

In the early eighteenth century, Egypt was not only spatially, but also temporally a very distant land, myth-laden and for this very reason peculiarly fascinating. The Green Vault contains probably the most impressive testimony to the reception of ancient Egyptian art in the European Baroque: the *Altar of Apis* by Johann Melchior Dinglinger (Fig. 1).² In the years in which this large-scale jewelled work of treasure art was created, an unusually strong interest in the pharaonic art of Egypt can be noticed, originating from the Saxon-Polish court.

Johann Melchior Dinglinger and ancient Egypt

Although in design and construction the 195 cm-tall work of treasure art is influenced by the tradition of wall-mounted Christian altars, it artistically integrates the then knowledge of the world of the gods of ancient Egypt in an unprecedented abundance. The cabinet piece, which in 1738 was added to the Jewel Room of the Augustan Treasure Chamber in the Green Vault – by then already densely filled with magnificent and precious works of art – was the last work of the court jeweller Johann Melchior Dinglinger, who died on 6 March 1731. The *Altar of Apis* became a *sui generis* personal legacy of the ingenious jeweller, for it was created, like most of his cabinet pieces, without a commissioner. Dinglinger's exploration of the temporally distant myths and imagery of Egypt was thus the work of a sixty-six-year-old artist nearing death, who sought to capture in it the timeless wisdom of a culture committed to the cult of the dead. The *Altar of Apis* still bears witness to the high intellectual, artistic and technical skills of its creator. One testimony to this is the inscription that the court jeweller had placed on the base of the obelisk. On the left-hand side, it reads:

QUAE ANTIQUA AEGYPTUS STUPIT / SUPERBA MOLIMINA / NOVA
LUCE HOC OPERE SIST- / UNTUR COLLUSTRA / QOD / AD VETER-
UM MONUMENTO- / RUM FIDEM / NEC INDUSTRIAE PARCENS NEC
/ SUMPTIBUS

(freely translated as: Proud monuments that ancient Egypt admired live on, illuminated by new light, in this work, which, faithful to ancient monuments, and sparing neither diligence nor expense);

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THE SAXON BAROQUE AND THE FASCINATION WITH EGYPT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY¹

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1 The essay is based on the author's dissertation: D. Syndram, *Ägypten-Faszinationen. Untersuchungen zum Ägyptenbild im europäischen Klassizismus bis 1800* (Frankfurt a/M, Bern, New York, Paris, 1990) and the treatise D. Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption unter August dem Starken. Der „Apis-Altar“ Johann Melchior Dinglingers* (Mainz, 1999).

2 The first treatment of this topic was presented by the archaeologist R. Enking, *Der „Apis-Altar“ Johann Melchior Dinglingers. Ein Beitrag zur Auseinandersetzung des Abendlandes mit dem alten Ägypten* (Glückstadt–Hamburg–New York, 1939).



Fig. 1

The *Apis Altar* in its current position in the New Green Vault, Dresden State Art Collections

the inscription continues on the right-hand side:

INVENT STRUXIT ORNAVIT / POTENTISSIMI POLONIARUM / REGIS
/ FREDERICI AUGUSTI / PRIMUS OPERIS GEMMATI ARTI- / FEX / JO-
HANNES MELCHIOR DINGLING- / ER / DRESDAE / A D S MDCCXXXI

([was] conceived, erected and decorated [by] the first jeweller of the great king of Poland Frederick Augustus, Johann Melchior Dinglinger, Dresden, in the year of Salvation 1731).³

With Dinglinger's other major works, the *Altar of Apis* shares the uniqueness of its appearance, but also the fact that it was not created by royal commission, but from the creative will of the goldsmith and – above all – at his own financial risk. This showpiece of Baroque erudition, which certainly cost more to produce than a town palace in Dresden, first appears in connection with the Green Vault in an entry by the inspector Johann Adam Schindler in the journal of this collection: 'On 1 March 1738, the Royal Majesty gave a large cabinet piece by H. Dinglinger, presenting the Egyptian sacrifices and idolatry, into the secret custody of the Green Vault, and it is located in the Jewellery Room, on the table where the coffee table otherwise stood'.⁴

In narrative terms, the iconography underlying this precious work of treasure art is quite concrete (Fig. 2). The core of the abundance of images is the myth of Osiris, the Egyptian god of fertility and the underworld. The central image on the base shows Osiris lying on a bier. The engraved depiction is framed by two priests offering sacrifices to him. The deep niche above, which is engraved with hieroglyphic writing on gilded plates, is dedicated to the Apis bull, the earthly incarnation of the god Osiris, crossing the Nile on a barque. The sculptural figures are remarkable, especially the two crocodiles covered with countless diamonds, symbolising the two banks of the Nile. The large-format cameo of agate, probably cut by Christoph Hübner, represents Osiris, the father of the gods, this time depicted with a dog's head, being worshipped after his death by his wife Isis and other gods of the Egyptian pantheon. Finally, the round enamel painting above shows the transfigured sphere of the divine couple Isis and Osiris and their child Horus. Further small sculptural images of the gods can be found on the entablature at the foot of the 75 cm-tall obelisk. This one is an exact, small-scale reproduction of the ancient Egyptian monument erected in front of the Lateran in Rome in 1588. On its top rises a gold-enamelled ibis, the symbol of Thoth, the god of wisdom and deepest knowledge.

3 For the translation of the Latin inscriptions from the narrow sides of the base of the obelisk of the *Apis Altar*, cf. E. von Watzdorf, *Johann Melchior Dinglinger. Der Goldschmied des deutschen Barock* (Berlin, 1962), vol. 1, p. 269.

4 Inventories of the Green Vault, Journal of the Green Vault (1733–1782) fol. 48r; cf. also D. Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption unter August dem Starken. Der „Apis-Altar“ Johann Melchior Dinglingers* (Mainz, 1999), p. 3.



Fig. 2

Johann Melchior Dinglinger (design); Dinglinger workshop (goldsmith's work); Christoph Hübner (stone carving); Gottlieb Kirchner (sculpture), lower part of the Apis altar, 1731, Kehlheim stone, agate, silver, gilding, enamel, gemstones, pearls; height 204 cm, Dresden State Art Collections

The material and graphic sources of the *Altar of Apis*

This precious chamber piece in a singular way combines the knowledge of the religion and art of ancient Egypt that existed in Europe in the early eighteenth century. Yet how did this world of thought and form, which had been buried for millennia and was geographically almost inaccessible, reach the Elbe from the Nile? On the one hand, it was the jeweller's personal encounter with ancient Egyptian objects – and while he worked on the *Altar of Apis*, Johann Melchior Dinglinger had this very much at hand in Dresden. Some Aegyptiaca were already in the Electoral Art Chamber and in the Court Pharmacy, but with the transfer of ancient sculptures from the Royal Art Chamber in Berlin to the possession of Augustus the Strong between 1723 and 1726, examples of artworks of the pharaonic era came also into the Dresden collection of antiquities. Above all, however, it was the spectacular purchase of the estate of Prince Agostino Chigi plus 160 sculptures and 34 antiquities from the collection of Cardinal Alessandro Albani that made the electoral and royal collection of antiquities of Augustus the Strong one of the earliest, and at the same time largest collections of antiquities – and also ancient Egyptian collections – north of the Alps from 1728 onwards, for along with the Roman antiquities, numerous relics of pharaonic culture came to Dresden as well. The architect Baron Raymond Leplat, who for many years worked as art director and art buyer for Augustus the Strong and also arranged for the two Roman antique collections to be brought to Dresden, published them in a folio format in the *Recueil des marbres antiques* in 1733. There, he dedicated five of the large sheets to objects that he associated with Egypt. Indeed, there are motifs there that Johann Melchior Dinglinger also used for his jewelled work of art: the Apis bull, the ushabtis, which are very strange to Europeans, various depictions of a sphinx, as well as several images termed an 'Idol Egyptien', such as the god Thoth in the form of a baboon, Isis with the Horus boy, or a statuette of Osiris.⁵

Yet the publication of the newly acquired Aegyptiaca took place in 1733 and thus two years after the death of the great goldsmith. There exist also attributions on the copper engravings, but they are only very brief and imprecise, so these real objects were probably not the inspirational source for the *Altar of Apis*, which overflows with Baroque knowledge.

Johann Melchior Dinglinger gained his knowledge of Egyptian culture, art and religion from a source whose importance to the eighteenth century can hardly be underestimated; namely, he was probably the first to use the plates and interpretations of the engraving work *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, published by the Benedictine priest Bernhard de Montfaucon in fifteen large folio volumes between 1719 and 1724.

⁵ R. A. Díaz Hernández, 'Zur Entstehung des ägyptischen Museums in Deutschland: Von der fürstlichen Kunstkammer zum Ägyptischen Museumssaal', *Curiositas*, vol. 14–15 (2014–2015), pp. 64–65.



Fig. 3

Detail of the Apis altar,
canope, Dresden State Art
Collections

Montfaucon's work, which was scientifically annotated and provided with excellent quality engravings, corresponded to the antiquarian erudition of the early Enlightenment. In addition to numerous testimonies of Greco-Roman antiquity, it comprised almost all works of art known at the time to be ancient Egyptian. Montfaucon's panels feature mostly sculptures and works of small art and glyptic from European public and private collections. Some sheets, however, are also devoted to imaginative views of large Egyptian buildings. This compendium of antiquities became one of the most frequently used pictorial sources of the eighteenth century. Not only did it influence the design of the *Altar of Apis*, but it also had an impact on the numerous depictions of a sphinx that were created at the time, which increasingly found their way into eighteenth-century gardens as an indispensable mythical protector and symbol of nature, and at the end of the century still determined the forms of the popular Egyptianising products of Josiah Wedgwood's earthenware company.

In his explanations, Montfaucon represented an image of Egypt that, on the one hand, emphasised the Egyptian culture as the origin of Occidental thought, but on the other hand, denied any positive aesthetic qualities to pharaonic art. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, this view

was shared by the vast majority of the public interested in art and the leading art theorists – but not so much by artists like Dinglinger, who regarded Egypt as the archetype of knowledge, the epitome of the striving for eternity and the cult of the dead, but also as the starting point of mystical speculation. Dinglinger's 'translation' of the two-dimensional black-and-white pictorial models into coloured three-dimensional sculptures and canopies deserves special attention (Fig. 3). It is remarkable how the goldsmith succeeded in restoring an Egyptianised appearance to the already somewhat Europeanised depictions from Montfaucon's *recueils* (Fig. 4).

The Saxon Sphinx

At the time Dinglinger's *Altar of Apis* was created, ancient Egypt was definitely a sales model, almost *à la mode* in Saxony and at the Saxon-Polish royal court. Sphinx sculptures not only crowned the Elbe steps of the royal pleasure palace of Pillnitz near Dresden, built by Pöppelmann in 1720, but they also guarded the parks of Großsedlitz and Joachimstein. Ancient Egypt also found its way into the product range of the royal porcelain manufactory in Meissen at an early stage. In 1732, for example, the sculptor Johann Gottlieb Kirchner, who had probably already enriched the Obeliscus Augustalis, completed in 1721, with depictions of sphinxes and also worked closely with Dinglinger on the *Altar of Apis*, created sphinxes in porcelain. Even today, the porcelain collection of Augustus the Strong still contains large-format monster figures in the Egyptian style (Fig. 5).⁶ The earliest porcelain sphinxes created in Meissen can be found in several forms. They appear in the archives as 'Sfinxe', 'Spinxhe' or 'Spinxe'.⁷ They are usually made as pairs with their heads turned towards or away from each other. The 22 cm tall and 24 cm long creatures are among the first sculptural works made of porcelain and most probably go back to a model by the court sculptor Johann Gottlieb Kirchner. They rest in a slightly ascending position on volute-like curled plinths, each wearing a typical, close-fitting bonnet with the two pleated temple scarves reaching to chest level. In this, Kirchner transformed the ancient royal headdress imbued with the pharaoh's power, worn by a creature depicted as a hybrid between a lion and a man, into a fashionable female headdress, which in the case of the Obeliscus Augustalis was even crowned with a diadem set with precious stones. As a model master of the Meissen porcelain manufactory, Kirchner created two forms of Egyptianising works of art for the

6 Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption*, pp. 46–9. Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections, inv. no. P.E. 1872, P.E. 1874.

7 S. Wittwer, *Die Galerie der Meißner Tiere. Die Menagerie Augusts des Starken für das Japanische Palais* (Munich, 2004), p. 309.

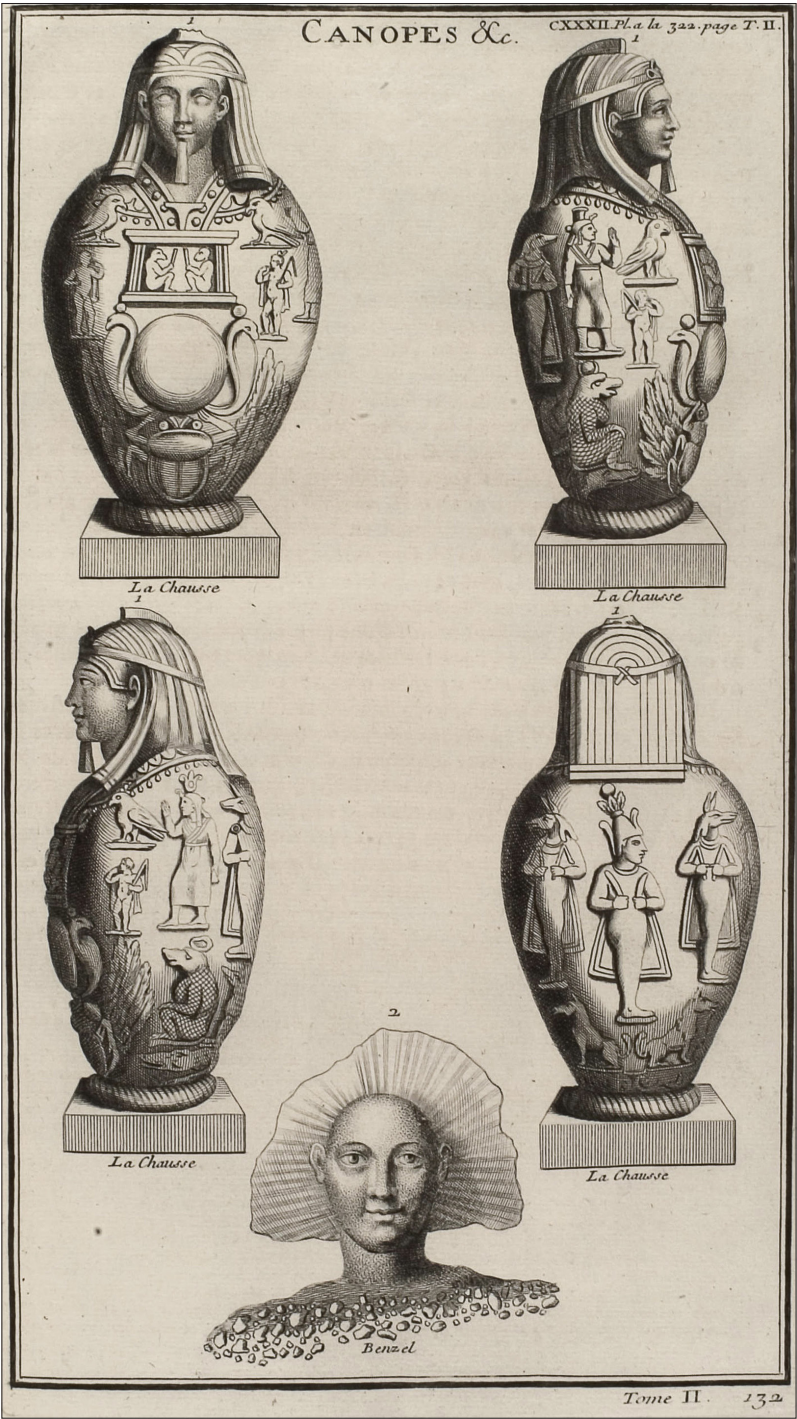


Fig. 4

Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures/ Antiquitas explanatione et schematibus illustrata*, Band 2,2, vol. CXXXII, Nr. 1, Paris 1722



Fig. 5

Johann Gottlieb Kirchner, *Resting sphinxes*, c. 1732, porcelain, painting: onglaze colours and gold, height ca. 21 cm, Dresden State Art Collections

royal porcelain collection. One of them are large, white-glazed sphinxes recorded in his model book in 1732.⁸ With the height of 51 cm, those hybrid creatures belong to the porcelain menagerie being created at the time for the pleasure palace of Augustus the Strong, the Japanese Palace. One of them is still in the Dresden porcelain collection today. The artistic conception of the large sphinx is related to that of the smaller ones; the figure features the same type of bonnet. However, Gottlieb Kirchner not only enlarged the dimensions considerably, he also changed the conception of the figure. The enigmatic, almost malicious look of the sphinx, the more ornamental conception of the pleated headscarf and the anthropomorphic design of the chest area largely withdraw the relationship to Egyptian art and make us think of the death-bringing, enigmatic sphinx from the Greek legend of Oedipus.

In contrast to the depictions of the Sphinx by Kirchner and other sculptors, which were found in increasing numbers in the Electorate of Saxony around 1730, two large canopic vases from the Meissen porcelain manufactory are even clearer evidence of the existence of a courtly interest in Ancient Egypt. The porcelain vessels with heights of 80.5 and 81.5 cm and diameters of 37.5 and 38 cm still have their original painting of brown oil paint and gold (Fig. 6).⁹ These extraordinary objects also belong to the 156 large-format vases, 132 animals and 120 life-size birds commissioned by Augustus the Strong in 1731 for the Japanese Palace in his manufactory in Meissen.

⁸ Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption*, pp. 48–9; „2 Sphinxen verändert ... groß“ Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections, inv. no. PE 5753.

⁹ Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption*, p. 50. Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections, inv. no. PE 5743.



Fig. 6

Johann Gottlieb Kirchner,
*Grotesque vase in canopic
 form*, c. 1735, porcelain, cold
 painting: red and gold, height
 80.4 cm, Dresden State Art
 Collections

An Egyptian cabinet in the Wilanów Palace

Another, today largely unknown testimony to Augustus the Strong's fascination with Egypt can be found in one of his royal buildings, the Wilanów Palace at the edge of Warsaw. The 'Polish Versailles' was built between 1677 and 1679 as the personal palace of the king of Poland Jan III Sobieski, the predecessor of Augustus the Strong. In 1730, the elector-king had succeeded in renting the magnificent palace complex for life from Maria Zofia Denhoffowa, its owner at the time.

Between 1730 and the death of Augustus the Strong in early February 1733, the elector-king had several rooms of the palace luxuriously refurbished, probably under the direction of the Polish court architect Johann

Sigismund Deybel. These included the Great Dining Hall in the south wing and two cabinets in the immediate vicinity of the royal bedroom. The two cabinets were each given a thematic decoration. One of these small private rooms was furnished as a Chinese cabinet. The other, a corner room that served as the royal dressing room, was given a clear Egyptian wall decoration with stucco work, sculptural carvings and paintings set into the wall.¹⁰ The lime green and light grey version of the wood panelling, restored in colour after the restoration in 1997, gives the small room an atmosphere that is as serene as it is majestic.

Above the doors of the Egyptian cabinet, there are two different depictions of the Egyptian sphinx which, according to the restorers, were possibly part of the room decoration already under King Jan III and could thus be dated to the late seventeenth century. One of them is a reclining sphinx made of gilded stucco, with a putto astride its back. This type originated in the garden of the Palace of Versailles. In Wilanów, however, this reclining sphinx with a putto was somewhat enriched, for the sphinx holds an incense vase in its right hand as a sign of worship of the gods. The putto, in turn, holds a golden image of the many-breasted Ephesian Diana, a symbol of all-encompassing nature, who in the Baroque period was directly associated with the Egyptian goddess Isis. The second sphinx form is also made of stucco; it is a very feminine hybrid creature depicted *en face*, wearing a clearly Egyptian pleated headcloth, crowned by two putti with flowering branches. Like the supraport sculpture, the murals painted against a gold background playfully refer to symbols of Isis or the Ephesian Diana and thus to the generative forces of nature. Particularly significant for this early reception of Egypt, however, are the austere Egyptian heads that were placed below the highly rectangular murals above the plinth zone and were otherwise only depicted again in this form towards the end of the eighteenth century. Their evenly cut faces are framed by strict pleated headscarves, for the time of origin distinctly 'Egyptian'. The long tresses of hair on the heads, however, are twisted into a typical Isis knot below the chin. The cabinet, which was decorated by artists commissioned by Augustus the Strong and belonged to the ruler's intimate sphere of life, unmistakably indicates that the elector-king of Saxony and Poland must have had a more than superficial interest in the mythical world of the Egyptian gods in the last years of his life. Perhaps Dinglinger had once again rightly speculated with his *Altar of Apis* that his royal patron would buy the outrageous cabinet piece – but then his death intervened.

Other sources of early Baroque Egyptomania

Curiosity about Egyptian art and culture was quite widespread at the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, this was particularly true of

¹⁰ Syndram, *Die Ägyptenrezeption*, pp. 47–9, Fig. p. 51.

the monumental architecture of the Nile country, for the fascination with the huge buildings of Egyptian antiquity mentioned by Herodotus and later travel writers had taken hold not only of Montfaucon, to lead him to create imaginative pictorial depictions: at about the same time as the French Benedictine priest, the architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach dealt with this exciting subject in his *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*, published in Vienna in 1721. His suggestive fantastical views of Egyptian monumental architecture gave inspiration for Egyptianising designs to later generations of artists, including Giovanni Battista Piranesi and the ‘revolutionary architect’ Étienne-Louis Boullée. The text section of Fischer von Erlach’s engraving, in which Egyptian architecture was treated precisely and without prejudice according to the state of research at the time, is one of the founding writings of architectural historiography. In addition, there is an apotheosis of various sphinx depictions in the garden of Prince Eugene’s Belvedere in Vienna, completed in 1726/1727 by the horticulturalist Dominique Girard.

It was the Enlightenment’s progressive thirst for knowledge that intensified the interest in Egyptian culture at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The new knowledge about pharaonic Egypt was to gradually override the traditional, mystifying image of that land, whose most impressive proponent in the seventeenth century was the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher, who worked in Rome and published energetically. The general need for objective information was met by travel reports, which were published in increasing numbers in the first half of the century. In addition to Paul Lucas (1714) and Benoît de Maillet (1735), it was above all the critical and detailed account by Richard Pococke (1743) and the superbly illustrated engraving work by Frederic Ludwig Norden (1755). While Fischer von Erlach’s fanciful pictorial depictions enlivened the architectural dreams of the eighteenth century, the latter two travel descriptions of the country on the Nile contained unusually accurate depictions of Egyptian architectural forms. Both authors, the English theologian Pococke and the Danish captain Norden, travelled the Nile Valley in the 1730s, Pococke subsequently going on to Palestine and Greece.

Pococke was the first to publish his travel report, which he did in 1743 under the title *A Description of the East*. He had initially started his work as a treatise on the generally unknown Egyptian architecture and later expanded it to include informative topographical descriptions. The book, which was influential in the development of the image of Egypt in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, was frequently reprinted in the following decades and translated into various languages. It was one of the indispensable source works for the researchers of the era, and also for the artists. Winckelmann and Caylus drew on Pococke’s explanations to support their own theses on ancient Egyptian art. On 76 plates of very different quality, Pococke depicted, with an almost

archaeological precision, the ground plans and elevations of pharaonic buildings as well as their architectural details. Yet his extensive descriptions of buildings seemed more important to his contemporaries than these scholarly illustrations.

While in Pococke's travel description the text outweighed the illustrations, in Frederick Ludwig Norden's *Voyage d'Égypte et de Nubie* it was the 150 outstanding, full-page copperplate engravings based on the artistically gifted Dane's own drawings that had an impact on the European fascination with Egypt even beyond General Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798 to 1801. The plates show not only ancient Egyptian architecture, but also the entire oriental environment of the country on the Nile, which surrounded those time-defying buildings. They were therefore received both as valuable models for architects and as atmospheric images in the sense of a *voyage pittoresque*. The two-volume, lavishly designed folio was not published until after the author's death in 1755, commissioned by the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen. It went into several editions and appeared in translations.

These two travel reports provided Europe with unusually detailed information, which at the beginning of European Classicism was not yet available for the classical sites of Greece. They were used not only by scholars, but also by architects, painters and travellers to Egypt – among others, by Dominique Vivant Denon travelling in the armada of Napoleon Bonaparte's expeditionary army – as an indispensable source of information and inspiration. They also set the standard for the illustrated travel reports that followed. Both the critics and the supporters of the aristocratic image of Egypt, held at the French court during the early Classicism seen around the middle of the eighteenth century, drew only too readily on those outstanding sources.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the discussion as to whether ancient Egypt was a model for contemporary Europe or perhaps a cautionary example, were in full swing. Depending on the character, social position and basic political and artistic convictions of the individual art theorist, philosopher or artist, it was a matter of nightmares or pipe dreams. In 1786, the Académie des Inscriptions et belles Lettres also took part in this debate by offering a 'Prix d'émulation' on this subject. The winner at the time, Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, published his *De l'architecture égyptienne* in 1803. In this work, he critically examined Egyptian architecture in the sense of an image of antiquity influenced by Winckelmann. Of course, he used the architectural views by Pococke and Norden as models for his illustrations.

A few years after the French Academy of Archaeology sought to clarify the significance of Egyptian art through this competition – which was particularly topical at the time due to the Egyptian vogue introduced by Queen Marie Antoinette and the landscape gardens of the free-spirited

high nobility – numerous examples of recourse to the two original works can be found in the German fashion newspapers. In addition to mysterious sphinx grottos and suggestions for garden fixtures in the form of the temple pylons of Luxor, it is the extravagant interiors with views of Nile landscapes that the Freemasons perceived to be particularly suitable as room decorations.¹¹

Piranesi and the Comte de Caylus

These rooms were influenced by an interior design in the Egyptian style that is still very well known today, which was executed between 1765 and 1767 in the taproom of the Caffè degl'Inglesi at the Spanish Steps in Rome according to the designs by Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The earliest news of this sensational café interior comes from a letter by the Saxon architect Christian Traugott Weinlig, which he sent to Dresden in 1767. He described the room as follows: 'On the left, opposite the staircase [...] is the English coffee house. The place where the many English students who study here tend to meet in the evening, and where one can best find out where to meet this or that person. This coffee house is painted in the Egyptian style according to the specifications and a drawing by the famous Piranesi. A number of Egyptian idols, wonderfully arranged, appear here in various colours of granite and other dark types of stone. Should you get to see his fireplaces in this style, you would be able to get an idea of it, but besides that, it is probably difficult'.¹²

The large-format copperplate engravings with two views of the Caffè degl'Inglesi and eleven depictions of Egyptian-style fireplace designs were offered by Piranesi in 1769 to the international public in three languages under the title *Diverse maniere d'adorare i cammini*, together with a theoretical explanation. Piranesi was a technically outstanding, highly creative engraver, but he was also receptive to the graphic art of his time. He proposed his Egyptianising copperplate engravings as models for interior designers, but they have more of the value of an autonomous work of art. Even today, many art historians are so impressed by the whimsical fireplace designs and interior views that they believe they have found in Piranesi the creator, and in his etchings the origin, of the Egyptian fashion of early Classicism. However, the artistic confrontation with the Egyptian cultural heritage is much more complex.

The search for the source of Piranesi's inspiration leads to another protagonist of eighteenth-century Egyptomania, this time one who lived not in Rome but in Paris. Piranesi's art-theoretical reflections and his models for the Egyptianising designs both have a common origin, namely the

11 See D. Syndram, 'Interieurs im ägyptischen Stil. Englische und deutsche Innendekorationen im Frühklassizismus', *Kunst & Antiquitäten*, vol. 6 (1989), pp. 38–45, esp. p. 41.

12 C. T. Weinlig, *Briefe aus Rom*, 3 vols (Dresden, 1782–1787), vol. 1, pp. 17–8.

Recueils d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines of the Comte de Caylus.¹³ The essential passages of Piranesi's explanations are derived from the positive aristocratic image of antiquity provided by this highly educated researcher of antiquities, artistic dilettante and committed patron. What is even more significant in connection with this topic, Piranesi's fireplace designs go back, in every detail, to the pictorial models of the *Recueils*, where almost all elements of their often very peculiar-looking decorations can be found. The volumes of the *Recueils* from which Piranesi drew his models were published between 1759 and 1764 (volumes 3 to 5).

The Comte de Caylus was one of the most important and influential art and culture theorists of the era, who aggressively propagated a return to Greek antiquity as well as to Egyptian antiquity. The Comte presented his reformist views concerning the sense of classicism in numerous lectures before the two royal academies in Paris to which he belonged, the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture and the Académie des Inscriptions et belles Lettres. Above all, however, he published them in his *Recueils d'antiquités*, which he edited in six volumes from 1752 to 1767. In addition to depictions of Greek and Roman antiquities from European collections, it contains hundreds of illustrations of ancient Egyptian or Egyptianised pictorial works with precise, scientifically systematic descriptions that were outstanding for the time. For the creative artists of the second half of the eighteenth century seeking images of the works of antiquity, the *Recueils* were a source whose importance can hardly be overestimated. Direct references to this important collection made by furniture and vessel designers, interior decorators and visual artists can be traced in numerous instances and are by no means limited to France. Artists or students of antiquity found there not only good pictorial models, but also the first treatise on the art of Greco-Roman antiquity and Egypt. It was precisely to the works which he had classified as Egyptian that Caylus attributed a high cultural testimonial value of their own and ascribed to them a clearly defined aesthetic quality that in part anticipated Edmund Burke's concept of the 'sublime'. Around 1750, this was quite a new approach. The *Recueil d'antiquités* – largely forgotten today – thus became an incunabulum of art historiography even before Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764).

In the seemingly archaic and austere monumental art of Egypt, the Comte de Caylus found new aesthetic values such as 'grandeur', 'solidité' and 'simplicité', which had until then been strictly devalued by his col-

13 The first and probably last monographic treatise on the Comte de Caylus is Samuel Rocheblave, *Essai sur le Comte de Caylus* (Paris, 1889); cf. F. J. Hausmann, 'Eine vergessene Berühmtheit des 18. Jahrhunderts: Der Graf Caylus, Gelehrter und Literat', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 53 (1979), p. 191.

leagues – and also by Montfaucon – yet which he recommended the artists of his time to adopt. In addition, he repeatedly stated in his writings that the common basis of all cultures of antiquity was that of Egypt. In his view, all other cultures of European antiquity, but also those of the Near East and China, had developed inspired by this first advanced civilisation and in competition with the mighty works of sculpture and architecture of the pharaohs, which were destined to last for eternity. The fact that the possible connection of ancient Egyptian culture with Far Eastern cultures was already known around 1700 is proven by a work by Johann Melchior Dinglinger held in the Green Vault: the throne of the Indian Great Mogul Aureng-Zeb. There, engraved pseudo-hieroglyphs and representations of gods from the country on the Nile cover the two wall sections framing the throne area.¹⁴

Some four decades later, the monumental artistic spirit and the eternity-oriented works of the Egyptians appeared to the Comte de Caylus as almost unattainable to his own present. For him, they were the result of an ideal, enlightened absolutist kingdom that could develop in an almost endless period of peace and in a land blessed by nature. Such a utopia could not withstand the political realities of mid-eighteenth century Europe. However, his visions of Egypt held great appeal for the high aristocracy of the *ancien régime* and became a trigger for the fashion for Egypt introduced by Queen Marie Antoinette – right up to revolutionary architecture in the years before the French Revolution.¹⁵ In fact, this ideal image, which can be traced back to Caylus, had an effect on the generals of the French expeditionary corps and the scientists that accompanied it.

The starting point for his scientific investigations was his own collection, which the Comte de Caylus kept in his apartment in the Orangerie of the Tuileries. The frontispiece of the first volume of the *Recueils* provides an insight into his collection of antiquities. The objects of his scientific desire are not arranged in an aristocratic, ceremonial manner, but rather stand in a scientific, unadorned depot on shelves. His urge to research, which was avowedly coupled with the possession of the objects to be described, was ultimately greater than the space available to him for storage. Caylus solved this problem by donating his treasures to the royal cabinet of antiquities in 1752 and then again in 1762. Some of the items described in his books are still on display in the showcases of the Musée du Louvre.

The sources of Baroque ‘Egyptomania’ are to be found in France. This applies – apart from Dinglinger’s *Altar of Apis* – not only to the scien-

14 D. Syndram, J. Schöner, *August der Starke und sein Großmogul* (München, 2014), pp. 90–3.

15 D. Syndram, ‘Die „Urzeit“ als Avantgarde. Italienische und französische Interieurs im Frühklassizismus’, *Kunst & Antiquitäten*, vol. 3 (1989), pp. 48–57, esp. p. 50.

tific-theoretical debate but also, to a considerable extent, to the artistic formulation. Yet Rome contributed to the 'Egyptomania' of early Classicism as well. The Académie de France in Rome and some of its most important students must be mentioned here, as, in the appropriation of the Egyptian heritage shortly after the middle of the century, they played an important mediating role between the reception of Egyptian works of art in Italy and the theoretical discussion in France. In this case, too, the influence of the Comte de Caylus was probably great. The painter of ruins and later garden architect Hubert Robert occupies a pioneering position among the young artists he had promoted. Robert came to Rome in 1754 as a scholarship holder of the Academy and remained there until 1765. In his extensive oeuvre, the preoccupation with the sublime testimonies of Egyptian culture played an important role from an early stage. Around 1760, Robert came into the circle of the Comte de Caylus through the antiquarian Paolo Maria Paciaudi and the Abbé Jean-Claude Richard de Saint-Non. This led Robert to study the painterly and monumental effect of Egyptian architecture in even greater depth. This is evidenced by two idealised landscapes with pyramids and obelisks from this period, as well as by a 'capriccio égyptien', in which the Egyptian repertoire of forms is combined with unadorned arched architecture.¹⁶ The fascination with Egypt that had gripped the French scholars in Rome around 1760 later led also to the Egyptianising designs by the chief master of the gallant rococo, Fragonard, who was a friend of both Robert and Saint-Non.

Some of Robert's designs and copies of antiquities were combined by Saint-Non into a series of 18 sheets, the *Suite de dix huit feuilles d'après l'antiquité*, which the Abbé etched in 1763. In addition to exact copies of Egyptian sculptures, the series also includes five very interesting sketches of Egyptianising objects, which attest to the architectural painter's interest in Egypt around 1760. Since Robert himself did not return to Paris until 1765, it is very likely that Saint-Non received the models for these etchings from Robert as early as 1761, when he left Rome. Saint-Non then also published Fragonard's Egyptian fantasies in ten sheets as the *Premier Recueil d'aquatintes* in 1767.

Among Robert's Egyptianising designs is one for a pyramid, which finally found its way from the sheet of paper to realisation, and this twice. Firstly, it was Robert himself who erected a pyramid with a base in the landscape garden of the Désert de Retz before 1785. Secondly, it was the Prussian king and freemason Frederick William II who had a somewhat more pointed, but otherwise very similar pyramid surrounded by pseudo-hieroglyphs on the base erected in his New Garden in Potsdam between 1791 and 1792.

16 Cf. the exhibition catalogue, *Ägyptomanie. Ägypten in der europäischen Kunst 1730–1930* (Paris–Ottawa–Wien–Mailand, 1994), pp. 60–3, cat. no. 22 and 23.

In the European Classicism before 1800, the Egyptian artistic and cultural heritage was dealt with in an extremely imaginative and creative way that had not been achieved before and was hardly surpassed later. The inspiration of the artists, as well as their patrons, was nourished by graphic models, perhaps more fruitfully than the almost Egyptologically accurate reports and depictions that reached France and the rest of Europe a few years after the conclusion of the French expedition to Egypt from 1798 to 1801. However, without these depictions of ancient Egyptian art, which stimulated the artistic imagination and aroused desire, the military and cultural appropriation attempt on the Nile Valley by General Bonaparte might not have taken place.

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