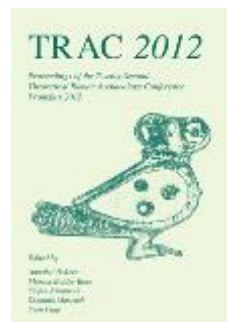

TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

www.trac.org.uk

Paper Information:

Title: The Perception of Egypt in Networks of Being and Becoming: A Thing Theory Approach to Egyptianising Objects in Roman Domestic Contexts
Author: Eva M. Mol
Pages: 117–131



DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2012_117_131

Publication Date: 27 March 2013

Volume Information:

Bokern, A., Bolder-Boos, M., Krmnicek, S., Maschek, D., and Page, S. (eds) 2013. *TRAC 2012: Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Frankfurt 2012*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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The Perception of Egypt in Networks of Being and Becoming: A Thing Theory Approach to Egyptianising Objects in Roman Domestic Contexts

Eva M. Mol

Introduction

Step 1: the statue. The following object will be the principal focus of this essay: an alabaster statue of the Egyptian god Horus, 42 cm in height found in the peristyle of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI 16, 7–35) in Pompeii (Fig. 1). According to its excavators the statue was found in the southeast corner of the peristyle in a shrine which was dedicated to the goddess Isis (Sogliano 1906; especially 1907: 556; 1908). Since its discovery, a

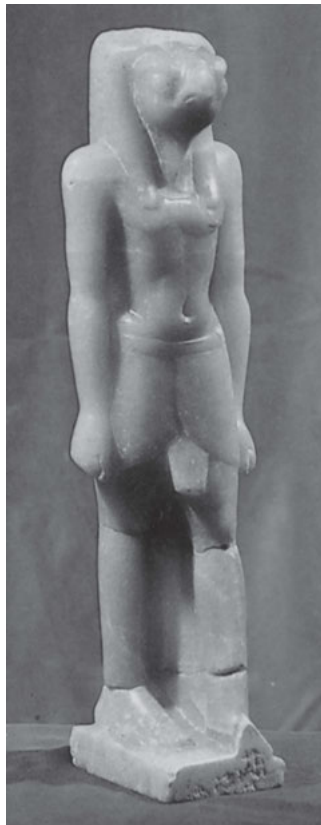


Figure 1: Alabaster statuette of Horus found in the Casa degli Amorini Dorati. From Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Napoli, Inv. no. 133230. From Swetnam-Burland 2007: 133: Fig. 6.

scholarly discussion exists about whether the statue was imported from Egypt, or locally made in an Egyptian style.

There are many more of such ‘Egyptian/Egyptianising’ objects to be found in domestic contexts in Roman Pompeii. The statue of Horus in this case exemplifies a category of material culture which is commonly referred to as ‘Aegyptiaca’. The category consists of a vast and rather heterogeneous array of objects, all connected to Egypt, either in style, iconography, or origin. In this category we find a great variety of subjects and media: statues, lamps and jewellery of Egyptian deities such as Isis, Serapis, Anubis, Harpocrates, Bes and Ptah, statues and paintings of sphinxes and pharaohs, Nilotic scenes, statuettes and fountains depicting Nilotic animals such as frogs and crocodiles, and wall paintings with Pharaonic imagery. The category Aegyptiaca and its heterogeneity present a very interesting case study. How were these objects used? How were they perceived in their contexts by Roman viewers? What effect did these objects have on their environment? What was considered their social or cultural value? And in what way and to what extent did these objects still refer to Egypt? Is it valid to consider them a distinct category? Especially the last enquiry in my view should be seriously reconsidered. Until now, many scholars have studied objects connected to Egypt as a conceptual and homogenous group, being interpreted as either a religious expression associated to the Isis cult, or valued as something exotic within the movement of the so-called ‘Egyptomania’, augmented after the annexation of Egypt as Augustus’ personal domain after the battle of Actium in 30 B.C. (Tran Tam Tinh 1964; de Vos 1981; Falanga 1989: 300; for an overview of the discussion see Versluys 2007: 1–14). First of all, the Egyptomania and religious explanations are problematic because they seemed to be brought forward as being exclusive interpretative frameworks, while they do not explain the incredible diversity in material and spatial contexts we witness at places such as Pompeii. Not every object which seems ‘exotic’ to our eyes was considered to be and used so, let alone that such objects should *a priori* be interpreted as religious. The complexities and sophistication relating to these objects, as we shall see in this paper, are in need of a more holistic view in which their presence forms an integral part of all the material found in domestic contexts in Pompeii. Further, Aegyptiaca as material culture needs to be complicated through a focus on all the different dimensions they offer in spatial and social contexts. Apart from the two overarching frameworks used for understanding the material, the contexts present a major problem, for Aegyptiaca have not yet seen an apposite spatial and social contextual analysis in order to look in detail at their use and appropriation. In contrast to other Roman sites, many Egyptian and Egyptianised artefacts in Pompeii have a secured find context. Consequently, a contextual analysis that answers why certain objects are found in certain spatial settings is particularly helpful in elucidating the questions raised above.

In this article I therefore want to challenge the notion of the existence of Aegyptiaca as a homogeneous category of material culture and point out the dangers of (pre) conceptualising Egypt through a contextual analysis of the statue of Horus and its use and perception in a domestic context. To do this properly I will take a few steps back by methodologically separating the things we encounter from the ideas we project onto

them. This will be done using Heidegger's ideas on the distinction between 'things' and 'objects' and the subsequent theories developed out of this separation, generally known as thing theory or materiality. The philosophy of Heidegger is very valuable for archaeological thinking because of his conceptualisation of materiality and his rethinking of time and space, challenging herewith Cartesian dualism and its inheritance on contemporary Western thinking (Thomas 1996a: 6; 1996b: 29–30). This last notion is of major significance for archaeology, as Gosden states: 'To any historical discipline worried about continuity and change these ideas [of Heidegger] are important and can lead to a real rethink of essentially static categories like society or culture.' (Gosden 1996: 22). In this article I will not use Heidegger as a new interpretative framework (rather an anti-interpretative structure is proposed) or as a methodology with some general benefit for archaeological theory. In my view, Heidegger's ideas prove their ultimate usefulness when employed as a thought experiment and exercise within solving questions offered by a specific dataset. It must be stressed in this respect, that although this exercise is principally inspired by Heidegger's philosophy it will not exactly follow his original thoughts and writings, for the theory in this paper is primarily meant to clarify an archaeological inquiry, not a philosophical one.

On the basis of this methodology, six steps will be distinguished concerning the statue of Horus, presented in the following order: step 1: description of the statue; step 2: materiality of the statue; step 3: import, style and iconography of the statue; step 4: place of the statue in the shrine; step 5: position of the statue in the house; step 6: the statue in the context of Pompeii and the Roman world.

Thing theory and materiality: when an object becomes a thing

The concepts of thing theory and materiality are known by many names and have a variety of scopes. In this paper I shall be speaking about 'thing theory', for the terminology stands closest to Heidegger's original writings. Thing theory, as inspired by Heidegger's distinction between objects and things, is used in many fields within humanities and social sciences, for example in literary studies (Brown 2001), sociology (Preda 1999), anthropology (Gell 1999; Ingold 2007) and philosophy (Harman 2005; Latour 2005). Thing theory has recently witnessed a dynamic adoption within archaeological thinking, primarily to overcome the preoccupation with the representational and symbolic value of artefacts. It is argued that more attention should be devoted to the physicality of objects, while ontologically we should ask how things can be understood as having a form of existence and agency of their own (Hodder 2011; 2012; Whitmore 2007; Webmoor 2007 and Shanks 2007, *ibid.* forthcoming; Olsen 2003; 2010; Renfrew 2002).

Except for a more dynamic way of thinking about material culture, why and how are we aided by Heidegger in reaching a better understanding of Aegyptiaca in Pompeii? On a larger scale, Heidegger's use relates to how he conceptualises the world as a holistic entirety. Heidegger describes the way in which we typically perceive the world as 'availableness' (*Zuhandenheit*) (Heidegger 1953: 83–84; 1996: 77–78; Dreyfus 1991: 60–88; Ingold 2000: 167–169). Availableness can be understood as an unreflective

coping with everyday life in which people are immersed with the world and the things surrounding them. This perspective, focusing on coping with everyday life instead of reflecting upon the different components of life, is important for this essay because it offers exactly that holistic viewpoint we advocated to be essential for conceptualising Aegyptiaca. Egyptian objects cannot be isolated from anything else that occurs in the lives of people dealing with these specific artefacts. However, Heidegger is also insightful on a smaller scale. His ideas help treating the second proposed aim of the introduction, namely in studying the diversity hidden by the term Aegyptiaca. Heidegger's thing theory in particular has the ability to help seeing which layers lie behind availability, how these layers function, and how we perceive things. Because this study focuses on how the Romans used and perceived 'Aegyptiaca', a way to dichotomise different layers of perception can be considered incredibly valuable.

What is meant by different layers within perceiving? For the analysis, it is necessary to commence with asking how the things primarily show themselves to us and try to comprehend of what deeper pre-ontological (not perceived) layers a perception is built up from. This means looking at which intrinsic qualities independent of our perception exist within things, and subsequently what effect these layers and qualities had on the environment and an observer. This can best be clarified by a small illustration: the brown wooden desk at which I am currently writing this article is generally not consciously perceived, but taken for granted as a supporting tool for the work that needs to be done behind it. So the desk is not perceived in daily use, let alone the perception of the desk being made of wood, or being coloured brown. There are many things taken for granted in this way, however, such objects and their properties make up our world and are of enormous influence on the way we experience life, what we call culture, and how we see ourselves (Heidegger 1996: 62–64). What is important for this paper, is that within perceiving an object, more layers are present than becomes clear in the conscious mind. The process of dissecting thus consists of an uncovering of the *a priori* layers that were already present, but not consciously experienced during the perception (Harman 2007: 41). And this brings us to the Heideggerian distinction between object and thing.

These ideas are first mentioned in Heidegger's famous tool-analysis (Heidegger 1996; Harman 2002) and are made explicit in an essay entitled: 'The Thing' (Heidegger 1971: 163–184; 1994: 3–23; Harman 2010). The distinction basically comes down to the fact that a thing is an entity in its proper reality, something which stands independently of what we think of it, while an object is the outward appearance and representation of an entity. In other words, a thing stands for itself, while an object represents an idea. As an example Heidegger makes the distinction between a jug and a coca cola can, the jug being a thing and the coca cola can an object. This does not mean that objects are not things; the distinction is meant to be methodological, for every entity is both a thing and an object (Heidegger 1994: 6). The 'proper' reality that things represent relates to their hidden layers of perception, but also to their functioning, construction and being: it is the 'essential nature, its precencing [...] what we call thing' (Heidegger 1972: 172). According to Heidegger we should look for the 'thingly' in things. By doing this, we arrive at a 'nearness' (*Nähe*) in which the thing reveals its true self and the way it unites,

reveals, and brings forth a world (Heidegger 1953: 102–103, 108; 1971: 165; 1994: 5).

Although looking for the ‘thinghood’ in things might seem to be an example of Heideggerian nebulosity, including this in an archaeological analysis overcomes the reduction to the restricted focus on an artefact’s symbolic meaning or on its production. Trying to study the ‘thingness’ in artefacts also provides us with a way to see what comes forth from an artefact and how an artefact is able to constitute a network of other things and ideas. The usefulness lies in turning Heidegger’s thoughts towards archaeological artefacts and study their inward qualities and hidden layers of perception, while after that we should turn our attention to the ‘object’ of Heidegger’s discourse. This means that the study will be an exercise of stripping the object down to its individual properties and inward qualities and look for the *a priori* materiality of things, their appearance and their agency. Hereafter, the gaze will be turned outward again to the concept of the object and the way the projections onto the object functioned in a specific environment.

Step 2: The Horus statue as a thing. What is Horus *a priori*? What can we see and gain from stripping down layers of pre-ontological perception of the statue? When we analyse the Horus statue there are a few properties that can be considered important, things we take for granted in perceiving the world around us: these are, for instance, the colour, material, texture, contrasts and patterns, sparkle and shine of the artefact. To start with the material itself: the statue is made of a calcite alabaster. Alabaster is a soft, fine-grained form of gypsum that can be easily carved (Ward-Perkins 1992: 159). The Horus statue is carefully polished, which presents another important property. By polishing the alabaster the statue received a translucency, which provided it with a type of coating that no marble could have achieved. By the polishing the stone developed a sparkling effect and a very soft, almost malleable, appearance. Whereas marble translucency evokes a visual depth resembling human skin, the polished alabaster exceeds the marble effect to something transcending human ‘realism’. Lastly, the colour resulting from the transparency of the alabaster can be considered a third property. In relation to other statuary in Pompeii this can also be considered atypical. Depending on the absorption and refraction of light, it occasionally seems yellow, orange, or pink.

Looking at all these different properties of the statue, and comparing it to what we usually find in *lararium*-statuary in Pompeii where most statuettes are made of bronze or marble (Boyce 1937; Fröhlich 1992; Dwyer 1980: 253–254), we can assume that Horus was an eye-catcher, standing out in ‘otherness’. Although alabaster is only sporadically attested in Pompeii, its use is not an uncommon phenomenon. In fact, other Egyptian artefacts made of alabaster are found in Pompeii in the form of four alabaster canopies. Although their exact find spot is unknown, these were probably used in a funerary context (Di Maria 1989: 134, 138). What is further remarkable however is that the presence of alabaster is only demonstrated in vases and bottles, never in statuary (Allison’s database 2004: *Pompeian Households: An On-line Companion*). It could be that there already existed a cognitive link between Egypt and alabaster, and its exceptional appearance as a statue could have made this link even stronger. What we can observe through this analysis is that the materiality of the statue allows its parent material to diffuse in such

a way that it manifests the connections in which it is rooted (Thomas 1996: 17). This means that while the alabaster will not be consciously perceived, the connection with Egypt becomes apparent through the alabaster. Alabaster can therefore be considered as one of those hidden dimensions within perception which are a prime connector to other factors. These factors or connections rooted in the alabaster are 'Egyptian', but also strangeness or exoticism, wealth, power and divinity. Through the way that these connections were able to 'cling' to the statue it assembled a world by which its meaning was created. These interconnections make the thing worthwhile to study as an object.

The thing becomes an object again

There are more forces than materiality responsible for the way the statue reveals itself to a human observer, many of them having a symbolic and representational value. Therefore it is important to also regard the statue on a hermeneutic level. This means that Horus should be considered an object that transcends its physicality and symbolises something. In this respect three layers of agency are important concerning Horus as an object: the statue being an import, its style and its iconography.

Step 3: the value of import, style and iconography of the Horus statue. Concerning the statue's value as an import, it is hard to establish the exact provenance of the material used. As mentioned before, the source of the material is disputed. While Di Maria and Falanga believe the statue represents an accurate Roman copy, Sogliano deems it is an Egyptian import (Di Maria 1989: 140–141, no. 14.7; Falanga 1989: 302; Sogliano 1907: 549–593, 556). The latter notion is endorsed by the Egyptologists Kaper and Van Walsem, who, on the basis of the material, technique, proportions, execution (the way the back pillar ends on the shoulders) and iconography, believe the statue is beyond any doubt derived from Egypt. The dating would most probably be either the Late- or Ptolemaic period (personal communication Kaper and Van Walsem: examination executed by means of photographic evidence). Although the type of alabaster used resembles Egyptian alabaster from the Nile valley (Borghini 1989: 140–141; Gnoli 1971: 186–187), due to its surface treatment (polishing) it is not possible to confirm this through macroscopic analysis. Further, although many objects in Egypt are made from alabaster, Egypt is not the only source. In the Roman period other sources are in use next to Egypt, such as in Asia Minor, Tunisia, Algeria and Italy itself (Borghini 1989: 136–152; Ward-Perkins 1992: 159). The main problem however, with determining the origin of the statue, is found in the fact that the combination of material, type and iconography are uncommon in both Egypt and Italy. Horus would normally be displayed as an amulet or in bronze statuettes, but never as a larger sculpture made out of stone. Furthermore, although alabaster as a stone type was commonly used in all periods of Egyptian antiquity, it was not often used for displaying statues of deities (see Daressy 1906; Russmann and Finn 1989). So this statue can be considered a unique piece for both places, which makes it even more interesting to think about how and why it ended up in a house in Pompeii. Could it perhaps be custom made in Italy, or was it created in Egypt for a foreign audience?

Swetnam-Burland refrains from this discussion when she states that: ‘...the distinction [between local production and import] need not be particularly troubling. [...], whether this was in fact an import or emulation would likely not have much changed the way its owners viewed it’ (Swetnam-Burland 2007: 132 n. 43). Although this might be the case for occasional visitors, the actual foreignness could have been an important aspect in an object’s production of value and self-presentation. The fact that it was an import therefore could have been of great significance for the owners, not least in a religious sense. Assuming that we are indeed dealing with an import the Horus statue has no real parallel in Pompeii, however, nor do other Egyptian imports found in Pompeian domestic contexts. Another example just as unique as Horus is for instance a basalt slab with a dedication to the 26th dynasty pharaoh *Psammetichus* II, re-used as a threshold in the *Casa di Ercole Fanciullo*, VII 3, 11. Although there are no close parallels, imports are also found in the Isis temple in Pompeii (D’Errico 1992: 77–80), as well as in temples dedicated to Isis in Rome, such as the *Iseum Campense*. The most striking characteristic of these collections of imports is their eclecticism (Lembke 1994: 30). Neither the collection of imports from Pompeii nor from Rome displays a specific preference in age, subject or grouping, which seem to suggest that they were primarily significant as an Egyptian import. This means that the value and meaning of the Horus statue likewise could have relied considerably on the fact that it was imported. How did this work? Through long distance procurement the import receives a series of extra qualities that are considered signifiers of a time-space extension (Lazzari 2005: 195). By its material and style the statue created a reference to the country Egypt, something un-Roman, but more important even, something old, something from far away, something sacred, and something expensive. These notions also point to the statue’s social powers. Because, through acquiring imports, the owner produces a spatiotemporal extension of himself and in this way, he produces personal value.

How these previous references to a time-space extension were cognitively triggered for the viewer has much to do with style-perception. In the same way as we have seen with the material, style as materiality also signifies a key property within perception. The style of the Horus statuette can be characterized as pharaonic, for it follows all the principals that made ancient Egyptian sculpturing so recognisable. Horus is standing straight up with a gaze pointed ahead, he holds his feet parallel and close together, with the left foot in front of the right, the arms are ‘glued’ to the sides, there is an emphasis on symmetry, the statue wears a typical Egyptian *shendyt* and it displays Horus with a falcon-head (Fig. 1). What is vital for the case I wish to make is that style as a property should be considered an important agent that exercises power over the viewer and over the environment it inhabits. In the case of this particular statue, the material properties and the style as a property reinforced each other in the ‘Egyptian perception’ by a Roman viewer. This is remarkable because, as has been concluded above, the statue is far from being a typical Egyptian object. The result of this is that the statue’s agency would strongly influence the perception of the shrine.

This brings us to *Step 4: the statue in the shrine*. Compared to the context of the shrine, the style of the statue can be considered unusual. The shrine is not pharaonic, nor

do other objects and paintings in the shrine display a pharaonic style (Fig. 2). They are all related to the Egyptian-Hellenistic-Roman goddess Isis, but in this period she can be considered a well-integrated deity in the Roman pantheon (Belayche 2000: 565–592; Bricault 2004: 548–556). However, the Horus statue makes the connections to Egypt, which was already present in the Hellenised and Romanised figure of Isis, stronger and therefore visible. In this way the shrine and Isis are transformed into something Egyptian. This phenomenon fits in with more recent discussions on how the Isis cult was experienced in the Roman world in this period. Although Isis was unquestionably Hellenised and Romanised, adherents seemed to have stressed her alterity and that of her cult, even if it is a ‘pseudo-alterity’, through deliberately egyptianising the cult (Alvar 2008: 2).

The last concept of the statue as an object concerns its iconography. Horus, the Egyptian falcon-headed god, was in the Hellenistic and Roman pantheon only worshipped in his Hellenised appearance as the child Harpocrates. This means that the meaning of Horus would probably not have been known and recognised by most viewers and therefore form preceded the iconography within perception. What, then, does the fact that the statue represents Horus add to the perception process? From the analysis so far it seems that in terms of agency and perception the concept of iconography was of



Figure 2: The shrine dedicated to the cult of Isis. The east wall (left) depicts attributes from the cult such as a sistrum, patera and uraeus snake. The south wall (right) shows the gods Anubis, Harpocrates, Isis and Serapis. Two shelves were placed in the shrine which supported the statue of Horus, a marble statuette of Fortuna, and a lamp depicting Anubis, Harpocrates and Isis (pictures taken by the author)

lesser importance than properties such as material and style. Because the owners of the statue venerated Isis they wanted an object which was connected to Egypt, however, it was in the first place the fact that it was an Egyptian import which might have attracted the owners to purchase the statue. Although at least one of the owners probably knew the meaning of its iconography, we cannot assume that every visitor (unfamiliar with the Isis cult) knew who Horus was; still, by the material and style they would have recognised it was 'Egyptian'. Its transformative powers therefore stem from the fact that the material is alabaster and that the style is pharaonic. The fact that it is Horus must rather be considered a by-product of the other factors.

The phenomenological solution

We need to return to Heidegger before we treat the last steps in this paper. In discussing step 4 it has become clear that the environment plays an important part within conceptualising the materiality of Horus and that thing theory should be regarded within Heidegger's wider phenomenological thinking on the hermeneutic of being and being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1996: 32–33). The statue needs to be contextualised and interpreted within the world in which it was experienced and used, and therefore considering the wider environment is of the utmost importance for the analysis. Although colour or material is a central fundament for perception, we perceive things in an entirety; a thing is more than its colour or texture. Or as Harman 2007 explains:

'[the world]... is not a spectacle of colors and shapes, but rather an environment in which all things have a special significance for us and are linked with another in a specific way... objects always have a highly specific meaning even when they are not lucidly present in consciousness. They are events, not perceptual or physical occurrences.' (p. 23)

The statue exists in a system of essential connectedness together with other social and material entities; but this interconnectedness always takes place somewhere. Within Heidegger's phenomenology artefacts are not just things or objects made up out of visible properties, they are events and it is important to realise that materiality as an archaeological concept is only meaningful when it is contextualised in the physical setting in which the experience takes place. According to Heidegger all objects gain their meaning only in their relationships. In this way everything belongs to a total system of meaning. This totality is what Heidegger calls 'world' (Heidegger 1996: 59–62). It is a set of meaningful contexts which together render a human being's experience comprehensible and which bring together material, social and spatial phenomena. Anything which we can become aware of shows up within the context of our world, in the sense that it is never experienced as a set of naked sensory stimuli. Heidegger uses the phrase 'being-in-the-world' to express the way in which human beings are totally entangled within their world (Heidegger 1996: 49–53). World takes account of the space, human beings, objects, their social relevance and the connections that exist between them. Therefore a next step within this analysis should be focused on the intertwining of the human and his surroundings within the totality of material and social involvements.

Step 5: the statue in its environment. Next to the ‘Egyptian’ shrine another shrine can be found at the other side of the peristyle. This shrine contained bronze statues of the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), Mercury and two Lares which presents an unusual juxtaposition where a ‘Roman’ shrine can be seen on the one side of the house, and an ‘Egyptian’ on the other. There are many statues of Egyptian gods found in Pompeii. However, most of them are found amongst all other types of gods in *lararia*, not isolated such as in this house. There was no religious necessity to separate Isis and other gods belonging to her circle such as Serapis, Anubis and Harpocrates from other Roman gods. So the reason for this separation must be sought elsewhere. Observations made by Seiler and Powers (respectively in the *Häuser in Pompeji* series from 1992 and PhD-dissertation 2006: 148–158) about the history of the house and its contents are insightful for the way we can apprehend our statue:

- 1) After the earthquake of A.D. 62 when most of the house was refurbished, the atrium of the house was not rebuilt but carefully restored, thereby preserving the first style incrustation of the two *cubicula* (Seiler 1992: 95; Powers 2006: 163–164).
- 2) The garden in the peristyle contains the highest number of marble sculptures found in a Pompeian house. These include sculptures such as a variety of Bacchus statues, various kinds of animals and theatre masks. A statue of the Lydian queen Omphale was also found. What is significant about this collection is that thematically they display a predominantly Bacchic leitmotif, while Seiler describes them stylistically as Attic, Hellenistic, or Neo-Attic (Seiler 1992: 123–125).
- 3) One of the pieces is a relief depicting Venus and Cupid which was attributed to a fourth century B.C. Attic workshop in Greece (Seiler 1992: Fig. 614).
- 4) The peristyle consisted of a floor with a large amount of imported marbles and two obsidian mirrors in the south wall of the peristyle which are ‘extremely rare in these contexts’ (Powers 2006: 152, 157).

These observations place the statue of Horus into a perspective where it forms an integrated part of the house and together tell us something about the identity and intentions of the owners. They were very much interested in displaying the exotic and the ancient and possessing imports was a way to express their status. It has also to some extent to do with displaying wealth and with that, power. As Dwyer has shown a determining factor in the outlook of a sculpture garden should be sought not only in taste, but also in notions of wealth (Dwyer 1980: 292). The family acquired possessions in the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* whose values were maximized by a distinctive spatial and stylistic composition. What is even more interesting, the inhabitants seem to have been aware of stylistic differences and able to play with them to express certain values. Whereas the *lararium* on the north side of the peristyle distinctively displayed ‘Roman’ deities, the Isis shrine, by its import, evoked an Egyptian atmosphere. The statuary in the garden subsequently showed an ambiance of something ‘Greek’ in the form of a Bacchic landscape and Neo-Attic sculpture. In the same sphere, the sculpture assemblage in the garden had as its prime piece an original imported Attic relief. Similarly, the Horus

statue fulfilled this role to elevate the *sacrarium*. This means that next to the assumed emphasizing of religious alterity of the Isis cult with an Egyptian import, we should take serious account of social factors as well. It also shows very clearly the existence of rules regarding decoration in the form of appropriateness. One of the ideas about gardens (amongst many other functions and concepts) in an urban context such as Pompeii is that they were conceived as a paradox of domesticating the wild, an exotic window to nature and a place of freedom of political and social obligations: *otium* (Purcell 1996: 121–130; von Stackelberg 2009: 96). In this context, images of Bacchus and his entourage were often found, for Bacchic themes within the atmosphere of theatre, but also of drinking, partying, sleeping, and sexual pursuit, ‘set a mood of cheerful hedonism’ (von Stackelberg 2009: 27, 30; cf. Neudecker 1988: 47–51). The goddess Isis was not deemed suitable for this kind of display; she was a mother goddess associated with family, marriage and birth, with sexual abstention and moral purity as most important religious pillars (Alvar 2008: 180). A serious adherent of the Isis cult would not ‘fool about’ with Egypt as exotic garden display element. As the *Casa Degli Amorini Dorati* shows, they used Bacchus for this. However, Egypt as a magical, distant and strange country would lend itself very well for this purpose. If we compare the peristyle of the Horus statue with other Pompeian peristylia, examples of the latter occur in the gardens of the *Casa di Loreius Tiburtinus* (II 2,2), the *Casa delle Nozze d’Argento* (V 2,i), and in the *Casa di Acceptus e Euhodia* (VIII 5,39). These gardens are full of Egyptian statuary, however not in the form of Isis or any of the deities belonging to her circle, but in faience-like glazed ceramic statues of gods such as Bes and Ptah, and pharaohs, sphinxes, frogs and crocodiles. In these cases statuary are used as exotic garden display, in which they are sometimes used as fountains. From this category, however, Bes and Ptah can also be found in the same form, outside garden contexts, in, for example, *cauponiae* (as was done in VI 1, 2). The emphasis in this case might have been placed on the statues’ apotropaic qualities instead of sculptural adornment. In those cases Bes and Ptah can be regarded as a part of a category of apotropaic statuary to which dwarf depictions, Priapus and ridiculed statuary of old and ugly people also belong (Clarke 1998: 130–134; Muratov 2012: 57; Garmaise 1996: 135–139), rather than something Egyptian.

This last notion is significant in the context of this paper. Regarding the remainder of the category of ‘Aegyptiaca’ compared to the Horus statue, we see inferences of shifting perceptions that lead away from perceiving artefacts as Egyptian. In this way a table with a foot in the form of a sphinx becomes conceptually linked to the category ‘tables’, not to ‘something Egyptian’, as much as a fountain displaying an Egyptian frog becomes a choice for a specific type of fountain, and a Nilotic scene a specific adornment of a *nymphaeum* and therefore principally conceived as a water-scene. Instead of horizontally framing all these elements together as Egyptian material culture, contextualisation allows them a vertical position where the function of artefacts becomes the primary conscious experience. They are not something Egyptian, but taken for granted as tools, just like the wooden desk from the beginning of this paper.

Conclusions (Step 6, the Horus statue in the Roman world)

As a conclusion I would like to argue first of all, that we should better abstain from overarching interpretations that try to explain the existence of Egyptian artefacts in a Roman context. More important however, 'Aegyptiaca' themselves can be considered a non-category of material culture. The object central to this paper, the statue of Horus, has a typical and unique way of portrayal and is in its context not a mere exotica, but reaffirms what is going on in the Roman *domus* and reaffirms the taste and values of the inhabitants. The concept Aegyptiaca means 'things or matters related to Egypt'. However, in the eyes of many scholars it suggests a 'conceptual category employed by the Romans' (Swetnam-Burland 2002: 57). In my opinion this action of 'enframing' an artificial category to a concrete and conceptual category of material culture, is a dangerous reduction which does not do justice to the complex social situation that the Roman world shows. It has simplified things to the extent that all materials within this category have become somehow similar in Roman appropriation, and can be interpreted accordingly as exotic or religious. This 'upheaping' has actually been leading us away from what these objects meant in a Roman context and reduced things to only one of the many ways in which they were perceived. This is why we should scrutinise Roman objects we call Egyptian carefully, starting with the way things show themselves to us, and without constructing theories beforehand about the world that might lie behind the conscious experience. The hidden dimensions of 'Aegyptiaca' show that they should be valued within different networks than has been done in the past. Starting with an exploration of the *a priori* layers of the thing and then proceeding to the analysis of its representational qualities and agency of style, meaning and environment, I hope I arrived at a nearness to what the object meant in its past environment.

Through the analysis it has also become clear that by its use and function within different networks, Egypt could become concealed as a layer of perception. The Egyptian perception of an object should therefore be considered relative to a number of factors, such as the viewer, spatial context, time and function. The perception of the same object can change; its 'Egyptianness' can become concealed, to be revealed again in another context. Meaning and value are no constants but fluid entities which are formed, reformed and transformed within a complex network of spatial, social and material relations.

What remains, however, is the question about the effect 'Egypt' exercised in this way. Even when a thing was not used or perceived consciously as something Egyptian, Egypt still had an effect, an effect independent of human consciousness. Images of foreign gods, objects made of faience and alabaster, Nilotic landscapes and furniture depicting sphinxes, they all had the effect of stretching Romanness. Because in this way the Egyptian became hidden for the conscious eye and because objects were not appropriated for being Egyptian, but valued and perceived as something religious, or as a garden ornament, or as a dwarf figure, or landscape painting, or a choice within apotropaic statuary or within fountains. By its concealment Egypt was hidden though present and able to change Roman society. By inhabiting places and using things a

deeper connectedness is created between people and their world and a constant dealing with objects and their diverging connections encapsulated Egypt, each in their own unique way, in Roman culture. In dealing with Egypt as a thing, an object, and as an idea, both worlds became enmeshed. This is how Rome also became Egypt.

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Acknowledgements

The ideas for this article are developed in the context of my PhD-research, currently undertaken at Leiden University within the *NWO* project: *Cultural Innovation in a Globalising Society, Egypt in the Roman World*, directed by dr. M.J. Versluys. First of all, my sincerest gratitude goes to the TRAC 2012 organisers for giving me the opportunity to present and publish this paper. Further, I would like to thank my two supervisors dr. M.J. Versluys and Prof. Natascha Sojc for their comments regarding this work. I would also like to thank Prof. Gert-Jan Burgers, Prof. Olaf Kaper, and drs. Marleen Termeer for their help and feedback, and dr. Emily Modrall for correcting the English.

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