



Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2024 Teaching Ancient Studies: Continuing Education Reading Group

Imperial Encounters: Material Culture under Roman Rule in Egypt

Led by Louise O'Brien

Introduction to Reading Group:

The introduction of Roman rule to Egypt in 30 BC brought about a transition from a dynastic monarchy, to a province of the expanding Roman empire, resulting in interplay between both imperial power and native Egyptian culture. Focusing on this transformative period, we will explore the values and importance of material culture as primary evidence, including the Fayum mummy portrait panels, hybrid tomb decoration, and changing temple adornments and architecture. We will analyze the cultural encounters between Rome and Egypt, understanding how Roman rule influenced the life of those living and working in Egypt during this period, including religious practices, elite strategy, and artistic expression in life and death.

Key topics will include the continuity of Hellenistic influences during this period, despite Egypt's status as a Roman province, the rise of syncretic deities such as Serapis, the assimilation of imperial cult with native Egyptian culture, and the appropriation and manipulation of classical culture by native elites. Critical analysis of primary sources and archaeological evidence will allow us to understand the complex dynamics of cultural exchange that occurred during this period and will shed light on how Roman rule affected the identities and experiences of Egypt as a result.

Reading Group Objectives:

- Explore themes and gain knowledge of cultural, artistic, and religious history in Roman Egypt (30 BC - AD 395).
- Develop a microhistorical approach to case studies from the Roman Period, focusing on a bottom-up view of society in Egypt.
- Analyze material culture and papyrological evidence to understand the socio-political context of Roman Egypt and the complexities of cultural encounters.

Your SASA Educational Ambassador:

Louise O'Brien

Completing a PhD in Egyptology at the University of Liverpool

Google Classroom:

During our weekly Zoom meetings, we'll come together to discuss our readings and delve into the topic. We will also use Google Classroom to provide easy access to reading materials, resources, and facilitate ongoing discussions through open forums. This platform will also be where participants submit their assignments.

Dates:

Saturdays @ 11:00 am EDT

- Session 1: June 15
- Session 2: June 22
- Session 3: June 29
- Session 4: July 6
- Session 5: July 13

Useful Readings:

These are a small selection of texts that are not required for a specific session, but will either be consulted often during the course, or provide a broad background and may be a good starting point for those wishing to ground themselves in the subject.

Bowman, A.K. (1989) *Egypt After the Pharaohs 332 BC - AD 642: From Alexander to the Arab Conquest*, LA. Available [HERE](#).

Lloyd, A.B. (2010) *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, Oxford. Available [HERE](#).

Riggs, C. (2012) *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, Oxford. Available [HERE](#).

Vandorpe, K. (2019) *A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt*, Oxford. Available [HERE](#).



Week 1: Introduction to Roman Egypt & Material Culture

- Overview of the historical, social and political transition from Ptolemaic to Roman Egypt.
- Overview of the importance of material culture in providing evidence for this period.
- Discussion of key historical events, and establishment of Egypt as a province of the Roman Empire.
- Examination of key written sources (including Strabo, Tacitus, and Philo), and papyrological evidence outlining the introduction of imperial rule.
- Examination of primary sources from the beginning of Roman rule, including stelae and Egyptian coinage.

Readings:

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- Bowman, A.K. (1989) *Egypt After the Pharaohs 332 BC - AD 642: From Alexander to the Arab Conquest*, LA. [[Chapter 3, 'State and Subject'](#)].
- Lewis, N. (1986), *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule*, Oxford. [[Chapter 1, 'The Coming of the Romans'](#)].
- Matthews, R., and Römer, C. (eds) (2003) *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt*, London. [[Chapter 12, 'Roman Poets on Egypt'](#)].
- Strabo, *Geographica*, [Book 17](#).
- Tacitus, *Histories*, [Book 1](#).

Recommended Readings:

- Lewis, N. (1970) '[Graeco-Roman Egypt: Fact or Fiction?](#)' Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Papyrology, University of Michigan. pp. 1-14.
- Vandorpe, K. (2019) *A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt*, Oxford. [[Chapter 4, 'A Roman Province in the Eastern Mediterranean'](#)].
- Walker, S., and Bierbrier, M. (eds.) (1997) *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, London. [[Catalog: Stone Funerary Stelae](#)]. pp. 141-144.

Week 2: Material Culture and Identity 1: Fayum Mummy Portrait Panels

- Analysis of the Fayum mummy portrait panels, including their context, material and technique.
- Discussion of the possible identity of those depicted in the panels, including analysis of elite strategy.
- Examination of the Hawara portraits as a case study, including understanding of how individuals depicted used Greek and Roman artistic culture.
- Discussion of papyrological evidence for elite individuals living in the Fayum (the 6475 *katoikoi*), and how they link to the portraits.

Readings:

- Borg, B.E. (2012) '[Portraits](#)', in Riggs, C. (2012).
- Rowlandson, J. (2013) 'Dissing the Egyptians: Legal, Ethnic, and Cultural Identities in Roman Egypt', London. Available [HERE](#).
- Walker, S., and Bierbrier, M. (eds.) (1997) *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, London. [[Particularly Bagnall 'The People of the Roman Fayum'](#)].

Recommended Readings:

- W.M.F. Petrie (1911) [Roman Portraits and Memphis](#), London
- Nelson, C.A. (1979) *Status Declarations from Roman Egypt*, Las Palmas. [[Chapter 2: 'The Metropolitites'](#), and [Chapter 4: 'The katoikoi'](#)].
- W.M.F. Petrie Journal Excerpts:[1887-88 Journal](#); [1910-11 Journal](#)

Mummies and portraits from the British Museum, Petrie Museum of Archaeology, Manchester Museum will be discussed, with links provided on Google Classroom.

A great resource for images and information on mummy portrait panels can also be found [here](#).

Week 3: Material Culture and Identity 2: Tomb Decoration

- Examination of case study of the Tomb of Padiosir Petosiris (Qaret el-Muzzawaka), exploring the decoration and appearance of the deceased and how he included classical elements in a traditionally 'Egyptian' tomb.
- Build on knowledge learned in the previous discussion to understand how and why the tomb is decorated in the way it is.
- Explore the content of the tomb - including the zodiacal ceiling (which invokes syncretic deities such as Mithras), and the clothing depicted on the deceased.
- Discuss the context of the tomb in relation to its location in the Dakhla Oasis.

Readings:

- Abdelwahed, Y.E.H. (2015) *Egyptian Cultural Identity in the Architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC – AD 325)*, London. [P. 120-125](#)
- Whitehouse, H. (1998) 'Roman in Life, Egyptian in Death: The Painted Tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhleh Oasis', in Kaper, O.E. (ed.), 1998. [P. 253-270](#)
- Omran, W.A.M. (2020) 'Petosiris in his Tomb at Dachla: Venerating the Deceased in Roman Egypt' *JAAUTH* 19(3): 97-112. Available [HERE](#).

Recommended Readings:

- Budge, E.W. (1913) *The Papyrus of Ani (Book of the Dead)*, facsimile, text, and translation. [p. 234-9](#).
- Priskin, G. (2015) 'The Dendera Zodiacs as Narratives of the Myth of Osiris, Isis, and the Child Horus' *ENeM* 8: [133-185](#).

For images of the Tomb of Padiosir Petosiris, see [MeretSeeger Books](#).

Week 4: Religious Syncretism, Fusion, and Adaptation

- Examination of the usage and popularity of syncretic deities such as Serapis, Tutu, and Cybele, and the nature of religion in Egypt.
- Discussion on the significance of such deities in the socio-political environment of Roman Egypt, and the wider Roman Empire.
- Analyse how syncretic gods were used in daily life and in public worship, including their importance as a tool for cultural integration and political legitimacy.
- Reflect on the broader implications of fusion of classical and Egyptian religion, as well as *interpretatio Graeca*, where classical deities are equated with Egyptian ones, and assimilation of Egyptian figures with classical myth (such as Agamemnon).

Readings:

- Bommas, M. (2012) '[Isis, Osiris, and Serapis](#)', in Riggs, C. (2012).
- von Lieven, A. (2016) '[Translating Gods, Interpreting Gods](#)' in Rutherford, I. (2016) *Greco-Egyptian Interactions*.
- Setne II ([Tale of Setne Khamwas and Si-Osire](#))
- *Conquest*, LA. [[Chapter 6, 'Gods, Temples, and Churches](#)].
- Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, [10.29.1](#).
- Herodotus, *Histories*, [11.582-593](#).
- Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, [1.15](#).
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Recommended Readings:

- Bowman, A.K. (1998) [Egypt After the Pharaohs 332 BC - AD 642](#): From Alexander to the Arab Conquest, LA.
- Tallet, G., and Zivie-Coche, C. (2012) '[Imported Cults](#)', in Riggs, C. (2012).
- Herodotus, *Histories*, [2.50](#).
- Pindar, [Pythian](#)

Week 5: Imperial Cult and Religious Legitimization:

- Explore the development of imperial religious cult, as seen on temple architecture at Philae and Dendur, and the establishment of Augustus as 'Zeus Eleutherios' the 'Liberator'
- Analyse the assimilation of imperial cult with native Egyptian religious practices, including the Sebastos cult of deceased emperors.
- Discuss the role of religion in legitimising Roman rule in Egypt, and the importance of the local elite in running imperial cult.
- Examination of how Roman rulers appropriated and manipulated Egyptian culture, and how this ultimately compared with the manipulation of classical culture by native elites, and examination of papyrological evidence to understand how native Egyptian cult may have endured.
- Discussion on the enduring legacies of cultural encounters and adaptation in Egypt, and reflect upon the end of 'Egyptian' native religion as a result of Roman rule (during the reign of Justinian).

Readings:

- Pfeiffer, S. (2012) '[The Imperial Cult in Egypt](#)' in Riggs (2012).
- Pfeiffer, S. (2019) '[A Successful Ruler and Imperial Cult](#)', in Vandorpe
- I. Portes 24 and 25, [Temple of Hathor at Dendera](#)
- P. Lond. 6 1912 [Letter of Claudius](#) In the original Greek but use the 'translate' function on your browser to convert to English.

Other Useful Sources:

- [Trismegistos](#) – for records of individuals, names, places, and texts.
- [Papyri.info](#) – papyrological information and materials.
- [Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri](#) – text and publication details of all documentary papyrological texts in Greek published so far.
- [Ancient World Digital Library](#) – 76 classic works in Greek papyrology.
- [Perseus](#) – text and translations of Greek and Roman ancient literary and historical works.
- [Attalus](#) – links to and translations of thousands of inscriptions, texts, and papyri (more variation than Loeb).
- A glossary of terms, as well as information on the Egyptian and agricultural calendars and chronology of Egyptian history during this period will also be made available on the Google Classroom.

Culminating Assignment:

Instructions for this assignment can be found in your Google Classroom under Coursework.

Certificates of Completion:

The following criteria must be met by participants in order to receive a certificate of completion:

- Complete culminating assignment
- Attended all 5 live class discussions

* If you are seeking continuing education/professional development credits SASA recommends that you check with your school district, continuing education committee, or other relevant authority in advance to ensure you receive the proper credit and advancement for your coursework. Save Ancient Studies Alliance does not guarantee acceptance by your school, district, or licensing authority.