

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPERIAL CULT IN EGYPT

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THROUGHOUT the Roman empire, the living emperor was the subject of worship and also, in part, the object of a cult that was often very similar, if not identical, to the cult of the gods. This also applies to the Roman province of Aegyptus. Here the worship of the living ruler as a god was already a 300-year-old Ptolemaic tradition (see Pfeiffer 2008). This chapter presents the institutional structures of the cult of the emperor in Roman Egypt.

DEFINITIONS

To understand the cult of the emperor in Egypt, some preliminaries must be set out. The first question to be asked is what exactly the cult of the emperor is. Secondly, a wider consideration of the entire Roman empire is needed to show how the imperial cult developed throughout its territories. That is to say, it is only by considering the worship of the emperor empire-wide that an understanding of the specifically Egyptian construct of imperial cult is possible.

The Emperor as God:

The Distinction between Imperial Cult and Emperor Worship

Although the title of this chapter refers to the 'imperial cult in Egypt', researchers are not entirely agreed about what an imperial cult actually is. The word 'cult' implies that the emperor was venerated as or like a god. Many see a solution to the problem in the difference between 'cult' and 'worship': cult is the honour reserved for the gods (e.g. offerings); worship can be given to mortals as well (e.g. prayer to a deity for the welfare of a person). Many researchers have a problem in assigning the emperor the status of a deity and would rather see him as a person especially venerated by his contemporaries, or else they attribute him a

status between man and god (Fishwick 1987–2004); hence, problems of terminology arise, because the emperor was the recipient of a cult like a god in many parts of the empire. Gradel (2002) nevertheless avoids using the term ‘imperial cult’ and speaks instead of ‘emperor worship’. For Gradel the divine cult of the emperor is nothing more than an *aspect* of emperor worship. Divinity in the ancient sense is, in his view, a ‘distinction of status between the respective beings, rather than a distinction between their respective natures’ (Gradel 2002: 26). The worshipped emperor was not a god in an ‘absolute sense’, but he had a ‘divine status ... in relation to the worshippers’ (2002: 29). The person performing the cult ritual sought merely to ensure that the emperor ruled effectively: ‘by receiving such honours, the emperor was morally obliged to return benefactions, that is, to rule well’ (2002: 369).

Following this line of research, one may ultimately draw a clear distinction between the immortal gods and mortal emperor. This strict separation is not followed in a different line of research, however. Clauss (2001: 470) took the following view: ‘At a time when the divine could be imagined in anything and everything, when each person themselves could become a deity in a mystery cult, why should the emperor, who was not just any man, not be seen as a deity?’ (my translation).

It is indeed very likely that a person whom his ancient contemporaries addressed as a god, and who was provided with a cult, *could* be considered a god, and the definition formulated by Gradel is therefore too shallow. We do not know the personal beliefs of the ancient people when they made a dedication to the emperor as a deity, so it is not for us to decide that they did not consider him as a deity. Since the pagan concept of god has only the word ‘god’ in common with Judaeo-Christian tradition (otherwise both mean something completely different by ‘god’), it should be assumed that, in fact, an emperor could always be a god in the ancient sense if he was given the same worship and addressed in the same way as a god—and this was often the case. The emperor was at that moment a present and powerful god residing in the world. Of course, he then had to behave as such, and that was exactly how offerings were meant to affect him. The same rules about a binding act of communication affected him as the gods—this was the ancient *do ut des* principle: ‘If I perform a cult for you as a god, you have to behave like a god’.

Thus, if the emperor appears as a god, we may speak of an imperial *cult* after all—and cult is therefore to be understood here in the sense used by Cicero (*Nat. D* 2.3.8), as *cultus deorum pius*. The essential characteristics that comprise a cult for the emperor and his family are:

- temples, groves, and altars dedicated to the emperor and his family;
- the establishment of a priesthood for the emperor;
- rites or rituals for the emperor that are only accorded to gods;
- celebrating festivals for the emperor that are identical with festivals for the gods;
- the equivalence of the emperor with deities, a cult shared with other gods.

However, emperor *worship*, which can be found much more frequently in the sources, is always present when it is a question of honours that could be paid to particularly deserving people without placing them on a level with the gods. The most common expression of emperor worship was when subjects showed their gratitude and/or loyalty to the ruler by means of dedications or an offering for his safety (Latin: *pro/pro salute*; Greek: *ὑπέρ* plus genitive). These dedications went in the cultic sense to a deity (e.g. Zeus or Apollo), who was to guarantee the salvation of the emperor and, ultimately, his subjects. So, in my eyes,

emperor worship is qualitatively something completely different from emperor cult, but both together could be called, as Fishwick (1987–2004) points out, ‘imperial religion’.

Different Forms of Imperial Cult in the Roman Empire

Imperial Cult in the Provinces

In the east of the Roman empire, especially in Asia Minor, the establishment of the imperial cult emerged from the provinces. In 30/29 BCE Octavian, later Augustus, had already allowed cities to institute his divine worship in Asia Minor (see Friesen 1993: 7–15). The Koinon of Asia, which was the federation of Greek cities in the province of Asia, practised the official imperial cult. At their provincial parliament, representatives of all the Greek cities of the province met to discuss common issues and to perform the imperial cult (Price 1984: 56). For this reason we may talk about a provincial imperial cult of Augustus and the goddess Roma. Accordingly, the provincial priest of Asia had the title of ‘chief priest of the goddess Roma and the emperor Caesar, son of god, Augustus’ (Fayer 1976: 112–23).

The provincial cult in Asia Minor was the model Augustus and his successors used to establish the imperial cult in the west of the empire (Fishwick 1987–2004). Following the example of the Koinon of Asia, similar provincial parliaments were created in provinces that were still vulnerable in the west, with the particular objective of pacifying and building up the loyalty of local elites to the emperor. The beginning of this was the installation of a provincial cult around the *ara Romae et Augusti* in 12 BCE in Lyons, serving the Tres Galliae (‘Three Gauls’), and before 7 BCE around the *ara Ubiorum* at Cologne. As Wlosok (1978: 47) observed, the purpose of establishing these cults was to promote the ‘Romanization’ of the provinces and consolidate the loyalty of local elites, whose members were responsible for both the priesthood and the provincial administration. However, the old senatorial provinces, long under Roman domination, did not have an imperial cult at the outset. Only under Vespasian were provincial cults introduced into these provinces.

Unofficial Imperial Cult

In addition to the imperial cult officially sanctioned by Rome, there were two other opportunities in the east to provide the emperor with a cult. First, there was the so-called municipal imperial cult, which was the responsibility of each Greek municipality (Kienast 1999: 251, with further references in n. 150). Secondly, there was the possibility of a private imperial cult, which did not have to be located within, or tied to, an institution. Even prayers and vows to the emperors can sometimes be found—evidence, therefore, of the existence of private piety focused on the ruler (Fishwick 1990; Chaniotis 2003: 19).

The Research Problem: What Kind of Cult Existed in Egypt?

In his examination of the imperial cult in Egypt, which still remains an important study, Blumenthal (1913: 325–7) maintained that there was no official provincial imperial cult of a Roman type in Egypt, because it would not have been possible, as was the case in Asia Minor,

for a *koinon* of cities to have organized a cult of this kind. He believed that the cult, as comprehended through the *sebasteia* (as the temples of the imperial cult were called), was a purely urban cult, constitutionally on the same level as the municipal cults mentioned above; therefore, no imperial cult, organized by the emperor or by Rome, existed in Egypt. This would mean that the Roman rulers had no political interest in the veneration of their person in Egypt, but rather left it to their conquered subjects to decide whether to provide the emperor with a cult or not. An important proof of this would be the fact that in Egypt, Augustus was not worshipped together with Roma, as he was everywhere else in the empire.

Dunand (1983: 51–3) reinforced Blumenthal's view that the cult was in the hands of the local authorities and was dependent upon their goodwill. Dunand saw the establishment of imperial temples, in their Egyptian form, as a series of sporadic gestures. In her opinion, however, there were no indications that any official guidance or interference, either by the emperor or by a representative of Rome, was involved. However, Rigsby (1985: 284) takes exactly the opposite view, which assumes that Rome adopted a strictly neutral stance towards other religions and that it simply had a different appearance in Egypt: 'Unlike imperial cult elsewhere, this was a creature of imperial policy and represents a decision by some emperor that he must sponsor emperor worship in Egypt.' Similarly, Dundas (1994: 119) believes that the Roman administration did institutionalize the imperial cult at a local level, in the *metropoleis*. Although neither Rigsby nor Dundas provide clear evidence for their opinion, or adequately address the opposing viewpoint, they are undoubtedly correct: an imperial cult did exist in Egypt and it was official, that is, instituted by Rome. The resolution to this research problem is set out in the following analysis of the structures and institutions that were associated with the imperial cult in Egypt.

INSTITUTIONS OF THE IMPERIAL CULT IN EGYPT

The Imperial Temples

In the whole of Egypt there are archaeological and papyrological references to imperial temples called *sebasteia* (from the Greek translation of the name Augustus) or *caesarea* (from the Latin title 'caesar', hence *caesareum*, both derived from the cognomen of Julius Caesar). In addition to their administrative functions, these temples were assigned the responsibility for emperor worship or the imperial cult.

The Sebasteion (Caesareum) in Alexandria

The biggest *sebasteion* in Egypt was, of course, in Alexandria (Herklotz 2007: 267–72). This is a construction begun by Cleopatra VII that was subsequently rededicated to Augustus and referred to as the 'temple' or 'shrine', variously *Καίσαρος νεώς*, *Caesaris templum*, or *Caesareum Magnum*, as well as *ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ* (Plin. HN 36.69; *C Pap. Jud.* II 153.60–1; *W Chr.* 463 II 7). If we want to try to deduce the appearance of this complex, we have to resort to the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria, who reports that throughout the world, Augustus received honours equivalent to those of the Olympian gods (Philo, *Leg.* 149–51). To give one example of that, Philo describes the Alexandrian Caesareum as follows:

Nowhere is there a holy place comparable to the so-called Sebasteion... great and famous, filled with offerings like nowhere else, surrounded with paintings and statues of silver and gold, a vast sacred precinct with covered ambulatories, libraries, rooms, sacred groves, gates, large open spaces, open courts, all decorated in the most extravagant manner.

The sanctuary was built in an elevated location and hence was clearly visible to all (Philo, *Leg.* 151). Although the archaeological record in Alexandria is generally extremely poor, we do know more about the location and layout of the Alexandrian Caesareum. Two obelisks survive, which are now in London and New York and which marked the location of the temple until the nineteenth century. The sanctuary of Augustus was indeed, as Pliny describes, *ad portum*, right on the harbour (Plin. *HN* 36.69; Strabo 17.1.9; Philo, *Leg.* 151). On a bronze sculpture of a crab placed beneath it, one of the obelisks bore the dedicatory inscription 'Year 18 [13/12 BCE] of Caesar, Barbarus erected it under the overall supervision of Pontius' (*OGIS* II 656 = *I Alex.* 2). Hence, the completion of the imperial cult complex was the responsibility of a Roman official named Pontius, and likewise its facilities, in this case the erection of an obelisk, were financed by a representative of the power of the state, Barbarus.

In a convincing interpretation, Alföldy successfully demonstrated that a third obelisk, now in St Peter's Square in Rome, also belonged to the temple of Augustus. Before its erasure, the Latin inscription on the base of the object read: 'By order of the Emperor Caesar, son of god, Caius Cornelius Gallus, son of Gnaeus, the *praefectus fabrum*, constructed the *forum Iulium* for Caesar, the son of god' (*Iussu Imp(eratoris) Caesaris Divi f(ili) C(aius) Cornelius Cn(aei) f(ilius) Gallus praef(ectus) fabr(um) Caesaris Divi f(ili) forum Iulium fecit*; Alföldy 1990: 18). Alföldy was able to show that the *forum Iulium* could only have been located in Alexandria and must have been a monumental complex of open spaces, which may be identical to the Σεβαστή ἀγορά, or the *forum Augusti*, known from papyri. It must therefore have been an open space located at the temple of Augustus (Alföldy 1990: 41–2).

The *forum Iulium* was renamed the *forum Augusti* after 27 BCE, when Octavian received the name Augustus. Thus, Gallus, the first prefect of Egypt, completed work on the space around the Caesareum that had in fact been begun by Cleopatra.

Furthermore, archaeological research quite plausibly suggests that the appearance of the temple of Augustus in Alexandria resembled official buildings of the city of Rome (Tuchelt 1981: 173). Ruggendorfer (1996: 218–19) points to the porticus of Octavia, the porticus of Pompey, and the Saepta Julia as comparanda. A complex based on a model from the city of Rome or a Romanizing model also accords rather well with Roman supervision of the design.

In summary, the Alexandrian sanctuary of Augustus was an institution with a direct imperial connection, since a Roman administrator was involved in erecting obelisks at the complex and the overseer of the project was also a Roman. It is therefore likely that the central Roman authority for establishing a cult for Augustus was at work in Alexandria. However, the cult was supported by the citizens of Alexandria, who chose the *neokoroi*—the cult officials designated as 'temple guardians'—from among their ranks. A letter from the emperor Claudius to the Alexandrians set out a lottery process for electing these cult officials, which eliminated the possibility of certain parties obtaining more influence and prestige by permanent occupation of the office (*C Pap. Jud.* II 153). The fact that it was Claudius who stipulated this procedure once again shows the direct connection between this complex and the emperor.

The Imperial Temple on Philae

On the island of Philae in Upper Egypt, which marked the southern border of the province, there was also a temple of Augustus (Herklotz 2007: 273–5). Its architrave bore the dedicatory inscription ‘For the emperor Caesar Augustus, saviour and benefactor, in the 18th year [13/12 BCE], during the term of office of the (*praefectus Aegypti*) Publius Rubrius Barbarus’ (Αὐτοκράτορι Καίσαρι Σεβαστῶι σωτῆρι καὶ εὐεργέτῃ, (ἔτους) ιη ἐπὶ Ποπλίου Ῥοβρίου Βαρβάρου; OGIS 657 = IGP II 140).

The temple is thus from the same year in which the foundation sculpture of a crab was placed under the obelisk in the Caesareum at Alexandria. In the open space in front of the cult building the foundations of a sacrificial altar can be detected (Fig. 6.1). A staircase occupies the middle half of the front of the temple and leads up to the tetrastyle pronaos *in antis*. The cult building stood on a podium, 9.7×16.7 metres in area and about 1.25 metres high—a feature that identifies this sanctuary as a Roman podium temple (Hänlein-Schäfer 1985: 220).

The naos itself had a floor area of 7.8×10.1 metres. The surviving architrave fragment with the inscription shows the remains of a Doric triglyph (Fig. 6.2). In addition, there were Corinthian capitals; these may have terminated the sanctuary’s pillars, which had no fluting and stood on Attic bases. It is a mixed Doric–Corinthian temple, a composite style consistent with



FIG. 6.1 The temple of Augustus on the island of Philae

Author's photograph.

the period. This form is similar to what was known elsewhere from hellenistic culture; however, Schenk (1997: 143) points out that the beams have a parallel in the Arch of Augustus at Rome.

Thus, in Upper Egypt, on the border with ancient Ethiopia, stands a temple of a very unusual design for Egypt. On whose initiative the sanctuary was built cannot be determined from the building inscription. The idea that the sanctuary was dedicated by the local inhabitants is based on a misinterpretation of an inscription from the time of Vespasian (*IGP* II 161 = *OGIS* II 670; *pace* Herklotz 2007: 282). This inscription merely states that the residents of the area donated a statue of the emperor, which reveals nothing about the initiative behind the construction of the sanctuary itself.

The Imperial Chapel at Karnak

Another imperial temple, probably also from the time of the emperor Augustus, was located in Karnak, next to the causeway of the temple of Amun. It stood just to the right in front of the first pylon, with its entrance aligned towards the dromos. Just like the temple at Philae, this sanctuary was located outside the enclosure wall of the Egyptian temple. Because of its location by the sacred way of the temple, however, this temple was directly related to the Egyptian temple and, in the fullest possible way, its public worship, which was always enacted on the temple approach (Fig. 6.3).



FIG. 6.2 Architrave fragment from the temple of Augustus on the island of Philae

Author's photograph.



FIG. 6.3 Imperial cult chapel in front of the first pylon of Karnak temple

Author's photograph.

The structure is in the form of a prostyle tetrastyle temple. The columns were of Corinthian design, since a column capital of that type was found, which can almost certainly be attributed to the architecture of the building (Pensabene 1993). However, it is no longer possible to reconstruct whether the sanctuary was a *templum in antis*, as at Philae, or whether the antae were replaced by two columns (Lauffray 1971, figs 2 and 31). Its small size—only 8.6×14 metres—seems to warrant calling the structure a chapel. Just like its much larger counterpart at Philae, it had a small staircase that occupies roughly the middle half of the façade, leading up to the podium temple.

It is revealing that the bases from a total of fourteen emperors' statues were found close together in the almost square cella. Not all of the statues have inscriptions, but two can be ascribed to Augustus and three to Claudius. At Narona, Dalmatia, a free-standing imperial cult building with similar features survives, in the form of archaeological remains. On the west side of the forum there, a nearly square room contained the remains of up to sixteen statues of the emperors and their family members, which date from the first century to the time of Trajan (Marin 1999).

Sebasteia and Caesarea in the Chora, Known from Papyri

Besides the three archaeologically documented examples, there are several records from Egyptian papyri of *sebasteia* or *caesarea* in the *chora*, of which the earliest is that at Canopus

(41 CE; *C Pap. Jud.* 153.60–1). It was under the administration of the Alexandrian citizenship, as attested by the previously mentioned letter from Claudius to the Alexandrians. Additionally, the existence of *caesarea* and *sebasteia* can be proved for Antinoopolis, Arsinoe, Elephantine, Heptakomia, Herakleopolis, Hermopolis, Lykopolis (probably), Oxyrhynchus, and Philadelphia (listed in Kunderewicz 1961: 124 and Strassi 2006: 236–43; for individual examples, see Dundas 1994: 135–77; Herklotz 2007: 275–82). Buildings of this kind appear to have existed especially in nome capitals; however, there is evidence from the villages of Philadelphia and Heptakomia (Strassi 2006: 224–5) that the cult of Augustus and his successors, and particularly the civic administration, was centred on a *caesareum* in other places, too.

Roman Podium Temples to the Emperor

It is highly significant that the imperial cult temples known from the Egyptian archaeological record were sanctuaries of Roman design. In Egypt the construction of Roman temples to the emperor, especially in the extreme south of the *imperium*, should be seen as an anomaly, otherwise attested only in the case of a few later sanctuaries to Serapis (Mons Claudianus, Tehne, Ras el-Soda (Alexandria)). Unlike in other provinces of the east, classical architectural forms, in particular following hellenistic trends, were not usually adopted for the sanctuaries of the gods; instead, temples in the ancient Egyptian tradition continued to be constructed for the indigenous deities.

As for the propagation of the imperial cult and emperor worship, the following observation should be made: the *caesareum* at Alexandria was situated at the ‘most visible’ (as Philo said) point in the city, and the temples of Philae and Karnak were in locations clearly visible to everyone. It is most likely that the other *sebasteia*, as well as those of Asia Minor, were also built where people came together for ritual, political, economic, ceremonial, and private reasons. As in Asia Minor, the Egyptian imperial cult complexes were closely linked to public and religious life.

The Regional High Priesthood: The ‘High Priest of the City’

Like the cult of the gods in an Egyptian nome capital, the imperial cult was in the hands of a city official, who, from the mid-second century, is frequently encountered in the papyri with the title ‘high priest of the city’ (ἀρχιερεὺς τῆς πόλεως; Oertel 1917: 335–8; Drecoll 1997: 104–5).

Unfortunately, information is very sparse about the activities associated with the civic ‘obligatory’ and ‘honorary’ functions of a high priest. It is certain that the office was only held by members of the wealthiest families, because there was a great financial burden associated with assuming a magistracy of this kind. Indeed, it can be assumed that no small part of the public cult festivities was the responsibility of this man. His specific responsibility for the imperial cult can be seen from his official titles. From papyrus *P Merton* I 18, dated 161 CE, the full title of the priest is recorded ‘as high priest of the Lords Augusti and all the gods’ (ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν κυρίων Σεβαστῶν καὶ θεῶν ἀπάντων). If this indicates that the high priest of the emperors was responsible for all the gods, then it is understandable that his title could simply be ‘high priest of the city’. Since he is probably identical to the high priest of the Augusti, or high priest of the Lords Augusti, his main task probably lies in his imperial cult

function. This is to be expected simply because all the other cults of a city had a local tradition with local priesthoods, whereas the imperial cult, as a cult form that had not grown up organically from Egyptian or Greek society, had no regional priesthood.

Let us turn now to the question of when the high priesthood of the city began. The specific difficulty is that the high priests of the city appear in papyri in increasing numbers only from the second century onwards. This would suggest that the office only existed from that time, although imperial temples in Egypt are known from archaeological evidence already from the time of Augustus. An Alexandrian inscription (*I Alex.* 29) may possibly help to fill this gap in our records: there we meet an Apollon, the 'current high priest of the Lords Augusti' from the time of Marcus Aurelius (ruled 161–80). Apollon also enumerates his genealogy, from which we can see that almost all of his ancestors and relatives were also priests of the Augusti. Therefore, the office must have been in the hands of this family since the mid-50s of the first century CE (Kruse 2002: 924).

The High Priests of Alexandria and the Whole of Egypt

An official known as the 'high priest of Alexandria and Egypt' (ἀρχιερεὺς Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ Αἰγύπτου πάσης) is known to us from numerous documents; the man serving as this priest had to hold the rank of a Roman *eques*. In contrast to the regional high priest, he is of Roman origin. Although the high priest of Alexandria and Egypt is certainly not to be confused with the regional high priests of the city just discussed, who served in the towns and cities of the *chora* as well as for Alexandria, it is proving difficult for researchers to reconstruct his areas of responsibility.

The Research Problem

Research on this problem generally starts from the premiss that there is no evidence that the high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt was a high priest of the imperial cult for the province. The general view is that, while it is true that the high priest had administrative oversight for all the cults in the country, despite his official title he did not function as an imperial priest. Stead (1980: 418), for instance, concludes that this priest, 'despite his title, was a bureaucrat'.

From the evidence in the papyri, the main task of the 'high priest of Alexandria and Egypt' was to control access to the Egyptian priesthood, because the circumcision of candidates for the priesthood had to be approved by him. Furthermore, he acted as a link between the people and the Egyptian temples, and mediated in disputes (Stead 1980: 415; Kruse 2002: 728–50; Demougin 2006: 515). This purely administrative function of the high priest is attested from the second century onwards. Furthermore, no one questions his responsibility for Greek cults in the province, even though there is no explicit evidence for it. Consequently, the high priest was responsible for the administrative oversight of all cult activities in Egypt, which means also the imperial cult. In a papyrus from the early third century (*P Harr.* I 69), he appears to have even had jurisdictional competence in a dispute about an inheritance with a temple-related background (it concerned the release of a sum of money from the estate of a priest, on which there were earlier claims).

Although the general opinion of scholarship assumes that the office was set up under Hadrian, there are a few voices that have a different viewpoint. Wilcken (1912: 127) believed it

was possible that the highest supervisory office had already been introduced by Augustus, which would then have been analogous to what happened to the high priesthood in Syria, since the first *archiereus* there was also a contemporary of Augustus (*BE* 1976: 718). Capponi also thought along those lines (2005: 41–2; in contrast Herklotz 2007: 300), drawing attention to *P Oxy.* XII 1434.9–10 and the former high priest Gaius Julius Theon, who is named there. Although the relevant papyrus dates to 107/8 CE, it relates to land that had formerly been in the possession of Theon. As the editors of the text note, Theon himself was a contemporary of Gaius Julius Aquila, the prefect of Egypt in 10–11 CE.

Rigsby (1985: 284–6) is also of the opinion that the high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt had existed quite early on, probably before 39/40 CE, because at that time a local ‘high priest of Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus’ appears in the Fayum (*P Merton* I 11; *P Ryl.* II 149). According to Rigsby, ever since then there had also been the generic ‘high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt’ to whom the regional high priests were subordinate. However, this is based on the premiss that the ‘high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt’ was actually responsible for the cult of the emperor, and that regional high priests had to be under the control of a central Alexandrian high priest—Rigsby assumes both of these without discussion. He also thinks that the office of ‘high priest of Alexandria and Egypt’ was set up by Tiberius for his late predecessor, and that under Caligula it was eventually extended to the cult of the living ruler.

The Duties of the High Priest of Alexandria and All Egypt

Varied opinions have appeared in research literature about whether, in addition to his administrative duties, the high priest of Alexandria and Egypt also had primary responsibility for the cult of the emperor, and whether he was, moreover, the cultic head of all the other high priests of the emperor in Egypt. A renewed debate on this issue is necessary, given that the title ‘high priest’ indicates a sacred office. In the other provinces of the empire, high priests of the imperial cult, with sacred duties, had already been installed in the reign of Augustus, so it is right to ask why exactly the high priest of Egypt should have held no sacred office.

The following points should be noted:

- It is not acceptable to conclude, solely based on the silence of the papyri, that the high priest was not accorded any ritual function.
- The very fact that the high priest held a sacred title suggests he had a sacred responsibility.
- Similar titles in other parts of the *imperium*, where the priests were undoubtedly responsible for the emperor worship, suggest that the high priest in Egypt was likewise responsible for the cult of the emperor.

First, therefore, the full title of the high priest needs to be considered: it was ‘high priest of the gods Augusti and the Great Serapis and the one who is responsible for the temples of Egypt and the whole country’. Unlike the regional priest, who carried out the cult for the ‘Lords Augusti’, the high priest of Alexandria and Egypt was thus responsible for the cult of the ‘gods Augusti’—this variation enables us to distinguish between the two priesthoods. The title of the Alexandrian high priest had no fixed formula and could certainly be shortened. In the applications for circumcision by candidates for the Egyptian priesthood he was

called both ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἱ[ε]ρῶν ('high priest and overseer of the temples in Egypt'; SB I 15.28, 16.17, 17.16) or simply ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ('high priest and overseer of the temples'; W Chr. 76.15–16). From the full title of the high priest, it is clear, however, that the administrative aspect, here expressed by the phrase ἐπὶ τ[ῶ]ν [κατὰ Ἀλεξάνδ]ρ[ε]ϊαν καὶ κατὰ Αἴγυ]πτον ἱερῶν, 'the one who is responsible for the temples in Alexandria and all of Egypt', was an additional task of the high priest rather than his principal duty. His main responsibility lay rather in the care and management of the pan-Egyptian cult of the emperors, as well as the cult of Serapis.

The title 'high priest of Alexandria and Egypt', always abbreviated in other documents, thus needs to be looked at carefully. The role holder was, on the one hand, the high priest and, on the other, the head of the governmental administration (*procurator*) of all the cult complexes in Egypt. From this it is clear that the Romans made a precise distinction between cultic and administrative duties, and the high priest, just like the comparable high priest in other provinces, was responsible for the imperial cult. It is also important that the cult of Serapis was under the control of the most senior management of the same Roman priest, which underlines the importance of that deity for Roman rule in Egypt.

In addition, it is likely that the high priests carried out different duties in various provinces of the empire as part of their *cursus honorum*. Thus, Lucius Julius Vestinus, mentioned above, was *ab epistulis* Hadrian and responsible for the Latin and Greek libraries in Rome, but was also ἀρχιερεὺς Ἀλεξανδρίας καὶ Αἰγύπτου πάσης ('high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt'; OGIS II 679). In addition to his possible activities as high priest in 55–9 CE, Tiberius Claudius Balbillus was *praefectus Aegypti* (Stein 1950: 33–4; Pflaum 1960–1, no. 15). Because of this *cursus* it is safe to assume that the high priests, like all the procurators, were of equestrian rank.

To summarize this line of argument, the full title 'chief (or high) priest of the gods Augusti and the Great Serapis and the one who is responsible for the temples of Egypt and the whole country' shows that the high priesthood covered both the Augusti and Serapis. The term high priest, *archiereus*, was chosen because it genuinely related to a sacred area of responsibility. Furthermore, the highest administrative responsibility of this man for the ritual aspects of Egyptian temples is recorded definitively in papyrological sources—which clearly demonstrates the second component of the full title. All the high priests of this title who are known by name were Roman citizens, and were probably of equestrian rank. The high priests were appointed by the emperor, as we learn from one of Hadrian's decrees of appointment (SB XII 11236). And lastly, we can also learn from these titles that, as well as the cult for the Augusti, which was to be performed throughout Egypt, the cult of Serapis must have held a central position in Roman times. Otherwise almost no Romans would have attained this position in the priesthood or, to put it another way, Rome would certainly not have been so interested in the supervision, and thus also the control, of the cult of Serapis.

A PROVINCIAL IMPERIAL CULT IN EGYPT

As we have seen, there is archaeological evidence for temples of Augustus in Egypt that are of Roman design. There is, however, not the slightest trace of parts of a temple of Augustus together with the goddess Roma, unlike the other provinces of the empire. This was possibly

because the senate, as the main representative of Rome, had no access to the province. In Karnak there is also evidence that the successors of Augustus were represented by statues in the Caesareum there, and there is a strong possibility that a cult of Augustus was already being performed in the *sebasteia* of Egypt during his lifetime—the temples were, after all, dedicated to him. Whether the other emperors received a cult in these temples cannot be established for certain, but since there were priests of Tiberius and Gaius at the level of the nomes, it seems quite possible.

Not taken into account in the literature so far is the fact that two of the three remaining imperial cult complexes in Egypt chose a design based on a Roman model, namely a podium temple. Although the podiums of the two complexes was not particularly high, they exhibited a foreign character to the Egyptians and Greeks living in Egypt. The foreignness of the imperial cult expressed in this way is also brought into stark relief by the fact that the imperial cult complexes in Asia Minor were constructed using what were, for the Greeks, familiar architectural forms, signalling the close relationship between divine cult and emperor worship (Zanker 2003: 295). In contrast, the podium temple was not a familiar form of building for either the Egyptians or the Greeks in Egypt. The acculturation of the imperial cult in Asia Minor is largely explained by the fact that the cult primarily emerged from the initiative of Greek cities and *koina*, who also built the temples. However, when a foreign design began to be used in Egypt, it seems likely that the initiative for such cult complexes came from the foreign power. The aim was to make a clear break with the Ptolemaic period (Pfeiffer 2009). If there were *sebasteia* in every nome from that time onwards, as Blumenthal (1913: 322) and Dundas (1994: 176) believe, then these temples must have been established immediately after Egypt became a province. In that case, the *sebasteia* in question must have been set up by the ruling power. At the very least, it is unlikely that members of the local elites would have taken the initiative to establish imperial cult places in the nome capitals, because it was not possible for them to take jointly coordinated action—there was no city council or similar body at that level. Instead, it is possible that a short time after Egypt became a province, the first *princeps* or the prefect of Egypt issued a decree to provide the whole of Egypt with *sebasteia*.

Besides the architectural argument for a Roman directive for establishing an imperial cult in Egypt, there are some other indications that this was the case. From the surviving evidence, the imperial cult temples, called *caesarea* or *sebasteia*, were the central places of administration within the nomes from the second century onwards, and must therefore have had very close official links with the Roman authorities. The imperial priesthood of the individual nomes was, furthermore, part of the public offices of the regional metropolitan administration, which means that the priests of the emperor were recruited from the local elite and involved in municipal government. It is highly likely that all the metropolitan regional imperial priests were subordinate to the 'high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt'. And lastly, the 'high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt' was a procurator-like official, appointed by Rome, and a Roman *eques*, who was also responsible for administrative oversight of all the cults in Egypt. Since the high priesthood of the Lords Augusti had no precedent in the form of a similar type of institution from Ptolemaic Egypt that might have been continued, it is hardly likely that the high priesthood was established in the whole of Egypt through the initiative of local elites without the assistance of the government; in fact, it is more likely that a higher authority ensured its establishment in Egyptian *metropoleis*, and this higher authority can only have been the emperor himself or his local representative, the *praefectus Aegypti*.

THE IMPACT OF THE IMPERIAL CULT IN EGYPT

In the non-government sector, in other words outside the precincts of the imperial cult, there is evidence of the emperor cult in the form of a handful, at most, of imperial cult *collegiae* (clubs or associations) (cf. *W Chr.* 112 = *BGUIV* 1137). It is also noteworthy that the Egyptian priests, in contrast to the Ptolemaic period, played almost no role in the imperial cult (see Pfeiffer 2004). The Roman emperor—unlike the Ptolemaic kings (see Pfeiffer 2008)—was not a god in Egyptian sanctuaries, and the existence of a private imperial cult practised by the populace, outside the official imperial cult, cannot be established. In the private context of his subjects, the emperor almost never achieved the position of a divinity who could receive a cult, or for whom one might gratefully fulfil a vow. This is quite remarkable, especially compared with the Greek east, where there were multiple forms of the imperial cult at a local level. In Egypt the explanation for this, at least in part, is the fact that there was no major impetus for it: there was none of the competitive situation between the Greek cities vying with each other for the attention of the emperor and the bestowal of so-called *neokorai* (which were granted to cities in Asia Minor).

At the non-governmental level, emperor worship, rather than cult, was the dominant and prevalent way of demonstrating loyalty, especially by making offerings to the emperor. Whatever their ethnic, cultural, or religious background, his subjects made many donations directed towards their own divinities, asking the gods to guarantee the well-being of the ruler. In this, the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians were alike; even Jews offered entire sacrifices to their supreme god for the emperor's sake (Philo, *Leg.* 357). Consequently, offerings *for the benefit of the emperor* was the unifying 'prescribed terminology' of emperor worship in Egypt. A similar situation existed in Rome, in the western empire, and in the Greek east.

The question of whether and to what extent the Roman emperor was able to persuade the hearts and minds of his subjects in Egypt to accept his sovereignty, and the special venerability of his person, is a different matter. Did the imperial cult strengthen the legitimization of Roman rule? The question is difficult to answer because we do not know what his subjects were thinking when they worshipped the emperor or provided him with a cult. For the mindset of the Alexandrian population at least, the viewpoint found in the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum* is very revealing (see Chapter 17). If the citizens were interested in the deification of the emperor, as one is led to believe from their official statements (*CPap. Jud.* II 153), the documents reveal this merely as an effort to secure goodwill, privileges, and benefits from him (on this, see Harker 2008). Despite all the loyalty it proclaimed to the emperor in inscriptions and oaths, the city's elite had serious clashes with the imperial house—clashes in which the Alexandrians were the losers. Whether the processes described in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* are historically documented conflicts or not is of secondary importance in this context. What is important is the insight that the texts provide into the almost anti-imperial mentality of the Greek upper-middle class in Alexandria. The discovery of copies of the documents throughout the country may further indicate that similar views were widely held among Greeks living there, including the Hellenized Egyptians. Apparently, Rome had not managed to get the elite, or at least important parts of the Greek middle class, entirely on its side.

CONCLUSION

After an almost total break from the traditions of the cult of rulers as it had been shaped by the Ptolemies, organized around the cult of Alexander and the Egyptian temples (Pfeiffer 2008), Augustus had already introduced into Egypt his own form of worship for the rulers. The state imperial cult in Egypt was fundamentally different from all the other official provincial cults in the empire in that the goddess Roma was of no importance here. The cult was institutionalized in the imperial temples of the nome capitals. Here, the office of high priest was exercised by liturgical officials from the metropolitan elite. Overall supervision of Egyptian emperor worship was the responsibility of the high priest of Alexandria and Egypt, who, as a Roman, was also the priest of the pan-Egyptian cult of the emperors and Serapis, as well as procurator of all cult matters in Egypt. The absence of the goddess Roma is due to the special importance that the province of Egypt without doubt attained in the overall structure of the *imperium*. In Egypt, the Roman senate had no power of control *de jure* or *de facto* here. The worship of Roma was closely connected with the senate, which is why Augustus did not introduce it in Egypt.

Let us therefore return to the starting point of this analysis—to the various possible cults of the emperor in the *imperium*: the material analysed does not allow any other possibility than to expand or differentiate the distinction of the imperial cult in the *imperium*. In Egypt the imperial cult was neither purely provincial, nor purely urban. Instead, it was a provincial imperial cult that was set up from above and locally organized, and which was subject to central supervision. The Egyptian form of the imperial cult directed from Rome differed only in part from other provincial cults. There was no Egypt-wide meeting of all provincial supervisors at an *ara Augusti*; this seems not to have been desired officially (Dundas 1994: 107). Here we have the most significant difference from the west of the empire. On the other hand there were *sebasteia* in Galatia, in other words in the east of the empire, as well as in Egypt, throughout the country, each having an altar to Augustus where his subjects were to demonstrate their loyalty to Augustus. How little, however, the imperial cult may have appealed to the subjects is apparent, on the one hand, from the solid Alexandrian criticism of the Roman emperors, and also from the existence of only very little evidence of the imperial cult from private individuals.

SUGGESTED READING

A number of recent works have re-evaluated the imperial cult throughout the Roman empire, such as Price (1984), Clauss (2001), Gradel (2002), or the still important work of Taeger (1960). For the imperial cult in Egypt, Blumenthal's (1913) early study remains valuable, but see also Dundas (1994), Heinen (1995), Herklotz (2007), and Pfeiffer (2010). For the Caesareum in Alexandria, see McKenzie (2007).

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