

CENTRE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE MÉDITERRANÉENNE  
DE L'ACADÉMIE POLONAISE DES SCIENCES

ÉTUDES et TRAVAUX

XXI

2007

JOACHIM ŚLIWA

*Giovanni Nardi (c. 1580 – c. 1655)  
and His Studies on Ancient Egypt*

In the history of archaeology, the seventeenth century is usually associated with a distinctive profile of Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), whose extraordinary activity shadowed the actions of other scholars. One of them was an Italian physician contemporary to Kircher, Giovanni Nardi, whose accomplishments have been almost entirely forgotten. As it turns out, however, Kircher made use of the results of his studies and valued contacts with Nardi very highly. The purpose of the following text is to recall the profile of Giovanni Nardi, a collector and scholar who may be forgotten, but whose accomplishments are substantial and interesting.<sup>1</sup>

Giovanni Nardi/Ioannes Nardius was born in Montepulciano in Tuscany around the year 1580. Unfortunately, we are not familiar with many facts related to his life and activities, he is not even mentioned in a majority of renowned encyclopedias and specialist studies.<sup>2</sup> The fact that he was born around the year 1580 was based on one of his texts, where he mentions that he is a sixty-year-old man – *sexagenarius*.<sup>3</sup> Since the text was written not later than 1644, Nardi must have been born before 1584. Nardi completed his medical studies in Pisa, in a college founded by cardinal Giovanni Ricci, who was as well originally from Montepulciano. After six years spent in Pisa Nardi obtained a doctoral degree in medicine from Giovanetti. The next and longest phase of his life is associated with Florence, where he came most probably around the years 1610–1615. In Florence, he continued to develop his career as a doctor and inquisitive researcher of many natural phenomena. Nardi wrote a number of works concerning medicine, physics, chemistry and natural history in a wide notion (the list of those works has not been ultimately established yet).<sup>4</sup> Nardi was also very ambitious when it came to literature and he became famous as an editor of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* with an extensive commentary. The above-mentioned work was published in Florence in 1647.<sup>5</sup>

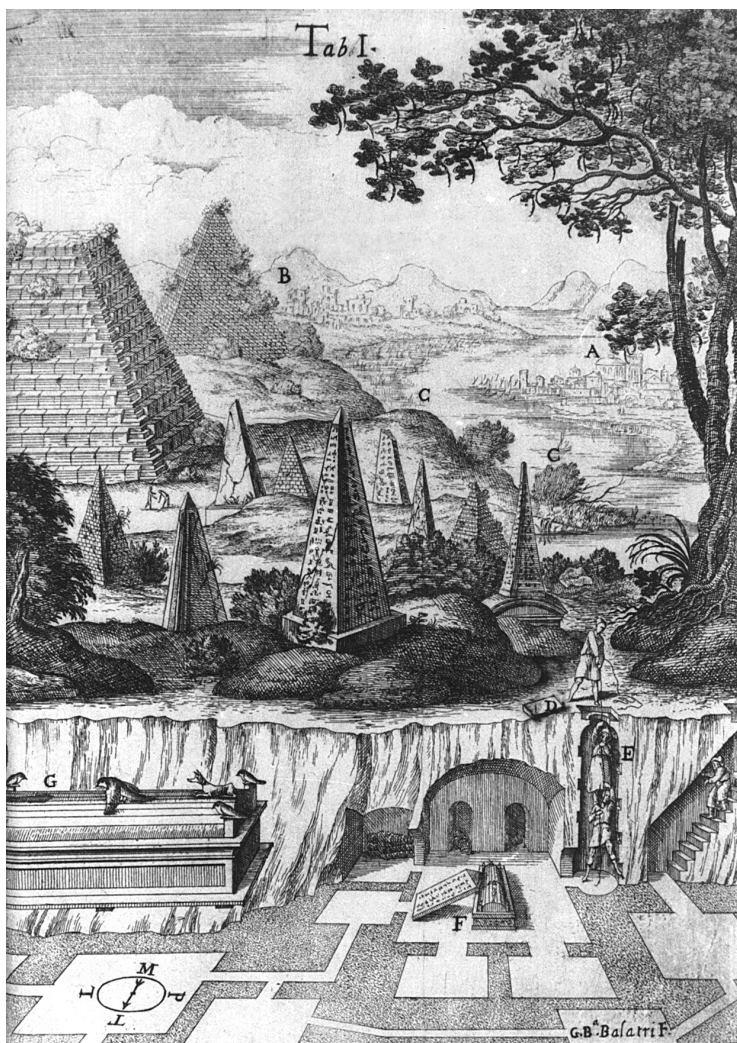
<sup>1</sup> Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664) highly valued his research on Egyptian mummies and in his treatise *Mumiae Wratislavienses* (1662) often mentions Nardi's findings. Cf. J. ŚLIWA, Andreas Gryphius und die Breslauer Mumien. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Schlesiens im 17. Jahrhundert, *Wolfenbütteler Barock-Nachrichten* 30, 2003, pp. 3–21.

<sup>2</sup> For basic information regarding Nardi, cf. J.H. ZEDLER, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, Vol. 32, Leipzig – Halle 1740, 660–661; C.G. JÖCHER, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, Vol. III, Leipzig 1751, 816 and a Supplement, *Id.*, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, Vol. V, Bremen 1816, 174; *Dizionario Biografico Universale*, Vol. IV, Firenze 1846, 159; *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, Vol. 37, Madrid 1967, 1097. See also G. NEGRI, *Istoria degli scrittori Fiorentini*, Ferrara 1772 [= *Istoria*], pp. 289–290 (there also a list of numerous epigrams and distiches dedicated to Nardi in recognition of his accomplishments); A. POGO, Ioannes Nardius (ca. 1580–ca. 1655), *Isis* 72/26, 1936 [= *Isis* 72/26], pp. 326–329; M.E. COSENZA, *Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the World of Classical Scholarship in Italy, 1300–1800*, Vol. 3, Boston 1962, 2419.

<sup>3</sup> In a dedication directed to B. Baldi (in his commentary to Lucrece – cf. *infra*, n. 5, book VI, pp. 435–436). See also: POGO, *Isis* 72/26, p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> The most important works of Nardi on medicine, chemistry, physics are e.g.: *Lactis physica analysis* (1634); *Apoleticon in Fortunii Liceti mulctram vel de duplici calore* (1638); *De igne subterraneo physica prolusio* (1641); *De rare disquisitio physica* (1642); *Noctes geniales* (1656).

<sup>5</sup> G. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex. Una cum Paraphrastica Explanatione et Animadversionibus D. Ioannis Nardii Florentini, Florentiae, Typis Amatoris Masse Foroliuini, M.DC.XLVII, Superiorum Permissu, in 4°* [= *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura*], pp. 680 (I used the copy of the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, sign. Lh 1327).



1. G.B. Balatri, A landscape with pyramids and a funerary crypt.  
 (According to G. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura...*, 1647, Pl. I).

In recognition of his accomplishments, Nardi and his family were given the citizenship of Florence (some indirect pieces of information point to the fact that Nardi had at least two sons – Ippolito and Filippo).<sup>6</sup> He was later often referred to as *Aesculapius Florentinus* or *Esculapio Fiorentino*. As a matter of fact, his fate was bound to that city until the end of his days. When an epidemic spread in Florence in 1630, as a doctor he took active part in fighting the disease (a reminder of those events can also be found in his commentary

<sup>6</sup> Both mentioned by NEGRI, *Istoria*, pp. 174, 341.

to Lucretius).<sup>7</sup> In Florence Nardi was widely regarded as an excellent doctor and university professor. In that city, he was also appointed to the position of a member of the local Academia Apathistarum. He also held the position of court physician of Grand Duke Ferdinand II Medici as well as supervisor of court manufactures – *intendente alla stilleria e fonderia*.

Giovanni Nardi died in Florence around the year 1655.<sup>8</sup> As an excellent physician and natural history researcher, during his lifetime he was already famous and widely appreciated. However, his commentary to Lucretius had been forgotten in time and only recently was once again noticed and appreciated by philologists-editors<sup>9</sup>. From our point of view, the most significant part of his commentary is the episodes where Nardi commits a lot of space and attention to Egypt. The texts in question are the subsequent so called *Animadversiones*: No. 30 – *Animadversio de Nili incremento*, No. 31 – *Soluuntur problemata duo a Prospero Alpino proposita, nec enodata*,<sup>10</sup> No. 50 – *De Funeribus Aegyptiorum*,<sup>11</sup> and, connected to that text, *Annotationes in prenarrata Funera Aegyptiorum*.<sup>12</sup>

Hereafter we will only focus on the text of *Animadversio* No. 50 – *De Funeribus Aegyptiorum* and the following *Annotationes*. In those works on some pages Nardi discusses Egyptian funerary customs associated with mummification and its specific techniques. His deliberations are based not only on the texts of classical authors, but also on the observations of Egyptian artifacts that he had direct access to. The particular attention that ancient Egyptians paid to protect the earthly remains of their deceased was according to Nardi caused by the fact that they were the first to conclude that the human soul is immortal: *Aegyptii primi dixerunt animam esse immortalem*.<sup>13</sup> He was also able to make a classification of Egyptian burials into three categories – the holy, royal, and private ones: *Funera apud Aegyptios trium erant generum – Sacra, Regia & Privata*.<sup>14</sup>

In his detailed deliberations Nardius took into account numerous Egyptian objects that were a part of the collection of the Tuscan Grand Duke Ferdinand II. A large number of the artifacts that Nardius described originated from his personal collection, which is at-

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura, Animadversio XLVII – De peste Florentina inuadente A.S. 1630*, pp. 592–598.

<sup>8</sup> This date is derived from a note left by Elias Schottelius, the publisher of the last of Nardi's works (*Noctes geniales*, 1656), in which he informs the readers that Nardi was already dead when the printer was working on the text. See also POGO, *Isis* 72/26, pp. 326–327.

<sup>9</sup> In 1998 Frank La Brasca gave an important lecture on Nardi as Lucretius' publisher: „Hinc mel, hinc venenum”. L'édition commentée du *De rerum natura* par Giovanni Nardi (1647), in: *Caesarodunum XXXII bis*, 1999 [Présence de Lucrece, textes réunis par Rémy Poignault. *Actes du colloque tenu à Tours, 3–5 décembre 1998*], Tours 1999, pp. 381–398.

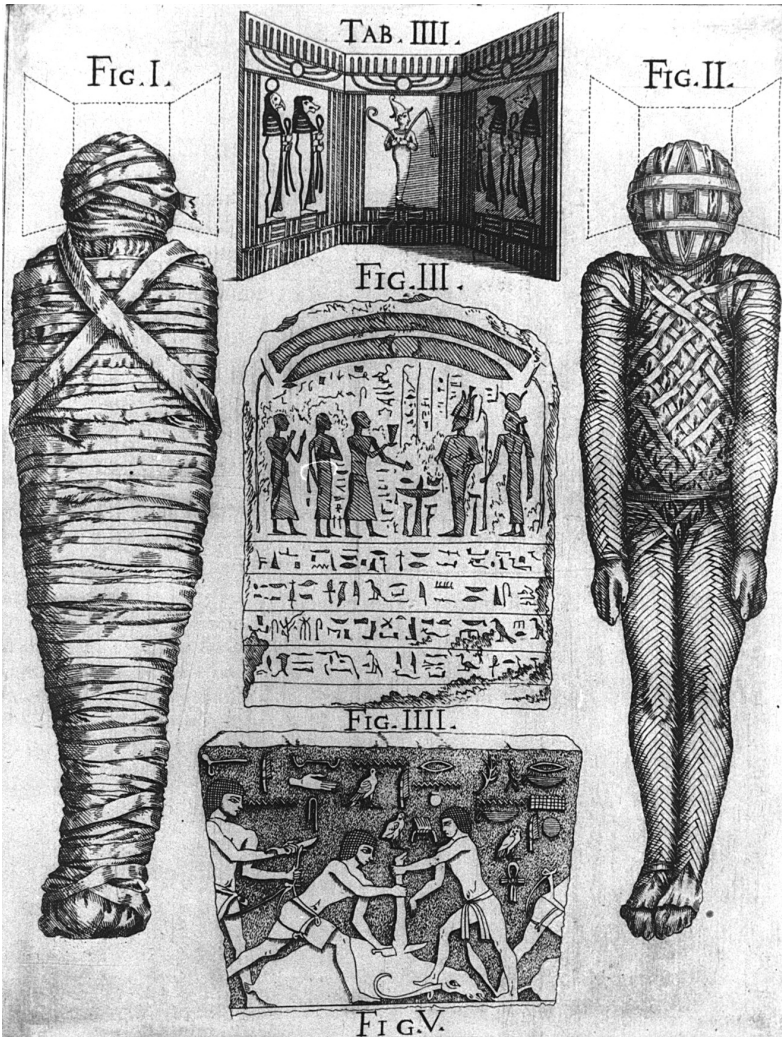
<sup>10</sup> An Italian physician Prospero Alpinus (1553–1616) visited Egypt in the years 1581–1584. Based on his experiences in that country he wrote *De medicina Aegyptiorum*, 1591, (where he mentions inundations among others issues concerning Nile) and *De plantis Aegypti*, 1592. Cf. *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, 3rd ed., London 1995, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura*, pp. 627–632.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 623–641.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 628.

<sup>14</sup> *Loc.cit.*



2. Egyptian mummies and other artifacts from the collection of G. Nardi, Florence.  
(According to G. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura...*, 1647, Pl. IV).

tested by the use of such phrases as *Nostrum haec ornant Museum, Haec apud nos, Nos- tris in aedibus, In nostro Museo* (which also occur in captions under drawings).

At that time in Florence there were among others over twenty Egyptian mummies and sarcophagi. Once they had been in possession of a French merchant staying in Florence, Louis Bertier, who had spent 22 years in Cairo.<sup>15</sup> The Grand Duke came into ownership

<sup>15</sup> According to the information found in Nardi's letter (dating to the 28th of January, 1642) written to Cassiano dal Pozzo. Cf. G. LUMBROSO, *Notizie sulla vita di Cassiano dal Pozzo*, in: *Miscellanea di Storia Italiana*, XV, 1876, pp. 360–361. See also: H. WHITEHOUSE, *Towards a Kind of Egyptology: The Graphic Documentation of Ancient Egypt, 1587–1666*, in: E. CROPPER, G. PERINI, F. SOLINAS (eds.), *Documentary Culture. Florence and*

of the collection after the merchant's death in 1643, and some of the mummies along with a number of lesser items enriched Nardi's collection.

An integral and extremely important part of Nardi's commentary are copperplate illustrations. The first plate was signed by Giovanni Batista Balatri (1627–1669), an artist who at that time was beginning his career.<sup>16</sup> The remaining plates (II–IX) were most probably also his creation. Balatri's tables are significant in comparison to other plates dating to that period due to the artist's great care and minuteness of detail, meticulousness and precision of lines. Even today, the above-mentioned plates may serve us in further iconographical and philological studies, as well as an unquestionable identification of artifacts. The credit for this achievement doubtlessly goes not only to the artist, who at that time was very young (19–20-years-old), but also to Nardi, who set very high requirements for his co-worker to fulfill.

The tables accompanying Nardi's text were therefore highly regarded and appreciated. Other artists would often copy them – with lesser or greater modifications. The original copperplates were also utilized by Athanasius Kircher, who made several copies of them to illustrate his works *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* and *Sphinx Mystagoga*.

The first plate illustrating Nardi's work (Pl. I) depicts an Egyptian landscape with pyramids and a burial crypt. This particular drawing gained a wide and exceptional recognition and was utilized and imitated multiple times. In the case of this plate a very important feature is the construction of underground chambers and the sarcophagi that are placed there – *crypta mumiarum*; the drawing is most probably based on an account of the above mentioned merchant Louis Bertier as an eye witness. It is also not unlikely that the author was influenced by the description and possibly drawings made by Tito Livio Burattini (1617–1681), who in 1641 returned from Egypt, having spent four years in that country.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the shapes and proportions of pyramids on the plate in question are improper;<sup>18</sup> they are most probably derived from the Roman funerary pyramid of Cestius; some major topographical inaccuracies are also visible. The plate of Balatri/Nardi was

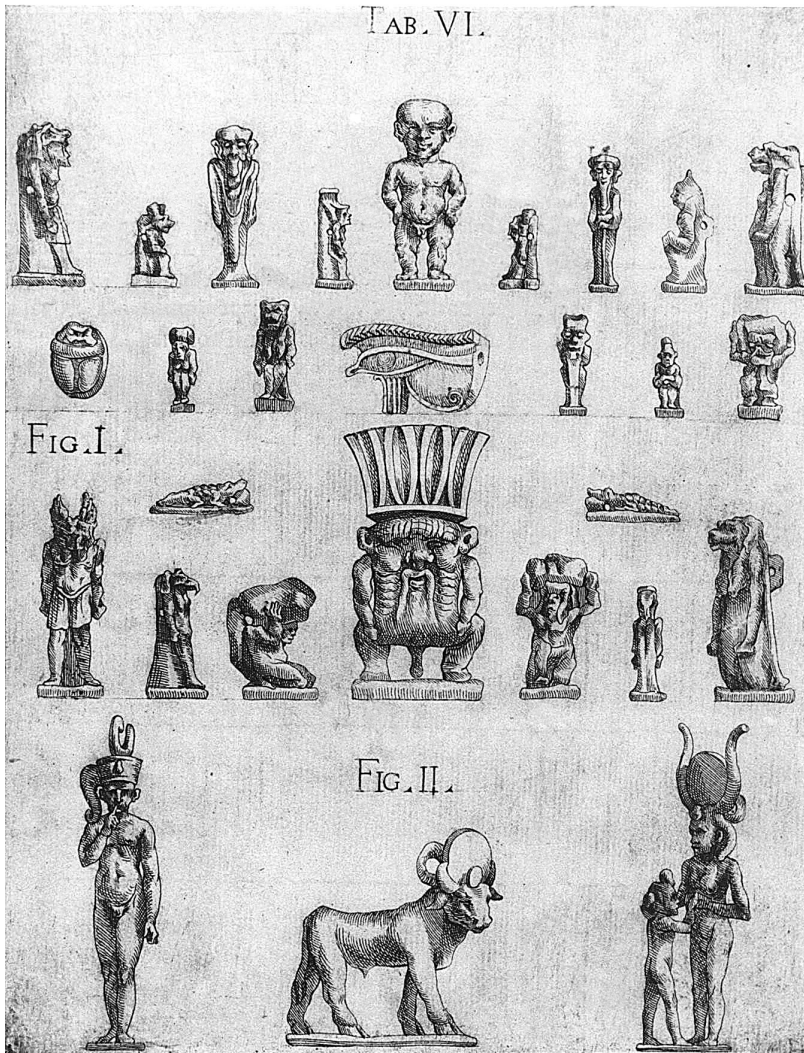
---

*Rome from the Grand Duke Ferdinand I to Pope Alexander VII. Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spelman, Florence 1990 – Villa Spelman Colloquia*, Vol. 3, Bologna 1992, pp. 66–67.

<sup>16</sup> Balatri became later famous in Florence as an outstanding architect and sculptor. He worked for a number of Florentine churches, among others he designed the fittings of the S. Mauro Chapel in la Badia Fiorentina (destroyed in 1733), the decorative elements of S. Maria Nuova; he was the author of the project of a small church S. Paolo di Padri Teresiani. Cf. THIEME-BECKER II, 1908, p. 385 and Allgemeines Künstlerlexicon VI, München 1992, p. 388.

<sup>17</sup> His description of the pyramids and sphinx was used by A. KIRCHER, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* II, 1653, pp. 303–304. The cooperation between Burattini and Kircher is described at length by H. BEINLICH, Kircher und Ägypten. Informationen aus zweiter Hand: Titio Livio Burattini [= Kircher und Ägypten], in: Spurensuche. Wege zu Athanasius Kircher, Dettelbach 2002, pp. 57–72. On Burattini cf. A. BIRKENMAJER, Polski Słownik Biograficzny 3, 1997, pp. 133–136, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani XV, pp. 394–398, and the recent work of W. TYGIELSKI, Włosi w Polsce XVI–XVII wieku. Utracone szanse na modernizację, Warszawa 2005, pp. 227–288. The influence of Burattini's account on the creation of the plate in question is taken into consideration by BEINLICH, Kircher und Ägypten, pp. 60–61.

<sup>18</sup> The upper, landscape part of the plate in question according to H. Beinlich's assumptions (*Ibid.*, p. 61) was most probably created under the influence of an illustration published in Christophe Harant's account of his travel to Egypt, 1598 (published in 1608).



3. Egyptian amulets from the collection of G. Nardi.  
(According to G. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura...*, 1647, Pl. VI).

twice utilized by Athanasius Kircher. It has been impressed from the original Nardi's copperplate in Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (p. 403), and after undergoing some changes made by Coenraad/Coenraeter Decker it was published as a frontispiece in yet another of Kircher's works – *Sphinx Mystagoga* (1676). The above-mentioned plate was also utilized by Thomas Greenhill in 1705,<sup>19</sup> after some amendments made by Johannes Kip. Altogether five plates copied from Nardi's work were utilized in Greenhill's book, however

<sup>19</sup> TH. GREENHILL, *NEKPOKHΔEIA, or the Art of Embalming*, London 1705, pp. 202–203 (where he informs the reader that he has used the plate from Nardi's work as well as about the amendments that were made).

the copied drawings were of a much poorer quality and even the readability of hieroglyphs was partially lost. Nevertheless, Greenhill made some important topographic amendments to Nardi's plates, that is he made corrections to the localization of Memphis – on the pyramid side, and Babylon/Old Cairo on the other side of the Nile. Some reminiscences of this particular Balatri's/Nardi's plate are still visible in Olfer Dapper's drawing (1676)<sup>20</sup> or even considerably later, during the nineteenth century, in the works of William John Bankes.<sup>21</sup>

The remaining plates in Nardi's work are mostly associated with his deliberations regarding mummies. There Nardi depicted (Pls. II–IV) a sarcophagus, a mummy in cartonnage and subsequent stages of unwrapping a mummy of the bandages as well as some examples of artifacts.<sup>22</sup> The remaining tables (Pls. V–VI) contain materials originating from Egyptian burials, such as ushebti figurines, a canopic jar, numerous amulets found among the bandages of the mummies during autopsies run by Nardi.

One of the tables (Pl. VIII) depicts characteristic *fragmenta silicea*, the decoration of which was described by Nardi as a scene of placing sacrifices before Isis and Osiris (in fact the depicted deities are Ptah and Hathor). Both fragments however did not belong to the scholar, but originated *ex Museo Gaddiano Florentino*.<sup>23</sup> This plate was as well entirely copied and impressed by Kircher in his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*;<sup>24</sup> he also added on the previous page<sup>25</sup> a drawing of slightly lower quality depicting a similar artifact from his own collection, with a caption stating: *Fragmentum vasis Nilotici ex Museo Authoris*. According to Kircher, those three objects were connected and he established their true purpose – his theory was that they were fragments of an ancient Egyptian waterclock. The fragment from Kircher's collection, originating from Iseum Campense, is currently a part of the collection of the Egyptian Museum in Turin,<sup>26</sup> while two granite fragments from Gaddi's

<sup>20</sup> O. DAPPER, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten*, Amsterdam 1676 – cf. BEINLICH, Kircher und Ägypten, Fig. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig. 12.

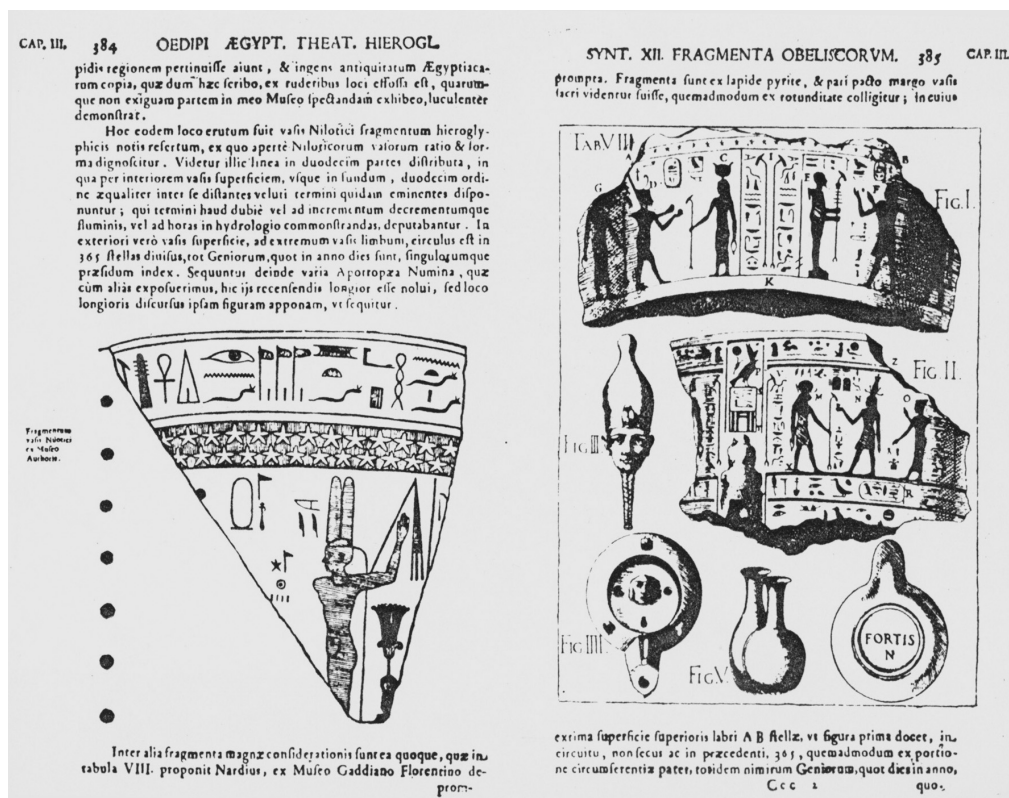
<sup>22</sup> The mummy in cartonnage and the sarcophagus (Pl. II) were reproduced by KIRCHER, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* II, 1653, p. 414. According to Pier Roberto del Francia, the mummy and the sarcophagus illustrated in Nardi's work were transferred to the Reale Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale in 1775 (now The Zoological Museum of the Florence University – “La Specola”). Cf. P.R. DEL FRANCIA, *Le mumie del Museo Egizio di Firenze e i loro contenitori lignei. Indagine sulla formazione della raccolta e la sua consistenza*, in: *Le mumie del Museo Egizio di Firenze, Maat 1. Materiali del Museo Egizio di Firenze* 1, Firenze 2001, p. 6, n. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jacopo Gaddi, born in the beginning of the eighteenth century in Florence, an accomplished poet and writer, among others an author of historic studies. His primary dissertation is *De scriptoribus non ecclesiasticis Graecis, Latinis, Italicis*, Florentiae 1648 and Lyon 1649 (written only up to the letter S). Due to his quarrel with the Grand Duke Ferdinand II, he was forced to leave Florence. He died in exile in 1668. Cf. J.H. ZEDLER, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, Vol. 10, Leipzig – Halle 1735, 37 and F. TARZIA, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 51, Roma 1998, 159–160.

<sup>24</sup> KIRCHER, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* III, 1653, p. 385.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>26</sup> Pink granite, height 21 cm. Cf. A. ROULLET, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome*, *EPRO* 20, Leiden 1972 [= *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*], p. 146 (No. 330) and the recent work of A. GRIMM, *Winckelmann und Ägypten. Die Wiederentdeckung der ägyptischen Kunst im 18. Jahrhundert*, München 2005, pp. 58–59 (No. 35) with recent literature.



4. Fragments of Egyptian waterclocks: left (A) – from the collection of A. Kircher (now Egyptian Museum, Turin); right (B) – from the collection of J. Gaddi (now in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg).

(According to G. NARDI, *Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura...*, 1647, Pl. VIII, after: A. KIRCHER, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* III, 1653, pp. 384 and 385).

collection, which were published by Nardi, had gone through a much more complicated route. It was established that the artifacts date to the times of Ptolemy II.<sup>27</sup> As it turned out, both fragments were also discovered in Rome within the boundaries of Iseum Campense and as soon as in the middle of the sixteenth century they were kept in the collection of ancient inscriptions in the palace of cardinal Carpi near the church Santa Maria sopra Minerwa. During the seventeenth century, the items in question – as we already know – were placed in the Florentine Museo Gaddiano and became an object of Nardi's, and later Kircher's interest, the latter managed to establish their true purpose.<sup>28</sup> During the nineteenth century they became a part of Bludow's collection, where they were further transferred to

<sup>27</sup> ROULLET, *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*, pp. 145–146 (Nos. 327 and 328).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A. POGO, Kircher, not Nardi, *Isis* 26, 1936, pp. 150–151. On the topic of the functioning of Egyptian waterclocks see A. POGO, *Egyptian Water Clocks*, *Isis* 25, 1936, pp. 403–425 and L. V. MACKENSEN, *Neue Ergebnisse zur ägyptischen Zeitmessung*, *Alte Uhren* 1/1978, pp. 13–18.

the collection of Vladimir Semenovič Goleniščev, and later, during the years 1887–1888, to the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, where they are kept until this day.<sup>29</sup>

The familiarity with Nardi's commentary to Lucretius allows us without major doubts to consider his text as one of the earliest egyptological works, which preceded even Kircher's research. In his deliberations Nardi not only committed himself to studies on the ancient mummification techniques (this lead was also continued slightly later by Andreas Gryphius), but also the interpretation of specific Egyptian artifacts. His goal was to discover the reason why the Nile inundated, he also commented on some remarks made by one of his contemporaries, Prospero Alpini/Prosper Alpinus. The exquisite quality of copperplates illustrating Nardi's works is especially noteworthy. The commentary that Nardi wrote to Lucretius may even be considered the first modern publication that in print (1647) depicted proper reproductions of hieroglyphic texts. This commentary can also be regarded as a precursor of later publications of Egyptian artifacts, which are the basis for further interpretations and scientific discussions.

Joachim Śliwa  
Instytut Archeologii  
Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków

---

<sup>29</sup> Nos. 2507 a and b, height 33.5 cm and 20.5 cm. Cf. ROULLET, *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments*, pp. 145–146 (Nos. 327–328), Figs. 337–342. See also: A.O. BOLSHAKOV, in: *Ägypten – Griechenland – Rom. Abwehr und Berührung*, Frankfurt a/Main 2005, Cat. No. 113 (the author attributes fragment „a” to Nectanebo I and Alexander the Great).