

The Egyptian Renaissance The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy¹

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Herodotus, that most ancient historian, who had searched many lands and seen, heard and read of many things, writes that the Egyptians had been the most ancient people of which there was memory, and that they were solemn observers of their religion if anyone was, and that they adored and recognized their idolatrous gods under the various figures of strange and diverse animals, and that these were fashioned in gold and silver and other metals, and in precious stones and almost every material that was able to receive form. And some of these images have been preserved up until our own day, having been very much seen as manifest signs of these very powerful and copious people, and of their very rich kings, and further from a proper desire to prolong the memory of them for infinite centuries, and further than this the memory of their marvelous intelligence and singular industry and profound science of divine things, as well as human [...]. Following these people, I myself can inform you that the art of good drawing and of coloring, and of sculpture and of representation in whatever manner, and in every manner of form, was held in great esteem [by them]. As for architecture, it should not be doubted that they were great masters, as is still seen in the pyramids and other stupendous edifices of their art that survive and will continue to last, as I myself believe, for infinite centuries.

Giovanni Battista Adriani (1568)²

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² Giovanni Battista Adriani, "Lettera di M. Giovambatista di M. Marcello Adriani a M. Giorgio Vasari nella quale brevemente si racconta i nomi e l'opere de' più eccellenti artefici in pittura, in bronzo ed in marmo [...]", from Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* (1568); in *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 2nd ed., 1:19–20 ([1906]; Florence: Sansoni, 1981):

Who owns Egypt? It is a question that has echoed through the ages, at least since the times when Alexander the Great and his self-styled Roman counterpart Augustus based their claims to empire in no small part on their conquests of this ancient land. For more than three centuries after his victory over Antony and Cleopatra in 30 BCE, Augustus and his successors filled the city of Rome with obelisks and other Egyptian spoils and imitations that proclaimed their inheritance of the Egyptian legacy of sacred and “earthly” power. During the millennium that followed, Western interest in Egypt entered a period of relative eclipse – but it never really died out, since Egypt remained a land of consequence for trade, pilgrimage, and crusade during these centuries. Meanwhile, in Egypt itself, medieval Arabic scholars explained the pharaonic tradition and its monumental legacy, and staked their own claims on the Egyptian inheritance in ways whose impact, until recently, has been largely ignored by scholarship.³

During the eighteenth century, intensified contact with Egypt, combined with a series of high-profile discoveries in Rome, provided the impetus for an emerging “Egyptian Revival” that culminated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the modern, “Western” discipline of Egyptology. In these years, the conflicts attendant to colonialism and nationalism injected a new but oddly familiar urgency to the claims of various parties – European and Egyptian alike – to the rightful inheritance of the Egyptian legacy.⁴ In recent years, disputes over this

Per quanto scrive Erodoto, antichissimo storico, il quale cercò molto paese e molte cose vide, e molte ne udì, e molte ne lesse; gli Egizj essere stati antichissimi di chi si abbi memoria, e della religione, qualunque fusse la loro, solenni osservatori; i quali li loro Iddii sotto varie figure di nuovi e diversi animali adoravano, e quelli in oro, in argento, ed in altro metallo, ed in pietre preziose, e quasi in ogni materia, che forma ricever potesse, rassembravano; delle quali imagini alcune insino alli nostri giorni si sono conservate, massimamente essendo stati, come ancora se ne vede segnali manifesti, quei popoli potentissimi e copiosi di uomini, ed i loro re ricchissimi ed oltre a modo desiderosi di prolungare la memoria loro per secoli infiniti; ed oltre a questo di meraviglioso ingengo e d'industria singolare e scienza profonda, così nelle divine cose nelle umane [...] Appresso costoro mi avviso io che fosse in gran pregio l'arte del ben disegnare e del colorire e dello scolpire e del ritrarre in qualunque maniera, ed ogni maniera di forme; perciocchè dell'architettura non si debbe dubitare che essi non fossero gran maestri, vedendosi di loro altre ancora le piramidi ed altri edificij stupendi, che durano e che dureranno, come io mi penso, secoli infiniti.

³ See the important study by Okasha El-Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium; Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings* (London: UCL Press, 2005).

⁴ See the recent studies by Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley and

legacy have been embroiled in the broader context of postcolonialism and the “culture wars” of the later twentieth century. In 1983, Edward Said, responding to the reopening of the Metropolitan Museum’s Egyptian galleries and an attendant film series, neatly characterized this dispute as a battle “for the right to depict Egypt”.⁵ In the American academic world, this conflict found its most visible expression in the often bitter debate that followed the publication of Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* in 1987.⁶ These contemporary and still unresolved conflicts must inevitably inform any attempt to consider the broader reception history of Egypt’s ancient civilization, including the present study, in which I shall attempt to elucidate a somewhat less familiar but no less conflicted phase in the “afterlife” or “mnemohistory” (to borrow Jan Assmann’s term) of ancient Egypt – the period traditionally known as the Renaissance in Italy.⁷

Indeed, given this book’s somewhat provocative title, the question might reasonably be asked: Did Egypt, or ancient Egypt, to be more precise, have a Renaissance?⁸ And if so, why and on what sort of terms might this “Renaissance” (or afterlife, to use a more fittingly Egypt-associated term) have taken place in Italy in the period circa 1400–1600? After all, in the long centuries that followed

Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); and Fayza Haikal, “Egypt’s Past Regenerated by Its Own People”, in *Consuming Ancient Egypt*, ed. Sally MacDonald and Michael Rice, 123–38 (London: UCL Press, 2003).

⁵ Edward Said, “Egyptian Rites”, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, 153–72 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); quotation is from p. 154. (Originally published in *The Village Voice*, August 30, 1983.) The political implications of the Western “claim to Egypt” have also been explored with considerable insight by Margaret Melamud, “Pyramids in Las Vegas and in Outer Space: Ancient Egypt in Twentieth-Century American Architecture and Film”, *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, 1 (2000): 31–47.

⁶ See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 2 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987–91); Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jacques Berlinerblau, *Heresy in the University: The “Black Athena” Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); and Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁷ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: Mnemohistory and the Construction of Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁸ My phrase here refers to the much-cited article by Joan Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koontz, 137–64 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

the decline and fall of pharaonic civilization, the memory of its achievements had never really been lost. As the acknowledged ancestor and progenitor of so many ancient arts, and the site of many events in the sacred and secular histories of antiquity, this “ancient” Egypt retained its grip on the imagination throughout the Mediterranean world. For generations of visitors to (and residents of) Egypt, the Pyramids of Giza and Saqqara, the obelisks of Alexandria and Heliopolis, and the ruins of the great temples in the more remote regions of Luxor and Karnak provided indisputable evidence for the great wealth and power of their ancient builders.

But my title suggests something more specific and problematic. Indeed, as it turns out, the Egyptian Renaissance that is the subject of this book has relatively little to do with the country of Egypt as it was known and experienced in the period. What it has everything to do with, however, is the construction of an early modern or Renaissance culture that sought legitimacy and authority through the appeal to antiquity. In this sense, the Egyptian Renaissance might be described as an exercise in *appropriation* as defined by Robert S. Nelson, a term that provides a more critical (but still problematic) alternative to relatively passive and ideologically neutral terms like *influence* or *borrowing*.⁹ But it must be admitted from the outset that the Renaissance “appropriation” of Egypt was not a simple case of reaching back to a more or less directly accessible Egyptian past. Inevitably, given the loss of the hieroglyphic “code” and the resulting lack of authentically Egyptian sources, the Egypt that was appealed to by the Renaissance humanists and their associates was available to them only in “translation”, or more specifically through the filters provided by some far from disinterested intermediaries. Classical, biblical, and patristic literature provided the most extensive sources of information, although these could be supplemented by traveler’s tales, by Arabic and other less-studied textual or oral traditions, and not least by the powerful visual testimony of the monuments themselves. As a result of the inevitable reliance on the classical sources, there is always a hint at least of what we now call Orientalist exoticism in the Renaissance vision of Egypt.¹⁰ But in contrast with the seductive appeal of nineteenth-century Egyptomania (for more on this problematic term, see below), the Egypt of the Renaissance was

⁹ Robert S. Nelson, “Appropriation”, in *Critical Terms in Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 116–28 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁰ I refer, of course, to the vast literature engendered by Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

most frequently imagined in syncretic terms as one of the more remote and mysterious but still relatively accessible cultures of “antiquity as a whole”.

Ultimately, of course, the Egypt of the Renaissance was less a matter of revival or appropriation than it was a *renovatio* – a renewal or reinvention in its own right, a creature composed like Frankenstein’s monster from collected fragments of the aforementioned lore but ultimately a creature with its own distinctive character and meanings. I stress this plurality of meanings because, as will soon become clear, the Renaissance vision of Egypt was by no means monolithic. Indeed, the multifaceted phenomenon that I have called the Egyptian Renaissance may be compared to the shape-shifting Egyptian king Proteus of classical mythology, insofar as the basic mythos of Egypt – with its intimations of antiquity, mystery, sanctity (in the form of Hermetic “revelation”), and imperial power – was flexible enough to serve a rich diversity of patronal interests and agendas. But this very mutability of the Egyptian legacy is, in itself, paradoxical. For as we shall see, what the Renaissance “revivalists” admired most in the Egyptian tradition was its promise of historical or cultural continuity – of a direct connection to ancient sources of knowledge and power.

My use of the term *Renaissance* to describe the Egyptian movement of the period deliberately invokes such familiar Egyptian themes as resurrection, rebirth, and afterlife, themes that invoke the cursed tombs and reanimated mummies of Hollywood lore.¹¹ But the Egyptologists of the Renaissance did not dream so literally of reanimated corpses. To the extent that they thought about mummies it was in predominantly therapeutic terms, as the practice of importing *mummi*a – the drug produced from the ground bodies of ancient Egyptians – flourished throughout the period.¹² But it was in the spirit of cinematic, resurrected Egyptians like Boris Karloff’s Imhotep that the intrepid Renaissance inscription hunter Cyriacus of Ancona described his enterprise as an effort “to wake the

¹¹ For mummies and mummy lore in cinema and popular culture, see Antonia Lant, “The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Caught Egyptomania”, October 59 (Winter 1992): 87–112; reprinted in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, eds. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, 69–98 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Renan Pollès, *La Momie de Kheops a Hollywood: Généologie d’un mythe* (Paris: Amateur, 2001); and Carter Lupton, “Mummymania for the Masses: Is Egyptology Cursed by the Mummy’s Curse?” in MacDonald and Rice, *Consuming Ancient Egypt*, 23–46.

¹² For *mummi*a and the mummy trade during the Renaissance, see Roland Pecout, *Les Mangeurs de Momie: Des tombeaux d’Égypte aux sorciers d’Europe* (Paris: P. Belfond, 1981); and Pollès, *La Momie*, 13–32.

dead”, and lead “the glorious things which were alive” in antiquity from the “dark tomb into the light, to live once more among living men”.¹³

Taking their cue from Cyriacus and his contemporaries, historians from the nineteenth century to the present have characterized – and to a certain extent defined – the culture of the Italian Renaissance in terms of its revival of antiquity.¹⁴ According to this disputed but still broadly accepted narrative, the humanist campaign to restore the languages and literature of the ancients had its artistic equivalent in the rediscovery and reintegration of classical form and content in the visual arts.¹⁵ For the most part, however, historians of Renaissance culture have directed their attention to the rediscovery and revival of works,

¹³ Cyriacus of Ancona, *Kyriaci Anconitani itinerarium nunc primum ex ms. cod. in lucem erutum ex bibl. illus. clarissimique Baronis Philippi Stosch*, ed. Laurentius Melius, 54–55 (Florence, 1742; reprint, Bologna: Forni, 1969); as translated by Charles Mitchell, “Archaeology and Romance in Renaissance Italy”, in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob, 455–83, esp. 470 (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

¹⁴ See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860; trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, London: Penguin Books, 1990), 120–84 (a classic discussion); and, more recently, Paula Findlen and Kenneth Gouwens, eds., “AHR Forum: The Persistence of the Renaissance” *American Historical Review* 106 (1998): 50–124.

¹⁵ For the theme of “reintegration” in the visual arts, see Aby Warburg, “Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara”, trans. Peter Wortsman, in *German Essays on Art History*, ed. Gert Schiff, 234–54 (New York: Continuum, 1988); Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953); Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, ed. Kurt W. Forster and David Britt, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999); E. H. Gombrich, “The Style all’antica: Imitation and Assimilation”, in Norm and Form: *Studies in the Art of the Renaissance 1*, 122–28 (London: Phaidon, 1966); Gombrich, “From the Revival of Letters to the Reform of the Arts” (1967), in *The Heritage of Apelles: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance 3*, 93–110 (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976); and Luba Freeman, *The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

themes, and styles rooted in the Greek and Roman traditions.¹⁶ One by-product of this approach has been the relative neglect of materials associated with other ancient cultures and their post-antique equivalents – including Etruscan, Egyptian, early Christian, Byzantine, and other works that we would now call medieval or Renaissance in production or style, but which served in some cases as what a recent study has characterized as “substitute” antiquities.¹⁷ Among these “other” antiquities, the productions of the Etruscans seem to have been most frequently conflated with the Egyptian tradition, most often as part of a broadly patriotic effort to argue for the primacy of local Italic cultures in relation to their perceived rivalry with the products of classical Greece.¹⁸

¹⁶ For archaeological culture and discoveries during the Renaissance, see Rodolfo Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi di Roma e notizie intorno le collezioni romane di antichità*, ed. Leonello Malvezzi Campeggi, Carlo Buzzetti, and Paolo Liverani, 7 vols. (Rome: E. Loescher, 1902–16; rev. and illus. ed., Rome: Quasar, 1989–94); Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1969; New York: Humanities Press, 1988); and Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ For “substitution” see the recent essay by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, “Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism”, *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005): 403–32, with responses by Charles Dempsey, “Historia and Anachronism in Renaissance Art”; Michael Cole, “Nihil sub Sole Novum”; and Claire Farago, “Time Out of Joint”, plus a “Reply” by the authors, *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005), 403–32.

¹⁸ For Etruscan revivals in the Renaissance, see Andre Chastel, “L’ ‘Etruscan Revival’ du XV siècle”, *Revue Archéologique* I (1959): 165–80; Chastel, *Art et Humanisme a Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique: Etudes sur la Renaissance et l’Humanisme platonicien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 63–71; Giovanni Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel Rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1980); Franco Borsi, ed., *La fortuna degli Etruschi*, exhibition catalogue, Museo dello Spedale degli Innocenti, Florence, 1985 (Milan: Electa, 1985); Michael Vickers, “Imaginary Etruscans: Changing Perceptions of Etruria since the Fifteenth Century”, *Hephaistos* 7–8 (1985–86): 153–68; Nancy Thomson de Grummond, “Rediscovery”, in *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies*, ed. Larissa Bonfante, 18–46 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986); Gustina Scaglia, “The Etruscology of Siennese and Florentine Artists and Humanists: Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane, Baldassarre Peruzzi, Sallustio Peruzzi and Cosimo Bartoli”, *Palladio* 10 (1992): 21–36; and Steven S. Bule, “Etruscan Echoes in Italian Renaissance Art”, in *Etruscan Italy: Etruscan Influences on the Civilizations of Italy from Antiquity to the Modern Era*, ed. John F. Hall, 307–35, Seth and Maurine Horne Center for the Study of Arts Scholarly Series (Provo, UT: Museum of Art, Bingham Young University, 1996).

Compared to the Etruscans and the Romans, the Egyptians might be expected to have occupied a more distant space in the conceptual landscape of the Renaissance antiquity. But a variety of factors – historical, intellectual, and artistic – conspired to grant the Egyptians a singular proximity and prominence. Thanks to the extensive testimony of the ancient authors on this point, the civilization of ancient Egypt was accepted as an influential ancestor and source for Greek and Roman culture. The Egyptians also shared a scriptural connection with the earliest Hebrews and other peoples of the ancient Near East.

There was also the factor of easy access to Egyptian and Egyptianizing monuments, most notably in Rome. As noted above, during the imperial period the Romans imported obelisks, sphinxes, and a host of other Egyptian artifacts to the ancient capital, and also ordered the fashioning of new works in imitation of the Egyptian ones. In this new setting, these Egyptian monuments in exile functioned as tokens of Rome's inheritance of pharaonic power, establishing a precedent that later rulers – from Renaissance popes and princes to the French and British imperialists of the nineteenth century – would embrace with equal zeal.¹⁹ They also provided appropriate ornaments for the sanctuaries of the Egyptian gods, Isis and Serapis, who overcame the early resistance of the Roman authorities to become revered protectors of the city and its empire.

By virtue of their prior appropriation by the Romans, the Egyptian monuments of Rome could hardly fail to attract the praise of the humanists, who made the study and renewal of the culture of antiquity the centerpiece of their own project. For a concise and revealing expression of this admiration, we need look no further than a prefatory letter on the arts of antiquity, published in the second edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* in 1568. The author, Giovanni Battista Adriani – a Florentine academician and court historian of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici – was careful to offer a few lines to the artistic accomplishments of the Egyptians.²⁰ In contrast with Vasari's own brief references to Egyptian art,

¹⁹ For the late appropriations, see Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 13–41 (on the Luxor-Place de la Concorde obelisk); and Fekri A. Hassan, "Imperialist Appropriations of Egyptian Obelisks", in *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Modern Appropriations*, ed. David Jeffreys, 19–68 (London: UCL Press, 2003).

²⁰ For Adriani, see G. Miccoli, "Adriani, Giovanni Battista", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 1 (1960): 309.

Adriani's discussion is both enthusiastic and revealing enough to provide a fitting epigraph to this introduction.²¹

Citing Herodotus, Adriani praises the piety of the Egyptians, their invention of countless arts, and the artistic ingenuity they employed in fashioning images of their strange and enigmatic gods. But the worthiness of the Egyptian artisans is demonstrated above all by the survival and preservation of their works by later peoples, most notably the Romans. And while his only named examples are the Pyramids, which were familiar to sixteenth-century readers from both ancient and contemporary accounts, there can be little doubt that Adriani is referring in addition to the obelisks, statues of idolatrous gods and other monuments that could be seen in Rome during his time. By Adriani's day, most of these had been recognized as Egyptian imports. And this recognition, significant in its own right, had served only to strengthen their established status as manifest signs of *Roman* antiquity and *imperium*.



Figure 1: Francisco de Hollanda, *Allegory of the Ruin (or Decadence) of Ancient Rome* (ca. 1540–63); according to Curran, *Renaissance*, frontispiece

²¹ Vasari, *Opere*, ed. Milanesi, 1:215–18.

For a visual demonstration of the integration of Egyptian elements into the broader fabric of Roman imperial imagery, we need only consider the evocative *Allegory of the Ruin (or Decadence) of Rome* (fig. 1), devised by the Portuguese miniaturist, writer, and self-styled disciple of Michelangelo, Francisco de Hollanda (1517–84), for his Escorial album of “antiquities” (*As antigualhas*).²² The drawing, which provides a melancholy pendant to a pendant allegory of Rome “triumphant”, was probably composed between circa 1557 and 1563, when Francisco prepared the album for presentation to his patron, the king of Portugal.²³ At the center of the scene we see Roma, personified as a widow. She wears a crown of ruins and has lowered the mirror in which she cannot recognize herself (“Non similis sum mihi”). The figure is supported by a fallen column that bears an inscription drawn from Jeremiah’s lament over the ruins of Jerusalem:

The Mistress of the Gentiles has been made as if a widow, and there is no one who can console her.²⁴

Adding insult to injury, a pair of classical *putti* taunts Roma with a satyr’s mask while a pair of winged “geniuses” (inspired by some angels in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*) fly in from the left, carrying a marble tomb slab with the inscription “Cognosce Te” (Know thyself). A globe and an eagle, emblems of Rome’s lost *imperium*, hover over the desolate Campagna and the distant Alban Hills.²⁵

²² Bibl. MS A/e ij 6, fol. 4r, Escorial, Spain; see E. Tormo y Monzo, *Os Desenhos das antigualhas que vio Francisco d’ Ollanda, pintor portugues, 1539–1540* (Madrid, 1940), 43–44; and Jose da Felicidade Alves, ed., *Album dos Desenhos das Antigualhas de Francisco de Holanda* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1989), 20–21.

²³ For the character and date of the album, see J. B. Bury, “Catalogue of Francisco de Holanda’s Writings, Drawings, Paintings and Architectural Studies”, in *Two Notes on Francisco de Holanda*, 30–45, esp. 33–34 (London: The Warburg Institute, 1981); and Sylvie Deswarte, “Rome Déchue: Décomposition d’une image de Francesco de Hollanda”, *Monuments et Mémoires publiés par l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 71 (1990): 97–181.

²⁴ “Facta est quasi vidua, Domina Gentium, et non est qui consoletur eam.”

²⁵ Deswarte, “Rome Déchue”, 116–21, suggests that the airborne figures, not to mention the reclining personification and the sphinx, could have been inspired by figures on the *Tazza Farnese*, a Ptolemaic cameo in the collection of the Farnese, which Francisco could have known well.



Figure 2: “Piramide di Cajo Cestio” in: Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Le Antichità Romane: Divisa In Quattro Tomi (tome 3): Contenente Gli Avanzi de’ Monumenti Sepolcrali di Roma e dell’Agro Romano* (Roma: 1784), plate 44

Francisco’s allegory of *Roma vidua* draws on a heritage that can be traced in Italian tradition to the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Fazio degli Uberti, whose *Dittamondo* (circa 1355) provides a distant model for the figure we see here.²⁶ And like her predecessor in a 1447 watercolor illustration of Fazio’s poem, Hollanda’s *Roma* is surrounded by monumental symbols of Rome’s faded glory. We see the Pantheon, the Colosseum, and the Column of Trajan, the Aurelian walls, and the aqueducts of the distant Campagna, as well as three Egyptian or Egypt-inspired forms: an obelisk, a sphinx, and a pyramid embedded in the ancient Aurelian walls. Among these, the obelisk, topped by a bronze ball and lacking hieroglyphic inscriptions, is immediately recognizable as the *guglia* (or “needle”) of the Vatican. As any well-informed observer of the time would have known, this immense granite monolith had been brought to Rome from Alexandria by Caligula, who erected it in his Vatican Circus in emulation of his predecessor, Augustus. Over the centuries, the obelisk had become identified as the tomb or monument of Julius Caesar, the *Columna Julia*, an association that persisted long after the monument’s true identity had been recognized by the

²⁶ MS ital. 81, fol. 182, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. See Weiss, *Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, 46–47; Silvia Maddalo, *In Figura Romae: Immagini di Roma nel libro medioevale* (Rome: Viella, 1990), 115–20, pl. 12; and Philip Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2, fig. 1.

Roman humanists. The pyramid is, of course, the tomb of Caius Cestius, a Roman patrician of the Augustan age, whose marble-covered tomb can still be seen, embedded in the Aurelian walls near the Porta Ostiense and the Protestant cemetery of Rome (fig. 2). In the Middle Ages, it was identified as the tomb of Remus, in association with a second pyramid in the Vatican that was held to be the sepulcher of his brother, Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome.



Figure 3: Francisco de Hollanda, *Sphinx of Achoris* (ca. 1538–40/63),
Bibl. MS A/e ij 6, fol. 26v, Escorial, Spain; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 6

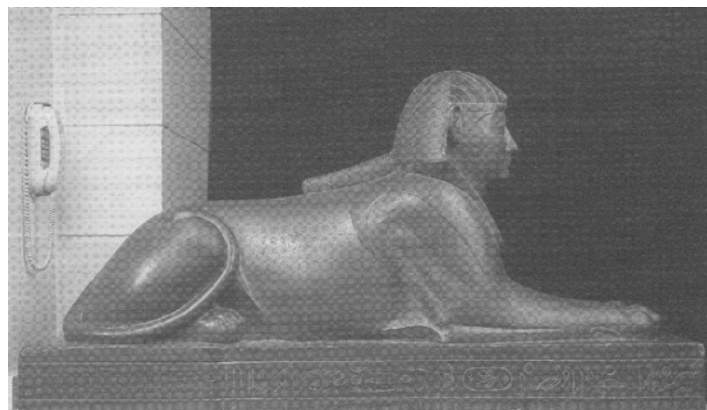


Figure 4: *Sphinx of Anchoris* (Hakor, ca. 393-380 BC), Musée du Louvre, Paris;
according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 193

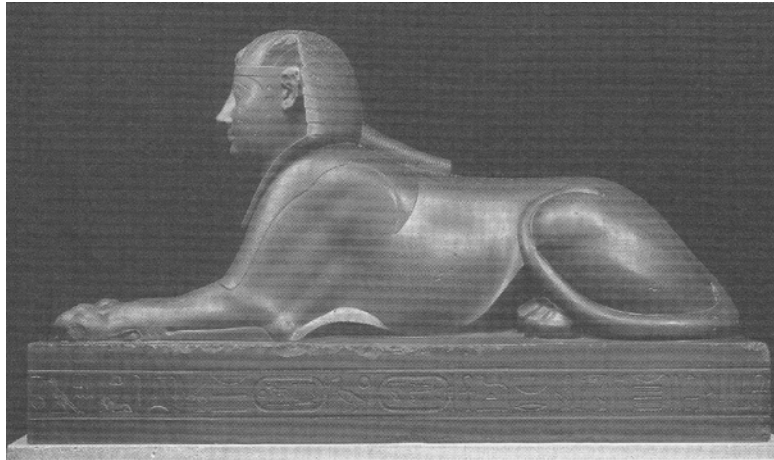


Figure 5: Sphinx of Nefertites I (Nefaarud, ca. 399–393 BC). Musée du Louvre, Paris; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 193

Given these traditional associations [...] it is hardly surprising to find the pyramid and the obelisk among the attributes of Rome's ancient magnificence. More unexpected, perhaps, is the sphinx, whose Egyptian identity is attested by the pharaonic *nemes* headdress and characteristic paws-forward pose. The visual sources for this figure may be traced to a variety of models. The first is the pair of black stone sphinxes inscribed for the late Egyptian pharaohs Nefertites I and Achoris, known in Rome by 1513, by which time they were installed on the steps of the Palazzo Senatorio on Capitoline Hill (see figs. 4 and 5). In this location, the sphinxes acquired the status of civic antiquities and symbols of Rome. They also attracted the attention of a number of artists and antiquarians, including Francisco himself, whose exquisitely rendered if somewhat embellished rendition of the Achoris sphinx appears in the same album (fig. 3).



Figure 6: Monte Cavallo/Capitoline Nile (Roman imperial), Piazza del Campidoglio, Rome, Author photograph

The sphinx's position beside the reclining Roma also invites comparison with the supporting attributes of the Roman Nile-god statues. In 1517, the colossal Nile from the Monte Cavallo (fig. 6) was moved to the Campidoglio along with its mate, the Tigris. A few years earlier, the smaller but more elaborately detailed Nile statue from the Iseum Campense had been installed in the papal statue court at the Vatican Belvedere (fig. 7). By Francisco's time, these creatures had been recognized as symbols of Egypt, and by extension, of Rome's appropriation of Egypt's position as the dominant civilization of the ancient world. But perhaps more appropriately, given her shadowy countenance in the *Allegory*, Francisco's sphinx provides an appropriate signifier of the composition's allegorical character. For as we shall see, a long-held Renaissance (and ancient) tradition explained the sphinx as a symbol of the "hieroglyphic mysteries" that the Egyptians devised to conceal, and preserve, their deepest secrets for eternity.



Figure 7: Nile (Roman Imperial), Braccio Nuova, Vatican Museums, public domain

If Hollanda's *Allegory* provides a compelling illustration of the integration of Egyptian monumental imagery into the visual language of Roman antiquity in general, there are equally compelling examples of the distinctive application of Egyptian imagery in particular. What these ensembles reveal, at the very least, is the surprising breadth of the archaeological recognition of Egyptian forms as a category in their own right by the early to middle cinquecento. The most revealing of these distinctly Egyptianizing ensembles are the illuminated "Egyptian Page" for the Mass of Saint John the Baptist in the Missal of Cardinal Pompeo Colonna (circa 1530–38; fig. 8) and the frontispiece for the second book of Étienne Dupérac's collection of drawings after the antique, the *Illustration des Fragmens Antiques* (circa 1570–75; fig. 9). Produced a generation

apart, and for very different purposes, these remarkable compositions bring together a selection of familiar Egyptian motifs: pyramids, hieroglyphs, sphinxes, crocodiles, apes, animal-headed gods, “canopic” figures, and so on. And while the broader context of both works remains Roman, it is clear in both cases that these images have been brought together for the express reason that they are *Egyptian*, and thus, we may assume, would have been recognized as such by an audience of informed observers.



Figure 8: “Egyptian Page”; Mass of Saint John the Baptist (circa 1530–38), Colonna Missal. Ms 32, fol. 79r, John Rylands University Library of Manchester; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, plate 1

We cannot be certain as to the precise sequence of events or processes that enabled this remarkable achievement, which amounts to the historical or “aesthetic” recognition of a whole class of artifacts in Rome as foreign imports. It had been widely assumed, of course, that many of Rome’s classical statues were imports from Greece. The ancient authors provided extensive testimony for the Roman taste for these works. With the exception of a few signed works, however, it was famously difficult to determine if a given marble statue or fragment discovered in Rome was a Greek import or a Roman original. The different materials, iconography, and style of the Egyptian pieces seem to have made the identification of Egyptian pieces that much easier (although the problem of Roman imitations was relevant to this category as well). But it must be remembered that for observers of the later Middle Ages, these distinctions were hardly self-evident. Today, when we expect even the most casually informed art history students to display a minimal familiarity with the characteristics of Egyptian art, it is hard for us to understand how these monuments could ever not have been recognized, in the most general terms, as products of a distinct artistic tradition.

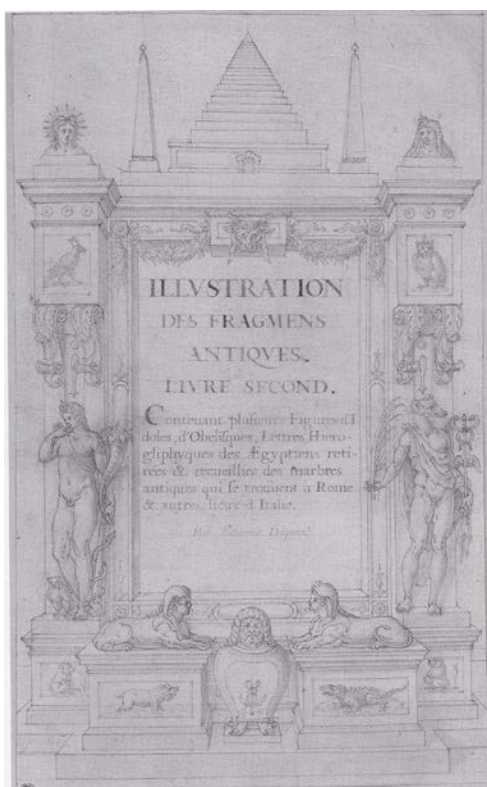


Figure 9: Francisco de Hollanda, Sphinx of Achoris (ca. 1538–40/63),
Bibl. MS A/e ij 6, fol. 26v, Escorial, Spain; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 8

But spectators of the later Middle Ages and the early Renaissance were not accustomed to making exquisite and meaningful distinctions between the artistic products of the various ancient cultures. With the exception, perhaps, of the more self-evidently native Etruscan and Roman artifacts (sarcophagi, inscriptions, and so on), these monuments, and especially the statues and other independent works of art, were admired and comprehended in the broadest terms as “antique”. By about 1530, however, as the Colonna Egyptian Page shows, it was possible for a more sophisticated student of ancient art to distinguish a fairly broad spectrum of Egyptian monuments and motifs. But despite this growing sense of antiquity’s diversity and complexity, the unified conception of antiquity proved remarkably resilient. Familiarity with descriptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals that the adjective *antico/antica*, when applied to a work of art, could connote a variety of divergent (if overlapping) meaning. In the simplest sense, it served to identify a work as “ancient” rather than “modern” (*moderna*), matters of particular importance to the compilers of inventories and guidebooks. But *antico* also carried associations of authenticity and value in both aesthetic and material terms: a work that was *antiquissimo* (very antique) could be understood to be very authentic, very beautiful, and very old. As a familiarity with the guidebooks and inventories of the period reveals, the label *antico* was applied liberally to the full range of ancient artifacts: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, early Christian, and even medieval.

If I have emphasized the visual and antiquarian aspects of the Egyptian Renaissance in this introduction, I have done so in an effort to distinguish my work from many prior investigations of the subject, which have generally concentrated on two overriding themes: the rediscovery and influences of the Hermetic tradition, on the one hand, and the “revival” or reinvention of the hieroglyphs, on the other. The finest of these studies are well known to scholars of Renaissance culture, but pride of place among them must be granted to the earliest and, quite possibly, still the best of these efforts: Karl Giehlow’s monumental article on the Renaissance *Hieroglyphenkunde*, which was published posthumously in 1915.²⁷ Hugely influential in its time, Giehlow’s study established the basis of virtually all later discussion of the subject, including the

²⁷ Karl Giehlow, “Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance”, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 32 (1915): 1–229. This essential study is now available in an excellent Italian edition: Karl Giehlow, *Hieroglyphica: La conoscenza umanistica dei geroglifici nell’allegoria del Rinascimento; Una ipotesi*, ed. and trans. Maurizio Ghelardi and Susanne Müller (Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2004).

appropriate sections in the work of his most notable successor, Erik Iversen, and the work of a host of later scholars of emblems and Renaissance visual theory.²⁸ Of comparable importance is Frances Yates's classic study, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), which may be considered the foundational document for a whole field of Hermetic studies of the Renaissance.²⁹

It is a tribute to the intellectual and scholarly authority of these works that they have inspired an impressive body of work in a wide variety of fields. The erudite studies of Rudolf Wittkower and Charles Dempsey, in particular, have expanded our understanding of the reception and re-creation of the hieroglyphs in the visual arts.³⁰ Special mention should also be made of the contribution of Karl Dannenfeldt, whose 1948 dissertation provides a still useful treatment of the Renaissance prehistory of Egyptology.³¹ Equally valuable are his articles on the

²⁸ Ludwig Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance* (Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1923); Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition*, rev. ed. (Copenhagen, 1961; reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Liselotte Dieckmann, *Hieroglyphics: The History of a Literary Symbol* (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1970); Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970); and Patrizia Castelli, *I geroglifici e il mito dell'Egitto nel Rinascimento* (Florence: Edam, 1979).

²⁹ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Among major studies indebted to – if sometimes critical of – Yates's work, see Brian Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science", in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman, 261–301 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and M. J. B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus and the Corpus Hermeticum", in *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought*, ed. John Henry and Sarah Hutton, 38–47 (London: Duckworth, 1990).

³⁰ Rudolf Wittkower, "Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance", in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), 113–28; and Charles Dempsey, "Renaissance Hieroglyphic Studies and Gentile Bellini's 'Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria'", in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, 342–65 (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988).

³¹ Karl Dannenfeldt, "Late Renaissance Interest in the Ancient Orient" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1948).

subject and his study of the textual tradition of the Corpus Hermeticum, all of them published by 1960.³²

But despite the efforts of these and many other fine scholars, the character and scope of the Renaissance “revival” of Egyptian antiquity has not been treated in a systematic or comprehensive way. The visual or artistic dimension of the early modern *Ägypten-Rezeption*, in particular, has been largely ignored by scholarship. One factor in this neglect, I suspect, has been the predominance of a certain generalizing attitude toward Egyptian revivals of whatever period that is exemplified by the recurring concept of Egyptomania.³³ *Egyptomania* is a term that, like so many in the cultural-historical realm, has its origins in an attitude of derision or disdain. So far as I know, the earliest author to wield the term in English was Sir John Soane (circa 1806–9).³⁴ Soane’s contempt for the “Egyptian Mania” of his time appears to contradict his own much-celebrated acquisition of the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I in 1825.³⁵ But his seeming change of heart may not be too surprising if we follow the unspoken implications of the mania discourse and accept the diagnosis of the “lure of Egypt” as a strain of exoticized dementia. For underlying the concept of Egyptomania is a presumption that the special appeal of this land of mysteries, mummies, and hieroglyphs is inherently irrational, sensual, and superstitious. As a result, the seductive attractions of Egyptomania seem to stand in distinct and disreputable contrast with the supposedly rational appeal of classical art and culture. It may be fun, it may be appealing in a less than healthy way; but the very notion of Egyptomania suggests something that, when it is not to be dismissed as dangerous, is surely not to be taken seriously by serious people.

³² See K. Dannenfeldt, “The Renaissance and Pre-Classical Civilizations”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952): 435–49; Dannenfeldt, “Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance”, *Studies in the Renaissance* 6 (1959): 7–27; and Dannenfeldt, “Hermetica Philosophica”, in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. F. E. Cranz, Virginia Brown, and P. O. Kristeller, 1:137–56 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1960–2003; addenda and corrigenda, 1992).

³³ For further thoughts on this theme, see B. Curran, review of *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730–1930*, by Jean-Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler, *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996): 739–44.

³⁴ Sir John Soane, *Lectures on Architecture*, ed. Arthur T. Bolton (London: Jordon-Gaskell, 1929), 20–21 (Lecture 1, 1806–9).

³⁵ Peter Thornton and Helen Dorey, *Sir John Soane: The Architect as Collector, 1753–1837* (London: H. N. Abrams, 1992), 13, 59, 65.

One by-product of the Egyptomania concept is the continuing subordination of Renaissance developments to later, more familiar flowerings of the “Egyptian Taste”. It is often assumed, for example, that the “discovery” of ancient Egypt and its artistic legacy was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, triggered in no small part by the Napoleonic expedition of 1798 and the wave of publications and discoveries that followed in its wake. It is true that the Napoleonic campaign brought the full scope of the monuments of ancient Egypt to the attention of the Western world for the first time, and set into motion the events leading to the decipherment of hieroglyphic script and the beginnings of systematic archaeology in Egypt. And these new discoveries inspired in turn an Egyptian Revival in the arts, and especially in architecture, where Egyptian forms were adapted to the prevailing neoclassical taste.³⁶ But as a spate of recent studies and exhibitions have made clear, the revival of the nineteenth century represented the fulfillment of an already vigorous Egyptian taste that had flourished in Europe and especially Italy

³⁶ For the Napoleonic expedition and its cultural impact, see Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments, and Meaning, 1808–1838* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978); C. C. Gillespie and M. Dewachter, eds., *Monuments of Egypt: The Napoleonic Edition; The Complete Archaeological Plates from “La Description de L’Égypte”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), 1–29; Jean-Marcel Humbert, *L’Égyptomanie dans l’art occidental* (Paris: ACR, 1989); Sergio Donadoni, Silvio Curto, and Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri, *Egypt from Myth to Egyptology*, trans. Elizabeth Poore and Francesco L. Rossi (Milan: Fabbri, 1990), 106–44; Jean-Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler, eds., *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730–1930*, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1994 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada; Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 200–309; Jennifer Hardin, *The Lure of Egypt: Land of the Pharaohs Revisited*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, 1996 (St. Petersburg, FL: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996); Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, 43–116; Cathie Bryan, “Egypt in Paris: 19th Century Monuments and Motifs”, in Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price, *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture, 183–205* (London: UCL Press, 2003); and James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West*, 203–80 (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1982; 3rd ed., London: Routledge, 2005).

throughout the eighteenth century.³⁷ The Egyptianizing creations of Piranesi, Mengs, Antonio Asprucci, Hubert Robert, and other settecento artists, while informed by pre-Napoleonic descriptions of the monuments in Egypt, were more directly inspired by a series of well-publicized discoveries of Egyptian and Egyptianizing monuments in Rome, at Hadrian's Villa, and in Pompeii during this period.³⁸ It was these discoveries that stimulated the first specialized collections of Egyptian antiquities and the first attempts at aesthetic explanation of Egyptian art in the writings of Piranesi, Winckelmann, and others.³⁹

The ancient background to the Egyptian Renaissance has also been explored, most notably and successfully in studies of texts and literature.⁴⁰ But despite considerable progress in the last decade or so, some of the most important art-historical issues, such as the meaning and character of Roman Egyptianizing sculpture, have yet to be addressed in satisfying terms. In contrast, the fascinating story of the "obelisks in exile" in Rome and other centers has been told with eloquence and learning by Erik Iversen, Cesare D'Onofrio, and others.⁴¹ The best

³⁷ See Patrick Conner, ed., *The Inspiration of Egypt: Its Influence on British Artists, Travellers, and Designers, 1700–1900*, exhibition catalogue, Brighton Museum and Manchester City Art Gallery, 1983 (Brighton: Brighton Borough Council, 1983); Dirk Syndram, *Ägypten-Faszinationen: Untersuchungen zum Ägyptenbild im europäischen Klassizismus bis 1800* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1990); Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, *Egyptomania*; and Curran, review of *Egyptomania*, 739–44.

³⁸ See Nikolaus Pevsner and S. Lang, "The Egyptian Revival", *Architectural Review* 119 (1956), 242–54; reprinted in *Studies in Art, Architecture, and Design*, by Nikolaus Pevsner (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968; subsequent citations are to this edition), 1:212–35; Pierre Arizzoli-Clementel, "Charles Percier et la Salle Egyptienne de la Villa Borghese" in *Piranèse et les Français*, ed. G. Brunei, Collection Académie de France à Rome 2, 1–32 (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1978); and Mauro de Felice, *Miti ed allegorie egizie in Campidoglio* (Bologna: Patron, 1982).

³⁹ See Rudolf Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth-Century Egyptomania", in *Studies in the Italian Baroque* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 260–73.

⁴⁰ See Phiroze Vasunia, *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴¹ For obelisks, see John Henry Parker, *The Twelve Egyptian Obelisks of Rome* (2nd ed., Oxford: J. Parker; London: J. Murray, 1879); Orazio Marucchi, *Gli obelischi egiziani di Roma* (Rome: E. Loescher & Co., 1898); Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *Cleopatra's Needles and Other Egyptian Obelisks* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1926); Cesare D'Onofrio, *Gli obelischi di Roma: Storia e urbanistica di una città dall'età antica al XX secolo*, 3rd ed., Collana di studi e testi per la storia della città di Roma, vol. 12 ([1965] Rome: Romana società editrice, 1992); Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gad, 1968–

of these studies capture the powerful sense of continuity that a spectator experiences on encountering one of these ancient stones in the center of a Roman piazza. And the outlines, at least, of the broader history of Rome's Egyptian imports and other Egyptianizing works have been traced in a fundamental catalogue by Anne Rouillet and in several other studies.⁴²

In fairness, the concept of an Egyptian "mania" could be – and in some cases, has been – applied to some of the more fantastic or disreputable aspects of the Egyptian Renaissance: the mysticism of the Hermetists, Annius of Viterbo's dubious hieroglyphic "translations", dynastic claims to descent from Egyptian deities, and so on.⁴³ But the absence of a synthesis of the Egyptian Renaissance as a whole has left gaping holes in our understanding of the visual response, in particular, to Egyptian monuments and themes by Renaissance artists and their patrons. Even in the case of a relatively familiar work like the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, discussion of context and Egyptological culture has been too often sidelined by the unending search for the identity of its elusive author. Indeed, until recently, the best and most reliable art-historical treatment of the Renaissance reception of Egyptian art was to be found in an article on the

72); Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt: Skyscrapers of the Past* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1984); and Giovanni Cipriani, *Gli obelischi Egizi: Politica e Cultura nella Roma Barocca* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1993).

⁴² Anne Rouillet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome*, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain 20 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972); Michel Malaise, *Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiens découverts en Italie*, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain 21 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972); Mariette De Vos, *L'egittomania in pitture e mosaici Romano-Campani della prima età imperiale*, Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain 84 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980); O. Lollo Barberi, G. Parola, and M. P. Toti, *Le antichità egiziane di Roma imperiale* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1995); Boris De Rachewiltz and Anna Maria Partini, *Roma Egizia: Culti, templi e divinità egizie nella Roma Imperiale* (Rome: Edizioni mediterranee, 1999); Susan Walker and Peter Higgs, eds., *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth*, exhibition catalogue (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Katja Lembke, with Cäcilia Fluck and Günter Vittmann, *Ägyptens späte Blüte: Die Römer am Nil* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004).

⁴³ For applications of the term and concept of Egyptomania to the Renaissance/early modern period, see Chastel, *Art et humanisme*, 443; and Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *La Quête d'Isis: Essai sur la légende d'un mythe; Introduction à l'égyptomanie* (Paris: Olivier Perrier, 1967).

Egyptian Revival by Pevsner and Lang, now almost half a century old.⁴⁴ In contrast, the reception history of Rome's classical monuments has been investigated in meticulous detail by generations of scholars, who have provided, at the very least, some conceptual models for the present study.⁴⁵

The great exceptions to this overall neglect include an old and typically learned article by Erwin Panofsky on the early modern invention of the Egyptian Deus Canopus; some recent and groundbreaking studies by Bertrand Jaeger on Giulio Romano's hieroglyphic decorations at Mantua; and Helen Whitehouse on seventeenth-century representations – and forgeries – of Egyptian antiquities.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Pevsner and Lang, "Egyptian Revival", 218–30; and see the more recent survey by Dirk Syndram, "Das Erbe der Pharaonen: Zur Ikonographie Ägyptens in Europa", in *Europa und der Orient, 800–1900*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Gereon Sievernich and Hendrik Budde, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 1989 (Berlin: Berliner Festspiele; Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Lexikon Verlag, 1989), 18–57. Rudolf Wittkower, *Selected Lectures of Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Donald Martin Reynolds, 36–126 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Donadoni, Curto, and Roveri, *Egypt from Myth*, 40–72; and Anthony Grafton, in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture*, exhibition catalogue, ed. A. Grafton (Washington, DC, Library of Congress, in association with Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1993), 118–23, also contain useful insights.

⁴⁵ Michael Greenhalgh, *The Classical Tradition in Art* (London: Duckworth, 1978); Frances Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, rev. ed. ([1986] London: H. Miller, 1987); and Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*.

⁴⁶ Erwin Panofsky, "Canopus Deus: The Iconography of a Non-Existent God", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th ser., 57 (1961): 193–216; Bertrand Jaeger, "L'Egitto Antico alla corte dei Gonzaga", in *L'Egitto fuori dell'Egitto: Dalla riscoperta all'Egittologia*, ed. Cristiana Morigi Govi, Silvio Curto, and Sergio Pernigotti, 233–53 (Bologna: CLUEB, 1991); Jaeger, "La Loggia delle Muse nel Palazzo Te e la reviviscenza dell'Egitto antico nel Rinascimento", in *Mantova e l'antico Egitto da Giulio Romano a Giuseppe Acerbi, Atti del Convegno di Studi, Mantova, 23–24 maggio 1992*, (Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana, Miscellanea no. 2, Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1994), 21–39; Helen Whitehouse, "Egyptology and Forgery in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of the History of Collections* 1 (1989): 187–95; Whitehouse, "Towards a Kind of Egyptology: The Graphic Representation of Ancient Egypt, 1587–1666", in *Documentary Culture: Florence and Rome from Grand-Duke Ferdinand I to Pope Alexander VII*, Villa Spelman colloquia, vol. 3, ed. Elizabeth Cropper, Giovanna Perini, and Francesco Solinas, 63–79 (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1992).

These scholars have pointed the way to my own effort to present a more complete examination of the reception and appropriation of Egyptian antiquities and imagery in Renaissance visual culture, and I could not have imagined pursuing this project without the inspiration their work has provided. It is not insignificant that the latter two of these scholars came to the subject of Egyptian Revival from ancient and Egyptological studies, a background I share in more humble terms as an Egyptological “apostate” lured to the field of Renaissance art history. One of the most forbidding challenges facing the would-be student of this subject is the requisite command of (or at least familiarity with) a host of diverse disciplines and knowledge systems – including, but not limited to, Egyptology, archaeology, classics, historiography, art history, and Renaissance studies. Only the most fearless – or foolhardy? – of scholars would dare to tread in these dark corridors, inhabited by visionaries, charlatans, and lost souls of ages past. I can hardly pretend to have mastered the skills necessary to bring order to this expansive subject, but I have done my best.

This book, then, represents my own modest and inevitably incomplete attempt to recount the story, still largely untold, of the afterlife of ancient Egypt and its antiquities in early modern Italy, and most significantly of the impact of this revival on the visual and antiquarian culture of the period. I have endeavored to tell this story, as much as possible, in terms of the experiences, observations, and decisions of actual, once-living persons, the better to give voice to Cyriacus’s awakened dead. The past may indeed be a foreign country, as David Lowenthal has reminded us.⁴⁷ But the people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, like the Egyptians and Romans before them, have left behind material traces of their time on earth-in-the-past, and it is from these present-tense fragments – texts, drawings, and other reflections of things that used to be – that the historian is compelled to construct a plausible (and, it is hoped, not too misleading) image of the past. I hope that I have not misrepresented or misunderstood too much.

In order to treat this complex material in the clearest and most accessible way, I have organized the book into a series of more or less chronological but essentially topical chapters. The first two chapters consider, in relatively concise form, the survival and transmission of the memory of Egypt its monuments from antiquity to about 1400. As we shall see, the attitudes and themes established in these earlier traditions provided a foundation for the contemplation and interpretation of things Egyptian in subsequent periods. Chapter 3 introduces Renaissance

⁴⁷ See David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

developments with an account of the early humanists' "recognition" of the obelisks and their hieroglyphs in the first decades of the quattrocento. Chapter 4 considers the Vatican obelisk project of Pope Nicholas V along with the closely related Egyptian "investigations" of such contemporary artists as Alberti and Filarete, again in a more comprehensive and synthetic manner than previous accounts. Chapter 5 examines two apparently unrelated but chronologically simultaneous developments, the Hermetic revival of the 1460s and the much less well-known phenomenon of the epigraphic copying and dissemination of hieroglyphic inscriptions. The early epigraphic and archaeological interest in hieroglyphs is perhaps the least studied aspect of the Egyptian Renaissance, and it is a theme to which I return periodically throughout the rest of the book. The next two chapters consider what may be the most celebrated and familiar of all Renaissance Egyptianizing products, Pinturicchio's Osirian frescoes in the Borgia Apartment [the following chapter] and the Egyptological fantasies of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (chapter 7). The almost simultaneous appearance of these works in the last decade of the quattrocento has prompted some scholars to link them to a common Egyptianizing culture in the Rome of that period. In the case of the Borgia frescoes, this connection is clear enough, since their imagery owes an evident debt to the contemporary theories of Annius of Viterbo, a Borgia associate whose researches connected his patrons to mythical Egyptian lineage. In the case of the *Hypnerotomachia*, while it is evident that its (much-debated) author and illustrator(s) had access to drawings and descriptions of Roman monuments, I argue that this antiquarian romance is best understood as the product of its Venetian ambience, as well as an emerging and widespread interest in things Egyptian – including the epigraphic drawings of hieroglyphs treated in chapter 5.

In the next several chapters, the Egyptological culture of the High Renaissance is explored in depth. A critical reevaluation of the (supposedly) anti-Egyptian patronage of Pope Julius II is followed by an extended consideration of the Egyptianizing projects promoted by the Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII, which are examined alongside contemporary commissions (such as the pyramids of the Chigi Chapel) that shared these pontiffs' claims to imperial authority and "divine kingship". Chapter 10 considers the hieroglyphic studies of Pierio Valeriano, a Medici courtier, in relation to the ongoing and expanding interest in "archaeological" hieroglyphs among scholars and artists. The final chapter is devoted in its entirety to a source-critical and patronage-based decipherment of the Egyptianizing imagery of the Missal of Cardinal Pompeo Colonna, a Roman nobleman who, like the Borgia, claimed to descend from Egyptian ancestors. This

reading draws extensively on unedited or overlooked sources, and may contain some of the most significant new material in this book. I conclude with a short discussion of the afterlife of Egyptian studies from the second half of the cinquecento to the age of Athanasius Kircher, whose vast project of translation and compilation represents the culmination of Renaissance Egyptology.

Our ancestors, in order to keep always before our eyes the eternal memory of the antiquity of our city, posted a column or tablet of alabaster on the *rostra* of the former temple of Hercules, now the temple of Saint Lawrence. It is the monument of Osiris' triumph, inscribed with sacred Egyptian letters in the form of birds, animals, heads and trees, about which the authors often write.

Anniius of Viterbo, *Antiquitates* (1498)⁴⁸

Egyptian Ancestors: Alexander VI, Pinturicchio, and Anniius of Viterbo

Egyptian Idols in the Palace of the Popes

By the last decade of the fifteenth century, the status of the Egyptians as the progenitors of a proto-Christian theology and inventors of the hieroglyphs and other arts had become so firmly established that the appearance of a full-blown Egyptian mythological cycle in one of the most important staterooms in the papal residence at the Vatican may not have raised many eyebrows. Occupying a central position in the suite of rooms on the first floor of the Vatican palace known as the Borgia Apartment, the Sala dei Santi was frescoed by the Umbrian master Bernardino Pinturicchio and his shop between 1493 and 1495.⁴⁹ The lunette-

⁴⁸ Fra Giovanni Nanni [Anniius of Viterbo], "Osiriana Aegyptia Tabula", in *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici, antiquitatum Italiae ac totius orbis libri quinque Commentariis Joannis Annii Viterbensis* [...] (Antwerp: I aedibus Ioan. Steelsii, 1552), 380:

Maiores nostri, in templo olim Herculis, nunc divi Laurentii, ut semper ante oculos nostros aeterna vetustatis huius urbis memoria teneretur, pro rostris posuit columnam. i. tabulam alabastrinam. Osiriani triumphii monumentum, avibus, & animalibus & capitibus & arboris, id est, sacris Aegyptiis literis excisam, de quibus saepe authores scribunt.

⁴⁹ For the Borgia Apartment, see Franz Ehrle and Henry Stevenson, *Gli affreschi Pinturicchio nell'Appartamento Borgia del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* (Rome: Danesi, 1897); Corrado Ricci, *Pinturicchio, His Life, Work and Time*, trans. Florence Simmonds (London: W. Heinemann; Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1902), 86–120; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 6:171–75; Federico Hermanin, *L'Appartamento Borgia in Vaticano* (Rome: Danesi, 1934); Fritz Saxl, "The Appartamento Borgia", in *Lectures* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), 1:174–88; D. Redig de Campos, *Wanderings among Vatican Paintings*, trans. Mary E. Stanley, rev. ed. (Milan: Martello, 1973), 23–42; J. B. Reiss, "Raphael's Stanze and Pinturicchio's Borgia Apartment", *Source* 3 (1984): 57–67; Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46–53;

shaped upper walls of the room, which served as a receiving and possible throne room for the second Borgia pope, Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, r. 1492–1503), are decorated with scenes from the lives of Alexander’s selected and patron saints. Some of these frescoes also contain allusions to Egypt and Egyptian antiquity, as we shall see. But for the most startling images in the room, the viewer must look up to the ceiling, whose painted and stuccoed decoration depicts, in rich and fanciful detail, the Egyptian myths of Isis, Osiris, and the sacred bull Apis (figs. 10 and 11). As the first large-scale Egyptian mythological cycle since antiquity, Pinturicchio’s frescoes have attracted considerable attention from scholars since they were reopened to public view at the end of the last century.⁵⁰ As a result of this focused and sustained attention, the primary motivation for this remarkable cycle has long been recognized – to provide a mythological exegesis on the origins and meaning of the Borgia family’s heraldic symbol, the ox.⁵¹ Alexander VI seems to have had a special affection for this creature, which appears in impressive numbers and in a variety of scales, colors, and media throughout the decoration

Sabine Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus: Das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan* (Weimar: VDG, 1999); and Pietro and Maria Rita Silvestri, *Pinturicchio* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2003), 112–28, 160–89.

⁵⁰ For the Sala dei Santi, see Giehlow, “Hieroglyphenkunde”, 44–46; Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 177–88; N. Randolph Parks, “On the Meaning of Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala dei Santi’”, *Art History* 2 (1979): 291–317; Paola Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo ispiratore di cicli pittorici”, in *Annio da Viterbo: Documenti e ricerche*, ed. Giovanni Baffoni and Paola Mattiangeli, 257–303, *Contributi alla storia degli studi etruschi e italici*, vol. 1 (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1981); Claudia Cieri Via, “Mito, allegoria e religione nell’appartamento Borgia”, in *Le arti a Roma da Sisto IV a Giulio II*, ed. Anna Cavallaro, 77–104 (Rome: Bagatto, 1985); Sabine Poeschel, “Age Itaque Alexander: Das Appartamento Borgia und die Erwartungen an Alexander VI.”, *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 25 (1989): 129–65; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 131–81.

⁵¹ In its standard form, the Borgia arms consists of a red bull *passant* on a field of gold, and is believed to reference their ancestral town of Borja in Valencia. See Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time* (Bruges: Desclée/De Brouwer, 1924), 1:16–20; Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 262–63; and Luigi Borgia, “L’araldica dei Borgia dalle origini ai primi anni del cinquecento”, in *I Borgia*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Carla Alfano, Felipe Vicente, and Garín Llombart, Fondazione Memmo, Rome (Milan: Electa, 2002), 201–13. For early recognition of the Apis-Ox connection, see Ehrle and Stevenson, *Affreschi*, 68; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 6:175; and Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 179–81.

of the Borgia rooms. The effect is perhaps most impressive in the Sala dei Santi itself, where the ox-filled marble frieze that wraps around the four walls of the room and the stuccoed Borgia coat of arms in the center of the vault make the connection to the bulls in the narrative scenes evident to even the most casual viewer. As we shall see, these heraldic and dynastic associations may be considered both allegorical and literal. In symbolic terms, the imagery of the room provides a visual proclamation of the virtues and aspirations of the Borgia and of Alexander in particular as the divinely sanctioned ruler of the church. Taken more literally, the Osiris-Apis story provides a mytho-historical justification for the Borgia family's claim to rule in Italy through their descent from "Egyptian" ancestors. But before attempting a detailed analysis of this point, it is best to begin with a brief description of the cycle as a whole.



Figure 10: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Myth of Isis and Osiris* (1492–94), North vault, Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museum; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, plate 5



Figure 11: Bernardino Pinturicchio, Myth of Isis and Osiris (1492–94), South vault, Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museum; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, plate 6

As noted, the Sala dei Santi is situated at the center of the Borgia suite, on the floor directly below the rooms decorated by Raphael for Julius II and Leo X and known to the world as the Vatican Stanze.⁵² The room takes its name from its six lunette-shaped wall scenes, the largest and most impressive of which is *Disputation of St. Catherine of Alexandria* (fig. 12), the richly ornamented fresco that dominates the south wall.⁵³ Given its scale, its location, and the favorable lighting it receives from the windows on the (north) opposite wall, there can be little doubt that this is the most important scene in the room, which apparently functioned as a throne room or audience chamber.⁵⁴ In the foreground, we see the learned young princess before the throne of Maxentius. She patiently counts her arguments on the fingers of her right hand as she systematically refutes the arguments of the emperor's fifty philosophers. Her principal opponent stands to the right with his back turned to the viewer and points with his left hand to a book that is held open by a kneeling acolyte. His colleagues to the left, right, and center are depicted as exotically attired magi whose robes, turbans and open books lend an appropriately "Eastern" tone to the scene that is underscored by the improbably green and lush "Alexandrian" landscape in the background. The center of the composition is dominated by a great triumphal arch that is obviously modeled on the Arch of Constantine in Rome. It is richly outfitted with multicolored marble and gold ornament and topped by a golden figure of a bull, symbol of the Borgia and the Egyptian Apis. A frontal bull's head also appears on the emperor's gilded throne, to the left.⁵⁵ These architectural elements are not merely painted and gilded, but are modeled in stucco relief, which gives the painted architecture a powerful effect of presence and depth.⁵⁶

⁵² See John Shearman, "The Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decoration", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 58 (1972): 369–424; reprinted in Holmes, *Art and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, 185–240 (subsequent references are to this edition).

⁵³ See Saxl, "Appartamento Borgia", 177; Redig de Campos, *Wanderings*, 30–34; Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 291–96; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 146–60.

⁵⁴ For the function and sources, see Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 295; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 80–81.

⁵⁵ For these details, see Redig de Campos, *Wanderings*, 31–32; Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 295–96; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 157–60.

⁵⁶ Vasari, *Vite*, ed. Milanesi, 3:499, criticizes the technique, opining that it makes the backgrounds appear closer than the figures. See Hellmut Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115–52, for a more appreciative discussion of Pinturicchio's style.



Figure 12: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (1492–94). South vault, Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museum, according to Curran, *Renaissance*, plate 7

The arch lends an appropriate air to this scene of Christian triumph. It also probably reflects the memory of the ephemeral arches and other fantastic displays concocted for Alexander’s coronation ceremonies in August 1492, that were liberally outfitted with statues and paintings of the ox and other Borgia devices.⁵⁷ The inscription in gold letters below the golden bull dedicates the arch to Apis as the *Pacis Cultori* (Cultivator of Peace), a notion that comes directly from Diodorus Siculus’s explanation of the Apis bull as a symbol of the “peaceful arts” of agriculture instituted by Osiris (and more indirectly from Alberti’s description of the ox as a hieroglyph of peace).⁵⁸ But the motto also makes direct reference to the Borgia pope, who was hailed on his elevation to the papal throne as a *Pacis Pater*. Indeed, this same motto, *Pacis Cultori*, appears on a papal medal struck in 1494, that is, at about the same time that Pinturicchio’s frescoes were being completed.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:390; Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 180–81; and Mattiangeli, “Anno da Viterbo”, 260–61.

⁵⁸ Diodorus 1.88.4; Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, 8.4; see Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 298–99; and Poeschel, “Age Itaque Alexander”, 158.

⁵⁹ Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 296, 309n29 (for the medal); and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 157–66.

The pride of place granted to this scene of Saint Catherine probably reflects her personal appeal to Pope Alexander. Her cult was extremely popular in this period, having been introduced to Latin Europe during the later Middle Ages by crusaders and other travelers to Egypt and Sinai, and her story was widely disseminated in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century collection, the *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend).⁶⁰ As an aggressive promoter of crusade, Alexander had reason enough to grant a place of honor to this scene of Christian conversion and triumph in an Eastern setting.⁶¹ But there were probably some more personal motivations as well. Prominent among these was Catherine's association with the city named for his greatest antique namesake, Alexander the Great. As the patron of Alexandria and, by extension, of Alexander's papal name, Catherine would naturally be held in high regard by this pope, who was hailed at his election as a "second Alexander the Great".⁶²

It was in this "Alexandrian" spirit that the second Borgia pope, following the precedent established by his uncle, Callixtus III, proclaimed the reclamation of the Holy Land as a major goal of his papacy.⁶³ The Spanish origins of the Borgia undoubtedly played a part in their passion for this cause, and it is worth noting that the surrender of Granada to Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain took place on the Feast of Saint Catherine, November 25, 1491, an event that the future pope Rodrigo Borgia celebrated in appropriately Borgian terms with a bullfight.⁶⁴ In this same crusading vein, it has been suggested that one of the two prominent Turkish figures in the *Disputation* could be a portrait of the exiled Ottoman prince Cem (or Djem), who was resident in the Vatican palace as a hostage and

⁶⁰ Hermann Knust, *Geschichte der Legenden der h. Katharina von Alexandrien und der h. Maria Aegyptiaca nebst unedirten Texten* (Halle a. S.: M. Niemeyer, 1890); and Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 2:334–41.

⁶¹ For the "crusade" interpretation of this fresco and the Sala in general, see Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 291–317.

⁶² Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 260–61; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 40–42, 176–81.

⁶³ For Alexander's policy of crusade, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:297–317, 6:85–106; De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 5:1–63; and Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1371)*, vol. 2, *The Fifteenth Century*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 127 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978), 381–482.

⁶⁴ Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 296, 310–33; and see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:314–15.

potential figurehead of a crusade at the time that the frescoes were painted.⁶⁵ This idea is typical of earlier interpretations that attempted to identify other protagonists in the fresco as portraits of Borgia family members, including Lucrezia (as Catherine) and Cesare. But recent study suggests that both of these Turkish figures are, in fact, generic types who were a standard feature in the art of this period.⁶⁶

On the north wall across from the *Disputation*, Saint Sebastian is shown bound to a column and enduring the arrows of his Roman tormentors in an evocative ruin-filled landscape featuring an imposing view of the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill in the background. The scene provides a visual link between the Egyptian capital of Alexandria and its Western counterpart, Rome (Egyptian-Roman connections are also a significant theme in the vault). On the east wall, the scene of *Susanna and the Elders* is flanked by Saint Barbara's escape from the tower. On the west, Saint Anthony Abbott and Saint Paul the Theban, the founders of Egyptian monasticism (and another "Egyptian" connection), break bread in the desert. Pinturicchio devoted the lunette above the door leading to

⁶⁵ For Cem, who lived in the Vatican from 1489 until shortly before his death in 1495, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:297–317, 464–65; 6:85–102; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 149–55. The standing figure to the left of Saint Catherine has been accepted as being a "probable" portrait of Prince Cem by Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 296, 309–310n32.

⁶⁶ The standing Turk on the left has been shown to be identical to a figure drawn by an artist in the circle of Venetian painter Gentile Bellini. See J. Raby, in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Jay A. Levenson, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 212 (cat. no. 108). The same figure appears in Pinturicchio's later fresco, *The Arrival of Pius II Ancona*, in the Piccolomini Library, Siena (ca. 1502–7); see Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 149–57. For more on Eastern figures and motifs in Renaissance art, see (a select list) Hermann Goetz, "Oriental Types and Scenes in Renaissance and Baroque Painting", *Burlington Magazine* 73 (1938): 50–62, 105–15; Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer, and the Oriental Mode: The Hans Huth Memorial Studies* 1 (London: Islamic Art Productions, 1982; Distributed by Sotheby Publications, Totowa, NJ); J. Raby, "Picturing the Levant", in Levinson, *Circa 1492*, 77–81; Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), esp. 149–70.

the Sala delle Arti Liberali to the *Visitation*, a scene from the life of the Virgin that seems to have wandered in from the Sala dei Misteri on the other side.⁶⁷

N. Randolph Parks and Sabine Poeschel have argued persuasively that the unifying element in these scenes is the triumph of the church and its saints over the enemies of the faith and the protection of the church by God.⁶⁸ The Egyptian hermits are miraculously fed by a raven; Anthony is delivered from demonic temptation; Sebastian survives the arrows; Barbara eludes (at least temporarily) the homicidal pursuit of her father; Susanna escapes the libidinous advances of the Elders; and Catherine, confronted by the amassed power of Maxentius's philosophers, converts them one and all to the true faith. Even the relatively peaceful scene of the *Visitation* is provided with an element of threat by the inclusion of Herod's soldiers in the background. In any case, the subject itself alludes to divine protection through the tradition that established the Feast of the Visitation as a day of prayer "for assistance in the struggle of the church against her heretical foes".⁶⁹ As we shall see, these themes of conflict, threat, and triumph are developed further in the Egyptian mythological cycle.

Moving to the ceiling, we note that Pinturicchio has illustrated the story of Osiris and Apis in eight scenes that correspond to the triangular spandrels of the oblong cross vaults of the ceiling, which dates to the time of Nicholas V (figs. 10 and 11). The artist has resolved the compositional problem posed by these alternating vertical and horizontal fields by filling the center of each "tall" compartment with an aedicular structure, while the horizontal panels are centered on a less imposing candelabra motif. Like the triumphal arch in the Saint Catherine fresco, all of these architectural elements – thrones, tombs, and shrines – are modeled in gilt stucco relief, the better to harmonize with the ornate borders that converge on the papal arms at the center of each vault. Within this framework, the narratives are enacted by small, graceful figures that stand on green grounds against a deep blue "sky". These blue fields are decorated with a gold pattern that enhances the shimmering, tapestrylike effect of the whole ensemble. Finally, the scenes on the north and south vaults are separated by an arch, which is generously encrusted with gilded stucco and also features five small octagonal panels containing scenes from the myth of Io.⁷⁰ Moving from west to east, the panels show the seduction

⁶⁷ As commented by Ricci, *Pinturicchio*, 103–4; see Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 292–96, 302–4; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 135–46, 160–64.

⁶⁸ Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 292–96; and Poeschel, "Age Itaque Alexander", 129–65.

⁶⁹ Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 292–94.

⁷⁰ See Saxl, "Appartamento Borgia", 181–82; and Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 280–83.

of Io by Jupiter; her transformation into a cow protected by Argus; Mercury killing Argus and freeing Io; and Io in Egypt, where she returns to human form as Isis and teaches laws and letters to the Egyptians.⁷¹ As this description shows, these scenes may be understood as a kind of Isiac prologue to the events in the vault, which relate the further events in the story of Isis and her husband after her arrival in Egypt.

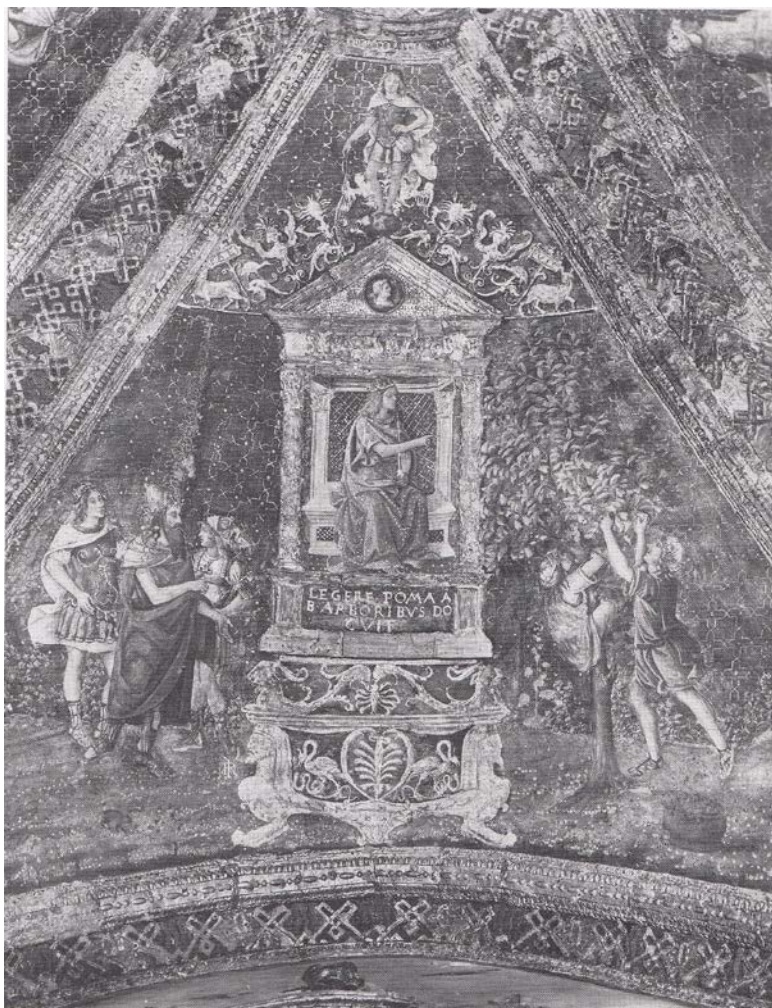


Figure 13: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Osiris Teaching the Egyptians to Gather Fruit* (1492–94), Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museums; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 112

⁷¹ Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 182, proposes that the youthful figure to the left of Isis is Moses; and Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 116, identifies the bearded figure on the right as Hermes Trismegistus. These identifications are accepted by Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’” 310n37; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 165; but the lack of inscriptions or identifying attributes renders any identification speculative.



Figure 14: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Osiris Teaching the Use of the Plow* (1492-94), detail, Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museums; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 113

The Osiris narrative begins on the northern vault (fig. 10), which features four scenes representing Isis and Osiris's actions as benefactors of mankind and "cultivators of peace". The cycle begins on the inside or northern horizontal spandrel with the marriage of Isis and Osiris. This is followed by two vertical scenes of the enthroned Osiris teaching the Egyptians to gather fruits from the trees (fig. 13) and cultivate the earth with the ox-driven plow (fig. 14). In the final horizontal compartment, we see Osiris teaching the Egyptians to cultivate the vine (fig. 10). Inscriptions on the thronebases in the taller scenes describe the action:

LEGERE POMA AB ARBORIBUS DOCUIT

[He taught them to gather fruit from the trees]

SUSCEPTO REGNO DOCUIT EGIPTIACOS ARARE E(T) PRO DEO
HABITUS

[After assuming the throne, he taught them to cultivate the earth with the plow,
and he was regarded as if he was a god by the Egyptians].⁷²

The scene with the ox-driven plow provides a direct link to the *Pacis Cultori* theme from the Saint Catherine panel, and is even more directly inspired by Diodorus's explanation of the Apis cult as a memorial to Osiris's invention of agriculture:

The consecration to Osiris, however, of the sacred bulls, which are given the names Apis and Mnevis, and the worship of them as gods were introduced generally among all the Egyptians, since these animals had, more than any others, rendered aid to those who discovered the fruit of the grain, in connection with both the sowing of the seed and with every agricultural labor from which mankind profits.⁷³

In a twist that has so far attracted little attention, this "Egyptian" scene also alludes directly to the mythical foundations of Rome. For, according to the tradition laid out by the Roman historians and poets, Romulus laid out the sacred boundaries of his new city with a plow driven by an ox and cow. As Plutarch put it in his *Life of Romulus*:

And the founder (Romulus) put a bronze blade on his plough, yoked up a bull and a cow, and himself drove them on, drawing a deep furrow around the boundary [...] It was with this line that they marked out the course of the wall, and it was called

⁷² For these inscriptions, see Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 286–90; Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 297–99; 310–13 (notes); and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 170–71.

⁷³ Diodorus 1.21.10–11; Diodorus, ed. Oldfeather, 1:69. Diodorus returns to this theme in 1.88.4.

the *pomerium*, a contracted form of “post-murum”, “behind” or “next to the wall”.⁷⁴

The scene’s correspondence to the Romulan episode is not exact. For example, some of the ancient sources describe Romulus’s ox and cow as pure white in color, which contrasts rather sharply with the brown and beige-white creatures in Pinturicchio’s fresco.⁷⁵ But the general resemblance could hardly have been lost on contemporary spectators. As early as 1438, Plutarch’s *Life of Romulus* had been translated into Latin by Giovanni Tortelli, a humanist who went on to serve as an advisor to Nicholas V in the foundation of the Vatican Library.⁷⁶ But Tortelli was only one of a host of quattrocento humanists who devoted intensive study to the problem of Rome’s Romulan foundations.⁷⁷ Indeed, the connection between the Borgia ox and the instrument of Rome’s foundation had already been proclaimed by an inscription on the base of an ephemeral golden ox fashioned for Alexander’s coronation in 1492:

ROMA BOVEM INVENIT TUNC CUM FUNDATUR ARATRO.
ET NUNC LAPSA SUO EST RENATA BOVE.

[Rome had discovered the ox when she was founded with the ploughshare. Now in decay she is reborn through her ox.]⁷⁸

It is interesting to note, as we prepare to consider the very different tone of the scenes on the second vault, that there are no direct representations of Osiris in his role as a commander and conqueror on any part of the Borgia vault. The only allusions to his military exploits are the discarded pieces of armor and weapons that appear in the marriage scene, although an appropriately triumphal and martial note is struck by the acroterial figures of the Old Testament heroes that

⁷⁴ Plutarch *Romulus* 11.14; translation from Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, eds., *Religions of Rome*, vol. 2, *A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 94.

⁷⁵ Ovid *Fasti* 4.807–62. For more sources and discussion, see Hans Joachim Kramer, “Die Sage von Romulus und Remus in der lateinischen Literatur”, in *Synusia: Festgabe für Wolfgang Schadewaldt zum 15. März 1965*, ed. H. Flashar and K. Gaiser, 355–402 (Pfullingen: Neske, 1965); and J. N. Bremmer, “Romulus, Remus and the Foundation of Rome”, in *Roman Myth and Mythography*, by J. N. Bremmer and N. M. Horsfall, 25–48, Bulletin Supplement/University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, no. 52 (London: University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, 1987).

⁷⁶ Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity*, 155.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 125–74, for extensive discussion.

⁷⁸ Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 181n8.

surmount the throne canopies in the vertical cultivation scenes. In the fruit-gathering scene, Osiris's throne is topped by a figure of David, who holds his sling and rests his right foot on the head of his fallen opponent, Goliath. In the ox-and-plow panel, this place is occupied by Judith, who holds a sword and the head of Holofernes. A small panel at her feet is inscribed with the letters SPQR, an unmistakable reference to the city of Rome that makes the previously proposed Romulus reference seem all the more plausible.⁷⁹



Figure 15: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *The Burial of Osiris* (1492–94), detail, Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museums; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 114

On the southern vault (fig. 11), the Osiris story takes a violent turn with a series of scenes that might be described as an Egyptian “passion cycle”. In the first

⁷⁹ For various interpretations of these figures, see Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 298, 312n143; Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 287–89; and Poeschel, “Age Itaque Alexander”, 155–56.

compartment, Osiris is murdered and dismembered by his jealous brother, Typhon. Isis gathers his dispersed limbs for burial in an aedicular pyramid-tomb topped by a statue of Neptune, a son of Osiris, according to one significant source (fig. 15).⁸⁰ The tomb is inscribed

UXOR EIUS ME(M)BRA DISCERPTA TANDEM INVENIT QUIBUS
SEPULCHRUM CONSTITUIT

[At last his wife discovered his dismembered limbs for which she set up this tomb].⁸¹



Figure 16: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *The Appearance of Apis* (1492–94), Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museums; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 114

In the next scene, Apis, the living reincarnation of Osiris and physical reminder of his civilizing legacy, appears before a group of worshippers at Osiris’s pyramid-tomb (fig. 16). Apis’s softly striped, black and white markings approximate

⁸⁰ Neptune was described as a son of Osiris by Annius of Viterbo; see Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 293. Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 298, 312n43, identifies this figure as Theseus, but this is not convincing.

⁸¹ Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 293; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 171.

descriptions given by the ancient authors.⁸² His head and body are ornamented with a beaded mantle or garlands, and he wears a sacrificial belt, or *dorsuale*, of the type worn by bulls in scenes of Roman animal sacrifice.⁸³ Similar belts appear on the bulls in the marble frieze below, as well as on some frescoed bulls in the Sala delle Sibille elsewhere in the Apartment; the latter stand on inscriptions of Alexander VI (A.PM.VI) and carry *putti* that hold the double-crown *impresa* above their heads.⁸⁴ The sacrificial altar with a burning flame on the right provides a further reference to Roman sacrifice. According to Livy, the sacrifice of bulls had been instituted soon after the foundation of Rome by Romulus, who sacrificed an ox to Hercules in emulation of a practice instituted many years earlier by Evander. As the story goes, Evander had chosen the ox to commemorate Hercules' victory over the cattle-rustling giant Cacus, who had stolen some of the cattle of Geryon and taken them to his cave on the Aventine.⁸⁵ It is easy to imagine that this story would have appealed to Pope Alexander, who claimed to descend from Osiris via his heroic son, the "Egyptian Hercules" – a theme we shall explore at length below.

As if to underline this point, Hercules appears prominently in the final scene on the vault, as the acroterial figure on a portable shrine of Apis (fig. 17). The figure of the living god had been replaced on this shrine by a golden statue, rendered in gilt-stucco relief, and the whole apparatus is carried by a group of youthful worshippers. As Fritz Saxl observed, the young boy blowing an oliphant horn at the head of the procession is marked with the device of the double crown, an

⁸² Herodotus 3.27–30; and Strabo 17.1.33, describe the bull as black with white markings, but as Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 314, points out, Pinturicchio's bull corresponds most closely to the coloring as described by Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 368 (c), who describes Apis's markings as bright shaded into dark. It is also possible that the radiant effect was inspired by a passage in Macrobius *Saturnalia* 1.21.18–21.

⁸³ The sacrificial belt is noted by Saxl, "Appartamento Borgia", 184, in relation to the bulls in the marble frieze below. By the late fifteenth century, an animal of this type could be seen in a relief of a Suovetaurilia procession in the collection of Cardinal Domenico Grimani at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome (now in the Louvre). See Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists*, 223 (cat. no. 190). For more examples, see I. Scott Ryberg, *The Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 22 (Rome: Tipografia del Senato del Dott. G. Bardi, 1955), 8–9, 30–31, 104–19; and Jean Prieur, *Les animaux sacrés dans l'antiquité: Art et religion du monde méditerranéen* (Rennes: Ouest-France, Université, 1988), 176–83.

⁸⁴ See Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 302–3, plate 16.

⁸⁵ Livy 1.6–7.

impresa that declares the Borgia family's claim of kinship to the royal house of Aragon.⁸⁶ The base bears the inscription

SACRA NO(N) PRIUS INITIABANT Q(UAM) POPULO OS(T)ENSUM
BOVEM ASCENDERENT

[They did not begin the sacred rites before they went up in order to display the bull to the people].⁸⁷

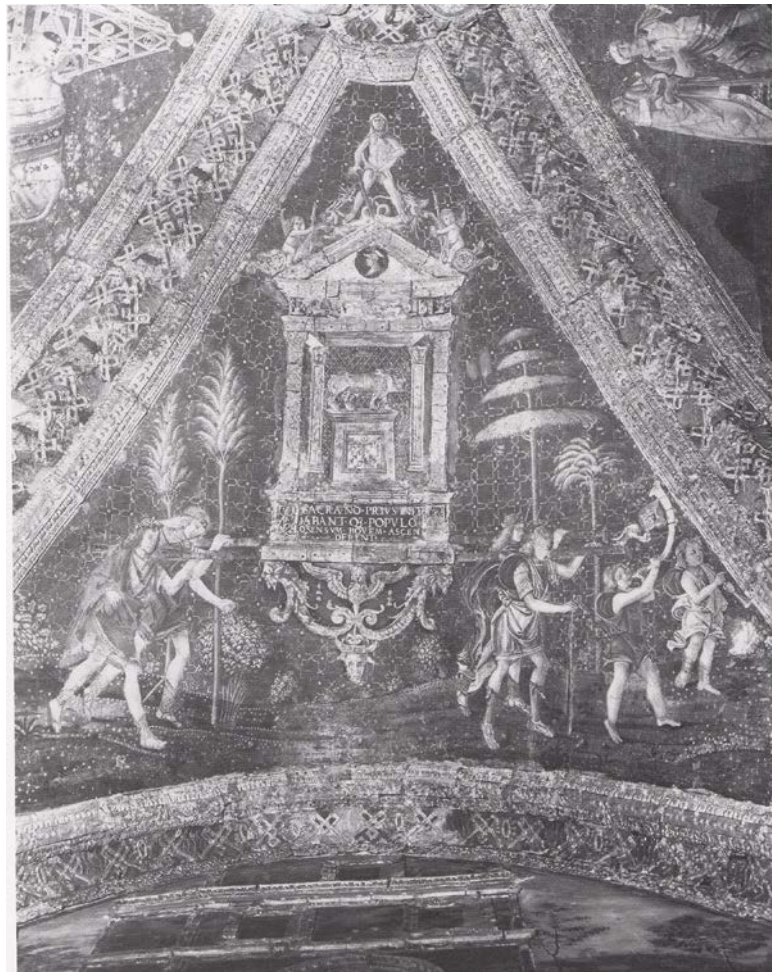


Figure 17: Bernardino Pinturicchio, *The Procession of Apis* (1492–94), Sala dei Santi, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Museums; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 116

⁸⁶ Saxl, "Appartamento Borgia", 178–179, 83; and Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 263. For the history of this device, see Albert Van de Put, *The Aragonese Double Crown and the Borja or Borgia Device, with notes upon the bearing of such insignia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (London: Gryphon Club, Bernard Quaritch, 1910).

⁸⁷ Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 294; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 171.

On the pediment of the shrine stands a figure of the Borgia ancestor Hercules, who is clearly identified by his club and lion skin. With this final flourish, the Borgia claim to descent from Osiris-Apis is established through their connection to this hero – who was also, according to the most likely contemporary source, Osiris’s son and the avenger of his murder.⁸⁸



Figure 18: Male sphinx, Lateran Cloister, Rome (ca. 1215-32), public domain.



Figure 19: Filarete: *Crucifixion of St. Peter* (completed 1445). Porta Argentea, St. Peter's Basilica; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 69

⁸⁸ Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 294–95; and Poeschel, “Age Itaque Alexander”, 156–60.

Although Pinturicchio's frescoes treat such potentially disturbing themes as fratricide and dismemberment, the overall tone is one of poetic fantasy and courtly pageant. The distinctive golden thrones and tombs, although richly furnished with sphinxes and other antiquarian bric-a-brac, are closer in form to contemporary altars and reliquaries than they are to anything identifiably "ancient". The few Egyptianizing elements that do appear seem to have been inspired not by the "authentic" monuments that could be seen in Rome, but by Roman and medieval imitations. The most conspicuous of these is the pair of bearded, *nemes*-wearing sphinxes that support Osiris's throne in the fruit-gathering scene (fig. 13). The closest model for these figures is the bearded male sphinx from the Vasalletto cloister at the Lateran (fig. 18) – an appropriately papal provenance to be sure. How much these figures were intended to be read as specifically "Egyptian" versions of this creature is almost impossible to know. Perhaps Pinturicchio knew the Egyptian sphinxes that were recorded on the Capitoline Hill in the time of Leo X (figs. 4 and 5). And he was certainly familiar with the *nemes*-wearing creature from the Monte Cavallo Nile colossus (fig. 7), which he copied quite accurately in his frescoes for the Palazzo of Giuliano della Rovere at SS. Apostoli (circa 1492–94).⁸⁹ It is not impossible that the Egyptian origins of this headgear had been recognized by this time. As we shall see, configuration of the *nemes* was described with precision in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* a few years later.⁹⁰ But the first real evidence that we have that the sphinxes on the Nile statues, for example, had been recognized as Egyptian symbols comes only in 1527, when the Roman antiquarian Andrea Fulvio described them as "animals peculiar to Egypt".⁹¹

⁸⁹ See Anna Cavallaro, "Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nella Palazzina di Giuliano della Rovere ai SS. Apostoli", in *Un'Idea di Roma: Società, arte e cultura tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento*, ed. Laura Fortini, 53–71 (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 1993).

⁹⁰ See Curran, *Renaissance*, chapter 7.

⁹¹ Andrea Fulvio, *Antiquitates Urbis Romae* (Rome: Nuperrime aeditae, 1527), fol. Eiiir:

Item duo pari forma ingentia, marmoreaque fluviorum simulacra seminuda, quae quantum ex rerum argumento deprehendi potest, Nili ac tigris flu. numina sunt. Quorum Alterum Sphynge aegypti peculiare animal, cui cubito inicit, habet, Alterum vero tygride Armenie truculentam feram, na nilus aegypti. tygris vero aremeniae flu. est. Aelianus scribit Nili simulacrum exprimi figura humana.

See R. O. Rubinstein, "The Renaissance Discovery of Antique River-God Personifications", in *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Roberto Salvini*, ed. Cristina De Benedictis, 257–63 (Florence: Sansoni, 1984), for discussion.

In the case of Osiris's pyramid-tomb, which appears in two different configurations, we can be sure that the type was chosen primarily for its Egyptian significance. But even here there is double reference to Egypt and Rome. For it is clear that the basic form of these richly inlaid, gilded and jewel-encrusted pyramids was copied from Filarete's rendition of the Meta Romuli on the bronze doors of St. Peter's (fig. 19), with the addition of a small globe at the pinnacle (in the *Appearance* scene) that inevitably suggests the Vatican obelisk. The relationship to the Meta Romuli and, by extension, to Romulus, is made clear by a slightly later description in the *Antiquarie prospetiche romane*, where the Meta is described as having been encrusted with "fine gems".⁹²

Taken together, this cluster of allusions to Romulus and Saint Peter (from the Romulan pyramid) and to Saint Peter and Julius Caesar (courtesy of the Vatican obelisk) invest Pinturicchio's Osirian pyramids with a rich conglomeration of historical and ideological associations that subtly underline the message of the entire cycle: the advent of the Borgia represents the fulfillment of the Egyptian, Romulan, and Christian foundations (and refoundations) of Rome. But there is a final irony in this case, since it was Pope Alexander himself who ordered, just a few years later in 1499, the demolition of the remaining vestiges of the Meta Romuli to open his new Jubilee road in the Borgo, the Via Alessandrina.⁹³

The last – and for the Borgia, one presumes, the most important – Egyptianizing element in Pinturicchio's cycle is the image of Apis itself, since it is through this heraldic and dynastic figure that the family's connection to Osiris is established. The laboring ancestors of the god appear as the laboring creatures in the agricultural cycle on the north vault, which sets the stage for the first appearance of the living god in the *Appearance* scene and the golden statues in the *Procession* and *St. Catherine* scenes (figs. 12 and 17). The passage from beast of burden to

⁹² As noted by Fairbairn, *North Italian Album*, 44; original text in *Antiquarie prospetiche romane*, ed. Giovanni Agosti and Dante Isella (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, Ugo Guanda Editore; Biblioteca di scrittori italiani, 2004), 16, lines 157–58: "A front' a llui era d'equal alteza, / una gran meta di pietra murata / di gemme fine et di gran gentileza."

⁹³ See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 6:166–68; Peebles, "Meta Romuli", 21–50; and Eunice D. Howe, "Alexander VI, Pinturicchio and the Fabrication of the Via Alessandrina in the Vatican Borgo", in Henry A. Millon and Susan Scott Munshower, *An Architectural Progress in the Renaissance and Baroque: Sojourns in and out of Italy; Essays in Architectural History Presented to Helmut Hager on His Sixty-Sixth Birthday*, ed. Henry A. Millon and Susan Scott Munshower, 64–93, Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University, vol. 8, pts. 1 and 2, 2 vols. (University Park: Department of Art History, Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 1:64–93.

golden idol is clearly presented, and the allusion to the Golden Calf must surely be intentional. In this case, however, the “idol of the Egyptians” is presented in the most favorable terms possible – as the living hieroglyph of Osiris’s (and the Borgia’s) civilizing rule. Indeed, the bull’s (and the Borgia’s) ultimate submission to Christian authority is underlined in the marble frieze below, where a small herd of sacrificial oxen is shown bowing before images of the Virgin, the cross, and the pope himself.⁹⁴



Figure 20: Filippo Lippi, *The Worship of the Golden Calf (Apis)* (ca. 1500), National Gallery, London; according to Curran, *Renaissance*, 118

A curious echo of this imagery may be observed in a contemporary work, the second of two *spalliera* panels representing episodes from Exodus, attributed to the Florentine painter Filippino Lippi and/or an assistant (sometimes called the “Master of Memphis”) and now in the National Gallery, London (fig. 20).⁹⁵ The panel, which dates to the later 1490s or early 1500s, illustrates the episode of the Golden Calf, with the expected crowd of licentious revelers in the foreground and the tents of the Israelite camp in the back, where a toppled figure of the calf can also be glimpsed. But instead of the expected golden image, like the one that appears in Cosimo Rosselli’s fresco of the same subject in the Sistine Chapel, Lippi depicts the object of worship as an improbably airborne, living bull, marked

⁹⁴ Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia” 184.

⁹⁵ For the panels, see Patrizia Zambrano and Jonathan Katz Nelson, *Filippino Lippi* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2004), 502–11, 602–4 (cat. no. 61).

as Apis by the crescent moon that appears on his shoulder.⁹⁶ Otto Kurz has argued that the London panels were conceived at the same time as the Borgia cycle, that is, at about the same time that Filippino was putting the last touches on his frescoes in the Carafa Chapel in S. Maria sopra Minerva.⁹⁷ Kurz also discovered an unexpected literary source for Lippi's aerodynamic Apis in one of the great encyclopedic works of the later Middle Ages, the *Historia Scholastica* of the French theological writer Petrus Comestor (1169–73).⁹⁸ In his commentary on Exodus, Comestor writes that the Egyptians' idolatrous reverence for this beast was God's punishment for their persecution of the Hebrews. He goes on to provide some colorful details about Apis and his cult:

According to Pliny, who saw him himself, the Apis is a bull who used to rise suddenly out of a river. Upon his right shoulder is the shape of the crescent moon. When the Egyptians gathered around him with music and chanting he rose in the air and moved above their heads, as if he were playing the *cithara*. When he moved, people beneath followed his movements, and when he stood still, they stood still as well [...] Some relate that he appeared every year at the feast of Serapis, and this is believed to be the reason why he himself is called Serapis, i.e., sacred to Apis.⁹⁹

Comestor's source for Apis's aerial activities is unknown (it is not Pliny, as he claims).¹⁰⁰ But should this panel be identified as a depiction of the "Worship of the Apis", as Kurz suggested, or as a representation of the Golden Calf assimilated with Apis as an astrological (or demonic) being, as suggested by Robert Eisler in a response to Kurz's piece?¹⁰¹ The two arguments would appear to be a matter of emphasis rather than real dispute. In any event, one wonders for whom these unlikely panels might have been painted. Someone in the Borgia family, perhaps, or one of the families that entertained Osirian claims of descent,

⁹⁶ The crescent-moon attribute is described by Ammianus 22.14.7; and Aelian 11.10–11. For the Sistine fresco, See Carol F. Lewine, *The Sistine Walls and the Roman Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 60–64.

⁹⁷ See Kurz, "Filippino Lippi's 'Worship of the Apis'", 145–47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹⁹ Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, Liber Exodi, chap. 4, col. 1143, in Migne, *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, vol. 198 (1855); translation from Kurz, "Filippino Lippi's 'Worship of the Apis'", 146.

¹⁰⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 8.71.185–86.

¹⁰¹ R. Eisler, "Apis or Golden Calf?", *Burlington Magazine* 90 (1948): 58–59.

like the Colonna? Unfortunately, given the present state of research, this question cannot be resolved here.¹⁰²

Returning to the Borgia frescoes, we must now consider the tricky problem of sources. To begin with, it is clear that, whatever active and creative role he must have played in conceiving of the visual forms here, Pinturicchio must have worked in close consultation with that most shadowy and controversial of collaborators, a “humanist adviser” (or advisers).¹⁰³ It is just not possible that the painter could have known, let alone have interpreted in these very particular ways, the esoteric and specialist literature upon which his cycle is based. As to specifics, we have already noted that the most important source for the Osiris story was Diodorus, whose Egyptian chapters were readily accessible in printed editions of Poggio’s Latinization.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the sequence of events in Pinturicchio’s frescoes corresponds so closely to Diodorus’s narrative that they can almost be said to “illustrate” his version of the story. Like Diodorus, Pinturicchio emphasizes Osiris’s institution of the “peaceful arts” of agriculture, including the ox-driven plow memorialized by Apis.¹⁰⁵ Pinturicchio’s architectural fixtures, especially the golden thrones and shrines, may well have been suggested by Diodorus’s report that Osiris built golden chapels in honor of

¹⁰² Kurz, “Filippino Lippi’s ‘Worship of the Apis’”, 147, suggested that the Apis theme had become “topical” thanks to its promotion by Alexander VI. In the catalogue to the recent Borgia exhibition in Rome, J. K. Nelson suggests that the image represents a possible critique of the Borgia as idolatrous orgiasts; see Claudio Strinati, “Nell’ Italia dei Borgia tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento”, in C. Alfano et al., *I Borgia*, 30–37, esp. 30. And see Nelson, in Zambrano and Nelson, *Filippino Lippi*, 152–54, for the suggestion that Apis’s crescent-shaped marking might allude to a family’s coat of arms.

¹⁰³ For the controversy over these advisers, see Creighton Gilbert, trans., *Italian Art 1400–1300: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), xix–xxvii; Charles Hope, “Artists, Patrons, and Advisers in the Italian Renaissance”, in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel, 293–343 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Ingrid D. Rowland, “The Intellectual Background of the ‘School of Athens’”, in *Raphael’s School of Athens*, ed. Marcia Hall, 131–70 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁴ For Diodorus as a major source for the cycle, see Giehlow, “Hieroglyphenkunde”, 40–46; Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 182–87; Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 297, 300ff; and Mattiangeli, “Anno da Viterbo”, 276–80.

¹⁰⁵ Diodorus 1.14.1–4, 1.15.8–9, 1.17.1–2, 1.20.3–4, 1.88.4; cf. Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 310–11nn38–39.

his parents, Zeus and Hera, and “made images of the gods and magnificent golden chapels for their worship”.¹⁰⁶

If Diodorus was the most important single source, the testimony of other authorities was almost certainly consulted as well. As Giehlow, Saxl, and others have noted, the inscription on Osiris’ throne in the fruit-gathering scene (fig. 13) is an abbreviation of Tibullus’s praise of Osiris in his elegy to the Triumph of Messalla.¹⁰⁷ Staying with the Latin tradition, an allusion to the Isiac episode in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* may be detected in the final scene with the shrine bearers. We recall that after his restoration to human form, Lucius devotes himself to service in the college of the *pastophori*, or shrine bearers, at the Temple of Isis in Rome.¹⁰⁸ The implied reference to this college in the shrine-bearing scene, with its figure marked as a Borgia ancestor, marks one more cleverly placed reference to the Egyptian-Roman *translatio*. Less clear is the influence of Plutarch, whose *De Iside et Osiride* contains a rich helping of Osirian content. Plutarch’s theological and allegorizing approach to this material has proved especially attractive to scholars seeking a Christological dimension in the passion and “resurrection” of Osiris.¹⁰⁹ N. Randolph Parks has noted some of the more convincing evidence for a Plutarchan source, including the placement of Osiris’s burial scene before the campaign against Typhon, which follows the order in *De Iside et Osiride* and inverts Diodorus’s sequence, the striped coloring of Apis, and the mutilated figure in the *Advent* scene (fig. 11), which may represent the castrated but still-living figure of Typhon as Plutarch describes him.¹¹⁰ But while elements of Plutarchan inspiration cannot be dismissed out of hand, it seems to me that the allegorical and Platonizing implications laid out in his treatise are largely absent here. These are magical and mythological events, to be sure. But the principal interest throughout appears to be narrative, historical, and dynastic. It is surely relevant in this regard that, as Parks has acknowledged, Plutarch’s Isiac treatise had no “discernable influence” on the work of Annius of Viterbo, whose fundamental importance for the Borgia frescoes is almost universally

¹⁰⁶ Diodorus 1.14–15.5; *Diodorus*, ed. Oldfeather, 1:47–51.

¹⁰⁷ Tibullus 1.7.29–32; cf. Giehlow, “Hieroglyphenkunde”, 45; Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 182n12; Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 297, 311n39; and Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 290.

¹⁰⁸ Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.26–30; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Hanson, 2:347–59.

¹⁰⁹ See especially Cieri Via, “Mito, allegoria e religione”, 90–96.

¹¹⁰ See Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 297, 300, 311n39, 314nn58–59. For other authors who accept a Plutarchan influence, see Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 186; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 171.

acknowledged.¹¹¹ Annius may well have been familiar with the *De Iside*, but he never seems to mention it in his writings, a circumstance that may reflect his uncertainty with the Greek (a conveniently authoritative Latinization of the treatise was not yet available) or his innate hostility to the “mendacity” of Greek historians in general.

For the scenes of Io’s bovine transformation and her translation into Egypt as Isis, the principal source was Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.¹¹² But significant elements could have drawn from a variety of other authors. Both Augustine and Isidore ascribed the “invention” of Egyptian letters to Isis.¹¹³ More recently, Giovanni Boccaccio told the story with admirable clarity in his *De Claris Mulieribus* (On Famous Women; circa 1361), where we read how Io, transformed into a cow to protect her from the jealousy of Juno, was held captive by Argus until he was killed by Mercury. Mercury drove her to Egypt, where she was restored to human form and renamed Isis. Finding the Egyptians to be a primitive and underdeveloped people, Isis taught them “how to till the soil, seed it, and finally how to make food from grain”, and further gave them laws and alphabetic letters.¹¹⁴ To honor her for these great accomplishments, the Egyptians considered her divine and made her their queen. She was married to Apis, who was also considered a god by the Egyptians, and was also known as Osiris or Serapis. After her death, “her divinity became so renowned and revered that at Rome, already mistress of the world, a huge temple was accorded her, and every year solemn sacrifices were held in the Egyptian manner”.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Parks, “Pinturicchio’s ‘Sala’”, 297, 300, 311–12, notes the absence of any discernible Plutarchan influence in Annius of Viterbo’s *Antiquitates*, a work whose affinity to the Borgia frescoes is almost universally acknowledged.

¹¹² Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.567–779; see Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 280–283.

¹¹³ Augustine *De civitate Dei* 18.3, 37, 39; Isidore *Etymologiae* 8.11.84.

¹¹⁴ Boccaccio, *De Claris Mulieribus*, 8. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown, I Tatti Renaissance Library 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 42–47. Boccaccio’s sources include Ovid, Eusebius, and Hyginus’s *Fabularum Liber*, 145. See also Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentiliium libri*, in Boccaccio, *Opere*, vols. 10–11, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari: G. Laterza & Figli, 1951), with numerous references.

¹¹⁵ Boccaccio, *De Claris Mulieribus*, 8.6; from Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Brown, 47.

Annius of Viterbo and the Italian Osiris

In the frescoes of the Sala dei Santi, it may be said that the honors of Isis and Osiris had been restored to Rome after a millennium or more of neglect. But while Isis and her consort had been offered sacrifices and other cultic tribute in the temples of the ancients, they return this time in a strictly subordinate position, as forerunners and “hieroglyphic emblems” of the virtues and authority of the Borgia pope. But who was the learned adviser responsible for this incredibly intricate exercise in Egyptological erudition? As it turns out, the identity of the leading suspect has been recognized for some time. And while it must be admitted that there are no documents to tie him to the project, and that the commission appears a bit “early” to show the influence by his fully developed work, the correspondences are such that it seems indisputable that the basic themes of the cycle were largely inspired by the “studies” of Giovanni Nanni, better known as Annius of Viterbo (circa 1432/37–1502).¹¹⁶ Annius, renowned, condemned, and – I suspect – secretly admired by many as a consummate literary and archaeological forger, is one of the most fascinating figures of the Italian Renaissance.¹¹⁷ A Dominican friar and student of theology who dabbled in prophecy and astrology, Annius worked for some years in northern Italy, most notably in Genoa, until he returned to Viterbo circa 1489–90 to take up an appointment as a teacher and public lecturer for the town government. He

¹¹⁶ Annius’s influence on the cycle was proposed by Giehlow, “Hieroglyphenkunde”, 40–46; and has been supported by most subsequent scholarship (Saxl, Parks, Mattiangeli, Poeschel). A note of caution was struck recently by Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 58–59, who observed that the ancient sources were sufficient to provide the basic elements, and that at the time that the ceiling was being painted, Annius was still based in Viterbo. But Annius’s contact with the Borgia seems to have been initiated by the fall of 1493, by which time his “Egyptological” work was well under way.

¹¹⁷ For Annius, see Roberto Weiss, “Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo”, *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 5 (1962): 425–41; Walter Stephens, “Berosus Chaldaeus: Counterfeit and Fictive Editors of the Early Sixteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1979); W. Stephens, “‘De historia gigantum’: Theological Anthropology before Rabelais”, *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 40 (1984): 43–89; Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 58–138; C. R. Ligota, “Annius of Viterbo and Historical Method”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 44–56; Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, 48–49, 54–55, 60–64, 100–118; A. Grafton, “Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe: The Strange Case of Annius of Viterbo”, in Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, 76–103; and Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 53–59.

labored mightily on a variety of historical and archaeological projects from the early 1490s until 1498, when his magnum opus, the infamous *Antiquitates*, was published in Rome. In 1499, he was appointed to the office of Magister Sacri Palatii (Theologian to the Papal Court) by Alexander VI.¹¹⁸ Among the services that Anniius presumably rendered to the Borgia pope was the composition of a “mythological genealogy” that traced the pope’s origins to Egyptian ancestors: to Osiris, in particular, and his son, the Libyan or “Egyptian” Hercules, killer of giants and avenger of his father’s murder. The text of this genealogy does not survive, but it probably resembled the Osirian genealogy that he composed for Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese circa 1491.¹¹⁹

Annius’s genealogies drew from the usual conglomeration of ancient and medieval sources that professional scholars mined with such ingenuity to lineages for their patrons. But he also had at his disposal a new collection of “ancient texts”, which he almost certainly forged himself and published with his own extensive commentaries in the aforementioned *Antiquitates*, whose full title, *Commentaria Fratri Joannis Annii Viterbiensis super opera diversorum auctorum de Antiquitatibus Loquentium* (Commentaries of Friar Giovanni Anniius of Viterbo on works of various authors discussing antiquities), gives a better sense of the work’s epic scale and ambition. The first edition of 1498, which ran to more than two hundred densely packed pages, was printed in Rome with the privilege and authority of Alexander VI. The collection seems to have been an immediate sensation, and saw numerous reprints and translations over the course of the next

¹¹⁸ See Weiss, “Traccia”, 425–36; and Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 265–75.

¹¹⁹ The text of the original treatise, *De Viterbii viris et factis illustribis*, is lost, but references and fragments survive in the letters of the cardinal’s son, Alessandro Farnese, and other sources. See A. Frugoni, ed., “Carteggio umanistico di Alessandro Farnese, dal cod. GL. Kgl. S. 2125, Copenhagen”, *Nuova collezione di testi umanistici inediti o rari* 8 (1950): 61–64; Weiss, “An Unknown Epigraphic Tract by Anniius of Viterbo”, in *Italian Studies Presented to E. R. Vincent on His Retirement from the Chair of Italian at Cambridge*, ed. C. P. Brand, K. Foster, and U. Limentani, 102, 106n15 (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1962); Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 266–68; and Ingeborg Walter, “Il presente come passato: Mito, storia e leggenda dei Farnese/Time Present and Time Past: The Role of Myth, History and Legend in the Making of the Farnese Dynasty”, in *La dignità del casato: Il salotto dipinto di Palazzo Farnese*, by Claudio Strinati and Ingeborg Walter, 39–69, 91–118 (Rome: Elefante, 1995).

century.¹²⁰ Among the “rediscovered” texts that Anniius claimed to have obtained from a Mantuan friend and an Armenian colleague in Genoa were an epitome of Berossus of Chaldea’s lost history of Assyria and Babylon, a copy of Manetho’s Egyptian king list, and fragments by other authors from Rome, Greece, and Persia.¹²¹ Prominent among the latter were two short treatises by the Roman historian Q. Fabius Pictor, which treat the foundation of Rome from the earliest times, and include an account of the city’s foundation by the plow of Romulus.¹²² From this collection of pseudoauthorities, and Berossus in particular, Anniius claimed to have discovered irrefutable proof that the earliest European civilization of postdiluvian times had been established in Italy, and more particularly on the future sites of Rome and his own native city of Viterbo. Indeed, as has long been understood, the underlying motivation for all of Anniius’s work, including the appeal to Egyptian and other nonclassical sources and traditions, was a political and nationalistic desire to undermine the claims to historical and cultural primacy promulgated by the Greeks and their contemporary admirers. That this agenda had a potentially significant appeal to the interests of Anniius’s own townsmen, to his fellow Dominicans and other defenders of the Scholastic tradition, and more broadly to the temporal and

¹²⁰ I have used the following editions: *Commentaria Fratris Ioannis Annii Viterbensis ordinis praedicator, theologiae professoris super opera diversorum auctorum de Antiquitatibus loquentorum* (Rome: Campo Florae, 1498); *Antiquitatum variarum, volumina XVII a venerando et praedictorii ordinis professore Ioanne Annio* (Paris: Petit, 1515); and *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici* (Antwerp, 1552, as in note 47). Also useful are the early Italian translations by Pietro Lauro, *I cinque libri de la antichita de Beroso [...] con lo commento di Giovanni Annio da Viterbo*, 2nd ed. (Venice: Baldassera Constantini, 1550); and Francesco Sansovino, *Le Antichità di Beroso caldeo sacerdote [...] et d'altri scrittori, cosi hebrei, come greci, et latini, che trattano delle stesse materie* (Venice: Presso A. Salicato, 1593). For a list of editions, see Stephens, *Giants*, 344–45 (app. 2).

¹²¹ For discussion of the texts and likely sources, see Stephens, “Berossus”, 25–155; E. Fumagalli, “Un falso tardo-quattrocentesco: Lo pseudo-Catone di Annio da Viterbo”, in *Vestigia: Studi in onore di Giuseppe Billanovich*, ed. Rino Avesani et al., 1:337–60 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984); Ligota, “Annius of Viterbo”, 44–56; Stephens, *Giants*, 101–38; Grafton, “Invention of Traditions”, 80–93; and Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 55–59.

¹²² See Stephens, “Berossus”, 39; and Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity*, 162–69, for discussion.

imperial aspirations of the papal state, must have seemed both obvious and attractive to the industrious old friar.¹²³

Annius identifies the founder of his primordial, pre-Etruscan state as no less a distinguished personage than Noah. As Berosus's account tells it, Noah came to Italy from Armenia in the year 108 after the Flood and established a colony on the left bank of the Tiber, in the area later known as the Janiculum Hill and the Vatican.¹²⁴ On this spot, Noah instructed the locals in the proper worship of God, introduced them to the arts of agriculture and natural magic, and showed them how to make wine, which inspired him to take a new name, Janus, which he adapted from the Hebrew word for "wine", *yayin*.¹²⁵ Returning to Italy again years later, Noah established further outposts in the northern regions of Latium, establishing his new capital in the town of Vetulonia (later Viterbo), which had been founded some time before by his grandson, Comerus. Some time later, the people of Vetulonia found themselves oppressed by a race of evil giants, until the about 549 Post Diluvium, when the Egyptian king Osiris, also known as Apis (and whom Annius identifies as a son of Noah's least favorite offspring, Cham), arrived to liberate them with the help of his son, Hercules the Egyptian (called Hercules Libyus or Aegyptius).¹²⁶ Following the defeat of the giants, Osiris ruled in Viterbo for ten years, reestablishing the rule of law and reeducating the people

¹²³ For these themes, see F. N. Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and Graecia Mendax", in *Classical, Mediaeval, and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, ed. Charles Henderson Jr., 2:293–310 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964).

¹²⁴ The story is told in the *Defloratio Berosi Chaldaica*; see Annius, *Commentaria* [...], fols. Nviiiir-Yvr (pp. 197–301); and Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 35–209. See Stephens, *Giants*, 111–35, for a useful summary of the main narrative.

¹²⁵ According to Stephens, Annius derived his conflation of Janus and Noah from the Genoese chronicle of the Dominican Jacobus da Voragine (1228/9–99); see Stephens, *Giants*, 109–10; and Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61–62. Jacobus attributed the foundation of Genoa to Noah in his persona as Janus, and it seems more than likely that Annius, as a Dominican resident for some years in Genoa, would have known this work. Other sources, dating as far back as the twelfth century, describe Janus as a founder of Rome and a son or grandson of Noah. These include the twelfth-thirteenth-century *Graphia Urbis Romae*, and the *Speculum regum* of Godfrey of Viterbo (1125–92), who supports his claims with reference to "Berosus". See Stephens, "Berosus", 76–89, 142–46; Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 319–21; and Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 87–90, for further discussion.

¹²⁶ For Hercules Libyus/Aegyptus, see Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 67–75.

in the agricultural arts that had been introduced by Noah. He then returned to Egypt, where he was overthrown and killed by his jealous brother, Typhon, who had aligned himself with most of the surviving giants. Hercules and his mother, Isis, began another war against Typhon and the other evil giants, and after defeating their principal enemy, Hercules carried the battle into North Africa, Spain, and Gaul and back into Italy, where he reigned for another thirty years.¹²⁷

As we see, Osiris is accorded a relatively late role in the early history of Viterbo and Italy in the *Antiquitates*, but this is not the case in Annius's earlier historical treatise, *Viterbiae historia epitoma*, which was composed circa 1491 and dedicated to Alexander VI's predecessor, Pope Innocent VIII.¹²⁸ In this much more summary history of Viterbo, the city's foundation is attributed directly to "the great Osiris Aegyptius", the "first father, civilizer, and sovereign of the whole barbarian world", who crossed into Italy with his "third-born son Libyus, called Hercules (the first-born of Isis)", his nephew, Italus (called Atlas), and their "close relative" Corynthus. Together, this group conquered the primitive tribes of Italy and established a series of "civilized" colonies whose capital was Biturgion (Viterbo). According to this version of Annius's tale, Osiris left his Italian empire in the hands of his nephew, Italus, and returned to Egypt, where he was murdered by Typhon. To the aid of the now oppressed Italian colony came Hercules Libyus, who defeated and killed Typhon; restored Isis and Osiris' son, Horus, to the throne; and pursued his uncle's accomplices into Phoenicia before moving on to Spain, Liguria, and other conquests.¹²⁹ So we see that according to Annius's original scheme, the origins of Viterbo and, by extension, of the earliest Italian or Etruscan civilization was almost entirely Egyptian.

Osiris's prominence in Annius's original history was probably inspired, at least in part, by the great interest in Egypt that erupted in the wake of Ficino's *Hermetica* translations. Indeed, the very form of the later *Antiquitates*, with its "ancient texts" and extensive commentaries, seems to have been inspired by these published works. To the reading public of the 1490s, the discovery of previously lost or unknown texts remained a real possibility, and we can only admire

¹²⁷ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 108–79; summarized by Giehlow, "Hieroglyphenkunde", 40–42; Stephens, "Berosus", 25–35; and Stephens, *Giants*, 134–35.

¹²⁸ Annius, *Viterbiae historia epitoma*, MS Vat. lat. 6263, fols. 346r–371v; published with Italian translation, introduction, and notes by G. Baffioni, in Baffioni and Mattiangeli, *Annio da Viterbo*, 13–251.

¹²⁹ Annius, *Viterbiae historia epitoma*, fols. 347–351v; Baffioni, in Baffioni and Mattiangeli, *Annio da Viterbo*, 80–97.

Annius's canny recognition of this "market" as a means to promote his own dubious claims. To this end, our "editor" takes great care in his commentaries to connect the evidence provided by his invented authors to passages from the established authorities. Among the most frequently cited of these "authentic" sources, especially as far as his Egyptian material is concerned, are Macrobius, Pliny the Elder, Josephus, and Diodorus Siculus.¹³⁰ Annius, whose knowledge of Greek appears to have been spotty, seems to have consulted Diodorus in Poggio Bracciolini's Latin translation, which had been printed by 1472. Indeed, this edition seems to have been the crucial source for Annius's Egyptological content, and it is not exaggerating to assert that Annius inhaled much of his basic narrative and methodology from the first five books of Diodorus's history.

Texts and citations are all well and good, of course, but what marks Annius as a truly original and audacious dissembler is the effort he devoted to providing his historical theories with "archaeological" evidence in the form of inscriptions. The majority of these seem to have been manufactured or commissioned by Annius himself in the early 1490s, since his first description of them appears in a short "epigraphic treatise", *De marmoreis Volturrhenis tabulis*, which he composed around 1492.¹³¹ The treatise, which is addressed to the eight governing magistrates of Viterbo, describes a series of marble tablets that Annius claimed to have discovered during his perambulations in the city and its surrounding regions. These include two so-called Libiscillan tablets, now lost, which Annius claims were inscribed in "Etruscan letters"; a second pair of "Tables of Cybele", inscribed in Greek; a single tablet containing a decree of the Lombard king Desiderius; and a final tablet that Annius describes as the "Herculean tablet of

¹³⁰ For the influence of Josephus and especially Diodorus on Annius's work, see Parks, "Pinturicchio's 'Sala'", 297, 300; Stephens, "Berosus", 88–127; and Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 274–78.

¹³¹ The *De marmoreis* manuscripts in the Vatican, MS Chigiano, I.V.168, fols. 32v–39r; and MS Chigiano, I.VI.204, fols. 58r–62v, have been published with commentary by Weiss, "An Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 101–20. For much of what follows, I am indebted the excellent discussions in Stephens, "Berosus", 163–76; and Amanda Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy and Its Legitimizing Potential: Annius of Viterbo, Etruscan Inscriptions, and the Origins of Civilization", in *The Afterlife of Inscriptions: Reusing, Rediscovering, Reinventing, and Revitalizing Ancient Inscriptions*, ed. Alison E. Cooley, 57–76, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, suppl. no. 75 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2000).

Osiris”, whose figured images are “all sacred letters of the Egyptians, as Pliny writes in book 35, chapter 8”.¹³²



Figure 21: The Columna Osiriana, Museo Civico, Viterbo. Author photograph

This final tablet (fig. 21) is the most significant for our interests. But a few words concerning the other tablets would not be out of line, if only for the light they might shed on the extremely problematic origins of the Osirian one. As noted, Anniius describes the first two tablets as having been carved in Etruscan letters, a script whose decipherment had baffled his contemporaries, including, as we have seen, Alberti. But Anniius marches ahead with supreme confidence and provides Latin translations for the short title of the first and a more extensive section of the second, which he explains as a *lapis incantatus*, or “magical stone”.¹³³ Turning to the Cybelline tablets, these are described, as noted, as having been carved in Greek, but Anniius is quick to note that they also contain elements of more Archaic letters, which he calls Ararathean and Maeonic, respectively. As Amanda Collins has shown in an erudite analysis of this material, both of these supposedly

¹³² Weiss, “Unknown Epigraphic Tract”, 114: “*De ultima herculea Osiridis tabula* [...] quae sunt omnino egyptiae sacrae literae, ut Plinius scribit lib. xxxv cap. viii”. As Weiss points out in his notes, 119–20n54, Anniius gets the Pliny citation wrong; he probably meant to refer to Pliny *Natural History* 36.14.

¹³³ Weiss, “Unknown Epigraphic Tract”, 110–11; Collins, “Renaissance Epigraphy”, 61, 63.

ancient scripts are basically the same, and they were introduced, it seems, to support Anniius's larger claim that the script of the Etruscans derived from the most ancient form of Hebrew.¹³⁴ Indeed, both of the tablets are presented as Greek "translations" of earlier inscriptions in the more ancient script. The first, now lost, describes the foundation of Viterbo by Janus and his son, Comeses, and the construction of the city's fortifications by Hercules the Egyptian. The second, which survives to this day in Viterbo's Museo Civico, provides an account of the marriage of Cybele and the Etruscan king Iasius, at which event their most distinguished guest, Isis, Queen of Egypt and widow of Osiris, baked the very first bread.¹³⁵ The surviving Cybelline tablet has been described as epigraphically unconvincing, since its Greek letters are carved in capitals of the type favored in Byzantine liturgical manuscripts, and seldom if ever on inscribed stones.¹³⁶ A similar slip appears on the so-called decree of Desiderius, which is carved in a Beneventan script that had been used in manuscripts but never on monumental inscriptions.¹³⁷

About a year after his first publication of the Viterbese tablets, Anniius was involved in yet another spectacular "discovery", this time apparently the real thing, at least in part. In the fall of 1493, at a time when Alexander VI was visiting Viterbo, Anniius was present at the (possibly orchestrated) discovery of an Etruscan tomb in nearby Cipollaro that contained a group of figured sarcophagi that he claimed to identify – from their Etruscan inscriptions – as commemorative statues of the aforementioned Iasius, Cybele, and Isis.¹³⁸ It is tempting to interpret this incident, which we know mostly from later accounts,

¹³⁴ Weiss, "Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 111–12; Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy", 61, 69.

¹³⁵ Weiss, "Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 112; Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy", 62–65. For the history of the tablets in Viterbo's civic collections, see Adriana Emiliozzi, *Il Museo Civico di Viterbo: Storia delle raccolte archeologiche*, Musei e collezioni d'Etruria, vol. 2 (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Centro di studio per l'archeologia etrusco-italica, 1986), 19–36.

¹³⁶ Weiss, "Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 117–18nn36–37; and Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy", 62–63.

¹³⁷ See Weiss, "Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 118n44; Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy", 62–63; and Emiliozzi, *Museo Civico*, 19–24. Weiss attributes the carving of the tablets to Anniius himself.

¹³⁸ Anniius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 341–68. An account of these events was published by Santi Marmocchini, *Dialogo in difesa della lingua Toscana* (1544). For discussion, see Stephens, "Berosus", 155–63; Stephens, *Giants*, 135–36; Emiliozzi, *Museo Civico*, 21–28; and Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 56–57.

as Anniius's effort to establish his credibility with the new pope.¹³⁹ In any case, he made sure to dedicate his preliminary study of the inscriptions to Alexander through its title, the *Borgiana lucubratio* (Borgian Study).¹⁴⁰ The discovery of Etruscan antiquities was far from unusual in this period. An Etruscan tomb richly outfitted with gold, vases, and sarcophagi, found in Volterra in 1466, is perhaps the most celebrated incident of this kind.¹⁴¹ Discoveries such as this were greeted by the inhabitants of central Italian towns like Volterra and Viterbo with a distinct sense of "local" pride as tokens of the community's revered ancestors.¹⁴² Anniius's approach follows this model, but is distinguished by his claim to be able to read Etruscan inscriptions. And though his work in this area was undoubtedly skewed by his larger agenda, he seems to have made some real progress in his study of Etruscan, as a number of recent scholars have noted.¹⁴³ That his readings were accepted in Viterbo, at least, is demonstrated by the town government's decision to install the "statues" of Iasius et al. in the Palazzo dei Priori in 1494–95. Some half a century later, they attracted the admiration of Vasari, who cited

¹³⁹ The Spanish jurist and prelate Antonio Agustín (1517–86) tells a somewhat similar story about Anniius. It seems that the wily Dominican had some of his fakes buried in a vineyard near Viterbo, at a place where some plowing was due to begin. He then showed up on the scene, claiming that his research had revealed that an ancient temple had once stood on this spot, and directed the workmen to the spot. See Antonio Agustín, *Dialoghi di Don Antonio Agostini [...] intorno alle medaglie, inscrittioni, et altre antichità*, ed. Dionigi Ottaviano Sada (Rome: Guglielmo Faciotto, 1592), 290–91.

¹⁴⁰ The treatise has been edited by Olof August Danielsson, *Etruskische Inschriften in handschriftlicher Überlieferung*, Skrifter utgivna av K. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala, vol. 25, no. 3 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1928), 13–29.

¹⁴¹ See John R. Spencer, "Volterra, 1466", *Art Bulletin* 48 (1966): 95–96.

¹⁴² For Etruscan "archaeology" in the Renaissance, see Chastel, "L' 'Etruscan Revival' du XVe siècle"; Weiss, "Renaissance Discovery", 119–20; Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel Rinascimento fiorentino*; de Grummond, "Rediscovery", in *Etruscan Life and Afterlife*, ed. Bonfante, 18–46; and Ingrid Rowland, "L' 'Historia Porsennae' e la conoscenza degli Etruschi nel rinascimento", *Studi umanistici piceni* 9 (1989): 185–93.

¹⁴³ For more on Anniius's Etruscan studies, see Stephens, "Berosus", 170–94; W. Stephens, "The Etruscans and Ancient Theology in Anniius of Viterbo", in *Umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Brezzi and Maristella De Panizza Lorch, 309–22 (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani; New York: Barnard College/Columbia University, 1984); Emiliozzi, *Museo Civico*, 26–27; and Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 56–57.

them as evidence of the advanced state of the arts among the ancient people of Etruria.¹⁴⁴

Annius's account of the "Herculean tablet" (fig. 21) in *De marmoreis Volturrhenis tabulis* is comparatively brief. He reports that it had been placed by "our ancestors" on the front of the *rostrum* (pulpit) of Viterbo's cathedral, which he identifies as the site of an ancient castrum (fortress) of Hercules.¹⁴⁵ After identifying the images on the tablet as "Egyptian sacred letters", he describes them in some detail, including the portrait heads of a bearded man and a nymph at the top left and right, and the birds, oak tree, and salamander on the lunette-shaped panel below. But he provides no further explanation of the meaning of "what they signify and in what manner they are to be read", deferring this to a future study that he calls the *Lucubrationes* (Studies), where he will prove that they commemorate the founding of colonies in the Viterbo area by Osiris and Isis.¹⁴⁶

The *Lucubrationes* never seems to have appeared as such, but presumably formed the foundation for the expanded account of that which appears in the *Institutiones Anniae* in the *Antiquitates*.¹⁴⁷ In this version, the erstwhile "tablet" is referred to throughout as the Columna Osiriana, presumably to conform more closely to Diodorus's description of the columns raised by Osiris in antiquity.¹⁴⁸ Deferring our analysis of the monument's actual character for a moment, let us consider a representative passage here, since it contains not only a description of the piece, but a portion of Annius's exhaustive (and somewhat repetitive) translation of its "hieroglyphic" message. He begins, as we see in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, with a slightly modified description of the tablet's findspot and a proclamation of the "column" as "the monument of Osiris' triumph", inscribed in "sacred Egyptian letters". He then proceeds to identify its imagery with reference to some ancient authorities:

¹⁴⁴ Vasari, *Vite*, ed. Milanesi, 1.220–21.

¹⁴⁵ Weiss, "Unknown Epigraphic Tract", 114: "Hanc ultima tabulam appelavi herculeam in lucubrationibus nostris, quia in Catro Herculis in ecclesia metropolitana pro rostris posuerunt eam nostri maiores."

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 115: "Quid haec signent et quomodo legantur, in nostris lucubrationibus etiam provabimus."

¹⁴⁷ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 331–90.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 380–90. The major sources for Osiris's "pillars" are Diodorus 1.19.20 and Herodotus 2.102–10, although Annius cites only Diodorus.

And Pliny, in his *Natural History* says that these images that you see are Egyptian sacred letters. Therefore, on this column there is a space, in the middle of which is the trunk of an oak tree, resembling a compounded scepter, the tops of whose branches form the image of an eye. These images are particular to Osiris, as Xenophon affirms. Both he and Macrobius, in the first book of the *Saturnalia*, confirm this, saying that to express Osiris in the sacred letters they carved a scepter, and they [also] represented him with the image of an eye. And by this sign they showed Osiris. Moreover, they placed on this tree trunk not one but many scepters, because he ruled not only one, but every part of the world, as Diodorus writes.

Therefore, these [...] effigies are read in this fashion: “I am Osiris the king, who was called against by the Italians and hastened to fight against the oppressors of the Italian dominion [...] I am Osiris, who taught the Italians to plow, to sow, to prune, to cultivate the wine, gather grapes, and make wine, and I left behind for them my two nephews, as guardians of the realm from land and sea”.¹⁴⁹

Turning from the text to the tablet itself, which is preserved along with some other Annian “antiquities” in the Museo Civico of Viterbo (fig. 21), this description seems to stretch our credibility to the breaking point. Indeed, modern scholars have long recognized that Annius’s “Osirian column” is an assemblage of two distinct – and decidedly un-Egyptian and post-antique – elements. The central section is a late twelfth- or thirteenth-century marble lunette, whose relief decoration includes the tree, birds, nests, and salamander that Annius identifies as the hieroglyphs of Osiris, his allies, and his enemies (more on these details below). This lunette is set rather awkwardly into the second component – a rectangular marble frame that has been assembled from several fragments, and which includes, in its upper corners, the profile heads that Annius identifies as portraits

¹⁴⁹ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 380: “Et Plinius in Naturali Historia has inquit quae vides effigies. Aegyptiae sacrae literae sunt. In hac itaque columna est spatium, in cuius medio est truncus et arboris quercus instar sceptri multiplicis, in quorum sceptrorum summo duo rami circulum faciunt instar sceptri multiplicis, quae effigies est propria Osiridis, ut ait Xenophon. Quod & Macrobius in primo Saturnalia confirmat, dicens, Osirim exprimentes Aegyptii sacris literis insculpunt sceptrum, inque eo speciem oculi exprimunt, et hos signo monstrant Osirim. Ponuntur autem in hoc trunco arboris non unum, sed plura scepra, quia non in una, sed omni parte orbis imperavit, ut Diodorus scribit [...]”; 389–90: “Sum Osiris rex, qui evocatus ab Italis contra oppressores Italici imperii festinus occurri, [...] Sum Osiris, qui docui Italos arare, serere, putare, vinitare, vindemiare et vinum conficere et eis duos reliqui custodes imperii mari et terra nepotes meos.”

of Osiris and his female cousin, “Sais Xantho, Muse of Egypt”.¹⁵⁰ The date of this frame is uncertain. It could be a late medieval or early quattrocento concoction that has produced for the tablet’s installation on the pulpit in Viterbo’s cathedral. A pair of profile heads of a broadly similar type can still be seen on a marble *ambo* in the Duomo of Ravello, and these have been dated as early as 1272.¹⁵¹ But most observers are content to agree with Roberto Weiss’s assertion that the heads were “made during the second half of the fifteenth century, when the lunette was probably inserted into [the frame]”.¹⁵² The implication that Annius had the heads manufactured himself cannot be proved, but even if this was the case, the Columna would have to be classified as a kind of “assisted readymade”, and not as an out-and-out forgery, like some of his other “finds.” As for the lunette itself, I am inclined to agree with Weiss that it was Annius’s “imagination” that saw hieroglyphs on it, and, at most, saw fit to enhance the impact of his “discovery” with some newly produced “portraits”.¹⁵³

However unlikely it may appear to modern observers, it is clear that in Viterbo, at least, the tablet’s authenticity was accepted enthusiastically by the civil authorities, who made sure that it was preserved and displayed along with the rest of the Annian “antiquities”. Indeed, as late as the 1580s, the Columna was installed with the other Annian tablets in the Viterbo’s Palazzo Comunale, where it was provided with a Latin translation for the benefit of the unenlightened spectator:

OSIRIDIS VICTORIAM IN GIGANTES LITTERIS HIEROGLYPHICIS IN
HOC ANTIQUISSIMO MARMORE INSCRIPTAM EX HERCULIS OLIM
NUNC DIVI LAURENTII TEMPLO TRANSLATAM AD

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 387. For the tablet and its original components, see Italo Falci, *Museo Civico di Viterbo, dipinti e sculture dal medioevo al XVIII secolo* (Viterbo: Agnesotti, 1955), 60–61 (cat. no. 38); Weiss, “Unknown Epigraphic Tract”, 119n53; Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 297–98; Emiliozzi, *Museo Civico*, 29–31; and Collins, “Renaissance Epigraphy”, 67–68.

¹⁵¹ For the Ravello heads, see Carla Guglielmi Falci, *Il Duomo di Ravello* (Torino: Cassa di Risparmio di Torino, 1975), 5, fig. 1.

¹⁵² Weiss, “Unknown Epigraphic Tract”, 119n53.

¹⁵³ The recent restoration of the tablet has revealed that a piece of the frame – the material is marble, possibly from Carrara – bears a fragment of Hebrew inscription, which most likely came from a Jewish tombstone in the area. This confirms the impression of an assemblage, but does not clarify the problem of Annius’s involvement in its manufacture.

CONSERVAN[DA] VETUSTISS[IMAE] PATRIAE MONUMENTA
ATQUE DECORA HIC LOCANDUM STAUIT S. P. Q. V.

[The Senate and People of Viterbo have erected here this very ancient marble, inscribed with hieroglyphs about the victory of Osiris against the Giants, in this temple, at one time dedicated to Hercules and now dedicated to Saint Lawrence, in order to preserve the monuments and glory of our very ancient fatherland.]¹⁵⁴

Returning to the 1498 text, it becomes clear that Annius's entire reading proceeds from his central interpretation of the oak tree in the lunette as a disguised representation of a scepter – or more specifically, a set of several compounded scepters – whose upper branches assume, in his reading, the shape of an eye – thus forming the hieroglyph for Osiris as described by Macrobius in the *Saturnalia*.¹⁵⁵ The rest of his “decipherment” draws from a variety of sources, real and supposed, including Lactantius, Tibullus, Pliny the Elder, and especially Diodorus, whose description of the hieroglyphic inscriptions of Isis and Osiris at Nysa provides the model for Annius's “translations” here.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Annius's sentences, and his use of the opening phrase “Ego sum Osiris” in particular, echo precisely the construction employed in Poggio Bracciolini's recently printed Latinized edition.¹⁵⁷ Underlining the point, Annius cites these very passages in support of his own reading:

¹⁵⁴ The inscription was added when the tablet was moved from the Duomo to the Palazzo dei Priori of Viterbo in 1581–87. See Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 296–302; and Emiliozzi, *Museo Civico*, 19–36.

¹⁵⁵ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 380–90, citing Macrobius *Saturnalia* 1.21.12, but not, significantly, Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 10 (354f–355a) and 51 (371e) on this point.

¹⁵⁶ See epigraph at the beginning of chapter 1 in Curran, *Renaissance*.

¹⁵⁷ Diodorus 1.27.3–6. For the model, see Poggio, *Diodori Siculi Historiarum priscarum libri VI a Poggio in Latinum Traducti* (Venice: Andrea[m] Iacobi Kathare[n]sem, 1476), fol. P.12v:

Ego Isis sum Aegypti regina a Mercurio erudita; quae ego legibus statui, nullus solvet. Ego sum [mater] Osiridis. Ego sum prima frugum inventrix. Ego sum Ori regis mater. Ego sum in altro canis refulgens. Mihi bubastia urbs condita est. Gaude gaude Aegypte: quae me nutristi. In columna Osiridis haec scripta dicuntur. Mihi pater Saturnus deor(um) omnium iunior. Sum vero Osiridis rex qui universum peragravi orbem usque; ad desertos indorum fines. Ad eos quoque perfectus sum: qui arcto subiacet usque ad histri fontes [...].

For analysis, see Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 297–302; and Stephens, “Berosus”, 167–70.

And [Diodorus] says in his first and second books, that [Osiris] ruled justly in Egypt, and set forth with great arms and armies, more for the benefit of the entire human race than for war. And so the following is written on a column in Egypt, as Diodorus recounts: “I am Osiris the king, and there is no place in the world to which I have not come, dispensing the things of which I was the inventor.” [Among these inventions] was certainly the domestication of the bull to the plow, hence he has for one of his names, Apis. Therefore, the Egyptians called the bull Apis, and the sacred and divine bull Set Apis.¹⁵⁸

Since the reader’s acceptance of Annius’s reading is obviously predicated on this resemblance, it is interesting to note that the Diodoran “translations” were considered genuine enough to be excerpted in one of the first epigraphic publications of the next century.¹⁵⁹ But the good friar’s translation of the other images on the tablet – the birds, bird’s nests, twisting grapevines and salamander, and the heads of Osiris and Sais Xantho – appear to be drawn almost entirely from his own imagination:

What is the writing that is carved on this Osirian column, and what is its order and significance? The answer is that this tablet contains three sacred letters of Osiris, and one of Sais Xantho. Secondly, it contains the hieroglyphs of the Giants overwhelming the kingdom of Italy, and of the Italians calling upon Osiris and of Osiris coming to their aid. Thirdly, there are the hieroglyphs of the settled and liberated Italy. There are, moreover, three hieroglyphs of Osiris: one denoting his universal and lawful empire, another of his journey in Vetulonia [Viterbo] in the company of Sais Xantho, and a third with the sign of himself united with his wife Isis-Ceres. The tree-trunk in the form of a scepter, whose upper branches form the image of an eye, signifies his just kingdom, as we have explained above. Since one scepter represents each of his realms, so many scepters represent the many parts of his empire all over the world [...] The second hieroglyph of Osiris is the head,

¹⁵⁸ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 382:

Et ut ait in primo & secundo libro, iuste imperavit Aegypto, & maximis copiis et exercitu profectus est ad beneficentiam humani generis magis quam ad bellum. Unde in columna Aegyptia, ut author est Diodorus, scriptum est. Sum Osiris rex, qui universum peragravi orbem, nec fuit in orbe locus quem non adiverim, docens ea, quorum inventor fui, scilicet tauros domesticare ad aratrum, unde Apis unum ex cognominibus habuit. Apim enim & Set Apim Aegyptii taurum & sacrum divumque taurum dicunt.

¹⁵⁹ See Petrus Appianus, *Inscriptiones Sacrosanctae Vetustatis, Non illae Quidem Romanae, sed Totius fere orbis summo studio ac maximis impensis Terra Marique conquistae feliciter incipiunt* (Ingolstadt: P. Apiani, 1534), cxxxvi.

facing right, with semi-long hair, which signifies his setting forth and journey, as shown above. This head of a long-haired man, moreover, is on the outside, and also above the tree on the left. This signifies Osiris setting forth on his journey outside Italy. The third of his sacred letters is the Calathus, in which are placed baby chicks.¹⁶⁰

After identifying the baby chicks as symbols of Osiris's instruction of the Italians in the arts of agriculture, Annius proceeds to explain the salamander as the symbol of the giants who enslaved the peoples of ancient Italy:

For the calling of him against the Giants, there are also three hieroglyphs. A serpent or crocodile-dragon occupies the base of the scepter. And the dragon signifies evil, as Diodorus says in his fourth book. Therefore, because this evil is on the scepter, it surely portends the tyrants laying hold of the realm of Italy. The second figure is of open-mouthed birds in their own nest. Their own nest signifies their own country, and the open mouth designates a crying out, a calling, even a speaking, as Xenophon says. There are, moreover, two nests, one on the right and one on the left. Therefore the birds calling out in their own nest are the Italians calling forth and beseeching for the aid of Osiris from both parts of Italy.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 387–88:

Quaeritur, quali scriptura sit excisa haec Osiriana columna, & quis ordo & significata. Respondetur quod haec tabula continet tres literas sacras Osiridis & unam Sais Xantho. Secundo continet literae sacrae gigantum opprimentium imperium Italiae et Italicorum evocantium, & festinantis auxilii. Tertia literas sacras compositae ac liberatae Italiae. Tres autem literas sacras Osiridis sunt, una universalis imperii iusti, alia peregrationis in Vetulonia, cum societate Sais Xantho. Tertio cum insigni sibi & Cereri Isidi coniugi communi. Signum autem imperii iusti est truncus instar sceptri, & in sumitate rami circunuoluti instar oculi, ut supra exposuimus. Unum autem sceptrum, unius partis imperium in orbe significat. Ergo plura sceptrum, plurium in orbe partium [...] Secunda litera sacra Osiridis est caput, facie dextra semicrinata, quae illum in profectione existentem significat & peregrinantem, ut supra probavimus. Hic autem extra atque, super arborem a sinistris est caput viri semifacie crinita. Quare Osirim in pe[re]grinatione atque profectione & extra Italiam significat. Tertia eius litera sacra est Calathus, in quo consistunt pulli.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 388:

Annius concludes by explaining the sparrows that feed the baby chicks in their nests as signs of Osiris and Hercules answering the call of the Italians, and the pair of larger birds as sparrow hawks that stand for Osiris's nephews Lestrigon and Phorcus, who were left in Italy to "guard the kingdom from attack from land and sea".¹⁶²

I have treated Annius's "translation" at some length for a variety of reasons, but most of all to call attention to its status as the first published exercise in the decipherment of a (purported) hieroglyphic inscription in post-antique times. If this is in fact the case, it could be said that the discipline of philological Egyptology began with an act of willful misidentification, hallucination, or outright fraud. In the end, it all depends on how sympathetically one wishes to categorize the "methods" of its author. But what of Annius's audience? Surely they must have recognized this odd little stone as a work of local and manifestly non-Egyptian manufacture. Or did they? We must remember that at this stage of the "revival of antiquity", let alone hieroglyphic study, the classification of monuments had barely begun to reach the level of systematic classification that it would obtain a mere half century later. And in Annius's defense, we should acknowledge that he does not describe the Columna as a pharaonic import, like the obelisks in Rome were known to be. The tablet in Viterbo is assumed to be something much older than these already ancient monuments, fashioned close to the beginning of post-Deluvian history by Annius's Etruscan "ancestors" using local materials and techniques. Indeed, in what appears to be a moment of unexpected reticence, Annius even concedes the possibility that the surviving Columna might be a later replacement or copy of a much older original. But this possibility, he insists, does nothing to undermine its "infallible proof" for Osiris's liberation of Italy.¹⁶³ In the end, what distinguishes Annius from his

Nunc de evocatione eius contra gigantes, tres sacrae effigies sunt. Serpens aut Crocodilus Draco iam initia sceptri occupans una. Draco malum significat, ut Diodorus in quarto libro dicit. Ergo quoniam hoc malum in scepro est, utique tyrannos occupantes Italiae imperium portendit. Aves in proprio nido aperto ore, sunt secunda effigies. Proprius nidus propriam patriam significat, & os apertum clamorem et vocationem, autem locutionem annotat, ut ait Xenophon. Sunt autem duo nidi altera a dextris altera a sinistris. Ergo aves istae clamantes in proprio nido sunt Itali evocantes et implorantes auxilium Osiridis: ab utraque parte Italiae [...].

¹⁶² Ibid., 388–90.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 390:

contemporaries is his willingness to put the oft-proclaimed universal legibility of the hieroglyphs to the test. He must have felt secure enough that his reading could not be seriously questioned; and, indeed, it is difficult to imagine who among his contemporaries might have been in a position to challenge his interpretation, although, as we shall see, not everyone was willing to be convinced.

As previously noted, Anniius had something of a sideline as a genealogist, in which capacity he provided an Osirian lineage for the “Viterbese” Farnese family. If, as is widely assumed, he provided a similar genealogy for Alexander VI and the Borgia, all literary traces of it seem to have vanished. But, as a number of scholars have observed over the years, the basic structure of a Borgian-Annian genealogy can be extrapolated from the pages of the *Antiquitates*.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Anniius’s entire enterprise could be described as genealogical, devoted as it is to tracing the origins and relations of the various postdiluvian kings and linking them to the prehistory of his native region. The connection between Anniius’s ancient worthies and the bloodlines of his noble patrons is not always evident to the modern reader, but the method is fully in keeping with a whole genre of mytho-historical genealogies that flourished in this period. For few indeed were the noble dynasties of Europe who were not open and accustomed to promoting their legitimacy through

Quo verò tempore haec tabella fuerit excisa patet quod primum sub Osiride. An vero haec illa sit, an ei vetustate labenti, ad eius exemplar suffecta, nondum compertum habemus. Existimamus tamen eandem permanere. Sed quisque opinetur ut volet. Sat est infallibiliter hanc tenere Osirim et eius in Italiam expeditionem.

¹⁶⁴ See Giehlow, “Hieroglyphenkunde”, 44–46; Saxl, “Appartamento Borgia”, 183–88; Mattiangeli, “Annio da Viterbo”, 260–69; and Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 165–76.

claims of descent from ancient heroes, princes, and gods.¹⁶⁵ During the quattrocento, discourses on the mythical ancestors of great men and noble families became standard elements in the funeral orations and other works composed by sycophantic humanists.¹⁶⁶ Using this method, even the relatively humbly born could claim some sort of noble ancestry. Anniius himself claimed to descend from the line of the emperors Antoninus Pius and Commodus.¹⁶⁷

But for the more distinguished families, like the Borgia or the Colonna, descent from a mortal Roman emperor was apparently deemed inadequate. Better to trace your family's origins even further back, to a legendary hero or god like Aeneas or Hercules. Anniius's Osirian and "Egyptological" spin appears to be an innovation in this field, but given the incomplete state of our present knowledge, we cannot be certain that he was not exploiting an already established Roman tradition. In any event, his "historical" genealogies provided a fertile source for the elaboration of such genealogies well into the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ For the ancient roots of this practice, see E. J. Bickerman, "Origines gentium", *Classical Philology* 47 (1952): 65–81. For the medieval and Renaissance periods, see Sez nec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 19–26; A. E. Asher, "Myth, Legend and History in Renaissance France", *Studi francesi* 39 (1969): 409–19; Frank L. Borchardt, *German Antiquity and Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Roberto Bizzocchi, "Familiae Romanae' Antiche e Moderne", *Rivista storica Italiana* 103 (1991): 355–97; Tanner, *Last Descendant of Aeneas*; and Roberto Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili: Scritti di storia nell' Europa moderna*, *Annali dell' Istituto storico italo-germanico*, Monografia, vol. 22 (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1995). For general discussion, see Peter G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 59 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

¹⁶⁶ John M. McManamon, SJ, *Funeral Oratory and the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 45–49, provides an excellent discussion of these orations.

¹⁶⁷ Anniius, *Antiquitatum variarum*, fol. 162v; cited by Weiss, "Traccia", 425n3.

¹⁶⁸ The Strozzi of Florence staked their claim of descent from Hercules Libyus on the evidence provided by Berosus in the *Antiquitates*; see Sansovino, *Antichità di Beroso caldeo*, 2r–v; and Roberto Bizzocchi, "Struttura familiare e memoria storica", in *Palazzo Strozzi: Metà millennio 1489–1989*, ed. Daniela Lamberini, 92–107 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1989).

For further evidence of an Annian Borgia genealogy, we need only turn to the imagery of Pinturicchio's frescoes.¹⁶⁹ For example, the initials of Alexander VI (AL. VI) that appear on the pediment of Osiris's throne in the fruit-gathering scene (fig. 13) establish a direct connection between the Egyptian king and his contemporary "descendant".¹⁷⁰ The clever juxtaposition of Apis and his forebears with the Borgia motto, *Pacis Cultori*, and the juxtaposition of Hercules and Apis in the final scene provide further evidence for the dynastic meaning of the cycle as a whole. Other details identified by Paola Mattiangeli appear to provide direct references to the Columna Osiriana. These include a medallion with male and female profile heads that appears on the marble frieze of the Sala dei Santi and the stucco bird's nests supported by winding tendrils that frame one of the scenes on the central arch.¹⁷¹

Turning from the visual to some textual evidence, we note that Annius dedicated the first edition of his *Antiquitates* to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, for whose interest he devised a genealogy of the first rulers of "Hispania" that conveniently established Hercules Aegyptius-Libys as the founder of the Spanish royal line.¹⁷² This same genealogy could be readily applied to Alexander and the Borgia, since, as self-proclaimed cousins of the house of Aragon, they could lay claim to the same lineage. We can only assume that this argument was presented to them with suitable gravity and auctoritas by Annius of Viterbo, theologian, historian, Etruscologist, hieroglyph expert, and master of genealogies ancient and modern. As the calendar raced toward the fateful year of 1500 it may have seemed, to both Annius and Alexander, that a new "Alexandrian" golden age was at hand.

As it turned out, however, both patron and courtier lived only briefly into the new century. Annius died in Rome in 1502, a victim, some believe, of the poisonous proclivities of the Borgia, although another report, identified by Ingrid Rowland, claims that he died raving in a straitjacket of chains.¹⁷³ He was buried in the Dominican Church of S. Maria sopra Minerva, a building that had been erected over the remains of the Roman Temple of Isis, where the rituals described by Boccaccio and Apuleius took place, and where so many Egyptian antiquities

¹⁶⁹ See Mattiangeli, "Annio da Viterbo", 260–308, for the most cogent arguments on this point.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 290.

¹⁷¹ See Ibid., 302–3, plates 12 and 14.

¹⁷² Annius, *Berosi sacerdotis chaldaici*, 290–307, esp. 299–300. For discussion, see Stephens, "Berosus", 44–46; and Stephens, *Giants*, 134–38.

¹⁷³ See Weiss, "Traccia", 436 (poisoning); Rowland, *Culture of the High Renaissance*, 54 (madness).

have been discovered over the years. We can imagine Annius's appreciation, along with a touch of déjà-vu, if he could have lived to have read the inscription on the base of the little obelisk that was found in the gardens of the convent in 1665 and erected in front of the church, on the back of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's elephant, by his patron's successor and namesake, Alexander VII (fig. 22):

In the year of Salvation 1667, Alexander VII dedicated to Divine Wisdom this ancient Egyptian obelisk, a monument of Egyptian Pallas, torn from the earth and erected in what was formerly the forum of Minerva, and now that of the Virgin who gave birth to God.¹⁷⁴



Figure 22: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Obelisk and Elephant* (1666–67) with obelisk of Apries (Minervan obelisk, 589–570 BC). Piazza di S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome.

¹⁷⁴ Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, I:97n4.