AEGYPTIACA

INVESTIGATING STYLE AND AGENCY IN THE IRON AGE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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In our ever-vigilant attention to the presence and quantity of Egyptian (or Egyptian-looking) artifacts in regions outside the Nile Valley, do we artificially privilege a category of objects, and a mode of reception, that more closely approximate modern responses to ancient Egypt than to their ancient contexts? Was there a consistent and widely shared understanding of their »Egyptianness«, a durable construct that crossed cultural and temporal boundaries? In the absence of evidence for viewer response, how can we reconstruct ancient perceptions of what we consider to be discrete and meaningful categories of visual and material culture? Drawing on material agency perspectives and innovative reappraisals of »Aegyptiaca« especially in the Roman world, I explore these questions with reference to two episodes of reception history in the Iron Age eastern Mediterranean, broadly defined. My aim is to explore the parameters of a familiar, seemingly self-evident class of objects, together with approaches to interpreting them within their new cultural settings.[1]

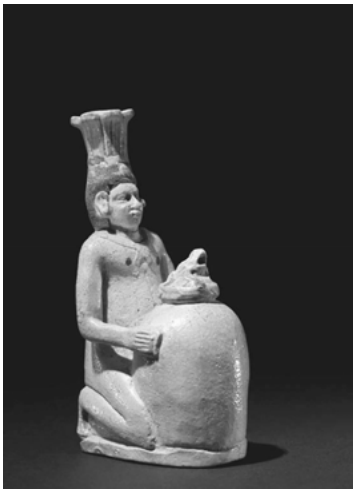
In the long history of ancient Egypt's material connections with the outside world, dating at least to Neolithic times, the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 BCE) surely stands out as a particularly robust period of interaction. An »international age« of high-level diplomatic contacts, along with the lively commercial exchange of raw materials and finished goods, linked the Aegean world with the empires and kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East.[2] Military and political expansion inaugurated by the Dynasty 18 pharaohs brought new regions to the south and north under Egyptian domination. In Nubia and the southern Levant, the material consequences included the local production of Egyptian-style architecture, pottery, stone vessels, and objects made of alabaster, faience, glass, and ivory. Precisely what this »Egyptianization« reflects is much debated – foreign military or admin-

istrative control, for example, or local elite emulation of foreign styles – but the material impact manifestly accompanied Egypt's commanding role in both political and commercial spheres throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Near East.[3]

By contrast, the Iron Age emerges as a new chapter in the life of Egyptian styles, in which »the influence of Egyptian imagery, and of imagery inspired by Egypt, exceeded the country's political weight and its importance as a trading partner«.[4] During the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1070–664 BCE) and later under Saite rule (664–525 BCE), Egyptian-type objects, including amulets, scarabs, and figurines, and Egyptian-themed metalwork, carved ivories, and faience, were disseminated in vast quantities across the Mediterranean, the Levant, and southwest Asia. These objects and styles reached new and distant destinations principally through the agency of non-Egyptian actors: Phoenician traders, Greek travelers or mercenaries, and Assyrian kings who seized booty and demanded tribute from conquered western regions. During this period Egypt was a complex of small states, in which the growing prominence of Libyans, especially in the north, engendered considerable social, political, and religious change. From its eastern Delta home of Bubastis, Dynasty 22 (945–715 BCE) successfully claimed the Egyptian throne until the Nubian annexation around 715 BCE. As Assyria gained influence and territory in the southern Levant beginning in the eighth century, it engaged with Egypt and first attempted an invasion around 674. Psamtik (Psammetichus) I, an Assyrian client-king, managed with the aid of foreign mercenaries to reunite Egypt and re-establish rule independent of Assyria and Kush under the Saite dynasty, based at Sais in the western Delta, which gradually achieved successful commercial relationships with Greek states not least by establishing foreign trading stations (*emporia*) at Naucratis and elsewhere in the Delta. Greek literary testimony, along with archaeological evidence, documents Saite patronage of Greek sanctuaries especially in the eastern and southeastern Aegean. Throughout the period a significant dimension of Egyptian politics, society, and culture was shaped by prominent goddess cults, including those of Bastet, Mut, Sakhmet, and Hathor.[5]

Scholars have tended to focus on the *human* identity and agency involved both in the production of these objects and their relocation to new geographical and cultural settings. In recent decades, interest has centered on the fundamental role Phoenicians played in the wide circulation of Egyptian and Egyptian-style works throughout the Mediterranean; as has long been recognized, Egyptian imagery and style comprised a fundamental and pervasive component of Iron Age Levantine material and visual culture more broadly. Shifting emphasis to *material* agency, I contemplate two different Iron Age contexts in which Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects were introduced as »foreign«: the sanctuary of Hera on the eastern Aegean island of Samos, and the tombs of queens at Nimrud in northern Mesopotamia. Both in the Iron Age Aegean and in Neo-Assyrian royal centers these objects are generally considered »exotica«, and their acquisition has sometimes also been framed as an early chapter in a long history of »Egyptomania«.[6] Our consistent terminology across such diverse cultural spheres suggests stable and self-evident categories with fixed and enduring

1 Scarab incised with sphinx holding cartouche and name of Amun-Re above sphinx. Green glazed steatite; l. 4 cm. Rhodes, Camirus, tomb; reign of Psammetichus I (664–610 BCE). London, British Museum, G&R 1861,1111.13.



2 Jar with lid in the form of kneeling figure supporting jar with frog. Glazed composition; h. 10.16 cm. Rhodes, Camirus; 6th century BCE. London, British Museum, G&R 1860,0404.75.

meanings: »Egyptian« (and »Egyptianizing«) as widespread (if not universal) and timeless phenomena. This framework emphasizes the static properties of objects, perhaps implicitly encouraging the expectation of a corresponding uniformity of meaning within broadly homogeneous cultural settings, or even across such divides as »East« and »West«. It promotes the notion of a monolithic »Egypt« to which there was a predictable or consistent response, perhaps even comprising the initial phase of an enduring (predominantly »Western«) reception history. By juxtaposing these very different contexts, I seek to emphasize instead the diversity of response to works in, or incorporating, Egyptian styles, and hence to the concept of »Egypt«. Egypt's cultural influence in the Iron Age across a vast geographical expanse was largely performed through objects deposited in sanctuaries and burials. In both circumstances, material agents that drew specifically and knowledgeably on Egyptian forms, materials, and iconographies were crucial to negotiating new social identities and introducing new ritual practices. And, adapted to different cultural settings, these material agents became something new, with the capacity to effect change. Joseph Maran has emphasized the transformative potential of appropriating items from »outside« with special reference to prehistoric societies: »In combination with the particular structure of a society, this agency must have at all times ensured that impulses arriving from outside were transformed by merging them with existing values and world views.«[7]

In the Iron Age Aegean, attention has long concentrated on the large corpus of amulets, figurines, and small vessels made from glazed composition, commonly known as faience (figs. 1–2). Found primarily in sanctuary votive deposits but also in tombs, these objects are

typically labeled »Aegyptiaca« – a term that usually embraces both works of Egyptian manufacture (»genuine«) and specimens closely modeled on them or exhibiting Egyptian elements of style and iconography but fashioned by Greeks or Levantines (»imitations«).[8] They have often been understood within the broader context of the »Orientalizing« period, an era of robust exchange during the ninth to seventh centuries BCE in which Phoenician traders are accorded a prominent role. Are these »Aegyptiaca« »genuine« imports (thus made in Egypt, either in Egyptian or Greco-Egyptian workshops in the Nile Delta), or »imitations« produced elsewhere (in the Levant, for example), or in eastern Aegean workshops (primarily on Rhodes)? If they are of Levantine origin, does their transport to the Aegean represent the agency of Phoenicians, or of Greeks who traveled to the eastern Mediterranean littoral or Cyprus? If genuinely Egyptian, are they contemporaneous products or »heirlooms«, perhaps acquired through intermediaries? Does their presence as votives in Greek sanctuaries exemplify dedications of »exotica« by Greeks, or were they sometimes personal possessions offered by foreign visitors?

At the Neo-Assyrian capital of Nimrud, in northern Mesopotamia, excavations have uncovered a few Egyptian or Egyptianizing objects in the lavishly furnished tombs of several Assyrian queens dating to the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.[9] Since the tombs predate the seventh century military conquests that brought Egyptian booty, resources, and personnel in large quantities to Assyrian royal centers, the presence of these works raises intriguing questions. Why were they considered suitable grave gifts for Assyrian royal women? Were they somehow connected with the individual biographies of the deceased, or do they exemplify a broader royal Assyrian »taste« for »exotica« or imports from »western« lands? Should we also link them with the vast corpus of »Egyptianizing« styles of metalwork and ivories recovered from royal storerooms and other locations at Nimrud, generally understood as tribute and booty acquired from conquered regions in the Levant, as further evidence for this taste?[10]

Issues of authorship, style, place of origin, and means of transfer have largely dominated approaches to Egyptian (and Egyptian-looking) objects found in new cultural settings – whether »Eastern« or »Western«. And because our categories emphasize artisan identity and geographical or cultural »source«, they have less actively fueled interest in the role of material culture in constructing new collective identities and altering social practices. Over the past few decades, scholars have critically reappraised longstanding assumptions about simple relationships between material culture and group identity. Rather than reflecting individual or collective identity, material culture is increasingly understood to play an active role in constructing identities and negotiating relationships.[11] As »exotica«, Egyptian and Egyptian-style works are typically considered – like other foreign imports – to signal status; as valuable personal possessions and markers of elite self-fashioning, they were subsequently re-used as tomb gifts or votive offerings. Recent studies have increasingly recognized a significant diversity among cultural responses to foreign-style objects in local cult or burial practices, and thoughtfully addressed »exotica« as a problematic category.[12] We can

likewise reconsider whether the categories of »Egyptian« and »Egyptianizing« continue to provide a productive means of classifying material culture.

I also refer selectively to earlier periods of Egypt's material connections with outside regions, for two reasons. First, recent investigations of the Egyptian impact on neighboring areas in the Late Bronze Age have addressed the problematic character of »Egyptian«, »Egyptianizing«, and »Egyptianization«, yielding insights that could prove useful both for exploring their Iron Age history and their treatment in modern scholarship.[13] Second, given the already long life of Egyptian styles outside the Nile Valley before the first millennium, we need to consider the issue of cultural memory. Some of the Egyptian and Egyptian-style works recovered from Iron Age contexts were manufactured decades or even centuries before their date of deposition, thus linking the objects and their biographies with a much more distant past. My discussion touches only marginally on this important subject, but it deserves further exploration. My approach has also been informed by provocative reappraisals of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects in Roman and later imperial settings that draw attention to the limitations of traditional scholarship and demonstrate the interpretive value of object biographies and a material agency perspective.[14]

EGYPTIAN AND EGYPTIANIZING: AUTHORSHIP, SOURCE, AND STYLE

A framework for the European reception of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects was already in place when preclassical civilizations were rediscovered in the mid- to late 19th century. The early modern investigation of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects in Italy established a method for their classification and interpretation, positioning Egyptian history and culture largely outside its ancient Roman setting: these decontextualized works were catalogued and analyzed as sources for Dynastic Egypt, not for imperial Rome.[15] For J. D. S. Pendlebury, writing in 1930, the ancient Greek encounter with Egypt and its material culture could be readily assimilated to the 20th century European experience of that land, its people, and the artifacts it »made available«. He emphasized the individual actor, and that individual's personal encounter with Egypt, in explaining the meaning of Egyptian objects placed in tombs or sanctuaries in the Archaic Greek world. Faience scarabs and amulets found in several burials in or near Athens, he concluded, »must be the ›souvenirs‹ of some returned adventurer of the Late Geometric period rather than the evidence of peaceful trade«.[16] By contrast, Egyptian objects in votive deposits at Sounion were thought to number among »the honest treasures and ›lucks‹ of Attic sailors brought from a far country, not amulets bought to place in a tomb with some hope of mysterious benefits for the dead«.[17] It was the Greeks' good fortune that possibilities for contacts with Egypt expanded during the artistic floruit of Dynasty 26, Pendlebury observed, collapsing several millennia in characterizing the Greek response: »Then too, as never before, the ordinary Greek, not the ad-

venturer alone, had the opportunity of visiting Egypt. There was the great trading station at Naucratis and, for all we know, personally conducted tours up the Nile by guides as delightfully inaccurate as their descendants.«[18] A later generation instead emphasized Phoenician agency in the long-distance contacts between the eastern Mediterranean littoral and the Aegean, along with the central and western Mediterranean. An equation of »Aegyptiaca« with »curios«, »souvenirs«, and »trinkets« dovetailed neatly (and conveniently) with the Homeric image of Phoenicians hawking »gee-gaws« (*athyrmata*). In most scholarship today, Phoenicians remain the prime movers in the circulation of Egyptian objects and styles, especially before the late eighth century BCE.[19]

Traditionally, our primary (or at least initial) task as scholars has usually been to distinguish Egyptian from Egyptianizing objects, »genuine« from »imitation«, in order to ascertain the object's place of manufacture and the artisan's (or consumer's) ethnic or cultural identity. And yet the limitations of these categories are also acknowledged, if less frequently elaborated. It is not always possible to distinguish Egyptian from Egyptianizing workmanship, for example, even on technical grounds.[20] Scholars also disagree on whether Egyptianizing signifies »derivative«, or whether the fact of emulation perhaps instead underscores the clear intentionality these artifacts reflect. »It is obvious that mere imports found in a tomb have less significance than the fact that somebody imitates, purposely and with effort, objects which he cannot acquire by import«, Günther Hölbl has observed; »we may assume that these imitations were as acceptable to their owners as imported originals«.[21] Moreover, it remains plausible that Egyptian artisans were involved in establishing the East Greek faience industry and its technical standards: »The nomenclature [Archaic Greek faience production] does not necessarily imply direct Greek involvement in their manufacture. A more exact designation would be Egyptianizing workshops in East Greece«, writes Virginia Webb: »The exact source of the technical and stylistic know-how which was adopted in the workshops established on Rhodes is still the subject of discussion.«[22]

Fresh perspectives on »Aegyptiaca« in other cultural spheres help steer us away from a preoccupation with classification and the determinative role played by authorship (or ownership), toward an emphasis on material agency and shifting identities. Drawing on phenomenological approaches grounded in the work of Martin Heidegger, Eva Mol argues persuasively for understanding Roman »Aegyptiaca« not as a discrete, homogenous category of material culture, but as objects interconnected to a world, or conceptual and spatial environment in which they were experienced and used; they participated simultaneously in multiple, complex, and dynamic networks. Mol's nuanced study challenges prevailing interpretive frameworks governing the analysis of »Aegyptiaca« by recognizing different layers of perception on which our notions of »Egyptianness« are built: »By its use and function within different networks, Egypt could become concealed as a layer of perception«, she writes: »The perception of the same object can change; its ›Egyptianness‹ can become concealed, to be revealed again in another context.«[23] From this interpretive perspective, we thus consider not only formal, seemingly static material properties (including imagery and

style) connecting Egyptian-type objects to others *we* perceive as permanent members of the same category, but also investigate how they were intertwined with other environments and in what spatial, social, and material contexts they were experienced. This approach aims to gain additional access to ancient viewers and responses, seeking a richer understanding of what these objects meant in their past environments.

EGYPTIAN AND EGYPTIAN-STYLE OBJECTS IN THE HERAION AT SAMOS

By far the most numerous imports in the Iron Age Aegean are the thousands of »Aegyptiaca« recovered from Greek sanctuaries, which therefore furnish prime sources for tracing both the spatial trajectories of these artifacts and the transfer of ownership and meaning accompanying their new cultural settings. As noted earlier, votive deposits typically preserve Egyptian imports along with Egyptianizing works attributed to Levantine manufacture and, especially from the late seventh and sixth centuries, the products of East Greek workshops. Despite their wide geographical distribution in the sanctuaries of multiple deities, broad patterns have emerged in the categories of »Aegyptiaca« recovered from votive deposits and the character of participating cults. As Günther Hölbl's detailed studies in particular have determined, they appear primarily in the sanctuaries of female deities: Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis, Aphaia, Demeter, and Hera.[24] Faience amulets and figurines are dominated by images of a particular constellation of Egyptian deities whose cosmic domains governed female fertility and the protection of young children: Amun, Isis, Horus, Bes, Sakhmet, Nefertum, and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris (Pataikos). The small vases that held special ointments, too, served a protective function. Burials, where »Aegyptiaca« are found almost exclusively with women and children, furnish further evidence for this gendering of objects and spheres of divine activity. The deities whose images appear in these capacities do not include those traditional for Egyptian funerary contexts. Given these correlations between object and owner in both sanctuaries and tombs, most examples recovered from votive deposits were probably offered by Greeks, perhaps especially female worshipers – regardless of the means by which these objects arrived at Greek sites.

Yet these sanctuary deposits also exhibit significant diversity in the overall quantities of Egyptian-style objects and their constituent types, the deities represented, and the proportions of Egyptian to Egyptianizing works. In some cases, differences surely reflect chronological disparities among the votive deposits. For example, scarabs and scaraboids were found in large numbers in the Hera sanctuary at Perachora and the Argive Heraion, but only a few have appeared at Samos. None belongs to the groups produced in the first half of the seventh century BCE. Thus, either these types of scarabs were not dedicated in Samos, or the votive deposits are too late to include them.[25] In other instances, differences in the types of Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects suggest highly significant and complex local circum-

3 Statuette of Egyptian priest. Bronze; pres. h. torso 26.6 cm. Samos, Hera sanctuary (B 1312). Vathy, Archaeological Museum of Samos

stances concerning source (Levantine or East Greek industry) and availability, cult practices, and the relationship between donors and votives.

The Hera sanctuary on Samos has yielded not only an impressive number of »Aegyptiaca« – over 1,000 objects, including more than 600 made of faience – but also examples of Egyptian or Egyptian-style material that otherwise appears rarely, or in very small quantities, at other Archaic sanctuaries: works fashioned from ivory, alabaster, and bronze, for example.[26] The large number and variety of »Aegyptiaca« is often attributed to the particularly close political and commercial ties between Egypt and Samos attested in Greek literary sources. Archaeological evidence has substantiated Greek literary testimony documenting Saite royal patronage elsewhere in eastern Aegean sanctuaries.[27] The unusual quantity and character of the »Aegyptiaca« at Samos have also been linked with the special role Ionian and Carian pirates and mercenaries played in the service of Saite pharaohs.

Most exceptional among the Samian »Aegyptiaca« are the bronzes, which number over two hundred; while the majority are assigned to Dynasty 26, works of Dynasty 25 (719–

4 Statuette of Osiris. Bronze; h. 25 cm. Samos, Hera sanctuary (B 929). Vathy, Archaeological Museum of Samos

656 BCE) date also appear. One group consists of hollow-cast figures of humans, deities, and sacred birds and animals, which occur in two scales: large, and generally fragmentary, with the exception of a once-gilded Egyptian *sem*-priest originally some 66 cm tall (fig. 3); and smaller examples that reach a height of 30 cm. Another group contains small solid-cast figurines also in the form of humans, animals, and deities. Miscellaneous object types include bronze furniture fittings, fragments of incense burners, fly or whisk handles, and a mirror inscribed for the goddess Mut.

The bronzes are also noteworthy because the figures represented do not mirror the same group of deities common to the faience »Aegyptiaca« preserved at most Greek sanctuaries. Instead, they are primarily images of male deities – Bes, Harpocrates, Horus, Ptah, and Reshef – and include three examples of the otherwise scarcely attested Osiris (fig. 4) and one of Min-Amun. Female deities, by contrast, are represented only by a figurine of Neith (fig. 5) and one probably of Mut.[28] Bronze figurines of Egyptian deities, male or female, seldom occur outside Egypt. If the Samian bronzes were acquired by Ionian or Carian mer-

5 Statuette of Neith. Bronze; h. 22.5 cm. Samos, Hera sanctuary (B 354). Vathy, Archaeological Museum of Samos

cenaries as »curiosities« or gifts, and were donated following their return from Egypt, we would surely expect similar examples to appear in other Ionian sanctuaries, where large quantities of »Aegyptiaca« in the form of faience amulets and figurines have indeed been found.[29] It is therefore plausible, as Helga Bumke has proposed, that the bronzes are offerings made by Egyptians and reflect *Egyptian* dedicatory practices. The statuettes of priests, she argues, can only be understood as gifts from Egyptian priests. The figurines of deities can also be understood as Egyptian offerings, reflecting the practice (especially common in the the Saite era) of presenting images of *Nebengöttern,* brought in small wooden shrines, alongside the main deity – in this case, Hera.[30] Bumke avoids concluding that these dedications demonstrate Egyptian influence on local cult practices, or Egyptian identification of Hera with Egyptian deities. Instead, she suggests, they reinforce an impression of knowledgeable interaction in the realm of cult ritual and its material expression. In this respect, they also provide a background to subsequent developments in monumental stone architecture and sculpture at Samos that manifestly drew on Egyptian traditions and technical expertise.[31]

From a material agency perspective, the single category of »Aegyptiaca« obscures critical differences among these votives in material, scale, origin/authorship, donor identity, function, and meaning within a new cultural setting. Once the faience amulets and vases were acquired from Egyptian or East Greek workshops and dedicated at Samos, they became something else: votive offerings to the goddess of the sanctuary, functioning within a different environment of material, social, and religious space. Their reference to special Egyptian forms, materials, styles, and divine protection persisted, but they were now also intertwined with a new network of sanctuary dedications, including numerous objects in non-Egyptian styles. At Samos, the bronze figurines of Neith, Osiris, and other Egyptian deities absent from the repertoire of faience votives, along with the large-scale bronze statuettes of priests, acquired a new identity as dedications to the sanctuary but through their iconography, material, and style were also linked to other material networks and dedicatory practices that extended far beyond the Heraion. They did not simply reflect the ethnic or cultural identities of their donors, but in fact enabled the participation of non-local visitors at the Hera sanctuary.

Finally, but not least, the visually stunning presence of numerous Egyptian-style votives made from special materials, such as faience or bronze, must have brought about dramatic changes in the physical appearance of the sanctuary over a period of several decades, as represented by votive deposits at the Samian Heraion. Virginia Webb has commented on the scale and quantity of faience votives fashioned as male figures and as falcons, including examples measuring 25 to 30 cm in height.[32] For a period of some forty years (c. 630–590/580 BCE), she observes, the cult areas »must have been overcrowded with faience flute-players etc. which would have glittered with iridescent turquoise glaze touched with blue black«.[33] Similarly, the numerous bronze statuettes of deities and large bronze statuettes of priests, some enhanced with gilding or copper, would have introduced a new visual culture, including a new sense of scale.[34] This profound aesthetic impact would have increased over time, further altering the sanctuary's appearance and therefore viewers' responses.[35] The special circumstances surrounding the Egyptian and Egyptian-type votives at Samos also suggest that seemingly identical Egyptian-looking objects appeared in quite different company within the various sanctuaries of goddesses in which they are typically found. The faience »Aegyptiaca« from Samos reflect the imagery governing female domains, as is the case for many Archaic Greek sanctuaries. Yet a significant number consist of male figures bringing animals for dedication or sacrifice or playing musical instruments (chiefly the double flute); they likely represent the donor himself.[36] Given an emphasis on identifying production centers and their characteristic manufacturing parameters, our catalogues of individual objects highlight similarities and differences among object types, material and technique, and stylistic and iconographical variations within those types. In the context of dissimilar configurations of votives, however, they must have appeared very different. At the neighboring Ionian sanctuary of Aphrodite at Miletus, for example, the bothroi yielded an exceptionally large number of faience »Aegyptiaca« in familiar categories, but few

bronzes. Moreover, the faience figurines exhibit marked differences in the constellation of deities represented, including an almost unparalleled image of the Theban deity Amun-Re-Harakte.[37] Their »Egyptianness« would arguably have been enhanced in this »visual ecology«, perhaps especially in contexts including special categories of Egyptian-style objects such as bronze figurines of priests or images of deities seldom encountered in Greek sanctuaries, whose iconography would have been unfamiliar to most visitors.[38]

Specific iconographies and styles were used to convey specific meanings: Greeks actively signaled those meanings through the use of Egyptian forms and frequently also Egyptian-style materials. To effectuate divine activity, material agents had to assume the precise forms of their Egyptian prototypes. Scarabs, other amulets, and figurines of particular deities were often fashioned within restricted parameters of form, type, scale, style, and material. Through these objects, worshipers knowledgeably appealed to the cosmic realms controlled by particular members of the Egyptian pantheon – a distinctive constellation of deities – through precise formal and typological manifestations. Thus, the specific features of local cult and votive practices, and the function of these particular artifacts, were differently understood and exercised different influences at each site. In other words, the material agency of »Aegyptiaca« was performed within local circumstances of cult and votive practices: this meaning was not entirely predetermined, nor fully independent of the objects themselves. The objects do not simply reflect contact with Egypt – direct or indirect – but actually constitute cultural innovation, enabling the establishment of new votive practices and the participation of non-local visitors.

EGYPTIANIZING, LEVANTINE, AND INTERCULTURAL STYLES IN THE NIMRUD QUEENS' TOMBS

Between 1988 and 1992, Iraqi archaeologists made a series of spectacular discoveries in the Neo-Assyrian capital of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), in northern Mesopotamia. In the Northwest Palace built by King Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), they unearthed several mostly undisturbed tombs dating to the ninth and eight centuries BCE.[39] The Queens' Tombs, as they are known, contained the remains of adults and children; accompanying inscriptions named some of the burials as royal women. A stone sarcophagus in Tomb II housed two females, one identified through cuneiform inscriptions on a nearby stone tablet and on two gold bowls as Yabâ, wife and queen (*sēgallu*) of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE). She is probably the same individual named in other inscribed objects placed in the tomb as »Banitu, queen of Shalmaneser« (V) (726–722 BCE), and may have died during the latter's reign.[40] One inscribed bowl was elaborately decorated with Egyptian – or strongly Egyptianizing – scenes (plate 15). Scholars have analyzed its rich stylistic and iconographic details in order to determine its place and date of manufacture, its artisan's ethnic or cultural identity, and its significance as a tomb gift inscribed for this particular queen.[41]

Although not the only gold vessel recovered from the tombs, Yabâ's bowl was exceptional in its elaborate hammered and engraved decoration, arranged in two principal zones filling the interior.[42] Around the circumference a concentric frieze depicts a lively boating expedition that takes place in a specifically Nile setting, a papyrus marsh. Four boats occupied by seated and standing figures engaged in hunting and other activities are placed at approximately equal intervals. One boat is distinguished by its bow in the shape of a water bird and a hull resembling a fish with scales (plate 16). The bowl's interior zone encircles a concentric arrangement of human and animal figures swimming in a lush setting of lotus plants: a nude female, a horse, a ram, a crocodile, and fish. Experts immediately recognized precise and extensive similarities between Yabâ's bowl and a silver bowl of nearly identical shape, dimensions, and decoration, allegedly recovered from a cemetery at ancient Golgoi on Cyprus and housed in the Berlin museums since 1886. Although less well preserved, its decoration is similarly arranged, with a concentric outer frieze composed of boating scenes in a papyrus thicket and an interior zone encircling swimming figures arranged in concentric patterns. Most scholars have attributed the Berlin bowl to Phoenician workmanship of the ninth to eighth century BCE.[43] In discussing the Berlin silver bowl probably made in the same workshop as Yabâ's gold bowl, Eric Gubel connected its boating scenes with the Bastet festival later described by Herodotus, an event that took place on the lake surrounding the temple of this goddess in Bubastis (Tell Basta), home of the Dynasty 22 rulers. Gubel suggested that this imagery may have first appeared in decorated Phoenician bowls between 850 and 825 BCE, when Osorkon II founded the Bubastis temple.[44] A late eighth century date would coincide neatly with the date that Yabâ's bowl was presumably deposited.

Yet a comprehensive study of the Nimrud bowl and its sister in Berlin has concluded that nearly every aspect of subject, composition, and style displays a strongly Egyptian character.[45] The authors drew comparisons with well-established Egyptian funerary imagery depicting the deceased in a boat hunting waterfowl, as in Dynasty 18 tomb paintings. They also cited links with boating scenes depicted on shallow faience bowls of New Kingdom date recovered from sites both in Egypt and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, such as Enkomi on Cyprus. Boating scenes and landscape settings on Egyptian faience chalices of the Third Intermediate Period also provide close parallels. Other features indicating an Early Iron Age rather than New Kingdom date are the scenes combining bovines and horses, along with certain landscape features. Only a few antiquarian details, such as types of furniture and musical instruments, argue for Levantine rather than Egyptian workmanship. In association, iconographic and stylistic comparisons suggest a date for both bowls in the tenth century BCE, perhaps as the products of a single workshop in the southern Levant with close ties to artistic centers in the Nile Delta. The gold bowl's cuneiform inscription naming Yabâ must have been added later and thus furnishes no evidence for date of manufacture. On the basis of her name, Yabâ has been identified as a princess of West Semitic origin, as have several other Assyrian royal women.[46] The gold bowl may thus have been an »heirloom«, perhaps an item of dowry or an official gift, furnishing a link

between her presumed homeland and the bowl's likely production site in the southern Levant.

Although unique in its elaborate figural scenes in a Nile setting, the gold bowl was not the sole Egyptian-looking object recovered from the Nimrud tombs. Egyptian elements of style, material, and iconography have also been recognized among the lavish and elaborately decorated gold jewelry, dress and hair ornaments, and other accessories that adorned the queens' bodies.[47] In her recent investigation of female dress and personal ornament in Tombs I, II, and III, Amy Gansell has identified multiple styles, defined as Royal Assyrian, Near Eastern, Intercultural, and Composite. The Intercultural style drew on foreign (Egyptian or Levantine) imagery, forms, or elements of female regalia; Composite style objects incorporated imported physical components.[48] While the elaborately decorated gold objects have received the most attention, the tombs also yielded examples of Egyptian-inspired protective imagery in the form of amulets and seals found in close association with the deceased. In Tomb I a terracotta sarcophagus housed a female 50 to 55 years of age, whose burial is dated to the ninth or eighth century BCE. Around the legs were monkey-shaped amulets made of lapis lazuli, rock crystal, and carnelian, and silver and carnelian amulets fashioned as heads of the Mesopotamian demon Pazuzu. A group of faience pendants and seals near the deceased's head also included pendants fashioned as Pazuzu heads and winged females, perhaps the demoness Lamashtu, and at least two stamp seals bearing hieroglyphic (or pseudo-hieroglyphic) inscriptions.[49] An unusually shaped gold fibula near the right ribs terminates in a female figure wearing a Pazuzu headdress, along with a bird of prey, perhaps an eagle (plate 17).[50] Near the right hand, a carnelian stamp seal, set in an elaborate gold mount, bears a hieroglyphic (or pseudo-hieroglyphic) inscription.[51] An apotropaic and exorcistic force, Pazuzu's image protected against evil demons, particularly Lamashtu, who threatened women during childbirth and abducted infants. Like his Egyptian counterpart Bes, Pazuzu was represented in two forms: as a complete figure with head and body, and also often partially, as a head alone. Tomb I's cluster of amulets and seals bearing images related to Pazuzu is of considerable interest, reflecting a marked concentration in the queens' burials and comprising the earliest securely dated examples of this demon's iconography. Additional examples associated with royal females were recovered from the queen's residence at Fort Shalmaneser in Nimrud, where five Pazuzu heads were found along with a Bes amulet and an Egyptian scaraboid inscribed »ms« (»to give birth«).[52] This discovery also underscores the close ties linking Bes, Pazuzu, and birth. While the tomb examples may not represent the initial appearance of Pazuzu's iconography, the cluster of images here and in the Fort Shalmaneser residence associates this protective imagery with the exalted status of the deceased.

We could also consider the presence of Egyptian-type features from the perspective of concealment introduced above. Multiple tomb objects inscribed for their owners attest to the material construction of Assyrian royal female identity. Some, such as Yabâ's Egyptian-style bowl, were made long before the queen's death and subsequently »person-

alized« by means of an inscription naming both deceased and king. Tomb II yielded altogether six vessels made of gold, electrum, or rock crystal, each bearing a cuneiform inscription naming Yabâ, Banitu, or Atalia, wife of Sargon II (721–705 BCE).[53] Thus inscribed, Yabâ's Egyptian-style bowl effectively became a new category of material culture, forging a crucial connection to the other inscribed objects deposited in the tombs, which were fashioned in non-Egyptian styles. In this way, a dimension or layer of the bowl's »Egyptianness« was concealed, and its meaning and value in constructing Assyrian royal female identity was emphasized. The electrum mirror recovered from Tomb II, described as »Egyptianizing« because of its papyrus decoration at the juncture of mirror and handle, could be similarly understood.[54] Once inscribed for Atalia, it participated in a new network of objects that emphasized the owner's personal and royal identity.

The Intercultural and Composites styles of female ornament, along with material practices involving the protection of women and children, may also reflect a newly cosmopolitan or imperial horizon, perhaps drawing on the cosmic spheres associated with Egyptian deities and forms of esoteric knowledge. And a variety of texts document interaction in this period between the Assyrian court and Egyptian ruling families, suggesting the high-level transfer of information concerning these material practices of communication with the divine.[55] During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Yabâ's consort, increased interaction resulted specifically from Assyrian military activity in the southern Levant, probably chiefly intended to expand regional commercial exchange. This king extended Assyrian control to the Mediterranean through a series of conquests in the Levant and asserted Assyrian might on Egypt's borders (the »Brook of Egypt«). He declared that he removed Hanunu, the Egyptian-backed ruler of Gaza, sacked the city, and erected a royal stele to commemorate his accomplishments.[56] Administrative records establish that Egyptians resided at the Assyrian court as scribes, and as horse experts.[57] In the final decades of the eighth century, during Sargon's reign, the Delta ruler Osorkon IV (c. 730–c. 725 BCE), who controlled the northeastern Delta (including Tanis and Bubastis), brought audience gifts to the Assyrian king in an apparent diplomatic overture.

CONCLUSIONS

The common label »Aegyptiaca« suggests a homogeneous and durable category of material culture not only with respect to type and style, but also to meaning. Building on recent scholarship advocating new approaches to this and other categories of »exotica«, I have sought to indicate the potential for emphasizing material agency and fluid boundaries in analyzing the altered perception of foreign-style objects in new cultural contexts. The broad dissemination and informed deployment of Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects in the Iron Age greater eastern Mediterranean indicates a widespread familiarity with material practices in the realm of divine protection, particularly in the domains of women and young chil-

dren, that reached across significant geographical expanses and social strata. The efficacy of this agency depended on highly specific typological and iconographic formulations, extending to color, material, dimensions, style, and other formal qualities. And yet the two contexts reviewed here debate notions of Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects as distinct and static categories of material culture, stable constructs that persisted across cultural and temporal boundaries and evoked predictable responses as »foreign« or »exotic«. Objects made in or incorporating elements of Egyptian styles must often have become something different in their new cultural settings; they could preserve references to Egypt in various aspects of their meaning and function, while simultaneously effecting changes in ritual practices and creating new social identities. By recognizing the capacity of these objects to reveal or conceal their »Egyptianness« in the context of changing environments and viewership, we acknowledge their transformative potential.