Egyptian Cultural Identity in the Architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC–AD 325)

Youssri Ezzat Hussein Abdelwahed

Archaeopress

Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

Front cover photo: The Roman Kiosk on Philae
Back cover photo: The Serapeum before the Temple of Luxor

Printed in England by Hollywell Press, Oxford

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

Table of Contents

Note to the Reader

All dates as AD unless otherwise specified. For the chronology of the Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman periods, I follow Wilkinson 2000 and McKenzie 2007 respectively. With the exception of Hermaion, Komasterion and Ptolemaion, I will use the anglicized terms of ancient monuments throughout the book. For example, I will use the Serapeum for Serapeion and the Thoereum for Thoereion, etc.

List of Abbreviations

For citation of classical literature and authors, I follow Hornblower and Spawforth 1996.

For citation of papyri and inscriptions, I adhere to the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which is available at: http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html

For citation of periodicals, I follow the conventions of *The Egyptian Journal of Archaeology*, available at http://www.ees.ac.uk/publications/journal-egyptian-archaeology.html and of *The American Journal of Archaeology*, available at http://www.ajaonline.org/editorial/175, with the following exceptions:

AmAn American Antiquity
AAASH Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
ABSA The Annual of the British School of Athens
BFA Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Farouk I University.
BJRL Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
IJMES International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
ISERP Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy
JAR Journal of Anthropological Research
RAIN Royal Anthropological Institute News
SH Studia Hellenistica
SO Studia Orientalia

For citation of footnote, I follow the Harvard system, except for the following:

DE Description de l'Égypte, ou, recueil d'observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, 1809-1822, Paris.

List of Illustrations

Chapter II:

Monumentality of the Pylon and Egyptian Cultural Identity

Chapter III:

   Houses and Egyptian Cultural Identity

Chapter IV:

   Tomb Iconography and Egyptian Cultural Identity

Chapter V:

Architectural Ornament and Egyptian Cultural Identity

List of Maps

List of Plates

List of Charts

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Then, too, there are a great many degrees of closeness or remoteness in human society. To proceed beyond the universal bond of our common humanity, there is the closer one of belonging to the same people, tribe and tongue, by which men are very closely bound together; it is a still closer relationship to be citizens of the same polis; for fellow-citizens have much in common –forum, temples, colonnades, streets, statues, laws, courts, rights of suffrage, to say nothing of social and friendly circles and diverse business relations with many (Cic. *De. Off.* I.17).

Architecture and society are locked together in that one cannot exist without the other (Grahame 2000, 23).

Concepts of ethnicity and culture have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in anthropology, archaeology, and history.[1] Research in this field had its roots in the colonial situation prevailing until the middle of the twentieth century. In their considerations of ethnographic descriptions of non-European societies, nineteenth-century culture-historians posited that each society was governed by its own norms, values, and ideas that guided behaviour within it.[2] Consequently, cultures were regarded as objective, homogenous entities defined by the unique system of rules determining conduct within them. Archaeologists imported this notion of culture, which was mainly used by pre-historians who wanted to explain the changes in the patterning of material objects. Culture-historians regarded the pattern of artefact in a bounded territory and time as the physical manifestation of a particular ethnic group.[3] In other words, archaeological cultures defined by material culture patterning were equated with ethnic groups.[4]

The concept of the archaeological culture had come under justifiable criticism in the field of archaeology, particularly with the recognition by anthropologists that 'society' and 'culture' is not the same thing.[5] Drawing on his research among the Kachins of northern Burma, Edmund Leach showed that members of ethnic groups need not share distinctive cultural traits such as religion, language, dress, architecture, and the like. Instead, ethnicity is created by subjective processes of unconditional ascription that have no necessary relationship to cultural commonalities.[6] Thus ethnicity emerged as a key problem in anthropology with the debate ensuing as to whether the analytical units for ethnic groups should be grounded on the observer's criteria or on indigenous distinctions. Carter Bentley argued that analytical units must be grounded on indigenous distinctions.[7] In other words, ethnicity refers to the self-conscious identification that individuals have with a particular social group and not to arbitrary distributions of material defined by an external observer. This simply means that material culture is not sufficient in itself for the recognition of a particular ethnic identity.[8]

The primordialist approach posited that ethnicity is 'primordial' conception which has different levels of political prominence in different periods, where individuals attach a 'primordial' quality to cultural 'givens' like blood, language, religion, history, and the like.[9] The instrumentalist method, on the other hand, argued that ethnic identity coalesces in particular modern circumstances primarily in pursuit of economic and political interests.[10] Ethnicity is defined as the adherence to group both larger than that of the immediate economic and social community and with a perceived historic unity.[11] Obviously, the scholarly discussion of ethnicity is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Ethnicity itself appears to be a fairly new concept.[12] The 'ethnic revival' was particularly associated with the rise of nationalism and the emergence of nation states in the latter half of the twentieth century. The essentially modern nationalist movements have politically exploited and placed a particular emphasis on the construction and use of ethnicity to validate nationalist ideologies.[13] Yet most historians are unable to identify any consciously nationalist movements before the French revolution.[14] The comparatively recent emergence of nationalism and ethnic politics suggests that ethnicity may be a feature of the modern era. It is unclear whether the use of ethnic labels in pre-modern political and social life has anything like the same modern meaning. Given the lack of ethnographic data, it is hard to tell whether the individuals sharing common cultural traits did actually recognise themselves as belonging to an *ethnos*.

As the word *ethnos* cannot to be translated into 'race',[15] it is no longer used to designate a group of people who have blood ties and hold something in common, be that a language, religion or history.[16] Herodotus claimed that

---

[1] Barth 1969; Smith 1986, 1991; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jones 1997; Eller 1999; Eriksen 2001.
[2] Klemm 1843-52; Taylor 1903.
[3] Childe 1956.
[4] Antonaccio 2010: 33.
[5] Shennan 1989: 2-14.
[6] Leach 1954.
[7] Bentley 1987: 24.
[8] Jones 1996: 1997; Grahame 1998.
[9] On the 'primordialist' approach: Shills 1957; Geertz 1963.
[10] On the 'instrumentalist' approach: Barth 1969; Cohen 1974.
[11] Alston 1997c: 84.
[12] Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1.
[13] Smith 1981; Eller 1999.
[14] Gellner 1983; Smith 2001.
[15] Zangenberg, Attridge and Martin 2007.
[16] Liddell and Scott 1986: 480.

inhabitants living in the Greek mainland have one 'Greek' ethnic identity:

There are the common blood and tongue that we Greeks share, together with the common cult places, the sacrifices and the similar customs.[17]

At first glance, Herodotus's passage seems to suggest that the indices that serve to define ethnic groups are genetics, language, religion, and customs. Yet Jonathan Hall has rightly argued that such fluid identifiers cannot be used as objective criteria for identifying ethnic groups.[18] Although kinship extension undoubtedly retains its importance in the sense of generational and historical continuity, genetics and other cultural traits cannot be seen as determinant of ethnicity.[19] The other cultural symbols that ethnic groups may have in common are also variable and situational.[20] In shifting the focus from the internal and cultural characteristics to the group's social features, biological descent and cultural traits are replaced as ethnic signifiers by self-identification and identification by others.[21] An ethnic group is defined by itself, and not by its somatic cultural traits.[22] The emphasis on mutable social and cultural traits rather than biological lineage has encouraged scholars to stress the changeable nature of both ethnicities and cultures.[23]

More often than not, people of different social classes appear to be part of the same social group. In this case, the unity of the social group is more dependent on a variety of symbols whereby the various groups construct their ethnic identity. No ethnic group, however, treats all aspects of its culture or history as markers of its identity; it would be awkward for any group if some elements of its culture or history are the same as those of another group. This similarity would undermine any claim of distinction or difference from the other group. Different ethnic groups sometimes use language, religion, dress and the like to define their identity. Yet the relative importance of such features may be in dispute within a particular group.[24] In modern Egypt, for instance, a perceived historic unity can be seen as an important symbol of ethnicity, but religion is not since we have Muslim Egyptians and Christian Egyptians. Ethnic groups may place emphasis on different cultural traits in different historical situations. In many cases, members of an *ethnos* have nothing in common except the shared adherence to the group.[25] The ability of ethnicity to transcend cultural, social, economic, and geographic boundaries provides the rational for its successful use as a political concept.[26] Despite the relatively important ethnic

symbols and the perceived common history, the *ethnos* appears time and again as a transient political alliance.[27] Ethnicity is as an aspect of social organization often related to economic and political relationships.[28] As a working definition, ethnicity is regarded as the expression of the self-conscious adherence to group identity.[29]

Ethnic groups are not defined so much by their cultural content as by the permeable social boundaries by which they are enclosed. That is, there is no objective relationship between ethnic groups and archaeological cultures. As ethnic groups cannot live in total isolation from each other, ethnicity is a phenomenon which allows for much variation.[30] Individuals may cross malleable ethnic boundaries and so in the course of their lives may be members of successive ethnic groups. This is what Fredrik Barth calls 'ethnic mobility'.[31] The social features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural traits of the members may likewise be transformed. Archaeological cultures are objectively real. Ethnicity on the other hand is subjective.[32] Ethnicity is, of course, one aspect of a multiple identity and if we are to unravel the problem of ethnic/cultural identity then it would be useful to distinguish between the various levels of identity assertion. As 'identity' expresses the ways in which individuals and groups differentiate themselves in their social relations from other individuals and groups,[33] we might first recognise a personal identity, which includes aspects such as gender, age, education, profession, social status, and the like.[34] Second, we might identify a social identity, which includes such relationships as family ties, peer group members, class allegiance, social status, and the like.[35] Third, we might recognise a civic identity, which includes such aspects as citizenship.[36] Fourth, we might recognise a local identity whereby members of the local community construct a sense of belonging to their city.[37] Obviously enough, the boundaries between these different forms of identity are not clear-cut. These or some of these aspects of identity are intertwined and sometimes overlap and are as much situational and variable as ethnic or cultural identity. The complexity and multi-layered nature of identity urges caution when attempting to read from material culture to aspects of identity. Context can sometimes tell the level or levels of identity in operation, but one must observe further caution while the context of a text or an artefact is often missing.

27   Horowitz 1975.
28   Barth 1969.
29   Morgan 1991: 131. The group must be larger than that of the immediate economic and social community. Priests, for instance, cannot be seen as an *ethnos*, but they can be members of an ethnic group or different *ethnoi*.
30   Eriksen 2001: 263.
31   Barth 1969: 9-10.
32   Just 1989: 74-5; Linnekin and 1990; Eriksen 1993: 20-2: 38; Graves-Brown, Jones and Gamble 1996; Hall 1997: 19; Alston 1997c; Grahame 1998; Eller 1999: 9.
33   Jenkins 1996: 4.
34   Venit 1999.
35   Hales 2003.
36   Delia 1992.
37   Cic. *De. Off.* I.17.

17   Hdt. 8.144.2.
18   Hall 1997: 13-33.
19   Smith 1999: 127.
20   Banton 1987: xi.
21   Venit 1999: 665; Schwartz 1975: 106-31.
22   Barth 1969: 10-15; Just 1989: 74-5; Eriksen 1993: 20-2, 38; Hall 1997: 19.
23   Bentley 1989; Goudriaan 1988; Alston 1997c.
24   Alston 1997c: 84.
25   Yelvington 1991.
26   Thompson 1983.

In attempting to understand the relationship between different perceptions of identity and material culture, scholars have adopted different methodological approaches. Since the 1990s, it has represented a major topic for debate in the humanities and social sciences.[38] Social anthropological approaches to ethnic identity have seen it as the active maintenance of cultural boundaries in the process of social interaction.[39] Drawing from his study of Maya identities, Johan Normark criticises the ways in which the concepts of ethnicity and culture are used by both archaeologists and indigenous people. His examples derive from contemporary Mayanist discourse, in which he finds an almost cultural-historical view of the past Maya area. In Guatemala, a growing movement among indigenous people also adopts this view. The Maya-movement emphasizes an essential relationship between Maya culture and ethnicity, which are rarely affected by external contacts. This standpoint is, however, quite easily refuted. Normark illustrates the diversion of ethnicity and culture in time by looking at ancient peoples' expression of identities in iconography, which clearly are different from those embraced by contemporary peoples.[40] As ethnic identity is no longer equated with group's culture or archaeological culture, Siân Jones argues that a one-to-one relationship between ethnic groups and material cultural similarities and differences cannot be assumed.[41] On the basis of ethno-archaeological research, Ian Hodder argues that the kinds of material culture involved in ethnic symbolism can vary between different groups. Equally, the expression of ethnic boundaries may involve a limited range of material culture, while other material forms and styles may be shared across group boundaries.[42]

In her ethno-archaeological analysis of stylistic variation and ethnic identity amongst the Kalahari San, Polly Wiessner considered style as an active form of information exchange and social marking in highly visible artefacts and in certain social contexts. She distinguished between the 'emblemic' style, which refers to 'formal variation in material culture that has a distinct referent and transmits a clear message to a defined target population about conscious affiliation and identity', and the 'assertive' style, which is 'formal variation in material culture which is personally based and which carries information supporting individual identity'.[43] By applying Wiessner's work on style to houses in Pompeii, Mark Grahame used stylistic variation in spatial layout of courtyard and non-courtyard houses to draw attention to the problem of reading from surviving archaeological record to ethnicity. The courtyard-house, in his view, was used as an 'emblemic' marker of social status rather than ethnic identity.[44]

Despite the obvious complexity of reading ethnicity from artefacts, it has long been recognized that material culture plays a significant role in communicating information about other aspects of identity.[45] By offering critique of current approaches to identity in Roman archaeology, Martin Pitts argues that, if pursued uncritically, 'identity' will be simply read off from archaeological remains in a culture-historical fashion, in which peoples were equated with generic combinations of material culture. By considering Roymans' investigation of Batavian identity in lower Rhine, where Rome helped establishing the Batavians as a political entity and an ethnic group with a strong sense of its own identity, and his own work on the role of pottery as a social practice in terms of domestic consumption and deposition in southeast Britain, Pitts develops a new approach to the construction of narratives of identity through dynamic social practices.[46] In his view, identity is best investigated through applying approaches that elucidate aspects of social practice through material remains rather than simply identify stylistic variation in material remains. Shelly Hales has considered the nature and role of domestic art and architecture in Roman houses, from Britain to Syria, in promoting aspects of social identities such as social status, education, wealth, and luxury.[47] Drawing from his considerations of images and myths in early Greek visual art, Tonio Hölscher demonstrated the gradual shift from representations of general Hellenic self-conceptualisation as civilised behaviour against barbarian to a more particular local identity in which individual cities appropriated those principles for their own purposes, especially in competition with other cities.[48]

Richard Alston addressed the relationship between ethnicities and public culture in cities of Roman Egypt, arguing for the use of ethnicity as a transient political concept employed by the Roman authority, wishing to organise the society and creating a politically loyal urban elite. He argued that urban and architectural changes in the public culture of metropoleis in the second and third-centuries do not represent individual ethnicity.[49] Although legal status was an issue in Roman Egypt where it determined social and economic privileges, Alston argued that Philo places little emphasis on the legality of the Jewish community in his discussion of anti-Semitic, ethnic conflicts that broke out in Alexandria in 38. The account of the persecution, Alston continues, focuses on the topography of the dispute: 'The Jews were robbed and driven from the streets of their city into exile and deprived of access to the theatre and market. Their leaders were humiliated in the most public places in the city and finally they were attacked in their own homes'.[50] Elsewhere, he drew attention to diversity in urban and rural housing in

[38] E.g. Laurence and Berry 1998; Hales 2003; Pitts 2007.
[39] Barth 1969.
[40] Normark 2004.
[41] Jones 1997.
[42] Hodder 1982.
[43] Wiessner 1983: 257-8. See also Wiessner 1984, 1985, 1989: 1990 where she engaged in debate with James Sackett over the passive and active function of style.
[44] Grahame 1998.

[45] Alston 1997c: 94; Grahame 1998: 160.
[46] Roymans 2004; Pitts 2007.
[47] Hales 2003.
[48] Hölscher 2011.
[49] Alston 1997c.
[50] Alston 1997d: 165. On anti-Semitism in Alexandria: Bell 1941.

Roman Egypt, suggesting a more sophisticated relationship between domestic architecture and ethnicity or culture.[51]

Alston has therefore applied the concepts of ethnicity and culture to the discourse on urban space and domestic architecture. Consequently, scholars working on Roman Egypt have especially looked to funerary architecture, iconography and other commemorative objects as spheres through which the concept of ethnicity can be further explored. Marjorie Venit identified a problem with attempting to infer from funerary art and architecture in Alexandria to ethnicity.[52] Yet she examined other levels of identity assertion like personal identity by examining the expression of gender in the Stagni painted tomb. She argues that the female patron used funerary iconography to assert her personal identity through gender.[53] Christina Riggs considered the use of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman imagery in funerary objects and, to a very limited extent, tomb paintings. She argued for the diversity of mortuary practices in the Roman period, and for the complexity of the concept of ethnicity in the funerary sphere.[54] Anna Boozer explored the relationship between statuettes, amulets, wall-paintings, and remains of food uncovered from two Romano-Egyptian houses in Trimithis (Amheida) in the Dakhla oasis and the concepts of memory and identity to illustrate the complex post-conquest situation. The diverse material culture uncovered from the houses, including the Egyptian Bes-amulet and Graeco-Roman statuettes, suggested that the residents had a mixed cultural heritage.[55]

This book explores Egyptian cultural identity in architectural form in Roman Egypt. It covers the period from the Roman annexation of Egypt in 30 BC to the official recognition of Christianity in AD 325. The book focuses on the relationship between architecture and the multi-layered nature of identity. Consideration is given to the issue of continuities and changes in Egyptian cultural traditions. The book takes account of different ethnic groups in Roman Egypt, but concentrates more on the relationship between architecture and levels of identity assertion. Buildings within the province are compared with each other and, whenever relevant, with structures elsewhere in the empire, in order to understand more fully how complex was the relationship between architecture and identity in Roman Egypt. When compared to other provinces, Egypt is rich in papyri and archaeological material, both of which facilitate the understanding of the relationship between architectural form and aspects of identity within the province.

It is helpful to start with considerations of ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt as a background to the Roman period. Egypt was an ethnically diverse society, where Greeks and other immigrants and Egyptians lived side by side and affected each other. Willy Clarysse has even shown

that there was an ethnic diversity among the Greeks themselves.[56] Elias Bickermann distinguished two kinds of ethnic labels used to designate the inhabitants: the '*Ethnikon*' and the '*Herkunftzeichen*'. The former is an adjective derived from the name of a polis or tribe and used to refer to Greek and other immigrants, while the latter characterized the native population and followed the formal *tôn apo* with the name of an Egyptian village or district.[57] The ethnic designations of 'Greek' or 'Egyptian', however, disappeared in the late Ptolemaic period, when Greeks and Egyptians were eventually assimilated with each other even in the capital.[58] Only a few Greeks lived in Thebes as suggested by the rareness of the ethnic labels *Wynn* 'Greeks', *Wynn ms n Kmy* 'Greeks born in Egypt', and the title κάτοικοι 'Greek settlers', 26 in total.[59] The Greeks fully shared in the taxes and there is limited evidence that non-Greeks were admitted to the gymnasium.[60]

Ethnicity had no importance to the administration of Egypt, when the Ptolemies relied on both Greek and Egyptian communities in the bureaucracy.[61] A number of Egyptian priests learnt Greek and reached high administrative positions.[62] Drawing from his consideration of ethnicity in more than 200 private documents, Koen Goudriaan stressed that ethnic labels in Ptolemaic Egypt were socially constructed identifiers.[63] Such a distinction between 'Greek' or 'Egyptian' depended on the perspective of whoever composed the document. In legal proceedings, the character of the tribunal decided which law should be applied: Greek/royal or Egyptian.[64] The ethnicity of the persons involved did not determine the legal system in use. Greeks, especially women, when they decided that Egyptian law would be more advantageous for them, would go to an Egyptian notary and have business documents drawn up in demotic. As inhabitants often used double Greek and Egyptian names, mainly for business matters, nomenclature is not a reliable ethnic identifier.[65]

In all, ethnicity had no political importance in Ptolemaic Egypt. However, the Roman authority created 'fixed, politically significant ethnic groups' in Egypt.[66] Roman Egypt is characterized by its ethnically diverse population, where the inhabitants were marked by their legal status, which determined their social, political, and economic privileges until Caracalla's extension of Roman citizenship

---

[51]   Alston 2001.
[52]   Venit 2002a.
[53]   Venit 1999, 2002a.
[54]   Riggs 2002, 2005.
[55]   Boozer 2005.

[56]   Clarysse 1998.
[57]   Bickermann 1927.
[58]   Fraser 1972; Bagnall 1988a; Delia 1996; Burstein 2000.
[59]   Clarysse 1995.
[60]   Delorme 1960: 427: 478; Fraser 1961: 145.
[61]   Préaux 1936.
[62]   Samuel 1968; Ray 1976; Thompson 1992: 2003. Even in the Saite period King Psamtik I (664-610 BC) sent a number of Egyptian boys to his Ionian mercenaries to be taught Greek. From these: the class of later interpreters was descended (Hdt. 2.154. 2).
[63]   Goudriaan 1988.
[64]   On laws and Egyptian law courts in Ptolemaic Egypt: Wolff 1960; Allam 1991. On the so-called Demotic Legal Code of Hermopolis West: *P.Oxy*. II.237; *P.Oxy*. XLVI.3285; Mattha 1975.
[65]   Clarysse 1985.
[66]   Horowitz 1975; Alston 1997c: 83.

to all free citizens in 212.[67] The Romans (Ῥωμαῖοι), Alexandrians (Ἀλεξανδρεῖς) and probably other citizens of the Greek poleis, Naucratis, Alexandria, Ptolemais and, from 130 onwards, Antinoopolis, came at the top of the Roman legal structure. These groups were exempt everywhere from the poll-tax (λαογραφία), levied on males between the ages of fourteen and sixty-two.[68] Roman and Alexandrian citizenship of the parents was indispensible for their offspring to qualify for the same status.[69]

The rest of the population was referred to as the Egyptians (Αἰγύπτιοι). In other words, the Roman authority applied the label 'Egyptian' to everyone living in Egypt who was neither a Roman nor a citizen of the Greek poleis or Jew (Ἰουδαῖος), a designation that applied to metropolites and villagers alike.[70] There were also various status divisions within this group. Even though many of them will have been of Greek ethnic origin, all the metropolites or citizens of the metropoleis of the *chora* such as Hermopolis Magna and Oxyrhynchus paid the *laographia* at a reduced rate,[71] while the ordinary people who inhabited the villages (*komai*) paid the full rate of the poll-tax.[72] The metropolite group included members of the gymnasium, who are known in papyri as 'those from the gymnasium' and had to prove in their *epikrisis* that their ancestors were members of the gymnasium.[73] In the Fayum, the equivalent group to the gymnasial class was 'the 6475 Hellenes of the Arsinoite nome',[74] who were presumably the descendants of the Greek and Hellenized mercenaries settled in the Fayum by the early Ptolemies.[75] Although there is no example of an *Aiguptos* who became an *Ioudaios*, or vice versa, an *Aiguptos* or an *Ioudaios* had access to Alexandrian and Roman citizenship.[76] Harpocras, the Memphite physician of Pliny, is an example of an *Aiguptos* who obtained Alexandrian and Roman citizenship, suggesting that it was possible for an individual to have multiple ethnicities.[77] Harpocras might have experienced what George de Vos calls 'ethnicity flow', which refers to the ability of individuals to cross permeable ethnic boundaries to negotiate their identity.[78]

Apart from the legal definition of identity, there are no other reliable signifiers by mean of which individuals can be recognised as Roman, Greek, or Egyptian. Similarly, the relationships between members of an ethnic group or between members of these ethnic groups are vague.

That is, the cultural and social boundaries between these groups, if any, cannot be easily outlined. Although there is a huge number of documentary papyri which show day-to-day interaction between the persons involved, nomenclature is not a reliable ethnic signifier. In the literary sources of the imperial period, there appears to be some suggestion that a legally-defined Roman in the West would need to display a certain familiarity with Roman culture or civilization (*humanitas*). Roman culture and *mores* were significant for Roman self-definition and identity in the west, where they played important roles in the cultural transformations of the western provinces. That is clear, for example, from Tacitus' references to cultural (the adoption of liberal education, Latin, and toga) and material cultural (the erection of temples, fora, porticoes, and baths) changes in Britain during the governship of Agricola.[79] As the emphasis on Roman culture encouraged western provincial elites to adopt imperial cultural modes and material culture, the possession of moral and material features of Roman culture has been taken as part of what it was to be 'Roman'.[80] However, we can reasonably assume that all those individuals who lived out their lives in a way that *we* would recognise as Roman did not always go to Rome and experience Roman culture first-hand. Above all, Rome itself was a melting pot of various cultural traditions.[81]

There is no evidence that the association between Roman citizenship and Roman culture in the West was in any way transmitted into the remoter eastern provinces in which Greek culture was far more present. Greg Wool argues that becoming Roman in the Greek East did not necessarily mean that inhabitants had to adopt only Roman cultural modes and material culture. Instead, he argues that Greeks could retain distinctive features of their Greek culture and identity, notably language, education, competitive euergetism, and material culture, while at the same time adopting much Roman material culture. So there was no contradiction, in his view, between becoming Roman and, simultaneously, staying Greek in the remoter provinces of the East.[82] It is equally argued that 'Roman' does not refer to a person's origin, nation, linguistic group, or common descent, but refers directly to a shared citizenship.[83] This simply means that if someone had the chance to be granted Roman citizenship then he would be straightforwardly classed as 'Roman'. Under Trajan, the already mentioned Harpocras was granted Alexandrian and Roman citizenship on the basis of the medical services which he offered to Pliny.[84] There is no evidence that Harpocras was required to neglect certain cultural features and adopt or at least show a certain familiarity with Roman culture as a prerequisite for citizenship. To complicate it further, to define what Roman culture was meant to be in a province like Egypt is problematic. Equally, if Greek ethnicity of

67   Bell 1942: 39-40.
68   On Alexandrian citizenship: El-Abbadi 1962; Delia 1991. On Antinoite citizenship: Johnson 1914: 171; Hoogendijk and van Minnen 1987; Malouta 2009.
69   Gilliam 1978.
70   *CPJ* II.156c.ii.25-7.
71   Lewis 1983: 26-64; Bowman and Rathbone 1992; Hanson 1992: 133-45.
72   Cf. *CPJ* II.156c.ii.25-7.
73   Nelson 1979: 22-4; *P.Oxy*. XVIII.2186.
74   Bowman and Rathbone 1992: 107-27.
75   Bell 1940: 136.
76   *CPJ* II.156c.ii.25-27.
77   Plin. *Ep*. 10.5-7.
78   De Vos 1975: 24-5.

79   Tac. *Agr*. 21.
80   Alston 1997c: 94.
81   Rowell 1962; Edwards and Woolf 2003.
82   Woolf 1994.
83   Finley 1973: 47.
84   Plin. *Ep*. 10.5-7.

the urban elite was partially defined by its relationship to Greek language and culture,[85] then an Egyptian who could fluently speak Greek and adopt Greek cultural modes would be classed as Greek. Similarly, if Egyptians had the chance to become citizens of a Greek polis as they indeed had done when they joined Antinoopolis then they would directly be classed as 'Greeks'.[86] In that sense, legal status was not closely associated with cultural markers, which may not be given a particularly ethnic subjective reading. This means, for instance, that *we* cannot use the worship of Egyptian deities, the participation in traditional festivals, and the patronage of traditional cults as objective criteria for defining someone as legally or ethnically Egyptian.

There is no question that Roman Egypt was a society of great complexity. Yet the complexity of the province may not necessarily be ethnic in nature, but seems to derive from the multiplicity of cultural traditions. In the multilingual Roman-Egyptian society inhabitants spoke and wrote a variety of different languages or scripts, the use of which depended on context. Throughout the Roman period, Greek remained the official administrative and documentary language, while Latin was almost completely confined to the military and Roman legal documents.[87] When it comes to dealing with authorities, traditional temples operated mainly in Greek, but also in certain religious matters. In 58 the temple of Souchos in Arsinoe could demand, in Greek, contributions from Romans, Alexandrians, and other inhabitants of the nome.[88] In 147 Pakebkis son of Marsisouchos sent a letter, in Greek, to the head of the *idioslogos* to ratify his appointment as the *prophetes* at the temple of Soknebtunis.[89] Equally, Reinhold Merkelbach published a Greek papyrus which used parts of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, the so-called Negative Confession, as part of the initiation of a *stolistes* priest in the early second century.[90] Hieroglyphs continued to be used a religious script on traditional monuments at least until 394.[91] Hieratic, which is a cursive script of hieroglyphs, was used mainly for literary texts.[92] Demotic, which is an even more cursive script, was used for daily documents such as contracts and letters, but for mortuary literature and rarely tombs.[93] Coptic emerged in the third century as a medium for transmitting Christianity when the church found it still necessary to use an Egyptian dialect but wanted it written in modified Greek letters.[94]

Willingly or unwillingly, there were inhabitants who were unable to speak or write in Greek or Latin, and there were also people who did not know Egyptian or indigenous scripts.[95] Yet social boundaries caused by language barriers could be overcome by bilingual individuals, by whom the large number of bilingual contracts, ostraca, and mummy labels were probably written.[96] Many people in administrative circles were bilingual, using both an indigenous script and the official and documentary language used by the central government, Greek.[97] As inhabitants had reasons for learning Greek, they also had motives for learning demotic. Thus a mother writes to her son:

I was delighted for you and myself when I heard that you are learning Egyptian writing, *i.e.* demotic, since now, at least, when you return to the city you will go to Phalu…es, the purge-doctor, to teach the apprentices and will have a means of support until your old age.[98]

Like language, dress and physiognomy cannot be straightforwardly used as markers of ethnicity.[99] Mummy portraits usually show the patrons in Greek or Roman appearance, but the frame and religious content is Egyptian.[100] Even in a single artefact the deceased could be represented in Greek or Roman and traditional representational systems, as is the case in the statues of the patrons in the main tomb at Kom el-Shouqafa who are shown in Egyptian dress and pose, but in Roman coiffure and veristic representation of facial features.[101] It is too difficult to gauge someone's legal or ethnic status from tomb iconography alone. Tomb iconography and the representational system in which the deceased is depicted cannot be straightforwardly taken as markers of legality or ethnicity. The representation in Greek or Roman traditional form does not always necessarily mean that the persons depicted were identifiably Greek or Roman. Neither does the representation of a person in Egyptian mode make him or her Egyptian. In tomb iconography, there was no contradiction between being Graeco-Roman in appearance and dress and Egyptian in religion. The biculturalism of tombs reflects a culture in which Egyptian and Greek or sometimes Roman traditions were equally manifest and without contrast.

Culture and other somatic traits cannot be easily used as ethnic markers. In that sense, we should not put so much weight on the letter of Ammonius who wrote in the third century to his brothers, Julius and Hilarus, mocking at the barbarian, inhuman Egyptians.[102] It seems unlikely that Romans, Alexandrians and other Greek citizens had a distinguishable culture from the rest of the population.

---

[85]   Alston 1997c: 92.
[86]   Johnson 1914: 171; Hoogendijk and van Minnen 1987: 71-4; Malouta 2009.
[87]   Fewster 2002: 224; Rutherford 2009: 199.
[88]   *P.Mert.* II.63.
[89]   *P.Tebt.* II.294.
[90]   Merkelbach 1968.
[91]   Winter 1976: 6 (Figure 7); Grenier 1983: 204-5.
[92]   Fewster 2002: 225.
[93]   Lewis 1993; Smith 2009; Gallo 1992; Riggs 2005; Smith 2009.
[94]   Alston 1997d: 9.

[95]   *P.Tebt.* II.316; Tac. *Ann.* 2.60; Youtie 1971: 260-1; Bowman 1986: 126.
[96]   For a Greek and demotic contract: *Papyrologica Lugd.-Bat.* 25. For a demotic and Greek contract: *Papyrologica Lugd.-Bat.* 5. For the Greek and demotic mummy label of Sionsis son of Tithoes: which is uncovered from Panopolis: *P.Mich. inv. 4534.4 = P.Coll.Youtie II.113.*
[97]   Ray 1976; Thomas and Tait 1998.
[98]   *UPZ* I.148 (the second century BC).
[99]   Riggs 2005.
[100]   Bierbrier 1997; Riggs 2005.
[101]   Venit 2002a: 129. This combination recalls the statues of Antinous (Meyer 1994: Figure 18).
[102]   *P.Oxy.* XIV.1681.4-7.

The Romans and Alexandrians were not culturally, geographically, or commercially detached from the *chora*.[103] Culturally, there are no clear-cut distinctions between Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians. In Roman Egypt, groups that were differentiated administratively interacted on a daily basis. Social, religious, and commercial contacts continually blurred social boundaries, promoted linguistic fluency, and jumbled ethnic categories.[104] Acculturation worked both ways. Although Roman law firmly banned close-kin marriages and the Gnomon of the Idioslogos prohibited intermarriages between Romans, Alexandrians, and their freedmen and the Egyptians, intermarriages between groups occurred even Alexandria and many incestuous marriages are also confirmed.[105] Intermarriage between legally-defined groups was more common in the *chora*.[106]

Biculturalism is a key feature in Roman Egypt and is clearly manifested in surviving material culture. The Roman authority solidified its control of the province through a strong military presence and the encouragement of urbanisation.[107] Unsurprisingly, Rome looked to the loyal urban elites for support. At the beginning of the first century, the Romans closed the village gymnasia that were active in the Ptolemaic period, and associated the specifically Greek institution with the metropolis.[108] Through their association with the gymnasium, the metropolitan elites could develop a Hellenic identity, but they also preserved traditional features of an Egyptian identity, notably temples and religious institutions.[109] It should be stressed that we are not dealing here with two separate cultures or identities, but with a culture in which differing traditional features were equally manifest and without contradiction.

The early second century brought about dramatic changes in the infrastructure of the metropoleis and accelerated the pace of Hellenization. The urban and architectural structure of poleis and metropoleis were reshaped with the construction of buildings with a distinctively classical appearance.[110] Graeco-Roman and Egyptian temples were placed under the control of the metropolitan elites, and continued to be important centres of local identity. Yet the gymnasium was placed at the forefront of official urban life.[111] Only Ptolemais and Antinoopolis appear to have a boule before 200.[112] The boule of Antinoopolis is attested as early as 133 when it was involved with the enrolment of minors as citizens.[113] In 160 Ptolemais became involved in a dispute with Koptos over the right to appoint neokoroi

for a temple of Ptolemy Soter in Koptos. In support of its claim to the right to appoint the neokoroi, the papyrus contains documents from the reigns of Claudius, Galba and Vespasian in which it is reiterated that the boule of Ptolemais is involved in making the appointments.[114] The gymnasial and later bouleutic elites of Oxyrhynchus and Ptolemais Euergetes similarly summoned festivities of members of the imperial family, Isis, Hera, Nilus, and Kronos-Sobek, which were celebrated in the theatre, hippodrome, and the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.[115] These festivities and their architectural backdrops appear to have helped the participants to construct a sense of belonging to their local community or the city.[116] Architectural forms and festivals in cities derived from Graeco-Roman and Egyptian traditional cultures. In this shared multicultural milieu, cultural markers carried no particularly ethnic subjective significance.

With the help of Romans and Alexandrians, the Hellenized elites helped to maintain Egyptian religious traditions, particularly those in the *chora*, through their incorporation into the dominant Hellenic milieu.[117] The temple of Souchos in Arsinoe could demand pious contributions from Romans, Alexandrians, and other inhabitants of the whole nome, regardless of their ethnic or legal status.[118] They also contributed to the construction of new temples dedicated to traditional cults like the temple of Isis at Taposiris Parva and the small Serapeum at Thebes.[119] The Tiberian pronaos of the goddess Hathor-Aphrodite at Tentyris and the Trajanic outer pylon of the temple of Isis and Serapis at Kysis were built respectively by 'the inhabitants of the metropolis and the nome' and 'the inhabitants of Kysis'. Such collective designations appear to place an emphasis on the identity of the local community as a whole.[120] Romans, Alexandrians, and the elite metropolites treated traditional temples and cults as part of their own religious culture. Religion in this case is not a marker of legal or ethnic identity. Inhabitants in Roman Egypt experienced a culture in which differing traditional features were manifest. The syncretism of deities is another obvious feature of the shared cultural heritage that is such a feature of Romano-Egyptian society. Hermes-Thoth was evolved out of the syncretism of Hermes and Thoth, reflecting the fusion of two differing cultural traditions.[121] Equally, Serapis and other deities associated with him such as Isis successfully transcended the particularity of their local origins and became cosmopolitan deities.[122] The temple of Hermes-Thoth in Hermopolis Magna and the Serapeum

---

103 *P.Giss.Lit.* 6.3 = *P.Giss.* 40.ii.16-29 = *Sel.Pap.* II.215.
104 Johnson 1992.
105 *BGU* IV.1024 (360); Hopkins 1980; Shaw and Saller 1984; Shaw 1992; Parker 1996. On the Gnomon of the Idioslogos: Seckel and Schubart 1919-34; Riccobono 1950; Swarney 1970.
106 Rowlandson 1998.
107 Bowman 2000.
108 Bowman and Rathbone 1992: 121.
109 Alston 1997c: 88.
110 Bailey 1989: 1990: 1991: 2007; Krüger 1990; Bowman 1995: 2000.
111 Bowman and Rathbone 1992; Alston 1997c.
112 Bowman 1971: 11-15.
113 *SB* VII.7603.

114 *SB* VI.9016.
115 On town councils: Bowman 1971. On the gymnasium: Burkhalter 1992.
116 Alston 1997b.
117 Alston 1997c: 89.
118 *P.Mert.* II.63.
119 Bernand 1969: no. 109: 428-30 (pl. 78); Golvin et al 1981.
120 Tentyris: Letronne 1974: I: 87-96. Kysis: *SEG* VIII.790 = *SEG* XXIV.1215 = *SB* 5.8438 = Letronne 1974: 120-1; Reddé 2004: 18.
121 Fowden 1986: 1993; *P.Ryl.* IV.616-51; *P.Herm.* 2-6; Rees 1968-69.
122 Bonneau 1964: 319-24: 353-4: 426-35.

in Alexandria appear to have had cross-regional and even cosmopolitan importance.[123]

Equally important for the issue of biculturalism is the large numbers of bilingual mummy labels, with inscriptions written in Greek and demotic. However, a large number of mummy labels were also written in demotic alone, and some partly written in hieratic. This shows a definite diversity in language or script and religious practice.[124] Equally, the care of the deceased remained the domain of Egyptian priests and mummification workshops; in these circumstances indigenous scripts remained the writings of choice, although sometimes translated into Greek.[125] While mummification remained the standard treatment for the dead, cremation and non-mummified burials are also attested.[126] In that regard, the concepts developed by modern postcolonial theorists such as hybridity or creolization, which respectively refers to the transformation of two different cultures or languages into a new 'third space' that represents 'neither the one nor the other', are not applicable to the prevailing shared cultural milieu in Roman Egypt, in which we have fluency in two distinct cultural traditions.[127] On the other hand, scholars have applied other appropriate terms to the combination or mixture of cultural traditions. 'Hybridization' is more widely used by modern archaeologists, especially in areas such as Cyprus, the Levant and Mesopotamia, which experienced a coming together of different cultures. The term is used in the sense of the blending of Greek and local cultural traditions, especially in material sources such as figurines, ceramics, temples, palaces, and houses.[128] Similarly, the term 'bilingualism' was applied largely to linguistics to the occurrence of two languages or scripts on objects such as mummy labels, ostraca, or stelae.[129] It is also used in connection with visual evidence from Roman Egypt to refer to the co-existence of a variety of iconographical traditions.[130] In the same way, the term 'biculturalism' is generally applied by scholars working on Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Whereas some have used it to refer to the fusion of Graeco-Egyptian religious traditions,[131] others have applied it to the combination of Hellenic and Egyptian cultural traditions.[132] These terms are to a large extent overlap and give the same meaning, and their use often depends on individual scholars working within different disciplinary traditions.[133] In the book, the applicability of these terms is addressed where relevant. It

is not unreasonable to suggest that inhabitants in Roman Egypt could develop a culture in which Graeco-Roman and Egyptian traditions were not separated from each other and each could play a part.

Five types of architectural expression are considered in this book in an effort to understand better how inhabitants used architecture to articulate layers of identity assertion in Roman Egypt and hopefully offer new insights into the complexities of being Roman, Greek, or Egyptian. These forms are urban space and public buildings, including temples; the temple pylon; domestic architecture; tombs, and architectural ornament. The book is, therefore, arranged on a thematic basis. The distinction between the chapters lies in the nature of the topics that are being discussed. A chronological division of the book seems illogical, because the construction history of buildings spanned over different periods, making it likely that a building is considered in more than a chapter. The absence of surviving archaeological evidence for a particular region like the Delta makes a geographical division of the book also implausible. Based upon direct field research, the book integrates the archaeological record with literary, historical, papyrological, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence. The book also makes use of results of previous and current excavations as well as archaeological reports. It equally provides catalogues for the chapters which will serve as databases for analysis. In trying to combine data from different fields in one study, it is necessary to struggle with archaeology, papyrology, and history. Throughout the book, every effort has been made to synthesise the available material and to apply a consistent interdisciplinary approach to the evidence. In an attempt to understand identity that depends on interaction between architecture and actors, an anthropological approach is applied in the relevant sections of the book by relating architectural form to cultic activity.

The book will begin with consideration of city layout, arrangement and use of urban space and public buildings in poleis and metropoleis in Roman Egypt. This places the specific building types discussed in the following chapters within a wider spatial framework. The first chapter stresses the diversity of architecture and the complexity and fluidity of ethnic or cultural identity. It also addresses the use of urban and other architectural forms in the construction of local identity. Despite the deity or deities worshipped in it, the temple for example was the religious centre of the deity of the city, and not of a specific group of inhabitants. This chapter adopts an anthropological approach by considering the correlation between architectural form and ritual activities as important evidence for reading from the archaeological record to issues of identity.

Being a self-evident symbol of Egyptian religious architecture, the second chapter suggests that the pylon offers a good example of the complexity of Romano-Egyptian society and the permeability of cultural markers of identity in Roman Egypt. The pylon cannot be used as a cultural marker of legally-defined Egyptians, because

---

[123] Fowden 1986; Rönne and Fraser 1953; Fraser 1960; Cook 1966: 23-34.

[124] Smith 2002: 235. On the bilingual Greek and demotic mummy label of Sionsis son of Tithoes: which is uncovered from Roman Panopolis: *P.Mich. inv. 4534.4 = P.Coll.Youtie. II.113*.

[125] On the Demotic Legal Code of Hermopolis West: *P.Oxy*. II.237; XLVI. 3285; Mattha 1975.

[126] Riggs 2002: 2005.

[127] On hybridity: Bhabha 1994. On Creolization: Abrahams 1983; Webster 2001.

[128] Kopsacheili 2011; Nitschke 2011; Westh-Hansen 2011.

[129] Lepsius 1866; Bresciani and Pintaudi 1987; Fewster 2002; Biville, Decourt and Rougemont 2008; Rutherford 2009.

[130] Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el Din 2004.

[131] Deschênes 1980; Guimier-Sorbets 1998.

[132] Vandorpe 2011.

[133] Campanile, Cardona, and Lazzeroni 1987.

Romans, Alexandrians, and the Hellenized elites equally participated in the construction of temple pyla and other monumental structures out of piety, not to mention other urban facilities and public buildings used by the local community. The pylon was an architectural emblem of traditional temples, but not necessarily a marker of ethnically or legally Egyptians. The third chapter focuses on cultural, social, and religious practices and rituals associated with different layers of identity assertion, and which are performed within or around the domestic space, as a feature of the complexity of the Romano-Egyptian house and the shared cultural heritage of its occupants. Again, this approach focuses on identity that depends on interaction between architectural forms and actors. The internal organization of houses is first considered, because it provides the physical framework for the rituals concerned. Special consideration is given to the difference between urban and rural housing to illustrate the diversity and complexity of reading ethnicity or culture from the Romano-Egyptian house. Then the ritual activities enacted before the front door of houses on 9 Thoth and 15 Pachon are considered. This sheds light on the use of the front door and the space in front of it as a focus of aspects of identity. The chapter ends with a consideration of the use of the internal space of the house as arena for different forms of ritual practices associated with the multi-layered identity.

Since a large part of our material evidence for Roman Egypt derives from objects and monuments created expressly to accompany or commemorate the dead, tomb iconography offers a unique opportunity to approach the religious belief and identity of inhabitants in Roman Egypt.[134] The fourth chapter addresses funerary architecture and iconography as an expression of the permeability of cultural markers of identities and as evidence for the biculturalism of the patrons. Through its close association with different forms of architecture, iconography in particular has the potential to provide a medium for constructing meaning and articulating different levels of identity.[135] The value of Bhabha's model of hybridity is considered in the light of the prevailing bicultural situation in Roman Egypt. The chapter also considers self-representation, ethnicity, hybridization, and biculturalism in tomb iconography. The final chapter deals with the correlation between architectural ornament and cultural identity. A theoretical framework on ornamental 'style' and identity is first established. Then the chapter focuses on the torus moulding, cavetto cornice, and Egyptian composite capitals with its five-tiered band and abacus both as a reflection of the changeability of cultural markers and as evidence for the hybridization of architectural ornament.[136]

---

[134] On other forms of funerary art: Borg 2000; Riggs 2002, 2005.

[135] Venit 1999, 2002a; Hales 2003.

[136] Egyptian composite capitals are quite distinct from, and not related to: the Ionic-Corinthian combination called composite capitals used in classical architecture.