

**Reciprocity and syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt :
the Denderah temple as a case study**

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SUMMARY

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The Egyptian religion existed at least 3000 years before Christ, and the best preserved temples were built during the latter part of the Ptolemaic period. The Ptolemies were Greek conquerors and started ruling Egypt, but over time, the Greeks and the Egyptians accommodated each others' beliefs and cultures.

This study explores the roles of honour, reciprocity and syncretism between the Greeks and the Egyptians. It demonstrates how this relationship was both syncretic and reciprocal through the archaeological evidence left behind. It compares and contrasts the autocratic Akhenaten with the more sensitive Alexander the Great and shows how the Greeks were able to find commonalities between their gods and those of the Egyptians. It shows how the use of Koine, the Greek language of that time, found its way into everyday Egyptian life and was a major contributing factor to the increasing similar ways of life of the Greeks and the Egyptians. The archaeological evidence in funerary artefacts and the Hathor temple, in particular, show examples where Hellenisation did and did not take place. More importantly, the Denderah zodiac at the temple of Hathor, goddess of the fertility and the heavens, is shown to be a construction in honour of the goddess Nut, another sky-goddess, and is not intended to be representative of any particular moment in time of the heavens. The Denderah zodiac demonstrates how syncretism and reciprocity is tangibly evident between the Greeks and the Egyptians.

KEYWORDS

Reciprocity

Syncretism

Egypt

Honour

Hathor temple

Denderah zodiac

Astronomy

Astrology

Ptolemy

Assimilation

OPSOMMING

Wederkerigheid en sinkretisme in Egipte onder Ptolomese heerskappy: die Denderahempel as ‘n gevallestudie.

deur

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Die Egiptiese geloof het reeds meer as 3000 jaar voor die geboorte van Christus bestaan en die beste bewaarde tempels is in die Ptolemiese tydperk gebou. Die Ptolemeërs was Griekse oorwinnaars. Nadat hulle oor Egipte begin regeer het, het die twee kulture mettertyd by mekaar begin aanpas.

Hierdie studie ondersoek die rol van eer, wederkerigheid en sinkretisme tussen die antieke kulture van die Grieke en die Egiptenare. Die studie toon hoe die twee kulture mekaar akkommodeer, met spesifieke verwysing na argeologiese bewyse. Die outokratiese Akhenaten word met die meer sensitiewe Alexander die Grote vergelyk. Dit toon duidelik aan hoe die Grieke gemeenskaplike verbande tussen hulle eie en die Egiptiese godsdiens gevind het. Hierdie studie toon ook hoe die gebruik van die Griekse *Koine* dialek in die daaglikse lewe van die Egiptenare ‘n groot faktor was in die geleidelike samesmelting van die twee kulture. Die argeologiese bewyse van die Hathortempel in Denderah, en meer spesifiek in die Denderahzodiak in die tempel, word ontleed om aspekte van sinkretisme en wederkerigheid tussen die twee kulture te illustreer. Die gevolgtrekking is dat die Hathortempel opgerig is om Nut, die hemelgodin, te vereer, en nie om ‘n spesifieke moment in die nagtelike sterrehemel uit te beeld nie. Die zodiak in besonder lewer getuienis van sinkretisme en wederkerigheid tussen die Griekse en die Egiptiese kulture.

SLEUTELWOORDE

Wederkerigheid

Sinkretisme

Egipte

Eer

Hathortempel

Denderahzodiak

Astronomie

Astrologie

Ptolemeus

Assimilasie

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To my father

Thank you

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Thesis statement

“Test everything. Hold on to the good.” (1 Thess. 5:23).

With these words, Pope Gregory I dispatched Saint Augustine in 596 AD (Thorne 1969:65) to the pagan Anglo-Saxons in Eastern England. It was best he believed to avoid giving the pagans needless offence while offering them the Christian message with respect (Collins & Price 1999:85).

‘Syncretism’ is a contentious term, often taken to imply ‘contamination’, the infiltration of a supposedly ‘pure’ tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible traditions. Problems with syncretism do not seem to lie with any substantive objections to the semantics of the term - since hardly anyone would deny that different religious traditions have amalgamated in the past, particularly the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians during the Ptolemaic period, where they continued to interact and borrow from each other (Lorton 2000:140).

It is also noteworthy that the concept of syncretism begins its history with positive connotations, referring to a strategically practical, morally justified form of political allegiance - to a form of ‘brotherly love’. A brotherly love/syncretism that this study will examine will aim to prove that it existed from the physical evidence left by these ancient communities through the celestial depictions in the Hathor temple at Denderah. It will be argued that these depictions are syncretic rather than astronomical or astrological.

1.2. Research problem

Denderah is a village in Upper Egypt on the bank of the Nile, and is famous for its veneration of the goddess Hathor, the cow-goddess of the sky and fertility. The Hathor temple built at Denderah is one of the best preserved temples of ancient Egypt. The present building dates from the Ptolemaic period and was completed by Augustus. It is in this temple that Napoleon and his troops discovered the renowned ‘Denderah Zodiac’ (Markham 1963:64), unique to ancient Egypt as it is the only zodiac found which was depicted in a circular fashion. Removed by Napoleon, it is housed today in

the Louvre in Paris. A plaster cast copy now fills the space of the original in the Hathor Temple. It is this circular zodiac that will form the basis for the argument of this study. In this circular zodiac, symbols of both Greek and Egyptian extract are represented and it is these juxtapositioned representations that need clarification. Why should the Egyptians, who were initially considered as second-class citizens by the Greeks, have bothered to include Greek symbols alongside Egyptian symbols in a temple that was commissioned to venerate an Egyptian goddess?

Both astronomers and astrologers wish to take ownership of the celestial representations in the Hathor temple at Denderah into their own disciplines, yet fail to take into account the way in which these symbols have been depicted. The ancient Greek and Egyptian astrological and astronomical symbols located in the Hathor Temple are unrivalled anywhere else in Egypt and bring into question why these symbols were depicted alongside one another in something as complex as the Denderah zodiac.

Social values of the Ptolemaic period indicate that the Greeks and Egyptians were able to coexist peacefully and retain their identity (Hertzler 1936:17). In this study it will therefore be argued that these cultures influenced each other sufficiently so that a state of syncretism became apparent through reciprocity in architecture, deities and symbolism.

1.3. Hypothesis

This study will argue that the symbols represented in the Denderah zodiac in the Hathor temple at Denderah, are tangible evidence of the syncretism that took place during the Ptolemaic period, reciprocated between the Greek and Egyptian cultures.

1.4. Method

The research in this study will use the following methods below:

- Firstly, the clarification of syncretism, reciprocity and honour in Ptolemaic Egypt needs to be established. This chapter will orientate the reader to the functions of these social values in Ptolemaic Egypt and the influence that these cultures had on each other, adopting them as normative actions in society and later mutually accommodating each other as depicted in both their behaviour

and their assessment of values (Pilch & Malina 1993:xvii). These values will be explored and qualified in relation to the time period and the lifestyles of the peoples concerned. This chapter will also establish an overview of Ptolemaic Egypt, placing the proposed syncretism in context.

- Secondly, the Greek and Egyptian religions of the period will be clarified and how, despite having developed individually, the Greeks were able to identify many commonalities between their gods and the Egyptian gods, which contributed to the evolution of syncretism.
- Thirdly, the Greek and Egyptian religion concerning their belief systems and the influence each had on the other will be discussed; this will explore the reciprocal relationships they had and how this resulted in syncretism.
- Fourthly, a discussion on the Hellenisation of Egypt and how the adoption of the Greek culture by the Egyptians contributed to the evidence of syncretism evident in the Denderah zodiac, architecture and funerary artefacts. The enigmatic rulers, Akhenaten and Alexander the Great will be discussed in the context of the Hellenisation of various deities and cults that were established.
- The final section of this study focuses on the syncretism inherent in the Denderah zodiac. In order to understand why the zodiac was depicted at all, the star systems in ancient Egypt and the history of the zodiac will build on the findings of archaeoastronomy and archaeoastronomy. They will form the basis for the final section of this study linking syncretism to the Denderah zodiac and the astronomical data in the Hathor temple.

1.5. Expected results

The relationship between the Egyptians and the Greeks will demonstrate how syncretism and reciprocity occurred during the latter part of the Ptolemaic dynasty. In particular, this is exemplified by the Denderah zodiac and that its inclusion in the Hathor temple was syncretic and that there was never any intention to depict a particular sky map at any given date or from any particular point of reference.

Chapter 2

Reciprocity, honour and syncretism

2.1. Introduction

“The word “value” describes some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behavior. A value is a general, normative orientation of action in a social system. It is an emotionally anchored commitment to pursue and support certain directions or types of actions” (Pilch & Malina 1993:xxiii).

In this study, it will be shown that reciprocity, honour and syncretism are pivotal social values relevant to the Ptolemaic period in Egyptian history. These social values were pursued and supported by the Greeks and Egyptians of the period, thereby adopting them as normative actions in society, accommodating each other in both their behaviour and their assessment of values (Pilch & Malina 1993:xvii). These values will be explored and qualified in relation to the time period and the lifestyles of the peoples concerned.

2.2. Historical overview of Ptolemaic Egypt

Clarification of the relationship between the Greek Ptolemies and the indigenous Egyptians is pivotal in the understanding of the proposed reciprocity that took place between these two cultures. It was this reciprocal relationship that laid the foundations for the syncretism evident in the temples left behind.

During the period when the Saite kings and the Persians reigned over Egypt, a new element found its way into the east and penetrated Egypt – they were the Greeks. They took service in the east as soldiers, settled down in Egyptian cities as merchants and manufacturers, and prospered everywhere by their skill and industry (Fraser 1972:25). They settled down quietly working, bargaining and advancing money (Erman 1907:203). As early as the time of Amasis a special Greek town in Egypt was founded called Naukratis, a wealthy city frequented by all nationalities, and when Herodotus travelled in Egypt he found the people completely accustomed to their foreign guests (Stephens 2003:31). Thus when Alexander's campaign in 332 BC made the Greeks

masters of the country, it only brought a political conclusion that had already been prepared by the enterprising commercial spirit.

From this time the Greeks were the dominant people in Egypt, controlling the government and becoming part of the population. The greater part of the Egyptians remained true to their nationality and above all to their inherited belief (Harris & Ruffini 2004:65). They remained pious Egyptians; but clung more closely to their religion than before and when in the course of centuries, these beliefs became remodelled by contact with the Greeks, the beliefs were not adversely affected. As a result the Egyptian gods even gained some adherents among the Greek populace (Fraser 1972:45).

Due to the strength of the Egyptian beliefs the Greek kings and the Roman emperors' only had one possible method of governing the country: by maintaining a good relationship and understanding with the religious leaders of the Egyptians (Jones 1940:26). As the State took the spiritual power under its protection and assisted it in every way, so it in turn was bound to support the secular power.

With the advent of Ptolemaic rule, many partly finished temples were left behind by the Persians and was now entrusted to the Greek successors to finish what the Persians had begun (Stephens 2003:38). When they had completed one temple, they had to consider the claims of some neighbouring temples of other gods, whose sanctuaries were equally in need of new buildings (Stephens 2003:39). Thus early in the Ptolemaic period there began a great epoch of temple building which lasted into Roman times; and which resulted in mighty creations which at the present day meet us everywhere in Egypt. Denderah, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Philæ, to name only a few of these, were built under the Ptolemaic and Roman rulers and endured over a long period of time (Jones 1940:27).

At Edfu, building continued with interruptions from 237 BC to 57 BC At Denderah and Kom Ombo it continued for about a hundred years. Philæ was begun under Ptolemy II and in the time of Tiberius it was still unfinished. The money for all this construction was initially financed by the king but was later supplemented by temple funds (Breasted 1916:446). However, the financial strength of the temple funds was dictated by the king and therefore the king indirectly provided for the building of the temples of the gods through the temple funds, just as the pharaohs had done before them (Harris & Ruffini 2004:68). Therefore, the Greek kings and Roman emperors can also be referred

to as the builders of the temples where they are often represented as pious worshippers praying and offering sacrifices. Although the crocodile god of Ombos, or the cow-horned goddess of Denderah, may have appeared absurd to them, it was they, who as rulers of the country, maintained these Egyptian deities in their grandeur and power (Breasted 1916:447).

Good insight is gained into the relationship between the kings and the priests by means of a great memorial tablet which the priests of Mendes, a town in the Delta, set up in their temple in honour of Ptolemy II (Erman 1907:205). The tablet states that soon after coming to the throne, he visited their temple, and thus their ram was the first sacred animal worshipped by his Majesty.

“He sailed in the bark of the god on the waters belonging to the temple as the king had done who came before him, and had fulfilled all the ceremonies of the visit as they are written down” (Erman 1907:205).

After Ptolemy II observed that the priests were repairing the damage which the barbarians had done to the temple he gave new orders to rebuild the temple.

“Then his Majesty returned to his place of residence, full of joy concerning that which he had done for his fathers, the very great living rams of Mendes” (Erman 1907:206).

While memorial tablets of this description tell us what the Ptolemaic kings did for the gods, others show us in what manner the priests testified their gratitude (Jones 1940:38). On special occasions the entire body of priests assembled at one temple and decided in a ceremonious conclave what extraordinary honours they could bestow on the king. Thus for instance the priests assembled in the temple of Canopus in the year 238 BC, and recounted what the beneficent gods, such as Ptolemy III and his consort, had done for the temples:

“They have benefited the temples in the land and greatly increased the dignity of the gods. They have provided in every way for Apis, Mnevis, and the other esteemed sacred animals with great sumptuousness and cost” (Erman 1907:206).

2.3. Reciprocity

The value of reciprocity is defined as:

“The quality or state of being reciprocal; or the mutual exchange of privileges”
(Mirriam-Webster 1999:427).

Jacques Derrida states:

“The impossibility of the gift is bound in its associations of reciprocity, obligatory fulfillments and desires. It is a bond without a bond and a bond that entails debt, credit, contract and exchange” (Derrida 1992:27).

In order to realize values such as reciprocity, human beings create and utilise social institutions. These institutions mark the boundary within which certain qualities and directions of living must take place. Generating and nurturing human beings must occur within the boundaries of kinship (Pilch & Malina 1993:xvii).

Kinship marks the general boundaries within which certain qualities and directions of living must take place. Thus with the advent of the Ptolemies, the Egyptians would have had new boundaries to adjust to and live by. These institutional boundaries delineate and define value objects, i.e. the objects that embody values. For example, the individual person is a valuable object. Institutionally, individual persons are usually delineated by social arrangements called roles and statuses that most persons possess within the social institution known as kinship (Pilch & Malina 1993:xvii). Alexander the Great identified the Egyptians as valuable to the success of his reign, and therefore the Egyptians were institutionalized whereby mutual exchange of privileges was expected of them. The Greek-Egyptian kinship resulted due to Alexander the Great declaring himself to be the embodiment of Amun and at the same time allowing the Egyptians to retain their identity and religious freedom, thereby creating a social institution within which the Egyptians were able to live in.

“An opportunity of befriending the Egyptian temples represented itself to the earlier Ptolemaic kings. In their expeditions into Asia, the three first Ptolemies found statues, temple furniture and books, which had been taken away from the temples during the Persian times, and they gladly took the opportunity of returning them to the temples from which they had been taken” (Erman 1907:204).

Acts performed by the Greeks such as those in the above-mentioned statement, help prove how the Ptolemies created social boundaries within which society was to function, thus emphasizing reciprocity that manifested itself. Similarities and changes between these two cultures in terms of religion, architecture and adornment also help to substantiate the reciprocity that developed between the Greeks and the Egyptians.

Material arrangements in society during this period can also be correlated to the creation of new social formations, supporting the theory of reciprocity, as evidenced by the conditions and contributions for marriage during the Ptolemaic period which included finding a house, bringing a bundle of goods, arranging domestic affairs, etc. Since the villages of Deir el Medina recorded these socialised transactions, this would suggest a supra-economic value to supplying gifts (Gill, Postlethwaite, & Seaford 1998:2).

Following Derrida's theory, these gifts are 'non-gifts' or 'impossible gifts' because they establish an obligatory relationship of reciprocity where there is an expectation of receiving something in return, whether between mortals and divinities or mortals and mortals (Price 1997:120). These obligatory relationships were practised by both Greek and Egyptian fully supporting the theory that reciprocity was evident during this period.

2.4. Requit and voluntary reciprocity

Reciprocity can also be used as an explanation for the examples found in architecture, the combined aspects of various deities, and the symbolism during the Ptolemaic period. During this period, the Hellenisation of Egypt was both voluntary and requital. 'Requit' and 'voluntary' therefore require qualification.

'Voluntary' means that an act is done of one's own accord. To 'requite' means to compensate another party for a generous act. The Egyptians may have felt no social or moral pressure whatsoever to reciprocate the generosity afforded them by the Greeks, or to 'obey' their new rulers (Gill, Postlethwaite, & Seaford 1998:4). However, because 'requital' is expected but not enforced, as in an act of generosity, even if seen as perhaps designed to elicit requital, it may nevertheless retain an appearance (or even the reality) of gratifying disinterestedness, for there is always the possibility that it will be requited (Meskell 2004:24). The claim that reciprocity was evident during the Ptolemaic period, points to a combination of voluntary and requital reciprocity that

evolved, which is evident in the physical evidence from the time. Involuntary reciprocity must also have surfaced during the Ptolemaic period between the Greeks and Egyptians, an unconscious acknowledgement of the kinship between the two cultures. Through endless repetition, the requital reciprocity the Egyptians experienced could possibly have inadvertently become involuntary reciprocity.

2.5. Political reciprocity

Reciprocity is also further sub-divided into political reciprocity. In Homeric society a chief's prestige and authority depended on networks of carefully forged and carefully nurtured personal reciprocal relationships with peers, subordinates, and inferiors (Price 1997:142). Political reciprocity has a different face when the other party is the whole community, subordinate in its parts, yet superior by its numbers and by the chief's lack of formal powers. The relationship is wholly asymmetrical; on one side a single figure, hailed as chief, leader, and ruler, and on the other side an abstract entity, the people, being the sum of the individuals, families, and groups, which collectively are said to follow and honour with gifts, and to obey him (Gill, Postlethwaite, & Seaford 1998:55).

2.6. Honour

Reciprocity, prevalent in Graeco-Egyptian society, was closely related to the ancient social value of honour. Honour, an abstract concept, might best be described as 'socially proper attitudes and behaviour in the area where the three lines of power, gender status, and religion intersect' (Malina 1981:30). This is also the pivotal social value in Mediterranean society (Pitt-Rivers 1966:25), and would therefore be most applicable to the Graeco-Egyptian culture. Honour ultimately means the perception someone has of his or her own worth and an appreciation of how he or she is rated by a relevant social group. It is a claim to worth and a social acknowledgement of worth.

Honour is either ascribed, that is obtained passively, simply by being who one is (typically, a member of a noble family) or by being granted a powerful and honourable position; or acquired, that is gained actively through various forms of social interaction (Esler 1994:25). Thus it would be probable to consider that the Greeks achieved honourable status in Egyptian society, by the non-obligatory gifts they bestowed on the Egyptians by means of political and religious freedom, thus resulting in a syncretic relationship between these two cultures.

2.7. Acquired honour

Acquired honour is the socially recognised claim to worth, which a person earns by excelling over others in various forms of social interaction. In Mediterranean society a line is drawn between those who are one's kin and who are one's fictive kin (Payne 2003:588). Between kin and fictive kin exists trust, confidence and unselfish assistance. To those who are not blood relations, hence known as fictive kin, a very different attitude prevails, not merely with relationships being governed by self-interest, but with the objective of obtaining honour by vanquishing or even deceiving non-kin in any possible situation (Bourdieu 1965:192).

Virtually any form of social intercourse - gift-giving, dinner invitations, discussions in public places, buying and selling, arranging marriages and any form of agreements on matters of common interest - opens up to the participants an opportunity to enhance one's honour at the expense of someone else (Bourdieu 1965:191). The Greeks, therefore, were able to enhance their honour at the expense of the Egyptians through various forms of social intercourse.

2.8. Syncretism

On semantic grounds, the word was often thought to be derived from the Ancient Greek prefix σύν, *syn*, 'with', and κράσις, *krasis*, 'mixture', which is combined in words such as σύνκρασις, *synkrasis*, 'a mixing together, compound', or ἰδιοσυνκρασία, *idiosynkrasia*, meaning '(peculiar, individual) temperament'. Of course, the English word 'idiosyncrasy' derives directly from this ancient Greek compound (Shaw 1994:4).

However, the very first attestation of συνκρητισμός, *synkretismos*, the direct forerunner of 'syncretism', does not appear until relatively late, when Plutarch (AD 45-125) uses it in the *Morali*. He makes the point that it is a necessity to be friendly with the friends of a brother, and unfavorable towards the enemies of a brother, imitating in this point, at least, the practice of the Cretans, who, though they often quarreled with and warred against each other, made up their differences and united when outside enemies attacked; and this it was which they called "syncretism" (Lorton 2000:142).

Professor Grant Showerman in the 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica explained how Plutarch clearly linked the word 'syncretism' to κρητίζειν, *kretizein*, which literally meant to combine against a common enemy, after the manner of the cities of Crete. It is

difficult to know whether Plutarch was earnestly communicating a widespread folk etymology, reporting and reviving an unattested earlier word, or simply making a pun on the familiar word σύνκρσις, *synkrasis*. Plutarch's 'syncretism' is highly idiosyncratic, and his story should remind us that the arena of syncretism is a deeply politicized site of difference, contact and reconciliation (Lorton 2000:143). It was only later falsely assumed to come from σύν, *sun*, and κεράννυμι, *kerannumi*, to mingle or blend (Showerman 1911:292).

Syncretism asks whether parts of a religion are borrowed and, if so, how these borrowings are used and how their presence should be interpreted. Syncretism poses historical questions about roots, cultural contacts and received influences (Stewart & Shaw 1994:128), which helps support the claim that syncretism was pivotal to the Egyptians and Greeks as a social value. By exploring Christianity (which is not syncretic by definition) and syncretism, a better understanding of Christianity's ambivalent attitude towards syncretism will be reached and will give a better understanding of syncretism in the Ptolemaic context.

2.9. Christianity and syncretism

Before exploring syncretism in the Ptolemaic in the religious environment, it may be helpful to understand syncretism in a Christian context. Christianity by definition is not syncretic, and yet in practice the Christian church has had an ambivalent attitude towards syncretism.

Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians in 61 AD from Rome because of the threat of syncretism to Christianity.

“There were Greeks and Jews in the Colossian church, as well as ‘native’ Phrygians. It was natural that they should cling to their own ideas and want to incorporate them into Christianity. It seemed harmless enough. But Paul knew that it struck at the heart of the Christian faith ...these are the thoughts behind his letter” (Alexander 1975:611).

Yet, the early church had no problem with bending the rules. Pope Gregory I told Saint Augustine to be accommodating when trying to convert the British pagans.

“Christian festivals displaced pagan ones. Christmas replaced the festival associated with the birth of the Roman god Mithras, just as St Valentine’s day replaced Lupercalia” (Giles 2002:36).

Mithras was a Persian sun-deity whose influence spread into Europe and was extensive in Roman times (Shapiro & Hendricks 1981:126). The Saturnalia an annual festival held in mid December in honour of Saturn, a Roman god of planting and harvest, was a time of gift giving and entertainment (Shapiro & Hendricks 1981:171). In these instances, replacing the birth of Mithras with that of Jesus is syncretic. The early Church told its new converts that in celebrating the birth of Mithras they intended to celebrate the birth of Jesus. There is no syncretism in *replacing* the Saturnalia with Christmas or the Lupercalia with Saint Valentine’s Day. Here the early Church was giving its new converts alternative celebrations. On the whole the Christian Church has been understandably intolerant towards other beliefs.

However, the actions of the Spanish missionaries who went to the New World to convert the native populations were unforgivable. A great deal of ancient culture was destroyed by over-zealous priests in eliminating what they considered paganism.

In South Africa today a current example of syncretism is the Zionist Christian Church, which is an amalgamation of Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Rural South Africans sees little difference between calling on their ancestors and praying to the saints (Hofmeyer & Pillay 1994:215).

2.10. Syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt

When the Macedonians under Alexander the Great conquered Egypt and liberated them from the Persians, their initial reaction was that of normal conquerors, in that they continued life in their own culture, taking little notice of the Egyptians. After consideration, the Greeks realized that the Egyptians were being alienated and that it would be to their benefit to accommodate the Egyptians (Lorton & Mysliwiec 2000:142).

Syncretism refers to a coexistence of socio-cultural and/or religious elements which are known to have existed independently. With the influx of Greeks to Egyptian shores, communities were established, and through values such as reciprocity and honour taking precedence in society, syncretism developed. Syncretism was most prevalent in

the worshipping of various deities. Over time, the Greek population of both Alexandria and the rest of Egypt grew more integrated, coming to resemble the Hellenomemphites of an earlier period, with frequent intermarriage, dual Greek-Egyptian names, and burial practices that included mummification and use of the distinctively Egyptian iconography (Vlachos 1936:153).

In this environment, total integration rather than rejection of anything Egyptian would have elicited positive response from the people. For most of those who hailed from Mediterranean Greek heritage who lived in Ptolemaic Alexandria, coming to terms with daily accommodation in some form, to the reality of Egypt - climate, monuments, religious practices, language and writing systems as well as court ceremonies - was inevitable (Faraone & Obbink 1997:122). Therefore, some form of common element was important for both cultures in order to develop social behaviour acceptable to both peoples.

A common element which linked both Greeks and Egyptians was religion (Faraone & Obbink 1997:123). Both the Greeks and Egyptians worshipped a pantheon of gods, and therefore adopting deities cross-culturally was not peculiar as both Greeks and Egyptians could find commonalities between their own pantheons. For example, Zeus in the Greek religion mirrored Amun / Amon in the Egyptian religion. Each community appears to have worshipped its own local deity, but as the villages gradually joined together to become larger political units, the gods of each community were amalgamated into groups who eventually protected the *nome*, an extensive geographical district (Nilsson 1926:23). This process is known as syncretism. In time, the god of the community that had seized local political power would become the chief deity of the *nome*, so that the religious practices in fact mirrored political reality (David 200:25).

2.11. Conclusion

In conclusion, reciprocity, honour and syncretism *are* pivotal social values relevant to the Ptolemaic period in Egyptian history. They were pursued and supported by the Greeks and Egyptians of the period and were adopted as normative actions in society. The Greeks and Egyptians came to accommodate each others beliefs which were revealed in both their behaviour and their assessment of value objects (Pilch & Malina 1993: xvii) such as their architecture, funerary art and sculptured deities.

Chapter 3

Egyptian and Greek religion

3.1. Introduction

“The ancient Egyptians worshipped a multitude of gods and goddesses and understanding of these is crucial for any inquiry into Egyptian mythology and religion. It is, however, easy to be baffled by the great number of deities, the variety of forms they take and the complexity of the relationships between them” (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:438).

In order to understand the syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt, it is necessary to understand both the Greek and Egyptian religions of the period and their respective pantheons of gods and goddesses. Despite having been developed individually, the Greeks were able to identify many commonalities between their gods and the Egyptian gods, which contributed to syncretism evolving.

3.2. Egyptian Religion

The Egyptians had an unwavering belief in the afterlife. They believed that the afterlife was eternal and was of more importance than life on earth, and saw life on earth as a means of achieving ever-lasting life (Nasr 1996:37). It was therefore important to them how they lived and conducted their lives on earth as they would inevitably be introduced to Anubis the god of the dead who would permit them to pass into the afterlife.

After death, Anubis would take the potential soul to be judged by Ma’at who would then decide if the soul was worthy of eternal life (David 2000:67). The Egyptians believed the soul resided in the heart. If the potential soul was deemed worthy, then it would be granted eternal life. If not the soul could be condemned to roam the earth eternally as a lost soul, as substantiated below:

“The deceased was presented with a long list of sins and had to deny each in turn. Anubis tested the veracity of their denials by weighing their heart... against a feather representing Ma’at. If heart and feather were of equal weight the deceased was declared “true of voice” and “justified”... whence they passed into the blessed

afterlife. But if the heart was heavy with sin and tipped the scales, it was thrown to Ammut, a hybrid monster that annihilated evil doers by devouring their hearts” (Fletcher 1999:129).

An aspect of Egyptian religion dealt with the notion that the dead had the possibility of joining the gods as an imperishable star in the afterlife (Snodgrass 1997:89). Therefore, the Egyptian priests’ approach towards astronomy was religious rather than scientific. Reaching the imperishable stars, namely the constellations of Draco, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor as depicted in the middle of the Denderah zodiac, was the life-time goal of the average man.

“The deceased may inhabit the underworld with Osiris, or rise up to the heavens to become one of the imperishable stars, or join the sun-god Ra... in its journey across the sky. ... The acceptance of a range of ultimate destinations for the deceased is typical of the Egyptians’ tolerant and multifaceted belief system” (Fletcher 1999:131).

While the average person was cautious in the way he conducted his life, aware that he was merely a mortal, he saw the pharaoh as god on earth. The people saw it as their task to assist the pharaoh in successfully making his journey to the afterlife. By ensuring the pharaoh’s success, they would then be ensuring their own successful path to the afterlife, as they had lived a good life and helped the pharaoh; more importantly, the pharaoh had paved the way for them thus helping them achieve the status of an imperishable star alongside him (Clark 2000:56).

As the majority of evidence is biased towards the state religion of the literate wealthy minority, it is difficult to untangle the beliefs of the ordinary people, which were concerned with everyday life, magic and religious ritual often becoming unified. This also resulted in the delineation between reality and the supernatural, which became blurred as the beliefs that the people harboured often explained the unexplainable. Therefore the manifestation of a pantheon of gods helped the average individual comprehend natural and unnatural or magical occurrences that came about in daily life (David 2000:68).

The Egyptians inhabited a natural environment that could prove hazardous and life was unpredictable. Much of what they encountered in life and the world around them may

have seemed mysterious and incomprehensible. The gods and goddesses they conjured up were divine personifications of all that was important to them, particularly in maintaining a sense of order and well being in this life and the next, ensuring the survival of the next generation and the continued fertility of the soil (David 2000:69). So there were, for example, gods of the cosmos, the afterlife, childbirth, grain, even drunkenness and merriment. The stories or myths that evolved around the various gods and goddesses were a means of explaining the unknown, such as why it is dark at night or the cause of an illness (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:439).

Daily life for the average Egyptian was beset with dangerous animals such as crocodiles and scorpions, whilst having to cope with famine, crop failure, death of livestock; infertility was also of concern (Brier & Hobbs 1999:55).

Religion was separated into two categories, religion of the state and popular religion. State religion decreed the national doctrine, where the people believed in a polytheistic system of worship rather than a monotheistic one as introduced by the hieratical Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten in 1353 BC (Lorton & Mysliwiec 2000:150). Popular religion was more personal and concerned the day-to-day religion of the people, which included magic, medicine, household deities which were worshipped and venerated, festival and pilgrimages and funerary paraphernalia. (David 2000:70). Worship often involved making offerings to the gods accompanied by invocation, in order to ensure their continued and benign presence in the lives of the people (Nasr 1996:40).

Thus popular religion and state religion became unified to suit individuals and often religious practices bordered on the edge of magic.

“A priest used to performing rituals in the cult of a state deity could also be called on to carry out what we would term magic or sorcery. State and popular religion were clearly inter-related” (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:440).

3.3. Egyptian gods

The Egyptians believed that the balance of order and chaos in the universe could only be maintained by the gods and goddesses and their representative on earth - the king. Originally these deities simply represented aspects of the natural world – the sun, the sky, the land and the river – until each gradually developed a more complex personality and history as every area of the country embellished the stories and myths surrounding

its own local deity. Eventually, many divinities came to share titles and attributes, and thus immersed the highly sophisticated pattern of religious belief that was so characteristic of ancient Egypt (Fletcher 1999:8).

The gods and goddesses of Egypt are famous for their representation in animal forms, as well as their representative therianthropic forms - that is a combination of human and animal characteristics (Price 2001:106). It is these representations that are clearly recognizable and have popularized Egyptology in modern society.

“In the polytheistic Egyptian religion an animal’s attributes and behaviour often determined its selection as a deity. Khepri, the god of the sun and creation, is shown as a scarab (dung) beetle and was thought to roll the sun through the sky like its ball of dung. The Egyptians sometimes worshipped a dangerous animal like the cobra snake, such as the fertility goddess Renenutet, in order to placate the animal and neutralize the danger from that animal” (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:268).



Figure 1: Thoth

However, it is the therianthropic gods and goddesses of the Egyptians who are most famous. For instance, Thoth (Figure 1), the god of wisdom and scribes, was shown as a man with the head of an ibis.

Horus, the god of the sky, is depicted as a man with a falcon’s head, and Anubis, the god of the dead, with a jackal-head. Selket (Figure 2) is often therianthropically depicted as half woman and half scorpion, and her name refers to her ability for the throat to breathe, presumably after a scorpion sting. She was also one of the four goddesses responsible for guarding the royal coffin (Barnett 1999: 102).



Figure 2: Selket



Figure 3 : Qadesh

The Egyptians also represented gods and goddesses shown in human form. One example is Osiris, king of the underworld, who is shown carrying the royal insignia of crook and flail. The creator god, Ptah, is shown in a skull cap and holds a staff that is a combination of the ankh sign and the scepter of straightness and stability (Hagen 1999:45). Qadesh (Figure 3), the goddess of sexual pleasure, is usually shown as a naked woman holding out flowers, while she stands on the back of a lion. Hathor, the goddess of music and dance, is often shown as a woman with the ears of a cow (Barnet 1999:81).

3.4. Greek religion

The Greeks believed that all aspects of life were affected by an appropriate deity. There were gods and goddesses who aided agriculture, drove the sun and moon through the firmament, caused war, or helped fertility and childbirth (Faraone & Obbink 1997:150). Yet, each city-state had its own deity and there were local deities for each stream, tree and hill. They believed that their gods were like immortal, super humans with their own flaws and weaknesses. These gods controlled their lives, and any misfortune could be attributed to an act they had done to upset a particular god (Welleitner 1998:313).

Like the Egyptians, the Greek religion was an anthropomorphic polytheism (Lorton & Mysliwiec 2000:98), the worship of a number of gods, thought of largely in human form and human in mind. It was a religion of everyday life, which sought for temporal blessings such as good crops, deliverance from enemies, health and peace within the community (Rose 1967:888). It was therefore naturally accepted by the Greeks that the religion they practiced mirrored their own lives in many facets. Just as the Egyptians enjoyed a popular religion which was relevant to the *nome* of the individual or their household, the Greeks enjoyed a popular religion whereby they compensated for defects in the state religion by venerating their choice of local powers such as nymphs who might assist farmers in their establishing a healthy crop (Rose 1967:888).

However, when they died, the Greek's soul/psyche went down into the underworld: only the gods and goddesses could go up to heaven. For a human to get to heaven, on Olympus, he had to be promoted to the status of a god, like Heracles. For those who

had lived lives displeasing to the gods, they were sent even further underground to Tartarus (David 2000:89).

Despite their belief in retribution from the gods, the Greeks were not frightened of criticising or mocking the gods, such as Euripides in his tragedies or Aristophanes in his comedies (Green 1967:886 & 887).

3.5. Greek gods

The people who historically called themselves the Hellenes (Greeks) came to Greece from an unknown district, perhaps that of Asia Minor. They brought with them only one deity whose name and native origin are certain that of Zeus, a deity related to important meteorological phenomena (Haydon 1941:260). It is also likely that they also had a corn-goddess named Demeter, Zeus' sister, who had a daughter called Kore (Rose 1967:886). Only later was the classical pantheon of gods established, with deities such as Pluton (Hades). Rose claims that many deities were anthropomorphic, however there were Greek deities who were often represented as manifestations of various animals. In early days, Athena was often worshipped as an owl. Zeus turned himself into a bull, a swan and a shower of coins when in pursuit of his many seductions. Poseidon, god of the sea was sometimes represented as a horse and Dionysus as a serpent or bull, however, other than Pan with his added goat characteristics, the Greek gods are never represented as animal-headed and human bodied which is standard for the Egyptian gods (Rose 1967:887).

Just because they recognized what the gods could do, it did not mean that the Greeks worshipped them. Hades was the god who ruled the underworld, but since he ruled the dead, the living did not build any temples for him. There are very few temples for Ares, god of war. Yet they all knew that Ares was having a prolonged affair with Aphrodite, goddess of love. She was married to the god, Hephaestus, the lame god of firs and blacksmiths (Gahlin 2001:268).

Hephaestus was thus the god of artisans, and when the Greeks went to Egypt, they recognized him in the artisan god, Ptah, who was the god of the original capital of Egypt at Memphis. One name for Memphis was Hikuptah, the "mansion of the Soul (*ka*) of Ptah". The Egyptians' own name for their land was Kēmi, "the black land", referring to the blackness of its alluvial soil. The Greeks, however, took the alternate

name for Memphis, and wrote it as Αίγυπτος, or Aegyptus, or Egypt (Gardiner 1911:41).

3.6. Correlation of Greek and Egyptian gods

It was the anthropomorphic polytheism that the Greeks identified with in the Egyptian religion. They associated Zeus with Amun, the chief Egyptian deity. Amun was the Egyptian sun god and was often depicted with a ram's head. In fact, it was the oracle of Zeus-Amun in the desert that Alexander the Great consulted several times during his conquest of Egypt (Görg 1998:432). Apollo was identified with the Egyptian sky and the sun god Horus, who was depicted with a falcon's head, whereas Apollo's animals were the dolphin and the crow. Despite the differences, the Greeks accepted that the Egyptian gods were their gods, merely having different names and appearances (Görg 1998:433).

Evidence of the borrowing of Greek and Egyptian gods can be traced to the written accounts by the Greeks of Egypt, such as those from Hecataeus of Miletus (circa 510 BC) and Herodotus of Helicarnassus (circa 450 BC). The former work is lost but is said to contain only geological and botanical information, so no cultural or religious connotations could have resulted from it being read back in Greece. Herodotus spent his last three months traveling in Egypt recording the history, lives, religion and wonders of Egypt in his work *The Histories*. Herodotus claims that Amun is shown with a ram's head in memory of a trick Zeus played on Heracles (Griffith 1996:134) and provides reasons for the differences between several other sets of Greek and Egyptian gods. He also claimed that many Greek heroes and demi-gods came from Egypt. Herodotus frequently mentions Egyptians gods but often uses their Greek equivalent rather than the Egyptian names transliterated into Greek (Griffith 1996:138).

Although Herodotus is inaccurate in many respects, archeology provides information that supports Herodotus' claims of the borrowing of Greek and Egyptian gods. In the early period of Greek interaction in Egypt (seventh century onwards), native foreign traditions, burial customs and indications of religious activities existed side by side without any overlapping. This is particularly evident in Greek tombs in Egypt containing "Hadra vases" - urns for cremation ashes – named after the south-eastern quarter of Alexandria where many were found. Since mummification was important to the Egyptians, cremation would have been unthinkable to them (Griffith 1996:150).

However, Egyptian-style burial chambers from 332 BC often have a floor plan akin to that of a Greek house but combine Greek and Egyptian architectural features, decoration and religious motifs. During the Ptolemaic period, a new god, Serapis was “created” in the city of Alexandria and combined the features of Osiris and Apis but having the appearance of Zeus in bull form (Luft 1998:416). During this period, the Greeks also adopted Egyptian funerary customs, particularly the Faiyum area. It was populated by Greeks from 332 BC onwards as the Ptolemaic pharaohs rewarded their veterans with land grants. Temples to locate variants of the crocodile god Seth have been found in many Greek cities in the area, even named in his honour – Crocodilopolis (Luft 1998:416). Archeologists have also recovered mummies with wooden face panels bearing the portraits of the deceased, both of which are traditional practices, however, the likeness of the deceased is painted in the Greek style rather than the Egyptian style.

3.7. Conclusion

It is therefore plausible that syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt evolved due to the commonalities identifiable between the Greeks and Egyptians in literature, architecture, art and funerary customs of the period.

Chapter 4

Hellenism and exceptional rulers:

the effect their reigns had on the Hellenisation of deities

4.1. Introduction

Hellenism is the general description given to the adoption by non-Greeks of Greek customs and the Greek language after they have been exposed to them and been absorbed into their own culture. It was found from Spain in the west to parts of India in the east (Ehrenburg 1967:323).

It is interesting to compare the Egyptian-born pharaoh Akhenaten with the Macedonian-born Alexander the Great, as they illustrate the difference in styles of ruling Egypt. Akhenaten declared himself the son of Aten; Alexander the Great declared himself the son of Amun (David 2000:110). Akhenaten declared there to be a monotheistic religion and ignored the feelings of his people, whereas Alexander who was not Egyptian-born did take into account the feelings of the Egyptian people. Akhenaten's rule would not allow any form of religious or cultural freedom for the individual, unlike the Hellenisation that took place during Alexander's rule. During the Hellenisation, many new gods were created due to the syncretism that was apparent between the Greeks and the Egyptians.

4.2. Greek language development

The Greek settlements populated the Mediterranean from about the 7th century BC.

“From the time of Psammetichus (d. 610 BC) Greek mercenaries had been used to prop Pharaoh's throne. At the same time Greek merchants had begun to find their way up the Nile and even to the Oases. A Greek City Naucratis was allowed to rise at the Bolbotinic mouth of the Nile. But the racial repugnance to the Greek, which forbade an Egyptian to eat an animal which had been carved with a Greek knife, probably kept the soul of the people more shut against Hellenic influences than that of other races of the East” (Bevan 1911:237).

The greatest contribution the Greeks made to the then known civilized world was its language. The Attic dialect of classical Greek evolved into what was known as the common dialect, *κοινή διάλεκτος*, *Koine dialektos*. It became the *lingua franca* from Spain to India. Not only was it the language of government, it was the common language of the communications.

The Jews as a people resisted Hellenisation the most, and yet there were Jews scattered around the Mediterranean who could only speak Koine (Swain 1998:28). Thus the books of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha are written in Koine rather than Hebrew so that these Jews could understand what had happened in Israel.

A Semitic dialect developed in the Middle East known as Aramaic, was used during the time of Jesus and his disciples (Bevan 1967:208). However, the New Testament was written in Koine to reach the largest possible audience, or diverse people (Ehrenburg 1967:329).

When the first Greeks arrived in Egypt, they called the inscriptions they saw on temples *Hieroglyphics* (sacred carvings), as opposed to the language spoken by the people which they called *Demotic*. With the advent of Hellenisation during the Ptolemies, the language of authority became Koine (Swain 1998:31). Thus, inscriptions started to be carved in all three languages, Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Koine. The most famous example is the Rosetta Stone now residing in the British Museum (Anderson 1999:3).

In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt and later a contingent of his expeditionary force discovered the Rosetta Stone, the key that started to unlock the secrets of hieroglyphs (Gordon 1971:37). The Rosetta Stone is a black basalt slab that the French found in the course of rebuilding a fortification, where the basalt slab had already been reused as building material (Moorehouse 1953:39). Now known as the Decree of Memphis, the inscription that it bears in triplicate is a decree honouring the young Pharaoh Ptolemy V Epiphanes in 186 BC (Gordon 1971:37).

Eventually, in 1822 Champollion used the *Koine* and demotic inscriptions to start to unlock the secrets of hieroglyphics (Moorehouse 1953:21).

4.3. Hellenisation in Alexandria

Alexander the Great founded the city of Alexandria in 323 BC as a centre of Greek culture on the Northern Egyptian coast and for a long time it was independent of Egyptian rule (Fraser 1972:189). It housed the famous Alexandrian Library and was known throughout the Mediterranean for its Light House, the *Pharos*. It was still a centre of learning during early Christian times.

“Alexandria had its own civic laws and thus occupied a special position within Egypt. The Hellenistic and Egyptian ways of life in the city merged to create a unique Alexandrian style” (Seidel 1998:291).

Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city, merging different lifestyles and beliefs, thus proving to be the perfect example of Hellenisation in Egypt during the Ptolemaic period (Fraser 1972:190).

4.4. The way of life during the Ptolemaic period

During the rule of the Ptolemies, the people’s religion was allowed to continue without interference. The Priests were still allowed to retain some of their own power but political power remained in the hands of the Greeks (Kessler 1998:291). They did not trust the Egyptian soldiers in the army. However, after the battle of Raphia (217 BC), which was only won because of Egyptian help, the Egyptians were used in more official capacities (Kessler 1998:292).

Over time the Greeks became more Egyptian rather than the Egyptians becoming more Greek.

“The Ptolemies treated the Egyptian religion with respect, and permitted the native priesthood to obtain some part of its old power. They themselves went through the Pharaonic rituals and built many temples to the native gods. On their side many Egyptians of all classes learned Greek (koine) and took Greek names, and yet this Hellenisation was quite superficial. Intermarriage between Greek settlers and Egyptian women did not bring Hellenisation to the Natives; rather it was the first step in a gradual weakening of the cultural identity of the Greeks, who increasingly adopted the native religion and customs” (Simpson 1967 8:57).

Whilst customs and cultures of the Greeks were introduced throughout the Mediterranean, Egypt was the only area where this did not extend to the design of the Temples.

4.5. The Ptolemies

Alexander the Great spent two years in Egypt, before continuing his conquest of the eastern part of Asia. On his early death his empire was easy prey to the strongest rulers (Kessler 1998:291). So whilst Greece itself remained Greek, the Asian part of the Empire was ruled by the Seleucids, whilst Egypt and Palestine was ruled by the Ptolemies.

“Alexander the Great occupied Egypt late in 332 BC without opposition, the inhabitants greeting him as a liberator from Persian tyranny. He visited Memphis and sacrificed to Apis in accordance with his policy in respecting local religions. After founding Alexandria he journeyed to the temple of Amon at the oasis of Siwah and thereby acquired in Egyptian eyes confirmation of his new position as Pharaoh of the Land” (Simpson 1967 8:56).

4.6. The pharaohs

On Alexander’s death (323 BC) the Macedonian Ptolemy, son of Lagus, was appointed satrap to govern alongside Cleomenes. He lost no time in ridding himself of Cleomenes and began at once to treat the land as his destined kingdom; however it was not until 305 BC that he took the royal title. The dynasty he founded ruled Egypt to the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC (Simpson 1967 8:56).

The male Pharaohs were called Ptolemy I, II, III, etc with a Greek name after, such as Ptolemy IX Soter II, whereas the female rulers were called Cleopatra I, II, III etc. such as Cleopatra VII Philopater (Stephens 2003:139). Despite their living in Egypt three hundred years, Cleopatra VII was the first and last Ptolemy to take the trouble to speak Egyptian. Whilst allowing the Egyptians their own religion the Greeks tended to regard the Egyptians as uncultured. This was rather unfair when it is taken into account that the time line between to-day and Alexander the Great is the same as that as between Alexander the Great and the building of the Great Pyramids.

The Ptolemies spent most of their days fighting the Seleucids, so as to maintain their control of the land they had taken by force.

“At first the country was regarded by the Ptolemies as no more than a base upon which to establish their power. Like their Seleucid rivals in Asia they relied entirely upon Macedonians and Greeks for the army and administration. These settlers, together with other new comers such as Syrians and Jews and Anatolians, represented only a tiny minority among the several millions of native Egyptians” (Simpson 1967:56).

But over time their hold on the people weakened and Egyptian influence increased.

“After the defeat of Antiochus the Great, at Raphia (217), when Egyptian soldiers had a large share in the victory of Ptolemy IV Philopator, nationalist feeling among the Egyptians grew rapidly; armed risings broke out, mainly in upper Egypt, and continued intermittently until 85 BC, when Ptolemy IX destroyed Thebes” (Simpson 1967 8:57).

Ironically, Cleopatra the Great’s courting of Julius Caesar and Anthony Caesar was her attempt to preserve Egypt’s independence. After her death, Augustus Caesar incorporated Egypt into the Roman Empire as a Province, albeit a wealthy one. It provided grain to the Empire (Kessler 1998:292).

4.7. Akhenaten



In the year 1353 BC, an enigmatic young pharaoh by the name of Akhenaten (Figure 4), plunged Egypt into a religious revolution by declaring the worship of the god Amun as the only true religion (Nasr 1996:103). By doing so, he banished polytheism in favour of monotheism, by his choice, not that of the people. The regime was not to last, as the Egyptian people found it difficult to adapt to the new regime and Egypt was restored to

Figure 4 : Akhenaten

its orthodoxy after Akhenaten's death.

By this example it is possible to suggest that the Ancient Egyptians were in fact rigid and inflexible. However, this was an isolated incident. It was the only occasion in Egyptian history that monotheism was attempted. Whilst Akhenaten believed in a single god, from a political point of view it was naïve not to realize how this would affect the feelings of the people after centuries of polytheistic tradition.

4.8. Alexander the Great

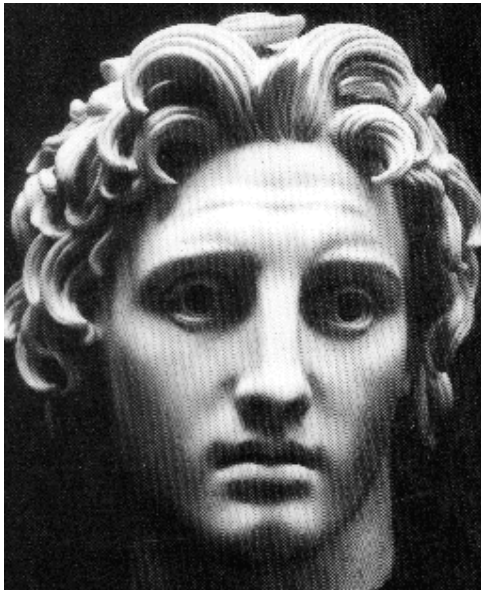


Figure 5 :Alexander the Great

In 336 BC, Alexander the Great (Figure 5) began his invasion of Persia and four years later, in the year 332 BC, Alexander made rapidly for Egypt where the Persians had ruled the country from 525 BC until 332 BC (Kessler 1998:291). The Egyptians, who had only recently suffered the re-imposition of Persian rule, welcomed him with open arms as a liberator, and in November 332 BC he was crowned as pharaoh at Memphis, having declared himself the son of Amun, thereby giving himself legitimacy. Alexander was

acknowledged as the latest in the line of rulers and provided with a royal title and cartouche (Brier & Hobbs 256). The *Alexander Romance*, building on the legend that Alexander was actually the son of the last pharaoh, Nectanebo, reports that Alexander was shown a large basalt statue of Nectanebo on which was inscribed

'The king who has fled will return to Egypt, no longer an old man but a young one, and will subject our enemies the Persians to us.'

Like the legend of the Gordian knot, any such inscription is likely to have been hastily contrived for the present moment; but as the *Romance* bears many signs of Egyptian origin it may well preserve a genuine tradition about this visit (Stoneman 2004:47).

Alexander, now hailed as a god-king and successor of the pharaoh, must have begun, in the light of his tremendous successes, to wonder whether he really was, in the terms of the ancient world, a superhuman being. The divinisation of mortals was only just

coming into fashion (Stoneman 2004:47). What the assumption of the throne ensured him was the Egyptians' support and allegiance as he had now declared himself the living embodiment of Amun (Stoneman 2004:49). He allowed the Egyptians to continue their daily worship and practise their religion, which consisted of a variety of deities, without any interference from the Greeks (Nilsson 1926: 89). It is thus possible that by allowing the Egyptian people to retain their religious and individual independence that they in turn respected Alexander; it is also possible that the reciprocity prevalent in the Egyptian legacy was executed begrudgingly and dogmatically. Irrespective of the original reason, a form of personal or political reciprocity did take place.

4.9. Hellenisation of deities

Initially, the new Macedonian rulers showed little interest in Egyptian religion and culture, as it seemed to be unlike their Hellenistic religious traditions. However, the phenomenon of syncretism, by which different deities absorbed elements originally distinct from them, and usually of foreign origin, made its appearance in Egypt at this time in the equivalent identification of Greek and Egyptian deities according to the similarity of the attributes associated with each (Luft 1998:428). This elementary form of syncretism was widely practiced by Greeks everywhere, who readily assimilated foreign gods into the likenesses of their own deities - as, for example, Osiris is Dionysus and Amun is Zeus.

4.10. Dionysus

Evidence suggests that it is particularly difficult to evaluate the attributes of a particular deity, for just as a Greek personal name may conceal an Egyptian or partially Egyptian personality, so the name of a Greek deity such as Dionysus may hide an Egyptian deity (Luft 1998:429). It appears that the more elaborate 'syncretism' by which deities accumulated qualities belonging to quite different gods, and hence also their identity, is largely a product of the monotheistic tendency of the Imperial period, and although Isis '*of ten thousand names*' and Sarapis '*Lord of the Universe*', play an important part in this development there is no clear indication of it in the Ptolemaic period (Kessler 1998:294). It corresponds to the early identification of native Egyptian gods with their Greek counterparts. Dedications by Greeks to Egyptian gods, other than the circle of Sarapis, are barely if at all attested from Alexandria, whereas in the Fayyum, where the

pressure of native cults was much more marked in many different ways, they are not uncommon (Fraser 1972:192).

The devotion of the Ptolemies to Dionysus sometimes extended as far as identification with the god, attested at various points from the Dionysiac 'Pompe' of Philadelphus, or even earlier. The aspect of Dionysus which emerges from the various pieces of historical evidence is singularly clear; he is the god of wine and revelry, of drama and of the luxury of nature and of man (Shapiro 1979:54). He is thus very much the Dionysus of the Classic and contemporary Greek world, from whom, it appears, the old



Figure 6 : Osiris

chaotic elements have largely dropped off. The notion of Dionysus as closely associated with the Underworld, even identified with Hades or Pluto, Lord of the Underworld, does not belong to the oldest strata of Dionysiac belief. It was only natural that when the Greeks came to learn of the Egyptian gods, the identification between Dionysus and Osiris (Figure 6) should be made.

It is attested by Herodotus, who, on account of the similarity between the phallic rituals of the two cults, regarded the Dionysiac cult as having been introduced from Egypt. This identification received an enormous boost in the Ptolemaic period, after the creation of the new god, Sarapis, whose fundamental characteristics derive from the chaotic aspects of Osiris, as represented by Osor-Hapi, the deified Apis of Memphis (Stoneman 2004:53). Through Osiris, then, Sarapis was also identified with Dionysus. In the Ptolemaic period, and probably at a fairly early date in it, Dionysus had assumed a very important role in the Memphian Serapeum itself. The *dromos* (an avenue or approach, a familiar feature of Pharaonic temples), about 100 metres long was located at the west end of the 'Temple of Nectanebos' along with the main shrine of Apis and was flanked by a low wall carrying a series of sculptured limestone groups representing the Dionysiac fauna - Cerberus, the panther, the lion, the peacock, and the Sirens - and the god himself as a child riding the panther and the peacock, a guise equally familiar both for the child Dionysus and for the Phrygian Attis, the so-called 'Dionysiac' Attis (Stoneman 2004:54).

A fragmentary sculptor's signature found near these figures suggests that some, if not all, were erected in the earlier part of the third century BC, that is, during the early

years of the cult (Hagen 1999:76). It is an indication, once more, of the early development of 'syncretism' in the religious life of the Greek population of Egypt, that these figures, fashioned to adorn the Hellenized shrine of Osor-Hapi, should express not only (through Cerberus) the chaotic, Osirian aspect of Dionysus, but also some essentially Greek features.

Certainly no Olympian deity was as easily accommodated by the Egyptians as was Dionysus, and it would be unwise to emphasise any single aspect of the god, Greek, Egyptian or both, at the expense of any other. Nevertheless, both the dynastically supported cult of Dionysus in Alexandria, and the Memphian amplification of Osor-Hapi, in which Dionysus played an important role, reflect deliberate acts of policy on the part of the first Ptolemies (Fraser 1972: 206).

4.11. Serapis

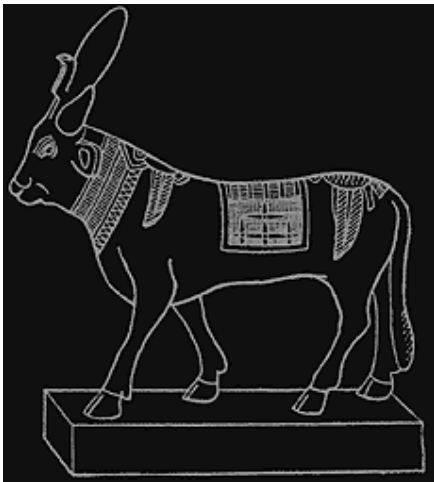


Figure 7 : Apis Bull

An obvious attempt to bridge the gap between Egyptian and Greek was the introduction of the cult of Serapis. The Apis Bull (Figure 7) was mummified and worshipped in death as Osiris-Apis, or Osorapis, by the Egyptians. The Ptolemies humanised this cult by introducing statues to represent the god in human form (Wilkinson 1999:78), but they did not separate it from the original animal worship of the Egyptian cult. The choice of Osorapis was not random: for the Greeks, Osiris was the equivalent of

Dionysus, and the sculptures that lined the *dromos* of the Memphite Serapeum offer a clear-cut example of the use of dual Greek and Egyptian symbolism.

“The fruitful encounter of the Greek spirit with the Egyptian culture had a divine impact on the divine world. The new Macedonian rulers maintained traditional Greek cults within their circles, but were soon forced to show more respect for Egyptian religious tradition. In order to merge the Greeks with the Egyptians in the early Ptolemaic period with the Egyptians tradition focusing on Osiris-Apis, a new god was created whose appearance completely corresponded to Hellenistic conceptions: Serapis” (Luft 2000: 428).

Certainly, the temple to Serapis erected in Alexandria, while humanizing the form of the god, also included Egyptian architectural elements as well as freestanding pieces such as obelisks, sphinxes and cult statues executed in the Egyptian style and inscribed in hieroglyphics. Here, too, the Egyptian deity, Isis, was worshipped as Serapis' consort, and by the fourth Ptolemy, her son, Horus-the-Child, whom the Greeks called Harpocrates, joined them in the cult. From inscriptions and archaeological evidence, it is clear that the royal Greek families associated themselves with the Egyptian gods in the cult from a very early period (Stephens 2003:15).

4.12. Isis



Figure 8: Tomb Painting of the goddess Isis

The Sky-goddess Nut was the celestial counterpart of Nun, the abyss and the daughter of Shu and Tefnut and the wife of Geb, the Earth-god, the 'bull of Nut'. She was 'lady of heaven', 'mistress of the Two Lands', but most importantly she was the mother of Isis (Figure 8) and Osiris (Haydon 1941:65).

Like Neith of Sais, Nut had connections with the underworld as well as with the heavens and the clouds, and appeared in the guise of a great cow whose legs formed the four cardinal points. She absorbed the attributes of many goddesses whose functions were allied to her own and eventually she adopted the horns and solar disk of Hathor, standing in a sycamore tree pouring water from a vase on behalf of the souls of the dead (Gahlin 2001:117). The hawk of Horus was among her emblems too, representing the rising or the setting sun. Nut was regarded as giving birth to the Sun-god daily when he had passed through her body during the night and sailed over her back in the day before he entered the boat of Re at noon.



Figure 9: The goddess Isis in Greek clothing

Nut's daughter Isis, however, remained the most popular and important of all maternal goddesses. She unquestionably was the greatest and most beneficent female deity,

personifying all that was most vital in motherhood (Gahlin 2001:118). Therefore, she became 'the Goddess of many names', until eventually she was equated with the Magna Mater of western Asia, Greece and Rome, as well as with Hathor, Neith and Nun in Egypt. The Greeks depicted the Egyptian goddess Isis in traditional Greek clothing (Figure 9) making her more acceptable.

It was the worship of Isis that spread rapidly in the Hellenistic period until it became a predominant element in the jumble of religions in the Roman Empire before and after the beginning of the Christian era. The readiness to identify one deity with another made it possible to evolve some kind of unity out of this jumble of cults. Thus, the cow-goddesses had so much in common, centered in their maternal attributes and functions, that they readily were resolved into a syncretistic deity. All of them were concerned with motherhood as their principal feature, giving birth to gods and men, suckling kings and bestowing life and fecundity in the natural order (David 2000:112). Therefore, they were treated as more or less synonymous divine figures, so that Hathor and Isis, Nut and Neith, were never clearly differentiated.



Figure 10 : Innana-Ishtar

In these various aspects, Isis manifested herself under a variety of names. Interestingly, it was in western Asia that this manifestation became most apparent. There, the worship of a nature goddess, in whom the productive powers of the earth were personified, culminated in that of the Great Mother who combined within herself all the local aspects of all-embracing divinity. Among the Sumerians and Babylonians, she had been known as Inanna-Ishtar (Figure 10), while in Syria and Palestine she appeared as Asherah, Astarte and Anat (Haydon 1941:80). They corresponded to Hera, Aphrodite and Artemis of the Greeks, representing the three main

aspects of womanhood as wife and mother, as lover and mistress, and as a chaste and beautiful virgin full of youthful charm and vigour, often confusing one with the other.

It was with this goddess that Anat was mingled in Egypt, when Semitic influences were strongly felt in the New Kingdom, especially at Memphis, in the guise of Anata, 'the Mistress of the Sky', 'Lady of the gods', the daughter of Ptah or Re. In her many manifestations of syncretism she was identified with Isis and Hathor as a Mother-

goddess, with Sekhmet the wife of Ptah (Haydon 1941:82). In the treaty with the Hittites she was represented with Astarte as the national goddess of the Syrian Kheta. Besides her martial functions which included her being 'mistress of horses, lady of chariots' and 'shield of the king against his enemies,' she was the goddess of love who 'conceives but never brings forth,' like Aphrodite. Although her attributes were virtually indistinguishable from those of Astarte, the two divinities actually were distinct entities in Egypt.

4.13. Conclusion

Hellenism therefore plays an important role in the identification of syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt, by exhibiting examples of the adoption by non-Greeks of Greek customs and the Greek language after it had been exposed to them and been absorbed into their own culture.

Akhenaten declared himself the son of Aten; Alexander the Great sparked a change in society that resulted in the creation of new cults and deities. Akhenaten on the other hand ignored the feelings of his people and forbid the worship of any gods except that of Amun. Religious and cultural freedom was encouraged and more importantly allowed during the reign of Alexander the Great, whereas Akhenaten did the opposite. During the Hellenisation that took place during Alexander's reign, many new gods were created, and in certain cases adopted such as Isis, due to the syncretism that was apparent between the Greeks and the Egyptians. It was divinities such as these that acted as the socio-cultural binding-agent for the Greeks and Egyptians.

Chapter 5

Temple art and funerary artefacts illustrating examples of reciprocity and syncretism

5.1. Introduction

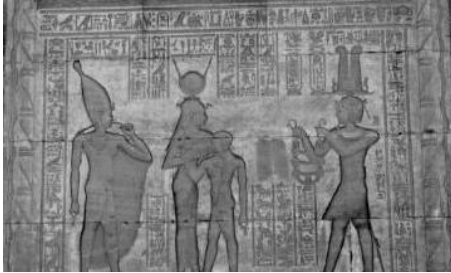


Figure 11: Foreign kings making offerings to Egyptian gods

With the advent of the Ptolemies, the Egyptians were further willing to accommodate their foreign conquerors socio-culturally, in their art and architecture, illustrating the syncretism and reciprocity developing between the two cultures, Figure 11 demonstrates this.

“The foreign rulers deprived the Egyptians of their political independence but not their religion. Although the temples were under state control, they retained their landed property and their priesthood systems, and with the aid of royal and private donations, the Egyptians were able to build new sanctuaries to extend those that already existed” (Kürth 1998:298).

5.2. Temples

All but the temples built during the Ptolemaic period showed increased levels of Hellenistic influence (Bevan 1911:245).

“The temples organised portions of the economy to that end, structuring areas of public life with temple festivals, for instance, and providing the new masters of Egypt with religious legitimacy. This legitimacy was expressed in the portrayal of the foreign kings on temple reliefs, performing acts of worship before Egyptian gods exactly as their indigenous predecessors of the past had done” (Kürth 1998:297).

The last temples to be built during this period were the temples at Edfu and Denderah. In fact it is probable that the workers from the temple at Edfu moved on to build the Hathor temple at Denderah construction of which began in 54 BC during the reign of

Ptolemy Auletes. The Denderah Zodiac from the Hathor Temple in Denderah, Egypt, as well as the temple itself, illustrates a concrete example of syncretism as well as reciprocity that the Egyptians exhibited by acknowledging the legitimacy of the foreign rulers during the Ptolemaic period.

The temples also house other examples of Greek and Egyptian symbols juxtaposed in the form of various zodiacs in the temple. The Greeks were primarily interested in the art of astrology which they believed would assist in future predictions; whereas the Egyptians were concerned with the science of astronomy which they used as a tool to help them track the movement of the stars and the seasons, which meant that they could then predict the expected inundation of the Nile.

5.3. Funerary artefacts

Initially, the Greeks subscribed to cremation of the body after death, which was anathema to the Egyptians, who believed the physical body was required to ensure eternal life, which was why so much emphasis was put on mummification (David 2000:35).

During the Graeco-Roman period, traditional embalming was still employed. However the style of coffin was greatly influenced by the conquerors. In showing Hathor/Nut on the inside of a coffin lid, linear zodiacs were often found such as those shown above in the Soter and Petamenophis coffin lids.

5.4. Coffins



Figure 12: Egyptian sarcophagus depicting Greek influence

Affluent Egyptian-Greeks, who could afford to be mummified after their death, would have had their bodies wrapped in woven bandages, including a painted face mask depicting the deceased. The painted face masks of the deceased were realistic rather than the stylised masks of the Egyptians and were in contrast to the face masks created in antiquity (Hagen 1999:92). The mummies and sarcophagi created during this period show the amalgamation of the Greek and Egyptian styles. The sarcophagi, like the mummies, were Egyptian in shape, style and decoration, whereas the face masks were often Greek in style (Figure 12).

Some sarcophagi depicted Greek influence such as this sarcophagus (Figure 12) which shows the deceased wearing a Greek-style beard. This is an example of physical syncretism that took place during the Ptolemaic period, as this sarcophagus shows a Greek styled coffin covered with Egyptian symbols and hieroglyphics, and yet the individual was possibly Greek due to the Greek-style beard depicted on his face.

5.5. Conclusion

Temple architecture and decoration, as well as funerary artefacts all form an integral part of the tangible syncretism that took place during the Ptolemaic period. The temples house examples of archaeoastronomy and archaeoastrology which illustrate the apparent syncretism, where as the temples proper exhibited the Hellenism which had evolved between these cultures.

Chapter 6

Archaeoastronomy and archaeoastrology

6.1. Introduction

In order to explain the syncretism that took place during this prolific period in Egypt, tangible evidence is needed to substantiate this theory. Some pharaohs are represented with *astronomical* depictions of the stars at the time of their birth. There is no evidence to suggest that these star charts were used to supply *astrological* divination. The best way to illustrate the consistency of the possible syncretism taking place at the time is to examine evidence that has been left behind, such as the archaeological remains of the Egyptians' temples, reliefs, statues and so forth, illustrating the astronomy and astrology of the time. It is this evidence that poses the questions as to why the Greek and Egyptian symbols are juxtaposed next to one another and whether they can be considered examples of syncretism.

The recently coined term, 'archaeoastrology', refers to the study of ancient divination based on the supposed influence of the stars upon human events (Clark 2000:130). In the present day, there is a distinct differentiation between astrology and astronomy but in the ancient world there was little distinction between the two practices. It is important to re-emphasise that the Greeks were primarily interested in divination (Fontana 1993:65) and the influence that the stars had upon their daily lives, whereas the Egyptians were *not* primarily focused on astrology as is often believed.

Although the Egyptians were obsessed with the heavens and believed that one travelled to the stars in the after-life, they did not foretell the future with the aid of the stars as the Greeks did. In fact, the ancient Egyptians were more concerned with astronomy - the study of the heavenly bodies – as an aid to a celestial clock. The Egyptians actually had a specific portion of their priesthood who were trained in the science of astronomy and dedicated their lives to studying the moon, stars and planets from observatories and temple roofs (Clark 2000:132).

By studying the stars and their movements, the Egyptians were able to determine the rise and annual flooding of the Nile, which was their primary concern for survival.

They were aware of the planets but showed little interest in them as they moved across the sky and did not help in keeping time. By using their calendar system of the dekans, the Egyptians knew that when Sothis (Sirius, the Dog Star) rose on the 19 July, the inundation of the Nile would begin and thus marked the Egyptian New Year (Fletcher 1999:13).

In view of the fact that the Egyptians were more interested in the astronomical aspect, the question still arises as to why would there be the juxtaposing of Greek astrological signs along with Egyptian astronomical signs, such as those found in the Denderah Zodiac B. It is important to note that this particular zodiac was depicted in the 'ritual round' when the majority of the zodiacs depicted by the Egyptians were represented as rectangular diagrams, such as the famous zodiac diagram found on the coffin lid of Soter (Figure 13).

6.2. Attitudes to the zodiac and astrology

Shown the sky at night, very few people would be able to point out the stars of the constellations they were supposed to be born under. Ask the same people their Star Sign and most would not even hesitate to give the correct sign. Ask them whether they believe that the stars can influence them, most would deny it and yet most would also admit to reading their supposed horoscopes in the daily newspaper.

Professor Morris Jastrow, in the 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica published by Cambridge University, proposed that if necromancy is the art of foretelling the future by calling up the dead and chiromancy is the art of foretelling the future by reading the lines on the palm of the hand, then foretelling the future from the stars should properly be called *astromancy* rather than astrology (Jastrow 1911:795 ff).

Jastrow pointed out in his article how words originating from astrology are unconsciously used in conversation every day. According to the Chambers English Dictionary, *contemplate* derives from the Latin *contemplāri*; *con-* signifying completeness; *templum* for auguries; *ātus* – to mark out carefully. Similarly, *consider* derives from the Latin *cōnsīderāre*, a term for augury - *con-* and *sīderis*, star.

Jastrow also mentioned astrological terminology being used on a daily basis such as an up-and-coming politician's *star being in the ascendant* (overt) and then referring to a *disastrous* speech the same politician subsequently makes (covert). He pointed out how people can be referred to as being *jovial, saturnine or mercurial*, although the terms may equally refer to the gods concerned rather than the planets with the same names.

The Church itself has had ambivalent attitudes towards astrology and the Zodiac. It embraced the Ptolemaic theory of the Heavens because Ptolemy's 2nd Century AD geocentric universe (Bruce 1998:15) had the Earth as God's footstool. The Zodiac as a result is found on a number of European cathedrals. Most 12th and 13th Century cathedrals in France show the Zodiac on their doorways, such as Notre Dame in Paris and the cathedrals in Amiens, Sens and Rheims (Clerke 1911:998). Only after Copernicus' heliocentric universe was propounded in the 16th Century did the link with the Zodiac and astrology start to fall away (Bruce 1998:17).

After all, predestination by the stars is at variance with Christian belief in free will.

6.3. History of the zodiac

The zodiac can be only be dated as far back as the 5th century BC in Mesopotamia and many of the constellations known today originate from there. Inevitably, different cultures group stars differently but a considerable number of similarities can be identified in many of the ancient civilizations that adopted the zodiac.

There were not even twelve signs to start with (Clerke 1911:994). If the sizes of the constellations are considered, it seems likely that the four big constellations of Taurus, Leo, Scorpius and Aquarius were recognised as cardinal points. With the precession of the equinox the sun moved out of these constellations at the requisite times every year and the adjacent constellations of Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces were selected (Ionides & Ionides 1939:42). With more precession, the constellations of Cancer, Libra, Capricorn and Aries filled in the remaining gaps. Often with very faint stars, Cancer being a case in point.

Agnes Clerke points out (Clerke 1911:993) that, although Aries was always the first sign to begin the Zodiacal year, this arrangement was a comparatively modern one.

Nevertheless, “*the twelve fold division of the zodiac*” was conveniently mirrored “*by the occurrence of twelve full moons in successive parts of it in the course of the year*”.

6.4. Ancient constellations

The Mesopotamians referred to the constellation of the Great Twins (Gemini) as *Lugal-irra* and *Meslamta-ea*, otherwise known as the Gate Keepers. Legend has it that they stood in the underworld with their hatchets raised, ready to dismember the dead. The two bright stars were identified as the twins Castor and Pollux, the stars that give the constellation its name (Ionides & Ionides 1939:43). The Egyptians recognised this constellation in their myth and legend. In the creation myth, Ra created Shu and Tefnut, who were later called the twins. Although the Egyptians referred to the constellation as that of twins, it was not until the Greeks conquered Egypt and brought the concept of the zodiac with them that the Egyptians incorporated it, as the Greek constellation of Gemini, into their astronomy.

Another symbol that originated in the zodiac was the symbol known to the Mesopotamians as the *Suhurmasu*, or the goat-fish, known today as the constellation of Capricorn. It was also associated with the Sumerian god *Enki* and the Babylonian god *Ea*. It was always depicted as the front half of a goat and the back half of a fish (Fontana 1993:78). This depiction of Capricorn is present in both the Denderah Zodiac and other linear zodiacs.

6.5. Description of the zodiac

The ecliptic is an imaginary belt in the heavens that encompasses the paths of the planets, sun and moon; it is divided into twelve constellations or signs, which constitute what is now called the zodiac. The planets deviate slightly from a common plane and the celestial bodies move in a narrow zone of the celestial sphere (Clark 2000:46). Since nearly all the constellations represented animals, the Greeks named the zone ζωδιακός κύκλος, ‘*zodiakos kyklos*’ or circle of animals, the exception being Libra (scales), hence the present name of the zodiac.

The zodiac, as such, was unknown in Ancient Egypt before the arrival of the Ptolemies as the zodiac itself was developed by the Babylonians.

“During the reign of the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) sky-gazer’s named 18 (unevenly sized) constellations including all the signs of the modern zodiac except the constellation of Aries. It was during this time that the ecliptic was divided into twelve parts. From the time of Nebuchadnezzar to some time before the end of the 5th century BC some constellations were dropped, the differences in constellation size were ignored, and the zodiac assumed the basic form in use today” (Clark 2000:48).

The Greeks absorbed the idea of the zodiac from the Babylonians and brought it with them to Egypt. The Egyptians, however, tended to think of the zodiac in linear terms rather than in a circle. Egypt itself was long and narrow, bounded by the sea in the north and the desert on the other three sides. It seems that the Egyptians considered the heavens to be a long and narrow box (Ronan 1983:20). This can be seen in the way Nut is depicted. As a result, all other Egyptian zodiacs are shown linearly rather than in the round. The archaeologist Georges Daressey, in his insightful *“L’Egypte Celeste,”* drew attention to a curious parallel between the zodiacal constellations and various townships along the Nile. Daressey showed how certain Egyptian townships used emblems, carved into the architraves of temples which depicted a sequence of the zodiac. This relationship suggests celestial-terrestrial mapping by the Egyptians and reflects a one-to-one alignment between the zodiacal constellations and the Egyptian townships (Clark 2000:49).



Figure 13: Coffin lid of Soter

If one looks at the coffin lid of Soter (Figure 13) depicting Heter, as well as the coffin lid of Petamenophis (Figure 15), the signs of the zodiac begin with Cancer running

from Hathor's right breast to her feet. The other half of the zodiac begins with Capricorn running from her left breast down towards her feet. By contrast other coffin lids show the zodiac going up one side and down the other. In other words, either the Egyptians did not understand the Greek concept of the zodiac, or they were not interested and may have understood something entirely different. This makes the circular zodiac at Denderah even more enigmatic.

6.6. Nut and the zodiac

Nut is usually shown in a very uncomfortable posture, supporting the heavens on her fingers and toes. Figure 14 is from the Greenfield Papyrus in the British Museum.

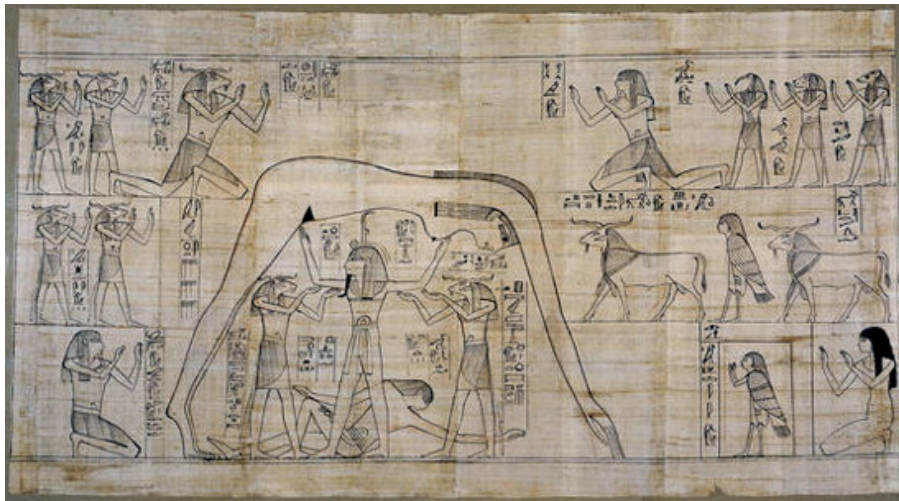


Figure 14: Nut supporting the heavens – from the Greenfield Papyrus

This vignette shows Nut stretched over the earth, represented by Geb, who lies below her. The toes of the goddess are at the eastern horizon and her fingertips at the western horizon. She is separated from Geb by her father Shu, who holds her up with both hands.

As stated, Egypt is long and narrow, therefore, the Egyptians thought of the heavens as being a long and narrow box (Ronan 1988:20). Showing the zodiac linearly would thus make more sense than a circular one. On the coffin lid of Petamenophis (Figure 15), not only is the zodiac depicted in a linear fashion but, more importantly, there is a depiction of the goddess Nut, the sky-goddess, again shown as a woman on her hands and feet supporting the vault of heaven with her back. She was often depicted in the colour blue, with her body filled with stars representing the heavens. The shrines dedicated to the

goddess Nut were few, but there were shrines at Per-Nut in Memphis and at Het-Nut in the Delta.



Figure 15: Coffin lid of Petamenophis

The three portions of the temple territory in Denderah were called Ant-en-Nut, Per-mest-en-Nut and Per-netch-Nut-ma-Shu all venerating the goddess Nut. In later times, the priests of Denderah asserted that Denderah was the home of the goddess Nut (Clerk 1911:994). The Egyptians believed that to have the goddess painted onto one's coffin meant that the deceased was under the goddess' protection, metaphorically and literally.

The concept of Nut and the zodiac suddenly become linked as the Egyptians seemed to use Nut as a symbol of all the stars in the heavens in conjunction with the zodiac. As on the coffin lid of Petamenophis (Figure 15), the goddess is sometimes depicted alongside the zodiac with her arms stretched above her head and there is also a zig-zag motif, a symbolic representation of the primeval waters from which Nut supported the sky. Although the goddess is often depicted filled with stars, only in Ptolemaic times was she shown with linear zodiacs next to her.

6.7. Conclusion

The archaeological remains of the Egyptian temples, reliefs, statues and so forth, which illustrate the astronomy and astrology of the time, help to prove that syncretism was apparent due to the Greek and Egyptian symbols juxtaposed next to one another.

Chapter 7

The Hathor temple

7.1. Introduction



Figure 16: Cleopatra & Ptolemy Caesar

The Hathor temple was built in Denderah during the Ptolemaic period and is situated near Edfu in Upper Egypt. Construction on the temple began around 54 BC, the time that the temple at Edfu was completed. The possibility that the same gangs of workmen were transferred from the site of Edfu to that of Denderah was great (David & David 1992:74). The latter was thus begun under Ptolemy XII, in whose name the crypts in the Hathor temple were decorated. The construction work was well advanced in the reign of Cleopatra, making it possible for the sculptors to cover the southern exterior wall with the famous scene depicting Ptolemy Caesar and Cleopatra (Figure 16) before the local gods and goddesses (David & David 1992:75). The temple contains the Denderah zodiac, exhibiting both Greek and Egyptian symbols which illustrate the syncretism between the two cultures.

The Hathor temple, built during the Ptolemaic period has its walls of the temple covered in depictions of foreign and indigenous kings giving offerings and thanks to the gods of ancient Egypt, e.g. Alexander the Great (Macedonian Dynasty 332-323 BC), Pepi I (6th Dynasty 2321-2287 BC), Cleopatra VII Philopator (Ptolemaic Dynasty 51-30 BC) and her son Caesarion.

The Hathor temple was under the rule of the Greeks, before they lost control of Egypt to the Romans in 30 BC. When the Romans conquered Egypt they also added their signature to the temple by adding two Roman birth houses onto the temple itself. By the addition of the Roman style birth houses, the Hathor temple eventually ended up as a hybrid of styles; fusing Hellenistic, Roman and Egyptian designs (Kürth 1998:299).

One of the crypts in the Hathor temple reveals an inscription stating that the plan of the temple was established in predynastic times, therefore, implying that the Egyptians had the intention of building the temple regardless of political interventions. The plan was written in ancient characters and possibly originated from the palace of King Pepi I who was known as “*Son of Het-Her, Lady of Denderah.*” Later texts of Thutmose I and III, who restored the temple, refer to the ancient *Heru Shemsu* (followers of Heru) who were the early kings of Egypt that descended from the Neteru (Clark 2000:52).

Kürth states that: “*The foreign rulers deprived the Egyptians of their political independence but not their religion*” (Kürth 1998:299), which possibly implies that the Egyptians were living a syncretic lifestyle with the Greeks and reciprocated the independence they wielded as far as their religion was concerned, by including some of the foreign style of the new legitimate rulers in the temples that they built at the time.

Kürth also states that the architecture during this period could be classified as somewhat monotonous, due to the simple and repetitive designs in nature that were displayed on the temple proper (Kürth 1998:300). This was the only effect of the Greek influence on design; however what the temples lacked in design they made up for in decoration. Different scenes of the pharaohs making offerings and paying homage to the goddess of the skies, Hathor, adorn not only the walls but the ceilings as well.

A remarkable link between the description of the plans of the temple, supposedly having been drawn up during the reign of King Pepi I, and the fact that there are representations of the king worshipping the gods on the walls of the Denderah temple



Figure 17: Foreign kings making offerings to Egyptian gods in the Denderah temple

(Figure 17), when actually the temple was only built during the reign of the Ptolemies (Fraser 1972:66). The Greeks posed no objection to the representation of an Egyptian predecessor possibly indicating the syncretism that was being practised by the population during that period. The fact that reliefs of Pepi I were considered and included in the temple will forever remain enigmatic. His role pertaining to the Hathor temple remains indefinite, yet nonetheless, he was included in the relief work millennia later.

7.2. Description of the Hathor temple



Figure 18: Hathor temple at Denderah

Renowned for its hybrid styles of architecture, the Hathor Temple (Figure 18) is covered in an amalgamation of Egyptian and Greek designs, giving concrete evidence of syncretism and reciprocity found during the Ptolemaic period.



Figure 19: Large hypostyle hall, Denderah

The pronaos of the temple, also known as the Large Hypostyle Hall (Figure 19), consists of nine columns on either side of the main entrance to the temple. The columns show relief carvings of foreign pharaohs making offerings to Egyptian gods, an action which demonstrates syncretism.

The pillars are shaped like musical instruments called the *sistrum* and each pillar shows the head of the goddess Hathor, with a human face and cow's ears (Figure 20), looking in all four cardinal directions (Fraser 1972:67). The columns of this hall support one of the few remaining temple ceilings in Egypt today.



Figure 20: The goddess Hathor

The symbolism of this type of column is very powerful as it represents Hathor viewing the entire world. On the interior of these walls various Greek and Roman kings are depicted wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, which demonstrates the acknowledgement by the Egyptians of foreign rule but not an example of syncretism.

The ceiling running the length of the Hypostyle Hall is covered in astronomical information, juxtaposing both Greek and Egyptian symbols, with depictions of the night sky as the ancients would have viewed them. On entering the Hall, the far left contains inscriptions depicting the stars and constellations on the ecliptic and the far right inscriptions depicting the asterisms of the northern pole. In the middle panel are the planets, the stars of the twelve hours of night and the signs of the zodiac (Clark 2000:51).

In the inner panels of this hall are depictions of the path of the sun and the path of the moon. The moon's register is divided into three scenes: the full moon, the fourteen days of the waning moon and the fourteen days of the waxing moon. The lunar hemicycles for both the waning and the waxing periods are symbolized by fourteen Neteru standing upon fourteen ascending and descending steps that lead to and from the celestial eye of the sun. The middle panel of the Hypostyle Hall is decorated with winged discs and vultures, symbols of the sun and the moon. On the west rear wall is an inscription of the sun giving birth to Kephri and on the east rear wall is an inscription of the sun shining on Hathor and her temple (Clark 2000:52).

Proceeding from the Hypostyle Hall is the Hall of Appearances. Scenes on the walls of this hall show a Ptolemaic pharaoh dedicating the temple to the goddess Hathor and he is shown emerging from the temple, breaking the earth for the foundations and placing the first stone. Pharaoh then presents the foundation bricks of the temple to Hathor, who purifies the sacred precinct and dedicates it to the Neteru – a ceremony known as the “stretching of the cord”. It was here in the Hall of Appearances that the statue of the goddess "appeared" from her sanctuary for religious ceremonies and processions.

Past the Hall of Appearances lies the Hall of Offerings - the entrance into the temple proper. The room is lighted by four ceiling vents and on the back wall are displays of the items that were to be offered (David & David 1992:76). On the opposite side of the room, scenes are depicted of the king offering Hathor drinks. This chamber was used as a place for the temple personnel to assemble and for practising temple music to the Neteru.

Past the Hall of Appearances lies the Hall of the Ennead. This room contained statues of the gods and foreign kings that took part in the ceremonies and depictions of these kings making offerings during festivals. Some of the reliefs depict the king making offerings to the gods during the barley and emmer festivals (Clark 2000:53).

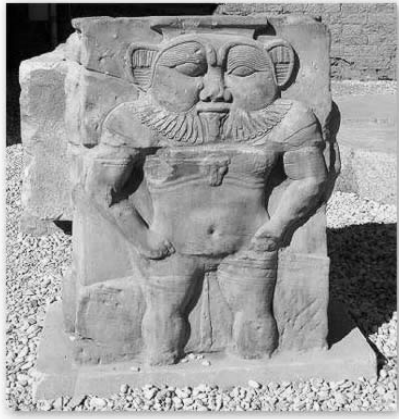


Figure 21: The god Bes

Images of gods located at Denderah range from Hathor, the goddess to which the temple is dedicated to Bes (Figure 21), the protector of women and children during childbirth. The construction of the *mammisi* (birth houses), is another peculiarity of Greek and Roman architecture.

“Unlike other Egyptian gods who are nearly always shown in profile, Bes is usually shown full face this may be because he could have originated outside Egypt in the Sudan” (Barnett M 1999:86).

Coincidentally, Hathor is another deity shown full face. Most of the figures of the god Bes are to be located outside the birth house, which would be the most logical place to find them, but it is here that important examples of the juxtaposing of Egyptian with foreign images is evident.

7.3. Temple integration into society

The late temples of ancient Egypt, such as the Hathor temple were thoroughly integrated into Egypt's society and economy, and three functions can be singled out as especially important.

First, the temple cultus ascribed *value*; it ascribed to Egypt and to life in Egypt the highest value by conceiving it as sacred (Nasr 1996:70). Secondly, the priests of the temple transmitted a *comprehensive and normative body of knowledge* about the ways

to perceive, experience and understand the world and to conduct communal life. Thirdly, the temples played *active roles* in land utilization.

The temple was a comprehensive institution involving great numbers of people and numerous categories of personnel. The daily cultus was in the hands of several kinds of priests. The high priests were the servants of god, referred to as *prophētai* by the Greeks (Nilsson 1926:102). Whilst the majority of the prophets were male in the temple, some were female which was unusual at a time when females were not encouraged to read and write. The rules for the recruitment of prophets, however, required that they belong to a sacerdotal family which resulted in many of these families gaining great social influence and status (Nilsson 1926:102). Prophets also had to be able to read the sacred documents, which meant that those who conducted the ancient cultus in the late period were well read in the rites, rituals and procedures of the temple.

The daily rites of attending and robing the statues were performed in the temples by priests whom the Greeks called *hierostolistai* (Faraone & Obbink 1997:154). The stylists were deputies to the prophets and when necessary, could also take over their work.

The prophets and stylists were assisted by various specialized priests, such as those who carried the sacred boat and other sacred objects (called by the Greeks *pastophoroi*), those who slaughtered the sacrificial animals, the wardens and their assistants and the singers and musicians (Nilsson 1926:106).

During the priests' periods of service, they were required to observe a set of taboos, such as abstaining from certain kinds of food and drink. The list of taboos was not rigid in stipulation but varied from temple to temple. The behavior demanded of those who entered into the temple was specified by cultic and ethical rules and admonitions inscribed on doors through which the priests entered the temple (Swain 1998:45).

Cultic purity was a precondition. During the periods of priestly service sexual abstinence was demanded. Priests were enjoined to be serious and conscientious in their work. They were not to neglect their cultic duties and were not to steal from the offerings. They were expected not to tell lies in the temple, to accept bribes, or to tamper with the scales and measures. The general aspect of these ethical rules suggests

that they were not merely a canon for priests but represented a universal model for Egyptian moral life (Nasr 1996:78).

Attached to the temples were groups of auxiliary laymen who assisted the officiating priest by guarding the doors, lighting the lamps, "erasing the priest's footprints" as he left the sanctuary and bringing food to the altars. They also assisted the personnel engaged in the practical work of the temples (such as the bakers, butchers and decorators) and helped tend the animals (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:270).

Then there were the scribes and scholars of the House of Life, called by the Greeks *hierogrammateis* (Faraone & Obbink 1997:165). Some were priests; all were guardians of liturgical and other kinds of texts, copying and commenting on them. They also participated in the construction and decoration of temples. They were indispensable to temple administration, managing, for example, the lands registered to the temples, a task that required scribes competent in keeping accounts.

The immense transfer of Egyptian tradition from one age to another depended on scholar-scribes. They worked in temple annexes that housed the libraries and served as places of study and writing (Moorehouse 1953:82). Naturally, the temple archives were comprehensive, and the libraries were large. In these centers of learning, a variety of disciplines were pursued: mythology, liturgy, iconography, arithmetic, geometry, law, medicine, astronomy, the interpretation of dreams, the study of the Nile and its inundation, and all other sciences pertaining to Egypt: geography, topography, history, and philology (the language of the hieroglyphic texts was dead).

This broad spectrum of disciplines necessitated scholarly specialization. For example, some important members of the community of priest-scholars made astronomical observations. They kept the time, found the right moments for cultic and non-cultic acts, and worked out lists of lucky and unlucky days.

Some of the priests knew Greek and maintained contact with Greek scholars, long after the Hellenistic rule of Egypt ended. Ptolemaic Egyptian thought, far from being a relic of a dying pagan system, was vital and in correspondence with much of Hellenistic thought.

Notwithstanding differentiations among the various categories of priests, they acted in many respects as a socio-religious group. They cooperated in cultic, administrative and

economic matters, and they met in synods. During a long period under the Ptolemies, they were expected to meet in annual conventions to discuss with representatives of the state, matters pertaining to politics and cultus which the Egyptians adhered to and respected.

7.4. Astronomical data in the temple

What makes the Denderah temple unique from any other in Egypt, is the fact that this temple is covered in archaeoastronomical and archaeoastrological data. Astronomical data in the Hathor temple juxtaposes Hellenistic and Egyptian symbols, demonstrating two cultures juxtaposed and co-existing and further showing evidence of reciprocity and syncretism. It is probably most famous for the circular zodiac/planisphere, known as the Denderah Zodiac B. The Hathor temple also boasts five other lesser known zodiacs which are depicted linearly (Clark 2000:67).

Denderah A is oblong in shape, a linear zodiac located in a side room on the ground level known as the “Silver Room”. Denderah B, the famous circular zodiac is positioned on the eastern ceiling of the temple. Denderah C is rectangular, covering the eastern and western halves of the ceiling of the western room known as the “Chapel of Asar”. Denderah D is inscribed in strips, on the ceiling of the Outer Hypostyle Hall on the ground level. Denderah E is also in strips, in the same location. Denderah F is located in the south corridor of the east wall, in “The Birth House of Auset”. The temple is synonymous with Hathor, goddess of the heavens and the earth, music and childbirth. Hathor later became interchangeable with Nut, goddess of the heavens (Clark 2000:68).

One of the linear zodiacs in the Hathor temple depicts the constellations of Leo, Sagittarius and Scorpio. Interestingly, Leo and Sagittarius are depicted in barques, the usual images of Egyptian transportation indicating movement across the heavens. Scorpio is painted realistically at an angle, unlike the other two which are painted stylistically.

The linear zodiacs, similar to the Denderah Zodiac B, lend themselves to the juxtaposing of Egyptian and Greek symbols. In the linear zodiacs, the constellations of the zodiac are represented above linear representations of the dekan. Unlike the

Denderah Zodiac B, most of the images, whether they are Egyptian or Greek, are depicted in a barque. Only a few of the constellations depicted in the circular zodiac have barques indicating movement (Clark 2000:69).

7.5. Nut/Hathor

Nut was a goddess associated with the conception of the cosmos. Her body was hypothetically the vault of heaven and her hands and feet planted firmly on the earth, representing the four cardinal points. Tradition decreed that the sun god Re was swallowed on a daily basis by the goddess at night and was reborn from her the following day. Due to the association between Nut/Hathor, the cosmos and the heavens there are countless depictions of Nut in the temple, incorporated into many combinations of Graeco-Egyptian reliefs.

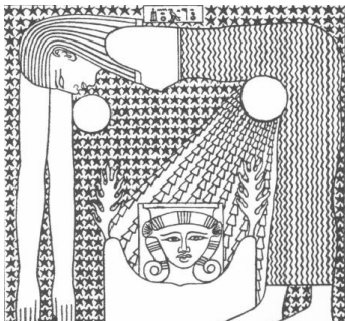


Figure 22: Depiction of the goddess Nut in the Hathor temple

The eastern chapels of the Hathor temple are dedicated exclusively to Nut, goddess of the sky. There are many depictions of the goddess stretched out on hands and feet supporting the vaults of heaven over the wounded Geb who formed the earth. One of the most famous depictions of the goddess Nut is in the New Year Chapel at Denderah, where she can be seen with the evening sun at her mouth, that she will swallow, and in her lap is the morning sun that she will give birth to (Figure 22). From this sun, rays of light are emitted that can be seen falling onto the Hathor temple itself (Fontana 1993:85).

It was also customary to have the goddess Nut painted onto one's coffin lid as a symbol of protection, such as on Petamenophis' coffin lid (Figure 15). The ancient Egyptians believed that to have her there served as protection both literally and metaphorically. It was only during Ptolemaic times that Nut and Hathor became interchangeable, and that Nut/Hathor was depicted on coffin lids with symbols of the zodiac represented linearly running alongside her (Clark 2000:70).

In modern interpretations of Egyptian descriptions of the sky, Nut is often excluded and as a result the interpretations are not complete. The linear zodiacs in the Hathor temple

are juxtaposed with representation of Hathor/Nut and should be interpreted jointly. An example of this would be the Denderah zodiac B, surrounded by the familiar

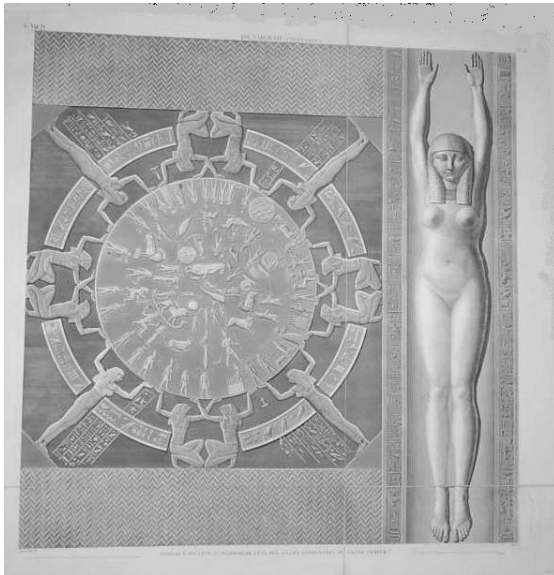


Figure 23: Original drawing of the Denderah zodiac as seen in Napoleonic times

representations of the zig-zag motif that represents the primeval waters, surrounding the zodiac (Figure 23). To the right hand side of the zodiac, is a representation of Nut, possibly echoing the cosmos story (David & David 1992:92). Various linear zodiacs in the temple, such as the zodiacs C, D and F are primarily concerned with more Graeco-orientated symbols, but Nut is still included by the Egyptians on the side of the zodiac. Nut has nothing to do with the science of

archaeoastronomy but rather belongs to the cosmogenesis story and thus belongs to Egyptian iconography. However, the Egyptians still incorporated her into their depictions of the heavens, representing their cosmogenesis interpretation, advocated by the foreign rulers of the period (Fontana 1993:85).

7.6. The Denderah Zodiac B

The most famous of the ‘sky maps’ depicted in the temple is the sandstone relief known as the Denderah Zodiac B (Figure 23). The Denderah Zodiac B is the name given to the whole artefact, as it shows a circular zodiac amongst the carvings. It shows a number of different aspects of the night sky centred on the pole star, represented by both Greek and Egyptian symbology. Traditionally, the Zodiac B was simplistically thought of as merely a sky map or a snapshot of the heavens (Clark 2000:71).

The palpable difference between the Denderah Zodiac B and the other lesser known zodiacs is that Zodiac B is circular and other zodiacs are represented linearly. The Egyptians, able to perceive things three dimensionally, would have been able to turn the linear zodiacs into cylinders in their minds if they so chose but there is no reason for them to have done so.

The Denderah Zodiac B (Figure 24) is located on the inner roof of the eastern chapel of



Figure 24: A painting of the Denderah Zodiac B

the temple. During the expedition by Napoleon to Egypt in 1798-1802, not only did they discover the Rosetta Stone, one of the explorers on the expedition copied the Denderah Zodiac which appeared in the book about the Napoleon expedition written by Denon, entitled “*Description de l’Egypte*”. The original zodiac was cut out of the ceiling in 1821 and taken back to Paris where it now resides in the Louvre (Stiebing 1993:63), but the depiction of Nut was left behind. Therefore, when the real Denderah Zodiac is viewed in the Louvre, it is not viewed or interpreted in context, as the surrounding images are not there. Viewing the Denderah Zodiac in isolation makes the interpretation of the zodiac, without the adjacent material, impossible which has resulted in many misinterpretations (Clark 2000:71). A plaster copy was later made and erected to replace the original in the Hathor temple. It is only possible to view the

zodiac in context by looking at the plaster copy in the original position in the temple itself.

7.7. The neteru

The relief of the zodiac is depicted with twelve neteru (the Egyptian word meaning gods), which are depicted supporting the ritual round or circle in which the zodiac resides. This circle was also believed to be a symbolic representation of the cupola of the sky. Eight of the neteru are depictions of the god Heru (Horus) and four of the neteru are depictions of the goddess Hathor. It is appropriate that these deities hold the cupola, as Hathor was the goddess of the skies, and Horus, the son of Ra, is linked not only to the earth but the light-giving sky as well (Clark 2000:72).

7.8. The thirty-six dekans

The circular relief is comprised of three concentric circles, one within the other. The outermost circle or band is comprised of thirty-six Egyptian symbols known as the dekans (Figure 25). The thirty-six dekans are groups of stars into which the ancient Egyptians divided the night sky. The ancient Egyptians used the dekans as a form of calendar system. This calendar system helped to determine the change of seasons and ultimately the annual rise and flooding of the Nile (Clark 2000:72).

The Denderah Zodiac B had the symbolic connection of being part of a cycle as well as the reassurance of future prosperity. However, since it was made up of a circle, which in mathematical terms is 360° and that the circle was accurately divided into equal sections of 10° respectively, each section was a specific dekan. The dekans move in a circular motion in the heavens and this circular path or motion is part of the path known as the ecliptic. The sun also moves along this path, which is inclined at 23° to the celestial equator, which forms part of the celestial sphere that constitutes the heavens, while the paths of the moon and the planets lie close to that of the ecliptic. The ecliptic also houses the constellations of the zodiac (Snodgrass 1997:90).

Like the Ancient Mesopotamians, the Ancient Egyptians based their number system on the number sixty. The Ancient Egyptians possibly created a circle by positioning six equilateral triangles together, realising that 360° could be achieved by multiplying $6 \times 60^\circ = 360^\circ$; dividing this by 10° would result in the required 36 sections in which to represent the 36 dekans. The dekan constellations were also equated to ten days, tantamount with the Ancient Egyptian “week” which consisted of eight working days and two days of rest, resulting in a ten-day week. The lunar calendar months were comprised of 29-30 days, in effect resulting in the Ancient Egyptians having three weeks in their months, each week comprising of ten days (Snodgrass 1997:90).

Astronomically the Ancient Egyptians knew that the constellations moved in circular bands across the sky and if they applied the above-mentioned formula they would end up with 10° of the night sky per constellation. One dekan was present for ten days at a time in one particular direction, and if one multiplied the thirty-six dekans by ten days the result would be 360 days which would almost comprise a full year. The Ancient Egyptians were aware of the remaining five days in the year and to these days they reserved for feasting and celebrations as the annual flooding of the Nile drew closer.

The dekan system was of obvious importance to the Ancient Egyptians or they would not have included it in the Denderah Zodiac, along with other representations of the night sky.

7.9. The eight captives

Within the dekan band of the Denderah Zodiac B is a disc containing eight captives, and it is below this disc that there is a symbol that marks the first dekan. According to Rosemary Clark in her book, *The Sacred Tradition in Ancient Egypt*, the first dekan is called *Kenmut*. The rest of the dekans are known to be made up of star constellations but the actual names of these dekan constellations are lost to us. The dekans themselves are read in the way in which the dekans face. They moved in a circular motion from the first dekan to the thirty-sixth dekan.

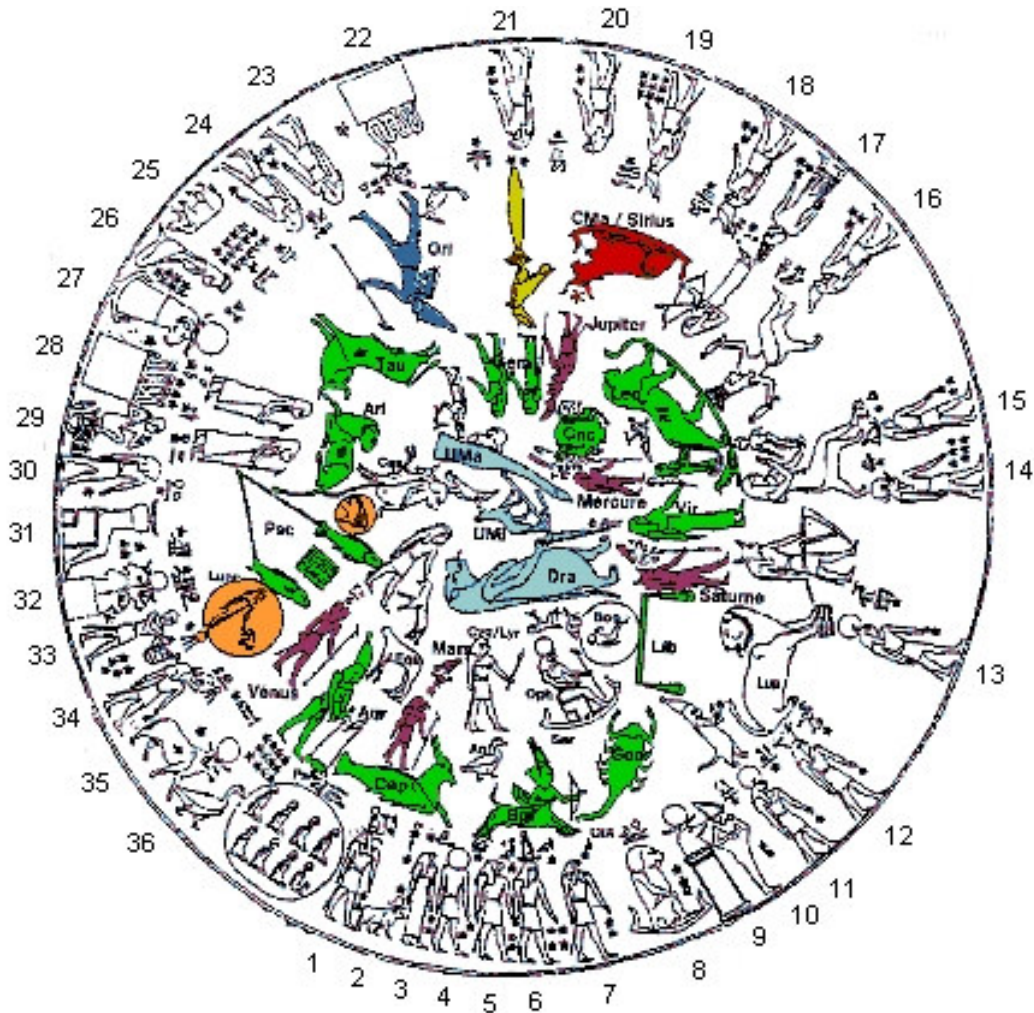


Figure 25: Denderah zodiac B showing the location of the thirty-six dekans

“The eight captives inside the large disk represent eight stars that could form the left hand half of Capricornus. These figures do stand for the glyphic symbol of enemies or wickedness. These are Dekan stars and the glyphs say Sa-r-s or a-s-sa; the figure to the right is also named sa-r-a” (Clark 2000: 78).

It would be interesting if this symbol was included in the numbering of the dekans but as it is not, only hypotheses remain as to its purpose in the zodiac. Unfortunately, the exact function of this symbol will always remain speculation.

7.10. The band containing the zodiac

Within the dekan circle is the main disc. It contains various Egyptian constellations, a circular zodiac, planets, sun, moon and three circumpolar constellations. The circle of the zodiac contains symbols that are more familiar to the modern eye albeit represented in the Egyptian fashion. There are all the familiar symbols such as the bull and the fishes that correspond with the constellations Taurus and Pisces. The planets are indicated by stars placed above the heads of certain symbols (Clark 2000:72).

The cow in the barque with a star above her head is in fact the representation of the constellation of Argo Navis and should not be confused with the constellation of Taurus, which is to be found just a few symbols away. The moon is represented by the disc containing a figure located below the Pisces constellation and above the thirty-fourth dekan. The constellation of Orion is represented by the pharaoh figure holding a *was*-sceptre, located above the twenty-second and twenty-third dekans.

7.11. The central circle

The third and inner-most circle is comprised of three constellations. Constellations, as the name suggests, are convenient groupings of stars. There is no reason why different cultures should use the same groupings or the same names. Thus the Greek constellation, known today by its Latin name Ursa Minor, and commonly known as the “Little Bear” or the “Little Dipper”, was known to the Egyptians as *Sak*, represented by the figure of the jackal. The constellation of Ursa Major, commonly known as the “Great Bear” or the “Great Dipper” was known to the Egyptians as *Meshtiu*, and is represented by an ox leg. The last constellation of Draco or “Dragon”, known to the Egyptians as *Hesamut* was represented by a hippopotamus. The constellation of *Hesamut* was exceptionally important to the Ancient Egyptians as it contained Thuban - the pole star when the Giza pyramids were built (Clark 2000:73).

The pole star of the present day differs from Thuban due to precession and today it is the constellation of Ursa Minor which contains the present pole star Polaris. When this portion of the Zodiac B was carved their pole was half way between Thuban and

Polaris. The dead were thought to rise up and join the ranks of the “Imperishable Stars” a term often used for the stars located around the pole star, in this case *Hesamut*, *Sak* and *Meshtiu*, which were visible to the Ancient Egyptians most of the year.

Despite the fact that Egyptian astronomical signs and Greek astrological signs are housed in the same zodiac, the question arises as to why the sun, moon and most of the planets are there at all.

7.12. The actual night sky above Cairo

In reference to the depiction of the actual night sky above Cairo in 51 BC (Figure 26), Ursa Minor and Draco only can be seen on the northern horizon. It is known that the Egyptians were interested in the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, when the sun rose due east. A computer program was used to regenerate the night skies from 52 BC to 42 BC. During this period nothing of significance happened at the vernal equinoxes; however, at the autumnal equinox in 51 BC, a priest looking due east from midnight until dawn would have been able to see the moon and all of the planets except Saturn appear from midnight until sunrise. He would have been able to calculate that Saturn as a slow wanderer would have been invisible as it was next to the sun but still in the same quadrant of the sky. Ironically, the Egyptians would have been unaware that Uranus and Neptune would also have been visible in this same part of the sky. This could have been a trigger to represent such a large relief.

This is the night sky above Cairo in September 51 BC

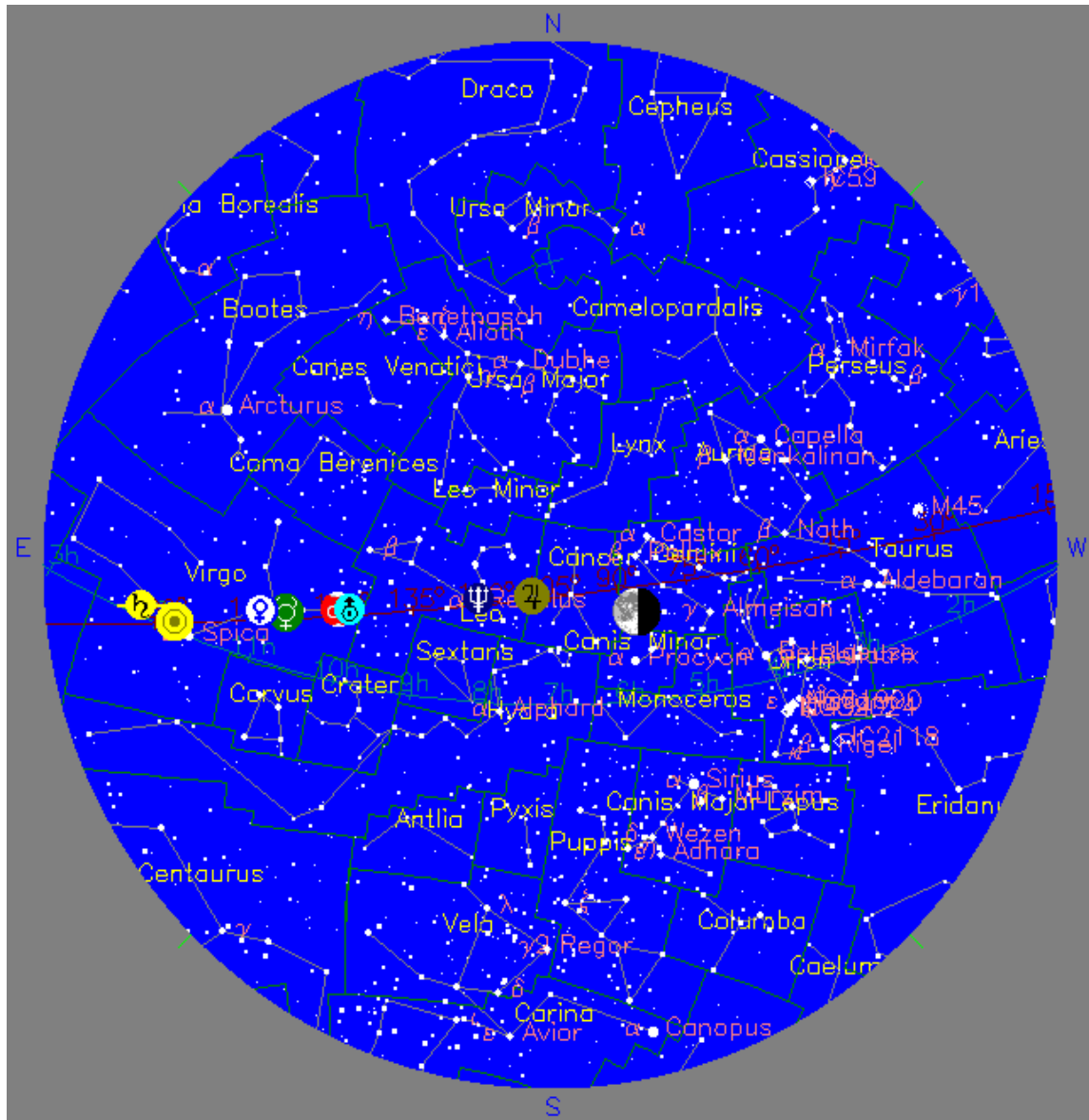


Figure 26: Computer sky map representing the night sky above Cairo in 51 BC

7.13. Discussion

In summary, the Denderah Zodiac B comprises Egyptian Neteru to support the sky, a band of dekans showing Egyptian star clusters, a band containing a combination of Egyptian constellations, Egyptian planets, sun and moon and an Egyptian attempt to represent the Greek zodiac, with finally in the centre three circumpolar constellations in the Egyptian style. Certain constellations such as Leo and Gemini are shown twice. The majority of the constellations between the circumpolar constellations in the zodiac are omitted. For instance, in the Zodiac Ursa Major (the ox leg *Meshtiu*) is shown next to Aries. In the night sky major constellations such as Auriga, Cassiopeia, Perseus and Andromeda would normally be seen. It was thus never intended to be an accurate representation of the sky or to be used as a star map. A genuine star map would surely have shown the night sky above Denderah.

7.14. Conclusion

It seems likely therefore that by cobbling different ways of showing the heavens, the designers were more interested in honouring Hathor/Nut rather than showing an accurate depiction of the sky especially as the whole relief was bordered by a large representation of Hathor herself. In their worship of Hathor, the Egyptians chose to include the Greek aspects of the zodiac which shows both syncretism and reciprocity.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

The depictions of the Greek rulers in Egyptian memorials were more than those of conquering nation. There was a conscious effort on the part of the Greeks to enter into the life of the Egyptian people. The Romans by contrast merely considered Egypt as a province supplying tribute to Rome.

8.2. Research problem

The focus of this study was to examine whether the social value of syncretism was in fact evident in Ptolemaic Egypt. It tried to illustrate that celestial depictions in the Hathor temple at Denderah were syncretic rather than astronomical or astrological.

8.3. Method

This study proves uses social values of the Ptolemaic period that indicate that the Greeks and Egyptians were able to coexist peacefully and retain their identity; yet influenced each other so that a state of syncretism was apparent through reciprocity in architecture, deities and symbolism.

An explanation was offered, by first exploring ancient social values such as reciprocity and honour, which were substantiated by examining the deities and architecture of the period, as well as the juxtapositioning of Greek and Egyptian archaeoastronomical and archaeoastrological symbols in particular those found in the Hathor Temple, Denderah.

8.4. Results and conclusion

In the above study examples have been provided where a mutual understanding took place between the Greek invaders and the Egyptian people. This was shown in the creation of new gods combining Greek and Egyptian attributes and characteristics such as in the creation of Serapis. The Denderah Zodiac B shows an amalgamation of Greek and Egyptian representations of the heavens as a means of glorifying Hathor. The temple itself shows distinct Greek influence. Even the way in which the dead from this period were buried and mummified, shows the fusion of Greek and Egyptian styles.

The Egyptians were not forced to accommodate the Greeks, the Greeks realised that it was in their interests to accommodate the Egyptians. As a result, reasons for reciprocity were created and syncretism followed as a result.

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3	Qadesh	Barnett, M 1999. <i>Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt</i> . Kent: Grange Books, 99
4	Akhenaten	http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/saqqara/images/Saqqara/Profiles/Akhenaten.jpg [Accessed 13/01/07]
5	Alexander the Great	http://www.meaus.com/AlexanderBust.gif [Accessed on 13/01/07]
6	Osiris	http://www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/Highlights/Collection.Highlights-FR.html [Accessed on 13/01/07]
7	Apis Bull	http://www.lexicorient.com/egypt/alexandria10.htm [Accessed on 13/01/07]
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