Republic, but perhaps a more accurate comparison would be that of India in relation to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain,¹² for Egypt lay within Rome's sphere of influence, and was to become part of the Roman Empire after Octavian's victories in 30 BC.

Certainly, by the first century BC, Egypt, and allusions to Egypt, were implied in Roman art, and symbols and attributes connected with Egyptian cults were depicted to suggest things Nilotic and exotic without being in any way associated with worship or religious devotions. Some scholars have pointed out that not all inhabitants or owners of villas in which Isiac symbols were used decoratively could have been adherents of that religion themselves, just as those who lived in or owned houses in which Bacchic motifs decorated the walls were not necessarily devoted to Bacchus/Dionysus¹³ any more than a Georgian gentleman, whose dwelling contained rooms featuring

8 For example DUNAND (1973, 1979), ENGELMANN (1975), GRANDJEAN (1975), HORNBOSTEL (1973), KATER-SIBBES and VERMASEREN (1975), LECLANT (1969), ROULLET (1972), TAKÁCS (1995), TRAN TAM TINH (1971, 1972, 1973), DE VOS (1980), and many others listed in the Select Bibliography.

9 See ROULLET (1972).

10 ARMS (1970), vii.

11 HONOUR (1961).

12 CONNER (1979), 113–53.

13 SCHEFOLD (1952), 58.

pagodas, magots,¹⁴ bamboo, and other motifs associated with China, would have been a follower of Confucius or The Buddha.

After the battle of Actium (31 BC) and the incorporation of Egypt as a province within the Roman Empire, Nilotic motifs in Roman decorative schemes became more common. In the *Aula Isiaca*, a room in the imperial palace on the Palatine in Rome, the décor was Egyptianising Roman work, featuring Egyptian motifs such as the *atef* crown, the sun-disc, *uræi*, lotuses, and so on,¹⁵ but it should be remembered that Augustus (64 BC–AD 14, Emperor effectively from 27 BC), distrusted ‘oriental’ cults, so the Egyptianising themes were probably more associated with the absorption of Egypt than with any religious or quasi-religious rites. After all, the Romans, and Augustus in particular (**Plate 3**), were conquerors of Egypt and thus heirs of Egypt and all its rich associations.

Many Ancient Egyptian objects, such as obelisks, were also brought to Europe partly because they demonstrated that Egypt had been subdued by Rome, and partly because they were admired for their æsthetic, monumental, mysterious, and exotic qualities.¹⁶ It should be remembered that obelisks were foreign to Græco-Roman art and architecture, so the importation of Egyptian obelisks and their re-erection in Rome by order of Augustus was clearly a political act. Obelisks, set up and newly adorned with inscriptions in Latin, visibly alluded to Roman conquest and the Emperor’s claims to power. Once obelisks (and other Egyptian artefacts such as lions and sphinxes) had been placed in the Roman context they became familiar objects, and took on new associations. Obelisks were erected in other cities besides Rome, so gradually they became part of the language of Classical architecture and decoration. Egypt had entered the Roman public landscape.¹⁷

It would seem that the cult of Isis was brought to Campania¹⁸ from Delos, which was an important point of connection between Italy and Alexandria,¹⁹ and by the first century BC was well established. The Roman tendency to absorb ideas created an eclecticism in many fields, not least in religion, architecture, and decoration: this assimilation of foreign intellectual and cultural themes after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and the consequent annexation of Egypt encouraged the cults of Isis and Serapis, and by the middle of the first century AD they were

14 Small grotesque figures of porcelain, ivory, etc.

15 ROULLET (1972), 47.

16 See HABACHI (1978, 1984) and IVERSEN (1968).

17 TAKÁCS (1995), 80.

18 The region of west central Italy bounded by the Apennines, the Sorrentine peninsula, and the River Liris (now Garigliano).

19 TRAN TAM TINH (1964 and 1972), MALAISE (1972*a* and *b* and 1984), and DEWANDEL (1941/2).

firmly established in the Roman pantheon. Isis's cult was advanced to the status of *sacrum publicum*²⁰ and was granted a site in the *Campus Martius* which eventually became the huge *Isæum Campense*. As certain Roman emperors began to adopt the ruling styles of the Ptolemies, Isis and Serapis increased in importance, eventually becoming imperial deities.

With Publius Ælius Hadrianus (Emperor Hadrian [reigned AD 117–38]), Egypt played a more important rôle in the Roman Empire, and it shows in the many Egyptianising artefacts of that time that have survived. Hadrian was genuinely interested in Egypt,²¹ although his intellectual curiosity was fired initially by his philhellenism. It should be remembered that to the second-century Roman, Alexandria was the place where the books, ideas, knowledge, and treasures of the cultural past still existed and could be studied, much as, to the early Renaissance mind, Constantinople was the city where Classical civilisation was still alive and could be rediscovered anew.²² Hadrian's²³ great complex at Tibur (the *Villa Adriana* at Tivoli) was a mnemonic of much, but it was especially a mnemonic of Alexandria and of Græco-Egyptian culture. The deification and Egyptianisation of Hadrian's companion, Antinoüs (c. AD 110–130), after the latter's death by drowning in the Nile, identified the Bithynian youth with Osiris, and, through his cult, helped to promote an Egyptianisation of taste throughout the Empire. Hadrian's interest in things Egyptian created a vogue for collecting Egyptian *objets d'art* or artefacts made in the Egyptian style²⁴ among the population as a whole, and stimulated a second-century Egyptomania as remarkable as was that of the early nineteenth century.²⁵

Thus the worship of Isis, of Serapis, and of other gods and goddesses, together with an undoubted fashion for collecting Egyptian ornaments, statues, and other things, ensured not only a steady export of Egyptian antiquities to the cities of the Roman Empire, but that such antiquities would be copied by artisans working in Europe. Egyptian forms, such as the statues of deities, obelisks, lions, sphinxes, pyramids, and so on, entered into the language of Roman imperial architecture and decoration to an extent that was largely unacknowledged until nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship²⁶ redressed the balance. It should be remembered that, after the decline of the Empire in the West, many such Egyptian or Egyptianising motifs ceased to be

20 An officially recognised cult permitted to have its ceremonies in Rome.

21 BIRLEY (1997).

22 TAKÁCS (1995), 105.

23 BOATWRIGHT (1987) and HANNESTAD (1988).

24 Throughout, objects made to look like Egyptian artefacts, but manufactured outside Egypt, will be referred to as 'Egyptianising'.

25 VERMASEREN (*Ed.*) (1981). See also VIDMAN (1970).

26 See Select Bibliography.

recognised as having Egyptian connotations at all, so that by the time artists of the Middle Ages saw them, their origins were obscure, to say the least. Only with the Renaissance did large numbers of antiquities with an Egyptian ancestry reappear to be exhibited with other Classical objects in the collections of the period. They were greatly prized, for the appreciation of ancient works of art grew apace at that time, and attempts were made to decipher the mysterious hieroglyphs, which nobody in Western Europe could read any more.²⁷

It is clear that Egyptian elements were of immense importance during the Roman Empire.²⁸ The many obelisks that grace the squares and open spaces of Rome itself, for example, provide evidence of the esteem in which these Egyptian objects were held in imperial times (although they have only stood on their present sites from the Renaissance and Baroque periods).²⁹ The collections of Egyptian pieces and of Roman works in the Egyptian style in the Vatican and Capitoline Museums indicate how widespread were such objects during the Roman Empire, and study of the literature dealing with the sites where ancient artefacts were discovered reveals that Egyptian cults had a powerful influence in imperial Rome. Many of the most spectacular discoveries were made on or near the sites of Isiac temples.³⁰ Some statuary, such as that depicting the god Bes, or the representations of the ‘many-breasted’ Diana (or Artemis) of Ephesus, startle with their bizarre Asiatic imagery. We are often brought up to consider Ancient Rome in the light of a pure Classicism, but such a view is unbalanced because the Rome of the Emperors was embellished with many items from Egypt and elsewhere, and in matters of art and architecture the motifs used became more and more eclectic, drawn from every corner of the Empire.

The impact of Egypt on Renaissance art was very considerable, and some notion of the interest generated by Egyptian and Egyptianising objects may be gained by a study of collections of drawings (notably the *Codex Ursinianus* in the *Biblioteca Vaticana* in Rome and the *Codex Pighianus* [drawings by Stephanus Vinandus Pighius (1520–1604)] in the *Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin), whilst statuary from Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli, especially the Egyptianising *telamones* now in the *Sala a Croce Greca* in the *Museo Vaticano*, provided inspiration for many artists, including Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio [1483–1520]) and Giulio Romano (c.1499–1546).³¹

27 See REYNOLDS (*Ed.*) (1989), Chapters III, IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII.

28 For example ROULLET (1972), HORNBOSTEL (1973), and the series *Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l’Empire Romain*.

29 IVERSEN (1968).

30 See ROULLET (1972), *passim*.

31 PEVSNER and LANG (1956).

The threads of Egyptian influences that run through Western European civilisation are many and varied. The continuity of an Egyptian religion and the revival of the Hermetic Tradition have been admirably chronicled by Dr Frances Yates (1899–1981), Dr Reginald Eldred Witt (1903–80), Theodor Hopfner (1886–1946), M. Münster, N. Martin Persson Nilsson (1874–1967), and others. Particularly interesting in the illumination of the Marian *cultus* and its connections with Antiquity are the works of Theodor Trede (1833–after 1889), Serafino Montorio (d. 1729), St Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori (1696–1787), and Hippolytus Marraccius (Ippolito Marracci [1604–75]).³² Dr Witt’s magisterial *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*³³ covers the early influence of Egyptian cults with enviable erudition and style, and is especially useful for its sources: it draws attention to the persistence of an Egyptianising religion, and has reminded us of the antiquity of elements in Christian liturgies and beliefs that connect our own European civilisation with something infinitely older that developed by the banks of the Nile.³⁴

Anne Roullet’s *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome*³⁵ records systematically in a *Catalogue Raisonné* those objects that once adorned the capital of the Western world, and is essential reading for those who wish to pursue the subject. Scholars including Adolf Rusch (born 1883), Pierre Saintyves (1870–1935), Frances Yates, Carlos Sommervogel (1834–1902), and René Taylor have discussed the importance of the Hermetic Tradition, especially in relation to the period of the Counter-Reformation.³⁶ The significance attached to Hermetic philosophy by Renaissance thinkers is now generally recognised, and Dr Frances Yates has shed light on the byways of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century intellectual life in her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.³⁷ The Hermetic-Egyptianising elements that recurred from the Renaissance period in writings and in illustrations produced an iconography becoming more overtly Egyptian after the triumph of the Counter Reformation in Central and Southern Europe. A list for further reading is included in the Select Bibliography which, though extensive, is by no means exhaustive. However, the general reader should find there sufficient material to facilitate further pursuit of aspects discussed in the text. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stage-design, for example, is a subject in itself, and can only be touched on by selected pictures and descriptions.

³² See Select Bibliography.

³³ WITT (1971).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

³⁵ Published by Brill of Leiden in 1972, it is the most thorough investigation of Egyptian and Egyptianising objects known to have existed in Rome at one time or another, and is an indispensable work for any student of the subject.

³⁶ See Select Bibliography.

³⁷ See list of works under YATES in the Select Bibliography.

As far as scope is concerned, this book will discuss the Egyptian Revival in Western Europe within the last two millennia, but will not dwell in detail on the history of the Revival in America, which has been admirably covered by the late Professor Richard G. Carrott in his *The Egyptian Revival. Its Sources, Monuments, and Meaning. 1808–1858*.³⁸ In certain instances there will be an inevitable overlap as sources are identical. The courteous help given by Professor Carrott is here acknowledged.

Coherent and consistent threads run through the story of the Egyptian Revival from Classical times to the present day and this is an attempt to trace them and to demonstrate the manifestations of Egyptian art, architecture, and forms in the West. All the known examples will not be named, for this is not a catalogue. Furthermore, the work is not concerned with the wider aspects of social conditions of each period covered. Economic considerations preclude the inclusion of illustrations of every item mentioned: it is hoped that the pictures finally selected will serve to enhance and explain points in the text.

The Argument

This study begins with an outline of how important aspects of Egyptian religion were absorbed into Græco-Roman culture and later into European civilisation as a whole. Early manifestations of a vogue for Egyptian objects from the time of the Roman Empire will be discussed, together with descriptions of the most important forms and images associated with the Nilotic religions. The interpretation of Egyptianising objects during the proto-Renaissance of the thirteenth century in Italy will be mentioned, especially in relation to Cosmati³⁹ sphinxes and lions. The rediscovery of Egyptian and Egyptianising⁴⁰ motifs in the Renaissance period will be described, together with the great interest in Hermes Trismegistus and the mysteries of Nilotic culture that developed in the time of the Humanists.⁴¹ The significance of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes to occultism, alchemy,

38 CARROTT (1978).

39 Roman workers of marble in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were known as the *Cosmati*, from the name *Cosma*, or *Cosmas*, which recurs in families of craftsmen working with the material at the time.

40 See footnote 24.

41 Term much used but rarely explained. It can mean **1.** belief in the mere humanity of Christ; **2.** devotion to human interests, or the character and quality of being human; **3.** system of thought concerned with purely human (rather than divine or supernatural) interests; **4.** devotion to the study of Græco-Roman languages, antiquities, and literature that came into vogue during the Renaissance; **5.** pragmatic devotion to studies promoting human culture, putting human interests and the mind of humans first, rejecting beliefs in the supernatural or in deities. In art-history terms, **4** is the usual meaning.

and the Hermetic Tradition will be outlined. The richness of Marian symbolism clearly owes much to that associated with the Egyptian goddess Isis. Apparently Baroque inventions, like the celebrated *Honigschlecker*⁴² on the altar of St Bernhard in the basilica of Neu-Birnaue⁴³ on the northern shore of Lake Constance (the *Bodensee*) in Germany, are similar to Græco-Roman images of Egyptianising deities such as Harpocrates to be found in many European collections. Egyptianising elements in the works of Robert Fludd (1574–1637), Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), Michael Maier (1569–1622), Freemasonic writers,⁴⁴ and in iconography will be mentioned. The use of Egyptian forms within the Rococo and Neo-Classical periods will be sketched in, while the importance of archæological and scholarly correctness after Egyptian buildings and artefacts had been studied in detail and published will be stressed.

An acquaintance with funerary architecture cannot leave the Egyptian Revival unnoted, for many mausolea, catacombs, cemetery gates and lodges, and designs for tombs owed much to the style.⁴⁵ Even the pyramidal form of funerary monument that will be familiar from the time of Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) owes its origins to Egyptian prototypes.⁴⁶ Egyptian motifs in art and architecture were favoured in Renaissance designs: Raphael used Egyptianising figures, whilst sphinxes and obelisks were commonly found in doorcases and in funerary architecture.⁴⁷ Egyptian elements recur during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the rediscovery of Egyptian architecture, correctly observed (as in the case of the architecture of Ancient Greece), dates from the eighteenth and (especially) nineteenth centuries. Yet even before an archæological approach was adopted, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78) had a complete Egyptianising interior built in Rome as a *capriccio*.⁴⁸ The French Academy in Rome produced architects of genius who used Egyptian forms in exotic combinations, with a severe Classicism (much inflated in scale), and their works abound with references to pyramids, obelisks, sphinxes, Egyptian cornices, columns, and details.⁴⁹

The Egyptian Revival in the last two centuries of our era⁵⁰ was an international movement, and was part of the final phase of Romantic

42 Honey-sucker. A *putto* licking his fingers.

43 See BOURKE (1961), 124–5 and 263. It was by Josef Anton Feuchtmayr (1696–1770).

44 See CURL (2002*b*).

45 CURL (2002*a*).

46 REYNOLDS (*Ed.*) (1989), Chapter III.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Illustrated in PIRANESI (1769).

49 ACADEMIE DE FRANCE À ROME (1976), ACADEMIE DES BEAUX-ARTS (1787–96, 1806, and 1818–34), and ROSENAU (1953, 1960, and 1976).

50 That is, within the last two hundred years.

Neo-Classicism.⁵¹ The æsthetic ideals of Neo-Classicism tended to strive for greater simplicity, grandeur, and massiveness, first by returning to the architecture of Ancient Greece, especially the Doric Order,⁵² and then going back even further to the buildings of Ancient Egypt, just as, in the Gothic Revival, the first style to be resurrected was late Perpendicular, then Second Pointed, then Middle and First Pointed, and finally a synthesis of many styles.⁵³ Many designers working with Neo-Classical forms became fascinated by the problems of designing for commemoration (possibly the purest type of architecture as there is no problem of daily and changing use with which to contend). The ‘visionary’ architects of eighteenth-century France⁵⁴ employed simple geometry, huge blank walls to emphasise the terror and finality of death, and Egyptianising motifs for their schemes for cemeteries, mausolea, cenotaphs, and memorials.⁵⁵ The Egyptian Revival from the eighteenth century was partially associated with a funerary tradition and with the search for what Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–99)⁵⁶ called *architecture parlante* (architecture expressive of its purpose, capable of arousing a powerful emotional response in all who beheld it). It was also important in the search for an architectural expression of the Sublime (the eighteenth-century æsthetic category associated with terror, power, vastness, ruggedness, and the ability to stimulate imagination and the emotions. The Sublime is associated with limitlessness, storms, waterfalls, a raging sea, mighty mountains, and huge, powerful stereometrically pure buildings. In architecture, an exaggerated scale, powerful unadorned fabric, and gloomy cavernous structures could be classed as Sublime).⁵⁷ Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the Revival has been the value given to simple, clear, blocky elements by architects and architectural critics. It is certain that Otto Wagner (1841–1918), Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841), Willem Marinus Dudok (1884–1974), and even the young Frank Lloyd Wright (1869–1959) could not have designed many of their buildings (where solid, cubic blocks play such an important part) without the precedent of the Egyptian Revival and its influence on Neo-Classicism as a whole.⁵⁸ The memorable images produced by Friedrich Gilly (1772–1800),⁵⁹ Boullée,

51 See especially ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN (1972), CLAY (1980), HONOUR (1977), MEEKS (1966), and TURNER (*Ed.*) (1996), **xxvi**, 735–44

52 PEVSNER (1968), **i**, 197–211.

53 CURL (1999 and 2000), 283–4, and (2002*d*).

54 See KAUFMANN (1952). See also KAUFMANN (1933 and 1968).

55 See ETLIN (1984), and CURL (2002*e*).

56 See ROSENAU (1953, 1960, 1976).

57 BURKE (1757), TURNER (*Ed.*) (1996), **xxix**, 889–91.

58 See PEHNT (1987): a perceptive paper on the subject.

59 WATKIN and MELLINGHOFF (1987), 66–70 and *passim*.

Schinkel,⁶⁰ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806),⁶¹ and others have been admired by architects of the twentieth century, and Schinkel especially has had a considerable following. The last's sets for Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*⁶² are masterpieces in the Egyptian Revival style,⁶³ appropriately enough for this partially Freemasonry-inspired *Singspiel*.⁶⁴ Many pamphlets, frontispieces, and illustrations associated with Freemasonry are not guiltless of Egyptian elements.⁶⁵ The iconography of European Freemasonry, that potent force in the Enlightenment, was steeped in Egyptianising design, for Ancient Egypt provided a main source of Freemasonic legend and wisdom.⁶⁶ Napoleonic discoveries brought accurate pictures of Ancient Egyptian art and architecture to Europe, and soon a revival of Egyptian styles in architecture made its appearance in halls, showrooms, exhibition buildings, factories, cemetery lodges, and mausolea.⁶⁷ Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) lampooned the style in his *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*,⁶⁸ for it was used in some of the early commercial cemeteries because of its associations with death, and incurred the wrath and scorn of that skilled polemicist.⁶⁹

The nineteenth century produced many examples of the Egyptian Revival. Buildings, furniture, jewellery, paintings, ornaments, and even chimney-pots offer thousands of variations in the style. Egyptianising motifs became fashionable in the Victorian period largely through the drawings, writings, and photographs of travellers who ventured to the Nile. Egypt was a popular goal for the Thomas Cook (1808–92) tours, and artists, photographers, and collectors made Egypt familiar.⁷⁰ Victorian jewellery in the Egyptian style, some of it designed by May Morris (1862–1938), was sought after, whilst furniture in the Egyptian Taste by Liberty, Holman Hunt, and others became popular. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) used Egyptianising furniture in his paintings, and there are strong Egyptian elements in paintings by Edwin Long (1829–91), Sir Edward John Poynter (1836–1919), the Hon. John Collier (1850–1934), David Roberts (1796–1864) (mostly

60 BERGDOLL (1994), and SNODIN (*Ed.*) (1991).

61 VIDLER (1990).

62 K.620 of 1791.

63 THIELE (1823).

64 Like an opera, but with spoken German dialogue between musical numbers instead of *recitative*.

65 See CURL (2002*b*).

66 See TERNER (2001).

67 CARROTT (1978), CONNER (*Ed.*) (1983), HUMBERT, PANTAZZI, and ZIEGLER (*Eds*) (1994), HUMBERT (*Ed.*) (1996), HUMBERT (1989*a* and 1998), and see Select Bibliography.

68 PUGIN (1843).

69 CURL (2000*c*), 103–7.

70 CLAYTON (1982).

fine topographical work),⁷¹ and William Holman Hunt (1827–1910). Ceramics and glass in the Egyptian Taste proliferated, and fakes and forgeries of ‘original’ Ancient Egyptian work were produced on a massive scale. At the end of the century the pictures by Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901)⁷² and his circle contain several Egyptian Revival elements, notably in the variations on the *Toteninsel*⁷³ theme.

In the twentieth century there have been further outbreaks of Egyptomania, the most spectacular occurring after the discovery of the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun in 1922. The famous *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1924–5 stimulated more Egyptianising themes in architecture, furniture design, interiors, jewellery, ceramics, and ornament, and gave its name to the style known as *Art Déco*, which exploited stepped forms, the chevron, bright primary colours, and rich materials, prompted by the discovery of Tutankhamun’s treasures.⁷⁴ Cinemas, and even factories, acquired exotic plumage in the 1920s and 1930s,⁷⁵ and films featuring Cleopatra and Ancient Egypt, culminating in the massive movie with Elizabeth Taylor as the Queen in the 1960s, encouraged revivals of the Revival.⁷⁶ The success of the Tutankhamun travelling exhibition in Europe and America aroused further interest in the Nile style.

The Egyptian Revival has had a longer life than most people suppose. This study will discuss a recurring theme in the history of Taste, how Ancient Egypt was the inspiration for design motifs in the West, and will describe the sources of the Revival, its influences, and its physical manifestations. The inspiration⁷⁷ of Egyptian art and architecture is not yet dissipated: the ways in which Egyptianisms have permeated the West are many, and this study will attempt to show that Egypt provided some of the most important influences that are central, rather than peripheral to our culture. The book has been written in the belief that Ancient Egyptian religion, art, and architecture have profoundly affected Græco-Roman and Christian civilisations in ways that, to a very great extent, have been grossly underestimated by historians and commentators: it will outline some of the most important examples of such influences, and will trace an extraordinary and persistent thread that leads back to the ancient cultures of the Nile.

71 CLAYTON (1982), and GUITERMAN and LLEWELLYN (1986).

72 PALMA and NUZZI (*Eds*) (1980).

73 The Isle of the Dead of 1880.

74 DUNCAN (1988), HILLIER and ESCRITT (1997), and BENTON, BENTON, and WOOD (*Eds*) (2003).

75 ATWELL (1981), HITCHMOUGH (1992).

76 HUMBERT (1989*a*).

77 See CONNER (*Ed.*) (1983).

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... the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots,
and when we did eat bread to the full

THE OLD TESTAMENT: *Exodus*, xvi, 3

The seed of the idea that eventually became *The Egyptian Revival* was sown in 1960 when I visited Mozart's birthplace in Salzburg and there saw an exhibition of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's designs for *Die Zauberflöte* and other theatrical and operatic productions: those designs, with their Egyptianising allusions, made an overwhelming impact, and they have remained embedded in my mind ever since. That seed, planted so long ago, prompted an obsession, and I began to note Egyptiana during my frequent travels at home and abroad. Gradually, the idea grew into an ambition to write a book, and this volume, written in my seventh decade, is the result. Even as I look up from my desk, I can see, high on a hill across the waters of the Lough, a tall obelisk-memorial. Egyptianising motifs are never far away.

I have been greatly helped by many people to assemble the great mass of material that forms the basis of this book. First of all, I am grateful to my original publishers, George Allen & Unwin, and especially to Mr Rayner Unwin and Mr John Newth for so quickly seeing the possibilities in my first ideas. Mr Merlin Unwin subsequently became closely involved at the formative stage, and took the process through to publication in 1982.¹ The book went out of print shortly after my publishers became Unwin Hyman, and the rights reverted to me: this reversion was confirmed when Unwin Hyman was taken over by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. Subsequently, Miss Katharine Reeve, of Manchester University Press, was equally speedy in determining to bring out a new version of the book in 1994, revised, corrected, updated, and retitled *Egyptomania*,² to coincide with a major exhibition of that name in Paris, Ottawa, and Vienna.³ That book, in turn, went out of print and again rights returned to me. Through the good offices of Mr Peter Clayton I was introduced to Mr Robin Page, of Rubicon Press, who, in 2002, agreed to publish a new edition: it was agreed that we should revert to the original title, with a new subtitle reflecting more accurately the contents of the book, and were determined to include some colour-plates (some taken specially for the purpose) in order to do better justice to some of the beautiful artefacts created as a

1 CURL (1982).

2 CURL (1994*a*).

3 See HUMBERT, PANTAZZI, and ZIEGLER (*Eds*) (1994).

result of this Revival. I delivered the book at the end of 2002, and worked with Mr Page and Mr Peter Phillips until by the Autumn of that year the book was almost ready for publication. Unfortunately, Mr Page died just as our labours neared their end, and the whole project went into a legal limbo. Mr Clayton again came to the rescue, and introduced the book to Mr Richard Stoneman of Routledge, who indicated his interest in publishing the work, but we had to wait for many months until Probate was granted and it became possible to purchase rights from the legal representatives of Rubicon. Thereafter, through the good offices of Mr Stoneman and Miss Katherine Davey (Production Editor) work proceeded at last, and the book was prepared for publication.

Even new editions cost money to produce, involving some new illustrations, re-use of old ones, and re-working of the text and bibliography to take modern scholarship into account. It was therefore useful to receive a modest grant from the Marc Fitch Fund towards the costs of obtaining the illustrations, and so I acknowledge with thanks this grant, the support of my referees, and the advice of Mr Roy Stephens when making my application.

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4 CURL (*Ed.*) (2001b).

Sir Nikolaus Pevsner graciously allowed me to quote from their pioneering essay on the Revival, and have my warmest thanks. Their work provided a valuable skeleton on which part of the present study is based. My younger daughter, Ingrid, very kindly told me about, and photographed, various Egyptianisms in France, and my brother, John, helped to track down Egyptianising mausolea with me in Ireland. My wife, Professor Dorota Iwaniec, gave me moral support while I was working on the complicated and frequently overwhelming task of revising and re-writing the book: I have dedicated the finished volume to her as a small acknowledgement of my great debt.

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JAMES STEVENS CURL

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1978–2003*

CHAPTER I

Egypt and Europe

The Idea of Egypt in the European Mind; The Isiac Religion; The Absorption of Egyptian Religion into the Græco-Roman World; Obelisks; The Isæum Campense; Pyramids; Epilogue

It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,
And times and things, as in that vision, seem
Keeping along it their eternal stands, –
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands
That roamed through the young earth, the glory extreme
Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,
The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT (1784–1859): Sonnet – *A Thought of [sic] the Nile*, lines 1–8,
from *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 211.

I am She that is the natural Mother of all things, Mistress and Governess of all the Elements, the Initial Progeny of Worlds, Chief of the Powers Divine, Queen of Heaven, the Principal of the Gods Celestial, the Light of the Goddesses. At My Will the Planets of the Air, the wholesome Winds of the Seas, and the Silences of Hell be disposed. My Name, My Divinity, is adored throughout all the World, in divers manners, in variable Customs, and in Many Names, for the Phrygians call me the Mother of the Gods; the Athenians, Minerva; the Cyprians, Venus; the Candians, Diana; the Sicilians, Proserpina; the Eleusians, Ceres; some Juno, others Bellona, others Hecate; and principally the Ethiopians who dwell in the Orient, and the Egyptians, who are excellent in all kinds of ancient Doctrine, and by their proper Ceremonies accustom to worship Me, do call Me Queen Isis. Behold, I am come to take pity on thy Fortune and Tribulation! Behold, I am present to favour and aid thee! Leave off thy weeping and lamentation, put away all thy sorrow, for behold the healthful day which is ordained by my Providence. Therefore be ready and attentive to My Commandment . . .

And know thou this of certainty, that the residue of thy Life until the Hour of thy Death shall be bound and subject to Me . . . Thou shalt live Blessed in this World, thou shalt live, glorious by My Guidance and Protection . . . And know thou that I will prolong thy days above the time that the Fates have appointed and the Celestial Planets ordained.

LUCIUS APULEIUS: (c.AD 125–c.170): *Metamorphoses*, Book XI.
Based on the translation by WILLIAM ADLINGTON of 1566.

The Idea of Egypt in the European Mind

Egyptological collections in museums throughout the Western world have made artefacts of Ancient Egypt familiar to us all. Mummified bodies, coffins, sculptures, hieroglyphic inscriptions, and stylised paintings are immediately recognisable as having derived from the lands of the Nile. Nowadays, with instant communication, ease of travel, and an immense treasury of published works, photographic images, and archaeological discoveries readily available, it might be thought that mysterious Egypt – the land of the pharaohs, where strange deities presided over a theology of immense complexity – has become less remote. Yet we find those dried bodies, the staring eyes of the painted masks, the ‘Canopic’ jars with their grisly contents, fascinating and rather terrible, as they await the call to a Resurrection that has never happened. The plundered tombs, the mighty pyramids, the ruined temples, and the weather-beaten Sphinx move us with their antiquity, their curious aura, their gigantic scale, and their brooding, massive solemnity. A realisation that a rich and powerful civilisation, with an enormous legacy of architecture, art, and artefacts, has vanished, and that its meaning and beliefs have ceased, apparently, to impinge on contemporary life, is food for gloomy thoughts.

And yet all is not as it seems. The civilisation of the West that developed from the Græco-Roman world, from the elaborate organisation of the Christian Church and its close connections with secular power and the legitimising of that power, and from the vast cultural stew of the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, drew heavily on the religion of Ancient Egypt, a fact that is often ignored, glossed over, or claimed as ‘exaggerated’ by commentators. Throughout the Græco-Roman world Egyptian deities were worshipped, and they exercised an enormous influence on other faiths, notably Christianity. It may be this that has led historians (who ought to be objective) to shy away from the obvious.

It is well known that trading relations between Egypt and the Greek world were established from the second half of the second millennium BC. Homer (*fl.* eighth century BC), in the *Odyssey*, tells us of the visit to Egypt of Menelaus,¹ and Greeks secured settlements in Egypt from around the seventh century BC. Herodotus (*c.*490–*c.*425 BC) travelled in Egypt and left us an extremely valuable account in his *Histories*, which were subsequently regarded as prime sources by later writers, including Diodorus Siculus (*fl.* *c.*60–30 BC) and Strabo (64 BC–after AD 24). The Greeks were aware of the antiquity of Egyptian civilisation, and were impressed by its religion,

1 The Legend of ‘The Egyptian Helen’, the subject of *Die ägyptische Helena*, an opera (premiered at Dresden in 1928) by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–29), with music by Richard Strauss (1864–1949).

buildings, and customs: even more important, however, was the awe with which Egypt was regarded, for it was seen as the repository of all ancient wisdom. Greek intellectuals visited Egypt at least as early as the seventh century BC: Thales of Miletus (*fl.* c.600 BC), the famous astronomer and scientist, has been credited with the organisation of geometry after studying Egyptian methods of land-measurement; there were Greek settlements in Egypt, notably at Naukratis; and it is clear from numerous Greek and Latin *graffiti* that tourists were no strangers to Egypt in Classical Antiquity.

Egyptian architecture developed very early, and evolved certain forms that remained more or less constant in their basic elements throughout the millennia. It was a massive columnar and trabeated architecture, with a limited range of capitals (bud, papyrus, palm-leaf, volute, etc.²), and a simple entablature, usually consisting of a lintel (architrave), torus-moulding, and gorge-cornice³. Ornament featured stylised versions of the lotus (both bud and flower),⁴ papyrus (bud and plant),⁵ and palm (which influenced Greek ornament in turn),⁶ whilst there are columns at Beni-Hasan and Deir-el-Bahari that suggest a prototypical Greek Doric Order (associated, in the case of the Beni-Hasan tombs, with rock-cut segmental ceilings).⁷ The Ancient Egyptian rock-cut tombs at Beni-Hasan have sixteen-sided columns *in antis*, slightly tapering towards the top and separated from the lintels by *abaci*: projecting cornices over have representations of beam-ends carved out of the solid rock. In basic arrangement, rock-cut tombs in Lycia, Arcadia, and Macedonia have similarities to those of Beni-Hasan,⁸ and it is not unlikely that there was some transportation of architectural ideas, although the geometry of formal spaces sheltering a dead body would appear to have been arrived at independently by a number of civilisations.⁹ Perhaps more intriguing is the appearance of Egyptian decorative motifs in Greek art and architecture. Palm-motifs occur in the capitals of the Tower of the Winds in Athens;¹⁰ the Egyptian decorated bell-capital suggests an archaic Corinthian capital; Egyptian wall-paintings and capitals featuring the lotus suggest the essential form of the Ionic capital; the anthemion as a design is not all that far removed from the stylised lotus-flower; *antefixa*, in Greek architecture, recall some Egyptian painted work; whilst sphinxes and other composite creatures are not uncommon in Hellenistic and Roman designs.¹¹

2 See Select Glossary, under **capital**. See also PHILLIPS (2002).

3 See Select Glossary for descriptions and illustrations.

4 *Ibid.* See also PHILLIPS (2002).

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 See CLAYTON (1982), for illustrations.

8 See KURTZ and BOARDMAN (1971), *passim*, for descriptions of Greek tombs.

9 See DINSMOOR (1950), 58–9, 124–216, 328 and STATHAM (1950), 10–16, 43, 46, 55, 56.

10 See Select Glossary, under **capital**.

11 For descriptions and explanations of the Classical Orders see CURL (1999, 2000) and CURL (2001a).

If some consider Egypt to be the possible source of the Doric Order, the origins of the Ionic Order are more markedly from the Southern Mediterranean area.¹² The characteristic volute or scroll-capital may have been derived from the Egyptian lotus, and there are similarities to Mycenaean scroll-work. Early capitals of the proto-Ionic type in Cyprus, Lesbos, Naukratis, and Neandria¹³ have volutes that are probably derived from vegetation, with palmettes interposed. The Ionic Order was particularly favoured in Asia Minor, and the most celebrated buildings in which it was used were the temples of Artemis at Ephesus and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus.¹⁴ Henry Heathcote Statham (1839–1924) pointed out that there is a quasi-Asiatic stamp¹⁵ about the Ionic Order. It might also be observed that the slight batter of the doorway of the north portico of the *Erechtheion* in Athens and in other Ionic buildings also recalls Egyptian architecture, especially the pylon-tower form. In Egyptian temples, capitals, decorated with papyrus, lotus, bud, or combinations of these, are usual. In some cases, however, the capitals are replaced by the face of the goddess Hathor with drooping sacerdotal hood repeated four times at the top of each column.¹⁶

The Egyptians themselves demonstrated an archaeological approach to their own past, notably in the Saïte period (664–525 BC), when there was a conscious revival of earlier art-forms, and much restoration of existing artefacts and buildings.¹⁷ From 332 BC, following the overthrow of the Persian monarchy by Alexander III, ‘the Great’ (356–323 BC), Macedonian Greeks known as the Ptolemies¹⁸ ruled Egypt, and Alexandria became the most important centre of Greek culture. The key to the remarkable early spread of the Egyptianising cults was Alexander, who was closely identified with Zeus-Ammon (**Colour Plate I**), with Osiris, and with Dionysus, as well as himself becoming heir to the pharaohs.¹⁹ When Alexander conquered Egypt, the ancient deities gained a new and potent influence throughout the Hellenistic world. Unlike many conquerors, Alexander did not attempt to superimpose his own culture or to obliterate the indigenous civilisation. Like Napoléon, Alexander brought scholars with him to study and interpret the riches of the Nile Valley, and, as a result, Egypt was to contribute an enormous amount to Hellenistic culture. The founding of the great city of Alexandria was to be associated with a harbour presided over by *Isis Pharia*, and the new capital was to become a fountain-head from which an Egyptianised Hellenistic civilisation would flow.

12 DINSMOOR (1950), *passim*.

13 See also Select Glossary of the present work, under **capital**.

14 Two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

15 STATHAM (1950), 65.

16 See Select Glossary under **capital**, and see CLAYTON (1982), for illustrations.

17 CLAYTON (1982), 7–8.

18 HORNBLOWER and SPAWFORTH (1996), 1271–3.

19 *Ibid.*, 57–9.

The early death of the god-like Alexander caused the elevation of Ptolemy I Soter (323–282 BC), who transformed Alexandria into a splendid metropolis, and encouraged the cult of the Græco-Egyptian hybrid god Serapis (or Sarapis), probably in order to help unify the country after the disruptions of conquest. It was during his reign that the cult of Isis began to spread outside Egypt, and spread in spectacular fashion. Ptolemy's son, by Berenice, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–246 BC), who ruled jointly with his father from 285 to 282 BC, followed the precedents of pharaonic Egypt and married his own sister, Arsinoë, who was closely identified with Isis.²⁰ Under this Pharaoh, Nilotic culture and religion were exported to Italy, Asia Minor, and Greece, and fine new temples were built at Philæ dedicated to Isis and Osiris.²¹ Significantly, the architecture at Philæ was Egyptian, not Greek, and, in any case, as has been mentioned above, there had been a long history of the revival of Ancient Egyptian architecture in Egypt itself (notably under Psammeticus I [664–610 BC] of XXVI Dynasty) in which Greeks had been involved, for many Greek mercenaries joined forces with the Egyptians to restore the independence and power of Egypt, and close connections with Greece were forged. Traditional art, architecture, and religion were revived to emphasise cultural continuity as well as national identity. The Greek colony of Naukratis was founded in the reign of Psammeticus I, and some strange mixtures of Greek and Egyptian art have been found at Saqqara and elsewhere. A Carian grave-*stele* of 550–530 BC, for example, has a segmental head, and is decorated with incised carvings: at the top of the *stele*, following the line of the segmental head, are the vulture's wings with sun-disc and *uraei* above images of a man taking leave of a woman that are entirely East Greek in style (**Plate 1**). This *stele* is one of the earliest surviving instances in which a purely Egyptian motif appears with a representation of figures that are purely Greek.²²

Egyptian art and architecture were certainly conservative, but the conscious Egyptian Revival of the Saïte period set the precedent for what was to follow. Philæ acquired buildings in the reigns of the native Pharaohs of XXX Dynasty (380–343 BC), Nectanebo I and II, in the Ptolemaic (Hellenistic) period (332–30 BC, notably in the reign of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysus [80–51 BC]), and in the reigns of the Roman Emperors Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) and Trajan (AD 98–117). At Philæ additions made by the Romans showed Augustus and Tiberius (AD 14–37) offering myrrh, incense, and other gifts to Isis and her family. To a certain extent the whole group of buildings erected at Philæ must be regarded as Revivalist.

²⁰ HORNBLOWER and SPAWFORTH (1996), 1272 and WITT (1971), 46–8.

²¹ WITT (1971), 46–8.

²² MASSON, MARTIN, and NICHOLLS (1978). The Author is grateful to Dr Nicholls for discussing this *stele* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, with him.



Plate 1 *Incised Carian grave-stele of c. 550–530 BC showing the Egyptian winged sun-disc (or globe) with uræi over a man taking leave of a woman. The wings, globe, and uræi are Egyptian in style, whilst the style of the drawing of the figures is Greek, demonstrating the fusion of motifs in Antiquity (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Exhibit No. E.1. 1971. Official Photograph No. FMK 1201).*

The temple complex of Horus at Edfu (237–57 BC) was begun by Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–221 BC); the main temple was completed by Ptolemy IV Philopater (221–205 BC) in 212; the hypostyle hall was built under Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (ruled jointly [170–164 BC] with Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II, then alone [164–163 and 145–124 BC], and finally with Cleopatras II and III [124–116 BC]); and the pylon-towers were added by Ptolemy XII in 57 BC. Dendera, dedicated to the cow-goddess Hathor, acquired its splendid temple (110 BC–AD 68) from the reign of Ptolemy IX Soter II (116–107 and 88–80 BC), and was added to by his successors, including Cleopatra VII (51–30 BC) (**Plate 2**).²³ Subsequently, the Roman Emperors Tiberius, Caligula (37–41), Claudius (41–54), and Nero (54–68) added to the embellishment of the complex, whilst Domitian (81–96), Nerva (96–98), and Trajan are celebrated in hieroglyphs in the entrance-pylon.²⁴ Augustus himself was depicted in his *Mammisæum* (Birth- or Incarnation-House) at Dendera as a completely Egyptianising figure (**Plate 3**), and at Kôm Ombo Tiberius is shown with bowls containing the crowns²⁵ of Upper and Lower Egypt (**Plate 4**).

²³ For a brief résumé of the Ptolemies, see HORNBLLOWER and SPAWFORTH (*Eds*) (1996), 1271–3.

²⁴ LEPSIUS (1849–59) illustrates and describes these.

²⁵ See Select Glossary.



Plate 2 Cleopatra VII (51–30 BC) presenting her son ‘Cæsarion’ (Ptolemy XV Cæsar [44–30 BC]) (the two figures on the left) to some Egyptian deities, including Isis, Re-Herakhte, Osiris, Horus, and Mut. Cleopatra shakes a sistrum and holds a menat, whilst Cæsarion offers incense. This carving is on the rear wall of the Ptolemaic temple at Dendera, and dates from the fourth decade BC. The graceful and sensuous figures of the queen and the goddess should be compared. It is clear from this and other carvings that the identification of Ptolemaic royalty with Ancient Egyptian deities was complete. The process was to continue when Egypt fell to Rome (PAC).

Plate 3 The Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BC-AD 14) in his Birth- or Incarnation House (Mammisæum) at Dendera presenting the sun on its horizon to Hathor. He wears the nemes head-dress with additional ornaments including the ram’s horns of Khnum with uræi, the crown of Lower Egypt, and a triple arrangement of discs, plumes, etc., so his complete Egyptianisation is clear, but not surprising, given that, once Egypt nominally became part of the Roman Empire when Octavian became Augustus in 27 BC, it had a peculiar status: it was governed from Rome, yet was regarded as part of the Emperor’s personal estates. It was the single most important granary of the Empire, and no member of the imperial family or of the Senate could visit Egypt without the personal permission of the Emperor. Furthermore, the deification of Roman Emperors was closely associated with Egyptian precedent (PAC).





Plate 4 *The Emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37), wearing the atef crown further embellished with ram’s horns and uræi, presenting two small bowls containing the white crown of Upper Egypt (right) and the red crown of Lower Egypt to a deity. From a column at the temple of Kôm Ombo (PAC).*

Now Ptolemaïc Egyptian architecture such as that mentioned above, although still in a recognisable traditional Egyptian style, had a refinement and elegance that had affinities with Classical Græco-Roman designs. At Elephantine, for example, there was an unusual type of building consisting of a *cella* with seven columns square on plan on either side, and two columns circular on plan set between the square columns at each end: the whole was placed on a high podium, and was crowned with a simple coved cornice (**Plate 5**). At some time in the 1820s the Elephantine temple appears to have been destroyed, but fortunately it was recorded by the French surveyors preparing plates for the great *Description de l’Égypte*, which will be described later.²⁶

The simple, square column was also used at the huge mortuary-temple of Queen Hatshepsut (1479 BC–1458 BC) at Deir-el-Bahari (c.1473 BC–c.1458 BC), designed by Senmut (or Senenmut). The composition has long ranges of these square columns, massive ramps joining the main levels, and is symmetrical (**Colour Plate III**). It had a considerable influence on the stripped Classicism of the twentieth century, notably some of the works of Albert Speer (1905–81 – e.g. the Party Congress Grounds at Nürnberg [from 1934]), and on the Neo-Classical architects K. F. Schinkel and Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson.

²⁶ COMMISSION DES SCIENCES ET ARTS D’ÉGYPTE (1809–28).

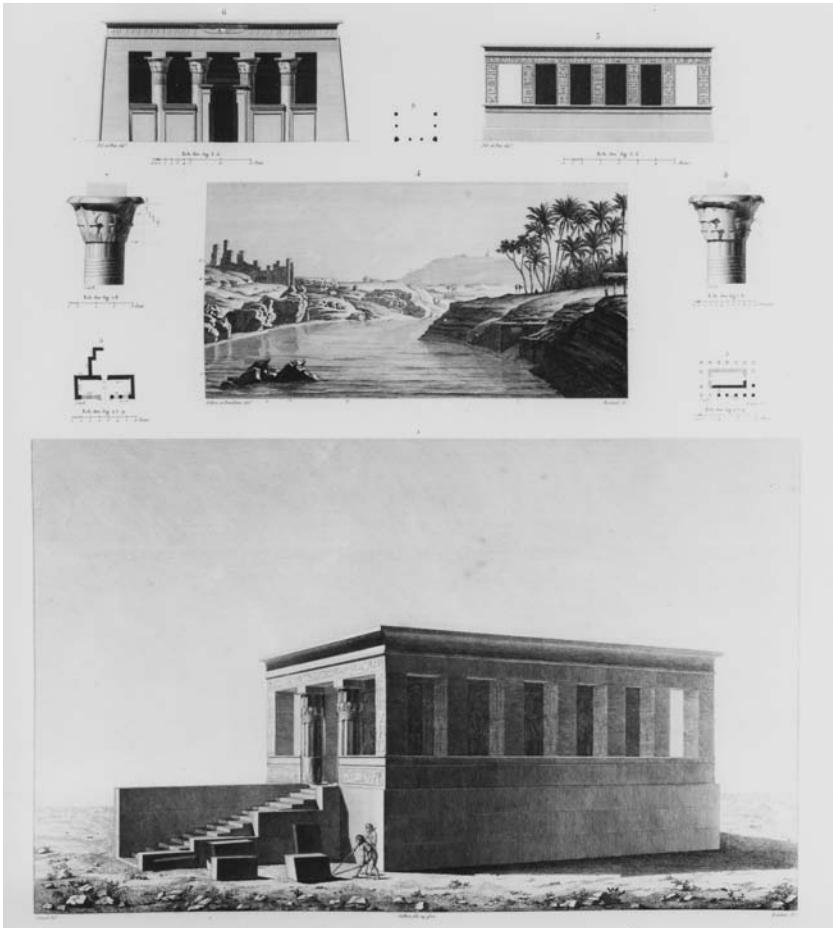


Plate 5

(Top left) Plan, elevation, and two papyrus capitals (one is on the right) from the temple at Syene (Aswan), showing a typical Ptolemaic arrangement of battered walls, covered cornice (or gorge-cornice) with winged globe and uræi, and four columns with papyrus capitals arranged almost in antis, with pluteus.

(Centre) View of the Isle of Elephantine and its environs. The small plan above the view is that of 'a ruined edifice' at Syene.

(Bottom) Perspective view of the southern temple at Elephantine showing the peripteral square columns set on a high podium on the long sides, with in antis arrangement of circular columns with bud capitals, all supporting a simple covered cornice. Repetitive square columns with Græcianised detail based on those of the choragic monument of Thrasyllus in Athens (see *Select Glossary*) became elements more favoured by certain architects of the Neo-Classical period, notably Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, and so demonstrated how Egyptian and Greek motifs fused and became one.

(Top right) Plan and elevation of the northern temple at Elephantine showing the peripteral arrangement of square columns along the flanks with circular columns at each end in antis, high podium, and covered cornice (From *Description*, A, Vol. 1, pl. 38, GB/SM).

The Ptolemaic Empire forged links over a wide geographical area. In Alexandria cultural life flourished, and a great museum and library, presided over by Isis and Serapis, were established. Egyptian deities were accorded the same status as that of the Greek gods and goddesses. Gradually, however, the Greeks themselves became Egyptianised, and many deities mingled by a curious process of syncretism that was a feature of the Græco-Roman world. Greek rule came to a close after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, after which the last Queen, Cleopatra VII, committed suicide, and Egypt was annexed by Rome in 30 BC, although its status was rather odd in that it was retained as a favoured province by Augustus, who began a process of moving monuments within Egypt, and also removing monuments (such as obelisks) to beautify Alexandria and Rome itself. Even Augustus became Egyptianised (despite his antipathy to ‘oriental’ cults), and his deification was yet another aspect of how potent was the theology of the ancient deities of the Nile (**Plate 3**).

Not only obelisks, jewellery, statuary, and *objets d’art* were imported by Rome: one of the most significant catalysts for Roman enthusiasm for things Egyptian was to be the Egyptian religion when the worship of the deities Isis and Serapis was publicly sanctioned among the *sacra publica*, and the deities were recognised as denizens of the Roman polytheistic pantheon.²⁷ This momentous event only became possible when the lands of the eastern Mediterranean became politically integrated with the Empire. Once that occurred, Roman artists began to manufacture objects in the manner of Egyptian artefacts, and a Classical Egyptian Revival began. However, there had been a major catastrophe earlier when Gaius Julius Cæsar (100–44 BC) took Alexandria in 47 BC, for the great library attached to the huge temple of Serapis (Osiris) there was burned, and many works were destroyed, including the mighty *History of Egypt* by Manetho (*fl.* 280 BC) which Ptolemy I Soter had commissioned. A further disaster occurred when the Emperor Theodosius I (AD 388–95) ordered the closure (389) of all non-Christian temples through the Roman Empire and two years later the Christian prelate of Alexandria, Theophilus (Patriarch AD 385–412), vigorously suppressed Egyptian paganism and was instrumental in destroying the great temple of Serapis at Alexandria, marking the end of religious toleration in the Empire (and incidentally also destroying many ancient texts stored in the library of the *Serapeion*). Earlier, Theophilus had ordered the Serapeion at Menouthis, north-east of Alexandria, to be destroyed, but, interestingly, the nearby temple of Isis Medica was temporarily spared. However, despite the destruction of the

27 TAKÁCS (1995), 127.

Alexandrian *Serapeion*, part of the library (Sarapiana) building, which formed part of the temple structure, seems to have survived for a time, and was still used by pagan scholars such as Hypatia, the woman learned in astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy, and an important teacher of Neoplatonist philosophy. Hypatia was torn to pieces in AD 415 by an infuriated mob of Christian zealots at the instigation of their leader, Cyril (Bishop of Alexandria from 412 to 444), whose polemics point to a continuing vitality of the pagan cults in Egypt in the fifth century of our era. He suppressed the cult of Isis at Menouthis by translating thither the supposed relics of Sts Cyrus and John, but, as we shall see, Isis was not that easy to obliterate.²⁸ After all, the Gnostics argued that Isis and the Virgin Mary shared the same characteristics, and Cyril would have been all too aware of that when he was vigorously promoting the official adoption of the Church of the dogma of *Panagia-Theotokos*, the All-Holy Virgin Mother of God, at the Council of Ephesus in 431.²⁹

Eventually, the Christian zealots had their odious way, and literary works that had survived the tragedy of 47 BC were consumed by fire. Thus a vast legacy of pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt was lost to the world, and the hieroglyphic script, still understood and used by certain cults, quickly became mysterious and unreadable, although we know that as early as the reign of Claudius hieroglyphs were being used to *suggest* Egypt, but meant nothing, so they were bogus or pseudo-hieroglyphs. By around AD 450 it would seem that virtually nobody could read the Ancient Egyptian texts, while an immense amount written in Greek about Ancient Egypt was lost. Egypt began to become infinitely remote, mysterious, and elusive.

Once Egypt fell to the Arabs in AD 640, the land and its buildings became even more mysterious and inaccessible: it was a legendary place, the seat of ancient mysteries lost in time, with important Biblical associations evident in the tales of Moses, Joseph, and, of course, the Flight to Egypt. A few intrepid pilgrims ventured into Egypt, but the difficulties were immense, and such was the extortion practised by the new masters there that hardly anybody bothered to travel in the lands of the Nile for many centuries.

Hieroglyphs were known from the obelisks that could still be seen in Rome, but it appears their meaning was quickly forgotten, even in the first decades of our era. So Egypt entered into the European mind as an inaccessible land, where ancient esoteric knowledge once could be tapped, and where legend and Biblical stories mingled in a heady brew. It was an enticing subject for speculation, mythology, and scholarship.

²⁸ See WITT (1971), 185–97, for further illumination.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

The Isiac Religion

No consideration of Egyptian influences in Europe can afford to ignore Isis, the Great Goddess, Mother of the God, Queen of Heaven, who was wise and cunning, infinitely patient, and life-giving, able even to resurrect the dead. Her legacy to European civilisation is immense, and her presence, in attributes and symbols, in religion and philosophy, in architecture, art, and design, and in the Christian Church, is very real. She helped to remove the particularist³⁰ aspects that had survived in the Christian Church, and, by her femininity and œcumenical appeal, she became loved and revered. The devotion she inspired in ancient times throughout the Græco-Roman world was enormous, and that devotion is still obvious, even in parts of Western Europe. She is the key to an understanding of the thread that joins our own time to the distant past, and which explains a great deal within the cultural heritage of the Western European tradition.

The rôle that the culture of Ancient Egypt played in the development of Western civilisation is not often recognised, even though the importance of the cult of Isis in Alexandria and in Italy has long been known.³¹ There are probably two main reasons for this: first, the images of Egyptian deities look very foreign to European eyes; and, second, an acknowledgement of how remarkably complete was the absorption of the Isiac religion in the Roman Empire would seriously weaken the unique claims of Christianity. Yet, as will be seen, there were countless objects made in Europe in an Egyptianising style, while the Great Goddess herself was Europeanised in her imagery. Furthermore, the resemblances between Isis and the Virgin Mary are far too close and numerous to be accidental. There can, in fact, be no question that the Isiac cult was a profound influence on other religions, not least Christianity. As Dr Witt has noted,³² the more we probe the mysterious cult of the goddess Isis, the greater that goddess appears in historical terms: Isis was a familiar deity in the cosmopolitan cities of Rome and Alexandria, in the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum, in the city-states of the Hellenistic period (c.323–end of the first century BC) in Asia Minor, and throughout Gaul, whilst there was an important Isiac temple in Roman Londinium. She cannot be ignored or wished out of existence, nor can it be assumed that one day in the fifth century of our era she simply vanished from the hearts and minds of men.

³⁰ Particularism was the doctrine that Divine Grace is provided for or offered to a selected part of humanity, or an élite.

³¹ The Author records his gratitude to Mr Peter A. Clayton for his help with many things Egyptian.

³² WITT (1971), 11. Dr Witt's monograph offers a conspectus of the Isiac religion in its entirety in one scholarly volume, and builds upon the early foundations set down by BERGMAN, GRIFFITHS, GRIMM, HOPFNER, LAFAYE, MERKELBACH, MÜNSTER, and TRAN TAM TINH, and others whose works are cited in the Select Bibliography of the present work. The Author acknowledges his debt to Dr Witt, as well as to the studies mentioned above: he is also grateful to Mr Stanley Baron and Thames & Hudson Ltd for permission to quote from Dr Witt's copyright work.

Isis was the ruler of shelter, of heaven, of life: her mighty powers included a unique knowledge of the eternal wisdom of the gods, and she was well-versed in guile. Her tears shed for her murdered brother and consort, Osiris, caused the waters of the Nile to flood, so she was associated with rebirth and with the resurrection of the dead,³³ for the river that seemed to die, like Osiris, was ‘reborn as the living water’.³⁴ Every pharaoh was understood to be a reincarnation of Horus,³⁵ and was therefore the offspring of Isis, the mother-goddess, who could not die, was incorruptible, and was closely involved in the resurrection and re-assembly of the dead.³⁶ She was the sacred embodiment of motherhood, yet was known as the Great Virgin,³⁷ an apparent contradiction that will be familiar to Christians. Isis, as the goddess of procreation, had many symbols, the most startling of which (the cow) she shared with Hathor.³⁸ Enthusiasts who have pursued the Marian *cultus* of the Christian Church, and who are familiar with the works of Hippolytus Marraccius and St Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori,³⁹ will recognise the young heifer as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, whose crescent-moon on many paintings of the post-Counter Reformation period recalls the lunar symbol of the great Egyptian. In imagery Isis is often represented as a comely young woman with cows’ horns on her head-dress,⁴⁰ the horns usually framing the globe (Plate 2 and see Select Glossary). The goddess often held in her hands a sceptre of flowers, or one of her breasts and her son, Horus.

To Plato (c.429–347 BC) and others, Egyptian culture was already very ancient.⁴¹ Indeed, Plato mentions the so-called *Lamentations of Isis*⁴² as being of considerable antiquity in his own day.⁴³ Herodotus of Halicarnassus suggested that the deities of Egypt had been adopted by the Greek city-states,⁴⁴ and that, specifically, Demeter and Isis were one and the same.⁴⁵ Symbols, such as the *sistrum*, or rattle, occur in Greek statues that can be identified as Isiac, and Herodotus noted clear similarities between Hellenic and Egyptian deities.⁴⁶ Others⁴⁷ have noted the occurrence of Isiac symbols in Cretan art,

33 HOPFNER (1922–25) and WITT (1971) discuss these matters at length. Although HOPFNER’s work is over eighty years old, it is still a classic, and the present study owes it a considerable debt.

34 WITT (1971), 15.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 See also STEINER (1980).

38 SEYFFERT (1899), 324–5. See also Select Glossary.

39 See Select Bibliography.

40 SEYFFERT (1899), 324–5.

41 See especially *Timæus*. WITT (1971), 15–16. See also HOPFNER (1922–5), *passim*.

42 The *Lamentations* consisted of a dialogue between Isis and her sister Nephthys during the Passion of Osiris, and were probably first written down in the third millennium BC.

43 WITT (1971), 16.

44 *Histories*, Book II, 49–51. See also NILSSON (1925), 10–11, and the later edition of 1949. See also the same scholar’s *La Religion populaire dans la Grèce* (Paris: Plon, 1954), *passim*.

45 SEYFFERT (1899), 324–5.

46 *Histories*, II, 59.

47 NILSSON (1925), 10–11.

suggesting cross-currents between Crete and Egypt: the importance of the sea-routes in spreading cultural influences cannot be overstressed.

Realities of life in Egypt produced their own symbolism. The fruitful Nile Valley, renewed in its fecundity each year, was in stark contrast to the deserts that bordered it. The Valley was the beloved land of Isis, but the deserts were the domains of the appalling Seth (otherwise Typhœus or Typhon), Lord of Foreigners, enemy of Isis, and killer of Osiris. From the realms of Seth came death, disease, blight, eclipses of the sun and moon, and evil itself. That disagreeably oppressive hot South Wind, called the *Sirocco* or the *Mistral*, was sent from Seth's country to spread its menace over the fair lands by the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. According to Hesiod (*fl.* c.700 BC),⁴⁸ Seth or Typhon was a giant of enormous strength, with a hundred snake-heads. Seth represented the fire and smoke within the earth, and was master of destructive forces: he was the source of hurricanes, and was the father of the fearsome dogs Orthos and Cerberus, as well as the progenitor of the Lernæan Hydra. His abode lay beneath the earth, in dark and dreadful places.⁴⁹

For millennia the Nile watered the lands that bore corn, palms, flax, and papyrus. The last, used for making boats and rolls on which texts could be written, was closely associated with Isis, who invented the skills of weaving and spinning,⁵⁰ who guarded boats and their crews from all perils, and who hovered protectively over those about to die.⁵¹ After death, the overseer of the embalming ritual and the guardian of the dead was Anubis,⁵² the transporter of souls, the friend and messenger of Isis. In that other Kingdom Justice was dispensed with infinite wisdom by Osiris, the god and consort-brother of Isis, just as was to be the case with the Hellenistic successor of Osiris, named Serapis.⁵³

Osiris, with his sister-wife, enjoyed the most general worship of all the Ancient Egyptian gods.⁵⁴ His colour, as that of the god associated with life, was green,⁵⁵ and his sacred tree was the evergreen tamarisk.⁵⁶ The Greeks identified Osiris with Dionysus.⁵⁷ Legend has it that Osiris had ruled as a King, and introduced agriculture, morality, and religion to the world, until

48 *Theogony*, 869.

49 SEYFFERT (1899), 663.

50 GAIUS PLINIUS SECUNDUS (AD 23/4–79): *Naturalis Historia*, Books 11, 13, etc., for descriptions of the use of papyrus for decorating images.

51 WITT (1971), 16–17.

52 SEYFFERT (1899), 38.

53 WITT (1971), 17; SEYFFERT (1899), 38, 324–5, 438–9. See also LURKER (1984), 28 and HART (1986), 21–26.

54 SEYFFERT (1899), 438–9.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.* See also PLUTARCH: *De Iside et Osiride*.

57 ÆLIANUS (1864–66), *passim*. See also SEYFFERT (1899), 439.

his brother Seth cruelly murdered him in a wooden chest,⁵⁸ which then was cast into the Nile. The grief-stricken Isis retrieved the chest, but Seth retaliated by cutting the body into small pieces which he then scattered.⁵⁹ These parts were collected by Isis, and his body was duly resurrected by her, although the phallus was missing.⁶⁰ This obliged the goddess to resort to parthenogenesis in order to conceive and bring forth Horus, avenger of Osiris, and mighty cosmic deity. Another version of the story involves Isis as a kite, fanning the breath of life into Osiris and being impregnated by her ithyphallic but dead brother.⁶¹ In either version the conception of Horus, like that of Jesus, was miraculous. Osiris the Resurrected, the Invincible, possessor of the All-Seeing Eye, was also Ptah, God of Fire and Architect of the Universe, identified with Amun (Ammon), Apollo, Dionysus, the real architect Imhotep, the Apis-Bull, and finally the powerful Græco-Roman Serapis.

Worship of Serapis–Osiris was first developed at Memphis, and combined in an anthropomorphic deity Egyptian and Hellenistic attributes of Osiris and Apis (Osorapis = Serapis or Sarapis). From the time of Ptolemy I Soter the centre of the cult became Alexandria, where the *Serapeion* mentioned above, a temple of unparalleled beauty and splendour,⁶² was erected by Ptolemy III Euergetes I. At the celebrated *Serapeion* not only was there a centre of scientific and medical research of an empirical nature, but ‘incubation’ cures (where the patient remained within the temple precincts, even sleeping therein) were also sought, similar to those chronicled at Lourdes in recent times. The transformation of the Ptolemies into deities was not only inevitable given the longevity and potency of the Isiac religion, but in turn it assisted in the spread of the Egyptian cults. Later, when the Roman Emperors became gods (nothing less would do after Egypt and its god-like monarchs had been conquered), the precedent of Egypt was powerful, and Isis enjoyed much imperial favour.

The conception of Serapis was extended in due course to include Osiris, Apis, Dionysus, Hades (Pluto), Asclepius, Zeus, and Helios.⁶³ Worship of Serapis, with the cult of Isis, spread rapidly from Egypt to the coast of Asia Minor, to the islands and mainland Greece itself, and finally to Rome and Italy: by imperial times, especially during the reign of Hadrian, the cults of Serapis and Isis extended throughout the Roman world.⁶⁴ Incorporation of the character and attributes of Æsculapius

58 SEYFFERT (1899), 439.

59 See HART (1986), 151–67.

60 PLUTARCH: *De Iside et Osiride*, 12, and *passim*.

61 HART (1986), 160.

62 SEYFFERT (1899), 578.

63 *Ibid.*

64 SEYFFERT (1899). See also WITT (1971), *passim*.

(Asclepius) within Serapis ensured his veneration as the god of healing,⁶⁵ and indeed serpents were particularly associated with Serapis as a beneficent deity.⁶⁶ As Zeus-Serapis, the deity is to be seen in the celebrated and colossal bust in the Vatican, with a *modius* or corn-measure, as a symbol of the abode of the dead (or of fertility in nature) on his head.⁶⁷ Images of Serapis, Isis, and Harpocrates once occurred on the abaci of the ornate Antique Ionic capitals in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome (**Plate 31**): R. Lanciani, in *Bulletino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* of 1883,⁶⁸ suggested these ornate capitals originated in the *Isæum Campense* in Rome, or from the *Thermæ* of Caracalla, and indeed their opulent style would perhaps indicate they were made in the reigns of Caracalla (Emperor AD 198–217) or Domitian (Emperor AD 81–96).⁶⁹ The strong association with Egyptian deities would point to the *Isæum Campense* as the more likely source.

The Absorption of Egyptian Religion into the Græco-Roman World

During the extraordinary fusion of religions in the Ptolemaic period, Isis and Osiris became further merged with many deities.⁷⁰ In particular, Isis, through the range of her powers, grew in stature to be the ‘most universal of all goddesses’,⁷¹ and held sway over the dominions of heaven, earth, the sea, and (with Serapis) mistress of the Other World beyond. She was the arbiter of life and death, deciding the fate of mortals, and she was the dispenser of ‘rewards and punishments’.⁷² During the first four centuries of our era Isiac cults became established in all parts of the Roman Empire.⁷³

Ritual worship of Isis consisted of morning and evening services; of annual festivals to celebrate the spring and the beginning of the navigation season; and of autumnal rites to prepare for winter. The spring festival was held on 5 March, and involved the *Navigium Isidis*, during which a sailing-vessel, built on Egyptian lines, and decorated in the Egyptian style, was laden with spices and cast upon the sea.⁷⁴ This festival was partly in recognition of

65 SEYFFERT (1899), 75–6.

66 *Ibid.*, 578.

67 *Ibid.*, 578–9, and see Select Glossary.

68 LANCIANI (1883), 35, 56.

69 NIBBY (1818–20), ii, 674.

70 SEYFFERT (1899), 324.

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*, 325.

74 APULEIUS: *Metamorphoses*, xi, 8–17. See also FIRMICUS MATERNUS (1938), 2. Apuleius gave descriptions of Isiac services, although he was coy about the Mysteries.

the goddess being patroness of navigation, inventress of sail, and protector of sailors and ships. The autumnal festival commemorated the grief of Isis and her subsequent joy on finding Osiris again.⁷⁵ Attributes of the goddess include the serpent, the *cornucopia*, the *hydreion* (vase for holy water), ears of corn, lotus, moon with horns, crescent-moon, segmental pediment, *sistrum* (rattle), and garment with knot beneath the breast (see Select Glossary).

Development of the cults of Isis and Serapis⁷⁶ was helped by trade, and there were certainly Isiac shrines in Rome by the beginning of the first century BC. Greek began to be used in the service of Isis from the third century BC, and cult-statues became Hellenised. Apart from the identification with Demeter (noted by Herodotus), Isis later became associated with Aphrodite, and was closely associated with the Ptolemaic Queens (Plate 2). The best-preserved shrine of Isis in Italy is in Pompeii, where wall-paintings show sphinxes, Nilotic flora and fauna, the Adoration of the ithyphallic mummy of Osiris, Isis as Fortuna, Isiac ritual, dance, and legend, and the sacred symbols of the goddess. Pedimented *ediculae* tombstones from Greece and Italy have survived showing priestesses of Isis holding the *sistrum* and *situla* (or *hydreion*), whilst in a Roman relief Isis herself is depicted with Serapis, a bull, Jupiter, Dolichenus, Juno, the Dioscuri, and a phoenix.⁷⁷ The mixing of Egyptian elements with Roman motifs emphasises the syncretism of the Isiac cults.

The spread of Egyptian religions brought an Egyptianisation of sculpture and architecture.⁷⁸ Classical statues identified with Egyptian deities sometimes had strongly Egyptian features and head-dresses, while the left foot placed before the right (the *pharaonic* stance) was common to both Egyptian and Greek statuary. Other representations of Isis seem almost completely Hellenistic, save for the Isiac attributes of *sistrum*, *hydreion*, and head-dress with lotus (see Select Glossary). The fine Roman marble statue of Isis found at Pozzuoli has the *sistrum* in the right hand, the *hydreion* in the left, a fertility-knot at the breast, and a vestigial lotus-bud on the head. The Egyptian head-dress is suggested by the ringlets and drapes (Plate 6). Vestigial lotus-buds are often found as a form of crowning feature above the forehead (Plate 7), not unlike the upper *acroterion* supporting an ornament at the apex of Greek pediments. There is a head from the *Villa Adriana* at Tivoli, now in the Vatican (the features of which are entirely Græco-Roman), that has a head-dress closely derived from Egyptian prototypes, and a lotus-crown (Plate 8). The iconography became fixed.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ WITT (1971), *passim*.

⁷⁶ TAKÁCS (1995), *passim*.

⁷⁷ Illustrated in WITT (1971), plates 31–33.

⁷⁸ See ROULLET (1972), *passim*.

⁷⁹ See ROULLET (1972), 93.



Plate 6 *A Roman marble representation of the Egyptian goddess Isis, found at Pozzuoli. In the right hand is the sistrum (rattle), and in the left is the hydrieion, situla, or vase, for holy water. Fertility is represented by the knot on the breast of the goddess. An Egyptian head-dress is suggested by the ringlets of hair and the drapes, and the connections with Egypt are made overt by the vestigial lotus-bud set above the forehead. Now in the Museo Nazionale, Naples (MC, Mansell/TimePix).*



Plate 7 *Another Roman representation of Isis with her attributes of sistrum, hydrieion, and lotus-crown (MC, Mansell/TimePix).*



Plate 8 *The goddess Isis re-interpreted. The face is completely Græco-Roman, but the head-dress still suggests the Egyptian prototypes, whilst the lotus-bud growing from the head emphasises the Nilotic origins. This fine head, now in the Museo Greg. Egizio (No. 73), is of white marble, came from the palæstra of the Villa Adriana at Tivoli (discovered in the sixteenth century), is a Roman or Alexandrian creation, and was drawn by Étienne Dupérac (c.1525–1601), Pighius van Campen (1520–1604), and Cassiano dal Pozzo (c.1588–1657), among others. The sphinxes on either side are Roman, and are of granite. Photograph of 1980 (JSC).*

Isis and Osiris were usually worshipped near each other,⁸⁰ and the same was true of Isis and Serapis. There were the celebrated Ptolemaïc temples of Isis and Osiris at Philæ, and there was a temple of Isis in the *Serapeion* at Delos, built by the Athenians in about 150 BC. Dedications are known to ‘Isis, Mother of the God’.⁸¹ The Egyptian goddess, in spite of being identified with Greek deities, was refreshingly different compared with the Olympians, and her qualities appealed to civilised Greeks and Romans who were no longer enamoured of the barbarities and licentiousness of their more traditional deities. She became associated in her capacity as Mistress of the Heavens with the moon, and so became identified with Artemis/Diana. Isis was seen as Pallas Athene, as Persephone, as Demeter, as

⁸⁰ WITT (1971), 18.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* See also MÜNSTER (1968), 158.

Aphrodite/Venus, and as Hera.⁸² The Egyptian goddess was Queen of earth, of heaven, and of hell.⁸³ As a moon-goddess she was Artemis/Diana,⁸⁴ goddess of chastity, and ruler of the mysteries of childbirth and/or procreative cycles.⁸⁵ Her son, Horus, became Apollo himself. Isis, in her catholicity, was astonishing.

In terms of imagery, however, the statues of Artemis of Ephesus are rather more startling, for they incorporate a curious necklace-like assemblage of egg-like objects that have been thought to suggest motherhood and fecundity, or even breasts. Anatomically, the many breasts are impossible, and are represented on some coins as eggs, although they reappear as breasts in Renaissance and later imagery. Breasts, fountains, and eggs have iconographical significance as symbols of rebirth and fecundity, and Artemis/Diana was identified with Isis as a mother-goddess. The cult-statues of Artemis of Ephesus were sculpted with the suggestion of a wrapping of the body, rather like the binding of an Egyptian mummified corpse, whilst the wrappings were decorated with the heads of horned animals, suggesting both the hunt and the cows' horns of Isis (later symbolised by the lotus-flower or -bud). Heads of such cult-statues had either wide-spread drapes or decorated moon-like discs suggesting halos. One of the finest surviving examples of such strange images was made in the second century AD for the Emperor Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, and is now in the Vatican ([Plate 9](#)).

We know that there were Oriental architects such as Apollodorus of Damascus (*fl.* AD 98–123) in Rome from Trajan's time, and Hadrian, it would appear, had both Asiatic and Egyptian artists in his service. In the early years of the Empire there seems to have been a ferment of intellectual activity as well as a widespread eclecticism in artistic matters stimulated, no doubt, by the geographical and cultural diversity under the rule of Rome. Egyptian portraits showing faces with great dark eyes painted on wooden panels and set in the mummy-wrappings during the Roman period are familiar images to haunters of museums where there are Egyptian collections: the fact that the style of these portraits is also found in primitive Christian paintings as well as in decorative themes that passed from Egypt to Rome cannot be overlooked. Oriental and Egyptian religions exerted such a powerful influence on Rome that even the appearance of the deities altered: Jupiter became horned Ammon, and Diana became the Syrian of Ephesus with her many 'breasts', now thought to be either eggs on threads, or the testicles of sacrificed animals.

82 SEYFFERT (1899), 325.

83 WITT (1971), 20.

84 *Ibid.*

85 See XENOPHON of Ephesus's novel (*c.* AD 100–150), *The Ephesian Story of Anthia and Habrocomes*.

Plate 9 *Artemis/Diana of Ephesus, mixing Græco-Roman and other traditions. This deity was identified with Isis as a mother-goddess, goddess of the Moon and Night. The horned animals around the body suggest the cows' horns of Isis, whilst the wrappings suggest the bindings of an Egyptian mummified body. The disc behind the crowned head suggests a halo. This replica of the celebrated cult-stature in Ephesus, with its symbols of fecundity, dates from the second century AD, and came from the Villa Adriana at Tivoli. The egg-like forms gave the statue the name multimammiam, or many-breasted, but they are not breasts, and are clearly shown hooked on to a necklace: they are probably the testicles of sacrificed animals, although another interpretation is that they are eggs. Now in the Galleria dei Candelabri in the Vatican, Inv. 2505. Photograph of 1980 (JSC).*



During the Roman Republic there appears to have been a *Serapæum* in the third century BC at Ostia (which was only a few days' sail from Alexandria), and there was an important cult-centre for Isiac worship in the *Campus Martius* in Rome for the last two centuries before the establishment of the Empire, so the cult of Isis was by no means confined to Egypt even then: there had been shrines of Isis in Rome at the time of Sulla (c.138–79 BC), and Isiac altars had existed on the Capitoline hill during the first century BC. When the Roman Empire established its ascendancy over the ancient land of Egypt, and Roman Emperors followed Hellenistic precedent by identifying with deities, Egyptian custom was absorbed and continued. The apotheosis of the Emperors to the status of gods is clearly linked with the Isiac religion, and when Octavian established the Empire Isis was already well entrenched in Italy.

Life, all life, was sacred in Ancient Egypt. Isis herself, by her reconstitution and resurrection of Osiris, and through her instructions for his worship, was the founder-teacher of Egyptian religion, and revered as such in Italy. Her association with Artemis/Diana (see the tondo of a silver *patera* from the Boscoreale treasure in which emblems of Diana and Isis appear)⁸⁶ was strengthened by the idea that Artemis became Bast (Bastet), the cat-goddess, when she fled to Egypt.⁸⁷ Bast was an important deity, with her chief temple at Bubastis, and, most significantly, her symbol and musical instrument was the *sistrum*. The route for pilgrimage to her shrine was the Nile itself. When Isis became Hellenised, the attributes of Bast-Artemis were taken over by her. Many Roman *sistra* are decorated with representations of cats, and many such examples have been found at Pompeii. Isiac temples in Italy were embellished with paintings and mosaics representing flora and fauna associated with Egypt, so that they, as well as architectural features associated with the Alexandrian deities, became familiar to worshippers. The *sistrum*, of course, was well-known, as was another Egyptian symbol, the *ankh*: the Christian symbol of the Cross would seem to owe much to the *ankh* sign, with the horns on top of the *ankh* anticipating the halo around the head of Christ. Indeed, when Christian mobs destroyed the *Serapeion* at Alexandria this Isiac symbol was recognised as a Crucifixion sign, and as a prophetic emblem that looked forward to the triumph of Christianity.⁸⁸

Obelisks

Augustus removed the first obelisk by sea to Rome. From that time further Egyptian obelisks were either shipped to Rome, or made by Romans in the Egyptian style, using Egyptian granite. Fourteen obelisks still stand in Rome alone, re-erected on their present sites from Renaissance times.

The visitor to Rome can hardly fail to notice the presence of so many Ancient Egyptian obelisks (some inscribed with hieroglyphs, and some plain) that grace major public spaces of the city. Connected symbolically both with the sun and with notions of a ruler's temporal power, monolith-obelisks, brought to Rome from the Delta area of Lower Egypt, served as expressions of divine radiance and political clout, and were re-erected on the *spinae* of circuses, in front of temples or tombs, or used as the gnomons of giant sundials.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ WITT (1971), plate 36, and *passim*.

⁸⁷ See HOPFNER (1922–5), 81, 23.

⁸⁸ BRADY (1935), discusses this matter.

⁸⁹ IVERSEN (1968) and HABACHI (1978, 1984). See also CURL (2000a and b).

One of the first Egyptian obelisks to be brought to Rome under Augustus was that of Sethos or Seti I (1290–1279 BC) (XIX Dynasty) which stood at Heliopolis. It was re-erected in 10 BC, with a dedication to the sun, at the eastern end of the *spina* of the Circus Maximus (which had close connections with the sun cult: the passage of chariots around the *spina* was likened to the movement of planets around the sun, a point emphasised by the Romans who fixed gilded globes at the tops of the pyramidions that capped obelisks). This red-granite obelisk was rediscovered in 1471, excavated in 1587, and re-erected in the Piazza del Pòpolo in 1589 by order of Pope Sixtus V (1585–90) under the direction of Domenico Fontana (1543–1607). The present elliptical form of the Piazza, and its embellishment with sphinxes and Egyptianising lions, was designed by Giuseppe Valadier (1762–1839)⁹⁰ (**Plates 10** and **11**).

Fontana is more celebrated for having organised the re-erection of the huge obelisk of red granite in the Piazza di San Pietro in 1586. Dating from the time of Nectanebo II (360–343 BC), and erected by Ptolemy II at Alexandria, this monument had been brought to Rome by order of Gaius Julius Cæsar Germanicus (AD 12–41), known as Emperor (from AD 37) Caligula, and was set up in the *Circus Gai et Neronis* where many Christians, according to legend, were martyred. The obelisk was still standing to the south of the Basilica of San Pietro during the Middle Ages, and so, as a ‘witness’ to so much suffering, was even associated with the crucifixion of St Peter (and thus was known as *Pyramis Beati Petri*). Its importance is emphasised by its prominent new position in front of the huge new church.⁹¹

Another large inscribed obelisk (again of red granite), this time from Karnak, dates from the time of Tuthmosis III (1479–1425 BC – XVIII Dynasty), and was moved first to Alexandria in AD 337 under Flavius Valerius Constantinus (c.AD 272/3–337, Emperor Constantine I [the Great] from 323). In 357 it was moved again to Rome under Constantius II (ruled 337–61), where it was put up on the *spina* of the Circus Maximus. It appears to have been toppled and broken in the sixth century, and lay under a deep layer of earth throughout the Middle Ages (though its existence was known). Disinterred in 1587, it was re-erected under the direction of Fontana in 1588 in the Piazza di San Giovanni in Laterano (**Plate 12**), where it stands today.⁹²

At the top of the Spanish Steps (*Scala di Spagna*), in front of the church of Santissima Trinità de’ Monti, stands an obelisk of red granite (**Plate 13**). It was brought to Rome uninscribed, and acquired its hieroglyphs in Italy,

⁹⁰ DEBENEDETTI (1979) and MEEKS (1966). See also CURL (1999, 2000), 695–6.

⁹¹ ROULLET (1972), 68.

⁹² IVERSEN (1968), 128–141, ROULLET (1972), 70–71, and CURL (2000a and b).



Plate 10 *Egyptian red-granite obelisk in the Piazza del Pòpolo, Rome, originally brought to the city from Heliopolis by Augustus in 10 BC to commemorate the subjugation of Egypt, and erected, with a dedication to the sun, at the eastern end of the spina of the Circus Maximus. The obelisk was still upright in the early mediæval period, but fell before Leon Battista Alberti rediscovered it in 1471. It was excavated in 1587, and was removed to its present position in 1589 by order of Pope Sixtus V (1585–90). On the west and east sides of the Piazza are curved walls with groups of Neptunes and Tritons, and of Roma between the Tiber and the Anio: sphinxes decorate these walls. The Egyptianising features and ramps were designed by Giuseppe Valadier in 1816, and completed in 1818. Photograph of 1980 (JSC).*

copied from those of the obelisk now in the Piazza del Pòpolo. It appears to have been set up in the Gardens of Sallust at some time between AD 79 and 360 (it was mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus [c.AD 330–95], the last great historian of the Roman Empire), and still stood in the eighth