Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context

From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture

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Imagining Ancient Egypt as the Idealized Self in Eighteenth-Century Europe

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The increasing globalization of the eighteenth century facilitated Western European encounters with ancient Egyptian material culture.[1] Yet, since Europeans were still unable to read the ancient Egyptian language, they primarily contextualized Egyptian *things* within the received traditions of classical and biblical literature. Scholars and artists, however, were only partially limited by these traditions and in many cases constructed new traditions surrounding the materiality of ancient Egypt based on common readings of Egyptian aesthetics. As Lynn Meskell has noted, using Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, ancient Egypt "occupies the classic position of a culture with auratic appeal," in that it is a culture that is distant in terms of space and time, but it still has a strong presence.[2] Meskell explains that the ancient material culture of Egypt survives well, but in a state that is completely detached from its original setting, readily allowing new interpretive strategies to emerge for understanding it. The monumentality of Egyptian art and architecture, mixed with its perceived exoticism, made it well suited for co-option into eighteenth-century design. Its antiquity was in some ways liberating, as it represented a grand tradition that predated the European nation states, predated the Church and Christianity, and predated classical traditions. An Egyptian-inspired aesthetic evoked the importance of the past without the hindrance of a Christian tradition.

Prior to and leading into the eighteenth century, the Egypt of baroque art is mediated through ancient Roman traditions yet adapted to a Counter-Reformation context to argue for the supremacy of the church. Later, Egyptian objects (themselves on view in Rome and Florence, and reimagined in design) are seen as evidence of a history of Italian art that was not dependent on the Greeks but on the Egyptians and the Etruscans. Egyptian design was adopted as part of French royal style, incorporated in both rococo and neoclassical fashions, which evoked a continuity of

[2]   Lynn Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies Past and Present* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 182–3.

elite styles originating in ancient times. Egypt's antiquity also proved inspirational in the context of the French Revolution and the development of pan-European Freemasonry, providing evidence of alternatives to the status quo and allowing the articulation of identities that were rooted in perceived ancient traditions. Finally, Napoleon's failed invasion of Egypt, yet successful scientific encounter with this rich cultural space, created another ancient Egyptian hermeneutics. Symbolic of the French Empire and the idolization of the person of the Emperor himself, this hermeneutics was based on the encounter with actual Egyptian artifacts and on renderings of them rather than artistic variations of Egyptian themes. Ancient Egyptian *things* appear sporadically throughout eighteenth-century Western Europe, each time reflecting a different ancient Egypt, unique to a specific context, in many cases more reflective of the selfhood of the scholar-artist than of ancient Egypt itself. While outlining how changing sensibilities to authenticity impacted European responses to Egyptian and Egyptianizing things, this chapter seeks to trace the different social meanings that both Egyptian objects and objects crafted to evoke Egypt reflected, reified, and helped formulate.

Using exotic things to evoke the self was not unusual in the eighteenth century. As Julie Park has argued in her seminal study, the rise of foreign and manufactured commodities throughout the eighteenth century facilitated the use of objects by people as "a rich and exotic idiom for selfhood."[3] The acquisition, display, and interaction with exotic goods were not just a means of understanding others but a means of self-definition.[4] This was certainly the case with antiquities, which signified cultivation and sophistication through "mastery" of the past while connoting an aesthetic sensibility rooted in history. Egypt was part of the biblical heritage, but Egyptian designs did not necessarily have theological connotations. Egyptian antiquities further signaled the exotic, at times marking difference in the backwardness of the ancient Other (following Edward Said's readings), or signaling the opposite, a connectedness or *sameness* between the eighteenth-century *civilization* and its remote precursors. By the end of the eighteenth century, Egyptian objects were purposefully evoked as part of the material culture of the colonial enterprise. Looking beyond the long eighteenth century, Daniel Miller's engagement with *stuff* may also be helpful in understanding this process of identity formation. Miller has articulated an understanding of material culture in which subject and object are not categorically bifurcated. In describing how the Internet and other technologies of communication allow people to be objectified, Miller illuminates processes in which people "strive largely to become the selves they hadn't previously been able to achieve," and then "gain a new imagination of themselves as people whom previously they were not aware they even could become."[5] Likewise, to somewhat recontextualize Bill Brown's query, it is worth

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[3]   Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects and Mimetic Subjects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), xiii.

[4]   Ibid., xix.

[5]   Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 118.

asking: "How does the effort to rethink things become an effort to reinstitute society?"[6] In this case, how do changes in thinking about ancient Egyptian objects throughout the long eighteenth century reflect conscious and subconscious efforts to create new societies? In the context of splintered and now openly challenged religious authority, the emergence of burgeoning nationalist and pan-European identities, and the vast project of Enlightenment, how did new versions of old things help people negotiate and construct new identities?

The conception of Ancient Egypt as an object both familiar and exotic could help articulate new identities. Egypt is well referenced in biblical and classical sources, and an educated eighteenth-century person would have been familiar with these *Egypts*. Yet little was directly known of Egypt other than the elements of its visual culture that had survived through classical traditions. Since the days of the early Greeks, Egypt had been viewed by Europeans as the most ancient of lands as well as the possessor of secrets and wisdom that were encoded in hieroglyphs or monuments which could no longer be understood. Meskell offers a useful comment on the ranges of meanings associated with the Egyptian pyramid form as received in Europe (and eventually North America):

> Their multivalency conveys to us everything from a notion of gross materialism and despotism to the notion of pure spirituality and eternal essence. In this manner they refract ideas about the material and the immaterial, which continue to be critical to both their production and continued consumption.[7]

It is precisely this *multivalency* of Egyptian things that allowed them to be used in the negotiations of eighteenth-century identity. From this perspective, Egypt may be thought of as a kind of meta-symbol. Egyptian *things* point to a higher symbolic ancient order, but as symbols are in fact empty enough of meaning for that meaning to be supplied by the symbols' appropriators.

Yet this still does not answer the question of why an identity should be articulated through an exotic, antique object. Jean Baudrillard's view of antiques as construed within a larger "system of objects" is useful in understanding why consciously recontextualized objects are so attractive. In asking why people "seek out signs extrinsic to their own time or space," he recognizes that antiques have a "special psychological standing" and understands their relationship to the possessor as being akin to a family portrait.[8] One need not subscribe to Baudrillard's explicitly Freudian reading of antiques to see the value in his understanding of these objects as loci for the creation and perpetuation of myths of origin. In Baudrillard's conception, antiques are things that have lost their original function and, in the

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[6]   Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (2001): 10.

[7]   Lynn Meskell, "Objects in the Mirror Appear Closer Than They Are," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 67.

[8]   Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 79.

process, have acquired a new function of signifying time.[9] It is not *real* time (if such a concept can even be taken as meaningful) but an index of idealized time—the passage of time as embodied by an object. As Meskell has argued in specific reference to Egyptian manifestations, antiquities are "dense objects" which "have myriad valences for buyers and onlookers, and our unchecked inhibitions and unbridled desires to read into them what we please, their frequent lack of independent didactic force, render them mutable, porous, reflective things."[10] Susan Pearce's Saussurian approach to understanding the interactive process between object and viewer through which meaning is created is particularly helpful here. She argues that the object holds the balance between the creative interpretations of individual viewers and the interpretative constraints provided by each viewer's community that limit that creativity.[11] Biblical, classical, and academic accounts of ancient Egypt somewhat restricted the types of meanings that Egyptian objects could hold for eighteenth-century viewers. The lack of direct knowledge of Egypt, however, still allowed considerable freedom of interpretation.

Through much of the eighteenth century, the Egyptian-inspired objects (such as furniture, porcelains and serving ware, architectural features, civic art, cemetery stones and monuments) that were created in European contexts were far from being authentically Egyptian. This would change following the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt and nineteenth-century direct encounters of this ancient civilization through archaeology. In Baudrillard's reading of the antique, this lack of authenticity is not problematic since for him antiques are always eccentric. By definition, they stand outside of an authentic context, and it is this new contextualization that infuses them with meaning. He states that the antique: "*is* false in so far as *it puts itself forward as authentic within a system whose basic principle is by no means authenticity but, rather, the calculation of relationships and the abstractness of signs.*"[12] In essence, newly created "antiques," imbued with signs that contemporaries would read as ancient Egyptian, signify time in the same way that antiques do, but they are manufactured with this function in mind. Implicit in their form are *functional* indices of signified time; the object is consciously constructed as a signifier of a signified time. As Baudrillard notes, "as a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones."[13] Thus the conceptualized antique object can become the signifier of an idealized and solipsistic time since it is freed from the baggage of authenticity. Until Europeans *regained* access to Egypt after the Napoleonic invasions, there was little that limited the imagining of ancient Egypt in an exoticized way. Ancient Egypt could not speak back to its constructed vision that was created in Europe.

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9   Ibid., 77–8.

10   Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt*, 189.

11   Susan M. Pearce, "Objects as Meaning; or Narrating the Past," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 27; original italics.

12   Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 78.

13   Ibid., 96.

Bernini and the Baroque City

Ancient Rome was one of the most important early loci for the recontextualization of Egyptian objects in European design; it is thus not surprising that their reappearance during the Renaissance would be part of a larger revival of ancient Roman aesthetics. Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) was one of the most important early figures in the reappraisal of Egyptian design for living architectural contexts. One of Rome's foremost sculptors, Bernini had a vision of the baroque city that remains an influence even in the urban fabric of Rome today. His vision was partially supported by the adoption of Egyptianizing elements as components of civic architecture. Bernini worked during the Baroque Papacy (1585–1689) of the Counter-Reformation, in the course of which Rome was rebuilt as the *capital city* of Europe in testament to the importance of the Catholic Church—a prominent status that the city had previously enjoyed, but which it was gradually losing in the wake of the Reformation. Egypt, as manifest in Bernini's monumental civic art, referenced not so much Egypt directly, but Egypt as understood in the Roman imperial context, after Augustus's incorporation of this geographical area into the Roman Empire. Bernini's references to Egypt are re-workings of themes that had already been explored in the classical city, but which were updated for a baroque aesthetic and the political-theological climate of the Counter-Reformation.

One of the most important Egypto-Roman design themes to appear in Bernini's works is the obelisk—a tall, tapering structure that incorporates a small pyramid (known as a *pyramidion*) on the top of its shaft. The Romans had made a habit, like the European colonial powers would again in the nineteenth century, of transporting obelisks from Egypt to Europe and setting them up in town squares. However, the obelisk was used very differently in European civic art from how it was initially employed in Egypt. The most readily apparent difference is that in their place of origin Egyptian obelisks were erected in pairs (as opposed to the solitary obelisks of European cities). Obelisks did not appear in urban contexts in ancient Egypt; they were instead associated with temples or funerary chapels. Likewise, the iconographic importance of the obelisk is dramatically transformed in the European context. In ancient Egypt, the obelisk referenced the sun and solar cults, as well as the *benben* stone, the primeval mound on which creation began.[14] As shall be seen, this is a very different semiotic range than the one carried by obelisks in Europe.

It was Bernini who brought back the ancient Roman use of obelisks in urban public space. He did this not by traveling to Egypt and procuring obelisks, like the ancient Romans did, but by reincorporating abandoned obelisks that had been transported back to Rome centuries earlier. In the Piazza Navona, Bernini erected an obelisk that had originally been brought to Rome around 81 CE, but which had fallen into disrepair in medieval times (Plate 20). In 1651, the Egyptian obelisk

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14   Brian A. Curran, Anthony Grafton, Pamela O. Long, and Benjamin Weiss, *Obelisk: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Burndy Library, 2009), 13–15.

was returned to Roman prominence, but in a new setting, the baroque city. The baroque obelisk was not treated as an unmediated artifact of the past—it was curated and altered by contemporary designs.[15] Bernini created a new base for the obelisk at the Piazza Navona, designing a sculpture that unified the ancient with the baroque—the Fountain of Four Rivers. The base represents the four corners of the world, each evoking an important world river anthropomorphized as a river deity. The iconography associated with each waterway helps to identify the river as well as to direct the viewer's interpretation of its importance within the context of the piece. To this effect, the Ganges holds an oar, indicating navigation; the Danube's proximity to the Vatican is represented by its contact with the papal coat of arms; the Río de la Plata reflects the abundant wealth of the Americas by resting on a pile of coins; and the Nile's head is covered by a cloth, reflecting the fact that Europeans at the time did not know the source of the river. Each river deity crouches in awe of the obelisk, itself directly representing papal authority. The addition of the Pamphili family symbol, the dove, to the top of the obelisk, along with the sculpture's location in front of Pamphili Palace makes the equation of the obelisk with the Pope clear since the fountain's patron, Innocent X (r. 1644–1655), was a member of this illustrious family.

Thus the obelisk in Bernini's sculpture is not the *benben* stone, nor does it refer to an ancient solar cult. Rather, it is the Pope (or at least the spiritual authority of the Pope). Like the ancient Egyptian obelisk, there is a universal message implied here when the sculpture is taken as a whole. Instead of universalizing the importance of a solar deity or celebrating the role of a deity in creation, the message here suggests the universal appeal of Catholicism and papal power. Bernini's sculpture, standing in the center of the Piazza Navona, which had emerged as Rome's main city market by the fifteen century, symbolizes the global reach of papal authority—a Counter-Reformation argument for the universal authority of the Pope. As in ancient Rome, the obelisk reflects the worldwide power of the individual who has erected it, but here the Pope stands in for emperor. And as in ancient Rome, the exotic reference to Egypt indicates that Roman influence is felt far away.

Neoclassicism without Greece

The ancient Egypt of baroque design grew in importance throughout the eighteenth century. Arguably, the most important figure in promoting a post-baroque Egypt was Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1788), who brought Egypt to areas beyond public art into the home and shop. Richard Carrott understands Piranesi's work as part of a larger program in which Italians re-examined the sources of Roman art and privileged the Egyptians (and the Etruscan transmitters of Egyptian style)

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[15] For an overview of the different obelisks in Rome, see Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile: Volume One, The Obelisks of Rome* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad Publishers, 1968).

over the Greeks as seminal artistic figures.[16] The relationship between Greece and Rome had been debated since ancient times, but the revival of interest in, and knowledge of, the Greek world in the Renaissance shifted focus away from Roman ingenuity towards Roman dependence on Greek ideals and aesthetics. By the 1760s, Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768), a Hellenist and foundational figure in the development of art history as an academic discipline, was able to claim an intellectual primacy for Greece, a primacy that was based on chronological-stylistic interpretation, on differentiation between Greek, Roman, and Greco-Roman forms, as well as on an evolutionary approach to changes in art, which included Egyptian and Etruscan traditions. For eighteenth-century Romans, this challenge to the city of Rome's primacy as the center of the artistic world was cause for concern.

Piranesi wrote an apology for Egyptian and Etruscan art in which he articulated an understanding that ran counter to the more prominent arguments advanced from elsewhere in Europe, which saw Greece as the progenitor of European art. Piranesi's approach differs from other early eighteenth-century approaches to Egyptian antiquities in that he tried to understand Egyptian art to some degree in its own right. By privileging Egyptian art as a precursor of classical art, Piranesi was able to consider the ancient artistic conventions seriously, rather than as merely pre-Greek attempts to manufacture on a grand scale. Piranesi himself collected Egyptian pieces (most notably he owned a small sculpture of Pharaoh Thutmoses III currently held by the Louvre), and he had access to the scholarly collections of Rome (such as the Gabinetto Egizio in the Capitoline Museum), so his work with Egyptian styles was empirically based. His Roman civic pride inspired him to approach Egyptian (and Etruscan) materials critically, with an eye to understanding their underlying principles.

In design practice, Piranesi's work with Egyptian styles brought ancient Egyptian themes into European interior design. He suggested two general media in which Egyptian themes could be utilized—fire surrounds and commercial architecture. In his 1769 *Diverse Maniere d'Adonare I Cammini [Various Ways of Decorating Fire Surrounds]*, Piranesi articulates a vision of ancient Egyptian objects that situates them within an historical continuum of European design and thus portrays them as suitable for use in the eighteenth century. The book contains 66 etchings, 13 of which feature Egyptian objects rendered into fire surround ornamentations. According to Michael Pantazzi, these 13 etchings were influential inspirations for the integration of Egyptian materials into the contemporary European design of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[17] Piranesi's suggestions were based on his recreation of Egyptian art as a living enterprise, justified by his demonstration

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[16] Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments, and Meaning, 1808–1858* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 22–3.

[17] Michael Pantazzi, "Mural decoration for the Caffè degli Inglesi, Piazza di Spagna, Rome," in *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730–1930*, ed. Jean–Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 67.

that the ancient Egyptian sculptors had been highly skilled and worked within a specific set of aesthetic conventions.

Piranesi's etched designs for fire surrounds are a curious blend of classical and Egyptian forms (Plate 21). Many of the individual components are extremely accurate reproductions of Egyptian designs on a very small scale. In some instances, the hieroglyphs are precise (albeit with minor stylistic variations), which indicates that they were clearly copied directly from authentic models. In other cases, Piranesi inserted into the two-dimensional etchings actual artifacts that were on display in Rome. For example, on a shelf above the fireplace, one fire surround shows canopic jars (funerary equipment in which a mummy's viscera were preserved for safekeeping). Another surround presents, compressed in length, the two sides of an obelisk that frame the edges of his installation. It is clear that Piranesi was quite familiar with published editions dealing with Egyptian antiquities as well as knowledgeable of Egyptian artifacts that were present in Rome at the time, which is a strong indicator of more widespread knowledge of things Egyptian during his time than it would be presumed.

The ancient objects that were thus recontextualized were diverse in their original uses. Piranesi borrowed architectural objects such as lotus columns and pyramids, but he transformed their architectural roles, in the most extreme inverting the pyramid form in a kind of corbel stepping. He also rendered statuary into two dimensions. In some cases, the statuary accurately reflected the ancient aesthetics: some examples are lions' heads, Horus (hawk) standards, and Apis bulls. Human busts remained relatively *true* to Egyptian statuary styles, using various types of headdresses as the Egyptians did. The human bodies, however, were modeled with classical musculature instead of reflecting the stiffness of Egyptian carving. Similarly, sphinxes show an added movement and energy lacking in ancient Egyptian art. Mummies, which rarely appear in the art of ancient Egypt, were treated like statuary in some of the surrounds. The sistrum was transformed from an Egyptian ritual musical instrument into a decorative ornamentation out of scale with the other figures in the surrounds, as were Osirian crowns. Abstract Egyptian symbols were treated as objects, with scarab beetles and winged solar discs taking on a lifelike, three-dimensional depth. Throughout the etchings, Piranesi used Egyptian iconography—such as stylized scarabs, apis bulls, sphinxes, *nemes*-headdresses, winged sun discs, and lotus flowers—to create an exotic, orientalizing, and Egyptian aesthetic. In sum, he captured the style of Egyptian things but divorced the objects from their original function.

Despite the authentic details, the overall scheme of Piranesi's fire surrounds would never be mistaken for Egyptian (beyond the fact that fire surrounds would have had no place in ancient Egyptian homes). Piranesi borrowed individual Egyptian elements but assembled them in a distinctly neoclassical fashion, ignoring the overarching organizational principles of Egyptian design. Part of this is functional, part of this reflects the limited knowledge of Egyptian architecture in the eighteenth century, and part of this shows the architect's hybridization of

Egyptian and classical aesthetics.[18] As a consequence, the figures of humans, although wearing Egyptian clothing, stand or sit in classical, not Egyptian postures, and have the musculature and modeling of classical body forms, not the rigid, strictly two-dimensional forms of pre-classical Egyptian style.

The significance of the specific Egyptian objects that Piranesi chose to transform into these new forms lay mostly in their aesthetic appeal. Convinced that Egyptian styles were beautiful, Piranesi further believed that the Egyptians had a proper appreciation of nature and were highly sophisticated artisans. By creatively adapting original artifacts, Piranesi used Egypt to push the boundaries of contemporary design. Within a larger neoclassical movement, there were more possibilities for variation of forms in Egyptianizing design, and the subjects certainly provided an exotic flair. Referencing Egypt instead of Greece, Piranesi furthered his own views that ancient Greek forms had been of less historical influence than Egyptian and Etruscan ones, at the same time as he claimed the civilization established in the land of the Nile as part of the Western tradition.

Piranesi may also have been the first designer to suggest that Egyptian forms could be utilized in commercial space. By the late nineteenth century, this use of Egypt in European design had become commonplace (culminating in the carefully considered art deco theaters of the 1920s, as well as the over-the-top hyper-reality of the 1990s Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas). Piranesi's eighteenth-century commercial Egyptian aesthetic, like his fire surrounds, combined semi-authentic individual Egyptian elements in a larger, classically-inspired schema. This approach was realized in his wall paintings for the Caffè degli Inglesi in Rome. Like his fire surrounds, these paintings recreated, in two-dimensional form, individual Egyptian pieces (some direct models of Egyptian artifacts in Roman collections, others just copies of hieroglyphs and iconography from artifacts). The overall schema, however, is overtly neoclassical, an approach to landscape art that was unknown to the Egyptians but common in ancient Rome and well known in eighteenth-century Europe through excavations at Pompeii. The Egyptian materials are organized into an architectural shape, creating pillars and windows beyond which the viewer sees exotic landscapes. Without a doubt, they evoke imaginary eighteenth-century Egyptian scenery, replete with Cestian-style pyramids, sphinxes, solitary obelisks, and desert vistas. Despite the orientalizing landscape, this particular approach to interior design is clearly Greco-Roman in origin, part of a tradition of depicting faux architecture in painting and exotic landscapes through imaginary windows.

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[18]   For more on this hybridity, see James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 157.

International Style: From the Rococo of Versailles to the Egypt of Wedgwood

Like Piranesi, the Comte de Caylus (1692–1765) also argued that Egypt was a precursor to Rome, but for him it was part of a pan-European tradition of artistic development.[19] In his 1752–1767 *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* [*Collection of Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities*], Caylus argued that the Etruscans were the conduit through which Egyptian art and design entered the Greco-Roman tradition. While Piranesi's etchings were the inspiration of Egypt's emergence as part of the European canon of design, Caylus's work provided the intellectual justification for the critical consideration of Egyptian art. To this effect Caylus identified aspects of Egyptian design that he deemed worthy of consideration and which led to its adoption into European forms: namely, its monumentality, simplicity, and primitivism. The French scholar's work was especially important in the neoclassical movement, and his collection of images served as the inspiration for those designers who wanted to adopt Greek and Roman styles. Although Egypt was not a major focus of the neoclassical movement, Egyptian forms were incorporated into neoclassical styles—under the influence of Caylus's book and Piranesi's etchings.

Caylus's thoughts on Egyptian elements of design were strongly influenced by the eighteenth-century French sculptor Edmé Bouchardon (1698–1762), who successfully incorporated Egyptian themes into his art. Caylus acted as patron to Bouchardon, who visited Rome in the 1730s and studied Bernini's fountains. When he moved back to Paris, Bouchardon brought the Egyptian aesthetic with him. Michael Pantazzi has maintained that Bouchardon was the first eighteenth-century artist to "systematically" adopt Egyptian themes into contemporary design.[20] Arguably, Bouchardon's most lasting influence on the urban design of Paris is his Fontaine des Quatres-Saisons (located in the seventh arrondissement), which was clearly sculpted in a neoclassical style without reference to Egypt. However, many of his drawings and models of fountains, which would have been known to his contemporaries, including those at the court of Louis XV, articulate a vision of how to integrate Egyptian themes into neoclassical design, paving the way for their adoption in rococo style.

Bouchardon recontextualized the use of Egyptianizing objects in civic art. In Paris, the erection of Egyptian style fountains did not signify Roman nationalist sentiments. Rather, they were the first steps in rethinking Egyptian style as emblematic of an international style, as a means of signifying that Paris was a world-class city.[21] This was not the first time that Egyptian and Egyptianizing

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[19]   Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival*, 24.

[20]   Michael Pantazzi, "Absolutism and Enlightenment," in *Egyptomania*, cited above, 118.

[21]   This should be seen as part of a more generalized Italianate movement in which things Italian were considered to be symbols of the best in design and aesthetics.

objects had been used in this fashion. Throughout the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 BCE), elites displayed Egyptian-made or Egyptian "knock-off" objects as evidence of their international connections, status, and perhaps cosmopolitanism.[22] Some of these ancient objects were still of interest in the eighteenth century (and continue to be to this day); examples include scarab (seals) with faux hieroglyphs, statues of sphinxes, and jewelry with Egyptian symbols manufactured locally. Similarly, everyday ceramics acquired an exotic flair with the addition of *wadjet* symbols (the "eye of Horus"), and thus they became suitable as funerary or temple offerings. The rulers of Late Bronze Age city-states in Canaan and North Syria displayed Egyptian objects as a means of conveying their royal status, since Pharaoh's court had a well-established visual culture signifying *royalty*. Syrian thrones (and other types of royal furniture) were thus inlaid with ivory panels carved in Egyptianizing scenes and statues of Syrian gods were posed in the "smiting posture" (with one arm raised to kill a foe), typical of Egyptian kings. It is interesting to note, then, the reemergence of the Egyptian style at Versailles and in the Parisian *hôtels particuliers*, most prominently in rococo interior design and furnishings.

The ancient Egypt of Piranesi, Caylus, and Bouchardon was well suited for the rococo movement of the Late Baroque Period, a movement that spurned symmetry and geometry for lighthearted forms filled with ornate details. Ancient Egyptian artists strived for symmetry and smooth geometric forms to an extreme degree, so the incorporation of Egyptian themes into the rococo is, at first blush, difficult to understand. However, the sources used by the neoclassicists did not present this fully authentic, contextualized view of Egyptian art. Rather, images like those produced by Caylus and Piranesi provided individual details of small artifacts and design motifs, which lent themselves to the detailing and elaboration of rococo design.

Ancient Egyptian themes were an ideal bridge between two distinct aesthetic sensibilities: the geometric harmony and antique pedigree of neoclassicism, on the one hand, and the ornate, naturalistic abstraction of rococo, on the other. Both these approaches to design were manifest at Versailles and in Paris. It was at the court of Louis XVI, however, that Egyptianizing designs made the most notable mark. Very fond of the Egyptian style, Marie Antoinette is often credited with bringing ancient Egypt to prominence at Versailles and other aristocratic residences. However, almost all of the Egyptian design motifs in use were those that had first been introduced to France as part of the rococo. Sphinxes, papyrus columns, and busts bearing *nemes*-headdresses were no longer new elements in French design. What changed, however, was their place in the larger compositions as a whole. The sphinxes, for example, no longer emerged out of florid designs, intermingled

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[22]   For a good overview of this issue and an exhaustive list of Egyptianizing objects found at Canaanite sites, see Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

with other elements. Rather, they were attached to pieces of furniture that in their other features bore the influence of Greco-Roman design. These were clean pieces with smooth lines. Furniture legs were now straight rather than curved, at times resembling Greco-Roman columns. Egyptianizing forms often graced these types of pieces. The strong line of Egyptian art complemented perfectly the clean line of neoclassical art. The Egyptianizing elements of these objects, which played a functional role beyond ornamentation, were armrests, chair legs and backs. Their use within a larger neoclassical design scheme referenced the past (somewhat legitimating Egypt as part of the classical tradition), while giving a nod to the exotic; it thus allowed for more variation than the exclusive application of Greco-Roman motifs. Furthermore, the Egyptian motifs signified elite culture through reference to ancient royalty, and came to be associated with contemporary royalty who had displayed rococo versions of these types of objects.

Marie Antoinette in particular seems to have favored the Egyptianizing approach popularized by the Duc d'Aumont in the 1770s. A patron of many important French artists at the time and an influential figure at court, d'Aumont was particularly fond of the hard stone used in Egyptian sculpture. Most of the works he encountered look more Greco-Roman than Egyptian in terms of influence (although all are clearly neoclassical, not direct copies of ancient pieces). However, it is the details of these pieces—especially sphinxes, *nemes*-headdresses, and floral motifs—that evoke Egypt. Upon d'Aumont's death in 1782, Louis XVI bought many of his Egyptianizing pieces for enormous sums, giving the king's approval to this type of décor. The Egyptian style was most prevalent in Marie Antoinette's private rooms at Versailles and Fontainebleau. Jean-Marcel Humbert has noted the variety of Egyptianizing pieces that the French Queen either commissioned or purchased, including furniture, decorative vases, as well as architectural embellishments, bearing sphinxes, *nemes*-clad heads, and papyrus columns.[23]

By the heyday of Louis XVI's court and continuing beyond, Egyptianizing forms were well established as part of a more general international style. The popularity of these motifs in Paris, by this point the center of European taste, led to their adoption and emulation elsewhere in Europe. An exemplar of this process is the work of Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), whose stonewares and porcelains emerged in this period as influential *objets d'art*. As James Stevens Curl has noted, the Egyptian style from which Wedgwood worked incorporated characteristics of the rococo (when a playful, exotic effect was desired), as well as elements of what he calls the "eclectic language of Neoclassicism."[24] Reliant on the scholarly works of Bernard de Montfaucon, Wedgwood's late eighteenth-century designs integrated Egyptian elements within Greco-Roman style objects while the manufactory crafted replicas of Egyptian objects known in Europe at the time. The most common direct replicas in Wedgwood's repertoire were canopic jars, here reused outside of a funerary context. Canopic jars were ideal Egyptian

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[23]   Jean-Marcel Humbert, "Bergère," in *Egyptomania*, cited above, 127.

[24]   Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 196.

objects to replicate and recontextualize for an eighteenth-century elite home, since their form was similar to classical vases and could be easily suited to pre-existing design schemas. Other things in Wedgwood's repertoire, such as candlesticks, cameos, and other furnishings, were not based on analogous ancient Egyptian classes of objects but could easily incorporate Egyptian elements. Some examples of such elements are sphinxes, *nemes*-headdresses, crowns, scarabs, ankhs, as well as Nilotic flora and fauna like crocodiles, snakes, hippopotami, hawks, palm trees, and lotus plants. Whether the objects were ornate rococo pieces or more geometric neoclassical items, the use of sphinxes and other images of Egypt added the allure of the exotic and the respectability of the ancient. The blue and white jaspar ware (for which the company remains famous to this day) was not particularly Egyptian, but Wedgwood's black basalt objects reflect ancient Egyptian materials. Usually the hieroglyphs on the Wedgwood objects are entirely faux; even after the translation of hieroglyphs in the next century, the continued use of Egyptian design in the works of Wedgwood's descendants shows little interest in authentic hieroglyphs, although there is a discernible aesthetic of authenticity in the company's immediately post-Napoleonic designs. Both *authentic* and *inauthentic* Egyptianizing furnishings became *things* for display in the home by the end of the eighteenth century. Meskell seems to be correct to suggest that, in the case of Egypt, Benjamin's argument that domestication of auratic objects diminishes their interest does not hold true.[25] If anything, it seems to be the opposite with Egyptian *things*—ownership excites the *nostalgic* yearning for the ancient Other.

Paris: Revolutionaries and Freemasons

Despite the absolutist tone of ancient Egyptian design, both from its historical associations of despotism towards the biblical Hebrews and its contemporary associations with rococo, the Paris revolutionaries fashioned Egyptianisms as symbols of liberty. Pyramids, obelisks, and other Egyptian forms of public art pointed to institutions that predated absolutist France, the nobility, and the church. Facilitating romantic historic traditions and anti-clericalism, the erection of things "Egyptian" provided an appealing medium for glorifying the French Revolution and substituting Christianity for a universalizing Deism. References to ancient Egypt were presented in the festivals of Revolutionary France, which explicitly attempted to stage public spectacles that created rather than destroyed, and imposed an order on the type of mass movements that had led to the formation of the Republic. These festivals were explicitly secular, unlike the traditional saints' days and other Christian celebrations of prerevolutionary France. They were intended to glorify historical individuals who, through their actions, had contributed to French historical progress. These heroes of the Revolution manifested as specific historical individuals or personified forces of the will of the populace. In the

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[25]   Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt*, 183.

festival setting, as Mona Ozouf has argued, the celebrants called for a break with the past but not with the entirety of human history.[26] Rather, it was an appeal to reject recent history in order to reestablish a connection to primitive history and nature itself. Ancient Egypt, with its evocations of nature in what appeared to eighteenth-century observers to be half-human, half-animal deities, well reflected a civilized culture with strong ties to the natural world.

One year after the French Revolution, Paris celebrated a Festival of Unity. Materially, six "stations" marked arenas where Parisians could celebrate various aspects of their new state. The first station was the Fountain of Regeneration, located at the Bastille, a logical site for the first stage of the festival. Here Egypt, as the aged precursor of the Republic, was evoked in a station themed on birth and rebirth. Erected on the ruins of the Bastille, the Fountain of Regeneration featured a statue of Isis as a universal mother goddess providing, in the form of her breast milk, a life-giving, regenerative force. The regenerative power of the symbolic breast milk gave new life on the ashes of the *ancien régime*. The reference to the nourishment of the infant at the symbolic location of the birth of the Republic was not coincidental.

The statue itself, which was designed by Jacques Louis David (1748–1825), was manufactured of bronzed plaster. The centerpiece of the statue was the Egyptian goddess Isis, seated between two lions. The figure of Isis did not look much like any authentic Egyptian statuary, but she wore a *nemes*-headdress and kilt, so the Egyptian reference would have been clear to all. Her arms were crossed over her chest, somewhat in the pose of pharaonic mummies, and her hands clasped her breasts, directing the flow of her "milk"— actually water flowing out of the fountain into the basin below. A contemporary engraving depicts a scene from a festival that had been orchestrated by David in which a man receives water from Isis's breast into a goblet that he then holds aloft before a crowd (Plate 22). Thus the Parisian is nurtured, symbolically suckled by a goddess of nature. The performance of August 10, 1793, at the Bastille began with the singing of a cantata. Then, the president of the Convention, Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles drank the "breast-water" from the fountain in a cup. The cup was then passed to 86 old men, representing the departments of France. The age of the men was important as their aged stature emphasized the rebirth of France.

Not all reactions to the Egyptianizing elements of the fountain were positive. Mary Jacobus quotes one contemporary onlooker who commented: "I would like to know why her hair was dressed in that way. We are French, and under the pretext that we have been corrupted in our morals and in our monuments, they want to turn us into Egyptians, Greeks, Etruscans."[27] The anonymous observer noted that the new iconography lacked traditional Gallic references or Roman

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[26] Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 34.

[27] Mary Jacobus, *First Things: Maternal Imagery in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 219.

(that is, church) references, while appearing to differentiate little between the earlier ancient cultures. Of course, these revolutionary reflections on ancient Egypt must have elicited unique responses from anyone who interacted with them— from evocations of a transcendent glory of past civilizations to implications of the tyranny of traditions, to casual approval/disapproval, to complete non-engagement. Yet these divergent reactions were part of a larger production of a new type of collective self-identity. Here then, the medium of Egyptian objects facilitated discussions on issues central to the new France emerging from the *ancien régime*.

The formation of collective self-identities in Revolutionary France (and the parts of Europe touched by the French Revolution), in tandem with Egyptian antiquities, did not just occur on the national level. Other groups similarly used Egyptianizing objects as markers of both the exotic and the self, claiming the alien, meta-symbolic values of Egypt as part of their own heritage. The Freemasons, who came to view Egypt as part of their sacred and secret heritage, appropriated ancient Egypt explicitly and directly.[28] As it developed in the 1750s, Freemasonry came to take on esoteric traditions, especially aspects of the Hermetic tradition (secret wisdom supposedly first articulated in ancient Egypt), in response to growing anti-Christian tendencies in the wake of the wars of religion, the scientific revolution, and the early Enlightenment.[29]

By the end of the eighteenth century, Freemasons were consciously seeking to connect their practices with ancient Egypt. Alexander Lenoir (1761–1839) did much to construct an Egyptian connection with Freemasonry by comparing Masonic practices with Egyptian ones in various articles and in his book, *La Franche-Maçonnerie rendue à sa véritable origine* (1814). Lenoir juxtaposed Egyptian artifacts with tools used in Masonic rituals and explained these rites in accordance with classical views of Egyptian religion (especially what was known of the Osiris myth) and practices described in the fictional work *The Life of Sethos* (misunderstood as an ancient account).[30]

By publishing images of Egyptian artifacts, presenting minor Egyptological artifact displays, and explicitly comparing Masonic practices with Egyptian ones, Lenoir and his Mason followers created an empirical basis for later Freemasons' understandings of the Egyptian roots of the craft. Of particular note were Egyptian objects that bore symbols similar to or adapted by the Masons. For example, the physicality of the *wadjet* eye, present on actual ancient Egyptian artifacts, and its similarity to the all-seeing eye of Freemasonry was tangible evidence that the two symbolic systems were related. Also of note were pieces of ancient Egyptian

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[28] Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 114–15.

[29] For a detailed account of the history of Masonry, see Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717–1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 24–31.

[30] Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 120–21.

equipment that seemed related to Masonic equipment. In later years, the triangular kilts worn by men in Egyptian reliefs were associated with Master Masons' aprons. Architectural tools such as mallets and chisels were taken as early exemplars of the craft's equipment. The argument was simple and effective: the juxtaposition of ancient artifacts with Masonic objects bearing either a functional or symbolic resemblance proved the relationship between the two. It was not just the individual objects but the objects' relationship(s) with one another that was filled with meaning. These Masonic historians acted as curators in the manner described by Pearce, where they mediated historical and pseudo-historical information about the objects through a "rhetorical act of persuasion," creating a very selective narrative about Masonic relationships to the past.[31]

Napoleon and the Archaeologically Authentic Aesthetic

Napoleon's failed 1798 invasion of Egypt created another ancient Egyptian hermeneutics, symbolic of the French Empire and the idolization of the person of its emperor. Throughout the eighteenth century, the adoption of ancient Egyptian aesthetics into European design made the exotic familiar, while constructing scholarly and popular bases for the somewhat solipsistic nineteenth-century Orientalist encounters with the ancient and modern Near East.

With the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, the ethos surrounding the consumption of ancient Egyptian objects changed dramatically. Europeans now had direct access to these objects, first in the form of the popular illustrated account provided by Baron Dominique Vivant Denon (1747–1825) of his travels to Egypt, second from the scientific illustrations produced by Napoleon's *savants*, and third, in their new ability to actually travel to the ancient land. Thus, the new ethos demanded, at least at the outset of the nineteenth century, that the emulation of ancient Egyptian objects should carry a level of archaeological authenticity. Yet as the authentic increasingly became part of the purview of the scholar, the shift in consumption patterns from the elites to the Victorian masses eventually brought with it a dissatisfaction with the authentic, and producers willingly offered hyper-real forms of Egyptian antiquity in their place.

Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Egypt may have been a failure for the French militarily, but it led to the establishment of Egyptology as a Western, colonially-infused academic discipline. Along with his army, Napoleon brought a team of *savants*, experts in scientific illustration, as part of a Scientific and Artistic Commission; they were charged with documenting the flora, fauna, people, customs, architecture and antiquities of Egypt. This was an explicit component of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, which was an intellectual conquest of the land, not just a military takeover. Napoleon later described this invasion as particularly formative in the birth of the new France, as those men who followed him to Egypt

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[31]   Pearce, "Objects as Meaning," 27.

were fundamental in the restructuring of the French state after 1799.[32] These experiences of Egypt, under the charismatic figure of Napoleon himself, bound these statesmen together; Egyptian themes were at their disposal as a material means of signaling bonds of fraternity. The frequency of Egyptian iconography, especially sphinxes and obelisks, in the Père Lachaise Cemetery (founded by Napoleon in 1804), hints that Egypt remained an important symbol for these men and their families until their deaths. Napoleon himself used ancient Egypt in his own artistic propaganda, and in many ways this ancient space became a synecdoche for the Napoleonic empire as a whole. In imperial statuary, for example, the Egyptian campaign is reimagined as a French victory. In Paris, both the Fountain of Victory in Place du Châtelet and the Fountain of the Fellah on Rue de Sèvres depict the Napoleonic empire through Egyptian forms. For Napoleon the Egyptian obelisk became a monument whose function was to commemorate heroes of the empire, as seen in such examples as the monument to Louis Charles Antoine Desaix in Place Victoire and the structure on the Pont Neuf that glorified the *Grande Armée*. For Europeans the obelisk thus developed into a symbol of empire and of France's importance as a world power. Napoleon's authority was not derived from the divine right of kings but from his own actions. Ancient Egypt, as part of this imperial style, participated in a self-legitimating process, relating Napoleon to the Pharaoh, evoking the glory of his Egyptian expedition, and associating France with the grandest and most ancient of empires. The authentic Egyptian artifacts (brought back by the *savants*), along with the Egyptianizing creations, constructed narratives of the birth of nineteenth-century France and a French world empire.

Many of the Egyptianizing things created during Napoleon's time used Egypt in a similar manner to how it was conceived in rococo or neoclassical design. Ancient Egypt appeared in candlesticks, featured as humans holding ancient Egyptian equipment, like the sistrum, or bearing hieroglyphs and symbols, like scarabs. Furniture, such as tables and chairs, carried similar motifs. However, a new, more realistic approach to Egypt emerged, what Curl has called "archaeological."[33] New architectural façades adopted Egyptian iconography, as was the case at the Hôtel Beauharnais, with its lotus columned portico and the battered walls reminiscent of the Egyptian temple at Denderah.[34] Hieroglyphs flank the entranceway, while an Egyptian sun disc rests above and between the two lotus pillars. Likewise, smaller objects were fashioned according to archaeologically authentic principles. Most extreme perhaps is the Egyptian table service crafted by Sèvres that included a scale crystal model of the temple of Karnak as its centerpiece. Facing this impressive

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[32]   Thomas Gaehtgens, Jörg Ebeling, and Ulrich Leben, "Eugène de Beauharnais: *Honneur et Fidélité* at the Hôtel Beauharnais," in *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style: 1800–1815*, ed. Odile Nouvel and Anne Dion-Tenenbaum (New York: Abrams, 2007), 79.

[33]   Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 196.

[34]   For a description of the hotel and its contents, see Gaehtgens, Ebeling, and Leben, "Eugène de Beauharnais," 78–87.

focal point, guests would be served from dishes fashioned in imitation of the red crown of Egypt (the *deshret*) and canopic jars; they would eat off of plates painted with reproductions of Oriental art surrounded by Egyptian symbols and hieroglyphs. As Steven Adams has noted, Napoleon was conscious of the political and cultural power of Sèvres porcelain, and the services crafted at the renowned manufactory created a political "will" that was both centrifugal (pointing to the expansion of the French Empire) and centripetal (marking Paris as the centre of world culture).[35] The new archaeological aesthetic of Egyptian things was part of this centrifugal and centripetal argument, born out of the direct encounter with Egyptian objects through various means: artifacts brought back from the Napoleonic campaigns to Egypt were transplanted and emulated in a different cultural milieu; artistic treasures seized elsewhere in Europe (especially in the Italian states) further augmented the encounter with and intrusion of the Other; the illustrations accompanying the writings of Napoleon's *savants* mediated the first experience of these *things* for a public greatly interested in exotic civilizations rediscovered through imperial expansion.

The most influential of the French scholars who traveled with Napoleon was the aforementioned Vivant Denon, who had been Madame de Pompadour's keeper of the cabinet of carved gems and later worked as a diplomat under Louis XV. He had remained in the favor of the revolutionaries, especially David and Robespierre, and his skills as a scientific illustrator (and clandestine pornographer) in Paris were well known. Napoleon invited Denon to accompany the French as the commander-in-chief's advisor on artistic matters, although the latter was not formally a member of the Scientific and Artistic Commission. Upon Denon's return to France, he published what quickly became a bestseller—*Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* [*Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*] (1802). Rapidly translated into English, this lively account of his travels blended the emerging genre of the travel narrative with elaborate descriptions of objects in an exotic setting. Lavishly illustrated with Denon's own images of what he encountered, this work presented the first accurate representations of Egyptian antiquities to a wide European reading public. Along with ethnographic images (concentrating especially on clothes and physiognomic aspects of the population), and depictions of local flora and fauna, Denon's drawings included fragments of stone inscriptions, renditions of tomb paintings, statuary, and architectural fragments.[36] Larger freestanding structures were also included, usually shown buried in sand or falling into ruin. Most important for subsequent design were his images of the temple of Denderah (called Tentyris in his accounts), which much later became the basis for Egyptianizing architecture in Europe and North America. Part of the travel adventure was the *stuff* that Denon saw along the way, and much of his narrative

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[35]   Steven Adams, "Sèvres Porcelain and the Articulation of Imperial Identity in Napoleonic France," *Journal of Design History* 20:3 (2007): 201.

[36]   The depictions of statuary included an image of the French *savants* crawling over an Africanized rendering of the sphinx.

is laden with object descriptions to supplement the illustrations. His book reflects a change in society's understandings of travel, which presupposed that the traveler moves through a new region with the explicit goal of experiencing objects and architecture in their authentic and exotic setting. Drawing on tendencies that had emerged with the earliest Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, the traveling that Denon recounted involved a secular fetishizing of the authentic *other* object. Part of the point of travel became to view actual objects in their intended surroundings.

Travel literature and scientific illustration were not the only means used by Denon to introduce the Other's objects in European society. Denon became the director of the Louvre in 1804 through an appointment by Napoleon. Under Denon, the Louvre displayed the spoils of Napoleon's wars, implying a public ownership of war loot as well as a new relationship between the government and objects acquired through combat. Denon established many of the formal means of displaying objects of art and curiosity to the general public. From now on, the Other's objects could be experienced out of their original framework, in a new fetishized context legitimated by the state—the museum. Arranged chronologically or thematically, these objects functioned primarily as things to be viewed, stamping the expansiveness and inclusivity of the state with the otherness of distant lands. The museum pieces were the tangible results of the imperial practice, which now carried with it an explicitly intellectual agenda.

The opening of the Louvre during Revolutionary times (on the same day as the Festival of Unity) was a revolutionary act itself, tantamount to a declaration of the public ownership of the art and artifacts contained therein. As Andrew McClellan has observed, I. M. Pei's glass pyramid that now stands in the center of the Louvre courtyard was prefigured in the eighteenth century by 16 torch-lit pyramids, erected to celebrate the arrival of Napoleonic booty from Italy.[37] Most of the Egyptian artifacts displayed (and still on display), however, were not acquired during the Napoleonic expedition but came from royal collections. In the years that Denon oversaw the Louvre, most of these were statues, and since they were both antiques and artifacts, they easily fit within a chronologically ordered schema of world art.[38] The study of ancient Egypt was eventually formalized at the Louvre with the creation of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities by a royal decree of Charles X in 1826, along with the purchase of over 9,000 artifacts from three major private collections. The display of objects that originated in private collections can be seen as one of the first steps towards the understanding that antique objects were more rightly owned by the state than by the individual. An early nineteenth-century visitor to the Louvre could have encountered in the

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[37]   Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 124.

[38]   It should be noted that in its early phases, the museum's sculpture gallery was not organized in a strictly chronological manner as was the painting collection, due to issues of space.

Egyptian collection statues, a golden bowl, a mummified cat, human mummies, fragments of inscriptions, jewels, amulets, and objects of daily life.

It is interesting to note that Denon's personal collection of things contained numerous Egyptian pieces. The 1826 catalogue compiled for the auction of his belongings after his death lists 58 pages of Egyptian artifacts of all classes.[39] His collection included bitumen and wax casts of artifacts as well as originals: ceramic figurines, stone amulets (including many *wadjet* eyes), scarabs, zoomorphic figurines, fragments of hieroglyphic inscriptions, papyri, pieces of mummies, stone models of deities, and additional statues undamaged or fragmented in bronze, basalt, or other materials. This personal collection was more than just an Enlightenment curiosity cabinet amassing diverse artifacts. Rather, these Egyptian things (and other artifacts of ancient life) were collected as part of Denon's particular approach to understanding the past in relation to the present. This was mirrored in his curatorial approach to the Louvre, whereby art was understood within a framework of historical progress.[40] Ancient things needed to be collected and preserved to prevent future deterioration, thereby allowing scholars to readily understand the lessons of the past.

Many of the objects amassed by the Napoleonic expedition ended up as holdings of the British Museum. After the defeat of the French by the British, the Treaty of Alexandria specified that French troops were to keep their personal belongings, but larger weapons, such as cannons, had to be ceded to the British. Antiquities that had been collected by the French scholars fell into a gray area since they could be understood as both objects of personal study and objects collected as part of the military enterprise, thus the property of the imperialist state. As a result, some of the more prominent pieces, such as the Rosetta Stone, were confiscated by the British. The importance with which these Egyptian artifacts were treated in the division of spoils speaks to their power as markers of contested narratives. In regard to the souvenir as a category of objects, Susan Stewart notes that the narrative surrounding it "is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor."[41] As souvenirs, these artifacts had no implicit value in the absence of an antiquities market; their value stemmed precisely from the imperialist and exotic narratives that were implicit in their new *Sitz im Leben*, sociological setting. The importance that the narrative of the possessor holds over an object is well demonstrated by the notice printed directly on the edge of the Rosetta Stone: "Captured in Egypt by the British Army 1801." There the narrative of possession became a physical part of the object. The new setting of these artifacts, the British Museum, institutionalized them as the property of the British people and as signs

[39]   L.J.J. Dubois, *Description des objets d'art qui composent le cabinet de feu M. le Baron V. Denon: Monuments antiques, historiques, modernes; ouvrages orientaux, etc.* (Paris: Imprimerie d'Hippolyte Tilliard, 1826), 1–58.

[40]   McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 147.

[41]   Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 136.

of the power of empire. The conservation of exotic objects was used as proof of Britain's centrality and its ability to act as caretaker for the world's cultural history. As Pearce has observed in relation to artifacts in museums more generally, these collections of Egyptian objects became sacred in their setting.[42] They were sacred in that they could be set aside as unique objects—that uniqueness allowing them to act as markers of difference and helping to create ways of understanding European relationships to this ancient Other.

Regardless of the fate of the objects after the war, it remains that the French team's rendering of them into two dimensions, through the new aesthetic of scientific illustration, allowed the objects (artifacts and buildings) to become part of the larger European visual culture repertoire. The act of rendering objects into visually accurate drawings captured them intellectually while allowing the wider European audience to experience and to *know* them. While the team's illustrations made their way into publication sporadically in the early part of the nineteenth century, the true triumph came between 1809 and 1828 with the publication of the *Description de l'Egypte* as a 23-volume folio set. The images themselves roughly fall into two categories. The first category included extremely accurate, carefully measured objects, depicted individually, free of illustrated context, but grouped with similar objects by the editors (Plate 23). The scope of objects depicted as such was encyclopedic in nature, intended to document the full range of material culture available to the *savants*. Architecture (in whole and in pieces) was drawn with care, as were artifacts (scarab seals, statues, amulets, jewelry, etc.). Inscriptions were transcribed in accurate detail even though, at the time, they could not be understood. Humans and animals, both living and dead (mummified), were also included. Flora, fauna, and ethnographic materials, such as clothing, documented the Egypt of the nineteenth century. The same principles of accuracy are used to render the objects in the second category of illustrations— romantic landscapes. In this category, the ancient objects (especially architecture and statues) are situated in a romantic and exotic setting, accompanied by valiantly posed, upright French soldiers, in contrast to lethargic Arabs lying or squatting on the decayed remains of Egypt, and surrounded by sand dunes burying the once regal Egyptian civilization (Plate 24). In this second category of images, the justification for the European conquest of the region and the subsequent removal of the antiquities is the underlying raison d'être. The consequences of the perceived squalor of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century inhabitants of the land are artistically inscribed in these images that also show the objects of antiquity as decaying and collapsing. Visually, the French appear as the true descendents of the once great Egyptians, who have a more legitimate claim to the objects of antiquity than the modern inhabitants of Egypt. The latter, as it is suggested by the Napoleonic imagery, scarcely understand the importance of these objects.

[42]   Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 406–407.

In recent years, some historians have questioned the scale of the *Description de l'Egypte*'s influence.[43] Regardless of how explicitly dependent scholars and designers were on this work in the early years, its transformation of the relationship between Europeans and Egyptian antiquities (and those of other ancient cultures in colonial environments) cannot be overstated. Of primary importance was the manner in which this and other later archaeological enterprises reified colonial relationships and demonstrated that the antiquities were part of a world heritage (read European), not the exclusive possession of the people of Egypt. As Baudrillard notes, when an object is no longer used (but is collected), its function becomes the definition of its possessor.[44] Collected objects signify the "mental precincts over which I [the collector] hold sway."[45] The collection of Egyptian antiquities by the colonial powers, then, was a material manifestation of a statement of intellectual possession of Egypt, both ancient and modern. As Stewart writes, "the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property."[46]

A more abstract effect of the publication of Denon's book and the *Description* was the limitations that it placed on the role of the artist in imagining ancient Egypt through objects. The artist was no longer as free to construct new antiques since *real* Egyptian objects could be experienced through museums or the printed word. As noted above, Pearce has used a Saussurian model to explore how objects carry a tension between the freedom of an individual's interpretation and the limitations of social expectations of those readings.[47] In this case, the social expectations surrounding ancient Egypt in the nineteenth century became more strictly defined by archaeological approaches to the past, or as Pearce might say, by the "power of the real thing."[48] In this way two "ancient Egypts" emerge in the nineteenth century: the Egypt of archaeology bounded by scholarly efforts to capture the authentic, and the Egypt of fantasy that uses this ancient land as a base for any number of imagined worlds. These two separate Egypts are readily apparent today: scholarly works on philological minutiae and popular works on curses and aliens both use the same *archaeological* materials but attract different audiences. For scholars, the collecting and classification of Egyptian antiquities continues to allow, as Baudrillard states, "the resolving of real time into a systematic dimension."[49] The act of organizing these things creates a new meaning and new function for them, while it presents a new *constructed* time for the objects themselves to signify. Despite the fracturing of the study of Egypt into popular and scholarly domains, the use of the land of the Nile to imagine the idealized self continues today.

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[43]   See for example Andrew Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the* Description de l'Egypte *in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain* (London: Golden House Publication, 2005).

[44]   Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 92.

[45]   Ibid., 91.

[46]   Stewart, *On Longing*, xii.

[47]   Pearce, *Interpreting Objects*, 27.

[48]   Ibid., 20.

[49]   Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 102.

PART II
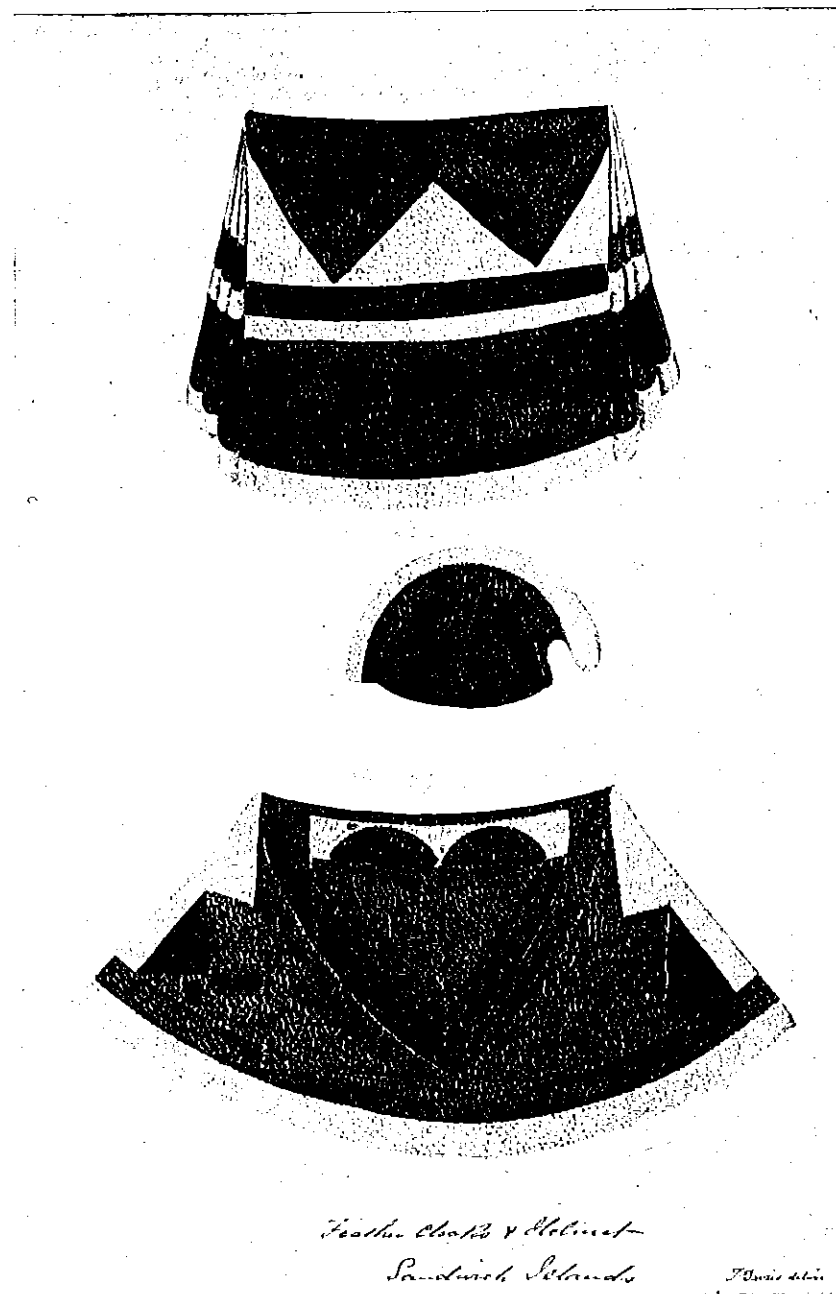# Under Eastern Eyes:
Garments, Portraits, Books

Feather cloaks and helmet

Sandwich Islands

Plate 19. Feather cloaks and helmet. Drawing by Thomas Davies of two lots in the Leverian Sale, 1806.

ALTRA VEDVTA DELLA' FONTANA IN PIAZZA NAVONA,
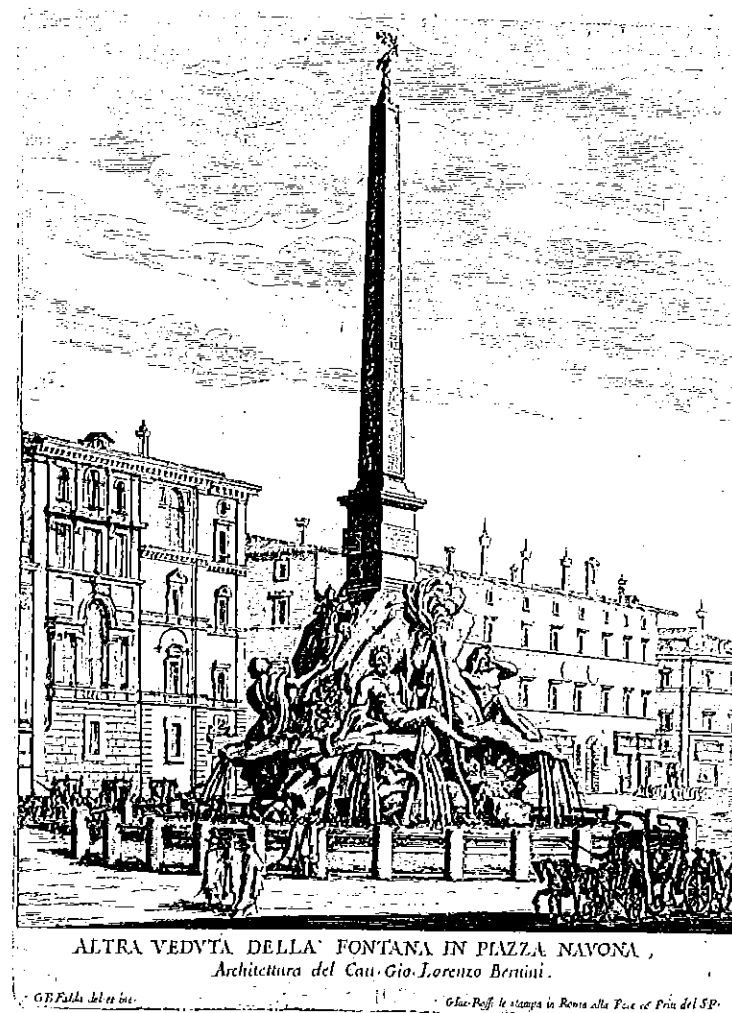Architettura del Cau. Gio. Lorenzo Bernini.

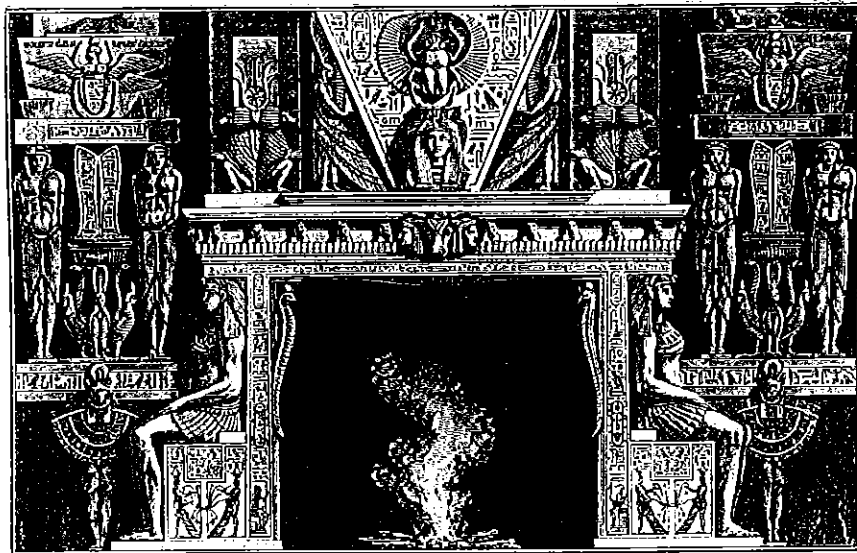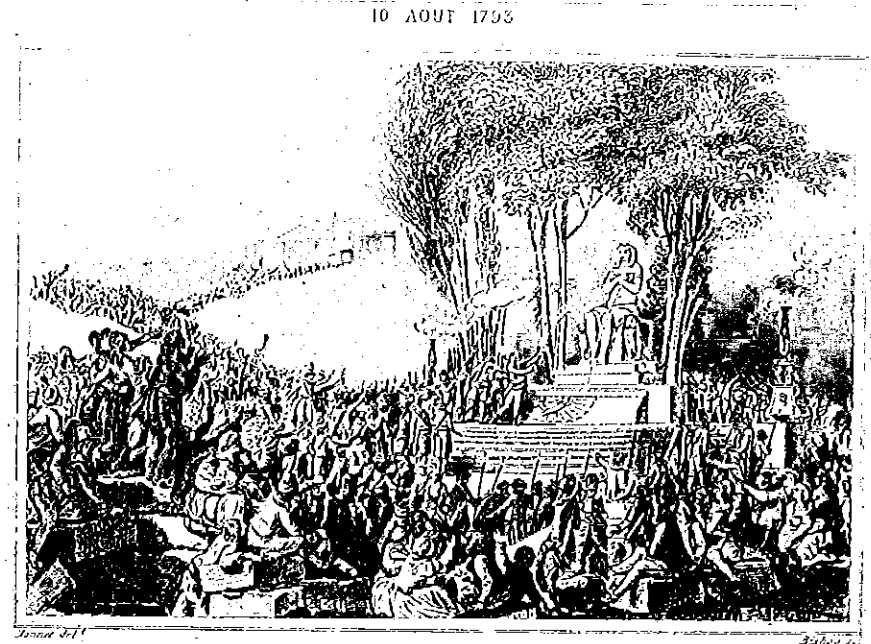Plate 20. The Fountain of Four Rivers in the Piazza Navona in Rome sculpted by Bernini.

Plate 21.   One of the fire surrounds designed by Giovanni Piranesi. The style is a hybrid of Egyptian and Classical styles.
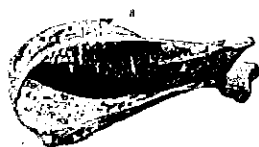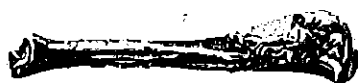

10 AOUT 1793

La fontaine de la Régénération.

Plate 22.   The Festival of Unity of August 10, 1793 at the Fountain of Regeneration on the ruins of the Bastille.

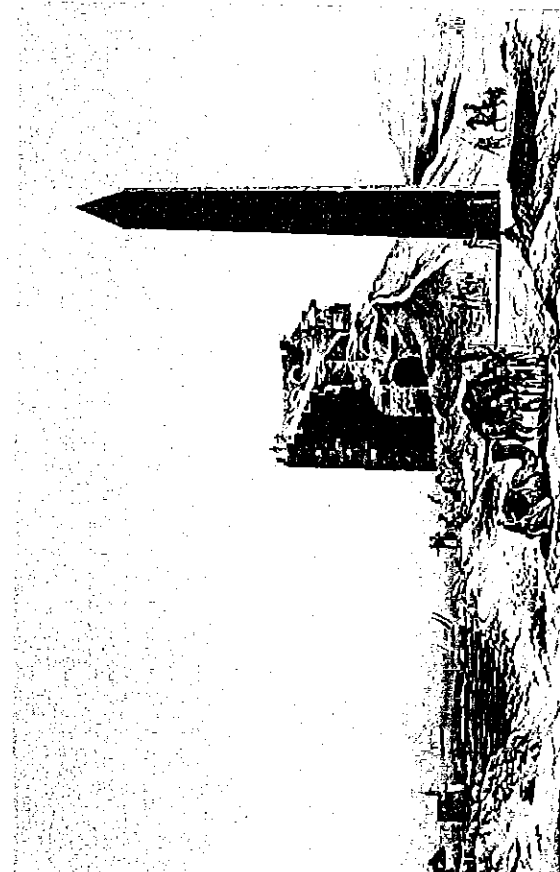1..6 MOMIES D'IBIS.—5 FRAGMENS DE MOMIES DE CHACAL QUI ONT ÉTÉ DORÉES.
11 FRAGMENT DE L'ENVELOPPE DES DOIGTS D'UNE MOMIE.

Plate 23.   A series of engravings made by Napoleon's *savants*. The editors of the Description grouped objects of related types together; the caption for this page reads "Thebes—Ibis Mummies."

ALEXANDRIE.

VUE DE L'OBÉLISQUE APPELÉ ABUSILE DE CLÉOPÂTRE ET DE LA TOUR DITE DES ROMAINS, PRISE DU SUD-OUEST.

Plate 24.   A romantic engraving made by Napoleon's *savants*. "Alexandria—View of the obelisk named Cleopatra's Needle and the so-called Roman Tower taken from the Southwest."