Greek *Nomos* and Egyptian Religion: cultural identity in Hellenistic Egypt

Ronaldo Guilherme Gurgel Pereira
Instituto Oriental – FCSH-UNL

1. On political usages of Egyptian religion

When Alexander the Great entered Egypt with his army in 332 B.C. the Egyptians had recently been defeated in their latest attempt to break the Persian rule, under pharaoh Khababash[1]. After a last and brief period of Egyptian contestation, the Persians restored their rule, disbanded the Egyptian army and established a Persian garrison. Consequently, when the Macedonians took up the administration of Egypt, there were no longer a native army or military elite. Huss[2] surmises that the Persian king Dareios III absorbed the remainder of the Egyptian army after the revolt led by Khababash. The author also observes that the Macedonians made large use of the bureaucratic and administrative Egyptian elite (the «land's administrators» or śšmj.w tꜣ). Apart from this, no military authority was bestowed on Egyptians. As Rostovtzeff explains[3], the Macedonians are likely to have kept the native administration since they needed an efficient administrative

[1] Khababash led a revolt against the Persians in ca. 337 B.C. He is briefly mentioned in the Satrap Stele (Cairo CG 22182), dated to times of Ptolemaios son of Lagos – or Lagide – when he was still but a satrap ruling in the name of Alexander IV, the official successor of Alexander the Great. This stele was dedicated in commemoration of the restoration of the rights of a temple at Buto, after Ptolemaios Lagide victory over Demetrius Poliorcetes at Gaza in 312 B.C. This stele mentions (lines 32-44) an inspection around the Delta region prepared by this pharaoh so that any effort of another invasion by the Persian fleet could be blocked off. Cf. Simpson, W. K., (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1972.

[2] Huss, E., *Der Makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester*, Stuttgart, 1994, p. 11.

[3] Rostovtzeff, M., *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century BC*, Rome, 1967), p. 3.

body. This was crucial in their struggle against the newborn Hellenistic kingdoms of Syria and Macedonia.

The political relations between Macedonian and Egyptian elites had many strands[4]. On the one hand, the Macedonian army was initially welcomed as liberator from the Persian domination; on the other hand, the Macedonians needed some sort of justification for their rule over the Egyptians nonetheless. The well-established Egyptian priests required more well-founded arguments than the mere “right of conquest”. This meant negotiation. The great social prestige the priests enjoyed as well as the influence they could exercise over society made them key factors in the process of recognition and legitimacy of the Macedonian dynasties[5]. After all, what the Macedonians tried to simulate was a natural and valid continuation of the ancient pharaonic lineage.

Throughout its Hellenistic rule, Egyptian priests functioned as major mediators establishing native acceptance of the Macedonian authority. The following generation of Macedonian kings, *i.e.* the *basilei*, pursued the strategy adopted by Alexander, which most foreign rulers of Egypt made use of as well. He took on the title of pharaoh and consequently assumed all prerogatives and duties such a position demanded within the Egyptian symbolic universe. In other words, in his role as pharaoh, the *basileus* had to meet the demands of an Egyptian king. Inevitably, this introduced a peculiar *realpolitik* at the Hellenistic court in Egypt, where native traditions and royal Egyptian ideology were considered to be important elements of the “affairs of the king”.

At the beginning of the Hellenistic administration of Egypt, Ptolemy I seized the opportunity to build on Egypt’s religiousness as means of reaching its population. A good example of this scheme

---

[4] Cf. Huss, *op. cit*., offers a very consistent debate about the different ways and dimensions of the possible negotiation, cooperation and opposition between the Ptolemaic kings and the Egyptian priestly elites.

[5] In Egypt, there were two distinct Macedonian dynasties: the Argeade, who where the blood-lined successors of Alexander the Great, and the Lagide, who where the blood line successors of Ptolemy son of Lagos – or Lagide. Ptolemy (later known as Ptolemy I), was a former general of Alexander, then Satrap on behalf of the Argeade and at last the first Macedonian king of Egypt after the integrity of Alexander’ Empire collapsed due to his generals’ disputes.

is the introduction of the Sarapis cult; *i.e.* the birth of a new Greek-Egyptian syncretistic deity created with the help of Egyptian and Greek sages. According to Kessler, the introduction of Sarapis enabled the Greek masses to take part in the Egyptian festivals at the Sarapeion of Alexandria[6]. The god's cult soon became popular among the Hellenised population of Egypt and spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin and towards all the places owned by the Lagides[7]. Religiousness thus worked as a driving force that brought cohesion to the new social structure of Hellenistic Egypt. It formed part of each Lagide ruler's agenda to build, expand, and restore Egyptian temples. The widespread popularity of the Egyptian gods, cults and religious practices among the Hellenised population also meant the maintenance of the social prestige enjoyed by the native priests.

Once Egypt's aristocracy was reduced to priests, "spirituality" became an important political tool for the elites on both sides, *i.e.* Egyptians and Greeks/Macedonians. According to Sahlins[8], "politics" serves as the essential mediator between man and society, nature and cosmos. By means of the political "instrumentalisation" of religiousness, Hellenistic Egypt developed a new symbolic *campus*[9], which in turn created channels through which power could be negotiated. This was possible because both elites recognised the new political channels as a valid means of communication between the respective representatives of Hellenistic and Egyptian bodies or "symbolic jurisdictions". Since both

---

6 The author understands it as a Hellenistic attempt to connect the Egyptian and Macedonian calendars and their cultural habits. See: Kessler, D., "Das hellenistische Sarapeum in Alexandria und Ägypten in ägyptologischer Sicht" in M. Görg; G. Höbl (eds.), *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im I. Jahrhundert v. Chr*., Wiesbaden, 2000, pp. 163-230.

7 Furthemore, Sarapis was later worshipped throughout the entire Roman Empire as an aspect of Zeus/ Jupiter.

8 Sahlins, M., *Islands of History*, Chicago, 1985.

9 Cf.: Bourdieu, P., *Le Sens Pratique*, Paris, 1980). The author defines as "*campus*" a cultural concept for a symbolic and delimitated field or sphere in a society, in which antagonism between different instances of power could both agree as valid for the legitimacy of the negotiations. A *campus* could be understood most simply as some sort of "jurisdiction of *habitus*". In this case, in Hellenistic Egypt, the social importance of the priestly social group implied in a reconnaissance of their specific line of action on Egyptian society as the best way to achieve a channel for political negotiations.

sides needed each other to achieve symbolic and political legitimacy as well as to gain support among both their rivals and allies, it was necessary to establish a symbolic space in which both groups could interact as representatives of their respective symbolic universes.

What occurred in such a space can be seen in the so-called "Synodal decrees"[10], where priests and kings acted interconnectedly due to their shared interest, namely the welfare of (priests and) Egypt[11]. All decrees start by reporting the individual benefactions made by the particular king to Egypt and its temples. By royal order, priests all over Egypt had to regularly meet for political deliberations in a synod[12]. The decrees were produced at the end of their session. They gave an account of all aspects concerning the king's domestic and foreign policies and dealt with several issues regarding Egypt's social organisation.

To the modern reader, the decrees serve as valuable minutes of the discussions between the king and the priests. The list of topics varies and may include, among others, the creation of a new *phyle* of priests or a reform of the Egyptian calendar – as can be found in the Decree of Canopus. The Raphia Decree, on the other hand, offers details of a military campaign to Syria including the return of lost sacred statues to the Egyptian temples and fiscal privileges granted them (as reduced taxes, for instance). The Memphis/Rosetta Decree makes reference to the organisation of a new fleet and army, an amnesty given to rebels, and the concession of fiscal privileges to the temples. All decisions taken were made public in every Egyptian temple by means of a stone stela that was inscribed in three languages: Greek, Demotic and hieroglyphs.[13]

[10] The idea of regular synods existed already since the Ramesside times. However, with the Ptolemaic rule, this practice was adopted with some innovations. For instance, the text of the decrees then followed some Hellenistic canons such as the invocation of Fortune, and the oath formula. There is a comparative study concerning the Ptolemaic synodal decrees and their antecessors in: Vallbelle, D.; Leclant, J. (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999.

[11] Although the priests worked together with the king, the temples also enjoyed some economic autonomy.

[12] Ptolemy V Epiphanes determined the end of the obligatorily of those regular synods. See: Crawford, D. J; Quaeguebeur, J.; Clarysse, W., *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*, Leuven, 1980.

[13] See: Huss, *op. cit.,* 1994, for a detailed analysis on the social and political context of the decree's production. See also Höbl, G., *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, London, 2001.

Seen from a broader perspective, the synods and their issued decrees formed part of a larger context of political relations between two spheres of power in activity in Egypt. The decrees worked as official and organised reaction of the Hellenistic government to home affairs – albeit clad in Ptolemaic religious practices. The priests returned the king's favour in form of material and symbolic support. This brief sketch helps to understand the role the priests played in the legitimacy of the Hellenistic ruler cult in Egypt. It is important, however, to note that this cult did not form a linear continuation of dynastic Egypt practices.

In the traditional Egyptian royal cult, pharaoh, due to his divine status (*nṯr*), received a cult both during his life and after his death. He acquired and maintained his divinity with the help of specific kingship rituals. These began with his coronation, which was also the most important ritual. In this ceremony, the king was transformed into a god by means of the god's union with the royal soul (*kꜣ*). As a god, pharaoh was identified with the sun god Re as well as with the manifestations of the gods Horus and Osiris[14]. The actual cult became popular at the beginning of the rule of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390-1352 B.C), *i.e.* during the New Kingdom. It followed the pattern of the daily temple rituals of other gods very closely and kings even erected (colossal) statues of themselves where offerings were deposited[15]. As this clearly shows, pharaoh was understood to be the mortal bearer of divine functions; at the core, he was essentially a mediator between the natural and the supernatural world.

The dynastic royal model stands in stark contrast to the Hellenistic *basileus* in Egypt, who totally depended on his own charisma and political skills for his transformation into a living god. The deification of the *basileus* based on his superior character (*arete*) stands in closer connection to the Greek custom of hero-worshipping than any

[14] Since the Middle Kingdom, the pharaoh was also identified with the god Amun-Re.

[15] There are depictions of the king making offerings to his deified self. These statues represented the royal *ka* of the living king, and when he or she worships their own statue, they are actually worshipping the concept of deified kingship as represented in the royal ka, which the king embodies. See: Morenz, S., *Ägyptische Religion*, Stuttgart, 1960.

Egyptian practices. However, the heroes' cult was in fact a cult centring on dead people and was maintained to preserve role models for future generations. Overall, the royal Hellenistic cult may therefore be labelled innovative[16]. This idiosyncratic cult first emerged under Ptolemy I. It started out as another Greek hero cult in honour to Alexander, whose body had been transported from Babylon to Macedonia for his burial and subsequent placement in a shrine in Alexandria. Ptolemy, however, did not only give homage to the deceased; he seized the cult as an opportunity to promote himself as a legitimate successor to Alexander. Nonetheless, Ptolemy never claimed divine worship for himself. It was his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, who arranged the formal deification of his parents around 280 B.C, which proclaimed them as "Saviour Gods" (*Theoi Soteres*). Some years later, Ptolemy II Philadelphos and his wife, Arsinoe II, were also deified. In contrast to Ptolemy I, they were endowed with their new title of the "Sibling Gods" (*Theoi Adelphoi*) while still living. They were worshiped in the above-mentioned shrine of Alexander.

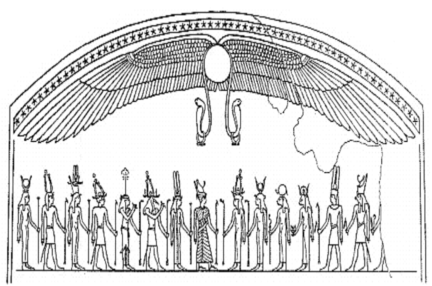
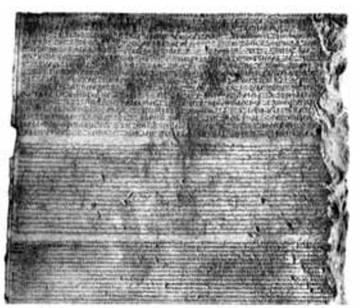
The development of the ruler cult as a Hellenistic "state religion" had the support and collaboration of Egyptian priests. The decrees they wrote usually[17] employed the Egyptian artistic canon thereby depicting the royal Macedonian family as a traditional pharaonic family. The following is a typical example of a Hellenistic Egyptian synodal decree:

---

[16] See: Préaux, C., *Le Monde Hellénistique,* vol. 1*,* Paris, 1997, pp. 238-71; Balsdon, J. P. V. D., "The Divinity of Alexander", *Historia* 1 (Stuttgart, 1950), pp. 363-388. Sanders, L. J., "Dionysius I of Syracuse and the Origins of Ruler Cult in the Greek World", *Historia* 40, (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 275-87; Walbank, F. W., "Könige als Götter, Überlegungen zum Herrscherkult von Alexander bis Augustus", *Chiron* 17 (1987), pp. 365-82.

[17] Altough the Decree of Raphia proclaimed that the pharaoh should be represented on horseback with Macedonian armoury and spear, the style remained Egyptian. See: Clarysse, W., "Ptolémées et Temples" in D. Vallbelle ; J. Leclant (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999, pp. 41-65 ; image of the stele in p. 47.

Table 1: Canopus Decree (Cairo CG 22186).

A) The top of the stela from Kom el-Hisn, in the Delta. (Greek Momenphis; Egyptian *Jmꜣw). Capital of the third nome of Lower Egypt.*[18]	B) A *Facsimile* with a drawing of the same stele by Gunther Roeder (the segmentation of the texts was omitted by the author of this paper).[19]
	
A. 1) Top of the stela with part of the text written in hieroglyphs.	This stela shows Ptolemy III Evergetes I and his wife, queen Berenike II, portrayed as gods at a gathering with their ancestors and Egyptian gods.[20]
	
A. 2) Middle section: The hieroglyphic text was chiselled atop its demotic version underneath which the Greek text can be found.	A. 3) At the bottom of the stela follows the Greek version of the document.

[18] Kamal, A. B., *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes: 22001- 22208 Stèles Ptolémaiques et Romaines,* Tome II, Le Caire, 1904, Plate LIX (top = A.1); LX (middle = A.2) ; LXI (botton = A.3).

[19] Roeder, G., *Kulte und Orakel im alten Ägypten, Band II,* Zürich, 1960, p. 151.

[20] Below the winged sun from the left side: Berenike I following Ptolemy I Soter (the first royal pair); Arsinoe II following Ptolemy II Philadelphos (the second royal pair); then the goddess Seshat, the god Thoth and the third royal pair: Berenike II and Ptolemy III Evergetes I. Ptolemy III is in front of the goddess of the third Egyptian nome, followed by the goddesses Hathor, Sekhmet, Sekhat-Hor, and the gods Amun-Re, Horus and a last god, unrecognizable due to damages to the stele.

Portraying the Ptolemies as Egyptian pharaohs, the visual discourse suggests the ideal of continuity between the former pharaohs and the current dynasty. In addition to this, the decrees proclaimed the legitimacy of the cult to the royal family.[21] They made the good deeds of the king public, reinforced the loyalty of the priests and recorded contracts concerning both the king and the priests. In fact, the newly fashioned Hellenistic ruler cult received full support from Egyptian priests through the decisions taken during the synodal decrees:

Table 2: Synodal Decrees.[22]

Ruler	**Modern Name**	**Synod Location, Date**	**Reason for Synod**	**Royal Images Decreed**
Ptolemy III Evergetes I	*Canopus Decree*	Canopus, 238 B.C.	Royal jubilee and deification of a princess	Deified princess Berenice
Ptolemy IV Philopator	*Raphia Decree*	Memphis, 217 B.C.	Victory at Raphia	King and queen
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Memphis Decree* (also known as *The Rosetta Stone; Rosettana*)	Memphis, 196 B.C.	Coronation of the king	King
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Philensis II*	Alexandria, 186 B.C.	Suppression of rebellion	King and queen
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Philensis I*	Memphis, 185 B.C.	Enthroning of Apis bull	King and queen

The decrees prescribed the inclusion of royal statues fashioned in Egyptian style inside Egyptian temples. However, the decrees also promoted social modifications, such as the creation of new priestly ranks, a calendar reform[23] and several fiscal benefits and privileges

[21] For the relations between the priestly synodal decrees and the ideology of the Hellenistic ruler cult, see: Thompson, D., *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience, Aspects of the Ruler Cult*, Oxford, 1973); Stanwick, P. E., *Portraits of the Ptolemies – Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs*, Austin, 2002. See also Pollit, J. J., *Art in Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, 1986.

[22] Table based on Stanwick, *op.cit.,* p. 7.

[23] Cf. The Canopus Decree.

granted to the temples in the decrees made under Ptolemy V Epiphanes. On the whole, the Egyptian priests helped consolidate a new cultural element in Egypt by accepting and organising the royal cult. On top of that, the decrees also featured passages on tax balances, fiscal privileges and several other political aspects relevant to the Greek/Macedonian government and the Egyptian priests. Politics played an important role in this process of social transformation altogether as both elites needed to establish platform on which their concerns could be debated. The decrees in turn functioned as intermediary medium to securing their respective ambitions. Generally speaking, they served as a balanced foundation for the discussions of power relations between political institutions, *i.e.* the throne and the temples.

As was already mentioned, the decrees were produced in three languages, namely two Egyptian scripts, hieroglyphs and demotic, as well as in Greek. The Greek name for the decrees, ψήφισμα, suggests some degree of symbolic submission on the part of the Egyptian priestly class[24]. On the other hand, the original Egyptian term for these decrees, *wḏ*, *i.e.* "(to) order or (to) command", implied a priori that giving the orders was a pharaonic and divine prerogative[25]. According to one example given by Valbelle[26], the royal decrees written under the Saites showed a tendency to reproduce Old Kingdom protocols. Gunn's analysis of the royal protocol on a Saite stela of pharaoh Apries highlights the use of the phrase «Le roi lui-même (dit): "Sa majesté a ordonné [...]"»[27]. Overall we may say that Egyptian priests

---

[24] ψήφισμα *(Psephisma)* is essencially an oath taken by those part who compromise themselves into fulfill the promises firmed by the Hellenistic decree. Indeed, there was already an interesting debate concerning whenever the synodal decrees from the Ptolemaic age should be classified as Egyptian or Hellenistic documentation. See: Clarysse, *art. cit.*, in D. Vallbelle; J. Leclant (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999, pp. 41-65.

[25] Cf. *wḏnsw*: «royal decree». Moreover, this term had also a magical meaning, connected to the divine capacity of creation through the will. See: Bickel, S., "La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire" in *OBO* 134, Fribourg, 1994, p. 101, and Morenz, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

[26] Valbelle, D., "Décrets égyptiens antérieurs aux Lagides" in D. Vallbelle; J. Leclant (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999, pp. 67-90. This article establishes a comparative analysis between the Egyptian priestly decrees from the Pharaonic and Hellenistic ages. It deals with several examples from different Dynasties.

[27] Gunn, B., "The Stele of Apries at Mîtrahina", *ASAE* 27 (1927), pp. 211-237.

during the Hellenistic age made use of a traditional political means of communicating with the pharaoh. A new addition, however, was that it was no longer the pharaoh who issued the decrees and took responsibility for their contents but the priests; they now took over the authorship and responsibility for the production of the decrees. In this sense, we may say that Hellenistic pharaohs enjoyed less symbolic power than his dynastic counterparts did.

The mentioned examples underline the priests' attempts at making the decrees appear to have been issued voluntarily or as a reward in recognition of the royal efforts to please the Egyptian temples and the country's people. Incorporating elements of Hellenistic protocols in these texts, the decrees achieved the status of acceptable by the Hellenistic Power. Thus the latter was satisfied with the alleged Egyptian symbolic submission implicit in a ψήφισμα, while the Egyptians were equally pleased with the usurpation of the traditional symbolic pharaonic prerogative of ordering the production of a decree.

There was no such thing as an Egyptian clergy in the Lagide Empire. As Huss observes, the Ptolemaic kings established – to some extent – a free spiritual space throughout the *hieratikoi* and *hieroi nomoi* respectively. This can also be perceived in the fact that priests were self-governed[28]. Moreover, Egypt was dotted with several temples for various deities, and inside temple walls different political points of view were common. The native priestly elite in Hellenistic Egypt was a complex and heterogeneous group with very particular objectives and strategies.

Since the Macedonian kings adhered to Egyptian rituals and symbolic prerogatives, the local priests were willing to recognise them as pharaohs. Following their native sacred rituals and symbolic prerogatives, Egyptian priests recognised the Macedonian kings as pharaohs. The priests also took part in the promotion of regular synods, at which the exchange of honours, prestige and privileges bestowed on both parties and mutually recognised were written on stelae and

[28] Huss, *op.cit*, p. 51.

consequently positioned throughout Egypt. Nonetheless, it was the same Egyptian priests who also supported the many and long regional rebellions that rose during the Ptolemaic rule – including some led by native self-proclaimed rebel pharaohs[29]. The Ptolemies, for their part, sought to control Egyptian temples by unifying them as one body. The organisation of regular synods proved a helpful tool in this undertaking. Eventually, a ψήφισμα-*wḏ* became a key factor in the establishment of regular dialogue between Egypt's ruler and its priests. Although some of the elites were willing to negotiate their support of the Hellenistic authority, the relationship between the Macedonian king and the Egyptian priests remained a complex issue overall.

2. On *Nomos* as "Greek" self-perception

Although many Hellenised settlements were founded in Egypt following the great influx of Hellenic and Hellenised immigrants, Hellenistic Egypt only featured three 'true' Greek *poleis*[30]. The first of these was Naucratis in the Delta, which had been created centuries

[29] See: Polybius V, 107, 1-3; XIV, 12, 3-4; for the Egyptian military (the native veterans from the Battle of Raphia, against Antiochus III from Syria) revolt against Ptolemaios IV. This revolt happened from 207 B.C. to 186 B.C. across the southern (namely the region of Thebes, or "Thebaid") Egypt and was crashed only by Ptolemaios V. For many years Egypt had a rebel pharaoh ruling the rebelled lands in South: the first, since 206 B.C., was Hor-em-Akhet, and later, since 199 B.C., Ankh-Wennefer. There is another rebellion described in the Rosetta Stone, lines 19 -20 (Greek text) between 198 B.C. and 197 B.C. – at the Delta, by this time – crushed again by Ptolemaios V. Even Alexandria faced a revolt, against the brothers Ptolemaios VI Philometor and Ptolemaios VII Evergete II (at the time in dispute for the succession), leaded by the Greco-Egyptian Dionysus Petoserapis (see Diodorus XXI 15 a., for the rebellion at Alexandria). After his defeat at Alexandria, Petoserapis fled to the country and started a new revolt against the Lagides (see Diodorus XXX 17 b., for the second revolt leaded by Petoserapis). Finally, a second revolt at the Thebaid started in-between 91 - 88 B.C., again with full priestly support, against Ptolemaios X Alexander I. It was partially controlled by his successor Ptolemaios IX Soter II (by the time in his second reign). At this time, the rebel province would be "pacified" only in 30 B.C., by Cornelius Gallus, after the Roman conquest of Egypt. See: Veïsse, A.-E., *Les «révoltes égyptiennes»: recherches sur les troubles intérieurs en Égypte du règne de Ptolémée III à la conquête romaine*, Leuven, 2004.

[30] The Greek "colonisation policy" in Egypt differed from the one they used in other places, where they founded one Greek-fashioned city after another. Their aim in Egypt, on the other hand was not to recreate a Greek world within the new cities.

before the arrival of the Macedonians. This was followed by Alexander's founding of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. Finally, Ptolemy I established Ptolemais[31] (or Ptolemais Hermiou[32]) in Upper Egypt. The Greek settlers – most of whom stemmed from the army – were sent to the countryside, so-called *chora,* where the majority of them received land in exchange for military services. Of this cleruchy[33] Höbel writes that:

> «This system of allotting land to military settlers probably spread over all the grain-producing lands of the Ptolemaic empire, [...]. Scattered over the entire country, the kleruchs introduced Greek ideas and technology into the agricultural environment in which they were living.»[34]

Broadly speaking we may say that Hellenisation was a consequence of the attempt to construct a *homogeneia*, *i.e.* a community that was tied not only by blood, but also by common behaviour, values, customs, traditions, laws, *etc.* In other words, the aim was a community joined by a common consensus of customs and laws, or, differently put, a community united by a common *nomos*[35]. What is more, the Hellenistic

---

[31] For further explanations about the exception status of Ptolemais, and for a general analysis about the foundation of new Greek cities and settlements in Hellenistic age, see: Préaux, C., *Le Monde Hellénistique* vol. 2*,* Paris, 2002, pp. 401-460. For Egypt's case, see: Mueller, K., *Settlements of the Ptolemies,* Leuven, 2006.

[32] For the epithet ἑρμείου, see Ptolemy, *Geography* (4.5.66). R.S. Bagnall comment about Ptolemais as being «the metropolis of the Thinite nome». Cf.: Bagnal, R. S., "Cults and Names of Ptolemais in Upper Egypt", *OLA* 85 (1998), pp. 1093-1101; Strabo describes this city (17.1.42,813) as the largest city of Upper Egypt and not smaller than Memphis (Egypt's second city): μεγίστη τῶν ἐν Θηβαίδι καὶ οὐκ ἐλάττων Μέμφεως.

[33] The Greek idea of cleruchy originated during the Classical period, however there was also an Egyptian similar precedent dated back to the New Kingdom – *vide* Appendix 01 for chronological correspondences – See: Bagnall, R. S. "The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs", *BAmSocP* 21 (1984), pp. 7-20. For further analysis of land status in Hellenistic Egypt, and specially in the Fayum, see: Crawford, D. J., *Kerkeosiris: an Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period*, Cambridge, 1971.

[34] Höbl, G., *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, London, 2001, p. 61.

[35] *Nomos* is a cultural convention that aims at promoting symbolic agreement and therefore the idea of social cohesion. By this terms, "to be honest" always was an individual choice, however the Greek definition of "honesty" was given by the group's *nomos*.

homogeneia comes closest to our modern concept of a nation. This ties in well with Hall's argument that a nation is not only a political entity, but also a unit that produces meaning, *i.e.* system of cultural representations[36]. Hall conceives nation as a symbolic community that is marked by its power to generate a sense of identity and, consequently, solidarity and loyalty.

Another element which is crucial to the understanding of Hellenistic Egypt is *nomos*, which played an important role in the growth of the concept of "Hellenic" in a new reality of cultural interactivity, *i.e.* in the process of creating what we now call "Hellenistic". The concept of *nomos* is apparent in numerous ways ranging from culture in general, laws, traditions and human artefacts (*e.g.* the polis, gymnasium, *etc.*) to the way people distributed of gifts. *Nomos* originally meant the common law found in a society that exclusively followed ancient customs and established social norms[37]. *Nomos* even included specific moral values, such as the notion of decency and comfort found in social relationships. It therefore stood in contrast to any form of "arbitrary" or "chaotic" decisions[38]. In addition to these aspects, Benveniste notes that the term *nomos* was also used to refer to a pasture shared by virtue of customary law.[39]

As we have seen, *nomos* gained its legitimacy through a consensus based on social relationships and habits. It grew out of a group's interest to perpetuate the commonwealth of its individuals and eventually developed into an efficient system that promoted social cohesion. It provided and helped create a sense of social and cultural identity among its members, who recognised its validity and obeyed the order of the symbolic universe it entailed. Ultimately, *nomos* was a common denominator of values and judgements uniting different individuals, who adopted the *nomoi* as unquestionable truth, reality and norm. Apart

---

[36] Hall, S., "Who needs 'identity'" in S. Hall; P. Du Gay., *Questions of Identity*, London, 1996, pp.1-17.

[37] Benveniste, E., *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris, 1969, p. 85.

[38] "Arbitrary" in order to escape from any kind of social normative code. The term implies the absence of any sort of law, criterion, order, *etc.*

[39] Höbl, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

from social cohesion, *nomos* also fostered the continuity of an ancestral past, be it historical or symbolical, and encouraged individuals to heed their cultural traditions. It was as a consensus creator par excellence and the ultimate mechanism for identifying and differentiating people who recognised Greek laws, *i.e.* Greeks – us, and individuals that did not obey them, *i.e.* barbarians – the others. By the same token, any disturbance of what was considered normal by a Greek community was felt to be an infringement of a taboo and consequently "barbarian" – in other words, outside a Greek *homogeneia*.

3. On religion and Egyptian identity

Everyday life in Hellenistic Egypt soon gave rise to intercultural marriages producing a succession of generations that were able to switch between two cultural identities[40]. It is safe to posit a closer co-existence of Greeks and Egyptians than has previously been assumed. Furthermore, integration it is likely to have occurred among every social class, not only elites. Religion as such seems to have allays served Egyptians as key identity marker. The Egyptian Negative Confession, *i.e.* spell 125 of the Egyptian New Kingdom's *Book of the Dead*, can be read as a definition of Egyptian identity and nicely sums up what was thought to be proper social behaviour:

> «[...] I know the names of the 42 Gods who exist with thee in this broad hall of the two Truths, [...]. I have brought thee truth; I have done away with sin for thee. I have not sinned against anyone. I have not mistreated people. I have not done evil instead of righteousness. I know not what is not (proper); [...] I have not

[40] Recent studies how Hellenistic elites actually helped to intermediate the relations between Greek and Egyptian symbolic universes. Dioskourides is a case of biculturalism: Greek officer in an Egyptian sarcophagus covered with hieroglyphs and even using the Egyptian custom of matrilineal filiations. See: Collombert, P., "Religion égyptienne et culture grecque: l'exemple de Dioskourídes". *CdE* 75 (2000), pp. 47-63. For other emblematic cases, see also: Coulon, L., "Quand Amon parle à Platon (La statue Caire JE 38033)" *RdE* 52 (2001), pp. 85-125; and Germeur, I., "Les syngènes Aristonikos et la ville de Tp-bener", *RdE* 51, (2000), pp. 69-78.

increased nor diminished the measure, I have not diminished the palm; I have not encroached upon fields. I have not added to the balance weights; [...] I have not driven small cattle from their herbage. [...] I have not (failed to observe) the days of haunches of meat. [...]. I am pure. [...]. I have not been deaf to words of truth.»[41]

In addition to this, Egyptian religiousness also functioned as an effective mechanism of social organisation. It spiritually permeated every dimension of everyday life and was deeply connected with what Egyptians perceived as "culture". Egyptians essentially understood being Egyptian as a matter of following what they called "Maat", *i.e.* truth or righteousness. Maat belonged to the key concepts of Egyptian mentality and was present in all dimensions of its people's natural and spiritual life[42]. Furthermore, supernatural phenomena could be explained with reference to Maat. Ultimately, the native people living in Egypt did not only consider each other to be "Egyptians" due to their public adherence to the principle of Maat, but also with regard to their private behaviour. To respect Maat was always also a private matter.

4. Egyptian religion and Greek identity

Greek-Hellenistic perception of culture, on the other hand, was essentially political and had jurisdiction over the public dimension of everyday life. In Egypt, this public domain was supplemented by Egyptian piety, which was present in various ways in Hellenistic quotidian life. Cultural hybridism, biculturalism and syncretism were all relevant and complementary elements of the formation of the new symbolic universe in Hellenistic Egypt. Thus, even those who had no extraordinary blood-ties with Egyptians adopted Egyptian religious

---

[41] See: Allen Th. G., (transl.), *The Book of the Dead*, Chicago, 1974, pp. 97-98.

[42] For the social dimension of Maat see: Assmann, J., *Maat – Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im altem Ägypten*, München, 1990.

practices as part of their culture. Simply put, it was considered "Greek" to pursue Egyptian religion. This was possible because, as was the case with Egyptian funerary practices, Egyptian customs did not interfere with the principle that being Greek was the antonym of being a "barbarian". The Greek's feeling of supremacy rested upon the assumption of cultural superiority, which had been largely debated since the Classical Greek period[43]. The innovation of the Hellenistic discourse was the use of "culture" as a political tool. Since the justification and legitimacy of an imperial attitude based on cultural superiority became increasingly problematic, Hellenistic civilisation employed the concept of Hellenisation as means towards achieving an effective and systematic domination.

The *nomos* also played a crucial role in the way Greeks dealt with Egyptian religion. At a certain moment in history, the Hellenised inhabitants of Hellenistic Egypt reached a consensus on what being Greek involved in an Egyptian reality. Thus it was agreed that a Greek in Egypt was still Greek even if he worshipped Isis and called her son "Isidoros", *i.e.* «the gift of Isis». These were interpreted as Greek behaviour and accepted since they were in line with the new *nomos* developed in Egypt: a Graeco-Egyptian *nomos.* In other words, a series of innovations taking place within the existing symbolic universe gave birth to a Hellenistic-Egyptian symbolic universe. On the other hand, some Greek things were adopted by the Egyptians, as for instance their language. In addition to this, Hellenised non-Greeks immigrants settled Egypt together with Greeks, and Greeks chose spouses among both the Hellenised and Egyptian native population. Their co-existence thus naturally gave birth to biculturalism. Moreover, the growing bicultural population laid the ground for practicing Egyptian religion

[43] Debates concerning the differences between Greeks and non-Greeks where an important issue since the Late Classical period in Greece and remained a relevant subject even during the Roman domination. For most relevant observations about it, see: Plato's *Republic* 436a; 469c; 471c. It is interesting to compare with Aristotle's *Politics* 1.2; 7.7. The idea of superiority over non-Greeks concerning the customs, traditions, laws, was summarized in the Greek concept of right social conduct contained by the idea of *nomos*.

in Egyptian manner and defined how Egyptian jobs were to be done in Greek fashion. Due to this mediation, Egyptian practices were more easily tolerated and became acceptable as Greek practices.

The question we need to ask ourselves now is: How could the original idea of *nomos* be "updated" to fit in with this new reality? This is a relevant question since practising Egyptian religion and doing Egyptian jobs in a Greek manner were not mere consequences of cultural hybridism, syncretism, biculturalism, *etc.* Being Greek in Egypt allowed such apparently contradictory behaviour. What we have to find out, however, is *how* it came into existence. As we shall see, the mixture of symbolic universes happened as a consequence of everyday interactions. Since these are dynamic and unplanned par excellence, day-to-day practice – or what is called *Altagspraxis* in German – is a category of social relations which is not immune to misunderstandings, adaptations innovations and reformulations. To the Graeco-Egyptian population adopting Egyptian practices posed no problems for their Greek discourse of identity, *i.e.* the way they saw themselves. Outsiders, on the other hand, judged differently, since they were excluded of the social and cultural symbolic agreement promoted by that community's *nomos.*

Hellenistic Egypt, however, viewed "being" Greek as publicly acting in line with what was expected by the group's *nomos*, *i.e.* the readiness to seek consensus for the sake of maintaining social "normality". It goes without saying that what the Greeks defined as "normal" was undergoing a process of reconfiguration in Egypt. What was regarded to be "*nomic*" in Egypt did not feature a geographical dimension, as had been the case during Classical age. *Nomos* had been redefined as something which could be perceived in social public activities. This is the reason why a witness of one's behaviour served as the ultimate monitoring instrument in the maintenance of the *nomos*. Since private acts received less attention, *i.e.* were less witnessed by other people, they fell out of the jurisdiction of the *nomos*.

The concept of identity upheld by Hellenistic elites in Egypt fits well into what Hall defines as "master identity". A "master identity" describes the core aspects of somebody's cultural identity that cannot

be consciously altered or abandoned. No matter how many Egyptian customs the Greeks incorporated into their lives in Egypt, in their own eyes they always remained true to themselves, *i.e.* they remained Greeks[44]. They were also not willing to change their cultural identity since, at least in their own eyes, the Greek culture was far superior to any other civilisation. This ties in well with Hall's statement that a «master identity» may involve the «desire to dominate the nature of the other.»[45] What the Greeks attempted to do was to find a way to remain Greek while adapting to their new Egyptian environment. They did this consciously as well as at an unconscious level; consciously, because they promoted a certain discourse; unconsciously because they naturally underwent a process of re-evaluating what they regarded as Greek and what as Egyptian.

We can now link this to the concept of *nomos*. It was *nomos* that helped the Greeks decide if they were still being Greeks or not. *Nomos* formed the cultural bond between them; it served as a means of defining their "master identity" and was actively promoted. In fact, in the eyes of the Greeks, *nomos* and "master identity" were synonyms. In the case of Egypt, the "master identity" was the search of a universal ideal of Greek culture, which enabled everyone to become Hellenised (albeit not unanimously and uniformly).

The Greek *nomos* in Egypt differs greatly from other *nomoi* found in Hellenistic societies. It clearly belongs to Hellenistic Egypt and was developed right there, not in Rome and not by another Hellenistic civilisation. Overall, it is not possible to subsume the different cultural identities found in the various Hellenistic societies by one "master identity," because such a "master identity" always gained its power within a specific political reality. Social interactions between natives and foreigners/immigrants naturally led to the mutual incorporation of initially alien cultural elements. The nature and the outlook of this

[44] It goes without saying that this may differ from what outsiders thought of their behaviour. We should not forget, however, that self-perception and perception by outsiders are always likely to differ.

[45] Hall, S., "The Question of Cultural Identity" in S. Hall; D. Held; T. McGrew (eds.), *Modernity and its Futures,* Oxford, 1992, pp. 273-326.

incorporation differed from Hellenistic society to Hellenistic society. Differently put, there was a Macedonian *nomos*, an Egyptian *nomos*, a Syrian *nomos*, *etc.* What nevertheless linked these different societies to each other was the desire to remain Greek while living in a new cultural environment.

This process of adopting foreign elements resulted in the diminishment of the original symbolic barrier between "us" and "them". As Hall explains, this was driven by "erosion of identity" as well as the emergence of new identities[46]. Burke, on the other hand, holds that cultural adaptation can be seen as an attempt to establish double-contextualisation and re-contextualisation whereby an item is removed from its original location and modified in such a way that it fits a new environment[47]. If we apply this to Hellenistic Egypt, we may define "master identity" as the attempt to maintain Greek "normality". However, this does not necessarily imply an impermeable Greek identity but is likely to allow exceptions and readjustments in day-to-day practice. Sahlins[48] has demonstrated how unpredictable innovations resulting from daily interactions are. Thus, the interactions between foreign cultural practices and native ways of doing things eventually produced unexpected results, *i.e.* "inventions" that were not directly absorbed by the discourse of *nomoi*. On the whole, we can say that the "cultural encounter"[49] between "Greeks"[50] and Egyptians triggered

---

[46] Hall, *art.cit*., in S. Hall; D. Held; T. McGrew (eds.), *Modernity and its Futures,* Oxford, 1992.

[47] Burke, P., *Hibridismo Cultural*, São Leopoldo, 2003, p. 91.

[48] Sahlins, M., *Islands of History*, Chicago, 1985. See also the excellent debate about crucial theoretical problems for Human Sciences such the comparative rationality: Sahlins, M., *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*, Chicago, 1995. This was his response to the academic attacks from Obeyesekere, G., *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, Princeton, 1992.

[49] It is important to remember that a culture is an abstraction; therefore, two cultures cannot "do" anything. An intercultural encounter happens when people meet each other and then their respective cultures serve as symbolic filters so that they might be able to classify the other throughout their own available symbolic systems.

[50] The single quotation marks are necessary since not all foreign participants of the prevailing condition in Egypt were ethnically of Hellenic origin. The nobility itself was Macedonian, and many Persians, Jews, Thracians, *etc.*, participated in the migratory flux into Hellenistic Egypt. Yet still they were considered non-barbarian anymore once they were recognized as "Hellenized", and despite it must be understood as a prime condition to citizenship, to be Hellenized is not necessarily the same thing as to achieve the juridical status of "citizen".

a process of mutual negotiation of two distinct ways of perceiving the world. While Egyptian law and customs were connected to their ancestral heritage, religiousness and the subjection to a pharaoh as well as to the social and symbolic prestige of the priestly class – in fact, this whole complex was considered to mirror cosmic order – the Greeks viewed their *nomoi* as the barriers of symbolic universes.

Sahlins termed the possibility of altering symbolic meanings though day-to-day practice «empiric risk»[51]. According to him it involved a "risk" since the production of new meanings could go unnoticed. One of the most emblematic Hellenistic additions to Egyptian traditions was the establishment of social acceptance of marriages between brothers and sisters. Taking a critical view towards this Hellenistic practice, Assmann claims that the marriage between brothers and sisters was, as many other examples, a case of mistaken interpretation of Egypt's past and consequently produced a entirely mistaken conception of Egyptian culture[52]. Roberts similarly remarks that: «[N]o concession by Hellenism to oriental manners is more striking than this; it is noteworthy that in the *Gnomon* of the *Ideos Logos* it was found necessary specifically to forbid such marriages to Romans.»[53]

5. Greeks and Egyptians under Roman rule

Life in Egypt broadly remained the same after the Roman conquest. The Egyptians took the view that the Roman emperors were merely a new dynasty of foreign pharaohs, as had been the case with the Macedonians and Persians. Lewis points out that:

---

[51] Cf. Sahlins, *op. cit.,* 1985.

[52] Assmann, J., *Weisheit und Mysterium*, München, 2000). p. 20. Assmann stress that in a failed attempt to produce some degree of archaism, the Hellenistic Egypt became victim of "Egyptomania".

[53] Roberts, C. H., "The Greek Papyri" in J. R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford, 1971, p. 386. The collection of civil regulations created by Augustus, the *Gnomon* of the *Ideos Logos,* aimed to control the social behaviour of Egypt's Hellenised citizens. Cf. Seckel, E.; Schulbart, W., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, *BGU* V, I, 1210, Berlin, 1919; Uxkull-Gylleband, W. G., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, *BGU* V, II, Berlin, 1934. The passage mentioned says: «23. It is not allowed to Romans get married to their sisters, neither their Aunts ...» cf. *BGU* V, I, 1210, 70.

> «Temples continued to be built and decorated in the native Egyptian style all through the three centuries of the Principate. On their walls the Roman emperors appear in the traditional settings, attitudes, and trappings of Egyptian royalty – the pharaonic garb and crown, the hieroglyphic cartouche enclosing the ruler's name, [...] the standard titles and honorifics of the pharaohs, such as "son of Ra", "beloved of Ptah and Isis", and so on.»[54]

Apart from a few adjustments, the Romans maintained the Ptolemaic administrative structure of Egypt. Thus, the administrative districts remained in the same shape as they had been during the Lagide rule. However, the *strategos* was now a mere a civil official who did not wield any military power. The only armed force allowed in Egypt were the Roman legions, who were permanently present in fortified camps and distributed in strategically important areas of the country. Nevertheless, despite the new Roman administration and legislation, there was no clear-cut cultural separation between Hellenistic Egypt, *i.e.* from Alexander the Great until Cleopatra VII, and Graeco-Roman Egypt, *i.e.* from Octavian Augustus Caesar until Theodosius[55]. That is because with regard to its culture, Egypt followed the tendency of the whole east Mediterranean which remained positively Greek in its self-perception. Thus the entire eastern Mediterranean basin continued being 'Hellenised' during the Roman rule. Among other things that meant that lingua Franca remained Greek, to be more precise, the so-called *koine* (lit. "common"). Furthermore, the Greek Gymnasiums were built and Greek education unquestionably remained the social model pursued by Hellenised elites.

However, during the Republican period, Romans had a generally negative opinion about Egypt's Hellenistic elite despising them as

---

[54] *Ibidem*, p. 15.

[55] *Ibidem*: «In local administration some Ptolemaic titles were retained, but where that was done the responsibilities of the office, (…) were usually altered. For the rest, new offices and new titles were created as needed, and new regulations are in evidence governing important aspects of economy, society, and religion» (p.17).

"degenerated" – *i.e.* a people who had become barbarians[56]. They consequently established a new juridical classification that made a clear distinction between Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. Transgression of class boundaries was penalised according to the so-called *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*. In it we read:

> «38. Those born of an urban Greek mother and an Egyptian remain Egyptians but inherit from both parents.
> 39. If a Roman man or woman is joined in a marriage with an urban Greek or an Egyptian, their children follow the inferior status.»
> …
> «44. If an Egyptian registers a son as an *ephebe* (of a polis), a sixth is confiscated.»
> …
> «49. Freedmen of Alexandrians may not marry Egyptian women.»[57]

Since the Graeco-Egyptian *nomos* differed from the one the Romans agreed with, the Romans despised Hellenistic Egypt as a "barbarised" or "decayed" civilisation. Roman disdain for the ways of Ptolemaic Egypt – particularly its royal cult – had emerged long before Octavian Augustus[58]. With the beginning of his rule, however, the Romans' attitude further exacerbated and developed into political and ideological hostility[59]. Their claim that «the Greeks in Egypt became barbarians or degenerate themselves» has to be taken with a grain of salt

---

[56] See: Polybius V, 34; Strabo XVII, I, II; Justin XXIX and Titus Livy XXXVIII, 37 – who blames the weather.

[57] *BGU* V, I, 1210. Commented by Lewis, N., *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Oxford, 1985, p. 33.

[58] The political differences between the Roman Republic and Ptolemaic Egypt are actually far more complex, and date back to the time before Augustus. What is to be said here is that the Roman civilization developed a different way to consider itself more "Hellenic" than "Barbaric" from the one developed in Egypt. Romans had a different way to think the idea of "degree of civilization / Greekness" than in Egypt, it is thus understandable that the pro-Roman intellectuals produced a picture of Egypt as a place where decayed and barbarized Greeks and Macedonians dwelt.

[59] Lewis, N., "Brief Communications: The demise of the Demotic document: when and why" *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993), p. 281.

though. After all, is it not a "barbarian civilisation" that is making such accusation? The Romans themselves certainly fell into this category as they did not speak Greek and had no blood-ties with Greeks. In fact, Cicero himself admitted that the Romans had their own definition of "barbarian", which differed from the one the Greeks used.

> «[Scipio] – Now tell me: was Romulus a king of barbarians? [Laelius] – If as the Greeks say, all men are either Greeks or barbarians, I am afraid he was; but if that name ought to be applied on the basis of men's manners rather than their language, I do not consider the Greeks less barbarous than the Romans.»[60]

So what was really happening when Rome, or pro-Roman writers[61], disqualified Hellenism in Egypt? On the whole, it was a matter of definition – and the Romans won the argument due to one crucial detail: their legions. Even after the Roman conquest and the subsequent re-classification of most Greeks as barbarians like the Egyptians, many subcategories between "citizen" and "barbarian" developed in the countryside due to the prominence of the Graeco-Egyptian *nomos* as the only mediator between Greeks and world around them. Overall, Roman Egypt featured a very heterogeneous society that included native Egyptian peasants and the Hellenised descendents of Greek settlers. The individual degree of Hellenisation formed the only means of distinction.

Ultimately, Roman administrative politics aimed at restraining social mobility. For a better understanding of this policy, the following offers excerpts of norms taken from a code of administrative and social

[60] See: Cicero XVI: *De Republica*, *De Legibus*, translated by C. W. Keyes – Loeb, Cambridge, 1970. In Cicero's *De Republica* I, XXXVII, 58: «(*Scipio) cedo, num' Scipio 'barbarorum Romulus rex fuit?'. (Laelius): si ut Graeci dicunt omnis aut Graios esse aut barbaros, vereor ne barbarorum rex fuerit; sin id nomen moribus dandum est, non linguis, non Graecos minus barbaros quam Romanos puto.*»

[61] Plutarch's ironies about the Egyptian religion and gods can be seen in *De Iside et Osiride*. The social reality of the reader will be extremely relevant to establish the possible line of dialogue between author and receptor. During Herodotus' Classical age, for instance, culture and politics had a different connection one to the other than in Plutarch's Graeco-Roman world. Plutarch's criticism may also symbolizes the mentality's changing concerning how culture itself was thought during the Graeco-Roman period.

regulations established in Egypt. The *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* also had regulations which directly affected Egyptian priests. With their establishment began a stricter foreign control over the priests' activities. Thus we are told that:

> «71. For the priests it is not allowed to have another occupation than the cult of the gods, neither to go forth in woollen clothing and neither to have long hair, even not when they are away from the divine procession.»[62]
>
> ...
>
> «76. A priest who wore woollen clothing and had long hair (was fined) 1000 drachmas.»[63]

It is important to remember that with the arrival of the Romans in Egypt native priests began to live as a closed community disconnected from the people around them. Following the orders of Augustus, the Roman policy of subordination also foresaw the embedding of all Egyptian priests and temples under the command of a Roman official in Alexandria[64]. Furthermore, Augustus abolished temple-owned estates, which used to make up the main income of Egyptian temples back in pharaonic and Ptolemaic times. Inevitably, the priests lost part of their social prestige, economic autonomy and general cosmic importance during the Roman period. They were no longer a relevant power within Egyptian society. The Roman administration turned the Egyptian priests into an extension of the Roman bureaucracy transforming them into a formal clergy subordinated to a "high-priest", *i.e.* a Roman administrator appointed by the Roman *praefectus* from Alexandria.

In 212 A.D, the Roman emperor Caracalla issued an edict granting Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire[65]. However,

---

[62] *BGU* V, I, 1210, 181 – 187.

[63] *BGU* V, I, 1210, 188.

[64] See: Otto, W., *Priester und Tempel im Hellenistischen Ägypten*, Leipzig, 1905 – Berlin, 1908 – Rome, 1975.

[65] The so-called "Antonine Constitution" (*P. Giss.* 40). Lewis, *op. cit.*, 1985, p. 34 explains: «only the "capitulated", whose identification remains matter of scholarly dispute, were excluded.»

in the case of Egypt, «the class relationships, the restrictions, show no essential modifications.»[66] In other words, the Graeco-Egyptian society maintained its complex strategies of negotiating differences during the Roman administration. This ties in well with Derrida's observation that the reproduction of the dichotomy "Us" vs. "Them" is a way of perpetuating pre-existing power relations. It is crucial to notice, however, rather than being fixed, this relation is produced by a dynamic and unpredictable process he called «*différance*»[67]. Indeed, classifying themselves as the positive opposite of their foreign counterpart lay at the root of Greek and Egyptian conception of identity during the Hellenistic period. The results of this process were newly defined identities and cultural ideologies that were compatible with the new circumstances of their lives.

List of Abbreviations

ASAE – Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte (Caire).
BAmSocP – The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists (Duhran – NC).
BGU – Ägyptische Urkunden aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Griechische Urkunden (Berlin).
CdE – Chronique d'Égypte (Bruxelles).
JEA – Journal of Egyptian Archaeology (London).
OBO – Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Fribourg).
OLA – Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven).
RdE – Revue d'égyptologie (Paris).

[66] Lewis, *op. cit.*, 1985, p. 35.
[67] Derrida, J., *On Grammatology*, Baltimore – London, 1976.

Bibliography

ALLEN, T. G. (transl.), *The Book of the Dead*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974.

ASSMAN, J., *Weisheit und Mysterium*, München, C. H. Beck, 2000.

____, *Maat – Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im altem Ägypten*, München, C. H. Beck, 1990.

BAGNAL, R. S., "Cults and Names of Ptolemais in Upper Egypt", *OLA* 85 (1998), pp. 1093-1101.

____, "The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs", *BAmSocP* 21 (1984), pp. 7-20.

BALSDON, J. P. V. D., "The Divinity of Alexander", *Historia* 1 (1950), pp. 363-388.

BENVENISTE, E., *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969.

BICKEL, S., *La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire* (*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 134), Fribourg, Éd. Universitaires, 1994.

BOURDIEU, P., *Le Sens Pratique*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980.

BURKE, P., *Hibridismo Cultural*, São Leopoldo, Unisinos, 2003.

CLARYSSE, W., "Ptolémées et Temples" in D. Valbelle; J. Leclant, (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999, pp. 41-65.

COLLOMBERT, Ph., "Religion égyptienne et culture grecque: l'exemple de Dioskourídes", *CdE* 75 (2000), pp. 47-63.

COULON, L., "Quand Amon parle à Platon (La statue Caire JE 38033)", *RdE* 52 (2001), pp. 85-125.

CRAWFORD, D.; QUAGEBEUR, J.; CLARYSSE, W., *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis* (Studia Hellenistica 24), Leuven, 1980.

CRAWFORD, D. J., *Kerkeosiris: an Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

DERRIDA, J., *On Grammatology*, Baltimore – London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

GERMEUR, I., "Les syngènes Aristonikos et la ville de Tp-bener", *RdE* 51 (2000), pp. 69-78.

GUNN, B., "The Stele of Apries at Mîtrahina", *ASAE* 27 (1927), pp. 211-237.

HALL, S., "Who needs 'identity'" in S. Hall., P. du Gay, *Questions of Identity*, London, Sage, 1996, pp. 1-17.

——, "The Question of Cultural Identity" in S. Hall; S. Held; T. McGrew (eds.) *Modernity and its Futures,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 273-326.

HÖBL, G., *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, London, Routledge, 2001.

HUSS, W., *Der Makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1994.

KAMAL, A. B., *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes*: 22001-22208 *Stèles Ptolémaiques et Romaines Tome II*, Le Caire, 1904.

KESSLER, D., "Das hellenistische Sarapeum in Alexandria und Ägypten in ägyptologischer Sicht" in M. Görg; G. Höbl (eds.), *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im I. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2000, pp. 163-230.

LEWIS, N., "Brief Communications: The demise of the Demotic document: when and why", *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993), pp. 276-81.

——, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule,* Oxford, Clarendon, 1985.

MORENZ, S., *Ägyptische Religion,* Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1960.

MUELLER, K., *Settlements of the Ptolemies* (Studia Hellenistica 43), Leuven, 2006.

OBEYESKERE, G., *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992.

OTTO, W., *Priester und Tempel im Hellenistischen Ägypten,* Leipzig, 1905 – Berlin, 1908 –Rome, Arno Press, 1975.

POLLIT, J. J., *Art in Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

PRÉAUX, C., *Le Monde Hellénistique,* 2 vols. – Nouvelle Clio, Paris, PUF, 1997-2002.

ROBERTS, C. H., "The Greek Papyri" in J. R. Harris, (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 355-89.

ROEDER, G., *Kulte und Orakel im alten Ägypten, Band II.*, Dusseldorf – Zürich, Artemis & Winkler, 1960.

ROSTOVTZEFF, M., *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century BC*, Rome, 1967 (Rep. of Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1922).

SAHLINS, M., *Islands of History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985.

——, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

SANDERS, L. J., "Dionysius I of Syracuse and the Origins of Ruler Cult in the Greek World", *Historia* 40 (1991), pp. 275-87.

SECKEL, E.; SCULBART, W., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, *BGU* V, I, 1210, Berlin, 1919.

SIMPSON, W. K. (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, London – New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972.

STANWICK, P. E., *Portraits of the Ptolemies – Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002.

THOMPSON, D., *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience, Aspects of the Ruler Cult*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1973.

UXKULL-GYLLEBAND, W. G., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, *BGU* V, II, Berlin, 1934.

VALBELLE, D.; LECLANT, J. (éds.), *Le Décret de Memphis. Colloque de la Fondation Singer-Polignac à l'occasion de la célébration du bicentenaire de la découverte de la Pierre de Rosette*, Paris, Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1999.

VALBELLE, D., "Décrets égyptiens antérieurs aux Lagides" in D. Valbelle; J. Leclant, (éds.) *Le Décret de Memphis*, Paris, 1999, pp. 67-90.

VEÏSSE, A.-E., *Les révoltes égyptiennes: recherches sur les troubles intérieurs en Égypte du règne de Ptolémée III à la conquête romaine* (Studia Hellenistica 41), Leuven, 2004.

WALBANK, F. W., "Könige als Götter, Überlegungen zum Herrscherkult von Alexander bis Augustus", *Chiron* 17 (1987), pp. 365-82.