Between religion and politics: Greek-Egyptian identity in Ptolemaic Egypt (4th – 1st centuries B.C.)

Ronaldo G. Gurgel Pereira[1]

Abstract

The Hellenistic civilisation in Egypt was the result of complex relations between two symbolic universes in a constant process of update. The Hellenistic period created a new political reality by gathering together the Greek-Dominant and the Egyptian-Dominated in the same physical space. That new community would coexist during the following three centuries. Consequently, one's perception of "Us" – and its differentiation from "Them" – become blurred. In this article, Egyptian religion gains a major focus to discuss how cultural updates are shaped by the way individuals understand, classify, and interact with the world surrounding them at a political, religious, cultural, and social levels. Hence, constant, gradual and always unpredictable transformations are in charge of redefinitions of cultural identities. The outcome of such a transformation of cultures is a new symbolic universe – in our case a Hellenistic universe – that developed a new world-view, replacing both traditional Egyptian and Hellenic.

Resumo

Este artigo discute, sobretudo sob uma perspectiva grega, as interações socioculturais e religiosas entre gregos e egípcios durante o período Ptolemaico. Apesar de todo um histórico de contatos diplomáticos e comerciais, a conquista macedónica estabeleceu um novo elemento na relação entre gregos e egípcios: a polarização "Dominantes vs.

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[1]   PhD. Post-Doc. Auxiliary Researcher, CHAM – FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Ronaldo.gurgel@yahoo.de.

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Dominados". Ao mesmo tempo, a nova realidade de aproximação e convivência entre gregos e egípcios atenuou a percepção de diferenças que caracterizam o "Outro", originando um processo de atualização de identidades. O fenômeno de assimilação da religião egípcia pelo que se definia como um "comportamento à grega" debate a identidade cultural grega no Egito Helenístico.

Introduction

Every civilisation influences and is influenced by its neighbours. This is true regarding spatial (neighbouring peoples) and temporal (ancestral traditions) dimensions. In the case of Egyptians and Greeks, their first encounter predates the Macedonian conquest by many centuries[2].

The rule of Alexander the Great and his successors easily accounts for the development of a so-called "Hellenistic civilisation" in Egypt. However, "Hellenistic" is a term created during the Modern age, based on the false premise that a 'pure culture' could exist in an impermeable condition, forever immune to external influences. Its original definition portrayed the

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[2]   By the time of the beginning of the New Kingdom, i.e. the 18th Dynasty (ca. 1550-1350 B.C.), intercultural exchange between Greeks and Egyptians had become intense. The foreign diplomatic documentation from the Amarna period (ca. 1365 - 1349 B.C.) contains the name "*Akkijawa*". This might be the Hittite equivalent to the Egyptian *'Aqawas* (Achaeans), who, in the Ramesside period (ca. 1292 – 1069 B.C.), were listed among "The Peoples of the Sea" due to their piracy and plunders in the eastern Mediterranean. See: MORAN, W. L. **The Amarna Letters.** Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992; GALLARD, J. (Ed.). **L'acrobate au taureau – Les découvertes de Tell el-Dab`a et l'archéologie de la Méditerranée orientale**. Paris: La Documentation Française, 1999. Later, during the rule of the 26th Dynasty (664-332 B.C.) the relations between Egypt and the Aegean world escalated to its apex. Greek mercenaries became the core of the Egyptian army and fleet, backing the Saite kings' ambition of restore Egypt's political influence over the Levant- See: PERNIGOTTI, S. **I Greci nell'Egito della XXVI Dinastia**. Imola: La Mandragora, 1999; GURGEL PEREIRA, R. G. "A XXVI dinastia e as suas relações com o Egeu: O Egito saíta como uma potência mediterrânea entre os séculos VII-VI a.C.". **NEARCO**, Rio de Janeiro, vol. XI, n. 2, 2019, pp. 147-174. https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/nearco/article/view/44182. In fact, the First Persian conquest (525 B.C.) defeated the Greek-Egyptian army of Psamtek III at Pelusium. Moreover, Egyptian rebellions against the Persian rule were greatly supported by the Greeks, as Thucydides describes (I, 104 – 105). See: LIBOUREL, J. M. "The Athenian Disaster in Egypt". In: **The American Journal of Philology**. Baltimore, 92, 1971.

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process where a "pure Greek culture" suffered from a degenerative influence of Oriental elements.

Chronologically this period was situated between Alexander's death and the fall of Carthage and Corinth, which marked the rise of Rome as a Mediterranean power. Thus, such interpretation reduced the whole Hellenistic age to a 'decadent' and 'intermediary' status. However, we must bear in mind that the Hellenistic civilisations growing in the eastern Mediterranean were not aware of any alleged 'lack of Greekness'. This prejudice is but a modern belief. Hellenistic cultures and people considered that they experienced the linear continuity of their Greek ancestors' culture and traditions. Differently put, Hellenistic Greeks identified their world/ culture/ society and civilisation as the Greek world/culture/society/civilisation; regardless of any apparent contradiction created by the systematic reception of new Oriental elements.

The Ptolemies: Egyptian religion as a political instrument

During the rule of Dareios III "Codoman", an Egyptian revolt ended with the ascension of a new – and last - native pharaoh, Khababash[3]. He was recognised as legitimate ruler throughout most part of Egypt. After that last and brief period of Egyptian contestation, the Persians, restored their rule, disbanded the Egyptian army and established a Persian garrison. So, when Alexander the Great arrived in 332 B.C., he found the land administrated by a Persian satrap.

Consequently, when the Macedonians took up the administration of Egypt,

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[3]   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 Ptolemy, son of Lagos, while 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 Ptolemy 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: Yale University Press, 2003.

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there were no longer a native army or military elite. Huss[4] 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[5], the Macedonians are likely to have kept the native administration since they needed an efficient administrative body. This was "crucial in their struggle against the new-born Hellenistic kingdoms of Syria and Macedonia".

The political relations between Macedonian and Egyptian elites had many strands[6]. 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'. That 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[7]. After all, what the Macedonians tried to simulate was a natural and valid continuation of the ancient pharaonic lineage[8].

Throughout its Hellenistic rule, Egyptian priests functioned as major

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[4]   HUSS, W. **Der Makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester**. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994, p. 11.

[5]   ROSTOVTZEFF, M. **A large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century BC**. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1967, p. 3.

[6]   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.

[7]   In Egypt, there were two distinct Macedonian dynasties: the Argeades - the blood lined successors of Alexander the Great – and the Lagides – the blood lined successors of Ptolemy, son of Lagos. Ptolemy (later Ptolemy I), was a former general of Alexander, then Satrap on behalf of the Argeades and at last the first Macedonian king of Egypt after the integrity of Alexander' empire collapsed.

[8]   Egypt acknowledged most of their previous foreign conquerors as legitim pharaohs.

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mediators establishing native acceptance of the Macedonian authority. The following generation of Macedonian kings, i.e. the *basilei*, pursued the strategy adopted by Alexander, and which most foreign rulers of Egypt made use of as well. Macedonian kings 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 assemble 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 "king's affairs" (*ta basilika pragmata*).

At the beginning of the Hellenistic administration of Egypt, Ptolemy I seized the opportunity to build on Egypt's spirituality as means of reaching its population. A good example of that agenda was 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[9]. The god's cult soon became popular among the Hellenised population of Egypt, spreading throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin and towards all the places ruled by the Ptolemies[10]. 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.

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[9] The author understands that 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: GÖRG, M., and HÖLBL, G. (Eds.). **Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im I. Jahrhundert v. Chr**. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000, pp. 163-230.

[10] Furthermore, Sarapis was later worshipped throughout the entire Roman Empire as an aspect of Zeus.

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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 [11], "politics" serves as the essential mediator between man and society, nature and cosmos. By means of the political instrumentalization of religion, Hellenistic Egypt developed a new symbolic *campus* of negotiation[12]. That means it 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 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 best be seen in the so-called "Synodal decrees[13]" [Figs. 1, 2, 3], where priests and kings acted interconnectedly due to their shared interest, namely the welfare of (priests and) Egypt[14]. All decrees start by reporting the individual benefactions made by the particular king to Egypt and its temples. By royal order, priests all over

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[11] SAHLINS, M. **Islands of History**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

[12] Cf. BOURDIEU, P. **Le Sens Pratique**. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 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.

[13] 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: VALBELLE, D., and LECLANT, J. (Eds.). **Le Décret de Memphis**. Paris: CNRS, 1999.

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

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Egypt had to regularly meet for political deliberations in a synod[15]. 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.

For 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 it can be found in the Decree of Canopus [Fig. 1]. The Raphia Decree [Fig. 2], on the other hand, offers details on a military campaign to Syria, including the return of lost sacred statues to the Egyptian temples and fiscal privileges granted to 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 Egyptian rebels, and the concession of more 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[16] [Fig. 1].

As 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, the pharaoh, due to his divine status

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[15]   Ptolemy V Epiphanes determined the end of the obligatorily of those regular synods. See: D. J Crawford, QUAEGUEBEUR, J., and CLARYSSE, W. **Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis**. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1980.

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

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(*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 (*kȝ*). As a god, the pharaoh was identified with the sun god Re as well as with the manifestations of the gods Horus and Osiris[17]. 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[18]. As this clearly shows, a 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 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[19].

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

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

[18] 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: Kohlhammer, 1960.

[19] See: PRÉAUX, C. **Le Monde Hellénistique 1**. Paris: PUF, 1997, pp. 238-271; BALSDON, J.P.V.D. "The Divinity of Alexander", **Historia**, Stuttgart, 1, 1950, pp. 363-388 ; SANDERS, L. J. "Dionysius I of Syracuse and the Origins of Ruler Cult in the Greek World", **Historia**, Stuttgart, 40, 1991, pp. 275-287; WALBANK, F. W. "Könige als Götter, Überlegungen zum Herrscherkult von Alexander bis Augustus", **Chiron**, München, 17, 1987, pp. 365-382.

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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. He proclaimed them "Savior Gods" (*Theoi Soteres*). However, 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.

The following images depict an emblematic example[20] of a Hellenistic synodal decree:

Fig. 1
*Canopus Decree* (Cairo CG 22186)[21]

1.1. The top of the stela from Kom el-Hisn, in the Delta. (Greek Momenphis; Egyptian *Jm3w*). Capital of the third nome of Lower Egypt. At the top of the stela it follows the text written in hieroglyphs.

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[20]   The Canopus Decree is the most important of those Hellenistic synodal decrees. The document is the only one preserving all its three versions (Hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Greek) entirely. Plus, the existence of multiple versions of that stela allowed Egyptologists to trace parallels in the Demotic text. Hence, it was possible to provide a control to Champollion's decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, vindicating his efforts.

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

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1.2. 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)[22]. 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[23].
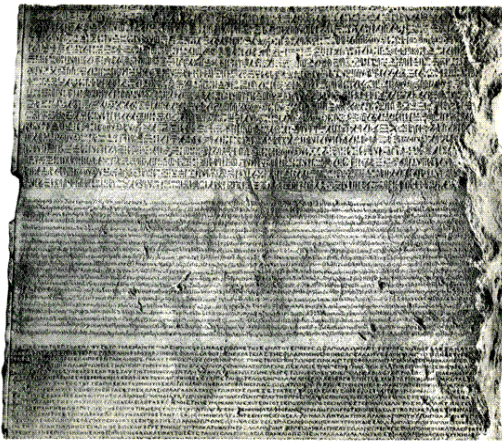
1.3. This stela shows Ptolemy III Evergetes I and his wife, queen Berenike II, portrayed as gods at a gathering with their ancestors and Egyptian gods.

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[22]   ROEDER, G. **Kulte und Orakel im alten Ägypten, Band II**. Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1960, p. 151.

[23]   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.

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[17]
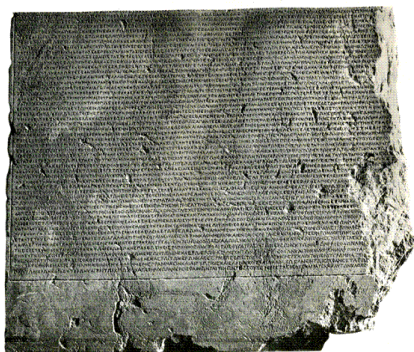
1.4. At the bottom of the stela follows the Greek version of the document.

The development of the ruler cult as a Hellenistic 'state religion' had the support and collaboration of Egyptian priests. The decrees [Fig. 3] they wrote always employed the Egyptian artistic canon thereby depicting the royal Macedonian family as a traditional pharaonic family.

Fig. 2
The Raphia Decree (Cairo CG 31088)[24]
Victorious Ptolemy IV Philopator I on horseback, wearing the Egyptian "double crown", plus Macedonian armour and spear.

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[24] CLARYSSE, W. **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 Diffusion, De Boccard, 2000, p. 47.

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The Decree of Raphia proclaimed that the pharaoh should be represented on horseback with Macedonian armory and spear, but in Egyptian artistic style:

> […] and the representation of the king that will be engraved on the stela on which [this] decree will be written should be made as … , wearing his panoply of war and crowned with the diadem which is appropriate to this, smiting a kneeling figure which the lance he holds, in accordance with what happened to the king who prevailed in battle […;] (lines 35-36)[25].

By portraying the Ptolemies as Egyptian pharaohs, the visual discourse suggests the ideal of continuity between the former pharaonic lineages and the current dynasty. On the other hand, the ambiguous body language of Ptolemy's representation reinforces a non-Egyptian way to make war. This non-canonical representation of Ptolemy as a Macedonian Companion, holding his spear on horseback is quite an artistic innovation, suggesting somehow that the current pharaoh was not so connected to the Egyptian tradition[26].

Nevertheless, the decrees had always a clear social and political function. They were tools of legitimacy for the royal family cult[27]. 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:

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[25] SIMPSON, R. S. **Demotic Grammar in the Ptolemaic Sacerdotal Decrees**. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1996, pp. 254-255.

[26] Despite such artistic liberty, Ptolemy IV is reproducing true pharaonic virtues in a traditional icon. By smiting a war captive, the pharaoh proclaims the triumph of Maat over the chaotic enemies of Egypt. So the deviant art is not necessarily a form of confronting the Macedonian legitimacy as king.

[27] 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: Clarendon Press, 1973; STANWICK, P. E. **Portraits of the Ptolemies – Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), See also: POLLITT, J. J. **Art in Hellenistic Age**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

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Fig. 3: A Table of Synodal Decrees[28]				
Ruler	**Modern Name**	**Synod Location, Date**	**Reason for the Synod**	**Royal Images Decreed**
Ptolemy III Evergetes I	*Canopus Decree*	Canopus, 238 B.C.	Royal jubilee and deification of a princess	Deified princess Berenike
Ptolemy IV Philopator I	*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 a 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[29] and several fiscal benefits and privileges 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 synodal decrees were produced in three languages, namely two Egyptian scripts, hieroglyphs and demotic, as well

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[28]   Table based on STANWICK, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[29]   One of the main demands of the Canopus Decree.

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as in Greek. The Greek name for the decrees, ψήφισμα, suggests some degree of symbolic submission on the part of the Egyptian priestly class[30].

On the other hand, the Egyptian term for these decrees, *wḏ*, "(to) order or (to) command," presupposes *a priori* that giving such orders was a pharaonic prerogative[31]. According to one example given by Valbelle[32], 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[33] […]'".

Overall we may say that the Egyptian priests usurped a traditional political means of communication from the pharaoh. Thus, in the Hellenistic age, it was no longer the pharaoh who issued the decrees and took responsibility for their contents but the priests. Priests assumed the authorship and responsibility for the production of the decrees. In this sense, we may say that – under the Egyptian perspective – Hellenistic pharaohs enjoyed less symbolic power than his dynastic counterparts.

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

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[30] "*Psiphisma*" is essentially 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, W. *op. cit.*, 2000, pp. 41-65.

[31] Thus, *wḏ-nswt* means: "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: Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 134, Fribourg, 1994, p. 101, and MORENZ, *op. cit.,* p. 172.

[32] VALBELLE, D. "Décrets égyptiens antérieurs aux Lagides". In: VALBELLE, D., and LECLANT, J. (Eds.). **Le Décret de Memphis**. Paris: CNRS, 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.

[33] GUNN, B. "The Stele of Apries at Mîtrahina". In: **Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte** 27, 1927, pp. 211-237. *Apud*: VALBELLE, D. *op. cit.*, p. 73.

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[21]

texts (e.g. formulae like "*psifisma*" and "With Good Fortune"), the decrees became acceptable by the Hellenistic Power. Thus, the *basileus* 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.

However, the Egyptian priests never embraced an institutional unity. There was no such thing as an Egyptian clergy in the Lagide Empire or before it. As Huss observes, the Ptolemaic kings established a free spiritual space throughout the *hieratikoi* and *hieroì nómoi* respectively. This can also be perceived in the fact that priests were self-governed[34]. 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. Those 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 consequently positioned throughout Egypt. Nonetheless, other factions of the Egyptian priesthood supported the many and long regional rebellions that rose during the Ptolemaic rule – including some led by native self-proclaimed rebel pharaohs[35]. The Ptolemies, for their part, sought to control Egyptian

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[34] HUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[35] 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 Ptolemy 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 Ptolemy 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 Ptolemy V. Even Alexandria faced a revolt, against the brothers Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VII Evergetes 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

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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.

Greek Cultural identity in Hellenistic Egypt

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*[36]. The first of these was Naucratis in the Delta, which had been created centuries before the arrival of the Macedonians. This was followed by Alexander's founding of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. Finally, Ptolemy I established Ptolemais[37] (or Ptolemais Hermiou[38]) in Upper Egypt. The Greek settlers – most of whom stemmed from the army – were sent to the countryside, or *chora,* where the

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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 Ptolemy X Alexander I. It was partially controlled by his successor Ptolemy 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: Peeters Publishers, 2004.

[36] The Greek 'colonization 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.

[37] 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 2**. Paris: PUF, 2002, pp. 401-460. For Egypt's case, see: MUELLER, K. **Settlements of the Ptolemies**. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006.

[38] For the epithet ἑρμείου , see Ptolemy, *Geography* (4.5.66). Cf.: BAGNAL, R.S. "Cults and Names of Ptolemais in Upper Egypt". In: **OLA**, Leuven, 85, 1998, pp. 1093-1101; p. 1093. Bagnall comments about Ptolemais as being "the metropolis of the Thinite nome". 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".

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[23]

majority of them received land in exchange for military services. On this cleruchy[39] Hölbl writes:

> 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[40].

Broadly speaking, we may say that Hellenization 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, by a common *nomos*[41]*.* What is more, the Hellenistic *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[42]. Hall conceives nation as a symbolic community that is marked by its power to generate a sense of identity and, consequently, solidarity and loyalty.

So, a crucial element to the understanding of identity in Hellenistic Egypt is *nomos.* It 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 nowadays call 'Hellenistic'. The concept of *nomos* is apparent in numerous ways ranging from culture in general, laws, traditions and human

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[39]   The Greek idea of cleruchy originated during the Classical period, however there was also an Egyptian similar precedent dated back to the New Kingdom. See: BAGNAL, R. S. "The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs", in: **BAmSocP**, New Haven, 21, 1984, pp. 7-20. For further analysis of land status in Hellenistic Egypt, and especially in the Fayum, see: CRAWFORD, D. J**. Kerkeosiris: an Egyptian village in the Ptolemaic Period**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

[40]   HÖLBL, *op. cit.,* p. 61.

[41]   *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*.

[42]   HALL, S. "Who needs 'identity'". In: HALL, S., and DU GAY, P. **Questions of Cultural Identity**. London: Sage, 1996, pp. 1-17.

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[24]

artefacts (e.g. polis, gymnasium, etc.) to the way people distributed gifts. *Nomos* originally meant the common law found in a society that exclusively followed ancient customs and established social norms[43]. *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[44]. In addition to these aspects, the term *nomos* was also used to refer to a pasture shared by virtue of customary law.

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 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 Greek *homogeneia*.

Everyday life in Hellenistic Egypt soon gave rise to intercultural marriages producing a succession of generations that were able to switch between

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[43] BENVENISTE, E. **Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes**. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969, p. 85.

[44] "Arbitrary" since it escapes from any kind of social normative code. The term implies the absence of any sort of law, criterion, order, etc.

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[25]

two cultural identities[45]. 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.
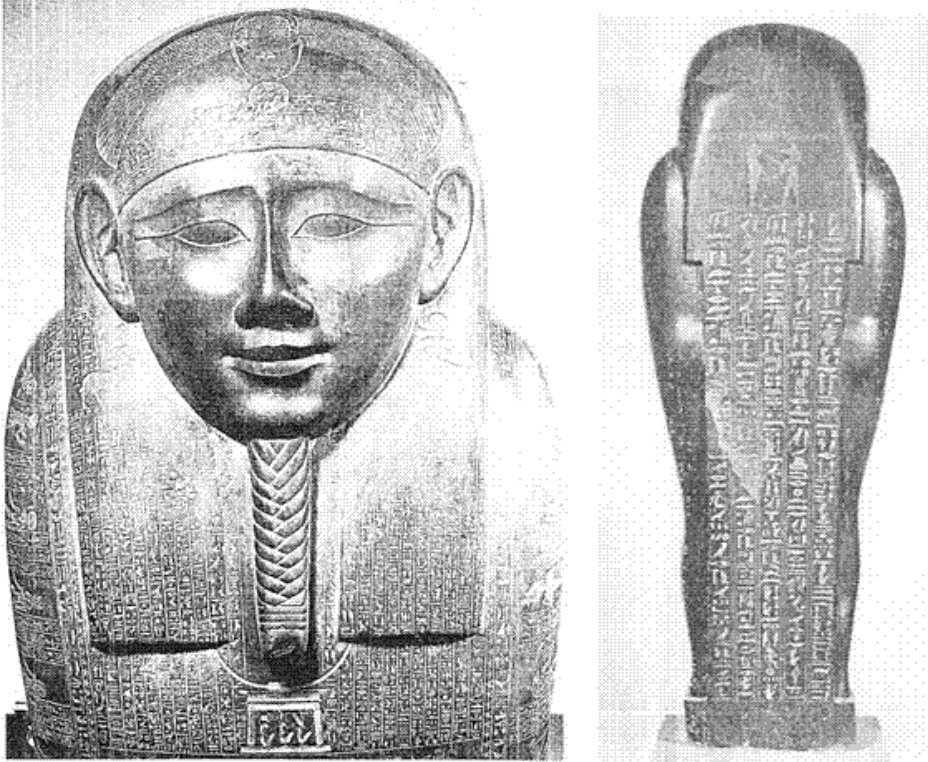

Fig. 4
Dioskourides and interculturality in Egypt
Louvre AE 008633[46]

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[45] 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, Ph. "Religion égyptienne et culture grecque: l'exemple de Dioskourídes". In: **CdE,** Brussels, 75, 2000, pp. 47-63. For other emblematic cases, see also: COULON, L. "Quand Amon parle à Platon (La statue Caire JE 38033) ". In: **RdE**, Paris, 52, 2001, pp. 85-125; and GERMEUR, I. "Les syngènes Aristonikos et la ville de Tp-bener", **RdE**, Paris, 51, 2000, pp. 69-78.

[46] See: COLLOMBERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 (left)-59 (right).

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[26]

The Egyptian bicultural elite actively fostered cultural mediation between the different symbolic universes. This can be deduced from the art produced at the time. A nice example thereof is the sarcophagus of Dioskourides [Fig. 4], who worked as a high-ranking official under Ptolemy IV.

His autobiography mentions his Egyptian mother, "Lady Imhotep", and lists his titles, which are given as Egyptian translations of his Greek offices[47]. In addition to this, Dioskourides adhered to traditional Egyptian funerary customs despite having led a public life as part of the Greek elite.

Religion as such seems to have served Egyptians as key identity marker. The Egyptian Negative Confession, i.e. spell 125 of the *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 thee; [...] I know the names of the 42 Gods who exist with thee in this broad hall of the two Truths, [...]. I have brought the 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 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 built a dam against flowing water. [...] I have not (failed to observe) the days of haunches of meat. [...]. I am pure. [...].
>
> [...] I have not sinned.
>
> [...] I have not robbed.

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47 For instance, the Greek title ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ was phonetically translated into *m ꜣrkysmṯpyrks*, while διοικητής was translated by the equivalent Egyptian title *snty*. See: COLLOMBERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-63.

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[27]

[…]

[…] I have not stolen the God's property.

[…] I have not profiteered.

[…]

[…] I have not quarrelled except in behalf of my property.

[…] I have not been deaf to words of truth[48].

In addition to this, Egyptian religion also functioned as an effective mechanism of social organisation. 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. piety, 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[49]. Furthermore, even 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 and individual matter.

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.

On the other hand, even those who had no extraordinary blood-ties with

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48 See: ALLEN, T. G. (transl.) **The Book of the Dead**. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1974, pp. 97-98.

49 For the social aspects of Maat see: ASSMANN, J. **Maat – Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im altem Ägypten**. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1990.

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[28]

Egyptians adopted Egyptian religious practices as part of their culture. There are far too many examples of Greek piety towards the Egyptian pantheon [Fig. 5]. The Greek-Egyptian royal family cult, and the Macedonian elites absorbing Egyptian religion are strong social precedents in order to authorise the rest of the people to adopt Egyptian gods without fearing any symbolic retaliation against their positive sense of "Greekness".
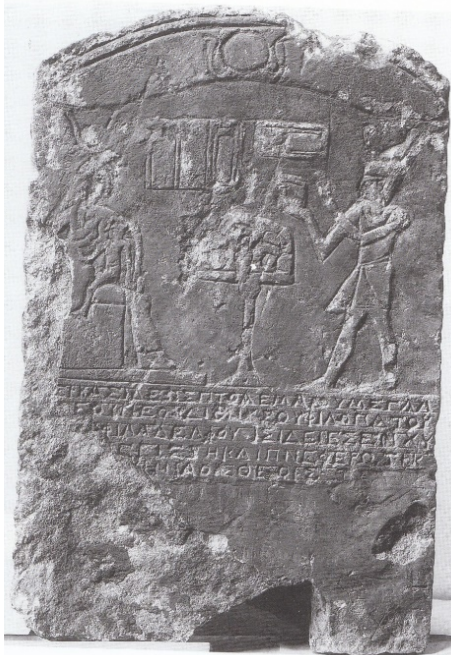
1. Ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου μεγάλ-
[ου] θεοῦ νέου Διονύσου Φιλοπάτορ-
[ος καὶ] Φιλαδέλφου Ἴσιδει Ἐσενχύ-
4. [βει θε]ᾷ μεγίστῃ καὶ Πνεφερώ[τ]ι κ-
[αι τοῖ]ς συννάοις θεοῖς.

1. Great King Ptolemy (XII), the greater
2. god, Neo Dionysos, Philopator
3. and Philadelphos. To Isis Esenchebis,
4. the greater goddess, and Pnepheros, and
5. all the gods who share the same temple.

Fig. 5
A Hellenistic private[50] *offering to Isis-Esenchebis*, 69-68 B.C., Medinet el-Fayum
Louvre E 20906[51]

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[50] The Fayum witnessed many land (*topoi, pecheis,* or even a couple of square meters, both in urban and rural areas) donations from Hellenes to Egyptian temples. For instance, in Kerkeosiris, ex-ephebes granted plots of land to the crocodile-god Souchos. Some kind of Hellenic ex-military association donated land to Isis-Enchebis in 68 B.C. It is possible that, previously, the same group may have added a *peribolos* to the temple. See: FISCHER-BOVET, C. **Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 348 *ff.*

[51] Cf. BERNAND, E. **Inscriptions Grecques d'Égypte et de Nubie au Musée du Louvre**. Paris: CNRS, 1992, pl. 16.

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[29]

Greek offerings combining Egyptian art and Greek language were freely addressed to the native gods. Simply put, it was considered 'Greek' to pursue Egyptian religion. This was possible because – as it was the case with Egyptian funerary practices – Egyptian customs did not interfere with the principle that being Greek was the positive 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[52]. The innovation of the Hellenistic discourse was the use of 'culture' as a tool of political legitimation.

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 elements were adopted by the Egyptian elites, as for instance Greek language, Philosophy, and technologic innovations.

A Greek-Egyptian nomos

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

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[52] 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*.

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[30]

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, the adoption of Egyptian practices posed no problems for their Greek discourse of identity. Outsiders, on the other hand, judged differently, as can be seen, for example in the Roman Republic's disdain for the Macedonian's Hellenism in the New Kingdoms, including Egypt[53].

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

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[53] See: Polybius V, 34 ; Strabo XVII, I, II ; Justin XXIX and Titus Livy XXXVIII, 17,11 – who relies on Polybious account, blames the weather, and declares *"Macedones, qui Alexandream in Aegypto, qui Seleuciam ac Babyloniam, quique alias sparsas per orbem terrarum colonias habent, in Syros Parthos Aegyptios degenerarunt".*

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[31]

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[54]. 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[55]". 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 - because they promoted a certain discourse – and unconsciously – because they naturally underwent a process of re-evaluating what they regarded as Greek and Non-Greek.

It was *nomos* that helped the Greeks decide if they were still being Greeks or not. The cultural bond linking the community served also as a criterion of defining their "master identity" and it was actively promoted. In fact, in the eyes of the Greeks, *nomos* and "master identity" were synonyms. In the case of Hellenistic Egypt, the "master identity" was the search for 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 other Hellenistic societies. It is clearly a product of Hellenistic Egypt, for it was developed right there, not in Rome, or by other Hellenistic civilisation. Overall, it is not possible to subsume the different cultural identities found in the various Hellenistic societies by one unique "master identity". A "master identity" always gained its power within a specific political reality. Social interactions between natives and foreigners naturally led to the mutual incorporation of initially alien cultural elements. The nature and the outlook of this incorporation differed from Hellenistic society to Hellenistic society.

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

[55]   HALL, S. "The Question of Cultural Identity". In: HALL, S., HELD, D., and MCGREW, T. (Eds.). **Modernity and its Futures.** Oxford: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 273-326.

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

The 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[56]. 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[57]. 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[58] has demonstrated how unpredictable the innovations resulting from daily interactions are. The "empiric risk[59]" leads to the production of new meanings that could go unnoticed. Hence, one of the most emblematic Hellenistic additions (or inventions) 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

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[56] HALL, *op. cit.*, 1992.

[57] BURKE, P. **Hibridismo Cultural**. São Leopoldo: Unisinos, 2003, p. 91.

[58] SAHLINS *op. cit.*. 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: University of Chicago Press, 1995. This was his response to the academic attacks from OBEYSEKERE, G. **The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

[59] SAHLINS, *op. cit.*, 1985.

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[33]

an entirely mistaken conception of Egyptian culture[60]. As Roberts similarly remarks:

> [N]o concession by Hellenism to oriental manners is more striking than this; it is noteworthy that in the *Gnomon* of the *Idios Logos* it was found necessary specifically to forbid such marriages to Romans[61].

The mentioned passage says: "23. It is not allowed to Romans get married to their sisters, neither their Aunts; (...)" (BGU V, I, 1210, 70).

Conclusion

After the conquest of Egypt by the Macedonians, the political relationship between Greeks and Egyptians started as a contrast between the dominant and dominated. Thus, the Hellenistic period could be classified as another moment of foreign domination, like many others in Egyptian History. As in other cases of foreign rule in Egypt, the Macedonian kings reproduced the traditional political relationship with the priestly elite. They assumed the symbolic category of pharaoh, and promoted a political relationship of power with the mediation of the native religious elite.

However, the Hellenistic relationship of power was also reproduced by a discourse of Greek cultural supremacy, which dragged culture into a political category. Since culture assumed a political value in the Hellenistic age, the reproduction of all traditional tensions between dominant and dominated factions carried a different societal impact. Due to these

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[60] ASSMANN, J. **Weisheit und Mysterium**. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000, p. 20. Assmann stress that in an failed attempt to produce some degree of archaism, the Hellenistic Egypt became victim of "Egyptomania".

[61] ROBERTS, C. H. "The Greek Papyri". In: HARRIS, J. R. Harris (Ed.). **The Legacy of Egypt**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 386. The collection of civil regulations created by Augustus, the *Gnomon* of the *Idios Logos,* aimed to control the social behaviour of Egypt's Hellenised citizens. Cf. SECKEL, E., and SCHULBART, W. **Der Gnomon des Idios Logos, BGU V, I, 1210.** Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung,1919; UXKULL-GYLLEBAND, W. G. **Der Gnomon des Idios Logos, BGU V, II**. Berlin: Weidmann, 1934.

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[34]

transformations on the handling of culture, the Hellenistic domination also created new perceptions and definitions of cultural identity.

Although Greeks and Egyptians could identify themselves as the positive antithesis of the other, as generations passed, such dichotomy would become even thinner as Greeks and Egyptians adopted nearly the same behaviours and customs in Egypt. Following the path of the entire Hellenistic kingdom, Hellenistic Egypt developed a Graeco-Egyptian mentality. This mentality could be roughly described as the combination of Greek and Egyptian cultural values.

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[35]