

CHAPTER 27

Religion in Society: Pharaonic

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1 History

The idiosyncratic features of Ancient Egyptian culture were its inclusiveness, adaptation to change, and apparently paradoxical conservatism. These characteristics combined to create one of the longest-running religions of humankind. Although it is often left out of discussions concerning the great religions of mankind, Ancient Egyptian religion lasted for well over three millennia and in fact it continues to engage many spiritually and intellectually. Changes did occur during Pharaonic times, but the fundamental themes and values that can be recognized as quintessentially Egyptian continued from the Predynastic Period through the Roman Period (see Frankfurter ch. 28) and survivals can even be found in Coptic Christianity. These included the emphasis on the need for continual maintenance of order over chaos – a balance known as *maat*, the belief in the numinous nature of the world, and the hope of living for eternity in the afterlife. These religious beliefs were embedded in Pharaonic society and affected life for all Egyptians, from the poorest to the divine king himself.

The earliest religious beliefs of the Egyptians are unclear, but it is clear that religion was firmly rooted in the culture and society even before the Pharaonic period. Male, female, and animal figurines made from stone, clay, wood, ivory, and even gold found in domestic and funerary have been variously interpreted by scholars as representations or representatives of deities or royalty, devices to encourage fertility, or votive offerings. The earliest ceremonial shrine found in the Predynastic site of Hierakonpolis incorporates most of the same architectural elements that would appear in later temples through the centuries. Although we cannot know for certain, it is likely that its main function was also the same as that of later temples – and that was not to serve as a place of worship for the general populace, but rather as a dwelling place for the god as well as the nexus for economic activity for the entire community (see Spencer ch. 14). The site has also revealed the remains of rituals

likely associated with deities such as Hathor that are well known from later times, as well as evidence for early mummification.

The concept of an afterlife epitomized by the Osirian cycle of myths became well-established in the Old Kingdom, as did the notion of the king being the son of the sun-god Re. Throughout Egyptian history, the Osirian cycle worked in tandem with the Solar cycle to provide models for the fundamental elements of Egyptian culture and religion (Quirke 1992). The myth of the death of Osiris at the hands of his brother Seth, and his subsequent mummification and resurrection with the help of his sister-wife Isis offered the hope to all Egyptians that they too could perform the same rituals and be resurrected. The journeys of Isis with Horus, the infant son that she had conceived with her newly-resurrected husband Osiris, and her constant fearless protection of him from the many dangers provided a model for the king's own protection of Egypt, as well as for healing in general. Once Horus as royal heir had grown, his battles against Seth over the rulership of Egypt and his final ascendancy over the deity of chaos provided an explanation for the nature of kingship. The cyclical nature of the world as well as the constant threat of chaos was elucidated by the repeated rising of the triumphant sun-god, his journey in the day to provide light and air to all people, his setting in the west during the night where he would wage battle with chaos, and his regular reappearance once again in the morning.

In the Old Kingdom through most of the Middle Kingdom, formal representations of worship featured the king in the role of worshipper to the god and intermediary for his people. The dead could also be approached through letters and perhaps rituals. While material evidence shows that gods were also approached, this was not expressed formally in texts. Aside from the Calendars of Days, there is also little evidence of divination through this time. However, it is clear that by the time of the New Kingdom, oracles were in use by royalty and commoners alike. From this time on, prayers also abound that provide written expression of direct appeals from individuals to the state gods in a format that had previously been restricted to formal royal texts. Many of these were directed to the god Amun as one's personal savior and guide, a champion of personal justice, mercy, and benefaction. The perception that the god was in charge of individual destiny perhaps also helps to explain the increased use of divination that was to become increasingly widespread. But personal worship and prayer to other deities also continued, and private shrines, figurines, votive offerings, amulets, spells, and hymns abound. Even during the Amarna period, although the pharaoh Akhenaten may have promoted the worship of the Aten and himself over other gods, material remains attest to the continuation of popular religious beliefs and practices directed to many of the same gods who had been the focus of appeals for centuries. The Ramesside Age gave rise to new forms of expressions of devotion to the gods and new methods of divination that continued. By the time of the Late Period the impact and reliance on the main gods for matters ranging from royal legitimation to micro-management of an individual's everyday safety was manifest in the abundance of popular cults.

Egyptian religion was not monolithic, and changes occurred in both practices and beliefs that are manifest both in the textual and non-textual archaeological remains. Nevertheless, the core principles remained steady through the millennia, and it is these which are the focus of the rest of this chapter.

2 Religion and the Relationships with the Divine

The inhabitants of the divine or supernatural world were an ever-present reality in the earthly lives of the Egyptians of Pharaonic Egypt; the entire cycle of life – from birth to eternal life in the afterlife – was numinous. A successful birth was attributed to a combination of the benign influence of the gods and the repulsion of hostile entities through the use of magic, or what the Egyptians called *heka*. This was a power that was available and accessible to all Egyptians as a gift from the gods to all of mankind in order to keep away the blow of events and to watch over them night and day, as described in the *Instructions of Merikare*. The gods themselves were imbued with innate *heka*, as was the king, while some priests were particularly skilled in its use. *Heka* itself was neutral – there was no concept of black or white magic – and it could be used for both positive and negative purposes. Indeed, *heka* and *maat* (order) can be considered as complementary forces underpinning the ordered functioning of the Egyptian cosmos. The key to the use of *heka* and the practice of religion was knowledge of the proper words, gestures, and materials necessary to achieve the desired aims. This knowledge could be acquired through various means. Some of the more complex and state related rituals were restricted to the use of selected priests and literate individuals who had access to texts stored probably in the scriptorium called the House of Life. For everyday applications, such as those associated with successful childbirth or emergency treatments for choking, the knowledge of proper practice would be transmitted orally and by example. Unfortunately, these leave little trace in the archaeological record. In either case, *heka* functioned in both the private and public spheres, and at both an individual and state level, within the context of religion. It also played a role in one of the most important functions of religion in Egyptian society, and that was to aid Egyptians in negotiating their relationships with the inhabitants of the afterlife.

Much of religious activity focused on negotiating relationships between humans and supernatural beings. Pharaonic Egyptians believed that there were basically three types of entities inhabiting the afterlife: the gods (*netjeru*), the justified dead (*akhu*), and the un-justified (*mwt*). At first glance there seem to be a virtually unlimited number of gods in Ancient Egypt, but this is in part an illusion created by the Egyptian practice of syncretism, combined with the practice of representing gods as theriomorphic entities. Specific animals represented specific attributes, and a deity could be represented with different forms to emphasize different facets of its personality. For example, the lioness represented rage and destructive power, and therefore when Ra sent out his daughter Hathor to destroy mankind, she took the form of the lioness-headed Sekhmet (meaning “the powerful female one”). Once pacified, the goddess could appear with the head of a cat as Bastet, emphasizing her gentle nurturing qualities. Both Bastet and Sekhmet also had cults of their own, and as appropriate either could be appealed to in times of need. Distinct deities could also be represented with the same iconography. A headdress of cow horns was used to stress the maternal aspect of a goddess, and was worn by both Hathor or Isis. Indeed, in the tomb of Nefertari, for example, both goddesses are depicted identically – they are distinguishable only by their names written in hieroglyphs before them.

The deities were not gods of the animals, so Hathor did not represent cows, nor were the animals themselves worshipped. An exception can be found in the worship of the Apis, Mnevis, and Bucchis bulls, each of whom was believed to embody the essence of the gods (respectively) Ptah and Osiris, Re and Min, and Montu, Re and Osiris. In each case a specific bull was recognized through its markings as the incarnation of the associated deity, and it lived out its life as the focus of cult worship even to the extent of being afforded full mummification rituals after its death. Nevertheless, it was not the bull itself that was worshipped but rather the essence of the god temporarily incarnating the bull as its avatar – bulls as a species were not accorded any special favors. Although certain goddesses could be represented in the form of cows, and the king himself was described as a bull, cattle were slaughtered for rituals and for food offerings. Indeed animal cults, and the widespread use of animals as votive offerings and messengers to the gods did not begin until the Late Period. During that time, the animals were likely considered as closer to the gods, and therefore animals associated with specific deities such as the cat (Bastet) or ibis (Thoth) were raised by the thousands not to be worshipped, but to be sacrificed and provided to petitioners as votives.

The use of animals (and occasionally objects) to emphasize attributes also allowed the Egyptians to visually represent deities who were the product of syncretism. Syncretism consists of the temporary merging of one god with another to emphasize either the attributes of both, or more commonly, a specific aspect of one of the gods. The fusion is often reflected in the imagery, as well as the name. The particular aspect of the deities that is thus formed can have its own character and even its own cult, but the merging is temporary – the gods also retain their own identity. For example, the god Amun (“Hidden One”), originally a minor god with little power, merged with Re, the sun-god who was the preeminent deity through all of Egypt’s history from the Fifth Dynasty onwards, and was known as “Amun-Re” representing the hidden power of the sun-god. Eventually, Amun-Re took on many of the roles previously held only by Ra and his priesthood became the most powerful institution of the middle Eighteenth Dynasty. Even Akhenaten took advantage of the benefits of syncretism, promoting not only the Aten (the visible sun disk), but Aten-Re.

The flexibility that the Egyptians evinced regarding their deities is readily apparent in their easy acceptance of those of a foreign origin. If a specific foreign deity had attributes or elements that resonated with the Egyptian worldview but for which there was not an exact Egyptian counterpart, that deity could be incorporated into the Egyptian pantheon and receive an Egyptian-style cult. An example can be found in the Canaanite-Phoenician god Reshep, who was associated with plague and lightning. Attested mostly from the time of Amenhotep II onward, he became particularly popular in the Ramesside village of Deir el-Medina. There, he became known as “lord of heaven” and “one who listens to prayers.” Another example of the inclusion of foreign deities to reflect changing times is the goddess Astarte represented as a naked woman riding on horseback (see Hoffmeier 2007 for an unusual representation of Reshep together with Astarte). Because horses were a late introduction to Egypt, there were no “native” deities associated with them. Astarte, the female counterpart of Baal (also welcome in Egypt and associated with the god Seth) became a popular deity in the New Kingdom, and appears in her unique form on stelae and ostraka.

In the Near East, however, she was also associated with the fierce goddess Anat who also appeared naked, often standing on lions (Stuckey 2003) – the iconography of the “Mistress of Animals.” The association between the deities is so close that it is often impossible to determine which goddess, Astarte, Anat, Hathor, or Baalat is meant to be represented in the absence of accompanying inscriptions. Identification is even more difficult and perhaps unwarranted in cosmopolitan cities and areas such as military garrisons and administrative units where there was intense interaction between peoples of differing cultures living in intimate proximity to each other.

The deities varied in the nature and extent of their interaction with mankind. A divine being such as Re was considered to be omnipresent and universal, a god who was acknowledged by all. Other deities were appealed to throughout Egypt for particular purposes, such as Hathor, to whom petitions for fertility were addressed. Others were more localized, such as Satet and her partner Anuket, who were mostly associated with Elephantine which was believed to be the source of the annual inundation of the Nile. Some, known only by their attributes (such as “Swallower of Shadows”), played a specific role only in the afterlife but had little to no impact on the society of the living. A number of the gods could be approached directly by all, but others could only be reached indirectly through the king, priests, or their avatars.

Besides the gods, the other supernatural entities included the justified dead and the damned. The justified dead were those who had been successfully reborn into the afterlife by having gone through the proper funerary rituals, and having the correct knowledge required to navigate through the perilous ways of the afterlife. The damned were those who had failed to have the proper funerary rituals carried out, who had been forgotten, or who had transgressed against the gods or the king in some way. The latter in particular were considered enemies of the king, Re, or Osiris, and were doomed to be punished and tortured for eternity or even to die the second death (which consisted of utter and irrevocable annihilation). These convictions that were transmitted through the religious and funerary rituals helped to regulate society by instilling in each individual a particular set of values, ethics, and ways of behavior according to one’s place in society. The ingrained belief in the afterlife served a critical function in maintaining social mores, for a failure to uphold *maat* relegated one to the side of the forces of chaos – a fate that most Egyptians wanted to avoid. For some of course, poverty or greed outweighed religious convictions and beliefs, as is well-attested by the physical and textual evidence for tomb-robbery.

3 Temple Interaction

Religion was also integrated into all facets of life – there was no artificial division between the secular and religious spheres. The king was also a god, while a temple functioned as a proclamation of his power, a home for the god(s) associated with it, and an economic institution. Even the space upon which a temple was built was sacred, while rituals provided further purification at every stage, including the burial of a foundation deposit. In the Middle Kingdom these deposits included food offerings, vessels, jewelery, building materials and model tools. The temple, with its

architectural grandeur and multitude of reliefs, was perhaps the most obvious physical manifestation of religious beliefs and practice. As is discussed later (see Spencer ch. 14), temples played a crucial role as centers of economic administration, storage, and distribution, as vehicles for the proclamation of the king's power and unique relationship with the gods, and as homes for the major gods with the priesthood in attendance upon them literally as servants of god (*hemu-netjer*). They were not generally the center of worship for the general populace, and access was likely restricted. The icon of the deity affiliated with the temple was housed deep inside, in an area only accessible to the high priest, while the people were allowed no deeper than the first forecourt. That distance between the gods and mankind was alleviated by the many festivals which afforded people an opportunity to view the deities and partake in rituals as well as to receive the largesse of the bounty of goods that had been offered to temples.

A list from the Middle Kingdom Fayum settlement of Lahun keeping track of the attendance of singers and dancers who were to work at the festivals provides us with details of some of the ones that were scheduled in one particular year. Although the list is incomplete, it includes no less than 33 festivals, which can be considered indicative of the types of festivals that would be celebrated by the inhabitants of settlements throughout Egypt. Some festivals appear only once, while others are repeated. Other texts mention festivals associated with the new moon, full moon, “*wag*” festival (a festival associated with Osiris and the dead), Thoth, Sobek, and Anubis (Luft 1992). Many of these could be considered as national festivals that were celebrated all over Egypt; others were regional, yet others seem to have been local to Lahun and would not be expected to be celebrated elsewhere. For example, the festival of “cloth of Khakheperre” (Senwosret II) who was the founder of the town of Lahun would have had less relevance for the rest of Egypt. Others were not related to any particular deity, but were rather seasonal or timely, such as festivals of the month, half-month, and year. Attendance lists from Deir el-Medina reveal that workmen were given time off to attend many of the festivals – some of which would last for days – as well as their own private group rituals. Presumably, they would be attended by the women, children, and elders as well. The festivals thus also fostered and strengthened the overall sense of community as a whole.

Particularly important national festivals that were held in a specific location would draw Egyptians with the means for travel from all over Egypt. The celebration of the Mysteries of Osiris that were held on an annual basis in Middle Kingdom Abydos is an example of these. Along with cemeteries, private chapels, and the temple to the god Osiris, an area was set aside for the votive dedications testifying to the involvement of Egyptians in the festivities. Participation guaranteed the participant an opportunity to witness the god and people flocked from different areas of Egypt to attend the event. To commemorate their visit, Egyptians would erect stelae with an image of the participant, hymns or offering formulae, or prayers, as well as often the names or images of spouses, children, and other relatives, co-workers and even the sculptor of the stele itself. Having one's name forever marked in stone at the sacred site offered one permanent access to the event, and a brush with divinity, even if one had not actually attended the event (Leprohon 1978).



Figure 27.1 New Year's flask in faience (EC733) 17 cm high. New Kingdom-Third Intermediate Period. These two-handled flasks, often called "pilgrim flasks," begin in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty. Courtesy the Egypt Centre, Swansea.

While for the most part the interior of major temples were not accessible for the populace, local chapels may have provided more opportunities for closer direct access to the divine. These have been found at small settlements such as the New Kingdom workmen's villages of Deir el-Medina and Amarna. Architecturally they incorporated the main features of the large temples, but they were built of mud-brick rather than stone. Many had benches in them; some at Deir el-Medina were seemingly reserved for specific individuals who recorded their names, while the benches in the sanctuary area of the Amarna chapels might have supported images. Some of the chapels also included ovens and there are signs that food was consumed there. That the chapels were a nexus for interaction between the living and supernatural beings is clear. In some cases these were gods, which at Deir el-Medina included Hathor, Ptah, Amun, and the agricultural goddess Renenutet, and at Amarna Amun, Isis, Shed, and Aten (Bomann 1991), while in other cases, the divine entities also included the revered dead.

The need to commune with the divine also led to the consecration of sacred spaces that were less formally constructed but that took advantage of natural environments that must have seemed particularly numinous. A prime example of this can be found on a barren desert hillside lying between Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Queens. A rocky outcropping there was carved out by the villagers to form a series

of rough chapels ideally suited for solitary communion with the divine. Their need for privacy combined with their desire for public expression of their piety led to them carving small stelae right in the rock itself – some on the outside of the chapels, some deep inside. Some of the hymns of praise here were dedicated to the god Ptah, the patron of craftsmen. Ptah was also popular in Memphis, where indeed he was the main god, but as many of the villagers of Deir el-Medina worked as craftsmen, it is no surprise that he enjoyed immense popularity there as well.

Many were directed to the deity Meretseger, “Lover of Silence,” a goddess who was often either wholly or partially represented as a snake. The multivalent nature of Egyptian deities was exemplified by Meretseger as she shared her snake iconography with Renenutet, a goddess of the harvest and grain, and on some stelae both deities were worshipped in tandem as Meretseger-Renenutet. Meretseger was a more local goddess than Ptah, and she was closely associated with the harsh bleak landscape, as indicated by one of her epithets was “Mistress of the Peak.” In this guise she was known to be swift in retaliating against transgressors who were stricken with anguish or blindness. The readers of the stela of a man named Neferabu are also warned that “she strikes with the strike of a fierce lion when she is after the one who transgresses against her” (McDowell 1999). In the typical Egyptian fashion of not emphasizing one’s own negative or anti-social conduct, the nature of the transgressions was not revealed on the stelae, but instead the texts focused on extolling her virtue and mercy for healing those afflicted. Modern visitors to the site have noted the distinct resemblance that the peak has to the head of a lioness, and if it had the same shape 4000 years ago, one can readily see why this particular barren silent location in the desert was selected as the area to erect votive stelae to the goddess who loved silence, and whose wrath was like that of a lioness when her peace was disturbed.

Active appeals to the gods through ritual and prayer took place in a variety of environments. At the west end of the Valley of the Queens (called by the Egyptians the “*ta set neferw*” “Place of the Beautiful Ones”) there was a natural grotto down which the torrential rain water would have poured during rare cloudbursts and storms (Vernus 2000; Leblanc 1989). A retaining wall was built there in the Ramesside period to protect the tombs from flooding, but it would also have acted as dam to collect water into a pool. The grotto, with its 22 m-high ceiling of stone and waters cascading via two levels into a natural pool would have been imbued with sanctity and resonated with divine power. Its strategic location at the far west end of the valley meant that it would have served as a natural boundary, not only on the physical earthly level as the end of the landscape of the valley, but also as a boundary between the valley as a liminal area that housed the tombs of the queens and princes, and the *Duat*, the divine landscape that was also called the Beautiful West and was inaccessible to mortals. In particular, the cascade grotto was linked to the Lady of the West, the goddess Hathor who is represented there in graffiti. This is likely the area that is described by the scribe, Qenherkhopshef the Younger, who recounts a series of five sacred rituals he performed for the goddess Hathor that included walking in the Valley of the Queens, ritual breakage (possibly of red pots), watering of reeds and lilies, spending the night in the shadow of the goddess herself within the natural sanctuary, and finally erecting stelae near Deir el-Bahri to exalt her magnificence (Szpakowska 2003a; Vernus 2000).

The force of personal piety was strong and recent research is just beginning to give us an idea of the extent of the freedom which even the non-elite had to express and make manifest the depth of their devotion to a deity outside of the carefully controlled temple environment. One dramatic example is the trove of over 500 votive stelae and about 50 figurines that were found in the Salakhana tomb at Asyut, in Middle Egypt (DuQuesne 2007a; 2007b). The tomb itself was the final resting place of the nomarch Djefaihap III who lived during the Middle Kingdom, but the rock-cut tomb clearly garnered a hallowed reputation over time, for the objects found within it date from the New Kingdom to Third Intermediate Period. Made of limestone, sandstone, alabaster, and (unusually for stelae) clay, the stelae are dedicated primarily to the gods Wepwawet and Anubis, whose cult was prominent in that area from the time of the Middle Kingdom. Other gods such as Hathor of Medjed (the consort of Wepwawet), Amun-Re, Osiris-Khentimentiu, Reshep, Ptah, Taweret, Sobek, Hathor, Harsaphes, and Re-Harakhty (DuQuesne 2007a: 468) also appear. While many of the stelae are inscribed with divine epithets of the dedicatee, the name of the donor, hymns, prayers, and the offering formula, others have no inscriptions at all. The titles that do appear reflect class levels spanning the lowly to the elite – a spectrum that is also supported by the range in quality, style, and material. While an alabaster stela was certainly commissioned by a more wealthy individual, there are many examples of uninscribed ones made of clay that would have been readily available even to the poorer members of society. In their very simplicity, however, these stelae reveal a deep piety and reverence for the gods and confirm that neither the desire to interact with the divine nor access to the gods was restricted to the literate or the wealthy. Both men and women are represented, including women who seem to have no affiliation to any man, and can be considered to have acted independently. Finds such as these testify to the impact of religion on Egyptians of all walks of life and regions, regardless of gender or class.

Some of the clay stelae had holes in the top, suggesting that they were meant to be hung either in the tomb, or perhaps in a household shrine. Perhaps the most common sacred spaces were those found in the everyday dwelling places of the Egyptians. Homes had a practical use of course, but their very construction also incorporated religious beliefs and elements that activated *heka*. Front doors, which act as barriers between the safe interior space and the unpredictable outside world, were often painted red – a color that represented not only the potent energy of the sun, but had apotropaic potential as well, and thus helped to repel uninvited entities whether they were earthly creatures such as humans or snakes, or demons crossing over from the other world. Even furniture and household items such as headrests, legs of beds or chairs, chests, mirrors, spoons, could be decorated with apotropaic or protective divine entities. Towns such as Amarna, Deir el-Medina, Elephantine, Lahun, and Tell el-Daba reveal that religious emplacements, furnishings, libation basins and reliefs were a part of many homes, whether they were elite estates or simple workers' homes (Stevens 2006). Stepped platforms that have been interpreted as altars made of stone and mud-brick were integrated as architectural features in some of the larger homes. Across the range of homes small shrines or niches have been found embedded in walls or columns.

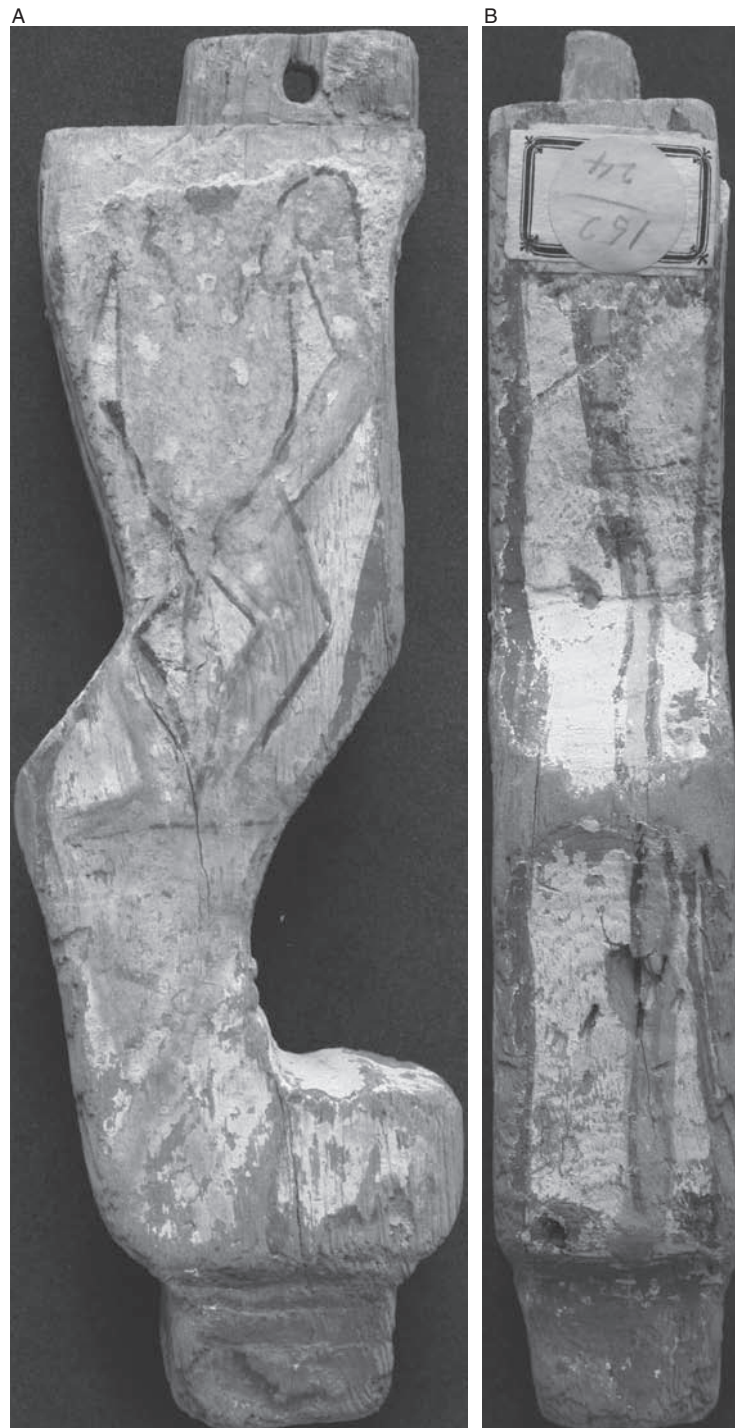


Figure 27.2a and b Decorated leg from a bed with Bes, painted blue (a), and snakes (b), probably from Akhmim. Bes appears to be standing on a *sa*-sign. Household objects were often designed with reference to religious beliefs appropriate to their function. It is possible that the leg is part of a “woman’s bed” upon which a woman would have given birth and/or rested shortly after birth (W2052a). Courtesy the Egypt Centre, Swansea.

Nevertheless, whether large or small, it is clear that the niches, shrines, and altars would have held stelae, ancestor busts, or figurines that were the focus of domestic worship and prayer. This is confirmed by a household shrine in Askut which was found in situ with its accompanying stela still intact (Smith 2003). That particular shrine contained a funerary stela, suggesting that rituals for the dead could be carried out in the home and were not exclusive to cemeteries. The presence of ancestor busts and *akh iqr en Re* stelae within the homes confirm that even after the dead were buried, they were remembered and revered. That these icons were the focus of formal rituals is also confirmed by the discovery of a small stela depicting a woman, the Lady of the Estate, offering libations to an ancestor bust. The figures and stelae were not hidden, but would be exposed and visible, and there is no reason to suggest that all members of the family – men, women, children, and the elderly would not have participated in the rites. The objects may have acted as a conduit for communication with recently deceased relatives and community figures. In the New Kingdom, clay and limestone figurines of females in association with beds (type 6, according to Pinch 1993, 207–9; 218) may also have served as foci for remembering the dead. Some of the figurines were found attached to a model bed, some were represented with a child, and some had separate beds, but most are depicted as nude and wearing heavy wigs, often with a cone on top. These have been found mostly in homes, though some also in tombs (rarely in chapels or temples) and it may be that these were meant to commemorate the loss of a woman (and perhaps her child) during childbirth.

A wide range of deities were represented in the form of figurines or depicted and named on household stela including deities that also enjoyed cults on a larger scale such as Amun, Ptah, Hathor, Thoth, and Min, deities whose presence was rare in the temple sphere such as Bes, Taweret, Meretseger, Shed, and Renenutet, as well as deities whose origins lay outside of Egypt such as Reshep, Qadesh, and Astarte. Other figures may have been generic or polyvalent. A particular class of stelae featured representations of ears, suggesting that the petitioner hoped that his prayer would be heard. Some were dedicated to specific deities, but others featured ears only and could have been used to amplify petitions to any deity. Certain types of female figurines may also have been meant to represent goddesses. Throughout the Ancient Near East, figures are found of a naked goddess who may be, but is not necessarily, associated with fertility – the warrior goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qadesh, and Baalat, are also depicted this way. As in the rest of the Near East, it is likely that the Egyptian female figurines served a multitude of purposes from being used to pray for or in gratitude for a successful birth, as icons of the female dead, or as a goddess. Male figurines and phalluses have also been found, as well as ones of animals such as rams, donkeys, canines, birds, and hippopotami. A variety of snake figurines remain, some at the bottom of bowls that may have been filled with oil and used for divination, some freestanding with their own offering stands attached, others were simple coils of clay. Their use probably varied according to type, location, and time (Szpakowska 2003b). Some could have been presented as votive offerings, some could have been used in conjunction with apotropaic spells, while others may have formed a decorative and sacred frieze above a shrine. They were likely associated with any number of goddesses who could be represented in serpent form such as Meretseger, Renenutet, Wadjet, Neith, or Weret-Hekau. Divine figures also appeared

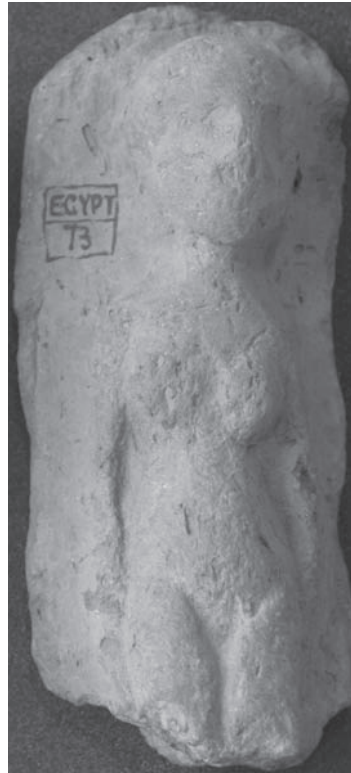


Figure 27.3 Red pottery figurine of a nude female (EC446). Similar to examples from Kom Rabia. Clay figures of women lying on beds have been found in domestic, temple, and grave sites. They may have been used to ensure fertility. Courtesy Egypt Centre, Swansea.

in homes as depictions on ostraka and amulets. Whether they took the form of large statues or tiny amulets, the presence of these objects reflects the intensity and integration of religion in all areas of life in Pharaonic Egypt.

All of these religious artefacts, ranging from chapels to amulets, were also embedded in life at Egypt's borders. Military installations, fortified centers, and administrative complexes from Egypt's southern outposts in Nubia to those running along the Mediterranean from Libya up the Levantine Coast include within their enclosure walls clear signs of the integration of religious beliefs and practices (Szpakowska forthcoming). Some of these take the form of temples dedicated by the Pharaoh, but cult emplacements as well as small religious artefacts such as figurines of clay and wood, remarkably similar to those found in settlements, are also found. These include ubiquitous clay balls, figurines shaped into the form of male and female humans, as well as animals such as ducks, rams and snakes, as well as artefacts associated with domestic life such as spinning bowls, whorls, pendants and scarabs. While some seem to have been transported from Egypt, others were clearly fashioned abroad. An example of these are the clay cobra figurines found at Beth Shan, whose shape combines that of the figures found in Egypt with the iconography prevalent in the local



Figure 27.4 New Kingdom limestone stela from Deir el-Medina depicting a woman presenting offerings to Thoth as a baboon (W1326). Courtesy the Egypt Centre, Swansea.

goddess cults. This reflects not only an integration of different methods of technology, but also the intermingling of Egyptian beliefs with those of the local region to create a new icon that could be readily embraced by both cultures. It seems that while religious beliefs were deeply embedded in their culture and self-identity, to the extent that the Egyptians brought them with them and continued to engage in the same religious practices associated with their native homes, the syncretistic nature of Egyptian religion allowed for its peaceful co-existence with foreign faiths.

4 Communication with the Divine

Supernatural beings were appealed to for a variety of reasons in Ancient Egypt, with the most obvious perhaps being for healing, fertility, and to gain knowledge. For the most part, help in these realms was sought from deities, but especially in the earliest eras of Egypt's history, help was sought from the dead as well. Through the Middle Kingdom, the living could try to contact dead relatives and friends by writing them letters and leaving them in or near the tomb. Although the letters could be written on papyrus, they were often written on pottery vessels, and left in the tombs. The very

fact that the Egyptians left these letters at all reveals their belief in the continuation of ordinary life in the next world, and the possibility of direct communication with the dead. Some of these letters, particularly the earliest ones, were written on bowls or vases, that may have originally been filled with offerings for the deceased, both out of respect and as further encouragement for the dead to help the living. The letters usually consisted of requests to the dead for personal favors either in this world – such as the settling of household quarrels, or property disputes, or the defending of an inheritance, or perhaps the birth of a healthy child – or direct intercessions on the behalf of the living, within the afterlife itself.

Healing could also be requested from the dead, but it was the power of the gods that was called upon for most of Pharaonic history. Religious and medical practice were fully integrated, with myths playing a major role and acting as a model for successful cures. Spells were composed that beseeched various powerful deities such as Re, Atum, Thoth, Sekhmet, even the entire Ennead, to come to the aid of the patient. In many spells, Isis was specifically named as the healer while the patient played the role of her child Horus. The actual gender of the healer and patient were irrelevant – what was important was that the treatment was set within the mythical plane and that those involved temporarily embodied deities in order to re-enact those mythic episodes wherein the goddess successfully protected her young divine son from assaults and cured his ailments and injuries.

The spells could likewise be successfully employed as preventive defences or as counter-agents against the adverse effects of disease, animal assaults, sickness, disorders of the stomach, eyes, and teeth, burns, splinters, aches and pains, as well as injuries caused by accidental trauma or inter-personal violence. Many of the disorders, diseases, and sicknesses were blamed on aggressive supernatural beings. While the invaders mentioned in the spells shared a common source as they all resided in the afterlife, their specific roles and attributes varied. The ones that were labeled as enemies (*kheftju*), or adversaries (*djay*) – those that represented the enemies of the great gods Osiris and Re – or those who were simply referred to as the host of dead (*mutu*), were those who had threatened or transgressed against the gods, and for whom the proper rituals were not carried out. They were therefore doomed to eternal punishment and unrest – predisposed to intimidate the living in whatever way they could. But the spells also mention the *akhw*, the “transfigured dead.” The irony is that a so-called demon could include an Egyptian who had worked very hard to become an *akh*, one of the blessed dead who were not only allowed unrestrained travel throughout the many regions of the afterlife, but also free passage into the land of the living. It seems that these *akhu* who could appear as benevolent ghosts, also had the power and the will to potentially harm the living in the same manner as the generic enemies and unjustified dead. These pugnacious beings, who inhabited the farworld, like the gods, were able to step through the permeable membrane between the worlds and attack the living. Their presence could manifest itself in the form of bodily pains and illnesses, or even mental anguish such as nightmares. This is the flip side of a belief in the numinous, of living in constant potential contact with the divine. While one could petition the gods and plead for their attention and intervention, the hostile dead and malignant entities were equally close at hand.

Most of the Egyptian spells also included a physical component, that needed to be produced and applied in order for the healing to be effective. Many concoctions used

to repel the malignant intruder worked because the affect of the ingredients on the demonic entity was opposite to the one it would have had on the living. The damned were believed to live a life reversed in the afterlife – even their posture was described as being backwards. Thus a common food such as onions, which the Egyptians recognized as being beneficial to the living, were harmful to the damned, while honey, sweet and healing for the righteous, was bitter for the demons. This again reflects the core Egyptian belief in the concept of *maat* – that there was a fundamental and correct order in the world that needed to be properly maintained. But *isfet* “wrongness,” the antithesis of *maat*, was also a constant threat and had to be kept at bay, often by applying the theory that what was good for the upright citizen would be harmful to those who were “un-*maat*.”

Much of the healing was the responsibility of priests, many of whom concurrently bore titles marking them not only as priests, but also as physicians, and specialists in *heka*, thus reflecting the melding of religion and medicine that was a hallmark of Egyptian treatments. Indeed, certain treatments seem to have been restricted only to literate priests. Not only were some individual incantations explicitly specified as inaccessible to commoners, but some of the major compositions (such as Papyrus Edwin Smith and Papyrus Ebers) were introduced by “beginning of the secret knowledge of a physician,” to emphasize the carefully regulated nature of the knowledge contained therein. Only those who were literate and who had sanctioned access to copies of the papyri, likely housed in the House of Life, were in theory able to successfully treat the ailments and injuries that these texts catalogued.

In everyday life, however, many more individuals must have practiced the art and science of medicine. Birth attendants and wet-nurses must have played a significant role at the least in the recognition of pediatric ailments. Although gynecological issues appear in numerous documents, the actual process of giving birth was likely considered a natural event – part of the ordered world as opposed to the ailments and diseases that stemmed from the chaotic realm. It was not necessary, therefore, to record any instructions. Unless there were serious complications, it is unlikely that doctors were needed, and experienced midwives may have been equipped to deal with many of the unforeseen problems. Other remedies would have required swift and immediate implementation if they were to be effective at all. For example, a person choking on a fish bone would not have had time to find a sanctioned doctor or priest for help. At least two spells have survived that provide the remedy that included reciting a short religious invocation and swallowing a piece of cake to force the bone down the throat (Borghouts 1978: 23). That the appropriate treatment for such a common emergency was transmitted in writing does not necessarily imply that its use was restricted only to the literate few. On the contrary, it is probable that a remedy such as this should be considered a part of that nebulous assortment of lore that was known by many, and that is often referred to as folk medicine. This kind of knowledge derives from a variety of sources and the patterns of transmission are often impossible to detect. In Ancient Egypt, with the exception of certain incantations that were specifically described as being classified information, there are few indications that physicians treated their patients in utmost secrecy. In most cases there would have been others who would have seen and heard the process, and possibly kept it in mind for the future. In other cases, simple trial and error would have been the source. In all of these cases,

whether a priest was used as an intermediary, or whether the gods were appealed to directly, both the source of the ill-health and the cure were attributed to beings who inhabited the supernatural realm, but whose presence was clearly felt in the land of the living.

The gods were also responsible for the fertility of the land of Egypt and its people. Part of the duties of the king was to carry out rituals whose purpose was to ensure proper levels of inundation and continued fecundity of the earth, and part of the role of the temple and its priesthood was to administer the storage and redistribution of the resulting grain to the people of Egypt. The task of ensuring personal fertility, however, fell to all individuals. In any society with a high infant and maternal mortality rate, the divine world is appealed to in an effort to maximize the chances of not only successful conception, but also a safe pregnancy that leads to the birth of a healthy child. Newborns were especially vulnerable to any number of natural risks and parents or care-givers would have taken advantage of every means possible to ensure the infant's survival into childhood. These means included petitions to deities particularly associated with fertility such as the ithyphallic Min, the hippopotamus goddess Taweret, and especially the goddess Hathor, whose was represented with the features of a cow to emphasize her maternal qualities.

Although Egyptians were well aware that the physical act of copulation was required for impregnation, it was believed that appeals to the gods could help the odds of successful conception. These often took the form of votive offerings in the form of figurines of naked women, phalli, and animals such as cows and cats, as well as beads and jewelery (especially of turquoise, the stone most associated with Hathor), amulets, textiles and stelae. These have been found in small chapels and sacred shrines throughout Egypt, as well as in domestic contexts, and would have been offered either as supplications for or in gratitude for successful conception.

Spells were composed specifically for the purpose of protecting mothers and their infants from the same demonic forces that caused other ailments, but artefacts could also be used. It is likely that vulnerable individuals would have been surrounded by carved hippopotamus tusks (sometimes called "wands" or "knives") incised with depictions of apotropaic deities, ivory rods carved with the forms of turtles, frogs, lions and other animals associated with those deities responsible for primeval creation according to various cosmogonies. Expectant mothers would give birth while squatting on bricks made of mud and decorated with deities such as Hathor, and the same apotropaic and protective deities that appeared on tusks and rods. That these supernatural beings could also be used to protect individuals other than infants is suggested by their appearance on objects such as headrests, (sleepers were in a particularly vulnerable state), as well as small cups with pouring spouts that could have been used for the feeding of infants, the aged, and the ill.

5 Divination

Deities could also provide information to individuals regarding issues such as healing, fertility, increasing wealth, promotions in terms of social status, and even the settling of disputes via divinatory techniques. The evidence for divination is firmly attested from the New Kingdom onwards, and by the Late Period a wide range was used

(von Leiven 1999). The most common method of obtaining knowledge from divine beings was through the use of oracles. Powerful Pharaohs, such as Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, publicly proclaimed the guidance they were given by the main state deity through oracles, but other members of society from the elite to workers were afforded the same opportunity, most commonly during festivals. While the statue of a major divinity, such as Amun, was usually housed deep within the sanctuary of the temple, during festivals the icon would be placed with a shrine and carried on a barque by priests through the temple and outside along the prescribed processional route. For many, this would have been their only chance to come close to the usually inaccessible god, and they made the most of the opportunity. Questions related to a wide assortment of concerns, ranging from whether the dreams that the sleeper will have will be good ones, to ones related to the settling of legal disputes, were written on pottery ostraka, and presented to the deity. One method for answering the question seems to have been by the priests moving the icon forwards for “yes,” or backwards for “no.”

By the Third Intermediate Period, “oracular decrees” were also worn in cylinders around the neck as amulets (Edwards 1960). The content of the decrees was a divine promise to keep the owner safe from a variety of problems and difficulties which could affect the living. These included a variety of diseases and health problems, dangers which could be met both while travelling and on a daily basis, both foreign and domestic practitioners of *heka*, the wrath of other gods, hostile demons and malignant entities, and dreams. Designed for the use of both male and female children, the papyri were prepared in advance with a space left blank ready for insertion of the name of the deities who would ultimately be responsible for the oracle. The parents or guardian of the child would take the papyrus to the shrine of the preferred deities who would convey the assurances to an intermediary, and the names of those deities would be inserted into the appropriate sections of the papyrus. The deities most often consulted included the Theban triad of Mut, Khonsu, and Amun, but the deities Montu-Re, Thoth, Isis and Horus were also consulted. The papyrus would be further personalized by including the child’s name and that of at least one parent (often the mother).

A variety of other divinatory practices are attested by textual remains. A Ramesside compendium of dreams and their interpretations (Gardiner 1935; Szpakowska 2003a), as well as a papyrus now thought to date to the Saite period provide evidence for the practice of oneiromancy (Quack 2006), while fragments of a papyrus in the Turin museum testify to the practice of lecanomancy (divination based on the interpretation of shapes caused by oil in bowls of water, see Demichelis 2003). Recent exegesis of demotic texts reveals that the Egyptians also practiced divination through animal omens, throwing dice, and casting lots (Quack 2006). Calendars of days were used as a sort of almanac to predict the auspiciousness of a particular day (*hemerology*). The earliest known calendar of this kind was found in Middle Kingdom Lahun. This hieratic papyrus features a neat vertical column consisting of the word “day,” followed by either the word good (*nefer*) in black, or the word bad (*dju*) in red (UC32192 in Collier and Quirke 2004: 26-7). Three of the days are listed as both good and bad. It is an unfinished papyrus, and even the other side remains blank. However, the large spaces left on either side of the column indicates that it would

have been filled in with more details. Later versions inform us that the formulas would have read something like, Day 1: Favorable today, till the coming forth of the moon. Day 4: Bad. Do not offer to your god today (Troy 1989). The question remains as to who would have used these. These are mostly found in temple contexts, suggesting that rather than having been consulted by the general populace, their use might have been restricted to that of priests (Troy 1989). Literate priests may also have been responsible for oneiromancy and lecanomancy, as well as for the other divinatory practices that were in use in the Late Period such as the interpretation of animal omens (Quack 2006).

6 Religion and Death

Much of our knowledge of Egyptian religion derives from physical and textual evidence from the mortuary sphere. The belief in some sort of afterlife is readily apparent already in the Predynastic cemeteries where individuals from all walks of life were placed consistently in a particular position and direction within their graves, often accompanied by carefully arranged goods such as pottery or figurines. But just as there were differences in religious practices based on rank, gender, and wealth so too mortuary practices varied greatly in terms of tomb structure, preparation of the body, rituals, grave goods, and inclusion of texts. Generally speaking however, the goal was to enjoy eternal life in the *Duat*, the afterlife inhabited by the gods and the dead. The structures were therefore built to last forever and placed in the dry desert environment, allowing far greater preservation of their contents than the architecture of daily life. Much of our knowledge of daily Egyptian religion therefore stems from the representations on tomb walls that feature representations of many of the deities, as well as festivals and offering rituals.

Aside from spells and hymns, mortuary compositions are our greatest source for uncovering Egyptian myths. Narrative mythology in the Pharaonic period was rare, and thus our understanding is based on piecing together single episodes or scenes from a variety of sources. The Pyramid Texts, written on the interior walls of pyramids, provided the king with the words and knowledge he would use in order to become one with the gods. In contrast to the sky-oriented Pyramid Texts, the texts written on First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom elite coffins reflect a chthonic dimension to the afterlife. Available for both men and women, these texts reflect a more universal yet more difficult access to previously restricted realms. Many of the Pyramid and Coffin Texts continued to be used in the New Kingdom as sections of the Book of the Dead. This collection of compositions was initially geared towards the non-royal dead, and its popularity is attested by its continued use through the Roman Period.

Compositions on the walls of tombs of the New Kingdom pharaohs provide a glimpse of the afterlife from a completely different point of view – that of the sun-god as he journeyed through the hours of the night. As in all aspects of life in Ancient Egypt, here maintenance of order was of primary concern, with the focus of many of the compositions being the victory of the sun-god (Re) over the serpent of chaos

(Apep). It was believed that this was re-enacted each and every night after the sun-god sank in the west with his entourage of other gods and the king. As the god passed through, the dead would awaken and acclaim in joy at being granted the vision of the sun god. They were provided by the god with food, clothing, and the ability to use their senses, and in return they would join the battle against his enemies. At the crux of the night, the aged Re (represented as an old ram) merged with Osiris, the god of the dead, in a perfect conjunction – a syncretism that sparked the rebirth of the sun-god in a rejuvenated youthful state, represented now as the scarab beetle. Through the use of *heka* and knowledge Re succeeded in suppressing the constant movement of Apep every night, and to emerge triumphantly every dawn in a revitalized state. This constant yet cyclical maintenance of *maat* was central to Egyptian religious ideology, and re-enacted on another scale not only by the pharaoh who was responsible for maintaining order in the Egyptian empire, but also by all Egyptians within the sphere of their own lives, no matter how humble.

FURTHER READING

The literature on Ancient Egyptian religion is enormous. The following works are particularly recommended to build on issues raised in this discussion: Allen 1989; Assmann 2001; Clarysse, Schoors, and Willems 1998; Hornung 1992, 1996; Pinch 1994, 2004; Quirke 1992; Ritner 1993; Stevens 2006; Szpakowska 2006; and Wilkinson 2003.

CHAPTER 28

Religion in Society: Graeco-Roman

David Frankfurter

1 Introduction

There is a display-case somewhere towards the end of every museum's Egyptian collection in which ten or twenty terracotta figurines are displayed. Many are nude or display genitalia; their crudely sculpted faces grimace, while their bodies are mottled with the remains of red and white paint. These are the images of the gods that Egyptians of the Graeco-Roman Period bought at temple festivals and kept in their houses and buried with their dead: Isis, voluptuous as Aphrodite or demurely robed as Demeter; Horus as Harpocrates, a pudgy infant with a pot or a goose at his side; Bes, a grimacing dwarf with a sword or a torch; the proudly bearded bust of Sarapis. Museum-goers generally have little idea what to do with these popular interpretations of the great gods, the same ones that in prior galleries had been displayed in monumental scale on thrones or reliefs. And yet each terracotta, studied carefully, reveals the earnest engagement of a local artisan in the meaning and function of the temple gods for everyday life. What is more, each reveals the multiple uses to which *Hellenistic* style – the approach to the human figure inherited from Greek and Roman tradition – was put in every workshop to draw out the meanings of gods.

Let us take three examples: the child Harpocrates stands, nude, holding a pot, his finger to his mouth, his hair shaved but for a sidelock. If the finger position and sidelock were traditional features in the iconography of the child, visible in relief on most temples that celebrated child gods, here his body stands naturally, casually, and most importantly in a frontal position. Hellenistic style contributes an infantile fleshiness to his body and a sexuality, signified in the clearly visible penis between his legs. He is child and masculinity in combination. He is also, apparently, celebration, for the pot holds something sweet and delicious – a festival food that children enjoy at the *Harpokrateia* each year? The figure beckons the viewer to taste and participate, to behold and enjoy the many aspects and powers of his body. He is Harpocrates the child sprung off the temple relief, and he is a real child in the round;

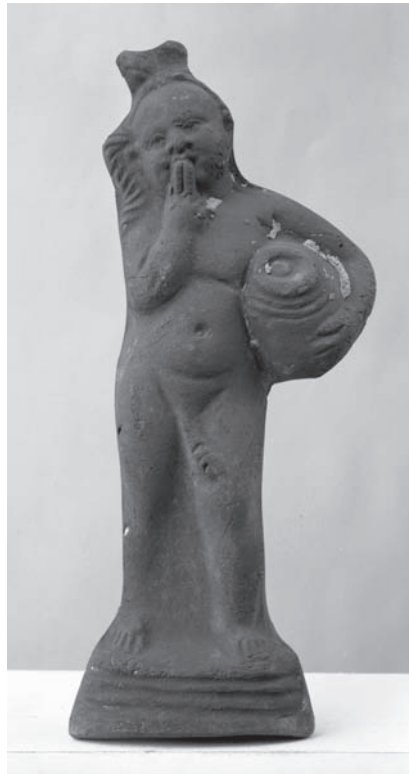


Figure 28.1 Harpokrates figurine (Dunand 1990: no. 134). © Musée du Louvre/Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville.

he is male potency, and he is the child born of male potency. Some workshop brought together both Egyptian and Greek conceptualizations of divinity to make an image that conveyed the fullness of Harpocrates' meaning.

The goddess Isis, in traditional crown and holding the traditional accoutrements of uraeus and situlus, stands looking at us from a pedestal, her centrally gathered Egyptian dress open on one side to expose her right breast. In this frontal pose what impresses us are the roundness of her body – belly and face – and the directness of her gaze, a powerful iconographic strategy once reserved almost exclusively for the protective deities Hathor and Bes. This is Isis as radiating protector, as watcher, but what immediately draws the modern museum-goer's eyes is not Isis's woman's body; it is the snake's tail that coils demurely from beneath her dress. This striking elision of Isis and serpent – in some related terracottas the snake's body dominates, with only a crowned bust of Isis appearing on top – would immediately have marked this image as a combination of Isis and Thermouthis, the Fayumic goddess Renenutet, commonly portrayed in serpentine form. In three-dimensional terracottas, then, Thermouthis becomes Isis, and Isis – great goddess of kingship and borders, of cosmos and fortune – becomes localized as Thermouthis. A foreign technique allows the identification of a regional goddess and a national, even cosmic goddess.



Figure 28.2 Isis-Thermouthis figurine (Dunand 1990: no. 388). © Musée du Louvre/Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville.

With his traditional grimace, beard, and feathered crown, the god Bes stands on a pedestal holding a shield and raised sword. His origins obscure, his status peripheral to official temples, Bes pertained to sleep and dreams, to sexuality and fertility, and to protection of children and home. Here we see him in his protective guise, but, if once he could repel the forces of danger simply through his grimacing face and squat, nude posture (suggesting a lion), here his ancient features have been augmented with sword, shield, warrior costume, and a helmet beneath his feather crown. He is Bes the soldier, reflecting a new *Egyptian* image of protective power developed through the centuries of Greek and Roman rule, but also an image of Bes rendered familiar to people of Greek or Roman heritage living and seeking protection for their homes in an Egyptian environment. His shield is Galatian, however, not Roman, suggesting a Barbarian from the Roman perspective instead of the southern tribes that Bes had traditionally recalled. His strength comes from this new frontier.

Much like Internet, billboards, and the English language in the contemporary third world, Hellenism was not so much a new culture in Egypt as a way for Egypt and Egyptians to understand their culture. In the case of the terracottas, Hellenism's representational technologies and idioms allowed new ways of interpreting and directing the powers of the gods. While temples adhered – through the Roman Period – to archaic traditions of representing gods and rulers on their walls, the



Figure 28.3 Bes Militant figurine (Dunand 1990: no. 31). © Musée du Louvre/Pierre et Maurice Chazotte.

religious world beyond those walls, the workshops and markets, festivals and processions, and village and urban cultures increasingly imagined their gods through the multiple dimensions and poses that Hellenism provided. Local deities came to assume the guise of cosmic rulers, and that cosmos embraced the whole Mediterranean world and the stars. National deities assumed imperial guise, radiating the authority of rulership that Roman military hegemony articulated. The mysteriously archaic iconographies cultivated by local temples and craftsmen assumed an updated, familiar guise, available and relevant for the increasingly multicultural society of the Graeco-Roman era.

It is for these reasons that any attempt to understand Egyptian religion in the Graeco-Roman Period, especially that beyond the temple walls, must take Hellenism as part of the picture. From the use of Greek to communicate with gods to the depictions of the gods themselves, Egyptian was a bilingual and multicultural society in which the use of Greek words or iconographic forms gave traditional forms of worship an expanded authority and meaning. Yet at the same time it was an Egyptian society, in which traditional temples, gods, processions, conceptions of death, and the Nile itself dominated the landscape and the people's lived experience. The excitement of this period for the scholar, reader, and museum-goer lies in the discovery of both elements at play (see Bowersock 1990).

2 Historical Overview

With a priestly institution devoted to interpreting and sacralizing power, Egypt embraced Alexander and the Ptolemies from the outset, proclaiming them as rightful Pharaohs, instruments of cosmic order and opponents of rebellion and chaos, as the Rosetta Stone celebrates. The full creativity of the Egyptian scribal enterprise was put to legends of Alexander's own divine birth (the *Alexander Romance*), to recasting Egyptian priestly wisdom in Greek (as the revelations of "Thrice-great Hermes"), and to developing new hybrid forms of Egyptian gods, such as the bearded Serapis (from Osiris in his avatar as the Apis bull, with an iconography inherited from the Greek Asklepios) and the civic god Shai as Agathos Daimon, supernatural patron of urban fortune. So thoroughly had priesthoods embraced Hellenism by the second century BC that the propaganda for a rebellion in support of a native, Theban king in the 130s was composed and subsequently reedited in Greek, despite prophesying the Greeks' departure and Alexandria's collapse (*Oracle of the Potter*: Kerkeslager 1998; Koenen 2002).

In response to such engaged priestly support Ptolemaic kings lavished support on the religious infrastructure, such that the great temples that the modern visitor beholds in Kom Ombo, Philai, and Edfu include many Ptolemaic buildings. This infusion of resources and temples also popularized new cult centers for Serapis and Isis where local cults had prevailed in earlier times. The new cults and the assimilation of Hellenism did not in any way reduce or suppress those local gods and cults distinctive to the various nomes and villages. Kom Ombo still hosted the twin gods Sobek and Haroeris; Saqqara remained a center for Thoth in his Ibis form; and people in the Dakhla oasis still invoked Seth as their protector from chaos.

While the beginning of Roman administration saw a renewed cultivation of the Egyptian priesthoods' favor and propaganda, the emperors quickly sought the complete control of every aspect of priestly service and temple administration. Dress, function, and hierarchy were all specified in Greek in the official *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, and temple inventories and calendars had to be submitted to Roman administrators. Thus rendered administratively responsible to the Roman authorities, the temples were then made financially dependent on Roman munificence, so when the empire suffered economic catastrophes in the third century AD the temples were dragged down as well, their lands and purses dwindling considerably. Inscriptions show little building or cultic activity after the third century. Yet religion hardly vanished. Both literary sources (like Roman historians and saints' lives) and scattered inscriptions show continuing cults from Alexandria in the north to Philae in the south. We also find evidence for a centrifugal shift in the practice of Egyptian religion. As the centers dwindled, important traditions became the responsibility of village, confraternity, and home (Frankfurter 1998: 97–144).

The Roman Period saw ever new Hellenistic syntheses of Egyptian religion: the Roman Dioskouroi, for example, as "modern" anthropomorphic versions of the crocodile god Sobek in his twin form and the establishment of the military rider as an attribute of royal gods. The ancient priestly vision of a divinely renewed and purified Egyptian landscape, preserved in the Greek *Oracle of the Potter*, assumed new resonance in the tumultuous third century, with multiple papyrus copies and

even influence on Christian texts. The continuing evolution of Roman religion itself led to some phenomena that stood at odds with Egyptian traditions, such as the empire-wide edicts to sacrifice publicly, demanded by the emperor Decius in 250, or the various shrines to the divinity of the emperor himself. Meanwhile, for the wider Mediterranean world, Greek and Roman novels (Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Heliodoros's *Aithiopika*), magical incantation manuals, and exported versions of the cult of Isis all presented Egypt and Egyptian religion as an exotic world of mysterious powers and resident wizards, inspiring spiritual tourists to visit the old Egyptian cult centers in search of both attractions. Numerous inscriptions and literary narratives attest to this rise in spiritual tourism in the Roman era, while the Greek *Hermetic Corpus* and the various Greek and Demotic magical papyri testify to Egyptian priests' own creative engagement with this ready market (Betz 1986; Frankfurter 1998: 198–230).

The rise of Christianity in Egypt over the fourth and fifth centuries involved fundamental shifts in the practice of religion, but also some important continuities. Like Hellenism, Christianity presented itself as an authoritative, global idiom for imagining and dealing with supernatural powers. Its ecclesiastical structure and elevation of the holy book together represented new ideas of ritual administration, economic patronage, and ideological authority – a transformation of the entire notion of religion. Yet sources from inside the Christian movement – saints' lives and teachings, for example – show that Christianity was at least as perceptible in its new landscape of saints' shrines and charismatic holy men as in the church, its Bible, and sacraments. The popularity and authority of the saints in people's lives owed much to indigenous sensibilities about earthly powers, ritual expertise, and the mediating powers of the dead (Frankfurter 1994; 2003).

Of course, Christianity brought with it an ideological intolerance that soon, from the late fourth century into the fifth century, assumed a zeal for iconoclastic destruction even celebrated in Christian legend. That iconoclastic zeal remains visible today in the mutilated images and crosses incised in Egyptian temples. Monasteries and Christian confraternities even more than villages were caught up in these mobilizations to purify a Satanic heathendom from the landscape. Indeed, by the fifth century the public face of Christianity was often open violence among monks, bishops, and imperial authorities, aligned variously as partisans of one or another theological or political position (Haas 1997).

Such radical disruptions in religious life and topography notwithstanding, much did continue in the realm of popular religious practice, from mummification to the ritual negotiation of dangerous and beneficial spirits, to the celebration and mythologization of the Nile's annual cycles. The powers of writing and of holy places, the sense that local shrines could be linked through procession and festival, all allowed Christianity to be assimilated to a broader Egyptian religious tradition. (Frankfurter 2003; 2005; Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004: 311–38).

3 Temples and People

The Egyptian temple was a place fundamentally set off from the outside, whose rituals of invoking gods, processing images, execrating the forces of chaos, making formal offerings to specific gods, and divining their will were conducted only by

“pure” priests. Through their literacy and by their utterances ritual words assumed efficacy and – as villagers probably saw it – the world ran in an orderly and generative way, but the separation of main temple rituals did not mean that Egyptian religion, broadly conceived, was restricted to priesthoods. Ordinary people would approach the temples for the touch of (or sand from) the hieroglyphs and reliefs, to avail themselves of potent stelae and images accessible to the public, to leave votive expressions and appeals, to request written answers to questions, and to participate in festivals and processions, when the god in his image would emerge and, perhaps, respond publicly to questions of civic importance.

Many temples constructed during the Ptolemaic and early Roman Periods included features designed for non-priestly, popular devotion. At Kom Ombo, begun under Ptolemy VI and further developed under Domitian and Trajan, a cult relief of the gods surrounding a set of divine eyes and ears, which represented the divinities’ ability to hear human appeals, was placed just on the outside of the inner shrines to the twin gods Sobek and Haroeris (Gutbub 1984; Bagnall and Rathbone 2004: 234). At the Dendera temple of Hathor, a project of the late Ptolemaic and early Roman Periods, an enormous relief of the goddess was built into the rear wall, adjacent to the site inside the temple where the goddess’s holiest image would have been stored. Covered by wooden doors, the image was a place of enthusiastic popular supplication, as we can infer from the vehemence of Christian monks’ mutilation of the image during the fifth century (Frankfurter 2008). An iconographic phenomenon that gained particular popularity in the Ptolemaic Period, the Horus *cippus*, also served as a way for temples to accommodate popular needs for healing substances. These stelae, ranging in size from several centimetres to a metre or more, portrayed Harpokrates standing frontally atop crocodiles, a selection of dangerous animals clutched in each hand, his head surmounted by a mask of Bes. It is an iconography of manifestly apotropaic meaning, collecting symbols of everything dangerous and submitting it all to images of protection: Horus, Bes, and various hieroglyphic spells that invoke Isis and other great gods to protect a person from scorpion venom. The larger cippi were erected on bases that allowed the collection of water poured over them. The water picked up the efficacy of the inscribed spells and could be preserved for healing and protection (Ritner 1989; 1992). Some temples seem to have expanded these popular features during the Ptolemaic and early Roman Periods. At the temple of Dendera, for example, a structure with numerous chambers was erected in the Roman Period that some archaeologists interpret as a kind of sanatorium, in which a hydraulic system evidently functioned to distribute magically charged water to the different rooms (Daumas 1957).

The appeal of certain temples and temple precincts as healing centers – not only Dendera but Menouthis and Canopus near Alexandria and Deir el-Bahri in Thebes – involved the institutionalization of such archaic traditions of the temple as a source of magical power and the site of appeals for divine intervention. Many temples opened up or constructed spaces for visitors to sleep, dream, and have their dreams professionally interpreted (Dunand 1991; 2006; Frankfurter 1998: 46–52; Łajtar 2006: 50–6; and below on dream incubation).

That central drama of temples in society, the procession of the shrine image beyond the temple doors to traverse village and countryside, had probably always been the

occasion for popular festival. Viewing the image and its priests, celebrating the god's radiation of generative powers to people and plants, and hearing sacred words altogether made the procession and festival the chief occasion in public religion. Festivals also had important social implications, bringing together people from the surrounding region, inviting personal appeals for the god's attentions, reinforcing the popular sense of a religious landscape through the processional integration of shrines, and allowing various types of frivolity. (At one festival, for the god Min at Mendes, Herodotos claimed that a woman would ritually copulate with a goat – 2.46). Materials and witnesses from the Graeco-Roman Period indicate the preparation and enjoyment of special foods, the shouting of special slogans, the lighting of special lamps, and certainly the selling of religious images and souvenirs like those described at the beginning of this essay. Considering the obvious priestly influences on the terracotta workshops and the participants' traditional investment in festival foods and collective feasting, we can see in the festival a rich and complex interchange between temple and village worlds, where populace accepts the performative authority of priests and their rituals while also asserting their own traditions, like dancing, and expectations, like fertility (Frankfurter 1998: 52–8). We also see this interchange in local temple traditions at Saqqara, Bubastis, and elsewhere, in which devotees had animals associated with the god killed and mummified as emissaries and votive offerings – hence the large numbers of slaughtered ibises, cats, ichneumons, and other animals that have been excavated and placed in museums (Charron 1990; Ikram 2005b; Rutherford 2005: 144–6).

Even before Alexander's arrival, Herodotos describes at least one festival receiving crowds of a size far exceeding what we would expect of the immediate regional population (2.58–60). It seems that, at some temples already in the Persian period the spectacle of the image procession and the accompanying festival was growing in extravagance, incorporating public theatre (at Edfu, for example), celebrations of civic patronage (like games), and a host of carnivalesque activities and markets. We should understand this development as the temples' deft acknowledgment of patronage, whether royal (in the Ptolemaic Period) or that of local elites (in the Roman Period), and eventually the festivals' reflection of Hellenistic identity and pride, beyond the purely religious element of the god's appearance. (Frankfurter 1998: 58–65). Still, however, many local temples and shrines maintained smaller-scale processions with meaning specifically for the local landscape. One such procession is remembered in connection with a Christian holy man still in the fourth century AD. Apa Apollo magically halts the priests with their image, and they cannot move for a whole afternoon (*Historia monachorum* 8.25–6).

Clearly Hellenism brought changes in the ways that temples presented their powers to people and cultivated piety at temple precincts. At many temples Greek itself came to dictate the very formulation of people's contact with temple traditions, both in the area of votive inscriptions (*proskynemata*) and in the priestly expropriation of temple rituals for domestic healing, protection, and personal success. Most of what we now call the "Greek Magical Papyri" are, in fact, Egyptian priests' translations and reformulations of temple rites and traditions for healing and for inviting visions of gods, but now for a paying public. Spells that once referred back to Egyptian texts and esoteric temple traditions now presented gods as both cosmic and as directly

available to the outsider. Thoth-Hermes of Hermopolis, for example, can be invoked for a shop's prosperity simply by reciting his attributes and shaping his image out of wood (*PGM* VIII.1–63; see Betz 1986). Other spells mention the temple as the site to procure magical dirt (*PGM* IV.2129), keep an amulet hidden (*PGM* IV.3125–71), or steal the linen off a statue of Harpokrates (*PGM* IV.1071–75), but they shift the actual rites and their efficacy away from the temple, towards spaces that an entrepreneurial ritual expert designates himself. In this way Hellenism and the priests' engagement with Hellenism led to a dislocation and mutation of temple rituals for the laity (See J. Smith 1995 and Assmann 1997; on the *PGM/PDM* see Ritner 1995 and Dieleman 2005) – and not just Egyptian laity. In their correspondence with novelistic portrayals of Egyptian priests as wizards current in the Mediterranean world, the magical papyri reflect Egyptian priests' own appropriation of the exotic stereotypes Greeks and Romans held of them. By the third century AD this stereotype appropriation would have had quite lucrative possibilities for priests (Frankfurter 1998: 210–37; 2000: 166–83).

The inscribed Greek *proskynemata* on temples (and other pilgrimage and tourist sites) are remarkable for their abundance across Egypt and for their wording, which ranges from the simple name or earnest appeal to the lengthy metrical composition that celebrates the god's cosmic character and salvific capacities (Bernand 1994). The dedicants comprise not only priests and others with Egyptian names but, quite often, visitors from elite, often non-Egyptian backgrounds. At the same temples we find appeals to gods in their Greek forms – Asklepios at Deir el-Bahri, Helios at Kalabsha – and in their Egyptian forms – Imouthes, Mandulis. Here again it would seem that many Egyptian cult centers – Abydos, Thebes, Philae, Saqqara – had become destinations for foreign visitors, not just regional folk, transforming sites of regional, priestly significance into what we might call pilgrimage centers (Bernand 1988; see also Elsner and Rutherford 2005).

In their individualized character, *proskynemata* reflect a personal desire to visit and behold a site and its god, not simply a village group's arrival for a festival. One third-century AD visitor came to the frontier temple of Kalabsha to “venerate the Divine, sacrifice to all the gods, [and] visit every temple to make an act of devotion [*proskynōn*]” (Bernand 1969, no. 165). Here is an impulse surely more pious than the word “tourism” captures, while the sense that piety involves travel to a multitude of shrines suggests more sightseeing than we typically (if incorrectly) ascribe to “pilgrimage.” We see then a new phenomenon of the Hellenistic Period that revolves around *individual* experience of temple sites and their gods, whether or not the visitors travelled in groups, and a conceptualization of the *entire* land of Egypt as a network of important shrines, rather than the preeminence of those with which one is affiliated by local and family tradition. (Bernand 1988; Volokhine 1998). Of course, for most people the impulse to visit and to leave votive signs at the regional temple represented primarily family tradition.

Still, the very custom of inscribing, or paying a local professional to inscribe, *proskynemata* on temple buildings and other sites points also to a new kind of piety. From such traditional expressions of supplicatory presence as leaving some iconic token or some mark of one's visit – often images of ears or feet – or simply taking sand or water from the temple site, the *proskynema* can communicate self-definition – as

a Hellenized individual, even as cultured. It shows a mode of piety that is both individualized and public, where temple walls offer not only the physical proximity to a god or a source of healing sand but also a slate for self-memorialization. Hellenism becomes a mode of representing oneself before others and before gods (see Nock 1972).

The rise in devotees' interest in healing shrines during this period also seems to reflect this construction and representation of the self according to Hellenistic *mores*. Whether in search of private dreams at Deir el-Bahri or secluded healing in the enclosures of the Dendera sanatorium, the supplicant comes to experience the temple deity through his members, even the lens of his own psyche in the case of incubation (Dunand 2006). Dream and personal health become the routes to defining a religious self separate from family and locale, and a piety of direct personal experience (see Stroumsa 2009: 23–46).

If these spiritual tendencies arose in Hellenistic culture through its encounter with Egyptian temple religion, they certainly influenced Egyptians in every way. Many of the names in *proskynemata* are Egyptian (although we cannot talk about a pure Greek ethnicity behind Greek names), and these inscriptions show that Egyptians too accepted the new vision of Egypt as a network of devotional sites, and of the individual self as bearer of piety and recipient of gods' benefits. The occurrence of priestly names at, e.g., Philae (Rutherford 1998: 40–2), suggests that the Egyptian engagement with this Hellenistic piety may have arisen with priestly efforts to translate Egyptian gods and their manifestations into Hellenistic forms, whether as mobile spells or in priestly accounts of personalized theophanies. In one such account, preserved in a second-century Greek fragment, an author laments his inability to translate a book about Deir el-Bahri's patron god Imouthes-Asklepios, but then he describes his ecstatic and transformative dream-vision of the god himself (P. Oxy. XI.1381). Imouthes-Asklepios emerges as a god with whom the earnest priest can cultivate a pious relationship evocative of Hellenistic ideals.

The new Hellenistic "pilgrims' economy" at Egyptian temples thus affected Egyptian religion in many ways. Workshops loosely affiliated with temples produced new, popular interpretations of the gods that certainly impacted the meaning of a local Horus, Bes, or Isis for visitors local and distant. At Saqqara, a thriving temple complex dedicated to Thoth, Serapis, and several other gods, a veritable arcade of shrines sprang up along the pilgrims' way, one of which was apparently dedicated to Bes in an erotic manifestation – so we infer from the voluptuous reliefs discovered there (Quibell 1907, with Derchain 1981). In this case the pilgrims' economy seems to have led to the regional centralization of a cult hitherto mostly domestic. So also the new spectacle culture that developed around temple festivals gave a "global" significance to local religion – a novel importance and exotic excitement, as local Egyptians and Greek tourists interacted around the same event, or simply visited the same shrine, some seeking ancestral gods and others Egyptian versions of cosmic gods (see Bernand 1988: 53–4; Rutherford 1998). Religious specialties developed in temples to serve the individual hopes and fantasies of visitors from afar: here a healing cult; there a place to behold the god of the heavens; and there a place known to give true advice.

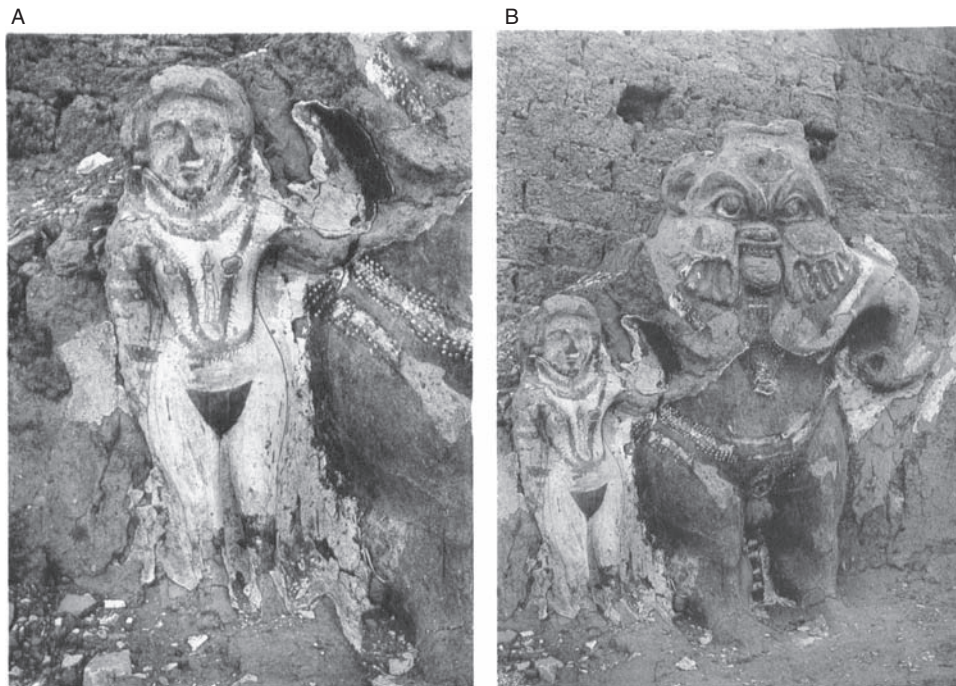


Figure 28.4 Saqqara Bes-room, photograph from Quibell, 1907.

4 Oracles and Divination

Along with the manifestation and procession of the god from the temple to bless fields and communities and repel disorder, the most vital interaction between temple and society took place in the course of divination. As the previous chapter described, based on numerous inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca that extend back to the New Kingdom, the processional barque on the shoulders of priests would halt at some point in the god's journey through his lands. With an audience present and often with a priest's mediation, lay people would ask questions of the god on his barque: "Is Pemou the one who stole my clothing? Is Soeris possessed by a god?" Then the barque would be felt to move on the priests' shoulders in such a way as to imply the god's answer – according to the interpretations of the observing priest. In this way communities experienced justice itself through the medium – and the theatre – of the temple god and his priests, while the divine image gained *social* significance beyond the plain magic of its appearance. Priests became essential, dramatic mediators of the god's authority over social and legal issues, and the temple gained authority as the site, or the topographical source, of the oracle event. Divination, as we see it in the processional oracle or in any of the numerous other forms of oracle that developed in the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods, served as the central performance of temple religion as it impacted religion in society (see Frankfurter 2005).

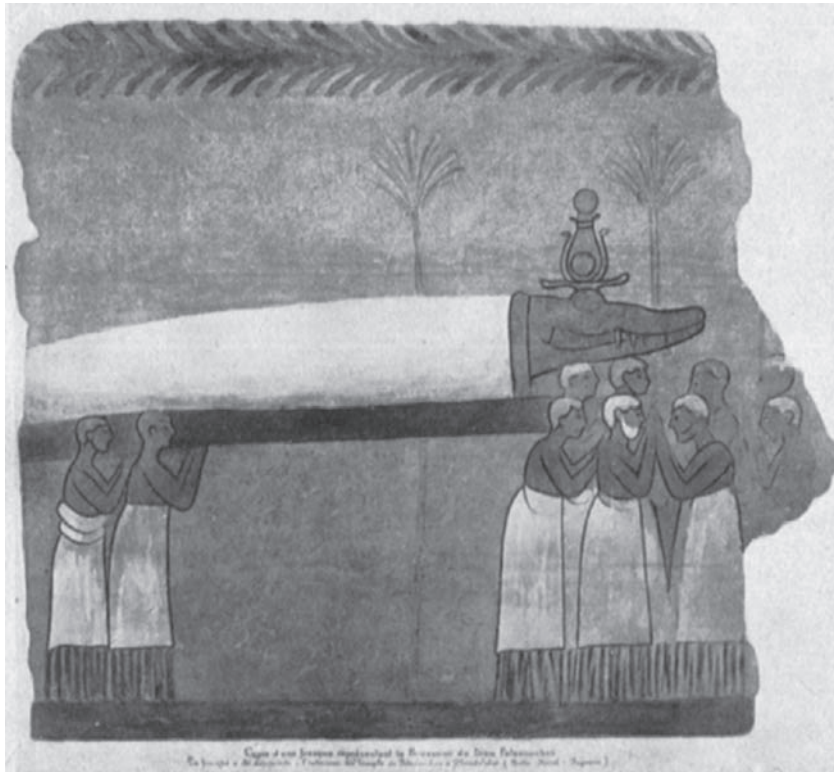


Figure 28.5 Theadelphia wall-painting of an oracular crocodile-mummy procession, from Frankfurter 1998: pl. 19 (originally from Breccia, 1926).

There are numerous witnesses to the continuity of the processional oracle throughout Egypt into the later Roman Period. For example, a late second-century AD Roman edict attempted to proscribe all oracles, whether “in writings as it were divinely delivered” – like the ticket oracle, to be discussed shortly – “or through the procession of images” (P. Yale 299, 12–15). Also from the second century, a wall-painting in the crocodile god Pnephros’s temple in Theadelphia (Fayum) shows a procession of priests carrying a mummified crocodile on a bier and stopped before other priests for interpretation of the god’s movements. And still in the fourth century historians and inscriptions attest to an oracular barque of Isis housed at her temple at Philai (Frankfurter 1998: 145–56).

What is especially remarkable in the Graeco-Roman Period, however, is the very diversification of divination practices: through writing, through incubation, through moving and speaking statues, and through new systematized rites for gaining oracles beyond the temple. In these ways divination shifted from the public omen occurring during the course of a festival to a regular service at a temple. As a mother writes to her son in the second century AD, “Do not suppose that I have neglected you. Every ten days I consult the oracle about you on each occasion. So, because I found that good opportunities did not serve you in the present quarter I did not write you for this reason.” In fact, when she pursued further one question with the oracle, a priest

informed her, “It is no longer the concern of the gods” (P. Merton II.81). Clearly this temple’s personalized oracle had become a regular part of some people’s lives.

One of the most intriguing developments of the temple oracle was the moving or speaking statue. During processions, of course, the god’s image became an oracular palette of sorts, attracting all eyes to its bobs and shifts atop the barque (as the Roman author Strabo describes, 17.1.43). In the same way that the shape of a bull’s liver, bird formations in a part of the noon sky, or animal tracks across a metre of sand each might vary ominously and thus stimulate oracular interpretation, so the god’s message would here be extracted from those ritually ominous movements. It is thus quite understandable that temples would develop statues that moved, apparently on their own accord, in their *naoi* or on pedestals before audiences on a more occasional basis than a festival procession. Evidence for one such moving statue, of a baboon, has been found at Saqqara (H. Smith 2002: 369), while a good number of stone images carved to rock on their bases have been found from early dynastic times (“Nodding Falcon,” 1967/68). Even more archaeological evidence exists for speaking statues: crypts beneath the stone plinths in temples to hold cult statues or, at Karanis, crocodile mummies; *naoi* with holes bored in their lower sides; pipes that stretch from statue plinths out to adjoining rooms. All these contrivances allowed priests to hide and deliver, in the voice of a god, oracular sounds and messages to interpreters and audiences. A temple with such a facility would thus be able to offer oracles at many times beyond processions and festivals. (Frankfurter 1998: 150–2, with some mechanisms described by the fifth-century Christian writer Theodoret in his *Church History* 5.22).

The mother who writes her son about her regular oracular consultations may have attended such audiences before a speaking statue or, more likely in the second century, one of the many “ticket oracles” known to have existed in Egypt at this time (and to have been proscribed in the edict mentioned above, P. Yale 299). This procedure, attested in some form as far back as the New Kingdom, involved having one’s question written in both positive and negative form and submitting it to the priest for the god’s decision: “If Psnepheros should go to his brother’s house, send out this ticket; if Psnepheros should not go to his brother’s house, send out this ticket.” By means of a moving statue, a live animal, or some other oracular technique the “correct” answer is chosen and delivered to the client, who might then keep it with him as an assurance and an amulet. The largest caches of these oracular tickets have come from local temples of the crocodile god Sobek in the Fayum, written in both Demotic and Greek, but other temples maintained such oracles as well: Abydos, for example, whose Bes oracle received queries from all over the Mediterranean world, only to be shut down in 359 AD by imperial order (Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12; see Frankfurter 1998: 159–62).

What is so remarkable about the ticket oracles, beyond their privatization of the divination process, is their elevation of writing as a medium for deciphering the god’s communication. The god does not communicate through writing, but the written word allows his omens that much more precision: from an image’s mere nod to, for example, the prognosis for one’s father’s illness or the instruction to go to Alexandria, and, while Greek allowed a certain ecumenism in clientele, the many cults that operated predominantly through Demotic – indeed, the very antiquity of this ticket

procedure in Egyptian writing – show us that writing itself rather than a particular script was associated with the interpretation of divine intentions. In fact, in the fifth century AD, long after the closing of temples' ticket oracles, the same procedure arose again in order to gain the Christian god's advice through the shrines of his saints. St. Colluthus of Antinoë, St. Philoxenus of Oxyrhynchos, and St. Leontius in Hermopolis all sponsored such oracles – so we learn from the many papyri found that address the God of these saints in Greek and Coptic and are likewise phrased in positive and negative formulations (Papaconstantinou 1994; Frankfurter 1998: 193–95; 2005).

Incubation, mentioned above in relationship to healing cults, required that space be set off for lay visitors near some inner sanctum or sometimes within a section of the temple no longer used for priestly service. To sleep in such spaces put one's body and psyche in immediate physical proximity to the god, so he could appear to the dreaming supplicant, sometimes obliquely, sometimes in full theophany, to instruct about queries or to reveal ineffable truths. Mantic incubation originated in Egypt primarily as a priestly pursuit (Sauneron 1959; Szpakowska 2003a: 123–57). The Demotic archives of the Thoth priest Hor, from Saqqara, record his regular consultation with gods through dreams, some of which involved quite spectacular theophanies (Ray 1976). Priests in the fictional Egyptian Setne-Khamwas romance sleep to behold the "mysterious forms" of gods like Osiris and Thoth (Setne 2, 2.4; 5:10). These uses of incubation to behold gods and to learn from them truths of a more esoteric nature consequently became a ritual commodity that priests of the Graeco-Roman Period could market for popular pursuit. Both literary sources (Apuleius, Thessalos of Tralles) and *proskynemata* on temple walls testify to an incubation tradition taken beyond simple queries to a quest for theophany itself (Nock 1972: 368–74). One visitor to the Bes oracle of Abydos celebrated this folk god in such exalted terms as "all-truthful, dream-giver and oracle-giver, sincere, invoked throughout the whole world, celestial God" (Perdrizet and Lefebvre 1919: #500). Further south, at the frontier temple of Talmis, the local god Mandulis was said to have revealed himself as "the Sun, all-seeing ruler, king of all, all-powerful Eternity" (Nock 1972: 366; see Bernand 1969: 576–83).

These devotional celebrations of local temple deities as actually cosmic in scope in many ways follow the archaic priestly tradition of identifying and linking gods: Sobek and Re, Amun and Re, Renenutet with Isis, and even, in the "Isis aretalogies" of the Graeco-Roman Period, all the goddesses of the world as mere names for the one true goddess Isis (e.g., *P. Oxy* XI.1380). This priestly strategy also explains the phenomenon of the Bes oracle at Abydos. The elevation of this folk god as oracle-giver certainly owed its success partly to the Bes's popularity, but priests seem to have derived Bes's authority from the god's ancient mythical role as guardian of the head of Osiris, the original god of Abydos. The cosmicizing of such gods thus followed from priestly ingenuity and tradition, not just Hellenistic predilection.

These esoteric roots to the Bes oracle also explain another phenomenon of the Graeco-Roman Period: the proliferation of "mobile" incubation and revelation spells. A series of such spells invoke Bes in his connection with Osiris: "I call upon you, the headless god . . . you are the one lying on a coffin of myrrh, having resin and asphalt as an elbow cushion . . . You are not a *daimon* but the blood of the two falcons who chatter and watch before the head of Osiris. You are the oracle-giving god"

(*PGM* VIII.64–110; cf. VII.222–49, CII.1–17). These spells must have been formulated by priests affiliated with the Abydos oracle on the basis of older Egyptian texts (Dunand 1997; Frankfurter 1998: 169–74). In these ways oracular incubation in Egypt maintained a traditional character, even when sought by foreign pilgrims. As much as the quest for private visionary experiences reflected a Hellenistic interest in the self as medium for the Divine, the interpretations with which priests aided the pilgrims for identifying and celebrating gods drew on local traditions and mythologies for the representation of divinities.

This multiplication of divination rites and services – incubation, ticket-oracles, talking statues, often at the same shrines – served temples' efforts to promote themselves as sacred centers, especially after the second century AD, when state sponsorship of temples ceased, and priesthoods and towns were forced to find other means of financing the religious infrastructure. Through various procedures for contacting gods people gained a more personalized relationship to temple divinities, while the temples maintained their importance in the landscape – and often well beyond it, like the cult of Bes at Abydos.

Those mobile Bes spells, however, represent a more centrifugal trend in the religion of Graeco-Roman Egypt as well. A large portion of the spell manuals in Greek and Demotic compiled in the Roman Period in fact sought to reformulate, for popular, often Greek-speaking clienteles, traditional Egyptian priestly rites for gaining instructive visions of gods: e.g., “Spell for a divine revelation. Invoke the great name in a time of great stress, in major and pressing crises . . . Say three times the “IAO,” then the great name of God. “I call upon you . . . let there be depth, breadth, length, brightness . . . Come in, lord, and reveal.” The serpent-faced god will come in and answer you. When you dismiss [him], make an offering of the skin of a serpent” (*PGM* XII.153–60, Betz 1986: 159). Some of these rites pertain to dreams, while others use bowls of water, mirrors, or pure young boys as “lenses” into the divine world. Thus, through a priestly expert’s instruction, authentic and awesome visions of gods might be had in chambers far from central temples (Ritner 1995; Frankfurter 2000: 180–2).

Another centrifugal trend in the practice of divination appears with *sortes* books – self-contained texts from which answers to typical oracular questions could be extracted. Inquiry of the gods here took place not by means of tickets ritually deposited at a temple but rather from a series of questions and answers, a special procedure, and an oracle-monger well-versed in endowing that procedure with mystery and authority. The client would ask her question and think of a number. The question would be found in the book with a number assigned, which, when combined with the client’s special number, would lead to an answer like: “If you sail soon, you will be in danger.” The *sortes* books were presented as the mysterious composition of an Egyptian priestly sage, Astrampsychos, or (later) the Christian saints, and they circulated alongside guides for the oracular use of Homer and even of gospel texts (tr. Stewart and Morrell 1998; see Frankfurter 1998: 179–84; Van der Horst 1998). The entire procedure imparted a numinous power to the book itself as mysterious repository of truth, and to some extent to the oracle monger as technician of the book, and in this way the type of personal consultation with gods that many temples were proffering could be had simply through the ministrations of a ritual expert and his book.

In these ways some historians have seen a larger shift from temple to ritual expert (J. Smith 1978), a shift that would reach its apogee in the Christian holy man of the fourth and fifth centuries – those “desert fathers” celebrated in dramatic *Vitae* like Athanasius’s on St. Antony or the *History of the Monks of Egypt*. These *Vitae* certainly celebrated their subjects as new oracles, answering by the power of the Christian god the same issues traditionally brought to temples to resolve (Frankfurter 1998: 184–93; 2003; see also Brown 1982), but it is important to realize that evidence for centrifugal *tendencies* like the ritual manuals and *sortes* books, and propaganda for the oracles’ replacement by wizards and holy men, do not in themselves imply or require the historical demise of temple oracles or of the cultural desire for ancient centers that those temples met. The fact that the Bes oracle of Abydos, the Isis temple of Philai (with its processional oracle), and even a smaller Isis oracle in Menouthis, just east of Alexandria, all continued to function with much renown well after Christianity’s rise shows that temples and their cults retained their meaning for society, even in an age of dwindling funds and “freelance” competition (Frankfurter 2005).

5 Religion of the Home

The materials, practices, and sites of religion we have seen thus far inevitably refer back to the health and good fortune of the domestic world whence come the devotees and pilgrims, and so it would be misleading to conjure a domestic religion entirely separate from religion around temples. Religion consists of the *interaction among* a domestic or private sphere of ritual activity; a local culture of traditions that transcends the home; and what the anthropologist Robert Redfield called the “great tradition”: that is, the literate (yet historically mutable) formulation of system and authority, in both ritual and mythology, that centralizing institutions pursued. Yet we can still talk about the domestic sphere of religion as involving some basic conceptual and ritual parameters. Even allowing for a range of domestic structures and living arrangements, we can (for example) perceive an inevitable refraction between the sense of family as a procreative unit that passes on traditions and the physical structure – the house – that contains that family: antechambers and bedrooms, altars and thresholds. The religion of the home will thus first involve the recognition of these boundaries as forms of protection, which are extended and articulated through threshold rituals and the invocation of protective deities (Frankfurter 1998: 111–42; J. Smith 2003).

If we have little evidence from the Graeco-Roman Period for threshold rituals, the abundant terracotta images of Bes, such as the one with which this essay opened, show a common and concerted effort on ordinary Egyptians’ parts to protect the home from the many hostile spirits that lurked in the landscape. (In fact, we know something about the range of hostile spirits from a remarkable series of amuletic “decrees” by temple gods that some priesthoods devised in the New Kingdom to provide protection as well as to consolidate the deities’ power. Each decree lists a great range of ghosts, gods, and demonic and foreign spirits from which the bearer should consider himself protected, and thus they offer a convenient picture of the

supernatural dangers Egyptians imagined: Edwards 1960). Images of the armored Horus, such as the famous window lattice in the Louvre (Frankfurter 1998: 3–4), or of the conglomerate sphinx-god Tutu also served this apotropaic function in domestic environments, much as warrior saints would in the Christian period.

The religion of the home also affirms generational continuity, both through procreation and through ancestors, whose presence and contact are cultivated in diverse ways. The importance of procreation in Graeco-Roman Egypt is abundantly illustrated in the many images of Isis that emphasize her sexuality – drawing her dress up to expose her vulva, for example – and of so-called Baubo figurines, females seated with legs apart, one hand pointing to the vulva. Harpokrates and Bes, too, were modelled to radiate fertility in its phallic mode, as was the ithyphallic god Min, who even appears in Hellenistic garb and pose (but still holding his enlarged phallus) in a panel painting from early Roman Tebtunis (Rondot 1998). Finally, nude images of priestesses and cult servants must have signified the procreative power in festival processions themselves (Dunand 1979: 60–81).

These images, as we have seen, represented both an *appropriation* of great gods for the domestic realm and *interpretations* – through the graphic media of Hellenism – of those gods in ways quite distinct from their temple iconographies. Yet, placed as they were in niches or on altars or by windows, perhaps rearranged according to the local festival calendar, – we have no ancient witnesses to the uses of these images – they contained the temple cult, its gods and processions, in miniature. Here Isis would dwell as surely as in her main shrine, but here specifically as bringer of fertility. Indeed, during festival times the home served as an extension of the local temple. Many of the terracotta lamps found in Graeco-Roman Egypt seem to have been bought and lit in connection with festivals. Even in the late fourth or fifth century AD the formidable Christian abbot Shenoute of Atripe complained about people lighting lamps in celebration of the *Shai* – the god of civic fortune – of the village and the home (see Frankfurter 1998: 63–4). The consuming of festival foods, described in some detail by the Greek writer Plutarch, reflected not only popular participation at temples and along processions; their very preparation integrated that principal activity of the domestic sphere, food production, with the sacred calendar and the processing gods (*De Iside et Osiride* 30, 50, 68). Terracotta images of the baby Harpokrates enjoying some sweet food from a bowl would thus refer back to and sanctify the sweets the family might consume at the Harpokrataia festival (see Török 1995: 119; cf. Dunand 1979: 74–6). In the case of Bes, who had little official presence in temples, the home may have represented the principal cult-site, even during festivals like the *Besia*. Not only did many Bes images actually function as lamps, but a remarkable object of the Graeco-Roman Period, the Bes jug, seems to have served as a container for some festival drink in the home. A terracotta image in the Budapest museum portrays Bes flanked by a jug and two bread-loaves, signifying domestic offerings (Castiglione 1957; Török 1995, no. 11; Frankfurter 1998: 126–8, pl. 13). Whether with cakes stamped with a god's image, sweet drinks, or fruits, the culinary world of the home became a microcosm of festival activity (Frankfurter 1998: 53–4).

Ancestors and the dead are equally the purview of domestic religion: both their memory and their supernatural abilities to intervene for good or ill in the lives of family-members. One obvious way of assuring harmony across the generations was

proper mortuary preparation, mummification and entombment by experts. In this way the deceased would become functionally assimilated to Osiris or Hathor, deities of considerable procreative powers. In the early Roman Period, however, a new preference developed in this regard in some parts of Egypt: to have the deceased represented as in life, hence the many mummy “portraits” visible today in museum collections. Whatever the larger significance of this new style, which did not affect every part of Egypt nor among all classes, we can understand it as one of the many options that developed for maintaining fruitful contact with the dead. Indeed, several Greek writers of the Roman Period claimed that Egyptians placed their dead in chambers adjoining their houses, allowing family members to gaze on them regularly (Diodoros 1.19.6; Athanasios, *v. Ant.* 90; see Borg 1997, Montserrat 1997). Although there is little archaeological evidence to confirm these claims, a wooden cabinet from the Roman Period, now in the Berlin Egyptian Museum, was designed for the purpose of storing a single mummy in a domestic context (inv. 17039, 32).

How important such contact should be for family life emerges in a late (first-century AD) example of the letters Egyptians had long used to communicate with their dead, asking them to intervene in this-worldly crises. In this late version, communicated to the local Osiris, a young woman asks for ancestral aid in getting her husband to impregnate her, “I having no power, I having no protector-son” (Satzinger 1975). Thus we see, behind the diverse forms of mortuary preparation and representation that developed in the Graeco-Roman Period and drew both Greeks and Egyptians, families’ basic efforts to maintain productive contact with the dead, partly through ensuring their safe, happy, and productive afterlife and partly through these forms of ritual communication (Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004: 319–31). Where the former efforts lay essentially in the hands of local professionals and burial guilds, ritual communication remained a principal function of the domestic world.

Overall, the home and its altar or its set-apart spaces served as the location *to which* family members would bring back images, sanctified water or sand, promising oracle tickets, or other materials from regional shrines and festivals, and the location *from which* family members would take messages and hopes that could be inscribed as *proskynemata* or signified through votive images bought at the shrine.

6 Religious Societies and Hybrids of Egyptian Religion

Between the home and the temple arose a new phenomenon in the Graeco-Roman Period, the religious confraternity – *snt* or *synodos*. In their Egyptian forms, confraternities developed around the support of local cults like Sobek of Tebtunis, Amun of Opet, and Isis of Khemmis to supply offerings, maintain buildings, and participate in processions, and they seem to have consisted mostly of local priests, but they also involved a collective dedication to the local deity, gathering to drink wine, make libations, and affirm social bonds specified in rules. Such rules have been discovered among Egyptian papyri, written in both Greek and Demotic (De Cenival 1972; Muszynski 1977). One cult association in Koptos was responsible for erecting, in

the third century AD, a stela of the protective god Tutu, with obvious benefits for all visitors to the temple (Sauneron 1960).

However, over the course of the Graeco-Roman Period, we find more Hellenized forms of the religious confraternity: a *synodos* dedicated to Zeus Hypsistos, for example, from somewhere in the Fayum, that reflects many of the same social features as the Egyptian confraternities, yet to a god who might be imported or might be a Greek form of an Egyptian god like Amun (Roberts/Skeat/Nock 1972). Some of these more Hellenistic confraternities certainly functioned to support particular temple cults, even if reflecting culturally an interest in more cosmic, salvific dimensions of the temple's god (see Bowersock 1990: 22–8). A number of *proskynemata* at the temple of Imouthes at Deir el-Bahri mention just such a confraternity regularly dining “in the second precinct” – that is, showing a commitment to the place itself (Łajtar 2006: 67–9). Others, reflecting Greek and Roman models of cult association – the *thiasos* or *kline*, which focused more exclusively on such ritualized meals – developed separately from temples, yet still in celebration of a god and a sense of religious community.

It is from this range of religious confraternities, both temple-based and delocalized, that we find many of the popular religious innovations of the late Hellenistic and early Roman Period in Egyptian religion. The development of a Hermetic corpus, writings of philosophy and cosmology attributed to the god Thoth in his Greek form, occurred among priests and interested, mystically inclined intellectuals devoted to Thoth, yet ultimately independent of Thoth temples (see Fowden 1986; Jasnow and Zauzich 2005). The promulgation throughout Mediterranean world of cults to Isis certainly came about through the patronage of such confraternities, which might eventually have had only token Egyptian memberships in some places (see, e.g., Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*). Indeed, confraternities offered lay-folk in and beyond Egypt opportunities to gain and express status as patrons and participants in religious spectacle itself as we might gather, for example, from an elaborate gold crown with religious motifs found at the Serapis temple at Kysis (Kharga oasis). Inappropriate head-gear for an Egyptian priest, it must have been designed for some prominent citizen allowed to parade both his patronage and his devotion in religious procession (Reddé 1992).

These kinds of religious societies represented a distinctly new formation of piety itself in the ancient world. In the words of the historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith they represented a “religion of Anywhere” (J. Smith 2003). Increasingly loosed from their moorings in temple activities, these confraternities and cult associations developed ritual forms that substituted for priestly rites and revolved around symbolic meals, prayers, and even group hierarchy, and they cultivated images of the gods that were not localized or bound to traditional images but cosmic: Isis as ruler of the heavens, Horus as the Sun, gods capable of *saving* devotees from the hostile forces of fate. The community of devotees itself became the site of religious communication, and in its declarations of kinship and gatherings for sacred meals the community drew much valuable religious symbolism from the world of domestic religion.

These “religions of Anywhere” were a pan-Mediterranean phenomenon, not restricted to Egypt, and they multiplied through the Roman Period in such forms as Mithraism, Dionysos-devotion, and even rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

In Egypt, however, we see their profusion against the backdrop of thriving temples. Christianity, for example, developed here first among small study-groups that traced their identity to Jewish scriptures and values but had now embarked on the interpretation of diverse gospels and apocalypses – pursued collectively or through the inspired insights of some prophet. As in the Hermetic conventicles, Christian groups' focus on texts allowed them both a mobility and a receptivity to new forms of itinerant leadership. As the Egyptian confraternities had developed modes of conduct for insiders, so Christians were defining rigid new systems for group morality and ritual. Some, as the Christian writer Eusebius describes in third-century AD Arsinoë, exerted themselves in interpretation and purification with an eye towards some imminent millennium, which itself would have recalled Egyptian prophecies like the *Potter's Oracle* (*Church History* 7.24), while other groups like the so-called "Gnostics" cultivated a heavenly identity around their texts and insights (Frankfurter 1996: 142–70; Pearson 2007). Influencing these kinds of study groups in the third century came Manichaeans, with more texts, rites, and terminology for members. The excavations of Manichaean communities in places like Medinet Madi (Fayum) and the Dakhla Oasis show a highly literary religion based in domestic spaces, yet communicating internationally – developing a sense of revelation and status that would transcend place and cultivate holiness through the individual body (Lieu 1994: 61–105). In these ways we can see the continuing importance and appeal of a religious form that evolved beyond temple and home, from earliest Hellenistic times through late antiquity, yet which combined in its structure the fictive family relations of the home with the sense of divine immanence and cosmos-sustaining ritual of the temple.

Yet the cultivation of such placeless groups of the wise and elect remained always the privilege of some in society – a rarefied piety disengaged from the landscape. As Egyptian Christianity itself became rapidly a religion of landscape, holy men, and saints' shrines over the fourth century, so the last phases of Egyptian religion too continued to revolve around shrines and holy places. In the early fourth century AD we find a confraternity from Hermonthis, all iron-workers, who have come to the now-decrepit temple of Imouthes-Asklepios at Deir el-Bahri to dine together, to slaughter a donkey (an archaic apotropaic rite), and to make ritual devotions to "the great god" (Łajtar 2006: 94–104). They did these things and left *proskynemata* with all their names. In Egyptian religion, place still mattered.

FURTHER READING

Readers interested in the historical development and character of Egyptian religion over this period should consult Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004, with Frankfurter 1998 especially on the Roman Period. On the evolution of the priesthood and its roles, especially in the development of magical texts, see Fowden 1986, Ritner 1995, Frankfurter 2000, and Dieleman 2005. On Egyptian temples as sites of pilgrimage, healing, and incubation see the essays by Dunand 1991, 1997, 2006; Rutherford 1998, 2005; Frankfurter 2005. The topic of domestic religion, especially through the lens of terracotta figurines, is covered extensively in Dunand 1979 and Frankfurter 1998; and its extension to mummification and mortuary customs is discussed in

detail in Borg 1997, Montserrat 1997, and Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004. On the broad religious shifts in the ancient Mediterranean world that frame Egyptian religion and the rise of Christianity one should read Brown 1982, Bowersock 1990, and the essays by J. Z. Smith 1978, 1995, 2003.

DEDICATION

To the memory of Dominic Montserrat: inspiring scholar, generous friend, abysmal driver.