Aegyptiaca Byzantina
Egyptian Imports in Aphrodisias, Deep History and Ancient Wisdom[1]

Ine Jacobs and Hugh Jeffery

Introduction

Almost forty years ago, excavators at the ancient city of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor made an unexpected discovery. Amid the destruction collapse of a late antique house were two small artefacts of obviously Egyptian manufacture: a statuette of a seated female, probably the goddess Isis or Ma'at in green diorite, and a faïence shabti (Figs 1, 2). Neither piece is complete. The shabti is broken at the knees and the statuette is missing its head. The damage is likely to have been the result of the violent circumstances of their deposition. From their condition and position within the collapse deposit it could be inferred that the two objects were present on an upper storey of a house at the moment of its destruction by fire, an event that occurred sometime in the seventh century AD.

After a brief introduction to the house, its spatial divisions and the material culture assemblage present at the moment of its destruction, we investigate the potential routes through which the *aegyptiaca* travelled to Aphrodisias, a site located about 140 km inland from the west coast of Asia Minor. The Aphrodisian finds are contextualised with reference to objects of Egyptian manufacture discovered in similar contexts across Asia Minor, often in coastal regions. We consider the effects the statuettes may have had on their Aphrodisian viewers, and in particular how they thrust Egypt into a late antique household. Which interpretations of these objects

[1] This publication arises from research funded by the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund. The authors are most grateful to R.R.R. Smith, Director of the Aphrodisias Excavations, for the invitation to examine and publish this material and for advice given. We would also like to thank John Baines and Jack Josephson for checking the identification and dating of the objects, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. Research of the House of Kybele at Aphrodisias is supported by the British Institute at Ankara, the Friends of Aphrodisias Trust in London, the Headley Trust and the Malcolm H. Wiener Foundation. All errors are our own.

were available to a late antique observer? A final section returns to the immediate find context, considering how the associations of such exotic objects shifted as they were retained by multiple generations of a single household. The statuettes themselves are briefly presented in an Appendix, but issues of workmanship, style or exact dating are not at the centre of this paper. We can assume that such detailed knowledge would have been unavailable and probably also irrelevant to the citizens of late antique Aphrodisias.[2]

As Miguel Versluys notes in the first issue of this journal, historically the study of ancient *aegyptiaca* has addressed two principal reception contexts: the Archaic Aegean and Roman Italy.[3] Rome and the Vesuvian cities loom large in the latter tradition, and much debate concerns the relationship between Egyptian visual culture, the cults of the *Gens Isiaca* and the celebration of Roman imperial rule. *Aegyptiaca* in late antiquity are fewer and have received less scholarly attention. The evidence remains concentrated within the city of Rome and, with an even narrower focus, the Esquiline hill. The Egyptianising *opus sectile* compositions of the Basilica of Junius Bassus (AD 331) are often cited as the final instance of the deliberate imitation of ancient Egyptian art in the western Mediterranean prior to the Renaissance. Objects of genuine Egyptian manufacture found in domestic contexts in the city tend to be interpreted with reference to the reactionary aristocratic paganism of the so-called "Circle of Symmachus".[4] This framework positions the fourth-century material as an epilogue to a long narrative of appreciation and appropriation of ancient Egypt in the city of Rome.

[2] Stephanie Pearson, *The Triumph and Trade of Egyptian Objects in Rome: Collecting Art in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 11.
[3] Miguel John Versluys, "Exploring Aegyptiaca and their Material Agency throughout Global History", *Aegyptiaca. Journal of the History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt* 1 (2017), 133, doi.org/10.11588/aegyp.2017.1.40167.
[4] Carla Sfameni, "Isis, Cybele and other Oriental Gods in Rome in Late Antiquity: "Private" Contexts and the Role of Senatorial Aristocracy", in *Demeter, Isis, Vesta and Cybele, Studies in Greek and Roman Religion in Honour of Giulia Sfameni Gasparro* (*Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beitrage* (*PAwB*) 36), ed. Attilio Mastrocinque and Concetta G. Scibona (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 2012), 119–38. For a strong critique against the notion of a cultural offensive spearheaded by Symmachus, see Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 353–98.

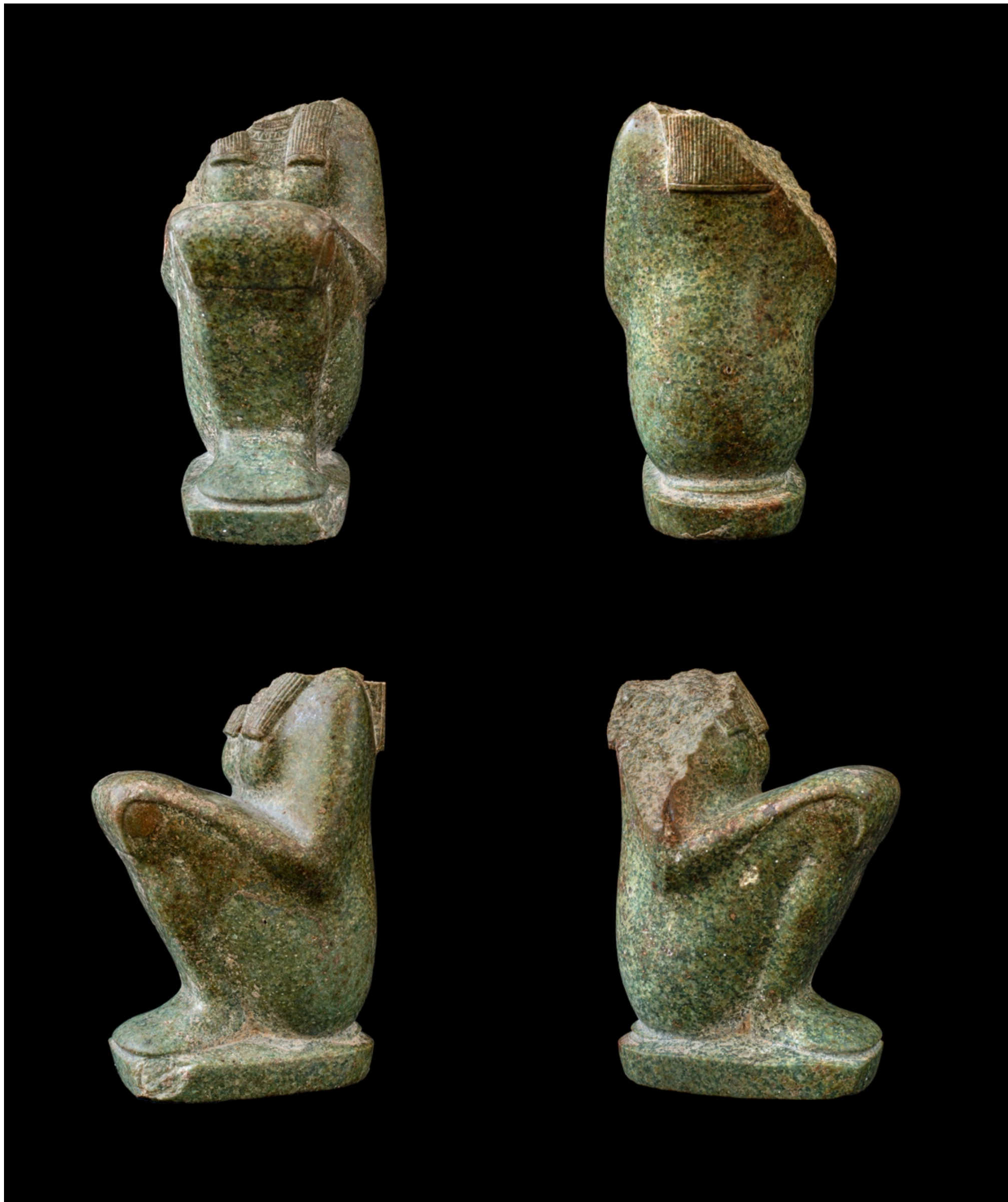

Fig. 1: Diorite statuette of a seated female found in the 1984 House of Kybele excavations, front, back and side views (11.3 x 5 x 8.9 cm).
Photographs © Aphrodisias Excavations.

Fig. 2: Faïence shabti found in the 1985 House of Kybele excavations, front and back view (7.7 x 3.8 x 2.8 cm). Photographs © Aphrodisias Excavations.

The *aegyptiaca* found at Aphrodisias do not fit such a framework. Not only were they found far away from Rome, in the region of Asia Minor where Roman *aegyptiaca* were more unusual,[5] they also suggest a different reception of Egypt in late antiquity. This later period needs to be considered less as epilogue and more as a different chapter, with fresh themes and debates pertinent to contemporary cultural and religious currents. We therefore propose to discuss these receptions under the rubric of *Aegyptiaca Byzantina* in order to underline the distinction. There were contemporary reasons to be interested in Egypt in late antiquity. The assimilation of Judeo-Christian traditions into the mainstream of intellectual culture also brought a renewed interest in the deep antiquity of Pharaonic Egypt as the geographic and temporal setting of the Old Testament. This interest was not restricted to the scholarly pursuits of chronographers; it extended to assumptions that pilgrims brought to bear on the remnants of Pharaonic material culture, as well

[5] Miguel John Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana: Nilotic Scenes and the Roman Views of Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 241 (deficit of Nilotic scenes in Asia Minor), 321 (of *aegyptiaca*).

as to the popularity of Hermes Trismegistus and the Hermetica with Christians and non-Christians alike. The extinction of genuine hieroglyphic literacy moreover opened the space for new interpretations of the ancient signs that pervaded the visual legacy of Ancient Egypt. Hieroglyphs remained a source of fascination for a diasporic community of Greek philosophers working within the broad fields of Neoplatonism. We will be situating the finds from Aphrodisias within both this particular intellectual context and a broader late antique interest in Egypt.

Aphrodisias and the House of Kybele

Aphrodisias is located in the fertile valley of the Morsynos, a tributary of the Meander (Figs 3, 4). Continuously inhabited from the chalcolithic through to the twentieth century, the settlement reached its largest extent over the course of the first through the seventh centuries AD. The current excavations, under the aegis of New York University, have been ongoing since 1961. Today, as was the case in the ancient world, the site is famous for the quantity and quality of its marble sculpture. Quarries a few kilometres to the north of the site provided large quantities of white stone, subsequently fashioned into grand architectural and sculptural displays in a Graeco-Roman artistic idiom. Though the production of new sculpture decreased in late antiquity, the monumental cityscape was curated and maintained well into the sixth century.[6] Aphrodisias for centuries remained a prosperous regional capital, home to both Christian bishops and Neoplatonic philosophers.

[6] Andrew I. Wilson, "Aphrodisias in the Long Sixth Century", in *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century: Current Research and Future Directions*, ed. Ine Jacobs and Hugh Elton (Oxford: Oxbow, 2019), 197–221; Ine Jacobs, "Looking in Two Directions. Urban (Re)building in Sixth-Century Asia Minor", in *Cities as palimpsests? Urban evolutions in the Eastern Mediterranean* ed. Elizabeth Fowden et al. (Oxford: Oxbow, 2022).

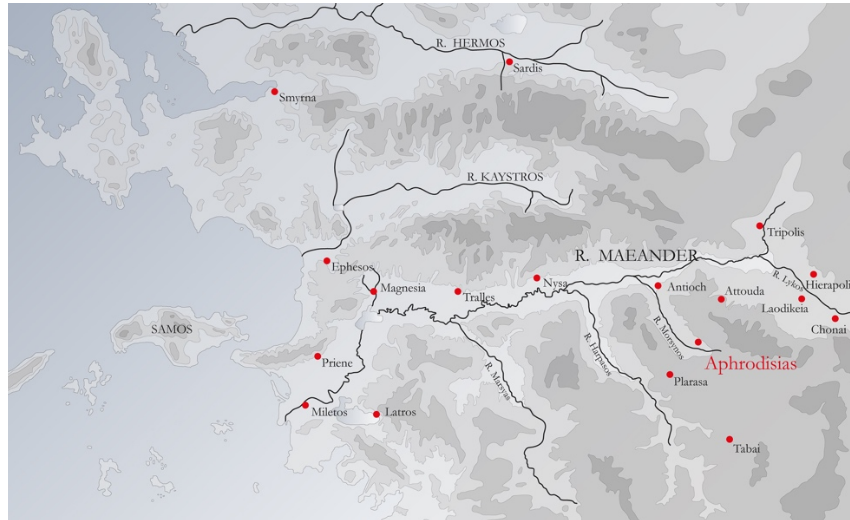

Fig. 3: Map showing the location of Aphrodisias in the Meander valley. Drawing by Harry Mark, © Aphrodisias Excavations.

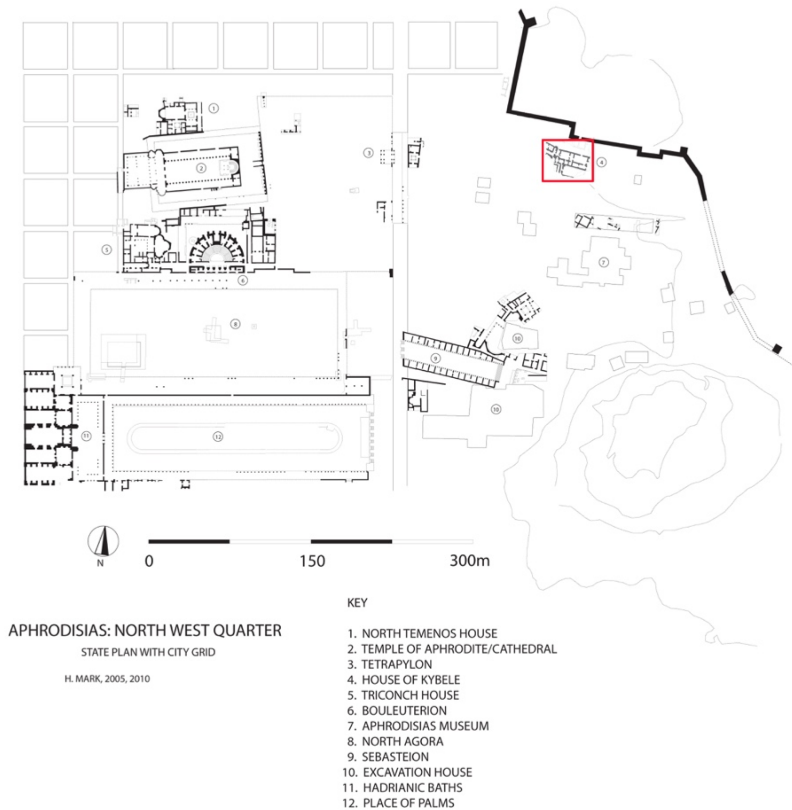

Fig. 4: The northwest city quarter of Aphrodisias with indication of the location of the House of Kybele. Drawing by Harry Mark, © Aphrodisias Excavations.

The House of Kybele was originally excavated under the name of the "Water Channel House" and has been re-named after a statuette of the goddess Kybele found near a niche on the ground floor. The house is situated in the north-eastern quarter of Aphrodisias, just inside the city walls, in the immediate proximity of one of the city gates (Fig. 4).[7] In 1956, an Ottoman-era drainage channel had yielded figural reliefs from the funerary monument of C. Julius Zoilos, a former slave of the emperor Augustus responsible for financing much of Aphrodisias' earliest civic infrastructure.[8] Several seasons (1961–64, 1966–68 and 1984–89) investigated the area and various structures were uncovered, including a city gate, a warehouse and a substantial part of a late antique mansion, as well as a paved east-west street (Fig. 5). Today's scientific work at Aphrodisias aims to document, study and publish the results of these older campaigns, and, where necessary, to enhance our understanding through further excavations. A new programme of work is planned in this peripheral neighbourhood. In 2019, the trenches were cleared of undergrowth. Old notebooks have been studied to create a preliminary outline of the house's chronology and stratigraphy as well as to establish an overview of the artefacts discovered in previous seasons. In what follows, we offer a brief survey of selected old findings as a framework for the discussion of the *Aegyptiaca Byzantina*. Research on the house and its associated finds continues and will be published in full in a future volume in the Aphrodisias series.

[7] Peter de Staebler, *The City Wall of Aphrodisias and Civic Identity in Late Antique Asia Minor* (Ph.D. diss. New York University, 2007), 166.

[8] Roland Ralph Redfern Smith, *The Monument of C. Julius Zoilos* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1993), 1–2, n. 1–2.

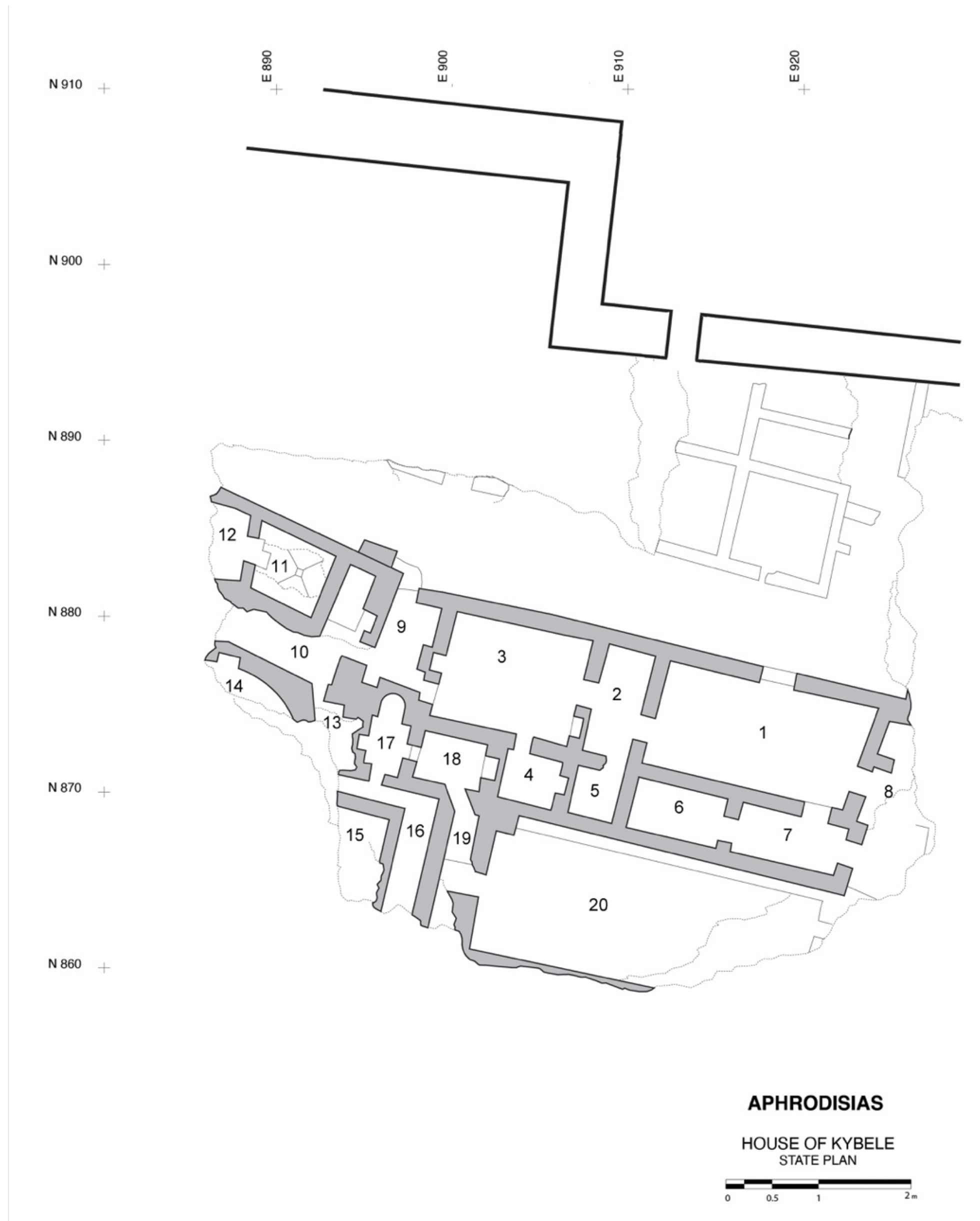

Fig. 5: Schematic plan of the House of Kybele with indication of room numbers. Drawing by Harry Mark, © Aphrodisias Excavations.

The urban framework of Aphrodisias was severely damaged in the early seventh century by an earthquake.[9] The House of Kybele, however, was already in ruins, having burned to the ground sometime shortly beforehand. The latest coins sealed in the deposit provide a *terminus post quem* of 614.[10] At the time of its destruction, the excavated portion of the house's ground floor had been partitioned into two discrete suites. The numbering system employed here follows the logic of the partition. Rooms 1–8 constitute the first suite, accessed through a doorway in room 1. Rooms 9–20 constitute the second suite, accessed through a doorway in room 9. Whereas the southern portion of the house was re-occupied and therefore presents a more complicated post-antique stratigraphy, above the latest floor surfaces of the northern rooms the excavators encountered a dense layer of debris, between 1.63 and 1.96 m in depth. Thick charcoal deposits, vitrified brick, molten metallic elements, burnt and friable fragments of marble all pointed towards a catastrophic fire. This deposit sealed extensive assemblages on the latest floor interface of the ground floor. The first suite (Rooms 1–8) appears to have been used primarily for utilitarian activities, including food production and storage. Here the floor interface yielded stacks of globular cooking vessels, transport amphorae, bronze pitchers and marble mortaria.[11] In addition to these intact vessels were several iron agricultural implements and two ceramic lamps.[12] The second suite (Rooms 9–20) retained a more representative aspect. Because of the subsequent reoccupation, undisturbed destruction assemblages were documented only in Rooms 9–11. Two ceramic lamps were recorded in Room 9, which apparently functioned as a passage.[13] A much larger assemblage of ceramic vessels was uncovered in Room 10, including seven lamps, four pitchers, two small double-handled vessels, a small bowl and a trefoil jug. The ceramics were concentrated close to the eastern wall of Room 10, which is

[9] Andrew I. Wilson, "Earthquakes at Aphrodisias", in *Visual Histories of the Classical World: Essays in Honour of R.R.R. Smith*, ed. Catherine Draycott et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 469–88.

[10] At least twenty-one coins were found on a floor interface, many of which had fused together in small stacks due to the heat of the fire. Seven of these were minted in the early years of Heraclius (610–641) (Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 263, 28–29). Wilson, "Aphrodisias in the Long Sixth Century", 213–15.

[11] Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 261, 103–21; 263, 35.

[12] Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 261, 97; 263, 64.

[13] Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 262, 11.

punctuated by two large niches flanking the entrance from Room 9.[14] Intermixed with the ceramic assemblage were fragments of two marble statuettes: a seated woman, wearing a mural crown, identified as the goddess Kybele, and a standing Asklepios, bare chested and holding a scroll in the traditional pose of a philosopher.[15] A marble base found nearby, inscribed with astronomical and magical symbols, in all likelihood supported both. The statuettes were probably positioned on a wooden support within the northern niche at the moment of the fire. Their find location in an open space near an entrance to the house suggests that they were openly on display.

Although no staircases were revealed in the excavated area, the depth and composition of the debris indicated that the House of Kybele had at least one upper storey. Both the female statuette and the shabti were recovered from contexts that would imply a position on an upper storey at the moment of destruction. The first was found amid destruction debris over the street immediately north of Room 3, the second c. 0.86m above the floor level in Room 4. Although the *aegyptiaca* therefore come from the same house unit, it would seem that they were not on display or stored together. They may not even have been in the same room. The total number of artefacts that can be attributed to the upper storey overall is low. In addition to the Egyptian statuette and the shabti, they include: three ceramic lamps; a bronze finial for a stylus; and five bronze weights, one of which bears an incised Christian cross alongside a beta. These were all found above the eastern Rooms 5–8.

The lack of a precise display/storage context is problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, it confounds any attempt to answer the question of whether the Egyptian statuette and shabti were implicated in domestic religion.[16] Such a

14 Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 277, 55.

15 Kenan T. Erim, "Recent work at Aphrodisias 1986–1988", in *Aphrodisias Papers: Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture*, ed. Charlotte Roueché and Kenan T. Erim (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1990), 9–36. See 27, 29, fig. 30; the statuettes are discussed further by Lea M. Stirling, *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antique Gaul* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 23.

16 Pearson, *Egyptian Objects in Rome*, 161–66 for earlier examples of Egyptian statuettes that may have served a religious function in Roman households. The alabaster statuette of Horus found in the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI 16, 7–35) in Pompeii offers a tempting, albeit very distant, template, amongst others because it as well was found separate from the more

function cannot be excluded. The nature and purpose of religious activities occurring in the domestic sphere in late antiquity remains poorly understood, as does the relationship between such actions and civic religion.[17] The find context of the statuettes of Kybele and Asklepios on the ground floor, set on a base inscribed with astronomical symbols, probably positioned within a niche, and discovered together with several lamps, suggests that cultic activity of some sort was still taking place in the House of Kybele in the seventh century. Exactly what this was intended to achieve, or how such actions informed the religious self-identification of the occupants of the house remains (for now) unknown. Even if more evidence were to come to light in future excavations, it is unlikely that any new discoveries will simplify the interpretation of the *aegyptiaca*.

"Roman" statuary. See Eva Mol, "The Perception of Egypt in Networks of Being and Becoming: A Thing Theory Approach to Egyptianising Objects in Roman Domestic Contexts", in *TRAC 2012: Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference,* ed. Annabel Bokern, Marion Bolder-Boos, Stefan Krmnicek, Dominik Maschek and Sven Page (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 117–31.

[17] David Frankfurter's work has demonstrated the potential of examining domestic actions taking place outside of the official sphere in numerous articles as well as in a recent monograph: David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). For an exploration of relations between religion in the civic and domestic spheres see David Frankfurter, "The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces in Late Antique Religions: An Overview", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 10 (2008), 199–210. At the turn of the seventh century, civic religion at Aphrodisias was Christian, as testified by the abandonment of the name Aphrodisias in favour of that of Stauropolis, city of the cross (Charlotte Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions*, revised second edition, (<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004>, 2004) (ala2004), VI.49–54; Charlotte Roueché, "From Aphrodisias to Stauropolis" in *Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected*, ed. Benet Salway and John Drinkwater (London: Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement 91, 2007), 183–92; Marek Jankowiak, "Notitia 1 and the Impact of the Arab Invasions on Asia Minor", *Millennium* 10 (2013), 440.

From Egypt to Aphrodisias

We do not know where precisely the artefacts that were once kept on the upper storey of the House of Kybele come from, nor when they arrived at the city. It is possible that this happened more than a millennium before they entered the archaeological record. *Aegyptiaca* were already widely disseminated in the first half of the first millennium BC.[18] Thousands of artefacts of Egyptian manufacture, including stone statuettes and faience figurines, have been published from Archaic sanctuaries of female deities, including the Heraion at Samos, the Artemision at Ephesus and the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Miletus.[19] The famous block-statue of Pedon, inscribed in Greek in the seventh century BC, was discovered in a cave near Priene.[20] Although there is not much evidence of such objects having travelled further inland, that they might have done so is not impossible. As mentioned above, there was already a settlement on the site of Aphrodisias. In Archaic times this became the centre of the cult of a local Carian fertility goddess; by the Hellenistic period the goddess had been assimilated to the Greek Aphrodite.[21] The majority of Archaic *aegyptiaca* in the Aegean were found at the sanctuaries of female goddesses, including those of Aphrodite. An argument for the female statuette arriving early at the site of Aphrodisias could therefore be made, but it would be a lot more difficult to explain why a shabti was deposited at a foreign sanctuary. Moreover, one would still have to account for their retention in a late antique domestic context.

---

[18] For a discussion and further literature, see Ann C. Gunter, "Aegyptiaca. Investigating Style and Agency in the Iron Age Eastern Mediterranean", in *Beyond Egyptomania: Objects, Style and Agency*, ed. Miguel J. Versluys (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 71–86.

[19] Günther Hölbl, "Ägyptisches Kulturgut im Archaischen Artemision", in: *Die Archäologie der Ephesischen Artemis: Gestalt und Ritual eines Heiligtums*, ed. Ulrike Muss (Vienna: Phoibos Verlag, 2008), 209–21; Günther Hölbl "Ägyptisches Kulturgut in Ionien im 7. Jh. v. Chr.: Der Beitrag Milets zu einem religionshistorischen Phänomen", in *Der Beitrag Kleinasiens zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte der Griechisch-Römischen Antiken: Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums Wien, 3.–5. November 2010*, ed. Josef Fischer (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 181–209. Both with further references.

[20] Mehmet C. Şahin, "Zwei Inschriften aus dem Südwestlichen Kleinasien", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 10 (1987), 1–2; Olivier Masson and Jean Yoyotte, "Une inscription ionienne mentionnant Psammétique Ier", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 11 (1988), 71–79.

[21] Lisa R. Brody, *Aphrodisias III: The Aphrodite of Aphrodisias* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 2007), 1.

The shabti points towards another scenario. The context for which it was originally produced was most likely funerary. At least the shabti, and potentially also the statuette, might have been excavated from earlier Egyptian graves, turned into a marketable commodity, and sold across the Mediterranean from the ports of Alexandria or Pelusium.[22] A broad range of objects, many originating from funerary contexts, made their way to Rome and the Bay of Naples through such channels, especially from the end of the first century BC onwards.[23] The exact mechanics of these transfers remain largely unknown. Smaller artefacts may simply have been brought as souvenirs by individual travellers.[24] Some of these *aegyptiaca* ended up in sanctuaries, others found a place in domestic gardens, domestic shrines or elsewhere in the house.[25]

Objects with an Egyptian origin found in Roman contexts in Turkey have tended to confuse excavators. In 1927 the construction of a factory over the site of a late antique necropolis at Kürigin Kaleh (Yahşihan), near Kızılırmak in central Anatolia, uncovered a diorite statuette of a standing male figure dating to dynasty eleven (c.

[22] Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana*, 328–29 discusses the presence and thus reuse of objects from earlier Pharaonic periods in Alexandria. This is confirmed by finds of older objects in excavations, see for instance Franck Goddio and David Fabre, *Egypt's Sunken Treasures* (London: Prestel, 2008), statue base, no. 451; sphinx no. 452; obelisk no. 461. For the occurrence of *aegyptiaca*, predominantly shabtis, in modern-day Croatia, see the work of Mladen Tomorad, including Mladen Tomorad, "Shabtis from Roman Provinces Dalmatia and Pannonia", *Journal of Egyptological Studies* 1 (2004), 89–116; Mladen Tomorad, "The Early Penetration of Ancient Egyptian Artifacts and Dissemination of the Cults of Egyptian Divinities in Istria and Illyricum (1st Millenium B.C. – 1st Century A.D.)", in *A History of Research into Ancient Egyptian Culture conducted in Southeast Europe*, ed. Mladen Tomorad (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015), 167–200.

[23] Molly Swetnam-Burland, *Egypt in Italy. Visions of Egypt in Roman Imperial Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19–22 for an overview of how objects from Egypt reached Italy throughout the centuries before and after Actium.

[24] *Ibid*, 23–26; Pearson, *Egyptian Objects in Rome*, 123–25.

[25] Swetnam-Burland, *Egypt in Italy*, 128 for a shabti figurine found together with four canopic jars in a house at Pompeii. *Aegyptiaca* were also found in domestic contexts in other port cities, including Aquileia and Delos. For a summary, see Sanda S. Heinz, "Mutual Cultural Exchange: Egyptian Artefacts in the Roman Landscape" in *Meetings between Cultures in the Ancient Mediterranean: Roma 2008, XVII International Congress of Classical Archaeology*, ed. Martina Dalla Riva (Rome: Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2008), 24–33, 28 with further references.

2130 to 1991 BC).[26] A statuette dating to dynasty twelve (c. 1991 to 1802 BC), now in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum, was discovered during the digging of foundations for the house of an American missionary in Adana in 1882.[27] It was found alongside a "small Greek clay figure" amid the remains of the Roman city. Both the Kürigin Kaleh statuette and the Adana statuette have been considered as intrusive anomalies.[28] As Kürigin Kaleh had also once been the site of a Hittite settlement, it was assumed that the construction workers had dug to a stratum below that of the late antique graves.[29] However, all other finds appear to have been related to the necropolis. Even though it is impossible to pinpoint the moment at which they travelled from Egypt to Turkey, transport in Roman centuries is perfectly feasible and physical engagement with these objects in the Roman period is almost certain. Since Roman *aegyptiaca* are particularly prevalent in port cities, such a scenario is especially attractive in the case of the Adana statue.[30] That objects produced in Egypt occasionally did play an active role in Roman households of port cities in Asia Minor is confirmed by finds made in Terrace House 2 at Ephesus. In the final occupation phase of Unit 2, dated AD 220–270, a rare bronze statuette of an Egyptian priest (610–595 BC), the origins of which could be traced back to the Temple of Amon in Karnak, had still been on display.[31] In addition, a basalt statuette

---

26 Hans Henning von der Osten, "The Ancient Settlement at Kürigin Kaleh in Asia Minor", *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43 (1927), 288–94; George Allen, "A Middle Kingdom Egyptian Contact with Asia Minor", *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43 (1927), 294–96. The statue is now in the possession of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara: accession number 3477.

27 Herbert Winlock, "An Egyptian Statuette from Asia Minor", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16 (1921), 208–10.

28 Winlock found it "hard to believe […] that this statuette was the sort of thing that a provincial collector of Roman times would have imported from Egypt': "An Egyptian Statuette from Asia Minor", 209–10.

29 Allen, "Egyptian Contact with Asia Minor", 295: "That an Egyptian statuette of the Middle Kingdom […] should have been discovered amid Graeco-Roman remains is explicable to both Mr. von der Osten and myself only on the supposition that it was found at that period during building operations which penetrated into 'Hittite' strata lower down and was preserved as a curiosity by its finders".

30 See note 25.

31 39cm high. See Nicolas Flessa, "Der ägyptische Priester aus SR 12", in *Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos. Die Wohneinheiten 1 und 2. Textband Wohneinheit 2*, ed. Friedrich Krinzinger (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 670–76. See also Pearson, *Egyptian Objects in Rome*, 161–64 for a discussion of the statuette and its context.

of an Egyptian priest of the fourth or early third century BC was present in Unit 6 when this structure was suddenly destroyed around AD 270.[32]

Seaborn trade and exchange between Egypt and the coastal areas of the Near East and Asia Minor only increased throughout the late antique centuries, as Egypt became the main supplier of grain for the new capital of Constantinople. The commodities shipped along the Alexandria-Constantinople axis could also make their way inland. At Sagalassos, a small city in the Pisidian mountains, Nile fish and Egyptian HIMT vessel glass were imported via the ports of Pamphylia until the end of the sixth century.[33] It is therefore feasible that the statuette and shabti of the House of Kybele made their way up the Meander valley, be it together or be it separately, in Roman or late antique centuries.

A third, very specific route through which the objects might have arrived in Aphrodisias is suggested by the extensive evidence for contact between Aphrodisias and Alexandria in the fifth century. Two literary texts, the *Philosophical Histories* (*PH*) of Damascius and the *Life of Severus* (*VS*) of Zacharius Scholasticus, illuminate strong connections between the educated elite of fifth-century Aphrodisias and their contemporaries in Alexandria.[34] As a young man, Damascius escaped the persecution of the Neoplatonist philosophers of the Alexandrian school of Horapollo in AD 489 together with his mentor Isodore. He wrote his *PH* in Athens sometime prior to the closure of the Academy in 529.[35] Damascius traces networks

[32] 7.6 cm high. See Elizabeth Rathmayr, "Skulpturenausstattung", in *Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos. Die Wohneinheit 6. Baubefund, Ausstattung, Funde*, ed. Hilke Thür and Elizabeth Rathmayr (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 367–433, p. 407 (S 52).

[33] Nile fish in Sagalassos: Allen Arndt et al., "Roman Trade Relationships at Sagalassos (Turkey) elucidated by Ancient DNA of Fish Remains", *Journal of Archaeological Science* 30 (2003), 1095–105; Wim van Neer et al., "Fish Remains from Archaeological Sites as Indicators of Former Trade Connections in the Eastern Mediterranean" *Paléorient* 30 (1) (2004), 101–47, see esp. 136; HIMT glass: Veerle Lauwers, *The Glass of Sagalassos. Typology and Chronology* (Ph.D. diss: KU Leuven, 2008).

[34] Robert first noted the relationship between these two "mirror" texts and their significance for the epigraphic record of Aphrodisias: Louis Robert, "Deux epigrammes d'Aphrodisias de Carie et Asklepiodotos", *Hellenica* 4 (1948), 115–26. Subsequent archaeological and epigraphic research at the site has revealed more of this intellectual milieu and its Egyptian connections: Charlotte Roueché ala2004, V.2–V.9.

[35] The *PH* survives only as a series of excerpts made in medieval Constantinople. Photius knew the work as the *Life of Isodore*, while the compilers of the Souda curated their excerpts

of established and aspiring philosophers operating across the eastern Mediterranean, weaving an autobiographical thread throughout.[36] Zacharias, a native of Gaza, had likewise been a student at the school of Horapollo in the 480s.[37] Between 512 and 518, he composed a hagiography of his former classmate Severus, then the controversial Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch.[38] The *PH* and *VS* therefore narrate sectarian conflict at the school of Horapollo from opposing Hellenic and Christian perspectives.[39]

Among the cast of teachers and students are several citizens of Aphrodisias. The most distinguished of these was a certain Asklepiodotos; the *VS* suggests he was the leader of the *Boule* of Aphrodisias, while the *PH* attributes to him a resurgence in (Hellenic) religiosity in the city.[40] A statue base found at Aphrodisias itself honours an Asklepiodotos as (re)founder of the city.[41] While in Alexandria, this Asklepiodotos met a younger man of the same name, an Alexandrian intellectual known for his empirical research in the field of Hellenic natural philosophy.[42] The elder Asklepiodotos persuaded the younger to return with him to Aphrodisias, where the younger Asklepiodotos married the daughter of the elder. The union proved infertile, and so the couple returned to Alexandria in order to seek a cure at a shrine of Isis at Menuthis. The miracle was effected, and the younger

---

under the heading *Philosophical History*. As the text's most recent editor notes, the *PH* is more prosopography than hagiography, and so we have opted to retain her use of the title found in the Souda: Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Damascius. The Philosophical History* (Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999). Section citations below refer to this edition. See also Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993), 1–29.

[36] Athanassiadi, *Damascius*, 41.

[37] *VS* §27.

[38] For the most recent edition and translation, to which section citations here refer, Sebastian Brock and Brian Fitzgerald, *Two Early Lives of Severos, Patriarch of Antioch* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).

[39] Edward J. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), employs the mirror texts to construct a microhistory of the conflict at Horapollo's school.

[40] *VS* §17; *PH* §86B.

[41] Joyce Reynolds, Charlotte Roueché and Gabriel Bodard, *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias*), https://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/insaph/iaph2007/iAph110068.html, accessed January 31, 2022, (IAph2007), 11.68 = ala2004, 53; Robert, "Deux epigrammes", 120.

[42] *PH* §80, 83, 85. Or, according to *VS* §17, "his use of incantations, enchantments and invocation of demons".

Asklepiodotos returned to Aphrodisias with his pregnant wife, where he headed an successful Neoplatonic school.[43] The *PH* tells how during the persecution of 489, Isodore wrote a letter from Alexandria to the "two philosophers in Caria".[44]

Both men appear to have survived to old age and to have died of natural causes.[45] An inscribed tomb monument found at Aphrodisias advertises that "in Olympus Asklepiodotos is among the stars – he who also built many splendid things for his motherland […]" It may be inferred from the latter part of the inscription that the father-in-law is meant.[46] The tomb monument took the form of a rectangular base surmounted by a tall pyramid (Fig. 6). This pyramidal form is unique at Aphrodisias, and it is tempting to follow Roueché's suggestion that it alludes to the elder Aklepiodotos' Egyptian connections.[47]

The *VS* furthermore narrates the story of a young man named Paralios, who came from Aphrodisias to study in Alexandria.[48] Paralios was one of four Aphrodisian brothers raised as Hellenes. Two of the brothers still lived in Caria; the third had converted to Christianity while visiting Alexandria sometime previously. Taking the name Athanasios, he had enlisted at the Henaton, a notorious monophysite monastery in the western suburbs.[49] Though his brothers in Aphrodisias had forbidden any contact with Athanasios, Paralios was soon drawn to the Henaton. Zacharias, author of the *VS*, employs a fraternal debate as a means through which to introduce a counter-narrative concerning the child of the younger Asklepiodotos.[50] According to the Christian text, the child was not born of a miraculous cure but adopted from a priestess of the cult of Isis. Persuaded by this

43 For a discussion and an impression of the physical appearance of such a school, see R.R.R. Smith, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits from Aphrodisias", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990), 127–55.
44 *PH* §112C.
45 *PH* §83B, 95A.
46 IAph2007, 11.69 = ala2004, 54.
47 Roueché ala2004, V.9. Pyramid-shaped stelae and tombs with pyramidal roofs occurred more widely in the Levant from the eighth or seventh century BC onwards, see Andreas Kropp, "Earrings, nefesh and opus reticulatum: Self-Presentation of the Royal House of Emesa in the First Century AD", in *Kingdoms and Principalities in the Roman Near East*, Ted Kaizer and Margherita Facella (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 199–216.
48 *VS* §12–58.
49 *VS* §12–13, 54.
50 *VS* §17–19.

version of events, Paralios denounces his pagan teachers and publicly insults the priestess. The ensuing assault on Paralios by his fellow students sparks a crisis that culminates in the violent destruction of the shrine at Menuthis.[51] Paralios and Athanasios were later to return to Aphrodisias, where they would establish a monophysite monastery.[52]

Fig. 6: Tomb monument with funerary verse for Asklepiodotos. Photograph © Aphrodisias Excavations.

A sundial, erected on the open plaza (Tetrastoon) adjacent to the theatre of Aphrodisias, supplies a further attestation to this late antique Aphrodisias-

[51] *VS* §25–43.
[52] *VS* §58.

Alexandria axis.[53] The sundial is inscribed on the flat upper surface of a marble cylinder. Letter forms of its epigraphic captions indicate a date in the fifth century. The shadow of a protruding rod above a flat plane will follow different hyperbolic paths from the winter to the summer solstice. The design of hourly markings on a flat plane therefore requires complex geometrical modelling, taking account of the sundial's latitude. Aphrodisias is located at 37° latitude. Pattenden has shown that the sundial employs a grid design intended for a site at 31° latitude. He therefore suggests that the geometric template employed in the creation of the Aphrodisian sundial was designed in Alexandria.[54]

Finally, it is worth noting that in the 1963 excavation trench some 15m north of the House of Kybele a portable sundial made of bronze was found: a device intended to read the time at multiple latitudes spread throughout the Roman Empire and therefore most likely the prized possession of a traveller.[55] The exact find context of this object was not registered and it therefore cannot be directly connected to either the house or the artefacts within it. However, considering the rarity of these portable sundials – Talbert discusses 14 such finds over the entire Roman Empire, thought to date between the mid-second and the fifth century AD[56] – it is not so much of a leap to connect it to the house and suggest that at some point in time its inhabitants had travelled far and wide. At the very least, the find attests to a familiarity with nautical travel among this inland community.

In summary, although it is possible that the artefacts entered the late antique domestic context from a much earlier occupation horizon, we consider this option the least probable. More plausible is that the *aegyptiaca* reached Aphrodisias as part of a wider interest in exotica in the Roman or late antique centuries. It is most likely,

53 Philip Pattenden, "A Late Sundial at Aphrodisias", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981), 101–12.

54 Pattenden, "Sundial at Aphrodisias", 111.

55 Inventory No. 63–400a. Derek J. de Solla Price, "Portable Sundials in Antiquity, Including an Account of a New Example from Aphrodisias", *Centaurus* 14 (1969), 256–62; Eva Winter, *Zeitzeichen: Zur Entwicklung und Verwendung antiker Zeitmesser* (2 vols.). (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 270–72 (Aphrodisias no. 6); Talbert, Richard J. A. (2017) *Roman Portable Sundials. The Empire in Your Hand* (New York: Oxford University Press), 60–62 (8 Aphrodisias).

56 Talbert, *Roman Portable Sundials*, Chapter 2. See p. 169 for the usage of these portable sundials for travel.

considering the extensive evidence for travel between Aphrodisias and Alexandria in late antiquity, that the statuettes arrived in this period. Aphrodisians travelled to Egypt for trade, for education and for religious fulfilment, both as Hellenes and as Monophysite Christians. Small and portable, the statuette and shabti could easily have been accommodated in the luggage of any one of these travellers.

Egypt at Late Antique Aphrodisias

The seated female statuette today is headless but may in Antiquity still have been intact and recognisable as a specific goddess, maybe Isis, or the personification Ma'at if it also had the characteristic ostrich feather headdress. Of course, this would then also require the educated elite of Aphrodisias to have been acquainted with the iconography of a foreign deity.[57] More certain and also more important is that Aphrodisians would have clearly recognised both the female statuette and the shabti as exceptional commodities coming from Egypt. The Egypt pertinent to the interpretation of the statuettes is inevitably that of the late antique imagination. We therefore begin with the broader connotations that *aegyptiaca* may have inspired.

Even if Antiquity was central to perceptions of Egypt in the ancient world, few people attempted to determine the age of the Nile civilisation in absolute terms. Classical authors were not overly concerned with deep history. Secure chronography began with the first Olympiad; prehistory was (in the terminology of Varro) ἄδηλος, indeterminate.[58] Any beginning could only be relative and not a cosmological absolute.[59] Some Hellenised intellectuals of the Eastern Mediterranean were keen to point out the relative novelty of the hegemonic culture. Josephus argued for the

---

[57] In spite of all uncertainties regarding exact identity and the extent of knowledge of iconography in Late Antiquity, it is worthwhile mentioning that an identification of the statuette as Ma'at would have probably appealed to an educated observer; Justice, the quality most closely associated with Ma'at, is central to Platonic virtue ethics (Christian Wildberg, "Neoplatonism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/neoplatonism/, last accessed 9 September 2021).

[58] William Addler, *Time Immemorial: Archaic History and its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks), 16. The relevant passage of Varro is cited in Censorinus, *De Die Natali* §21.2.

[59] Censorinus, *De Die Natali* §16.1.

historical primacy of Judaism over Hellenism, citing excerpts of earlier chronographers making similar arguments: Manetho for Egypt and Berossus for Assyria.[60] However, these authors gained little traction in the classical tradition.[61]

Ambivalence towards the pre-Hellenic past faded with the advent of Christian hegemony. In Genesis the universe now had an absolute beginning; it followed that an absolute chronology of pre-Hellenic history was both necessary and possible. Christian chronographers scoured available historiographic records of Pharaonic Egypt to furnish the Genesis narrative with a secure chronological scaffold that would confirm its primacy.[62] Eusebius therefore tabulated different historical timelines in parallel, creatively assimilating lengthy Egyptian, Chaldean and Greek chronologies with those of the Old Testament.[63]

The assimilation of Pharaonic Egypt and Old Testament temporality was not limited to scholasticism. When the fourth-century pilgrim Egeria travelled through the desolate city of Rameses, she came face to face with "Theban stone" (porphyry) statues identified by the bishop of the nearby city of Arabia as Moses and Aaron.[64] Although it is impossible to identify the statues to which this story refers, the later association probably draws upon the association of the younger of the two brothers with the Pharaonic court, or perhaps on the Septuagint's explicit location of Aaron in this eastern borderland of Egypt.[65] The same Egeria, journeying through the Holy Land, reports the discovery of a tombstone marked with the name of Job and

[60] Addler, *Time Immemorial*, 20–27.
[61] Addler, *Time Immemorial*, 28–30.
[62] Jennifer T. Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs in the Late Antique Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 54–67.
[63] Christopher Kelly, "The shape of the Past: Eusebius of Caesarea and Old Testament history", in *Unclassical Traditions, 1. Alternatives to the Classical Past in Late Antiquity* (*Cambridge Classical Journal. Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society. Supplementary Volume 34*), ed. Christopher Kelly, Richard Flower and Michael Stuart Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13–27; Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, 54–61.
[64] *Itinerarium Egeriae* §8.1–3. transl. Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria: A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018), 118–19.
[65] For a discussion on the passage from Egeria, see Ine Jacobs, "Old Statues, New Meanings. Literary, Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence for Christian Reidentification of Statuary", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 113 (2020), 789–836, 808, 814.

its subsequent enclosure within a Christian church.[66] Now the village of Al-Shaykh Saad in south Syria, the location has ever since hosted a cult dedicated to the prophet. In the later nineteenth century, Egyptologist Adolf Erman visited the Monastery of Job (Dier Ayoub) and produced a translation of the hieroglyphic inscription of the *Hiobstein*. It transpired that the slab of basalt in fact bore the cartouche of Ramses II, alongside the faint image of the pharaoh accompanied by Osiris.[67] That this monolith may have been venerated for over a millennium attests to the enduring appeal of Egyptian antiquities as material traces of Old Testament time.[68] It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that the statuette and shabti discovered at Aphrodisias may have appealed to a Christian traveller; objects of ancient Egyptian material culture were not universally despised as pagan obscenities.

Egypt was indeed a place of obscure and esoteric knowledge in late antiquity, for Christians and non-Christians alike.[69] This is probably exemplified best in the widespread dissemination of Hermetic literature, technical treatises on magic, alchemy and astrology and highly diverse philosophical writings, composed in

[66] *Itinerarium Egeriae* §16.6. transl. Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria: A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018), 132–33.

[67] Adolf Erman, "Der Hiobstein", *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 15 (1892), 205–11.

[68] For the identification of Egypt and the Old Testament in the medieval Latin West see Charles Burnett, "Images of ancient Egypt in the Latin Middle Ages", in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions Through the Ages*, ed. Peter Ucko and Timothy Champion (London: UCL Press, 2003), 65–100. The omnipresent interest in the Old Testament may also explain why mosaics of Nilotic landscapes, featuring amongst others Nilotic fauna and flora, the personification of the Nile and the Alexandrian Nilometer, appear in synagogues and churches as well as in residential contexts in the fifth- and sixth-century Near East but had been quasi-absent from the region in Roman centuries. Versluys 2002, 224–36 summarises several examples. The most complete overview of examples of both the near eastern provinces and Cyrenaica is that of Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends: Selected Studies* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), 97–109, with a summary table on p. 107 and an overview of interpretations at 106–9.

[69] Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, offers a comprehensive discussion on the reception of the hieroglyphic script in late antiquity. See especially Chapter 3 on the topic of hieroglyphs concealing sacred knowledge and wisdom in both Greco-Roman times and Late Antiquity. Romans as well already regarded hieroglyphs as sacred and potent. See Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1961) 41–44.

Ptolemaic or Roman Egypt.[70] Most of the works were attributed to the legendary sage Hermes Trismegistus or featured him in the capacity of teacher.[71] Hermes Trismegistus, in whom the Egyptian deity Thoth was combined with the Greek god Hermes, was thought to have conveyed wisdom to mankind around the time of Moses. Amongst others, he was credited with the invention of writing by Greek and Roman authors as well as by Christian Church Fathers.[72] The latter especially showed great interest in the philosophical Hermetic texts.

This "wisdom of the Egyptians", in which also Moses had been instructed (Acts 7:22), was thought to have been encoded in the *hieroglyphika grammata*, holy writing that had been jealously guarded by an exclusive caste of priests.[73] Bands of such mysterious and potentially holy signs traverse the chest of the shabti uncovered at Aphrodisias. The romanticising stereotype of hidden lore was not entirely unwarranted, since secret knowledge had played a significant role in Egyptian priestly instruction.[74] However, as Alexandra von Lieven wryly notes, the outsider's perception of concealed mysteries is dependent on their inability to decipher the hieroglyphs, as "otherwise one would have seen the banality of much of the supposed wisdom".[75] An inscription on a shabti would more likely give names, epithets and official titles than deep philosophical insight.[76]

[70] The authoritative study on the Hermetica and its circulation until the end of Antiquity remains Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993). For the spread of the Hermetica in late antiquity, see esp. 177–212. For a useful introduction to the Hermetica, see Florian Ebeling, *Das Geheimnis des Hermes Trismegistos. Geschichte des Hermetismus* (München: Beck, 2005), 1–36.
[71] Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 33.
[72] Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 22; Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, 36–47.
[73] Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, 69, 88–92.
[74] For a discussion of secrecy and Egyptian scripts see Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 80–87.
[75] Alexandra von Lieven, "Script and Pseudo Scripts in Graeco-Roman Egypt" in *Non-Textual Marking Systems, Writing and Pseudo Script from Prehistory to Modern Times*, ed. Petra Andrássy, Julia Budka and Frank Kammerzell (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 2009), 110.
[76] Hans D. Schneider, *Shabtis - An Introduction to the History of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Statuettes with a Catalogue of the Collection of Shabtis in the National Museum of Leiden* (Leiden: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 1977).

Yet, by the fourth century hieroglyphic literacy was confined to very few, and by the fifth the phonetic values of hieroglyphic characters were forgotten.[77] It was known that hieroglyphs encoded esoteric knowledge, but how they might be decoded was an intractable mystery. Greek philosophers working in the revived Platonic tradition were particularly drawn to a means of communication that they (incorrectly) believed to function non-discursively through the expression of perfect, transcendent concepts. This interpretation of hieroglyphic wisdom was articulated by Plotinus in the third century AD:

> The wise men of Egypt […] when they wished to signify something wisely, did not use the forms of letters which follow the order of words and propositions and imitate sounds and the enunciations of philosophical statements, but by drawing images and inscribing in their temples one particular image of each particular thing, they manifested the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not discourse or deliberation.[78]

The speculative late antique method of translating hieroglyphs as concepts is preserved in more detail in the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo Nilous, probably the same fifth-century philosopher at whose Alexandrian school the Aphrodisians of the *Philosophical Histories* and *Life of Severus* studied.[79] Such Aphrodisians, well-versed in the Neoplatonic corpus, would not have imagined that the hieroglyphs on the shabti in the House of Kybele might convey sterile titles in syntactical phrases; rather, they would have understood them to signify perfect and forever-inaccessible truths.

Aegyptiaca Byzantina *as Personal Possessions*

The above paragraphs have explored the possible Egyptian connotations of the Aphrodisian *aegyptiaca* from the general to the specific. To varying degrees, these possible connotations rely upon the interpreting subject recognising the Egyptian

[77] Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 64; Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, 28–33 for a brief overview of how hieroglyphs became obsolete.
[78] *Enneads* V.8.6, transl. Arthur H. Armstrong, *Plotinus: Ennead V* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 257.
[79] Westerfeld, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs,* 79–81. The *Hieroglyphica* survives in 13 copies of the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, attesting to a medieval Byzantine interest in *Aegyptiaca*.

quality of the objects and bringing to bear some knowledge, however caricatured, of Egyptian culture. In this final section we return to the immediate context in which the objects were found: the seventh-century House of Kybele.

It is plausible that the final occupants of the household were the descendants of the persons responsible for bringing the *aegyptiaca* into the house, certainly if they were late antique imports. The subdivision of the house need not imply any rupture in property relations in the intervening period. Subdivision of elite houses was common in the cities of Asia Minor by at least the second half of the sixth century.[80] Carefully delineated cohabitation allowed elites to reduce the maintenance costs of urban properties while retaining control of urban space. Such properties often came to adopt the spatial divisions typical of rural dwellings: comfortable domestic quarters on the upper storeys and production/storage on the ground floor.[81] The impression of wealth given by finds on both lower and upper storeys of the House of Kybele confirms an elite presence in the seventh century.

The final inhabitants are still likely to have cherished the *aegyptiaca* for several reasons. Even if their position on the upper floor inhibits conclusions regarding their precise context in the house, there is no reason for them not to have been on display when the house burnt down. The marble statuettes, openly on display on the ground floor, may present an informative parallel. Moreover, for later generations, these artefacts may have become heirloom objects, connoting an ancestral past and becoming inalienable possessions of the household.[82] Such connotations could happily coexist with connotations of Egypt, and the Egyptian provenance may even have been continuously emphasised by consecutive keepers.[83] Regardless of their specific origin, the *aegyptiaca* possessed an obvious and intriguing alterity, singling

[80] Jean-Pierre Sodini, "Habitat de l'antiquité tardive", *Topoi,* 7 (1995), 484–91, 496; Inge Uytterhoeven, "A Change of Appearance. Urban Housing in Asia Minor during the Sixth Century", in *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century. Current Research and Future Directions*, ed. Ine Jacobs and Hugh Elton (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 9–28, esp. 17–18.
[81] Uytterhoeven, "Urban Housing in Asia Minor", 18–19.
[82] On these shifts, see Katina T. Lillios 1999, "Objects of Memory: The Ethnography and Archaeology of Heirlooms", *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 6, 235–62, on p. 236, 244–45.
[83] Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss, "Introduction: Biographies, Travels and Itineraries of Things", in: *Mobility, Meaning and the Transformations of Things*, ed. Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (Oxford: Oxbow, 2013), 6.

them out as imports with a special status and carrying undertones of luxury, prestige and power.[84]

Perhaps this aura of the unknown might indeed be key to understanding the appeal of these statuettes for consecutive generations and of Egypt in late antiquity in general.[85] We are accustomed to describing archaeological artefacts as if they were known knowns – "a statuette of Ma'at", "a faïence shabti" – though of course many known unknowns lurk behind these confident abstractions. They will occasionally come to overdetermine perceptions of extremely unusual things. Sometimes the power of mysterious objects is located precisely in the mystery. The two Egyptian statuettes pose more questions than they answer, now, and perhaps also in late antiquity.

Conclusion

In the seventh century AD, two statuettes manufactured in Egypt were still retained on the upper storey of an elite urban residence in southwest Asia Minor. Through these Aphrodisian *aegyptiaca*, we have explored a range of historical questions. Contextualisation both in time and space has allowed us to propose hypotheses regarding the ways in which the objects may have been brought to Aphrodisias, as well as the motivations for their transport and their reception by later generations. Some of these hypotheses may be very tempting; the well-documented network of Neoplatonist philosophers operating between Aphrodisias and Alexandria offer a particularly attractive vector for the arrival of our *aegyptiaca* amid the personal possessions of a homebound Aphrodisian. But we acknowledge that such conclusions will inevitably be speculative. Most of all we have aimed to demonstrate the potential for the study of late antique receptions of ancient Egypt as more than a mere coda to the *Aegyptiaca Romana*. It is all too easy to frame such receptions as essentially anachronistic; futile and reactionary gestures against the advent of

[84] See, amongst others, Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value", in: *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63; Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Wiley, 1987); Mol, "Perception of Egypt" and Swetnam-Burland, *Egypt in Italy*, 124–26 for the special value of *aegyptiaca* in Pompeii.
[85] Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail. An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), esp. 114–30.

Christian hegemony. But this would be to deny the inventive impulses of later centuries. *Aegyptiaca Byzantina* are best appreciated on their own terms as the products of a world in which Egypt could capture the imagination in new and exciting ways.

Appendix

1. Diorite statuette of a seated female, probably Late Period

Discovered amid destruction debris over the street immediately north of Room 3. It was inferred from the position of the statuette within the debris that it had fallen from an upper storey.

H.: 11.3, W.: 5, D.: 8.9 cm.

Inventory No. 84–016. Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 261, 38–40.

Single fragment, broken at the base of the neck. Missing head. A small chip on the base adjacent to the left foot. Otherwise intact with slight surface incrustation in crevices. The excavation notebook records that at the moment of discovery the statuette exhibited dark red stains indicative of burning.

A small statuette in green diorite representing a seated female. Rectangular base with rounded corners. Abstracted forms suggest a close-fitting garment enveloping the body, including the feet. Feet are drawn up to the thighs, hands placed upon the knees. The female wears a striated tripartite lappet wig, the lappets resting on the breasts. The rear of the wig extends a little below the shoulders. A high-necked collar piece is indicated by simple geometric incisions between the lappets. The statuette may have represented a goddess, possibly Isis or Ma'at, but the missing head makes identification impossible.

The lack of identifying inscription makes it difficult to arrive at a date for the production of the statuette.

2. Faïence shabti, seventh-fifth century BC

Discovered amid a concentration of brick and plaster at an elevation c. 0.86m above the floor level in Room 4; the excavator therefore inferred that it had fallen from an upper storey.

H.: 7.7, W.: 3.8, D.: 2.8 cm.

Inventory No. 85-037. Aphrodisias Excavation Notebook 263, 50.

Single fragment, broken at the knees. Surfaces are extremely worn, and exposure to heat has rendered the fabric friable.

A small mummiform shabti in a yellow-green faïence. Arms are crossed on the chest so that the elbows do not protrude from the body. Sleeves are indicated, and the figure holds in its hands agricultural implements, now much worn. Wearing a lappet wig with no indication of striation and a long beard. Facial features are poorly preserved. Worn and illegible hieroglyphs, framed by horizontal lines, run across the body. A basket and a back pillar are present at the rear.

The shape of the figure, the long beard, and the back pillar are characteristic of shabtis of the Late Period. The date may be refined according to Schneider's typology, in which this figurine would belong to Type XIA, produced during Dynasties 26 and 27 (664 to 404 BC).[86]

[86] Schneider, *Shabtis*, 227–28.