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**Title:** Egypt in material and mind: the use and perception of Aegyptiaca in Roman domestic contexts of Pompeii  
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The purpose of this dissertation was to obtain a better image of the use, integration, and perception of Egyptian artefacts in the domestic contexts of Pompeii. It did not so much wish to give ‘Egypt’ back a place as a cultural influence amongst Roman material culture by arguing it was also important next to ‘Greek’ artefacts or Greek culture. On the contrary, it wished to deconstruct such cultural labels within the context of the daily use of objects. In the introduction it was already stated that this would not be a straightforward task, because the modern concept of Egypt and its accompanying visual and material associations caused scholarship to develop a strong preconception of what exactly the Egyptian entailed, what it looked like, and what it meant. It was this preconception however, that lead to an interesting issue about how objects are able to influence our idea about how the world appears to human beings, how people seem to respond automatically to situations such as interpreting Egypt, and how easily people are complementing missing things from their own obtained knowledge picked up from the surrounding lived environment. The example from the Iseum Campense reconstruction by Trabacchi and Gatteschi (fig. 1.1 from the introduction) served as a first realisation of this hermeneutical issue and formed the starting point for the enquiry.

The historiographical chapter (2) tried to frame the problem of the way this Iseum reconstruction was made. First by tracing so-called ‘Egypt out of Egypt’, sketching a diachronic overview of the spread of Egyptian artefacts that were found in contexts outside Egypt, but even more so by studying how was dealt with the concept of Egypt and the process of interpreting ‘exotica’ for these different contexts. It appeared that the long period of presence of Egyptian material in non-Egyptian contexts yielded a diverse array of objects. From the Bronze Age onwards, things we call Egyptian, and things that are meant to look Egyptian, can be found at various sites in the Near East, Aegean, and Mediterranean area. Regarding the incredible
diversity of these objects, it seemed that there was no specific idea or image of Egypt present in history that was so sustainable that it leads to the adoption of a particular Egyptian object or style. Egypt could mean something else for all the different societies involved. This seems quite straightforward, but it is of importance to stipulate the actual flexibility of the concept. The idea of Egypt was never a fixed concept, but dependent on who thought about it. Egypt as it is employed throughout history is a constantly re-invented idea based on environmental situatedness. From this it could be concluded that our currently employed concepts of Egypt likewise are dependent on the intrinsic thoughts and material derived from culture and society, and has nothing to do with Egypt per se. That this is not something which is always taken into account when scholars study 'exotic' objects was made clear as well, as the interpretations of Aegyptiaca and exotica throughout history have had many difficulties concerning cultural labels. Calling objects Egyptian, or Punic, or Oriental never takes enough account of how the societies involved dealt with these artefacts. However, the way they were made, or the choices that were made regarding specific imports, says something valuable about that society. This realisation argued strongly in favour for a contextual and horizontal (meaning intra-society and not diachronically tracing Egypt and thereby regarding it as one bounded entity) approach to such artefacts.

Because it was established that the idea Egypt is a fluid concept, chapter 2 was also aimed at finding where our present image of it was derived from. This appeared to be quite specific. The visual image of Egypt has never been as strong as in present society, through movies, art, and museums. Especially museums appeared to have played a pivotal in the creation of our modern day concept of Egypt and Egyptian material culture. Museum collections, once created from nationalistic perspectives, were able to re-make the image of ancient Egypt for Western Europe. They not only selected what we think that Egypt should entail visually, but also separated its artefacts carefully from all other cultural styles, making that we nowadays have come to think of Egypt as something alien and special, while at the same time it was made recognisable through its specific visuality. The process of alienating Egypt and ability to recognise Egypt is called *artefaction*, and this has influenced both the trained and untrained modern observer to employ a projection we are not even consciously aware of we have it. However, because it occurs by visual association and concerns an automatic response it has affected the study of Aegyptiaca for the past
profoundly. Moreover, the interpretations done for Roman Aegyptiaca, presented an unsophisticated construction. A religious interpretation of these artefacts could be considered a too restraining interpretation regarding the heterogeneity of the artefacts and the contexts in which they are used. Egyptomania and exoticism are likewise problematic, because it constantly classifies objects as being foreign to a society and because it does not take account of the different ways that Egyptian artefacts could be employed and integrated. The largest issue with these interpretations however, was the assumption that for a Roman audience, Aegyptiaca contained a clearly bounded set of objects that was conceptually understood as Egyptian and as a category.

Chapter 3 was therefore devoted to finding a way to get around artefaction, and to move instead to the study of perception. Only then it would be possible to obtain a clearer image of what Egyptian artefacts might have meant for a Roman audience and whether this indeed could still be connected to Egypt. To get closer to the emic uses of Egypt, Egypt should be discarded as an a priori categorisation, for this fills in what we do not know yet. Because in the case of Aegyptiaca the idea is so strong and becomes automatically projected, the solution was found in trying to methodologically separate thing from idea, to unravel the object and the concept in different layers, study how these affected each other, and look at its influence on perception. Instead of employing Egypt as a top-down concept, material properties, iconography, colour, size, and context should be studied, and the different layers that go behind perception should be dichotomised. Within this disentanglement, it was tried to get back in a way to a pre-enlightenment situation in which thought and environment were not as radically separated as they are today. All humans and non-humans are constituted in one relational field and this is where appropriation takes place and meaning is constructed. Approaching the dataset in this way, through deconstruction and the use of network visualization, it became possible to investigate the connection between objects and Egypt instead of investigating objects as Egyptian. The research was therefore greatly aided in taking up relationality as an ontological framework, such as was explicated in chapter 3. It was furthermore helped by a concept such as materiality, as it argues that the object itself is not only thought of, or works as a symbol, it actually forms the way we think as well. By choosing to avoid the binary oppositions
between the material and the cultural it became in fact possible to focus on the process of human thing and thing-environment interaction.

Next to the different parts and how these affected the totality of perception, the sum of those parts and how they were created through their environment was also of concern. This was attempted with a completely different instrument than through deconstruction and networks. By using place-making as the analysis of dwelling, intentional value-making processes and the meaning and use of artefacts from a holistic phenomenological perspective were analysed. Within this approach, the social-spatial context of the house, and the interaction between its inhabitants, their behaviour, and the material culture was considered the main focus. The methodology as a whole therefore was aimed first at separating the different components to deconstruct the category of Aegyptiaca, and secondly focused on a re-placing of the objects in the contexts in which they were used. This resulted in two different analytical chapters that both yielded their own results with regards to how objects were perceived in domestic contexts and specifically how ‘Egypt’ was treated therein.

Chapter 4 unraveled the category of Aegyptiaca by separating different types of artefacts that were usually shared under this denominator. Examples of artefact groups were selected to be analysed. On the accounts of an initial network visualisation created in part 4.1 these categories could be selected accordingly, as they already showed significant variances in the way and in the contexts they were applied. The results from disentangling the categories had surprising results, not only with regards to how the concept of Egypt was used, and how Egyptian artefacts were integrated in Pompeian society, but also how object identification and perception work on a more general level.

With respect to integration of objects and concepts chapter 4 exposed a diverse and dynamic pattern. Studying how Egyptian artefacts, or better artefacts connected to Egypt, were integrated in Roman Pompeii showed an interesting image of how such incorporation processes actually function. And the most important conclusion in that respect was the observation that what became selected from the array of ‘the exotic’ and how that subsequently became appropriated, was dependent on how something was recognised and with what other artefacts it became associated with from those objects and

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1050 These groups consisted of: representations of Egyptian deities (4.2), statuettes (4.3), the figure of Bes and Ptah (4.4), Egypt as a style (4.5), and Nilotic scenes (4.6).
images which were already present in society. Things can become cognitively enmeshed because they are recognised in a certain way. The table foot with an Egyptian sphinx became used as such, because table supports in general were decorated with *mischwesen* and the sphinx fitted in this context. The specific way that pygmies featured in scenes of everyday life, was because through their physical resemblance, they could be linked to cupids in wall paintings which were used for the same purpose. And even though the grey stone slab displaying hieroglyphs that became to be used as a threshold might have been chosen because it appeared exotic, or because one wanted to show their affiliation with the Isis cult, the fact that the slab was re-used as a threshold exactly was because the form, the size, the shape, the material and the colour was identical to other common grey lava-made thresholds in Pompeii. One of the conclusions this thesis proposes, therefore, is that things were not used in a certain way because they were considered strange; they were selected because they were considered familiar in a specific way, which dictated their future use.

Egypt is therefore not an exotic and external feature of the Roman world and its material culture. To say that Egypt was a completely integrated phenomenon that was always considered Roman—or was never considered at all—however, is equally oversimplifying the matter. It can be considered valuable in this respect to observe the circumstances of the occasion when a thing does *not* become integrated. Because there also seems to have been limits to the integration of Egypt, however, only in particular cases and contexts. That such limits existed became clear by constantly comparing Egyptian objects to other artefacts and images from Pompeii that could not be culturally linked to Egypt. What was notably different for instance was the way Isis and the Isiac deities were used as artefacts and imagery and the way Isis was present in the collective memory of Pompeians in comparison to Venus. When Isis as image and object was observed in Pompeii, it seemed that she was conceived in these cases only as a representation, meaning not a deity itself, but a statue or a painting of a deity. She remained a static presence in Pompeii, and when she was painted, she was always painted specifically as a statuette in a domestic shrine, sometimes even with a painted shrine included as to emphasise this idea. The one time that Isis became conveyed in a dynamic and lifelike situation (in the *Ekklesiasterion* of the Isis temple) this could only be made possible through using the Greek myth of Io. That this specific static reception is related to Isis (or at least
with the period in which Isis was adopted as a Roman deity) and not a general phenomenon, could be concluded when Isis was compared with Venus. Venus did appear in a great variety of dynamic positions and in human-like postures and situations. The difference might have to do with the period of integration into the Roman pantheon, which was much later for Isis than for Venus. This view was sustained by the comparison between representations of Isis and Mithras. Both Mithras and Isis were adopted as cults somewhere around the first century BC and the way their images were used within material culture of the Roman world, Mithras seems to have been cognitively incorporated in a comparable way to Isis.

This example of the Roman Pompeian conception of Isis can be regarded an automatic and a subconscious response to a concept. Isis was not deliberately singled out, she was just conveyed differently. Another side of the integration process witnessed however, was more intentional and concerned the limits in perception, which could be well illustrated through analysing Egypt as a style. Although there were not many objects that could be listed as displaying a cultural style connected to pharaonic Egypt, those that could were revealing with regard to style use and perception. Because through the study of Egyptian-style something valuable about the perception of Roman wall painting was discovered. Egypt was recognised as a different style, and could be used accordingly, however, never as internally perceived feature in Roman wall painting, but only as a style. Both in the sense of concepts, such as Isis, and even more with style, there is a difference in how things are perceived, and whether that was experienced as intrinsic (regarded as belonging inherently to one’s own world) or extrinsic (seen as alien to the home culture). The way that Egypt as a style was implemented in the walls of Pompeii could only occur through consciously placing outside the ‘reality’ of the picture (the imagery rendered in Graeco-Roman style). Comparable to Isis, Egyptian style could not be used to paint something that was living, but could only appear as an architectural feature that was framed from the rest of the picture, or conveyed as a statue. However, an important note with regards to Egypt as a concept is that in the case of Egyptian style it belongs to a larger phenomenon of stylistic perception of Roman wall painting, as the same architectural framing could be witnessed when Archaic Greek style was employed in the Villa della Farnesina. That might also be the reason why we see Egypt as a style appearing after the

\(^{1051}\) Such as in the case with the Egyptian sphinx, which was always painted as a statue of a sphinx, and the Greek sphinx, which was also depicted as a living creature.
introduction of the Third Pompeian Style which introduced such architectural frames, thereby making it possible to single out deviant styles from the rest of the painting. This means that the appearance of Pharaonic styles in wall painting after this period might had less to do with Augustus capturing Egypt or with Egyptomania which was always assumed, but rather with the perception of wall painting in general and their changing possibilities through developments in painting.

Next to an unconscious level of perception in the case with Isis, and the limits to the use of a deviant style in relation to how wall paintings were perceived by a Roman audience, a further level of integration that was noted through the analyses in chapter 4 contained a case where the foreignness of Egypt was deliberately used to convey a certain message. It could be argued for instance, that the sexually aberrant scenes that were sometimes shown within Nilotic imagery, could be rendered in this way specifically, because it considered non-Roman figures in a foreign setting. While Nilotic scenes are as diversely employed and experienced as the category of Aegyptiaca itself, the pygmies displaying sexual behaviour against an explicit foreign setting, show a case of an intentional use of the non-Romaness of an image in order to stretch the boundaries of accepted behaviour in wall painting.

To conclude, by using Egypt as a heuristic tool the research was able to uncover many of the intricacies of integration and appropriation processes, and revealed that the premises of how something becomes integrated consisted of a complex interplay between the properties of material culture within the artefacts and the material culture already present in society.

On a more general level, chapter 4 observed an important development with regards to object interpretation and iconography. A discrepancy was noted between how archaeologists interpret artefacts and subsequently group these together, and how this was done in antiquity. This was discovered when different materialisations of Bes were analysed. Generally, contexts that contained green-glazed statuettes of Bes were automatically linked to the Isis cult, because our modern conception of Bes cognitively links this figure via Egypt to Isis. However, it is not certain whether these associations were experienced in the same way in Roman Pompeii, for the simple reason that there probably was no concept of ‘Bes’ present. The analysis showed that a multitude of understandings of this dwarf figure were employed, and not all of them were connected to Egypt, let alone to Isis. When contextually reviewed, no single statuette could for instance be associated with a cultic
context, nor in private domains, nor in the sanctuary of Isis. Although there is a strong modern connection between Isis and Bes, and there exists a conceptual relation between Bes (as a painting) and Isis in the Isis temple, there is no cognitive connection between Bes *statuettes* and the cult of Isis. Figure 6.1 show a simplified schematic version of how concepts and objects are related. A similar phenomenon was observed between wall paintings in the Iseum, that could depict Hellenistic sphinxes, and objects in the Iseum, which had to look authentically Egyptian. Objects and concepts cannot be taken as automatically linked phenomena. This makes clear why it is important to work with associational proximate networks and accept heterogeneity in material culture, and to methodologically separate not only concepts from objects, but also objects from contexts and objects from material properties. An important thesis underlying the methodology of this research was that people in Pompeii did not perceive artefacts in the way researchers dealt and deal with them.

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 6.1) An example from one of the analytical chapters (part 4.4) to show that concepts and objects cannot be attributed to similar categories of use and perception. Connections between these entities should not be based on the knowledge of the modern observer but be approached from the contextual evidence of the environment.

This seems a truism, but when it comes to studying use and perception of material this hermeneutic differentiation is seldom taken into account. It not only counts for how things are interpreted by scholars, but also, or mainly, the very fact *that* things become interpreted. What is of concern in this respect is on what level things become reflected upon and on what level they are just used. This last fact is important, also for the impact of Egypt as a cultural factor in a Roman context. People did not interpret consciously all the objects from their house, they were often simply used. The social interaction between visitor and owner could change this to a more reflective perception. Within the Roman house, all the objects therefore carried
different and dynamic perceptional sets of value with their own social and
temporal dimensions.
In the end, the contexts, the different integration processes, and the different
associative trajectories of the objects from the database in the material
networks proved that Aegyptiaca were not a conceptual category for the
Romans. In the case a connection with Egypt was present, it could be
observed from the way these objects were used, that a multitude of concepts
related to Egypt were employed. And in some cases it could be stated that an
object, although it could easily be listed as Egyptian by a scholar (because it
came from Egypt for example), was not conceptually related to Egypt at all
by the user. Moreover the connection was not related to the object itself,
because similar looking objects could be used in the one case as something
Egyptian together with other Egyptian artefacts, and in the other case
without any realisation that it was an Egyptian artefact. This demonstrates
that object meaning and the way objects look, cannot be the decisive factor
by which objects become classified. This is something that only the context
can reveal.

Chapter 5 therefore was utilised to scrutinise further the objects in their
contexts. Contextual research means that not only Egyptian objects can be
applied to form an argument of the use of Egypt as a cultural influence in
Roman houses, but only when all objects are studied inclusively one can see
what Egyptian artefacts meant. A holistic methodology called place-making,
tried to analyse together the materiality and the conceptual workings of the
house as a physical and psychological unit, by making use of a variety of
analytical tools such as space syntax and pattern analysis. The two case
studies that were selected, the Casa degli Amorini Dorati and the Casa di
Octavius Quartio, showed the different ways of how Egyptian related
artefacts could be used in house, but especially demonstrated that meaning
and perception could only become clearer arguing from a social framework
and not from a cultural one. Place-making appeared to be a suitable
orientation in close connection to the theoretical premises that were set out
in chapter three, and comprised tools aimed at capturing the relation
between material and meaning. Both general observations on how objects
and decoration were able to structure the use of space -which appeared to be
quite different for the two case studies - and observations with regards to the
use of Egypt, could be made through the analysis.
First of all, Egyptian artefacts were both employed in notable diverse ways within the two houses. In the Casa degli Amorini Dorati Egypt-related objects were used as a strictly cultic phenomenon, where the artefacts were only attested within the boundaries of their specially designed house altar. In the Casa di Octavius Quartio the finds were more distributed through the house and were used to add, all in their own way, to the different atmospheres of the two garden contexts. The inhabitants of the Casa degli Amorini Dorati deliberately abstained from using anything Egyptian in the garden, probably because their employment of Egypt was a seriously cult-connected phenomenon for them, while the other house used Egypt as decorative garden display within more playful settings. However, regardless of these differences in use, both the houses show that Egypt could be employed like any other valuable artefact important within the social processes of value-making and the expression of status, wealth, and knowledge. The Casa degli Amorini Dorati used a large variety of ‘stuff’ they considered special, such as imports, antiques, and precious materials like a large collection of differently coloured marbles, obsidian, white marble statues, and an alabaster figurine of Horus. Egypt was an inherent part of this particular process of self-expression in the Roman house. The same holds for the Casa di Octavius Quartio, whose inhabitants displayed a marble sphinx and a large quantity of green glazed artefacts in the most important social spaces in their house.

Concerning the discussion on authenticity, on import and copy, or on Egyptian versus Egyptianising artefacts, the bottom-up analysis of the artefacts in their contexts was able to present a more nuanced view. Use was different between contexts, such as within houses, bars, or in the sanctuary of Isis, but also in form, object and material. The distinction only mattered in specific contexts, and even in those cases it was not uniform. For example, n the one hand, in particular cases it seemed that imports might have been of concern, such as was the case with the limestone stele or the ushabty from the Iseum. In these instances they seemed to have been directly connected to ritual use. One the other hand however, the Isis sanctuary also displayed a locally crafted terracotta sphinx statue that was made in an Egyptian style in which it evidently did not matter whether it was an import or not. The concern for authenticity depended on the particular functions of the objects.
By studying the artefacts in their social contexts an important observation was made with respect to the use and perception of material, something which has not always been at the forefront when archaeologists interpret Pompeian interiors and their contents, which are currently mostly interpreted according to iconography (and hence are forced employing terms like ‘eclectic’). Whenever something referred to Egypt, archaeologists usually state it was their Egyptianness that made it exotic and desirable. However, the statue of Horus in the Casa degli Amorini Dorati seemed to have been selected not for its iconography, which was unknown in Italy, but also for its material alabaster and partly for its deviant style. The glazed statuettes in the peristyle garden of the Casa di Octavius Quartio were special not only because they represented Bes and a pharaoh, but foremost because they displayed a notable green glaze. That is why five of such statues were placed together in a place where they would be mostly regarded for the way they appeared as material and as object group (framed behind walls in a trough-route to the triclinium or biclinium) rather than for their individual iconographical meaning. The marble Egyptian-styled sphinx was placed together with the marble statues at the upper canal, as a marble statue, not as an Egyptian sphinx. It seems that the experience and value of material in relation to the spatial context is something which was clearly of considerable significance for the Roman user and observer.

As chapter four sketched the conditions and limits of integration, chapter 5 showed the social component of appropriation and perception. It can be argued that not only the way objects were shaped, of what material they were made of, or which objects could be associated with familiar things, but that the context itself could have been an important factor of integration as well. The fact that Egypt in its diverse guises became adopted in domestic contexts made Egyptian objects to be perceived as less foreign and alien and aided in becoming a part of the Self. Just because the safety of the home is an extension of a personal identity, objects in houses naturally become perceived as belonging to the personal, and the familiar. Therefore employing Egypt in domestic contexts might have been a stronger force of integration than the display of Egyptian artefacts in sanctuaries or in public imperial contexts, because those were both aimed at creating a distance between the observer and the content. Sanctuaries intented at creating a sense of otherworldliness for spiritual gain, and objects associated with such a context would always be regarded as alien. Within imperial contexts, such as the obelisks, the pyramid of Cestius in Rome, or the statues at the Canopus.
in Tivoli, a distance is also created, this time between ordinary men and those with supreme power and fortune. The size, material, and grandeur of the objects of course aid in this too, but also the way they were disclosed to the public. The obelisk and the pyramid stayed partly foreign in a social sense because they were not meant for common people to own, they were meant to admire from an appropriate distance those people who could display them and their social meaning made them unusable in a domestic context. However, the Egyptian objects that were present in homes did bring Egypt closer, solely by their presence in houses, even in those rare cases when it initially was deployed to represent something exotic.

Therefore it can be concluded that concerning the objects, Egypt could as much be a part of the ‘Self’ as it could be of the ‘Other’. Egypt is more complex as a concept, and objects are not just the transmitters of ideas. Concepts cannot unequivocally be projected on objects; they have different agencies of their own. The problem seems to lie for the greater part with us, the interpreter. In future research to objects with a strong cultural connotation therefore, methods should be designed to allow for the ontological balance between ideas and things. It is not the fact that the objects from the database could not have been regarded as exotica, or that they were not religious, or that they were not seen as Egyptian, the problem is, because of our own engagement with the concept of Egypt, that we cannot make such assumptions a priori.

As can be seen, Egyptian artefacts could be perceived and used in many different and complex ways, and even the fact whether they were consciously regarded as Egyptian, or consciously regarded at all, depends on the context in which they were used. The first analyses executed in chapter 4 showed the possibilities in which the artefacts could be understood and subsequently how they could be integrated, the second set of analyses carried out in chapter 5 subsequently showed how they were used in the context of everyday social life. It can be stated therefore, that through all the different ways these objects were used, the power of Egypt was working. The piano at the Mesolithic site of Lepenski Vir shown in figure 3.2 asked the question whether Egypt in Pompeii was the piano or whether it belonged to the surrounding everyday objects that were unconsciously used at the site. The answer is that in a way, Egypt was domesticated, and even as still being partly ‘a piano at a Mesolithic site’ it had been given a social role, therefore it was not completely alien. Furthermore, part of the unconsciously used
objects did also become Egyptian. Through the analysis it has become clear that by its use and function within different networks, Egypt could become concealed as a layer of perception. The Egyptian perception of an object should therefore be considered relative to a number of factors, such as the viewer, spatial context, time and function. The perception of the same object can change; its ‘Egyptianness’ can become concealed, to be revealed again in another context. Things that were unreflectively used and ready-at-hand for someone could suddenly become present again in perception and consciously reflected upon when a stranger invited for dinner beheld it. Meaning and value are no constants, they are fluid entities which are formed, reformed, and transformed within a complex network of spatial, social and material relations. However, it could be seen that even when a thing was not used or perceived consciously as something Egyptian, Egypt still had an effect, an effect independent of human consciousness. Because it became associated with familiar things, thresholds, griffin table supports, and fountain-paintings, it became part of the internal reference frame. It added more ties to the cognitive networks of people, and other things Egyptian through this process could become associated with what was familiar. In careful steps images of foreign gods, objects made of faience and alabaster, Nilotic landscapes and furniture depicting sphinxes, all had the effect of stretching what was conceived as acquainted, stretching Romanness one could say. However, not all, and in compartmentalised and temporal ways. Because in so many ways the Egyptian became hidden for the conscious eye and because objects were not appropriated for being Egyptian any longer, but valued and perceived as something religious, or as a garden ornament, or as a dwarf figure, or landscape painting, or a choice within apotropaic statuary, or within fountains. By its concealment Egypt was hidden though present and able to change the view on what was their own and what was foreign. By using things in domestic contexts especially, a deeper connectedness and familiarity was created between people and their world and a constant dealing with objects and their diverging connections enmeshed Egypt, each in their own unique ways, in Roman culture.