

## From Representation . . .

### *Anubis, Actium, and the Limits of Exoticism*

The ekphrasis of Aeneas's shield in Book 8 of the *Aeneid* looks forward to the cataclysmic conflict between Octavian and Antony. To reimagine the civil war between two Romans as a fight between Octavian and Cleopatra, between Roman order and foreign chaos, Virgil turns to Egypt's gods:<sup>1</sup> "In the middle the queen Cleopatra calls to her army with native rattle, she does not yet look back behind her at the twin snakes. Monstrous forms of every sort of god and the barker Anubis hold weapons against Neptune and Venus and against Minerva."<sup>2</sup> Monstrous Egyptian animal gods oppose august Roman divinities. Over a century later, the satirist Juvenal took up the same theme: "Volusius of Bithynia, who doesn't know what sort of monsters mad Egypt worships? . . . Whole towns venerate cats there, here freshwater fish, a dog there—but none worships Diana."<sup>3</sup> The abhorrence for Egyptian religion displayed by Virgil and Juvenal suggests that Rome had no place for Egypt and its strange practices. Even as the role of Egypt in the Roman empire

1. I here emphasize that Virgil soldered Egyptian zoomorphism onto dichotomizing Egypt-Rome battle imagery, rather than falling into the trap of critiquing, but simultaneously reinscribing, the debate about the *Aeneid*'s optimistic or pessimistic view of Augustan rule and Roman imperialism, a pattern noted by Thomas (2001, 20–24). For the shield's use of triumphal imagery, see McKay (1998, 210–11) and Pandey (2018, 194–201).

2. Virgil *Aen.* 8.696–700: *regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro, / necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis. / omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis / contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam / tela tenent.*

3. Juv. 15.1–8: *Quis nescit, Volusi Bithynice, qualia demens / Aegyptos portenta colat? . . . / illic aeluros, hic piscem fluminis, illic / oppida tota canem venerantur, nemo Dianam.*

had changed drastically between Virgil and Juvenal and the reigns of Augustus and Hadrian, there is a shared reliance on barbarizing rhetoric.

When we look at material culture, the opposite picture emerges. The cult of Isis spread throughout the Roman empire. In many ways, Isis's trajectory is similar to Apion's. Originally Egyptian, in the Ptolemaic period Isis became a central figure in Alexandria and bridged Greek and Egyptian religious traditions. This cultural pluralism facilitated her movement around the Mediterranean: Isiac inscriptions can be found from Spain to Syria.<sup>4</sup> The trappings of Egyptian religion—and animal gods like Anubis and the Apis bull—were scattered across Italy. There were well-known Isis temples in Pompeii and Rome's Campus Martius, the former still standing to this day.<sup>5</sup> The elegist Propertius spends a poem complaining that his girlfriend's adherence to the cult of Isis keeps them from spending time together.<sup>6</sup> During Isis festivals like the “discovery of Osiris” (*inventio Osiridis*) and the “navigation of Isis” (*navigium Isidis*), so-called Anubophores would don the dog-faced mask of Anubis. Their public commitment to Anubis worship forms a very different response to Egypt's animals than one sees in Virgil.<sup>7</sup> Isis and animals were thus closely intertwined. In the years after Actium, they jointly reflected a new kind of Roman multiculturalism that elicited divergent responses. Augustus himself forced Rome's Isis temple to move outside the *pomerium*, Rome's sacred boundary. Tiberius destroyed the Campus Martius temple after a Roman magistrate donned an Anubis mask to sexually assault the Isis devotee Paulina.<sup>8</sup> Both emperors tried to create space within the city for a Roman religious identity that could be free from Egyptian religion's obviously significant influence.<sup>9</sup>

### *Back to Rome*

If one follows authors of *Aegyptiaca* on their journeys to Rome, what reception did they receive? When the scene changes from Roman Egypt to Egypt in Rome, the

4. Mazurek (2022) focuses on the cult of Isis in imperial-era Greece. Of particular note is her interest (88–119) in the materiality of Isis cult in Greece, which skews toward Greek stylistic paradigms to facilitate connections between Isis and goddesses like Aphrodite, Demeter, and Athena.

5. The Isis temple in the Campus Martius is well discussed by Lembke (1994) and Versluys, Clausen, and Vittozzi (2018); for Isis at Pompeii see Tran-tam-Tinh (1964) and Swetnam-Burland (2015, 105–41).

6. In 2.33a, Propertius directs a tirade against Isis because his girlfriend is off celebrating a festival in her honor. As Miller (1981, 105, 108) notes, Propertius, like Virgil, presents all of Rome as a unified front opposed to Isis. But, in doing so, Propertius offers a self-aware performance of the lover's outsized and mock-epic response to a personal annoyance.

7. For background on visual and literary evidence for these Anubophores, see Bricault (2000–2001). Gasparini (2018, 726–27, 743) (cf. Gasparini 2017, 396–98) integrates the Anubophores into the larger theatricality of Isiac performance. For cult worship of Anubis, see Sfameni Gasparro (2018).

8. On this episode, see Gasparini (2017) and chapter 6 in this book.

9. Orlin (2010, 211–12) (cf. Orlin 2008, 243–45, for Augustus's use of the *pomerium* as an essential ideological boundary) argues that this marginalized, but did not ban outright, the cult of Isis.

contours of cultural contact change with it. It is no surprise that Greek and Roman authors were fascinated with Egypt, whether because of the Nile, hieroglyphs, Isis, or the like. Amid that variety of themes, this and the next chapter take up the role of animals in Egyptian religion. As I will show, Egypt's sacred animals do a particularly good job reflecting larger disciplinary patterns through which Egyptologists' versus Classicists' perspectives on a given *topos's* Egyptian origin and Greco-Roman reception drift apart from each other. Whether embraced alongside Isis or rejected by Virgil and Juvenal, it is all too easy for Egypt's animals to become a foil for the complexities of Romanness under empire, one of several Egyptian mirrors through which Romans made sense of themselves. The alterity of Egypt's animals helps crystallize an author's relationship to the emperor, or an Anubophore's public commitment both to a citizenship status and a religious community, or a Roman banqueter's reaction to the exotic fauna of a Nileescape.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, these Romans' creative conceptualization of Egypt should be evaluated on its own terms. But all the same, this insistent individuation of Rome's fictive Egypt continues to push out of frame the actual systems of significance surrounding animals in Egyptian culture.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I chart a path to authors of *Aegyptiaca* and their own role in the animal/religion *topos* via the heterogeneous strategies of cultural representation through which Greek and Roman authors explained Egypt's sacred animals. Those strategies of representation partially (but only partially) track a frequently cited transition from Julio-Claudian antipathy to Flavian patronage of the cult of Isis.<sup>12</sup> I proceed through three main modes of representation. The first, the rhetoric of barbarization associated with Virgil and Actium, is a strategy of non-translation. In the aftermath of the civil war, Roman authors refused to see a cow as anything other than a cow. In the second strategy, Roman authors leveraged patterns of mutual identification—of Io with Isis, or Osiris with Apis—to connect Egypt's animals with cognate stories of human/animal/god fluidity in the Greek mythological tradition. In a third strategy, Greek and Roman authors took a step back to weigh the pros and cons of zoomorphic versus anthropomorphic gods. As will become clear over the course of this chapter, the cult of Isis and dynastic change in Rome are undoubtedly central frames for these three different strategies and the way

10. For an exoticizing interpretation of Egyptianizing material in Rome, see Versluys (2002, 354–55, 375–76) and Swetnam-Burland (2015, 18–19) (though Pearson 2021, 194 pushes back against exoticism's explanatory utility).

11. Malaise (2005), Swetnam-Burland (2015, 30), and Versluys (2017a, 276) have all sought to individuate Romans' fictive Egypt. Barrett (2019, 34–35, 58–59) reframes the “authentic” vs. “fictive” debate in terms of Romans' selective and eclectic engagement with and transformation of earlier Egyptian models.

12. For the Flavian recuperation of Egypt, see (on the literature side) Manolaraki (2013, 13–14, 125–32, and 2018); for Pompeian imagery, Barrett (2019, 21–28); and for the cult of Isis, Mazurek (2022, 64–65).

they appear in authors like Lucan or Statius. But by prioritizing the strategies that different authors used, I argue that these two frames also have their drawbacks: a rigid periodization oriented around an emperor's support for or opposition to Isis overburdens the concept of "imperial ideology" and flattens out tonally ambivalent engagement with Egypt. Once I have emphasized Romans' multifaceted interest in Egypt's animals, the threads of cultural translation woven by authors of *Aegyptiaca* can be spliced in with a larger domain of cultural representation under empire that is of broad interest to Classicists.

#### A COW IS NOT A GOD: JULIO-CLAUDIAN BARBARIZATION

I have been cautioning against overusing barbarism and exoticism, but it is easy to see why they are such attractive explanations of Romans' responses to the role of animals in Egyptian religion.<sup>13</sup> It is important not to dismiss barbarism outright, but instead to locate barbarizing descriptions of Egypt in a specific social and historical context. The rhetorical strategies that Virgil and Propertius crafted after Actium inaugurated a Roman self-definition against Egypt designed specifically around the challenges that had accompanied the civil war.<sup>14</sup> Actium kicked off a new kind of discourse well suited to the post hoc reconstruction of Augustus's consolidation of power, whose fulcrum was regularly located at Alexandria with the death of Cleopatra and Antony. For the alienation of Antony and Cleopatra from Roman and Greek identities to be effective, Virgil's portrait of Isis and her retinue of animals had to reject the culturally mixed iconography in her Roman temples. Egyptian religious traditions around animal-formed gods are roundly criticized to distance those, like Cleopatra, whose iconographic self-presentation changed between Greek and Egyptian idioms.

The need to demonize Cleopatra thus ensured that Egyptian sensibilities around animals and the divine were cut to size to fit the procrustean bed constructed by elite male authors of the post-Actium decades.<sup>15</sup> Virgil was not the only such author.<sup>16</sup> Propertius also gives space to this systematic comparison of Rome

13. For barbarizing explanations, see Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984) and Maehler (2003). Pfeiffer (2015) notes the ethnic Greeks in Egypt who participated in animal cult, but still contrasts (50) intra-Egyptian acceptance with a version of Roman interest in Egypt's sacred animals circumscribed by the Actium moment.

14. Pandey (2018, 197) underlines these two authors' "intergeneric dialogue" vis-à-vis Nile scenes.

15. Hornung (1982, 100–42) surveys the range of those Egyptian sensibilities.

16. The shield of Aeneas looms large in Virgil's antagonistic arrangement of Rome and Egypt, but note too the presence of Osiris in the Trojans' climactic fight with the Rutulians in *Aen.* 12.458–61, through which (per Reed 1998, 403) Actium rhetoric seeps into the Trojans' fight against native Italians.

and Egypt via divine bodies.<sup>17</sup> Propertius begins a poem situating his own enslavement (his words) to his girlfriend through a list of historical and mythological exempla of men's dangerous subservience to their lovers. Cleopatra is the central figure in this catalogue. Propertius's poem mirrors Virgil's approach: "Assuredly, whore queen of foul Canopus, the one branded mark of Phillip's blood, you dared to place barking Anubis against our Jupiter."<sup>18</sup> Like Virgil, Propertius uses barking to underline Anubis's animality, undercut the legitimacy of Egyptian religion, and mark out Cleopatra as guilty by association. The poem's emphasis on captivating women suggests that Octavian's real antagonist is not his fellow Roman Antony, but is instead Cleopatra, by whom Antony had been perversely ensnared.

Over time, a set narrative took hold in which Augustus personally inaugurated the demonization of Egyptian animal gods one sees in Virgil and Propertius. There is some evidence in the series of coins he minted in 28–27 BCE to mark the annexation of Egypt. These coins and their legend *Aegypto Capta* not only signal the rearticulation of civil war as imperial annexation, they also use a lone crocodile to underline Egypt's exoticism.<sup>19</sup> More promising evidence long postdates Augustus's actual life. Cassius Dio, the hellenophone Roman historian, points out that Augustus himself found animal worship irredeemably misguided. During Augustus's tour of his new province, Dio notes that Augustus studiously avoided traditional modes of Egyptian worship: "And for this same reason Augustus also didn't want to meet with the Apis bull, claiming that he was wont to worship gods, not cattle."<sup>20</sup> Like the "barker" motif, Dio's bon mot elevates the animality of the Apis bull to create a rhetorically effective contrast between the bestial and the divine. It is important to clarify that this cannot be taken as tidy evidence of Augustus's own beliefs. Dio is likely populating the anecdote—where Augustus shows deference to Alexander and Sarapis but dismisses the Ptolemies and the Apis bull—with his own view of a paradigmatically moderate conqueror. This is especially true when Dio is writing some two hundred years after the events in question and is clearly fashioning Augustus as a model for the contemporary Severan emperors.<sup>21</sup> This rejection of the Apis bull might be an idiosyncrasy of Dio's tendentious representation of Augustus, but the literary convention of Egyptian religious barbarism is

17. Relevant are Propertius's emphasis on a chained Nile in 2.1—which takes up rivers' metonymic importance in triumphal imagery—and his comments (2.31) on the portico of the Danaids in the Palatine complex, discussed by Pandey (2018, 94).

18. Prop. 3.11.39–41: scilicet, incesti meretrix regina Canopi, / una Philippi sanguinis usta nota, / ausa Iovi nostro es latrantem opponere Anubim. Text from Heyworth (2007) (whose reading departs from the manuscripts).

19. RIC I Augustus 275A and B, 544, 545 (cf. 546).

20. Cass. Dio 51.16.5: κάκ τῆς αὐτῆς ταύτης αἰτίας οὐδὲ τῷ Ἄπιδι ἐντυχεῖν ἠθέλησε, λέγων θεοὺς ἀλλ' οὐχὶ βοῦς προσκυνεῖν εἰθίσθαι.

21. See Rich (1990), Reinhold and Swan (1990), and regarding the Severans, Gabba (1984, 73–75).

still notable in its longevity. In this entrenchment of Egyptian religious deviance and its importance to the Egyptianization of the civil war, the convenience of the Apis bull needs little elaboration.

As the scene shifts from Augustus and Actium to the later Julio-Claudians, authors continued to locate the origins of Rome's turn toward empire and the principate in Pompey's, Cleopatra's, and Antony's deaths in Egypt. Even as times changed, the rhetorical convenience of animals-qua-gods remained the same. The epic poet Lucan is a particularly loud voice in this continuation of the barbarizing template. Lucan's engagement with Egypt is certainly multifaceted. He simultaneously underlines Egypt's culpability in Pompey's death and draws natural-philosophical inspiration from the Nile and its inundation. Jonathan Tracy and Eleni Manolaraki have taken up Lucan's combination of Egypt's political and natural-philosophical import and the light that the fictional priest Acoreus shines on that combination. That is an angle of approach I will return to in the Conclusion.<sup>22</sup> For present purposes, I want to flag Lucan's easy use of barbarizing rhetoric around Egypt's sacred animals.

Like Virgil, Lucan returns to Anubis to denigrate Egypt and bemoan its corruption of Roman cultural practices. After Lucan recounts the death of Pompey in Egypt, he complains that Egyptian gods have marched into Rome even though Pompey remains ignominiously buried in Egypt: "Into Roman temples we've received your Isis and half-divine dogs."<sup>23</sup> Egypt's sacred animals help Lucan defamiliarize the goddess Isis, an otherwise anthropomorphic and culturally mixed Greco-Egyptian divinity. The more vehemently Lucan keeps Egypt's gods at a distance, the clearer their popularity in Rome becomes. Lucan thus juxtaposes Egypt's culpability in Rome's fall into sole rule with its detrimental effects on Roman religious practices. He connects a "capital P" political resonance of Egypt—as site of the death of the Republic—with a "lower-case p" political emphasis on the negative impact of Isis religion on Roman cultural norms. Caesar's embrace of Ptolemaic luxury and Rome's embrace of Egyptian gods go hand in hand.<sup>24</sup>

In a similar spirit, Lucan humorously blurs the lines separating Egypt's gods from its food. Lucan cannot help but crack a joke to that effect in Book 10, when Caesar first meets Cleopatra at a banquet in Alexandria: "They served up many birds and beasts, Egypt's gods."<sup>25</sup> It is a felicitous joke. Lucan's gibe about Egypt's

22. Tracy (2014, 3–8) sets up this dichotomy and maps it onto Lucan's endorsement of pharaonic Egypt and criticism of Ptolemaic Egypt. Manolaraki (2013) contrasts a politicized Nile of the Pompey episode (ch. 2) with the philosophized Nile of the Nile digression (ch. 4).

23. *Luc. Bell. Civ.* 8.831–2: nos in templa tuam Romana accepimus Isim / semideosque canes . . . Text is Bailey (1997).

24. Manolaraki (2013, 80–117) emphasizes the political stakes of the Nile digression in Book 10, where Caesar implicates himself into a succession of Nile-conquering dynasts which begins with Sesostris and proleptically anticipates Nero.

25. *Luc. Bell. Civ.* 10.158–9: multas volucresque ferasque / Aegypti posuere deos.

barbaric “taste” in gods does double duty; it riffs on the bestiality versus divine dynamic inbuilt into the barker Anubis while also looping in a related critique of Eastern luxury and banqueting, which had long been used to criticize Cleopatra in Actium literature. To cap it off, Lucan’s joke reemphasizes the vector of this combined cultural and political degradation, which travels from Cleopatra to her co-banqueter Caesar and, by extension, on to Nero.<sup>26</sup>

In both passages, I would emphasize just how much animal gods are to Lucan a rhetorical convenience. They form a readymade object of outrage that can be trotted out at key narrative moments like the death of Pompey. By echoing Anubis in particular, Lucan uses Egyptian gods as yet another way to position his own epic against Virgil’s. In a poem whose stylistic hallmark is sustained expressions of pessimism—whether via parodic subversion or rhetorical questions—Egyptian religion’s barbarity is both rhetorically effective and widely legible because of Virgil’s precedent.

#### IO WAS TURNED INTO A COW: EXPLANATION VIA SYNCRETISM AND METAMORPHOSIS

There was, then, a keen desire to work through Rome’s own transitions, its increasingly multicultural and widespread empire, through Egypt’s sacred animals. Simmering in the background, as in Lucan’s condemnation of Isiac religion and its coterie of animal gods, is a frustration that these Egyptian practices have become a part of Rome. That is what animates Juvenal’s condemnation of Egyptian animal worship in *Satire* 15, which is only coherent when read against his critiques of Egypt’s presence in Rome—via the figure Crispinus—in earlier satires.<sup>27</sup>

I am not arguing against the fact of the Actium script and its fossilization of a binary between Roman anthropomorphism and Egyptian zoomorphism. But even if that Actium script loomed large, it should not completely overshadow contemporary discourses that do not fit the pattern it set. Actium rhetoric around Egypt’s animals thus reflects the larger problems of the term “Augustan ideology,” which too easily becomes a freestanding monolith against which all culture must be measured.<sup>28</sup> I am far from the first to caution against this overamplification of Augustan exceptionalism and oversimplification of the term “political.”<sup>29</sup>

26. Per Feldherr (2021, 140–42) (cf. Tracy 2014, 95–96), Lucan traces Roman luxury (particularly Neronian excess) back to Cleopatra and Egypt.

27. For example, his frustration with Isiac religion in *Satire* 6 (6.526–9, 13.93) and his diatribes against the Egyptian Crispinus in *Satires* 1.26–9 and 4.1–36.

28. Galinsky (1996, 12–14), on the reciprocity of Augustus’s “authority” (*auctoritas*), shows that this puts the cart before the horse. Roman authors and artists produce, rather respond to, the cultural dynamics which are called “Augustan.”

29. Habinek (1997) notes this false exceptionalism and Farrell (1998) the dangers of collapsing political readings of literature into a pro- or anti-Augustan dichotomy.

In other words, the Actium script is dangerous because, when it overshadows other Roman representations of Egypt's animal gods, it changes the color of those same representations.<sup>30</sup> Passages that are taken as an Orientalizing representation of Egyptian practices concordant with Virgil's, Propertius's, or Lucan's general critiques might, when viewed in their own light, reveal a more complex reaction to the ways in which Egyptian and Roman religious traditions were comparable.

The Flavian poet Statius is a good example. He writes a send-off poem (propempticon) that wishes the Roman administrator Maecius Celer well as the latter heads off on a military assignment in Syria.<sup>31</sup> Celer follows the standard route, traveling to Syria via Alexandria. In that vein, Statius asks Isis to welcome Celer and teach him about a range of Egyptian traditions, which Statius proceeds to catalogue. Among the set of topics Isis ought to cover for Celer, Egyptians' mode of religious worship is central: "With you there to guard him, let him learn why they equate lowly animals and the great gods."<sup>32</sup> There is an unambiguous rhetorical similarity connecting this line with Dio's rejection of the Apis bull. Statius, like Dio's Augustus, draws a contrast between the "low" (*vilis*) and the "great" (*magnus*) to amplify the misguidedness of treating beast and god as equals.

But the structure of the poem promotes a different reading. In the first place, Statius asks Isis to be a guide who not only teaches Celer, but also keeps him safe. This tutelary Isis, as protector of travelers, stands apart from the antagonistic role assigned to her by Virgil and Lucan.<sup>33</sup> As Eleni Manolaraki has argued, Statius includes Isis's sistrum and paints a triumphal atmosphere to first raise the image of an Augustan-era, inimical Isis leagued with Cleopatra and then to subsume that threatening Isis into a new and entirely supportive role.<sup>34</sup> That new role loudly announces the new politics of Isis under the Flavians. Statius is writing with the support of Domitian, an emperor who—unlike Augustus—actively contributed to the temple of Isis in Rome.<sup>35</sup> Celer, both because he stands in for the Egyptophile Domitian and because he spent his youth in Egypt, facilitates a suitable response to

30. Virgil *Aen.* 8.685–700, Prop. 3.11, and Hor. *Ep.* 9 are the examples cited most typically, for example by Maehler (2003, 205–10) and Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984, 1854, 1928–29) (who do not mention Horace).

31. The poem is the first of three (3.2–4) Statius addresses to those in the imperial and military bureaucracy, as Newlands (2002, 232–33) notes in her discussion of the risks of service under bad emperors.

32. Stat. *Silv.* 3.2.107–13: *te praeside noscat / . . . vilia cur magnos aequant animalia divos*. Text from Bailey (2015). See also Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984, 1960–61).

33. That tutelary function aligns well with Isis's soteriological role in inscriptions dedicated by seafaring merchants, collected by Vidman (1969).

34. Manolaraki (2013, 191–92). See too Putnam (2017, 117–19), who notes allusions to Virgil in Statius's description of Isis (3.2.101–7).

35. As proven most obviously by the original placement of Domitian's obelisk (now in the Piazza Navona) in the Isis temple of Rome, on which see Lembke (1994, 69–70) and, on Domitian's activity in Egypt, Klotz (2008).

a long lineage of political antagonism between Egypt and Rome. Where to Lucan Egypt is guilty in Pompey's death, in the propempticon Isis more than delivers on Statius's request for Celer's safe transit.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond Isis's supportive rather than antagonistic relationship to Celer, Statius leans heavily on the long-standing Io/Isis pairing. Statius, like many before him, identifies Isis with Io: "Isis, formerly stabled in the caves of Phroneus."<sup>37</sup> Io's metamorphosis into a cow in Argos (where these caves were located) and then journey to Egypt were regularly invoked as a cross-cultural origin story for the Egyptian goddess Isis.<sup>38</sup> This equivalence-drawing thus locates Isis in a specifically Greek mythological and literary context absent in Virgil and Lucan.

The long pedigree of the Isis-Io syncretism thus paves the way for the explanatory role Statius assigns to Isis in the poem.<sup>39</sup> Io's metamorphosis into a cow provides an answer to the question Isis is supposed to answer for Celer: why Egyptians think animals can be gods. Io's time as a cow suggests that humans and gods alike can lurk beneath an animal exterior. Through Io, it begins to become clear that the cow-god identification inbuilt into Apis worship is also reflected in the Greek and Roman tradition of human-god-animal metamorphosis—where gods, demigods, and mortals regularly change shape. Statius had already tipped his hand earlier in the poem, when he introduced the Greco-Egyptian shape-shifter Proteus.<sup>40</sup>

Statius's willingness to loop Isis into a propempticon for his friend Celer certainly reflects the new political climate of the Flavians. But Statius is still building on earlier authors who connected their patrons with, rather than contrasted them against, Egyptian practices.<sup>41</sup> The Roman elegist Tibullus shows that this warmer approach to Egypt took hold even during Augustus's rule. After stints supporting the assassins Brutus and Cassius and then Antony, the famous literary patron Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus had eventually aligned with Augustus and took part in the latter's victory at Actium. Among his public works, Messalla rebuilt a

36. Per Manolaraki (2013, 193–94).

37. Stat. *Silv.* 3.2.101: *Isi, Phoroneis olim stabulata sub antris.*

38. Herodotus 2.41 makes the identification. Relevant too are the interconnected Io tales in Ovid and Valerius Flaccus, both of which (*Met.* 1.747, V. Fl. 4.416–18) position the myth as a prelude to contemporary Isis cult, on which see Manolaraki (2013, 144).

39. In this and in what follows, I am indebted to the defense of "syncretism" offered by Frankfurter (2018, 15–20), who defines syncretism as "an assemblage of symbols and discourses" and *not* "the weaving together of two theological systems" (16). Where Droge (2001, 376) claims that syncretism is "devoid of explanatory utility," I maintain that it can help locate Aegyptiaca's modes of cultural mixture in the specific domain of religious transformation.

40. Manolaraki (2013, 199) notes that Io-Isis's biform and multilocal identity answers Statius's questions. Statius is far from alone in using Proteus in this way. So, for example, Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius* (1.4) includes a mention of Proteus of a similar type (on which see Miles 2016).

41. In this regard, I am pushing back a bit against Manolaraki (2013, 215–16), who explains Statius's warmer view of Isis through the Flavians' new attitude to Egypt. Tibullus's endorsement of the peaceful Osiris suggests that this alignment of Egyptian god with poetic addressee precedes (and thus cannot be wholly explained by) the Flavians.

road through Tusculum that occasioned a poem of praise from Tibullus, whose poetry Messalla sponsored. In Ode 1.7, Tibullus honors Messalla in a surprising way. Before offering explicit praise of the road in question, Tibullus develops a lengthy comparison of Messalla and the god Osiris.<sup>42</sup> As the logic goes, Messalla, like Osiris and his syncretic partner Dionysus/Bacchus, is a bringer of peace and of civilization.<sup>43</sup> Analogizing a confidant of Augustus to an Egyptian god is perhaps surprising, since Actium rhetoric deliberately associated Egyptian religion with Cleopatra and the forces opposed to Augustan order. But the identification is there to be seen. Tibullus's praise for his Roman patron via Osiris points to a cross-cultural framework of religious identification that is contemporary with, but ideologically distinct from, the Actium temple.<sup>44</sup>

Tibullus uses the Nile and then the Apis bull to effect an otherwise delicate transition from praising Messalla's war valor to singling out Osiris's value as paradigm of peace: "Father Nile, barbarian youth, taught to mourn the Memphite bull, sing of you and marvel at you as their Osiris. Osiris first made a plow with expert hand. . . ." <sup>45</sup> Tibullus thus triangulates the Nile, its identification with Osiris, and the contiguity of that pair to the practice of mourning the dead Apis bull. To be clear, this leaves aside the identification of the living Apis bull as the embodiment or visual manifestation of a range of different Egyptian gods—particularly the patron god of Memphis, Ptah, and the later syncretic funerary god Ptah-Sokar-Osiris.<sup>46</sup> In a pharaonic cultural context, identifying the dead Apis bull with Osiris as a divinized "Osiris-Apis" (*Wsr-Ḥp*) is far from remarkable.<sup>47</sup> It is only with the development of the Hellenistic god Sarapis (developed from the Greek transcription "*Osor-apis*") that the Apis/Osiris pairing rises to a particular position of prominence.<sup>48</sup> The importance of Isis cult elsewhere in Tibullus's poetry points to a potential vehicle of cultural explanation: a set of Egyptian practices around the

42. While less essential as a critical reading of the poem, the Egyptological perspective on 1.7 offered by Koenen (1976, 135–57) remains valuable.

43. For the identification of Messalla and Osiris, see Bowditch (2011, 109–11), and earlier Gaisser (1971, 225–28). For the interconnection of the Messalla/Osiris and soldier/farmer pairs, see too Konstan (1978, 174–75) and Moore (1989, 424).

44. I find unpersuasive subversive readings of the poem, where the Osiris identification is meant to feign praise while substantively undercutting that praise via the Egyptian referent. With Moore (1989, 428), I think Tibullus uses Osiris to bring Messalla as violent *triumphator* into his own vision of rural peace.

45. Tib. 1.7.27–9: *te canit utque suum pubes miratur Osirim / barbara, Memphiten plangere docta bovem. / primus aratra manu sollerti fecit Osiris. . . .* Text is from Luck (1998).

46. For the Apis bull as ba of a range of divinities, see Kessler (1989, 56–90).

47. That said, the presence of the personal name "Osorapis" in the documentary record speaks to the Egyptian importance of the Osiris-Apis pair, on which Cousement (2016, 90, cat. 84) and Clarysse (2009, 213–17).

48. As demonstrated by the proliferation of Sarapis worship across the Roman world, on which see Tran-tam-Tinh (1983) and Takács (1995).

Apis bull and its funerary cult is refracted—albeit with distortions—into a Roman cultural context.

Hellenistic versus pharaonic Apis worship notwithstanding, it is still significant that Tibullus contextualizes god, animal, and river through each other. There remains a translation of a god-animal pair from Egypt, through Isis cult, into Tibullus's poetry. In the process, Tibullus reveals the divergent positions taken to Egypt even under the Julio-Claudians: Egyptian gods can be identified with, rather than foils for, elite Romans; they can facilitate a delicate conversation on the merits of peace versus war in the years after Actium. The presence of barbarizing language—"the barbarian youth" (*barbara pubes*, 27–28)—in this otherwise surprisingly amiable approach to Osiris is doubly valuable: it helps push back against a sense that any poem that does not hew fully to the Actian template is by definition anti-Augustan; and it shows that "barbarian" as a designation for non-Romans does not foreclose any possibility for substantive engagement with Egyptian religion.<sup>49</sup>

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is an essential entry in this tradition of mythological explanations of Egypt's sacred animals. Like Statius's Io/Isis and Tibullus's Osiris/Bacchus pairs, Ovid's worldwide story of change is constructed by syncing up, rather than schematically contrasting, different cultural traditions. Its manifold tales of humans, gods, and animals constantly offer up origin stories for flora and fauna that connect the natural world with the divine realm. The *Metamorphoses*' focus on "bodies changed into new forms"<sup>50</sup> makes it the perfect place for an etiology of deities who take on a nonhuman animal form. The song of the Pierian muses includes just such an etiology of Egypt's sacred animals:<sup>51</sup>

... she says how Typhon, sent out from earth's darkest depths, scared the heavenly gods. How they all fled, until the land of Egypt and the Nile with its seven mouths welcomed them in their exhaustion. How the earth-born Typhon came there too and the gods hid themselves in false shapes: 'Jupiter,' she said, 'became the leader of the flock, whence derives Libyan Ammon, even now represented with curving horns; Delian Apollo hid in a crow, the son of Semele in a goat, the sister of Phoebus in a cat, Juno in a snow-white cow, Venus in a fish, and Mercury in an ibis bird.'<sup>52</sup>

49. To build on Manolaraki (2013, 34–35).

50. *Ov. Met.* 1.1–2: In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora.

51. See also the similar story in Diodorus 1.86.3, which attributes it entirely to Egypt and thus lacks the cross-cultural explanatory framework inbuilt into Ovid's version. Buxton (2009, 162) positions the anecdote (and divine escape generally) as one among several of the gods' motivations for animal metamorphosis (cf. Bremmer 2021, 199n124).

52. *Ov. Met.* 5.321–31: emissumque ima de sede Typhoea terrae / caelitibus fecisse metum cunctosque dedisse / terga fugae, donec fessos Aegyptia tellus / ceperit et septem discretus in ostia Nilus. / huc quoque terrigenam venisse Typhoea narrat / et se mentitis superos celasse figuris: / "dux'que "gregis" dixit "fit Iuppiter, unde recurvis / nunc quoque formatus Libys est cum cornibus Ammon; / Delius in corvo, proles Semeleia capro, / fele soror Phoebi, nivea Saturnia vacca, / pisce Venus latuit, Cyllenius ibidis alis. Tarrant (2004) for text.

The *Metamorphoses* as a project highlights the presence of animal-shaped gods in the Greco-Roman mythological canon. The gods associated with these animals may be subjected to an *interpretatio Graeca*—Mercury stands in for Thoth, Typhon for Seth, Juno for Hathor, Diana for Bastet (and perhaps Sekhmet). But even still, Ovid is perfectly comfortable offering a narrative around animal gods that connects rather than separates Egyptian and Roman religious attitudes.<sup>53</sup> I do not want to minimize the nagging sense that Ovid subsumes Egyptian traditions into a fundamentally Greek story; the sense that this is an act of cultural projection of the Greek onto the Egyptian rather than of cultural translation of Egyptian mythology for a Greek and Roman audience. That is a question I will return to in chapter 6. For now, these explanations of Egypt's animal gods demonstrate that a cross-cultural connective model rooted in metamorphosis had its own footing even under Augustus.

The earlier authors on whom Ovid depends for this Typhon story wrote during a time of increased cultural contact. Ovid's Typhonic etiology of Egyptian animal worship builds on Nicander's *Heteroioumena*, a Hellenistic text whose fourth book contained the Typhon myth.<sup>54</sup> Nicander's text, like Callimachus's *Aetia* and so much fragmentary literature of the fourth century BCE, reveals how the movement of people around the Mediterranean was reflected in literature that synthesized Greek and non-Greek aetiological traditions in new ways.<sup>55</sup> The poor state of preservation of these texts makes it easy to lose sight of the Hellenistic origins of Ovid's cross-cultural aetiologizing.

The location of the Typhon story within the *Metamorphoses* adds a wrinkle. The Olympians' flight to Egypt is part of the warped era of the Typhonomachy, when the titan Typhon battled with the Olympian gods. Ovid places this etiology in the mouths of the Pierides, whose contest with the Muses maps onto Typhon's quarrel with the Olympians. In the Pierides' anti-Muse account, Typhon is the surprise hero of a narrative that is deliberately contrary to Olympian values. Within this overarchingly pro-Typhon story, this etiology could be an attempt by the Pierides to ridicule the Olympian gods by connecting them with Egypt's animals. The otherwise august Olympian gods are guilty by association with Egypt's lowly animal gods. This interpretation, persuasively outlined by Gianpiero Rosati, is appealing.<sup>56</sup>

53. See, on this connective function, the discussion of Aston (2017) (chapter 5, 3.2), who situates the passage against the wider backdrop of Greek theriomorphism.

54. The now lost section was epitomized by Antoninus Liberalis, who relates the Typhon myth in §28. It is also present in pseudo-Apollodorus 1.6.3, another imperial-era compilation.

55. Even as I am claiming something new in the combinatory impulse of Nicander, I do not want to discount the cross-cultural identifications already present in, e.g., Herodotus's *Histories* Book 2. Callimachus's *aetia* of Argos's fountains and of Berenike's victory, like the Io myth, helped link Argos and Egypt. As Acosta-Hughes and Stephens (2012, 168–70) note, this vouchsafes the legitimate Greekness of the otherwise ethnically marginal Macedonians.

56. Rosati (2009, 272–74 for theriomorphism as an anti-Olympian ridiculing strategy; 276–78 for the cultural battle of priority of syncretized gods). Richter's (2001, 213–36) reading of Plutarch's *DIO*,

The other main example of divine metamorphosis into animals occurs within the similarly subversive speech of Arachne, who cites (6.115–28) the greatest-hits catalogue (Leda and the swan, Europa and the bull) of gods seducing women while in animal shape.

But an emphasis on shock value and subversion—even when persuasively argued—risks putting the cart before the horse. In the race to a ridiculing message, readings of the passage focused on the Pierian narrators have elided the unified cosmogony created by this etiology. An argument for rivalry and ridicule still requires that religious systems—including Egypt's animal-shaped gods—are synced. For the ridicule to land, there needs to be an accepted premise in which gods can transform into animals and can travel between Greece and Egypt. That cross-cultural premise is further strengthened by the speech of Pythagoras in Book 15, in which metempsychosis provides a philosophical justification for human-animal metamorphosis.<sup>57</sup> The Pythagorean coda to the *Metamorphoses* adds a complexity that has not been fully appreciated in the subversive readings of this passage.

The Pierian context cannot wholly explain away the identification of the Olympian gods with the Egyptian habit of worshipping animals, not least because Egypt's animals reappear outside the Pierides-Muses contest, during the story of Iphis's gendered metamorphoses in Book 9.686–94.<sup>58</sup> Telethusa had been told by her husband Ligdus that, because of their poverty, they could not afford to have a daughter.<sup>59</sup> Once pregnant, Telethusa—a devotee of Isis—was at a loss about what to do. One night Telethusa fell asleep and was visited by Isis, who encouraged her not to expose the daughter to whom she was soon to give birth. It is important to note that the Iphis story, and Isis's salvatory role in it, lack any negative frame. In the dream, Isis is accompanied by her standard retinue, which includes the *latrator* Anubis, Bastet (called Bubastis by Ovid), Osiris, and the Apis bull. The specific representation of Egypt's gods in Book 9 is thus bound up in the cult of Isis and the sacred animals that were associated with it—most notably the Apis bull

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which emphasizes Plutarch's belief in Greek philosophy's priority and superiority to Egyptian religion, is a valuable *comparandum*.

57. The speech of Pythagoras runs for 404 lines in the final book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The intended tone of Pythagoras's speech has been divisive. Some see it as a parody of philosophical discourse (Segal 1969, 278–92, and van Schoor 2011, 129–35, the former opposed by Little 1974), others a wonder-filled, unphilosophical philosophical discourse (Myers 1994, ch. 4, and Beagon 2009, 297–98), and yet others a speech that hearkens back to earlier philosophical poetry (Hardie 1995, 210–12, and Oberrauch 2005). Lévi (2014, 295–305) offers a measured review of the issue.

58. One can add to this list of non-Pierian-framed Egyptian passages the tale of Erysichthon in *Met.* 8.731–7, where Achelous cites Proteus, the Egyptian shape-shifter, as an archetype of unbridled metamorphosis.

59. Not unsurprisingly, most critical attention (especially Pintabone 2002 and Kamen 2012) has focused on Iphis's gendered metamorphosis and the episode's representation of same-sex desire.

and Anubis. In this regard, Ovid anticipates the presentation of Egypt's animals in Statius, who similarly coordinated Isis-as-counselor, the Apis bull, and Anubis.

By repeating the *latrator* epithet and turning Isis from a sistrum-rattling Cleopatra-partisan into an agent of sound advice, Ovid directly responds to Virgil. As Rosati has argued, Ovid recontextualizes *latrator* Anubis and the Isiac retinue to counterbalance Virgil's eristic representation of them in the shield of Aeneas.<sup>60</sup> The rarity of the phrase *latrator Anubis* (these are the only two passages in which it appears) makes it clear that Ovid is intentionally contraposing his own and Virgil's interest in the most iconic example of animals in Egyptian religion. So too is it clear that Isis religion is a dominant frame through which that alternative barbarization of and engagement with Anubis is deployed, both here and elsewhere in Ovid's poetry.<sup>61</sup> But the scope and ambition of the *Metamorphoses* is reflected in the heterogeneous ways Ovid engages with Egypt's animals across Book 5 and Book 9. Juxtaposing his own view of Isis and Anubis with Virgil's is certainly one of those modes of engagement. But Ovid's interest in the Typhon story shows his debt to a Greek tradition that long precedes him and that falls outside the domain of Isis cult.

In the cases of Statius, Tibullus, and Ovid, it is important to make space for Roman discussions of Egypt's sacred animals that avoid complete exoticization or demonization. Through the coordination of Greco-Roman (specifically Olympian) and Egyptian religious systems, Ovid, Tibullus, and then Statius make creative connections between Egypt and Greco-Roman sensibilities. Thus Tibullus offers protreptic praise of his patron Messalla as a mixed Osiris-Bacchus figure to emphasize the value of peace and agricultural prosperity as against martial violence, a theme that recurs throughout his corpus.<sup>62</sup> This praise of Osiris's pacifism can naturally loop in the Apis bull and its death, whose connections to Osiris were promoted via the cultural export Sarapis. Ovid can trot out the same stereotyped vision of Isiac and Egyptian worship presented in Virgil—including the deliberate emphasis on the bestial barker Anubis and the bovine Apis—but tie it into a broader tapestry of stories about bodies that change shape and move between cultures. To Ovid, the fluidity of gods' animal and anthropomorphic exteriors helps him tell the larger story of metamorphosis and its cosmogonic primacy.<sup>63</sup> It is essential to note that this push-and-pull is inflected, but not entirely

60. Rosati (2009, 286–87) sees this passage as a correction of Actium-inflected propaganda and the poets who participated in its propagation. This helpfully correlates the poetic contraposition Ovid takes to Virgil with a similar contraposition on Egyptian animals.

61. *Amores* 2.13.7–14 (cf. Rosati 2009, 285–86) provides a perfect example. An embedded prayer to Isis for Corinna's wellbeing frames a catalogue of Egyptian gods that includes Anubis (with animality suppressed) and the Apis bull.

62. See, e.g., the similar valorization of peace over war in 1.10, which repeats the same peace/viticulture nexus facilitated by Osiris/Bacchus in 1.7.

63. For Ovid's cosmogony, see Myers (1994). She references the etiology only briefly (viii).

circumscribed, by the on-the-ground debate about Isis-worship's popularity in the city of Rome.

A COW IS LIKE A STATUE:  
THE NTHROPOMORPHISM/ZOOMORPHISM DEBATE

Even before Actium implicated Egypt into Romans' self-reflection on the principate, Romans were struck by the central position of animals in Egyptian religion. Cicero is a good example. The condemnatory language he deploys seems to connect directly with the critiques made by Virgil, Propertius, and Lucan. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero bemoans Egyptian animal worship in obviously pejorative language: "Who doesn't know the customs of the Egyptians? Their minds are steeped in perverse mistakes and would undergo any sort of torture before committing violence against an ibis or snake or cat or dog or crocodile."<sup>64</sup> The language of perversion creates a wedge that separates Egyptian and Roman habits. The catalogue—whose length is exaggerated through the polysyndeton of "or" (*vel*)—runs through the cast of beastly characters typically associated with Egypt's sacred animals.

But underneath the eye-catching vocabulary, this condemnation of Egypt's misplaced religiosity is surprisingly nuanced. As I quoted him, Cicero bemoans Egyptians' "perverse" (*pravus*) religious practices. In the context of the speech, though, Egyptian religious practices are being praised. In Book 5 of the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero presents a Stoic argument that criticizes the deleterious effect of the emotions and defends the singular importance of virtue for the happy life. In this condemnation of the emotions, fear of pain receives its own repudiation.<sup>65</sup>

To help make his point, Cicero offers a list of miraculously pain-tolerant peoples. As a part of this exoticizing catalogue, Egyptians are a ready point of comparison through which Cicero criticizes Romans' enervation and the pain intolerance brought on by excessive luxury. Egyptians' fortitude in the face of adversity—their willingness to suffer torture rather than commit sacrilege—compares favorably with the moral dissolution in Rome about which Cicero is grumbling. Their religious missteps notwithstanding, Egyptians appear in a catalogue of non-Romans who practice a Stoic fortitude that the text is in fact endorsing. This is certainly a broadly drawn exoticization of Egyptian practices. Cicero's Egyptians are thin foils in a discussion which focuses on Rome. But it is still important to note that Egypt's animals help him mount a broader philosophical argument about religious practices and the emotions.

64. Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.78: Aegyptiorum morem quis ignorat? quorum inbutae mentes pravitatis erroribus quamvis carnificinam prius subierint quam ibim aut aspidem aut faelem aut canem aut crocodilum violent. Text from Pohlenz (1982).

65. For this overarching argument about fear of pain and the best way of overcoming it, see Woolf (2015, 214–24).

Cicero points to a strain in Roman literature where Roman and Egyptian habits are weighed against each other. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, that discussion was contrastive. But elsewhere, Cicero makes an assimilatory argument that opposes the schematic separation seen in Virgil. In the *De Legibus*, Cicero leverages the same “worshipping animals” motif to make a universalizing argument: “nor, if among different peoples there are different beliefs, is it the case that those who worship a dog and cat as gods are not afflicted by the same superstition as other peoples.”<sup>66</sup> Even where the outward expression of worship is different, Egyptians and Romans experience the same underlying drive to superstition. Egypt’s sacred animals help Cicero prove cultural universals to the dialogue’s interlocutors Atticus and Quintus. Cicero encourages his audience to look past the superficial difference of worshipping animals or statues to appreciate that the impulse to worship is the same for Romans and Egyptians alike.

These two Cicero examples are, then, not the concordant examples of “deviant worship” they at first seem. Egypt’s animals defy that kind of summarization. Their utility to Cicero is heterogeneous. In one case, animals are woven into an assimilatory argument that connects Roman and non-Roman superstition. In another, animals are used to opposite effect: they prove a dissimilatory argument that separates Roman and non-Roman pain intolerance and tolerance. In both cases, Cicero’s interest in the motif defies the poles of imperial assimilation or barbarization. So too does Cicero—as a late Republican author—help show that Romans’ interest in the question is not a simple rubric through which an author advertises their stance vis-à-vis an emperor’s accepted approach toward Isis.

The ambivalence on display here—eye-catching denigration of monstrosity overshadowing the more nuanced contextual argument being made with Egyptian animal worship—pops up frequently in Roman discussions of Egyptian religion. Pliny the Elder is a particularly important example, as a post-Actium Roman author. When excerpted, his criticism is obvious: “some peoples treat animals as gods, even some repulsive ones, and many things even more shameful to speak of, swearing by rotten food and other such stuff.”<sup>67</sup> This is damning. But once again, it helps Pliny make an argument about a larger failing that Egyptians and Romans share equally. As Eleni Manolaraki has noted, Pliny’s criticism of Egyptian animal worship in 2.16.5 is only a small part of a larger criticism of religious representative

66. Cic. *De Leg.* 1.32: nec si opiniones aliae sunt apud alios, idcirco qui canem et felem ut deos colunt, non eadem superstitione qua ceterae gentes conflictantur. Text from de Plinval (1968). For the role of superstition in Cicero’s articulation of the “correct” practice of religion, see Wynne (2019, 76–78).

67. Plin. *NH* 2.16: gentes vero quaedam animalia et aliqua etiam obscena pro dis habeant ac multa dictu magis pudenda, per fetidos cibos, alia et similia iurantes. Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984, 1959–60) note Pliny’s suspicion toward anthropomorphism too, but still emphasize his overarching criticism of animal worship.

strategies.<sup>68</sup> To Pliny, anthropomorphism, with its attendant insistence on divine adultery and intranecine rivalry, is just as grave a misstep as animal-shaped zoomorphism. His criticism of anthropomorphism is even more forceful:

That people even believe in marriages among the gods and that, in such a long lifespan, nobody is born from them, and that some gods are eternally aged and grey, others young men and boys, dark-complexioned, with wings, limping, hatched from an egg and living and dying every other day—that is pretty much the stuff of puerile nonsense (*puerilium prope deliramentorum*).<sup>69</sup>

There is a real risk of stripping examples of animal worship from quotes like this. When viewed holistically in Pliny's larger Stoic argument about the divine, all "morphic" representations of the gods have their problems. Anthropomorphism is just as foolish and puerile as zoomorphism is shameful.

The Pliny anecdote has begun to shift gears, from a critique of Egyptian animal worship to a comparison of human- and animal-shaped gods. When one pauses to reintegrate these passages into their original context, there emerges a sustained interest in the different merits (or pitfalls) of representing the gods as humans (anthropomorphism), as animals generally (zoomorphism), or as wild animals specifically (theriomorphism).<sup>70</sup> Pliny's equal frustration with anthropomorphism and zoomorphism reflects both the Stoic frame that unifies the *Natural History* and his larger attempts at analogization between Egyptian and Roman cultural practices.<sup>71</sup>

To pivot toward this "morphic" discussion, I need to reevaluate the basic framing I have been using so far. Moving from the cult of Isis—where devotees would readily worship Anubis and Sarapis—to Pliny begins to show the limits of the phrase "animal worship." There is a good deal of damage done when discussions of Greco-Roman interest in Egypt begins with the premise "Egyptians worshipped animals" rather than the premise "Egyptians worshipped *with* animals."<sup>72</sup> Persevering with an underdefined phrase "animal worship" necessarily tips the balance

68. Manolaraki (2018, 353–59) frames Pliny's comparative approach to the twin pitfalls of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism through the "Vespasianic reconstruction of Egypt," which made earlier strategies of barbarization untenable.

69. Plin. *NH* 2.17: *matrimonia quidem inter deos credi tantoque aevo ex <i>is neminem nasci et alios esse grandaeuos semper canosque, alios iuvenes atque pueros, atri coloris, aligeros, claudos, ovo editos et alternis diebus viventes morientesque, puerilium prope deliramentorum est.*

70. This is one vein in a larger issue of squaring the divine's immanence on earth and transcendence, an issue discussed by Vernant (1986, 40–45). Kindt (2019) brings this balance of anthropomorphic familiarity and transcendent ontology to bear on Greek gods' temporary zoomorphisms.

71. To reiterate an argument made by Manolaraki (2018).

72. Egyptologists have long called for this distinction and cautioned against the skewed picture painted by the animal-cult template. See particularly Hornung (1982, 137–38) and Kessler (2005, 35–37).

toward the conclusion that to Romans Egypt's sacred animals were a free-floating signifier of nebulous strangeness or cosmopolitan modishness.<sup>73</sup>

As a first step toward an Egyptian perspective on the issue, I would build on those who, like Eleni Manolaraki and Julia Kindt, have used zoomorphism rather than animal worship to frame the issue of Egypt's sacred animals.<sup>74</sup> As they note, many Romans appreciated that a scarab-headed god is less a matter of animal cult, and more a matter of representing a god in animal form. This is distinct from "animal worship" (theriolatry), which focuses on the direct worship of wild animals rather than their utility as a form of identification of the divine. To be sure, the line separating form (envisioning a god in the shape of a falcon) and essence (said falcon *is* divine) is blurry at best. But the difference of approach still bears fruit.<sup>75</sup> When rephrased as a question of representation, the difference between a living animal and a piece of wood carved into a statue is less stark.

Even as he predates Pliny, Cicero even more fully developed this strain of equivalence-making between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations of the gods. In the *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero uses the dialogue form to compare the different approaches to the divine taken by Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptic philosophies. Cotta represents Academic skepticism and serves as the mouthpiece for Cicero's own philosophical point of view. He opposes Velleius, who espouses an Epicurean, anthropomorphic divinity that is eternal, changeless, and uninvolved. To Cotta, this makes an Epicurean god pretty much useless. To make the point, he notes that even the Egyptians worshipped animals like the ibis because of their utility. He leverages a common utilitarian explanation of Egyptian animal worship that stretches through Diodorus back to Herodotus.<sup>76</sup> Cotta points to this decidedly quotidian and function-oriented approach to divinity to emphasize the pitfalls of Epicureanism's eternal, aloof, and ultimately unhelpful divinity.

The Epicurean Velleius and the Skeptic Cotta disagree about the divine's anthropomorphism. Where Velleius sees god's anthropomorphic form as natural and "true," Cotta insists it is merely conventional and culturally specific. In this refutation, Cotta highlights the variety of forms in which different cultures conceptualize the divine:

Ever since we were little we recognize Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcan, Apollo, and the other gods by the appearance with which painters and sculptors have

73. Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984) (cf. the even-handed, but still exoticizing reading of Kindt 2021b). I use "floating signifier" to indicate a "symbol in its pure state, therefore liable to take on any symbolic content whatever," per Lévi-Strauss (1987, 63–64).

74. This is a central premise of Kindt (2019, 2021b) and is discussed by Manolaraki (2013, 198–206 on Statius, 301–2 for Philostratus; 2018, 353–59, on Pliny the Elder).

75. Hornung (1982, 137–38) notes the ways that different bodies of evidence amplify or blur this distinction between god and animal manifestation.

76. This strain begins with Herodotus (e.g., his utilitarian explanation of ibis-worship at 2.75) and extends, via Hecataeus of Abdera (following Murray 1970), to Diodorus 1.87, and then to Plutarch *DIO* 74, 38of.

wanted to depict them—not only by their appearance but even by their attire, age, and clothes. But not so for the Egyptians, Syrians, and pretty much all other barbarians; for you would see that their respect for certain animals is stronger than ours is for the most sacred temples and statues of the gods. We've seen many temples that have been laid waste to and many statues of gods that have been carried off from the most sacred shrines by our own countrymen, but nobody has ever heard, even by hearsay, of a crocodile or ibis or a cat being harmed by an Egyptian. So what do you think? That the Egyptians don't consider the Apis a god, that bull sacred to the Egyptians? As much as you do that Juno the savior of yours. You never see her—not even in your dreams!—except with goat-skin pelt, spear, shield, and slippers with pointed toe. But that isn't how Argive or Roman Juno looks.<sup>77</sup>

Cicero deploys Egyptian divine animals in a context that hinges on the medium in which the divine is conceptualized. Within this domain, Cicero, and Academic skepticism more broadly, are much more willing to accept zoomorphism as a strategy for imagining the divine; an animal form is no less viable than the highly localized portraits of, say, an Argive or Roman Juno. The specific way that god and form are linked illustrates this preoccupation with the media with which humans and divine can face each other. The verb *videri* links the subject Apis and the predicate *deum*. While casual translation suggests “seem,” a more formal translation of “is seen as” or “appear as” better fits the passage and recenters visualization as against the connotations of incredulity in “seems.”<sup>78</sup>

Vision and conceptualization are the dominant motifs of the passage. To advance a Sceptic argument about a god's true form, Cotta emphasizes that a generic “you” can only recognize gods in a specific and localized guise. The mention of clothes and ornament helps Cotta make his relativizing argument for seeing the divine: it is no sillier to believe that animals represent the divine than to imagine that one's own highly regional cult imagery is *the* true form of that god. This focus on vision subtly, but insistently, introduces issues of mediation that shift the tone of the passage away from the distancing effect between Egyptian and Roman habits animating Actium rhetoric.

When the question is rephrased on these terms, Cotta's attitude becomes quite different from the stereotypical befuddlement with which Romans wonder why Egyptians treat a cow as a god. Zoomorphism is considered an effective

77. *Nat. D.* 1.81–82: a parvis enim Iovem Iunonem Minervam Neptunum Vulcanum Apollinem reliquos deos ea facie novimus qua pictores fictoresque voluerunt, neque solum facie sed etiam ornatu aetate vestitu. at non Aegyptii nec Syri nec fere cuncta barbaria; firmiores enim videas apud eos opiniones esse de bestiis quibusdam quam apud nos de sanctissimis templis et simulacris deorum. etenim fana multa spoliata et simulacra deorum de locis sanctissimis ablata videmus a nostris, at vero ne fando quidem auditumst crocodilum aut ibin aut faelem violatum ab Aegyptio. quid igitur censes Apim illum sanctum Aegyptiorum bovem nonne deum videri Aegyptiis? tam hercle quam tibi illam vestram Sospitam. quam tu numquam ne in somnis quidem vides nisi cum pelle caprina cum hasta cum scutulo cum calceolis repandis. at non est talis Argia nec Romana Juno. Text from Ax (1980).

78. This is a standard use of the passive of *video*, which often appears in divine revelation (e.g., Ennius's dream in F 3 of the *Annales*).

explanation of another Egyptian religious *topos*, the extremity of its piety. Cotta explains Egyptian piety, versus Rome's moral decline, through their choice of animate, versus inanimate, sacred objects.<sup>79</sup> Insofar as the media of the divine are necessarily imbued, at least partially, with the essence of the divine, an animate being could be a more suitable medium than an inanimate object.

Cicero's engagement with Egypt's sacred animals is, then, far from condemnatory. His comparison of clothed statues and animals reveals a new impetus for comparative discussion for the conceptualization of the divine. To focus on select words like *barbara* and *bestia* is to misconstrue the wider point Cicero is making about the distance between divine image and essence. As in metamorphosis literature that prioritized the points of connection between Egyptian and Greco-Roman myth, the zoomorphism-anthropomorphism debate allowed Roman authors to juxtapose different cultures' approaches to divine icons in ways that avoid the poles of barbarizing alienation and domesticating familiarity.<sup>80</sup>

PLUTARCH'S *ON ISIS AND OSIRIS*:  
PHILOSOPHIZING EGYPT'S ANIMALS

Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (*DIO*) brings together cross-cultural syncretism and the zoomorphism/anthropomorphism debate. Plutarch here lays out a philosophical reading of the myth of Osiris, the Egyptian god-king who was murdered by his brother and would-be usurper Seth (in Plutarch, syncretized with and referred to as Typhon), reanimated by his sister Isis, and later avenged by his son Horus.<sup>81</sup> Plutarch then segues into a broader defense of the similarities shared between Greek philosophy and Egyptian religion. Plutarch's retelling of the myth suggests that the struggle of Osiris and Isis against Seth/Typhon is an example of the dualist metaphysics of the good and the bad that was a foundation of Plutarch's Platonism.<sup>82</sup> Isis's victory over Seth/Typhon is a felicitous myth for a metaphysical primacy of the good over the bad.

Plutarch offers a sustained engagement with Egypt's sacred animals only matched in scope by Diodorus.<sup>83</sup> The *DIO* is a text long central to Egyptological reconstructions of the Osiris myth, which is as important to ancient Egyptian cosmology as it is lacunose in Egyptian-language evidence. Alongside the *Memphite Theology* and the more playful and literary rendition of the myth in the Late-Egyptian *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, Plutarch provides critical evidence

79. Sonnabend (1986, 123–24).

80. For “domesticating the foreign,” see Manolaraki (2018), Barrett (2019, 20, 141–42), and Mazurek (2022, 183).

81. When referring to Plutarch's discussion of the Osiris myth, I will use the admittedly clunky phrase Seth/Typhon. For the goals, sources, and content of the *DIO*, see Griffiths (1970).

82. Summarized at *DIO* 46, 369d. On Plutarch's dualism, see Dillon (1988, 107–13).

83. Diodorus discusses Egyptian animal worship at 1.83–90 (cf. Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1895–1905).

of the narrative's core components.<sup>84</sup> Even more germane to my goals in this book, it has long been the point of departure for those, like J. Gwyn Griffiths, interested in showing the joins connecting Greco-Roman and Egyptian literary and intellectual culture.<sup>85</sup> Both narrowly for the Osiris myth and broadly for Greek and Egyptian intellectual contact, the *DIO* is *the* text.

Plutarch's discussion of Egypt's sacred animals synthesizes the different explanations offered by Greek and Roman authors. Much of Plutarch's account harkens back to Herodotus, whose utilitarian approach to Egypt's animals continued to shape authors in the imperial period. I have argued elsewhere that Juvenal's condemnation of Egyptians' worship of wild animals subtly loops in the Herodotean explanations—totemism, utilitarianism—which makes that worship intelligible.<sup>86</sup> But unlike Juvenal's subtle incorporation of these explanations, Plutarch addresses them head-on. Plutarch rips apart many of the popular explanations of zoomorphism. He rejects Ovid's etiology of animal gods, in which Typhon chased the Olympians to Egypt, where they hid in animal shapes: "The notion that the gods transformed into these animals because they were afraid of Typhon, as if concealing themselves in the bodies of ibises, dogs, and hawks, exceeds any and all fairy tales and mythology (*muthologian*)."<sup>87</sup> Unlike Ovid, Plutarch sees "mythology" (*muthologian*) not as a wellspring for poetic innovation, but as childish nonsense. Like Pliny, Plutarch worries that any assignation of fear and subterfuge to the Olympians attributes too much emotional volubility to the divine.

Plutarch is no kinder to the other popular origin stories for sacred animals. He presents, and then brushes aside, the political etiologies found in Diodorus: that the animals sacred to Egyptian communities were originally military standards by which to totemically organize the army.<sup>88</sup> This germinated into a wider range of social theorizations of animal worship. There was a related explanation that

84. Griffiths (1970, 78–81), Hani (1979, 469–70), and Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984, 1961) have all underlined Plutarch's ability to engage with Egyptian religious material reliably, even granting that Platonism impacts his narration and interpretation of the Osiris myth. For the core components of the Osiris myth, see Assmann (2001a, 123–47).

85. This is of course evident from Griffiths's commentary on the *DIO* (Griffiths 1970). But it ripples throughout his work, whether on allegory (Griffiths 1967, 1969) or on Isis/Osiris (Griffiths 1960a, 1960b, 2012).

86. Kelting (2019). Diodorus (1.90) mentions that Egyptian communities expressed their collective identity through animal totems.

87. *DIO* 72, 379e: τὸ μὲν γὰρ εἰς ταῦτα τὰ ζῷα τοὺς θεοὺς τὸν Τυφῶνα δέισαντας μεταβαλεῖν, οἷον ἀποκρύπτοντας ἑαυτοὺς σώμασιν ἴβειων καὶ κυνῶν καὶ ἱεράκων, πᾶσαν ὑπερέπαικε τερατεῖαν καὶ μυθολογίαν . . . Text from Griffiths (1970).

88. Diod. Sic. 1.86.4, 1.90.1. The predynastic and early-dynastic use of sacred animals has sometimes been interpreted totemically, in ways not very different from the explanations dismissed by Plutarch. Core evidence includes predynastic standards with zoomorphic images connected to a king's local base (e.g., standards displayed in the Scorpion and Narmer maceheads), the choice of the Seth-animal in the serekh of the Second Dynasty king Peribsen, and the changing serekhs of Kasekhem/Khasekhem, his successor. For an overview, see Wilkinson (1999, esp. 69, on the political implications of serekh choice, and 168–70, on standards and their symbolism).

animal masks were royal insignia and evolved into the worship of said animals.<sup>89</sup> In a later political variant, kings used animal worship to keep the Egyptian populace pitted against each other and thus easily governable.<sup>90</sup> This divisive function of animals—acting as a community's totem or organizing principle—became the key for Juvenal's communalist approach to sacred animals in Satire 15.

After moving briskly through these alternate explanations, Plutarch decides in favor of utilitarian and symbolic explanations of animal worship. Of these, the purely utilitarian explanation is rooted firmly in the Greek tradition and spans the length of Greeks talking about Egypt, from Herodotus through Diodorus. In this logic, animals were worshipped for the useful things they did. Plutarch clearly echoes this tradition, repeating Herodotus's and Diodorus's utilitarian explanations for the worship of the snake-eating ibis, crocodile-killing ichneumon, wool-giving sheep, and plow-bearing oxen.<sup>91</sup>

Plutarch's general survey of Egyptian worship of animals includes a specific comparison that caps a dual-reading dynamic I have been promoting in this chapter. His discussion of Egyptian practices first looks like a direct critique of Egyptian theriolatry. In its excerpted form, Plutarch's opening salvo on Egyptian animal worship seems to reject Egyptian behavior and endorse a Greek sensibility:

Egyptians have experienced this a great deal concerning their sacred animals. In this the Greeks correctly state, and believe, that the dove is the sacred animal of Aphrodite, the serpent the sacred animal of Athena, the raven of Apollo, and the dog of Artemis—as Euripides says, 'Dog, you will be the glory of light-bearing Hecate.' *But most Egyptians, in worshipping the animals themselves and treating them as gods, have not only filled their religious services full of ridicule, but this is the least of the evils of their stupidity.*<sup>92</sup>

First and foremost, Plutarch brings to the surface a distinction whose importance I have been trying to underline: that worshipping an animal is distinct from identifying an animal with a god. Plutarch endorses zoomorphism but lambastes in no uncertain terms a mistaken identification of these animals *as gods*.

The above quote certainly seems to differentiate (bad) Egyptian theriolatry from (good) Greek zoomorphism.<sup>93</sup> But once again, this is a passage that looks different when divorced from its original argument. The opening pronoun "this" hints at key context which has been omitted. It is clunky to quote long passages.

89. Diod. Sic. 1.62.4. While masks themselves are not attested as royal insignia in battle, Diodorus's actual examples—snake and lion imagery—were constituent elements of a king's iconography.

90. Isoc. *Bus.* 25–6, Diod. Sic. 1.89.5.

91. *DIO* 74, 38of; Diod. Sic. 1.87.

92. Note especially the play on ἄγαλμα, which combines the sense of "pet/delight" and "statue (esp. of the gods)." *DIO* 71, 379d–e: Αἰγυπτίων δ' οἱ πολλοὶ θεραπεύοντες αὐτὰ τὰ ζῷα καὶ περιέποντες ὡς θεοὺς οὐ γέλωτος μόνον οὐδὲ χλευασμοῦ καταπεπλήκασιν τὰς ἱερουργίας, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τῆς ἀβελτερίας ἐλάχιστόν ἐστι κακόν.

93. That is the reading offered by Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984, 1961–62).

But in the present case, the full passage redraws an Egyptian/Greek contrast into a new form of comparison:

*So, for instance, there are those of the Greeks who haven't learned or grown accustomed to calling bronze and painted and stone works as statues and honorary dedications of the gods, but simply call them gods, and they then dare to say that Lachares stripped Athena naked, and Dionysius gave a buzz cut to Apollo of the golden locks, and Capitoline Zeus was set on fire and destroyed during the civil war. These people unknowingly follow along with and take up wicked ideas that are in keeping with the names.*

Egyptians have experienced this a great deal concerning their sacred animals. In this the Greeks correctly state, and believe, that the dove is the sacred animal of Aphrodite, the serpent the sacred animal of Athena, the raven of Apollo, and the dog of Artemis—as Euripides says, ‘Dog, you will be the glory of light-bearing Hecate.’ But most Egyptians, in worshipping the animals themselves and treating them as gods, have not only filled their religious services full of ridicule, but this is the least of the evils of their stupidity.<sup>94</sup>

The passage takes on a completely different complexion. No longer is there a comparison between Greeks and Egyptians in which Greeks are right and Egyptians are wrong. There are misguided views to be corrected among both groups.<sup>95</sup> Even more importantly, there is the same comparison of statues and animals. Plutarch and Cicero both equate worshipping animals and statues. They become kindred media through which to honor and display reverence for the gods. To undress the statue is not to undress the god. Thus not only are Greek and Egyptian practices brought into alignment, but Plutarch is criticizing idolatry (with statues) just as forcefully as theriolatry (with animals). In other words, Plutarch's authorial and philosophical cachet emerges from his keen desire to show that medium is not the same as essence. The quote becomes a general criticism of confusing how you worship (with statues or animals) with what you worship (the divine). Egyptian practices become symptomatic of a larger problem rather than uniquely at fault. Plutarch, by saying “not least have Egyptians experienced this,” underlines the equivalency of Greeks and Egyptians who fall into errant ideas about divine representation. The dividing line is one of expertise, wisdom, and (implicitly) elite status, not of cultural difference.

Plutarch's description of the Apis bull is a good example of his persistent distinction between zoomorphism and direct animal worship. As Plutarch styles it, “The Apis, with a few other animals, seems to be the sacred image of Osiris.”<sup>96</sup> The grammatical construction—literally, “is the sacred object of Osiris” (ἱερὸς εἶναι τοῦ Ὀσίριδος)—repeats the syntax used in the Aphrodite-dove pairing (ἱερὸν

94. *DIO* 71, 379c–e: ὡςπερ Ἑλλήνων οἱ τὰ χαλκᾶ καὶ τὰ γραπτὰ καὶ λίθινα μὴ μαθόντες μηδ' ἐθισθέντες ἀγάλματα καὶ τιμᾶς θεῶν, ἀλλὰ θεοὺς καλεῖν . . .

95. Kindt (2021b, 136–37) also emphasizes Plutarch's even-handed critique of Greek and Egyptian ambiguity around essence versus medium.

96. *DIO* 73, 380e: ὁ γὰρ Ἄπιδος δοκεῖ μετ' ὀλίγων ἄλλων ἱερὸς εἶναι τοῦ Ὀσίριδος.

Ἀφροδίτης ζῶον εἶναι). For Egyptians and Greeks alike, Plutarch takes pains to designate animals as sacred emblems rather than gods. Far from a one-off, a desire to clarify that Egyptian animal religion is zoomorphic rather than theriolatrous extends throughout Plutarch's discussion. With the proper contrast drawn, Plutarch's attitude becomes much more coherent.

Plutarch takes this idea of representation and uses it as a springboard for his discussion of philosophically rich representations of the divine. Plutarch endorses symbolic representations of the gods that are wonderfully batty. Thus, the sacred status of the ibis is clear because, when it drinks, its legs and beak form an equilateral triangle—a shape whose perfection was associated with divine order. Plutarch compares this to a statue of Zeus without ears, which he commends as a better representation of a god whose ubiquity in the universe makes the concept of “listening” vacuous. In short, once the idea of divine representation is put on a proper footing, Plutarch is remarkably catholic in his list of appropriate media. Pythagorean number theory, where different numbers are identified with different gods, also fits the bill.

In the end, Plutarch ends up preferring animals as a medium with which to identify the gods. This celebration of the animate as a medium for the divine caps what has been a step-by-step move away from a tidy barbarization or exoticization of Egypt, from the ready conclusion that Greeks and Romans found in sacred animals only a mirror for social change in Rome. When one compares the animate and the inanimate as media with which to envisage the divine, Plutarch chooses the animate:

For it is not in colors nor in forms nor in a smooth finish that the divine is present, but whatever has had no share in life and cannot by nature share in it, is worse off than the dead. The nature, on the other hand, which lives and sees, which has its principle of movement from itself and knows what belongs to it and what does not, has imbibed an efflux of beauty and derives its lot from the intelligent being ‘by whom the universe is guided’ according to Heraclitus. *In view of this the divine is represented no less faithfully in these animals than in bronze and stone works of art, which equally take on gradations of color and tincture, but are by nature devoid of all perception and intelligence.* Concerning the animals honored, then, I approve especially of these views.<sup>97</sup>

To Plutarch, Egyptians' identification of the divine with the animate is philosophically preferable to the anthropomorphic statues central to Greek and Roman worship. This is a long way from Actium.

Plutarch repeats what has been a recurrent trend. An excerpted passage proves that Plutarch barbarized Egypt's animal worship. But when recontextualized, that

97. *DIO* 76, 382b–c: ὄθεν οὐ χεῖρον ἐν τούτοις εἰκάζεται τὸ θεῖον ἢ χαλκοῖς καὶ λιθίνοις δημιουργήμασιν, ἃ φθορὰς μὲν ὁμοίως δέχεται καὶ ἐπιχρῶσεις, αἰσθήσεως δὲ πάσης φύσει καὶ συνέσεως ἐστέρηται. Translation from Griffiths (1970).

passage reveals Plutarch's comparative interest in the philosophical pros and cons of anthropomorphic versus zoomorphic, and animate versus inanimate, media for the divine. This was certainly true of Cicero and Pliny the Elder, both of whom gave a philosophical comparison of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine. These cross-cultural comparative discussions used different tools to forge meaningful connections between Greek, Roman, and Egyptian norms. In some cases, reverence for animals helps to underline superstition's universality; in others, an omnipotent, formless, universal god is failed equally by the adulterous emotional volubility of Greco-Roman anthropomorphism and by the monstrosity of Egyptian theriomorphism.

#### CONCLUSION: REDRESSING ANUBIS

By way of conclusion, I would like to return to the "barker" Anubis. He allowed Virgil to widen the distance that separated Roman and Egyptian norms around the divine. Egypt's lowly animal gods were irreparably divided from proper august (and Augustan) divinities. In the meantime, I have reemphasized the other literary, historical, and philosophical currents that shaped Greeks' and Romans' interest in Anubis. The emperor Hadrian and his Egyptophilia provide a final, striking representative strategy for Egypt's divine animals. Hadrian populated his palace at Tivoli with an assemblage of Egyptian and Egyptianizing material culture.<sup>98</sup> It is easy to get bogged down in Hadrian's biography and the motivations surrounding his enthusiasm for Egyptian religion. The death of his lover Antinous in Egypt definitely looms large. It became an inflection point for the presence of Egyptian material culture in Rome and, with the foundation of the metropolis Antinoöpolis, for Roman administration of Egypt. For present purposes, the statues today in the Vatican's Gregorian Egyptian Museum speak to the dynamic and changing relationship between Egyptian and Roman religious conventions, rather than to a single man's biography.

These statues are remarkable for their ability to capture the flexible connections between gods and sacred animals in Egyptian religion. Two statues reflect well the tenor of discussions around Egypt's animals in both *Aegyptiaca* and Greco-Roman literature. First, a statue of Anubis, found on the grounds of the Villa Pamphili in 1750, represents the Egyptian god in a hybrid anthro/zoomorphic form (fig. 3). The dress and accessories of Anubis promote his syncretic identification with Mercury and Hermes. This mixed Hermanubis's role as psychopomp bridged Greek, Roman, and Egyptian eschatology.<sup>99</sup> Plutarch's *DIO* notes Hermanubis's chthonic

98. Catalogued by Raeder (1983) and discussed by Mari and Sgalambro (2007) and Mari (2008).

99. This explains Hermes's identification with Anubis, rather than the much more common Hermes-Thoth syncretism reflected in the Hermetic tradition.



FIGURE 3. Statue of the god Anubis-Mercury. From the Villa Pamphili, Anzio, 1st–2nd century CE. Gregorian Egyptian Museum, Vatican Museums Cat. 22840, Rome. Photo courtesy of the author.

associations. Apuleius describes (*Met.* 11.11.1) Anubophores who looked a lot like Hermanubis when they marched in Isiac festivals.

The statue, and its engagement with Isiac iconography around Hermanubis, offer dramatic proof that Augustus's self-definition against Isis and her retinue of animal gods quickly gave way to imperial support for Isis. Thus, Domitian

cemented the Flavians' close connection to Isis through the obelisk that he erected in Rome's Isis temple. As Laurent Bricault has noted, the *Historia Augusta* (*Vita Commodi* 9.4–6) claims that the emperor Commodus helped carry a statue of Anubis in an Isiac procession.<sup>100</sup> Domitian, Hadrian, and Commodus all cemented their own authority in a multicultural empire by aligning themselves with, rather than defining themselves against, Anubis.

But Egypt's animals did not simply weather Julio-Claudian antipathy before enjoying wide acceptance. Later Greek philosophers remained critical of the cultural mixedness of this Hermanubis figure. As the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry notes, Hermanubis is a "half-Greek."<sup>101</sup> This is an apt pejorative for mixed identity, one that aligns religious syncretism with the formulation of creole identities in Roman Egypt. Hermanubis, then, has a lot in common with Pan-crates, whose culturally mixed self-presentation was also the target of Lucian's loaded criticism.<sup>102</sup>

The second statue (fig. 4) is a two-headed figure, rediscovered in 1736 on the grounds of Hadrian's palace at Tivoli. When viewed from one side, you see a fully anthropomorphic statue of Osiris in the visual language of the Ptolemaic period. But when you look from the opposite side, you see the head of the Apis bull juxtaposed, Janus-like, with Osiris's human head. This double-headed visual representation gives concrete form to a larger argument hinted at by Tibullus's alignment of Apis and Osiris. Like Tibullus and Ovid, the statue prioritizes association and interconnection, which Actian rhetoric of Egyptian religion's monstrosity doggedly refused.

Barbarizing reactions to Egypt's animals were certainly an important discourse in the early imperial period, one that continues to receive widespread scholarly attention.<sup>103</sup> There are good reasons for Virgil's, Lucan's, and Juvenal's tendentious representation of Egyptian zoomorphism, provided one appreciates that this mode of representation was neither an inevitable nor exclusive Roman attitude, in any dynastic period. Juvenal's fifteenth satire, with which I opened this chapter, barbarizes Egyptian practices as a riposte to Hadrianic visions of a coherent empire vividly embodied by these statues. In its two-headed form, the Apis/Osiris statue represents the opposite impulse of Juvenal's barbarizing non-translation. It is vividly symbolic, bringing together two halves of an otherwise sundered whole.<sup>104</sup> What is interesting is not so much a vivid accuracy in this alignment of Apis

100. Bricault (2000–2001, 30–31).

101. Porph. *De Imag.* F 8 (cf. Benaissa 2010): μιξέλλην.

102. From Lucian *Philops.* 34, as I discussed in chapter 2.

103. Per Gasparini (2017, 399), "animal worship in the Graeco-Roman world was perceived not just as inappropriate, but as outlandish, despicable, and monstrous." Eleni Manolaraki has noted authors who avoid Actian rhetorics of theriomorphism's monstrosity, *viz.* Pliny (Manolaraki 2018, 353–59) and Statius (Manolaraki 2013, 198–206).

104. To lean heavily on the original semantics of the verb συμβάλλειν, which denoted the two halves of a contract, discussed by Struck (2004, 79–80).



FIGURE 4. Statue of Osiris-Apis. From Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli, reign of Hadrian. Gregorian Egyptian Museum, Vatican Museums Cat. 22807, Rome. Photo courtesy of Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

bull and Osiris. It is instead important to see how the statue creatively connects animal and god.

The statues, then, reflect the disparate processes through which Egypt's sacred animals were translated into forms legible to a Greek and Roman audience. They confirm, corporally and dramatically, that Egypt's animals contributed to cross-cultural conversations about the ties connecting animals and the divine. Some of those ancient discourses have received more scholarly attention than others. The cult of Isis framed Roman interest in Anubis and the Apis bull, not least because Anubis and Sarapis rounded out the Isiac triad.<sup>105</sup> It makes good sense that much work on Anubis broaches his animality through the exotic appeal—or danger—of Isiac religion across the empire. I have tried to show what is risked when barbarization and the cult of Isis monopolize scholarship on Rome's interest in Egypt's animals. The enduring importance of Typhon, Herodotean utilitarian explanations picked up by Plutarch, and Cicero's comparison of medium versus essence point toward other literary traditions that engaged with Egypt's animals from very different perspectives and with very different conclusions.

It is via these other literary traditions that authors of *Aegyptiaca* enter into Greek and Roman discussions of Egypt's animals. In the next chapter, I chart the path of cross-cultural translation that authors of *Aegyptiaca* undertook. By shifting conversation around Egypt's animals away from barbarizing projection and toward philosophical dialogue, it becomes clear that Greeks and Romans were open to the presentation of Egyptian practices offered by authors like Manetho, Apion, and Chaeremon.

105. Sfamini Gasparro (2018) notes how views of Anubis changed because of his role in the cult of Isis.