

Trade Contacts and Cultural Exchange between Egypt and India in the Ptolemaic and Roman Period

Abstract. When speaking about Egypt's cultural contacts, only the nearest Mediterranean, African and Near Eastern civilizations are usually taken into account. However, during the Greco-Roman period, Egypt also had direct contact with Ancient India via the Red Sea trade. While this fact is in principle well known, these contacts are usually seen as relating to Greco-Roman trade. However, this trade was physically conducted via Egypt and consequently generated a cultural exchange between Egypt and India, a fact which has not yet elicited much study. This is perhaps due to the fact that specialists in Ancient History did not have a particular interest in Egypt, while Egyptologists were for a long time not interested in the later epochs, believing that Egyptian culture had long since declined by then. As recent research has shown that Ancient Egyptian culture was alive and thriving until well into the Roman period, this question now needs to be re-evaluated.

Egyptian Contacts to the East up to the Ptolemaic Period

When Egyptologists think of civilizations with which Ancient Egypt had cultural contact, many African, Levantine, Mesopotamian, Anatolian or Aegean cultures and countries readily come to mind. Ancient India and her neighbours are normally not included in this list. However, they clearly should be, as there can be no doubt that at least from the Ptolemaic Period, i.e. from the 3rd century BCE onwards, direct trade contacts between the two cultures did indeed exist. The interesting question is whether these direct contacts developed only then or had already been flourishing before, and since when. Indirect contact must have already existed from the Predynastic Period (ca. 3500 BCE) onwards, as lapis lazuli has been a prized commodity since this time.¹ As far as we know, this gemstone is only found in Afghanistan. However, it seems to have reached

1 Alfred Lucas and James Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, London 1962⁴, 398–400; Paul Nicholson and Ian Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, Cambridge 2000, 39–40.

Egypt via Mesopotamian intermediaries and up to this day, there has been no reason to assume that the Egyptians had any idea where the stone really came from (except that they probably knew it was very far away). According to Egyptian texts from the 2nd millennium BCE, it was supposed to come from *Tfrr.t*, literally “Lapislazuli land”, a place not yet identified, located in the general direction of other Near Eastern neighbours.² In fact, it is likely that this is just a geographical name made up to give a place of provenance at all.

Bactria

The question since when the Egyptians had more precise knowledge of those far-away regions to the east, even beyond Mesopotamia, is not without interest insofar as there is a great debate on the dating of the so-called Bentresh Stela, a text mentioning a princess of Bakhtan.³ This toponym, known from several other sources as well, clearly denotes Bactria. It is equally certain that the text of the stela, purportedly written in the reign of Ramses II, is a later pseudepigraph propagating a particular form of the god Khonsu. The question as to when the text was originally composed remains unanswered. Epigraphically, the stela looks quite plausible for a dating to the Third Intermediate Period, which would also fit the oldest other attestations for this particular deity, namely Khonsu-the-Counsellor (*Hnsw p3 iri šhr.w*). It is therefore no surprise that such a date has been proposed in the past by some scholars. Yet, it seems hard to believe that Bactria as such was already known in this period and Kim Ryholt has recently plausibly suggested that the text as a whole should be understood in the framework of an *imitatio Alexandri*, thus being a composi-

² James Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals*, Berlin 1961, 124–129, 134; Lucas and Harris, *Materials* (cf. n. 1), 400; Jürgen Osing, *Hieratische Papyri aus Tebtunis I: The Carlsberg Papyri 2* (Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 17), Copenhagen 1998, 107–109; Holger Kockelmann, Die Fremdvölkerlisten in den Soubasements der ptolemäisch-römischen Heiligtümer. Feindnamen und Feindvernichtungsrituale im Tempel zwischen Tradition und Wandel, in: *Von Meroe bis Indien. Fremdvölkerlisten und nubische Gabenträger in den griechisch-römischen Tempeln*, ed. Holger Kockelmann and Alexa Rickert (Soubasementstudien V, Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion 12), Wiesbaden 2015, 3–141, here 71.

³ Orell Witthuhn, Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi, Moritz Klimek et al., *Die Bentreshstela: Ein Quellen- und Lesebuch. Forschungsgeschichte und Perspektiven eines ptolemäerzeitlichen Denkmals aus Theben (Ägypten)* (Göttinger Miscellen Occasional Studies 2), Göttingen 2015; Joachim Quack, Importing and Exporting Gods? On the Flow of Deities between Egypt and its Neighboring Countries, in: *The Dynamics of Transculturality. Concepts and Institutions in Motion*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Jivanta Schöttli, Heidelberg 2015, 255–277, here 269–270.

tion from the Ptolemaic Period at the earliest.⁴ This date corresponds to a recent dating proposal by the Göttingen Bentresh Study Group.⁵

India

The earliest textual mentions of India proper (*Hntwy*, later also *Hntw*) date to the Persian Period. They do not contain any information, but just mention the toponym in a list of subjugated foreign countries.⁶ Such lists were a stock feature of Egyptian political representation and while they often transported traditional, even outdated information, they were updated if there was a specific need and interest to do so. Thus, in the Persian Period, the lists reflect the Persian Empire and its border countries. Whether any more detailed information on these countries was available in Egypt is unfortunately unknown.

Against this background, the expedition of Alexander the Great and the subsequent reign of the Ptolemies as kings of Egypt led to a significant change. Suddenly, more detailed knowledge of India was available in Egypt. While surely at first this knowledge was accessible in Greek-speaking circles in Alexandria, there is good reason to assume that it also spread further. At any rate, literary texts written in Demotic, the contemporary script and language of the native Egyptians, begin to mention India as well. In such literature, India and Bactria are not just names: we are told much more about them.⁷

⁴ Kim Ryholt, *Imitatio Alexandri in Egyptian Literary Tradition*, in: *The Romance between Greece and the East*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh and Stuart Thomson, Cambridge 2013, 59–78, esp. 62–72.

⁵ Witthuhn, *Bentreshstele* (cf. n. 3), 62–67.

⁶ George Posener, *La première domination perse en Égypte. Recueil d'inscriptions hiéroglyphiques* (Bibliothèque d'Étude 11), Cairo 1936, 70, 187, Pl. V (no. 9); Jean Yoyotte, *The Egyptian Statue of Darius*, in: *The Palace of Darius at Susa. The Great Royal Residence of Achaemenid Persia*, ed. Jean Perrot, London 2013, 240–279; Günter Vittmann, *Tradition und Neuerung in der demotischen Literatur*, in: *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 125 (1998), 62–77, esp. 75–77; for the later lists in Greco-Roman period temples see Kockelmann, *Die Fremdvölkerlisten in den Soubassements* (cf. n. 2), 3–141.

⁷ Martin Stadler, *Einführung in die ägyptische Religion ptolemäisch-römischer Zeit nach den demotischen religiösen Texten* (Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 7), Berlin 2012, 55–56 with n. 260; Ryholt, *Imitatio Alexandri* (cf. n. 4), 72–78; Joachim Quack, *Isis, Thot und Arian auf der Suche nach Osiris*, in: *Demotic Literary Texts from Tebtunis and Beyond, The Carlsberg Papyri* 11, ed. Kim Ryholt (Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 36), Copenhagen (in press). See also below.

Maritime Trade between Egypt and India

As has been stated, interest in this part of the world was obviously fostered by an interest in Alexander the Great and his exploits. Soon, however, another element is to be reckoned with, namely direct contacts between Indians and Egyptians via trade relations.⁸ Such trade took place in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods and is well known from Greek documentary papyri⁹ and ancient authors and texts like the famous *Periplus Maris Erythraei*.¹⁰ This can also be proven by archaeological finds from several important Red Sea ports (for details see the paper by Andrea Jördens in this volume). The archaeological finds especially are of great relevance as they demonstrate the physical presence of actual Indians on Egyptian soil and not just Indian goods transported by Greeks.¹¹ On the one hand, this concerns the presence of large quantities of Indian household ceramics in mid-1st century CE Berenike. On the other hand, sherds (including one of a Roman amphora) inscribed in Tamil Brāhmī have been found in Berenike and Koptos, as well as others bearing Prakrit inscriptions in Qusayr al-Qadīm, ancient Myos Hormos.

While those inscriptions have only been few in number up to now, the recently published inscriptions from Hoq cave on the Isle of Socotra with nearly 250 graffiti in different languages and scripts,¹² including south Indian Brāhmī and even north Indian Kharoṣṭhī, should dispel any doubt that Indians themselves really travelled all the way to Egypt. In fact, the Brāhmī inscriptions

⁸ Steven Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.-A.D. 217*, Leiden 1986; Roberta Tomber, *Indo-Roman Trade. From Pots to Pepper*, London 2008.

⁹ Lionel Casson, New Light on Maritime Loans: P.Vindob. G 40822, in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 84 (1990), 195–206 with further bibliography; Stephan Schuster, *Das Seedarlehen in den Gerichtsreden des Demosthenes. Mit einem Ausblick auf die weitere historische Entwicklung des Rechtsinstitutes: dāneion nautikón, fenus nauticum und Bodmerei* (Freiburger Rechtsgeschichtliche Abhandlungen Neue Folge 49), Berlin 2005, 171–172; Andrea Jördens in this volume.

¹⁰ Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei. Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Princeton 1989.

¹¹ Richard Salomon, Epigraphic Remains of Indian Traders in Egypt, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991), 731–736; Steven Sidebotham and Willeke Wendrich, Berenike: Roman Egypt's Maritime Gateway to Arabia and India, in: *Egyptian Archaeology* 8 (1996), 15–18, esp. 16–17; idem, Berenike. Archaeological Fieldwork at a Ptolemaic-Roman Port on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt 1994–1998, in: *Sahara* 10 (1998), 85–96, esp. 89; Tomber, *Indo-Roman Trade* (cf. n. 8), 73–76; Steven Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, Berkeley, Calif. 2011, 231.

¹² Ingo Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra. The Inscriptions and Drawings from the Cave Hoq*, (Vergleichende Studien zu Antike und Orient 3), Bremen 2012.

make up the lion's share of the texts in the cave, widely eclipsing those in e.g. South-Arabian or even Greek.

Thus, there can be no doubt about trade contacts. Of course, the even more interesting question that can be inferred from this state of knowledge is whether apart from a simple exchange of goods also an exchange of ideas or at least an influence on certain cultural levels occurred. We would surely expect this to be the case, and indeed, there are some indications, even if they are not always easily detected.

Cultural Exchange

Aśoka's Buddhist Mission to Ptolemy II

Certainly, the most spectacular cultural contact is attested through one of the famous edicts of the Indian emperor Aśoka (ca. 269–232 BCE). In decree no. XIII, the Kalinga Decree,¹³ he first describes his successful war against the state of Kalinga, approximately in the region of modern Orissa. However, the sufferings caused by this military action provoke deep remorse in him and, having converted to Buddhism, he vows to henceforth only “conquer through the Dhamma”, i.e. to spread the Buddhist teachings. To begin with, he states that he managed such a “conquest as a source of happiness” in many places near and far, “up to a distance of six hundred yojanas”. Unfortunately, the exact length of this measure of distance in this period is not known. Apart from two South Indian peoples, and Sri Lanka, which according to other sources are known to have been converted by his brother and son, he names some other places. They are “where the Greek king called Am̐tiyoka is and apart from this Am̐tiyoka the four kings by the names of Tulamaya, of Am̐tekina, of Makā, of Alikasudala”. This enumeration clearly refers to the Hellenistic kings known as Antiochos III (261–246 BCE), Ptolemy II (285–245 BCE), Antigonos Gonatos (276–239 BCE), Magas of Cyrene (?–258 BCE) and Alexander of Epirus (272–255 BCE). On this base, the Kalinga decree and the Buddhist mission it describes can be dated quite precisely to the years 261–258 BCE. The fact that Aśoka and Ptolemy II exchanged diplomatic contacts with each other is also indirectly confirmed by Pliny VI 58, who in passing mentions that Philadelphos (i.e. Ptolemy II) sent Megasthenes and Dionysios to India. In the preceding sentence, Pliny speaks of Greeks who spent some time at the court of Indian kings, and this can naturally

¹³ Ulrich Schneider, *Die großen Felsen-Edikte Aśokas. Kritische Ausgabe, Übersetzung und Analyse der Texte* (Freiburger Beiträge zur Indologie 11), Wiesbaden 1978, 118–119, XIII, P-Q.

also be assumed for the two men mentioned by name. It is likely that this is how Aśoka learned about Ptolemy.

Unfortunately, however, I am not aware of any sign that his Buddhist missionaries ever reached Egypt or at least had any impact there. As far as I know, there is no certain notice about them in Greek texts, let alone any source in Egyptian.

The question as to whether Egyptian Buddhists ever existed has to be asked, particularly in view of a find from Sri Lanka. Among the offerings in Kiribat Vihāra in Anurādhapura, there was also an Egyptian scarab.¹⁴ This Buddhist monastery was active from the 1st to the 5th century CE, which gives us an approximate dating of the deposition time of the piece. Unfortunately, however, it is impossible to know whether this scarab made its way to Sri Lanka as merchandise or whether it belonged to the personal possessions of an Egyptian who had travelled there.

An Indian Venerating an Egyptian God under a Greek Name

There is, however, some better evidence for Indians in Egypt. A Greek graffito, no. 38 in the edition by Bernand,¹⁵ has been found in the vicinity of the temple of Kanais. Based on epigraphic criteria, the editor dates it to the “advanced Ptolemaic Period”. Since the time of Ptolemy I, the god Amun-Re had been venerated in the temple of Sethi I as “Pan of the good way”. Pan of course stands for the traditional Egyptian god Min, often identified with Amun-Re, as lord of foreign countries and thus quite naturally also of travellers.

Graffito 38 reads: “To Pan of the good way, and the Listener, Sophōn the Indian for himself”. Bernand wanted to understand the dedicant Σοφῶν ἰνδός as “Sophon the elephant guide” and remarks that the name would not otherwise be attested in Greek, but be “well formed”. Basham,¹⁶ on the other hand, proposed to understand Σοφῶν as a graecized rendering of the Indian name Subhānu, and to take ἰνδός as a geographical indication of origin seriously. In view of the other inscriptions collected by Bernand, I would agree with Basham’s view.¹⁷ The denomination ἰνδός “Indian” is also attested in a few

¹⁴ Petr Charvát, An Egyptian Scarab from Sri Lanka (Ceylon), in: *Göttinger Miszellen* 70 (1984), 19–26.

¹⁵ André Bernand, *Le Paneion d’El-Kanais: Les inscriptions grecques*, Leiden 1972, 99–100. In the notes, Bernand provides further attestations for ἰνδός in Greek inscriptions from Egypt.

¹⁶ Arthur Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, London 1967³ (reprint New Delhi 1993), 230–231.

other Greek graffiti. In general, indications of profession are rare in them, while indications of origin are more frequent, a feature that should not astonish us in view of the fact that the god honoured was particularly a patron of travellers.

The identity of the god is also a matter of interpretation. Basham stresses the degree of Hellenization of the writer and proposes to identify the “god of flocks and herds” Pan with the Indian shepherd god Kṛṣṇa. As a further reason, he states that both were associated with flute playing. While this is undeniable, the identification of the truly Greek goat-footed Pan with the breathtakingly beautiful and seductive Indian god Kṛṣṇa seems to be a less obvious choice.

Thus Basham assumes that Sophōn/Subhānu used the *interpretatio graeca* of the god for better international communication as he used the Greek language as *lingua franca*. If Sophōn/Subhānu had linked the name Pan with the Egyptian god Min, that it denotes,¹⁸ he would have probably perceived him as Śiva in view of the traditional iconography of Min as ithyphallic. However, as there is no such depiction in the temple of Kanais because the original lord of the temple was Amun-Re, not Min, such a scenario is less plausible. Rather, it is possible that Sophōn/Subhānu did not at all feel a need to think of any Indian god when he dedicated his inscription just to the local deity, whom he only knew under his Greek name. I therefore cannot see a coercive reason for trying to find any Indian identification in this particular case.

17 Rachel Mairs, Egyptian ‘Inscriptions’ and Greek ‘Graffiti’ at El Kanais in the Egyptian Eastern Desert, in: *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, ed. Jennifer Baird and Claire Taylor, London 2011, 153–164, esp. 155, does not say to which of the two options she assigns no. 38 (although this graffito is listed in another context on p. 161). However, in Rachel Mairs, *Intersecting Identities in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, in: *Egypt. Ancient Histories, Modern Archaeologies*, ed. Rachael Dann and Karen Exell, Amherst 2013, 163–192, esp. 174–182, she definitely opts for an occupational interpretation of ἰνδός, not an ethnic one. In view of the uniqueness of the name, which she also admits, I am not convinced. Perhaps the other cases of graffiti labelling the writer as ἰνδός should be reconsidered, too. There is a general danger that the epigraphers formed their opinion about the term on the simple assumption that it could not be explained otherwise. This would be less convincing in the light of the clear archaeological evidence for the presence of actual Indians, not just Indian goods on Egyptian soil.

18 For the complexities of *interpretatio graeca* of Egyptian deities see Alexandra von Lieven, *Translating Gods, Interpreting Gods. On the Mechanisms behind the Interpretatio Graeca of Egyptian Gods*, in: *Greco-Egyptian Interactions. Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BC–300 CE*, ed. Ian Rutherford, Oxford 2016, 61–82.

India and Indians in Egyptian literature

As already mentioned, India and neighbouring countries like Bactria also feature in Demotic literary texts. The novel known as “Egyptians and Amazons”¹⁹ forms part of the Inaros-Petubastis cycle of narratives. Unfortunately, it is only fragmentarily handed down. In this text, the hero Petekhons is shown on a military expedition to the east. They reach the Land of Women. At first, the two parties fight each other, but in the course of fighting, Petekhons and Serpot, the queen of the women, apparently fall in love with each other. In the following, they march together against the Indians and seem to win. Unfortunately, the continuation is lost due to the bad preservation of the manuscripts. One wonders whether the story found in the “Egyptians and Amazons” novel, in which Petekhons is apparently not only the leader of the Egyptians but also has Assyrians among his men, has anything to do with the tradition recounted by Arrian V 7 that Semiramis the Assyrian wanted to conquer India, but died before being able to accomplish her goal.²⁰

What is particularly interesting in the Amazon’s novel is that the god Osiris is invoked by the Indian leader as “the great Agathodaimon of India”. Since the women venerate Osiris as well, and—much more fittingly—Isis, one might be incited to think that the Egyptian author only ascribed the cult of a prominent Egyptian deity to a foreign people. In this way, the passage has been interpreted by its last editor, Friedhelm Hoffmann. However, Günter Vittmann²¹ rightfully called the fact to attention that Osiris or Dionysos, as he is called in the *interpretatio graeca*, is also credited with an expedition to India in several other texts.

The isolated case of the “Egyptians and Amazons” novel can now be backed up by further Demotic literary texts. For example, P. Carlsberg 456, one of the manuscripts of the story of the “Fight for the Armour of Inaros”, proclaims that the heroic deeds of Inaros would be famous within all the *nomes* of Egypt as well as up to India.²²

¹⁹ Friedhelm Hoffmann, *Ägypter und Amazonen. Neubearbeitung zweier demotischer Papyri. P. Vindob. D 6165 und P. Vindob. D 6165 A* (Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek (Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer), Neue Serie 24), Wien 1995.

²⁰ Pierre Chantraine (ed.), *Arrien, L’Inde*, Paris 2002⁴, 29.

²¹ Vittmann, *Tradition und Neuerung* (cf. n. 6), 67.

²² Kim Ryholt, *Narrative Literature from the Tebtunis Temple Library, The Carlsberg Papyri 10*, (Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 35), Copenhagen 2012, 75, 78, 82, pl. 10.

There are also several still unpublished literary papyri which treat the exploits of the god Osiris himself in India. One of these texts also mentions Bactria (*BXtn*) and a “Great one of Kabul” (*Öbrw*).²³

Dionysos and Herakles

All these texts in the West seemingly presuppose the Alexander expedition. In fact, Kim Ryholt’s proposal²⁴ that the Egyptian texts are all facets of an Egyptian *imitatio Alexandri* is highly plausible. Nevertheless, these stories tied to the name of Osiris-Dionysos are not just Greek or Egyptian fiction. Arrian transmits information from Megasthenes, one of the Ptolemaic envoys to the Maurya court, which clearly ascribes the great exploits of Dionysos in the Greek myths to the Indian tradition as well.²⁵ He also recounts that Sandrakottos, i.e. Candragupta Maurya, the grandfather of Emperor Aśoka, traced his lineage back to Dionysos.²⁶ Clearly, there must be a real Indian tradition behind this. One is immediately reminded of the solar and lunar lineages so prominent in the Purāṇas. Klaus Karttunen, who investigated the sources in some detail, proposed to identify Dionysos with Śiva, demonstrably one of the most important gods of the Indian pantheon.²⁷ Herakles, who is named as another Indian god by Arrian,²⁸ should thus be seen as the other major divine figure, namely Kṛṣṇa.

In this context, it is important to note that in the palace treasury at Begrām in Afghanistan, among many other imported goods from the west, and Alexandria in particular, a splendid bronze figure of Sarapis has been found, which strangely holds the club of Herakles in his hands.²⁹ Against this background, it is also noteworthy that the Kuṣāṇa king Huviṣka (ca. CE 102–142 or 150–187)³⁰ later on included Sarapis among the gods who were minted on his gold coins.³¹

²³ Quack, Isis, Thot und Arian (cf. n. 7).

²⁴ Ryholt, *Imitatio Alexandri* (cf. n. 4).

²⁵ Chantraine, Arrien (cf. n. 20), 32–33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ Klaus Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Studia Orientalia 65), Helsinki 1989, 210–219.

²⁸ Chantraine, Arrien (cf. n. 20), 33–36.

²⁹ Pierre Cambon, Begram – antikes Alexandria am Kaukasus und Hauptstadt der Kushana, in: *Gerettete Schätze – Afghanistan. Die Sammlung des Nationalmuseums in Kabul*, Bonn 2010, 65–85.

Fables east and west

Apart from these direct links, there are also possible indirect hints at mutual cultural influences. At least for one fable in the Pañcatantra, an Egyptian parallel can be adduced, namely the text known as the “Swallow and the Sea”.³² While the proposed explicit connection of King Auski, who supposedly sent the text to pharaoh Psammetichus II, with Aśoka³³ is unfortunately rather unlikely for reasons of chronology as well as the fact that Auski is explicitly called an Arab king,³⁴ the likelihood that the two texts can in fact be traced back to the same source of popular fable telling is at least rather high. An influence from Egypt on the Indian version has explicitly been proposed since this particular fable does not belong to the oldest core of the text.³⁵

Pepper in Medical Recipes

The products from India, namely pepper, were not only found in large quantities in the excavations of Red Sea ports but also appear textually in recipes in Demotic medical treatises.³⁶ As the ending of the Egyptian word *pprs* demonstrates, the name *pippali*³⁷ entered the Demotic Egyptian vocabulary via the

³⁰ Dates according to Hans Loeschner, Kanishka in Context with the Historical Buddha and Kushan Chronology, in: *Glory of the Kushans. Recent Discoveries and Interpretations*, ed. Vidula Jayaswal, New Delhi 2012, 137–194, esp. 166 and Robert Bracey, Policy, Patronage, and the Shrinking Pantheon of the Kushans, in: *ibid.*, 197–217, esp. 204.

³¹ Laurent Bricault, Sarapis dans l’empire kouchan, in: *Bulletin de la Société Française de Numismatique* 53 (1998), 249–254; Loeschner, Kanishka in Context (cf. n. 30), 167, 178–179; Bracey, Policy, Patronage, and the Shrinking Pantheon of the Kushans (cf. n. 30), 199–201, 203.

³² Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur* (Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 4), Berlin 2007, 194–195, 355–356.

³³ Maria Carmela Betrò, Aśoka in un testo letterario demotico?, *Studi Ellenistici* 12 (1999), 112–125.

³⁴ This identification is however now reinforced by Günter Vittmann, Die Schwalbe und das Meer, in: *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, Neue Folge, Bd. 8: *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Daniel Schwemer, Gütersloh 2015, 440 n. 508. See Joachim Quack’s contribution to this volume.

³⁵ Joachim Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte III: Die demotische und gräko-ägyptische Literatur* (Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 3), Berlin 2009², 170–171; Philippe Collombert, Le conte de l’hirondelle et de la mer, in: *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies, Copenhagen, 23–27 August 1999*, ed. Kim Ryholt (Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 27), Copenhagen 2002, 59–76.

Greek intermediate *πίπερις*. Interestingly, this denotes the pepper tree in Greek, while pepper would only be *πίπερι* in Greek.

Astrological literature

In the realm of scholarly literature, particularly Egyptian astrological ideas which had entered Greek astrological treatises made their way to India. This is certainly true of the concept of the so-called decans, originally a group of 36 constellations used for time-keeping at night.³⁸ With the introduction of the zodiac from Mesopotamia to Egypt, they were transformed into imaginary entities governing 10 degrees of the zodiac each. In this form, they gained a certain popularity in the entire Roman Empire, as is attested by depictions found in many places, mostly on magical gems, but also on astrological tables probably used for divinatory purposes. Several treatises in Greek and Latin describe them.

It is therefore not surprising that they are also found in Indian works based on such sources. In the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujidhvaja (in its current form from the 3rd century CE)³⁹ they take up a whole chapter. As the title clearly indicates, the author used Greek sources. *Yavana* is the Sanskrit word for “Ionian”, i.e. Greeks, later also extended to mean “western foreigner” in general. However, this is not the only text which describes the decans. For example, they also figure prominently in the 27th chapter of the most prestigious Indian

³⁶ Friedhelm Hoffmann, *Zur Neuedition des hieratisch-demotischen Papyrus Wien D 6257 aus römischer Zeit*, in: *Writings of Early Scholars in the Ancient Near East, Egypt, Rome, and Greece: Translating Ancient Scientific Texts*, ed. Annette Imhausen and Tanja Pommerening (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 286), Berlin 2010, 201–218, esp. 211.

³⁷ Sanskrit; the merchants would of course have spoken a vernacular language (Prakrit, Tamil, maybe Pali) anyway.

³⁸ Wilhelm Gundel, *Dekane und Dekansternbilder* [1936], Darmstadt 1969²; Joachim Quack, *Beiträge zu den ägyptischen Dekanen und ihrer Rezeption in der griechisch-römischen Welt*, Habilitation thesis, Freie Universität Berlin 2002.

³⁹ David Pingree, *The Indian Iconography of the Decans and Horās*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26 (1963), 223–254; David Pingree, *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja* (Harvard Oriental Series 48), Cambridge, Mass. 1978, I 82–89, II 15–19, 252–253. A later date has recently been advocated by Bill Mak, *The Date and Nature of Sphujidhvaja’s Yavanajātaka Reconsidered in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Materials*, in: *History of Science in South Asia* 1 (2013), 1–20; idem, *The ‘Oldest Indo-Greek Text in Sanskrit’ Revisited. Additional Readings from the Newly Discovered Manuscript of the Yavanajātaka*, in: *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 62 (2014), 1101–1105.

astrological manual, Varāhamihiras Brhājātaka (ca. 5th century CE).⁴⁰ Despite their heavy “Hinduization”, their Egyptian origins are beyond question.

The Yavanajātaka also mentions the Dodekatropos, another astrological theory prominent in Graeco-Roman treatises.⁴¹ A while ago, I demonstrated that there is evidence that this concept had its origins in old Egyptian concepts of four main directions, which were later expanded into the full-fledged 12 “houses” in the sky.⁴²

These examples show that particularly in the field of scholarly literature, there is still a large unexplored field for potential indicators of cultural transmission. As such texts have often not yet been edited in reliable scholarly editions, let alone been translated, it is very difficult to assess this material correctly. Ideally, one would need to consult all of them and be skilled in all necessary original languages. Realistically, however, it is clear that this is utterly impossible. Therefore, such an endeavour would only be brought about by a large interdisciplinary team.

Indianization of Egyptian Iconography in Mathurā

The Statue Government Museum, Mathura Acc. no. 00J.7

There is at least one striking example of iconographic influence of an originally Egyptian motif on a piece of genuinely Indian sculpture. As with the other cases, it went through a Hellenistic filter. While the strong influence of western, i.e. Graeco-Roman art on the development of early Indian, particularly Buddhist, art is in principle well known, it is usually the strongly Hellenizing art of Gandhāra, a cultural hub in modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan which stands out.⁴³ This is understandable as the influences are very strong there and

⁴⁰ P.S. Sastri (ed.), *Brihat Jataka by Varahamihira. Text with Translation and Notes*, New Delhi 1995, 207–215.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Hübner, *Die Dodekatropos des Manilius (Manil. 2, 856–970)* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz: Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 1995, 6), Stuttgart 1995; Dorian Greenbaum and Micah Ross, *The Role of Egypt in the Development of the Horoscope*, in: *Egypt in Transition. Social and Religious Development of Egypt in the First Millennium BCE*, ed. Ladislav Bareš, Filip Coppens, Květa Smoláriková, Prague 2010, 146–182.

⁴² Alexandra von Lieven, *Grundriß des Laufes der Sterne. Das sogenannte Nutbuch* (The Carlsberg Papyri 8, Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 31) Copenhagen 2007, 146–147.

⁴³ John Boardman, *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity*, London 1994, 129, fig. 4.67, 142–143, fig. 4.87–89.

consequently relatively easy to detect. Interestingly, though, in spite of my own intense research and consulting of experts in the field of Indian arts of the period,⁴⁴ I am not yet aware of any Gandhāra sculpture exhibiting the particular feature being discussed here.

This is all the more striking, as the art of Mathurā in Uttar Pradesh in northern India is not famous for having absorbed many characteristically Hellenistic features. Yet it was among the sandstone sculptures from Mathurā that the figure in question was discovered.⁴⁵ It is dated to the 2nd to 3rd centuries CE, i.e. a time when the trade contacts between Egypt and India were already well established for several centuries. The semi-plastic statue stands in front of a pillar, which once formed part of a railing around a sacred building.⁴⁶ The figure shows a slightly chubby youth in perfectly local Indian costume standing beneath a tree. While the left hand is held downwards in an elegant, but somewhat idle gesture, the right one is lifted upwards. Two fingers are put against the chin in a gesture that might suggest thoughtfulness or bewilderment. All of this would not be noteworthy if it was not for the peculiar head-dress of the boy. In the middle of his turban sits a strange protuberance which is flat at the front and rises upwards considerably at the back. The lower part is striated like a horn.

Indeed, the horn is an interpretation to be found for this detail in literature. The sculpture itself has been thought to depict the ascetic Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who was born with a gazelle horn on his head due to the fact that he sprang from the spilled seed of an ascetic licked up by a female gazelle.⁴⁷ His legend is told in many sacred scriptures, but apparently the gazelle does not feature in all of them. The interpretation of the Mathurā figure as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga has been questioned, though.⁴⁸ Indeed, the protrusion supposed to be the horn does not look very horn-like.

44 My special thanks here go to Martina Stoye, Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, for having discussed the issue with me.

45 Alexandra von Lieven, Ein indisierter Harpokrates in Mathurā (Government Museum, Mathura Acc. no. 00J.7), in: *Sapientia Felicitas. Festschrift für Günter Vittmann zum 29. Februar 2016*, ed. Sandra Lippert, Maren Schentuleit, and Martin Stadler (Cahiers de l'ENIM [Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne] 14), Montpellier 2016, 343–354.

46 Marianne Yaldiz, Nachdenklicher Jüngling, in: *Palast der Götter. 1500 Jahre Kunst aus Indien*, Berlin 1991, 60–61 (no. 9).

47 Klaus Fischer, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in the Narrative Art of Jaina *Stūpas* at Kāṅkālī-Ṭīlā. *Kāma* and *Tapas* in Jaina Sculpture: Patrons, Artists, Worshippers, in: *Indologica Taurinensia* 11 (1983), 227–239, esp. 231 with n. 35–37.

48 Gouriswar Bhattacharya, Wer waren die Auftraggeber der Werkstätten Mathurās? (Inchriftlicher Befund), in: *Künstler und Werkstatt in den orientalischen Gesellschaften*,

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga or Harpokrates?

Nevertheless, it might even be true that for the Indian artists who created this statue, this was indeed Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Yet, as an Egyptologist, one cannot fail to notice the remarkable similarity to the standard iconography of Harpokrates, the child form of the god Horus. As a child, he is always denoted by the gesture of sucking on his finger in Egyptian iconography. While today children usually suck on their thumbs, in Ancient Egypt it was always the index finger of the right hand that was depicted. The gesture was already reinterpreted in the Roman sphere within the Isiac mystery cult as a symbol of silence and secrecy.⁴⁹ It is easy to see how yet another culture might very well have reinterpreted the gesture in yet another way, namely as denoting thoughtfulness.

Horus is the main divine incarnation of kingship. In traditional Egyptian depictions, Horus-the-child (Harpokrates), the legitimate future ruler, is therefore often depicted with a rather prominent Double Crown.⁵⁰ The Double Crown was the traditional royal crown denoting rule over Upper and Lower Egypt. Hellenized depictions of Harpokrates tend to change the proportions, so that the crown shrinks considerably in size in comparison to its wearer. As a consequence, the crown can become rather small as well as slightly misshapen.⁵¹ Therefore it can easily be explained how the Double Crown on Harpokrates' head could become something like a little horn. Thus, theoretically, an Indian viewer might have interpreted such a figure as a depiction of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in the light of the well-known legend. Alternatively, for Indian viewers, it might of course just have been a turban decoration without any deeper meaning. Interestingly, already Maurizio Taddei proposed precisely the above mentioned interpretation for similar looking turban decorations.⁵²

ed. Adalbert Gail, Graz 1982, 109–118, pl. XIII–XVI; Gouriswar Bhattacharya, The so-called Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, in: *South Asian Studies* 7 (1991), 141.

⁴⁹ Philippe Matthey, « Chut! » Le signe d'Harpocrate et l'invitation au silence, in: *Dans le laboratoire de l'historien des religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Borgeaud*, ed. Francesca Prescendi and Youri Volokhine, Geneva 2011, 541–572.

⁵⁰ Günther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* (Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 6), Berlin 1956, pls. 15–21 passim (demonstrating that traditionally the Double Crown was only one possibility, another was particularly the Hemhem Crown, which on the contrary is very rare in Hellenistic depictions).

⁵¹ Herbert Beck, Peter Bol, and Maraike Bückling (ed.), *Ägypten – Griechenland – Rom. Abwehr und Berührung, Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie 26. November 2005–26. Februar 2006*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, 654–657, 660 (compare the traditional bronze of Harpokrates no. 242 with the Hellenized terracottas nos. 243, 245, 248, 249 and 254, which interestingly also often combine a hornlike tiny crown with a sort of elaborate turban).

At any rate, the Mathurā youth is indeed a heavily indianized offshoot of the Harpokrates iconography. This is assured by two factors, firstly the combination of the hand-to-mouth gesture with the horn-like crown, and secondly the shape of the supposed “horn”, which is rather odd for a true gazelle horn and even as a mere turban ornament, but which still clearly betrays its origins as an Egyptian Double Crown by its shape.

Harpokrates Figures in India

Of course, this theory requires Indians being able to see a Hellenized Harpokrates in the first place. Thankfully, this requirement can easily be met with. There are actually several Harpokrates figures which were found in the region.⁵³ At least some of them have an ascertained archaeological provenance like the palace treasury of Begrām and a hoard buried in the courtyard of a house in Taxila. Rachel Mairs, who recently collected the evidence, has wondered about the meaning which might or might not have been attached to such figures in Asia.⁵⁴ While the question of meaning cannot be answered conclusively and even the identification of the Mathurā youth himself cannot be established beyond doubt, this figure is nevertheless very precious for the subject investigated here. For the first time it offers tangible evidence for a creative Indian adaptation of an artistic model of ultimately Egyptian origin in the Graeco-Roman Period.

Thereby it proves that the Harpokrates bronzes found in India were not just curiosities kept in palace treasuries but that they provoked some active engagement with these objects on the part of the Indian viewers. Even if it is not possible to unravel any more, it is thereby beyond doubt that *some* meaning must have been attached to them. The creative adaptation also makes it highly likely that this meaning was a genuinely Indian, not a foreign one.⁵⁵

⁵² Maurizio Taddei, Harpocrates – Brahmā – Maitreya: A Tentative Interpretation of a Gandharan Relief from Swāt, in: *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 3 (1969), 364–390.

⁵³ Rachel Mairs, Egyptian Artefacts from Central and South Asia, in: *Current Research in Egyptology VI: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Symposium which took place at the University of Cambridge, 6–8 January 2005*, ed. Rachel Mairs and Alix Stevenson, Oxford 2007, 74–89, esp. 77–80.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁵⁵ For similar conclusions regarding terracotta figures see Serena Autiero, Terracotta Figurines from Egypt as Agents of Cultural Globalisation in the Indian Ocean, in: *Current Research in Egyptology 2014, Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Symposium University College London & King’s College London 2014. Ancient Egypt in a Global World*, ed. Massimiliano Pinarello, Justin Yoo, Jason Lundock et al., Oxford 2015, 90–99.

