**GREEK AND EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS PARALLELS**

**Egyptian Gods with Greek Names in Herodotus and Votive Statuary**

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Throughout much of Book II of his *Histories*, Herodotus frequently draws comparisons between Egyptian and Greek deities and goes so far as to identify the Egyptian gods with a Greek counterpart. When referring to the temple of an Egyptian deity in an Egyptian city, Herodotus generally calls the deity by a Greek name.1 When actually using the Egyptian name, he tends also to supply the Greek equivalent.2 What is his motive for identifying Egyptian deities in a Greek context? Is Herodotus merely doing this for the sake of his Greek audience, who might generally have been unfamiliar with many of the Egyptian gods and goddesses? Is he trying to make a point or is he working off of a previously established tradition of theological comparisons between Greece and Egypt?

We must further consider why Herodotus chooses to identify specific Egyptian gods and goddesses with their Greek counterparts. What is his reason for equating two particular deities? Does he witness similar cultic and ritual behavior? Do the two share similar myths and legends or iconography and symbolism? Does his methodology consider similarities in the sounds of the Greek and Egyptian names for the gods? A thorough analysis of Herodotus' equations of all Greek and Egyptian gods cannot be completed here. Herodotus often fails to provide enough evidence to begin a structural analysis of the associations of Greek and Egyptian gods, so we can only draw conclusions for a few particular examples where enough information about the cult, ritual, symbolism, iconography, and name is provided. Additionally, to restrict ourselves to the testimony of a single ancient traveler would not only perhaps give us a somewhat narrow or skewed perspective, but might also leave us with the notion that Herodotus was the inventor of these comparisons and equations between Egyptian gods and religion and his own. A brief examination of votive statuary from the Greek Archaic and Classical Periods (Egyptian Saite and Persian Periods, 664-332 BCE) may provide further evidence of a Greek incorporation of Egyptian religion and identification with Egyptian gods well before Herodotus' exploits.

**Theban Zeus**

One of the most frequently mentioned deities in Herodotus' account of Egypt is "Theban Zeus." Herodotus makes it abundantly clear that Zeus is known as Amun among the Egyptians. He relates a myth that he heard from the Egyptians at Thebes, the cult center of the ram-headed god Amun, where Heracles3 attempts to persuade Zeus to reveal his true form to him, but Zeus resists and devises a means by which to get around the issue. Zeus skins a ram and cuts off its head;

then, holding the head before him and covering himself in the fleece, he showed himself to Heracles. This story explains why the Egyptians represent Zeus with a ram's head--a practice, which has extended to the Ammonians, who are a joint colony of Egyptians and Ethiopians ... So far as I can see, the Ammonians took their name too from the circumstance; for Amun is the Egyptian name for Zeus.4

Two phrases from the above passage might help us to discern how Herodotus conceived of the relationship between Egyptian and Greek gods. Herodotus explains why "the Egyptians represent Zeus with a ram's head."5 He does not assert that the Egyptians represent *their* "Zeus" or their chief god with a ram's head, but specifically equates Zeus with the ram-headed god of Thebes, Amun. Furthermore, Herodotus actually claims that "Amun is the Egyptian name for Zeus."6 Again, we find a direct equivalency between the identities of Zeus and Amun rather than a mere similarity. While Herodotus clearly identifies Zeus with Amun, however, the numerous appearances of his name in context offer little evidence to suggest why the two deities were considered to be one under different names.7 He acknowledges the difference in the representation of Zeus/Amun among the Greeks and Egyptians and offers no plausible explanation for the equation of the two.

**Methodology and Tradition**

Herodotus makes no effort to defend himself when identifying an Egyptian god by a Greek name. Just as he rarely provides any evidence to suggest a possible reason for equating foreign and Greek gods, he seems to take their equation for granted and assumes the audience is fully comfortable with this. As Ivan M. Linforth notes in his *Greek Gods and Foreign Gods in Herodotus*, Herodotus "seems to assume that there can be no doubt about the identity and that his readers will not be conscious of anything peculiar."8 Linforth also asserts that, while "[h]ere and there the direct equation of an Egyptian name with a Greek name is stated ... there is nothing systematic about it."9 While it is true that Herodotus seldom offers any clues as to why he equates particular Egyptian and Greek divinities, one can draw a few conclusions about his methodology when looking beneath the surface of the text and at the myths, rituals, and iconography of the gods and goddesses in question.

After a lengthy account of the Egyptian practice of bull sacrifice, Herodotus mentions that "[t]he statues of Isis show a female figure with cow's horns, like the Greek representations of Io."10 He does not specifically equate Io with Isis in this passage or anywhere else in the text, but perhaps he is drawing on his knowledge of Io's legendary adventures as his motive for positing the similarity between her and Isis' images.11 According to Greek myth, Io came to be revered in Egypt as Isis. Herodotus places his effort simply on affirming similar bovine representational characteristics of the goddesses.12 The specific value of this passage is that Herodotus demonstrates a possible methodology for associating Egyptian deities with those of the Greeks. An association or equation is made here based on a similar anthropomorphic appearance of the deities, but this is not the sole reason behind the equation of the two goddesses (or goddess Isis and heroine Io). Upon close inspection of the symbolism and legends of the two figures, we see a greater common iconographic and mythic element, which, in the narrow tradition of Io13, appears to have been the motive for their equation among the Greeks.

**Adoption of Pantheon and Theology**

If Herodotus hints at the equation of Io and Isis and boldly asserts Zeus and Amun to be one in the same, can likewise be said for the remainder of the Egyptian and Greek deities? If so, what then does this suggest about the nature of gods, pantheons, and religio-cultural differences according to Herodotus? Are we to read Herodotus as suggesting the universality of gods--that all cultures worship the same divine being under different names and through different rituals, rites, and symbols--or does Herodotus suppose that the Greeks and Egyptians, in particular, share common deities as a result of cultural importation?

Herodotus takes great advantage of the opportunity to hammer down his belief that the Greeks adopted many features and figures of the Egyptian pantheon:

The names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt. I know from the inquiries I have made that they came from abroad, and it seems most likely that it was from Egypt, for the names of all the gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning of time, with the exception (as I have already said) of Poseidon and the Dioscuri--and also of Hera, Hestia, Themis, the Graces, and the Nereids. I have the authority of the Egyptians themselves for this.14

That Herodotus asserts the probability that the "names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt" is not surprising, since Greek tradition held Egypt to be one of the worlds oldest civilizations and often ascribes to them the origin of many cultural and technological elements.

They also told me that the Egyptians first brought into use the names of the twelve gods, which the Greeks took over from them, and were the first to assign altars and images and temples to the gods, and to carve figures in stone.15

Herodotus frequently mentions that the Greeks adopted the *names* of the gods from Egypt. Herodotus does not mean to suggest that the names of the gods of Greece are actually Egyptian in origin. Linforth argues that Herodotus, when stating this, "wishes to say that the Greeks derived their knowledge of a god from Egypt."16

[Ancient peoples knew] gods as individuals, prayed to them as individuals, sacrificed to them as individuals, and told stories about their relations to one another as individuals. For this individualization the first necessity was names: to name a god was to recognize him as an individual, to learn the name of a god from a foreign people was to learn to recognize him as an individual, whether the actual word used as a name by the foreign people was adopted or a totally different word substituted for it.17

Thus, just as "the Egyptians deny knowing the names of Poseidon and the Dioscuri," so are these gods "not received amongst the rest."18 To "know the name" seems to be synonymous with knowing and accepting the identity.

It cannot be the Greeks and Egyptians, alone, who revere the same gods, for, according to Herodotus, we have already seen that the Ammonians, an Egyptian-Ethiopian people, also revere Amun, or Theban Zeus.19 Similarly, at Meroe, "the capital city of the Ethiopians ... [t]he inhabitants worship Zeus and Dionysus alone of the gods, holding them in great honour."20 Herodotus additionally believes that the Greeks incorporated the religious traditions of other foreign cultures. As we have already seen, Herodotus claims that "the names of all the gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning of time, with the exception (as I have already said) of Poseidon and the Dioscuri--and also of Hera, Hestia, Themis, the Graces, and the Nereids."21 He does not believe that the names (identities) of the gods of whom the Egyptians have no knowledge were initially discovered by the Greeks, themselves, but rather that they were "named by the Pelasgians22--with the exception of Poseidon, about whom they learned from the Libyans."23

The evidence does not seem to suggest a complete universality of the gods, that all deities were recognized equally by all cultural groups. Some cultures supposedly denied the existence of certain deities, as the Egyptians did with Poseidon and the Dioscuri.24 Furthermore, other foreign civilizations revered gods recognized by the Greeks only as natural forces: the Persians, for example, "worship the sun, moon, and earth, [and] *fire, water, and winds*, which are their only original deities."25 Nevertheless, Herodotus seems to believe that all gods recognized by the Greeks were originally recognized elsewhere and the Greeks, in turn, imported the conception of these deities. For, even Athena, patron goddess of Athens, is identified with the goddess Neith, patroness of the Saite administrative capital of Sais in the Egyptian Delta.26

**Osiris and Dionysus**

One of the more curious associations of an Egyptian god with a Greek god found in Herodotus is that of Osiris with Dionysus.27 What would possess the Greeks to identify the Egyptian god of the dead and afterlife with their god of wine, intoxicated reverie, and fertility? As is to be expected, Herodotus offers little that might suggest a possible motive for their association. One correlation between the two gods is a common domain over fertility. Dionysus was the god of wine and also the vine, the plant from which wine was produced. Incorporating his domain over wine's intoxicating effects, Dionysus also presided over mystic rites of ecstasy and unchecked sexuality.28 In addition to death and the afterlife, another sphere over which Osiris has divine influence is agrarian fertility. This aspect of his cult is likely connected to his ancient origin as a chthonic agriculture deity overseeing the growth of crops and perhaps affiliated with the inundation of the Nile valley with its rich black alluvium soil.29 Osiris is often depicted with green or black skin, symbolic of lush vegetation or the fertile soil deposited by the Nile's annual flood. His association with death and resurrection in the afterlife likely came about as the cult spread throughout Egypt and syncretized with other religious traditions.30 The funerary and fertility aspects of Osiris are blended together perfectly in the so-called Osiris bed found in only a few Egyptian tombs of the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE). This wooden frame formed in the shape of Osiris in mummy's wrappings with royal crown was filled with alluvial silt and sown with seeds of barley. The growth of the seeds from figure of the deceased symbolizes the resurrection of Osiris and closely ties in the agrarian fertility aspect of his early cult.31 Despite the initial seemingly unrelated natures of Dionysus and Osiris, a similar fertility aspect may have induced the Greeks to identify these deities as one.

A closer examination of the myths and cults of Osiris and Dionysus reveal a number of additional similarities. Both gods, for instance, possess similar myths of a double birth. Dionysus was the child of Zeus and his mortal mistress, Semele. While carrying the unborn Dionysus, Semele desired to see the full majesty of her beloved Zeus, but upon seeing the brilliance of the lightning surrounding Zeus, she burned up. Zeus plucked forth the premature Dionysus from Semele's womb and stitched the infant into his thigh. Zeus carried Dionysus in his thigh to term, at which point the "twice-born" infant god was born, emerging from a "womb" a second time.32 The twice-born aspect of Osiris is found in his resurrection from the magicks of his wife and sister Isis after his betrayal and murder by his brother Set. Seeking the throne of Egypt for himself, the wicked Set tricked Osiris at a banquet to lie in a beautifully adorned chest. Set and his conspirators nailed Osiris in the chest, poured boiling lead over it, and set it adrift on the Nile. Isis searched throughout Egypt for the chest containing Osiris and found it in the trunk of a tree. She opened the chest and mourned over the body of her husband, but soon hid the chest and left in longing of her son, Horus. Set discovered the richly adorned chest, tore the body of Osiris into numerous pieces, and scattered the parts throughout Egypt.33 Upon hearing of this, Isis traveled throughout Egypt, collecting and reassembling the pieces of her husband--all but the phallus, which was consumed by the fish of the Nile, so Isis formed an artificial phallus out of Nile mud. In the form of a kite bird, Isis then mated with the deceased Osiris and conceived the god Horus.34 Horus overthrew Set and became the godhead of Egypt, while Osiris moved on to become ruler of the underworld.35

The resurrection myth of Osiris clearly demonstrates the origin and significance of phallic imagery in the cult of Osiris. Symbolic of the resurrection and Osiris' role as a fertility deity, the phallus makes appearances in votive offerings, festivals, and ritual procession.36 In a rare exception to his self-imposed restriction from describing the myths and rituals of Egyptian religion37, Herodotus offers a detailed account of a festival of Osiris and compares the cultic rites and ritual processions of the two gods, with particular attention to phallic and sexual imagery. Herodotus briefly explains the Egyptian practice of sacrificing a hog on the eve of the festival of Osiris and goes on to state:

In other ways the Egyptian method of celebrating the festival of Dionysus [Osiris] is much the same as the Greek, except that the Egyptians have no choric dance. Instead of the phallus they have puppets, about eighteen inches high; the genitals of these figures are made almost as big as the rest of the bodies, and they are pulled up and down by strings as the women carry them round the villages. Flutes lead the procession, and the women as they follow sing a hymn to Dionysus. There is a religious legend to account for the size of the genitals and the fact that they are the only part of the puppet's body which is made to move. Now I have an idea that Melampus the son of Amythaon knew all about this ceremony; for it was he who introduced the name of Dionysus into Greece, together with the sacrifice in his honour and the phallic procession. ... and from Melampus the Greeks learned the rites which they now perform.38

As Osiris and Dionysus are male fertility deities, phallic imagery is prominent in the cults and myths of both. In the festival of the Dionysia, to which Herodotus is making the above comparison, however, the phallic symbolism seeks to emphasize the erotic aspect of genitalia often to the point of a grotesque burlesque and sexual arousal for its own sake, rather than procreation.39

Perhaps the most striking parallel between the mythic traditions of Osiris and Dionysus is that they both share a similar dismemberment and resurrection myth. We have already explored the Egyptian account of the betrayal and murder of Osiris at the hands of his jealous brother Set, who angrily dismembers his body and scatters the parts throughout Egypt. Isis then reassembles Osiris, save the missing phallus, which she fashions out of Nile mud, thereby restoring him to wholeness and resurrecting him as the undead god of the underworld. We find its mythic parallel among the secret Orphic mystery cult of Chthonic Dionysus, known especially through the later compilation called the *Rhapsodies*.40 In this consmogony, Zeus rapes his mother, Rhea-Demeter, and sires Persephone, whom he rapes, in turn, in the form of a serpent and sires Dionysus. To the child Dionysus, Zeus then bequeaths the rule of the world and places him on his throne. Hera sends the Titans to distract the child with toys, the most beguiling of which he finds to be a mirror. As Dionysus gazes at his image in the mirror, the Titans attack him, dragging him from the throne and cutting him up into numerous pieces, which they then prepare and consume in an antithetical sacrificial manner.41 As the Titans consume the body of Dionysus, save the heart, which is hidden and spared, Zeus hurls a thunderbolt to destroy the murderers. From their charred remains rises the race of men and from the collected remnants of Dionysus the god is reassembled and reborn.

The Egyptian and Greek dismemberment myths both involve a defilement of the deity's physical being and divine sanctity and an eventual resurrection. Just as Osiris first experiences death, dismemberment, mummification, and resurrection as a form of sacrificial transformation to become the god of the afterlife, the dismemberment and preparation of Dionysus strongly mirrors normal sacrificial tradition. Similarly, both cultic traditions offer an anthropogenic account. In the Dionysus myth, from the charred flesh of the Titans, further evocative of the burning of a sacrifice, springs forth mankind.42 In the Egyptian tradition of Osiris, the Middle Kingdom (2040-1640 BCE) "Coffin Texts," a series of spells for the afterlife written on the deceased's coffin, contain passages equating the resurrection of the deceased with the sprouting of barley from the body of Osiris.43 While not indicating a direct and original creation of mankind from the body of Osiris, this association suggests an anthropogenic or regenerative quality to the fertility and resurrection aspect of Osiris. From the slain body of Osiris rises the newly reborn Egyptian deceased.44

The question of whether the myth of the dismemberment and resurrection of Dionysus finds the impetus for its origin in Greek tradition or later as a result of the already-established parallel with Osiris must be considered. There is no indisputable evidence that the *Rhapsodic* Dionysus myth existed before the Hellenistic era (the Egyptian Ptolemaic Period), but indirect indications suggest that the myth was already well known to Classical authors.45 While mentioning Osiris' and Horus' struggles with Set, Herodotus is silent about the actual dismemberment of Osiris, although in Egypt there was no secret about this myth and it was in fact absolutely critical to the ideology of kingship and cosmic order. Burkert explains Herodotus' silence suggesting that "the corresponding myth of the dismemberment of Dionysos was an unspeakable doctrine of the mysteries."46

The specific question concerning the origin of the Dionysus dismemberment myth may not yet have an answer, but there is certainly no doubt in Herodotus' mind of the influence that Egyptian myths and mysteries had on Greek religion. On the heels of his account of Egyptian festival of Osiris and the comparison of its phallic imagery with that of Dionysus, Herodotus quickly adds:

I will never admit that the similar ceremonies performed in Greece and Egypt are the result of mere coincidence--had that been so, our rites would have been more Greek in character and less recent in origin. Nor will I allow that the Egyptians ever took over from Greece either this custom or any other.47

According to Herodotus, we are only left with the possibility that Greek ceremonies similar to Egyptian ones were in some way influenced by Egyptian traditions. This clearly indicates Herodotus' belief that Greek religious traditions might openly and consciously welcome an Egyptian influence. Where Archaic and early Classical literary evidence escapes us, archaeological evidence may provide some answers as to the nature of the Egyptian influence on Greek religion.

**Greek Assimilation of Egyptian Religion**

Traces of Archaic and Classical Greek involvement in Egyptian religious institutions and practice can be gathered from various Egyptian and Greek sites throughout the Nile Valley and Delta. Valuable evidence for a Greek identification with and participation in Egyptian religion can be gathered from a number of bronze votive figures bearing Greek dedicatory inscriptions discovered in Lower Egypt.

One example is that of the Isis with baby Horus type very familiar to Ancient Egypt ([fig. 1](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/01.html)).48 Although the provenance of this statue is unknown, an analysis of the inscription suggests an Archaic Ionian dialect and dates the figure to about 500 BCE.49 The use of such a popular Egyptian statue type might indicate that the figure was purchased from a stock of similar items crafted specifically for dedication at a nearby Egyptian temple. The inscription was then, no doubt, made to order for the worshipper, for it reads: "Pythermos, son of Neilon, offered me, a statue of Isis."50 The fact that the inscription is in Greek obviously suggests that a Greek traveler or expatriate visited and made offering at an Egyptian temple.51

Another bronze votive example is a small statue of the Apis bull rendered in a purely traditional Egyptian style, while bearing a distinctly Greek dedicatory inscription to the god "Panepi" ([fig. 2](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/02.html)).52 The style of the inscription suggests a date between 500-450 BCE and that the worshipper was not Ionian, but possibly Aeolian or more probably Dorian.53 The exact find spot is unspecified, but it is noted to have come "from a Greek site in the Delta."54 Considering the suggested late Archaic to mid-Classical date for the inscription, surely this Greek site must be the port city of Naukratis, the only considerable Greek site in Egypt at this time, assuming the object had not been removed from its original location and reused elsewhere during the Greco-Roman Period. The votive inscription reads: "Sokydes dedicated me to Panepi."55 In this ancient animal cult, the Apis served as the Ba (*b3*--the spirit or physical manifestation) of the Egyptian god Ptah, chief god of the city Memphis.56 The Greek name "Panepi" is thought to derive from the Egyptian phrase *b3 n Pth*, the "Spirit of Ptah," but Panepi is not attested to as a god elsewhere in the literary evidence.57 Herodotus describes the mystical nature of the birth of the Apis, where "a flash of light descends upon the cow from heaven, and this causes her to receive Apis" and the mother cow "is never afterwards able to have another [calf]."58 Upon the death of the Apis bull, it becomes identified with Osiris, god of the dead and underworld. Because of the divine nature of the bull's birth and its affiliation with Osiris, the bull's mother, hence, comes to be identified with Isis, goddess of motherhood and sorceress whose magic resuscitated the deceased Osiris.59

The Egyptian Saite Period (ca. 664-525 BCE) experiences a profound rise in the popularity of animal cults with interesting attention being paid to the mothers of the Apis bulls. From the 37th regnal year of Amasis (reigned 570-526 BCE) onward, we see the ritual mummification of the so-called "Mothers of Apis" and burial in their own catacombs in the sacred animal cemetery at the royal necropolis at Saqqara.60 This is also the period during which we see strong political, economic, and military relations between Greece and Egypt and a thriving Greek presence in the Egyptian Delta at Naukratis. As noted above, the bronze Apis votive statue was found at "a Greek site in the Delta,"61 which we might assume to be Naukratis. It seems reasonable, then, to suspect that the Greeks in Egypt witnessed this new attention the Egyptians paid to the "Mother of Apis."

We are left to wonder, however, what business a Greek would have dedicating a votive offering of the Apis bull in the Greek colony of Naukratis. There is no evidence of a temple or shrine of the Apis cult at Naukratis, or to Ptah (whose Ba the Apis represented), or Hephaestus, the Greek equivalent to Ptah.62 As we have seen above, the "Mother of Apis" was associated with Isis. There is no evidence to suggest the existence of a temple to Isis or any other Egyptian temples at Naukratis, nor is there evidence for a Greek temple to Demeter, whom Herodotus equates with Isis.63 There is evidence to suggest, however, that the Temple of Aphrodite at Naukratis may have received votive offerings related to Isis.

Excavations within the Temple of Aphrodite at Naukratis by W. M. F. Petrie and E. A. Gardner revealed a votive figurine of a seated woman with child indicative of a Greek Egyptianizing style ([fig. 3](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/03.html)).64 This figure immediately brings to mind the exceedingly popular Egyptian statue type of Isis with the child Horus (later known as Harpokrates).65 The Greeks were certainly quite familiar with this statue type, as is clearly evident from the previously discussed bronze Isis and Horus statue offered by a Greek at an Egyptian temple.

Additional votive offerings found at the Temple of Aphrodite at Naukratis also echo the element of motherhood. A series of crudely rendered small stone figures of a nude woman reclining on a couch or bed are exemplary of the local "Egyptianizing" style of Greek figurines at Naukratis ([fig. 4](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/04.html)).66 Some examples of this series date to as early as the 6th century BCE and it appears that the manufacture of this Greco-Egyptian statue type continues in a more or less unchanged iconographic and representational style for many centuries.67 We encounter a similar figurine type of a nude woman reclining on a bed among native Egyptian statuary. The strong similarity of the motif suggests the adoption of this Egyptian statuary type by the Greeks in Naukratis for use in their own religious context. A large number of examples come from the New Kingdom Egyptian workman's village of Deir el-Medina among the residences of laborers working on the royal tombs and mortuary temples. Many of the Deir el-Medina figurines are decorated with painted designs or naked children beside the reclined woman.68 In general, the figurines are associated with Hathor, the goddess of sexuality and identified with the Greek Aphrodite, which justifies their presence in the Temple of Aphrodite at Naukratis. On some examples from Deir el-Medina, the legs of the beds on which the woman or pair recline are rendered in the form of Bes, the grotesque Egyptian dwarf god of sexuality and childbirth. The child figure beside the grown woman further emphasizes the object's childbirth and motherhood symbolic and magical significance.

To summarize the amounting evidence, we see in the Temple of Aphrodite at Naukratis the presence of votive figurines of the mother and child type commonly associated with Isis and the child Horus. We further see the presence of reclining female nudes reminiscent of the Deir el-Medina type. This evidence seems to indicate the possibility that Aphrodite at Naukratis may have possessed a motherhood aspect to her cult beyond the traditional aspects of love and sexual eroticism or that her temple acted as sort of surrogate house of worship for other goddesses not represented at Naukratis.

It seems plausible, then, that a votive offering of the Apis bull found at "a Greek site in the Delta" could have been dedicated at the Temple of Aphrodite. We see now that the Temple of Aphrodite received offerings associated with Isis and that Isis was identified as both the mother of the Apis bull and the wife of Osiris (the Apis bull, himself). Furthermore, Aphrodite is the wife of Hephaestus, who was identified with the Egyptian Ptah, and the Apis bull functioned as the Ba (or physical manifestation) of Ptah. The myriad of connections makes the Temple of Aphrodite the most likely location for the dedication of the Apis statue.

A final and very significant example of a bronze votive figurine dedicated by a Greek speaker at an Egyptian temple is that of a seated Osiris with a lunar-disk crown from Saqqara ([fig. 5](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/05.html)).69 An analysis of this figure's Greek dedicatory inscription suggests a probable date as late as 400 BCE70. The truly remarkable character of this object is revealed by its inscription: "Zenes, son of Theodotos, made [this] statue of Selene, given life."71 The inscription incorporates both Greek and Egyptian Hieroglyphs, jumping from one language to the other as appropriate for the common Egyptian royal and divine epithet "given life" (*di ankh*). This may indicate that the Greeks were not only becoming comfortable with the Egyptian language in general, but also familiar with the usage of specific divine and royal epithets, while seeking to incorporate them into their religious observance.

**Conclusion**

The literary evidence clearly reveals that the Greeks identified their gods and goddesses with those of other cultures. While the names, appearance, and cultic practices may be dramatically different, similarities within their myths and spheres of divine patronage, whether profound or miniscule, proved sufficient to justify not a mere parallel, but an actual sameness in the deities' beings. As Linforth maintains, "There was needed only the slightest resemblance to cause two apparently distinct gods to fly together and coalesce in one. The power of attraction was greater than the power of repulsion."72 The archaeological evidence, furthermore, supports the notion that Greek speakers in Egypt also offered Egyptian votive sacrifices in Egyptian temples. Generally, the Greek worshipper continued to identify the Egyptian god or goddess by his or her Greek name, though occasionally he adopted the use of the Egyptian name.73 This suggests that, Archaic and Classical Greek religion as it was practiced in Egypt may have been receptive of certain Egyptianizing influences. For the most part, however, the Greek speaker continued to conceive of the deity as the god of his native Greece. Nevertheless, he seemed to acknowledge the fact that foreign peoples were simultaneously worshipping this same deity in an entirely different manner.

The cultural implications of the material offering to the deity seemed not to matter as much as the offering itself. The continued use of Greek as the language of the dedicatory inscriptions and the style of the inscription (use of the first person as if to make the statue speak)74 suggest that the Egyptian votive materials were adopted without necessarily adopting much of the Egyptian religion, itself. The incorporation of Egyptian Hieroglyphics into the Greek dedicatory inscription, however, suggests a likely familiarity with and acceptance of Egyptian ritual language running parallel with traditional Greek-style worship. On the topic of religious myth, ritual, and legends, Herodotus asserts that "I do not think that any one nation known much more about such things than any other."75 Since the Greek speaker considered the Egyptian cult of a god as no less valid than the Greek cult of that *same*god, the fact of the offering mattered more than the cultural implications of the manner and material in which it was offered.

**Appendix**

Table 1. Egyptian deities with Greek equivalents mentioned by Herodotus (adapted from the table in Linforth 6-7).

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| **Egyptian Deity** | **Greek Deity** | **Location in Herodotus** |
| Ptah | Hephaestus | II.3.1, 112.1 |
| Horus | Apollo | II.144.2 |
| Osiris | Dionysus | II.42.2, 144.2 |
| Isis | Demeter (Io) | II.59.2 (II.41.2) |
| Set/Apophis | Typhon | II.144.2, 156.4 |
| Bubastis (Bast) | Artemis | II.137.5 |
| Neith | Athena | II.28.1, 59.3 |
| Amun | Zeus | II.42 |
| Hathor | Aphrodite | II.42 |
| Khonsu (?) | Herakles | II.42 |
| Min | Pan | II.46.4 |
| Apis | Epaphus | II.153.1 |

**One additional bronze votive statue:**

(From *Saites, Persians, and Greeks, Oh My! A Brief Look at Egyptian Cultural Influence on Greeks in Egypt during the Saite Period and the Effect of the Persian Conquest*, Lucas Livingston, March 11, 2002.)

Another example of a bronze votive offering suggesting a Greek involvement in Egyptian religion is a small statue pedestal from Memphis with a relief depicting Amun and Mut receiving an offering from a worshipper [[fig. 6](http://www.saic.edu/~llivin/research/greeks_egyptian_gods/06.html)].76 While the artistry of the scene is distinctly Egyptian, the dedicatory inscription running along the sides and top of the pedestal is written in both Greek and Egyptian Hieroglyphs. The content of the inscription is even more interesting, as it clearly demonstrates that this offering was presented by a Greek to the Egyptian temple of Amun at Thebes: "Melanthios dedicated me, a statue for Theban Zeus."77 Based on an analysis of the Greek inscription, it is determined to be of Ionian dialect and has been assigned a date of 550-525 BCE.78

**Additional passages from Herodotus on the "Twelve" and "Eight" Gods:**

From the coast inland as far as Heliopolis--just about the same distance as along the road from the altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Pisa--the country is broad and flat, with much swamp and mud.79

I was told that this Heracles was one of the twelve gods. Of the other Heracles, with whom the Greeks are familiar, I could get no information anywhere in Egypt. Nevertheless, it was not the Egyptians who took the name Heracles from the Greeks. The opposite is true: it was the Greeks who took it from the Egyptians--those Greeks, I mean, who gave the name to the son of Amphitryon.80

Nevertheless, the Egyptians have had a god named Heracles from time immemorial. They say that seventeen thousand years before the reign of Amasis the twelve gods were produced from the eight; and of the twelve they hold Heracles to be one.81

In Greece, the youngest of the gods are thought to be Heracles, Dionysus, and Pan; but in Egypt Pan is very ancient, and one of the 'eight gods' who existed before the rest; Heracles is one of the 'twelve' who appeared later, and Dionysus one of the third order who were descended from the twelve.82

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