

Ptolemaic Statue Group in the Museo Gregoriano Egizio: Egyptian monuments, Roman Propaganda, Papal Intent

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If history and art do indeed function as mirrors that reflect our self-desired images back to us, then it is tempting—and a little frightening—to consider the messages that our own culture may find reflected in the ‘enduring appeal’ of ancient Egypt.¹

Popular interest in the myths and lore of ancient Egypt have caused basic elements of Egyptian iconography to be ubiquitously recognized, if not understood, by modern viewers. Surviving material remains from the civilization of ancient Egypt project the idea of a culture seemingly obsessed with death. Glimmering golden masks, bejeweled coffins, the pursuit of eternal life, are all ideas tied up in the modern cultural imagination about the marvels of ancient Egypt. But in order to understand the historical importance of Egyptian objects outside of their native land, it is necessary to attempt to reconstruct and understand the mindset of a society with different cultural values than our own, but also different from those of ancient Egypt. In essence, we must defamiliarize ourselves with the ancient Egypt we think we know.

In this paper, I investigate the reuse, repurposing, and reinterpretation of an Egyptian statue group during two periods of Roman history, Augustan and *Settecento* Rome. The group in question is composed of three over-life-size sculptures, one male and two female, now in the Museo Gregoriano Egizio (cat. nos. 22681, 22682, and 22683), identified as Arsinoe II Philadelphus, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, and another female figure with disputed identity.² Nearly nothing substantial is known about the lives of

¹ Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 287. I would like to thank the Art History Department at the Pennsylvania State University for their generous funding of my research and also to my graduate colleagues, in particular Brynne D. McBryde. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Elizabeth J. Walters, who has supervised my dissertation work and provided support both intellectual and practical. Finally, this article would not exist were it not for Brian Curran and I know would have been greatly improved under his guidance.

² For images see: “[Group with Ptolemy II](#)”, Vatican Museums, accessed March 7, 2018. Cat. 22682: height 276 cm, width 43 cm, depth 96 cm; Cat. 22681: height 270 cm, width 42 cm, depth 81.5 cm; Cat. 22683: height 270 cm, width 45 cm, depth 82.5 cm. Giuseppe Botti,

these statues before their re-discovery in the early eighteenth century near the Villa Verospi.³ With much of the history of these statues ultimately unknowable, we must rely on formal analysis and contextual clues to begin to understand their significance. It is difficult to put ourselves into the cultural mindset of the eighteenth-century archaeologist, unable to translate, or even consult secondary sources to read the hieroglyphic inscriptions. Ancient statues in the Renaissance were given authority and authenticated based on comparison to ancient literary sources.⁴ If, though, Renaissance Romans could not read ancient Egyptian writing, how did Egyptian sculptures speak, or find their voice? In what way—since it was not based on textual analysis—did the eighteenth-century collector interpret Egyptian objects? Despite the incomprehensibility of Egyptian hieroglyphs at the time, there was a rich tradition of Egyptological endeavors in Rome since the early stages of Humanism—both artistic, as evidenced in Pinturicchio’s decoration of Alexander Borgia’s papal apartments, and

Pietro Romanelli, Bartolomeo Nogara, Carlo Pietrangelli, *Le sculture del Museo Gregoriano Egizio* (Città del Vaticano: Tipogragfia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1951), 22 – 26; Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* IV (Oxford: Griffith Institute and Ashmolean Museum, 1968), 63; Michel Malaise, *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain. Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiens découverts en Italie* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 183; Anne Roulet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 102, 109; Jean-Claude Grenier, *Notes Isiaques* I (Vatican City, Tipografia Poliglotta, 1989), 21 – 32; Kim J. Hartswick, *The Gardens of Sallust: A Changing Landscape* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2004), 131–132, figures 3.38, 3.39, 3.40, and 3.41; for Cat. 22681 and 22682 only: Jan Quaegebeur, “Cleopatra VII and the Cults of the Ptolemaic Queens”, in *Cleopatra’s Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies*, ed. Richard A. Fazzini, et. al. (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1989), 48 – 49; Sally-Ann Ashton, *Ptolemaic Royal Sculpture from Egypt: The interaction between Greek and Egyptian Traditions* (Oxford: Archeopress, 2001), 84 no. 6 and 100 no. 35; Paul Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies: Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), entry A4, figures 4–5; Sanders Müskens, *Egypt beyond representation: Materials and Materiality of Aegyptiaca Romana* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2017), 164 no. 076 and 166 no. 077; for 22681 and 22683 only: Sabine Albersmeier, *Untersuchungen zu den Frauenstatuen des ptolemäischen Ägypten* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), catalogue entry 136 and 137.

³ Anne Roulet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 102 and 109.

⁴ For the reliance on ancient texts, see: Leonard Barkan, “The Beholder’s Tale: Ancient Sculpture, Renaissance Narrative”, *Representations* 44 (Autumn, 1993), 133 – 166.

academic, such as the mental gymnastics performed by Annius of Viterbo.⁵ Therefore it was the Egyptian-ness of these objects alone that would be the obvious basis of interpretation, with knowledge of their original purpose and context being irrelevant to the eighteenth-century viewer.

In 1710 building activity on the Vigna Verospi unearthed the aforementioned Egyptian triad, part of a cache of sculptures. A wide variety of sculptural finds have been unearthed at the site of these gardens, including: the aforementioned Ptolemaic triad, a personification of the Nile god Hapy, a statue of the nineteenth dynasty queen Tuya, a red stone hippopotamus, the *Dying Gaul*, the *Suicidal Gaul and "Wife"*, several monuments related to Dionysus, a Niobid group, an Artemis and Iphigenia group, an Orestes and Electra pair, the Ludovisi and Boston thrones, and fragments of sculptural friezes.⁶ The hodgepodge nature of these finds implies that this site probably was not specifically used as an Egyptian cult site—nor for any explicit religious function—and instead these statues should be interpreted as a decorative program. Based on the location of the eighteenth-century findspot, these three objects are thought to have been displayed in the *Horti Sallustiani*. However, the massive building campaigns of the 1870s, in which the valley between the Pincio and Quirinal Hill was filled with earth has left the topography of this area indeterminate.⁷ A complete study of the sculptural programs of the Gardens of Sallust is beyond the scope of this paper, but the triad is a useful case study to explore the multiple meanings of Egyptian sculpture in Rome.

Bernard de Montfaucon documents the Egyptian statues of Rome in his publication from 1719, *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*.⁸ His discussion of the Ptolemaic triad is entirely in relation to the cult of Isis, and he identifies the female

⁵ For the Borgia apartments: Fritz Saxl, "The Appartamento Borgia", in F. Saxl, *Lectures 1* (1957): 174–188. For Annius of Viterbo: 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, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement 75 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2000), 57–76.

⁶ Hartswick, *The Gardens of Sallust*, 83–142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁸ Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 2.2, *la religion des Egyptiens, les Abraxas; La Religions des Arabes, des Syriens, des Perses, des Scythes, des Germains, des Gaulois, des Espagnols & des Cathaginois* (Paris: Delaulne, 1719), plate CVII.

figures as representations of the goddess and the male as either Osiris or a sun god.⁹ He mistakes the forehead ornament of the male figure—a looped uraeus—as a fleur-de-lis. I would suggest that the implicit association between the fleur-de-lis and imperialism played an unconscious role in Montfaucon’s identification of this attribute. He also lists the hieroglyphs that appear on the male figure: a palm, eyes, an oval containing animals (undoubtedly the cartouche), an Ibis, a cross, a serpent, and classifies them as “unintelligible mysteries”. He illustrates the inscribed belt and backpillar of the figure of Ptolemy, and his fidelity to the monument is remarkable despite his inability to decipher the inscription.¹⁰ Montfaucon’s understanding of Egyptian religion and history was dependent upon its distillation through classical authors. Because of the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus, the hieroglyphic script as a whole was understood to have implicit associations with kingship.¹¹ Noting this association, it is not surprising that Montfaucon “misread” the looped uraeus on the male figure as an eighteenth-century symbol of kingship, rather than recognizing it as the ubiquitous forehead protective deity. Curiously, Montfaucon does not include the hieroglyphic inscription of the female figures in his illustration, even effacing the glyphs on the single illustration he provides of the backpillar of one of the female figures.¹² The hieroglyphs on the back of the two female statues vary, which could explain Montfaucon’s reluctance to illustrate them. Whatever his motivation, however, this omission serves to reinforce the association between hieroglyphic inscriptions and kingly dominion.

In his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* Athanasius Kircher, the seventeenth century Jesuit scholar, correctly identifies a connection between the ancient Egyptian language and Coptic. But his theory of hieroglyphs has proven false, as his translations were purely based on a symbolic interpretation of the symbols.¹³ Kircher’s symbolic interpretation

⁹ Montfaucon, *L’Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 2.2, 278 and Bernard de Montfaucon, *Supplément au Livre de L’Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 2, *le culte des Grecs, des Romains, des Egyptiens, et des Gaulois* (Paris: Delaulne, 1725), 130.

¹⁰ Montfaucon, *Supplément*, 129–130 and plate XXXIV.

¹¹ 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* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Folger Books, 1988), 345.

¹² Montfaucon, *Supplément*, plate XXXV.

¹³ Pierre Marestaing, “Un Égyptologue du XVII^e siècle: le Père Kircher”, in *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes: pour servir de Bulletin à la Mission Française du Caire* (Paris: Institute Françias d’Archéologie Orientale, 1908), 30.

completely obscured the fact that each glyph can function as many different things: a uniliteral, biliteral, or triliteral sign; an ideogram; or an unvocalized determinative. His ideographic interpretation of glyphs, although not faithful to the ancient language, allowed early modern translators to present symbolic understandings of single signs, mutable to the context in which they appear.

Rather than attempt to distort the hieroglyphs for some sort of symbolic purpose as had previously been practised by Egyptologists, Montfaucon faithfully records the inscription. However, his inability to accurately read the inscriptions resulted in what we would today classify as a misidentification of these figures. He identifies these individuals not as historical kings and queens, but instead as Osiris and Isis, figures he was familiar with from Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (*Moralia* 26).

Montfaucon's illustrations exaggerate the corpulence of these figures. Voluptuousness is a characteristic of Ptolemaic art, however a nineteenth dynasty statue of Queen Tuya (Museo Gregoriano Egizio Cat. 22678) appears on the same plate in a similar state of exaggerated obesity.¹⁴ In the plate, Montfaucon has depicted the svelte New Kingdom statue with the same fullness of form as the Ptolemaic figures—engorged breasts, distended abdomen, thick thighs, broad shoulders and arms. Even the admittedly fleshy Ptolemaic group appears adipose in Montfaucon's rendering, which swells the bellies, breasts, thighs, and arms of the figures. He also focuses on the extreme physicality of the bodies in his written description of the statues. He remarks that the statue of Ptolemy has breasts that are rather large for a man, but that the other elements of his body are those of a man.¹⁵ By overemphasizing the corpulence of these figures, and also somewhat emasculating the male figure, Montfaucon makes an implicit judgment of the objects that reads them as luxurious and decadent, common tropes of ancient Roman authors describing the Hellenistic Kingdoms, reflected in the physical form.

Francesco Bianchini, the excavator of the Egyptian statues from the Vigna Verospi, and Pope Clement XI made a deal to give five Egyptian-style statues to the Pope in exchange for access to water from the Trevi for a palace on the via del Corso, which was made an official act on October 26, 1714.¹⁶ Papal historian Ludwig von Pastor records this transfer of Egyptian objects to the Cancelleria: "The Pope also assigned to

¹⁴ Roulet, *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*, 108.

¹⁵ Montfaucon, *Supplement*, 130.

¹⁶ Hartswick, *The Gardens of Sallust*, 130; Mauro de Felice, *Miti ed allegorie egizie in Campidoglio* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1982), 25, fn 8.

the Palace of the Conservators some Egyptian statues of kings discovered in the Vigna Verospi, as also the antique objects found in Sallust's gardens."¹⁷ This may be a reference to the Ptolemaic statues, but von Pastor does not mention the presence of any queens, even though in total three female statues were found on this site, the two Ptolemaic objects and the representation of Tuya. Although not specifically mentioned by von Pastor, it seems that the queens must have been part of this purchase, and the quick acquisition of these statues by the papacy is comparable to Pope Julius II's immediate purchase of the Laocoön upon its finding in 1506.¹⁸ The ancient pedigree of the Laocoön and the ability of Julius to procure it enhanced the aura of this Pope's temporal power, and similarly, Clement XI's possession of the Egyptian pieces signaled the continuity of papal power with the inherited power of antiquity. Such papal patronage shows the Pope as a secular leader re-asserting the temporal power of Rome as *caput mundi*.

In addition to expressing the connection between papal power and the antique, the granite used for all three Ptolemaic statues can be linked to the granite obelisks found throughout Rome. Granite was widely used by ancient Egyptian sculptors, with ancient quarries in Aswan, Tumbos—the stone extracted from this site is often called gneiss—and in the eastern desert.¹⁹ A seven on the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, granite is difficult to extract but once removed from the earth was used for free-standing sculpture and architectural elements because of its durability.²⁰ Furthermore, once granite is extracted from the living rock, a process known as case-hardening occurs, in which the stone becomes even harder.²¹ There are several quarries in the area of Aswan, from which two different varieties of granite are harvested.²² Syene, modern day Aswan, marked the northernmost city of the Dodekaschoinos, a twelve-mile

¹⁷ Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archive of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, trans. by Dom Ernest Graf (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957), 512.

¹⁸ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 3–15.

¹⁹ Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

²⁰ Rosemarie Klemm and Dietrich D. Klemm, *Stones and Quarries in Ancient Egypt* (London: The British Museum Press, 2008), 245–249.

²¹ Michael J. Walters, "Reviving Antiquity with Granite: Spolia and the Development of Roman Renaissance Architecture", *Architectural History* 59 (2016), 150, fn. 6.

²² Nicholson and Shaw, *Materials and Technologies*, 35.

district of rich agricultural lands marking the border between Egypt and Meroë. The taxes from this land were donated to the temple of Isis at Philae by Ptolemy II, proving the king's interest in this far-reaching area of his territory.²³ By employing granite from the southernmost extent of their territorial hegemony, Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II showcased their ability to control this vast area and exploit the resources available therein, while simultaneously aligning themselves with the long tradition of pharaonic sculpture in granite.

Beginning with Augustus and continuing throughout the Imperial Period, Roman emperors appropriated Egyptian obelisks for their own political, religious, and aesthetic purposes.²⁴ Pliny dedicated two chapters of his *Natural Histories* to obelisks: chapter fourteen being a general summary of obelisks in Egypt, and chapter fifteen focusing specifically on the obelisks removed to Rome.²⁵ By including two distinct chapters, one about obelisks within Egypt and the other about those in Rome, Pliny intuitively recognizes that the different context of these monuments means different viewership, and different viewership results in a difference in interpretation and meaning.

In Rome, the obelisks came to signify more than simply an abstract idea of Egypt and became connected to the worship of the imperial family, to the cult of Roman solar deities, and to the triumph of Rome and of Roman ingenuity.²⁶ Throughout the city, Romans could see obelisks decorating public venues, such as on the *spina* of the Circus Maximus and of the Vatican Circus, serving as the gnomon for the *Solarium Augusti* in the Campus Martius, and at the temple of Isis in the *campus martius* (the *Iseum Campense*), near modern-day Santa Maria sopra Minerva. The movement and re-erection of obelisks was a feat of engineering, which in and of itself proclaimed the might of the emperors of Rome. Due to the popularity of the imported Egyptian obelisks, Romans began to quarry and create their own versions of the monolithic objects.²⁷ The taste for things Egyptian also made itself apparent in the import of

²³ Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, trans. by Tina Saavedra (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 86.

²⁴ Brian A. Curran, Anthony Grafton, Pamela O. Long, and Benjamin Weiss, *Obelisk: a History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Burndy Library, 2009), 36–48. By the mid-Fourth Century there were nearly fifty obelisks in Rome.

²⁵ Pliny, *The Natural History*, XXXVI.14 and XXXVI.15.

²⁶ Curran, Grafton, Long, and Weiss, *Obelisk*, 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

eastern cults to the eternal city, such as those of Isis and Serapis, into Rome and its territories.²⁸

The use of Egyptian objects and ideas “in exile” signified the inheritance of pharaonic power—geographic, cosmic, and temporal—by the leaders of Rome.²⁹ The original Egyptian context of this sculptural group is contested and the ancient Roman context can only be gleaned from historical narratives and the modern findspot. The idea of a second population in Rome is not a modern notion but has existed since antiquity.³⁰ Rather than a single, monolithic voice from the cosmic fugue of the past, Rome’s other population spoke in various visual vocabularies. Alongside patriotic Republicans, convivial nymphs, and stoic deities, there also existed foreigners amongst this second citizenry. Within this class is yet another taxonomic subdivision: statues made by Romans to represent non-Roman individuals or personifications as against those made in foreign lands by alien hands. Dacians bearing the weight of defeat atop the Arch of Constantine and Gallic warriors suicidal in defeat would fall into this first category. The colossal Ptolemaic group falls into the second category of statues made in foreign lands and imported into the eternal city.

An unknowable datum about these objects is the point of time at which they were moved to Rome. Jean-Claude Grenier asserts that the emperor Caligula was responsible for moving 22681 and 22682 to Rome, and the emperor himself commissioned 22683.³¹ Grenier explains that Caligula’s motivation for executing a copy of the Arsinoe statue would have been the parallel between the incestuous relationship of Ptolemy and Arsinoe and that of Caligula and Drusilla. The parallel is furthered in the posthumous divinization of the sister by the brother in both instances.³² While Grenier’s argument is intriguing, I hardly think it is definitive.

²⁸ Eric M. Orlin, “Octavian and Egyptian Cults: Redrawing the Boundaries of Romanness”, in *The American Journal of Philology* 129.2 (Summer, 2008), 23–253.

²⁹ Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 4.

³⁰ Peter Stewart, “The Other Population in Rome”, in *Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 118–119. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 7.13 and 7.15, in which Cassiodorus championed the preservation of Rome’s sculptures, see the [eBook of the Letters of Cassiodorus, trans. by Thomas Hodgkin](#), accessed May 22, 2018.

³¹ Jean-Claude Grenier, “Notes Isiaque”, in *Bollettino Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 9.1 (Città del Vaticano: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1989), 8–35. Relying on Grenier, the Vatican gives this explanation for the group’s arrival and creation in Rome, see [reference](#).

³² The death and divinization of Arsinoe II is recorded on the Mendes Stele, see Sethe, *Hieroglyphische Urkunden der Griechisch-Römischen Zeit* II, 39–41; Serge Sauneron, “Un

There is no single use for Egyptian objects in Rome and a multitude of cultural perceptions should be explored.³³ Instead of focusing on biographical similarities between Caligula and Ptolemy, I examine the supposed ancient Roman use of these three objects prior to the Imperial period.

Although it is difficult to know the exact date of the move of the Ptolemaic triad to Rome, the appetite for things Egyptian among Romans is an indisputable motivation for the presence of these objects in Rome. The only definitive empirical information about these objects that cannot be gleaned from formal analysis alone is their eighteenth century findspot. The discovery of an obelisk in the same place further complicates Grenier's assertion that Caligula was responsible for moving the triad. The obelisk, now in front of SS. Trinità dei Monti at the top of the Spanish Steps, is not included in Pliny's list of obelisks in Rome.³⁴ It seems unlikely that Pliny, who died in 79 CE, would have excluded this object from his list of obelisks in Rome had it been known during the reign of Caligula.

The earliest known owner of the *Horti Sallustiani* is Gaius Sallustius Crispus and it is unclear who owned the land before Sallust. Unsubstantiated arguments exist that Sallust procured the land for his gardens from Julius.³⁵ Sallust's gardens became imperial property at the latest by the time of Nero as records indicate he stayed there.³⁶

Document Égyptien relative à la Divinisation de la Reine Arsinoé II", *BIFAO* 60 (1960), 83–109; Martina Minas, "Die Pithom-Stele. Chronologische Bemerkungen sue frühen Ptolemäerzeit", in *Aspekte spätägyptischer Kultur: Festschrift für Erich Winter zum 65. Geburtstag* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1994), 203–211; Hélène Cadell, "À quelle date Arsinoé II Philadelphie est-elle décédée?" in *Le Culte du Souverain dans l'Égypte ptolémaïque au III^e siècle avant notre ère; Actes du colloque international, Bruxelles 10 mai 1995*, ed. by Henri Melaerts (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 1–3; Branko F. van Oppen de Ruiter, "The Death of Arsinoe II Philadelphus: The Evidence Reconsidered", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 174 (2010), 139–150.

³³ For the multivalent interpretations possible for Egyptian sculpture in Rome, see: Molly Swetnam-Burland, "Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts: A Taste for Aegyptiaca in Italy", in *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World: Proceedings of the IIIrd international conference of Isis studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11 – 14 2005*, ed. by Laurent Bricault, M. J. Versluys, and P. G. P. Meyboom (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 113–136; and Caroline Vout, "Embracing Egypt", in *Rome the Cosmopolis*, edited by Catherine Edwards and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 177–202, especially p. 195–202.

³⁴ For the obelisk, see Roulet, *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*, 71.

³⁵ Hartswick, *Gardens of Sallust*, 9.

³⁶ Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae*, 66.10.4.

It would be provocative to suggest that the Ptolemaic triad was already present on this land when Sallust acquired the estate. Would this mean that Caesar himself moved these statues here, perhaps to make Cleopatra herself more comfortable during her visit to Rome in mid-46 BCE? Located outside the city walls, the *Horti Sallustiani* (perhaps in part identical to the *Horti Caesari*) would have provided a proper location for Cleopatra to stay, since foreign heads of state were not allowed within the sacred boundaries of Rome.³⁷

Caesar did have a statue of Cleopatra erected in the temple of Venus Genetrix. If the connection to Venus as divine ancestor of the *gens Julia* was the emphasis of the statue, and not the worship of divine Egyptian rulers in public Roman space, this statue was divested of some of its Egyptian political baggage. Furthermore, Ptolemaic queens had been shown in the guise of Venus (Aphrodite) since the earliest days of this dynasty; for example, Arsinoë II was assimilated to Aphrodite, sharing cultic and iconographic elements.³⁸ Thus the placement of the statue of Cleopatra-as-Venus can be seen as an attempt by Caesar to simultaneously flatter Cleopatra and her dynasty without implicating himself further in Egypto-Roman political affairs. Even if it could be definitely proven that Sallust's gardens had previously belonged to Caesar, including an identifiably Egyptian statue group in his own private gardens would seem an incongruously overt statement of Egyptophilia from the decidedly calculating dictator. Thus it is more likely, in my opinion, that Sallust was responsible for moving the Ptolemaic triad to their eventual findspot.

Primarily remembered for historical writings, such as his account of the first Catilinarian conspiracy, Sallust was appointed as governor of the province of *Africa Novus* (Numidia) by Julius Caesar. According to Dio Cassius, Sallust was a negligent administrator.³⁹ He amassed a personal fortune during his time in Numidia, and was able to procure the lands that would become his eponymous gardens. It seems hypocritical that Sallust blamed the luxurious and impious lifestyles of Romans for the civil wars that plagued the city in the first century BCE in his writings, while simultaneously owning a large garden estate devoted simply to the idea of relaxation

³⁷ Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae*, 43.27.3

³⁸ Maria Nilsson, *The Crown of Arsinoë II: The Creation and Development of an Imagery of Authority* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, Department of Historical Studies, 2010), 55; and Wendy Cheshire, "Aphrodite Cleopatra", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 43 (2007): 151–191.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.2.9.

and pleasure. Publicly disgraced by his actions as governor of *Africa Novus*, Sallust was only saved from prosecution because of his close relationship with Julius Caesar.⁴⁰ Given his precarious political position, I would argue that Sallust was responsible for moving the colossal Ptolemaic triad to Rome, in order to show appreciation for Caesar's intervention in his mishandling of the Numidian governorship. Outside the boundaries of the city, these Egyptian objects are distinctly marked as exotic, as against Roman identity.⁴¹ By installing the likenesses of Egyptian rulers, Sallust asserted his connection to Julius Caesar and his family and simultaneously flattered the dictator. This obsequiousness is in line with his positive portrayal of Caesar in *Bellum Catilinae*; the statues make physical Sallust's rhetorical praise of Julius Caesar. Caesar's exploits in Egypt resulted in the humiliation of the Ptolemies through the appearance of the Ptolemaic princess Arsinoe IV in his triumph of 46 BCE, and also the creation of political alliance and romantic union between himself and Cleopatra VII. Thus, the Egyptian figures in Sallust's garden play up to important events in Caesar's personal and military life, a perpetual expression of gratitude to the dictator for his aid in Numidia. Whether Caesar or Sallust was responsible, since the exact moment these statues were moved is unknowable it is necessary to consider the different interpretations the statues could have had at different time periods.

In 31 BCE, shortly after Sallust's death, Rome's power in Egypt increased significantly as a result of the Battle of Actium. Following the deaths of Cleopatra and Mark Antony the next year, Egypt became an imperial province. After this imperialization of Egypt, an increasing taste for things Egyptian and Egyptianizing permeated the population of Rome.⁴² The possession of Egyptian objects not only signified the triumph of Rome over the millennia-old empire of Egypt, the superiority of Rome over barbarian enemies, but also the display of such objects announced the close connection between their owners and the emperor himself.

One of the few known topographical features of the gardens is that a small stream, now known as the Acqua Sallustiana, ran along the valley between the Pincio and Quirinal.⁴³

⁴⁰ Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae*, 43.2.9.

⁴¹ Eric M. Orlin, "Octavian and Egyptian Cults: Redrawing the Boundaries of Romanness", in *The American Journal of Philology* 129.2 (Summer, 2008), 231–253.

⁴² Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 28.

⁴³ Hartswick, *The Gardens of Sallust*, 1. In *De natura Decorum* 3.20, Cicero names the Tiber, Spino, Almo, and Nodinus, and mentions the existence of other rivers. No definitive conclusions can be made as to whether any of these rivers are identical to the Acqua Sallustiana.

This is the likely location of the sculptural group within the gardens. In setting up the representations of kings and queens of Egypt next to this stream, whoever was responsible for moving objects here created a parallel with their former dominion over the Nile River Valley. This comparison is pushed further by the presence of a *rosso antico* hippopotamus and a statue of the Nile god Hapy within the gardens.⁴⁴ While this visual analogy is reflective of the true role of pharaoh in life, to watch over the fertile waters of the Nile, it is also a humiliation of the rulers—reduced to looking over a small stream that cannot rival the powers of the Nile, mere ornament in the garden of wealthy Romans. How curious and serendipitous that these Egyptian statues, who once reigned over the Nile River Valley and its life-giving water, were exchanged for the privilege of access to water in *Settecento* Rome. These statues evoke a specific exotic setting and the reach of the Roman empire to the extremities of the known world. The Gardens of Sallust were destroyed in the successive sacks of Rome in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries and fell into a ruined state until the Renaissance, contributing to the dearth of information available to us today.

After the fall of the western Roman empire these Egyptian objects fell into obscurity, remaining unknown until the eighteenth century. However, the obelisks in Rome were too large to be completely lost, although their original meaning had long since been forgotten. One obelisk in particular stimulated the imagination of tourists and Romans alike: the Vatican obelisk, an aniconic monolith.⁴⁵ Devoid of hieroglyphic inscription, this obelisk was a blank slate receptive to the imaginative interpretations of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Romans alike. The mid-twelfth-century guidebook *Mirabilia urbis Romae* identifies the obelisk as a funerary monument of Julius Caesar, with his ashes held in a bronze globe atop the monolith.⁴⁶ Magister Gregorius, the author of the *Mirabilia*, also mistakenly identifies this obelisk as being made of porphyry, an extremely hard igneous rock from Egypt, valued by the ancient Romans for its purple color, and thereby its imperial associations.⁴⁷ Although the stone is misidentified, some of the properties of porphyry are shared by granite, namely durability and hardness. The long lives of obelisks and of the Ptolemaic triad are in part possible because of the material from which these objects are made. Thus, the materiality of the stones created a pedigree of *antiquissimo* and it is their physical

⁴⁴ Hartswick, *The Gardens of Sallust.*, 135.

⁴⁵ Curran, Grafton, Long, and Weiss, *Obelisk*, 67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁷ Nicholson and Shaw, *Materials and Technologies*, 48–50.

qualities, particularly that of hardness, that gave them intrinsic cultural value during the Renaissance.⁴⁸ If obelisks held pride of place as some of the oldest and biggest antiquities within the city of Rome, then other objects might share this pedigree.⁴⁹ For instance, the Ptolemaic triad falls into some of the same categories as the obelisk: Egyptian in style, made of a hard stone, and monumental in scale—all members of the triad are deemed “colossal” although they are more accurately described as over-life-size.⁵⁰

All three statues are represented in a purely Egyptian style. The statue type, material, size, treatment of the body, and iconographic elements employed correspond with traditional Egyptian aesthetic conventions. Each of the figures maintains a strict frontality, arranged thus so the viewer—ostensibly, the one who presents an offering—directly interacts with the object. The three statues also share the same pose: rigid, striding forward, with the left foot extended out in space in front of the right. Emphasizing the frontal aspects, each of the statues has an inscribed backpillar, not visible from a frontal viewing point.

The first female figure, cat. no. 22681, is a free-standing figure with a backpillar. This object is identifiable as Arsinoe II Philadelphus, based on the presence of her name and titles in the inscriptions.⁵¹ When discovered in the eighteenth century, the statue was already broken below the left arm and at the ankles, the right arm was also broken off, and the right hand was damaged and has been restored.⁵² The left arm is sharply bent at the elbow while the right lays flat against the side of her body, but neither arm is carved free from the body. The left hand clutches an object, identified by Stanwick as a *menat*, under the breasts; while the right hand holds an enigmatic cloth object.⁵³ The backpillar has slightly beveled outer edges and is not visible from the front. The

⁴⁸ Michael J. Waters, “Reviving Antiquity with Granite”, 161–162.

⁴⁹ Miguel John Versluys, “Understanding Egypt in Egypt and Beyond”, in *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: proceedings of the IVth international Conference of Isis Studies, Liège, November 27 – 29, 2008*, ed. Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 19.

⁵⁰ 22681 and 22683 are both 270 cm tall and 22682 is 276 cm tall.

⁵¹ The queen’s name, (*irsin3t*), is preserved within two cartouches along with titles of the queen. See Sethe, *Urk II*, 71–72.

⁵² Sabine Albersmeier, *Frauenstatuen des Ptolemäischen Ägypten*, 372.

⁵³ Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies*, 99. For more on this enigmatic cloth object, see: Henry G. Fischer, “An Elusive Shape within the Fisted Hands of Egyptian Statues”, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 10 (1975): 9–21.

inscription runs in a single column down the middle of this pillar. Another inscription with similar content, name and epithets, is found on top of the base of the statue, running perpendicular to the left foot.⁵⁴

The queen is represented wearing a tripartite, striated wig, and a tenon is preserved on top of the head, indicating that originally this statue would have had additional ornamentation, perhaps in the form of the crown of Arsinoe II.⁵⁵ The forehead is decorated with a double uraeus, an iconographical element often seen on portraits of Arsinoe II.⁵⁶ The figure wears a tight-fitting sheath dress, which stops just above her ankles, barely hiding the body beneath. The deeply indented navel accentuates her rounded stomach and her unnaturally spherical breasts emphasize the slighthness of her waist. Her face conveys little emotion, the drilled corners of the mouth creating just the hint of an archaic smile.

The male figure, cat. no. 22682, too is identified by the inscribed name and epithet located on both the backpillar and the belt as Ptolemy II Philadelphus.⁵⁷ The dorsal support stops at the shoulders, and therefore is not visible from the front.⁵⁸ Both arms are held closely along the sides of his body, fists clenched, with no indication of movement. The figure wears a plain *shendyt* kilt, a traditional garment worn by kings, and a banded *nemes* cloth headdress. The *nemes* has a single-looped uraeus at the forehead, a type commonly found on Late Period sculpture.⁵⁹

Scholars dispute the identification of the third member of the triad, cat. no. 22683, with several claiming that this is a Roman copy.⁶⁰ As stated above, Grenier identifies

⁵⁴ Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies*, 99.

⁵⁵ For the crown of Arsinoe II see: Maria Nilsson, *The Crown of Arsinoë II: The Creation and Development of an Imagery of Authority* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, Department of Historical Studies, 2010).

⁵⁶ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 38.10; Leiden, Rijksmuseum, F 1938/7.20.

⁵⁷ *ptwlmys* and *mry imn*, Sethe, *Urk.* II, 71–72.

⁵⁸ Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies*, 98. Stanwick has confused the museum numbers for the statue of Ptolemy II and that of Arsinoe II, he reports them as 22681 and 22682 respectively, however Ptolemy II is 22682 while Arsinoe is 22681. He does not include the third member of this triad (22683) in his monograph.

⁵⁹ Jack A. Josephson, “Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period Revisited”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997), 7–9.

⁶⁰ Jan Quaegebeur, “Trois statues de femme d’époque ptolémaïque”, in *Artibus Aegypti: studia in honorem Bernardi V. Bothmer a collegis amicis discipulis conscripta* (Bruxelles: Musées royaux d’art et d’histoire, 1983), 114–115, in which he identifies 22683 as either Philotera or another representation of Arsinoe II; Jean-Claude Grenier, *Notes Isiaques* I, 21–32, who identifies

this statue as a Roman copy made by Caligula. Albersmeier agrees with this identification. Jan Quaegebeur identified this figure as a Ptolemaic princess, probably Philotera, the other sibling of the divine pair. It is nearly identical to the statue of Arsinoe in size, style, and pose, down to the placement of the hands, the held objects, and even the tenon atop the head. This statue lacks a complete inscription and therefore cannot be definitively identified. The inscription that runs along the backpillar does not contain either a name or an epithet.⁶¹ Although incomplete, what remains can hardly be classified as “garbled hieroglyphs.”⁶² What is there can be read as “hereditary princess, the one who sees Horus”, both of which are titles held by Egyptian queens as far back as the Old Kingdom.⁶³ In comparing the completed inscription of the female figures, both Arsinoe and the unidentifiable female are given the title “hereditary princess.” If the statue were a Roman copy, the commonality could be attributed to rote transcription from 22681, as the inscription on the statue of Arsinoe also starts with this exact grouping of hieroglyphs. However, the presence of the title “the one who sees Horus” is not found anywhere on the statue of Arsinoe.⁶⁴ Where would this title have come from if not copied, as Rouillet asserts, from the other female figure?⁶⁵ The title does appear in the tombs of Old Kingdom queens, ostensibly visible to the Egyptian sculptors at the time of this statue’s production. But following the law of parsimony, it seems most reasonable to assert that this was a title held by whomever the statue is supposed to represent, and a knowledgeable patron—be it a priest or a royal representative—was familiar with these Egyptian titles.

22683 as a Roman copy from the time of Caligula; Albersmeier, *Frauenstatuen des Ptolemäischen Ägypten*, catalogue entry 137, following Grenier, also views this as a Roman copy.

⁶¹ Sethe, *Urk.* II, 72.

⁶² Anne Rouillet, *Egyptian and Egyptian Monuments of Rome*, 109, uses the description “garbled hieroglyphs”, however, the hieroglyphs can be read as titles commonly held by Egyptian queens.

⁶³ *r-p^ct* and *m33t hr*; Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in ancient Egyptian myth and history* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986), 68, 79, 189; V. G. Callender, “Curious Names of Some Old Kingdom Royal Women”, *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 97 (2011), 127–142; and V. G. Callender, *In Hathor’s Image I. The wives and mothers of Egyptian kings from Dynasties I-VI* (Prague: Charles University Faculty of Arts, 2011), 328–332.

⁶⁴ Grenier uses the presence of this title to argue that the statue cannot represent Philotera, the sister of Arsinoe and Ptolemy, since this is a queenly title and Philotera was never queen. Jean-Claude Grenier, *Notes Isiaques I, 1 – 6* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta, 1989), 32.

⁶⁵ Rouillet, *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*, 109.

Although heretofore discussed as a group, displayed as a group in the Vatican, and sharing stylistic and material similarities, it is unclear if these statues were created contemporaneously for a common purpose. All three statues are granite, but the color of the granite is visibly different, even in photographic reproduction. The hue of the granite used for the unidentifiable female is considerably darker than either of the other two statues—rather than a granite with overtones of pink and sprinklings of darker inclusions, this statue is a dark greyish-brown granite with pink sprinkles. The second female, although a single block of stone has both fine- and coarse-grained granite. The left leg, right foot below the ankle, and the base are all this finer-grained stone.⁶⁶ The size of the granite crystals of the unidentified female figure are much larger than those seen on the statue of Arsinoe. Albersmeier suggests that this difference in material is a factor in designating this particular figure as a copy rather than a Ptolemaic original.⁶⁷ However, the simultaneous presence of fine and coarse grained materials, resulting in varied color, in a single sculpture is visible in objects of pharaonic facture, such as is seen on the “Younger Memnon.”⁶⁸ Thus, from a material standpoint alone, I would not suggest that the third member of the triad be judged a copy.

The provenance of these statues before their abduction and transport to Rome is nearly unknowable. No specific toponyms are preserved on the surviving inscriptions of any of the figures. Nevertheless, the hieroglyphs on Arsinoe make reference to the god Atum, whose cult center was Heliopolis, and thus it has been assumed that the group is from this city.⁶⁹ However, Dieter Arnold argues Heliopolis would not have been the original site for these statues, since the Persian destruction of the city in 342 BCE left it uninhabited and abandoned by the reign of Ptolemy II.⁷⁰ He also makes the cogent argument that Heliopolis no longer served as the cult center of Atum during the Ptolemaic Period, when much of the worship of this god shifted to Sais, Bubastis, and Pithom.⁷¹ These cities are in the Delta, and we know the Ptolemies

⁶⁶ Albersmeier, *Frauenstatuen des Ptolemäischen Ägypten*, 373.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ British Museum EA19. Thierry de Putter and Christina Karlhausen, *Les pierres utilisées dans la sculpture et l'architecture de l'Égypte pharaonique: guide pratique illustré* (Bruxelles: Connaissance de l'Égypte ancienne, 1992), 82.

⁶⁹ Sethe, *Urk. II*, 72, nb *Bwy i-r-sn-3wy mr.sn tm nb Bwy [iwnw]*. Sethe has reconstructed the last word.

⁷⁰ Dieter Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 158, fn. 72.

patronized them, so perhaps the group originated there. I have therefore referred to this group as Ptolemaic rather than Heliopolitan throughout this paper.

During his tour of Egypt with the prefect Aelius Gallus, Strabo traveled the length of the Nile River from the Delta to Syene (modern day Aswan). In the seventeenth book of his encyclopedic *Geographica*, he chronicles important historical information—more lore than historical fact—about the imperial province within a generation or two of its addition to the Roman Empire.⁷² He describes the cityscape of Heliopolis, once a bustling center of priestly activities such as philosophy and astronomy, as being devoid of these endeavors.⁷³ Nonetheless, he does record priests who perform sacrifices and some others who explain the rituals to foreigners (ξένοις).⁷⁴ The priests' cognizance of the presence of a population of others, alien to the beliefs and daily temple practice of Egyptian religion, illustrates the fact that ancient Egyptians were aware that meaning is mutable, and that that meaning shifts based on the experiences and knowledge of the viewer.

Unfortunately, the exact context from which the statues were removed is ultimately unknowable. However, some basic conclusions can be drawn. First, these statues are from an Egyptian temple context most likely from a site in the Delta, where most of Ptolemy II's building activities were confined—with the exception of his construction of the temple of Isis on the island of Philae. Second, the Egyptian context, traditional pharaonic pose and style of the objects imply that the original audience can also be assumed to be mostly native Egyptians. The erection of votive statues of the king and queen (or queens) would be the means by which these rulers showcased their dominion over previous foreign conquerors, thus outdoing former foreign invaders, regardless of the site. By placing representations of themselves in temples, perpetually presenting and receiving offerings, the Ptolemaic royal couple self-identified as native Egyptian rulers performing the necessary duties to maintain an ordered cosmos in a way that would have been understood by the native populace.

Until 1822, when Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered hieroglyphs, this statue group was open to the interpretation of the eighteenth-century viewer—like obelisks before them, identity was in the eye of the beholder. Despite not being able to read the inscriptions, the hieroglyphs themselves held implicit associations with sacredness and

⁷² The date of *Geographica* is widely disputed. See Daniela Dueck, "The Date and Method of Composition of Strabo's 'Geography'", *Hermes* 127, vol. 4 (4th Qtr., 1999), 467–478.

⁷³ *Geographica* 17.1.29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

kingship, as demonstrated above. Thus the male figure is not only a king of Egypt, but the uraeus misidentified as a fleur-de-lis symbol and the hieroglyphs themselves have connotations of universal kingship. Therefore, the Pope's acquisition of the object asserts his supremacy over all kings, as the vicar of Christ, he proclaims his transcendence of the temporal and geographical limitations that impose themselves on earthly rulers.

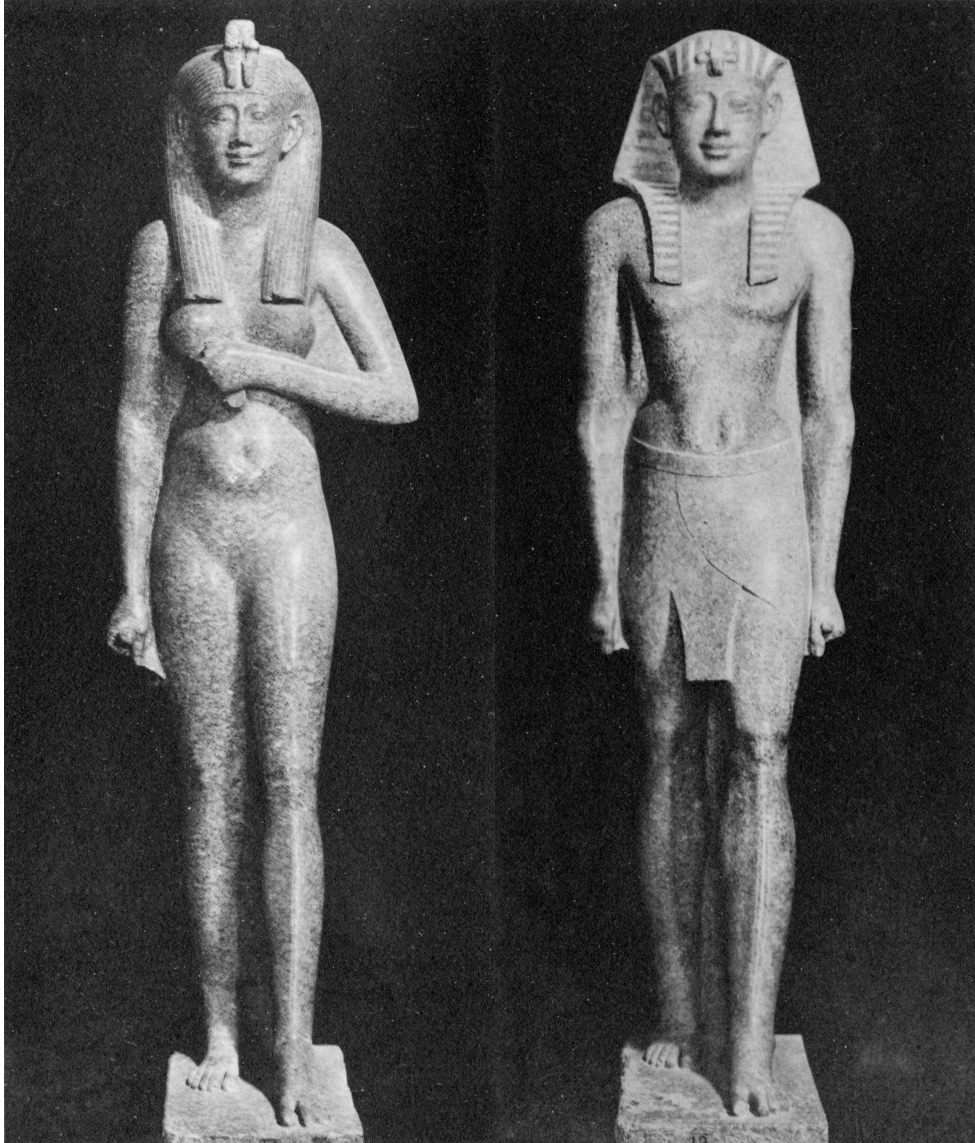
One Egyptian queen in particular looms over the history of Rome, Cleopatra VII Philopator. In the taxonomic mind of the ancient Romans, who are a few steps removed from Egyptian culture, the difference between queen, Egyptian, Ptolemaic, Arsinoe II Philadelphus, and queen, Egyptian, Ptolemaic, Cleopatra VII Philopator, is only barely significant. Thus, the identities of these two Ptolemaic queens easily collapse into one another within the Roman imagination. Furthermore, the latter queen adopted much of the iconographic elements and titular designations of her third-century ancestor, intentionally encouraging temporal confusion.⁷⁵ By acquiring these Egyptian queens, Pope Clement XI participated in a dialogue with Renaissance popes, possessing the body of "Cleopatra" and projecting his own self-aggrandizing sense of papal power.⁷⁶ Montfaucon, too, was aware of the collapsing identity of Cleopatra into Isis. Montfaucon notes that, according to Plutarch, Cleopatra wore the sacred costume of Isis and was called "new Isis" in her titulary.⁷⁷ Thus, in identifying the Ptolemaic female figures as Isis, Montfaucon, unwittingly or not, reinforced Cleopatra's self-identification as both Arsinoe II and Isis. This statue group has become who and what it needed to be for each set of viewers who encountered it throughout its history. Individual viewers brought their own specific knowledge, assumptions, and context to their encounters with this group and interpreted them accordingly. This process continues today with our own interpretations being rooted in knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphs, archaeological records, and a potentially more "authentic" understanding of the ancient Egyptian perspective of these objects.

⁷⁵ Jan Quaegebeur, "Cleopatra VII and the Cults of Ptolemaic Queens", in *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies*, ed. by Richard A. Fazzini, et. al. (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 41–54; Sally-Ann Ashton, "Identifying the Egyptian-style Ptolemaic queens", in *Cleopatra of Egypt: from History to Myth*, ed. by Susan Walker and Peter Higgs (London: The British Museum, 2001), 148–155, especially 152–154.

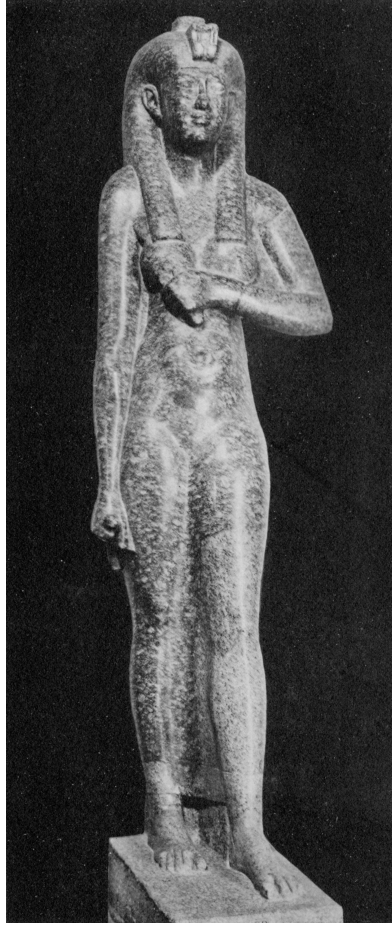
⁷⁶ Brian A. Curran, "Love, Triumph, Tragedy: Cleopatra and High Renaissance Rome", in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret M. Miles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 96–131.

⁷⁷ Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 2.1, 323.

Further topographical and archaeological work and archival research could reveal more information about the Gardens of Sallust and the objects found therein. As more information is known, the interpretation of these objects will continue to shift, with the meaning of these monuments not inherent but rather applied based on the cultural perceptions, values, and knowledge of the viewer.



Arsinoe II (left, cat. no. 22681) and Ptolemy II (right, cat. no. 22682)
from Giuseppe Botti and Pietro Romanelli, *Le sculture del Museo Gregoriano Egizio* (Città
del Vaticano, 1951), plate XXIII.



Philotera (cat. no. 22683) from Giuseppe Botti and Pietro Romanelli, *Le sculture del Museo Gregoriano Egizio* (Città del Vaticano, 1951), plate XXIII.