

Arsinoe's Adonis and the Poetics of Ptolemaic Imperialism*

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The Adonia sponsored by Queen Arsinoe in Theocritus' fifteenth *Idyll*, our fullest account of an Adonis festival anywhere, is a hybrid ceremony, woven together out of different religious and cultural practices. The present article seeks to understand the festival within its poem and that poem within the Alexandrian courtly milieu that produced it. Our fragmentary evidence for the cult and myth of Adonis in general comes from throughout the Mediterranean world, from a wide spectrum of literary genres, and from all strata of ancient chronology. The variegated, inconsistent picture it presents is no trick played by its lacunosity, but a function of its diverse origins and uses; thus in a text like *Idyll* 15, it is not simply a question for us to unravel syncretistic matter from some essential Adonia. We will find a series of mutually interwoven texts (in the broadest sense): the Adonia of Classical Greece, the ritual codes of Egypt, the public image of the Ptolemies, the other Greek poetry of Theocritus' time and place, and the life of early Ptolemaic Alexandria, all read and misread by the poet who frames our view of them.

Arsinoe's Adonia

Idyll 15, a hexameter dialogue titled "Syracusan Women, or Worshippers of Adonis" in our manuscripts, is set around the later 270s B.C.E.¹ Gorgo and

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¹Berenice I is dead, as she was by the winter of 275/4, and Arsinoe is alive, as she was until July 270 (the traditional dating, upheld by Cadell) or July 268 (Grzybek 103–12, Cameron 160–61).

Praxinoa, Alexandrians of Syracusan origin (line 90), set out one morning for an Adonis festival sponsored by Queen Arsinoe at the palace. The women admire tapestry depictions of the god (78–86) and hear a forty-five-line hymn that represents Arsinoe as celebrating Adonis in gratitude for Aphrodite’s deification of the late Queen Mother, Berenice (106–11). The singer’s impressionistic description of the display includes a representation of Adonis on an ornate bed with his goddess-lover under a leafy canopy (119–31); near him lie fruit, mini-gardens kept in silver baskets, golden bottles of scented oils, breads, and meats (112–18).² At dawn “we women” will carry Adonis to the seashore in mourning and begin a song, presumably the competitive dirge at which the singer herself won last year (132–35; cf. 98). The hymn ends with a prayer, echoed by Gorgo, that Adonis be favorable next year too.

The poem is a royal encomium,³ exalting the queen as heir and champion of Hellenic culture. By the time of the Ptolemies the Adonia, originally a transformation of the yearly ritual mourning for the Mesopotamian god Tammuz, had long had a special place in Greek society; in Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., whence the bulk of our evidence comes, it was observed by women at home with a combination of lamentation and merriment.⁴ Arsinoe’s celebration, “at home” as in Athens, is a clear statement of her own Hellenism.⁵ It also includes the poetic competitions that linked Ptolemaic Egypt to Greek literary history, and in particular continues a tradition of Adoniac cult hymns like those of Sappho and Praxilla of Sicyon; at line 129 the Sapphic associations of the term *gambros*, “bridegroom,” unite Sappho’s marriage songs and Adonis-songs in a single literary pedigree.⁶ The singer herself is introduced as “the Argive woman’s daughter” (97): the Homeric meter and language of the poem, themselves harnessed to the ideological program, lend the mother’s ethnic the

²On the way these details fit together and on the textual problems see Platnauer, Gow 1952: 2.298–99, Atallah 105–35, White 199–203, Torelli 249–50.

³A fact not lost on the ancient argumentator (Wendel 305.14–17). The singer’s references to Golgoi, Idalion, Miletus, and Samos (100, 126) recall recent Ptolemaic conquests: see Gow 1952 on 100–101, Whitehorne 73, Hunter 1996a: 131.

⁴Origins: Burkert 105–8, Brown 19, Reed 1995: 317–21. Athenian cult: Nilsson 727–28, Detienne 239–40, Winkler 189–93, Reed 1995: 345–46. Most of our sources are late lexicographical and rhetorical works that draw largely on Classical Attic literature.

⁵Here and in the following sections I consider the festival as an event within the poem; a later section will address whether Arsinoe really did sponsor such an Adonia.

⁶Sappho: fr. 140, 166 Voigt; Praxilla: *PMG* 747. On γαμβρός see Σ 129 (I cite scholia from Wendel).

Homeric sense of "Greek" (versus non-Greek).⁷ References to the ruling dynasty here are not vague: the Lagids, like all noble Macedonian families, traced their ancestry and legitimate Hellenism back to Argos (specifically to Heracles, as in *Idyll* 17.20–27). The singer's identity thus parallels that of the festival's sponsor: in terms of Ptolemaic ideology, Arsinoe too is "the Argive woman's daughter." In this gynocentric poem song and monarchy follow the same path, from mother to daughter.⁸

Yet a searching comparison of Theocritus' picture with the Greek Adonia reveals a more complex encomiastic impulse. Arsinoe's Adonia can be read as a composite whose slippage from its Greek referent—particularly in the cult objects, food offerings, emphasis on Adonis' reunion with Aphrodite, and palatial setting—discloses the Ptolemies' dual allegiance to Greek culture, which binds them to the whole Hellenic world and assures their credentials in it, and to the throne of Egypt, whose ancient reputation for bounteousness they are keen to uphold. Trappings we know of from the Greek cult—potted plants and a doll-like effigy of Adonis—are accounted for in Arsinoe's palace, but under royal supervision they have swelled in extravagance.⁹ The effigy is swathed in costly purple-dyed sheets and embowered amid ebony, ivory, and gold (123–25); Rice, comparing similar display figures from Philadelphus' court, assumes a life-like, life-sized image of the young Adonis.¹⁰ The name of the "gardens" (113) unmistakably directs us to the Greek "gardens of Adonis," seedlings sprouted especially for the festival, like the seedlings grown in pots or dishes for certain festivals today (for example, "St. Barbara's wheat" in Provence).¹¹ Our Attic sources, which mention (broken) pots as the characteristic receptacle, suggest a degree of informality and domestic improvisation; here the "tender

⁷The term may also connect her to the Argive cult of Adonis mentioned by Paus. 2.20.6, if it existed in Theocritus' time. The opinion in Σ 97 that both the singer and her mother bore the *name* Argeia, and that she came from Sicyon (doubtless a borrowing from Praxilla), seems only a guess; see Reinach 236–37.

⁸Aphrodite too, often motherless, is defined by her mother at 106: Κύπρι Διωναία.

⁹de Vaux 31 n. 2, Weill 692; cf. Creuzer 100.

¹⁰Rice 59; cf. Gow 1952: 2.299–300. Ebony, ivory, and gold are likewise carried together in Philadelphus' grand procession (Callix. *FGrH* 627 F 2); see Rice 98–99. For the effigy in the Classical Adonia see Plut. *Alc.* 18.3, *Nic.* 13.7; Alciph. 4.14.8; Hsch. α 1231; Phot. *Lex.* s.v. 'Αδώνια (whence *Suda* s.v.).

¹¹For sources and discussions see Burkert 107; Atallah 211–28; Reed 1995: 319, 323–28, 332–33, 338–40. The late Byzantine Eustathius' note that they were planted "in an earthenware pot or wicker basket, indeed in any basket" (Eust. *Od.* 1701.47–49) may be an attempt to reconcile the baskets in Theoc. 15 with the pots specified by our other sources.

gardens” are “kept in silver baskets.”¹² The bounty of ripe produce, baked goods, fowl, and meat offered to Adonis, especially if intended for a banquet later,¹³ might be a regal correlative to refreshments served at the Greek Adonia. The evidence for food there is weaker than usually supposed: only the late lexicographer Hesychius (probably drawing on Attic sources) attests that “at the Adonia they bring forth...all kinds of fruit,” and his testimony is problematic.¹⁴ A group of late fifth-century vases depicting festive women, some carrying serving-baskets of grapes, has long been held to depict the Adonia, perhaps wrongly.¹⁵ Yet whether or not there was food at Athens, the Alexandrian display represents not just an aggrandizement of a Greek custom but a revision. At the Greek Adonia (which was not an agricultural rite)¹⁶ an offering or display of produce would have made no ritual sense; Arsinoe’s Adonia, on the other hand, if it is not expressly an agricultural rite (as Weber 170 has recently characterized it), at least advertises—to the god and goddess, and to the crowds of spectators—the fertility of Egypt and her own dynasty’s successful custody thereof.¹⁷

¹²Torelli’s idea that the gardens in line 113 correspond to the gardens of Adonis without being identical to them (Torelli 250, 284 n. 51) is a needless subtlety prompted partly by his misconstruction of line 112 and partly by the common assumption that a practice attested for the Adonia must be applicable to the Adonia everywhere, which requires him (like Gow 1952: 2.295 and Atallah 122–23 in different ways) to reconcile Theocritus’ account to testimonia from Zenobius (see n. 25 below) and others.

¹³A reasonable guess of Gow’s, which he supports with common sense (the food is “not meant to be wasted”) and circumstantial evidence (Gow 1938: 194–95, with further details in 1952: 2.297–98). White’s argument (195–96) that the fruits must be wax models, since “all fruits” (112) cannot be ripe in the same season, neglects the hymn’s element of hyperbole. For some reason the meats in 118 have long been interpreted as pastry simulacra (see, e.g., Valckenaer 244–45; *contra*, Gow *ad loc.*), without any particular support from the text.

¹⁴Hsch. α 1231. The mention of fruit syntactically disrupts an account of the gardens, and looks like an interpolation motivated by the pairing of fruit and gardens in Theoc. 15.112–14 (cf. Gow 1938: 183 n. 13). The lexicographers who share Hesychius’ source here do not mention fruit (Phot. *Lex.* and *Suda* s.v. Ἀδώνιδος κήποι).

¹⁵See Weill. Edwards, who reviews the scholarship on the question, dissociates these paintings from the cult; Wehgartner 194 n. 41 reaffirms the connection.

¹⁶This old interpretation, inspired by Roman-era theology (see n. 42 below), is traceable through such discussions as Creuzer 104–7, Movers 205–31, and Greve 54–57 before coming into full bloom in the anthropological theories of Mannhardt and Frazer. It was questioned by Atallah 317–24 and laid to rest by Detienne.

¹⁷Cf. Hunter 1996a: 117, who compares Ath. 11.497b–c and similar passages in Theoc. 17.

Structurally, too, the festival betrays Alexandrian tinkering. The idea that the Adonia in *Idyll* 15 is a two-day festival, with one of joyful hierogamy followed by one of lamentation, corresponding to the marriage and death of the god, has strongly affected reconstructions of the Adonia generally, but only imperfectly accounts for even Theocritus' data. It seems influenced by the Byblian Adonia described by Lucian and the late Alexandrian Adonia described by St. Cyril, where the mourning is *followed* by rejoicing and a declaration that "he lives" or "he has been found."¹⁸ Arsinoe's Adonia, as the poem presents its structure, is a yearly public display in the royal palace followed by a funeral procession and competitive dirge "at dawn" (132). The timing suggests that the procession concludes an Adoniatic *pannykhis* like those attested for both Athens and Ptolemaic Egypt itself.¹⁹ The funeral procession too is traditional, and in the morning the effigy will presumably represent a corpse; yet at 129–30 it represents the living Adonis, the young "bridegroom" whose kisses are soft. The ornate canopied bed is no catafalque, but a nuptial bower. This hierogamic element (may we call it a rite?) seems an innovation by the Ptolemies, perhaps after the celebrated Adonia of Byblos, which had longstanding connections with Egypt and where a marriage of the god and goddess is at least heavily suggested by later poets.²⁰ It reorients the ceremony fundamentally, as we shall see.

Recent scholarship emphasizes how the placement of the festival under the supervision of a woman and in a narrative frame dominated by women and their daily lives replicates the context of the Greek ritual lament for Adonis.²¹ The queen is the sponsor and hostess; women are to perform the mourning; men are marginal to the rite. But again, there are differences: men (like the surly man in 87–88) are present as spectators on a par with Gorgo and Praxinoa and seem to

¹⁸Lucian *Syr.D.* 6; Cyril Alex. *Comm. Is.* 2.3 (PG 70.440), perhaps preceded by Origen *Sel. Ezech.* 9 (PG 13.800). Cf. n. 91 below.

¹⁹Men. *Sam.* 46, Diosc. *AP* 5.193 (on this poem see further below). It may also be attested by personified Pannykhis attending Adonis on the Meidias vase (*LIMC* s.v. "Adonis" no. 10, Attic, late fifth century).

²⁰Heitsch 1.10.24, Nonn. *D.* 42.268; cf. Bion *Ad.* 87–90, which may reflect Byblian rites (see Reed 1997: 21 and 245, where I regret too affirmatively labelling Arsinoe's ceremony a hierogamy). Compare Theoc. 15.119–20 with Nonn. *D.* 41.4–6 (cf. Stocks 33–35). Torelli 258–63 imagines a hierogamy, acted out by the celebrants, as part of the Athenian Adonia, without evidence.

²¹On women in Theoc. 15: Griffiths 1981; Pomeroy 78; Kraemer 31–36; Burton 84–88, 133–54; Davies; Whitehorne.

be conceived as beneficiaries.²² This inclusiveness develops from the Alexandrian festival's status as a public spectacle. The very siting of the display in the royal palace, "at home" as in Athens, yet in public (in the home of the first woman in the realm), is significant. It is striking that Gorgo and Praxinoa do not seem to keep the Adonia at home, as women of Athens did. Gorgo mentions the festival in terms of going out (22–24); their whole experience of it is confined to their awestruck visit to the display, while their plans for home, far from including such festivities as we hear of in Athens, come down to Gorgo's ill-tempered husband's lunch (146–47). The evident segregation of the spectators from the celebrants recalls Dunand's reading of the roughly contemporary spectacles and banquets of Philadelphus' grand procession, and might yield a similar message about the Ptolemies' ideal of the Alexandrian social order. Theocritus represents the Alexandrian Adonia as both an advertisement to outsiders of Egyptian glory and the queen's gift to her subjects. The familiar trappings of the Greek Adonia have been engineered to exalt Ptolemaic monarchy. Gazing upon the display, we are gazing upon an intertext.

Adonis as Osiris

Another intertext involves the indigenous religion of Egypt: certain of this Adonia's features, unparalleled in the Classical Greek sources, point us to native Osiris-worship. The most striking is the funeral procession to the seashore, which according to a scholiast will culminate in the casting of the effigy upon the sea.²³ The scholiastic *argumentum* to the poem implies the belief that this was strictly an Alexandrian practice: "Along with the usual rites, the Alexandrians had the custom in the Adonia of carrying the effigies of Adonis they had prepared to the sea."²⁴ The closest parallel outside of Egypt is furnished by the paroemiographer Zenobius (second century C.E.), who records that the gardens of Adonis are carried in a funeral procession with the effigy and cast into public springs.²⁵ To make this rite account for the Theocritean passage,

²²See Gow 1938: 182 n. 10 on the masculine participle χαίροντας in Gorgo's prayer (149). The scholia (nn. 23–24 below) use masculine participles to describe the celebrants, perhaps generically, but perhaps reflecting knowledge of an inclusive rite.

²³Σ 133: ἐπὶ γὰρ τὴν θάλασσαν ἐκφέροντες τὸν Ἀδωνιν ἔρριπτον ἐπὶ αὐτήν. The participle means "bearing in the *ekphora* (the funeral procession)."

²⁴Wendel 305: ἔθος δὲ εἶχον οἱ κατ' Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἐν τοῖς Ἀδωνίοις διακοσμήσαντες τὰ εἶδωλα τοῦ Ἀδωνίδος μετὰ τῶν νομιζομένων ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν κομίζειν. The "usual rites" will be those practiced in the Adonia elsewhere, like the ritual lament.

²⁵Zen. 1.49 (L-S 1.19): οἱ κῆποι τοῦ Ἀδωνίδος...ἐκφέρονται δὲ ἅμα τελευτῶντι τῷ θεῷ καὶ ῥιπτοῦνται εἰς κρήνας. The twelfth-century testimony of Eust. *Od.*

we would have to accept first either that Zenobius meant that the effigy too ended up in a spring (perhaps naming only the gardens because they were his immediate subject), or that Theocritus' Alexandrians have extended or transferred the immersion to it; and secondly that the Alexandrians have replaced the springs with the sea. Faced with a lack of evidence, we cannot rule out such accommodations. But whether or not the activity that Theocritus' singer describes continues a Greek rite, we meet closer parallels in Egypt. In two almost identical epigrams by the early Ptolemaic poet Dioscorides, the speaker sees a girl who has just been beating her bare breasts at the Adonia (so at the ritual mourning, the ceremony that Theocritus' singer locates at the seaside) and lewdly offers to go to sea as Adonis' fellow-voyager (*symplooun*) when he dies, if only she will perform the same favor for him.²⁶ Dioscorides' first poem also approaches the Theocritean singer's description in locating the ritual mourning beside a *kalybê* (a makeshift shelter of reeds or branches), which should be identified with the "green canopy" (*khlôrai skiades*) that apparently embowers Adonis at *Idyll* 15.119–22.²⁷ We are dealing with a ritual death-voyage here, and also in the Theocritean singer's account. Her farewell to the god at 143–44 is a "bon voyage."

Of all gods Egyptian Osiris is best known for an immersion, whether his drowning or a mystical voyage he makes in death. The *Pyramid Texts* of the Old Kingdom refer to "the place where [the dead king, identified with Osiris] drowned," presumably depending on a myth that his brother Seth killed him that way, and later texts support this idea, once in connection with the scattering of Osiris' body.²⁸ Against this background, Theocritus' mourners could be

1701.45–50 that the gardens of Adonis were thrown into the sea (he does not mention the effigy) sounds like a conflation of Zenobius' account with the Theocritean scholium, and should not be accepted as an independent source on the rite (cf. n. 11 above).

²⁶Diosc. *AP* 5.53 and 193. On his date see *HE* 2.235–36 (with commentary on our two poems on 238–39). On whether we have two versions by the same poet or (as often) one original and one imitation with mistaken attribution, see *HE* 2.238 (where the first possibility is favored).

²⁷On the term *καλύβη* see Westendorp Boerma 653–57. Note that the ancient commentators identify Theocritus' *σκιάδες* as *καλύβαι* (*Σ* 119, 120/121). The doubts expressed in *HE* 2.238 on the correspondence between Dioscorides' *καλύβη* and Theocritus' *σκιάδες* rest on Gow's interpretation of *σκιάδες* as the canopies for an ensuing feast (*contra*, White 198–99). Even in that case, however, they would be a logical place to mourn the god as well.

²⁸*Pyr.* §§24D, 615D, 766D (translations in Faulkner 1969). See Gwyn Griffiths 1960: 6–7 and 1980: 9, 107–111, 160–62; cf. Merkelbach 1988 on Greek reflections of Osiris' drowning.

reenacting the god's death (at the seashore—because of Alexandria's location?—instead of by the Nile, as the Egyptian texts have it).²⁹ Some ritual correlative to the texts would have provided an immediate model.

Even more cogent is Osiris' voyage. Ritual texts for his festivals enjoin a procession with the *nšmt*-barque from one point in the ritual precinct to another, either by canal or on the Nile. The mystery text from the East Osiris Chapel at Dendera, a priestly compilation from the late Ptolemaic or early Roman period drawing on older prescriptions for the Osiris festival in the month of Khoiak (roughly December), speaks of sacred boat-processions on the river on the 22nd of the month in which the god's boat is one of thirty-four carrying, in addition to effigies of the gods, three hundred and sixty-five lamps.³⁰ Khoiak navigations of Osiris figure in both Egyptian and Greek ritual texts of the time of Ptolemy I.³¹ The Canopus Decree of March 234 B.C.E. states that Berenice, the deceased young daughter of Ptolemy III Euergetes and Berenice II, is henceforward to accompany Osiris by boat to his temple at Canopus in the Khoiak festival.³² To be sure, Osiris is not the only Egyptian god to be borne in procession in a boat.³³ In his case, however, the voyage is connected with that of the dead (whom he represents, especially the dead king) to a new home in the hereafter. "I caused him to embark on the great ship which carried his beauty," says Ikhnofret, recounting his execution of his sacral duties. "It came to land in Abydos [a traditional resting place of the dead god] and brought Osiris, foremost of Westerners [= the dead], to his palace."³⁴ In a Dendera text, Osiris' voyage in the *nšmt*-barque culminates in the burial of the effigy of the god.³⁵ The voyage of Osiris is thus a death-voyage, conveying the god to his tomb or, mystically, to the Afterlife. At some point the ritual was brought to the seashore: such a

²⁹So Merkelbach 1995: 50: "Adonis ist ertrunken wie Osiris."

³⁰For the Dendera texts see Chassinat, Cauville 1997; cf. F. Daumas, *LÄ* s.v. "Choiakfeste"; Lloyd 2.276–79. For the navigation rite see, e.g., cols. 20–21, 113–14 (Cauville 1997: 1.16, 25).

³¹*P. Hibeh* 27.60–62 (see Grenfell/Hunt 153), *P. Louvre* N. 3176 (S) col. 5.11–12 (see Barguet 18, 54; cf. 27).

³²Sethe 142–49.

³³Gwyn Griffiths 1975: 36: "For processional purposes gods are generally carried in barques; this was because a part of the journey would be on the Nile." See Gwyn Griffiths 1975: 34–40, 1980: 75 on navigation rituals connected with the death of Osiris.

³⁴Gwyn Griffiths 1975: 35, translating the Stela of Ikhnofret (12th Dyn.).

³⁵Goyon 1969: 62.

practice must lie behind the myth in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* that Typhon (Seth) and his accomplices shut Osiris in a chest and set him adrift on the sea.³⁶

The Ptolemies made full and early use of Osiris. He furnishes the prime ingredient of the cult of Sarapis, invented under Ptolemy I Soter out of Egyptian and Greek elements, and it is unsurprising to find Soter's daughter assimilating him to Adonis, another dying god whose chief function in ritual was to be lamented.³⁷ Like Adonis, whose youthful beauty Theocritus emphasizes in traditional Greek terms (85, 127–30), Osiris was thought of as young and beautiful, indeed nubile. For Ikhnofret (above), "his beauty" is metonymical for the god. He has the rare epithet *Hwn nfr*, "perfect/beautiful youth," at Philae and in liturgical texts from our period.³⁸ An Egyptian text from early in the reign of Ptolemy I calls him "uniquely youthful, beauteous to behold."³⁹ The traditional assimilation of Aphrodite to Isis also assimilates Adonis to Isis' traditional consort; indeed, the epithet given to Aphrodite in 109, "of many names" (*polyônymos*), recalls the title *myriônymos* given to Isis by Plutarch.⁴⁰ The epithet itself would recall to the alert reader that one of Aphrodite's many names was Isis. The image of a great goddess bending in sorrow over a beautiful dead youth could be either Greek or Egyptian; yet the similarities between Adonis and Osiris cast into relief their differences. Having worked away at one anomaly in Theocritus' Adonia, the ceremony at the shore, and followed where it led, we find that other anomalies lead in the same direction. The prayer for Adonis' favor (143–44, 149) is unparalleled in Classical Greek sources, but makes sense if he is being treated as a god with power to bestow blessings. The singer's last words—"to the rejoicing of women you have come this time,

³⁶Plut. *De Is.* 13.356c; this is how Plutarch accounts for the death of Osiris. See de Vaux 39–43 (detecting Osirian influence in Theoc. 15.133), Gwyn Griffiths 1970: 311 and in *LÄ* 4.633.

³⁷For explicit examples of this identification, all from the Roman period, see nn. 89–90. For modern theory the seminal discussion of the identity of Osiris, Adonis, and other such figures is Frazer; Smith 69–73 gives a recent assessment of his "dying and rising god" (discussing Ugaritic Baal in particular).

³⁸abkar 30; Faulkner 1934: 341, 1936: 123 (translating "fair Stripling").

³⁹*P. Bremner-Rhind* col. 3.8 (Faulkner 1936: 124). Cf. Gwyn Griffiths 1970: 501–2. Plutarch may work this topos into his Platonic allegory, where it is Osiris' "ineffable and humanly inexpressible beauty" that draws his worshipers and arouses Isis' love (*De Is.* 78.383a).

⁴⁰Plut. *De Is.* 53.372e; for other Greek instances of "Isis of many names" see Gwyn Griffiths 1970: 502–3, who notes that although the equivalent Egyptian epithet *ꜥšꜣ m.w* is not found applied to Isis, she could have borrowed it from Hathor (among many deities who bear it).

Adonis, and when you return, you will be dear in your coming,” endorsed by Gorgo in the last line of the poem—sound like an Egyptian motif, recalling, for example, Osiris’ welcome in the early Ptolemaic *Lamentations* of Isis and Nephthys, who reiterate “It is good to see thee!” and “Our hearts are joyful at seeing thee!”⁴¹

When in the Roman period a connection between Osiris and Adonis is explicitly made, it may be understood as part of a broader tendency toward syncretism, especially of dying gods and their consorts. Theologians subsumed both gods, for example, into the symbolic role of god of the crops or of the fertile season.⁴² But the syncretism that Theocritus intimates has a special significance in the Alexandrian court, whose iconography is always double-edged, suggesting different meanings to the Greek and native points of view. Youth and beauty, for example, have particular meaning for Osiris. His titles in hymns from Philae, “the Eternal One rejuvenating himself” and “the eternally youthful who raised up Eternity,” suggest the crucial qualities of imperishability and cyclicity that his youth symbolized for Egyptians; through his identification with the Nile flood, fertility enters the characterization.⁴³ Baines suggests that the phrase *Hwn nfr* assimilates Osiris to “the young sun-god or demiurge”; in the hymn at Philae it rings against the military prowess of Osiris extolled there (“who performs slaughter among the disaffected of the two lands”), making him a stalwart young soldier.⁴⁴ Germond shows that the epithet *Hr nfr*, “beautiful of countenance,” is applied to deities (including Osiris) especially when their favor is sought; “beauty” here represents something like “divine grace.” Adonis, whose youthful beauty in Greek mythology and cult may mark him for both good and ill as a sexual object, is never a warrior, a creator-god, or a powerful deity to be conciliated. Yet here in Arsinoe’s palace, through the quirks and clues that make us see Osiris in his shadow, he becomes all these things. Youthful beauty is a hinge between two cultural visions.

⁴¹Faulkner 1934, cols. 2.7 and 3.10; cf. *Pyr.* §939. The anticipation of next year in the singer’s formula may also have a non-Greek origin (see Reed 1997: 251).

⁴²Cf. Greve 51–52. Osiris as god of crops: Plut. *De Is.* 65.377b (scornful of the belief; see Gwyn Griffiths 1970: 529–30). For Adonis see Reed 1995: 320 n. 16, 340. This symbolism underlies the pairings of the two in Corn. *Theol.* 28, Hippol. *Haer.* 5.9.8 = Heitsch no. 44.2 = Wolbergs 8, and Macr. *Sat.* 1.21.1.

⁴³ abkar 31; cf. 34–36. See DuQuesne 27 on Osiris’ title Onnophris (*Wnn-nfr*).

⁴⁴Baines 290; abkar 32–33.

The double identity and split aptitude of Theocritus' Adonis was asserted by Brugsch long ago,⁴⁵ but seems to have been forgotten, although occasionally reapproached.⁴⁶ Although some of the points he emphasizes may not seem as relevant to us, his formulation is valuable for casting the syncretism in terms of two points of view whose exponents each take advantage of the overlap, and especially for distinguishing one of those points of view as that of the Egyptian priestly hierarchy whose cooperation was needed for the Macedonian dynasty's success. Brugsch's insight is all the more remarkable for having occurred when the great hieroglyphic texts had barely begun to reemerge from oblivion; our own initial evidence for the syncretism, the sea-voyage on which Plutarch sheds such precious light, Brugsch denies himself, holding that the Plutarchan account derives wholly from syncretism with the Adonis of Byblos.⁴⁷ His contrapuntal reading (Said's term) warns us to listen for the Egyptian voices in *Idyll* 15; this Adonia, in fact, will reward the kind of reading that Koenen (1993) applies to Ptolemaic portraiture, whose combination of native and non-native features promotes two different styles of kingship simultaneously by identifying their common points. Ubiquitous sphinxes and obelisks and hieroglyphic inscriptions, now eye-opening explicated by Yoyotte, made Ptolemaic Alexandria itself just such a bicultural monument.

Look again at the display. Again and again the differences between the two cults—the Greek and Egyptian features with no mutual correspondence—are elaborated around a core of common objects and offerings, so that two complexes of meaning unfurl from a shared iconography. Both traditions

⁴⁵Brugsch 11: "Wenn die Griechen mit ihrem angeborene Sinne für das Schöne außer anderen Ursachen schon in der poetischen Auffassung des ganzen Festes einen hinlänglichen Grund finden konnten, den Kult des morgenländischen Adonis einzuführen, so war es in Aegypten nicht die poetische Seite dieses Mythos, sondern die Aehnlichkeit der über- und unterirdischen Natur des vergötterten Adonis mit Osiris, die gleiche Bedeutung der Kypriis und Isis, der Gattin des Osiris, welche den ägyptischen Priester bewegen konnte, das Fremde den Mysterien der Isis einzuverleiben." Brugsch is addressing himself specifically to Theoc. 15.

⁴⁶Greve 29 seems to echo Brugsch; Baudissin 196–97 at least suggests syncretism in the Alexandrian Adonia. See also de Vaux (n. 54), Merkelbach (n. 29). Glotz 180, for whom "larges emprunts à la religion nationale d'Isis et d'Osiris" are axiomatic for the Adonia in Ptolemaic Egypt, oversimplifies the question: "Où elle est Aphrodite, il est Adonis; où elle est Isis, il est Osiris."

⁴⁷Brugsch 11–12; so too Baudissin 188–90, though expressing doubts (196–97). Plutarch's account does show knowledge of the Byblian Adonia, but hieroglyphic texts reveal its Egyptian basis (Gwyn Griffiths 1970 *passim*), and Byblos itself was long influenced by Egypt (Montet, Gwyn Griffiths 1980: 28–34, Lemaire 95–96).

required an effigy. In the Khoiak text from Dendera a figure of Sokar, an avatar of Osiris already known to Attic comedy, is composed of aromatic substances and shaped in a special mummiform mold made of gold.⁴⁸ Each deity rests on an opulent bed: just as the bed of Adonis is resplendent with ebony and gold (line 123), so the Dendera text prescribes that the “bed-chamber” of the Sokar figure (the chest in which it lies) be made of ebony and gold.⁴⁹ The Alexandrian “green canopy” of vegetation (119) strongly recalls the leafy pavilion that surrounds Sokar’s bed-chamber: it is to be made of fourteen columns, covered with mats of papyrus and plants, and hung inside with textiles (Chassinat thinks of figured tapestries, which one could connect with the tapestries admired by Gorgo and Praxinoa in Arsinoe’s display). Both gods are attended by lesser divinities: Adonis by his lover’s familiars, the Loves that flit about like fledglings in the canopy; the Sokar figure by two guardian gods at the bed and the gods Hu and Sa by the door of the bed-chamber.⁵⁰

To Glotz the line introducing the offerings, “Arsinoe pampers Adonis with all fine things (*pantessi kalois*)” (111), recalls the offering enjoined at Dendera for Osiris’ funeral voyage, “Grande offrande de toutes choses bonnes et pures (*nb.wt nfr.w w^cb.w*).”⁵¹ Certain details of Theocritus’ list bring us close to other parts of the Khoiak festival. The “tender gardens” (113–14) recall both the Greek gardens of Adonis and the Egyptian “grain-mummies,” mummiform figures (modeled after the traditional image of Osiris) made of a compound of barley and sand (or clay) and sometimes watered and allowed to germinate. Connected with the resurrection of the deceased in the Afterlife, they are attested in tombs from the Third Intermediate Period onward, although their origins go back further in time.⁵² In the Osirian rites described at Dendera this phenomenon is represented by the Khenty-Amentet figure, taking its name (“foremost of the Westerners”) from the funereal god whom we have already seen identified with Osiris on the Stela of Ikhnofret.⁵³ Like the Sokar figure it

⁴⁸Dendera text cols. 31–34 (Cauville 1997: 1.17), Chassinat 41. For Sokar see Cratin.Jun. fr. 2 *PCG*.

⁴⁹Dendera text cols. 69–70 (Cauville 1997: 1.21), Chassinat 57.

⁵⁰Dendera text cols. 70–71 (Cauville 1997: 1.21), Chassinat 63–64, 607.

⁵¹Dendera text col. 78 (Cauville 1997: 1.22), Glotz 185. See Chassinat 618. Note the broad semantic overlap between Gk. καλός and Eg. *nfr* (both “good, beautiful”).

⁵²On this object, often referred to in British parlance as a “corn-mummy” or “corn-Osiris,” see Gwyn Griffiths 1980: 163–70, Raven (27–29 on the Osirian rite from Dendera). Firmicus Maternus in the fourth century C.E. knows a version of this custom (*Err.* 27.1 Turcan, *de seminibus factum idolum Osyridis*). Σ 113 lists barley (along with wheat) as a plant grown in the gardens of Adonis—reflecting an Osiris-derived custom?

⁵³See Gwyn Griffiths 1980: 174–75, who cites, e.g., *Pyr.* §1666A.

was shaped in a golden mummiform mold, but was made of the sand and barley mixture. Watered daily over a period of nine days during the Khoiak festival, it was allowed to sprout in its own perforated receptacle with a granite tray underneath to catch the runoff.⁵⁴ This apparatus, like its Adoniac correlative, is referred to as a “garden” (*hsp*); once it is the “garden of Osiris,” *hsp n Wsir* (col. 11), verbally corresponding to the Greek “garden of Adonis.”

The edibles on display at *Idyll* 15.112–18 offer an even more striking point of contact. The singer devotes a full three lines out of the seven to the baked goods (115–17): “and [there lie beside him] all the dainties at which women toil on the kneading board, mixing all kinds of flowers into white flour, and all that are [made] from sweet honey and in fluid olive oil.” Why such emphasis? In an Egyptian context the bread recalls the loaves offered by the king to Sokar-Osiris in the Khoiak text at Edfu; they are part of a food-offering on the 26th of the month that confirms the god’s revival and physical integrity, the sacred purpose of the mysteries.⁵⁵ But what are the “flowers” (*anthea*) mixed in with the flour (*maleurōi*, specifically wheat flour)? The scholiast guesses clumsily: “Topping for the bread; it might mean sesame seeds.”⁵⁶ Vollgraff, endorsed by Gow and others, interprets “colors,” a sense that *anthos* sometimes has from the fifth century onward.⁵⁷ But for food a more likely metaphorical sense of “flowers” is another that Gow raises: “flavorings”—or even better, “aromatics”—that are added to the dough before baking or frying. A parallel is the use of *anthos* in expressions for the bouquet of wine.⁵⁸

It so happens that scented loaves of bread accompany the Sokar figure in the Osirian mysteries described at Dendera. Called *kfn*-loaves, they are baked in special molds that mark them as representations of Osiris’ body parts, and they too are made of wheat flour (*bdt*, emmer wheat) mixed with aromatic substances (listed in columns 47–48).⁵⁹ There is more: the phrase used of the ingredients,

⁵⁴Dendera text cols. 14–20 (Cauville 1997: 1.15–16), Chassinat 42–51. In comparing the grain-mummies to the gardens of Adonis, de Vaux 36–37 recalls the growth of crops from the body of the dead god, a staple of Osirian iconography; cf. Raven 29.

⁵⁵*Edfou* 5.290.4–9; see Goyon 1978: 434–35, Cauville 1983: 138–39.

⁵⁶Σ 114–16b τὸ δὲ ἄνθεα τὰ ἐπιπάσματα τῶν ἄρτων λέγοι δ’ ἂν τὰ σήσαμα.

⁵⁷Vollgraff 134 n. 4 gives examples of the usage.

⁵⁸On which see now Renehan 56–58.

⁵⁹Dendera text cols. 6–7, 45–47 (Cauville 1997: 1.14, 19); Chassinat 58–59, 378. The Canopus Decree of 234 B.C.E. mentions *kfn*-loaves (Sethe 153). The *kfn* molds might just be reflected in Theocritus’ πλάθανον, which can mean a baking mold as well as a kneading board (cf. Pollux 10.112), but his phrase ἐπὶ πλάθανῳ means “on” the thing,

“toutes sortes de substances aromatiques” in the French of Chassinat and Cauville, strongly recalls Theocritus’ *anthea pantoia*. In fact, the standard Egyptian lexicon calls the word translated by “substances aromatiques” (*h3.w*) “perhaps identical” to a word with the same consonant sequence meaning “plants, flowers”—all the more so in our passage, where *h3.w* is modified by *nb.w*, “all, every sort of,” as is “almost always” the case with the other word.⁶⁰ Thus whether or not *anthea* suggested aromatics, colors, or even sesame seeds to a Greek audience, Theocritus has chosen a phrase that replicates one in the Dendera mystery text and assimilates Adonis’ bread to that of Osiris. Because of the role of the *kfn*-loaves in the Osiris cult, the bread at Alexandria becomes the centerpiece of an array that has other purposes.

Of the objects resting by Adonis only the “golden bottles of Syrian perfume” (114) now remain to be correlated to Osirian ritual. On the surface they attest to the queen’s wealth—not only the gold of the containers but the perfume within, oils infused with rare scents of oriental (“Syrian”) provenience like myrrh. They could be on hand to anoint celebrants at an ensuing banquet, or for a funereal anointing of the effigy.⁶¹ The latter possibility recalls the ritual anointing of the Sokar figure and the Khenty-Amentet before their burials at the Khoiak festival.⁶² The bottles also recall the ritual offering of perfume to deities, as of ten vessels of unguent to Sokar-Osiris by Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and his queen on a relief at Edfu.⁶³ The object there is for the living king to revive the god (the dead king) and receive his blessing; a reference to his embalming is implicit (the importance of myrrh for the reconstitution of Osiris’ body⁶⁴ resonates against our singer’s specification “Syrian”). Finally, the perfume does not simply complement the statue, but actually replicates it, insofar as the aromatic Sokar figure in its golden mold has a second Ptolemaic counterpart, alongside the Adonis effigy, in the golden bottles of scented oil. The unguents in Theocritus, though they do not compel a reference to Osirian rites through some

not “in” it. Σ 114–16a glosses ἐν οἷς διαπλάττουσι τοὺς ἄρτους, perhaps out of familiarity with molds.

⁶⁰*Wb* 3.221.

⁶¹Atallah 122–23, invoking the banquet that Gow infers (n. 13 above). Erotes anoint the dead Adonis in Bion *Ad.* 77–78; Aphrodite seems to in Noss. *AP* 6.275.4 (death not specified); these passages might etiologize ritual. David Leitão notes that, as a generic part of a lover-boy’s toilette, scented oil is appropriate for the living Adonis.

⁶²Dendera text cols. 92, 12–17 (Cauville 1997: 1.23, 26); cols. 114–16 (Cauville 1997: 1.25). Cf. Junker 50.

⁶³*Edfou* 4.114.4–115.4; see Cauville 1983: 128–29 (cf. 178).

⁶⁴Noted by DuQuesne 39, citing, e.g., *Urk.* IV.347.7.

curious detail, are consistent with them and pick up Osirian meaning through the general frame of reference.

Needless to say, the proceedings in *Idyll* 15 cannot be read as an enactment of the Khoiak rites; we should certainly not trust the parallels to indicate a December date for Arsinoe's festival, which has been variously dated.⁶⁵ To take just one discrepancy, the Osiris festival did not end with the voyage, as the Adonis festival ends at the sea. Theocritus' own account is sketchy, and the ritual texts he engages with may not agree with actual practice in every particular.⁶⁶ The Egyptian analogues to any detail of Arsinoe's Adonia are often plural and inconsistent. Yet the imprecision and overdetermination are by-products not just of the texts, but of the process of syncretism itself. The bicultural semantics of the rite only gain in scope and power thereby. Detail after detail of Arsinoe's tableau yields the knowing viewer a superfluity of meanings, Greek and Egyptian, superimposed on one another; the verses that describe them clothe magically nuanced Egyptian liturgies in the palimpsestically rich language of Greek poetry, giving the words a far-reaching bivalence. This is not an Osirian rite disguised as the Adonia, but an Adonia embroidered with potent hints of the Osirian mysteries. Yet neither are we looking at any previously known Adonia; only the name clearly points the way back to Greece.

This superimposition makes it impossible for us to look at a Greek rite without seeing an Egyptian one, and vice versa; and in this aggressively Greek poem, constituted and explicated by the voices of Greeks, the names of Adonis and his lover overwhelm the Egyptian elements, subsuming them into the Hellenic culture that the Macedonian Ptolemies were so anxious to champion.⁶⁷ Even though Greek mythology made Adonis an Oriental, Theocritus is at pains

⁶⁵Glötz 214–20 holds for early November, Gow 1952: 2.265 for late summer or early fall, White 194–97 for spring. More secure evidence, offered by Gow 1938: 183, did not pan out (Gow 1940). Weill 682 suggests that Theocritus' silence on this point argues for the Athenian summer date of the Adonia, but it may equally well be designed to downplay a discrepancy between the Alexandrian and Athenian dates.

⁶⁶Raven 29 contrasts the Dendera text's description of the grain-mummy with actual specimens.

⁶⁷Cf. Griffiths 1979: 85: "Theocritus [in his portrayal of the Adonia] seems to participate...in a conspiracy never to reveal that Egypt is not a Greek land." Although Griffiths discounts Osirian influence on the poem, there is value in his remark that Theocritus "purges the festival of any oriental touches" (in contrast with Callimachus' satirical emphasis in fr. 193.37–38 on the allegedly oriental wailing that characterized the Adonia). Our poet's insistence on self-contained cultures is only preliminary to his setting these cultures in dialogue with each other.

to Hellenize him and account for his traits in terms of Greek religious custom. The catalogue in lines 136–42—Adonis alone of demigods visits both earth and Underworld—puts him on a par with Homeric heroes and the like (in the tweaking of Greek theology the joints of syncretism begin to show).⁶⁸ The ivory eagles bearing Ganymede away (seemingly part of the bed), with their commentary on Aphrodite's love for Adonis,⁶⁹ also secure him within the Greek realm (123–24). In 110 *Helenai eikyia*, “like Helen,” applied to Arsinoe, does not merely compliment the queen's personal beauty, but recalls the legend approved by Herodotus, and allegedly retailed to him by Egyptian priests, that Helen sojourned in Egypt during the Trojan War, thus establishing a Greek foothold in the country, or at least a precedent for residence there.⁷⁰ Theocritus is practicing a poetics of imperialism, fusing the native culture to the cultural identity that its Greek-speaking overlords professed. This whole production sounds like a defense-formation against the anxiety of conquerors far from home, asserting a claim to Egypt's culture as well as to its land. Through a diplopic superimposition of cultural indices, Theocritus persuades us that Osiris is Adonis, and this country of crocodiles, pyramids, and hieroglyphs is in some sense really Greece.

The Monarch of the Dead

So thorough is the subordination of Egyptian iconography to Greek that Theocritus might seem to have expunged the native significance of his imagery. Unlike Adonis, Osiris was a central figure in his worshipers' state pantheon. His reintegration and resurrection symbolized the maintenance of order and prosperity in the kingdom. Identified with the dead king of Egypt, now reigning in the afterlife, he connected earthly rule with the cosmic cycles of life and death; to claim legitimate kingship, the ruling monarch (identified with his son Horus) needed to pay honor to him as to the predecessor. These are the implications of the Osirian elements in *Idyll* 15, as suggested above; yet they seem bereft of any resonance within the poem. Arsinoe's ceremony incorporates none of the vital conflict, the fighting and scrapping with Seth and other enemies that are preliminary to Osiris' triumph; Theocritus' languorous Adonis has none of Osiris' regality and immense consequence for the temporal sovereigns.

In fact the poet has not suppressed, but only sublimated this meaning, diffusing it throughout the hymn. First of all, this Adonia celebrates the

⁶⁸See Hunter 1996a: 135–37 on this comparison.

⁶⁹Cf. Burton 137–38.

⁷⁰Hdt. 2.113–20. Cf. *Od.* 4.125–32, 227–29; *E. Hel.* 1280–83; see Griffiths 1979: 88, Cameron 434.

deification of Arsinoe's mother Berenice. The singer begins with the care that Aphrodite has shown her, distilling ambrosia—literally “immortality,” the substance that keeps the gods immortal—into the dead queen's breast (line 106–8). This reflects the actual worship Berenice received as an avatar of Aphrodite,⁷¹ yet here the goddess and she are kept distinct; this missed opportunity calls for explanation. Why does the hymn hint at her deification, only to drop it? The embedded Egyptian orientation suggests an answer. As Aphrodite, Berenice would naturally be assimilated to Isis (as indeed she is in some inscriptions); but our hymn, which immediately puts her under the reviving care of the goddess, casts her as the young god, Osiris, the deified form of the dead monarch. From this perspective Arsinoe's annual Adonia looks like a mortuary cult of the deified queen; the poem is telling us that she has fulfilled her funerary duties toward her predecessor.⁷² Hunter cleverly wonders whether the administering of ambrosia in 108, with its verbal echo of the anointing of Patroclus' body with ambrosia in the *Iliad*, lays claim to a Homeric precedent for Berenice's mummification.⁷³ Through the Argive woman's daughter the voices of the Greek past extol the Ptolemaic pharaohs of Egypt.

The assimilation of a deceased female royal to the male Osiris, by the way, should not surprise us. We have already seen the princess Berenice introduced into the Khoiak rites of Osiris after her death. Not only does she share the god's funereal navigation, but the maidens and priests are to prepare an image of her annually, like his; as far as the rites go she is Osiris. Of the deceased Cleopatra I's treatment as Osiris Koenen observes, “As Queen Hatshepsut had shown..., theology and ideology made no difference between a male and a female pharaoh; the queen played the male role.” Arsinoe II herself routinely receives masculine royal titles in life.⁷⁴ Moreover, quite apart from titular usage (or the actual “kingly” power of Berenice and Arsinoe), the treatment of a queen as Osiris feels normal in this gynocentric poem. In a world of women, the

⁷¹Fraser 1.240, 2.934 n. 390; he discusses Theocritus' *Berenice* (fr. 3 Gow) in this connection (1.667). Cf. Asclep. *API*. 68 with Cameron 238–39.

⁷²The best-known parallel is the depiction of Ay performing rites for his predecessor Tutankhamun (depicted as Osiris) on the latter's burial chamber wall, thereby legitimating his own accession. Rotroff 225 sees Soter's waylaying and burial of Alexander's body as a reassurance to Egyptians that he had properly claimed the throne.

⁷³Hunter 1996a: 133–34. Cf. *II*. 19.38–39.

⁷⁴Princess Berenice: n. 32 above; cf. Gwyn Griffiths 1975: 38. Cleopatra I: Koenen 1993: 64. Masculine titles of Arsinoe: Quaegebeur 45. The early first-century C.E. Queen Amanitore of Nubia was buried “in emulation of those rites accorded Osiris-Sokar” in the Khoiak festival (Yellin 161).

paradigms of Egyptian kingship quite naturally play themselves out through the female royals.⁷⁵ Following Griffiths, we can situate this effect within the poetics of Theocritus' court poems (15, 17, 22, 24, and 26): "Maternal descent gains a strictly new prominence throughout (Alcmena, Helen, Semele), but then the royal family had its best blood through Lagus' wife Arsinoe, and Philadelphus' mother Berenice quite overshadows her husband in *Idd.* 15 and 17—possibly as Philadelphus' best claim to preferment over Soter's older sons by Eurydice, possibly as a model for his formidable daughter, Arsinoe Philadelphus."⁷⁶

Now one recalls Theocritus' doctrine that Adonis is the only demigod who visits the worlds of both life and death (136–42), the detail on which for Brugsch the syncretism hinges. This conception goes back at least to Panyassis in the early fifth century, in whose version Adonis is an object of dispute between Aphrodite and Persephone and, through the arbitration of Zeus, ends up spending part of the year with each.⁷⁷ The story, which predates the more famous one of his death in a boar-hunt, etiologizes the mourning ritual more abstractly, eschewing an actual grisly death in favor of a simple hello-and-goodbye, as does our singer. She does not say when or how Adonis dies. The Seasons have restored him to the world of the living (102–5), and he will return again in a year (143–44, 149); his "death" is just an excuse for the seaside lament, as his "life" is no more than the contrastive prerequisite. Here the demigod fits into Theocritus' vision of Ptolemaic kingship, at whose heart Griffiths finds the figure of the "shuttle" between two different worlds, providing grand mythological prototypes for the dual nature of the dead monarchs, simultaneously human and divine.⁷⁸ For *Idyll* 15 he cites the carven eagles in lines 123–24, bearing Ganymede up to Zeus, as parallel to Adonis in this respect, reinforcing his "shuttle"-like qualities. One cannot help noticing now that this emphasis on dual nature and posthumous honor effects a very Egyptian concept of kingship.

The real oddity is that Theocritus' singer produces a kind of epithalamium, a mode unattested in either the Classical Greek or Osirian rites, which were both funereal. Last year she sang the winning dirge (98), but this year her hymn shunts the lamentation to a few lines about "tomorrow morning" (132). Elsewhere the funereal aspect of the festival comes out only in Praxinoa's

⁷⁵I owe this formulation of the idea to Chris Faraone.

⁷⁶Griffiths 1979: 54.

⁷⁷Panyas. fr. 27 Bernabé = [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.14.3. I do not share the doubts of some researchers that the story is Panyassis'; see Reed 1995: 330–31. Praxinoa may allude to this myth at Theoc. 15.86 (cf. Σ; *contra*, Gow 1938: 199 and *ad loc.*).

⁷⁸Griffiths 1979: 59, 66, 84.

remark that Adonis is “loved even in the Underworld” (86). The hymn represents the festival as the marital reunion of a god and goddess—in the Egyptian subtext, a god and goddess who are brother and sister. Here we can appreciate the shift in emphasis. Whitehorne detects in the poem as a whole a justification of the royal incestuous marriage through an appeal to the prosperity of the kingdom (such an appeal is very Egyptian, though Whitehorne does not raise native influence here); the message is concentrated in Praxinoa's platitudinous remark on the old lady at line 64, “Women know everything, even how Zeus married Hera,” a reference that in poetry written under Ptolemy II inevitably goes back to the royal couple.⁷⁹ Griffiths sees brother-sister hierogamy in Theocritus as the partners' “passage to godhead”: “[o]n this new Alexandrian Olympus, marriage is normally incestuous: Zeus and Hera (*Idd.* 15 and 17), Heracles and Hebe (*Idd.* 17 and 24), Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II (*Id.* 17).”⁸⁰

Hecataeus of Abdera, writing under Ptolemy I, had already promulgated to Greeks the doctrine that Osiris and Isis are the model for all Egyptian royal couples.⁸¹ In our poem this message, touched on lightly by Praxinoa and only truly activated on the Greek level by recollection of 17 and 24, directs itself more insistently to the Egyptian viewpoint. That that needed to be done is manifest on the temple walls of Philae, where Arsinoe and Ptolemy are approximated, literally, to Isis and Osiris, and the queen is given the title *nṯr.t mry(t) sn=s*, “the goddess who loves her brother”—the *theos philadelphos* gains even more divine majesty in Egyptian than in Greek.⁸² At Philae, of course, the object is not just the legitimacy of the incestuous marriage, but that of the monarchs' godhead and right to rule over the lands of Egypt, and is part of the emergence of the dynastic cult (as abkar notes). Thus the hymn in *Idyll* 15 establishes Arsinoe's claim to queenship in Egyptian terms, both by invoking the marriage of the divine couple that exalts Arsinoe's own and by establishing Arsinoe's rightful succession to her mother's place. Again, the code is messy and inconsistent—or let us say overgenerous to Arsinoe, in casting her as both Isis and Horus.⁸³

⁷⁹Whitehorne 74–75; cf. Pomeroy 36. On the marriage of Zeus and Hera in poetry under Philadelphus see Griffiths 1979: 60–61, Burton 149–53, Cameron 18–22; elsewhere in Theocritus see 17.131–34.

⁸⁰Griffiths 1979: 53–54; cf. 66 (invoking Isis and Osiris).

⁸¹See Selden 337, discussing Diod. 1.27.4–5.

⁸²See abkar 12–15, 89–90, 177 n. 99.

⁸³The former subtext accords with both the Isiac identity of every Egyptian queen and Arsinoe's assimilation to Isis in the Greek sphere (see Fraser 1.240–43).

Theocritus, in sum, presents Arsinoe as a creative misreader of both the Greek Adonia and the Egyptian rites of Osiris. Embedded in the very Hellenism of her Adonia is a syncretism between the two cultures, driven by a capacious metaphoricity that Theocritus may have learned from Egyptian thought itself.⁸⁴ Very much as in his hymn to Heracles in *Idyll* 24, Theocritus is weaving a message together out of three texts—Greek religion, Egyptian royal ideology, and court propaganda—whose overlap and divergences from one another create a doubly compelling vision of Ptolemaic authority.⁸⁵ To the native Egyptian Arsinoe's spectacle is reassuring: the dynasty from the north is carrying out the ancient responsibilities of the pharaohs. But the Greek too is reassured by the way the Ptolemies transmute native tradition into Greek terms: the rites of Egyptian kingship end up as the diversion of the Athenian housewife.

It has been easy for scholars of Theocritus to overlook the native component in this poem, first because of the long-time inaccessibility of the hieroglyphic evidence and the slow progress Hellenists have made in turning their attention to it; perhaps also because of our easy sympathy with the Greek viewpoint, both as readers primarily of Greek accounts of eastern Mediterranean history and as heirs to the European and American outlook on Asia and Africa, including Egypt, that has long emulated that of Greek and Roman conquerors.⁸⁶ It is still easy, in fact, to think of ancient religious syncretism as outside the imperialist experience, since "both conquerors and conquered in the Hellenistic world were polytheists, open to the cults of others and not particularly intent on imposing their own on anyone."⁸⁷ And yet Arsinoe's Adonia has shown how religious symbols and personae can be used as part of the grammar of conquest when they are called by other names, filled with new meaning while their appearance remains the same. At the same time, Theocritus allows us easily to imagine how a conquered people might use shared iconography to preserve native traditions while accommodating them superficially to those of the new rulers.⁸⁸ In its context, our poem discloses a complex interplay of viewpoints and a richly ambivalent vision of cultural imperialism.

⁸⁴See Selden 349–54, Stephens 171–72 (on Callimachus' similar technique).

⁸⁵On Theoc. 24 see Koenen 1977: 79–86; for equally magisterial and essential discussions of the bicultural image of monarchy in Alexandrian poetry see Merkelbach 1963, Selden, and Stephens (who is preparing a book on the subject).

⁸⁶See Bagnall; cf. Said, esp. 56–57, 304.

⁸⁷Bagnall 230, summarizing a view taken by Will.

⁸⁸Cf. Eddy 283–84, on Osiris as a vehicle of native resistance in Ptolemaic Egypt.

The Adventures of Alexandrian Adonis

But if we assume that a real queen's court framed the poem's representation of one, we are compelled to attend to the relationship between the two. Where do we find, outside the boundaries of the poem, the threads we have traced within it? Whence does Theocritus reflect the Egyptian viewpoint? Was Arsinoë's Osirian Adonia real? The two epigrams by Dioscorides provide our least ambiguous corroboration for the theology we find in *Idyll* 15; it is significant that Dioscorides too worked at Alexandria (perhaps a little later than Theocritus) and eulogized the royal family. Among explicit assimilations of Adonis to Osiris, all from the Roman period,⁸⁹ clear Ptolemaic connections attach only to the cult of "Adonis-Osiris" at Amathus in southern Cyprus, where a dedication by Ptolemy VIII to Osiris' near-equivalent Sarapis presumably reflects an interpretation of the local *parhedros*; but this does not necessarily go back to Arsinoë II.⁹⁰ St. Cyril's late Alexandrian cult-myth about Aphrodite's "discovery" of Adonis in the Underworld could reflect the announcement that the god is alive *in the land of the dead*—the crux of Osiris' supreme persona as ruler of the Afterlife—and thus be a development of the syncretism we have traced.⁹¹ If so, however, the cult has fundamentally changed; de Vaux rightly dissociates the joyous festival described by Cyril from the "return" anticipated in *Idyll* 15.144 and 149, stressing that in our poem the return of Adonis is merely the understood prerequisite to the Adonia, not a separate rite.⁹² As for extra-literary evidence, a hindrance to our search is the naturally elusive material remains of a marginal cult based on a single annual festival.⁹³ An Alexandrian dedicatory inscription from the mid-third century by one Simonides to Ptolemy I Soter, the Dioscuri, and (plausibly) Adonis at least increases the suspicion that a

⁸⁹Lucian *Syr.D.* 7 (cf. Baudissin 185–96, Soyez 73–74, Gwyn Griffiths 1980: 28–34), Dam. *Isid.* fr. 174 Zintzen (cf. Fraser 2.336–38 n. 79). In a couple of late verses Osiris bears epithets typical of Adonis: Porph. fr. 309.14 Smith (ἄβρός; see Reed 1997: 240), Bernard no. 129.8 (πεποθημένος; see Reed 1997: 229).

⁹⁰"Adonis-Osiris": St.Byz. s.v. Ἀμᾶθοῦς; Paus. 9.41.2–3 tells of a cult of Adonis here. Cf. Burkert 107, 195 n. 22. Dedication: Hermary 102 no. 6.

⁹¹Cyril Alex. *Comm. Is.* 2.3 (PG 70.440–41); see de Vaux 54–55, Lambrechts 20–25. He is echoed by Procop. *Comm. Is.* 18 (PG 87.2.2137–40) and others. Origen *Sel. Ezech.* 9 (PG 13.800) is similar; Jerome *Comm. Ezech.* 3.8 (PL 25.82–83) follows him.

⁹²de Vaux 43–55; cf. Baudissin 134–37. For another celebration of Adonis' return see Lucian *Syr.D.* 6.

⁹³Whatever rites were performed at the Etruscan and Sicilian sites identified as sanctuaries of Adonis by Torelli and di Filippo Balestrazzi, they were not the Adonia that our sources describe. The Motya statue, which di Filippo Balestrazzi identifies as Adonis, depicts a victorious charioteer (see now Denti).

state cult—observed by men, like the new cult of Sarapis-Osiris (for example), but unlike the Classical Greek Adonia—is passing under the name of Adonis and is connected to the particular deities of the ruling dynasty.⁹⁴ Griffiths finds in this particular triad of dedicatees the same themes of marriage, death, and regeneration crucial to Theocritus' royal mythography.⁹⁵

Our most tantalizing clue is *P. Petrie* 3.142, an account of personal expenses composed in the Fayum in the reign of Ptolemy II and dated the 6th through 9th of an unidentified month.⁹⁶ On the 7th the spender paid 5½ obols for “garlands for Adonis” (*stephania tōi Adōnei*), perhaps destined for an effigy of the god,⁹⁷ if not for the banqueters at a ritual feast. Glotz, who was the first to realize the significance of this text, tries to attach all the other purchases on the list to the Adonia; most plausible are his conjectures that the inordinately expensive haircut on the 6th was a ritual head-shaving and that the huge expenditures for food (mostly nuts and figs) on the 7th reflect an *eranos* or contributory meal.⁹⁸ Now one recalls the food surrounding Arsinoe's Adonis (especially if *dryos akra* in 112 refers to nuts).⁹⁹ And yet there are no distinct similarities here to the festival in *Idyll* 15, certainly nothing to suggest Osirian influence beyond the fact that Adonis is being treated seriously by a man.¹⁰⁰ The prosperous male devotee and the possibility of a banquet make one think rather of the Adoniac *eranos*-societies of Hellenistic Rhodes and Caria, established and maintained by local burghers.¹⁰¹ Glotz would trace the cult in

⁹⁴*SEG* 24.1174. The stone has ΑΔΩΤΙ, not ΑΔΩΝΙ; cf. Fraser 2.333 n. 60. On the connection of the Dioscuri with the royal cult see Cameron 433–34 (with citations).

⁹⁵Griffiths 1979: 59–60.

⁹⁶See Glotz, Gow 1952: 2.262–64, Atallah 136–40.

⁹⁷Atallah 225. Bion *Ad.* 75–76 (flowers and garlands cast upon Adonis' corpse at the laying-out) may etiologize such a ritual.

⁹⁸See especially Glotz 197; Lucian *Syr.D.* 6 attests head-shaving at the Adonia at Byblos (though not as part of a lament). Glotz's further inference of an Eleusinian-style mystical drama (203–8) is much less secure; see Lambrechts 24–25. On the sense of “mysteries” (*sṣtβ.w*) as they are used of the Osirian rites, and their difference from Greek μυστήρια, see Lloyd 2.279 on Hdt. 2.61.

⁹⁹An old interpretation, already noted in the Antinoe papyrus (Hunt/Johnson 47), takes δρυὸς ἄκρα as a synonymous “division” of the term ἀκρόδρυα “nuts”; see Σ 112/113, Eust. ad *Il.* 626.53, Gow *ad loc.*

¹⁰⁰The activities attested by the papyrus suggest that the male spender himself is the worshiper: Gow 1952: 2.264 n. 3, 593.

¹⁰¹Blümel no. 12 = Bresson no. 202 = *SIG*³ 1113 (Loryma), Pugliese Carratelli no. 1 (Rhodes). Cf. Blümel no. 471 = Bresson no. 57 = *SEG* 4.168 (modern Orhaniye), *IG* 12.3 no. 6 = Cole no. 43 (Syme), Blümel no. 156 = Bresson no. 126 (Thyssanus). The similarity of

the Fayum to the prominent worship there of Arsinoe as Aphrodite; be that as it may, whatever influence the Fayum-dwellers may have felt from any royal cult of Adonis is irrecoverable.

Our search becomes more rewarding when we turn to mythological literature and seek support for the theology of *Idyll* 15 among the other "laureates of the new Ptolemaic mythology," in whom we should see no cloistered irrelevants, but powerful reshapers of the Greek mentality in a new land.¹⁰² The poets of the early Ptolemies show a distinct interest in the myth of Adonis. He occurs twice in Theocritus' own pastorals (1.109, 3.46–47). Ptolemy IV Philopator composed a tragedy on him at the end of the century.¹⁰³ Glycon and Lycophron provide our first certain (though esoterically phrased) attestations of the myth of Adonis' death in a boar-hunt; the Egyptian doctrine that Seth took the form of a boar (at least when he was killed by the avenging Horus) raises the possibility that syncretism increased the appeal of the boar-hunt myth for the Alexandrians.¹⁰⁴ In an isolated line from Euphorion's *Hyacinthus*—"Cocytus alone washed off the wounds of Adonis"—the god's immersion in the river of the Afterlife is at least open to an Egyptian reading.¹⁰⁵ Sotades wrote a poem called *Adonis* whose first line survives: "Which of the old stories do you wish to hear?" We recall the poet's wit, his irreverence toward the Isiac marriage of Ptolemy and Arsinoe, and his position as both insider and ironist at the Alexandrian court, and keenly regret that lack of context keeps us from speculating on the rich play with Greek and Egyptian tradition that the phrase "old stories" could suggest.¹⁰⁶

Philostephanus of Cyrene, the paradoxographer and disciple of Callimachus, is credited with a unique myth: "Adonis...was born of Jupiter without the

Arsinoe's festival to these groups' (Gow 1938: 182) goes no further than the assemblage of food.

¹⁰²Griffiths 1979: 5; cf. Stephens 182.

¹⁰³*TrGF* 119. Glotz 173 connects the play with Philopator's interest in Syrian religion; the connection with Osiris is closer to home. A play *Adonis* by the Athenian comic poet Philiscus has sometimes been credited to the Alexandrian tragedian Philicus (see *PCG* 7.356).

¹⁰⁴*Lyc. Alex.* 829–31; Glycon *ap. Heph. Ench.* 10.2 = *PMG* adesp. 1029 (on his identity and dating, and on the origins of the myth, see Reed 1996: 382). On the Seth story see Gwyn Griffiths 1960: 31–33, Koenen 1977: 83.

¹⁰⁵*Euph. fr.* 43 Powell, preserved by Ptolemy Chennus, whose interpretation of the line reflects the perplexity and creative ingenuity of critics and suggests that the original context did not elaborate on the image.

¹⁰⁶*Sotad. fr.* 3 Powell. Cf. Glotz 173; Cameron 18–19, 98. 'ἱστοριῶν ("stories"), with its Herodotean connotations of sought-out local sources, is suggestive.

accouchement of any woman.”¹⁰⁷ Adonis’ mother is prominent in his most widespread birth-myth: named Smyrna or Myrrha (both mean “myrrh”), she conceived him by her own father, and bore him after metamorphosing into the myrrh-tree.¹⁰⁸ Philostephanus’ dissenting version assimilates Adonis to Dionysus, whose birth by Zeus, without any female parent, is asserted to be the true story in *Homeric Hymn* 1.1–7 (that sly prooemium underlying Callimachus’ *Hymn to Zeus*, whose Osirian subtext Stephens explicates). These gods’ resemblance to each other is slight; their implicit theological bridge must be Osiris, whom the Greeks identified with Dionysus at least since Herodotus.¹⁰⁹ The Dionysus-Adonis link, to be sure, occurs in the Roman era, when it follows the tendency to subsume them both into a symbolic agricultural role¹¹⁰; to Philostephanus’ Alexandrian audience, however, the Osirian bridge would have been necessary and obvious. We have here a complex, compound syncretism, once again justifying a reduction of Egyptian elements to Greek tradition.

A couple of versions of Classical Adonis myths from our period that overtly advertise their debt to Attic drama may also betray concern for an Egyptian perspective simply by the apt meaning they would have had in Egypt. The first has again to do with Dionysus; one wonders how Adonis served the Dionysiac cult that the Ptolemies cultivated to their prestige, as in Philadelphus’ grand procession (Dionysus was important for the cult of Sarapis too). In an isolated couplet from Phanocles’ catalogue of paiderastic myths, the god “carried off (*hêrpassen*) divine Adonis.”¹¹¹ This adopts a comic poet’s fancy that Adonis was his *erômenos*, but in the Alexandria of *Idyll* 15 would also involve syncretism with Osiris. To structure assimilable deities as a paiderastic couple was one way

¹⁰⁷Fr. 14 Müller, preserved by [Probus] on Verg. *Ecl.* 10.18 (Thilo/Hagen 3.2.348). The exegeses of Müller 31 and Gisinger 109 rest on Müller’s elliptical and outdated text; I use that in West 42 (under Antim. fr. 102): “Adonis...ut Philostephanus libro quo quaestiones poeticas reddidit, ex Iove sine ullius feminae accubitu procreatus.” This fragment is not included in the paradoxographical collections of A. Westermann (Brunswick 1839) or A. Giannini (Milan [1966]).

¹⁰⁸First attested in Panyas. fr. 27 Bernabé = [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.14.3; implicit in Lyc. 828–33. Elsewhere Adonis’ mother is named as Alpheisiboea ([Hes.] fr. 139 M-W), Metharme ([Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.14.3), Thymaretis, and Aoa (*FGrH* 758 F 3A, 7).

¹⁰⁹Hdt. 2.42.2; for this syncretism under the Ptolemies see Fraser 1.206. Greve 16 sees syncretism with Dionysus in Philostephanus, but does not make the connection with Osiris.

¹¹⁰Cf. n. 42 above. For explicit and implicit identifications of Adonis with Dionysus see Plut. *Mor.* 671b (cf. fr. 212 Sandbach); [Orph.] *H.* 42.7 and 56.3, 6 (cf. Greve 16); Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 3.23.52 Hansen; Auson. *Epig.* 48–49. Cf. Baudissin 199–200.

¹¹¹Phanocl. fr. 3 Powell, following Pl.Com. fr. 3 *PCG*; the myth is listed in [Clem. Rom.] *Hom.* 5.15.

to associate them without denying their separate identities; the cult-myth of Hyacinth is an example. Adonis' epithet "divine" (*theion*) recalls his father Theias in an old version of the myth,¹¹² but also unusually emphasizes Adonis' divinity, subtly insisting (as Theocritus does too) on a more exalted status than Greek Adonis had had, and assuring him a certain equality with Dionysus.

In the same generation, Callimachus told that Aphrodite hid Adonis in a bed of lettuce, a detail that also seems to derive from Attic comedy, or was at least made famous there.¹¹³ Against the background of Athenian custom, this myth might etiologize the sowing of lettuce in the gardens of Adonis; it would have even sharper etiological force if the celebrants laid the effigy of Adonis amid the potted seedlings, a custom for which we have no evidence.¹¹⁴ But look at Callimachus' myth through Egyptian eyes. To Egyptians lettuce (*abw*) was a kind of fertility drug; it was particularly associated with the god of procreation Min, but Egyptian iconography had the king offer lettuce to any ithyphallic god (such as Osiris was in some forms).¹¹⁵ Against this background, Callimachus' story suggests the efforts of the great goddess to awaken the dead god's fertility, as Amenmose's hymn, our fullest Egyptian version of the myth of Osiris, tells us Isis did (though not with lettuce) when she "joined her brother, raised the weary one's inertness, received the seed, bore the heir."¹¹⁶ The detail that Aphrodite *hid* Adonis in the lettuce (from the boar or another enemy?), whereas Eubulus had her lay him out in it, is suggestive, since at *De Iside* 18.357 Plutarch has Isis hide Osiris from Seth (the boar-god). From the Egyptian viewpoint, Callimachus effects a pointed misprision of the comic poet's tale, which punningly made the death of Adonis the etiology for the reputed power of lettuce to cause impotence ("death").

¹¹²Panyas. fr. 27 Bernabé = [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.14.3.

¹¹³Call. fr. 478 Pfeiffer, apparently following Amphis fr. 20 *PCG* (incompletely excerpted) and Eub. fr. 13 *PCG*; see Reed 1995: 325–26. Nic. fr. 120 Schneider gives another version; see Reed 1996. All four fragments are preserved in Ath. 2.69b–c.

¹¹⁴Reed 1995: 325. Movers 200 assumes that the figure was "in den sogenannten Adonisgärtchen versteckt" (similarly Brugsch 4); his wording betrays the influence of Callimachus. Our source on lettuce in the gardens is Hsch. α 1231, followed by the *Suda*.

¹¹⁵See Adams, Defossez.

¹¹⁶Lichtheim 83; compare Osiris' posthumous begetting of Harpocrates (*Hr p A hrd*, "Horus the child") in Plut. *De Is.* 19.358d, with Gwyn Griffiths 1970: 353. In a story from the temple at Edfu lettuce plays a crucial role in Isis' securing for Horus his inheritance against Seth (*Edfou* 2.44.12; see Derchain 42). It is worth wondering whether Callimachus' Adonis begat an heir as Osiris did; a founding-myth involving a son of Adonis is known from the previous generation (Chares of Mytilene *FGrH* 125 F 5).

One last scrap: Parthenius' reference to "Adonis of Canopus" two centuries later suggests to Baudissin that a cult of Adonis was established at Canopus, if not from Alexandria in the Ptolemaic period, then earlier by the Phoenician colonists who settled there.¹¹⁷ But it was at Canopus, long the foremost site of Sarapis worship, that that god was most closely identified with Osiris in his funereal aspect (here, as we have seen, the deceased daughter of Euergetes was integrated into the Khoiak festival). An Adonis cult here could have resulted from such syncretism as we are investigating.¹¹⁸ Or perhaps there was never an Adonis cult *per se* at Canopus, but the learned Parthenius, seeking a novel epithet, took advantage of a tradition of an Osirian Adonis.

These texts are fragmentary, and no extant Ptolemaic poet explicitly identifies Adonis with Osiris. Philostephanus is the most suggestive; Phanocles and Callimachus, judged by the narrowest criteria, need not attest the syncretism at all. Yet in a time and place where Theocritus permits the most recondite details of Osirianism to shape his portrayal of the Adonia, poetry on Adonis would potentially have engaged with Osiris, and piquant details (like Phanocles' *theion* or the concealment in Callimachus) would have drawn the Osirian element closer to the fore. The poets did not work out this theology on their own, and Dioscorides and the Simonides inscription suggest that something of the kind was current outside of poetry. Whether or not Arsinoe did hold an Adonis-festival like the one described by Theocritus, the court seems to have openly elaborated the parallels between the Greek and Egyptian deities, no doubt with the help of learned native hierarchs like the historian and priest Manetho,¹¹⁹ in an effort to bring the Greek cult into the Alexandrian orbit and make it work to legitimize the Macedonian interlopers as heirs to the pharaohs of Egypt. Theocritus is colluding in a grand, political poetics.

Adonis at Court

Let us conclude by taking a final step back from *Idyll* 15 and looking at how its mime form frames and shapes its ideology. Recent scholarship has distinguished different viewpoints in the poem, particularly based on class and gender.¹²⁰ The

¹¹⁷Parth. *SH* 654, Baudissin 198 (cf. Glotz 173 n. 3). For Phoenicians at Canopus see Hdt. 2.113, with Lloyd. Fraser 1.584 sees Adonis in the "god of Canopus" to whom a lamp is dedicated in Call. *AP* 6.148; cf. Weber 279, Lightfoot 201.

¹¹⁸Greve 29. Lightfoot 201–2 does not entertain the syncretism, believing it peculiar to Byblos.

¹¹⁹Stephens 168.

¹²⁰For studies of gender in the poem see n. 21; many of them also discuss class distinctions between the speakers and the court they admire. On the alienation of Gorgo and Praxinoa's viewpoint from that of the implied audience see Griffiths 1981: 249,

comical Gorgo and Praxinoa seem to embody a class stereotype as seen from above; Whitehorne, for example, crucially illuminates their domestic complaints in the early lines of the poem as the disguised boasts of Alexandrian nouvelles-riches, cattily disingenuous about their status. And the overall gynecocentrism of the poem is narratologically split on class lines: seen against these women, the world of women's power in which they act is at bottom a world simply of power. The implicit, more canny perspective that ironizes the speakers' bourgeois manners also estranges their exaggerated femaleness from the audience.

We can now see that this irony operates in the realm of ethnicity too, and reflects a perhaps necessary multivocality consequent on intercultural encounters, imperialist inclusions.¹²¹ The text desiderates a reader like Arsinoe: schooled minutely in the usages of the Ptolemaic court, fluent in both Greek and Egyptian culture, committed to a balance of the two that grants Egyptian sovereignty to Greek personae. Theocritus' pains are lost on Gorgo and Praxinoa, whose naive pride in being Greek (reinforced by the poem's debt to Sophron's fifth-century mime "Women Watching the Isthmian Festival"¹²²) points up their obliviousness to the larger ethnic view that enfolds theirs. Praxinoa's relief at the king's elimination of street crime by native Egyptians (46–50), for example, acquires a sly irony when we recall that to establish law and order is one of the pharaoh's duties, as Amenmose enumerates them in a paean to Osiris: "Evil is fled, crime is gone, the land has peace under its lord."¹²³ Praxinoa's pro-Hellenic effusion starts from the living king's succession to the place of the dead and deified one: "Many good deeds have you done, O Ptolemy, since your father has been among the immortals. No evil-doer sneaks up in Egyptian style and does an ill turn to someone walking along...." The same terms underlie Arsinoe's Adonia, whose *raison d'être* is the queen's succession to Berenice's estate. In all three cases Osiris is the metaphor for that succession, that assured eternity of good order and prosperity. Praxinoa just doesn't know it.¹²⁴

Goldhill 274–77, Hunter 1996b. A courtly destination is usually assumed for Theocritus' dialogue-poems; see Cameron 90 n. 121, Weber 170–71 (on Theoc. 15).

¹²¹Cf. Said 189.

¹²²The Sophronic intertext is reported in the scholiastic *argumentum* (Wendel 305.7–8); nothing is known of this mime but the title.

¹²³Lichtheim 85.

¹²⁴Cf. Goldhill 276 (tracing irony in the characters' encomiastic remarks) on 89–95, where Praxinoa indignantly vaunts her Dorian heritage: "[D]oes the need to emphasize descent in this way...highlight...a fiction of Hellenization?" Burton 145 is neglecting Praxinoa's ironically limited awareness when she says that "any [ethnic] inclusiveness

“Thrice-beloved Adonis,” she says in her final comment on the tapestries, “loved even in the Underworld!” Critics have noticed how Adonis functions for her and Gorgo as a fantasy lover, a foil for their unappreciative husbands (as at the end of the poem).¹²⁵ The frolicking, wailing, and general escapism that characterized the Classical Adonia, as Winkler and Kraemer note, would tend to point up and affirm women’s more restricted lives during most of the year. A like inversion works itself variously into the structure of *Idyll* 15: not only does the quaint admiration of Gorgo and Praxinoa remind us that they are *not* Aphrodite or Arsinoe, but the poem’s female viewpoint somehow implies a more generic one, its view on bourgeois life presupposes the life of the court, and its philhellenic surface cannot conceal a depth at which Greek and Egyptian traditions together support Ptolemaic monarchy. The dramatic form of the poem, excluding by its nature an overarching focalization, nevertheless creates a shadow focalization in opposition to the speakers’, a place for the audience to stand apart from them. The god himself is inextricable from this web of oppositions. Adonis shines forth in tapestries commissioned by a Macedonian queen, is sung by the Argive woman’s daughter, and is admired by Syracusan women. Yet the eyes that Theocritus gives us to see him are not only Praxinoa’s and Gorgo’s, the voice of the Greek singer resounds with Egyptian strains, and the image of the young god is woven out of the shimmering fabric of another.

suggested in Theocritus’ representation of an Adonia would not extend beyond the Greek community, for...Praxinoa specifically bars Egyptians and projects her discriminatory impulse into the court itself.”

¹²⁵See, e.g., Burton 84–89, 138–40.

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