

Sirius Rising 139 AD: Hadrian, Tivoli, and the *Tazza Farnese*

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Abstract. The heliacal rising of Sirius in 139 AD, intersecting with the beginning of the Egyptian year after an interval of 1461 years, signaled abundant fertility derived from the flooding of the Nile and the resurrection of Osiris. Hadrian's preparation for this event, which he did not live to see, at his villa in Tivoli was concurrent with the establishment of the cult of Antinoos assimilated to Osiris, Hermes and Master of the Hounds, following his drowning in the Nile. The site of the obelisk marking Antinoos' tomb and describing his resurrection has recently been discovered near the so-called "Canopus" at Tivoli, where the prominent placement of Demeter/Isis/Sothis and Antinoos/Osiris suggests the rising of Sirius on 20 July 139 AD and flooding of the Nile. Furthermore, this astronomical-cultural event shown on coins and gems of the period, may also be represented in the much debated iconography of the *Tazza Farnese*, a carved Hellenistic sardonyx libation bowl owned by a prince of Samarkand, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Frederick II, and said to have been found in Hadrian's tomb.

1. Introduction

Censorinus' gift of *The Birthday Book* in 238 AD to his best friend Quintus Caerellius has provided us with rare insights into Pythagorean philosophy and Etruscan divination as well as crucial clues to the dating of ancient Egyptian history. The Great Year of the Egyptians, otherwise known as the Heliacal, Canicular or Solar Year, the Year of God, or the Dog Star Year, fell on the first day of the month, which the Egyptians call the Month of Thoth, and on the day on which Sirius the Dog Star rises before the Sun after disappearing for seventy days. As the Egyptian civil year had exactly 365 days, the two cycles only matched every 1461 years¹. Censorinus explains that this last occurred on the 20 July 139, during the second consulship of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. This information, also known to Caesalpinus and to his student Galileo at the University of Pisa, has allowed modern scholars to date Egyptian Pharaonic history. The event was important enough to be noted by Censorinus one hundred years later, and had been long anticipated in Egypt and throughout the Roman Empire. I suggest that this momentous event, the sky at the advent of the Great Year, was depicted on the most remarkable carved gem known from antiquity, the sardonyx libation bowl known as the *Tazza Farnese*².

¹CENSORINUS, *Livre de Censorinus sur le jour natal*, trans. J. MANGEART, Paris, C. L. F. Panckouke, 1845, pp. 103-105.

²The *Tazza Farnese* is in the collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples.

2. The History of the *Tazza Farnese*

The origin of the *Tazza Farnese* is unknown and its iconography has been long debated. While tradition holds that the *Tazza* was found in the early 18th century at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, Furtwangler and others have provided evidence that the story cannot be true. The carved sardonyx cameo bowl was purchased by Lorenzo in 1471, and was considered the most valuable object in his collection, estimated in the inventory of 1492 following his death at 10,000 florins. As Laurie Fusco states, "One reason for this was its illustrious provenance: it had been owned by Frederick II (1235), a Persian Prince in Samarkand or Herat (early 15th century), Alfonso I d'Aragon (d. 1458), Ludovico Trevisan (d. 1465), and Paul II (d. 1471)"³. Alfonso was said to have paid 1000 ducats for it; Lorenzo would not sell for it for 10,000. It is not known, of course, if Lorenzo knew that the *Tazza* had once been owned by Frederick II, but Lorenzo did own another cameo previously owned by Frederick II: the onyx cameo *Ark of Noah* now held in British Museum.

Ulrico Pannuti has recently provided the full text of the *Tazza*'s earliest appearance⁴. On 4 November 1239, the Provençal merchants Gusbertus of Turano and Bernardus of Lyes sold to an agent of the Emperor Frederick II a great cup of onyx along with other jewels, for the sum of twelve hundred thirty ounces of gold. Pannuti notes that although the *Regestrum* does not provide a precise description of the object, it is difficult to doubt that the great onyx cup is not the *Tazza Farnese*, as it is the only known cup of antiquity of that size and value. Pannuti also draws our attention to the possibility that the *Tazza* may have resurfaced in the notarial archives of Genoa⁵. On 21 December 1253, 987 jewels, including 783 loose stones, 100 rings, 94 brooches or pendants and 10 religious or other objects, such as crucifix of gold, of crystal, gold reliquaries, and a large sardonyx vase or cup were placed as security for a loan by a merchant on his way to the Champagne fairs acting for the Hohenstaufens of Sicily (Frederick's son Conradin). The security was 2500 pounds; in 1253, Byrne notes, a weaver made 5 pounds per year; the amount which did not begin to represent the worth of the jewels could buy a large ship, 8000 cattle, or more than 350 slaves. Ten years later the royal Sicilian debt had not yet been settled. Perhaps the *Tazza* then went East, for by the early 15th century a drawing was made of it in Samarkand or Herat, by Muhammad Khayyam, associated with the court of Baysunghur, grandson of Tamerlane. The *Tazza* may have been acquired by Tamerlane (1336-1405) during his many campaigns, or sent to him as a gift, or it may have returned to Europe through some Venetian intermediary in the

³L. FUSCO-G. CORTI, *Lorenzo de' Medici, Collector and Antiquarian*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006. See Doc. 293.

⁴U. PANNUTI, "Tazza Farnese" *Datazione, interpretazione e trasmissione del cimelio*, "Journal of the European Network of Scientific and Technical Cooperation for the Cultural Heritage", 23, 4, 1989, pp. 205-215. "Novembr. ante Pontem Placentie. IIII. Novembris. De imperiali mandato facto per magistrum Albertum, scripsit G. de Cusentia licteras patentes. Notum facimus Universus, quod Gusbertus de Turano & Bernardus de Lyes mercatores provinciales vendiderunt & assignaverunt in Camera nostra unam magnam scutellam de Onichio & alias plures lolyas, de quarum venitione habere debuerunt a Curia nostra in summa uncias mille ducentum & triginta, ad generale pondus Regni, de quibus unciis, quia centum uncias auri de nostra Camera receperunt, de reliquis mille centum triginta unciis promissimus eis & convenimus, ut Angelus Frisar, magister Portulanus Sicilie citra flumen salsum fidelis noster de pecunia victualium Curie nostre [...]".

⁵E. BYRNE, *Some Mediaeval Gems and Relative Values*, "Speculum", X, 1935, pp. 177, 187.

embassies exchanged between Aqqoyunlu and the Venetians. Others suggest an intermediary Ottoman context and link the arrival of the bowl in Europe to the dispersal of Christian relics from Mehmed the Conqueror's treasury⁶.

3. Reading the *Tazza Farnese*

From Lorenzo de' Medici the *Tazza* eventually came, by marriage, into the Farnese collection, thus acquiring its present name. Nothing is known about its origin and early history. Dimitris Plantzos⁷ argues for an Alexandrian origin with Ptolemaic patronage, dating the work at the late first century BC, based on stylistic analysis following Thompson⁸ and Dwyer⁹. Plantzos demonstrates effectively through comparison of the *Tazza* with cameo portraits of Ptolemaic kings that neither the central male figure nor the woman lying on the Sphinx are likely to be portraits. He does however, through similar comparisons with Alexandrian cameos, show that the central figure is most probably Isis. He therefore follows Merkelbach¹⁰ in identifying the figures with constellations related to the Isis/Osiris myth, however rejecting his late 3rd century BC date for the work. Plantzos references *Moralia*¹¹, in which Plutarch states that the Nile was perceived as a persona of Osiris, married to Isis, and that the tears of Isis were thought by the Egyptians to have caused the rising of the water. According to Plutarch, Sirius/Sothis, the most brilliant star in the constellation Sirius, was the soul of Isis and her celestial form, with a powerful influence on the inundation of the Nile. However, Plantzos ultimately rejects a reading of the *Tazza* as the heliacal rising of Sirius, because Sirius does not appear in canine form. For Plantzos, the *Tazza* represents the "whole system of the cult of the Nile in Isaic form". He notes that the placement of the elaborate gorgon on the bottom of the *Tazza* is similar to gorgons found on the bottom of ordinary drinking vessels, to protect the drinker.

Plutarch's discussion of Isis/Sothis is also noted by Dwyer, who reads the *Tazza* as a sky chart. Dwyer's sky does not show the heliacal rising of Sirius, but the moment of creation as told in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Plantzos rejects Dwyer's complex reading and "quite improbable system of allegorical and astronomical allusions". While Dwyer's suggestion of associations with Macrobius' descent of the soul is compelling, it is difficult to imagine the *Tazza*'s figures representing that Neo-Platonic text in which

⁶D. ROXBURGH, *The Persian Album 1400-1600*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1, 2005, p. 327. See J. M. ROGERS, *The Gorgeous East: Trade and Tribute in Islamic Empires*, in J. LEVENSON (ed.), *Circa 1492: Earth in the Age of Exploration*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 69-74.

⁷D. PLANTZOS, *Ptolemaic Cameos of the Second and First Centuries BC*, "Oxford Journal of Archaeology", 15, 1, 1996, pp. 39-61.

⁸D. B. THOMPSON, *The Tazza Farnese Reconsidered*, in M. H. MAEHLER-V. M. STROCKA (eds.), *Das ptolemäische Ägypten. Akten des internationalen Symposion. 27-29 September 1976 in Berlin*, Mainz, 1978, pp. 113-122.

⁹E. DWYER, *The Temporal Allegory of the Tazza Farnese*, "American Journal of Archaeology", 96, 2, 1992, pp. 255-282.

¹⁰R. MERKELBACH, *Die Tazza Farnese, die Gestirne der Nilflut und Erathostenes*, "Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Geschichte", 99, 1973, pp. 116-127.

¹¹PLUTARCH, *Isis and Osiris*, in *Moralia*, Vol. V, trans. F. C. BABBITT, Loeb Classical Library No. 306, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp. 131-157.

creation is not figurative, but filled with sound and blinding, swirling light. The *Tazza*'s scene is far from abstract. The sensuous figures evoke sadness and expectation, not the body as a tomb or prison for the spirit. Both Plantzos and Dwyer lead us to Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, where we may find a full context for the *Tazza*. "The soul of Isis is called by the Greeks the Dog-star, but by the Egyptians Sothis, and the soul of Horus is called Orion"¹².

Imagining that the *Tazza* is an allegorical depiction of the first day of the Great Year—20 July 139 AD, at the moment when Sothis-Isis-Demeter rises from the Sphinx just before the Sun, Isis follows Orion-Osiris-Dionysus, who has risen above and before her. They both look to the right expectantly, waiting for the inundation brought by the Etesian winds overhead, in the position of the constellation Gemini. Nilus and the two women to the right bear an empty cornucopia and bowls, lamenting the drought, the death of Osiris, and the disappearance of Sothis-Isis-Demeter. The gorgon on the underside protects the rite of inundation described by Plutarch, and also signals the coming storm, as she does on Athena's aegis as a storm cloud, and on the roof tiles of the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and elsewhere to protect from lightning strikes. As Sirius rises in the east, the gorgon appears mid-heaven, held by Perseus.

The myth of Isis and Osiris assimilated to Greco-Roman cults is addressed at length by Plutarch, who may speak authoritatively for syncretic Hellenistic beliefs, rituals, and artifacts, of which the *Tazza* is a supreme, however mystifying, example. After Typhon (who withholds rain¹³) shut Osiris into a sarcophagus, and placed it in the Nile, Isis searches for him. She finds the sarcophagus which has become enfolded by a tree on the riverbank, grown to great size, and cut down for use as a pillar in the king's palace at Byblos. Isis meets the queen's maidservants by a spring, and becomes nurse to the royal son in order to make him immortal, and from here the story closely parallels the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The Isis/Demeter assimilation is explicit. That she leans upon the Sphinx is not merely an allusion to Egypt, however un-Egyptian it may appear¹⁴. Plutarch notes

Of the stars the Egyptians think that the Dog-star is the star of Isis, because it is the bringer of water. They also hold the Lion in honour, and they adorn the doorways of their shrines with gaping lions' heads, because the Nile overflows when for the first time the Sun comes into conjunction with Leo¹⁵. As they regard the Nile as the effusion of Osiris, so they hold and believe the earth to be the body of Isis¹⁶.

Plutarch provides insight into both the allegorical meaning and possible use of the *Tazza*.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 39. The insidious scheming and usurpation of Typhon, then, is the power of drought, which gains control and dissipates the moisture which is the source of the Nile and of its rising.

¹⁴J. POLLINI, *The Tazza Farnese: Augusto Imperatore "Redeunt Saturnia Regna!"*, "American Journal of Archaeology", 96, 2, 1992, pp. 283-300.

¹⁵PLUTARCH, *Isis and Osiris* (cit. note 11), p. 63, also notes the presence of the man-faced lion on the sistrum, the instrument used in Isiac ceremonies to repel the destructive, drying influence of Typhon.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 38.

The story told of the shutting up of Osiris in the chest seems to mean nothing else than the vanishing and disappearance of water. Consequently they say that the disappearance of Osiris occurred in the month of Athyr¹⁷, at the time when, owing to the complete cessation of the Etesian winds, the Nile recedes to its low level and the land becomes denuded. As the nights grow longer, the darkness increases, and the potency of the light is abated and subdued. Then among the gloomy rites which the priests perform, they shroud the gilded image of a cow with a black linen vestment, and display her as a sign of mourning for the goddess, inasmuch as they regard both the cow and the earth as the image of Isis; and this is kept up for four days consecutively, beginning with the seventeenth of the month. The things mourned for are four in number: first, the departure and recession of the Nile; second, the complete extinction of the north winds, as the south winds gain the upper hand; third, the day's growing shorter than the night; and, to crown all, the denudation of the earth together with the defoliation of the trees and shrubs at this time. On the nineteenth day they go down to the sea at night-time; and the keepers of the robes and the priests bring forth the sacred chest containing a small golden coffer, into which they pour some potable water which they have taken up, and a great shout arises from the company for joy that Osiris is found. Then they knead some fertile soil with the water and mix in spices and incense of a very costly sort, and fashion therefrom a crescent-shaped figure, which they clothe and adorn, thus indicating that they regard these gods as the substance of Earth and Water.

By means of sympathetic magic, water is poured into a "small golden coffer", to bring the Etesian winds and the inundation. If such an object was used every year, would not a precious bowl like the *Tazza* have been most appropriate for the rites of the Great Year which only occurred every 1461 years?

Pollini writes that if the *Tazza* was used as a

libation bowl, as seems likely, Medusa would have faced down toward the ground as the *Tazza* was held out horizontally to ward off from Earth any potential evil before the sacrificial wine was poured from the bowl onto the ground. Given its function as a charm and its highly rhetorical imagery, the *Tazza Farnese* would very likely have seen actual use in some important religious ceremony, possibly a sacrifice to Ceres, Terra Mater or Saturn¹⁸.

According to Plutarch, the rites of Isis and Osiris resembled those celebrated for Dionysus. Many scholars have noted the resemblance of the central male figure on the *Tazza* to Dionysus, or a satyr, with the characteristic large eyes and wild hair.

That Osiris is identical with Dionysus who could more fittingly know than yourself, Clea? For you are at the head of the inspired maidens of Delphi, and have

¹⁷The 79th day of the Egyptian year. See J. E. GEMINOS-J. LENNART BERGGREN, *Geminus's Introduction to the Phenomena: a Translation and Study of a Hellenistic Survey of Astronomy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 18-21.

¹⁸POLLINI, *The Tazza Farnese* (cit. note 14) reads the large figure as Saturn, rather than Nilus, and the *Tazza* made for Augustus, an emblem of the Augustan Golden Age.

been consecrated by your father and mother in the holy rites of Osiris. If, however, for the benefit of others it is needful to adduce proofs of this identity, let us leave undisturbed what may not be told... Furthermore, the tales regarding the Titans and the rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regenesi. Similar agreement is found too in the tales about their sepulchers. The Egyptians, as has already been stated, point out tombs of Osiris in many places, and the people of Delphi believe that the remains of Dionysus rest with them close beside the oracle; and the Holy Ones offer a secret sacrifice in the shrine of Apollo whenever the devotees of Dionysus wake the God of the Mystic Basket. For this reason all who reverence Osiris are prohibited from destroying a cultivated tree or blocking up a spring of water¹⁹.

Plutarch mentions another tale current among the Egyptians that

Apopis, brother of the Sun, made war upon Zeus, and that because Osiris espoused Zeus's cause and helped him to overthrow his enemy, Zeus adopted Osiris as his son and gave him the name of Dionysus... Moreover, the Greeks are will not to consecrate the ivy to Dionysus, and it is said that among the Egyptians the name for ivy is *chenosiris*, the meaning of the name being, as they say, "the plant of Osiris"²⁰.

Finally, he notes that the

first to learn of the deed (the death of Osiris) and to bring to men's knowledge an account of what had been done were the Pans and Satyrs... even to this day, the sudden confusion and consternation of a crowd is called a panic²¹.

Who could have afforded the *Tazza*, which most likely took several years to carve? Plantzos believes that it was fashioned for the Ptolemies, although not representing any individual. Could it have been brought to Rome by Augustus? Plantzos gives us this excerpt from Suetonius: "When the treasures of the Ptolemies were brought back to Rome, money was made so plentiful that interest fell and the price of land rose"²². In another passage we read that when Augustus took Alexandria he took none of the royal treasure except a single agate cup²³. Plantzos notes that "Dwyer suggested that this very cup was in fact the *Tazza Farnese*"²⁴. Pollini makes a strong case for its commission by Augustus as an icon of the return of the Golden Age²⁵, and other scholars have dated the *Tazza* to the late Hellenistic period²⁶. Sardonyx cameos are known from the

¹⁹PLUTARCH, *Isis and Osiris* (cit. note 11), p. 35.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 37.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 73.

²²SUETONIUS, *The Twelve Cæsars*, trans. R. GRAVES, London, Penguin, p. 69.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁴DWYER, *The Temporal Allegory* (cit. note 9), p. 232.

²⁵POLLINI, *The Tazza Farnese* (cit. note 14).

²⁶U. PANNUTI, *Catalogo delle gemme che non recano l'iscrizione LAV. R. MED. ma provenienti dal Tesoro di Lorenzo de' Medici*, in N. DACOS-A. GROTE-A. GIULIANO-D. HEIKAMP-U. PANNUTI (eds.), *Tesoro di*

Hadrianic period, including portraits of Plotina and Trajan made c. 117 AD in British Museum²⁷. C. W. King²⁸ describes busts of Titus, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Plotina and Sabina carved in chalcedony and sardonyx. Hadrian sent two cups from a temple of Serapis in Alexandria to his friend Servian²⁹. King notes that many cameos in sardonyx show a fine hole drilled through their diameter which “Pliny himself remarks proves that the stones came from India”³⁰. Furthermore, he describes large medals of Antoninus Pius from an Alexandrian mint which have on the reverse:

Serapis surrounded by the heads of the planetary deities, and encircled by the zodiac. Caylus publishes one example; I know of a second in the Bosanquet collection, and there was a third in the Praun on an Egyptian emerald. In this design, the centre bust is easily recognizable as Jove’s, the supporters are the Dioscuri; but the others it is more difficult to attribute to the right personages. Barthelemy explains the medal-type as exhibiting the relative positions of all the planets at the commencement of the Sothiac Period. This name is derived from Sothis the star whose heliacal rising regulated all the Egyptian festivals³¹.

Although the *Tazza* was “discovered” prior to the main excavations at Tivoli, it could have belonged to Hadrian, coming into his possession through Augustus, and perhaps influencing the construction of his Villa.

4. The *Tazza* and Tivoli

Jean-Claude Grenier, Consultant of the Museo Gregoriano Egizio of the Vatican Museums writes that the Great Year (139 AD) was anticipated by Hadrian in the construction of the Canopus at Tivoli, and that it influenced his design³². Although recent evidence shows that the Hellenistic cup was “discovered” by the 13th century, it could have been owned by him, or even made for him. According to Grenier, the colossal bust of Isis-Sothis-Demeter³³ was found in front of the large niche at the back of the Serapeum in the Canopus, against the wall of the cistern. The site evoked the first cataract of the Nile, the cave from which the inundation poured out. Beside the statue of Isis stood

Lorenzo il Magnifico. Repertorio delle gemme e dei vasi, Firenze, Sansoni, 1980, pp. 69-72: “Il Matz opina che difficilmente l’opera potrebbe giudicarsi tardo ellenistica: l’Adriani e lo Horn pensano che il lavoro sia stato eseguito poco dopo il 150”. See also F. MARZ, *Bemerkungen zur römischen Komposition*, “Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse”, 8, 1952, p. 638.

²⁷T. HOPPER, *Hadrian: Empire & Conflict*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, f. 45, p. 61.

²⁸C. W. KING, *Antique Gems and Rings*, London, Bell and Daldy, 1872, p. 318.

²⁹Id., *Antique Gems, Origins Uses and Value*, London, John Murray, 1860, p. 74, citing Vopiscus in *Vita Saturnini*.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 253

³²J.-C. GRENIER, “*Serapeo*” e il “*Canopo*”, un “*Egitto*” monumentale e un “*Mediterraneo*”, *Adriano Architettura e Progetto*, Milano, Electa, 2000.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 74.

the statues of priests and priestesses, Serapis represented in a double bust associating Osiris and Apis emerging from a lotus flower. Six niches in the Serapeum held figures of Ptah, Isis (now lost), Horus (in Munich), two Osiris-Antinoos (in Munich), eight great statues of Osiris-Antinoos of various colored stone (in the Vatican) and two busts of Antinoos-Osiris, one in the Vatican and one in a private collection. The concentric canals in the system of the exedra represented the branches of the Nile. Grenier states that the construction fulfilled several functions: a site for ceremonies of the cult of Serapis assimilated to the Emperor Hadrian, the presence of Isis-Sothis-Demeter who presided over the Great Year anticipated in 139, and the omnipresence of Antinoos as Osiris as a consequence of his drowning in the year 130 and subsequent creation of the new imperial cult in which Antinoos was assimilated to Osiris, Dionysus and Sylvanus (as he is depicted with a hound in the relief at the Palazzo Massimo Museum in Rome).

Statues of Nilus and the Sphinx were found in the Canopus. It is not difficult to imagine that the *Tazza* may have influenced the design of the Canopus, in anticipation of the Great Year, and that it may have played a role in the ceremonies had Hadrian not died in 138³⁴. Even so, Antoninus Pius may have used it; coins and seals made shortly after he became emperor (Isis riding on a dog, with a star above, as Sirius) show that he associated his reign with the Great Year. Furthermore, if the *Tazza* was made for Hadrian, the gorgon is especially significant, in that it was Hadrian's personal emblem, appearing on many portraits. Although the particular style of the gorgon was ubiquitous from the 4th century BC, her attitude, of extreme sadness is unique. If made for Hadrian, perhaps she mourns Osiris assimilated to Antinoos, who drowned accidentally in the Nile, as shown by Grenier, while he washed off the blood of the lion he slew in the company of Hadrian³⁵.

We know that following the death of Antinoos, Hadrian was shown a "new constellation" as the celestial incarnation of his lover located near the constellation Aquila. Grenier states that text from Antinoos' obelisk on Pincian Hill in Rome³⁶ suggests that Antinoos death immediately followed the lion hunt. In a fragment from the Alexan-

³⁴According to PLUTARCH, *Isis and Osiris* (cit. note 11), p. 22: "The Egyptians [...] give to Osiris the title of general, and the title of pilot to Canopus, from whom they say that the star derives its name; also that the vessel which the Greeks call Argo, in form like the ship of Osiris, has been set among the constellations in his honor, and its course lies not far from that of Orion and the Dog-star; of these the Egyptians believe that one is sacred to Horus and the other to Isis". In Alexandria, Canopus, the second brightest star in the sky, appeared to cross the sky below Sirius at 8 p.m. on 13 December 139.

³⁵J.-C. GRENIER, *L'Osiris Antinoos*, "Égypte nilotique et méditerranéenne", 1, 2008.

³⁶Excerpts from the obelisk of Antinoos:

West face: "The God, Osiris-Antinoos the Justified, has become a youth, with perfect face, and eyes and strength, whose heart is glad like the heart of a strong-armed hero, after he received the order of the gods at the time of his death.

On Antinoos will be repeated every ritual of the hours of Osiris together with each of his ceremonies in secret. His teachings will be spread to the whole country... while he breathes the air of life and his reputation comes to being in the hearts of mankind.

Lord of Hermopolis, Lord of the Words of Gods, Thoth! Rejuvenate Antinoos' soul like all things at their time, in the night and by day, at all times, and every second! The love for Antinoos is in the hearts of his followers and the fear of him... and his praise with all his subjects as they worship him.

He takes his seat in the Hall of the Just, the transfigured and the splendid, who are in the entourage of Osiris in the Realm of the Dead, while the Lord of Eternity gives him justification. They let his words endure on the Earth, because their hearts are pleased by him.

He goes anywhere he pleases. The doorkeepers of the underworld, they say to him, "Praise to you!" They loose their door-bolts and open their gates before him. He will live forever.

drian poet Pancrates describing the lion hunt, a red lotus miraculously appears called Antinoeios when the lion's blood was spilled, thus assimilating Antinoos to Adonis, Hyacinthus and Narcissus. A newly discovered fragment³⁷ of a *geste* of Antinoos centers on the lion chase: Antinoos had hastened to the Nile to wash the lion's blood off, but the goddess Selene desired him for her husband. He became a star, associated with the hunt, and Diana Lanuvium, a center of his cult. He was certainly assimilated to Osiris, as is attested by the multitude of sculptures from Tivoli.

Part of a new elite grown rich from the oil trade in Spain, Hadrian was intellectually, culturally, spiritually, a product of the Hellenistic Age. He was called "the Greek-ling". He gave elaborate dinner parties in the Canopus, lined with copies of works from the Athenian Acropolis and from Egypt. In the exedra, the prominent placement of Demeter/Isis/Sothis in association with Osiris, Nilus and the Sphinx at the center of an apparatus designed to replicate the flooding of the Nile, suggests preparation for the celebration of the heliacal rising of Sirius (before the Sun, at dawn) on 20 July 139 AD. Hadrian had visited the Nile in 130, with tragic results. Two days after Antinoos' drowning, Hadrian established a city in his honor on the site. The cult of the deified Antinoos spread quickly throughout the Empire, to Naples, Carthage, Spain, Greece, Ephesus, Tarsus, Alexandria, and what is now the Republic of Georgia. He was assimilated to Osiris, Hermes, Apollo, Sylvanus, Dionysus and Iakhos a god of the Eleusian Mysteries, into which both Hadrian and Antinoos had been initiated. As a god, he offered protection to men, women and children, shepherds, merchants, bureaucrats, actors, soldiers, and the spirits of the dead. The veneration of Antinoos did not end with Hadrian's own death in AD 138. Although his promotion as a god must have served political agendas, his cult, the last of the Roman Empire, was extremely popular, and his followers, like Christians, hoped for salvation and eternal life. The recent discovery and excavation in 2000 of the tomb or temple of Antinoos is in close proximity to the Canopus³⁸. Little remains but the outline of the structure which includes a large exedra and two temples. Objects may have been removed at an early date.

Where did the Provencal merchants get the *Tazza Farnese* which they sold to Frederick in 1239? The Mausoleum of Hadrian, according to the *Mirabilia*, once contained a porphyry sarcophagus

which they call that of Hadrian, had been transferred to the Lateran and later formed the tomb of Pope Innocent II; its cover is in the Atrium of St. Peter's over the tomb of the Prefect.

He goes out of his places to many temples in the whole country and he hears the pleas of those who call upon him; he heals the diseases of the needy ones by sending a dream".
South Face: "The god, who is there, he rests in this place, which is in the middle of the border-fields of the Lord of Welfare, the Prince of Rome.

A temple sanctuary of this god is therein, who is called Osiris-Antinoos the Justified, built from good white stone, surrounded by statues of the gods and the sphinxes, as well as numerous pillars, as they were made by the ancestors before, and as they were made by the Greeks as well.

All gods and goddesses will give him the air of life, so that he breathes rejuvenated."

³⁷GRENIER, *L'Osiris Antinoos* (cit. note 35), p. 56.

³⁸Z. MARI-S. SGALAMBRO, *The Antinoeion of Hadrian's Villa: Interpretation and Architectural Reconstruction*, "American Journal of Archaeology", 111, 1, 2007, pp. 83-104.

Pope Innocent II was buried in September in 1143³⁹. In 1239 Louis IX purchased relics from Baldwin II of Constantinople for 135,000 livres, constructing Sainte Chapelle to house them. Did he purchase the *Tazza Farnese* along with relics of the cross, and the crown of thorns? Other Hellenistic cameos had been given Christian readings: the temptation in the Garden for the contest between Athena and Poseidon and Prudence for Venus. Was the *Tazza* too “pagan” to read as Christian allegory, and did he then sell it to Frederick II, his friend and ally, knowing that Frederick collected and displayed pagan art?

Lorenzo valued the *Tazza* above any object in his collection, keeping it in his private room at the Palazzo Medici. His friend, the artist and philosopher Poliziano, wrote a poem about it⁴⁰. The *Tazza* appears in Lorenzo’s own work, in the poem *Ambra*, in which a nymph is chased by a water deity and turns into stone, an amber cameo. The Gorgon appears in Lorenzo’s commentary on his Sonnet 15:

The eyes of my lady have that power and virtue that [...] the face of Medusa possessed, and just as the sight of her turned men to stone, so the eyes of my lady thus painted in my heart to turn it into a hard diamond⁴¹.

The influence of the *Tazza* upon works of artists under the patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici, such as upon Botticelli in his *Birth of Venus*, should be investigated. Recent studies have increased our knowledge of the history of the *Tazza Farnese*. But for the present, any reading of the *Tazza*’s imagery and origin must remain conjectural. Like Antinoos/Osiris of the obelisk on Pincian Hill, the figures of the *Tazza Farnese* take on many forms as they appear to mortals.

³⁹S. ROWLAND PIERCE, *The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius*, “The Journal of Roman Studies”, 15, 1925, pp. 75-103.

⁴⁰In pateram egregiam Laurentii Medicis
 Ingenio partitus opus, nova pocula finxit
 Mirandasque opifex protulit effigies,
 Munere naturae, proprio vel digna nitore
 Gemma, sed artificis dignior illa manu,
 Pontificum mensas, regumque ornaverat olim
 Quam Laurens Thuscae nunc decus urbis habet.
 See FUSCO-CORTI, *Lorenzo de’ Medici* (cit. note 3), p. 140.

⁴¹LORENZO DE’ MEDICI, *Autobiography of Lorenzo de’ Medici the Magnificent, A Commentary on My Sonnets*, trans. J. W. Cook, Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000.