



AEGYPTIACA: EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS VALUES AND DEMONIC MOTIFS IN ARCHAIC GREECE

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This research strand, in which the transfer of religious ideas and the mobilization of certain demonic identities are mapped and examined in the ecumene of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, is my contribution to the on-going project *Aegyptiaca: ecumene and economy in the horizon of religion* (in cooperation with Prof. Dr. LUDWIG MORENZ, Bonn Universität, and distinguished scholars from eight institutions). The project attempts to investigate certain aspects of cross-cultural interactions, socio-political and economic relations between Egypt and the Aegean world during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE. In the absence of adequate written evidence during this period, our knowledge of contacts in the Mediterranean usually stems from the study and evaluation of imports and their archaeologically visible influence in indigenous material horizons. These imports are often examined alongside patterns of transmission of technology and craftsmanship in an attempt to understand the gradual *orientalizing* awakening of the Aegean that reached its apogee in the 7th century BCE.

The functionality and contextualization of the religious Aegyptiaca within the broader nexus of the international relations of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE must be seen as an epitome of the continuous attempts by the Saite kings of the 26th Dynasty to reestablish a political and social link with major cultic centers in the Aegean and the Levant. Although no information survives on the ideological component of these votive offerings, the locally manufactured Egyptianizing objects clearly exemplify

the fact that Greeks had gained insight into Egyptian religious beliefs. Thus, they were probably familiar with the significance of at least some of these objects and the magical connotations they carried. Even if these objects were not used in the precise manner that they would have been in Egypt, they were regarded as highly precious and venerated objects, having been assigned a whole new function and identity within a different cultural environment. They were adapted to the international syncretistic religious background of the receptive culture and they generated a cultural wave of *Egyptianization* in the Aegean.

My initial research on the votive offerings from the Rhodian sanctuaries is now further expanded to cover all Aegyptiaca of a religious nature from the Aegean and mainland Greece of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. The great majority of these objects is somewhat related to the sacral field, but not exclusively restricted to it. Right from the start we can notice a complex interplay between the sacral, the political and economic fields. Predominant among these objects are faience figurines in the shape of Egyptian divinities, demonic entities (e.g., the lion-headed dwarf-god/demon Bes), hybrid animals and symbols. My immediate research goals on this project are: (a) a complete catalogue with proper description and classification of the religious Aegyptiaca; (b) clear delineation of their character and function; (c) an analysis of the religious and demonic motifs that contributed greatly to the spread of Egyptian demonic figures into the decorative arts of the Greeks of the archaic era.