

ISIS &

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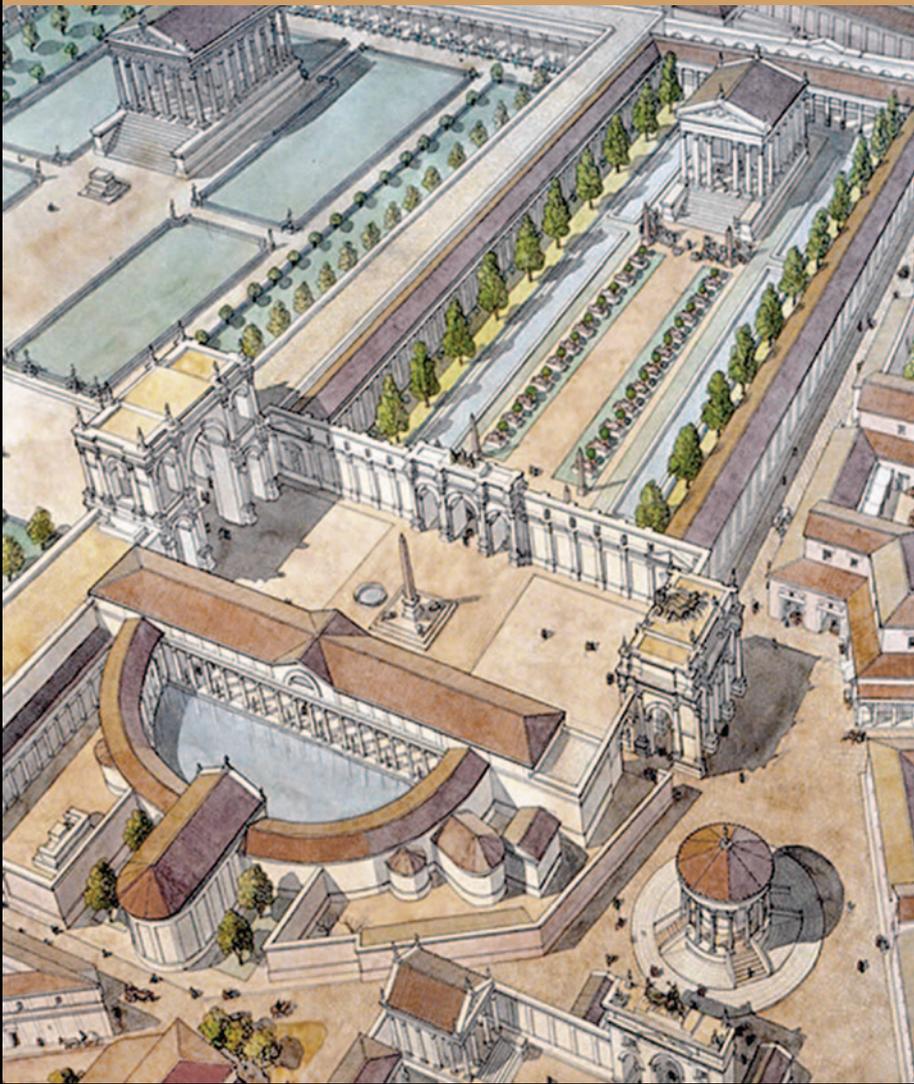
by Lucy Gordan-Rastelli

# GYPTIANIZING ROME

**S**ince the beginning of my collaboration with *Kmt* in 2003, five of my forty-five articles have concerned Rome, where I live, and Vatican City. They were titled: “Ancient Egyptian and Egyptianized Art in the Vatican” (spring, 2006), “Traces of Egypt at Hadrian’s Villa, Tivoli” (fall, 2006), “Egypt on the Tiber” (fall, 2008), “Cleopatra Returns to Rome” (winter, 2013-14), and “Scientific Mummy Studies at the Vatican” (fall, 2015).

Concerning Vatican City, my article dealt with the seven rooms of the Vatican’s official Egyptian collection, the “Gregorian Egyptian Museum,” but failed to include the ancient Egyptian or “Egyptianized” artifacts in other sections of the Vatican Museums, which are covered





*Previous two pages, One of a pair of basalt lions dating to Nectanebo II now in the Vatican Museum. Vatican Museums photo*

*Left, Reconstruction of the Iseum Campense in the Campus Martius of ancient Rome by Jean-Claude Govin. Internet image*

*Opposite, Three of Rome's several ancient Egyptian obelisks, left to right: Atop Bernini's "Fountain of the Four Rivers" in Piazza Navona; in front of the Pantheon; & supported by Bernini's sculpture of an elephant in Piazza Minerva. Author's photo*

below, thanks to documentation provided to me by Lucina Vatuone, director of the Museums' Press Office; Alessia Amenta, curator of the Museums' Egyptian and Near Eastern collections; and Giandomenico Spinola, director of the Museums' Archaeology Department and curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities collections.

As for the Eternal City, my article covered the Egyptian collections in three Roman museums — the Capitoline, the Baracco and Palazzo Altemps — but mentioned only a few ancient Egyptian artifacts and monuments around Rome, often called “an open-air museum.” Most are no longer visible. The most important of these are the Iseum Campense and the Serapeum or the Temple of Isis and Serapis in the Campus Martius, the original home of several surviving sculptures. The Campus Martius, a one-square-mile floodplain at a bend in the Tiber, was first used as a military exercise-ground and over several centuries became

the site of many large public buildings and temples.

Before the construction of this Isis/Serapis double-temple — some remains of which are known to be fifteen to twenty-five feet below street level, under the churches of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and Santo Stefano del Cacco, and the Palazzo Seminario, today home to Italy's Library of Congress and government offices, none of which are visitable — it seems their cult most likely had been introduced in Rome during the Second Century BC. This is attested by two inscriptions discovered on the Capitoline Hill mentioning the priests of Isis Capitolina, possibly the earliest temple dedicated to the Egyptian goddess in Rome.

No archeological remains from there have survived, except for the uppermost section of an obelisk (nearly nine feet tall) dating to Rameses II and his Temple of Re at Heliopolis (Iunu). Today it is the top part of the obelisk which, since 1587, has

stood in the public park Villa Celimontana on the Caelian Hill. The date of its arrival in Rome is unknown. That Roman statesman and historian Dio Cassius reported that in 53 BC the Senate ordered the destruction of all private shrines inside Rome's religious confines, known as the *pomerium*, dedicated to Egyptian gods might explain this lack of remains. For the Senate believed that this foreign cult — introduced by sailors and merchants from Egypt via Greece, in particular via the island of Delos because of its enormous slave market, and especially popular with women and the lower classes, including slaves — was a risk to the worship of the traditional Roman gods of the state. However, that said, the consul Aemilius Paulus, try as he did, could find no workmen for their demolitions.

Moreover, Dio Cassius also reported that the construction of a new double-temple to Isis/Serapis was voted in 43 BC by the Second Triumvirate: Marcus Anto-



nus, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Octavian (the future emperor, Augustus). Thus, although we have no precise date for the temple's construction, it was either shortly after that date or, even more likely, after the Battle of Actium in 30 BC, when Egypt became a Roman province and Octavian/Augustus a pharaoh, with Egyptomania sweeping through Rome.

No matter the date of its original construction, this double-temple and Isis worship had a long checkered history in

in ancient Rome. "The Cult of Isis," an article published on the Internet, with a reconstruction of the Iseum Campense by Jean-Claude Govin, summarized chronologically the judgments of several Roman emperors from Augustus through Caracalla. Augustus disapproved of the Isis cult, calling it "corrupt and pornographic," although the cult was known to proscribe periods of sexual abstinence to its worshippers. Thus, in 28 BC he introduced repressive measures.

However, "the real reason for Au-

gustus's wrath," according to the website, "was that the cult was linked to Egypt and thus the power base of his rival, Antony. [The latter's mistress] Cleopatra, had even gone so far as to declare herself Isis reincarnated. Nonetheless, Augustus's scorn did little to stem public opinion. Officials and servants of the Imperial household were followers of the cult. It seems even his infamous daughter, Julia, was a devotee; whether her belief was genuine or merely another aspect of her defiance against her father can-



*Above & top right, Gigantic marble foot from a colossus of Isis (or possibly Serapis), today on a side street of Rome. Right & opposite, Badly eroded 10-foot-high bust of a colossus of a female goddess, probably Isis; nicknamed “Madame Lucrezia.” Author’s photos*

*not be determined.”*

Augustus’s successor as emperor, Tiberius, continued to disapprove of the cult. When he got wind of a sexual scandal involving it in 9 AD, he had the Temple’s priests crucified and the cult statue of Isis thrown into the Tiber.

However, from Caligula (r. 12-41 AD) onwards for some 300 years, Isis worship usually enjoyed official approval. Caligula legitimized the religion, permitting the construction of more temples to Isis; and her festivals became part of the civil calendar. Vespasian (r. 69-79) adopted Isis and Serapis as his personal savior-deities. Domitian (r. 81-96) owed his life to Isis, having fled from opponents dressed as an Isiac cultist; and in the year 80 he rebuilt the Temple complex, after it had been destroyed by fire. Hadrian (r. 117-138) and Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180) neither favored nor opposed Isis worship; Commodus (r. 180-192), on the

other hand, shaved his head bald like the priests of Serapis. He also used to flagellate those around him while wearing a mask of Anubis, which was common in the procession of the cult.

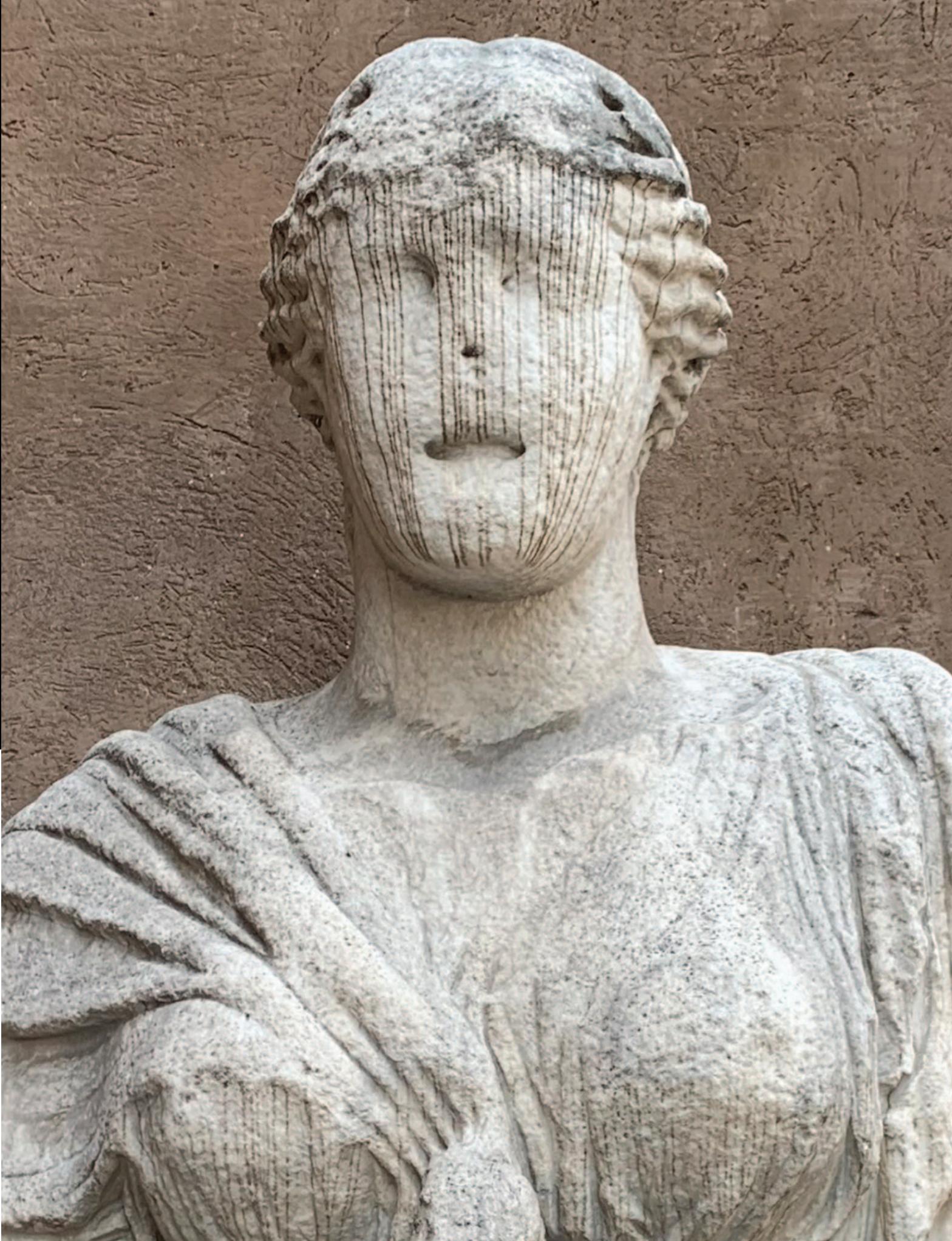
Last but not least, Septimus Severus (r. 193-211) found the cult fascinating and his son Caracalla (r. 211-217) dedicated a giant temple to Serapis on the Quirinal Hill, which rivaled the one built to Capitoline Jupiter, Rome’s original patron-god. “*The meaning was clear,*” the website recounts, “—*the gods of the East that had once been maligned by the ruling classes of the Republic were now on equal footing with the traditional gods of the State.*”

Emperor Theodosius finally closed the Temple of Isis in 391 AD, when he declared Christianity the sole legal religion in the Empire. A fire during the Fifth Century destroyed the building complex, although parts of its ruins remained standing through-

out the middle Ages.

However, there are records which suggest that the cult’s worship may have continued for some years after Theodosius outlawed it. This could have been because its believers were afraid of suppressing its rituals, which supposedly secured safe and prosperous travel, and thus commerce by sea. From a record dating to 354 AD, it is known that the cult’s most important date of the year was March 5. On that day the Romans held a festival in the goddess’s honor called Navigium Isidis, celebrating the re-opening of travel by sea after the winter’s four-and-a-half-month closure. A joyful masked procession, perhaps a predecessor of today’s Carnival, went to the banks of the Tiber to launch a boat dedicated to the goddess on the river.

Although there are no visitable ruins and later buildings have totally overbuilt traces of the Isis temple’s architecture,





*Left & above, Copies of a pair of basalt Egyptian lions found near the Iseum & used by Michelangelo to frame his cordata staircase on the Capitoline Hill. The originals are in the Capitoline Museums. Author's photos*

thanks to the satirist Juvenal it is known the temple was next door to the Saepta Iulia, a building constructed for Julius Caesar — first used for popular elections and during Imperial times for cultural and sports events — in the Campus Martius or “Field of Mars.” However, the temple’s only known depictions are its plan on the “Forma Urbis Romae,” a map of the city, also known as “The Severan Marble Plan of Rome,” and on four *denarii* minted during the earlier reigns of Vespasian and Domitian. The “Forma” was engraved on sheets of marble, roughly sixty by forty-three feet and mounted on a wall of the Temple of Peace. It dated to 203-211 AD, during the reign of Septimius Severus (r. 193-211); only ten-to-fifteen percent of it has survived in more than 1,000 fragments. From these depictions the temple seems to have been rectangular, measuring approximately 220 by seventy meters, and was divided into three parts: a long plaza decorated with obelisks and sphinxes; a central area with monumental entrance arches on its short sides; and a semi-circular structure with a portico and the cult statue.

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Nonetheless, several *Aegyptiaca*, almost certainly from the temple, over the centuries have been discovered in the Campus Martius and several still remain there. Some others, those not in museums, have been incorporated into other monuments in downtown Rome.

Previous Journal articles have dealt with the obelisks of Rome (by Aidan Dodson in *Kmt* Volume 17, Number 4, winter 2006-07; and in the just-previous fall issue, co-authored by Bob Brier, Richard Bowen and Pat Remeler), so here I only want to mention that five of the Eternal City’s thirteen visible obelisks were brought from Egypt to specifically decorate the Isis temple-complex. They are: 1) In the square fronting the Pantheon, dating to the reign of Rameses II and taken to Rome by Domitian; it was discovered in 1373 in the Piazza San Macuto and moved to its present location in 1711, at the wishes of Pope Clement XI;

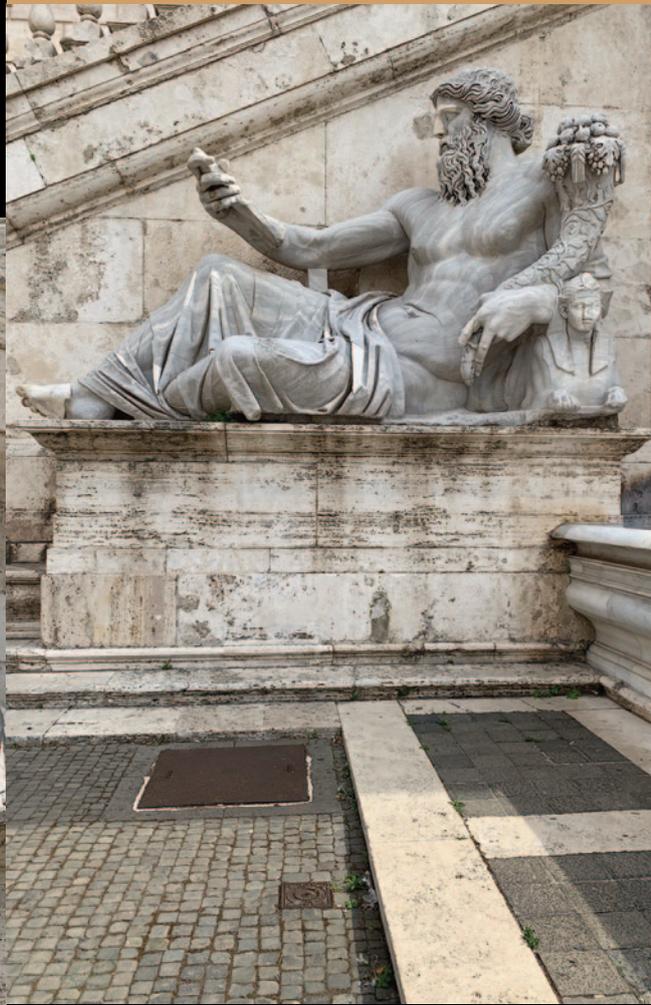
2) In the Piazza Minerva, with Bernini’s elephant-sculpture as its pedestal, this red-granite obelisk, discovered in 1665 next to the cloister of the Church of Santa

Maria Sopra Minerva, was shipped to Rome by either by Emperor Domitian or Emperor Diocletian, especially to decorate the entrance of the Temple of Isis and Serapis; originally erected by Pharaoh Apries of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty around 580 BC, in his capital of Sais; at only eighteen-feet tall it, is the smallest obelisk in Rome and considered the twin of the obelisk in Urbino;

3) The obelisk in today’s public park Villa Celimontana on the Caelian Hill since 1587; made up of parts of several obelisks of unknown origin, except for the top part (some nine-feet tall), which has hieroglyphic inscriptions of Rameses II and was brought to Rome in antiquity (date unknown) to decorate the Temple of Isis Capitolina on Capitoline Hill;

4) In the square outside Rome’s main railroad station, this obelisk, erected at Heliopolis by Rameses II, was found in the Campus Martius in 1883, near the Church of Sant’Ignazio; since 1887 it has topped the Monument to the Battle of Dogali in Ethiopia, commemorating 500 Italian soldiers who had died there that year.

Left, Marble statues personifying the River Tiber &, above, the River Nile, both today on the Campidoglio. Author's photos



5) The obelisk atop Bernini's "Fountain of the Four Rivers" in Piazza Navona was commissioned by Emperor Domitian, sculpted in Egypt and transported to Rome, specifically to decorate the Temple of Isis and Serapis.

A sixth Isis-temple obelisk is still buried near the French church, San Luigi dei Francesi.

Other finds from the Iseum Campense and Campus Martius include a marble statue of a cat, for certain the goddess Bastet, now located on the cornice of Palazzo Grazioli, until recently the Roman home of Italy's infamous politician Silvio Berlusconi. Three legends are associated with the cat statue's present location. One is that the cat's meows alerted a mother that her small child had climbed out onto the cornice, thus saving his life; another is similar: that a fire broke out in this neighborhood one night and that the cat's meows awakened the inhabitants and saved their lives and possessions; and the third recounts that the cat is looking in the direction of a lost treasure of gold coins, which, however,

has never been found.

Statues of four lions and a badly-damaged baboon, representing the god Thoth, (now in the Vatican's Gregorian Egyptian Museum) were also found near the Isis temple. Michelangelo used two of the four lions to decorate the base at each side of his famous staircase, the *cordata*, which leads to the piazza on the Capitoline Hill. The lions there today are modern copies; the originals are in the Capitoline Museums. Domenico Fontana incorporated the other two in his fountain on the Quirinal Hill, built in 1585-88 and known as the Fontana dell'Acqua Felice or the Fountain of Moses. It is said that these two were originally part of a monumental fountain in front of the Pantheon, dedicated to its builder Marcus Agrippa. Today the originals are in the Vatican Museums.

Besides the above-mentioned obelisks and animals, one enormous ancient Egyptian heavily restored black-red granite (from Aswan) round basin is located just off nearby Piazza Sant'Eustachio on Via degli Straderari in the Campus Martius. It probably came from the caldarium for hot-water

bathing in the monumental Baths of Nero, built by this infamous emperor either in 62 or 64 AD and later rebuilt by Alexander Severus in 227 AD.

The two other artifacts which were part of the Isis complex are Egyptian subjects made in Rome. The most famous is the marble left foot — wearing a Greek-style sandal called a "*crepida*" — of a colossal statue of a female goddess (almost certainly Isis, although not part of the Temple's cult statue, which is in the Capitoline Museums; however, some scholars believe it belonged to a Serapis cult-statue). Originally found nearby the foot was moved to its present location on its namesake street (*Via del Piè di Marmo* or "Marble Footway") in 1878, to make room for the passage of King Vittorio Emanuele II's funeral procession. Since the foot is four-feet long, the statue to which it belonged would have been some twenty-six feet high.

There is an unproven theory which associates the foot with the bust (some ten-foot high) of a badly eroded female colossus, probably of Isis or else a priestess of that



*Left, Statue of a cat (Bastet?) from the Iseum & today on a cornice of Palazzo Grazioli. Author's photo Above, Column drum from the Campus Martius with high-relief religious scenes, one of several today in the Vatican Museums.*

Vatican Museums photo

goddess — or perhaps, though less likely, of Empress Faustina. Today located in Piazza San Marco, in a corner of Palazzo Venezia, the bust was given to Lucrezia d'Alagno, lover of Alfonso d'Aragona, King of Naples, when she moved to Rome following Alfonso's death in 1458. Nicknamed "Madame Lucrezia" from the Sixteenth Century onwards, it was one of Rome's five "speaking statues." *Pasquinades* — irreverent satires poking fun at public figures — were frequently posted beside the bust.

Besides Isis Capitolia and the Iseum Campense, there were several other temples or shrines dedicated to Isis or Serapis in ancient Rome; about two the most is known: 1) The Iseum Metellinum or Regio III on the slopes of the Oppian Hill (above the Colosseum), which may be the oldest Isis temple in the city, and was built in the First Century BC; a section of its walls remains today between Via Labicana and Via Merulana, near the Piazza Iside; a small number of artifacts from it, mostly Egyptianized, are conserved in the Antiquarium underneath the Basilica of St. John in Lateran, not open to the public;

2) Located on the slopes of the Quirinal Hill, a temple to Serapis — with an area of 143,375.29 square-feet is one of the largest temples in the city and its construc-

tion is attributed to Hadrian (r. 117-138) and his successor Antoninus Pius (138-161), rather than to the later Severan Dynasty (193-235); a section of its walls remain visible between Palazzo Colonna and the Pontifical Gregorian University, as does an enormous fragment of its entablature, which weighs around 100 tons and is almost 100-feet long.

Locations of the other Isis/Serapis temples and shrines are known, but almost nothing more: an Iseum near the Church of Santa Sabina on the Aventine; another in the Baths of Caracalla; and shrines to Isis known as Larario di Via Giovanni Lanza, near the Church of Sant'Ignazio, in Porta Portese and in Castro Pretorio; and to Serapis in the Hortii Sallustiani. Near the Vatican, in 1941, while excavating to build Via della Conciliazione, Mussolini's majestic street from the Tiber to St. Peter's Square, a bas-relief showing Isis, Serapis and Harpocrate was uncovered. Its date is disputed, but a majority of scholars say that it was made in Rome during the Second Century AD. Today it is in the Capitoline Museums' Centrale Montemartini.

As for Egyptomania in Rome, the most ostentatious by far, perhaps the most bizarre ancient monument in all of Rome, is located on the ancient road Via Ostiense: the Pyramid of Gaius Cestius. Nearly 120-feet

high and constructed of bricks and concrete, but completely covered with blocks of marble from Carrara, it was built as Cestius's tomb. A strong supporter of Emperor Augustus, with a fascination for Egypt, Cestius was a very rich and eccentric politician of the First Century AD; also a prankster, his will stated that his heirs could have their inheritances on the sole condition that they would build him a tomb in the form of a pyramid within 330 days of his death. Mission accomplished! Luckily, it was not stripped during the Middle Ages of its marble veneer, because Emperor Aurelian (r. 270-275) incorporated it into his defensive city-wall as part of a fortified tower.

During Imperial times there were at least another three monumental tombs in pyramidal form, now all demolished. One was on Via Flaminia, near the area today occupied by the Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Piazza del Popolo. Another stood across the piazza where today's Via del Babuino, Via del Corso, and Via Ripetta more or less converge.

Yet another pyramid tomb stood at the river-end of today's Via della Conciliazione, perhaps decorated with the above-mentioned bas-relief. It must have been a twin to Cestius's, because in the Middle Ages that pyramid was thought to be the Tomb of Ro-



*Above, Aswan-granite fountain basin from the baths of Nero & today nearby Piazza Sant'Eustachio on Via degli Straderari in the Campus Martius. Author's photo*



*Left, Second of the pair of Nectanebo II grey-granite lions now in the Vatican Museums. Vatican Museums photo*

*Overleaves, Magnificent marble colossus personifying the River Nile found on the Campus Martius & today displayed in the Vatican's Chiaramonti Museum.*

Vatican Museums photo

mulus and the one near the Vatican the Tomb of Remus. It is known that the so-called Tomb of Remus was demolished in 1499, to make room for a street called Via Alessandrina, which is also no longer in existence.

Regarding of the Vatican and its museums, not in the official Gregorian Egyptian collection, but in the ancient sculpture galleries and in the Cortile della Pigna — or Pine Cone Courtyard — are several authentic ancient Egyptian or “Egyptianized” artifacts:

1) The Courtyard gets its name from a giant (almost seven-feet-tall) bronze pinecone displayed there, found in the Campus Martius during the Middle Ages. Scholars debate as to whether or not it was part of the decoration of a fountain in the Iseum Campense. Also in the courtyard are two grey-granite reclining lions regarding which the Museums’ official guide states: “*The two lions date from the reign of Nectanebo II and the long inscription on the plinth would suggest that they were originally located at Rehuy, likely to correspond to Hermopoli Parva in the Delta, present day Tell Baqliya. Here the pharaoh had built a shrine to the god Thoth... In the Roman Imperial Age the two sculptures were transferred to Rome to be placed in front of the Pantheon or, according to another hypotheses, to decorate the the Temple of Isis at Campus*

*Martius... The lions were rediscovered during the papacy of Eugene IV (c. 1435) during the fifteenth century. They were placed on two columns in front of the Pantheon at the behest of Pope Clement VII, and subsequently used to decorate the Fountain of Acqua Felice at the Baths of Diocletian under Pope Sixtus V (1586). Upon the request of Pope Gregory XVI they were substituted by copies in 1839.”*

2) In the Sala della Croce Greca or “Greek Cross Room” of the Museo Pio Clementino, founded by popes Clement IV (r. 1769-74) and Pius VI (r. 1775-99) are two sphinxes. The grayish-red granite one, dating to the First Century AD, was uncovered during excavations sponsored by Pope Alexander VII (r. 1655-67), to build a new staircase for St. Peter’s Basilica. It probably was part of the decoration of the Circo Gaiet Neronis or the the Circus of Caligula and Nero, where St. Peter was supposed to have been crucified and where the obelisk, brought by Caligula to Rome in 37 AD — and since 1585 in St. Peter’s Square — was first placed. The sphinx has been in the Museum since 1773.

The second red-granite sphinx, datable from the First Century BC to the First Century AD, seems to have been found just outside Piazza del Popolo during the se-

cond half of the Sixteenth Century. According to Giandomenico Spinola’s guide to this Museum, published in 1999, this sphinx could have been among the decorations of Caligula’s “Egyptian Pavillion” in the Hortii Sallustiani, because many artifacts in the Gregorian Egyptian Museum come from that location. However, it more likely decorated a tomb on the Via Flaminia.

3) Flanking the door to the Sala Rotonda are two Aswan red-marble *telamoni*, some nine-feet-tall and nicknamed the “*cioci di Tivoli*.” (A *telamone* is a statue of a man, either freestanding or in relief, usually used as architectural support and for decoration.) Each wears Egyptian royal-attire and is crowned with a capital of water-lily flowers. Their faces are suggestive of Antinous, Emperor Hadrian’s male lover, probably the derivation of their nickname, “dear ones” in Tivoli’s dialect.

The pair are “Egyptianizations,” probably uncovered during the first excavations of Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli (1492-1503), sponsored by Pope Alexander VI Borgia. In 1779 the Bishop of Tivoli gave them to Pius VI in exchange for 1,000 *scudi* needed to build the town’s aqueduct. After restoration the pope placed them in the Vatican Museums.

4) In the Museo Clementino-Pio’s









*Above, Two Late-Period granite sphinxes which once decorated the Circus of Caligula & Nero & today are in the Vatican's Sala della Croce Greca. Vatican Museums photo*

Gallery of the Candelabra are several ancient Egyptianized artifacts: a white marble bas-relief of Horus probably dating to the First Century AD ; several column drums with religious cult-scenes; and the bust of a priest called "the Minister of Haroeris," dating to ca. 160-180 AD.

5) The Vatican Museums' most intriguing "Egyptian" artifact, on display in the Chiaramonti Museum is a colossal marble statue of the Nile, discovered in 1513 in the Campus Martius and probably part of the decoration of the Iseum Campense. The official guide to the Museums recounts: "The river is shown as a venerable old man stretched out on his side with a cornucopia

*of fruit in his left arm and ears of wheat in his right hand. Egypt is represented by the presence of a sphinx, on which the figure of the Nile supports himself, and by some exotic animals. The scene is enlivened by sixteen children who allude to the sixteen cubits of water by which the Nile rises for its annual flood. The base of the statue is decorated with a Nile landscape with pygmies, hippopotamus and crocodiles. The sculpture was probably inspired by a monumental statue of the Nile in black basalt, a masterpiece of Alexandrian Greek sculpture, which Pliny the Elder described as being within the Forum of Peace."*

Another ancient statue of the Nile

*Below, Flanking the door to the Vatican's Sala Rotonda are a pair of nine-foot-tall red-granite Egyptianizing telamoni found at Hadrian's Villa Tivoli & thought to depict the emperor's deified male-lover, Antinous.*

Vatican Museums photo



and one of the Tiber, were unearthed in the Baths of Constantine on the Quirinal Hill. They were placed on the Capitoline Hill in 1518, before Michelangelo remodeled it. Like the Vatican's more elaborate Nile, the Campidoglio's is a bearded elderly man holding a cornucopia and supporting himself by leaning on a sphinx.

Like the Nile on the Campidoglio, the Vatican's had a Tiber companion. Both the Vatican's Nile and Tiber were carried off to Paris by Napoleon in 1797, with only the Nile subsequently returned. The Tiber is still in the Louvre, having been gifted to Louis XVIII (r. 1814-24) by Pius VII.

Besides the Vatican's and Rome's



*Above, The 1st Century AD some 120-foot tall pyramidal Tomb of Gaius Cestius on the ancient road Via Ostiense,*

*Right, Ruins of the Iseum (Temple of Isis) at Pompeii, destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD. Both Internet photos*



Campidoglio statues of the Nile, there is a third one, almost identical to the Vatican's in Naples' Piazzetta Nilo. The Nile in the Vatican was sculpted in Rome and is a much earlier copy than the Naples' Nile of the same ancient Egyptian statue.

The Vatican's Nile, uncovered several months after the Vatican's Tiber in 1512/13, is a Trajanic or Hadrianic copy of an earlier Hellenistic statue from Alexandria (Third Second centuries BC), made of dark Egyptian stone and likely carried off to Rome by Emperor Nero; under Emperor Vespasian it was relocated to the Temple of Peace. Thus it is likely that the Vatican Tiber — now in the Louvre — was part of a pair, carved in

Rome from marble from Mount Pentelicus near Athens; together the statues decorated a fountain in the Iseum Campense. The pair on the Campidoglio date to the Third Century AD, like the baths where they were found, although some scholars date them to the Second Century AD. This would they probably decorated an earlier complex. What is certain is that the Campidoglio's Tiber was originally the the Tigris, and the river-statue was resting on a tiger. In the Sixteenth Century, the tiger was replaced with Romulus and Remus suckling a wolf.

To have a better idea of what an Iseum looked like, it is worth the two-hour drive south from Rome to Pompeii to see

there the best-preserved Iseum outside Egypt. Built in the Second Century BC, it was badly damaged by an earthquake in 62 AD, and rebuilt by freedman Numerius Popidius Ampliatus soon afterwards, to spark the political career of his six-year-old son, Celsinus. Buried under ashes by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, it was excavated between 1764 and 1766; a very popular site on the Grand Tour, it inspired Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

**About the Author** Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is the Journal's European correspondent based in Rome, and a frequent contributor, specializing in European museum Egyptian collections.