

CHAPTER 14

Priests and Temples: Pharaonic

Neal Spencer

1 Introduction

The temples of Egypt are now viewed as one of the defining characteristics of pharaonic culture. In the ancient Mediterranean world the priests who staffed temples were recognized as individuals with particular skills and access to knowledge (Potter 1994: 183–212). The term “priest” is, however, rather laden with meaning which can mislead the modern reader, particularly as it is a designation of those who perform public religious duties in Christian churches. Ancient Egyptian priests fulfilled very different roles, not least in acting within a non-congregational setting. Priests of the pharaonic era were, of course, more than religious officiants: the careers of some could be easily characterized as political, and even the lower-ranked priests performed a multitude of mundane tasks. For many it was only a part-time profession.

Though Egyptian cult places are present in both the archaeological and the representational record from late Predynastic times (Kemp 2006: 116–35), the explicit evidence for officiants in that cult, as distinct from personal and thus direct expressions of piety, is not possible before the use of writing for a broader range of subjects. Though many early temples should perhaps be re-interpreted as arenas for royal display (McNamara 2008), all such institutions would have needed servicing, whether with part-time or full-time staff. As discussed below, the organization of cult in “royal” temples is rather similar to that in those of “gods,” perhaps emphasizing the misleading nature of our terminology. It is clear that in Middle Kingdom Lahun, for example, a cult of Anubis was housed within the Senwosret II temple (Quirke 1997). Priestly titles are already attested in the First Dynasty, with some of the designations for high priests appearing at the end of the Second Dynasty (Wilkinson 1999: 272–4). Explicit evidence for priests in provincial cult centers is not found until the Fifth Dynasty.

The papyrus archives of the same era provide a fascinating glimpse at the micro-management of temples, a system which is likely to have been in place during the Third and Fourth Dynasties too, when large cult complexes were associated with the

royal tombs. Though these complexes provided a setting for the cult of the deceased Pharaoh, many elements of the regular rituals in these cults would become integral to the cult of deities in ensuing periods. Thereafter, the introduction of biographical texts, first upon tomb walls and later inscribed on statues and stelae, expands the depth of information available on temples and the priests who staffed them. Royal decrees concerning temples, and the fortuitous survival of several ritual texts, improve our understanding further. Evidence from well-preserved archaeological contexts can also be used to shed light on priestly activities, though, as is often the case, the evidence from northern Egypt is less well preserved (particularly in terms of papyri, and metal and wooden cult paraphernalia), and our knowledge is mostly confined to the large, formal, cult temples. This chapter largely eschews consideration of the funerary sphere, though many of the rituals and organizational structures were similar.

This chapter will seek to provide a broad characterization of the ritual roles of priests within formal cult settings, but also the organization of priesthoods as attested in many important temples. The minutiae of when individual titles appeared, and in which parts of Egypt, are not appropriate here: an array of detailed studies are available for those interested (see Further Reading). The term “priesthood” creates a modern impression of a uniform, well-organized model for organizing the staffing of temple cult, but variation was undoubtedly prevalent, with practical and political considerations probably as important as the desire to ensure a temple had a “complete” priesthood at any given time. A sense of the variety of priestly positions and roles is hopefully reflected amongst the examples discussed. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to highlight the range of non-ritual activities undertaken by priests. Readers should remain aware that during the two and a half millennia covered by this chapter there are large formal temples (plate 6), small village shrines, chapels dedicated to divine birth narratives, royal “mortuary” temples and sacred places (often natural features) imbued with meaning, both in the Nile Delta and Valley, and in the desert and distant foreign territories. All of these required a cult service, of vastly varying scale and degrees of permanence: some may only have been staffed seasonally, particularly sacred places at, or en route to, mines and quarries. A detailed discussion of religion in society – temples large and small provided the most evident, but not the only, arena for expression – and the subject of temple architecture are not covered here (see chs. I, 27; II, 7).

2 The Organization of Ritual Staff

In common with many other areas of elite pharaonic social structure a bewildering array of titles existed which are now broadly classified as “priestly,” though the activities undertaken by the holder of such titles may not match modern expectations hinted at by the translated titles. Long biographical texts make it clear that strings of priestly titles could be accrued over a successful career. Presumably these individuals were not fulfilling the duties of all of his or her positions; there would, however, have been considerable financial benefits to the accumulation of titles. It needs to be stressed, however, that there was not always a permanent priesthood, akin to

a modern clergy, for every temple, and this may in fact have been quite unusual until New Kingdom times. Rather, many of the roles were fulfilled on a part-time basis, the protagonists being fully integrated into Egyptian society for the remainder of the year.

The most common title was *ḥm-ntr*, literally “God’s Servant,” often translated as “prophet” or simply “priest.” There is ample evidence for individuals holding offices relating to the cults of several divinities and of course, in several temples, not always in the same town or even region. The title could be associated with both gods and statues of Pharaohs. The other major group of priests hold the title *wꜥb*, or “pure one.” These are not necessarily lowly priests deprived of access to the divine images; at Karnak there is copious evidence that they were particularly involved with processional images (Kruchten 1989: 251–4). While these are generally accepted as a lower rank of priests than the *ḥm-ntr* priests, in some cults they would have performed specific duties. Thus the *wꜥb*-priests of Sekhmet, closely associated with the notion of appeasing the furious goddess, were involved with medicine, if one can rely on their prominent role in the medical papyri (Von Känel 1980).

Temples from the Old Kingdom onwards had “an Overseer of God’s Servants” (*imy-r ḥmw-ntrw*), and in some cases an “Inspector of God’s Servants” (*shd ḥmw-ntr*). Others were simply qualified as “great” (*ḥm-ntr ʿ3*, *wꜥb ʿ3*), suggestive of a more elevated rank. Priestly positions could be conferred by Pharaoh (e.g. Strudwick 2005: 343–4); personal circumstance and favour must have been very important. By the New Kingdom, the larger temples had more developed hierarchies of officiants, with a “First Servant of the God” (High Priest), below which were Second, Third and Fourth Servants of the God. This is well attested at Karnak, particularly in New Kingdom statues and reliefs, and upon the large number of private statues of the Third Intermediate Period, but sources from other major temples indicate this organizational model was more widespread. Three cities are notable for the distinctive terminology used for their most senior officiant: “Greatest of Seers” (*wr m33w*, Heliopolis), “Great (one) of those who control the Craftsmen” (*wr ḥrp ḥmwt*, Memphis), and “Greatest of the Five” (*wr diw*, Hermopolis Magna); it is perhaps no coincidence that these cities were all associated with distinct creation narratives.

Other titles which appear with some frequency include “God’s Father,” held by high-ranking priests in the Old Kingdom, but much more widely used in later periods (*LÄ* 6: 389), and “Lector Priest” (*hry-ḥbt*). This last title is particularly common amongst the elite, often combined with other administrative, courtly, or temple titles. While some may have been involved in temple ceremonies, they were also prominent in mortuary rites such as the Opening of the Mouth ceremony; several can be associated with copying texts, artistic production, or liturgies (Parkinson 2009: 157–9). The “Stolist” (*sm3ty*) was responsible for clothing the god, particularly the royal image in mortuary temples (e.g. Quirke 2004: 127). “Hour-priests” have been interpreted as part-timers by some Egyptologists, whereas others propose the holders of this office had specific knowledge of the celestial bodies in relation to the timing of rituals and festivals. Titles generally understood to relate to the funerary cult, most notably “Servant of the *k3* (*ḥm-k3*)” and *Sem*-Priest (Schmitz, *LÄ* 5: 833–4) would not lie entirely outside the temple sphere, particularly with the trend towards elite burials in temples during the first millennium BC.

These are only the most common titles, with many others known only from a small number of monuments, most notably the private statues set up in temples. Many are difficult to transcribe, let alone translate or understand their meaning. It is clear that some were associated with one or several temples in a particular town or region. For example, the combination of *rnḫ* and *ḥpt-wdꜣt* seems specific to the Kom el-Hisn/Kom Firin region of the western Delta (Perdu 1992: 186–7; for titles specific to other sites see *LÄ* 4: 1097–8). At a period when ritual and mythological texts particular to certain towns or regions were apparently being developed in ever larger numbers, it might be that the Late Period saw more positions with specific roles to play in local rituals. Furthermore, many of the titles may have quickly become markers of status rather than reflecting the duties performed, a facet further emphasized when arcane titles came back in vogue, as happened in the Late Period (*LÄ* 4: 1097).

During the Old Kingdom, and perhaps to a lesser degree in later times, a number of elite women held the title of “God’s Servant of Hathor,” but there is sufficient evidence to show that women could also hold priesthoods relating to other gods and goddesses, as well as to royal statues (*LÄ* 4: 1100–5), though the proportion of sources seems to suggest that this was a relatively rare female occupation. There is evidence that musical troupes (*ḥnr*) and dancers, both of men and women, were attached to temples, perhaps as early as the Fifth Dynasty onwards (Nord 1981). The *mrt*-dancers were particularly associated with royal rituals from the Fourth Dynasty.

In the New Kingdom and thereafter there seems to be a decline in the number of women holding priestly positions, with two notable exceptions. Firstly, the designation “Songstress (*šmꜣt*)” is rather common throughout Egypt in the New Kingdom, and may not have reflected a real ritual role. Secondly, the important office of “God’s Wife of Amun” becomes prominent in the early Eighteenth Dynasty, when it was held by royal figures such as Ahmose-Nefertari (Gitton 1984; Gosselin 2007). The role of this woman was to act as the consort of Amun during religious ceremonies; the designation “Divine Adoratrice” and “Hand of the God” was held by many of the same individuals. With the development of royal birth narratives in the Eighteenth Dynasty, eventually resulting in the creation of *mammis* (birth-houses) as separate cult-buildings, it is perhaps unsurprising that the God’s Wives assumed particular importance. In the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties, the God’s Wives of Amun were often political appointments, most notably when Nitocris is installed to mark the consolidation of Psamtik I’s power over Upper Egypt (Caminos 1964).

A papyrus archive from the Fifth Dynasty funerary temple of Neferirkare-Kakai allows us a detailed glimpse at the workings of a royal funerary temple, including the range and roles of the different personnel involved in ritual service (Posener-Kriéger 1976, 1997). The cultural tasks required in each month of temple service were recorded upon a dedicated roll of papyrus, with additional rolls being kept for particular festivals. Staff were organized on the basis of “phyles,” also prevalent in the organization of mortuary cults and *corvée* labor (Roth 1991), which allowed priests to work one month in four. The vast majority of the persons held the title of *ḥm-nṯr* or *hnty-š*, the latter denoting those responsible for bringing offerings into the temple. Evidently, the phyle system ensured that a large number of persons were involved in temple service, including central government officials (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 589–609), while ensuring they remained integrated into society at large. As the



Figure 14.1 Temple furniture inventory upon a papyrus from the Abusir archive, relating to the funerary temple of Neferirkare-Kakai (Fifth Dynasty). The material, object and quantity of items are given in tabular arrangement, across three successive inspections when the phyles changed over. British Museum EA 10735/12. Courtesy the Trustees of the British Museum.

priesthood grew, this was essential to ensure that agricultural productivity, the basis for Egypt's prosperity, was not undermined. Conversely, with the development of a strong centralized government in the early third millennium BC the importance of involving a large number of people in remunerated positions, and immersing them in settings where the royal ideology was proclaimed, cannot be underestimated. Further finds from Abusir and Gebelein (Posener-Kriéger 1975, 1997) provide corroboration that the situation portrayed by the Neferirkare-Kakai archive was not unusual.

Documents and sealings from several Middle Kingdom temples provide further evidence for the complex administration required for the functioning of religious and economic institutions, again principally from temples related to the royal mortuary cult. The phyle system continued, identified by number only, without the characteristic names of the Old Kingdom royal phyles. Priests would thus be termed as belonging to, for example, “the third phyle” (literally 3-*ḥ*, “the third watch”). Excavations at the mortuary temple of Senwosret III at southern Abydos yielded a mass of sealings, but very few bore priestly titles. This may simply reflect that priests were not largely responsible for sealing goods and documents (Wegner 2007b: 355–7); the priests attested include an “Overseer of the Temple,” “Phyle Regulator” (*mty n ḥ*), *wꜥb*-priests and a lector priest, but also a “God’s Father of Sobek, Lord of Crocodilopolis.” The last example hints at movement of priests, something attested throughout Egyptian history (e.g. Frood 2003, a high priest at Abydos who also held responsibilities at Akhmim). Wegner notes that the phyle regulators probably rotated at each watch-change, a suggestion supported by the evidence from Lahun, where complete lists of men eligible for service in each phyle also survived (Quirke 2004: 119–31). This phyle system persists throughout most of dynastic history: at the temple of Teudjoi in Middle Egypt, each phyle consisted of twenty men during the sixth century BC (Vittmann 1998: 158–9); it is also referred to in the *Book of the Temple*, a series of late copies of a manuscript which includes descriptions of priestly

duties and ranks (Quack 2003). A fifth phyle was added in 238 BC, a development recorded in the Canopus Decree. The phenomenon of cult guilds, to ensure the requisite amount of priestly participation, through shared responsibility for undertaking ritual and burial of sacred animals, is principally known from Ptolemaic documents, but there is evidence for similar arrangements from the sixth century BC onwards (de Cénival 1972).

3 Servicing the Gods

Physical manifestations of the divine, typically in the form of statues, were the focus of regular ceremonies to ensure the satisfaction of the gods. These cult actions were motivated by a fundamental ideology which defined Pharaoh's relationship to the divine world. In essence, the king was guaranteed a prosperous reign if he ensured the territorial integrity of Egypt (maintaining the order of Maat) and satisfied the god's requirements for sustenance, thus ensuring the continued cosmic order. This latter aspect was architecturally codified through formal cult temples at which, in theory, the king regularly completed rituals, particularly the offering of food and drink, to sustain the gods. A text known as *The King as Sun-priest*, first attested in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri, but probably of earlier date, occurs in seemingly restricted contexts (mostly temples) until the Saite era (Assmann 1970). Though placing an accent on secret knowledge needed to perform the role, it nonetheless sums up the reasons underlying formal temple cult as practiced throughout Egypt:

Re has placed the King NN on the earth of the living
for endless repetition and invariable duration
to administer justice to human beings and satisfy the gods,
to fulfil Maat and annihilate injustice.
He (the king) gives food-offerings to the gods
And funeral offerings to the transfigured (dead). (Assmann 1995: 19–20)

In practice, of course, priests fulfilled the ritual obligations of the king.

Unsurprisingly, those involved in these rituals were expected to follow certain rules related to “purity.” Much has been assumed about these rules, and the taboos, of the Egyptian priests, but again there would have been considerable variation from formal temples to the local chapels. Herodotus remains our best source: effectively descriptions of Saite practices, somewhat distorted through second-hand evidence and the Greek viewpoint of the author. Egyptian sources include a relief at Karnak depicting temple staff undertaking purification rituals prior to service, labelled as “going down to wash by the God's Servants, the God's Wife, the God's Hand, in the cool pool, (then) entering into the temple” (Legrain and Naville 1902: pl.11b). A series of texts known as “priestly annals” were carved in spaces near the central sanctuary at Karnak during the Third Intermediate Period: these record the initiation of a priests into the sacred space for the first time, using the charged term *bs* (Kruchten 1989). The lengthier examples include genealogies, sometimes fictional, followed by an address hailing the power of Amun-Re, and alluding to the experience

of being before the god. Bakhenkhonsu, a High Priest of Amun under Ramesses II, actually describes his initiation:

I went forth from the “room of writing” as an excellent youth in the temple of the Lady of Heaven (for) my instruction as *wꜥb*-priest in the temple of Amun . . . I was initiated (*bs.kwi*) as God’s Father (so) I could see all his forms. (*KRI* III: 296, 1–4)

A room known as the “house of the morning” (*pr-dwꜣt*) may have been dedicated to the pre-ritual purification of priests. The Piyi Stela describes how, following the king’s conquest of Memphis, he underwent purification: “in the *pr-dwꜣt*, there were performed for him all the ceremonies that are performed for a king, (then) he entered the temple” (Grimal 1981a: 104).

Ideologically, the daily ritual before the cult statue was only undertaken by the High Priest, as representative of Pharaoh (himself seen as the son of the god in a given temple). Ptolemaic sources, most notably reliefs in Edfu temple (Alliot 1949), provide a comprehensive description of this daily ritual. Less expansive descriptions from earlier times suggest that earlier temple ritual not remarkably different from that described at Edfu. A range of Old Kingdom titles reflect some of the rituals (*LÄ* 6: 390): “Keeper of the Headdress of adorning Ptah” (*iry nfr-ḥꜣt m ḥkr Pth*), “Chief of the Wardrobe in the Temple of Onuris” (*ḥry-tp dꜣt m ḥwt-nṯr nt ’In-ḥr*). Biographical texts of the late Old Kingdom also refer to the daily ritual. Pepyankh, Overseer of Priests of Hathor of Cusae, describes “entering in before Hathor, Lady of Cusae, seeing her, performing the rituals (*ih*) for her with my hands” (Blackman 1924: pl. 4A). The monthly registers of temple service from the Neferirkare-Kakai archive at Abusir offer further glimpses at some of the rituals, including those before the royal statues at the start of each month (unveiling, purifying, clothing, adorning, incensing), performing morning and evening rituals around the royal tomb, but also the responsibilities in caring for the sacred equipment after use in ritual. A legacy of extensive inventories of cult equipment has survived as a result of this last preoccupation (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 1–57, tableau I; 125–208, 536–40).

Slightly later in time, in the *Instruction for King Merikare*, the ideal role of a priest is described as

In the monthly service, wear the white sandals
Visit the temple, observe (?) the mysteries,
Enter the shrine, eat bread in the god’s house;
Proffer libations, multiply the loaves
Make ample the daily offerings. (Lichtheim 1976: 102)

Thus the basic ritual always seemed to consist of food offerings and libating, as was still the case at Edfu over two millennia later. It is, of course, not surprising that temple cult may have been one of the more ostensibly conservative areas of pharaonic civilization.

Our sources are more expansive for the New Kingdom, with a series of scenes in the sanctuaries of the temple of Sety I at Abydos indicating the similarity of the daily ritual for the different gods (David 1973: 89–144). Much of the detail is matched in the Twenty-second Dynasty papyri which provide a checklist of the daily rituals enacted



Figure 14.2 The king as priest before Ptah: performing the “spell for breaking the clay seal (of the god’s shrine),” an episode in the Daily Temple Ritual, as depicted in the temple of Sety I at Abydos. Courtesy Neal Spencer.

for Amun-Re and Mut at Karnak (Moret 1902); a related text inscribed at Hibis temple refers to similar rituals being recorded upon wooden tablets (Lorton 1994: 168). The rites for Amun-Re in the Twenty-second Dynasty papyri are introduced as

Beginning of the formulae of offerings to the god made at the temple of Amun-Re, king of the gods, in the course of every day, by the chief *wꜥb*-priest who is in his day of service.
(Moret 1902: 7)

followed by 66 individual actions, many of them repeated. To summarize, after purification of the area with incense, the sealed doors of the shrine containing the divine image were opened. The principal officiant then kissed the ground before the god, prostrated himself upon his stomach and raised his arms in adoration while reciting hymns to the god. Offerings of incense and scented oil follow and an offering of Maat (itself embodying all other offerings, Teeter 1997). The statue is then dressed in different types of cloth before two types of eye-paint are proffered. Finally, the priest leaves, with offerings of natron, water, and incense left for the god. Within the ritual for Amun-Re there is also reference to burning incense for other gods. Similar, but shortened, rituals would take place at midday and in the evening.



Figure 14.3 Copper alloy incense burner, with representation of a kneeling priest. British Museum EA 41606. Courtesy the Trustees of the British Museum.

The paraphernalia needed for these rituals has in places survived, with incense-burners, braziers, libation bowls, situlae, tongs, ladles, strainers, sistra, and other objects recovered from caches in temples (Insley-Green 1987). Water clocks (clepsydrae) would facilitate time-keeping through the night (Mengoli 1989).

Few cult statues survive, but depictions such as those on a naos from Saft el-Henna (Roeder 1914: pls.17–32) remind us that many cult images consisted of complex groups of statues, often in active poses. Ancient descriptions underline the fantastic array of materials of which these were made, even in relatively small temples (McDowell 1999: 95). Hill has commented on how many cult statue groups may have been dismantled after ritual use (2007: 157), though this may not have been the case for the main cult image which benefited from daily ritual. These were not the sober, stone images of gods that today dominate museums and the much-visited temples of Egypt.

The site of Deir el-Medina provides plentiful evidence of ritual continuing along similar lines to that in the grand temples, if on a more modest scale. Papyri have survived containing a modified version of the daily ritual to benefit the deified Amenhotep I (e.g. McDowell 1999: 93–4). Excavations at other sites reflect a degree of consistency in the layout of shrines and temples, particularly the architectural progression towards a sanctuary area, and a similar focus on offering as a ritual (bowls, evidence of burning, small figurines and other “votives”; see Pinch 1993). There was not always a clear delineation between magical practice and formal “state cult.” The fact that clay figurines, such as those of cobras, are found in domestic, military, funerary, and temple contexts (Szpakowska 2003) underlines how fluid magico-religious practice was in pharaonic Egypt, encompassing both formal temples and domestic cult. Other rituals seem more specific to certain sites, at least

in their initial guise. The “ritual of the four balls” featured the throwing of clay balls towards the cardinal points, as a means of protecting Osiris from his enemies (Goyon 1975). This ritual is known from relief depictions in a number of temples (Abydos, Hibis, Karnak), yet is also transmitted through less elevated media, such as on amuletic papyri bearing spells against snake bites. As such, there is clearly an underlying consistency, though not bland homogeneity, to cult practice throughout levels of society.

It is striking how restricted the range of offerings is in the daily rituals for Amun and Mut known from papyri. In contrast, the list of products designated as offerings for Amun-Re in *P. Harris I* is staggering, encompassing an array of bread and cakes, beer, wine, incense, oils, honey, fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and poultry, flowers, wax, linen, and leather (Grandet 1994: 246–52). Few of these would have been physically placed before the god: a select group of offerings were seen to embody the whole lavish array. Temples clearly housed significant amounts of produce and goods, as evident from the large storage capacity at temples such as the Ramesseum and Abydos, though this temple should not be seen as typical of all sites in Egypt. The construction of “storehouses of the divine offerings” (*šnwt nt ḥtpw-ntr*; Quirke 1997: 29) and later “pure storehouses” (*šn^c w^cb*, Traunecker 1987a) allowed a proportion of the regular offerings to be sanctified before being brought into the divine presence. Architectural arrangements were also made to substitute for the regular trips dictated by festival ritual (Traunecker 1982).

A central tenet of Egyptian temples was the practice of the “reversion of offerings (*wdb-rd*),” in which offerings placed before the principal god were then offered to secondary gods and even revered ancestors before eventual distribution, including to mortuary cults outside the temple. The priests were an evident beneficiary of the system, which may also have affected a wider tranche of the population. Some priests held titles clearly attesting to their involvement in managing the distribution process, such as “Overseer of the Divine Offerings (*imy-r ḥtp-ntr*).” This redistribution system was already in place during the Fifth Dynasty (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 405–12).

The daily ritual during the theological revolution of the Amarna period was somewhat different. In the formal temples of the royal city Akhetaten only the Aten received offerings, but, in contrast to traditional temples, the courtyards of the Great Aten temple were provided with row upon row of offering tables, filled during rituals with food, drink, and floral offerings, as shown in contemporary tomb reliefs (Davies 1903: pl. 25). The culmination of the offering ceremonies took place on one of the raised open-air altars. Excavation of a structure at Amarna has provided details of the vast quantity of cattle slaughtered for the Great Aten temple (Payne in Kemp et al. 2006: 45–52), with the suggestion that only the heads and shoulders were being dedicated in the temple; presumably other parts were processed and immediately redistributed for consumption.

Outside of the daily ritual the calendar for most temples appears to have been crowded with festivals of varying size and importance. The early nationwide processions of the king recorded in the Palermo Stone may have provided the model for the lavish processional festivals of later times. At Abusir the Neferirkare-Kakai complex hosted a monthly festival to mark the new month; further celebrations were held in honor of Min and Hathor; and another festival, perhaps processional in character, was

focused upon a series of divine emblems (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 59–123, 544–63). The amount of offerings dedicated in these Old Kingdom festivals is evident from reliefs in the nearby sun-temple of Niuserre (Strudwick 2005: 86–90). The Sokar festival was probably the major annual event in the Memphite necropolis, which involved rites at various royal mortuary temples in turn. Elements of the royal jubilee festival (*Heb-sed*) were staged in and around certain temples, and surviving reliefs indicate that priests from different temples throughout Egypt participated in the rites (Hornung and Stachelin 2006).

The most extensive sources relate to Theban festivals, particularly during the New Kingdom. In the “Festival of the Valley,” the cult images of Amun-Re (and other gods) from Karnak visited shrines on the West Bank (Schott 1952). The other principal festival at Thebes was the Opet festival, when the images of the Theban triad travelled from Karnak to Luxor and participated in rituals designed to reinvigorate royal power (Bell 1985). It has been suggested that iconographic keys in the reliefs could hint at which areas of the temple were accessible during such festivals (Bell 1997: 164–70). Other celebrations were more localized, with several dozen festivals known from Deir el-Medina. Those inhabitants with priestly roles would have been busy during some of these, though the atmosphere may not have been especially formal, with the village’s inhabitants purportedly drinking for four days in the lead-up to the festival of the deified Amenhotep I (McDowell 1999: 96–7).

Outside Thebes and Memphis, the evidence is less expansive prior to the Ptolemaic era, but the number of regular festivals is clear from both temple and tomb sources (Spalinger 1996). Osiride festivals were evidently an important part of the year at temples throughout Egypt, as attested in papyri (Barguet 1962a) but also from the archaeological evidence for the burial of figurines of Osiris at Karnak (Coulon et al. 1995). Abydos, the southern center for Osiride cult, hosted an important processional festival. A Twelfth Dynasty stela of the “overseer of gold and silver houses” Ikhernofret, describes his participation in a dramatic performance relating to the triumph of Osiris:

I conducted the Procession of Wepwawet, when he goes forth to champion his father. I repulsed the attackers of the *nšmt*-barque, I felled the enemies of Osiris. I conducted the Great Procession, following the god in his steps. I made the god’s boat sail, Thoth steering the sailing. I equipped with a cabin the barque “Truly-risen-is-the-Lord-of-Abydos.” Decked in his beautiful regalia he proceeded to the domain of Peker. I cleared the god’s path to his tomb in Peker. I protected Wennefer on that day of great combat. I felled all his foes on the shore of *Nedyt*. (Lichtheim 1975: 124–5)

Later, the Ramesside High Priest Wennenefer outlined his involvement in similar mysteries (*KRI* III: 452). The recent publication of a manual relating to cult and ritual in the temples of the Nile Delta provides glimpses at otherwise unknown or obscure temples and their festivals (Meeks 2006). The celebrated festival at Bubastis drew 700,000 pilgrims to the city, according to Herodotos (II: 138–9) of which very few can have been allowed into the inner parts of the temples.

As times when the divine presence was physically projected beyond the temple enclosures, festivals enabled direct supplications to divine images by a wider group. The mechanics of these approaches are well understood, with a movement of the

divine image, or the barque upon which it was housed, denoting a positive or negative view of the question put before the divinity. At Karnak, particular places within the temple hosted oracular consultations (Kruchten 1986). In the late first millennium BC oracular petitions were handed over to a priest in the temple forecourt or *dromos*, brought before the divine image, and the pronouncement was later conveyed to the supplicant. Oracles relating to royal succession, such as Hatshepsut being “chosen” as ruler, clearly reside within a framework of pharaonic ideology and political legitimization. The majority of approaches, however, would have been more mundane (see Smith 2002: 367–8). Evidently, this placed considerable power in the hands of the priests. It is not always clear how access to the gods was managed. At Deir el-Medina persons of apparently modest standing could approach the gods of the village, but it is not clear whether other famous oracles, such as that in the Siwa oasis, were accessible to the wider populace.

Daily and festival rituals were evidently recorded in ancient temple documents, and there is clear evidence for the presence of libraries within temple precincts. Institutions such as the “House of Life” and the “House of Books” are referred to in many texts (Gardiner 1938). The only preserved structure securely identified as a “House of Life” is at el-Amarna, but other excavations have revealed temple buildings designed to house texts. On the south side of the Ramesseum a building with rooms or cells overlooking a court yielded a number of ostraca bearing literary texts, leading to its identification as a school (Leblanc 2004). A modest brick building of the Thirtieth Dynasty, fitted with wooden shelves for storing papyri, was found near the royal tombs in the temple enclosure at Tanis (Bovot et al. 2000). The charred papyri recovered from within included accounts, personnel lists relating to the Khonsu temple, and one lengthy text recording the distribution of goods to various religious institutions. The compositions stored in temple libraries would also include ritual instructions, though the oblique nature of the texts makes it clear that these were not step-by-step manuals but rather texts for those already familiar with aspects of the ritual. A list of compositions stored in a library, possibly a Ramesside temple, includes literary works (Burkard and Fischer-Elfert 1994: no.180). We should not necessarily expect different departments, or even distinct storage spaces, to house documents of administrative, liturgical, or other types.

In the first millennium BC a genre of texts termed *pseudepigrapha* is attested in which declarations of a temple’s rights, immunity from expropriation, or simply its resources, are fictionally placed in much earlier times, presumably to lend them legitimacy. These works can only have been authored by the priests of the temple in question, perhaps inspired by ancient texts housed in the temple libraries. Examples include the Famine Stela at Sehel, purporting to be a decree of Djoser granting revenues to the temple of Khnum at Elephantine (Lichtheim 1980: 94–103).

Were ancient Egyptian priests scholars of theology? Many were likely to have been actors in carefully defined roles, content with remuneration, and may not have had a personal interest in theological matters. Yet Classical writers certainly credited the Egyptian priesthood as a knowledgeable class (Sauneron 2000: 61), and the nature of some texts makes it evident that theological matters did concern some priests, motivating a desire to compile, edit, and re-interpret ancient narratives and rituals. This is hinted at in some biographical texts, such as that of the priest Wennenefer,

who claims to have acquired a knowledge of the geography (*ip m ki*) of Ta-wer, the region around Abydos (KRI IV: 297, 6–11). The *Delta Cult Manual*, a Late Period document with information relating to various northern temples, is one example of the compilation of various mythological traditions. Again, the enigmatic nature of some of the texts suggests these were not written for an uninitiated audience. The *Manual* reflects a rich tapestry of regional variation in ritual, festivals, and the associated mythological narratives, too often obscured by a dependence upon Upper Egyptian sources. While architecture and decoration were consistent, but not identical, in many areas of Egypt, the survival of a series of monolithic shrines, with unusual decorative schemes, from Late Period temples in the Nile Delta (but not in Upper Egypt, where shrine decoration remained more traditional) indicates a growing interest in codification and re-presentation of local cosmogonies. Priests must have been key protagonists in such developments, which include “catalogues” of divine images held in temples but also the presentation of local mythological narratives (Spencer 2006). By the middle of the first millennium each temple had become the symbolic place of the first time, and creation myths recounted how the world had come into being around the specific temple (also evident in the décor of the small temple at Medinet Habu). These myths were often developed from much older antecedents, those relating to the sacred cities of Memphis, Heliopolis, and Hermopolis being amongst the better known. The Memphite theology, for example, is preserved upon the Shabaka Stone (Lichtheim 1975: 51–7). The vast majority of surviving solar hymns come from funerary contexts, though many are rooted in older temple cult (Assmann 1995). The religious response to the Amarna period – how theological questions brought up by the schism were to be ignored or approached in sacred contexts – must also have seen priests play a crucial role.

Outside the confines of Egypt proper, colonial communities and military garrisons naturally echoed the arrangement of temple cult back in Egypt, albeit at varying scales. The cult of Amun and associated gods persisted in Nubia long after Kushite control over Egypt had been lost. The royal stelae from Kawa clearly indicate the organization of ritual, and the endowments of Kushite temples had many similarities with that in Egypt (Macadam 1949). Despite the difficulty in deciphering Meroitic texts, it is still possible to propose a hierarchy of priestly positions (Török 1997a) and the temple reliefs at Naga, Meroe, Dangeil, and Musawarrat es-Safra suggest that many of the same rituals were undertaken, though they may well have been imbued with new meaning (Török 1997b). Of course, foreign communities resided in Egypt in not insignificant numbers: the presence of non-Egyptian temples has been suggested for several enigmatic buildings by their excavators (e.g. Martin 1981), while a mass of textual data attests to the functioning of a Jewish temple at Elephantine and its often uneasy relationship with the staff of the nearby Egyptian temple of Khnum (Porten 1996: 17–18). The integration of foreign gods into Egyptian cult should also be borne in mind, particularly in the New Kingdom (Baal, Reshep, Astarte, Dedwen). Though this may derive from imperial prerogative, it is implicit from this presence of non-Egyptian deities that dialogue between cult practitioners from Egypt and elsewhere would have taken place.

4 The Mundane within the Sacred World

As with officiants in any religion, pharaonic priests existed in the real world, where they had families, received remuneration for their services, and carved out careers, in some cases attaining the throne. Additionally, immoral and criminal activity, particularly corruption, were far from absent in the priestly sphere in ancient Egypt.

We are fortunate that extensive documentation survives in relation to the remuneration of priests, which typically derives from temple lands and income allocated to the office. There is abundant evidence for the endowment of funerary cults, but also relating to temple service. The early Fifth Dynasty tomb of Nykaiankh at Tehna features inscriptions relating how thirteen individuals were provided with fields in return for serving as priests in the local Hathor temple (Strudwick 2005: 196–7); after their death, these persons' children would fulfil the duties and benefit from the endowment. While concerning arrangements for his mortuary cult, the lengthy inscriptions in the tomb of Djefaihap at Assiut illustrate how priests in the temples of Anubis and Wepwawet at Assiut could be paid from the resources of an individual, whether from personal wealth or through the proceeds from his various positions, including that of High Priest. A complex system of redistributive system can thus be reconstructed (Spalinger 1985).

Sizeable salary differentials existed amongst the priesthood in many temples. This is clear from papyri such as those from the Twelfth Dynasty royal mortuary temple at Lahun. Over a millennium later the Demotic papyri relating to Teudjoi again allow us a glimpse of the financial rewards available for priests at a regional temple of the Late Period. Revenue from temple lands was divided at 20 percent for each of the four phyles (of 20 priests), and the remaining 20 percent was assigned to the “Priest of Amun” and “Priest of the Ennead,” positions held by the same person in this instance (Vittmann 1998: 159, 490).

At Ayn Manawir in the Kharga oasis Demotic ostraca record the regular leasing of liturgical responsibilities, presumably to the inhabitants of the settlement, for the “festivals of the temple of the domain of Osiris-*iw*” (Chauveau 1996). *P. Rylands IX* records how the transfer of priestly titles, with associated incomes, was something recorded upon papyrus (Vittmann 1998: 122–7). It is not clear if accommodation for priests was provided as part of their remunerations; housing areas are known from temple precincts at certain periods, some clearly occupied by priests (Traunecker 1993).

For many individuals, it is possible to chart their career, through a succession of priestly posts, as proclaimed in the biographies upon statues often set up in temples. These statues were intended to ensure the legacy of the individual and access to the distribution of offerings. Some were clearly in a position to commission a large number of such statues, which could become the focus of piety in their own right. The Late Period phenomenon of healing statues is one example of this, but the importance of such statues also led to the proclamation of lengthy genealogies to claim an illustrious background for an individual who felt this was necessary (e.g. Ritner 1994; Vittmann 2002). Hereditary transmission of priestly offices is well attested at many periods of dynastic history. A priest Hori, in the reign of

Takelot II, emphasizes his parents as hailing from good priestly families, and that he was born in Thebes – “I am not one newly arrived!” (Kruchten 1989: 257–9).

Higher authorities could intervene to appoint new priests. The High Priest Nebwenenef was transferred from Abydos to Karnak at the behest of Ramesses II, with his former office being assigned to his son (Ritner 1994: 220–2). In Saite times, the Master of Shipping was the local authority in Middle Egypt: he appointed staff to the temple at Teudjoi (Vittmann 1998: 138–9). Oracles were also consulted for matters from the divine to the legal, including priestly appointments, such as at Deir el-Medina (McDowell 1999: 95). Kruchten has put forward the case for a dispute between rival priesthoods in Karnak of the early first millennium BC (1989: 264–7), something that is not explicit in any of the records. The occasional reference to turmoil at the highest levels of the Karnak priesthood (von Beckerath 1968) is perhaps unsurprising given the amount of influence and wealth at stake.

Throughout dynastic history there was no clear division between the priestly world and the civil administration, the military, and other spheres of activity. In fact, priests were often overtly political. It was common for Middle Kingdom town mayors (*ḥꜣtyw-ꜥ*) to also hold the position of Overseer of God’s Servants (*imy-r ḥmw-nṯrw*), for example at Lahun and Abydos, echoing the situation that had developed at the end of the Old Kingdom, when the nomarchs came to hold both civil and religious offices. The Heliopolitan high priest (*wr mꜣꜣw*) typically held elevated civil titles during the Middle Kingdom (Grajetski 2000: 111). More striking still, by the end of the New Kingdom, the High Priests of Amun displayed clear political ambitions, some assuming effective control over parts of a politically fragmented Egypt (Kees 1964; Kitchen 1986). These High Priests displayed their titulary within cartouches. Perhaps in a bid to ensure the Amun priesthood did not again become a springboard to political rule, the Twenty-sixth Dynasty kings installed family members as God’s Wives of Amun at Thebes, ensuring a dynastic presence in the southern capital (Camino 1964).

Other than priests seeking political advantage, many were involved in other aspects of state activity. Overseers of Priests (*imyw-r nṯrw*) were already part of large military expeditions sponsored by Pharaoh at the end of the Old Kingdom (Lichtheim 1975: 20), and even in times of reduced central control the “Elder of the Portal of the Temple of Amun” at Karnak, Wenamun, travelled to the Levant, via the ruling house at Tanis, to acquire wood for a sacred barque (Lichtheim 1976: 224–30). We need not imagine all regional temples acting in this manner, as the considerable resources of Karnak at the end of the New Kingdom were probably unusual.

Many expeditions were mounted to seek building materials: limestone and sandstone were typically quarried in areas of some proximity, but significant resources were also expended to source hard stone such as granite from the Aswan area, even by temples in the far-away Delta. There is plentiful evidence that priests were involved with quarrying expeditions, such as the Third Priest and Chief of Phyle of Hermopolis Parva, who left his name in the Tura quarries (Zivie 1975: 136–44). In view of the number of temples that would be witnessing construction work at any one time, it seems striking that the quarrying missions seemed to be aimed at acquiring material for individual temples. However, this probably reflects the degree of local and non-royal initiative that lay behind much temple building (Spencer 2000). From the Old

Kingdom onwards there is ample evidence for priests being involved in the building of temples, which can range from minor modifications to the demolition of existing buildings to make way for a replacement (e.g. Strudwick 2005: 271–2; Frood 2007: 77–81). It is not only the most senior priests who are involved in this activity. In Athribis of the fourth century BC, the “Chief Doorkeeper” and “Chief Guardian of the (Sacred) Falcon” Djedhor was seemingly responsible for an extensive building programme (Jelinkova-Reymond 1956: 104–8). Presumably some of these individuals can be credited with the design of temples, rather than simply project management. Foundation ceremonies complemented the building work; theoretically a prerogative of Pharaoh, these were of course undertaken by a wide variety of officials and priests (e.g. Cumming 1984: 39–40).

Ritual activity would have been disrupted by construction work, and many of the large temples were effectively building sites during much of antiquity. When the Saite temple of Khnum was dismantled to allow the construction of a replacement under Nectanebo II, a project requiring years of construction work, it seems that a small stone temple was built alongside the construction site. The excavator has plausibly suggested this was a temporary cult installation until the new sanctuary was operational (Kaiser et al. 1999: 145–8). Once constructed, temples needed to be consecrated before they were deemed fit for purpose, and repurifications were necessary prior to festivals and particularly after events seen as desecrations, as with Montuemhat’s actions after the Assyrian sacking of Thebes:

I purified (*sw^cb*) all the temples (*rw-prw*) across all the regions of Upper Egypt, conforming to the ritual “purification of the sanctuaries (*mi ntt r sw^cb r-prw*)” ... after what occurred ... in Upper Egypt. (Leclant 1961: 202)

Though this chapter has focused on the priests of Egyptian temples, formal cult temples of the pharaonic era also employed a large number of individuals, both in and around the temple, and even elsewhere in Egypt. The archives from the funerary temple of Neferirkare-Kakai are dominated by records of commodity deliveries and redistribution, much of it from the solar temple of Neferirkare (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 209–428), which would dictate a certain level of staffing. Outside of the residence city an extensive number of employees is attested at the temple of Min at Koptos, according to the Sixth Dynasty royal decrees: servants (*mrt*), functionaries (*imyw-st-^c*), retainers (*šmsw*), day attendants (*wršt*), people of the workhouse (*šn^cw*) and builders (*ḳdw*) (Strudwick 2005: 107–11). The administrative papyri from Lahun attest to scribes, laborers (*k3wtyw*), doorkeepers (*iryw 3*), a brewer (*‘fty*), and a Steward of the God’s Offerings (*imy-r pr n ḥtp-ntr*) working within the temple (Quirke 2004: 121–31). Immense economic holdings are a well-known feature of New Kingdom temples, including land and its produce, livestock, and a myriad of precious commodities. Again, this needed administering, and positions attached to temples included stewards, gardeners, farmers, brewers, bakers, fishermen, craftsmen, weavers, and scribes. *Papyrus Harris* I records the assignment during the reign of Ramesses III of 86,486 workers, 421,362 cattle, and 864,168 arouras [23,634 km²] of land to institutions of Amun alone, as well as boats, workshops, and gardens (Grandet 1994: 235–6). Sety I saw fit to endow his temple at Abydos with a staff

of gold-washers, based in the Wadi Mia opposite Edfu (Lichtheim 1975: 52–7); in specifying that these staff cannot be co-opted for other tasks, the decree implicitly attests to a problem with the permanence of temple staff. This issue of appropriating temple goods and staff had become a problem in the Old Kingdom, prompting a series of decrees preventing provincial staff and assets of provincial temples from being requisitioned for other purposes (Strudwick 2005: 97–127). Many of those fulfilling “secular” duties within temples simultaneously held priestly offices.

Egyptian temples were in theory places of great sanctity. Yet in those temples where fortuitous archaeological preservation allows us glimpses of an operational institution, one is struck by the clutter. Fine statues, decorated walls and monolithic shrines are perhaps what we expect, but the halls were also filled with royal and private donations of varying scale and quality: statues in various materials including bronze figurines (some of which may have been hung on the walls, Perdu 2003), the “sculptors models” (Tomoum 2006), and perhaps the common but rarely published clay and terracotta figurines. A striking example of this sacred clutter was found in the small ancillary rooms adjacent to the sanctuary of the temple of Osiris-*iw* at Ayn el-Manawir, in which nearly 400 small metal alloy statues had been stacked up, mostly of the god Osiris (Wuttmann et al. 2007). The excavators suggest that the statues had been deposited at intervals. Caches of bronze statues, particularly at popular places of pilgrimage such as the Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara, attest to the need for periodic burial of these statues to clear space for the temple to remain operational (Davies 2007). As this was presumably a religious ritual, taking place within the sacred space, one can expect a priest to have been present, if not charged with undertaking the burial. Evidently, persons would have been employed to dig the pits for these caches. The building work would have created an almost constant flurry of dirt and dust, the situation being further exacerbated by Egypt’s climate with its frequent sandstorms and annual Nile flood. A stela records the large hall at Karnak being flooded in the Seventeenth Dynasty (Baines 1974). Who cleaned and swept up? Largely anonymous in the elite written record, the *talataat* of the Amarna age do offer a glimpse of the sweepers in a palace context (Cooney 1965: 73); the title “laborer” (*k3wtj*), known from temples (*LĀ* 6: 403), may encompass such lowly positions.

Many pharaonic temples bear grooves ground into the wall surfaces, often referred to as “pilgrim gouges,” as they may be the result of the pious wanting to take away fragments imbued with the temple’s power. Some can be accurately dated to the dynastic era, and their distribution in the temple at Karnak suggests areas where access was less restricted (Traunecker 1987b). During the first millennium BC, there is ample evidence for temple staff being responsible for ensuring that private donations – whether land or small statuary – were maintained and benefited from cult and ritual. This responsibility was doubtless accompanied with some material reward (Hill 2007: 153). Priests were effectively intermediaries, though often remunerated ones, in these transactions (e.g. Morkot 1990: 332–3). The practice of pious individuals overnigh-ting in temples (incubation) is best known from later sources (Daumas 1957; Ray 1976: 130–6), but clearly occurred in the New Kingdom (McDowell 1999: 100–1). All of these phenomena demand that we imagine some areas of temples being busy with people making donations, touching statues and relief images thought to resonate with spiritual powers, and attempting to approach the gods in personal ways.

Did temples require policing? It is worth bearing in mind, as the treasuries of the principal temples evidently held extensive resources, many of them extremely valuable, but also transportable and re-saleable. The tomb-robbery papyri of the late New Kingdom bear ample witness to the attraction of similarly luxurious burial goods. With the number of staff employed in these temple, the amount of precious goods stored therein (under Ramesses III alone 780 *deben* [10.6 kg] of gold and silver were donated to the Ptah temple at Memphis, Grandet 1994: 294), alongside the masses of pilgrims which had access to at least the outer parts of temples, security must have been a consideration. The Abusir papyri already attest to the organization of a system of surveillance of the temple and its storerooms throughout the day and night (Posener-Kriéger 1976: 27–46). The great inspections of nationwide temple holdings (*sipt wr*, for references see Cauville 1987: 73–4) must have been partly introduced to facilitate the management of precious resources. More generally, the control of sacred space was achieved through the construction of large enclosure walls around temples but also less imposing modifications to ensure processional ways remained unencumbered, as outside the East Gate at Karnak (Pirritano 1979). In contrast, some sacred areas remained free of later incursions, despite the apparent lack of any defined physical boundaries, most notably in the area around the Early Dynastic royal enclosures at Abydos, at least between their construction date and the Middle Kingdom (O'Connor 1989: 67). The lengthy *P. Rylands IX* has elicited much debate as to the nature of the text – documentary or literary (Vittmann 1998) – but the portrait of long-running squabbles over temple revenues, culminating in murder in the temple area (Traunecker 2008), can reasonably be seen as reflecting aspects of ancient life, perhaps more so than the official texts we typically rely on. Less serious types of crime within temples, but undoubtedly more common and often unnoticed, include misappropriation of property, such as at Elephantine in the Twentieth Dynasty (Peet 1924).

Temples were bustling microcosms of the settlements in which they were located, encompassing sacred rituals enacted by elite priests but also activities such as baking bread for the offerings, or overseeing the delivery of building materials for a new construction project. It is little wonder that the Greeks named each Egyptian city after the main god of its temple, as the temples at their center would have seemed like the pulsating heart of the settlement, and the officiants of cult as the knowledgeable, somewhat mysterious, guardians of traditions and wisdom. This was to be the view transmitted through the ancient Mediterranean.

FURTHER READING

The general *Lexikon* entries on priests largely discuss the attestation of certain titles at different periods, with a separate entry on female priests (*LÄ* 4: 1084–1105); another pair of articles concerns temple personnel in a broader sense, though the abundant post-New Kingdom evidence is not considered (*LÄ* 6: 387–407). Both sets of articles provide extensive references to source material. The most accessible introduction to priests is that of Sauneron, originally published in 1957 (new translated edition, 2000). With an emphasis on evoking an ancient ambiance, the work fails to convey the complexity and variation evident in ancient sources.

The prior publications of Blackman (collected in Lloyd 1998) and Kees (1953; 1958) remain important points of reference, underlining how wide-ranging studies of the priesthood are long overdue, other than chapters dedicated to the subject in more general volumes (e.g. Schafer 1997). Studies of the priests of certain temples, gods, cities, or regions have been a staple of twentieth century Egyptology, such as Gauthier (1931), Kees (1964), Gitton (1984), Graefe (1981), Gosselin (2000), Von Känel (1984), Moursi (1972), Naguib (1990), Vittmann (1978), Lefebvre (1929a, 1929b), Clère (1995), and Guernier (2006); there are many more examples in journal articles. More integrated studies, rather than following a certain title or studying individual temples, are now needed. The ritual of an even smaller number of temples has been the focus of analysis, notably the atypical Luxor (Bell 1985) and Abydos (David 1973). The most comprehensive study of the organization of priests is possible through the Abusir Papyri (Posener-Kriéger 1976). Some ancient individuals have commanded whole volumes on their careers, such as the governor of Thebes and Fourth God's Servant of Amun, Montuemhet (Leclant 1961). Otherwise, the scholar is required to browse the vast numbers of articles which present one or several monuments of individuals, many of which provide important insights into priests and temples.

CHAPTER 15

Egyptian Temples and Priests: Graeco-Roman

Willy Clarysse

1 Gods, Temples, and Cult

Function of the temple

Public Egyptian religion was concentrated in the temples, which were called *ḥwt-ntr*, “mansions of the god.” The temples were the earthly dwellings of divine forces, represented by their statue, usually in human form, in the holy of holies. The ordered world (*kosmos*, *Maat*) created by the gods and continuously recreated by them, was like a fragile soap-bubble surrounded on all sides by chaos, which was the natural state of things before creation: the realm of the dead beneath the earth, the water of the *Nun* above and below (coming down as rain and coming up as the Nile flood) had to be kept at a distance or tamed; within this created world Egypt was the real *kosmos*, threatened on all sides by barbarians, but chaos also loomed from the deserts surrounding the cultivated land. Inside each town the temple was the only place where *kosmos* really ruled: the tidiness inside the temple walls contrasted with the dirt of the surrounding city like the whitewashed and quiet mosque in the messy and noisy street today. The gods renewed their creation every day after the chaos of the night, every month when the moon waned and was reborn, every year when the Nile rose from the waters of the *Nun*. They did so thanks to their presence on earth in a sacred place, where they received the service of humankind, represented by the Pharaoh. On the walls of the temple the Pharaoh acts as the intermediary between men and gods, presenting to the gods all kinds of offerings (food and drink, clothes and incense, fields and crowns, and finally *Maat* herself) in a never ending ritual of *do ut des*. The daily cult service to the gods guaranteed the well-being of the country. When the service was stopped, the country fell into chaos (we, of course, see things rather the other way round). In this respect, the temples functioned more as nuclear power plants than as churches or mosques.

Temple building

Because the temples were dwellings of the gods, they were “houses of eternity” and were built in stone, not in mud brick. Sandstone was used in Upper Egypt and limestone in Middle and Lower Egypt. Ptolemaic temples were copied from their New Kingdom predecessors, with some minor innovations, e.g. carefully prefabricated stones were now placed in regular courses of equal (isodomic) heights (Arnold 1999: 144); human and divine figures are all of the same height and cut at the same places by the horizontal joins of the stones. The house in which the god lived symbolically represented the world: it was directed towards the east (its front gate oriented towards the Nile), and the sun came up between its two pylons; the columns were enormous plants (lotus, papyrus, and all kinds of composite leaves) supporting a roof decorated with stars symbolising the sky.

The temple was centered around the divine statue, often gilded, set up in a stone shrine (*naos*). In this statue the god was present. This statue was not the god but a sacred spot where he came to rest on earth, not unlike the presence of Christ in the tabernacle of a Catholic church. The *naos* stood in a chapel at the very end of the building, preceded by a room in which the divine barque was kept. In the larger temples the holy of holies was surrounded by a series of chapels and by an ambulatory (the *couloir mystérieux*). In the Graeco-Roman Period one of these chapels, the *wabet*, had an open air court in which the New Year festival was celebrated (Hölbl 2000: 56). Temple building started from this inner sanctuary towards the front, and over the years new constructions might be added: a hypostyle hall with heavy columns, an open courtyard, one or more gate towers (pylons), colossal statues, obelisks and a sphinx alley (*dromos*). Finally a separate birth house (*mammisi*) could be constructed for the divine child god, since the god usually lived with his divine wife. The separate *mammisi* is a typical feature of Graeco-Roman temples. The birth of the divine child from a divine and human father legitimated the reigning king. Guidelines for the building of an ideal temple, given in the so-called *Book of the Temple*, were taken into account where possible (Quack 2000).

Walking along the alley the visitor entered the temple through a monumental gate with two pylons, often decorated with a scene depicting the king smiting his enemies. Though these enemies are identified as barbarian peoples, the scene also shows how the forces of chaos were kept out of the sacred space. The temple was constructed as a fortress to keep all chaos out. The floor gradually rises, the ceilings become lower and the interior darker, so that no unclean intruders can pollute the god in the holy-of-holies. Demons with knives inside the gate also keep evil forces out, and the king is depicted as being purified with live-giving water by Horus and Thoth before he enters the gate. Only clean-shaven priests were allowed beyond the open courtyard.

Typically the walls of the temple are full of hieroglyphs and reliefs (the figures are in fact enlarged hieroglyphs), which were brightly colored. This *horror vacui* is still very much the style of the Ptolemaic Period but tends to disappear later (though in Esna, for instance, it is kept up to the end). The hieroglyphic script, written in the classical language of two thousand years before, becomes ever more complicated: new signs are added, word plays and rebus techniques suggest hidden meanings.

Table 15.1 The spread of temple decoration during the Graeco-Roman Period

<i>Date</i>	<i>Kings and emperors</i>	<i>Temples</i>	<i>Scenes</i>
331–304	Alex. III, Philip Arrhidaios, Alex. IV	9	227
304–246	Ptol. I, II	24	508
246–205	Ptol. III, IV	16	945
205–145	Ptol. V, VI	17	549
163–80	Ptol. VIII, IX	24	1214
107–30	Ptol. X, XII, Kleopatra VII	15	863
– 30 - + 14	Augustus	18	1177
14–69	Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero	14	997
69–98	Flavii	12	245
98–161	Nerva, Traianus, Hadrianus, Antoninus Pius	26	386
161–192	M. Aurelius, Commodus	7	84
192–250	Severi and third century	4	39

Recent studies (Arnold 1999; Hölbl 2000–5) and the Würzburg database on ritual scenes in Egyptian temples allow us to map how temple decoration was spread over time and place. Though the decoration was sometimes added many years after the building was completed, the names and titles of the kings on the reliefs are our surest way of dating the buildings (see table 15.1).

These are rough figures because the periods are uneven in length and decoration is not always contemporaneous with the building of the temple. Moreover in Upper Egypt and in the desert the chance of survival is far better than in the towns of the Delta, where the stones were reused as building material. However, differences between individual rulers are surprisingly great: Ptolemy VIII (1214 scenes) and Augustus (1177) appear far more often in offering scenes than Ptolemy II (438) or Ptolemy III (only 174). The very low figure for Ptolemy V (91) can be explained by the great revolt in the south during most of his reign, but the drop under Ptolemy I (70) after the reign of Alexander and his successors (227) is unexpected, since the temples carrying the names of Philip Arrhidaios (124) and Alexander IV (26) were, in fact, built by the later Ptolemy I in his role as satrap. Under the Flavii Domitian is far better represented than Vespasian and Titus (186 vs. 36 and 23 respectively), and there seems to be a last revival under Antoninus Pius (95 vs. only 78 for Hadrian, who visited Egypt). The distribution over the country is also very uneven: whereas Lower Egypt is well represented from Alexander to Ptolemy I, and Middle Egypt sporadically occurs until Ptolemy VI, Upper Egypt becomes predominant from Ptolemy III onwards. The new temples built in the Roman Period are all in Upper Egypt (El-Qala, Shenhur, Aswan, Philae) or in far away Nubia and the oases.

Temple ritual

Though on the temple walls the Pharaoh acted as the sole representative of humanity towards the gods, and he may actually have performed some rituals in person when visiting the temples (Clarysse 2000b), the daily service was, in fact, delegated to the priests. By the end of the Ptolemaic Period and certainly in the Roman Period

Pharaoh often became a nameless figure, a purely ritual king (instead of a royal name the cartouche could be filled by the word *pr-ꜥ3*, “Pharaoh”), and sometimes his functions were even taken over by a god (Hölbl 2004: 152–3; 2005: 103).

The daily ritual of clothing and feeding the god was performed in hermetic isolation by a small group of male initiates, who had to be clean, both physically and ritually. The “clean” (*wꜥb*) priests were circumcised, cleanly shaven, dressed in linen, and subject to alimentary (no pork, no fish) and vestimentary (no leather, no wool) taboos. Before entering the temple they purified themselves with water from the sacred lake. The daily service is well known thanks to the ritual texts on papyrus and the scenes on the temple walls: the shrine was opened, the image of the god was purified, clothed, and crowned and a sacrificial meal of several courses was set before it. The priest left the sanctuary walking backwards, whilst an assistant swept away the traces of his footsteps. The liturgy was accompanied by incense burning, vocal and instrumental music, sometimes by dancing. Each activity was exercised by a specialist, such as *stolistai* for clothing the god’s statue. As a rule only singers and sistrum players were women, and these probably had to stay outside the holy of holies (see Colin 2002 for priestesses).

The gods and the common people

Since the temple was not a meeting place for the faithful, but, to a large extent, forbidden territory, the common people, those who were not pure, looked for other ways of making contact with the divine. The public approach to the temple was along an alley, called *dromos* in Greek, *ḥft-ḥr* in Egyptian, leading to the sacred gate. A lot of activities were concentrated at the temple entrance, which was often the center of the town: official proclamations could be held here; royal and priestly decrees were put up here in public view (Hölbl 2005: 37–9); judges, both officials and priests, held court at the gate (Quaegebeur 1993); oaths were sworn by the local god to prove one’s innocence (Kaplony-Heckel 1963: esp. 20–2); notaries and bankers had their offices along the *dromos* (e.g. Bogaert 1994: 79–92), where one could also find chapels, food stalls, tax offices, and club houses; when the gate opened the public could have a glance into the first court, which was no doubt accessible to important persons and on festive occasions for the masses. Worshippers could also approach the divinity from the rear wall of the temple, where they could come close to the back of the divine statue in its *naos*. In several temples, e.g. Dendera, Kom Ombo or Shenhur a large relief and/or traces of beams in the wall show the cultic importance of this area (Gutbub 1978).

On festive occasions the god left his temple in a solemn procession, carried in a barque by the priests. Thus, three times a month the statue of Amun of Thebes, sitting on his throne and hidden under a veil (to protect it against evil forces) in a portable sacred barque, crossed the Nile to the west bank on the Festival of the Decad (Doresse 1979). In Pauni the highest civil authorities were present when the god crossed the Nile for the Festival of the Valley (P.Tor. Choach., p. 184). Every year in Epiph Hathor left her temple in Dendera for a divine marriage (“the Good Reunion”) with Horus in Edfu, 100 km south (Altenmüller 1998). Processions also offered the opportunity to see and to consult the gods. For these special

occasions people went on pilgrimage to sanctuaries near-by or far-off to be close to the god, often for oracle consultations or therapeutic purposes (Volokhine 1998: 82–97).

Popular cults

The limited access to the great gods may have been one of the causes of the rise of popular cults in small “open” shrines with only one or two rooms, often partly or completely built in mud bricks. To these minor temples of second and third rank belonged, no doubt, the numerous Isis shrines (*isieia*) in the countryside, which were run by a single priest and his family (*isionomos* or *in-wwy*) and where the goddess was directly available without the pomp of the great temples (Depauw 1998). Other gods of the official pantheon also developed popular forms: Mestasytmis (*Msdr-sdm*, the hearing ear) (Quaegebeur and Wagner 1973) and Pnepheros (*P3-nfr-hr*, “the Beautiful of Face”) are “listening gods” (*epekooi theoi*), i.e. gods who listen to the prayers and look down mercifully upon those who call upon them. In these cases, as also with the popular cults of Isis and Sarapis abroad, Pharaoh is no longer needed as an intermediary between the believer and his god. Ultimately this development may have contributed to an Egyptian religion without temples in the fourth century AD (Frankfurter 1998).

Another example of this “religion of the poor” are the animals cults, which flourished in the Graeco-Roman Period as never before. The sacred bulls or lions were “living images” of their gods, visible to the public in their bullrings and zoos; the crocodiles were fed by the priests and by tourists alike (P.Tebt. I 33 = Wilcken, *Chrest.* 3, to be compared with Strabo 17.1.38); and ibis shrines were ubiquitous in the villages (Vandorpe 1991). After death these animals were mummified and solemnly buried. Millions of sacred ibises, hawks, and cats, often killed for the purpose, were dedicated in the animal cemeteries. The crocodile mummies were carried to the necropolis by *theagoi* (*ty-ntr*), apparently a prestigious duty for the villagers involved (Dils 1995). The animal cults were linked to the temples of Ptah (the Apis bull in Memphis), Montu (the Buchis bull in Hermonthis), Thoth (the ibis cemeteries in Hermopolis and elsewhere) or Bastet (the cats’ cemeteries), but also led a life of their own. In the temple of Edfu a living hawk played a role in the official cult, but the hawk cemeteries in Saqqara and elsewhere were only loosely connected with the main temples. In AD 210 the temple of the crocodile god Soknebtynis provides *byssos* for the burial of the Mnevis bull in Heliopolis (P.Teb. II 313), but animals which were sacred in one place could be persecuted elsewhere, e.g. the crocodile was venerated in Kom Ombo but killed in Dendera (Juvenal 15.27–92).

There were also cults of deified humans. In the Fayum the Middle Kingdom Pharaoh Amenemhet III was venerated as Marres (*M3-t-R*) or Prammarres (*pr-3-M3-t-R*) (Widmer 2002) whereas a cult for the sages Imuthes and Amenothes was established in the New Kingdom temple of Deir el-Bahri (Lajtar 2008). For different reasons ordinary people could receive in death the status of “hesi,” “blessed,” or “heri,” “master,” and a limited cult, perhaps to be compared with the present-day sheikh tombs (Quaegebeur 1977).

The so-called cult-guilds or religious associations also illustrate how religious life was organized alongside the official temple cult (Muszynski 1977; Bresciani 1994).

The guilds (Dem. *snt*, Greek *synodos*) are primarily known through their extensive rules. Members paid regular dues and attended monthly meetings in which wine or beer were consumed and offerings given to the gods and the kings. Many of the participants belonged to the lower priestly class; they took part in processions, festivals, and in the burial of sacred animals. Though some titles are identical to those in the temple hierarchy (e.g. prophets), most (e.g. “general,” “second”) are not, and the link with the temples is unclear. The associations also provided mutual assistance (common payments for burials of members, assistance at court), and fines were laid out for misbehavior, such as absence at meetings, drinking too much, or quarrelling. Women’s associations were copied on those of the men (Colin 2002: 110–14).

Dynastic and imperial cults

The Ptolemies innovated by introducing the dynastic cult into the temples. It all started with the cult of the divinized queen Arsinoe in 270 BC (Quaegebeur 1998), but soon after the whole royal family entered the temple as “associated gods” (*synnaoi theoi*). The king (often accompanied by his queen) now brings offerings not only to the Egyptian gods, but also to his own forebears, who are enumerated on the temple walls (Minas 2000). In 237 BC a fifth priestly phyle was instituted in honor of the *Theoi Energetai* (i.e. Ptolemy III and Berenike) (OGIS I 56.24–33) and the official titlature of the priests now includes the names of the divinized Ptolemies, following those of the main gods of the temple (Lanciers 1991).

In the Roman Period the cult of the predecessors, the associated gods, and the images of the queens disappear from the scene. With the exception of Augustus (Dunand 1983), the imperial cult was practiced in Greek civic temples by municipal elites. On the temple walls the emperor still plays the roll of mediator between humanity and the gods, but statues of emperors as Pharaohs are rare. Even though the imperial cult is no longer part of the temple ritual, the priests continue to stress the importance of the temple rites for the well-being and victory of the reigning monarch (e.g. P.Oxy. XXXVI 2782), and they celebrate the imperial birthday as a festive occasion with a procession or the burning of incense (Stud. Pal. XXII 183 col. iii.51–4).

2 The Temples in the World

Temple property

The temples were not just cult buildings, but also economic organizations. Their main source of income was the temple land (*hiera ge*), which was, in theory, donated by the king, who is time and again shown in the ritual scenes offering the hieroglyph for field () to the gods. In fact each monarch renewed the donations of his predecessors and usually the same land was offered generation after generation. According to Diodoros 1.27.7 and 73.2 one third of the land of Egypt was controlled by the temples, though this is probably an overestimation.

A famous inscription on the outer wall of the Edfu temple celebrates a donation by Ptolemy X Alexander, confirming an earlier grant by Nectanebo II and even by Darius (Meeks 1972; English translation in Manning 2003b: 245–66). According to this text, a hieroglyphic copy of a Demotic land register, the Edfu temple owned 13,209 arouras (3,640 ha), of which 9,181 were in the Apollinopolite nome (about 18% of the agricultural land in the nome), and nearly 4,000 in Pathyris and Latopolis (Manning 2003b: 74–9). Ptah and Apis together owned at least 1,680 arouras (c. 420 ha) in the Memphite nome in 110 BC; another 10 arouras were set aside for the lighting of the Ptah temple (BGU VI 1216, ll. 52–3, 190–1, 130–2). Land could also be donated by private persons: about 100 BC the temple of Tebtunis owned about 1,000 arouras (2,756 ha), to which the cleruchs from Kerkeosiris added 130 arouras in 130/128 BC (Crawford 1971: 96–9). In Kerkeosiris sacred land for different temples amounted to 292 arouras (about 6 percent of the village land), most of it belonging to the first-class temples of Souchos and Soknebtynis (Crawford 1971: 44, 86–102); in neighboring Magdola the figure is similar (170 arouras). The temple of Soknopaiou Nesos owned its land on the other side of the lake, as far as Dionysias (P.Amh. I 35). On the land of the temples, often leased by priests (cf. below), grain was cultivated, but also vines, olives, and palm trees.

Some of the livestock grown on temple land was, no doubt, offered to the gods (P.Gurob 22; Crawford 1971: 89 n.8). In Kerkeosiris one third of the produce of the pigeon-houses was dedicated to Soknebtynis (P.Teb. I 84, 9–10). The importance of the temple for the economy is well illustrated by the fact that weights and measures often referred to the standard measure in the local temple (P.Recueil II, p. 47 n. p).

Economic activities of the temples

Alongside agriculture and its immediate results the diversified industrial activities of the temples included papyrus production and weaving. The temples produced their own oil for lighting; thus the temple of Soknopaiou Nesos even owned oil presses in several villages (Lippert-Schentuleit 2005, p. 72). Thanks to an abundant supply of papyrus the Egyptian temple notaries wrote their contracts on large papyrus rolls, whereas the Greek notaries often scribbled on small sheets (Quaegebeur 1979: 724–5). The finest linen products, the so-called royal linen or *byssos*, were apparently manufactured only in the temples (Evans 1961: 226–8). Weaving remained important in Roman Soknopaiou Nesos (Lippert-Schentuleit 2006: 11). The ferry-boats which set the pilgrims over Lake Moeris were let out by the temple (P.Oxf. Griffith 52–4; P. Berl. 15505; Lippert and Schentuleit 2005: 76; 2006: 10).

Temple activities in the service sector were often linked with religious activities. In the temple the gods could be consulted by means of written oracle chits, often addressed to the god in double copy, one positive and one negative. Hundreds of such chits have been found in or near the temples (for Tebtunis see now Hoffmann-Thissen 2004: 110–14) and there can be no doubt that the temple was paid for this service (Valbelle-Husson 1998; Martin 2004: 413–26). A Prefect's letter of AD 202 threatens the death penalty for those who “through oracles, i.e. by means of written documents supposedly granted in the presence of the deity, or by means of the processions of the cult images or suchlike charlatanry, pretend to have knowledge

of the supernatural or to know the obscurity of future events” (SB XIV 12144). Clearly the custom was still flourishing when Septimius Severus visited Egypt, and it survived even in Christian churches up to the seventh century, no doubt because it made a handsome profit for the priests.

In Egypt burial was usually accompanied by mummification, and the family tombs received a funerary cult over many generations. God’s sealers and embalmers (*ḥtmw-ntr wyt*, stolistai), lector-priests (*ḥryw-ḥb*) and choachytes (*w3ḥw-mw*, choachutai), originally responsible for the three consecutive phases of mummification, burial and mortuary service, all became “owners” of tombs and funerary chapels, which could be sold or bequeathed among them (Derda 1991; Vleeming 1995). They are the best known religious professionals in Ptolemaic Egypt, because they often kept their family papers in well-protected tombs. Their business was supervised by the director of the necropolis (*imy-r-ḥ3st*), who was a priest of the local temple. In the early Ptolemaic Period the “payment for the director of the necropolis” amounted to 1 dr. for each burial (Malinine 1961; Muhs 2005: 88–95). In the later Ptolemaic Period the state was also involved, and the products used for mummification were sold to the undertakers like other monopolized raw materials (Clarysse 2007).

An important source of income were the notarial offices, held by priestly scribes, who wrote in Demotic. In Thebes these scribes wrote “in the name of the priests of Amonrasonther,” in the Memnoneia “for the prophetess of Djeme,” in Pathyris “in the name of the priests of Hathor” (P. Recueil I, p. 139). In the Roman Period Demotic contracts are no longer written in the temples, but in the *grapheion*, the Greek notary office. Here Demotic is superseded by Greek by the end of the first century AD (Depauw 2003a).

Temples were also health-care centers where priestly doctors combined science and magic. Egyptian medicine drew upon an age-old tradition and Demotic handbooks dealt with specialized matters, such as eye diseases, snake bites or gynaecological problems. One could be healed by sacred water that had been poured over a divine statue of the Horus child standing on the crocodiles, receive a dream when passing the night in the temple, get a child by divine intervention like Taimouthes the wife of the Memphite High Priest (Otto 1954: 192; Reymond 1981: 165–77), or be treated in the temple sanatorium (Daumas 1957; Hölbl 2000: 83). The healing cults are also illustrated by graffiti and ex-votos (Frankfurter 1998: 46–50).

Temple income and expenditure

The temples received most of their income from their land and from the economic activities mentioned above, but some religious services were paid for by visitors. Priestly intervention in oracle questions, health services, and mummification have been treated above as economic activities. Similarly the so-called self-dedications, by which persons became “slaves” (*b3kw*) of the god and paid a small monthly sum for the rest of their lives, may in fact have functioned as a health insurance for alternative medicine (Clarysse 1988). The purity of sacrificial animals had to be checked by a specialized priest, a *moschosphragistēs* (P. Recueil 13–14, with commentary in vol. II, 117–21); that a payment was involved appears from the taxation on sealing sacred animals in the Roman Period. Newly admitted priests paid an entrance fee

(*eiskritikon*) to the temple, which amounted to 52 dr. in Roman Tebtunis (SB XIII 1156) and 12 dr. in the smaller temple of Bakchias (Gilliam 1947: 203–4). Individuals also offered valuable assets to the temple in precious materials as, for instance, a golden harp and an ebony couch offered by the officer Peteesis to the temples of Elephantine and Philai (Ray 1987), or more generally the renovation of the “cult material in silver, gold, bronze, wood and stone” (Zivie-Coche 2004: 259 §9). The Elephantine text also advises giving a tithe (1/10) to the gods, but this instruction was certainly not applied universally. Lay persons could also contribute to the mummification and burial of sacred animals, as in P.Lund. IV 11, a list of expenses for the burial of sacred crocodiles in Bakchias, followed by the Greek and Latin names of contributors (total amount 1340 dr.; AD 198).

Money was needed for building, renovating, and keeping up the numerous and often grandiose monuments, but also for the daily cult, which involved offerings of meat, bread, oil, and incense. It can hardly be doubted that the new temples in places difficult of access, e.g. in Philai, Kalabsha, Dendur, and elsewhere in the deep south, were constructed by the king or emperor, but buildings were also paid for by private individuals, as is shown by scores of inscriptions in hieroglyphic (e.g. Zivie-Coche 2004: 259 and 272), Demotic and Greek. A conspicuous example is the building inscriptions by Parthenios in Koptos (Vleeming 2001, nos. 179–202 and Pasquali 2007). Not only priests but also private persons, soldiers, and professional groups proudly advertised that they erected pylons, *dromoi*, enclosure walls (*periboloi*), and other temple buildings (Otto 1905: 398–9).

In the great priestly decrees the kings are praised for their benefactions (*euergemata*) towards the temples (e.g. OGIS I 56.9–10; 90.9–10), but details are given only exceptionally, as in the Pithom Stela. Here the king offers 500 silver talents yearly to the temples of Egypt; for year 21 of Ptolemy II the amount given is 2,500 talents (on a yearly royal income of about 30,000 talents), besides gifts of wine, oil, meat, fruits, and incense (Thiers 2007: 118–22). The king also contributed to the burial of sacred animals, e.g. the Apis bull (Diodoros 1.84.8; confirmed by C.Ord. Ptol. 53.76–79) or the Hesis cow (P.L.Bat. XX 50). Such gratuities by the government disappear in the Roman Period.

Temples could also be indirectly subsidized by setting them free from certain taxes. Thus the Isis temple south of Ptolemais, built by the *epistrategos* Kallimachos, is proclaimed tax-free (*ateles*) in 75 BC (C.Ord. Ptol. 67). Economic activities of the temples could also be exempted from taxation, e.g. the ferry tax in the Mendesian nome (Thiers 2007: 191). In the Rosetta Stone the contribution for *byssos* textiles is reduced to one third, and some taxes on grain land and vineyards belonging to the temples are abolished (OGIS 90.17–18; 30). In several second-century amnesty decrees temple income is protected against exactions by officials (see, e.g. C.Ord. Ptol. 53.57–61). Sometimes taxes were even set aside for the temples. Thus Ptolemy II set apart the *apomoira* on vines for the cult of Arsinoe (Clarysse and Vandorpe 1998: 13–17), and in some instances the temples also benefited from the Ptolemaic sales tax on houses, up to the second century BC (Depauw 2000: 56–63). This is clearly no longer the case in the Roman Period.

From the late third century BC onwards until the third century AD temples received a yearly allowance in money and in kind from the state (Otto I 1905: 366–84; P. Köln

XI 454). This allowance was called *syntaxis*, and this Greek term was transliterated into Demotic (cf. Clarysse 1987: 30). Already in the Rosetta Stone Ptolemy V guarantees that these *syntaxeis* “will remain in place as under my father” (OGIS I 90.15). In the second half of the second century AD the temple of Soknopaiou Nesos still received from the royal bank the substantial amount of 8,160 dr., no doubt as *syntaxis*, for a year or perhaps even for a few months (Lippert and Schentuleit 2006: 13 and no. 69). This *syntaxis* is usually interpreted as a compensation for the growing state intervention in the economic life of the temples, though proof for this is rather scanty. Thus in P. Teb. II 302 the *syntaxis* comes in place of the right to cultivate 500 arouras of temple land. The allowances were used for paying priestly services, and these payments from the temple to the priests are also called *syntaxeis* (Préaux 1939: 49, 481).

Some bookkeeping documents from Soknopaiou Nesos offer an idea of the yearly expenses by the temple. About AD 138 (P.Louvre I 4 with important addenda by Capron 2008) money taxes amounted to 9288 dr. Taxes on land and on economic activities were clearly a major expense (Evans 1961: 253–77; Lippert-Schentuleit 2005: 73). It is less clear whether they increased in the Roman Period, when temple income decreased (Evans 1961: 282). Other payments were for products used in the cult, such as linen, perfumes, incense, myrrh etc. (1340 dr.), oil for lighting the lamps and for anointing the statues (21 *metre tai*) and wine for cleansing and for special occasions (47 *keramia*). The salary for the prophet of Souchos amounted to 344 dr., payments for priests who took part in religious festivals and processions totalled 1150 artabas of grain. The payments in kind (11.100) were neatly offset in the account by incomes from pious donations (ll.1–4). Again in Soknopaiou Nesos one artaba (40 l.) of wheat was needed for the daily meal of the god; this bread was baked into loaves by the temple bakers (Lippert and Schentuleit 2006: 13).

Temples and the civil administration

The Pharaonic administration was based on priestly scribes, the only literate group in the country: taxes were levied through the temples. Part of the income was used for the cult, for the clergy, and for new buildings, the rest went to the royal treasury. The local temple was the administrative center in each nome. The Ptolemies installed a civil administration (in Greek) and also privatized to a large extent the collection of taxes. The levy of a tax could be “bought” for a fixed sum from the government. After payment of this lump sum the tax collector had to see that he got his money from the tax payers. This system insured the government against risks (Bingen 1978). Just as beer taxes or oil taxes were farmed out to one or more local brewers or oil-sellers, so taxes on economic temple activities could be collected through the priests. Thus the change from a temple to a civil administration happened gradually and in different ways from one region to another. In some areas it was complete only in the Roman Period. This is not only the case in the south, but also in the far more Hellenized Fayum, where the temple of Soknopaiou Nesos continued to function in the collection of taxes on oil-presses, washermen, or weavers who worked for the temple or even beyond. It is not always clear when the temple pays taxes for its own produce of oil, linen etc. and when it functioned as a kind of tax office within the

administration (Lippert-Schentuleit 2005; 2006: 9–14). Similarly in Tebtunis weaving taxes were in some way still farmed out through the priests in AD 135 (P.Tebt. II 305).

Elite priestly families quickly adapted to the new situation: taking over the Greek notarial offices they became *agoranomoi* in Pathyris and Dendera in the second century BC (Pestman 1978); they became involved in the royal administration of the nome in such a way that in hieroglyphic monuments it is often difficult to decide whether a “royal scribe” belongs to the temple or to the civil administration (Gorre 2009); they may even have taken over banks and royal granaries (Clarysse and Vandorpe 2008). The involvement of natives in the administration probably started with scribal functions (Quaegebeur 1979: 716–27). Although village scribes, *topogrammateis*, and even royal scribes on the nome level kept their Egyptian names, they headed an administration that wrote mainly Greek, and they may even have entered the category of tax Hellens (i.e. people treated for tax purposes as Greeks) (Clarysse and Thompson 2006: 144). Some Hellenized Egyptians reached the highest circles of the kingdom, such as the dioikētēs Dioskourides (Collombert 2000) or the military family of Ptolemaios in Edfu, who were also priests of the local cults (Yoyotte 1969).

Whereas priests became administrators, Ptolemaic officials also assumed priestly functions. Government officials, who closely collaborated with the priests in the collection of taxes or passed justice at the gate of the temple, also needed to enter the temple precinct in order to give honor to the gods. Therefore, they often adopted some priestly titles and functions. In the later Ptolemaic Period it is hardly possible to know whether the “indigeneous” *strategoi* of Dendera were primarily priests or officials (De Meulenaere 1959); in Ombos the solemn burial of the sacred ibises and hawks is headed by the local *strategos*, *oikonomos*, and *topogrammateus* (O.Prinz Joachim); Plato Jr, an important official and the son of an official in Greek documents, appears as an Egyptian priest on a hieroglyphic statue (Coulon 2001); Heroides, phrourarch of Syene about 150 BC, is at the same time prophet and *archistolistes* of Khnum (I.Th. Sy. 302; *Pros. Ptol.* II 2059). It is, therefore, erroneous to oppose “church and state” in Egypt. The temples were part of the kingdom, and their world view necessarily puts the Pharaoh in the center as the intermediary between gods and humans. The priests honored the Ptolemaic kings; they went to Alexandria for the yearly synods; and they stressed in their petitions the importance of their offerings and services for the reigning house, both emperors and kings. The temples were also engaged in the administration of the kingdom on the local level, and some members of priestly families made a career in the royal administration or even in the army. Temple loyalty functioned as a legitimation for the Ptolemies, less so for the Romans, because in the Roman Period officials served outside their hometowns. This was probably a measure against nepotism and favoritism, but it also put an end to local power bases and led to a growing separation between temple and civil government.

Because they were part of the system, temples and priests also enjoyed the privileges going with this, but at the same time they stood, as a matter of course, under government control. For this same reason temples were attacked during the revolts, even though many priests may have personally sympathized with the opposition.

In the early Ptolemaic Period temples were allowed to produce oil for their own use outside the monopoly system. The oil presses were, however, strictly controlled, and it was forbidden for the temples to sell their produce (P.Rev. Laws 50.20; 52.3).

From 263 the *apomoira*, earmarked for the cult of Arsinoe, was levied by tax-farmers and, therefore, went first to the government and from there to the temples. Of course there was a risk here that the money never reached its final destination (Clarysse-Vandorpe 1998: 16–17). The *epistates* of the individual temples may have been originally a kind of royal controller, but the function was rather quickly taken over by a member of the clergy, thereby losing part of its intended purpose (UPZI: 44–5). In the second century Fayum the prophet of Bastet seems to have functioned as a royal controller (*nty šn*) for the whole Arsinoite nome (P.Oxf. Griffith 39). When temples in an area could not fulfil their obligations towards the king, a Greek official could be appointed to check their accounts, as did the “praktōr of the temples” Milon in late third-century Edfu (Clarysse 2003).

It is often claimed that government control became tighter in the Roman Period, when the *archiereus*, a Roman *procurator* in Alexandria, was in charge of all the temples of the country (Demougin 2007). Growing government interference is also seen in the *graphai hierēōn kai cheirismou* (“reports of priests and temple inventory”): each year the priests of all temples had to send to the *strategos* (“nome governor”) a list of the temple personnel and cult objects and an account of the corporate receipts and expenditure for taxes or religious purposes. These yearly lists are, however, not a full inventory of temple possessions and do not imply full control (Burkhalter 1985: 131–4). In our opinion temples functioned as wheels of the government in both periods, but this same role also involved protection of the temple community by the king and the emperor. This clearly emerges from the royal decrees forbidding visiting officials to importune the temples (C. Ord. Ptol. 51–2), guaranteeing temple income from land and state subventions (*syntaxis*) (C. Ord. Ptol. 53.50–6), or protecting asylum rights against encroachments by overzealous civil officials (Rigsby 1996: 540–73). In difficult times the temples may even receive substantial tax cuts.

Temples and native culture

Temples were the main centers of native erudition and culture, which were practiced in the so-called “House of Life.” In Edfu and Philai some rooms where papyrus rolls were stored can still be identified, thanks to the hieroglyphic inscriptions (Hölbl 2004: 56–9). The temple libraries of Tebtunis and Soknopaiou Nesos are partially preserved and offer a glimpse of priestly scholarship, with its inextricable mixture of religion and science. Ancient religious texts in the classical language were copied in Hieratic and Demotic scripts, and their vocabulary was listed in onomastica, which developed into encyclopedias of native knowledge (Osing 1998). These books were used as lexica for drawing up the sacred hieroglyphic texts on temple walls: though the syntax of the ritual texts is repetitive and basic, their vocabulary is extremely diversified, as scribes looked up synonyms in their onomastica. Handbooks for the organization of the temple, both its ideal architecture, the management structure of the priestly staff, and the liturgic rituals, are preserved in many copies, in Hieratic and Demotic (Quack 2000). Religious geography is found in the *Book of the Fayum*, which includes a kind of map in the form of a goddess, with ancient crocodile shrines situated on both sides of the Bahr Yusuf (Beinlich 1991).

Knowledge about the time and the height of the Nile inundation was gained from the Nilometers along the Nile; the rising of the waters first visible in Elephantine could be transmitted by fire signals to the capital in a single night. It was also measured in the temples by means of a well. Thus good and bad floods could be predicted from the start of the agricultural year; but at the same time the rising of the waters was explained by divine intervention. Thus Ptolemy X continued the traditional role of the Pharaoh by performing the *sollemne sacrum* at the so-called sources of the Nile in the First Cataract at Elephantine (OGIS I 168 = O.Thèbes-Syene 244 ll.9–10). Precise astronomical observations are inextricably mixed up with astrological predictions of good and bad days in the treatises on the heavenly bodies (e.g. Hughes 1986) and in the onomastica. They were applied in the astronomical ceilings of several Graeco-Roman temples and in horoscopes, which are a new phenomenon of the Roman Period (Neugebauer and Parker 1969; Cauville 1997). The user-friendly Egyptian calendar of 12 months of 30 days with 5 festival days at the end of the year was also taken over by the Greeks; a minor correction, adding an extra day every four years, was first proposed in 237 BC (OGIS I 56 ll.37–47) and eventually put into practice by Augustus in 30 BC. Native judges (*laokritai*) rendered justice at the gate of the temple on the basis of traditional Egyptian laws, which were codified, amongst others, by Pharaoh Busiris and the Persian king Darius (Quaegebeur 1981). Some sections are preserved in Demotic papyri (e.g. P. Mattha and P. Zauzich 41 and 42), and a Greek translation was still in use during the second half of the second century AD (P.Oxy. 46 3285 Vo.).

Greek breaks in

Whereas in the early Ptolemaic Period only the Greek names of the new rulers point to foreign influence, the Greek presence becomes gradually more visible. Side by side with the buildings in the age-old Egyptian tradition appear smaller shrines in Greek style within the enclosure or along the *dromos*. Examples are the Greek chapels and statues along the *dromos* of the Serapeum at Saqqara (2nd century BC; Bagnall and Rathbone 2004: 100), the Sarapis temple along the *dromos* in Luxor (inaugurated on Hadrian's birthday in AD 126; Hölbl 2000: 53), or the Isis chapel with Greek inscription on its lintel in Dendera (I.Portes 25; AD 1). The pronaos of the Egyptian temple of Kalabsha seems to take into account the rules of Graeco-Roman architecture as expounded by Vitruvius (Hölbl 2004: 127). The lower register in the Tutu temple in Ismant el-Kharab (Dakhla oasis; second century AD) is decorated with imitation marble slabs, similar to what is found in houses at Pompeii (Hölbl 2005: 91).

Greek inscriptions are cut side by side with traditional hieroglyphs: dedicatory inscriptions are carved above the rock temple of Hakoris (I.Akoris 1; 197–194 BC), on door lintels in Philai, Kom Ombo, or in Theadelphia (I.Philae I 4 and 8, 244–21 BC and 186–80 BC; I. Thèbes Syène 193, AD 88; I.Fay. II 107; 137 BC), and even on the shrine of the god in Soknopaiou Nesos (I.Fay. I 74; AD 50); trilingual decrees for the Ptolemies were set up in all major temples, and this continues in the early Roman Period with the inscription of Cornelius Gallus (I.Philae 128), Greek hymns on the door posts of the sanctuary of Narmouthis (I.Métr. 175; first century AD), Greek dedications on the walls, on stelae, and statues (I.Fay. I 77–80), royal orders

protecting rights of asylum, and Greek graffiti on the walls or on the sphinxes of the *dromos* (Rogge and Harrauer 1999: 1–15). The twenty-five building inscriptions by Parthenios, *prostatēs* of Isis in Koptos in the time of Tiberius, are written in a remarkable mixture of Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphic (Vleeming 2001: nos. 179–202 *passim*).

Though keepers of the indigenous traditions, the priests were not averse to Greek culture. Greek papyri, including fragments of Homer and Euripides, but also scientific works on medicine and astrology were found in the priestly houses and the rubbish dumps near the temples of Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtunis (van Minnen 1998: 145–68). The astrological ceilings of the *wabets* in Dendera, Shenhur, and elsewhere, render the Greek zodiac in Egyptian style. Oracle questions to the gods originally in Demotic change to Greek already in the Ptolemaic Period in Tebtunis. The numerous Roman examples are all Greek, though they were written in the temple by priestly scribes. In the great trilingual decrees honoring the Ptolemies the priests, with their *phylai*, take the place of citizens (also organized in *phylai*!) elsewhere in the Greek world; these honorary decrees follow the Greek epigraphic model: the verb “it has been decided” is preceded by a series of motivations introduced by *epeidē*, “because,” and followed by infinitives containing the honors voted upon the kings. The priests have adapted the Greek format to the Egyptian situation (Clarysse 2000a).

3 The Role of the Priests

Organization of the priesthoods

Priestly status was normally inherited from one’s father, as is clear from hundreds of hieroglyphic inscriptions. Besides having to demonstrate priestly lineage (belonging to the *hieratikon genos*) priests were examined and declared pure, which involved circumcision. In P.Teb. II 291.40–45 (AD 162) a new priest gives a practical demonstration of his literacy by reading from a hieratic book (Sauneron 1962).

In the major temples priests functioned by rotation on the basis of four tribes (*phylai*), augmented after the Canopus Decree (237 BC) to five, carrying out duties for one month at a time (sometimes even for half a month, see e.g. Pros. Ptol. IX 5351–5368 *passim*) at the time. The tribes were headed by a *phylarchos*, called “great one of the *phyle*” (‘*z-n-sz*’) or “great one of the month” (‘*z-n-ibd*’) in Egyptian. Perhaps the titles “first, second, third prophet” refer to these tribes rather than to a hierarchy among the prophets. This would explain that some priests combined different prophecies in the same temple, since they could be members of more than one tribe. In Ptolemaic inscriptions prominent priests accumulated functions in different tribes and different temples (see Pros. Ptol. III and IX 5351–5874 *passim*). This was apparently less common in the Roman Period.

The cultic hierarchy was very diverse and titles partly overlapped. There was a great difference between the major temples of first, second, and third rank and the small shrines, served by a single priestly family. All priests entering the major temples were

“pure” (*w^cb*, rendered in Greek as *hierous*), but some were more prominent than others: prophets (“servants of the god,” *ḥmw-ntr*), *stolistai* (“the priests who enter the *adyton* for clothing the gods”), *pterophoroi* (“feather-bearers,” in Demotic “scribes of the sacred books”) and *hierogrammateis* (“sacred scribes,” in Demotic “scribes of the house of life”) are singled out in the great decrees of Memphis, Canopus, Raphia, and Philai. Since, however, these offices were often combined by one and the same person, this is not a strict hierarchy. Clearly singers and dancers, often women, ranked lower, and so did mortuary priests and *pastophoroi*. The latter group, whose obscure Greek title *pastophoros* (“bearers of a *pastos*”) apparently corresponds to Demotic *iry-ʿ3*, “door-keeper,” were perhaps at first a kind of temple wardens (see PSI IX 1149 and Zauzich 2000: 47–8), not real priests. In the Roman Period rivalry seems to have developed between priests and *pastophoroi*, as appears from the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* §§ 82, 88, 94, 95 and SB X 10564.

The more important temples also had an administrative hierarchy and were headed by a *lesonis* (*mr-šn*), whose title could also be translated as High-Priest (*archiereus*) in Greek. In the great decrees these *archiereis*, who were chosen from the highest-ranking priests, precede the prophets. In the Ptolemaic Period the *lesoneis* were chosen for a single year and acted as a kind of temple director rather than as priests; probably they were personally responsible when the temple failed to pay to the government. In third-century Edfu a family of High Priests fell into financial difficulties and had to sell part of its property because of debts owed by the temple (Clarysse 2003). Elsewhere priests complain against a *lesonis* abusing his power (e.g. P.Oxf. Griffith 39 and P.Amh. 35).

In the later Ptolemaic Period the eldest (*hl-ʿyw*) of the priests functioned as a corporate body side by side with individual temple officials (e.g. P.Oxf. Griffith 28; P. Lugd. Bat. XXIII, p. 168–70). In Roman times the *lesoneis* too became a board of priests (P.Dime Dem. II, pp. 16–18); it is not clear if they are identical with the board of (usually five) elders (*presbyteroi*), mentioned in the Greek texts of Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtunis (cf. already Otto 1905: 46–52), but there clearly was not a uniform structure in the administration of the temples and individual directors (*prostatai*), like Parthenios, played a role in the early Roman Period.

Sometimes priests of individual temples are controlled by a superior authority which is in charge of a whole area. The most conspicuous example is the High Priests of Memphis, who crowned the Ptolemaic kings and seem to have been a kind of *primi inter pares* among the higher clergy, thanks to their relationship to the royal court (Thompson 1988: 138–46). In the Roman Period *archiprophetai* are in charge of several temples (Bülow-Jacobsen 1979; add P.Ammon II 50.4–5).

Priestly assets and privileges

The priestly status, though not always a full-time job, entailed financial and fiscal advantages. Lower-ranking priests, no doubt, combined their religious functions with farming or other activities. In the Ptolemaic Fayum up to 10 percent of the population was registered with priestly functions (Clarysse & Thompson 2006: 195). For the Roman Period we get an idea of the numbers of temple personnel thanks to BGU XIII 2215 (AD 112): 61 priests in Bakchias, 54 priests and 50 *pastophoroi* in Karanis,

40 or 50 priests and 40 *pastophoroi* in Tebtunis. In Soknopaiou Nesos 100 males were exempt from tax or from corvée, no doubt because of their priestly status (SB XVI 12816).

Being a priest may have helped to escape professional taxes in the Ptolemaic Period, as each person was listed with one single function (Clarysse and Thompson 2006: 177–86). On one occasion priestly hierarchies (*hiera ethnē*), more than 100 persons on a population of 2000, are listed as “not paying tax” (*ateleis*) (P. Count 16). In the Roman Period there was a *numerus clausus* of priests who were “set free” (*apolysimoi*), usually interpreted as exempt from poll-tax (Gilliam 1947: 205). Others paid at a reduced rate (P. Lund IV 1 registers payments of 8 dr. in AD 198). Tax arrears were remitted for leading priests in C.Ord. Ptol. 53.62–76 (118 BC). Priests were also to a certain extent free of compulsory labor, as is confirmed by an edict of the Roman Prefect in favor of the priests of Soknopaiou Nesos, again using the verb *apoluō* (P. Fay. I 75; AD 54; see also P.Aberd. 16, AD 134 and Gilliam 1947: 199–202). In fact *apolysimos*, when not accompanied by the specification *apo laographias*, as in Wilcken, Chrest. 102, may refer to exemption from corvée rather than poll-tax.

Besides these fiscal privileges priests were also paid for their work in the temple. Thus the “twins” (*didymai*) in the Serapeum, who were lower-ranking priestesses, received a yearly allowance of 49 artabas of *olura* bread and 1 *metrētēs* (about 30 l.) of oil each, far more than was needed for their personal use (Thompson 1988: 237–8). In AD 107 priests in Tebtunis who were serving on their month of duty in the temple received a daily allowance of 1/4 artaba of wheat and the *pastophoroi* 1/8 artaba (P.Teb. II 298.67–9). The high clergy could certainly make a living from their temple functions. In the mid second century AD, for instance, the prophet of Souchos at Soknopaiou Nesos received a yearly salary of 344 dr. (P.Louvre I 4; Capron 2008: 142 l.42). In AD 146, 2200 dr. were offered for a *prophēteia* in Tebtynis; the yearly income of the prophet would be a fifth share of the temple revenues, which amounts to 50 artabas of wheat, 10 artabas of lentils, and 50 dr. (P.Teb. II 294; cf. Evans 1961: 187). These temple services, expressed in monthly “days of emolument” (*hrw n s'nh*) could be leased, sold, or bequeathed as profitable property among priests; the same applied to funerary services on family tombs (Johnson 1986: 78–81). Priests had also preferential access to temple land, probably at low rent rates. Part of the temple land was confiscated in the early Roman Period, but most became a kind of private property of priestly owners, comparable to catoecic land (Monson 2005b). Priestly houses (*pastophoria*), built within the temple precinct, were also treated as private property.

4 The End of the Temples

Organized Egyptian religion flourishes until the first half of the third century and then seems to decline rapidly. Often the Roman government is held responsible because the temples were now strictly controlled and financially squeezed. Though some temple land was confiscated in the early Roman Period, and new central controls were instituted by the Prefect Tuscus in the reign of Nero (Whitehorne

1978) and by the *archiereus* of Alexandria and all Egypt about AD 120 (Demougin 2007; P. Oxy. XLIX 3472), the Romans also built new temples, and they did not abolish priestly privileges. In fact no decline is visible in the first two centuries of Roman rule. On the contrary, the priests flourished: they were exempted from some taxes and liturgies; they were well paid for their services; they had prime access to temple lands and turned these lands into private possessions; and the most prominent of them became part of the Greek-speaking elite. In the mid-fourth century a rich metropolitan family of Panopolis was fighting for the *archipropheteia* in that nome, and it is clear that great financial interests were involved; the (Christian) emperor would in the end decide (P. Ammon I 3). In AD 299 the family declares more than 50 arouras of temple land (P. Ammon II 50).

The decline of traditional religion was probably due to a change in the religious interest of the population rather than to government interference. Dedicatory inscriptions in the temples and priestly activities in the papyrus documentation disappear in the early third century (Bagnall 2003: article X). The great gods of old were replaced by newcomers (Shai, Bes, Tutu) or take on pantheistic features, which bring them closer to monotheism. Traditional name patterns lose their rich diversity, before being superseded by moralising (Eusebios, Akakios) and Christian (Biblical) names in the fourth century. Egyptian religion was hollowed out from within rather than by neglect or obstruction from the government. It simply became irrelevant to its customers and was replaced by a new form of religion, based on a single sacred text and uniform throughout the whole Roman Empire. In the fourth century Christianity could occupy a largely empty space (Bagnall 1993: 261–89). Most of the violent conflicts between pagans and Christians are probably later inventions (van Minnen 2006).

FURTHER READING

In Clarysse, Schoors, Willems 1998 one finds a wide array of articles on Egyptian religion in the late period, e.g. oracle questions, typical gods, temple building, priestly titles and functions, dynastic cults etc. See also Clarysse in Bagnall 2009: 561–89. On temple building in the Graeco-Roman Period see Arnold 1999 and Hölbl 2000–5. Sauneron 1957 gives a general survey of the tasks and position of the Egyptian priests; Colin 2002 concentrates on the role of women and offers a full recent bibliography. For the social and economic role of the clergy see Evans 1961 (concentrated on Tebtynis), updated in a broader context by Quaegebeur 1979. For the relationship between temples and Ptolemies see Huss 1994 (the old view; very well documented) and Clarysse 2000a (the view presented here).

CHAPTER 16

The Economy: Pharaonic

Christopher Eyre

1 Introduction

The relationship between production and consumption defined both social structures and the interaction between people and their environment in the Nile Valley. Egypt was a large country, of small villages, with regional centers focused on local temples, but few major cities. Patterns of settlement, population densities, and economic activity were defined by the Nile and the reliability of flood-based agriculture (Butzer 1976). Communications were dependent on the river: a rapid highway in ideal conditions, but travel out of season was difficult. Individual settlements, towns, and villages, relatively isolated within their agricultural hinterlands for significant parts of the year, show strong local identities, and central government penetration of the provinces was uneven and erratic. It is important, then, to distinguish between the imperatives of local economies – micro-economics at the local level – and the functioning of the national economy, in terms of the macro-economic structures represented by central government activity.

Cycles of prosperity and crisis are associated with fluctuations in the Nile flood, short and long term, although warfare, imperial expansion, and internal conflict characterize the peaks and troughs of individual cycles. Such cycles are recognized in the archaeological record as periods of major monument building, against periods of few and poor quality monuments. Long-term change is more difficult to evaluate. The greatest mass of data comes from the New Kingdom, but differences are visible in the political and cultural regimes of the Old or Middle Kingdoms, which must be reflected in economic activity. Evidence for the pre-historic, pre-Pharaonic economy of the Nile Valley is very limited and provides little basis for speculation about economic factors in the origins of Egyptian civilization. However, deep common imperatives run throughout the Pharaonic economy at all levels and all periods.