

BOOK REVIEW

Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World. Edited by JEFFREY SPIER, TIMOTHY POTTS and SARA E. COLE. Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018. Pp. xv + 344. Hardback, \$65.00. ISBN: 978-1-60606-551-8.

As the first in a series of exhibitions entitled *The Classical World in Context*, the J. Paul Getty Museum investigates and displays evidence for cultural exchange between Egypt and the Greco-Roman world. Given the “classical orientation of the [Getty’s antiquities] collection” (xi), this endeavor is to provide museum visitors with a more wholistic understanding of the development of classical art. Quite ambitious in its scope, *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* presents material from the middle Bronze Age through late Roman times. Of course, though the Bronze Age is not traditionally part of the “Classical” world, its inclusion is necessary as it demonstrates the substantial and longstanding connectivity of the eastern Mediterranean.

Following an Introduction outlining historical information and the types of artifacts within the volume, the publication is divided into four sections: “The Bronze Age (2000–1100 BC),” “The Greeks Return to Egypt (700–332 BC),” “Ptolemaic Egypt (332–30 BC),” and “The Roman Empire (30 BC–AD 300).” Each section is self-contained and is comprised of two to five essays, the first always surveying the chronological period under review, then a lengthy catalogue follows. The catalogue entries provide standard data (i.e., title, culture, date, material, dimensions, provenance, modern location, inventory number) along with descriptions that reveal their connection to Greco-Roman-Egyptian cultural interaction.

Section one on the Bronze Age details important cities (e.g., Avaris and Pi-Ramesse), concepts (e.g., direct exchange between the Aegean and Egypt) and peoples (e.g., Sea Peoples). The first essay, “Memphis, Minos, and Mycenae: Bronze Age Contact between Egypt and the Aegean,” provides an excellent overview of the dominant Egypto-Aegean Bronze Age civilizations and describes the types of evidence indicating cultural interaction. Incidentally, in addition to influencing the nature of their wall paintings and artifacts like vessels, metals and texts, exchange with the wider eastern Mediterranean may have even impacted the

Minoan formation of a palatial society. Indeed, the authors mention the possibility “... that increased Minoan contact with Egypt and other states of the ancient Near East prompted the construction of the earliest Minoan palaces and the formation of the social structures that supported such buildings” (10). Within the catalogue are familiar items like scarabs, sistra, vessels and jewelry, along with several objects of note: numbers 3-4, seals in the form of baboons; number 50, an outstanding photograph of the faience plaque from Mycenae with the cartouche of Amenhotep III; and number 57, a wood and ivory box from Pella (Jordan) featuring heraldically positioned lions atop intertwined *uraei* (n.b., this box compares well to the Lion Gate and Mycenae).

While contact amongst eastern Mediterranean civilizations was sparse between the 12th and 8th centuries, East Greeks (and Carians) arrived in Egypt in the 7th century and began to serve as mercenaries under pharaoh Psamtek I. Exploring this renewed relationship is section two of *Beyond the Nile* where both essays emphasize the continual presence of Greeks in Egypt, especially in cities like Memphis and Naukratis. Serving as mercenaries, advisors, interpreters or court officials, these Greeks created permanent settlements, built Hellenic sanctuaries, intermarried and buried their dead. Demonstrating the multicultural nature of this period is catalogue number 59, a 6th century stela from Saqqara featuring a Carian inscription, Egyptian gods and, in the lowest register, the depiction of a typical Greek *prothesis*. Other artifacts in the catalogue include vessels, statuettes, coins and figure decorated pottery illustrating Herakles and Bousiris. For catalogue numbers 76-78, a short discussion outlines the connection between Egyptian sculpture and the Archaic Greek kouros and refutes the notion that Greek sculptors adopted the Egyptian grid system for figural compositions. Rather, it is suggested that they “merely modified the *idea* of the statue’s schema but not the *mechanics* by which it was designed” (107). Since *kouroi* and Egyptian pharaonic sculpture provide an important (and well-known) visual connection between the two cultures during this time period, it is curious that this topic was not a full-fledged essay.

Section three discusses the Ptolemaic control of Egypt during the Hellenistic Period (332–30 BC) and its accompanying catalogue presents an array of artifacts like portraits, coins and cameos. Undoubtedly, the Ptolemies modeled themselves after the pharaohs of Egypt’s past, but they certainly had their own agenda. One noteworthy change in administration was the introduction of Greek, and the essay outlining the numerous languages in Egypt (i.e., Demotic, hieratic, hieroglyphs, Greek, Coptic) is a fascinating read. In order to project the dominance of Egypt into the wider Mediterranean, the Ptolemies created impressive armies, fleets and

cities, and the new capital of Alexandria grew in prominence and esteem. Though the Ptolemaic kings had absolute power, they shared bureaucratic responsibilities with a large number of court officials and supported the powerful Egyptian clergy by investing in temple infrastructure. Attesting to the prominence and prestige of these elite individuals is the catalogue which includes mostly portraits in a variety of forms (e.g., sculpture, coinage, rings).

In 30 BC, Rome annexed Egypt as an official province. From Augustus emphasizing *aegyptus capta* in propaganda, to Septimius Severus establishing a special bond with the god Serapis, from the pyramidal tomb of Gaius Cestius, to the funerary stela of Alexandra as a priestess of Isis (cat. no. 151), Egyptian culture attained unprecedented popularity. Indeed, the accompanying catalogue offers an array of sculpture, paintings, mosaics and vessels, and there are even groupings of artifacts to explore such themes as Egyptianizing sculpture from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli and Egyptian cult objects in Pompeian homes. Though some items (purposely) display Egyptian archaizing features, especially the pharaonic representations, there are also naturalistically rendered figures like gods, heroes and the dead.

The allure of ancient Egypt, however, did not begin in Rome during the imperial period as the essay "Before the Empire: Egypt and Rome" emphasizes. While evidence for Egyptian culture in Italy could date to as early as the 7th century BC (e.g., fig. 60, the Etruscan pectoral from the Regolini-Galassi tomb in Cerveteri), official contact with Egypt occurred after Ptolemy II Philadelphos communicated with Rome in 273 BC. Shortly thereafter, around the mid-3rd century, the worship of Egyptian deities like Isis and Serapis swept through the eastern Mediterranean and gained a foothold in Rome. Despite some attempts to hinder these cults in later periods by emperors like Augustus and Tiberius, their popularity persisted publicly and privately.

Overall, the exhibition catalogue is as thoroughly enjoyable as it is thoughtful and informative. Particularly helpful were the maps detailing specific areas of concern; these were located before each of the four sections and found within several essays. As with all Getty publications, one expects high-quality figures and plates, and this volume does not disappoint. The images are vivid and absolutely beautiful. Certainly, it is strange that there are only two essays in the section titled "The Greeks Return to Egypt (700–332 BC)" (as opposed to the four or five individual essays of the other sections), but the compact treatment of this period ensured that there was great flow and little repetition. Conversely, in "The Roman Empire (30 BC–AD 300)," the topic of religion became marginally tedious. Of course, this

type of repetition may actually serve to enhance the usage of this volume, allowing a reader to target information easily or allowing a teacher to assign one of the essays to students (e.g., perhaps you would like to read more about Egyptian gods in general during the Roman period or perhaps you want more information on Isis in particular).

Beyond the Nile is highly recommended as it has something for everyone: from Bronze Age material to late Roman; from epigraphy to painting; from sculpture to coins; from portraits to pottery. While investigations of cultural interactions are not new, the Getty Museum is the first institution to explore this concept in an exhibition format. Truly, it is exciting to think about their proposed series *The Classical World in Context* and future exhibitions involving other non-classical cultures (e.g., Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Levant, Central and South Asia, the Eurasian steppes). Next up: Persia.

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