

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Creativity in Visual Arts

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34.1 A Dialogue Between Change and Continuity

With Alexander the Great's probable coronation as pharaoh at Memphis (Winter 2005, pp. 205–207; Pfeiffer 2014, pp. 104–106) and his consultation of the oracle in Siwa Oasis, where he was declared the son of Zeus-Ammon, he demonstrated a wish to be legitimized by the Egyptian gods. A legitimate pharaoh was required to care for Egypt by fighting against its enemies and by providing temples and cults for the gods. Alexander used the ideas of Egyptian divine kingship for his own purposes while fulfilling the needs of those whose native traditions they supported: the Egyptian elite.

The Ptolemies followed his example and carried to fruition the aspiration of the last native rulers of the Thirtieth Dynasty to create a once again powerful Egyptian empire, which dominated the Eastern Mediterranean at least for a time. The gigantic Egyptian temples of the Greco-Roman Period are the principal surviving monuments of the Ptolemies and the Roman emperors in the country (Minas-Nerpel 2012, 2017), so it seems evident that these rulers attached great importance to these enormous structures, which dominated Egypt's landscape in ancient as in modern times. Temple construction continued well into the second century AD, and temple decoration, although on a much smaller scale, into the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries. Temple architecture, reliefs, and inscriptions attest not only to the continuation of tradition but also to creativity in theological and iconographic matters, from which the strongly visual Hieroglyphic writing system should not be excluded.

Alongside the unbroken customs of the indigenous Egyptian population, the new Greek elite established their own traditions in Ptolemaic Egypt, resulting in a slow process of transformation and new trends in style. Under Roman rule, three cultures

met in Egypt: Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. Greek representational forms, in both two and three dimensions, were incorporated into the fabric of the society and became familiar, while native Egyptian culture maintained a strong presence, both physically and in social practices and language. The multiethnic population was thus situated among new patterns of rule and traditional ways of life, which resulted in sophisticated artistic modes of expressions that maintained a dialogue between change and continuity. Change should not be seen as negative or as decline, as it often has for Egypt's Late Periods (Stadler 2012a, p. 390). Change, rather, stands for the ongoing vigor in Egyptian culture.

34.2 Diversity of Sources and Scholarship

A definition of the abstract word “art” is difficult to supply (Robins 1997, pp. 12–29; Baines 2014). The Egyptian word *ḥm.t*, “craft, art,” corresponds in many ways to the pre-nineteenth century Western terms and usages for “art” (Baines 2007). Although Egyptians gathered past works (e.g. in Tanis), they did not collect art in museums, galleries, or *villae*, as the Greeks and Romans had already started doing. Egyptian art was mostly developed to serve practical purposes, for daily life, for worship, and for eternity. Although a rigid convention was applied, Egyptian artists also valued variation and avoided producing exact copies of the same forms. Change and cultural influences were possible, and hybrid forms could develop. Specific styles and forms in Roman Egypt have been widely discussed (e.g. Bergmann 2010; Riggs 2005).

For this chapter, “art” refers more or less to all the visual evidence attested for Egypt, even if for many, the term “visual arts” primarily conjures up funerary art, including burial goods, mummy masks, portraits, coffins, shrouds, tomb architecture, and decoration. Besides Thebes, Tuna el-Gebel, and other places, large necropoleis were located in or near Alexandria. These have been explored by Venit (2002). The new capital city of Egypt, the “first city of the civilized world” (Diodorus Siculus 17.52.5), has meanwhile been studied by many scholars, notably Fraser (1972), Grimm (1998), Pfrommer (1999), and McKenzie (2007). Alexandria was conceived as a Greek *polis*, which not only exploited the wealth of Egypt, but also imported luxury items from places as far away as India. Buildings were embellished with numerous Egyptian features, and sculpture and architectural elements were transported from all over Egypt, as exemplified by “Cleopatra’s Needles,” two famous obelisks that were moved from Heliopolis and positioned in front of the Caesareum (McKenzie 2007, p. 177). New visual expressions were created, and these illuminate questions of identity and cross-cultural influences in the multicultural city. McKenzie (2007) provides a substantial overview and analysis of Alexandria and its features, both Classical and Egyptian, from its foundation until the seventh century AD, taking into account not only material culture, but also political, cultural, religious, and philosophical developments. Her study demonstrates that in the last few decades, scholarship and publications have shown a resurgence of interdisciplinary research in a multiethnic society in Alexandria and the *chora*, exploring not only individuals, but also collective and cultural-religious identities (Vandorpe 2012; see also Chapters 18 and 19 for social and ethnic identities).

Identity depends on one's situation, both in life and in death, and is to a certain extent negotiable. Within the country's administrative elite, there was soon not much distinction according to the "ethnic" classification, because the inhabitants liked to switch between cultures and religions (Baines 2004). This fluidity has a large impact on the sources and their analysis. Several publications are dedicated to the study of how art and identity intersected, very often in funerary beliefs and material culture (e.g. Riggs 2005), and the same is visible in exhibitions such as *Les empereurs du Nil* (Willems and Clarysse 2000), *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth* (Walker and Higgs 2001), and *Egypt's Sunken Treasures* (Goddio and Clauss 2006). Egypt under Greek and Roman rule, with its tradition and new cultural developments, which often produced hybrid features, can only be illuminated meaningfully by interdisciplinary approaches, as exemplified by Beck et al. (2005).

This chapter cannot be comprehensive in covering categories of artifacts; instead, it focuses on some trends in different areas of the cross-cultural visual legacy. Many groups of material can only be mentioned and developments only summarized, but case studies highlight specific creative changes. Since art cannot be separated from its cultural setting, the context is described, or at least alluded to, in all case studies.

In most cases, visual evidence should not be separated from written testimonies. Often, the same source combines both textual and iconographic details, and visual and textual sources have complementary roles in the analysis of cultural, social, religious, and political elements. Besides some of the main categories of visual sources – temples, tombs, and stelae – this is true in particular of the inscribed sculpture of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. Ptolemaic rulers and Roman emperors were shown as pharaohs, with some hybrid features. Their statues have been discussed in some detail (e.g. Ashton 2001; Albersmeier 2002; Stanwick 2002; Walker and Higgs 2001), but statuary, both private and royal, is a vast area, with many cross-cultural influences, so that Lembke and Vittmann (2000, p. 8) comment in their contribution: "Die Kunstgeschichte der ptolemäischen und römischen Zeit ist bis heute ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln."

Coins were widely disseminated, and they combine elements of all of the cultures that came together in Egypt. On the obverse, they bore the approved royal or imperial image, and on the reverse, a variety of symbolic images drawing on Greek, Roman, and Egyptian content but conveyed in the Hellenistic mode (Kyrieleis 1975). Personal objects, such as jewelry (Pfrommer 2001) and art in glass (Schlick-Nolte 2004), bronze, and other metals (Rabe 2011), are innovative but consistent with those made in other areas of the contemporary Mediterranean world (Riggs 2005, p. 25). Because it is not possible to discuss them in this chapter – nor paintings and mosaics (see e.g. McKenzie 2007, pp. 181–184; Grimm 1998, pp. 102–105), terracottas (Sandri 2012), or pottery (Kreuzer 2011; Gates-Foster 2012) – I focus on one specific, highly creative type: the *oinochoai*, "wine jugs," which were basically Greek vases with partly Egyptian details that exemplify political, religious, and cultural issues. I begin, however, with the largest group, the Egyptian temples, within which were found some Egyptian royal stelae. After considering developments in this group, I analyze the example of Arsinoe II and the traditions and innovations in visual sources reflecting her position within the dynasty, in a treatment that combines several groups of material.

34.3 Egyptian Temples and Stelae

The huge temples, such as those at Dendara and Edfu, are much larger than anything that came before. Yet the foreign rulers, both the Ptolemaic kings and the Roman emperors, knew little in detail of the meaning of these buildings and their inscriptions. The construction policy, although centrally steered by the court, must have been stimulated by the priests and native elite, whose life focused around the temples, which were fundamental repositories of native Egyptian culture, and under Roman rule almost its sole carriers (Baines 1997, pp. 216, 231), embodying a sense of the Egyptian elite identity (Spencer 2010, pp. 441–446; Minas-Nerpel 2012, 2017). This significance for the elite may be one reason why the traditional forms of Egyptian cult places persisted through periods of foreign occupation.

At the same time, two different worlds, the Egyptian and the Hellenic-Roman, could be joined in one temple complex, as exemplified by Greek building inscriptions, for example in the temple of Hathor at Dendara. Outside the main entrance of this temple complex, there are Classical structures, such as the fountain house on either side of the entrance at the end of the colonnaded *dromos*, just before entering the enclosure (McKenzie 2007, pp. 160–161), while within the temple itself, traditional Egyptian decoration dominates. Just a few Hellenistic features are present in Egyptian temples, such as the zodiac on the ceiling of one of the Osiris rooftop chapels at Dendara (Cauville 1997). This zodiac is a planisphere or map of the stars or the sky on a plane projection in circular form, reflecting Greek and Babylonian influences in astronomy. In the temple, the zodiac signs themselves take Egyptian representational forms, but in tombs and on coffins some signs are in Classical forms (Osing et al. 1982, pp. 96–101; Riggs 2005, pp. 201–203).

The Egyptian temples of the Greco-Roman Period were not only architecturally sophisticated, but also decorated – and originally painted – in very complex ways according to specific principles of decoration (Kurth 1994). Despite their provincial locations, many of these temples display a high standard of execution, but they have hardly been studied from an art-historical perspective, with exceptions such as Vassilika (1989) and McKenzie (2007, pp. 119–146). Detailed studies of iconographic elements, such as royal regalia, are a *desideratum*, although items such as the “mantle” that the Ptolemaic king could wear in ritual scenes of confirmation of rule have received some consideration. A related form of garment can also be found on the late Ptolemaic and early Roman statues known as “striding draped male figures” (Bianchi 1978). These hybrid statues combine elements of Egyptian and Greek origin, representing their owners in elaborately draped ceremonial fringed garments, with the hem held in a fist. This type is not attested in Egyptian statuary of the Dynastic Period and was devised to meet the new social and cultural demands of the Greco-Roman era (Warda 2012).

The Satrap Stele (Figure 34.1) exemplifies how textual sources can elucidate the implications and significance of images. This stele, of pure Egyptian design, 185 cm high, was discovered in 1870 rebuilt into a Cairo mosque; it is now in the Egyptian Museum Cairo (CG 22182; Kamal 1904, pl. LVI; Schäfer 2011). Under the lunette, it is inscribed with 18 lines of Hieroglyphic text. The monument dates to year seven of Alexander IV (311 BC), when Ptolemy son of Lagus did not yet rule over Egypt as king, only as satrap (see Chapter 3). In the last section (lines 12–18), the monument commemorates the

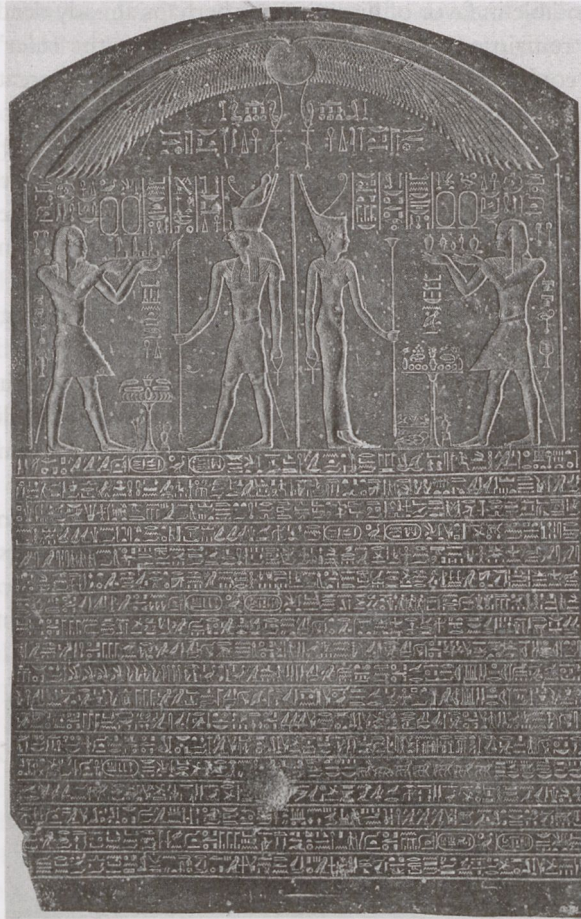


Figure 34.1 The Satrap Stele, showing Pharaoh Alexander IV or Satrap Ptolemy offering to Harendotes (left) and Wadjet (right). Source: courtesy Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 22182. Photograph Kamal (1904, pl. LVI). © Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

return of an agricultural area to the ownership of the temple of Bouto in the Delta, where the stele was probably set up. In return, the priests reassure Ptolemy of divine support, which of course implies their own. This example is a key to understanding the effort that went into constructing temples, and thus caring for the Egyptian cults: according to the principle *do ut des*, the ruler would be blessed and supported by the Egyptian deities, and thus by the clergy. The Ptolemies needed to secure the support of the native priesthood and administrators, since they played such a leading role in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of Egypt.

In the lunette of the Satrap Stele, a typical Egyptian ruler is depicted twice under the winged sun disk offering to the god Harendotes and the goddess Wadjet, but his cartouches remain empty, even though the stele text uses a date of Alexander IV. The king is not mentioned otherwise in the inscription, only Ptolemy, whose deeds are praised like those of a traditional pharaoh. It seems that Alexander IV merely served for dating purposes, but

was otherwise dispensable in favor of his satrap, or perhaps already dead – possible reasons why the cartouches remain empty. The depiction, and thus the ruler's identity, remains ambiguous, since it could refer to either Alexander or Ptolemy; a creative solution of the priest(s) who drew up the stele's scenes and inscriptions.

Although made almost 300 years later, the Gallus Stele (Figure 34.2) stands very much in the tradition of the Satrap Stele, at least in regard to the praise of a governor in Hieroglyphic Egyptian (Hoffmann et al. 2009; Minas-Nerpel and Pfeiffer 2010). When Octavian departed Egypt in 30 BC, he placed the new Roman province *Aegyptus* in the charge of C. Cornelius Gallus, who received the newly created title of *praefectus Alexandrae et Aegypti*, "Prefect of Alexandria and Egypt." His trilingual victory stele of pink Aswan granite, originally about 165 cm high, is housed in the Egyptian Museum Cairo (CG 9295) and dates to April 16, 29 BC. It was discovered in 1896 in front of Augustus' temple at Philae, which the prefect Rubrius Barbarus had dedicated in Augustus' year 18 (13/12 BC). When cut for reuse in the foundations of the temple's altar, parts of the top and approximately 8 cm in the middle were removed.

The layout of the stele is purely Egyptian. In the lunette, the traditional Egyptian winged solar disk is depicted. In the register below, a group of a horseman attacking an enemy, both Hellenistic in style, is carved in sunk relief, framed by three columns of Hieroglyphic text on both sides. Below the relief, there are 28 lines of inscription, 10 in



Figure 34.2 The Gallus Stele, showing Egypt's first Roman prefect in a Hellenistic pose. Source: courtesy Cairo, Eg. Museum CG 9295. Photograph Lyons (1896, p. 51). © Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Hieroglyphs, 9 in Latin, and 9 in Greek, conveying the deeds of Gallus. It can be assumed that Gallus himself ordered that he be depicted as a triumphant victor in Hellenistic tradition. He probably also drew up the Latin inscription, so that we have unique evidence of his own understanding of his deeds and actions. In an idealized battle scene, he is shown attacking an enemy who has fallen to his knees and is trying to protect himself with his shield. The depiction is accompanied and explained by a line of Hieroglyphs including a cartouche, which should be read “Romaïos,” referring to Octavian, the soon-to-be Augustus.

The horseman, Hellenistic in style, does not fit well on an otherwise Egyptian stele. It was quite unusual that Gallus, as a living general, wished to be depicted as a horseman in a relief scene. On the assumption that the Gallus Stele once stood in a public place of the Isis temple complex, the audience for his self-presentation would have included Greek, Roman, and Egyptian visitors. Greeks and Romans would have recognized the triumphant attitude without difficulty. Egyptians, too, could understand a group like this one, since temple walls depicted the pharaoh slaughtering enemies, even if the Egyptian king was never shown riding a horse in combat. This motif is only known in the Hellenistic Period from the Raphia Monument from 217 BC (Hoffmann et al. 2009, pp. 27–28), but more examples probably existed. On the Raphia Monument, the Hellenistic pharaoh is depicted as a triumphant horseman spearing an enemy who has fallen to his knees. With this depiction, the Ptolemaic ruler imitates Alexander the Great, combining the traditional Egyptian icon of a pharaoh punishing enemies with the Hellenistic element of a horseman in combat. Gallus was possibly adapting a fairly widespread motif in a more Hellenistic form, but his pose might have been misunderstood as an imitation of Alexander or a Ptolemy-like immortalization. However, the main message was conveyed: he was a glorious general, proud of his victories.

The depiction of the horseman at the center of the lunette created another problem: to show the Egyptian deities behind the Roman prefect would contravene Egyptian norms. Therefore, they are not depicted; only their names and epithets are inscribed – Khnum, Satis, and Anukis on the left side, Osiris, Isis, and Horus on the right. This arrangement avoided that Gallus assumed the royal prerogative of being depicted venerating Egyptian gods. The horseman could have been placed left, as on the Raphia Stele, but he is much more prominent in the middle, and this must have been Gallus’ aim; the more so since far more viewers of the stele could comprehend the image than could read the inscriptions. Inscriptions were important and necessary for the stele as an entity, but the visual element of the triumphant horseman spearing an enemy was the main feature for the audience.

Gallus’ alleged hubris and his assumed *damnatio memoriae* have often been discussed. *Damnatio memoriae*, the destruction of all memory of a person, is well known from Pharaonic Egypt, and we also encounter it in Roman Egypt, for example in the so-called Emperors’ Corridor in the temple of Sobek and Haroeris at Kom Ombo, where Commodus’ name has been erased. Construction and decoration of the Kom Ombo temple started under Ptolemy VI Philometor and continued through to the early third century AD. This large building was designed as a unique double temple with two main west–east temple axes, the southern one leading to the sanctuary of Sobek, the northern one to that of Haroeris. Both principal deities formed the center of triads that were well established long before this temple was built: Haroeris was linked to Hathor and Khonsu,

Sobek to the rather abstract deities Tasenetnofret, “the Good Sister/Spouse,” and the child-god Panebtawy, “the Lord of the Two Lands” (Baines 1997, p. 231). Kom Ombo exemplifies perfectly the continuation and elaboration of theological traditions and the creative thought of the priests, which can be detected in the architecture as well as in the iconography and the texts.

The ritual scenes show two categories of protagonists: one or several deities, and the pharaoh in traditional Egyptian regalia, whether native or foreign. It was a requirement of temple decoration to show the pharaoh performing the rituals that would guarantee the maintenance of the Egyptian cosmos. From the very beginning of Roman rule, Octavian-Augustus and his successors were depicted as pharaohs. Although the rulers were not Egyptian, they were the ritual protagonists who approached the divine power in order to sustain Maat (“truth, world order”). The Ptolemies might have regarded it as beneficial to possess this religious legitimacy, but Roman emperors do not seem to have been concerned about it, although temples were funded generously until at least the mid-second century AD. Egypt remained important because it was economically vital. However, even if the Roman pharaohs wanted to be seen doing the proper thing in the temple context, they were rarely present in the country. Hölbl (2000, p. 18, 117, 2004, pp. 102–105) hence concludes that the Roman emperor should be seen as a “cultic pharaoh,” who had lost his historical significance.

This generic character seems to be valid for most relief scenes, but a political or historical meaning can be detected in several instances, such as the ritual scenes carved in the Emperors’ Corridor of Kom Ombo (Hölbl 2000, pp. 94–99, figures 119, 121–125; Minas-Nerpel 2012, pp. 374–378, with references). On the northern half of the inner east face of the corridor, seven ritual scenes depict Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180) either as sole ruler or accompanied by his co-regent Lucius Verus (161–169). The southern half is decorated with only three scenes, of which the earlier are the two northern ones, bearing the cartouches of Commodus (180–192). In each case, parts of the latter’s name were erased, exhibiting his *damnatio memoriae* and reflecting developments that affected the entire Roman world, even indigenous temples in southern Egypt. The latest relief scene on this wall was decorated under Macrinus Augustus and his son Diadumenianus (217–218), who is otherwise not attested in Egyptian temples. The empty panels on the southern half show that the decoration of the corridor and the temple was abandoned after the death of Diadumenianus. Even if Egyptian temples received less attention than before, the degree of reflection of historic-political events in such an atmosphere is impressive, although the style of the reliefs is arguably less accomplished and more “provincial” than earlier in the Imperial Period, reflecting the general decline in funding and requisite artistic skills in Egyptian temples.

One offering scene in the northern half of the Emperors’ Corridor is quite unique among the surviving material. It shows a set of surgical instruments, as well as a shallow basin on a stand beneath a cone-shaped jar bearing a Hieroglyphic text (see Figure 32.1; see also Hölbl 2000, p. 96, figure 121; Bagnall and Rathbone 2004, p. 136). The upper part of the scene is lost. Marcus Aurelius, depicted kneeling, faces two small, seated goddesses, Isis and an unknown deity, and offered two *wedjat*-eyes in his raised hands to Haroeris and his consort Tasenetneferet. The surgical instruments aid in the healing of the mythical eye of Horus. From the cone-shaped jar, water is poured into the shallow basin,

and the text accompanying it explains that this is done in order to purify and heal the *wedjat*-eyes. The text to the left of the vase links the water to the places in Egypt where the body parts of Osiris were buried. The jar represents in a rather geometrical way the form of Egypt, being broader at the top (the Delta) and narrower at the bottom (Elephantine at the first cataract). This ritual re-enacts the resurrection of Osiris and the fertility of Egypt in connection with the regenerative Nile flood. As Osiris is restored, illnesses are cured by both science and ritual means. This relief demonstrates the extraordinary creativity of the priests in linking both mythical depictions and description and medical instruments with a ritual that was probably performed in the temple.

This is not the place to discuss the temple architecture (see e.g. Arnold 1999; Kurth 2004a; Minas-Nerpel 2012, 2017), but one feature that demonstrates the period's creativity should be mentioned: composite column capitals, which exhibit a large and complex range of variation. They bring together different vegetal elements and are instantly recognizable features of Egyptian temples of the Greco-Roman era (Arnold 1999, pp. 292–302; Phillips 2002, pp. 161–210; Fauerbach 2009), forming a point of contact with Hellenistic architecture (McKenzie 2007, pp. 122–132, 138–146) and displaying the most cutting-edge methods used to create such visual parts of the temples. An example is one of the composite capitals of the kiosk of Qertassi in Nubia (Figure 34.3), dating to the Early Roman Period (Arnold 1999, pp. 237–240). The eight-stemmed lily capital comprises three tiers of leaves, including palm and lotus. The leaves of the third layer are further decorated with wine and grain motifs.



Figure 34.3 Kiosk of Qertassi, composite capital with different vegetal elements. Source: Image courtesy Martina Minas-Nerpel.

So far, only Egyptian temples have been referred to, but numerous Classical monuments were built in Alexandria and the urban centers of the *chora*, too (Lembke et al. 2004, pp. 26–36, with references; see also Chapter 33). Buildings in Ptolemaic Alexandria had Doric and Ionic orders, which remained close to those in Greece itself. The forms of Classical architecture that developed in the new capital city look Greek on the surface, but were stimulated by the ideas provided by the local Egyptian architecture, as reflected in the mixed capitals (McKenzie 2007, pp. 115–118). These local traditions remained strong in the Roman Period, when local Classical architectural decoration coexists in Egypt with the architectural style of the Eastern Roman Empire, rather than being replaced by it. This pattern of development explains how skilled local architects produced high-quality architecture in the fourth to the sixth centuries AD, continuing Classical traditions into the Late Antique Period (McKenzie 2007, pp. 221–228).

34.4 Tombs and Their Decoration

Much of the known material culture of Greco-Roman Egypt comes from burial contexts, so that Egyptian funerary religion often dominates our view of the country. Funerary artifacts, however, do not correlate directly with identity or ethnicity, in either the Ptolemaic or the Roman Period (Riggs 2005, p. 23; Lembke 2004, pp. 51–65; see Chapter 23). The tomb of Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel is a clear example of this complexity.

Tuna el-Gebel was the necropolis of Hermopolis, the capital of the fifteenth Upper Egyptian nome, which was an important administrative city and a religious center because of its temple of Thoth, whom the Greeks identified with Hermes. From the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty onward, animal mummies – mainly ibises and baboons – were buried in the underground galleries. In the Greco-Roman Period, the human burial ground was located near the sacred precinct of Thoth. The earliest tombs of considerable size were built for two priests of Thoth in around 300 BC: Petosiris (Lefebvre 1923–1924; Cherpion et al. 2007) and his elder brother, Djed-Thoth-iu-ef-anhk. Petosiris chose a place close to the temple in Tuna el-Gebel, and his tomb soon became a focal point for pilgrimage, with visitors carving graffiti in Greek and Demotic. His temple-like tomb reflects the impact of Greek art and culture on a native Egyptian. Petosiris and his family witnessed probably the last native rulers of the Thirtieth Dynasty, the Persian occupation, and the arrival of Alexander and the Ptolemies: a period of turmoil and transition that is alluded to in the autobiography engraved on the tomb's walls. Although the sanctuary of the bipartite tomb is mostly decorated in traditional Egyptian style, it is clearly innovative, and a sort of free variation of temple style. The pronaos shows strong Hellenistic influence, presenting a mixed Hellenizing art style with Egyptian and Greek elements, demonstrating that the native elite – in this case Petosiris – engaged with the new Hellenistic rulers and their style. The tomb's hybrid decoration is seen in a voluminous fringed mantle, which Petosiris, his male family members, other officials, and scribes are shown wearing (e.g. Cherpion et al. 2007, pp. 33, 36–38, 56, 80, etc.) and which has antecedents in the Late Period. Those who wear it are never engaged in manual work, so it signifies an elite lifestyle (Warda 2012, pp. 75–76).

Roughly four centuries later, another Petosiris, the owner of a tomb at Qaret el-Muzawwaqa at the western end of the Dakhla Oasis (see Figure 23.3), was Roman in life but Egyptian in death (Osing et al. 1982, pp. 71–101; Whitehouse 1998). His tomb of the first century AD is rock-cut, consisting of two chambers, with a recess for the body; it more or less belongs to the Greco-Roman tradition, but is not as sophisticated as the *triclinium*-tombs of Roman Alexandria (e.g. Tigrane Pasha; Venit 2012, pp. 116–118). The tomb's religious function is expressed in traditional Egyptian iconography, executed in a conventional Egyptian style – although the Egyptian motifs and gods often seem poorly proportioned, betraying Hellenistic-Roman influence, especially in the use of foreshortening and the portrayal of generally Hellenistic-Roman dress. Although different from the mantle in the tomb of Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel, this Petosiris' garment is as voluminously draped, and exemplifies the tomb's hybrid style. Whitehouse (1998, p. 253) states that “of the Greco-Roman tombs so far discovered in Egypt, that of Petosiris offers probably the most vivid evidence for that mixture of cultural and religious traditions which ... become a focus of interest in the study of post-pharaonic Egypt.” In the tomb of Petosiris, as well as that of Petubastis at Qaret el-Muzawwaqa, the previously mentioned zodiac ceilings are found. Originally, astronomical ceilings were the preserve of temples and royal tombs, but a small group of funerary zodiacs demonstrate their privatization, ensuring an eternal cycle of rebirth (Whitehouse 1998, p. 264).

Categories of grave goods, such as mummy masks and funerary shrouds, have been extensively studied. Culturally mixed shrouds are a distinctive Roman Period category. The painted, full-length linen shrouds would have enveloped a mummified body, with the naturalistic Greek portrait head positioned directly over the face. The deceased is often depicted as Osiris, in the hope of their being rejuvenated. Shrouds vividly combine Greek and Egyptian elements, and decorative motifs with an origin in the Roman cultural milieu are likewise incorporated (Riggs 2005, esp. chapter 3, color pls. 6–9, 12). In this chapter, however, I mention only one unique item of grave good: an *icosahedron*-die. This regular polyhedron, formed by 20 equilateral triangles, was found at Qaret el-Muzawwaqa in the 1980s and is now housed in the New Valley Museum at Kharga (Minas-Nerpel 2007). It is 5 cm high, 6 cm wide, and probably dates to the first century AD. In contrast to other *icosahedra* known from Greco-Roman Egypt, this one is not inscribed with Greek or Latin letters or numbers, but with 20 names of Egyptian divinities in Demotic, adapting Egyptian concepts to a Greek form. The piece provides striking evidence for the mixing of cultural traditions in Dakhla Oasis in the Roman Period, being anchored by its form to the Greco-Roman background and by the names of the gods and the Demotic script to the Egyptian tradition. The die was presumably used in an oracular procedure intended to establish which deity would provide help to the petitioner. These exceptional presentations in Dakhla suggest that such objects would have been widespread elsewhere but happen not to have been discovered.

34.5 The Ptolemaic Faience Wine-Jugs or *Oinochoai*

A truly unique object category of the Hellenistic world, limited to a period of about a century from Arsinoe II to Cleopatra I, is the faience *oinochoai*, also called “Berenike-jugs” or “Ptolemäerkannen.” Thompson (1973, p. 1), who published a comprehensive

study of these jugs and their decorations, characterizes them thus: "They face two ways; they look back at the Greek and forward to the Egyptianized ways of thinking."

The form is well known from Greek pottery, with one handle at the back and a trefoil mouth for pouring. Greek *oinochoai* were usually made of painted terracotta, but Egyptian ones were made of greenish-blue "Egyptian faience," a non-clay ceramic with a glaze; a material rather foreign to the Greek world. The bodies of faience *oinochoai*, usually around 30 cm high, always bear the same key representation: a rite executed by a Ptolemaic queen in Classical dress. The example discussed here (British Museum 1873,0820.389; cf. Thompson 1973, no. 1; Figure 34.4), shows Arsinoe II pouring a libation. The jug was probably made after Arsinoe's death, but still during the lifetime of her husband Ptolemy II (270–246 BC), and is said to have been found at Canosa, Italy (Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 48). It has been restored from many fragments, and the bluish-green enamel of the surface is nearly all worn away. Traces of gilding, surviving on the Silenus masks at the handles and around the foot, suggest that the jug was intended as an imitation of similar vessels in precious material. The Silenus mask, a companion of the wine god Dionysus, may have reminded Egyptians of the god Bes. In the main relief, the queen is depicted in a frontal pose, with her head turned toward a horned altar. She stands on a base holding out in her right hand a large *phiale*, a libation bowl. Her left hand supports a double cornucopia, symbol of abundance;



Figure 34.4 Faience wine-jug or *oinochoe*, showing Arsinoe II. Source: British Museum 1873,0820.389. © Trustees of the British Museum.

other queens mostly hold a single cornucopia. Arsinoe, whose hair is in Greek style, is draped in garments that were worn by fashionable Greek women of the third century BC: a long tunic (*chiton*) and an outer garment (*himation*) twisted around the waist in a thick fold. Behind her is a *baitulos*, a sacred pillar, decorated with garlands. On the shoulder, the jug bears a Greek inscription wishing great good fortune on Arsinoe II.

These jugs were probably used in rituals associated with the ruler cult established under Ptolemy II Philadelphus to pour libations in honor of the depicted queen over altars (Pfeiffer 2008b, pp. 62–64), especially during the posthumous cult festival for Arsinoe II. The *oinochoai* were invented for this cult (see Chapter 27), and adopted under the following Ptolemaic queens, whether they were executing or receiving the offering (Grimm 1998, pp. 78–79; Walker and Higgs 2001, p. 69). Although the faience *oinochoai* are not attested after Cleopatra I (c. 204–176 BC), the tradition of making decorated faience vessels (even decorated with faience heads, mostly of gods) continued well into the Roman Period (Ashton 2003a, p. 337, 2003b, pp. 50, 53–58).

34.6 The Visual Identity of Arsinoe II Philadelphus

The *oinochoai* emphasize Arsinoe Philadelphus' highly exceptional position, of which I will now explore further visual aspects. Arsinoe II was the daughter of Ptolemy I Soter, the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and the sister and wife of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. She was married three times to three different kings, a fact that was perhaps in itself not so spectacular in the fast-moving Early Hellenistic Period. That her second husband, Ptolemy Ceraunus, was her half-brother, and especially that her third, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, was her full brother, was however sensational, and changed the position and perception of Ptolemaic queens fundamentally (see Chapter 3). Her new status was expressed in text and in material culture, including in temple offering scenes, stelae, statues, coins, and other sources. During her lifetime, Arsinoe II became critical to the projection of the image of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and her importance only increased after her death.

The Ptolemies not only adopted the presentation of Hellenistic rulers, but also became Egyptian pharaohs, appropriating pharaonic traditions and styles, as can most clearly be seen in the Egyptian temples. Their public display as Egyptian rulers will have held great attraction for the Ptolemies, whose six monumental statues (up to 12m high) greeted every foreigner landing in the harbor of Alexandria (Empereur 1998, pp. 76–77; Pfrommer 2002, pp. 29–32). Ptolemy II Philadelphus put much emphasis on the Egyptian perception and display of his kingship, for the benefit not only of the Egyptian population but also of the Hellenistic oecumene. In order to attract the Greek population and to bind it to the Egyptian, Ptolemy I either instigated or at least actively promoted the cult of the Greco-Egyptian god Sarapis (Pfeiffer 2008a; see Chapter 28), which came to be of great importance for the elite and their identification with the country. Ptolemy II went a step further and introduced an official ruler cult: Ptolemaic propaganda developed the king into a god-king who was accorded a divine cult together with his consort. The Egyptian pharaoh, although his office was divine, had never been the object of such worship (Hölbl 2001, pp. 90–92; Pfeiffer 2008a, p. 388, 2008b, pp. 31–73; see Chapter 27). The *oinochoai* discussed earlier were probably used in this ruler cult and during its festivals.

Ptolemy II took an important step shortly before Arsinoe's death, associating himself and his sister-wife with the cult of Alexander, and thus seeking divinity for the "Brother-Sister Gods" (*Theoi Adelphoi*), as attested by altars and other objects (Lembke 2012b, pp. 210–211; e.g. the altar placed in the Serapeum of Alexandria, Sabottka 2008, pp. 50–64). Their epithet referred to the sibling marriage, which was meant to be understood as a "holy wedlock" (*hieros gamos*) of Zeus and Hera, celebrated by Theocritus in his *encomium* of Ptolemy II (*Idylls* 17); for the indigenous Egyptian population, this union could relate to Osiris and Isis. The "Brother-Sister Gods" thus absorbed both Greek and Egyptian mythology (Lembke 2012b, pp. 209–211; Carney 2013, pp. 49–64).

Shortly after her death, Arsinoe received her own eponymous cult in Alexandria, performed by a priestess called the *kanephoros*, "basket-carrier" (Minas 2000, pp. 93–96). Although attested only in written sources connected to the Greek ruler cult, the priestess seems to have been depicted on a purely Egyptian monument: the lunette of the Mendes Stele (Egyptian Museum Cairo, CG 22181; Kamal 1904, pls. LIV–LV; Schäfer 2011, pp. 239–276). In 265/4, Ptolemy, the son and co-regent of Ptolemy II, who set himself against his father, performed the dedication of a temple in Mendes. He is depicted behind the royal couple in the left or royal half of the lunette. On the right, the deities are shown: the Ram of Mendes, Harpokrates; the deceased Ram of Mendes in anthropomorphic form, Hatmehit; and the new co-templar goddess, the deceased Arsinoe II. Upon her death in 270, she had been deified as an Egyptian goddess, which meant that her statues would now be placed in sanctuaries all over Egypt beside the main god or goddess as a guest-goddess, a "temple-sharing deity" (*synnaos thea*). On the royal side of the Mendes Stele, the *kanephoros* seems to take her place in the depiction of the royal family performing the rituals (Minas 1998).

Ptolemy II is depicted venerating his deified sister and wife in temple reliefs and stelae (Quaeghebeur 1971a, 1971b). One example is a rectangular limestone temple relief from San el-Hagar/Tanis (British Museum EA 1056: 42 cm high, 34 cm wide; Figure 34.5). Arsinoe II is shown on the divine side, facing Ptolemy II, who wears the double crown and holds a *was*-scepter in his right hand. His left hand is raised above his shoulder and holds a thunderbolt. This symbol is the only Hellenistic component in an otherwise purely Egyptian scene, and it identifies Ptolemy II with Zeus, the almighty god of the sky, whose symbol is the thunderbolt, and who is so aptly described by Cleanthes in a hymn as holding the "two-edged, lightning-forked thunderbolt" in his "invincible hand." Cleanthes of Assus in Lydia, born around the time of Alexander's conquest of Egypt, was a Stoic philosopher and disciple of Zenon. Since Stoic philosophers had great influence at the Ptolemaic court, it is understandable that this detail should find its way into an Egyptian temple as a symbol of Ptolemy II (Minas-Nerpel 2015, pp. 105–109).

Arsinoe II, identified on the Tanis relief by two names in a cartouche, wears a unique crown, composed of strategically chosen elements that set her clearly apart from other royal women. The crown is placed on a tripartite wig and a vulture headdress, to which a uraeus is attached at the forehead. The parts of this symbol, termed a "symbol of authority" by Nilsson (2012, pp. 148–150), demonstrate her association with various deities, kings, and queens, and the whole serves as a manifestation of the Egyptian divine world and its legacy (Nilsson 2012, pp. 16–35). The main elements are the red crown, often placed on ram's horns, but not on the Tanis relief; a double-feather plume,



Figure 34.5 Relief from San el-Hagar (Tanis), showing Ptolemy II Philadelphus and Arsinoe II Philadelphus. Source: British Museum EA 1056. © Trustees of the British Museum.

identical to those incorporated in the traditional Egyptian crown worn by queens, goddesses, and the Divine Adoratrices of Amun; and cow horns and a solar disc, this being a traditional Hathoric crown, again worn by queens and goddesses. Arsinoe's visual identity is thus a mixture of traditions and new creations that merge to her specific symbol. Although on the Tanis relief she wears a very simple, tight-fitting dress, she can be depicted with very elaborate clothing closely related to the Isis dress, for example on a bilingual stele dedicated by the pastophorus-priest Totoes in a private collection (Albersmeier and Minas 1998), on which the deified Arsinoe II faces a deity, now lost except for the lunar crown, with whom the queen shared a temple. This dress, which combines Egyptian traditions and Hellenistic innovation (Albersmeier 2002, pp. 85–105, 2004, pp. 421–432), is closely related to the one worn by queens in “ancestor scenes” in Ptolemaic Period temples, in which the king is dressed in the mantle discussed earlier. Elite women could also wear the Isis dress, but this is attested only for the Late Ptolemaic and Early Roman Periods, as exemplified by the stele of Tayimhotep, wife of Pasherentah III, the High Priest of Ptah (42 BC; British Museum EA 147; cf. Walker and Higgs 2001, pp. 186–187, cat. 193). At Tuna el-Gebel, the daughters of Petosiris and other females are depicted dressed in forerunners of the Isis dress (see e.g. Cherpion et al. 2007, pp. 83, 126–127, 138); the tomb also has examples of the specific male mantle (see earlier).

In view of the intimation that Arsinoe II was worshiped as a “temple-sharing deity” in every single Egyptian temple, very few statues of her survive (Albersmeier 2002, pp. 177–182). A well-preserved example, clearly identified by an inscription, is in the Museo Gregoriano Egizio in the Vatican (22681; Albersmeier 2002, cat. no. 26). It dates after her death but still during the lifetime of Ptolemy II. One of the most extraordinary images of Arsinoe II must have been planned for her sanctuary on Cape Zephyrion east of Alexandria; the admiral Callicrates of Samos had financed it, probably while she was still alive. This temple, where Arsinoe was worshiped as Aphrodite, also contained a mechanical drinking horn in the shape of the Egyptian god Bes that made music (McKenzie 2007, p. 33, 52). As Pfrommer (2002, pp. 61–69) has shown, a “floating” statue was to be positioned in the center of the temple, suspended by magnetic fields, but this project was probably never finished. This would have been a showpiece of visual and technical creativity in a Classical temple that also included Egyptian features.

34.7 The End of Pharaonic Culture and Traditions

According to tradition, St. Mark established Christianity in Alexandria in the mid-first century AD, but only by the mid-fourth century did his martyrdom in the eastern part of the city become a place of pilgrimage. The city’s first cathedral, the church of Theonas, was built in 300–311 (McKenzie 2007, p. 231). The end of the fourth century saw rioting between Christians and pagans that resulted in the destruction of the Serapeum in 391, marking the end of a salient pagan presence in the city. Egyptian temples and stelae in the *chora* continued to be decorated on a small scale into the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries. The latest known cartouche of a Roman emperor in a temple was inscribed under Maximinus Daia (305–313) on blocks belonging to the temple of Horus at Tahta, located on the west bank of the Nile, north of Athribis (Hölbl 2000, p. 45, n.177, p. 114, figure 157). Egyptian stelae decorated in the traditional native style and inscribed in Hieroglyphs continued to be set up in Egyptian temples, for example in the Bucheum at Armant, where the latest known example is dated to 340, the 57th year of the era of Diocletian (Goldbrunner 2004, pp. 78–79, 302; Hölbl 2000, p. 45, n.178). This demonstrates that Egyptian temples continued to function during the period when large churches began to be erected.

By the fifth century, pagan cults were largely outlawed and Christianity was in plain sight, with the great churches and monasteries dominating the landscape (Heinen 1998, p. 37). The temple of Isis at Philae, where Hieroglyphs were carved in the temple of Harendotes as late as 394 (Winter 1982, p. 1023), was the last to be kept open, being closed down under Justinian between 535 and 537, when it was converted into a church (see Dijkstra 2008). New creative trends developed, in architecture, sculpture, ceramics, terracottas, textiles, and other media (for an overview, see Krause 1998; Lembke et al. 2004). The term “Coptic” is applied not only to the language but also to the art and architecture of Late Antique Egypt (see Box 19.1). Byzantine rule in Egypt, which started in AD 330 when Constantinople was made the imperial capital of the East, ceased with the Arab conquest of Alexandria in 642, bringing further new visual trends and styles.

34.8 Conclusion

The changes in art that developed in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods should be seen not as a decline in culture but as a sign of ongoing vitality and creativity, often imbued with the influences of several peoples. Traditional Egyptian styles continued in many areas, and Hellenizing as well as hybrid forms developed, which are displayed in tombs and temples, pottery and jewelry, mosaics and coins, etc. The multiethnic population and cross-cultural influences led to new artistic expressions in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Often, the political and sociocultural situation was reflected in material culture, as is exemplified by the visual identity of Arsinoe II Philadelphus. Late Antiquity too should be seen not as a period of decline but as another era of metamorphosis, as pointed out by Heinen (1998, p. 37): “Die Spätantike ist also nicht so sehr die letzte Phase eines langen Niederganges als vielmehr eine in vielerlei Hinsicht glänzende, anziehende Epoche, die eine Metamorphose durchlebte und Entwicklungen von lang andauernder Wirkung in Gang setzte.”

FURTHER READING

The *Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, edited by Riggs (2012), gives a valuable comprehensive survey of Roman Egypt, including many developments of Ptolemaic Egypt. Riggs also covers the funerary aspects of Roman Egypt and approaches the question of identity in her monograph *The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt* (2005). Baines (2007, 2014) and Robins (1997) examine ancient art and discuss its purpose and status. For the architectural developments of Greco-Roman Egypt, refer to McKenzie’s book on Alexandria (2007) and Arnold’s on the Egyptian temples (1999). The victory stele of Gallus exemplifies the unity of both text and image, the transition from a Hellenistic empire to a Roman province, and the interconnections of Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman culture (Hoffmann et al. 2009). Lembke et al. (2004) offers an overview of Egypt’s cultural development in the Roman Period, while Bagnall and Rathbone (2004) provide a guide to archeological sites dating from Alexander the Great to Christian times. For an overview of Coptic art and architecture, see Capuani (2002); for the Coptic culture more generally, see Krause (1998).