

CHAPTER 27

EGYPTIAN CULT

Evidence from Temple Scriptoria and Christian Hagiographies

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EGYPTIAN CULT AND ROMAN RULE

Everything could have turned out so well! The Persian kings and the Ptolemies had placed themselves in the tradition of the Egyptian kings and with varying success had taken over, at least formally, their very central role in Egyptian religion. Could one not have expected this of the Roman Octavian? When, however, his rule over Egypt began in 30 BCE and he viewed the conquered land, though paying his respects to Alexander the Great at his monument, he would not go on to visit the tombs of the Ptolemies (Cass. Dio 51.16.5; Cary 1960: 44–7). From the perspective of the Egyptian priesthood this would have been tolerable, but his refusal to present offerings at the altar of the Apis bull was not: the Apis was a living bull, selected on particular criteria by the priests, and worshipped as a god. Acting in this way, Octavian refused to carry out one of the most intrinsic duties of an Egyptian king (Suet. *Aug.* 93; Rolfe 1998: 284–5) and thus removed a foundation stone from the Egyptian world-view. According to Cassius Dio (51.16.5; Cary 1960: 46–7), he is even supposed to have said, when he declined to present offerings to the Apis, that he was accustomed to make offerings to gods and not cattle. In theory, however, a king who performed religious functions was indispensable to the Egyptian cult, as the priests acted only as his representatives. Octavian's affront posed difficult theological problems for the Egyptian priests, which carried over to the economic and administrative level (cf. Kockelmann 2010: 204–14 for the Fayum). Temple land was nationalized, at least in part, and the former owners received payments in lieu from the state in the form of grain and money, or they were allowed to lease back the land on favourable terms (Evans 1961; cf., however, Monson 2005). Thus, the temples, the centres of the Egyptian cult, lost a considerable part of their economic power.

A further change made by the Roman administration, which, though less serious, might nevertheless endanger the continuance of the Egyptian cult, was in the stipulations listed in the Gnomon of the *Idios Logos*, which were to be fulfilled if one was to serve as a priest (Moyer 2003: 53). It emerges from the edict of the *praefectus Aegypti* C. Turranius (7–4 BCE) that membership of the priestly class was indeed strictly controlled (BGU IV 1199; Geraci 1983: 185–7; Jördens 2009: 339–40 with n. 38). Admittedly this was probably a measure to prevent too many people from enjoying the priestly privilege of reduced taxation (Jördens 2009: 338–43). However, the number of those belonging to the class that performed the cult was thereby restricted.

Despite these initial stresses, the Egyptian cult was not destroyed. A circular of Q. Aemilius Saturninus of 199 CE, which forbade divination and typically Egyptian practices, such as obtaining oracular pronouncements by means of processions or via written notes, shows the continuance of certain forms of the practice of the Egyptian cult until at least the end of the second century (Ritner 1995: 3355–6; Jördens 2008: 445). The circular was not even particularly effective under some circumstances, and was obviously circumvented (Frankfurter 1998: 153–6). In this chapter I will also discuss several references to a continuation of the temple cult into the fifth century.

The rest of the imperial family, and subsequent rulers, did not take the negative attitude towards the Egyptian temples that Octavian had initially been forced to do in 30 BCE, against the background of his struggle against M. Antonius, which was presented as the defence of traditional Roman values against oriental decadence. A little less than fifty years later, in 19 CE, Germanicus, a high-ranking member of the imperial family, travelled to Egypt—though without Tiberius' permission—and, unlike Octavian, made offerings to the Apis. Germanicus was, however, not a ruler, and so his actions may have been presumptuous. The animal, as stated by Pliny (*HN* 185; Ernout 1952: 87–8) and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.14.8; Rolfe 1950: 278–9), did not eat. The refusal of the bull to accept the offering was seen as a premonition (*prodigium*) of the death of Germanicus, which was to occur in the same year. Meanwhile, a *modus vivendi* had evolved, and Tiberius could be represented without any difficulty in the ritual scenes of the temples.

This had not always been the case. At first the Egyptian priests needed to deal with the problem of how the king was to be named if the person first in question, Octavian, was so dismissive of the cult. In parallel with the establishment of the principate in Rome, the evolution of a Roman or cultic pharaoh progressed in several stages, in order to fill the gap left by the king, so keenly felt in the temple world (Hölbl 1996, 2000, 2004; also Chapter 22). Octavian-Augustus and his successors thus continued temple building, though on a smaller scale than the Ptolemies, and as a consequence took over the role of the pharaoh who performed the cult.

PRACTITIONERS OF RELIGION AND CULT

For Egyptian religion these problems are not mere matters of detail in the daily business of worship, or in theological discourses by a few priests, but have fundamental significance because the Egyptian religion was a cult religion (Assmann 1984). It was based not on revelation by a founder or a canonical sacred text, but lived through constant renewal in the

exercise of the cult. If the rituals ceased, then the Egyptian religion would also come to an end. The Egyptian cult as it was performed in temples has a holistic character in its focus on cosmic connections, and claims to be effective in saving the world from destruction (Assmann 1990: 160–236). One of the most essential royal tasks is to nurture this through the building and maintenance of the temples. The building and maintenance of the temples is thus a divine offering in itself and part of the cult (see Chapter 22). The opportunities for private individuals to participate actively in these cult forms were, of course, restricted by their economic power. Yet there was always private participation in the cult, of the most diverse kinds, with contributions made according to the individual's means (Baines 1987, 1991). From the time of the Ptolemies and the Romans there are increased surviving sources evidencing private financial involvement in the temple cult, underestimated until now, or in the erection of temple buildings (Kockelmann and Pfeiffer 2009). The motivation for this could be the wish to prove one was a loyal functionary of the king, i.e. a public official who supports privately a cult fostered by the king, or it could be a real, personal religious relationship to an Egyptian deity (Heinen 1994; Kockelmann and Pfeiffer 2009).

Besides individuals, groups could also form in support of the cult, like the sheep-breeders of Neiloupolis in 24 BCE, for instance. Through their stela they informed posterity that they had financed the enclosing wall of the temple of Dime (Soknopaiou Nesos) (Bernand 1975: 142–4, no. 74). Mentions of such private endowments are significantly rarer in Roman than in Ptolemaic times in the Fayum, and even the more substantial endowments date from before 79 CE (Kockelmann 2010: 214–20). More common were the religious associations in which usually wealthier individuals from one place joined together (Lüddeckens 1968; de Cenival 1972; San Nicolò 1972: 11–29; Muszynski 1977). Such religious associations existed from at least the 26th dynasty, and though they are best documented and researched for the Ptolemaic period, were active even in Roman Imperial times (Monson 2006; Lippert 2008: 119). In their constitutions, adopted afresh every year, which are known from Demotic and Greek papyri, the members were obliged to pay a membership fee and participate in the cult of the temple concerned. Thus, they contributed offertory gifts like loaves of bread, salves, oil, and incense, took part in the burial of the sacred animal of their temple, and joined in the feasts and processions with burnt offerings and libations. They could also pay the costs of building works in the temenos (e.g. in Dendara (?), 19 CE; Vleeming 2001: 145–6, no. 159). A great deal of space in their constitutions is taken up by the social aspects, i.e. mutual support of the members in different situations in life (legal proceedings, mourning, death, and burial). This bonding into a group could count as reciprocation for their involvement in the cult. Cult communities, like church parishes, thus created a social network and the opportunity for lay people to take part in the temple cult.

The actual performance, of course, was in the hands of specialists, the priests, who were not necessarily members of the religious associations, though holders of the highest priestly offices do feature as contributors among the members. I highlighted earlier in this chapter the regulation of membership of the priestly class by the Roman provincial administration. Nevertheless, in the temple of Dime, for instance, one might count up to 130 priests who appeared daily (Lippert and Schentuleit 2006: 21–3). In Tebtunis there were still fifty priests early in the second century, but in other temples after 150 CE the temple staff was reduced (Kockelmann 2010: 212–14). The sanctuary of Dime was, as a building, only of moderate size, and for this reason the number 130 might be surprising. However, as far as taxation was

concerned, Dime was in the first rank of temples, and thus among the more significant institutions of its kind in Imperial Egypt. Thanks to the Demotic documents from the site, produced by the temple administration, we are particularly well informed about Dime. They include the description of the priests' duties (*hn.w*), only a few of which have so far been published, which list the conditions for numerous vocations within the temple administration, including that of the priests (Lippert 2007). Breaches were punished with fines, and for this reason the agreements are similar in a certain way to the constitutions of the religious associations.

In addition, we are informed about the rules for priestly purity by the relevant vows, which are preserved in the Book of the Temple. The Book of the Temple is a substantial, comprehensive treatise, attested in many manuscripts, which describes the architecture, the organization, and the cult of an ideal Egyptian temple. It has not been published in its entirety, but it has been made known by its editor through more than a dozen preliminary reports (most recently Quack 2009b). In its completeness of content it must be a unique source for the Egyptian temple, and of course it also deals with the tasks of the priests. Among them are the vows of priestly purity, which are also known in a Greek translation (Quack 1997, 2005) and are connected with the Negative Confession of chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead (Stadler 2008). The Book of the Temple seems to have been particularly popular among Egyptian priests of the Imperial period, for we know of around thirty exemplars from Tebtunis alone and fifteen from Dime. In addition, there are other places in Egypt that are proven to have possessed this handbook. The great number of priests active in a temple of medium size, together with the high incidence of a treatise about the Egyptian temple, indicates in the first two centuries CE at least a very lively and active priestly milieu with functioning scriptoria (Egyptian: *prꜥnh*, 'House of Life') in which priestly training was carried out and priestly knowledge was cultivated. Numerous other sources, which cannot be treated here, enrich our knowledge of the creativity of the Houses of Life in Roman Egypt, like the Book of Thoth, itself a text for an initiation rite (Jasnow and Zauzich 2005; cf. Quack 2007) or the handbooks of priestly knowledge (Osing 1998; Osing and Rosati 1998), which summarize cult knowledge.

CULT AND MAGIC

Rituals were not performed only in an official temple context, primarily by priests: rituals also have their place in the private sphere. They are made immediate and concrete by coroplastic figures of a whole bevy of deities and bear witness to the piety of the population (see Chapters 20 and 38). In the case of home cults there is, however, a fluid boundary with magic (see Chapter 21). A differentiation between religion and magic, or cult and magic practices, is problematic in the case of Egypt, for here magic, or more accurately the power of incantation (*hkꜣ*), is an integral component of the official temple cult, as an instrument of cult activity and religious practice (Baines 1987; Fitzenreiter 2004). Thus, there is hardly any recognizable distinction between religion and magic. For this reason a distinction of this kind in present-day Egyptological research is rejected out of a kind of political correctness

(cf. Quack 2002, esp. 43), as the distinction between religion and magic would devalue the magic texts as compared with the religious texts. In doing so, however, scholarship adopts a particularly Christian, disparaging concept of magic, which at that time was applied without distinction to anything that was non-Christian. In a sermon, Shenoute of Atripe (died 465), for instance, gives a list of objects that he removed from a sanctuary or shrine. Among them was also 'the book which was filled with every kind of magic' (ΠΙΧΩΦΗΕ ΕΤΗΕΖ ΜΗΑΓΙΑ ΝΙΜ); Leipoldt 1908: 89, lines 15–16; the translation 'sorcery books' in Frankfurter 2008: 142 is misleading). As I shall argue below, it is very probable that this was a book of rituals that, on account of its heathen origins, was in Abbot Shenoute's eyes full of magic, and not religion, which for him could only be Christianity.

The eyes of magic are fixed not on the transcendent, but on everyday human life and the problems associated with it, while the aim of the temple ritual is directed at a much wider context, especially maintaining the journey of the sun. The temple ritual is directed towards gods, from earth to heaven, to make the gods benevolent to mankind, while the act of magic is essentially tied to the earth and seeks to bring the gods here by force. In all the acts of incantation that took place within the temple cult (Quack 2002), there are thus two different fundamental attitudes towards God: the one is that of the priest, which is exemplified in hymns praising God, his magnificence, his might, and his qualities as the primeval creator, on whose actions the welfare of the earth essentially depends; the other is that of a magician who puts pressure on a god, threatens the cessation of offering, and thus seeks to blackmail him into helping (Ritner 1992). The Egyptian magician thus places himself above the entity where power resides, and operates in a secular sphere, no longer serving the deity but attempting to make the perfection of divine power subservient to his own will. Magic thus takes a different position vis-à-vis the divine from that taken by the temple cult. The borderline is fluid, however, and depends on the cultural background or the point of view of the participants: if a Greek in Roman Imperial times receives in exchange for payment a vessel divination from an Egyptian priest, then the priest is performing a ritual. For the buyer, however, it is magic, not least because it is a bought product (Moyer 2003). The example of Shenoute and his attitude to temple books given above also shows that it is the observer who makes the distinction.

Despite all the commonality, namely the same processes and the uniform Egyptian terminology of (*hk3*), 'incantation', the differences are retained, for incantatory power and magic are not the same thing. Incantatory power (*hk3*), which the Egyptians considered really to exist, is an instrument that was used in the temple cult just as it was by private people in similar or related practices. Thus, (*hk3*) is a connecting link between religion and magic, and it is tempting to confuse these two areas. Separating them does not, however, imply a value judgement, for magic in Egypt is not a degraded form of religion, but its twin sibling. An additional factor to this close relationship of cult and magic practice is that temples, of course, did not exist removed and isolated from the cares of mankind, but had to deal with human needs. This was the purpose of the oracle cults attached to the sanctuaries, or the cult at the contra temple, which enjoyed some popularity even in Imperial times (see Chapter 20; Stadler forthcoming). With other texts we can no longer distinguish with certainty whether they were used in the temple cult or in the domestic sphere and thus might be akin to the Greek, Latin, or Coptic *sortes* books (Stadler 2004, esp. 269–75; 2006; Dieleman 2009; Naether 2010).

THE REALITY OF THE TEMPLE CULT IN ROMAN IMPERIAL TIMES

The magic texts that survive from Egypt from the third century CE and later, in Greek and in Demotic, fill a gap in the documentation of Egyptian rituals after c.200 CE. They continue into the fifth century and may be compared with texts from Pharaonic Egypt, to which they are related (Quack 2009c; Chapter 20). In the third century, however, the direct Egyptian sources for the cult diminish dramatically, and for this reason the magical papyri, despite the distinction just drawn, are still undeniably important in gaining an adequate understanding of the continuance of the Egyptian cult.

But what is the range of documentation of temple ritual texts in the Egyptian language for the period up to the rule of Septimius Severus? It includes the inscriptions and ritual scenes of the temples, papyrus manuscripts, and also isolated texts on other portable writing surfaces such as wooden panels (Widmer 2004). The documentation is so extensive that a description of Egyptian cult practice in Roman Imperial times must be restricted, given the space of this chapter, to Egyptian texts, and may create the erroneous impression that the temples were barely touched by close contact with foreign cultures and religions or by the changing historical conditions sketched briefly above, and that almost nothing had changed since the New Kingdom. The reality of the cult is, of course, much more colourful—the reference to magic has already made that clear—but I will focus on a description according to the Egyptian sources, while Frankfurter (Chapter 20 in this volume) describes religious practice outside the temple and highlights the interaction of non-Egyptian and Egyptian religions. It is this existence side by side with the traditional Egyptian temple cult and its adaptations in daily life, using forms of worship associated with non-indigenous Egyptian divinities, that makes the study of religion in the considerably Hellenized Egypt of Roman Imperial times so appealing.

While little is known of Thebes, at one time so significant in terms of cult, and still dominant in the domain of funerary texts in early Imperial times (see Chapter 23), Latopolis (Esna) situated about 55 km south of Thebes, offers a large corpus of inscriptions from which there emerges a very good picture of the festive events in this temple, where Khnum was worshipped as the main god (Sauneron 1962). From the sanctuaries still decorated in Roman Imperial times there also survive major corpora of inscriptions, above all from Dendara, Kom Ombo, and Philae. On the basis of the documentation we cannot determine with certainty in every case what is new in these sources and what is founded on ancient Pharaonic traditions. Yet the Imperial inscriptions differ so little from earlier Egyptian religious sources that we must assume there was a high proportion of old ideas, old concepts of the divine and the way the divine was worshipped, rather than an extreme degree of innovation. In the case of several hieratic manuscripts, unfortunately very fragmented, the older models are easily demonstrated. The papyri we are concerned with contain recitation texts for the daily ritual in the temple of Tebtunis and are dated from the first and second centuries CE. I shall call these texts simply the Daily Ritual; in Egyptian they are entitled (*r3.w n.w h.t-ntr iry m pr Sbk nb Bdnw*, 'Utterances of the things of God which are performed in the temple of Soknebtunis'). Although dating from Imperial times, the papyri are clearly written, both graphically and linguistically, and are evidence of the competence of the priesthood there in dealing

with religious texts. A few of the manuscripts have been published (Rosati 1998), others have not (Osing, personal communication), and still others have been dug up in recent years in Tebtunis (Guermeur 2008, forthcoming).

There is a surviving Demotic version of the Daily Ritual from Dime; eleven manuscripts of it are known, all of which date from the first two centuries CE, to judge by their palaeography (Stadler 2007). To perform the daily ritual of offerings, the priest had to enter the temple and head towards the innermost sanctuary with the cult image. Before he could go into the temple itself, he had to purify himself, and then in the case of the Dime temple walk through five gates. He then reached the hall (*wsh.t*, in Edfu the *wsh.t wr.t*, 'Great Hall'), and through the altar hall (*wsh.t htp* in Edfu) and the central hall (*wsh.t hr.t-ib* in Edfu) he reached the sanctuary. The Daily Ritual as it can be reconstructed from the individual manuscripts is a collection of the words that the priest had to recite at each station. An extract is given by way of example, quoted from the Tebtunis version and supplemented according to the Dime version:

Utterance on entering the hall. Words to be spoken:

[Greeting to you, <Hall, as> the Hall, your name being Nut.] ... pure.

[I cense, I... so that] you [avert] away every evil harm,

[driving back slaughter ...]

I am pure. [My purity is the purity of the gods.

Hail,] Nut, Geb, Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Horus, son of Isis,

May [you] drive away [every evil.

Take action against evil.

May you drive outside every evil enemy away from me,

when t]hey enter the temple behind me,

for I am [Thoth, who created the Horus eye] after his exhaustion.

An offering that the king may give. I am pure.

(*P Flor.* = PSI I 70 fr. A I, Z 1-3; Rosati 1998: 106)

The Demotic version from Dime is almost completely identical, and marks only the part from 'Hail, Nut, Geb, Osiris, Isis ...' as a variant (*ky r3*) of what precedes it. The character and structure of the utterances can easily be illustrated with this quotation. After a title partly written in red ink (here given in italics), which announces a context of action, there follow short hymns or invocations to deities or the self-identification with the gods by the priest performing the ritual; here it is Thoth, in other places Horus or Anubis. The titles make it possible to follow the path the priest took.

The text itself is not a new creation of Ptolemaic and Roman times, but has, in parts, parallels in the description of the Daily Ritual and the associated subsidiary writings of the New Kingdom (Moret 1902; Kausen 1988; Osing 1999; Tacke 2003; Cooney and McClain 2005). Further parallels are preserved in the rituals for Amun and for Mut, among others, the manuscripts of which come from Thebes and were written in the Third Intermediate period (Generalverwaltung der königlichen Museen zu Berlin 1901; Guglielmi and Buroh 1997) and also in inscriptions from the temples of the Graeco-Roman period. This is the case with the ritual of the hourly vigil (Pries 2011), which in turn is based on a long tradition reaching back to the Old Kingdom. The versions of Tebtunis and Dime supplement this stock of texts with utterances coincidentally not attested until now. Though some parts are not paralleled in earlier sources, they are old, as is shown by their connection with demonstrably old language corpora and the Middle Egyptian language, i.e. the form of Egyptian as it was

spoken roughly between the twentieth and the fifteenth centuries BCE. The texts are composed in a liturgical language, even if they are recorded in Demotic writing.

The significance of the Daily Ritual of Dime lies in the enrichment of the corpus of utterances, the transfer of a hieratic–hieroglyphic text into another written form, Demotic, and also the link with the architecture of the temple of Dime, which was dedicated to the local figure of the crocodile god Sobek, called Soknopaïos in its Hellenized form (Egyptian: *Sbk nb Pay*, ‘Sobek, the lord of Pai’). The ritual text corresponded exactly to the architecture of the sanctuary in its last building phase, when it was enlarged: a priest did indeed have to walk through five gates, as the anthology of utterances suggests, before he reached the *wsḥ.t* hall and then continued further (Stadler 2007; Davoli forthcoming). This yields a relative dating for the compilation and writing of the Daily Ritual of Dime, which must have occurred about the same time as the extension of the temple. In Tebtunis there is a less obvious parallel between architecture and ritual, owing to the poor state of preservation of the temple there (Stadler 2007).

The transfer of the Middle Egyptian text into Demotic writing was done using eccentric orthography (Widmer 2004: 669–83). These ‘non-etymological’ or ‘phonetic’ spellings are typical of a series of Demotic papyri with religious texts that extend into Imperial times, as well as liturgical texts that are transmitted on various papyri, the most complete example being *P Berlin 6750*—for the sake of brevity, I will use the name of the papyrus for the text (Spiegelberg 1902, table 71, 75–83). Like others discussed above, the papyrus originates from Dime and contains two liturgical compositions, the first of which is concerned above all with Osiris and his resurrection; the second, however, takes Horus, his birth, and his path to kingship as its theme (Widmer 1998; 2003: esp. 15–18). *P Berlin 6750* shows, in the same way as the Daily Ritual, how the Imperial era exemplars of Egyptian ritual texts were based on earlier ones: short sections are quotations from older hieratic funerary papyri, or the well-known text of the ritual of the hourly vigil, which was part of the Osiris cult (Widmer forthcoming). The events surrounding the birth of Horus and his enthronement are praised in the form of a festive hymn that has some very similar counterparts from the *mammisi* (birth house) of Edfu, constructed around 100 BCE (Chassinat 1939: 196.6–10; 197.8–12; 205.11–16; see Quack 2001: 109 with n. 53).

As all the text exemplars originate in Dime, we must ask to what extent the content of *P Berlin 6750* may be placed within the mythology and cult of Dime, since Sobek, the lord of Pai (Soknopaïos), i.e. a crocodile god, was the main object of worship there. The naming of Soknopaïos and Soknopiaïas in Greek sources from Dime gave rise to the assumption that a Horus deity was to be seen in Soknopaïos and an Osiris deity in Soknopiaïas (Widmer 2005). Both might have been incarnated as crocodiles: when one sacred crocodile died, it became the Osiris crocodile, and a young crocodile was enthroned as the sacred animal of Dime, who would take over the function of Horus. For the associated cult, which accompanied, re-enacted, and supported the burial of the old crocodile, and the ensuing installation of the young one on the temple’s roof, *P Berlin 6750* is probably a compilation of relevant texts for recitation (Stadler forthcoming). This would correspond to what is known from other temples. In Edfu, for instance, a falcon was enthroned as a divine king and incarnation of the divine on earth, so to speak (Alliot 1954: 303–433; Fairman 1954–5). There are similarities in the Osiris part of *P Berlin 6750* to the Khoiak festival rites, which are known mainly through inscriptions from the temple of Dendara. In Dime these rites, which perhaps were performed with crocodiles, might have taken place during the festival of Genesia, which was celebrated

in Dime from 7 to 25 Hathyr (in Imperial times from 3 to 21 November), since a few days from this period are mentioned in *P Berlin* 6750. In this interpretation of cult practice in the Fayum, the solar and cosmic aspect of Sobek, which required a regular death and an equally regular rejuvenation and rebirth, was expressed through the Osiris-Horus constellation, projected onto Sobek, and ritually represented with real crocodiles.

Merely the fact that we are able to compare various temples with each other, independently of the chief deity of a sanctuary, shows how very transferable cult texts are. The exemplars of the Daily Ritual from Imperial times follow models that were originally meant for Osiris and place them, in part, alongside spells that were recited in Karnak for Amun-Re as the cosmic supreme god and his consort, Mut. *P Berlin* 6750 also contains essentially Osirian texts and some in honour of Horus, and yet despite this obvious connection to the Osiris-Horus myth complex, the contents may also be related to Sobek, if only hypothetically. Osiris, Isis, Horus, and the particular chief god are thus 'words' of a mythical ritual language and denote certain phenomena: the chief deity denotes the cosmic-solar supreme god, Osiris the dead and revived incarnation, Horus the successor or new incarnation of the divine on earth, all of which were made flesh and blood in the sacred animals: the species was again determined by the local environment and the particular mythology. Horus himself is a deity with manifold meanings within this language, for in him are united qualities of the child-god in the figure of Harpocrates, and also sun-god qualities, because Horus is also a god of heaven. Thus, the worship of Harpocrates is equally the worship of the young sun-god (Budde 2003; Sandri 2006; Stadler 2006). Of course, at many cult sites there were also original Osirian and Horus cults, and *P Berlin* 6750 may also have been part of this context, whereas within Dime such cults have not yet been located. The fundamental Egyptian myths could therefore be adapted for regional use and thus enacted in rites at different places.

Myth narratives themselves must also be counted as recitation texts for rituals, and thus as cult texts (Quack 2009a). For example, the Demotic version of the Myth of the Sun's Eye, whose surviving manuscripts date from Roman times, was probably intended for recitation at a festival. This is not an innovation of the Graeco-Roman period, but established Egyptian tradition (von Lieven 2007: 274–83). Likewise, a report of creation in narrative form, the Neith cosmogony of Esna, was clearly used ritually as a text for recitation. It is designated in the Egyptian itself as a ritual (*nt ꜥ*), and is related to the festival of 13 Epiphi (7 July) (Sauneron 1968: 28–34, no. 206; Sauneron 1962: 253–76; Sternberg-el Hotabi 1995: 1078–86; Broze 1999). Creation through the word, as described here, may be thought of as the fundamental model for all the texts that accompany ritual acts and which realize the acts through their performative power; that is to say, create them anew (Finnestad 1985: 68–78; Smith 2002b: 199–200; Quack 2009a).

THE END OF THE WRITTEN TRADITION OF THE EGYPTIAN CULT

Philological competence seems to have varied greatly in different places. While the priests of Tebtunis maintained the hieratic script, those of Dime preferred the Demotic and even further developed non-etymological spelling, as mentioned above, into a complex system.

Meanwhile, at Esna the mythological play of visual and phonetic values of hieroglyphic writing was still understood in the second century. The inscriptions extend into the reign of Decius (249–52), yet their quality diminishes under Septimius Severus, until the hieroglyphs carved under Decius are barely comprehensible (Sauneron 1959: 43–4). Apparently the wooden panel Louvre E 10382, which is dated to the end of the Ptolemaic or the beginning of the Roman Imperial period, was used for direct recitation (Widmer 2004). In order to recite this hymn to an unnamed goddess, described as a daughter of the sun-god, it seemed appropriate to the writer to resort to phonetic Demotic spellings, i.e. to use above all spellings with Demotic single-consonant signs. Clearly this was easier for the performer to read than a hieratic or hieroglyphic text. It is not known which temple the wooden panel comes from, but on the basis of the dating we may say that it is not correct to claim that the newer a text, the less knowledge of hieroglyphic or hieratic script could be assumed. And yet we know of no Egyptian recitation texts associated with the temple cult that were written down after the second century CE. The lack of relevant evidence may not be explained only through the slow dying out of indigenous Egyptian script, as the rituals could have been noted down in Greek script supplemented with special Demotic signs, such as the magical-ritual papyrus *P. Brit. Mus.* EA 10808 (Sederholm 2006; cf. on this point Quack 2009d).

Was there therefore no cult being practised in the temples from the third century? The continuance of an Egyptian cult is shown by objective sources, objective because they are documentary, like the ostraca from Narmouthis, from which it appears that in the late second and early third centuries CE a cult of offerings was still being practised in the temple of Narmouthis (Gallo 1997; Menchetti 2005). Scholars like to quote Philae as the latest example, where Nubian Blemmyans and Nobadians (but not Egyptians!) worshipped Isis until 535–7, and where there was a brief restoration of the cult in 567 (Dijkstra 2008; Hahn 2008). From as early as the 340s there was only one remaining temple priest in Philae (not more than one, as Frankfurter 2008: 142 suggests): this is the way it is formulated by the author of the episode in the Coptic life of Aaron (Dijkstra 2008: 235–7). According to this source, the priest's sons acted for him from time to time. On the other hand, the Demotic and Greek graffiti in Philae are evidence of a whole series of individuals acting as temple staff in Philae, though in a somewhat isolated way (Dijkstra 2008: 193–218). Among these were some who, judging by their titles, ought to have been in a position at least to read Egyptian texts. Apart from the high priests (*hm-ntr*), these are, in the years 372/3 and 435 particularly, the writers of divine words (*sh mt.t-ntr*, *hierogrammateus*) (Griffith 1935–7: 103, table 55; Eide et al. 1998: 1110–12) and in 407/8 the writer of the divine words together with a master of ceremonies (*<hry> sšt3*) (Griffith 1935–7: 102, table 54). To what extent the titles were actually held by living incumbents and were not merely handed down for reasons of tradition will probably never be completely certain.

In Lower Egypt, too, the activity of the priests seems to have continued in the temple of Isis in Menouthis. As late as the end of the fourth century the sanctuary was said to be full of young men who had worked as priests (Eunap. VS 471 = 6.9, 16; Wright 1952: 416–17). This community had gathered in quest of philosophy, around a certain Antoninus. We must assume from this that the circle was heavily Hellenized and cannot be considered Egyptian in the narrow sense. After the temple had been transformed into a church in 391, there had been attempts to link oracular practices with the relics of martyrs and thus put them into a Christian context; the Isis cult was simply moved to another building until the patriarch of Alexandria, Petros Mongos, intervened. He had this building and the images of gods found there destroyed (Zachariah of Mytilene, *Vita Severi* 27–9; Kugener 1907: 27–9; Herzog 1939).

The relevant description of this occurrence mentions a house whose walls were completely covered in heathen inscriptions, which makes one think of hieroglyphs (thus, Kugener 1907: 27, followed by Trombley 1994: 221–2). Was the building into which the cult of Isis had withdrawn not recognizable from the outside as a sanctuary, but set up on the inside as a new temple? These would have been the last hieroglyphic inscriptions to be carved or painted in Egypt. In addition, this would suggest that the form of the cult of Isis as practised there may have presented itself in a very Egyptian mode, while the people of the time were also enthusiastic about Greek philosophy.

The gap of about 300 years between the last cult texts and the violent ending of the worship of Isis in Menouthis or Philae may be bridged by other Coptic hagiographies, which, as in the case of Menouthis, describe the robust intervention by Coptic monks or bishops in the establishment of the Christian faith in Egypt during the fourth and fifth centuries. The historicity of those reports is in essence accepted, despite the fact that they possibly modelled themselves on biblical texts (Emmel 2008; Frankfurter 2008; el-Sayed 2010). A common factor in these episodes is that they speak of stamping out heathen ritual still practised in the temples. In a number of cases people like the abbot of the White Monastery, Shenoute of Atripe, had to justify their deeds in court or other state tribunals (Leipoldt 1908; Emmel 2008: 162–6). Pagan priests thus thought that they had been wronged and had some chance of getting the courts to impose punishment.

In one of his raids on pagan sanctuaries, Shenoute, as mentioned above, confiscated from a building ‘the book which was filled with every kind of magic.’ The definite article in ΠΙΧΩΘΗΕ, ‘the book’, may indicate that it must have been important to the sanctuary and may have been a book of ritual. From this we may understand the formulation ‘which was filled with every kind of magic’ (ΕΤΗΕ2 ΜΗΑΓΙΑ ΝΙΜ), which has a different implication from ‘sorcery incantation’, even if this possibility cannot be completely excluded. As the cult, in its own words, used the power of incantation (*hk3*), then even ritual papyri would be ‘filled with magic’, without being an actual sorcery book. Whether Shenoute could read the text may be in doubt, but for him all texts in an Egyptian script were the devil’s work (Young 1981) and the ‘book filled with every kind of magic’ was a trophy with which he could demonstrate a victory in the struggle for the proper worship of God. It was thus to be presented as a document of false worship of God and with no application for Christians.

From Shenoute’s note it could thus be concluded that, in the fifth century, ritual books or texts still existed and were subject to focused persecution, which might explain the gap in the written tradition of the fourth and fifth centuries: in the third century a decline in temples had begun (Grossmann 2008), and the most recent surviving Egyptian manuscripts, discussed above, come from sanctuaries that were abandoned together with their associated settlements in the third century, so that here the chances for preserving the papyri were good. However, the temples or shrines that were still used into the fourth or fifth centuries were subjected to destruction by Christians. Perhaps manuscripts that continued to be used here were also very old, for one cannot assume that ritual texts continued to be produced in any quantity. Presumably the decline in competence in writing Egyptian script greatly diminished the number of ritual manuscripts produced and thus the chances that any one exemplar was preserved. There are sometimes suggestions in the literature that fully functioning temples were closed (e.g. Trombley 1994: 5–6, 220–1; Frankfurter 1998; 2008: 142–5), but the sources hint, as shown above, that in the fifth century the Egyptian cult took refuge in houses and was therefore in retreat (cf. also Smith 2002a: 245–7).

Even if the temples became less numerous, they did not disappear completely. Only the conversion of the emperors to Christianity, and the imperial laws that turned a blind eye to Christian attacks against pagan religion, led to the complete extinction of the temple cult. Faced with the initial difficulties with the Roman emperor, then the reduction of temple land with the economic crisis of the empire in the third century, and then the ban on pagan cults, the priests had managed to continue the cult at a few places for more than 500 years from the time of Octavian—until the emperors went so far as to ban the cults they were once supposed to head.

SUGGESTED READING

The Egyptian temple cult during the Roman empire has not yet been treated in a coherent and concise manner. A number of individual studies are available, and the most important ones have been cited in this chapter. Of these, however, Sauneron (1962) is to be singled out and recommended for gaining an insight into the festivals of a temple in Imperial times, using the example of Esna temple; a similar study on Dendara (Cauville 2002) is also available. For the Daily Ritual in Roman times, however, there is no comparable study. As a case study for the existence of the cult at the Sobek temples in the Fayum, Kockelmann (2010) is recommended, as is Dijkstra (2008) for the end of the cult in Philae.

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