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Roman collecting and the biographies of Egyptian Late Period statues

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ABSTRACT

Studies of Egyptian Late Period statuary often assume that the extant corpus is a representative sample of the artistic output of the Twenty-Sixth to Thirty-First Dynasties (c. 664–332 BCE). This assumption ignores the various human processes that affect the survival of statues after their initial dedication. In particular, the Roman practice of collecting Egyptian naophorous statues for reuse in cult spaces of Egyptian gods in Italy has skewed the chronological distribution of the corpus in favour of statues of Twenty-Sixth Dynasty date. This in turn informs perceptions of the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty, the period of Achaemenid rule in Egypt, as being a time of artistic poverty. This paper examines the biographies of Egyptian statues in order to better distinguish between the products of ancient agency and modern scholarly constructs.

KEYWORDS

Statues; Late Period Egypt;
Achaemenid Persian Empire;
Roman collecting;
Aegyptiaca; object
biography

Introduction

Statues are an invaluable source of evidence for the social history of the Egyptian Late Period (c. 664–332 BCE). During this period it was a common practice for certain individuals, including kings, to dedicate specially commissioned statues of themselves in temples. Although not necessarily true to life, the images on these statues were individualized representations, tailored to the dedicator's conceit of himself and his place in society. They also featured 'autobiographical' inscriptions, which usually listed titles held by the individual in his lifetime along with generic statements of personal merit and piety. Many of these inscriptions include an 'Appeal to the Living', a request that passersby perform rites on the dedicator's behalf, indicating that these statues were designed with an audience in mind. This means that in addition to being statements of personal piety, these statues also played a role in the negotiation of social identities. As such they provide a window onto Egyptian society in the Late Period, and can be used to address a host of important questions.

Yet despite their importance as historical evidence, there has been little consideration of the biographies of these statues, or of how these biographies have affected their study. Most of them do not derive from controlled excavations, and those that do were by and large recovered from secondary contexts. It is clear that a variety of processes act on these statues between the time of their initial dedication and when they became objects of study by modern scholars. This paper argues that one of these processes, the Roman practice of collecting Egyptian statues for use in

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Egyptian cult spaces in Italy, has meaningfully skewed the corpus of extant Late Period statuary in favour of material of Twenty-Sixth Dynasty date. This has in turn contributed to the longstanding view that, by comparison, the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty, the period of Achaemenid rule in Egypt (c. 526–404 BCE), was a period of artistic scarcity. Given the value of statues as historical evidence, including evidence for the Egyptian experience of Achaemenid rule (e.g. Colburn 2014a, 791–794), this view seriously impairs the study of the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty and the Achaemenid Empire more broadly.

This paper, then, has two objectives. The first is to identify as much as possible what happens to statues after they are dedicated in Egyptian temples. It is abundantly clear that statues do not simply remain in place until their discovery by modern scholars; rather, they can have complicated biographies that can lead to their dislocation or destruction, or their removal and repurposing. The second objective is to consider how Roman collecting has affected the extant corpus of Late Period statuary. Both of these factors have contributed to the formation of the corpus of extant Egyptian art, and understanding their effects permits us to better distinguish between the products of ancient agency and modern scholarly constructs.

The Late Period and Achaemenid rule of Egypt

During the Late Period, Egypt was politically unified, both under native Egyptian rulers (the Twenty-Sixth and Twenty-Eighth to Thirtieth Dynasties) and as a province of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (the Twenty-Seventh and Thirty-First Dynasties; Kientiz 1953; Perdu 2010; see Table 1). As its name suggests, in traditional historiography this period was regarded as an epilogue to the more interesting and more important periods of ancient Egyptian history. This view has changed significantly over the last few decades, and the Late Period is now more often viewed as a renaissance: Egypt's art and literature flourished, its military might was considerable, and it played a prominent role in the political and cultural landscape of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. It is now seen as a vibrant and vital part of Egypt's history, well worthy of study by modern scholars.

Despite this very welcome shift, the study of the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty, the period of Achaemenid rule in Egypt, c. 526–404 BCE, remains hampered by what Margaret Root (1991) has called the 'politics of meagerness'. This refers to the tendency of some scholars to emphasize the perceived scarcity of archaeological material relevant to Achaemenid rule. This scarcity is informed by preconceived notions, deriving ultimately from ancient Greek stereotypes of the Persians and nineteenth-century orientalist prejudices, that Achaemenid rule was necessarily ephemeral and weak. These preconceptions in turn inform the dating and interpretation of archaeological materials, including statues, with the result that the initial assumption is confirmed.

An article on Late Period statuary provides an illustrative example of this phenomenon in action:

Table 1. Chronological summary of the Late Period. There is still disagreement over certain dates; see the overview in Depuydt (2006).

Dynasty	Date
26th (Saite Period)	664–526 BCE
27th ([Achaemenid] Persian Period)	526–404 BCE
28th	404–399 BCE
29th	399–380 BCE
30th	380–340 BCE
31st (Second Persian Period)	340–332 BCE

But there was a marked reduction of building activity and work in sculptural ateliers. The invasion of the Persians must have caused major disruptions in the lives of the Egyptians. It seems inconceivable that sculptural ateliers were operating normally, if at all, after this traumatic event. The extreme rarity of sculpture safely datable to this period attests to the logic of this conclusion. (Josephson 1997, 10)

There is circular reasoning at work here. The author's starting assumption, that Achaemenid rule disrupted artistic production in Egypt, informs the 'extreme rarity of sculpture safely datable to this period' that he observes, which in turn provides confirmation of his original assumption. Thus, a vicious cycle is perpetuated. Indeed, it has been observed that Egyptologists tend to date material to the Saite period or the fourth century BCE, but not the period of Achaemenid rule unless compelled to do so by irrefutable epigraphic evidence (Aston 1999; Colburn 2014b, 208–229). This tendency further propagates the scarcity of material belonging to this period and the attendant interpretations of the nature of Achaemenid rule.

The conclusion that Achaemenid rule is responsible for the apparent scarcity of statues dating to the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty is prefaced on the assumption that the extant corpus of Late Period statuary is a representative sample of the entire artistic output of the years 664–332 BCE. This assumption, however, ignores the fact that objects do not exist statically, and that over time they can undergo changes in ownership, function, appearance and location. Even objects of similar type, material and disposition can have different biographies, and thus may survive in uneven quantities. This certainly applies to Egyptian statues, as well as to other forms of material culture.

The statuary of the Late Period (Bosse 1936; Bothmer 1960; Russmann 2010) consists primarily of images of men, and among these 'naophorous' (meaning 'shrine-bearing') statues are especially prevalent (De Meulenaere 2009; Klotz 2014). In these statues an individual is represented either standing and holding a shrine for a specific god, or kneeling with his hands placed on the sides of a shrine. Sometimes the shrine was replaced by the figure of the god itself (these are properly called 'theophorous' statues). The inscriptions on these statues also name the specific god to whom they are dedicated. This combination of visual and epigraphic evidence shows pretty clearly that these statues were intended to be placed in temples, and often the inscription indicates what temple was the original site for the statue. However, very few Late Period statues have been found in what is clearly their original context. More often they are found in fill, in contexts of reuse, or otherwise scattered about the site; often they are damaged as well. For example, none of the 215 statues and statue fragments excavated at the Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara between 1964 and 1976 was found in situ (Smith 1997, xxxi–xxxiv); all were recovered from disturbed secondary contexts, and most were likely originally set up in Memphis. Thus, before attributing the scarcity of Persian period statuary to the nature of Achaemenid rule in Egypt, it is important to consider first how the biographies of these statues could have affected their survival to the present day.

The lives of Egyptian statues

The biographical approach to the study of objects is fundamentally the study of the changing relationships between objects and people over time. As Gosden and Marshall (1999, 170) have put it: 'Objects become invested with meaning through the social interactions they are caught up in. These meanings change and are renegotiated through the life of an object... Meaning emerges from social action and the purpose of artefact biography is to illuminate that process'. In other words, while they are generally created for specific reasons, as objects age they undergo changes

in ownership, function, appearance and location. Moreover, since these changes are linked to human activity, they do not necessarily affect all objects equally, and objects of similar types with similar origins can have very different biographies. That said, it is often impossible to trace the complete biography of a single object, owing to limitations in the available data. In such cases it can be useful instead to reconstruct a 'typical' biography of a certain object type, with a view towards identifying the various possible 'lives' a given object could have (Joy 2009).

The inscriptions on Late Period statues imply that their dedicators intended them to stand in the temple for all time, but this rarely happened. Even those statues that were dedicated in the most enduring temples, such as the Karnak temple, were subject to disturbance and relocation. Assuming steady, or even diminishing, numbers of statues added every year, temples eventually ran out of space. The priests then had to bury old statues within the temple precinct, since removing them entirely or defacing them could potentially have profound theological consequences. The best example of this is the so-called Karnak Cachette, a deposit of over 800 stone statues and nearly 17,000 bronze figures excavated between 1903 and 1907 in the courtyard in front of the Seventh Pylon at the Karnak temple (Porter and Moss 1972, 136–167). These statues date from the New Kingdom into the Ptolemaic Period, and the deposit thus represents the accumulated statuary of seven or eight centuries (Jambon 2009; Russmann 2010, 945). Smaller caches of royal statues have been discovered at Kerma and Gebel Barkal in Nubia (Bonnet and Valbelle 2006, 70–83; Reisner 1917, 216–217, 1920, 251–253). These caches are believed to contain royal statues damaged during the invasion of Nubia by Psamtik II (reigned 595–589 BCE) and subsequently buried in the temple precinct. The cache of statuary found in a pit at the Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara, which shows signs of damage and burning, may be a variation of this process (Smith 1997; xxxii–xxxiii; Hastings 1997, 68–73), in which objects were removed from one temple and reburied in a different sacred space nearby.

Statues could also be defaced or outright destroyed. Instances of *damnatio memoriae* have been proposed for several Twenty-Sixth Dynasty kings, though this was generally directed towards cartouches naming these kings rather than other parts of a statue. But defacement and destruction could happen for other reasons too. In the idiosyncratic demotic Egyptian text known as the *Petition of Petiese*, dating to 513 BCE, the narrator accuses the priests in the temple of Amun in Teudjoy of throwing two statues of his grandfather (also named Petiese) into the Nile (Griffith 1909, 103; Ray 2002, 108). These priests had feuded with Petiese's family for generations, owing to a dispute over the proceeds from a prebend that Petiese claimed to be owed. The *Petition of Petiese* is a singular document, one which defies easy characterization in any recognizable modern genre. Members of Petiese's family are attested in contemporary documents (Traunecker 2008), suggesting the people in the *Petition* are real, if not the events it describes. It is not difficult to imagine this sort of local strife leading to the destruction of statues, in a manner that is not easy to model or predict.

There is also some evidence for the removal and destruction of statues during Late Antiquity in the context of early Christian iconoclasm (Frankfurter 2008; Kristensen 2013, 107–195). Of particular interest is an episode recounted by Shenoute of Atripe in his sermons in the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE. In these sermons he alludes to an episode in which he and his followers raided the house of one Gesios and removed 'idols' from it, including 'the images of priests with shaven heads and altars in their hands' (Emmel 2008, 169–170; Frankfurter 2008, 143; Kristensen 2013, 139–142). This must refer to naophorous statues, which Gesios presumably had removed from a temple at an earlier date and placed in his own home. According to the *Life of Shenoute* (a biography of uncertain authorship) the statues were then broken into pieces and thrown in the

Nile (Emmel 2008, 169). It is somewhat difficult amid Shenoute's rhetoric to determine precisely what transpired, but the reference to naophorous statues suggests at least that by Late Antiquity such statues were associated with paganism, which surely did not contribute to their safekeeping and preservation.

There were also more prosaic acts of destruction. Some of the temples which had been prominent in the Late Period or earlier fell into disuse in the late Ptolemaic and Roman periods, due to shifting priorities on the part of the state or broader religious change. As a result the protection afforded to these temples by their sacred status gradually eroded, leaving them and the statues within them vulnerable to seizure and destruction. For example, by the mid second century BCE the temple of Edjo at Buto in the Nile Delta had become an industrial area for the production of ceramics (Seton-Williams 1969, 9). Several statue fragments were found in the fill above the temple floor there. Likewise, the vast mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu near Thebes had become the town of Djeme by the Roman period (Wilfong 2002, 1–22). The presence of lime kilns at the site suggests another possible fate for the statues dedicated in the temple in earlier periods. At Hermopolis Magna a colossal statue of Nectanebo I was discovered near a lime kiln (Roeder 1959, 61–62, 286), implying it narrowly escaped being burned to produce quicklime. And the White Monastery near Sohag, where Shenoute was abbot, was built using spolia taken from earlier monuments. At least one inscribed base from a private statue, dating to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, has been identified on the premises (Perdu 1992). The inscription indicates it was originally set up at Abydos, some 50 km to the south, most likely in the temple of Osiris. Its removal to Sohag shows how far a statue could travel in the course of its reuse.

The processes discussed above are all examples of the potential directions an Egyptian statue's biography could take after its initial dedication in a temple. All negatively affected a statue's chances of survival to the present. Even the burial of statues on site can make them difficult to recover, since excavators must be fortunate enough to happen upon them. In general these processes are indiscriminate with respect to historical periods; i.e. statues of Twenty-Seventh Dynasty date are not necessarily any more likely to be destroyed than those of earlier or later periods. One exception to this, however, is the Roman practice of collecting Egyptian statues and taking them to Italy, where they were subsequently rediscovered and collected a second time by Renaissance antiquarians. This collecting not only privileged statues of certain dates, but also enhanced their chances of survival and recovery in the present.

Collecting Egyptian statues in antiquity and the Renaissance

The Roman annexation of Egypt took place over the course of the first century BCE, culminating in 30 BCE with the death of Cleopatra VII, the last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and the appointment of C. Cornelius Gallus as the first Roman prefect of Egypt (Herklotz 2012). Egypt remained part of the empire, and of the subsequent Eastern Roman (i.e. Byzantine) Empire, until the Sasanian invasion c. 619 CE and the Arab conquest in 639–646 CE. During these seven centuries the Romans removed numerous statues and other items from Egypt and brought them to Rome and other parts of the empire. The material collected by the Romans includes statues of gods, kings, private individuals and animals, as well as obelisks, amulets and other types of objects (Capriotti Vittozzi 2013; Malaise 1972; Roulet 1972; Swetnam-Burland 2015; Versluys 2002, 303–384). It has been found in Rome and other sites in Italy, including Cumae, Pompeii and Beneventum (Swetnam-Burland 2015, 28–33; Versluys 2002, 308–314).

There are many reasons why Egyptian material culture, including statues, appealed to the Romans, and many different functions that such material could serve in a Roman setting. Versluys (2010, 12–20) has recently identified four general areas of potential meaning for Egyptian objects collected and deployed in Roman contexts: (1) they evoked an elite world of exotic luxury; (2) they had imperial connotations, especially in reference to the transport of obelisks; (3) they alluded to the conquest of Egypt by Rome, and by extension Augustus' triumph over Antony and the birth of the Augustan cultural revolution; (4) they referenced contemporary Egypt's status as an imperial province, and more generally Rome's geographic vastness and inclusion of older civilizations within it. In some cases, such as the re-erection of obelisks (Swetnam-Burland 2015, 65–104), these Egyptian objects served imperial purposes. In other contexts, such as cult spaces dedicated to Isis or Sarapis, they served religious purposes. In others still their significance was personal, and reflected the tastes, interests and aspirations of their collectors. In all cases, however, it seems the main criterion for their selection was their visibly 'Egyptian' character, i.e. their distinctiveness from other established types of material culture, and once in Italy they were imbued with new meaning that did not necessarily have any relationship to their original purpose in Egypt.

Naophorous (and theophorous) statues are a good example of the repurposing of Egyptian material culture. As noted above, these statues represented individual worshippers, but there is some evidence to suggest the Romans understood them to be images of priests. A theophorous statue in the British Museum (BM EA 24784; Erman 1893; Malaise 2004, no. 27; Fig. 1), formerly in the possession of a Danish consul in Beirut, Peter Julius Loytved, features a hieroglyphic inscription, which defies translation, on the back of dorsal pillar, and two short inscriptions on the left side of the dorsal pillar. These inscriptions, which are carved in very similar hands, read *sacerdos Osirim ferens* in Latin and προφή[της] Ὀσειριν κώμ[α]ζω[ν] in Greek, both of which translate simply as 'priest carrying Osiris' (Bricault 2005, no. 402/0802). The statue's condition makes it extremely difficult to gauge its date of origin, but it is unlikely to be later than the first century BCE, as the latest surviving naophorous statues date to the end of that century (De Meulenaere 2009, 228). The Greek and Latin inscriptions, which date on paleographic grounds to the second or third century CE (Bricault 2005, 505; Malaise 2004, 74 n. 17), were undoubtedly later additions. Moreover, since Latin was little used in Egypt even under Roman rule it is likely these inscriptions were added during or after the statue's removal from Egypt, presumably as labels to identify it as an image of a priest. This reinterpretation of naophorous statues as representations of priests led to their use as décor for Roman sanctuaries of Isis or Sarapis especially (Malaise 2004; Roulet 1972, 111), making them specialty items of a sort.

The sites in Egypt from which these statues came were not evenly distributed. The provenances of most of the objects taken to Rome cannot now be ascertained, but in some cases their inscriptions provide important clues in the form of references to gods associated with specific location. In her catalogue of Egyptian objects in Rome, Roulet (1972, 14–15, 153–156) lists 29 items with certain or putative Egyptian provenances, a small sample to be sure, but informative nonetheless. The main sources of objects are Heliopolis (10, mostly obelisks), Alexandria (four), Thebes (three) and Sais (three) (Fig. 2). Sais was the dynastic capital of Egypt during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (c. 664–526 BCE), and under the patronage of the Saite pharaohs the cult of Neith, Sais' hometown goddess, became especially prominent. As a result, many individuals chose to dedicate statues of themselves there. By the Roman period, however, Sais had lost its political and religious importance (Leclère 2008, 183–184; Wilson 2006, 266–271), making the temple of Neith vulnerable to pilfering. This contrasts with Memphis, the seat of the Achaemenid governor where many

Figure 1. Naophorous statue, c. third–first centuries BCE. London, British Museum EA2 4784. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 2. Map of the Nile Delta.

Twenty-Seventh Dynasty statues were dedicated; it continued to be a major city into the Roman period (Leclère 2008, 80–90). But it was subsequently mined for building materials during the middle ages, especially for the construction of the Cairo citadel by Salah ad-Din in the late twelfth

century CE (Jeffreys 2007, 33). Indeed, Rouillet (1972, 112–113) notes only one item, a statue, from Memphis (see also Lembke 1994, 223–4). Sais' proximity to Alexandria also made it convenient for seaborne merchants bound for Italy to acquire statues there. The grain ships and other vessels that sailed from Alexandria to the Roman port of Ostia were mostly incapable of navigating the waterways of the Nile Delta. Merchants looking to export statues would have bought locally then, rather than making the effort to go upriver.

Once they were in Italy, a different set of human activities came into play affecting the survival of Egyptian statues. Here the well-known naophorous statue of Udjahorresne, currently in the Vatican (Museo Gregoriano Egiziano 22690; Colburn 2014b, 279–290), may serve as an illustrative example of a statue's biography. According to the lengthy inscription (Kuhrt 2007, 117–122), Udjahorresne was a courtier who served in various high positions under the Saite kings Amasis and Psammetichus III and the Achaemenid kings Cambyses and Darius, even spending time at the Achaemenid royal court. The inscription indicates the statue was originally dedicated in the temple of Neith at Sais. Presumably it remained there until the Roman period, at which time it was taken to Italy. It is generally thought to have been one of the Egyptian statues set up at Hadrian's villa at Tivoli (Gusman 1904, 310; Rouillet 1972, 114), where it may have been placed in the Egyptian-themed pool complex known as Canopus (Grenier 1989; MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 108–111), named for an Egyptian coastal town. Alternatively, it may have been part of the shrine to Antinous (Mari and Sgalambro 2007), Hadrian's lover who drowned in the Nile and to whom the emperor subsequently established a cult. If Hadrian believed the statue represented a priest, the latter option is perhaps more likely. In either case, from this point on the fortunes of the statue, like those of all other Egyptian objects at Tivoli, were tied to those of the villa itself.

The last secure evidence for imperial use of the villa dates to the reign of Caracalla, between 211 and 217 CE. After that point it ceased to be an imperial property and was ransacked, plundered and reoccupied by less illustrious residents (MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 198–199). Part of a lime kiln was discovered in one of the buildings, suggesting that much of the villa's stone, including statuary, was burned to produce quicklime. Many local buildings in Tivoli, including the twelfth-century CE churches of San Stefano and San Pietro, and the sixteenth-century villa of Ippolito d'Este, Cardinal of Ferrara, were constructed using spolia from the villa, to the extent that one particular type of marble became known as 'porporina di Villa Adriana' (MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 206). In 1461 the villa was identified as Hadrian's by Flavio Biondo, on the basis of the description in the *Historia Augusta* (26.5; MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 207–208). This identification gave an added degree of prestige to statues found there, and for centuries afterwards the villa was excavated for the purposes of recovering works of art for various patrons. Notably, in the mid sixteenth century Pirro Ligorio excavated the villa on behalf of the Cardinal of Ferrara, and in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Bulgarini family (who owned portions of the land the villa was on) provided concessions to various other excavators in search of art (Haskell and Penny 1981, 64–65). While many of these excavators were in search of remnants of Classical antiquity, during the Renaissance there was likewise a renewed interest in ancient Egypt, no doubt fueled at least in part by the discovery of Egyptian (and Egyptianizing) objects at sites in Italy (Curran 2007).

One of these excavators presumably uncovered the statue of Udjahorresne, since in 1783 a drawing of it (Fig. 3) was published in Carlo Fea's Italian edition of Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (Winckelmann 1783, pl. 8; see MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 286–300 for the excavations that took place at the villa prior to 1783). According to the archives of the Museo Egiziano Gregoriano, it was acquired by the museum in the same year from a surgeon named Carlo De Assulle, who had in turn acquired it from one Count Pasch (or Pask) of

Figure 3. Naophorous statue of Udjahorresne as represented in Carlo Fea's 1783 translation of Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (pl. 8). Public domain image.

Kniefen in 1774 (Pietrangeli 1951, 137). The identity of Count Pasch is unknown, so he cannot be connected explicitly to the villa. He might be Heinrich Leopold, Graf Pasch Von Krienen, whose published work (1773) certainly suggests he was the sort of adventurer who would have been involved in plundering the villa's ruins in search of art. Around this time a female head was put on the statue as a restoration, indicating that Udjahorresne's fleshy torso and long garment had been mistaken for those of a woman (Tulli 1941). Once in the Vatican the statue became the subject of study by scholars such as Fea and thus became a foundational part of the study of ancient Egyptian art.

The biography of the statue of Udjahorresne illustrates how statues dedicated at Sais could become part of modern scholarly discourse. Statues dedicated elsewhere in Egypt did not necessarily have the benefit of Roman collecting and Renaissance antiquarianism to bolster their chances of survival. Many of these statues likely ended up in caches like that at Karnak or were

destroyed altogether. Those that did remain in Egyptian temples became targets of early treasure hunters and collectors, including Arabs (El Daly 2005, 31–44) and then Europeans and Americans (Fagan 2004, 79–150; Oliver 2014; Reid 2002, 64–92), who were interested primarily in selling objects rather than studying and publishing them. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that legal protections were put in place to regulate the excavation and export of antiquities (Reid 2002, 99–103).

Since Sais was a dynastic and cultic centre primarily during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, the statues procured there by the Romans mostly date to this same period. The statue of Udjahorresne, who served both Saite and Achaemenid kings, is the main exception. But according to the inscription on his statue he was involved on multiple occasions in the preservation and restoration of the temple of Neith, suggesting perhaps he had a personal connection to Sais. For the most part, however, during the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty Egyptian elites elected to dedicate their statues at other cult centres, especially in Memphis, which served as the capital under Achaemenid rule. Thus, Roman collecting caused statues of Twenty-Sixth Dynasty date to survive in greater quantities than those from the rest of the Late Period, including the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which this collecting has skewed the extant corpus of Late Period statuary. But it is clear that this corpus is not a representative sample of all the art produced in Egypt between 664 and 332 BCE.

Conclusion

Any patterns now discernible in the extant corpus of Egyptian Late Period statues are not solely the product of ancient activity. Rather, a wide variety of human processes and actions have shaped this record over two and a half millennia. Many of these processes could cause statues to be removed from the original context of their dedication, or destroyed outright. One of them, however, the Roman practice of collecting statues for use in Egyptian cult spaces, actually increased the odds of survival of statues dedicated at Sais in the Nile Delta, most of which were of Twenty-Sixth Dynasty date. This imbalance has potentially significant ramifications because of how Egyptian sculpture is dated. In general, objects without probative archaeological or epigraphic context are dated based on their formal similarities to more securely dated material (Hartwig 2015, 43–44). In the case of the Late Period, statues of Saite date serve as the primary comparanda, with the result that many other statues are dated (or re-dated) to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (e.g. Shubert 1989; Josephson 1997). This contributes to the impression of artistic scarcity in the succeeding Twenty-Seventh Dynasty, which in turn serves as evidence for the nature of Achaemenid rule in Egypt.

Collecting is a significant aspect of the biographies of ancient Egyptian statues. By singling out certain statues for special treatment, for reasons that did not necessarily have any relation to the social and historical contexts of their original dedications, it affected which statues survived to the present day and which were left to the vagaries of time. Collecting in the past thus could have a profound impact on the formation of archaeological knowledge in the present. In studying Egyptian statues, and indeed any corpus of ancient art, it is important to understand as best as possible the full biographies of these objects, and to consider what has been lost, as well as what survives.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Henry P. Colburn is a guest researcher at the Getty Research Institute. His research focuses on using objects to reconstruct ancient social conditions, primarily in the context of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (c. 550–330 BCE). Currently he is preparing a monograph, based on his University of Michigan doctoral dissertation, on the archaeology of Achaemenid rule in Egypt.

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