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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This dissertation was written within the NWO VIDI project ‘Cultural innovation in a globalising society, Egypt in the Roman world’, (Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University) directed by dr. Miguel John Versluys. The general aim of this project is devoted to the understanding of the different contexts in which Egypt as style, imagery, object, and text, was integrated in the Roman world. It thereby wishes to give Egypt its proper place within the process of Roman cultural innovation through carefully studying its material and textual remains in the context in which they were created and appropriated. Studies on the Roman perception of Egypt, concerning both textual and archaeological sources, generally approach Egypt from fixated and normative concepts. For example, Aegyptiaca have traditionally been interpreted within a framework of oriental cults or Egyptomania. The research project, in contrast, demonstrates that the dichotomy Rome versus Egypt should be approached with care. Besides the present thesis, three other PhD-dissertations are written within the scope of the project: Marike van Aerde, examining the role of Egyptian material culture in Augustan Rome, Sander Müskens, focusing on the material analysis of stone Aegyptiaca in Rome, and Maaike Leemreize, studying the Roman literary perceptions of Egypt.

The purpose of this particular dissertation is to obtain a better image of the use, perception, and integration of Egyptian artefacts in domestic contexts, using Pompeii (1st century BC – 1st century AD) as a case study. The houses of Pompeii yielded many objects that scholars nowadays would call Egyptian or Egyptianised artefacts and are subsumed under the denominator of Aegyptiaca. For the case of Pompeii, Aegyptiaca form a heterogeneous group of both imported and locally produced objects spread throughout the town, consisting of statuettes, imported sculptures, furniture, jewellery, or wall paintings. The most predominant interpretations drawn about the use of these objects have mainly been done on the basis of two accounts: they were interpreted as religious artefacts and explained in the context of the cults of Isis, or they were interpreted as exoticum. The interpretations have been drawn mostly without any contextual analysis or any theoretical underpinnings, and more problematic: the collecting and interpretation of artefacts have been based on modern scholarly perceptions of what Egypt entails, while we as scholars recognise something ‘Egyptian’ on different grounds than the people of Pompeii once did. The category Aegyptiaca in
itself should be seriously questioned and the way Romans categorised should be scrutinised. The aim of this thesis therefore is to analyse the perception of these objects from a bottom up perspective, avoiding the a priori cultural labelling of Egyptian artefacts, but starting instead from the object itself with its main goal to contextualise and to give the finds meaning from within their original use-contexts. For this, methods derived from recent developments in object agency and relationality are used.