

Conclusion

Acoreus, Aegyptiaca, and the Question of Cultural Influence

Aegyptiaca enabled its authors to display a mixed expertise that was couched simultaneously in philosophical, scribal, and priestly traditions. The mixed philosopher-priest—an author of *Aegyptiaca* based in Alexandria but with broadly defined pharaonic *bona fides*—gave shape to narratives of philosophy’s Egyptian origins. When tracing philosophy’s roots, Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius imagined a form of wisdom that was at once authentically Egyptian and a tailor-made precursor of Greek natural philosophy. In large part because of Manetho and his successors, Greek authors retrojected a Hellenistic and culturally mixed presentation of Egyptian religion back to a distant Egyptian past that Plato and Pythagoras supposedly encountered. But as I discussed in chapter 6, the connection between philosophical and priestly self-fashioning was far from an external Greek projection that bastardized Egyptian religious sensibility. Both Egyptian- and Greek-language texts produced in Egypt show how imperial Egyptians increasingly blended scribal and philosophical initiations into privileged knowledge. By advertising their mixed initiation into religio-philosophical wisdom, authors of *Aegyptiaca* sought to bolster their expertise and social clout before a Greek and Roman audience.

To conclude, I want to continue in this vein of the philosophically framed scribal priest while returning to a central premise of this book: that *Aegyptiaca* meaningfully shaped the way Romans talked about Egypt. *Aegyptiaca* was such an impactful genre because of its authors’ effective use of the philosopher-priest persona. It allowed Chaeremon to present to his pupil Nero a description of Egyptian priestly life in which contemplation of the stars took center stage. This combination of traditions did not happen in a vacuum, but because of the

opportunities outside of Egypt that made this combination socially advantageous. The reception of the philosopher-priest in Rome will thus tie together the two key frames I have been using for *Aegyptiaca*, root and road: the heterogeneous web of traditions to which the mixed philosopher/priest points, and the socially and politically circumscribed paths that dictated how authors of *Aegyptiaca* and their work moved between Egypt, Greece, and Rome.

ACOREUS AND AEGYPTIACA

Lucan's historical epic poem, the *Bellum Civile*, combines these twin facets of *Aegyptiaca*. The *Bellum Civile*'s cast of characters includes the Egyptian sage Acoreus, a lightly fictionalized author of *Aegyptiaca* whose discourse on Egypt ranges across the poem's final book. Acoreus and his conversation with Caesar provide ample opportunity to reflect on *Aegyptiaca*, its social context, its strategic presentation of Egyptian culture, and its alternatively warm (by figures like Apuleius and Plutarch) or cold (in the case of authors like Pliny the Elder, Seneca, Josephus, and Aulus Gellius) reception outside of Egypt. Lucan's approach to Egypt is productively ambivalent—he underlines both Egypt's philosophical profitability and its political culpability. In the latter vein, Lucan recurrently criticizes Ptolemaic rule. Egypt is the site of Pompey's (and by extension the Republic's) death, a fact which Lucan bemoans in no uncertain terms.¹ The civil war allows Lucan to proleptically anticipate Rome's adoption of the Ptolemies' luxury and tyranny.² Egypt slots tidily into Lucan's general critique of Rome's slide into dictatorship, a critique inevitably colored by the poem's unfinished ending and Lucan's own death at Nero's hands.³ Through Lucan, one can see how Roman reactions to *Aegyptiaca* and its popularity outside of Egypt are shot through with anxiety about the principate and social changes in Rome.

Egyptians and Alexandrians were regularly the foils through which Romans complained about obsequious advisers. Per Suetonius (*Nero* 20.3), Nero considered Alexandrians the ideal sycophantic audience because they clapped so well. Juvenal is singularly frustrated with the "Nile's trash" (*verna Canopi*, 1.26) Crispinus because he is an exogenous, enabling adviser in the court of Domitian, another Egyptophile emperor demonized by senatorial elite.⁴ Within the *Bellum Civile*, it

1. Tracy (2014) analyzes Egypt's ideological significance in the *Bellum Civile* (part 1 discusses Pompey, part 2 Caesar).

2. McCloskey and Phinney Jr. (1968) argue that Lucan critiques Nero via Ptolemy XIII.

3. Fantham (2011) lays out a biography of Lucan and the sources on which that biography is based. Lucan's attitude to Nero is an object of debate (cf. Kimmerle 2015, 110–16), one that clusters around the paradoxical criticism of Caesar and praise of Nero (on which see Holmes 1999).

4. It is hard to translate, but important to note, the mixed semantics of *verna*, which binds together a pejorative for "natives" with a term for a house slave. For the historical Crispinus, see Vasileiou (1984) and Jones (1992, 70). See also the prosopographical approach of White (1974, 377–78) and Baldwin (1979, 110–11), the former of whom sees Crispinus not as an official but as a mere gourmand.

is Pothinus who poisons the ear of Ptolemy XIII. In a council scene, Ptolemy XIII weighs whether to welcome Pompey or kill him after the latter flees to Egypt in the wake of his defeat at Pharsalia. A palace eunuch of humble birth, Pothinus is best able to deliver morally bankrupt but self-serving advice to a tyrant all too ready to take the easy path: “But Pothinus, better able to counsel evil and know tyrants, dared to condemn Pompey to death.”⁵ This image of the corrupt and non-Roman adviser, here located around the Ptolemies, is both an etiology for and retroactively produced by the dangerous amount of power unscrupulous confidants had with “bad” emperors like Nero and Domitian.⁶ Lucan and Juvenal thus offer a contrastive view on the paths taken by authors of *Aegyptiaca* who made the move from Alexandria to Rome and the emperor. One such author, Tiberius Claudius Balbillus, leveraged his astrological knowledge to justify Nero’s summary execution of Roman elite.⁷ In the eyes of Roman authors navigating the dangerous reigns of Nero and Domitian, Egyptians and their presentation of Egyptian history help translate tyrannical rule to Rome.

Into this general picture of Egypt as site and etiology of Rome’s turn to tyranny enters Acoreus, an Egyptian priest who also serves as adviser to Ptolemy XIII. Through Acoreus’s mixed position as learned figure and imperial adviser, Lucan reflects on the structures that surround and enable tyrannical rule, in Egypt and—by implication—in Rome. As an epic poet writing in the paranoia-ridden court of Nero, Lucan at once sees himself in the figure of Acoreus—who must also navigate the dangerous curiosity of a Caesar—and defines himself and all Romans against the Egyptian adviser’s cozy relationship with tempestuous Ptolemaic dynasts.⁸ That tension is what makes Acoreus, as a figure who reflects doubly the history of Egyptian authors of *Aegyptiaca* and the new realities facing Lucan, Chaeremon, Seneca, Petronius, and others writing under Nero’s shadow, so interesting.

As a mixed adviser and exegete of Egyptian culture, Acoreus is a more complex figure than the flatly demonized Pothinus. Unlike Pothinus, Acoreus urges Ptolemy to remain loyal to Pompey. When Acoreus enters the *Bellum Civile* during this council scene, Lucan highlights both Acoreus’s good advice to Ptolemy and his general wisdom in *Aegyptiaca*. Acoreus thus coordinates two poles around which I have been positioning authors of *Aegyptiaca*—a direct connection to the emperor and a broad expertise in Egyptian culture:

Among the council Acoreus’s speech came first, Acoreus serene in his old age and made mild by his broken years. Memphis, ostentatious in its sacred rights, the

Demougin (1994, 293) discusses Domitian’s elevation of equestrian freedmen. For Domitian’s connections to Egypt, see Klotz (2008).

5. Luc. *Bell. Civ.* 8.482–3: *sed melior suadere malis et nosse tyrannos / ausus Pompeium leto damnare Pothinus.*

6. Flamerie de Lachapelle (2010) emphasizes the Roman-imperial resonances of Pothinus’s speech.

7. Per Suet. *Ner.* 36.1, which I discuss in chapter 2.

8. Feldherr (2021, 139) notes the deliberate blurring of Cleopatra/past into Nero/present in Book 10.

protector of the Nile inundation, gave him birth. As he tended the gods many Apises had lived out the spans imposed by their Diana.⁹

Acoreus embodies the *longue durée* of Egyptian history. His old age metonymically represents Egypt's age-old wisdom and explains his (attempted) moderating influence on a young king. The Stoic catchwords "placid" (*placidus*) and "moderate" (*modestior*) make clear that Acoreus embodies the philosophical peace that Lucan and his uncle Seneca both associated with Egypt. His mixed adviser-philosopher role recalls the Stoic and sacred scribe Chaeremon. Jonathan Tracy and Eleni Manolaraki have unsurprisingly looked both to Chaeremon and to the other adviser of Nero, Lucan's uncle Seneca, for Acoreus's historical model.¹⁰ Both were older tutors attempting to temper Nero's rash tempestuousness.

Acoreus's association with Memphis strengthens his embodiment of Egypt's cultural patrimony. Memphis is, after all, the site of Egypt's antiquity par excellence. It was the Old Kingdom capital and pharaonic counterpart to the paradigmatically Ptolemaic Alexandria. Lucan makes Memphis and its signification of all things pharaonic an immediate frame through which to make sense of Acoreus. Lucan's introduction of Acoreus drills down on three specific examples (Nilometers, the Apis bull, and lunar cult) of the mixed religious and natural-philosophical bona fides associated with Memphis and constitutive of Acoreus's priestly authority. Acoreus's old age and position as priest are the source of his expertise over the otherwise quite heterogeneous traditions of hydrometry, animal cult, and astronomy. In this way Acoreus exemplifies the same pattern I have been underlining for authors of *Aegyptiaca*. The Nile, the Apis bull, and the moon tidily delineate a wide field of cultural authority for the fictional Acoreus and the historical authors of *Aegyptiaca* after whom he is patterned.

Acoreus makes only a brief appearance in the council scene (his advice cannot stack up with Pothinus's), but he is the central figure of the *Bellum Civile*'s final book. It is there, in a banquet that shifts from feasting to natural-philosophical conversation, that the systems of Roman imperial power that gave shape to *Aegyptiaca* take center stage. Justifiably, most attention turns to the speech that Acoreus gives about the origins of the Nile. It runs for some 137 lines (10.194–331).¹¹ The speech rewards the critical attention paid to it: Acoreus deftly coordinates superficially neutral natural-philosophical curiosity with the latent ideologies of southern conquest animating the historical Nubian expeditions of Senwosret, Cambyses, Augustus, and Nero; a penchant for natural philosophy present across Lucan's epic

9. Luc. *Bell. Civ.* 8.475–80: . . . quos inter Acoreus / iam placidus senio fractisque modestior annis / (hunc genuit custos Nili crescentis in arva / Memphis vana sacris; illo cultore deorum / lustra suae Phoebe non unus vixerat Apis) / consilii vox prima fuit.

10. For the identification with Seneca (partially based on Seneca's tract on the Nile in *Nat. Quaest.* 4a), see Williams (2008, 231–34), Manolaraki (2013, 64), and Tracy (2014, 153–69). For the identification with Chaeremon, see Manolaraki (2013, 108–10) and Tracy (2014, 10n31, 174).

11. In particular, the readings of Manolaraki (2013, 80–117) and Tracy (2014, 181–224).

and consonant with his uncle Seneca's *Natural Questions* takes center stage as the work reaches its (unfinished) conclusion; the détente between the philosophically valorous Acoreus and the politically destructive Caesar allows Lucan to work through his own relationship to Nero.¹²

But it is Caesar's introductory speech that sets out a Roman perspective on Aegyptiaca. When Caesar asks Acoreus about Egypt, he does so in a way that reflects well Aegyptiaca's broad cultural ambit. Caesar's concluding promise to abandon imperial conquest and the civil war makes explicit that the knowledge offered by Acoreus and constitutive of Aegyptiaca was bound up in the processes of imperial ambition and institutional collapse that Lucan's Neronian audience was facing:

O you aged devotee of sacred matters, and—as your age attests—not neglected by the gods, explain the origins of the Egyptian *gens*, the lay of the land, the customs of its people, and the gods' rites and shape. Bring forth whatever is inscribed on the ancient inner sancta and reveal gods who want to be known. If your ancestors taught Athenian Plato their sacred learning, what guest was ever more worthy of hearing this, more able to contain the world. . . . But although such virtuousness, such love of the truth lives in me, there is nothing I'd rather know than the causes and the unknown source of the Nile inundation—hidden over so many centuries. Let there be a definite hope of seeing the source of the Nile, I'll abandon civil war.¹³

Caesar's speech homes in on the areas of Aegyptiaca I have centered in this book. He echoes a heterogeneity of subjects absolutely crucial for the social function of Aegyptiaca. Ethnography, geography, etiology, and religious exegesis all swirl together. That range of intellectual traditions is too easily lost when Aegyptiaca is collapsed into history-writing and the model provided by Manetho's dynastic history. Within the logic of the narrative, Caesar can reasonably ask somebody like Acoreus to cover all these different areas. Rome's appetite for knowledge was expansive. Responding to the kinds of requests for auto-ethnographic exposition made by Caesar is what created the opportunities on which Apion, Chaeremon, Pancrates, Julia Balbilla, and other authors of Aegyptiaca capitalized.

The last in Caesar's laundry list of subjects, "the gods' rites and shapes," reflects a crux of the argument I have tried to make via Aegyptiaca. The specific phrasing (*ritus formasque deum*) matters. Caesar displays a curiosity about the divine that deprioritizes animal worship—to which he tangentially refers via "rites"—and instead emphasizes the different forms that gods take. That question of form, of

12. For the shadow cast by Nero's (failed) expedition on this exchange, see Tracy (2014, 186).

13. Luc. *Bell. Civ.* 10.176–83: "o sacris devote senex, quodque arguit aetas, / non neglecte deis, Phariae primordia gentis / terrarumque situs vulgique edissere mores / et ritus formasque deum; quodcumque vetustis / insculptum est adytis profer, noscique volentes / prode deos. si Cecropium sua sacra Platona / maiores docuere tui, quis dignior umquam / hoc fuit auditu mundique capacior hospes? . . . sed, cum tanta meo vivat sub pectore virtus, / tantus amor veri, nihil est quod noscere malim / quam fluvii causas per saecula tanta latentis / ignotumque caput: spes sit mihi certa videndi / Niliacos fontes, bellum civile relinquam."

human- versus animal-shaped gods, was a critical avenue for cross-cultural conversations in which Greek and Roman philosophers and authors of *Aegyptiaca* all took part. It is interesting that where a few lines earlier (10.158–9) Lucan's authorial voice takes pot shots at the Egyptian animal and vegetable gods on that evening's dinner menu, Caesar asks about Egyptian religious practices much more even-handedly. Even in a poem whose barbarization of Egyptian religion I discussed in chapter 3, there are clear signs that Lucan knows well the terms of the zoomorphic debate occurring in Cicero, Ovid, Diodorus, Plutarch, and *Aegyptiaca*. In other words, Lucan's rejection of animal worship earlier in the poem is not an unconsidered cultural chauvinism.¹⁴ It is an instrumental, passage-specific rhetorical effect through which to concatenate luxury and barbarity.

Acoreus has authority over this list of "Egyptian things" because he can publish hieroglyphic texts hidden in temples. After asking about a range of traditions, Caesar changes tacks and asks Acoreus to disclose everything written in hieroglyphic. Both spatially and metaphorically, hieroglyphic's appeal depends on its inaccessibility. It resides in "sancta" (*adytis*) that can only be brought out into the light (*profer*) by somebody with Acoreus's skillset. Acoreus's authority over a linguistic tradition associated specifically with inscribed temple texts is consonant with the expertise advertised by authors of *Aegyptiaca*. Starting already with Manetho, auto-ethnographic authority was expressed as a translation into Greek of hieroglyphic source material.¹⁵

That translation occurred on multiple levels. It was, of course, lexical. Authors of *Aegyptiaca* presented in Greek concepts and traditions that had been linguistically Egyptian in origin—whether that "Egyptian" is a hieroglyphic temple inscription or a Demotic text. So, scribal labels like "the scribe of the house of life" (*sh pr-nh*) or the more general "sage" (*rh-ht*) were translated flexibly into either "sacred scribe" (*hierogrammateus*) or "philosopher." Manetho offers a gloss of Amun's name that foregrounds the philosophical importance of removal and hiddenness. Apion's presentation of Egyptian pharmacology uses two different translations of a specific herb (*osiritis* and *cynocephalia*) to underline the interconnection of technical botanical knowledge and Osiris mythology.¹⁶ But beyond discrete acts of translating between languages, *Aegyptiaca* itself was a broader form of cultural translation. Its authors sought to rearticulate the contextual meaning of gods, animals, royal power, and cosmology in terms compatible with philosophy and legible to an external Greek and Roman audience.

Caesar makes a provocative comparison to legitimize his own request of Acoreus. His conversation with Acoreus naturally succeeds Plato's earlier lessons from pharaonic priests. This is another important example of the mythologization of philosophers' visits to Egypt, whose importance to imperial-era *Aegyptiaca* I

14. As I discuss in chapter 3, Lucan criticizes Isis cult's popularity in Rome at *Luc. Bell. Civ.* 8.831–2.

15. As is made clear in Joseph. *Ap.* 1.73 = *BNJ* 609 T 7a, which I discuss in chapter 5.

16. Plin. *HN* 30.18 = *BNJ* 616 F 15, discussed in chapter 1.

unpacked in chapter 6. Platonism is but one of the proliferation of philosophical traditions that Greek and Roman authors traced back to Egypt and its priests. As the logic goes, Caesar is only asking for a set of answers that had already been freely given to earlier visitors. The banquet in Alexandria, at the liminal moment of transition from Ptolemaic to Roman rule, self-consciously adapts itself to the transfer of wisdom and wisdom-seeking from Egyptian priests to Greek philosophers.

The tenor of Acoreus's discourse on the Nile helps prove natural philosophy's Egyptian origins. His speech naturally touches on doxography of the Nile's sources. But it is no accident that Acoreus opens with a precis of astronomy and its role in Egypt's seasonal cycle, a kind of Greco-Egyptian knowledge tradition central to Aegyptiaca. That is both a good fit for the astronomical bent of the *Bellum Civile* and a reflection of imperial Aegyptiaca's interest in the stars, on display in authors like Chaeremon, Thrasyllus, and Tiberius Claudius Balbillus. By performing a priestly knowledge steeped in natural-philosophical traditions practiced in Alexandria, Acoreus continues the same circular feedback loop that I called attention to in the case of Manetho, in chapter 6. Aegyptiaca, as a mixed Greco-Egyptian intellectual tradition situated at the intersection of religious and philosophical expertise, provides the substance of an original Egyptian wisdom that priests taught to Plato and Pythagoras and that then metamorphosed into "philosophy." Acoreus's culturally mixed presentation on the Nile and the stars is, to Caesar, the authentically pharaonic material that Plato molded into philosophy.

Caesar's self-comparison to Plato draws attention to the political stakes of religio-philosophical knowledge-seeking. The otherwise innocent claims to curiosity touted by Caesar are entirely unconvincing. His disingenuity is betrayed by the phrasing he uses to underline his suitability as Acoreus's pupil. He arrogates for himself a capacity for knowledge—"more able to contain the world" (*mundique capacior*)—that slips into a language of imperial conquest. That culminates in the overbold promise that caps Caesar's opening speech: he would happily quit the civil war if he could set eyes on the Nile's sources. Of course, the phrase *mundi capacior* deliberately blurs seeing the Nile and conquering Egypt. To see the Nile's sources, to know the Nile, would be an act of expansion grander than any of Caesar's predecessors.

Acoreus is entirely aware of this. He draws out a lineage of knowledge-seeking dynasts who have tried to conquer the Nile: "The desire you have to know the Nile was shared by Egyptian, Persian, and Macedonian kings."¹⁷ The lineage of power-hungry and expansionist kings—Senwosret/Sesostris, Cambyses, and Alexander—complement Plato as a no less important aetiological prelude to Caesar's thirst for imperial knowledge. It also broadens the scale in which Acoreus's auto-ethnography gains coherence. There is a long list of dynasts who have attempted to leverage the kind of knowledge safeguarded by Acoreus and typical

17. Luc. *Bell. Civ.* 10.268–9: quae tibi noscendi Nilum, Romane, cupido est, / et Phariis Persisque fuit Macetumque tyrannis. . . .

of Aegyptiaca. For as long as there have been power-hungry conquerors, there have been folks like Acoreus, or Manetho, or Chaeremon, or Pancrates who have been forced to figure out how to shape their expertise around the dangerous curiosity of their powerful interlocutors.

In other words, Rome is but one, latter-day entrant in this history of politically fraught external interest in Egyptian traditions. In a narrow sense, Manetho begot Aegyptiaca as the same kind of Ptolemaic adviser as the fictional Acoreus. His cultural translation of Egyptian dynastic history was born under the same set of circumstances: navigating how best to present Egyptian sensibilities around kingship to Ptolemaic dynasts keen both to adopt Egyptian trappings of rule and to elevate Greekness as a proxy for citizenship and socioeconomic mobility. That dual framework constantly overhangs imperial-era Egyptians' approach to Aegyptiaca. Their attempts to naturalize the joins between things Greek and things Egyptian, Homer and the Nile, or Stoicism and hieroglyphic, reflect well the way that auto-ethnographers ancient and modern must carefully navigate the uneven terrain on which they and their audience stand.

Authors of Aegyptiaca thus sought simultaneously to remain faithful to inherited Egyptian sensibilities, reflect ongoing cultural mixture within Egypt, and advance along the paths to Rome and the emperor carved by the layered histories of Kushite, Persian, Ptolemaic, and Roman control of Egypt. To assess Aegyptiaca exclusively through a yes-no evaluation of cultural fidelity misses out on the interconnected motivations that animate cultural translation under colonial rule. But by the same token, authors of Aegyptiaca wrote what they wrote with set social and economic motivations in mind. Chaeremon, one popular choice for Acoreus's inspiration, leveraged his expertise in priestly wisdom and the hieroglyphic script to become Nero's tutor. Apion gained Alexandrian citizenship because of his intellectual production. Pancrates's interview with Hadrian secured him membership in the Museum. Presentation of the Exodus story, one through-line for Aegyptiaca, responded to the zero-sum game for Roman support that pitted Alexandrian Greeks, Jews, and Egyptians against each other. Acoreus is such a productive figure for a retrospective on Aegyptiaca because his interview with Caesar collapses the broad social hierarchies surrounding auto-ethnography into a one-on-one interview between thinker and tyrant, Egyptian and Roman, speaker and audience.

AEGYPTIACA, BERNAL, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF POSTERITY

Acoreus's meeting with Caesar, like Aegyptiaca's presentation of Egyptian traditions to Greeks and Romans, is self-consciously posterior. Caesar and Acoreus both position themselves against a mythologized set of encounters through which the former's imperial ambition and the latter's elucidation of long-guarded Egyptian wisdom gain shape. That mythologization is so potent because it imagines an original moment of cultural contact that precedes those latter-day meetings—like Acoreus

with Caesar or Apion with Caligula or Chaeremon with Nero—on which the *ur*-meeting is patterned. I have tried to reapproach the self-conscious posteriority undergirding Aegyptiaca. Imperial Egyptians' engagement with and presentation of cultural commonplaces like animal cult, hieroglyphic inscriptions, and scribal learning displayed the same inventiveness, playfulness, and strategic rearrangement as that found in imperial Greeks' self-positioning against the classical past.¹⁸

The Egyptian culture on display in Aegyptiaca gains its authority through a rhetoric of access and of cultural purity that was plastic. It was something constantly molded, shaped, and reformed by imperial Egyptians who were not at all naïve about the reality of cultural mixture that had always been underway in Egypt, from the early-dynastic period onwards. The threads these authors used to splice their own culturally mixed, but still doggedly Egyptian wisdom traditions into a grand narrative of changeless pharaonic culture form a picture of cultural creativity worth viewing on its own terms. The narratives of cultural degradation that have been used to unfavorably compare mixed authors like Apion and Chaeremon with the true-blue Egyptian Manetho speak not to any truth about pharaonic versus Ptolemaic versus Roman Egypt.¹⁹ They instead reflect scholarly anxieties around policing disciplinary boundaries conventionally tethered to ethnic (Greek, Egyptian) and temporal (pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Roman) ones. A need for temporal-cum-disciplinary boundaries makes it so appealing to reach back for a historical moment of cultural contact between the purely Egyptian and Egyptological and the purely Greek and classical.

Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* remains a powerful example of the promise and peril of chasing down a prototypical original meeting, in whose shadow the Acoreus-Caesar encounter operates.²⁰ The trope of the philosopher's visit to Egypt has become the crux of arguments for Egypt's influence on Greece and, by extension, for Africa's intellectual history and its marginalization in the modern university. Scholars like Bernal and Cheikh Anta Diop zoom in on Pythagoras's and Plato's visits to Egypt when underlining the transmission of canonized bodies of knowledge from Egypt to Greece.²¹ There is a long shadow cast by this archetypal narrative. In antiquity, Caesar tendentiously imagines himself as an intellectually curious tutee to add philosophical legitimacy to his Roman cooption of Egyptian ideologies of Nile conquest. In the twentieth century, figures like Pythagoras and

18. Whitmarsh (2001, 32) captures well imperial Greeks' creative rather than slavish imitation of the classical past.

19. Fowden (1986, 65) and Burstein (1996, 603).

20. Bernal (1987–2006) broadly covers Egypt's (and Phoenicia's) influence on the formation of Greek culture and the European (Aryan Model, in his terms) tradition that has sought to erase that influence. Part of the lingering controversy is in Bernal's insistence on the historicity of narratives of Egyptian colonization of Greece and of philosophers' visits to Egypt. For a measured response, see the archaeological perspective offered by Morris (1989).

21. Bernal (1987–2006, I.71–2, 103–18) and Diop (1974, xiv).

Plato proved that Egypt, and Africa more broadly, attained significant cultural achievements in which Africans and Africans in the diaspora should take pride.²²

I have tried to show, in the specific *topos* of philosophy's Egyptian origins, how frequently that narrative was shaped and bent. It underwent constant rearticulation, simultaneously indebted to and making meaningful the translation of Egyptian wisdom that took hold in the social conditions of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. This is not to erase any possibility for tracing back moments of contact and influence into the past. Already in Herodotus, Pythagoreanism's, Empedocleanism's, and Orphism's Egyptian roots were being postulated. Certainly, the narrative of origins—of Egypt's place out and ahead of the formation of Greek culture—is an important one whose place in Afrocentrist thought I do not want to discount or minimize. But to confidently stake claims for the genesis of that contact hits up against the ongoing and expansive process of cultural mixture that I have been underlining through Glissant's creolization.

In other words, there is something to be said for a making and remaking and remaking again of the "Greek" that abandons origins in favor of an ongoing formation of cultural canons. After all, the Greek past only became classical under Rome, with Aulus Gellius's retrospective view.²³ That has inaugurated a raft of important work on the social conditions that gave rise to imperial Greeks' creative reimagination of the classical past in their own moment. What has yet to be appreciated is how Aegyptiaca (and beyond it the mixture of Greek and indigenous traditions broadly characteristic of the Hellenistic world) is an equally important mode of reforming and reimagining the classical past. Thrasyllus, a Greco-Egyptian author, canonized Plato and his corpus. A philosophy of the soul became the object of a set path of movement from India and Egypt to Greece and then Rome. As Apion makes clear, the consolidation of Homeric scholarship in Alexandria was not immune to that city's mix of Greek and Egyptian intellectual milieux. Seeing this work of cultural mixture in process better shows how the plural identities of the imperial world—onto which Aegyptiaca provides a view—is not just relevant to, but is in fact constitutive of the gestation of a canon of traditions that then became classical. Authors who were simultaneously African and Greek and Roman occupied an inarguably central role in this post hoc making of the classical, whether that "classical" is the Greek or pharaonic past.

MULTICULTURALISM BEYOND RECEPTION

Aegyptiaca can be a productive place where core, unresolved questions posed by Bernal can continue to be discussed without the strain that historical origins tend

22. Pythagoras's visit to Egypt is the opening gambit of James (1954, 9), a key if controversial text representing US Afrocentrist engagement with this issue.

23. For the passage, see Aul. Gell. 19.8.15, and discussion by Citroni (2007), who notes the analogization between canonized authors and Rome's social structure.

to place on the available linguistic or archaeological or literary evidence. There is an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history that explains the division of mixed Greek and Egyptian intellectual expertise into separable parts slotted into disparate disciplinary fiefdoms.²⁴ Apion the Homerist lives apart, in a distinct repository of knowledge, from Apion the chronicler of Egyptian history. Pancrates the magician only approaches Pancrates the Alexandrian poet tangentially, in the margins of commentaries that are themselves deeply marginal to disciplinary centers. Tiberius Claudius Balbillus the capable Roman administrator and Tiberius Claudius Balbillus the Greco-Egyptian astrologer become two entirely different people.

The list goes on. But part of what makes this division of the Greco-Roman from the Egyptian so troublingly durative is that it is often much less ideologically malicious than Bernal's history would have it. German Romanticism and the rise of the modern university, whose formation of an isolated Greece Bernal and others have analyzed, cannot explain entirely the acts of erasure that have plagued *Aegyptiaca* and other literatures that mixed indigenous and canonically "classical" bodies of knowledge. I have tried to show that much of the problem is mundane—it runs into the nitty-gritty of prosopography and fragments and alienatingly technical knowledge traditions. Put simply, much of the ancient world's vibrant cross-cultural mixture has resided in disciplinary nooks and crannies. These sites of entanglement between Greco-Roman and other Mediterranean intellectual histories have not so much been erased as they have gathered dust.

I find that surprisingly reassuring. There is nothing inevitable or necessary in the glue binding Classics's subject and method. One can move away from a singular focus on Greece and Rome while maintaining the methodological values—doing a lot with little evidence; close reading and incisive lexicography; working between historical and archaeological and literary-critical sensibilities—that have come to define the discipline. In fact, I hope to have suggested in this book that we *need* those methodological tools to push back against Greece and Rome's outsized place in the study of the ancient Mediterranean.

A rich engagement with those values is a point of departure for a more significant reevaluation of where to locate the boundaries of the classical. When thinking through those boundaries, I hope to have shown that Classics should not only be broadened by reception studies, by widening the communities who engaged with a canon of Greek and Roman traditions. We must also begin to widen the peoples and traditions that are considered central to the study of the ancient Mediterranean world. The integration and then reinvention of the Greek and Roman within a local context—the dynamics that make reception studies so vibrant—have been

24. This history obviously intersects with that treated by the first volume of Bernal (1987–2006), but has its own points of departure. Dionisotti (1997) discusses the much longer history of collecting fragments, which has materially contributed to the continued marginalization of *Aegyptiaca* as a tradition.

there from the beginning, if on the disciplinary sidelines. Already in the ancient world, culturally mixed authors blended their own traditions with a socially, politically, and economically valorized canon of Greek knowledge remade under the shadow of a Roman imperial regime. If the reception of *that* ancient Mediterranean world has not been written, it might yet be.