

EGYPTIAN IMAGERY ON ROMAN WALLS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ROMAN AND EGYPTIAN ELEMENTS IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CE ROMAN
WALL PAINTING *ISIAC RITUAL WORSHIP* FROM HERCULANEUM

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2018

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Egyptian Imagery on Roman Walls: The Relationship between Roman and Egyptian Elements in the First-Century CE Roman Wall Painting *Isiac Ritual Worship* from Herculaneum

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Degree awarded June 2018

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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June 2018

Title: Egyptian Imagery on Roman Walls: The Relationship between Roman and Egyptian Elements in the First-Century CE Roman Wall Painting *Isiac Ritual Worship* from Herculaneum

Incorporating Egyptian imagery in a Roman medium, *Isiac Ritual Worship* is a remarkable example of first-century CE Roman wall painting. Discovered in Herculaneum, it illustrates a ritual to the Egyptian goddess Isis. Discussions of *Isiac Ritual Worship* in modern scholarship position the wall painting as evidence of Isiac ritual practice in Roman Italy without conducting a close visual analysis and examining its combined use of Roman and Egyptian imagery. Therefore, in this thesis, I ask two pressing questions: How does Roman and Egyptian imagery coalesce in *Isiac Ritual Worship*? And why are the Roman and Egyptian motifs combined in certain ways in the wall painting? To answer these questions, I conduct a visual analysis of *Isiac Ritual Worship*, drawing upon ancient literary sources, Isiac and Egyptian imagery, and contemporaneous wall paintings.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Professors Kristen Seaman and Kevin Dicus for their assistance, patience, and sage advice in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition, special thanks are due to Professor Maile Hutterer for agreeing to sit on my committee as the necessity arose and her encouragement along the way. I also thank the all the professors in the History of Art and Architecture Department for being instrumental in my development as a scholar and whose lessons I carry with me in this thesis and all my future endeavors. A special mention is owed to Professors Kate Modloch, Jenny Lin, and Joyce Cheng for their continued mentorship in my growth as a scholar and art historian. This thesis was supported in part by a Graduate Teaching Fellowship from the Department of the History of Art and Architecture. Additionally, it was supported also by the Gloria Tovar Lee Scholarship in Art History, the Marian Donnelly Student Travel Grant Fund, and by an Architecture & Allied Arts Travel Fund Scholarship. Receiving these funds enabled me to visit Italy and see my wall painting in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale Naples, as well as Pompeii, Herculaneum, and various museums in Rome and Vatican City. A final thanks must go to the wonderful community I have around me in the History of Art and Architecture and Art departments: Alex your dedication and endless kindness were pillars for me during my time here; Hyperplum and Colin thank you for our conversations which taught me almost more about art than I could have ever learnt from any book; and Caroline, your intelligence and light inspires me each and every day. Thank you.

Dedicated to any and all dyslexic students
– we can do it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Once adorning a wall in the coastal town of Herculaneum, Italy, *Isiac Ritual Worship* is a remarkable example of first-century CE Roman wall painting (fig. 1).¹ Significant for its incorporation of Egyptian imagery into a Roman medium, the wall painting depicts figures performing ritual worship to the Egyptian goddess Isis.² Composed of officiants and devotees performing various ritual actions, the wall painting is organised around a central figure, a male officiant. Framed by the open doorway of the temple, this officiant stands clad head to toe in white ritual attire. His striding right foot extends before him, suggesting his impending descent down the steps towards the sacred fire on the ritual altar below. Flanking the central officiant are a female officiant and a male officiant in ritual dress. In their hands they carry Isiac ritual objects and stand with the central officiant in front of the small temple's simple unadorned façade. On either side of the temple two stone sphinxes stretch out, flanked, in turn, by two tall date palms. Reaching up into the sky, the verticality of the palms juxtapose the horizontal sphinxes and intensify the overall symmetry of the wall painting's composition. In the courtyard

¹ Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, 8924. In the museum, the label for the wall painting gives its name as *Isiac Ceremony*, shared with another wall painting that it is oftentimes paired with. As the wall painting lacks an official name, with the scholarship referring to it by various descriptive titles, I will be calling it *Isiac Ritual Worship* following the museum's title and the precedent for descriptive titles. Therefore, I hope to minimise confusion with another similar wall painting, *Isiac Ceremonial Dance* (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, 8919), by differentiating between the two. By referring to this wall painting as *Isiac Ceremonial Dance*, I follow Frank Snowden's descriptive title for it: *Isiac ceremonial: sacred dance performed by a black*. Snowden 2010, 225.

² In this thesis, 'Egypt' refers to the geographical area that became a Roman province after its annexation by the Emperor Augustus in 30 BCE. Egypt does not refer to Dynastic Egypt unless specified. 'Rome' may refer to the geographical location of the city of Rome as the seat of governance in the Roman world and as such it will be indicated by the use of 'metropolitan.' Additionally, 'Rome' may refer to the Roman empire and this will be noted in text to provide clarity. The term 'Roman' refers to objects and imagery associated with metropolitan Rome and Roman Italy, whereas, the term 'Egyptian' refers to objects or imagery which evoke visual associations with and are present within the geographical area of Egypt.

on either side of the staircase stand two groups of devotees, some of whom have their arms raised skyward as if in prayer, jubilation, or applause. The remaining officiants, identifiable by their white garb, perform ritual activities at the base of the stairs and around the altar. Interspersed throughout the scene are four black and white ibises, emblematic of the Egyptian imagery used throughout *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

Despite its rich visual details, little is known about the wall painting's context. Measuring 81 by 82cm, *Isiac Ritual Worship* was buried and preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE.³ However, during the first excavations that tunneled through tufa into the site of Herculaneum in the eighteenth century, the wall painting was removed from its original location.⁴ Consequently, as the primary context is unknown, it is difficult to ascertain the exact style of the wall painting and it is not given a definitive date in modern scholarship. Some scholars suggest the wall painting was painted during the first half of the first century CE, whereas others postulate its date to be around the third quarter of the first century CE, albeit tentatively.⁵ Nevertheless, the scholarship securely places the production of *Isiac Ritual Worship* during the first century CE, in part because of its execution in the third or fourth style of Roman wall painting. In keeping with these two styles, the wall painting's red and white border suggests that the wall painting is a smaller centralised inset in the larger decorative scheme of a room, likely a Roman domestic setting.⁶

³ Snowden 2010, 225.

⁴ Bragantini 2012, 24.

⁵ Ling 1991, 162; Bragantini 2012, 24

⁶ TheCRA, s.v. "Priesthoods of non-Roman traditions", 139; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 13.

In this domestic setting, it is highly probable that *Isiac Ritual Worship* was joined by another wall painting of comparable size, date and subject matter. Within the material record there is only one extant wall painting that is comparable with *Isiac Ritual Worship*: a wall painting that is now referred to as *Isiac Ceremonial Dance* (fig. 2). Likewise discovered during the first excavations at Herculaneum, the scene of Isiac ritual performance in this wall painting is more dynamic than that in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. This disparity led Molly Swetnam-Burland to characterise them as an ‘ecstatic’ and ‘stately ceremony’ respectively.⁷ Their almost identical size and parallel border, colour and patterning suggest that the wall paintings were likely square insets in a larger decorative mural scheme from a single room, operating in the room as a pendant pair.⁸

Compositionally, *Isiac Ritual Worship* shares similarities with two genres of wall painting identified by Roger Ling: panel-pictures and sacro-idyllic landscapes.⁹ Although panel pictures generally illustrated mythological or historical scenes, *Isiac Ritual Worship*’s coherent ritual narrative, which fills the entire visual space and is enclosed by a square border, recalls characteristics of this genre.¹⁰ The wall painting’s everyday subject matter and extended landscape with non-fragmented architecture are compositional features commonly found more in sacro-idyllic landscapes than in panel-

⁷ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 12.

⁸ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 12.

⁹ Panel-pictures and sacro-idyllic landscapes are modern, not ancient, categorisations of Roman wall paintings designated and defined by Roger Ling. Ling 1991, 112; 144-146.

¹⁰ A comparison with the wall painting illustrating the courtship between Mars and Venus from the House of M. Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii dating to around 40-50 CE suggests that the square composition of *Isiac Ritual Worship* is in keeping with the square shape demarcated by rectilinear borders found in Third and Fourth-style panel-pictures. Ling 1991, 101, 116-117, Plate XIA.

pictures.¹¹ Both genres use a maintained perspective and depth, qualities seen in the carefully composed *Isiac Ritual Worship* with its symmetrical and largely naturalistic scene centred around the ritual action at the base of the temple. This confluence of features allows for the complexities in the wall painting's subject matter (the high number of figures, various ritual actions, and full architectural setting) to be fully articulated. Likely, the composition of *Isiac Ritual Worship* stems from a desire to represent the ritual scene without compromising either narrative or landscape.

In previous scholarship concerning *Isiac Ritual Worship*, its ritual scene is foregrounded and the wall painting is discussed in terms of ritual practice, as well as gender, race and identity, and its apparently Egyptian imagery.¹² The wall painting is most often used as a secondary piece of evidence in larger scholarly considerations which, for instance, provide evidence for Isiac ritual worship in Roman Italy.¹³ A consequence of this approach is that *Isiac Ritual Worship* has not received a close visual analysis. This oversight is problematic: although the scholarship does acknowledge the presence of Egyptian imagery, it has overlooked the impact of combined Roman and Egyptian elements on realism and representation in the wall painting. If this mixing of elements produces unrealistic forms and images, then the reliability of the wall painting as evidence for real-life events is called into question. This, then, negates its use as a credible source for academic inquiries into ritual practice.

¹¹ Ling 1991, 142, 144.

¹² Contemporary classical scholarship still references Tran Tam Tinh (1971, 28-49) as providing the fullest description of the wall painting. See also Snowden 1970, 189; Heyob 1975, 84; Witt 1997, 117; Alvar 2008, 311-12; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 13-14.

¹³ Heyob 1975, 84.

Molly Swetnam-Burland's writings about Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects may aid us in identifying a potential cause of these scholarly omissions. She notes that 'Egyptian-looking' objects (those objects not produced in Egypt but whose appearance evokes it) are 'explained away as non-Roman or treated as historiographically 'other'[in scholarship about the classical world].'¹⁴ She goes on to state that 'there is a binary divide in scholarship on Egyptian and Egyptian-looking materials in Roman Italy, which generally treats them either as 'religious' [evidence] or as 'exotic' [decorative].'¹⁵ *Isiac Ritual Worship* is unequivocally Roman, yet its Egyptian subjects render it Egyptian-looking. This places *Isiac Ritual Worship* as unusual or 'other' in the canon of Roman art and holds true for the scholarship concerning *Isiac Ritual Worship*. Modern scholarship does not pay close attention to the combined Roman and Egyptian imagery because it largely uses the wall painting as evidence of cult practice and identity in Roman Italy. This attests to Swetnam-Burland's assertion of the religious/decorative binary that exists in discussions of Egyptian-looking objects like *Isiac Ritual Worship*. Such a binary begets limited scholarly discussions. From this narrow focus in the scholarship surrounding *Isiac Ritual Worship* important questions pertaining to the wall painting and its Roman and Egyptian imagery remain unasked and unanswered. It is the ambition of this thesis to redress this by asking how does Roman and Egyptian imagery coalesce in *Isiac Ritual Worship* and why are the Roman and Egyptian imagery combined in certain ways in the wall painting?

To answer these questions, in this thesis I conduct a close visual analysis of *Isiac Ritual Worship*, drawing upon ancient literary sources, examples of Isiac, Dynastic,

¹⁴ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 2.

¹⁵ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 12.

Ptolemaic, and Roman Egyptian imagery, and contemporaneous Roman wall paintings as comparanda. In chapter two, I give a historical overview for the cult of Isis and Egyptian imagery in Roman Italy as well as modern scholarship on *Isiac Ritual Worship* to locate the wall painting in its socio-political context. In chapter three, I look to the ritual performers and their dress to understand how Roman and Egyptian elements combine in the wall painting and why the ensuing forms appear as they do. In chapter four, I continue my visual study of Roman and Egyptian features in *Isiac Ritual Worship* by examining the ritual objects and setting of the fresco. In my fifth and final chapter, I draw these conclusions together and consider the implications of my findings on both our understanding of the wall painting itself and discussions about Egyptian imagery within Roman art.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

Before discussing *Isiac Ritual Worship* in detail it is paramount to situate the wall painting within its religious, historical, and political context, especially that which is associated with the cult of Isis in Roman Italy and Rome's (the empire) combative relationship with Ptolemaic Egypt.

Egyptian Ritual and Art in Roman Italy

As its modern name suggests, *Isiac Ritual Worship* depicts a scene of cultic activities directed towards Isis. As the wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus, Isis was worshipped as the universal mother goddess of life and rebirth.¹⁶ Originating in ancient Egypt in around the third millennium BCE, her cult arrived in the Roman Empire as early as the second century BCE during the period when political relations formally began between the Roman Republic and the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt (305-30 BCE).¹⁷ As the arrival coincided with Rome's growing political prominence in the Mediterranean, it is tempting to equate Rome's new political relationship with the cult's presence in Italy. But diplomatic relations had little to do with its diffusion through the second century BCE.¹⁸ Instead the cult's growth is linked to movement of people and goods through merchants and trade.¹⁹ Birgette Bøgh goes so far as to suggest that southern Italians may have encountered the cult a century earlier through interactions

¹⁶ Bøgh 2013, 228.

¹⁷ Spanu 2009, 1; Swetnam-Burland 2011, 336

¹⁸ Siekierka 2008 229.

¹⁹ Siekierka 2008; Spanu 2009; Swetnam-Burland 2011, 336.

with the Greek Isiac cult centres on Delos and Rhodes and with Greek colonists in southern Italy.²⁰ In either case, by the first century BCE and the general Sulla's reassertion of Rome's dominance over the southern Italian region of Campania in 80 BCE, the cult of Isis was well-established in Roman communities, exposing them daily to Egyptian visual culture.²¹ Subsequently, the cult spread up through Italy towards metropolitan Rome, bringing Egyptian imagery with it.²² Despite strong opposition to the spread of the cult into metropolitan Rome by Republican politicians, it remained popular and later enjoyed a period of revitalisation in the western Mediterranean as a direct result of the conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt by Octavian, later known as the emperor Augustus.²³ The period after the conquest is identified as the 'imperial phase' in the diffusion of the cult of Isis, as following the establishment of the Principate and annexation of Egypt in 30 BCE, the most important people immigrating to Italy, voluntarily or not, were from the now Roman Egypt.²⁴ Alongside cult proliferation, a remarkable surge in Egyptian or 'Egyptian-looking' objects occurred after Octavian's victory over the last Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra VII, and Mark Antony in 31 BCE and his triple triumph in 29 BCE.²⁵

During the early Roman empire, the period in which *Isiac Ritual Worship* was painted, the cult of Isis rose in prominence. However, as in the Republican period, it was not met with universal acclaim. Contemporary sources suggest that during the early

²⁰ Bøgh 2013, 232.

²¹ Davies 2011, 356; Bøgh 2013, 232.

²² Bøgh 2013, 232.

²³ Siekierka 2008, 229; Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 4.

²⁴ Siekierka 2008, 244.

²⁵ Davies 2011, 356. Swetnam-Burland 2015, 1.

empire Octavian (now Augustus) and some of his Julio-Claudian successors were opposed to the growth of the cult in metropolitan Rome.²⁶ However, the material record indicates that in spite of elite reluctance, a number of Isiac cult sites were established and developed during the early part of the first century CE in Roman Italy.²⁷ Accompanying the proliferation of cult sites was an increase in Egyptian imports and Egyptian-looking art.²⁸ This increase had an imperial model, as in the years following his conquest the Emperor Augustus imported monumental obelisks to metropolitan Rome in celebration of his victory over Cleopatra (fig. 3), constructing a visual display of his military might and power.²⁹ It was at this political juncture with Augustus' rise to power and subjugation of Egypt that the Roman peoples found themselves in the throes of a Roman 'Egyptomania', as both the cult of Isis and Egyptian-looking objects flourished in Roman Italy.³⁰ Roman consumption of Egyptian imagery (from all periods of Egypt's history) continued throughout the first century CE into the reigns of the emperors in the Flavian Dynasty (69 CE to 96 CE) with the cult of Isis enjoying the imperial patronage of the emperor Vespasian, legitimising its place in the Roman religion and the empire.³¹

²⁶ Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689 in reference to Tac. *Ann.* 2.85; Suet. *Tib.* 36.1.

²⁷ Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689.

²⁸ Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689.

²⁹ Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689-690.

³⁰ For further discussion pertaining to the Roman 'Egyptomania' see: Davies 2011, 356; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 5; Hackworth Petersen 2016, 1.

³¹ Swetnam-Burland 2012, 689.

History of the Scholarship

A product of this Roman Egyptomania in Roman Italy, *Isiac Ritual Worship* is identified as one of the few representations of Isiac ritual activities in Roman art. Yet despite this and the cult's popularity and presence in the material record we know relatively little about it. For the cult of Isis was a mystery cult and thus its rites, rituals and texts were deliberately shrouded in secret.³² This is one of the most limiting factors in analysing *Isiac Ritual Worship* as much of the cultic practices and intentions are unknown.

Unsurprisingly then, most of our knowledge of the cult and its ritual practices comes from three ancient texts: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, and Herodotus' *The Histories*.³³ In addition, *Isiac Ritual Worship* is commonly used in scholarship as supplementary evidence for Isiac ritual practice. R.E. Witt, in his book *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (1977), asserts that the wall painting 'vividly [reveals] various aspects of Isiac ritual', noting that 'the use of the *sistrum* is striking' and describing how the priestess holds a *situla* whilst a priest fans the flames on the altar.³⁴ Whilst rightfully identifying the wall painting's use of Egyptian imagery, such as the roaming ibises, Witt's position assumes that the wall painting is an accurate representation of cult practices by treating the wall painting as a reliable example of documentary realism.³⁵ Although his assertions are not unfounded as they are, for instance, supported by the presence of *sistra* in the material record, Witt's approach takes

³² Hackworth Petersen 2016, 6.

³³ Apul. *Met*; Plut. *De Iside*; Hdt. 2.

³⁴ Witt 1977, 71.

³⁵ Witt 1977, 71.

the wall painting at face value and consequently ignores the impact of the interplay among Roman modes of visual representation and Egyptian imagery and style within *Isiac Ritual Worship* and its depiction of Isiac cult activities.

If Witt's use of the wall painting focuses on ritual identification, then Sharon Heyob's use is more concerned with identity itself.³⁶ In *The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Greek and Roman World* (1975), Heyob presents *Isiac Ritual Worship* as evidence, along with Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and various inscriptions, for the participation of women in Isiac cult activities.³⁷ In a similar vein, Frank Snowden Jr., in his seminal work *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970), also centres his discussion of the painting around participant identity, acknowledging the presence of black officiants in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.³⁸ Snowden ties their inclusion to the cult's popularity with Ethiopians in their native lands and in Egypt, arguing that immigrants from Ethiopia to Roman Italy would continue their interest in the cult of Isis.³⁹ Nevertheless, he acknowledges the difficulties in determining ethnicity from the figures' roughly sketched facial features alone.⁴⁰ Snowden's approach, as with Witt's and Heyob's, focuses primarily on content and ritual practice without examining how the wall painting relates to other examples of Roman domestic art.

In his updated analysis of the painting in *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (2010), Snowden includes a brief discussion of interplay among attire, fabric colour, and skin tone within *Isiac Ritual Worship*. He reasserts the idea of clear racial differentiation

³⁶ Heyob 1975, 84.

³⁷ Heyob 1975, 84.

³⁸ Snowden 1970, 189.

³⁹ Snowden 1970, 189.

⁴⁰ Snowden 1970, 189.

in *Isiac Ritual Worship* with his observation that some of the figures are obviously intended as black and others as white but furthers this by including a short analysis of the formalistic elements of the composition.⁴¹ Snowden discusses how the artist ‘heighten[s] the dramatic effect’ of the wall painting by using the white linen tunics to emphasise the ebony skin of some devotees as a contrast with the other participants and ‘to enliven the scene.’⁴² Here Snowden moves away from solely using *Isiac Ritual Worship* as evidence for ritual practice and begins to consider iconographical choices in the wall painting and their effect.

Most recently, in *Egypt in Italy: Visions of Egypt in Roman Imperial Culture* (2015), Molly Swetnam-Burland raises the crucial point that *Isiac Ritual Worship* can serve as evidence for ritual (and by extension female cult participation or racial demographics) or idealised ideas of ritual. However, she counters this by stating that any approach to the wall painting must think ‘carefully about the conventions of wall painting as a medium and their function as part of a private home’s décor.’⁴³ This call to action underscores the importance of situating *Isiac Ritual Worship* within and understanding its relevant contexts before using the wall painting as evidence for a larger argument.

In outlining the scholarship concerning *Isiac Ritual Worship* it becomes apparent that modern commentators have approached the wall painting primarily as reliable evidence for ritual participation and activity (with the exception of Swetnam-Burland) and it has received a largely cursory treatment. Although all the scholars acknowledge the use of Egyptian imagery, none investigate its use in a Roman medium by scrutinising

⁴¹ Snowden 2010, 225.

⁴² Snowden 2010, 225.

⁴³ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 13.

how it is expressed in the wall painting. In my next chapter, I address these instances of cross-cultural exchange as they appear in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

CHAPTER III

RITUAL PERFORMERS, RITUAL DRESS

Isiac Ritual Worship uses a Roman medium, the domestic wall painting, for apparently Egyptian subject matter and Egyptian imagery, produced and subsequently consumed in a Roman context, Roman Italy. This chapter is primarily concerned with investigating this relationship between Roman and Egyptian imagery as represented in the performers resplendent in their ritual attire. To do so, I address individuals and groups of figures, such as the devotees, in turn starting with those who have primarily Egyptian characteristics, then Roman, and finally those figures in which Roman and Egyptian elements coalesce. From this examination emerge nuances in the different instances of Roman and Egyptian imagery intermingling in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

Egyptian Imagery

In *Isiac Ritual Worship* there are three black male officiants who display, individually and collectively, Egyptian elements. This group consists of the black officiant standing on the right of the central canopic priest, holding a *sistrum* in his right hand; the black priest who stands in the centre of the composition, between two groups of devotees, with his right arm outstretched and an indiscernible object in his left hand; and the black priest who, slightly bent forwards, tends to the fire on the ritual altar. All three of the priests have shaved heads and wear a long white robe that comes across the chest underneath the arms and ties on the front of their chests in a knot known as an Isiac knot. This leaves their shoulders bare, and the garment hangs down to their equally bare feet.

Multiple ancient sources confirm that this was standard attire for Isiac officiants.⁴⁴ For example, Apuleius writes in the later second century CE, ‘the men’s heads were completely shaven... the leading priests also clothed in brilliant-white linen drawn tight across their breasts and hanging down to their feet.’⁴⁵ Each element in Apuleius’ description of an Isiac priest corresponds with the representation of these three priests in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, from the shaven heads and Isiac knots to the long white robes, therefore illustrating that these officiants are clad in Isiac ritual attire.

Legislation from Graeco-Roman Egypt, the *Idios Logos*, corroborates Apuleius’ account and the wall painting’s representation, and reveals that the figures are clad in Isiac ritual attire as it existed in Egypt. The *Idios Logos* decreed that priests in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt were forbidden from having long hair and wearing woollen dress.⁴⁶ As these are two of the primary characteristics of the black officiants in *Isiac Ritual Worship* the dress of these figures is in keeping with Ptolemaic and Roman law in Egypt. Adherence to this edict in the wall painting’s representations of the three black officiants indicates that either this rule was followed outside of Egypt itself or it was so closely associated with Egyptian officiants that it became a visual shorthand for conveying male Egyptian priesthood. Regardless of which might be the case, the Ptolemaic origin of this legislation and its parallels with the attire of the black priests in *Isiac Ritual Worship* suggest that these figures should be read as Egyptian. Thus, with these figures we see an

⁴⁴ Croom 2002, 71.

⁴⁵ Apul. *Met.* 11.10, as translated by Croom (2002, 71). For more references to Isiac priests in ancient literature see: Apul. *Met.* 11.23, 11.24, 11.30; Joseph *AJ* 18.65; Plut. *De Iside.*; Porph. *De Abst.* 4.6-8; *SHA Comm.* 9.4; Strab. *Geography* 17.1.28-29; Suet. *Dom.*, 1.2; Tac. *Ann.* 3.74.

⁴⁶ Swetnam-Burland 2011, 337.

example of a simple incorporation of an Egyptian image, the priests in ritual attire, into a Roman medium.

As with the black officiants, the canopic priest in *Isiac Ritual Worship* follows Egyptian representational models for ritual attire. Splendid in a white robe, the canopic priest has a shaven head, lighter skin, and stands at the top of a stone flight of stairs. His clothing is entirely white and draped around him, effectively covering his entire body including his arms. In his covered hands, he carries a water jug, or a canopic jar, held slightly aloft, full of water from the sacred river of the Nile.⁴⁷ Owing to cracking in the painting the priest's feet are partially obscured. However, it appears that the priest is barefoot as he stands at the top of the temple.⁴⁸

Parts of Apuleius' description of the Isiac priestly attire correlate with certain elements of the canopic officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship* implying a connection between the officiant and Egyptian ritual characteristics. The officiant's head, as with the three black priests, is shaven and the white robe hangs to his feet. However, with his covered shoulders and the absence of an Isiac knot, the officiant's garment corresponds neither with Apuleius' description nor with representations of other Egyptian officiants in *Isiac Ritual Worship* discussed so far. Nonetheless, three first-century CE granite columns from the Iseum Campense in metropolitan Rome offer iconographical parallels for this style of Isiac ritual dress elsewhere in Roman Isiac art. The columns depict half life-sized officiants facing towards each other in pairs around the circumference carrying various

⁴⁷ Cheek 2013, 1 October.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, all the officiants in this scene appear to be barefoot, contrary to representations of Isiac priests from the Iseum of Pompeii in which the officiants wear light coloured sandals. See Moormann (2016) for a recent publication which includes illustrations of these officiants.

ritual implements (fig. 4).⁴⁹ On each column two individuals carry Osiris Canopus jars in outstretched arms covered by diagonal and regular raised ridges. These suggest folds of drapery, indicating that these figures are covered fully in ritual robes. Although the jars are a different shape, the length of the robes and how they cover the priests' arms, coming across the front of the chest is directly comparable to the robe worn by the canopic figure in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. The original location of these columns in an Iseum confirms the figures' dress as Isiac. In turn, this indicates that the canopic priest in *Isiac Ritual Worship* also wears a style of Isiac ritual attire.

A statue of an Isiac officiant discovered on the sunken island of Antirrhodos in the harbour of Alexandria suggests that this same style of dress is found in, and thus is associated with, Graeco-Roman Egypt (fig. 5).⁵⁰ Dated to between the first-century BCE to second century CE the granodiorite statue stands at 1.22 meters tall and was excavated from a small Iseum, like the one illustrated in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.⁵¹ Made during the Ptolemaic or Roman period, the statue was produced in the location it was consumed in, Egypt. Like the figures on the columns from the Iseum Campanese, the statue holds an Osiris Canopus jar and wears a robe that stretches down to the ankles and covers the hands. F. Goddio and A. Masson-Berghoff note that this imagery, although potentially consistent with Egyptian ritual practice, appears to have been popularised during the Roman period.⁵² Regardless, this along with the figures on the Iseum Campanese columns bearing Egyptian ritual implements, shows that the canopic figure in *Isiac Ritual*

⁴⁹ Rouillet 1972, 99.

⁵⁰ Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 228.

⁵¹ Butler 2007, 193; Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 228.

⁵² Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 228

Worship likely was associated with Egypt (even if it is closely linked to the Graeco-Roman period in Egypt) as an Egyptian figure in Egyptian ritual attire of the Graeco-Roman period. Thus, Egyptian imagery is used again in the representation of a ritual performer in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

Roman Imagery

In contrast, the devotees in *Isiac Ritual Worship* wear obviously Roman attire. Many of the figures are indistinct, but those shown in detail (the majority of whom are female) are dressed in clothing that is consistent with clothing in Roman Italy.⁵³ The female devotees wear a *palla* over a *stola*, as seen in a first-century CE marble statue of a Roman matron from the Tiber Island in Rome (fig. 6).⁵⁴ Although the *palla* is pulled up over the head of the statue acting as a veil, it suggests how the cloth was worn around the body, unpinned, and could be pulled underneath the right arm and draped over the left like a toga.⁵⁵ As this is the same method of drapery seen on the female devotees it is evident that their clothing is Roman.

From looking at these officiants and these devotees we could conclude that all of the figures in *Isiac Ritual Worship* likely were perceived as Egyptian or Roman in character, with the elements operating side by side within the image. However, the remaining two officiants in the wall painting paint a more complicated picture of the interaction between Egyptian and Roman imagery in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

⁵³ The presence of all these women is taken by Sharon Heyob to indicate female participation in Isiac cult activities in Herculaneum during the first century CE. Heyob 1975, 84.

⁵⁴ Edmonson and Keith 2008, 1-17.

⁵⁵ Cleland, Davies, and Llewellyn-Jones 2007, 136.

Coalescence

The light-skinned priest who stands to the right of the priest tending to the ritual flames suggests the impact of Roman modes of representation on Egyptian ritual attire.⁵⁶ The priest holds long thin objects, one in each hand. His head is shaven in correspondence with the black officiants, canopic priest, and *Idios Logos* edict. Over the top of his tunic the priest wears a white fringed length of cloth draped over his left shoulder, then under his right arm and gathered over his left arm and slung across his left shoulder forming a multi-garmented ritual attire that differs substantially from both the black and canopic officiants. A small wall painting of an Isiac officiant dating between 62-79 CE found in the House of D. Octavius Quartio in Pompeii offers a comparison for this from Isiac art in the material record (fig. 7).⁵⁷ The figure of the officiant appeared opposite the personification of summer, on the south wall of room *f*, surrounded by the white background of the larger decorative scheme.⁵⁸ Standing alone as the focal point within a painted architectural frame, the officiant is small and, unfortunately, not well preserved.⁵⁹ He wears ritual attire typical for a priest to Isis, complete with a shaven head, white robes, *sistrum* and *situla*.⁶⁰ From the bulkier shape of the upper garment compared

⁵⁶ Owing to the fading of the colours in *Isiac Ritual Worship* it is difficult to ascertain whether this priest was intended to be white, especially in the way we currently define white as a racialised category. I have chosen to use 'light-skinned' to describe the priest's skin tone as Snowden (1970, 189) was correct in his assertion that it is hard to define 'ethnicity' or 'race' from this single characteristic.

⁵⁷ Swetnam-Burland 2011, 339. Close examination of *Isiac Ritual Worship* reveals that all the officiants in the wall painting wear white robes with fringing. Fringing is an element of dress rarely found within Roman Italy outside of Isiac or Egyptian contexts. Thus, it follows that fringing is a signifier for Egypt or Egyptian styles of dress.

⁵⁸ Clarke 1991, 196.

⁵⁹ Swetnam-Burland 2011, 339.

⁶⁰ Swetnam-Burland 2011, 339-340. At the time of excavation, now faded letters identified this figure as AMVIVS AV TINVS TIBVRS. Scholars have translated this inscription in a number of ways

to the straight lower section it appears that there is a large piece of cloth draped across the top part of the priest's body, with a tunic beneath it much like the officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. Such similarities show that garments worn by the officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship* were associated by a Roman audience with Isiac cult practice.

Another close parallel for this type of drapery comes from an Egyptian diorite statue of a striding official, dating around 151/0 BCE in the Ptolemaic era (fig. 8).⁶¹ A male official wears an ensemble of three garments: a sleeved tunic closest to his body, a long-fringed skirt (comparable with the fringing present at the bottom of all the officiants clothing in *Isiac Ritual Worship*) over that, then a shawl.⁶² The shawl is draped around the upper half of the statue's body, covering the left arm and passing around the back and underneath the right arm to the left fist in which it is gathered.⁶³ Although the gathering point of the shawl differs between the officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship* and the statue from Alexandria, over the arm and in the hand respectively, the diorite statue shows the use of this type of shawl and drapery in Egyptian official attire of the Graeco-Roman period. Clad in a similar shawl the officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship* probably adheres to an Egyptian model for Isiac ritual attire.

Although in all likelihood this arrangement has an Egyptian precedent, the draping of the shawl around the officiant's torso in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is reminiscent of the drapery found in representations of the Roman toga in Roman Italy. A mid-first-century CE statue from Herculaneum (now known through a modern illustration) shows a

such as a *tria nomina* or descriptive phrase and nomen, but Molly Swetnam-Burland asserts that it should be read as 'the distinguished alumnus Tiburs.'

⁶¹ New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 65.119. Hill 2016, October.

⁶² New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 65.119.

⁶³ New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 65.119.

man wearing the early imperial style of toga (fig. 9), which hangs in fashion similar to the cloth seen hanging around the officiant.⁶⁴ The cloth is draped over the left shoulder and comes diagonally down the back and underneath the right arm and then over the left shoulder again. It appears to bunch up into tighter folds in front of the figure, creating a noticeable mass of textile: a part of a toga arrangement known as the *balteus*.⁶⁵ How the *balteus* gathers is similar to the rolls of cloth that come across the officiant's front and is remarkably dissimilar to the drapery on the diorite statue. As the *sinus* and *umbo* are noticeably absent from the officiant's attire, two other key characteristics of the Roman toga, it is unlikely that the officiant wears a Roman toga (although it should be noted that the positioning of the officiant's arm obscures the place in which an *umbo* would fall). Instead, it is more likely that the attire of the officiant is based on the Egyptian precedent but its execution, probably, is influenced by the representational manner of togas in Roman art. Thus, this rendering of this officiant brings a more complex interaction between Egyptian and Roman imagery into the fore.

A second officiating figure that combines Roman with Egyptian elements is the female officiant standing at the top left of the temple steps. She is identifiable as female owing to her long hair, as female officiants were not bound by the same rules that governed the hair length of male officiants.⁶⁶ The long white robe which hangs down to her feet is similar to other Egyptian ritual robes represented in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. However, in contrast to the figures I previously discussed, this female officiant wears additional garments that are generally atypical for standard Roman and Egyptian

⁶⁴ Cleland, Davies, and Llewellyn-Jones 2007, 192.

⁶⁵ Cleland, Davies, and Llewellyn-Jones 2007, 192.

⁶⁶ Heyob 1975, 84.

representation of Isiac priestesses. A blue length of cloth with red borders, similar to the Roman mantle, is slung across the officiant's body and a similar length of cloth (either connected to the first or not) hangs around the left shoulder. Typically, priestesses of Isis are associated with a type of dress where a cloak is worn over a long tunic, tied in the front in an Isis knot. There are many examples of Isiac female officiants wearing garments tied in the front in this way, such as a first-century CE stone funerary relief, from Athens, showing an Isiac priestess (fig. 10). This corresponds with representations of Isis herself, as seen in a statue of her from the Pompeiian Iseum (fig. 11) and a terracotta statue of Isis, from Ptolemaic Egypt (fig. 12).⁶⁷ Additionally, representations of female officiants with Isis knots are found from within Roman Italy. Wall paintings from the arc passages of the Ekklesiasterion (a long room and gathering area at the back of the sanctuary) at the Pompeiian Iseum illustrate Isiac priestesses atop candelabra holding various offering trays or Isiac ritual implements (fig. 13). Regardless of these objects, each of the priestesses wears a robe tied at the front in an Isis knot, identifiable by the V-shape it creates around their necks and wide flowing pleat below the knots. Therefore, it is apparent that the female officiant's attire in *Isiac Ritual Worship* does not confirm to these standard representations of Isiac priestesses from Roman, Greek, or Egyptian contexts.

How the female officiant wears this length of cloth is more consistent with the Roman way of wearing a mantle found in Roman Italy. The Roman mantle or *palla* was worn by women throughout the Roman Republic and Empire, consisting of a large piece

⁶⁷ Tran Tam Tihn 1973, 198-199; Fischer 1994, 90; Croom 2002, 115; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 59.

of cloth which covered the body from shoulder to knee or lower calf.⁶⁸ In the Republican period the *palla* was draped over the left shoulder, brought around the back and then flung over the left shoulder, or alternatively brought over the right shoulder to conceal most of the figure.⁶⁹ Smaller versions of the mantle, like the one shown on this figure, were worn like a wrap thrown around the person.⁷⁰ One could interpret the difference between the Ptolemaic statues from Egypt as compared to the officiant in the Roman *Isiac Ritual Worship* as a consequence of the location of production and conclude that officiant is wearing a Roman mantle on top of standard Egyptian ritual attire.

A funerary portrait illustrating the deceased as an Isiac priestess, from a mausoleum at Oxyrhynchos, Egypt and dating to around the third century CE both supports and complicates the suggestion that the priestess' dress is the result of a mixture of Egyptian and Roman garments (fig. 14).⁷¹ Covering the female figure is a white robe like the one seen on the female officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. On top, she wears a cloak tied at her chest, slung over which is a long-fringed mantle, an accessory for the Roman cult of Isis, with a small fabric supported garland on top of that, coming up and over her left shoulder and under her right arm.⁷² The arrangement of the mantle and garland in this figure parallels the placement of the blue and red cloth on the female officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, with a long length falling over the left shoulder and piece of cloth worn crosswise. Although made at a much later date than the wall painting,

⁶⁸ Croom 2002, 89.

⁶⁹ Croom 2002, 89.

⁷⁰ Croom 2002, 91.

⁷¹ Louvre, E 26928. Vandier 1972, 190-192.

⁷² Vandier 1972, 190-192.

this funerary portrait may suggest that the blue and red cloth that the female officiant wears is in fact two separate garments, a mantle and wrap. Unfortunately, owing to the state of preservation of *Isiac Ritual Worship* and its light sketchy style of painting it is impossible to know for certain. However, as these garments juxtapose the Ptolemaic statues of Isis with their Isis knots and conform to Roman styles of dress, they suggest that the lengths of blue and red cloth worn by the female officiant are likely an invention and style of Isiac ritual attire originating from Roman Italy. As with the priest, the priestess' garb may expose another instance of the combination of Egyptian and Roman imagery within a single figure in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. Alongside the Egyptian and Roman attire in the wall painting, through these examples we can begin to see a complex picture of how Roman and Egyptian imagery coalesces in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

Conclusions

Examining the various figures and their ritual attire in *Isiac Ritual Worship* reveals that Roman and Egyptian imagery combine in three distinct ways. The first is the inclusion of Egyptian imagery, as seen in the attire of the black officiants and canopic officiant, in a Roman medium. The second is having this imagery alongside distinctly Roman imagery, such as the devotees in Roman dress. Finally, the third is the comingling of Egyptian imagery and Roman execution in a single figure, namely the officiant holding the long stick-like objects and the female officiant. His attire is in the Egyptian style. However, the unusual bunching around his arm, not seen in other Egyptian or Roman representations of this style of dress, recalls the Roman toga. Her attire is largely Egyptian too, yet the inclusion of the mantle, a Roman style garment, indicates the attire

also may include an item of Roman garb. Thus, it appears that here we see two examples of the depiction of Egyptian imagery being influenced by Roman representation.

This division of imagery, Egyptian, Roman, and examples of coalescence, communicates some important points concerning the figures represented. There is a clear distinction between those in Roman ritual attire and those in Egyptian dress from Graeco-Roman Egypt. The figures in Roman ritual attire, the devotees, have a secondary role in the ritual proceedings observing the ritual from the side-lines (many are not even illustrated clearly, indicating their lesser importance). The officiants in Egyptian ritual attire, on the other hand, take on a leading role in the ceremony. It appears that Egyptian ritual attire signifies ritual authority and status. Perhaps some figures are intended to be read as Egyptian. However, this is impossible to assert with any certainty. Just as likely, these figures are Roman, or Egyptians now considered as Roman in the Roman Empire's post-annexation of Egypt, who don the obviously Egyptian garb to connote their ritual identity. Additionally, the confluence of Egyptian and Roman elements in the officiant and female officiant suggests that the painters of *Isiac Ritual Worship* were drawing on previous models of representation. Perhaps they too were Roman, but held an intimate knowledge of Isiac cult practice, which enabled them to marry together Roman and Egyptian aspects of dress.

CHAPTER IV

RITUAL OBJECTS, RITUAL SETTING

As with the performers and their attire, the ritual objects and setting in *Isiac Ritual Worship* paint a complicated picture of the combination of Roman and Egyptian elements in the wall painting. In this chapter, I again look at the relationship between how Roman and Egyptian imagery is represented and mixed in both the implements used in the ritual scene and the setting that those actions take place in.

Ritual Objects

Other features of *Isiac Ritual Worship* that either present Egyptian imagery or combine their use with Roman imagery are the ritual implements, namely the *sistra*, *situla*, and the canopic jar. Many of the officiants and a few devotees clutch *sistra* in their hands. These objects are akin to metal rattles that officiants and devotees shook during Isiac rituals, adding an aural component to the proceedings.⁷³ Totalling five at the final count, these are Egyptian elements within *Isiac Ritual Worship*. All of the *sistra* in *Isiac Ritual Worship* are represented in a sketch-like manner, in keeping with the delicate application of paint throughout the wall painting, yet in shape and form they are consistent with examples of *sistra* from the material record, as seen with *sistra* found in Roman Italy (especially Pompeii) and Dynastic Egypt respectively (fig. 15 and 16).⁷⁴ Their adherence to the Egyptian examples confirms them as Egyptian features in *Isiac Ritual Worship*.

⁷³ Apul. *Met.* 11.4, 12.

⁷⁴ British Museum, EA 36310; Dal Maso 2013, 25.

This holds true for the *situla* in *Isiac Ritual Worship* as well. *Situla* are bucket-like vessels, perhaps used to transport sacred liquids. The female officiant holds one, the form of which is accordant in both size and shape with extant examples of *situla* in the material record. Take for example, a bronze incised *situla* found in Thebes, Egypt, dating to 30th Dynasty (fig. 17).⁷⁵ Earlier than *Isiac Ritual Worship*, this *situla* still bears the same rounded form and handle and, therefore, is concordant with the shape of the *situla* seen in the vessel in the female officiant's left hand.

Conversely, the jar held by the canopic officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is a ritual implement ubiquitous in Egyptian ritual practice, stretching back to Dynastic rule. However, its shape aligns more with a vase type found in Roman Italy, rather than with the Egyptian forms of the jar. In the wall painting, the canopic jar has a rounded body which tapers into a distinct neck before flaring out into the lip and rim of the jar. Generally, in both Egyptian and Roman representations officiants carrying this object type would hold a jar with the same rounded body and a lid in the shape of a human face, Osiris (fig. 18).⁷⁶ Known as Osiris Canopus, this form of Osiric representation has uncertain origins.⁷⁷ This specific jar type is linked with the Ptolemaic era of Canopus in Egypt and corresponds with the move in official religious practice away from worship of the Hellenistic god Serapis to more Egyptian forms of cult under Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222 BCE).⁷⁸ Osiris Canopus appears to have played an essential role in Egyptian

⁷⁵ Perdu 2012, 126-7.

⁷⁶ See also the statue of a canopic officiant recovered from the Bay of Alexandria (fig. 12) from Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 228. Swetnam-Burland 2015, 36; Gallo 2016, 81.

⁷⁷ Rouillet 1972, 99.

⁷⁸ Rouillet 1972, 99.

cults during the Roman Imperial period, with an especially close association with Isis.⁷⁹ Many of the Roman representations of officiants carrying jars, including the reliefs on the Iseum Campanese columns, confuse Osiris Canopus with canopic jars, suggesting perhaps an indiscriminate use of these objects.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, this still does not account for the shape of the jar in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, which clearly has a lip and rim rather than a lid.

A first-century CE marble relief from metropolitan Rome illustrates a vessel whose form is analogous to the jar in *Isiac Ritual Worship* (fig. 19). In the relief four figures dressed in ritual clothing process from left to right in honour of Isis. The second figure from the left, a man with a shaven head and a robe that covers his entire body, carries a large rotund jug.⁸¹ Completed by a pronounced spout, a curvilinear form sits atop the handle, perhaps that of a snake. These features indicate that it is a vessel intended for carrying liquids and thus in both use and form it is reminiscent of an *oinochoe*, a Graeco-Roman vase type (fig. 20).⁸² In scale, the jar in the relief is much larger than the golden jar carried by the officiant in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, whose size is more suggestive of a canopic jar. However, the shape of both vessels is directly comparable as they share the same rounded body and spout. This lends to the conclusion that although the jar in the canopic officiant's hands references an Egyptian ritual signifier, its incongruent shape intimates a representational shift from canopic jar to *oinochoe* as it is incorporated into a Roman wall painting.

⁷⁹ Rouillet 1972, 99; Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 228.

⁸⁰ Rouillet 1972, 99.

⁸¹ Toynbee 1969, 238; ThesCRA, s.v. "Rauchopfer" Plate 42.

⁸² Mannack 2012, 41.

As with the various examples of ritual dress throughout *Isiac Ritual Worship*, some Egyptian ritual objects, such as the *sistra* and *situla*, are consistent with Egyptian forms, whereas other Egyptian-seeming elements like the canopic jar are in fact Egyptian-looking elements. Thus, examining ritual implements affirms the complex mingling of Egyptian and Roman imagery in *Isiac Ritual Worship*'s iconography.

Ritual Setting

In *Isiac Ritual Worship* the setting presents a complicated example of the combined use of Roman and Egyptian imagery through individual features and the collective backdrop. This oscillation among Egyptian, Roman, and a combination of the two creates an ambiguous environment and locale. For instance, parsing elements from Roman Italy and Egypt in the temple façade in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is difficult as its simplistic representation prevents categorisation. The façade is a simple rectilinear shape, consisting of plain faded burnt orange walls interrupted by a rectangular doorway adorned with a red garland. The scale and form of the temple front is strikingly similar to the Pompeiian Iseum (fig. 21), which also has an isolated central flight of stairs leading up to the entryway with space on either side.⁸³ However, the temple in *Isiac Ritual Worship* does not have pilasters as the Pompeiian Iseum does, nor does it have a portico. An unusual deviation from typical Roman temple architecture, this omission implies that the temple is not intended to be Roman. The lack of a portico and the simple geometric structure around a doorway are features found in Ptolemaic Egyptian temple architecture,

⁸³ Moorman 2016, 109.

as with the Temple of Isis at Philae (fig. 22).⁸⁴ Nonetheless, without the presence of towering pylons and ornamentation in low relief it is difficult to designate this temple as Egyptian. If the façade cannot be comfortably described as either Roman or Egyptian this would seem to suggest that it is neither. However, I would argue that it may be interpreted as neither and both. Unlike many of the other features in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, the basic temple operates more as a neutral element that could be read as either Roman or Egyptian depending on the viewers. An apparently abstruse feature, the temple façade may operate as an unstable element in identifying the location of the scene as it can be supposed as introducing the possibility of multiple locales and compromises *Isiac Ritual Worship*'s purported realism.

In contrast, the 'horned' altar in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is primarily Egyptian in character yet may be informed by a local example. With its vertical angled protrusions, the altar clearly has Egyptian precedents.⁸⁵ Compared to other examples of altars in Roman wall paintings, for instance one represented in a wall painting from the Pompeiian Iseum (fig. 23), the form appears to be unusual.⁸⁶ The wall painting is a landscape with an officiant performing an offering in front of the sarcophagus of Osiris. The cubic Roman altar, on which the officiant performs his offering, lacks these horned protrusions, seeming to indicate that the altar in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is entirely based on an Egyptian structure. However, eighteenth-century drawings of the Pompeiian Iseum by Giovanni Battista Piranesi prove that its altar had the same form as the altar in *Isiac Ritual Worship*

⁸⁴ Dunning 1905, 198.

⁸⁵ A similar 'horned' altar is found in *Isiac Ceremonial Dance*.

⁸⁶ Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, 8570; ThesCRA, s.v. "Priesthoods of non-Roman traditions," Plate 15.

and must have degraded over time. A drawing of the site he produced in 1778 preserves some of the original forms of the altar as it shows an altar crowned by four ‘horns’ (fig. 24).⁸⁷ This does not refute the non-Roman character of the altar, yet it attests to the incorporation and use of this altar type within the Roman context. Creating an identifiable link between the wall painting and the Pompeiian Iseum through the altar, Piranesi’s drawings suggest that it is likely that the Iseum was used as a model for the temple compound in *Isiac Ritual Worship*. By perhaps linking the wall painting to features of Roman ritual practice encountered in everyday life, Piranesi’s drawings further complicate a definitive reading of the scene as Roman or Egyptian.

The sphinxes flanking the entryway on the other hand are decidedly Egyptian. Although lacking in detail, their presence in front of a temple is a common feature in Egyptian temple architecture (Dynastic, Ptolemaic, or Roman) as they serve as protective elements and indicators of liminality.⁸⁸ At the Iseum on the island of Antirrhodos in Alexandria, Egypt, where excavators discovered the statue of the canopic priest, two sphinxes were also found alongside the statue (fig. 24).⁸⁹ This configuration is strikingly similar to *Isiac Ritual Worship*, perhaps indicating that this composition had a Graeco-Roman Egyptian precedent in Isiac ritual practice. Nonetheless, the sphinxes in *Isiac Ritual Worship* operate as Egyptian imagery and perhaps suggest an Egyptian locale.

Beyond architectural structures, the setting in *Isiac Ritual Worship* is enhanced by the presence of flora and fauna intended to evoke a sense of Egyptianness. Ibises, of which there are four in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, are imagery commonly associated with

⁸⁷ The Morgan Library and Museum, Inv. 1979.41. Denison, Rosenfeld and Wiles 1993, no. 45.

⁸⁸ Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 232; Wilkinson 2017, 54.

⁸⁹ Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, 232.

Egypt and Isiac worship in the Roman Empire. They simultaneously signify that the temple precinct is sacred to Isis and work as distinct Egyptian imagery.⁹⁰ On either side of the temple are two date palms. Date palms were the most common palm in Egypt and are prevalent in Nilotic scenes found in Roman Italy.⁹¹ Their use in other scenes that represent or evoke Egypt shows the codified association between date palms and place.⁹²

Conclusions

In the scholarship there is much debate over the intended location of the setting. Swetnam-Burland asserts that the Egyptian imagery, such as the ibises in *Isiac Ritual Worship*, may indicate that the scene should be understood as taking place in Egypt.⁹³ Although the ibises do conjure up strong images of Egypt, their import is tempered by the ambiguous architectural structures, along with the Roman style dress of the devotees.

On the other hand, some scholars identify the setting as entirely Roman. Tran Tam Tihn proposes that *Isiac Ritual Worship* takes place in Herculaneum and is “the start of a procession, perhaps on the occasion of the Navigium Isidis.”⁹⁴ In contrast, Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price disagree with this assessment and doubt the realism of the ritual scene. They assert that *Isiac Ritual Worship* is “an ideal version of Isiac

⁹⁰ Beard, North and Price 1998, 303.

⁹¹ Versluys 2002, 264.

⁹² Bragantini 2012, 26.

⁹³ Swetnam-Burland 2015, 13.

⁹⁴ Translation author’s own. ThesCRA, s.v. “Priesthoods of non-Roman traditions,” 139. The Navigium Isidis was an annual Roman festival held in honour of Isis on 5th March. This celebration marked the beginning of the sea trade season. To gain the divine favour of Isis whilst at sea an unmanned vessel was piled with gifts and consecrated to the goddess. Spanu 2009, 6.

ceremonies to be compared with Apuleius' story, and not an actual commemoration of a feast held in Herculaneum."⁹⁵ However the Egyptian flora and fauna complicate the conclusion put forth by these scholars.

Rather than arguing that the location is either Roman or Egyptian, I argue that *Isiac Ritual Worship's* ambiguous setting may evoke both simultaneously. Whilst the ritual implements signify that the scene shows a rite to Isis, the combined use of Roman, Egyptian, and indefinite elements (the temple façade and canopic jar) constitutes a scene belied by Egyptianness and references to local Roman ritual. Consequently, this encourages interpretations of the setting as concurrently Egyptian, Roman, or both. As with ritual attire and implements, a close examination of each constituent part of the setting in *Isiac Ritual Worship* reveals a complex interaction between Roman and Egyptian elements resulting in a setting that encourages multiple interpretations.

⁹⁵ ThesCRA, s.v. "Priesthoods of non-Roman traditions," 139.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS: INTEGRATING *ISIAC RITUAL WORSHIP*

By looking closely at the Roman and Egyptian imagery used in the ritual attire, implements, and setting in *Isiac Ritual Worship* it becomes clear that the inclusion of Egyptian subjects in a Roman medium is neither simple nor consistent. Some elements are primarily Egyptian in origin (for instance, the attire of the black priests, *sistrum*, *situla*, and sphinxes) and their representation reflects this. Others are Roman, such as the dress of the devotees. The wall painting additionally includes figures, objects, and structures formed by a combination of Egyptian and Roman elements and precedents, as with the light-skinned and female officiants, golden jar, and temple façade. Thus, in *Isiac Ritual Worship* a more complicated relationship and interaction between Roman and Egyptian visual culture takes place. Examining ritual attire, implements, architectural elements, and setting exposes the complex process of coalescence taking place in the wall painting.

To return to Molly Swetnam-Burland's points about the status of objects with a discernible Egyptian character in Roman art historical discourse, the close analysis of *Isiac Ritual Worship* in this thesis has some important implications for why the combined Roman and Egyptian elements in the wall painting should be addressed in classical scholarship. Until recently, classical scholarship treated Egyptian-looking objects in Roman Italy as either religious or decorative imagery. Moreover, they remained 'distinctly other' in discussions of Roman art, given a cursory treatment but not fully examined in ancient art historical discourse.⁹⁶ Without situating *Isiac Ritual Worship* in said narrative using comparanda and a close visual analysis it would not be possible to

⁹⁶ Davies 2011, 354; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 12.

identify and determine that the wall painting may be an unreliable source of evidence for Isiac cult activities in Roman Italy. The innovative combination of Roman and Egyptian imagery into new forms, for instance the golden jar, ritual attire of the officiant with the long stick-like objects, and temple façade, suggests this. It follows that Egyptian-looking objects should be reconsidered and revisited as examples of Roman art within the canon of Roman art.

In conclusion, in *Isiac Ritual Worship* obviously Egyptian imagery and features are interwoven with clearly Roman imagery within a Roman wall painting, producing new and complex combinations of imagery and forms that draw upon associations with both Egypt and Roman Italy. Through fully investigating the relationship between Roman and Egyptian imagery in *Isiac Ritual Worship* it becomes apparent that ritual attire denotes a hierarchy of ritual identity. Meanwhile the ambiguous setting combined with the largely Egyptian ritual implements means that this ritual scene unfurls in a fantastical setting that can be read as Roman, Egyptian, or both. By treating *Isiac Ritual Worship* as an important example of Roman art within its own right, rather than a secondary piece of ritual or decorative evidence, we can draw important conclusions about what the wall painting communicates to us as a modern audience. It advances our understanding of how Egyptian art and ritual practice were assimilated into the Roman Empire during the first century CE, adding to the Empire's already rich multi-culturalism. Thus, as the cult of Isis and Egypt were integrated into Roman culture, so should we integrate Roman objects with Egyptian characteristics into our discussions of Roman art.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

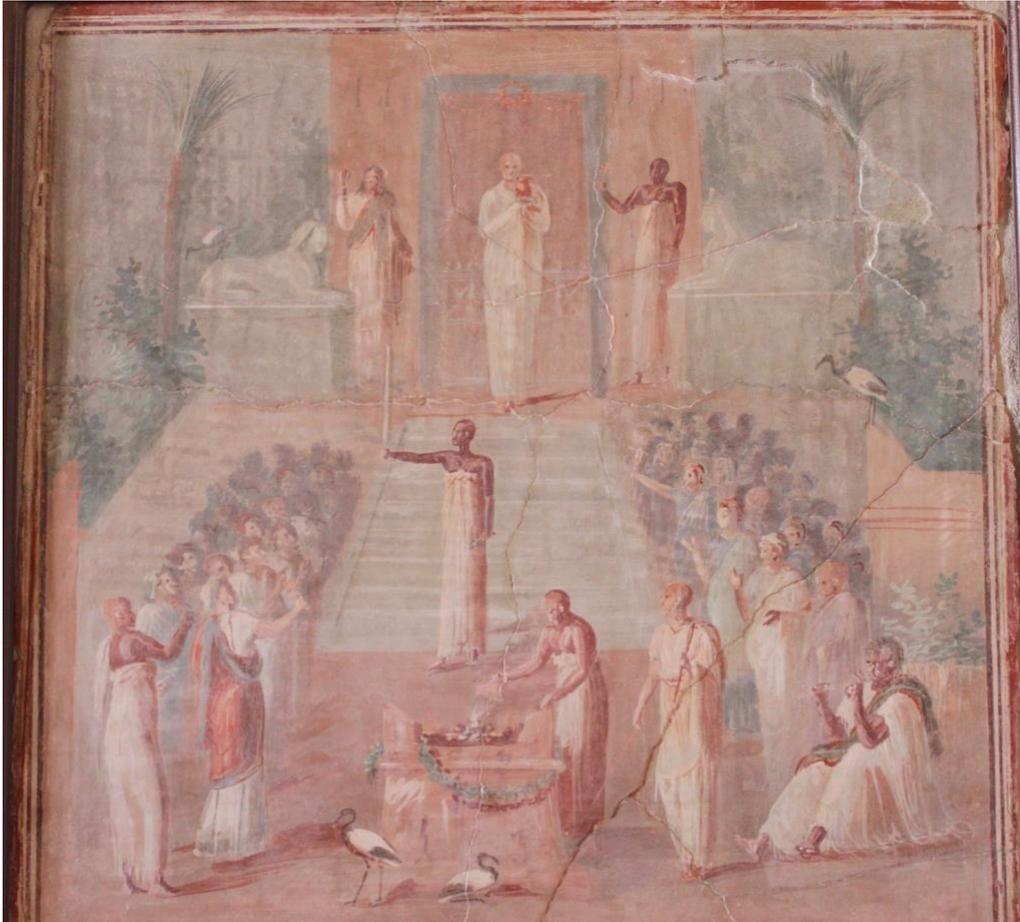


Figure 1: *Isiac Ritual Worship*, Herculaneum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, first century CE.
Photograph author's own



Figure 2: *Isiac Ceremonial Dance*, Herculaneum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, first century CE (Science Junkie Tumblr. “Isis Ritual Ceremony.” Last Accessed April 8, 2018)



Figure 3: *Montecitorio Obelisk*, 26th dynasty, brought to Rome in 10 BCE (Swetnam-Burland 2012, fig. 41.2)



Figure 4: *Granite column*, Iseum Campanese, Rome, first century CE
Photography author's own



Figure 5: *Officiant with Osiris-Canopus jar*, Alexandria, National Museum of Alexandria,
first century BCE – second century CE
(Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, fig. 67)



Figure 6: *Statue of a Roman matron*, wearing a stola and palla, Tiber Island, Rome, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, early first century CE (Edmondson, Jonathan & Keith, Alison 2008, fig. 1.2)



Figure 7: *Officiant to Isis*, room f, House of D. Octavius Quartio, Pompeii ca. 62-79 CE (Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, and J. Paul Getty Museum. 2004, Plate. 15)



Figure 8: *Official with pleated costume*, Egypt, 150-1 BCE
(The Met Museum. Last Accessed April 8, 2018)

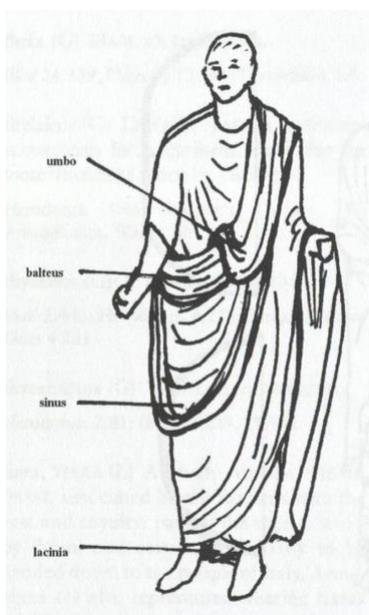


Figure 9: *Line drawing of statue of a man wearing the Early Imperial style toga*, Herculaneum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, mid-first century CE
(Cleland, Davies, and Llewellyn-Jones 2007, p. 192)



Figure 10: *Line drawing of priestess of Isis, relief from tombstone, Athens*
(Croom 2002, fig. 55)

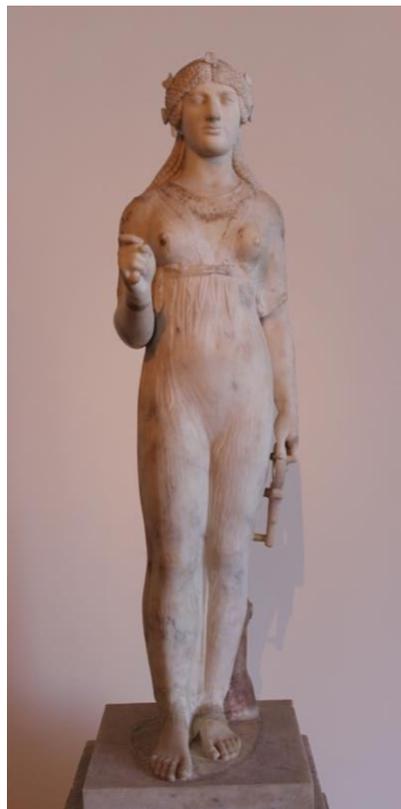


Figure 11: *Statue of Isis, dedicated by L. Cacilius Phoebus, sanctuary of Isis, Pompeii, mid-to-late first century CE*
Photography author's own



Figure 12: *Terracotta Isis*, Naukratis, Egypt, British Museum, third – second century BCE
(The British Museum, Last Accessed April 8 2018)



Figure 13: *Candelabra with priestess holding a situla and crocodile*, Temple of Isis, Pompeii, ca. 62-79 CE
Photography author's own



Figure 14: *Funerary statue of a priestess to Isis, Oxyrhynchos, Egypt, The Louvre, third century CE*
(The Louvre. Last accessed April 8, 2018)

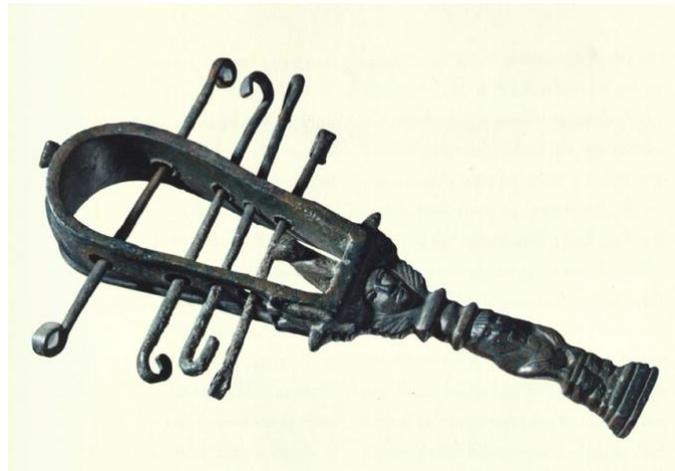


Figure 15: *Bronze sistrum with the image of the dwarf god Bes, Pompeii, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale*
(Dal Maso 2013, fig. 9)



Figure 16: *Sistrum*, Egypt, The British Museum, Late period
(The British Museum. Last accessed May 18, 2018)



Figure 17: *Situla with divine scene*, Thebes, Egypt, The British Museum, 30th
Dynasty
(The British Museum. Last accessed May 18, 2018)



Figure 18: *Canopic jar*, Pozzuoli, loc. Croce Campana, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, first century CE
(Gallo 2016, fig. 56)



Figure 19: *Marble relief of an Isiac procession*, (probably) Iseum, Campus Martius, Rome, first century CE
(Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, and J. Paul Getty Museum. 2004, Plate. 42)



Figure 20: *Chart of Greek pottery shapes* (after: Pedley 2007: fig. 6.72)
(Mannack 2012, fig. 3.1)



Figure 21: *Façade of the Temple of Isis, Pompeii, c. 62-79 CE*
(Moormann 2016, p. 109)

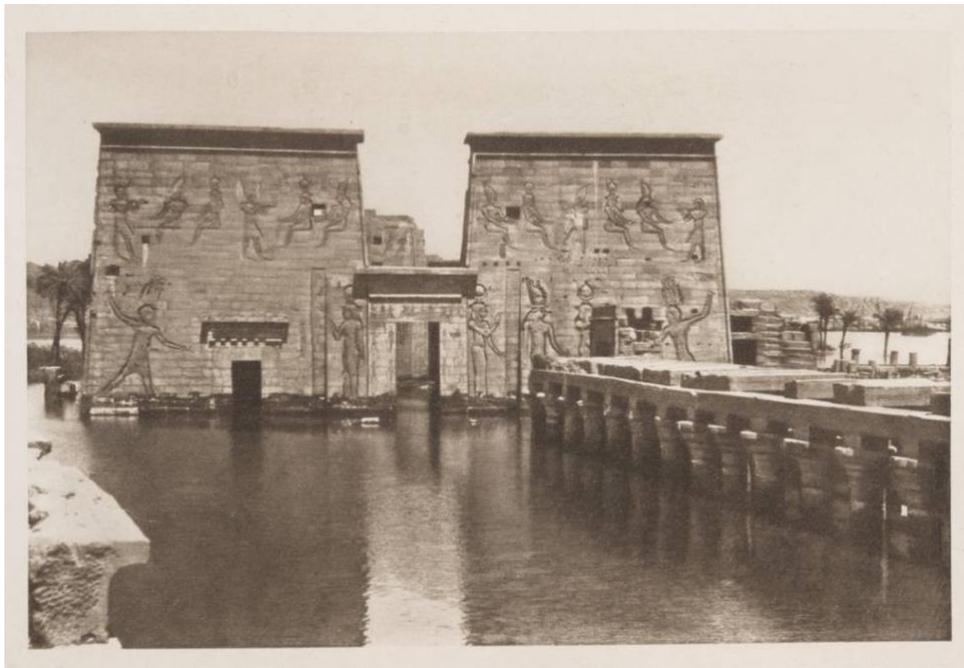


Figure 22: *Façade of the Temple of Isis, Philae, Egypt, 380-362 BCE*
(Dunning 1905, p.198)



Figure 23: *Landscape with ceremony in honour of Isis*, Temple of Isis, Pompeii, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, ca. 62-79 CE
Photography author's own

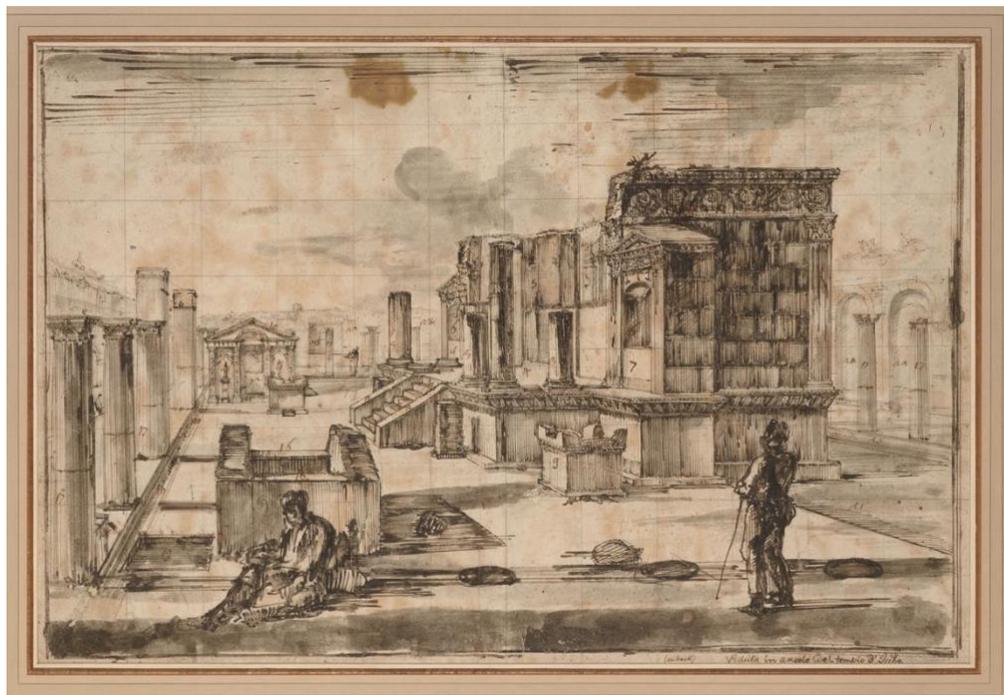


Figure 24: Piranesi, *drawing of the temple of Isis at Pompeii*, The Morgan Library and Museum, 1778
(The Morgan Library and Museum. Last accessed April 8, 2018)



Figure 25: *Pair of sphinxes*, Alexandria, National Museum of Alexandria, first century BCE
(Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p.232-233)

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