THE MAGIC OF THE MATERIAL

RECEPTIONS OF ANCIENT EGYPT AND THEIR IMPACTS

Stephanie Moser

The adoption of ancient Egyptian motifs in historic and contemporary contexts is extraordinary, revealing the enduring capacity of Egyptian material culture to inspire communities all over the world. Engaging with ancient Egypt in multiple domains and over successive generations, scholars, travellers and creative professionals have expressed fascination for many aspects of Egyptian antiquity in their writings and visual outputs (including the decorative arts). In studying this diverse and sustained response to ancient Egypt, specialists from many disciplines have outlined concepts, terms and ideas relating to its reception. Researchers in Egyptology, archaeology, art history, history, film, classics, literature and cultural studies have all contributed to the understanding of Egypt's legacy from antiquity to the present. Experts in specialised fields such as antiquarianism, design history and colonialism, have also informed our appreciation of the extent to which and the manner in which ancient Egypt has been engaged with over time. Through divergent conceptual frameworks, scholars and popular writers have outlined compelling narratives on the »survival« of ancient Egyptian cultural forms beyond the realms of the Nile.

While the representation of ancient Egypt in historical and creative contexts provides testimony of its visual potency and striking appeal, we know little about the ways and extent to which such representations impacted the cultural traditions within which they were created. The ambition of *Beyond Egyptomania* is to examine this issue of impact from an object-oriented perspective. In seeking to contribute to research on the reception of ancient Egypt, the volume explores the agency of Egyptian material culture through a series of case studies on Egyptianising objects and Egyptian-themed images. The authors discuss objects and images that were produced during a range of time periods and in a great variety

of contexts. Together they aim to document how representations of ancient Egypt affected their surroundings and the wider historical contexts within which they were generated. In the following discussion I outline key points made in *Beyond Egyptomania* before turning to the significance of the »material« in a highly impactful body of representations of ancient Egypt.

Rather than summarizing what the papers in *Beyond Egyptomania* achieve individually, it is perhaps more fruitful to discuss what the volume achieves collectively. Several important points are made that do much in the way of demonstrating the value of studying the reception of ancient Egypt. First and foremost, the volume demonstrates a growing appreciation of the role of Egyptianising antiquities in cultural expression and transformation. This involves exploring how artefacts from cultures both contemporaneous and successive to ancient Egypt innovatively adapted Egyptian motifs in their artforms and other expressions of material identity (often referred to as »Aegyptiaca«). The contributors to *Beyond Egyptomania* demonstrate how such objects and images reflect a diverse range of cultural priorities and agendas, impacting the conceptual domains and physical environments in which they were made and used. Outlining the diversity of frameworks through which ancient Egypt has been understood, the authors also show that western narratives about the history of art do not really take this rich trajectory of adaptation and interpretation into account. Overall, the chapters assign the material residues of Egypt with a proactive role in cultural history due to their innovative adaption in multiple historical contexts. We learn, for instance, how ancient Egyptian motifs and iconography became embedded in a variety of religious traditions and secular practices, significantly affecting those who viewed and engaged with them. We also see how those who incorporated ancient Egyptian elements within their own traditions of representation did so in highly creative ways, »repurposing« ancient Egypt in ways that transformed the surroundings in which such representations were housed or exhibited.

Another important contribution of the volume to the study of the reception of ancient Egypt is the shift away from studying the representation of »great treasures« and well-known monuments of Egypt. Several authors explore the depiction of Egyptian motifs in smaller antiquities and the »minor arts«, evaluating the way in which these responses advanced the ideas and agendas of the representing culture. In addition to this, the volume demonstrates that there are important differences between the reception of ancient Egypt in the arts and the recycling of concepts and ideas from Egypt in non-visual realms. While the former have been typically evaluated within an art history framework, *Beyond Egyptomania* demonstrates that an archaeological (object-orientated) perspective assigns agency to Egyptianising antiquities, rather than treating them as an artistic »by-product« or derivative form of art. This agency becomes apparent when the materiality of Egyptian antiquities, not just their meanings and iconography, is more fully considered. Intimately related to this is the paradoxical appraisal of Egyptian antiquities, where they are simultaneously considered familiar and recognizable, yet exotic and mysterious.

A recurring theme in *Beyond Egyptomania* is the challenge to the notion that Egyptianising objects constitute a coherent body of material with similar attributes, uses and meanings. Such artefacts are shown to be highly varied and created for a wide range of purposes. As the authors demonstrate, ancient Egypt and its visual motifs meant completely different things to different communities. The significance of Egyptian antiquities to those representing them often related to their historical, political and economic connections with Egypt. The religious significance of ancient Egypt in Christian traditions has also been extremely important in informing its reception in history, art and cultural memory. Egyptian art, its iconography and material characteristics were skillfully woven into and incorporated within contemporary frameworks of reference, serving particular agendas that had little or no connection to the »original« functions and meanings of Egyptian material culture.

Important to consider in this context of examining receptions of Egypt are the routes of access to Egyptian antiquities, and here *Beyond Egyptomania* demonstrates the critical role of the visual images of Egypt circulated from the early modern period. As is shown in the volume, antiquarian illustrations were particularly important as a source from which receptions were generated. While collectors, travellers, scholars and members of learned societies would have had opportunities to directly encounter Egyptian antiquities, artists, designers and architects relied on illustrative recordings for their representations of Egyptian artistic forms. These recordings were highly selective and interpretive in their nature, and practitioners from the visual industries were often drawn to the stylistic qualities of early archaeological imagery, responding to their material elements rather than their symbolic meaning.

More generally, the authors in *Beyond Egyptomania* promote an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates the perspectives of archaeologists, classicists, art historians, cultural historians and historians of science. While many who research the reception of ancient Egypt remain loyal to certain theories and disciplinary methodologies, there is a general recognition that Egyptian artforms have had a major impact on the visual arts and on design history since the Renaissance. Finally, some contributors to this volume raise the issue of the variable quality of research on Egyptomania and express concerns about the continued use of the term »Egyptomania« to denote the field, which suggests that it is concerned with tracing a history of obsession and fantasy. As argued elsewhere, there are important historical reasons why ancient Egypt emerged as an intellectual domain that did not share the same boundaries that existed for the study of other ancient civilisations.[1] The perception of ancient Egypt as a more ›accessible‹ ancient culture that did not demand the same level of expertise required to understand and interpret the antiquities of Greece and Rome reflected how, for the latter two cultures, there was a tradition of classical scholarship that had been in existence since the Renaissance. No such scholarly tradition existed for ancient Egypt, resulting in different levels of intellectual engagement that were more diverse and eclectic. Furthermore, without the ability to read hieroglyphs there was a wide lack of understanding of Egyptian antiquities and audiences felt a sense of entitlement in interpreting the remains according to frameworks that were meaningful to them. To a certain degree ancient Egypt

has retained this legacy of being »open to all« and it this, perhaps, which enhances concerns about retaining the word »Egyptomania« to delineate the field of ancient Egypt reception studies. Added to this are the connotations of »mania«, which implies something that is irrational and incommensurate with scholarly study. Such associations are indeed problematic, but resolving the terminological conundrum of the word »Egyptomania« is complicated. While it is important to critically evaluate previous approaches to documenting the reception of ancient Egypt and essential to develop new ways of exploring the subject and taking it forward, the many traditions of writing about Egyptomania, »Aegyptiaca« and Egyptian Revivals will undoubtedly continue to co-exist. Just as receptions of the past are persistent and continually recycled and innovatively reworked in new cultural contexts, such is the case with studies of Egyptomania. Scholars from numerous disciplines and with divergent theoretical loyalties can all identify important aspects of the legacy of ancient Egypt, and with the increasing number of detailed investigations on the subject, researchers specialising in this area are achieving much in the way of characterising the distinctive impacts of representations of ancient Egypt.[2]

CAPACITIES FOR IMPACT

As mentioned above, a key aim of *Beyond Egyptomania* is to promote an appreciation of the »material agency« of Egyptian antiquities in the reception history of ancient Egypt. A widely used concept that has varied applications in many disciplines, »agency« has long been explored by archaeologists, who have argued that ancient artefacts have active social lives that are central to the formation of identities and social networks. Theories of agency specifically relating to archaeology have been vigorously discussed, with researchers considering the value of »archaeological agency« for understanding ancient communities and cultural development.[3] As specialists of ancient material culture, archaeologists have (like others) adopted ideas from the work of anthropologist Alfred Gell, notably those presented in *Art and Agency* (1998).[4] Gell's emphasis on the role of artworks in enacting agency has been more recently developed by archaeologists seeking to reflect on materiality and the significance of the material in ancient and prehistoric worlds. In *The Archaeology of art. Materials, practices, affects*, Jones and Cochrane (2018) take their departure from Gell's arguments about how objects become enmeshed in social life through their production, distribution and reception. Their study demonstrates how the processes involved in the creation and adornment of artworks are as important in social life as is their physical existence. In focusing on the making of ancient art, they highlight the significance of the material character and qualities of such objects, focusing on their affective nature. Their materially focused, process-based approach shows that ancient artworks should not been seen as finished products because they essentially remain active. Adopting the concept of »affect« to address the relationship between artists/makers and materials, Jones and Cochrane de-

scribe how affects are moving forces which are multiple and ongoing. This kind of approach to the »material agency« of antiquities reinforces the highly fluid nature of objects, demonstrating that the interactions artists and makers have with the things they create is much more than a technical or practical exercise, and that the treatment of objects as static entities undermines the extent of their role in human existence. Such ideas can also be explored in relation to representations of ancient art and, more specifically, representations of ancient Egypt. The non-Egyptian images of ancient Egypt produced by artists and artisans over thousands of years have remained very much »alive«, making an impact on viewers from successive centuries and encouraging them to engage with antiquity in new ways. Indeed, a key point made in »agency studies« and which is particularly relevant to *Beyond Egyptomania*, is the idea that the agency of objects is enacted via the impact they have on audiences. Archaeological agency essentially refers to the capacity of ancient objects to »act« and affect those who make, use and view them and this can be widened to include representations of the past, which can be shown to have impacted their makers and the audiences who engaged with their creations.

The focus on »material agency« in *Beyond Egyptomania* demonstrates how ancient Egyptian and Egyptianising objects did not simply generate aesthetic interest but had other important impacts as well. In the following discussion I discuss the capacity for impact of receptions of ancient Egypt, focusing on the way in which an important body of visual representations of ancient Egypt engaged intensively with its material dimensions. In association with this I reflect on what might be termed an »engagement cycle«, where historic representations of ancient Egyptian objects are shown to have fostered new levels or layers of response to Egyptian antiquities. Examining how audiences have engaged with ancient objects and subjects, archaeological representation and reception studies consider how such responses generated distinctive impacts on perceptions of the past.[5] Researchers working in this area do not simply evaluate how ancient artefacts and cultures have been presented in particular ways, but also address the capacity of representations to affect viewers and promote new reception regimes. The extent and nature of the engagement that audiences have with archaeological artefacts reveals how the agency of such objects does not just reside in their visual impact but also in their powerful material presence. More specifically, audiences do not just appraise antiquities and representations of them in terms of what they represent, they also respond to them in terms of how they are constructed, formed and displayed. This theme has been explored in projects on the representation of ancient Egypt in museums, exhibitions, design and art (see below). Detailed investigations of the representation of ancient Egypt in 18th and 19th century Britain have revealed how museum curators, designers and artists animated ancient Egyptian material culture through their work. They achieved this by highlighting aspects and attributes of Egyptian antiquities that brought these objects »to life« in ways that were meaningful to the audiences of the time.

Material agency is manifest in the display of Egyptian collections in museums around the world. The findings of a study on the presentation of Egyptian antiquities in the British

1 Egyptian Room in the British Museum, opened in 1838. Photograph by Frederick York, 1875

Museum from the mid-18th century to the late 19th century demonstrated that the manner in which the Egyptian objects were arranged encouraged visitors to interact with the materiality of Egyptian antiquities.[6] As little was known about the meaning and symbolic significance of Egyptian antiquities, the material characteristics of the objects became a primary route through which they were appraised. The size, shape, materials and decoration of the Egyptian objects were commented on at length, with comparisons made to the way in which their forms contrasted with those of ancient Greek and Roman antiquities. Moreover, the modes of arrangement adopted for presenting the Egyptian antiquities in the museum were not only informed by classificatory systems relating to object type, but were driven by the material qualities of the artefacts. Within broader groupings of antiquities that were arranged according to function (such as votive figurines, funerary items and domestic utensils), objects were assembled in visual arrangements based on shape, size and material. These »micro-installations« generated distinctive effects, attracting viewers to engage with the material and stylistic aspects of the items on display (fig. 1). In observing these features of the objects, visitors came to understand ancient Egypt in terms that were comprehensible to them. Ancient Egypt thus assumed a paradoxical identity; although ancient, exotic and mysterious, it was at the same time familiar and recognisable. Displaying items according

to similarities and differences in size, shape and material (within broader chronological and typological arrangements) might be simply dismissed as little more than an aesthetic conceit, yet such arrangements enabled objects to exert their own distinctive agency in inviting audiences to connect with the past.

Another key facet of the material agency of Egyptian antiquities was explored in a project on the representation of ancient Egypt in the work of prominent Victorian designer Owen Jones.[7] Through the Egyptian Court exhibit that he created for the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, and his landmark work *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), Owen Jones highlighted the powerful role of ancient Egyptian ornament in communicating the values, aspirations and nature of ancient Egyptian society. His design of a large scale reconstruction of Egyptian architectural forms in the Egyptian Court, through which visitors could move and interact with multiple material elements, had a major impact on the perception of ancient Egypt (fig. 2). In this striking and vivid interpretation, which Jones created together with the Egyptologist Joseph Bonomi, a thoroughly immersive material world was presented. Here was a site in which ancient Egypt could be experienced rather than simply observed. As opposed to isolated objects brought together in the context of a more formal museum setting, the Egyptian Court seamlessly combined fragments of ancient Egypt into a coherent material environment. Visitors responded to the sensory effects of this exhibit, expressing awe at the scale, form, colour and extensively decorated surfaces that the unique space offered. Although entirely different from the materially affective »micro-installations« of the British Museum referred to above, the Egyptian Court also made its impact through the material. While the elements of the exhibit were reconstructed copies rather than original antiquities, they nevertheless created a powerful material effect. Augmenting this was Jones' detailed graphic renderings of Egyptian motifs in *Grammar of Ornament*, which promoted the idea that Egyptian artists and artisans had constructed a language of ornament that mapped their world. His graphic interpretation of Egyptian ornament conveyed the striking impact of ancient decorative styles, encouraging viewers to appreciate the combination of geometric and abstracted forms with vivid colour harmonies. Together, these three-dimensional and two-dimensional representations of ancient Egypt were shown to have had a significant impact on visitors/viewers, some of whom re-appropriated aspects of these interpretations in new representational schemes (see below). Essentially, Jones demonstrated that the rich ornament with which the ancient Egyptians' adorned their monuments and manufactured objects was not simply created for decorative or aesthetic effect. More than simply a »render« on the surface of monuments and objects, Egyptian systems of ornamentation were shown to be an integral part of the »anatomy« of their material culture. Through these highly viewed and widely distributed representations of ancient Egypt, the designs and motifs created by ancient Egyptian artists were revealed to constitute a distinctive material signature of ancient Egyptian religious systems and cultural beliefs. Indeed, archaeologists and Egyptologists were inspired by Jones' compelling representations, adopting more contextual modes of museum display and producing studies

2 Hall of Columns display in the Egyptian Court, Crystal Palace. Photograph by Henry Negretti and Joseph Zambra, undated

of the decorative aspects of Egyptian art that assigned them greater significance in the wider realm of ancient Egyptian culture.

The notion that representations of ancient Egypt served to animate Egyptian antiquities and assign them an agency aligned with their materiality has been recently explored in a project on the historicising paintings of Egypt.[8] This research examined how artists working in Britain in the second half of the 19th century engaged intensively with ancient Egyptian objects, focusing in particular on the Egyptian-themed pictures of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edward Poynter and Edwin Long. Described as »archaeological genre paintings« in their pictures had a strong materialist focus, generating striking views of domestic life and religious rituals in ancient Egypt. The Egyptian subjects they exhibited at the Royal Academy

and in other major art venues demonstrate how material agency is enacted on different levels. First, the material agency of Egyptian objects on display rendered them highly appealing to artists, who became inspired to represent historicising scenes of Egypt that were densely populated with archaeological objects. In responding to these museological representations, artists endowed Egyptian objects with another »layer« of agency by showing how central they were to social life. Through the artists' imaginative visions, Egyptian objects became embedded in meticulously reconstructed material worlds. Far beyond serving as picturesque »props«, which they often did in other historicising paintings featuring the ancient world, artefacts assumed a powerful and meaningful presence in Alma-Tadema's, Poynter's and Long's art. More specifically, these artists did not simply suggest how Egyptian artefacts were central to the functions of daily life, but elevated them into objects that enriched life in other ways. Ancient utilitarian items were not only valued by the artists because of their domestic connotations, but also for their ability to evoke an atmosphere of »beauty«. This sense of beauty was manifested by the seemingly simple and functional, yet simultaneously aesthetic properties of objects. Populated with an abundance of painstakingly rendered domestic antiquities, Alma-Tadema's, Poynter's and Long's paintings both captured and celebrated the sumptuous material world of Egypt. In doing so, these pictures promoted the value of the less sensational and more ordinary objects in gaining insight on the more intimate lives of the Egyptians.

The impact of the richly constructed material settings in archaeological genre paintings has been more fully explored elsewhere, but the notion of »material agency« can be outlined here with one important example.[9] Alma-Tadema's *Egyptian Widow* of 1872 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), aptly demonstrates how the artist deployed a multitude of material details to create a highly atmospheric and affecting scene (plate 41). While the subject of the picture centres on a grieving widow crouching by the side of the coffin of her deceased husband, the details of the setting have been assigned great attention. Alma-Tadema consulted a vast array of material and visual sources to inform his scene, including sculptures, architectural features, funerary scenes on walls and papyri, wooden mummy cases, sarcophagi, funerary objects and domestic items. Examples of all these classes of material are assembled into a highly detailed interior space where virtually every surface is covered with decoration. A substantial number of the objects in the picture can be sourced to the British Museum, notably the coffin, mummy, and canopic jars. Designs on the walls have also been copied from artefacts in the museum, and it is likely that other elements were taken from an important series of photographs of British Museum objects published in the same year as the painting.[10] Aspects of the picture also suggest that Alma-Tadema was influenced by the Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace. Beyond the close similarity in the column capitals, the way in which viewers are encouraged to look over the low wall into another richly decorated room is highly reminiscent of the Egyptian Court. The Egyptianising frame Alma-Tadema had made for the picture also appears to have drawn on the style of repeating motifs from Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*.

The reception of *Egyptian Widow* provides important insight into the way that archaeological genre paintings were evaluated in terms of their attention to the material. The *Athenaeum* highlighted its »vitalizing ability«, *The Times* referred to its »solidity of effect« and the *Examiner* admired it for investing »archaic accessories like these with a semblance of vitality«.[11] Interestingly, the writer for the *Examiner* felt that the highly detailed setting was compatible with the subject of the painting, revealing how for some critics the material elements constituted more than just a background. In more recent times, however, critics have suggested that the details of the interior are too dominating. Egyptologist Herman de Meulenaere, for example, reflects that even the »wailings of a widow, kneeling at the feet of her husband's coffin, are drowned in such an exuberance of decorative motives that they fail to move one's heart«.[12] While the profusely ornamented interior is a primary characteristic of the composition, it does not necessarily, however, undermine the subject of the work. With her hunched posture, hand covering her face, and arm gripping the coffin, the widow evokes a powerful sense of grief. Her gestures are instantly recognisable as an expression of sadness and loss. Furthermore, her translucent and relatively plain garment sharply contrasts with the richly decorated elements all around her.

Returning to the theme of materiality, *Egyptian Widow* is notable for the way in which the texture of ancient materials has been highlighted. Alma-Tadema seeks to capture the natural qualities and intricacies of the wooden door, bier, bedframe and harp. Although he is famous for his ability to replicate the appearance of ancient marble with great fidelity (particularly in his Roman paintings), his keenly observed rendering of wood, metal, glass and ceramics is equally pronounced. Another distinguishing feature of the picture is the attention to how things are made. Wooden pegs in the bier, semi-concealed »pins« attaching the tails to the bedframe, the wooden »hinge« on the top of the door, and the splits in the vaulted coffin lid, are testimony to Alma-Tadema's fascination with the processes involved in making things. Attention to these material details reflected his desire to understand the inner-workings or »anatomy« of objects. Like an archaeologist, he recognised that the act of constructing and decorating objects was just as important to their agency as was their finished physical form. This aspect of his art had an impact on responses to such objects and demonstrated that the intense archaeological realism of his pictures did not just pertain to surfaces, but hinted at something deeper. Such details, for instance, endowed paintings such as *Egyptian Widow* with a sense of intimacy, encouraging viewers to feel they were present in these ancient spaces, witnessing these scenes with their own eyes.

The focus on the material world of ancient Egypt in the art of Alma-Tadema, Poynter and Long did not simply result from a motivation to reconstruct antiquity in an archaeological manner in order to lend weight to the veracity of their scenes. Rather, these artists featured numerous highly realistic depictions of specific antiquities as a means for capturing the *spirit* of life, which for them was both intimate and personal. While they were interested in a broad range of artefacts indicative of past traditions and behaviours, what attracted them the most were the smaller utilitarian items that were ostensibly functional but lavishly and skil-

fully decorated by the ancient artisans. Drawn to the »civil« and »industrial« antiquities displayed in the Egyptian Rooms at the British Museum, the artists found a rich quarry for their paintings. From these galleries numerous items were carefully selected and assembled into vivid scenarios of specific moments in life. Alma-Tadema's, Poynter's and Long's pictures were distinctive for conceptualising ancient Egypt in terms that were less formal than those conveyed in museum displays, publications and other artworks, particularly in their desire to convey more emotion in the representation of a culture that was often depicted as cold, cruel and exotic. While their scenes reflected the growing interest in the »manners and customs« of ancient ancestors, they were also a result of the fascination for the growing collections of everyday objects acquired by museums. Importantly, however, their passion for including these items in their scenes was not the result of a materialistic »fetish«, but stemmed from the combination of an admiration for the quality of design and decoration evident in items manufactured thousands of years ago, and the way in which these »relics« were suggestive of lives once lived. Intimately related to this was the design movement of the 19th century, where practitioners expressed great interest in the development of skilled traditions of craftsmanship from ancient times, and where an emphasis on the material dimensions of the past spoke to the wider issue of privileging fine art above the applied or decorative arts. Although rendered as paintings and thus classified as »fine art«, Alma-Tadema's, Poynter's and Long's pictures elevated the status of the manufactured arts by assigning them a role beyond the merely functional and decorative. No longer simply »accessories« that were included to provide visual interest, ancient domestic objects had come alive.

With their precisely copied and prominently placed artefacts, archaeological genre paintings assigned great potency to the material dimensions of the past, yet the response to the focus on »accessories« was contentious. Some critics felt the emphasis on the material did not fulfil the true aims of art, and that the attention to the background was disproportionate and detracted from the subject of the work. For many the material elements of a picture were considered secondary in comparison with the representation of human action and accordingly, Alma-Tadema, Poynter and Long were criticised for attributing too much importance to *mis-en-scène*. Although these artists did not intend for the setting to be the dominating force in their pictures, they believed archaeological details offered far more than historical context. Ultimately, attention to the material dimensions of everyday life enabled them to capture the beauty of the »ordinary«. They saw something special in ancient utilitarian objects, believing they could be used to draw the viewer in to experience a sense of the past as it may have been. Just as the scale and skilfully crafted spaces of the Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace had exerted their agency by providing an immersive environment within which visitors could, interact, with ancient Egypt, the paintings of Alma-Tadema, Poynter and Long provided viewers with believable material worlds.

It is significant that Alma-Tadema, Poynter and Long produced their pictures at time when archaeologists were emphasising how all classes of antiquities should be scrutinised to reconstruct ancient lifeways. One of the key impacts of their paintings was that they

helped challenge the assumption that textual sources, monuments and major artworks were the primary means for investigating the past. Like archaeologists, these artists appreciated the value of the »minutiae« surviving from antiquity and for them, the beautifully crafted domestic items from ancient Egypt were particularly compelling. As people were becoming increasingly accustomed to mass-produced items in the wake of industrialisation, the objects that been hand-crafted by ancient artisans assumed a special resonance for designers and practitioners in the visual arts. Showcased with such care in archaeological genre paintings, beautifully made artefacts from antiquity also satisfied the Victorian passion for material things. Importantly, the attention paid to the material in archaeological genre painting was not fleeting but grew out of a desire to convey an »inner truth« rather than just a physical reality. Ultimately, Alma-Tadema, Poynter and Long aspired to represent something more than just an authentic reconstruction of the past; well-copied antiquities were not simply inserted into scenes to suggest what life may have looked like, their rich material qualities were thought to offer a sense of what life may have felt like as well.

CONCLUSION

Beyond Egyptomania demonstrates how Egyptianising objects and images became transformed in new cultural contexts, assuming an important role in the creation of social identities and making an impact on their immediate environment. Close inspection of representations of ancient Egypt demonstrate that aspects of Egyptian art and culture were not simply exploited for their novelty and exotic connotations. Ancient Egypt has enjoyed a rich reception history because it offers opportunities to express ideas and aspirations that are meaningful to the communities who choose to engage with it; it can also accommodate multiple viewpoints at the same time. Indeed, there is so much diversity in the nature and modes of engagement with ancient Egypt that it is almost impossible to identify a coherent pattern or unified approach in appraising its reception. Beyond the variations in responses over time, there are also significant differences in the treatment of ancient Egypt in genres such as art, literature, film and philosophy. While the title *Beyond Egyptomania* implies a move forward and that »Egyptomania« is something we should leave behind, it is unlikely that those of us specializing in the subject can control or prevent the many enthusiasts who will continue to appraise the cultural legacy of Egypt in terms of irrational obsessions and fantasy. Furthermore, fixed definitions for the study of receptions of ancient Egypt are not necessarily helpful because representations are not static and continue to inform each other from one generation to the next. Ultimately, no one discipline can claim to be the »gate-keeper« or authoritative voice on studies of the reception of ancient Egypt. As a multi-disciplinary, multi-temporal and multi-conceptual field, reception studies of ancient Egypt will undoubtedly continue to thrive as an eclectic and vibrant area of investigation.