
THE NATURE OF LAY
RELIGIOSITY IN ROMAN EGYPT
FROM THE SECOND TO FIFTH
CENTURIES A.D.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Tamar Elderton Welch hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the forms and nature of lay religiosity in Roman Egypt from the second through to the fifth century A.D. I clarify not only the nature of lay religiosity but also locate its relationship to the social and cultural frameworks of Roman Egypt. I employ anthropological theory and readings of religion in contemporary and early modern societies to explore the relationship between religious practices and social structures. Previously much of the secondary literature on Egyptian religion has retained a focus on ethnicity as a primary analytical frame or has followed a traditional trope of intellectual history in being interested primarily in origins and as a result has often been written within a predominant trope of 'decline'.

My approach is to locate religious activity within frameworks of social meaning within Egyptian society and thereby understand Egyptian religion as a vital and inventive element within Egyptian social mentality. This mentality is dynamic in that it shifts in form and meanings in parallel with changes in Romano-Egyptian society. The Egyptian paganism I uncover is not a religion in decline. It is a religion that builds on traditions, yet is notably eclectic in drawing influences from a range of sources and inventive in developing new forms and cults in the Roman period. The inventiveness of religious practices in Roman Egypt reflects an engagement with Mediterranean cultures, but I argue that drawing on cultural influences from outside Egypt is an attempt, in part, to understand and reflect the networks of power within the Roman empire.

Further, the Egyptian religious literature of the Roman period seems notable in the relative absence of institutional structures, hierarchies and authority. The hierarchies that emerge in the magical and Hermetic texts derive purely from religious knowledge and power, not from institutional or social status. I see Egyptian religion as emerging more fully from temple contexts and undergoing a quasi-democratisation through textual dissemination. This shift, together with the eclecticism, produce a religious mentality which is more disordered and more anarchic. Within this anarchic potential there is both an oppositional potential to Roman imperial hierarchies and a profound uncertainty about the world (especially as reflected in the magical texts).

I argue that this uncertainty is reflected in particular cultic activity, but also corresponds to anthropological models of group and grid that suggests a profound shift in Egyptian religious mentalities and a questioning of the place of the individual and the community in the cosmos. I approach these problems through detailed analysis of a variety of literary and archaeological materials, used and circulated away from the traditional temple. I examine the issue of change and continuity in traditional Egyptian religiosity in the philosophical Hermetica and the Graeco-magical papyri; and the rise of magic and its relations to individualistic religion. Key bodies of evidence include the magical papyri and the *Hermetica*.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

The study of Egypt's religious landscape is one which has provided particularly fertile grounds for ancient and modern commentators of ethnographic and religious studies. In this regard, religion has been used as a definitive marker of traditional Egyptian culture. Yet there are significant issues in seeing religion as an institutional distillation of traditional Egypt. Those problems relate particularly to how religion is viewed in modern analyses and to the nature of Egyptian religious practices in the pre-Roman period especially. During the pharaonic period, religion was inseparable from the institutionalised service of the gods on behalf of the community.¹ Temple religion represented (in one way or another) the Egyptian state. The surviving evidence we have for institutional religion (i.e. temple cult) is plentiful and stands as a lasting testament to the religion of the pharaohs. Yet, the relationship between the religion of the Temples and religious practices in the communities is more problematic. Clearly, iconography and key texts (such as the *Book of the Dead*) had wide dissemination and at least some cultic activities were based within communities external to the temple. The relationship between state, temples and community was close and we can imagine the pre-Roman Egyptian as having an integrated religious mentality that incorporated these three levels. It is, therefore, tempting to give the traditional temples, as the most obvious and impressive manifestations of Egyptian religious culture, analytical primacy in thinking about Egyptian religion and regard their prosperity and power as indicative of wider issues of religiosity. Further, a uniform system can be treated as an orthodox system in which the authority of the temple becomes far more important and significant than any heterodox, localised and particular religious practices. This creates an issue in the relationship between temple practices (seemingly orthodox and authoritative) and the nature of piety as an authentic expression of the individual's relationship to their gods. Historians of Egyptian religion (and indeed religion elsewhere in the Ancient World) have tended to sidestep issues of piety (perhaps regarding it as impervious to historical analysis) and focus on the conventional institutional histories. Evidence for personal expressions of religiosity by the 'lay' demographic has tended to be ignored or treated in isolation from their social-cultural and ideological frameworks.

¹ As reflected in the lack of a separate word in Egyptian for 'religion'. Morenz:1992, pp.3-4

In a similar way, the historiography of religion has tended to concentrate on the institutions of religion due to a tendency to locate religious feeling within a separate sphere. However, religion is a system of knowledge, part of a cosmology, about a person's place in the world. Religion operates within a public and private sphere, crossing boundaries between public and private. Similarly, religion is not just a matter of faith (about which there can probably be no history) and practice (which is institutionalised and therefore capable of historical analysis) but is a matter of practices and performances within society which enact certain social and intellectual values. In this sense the practising of religion is a performance of a certain set of social values that reinforces those values by providing them with a transcendent meaning. Religion is thus operational within society, but also formative of society and its hierarchies. One needs therefore to view religion within a societal context, not just a political or institutional context whereby religion is viewed as a discursive system of knowledge in which social identities are established and enforced. Religion is thus an anthropological factor, and must be interpreted within a social anthropology, not as an institutional form: in this way one differentiates the approach from studies of religious institutions, but also studies of ethnicity, since the ethnic basis of religion is only significant if ethnicity is in itself a primary element in the constitution of a society. Otherwise ethnic origins matter very little since what is important is the discursive meaning of religious practices and beliefs. For ethnic origins to be important, one would have to make a strong case for both the consciousness of and significance of those origins.

As I will discuss, the history of religion has tended to be approached by scholars in terms of its institutional forms. As defined by Roland Robertson, institutional religion can be thought of as a "viable religious commitment and practice as these are discoverable in terms of formal organisation and culturally well-accepted conceptions".² The issue with analysing religion in its institutional forms is that, whilst giving a deeper understanding of the workings of said system, it will often isolate religiosity from the cultural system from which it derived³. Also the problem of assuming the religiosity of a system as a whole as equivalent to the religiosity of an individual misses the interaction of complex elements of beliefs for a set of generalised statements of belief. In recognition of this issue, sociological analyses have in recent years moved away from the study of institutionalised religion to focus more on the study of individual religiosity.⁴ In the field of ancient history, the study of individual religiosity is met with the additional difficulties that

² Robertson:1970, p.3

³ An example of this can be seen in the attempt of the Indian post-imperial government of 1946 to create a distinction between Hinduism and secular institutions. As Hinduism is a way of life rather than purely a religious institution, such artificial distinctions could not be drawn. Ibid, p.46

⁴ Nottingham:1971, p.312

survival of evidence for personal piety entails. Thus the history of religion in Roman Egypt has been rarely analysed in its fullest context. Religion should not be viewed as a separate sphere of activity particularly with regards to the socio-religious context of Roman Egypt in which there were strong theocratic tendencies, i.e. religion was inextricably bound within the economic and political frameworks.⁵ Religious phenomena as described by its constituent myths, rituals and institutions have therefore not been analysed in terms of its wider cultural and philosophical contexts.

Freeing myself of the limited parameters of traditional studies allows me to demonstrate that the religion of Roman Egypt developed a highly idiosyncratic belief system, distinct from both the temple, domestic and philosophic circles of the period. This view runs contrary to views expressed by scholars such as Fowden, Frankfurter, Bagnall and Morenz, who argue that there is no distinction between institutional and popular religion, i.e. that they are merely domestic forms of temple ritual (Bagnall:1993, p.261, Morenz, 1992, pp.81-109) or that the religio-magical literature of Roman Egypt is the preserve of a narrow and isolated intellectual elite (Fowden:1993, pp.188-192) operating at the highest end of a two tier system of village ritual specialist versus educated itinerant priest (i.e. grand traditions verses little traditions. Frankfurter: 1998, p.222 and Frankfurter: 2001, p.215).

Furthermore, I can demonstrate via the evidence of the philosophic *Hermetica* and the *Graeco-Magical Papyri* (or *PGM*) that these circles were actually highly inclusive, individualistic and contemplative. They re-etymologise the religious, mythological and philosophical material from a broad range of traditions in an idiom whose origins stem from temple ritual. Such a conclusion is paradoxical within the established interpretative traditions of religious history. The *religio mentis* of Roman Egypt as represented by these texts is one which defies tradition Weberian and Protestant teleology, in that it is both contemplative and magical.

I can also establish that through careful analysis of this material within the context of the societal rather than institutional framework, it is possible to discern the changing social identities and preoccupations that integration into an expanded world-view brings. The perception of the cosmos represented in these texts is of a loosely structured, chaotic world inhabited by a host of new and capricious supernatural entities. The function of these texts is the empowerment of the individual to control these forces via direct contact with the Supreme deity. Through the correct application of knowledge, the texts promise a form of *apotheosis* on this mortal plain, reflecting

⁵ Ibid, p.69

ideas which can be argued to be anti-imperial (opposing Graf's view of a neatly hierarchical and stratified cosmology) but reflect mostly the perception of a weakening of the social body. I show the perceived fragmentation of the unified social body, under the profusion of cultural influences, led to an increase in ritual usage (facilitated by traditional cultic knowledge and magical practices) in line with the shift towards a more individualistic and independent approach to religion. The literary evidence is therefore representative of a milieu in Roman Egypt that sought direct personal access to the divine without the necessity of institutional apparatus.

1.2 *Historiography: The decline of the temple*

It is the aim of my research to uncover the broad contours of religious mentalities; however the historiography of religion in Roman Egypt has tended to focus on three central themes. Firstly that the dominant focus has been on temples as the central element of institutional religion, and the major analysis has been the reasons for the 'decline' of Egyptian temple religion and its relationship to the rise of Christianity, which parallels considerations of the religious history of the period elsewhere. In traditional analysis by scholars such as Milne,⁶ Wallace,⁷ Sharpe⁸ and Rees,⁹ the explanation for the decline has been squarely attributed to the religious and taxation reforms of Augustus and the triumph of redemptive religion. This argument focuses upon the measures brought about in 19/20 BC under the prefect Petronius, who confiscated temple lands and offered the priesthood two options in return: to either rent back the lands or accept a subsidy (*συνταξίς*). The ramifications were argued to result in increased financial burdens for those choosing to rent and for those in receipt of the *συνταξίς*, an increasing dependence upon the vicissitudes of the Roman administration's subsidy payments.¹⁰ Despite the exemption from the poll tax, the erosion of traditional rights and privileges such as the *ὑπέρ σφραγισμοῦ* (the fee charged for the 'sealing' of sacrificial animals which was originally paid directly to the priesthood but by Hadrian's reign was diverted to the government¹¹), and the power of asylum, gradually reduced the income and influence of temple infrastructure.

⁶ Milne, G:1898, Milne, G: 1927

⁷ Wallace:1969

⁸ Sharpe: 1842

⁹ Rees:1950

¹⁰ As demonstrated in the records from the temple at Soknebtunis, payments of the *συνταξίς* ceased in 233-4 CE (Evans, J.A.S. 'A Social and Economic History of an Egyptian Temple in the Greco-Roman Period', YCS 17, 1961, p.213-4). This appears to reflect a general trend due to the complaints of failed payments from BGU IV 1197, 1200, II 707; Hawara Archiv 5 p.387, no. 188; P.Lond. II 359; P.Teb. II 298, 302; SB XXII 184; P. Oxy. VII 1046

¹¹ Evans, J: 1961, p.255-6

One such example of this traditional view can be found in Sharpe's *History of Egypt under the Romans*¹² in which his views on the history of religion in Roman Egypt can be summarised in three points: Firstly, the decline of Egyptian religion was due to a lack of infrastructure to uphold the beliefs of the followers. Secondly, Christianity had a greater number of truths. Thirdly, Egyptian religion was inherently segregated into a low version for the "vulgar masses" and a high one for the "learned in the schools and priests in sacred colleges" who kept the sacred doctrines secret due to disbelief on their own part.¹³ The distinct prejudice towards the superiority of Christianity and the association of paganism with intellectual impoverishment is an undercurrent in many of the discussions of religious history of this period.

Grafton Milne wrote extensively on Roman Egypt in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. In his *A History of Egypt under Roman rule* (1899) and 'The ruin of Egypt by Roman mismanagement' (1927),¹⁴ Milne was amongst those to attribute the decline of temples to the familiar tropes of Augustan reorganisation of temple administration, secularisation of its property, and the social inferiority of those who supported Egyptian cult. Milne argues that Augustus disapproved of Egyptian cults and therefore sought to control the temples to prevent them becoming a focus for nationalistic uprising.¹⁵ The confiscation of temple lands resulted in a reduction of the revenue for the priesthood as part of a larger government policy to secure all private properties in Egypt.¹⁶ Securing temple property into the crown's estate, Augustus centralised the administration of the temple under the High Priest of Alexandria and created the secular office of *Idios Logos* to ensure the priesthood adhered to regulations.¹⁷ Milne then comments that the devotees of the Egyptian cults would have been a "poor and illiterate class"¹⁸ and that the clergy were wholly muzzled via the control of the inspectors of the office of the *Idios Logos* until direct management passed to the College of Elders and the establishment of local senates in 200AD. Milne paints a picture of a regime under which the temples and the economy of Egypt were exploited till breaking point. With regards to the general economy, he uses the examples of the diversion of corn tax away from the 'indigenous court' to Rome coupled with the removal of import levies in favour of Roman merchants to explain economic decline.¹⁹ With the additional financial impositions of a universal direct poll tax and the demand for cash in lieu

¹² Sharpe's *History of Egypt under the Romans*¹², Edward Moxon, London, 1842

¹³ Ibid, p.91-92

¹⁴ Milne, G: 1927

¹⁵ Milne, G:1898, p.33 & p.181

¹⁶ Milne:1927, p.4

¹⁷ Milne:1898, p.182

¹⁸ Ibid, p.192

¹⁹ Milne:1927, p.3

of the traditional payment in kind such as military service,²⁰ Egypt's economic infrastructure was put under incredible strain. Milne asserts that the disenfranchisement of the administrative classes in favour of Roman officials alongside other reforms such as the changes that made tax collectors (who were indigenous Graeco-Egyptians) personally liable for any deficits,²¹ the devaluation of the Egyptian currency, and trade restrictions,²² nullifies any benefits such as the improvement to the irrigation system that may have resulted from Roman intervention. In short Milne sought to address the misconception that decline did not occur in Roman Egypt until two centuries later²³ and locates the causes as due to a programme which deliberately and systematically sought to exploit Egypt's resources.

In a similar vein, J.E.G. Whitehorne in his 'New light on Temple and State in Roman Egypt' makes reference to three previously unpublished papyri dating from the mid second century AD, demonstrating the increasingly robust administrative measures that sought to curb the rights of the priesthood. Whitehorne describes the innovations under the Roman regime as beginning with the resumption of temple lands with the option to either accept the *συντάξις* (as under the Ptolemaic system) or to rent the land at a fixed price.²⁴ Then under the prefect Turranius in 4 BC, there was a requirement for all those attached to the temple to register themselves. Whitehorne sees this as potentially the opening salvo in a campaign against exemption from the liturgies itself (although he does admit that it could also merely be a means for the administration to rid itself of those who strictly have no eligibility for exemption). He then continues by stating that the increase in petitions by priests and the resulting edicts reiterating the priesthoods' rights of exemption (e.g. the edict by prefect L.Lustius Geta in AD 54 and *P.Phil.* 1 i.18-34), meant tax collectors were more frequently encroaching on these rights. Importantly by AD 103-7 an edict was released which narrowed the criteria for exemption, i.e. it was no longer enough to be a priest, but they must now also not farm private land (lines 24-5).²⁵ The petitions continued through the early second century (e.g. *BGU* 176 and *P. Aberdeen*) but by AD 171, the priests were no longer taking issue with exemption from the liturgies, but in performing them far from home. Thus Whitehorne argues we see a slow erosion of priestly rights under Roman management which resulted in a decrease in the number of priestly offices. The decline was such that some

²⁰ Ibid, p.4-5

²¹ Ibid, p.5

²² Ibid, p.6-7

²³ Milne reinforces this point by detailing the attempts by Severus and Diocletian, to arrest the economic decline by granting greater autonomy to local senates to collect tax under Severus and assimilated the currency to the rest of the Empire under Diocletian – pp.9-10

²⁴ Whitehorne: 1981, p.220

²⁵ Ibid, p.220

temples did not have a single priest to maintain the cults (the inclusion of a stipulation within the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* that priests from neighbouring villages can be called upon in these instances, demonstrates that this state of affairs occurred from time to time and not just in isolated instances). This is the backdrop used to introduce the three new papyri, which Whitehorne argues shows the extent of Roman intervention in matters of temple revenues.

The first is a letter preserved in a Papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dating from the mid second century AD (P.Oxy. inv.45 5B 55/B 1-3a) in which the *strategus* instructs Ammonius to supply detailed records concerning plots of land he owns within the precincts of Athena in Thenepmoi.²⁶ Whitehorne speculates that Ammonius is most likely a member of the *pastophori* and that the demand for these records stemmed from a ruling by the current *idios logos* (Claudius Justus) which states that only those who were connected to individuals who submitted a valuation of their property under Tuscus could legally lay claim to the plots. This pronouncement affected not just those like Ammonius's plots at Athena's shrine but as a general ruling, the entire nome. Thus, Tuscus' records were of considerable importance in evaluating future property rights connected with the temple. Tuscus is referenced again in the second papyrus discussed by Whitehorne (*P.Lond.II* 359, p.150), in which his valuations are used to determine the amount of tax owed in a report on the progress of a court case.²⁷ The impact of these papyri is that they demonstrate that Egyptian priests were made to submit a valuation of their property which would later be used by the *Idios Logos* to determine property rights, as well as submitting detailed account of their revenues and their dues in their annual returns.

The third text (*SB VI* 9066) dates from the reign of Antoninus Pius and describes the allegations of Harpagathes (a priest of Socnopaeus at Socnopaeou Nesus) against his fellow priests of charging excessive dues and illegally manufacturing oilskins. In this account is a declaration by the accused to check the report of the temple's dues inferred not to be the annual temple returns but the valuation undertaken by Tuscus.²⁸ Whitehorne proposes that this Tuscus is most likely the same Tuscus involved in a dispute with veterans in AD 63 as to their rights and privileges in Egypt. He argues that these documents demonstrate a "nit-picking attitude about their [veterans and the priesthood] privileges... particularly if his [Tuscus'] brief was to generate more revenue for the emperor".²⁹ The imposition of these reports upon the priesthood, he argues, effectively bound them to a set of valuations and submission that made future growth

²⁶ Ibid, p.221

²⁷ Ibid, p.221-4

²⁸ Ibid, p.224

²⁹ Ibid, p.226

very difficult and thus were an important milestone in the gradual decline of the temple infrastructure.

Other works relating to the history of religion in Roman Egypt sought an explanation for the decline in temple religion as a product of an increasing desire for a redemptive and personalised religion. Examples of this view are present in the works of Rees³⁰ and Bell³¹, whose independent surveys on the nature of religion in Roman Egypt looked for an explanation for the success of Christianity at the expense of traditional cults. Rees builds his argument with an examination of pagan practices which express the religious needs of the everyman, from oracle slips, magical texts, to healing cults. He states that the adoption of these practices by the Christian church, helped to 'bridge the gap' between the two religions, easing assimilation into the wider population (for example, the use of invocations to the saints and God to answer everyday problems as akin to oracle requests, invocations of angelic names as similar to pantheism and the use of St Michael's prayer and the Lord's prayer as particularly efficacious as a magical device³²). Rees then explains that the additional 'advantage' Christianity had over temple cultus lay in its universal appeal to all in society - its tenets could be readily understood by everyone unlike the "esoteric" and "expensive" Egyptian cults which acted a barrier to the uneducated and poor.³³ This is in part due to the nature of having a holy book which provides a religious terminology and an orthodoxy for discussing matters of faith, and in part by describing god as a fatherly figure which Rees supposes would be more relatable than pagan gods ("Religion ceased to be remote, something to be sought when needed, in temples or local shrines.").³⁴ Finally he argues that as the Christian church became land owners, they began to fulfil the secular functions previously supplied by the temples under the Ptolemies, such as feeding the poor, thereby becoming indispensable to their communities.³⁵

A contemporary of Rees, Idris Bell shared a similar notion that the rise in Christianity was due to the relative shortcomings of pagan spirituality by comparison to the superior and sophisticated Christian philosophy. In his early chapters Bell sets the scene for the separate roles Greek religion and philosophy played in civic life and likewise how the institutions of temple and

³⁰ Rees, 'Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt II. The Transition to Christianity' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 36 (Dec. 1950) pp.86-100

³¹ Bell, I:1953

³² Rees: 1950, pp. 86-89

³³ *Ibid*, p. 94

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.96-97

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.93

secular power in Egypt were closely allied in the pharaonic period.³⁶ He then follows this with a description of the Jewish communities in Egypt and their interactions with other ethnic groups in Egypt prior to the Roman conquest (Chapter Two: The Jews in Egypt). Bell notes that the Roman administration had a negative impact upon traditional Egyptian cult (as evidenced by the decreasing numbers of priests and the declining quality of mummification practices and hieroglyphic engraving), however, interest in spiritual matters was flourishing. The changes in religious infrastructure are seen as precursors to the growth in individual rather than communal relationship with god and the increasingly syncretic deities as leading a trend to see gods as manifestations of one transcendent god.³⁷ He also credits the imperial regime with an increase in the popular consciousness of a sense of sin and thus a desire to redeem oneself:

“Constantly, in the thought of the Imperial period, we are conscious of what can only be described as a sense of sin, a realisation of man’s weakness and corruption, a craving for a redemptive religion and closer union with god that could not be satisfied with materialistic rationalism.”³⁸

Unlike Rees’ approach in accounting for Christianity’s success as due to the secular and assimilative roles fulfilled by the church, Bell relates it to the appeal of Christian values. Of these, crucial is the idea of incarnation, in which Christ is depicted as a sympathetic figure of recent history who was both god and man and unlike other dying gods such as Osiris, Adonis et al, sacrificed himself of his own volition. This, Bell maintains, was an attractive idea to men conscious of the evil around them.³⁹ Another appeal of Christianity is the concept that through god’s love of all mankind, all were capable of receiving divine grace. This sits in contrast to other means of *gnōsis* which were acquired through intellectual means, disbaring the poor and uneducated and therefore only available to the elite.⁴⁰ Finally, Bell argues that the doctrine of Love as a Christian virtue created a cohesive force which the fluidity of paganism lacked. The ferocity of the persecutions forced Christians to become a better organised sect with a stronger sense of group identity than other cults, such as those of Mithras and Isis which operated as localised independent groups.⁴¹ Ending his analysis with the statement - “[paganism] had been conquered by the truer and finer religion which at last brought the solution of problems which

³⁶ Bell: 1954, pp.2-24

³⁷ Ibid, p.65

³⁸ Ibid, p.69-70

³⁹ Ibid, p.103

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.104

⁴¹ Ibid, pp.104-5

paganism had posed but to which it found answer”,⁴² Bell reiterates the ‘triumphalism of Christianity’ bias that was predominant in the study of ancient religion.

1.2.1 *Historiography: The decline of the temple due to institutional ‘gap’*

The most recent analyses have tended to move away from such pejorative statements. Similarly, the view of temples in decline under Roman malign influence and anti-Egyptian policy had been rejected. Invaluable contributions from historians such as Capponi,⁴³ Whitehorne,⁴⁴ Glare,⁴⁵ Alston,⁴⁶ Bagnall,⁴⁷ Rathbone⁴⁸ and Kaper,⁴⁹ attribute the decline to a ‘gap’ in institutional religious practice, a period of temple decline in the late second or third century which predates the rise of post-Constantinian Christianity religion in the late fourth century. As outlined above, the traditional analysis viewed the decline of temple religion as directly influenced by punitive Roman administration due to temple land confiscation under Augustus and increased taxation. However, the traditional attribution of Roman mal-administration for the decline of temple infrastructure has come into disrepute in more recent research. Scholars such as Capponi⁵⁰ and Glare⁵¹ have made the argument that the rates of taxation had remained relatively unchanged since the Ptolemaic era (with the exception of land confiscation, though this is disputed by Glare who admits taxation may have had a negative effect on temples) at the rate of 1-2 artabai per aroura.⁵² Glare makes the case that temple administration (including aspects such as increased tax and liturgical burdens, increased control and reduction of temple revenues⁵³) under the Romans marked a continuity with Ptolemaic antecedents and as such there was no malicious attempt to undermine them. Moreover the temples were not a focus for nationalistic opposition due to the fluidity and loose organisation of temple personnel.⁵⁴ Where Roman innovations are more marked is their strict regulation of cult regulations, the

⁴² Ibid, p.105

⁴³ Capponi: 2005

⁴⁴ Whitehorne, J. ‘New light on temple and state in Roman Egypt’, *Journal of Religious History* 11, pp. 218-26.1980-81

⁴⁵ Glare, P. *Temples of Egypt*, 1993

⁴⁶ Alston, R: 2002, p.273

⁴⁷ Bagnall:1993, p.3267–8, and Bagnall: 2004

⁴⁸ Rathbone:2004, Rathbone:1993

⁴⁹ Kaper:1998

⁵⁰ Capponi, L. *Augusta Egypt, The Creation of a Roman Province*, Studies in Classics, Routledge, 2005, p.152-3 and Rathbone ‘Egypt, Augustus and Roman Taxation’, *Cahier G.Glot* 2 1993 p.81-112

⁵¹ Glare, P. ‘Temples of Egypt’ p.60-85

⁵² Capponi:2005, p.152

⁵³ Glare:1993, p.33

⁵⁴ Ibid, pps 86-106

introduction of compulsory services and the more Roman character of the Imperial cult in Egypt.⁵⁵

In terms of fiscal analysis of the taxation trends, Otto, Wilcken, Johnson and Wallace contributed surveys which demonstrate that throughout the first three centuries there was no rise in taxes. Rathbone's analysis of the impact of Augustus' taxation upon Roman Egypt, similarly argues that the 'innovations' were in line with the previous Ptolemaic system coupled with some minor changes. Examples of Augustus' use of pharaonic/Ptolemaic administrative traditions include: 1) the continuation of the Nome as a geographical, cultural and administrative boundary, each with their own idiosyncratic names of taxes, officials and land-tenure regulations;⁵⁶ 2) Alexandria remained exempt from direct royal taxation (as it was under the Ptolemies); 3) Although there were changes made to the categorisation of public and private land (with the *hierarge* sub-categorised as a type of state land), which determined whether the dues were paid to the *demoision* instead of the *basilikon*, they were all subject to the same system derived from Ptolemaic practices.⁵⁷ The innovations that were implemented by Roman administration reflect recognition of the status of certain societal classes rather than a systematic destruction of temple revenues, for example, under the Ptolemaic period owners of private land were subject to military service as well as a 10-20% tax on harvests in lieu of a rent. The Romans removed the military obligation as well as restrictions on individuals accumulating land, creating a propertied class in Roman Egypt.⁵⁸ In conclusion, Rathbone argues that existing land rights and categories of taxation from the Ptolemaic system were largely respected; the only major developments being the terminology of land ownership and taxation. In fact, in opposition to the traditional view that Egypt was treated differently to other Roman provinces, Rathbone argues that by classifying lands under *ager publicus* and *ager privatus*, Augustus was bringing Egypt into line with the administrative template set for the Republican provinces of Sicily and Greece.

This fiscal evidence against the decline of the temple due to Roman maladministration is also supported by the archaeological evidence we have for temple activity during this period. In her article 'Fringes are anchored in warp and weft: The relations between Berenike, Shenef and the

⁵⁵ Ibid, pps.154-172

⁵⁶ Rathbone: 1993, p.82

⁵⁷ State land was taxed according to similar principles laid out by the Ptolemaic system, based on the quality of the Nile flood. Taxation of *ge idiotike* or private land (vines, plantations and allotments) was taxed similar to the Ptolemaic system, with variations between Nomes but minor changes were made under Roman rule with new land created or sold-off if out of production. Ibid, p.84

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.84

Nile Valley’,⁵⁹ Wendrich details archaeological evidence from excavations at Berenike, that demonstrate the continuation of ‘pagan’ practices in the 5th and 6th centuries. The evidence is in the form of a group of offering tables (datable to 5th/6th century AD) thought to be part of a cache of pagan temple furniture. In an adjacent trench are indications of a building used as a pagan shrine used from at least the beginning of third century until the sixth century AD. Excavations in 1998 on the northern side also reveal a building in which a wealth of temple furniture was stored (trench BE98-23). The date of these artefacts shows that despite the numerous decrees throughout the 4-5th centuries amounting to the closing of temples and banning pagan worship, Berenike (as with Philae) continued pagan practice until the sixth century.⁶⁰

The continuities of pagan practices at certain centres at Berenike but also and more famously the temple of Isis at Aswan, suggests that there was a complex relationship between the advent of Christianity and the closing of temples (i.e. the decline was not due to an inclination away from indigenous practices towards a more ‘redemptive’ religion). Further, pagan practices continued despite lack of temple infrastructure and are attested among the ‘philosophers’ of Alexandria into the fifth and probably sixth centuries.

There is also considerable evidence for a decline in traditional temples pre-dating the rise of Christianity. The Stele inscription from Koptos, for instance, dating to 32 AD inscribed by Parthenios the ‘financial director’ of the temple mentions repairs to temples which had fallen into disuse.⁶¹ Bagnall has argued that the decline started much earlier than previously assumed. He sees the situation as a slow starvation of the traditional cults: “the decline of construction, decoration, and inscriptions after Augustus to virtual extinction after Antoninus”.⁶² This suggests a gradual decline though this was not a smooth transition: the reign of Antoninus Pius saw a high level of building activity in the temples which remains unexplained. Other scholars have attributed the decline to ‘the alienating Greco-Roman influence, the impoverishment of the country and the spread of Christianity’; the dominance of Hellenic culture over traditional cultural expression coupled with the deterioration of hieratic, demotic and hieroglyphic text during this period.⁶³ Bagnall’s reading depends heavily on dated epigraphy, mostly Greek. Despite this decline, the archaeological evidence for temple building shows that, conversely,

⁵⁹ Wendrich.W: 1998, pp.243-249

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.243-249

⁶¹ Bagnall and Rathbone: 2004, p.216

⁶² Bagnall:1993, pp.267-268

⁶³ J Quaegebeur (1980:p. 115) cited in Kaper:1998, p.139, also cf Bagnall: 1988, pp.288-89; Osing: 1997, pp.352-53

temple construction continued until the mid-second century AD and decorations and repairs till mid third.⁶⁴ In Kaper's⁶⁵ review of temple building during the Roman period in the Egyptian deserts, he builds on the survey compiled by J.C. Grenier,⁶⁶ charting the sites of temple building and renovation during the Roman period. His conclusions demonstrate that temples continued to be erected in the traditional style and building activity temporarily increased under new Roman management. Kaper establishes that such extensive works could only be initiated by central authorities.⁶⁷ Major works were still being carried out at Esna even as late as the reign of Decius (249-251AD). The most recent temple in Egypt is traced to the Tahta sanctuary dating to the reign of Maximinus Daia (305-313 AD).⁶⁸

Kaper identifies the sites that show the development of temple construction in the Eastern Fringe dating to the Roman period as Berenike, Mons Claudianus, Mons Porphyrites, Mons Smaragdus and Semna (with only Berenike decorated in the Egyptian style which he attributes as related to the fact that these temples were built by private individuals for the benefit of a multinational community⁶⁹). The increase in temple building under Trajan and Hadrian is speculated to be due to the increased exploitation of the quarry sites. Conversely the Western Fringe sees marked Roman engagement at Siwa in late first and early second century AD.⁷⁰ The expansion of temple building at these sites is attributed to the marked population increase that took place during the Roman period at southern oasis.⁷¹ Kaper's findings show that (bearing in mind the caveat that the surviving temple remains show a heavy geographical bias⁷²), epigraphic and archaeological evidence for the great oasis in the south indicate that many of the pharaonic and Ptolemaic temples were still functioning as well alongside the temples dating from the Julian-Claudian dynasties. This proves that activity in the oases increased during the second half of the first century, probably in line with increased economic exploitation of the oases. The major difference between temple building in the eastern and western desert is the role played by private funding. The Greek inscriptions in the eastern desert name a private individual responsible for

⁶⁴ Bagnall and Rathbone: 2004, p.41

⁶⁵ Kaper, O. 'Temple Building in the Egyptian Deserts', 1998

⁶⁶ Grenier, J.C: 'La religion traditionnelle: temples et clergés' in *Egypte Romaine: l'autre Egypte*, catalogue de l'exhibition Marseille, 1997, p.175-177

⁶⁷ Kaper: 1998, pp.144-145

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.144

⁶⁹ Building inscriptions from Mons C and P indicate they were result by imperial slave Epaphroditos without state participation – Kaper, p.149

⁷⁰ Dush Hibis, Qasr ez-zayan, Ain Birbiya, Deir el-Haggar, Ismant el-kharab

⁷¹ Kaper:1998, p.148-9

⁷² With the exception of Alexandria, none of the delta sites has yielded evidence for Roman temple building. This is unusual as temples from earlier periods remain. Therefore a likely explanation is that many temples from the area surrounding Alexandria would have been subject to the systematic destruction of shrines by Christians following the edict of Theophius in 391/392 AD. Kaper:1998, p.150

dedicating the shrine to the emperor. Whether public money was used remains open to question.⁷³ In the Western desert, private sponsorship occurs in relation to dedications of votive gifts to temples, as was common all over Egypt. Gifts in the form of building extensions may all date from a time where state support was lacking.

The historiography suggests a very mixed pattern of temple building and maintenance. There is evidence from the Nile valley that some temples may have struggled to maintain their core cadre of priests and that even temple buildings may have fallen into decline. It seems possible that some temples were no longer in use by the time the Christian emperors started to pronounce against pagan temples. Nevertheless, we need to be careful in regard to the anecdotal nature of the papyri: a complaint from a priest of a particular temple should not obviously be generalised. Conversely, in fringe areas, exactly the areas where we might expect investment in new traditional temples, we find new temples being built. Even in the Nile Valley proper, where many cities already had large temple complexes, new builds of smaller temples or sanctuaries within temple complexes appear to have been quite common. We can conclude positively that there was no province-wide pattern of temple decline, no evidence of a systematic rejection of traditional Egyptian religious institutions in the first two centuries or more of Roman rule, and the temples themselves provide no evidence for a sustained decline in traditional Egyptian religion.

1.3 *Historiography: Religion, Assimilation and Resistance*

The second observable trend in the historiography of religion in Roman Egypt centres on religion as a site of assimilation or resistance (Frankfurter/Fowden).⁷⁴ The Egyptian identity of religion, institutionalised in the temples and the continuation of Demotic and Hieroglyphic (as in the temple at Tebtunis) has been seen as challenged by Hellenisation and the incorporation of the temples into the administrative and cultural systems of the *metropoleis*. Contrary in this debate are functional analyses of religious activity (Frankfurter) which argue for continuity in function even if there is change in form and evidence of iconographic continuity between pagan and Christian cult, for example, the Isis-Harpokrates: Mary-Christ imagery. Early analyses on the subject tended towards a post enlightenment view that the indigenous religious practices were in direct competition with an intellectually and religiously superior Christian and Jewish doctrines.

⁷³ Ibid, p.152

⁷⁴ Frankfurter, D: 1998 and Fowden, G: 1993

These secular and ethical considerations have been viewed alongside the decline of the indigenous infrastructure as the main causes of disappearance of native religious practices.

Frankfurter however argues in his *Religion in Roman Egypt: Resistance and Assimilation*, that Egyptian religion not only survived the economic decline of the temple, but positively thrived and helped shape the contours of Coptic Christianity. A cornerstone for much of his analysis is Redfield's anthropological model of 'great' traditions (represented by an urban orthodox community) and 'little' traditions (provincial, local practices).⁷⁵ These he argues, provide an idiom by which religious traditions are expressed, maintained and also new ideas are interpreted and 'indigenized'. Within the context of the reduction of temple services and encroachment of other religious ideologies, Frankfurter describes a centrifugal movement away from centralised religious practices to local domestic/popular activities. In this way, in opposition to the perceived decline, there is sustained resilience, bolstered in part by the function of the priest within society even as the temples were closing. In his model for the changing role of the priest in Roman Egypt, Frankfurter describes how by virtue of their charisma and ritual expertise, priests were still able to maintain their social status within the community, with some re-envisioning themselves in the mould of *magos* to appeal to the urban Hellenised clients and producing the magical papyri which would later become assimilated into some Christian institutions.⁷⁶ Frankfurter here (as elsewhere) formulates his understanding of religious activities based upon an analysis of institutionalised religion. In his history of religion in Roman Egypt, Frankfurter's reduction of religious practices to binary terms of high and low culture as a by-product of the decline of temples continues the tradition of writing about religion in terms of writing about institutions. This is an approach I hope to avoid by keeping the focus of my analysis on the sociology of religious experience beyond the temple.

Following on from the theme of assimilation and cultural transfer of religious ideas is the analysis focusing on the cult of Isis. Here research has uncovered the breadth of the cult's popularity and uptake across the Roman Empire as well as its survival due to Isis's assimilative qualities into the iconography of the Virgin Mary. Notable contributions to the field have included R.Witt's *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*⁷⁷ in which Witt reviews ancient sources and archaeological evidence to uncover the development of the cult of Isis from its earliest inception through to the fourth century AD. Witt goes to great lengths to fully document the nature of

⁷⁵ Frankfurter:1998, pp.6-7

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.9

⁷⁷ Witt:1971

Isis' iconography and the manner in which her cult was received (as well as detailing the regional variations) as her cult centres spread throughout the Mediterranean world. In chapters 1-3, Witt embarks on a description of Isis as preserved within the mythological depictions in Egyptian canon. He then dedicates the next two chapters to the description of the cult as it was worshipped in Greece and Greek settlements outside of Egypt. Chapter six discusses the adoption of the cult in Italy and its reception there. Chapters 7 and 8 then proceed to the discussions of the nature and organisation of the priesthood and a study of the hymns and litanies produced by them. Here (particularly in chapter 8), Witt goes into great detail displaying the weight of evidence for Egyptian elements over Hellenistic elements in aretologies, concluding that they are composed in Egypt, but for distribution amongst a Greek audience. The second half of the book covers the identification of Isis with mother goddesses, her association with Artemis, her role in incubation and healing practices and the assimilation of Anubis to Hermes, Isis to Mary and Horus to Jesus. The final chapters of the book focus on the importance of the Isis cult to the development of Christianity. Witt's main arguments revolve around the similarities between the iconography (as well as specific anecdotes such as the blinding of Paul on the road to Damascus⁷⁸) and theological speculations within the New Testament which have found to have antecedents in Egyptian mythology. He argues that the debt Christianity owed to Isis is substantial not only in terms of the use of certain epithets and iconography but also in terms of the ethical dimension central to the cult. The appeal of Isis and the breadth of her attributes, according to Witt, allowed for easy assimilation into the early Christian canon and ultimately helped to shape Christian theology thinking and practices. Other authors have taken a similar approach to the Isiac material in terms of delineating the nature of cult and its spread (for example S. Heyob's *Cult of Isis among women in the Graeco-Roman world*,⁷⁹ M. Versluys' 'Isis Capitolina and the Egyptian Cults in Late Republican Rome',⁸⁰ Dunand's *Le Culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée*⁸¹ and F. Solmsen's *Isis among the Greeks and Romans*⁸²). J. Alvar argues that Isis' appeal to the empire lay in her role in Egyptian mythology in maintaining cohesiveness within the family, political cohesiveness, and on a mystical level, cosmic order.⁸³

This is also a theme adopted by Takacs (*Isis and Sarapis in the Roman world*, 1995) who examines the reception of the cults of Isis and Serapis into the Roman Empire. Her purpose is threefold:

⁷⁸ Witt: 1971, Chapter XIX, pps 255-269.

⁷⁹ Heyob: 1975

⁸⁰ Versluys, M. 'Isis Capitolina and the Egyptian Cults in Late Republican Rome', in *Isis en occident* Leiden: Brill, 2004

⁸¹ Dunand:1973

⁸² Here Solmsen traces the historical processes by which Isis assimilates other deities to become a universal goddess and traces the major stages of her reception: Solmsen:1979

⁸³ Alvar:2008, pps 4-51

to gain a better understand the mechanism of assimilation of these cults; to examine Isis and Serapis functioning outside their normal cultic context; and to see their function in the Rhine and Danube provinces.⁸⁴ She dispels many of the misconceptions associated with these cults and the imperial attitude towards them (e.g. that they were cults of the lower strata of Roman society, that their success was in part due to declining Roman religion and that they were viewed negatively as contrasting with the Roman *mos maiorum*). On the contrary, Takacs confirms the view that the cult of Isis was readily assimilated due to her role as one who gives structure to the universe, ensuring a place for each individual.⁸⁵ For Takacs, Augustan pronouncements against the Egyptian *Sacra* were an aberration based purely on political sensitivities and propaganda rather than real religious tensions.⁸⁶

More recent scholarship has taken a more critical position, contrasting the Christian Mary to the pagan Isis⁸⁷ and has discussed the cult in relation to female spirituality and patterns of dissemination.⁸⁸ A notable example is Donalson's *The Cult of Isis in the Roman Empire*⁸⁹ in which after a lengthy description of the goddess' chief attributes, the features of her cult, the calendar and festivals, the construction of the temples and the development of the cult under various emperors (until Commodus), he infers that the religious attributes of Mary and Isis were really a front for a more universal, continuous syncretistic female deity encompassing the roles of Minerva, Demeter, Hekate and Diana (in which Mary is seen as a less dynamic embodiment of female spirituality).

“To overlook the importance of such examples [in reference to the appearance of other goddesses, such as Diana, in Isiac iconography] would be to mislead the student into the false impression that Isiacism remained a separate and ‘foreign’ cult.”⁹⁰

Garth Fowden also takes up the theme of assimilation and resistance in his work *The Egyptian Hermes*, in which he sheds a new light on the Hermetic corpus by discerning the sociological and religious milieu in which it developed. His book is split into three parts with the first part

⁸⁴ Takacs:1995, p.1

⁸⁵ Takacs:1995, pps.18-29

⁸⁶ Takacs:1995, p.77

⁸⁷ Cf Tran Tam Tinh: 1973 who argues against the impact of *Isis lactans* on the iconography of Maria Lactans.

⁸⁸ For discussion on the appeal of oriental mystery cults and explanation for their success and eventual decline cf Turcan: 2000 (he argues they offered solidarity and a sense of certainty amongst their members during a time of anxiety. But their diversity and lack of coherence in the face of strong Christian doctrine, had the opposite effect in later times)

⁸⁹ Donalson:2003

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.vi

describing the variety of Greek and Egyptian thought in the Nile valley, from which the *Hermetica* was formed. In the second part Fowden argues that there was no discontinuity between the technical and the philosophic *Hermetica* (in opposition to the divisions postulated by earlier scholars). In fact, the philosophic, astrological and alchemical aspects of the writings are representative of the Hermetist's assimilation of certain aspects of an eclectic, philosophic and religious milieu in Roman Egypt. Fowden suggests that the *Hermetica* expressed a pro-Egyptian sentiment, proto-nationalistic in its investment of in Egyptian traditions as against over Hellenism. Moreover the authors of the *Hermetica* assimilated aspects of Hellenistic idioms (language, format and terminologies) in which to express the primacy of Egyptian religious forms which demonstrate its temple pedigree. In the final third of *The Egyptian Hermes*, Fowden attempts to locate the milieu of the Hermetic circles. By virtue of their familiarity with temple ritual, their bilingual capabilities and their familiarity with other religious and philosophic traditions, Fowden argues that they would have been small a exclusive enclave comprised of a Greek speaking disenfranchised elite (he borrows Weber's term *Laienintellektualismus*):

“They [Gnostics, Platonists and Hermetists] were none of them religions of the masses, because they all taught that salvation comes through knowledge... But however it was acquired, it was always the possession of an elite. Hence the tendency within these milieux towards the emergence of a two-tier structure...”⁹¹

1.4 *Historiography: The 'secularisation' of the priesthood*

Thirdly, although not as extensively covered as the previously described trends, there is a focus on the exclusivity of the Egyptian priesthood and religion and the way in which religious institutions incorporated non-priestly individuals into the activities of the temples. Here, the enquiry has been centred on temple dining cults, on processions, on the recruitment of priests, and the preservation of abstruse knowledge within temple elites. Lack of exclusivity has been seen as symptomatic of decline, continuing on an image of an elect sect of priestly leaders of the Egyptian community. This is in part due to a problem of translation. Modern writers are careful in terms of translating distinctions in political office, but when it comes to religion, the specific religious roles are undifferentiated, coming under general category of 'priest'. It treats all offices in different periods and societies as broadly equivalent and secondly it assumes that these offices are purely religious. The translation of any given title by the word 'priest' involves imposing

⁹¹ Fowden: 1993, p.189

modern categories and obscures the nature of the official's role in his own society.⁹² Within Hellenistic Egypt, although the institution of the temple offers a more specific delineation for religious authority, a precise definition of priesthood is still difficult, particularly as temples were complex, assimilating secular and religious activities such as crafts, music making, agricultural work. As large land-owners, they were part of political and social life of community employing many diverse functionaries such as oil pressers, goldsmiths etc. It is therefore hard to designate which were priests and which were purely functionaries.⁹³ Tackling this issue, Mary Beard and John North (1990) summarised the obstacles of language and culture in distinguishing those roles thought of as belonging to the priesthood, thus: "...the view that temples were the voice of religion when they intervened in political matters is a traditional view based upon Christianising assumptions about the nature of temples and priestly officials with them. It is more plausible to see a complex interaction of religion and political authority and not necessarily implying that religious and priestly authority was separate from political authority".⁹⁴

One such study which gives strong emphasis to the changing nature of the priesthood between the Pharaonic and Roman periods is Thompson's 'The high priests under Ptolemaic rule'.⁹⁵ Although Thompson cedes that much of the maintenance of the cults remained unchanged by the Romans, she also emphasises the breaks in tradition relating to the nature of the high priests in the pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman eras. The changes can be categorised as economic,⁹⁶ administrative,⁹⁷ and religious⁹⁸ in scope. The most important of these innovations Thomson lists as the appointment of a royal agent within the temple administration. From the third century BC, the high priest of Memphis, Anemhor II, is given the office of royal scribe for all financial matters in the temple and estates of Osiris-Apis and in valley in temple of Memphis and Arsinoe Philadelphus.⁹⁹ Thompson remarks that this is a sign of royal concern to control temples and work through this prominent Memphis family. The names show these officials were Egyptian not Greek and were priests. These royal representatives (or *epistateis*) were involved in fiscal and more general cult responsibilities in temples of Memphis. Despite not having much influence over traditional Egyptian affairs, the subordination of the temple to the financial departments of

⁹² Beard, M and North, J: 1990, p.4-5

⁹³ Ibid, p.10

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.11

⁹⁵ Thompson, D:1990, pp.103-116

⁹⁶ The introduction of new tax measures (due to the effects of a new tax in the form of one artaba to the aroura) reduced the economic autonomy of temples.

⁹⁷ The change from traditional demotic or Aramaic as the language of the administration to Greek.

⁹⁸ Ptolemy III Euergetes, when he added an extra class of priest in honour of his daughter Berenike.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.108

the royal administration represented a more significant diminution of an area of power and independence.¹⁰⁰

Another important Ptolemaic innovation was the institution of an official dynastic cult started by Ptolemy II Philadelphus when he introduced Arsinoe into temples as a *sunnaos theos* to share the cult with chief god of individual temples. Her cult was funded by tax on orchards and vineyards (*apomoira*) and with the introduction to temples of a regular Ptolemaic ruler cult in the Greek style, all priests were henceforth priests of *theoi evergetai*.¹⁰¹ The ruler cult became very pervasive as seen in the use of penalty payments awarded to ruler cult if a contract has been forfeited. This penalty clause meant the crown could be approached in appeal for justice, therefore reaffirming king's status as god and secular ruler.¹⁰² By sharing a temple with the main god of the place, the king was a recipient of both cult and respect from priest and populace. In this way the traditional power of the temple was encroached. Despite these innovations the maintenance of the cult and the temple's autonomy over religious manner continued in much the same way as before. The Ptolemies made regular visits to the old pharaonic religious centres such as Memphis and made sacrifices to the gods, continuing the religious traditions and responsibilities expected of the pharaoh as high priest of Egypt (i.e. officiating important rituals such as the start of the Egyptian New Year¹⁰³). Under Roman rule, however, Thompson argues the religious traditions of the temple were broken due to the initial refusal of Octavian to accept the religious duties of pharaoh, as for example, when he refused to enter the presence of the Apis bull and declined to bury the high priest of Memphis for two and half years after a successor had been named.¹⁰⁴ Thompson remarks that as an absentee dynasty, the Roman style of ruling marked a very different style from the Ptolemaic regime.

“The temples were soon taken over, their power and wealth reduced. In the imposition of this new authority the old ways were regularly abandoned and local sensibilities ignored. The fate of temples and of the Memphite priesthood is but one sign of the wholesale change the Romans introduced.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.109

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.110

¹⁰² Ibid, pp.112-113

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp113-4

¹⁰⁴ Thomson believes the appointment probably occurred after the events in Rome of 13th January 27 BC

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p,116

More recent work (from scholars such as Bowman,¹⁰⁶ Frankfurter,¹⁰⁷ Dunand¹⁰⁸ *et al*) has tended to emphasise the continuities between Pharaonic and Roman practices in involving communities in temple activities. Bowman argues that despite the inclusion of Roman, Greek and Jewish religious practices, the traditional Egyptian religion remained largely unaffected and traditional Egyptian religion continued without too much influence by foreign cult.¹⁰⁹ Despite the innovations under Roman and Ptolemaic administration (which saw the power and influence of the priesthood severely curtailed) the Egyptian priesthood maintained its distinctiveness. He demonstrates this by reference to a description of an Egyptian priest written in the first century AD¹¹⁰ and the regulations of the emperor's special account (the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*), which show the Roman administration's concern for the distinctiveness of the Egyptian priesthood. Despite the change in the status of priesthoods from hereditary to saleable, this caste system remained intact (i.e. priests still has to conform to the stipulations for circumcision, the ability to read hieratic and demotic texts and a priestly pedigree). This caste system distinguishes the priests sharply from Greek and Roman cults in that private individuals were not permitted to take part in religious rites (as in *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, BGU 1210 section 86 (AD 150/61)) whereas there was no separate priestly caste in the cults Greece and Rome. Greek priests were layman and their offices had the same status as the civic magistracy, they were often appointed for a fixed term and came from the wealthy elite. Thus the direct supervision of the revenues and property of temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Arsinoe was under high priest who was also the town councillor (third Century AD¹¹¹).

1.5 Historiography: Religion as a marker for social differentiation

The discussion of priests and the priesthood has also been the site for a debate upon social differentiation through religion. As previously discussed in Fowden's study of the *Hermetica*, he

¹⁰⁶ Bowman: 1986

¹⁰⁷ Frankfurter:1998

¹⁰⁸ Dunand:1979, Dunand: 2002

¹⁰⁹ He cites as examples the Greek cult of Theadelphia in temples of the Dioscuroi and the cult of Antinous at Antinopolis. Also in the Roman period the temples of the Roman emperors such as the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Arsinoe, the celebration of the Capitoline games at Oxyrhynchus. The Jewish religious practises and places of worship remained unchanged and in temple of Isis at Philae is shrine to Egyptian god Mandulis and in Serapeum at Memphis is shrine to Syrian god Astarte. Bowman: 1986, p.179

¹¹⁰ The priest is described as following an ascetic way of life, in which contemplation and abstinence were imposed upon themselves - Van der Horst, fragment 10 1984 cited by Bowman: 1986, p.180

¹¹¹ Bowman: 1986, p.183

speculates that these works could only have been the product of the disenfranchised elite, due to the necessity of literacy and knowledge of temple rites, and likens the authors to the *Laienintellektualismus*.¹¹² Furthermore, he argues that due to the prerequisite of knowledge as a means of *gnōsis*, the Hermetic circles would have had a stratified structure comprising of an elect and listeners.¹¹³ These forms of religiosity in certain respects mimicked the practices and rituals of traditional institutional bodies and were seen as markers of social differentiation.

Frankfurter's *Religion in Roman Egypt* (as well as in his other works¹¹⁴) also propagates this view. In the discussion of the role of the priesthood in the wake of the decline in temple infrastructure, Frankfurter envisages the emergence of two classes of priest, distinguished by their level of ritual knowledge and location. Here he looks to the model of the African *debertera* in which the decline of temples led to the development of a class of itinerant priests who were educated and charismatic and could dispense spells and charms for paying clients. He sees the eclectic nature of Egyptian spells as reflecting the needs of a growing Hellenised clientele situated in the *metropoleis*. These cosmopolitan and urban '*magi*' sit in direct contrast to Frankfurter's vision of the priests who stayed in the *chora* who lost their literacy, coming to fulfil the needs of the village as a ritual specialist, dealing in magic for the protection of crops, rites of passage, etc. This model runs contrary to the evidence for cultural contacts marked by the extensive use of Greek language and literature within temple libraries. Also the evidence from the spells themselves point to a culturally eclectic milieu, with knowledge of the ritual forms of temple tradition as well as the magical knowledge from other cultural areas. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, this milieu is syncretic and does not conform to Frankfurter's attempt to place it within specific geographical boundaries (particularly if you consider the possibility of copying centres producing these spells for a wide distribution) and is a reiteration of old prejudices related to rural versus urban stereotypes. It is also reflective of the institutional way of analysing the history of religion in Roman Egypt: both Frankfurter and (to a lesser extent) Fowden seek to understand the religious milieu via the decline of traditional religious centres and the emergence of new religious circles with implications for the nature of religious practices.

In the historiography of religion in Roman Egypt, there has also been much debate about the role of ethnicity in the understanding and interpretation of religion. The religious ferment from which the *Graeco Magical Papyri* and the *Hermetica* were formed, represents a period of great

¹¹² Fowden:1993, p.189

¹¹³ Ibid, p.189

¹¹⁴ Cf. Frankfurter, D. 'The Perils of Love: Magic and Counter-magic in Roman Egypt', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.10, No.s 3-4, July/October 2001

cultural interaction spawning new, heterogeneous ways of explaining the nature of existence and approaches to the divine. In the research for my chapters on the *Hermetica* and the *Graeco Magical Papyri*, the number and diversity of different religious forms within these texts have given fertile grounds for scholars to debate the ethnic and philosophical pedigree (with the majority of focus on the interactions between Greek philosophy and Egyptian ritual practices). The results of this line of questioning has helped to more closely discern the extent of acculturation within the Roman Empire as well as contrast the areas of contention where religion has been used as the site of local resistance to imperial rule (for example, the XVI Hermetic tractate *The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon*, which opens with a warning to not translate the work into the language of Greeks for fear of rendering it unintelligible to the gods and lacking in *energeia*).

In defining ethnicity, sociologists and historians have used the term to refer to a means of categorisation that establishes a group identity (normally a group significantly diverse and of a size considerably larger than of an immediate community), based on various possible criteria, i.e. race, language, history, traditions, geographical origin, political system, etc., which locates the origins of that group identity in remote time¹¹⁵. It has been used as a way of approaching questions relating to the social identities of smaller politically defined groups (though less so with regards to the analysis of dominant cultures)¹¹⁶. Ethnicity is multifaceted and problematic in part because it is a dynamic social construct rather than a static and biologically determined means of identification. As such ethnic categorisation can best be characterised as a fluid system, sensitive to context. For example an individual's ethnic identity (and by extension their sense of individuality within society) could centre around cultural markers (language, history, geography). However, there might be considerable debate as to what cultural markers would define membership of the group, or even whether other somatic characteristics should be taken into account. Individuals might stress language, shared history, social customs, dress, or any combination of these in defining membership of a group and such tensions might exist both within a particular ethnic group and between one ethnic group and another¹¹⁷. It seems that the set of identifying criteria available to an individual are multiple and therefore a careful analysis of the sociological context when a particular identification is made is essential. The issue is further complicated by the fact that ethnicity can be seen as a choice, it is about self-representation, and in the particular context of religious affiliation, there is demonstrable conflict between self-

¹¹⁵ Friedman:1990, p.26

¹¹⁶ Mitchell:2000, p.xli

¹¹⁷ One manner of expressing this concept would be to ask a British Muslim how they would choose to define themselves within their society; do they use religion, politics, language or country of origin as a means of identification.

representation in the sphere of burial practices and other markers of culture. Within the specific context of Roman Egypt, the issue of ethnicity for the interpretation of traditional mythology is difficult to define¹¹⁸ and not perhaps relevant in and of itself (particularly as religious offices were commodities to be bought and sold). The more secular approach of philosophers such as Euhemerus and the importance of Neoplatonic and Pythagorean concepts to the understanding of religion are therefore not necessarily defined by narrow ethnic criteria such as origin of birth or political membership but represent the eclectic religious speculations of non-localised, philosophic circles¹¹⁹. In this sense they are non-ethnic texts, rather they part of a construction of a new social identity brought about by changing cultural and socio-political conditions.

1.6 *Definitions of Lay piety*

Locating religious activities that may be defined as 'lay' or 'popular' as distinct from overlapping fields of religious activity requires a subtle evaluation of the surviving evidence of religious behaviours.¹²⁰ It is not enough to draw simplistic divisions between domestic/temple practices and priest/lay audience, particularly as priestly duties could be administered by functionaries not consecrated to the deity who lived secular lives outside of the temple.¹²¹

The experience of religion was not limited to those activities that took place within the precincts of the temple. The use decorative murals and paintings around the home featuring the Egyptian pantheon is evidence of religious activity or personal affiliation to a god/s, as also could be argued, the use of theophoric names such as Petosiris (gift of Osiris), Isidorus (gift of

¹¹⁸ Particularly as during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, Egypt was a culturally pluralistic society with many 'ethnic' groups and the boundaries between these groups being fluid. The impact of time on these ethnic categories altered completely with some groups such as the Thracians, disappearing completely (Goudrian, K. 'Ethnic strategies in Graeco-Roman Egypt', 1992). The overlap between these groups means that nomenclature is an unreliable means of identifying ethnic groups as is choice of religious affiliation and language as these are context sensitive social definitions and not definitive ethnic marker (Versluys 'Understanding Egypt in Egypt and beyond', 2010, pps.10-11) Also on the issue of names and ethnicity cf. Otto (1905-8) I ppl-16;

¹¹⁹ Cf. Doresse 1960, pp.2-13 for outline of numerous examples of gnostic sects and mystery cults circulating the Mediterranean world in this period. Also see Cumont's *Oriental Religions of Roman Paganism* and Reitzenstein's *Hellenistic Mystery Religions* for descriptions of popular eclectic, syncretistic religious circles. For a comprehensive description of the Hellenistic Skeptic, Stoic and Epicurian movements, see A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987)

¹²⁰ Such as temple activities performed on behalf of the community and those involving the participation of the laity, and those religious behaviours which show some degree of ritual/specialist knowledge performed independently of the temple (such as the literary evidence discussed in the ensuing chapter).

¹²¹ Such as the four phyles of priests organised so that each group is only called upon three times a year to the temple, meant that in every other respect they lived secular lives for most of the year - Dunand & Zivie-Coche:2002, pps.120-122

Isis), Theodorus (gift of god)¹²² (other examples can be found in *P.Frieb.* IV with *W. Clarysse, Enchoria 16 (1988)* 7-8, Philadelphia, 209/8 or 192/1 BC¹²³). Phrases which have a religious tone are also found in letters, for example ‘with the help of the gods’ and ‘if the gods keep you safe’, which were a common idiom. This sentiment is carried over in official formulae for certain oaths in which the gods and rulers appear, e.g. a speaker may swear an oath by ‘King Ptolemy, Queen Arsinoe and your *daemon*. I pray for your health with your children, whom may the evil eye not harm, and I make supplication for you every day before the lord Serapis and praying you and all your household the best of things’.¹²⁴ There is evidence to suggest that these were not simply empty phrases but were in some cases intended literally (e.g. there are travellers writing in Alexandria in particular that make it clear in letters that they travelled specifically to visit the Serapium to make supplications)¹²⁵.

Personal piety is also attested in the large body of terracotta altars and figurines that were mass produced in the first to fourth centuries AD, specifically for domestic purposes, many of which depict figurines of priestesses of Isis.¹²⁶ Frankfurter speculates that these provided two functions, firstly, as they appeared nude, they were intended to promote fertility and secondly, as they depicted officiates of the temple, they were meant to convey some of that religious power evoked by the procession itself. Amongst the most popular of the terracottas was the image of Harpocrates which had the purpose of denoting fertility as well as protecting the household from evil. These figurines would be housed in domestic shrines probably alongside other ritual objects replicated from temple versions. The ritualistic use of terracottas was probably to receive food offerings or as objects of prayer.¹²⁷

There was thus a continuity in religious practice from temple to household. To a certain extent the importance here is not to distinguish activities which show individual (lay) enterprise but to recognise the nature and contours of personal religiosity. For the purpose of this thesis, I shall be defining lay/popular piety as those religious practices which are formulated externally to the temple and demonstrate a non-institutional approach to divine access. However, such a division is to a certain extent artificial, given that these observed religious contours ran parallel to temples and households and through other institutions along which individuals would pass.

¹²² Bowman:1986, pps.188

¹²³ Rowlandson:1998: p.63

¹²⁴ *P.Oxy.*1758 (II) cited in Bowman:1986, pps.188

¹²⁵ Bowman:1986, pps.181-2

¹²⁶ Frankfurter:1998, p.55

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.136

Also analysis is rendered more complex by the nature of our more sophisticated evidence for lay piety: the *Hermetica*, the magical papyri, and various other philosophical-religious texts. These texts require literacy and knowledge of temple rites, Neoplatonic philosophy, and other religious traditions. The complexity of knowledge required suggests that the texts illuminate a very particular and unrepresentative religious mentality. Weber coined the phrase *Laienintellektualismus* as a means of defining philosophically redemptive groups such as the Gnostics and Manicheans who display levels of education and understanding not common amongst the general population. These groups, he argues, are typically those who were once part of the political and/or religious elite who have become disbarred from their traditional seats of power and therefore seek to define their own set of transcendental values based on intellectualised conception of the cosmos.¹²⁸ Fowden borrows this term to describe those groups that formed the Hermetic circles on the basis that they display knowledge of temple rites, Alexandrian philosophy, and write in Greek. This definition could equally apply to the authors of the *Graeco Magical Papyri* (PGM). In Weberian terms, the texts might point not to the culture of a generalised Egyptian lay community, but to an eclectic and individualistic milieu outside the institutional frame.

On this point, I draw a distinction between ‘popular’ and ‘lay’ religiosity. I do not regard the religion of the laity as necessarily lacking in sophistication. The written evidence for religion by necessity displays a bias towards those of an educational level capable of authoring these works, yet to suggest that all aspects of popular religion must be domestic non-literate folk religion separate from that of literate sophisticates is simplistic.¹²⁹ Dunand argues there was no schema which divided an official institutional religion understood only by the educated elite and a folk, magical religion. On the contrary there were a number of approaches to the divine: temple cult maintained numerous heterogeneous avenues.¹³⁰ Although temple cults, the Hermetists and the PGM act within clearly codified frameworks for divine access, there were differences, as I shall show. The temples display normative and conservative traits, while the magical papyri and the *Hermetica* were more integrative and pluralistic. Yet, the differences do not mask broad similarities, both in the traditions from which the *Hermetica* and the magical texts worked and in approaches that we find mirrored in definitively popular religious artefacts, such as amulets. The magical papyri themselves were more widely distributed than the *Hermetica* and were almost certainly less specialized and more eclectic. However rather than operating with a division

¹²⁸ Weber:1922, 1.304-10

¹²⁹ C.f. Frankfurter: 1998, pps 6-7 where he describes popular religion as belonging to the rural and domestic spheres of devotional practice.

¹³⁰ Dunand & Zivie-Coche: 2001, pps 107-9

between 'high, intellectual' and low religious cultures, I prefer to see a social and intellectual spectrum of representations of a shared religious milieu. The commonality of ideas between the various religious texts, which I shall demonstrate in the chapters that follow, supports this position.

1.7 Methodology

My study will seek to define the nature of religious activity in Roman Egypt through the exploration of the sociology of the religious experience beyond that of the temple. This is an innovative approach which contributes towards a greater understanding of the character of the *religio mentis* of this period. My aim is understand better the religious mentalities of the inhabitants of Roman Egypt. A fundamental tenet of this analysis is that major cultural change should be reflected at the level of the individual as well as at institutional level, and that meaning of religious activity in a community is constructed at an individual level. Using papyrological evidence (such as magical texts and other evidence of personal religious devotion), the key areas under discussion are divided into three chapters to be detailed in the next sub-section.

Important to the approach is the use of sociological and anthropological models. A model I frequently employ is the Grid/Group affiliation model formulated by Mary Douglas in her *Natural Symbols: Explorations of Cosmology*. The premise is that most symbolic behaviour works through the human body. Although bodily symbolism will be common, the meaning of such symbols will vary from culture to culture, dependent upon the social conditions under which they were formulated. The formula Douglas created to express the range of bodily symbolism is called the Grid/Group model. The Group is a socially bounded unit whereas Grid refers to the rules which relate one person to another on an 'ego centred basis'.¹³¹ In a situation in which a person feels strong ties to Group, but not to Grid, they would feel a strong allegiance to the wider society, however the smaller groups that make up society are perceived as undifferentiated. Other permutations are when both Grid and Group are at their maximum influence then an individual will feel bound to the social formation and by individualised relationships. When both Grid and Group are at a low influence, the individual is free of social constraints and conformity. Where Group is weak but Grid is strong the person will feel bounded in their relation to others by a set of ego-centred categories.

The less the control of Grid and Group then the less value placed on social interaction/organisation and thus less regard for ritual. In impersonal societies, such as industrial society,

¹³¹ Douglas:1970, p.viii

people feel controlled by 'the machine', they develop a cosmology of diffuse symbols. The higher the value placed on social constraints the more the metaphor of the bodily is used.¹³² The extent to which within a society bodily control is exerted reflects the level of social control over the individual. Thus the impact of societies' attitude on the body is reflected by their choice of ritual/anti-ritualist forms of religion. Douglas' theory works with the notion of Marcel Mauss who asserts the human body is always treated as an image of society because any consideration of the body has a social dimension.¹³³ This in turn is based on his supposition that the image of the body is culturally learnt due to the idea that every kind of action leaves an imprint of learning- bodily control reflects social control.¹³⁴

Douglas relates the structural analysis of symbols to bodily representation by arguing that in order to achieve harmony across all levels of experience, there needs to be an agreement in all means of expression. Therefore the body must be co-ordinated with other media. Secondly, society places controls on the scope of expression by limiting the means of bodily expression- there can be no form of bodily control without corresponding social forms. Therefore, when the correspondence between bodily and social controls is traced then the basis for political and theological foundations of a society are exposed.¹³⁵ Where role structure is strongly defined, formality is valued, as are distance and boundaries, which would lead to ritualistic forms of religious expression and tight controls over bodily expression. In informal societies it is the opposite that is valued, leading to anti-ritualistic expression. This is because lack of social organisation is tied to a disassociation with the body and thus disassociation with the social body. Douglas tests this hypothesis based on the idea that as trance is a form of disassociation, religions using trance will be found in low organisational societies.

Beliefs are thus determined by social context. None are intellectually free as each social form and style of thinking restricts individual thought, e.g. those with virtually no Grid or Group are intellectually nullified and ineffective due to lack of organisation or interaction with others; the community with strong Group and Grid gives the individual an inadequate view of self, due to intolerance of imperfections and failure to confront idea of evil either by ignoring it or explicitly rejecting it; and in ego-centred group there is an impoverishment of symbolic life as

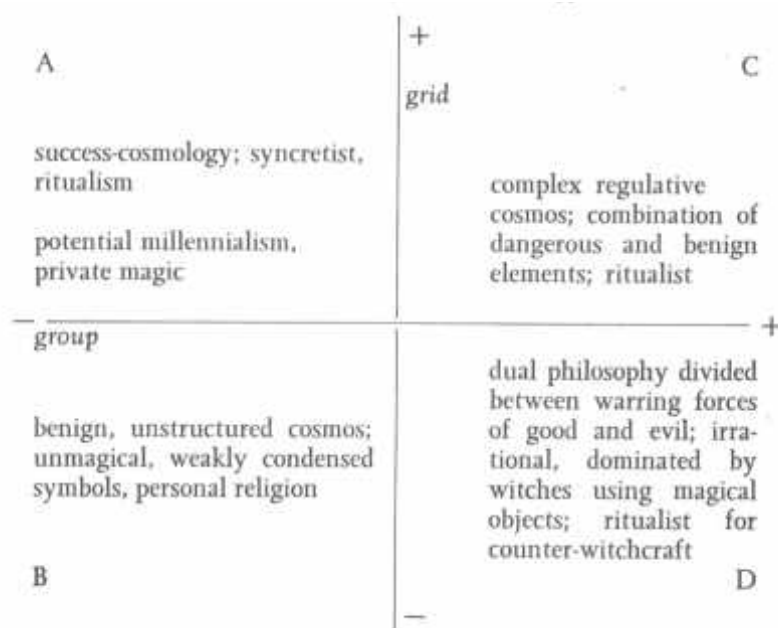
¹³² Ibid, pps 47-64

¹³³ Ibid, p.65

¹³⁴ Mauss: 1936

¹³⁵ Douglas:1970, p.71

interpersonal relationships are subjugated to the altar of self.¹³⁶ The relationship between Grid/Group and the resultant religious attitudes can be summarised thus:



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- Group is weak - cosmos dominated by impersonal powers, no system of transgression
- Grid is strong - system of positive feedback, offers success to those who are strong, total denigration to failures, no concept of sin.
- Group is strong - powers that control universe depicted as human, social control built into conception of cosmos, transgressions punished
- Grid is weak - increased moral asceticism, joy of spiritual
- Grid strong/Group weak - magic helps individual in competitive society
- Grid strong/Group strong - magic affirms social order
- Group strong /Grid weak - magic protects borders of social unit
- At zero - no interest in magic or ritual for they require social interaction

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.73

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.64

Douglas' Grid/Group model offers a useful formula for thinking about the relationship between social structure and religious attitudes which can be applied to an analysis of the groups producing religious literature outside traditional centres. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, one can use Douglas' model to explore the relationship between societal change and religious practices without resorting to institutional dynamics (that is an attack in the temples, or a bankruptcy of temples¹³⁸) as the instigator of religious innovations. However the use of models is not without its dangers. The main objections to their use include the position that by a simple narration of events, the events are able to speak for themselves and that the role of the historian should never be to impose upon history any form of theory or system, because events are too unique to accept a generalised or abstract explanation.¹³⁹ One of this theory's strongest proponents includes Meyer who stated that there can be no attempt to impose theories or explanations for the past as they are ruled by chance and thus the historian has complete freedom to represent the past as they wished based on nothing more than their own intuition.¹⁴⁰ Advocates of this traditionalist stance also take offence that the concept of a theory of history would deny the potency of human agency and personality to mould events, allowing instead for individuals to be at the mercy of recurring predictable patterns in history. Therefore models present a deterministic slant on human existence that has no place in what they conceive to be a chaotic and unpredictable universe.¹⁴¹ From another perspective, they also object to a worrying trend in dependency upon social theory as a means to better understand history, as it is a discipline based upon theories pertaining to the present rather than the past as well as believing their motives to lie in a wish to use history as a testing ground for their own theories.¹⁴²

In answer to these concerns regarding the use of historical models in academic research, the following points should be considered. Firstly that models, when applied to demonstrate the main variables and their inter-relationships for a specific event (and not as a template to explain all other similar historical events) in a simplified form, they illuminate important factors. In this respect, as with Weber's theory of ideal types, the use of models for historical research can be used mindfully with the caveat that they are "... mental construct can never be found empirically

¹³⁸ See Bagnall:1993

¹³⁹ Tosh:2006, p.158

¹⁴⁰ Finley:1985, p.53

¹⁴¹ Tosh: 2006, p.158

¹⁴² Tosh: 2006, p.159

in reality. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent, to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality.”¹⁴³

Secondly, the use of historical theory helps avoid inadvertently colouring an interpretation of the past to conform to personal biases. This formulates a better understanding of the inter-relatedness of issues pertaining to a particular inquiry leading to a better perspective on the totality of history.¹⁴⁴ And thirdly, when faced by the shortcomings in the primary sources, by careful selection of an anthropological theory most aligned to the conditions and variables of the ancient society, insights and observations can be gained that would otherwise be unavailable (due to a lack of direct evidence). It may also serve to inspire debate on new perspectives garnered in this way. By contrast the hostility towards the usage of models as a form of historical explanation has been described as an “allegiance to historical positivism... and the virtue of common-sense... and limits the exploration and expansion of history as a discipline”.¹⁴⁵ It has also been argued that this hostility is merely a reflection of the conservatives’ fear of social change that forms a basis for their prejudice towards theory making.¹⁴⁶ Also by noticing where a model fails to fit a given context, generalised theory promotes and emphasises the unique quality of certain events in history, such is the case also with regards to the importance of the individual, models do not diminish their importance as there has always been recourse to classify individuals into groups (by looking at the general factors described by models, limitations and constraints upon the individual can be examined in its wider context).¹⁴⁷ The danger of ignoring the viability of models on the other hand, is to risk imposing cultural biases unwittingly via the selection of their material and thereby imposing one’s own culturally determined limitations.¹⁴⁸

1.8 *Outline of Research*

Chapter two examines examples of the philosophical *Hermetica*, specifically *The Poimandres*, *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead (Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6)*, *Definitions of Asclepius to King (Corpus Hermeticum XVI)*, and *The Asclepius/The Perfect Discourse*. In previous scholarly debates on the philosophical *Hermetica*, the sole concern has centred on discerning the ethnic or philosophical pedigree of the texts for the purpose of informing the debate on acculturation in the Roman

¹⁴³ Tosh: 2006, p.154

¹⁴⁴ Van Wees:1996, p.13

¹⁴⁵ Van Wees:1996, p.159

¹⁴⁶ Van Wees: 1996, p.159

¹⁴⁷ Van Wees:1996, p.161

¹⁴⁸ Finley: 1985, p.52

Empire. However this narrow focus on the origin of the ideas ignores the significance of the Hermetic writings as markers of religious mentality. Chapter three therefore, presents the case that the Hermetic Corpus should be categorised as part of a magical rather than contemplative philosophical tradition with its roots within traditional Egyptian cult. Moreover, the milieu within which the *Hermetica* was formulated is one which saw the declining influence of temple practice within the community and a trend towards a more individualistic approach to divinity (that is not to say that the development of personal religious practices precipitated this decline, rather it was a reaction to it). The status of these texts as magical rather than philosophical operates against Weberian (and protestant) teleological associations of contemplative and individualistic religion as against ritualistic and communal practices.

Chapter three examines the *Graeco Magical Papyri* which succinctly and directly express the concerns of individuals. The focus is on how the magical papyri, whose origins derive from temple traditions, come to be used by a largely non-literate audience and how this reflects the changes of cultural roles of the temple and priesthood. The shift in roles and status of a specialised priesthood and the change in the role of magic from that of ritual on behalf of the community to personal use, forms another example of a more individualistic approach to religion. The previous analyses from scholars such as Graf,¹⁴⁹ concluded that the profusion of supernatural entities invoked within the spells were demonstrative of a greater systematisation of the invisible universe and thus reflective of the greater systematisation of society under Roman rule. Linguistic analyses of the spells by Nock,¹⁵⁰ focussed upon an ethnic reading of the texts, ascribing the likely authors as non-Greek due to the high frequency of metrical errors. And Frankfurter's¹⁵¹ interpretation of the material (as previously mentioned) supports his view of changing role of priest to 'magos' (i.e. the priests represented themselves as *magos* to appeal to Hellenistic clientele). My treatment of the magical texts takes a holistic view, examining the representations of the deities, the invention of new supernatural entities, the reinterpretation of philosophic/religious beliefs from outside Egypt, and the ritual antecedents to *Voces Magicae*. By examining each of these attributes in-depth, it is possible to assess the breadth and nature of religious influences and the socio-religious implications of the eclectic, chaotic and heterodox treatment of the deities cited therein.

¹⁴⁹ Graf:2003

¹⁵⁰ Nock:1929

¹⁵¹ Frankfurter:2001

Through an in-depth analysis of these bodies of evidence, I trace religious practices from the second through to the fifth century. The variety of material and the emphasis on the non-orthodox channels has allowed me to capture the interaction of belief- and ritual-systems in Egypt and locate religion within lay culture. The findings of this research have allowed me to contest the received view of lay religion¹⁵² and offer a new understanding of the religious milieu operating outside of the temple.

Firstly, the authors of the Hermetic and Magical Papyri showed that they were at once contemplative and yet also highly magical. This argues against the previous delineations of magical/religious behaviours as defined by Protestant and Weberian teleology. Second, I argue *against* the view that the highly philosophical (particularly with regards to the philosophic *Hermetica*) and syncretic nature of these writings are by necessity products of a disenfranchised Greek educated elite (and thus were the preserve of exclusive and highly-educated circles). My analysis of these works show that although there are many allusions to the Gnostic, Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophies (not to mention early Christian, Hebraic, Babylonian and Hellenic mystery cults), the authors of the *Hermetica* and *PGM* were highly inclusive, individualistic and contemplative. Each of the cited influences developed from the same milieu as the *Hermetica* and *PGM*, so it is therefore unsurprising to find similarities between their doctrines. This very eclecticism of the *PGM* and the *Hermetica* has been used to point to a lack of coherence. My analysis shows that despite the cultural profusion, a complex framework of symbolic associations based upon origins in Egyptian temple ritual, though lacking the institutional apparatus, can be found.

Third, I show not just changing patterns of religious thought but also changing perceptions of the social body. The universe presented in these corpora is complex, contradictory and inhabited by a host of new and capricious supernatural entities. These supernatural beings do not conform to their representation in their original cultural traditions and are re-etymologised to reflect an altered status within an altered society.¹⁵³ This provides an insight into the perceptions

¹⁵² i.e. that there is no distinction between institutional and popular religion, that they are merely domestic forms of temple ritual (Bagnall:1993, p.261, Morenz, 1992, pp.81-109) or that the religio-magical literature of Roman Egypt is the preserve of a narrow and isolated intellectual elite (Fowden:1993, pp.188-192) operating at the highest end of a two tier system of village ritual specialist versus educated itinerant priest (i.e. 'grand' traditions versus 'little' traditions. Frankfurter:1998, p.222 and Frankfurter:2001, p.215).

¹⁵³ Within the traditional pantheon, each god/goddess had well defined characteristics and mythological cannon (dependent upon each of the major religious centres cosmology), they formed the basis for an allegorical understanding of the problems of existence as well providing a mythic framework for the socio-political structure of pharaonic Egypt. Outside of the religious infrastructure in Roman Egypt, the pantheon had become expanded to incorporate the deities of other cultures into a framework that is loosely bounded. Divorced from their original

of the individual within a culturally expanded world and the religious developments required to adapt. The resulting picture is of an increased desire to exercise control over the environment via ritual means. This individual empowerment was achievable by direct communion with a supreme deity, but only through the application of the correct ritual and philosophical knowledge. Once communion was achieved, the individual would become a divine being whilst living in the mortal realm. I argue that the increased importance of a supreme deity, who is remote and unknowable, not only reflects the psychology of those governed by a remote imperial ruler but also an anti-imperial sentiment (in that godhood could be achieved those with the appropriate knowledge and is therefore not just the preserve of rulers and the depiction of the environment within the corpora defies the neat, categorisation of imperial administration). I show that the perceived fragmentation of the unified social body (as well illustrated by the appearance of new deities of fragmentary appearance such as Abrasax), under the profusion of cultural influences led to an increase in ritual usage (facilitated by traditional cultic knowledge and magical practices) in line with the shift towards a more individualistic and independent approach to religion. The literary evidence is therefore representative of a milieu in Roman Egypt that sought direct personal access to the divine without the necessity of institutional apparatus.

context, they also have ill-defined roles and characterisations that appear contradictory to their mythic representations.

CHAPTER TWO

The Hermetic Corpus

2.1 *Introduction*

In the study of religion in Roman Egypt, The Hermetic Corpus¹⁵⁴ represents a complex and intriguing example of the ‘decentralisation’ of religious practices reflected in a putative decline of Imperial support for temple infrastructure (in the form of extensive construction programmes from the mid to late first century CE onwards)¹⁵⁵ and a movement towards a more personal approach to divine access. The Hermetic Corpus represents one such marker of these processes. It can also be seen as expressing an increasing ‘nativism’ within the expanding sphere of philosophical and religious speculation. For this reason, the *Hermetica* are of great interest to the study of popular piety within the period of Roman Egypt.

In this chapter, I argue against a narrow focus on the origin of the ideas of the *Hermetica*, though the ethnic or philosophical roots of the *Hermetica* have been the focus of considerable debate, (see below). The *Hermetica* have also formed part of the discussion about acculturation in the Roman Empire, a debate that has dominated much of the secondary literature on Roman imperial culture. Instead, my focus is on the religious mentality of the period. Issues of origin are important in my argument, but only in so far as they are useful in establishing the contours of that religious mentality. I do not, therefore, seek a rigid categorization of ‘traditional Egyptian’, Greek, and Greek-philosophical conceptions, as if these could ever have been isolated categories of cultural experience. I use an analysis of the origins of the religious beliefs to argue that the *Hermetica* represent a continuation and extension of temple practices within the wider community. The religious sensibilities within the *Hermetica* demonstrate not only an engagement with ideas and conceptions circulating in that community (some of which were philosophical or Greek), but also responded to new needs and new social, cultural, and political formations in that

¹⁵⁴ As distinct from the *Corpus Hermeticum* which is a specific collection of Hermetic writings from between first to third century and formed into a collection in the Byzantine period.

¹⁵⁵ Bagnall argues that following the support of temple construction and renovation in the Augustan period, imperial support declined markedly in the reigns that followed, culminating in a cessation of these activities around the mid third century. Bagnall:1996 pp.262-263, cf Frankfurter:1998, p.27

wider community. I argue that they need to be seen alongside other ‘traditional’ texts in reflecting a shifting cultural and religious milieu in Egypt in the second century AD and later.

This milieu was, indeed, less focused on the temples, but it is not necessarily the case that this shift was in reaction to the institutional pressures applied to the temples in the Roman period. Such models of religious change too easily fall into a ‘zero-sum’ game in which the institutional infrastructure exists in conflict with individualistic religion and a weakness of one will necessitate a strengthening of the other. This is, of course, a broadly Weberian and teleological model in which the ‘triumph’ of individualistic religion is foretold. It seems to me that not only was the temple never a monopolistic provider of religious experience, but that an extension of religious thought beyond the boundaries of the temple in the context of religious tracts might, in fact, represent a strengthening of the hold of ‘traditional’ Egyptian religion on the population. Although it does seem to me that the decline of the temples is probably related to the development of religious practices such as those attested within the *Hermetica*, this appears to be to an unintended consequence of these developments, and not to be the cause of such religious changes. Further, the connections between the development of individualistic religious practices and the decline of the temples are far from straightforward.

Alongside that Weberian evolution towards individualistic religion is a teleology in which contemplative religion will emerge in place of magical religions. I propose that the Corpus is indeed reflective of an increasingly individualistic approach to religion, and demonstrates that religious wisdom could exist outside the temple, among the lay community. However the Corpus also recognises and derives its theological status in large part from temple religious practice. It would thus be inappropriate to draw hard lines between temple practices and those recognised in the *Hermetica*. Similarly, the linguistic issues do not represent a desire to break with temple traditions, but to express those temple traditions in new media and to a new audience. Further, although the *Hermetica* (the nature of the corpus will be explored below) is frequently divided between technical (magical) and philosophical tracts, it is clear that there was no such distinction within the body of thought that we find represented in the surviving material. There is a strong magical component within all the texts, and the ‘technical’ *Hermetica* are of a piece with the ‘philosophical’ *Hermetica* in maintaining similar theologies and approaches to divinity and understanding. In this emphasis on magicity, (as I will demonstrate), the *Hermetica* need to be seen alongside the magical papyri and the Egyptian ‘spell’ texts, such as the *Book of the Dead*, and

not as a separate religious tradition circulating only in a narrow and isolated intellectual elite¹⁵⁶ (. The texts can, of course, be read alongside neo-Platonic texts, and especially those of the ‘Pagan Holy Man’¹⁵⁷ (see below), but also need to be positioned within the context of magical texts that appear to have circulated widely in Egypt in this period. The *Hermetica* reflect a magical religious tradition, rather more than a contemplative religion, thus operating against the Weberian teleological associations.¹⁵⁸ .¹⁵⁹ Not only are the *Hermetica* complex in themselves, both in tradition of transmission and religious message, but their place in the religious history of Egypt is also complex. They refuse easy categorization and simplistic models (either ethnic or teleological). Instead, they seem to reflect an extension of Egyptian religious thought and practice into the lay community, and in so doing reduce the dependence on the temple. There was thus the possibility of an increasing separation of religious thought and practices and temple institutions such as would allow the possibility of broad religious continuities and institutional decline. Thus, the religion of the temples could exist without the temples. In this way, my analysis of the *Hermetica* confuses polarities and teleologies and poses questions as to how we think about Egyptian religion. A more sensitive understanding of the *religio mentis* of this period will help us understand the increasing domestication of divine access and the weakening of the institutional cultural/religious infrastructure. In so doing, a better appreciation of the religious transformations of the period will emerge, refining and aiding our understanding of the *religio mentis* of the period.

Within what follows, I examine the nature of Hermeticism and its place within the religious climate of this period. Yet, this is far from straightforward, and is an issue that has concerned much of the prior scholarship on the *Hermetica*. Unlike some contemporary and philosophically aligned groups (e.g. Gnostics, Sethians, Manicheans, and Alexandrian philosophic schools), the Hermetists had no fixed doctrine (except for the concept that those born capable of self-knowledge can attain *gnōsis* of God), there are no ritual practices as such, no hierarchy, and the texts themselves can sometimes appear so contradictory as to be united only by virtue of the shared authorship of Hermes Trismegistus. In fact, it may be argued that the term ‘Hermetic’ and even the term ‘Gnostic’ are modern conceptions that do not necessarily correspond to the self-definition contemporary ‘Hermetists’ may have used to describe their religious/philosophical

156 As argued by Fowden:1993, pp188-192 who parallels the authors of the *Hermetica* as *Laienintellektualismus*

157 See Fowden, G. ‘The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antiquity’1982

158 In that the *Hermetica* are at once contemplative, magical and individualistic religion where Weberian classification see religion becoming more contemplative and communal as belief in magic/ritual decline.

159 In that the *Hermetica* are at once contemplative, magical and individualistic religion where Weberian classification see religion becoming more contemplative and communal as belief in magic/ritual decline.

leanings.¹⁶⁰ However, as I argue, the evidence pervading the tracts themselves points to a certain doctrinal coherence. This is corroborated by the reference to a ‘way of Hermes’ by Iamblichus,¹⁶¹ ¹⁶² as well by a scribal note written in the margin of Codex VI.7 from the Nag Hammadi Library that attests to the incorporation of the texts into collections (implying that the texts shared enough commonalities as to form a coherent corpus).

“I have copied this one discourse of his. Indeed, very many have come to me. I have not copied them because I thought that they had come to you (pl.). Also, I hesitate to copy these for you because, perhaps they have (already) come to you, and the matter may burden you. Since the discourses of that one, which have come to me, are numerous ...” *Nag Hammadi Corpus, Codex VI.7, scribal note at the end of the Prayer of Thanksgiving*¹⁶³

Nevertheless the inclusion of Hermetic texts in the Gnostic Nag Hammadi Library, discovered in 1945, demonstrates that the compilers of this library deemed certain Hermetic texts (Codex VI.6-8) compatible with Gnostic beliefs or at least of interest to Gnostics.¹⁶⁴ The interaction between the two doctrines could be indicative of a syncretic movement hinted at by Zosimus (b.250AD) in ‘*Upon the letter Omega*’ where myths from Zoroaster and Nicotheus ‘the hidden’ and the Jewish Gnostics are referred to in the same instance as ‘*On the natures*’ and ‘*On Immateriality*’ which are said to be written by Hermes Trismegistus.¹⁶⁵

Due in part to their use of Greek philosophical conventions and Greek language, the *Hermetica* have been seen (notably by Festugiere¹⁶⁶) as an amalgamation of Platonic and Stoic philosophy. However, the appearance of these tracts (which aside from the Vienna Papyri, are the earliest datable examples of *Hermetica* surviving today) within a Coptic library suggests that Greek may not have been the original language of transmission. The subsequent transmission of these texts in Greek and Latin may indicate that they attracted or were intended to attract a diverse audience. I suspect that the writers of the Hermetic treatises were influenced by the idioms of

¹⁶⁰ There has certainly seemed to be a penchant amongst earlier scholars to view the Hermetic writings as a body of divergent tracts, loosely termed as ‘Hermetic’, with little to connect them except the same supposed authorship. Fowden, 1993, p.95.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.96

¹⁶² Ibid, p.96

¹⁶³ Fowden speculates that the statement refers to the *Prayer of Thanksgiving*, in which case it can be assumed from the scribal note that it had an identity of its own separate to that of *Perfect Discourse*, which may not have been its earliest origin. Ibid, p.5

¹⁶⁴ On this subject Doresse hypothesizes that these texts would be destined for use by sectaries related to those of Chenoboskion (the ancient name for Nag Hammadi, translated from the Greek as ‘Geese grazing ground’)

¹⁶⁵ Doresse, J. 1960, p.248

¹⁶⁶ Festugiere: 1950-54

Greek philosophical speculation and sought a place for their doctrines within that milieu. As a consequence, the texts needed to be in Greek. Language is not however necessarily an accurate means of assessing religious/philosophical affiliation.

As I shall argue below, it seems that the unity of the *Hermetica* rests primarily on an association with Hermes Trismegistus, and secondarily on the doctrine that it is through the acquisition of the correct knowledge that one can gain access to the divine and in so doing escape the bonds of fate; in essence to achieve *apotheosis* in one's lifetime. This *apotheosis* is a surviving remnant of an Egyptian temple philosophy which is closer to a magical tradition than it is to a classical philosophical tradition. The tracts are also primarily educational. The 'question and answer' format of the dialogue within these texts suggest that they were didactic in function. They also seem to have formed a sequence of sorts through which the initiate should progress. It is clear from *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* (N.H.C VI.6) that the knowledge imparted within the texts was of a secret nature, imparted by the divine and must never be repeated for fear of terrible repercussions.¹⁶⁷

As initiatory texts, they offer us a direct insight into the *religio mentis* of Roman Egypt. They appear to have been widely known and distributed, and offer a direct attestation of beliefs and practices in Roman Egypt. This sits in contrast to the majority of literary evidence we have for religious practices within Roman Egypt (from the likes of Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, Euhemerus, Iamblichus, Hecateus of Abdera, Herodotus, *et al*), where the interpretations have inevitably suffered from an '*interpretatio Graeca*' and their distribution within Egypt was probably limited.

Yet, with their undoubted Greek influence, there is a question as to whether and how the Corpus could be said to reflect 'lay' religion in Roman Egypt. The philosophical and sophisticated nature of the tracts presupposes a high level of education among its followers. Nevertheless, as a body of work created outside of the orthodox channels of temple religion by non-specialist authors, the *Hermetica* is by definition within the category of lay religion. Another approach to this issue is followed by Garth Fowden, who argues that the Hermetic tracts share similarities to a specific Isiac Aretology from Egypt (P.Oxy.1381), which as a devotional tract is an example of lay religiosity. The similarities he enumerates are that they share the same

¹⁶⁷ "This is the oath: I make him who will read this holy book swear by heaven and earth, and fire and water, and seven rulers of substance, and the creating spirit in them, and the <unbegotten> God, and the self-begotten one, and him who has been begotten, that he will guard the things that Hermes has said. And those who keep the oath, God will be reconciled with them and everyone whom we have named. But wrath will come to each one of those who violate the oath. This is the perfect one who is, my son." N.H.C VI.6

proposed model of an educated speaker amongst lay devotees, (Fowden claims that the authors and readers of the Isiac aretologies would have attracted a similar audience).¹⁶⁸ The text also shows that the author was bi-lingual but that his/her first language was most probably Egyptian. The aretology is also a hagiographical work, whose purpose was to disseminate to the Greek-speaking world the cult of Imouthes-Asclepius. The work is not a straightforward translation of Egyptian into Greek, but an interpretation that allows him to ‘render plausible’ the confusing mythological narrative of Egyptian religion to a Greek audience. There are certainly Greek influences at play, such as the crediting the god with co-authorship. But in many other ways, the text is very definitely Egyptian, i.e. the reference to cosmogonical treatise, the close association of Thoth and Asclepius, and the revelatory atmosphere. All show that this aretology came from the same milieu as Hermetism.¹⁶⁹ One of the lessons of this, Fowden argues, is not to isolate the Isiac aretologies from the more sophisticated philosophical and theological speculations, even though their formulaic and didactic construction makes it likely they were intended for a popular audience. Despite the sophisticated nature of many of the Hermetic texts,¹⁷⁰ the comparison with *P.Oxy.* 1381 suggests a milieu separate from temple cult as well that they can be categorised as lay and outside a putative narrow intellectual coterie.

Previous analyses¹⁷¹ of the Hermetic Corpus have focused on discussions of the Greek or Egyptian antecedents of the tracts, or (more recently) on whether the syncretic nature of these is symptomatic of ethnic tensions. The most comprehensive of these recent studies has been Garth Fowden’s *The Egyptian Hermes* in which he provides an invaluable insight into the complex milieu within which the *Hermetica* were formulated.¹⁷² By examining the structure and philosophy of the previously segregated forms of *Hermetica* (i.e. the philosophical and technical), Fowden plausibly argues that they are not two divergent disciplines; rather they represent different approaches to the same cosmological model. The examination of both the technical and philosophical tracts allows him to locate them within the philosophical milieu of Roman Egypt

¹⁶⁸ In his particular example, the aretology is written by a Greek dating from late second half of the second century and begins with an extended prologue of an aretology of Imouthes-Asclepius. The author describes how he had been procrastinating for a long time over writing a translation of the god’s power and manifestations into Greek. The author then fell ill and the god appeared to him in a dream. When he awoke he was miraculously cured, upon visiting the priest ‘who serves him [the god] in the ceremonies’ he was told that in return, Asclepius wants him to complete his work. Fowden: 1993: p.50

¹⁶⁹ Fowden:1993, p.51

¹⁷⁰ Although their complexity varied since some, it appears, are of lesser sophistication due to their intended use by those only recently initiated

¹⁷¹ See Granger: 1904, Scott: 1925, Reitzenstein: 1926, Griffiths: 1970, Nock: 1945, Festugiere: 1950-54, Kingsley: 1993, Marcus: 1949., Mahe: 1996

¹⁷² Fowden’s analysis replaces Festugiere’s four volumes (*La révélation de Hermes Trismégiste*: 1950-54) as the starting point for all analyses.

and speculate as to the *religio mentis* of the Hermetists themselves. He concludes that the sophisticated nature of the texts presupposes a rhetorical education, which combined with the sense of separateness espoused in the *Hermetica*, reveals a psychology akin to Weber's *Laienintellektualismus* (an educated but disenfranchised elite, who transcend the limitations placed upon them by the social order by declaring their own value system).¹⁷³ Fowden thus locates the *Hermetica* within a lay culture, but outside the commonalities of Egyptian religious life. The *Hermetica* may not belong to the temple, but are given a socially-restricted significance, and perhaps a marginal status within Egyptian religious life.

Fowden's approach towards the material is impressive, however I feel it has also provoked questions requiring additional thought. For example, he states that "The various references made by the philosophical *Hermetica* to priests, conversions in temples and so forth strike one, it is true, as more decorative than essential; and the genre itself is unrelated to anything we know about the Thoth literature" (Fowden: 1993, p.166). However it is my contention that by careful examination of the texts (as well as by comparison to texts that predate Neoplatonic influence, i.e. the Demotic *Book of Thoth*) it is possible to establish the *Hermetica* within traditional Egyptian temple practices (specifically to the cult of Thoth). This, in turn, has implications for our understanding of the socio-religious milieu of Roman Egypt. As I shall argue, the weakening of the traditional institutional religious framework (which during pharoanic rule was so deeply interwoven into the political framework as to be inseparable) by Hellenistic conquest, led to a diffusion of religious ritual divorced from its original temple context. The content of these Hermetic texts emphasise personal rather than communal relationship with the divine, thereby demonstrating a shift towards a more individualistic approach to religion.

Furthermore, I argue against the common classification of these texts as 'philosophical' by Hellenistic standards rather than magical, based upon the observation that the texts bring about divine revelation through mechanical efficacy rather than by the process of contemplation or enlightenment. The texts reflect a traditional Egyptian view that divine access is mediated via a causal relationship between the symbolism of binary opposites and seemingly redundant literary (and pictorial) imagery. By exposing these texts as magical rather than philosophical, it is clear that Weber's paradigm for the disenchantment with religion as a product of social progression is flawed. By way of explanation, Weber in his 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions' (1922-1923, 281) presents a teleological argument that redemptive religion corresponds to an

¹⁷³ Fowden: 1993, p.189

evolution away from magical means of answering the problems of existence. As the primary doctrine of Hermetic philosophy is that knowledge is the key to 'salvation' from the bonds of Fate and as such can be classified as a 'redemptive religion', its status as a magical as well as a redemptive tract undermines Weber's polarities.

A more informative approach to Hermetism within Roman Egypt can be sought through use of Mary Douglas' Grid/Group model,¹⁷⁴ which seeks to explain the relationship between ritual action and social psychology. Here Group refers to a bounded social unit and Grid refers to the rules which relate one person to another on an ego-centred basis. For example, according to Douglas's theory, in ego-centric societies where a sense of affiliation to society 'at large' is weak, attitudes towards ritual action are highly magical and individualistic. The sense of transgression does not exist and the concept of a malleable universe for those who have attained for themselves 'secret knowledge' is pervasive.¹⁷⁵ Within the context of Roman Egypt, a weakening of traditional channels of Egyptian religiosity can be likened to societies in which Group is weak but the interpersonal relationships (i.e. Grid) within it are strong leading to use of magic to get ahead in a competitive environment and a desire for a more personal relationship with God. This shows a marked development away from the Group Strong/Grid Strong pattern where ritual action enforces the social order, which best characterises the relationship during pharaonic rule.

Locating this model within the context of Roman Egypt requires further elucidation as to how it can relate to our current understanding of the cultural-religious scene. With the advent of Graeco-Roman imperialism, Egyptian society experienced a growing multiculturalism, the outcome of which (it may be argued) invariably leads to an expanded world-view and thus a weakening of the integration with the larger social body. With this increasing sociological plurality, the cohesion of Group breaks down as communities become more differentiated, leading to increased Grid based affiliations based on the individuals rather than institutional bodies. Applying the Group/Grid to Roman Egypt, we would appear to see a weakening of Group within Roman Egypt and the increase of Grid (as previously stated, typified by increased ritual/magic as individuals compete in a more integrated set of distinct relationships) and we would seek to locate this change in greater social differentiation and fragmentation (rather than acculturation) leading to a more individualised approach to religion. As previously stated, the milieu of the *Hermetica* is has its roots in temple religion. I do not seek to explain its appearance

¹⁷⁴ Douglas, M: 1970, p.60

¹⁷⁵ See Douglas's description of the Garia tribe from New Guinea, Chapter Nine, p.139

among the lay populace as being a result of temple decline. Instead, I argue that the *Hermetica* reflects a greater sense of individualisation and competitive local interaction.

The Hermetic Corpus demonstrates a continuation of traditional religious philosophy, removed from the context of temple cult and used by small groups and individuals as an expression of personal piety. This could be argued to demonstrate a genuine syncretism between indigenous and Hellenistic religious thought in contrast to the political and social tensions between these groups apparent in Alexandria.¹⁷⁶ In short, the Hermetic Corpus represents a complex form of Hellenistic and Egyptian religiosity, provoking interesting questions concerning the nature of religion in Roman Egypt and the inter-relationship between Greek philosophy and Egyptian religious forms. In contrast, then, to Fowden's location of the *Hermetica* as an outgrowth of Egyptian tradition, but one which is distant from the temples or anything that could be seen as popular religion within Egypt, as a cultic, elitist religious enclave within Roman Egypt, I locate Hermeticism firmly within a range of Egyptian religious traditions that grew out of the temple traditions, and still located itself in relation to those traditions. I see no reason to regard it as an isolated movement, a lay intellectual movement excluded and exclusive, but rather as an adaptation of traditional religious values to new social circumstances. One can use Douglas' model to explore the relationship between societal change and religious practices in a way which does not require all religious change to be caused by institutional factors (that is an attack on the temples, or a bankruptcy of temples¹⁷⁷) and by locating Hermeticism within that grid, there is no need to isolate this religious form from other religious practices and shifts in Roman Egypt, regardless of their complexity. Even if we see the production of Hermetic texts as being the preserve of a highly educated elite, the religious problems that this elite were facing were probably not particular to their class, nor could one argue with any great conviction that the religious thought of the *Hermetica* was inaccessible to their lesser educated contemporaries: education and intellectual ability are not necessarily closely related in the ancient context. As I shall show, once one establishes the *Hermetica* as not just having Egyptian origins, but as operating within a contemporary context of Egyptian religious thought, the social exclusivity that Fowden proposes seems difficult to defend.

¹⁷⁶ Despite the cosmopolitan nature of the city, social tensions between Alexandrian and native Egyptian inhabitants can be observed in the marginalisation of the native culture in social and native life (for example in the exemption of the Greek population from the poll tax, the necessity of proving Alexandrian citizenship for entry to the Gymnasium). This became arguably more pronounced under Roman administration, where the Egyptian influences (particularly with regards to the remodelling of the Serapeum and the incorporation of the priesthood into the administration structure) were curtailed. (Finneran, N. *Alexandria: A City and Myth*, Tempus, 2003, p.80) also cf Alston:2002, pps.141-61 and Alston: 1999 pps 129-53

¹⁷⁷ See Bagnall:1993

The Hermetic texts are so diverse and complex that an analysis of each and every text would be impractical. Instead, I will explore the issues raised above through a detailed analysis of three of the texts: *The Poimandres*, *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* and *The Asclepius/The Perfect Discourse*. I chose these three in part because of their value in the exposition of Hermetic doctrine, but also because they include elements that demonstrate the continuity of traditional Egyptian religious practices.

To summarise, I begin by attempting a definition of Hermetism through a survey of those works that survive to us today. I shall then proceed to outline the history of the debate and the conclusions reached by previous studies of the Hermetic works on the nature of the interaction between Greek and Egyptian. From this I shall move beyond the earlier scholarly tradition of examining the evidence for ethnographic stratification, to a thorough examination of the principle examples of Hermetic literature mentioned above, discussing their influences, structure and the nature of their philosophy. By examining the texts in conjunction with contemporary philosophic traditions, such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Judaism/Christianity, I hope to cast light on the wider religious context which will offer clues to interpreting Hermetism as part of the '*religio mentis*' of Roman Egypt.

2.1.1 *The Sources for Hermetism: The technical and philosophic works*

Hermetism survives to us today in two forms, the technical *Hermetica* and the philosophic *Hermetica*. Although this essay will be examining the evidence of tracts classified as philosophical, it worth noting that such a classification is little more than a construct of contemporary scholars. Both groups of texts represent a unified body of work, sharing the common philosophical principle of cosmic sympathy.¹⁷⁸ Festugiere speculated in his analysis of Excerpt VI of Stobaeus' *Anthologium* that certain aspects of the technical works (in this instance the study of the decan stars which finishes with a hymn of piety) were intended as an aid to the path of spiritual *gnōsis*.¹⁷⁹ This shared principle suggests that despite the seemingly heterogeneous nature of the technical *Hermetica*'s tracts, they shared the same audience or at the least a common interest.

¹⁷⁸ As noted by Fowden (1993, p.76-89) this is manifested in the technical *Hermetica* in the conception of daemonology, astrology and alchemy where the transmutation of base metals into gold forms an allegory for the purification of the soul. This links very clearly to the preoccupations of the philosophical treatises which focus on man's need to transcend fate before he can be united with God.

¹⁷⁹ Copenhaver:1992, p.xxxiii

Of the ‘philosophical’ treatises, the works that survive to us today comprise of the eighteen treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the forty tracts of Stobaeus’ *Anthologium*, the *Armenian Definitions*, the three tracts discovered in the Coptic library of Nag Hammadi (*Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* IV: 6, a prayer of thanksgiving from the end of the ‘*Perfect discourse*’ IV: 7 and 21-9 of the Latin *Asclepius* IV: 8) and the Vienna Papyri.¹⁸⁰ In dating the emergence of the philosophic *Hermetica*, we have recourse to evidence from the bodies of text mentioned above as well as the references to the *Hermetica* by antique authors. Of the texts themselves, the oldest of these pieces is the Vienna Papyri, which is dated to the second or third centuries from two references within the fragments to other contemporary bodies of work.¹⁸¹ Following the Vienna Papyri are the Nag Hammadi Corpus VI.7 and the prayer section of *The Asclepius* which are datable to the late third century from references also repeated in the *PGM* III (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*).¹⁸² The earliest evidence that can give us a firm dating for the entirety of the Latin version of *The Asclepius* is from Augustine’s *City of God*, which was written between 410 and 426 AD, which is also the latest date for the Greek version used by Lactantius. The Coptic version of this text, found in *NHC*. VI.8 is from around mid 4th century.¹⁸³ Similarly, the earliest incarnation of the *Perfect Discourse*, from which the Latin *Asclepius* is derived, is also from the mid 4th century. Stobaeus’ *Anthologium* which comprise of around 40 Hermetic texts (including excerpts from the *Corpus Hermeticum* II, IV, IX and *The Asclepius*) represent one of the later collections of *Hermetica* dating to about 500 AD, although earlier references to texts in his collection were made by Cyril of Alexandria from around the middle of the fifth century.¹⁸⁴

Aside from the evidence of and in the texts themselves, there were references to Hermetic writings by non-Hermetic authors. Of these, we have early claims to authorship by Trismegistus from Athenagoras of Athens and Philo of Byblos, both from the second century AD.¹⁸⁵ From the early third century, we have the earliest direct quotes from the Hermetic Corpus from the Christian author Tertullian in his *Adversus Valentinianos* and the *De Anima* written in 206/7,¹⁸⁶ and from the mid third century we also find a reference to the philosophic *Hermetica* in ps.- Justin’s *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ Fowden: 1993, p.9

¹⁸¹ Copenhaver:1992, p.xlii. The Vienna fragments also refer to lost treatise nine and ten, indicating that they were part of a larger collection of works.

¹⁸² Fowden:1993, p.11

¹⁸³ Copenhaver:1992, p.xliii

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p.xlii

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p.xliii

¹⁸⁶ Fowden: 1993, p.198

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.11

With regard to the compendium of seventeen tracts that make up the *Corpus Hermeticum* as we know it today, they were not collated into a single collection until the eleventh century by Byzantine scholar Michael Psellus.¹⁸⁸ They are therefore more closely representative of the selective tastes of a Christian Byzantine readership rather than the full breadth of the Hermetic scene of the fourth century or earlier.¹⁸⁹ It is also apparent from references from authors such as Lactantius to texts lost to us that there were many more Hermetic texts in existence. Of the individual tracts that are now within the *Corpus Hermeticum*, there is a reference by Zosimus of Panopolis to *CH.I* and *IV* within the same context, from the 300 CE.¹⁹⁰

References to the Hermetic Corpus can only give a date of their circulation and no concrete date as to their earliest publication. Despite this however, most scholars accept a dating for the writing of the *Hermetica* to the late first to late third century.¹⁹¹

2.2 *The Poimandres*

Of the many Hermetic texts, it is *The Poimandres* that has occasioned the largest body of secondary literature. This is probably due to the relative clarity with which the text extols Hermetic philosophy and cosmology, as well the view that the text is broadly representative of the body of Hermetic literature. Much of the scholarship on this text revolves around the debate as to whether it displays Egyptian or Greek antecedents. However, there has been little discussion as to why there are elements of both traditions within the text and what this can reveal about the religious sensibilities of the time. As I shall demonstrate, *The Poimandres* shows a continuation of traditional religious wisdom (specifically the cult of Thoth) in which knowledge is seen as essential for the reception of revelation and enlightenment. However what distinguishes the Hermetic doctrines from other philosophically analogous circles of the period is the concept that one can become deified (and free from the snares of fate) and ‘know’ god whilst living. Alongside the philosophical contents of the text, there is also evidence that the revelation required to achieve *gnōsis* is intended to be brought about via magical rather than contemplative means. Evidence of this will be demonstrated through a thorough deconstruction of the text as

¹⁸⁸ Copenhagen:1992, p.xl

¹⁸⁹This interpretation is validated in part by the obvious omission of the popular *Perfect Discourse* alongside other examples of Hermetica that were unsuited to fit a Christian context. Fowden demonstrates this by a comparison between NHC VI.6 (which includes references to magic, astrology, pagan cult and lots of Egyptian décor) and CH XIII, which omits these elements, but is otherwise very similar. Fowden: 1993 p.8

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.8

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p.11

well as by the supporting evidence of the Demotic *Book of Thoth*. This body of evidence provides a clear link between Egyptian temple wisdom (and ritual usage) and the Hermetic wisdom, particularly as the Demotic *Book of Thoth* contains key philosophical ideas in an idiom devoid of Greek philosophical influence. There are also linguistic and stylistic indicators that point to its origins within the philosophy in temple ritual usage.

The Poimandres is the first tractate of seventeen (eighteen including *The Asclepius*) within the collection of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It tells of the initial revelation of divine wisdom to Hermes Trismegistus by the ‘supernatural intellect’ Poimandres (*Nous*). Hermes describes how, during a period of reflection, he received a vision where Poimandres showed him the origins of the cosmos and explained the nature of Man, God and the natural world (*Corp. Herm.* I.6-12). He then showed how Man became captivated by Nature and thus ensnared in a mortal body, hence Man’s dual nature as both mortal and divine and his subjugation to the tides of Fate (*Corp. Herm.* I.14-15). The vital message Poimandres imparts to Hermes is that it is possible to escape the bonds of Fate and thus achieve immortality through *gnōsis* and a moral lifestyle. Describing the journey of the soul through the cosmic framework, Poimandres left a final instruction to Hermes to impart this knowledge to others, so they might also be ‘saved’. Poimandres then joins the other powers and Hermes finishes with a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

2.2.1 Influences upon *The Poimandres*: The Linguistic Evidence

Previous studies of *The Poimandres* concluded that it was principally the product of Greek and Christian influences with little by way of Egyptian religiosity except for the syncretic associations of Hermes with the Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth. Scholars such as Granger,¹⁹² Scott,¹⁹³ Reitzenstein (although he later changed his mind to favour an Iranian influence¹⁹⁴) and Griffiths¹⁹⁵ were amongst the first to propose an Egyptian antecedent to the Hermetic Corpus, however this was quickly dismissed in favour of a Greek thesis by scholars such as Nock¹⁹⁶ and Festugiere.¹⁹⁷ The crux of their debate centred upon the etymology of the name Poimandres

¹⁹² Granger: 1904 395–412, particularly p. 400

¹⁹³ Scott: 1925

¹⁹⁴ Copenhaver: 1992, p. Liii

¹⁹⁵ Griffiths: 1970

¹⁹⁶ Nock: 1945

¹⁹⁷ Festugiere: 1950-54,

(within the context of its appearance in *CHI* and XIII).¹⁹⁸ Granger was the first to suggest a Coptic origin of Poimandres which would translate as ‘the witness’.¹⁹⁹ This has been rejected upon the grounds that Hermes has no precedent as ‘a witness’ and neither does this interpretation fit with the general theme of the work. Mead also dismissed the Coptic etymology although he did admit that there may be grounds for seeing a demotic antecedent.²⁰⁰ Similarly Kroll and Meyer also dismissed the Egyptian link preferring the known association of Hermes and the role of Shepherd and as educator of mankind. It was not until Walter Scott that the concept of an Egyptian interpretation was voiced again, where he argues that Poimandres may have been an Egyptian name assimilated into a Greek name like Poimandros, which may have been an epithet.²⁰¹

In more recent studies by Fowden, Kingsley and Marcus, Egyptian influences are again debated in relation to the name Poimandres. Griffith argued that a linguistic analysis demonstrates an Egyptian pedigree for the term Poimandres. Griffith argues that the P of Poimandres is the masculine, singular definite article in Demotic and Coptic, occurring very often in personal names. Also a P is most often used when the personal name is built around the name of a deity such as ‘The gift of Isis’ (*Petiese*). The suffix ‘res’ could refer to the traditional manner in which the Greeks transcribe Egyptian names ending with ‘son of Re’, for instance ‘The gift of Horus-Re’ becomes *Petearpres*.²⁰² Therefore, the Egyptian should be read as *P-eime* (*a word commonly placed before an abstract concept*) nte (meaning knowledge of)-Re, i.e. ‘The knowledge of Re’ or ‘The understanding of Re’.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ This question is hardly new and can be traced back as far as antiquity. For example in the thirteenth of the *Hermetica*, there is a pun on the etymology of Poimandres in that the supernatural intelligence is acting the role of shepherd or ‘Poimainein’, as in the first treatise where Poimandres introduces himself “I am Poimandres, intelligence of the supreme authority. I know what you want, and I am with you, wherever you are”, *Corp. Herm.* 13.19, 1.2.). Zosimus from Panopolis, made the pun more explicit by advising Theosebia to return to her ‘Poimenandra’. The title of ‘Shepherd of Men’ also gave rise to polemic due to obvious parallels to Judaic and Christian references and was used as evidence of the *Hermetica*’s indebtedness to these religions. However this would be to ignore the fact that as a translation ‘Shepherd of Men’ is linguistically incorrect. A correct transliteration would be ‘Poimandros, Poimanor or Poimenanor’ not Poimandres. What makes this more problematic is that the term also makes sense within the context of the *Hermetica* and is also referenced by Hermetists within that context - Kingsley: 1993, p.1

¹⁹⁹ Marcus: 1949, p.41

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.41

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.42

²⁰² Kingsley: 1993, p.4

²⁰³ On a side-note, Kingsley speculates this Egyptian etymology and translation of *The Poimandres* has important parallels to the ‘semi personalized, semi abstract’ expressions of the Gnostic texts found in the Nag Hammadi library, particularly with Gnostic works such as ‘The Gospel of Truth’ in which the importance of the intelligence of the Father is discussed (Kingsley:1993, p.5)

However, there are detractors of Griffith's linguistic analysis (such as Marcus: 1949) in part due to the lack of the Coptic definite article which would normally be placed in front of Re.²⁰⁴ There is also the issue of the assimilation of Re with 'authenticia' which Marcus feels is impossible due to Re's/Helios' status as little more than a demiurge in Gnostic writing and therefore not compatible with the status of 'authenticia' in *The Poimandres* (not to mention being out of keeping with the general structure of *The Poimandres*.) Instead, Marcus proposes that the name Poimandres was a Greek term, translated into Egyptian and then retranslated into Greek. The basis for this view is the belief that the ideas expressed in *The Poimandres* are derived from Stoic philosophy and that Poimandres itself is a name expressed in Coptic as *peimentmentero* or 'the reason of sovereignty', which latterly would come to be Hellenised as *peimentero*. Marcus bases his claim for a Greek (specifically Stoic) etymology on the resemblance of the Coptic word *perimentero* to Poimandres, which he claims correlates more closely to 'Nous of authenticia'. He also argues on linguistic grounds that as there was no such thing as a true adjective, the term 'the sovereign of reason' should in fact be translated as 'the sovereign reason' which therefore correlates to the Stoic concept of *hegemonikon* (as associated with the terms *dianoia* and *logismos* by writers such as Philo and Plotinus).²⁰⁵ This thesis runs contrary to the conclusions of most scholars, who argue that the name Poimandres is possibly the result of a Greek author attempting to convey to a Greek audience the interpretation of a non-Greek name.²⁰⁶

2.2.2 *The Stylistic and Philosophical Evidence*

Kingsley presents the case for Poimandres as the product of a Greek re-etymologising an Egyptian concept, based upon an examination of the stylistic attributes of the texts, which, he argues, represent typically Egyptian traits. For example, the statement 'I am Poimandres, supreme authority etc' follows the traditional 'I am...' formula common to Egyptian literature.²⁰⁷ Two examples of this stylistic tradition are exemplified by the following Middle Kingdom inscriptions:

²⁰⁴ Marcus: 1949, p.43

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p.43

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.40

²⁰⁷ Kingsley: 1993, p.4, e.g. from Edfu, Thoth declaring his ancestry from Re as well as numerous other examples within Egyptian religious literature and Graeco-Egyptian magical texts where the declaration can be made by the magician or from a deity in order to assert their supremacy

“I am your deputy, you made me lord of life, undying... I am the nursling of early dawn, I am the nursling of night’s early hours...I am he who makes the singer waken music for Hathor” (*Stele of King Wabankb Intef II*)²⁰⁸

“I am wealthy, I am great; I furnished myself from my own property, given me by the majesty of my lord, because of his great love for me.” (*Stele of Treasurer Tjetji*)²⁰⁹

Kingsley further argues that the concept of a supernatural intelligence which has hitherto been assumed to be of Greek origin, can be seen as early as the Pyramid Texts where references to ‘*Sia*’ (understanding or intelligence) and ‘*hu*’ (command or word) have been found, e.g. *Sia* is referred to as the ‘Representative of Re’ coupled with *Hu*, ‘the divine word’. This has striking parallels to the coupling of *Nous* (intelligence) with *Logos*, in the creation of the universe in *The Poimandres*. Also *Sia*, though originally associated with Re, was later more closely identified with Thoth, so much so that by the Graeco-Roman period it was not uncommon for Thoth to be referred to as ‘*Sia*, Lord of Hermoupolis’.²¹⁰ Another piece of evidence that provides a link to Egyptian antecedents rather than Greek is the epithet ascribed to Thoth - ‘the heart of Re’ (*ib n Ra*). What is compelling about this title is that the heart was seen as the seat of the intellect and understanding. Kingsley hypothesizes that this has a particularly strong cosmological interpretation that lends itself to a philosophy very close to that expressed in *The Poimandres* (i.e. the heart or intelligence of Re, *Sia*, coupled with the creative word, is what brought the universe into being).²¹¹ In fact he suggests that a whole range of Egyptian religious practices such as incubation and induced visions are hinted at in the first few lines of *The Poimandres*.²¹² If we take this interpretation to be correct, then the question of the significance of these ritualistic practices comes to the fore. It may initially appear that the types of practices Kingsley believes are referenced would be incompatible with the core message of Hermetic instruction (i.e. that *gnōsis* can only be achieved by means of revelation through private contemplation for those that have reached a stage in which they are ready to receive divine wisdom and not through a ritualistic act), but that would be to offer too hard a definition of temple religion as collective and communal and other religious forms as contemplative. There is, for example, much evidence of

²⁰⁸ Lichtheim: 1975, .p.95

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.91

²¹⁰ Whenever it was deemed necessary to emphasise the wisdom of a particular god, *Sia* was attached to their name. However Thoth was so synonymous with the *Sia* that by the Graeco-Roman period, *Sia* was just another means of referencing Thoth. Boylan: 1922, p.105

²¹¹ Kingsley: 1993, p.8

²¹² Ibid, p.15

individuals attending the temples for personal rather than communal practices, such as incubation at the temple of Imhotep at Thebes where they would receive ‘dream oracles’.²¹³

Another example where stylistically *The Poimandres* demonstrates specifically Egyptian traits is reflected in the statement by Poimandres ‘I know what you want, and I am with you wherever you are’ which is a reference to Thoth’s function as god of knowledge and omnipresence.²¹⁴ This is corroborated by the correspondence of *Nous* to Life, which in Greek philosophical interpretations makes little sense, but makes perfect sense when considering the role of Thoth as creative power in the Egyptian cosmological tradition.

Kingsley’s argument plausibly locates *The Poimandres* within an Egyptian tradition that has deep roots, establishing philosophical and stylistic similarities that argue against any formative Greek influence. This interpretation is further supported by an analysis of Hermes Trismegistus himself. Although there are clear associations with the Greek god, Trismegistus is both Thoth and the human recipient of Thoth’s knowledge, who is thereby in receipt of the godhead. This association is Egyptian in origin, in part deriving from an established association of Thoth with knowledge. Further, this Egyptian origin appears to be how the Hermeticists themselves understood the cult, claiming that it originated in translation of a series of hieroglyphic texts. I argue that the cult has a strongly conservative culture and differs greatly from the innovative syncretic developments that we associate with Alexandrian culture. In fact by closely examining Hermes Trismegistus’ representation as a synthesis between Hermes and Thoth, as well as his dualistic nature as both man and god; it will be possible to gain a better understanding of his significance as expressing a philosophical tradition distinct from contemporary philosophical schools.

2.2.3 *The personification of Hermes Trismegistus*

Hermes Trismegistus, as the main protagonist of the *Hermetic Corpus*, takes on the role as the receptor of a divine revelation brought about by *Nous* (the divine intellect). At the stage prior to his revelation, he is but a man, however after achieving ‘*gnosis*’ by virtue of the vision given to him, he achieves a semi-divine status.

²¹³ Roberts: 2000, p.196

²¹⁴ Kingsley, p.16

“As he was saying this to me, Poimandres joined with the powers. Then he sent me forth, empowered and instructed on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision, after I had given thanks to the father of all and praised him. And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge...” *CHI.27*

In this empowered status, he becomes a personification of the core meaning of the text, i.e. that one can achieve *gnōsis* (of god and the universe) during one’s lifetime and become divine. In this way, the characterisation of Hermes reinforces the concept of the redemptive power of knowledge of Hermetic philosophy. To further emphasize this point, Hermes Trismegistus is a conduit for disseminating this message to others – he is a messenger and a bridging point between the spiritual and the material planes. In this he takes on the attributes of both the Greek god Hermes and to a lesser extent (with regards to the role of messenger) the Egyptian god Thoth. He is therefore human, but imbued with esoteric knowledge of a cosmic deity.

This leads us to examine which aspects of the gods Hermes and Thoth, Trismegistus is seen to incorporate into his depiction within the *Hermetica*. Other than the aforementioned role of messenger between the divine and mortal realms, Trismegistus shares with Hermes an association with the underworld (e.g. his connection to the Oneiroi and conductor of souls to the underworld as Hermes psychopompus), and the moon²¹⁵ (not to mention healing using magical arts) as seen in the following passage -

“Hermes Kyllenios (of Mt Kyllene) began to summon the suitors’ ghosts [at dawn’s first light]; he held in his hand the golden rod that he uses to lull men’s eyes asleep when he so wills, or again to wake others from their slumber; with this he roused them and led them on [to the underworld], and they followed him, thinly gibbering.” Homer, *Odyssey 24.1*

The significance of using a god associated with magic as the key propagator of knowledge demonstrates on a symbolic level that the text is not separated from traditional (Egyptian) religiosity, but is a continuation of that tradition.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ C.f. Plutarch’s rendition of how Hermes won five extra lunar days by winning a game of draughts with the Moon – *De Iside et Osiride* 12.355d-e

²¹⁶ Traditional religiosity defined here as the deeply ritualistic temple practices mediated on behalf of the pharaoh by the temple priests, to ensure the continued well being of Egypt by means of affecting cosmic harmony and balance. Finnestad 1998: p.204

This is even more powerfully apparent in a comparison of 'Trismegistus' role within *The Poimandres* (as well as the other *Hermetica*) and the features of the Egyptian god Thoth. Thoth, even more than Hermes, is primarily associated in Egyptian religious literature as the purveyor of magical knowledge. He is credited with inventing writing and is associated with the moon.²¹⁷ As the court scribe in the judgement hall of Osiris, as well as the companion of Re on his celestial bark, Thoth has strong association with the afterlife and is also seen as the creative principle at his cult centre at Hermopolis.²¹⁸ If we compare this to the central concerns of *The Poimandres* (i.e. a vision from the supreme intelligence of the origins of creation, coupled with the chief axiom that knowledge, specifically knowledge of the cosmos, leads to divinisation) we can see that Trismegistus is an embodiment of Thoth (or at the very least, it is an acceptance that one must understand the arts associated with Thoth to achieve *gnōsis*).²¹⁹ Validating this association between the Trismegistus of the Hermetic literature and the Egyptian Thoth is the name itself: Thoth's epithet is 'thrice great' or 'Trismegistus'.

Although the evidence for the association of Trismegistus to Thoth is very strong, it cannot be ignored that in *The Poimandres* (as elsewhere, with the exception of his appearance in Stobaeus' *Kore Kosmou* where he is wholly divine²²⁰) he is depicted as a mortal. Within *The Asclepius* Hermes Trismegistus makes reference to his ancestor who is the god Hermes whose residence is in Hermoupolis. The Hermetists insist that their texts were written in hieroglyphic text on stelae by the first Hermes and translated into Greek later on.²²¹ This was supported by Iamblichus who records that an Egyptian priest named Bitys, copied the original Hermetic texts from hieroglyphics into Greek, using Greek philosophical terminology (Iam., *Myst.* VIII.5, X.7). He also claims that Plato and Pythagoras read the same stelae with the help of Egyptian priests.

“If, however, thou wouldst propose some philosophic question, we will determine it for thee according to the ancient Tablets of Hermes, which Plato and Pythagoras, having studied thoroughly beforehand, combined together in Philosophy” Iam., *Myst.* I.3

It is interesting that the Hermetists thought it important that the origins of the doctrines were seen as Egyptian. Later, the myth evolved so that Hermes the younger was the translator of the

²¹⁷ Boylan: 1999, p.88

²¹⁸ David: 2002, p.88

²¹⁹ Interestingly, Thoth was also regarded as the keeper of time and lord of fate, and was said to be able to pass on the incredible power of his knowledge to his followers as shown in the Middle Kingdom story of 'The Magician Djedi' (which links to the Hermetic notion that one can escape Fate through knowledge) Wilkinson: 2003, p.216

²²⁰ Fowden: 1993, p.28

²²¹ Ibid, p.29

stelae. The explanation of why the Hermetic texts are in Greek rather than Egyptian as well as the existence of two Hermes in the texts, helped to facilitate the appearance of an Egyptian god in a Greek idiom as a messenger of the gods. They also demonstrate by virtue of the insistence of Hermetic authors as to the Egyptian provenance of these writings, a strong attachment to traditional religious practices.²²²

Trismegistus as a man works within the text as means to explain the principles of Hermetic philosophy, but more than that he represents an archetype of all the initiate is hoping to achieve, i.e. divinity through *gnōsis* via knowledge of esoteric arts. Aside from the use of Trismegistus as a metaphor for becoming Thoth, the use of his name as the equivalent of Thoth transforms the genre of the piece from a philosophical work to that of a semi-technical tract. In fact the use of Trismegistus could be seen as invocatory in the same manner as magical texts invoke the spirit of a daemon to aid them.²²³

The investigation into the symbolic usage of Trismegistus suggests that the tract is neither an expression of pseudo-Alexandrian philosophy nor an *Interpretatio Graeca* of the Thoth mythology, but a different expression of the knowledge of Thoth independent from temple practices, expressed within a terminology which would make sense to Greek readers. It therefore does not represent itself as a separate development of religious tradition, but as a sophisticated blend of philosophy designed to achieve *gnōsis* through dissemination of the essential knowledge with the power of invocation via association with Thoth.

2.2.4 *The Demotic 'Book of Thoth'*

If one accepts the thesis that *The Poimandres* represents a continuation of traditional religious expression from the pharoanic period, the evidence of the Demotic 'Book of Thoth' (more or less contemporary with the earliest examples of Hermetic literature in the 2nd Century AD²²⁴) can be more easily used both as evidence of the religious milieu in which Hermetism emerged and as an element of the Hermetic tradition itself. The absence of a strong and obvious Greek philosophical element and the language of composition do not stand against its categorisation with the texts traditionally within the Hermetic archive. Further, since the content of this book demonstrates a tendency to make explicit the links between traditional Egyptian religious ideas

²²² Ibid, p.30

²²³ Naydler, J: 1996, p.153

²²⁴ Mahe:1996, p.358

and ideas that would be more naturally associated with Greek philosophy (the discovery of traces of Coptic or Greek in some copies demonstrates the multi-linguistic nature of certain bodies of its readership), we can see in the text the emergence of some of the characteristic features of the Hermetic tradition. And since this book reveals certain literary motifs that have parallels with older indigenous tradition such as - the ‘question and answer’ format (although as Mahe admits that this format is also shared with Platonic treatises), the advice given from father to son and the descriptions of the role of Thoth, all of which can be traced back to ancient Egyptian antecedents in texts such as *Myth of the Sun's Eye* or underworld literature (e.g. the *Book of the Dead*, or the *Book of the Two Ways*, which focuses on the role of Thoth), Egyptian prophecies, hymns to the Gods or mythological texts (HHE, t. 2, pp. 90-113 et pp. 278-308) and Wisdom texts, there can be no doubt that it belongs firmly within a long tradition of Egyptian religious writings.²²⁵

This text can be described as proto-Hermetic in that the text expresses a nascent form of Hermetic philosophy and offers interesting philosophical parallels to the Hermetic doctrine of *The Poimandres* in particular.²²⁶ A prime example of this can be found in the shared preoccupation of the text's author with the redemptive power of knowledge, for with knowledge comes enlightenment and through enlightenment comes eternal life. Examples of the *Book of Thoth's* emphasis on the importance of knowledge can be especially seen in the reading requirements for those that wish to gain *gnôsis* as well as certain phrases -

“...the book of Insight, the book of Power, the book of Annals, the book of the Djed-pillar, the book of Interpretation (. . .), the book of the Collection of the Praises, and the book of Honouring their Father who is Powerful (. . .), the book of Secrets” (B 3/13-15).

This is loosely paralleled with the importance of knowledge in *The Poimandres* (though without the reading list):

“This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god”. *CHI.26*

²²⁵ Ibid, p.358

²²⁶ The Demotic Book of Thoth validates my argument that the wisdom of *The Poimandres* derives from an older pharaonic tradition harkening from the temple cult of Thoth. This thesis (though not contingent upon this support), is strengthened by the fact that these two pieces of evidence are independently and mutually supportive of this claim.

“And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge”
CHI.27.

Also key phrases that emphasise the importance of knowledge include:

“You have caused that I become old, I being young of birth. You have given to me the means of becoming a youth” (C 4/20-21).

“The breast of knowledge,” (or of “wisdom”), and

“The nurse who nurtures language” (B 3/ 16-4/ 1),

Which can be compared to –

“Philosophy and magic nurture the soul just as medicine heals the body”

(Stobaei *Hermetica* XXIII, 68)²²⁷

Although there are marked parallels between this text and the Hermetic texts (for example, the didactic literary format, themes of ethics, life after death, use of the title ‘thrice great’ in reference to Thoth, emphasis on eternal life through knowledge and the explanation for sacred animals proffered in *The Asclepius*, 37 SH IV, 2-5, as a product of cosmic unity and in the *Book of Thoth*, as *Heka*²²⁸) the primary differences occur in the *Book of Thoth*’s conception of the afterlife which remains stubbornly traditional (i.e. the soul’s perilous journey through the underworld to sail on the bark of Re). The redemptive power of knowledge is a strong and recurrent theme between *The Poimandres* and *The Book of Thoth*. All of these parallels confirm a link between Egyptian philosophy expressed in its traditional form and Hermetic philosophy. Although ethics and morality are important for the Hermetist to receive his divine rebirth, it is the elucidatory benefits of knowledge that brings about immortality and escape from Fate.

“Why have you surrendered yourselves to death, earthborn men, since you have a right to share in immortality? You who have journeyed with error, who have partnered with ignorance, think again: escape the shadowy light; leave corruption behind and take a share in immortality.” *CHI.28*

²²⁷ Mahe: 1996, p.355

²²⁸ Ibid, p.357

“Having made them rise, I became guide to my race, teaching them the words – how to be saved and in what manner – and I sowed the words of wisdom among them and they were nourished from the ambrosial water.” *CH.I.29*

This premise is similar to that of traditional Egyptian religion in which admission into the afterlife can be wrought through proper mystical rites and the Soul’s knowledge of the appropriate spells. Despite funerary inscriptions and papyrological evidence which describes the weighing of the heart of the deceased in the Judgement Hall of Osiris and the formulaic statements of the deceased that they have led a blameless life, the importance of an ethical life are undermined somewhat by the accompaniment of spells to force the judgement in the deceased’s favour. From this comparison then, it is clear that the central concept of *gnôsis*, the drive to ‘know’ God could have developed from Egyptian thought.²²⁹ Moreover, the idea that upon achieving *gnôsis* one becomes divine is very close to the Egyptian concept of the necessity of ‘becoming Osiris’ in order to achieve immortality (i.e. in death the iconography of the deceased is always that of Osiris in his mummified form, except in reliefs where aspects of the life of the deceased are portrayed).

Dudycha takes this further to suggest that Poimandres himself could also be Osiris in a different guise (and if not Osiris then at least a supernatural being who shares the ‘all pervasive’ nature of the Egyptian god Kephera in the ‘Legend of Creation’). The basis for his statement however, is little more than an observation that Osiris had an association with Nu (the primordial mass) and that this has a resemblance to Poimandres and his revelation to Hermes of the beginnings of the cosmos.²³⁰ He also cites parallels between the Egyptian cosmology and Poimandres’ description of the beginning of all things from a state of inertia²³¹ -

“I myself raised them [earth, sky, gods, animals and man] up from out of Nu, from a state of helpless inertness.” (Budge, *Legends of the Gods*, Vol. 1, p.3-7)

And:

“I am the light you saw, mind, your god,” he said, “who existed before the watery nature that appeared out of darkness. The light-giving word who comes from mind is the son of god.” *CH.I.6*

²²⁹ Although an emphasis on knowledge is also shared with Greek philosophical tradition, the importance of this within the Egyptian tradition is fundamental above any other consideration for affecting a transformation.

²³⁰ Dudycha: 1931, p.266

²³¹ *Ibid*, p.266

The Egyptian influence on this aspect of *The Poimandres* is also supported by the similarities of *The Poimandres*' cosmogony to later Egyptian texts on the birth of Thoth²³² and the account of creation given in the 'Legend of Creation' papyrus dating to 311 BC. Also the concept of a primordial watery abyss is present in Egyptian cosmology as Nu and also in *The Poimandres* "And then the Darkness changed into some sort of a Moist Nature, tossed about beyond all power of words" (CH 1.4). Although the dualistic themes of light and darkness, water and earth appear in other cultures and traditions, including Manichaean and Mandaean dualism,²³³ Kingsley dismisses the dualistic interpretation, seeing it rather as an Egyptian reference to the appearance and disappearance of the Sun, and as darkness being sometimes the opposite of light and other times merely its primeval form.²³⁴ This is partially substantiated by a reference to the coiled serpent, which in Egyptian cosmology represents the primordial manifestation of the divine and the god Apophis.

"But in a little while Darkness came settling down on part [of it], awesome and gloomy, coiling in sinuous folds, so that methought it like unto a snake." CH 1.4

Thoth's connection to this sacred snake is also demonstrated by the cult centre of Hermopolis' use of the divine snake imagery (Philo of Byblos also remarks that the sacred snake is a matter of the divine writings of Thoth - Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1. I 0.46-3 1,²³⁵).

2.2.5 Evidence for Egyptian systems of thought in *The Poimandres*

It can be seen that the Hermetists borrowed heavily from Egyptian cosmological myths. Nevertheless, the pervasive use of Greek philosophical terminology throughout the entire tract cannot be ignored. This Greek terminology should not be seen as undermining the fundamental Egyptian origin of the thought and myth, but needs to be seen in conjunction with rather than opposition to those traditional elements. From the following analysis of Greek philosophical key words and phrases within the first lines of *The Poimandres*, I argue that rather than demonstrating a repurposing of Greek concepts, they are in fact pharoanic in origin.

"Once, when thought (*ennoias*) came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or

²³² Copenhaver: 1992, p.98

²³³ Ibid, p.98

²³⁴ Kingsley: 1993, p.17

²³⁵ Ibid p.17

toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: “what do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know (*gnonai*) from your understanding (*noesas*)?” (CH. I.I)

Concepts such as *ennoia* have a very specific meaning in the context of its use by the materialist Stoics (such as Antiochus of Ascalon), who interpreted it as a concept deriving from sensation. *Ennoia* was also interpreted by the Valentinian Gnostics as one of the first pair of thirty Aeons. However, in the context of *The Poimandres*, Copenhaver argues that *ennoia* is more of an abstraction, though not necessarily in the same mould as the Stoic interpretation.²³⁶ Further along, the term *pneuma* or spirit is used, which would again seem to refer to the Stoic conception, (i.e. a material that sustains life and thought not an ephemeral, non physical force).

“The fire was nimble and piercing and active as well, and because the air was light it followed after spirit [pneuma] and rose up to the fire.” CH.1.5

In this context *pneuma* appears to refer not to a material substance,²³⁷ but to be closer to the Egyptian concept of the *ba*. Within Egyptian spirituality, the ‘*ba*’ represents one of the etheric components of the human soul. However unlike the Christian interpretation of the soul (which it is most often mistranslated as the closest approximation to the Egyptian concept), it does not consist of the characteristics that make up the personality of the individual to which it corresponds.²³⁸ Rather, the *ba* represents the principle of a life force; this is where the similarity to the Stoic conception of *pneuma* begins and ends. For where the Stoic conception of *pneuma* is that is a physical unseen force that maintains existence, the *ba* has a will and can exist simultaneously on both the material plane and the spiritual realms and often acting as a messenger between the two.²³⁹ Therefore as we can see, despite the use of Greek terms that have very specific connotations in the context of philosophy, their inclusion here marks an approximation to the Egyptian conception of an etheric body (i.e. *ba*) and not the *pneuma* of Stoic philosophy.

The problems in the translation and the interpretation of Egyptian philosophical concepts are crucial to a proper understanding of Egyptian systems of thought and their correspondences to the ‘classical mould’ of thinking. Scholars such as Finnestad (‘Egyptian Thought About Life as a

²³⁶ Copenhaver: 1992, p.96

²³⁷ Ibid, 1992, p.100

²³⁸ The ka disengages from the body at the moment of the death and is synonymous with the concept of nourishment and vitality.

²³⁹ Antelme & Rossini:1995, p.4

Problem of Translation', 1988) and Hornung (*Der Eine und die Vielen*, 1973) have seen this problem as endemic in modern as well as ancient commentators of Egyptian religion. The problem is that Egyptian systems of logic were previously viewed as pre-modern, i.e. 'non-Aristotelian'.²⁴⁰ It is a feature of Egyptian philosophy that an object can hold sometimes paradoxical and dual meanings, such as the idea that a human is not defined by his individual self, but by the essences of the spiritual components of *ba*, *ka*, *akh* (which allow man to transcend death through the collective power of these regenerative forces). It is only when these forces are considered as part of a 'biotic whole' (as Finnestad terms it) that the separate functions of these components make sense. This is exemplar of the system of Egyptian ontological thought – that there are no divisions between heaven and earth, man and animal – they are all integrated within the same cosmic framework. Therefore, when an object is depicted by the Egyptians as a system of binary opposites, it is not reflecting the two unreconciled aspects of the object, rather it is reflecting the dual conditions that are necessary to preserve "the dynamics of the one and only existing, self-maintaining organism of life"²⁴¹. With this in mind, there is no paradox in the sometimes incompatible predicates assigned to various phenomena when they are considered to all be integrated into the same conceptual whole.²⁴²

Within the context of a linguistic analysis of *The Poimandres* (as elsewhere within the *Hermetic Corpus*), the argument made by certain scholars that the treatise is another example of Greek philosophy is mostly based upon the similarities to commonly used Greek terminologies and systems of thought. However, it seems likely this is based upon on a misconception of the Egyptian mode of thought. These terms (when dissected in the context of the piece) seem to reflect an approximation of an Egyptian idea translated into Greek, but scholars have found it difficult to translate such terms back into an acceptable Egyptian equivalent. The inclusion of specifically Greek philosophical terminology appears only indirectly and linguistically to relate to the employment of that language within 'mainstream' Greek philosophy.

Aside from these instances of specific terms, some of the larger concepts embedded in the ideas expressed in *The Poimandres* require discussion. The first of these is the creation story itself, which upon first analysis appears to be a reworking of the *Book of Genesis* (for example, the description of the separation of light from darkness – I.4, the inclusion of a serpent-like being – I.4, the formation of the Word and Man by God the Father – I.6, of Man being made in God's

²⁴⁰ Finnestad, p.29

²⁴¹ Ibid, p.33

²⁴² Ibid, p.32

image – I.12, and the damning of Man to mortality due to errant love – I.15). However closer inspection demonstrates a wider variety of influences. Doresse’ analysis of *The Poimandres* shows that the creation myth shares much with *The Secret Book of John*²⁴³ as well as demonstrating certain Iranian influences (particularly in the concept of a higher-power seeking to ‘free’ the sparks of its own divinity trapped in the lower realms).²⁴⁴

There are a number of concepts deployed in the text that have been connected to Greek philosophy. The most prominent can be deduced from a passage in *CHI.18*:

“...and let him who is mindful recognise that he is immortal, that desire is the cause of death and let him recognise all that exists.” *CHI.18*

It is possible to recognise in this passage principles derived from Greek philosophy and in particular the Delphic saying ‘know thyself’.²⁴⁵ Within the context of Greek (specifically Platonic) philosophy, the phrase to ‘know thyself’ refers to a cognisance of the human condition (i.e. matter which has an immortal soul) which is within everyone’s power. However within the context of *The Poimandres*, not everyone is capable of recognising their true nature, for only those who are intrinsically good can receive the *Nous*, and the potential to recognise themselves. Thus, the reason for death and Man’s condition is explained in *The Poimandres* as due to Man’s temptation by desire and not God’s will. This emphasis of theodicy, Betz explains, is central to the understanding of *The Poimandres* and reflects traditional Egyptian literary concerns (as seen in the pessimistic literature of the Middle Kingdom, e.g. *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* and their rebuttal in *The Coffin Texts* 1130) as well as elements of Orphic-Pythagorean traditions. The concern with the vindication of the gods in regard to the problem of evil is one that occurs frequently in Greek literature, appearing, for instance, in Plato’s *Republic* and Homer’s *Odyssey*²⁴⁶ -

“No divinity will be allotted to you; you shall choose your own. And he on whom the lot falls first shall be the first to choose the life which then shall of necessity be his. Excellence knows no master; a man shall have more or less of her according to the value he sets on her. The fault lies not with god but with the soul that makes the choice.” Plato’s *Republic* 10.617e

²⁴³ Doresse, J. 1960, p.277

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p.282. Copenhaver also agrees that this creation myth is more likely of Hellenistic-Judaic origin, except in the description of God the Father as androgyne, to which he attributes a Stoic origin (Copenhaver: 1992, p.103)

²⁴⁵ Betz: 1995, p.85

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p.89

“Look you now, how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that all evils come...” *Odyssey*, I.32-33

“And in reality of course god is good, and he must be so described... Then god, being good, cannot be responsible for everything, as is commonly said, but only for a small part of human life, for the greater part of which he has no responsibility.” Plato’s *Republic* 2.388b-d

Issues of theodicy here have been commonly linked specifically to Greek Platonist philosophy and recur frequently in *Hermetica* (in *CH.IV.7-8* and *The Asclepius*, 16). However, there is also a tradition of these concerns in Egyptian texts, for example *The Oracle of the Potter* (Rainer Papyrus, c.130 BC) written in the Ptolemaic era which can easily be paralleled to the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (supposedly written in the Second Intermediate Period but relating to events in the First Intermediate Period, although there is no conclusive dating and its veracity has been debated²⁴⁷)

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“The Girdle-wearers being Typhonians are destroying ... And then Agathos *Daemon* will abandon the city being established and will enter Memphis, and the foreign city which will be built will be emptied. And these things will take place at the conclusion of the evils when the falling of the leaves occurs in the Egypt of the foreigners. The city of the Girdle-wearers will be laid waste as in my furnace, because of the unlawful deeds which they executed in Egypt.” *Oracle of the Potter*, 130BC

“He brings coolness upon heat; men say: "He is the herdsman of mankind, and there is no evil in his heart." Though his herds are few, yet he spends a day to collect them, their hearts being on fire.

Would that he had perceived their nature in the first generation; then he would have imposed obstacles, he would have stretched out his arm against them, he would have destroyed their herds and their heritage. Men desire the giving of birth, but sadness supervenes, with needy people on all sides.” *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, XII (Papyrus Leiden 334)

²⁴⁷ Lichtheim: 2006, p.150

“Does a herdsman desire death? Then may you command reply to be made, because it means that one loves, another detests; it means that their existences are few everywhere; it means that you have acted so as to bring those things to pass. You have told lies, and the land is a weed which destroys men, and none can count on life. All these years are strife, and a man is murdered on his housetop *even though he was vigilant in his gate lodge*” *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, XIII (Papyrus Leiden 334)

The evils Mankind commits against his fellow Man and the consequence of these actions albeit not exclusive to Egypt are a frequent theme in Egyptian apocalyptic literature. The particularly strong tone theodicy takes as a trope in Egyptian secular literature, as well as the inclusion of a divine shepherd figure (mentioned in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, XII as the divine herdsman), which bears remarkable similarity to the Shepherd of Man metaphor in the translation of the name Poimandres, occasions further comment. Usually Egyptian apocalypica, centres upon the evils befalling Egypt as instigated by a foreign invader, rather than the more general issue of exonerating the divine for the creation of evil as conceived of by Greek philosophy. However, that is not to say that the issue of theodicy disassociated from the evils of the invader does not occur in Egyptian literature, in fact there are many incidences to the contrary e.g:

“I made every man equal to his fellow, and I forbade them to do wrong, but their hearts disobeyed what I had said.” *The Coffin Texts* 1130)

“Do not hack up graves, do not hack up, do not hack up. I did the same, and the same happened as is done to one who transgresses the way of the god” *Instructions for Merikare*.²⁴⁸

Betz speculates that a point of divergence between Hermetic literature from both Egyptian and Greek Neoplatonism is that in Hermetic literature, god offers a means of redemption for those that recognise the divine in themselves.²⁴⁹

“The one who recognised himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death” *CHI*.18

²⁴⁸ Lichtheim: 1975, p.97

²⁴⁹ Betz: 1995, p. 89

The result of the romantic union between the divine *anthropos* and nature is the creation of human beings with a nature both divine and mortal. But immortality can only be achieved by the ‘essential human’ for those that love the lower realms of matter are already “...*in death. Because what first gives rise to each person’s body in the hateful darkness, for which comes the watery nature, for which the body was constituted in the sensible cosmos, from which death drinks*” (CH I. 19). Therefore to ascend to the higher realms and escape death, it is essential for the enlightened to first ‘know thyself’ and recognise their divine nature and then through an ascetic lifestyle, to learn to not love the material body. This will ensure the survival of the soul beyond the death of the body for it to take its journey through the spheres to the Ogdoad and become subsumed into the oneness of the divine.²⁵⁰

The significance of this issue of theodicy is that it is representative of secular Egyptian literature from the pharoanic period and upon closer comparison to the complaint literature more parallels can be found linking the description the ‘great shepherd of Mankind’ to the name Poimandres. Once it is accepted that an important contention within *The Poimandres* is the concept that only an elect few have the potential to be ‘saved’ by *gnōsis*, and that Man’s condition is due to temptation and not by god’s will; then the implicit link to the popular and extensive literary tradition of ‘complaint literature’ (where the evils befalling Egyptians are also blamed upon the actions of Mankind and not the gods) is demonstrated. This shows then yet another link of Egyptian tradition to the philosophy of *The Poimandres*. Although it is not suggested here that *The Poimandres* itself is a part of this literary genre, it does provoke interesting questions, particularly when compared to a famous passage in *The Asclepius*, which is deliberately fashioned as a piece of complaint literature.

2.2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, from this analysis of *The Poimandres* it can be seen that with regards to the implicit reference to the use of ritual practices from indigenous traditions, the Hermetic Corpus represents a parallel tradition adjunct to the popular use of ‘magical/technical’ religious forms to one better characterised as a ‘redemptive religion’. In his ‘The Social Psychology of the World Religions’ (1922-1923, 281), Weber defines ‘redemptive religions’ as the product of a rationalisation of religion, in which there is an assumption that there “should somehow be a

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p.91

meaningful cosmos”,²⁵¹ systematising and rationalising the existence of suffering, allows one to take a corrective stance in response to a senseless world. This is in contrast to ‘magical’ religions that sought to manipulate the gods or their intermediaries to overcome obstacles in a world order that is not assumed to be fair or ethical. However, in the context of *The Poimandres* and the Hermetic Corpus at large, this terminological distinction disregards the possibility of a philosophy that supports (and indeed reinforces) an inherent technical (i.e. magical) purpose. Moreover, this lack of distinct boundaries between the religious and philosophical spheres is a particular feature of the traditional Egyptian ‘world-view’ (i.e. the Egypt is the ‘mirror of heaven’). As previously demonstrated there are elements within *The Poimandres* that point to Egyptian antecedents in structure (following the literary tradition of wisdom and complaint literature), in language (the deconstruction of the name Poimandres), linguistically (the analysis of Greek translations of Egyptian concepts belies their Egyptian origin) and in philosophy (its direct linkage to the *Book of Thoth*, the concept of *gnōsis* deriving from the Egyptian notion of continuation of the soul through knowledge of the cosmos). However, what is most interesting from examining the ‘archaeology of the text’ is that it is part of an evolving tradition, linking back to the pharaonic cult of Thoth, which is both technical and philosophical. Rather than seeing this text as an offshoot of Alexandrian philosophy, it is more accurately described as an example of traditional religious affiliation, in the form of written culture that has escaped the confines of the temple. Whereas ritual acts are a communal and oral rather than a personal means of connecting to the divine realm, *The Poimandres* suggests a means of creating a personal connection based upon the traditional wisdom of Thoth via a written tradition. It functions as both a philosophical tract and also as a technical tract, for personal rather than communal spiritual connection. However, further analysis of the Hermetic texts – specifically *The Asclepius* and *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*, will elucidate this issue.

2.3 *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*, Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6

The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead is the first of three Hermetic treatises discovered in the Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi. The focus of the piece is a description of the journey of the soul to where the eighth planetary sphere reveals the ninth. The importance of codex VI.6 is due in part to its idiosyncratic nature but mostly because it makes reference to a deliberately Egyptian appearing ritual. Previous studies of this ritual had dismissed its inclusion as mere Egyptian

²⁵¹ Weber: 1922, p.281

colouring, however, as Fowden posits, even if the practice itself is not completely authentic, it does demonstrate that the author had knowledge that seem to stem from adaptations of the formulae from inscriptions lining the *dromoi* of Upper Egyptian temples.²⁵² The significance of this ritual is not predicated upon its relative authenticity but what it is able to elucidate on the Hermetic milieu and their insistence upon identifying themselves with native traditions. I will discuss this in greater detail after a more general survey of the texts and what it can reveal of the Hermetic circles and their philosophy.

The text begins with a plea from Tat to Hermes that he fulfils his promise to reveal the eighth and ninth spheres. In tone and subject matter, the text is very similar to that of the XIII Hermetic tract from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in that it relates the instructions of Hermes to Tat on how to achieve the divine revelation that will lead to his spiritual rebirth. Hermes then tells him that this revelation is dependent upon Tat having truly absorbed the scriptural knowledge that has been passed to him. The reference to a body of textual work hints at the formative stages of private study required by the initiate prior to any form of spiritual revelation.

“And it is right for you to remember the progress that came to you as wisdom in the books, my son.” *N.H.C.* VI.6

They then pray for the divine intelligence to illuminate Tat using Hermes as a medium for this message. To make their case, Hermes reiterates the prerequisites that they have followed in order to progress to the next level of initiation. From this we can see that the tract is intended to be used as part of a sequence of instructions within the *Corpus* whereby it is assumed that the initiate has already followed the formative instructions for ethical and pious behaviour.

“We have already advanced to the seventh, since we are pious and walk in your law. And your will we fulfil always. For we have walked in your way, and we have renounced [...], so that your vision may come.” *N.H.C.* VI.6

After this entreaty, the Mind/*Nous* enters Hermes allowing him to describe the vision of the eighth sphere where the angels sing a hymn to the ninth ‘in silence’. Tat implores Hermes/*Nous* to impart the vision to him too and sings a song of praise to the divine, to which Hermes replies

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²⁵² Fowden:1993, p.35

“Concerning these things, I do not say anything, my son. For it is right before god that we keep silent about what is hidden...Return to praising, my son, and sing while you are silent. Ask what you want in silence.” *N.H.C.* VI.6

The vision then comes to Tat also and he praises god for showing him the souls within the eighth sphere, the angels singing a hymn to the ninth and then the supreme deity beyond them, creating souls. Again the emphasis on the necessity and power of the ‘hidden’ is spoken, as Tat thanks the divine for his divine rebirth –

“No hidden word will be able to speak about you, Lord... I am an instrument of your spirit; Mind is your plectrum. And your counsel plucks me. I see myself! I have received power from you. For you love has reached us.” *N.H.C.* VI.6

The importance of the nature of the received wisdom being secret and hidden is reiterated frequently throughout the piece, culminating in the ultimate threat at the end of the text that those who read the text and do not keep it secret will suffer the wrath of god. Only those that follow god’s law and ask for *gnōsis* and guidance are permitted to read the text. Moreover, only those who have understood and advanced along the path of enlightenment will be able to receive the vision of the Ogdoad, who in turn will reveal the Ennead. The disciples then swear an oath “by heaven and the earth, fire and water, the seven ousiarchs, the creator spirit and the god who engenders and he who is born of himself and those who have begotten him, that they may guard the things Hermes has told”.²⁵³ Those who break the oath will incur the wrath of those supernatural beings it is sworn by.

Before Tat receives this vision, he calls out the divine’s ‘hidden name’ and is then instructed by Hermes to write about this event, in hieroglyphic text on steles of turquoise at the temple of Diospolis. The significance of the hieroglyphic characters is that they were developed by Mind itself. He continues to instruct Tat that the steles must be placed in the sanctuary and guarded by eight guardians (four frog-faced males and four cat-faced females). This must all be done according to very specific astrological conditions said by Doresse to have derived from old Chaldaean astrological system.²⁵⁴ The inclusion of this specific instruction not only highlights an attempt to create a parallel between the Egyptian tradition and Hermetic philosophy, but upon close analysis of the ritual, it appears to serve a dual purpose. On one level, the use of the imagery is a physical manifestation or symbol of the Ogdoad and Ennead in their traditional

²⁵³ Doresse, J. 1960, p.244

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p.244

Egyptian iconography. And secondly, that the imagery of the text is designed to re-create the cosmic order described by the text and serve as a complimentary scene to mirror the philosophical element, and in this way the magical and the philosophical mirror and amplify their intended effect on the devotee (i.e. *gnôsis*), in a magical sense.²⁵⁵ The text is therefore, even more so than *The Poimandres*, serving a technical as well as philosophical purpose.

In Egyptian mythology, the Ogdoad were a group of eight gods (depicted as frog-faced), whose purpose was to represent the principle cosmic forces that bring about the first time in conjunction with the supreme deity Kem-Atef. Of the eight there were four male and four female (Nun/Naunet symbolic of the primordial abyss, Heh/Hauhet symbolic of infinity, Kek/Kauket symbolic of darkness and Amun/Amaunet symbolic of hidden power). Their main cult centre was a town called 'Eight Town' or Khemnu which later became known as Hermopolis in Hellenistic Egypt due to the town's patron god Thoth or Hermes. So it appears from the use of the material forms of traditional Egyptian symbolism in conjunction with the revelations in the text as well as the fact that they shared the same cult centre as Thoth/Hermes, their inclusion is intended to mirror and substantiate the wisdom in the texts. In this way, the two traditions – the eclectic philosophy that draws from the Alexandrian, Judaic and Egyptian systems of belief and the symbolism of the native ritual practice are seen as embodiments of the same cosmic principle.

In the text the Ennead is the ninth spiritual realm glorified by the hymns of the angels in the eighth realm. In Egyptian mythology, although there were several types of Ennead (dual, greater and lesser²⁵⁶), the Great Ennead of Heliopolis represents the nine principle gods (Atum, Osiris, Isis, Seth, Geb, Nut, Nephthys, Shu and Tefnut) associated with the three great tenets of Egyptian thought – creation, the afterlife and divine kingship. Within the context of the revelations of the Hermetic tract, the cat-faced deities reflect the theme of creation and

²⁵⁵ The principle behind Egyptian magic was that in order to bring about a desired consequence on the material plain, the desired result must be enacted in the spiritual plain by means of ritualistic action. The evidence for this 'mirroring' technique is present in the use of temple and tomb painting, which depict an idealised vision of the afterlife in order to enact it in the heavenly plain. Also the use of Shabti figurines to symbolise a servant in the material plane and recreate it on the spiritual plane. Supplemental to this, however, was the use of binary pairs in Egyptian religious/magical iconography to reinforce the magical effect on the material and cosmic planes. This is especially visible in the pairing of gods, who at first glance would seem opposites in their mythological roles. For example, in the popular iconography of Re (on his journey to the across the sky) he is depicted as strong at the start of his journey and old and infirm by the end of his journey. In order to become reinvigorated, he must integrate with Osiris 'the corpse' to become Re-Osiris. Thus by integrating opposites (the dynamism of Re's light giving powers with the immobility of Osiris association with death and night) both Re and Osiris are reinvigorated as they are both two halves of the same totality. This union is necessary for the regeneration of energy necessary to continued existence of the material plane. England:1988, p.80

²⁵⁶ Wilkinson: 2003, p.78

rejuvenation. The iconography of feline-faced goddesses in Egyptian mythology may also reveal something of the intentions of the author of the piece, for in general terms, feline deities were mostly representative of protective female divinity. Therefore in this context the choice of feline iconography for the Ennead could represent nothing more than the feminine nature of the group which is required to accompany the four male gods of the Ogdoad in order to symbolise the fecundity of the first moment of creation. However, the feline iconography in Egyptian mythology was always associated with the destructive nature of the sun, as well as the fertile aspect of the sun's influence on nature. In the majority of cases feline-anthropomorphic deities acted as protective guardians e.g. Bastet (guardian of souls in the Underworld), Mahes (guardian of sacred places), Sekhmet (powerful protector against martial forces) and Tutu (an obscure god worshipped mostly in the Graeco-Roman period and used to protect against cosmic and mortal enemies).²⁵⁷

The insertion of the Egyptian ritual as described in *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*, is more significant than previous speculations have so far allowed. The use of four representatives from the Ogdoad and four from the Ennead creates in Egyptian numerological terms a more powerful assembly of eight. The pairing of four male and female principles mirror and intensify their power as creative and protective principles and are symbolic of the general theme of totality (e.g. groups of four gods are often found in depictions of the afterlife and can represent the cosmic geography of the cardinal points. As two sets of four, this symbol of totality is doubled²⁵⁸). In summary the Egyptian deities therefore serve as symbols of the complex cosmology described in the text, in that firstly the statues are embodiments of the eighth and ninth realms. Secondly they represent the principle of creation *ex nihilo* by virtue of the role the Ogdoad played in Hermopolitan creation myth. Thirdly, they represent the totality of the circle of birth, degeneration and regeneration, as symbolised the inclusion of Heh/Hauhet (representative of infinity) and the feline-headed goddesses as representatives of rejuvenation and creation. Finally the theme of protection of the soul on its journey into the 'hidden realms' as well as protection against the use of the text against 'impious souls' is expressed through the use of the feline goddesses and their associations with protection against cosmic and material enemies.

In this way the symbolism is designed to work on two levels, the direct interpretation that reflects its intended use on the physical plane and the designed effects on the spiritual. The material effect in this instance is the evocation of symbols for the protection of the texts, the

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p.183

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p.77

association of the two groupings of Ogdoad and Ennead to their mythic portrayal, as well as the connection to Thoth/Hermes as a centre for the cult. The spiritual/magical components work to ensure the protection of the soul of the initiate on its contemplative journey to the realm of the Ogdoad and Ennead, and evoke the principles of creation and rejuvenation and totality.

This form of juxtaposition between material symbolism and the written philosophy is a technique typical of the Egyptian tradition and is based upon the precept that texts take on a magical efficacy of their own, particularly as Egyptian hieroglyphs (the preferred type of text for religious functions) are pictographic in nature. There is therefore a causal link between script and image in religious iconography. Examples of this can be found in the religious inscriptions of the Egyptians where mythic scenes and ritual scenes are paralleled to reinforce their magical efficacy in the afterlife. Two specific examples of this are the papyrus of Khonsu-renep and *Book of the Dead* of Hunefer.²⁵⁹

In the Hunefer *Book of the Dead*, the deceased is shown worshipping the rising sun/Re in a hymn, which in itself leads to a tableau showing the mythic depiction of the perpetual worship of Re by heavenly baboons. This solar regeneration is then paralleled by Osirian regeneration as the product of the worship of Osiris by Isis and Nephthys depicted in an adjoining scene. This scene is reminiscent of the myth of the lamentations of Isis and Nephthys, where they restore Osiris back to life, thus indicating Osirian regeneration and by proxy the regeneration of Hunefer. The Osirian regeneration reflects the solar regeneration and the worship is also reflected in the gestures of the deceased and his wife paralleled with the worshipping posture of the heavenly baboons and Isis and Nephthys. By implication, the book is therefore a votive text, where the worship is perpetually reproduced.

In the example of the papyrus of Khonsu-renep, the first scene shows Khonsu worshipping Osiris accompanied by a hymn to the rising sun which is also depicted in the top left hand corner of the scene.²⁶⁰ Within the depiction of the hymn is featured the Bas of Pe and Nekhen who are also reflecting the pose of adoration of Khonsu. Both scenes serve the ritual purpose whereby Khonsu's worship is "made to grow into the sky and Netherworld and makes him participate in cosmic and mythical regeneration". This theme is reinforced by a scene depicted below which shows the Osirian mummy, flanked by a grieving Nephthys and Isis in which Osiris is regenerated. This is balanced by the symmetrical positioning of the next scene which shows a

²⁵⁹ Sorensen: 1987, p.47

²⁶⁰ Sorensen: 1987, p.49

Horus head coming down from the sky emanating life-giving powers to the Osiris mummy below. The life-giving powers of the sun are well attested in Egyptian religious literature, but here there is an explicitly causal link between solar and Osirian regeneration. In this way Khonsu is participating in the mythic regeneration of Osiris, not just by association with him but because it is a variation on the theme of worship.²⁶¹ Sorensen argues that these images do not form a formal causal or temporal link but serve to reflect each other, to create a more potent magical effect. They also form mutually supporting structures - the worshipping of the sun by Khonsu supports the rising of the sun which regenerates Osiris and by extension, Khonsu. In later sequential scenes Khonsu is gradually placed in pose of worship in images of cosmic and mythical regeneration until towards the end he is depicted in the celestial realm worshipping the gods face to face – but still in scenes that reflect each other.²⁶² This is a votive papyrus and therefore a form of ritual aiming to integrate him into the process of regeneration.²⁶³ The words and images recorded in the papyrus have an *energeia*²⁶⁴ of their own to enact these events on a cosmic level - through the repetition on the theme of regeneration, Khonsu becomes more integrated into the cosmic landscape. In contrast to philosophy, it is designed to work through magical efficacy rather than enlighten or persuade.

This same technique is utilised by the authors of the Hermetic treatises as previously demonstrated by *The Ogdoad reveals The Ennead* and perhaps more overtly in the *CH.XVI* where (as Sorensen argues), the text represents the same principles of magical efficacy through repetition and mirroring as in hieroglyphic inscriptions and temple reliefs. The texts replicate the magical reinforcement of the vignettes by repetition of certain phases of power and their sequence in a textual version of the temple reliefs.

2.3.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Ogdoad reveals The Ennead* expresses several important aspects of the Hermetic milieu. Firstly, the inclusion of a ritual which has previously been dismissed as decoratively Egyptian has upon closer deconstruction made use of traditional Egyptian imagery and mirroring techniques to impose a magical effect (in this context to bestow *gnōsis* through a conjured

²⁶¹ Ibid, p.50

²⁶² Ibid, p.51

²⁶³ Ibid, p.52

²⁶⁴ *Energeia* in this context refers to the inherent magical energy within the inscriptions that initiates causation on the cosmic planes.

revelation). The text can therefore not be classified as philosophical by traditional terminology but magical. More specifically, certain aspects of the imagery (specifically the use of Frog and Cat faced statues that in Hermoupolitan mythology represent the Ennead and Ogdoad) point to an identification of traditions and religious symbology associated with Thoth. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the material symbol with philosophy is typical of Egyptian temple ritual technique.

The significance of these observations is that they not only demonstrate a continuation of traditional religious forms, but that these forms although not entirely impervious to cultural influence, show a remarkable resilience. *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* suggests that the Hermetists chose a specifically Egyptian idiom and employed ritual magic as a means to connect to the divine, regardless of the declining influence of the temple. It may be argued that the authors of the tracts perceived a weakening of social and religious cohesiveness within Egypt (particularly the author/s of *The Asclepius*), which encouraged a more individualistic approach to religion. The use of ritual within the text, which in this context is divorced from temple practice (which was exercised on behalf of the community) to a personal and self-empowering form, is indicative of not merely an increased level of access, but also a shift in social structure.

2.4 Corpus Hermeticum XVI: Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon on god, matter, vice, fate, the sun, intellectual essence, divine essence, mankind, the arrangement of the plenitude, the seven stars, and mankind according to the image

Of specific interest within the *Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon* are two issues, firstly the manner in which the tract is demonstrative of this ‘mirroring’ effect as discussed earlier (and thus bears the trappings of a philosophical doctrine re-enforced by magical means); and secondly the outward hostility directed against the transmission of Hermetic wisdom in the language of the Greeks. The XVI Hermetic tractate begins, with an introduction by Asclepius to King Ammon, in which Asclepius makes overt the intended obscurity of the Hermetic discourses. The nature of the discourses is hidden and Asclepius warns that translation of the wisdom into Greek would cause it to lose its magical potency.

“Expressed in the original language, the tractate clearly preserves the sense of the words – for also the very character of the sound and the ... of Egyptian words has in itself the power/meaning (*energeia*) of what is said.

In as far as it is possible for you, oh king – and everything is – preserve this tractate untranslated, lest such mysteries get into the hands of the Greeks, and lest the presumptuous rambling and, one might say, ostentatious idiom of the Greeks dispose of the holiness and the strength and the efficacious (*energetikos*) speech of the words. For the Greeks, O king, have empty arguments fit for proofs, and that is what the philosophy of the Greeks is: a noise of arguments. We however, use no arguments, but sounds full of efficacy.”

(*Def. Asclep.* 2)

The concern of this piece is not one of mistranslation but an assertion of Egyptian spirituality over Greek philosophy. The conclusion of most scholars examining the contention that the tract was originally written in hieroglyphic text is that it is little more than a literary conceit used to authenticate the historicity of the text.²⁶⁵ However, there is evidence that regular translations of Egyptian texts into Greek did occur. Specifically this can be seen in the dissemination of the cult of Isis to the Greek-speaking world and from the evidence of a manuscript about Imhotep which begins with the words – “*The entire Greek language will relate thy tale and every Greek will worship Imouthes [Imhotep], son of Ptah.*”²⁶⁶ Unlike the author of the Hermetic text, the author of the Imhotep text welcomes the idea of spreading the prestige of Egyptian religion to the Greek-speaking world. However this is most likely due to the fact that the intention of the text is not the transcription of sacred, magical text but a biography of the god and his functions. With regards to *The Asclepius*, the polemic against the transmission into Greek, written in the language of the Greeks, raises some interesting questions as to the purpose of the text. It is most likely that the author is writing in Greek either because the audience of Hermetists are mostly Greek-speaking or to serve as a confrontational piece design to create polemic. Sorensen takes the view that the author is an Egyptian expressing the primacy of Egyptian religious expression over Greek philosophy,²⁶⁷ which is in turn endorsed by Fowden who remarks on the nature of language as a marker for ethnic identities and thus the cultural and social repercussions of a perceived erosion of a linguistic tradition.²⁶⁸ However, this would presuppose that language is the primary indicator of ethnic affiliation and that philosophy and spirituality are ethnic issues. Regardless of the intentions of the author of this tractate, which cannot be reconstructed, he does seem concerned with emphasising the view that Egyptian texts had an implicit power. This

²⁶⁵ Sorensen: 1987, p.20

²⁶⁶ Morenz:1992, p.250

²⁶⁷ Sorensen: 1987, p.42

²⁶⁸ Fowden: 1993, p.37

was a concept that was shared by many in the classical world and popularised by certain Greek writers, such as Plotinus who said –

“Each carved image is knowledge [*episteme*] and wisdom grasped all at once, not discursive reasoning nor deliberation”. *Ennead* 5.8.6

And Iamblichus:

“An intellectual, divine and symbolic character of divine resemblance... in the names, and if this is unknown to us, it is then most august since it is too mighty to be known by determination... The gods have shown us that all speech of the sacred nations, such as the Assyrians and the Egyptians, is fit for sacral usage.” *On the Mysteries* 7.4.254-6

At least some Greeks held the view that in matters of spirituality, the obscurity and antiquity of Egyptian held a primacy over other expressions of religious sentiment.²⁶⁹ This is partly substantiated by Iamblichus, who in his *On the Egyptian Mysteries* expresses the opinion that the Egyptians were closer to the nature of the divine due to the conservatism of their customs in comparison to the changing nature of the Greeks.²⁷⁰ In the context of this argument, the power of Egyptian text is created by the same mirroring technique that was used in a non-literary example described earlier (i.e. papyrus of Khonsu-renep and Book of the Dead of Hunefer).

After the introduction by Asclepius, the text begins with an invocation to god in which redundant sequences of images mirror each other. For example, the supreme divinity is made the point of departure six times as is also the intermediaries through which the divinity acts upon the world. These are then followed by statements about the nature of the interaction between god and matter.²⁷¹

In the first image (XVI.3-5) god is invoked as the “*master, maker, father and container of the universe, the all who is one, and the one who is all*”; followed by philosophical considerations on the unity and universality of god; that water and fire are the root of the elements and that the centre of the earth stores all these elements that constitute matter; the idea that sun is the demiurgos (no clear distinction made between sun and god and in following sections sun takes over the role of god)

²⁶⁹ Copenhaver: 1992, p.202

²⁷⁰ Gress: 1999, p.564

²⁷¹ Sorensen: 1987, p.54

and it is through the sun's power that essence is sent to earth and matter is raised up into the heavens.

“In this way the craftsman (I mean the sun) binds heaven to earth, sending essence below and raising matter above, attracting everything to the sun and around it, offering everything from himself to everything, as he gives freely of the ungrudging light. For it is the sun whence good energies reach not only through the sky and air but even to earth and down to the nethermost deep and abyss”. *CH.XVI.5*

In the second image (XVI.6-11) the exact nature of the interaction between the sun/supreme god and the cosmos is described, i.e. the intelligent substance is in the sun, which governs the world through the intermediaries of life, soul, spirit (*pneuma*), immortality and generation (*genesis*). The sun is described as wearing the universe “*like a crown*”, which has parallels in the rites of Mithras (who is the invincible sun) where the initiate into the cult is offered a crown which he must reject, stating Mithra is his only crown.²⁷² The sun releases life-giving rays which go up to maintain the immortal parts of the cosmos and go down to make the elements below live, move and change. This in essence is also very similar to the cult of the Aten in the Armana period where the Aten ‘the hidden one’ (or sun) was worshipped for its invisible rays of energy.

“Like a good driver, it steadies the chariot of the cosmos and fastens the reins to itself to prevent the cosmos going to of control. And the reins are these: life and soul and immortality and becoming... The sun portions out eternal permanence to the immortals and feeds the immortal part of the cosmos with the rising light emitted from its other side, the one that faces heavenwards... It brings transmutation and transformation among them as a spiral, when change turns one thing to another... For the permanence of every body is change: in an immortal body the change is without dissolution; in the mortal body there is dissolution.” *CH. XVI.6-9*

In the third image (XVI.10-11), Asclepius evokes god again through the discussion of the continuation of the sun's light and its generative properties. He then introduces the concept of demons as intermediaries between immortals and humankind. They receive instruction from the gods and as well on the material plain to advise mankind and punish *asebia* through natural disasters (so that man might maintain their reverence towards the gods).

²⁷² Copenhaver: 1992, p.205

“Irreverence is mankind’s greatest wrong against the gods: to do good is the gods’ affair, to be reverent is mankind’s; and the demons’ is to assist.” *CH.*
XVI.11

The fourth image (XVI.12-14) gives a more thorough account of the nature of the interaction between demons and humans. Again, the starting point for this section is the sun and a reiteration of the role of the sun in maintaining the cosmos. The explanation given is that despite the sun’s ability to bring about a sequence of perpetual change in nature, the reintegration of the degenerated elements allows for the regeneration of new material to occur. The relation of the sun to the troops of demons is then described and how the sun arranges the demons under the auspices of the stars and the impact of this upon mankind is fully realised.

“Thus deployed they [the demons] follow the orders of a particular star, and they are good and evil according to their natures – their energies that is. For energy is the essence of a *daemon*. Some of them, however, are mixtures of good and evil” *CH.XVI.13*

The fifth image (XVI.16-17) describes how those who have been illuminated by the wisdom of the divine (i.e. received *gnōsis*) are freed from the influence of demons. This influence, Asclepius states, is otherwise termed as ‘fate’ by Hermes. The power and generative effects of the sun are mirrored again through the repetition of these aspects of the divinity in XVI.17, where the spiritual hierarchy and their roles are enumerated. It describes how everything is dependent upon god from the top down (on god depends on spirit world on which depends the earthly world, through both worlds, through both worlds the sun get its creative power from god – thus creation is a process of interaction between both worlds and the sun. The demons are bound by the spheres around the sun in a chain of causation and dependence.²⁷³

“The intelligent cosmos, then, depends from god and the sensible cosmos from the intelligible, but the sun, through the intelligible cosmos and the sensible as well is supplied by god with the influx of good, with his craftsmanship, in other words. Around the sun are the eight spheres that depend from it: the sphere of the fixed stars, the six of the planets, and the one that surrounds the earth. From these spheres depend the demons, and then, from the demons, humans. And thus all things and all persons are dependant from god.” *CH.XVI.17*

²⁷³ Sorensen: 1987, p.54

The sixth image (XVI.18-19) marks the end of the tract providing a summary of the order of the cosmos, again starting with god and the sun, then delineating the hierarchy of beings in order to return to the creative process of interaction. It then concludes with a reiteration of the status quo of god is in all things and upon god all things depend. The act of creation being as ceaseless and self generating as divinity itself.

“But if all things are parts of god, then all things are god, and he makes himself in making all things. His making can never cease because he is ceaseless. And god has no end, so making has neither beginning nor end”. *CH.XVI.19*

As demonstrated by the above excerpts, there is an observable process in which repetition and mirroring are occurring to reinvigorate and preserve the cosmic order as described in the text itself (it is therefore a magical invocation). In this way the texts are designed to effect illumination and realization of the concepts described in the mythological vignettes, rather than inspire contemplation through explanation as is the case with philosophy.²⁷⁴

As expressed earlier, the concept of mirroring has a grand tradition in Egyptian religious thought, i.e. the earth is a mirror to the heavens. We can thus see in this aspect of Hermetic philosophy a re-imagining of native thought, placing it within a new, contemporary Hellenistic idiom. Sorenson remarks that the tract represents an Egyptian interpretation of Hellenistic ideas, reducing the Hellenistic concepts (for example, that *gnōsis* requires the realisation of the all-encompassing nature of god) to traditional Egyptian pantheism.²⁷⁵ However this view disregards the evidence that the central premise of Hermetic philosophy, i.e. *gnōsis* through cosmic knowledge, was been a core element of Egyptian philosophy (and more specifically, the wisdom of Thoth) and is not simply a recasting of Hellenistic philosophy. Where the Hermetic texts distinguish themselves from contemporary philosophies is that it both technical and philosophical. An excellent example whereby a physical, material symbol is used to illustrate as well as bring about a metaphysical affect is the ritual drama of the ‘Triumph of Horus’ as depicted on the reliefs from c.110BC in the temple of Edfu. To summarise Sorensen’s analysis of the reliefs, there are three ‘acts’, the first includes an introductory scene where Horus and the King are both spearing a hippopotamus (representative of Seth), thus setting the context that Horus and the King are paralleled. Then follow five double scenes, each depicting the king (Ptolemy IX) present on the shore as Horus continues the struggle against Seth. In each relief

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p.55

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p.55

the scenes show little deviation. However, they are not simply redundant, firstly because the mythic episode they represent (i.e. the struggle between Horus and Seth) where Horus eventually emerges victorious, is of particular significance at Edfu, representing the victory from which the current Kingship owes its existence. The second act shows the same harpooning scene with the king participating, followed by the crowning of Horus as king of Egypt. Act three then shows the distribution of the hippopotamus amongst the gods twice, once in a mythic context and secondly in a ritual context.²⁷⁶ These two contexts are juxtaposed by scenes showing the modern day king harpooning an enemy, thus making explicit the linkages between the mythic scene of Horus' victory over Seth obviously taking place in the primeval level and the renewal of kingship in the present day. The direct parallelization between the enactments on the mythic level with ritual in the present day serves to reinforce and reinvigorate kingship by incarnation of Horus with present day king.²⁷⁷ Therefore the interpretation of the vignettes in this manner demonstrates the Egyptian practice of using binary pairs that reinforce and re-energise each other by reflecting actions on the cosmic plane and their consequences on the earthly. That the author of the tractate chooses an Egyptian idiom to express ideas developed from Hellenistic and native philosophy, is demonstrative of an active and vital tradition. Also the manner in which he disparages the verbose method of transmission of Greek philosophy, means that the author has allied himself with the Egyptian means of expression, implying a certain degree of rivalry between the two traditions or at least a sense of competition on the part of the Egyptianising school (which I shall be discussing in greater detail with an analysis of *The Asclepius*).

2.4.1 Conclusion

Despite observing Gnostic antecedents in this native tradition,²⁷⁸ Sorensen still labels the Hermetic tract as a product of Hellenistic thought, expressed in Egyptian terms. Although discussions of funerary rituals frequently give primacy to Egyptian elements and see Hellenistic features as decorative, in religious and philosophical literature, the primacy of Egyptian material seems hardly ever to be considered. The '*Definitions to King Ammon*' seems to me to be a technical tract. It uses the same mirroring technique as in temple vignettes employing 'redundant' imagery, to reinvigorate the energies and supernatural being described in the text, which in turn, ensure the continuation of the cosmic framework described in the piece. The often quoted

²⁷⁶ Sorensen: 1987, p.43

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p.46

²⁷⁸ Gnostic philosophy owes a debt to Egyptian mythology (as will be explained fully later), in its appropriation of the theory of emanations and the concept of the spiritual bodies that constitute a person.

speech by Asclepius which disparages the method of Greek transmission in matters of religious significance, rearticulates the belief in Egyptian religion of the power of the written word (as well as reflecting the contemporary view of other cultures as to the power of hieroglyphic inscription).

2.5 *The Asclepius/ The Perfect Discourse*

The Asclepius is a fourth century Latin version of an earlier Greek text called *The Perfect Discourse* and is the only fully-fledged version of the tract that survives to us today'.²⁷⁹ Of the Greek text, only fragments survive, consisting of mainly citations from Lactantius. With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library however, fragments of the text came to light that demonstrated by comparison, that the Latin version²⁸⁰ is paraphrastic. Upon careful analysis of the contents of the tract, *The Asclepius* is typical of the general Hermetic world-view and repeats several of the doctrines found in earlier texts (however, as a later text, there are more obvious influences from Christian, Jewish, Stoic and Platonic schools than the earlier Hermetic tracts). Therefore, rather than discuss all the contentions of this tract, I shall briefly enumerate the topics of discussion, providing an in-depth analysis of only those subjects relevant to this study.

The text begins with Hermes explaining to Asclepius, Tat and Hammon, that God is in everything and therefore everything is united – “*One matter, one soul, one god*” (*Asclep.3*). Hermes continues upon the theme of the nature and universality of god by stating that everything is dependent upon god (*Asclep.4*) and that the forms of all things resemble their maker (e.g. those made by demons are like them in nature *Asclep.5*). This segues into a section where the nature of man is discussed (i.e. that man has two-fold nature of man, part mortal and part divine, *Asclep.6*) and the method by which all living things are sustained (i.e. beings with souls are nourished by that which comes from above and those without souls, from that which comes from below, therefore bodies need nourishment from the earth and the soul is nourished from ‘the ever restless stirring of the world’).

Hermes continues with an assertion that consciousness is not uniform in mankind (*Asclep.7*) and that the reason for mankind’s existence is to marvel at god and be caretaker to the earth (*Asclep.8*). It is this reverence that god defines as the ultimate standard of goodness and

²⁷⁹ Fowden: 1993, p.9

²⁸⁰ Although very widely read and representing a comprehensive survey of Hermetic philosophy.

therefore a healthy disdain should be maintained for material possessions and the body (*Asclep.*10). The reward for virtue in the Hermetic world order is a restoration of man's 'higher' nature to divinisation post mortem (*Asclep.*11). Hermes then makes a deliberate attack on the use of philosophy when removed from its original purpose (i.e. from wonderment of god) and made incomprehensible by combining it with arithmetic, music and geometry (*Asclep.*13). This appears to be reminiscent of the attack on the verbose nature of the Greek language divorcing the meaning of the words into "an inane foolosophy of speeches",²⁸¹ *Def. Asclep.* 2), which is a recurring motif in Hermetic literature.

The text then tackles the reason for the existence of evil in the universe (i.e. that god furnished mankind with consciousness and understanding to equip him against falling into the snares of evil, *Asclep.*16). Following this, Hermes elucidates upon the nature of the ruling supernatural influences on mankind and their relation to man (i.e. there are many types of gods, of whom one is intelligible and the others sensible. The sensible gods produce things that are sensible in nature but the intelligible are so removed from the material plane that they are beyond the faculties of humankind to perceive them. The sensible gods are attached to the insensible as mortals are to the immortals (*Asclep.*19), however they are all dependent upon one another and as such can be said to be manifestations of the one god):

"There are many kinds of gods, of whom one part is intelligible, the other sensible. Gods are not said to be intelligible because they are considered beyond the reach of our faculties; in fact, we are more conscious of these intelligible gods than those we call visible... to mortals the mortal and to them their like. Given such conditions, all things from bottom to top [reach out to one another and link together in mutual connections. But... mortals are attached to immortals and sensibles to insensibles." *Asclep.*19

Asclep. 21 contains a section which refers to the mysteries of the sexual union between a man and woman. This union represents a sacred act where the strength of man and woman is imparted to their opposite number. It is due to this mystery of the joining of natures, that carnal union is done in private so it may not be defiled by the presence of the impious. Hermes then tells of the transient nature of the human body and the mystery that awaits the soul after death. A form of justice beyond that of mere human justice is dispensed to punish the souls of the

²⁸¹ Copenhagen explains his translation based on the pun in *logon psophos* contrasting the 'wisdom' (Sophia) in *philosophia* with 'empty sound' (*psophos*), p.202

wicked. This is enacted by the chief *daemon* who resides in the realm between heaven and earth and judges the souls of the departed. Those found wanting are cast in the ether between the heavenly and earthly spheres where they are swept back and forth for eternity (*Asclep.* 28). God protects the souls of the reverent and upright, because the light of reason divinises the pious man (*Asclep.*29). This passage has a resemblance to the judgement of souls as described in the *Books of the Dead*, in which the souls of the impious and wicked are cast down and devoured by the god Ammut. However those who have led a moral life or alternatively, those who are ‘illuminated’ by knowledge of the correct incantations and spells will achieve divinisation. The tract finishes with a description of the nature of eternity and how through the agency of fate, necessity and order, god’s will is achieved (*Asclep.* 39-40); followed by a prayer of thanksgiving.

“These three, then - *Heimarmene*, Necessity and Order - are in the very fullest sense the products of god’s assent, who governs the world by his own law and divine plan, and god has not barred them altogether from every act of willing or willing-not... they subject themselves to the necessity of the eternal plan. And the plan is eternity itself: irresistible, immovable, indestructible...I have told you everything that a human being could say, with god’s willingness and permission. Blessing god and praying, it remains for us only to return to the care of the body. We have dealt enough with theology, and we souls have eaten our fill, so to speak.” *Asclep.* 40

The above overview of *The Asclepius* demonstrates that the text contains much of the doctrinal references found in other examples of *Hermetica* (as previously discussed in *The Poimandres*, *The Ogdoad reveals The Ennead* and *The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon*) and as such is representative in its detail of Hermetic doctrine). Examples of such parallels can be seen in *The Asclepius*’s discussion of the dual-nature of man, the nature of god his relationship to the cosmos, etc. As a text, it also demonstrates the ‘mirroring’ between apparent opposites, so illustrative of the traditional Egyptian world-view. Examples of this can be seen in the description in the sacred pairing of man and woman, the interaction between sensible and insensible beings, and the broader interaction between supernatural entities on the invisible planes with those of the mortal plane. In each of these pairings, they do not just represent mere static opposite principles that find their ultimate resolution when joined but are actively regenerating and engaging with their binary pair in order to maintain an ordered universe.

From this point forwards the tract departs from metaphysical speculations towards a more ‘technical’ description of Egyptian magical practices and a prophecy foretelling the destruction of Egypt. These are of specific interest to this discussion, as they express attitudes and tensions of concern to the Hermetic follower. The first of these passages is one which the nature of divine statues is explained (*Asclep.*23). Here Hermes explains that mankind has the ability to create ensouled statues and that these statues are able to perform various functions.

“Always mindful of its nature and origin, humanity persists in imitating divinity, representing its gods in semblance of its own features, just as the father and master made his gods eternal to resemble him.”

“Are you talking about statues, Trismegistus?”

“Statues, Asclepius, yes. See how little trust you have! I mean statues ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by many other means; statues that make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves.” *Asclep.*23-24

This discussion of divine statues is demonstrative of a typically Egyptian belief in the ability to endow cult-statues with the spirit of the divine. Although the use of divinely endowed statues is not unique to Egypt, the specific attitude towards them as temporary habitations of the divine and their use in funerary rituals as statues of the deceased (i.e. shabtis etc.) finds powerful expression in Egyptian religious practice.²⁸² This belief originates in the Memphite mythology where Ptah fashioned man and the animals out of clay and animated them with spirit. The production of cult-statues required a specific ritual called ‘the opening of the mouth’ in order to vitalise them and make them divine.²⁸³ However, the Greek view of this practice was to criticise the use of statues in such a manner as a primitive association of the divine with its image.²⁸⁴ This is contrary to the views expressed in Egyptian religious literature where it is maintained that the statues are temporarily inhabited by the divinity, not that the statues were divine in their own

²⁸² In fact one of the worst crimes against an individual in the afterlife was to deface their statue. In this way the senses of the etheric body would be similarly disfigured.

²⁸³ Taylor:2001, p.190

²⁸⁴ Morenz:1990, p.155

right (which is why the ritual of ‘the opening of the mouth’ was necessary to enliven dead materials, making them hospitable to the gods²⁸⁵).

“Osiris... he appears as a spirit to join his form in his sanctuary. He comes flying out of the heavens like a sparrow-hawk with glittering plumage, and the *bw3* of the gods are together with him. He soars like a falcon to his chamber in Dendera. He beholds his sanctuary... In peace he moves into his magnificent chamber with the *bw3* of the gods which are about him. He sees his secret form painted at its place, his figure engraved upon the wall; then he enters his secret aspect, he installs himself upon his image... The *bw3* take their place at his side.” *Vigil for Osiris*

“He comes daily from Naunet to see his image and joins his falcon idols”

Inscription from Horus’ temple at Edfu

The Greek interpretation of the function and exact nature of divine statues within Egyptian ritual is indicative of a wider misconception that Egyptian religion was a materialistic religion, devoid of philosophy or symbolism. In this way an observer of the use of divine statues (particularly by the priesthood who would attend to the daily service of the cult statue) would presume those in the service of the god ‘believed’ the statue to be the god or at least the permanent home of the god on the physical plane. An example of this misconception of the function of divine statues is the polemical ‘*Wisdom of Solomon*’, thought to have written during the Ptolemaic period in Alexandria.²⁸⁶ Those who sought a sympathetic explanation for statues use the argument that the statues are merely representative of the power of the deity –

“Whilst we are honouring [them], although not endowed with life, we do not vainly imagine that the gods who are endowed with life, feel a great goodwill on this account, and gratitude towards us.” Plato *Laws*, XI, 931a

The Neoplatonist Iamblichus is closest to the Egyptian tradition in his description of the relationship between statue and divinity (in *On the Egyptian Mysteries*).²⁸⁷

“One most excellent solution of all these and an infinite number of similar questions is by a survey of the manner in which the gods are allotted.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p.155

²⁸⁶ Ibid, p.156

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p.156

This, then, is the explanation: Whether the allotment be to certain parts of the universe, as to heaven or earth, whether to holy cities and regions, whether to certain temple-precincts or sacred images, the divine irradiation shines upon them all from the outside, just as the sun illuminates every object from without with his rays.” *On the Egyptian Mysteries*, Part One, Chapter 3

This topic is further elucidated at *Asclep.37* where Hermes describes how in the distant past man was able to create gods but could not create souls. Therefore in order to bring life to statues, they summoned the souls of demons and angels and combined them with a power derived from matter and then implanted them into idols that could do either good or evil. Hermes then recounts the examples where this has occurred such as the temple of Asclepius, where the spirit of Asclepius has the power to cure the sick; and how Hermes still dwells in his native city where he can offer aid to those who call on him. However, these gods are unlike the unintelligible gods in that they are material deities and as such as capable of anger due to their dual nature. It is into this same category (i.e. of material gods), that the *Asclepius* categorises sacred animals and it is because of their material nature, they enjoy the material methods of veneration such as incense, sacrifices and hymn and will offer divination and aid in return for these offerings.²⁸⁸

“Whence it happens that these are called holy animals by the Egyptians, who throughout their cities worship the souls of those deified whilst alive, in order that cities might go on living by their laws and calling themselves by their names.” (*Asclep.37*)

“Do not suppose that these earthly gods act aimlessly, Asclepius. Heavenly gods inhabit heaven’s height, each one heading up the order assigned to him and watching over it. But here below our gods render aid to humans as if through loving kinship. Looking after some things individually, foretelling some things through lots and divination, and planning ahead to give help by other means, each in his own way.”(*Asclep.38*)

²⁸⁸ Interestingly, this depiction of the use of sacred animals corresponds to our understanding of their socio-religious function. Sacred animals fell into several categories, the most important being the ‘temple’ animal. This animal was more than the totem for the deity, but in the same manner that divine statues were used as temporary housing for the visiting ‘ba’ of the god, so to was the temple animal. Other types of sacred animals were not viewed in this manner but as physical representations of the god, not a divine manifestation imbued with the consciousness of the deity itself (Taylor:2001, p.246). The use of cult animals in this context was a feature that was very popular (particularly in the Roman period) and became synonymous with Egyptian religion and as such was mobilised a means to promote national identity (Lloyd:183, p.295). The inclusion of this explanation for sacred animals, therefore suggests a ‘nationalistic’ reading.

By inserting references to traditional temple practice (i.e. the explanation of sacred animals and divine statues) the Hermetic author is creating a direct association between the doctrines of Hermetic philosophy and temple practices. The choice to place this aspect of Hermetic philosophy within a native idiom demonstrates an attempt to emphasize native forms of religiosity over Hellenistic forms. This is even more apparent with the piece of apocalypica which follows the grand tradition in Egyptian culture for foretelling of the destruction of Egypt due to the impious actions of mankind in abandoning their gods (normally following a period after conquest by an alien culture).

In what is possibly the most famous passage in *The Asclepius*, Hermes warns of the destruction of Egypt. He begins with an explanation that as Egypt is a reflection of the cosmic order, any disruption to the religious rites and rule of *Maat* (the delicate balance of order and justice upon which their justice system is based²⁸⁹) in Egypt will result in reciprocal action in the cosmos.

“Do you not know, Asclepius, that Egypt is an image of heaven or, to be more precise, that everything governed or moved in heaven came down to Egypt and was transferred there? If truth were told, our land is the temple of the whole world.” *Asclep.*24

This prelude represents a founding principle upon which, traditional Egyptian ideals of pharoanic kingship (as the upholder of *Maat*), their cosmology and their legal system were based.

“The sky is at peace, the earth is in joy, for they have heard that [the deceased king] will set right in the place of disorder. [Amenemhet II] drove out disorder by appearing as Atum himself. [Tutankhamen] drove out disorder from the Two Lands and *Maat* is firmly established in its place; he made lying an abomination and the land is as it was at the first time.”²⁹⁰

Hermes then proceeds to enumerate all the disasters that will befall Egypt, as a result of the abandonment of traditional religious activities due to the dilution of culture at the hands of foreign influence.

“O Egypt, Egypt, of your reverent deeds only stories will survive, and they will be incredible to your children! Only words cut in stone will survive to tell your faithful works, and the Scythian or Indian or some such neighbour barbarian

²⁸⁹ Morenz, p.113

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p.114

will dwell in Egypt. For divinity goes back to heaven, and all the people will die, deserted, as Egypt will be widowed deserted by god and human... Whoever survives will be recognised as Egyptian only by his language; in his actions he will seem a stranger.” *Asclep*.²⁴

This clearly demonstrates an unequivocal reaction by the Hermetic milieu to a perceived loss of national identity which is delineated by them along lines of religious affiliation. Religion in this instance is probably the most obvious means of cultural identification and in relation to Egyptian culture, religion is not only a cultural marker but a vital structure for survival of Egypt. This interpretation is emphasised by the form in which this section of the text takes as a form of the literary ‘complaint’ *topos* native to Egyptian literature since the Middle Kingdom and possibly earlier (e.g. The instruction of King Amenemkhet I for his son Sesostri I, *The prophecies of Neferti*, *The complaints of Khakheperre-sonb*, *The admonitions of Ipuwer*, and the *Oracle of the Potter*). Most markedly, this particular section has its closest parallels with *The Oracle of the Potter* (second to third century AD²⁹¹) which is written in Demotic and foretells the return of the ‘good daemon’ or king, who will return and punish the Greeks.

2.5.1 Conclusion

In terms of what this can reveal to us about the Hermetic milieu, it is clear that the adherence to the literary forms and interpretations of traditional religiosity reflects a desire to revitalise and use the rich religious canon of the Egyptians as a symbol of their separateness to the predominant cultural forms. Clearly, neither the philosophy of the Greeks, nor participation in temple cult was sufficient to satisfy the spiritual concerns of the Hermetic devotee. The key concept that defines Hermetic thinking is the idea that one can achieve knowledge of god before death and share in the revelations of the nature of the cosmos to become a divinised human. This demonstrates a desire to achieve a personal relationship with god and become god-like²⁹² through ethical living, private study and contemplation. Neither of these attributes could be achieved through the other avenues of religious approach. The concept that by following the way of Hermes, one could achieve a form of divinity, coupled with the sophisticated nature of the texts themselves and the secret nature of the Hermetic circles is suggestive of the disenfranchised intellectual classes, debarred from public service, classified by Weber as

²⁹¹ There are two recensions of the text dating to this period although the prophecy is thought to reflect an earlier period of Egyptian history dating to c. 130 BC - Aune:1983 p.76

²⁹² The idea that one can become ‘divinised’ whilst living, has interesting parallels to the traditional concept of the ‘god-king’ status of pharaoh.

'*Laienintellektualismus*' (i.e. groups who renounce the world and proclaim a new set of transcendent values).²⁹³ This is the view of the Hermetic milieu proposed by Fowden, and does sound plausible, particularly as it would fit with the Hermetic view that matter is evil and love of the body will lead to a spiritual death. However, another approach to explain the audience for the Hermetic Corpus is to take the view that it fulfilled a particular niche that bridges the gap between communal temple practices and a personal, redemptive approach in traditional philosophy. Within the context of the religious milieu of Roman Egypt between the first to third centuries; the lay populace had recourse to the various forms of religious experience ranging from the traditional, revelatory and philosophic schools. Each offered their own interpretation of cosmology, establishing niches within the plethora of religious experiences available. The appeal therefore of the Hermetic system of thought is that it could resolve the issues that each of these that neither pure philosophy, nor temple cult practices could satisfactorily provide amid an expanding world-view. The solution provided by the 'Way of Hermes' is that it offers a personal connection to a divine figure who is embedded within the local tradition whilst remaining outside the known institutional framework. However, I must add a caveat that to try to reconstruct the Hermetic milieu is speculation and beyond the remit of this chapter. Rather, by a comparison to the philosophic schools influential in Roman Egypt during this period, it will be possible to examine the hypothesis for the *Hermetica* to be firstly a continuation of the wisdom of Thoth (by means of their status as semi-technical tracts and previously enumerated evidence for their origination from Egyptian religion. Secondly, that the *Hermetica* is an expression of native resistance to cultural erosion through complaint literature. And thirdly that the Hermetic Corpus is actually a forerunner to neoplatonist philosophy of Neoplatonism in itself.

2.6 *The Philosophy of the Hermetica*

Within my examination of *The Poimandres* (CH.I), *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* (N.H.C. VI.6), *The Definitions to King Ammon* and *The Asclepius/The Perfect Discourse*, certain preoccupations dealing with the redemptive qualities of knowledge and the quasi-technical character of the texts, demonstrate an alignment of the Corpus to the canon of Thoth literature rather than with the Alexandrian schools of philosophy. However, in order to properly evaluate the schema in which these tracts sit, it will be necessary to analyse them in the broader context of the general

²⁹³ Fowden:1993, p.188

philosophy espoused by the Hermetic writings and contrast it to philosophically analogous groups of the period.

In general terms, the philosophical content of these writings can be broadly described as similar to the Gnostic and Neoplatonist schools, with their basic premise being there is an incorporeal god, formless and invisible.²⁹⁴ In *The Key* (CH X) and *The Poimandres* (CH I), the act of creation is described as originating through the luminous *logos* who is the son of God. His agents are the lesser divinities and rulers of the spheres. Man's soul was originally created in god's image but became enamoured of matter and thereby became imprisoned by flesh. The only means that mankind can free him/herself from the bonds of Fate is through *gnōsis* of god; it is therefore Man's desire to become reunited with God.²⁹⁵ Although the concept of *gnōsis* as a means of salvation is certainly not an exclusive concept to the *Hermetica*, it appears that Hermetism is the only theosophy that claims interaction with god is possible whilst still mortal.²⁹⁶

The texts themselves have been accused of various inconsistencies. For example, the idea that one can *know* god whilst still living is a concept shared by most of the Hermetic texts, however in *The Poimandres*, the opposite is stated. There is also an inherent disparity between the concept that God and the World are linked by cosmic sympathy whilst maintaining that god is transcendent above all other entities and matter (though created by god) is wholly evil.²⁹⁷ Fowden posits that these discrepancies can be reconciled if it considered that these texts reveal knowledge appropriate to the level of initiation of the reader and therefore represent a sequence.²⁹⁸ In the earlier, initiatory texts, knowledge of the world (and specifically astronomy was necessary to ensure that the soul would not get lost when it contemplates the divine realm) is encouraged as all knowledge leads to god:

“The gods sowed the generations of humans to know the works of god; to be a working witness to nature; to discern the things that are good; to increase by increasing and multiply by multiplying. And through the wonder-working course of the cycling gods, they created every soul incarnate to contemplate heaven, the course of the heavenly gods, the works of god and the workings of nature; to examine things that are good; to know divine power; to know the

²⁹⁴ Walker: 1983, p.166

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p.167

²⁹⁶ Fowden:1993, p.111

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p.103

²⁹⁸ Fowden: 1993, p.99

whirling changes of fair and foul; and to discover every means of working skilfully with things that are good." *CH* II.3

"If you ask about god, you ask also about the beautiful. Only one road travels from here to the beautiful – reverence combined with knowledge. Hence, those who remain in ignorance and do not travel the road of reverence dare to say that mankind is beautiful and good, but a human cannot see nor even dream of what the good might be." *CH* VI.5-6

In later texts (such as *CH* XIII.7, VII.2) however, knowledge of the world is dismissed as a diversion from true *gnōsis* of god.²⁹⁹ Treatise ten from the *Corpus Hermeticum* represents the more sophisticated level of instruction and like *Stobei Hermetica* VI it specifically presents itself as part of a didactic sequence. "*Yesterday, O Asclepius [Hermes begins], I expounded the Perfect Discourse. Now I think it necessary, in succession to that discourse, to discuss the doctrine of sensation.*" The treatise specifically tackles the concept that man cannot through reason alone arrive at the truth. *Logos* can guide the intellect up to a certain point but from that point onwards the intellect must attain faith,³⁰⁰ "*for to have understood is to have believed and not to have understood is not to have believed*" - i.e. human and divine knowledge, reason and intuition are interdependent. There are two types of knowledge- *episteme* (science) and *gnōsis*, which are products of reason and understanding combined with faith- as stated at the end of *CH* IX. As *CH*.X.9 puts it "*gnōsis is the goal of the episteme, i.e. to know god you must know his creation*".³⁰¹ Texts such as *CH* V steer a middle course representing a positive attitude to the material world, marking the transition that the initiate will travel from *episteme* to *gnōsis*.³⁰²

The concept of *gnōsis* is fundamental to the doctrine of Hermetic philosophy, for by achieving *gnōsis*, man is capable of awakening and strengthening the divine potential within him. *Gnōsis* is not merely knowledge of god but assimilation into god. It is also a two way process (i.e. man desires to know god but god also desires to be known, so he will bestow on the initiate some of his power mediated through a spiritual instructor³⁰³). The function of the divine intellect or *Nous* is to link together the hierarchy of god, world and man and the animals and to enable the soul (his vehicle) to free itself from the bonds of matter. God wishes to know man because there is a divine spark in mankind. It was important for man to understand the nature of the world and

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p.102

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p.100

³⁰¹ Ibid, p.101

³⁰² Ibid, p.103

³⁰³ Walker: 1983, p.12

creation in order to ‘remind’ that aspect of him that is divine, of the roots of all existence. It is man’s ignorance that prevents him from understanding his true nature and thus the nature of god.³⁰⁴ Hermetic initiation is not represented as a symbol but a real experience to retrace one’s steps to primordial time to apprehend god - thus the early aspects of Hermetic instruction are solitary, private study, but for the initiation itself the guidance of a spiritual leader is essential - hence the dialogue format of the texts. Also it is important that the initiate lead an ethical life of piety, obedience and purity.³⁰⁵

“Therefore, whoever through mercy has attained this godly birth and has forsaken bodily sensation recognises himself as constituted of the ineligibles and rejoices” *CH XIII.10*

The Hermetists were not austere ascetics (in fact in *CH II* it is encouraged for Man to bear children although in the more advanced spiritual texts the body is seen as a prison and rejection of bodily pleasures is expected – *CH XIII.7; I.18-19, 24; VII.2*) but the demands they placed on themselves undoubtedly increased as they advanced on their spiritual journey. The Hermetist has to make a choice between love of ‘material’ man or ‘essential’ man, for you cannot love both simultaneously. This is explained by Hermes to Tat in *CH XIII*, which culminates in Tat receiving a spiritual rebirth through the reconstruction of his ‘essential’ self. The rebirth represents a new plane of existence and a negation of physical rebirth.³⁰⁶ The rebirth is in effect the ability to overcome Fate through observation of the appropriate moment in which the soul can be freed from the bodily prison.³⁰⁷

As previously discussed in the ‘*Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*’, Hermes, in describing the journey of the soul through the planetary spheres, becomes *Nous* and beholds the origin of divine powers. Tat then implores that the power is bestowed on him as well. To the Hermetists initiation is not to gain external knowledge of god but to become subsumed into one of the attributes of god, and thereby receive divinization.

“We must presume then to say that earthly man is a mortal god and that the celestial god is an immortal man. And so it is through these two, the world and man, that all things exist; but they were all created by the One”. *CH X.25*

³⁰⁴ Copenhaver: 1992, p.xxxix

³⁰⁵ Fowden: 1993, p.106

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.108

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.109

This process does not come automatically about by the transition from living to dead or by the proper use of spells or religious invocation alone, but through the conscious and protracted effort to understand the nature of the divine and the cosmos. The reward for this effort is a spiritual rebirth by way of revelation, by which he then can comprehend the true nature of the immaterial and material planes. It is this path to the knowledge of the divine is one of the strongest defining traits of Hermetism in an otherwise diffuse and sometimes contradictory doctrine.

2.6.1 *Origins and Influences of Hermetism: the relationship between Gnostic, Platonist and Hermetic thought*

Previous studies of the Hermetic Corpus (the most influential being Festugiere's '*La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*') were quick to dismiss the Egyptian elements, preferring to view that the Corpus is a distinctly Alexandrian phenomenon (with particular emphasis on Neoplatonist, Gnostic and Jewish influences) embellished with a few decorative Egyptian elements. Of the influences attributed to the Hermetic Corpus by earlier studies, it is the Platonist influence that is perhaps the most obvious by its similarities in the shared conception of an ordered hierarchy of beings generated as emanations from the One Source, the concept of *Nous*, and the idea that Man's ultimate goal is to be reunited with the One Source. Alongside these tenets is also their belief in the tripartite nature of Man (vital, material and spiritual, where *Nous* can be equated to the vital or psychic).³⁰⁸

“Man has the two natures, both the mortal and the immortal.

Man has three essences, spiritual, vital ("psychic") and material.”

Definitions of Hermes Trismégistus to Asclepius, VI.1

Walker speculates that interaction between Platonist philosophy and the technical *Hermetica* can be seen in the adaptation of Neoplatonism into a system of theurgy, complex number systems and demonology by Iamblichus.³⁰⁹ However, despite sharing certain similarities it would be a mistake to assume a direct knowledge of the technical *Hermetica*, rather they are products of the same philosophical ferment.

³⁰⁸ Quispel, G: 1992, p.2

³⁰⁹ Walker: 1983, p.167

Scholars have been quick to pick up upon the similarities between Hermetism and Greek philosophy and to dismiss the work of the Hermetic Corpus as "the work of Gnosticizing Platonists... contemporary with Valentinus and the Sethians" (Layton, 1981, p.xi). But as I shall demonstrate, despite the obvious interchange of ideas between the theories of the Hermetists, Neoplatonists, Gnostics, Jews, Christians and Eastern mystery religions, these influences do not necessitate a specific antecedent for these ideas, rather a trend for religions to offer direct path to God.

Within Roman Egypt there was much dialogue between the Neoplatonist, Gnostic, Stoic, Christian, Judaic and Hermetic circles suggesting a ferment of philosophical speculation supplementary to religious practices.³¹⁰ Despite vociferous opposition from certain Neoplatonists (e.g. Plotinus, *Against Those That Affirm the Creator of the Cosmos and the Cosmos Itself to Be Evil*, Ennead II.9), they inspired many Gnostic followers. Perhaps the singular most characteristic trait of Gnosticism is its highly syncretic and eclectic nature, with influences drawn from Neoplatonism, Jewish Apocalyptic writings and Christianity. The specific credo of Gnostic thought is that from the divine unity sprang *Nous* and from *Nous*, World Soul. From these emanated everything else. The chief Archon was identified as the Old Testament God and redemption could be sought through the revelations of the 'holy redeemer' who in some sects was equated to Christ and was to others Seth or the 'Female Divine Thought of the Absolute'. The most compelling disparities between the two schools is their conception of the Supreme god. Whereas the Neoplatonist held that the Supreme god was a distant supreme creative force, the Gnostics believed in a more personal divinity,³¹¹ they also believed the soul had a divine origin but is tainted by the evil implicit in matter, to which asceticism was advocated to purge soul of impurities. In this regard it can be argued that Hermetists and Neoplatonists share greater commonality.

Parallels have also been drawn by past scholarship between Gnosticism and Hermetism. The primacy attached to Greek thought over native and genuine examples of synthesis between the two cultures, demonstrates a lack of understanding of the roots of Hermetic thought and its influence on contemporary philosophies. The Gnostics were essentially a sect formed in the philosophical ferment of Alexandria. They were secret in character and eclectic in their

³¹⁰ Evidence for their interactions can be observed in the plethora of writings on the subject of Egyptian religion by Hellenistic commentators such as Plato, Diodorus Siculus, Euhemerus, Iamblichus, Herodotus, as well as criticisms of the Hermetic doctrine by Jewish writers and the Hermetists response to the Greeks in the form of the 'complaint literature'. Detailed examples of these are discussed later in the essay.

³¹¹ Walker, 1983, p.169

influences. As mentioned previously, the principle character in their belief system is the supreme deity who is essentially good and merciful and exists in realm of light remote from the cosmos, and Logos, who is identified as Christ the Son of God. The Gnostic conception of the Cosmos is that it is evil and not the work of the god but that of the demiurge, who is one amongst a hierarchy of spiritual beings in which angels work as agents for the upper world of light whilst archons work for the inferior world in which we dwell. Within this hierarchy sits Man, who represents the primeval duality that pervades the universe - he fell from the world of light and became entrapped by matter. Salvation in this context refers to transcendence over the material plane as distinct from the notion of morality, and is only accessible via an ascetic lifestyle designed to purge the soul of impurity and *gnōsis*, i.e. knowledge of God's redemptive purpose through logos.³¹²

Any attempt to summarise the influences on Gnostic thought, soon becomes mired by the plethora of material absorbed from various contemporary religions. Of particular interest is the debt that Gnosticism owed to traditional Egyptian religion's theory of emanations (i.e. the concept that divine beings derive from a primary source. This differs from the idea of a 'creator god' because it is independent of divine will. It is an act of causation rather than by design) for example Khepera from Nun, Ra from Khepera and the pairing of gods as well as their arrangement in significant groupings such as the triad at Thebes, the Ennead at Heliopolis and duodecad at Heracleopolis. Also Egyptian religious thought had a focus on non-physical elements that compose a human being (e.g. the etheric double/*khaibit*, the astral body/*ka*, soul/*ba*, as well as personification of attributes/powers of gods e.g. fate/*shoy*, reason/*ab*, the word/*hu*, name/*ren*, power/*heka*, wisdom/*sia*). Other parallels can also be drawn between the Gnostic practice of incanting phonemes (which are used to protect the soul in its journey through the underworld) and the protective spells from Egyptian 'Book of the Dead, for the same purpose.³¹³

In another Egyptian cosmogony it is the tongue and the heart that brought about creation, i.e. thought and word. Also, the myth of the creation of the sky, in both traditions, share parallels, e.g. the arched body of Nut which forms the sky is likened to the body of Sophia also creating the sky during her struggle to extricate herself from the realm of matter.³¹⁴ The creation myth

³¹² Ibid, p.12

³¹³ Ibid, p.13

³¹⁴ According to the Gnostic myth, Sophia descends from the Pleroma into the abyss where she becomes trapped. In her bid to return to the higher realms she accidentally causes the creation of matter. Seeking to extricate herself from

inscribed on the walls of the Theban temples, bears some resemblance to the biblical creation myth and to the Old Testament God, particularly in the statement "there is no other god than I" which is repeated in the Hermopolis cosmology, some of which is inscribed on the temple of Petosiris.

Despite the above similarities between the two philosophies, the concept of a Supreme Being is widespread within diverse polytheistic traditions, reflecting monist traditions, creationist mythologies, and monotheistic theological influences and not evidence in itself of parallel tradition. In Doresse' study (*The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*³¹⁵), he is able to demonstrate the inclusion of some of the Gnostic elements in separate traditions such as an early myth dating from the early dynasties of the Merets, where the story of an attempt to steal the seed of Re and master the sun is akin to the Gnostic myth of Prunikos' seduction of the Archons. He then continues to enumerate other likenesses such as the acknowledgement of the Peratae that Isis and Osiris as rulers of the hours of day and night,³¹⁶ the existence of a sub-sect of the Gnostic movements called the Sethians (who saw a continuity between the biblical Seth and Egyptian Seth, mainly due to the idea of duality and opposition to Re/god as described in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*). For the Sethians, Seth can be seen in the Gnostic myth of struggle between Ialdabaoth-Sacla and the divinity of light. From the Roman period there is a fragment of text which refers to Gnostics as sons of Typhon (XXV, 8). Also the Archons are described as well as sharing similar rituals dedicated to them as the decans of the Egyptian astrology. The Gnostic hell shares the same name as Egyptian afterlife Amente and very similar spells and magical devices to ensure the soul's safety as it navigates past the Archons.³¹⁷

To summarise, Gnosticism is in itself an eclectic blend of religious mysticism, Egyptian traditions, Jewish and Christian messianism and Hellenic philosophy which operated with a syncretic milieu. The syncretic milieu encouraged the drawing on mythic cultures and the interpretation of those cultures within a specifically Gnostic formulation. In this way, and as with the interpretations of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, the issue of what elements are Gnostic and which are Egyptian is somewhat beyond the point and parallels with Hermeticism are unsurprising. Specific divergences between Hermetic and the Gnostic thought can be seen in the confused collection of elements from other systems of religious thought, overall contributing

the lower realms and return to the Pleroma she raised herself upwards and stretched out causing the formation of the firmament. Doresse, J. 1960,p.64-65 and p.272

³¹⁵ Doresse, J. 1960,

³¹⁶ Ibid, p.273

³¹⁷ Ibid, p.274

to a lack of cohesion (i.e. in their use of complex cosmogonies, geneses or evocations by prophets) as distinct from the use of a more stable reasoning found in the Hermetic works.³¹⁸

As previously stated, Gnosticism was a post-Christian phenomenon and as such it should be of no surprise to find that there are certain superficial similarities between Christianity, Judaism and Hermetism. The most obvious of these is the shared concept that one can ‘know’ God – a concept that is not shared by any other philosophies/religions of the period.³¹⁹ Another example can be found in *CH IV*’s account of God offering the souls of men the chance to be baptized, in order that those deserving of gnôsis would receive *Nous* and Logos and the concluding prayer of the Perfect Discourse.³²⁰

“‘immerse yourself in the great mixing bowl if your heart has the strength, if it believes you will rise up again to the one who sent the bowl below, if it recognises the purpose of coming to be.’ All those who heeded the proclamation and immersed themselves in mind participated in knowledge and became perfect people because they received mind.” *CH4.4*

These similarities, though merely represent one element of a shared premise rather than a pervasive influence of an entire doctrine.³²¹

Evidence of this is cited by reference to the alchemical manuscript ‘A genuine Discourse by Sophe [Cheops] the Egyptian and by the god of the Hebrews, The Lord of Powers Sabaoth’: “*for there are two sciences and two wisdoms: that of the Egyptians and that of the Hebrews*”. Also Doresse refers to Reitzenstein’s, *Poimandres* (pp185-6) in which he describes an Aramaic text transcribed into Demotic and some quotations from the Psalms written in hieroglyphics texts on the temple of Petosiris at Hermopolis (G.Lefebvre, *Le Tombeau De Petosiris*, Part 1, Cairo, 1934, pp37ff).³²² Other evidence includes a quote from a magical text as quoted in Festugiere’s *La révélation de Hermes Trismegistus*, which reads, “*It is this very book which Hermes plagiarized when he named the seven perfumes of sacrifice in his sacred book entitled ‘The Wing’.*” The book he is accused of plagiarizing is a magical text called *‘The Book of Moses’*. Doresse believes that the Hermetic school consistently re-labelled Judaic magical works as having been expounded by Hermes Trismegistus and thus

³¹⁸ Ibid, p.275

³¹⁹ Fowden:1993, p.112

³²⁰ Ibid, p.114

³²¹ Doresse, however goes further to suggest that not only were there many influences from Judaism, but there was outright competition between the Jews and the Hermetists. Moreover, that Hermetists frequently appropriated Judaic myths and attributed them to Hermes.

³²² Doresse: 1960, p.106

claiming them for themselves.³²³ However, the evidence itself is demonstrative of nothing further than a dialogue between the followers of these schools and perhaps also competition. Comparison of and communication between the various religious groups in Roman Egypt and debate as to their authority are to be expected. Doresse demonstrates a groundswell of religious sentiment grounded within the Egyptian tradition.

2.7 Conclusion

The analysis of *The Poimandres*, *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* (Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6), *Definitions of Asclepius to King* (Corpus Hermeticum XVI), and *The Asclepius/The Perfect Discourse*, have shown that contrary to prior studies (which centred on issues of ethnicity and origins), the milieu of the Hermetica cannot be argued to consist solely of either tradition. Rather, these texts mark a development in religiosity which drew upon temple practices and philosophy and reformulated them into a new medium. This new approach utilises magical/ritual principles to achieve *gnôsis*, and is therefore closer to the technical corpora than previously thought.

Beginning with *The Poimandres*, a linguistic analysis of the name and specific terms such as *Ennoia* and *Pneuma* demonstrated that despite prior assumptions that the text represents an offshoot of Alexandrian philosophy, they cloak a pharoanic precedent (with the name translating as ‘knowledge of Re’ and *Ennoia* and *Pneuma* representing Egyptian concepts rather than Stoic or Neoplatonist). Also from an analysis of the content and philosophy within *The Poimandres*, further parallels between *The Poimandres* and native religious forms were drawn – 1) that the core principle that defines Hermetic philosophy (expressed repeatedly in *The Poimandres*) i.e. *gnôsis* is one whose precedents can be traced to traditional Egyptian practice via the ‘*Book of Thoth*’; 2) That the cosmological explanation offered in *The Poimandres* demonstrate a link to the Pyramid texts (references to *Sia* or ‘intelligence’ and *Hu* ‘the divine word’, 3) Stylistically *The Poimandres* follows the same didactic question and answer format of Wisdom Literature; 4) The character of Hermes Trismegistus is conceived as an archetype representing both the principle of Thoth as god of esoteric wisdom and the journey of the Hermetic initiate towards salvation through knowledge; and 5) That the scenes described in the opening paragraphs of *The Poimandres* are suggestive of a range of temple practices such as incubation and associated visions. *The Poimandres* was able to demonstrate to us that there is a very strong linkage between the Hermetic tradition and traditional temple religious concepts, with a specific emphasis on the cult of Thoth

³²³ Ibid, p.107

as a direct antecedent to the philosophy in the text. However unlike temple practices which are undertaken on behalf of the community and are not personal, *The Poimandres* expresses a parallel tradition stemming from temple roots but for private individual salvation and access to the divine.

The second Hermetic text '*The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*' described Tat's revelation by the divine word and resultant *gnôsis*. The description of the ritual, reflected a knowledge of traditional Egyptian symbolism (e.g. use of the Ogdoad grouping and the Ennead groupings and their original symbolism in funerary literature) and the ritual itself is a reflection of the journey of the soul through the eighth and ninth realms. The purpose of this mirroring of the text with the ritual is representative of the Egyptian religious view that there is a causal link between religious ritual and their resultant effect and that by mirroring, they increase the efficacy of the ritual. The text could therefore be seen to be both a philosophical tract and a technical tract in that the technical aspect of the tract is a mechanical aid to bring about the revelation described in text.

Following from *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*, the examination of *the Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon*, demonstrates the same purpose of the text as being both technical and philosophical, the presumed purpose of the technical aspect, to bring about the *gnôsis* as well as to maintain the cosmic framework it seeks to describe. The text makes use of seemingly redundant scenes that mimic the same technique used in mythic scenes engraved on temple walls. And in so doing, demonstrates a continuation of native ritual techniques to express concepts derived from both Hellenistic and Egyptian philosophy. The author of the text remarks at length that the expression of these ideas into the language of the Greeks undermines the efficacy of the tract. The *Definitions of Asclepius* conceives of the notion of *gnôsis* as the product of both philosophical and magical behaviours. The result is more than a rearticulation of Hellenistic philosophy under the guise of Egyptian ritual tradition. It is a technical tract rather than contemplative that undermines Weber's teleological argument of the triumph of philosophical over magical approaches to religion.

The final tract examined in this chapter is *The Asclepius*. This text displays the same themes discussed in the previous two tracts in attacking the use of philosophy divorced from its original purpose (i.e. *gnôsis* of god). There are also stylistic elements that reflect the use of the mirroring technique derived from Egyptian religious/temple imagery. As with *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*, this mirroring of binary pairs (in this instance, the pairing of man and woman, the sensible and insensible beings, and the broader interaction between the invisible planes and the mortal plane) is used to create a magical synergy between those cosmic forces they represent, thereby creating

on the metaphysical plane the Hermetists' vision of the cosmos and then energising those forces. The text then goes on to promote a typically Egyptian representation of itself by explaining the philosophical justification for divine statues and sacred animals, seemingly in Neoplatonic terms. However as I demonstrated, the description of their religious function shows a closer parallel to our current understanding of their significance in temple practices than the contemporary Hellenistic view of these practices. At the very least, the inclusion of the practices by the author of *The Asclepius* encourages an Egyptian reading. This reading is further validated by the inclusion of the apocalyptic section in which the destruction of Egypt takes place as a result of the corruption of traditional religious practices by foreign invaders. This demonstrates an alignment with traditional Egyptian literary and religious forms as well as an in-depth knowledge of the symbology of native religious form (statues and sacred animals) that differs markedly from contemporary Hellenistic thinking.

To conclude, the four examples of the Hermetic Corpus discussed in this chapter (*The Poimandres*, *The Asclepius*, *The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon* and *The Ogdoad Reveals The Ennead*) each demonstrate that (contrary to the opinion of much of the modern analysis of the literature) the antecedent for these tracts lies in the traditional religious philosophy of pharaonic Egypt. And secondly they manifest strong assertions of the efficacy of Egyptian forms of religious expression. In this regard, they stand, to a certain extent, against Hellenistic philosophy, in that they not only espouse a message explaining the structure of the cosmos, but offer a means of transcending it through *gnōsis* achieved via technical means (i.e. the texts themselves are not wholly philosophical but semi-magical. In this way *gnōsis* is achieved not by inspiration alone but revelation through magical means).³²⁴ This method of achieving *gnōsis* differentiates itself from the *henosis*³²⁵ and has far more in common with the theurgic practices of Neoplatonism (whose interaction with Egyptian religious ideas ultimately informed its development).³²⁶

Moreover the texts themselves are not just an ontological thesis but act as a personal guide for connecting to the divine and achieving immortality. To achieve the aims of these tracts, techniques traditionally associated with temple ritual use of imagery (such as the use of binary pairs and 'mirroring' to mechanically bring about the cosmic conditions necessary for *gnōsis*) are employed. The *Hermetica* are therefore not categorised as philosophical but are semi-technical

³²⁴ The origins of theurgy can be argued to be entirely separate from pure philosophy. The origin of theurgic practices can be traced to the Chaldean Oracles where the existence of theurgy is first mentioned "For the theourgoi do not fall under the fate-governed herd" Fragment 153 des Places (Paris, 1971) Tardieu: 1978, p.421-466

³²⁵ i.e. unity with the source of everything or Monad

³²⁶ Lane Fox:1986, p.126. Also cf Iamblichus I.I.1-2 in which he cites Hermes as the patron and divine inspiration for his works in much the same way as the Hermetists before him.

tracts with a religious pedigree. The evidence suggests that the *Hermetica* reflect traditional temple approaches to not only the role of religion i.e. to maintain the material and spiritual planes through service to the gods and revitalise the life-force of pharaoh (who represents the bridging point between these two realms), but also share the same techniques as temple rites, i.e. through the use of magical practices that seek to balance opposing forces. The *Hermetica* has therefore repositioned the traditional religious approach to these issues, removing them from the communal context of temple rites, specifically for personal transcendence over the material realm via *gnōsis*.

It could be argued that within the religious context of Roman Egypt, the *Hermetica* represent a need within certain sectors of that society, which neither the traditional philosophic-religious schools (in this context, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Judaism) nor traditional religious activities could completely fulfil. The analysis of the Hermetic tracts demonstrates that there are Egyptian antecedents to the philosophy of the Hermetic Corpus (for example, concept of emanations, similar cosmologies, use of the 'I am' formula, immortality through knowledge, use of mirroring techniques, symbolic importance of Trismegistus as an embodiment of Thoth etc), which demonstrate a continuity between the cult of Thoth and contemporary Hermetic philosophy. However, traditional philosophy was never previously expressed as a coherent system of thought, divorced from religious practices until Hellenic influences from the Platonic schools. What becomes clear from particular instances such as XVI Hermetic tractate and others, is that rather than simply expressing Hellenic philosophy in an Egyptian idiom, the Hermetic tracts marks a development/re-etymologising of an older Egyptian philosophy using the structural framework of Hellenistic philosophy as a means of expression outside of its original framework.³²⁷

The Hermetic tracts do not represent merely an assertion of the efficacy of the Egyptian tradition over that of the Greeks, using the language and philosophical terminology of the Greeks (as previous interpretations of *The Asclepius* would have us believe) or indeed Hellenic philosophy with a veneer of Egyptian mysticism. Rather it embodies a new mode of expression for older native traditions, that has taken inspiration for its form from Greek philosophy. This in part, answers the question as to why, if the *Hermetica* are indeed an extension of Egyptian

³²⁷ This in some sense could be paralleled to the approach by Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE) in his fusion of Jewish with Stoic philosophy. He asserted that the traditional approach to religious understanding was insufficient in illuminating the true nature of the cosmos. Thus by using an interpretive framework informed by Alexandrian philosophy, he demonstrates the increasing movement towards non orthodox, more eclectic expressions of religiosity.

temple practices, are there so many copies that survive to us today in the Greek. Their translation from Coptic to Greek, represents a desire to express the Hermetic ideas using the idiom of Greek philosophy, perhaps to engage with other philosophical circles within the milieu of Roman Egypt. Not only this, but their re-etymologising into Greek is indicative of the individualistic shift towards a more personal relationship with god, without recourse to the intermediaries of an institutional religious framework. Important to the authors of the Hermetic tracts though, is the concept that unlike philosophy, the *Hermetica* offers its readers a personal relationship with the divine through means of *gnôsis* as well as means to become divinised whilst alive. Moreover, unlike philosophy, the words are ‘charged’ with a magical power to bring about *gnôsis*.

The doctrine of the *Hermetica* promises the adept that by following an ascetic lifestyle and contemplation, one can free themselves from the bonds of fate and reach a *gnôsis* of God. This is an idea seemingly foreign to the channels of temple cult – one can attend a religious festival and be in the presence of the god, but it was never achievable to ‘know’ the divine, unless you were either pharaoh or unless you were subject to a divine revelation by way of a dream. Previously, the divinisation of the individual was a regal or possibly temple characteristic, but in the *Hermetica* it has become available to a wider social milieu.

This naturally provokes certain question relating to the significance of this shift in the perception of the human relationship with the divine and its consequences for temple religion. When one examines the complex cosmologies of the Egyptian temple religion and the rituals used to enact cosmic scenes, they reflect a characterisation of the relationship with God as impersonal (especially as he is described as a non-anthropomorphic creative principle). The temple priesthood’s collective activities (including the daily ritual of the gods and the engraving of mythic scenes and religious wisdom with the precincts of the temple) served a magical and communal function rather than a devotional and personal one.³²⁸ Hermetic philosophy appears as an extension of this function but removed from its original sociological framework. Thus the temple mysteries are utilised by individuals for personal needs. In this way the individual in receipt of divine revelation is empowered and experiences not just communion with the divine but becomes divine. This step away from the use of ‘the wisdom of Thoth’ within temple rites which can be read as reinforcing a particular communal or political order (honouring the status

³²⁸ However that is not to say that individuals within the priesthood did not have a personal relationship with the deity, merely that their collective function did not serve that purpose. The gods were seen as representative of certain cosmic principles rather than supernatural beings. See Morenz (1973), p.20 and Lloyd (1989), p.121

of the pharaoh or the priesthood) to independent revelation and access to the divine could reflect either a weakening of the temple as a dispenser of spiritual wisdom in the Roman period (as argued by Morenz³²⁹) or it could be an indicator of increased access to religious/magical knowledge outside of temple cult. Ritner makes the case that despite the commonly held view that the proliferation of ‘magical’ objects (i.e. amulets, healing statues and magico-religious papyri) in the Roman period were indicative of a degeneration in traditional Egyptian temple practices, it more likely the case that it represents increased access to religious/magical paraphernalia and a ‘democratisation’ of Egyptian religious prerogatives.³³⁰

This is also substantiated by Mary Douglas’ theory of the relationship between an individual’s attitude towards ritual and religion and the strength/weakness of the Grid/Group structure of the society. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Grid/Group model appears to fit well with the socio-political description we have for Roman Egypt and supports the observations of this chapter as to the *religio mentis* revealed by the *Hermetica*. Within this theory, the Group refers to the experience of a socially bound unit and Grid to the rules which relate one person to another on an ego-centred basis. Group and Grid may be found together in which case they form an ordered and clearly bounded unit. Within a society that gives a disproportionate influence to Group, a member of this society has a strong set of allegiances to a social group but does not know how s/he fits in and relates to other members. The image of the human body is often used to express the exclusive nature of the allegiance and the nature of the social experience. When there is a tendency towards a Grid strong pattern, the image of the body as society is less strong for the individual and thus they feel less connected to any social group or loyalties but instead to be engaged by a set of rules that involve them within reciprocal actions. Therefore the individual does not separate mind from matter and tends towards the secular in outlook.³³¹

Douglas reinforces this theory with by example of an anthropological study of Peyotists conducted by Davis Aberle. From this study, Douglas is able to explain the social mechanism behind the development from a highly ritualised religion to that of a more personal and internal religion based on the consumption of Peyote.³³² This example may also provide an insight into the potential impact of similarly dramatic changes to the social structure of Roman rule, upon religious forms. In this study, Aberle claims that the structure of Navaho life required a tight-

³²⁹ Morenz:1973, p.256

³³⁰ Ritner: 1989, p.104

³³¹ Douglas: 1970, see introduction

³³² Ibid, p.13

knit community in which members were mutually dependent upon each other for survival to combine goods and services and to give economic aid and seek revenge when needed. Their ethical structure is supported not by love of virtue but by fear of sanctions and withdrawal of economic support. The cohesion of the community lessened in response to American law taking the place of aid in society: thus mutual aid was reduced and they became more independent and bound to more external forces for wages, healthcare, policing etc. Thus, as the social group has less of a grip on its members, ritualism declines and doctrines alter. Peyote eating comes as a reaction to increased isolation and a wish to commune directly with god. In the same way, despite the lack of evidence to attempt a complete reconstruction of the religious and societal conditions in Roman Egypt, there are enough observable similarities (such as the increase in private means of accessing supernatural aid in conjunction with the weakening of larger religious centres) to indicate that Douglas' analysis offers a plausible model for the religious milieu in which the *Hermetica* was formed. This can be seen in the disruption of the temples' cohesive function within the social, political and religious framework as a disseminator of the national traditions. In applying this model to Roman Egypt, Group would be seen as weak but the interpersonal relationships (i.e. Grid) within it are strong leading to use of magic to get ahead in a competitive environment and a desire for a more personal relationship with God. This shows a marked development away from the Group Strong/Grid Strong pattern where ritual action enforces the social order, which best characterises the relationship during pharoanic rule.

The social implications for the key component of Hermetic wisdom (i.e. esoteric knowledge from the Cult of Thoth can be used for personal purposes divorced from the ritual service of the god and that one can become a living god) suggests a radical change in the perception of the relationship between state and religion. The ability to conceive of oneself as divinised during their own lifetime could only be expressed once the sociological shift away from the divine kingship allowed for non-royal personages to develop this prospect for themselves. To express such ideas during pharoanic periods would seem an anathema, heretical and politically unwise.³³³ However, the influence of Alexandrian schools of philosophy which encapsulated the concept that *gnôsis* of the cosmos can occur outside of ritual action, allowed the development of traditional religious forms to be adapted from the temple ritual for personal use. The shift is therefore one that accepts the possibility of ritual action divorced from temple/communal purposes and the free agency of the individual to become divinised in life.

³³³ Cf the description of the process by which the possibility of an afterlife percolated through social strata, Morenz: 1973, p.13

The origins of this religious/magical rite whereby one receives the godhead and is thus endowed with knowledge of the cosmic matrix, can be traced to pharoanic Egypt and the Sed ritual (i.e. the ritual by which members of the priesthood revitalise the cosmic energies of living god-king³³⁴). For ordinary citizens ritual action was only experienced via temple practitioners and there was certainly no possibility of divinisation. The best one could hope for was for the continuation of the soul into the afterlife, vicariously through identification with Osiris, certainly not via a divinisation in death or life. It was therefore when the social and religion framework (i.e. Group) which was underpinned by the concept of the pharaoh (who was also the chief high priest) as the embodiment of cosmic order on the mortal plane, began to weaken under successive conquests that a body of literature such as the Demotic *Book of Thoth* and the *Hermetic Corpus*, could emerge to proffer a personal rather than communal function. The continued survival of traditional religious forms under a different guise therefore directly reflects a perceived change by certain sectors of society, to the possibilities religion can offer them. This change, I have argued, stems from the perceived fragmentation of the unified social body, to be replaced by a profusion of cultural influences. This weakening of the socio-religious matrix thus led to an increase in ritual usage (facilitated by traditional cultic knowledge and magical practices) in line with the shift towards a more individualistic and independent approach to religion. The *Hermetica* are therefore representative of a milieu in Roman Egypt that sought direct personal access to the divine without the necessity of institutional apparatus. Also their status as magical texts expressed in terms of Egyptian religiosity³³⁵ within the wider lay community shows that the *Hermetica* were not the preserve of an exclusive collective of disenfranchised elite (as argued by Fowden who also places the philosophical texts firmly within the milieu of a Greek speaking *Laienintellektualismus* and therefore distinct from lay religiosity) but a broader social milieu.

Moreover, I believe the *Hermetica* represent a continuity of traditional Egyptian religious forms in that they seeks to bring about *apotheosis* through magical rather than contemplative means. They are therefore not as separate to the technical *Hermetica* as has been assumed by much of the secondary literature,³³⁶ rather they are an expression of the laity's demand for a magical means of personal *gnōsis*. This socio-religious shift towards increased ritual usage and an increasingly individualistic approach to religion argues against the traditional teleological (Weberian) view that correlates the decline of ritualism with an increase in contemplative religions. In this regard a

³³⁴ David: 2002, p.70

³³⁵ As part of the same tradition as the magical papyri and the Egyptian 'spell' texts

³³⁶ Even Fowden who to a certain extent agrees that the philosophical and technical *Hermetica* are unified by virtue of a shared principle that the purification of base metals is analogous to the purification of the soul, stops short of fully identifying the *Corpus* as technical

better analogy to explain the relationship between societal change and religious practices (without recourse to an institutional explanation), is sought in Douglas' model which, when applied to the circumstances of Roman Egypt, not only indicates that the continuity of Egyptian magical practices can correspond to an increase in individualistic approach to religion, but is also able to explain how the interrelationship of these two factors operates.

CHAPTER THREE

Individualism and Religiosity in the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri

3.1 Introduction

The *Greek Magical Papyri* constitute a large and eclectic collection of magical texts originating in Graeco-Roman Egypt and written in Greek, Demotic and a mistransliterated Egyptian designated as Old Coptic.³³⁷ Dating from the second century BC through to the fifth century AD, the papyri reflect not only the diversity of the concerns of the laity but also a diversity of composition, taking the form of hymns, spells, formulas and rituals.³³⁸ Amongst the spells, a distinction can be made between the large numbers of short magical texts that deal primarily with applied charms (i.e. apotropaic charms to ward against illness and malign influences, binding spells and particularly *defixiones*) and the longer papyri which represent magical books. These longer magical ‘collections’ include the whole gamut of magical practices described individually in the shorter papyri; however they also include recitations of a more mystical revelatory manner (i.e. spells to ‘know’ god), which are of primary interest in this chapter.

The spells themselves are the surviving remnants of what can be assumed to have been a much larger corpus of magical books in circulation. However, due to the esoteric nature of the texts, which demanded the utmost secrecy from their readers,³³⁹ as well as various acts of suppression in the Imperial³⁴⁰ and Christian eras (such as the burning of magical scrolls in Ephesus described in *Acts* 19:19³⁴¹), the full breadth of magical practices in Roman Egypt, may never be fully known. The discovery of the Anastasi collection (which forms the majority of the Greek/Demotic papyri), is therefore as important to the comprehension of Graeco-Roman

³³⁷ In some cases the spells exhibit a combination of all three, as in ‘Myth of the Sun’s Eye’ *PGM* II/Leiden I 384v – Frankfurter:1998 p.229

³³⁸ Betz:1992, p.xli

³³⁹ Cf. *PGM* XIII.734-1077 “I have also set out for you the oath that precedes each book, since, when you have learned the power of the book, you are to keep it secret, child, for in it there is the name of the lord, which is Ogdoads, the god who commands and directs all things...” (See also *PGM* LVII and *PGM* LXXII which are written in cryptographically).

³⁴⁰ Such as Augustus’ proscription of magical books in 13 BC (according to Suetonius, Augustus gathered around 2000 magical texts and had them burned: “He then caused all prophetic books, both in Latin and Greek, the authors of which were either unknown, or of no great authority, to be brought in; and the whole collection, amounting to upwards of two thousand volumes, he committed to the flames, preserving only the Sibylline oracles; but not even those without a strict examination, to ascertain which were genuine. This being done, he deposited them in two gilt coffer, under the pedestal of the statue of the Palatine Apollo.” Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.I).

³⁴¹ Betz: 1992,p.xli

magic/religiosity, as the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts were to the understanding of Gnosticism.³⁴² So successful was the repression of magical literature that without the discovery of the *Greek Magical Papyri* (henceforth abbreviated to *PGM* as in *Papyri Graecae Magicae*), our knowledge of magical practices would have been limited to information gleaned from material artefacts (i.e. amulets, talismans etc), fictional works (such as the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius), isolated historical accounts (such as Ammianus Marcellinus *Hist.* XXII.15.19 and *Hist.* XXIX.2.1-28) and references by philosophers from the Neopythagorean, Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Hermetic schools.³⁴³

As mentioned, a large proportion of the texts within the *Greek Magical Papyri* come from the Anastasi collection, though there are other surviving magical texts from Tebtunis, the Fayoum more generally, and Oxyrhynchus. In the introduction to *The Greek Magical Papyri Including the Demotic Spells*, Betz attributes the survival of the texts that form *PGM* and *PDM* to the efforts of nineteenth century collector, Jean d'Anastasi. M. d'Anastasi whilst working in Alexandria as a consular representative of Sweden, collected a large number of magical papyri, thought to be from one original cache discovered in Thebes.³⁴⁴ The collection eventually was auctioned off to various libraries including the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale and the Louvre in Paris, the Staatliche Museen in Berlin and the Rijksmuseum in Leiden.³⁴⁵ They were later joined by another magical papyrus acquired by Jean Francois Mimaut, who sent the text which was to become *PGM* III to the Bibliotheque Nationale. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the texts that made up *PGM* began to be translated by scholars – a work that was undertaken by many, but not published under a single volume until the Karl Preisendanz edition in (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*) in 1928, followed by a second volume in 1931.³⁴⁶

The study of the *PGM* was largely neglected during the early half of the last century or treated in the main with contempt as products of “the humblest stratum of the population”³⁴⁷ and “gross aberrations of the human mind”.³⁴⁸ In more recent investigations (thankfully unhampered by these earlier prejudices), scholars have focused more upon either dissecting the *PGM* and

³⁴² Graf:2003, p.4

³⁴³ Betz:1992, p.xlii

³⁴⁴ Although the circumstances of the discovery of this Theban cache are unknown, Betz speculates that the papyri may have originally belonged to a temple library or tomb and were the result of one man's collection – Betz:1992, p.xlii

³⁴⁵ Betz:1992, p.xlii

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p.xliv

³⁴⁷ Reiss: 1935, p.105

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p.105

PDM for their constituent influences,³⁴⁹ correcting/updating earlier translations of certain spells³⁵⁰ or in certain cases taking a broader sociological analysis of the papyri (particularly emphasis upon ‘love magic’ and witchcraft³⁵¹). In isolation, the study of these texts can reveal only so much of the *religio mentis* of Roman Egypt. However, by analysing the papyri within the context of sociological frameworks (such as Mary Douglas’ Grid/Group model and Keith Thomas’ study of witchcraft accusations), a more comprehensive evaluation of religiosity can be achieved.

Upon first inspection of the *PGM*, it is clear that the corpus has not only the potential to reveal the religious sensibilities and concerns of individuals from Roman Egypt, but also is able to reflect the sociological conditions which preceded them. As with the Hermetic literature, the texts demonstrate a plethora of religious influences and techniques known throughout the ancient world³⁵². This plurality of influences is expressed by the collation of divinities from diverse religious traditions and their subsequent re-envisioning within a new context. The eclecticism of the spells is further demonstrated by the increased use of foreign ‘words of power’ (*voces magicæ*) containing fragments of Persian, Jewish and Egyptian names. The usage of *voces magicæ* within these spells (as I shall discuss) aside from operating to safeguard the knowledge and prestige of the magician, reflect characteristic themes of social and religious disruption in the very eclectic nature of the texts. Knowledge, as presented in the *PGM*, is diverse.

A prominent feature of the magical texts is the systematisation of these diverse supernatural powers into a hierarchy under one transcendent god. Graf related the increasingly hierarchical nature of deities and other supernatural entities³⁵³ to the increasingly hierarchical nature of Egyptian society under Roman rule. In this regard it seems entirely plausible that with the decline of traditional local leadership under the Imperial regime, the traditional local gods suffered a relative decline in status and, alongside a host of imported deities, came to be ruled by a remote all-powerful deity: the religious world would thus operate as a mirror of the political world. However, in concert with the expansion of the traditional religious pantheon, new magico-religious practices developed independent of a fixed canon with a rather incoherent and heterogeneous philosophy. This creative eclecticism stands in sharp contrast to Graf’s model of a neatly categorised magico-religious system that reflected of a greater systematisation of the

³⁴⁹ See Reiss:1935, Nock:1929, Betz:1980, Fossum: 1994

³⁵⁰ See Reiss:1896, Reiss:1941, Crum: 1942

³⁵¹ See Frankfurter:2001, Fraser:2009, Collins:2003

³⁵² As indicated by their transmission in Greek, Coptic and Demotic languages as well the invocation of Jewish, Egyptian and Greek supernatural entities.

³⁵³ Graf:2003, p.226

invisible world. In fact, (as I will discuss in-depth later) the plurality of influences and chaotic world-view of the *PGM* has more in common with anti-Imperial sensibilities in its refusal to conform to easy categories. Power and political relationships were chaotic and magic was a source of power not easily assimilated into imperial order. From this standpoint, it is plausible to hypothesise that the adoption of an increasingly individualistic approach to religious practices was a response to changing social paradigms, but not necessarily a direct reflection of imperial hierarchies and order. Evidence of this theory within the *PGM* (as will discuss later in greater length) is also reflected by the confused iconography of the deity Abrasax, whose body is represented as a composite of a human, with the head of a cock (or in some examples, a lion), and legs of snakes terminating in scorpions. This bizarre depiction of a god which does not follow Classical, Egyptian or Jewish traditions, may metaphorically reflect a confused and fragmentary social body.³⁵⁴

In discussing the significance of these features in the wider discussion of lay religiosity, my lines of inquiry will include an analysis of the short texts for applied charms (i.e. those applied spells which are concerned with prosperity, medical cures, binding spells and prophylactic anxieties) as well as the hymns and larger magical papyri which deal with magico-religious concerns. Although these larger revelatory spells offer the most overt insights into the *religio mentis* of ‘heterodox’ religious practices in Roman Egypt, the short charms also reflect religious sensibilities and should be treated alongside other magical texts, regardless of their seemingly more prosaic concerns. The shorter applied charms offer glimpses of religious sentiment in several ways; firstly the language of the spells demonstrates closeness (or a desire for closeness) to the deity invoked:

“Come to me, Lord Hermes, as foetuses do to the wombs of women. Come to me, Lord Hermes, who collect the sustenance of the gods and men; [come] to me, NN, Lord Hermes, and give me favour, sustenance, /victory, prosperity....” *PGM VIII*, 1-60 (Fourth Century AD)

ἔλ[θ]έ μοι, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, ὡς τὰ βρέφη εἰς τὰ<ς> κοιλίας τῶν γυναι[κ]
]ῶν. ἔλθέ μοι, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, συνάγων τὰς τροφὰς τῶν θεῶν | καὶ ἄν

³⁵⁴ Cf. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p.viii in which she argues that changes in social conditions are often reflected symbolic form, with the body being the most universal symbol across cultures.

θρώπων, <ἐλθ>έ μοι, τῶ δέϊνα, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, καὶ δός μοι χάριν, τροφ
ήν, νίκην, εὐνμερίαν....”³⁵⁵ PGM VIII, 1-60

“Come close to me with a happy face, to a bed of your choice, giving to me,
NN ... I beg, master, accept my entreaty” PGM III 576-577 (Fourth Century
AD)

“ἐλθέ μοι || ἰ]λαρῶ τῶ πρ[ο]σώ[πῳ] ἐπ̄ αὐτοθελ[ητῶ] κοίτη, διδους ἐ
μοί, | τῶ δέϊνα...Λίσσομαι, ἄναξ, πρόσδεξάι | μου τὴν λιτανείαν”
PGM III 576-577

Secondly, the knowledge of the divinities’ ‘secret names’ or *vores magicæ*³⁵⁶ might infer an intimacy with the deity’s true nature and a means of legitimising the request for divine aid. In this way, whereas religion uses various forms of ritual approach to ensure success (i.e. the enumeration one’s good deeds and sacrifices/dedications to the god in question), magic is also concerned to ensure a connection to the divine but achieves this connection by obtaining the correct knowledge. Magic can, therefore, be seen to have its own well-defined epistemology, which it shares with, for instance, the initiation ceremonies of mystery cults.³⁵⁷ Also, religious sentiment may be inferred in manner in which the magician envisioned his/her relationship with the divine. In many of the short charms, the transcendent god is referred to a ‘Lord’ (Adonai) whilst the magician refers to himself as the god’s servant. This imagining of the relationship in which the mortal is subservient and respectful of a divine figurehead implies a measure of trust and pietistic sentiment which would seem to have devotional overtones. Such a relationship is very different from the old conception of magic as coercive of the divine force, whereas religion is seen as supplicative³⁵⁸).

I will therefore include select spells for this analysis from both the longer magical/revelatory books as well as form the shorter applied charms mentioned above. I will discuss these spells

³⁵⁵ The original Greek can be found in Preisendanz:1931, p.45. Current translations of the Greek are derived from Betz:1992

³⁵⁶ Graf:2003, pp.220-221

³⁵⁷ The similarities are reflected in the tenet that secret knowledge is necessary for a divine experience. In order to become a member of any one of the mystery cults, one must undergo a secret initiation to evoke a divine encounter. Knowledge of the rites involved was restricted to the members of this closed group and was therefore the necessary component for religious experience. The content of the ritual varied from group to group and may involve a figurative death and rebirth (as in the Eleusian and Egyptian mysteries, described by Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, bk 11 and the Mithraic inscriptions from Santa Prisca) or the taking part in a ritual meal (as in the Mithraic and Dionysian ceremonies). Meyer: 1987, pps.8-9 also cf Bowden:2010

³⁵⁸ Ankarloo, B. & Clark, S:2002, p.8

thematically beginning with a lexicographic analysis of the *vores magicae* in order to reveal the breadth of religious syncretism. Also of interest to this particular study is an analysis of those spells which make reference to daemons. This is a development of the Imperial era and offers insights into the increasing plurality of supernatural entities. As I shall demonstrate, the addition of daemons to the growing population of increasingly undifferentiated deities cited in the *PGM*, (contrary to Graf's explanation) is symptomatic of a chaotic, unsystematised but inclusive group. Moreover, the use of *daemons* to achieve divine access, demonstrates a milieu that is closely aligned to that of the *Hermetica* (in that *systasis* is achieved through a system of thought which employed ritual/magical means rather than a purely philosophical/contemplative approach). The connection to the *Hermetica* (and the use of Demotic script in certain instances) reflects the temple origins of the spells and further establishes the artificial nature of modern divisions of magic and religion.

I shall then widen my analysis to examine the types of deities that are invoked and to trace the diversity of religious influences. By examining the divergences between the depiction of the gods and their traditional religious/mythological forms (with a particular focus on deities unique to the *PGM*, such as Abrasax) I will uncover a putative shift in religious and cosmological perspectives. Through a lexicographical and qualitative analysis, the spells offer a variety of channels along which the contours of the religious milieu of Roman Egypt can be envisioned. I will then relate these features to a discussion of relevant sociological frameworks concerned with the supposed dichotomy between religion and magic.

However, before I begin, there are issues specific to the analysis of the *PGM* which need to be addressed. The principle concern is producing a satisfactory classification of magic within the context of the Graeco-Roman world. The precise delineation of magic as separate from other expressions of religious behaviour raises issues. The texts demonstrate religious sensibilities in concert with magical invocations and ritual. In exemplifying a magical approach to religion the texts reflect continuities with the magico-religious system of the temple. Any polarised definitions of magic in relation to religion (licit/illicit; mechanistic/spiritual; theological/demonic; displaying human awe of the divine/displaying human control of the divine) seem to fail in the face of the religiosity of predominantly 'magical' texts, and also the magical nature of predominantly 'religious' texts. It seems that in the Egyptian approach to the divine there was no hard distinction between magic and religion. As with the *Hermetica*, in which both contemplative and magical approaches combine into a single system of thought, there is equal difficulty in applying modern distinctions.

The other main issue with the analysis of the magical papyri is isolating the users of the magical papyri and assessing the extent of their distribution. Outside of the Theban cache from which most of the Anastasi collection originates, small numbers of magical papyri have been found at sites such as Tebtunis and Oxyrhynchus. Additionally, remarkable parallels (in terms of the religious influences, deities cited and wording of the curses) between the *defixiones* found throughout the Roman empire and the papyrus binding spells from Egypt suggest a broad non-specialised, highly-syncretised Mediterranean authorship. Alongside this are lexicographical clues (identical parts of a magic formulary were found in *PGM P.Oxy 4468/PGM LII*, through written by two separate authors) which suggest that at least some of the magical books were produced by a copying centre and that they had a broad distribution and use by non-specialist groups. Such a wide distribution means that it is less than straightforward to establish who used these magical codices. The problem, however, is not insurmountable. The transmission of certain papyri in Greek, Coptic and Demotic, yield linguistic clues (as will be discussed later) which help in this regard.

4.2 *Voces Magicae*

The use of *voces magicae* (the names of the gods and goddesses invoked with the spells as names of power) offer a glimpse into the diversity of influences within the *PGM* and a clue as to the psychology of the practitioners and the function of this innovation in religious practices. Many of the names are untranslatable strings of letters (sometimes with combinations that have a numerical significance), or vowel combinations. These are presumed to be meaningless to the reader although in certain examples there are fragments of Greek, Coptic, Babylonian, Egyptian and Semitic words preserved. In some cases there are examples of the *voces magicae* that contain elements of divine and daemonic names stemming from these aforementioned influences, for example the Babylonian Ereschigal (*PGM.IV.338*), a possible Assyrian name Eulamo (*PGM V.473*), Jewish sacred names (Yaweh, Jacob), possibly Iranian and Mandaean names and Greek names (given partially in some circumstances and fully in others). Occurrences of the *voces magicae* before the Imperial period were rare, but became common thereafter.³⁵⁹

I shall begin with a detailed description of the *voces* and their suggested etymology. I will then follow this with a dissection of the longer *voces* for partial deity names in order to further trace origins and demonstrate the cultural plurality within the spells. I shall also examine the role of

³⁵⁹ Ogden:1999, p.46

vores as an expression of piety within the same epistemological system of thinking as the mystery cults. Finally, I shall look to literary formulations that hint towards temple origins (such as the use of the ‘I am’ formula and their transformation in certain instances into palindromes) and the attitude of contemporaries to the use of *vores* as a means of asserting primacy of the written word over oral traditions and (by inference) the primacy of Egyptian temple traditions.

The origins of the *vores magicae* are thought to have derived from the *Ephesia grammata* (although they are not thought to have any special connection to Ephesus, more likely the name derives from the Babylonian *epesu*, ‘bewitch’).³⁶⁰ Some of the words in the *Ephesian Letters* evoke Greek words and one of the words (Damnameneus) was thought to be from one of the Idaean Dactyls of Hephaestus. The earliest references to them is an inscription from Mycenae dating from 5th century BC as well as in Euripides’ *Iphigenia among the Taurians* where Iphigenia utters ‘barbarous words as a true witch’³⁶¹ when preparing the sacrifice of Orestes. Although (as mentioned), many of these words were untranslatable strings, their repeated use endowed the names with a familiarity to the magicians, leading them to become credited as powers in their own right (for example ABRASAX,³⁶² who developed as a *vox magica* into a deity with his own iconography and distinctive qualities). The profusion of newly created gods/powers increased the number and diversity of supernatural beings within a pantheon under the Supreme God. With the exception of Abrasax however, the majority of these powers are largely undifferentiated, seemingly existing as purely a name. The profusion of these names-powers, gave the magician a range of coercible forces to be invoked as intercessors, preserving the deferential relationship to the transcendent god and displaying pietistic sentiments.³⁶³ The significance of the *vores*, as symbols of religious sentiments can also be understood from the explanation for their purposes offered by Iamblichus (*Myst. Aegypt.* VII.4-5):

“But why of meaningful names, do we prefer the barbarian to our own? For this again, there is a mystical reason. For since the gods have shown that the entire dialect of the sacred peoples such as the Assyrians and the Egyptians is appropriate for religious ceremonies, for this reason we must understand that our communication with the gods must be in the appropriate tongue. Also

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p.47

³⁶¹ Euripides, *Iphigenia and the Taurians* 1336f

³⁶² I shall discuss in greater detail the significance of the inclusion of Abrasax in the texts in the Gods and Angels section of this chapter.

³⁶³ It is interesting to note that the creation of ‘intercessors’ to mediate between the magicians and the transcendent deity, had the added benefit of giving confidence to the magicians to manipulate the dangerous forces without the risk of provoking divine wrath or endangering cosmos. This is in contrast to the perceived risks of invoking higher powers in temple rites.

such a mode of speech is the first and most ancient. But most importantly, since those who learned the very first names... the barbarians, being consistent in their customs, remain faithful to the same words. Thus they endear themselves to the gods, and proffer words that are pleasing to them. To change these in any way whatsoever is permitted to no man. Such then is our answer to you concerning the names, which may indeed be called ‘inexplicable’ and ‘barbarous’ but which are in fact wholly suitable for sacred rituals.”

In Iamblichus’ explanation, the *voces magicæ* must be uttered precisely and correctly for the spell to work. These words are not intended to be understood by mortal ears as they are outside the normal realms of human experience. They cannot be understood by rational means as they are ineffable signs denoting divinity.³⁶⁴ They operate as markers of the magician’s skill as a ritual specialist. The exoticism and archaism work to elevate the prestige of these words of power, in much the same way that the Egyptian language is described in the *Corpus Hermeticum* as containing an *energeia* not found in other languages.³⁶⁵ Iamblichus argues that these utterances are more appropriate to divinity and more pleasing to them than artificial prayers, such as those from the Greeks, which may make sense to those delivering them but are subject to constant change.³⁶⁶ In this way, Iamblichus asserts the primacy of older religious traditions over the language and traditions of the Greeks. Moreover, by demonstrating intimate knowledge of a particular deity, including knowledge of their ‘hidden names’ and the correct ritual approaches to them, the magician is communicating that they have a personal connection to the deity and are therefore worthy of the god’s aid:

“[Hail Helios!] Hail, Helios! Hail, [Gabriel! Hail Raphael! Hail] Michael! Hail, whole [universe! Give me] the [authority] and power of SABAOTH, the/[strength of IAO], and the success of ABLANATHANALBA, and the [might of] AKRAMMACHAMAREI. Grant that I [gain] the victory, as I have summoned you” (then write 59-[letter] IAEO formula). “Grant [victory] because I know the names of the Good *Daemon*, HARPON [CHNOUPHI] BRITATENOPHRI BRISAROUAZAR BASEN/KRIPHI NIPTOUMI CHMOUMAOPHI (add the usual) and accomplish this for me” Speak to [no none] PGM VII.1017-26. (Late Third/Early Fourth Century AD)

³⁶⁴ Iamb. *Myst Egypt.* VII.4

³⁶⁵ Gordon:1999, p.243

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p.242

“χαῖρε Ἡλίε, χ]αῖρε Ἡλίε, χαῖρε Γ]αβριήλ, χαῖρε Γ]αφαήλ, χαῖρ]ε
Μιχαήλ, χαῖρε σύμ[παντα δός μοι | τή[ν ἐξουσίαν] καὶ τὴν δύναμιν
τοῦ Σαβ[α]ώ[θ,το] | | κρ[άτος τοῦ] Ἰάω κ]αὶ τὴν ἐπιτυχίαν τοῦ Ἄβλ
αναθα[ναλβα | κα[ὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν τοῦ Ἄ]κρα[μ]μαχα[μ]αρεὶ δός μοι τ
ὴν νίκην προ[ς | κτ[ή]σασθαι], ὡς ἐκάλ[εσά]σε. εἶτα σὺ γράψον <γράμ
ματα> νθ, ἰαεω – λόγον. ἴδος [νίκηε, ὅ] τι οἶδα τὰ ὀνόματα τοῦ Ἄ
γαθοῦ Δαίμονος Ἄρπο[η] χη[ουφι βρ]ιντατη[ν]ωφριβρισαρουαζαρβ
ασεν | | κριφ[ινιπτουμιχμου]μαωφί (κοινά) ἄ καὶ τέλεσόν μοι το
ῦτο. λ | ἄλει μ[ηδενί].” PGM VII.1017-26.

In the above spell, it is the magician’s specialised knowledge of the supreme deity’s (in this instance the Good *Daemon*) secret names that grants access to the host of divine beings and the ability to command them. The pre-requisite of knowledge for communing with the divine implies a philosophical stance akin to that of Neoplatonist, Gnostic and Hermetic groups.

The *voces magicae* are also used in other contexts within spells as elaborate symbols, palindromes and also as statements of self-identification with the powers represented by the *voces magicae* as well as a variety of better known deities.

“I am Anubis, I am Osir-phre, I am OSOT SORONOUUIER, I am Osiris
whom Seth destroyed.³⁶⁷.. Rise up infernal daemon, IO ERBETH IO
PHOBETH IO PAKERBETH IO APOMPS” PGM I.247-62 (Late Fourth
Century/Early Fifth AD)

In the above example from the late fourth or early fifth centuries, the association of the magician with the invoked deity establishes a parallel to the ‘I am’ formula of the Egyptian religious tradition, whereby identification with the deity, allows one to safely command supernatural powers as well as ensure the efficacy of the spell. Further, the recognisable names of deities within the *voces magicae* reveal the syncretic nature of the spells. Even though the most frequently cited names of power belong to Egyptian deities or else Egyptian deities referenced using the names of their Greek equivalents,³⁶⁸ there are traces of influences from Jewish, Babylonian and Greek traditions. An example of this can be seen in the oft cited IAO, which is

³⁶⁷ Underlined text references where the text was originally written in Demotic script

³⁶⁸ Pinch:2006, p.164

derived from the name of the Hebrew god YHWH,³⁶⁹ as well as AKRAMMACHAMAREI and ADONAIOS. Babylonian influences are also observed in the NEBOUTOSOUALETH formula which is commonly associated with Ereschigal and Aktiophis and may possibly be derived from the Babylonia god Nebo, though there is some doubt.³⁷⁰ It is possible that as these names are obscured in their inclusion in long palindromes, the original sense of the deity is not necessarily implied or even understood. In incomprehensibility, they would stand as artefacts of foreign cultures the use of which would increase the prestige of the magician as someone with erudition and knowledge of the religiously arcane. The use of 'foreignness' would also render more difficult the correct pronunciation and usage and raise the status of the practitioner within their community.

Graf argues that the inclusion of foreign words constitutes a reversal of 'normal' linguistic behaviour.³⁷¹ The use of inversion in ritual allows the participants to enter a liminal space whereby reality can be manipulated and the action of the spell can become instituted. In the Egyptian conception of the supernatural plains of existence, the normal rules of existence were often in opposition to the laws of the earthly plain (for example, daemons were said to have the positions of their anus and mouth reversed) and normal behaviours/properties of some ingredients are used to enact the opposite result in the spiritual plane (e.g. a spell in which honey is used as a ward against malicious entities on the basis that demons would dislike those ingredients to which mortals were normally attracted³⁷²). The use of *voces* can be seen as a supplementary act of inversion which reinforces the function of the spell.

In the instances in which the *voces magicae* are collections of letters, symbols and images, their function within the rites takes on a more active role. Palindromes, for instance, seem to have been popular since they cannot be written in reverse and so cannot be used in curse tablets.³⁷³ It was also common to write the *voces magicae* in the form of shapes such as squares, isosceles

³⁶⁹ Betz:1992, p.335

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p.332

³⁷¹ 'Normal' linguistic behaviour here refers to communicating with the divine in one's own language. The inclusion of foreign or nonsensical words, therefore is an inversion of normal modes of communication and interaction. An example cited by Graf is the writing of a Latin Spell using Greek letters (e.g. Audollent 1904:no.231 (Carthago); 252 (id.); 270 (Hadrumetum); Kotansky 1994: no.7.) Graf:2003, p.220

³⁷² An example is a charm designed to protect children from evil spirits at night: "Come on out, visitor from the darkness, who crawls along with your nose and face on the back of your head, not knowing why you are here! Have you come to kiss this child? I forbid you to do so! Have you come to do it harm? I forbid this! I have made ready for its protection a potion from the poisonous afat herb, from garlic which is bad for you, from honey which is sweet for the living but bitter for the dead." Hawass: 2009, p.88 Also c.f. Pinch:2006,p.82, and Cline and Rubalcaba: 2005, p.73

³⁷³ The use of retrograde writing is not uncommon in spells in which the reversal of names is part of the more general methodology in which inversion signifies the inversion of normal boundaries and transcend the normal rules of 'cause and effect'. Ogden:1999, p.49 and Graf:2003, p.132

triangles, and wing forms. An example of these word patterns that can be seen frequently in curse tablets (e.g. *SGD* no.157³⁷⁴ and *CT* no. 8, Egypt, iv AD³⁷⁵) and in the *PGM* (see figure i). A particular example of word patterning found in curse tablets (though less so in the *PGM*) is the ‘Eulamo’ square. The square is created by transposing a letter from the word from the end to the front, so that the word Eulamo can be also be read vertically in the first column as well as horizontally.³⁷⁶ Triangles were also formed from *vores magicae* by dropping the last letter from each row, e.g. *PGM* VII.940-68 (Fig. iii), *PGM* XXXIII.1-25/P.Tebt. II 275 (see below), *PGM* XVIIIb.1-7 (Fig. iv). Ogden surmises that they were favoured for their symmetry as well as for their function as vocalisations (as the mirroring diphthongs appearing in the same orientation as their opposite halves).³⁷⁷

It is, however, more plausible to assume that the mirroring and repetition of letters is intended to function not just sonically but also symbolically (i.e. by using the words and rendering them into repeating patterns, the text symbolically increases the effectiveness of the spell by mirroring and intensifying the power of the words. This is a technique that can be traced to Egyptian temple traditions albeit using scenes of mythic significance rather than literary inscriptions.³⁷⁸ This technique is also used with a list of letters, formulated into patterns of the same type. Vowels were seen as especially effective and given a mystical significance in part because the Greek alphabet had seven vowels which could be equated to the seven planets, angels and sounds (see *PGM* X.36-50).³⁷⁹ Examples of the use of word patterns are not just found within the *PGM* but also in isolated papyri from around Egypt dating from the same period as the *PGM*. One such example is a prayer for the recovery of a woman from a fall. It is addressed to a deity called Kok Kouk Kouλ and preceded with a magical word and repeated with successive omission of the first and last letters to form an inverted triangle which reads the same along the top or down or side and up. This spell also shares several similarities to a papyrus found in *BGU* 956):

³⁷⁴ Jordan:1985

³⁷⁵ Gager:1992

³⁷⁶ A particularly dramatic example of word squares, diamonds, triangles and wing-shapes is *PGM* XIXb (see fig.2). Also see *PGM* XXXVI.187-210, *PGM* X 36-50, *PGM* VII.940-68

³⁷⁷ Ogden:1999, p.49

³⁷⁸ Cf. Finnestad:1988 ‘Egyptian thought About Life as a Problem of Translation’, and Sorenson:1988 ‘Ancient Egyptian Thought and the XVIth Hermetic Tractate’ for discussion of the use of mirroring of imagery in temple art as ritually and magically effective.

³⁷⁹ Ogden:1999, p.49

“(voces magicae) Unwearied kok kouk kouλ, save Thais whom Tar... bore from fever, whether it be tertian or quartan or daily or on alternate days or by night..., since I am ... Kok Kouk Kouλ”

Spell 275 Magical Charm (3rd Century), Tebtunis Papyri Part II/PGM XXXIII.1-25 (Third Century AD)

ΑβλαναθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααραμαρα[χ?
βλαναθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααραμα[ρα
λ[α]ναθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααραμαρ
αναθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααραμα
ναθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααραμ
αθαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααρα
θαναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχααρ
αναΒλαναμαχααραμαραχα
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Ἄκάμ[ατ]ε Κὸκ Κουὸκ Κούλ, παῦ[σο]ν τὴν Ταΐδα ἀπὸ παντὸς ρίγους ἦν ἔτεκεν Ταρ[...] τριταίου ἢ τεταρρταίου ἢ καθημερινοῦ{ς} ἢ παρημερινοῦ[ς] ἢ νυκτοπυρετ[ο]ῦ [.....ὸ] τι ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ πατρο–[21 letter s Kὸ]k K[ο]ῦk Κού[λ]

Spell 275 Magical Charm (3rd Century), Tebtunis Papyri Part II. (Third Century AD)

Another example in which the *vores* are used as part of (or in conjunction with) palindromes and diagrams is an erotic spell dating from the late fourth century entitled ‘Invocation of a deity to seduce a woman’ (spell 4673). The spell itself is two fragmentary sections and contains a drawing of Seth. It also has characters and a long palindrome (15-17) including *vores magicae*. The use of personal names and horizontal folding marks indicates the papyrus was written as an individual spell rather than part of a formulary. The magical figure appears to be Seth represented as Ass-headed and equipped with a whip. He is a coercive deity and represents the desire to break established relationships to bring about the desired union. Ass characteristics are also associated with boundless sexuality.

“(vores magicae) I adjure you... (whom) is Idora(?) bore... her to Helenus, whom Tapiam bore, until they join together lips to lips and black to white. Since I adjure you by mighty Necessity (vores magicae). Spell 4673 P.Oxy.Vol. LXVIII (Late Fourth Century AD)

οηο	ιω
ουυ	αα
αε	ιι
οε	οο
υα	υυ
υυ	αα
οο	ιι
εω	εε
θθ	αα
ηη	υυ
αα	αα
	ιι

ιαεωβαθρενεμουνοθηλαν ρικριφιαευ[εαιφιρικτρναλ]ηθο
 νυομενερφα[βω]εαι ἐξορκίζω σαι . [...].νσο . [.]. υσο ν.[...]. τωνις..

[...][...][...] και τη...[.].ησε.[...] [.....]ηγανισον[.....] [.....]α τον[.....]
 [...ή]ν ἔτεκε[ε]ν Εἰσι[δώρα?] []..[] [..]. αὐτήν τῶ
 Ἐλένω ὃν ἔτεκεν Ταπιαμ ἔστ' ἄν χίλησιν χίλη[α] συνάψουσιν καὶ τὸ
 λευκὸν τῶ μέγανι ὅτι ἔξορκίζω σαι κατ[ά] τῆς κρατεᾶς Ἀνά[γ]κης
 μασ[σ]κε[λλε] μασκελλωφνουκενταβα[ωθ] ορεοβα[σ]ζαγρ[α]ρηξιχθωνιπ
 ποχθωνυπτ...υγααυ. Spell 4673 P.Oxy.Vol. LXVIII

The use of *voces magicæ* within palindromic (and other complex word-play) formulations attests the importance of a written tradition. Although it seems quite possible that there was an oral tradition of magical practice, of which some of our spells might be the written versions, the complexities of word-play would seem to require a primarily written transmission and origin. Their creation as written works might also have enabled a more thorough and rapid inclusion of extraneous cultural influences (foreign names and gods) within the Egyptian magical tradition. It is possible that the diversity of textual influences feed their way through various recensions of magical texts without requiring any deep knowledge of the original cultures, or, indeed, anything other than an ability on the part of the magician to read, speak or copy the foreign words.

These factors suggest a plurality of religious influences in the magical papyri. Nevertheless, this syncretistic collection of names of power operated at a fairly superficial level with deities aggregated by virtue of a seemingly vague knowledge of their name and function but without importing the magical methodologies or the cultural and religious milieu from which these deities derived. We can take the following as an example:

“Take a cat [make] it into a *Esies* [by submerging] its body in water...Come hither to me, you who are in control of the form of Helios, you the cat-faced god, and behold your form mistreated by [your] opponents...[lines 1-5] I call on you Mother of all men,/you who have brought together the limbs of Meliouchos, even Meliouchos himself, OROBASTRIA NEBOUTOSOULETH, Entrapper, Mistress of Corpses, Hermes, Hekate, [Hermes?], Hermekate...[lines 44-45] I conjure you, the *daemon* that has been aroused in this place/ and you, the *daemon* of the cat that has been endowed with spirit[lines 46-50]... IAO SABAOTH ADONAI ABRASAX [lines 77-78]... by the god MICHAEL, by the god SOURIEL...[line 149]” PGM III.1-164 (Fourth Century AD)

“Δαβὼν αἴλουρον ἐκποίησον Ἐσιῆν ἐμβαλὼν | τὸ σῶμα[α ἐς] τὸ
 ὕδωρ...δεῦ[ρό] μοι, | [ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς μορφῆ[ς] τῆς τοῦ Ἥλιου, ὁ αἴλουρο]ο
 | | πρ[ό]σωπος θεός, κ[α]ί ἰδὲ σοῦ τὴν μορφ[ὴν τὴν] ἀδικουμένην ὑπὸ
 [τῶ]ν ἀντιδίκων σου, [τῶν] δεῖνα... ἔπικα | λουμάι σε, τῶν πάντω[ν]
 ἀνθρ[ώπων]γενέτειρα, | | τὴν συναναγκασαμέν[η] <ν> τὰ μέλ[η το]ῦ
 Μελιούχου | καὶ ἀντὸν Μελιούχον οροβαστρια [Νε]βουτοσου | ἀληθ
 ,ἀρκυῖα, νεκυῖα, Ἐ[ρ]μῆ, Ἐκάτ[η], Ἐρμῆ, Ἐρμε | κάτη...Ὀρ]κίζω σε, |
 τὸν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ [τ]ούτῳ ἐπη[γηρ]μένον | | δαίμονα, καί σέ, τὸν
 δ[αί]μονα τοῦ [αἰλού]ρου πνευ | ματωτοῦ... Ἰάω Σαβαώθ, Ἄδωναί, |
 Ἄβραξᾶξ...θεοῦ Μιχαήλ, θε | οῦ Σουριή[λ]”. PGM III.1-164

In this spell which is intended for a multitude of purposes (all malicious), deities from Greek, Jewish and Egyptian traditions are invoked in a ritual that appears Egyptian in origin (the idea that death by drowning in the Nile gave renewal in the afterlife is known from texts from the 30th Dynasty³⁸⁰). Although the invocations to the gods appear to be random there is a broadly discernible pattern; for example chthonic deities are most often invoked for divination and revenge spells and variations of the Sun god/transcendent god for revelation and foreknowledge. Aside from this general paradigm, throughout the *PGM* the invocations to the gods in the *voces magicae* function more as a list of names of power rather than appealing to the humanistic deities from mythology. In this way, they form an eclectic rearticulation of earlier religious traditions (as will be discussed in the following section relating to influences) that are drawn from many diverse cultures, showing that authors of the *PGM* were an inclusive, heterodox milieu.

The connection between the *voces magicae* and earlier temple practices is subtle and difficult to demonstrate definitively. However despite the *voces magicae* not in themselves reflecting any specific ritual tradition known to us from cultic activities, there are aspects of their syntax and use of word play that hint towards a shared pedigree. This can be seen in the frequent usage of the ‘I am...’ formula, which is a shared trope between the magical texts and ritual texts/inscriptions from the temple,³⁸¹ the use of mirroring technique, wordplay and in the inscription of *voces* upon amulets.

³⁸⁰ Taylor:2001, p.41

³⁸¹ The frequency and importance of the ‘I am...’ formula is well attested and is examined in greater detail in the previous chapter (Hermetic tradition p.12).

With reference to the discussion of syntax and wordplay used in both the *vores* and pharaonic era liturgies, the highly formulaic usage of a deity's name represents more than simply a reference to the divinity (at least it can argued so). As discussed by Assmann,³⁸² repeated citing of a divine name is a means of establishing divine presence and strengthening the deities associations to a cultic sphere. In traditional Egyptian litanies dating from the pharaonic period, the name of the deity is cited in conjunction with their relationship to the other gods (g), an action (a) and a cultic object (o), as seen in the following:

“They (the gods) will fraternize (a)
with you in your name of *smt*-shrine (o).
They will not turn (a) your back
in your name of *itrt*-shrine (o)

Horus is ba, he lays claim to (a)
His father in you in your name
Of Ba-repit (-palanquin) (o)
Your mother Nut has spread (a)
Herself over you
In her name of Shetpet (o). *Pyramid Texts*

In these examples the name is replaced with cult objects such as *smt*-shrine (although the texts do contain, in certain examples, the actual name of the deity). There is a word play at work in which the action (a) and the object (o) are juxtaposed to provide the name of the deity.³⁸³ The importance of word play in cultic speech with Egyptian ritual cannot be underestimated. In Assmann's analysis, the role of wordplay as a means of bringing together the cultic and divine sphere is substantiated by the large numbers of such examples in spells and liturgies. He argues: “In Egypt, however, wordplay was regarded as a serious and controlled use of language, for language was understood to be a dimension of divine presence.”³⁸⁴

Within the context of the *PGM*, the *vores magicæ* similarly conform to a highly formulaic means of wordplay. The structure of the *vores* tends to fall into the following order: 1) an invocation of the *vores*, 2) a further identification of the god and their associations, and 3) the

³⁸² Assmann:2001, pps 84-85

³⁸³ Ibid, p.84

³⁸⁴ Ibid, p.87

command/instructions. In certain instances (though not all) there will follow a citation of why they should heed the magician. For example:

“CHALAMANDRIOPH IDEARYOTH THREDAPHNIO

ERTHABEALNIG RYTHANIKO PSAMMORICH, O sacred names of the god, listen to me – you also, O Good *Daemon*, whose might is very great/among the gods, listen to me: go to him, NN, into his house, where he sleeps, into his bedroom, and stand beside him, causing fear, trembling, by using the great and mighty names of the god. And tell him such-and-such.

“I conjure you [by] your power, [by] the great god SEITH, [by] the hour in which you were begotten a great god, [by] the god revealing it now (?), [by] the 365 names of the great god, to go to him, NN, this very hour, this very night, and tell him in a dream such-and-such.

“If you disobey me and don’t go to him, NN, I will tell the great god, and after he has speared you through, he will chop you up into pieces and feed your members to the mangy dog who lies amongst the dungheaps. For this reason listen to me immediately, immediately, immediately; quickly quickly, so I won’t have to tell you again.” PGM XII.132-145

Ἰαλαμανδριωφ ιδεαρυωθ θρεδαφνιω ερθαβεανιγ ρυθανικω ψαμμο |
ριχ, τὰ ἅγια τοῦ θεοῦ) ὀνόματα ἐπάκουσατέ μου [καὶ] σύ, Ἄγαθὲ Δα
ίμων, οὗ κράτος μέγιστόν ἐστιν | ἐν θεοῖς ἐπάκουσόν μου πορευθεῖς
πρὸς τὸν δεῖνα εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ, ὅπου κοιμᾶται, | εἰς τὸν κοιτῶν
α αὐτοῦ, καὶ παραστάθνητι αὐτῷ φοβερός, τρομερὸς μετὰ τῶν τοῦ θε
οῦ) |

μεγάλων καὶ κραταιῶν ὀνομάτων, καὶ λέγε αὐτῷ τάδε. ἐξορκίζ
ω σε [τ]ὴν δύναμίν σου, τὸν | μέγαν θεὸν) Σηίθ, τὴν ὥραν, ἐν ἣ ἐτέχ
θης μέγας θεός, τὸν χρηματίζοντα τὸ ν[ῦ]ν | θεόν, τὰ τξέ ὀνόματα |
τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ, πορευθῆναι πρὸς τὸν δεῖνα ἐν τῇ ἄρτι ὥρα, ἐν τῇ
. ἄρτι νυκτὶ καὶ λέγειν αὐ[τῷ] | κατ’ ὄναρ τάδε.

ἐάν με παρακούσης καὶ μὴ πορευθῆς [π]ρὸς τὸν δεινα, ἐρῶ τῷ μεγάλῳ θεῷ | | κ[αὶ τ]ρήσας σε κατακόψει μεγεῖστι καὶ τὰ κρέατά σου δώσει φαγεῖν [ν] τ[ῷ] ψθριῶντι κυ[νὶ] τῷ ἐν ταῖς κοπρίαις καθημένῳ. διὰ τοῦτο ἐπάκ[ουσ]όν | μ[ο]υ ἤδη ἤδη, ταχὺ ταχύ, ἵνα μὴ ἀναγκασθῶ ταῦτα ἐκ δευτέρου λέγειν. | PGM XII.132-145

“...ARSENOPHRE, O king of the heavenly [gods], ABLANATHANALBA, you who possess righteousness, AKRAMMACHAMAREI, gracious [god,] SANKANTHARA, ruler/of nature, SATRAPERKMEPH, origin of the heavenly [world], ARTHTHANNOU ATHTHENNOU ASTRAPHAI IASTRAPHAI PAKERTOOTH PA ... ERINTASKLIOUTH APHIO MARMARAOOTH.

“[Let] my outspokenness not leave me. [But] let every tongue and language listen to me, because I am PERTAO [MECH CHACH] MNECH SAKMEPH IAOOYEE OEO OEO IEOYOEIEIAEIAEA IEOYOEI, Give [me graciously] whatever you want. ” PGM XII 184-89

Ἄρσενοφρη, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν οὐρανί[ων θεῶν, Ἄβ]λαναθανάλβα, | ὁ τὸ δίκαιον ἔχων, Ἄκραμμαχαμαρει, ὁ ἐπίχαρις θε[ός]σανκ[αν]θαρα, ὁ τῆς φύσε | ωσήμων, ζατραπερκμηφ, ἡ γένεσις τοῦ οὐρανίου [κ ὄσμου], ἀθθαννου | ἀθθαννου, ἀστφαι, ἰαστραφαι, πακεπτωθ, πα[.....]ηρινταςκλιουθ | ηφιω, Μαρμαραώθ.

ἡ παρρησία μου μὴ με ἐγκαταλείπ[έτω, ἀλλ'] ἀκουσάτω μοι | πᾶσα γλώσσα καὶ πᾶσα φωνή, ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι Περταω [μηξ ξαξ]νηξ ζακμηφ | ἰαωουεη ωηω ωηω ἰεουωηηηιαηα ἰηωουεη, δός μ[ο]ι εὐμέν]ως, ὃ ἐάν βούλη. PGM XII 184-89

This systematised means of summoning and harnessing the supernatural powers is reminiscent of temple liturgy. However instead of acknowledging the god's association to the cultic realm (as in Assmann's examples from the Pyramid Texts), the *voces* are more likely to be associated to the

cosmic realm. In essence this delocalises the powers summoned, allowing them to become more accessible across different cultures and connects their power to a transcendent, supreme deity.

Other attributes of the *vores* which draw comparison to temple practices lie in the application of the ‘mirroring’ technique more often used in mythological symbology on temple reliefs³⁸⁵ and the complex use of word-play which attests to a literary tradition. The significance of wordplay as a means of connecting the cultic and divine realms is well attested (as discussed above and in the previous chapter). The magical texts, therefore could be argued to show a shared pedigree with temple ritual practices which is further reinforced by their usage on amulets.

The use of amulets as a means of protection or to attract desirable outcomes was popular from the pre-dynastic era through to the Graeco-Roman period and disseminated through every stratum of Egyptian society. Although it is highly possible that the production of amulets may not be restricted to the locus of the temple, there is plenty of supporting evidence that demonstrates a strong antedotal link between them. Firstly the literary nature of certain types of amulets produced during the dynastic era (when literacy rates among the general populace are thought to have been very low³⁸⁶) presupposes temple origins. Examples of the literary nature include the references to amulaic spells in the *Book of the Dead*, the use of papyri with hieroglyphic text (often excerpts from the *Book of the Dead* or oracular decrees) as amulets, and spell inscriptions on the reverse of the amulet. Another factor that links amulets to the temple is the use of ritual and divine objects as amulets (particularly during the later first millennium BC).³⁸⁷ Crucially, amulets were made available from temple workshops where they could be ‘charged’ by blessings from the gods.³⁸⁸

The importance of the *vores* as symbols of magical power (using temple techniques and ritual practices) is that they function as literary/physical artefacts in much the same way as amulets and thus symbolise a continuum of religious practices that derived from the temple. This connection is further reinforced by the appearance of many *vores magicae* and divine names (in particular Abrasax, Harpocrates, Anubis and ancient Egyptian symbols, normally accompanied by a Greek inscription on the reverse) found within the *PGM* on amulets contemporary to the writings.³⁸⁹ As with the spells of the *PGM*, the amulets share the same large ‘canon’ of heterogeneous gods

³⁸⁵ As discussed in more length in Hermetic Corpus chapter

³⁸⁶ Parkinson puts the figure at around 0.3% to 5% of the population during the pharaonic era (with the caveat that there is insufficient data for a definitive figure), Parkinson, R. Quirke, S: 1995, p.49

³⁸⁷ Pinch, G:2006, p.117

³⁸⁸ Ibid, p.118

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p.165

from various traditions as well as sharing the same symbolic language (numerical, mythological and astrological) and interrelationships.

From the *voces magicae*, certain deductions can be made as to the milieu they reflect. Firstly, they are similar to the *Hermetica* in terms of approach, i.e. that specialist knowledge allows access to the supreme god.³⁹⁰ This is a trope that arose from the ancient Egyptian association of Thoth to magic, knowledge and writing (i.e. that is through knowledge of the ‘hidden’ names of the gods, that their true nature and thus the nature of the cosmos are revealed. Knowledge, in this respect, is of a literary and secret nature as recounted in the Middle Kingdom story called ‘The Magician Djedi’³⁹¹). This individual connection to the divine allows the magician the power to coerce the lower orders of supernatural beings to achieve the purpose of the spell but also displays an inherent religious sentiment. Secondly through the sheer diversity of the ‘names of power’ cited within the *voces magicae*, demonstrates the plurality of religious influences prevalent within magical circles in Roman Egypt. Thirdly, the complex use of word patterns shows the concept of mirroring imagery synonymous with temple cult, albeit applied to letters rather than religious imagery. As discussed earlier, the use of *voces* in magical formulation can be seen as a development in the use of wordplay used in temple liturgies. The traditional purpose of wordplay was a means to bring the divine and cultic worlds together. However in the absence of a cultic apparatus, the *voces* (as wordplay) act as means of communicating with the divine on a transcendent level. The eclecticism of this systematisation of old gods into new traditions offers a new and individualistic path to the divine using familiar tropes and techniques from cult practice but which were reformulated in a manner that did not require participation in temple cults. This reformulation drew on diverse traditions drawn from across the East of the Roman empire.

3.3 *Daemons*

The inclusion of spells within the *PGM* that address the supreme god raises the problem of the appropriateness of coercion of such a being and the validity of ritual action.³⁹² The solution was the use of *daemons* as intermediaries. *Daemons* could be coerced or compelled by ritual action as

³⁹⁰ This is connected to the idea espoused in the *Hermetica* that in order to achieve salvation, esoteric knowledge rather than *gnōsis* via contemplative/philosophical means, is required. However this knowledge of the wisdom and associated rites can be achieved on an individualistic basis without the apparatus of temple cult (see Poimandres). Also the idea of using the mirroring technique outside of temple iconography and using them as a literary form of magic has been used in the Hermetic tract *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead, The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon and The Asclepius*

³⁹¹ Wilkinson:2003, p.216

³⁹² Cf. *The Asclepius*,41 in which Hermes rebukes his disciples for considering an offering of incense to the Supreme god, which he describes as sacrilegious.

required.³⁹³ Such techniques of influencing the divine find proponents in literary sources such as Plato,³⁹⁴ Plutarch³⁹⁵ and Apuleius,³⁹⁶ mainly as a means of reconciling mythological and cultic elements of religion within a philosophical framework. Within this framework *daemons* are depicted as intermediate beings who are influenced by actions within the corporeal sphere and can be supplicated by sacrifices or threatened. They can be representative of the forces of chaos and be dangerous forces to manipulate or else they can be represented as *parhedroi* (supernatural assistants). Examples within the *PGM* that illustrate this distinction between the Supreme deity and the *daemons* include the following:

“Hear me because I am going to say the great name, Aoth, before whom every god prostrates himself and every *daemon* shudders, for whom every angel completes those things which are assigned.” *PGM XII.118-120*. (Late Fourth/Early Fifth Century AD)

“[ἐ]πάκουσόν μου, ὅτι μέλλω τὸ μέγα ὄνο<μα> λέ | γειν Ἄώθ, ὃν πᾶς
θ[εὸς] προσκυνεῖ καὶ π[ᾶ]ς δαίμων φρίσσει, ᾧ πᾶς ἄγγελος τὰ ἐπιτασ
| σόμενα ἁποτελεῖ.” *PGM XII.118-120*

“...Fulfil, *daemon* what/is written here. And after you have performed it, I will pay you sacrifice. But if you delay, I will inflict on you chastisements which you cannot endure. And perform for me the NN deed, immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly.” *PGM IV2095-2100* (Fourth Century AD³⁹⁷)

“...Τέλεσον, δαῖμον, τὰ ἐν | | θάδε γεγραμμένα. Τέλεσαντι δέ σοι | θυσί
αν ἀποδώσω, βραδύναντι δέ σοι κολά | σεις ἐπενεγκῶ, ἄσ οὐ δύνα
σαι ἐνεγκεῖν, | καὶ διατέλεσόν μοι τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶγμα, ἦδη, ἦδη, ταχ
ύ ταχύ.” *PGM IV2095-2100*

³⁹³ Fraser:2009, p.136

³⁹⁴ “He is a great spirit (*daemon*), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.” “And what,” I said, “is his power?” “He interprets,” she replied, “between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all, prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love. All the intercourse, and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar.” Plato’s *Symposium* 201.e

³⁹⁵ Plutarch, *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 417b

³⁹⁶ Apuleius *De Deo Socratis*.165

³⁹⁷ Dated to fourth century AD by Kiley:1997, p195

“Guard me from every evil *daemon*, whether an evil male or female.” *PGM*
IV2516 (Fourth Century AD)

“διαφύ | λαξόν με ἀπὸ πονηροῦ παντὸς δαίμονος, | ἦτοι ἀρσενικοῦ π
ονηροῦ ἢ θηλυκοῦ.” *PGM* IV2516

Graf argues that the use of *daemons* as well as other intermediary supernatural beings such as angels and archangels within the magical papyri relates directly to an increasing hierarchization of society under Roman rule.³⁹⁸ However, this bold assertion is on the face of it difficult to prove, resting on a presumption that religious society is a metaphorical mirror of ‘real’ society. It would be a complex enough task to establish that Roman Egypt was a more stratified and hierarchical society than Ptolemaic Egypt and as such an increased influence of hierarchy in social practice cannot just be assumed. For example, we can certainly establish a complex political hierarchy in Roman Egypt that linked villagers to the Roman emperor and it is easy to believe that villagers would have been aware of such links through, for example, law, money, and administration, but the significance of such political structures for the social mentalities of the Egyptian villagers is not so obvious. The relationship between an imperial system and a monotheist system has long struck scholars,³⁹⁹ even though the Empire was largely polytheistic for at least three centuries.

If one does not accept a simple mirroring of the imperial political system, other relationships between the divine and the human can be envisaged. Graf’s model would presumably require some form of mirroring of the multiculturalism and eclecticism of the spells within Romano-Egyptian society. Yet, the influences of non-Egyptian traditions, and especially those drawn from Semitic cultures cannot be closely paralleled with similar sociological influences of Semitic communities in Egypt. Instead, the increasing number of supernatural entities is not so much reflective of a highly stratified society as of a more syncretic and open milieu. Within the cosmology of the *PGM* there are a plethora of entities ranging from those from Egyptian religious traditions (i.e. deities, *Akhu*/‘the Dead’, conceptions of the *Ba* and *Ka*), as well as those from other cultures such as Jewish and Christian (use of the names of angels, archangels and God), Greek (classical pantheon, mystery religions and Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophies) and Persian (influence of Mithraism and magos). The seemingly haphazard manner⁴⁰⁰ in which these

³⁹⁸ Similarly the effect of the increased stratification of society may also be mirrored in the popularity of Platonic, Gnostic and Neoplatonic conception of the universe. Fraser:2009, p.137

³⁹⁹ Cf. Lane-Fox: 1986 pps34-35; Ando:2006, pp 395-396

⁴⁰⁰ Haphazard in the sense that a single spell may integrate elements from many of these traditions without consideration of their original context; e.g. in *PGM* XII.270-350, the purpose of the spell is to create a ring for “success and favour and victory”. The engravings upon the ring and the decoration are Egyptian (and the title is

traditions are integrated within the magical corpus of Roman Egypt seems to argue against the degree of systematisation implied by Graf and for a more fluid integration of these elements.

The second predominant interpretation of the use of *daemons* is that they perhaps demonstrate an implicit monotheism in the *PGM* due to the prohibition against threats or bribery against a transcendent god.⁴⁰¹ It is difficult in the discussion of this issue not to imply a Protestant conception of ‘monotheism’, but there was a powerful Egyptian tradition of monism that developed in religious discourse during the Amarna and Ramesside periods, in which the plurality of deities were viewed as facets of a singular transcendent god.⁴⁰² Within this system the concept of a transcendent deity presiding over the many was part of the dualistic theology which reconciled the two without contradiction (until the Amarna period). Assmann explains this theory thus: the pantheistic religion was used to explain, via myth, the nature of the cosmos and the conditions/ problems of the physical world. Myth was a necessary vehicle for this, requiring multiple protagonists, hence a multiplicity of gods. There was, however, an overarching monist conception of religion that could be said to be an implicit theology. The gods interacted with the physical world but they were equally emanations of the transcendent deity from whom everything exists.⁴⁰³ This concept also has its parallels in Greek culture. Firstly the Homeric vignette of Zeus pulling upon a golden chain, raising the pantheon of gods with it (*Iliad* VIII 1-52), demonstrates the idea of One God above the many. This is more explicitly developed in the concept of Neo-Platonic monism in which the One is a primeval source from which everything in the universe originates, including lesser deities and supernatural beings. These traditions developed the concept of an omnipotent deity from whom the pantheon of deities emanates independent of the Christian/Judaic influences and the socio-political pressures of an Imperial regime.

The most significant function of *daemons* within some of the texts is their role as intercessors between the magician and Supreme deity. In the act of evoking a daemon to appear, the magician claims the authority of the Supreme deity. The magician is then able to control the daemon in order to gain direct access to the Supreme deity and achieve the ultimate goal of the spell, divinisation.

written in Demotic) but the incantation invokes Isaac, Abraham and Jacob as well as “the opponent of Thoth” and a number of miscellaneous voces. However as will be discussed later, there is a logical grouping of gods analogous to certain practices throughout the corpus as a whole (i.e. spells for revelation often call upon Helios, IAO and Yahweh; spells for binding often call upon chthonic deities such as Anubis, Hecate etc; and spells for prophesy call upon the dead).

⁴⁰¹ Janowitz: 2001 p.30

⁴⁰² Cf. Allen:1989, p.89; Assmann:2001, p.240 and Morenz:1973, p.255, North:2010, p.51

⁴⁰³ Assmann: 2001, pps 12-13

If somehow he delays, say in addition this following incantation... “The great, living god commands you, he who lives for eons of eons, who shakes together, who thunders, who created every soul and race, IAO AOI OIA AIO IOA OAI. Enter in, appear to me, lord, happy, kind, gentle glorious, not angry because I conjure you by the lord IAO. *PGM IV1037-1041* (Fourth Century AD)

ἐπάναγκος ἐάν | πως βραδύνη, συνεπίλεγε τὸν λόγον τοῦτον ὕστε | ρ
ον τῆς θεολογίας... ἐπιτάσσει σοι ὁ μέγας Ζῶν θεός, Ὁ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶ | ν
ας τῶν αἰώνων, ὁ συνζείων, ὁ βροντάζων, ὁ πᾶσαν | | ψυχὴν καὶ λέ
νεσιν κτίσας Ἰάω αἰὼ ἰῶα | αἰὼ ἰῶα ἰῶα. εἴσελθε, φάνηθί
μοι, κύριε | ἰλαρός, εὐμενής, πραῦς, ἐπίδοξος ἀμήνιτος. ὅτι σε ἐφορ
κίζω κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰαω.

PGM IV1037-1041

For you are I, and I, you. Whatever I say must happen, for I have your name as a unique phylactery in my heart... no spirit will stand against me – neither *daemon* nor visitation nor any other of the evil beings of Hades, because of your name, which I have in my soul and invoke.” *PGM XIII.795-800* (Third Century AD)

σὺ γὰρ εἶ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ σύ. ὁ ἐ<άν> εἶπω, δεῖ γενέσθαι | τὸ γὰρ ὄνομά
σου ἔχω ἔν φυλακτήριον ἐν καρδίᾳ τῆ... οὐκ ἀνιτιτάξεταί μοι πᾶν
πνεῦμα – οὐ δαιμόνιον, | | οὐ συνά<ν>τημα οὐδὲ ἄλλο τι τῶν καθ’
Αἰδοῦ πονηρῶν, | δι<ὰ> τὸ σὸν ὄνομα, ὃ ἐν τῇ φυγῇ ἔχω καὶ ἐπικαλ
οῦμαι. *PGM XIII.795-800*

After you have said this three times, there will be this sign of a divine encounter, but you, armed by having this magical soul, be not alarmed...

“I have been attached to your holy form.

I have been given power by your holy name.

I have acquired your emanation of the gods,

Lord, god of gods, master, *daemon*.

ΑΤΗΤΗΟΥΙΝ ΤΗΟΥΤΗΟΥΙ ΤΑΥΑΝΤΙ ΛΑΟ ΑΡΤΑΤΟ.”

Having done this, return as lord of a godlike nature which is accomplished through this divine encounter. *PGM IV*209-221 (Fourth Century AD)

ταῦτά σου εἰπόντος | τρις σημεῖον ἔσται τῆς συστάσεως τόδεσὺ δὲ |
| μαγικὴν ψυξὴν ἔχων ὄπλισθεὶς μὴ θαμβηθῆς... 'συνεστὰ | θην σου τ
ἦ ἱερῶ μορφῇ, ἐδυναμώθην τῷ ἱερῷ σου ὀνό | ματι, ἐπέτυχόν σου τ
ῆς ἀπορροιας τῶν ἀγαθῶν | κύριε, θεῆθεῶν, ἄναξ, δαίμου αἰθουῖν θ
ουθουῖ | ταυαντι λαω απταω.' ταῦτα ποιήσα κάτελθε | | ἰσοθέου φ
ύσεως κυριεύσας τῆς διὰ ταύτης τῆς συστά | σεως ἐπιτελουμένς ἀν
θοπτικῆς λεκανομαντείας | ἅμα καὶ νεκουαγωγῆς. *PGM IV*209-221

This divine union (*systasis*) can be achieved through the charismatic and magical art of the magician rather than through the *gnōsis* required by philosophical and Jewish/Christian schools. This is achieved either through rites of initiation and invocation (*PGM IV* 475-829) or through the use of an assistant *daemon* who creates a direct link to the divine⁴⁰⁴(for example, “When you are dead, he will wrap [up] your body as befits a god... \and he will give [you both] wild herbs and the power to cure, and you will be [worshipped] as a god since you have a god for a friend.” *PGM I*.175-190). The mechanical methods of achieving a personal link to the divine are not opposed to the desire to commune with the divine: in this parallelism between technical and mechanistic and the more spiritual and theosophic aspects of the spells, we can see similar conjunctions as we found in the Hermetic corpora.⁴⁰⁵ The parallelism further demonstrates the artificiality of any impositions of modern categorisation of magic and religion on this Egyptian material. Instead, we can associate this material, for all its eclecticism and diversity with the magical religious traditions of Egyptian temples.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. XII.201-69 XIII.1-343 V.96-172, Va1-3, IV.1596-1715 IV.930-1114 IV.475-829 III.494-611 III.187-262 I.195-222 II.90-180

⁴⁰⁵ Further evidence of the similitude between the Hermetic and magical circles can be found in *PGM XIII*.1-343 ‘A Sacred book called Unique or Eighth Book of Moses’ which cites a list of seven incenses for seven different gods which he claims are plagiarised from by the writers of one of the books of Hermes called ‘The Wing’.

3.4 *Non Egyptian Influences*

Despite the strong Egyptian components of the texts, there is also a sizable influence traceable to other origins. Most obvious are the references to Greek deities (namely Zeus, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hecate, Selene, Persephone, Helios, Physis, Chronos, the Moirai and Aion). Yet, the depiction of the Greek pantheon is not as classically Greek as it would at first seem. Although the gods invoked in the spells may appear to be Greek, they are, in fact, depicted either as their Egyptian counterparts (for example Aphrodite Ourania or ‘heavenly Aphrodite’ whose city is Aphroditopolis/Dendera actually refers to Hathor⁴⁰⁶ and Hephaistos in the *PGM* reflects Ptah rather than Greek god of heath and fire⁴⁰⁷) or else as abstract or astral phenomena. For example, Apollo is most often invoked as Apollo-Helios (Helios in the *PGM* could be translated to mean ‘sun’ as it is devoid of religious/mythical characteristics, being purely an astral phenomena) and the same is true for references to Selene, which could be interpreted as the moon’.⁴⁰⁸

However in specific instances where the god cited is not intended to reflect an astral phenomena, they are characterised in a manner quite different to their instances outside of the magical papyri. Betz describes the depiction of the Greek gods in certain spells as “capricious, demonic and even dangerous”, closer perhaps to their original depiction in Greek folklore.⁴⁰⁹ Their roles also appear to be less specialised, subsuming characteristics that would normally be associated with other deities to produce a more universal syncretised function. An example of this can be seen in the depiction of Helios who (alongside the connection to the sun) is described as ruling the water, light and even the underworld.⁴¹⁰ Here it can be noted that Helios’s functions have expanded beyond his role as the personification of the sun, to incorporate those of other deities (Poseidon and Hades). He has become divorced from his cultural origins and mythology and has become integrated with the Egyptian Re (who according to Egyptian mythology enters the underworld on his bark at sunset). An example of the expanded role of Helios and the plethora of diverse influences can be seen in hymn *PGM* I.262-347, which at first seems to be Hellenic. It begins with instructions for a lamp divination (thought to share a number of parallels to the cult of Apollo⁴¹¹), followed by an invocation to Apollo to “...come with Paian... Leave Mount Parnassos and the Delphic Pytho”. The setting for

⁴⁰⁶ Bleeker:1973, p.46

⁴⁰⁷ Betz:1992, p.335

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p.xlvii

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p.xlv

⁴¹⁰ Reiss:1935, p.107

⁴¹¹ Betz: 1992, p.11

the spell is thus evocatively Hellenic. However, what follows is another invocation to the ‘angels of Zeus’ –

“First angel of [the god], great Zeus. IAO and you MICHAEL, who rule heaven’s realm, I call you GABRIEL. Down from Olympus, ABRASAX, delighting in dawns... I adjure eternal god, AION of all;/I adjure you self-growing Nature, mighty ADONAIOS; I adjure setting and rising ELOAIOS”.
PGM I.300-347 (Fourth Century AD)

“ἄγγελε πρῶτε <θε>οῦ, Ζηνὸς μεγάλιοι, Ἰάω, καὶ σὲ τὸν οὐράνι |
ον κόσμον κατεχοντα, Μιχαήλ, καὶ σὲ καλῶ, Γαβριήλ πρῶ | τὰ
γγελε δεῦρ ἀπ’ Ὀλύμπου, Ἀβρασάξ... ὀρκίζω θεὸν αἰώνιον Αἰῶνά τε
πάντων, | ὀρκίζω φύσιν αὐτοφυῆ, κράτιστον Ἀδωνάϊον, | ὀρκίζω
δύνοντα καὶ ἀντέλλοντα Ἐλωαίον”. *PGM I.262-347*

The inclusion of Jewish and Gnostic figures demonstrates the promiscuity with which the authors of the *PGM* collected ‘names of power’. We have here the divine intercessors Michael and Gabriel; the name Iao, which in Gnostic circles could either refer to the abbreviated secret name of one of the seven archons (Ialdabaoth) or more likely is one of the following six archons (described by Origen in his *Contra Celsum* as a belief stemming from the Orphite Sect) along with Sabaoth, Adonaios, Elaios, Astaphanos and Horaios (*Contra Celsum* Book IV, Chapter 31).

The invocation ends with a prayer for the sun god (represented here as the supreme deity) to return without harming the magician.

“Be gracious unto me, O primal god,
O elder-born, self-regenerating god.
I adjure the fire which first shone in the void;
I adjure your pow’r which is greatest o’er all;/
I adjure him who destroys e’en Hades,
That you depart, returning to your ship,
And harm me not, but be forever kind.”
PGM I.342-347 (Fourth Century AD)

“ἰλαθί μοι, πραπάτωρ, | προγενέστερε, αὐτογένεθλε ὀρκίζω τὸ πῦρ |
τὸ φανέν πρῶτον ἐν ἀβύσσῳ, | ὀρκίζω τὴν σὴν δύναμιν, τὴν πᾶ
σι μεγίστην, | | ὀρλίζω τὸν φθείροντα μέχρις Ἄϊδος ἔισω, | ἵνα ἀπέθ
θης εἰς τὰ ἴδια πρυμνήσια καὶ μή | με βλάβῃς, ἀλλ’ εὐμενῆς γενοῦ δ
ιὰ παντός.” PGM I.342-347

The depiction of the sun god here resembles the Egyptian Re, particularly with regards to the reference to ‘return to [his] ship’ and secondly to his ability to ‘destroy, even in Hades’,⁴¹² suggesting an Egyptian precedent despite using the appellations of solar-gods from other regions.

Another example of a spell which represents the melange of cultural influences with the magical tradition of Roman Egypt is *P.Oxy.* 4468. This formulary is divided into several sections each of which present examples from Greek and Egyptian literary traditions⁴¹³:

Recto, col. i

“...brave ... from Zeus, sender of rain... [you opened] your eyes [and there was light, you closed] your eyes and [there was] darkness for all the images, for all the forms, for all the colours... for all you... Come to me, come to me, hurry, hurry, quick quick ... bleed NN daughter of NN this very day... I know your names and your course in the sky, I know your forms too. You have a form among the quadruped animals, which is (?) the goat, your form among the sacred bird creatures is the phoenix, your form in the river is the black labeo, your form in the desert is the lion, your form on the earth is the scarab, your form among the plants is the sacred cardamom. Your city is Heliopolis. Dog-headed one (?), your name is eternity, your form among the quadrupeds is the bull, among the creeping things your name is snake, your plant is the dill. The illustrious name because of you... in the sky (is?) Olympius, in the... at sunset the living and the dead... all and all the plants and all the wingless creatures and all the travellers and those who are below ground)?) in the water. From you we derive life. When you opened your eyes you created (?) light for every

⁴¹² A reference to the slaying of Apophis (forces of darkness, chaos and non-being) by Ra during his journey through the Underworld – Wilkinson: 2003, p.221

⁴¹³ Recto, col. I incantation of aggressive magic, Col, ii: various spells of uncertain nature. Verso, Col i: lines 1-17 *charitesion* (remains of hexameters); 18-26 perhaps *agrupnetikon* (remains of hexameters). Col ii 1010: erotic charm; 11-14, *agrupnetikon*; 15-19, somniferent charm; 20-25, phylactery with a *logos* in Egyptian.

form, from which it (viz. every form) draw life. When you appear all are joyful; when you set, death comes and darkness comes. All (share?) in your gifts. Your name is: Sun, child, holy, Titanus, brave, the greatest, he who appears from Zeus sender of rain. Come to me and hearken to me. This very day shatter and make bloodless NN, daughter of NN. If you don't do it, I will go to Phagropolis and into the house of Benben and to Heliopolis, and I will twist the bones of the sacred phoenix, the greatest, and every day I will pour true oil on the true emerald where your tomb is, and I will open the... where lies Osiris, the greatest, in the inaccessible... is shaken beneath him... where the four dog-headed one..." (Late First Century) *P.Oxy.* 4468

"...ἄλκιμος...μβρίου Διός [τους ὀφθαλμ[σὺς] σας τοὺς ὀφθαλ[μοὺς] και σκότος [ἐγένετο τοῖς] εἰδώλοις πάσι, ταῖς μορφαῖς πασαις, τοῖς χρώμασι π[ᾶσι] σου πάση ἠκέ μοι β-, σπεῦσον β-, ταχὺ β-
[.].[.].[ἐξ]αιμάτ[ι]σον τὴν δ[εῖνα] δ[εῖνος] ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμ[έ]ρα [.]
οἰδὰ σου τα ὀνόματα κ[αι] τὴν πορηαν σου ἐν τῷ [οὐραν]ῳ, οἰδὰ σου κ[αι] τὰς μορφάς. ἔχεις μορφήν [ἐν] [το]ῖς τετράποσιν ζῴοις ἐστὶν τράγος, ἡ μορφή σου ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ Ἀλάβης ὁ μέγας, ἡ μορφή σου ἐν τῷ ὄρει λέων, ἡ μορφή σου [ἐν] τῇ γῆτι κἀνθαρος, ἡ μορφή σου ἐν τοῖς δένδρεσι καρδαμωμον ἅγιον ἡ πὸ[λις] σου Ἡλιούπολις ἐστὶν κυνοκέφαλος ὄνομα σ[ο]ι αἰὼν ἡ μορφή σου ἐ τοῖς τετραποσιν ταῦρος, ἐν τοῖς ἐρπετοῖς ὄνομα σου [ὄ]φις. ἡ βοτάνη σου ἄνηθον τὸ ἐξ σοῦ ἐπιφανὲς ὄνομα σοι [ὄ]θις, ...ρω σου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ
Ἄλυμπος [...ονο]μὰ σοι ὁ ἐν τῷ [... δ]υσμαῖς οἱ ζῶ[ν]τε[ς] κ[αὶ] τὰ δένδρη πάντα και τὰ [ἄ]πτερα [πάντα και οἱ ὀδ]οιποροῦ[ν]τε[ς] πάντες πάντες κ[αι] οἱ ὑπο [...]νοντες ἐν τῷ ὑγρ[ῷ] ἐξοῦ τὸ ζῆν ἔχομε[ν.] ἀνοιξας [του]ς ὀφθαλμοῦς ἐπ [...] ας τὸ φῶς πάση μορφῇ ἐξ οὗ ζῆι. [ἐ]ὰν φάνῃς. ἰλαροὶ γιν[ο]νται παντες ἐὰν δύνῃς, θάνατος γίνεται κ[αι] σκότος γίνεται. τῶν ἀγαθῶ ν σου παντες. Ὄνομα σοι ἥλιος, νῆπιος, ἅγιος, τ[ι]τάνηος, ἄλκιμος, Μέγιστος, ὁ ἐπιφανεῖς ἐκ τοῦ ὀμβρίου Διός. ἠκέ μοι κ[αι] ἐπακουσον μου ἰλαρὸς ὢν, κ[αὶ] ἐπακουσάτωσάν μοι οἱ θεοὶ κ[αὶ] αἱ θεαῖ ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμερον ἡμέρα ἔκρηξον κ[αὶ] ἔξαιμον ποιησον τὴν δ[εῖνα] δ[εῖνος] ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ποιήσητε, πορευέσομαι εἰς Φάγρων πόλιν κ[αι] εἰς Ἀβωνβον κ[αι]

εἰς Ἡλιόπολιν κ[αι] στρέψω τὰ ὄστα τοῦ ἀγίου φοῖνικος μεγίστου
κ[αι] ἐπίχεω ἔλαιον ἀληθινὸν καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν ἐπι τὸ[ν]
ἀλη[θιν]ὸν σμάρραγον οὐ ἔστιν σου ὁ τάφος καὶ ἀνύξω το [...]ὸν ου
κεῖται ὁ μέγιστος Ὅσειρις ἐν τῷ ἀπλάτω[.....]αι διακεινέται
ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ οἷε[.....] [.....] οὔντες αὐτὸν κ[αι] ἐξαφε
[.....] καὶ] γένηται." P.Oxy. 4468

Although the nature of the spell is not specific, the fact that it is directed against a woman means it is probably erotic. The whole spell is occupied by a *logos*, a prose hymn to the Sun. The structure is invocation to the god (i.e. *epiclesis*), praises of the god, invocation, petition, argument: knowledge of the forms, names and course of the sun, praises, *epiclesis*, petition, arguments: threats against the sun.⁴¹⁴ As with PGM I.262-347, there is a mix of influences with references to both Egyptian and Greek deities. Also the linguistic analysis shows that it is most likely to have been either composed or translated by a non-Greek.⁴¹⁵

In this promiscuity of influences, we see a melange in which deities from around the Graeco-Roman world are borrowed and reused. This move towards syncretism shows a breaking down of cultural barriers and an acknowledgment that foreign magical/religious forms have power.

3.4.1 *Abrasax*

A key example of the inventiveness of this religious culture is Abrasax (also known as Abraxas). Abrasax is a strange composite deity depicted as a snake-footed and armoured god, with the head of a cock (see fig.v). He is recognized as a solar deity and often used on gems and amulets as charms. He is also known as the year god because in numerology the letters of his name total 365. The most likely reason for the inclusion of Abrasax here though, is in relation to the Gnostic interpretation of this deity as an Aeon and principle creative force (with each letter of his name representing one of the seven classic planets).⁴¹⁶ However the author of spell PGM I.262-347 has removed Abrasax from his original context within Gnostic philosophy and placed him literally and figuratively amongst the Greek gods on Mount Olympus. His inclusion, (as potentially with the other deities/supernatural beings) is representative of the heterogeneous

⁴¹⁴ The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume LXV Edited by M.W. Haslam, A. Jones, F. Maltomini, M.L. West (et al), 1998

⁴¹⁵ Due to grammatical/metrical errors as well as the close correlation of the hymn of Ra at the end of the composition to the litany of Ra from the Metternich Stele 83 and the correlation to the concept of god as 'One and the Many' - Borghouts:1978, p.109-111

⁴¹⁶ Walker:1983, p.142 and cf. Betz:1992, p.331

nature of the corpus and exemplified an eclectic, culturally inclusive milieu of the texts. Yet, the symbolic value of the unique iconography of Abrasax is also revealing of societal stress and the inclusion of Abrasax within an 'orthodox' religious environment, such as Olympus, suggests a decline in the authority of the traditional forms of mythic thinking and the permeability of traditional forms of mythology in these magical texts.

If the fragmentary nature of the body of Abrasax is applied to Mary Douglas' analysis of the body as a symbol of society, then it shows that there is a disconnect between the individual and the larger concept of society. In a period of disruption, the body is seen here as representative of a failing system and thus magic is used as an aid for the individual. The immediate supposition is that the depiction of a partially human deity with the limbs and head drawn from seemingly random animal body parts (as differentiated from the traditional zoomorphic deities of the Egyptian pantheon, in which animal heads denoted aspects of their character), demonstrates a confused and fragmentary image of the social body. This disordered perception of the cosmos also comes through with the numerical significance of Abrasax as a calendar deity⁴¹⁷; for by aligning Abrasax with numerical orderliness, the magician is attempting to impose an order on a disordered world.

Under additional deconstruction, Abraxas offers further insights into the milieu of the *PGM*; for example the use of snakes may reflect an association between snakes and chthonic deities and thus magic from many cultures within the ancient world.⁴¹⁸ In Greek,⁴¹⁹ Egyptian⁴²⁰ and Judeo-Christian⁴²¹ traditions, for example, the snake symbolises salvation/healing, as well as hidden/forbidden wisdom and danger. Snakes (with all the aforementioned associations) were used in other magical apparatus as a means to protect the user against a range of magical threats⁴²² and associated in magical circles with twisting and binding curses.⁴²³ The depiction of

⁴¹⁷ Whose numerical value totals 365 and whose seven letters reference the seven days of the week and the seven planets.

⁴¹⁸ Perhaps originally due to the underground nature of their habitat. Pinch:2006, p.35

⁴¹⁹ Use of snakes for oracles at Epirus in the grove of Apollo; and at Lanuvium. Also the representation of the earth goddess as a snake at Delphi. Luck:2006, p.305. Also the staff of Asclepius.

⁴²⁰ In Egyptian religion snakes symbolised the forces of chaos due to practical reasons such as the danger they presented particularly during harvest time (Pinch:2006, p.55) and also due to mythological references where Apep/Apophis is a god of the underworld and arch-nemesis of Re. (Hart:1986, p.32)

⁴²¹ In Genesis, the serpent tempts Eve to eat the fruit of forbidden knowledge (Gen. 3:4-51). Snakes also used to represent magical knowledge and salvation in Exodus 4:2-4 where the staff of Moses transforms into a snake and then back into a staff and in John 3:14-15 where the ascension of Jesus is likened to the raising of the staff of Moses as a symbol of salvation.

⁴²² This particular association is well expressed by the python goddess Wadjet who was seen as a protector and displayed as the Uraeus on pharaonic crown and also worn as a protective charm in the form of a Wadjet Eye.

⁴²³ The notion of twisting was used in sympathetic magic to bring about a sense of confusion and restraint to the subject of the spell. This is portrayed in the depiction of Hephaistos in magical texts, with twisted legs

Abrasax as a snake-footed deity therefore references the magical nature of the deity and corresponds to his use in charms and amulets as a protective.

The significance of the symbolism attached to the depiction of Abrasax as having the head of a cockerel has similar connotations to that of the snake. Both have associations with the underworld, but particularly pertinent is the association with the Sumerian underworld deity Nergal, who is also depicted as having the head of a cock.⁴²⁴ There is also a strong association with fertility as present in the connection to Persephone,⁴²⁵ Asclepius⁴²⁶ and in the phallic associations as a fertility totem in Rome.⁴²⁷ In ancient Christian symbolism the cockerel was also symbolically represented as Christ chasing the darkness away at dawn and so could be argued to have apotropaic associations; as well as frequently as being used a sacrifice in the Jewish Kapparah (although these Judeo-Christian association are less likely to be as pertinent as the fertility and chthonic symbolism).⁴²⁸ Among the associations of Abrasax, is the underworld, renewal and protection. This combined with the fragmentary nature of the body itself paint a picture of a society which is also fragmented and differentiated (a perception which is also illustrated in the pervasive use of Hecate/chthonic forms in spells outside of the Abrasax type). The chthonic associations of Abrasax can be related to a general trend within the *PGM* towards a 'Hecate type' magic.

3.4.2 *Hecate Magic*

'Hecate magic' was coined by Nock⁴²⁹ to describe the character of a magic in the *PGM* that has strong associations with the Underworld. These underworld associations have elements traceable to Greek, Jewish, Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions. The Egyptian elements in Hecate magic developed from a tradition in which magic was a legitimate literary tradition. These elements include threats against the gods, the magician masquerading as a deity, the belief that certain materials contain supernatural powers and the use of incomprehensible formulas.⁴³⁰ Other influences can be seen in the similarities to other types of literature in the ancient world,

(Ogden:1999, p.29) and in the imagery of snakes and other chthonic animals, coiled around a bound figure
Ogden:1999, p.50)

⁴²⁴ Werness: 2003, p.89

⁴²⁵ Frazer: 1927 p.486

⁴²⁶ Particularly his ability to raise the dead - Werness: 2003, p.89

⁴²⁷ Werness: 2003, p.89

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p.89

⁴²⁹ Nock:1929, p.228

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p.228

including medical recipes (*PGM* IV286, 2967), *devotiones* (*PGM* IV 296, 338, *PGM* V.334) and *defixiones* (*PGM* IV2212, similar to Latin tablets from Carthage and Egyptian ‘Sethian’ tablets⁴³¹), superstitions relating to gems and stones (*PGM* IV 1726), and Neoplatonic theurgy.⁴³² The appearance of Hecate magic shows, as I will argue, not just the pervasive heterogeneity of the Egyptian magical texts of this period, but also a cosmology which sees the universe as chaotic and competitive. In such a place, arbitrary divine events pose a considerable threat and magic is a necessary mechanism by which to control or influence such a universe.

One such example of Hecate magic is *PGM* LXX4-25⁴³³ which is a fragment from a catabasis ritual to: “obtain favour, to dissolve a spell, to protect and to win victory” (lines 3-4).

If he comes forth,... “I am Ereschigal, the one holding the thumbs, and not even one evil can befall her”

...“Ereschigal, virgin, bitch, serpent, wreath, key, herald’s wand, golden sandal of the Lady of Tartarus.” And you will avert him.

“ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON IOR MEGA SAMNYER BAUI
(three times) PHOBANTIA SEMNE, I have been initiated, and I went down into the [underground] chamber of the Dactyls, and I saw / the other things down below, virgin, bitch, and all the rest.” *PGM* LXX4-25

ἐὰν ἐξέρχεται.... ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἐρεσχιγάλ κρατῶν τοὺς ἀντι[ί]χειρας, καὶ οὐδὲ ἔν δύναι]ται κακὸν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι.

...Ἐρεσχιγάλ παρθένε, κύων, δράκαινα, στέμμα, κλείς, κηρύκειον, [τ]ῆς ταρταρόνχου, χρύσειον τὸ σάνδαλον.

Ἄσκει Κατασκει ἐρων ορεων ἰωρ μεγα σεμνυηρ βαυῖ γ', φοβαντία σε μνή, τετέ[λ]εσμα καὶ εἰς μέγαπρον κατέ[βη]ν Δακτύλων καὶ [τ]α ἄλλα εἶδον κάτω, παρθένος, κύων, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πά[ν]τα. *PGM* LXX4-25

In this spell, the Mesopotamian goddess Ereschigal is invoked to protect the magician, after which the magician is instructed to grasp their right heel and recite a list of magical implements that Betz states as being elsewhere associated with the underworld deities Hecate, Persephone

⁴³¹ Ogden:1999, p.8

⁴³² Nock:1929, p.229-230

⁴³³ Dating to late third/early fourth century.

and Selene.⁴³⁴ The reference to a key may reflect an association with Anubis whose iconography in the Roman period depicted him as a ‘key bearer’ as well as expanding his traditional role in mortuary cult as escort of the dead through the underworld to include an association with Hecate and Hermes *psychopompus*.⁴³⁵ The purpose of the list of Hecate associations may be to have a magical effect in parallel to the hymn.⁴³⁶ However, the interest here lies in the associations that link the spell to chthonic cult. Betz⁴³⁷ speculates that the reference in lines 14-16 (“I have been initiated, and I descended into the underground chamber of the Dactyls, and I saw the other things down below, virgin, bitch, and all the rest”) marks the combination of spells from such diverse origins as the liturgical remnants of the Idaean Dactyloi, the catabasis myth of Timarchus in Plutarch’s *De gen.Socr.*, the *tridos* in Orphic underworld myth and other chthonic gods of Babylonian and Egyptian origins. The common thread between these influences is the assemblage of ‘demonic’ powers that are themselves terrifying, for the purposes of averting fear. Seth-Typhon throughout the *PGM* seems also to act in a similar way to the chthonic deities. Seth-Typhon is associated in with primeval forces of chaos and the threatened overturn of social/mythological order. The invocation of such gods is to harness their power to subvert and disrupt and break down social connections between individuals (such as in binding spells and curse spells) and to reinstitute new bonds.⁴³⁸ Fear-inducing deities protect against fear and chaos-inducing/destructive deities subvert the status-quo (see *PGM XXXVI.69-101*).

“Come Typhon, who sit on top of the gate..... as you are in flames and on fire, so also the soul, the heart of her NN, whom NN bore, until she comes loving me...” *PGM XXXVI.69-84* (Fourth Century AD)

“Ἐλθέ, Τυφῶν, ὁ ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπτίαν πύλην καθήμενος... ὡς ὁ μείσκαίεσθ
ε και πυροῦσθε, οὕτως καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, ἡ καρδία | τῆς δεινα, ἡς ἔτεκ
εν ἡ δεινα...” *PGM XXXVI.69-84*

“Hear me, you who have founded and destroyed and became the mighty god whom a white sow bore,⁴³⁹ ALTHAKA EIATHALLATHA SALAIOTH, who appeared in Pelousion, in Heliopolis possessing an iron staff with which you opened up the sea and passed through after you had completely dried up all

⁴³⁴ Betz:1980, p.291

⁴³⁵ Wilkinson:2003, p.189

⁴³⁶ Betz:1980, p.291

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p.294

⁴³⁸ Frankfurter:2001, p.484

⁴³⁹ The Egyptian god Min

the plants. Attract to me, NN, her, NN aflame, on fire, flying through the air, hungry, thirsty, not finding sleep, loving me...”

PGM XXXVI 105-110 (Fourth Century AD)

“κλῦθί μοι, ὁ κτίζων καὶ ἐρημῶν | καὶ γενάμενος ισχυρὸς θεός, δν
ἐγέννησεν λευκὴ | χοιράς, ἀλθακα, εἰθαλλαθα, σαλαιοθ, ὁ αναφ
ανεῖς | ἐν Πηλουσίῳ ἐν Ἡλίου Πόλει, κατέχων ῥάβδον σιδηρᾶν, | ἐν
ἧ ἀνέφραξας τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ διεπέρασας ἀνε<κ>ξη | | ῥάνας πάν
τα τὰ φυτὰ, ἄξον ἐμοὶ τῶ δεῖνα τῆς καιο | μένην, πυρουμένην, ἀερ
οπετουμένην, πεινώσαν, | διψῶσαν, ὕπνου μὴ τυγχάνουσαν, φιλοῦσ
αν ἐμὲ τὸν δεῖνα. *PGM XXXVI 105-110*

“Arise daemons of the dark; leap up onto the bricks and beat your breasts after you have smeared your faces with mud. For because of her, NN whom NN bore, unlawful eggs are being sacrificed: fire, fire, fire, unlawfulness, unlawfulness. For Isis raised up a loud cry and the world was thrown into confusion. She tosses and turns on her holy bed, and its bonds and those of the *daemon* world are smashed to pieces because of the enmity and impiety of her, NN, whom NN bore. But you Isis / and Osiris and [*daemons*] of the chthonic world, ABLAMGOUNCHOTH O ABRASAX...” *PGM XXXVI.137-60. (Fourth Century AD)*

“ἐγείρεσθε, οἱ ἐν τῶ σκότει δαίμονες, καὶ ἀνάλλεσθε ἐπὶ τὰ πλιν | θί
α καὶ κόπτεσθε τὰ στήθη πηλωσάμενοι τὰ πρόσωπα. δια | | γὰρ τὴν
δεῖνα, ἣν ἔτεκεν ἡ δεῖνα, τὰ ἀνόμιμα ῶα θύεται πῦρ, πῦρ | <ἀ>νο
μία ἀνομία. ἡ γὰρ Ἴσις ἀνεβόησεν μεγάλην κραυ<γ>ήν |, καὶ συνετα
ράχθε ὁ κόσμος στρέφεται ἐπὶ τὴν ἱερὰν κλί | νην, καὶ διαρῆσεται
αὐτοῦ τὰ δεσμὰ τοῦ τε δαιμονιακοῦ εἶνε | κεν τῆς ἐχθρᾶς καὶ ἀσεβο
ῦς τῆς δεῖνα, ἣς ἔτεκεν <ἡ> δεῖνα. σὺ δέ, Ἴσι | | καὶ Ὀσιρι καὶ χθονὸς
<δαίμονες> Ἀβλαμ᾽ γουνξωθω, Ἀβρασάξ...” *PGM XXXVI.137-60.*

“Night Hecate, let Hecate be my messenger... stand beside the head of NN, whom NN bore and take the sleep from her until she jumps up and comes to me. NN, whom NN bore, loving me and desiring me and seeking intercourse

with me for the duration of her life (*vocei magicae*) with four dog faces, fourfold barker, let NN whom NN bore (?), be sleepless, loving me and desiring me, NN whom NN bore and seeking intercourse with me for all the duration of her life.” *P.Oxy.* LXVIII Spell 4672⁴⁴⁰ (Late Fourth Century AD)

“Νὺξ Ἐκάτη Ἐκάτη δέ μόν ἄγγελος ἔστω καὶ πορευθεῖσα καὶ σταθίσα πρὸς κεφαλῆς τῆς δ[εῖνος] ἧς ἔτεκεν ἢ δ[εῖνα] περίελε αὐτῆς τὸν [ύ]πνον ἕως ἐξαναπηδήσασα ἔλθῃ πρὸς ἐμὲ τὸν δ[εῖνα] τῆς δ[εῖνος] φιλοῦσά με καὶ ἀλαπῶσα με καὶ ζητ[οῦ]ά μόν τῆ[ν] συνουσίαν ἐπὶ τὸν τῆ[ς ζω]ῆς αὐτῆς χρόνον ατρακ [2-3]τα τρακα ἄ τετρακύων ἄ τετρ[α]υλάκτ[α] ἄ ἀγρυπνεῖτ [.].[2-3] φι[λοῦ]σά μ[ε] καὶ ἀγαπῶ[σά] με τὸν δ[εῖνα] τῆς [δεῖνος καὶ ζητοῦσά μου τῆν] συν[ουσία]ν ἐπ[ι] τὸν τῆς ζωῆς] αὐ[τῆς πάντα χρόνον.” *P.Oxy.* LXVIII Spell 4672

The use of Greek and Egyptian deities reflects a plurality of influences and a syncretic tendency to assimilate groups of deities of similar functions. In particular, these texts use deities associated with death and the underworld or chaos and destruction. They contain very little of their mythological characterisations and individual features; rather they are reconceived as archetypes of fearsome powers. The example of *PGM XXXVI 102-3*, in which Min is evoked as a destructive deity provides such an example. In traditional Egyptian mythology Min is a deity associated with fertility and is a protective deity to the miners of the Eastern desert, but not a fearsome deity and certainly devoid of chthonic associations and associations with the iron staff cited in the spell. The inclusion of Min, in this instance shows an inventive and subversive use of his original attributes (i.e. desert associations are exaggerated to affect thirst in the victim of the spell. Likewise with Min’s epithet as ‘woman hunter’ in the Coffin Texts⁴⁴¹ is now singled out as his primary function). The use of Isis in the subsequent spell (*PGM XXXVI.134-60*) follows a similar pattern in that she is depicted as a vengeful goddess, capable of unleashing daemonic entities upon the impious. In conjunction with Osiris they are then cited as coming up with the daemons of the chthonic world, insinuating they are fearsome underworld gods, unleashed by a desire for vengeance. This mischaracterisation of Min/Isis and Osiris, using violent imagery and fearsome attributes could be explained as a necessary element given the nature of the spell (especially in the instances of separating or binding spells in which the violent language/deities

⁴⁴⁰ Translated by Gonis, N. Obbink, D. Parsons, P.J. 2003

⁴⁴¹ Hart:1986, p.124

reflects the psychology of the user).⁴⁴² Although Hecate type magic represents a small number of spells within the *PGM*, the authors of these spells drew upon underworld mythologies from Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian mythology, to create a sub-genre of spells which subvert normal mythological representations and behaviours. The perception of the social milieu given by these spells is one which is highly competitive, hence the requirement for magical aids to gain love, win victory and for protection. It is also a world which believes in the strong possibility of fearsome daemonic influences and previously benign gods as characterless and vengeful. The heterogeneity of the spells also demonstrates a perception of a world as inhabited by a multiplicity of supernatural beings from various cultures, even if they can be subsumed into a singular category of the 'Hecate' type.

3.4.3 Jewish influences

Another feature of the spells is the Jewish influences, such as a belief in the power and sanctity of the Name of God, use of exorcisms, angelology, use of amulets, and the personalised relationship with god.⁴⁴³ There are obvious signs that the authors of the *PGM* were not themselves Jewish. Reiss observed that the use of the name of god is restricted within Jewish circles to either 'hashem' (meaning 'the name') or 'Adonai' (Lord). In *PGM* XIII.358, instead of the usual substitutions, a symbol is used which elsewhere means 'the name'.⁴⁴⁴ Also Reiss notes that with regard to the names of angels and archangels, the writers simply thought it sufficient to append any name with the suffix – 'el' (meaning close to god).⁴⁴⁵ In *PGM* IV.3040⁴⁴⁶ there are further mistakes and incongruities in the Jewish references; for example, the 'seal which Solomon placed in the mouth of Jeremiah', and the attribution of Jesus as god of the Hebrews, reference to the 140 languages of the world instead of the normally cited 70 languages in the bible.⁴⁴⁷ The authors of these spells were well acquainted with aspects of Jewish thought, though it is doubtful whether Jews would make such mistakes.⁴⁴⁸ Jewish influences are most obvious in the references within the *voces* to the names of angels and archangels; their inclusion is recognition that these names had power. They show that spells enthusiastically crossed cultural boundaries

⁴⁴² Malinowski:1954, p.51-55

⁴⁴³ Nock: 1929, p.229 However, these influences are not exclusive to Judaism and in fact have many parallels in the Egyptian tradition.

⁴⁴⁴ Reiss:1935, p.107

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p.108

⁴⁴⁶ Dated to Fourth Century AD

⁴⁴⁷ Reiss:1935, p.108

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Smith, M: 1996, pp. 184-196 for an in-depth analysis of the nature of the Jewish elements in the *PGM* in which he concludes they are written by those familiar with Judaic names of power but separate from that tradition.

and a belief in the non-exclusivity of supernatural beings and a lack of care for the cosmological framework from which these Jewish divine powers emerged.

3.4.4 *Mithraism within the texts: Roman, Persian or Egyptian influence*

Certain spells also demonstrate a similarity with Mithraism. Of particular interest are those aspects of Mithraism that have been singled out by the authors of the spells for their individualistic approach to personal ‘salvation’. It can only be assumed that these passages have been included because they share a similar philosophy to that expressed in the *Hermetica* and in Egyptian religion. Persian influences have been found in the *PGM*, often in regard to the references to Mithraism. However, although there are certainly a few individual attestations of Mithras (such as *PGM* III.461) and not least to the ‘Mithras Liturgy’ Paris papyrus (*PGM* IV.475-829), to cite these as Persian or even Mithraic in the proper understanding of the traditions, would be inaccurate.⁴⁴⁹ As I will demonstrate, the Mithraic elements cited in the *PGM* are reflective of (at best) a marginal Mithraism more in keeping with Egyptian traditions of the Hermetic literature than its traditional association.⁴⁵⁰ The main source for this view is the ‘Mithras Liturgy’ (*PGM* IV.475-829) which begins with an invocation:

“Be gracious to me, O Providence and Psyche, as I write these mysteries handed down [not] for gain but for instruction; and for an only child I request immortality. O initiates of this our power (furthermore, it is necessary for you, O daughter, to take / the juices of herbs and spices, which will [be made known] to you at the end of my holy treatise), which the great god Helios Mithras ordered to be revealed to me by his archangel, so that I alone may ascend into heaven as an inquirer / and behold the universe.” *PGM* IV.475-485

“Ἰλαθί μοι, Πρόνοια καὶ ψυχὴ, τάδε γράφοντι | τὰ <ᾶ>πραταπαραδο
τὰ μυστήρια, μόνῳ δὲ τέκνω | ἀθανασίαν ἀξιῶ, μύσται τῆς ἡμετ
έρας δυνά | μεως ταύτης (χρὴ οὖν σε, ὦ θύγατερ, λαμβά | | νειν χυλο

⁴⁴⁹ Firstly the idea that Mithraism is Iranian in origin is largely contested (Hinnells:1975, p. 303-4). Cumont (Cumont: 1894-6) was the first to propose a Persian/Zoroastrian antecedent to the cult of Mithras. In the texts outside the *PGM*, Mithraism is best understood as a largely Roman as this was the culture in which it was practiced and developed (Boyce:2001 p.243),

⁴⁵⁰ Meyer:1987, p.212

ὕς βοτανῶν καὶ εἰδῶν τῶν μ[ελ]λόντων σοι <μηνυθήσεσθαι> ἐν τῷ τέλει τοῦ ἱεροῦ μον συντά | γματος), ἦν ὁ μέγας θεὸς Ἡλιος Μίθρας ἐκέλευ | σέν μοι μεταδοθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρχαγγέλου | αὐτοῦ ὅπως ἐγὼ μόνος αἰ<τ>ητῆς οὐρανὸν βαί | νω καὶ κατοπτεύω πάντα. ἔστιν δὲ τοῦ λόγου | ἦδε ἡ κλήσις.” PGM IV475-485

Here the Mithraic tendencies are characterised by the depiction of the ascent and immortalization of the soul and of course the direct reference to Helios-Mithras in line 482. The tone of the spell is mystical and revelatory in nature and already shows a degree of eclecticism with reference to Greek gods Providence, Psyche and Helios alongside the Roman god Mithras and the Judeo-Christian archangel. The ultimate goal of the Mithraic rites was salvation by means of a rebirth of the soul which in turn would also bring a rebirth to the cosmos. This was achieved through the ascent of the soul represented by seven stages of initiation represented by the Raven, Bridegroom, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Courier of the Sun and Father. The purpose of the spell therefore has the appearance of being Mithraic. However it has more in common with other magico-religious circles of the period for which an individualistic path to ascension with god was a shared goal, achieved through private, highly ritualised and philosophical route.

Other aspects seen as Mithraic features include the following sections of the spell:

“First origin of my origin, AEEIOYO, first beginning of my beginning, PPP SSS PHR [E]. spirits of spirit, the first of the spirit / in me, MMM, fire given by god to my mixture of the mixtures in me, the first of the fire in me, EY EIA EE, water of water, the first of the water in me, OOO AAA EEE, earthly material, the first of the earthy material in me, /YE YOΕ, my complete body...” lines 487- 495

Ἴ[Γ]ένεσις πρώτη τῆς ἐμῆς γενέσεως αεθίου, | ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀρχῆς > πρώτῃ πππ ρρρ φρ[.], | | πνεῦμα πνεύματος, τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ πνεύματος | πρῶτον μμμ, πῦρ, τὸ εἰς ἐμὴν κρᾶσιν τῶν | | ἐν ἐμοὶ κρᾶσεων θεοδ ὄρητον, τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ πυρὸς πρῶτον ηη ηια εη, ὕδωρ ὕδωρ ὕδατος, τοῦ ἐν | ἐμοὶ ὕδατος πρῶτον ωω ααα εεε, οὐσία | λεώδης τῆς ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐσία γεώδους πρώτη | | υη υωη...” lines 487- 495

“Give ear to me, hearken to me, NN, whose mother is NN, O lord, you who have bound together with your breath the fiery bars of the fourfold / root...” lines 585-590

“ἐπάκουσόν μου, ἄκου | σόν μου, τοῦ δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα, κύριε, ὁ συνδήσας πνεύματι τὰ πύρινα κλῆθρα τοῦ τετρα | λιζώματος...” lines 585-590

“Say all these things with fire and spirit, until completing the first utterance; then, similarly, begin the second, until you complete / 7 immortal gods of the world.” lines 617-618

“ταῦτα πάντα λέγε μετὰ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύμα | τος τὸ πρῶτον ἄποτελῶν, εἶτα ὁμοίως τὸ | δεῦτερον ἀρχόμενος, ἕως ἐκτέλεσης τοὺς | Ζ' ἀθανάτους θεοὺς τοῦ κόσμου.” lines 617-618

“When you have said this, the rays will turn toward you; look at the centre of them. For when / you have done this, you will see a youthful god, beautiful in appearance, with fiery hair, and in a white tunic and a scarlet cloak, and wearing a fiery crown...” lines 635-637

“τοῦτο εἰπόντος στραφήσονται | ἐπὶ σε αἱ ἀκτῖνες ἔσιδε αὐτῶν μέσον . ὅταν | οὖν τοῦτο ποιήσης, ὅψη θεὸν νεώτερον, εὖει | δῆ, πυρινότριχα, ἐν χιτῶνι λευκῷ καὶ χλα | μύδι κοκκίνη ἔχοντα πύρινον στέφανο v...” lines 635-637

“... and a god descending, a god immensely great, having a bright appearance, youthful, golden haired, with a white tunic and a golden crown and trousers, and holding in his right hand a golden / shoulder of a young bull: this is the Bear which moves and turns heaven around, moving upward and downward in accordance with the hour. Then you will see lightning bolts leaping from his eyes and stars from his body.” Lines 696-704

“... καὶ | κατερχόμενον θεὸν ὑπερμεγέθη, φωτι | νὴν ἔχοντα τὴν ὄψιν, νεώτερον, χρυσοκόμαν, | ἐν χιτῶνι λευκῷ καὶ χρυσῷ στεφάν

φη καὶ | ἀναξυρίσι, κατέχοντα τῇ δειξιᾷ χειρὶ μόσχου | | ὦμαν χρύσ
 εον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἄρκτος ἢ κινουῖσα | καὶ ἀντιστρέφουσα τὸν οὐρανόν κ
 ατὰ ὦραν | ἀναπολεύουσα καὶ καταπολεύουσα ἔπειτα ὄφη | αὐτοῦ ἐκ
 τῶν ὀμμάτων ἄστραπαὺς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ | σώματος ἀστέρας ἄλλο
 μένους.” Lines 696-704

These excerpts include Mithraic features such as the invocation of the elements (lines 487-495), the description of the fire-breathing Aion (lines 585- 590), the implicit reference in lines 617-618 to the seven grades of initiation, the planetary gods and ascension in the Mithras mysteries⁴⁵¹ and the portraits of Helios (lines 635-637) and the highest God (lines 693-704).

Yet, aside from these superficial similarities to Mithraism, the so-called ‘Mithras Liturgy’ (PGM, IV.475-829) does not conform to the usual understanding of Mithras cult as a communal religion for the purposes of salvation. From the surviving evidence for the way in which Mithraism was practiced through the Roman Empire, the cult attracted primarily sailors, soldiers and imperial officers (hence the large number of Mithraea in frontier provinces).⁴⁵² Participants in the mysteries would congregate in order to undergo purification rituals, initiations and ceremonial meals. The imagery attached to the rites of Mithras (particularly with regards to the astrological imagery), shares some features with the ‘Mithraism’ of the Mithras Liturgy (as outlined above). However the authors of the Mithras liturgy approach the concept of salvation in a highly syncretic⁴⁵³ and individualistic way. As with the references drawn from Judaism, the Mithraism in the corpus had little of the original conception and was mined for a revelatory/divinatory/salvationist content in which there was a conception shared with many other spells that it is possible for the soul to become one with the Supreme deity during a person’s mortal existence. In this regard, the Mithras Liturgy is closer to the Egyptian conceptions than either the Persian or Roman version of the cult. As with other gods, Mithras is syncretised through Helios (in this context, Helios-Mithras) to the Egyptian Re and thus to the concept of transcendent unity amid the pluralism inherent in polytheism of Egyptian religion.

⁴⁵¹ Betz:1992, p.50

⁴⁵² Tertullian (*De Corona*, 15; *De Baptismo*, 5; *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 40), Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum* 6-7, Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, 24.1-8, Mithraic Inscriptions of Santa Prisca, Firmicus Maternus *De errore Profanarum Religionum* 5.1-2 and 20.1, Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.22 Meyer:1987, p.199

⁴⁵³ The Mithras Liturgy contains references to the goddess Psyche (PGM IV.475), to Hebrew divine names (PGM IV.595), Egyptian deities and cosmology (PGM IV.664-670) and several quotations from Homer’s *Iliad* (PGM IV, 820-824)

The concept of a hidden transcendent deity amongst a multitude of gods emerged in the Ramesside period and developed into the fully expressed philosophy of the Hermetic writings. This formulation found expression in late antiquity in the Greek hymns dedicated to Isis and her aretologies in which not only was she representative of a supreme universal god but a caring deity concerned with alleviating the sufferings of the common man. In one Latin inscription, Isis is called ‘*una quae es omnia*’ (you one who are all).⁴⁵⁴ The Egyptian approximation to this expression appears in sources from the early Ramesside period and always applied to the conception of a universal deity described as one ‘who becomes millions’, ‘who creates millions’ and ‘whose body is millions’. In this context, the Egyptian idea of ‘millions’ is close to our conception of eternity.⁴⁵⁵ Assmann describes this type of text as ‘a theologising discourse’ in that even with the presence of a multitude of gods, it was the hidden transcendent god with whom the individual felt as dependent for this continuing existence:

“Your being in the endless plenitude of time, your image is unalterable
duration, all that happens springs from your planning will (ka)” (*Sonnenhymnen
in thebanischen Grabern*)

Assmann makes the association between the religious development of a transcendent ineffable god finding expression in popular religion with a prevailing sense of uncertainty and changeability within the popular consciousness⁴⁵⁶:

“Greetings, you sole one who makes himself into millions,
Who extends in length and breadth without bounds,
Equipped power that created itself,
Uraeus-serpent with huge flame,
Rich in magic, mysterious of form,

Hidden ba to whom reverence is shown
King Amun-Re, may he live, prosper and be healthy, the self-created,
Akhty, the eastern Horus,
The one who rises blazing with light,
The light that shines upon the gods.

⁴⁵⁴ Assmann:2001, p.240

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid,p.240

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid,p.241

You have hidden yourself as Amun, the great one,
You have distanced yourself in your embodiment as sun,
Tanaen, who elevates himself above the gods,
Amun, who abides in all things,
This god who founded the earth through his decision.
(*P.Mag.Harris* III.10-IV.8)

This concept of the hidden nature of the supreme god finds expression within the *PGM* with reference to not just the Helios but also Agathos *Daemon*, who is often depicted as the supreme deity.

Come to me, you from the four winds, god, ruler of all, who have breathed spirit into men for life, master of all things in the world. Hear me lord, whose/hidden name is ineffable... Heaven is your head; ether, body; earth, feet; and the water around you, ocean, [o] Agathos *Daemon*. You are the lord, the begetter and nourisher and increaser of all." *PGM.XII.242-244* (Fourth Century AD)

"δεῦρό μοι, ὁ ἐκ τῶν δ' ἀν[έ]μων, ὁ παντοκράτωρ θεός, ὁ ἐνφυσί
σας πνεύματα | ἀνθρώποις εἰς ζωὴν, δέσποτα τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ καλῶν, ἐ
πάκουσόν μου κύριε, οὐ ἔστιν | τὸ κρυπτόν ὄνομα ἄρρητον... οὐραν
ὸς μὲν κεφαλὴ, αἰθηρ δὲ σῶμα, γῆ πόδες, τό δὲ περί σε ὕδωρ, ὡκεα
νός, Ἄγαθὸς Δαίμων. | σὺ εἶ κύριος ὁ γεννῶν καὶ τρέφων καὶ αὐξῶν
τὰ πάντα."

PGM.XII.242-244

By the time of the *PGM*, monotheistic tendencies in the form of a theistic monism had developed in parallel to the more traditional concept of a transcendent being within Egyptian religion.⁴⁵⁷ The importance of a Supreme deity within the *PGM* can be ascribed firstly to precedents within the religious literature of the Ramesside and Amarna period (perhaps in response to a period of social disruption) and secondly to the increasing popularity of Neoplatonic and Christian systems of thinking. The re-emergence of the phenomenon of the preeminent god within the *PGM* suggests that the Supreme deity might be a response to a desire

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p.244

to bring order to a chaotic world and a means of controlling religious diversity. A system overseen by a transcendent god, it may be argued, provides a more direct and accessible means of determining human relationships with the divine.

In summary the Mithraic elements within the *PGM* reinforce certain themes that can be found throughout the *PGM*. Firstly that the inclusion of Mithras (as with other deities cited elsewhere in the *PGM*), is demonstrative of the inclusive and appropriative nature of the magical circles. Although (as is typical of the *PGM*) the Mithraism portrayed here does not correspond to how it is practiced outside the magical corpus, it was most likely included due to the association of communion with the transcendent god, which was of concern to many of the writers of the *PGM*, the *Hermetica* and the Neoplatonic and Pythagorean schools. The adaption of Mithraic communal rituals to private and individualistic practices exemplifies the shift towards a personal relationship with the divine using magical rather than purely contemplative means. Another important feature of the Mithraic content in the spells is that they reinforce the importance of a transcendent deity. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, this could be in response to a desire to impose order upon a world that has become filled with a diversity of gods and supernatural beings. Similarly it could be to better facilitate the human interaction with the divine as driven by the desire to commune directly with the deity without cultic apparatus. In any case, the concept of a transcendent god has been part of the Egyptian religious philosophy since the Middle Kingdom (particularly in times of social disruptions) and demonstrates a link to temple ritual as seen in the Hermetic texts. In terms of how the renewal of interest in the transcendent deity relates to social identity, the inclusion of Egypt into an Imperial system where the pharaoh-king is distant, alongside a decline in local leadership, could lead to this change in conceptions of the divinity.

The analysis of the Mithras liturgy and spells with Mithraic features when seen in the context of influences outside traditional Egyptian religion, adds to the overall picture of lay piety emerging from the spells. The milieu from which these spells emerge is one which is eclectic, appropriating the deities and cosmologies without a sense of a coherent doctrine. The original characteristics of these deities are less humanistic and serve as powers to be invoked. The conception of the universe is one which is competitive and chaotic, thus magic is used as a tool to bring about order. As I will demonstrate in the following sections, this culturally eclectic and haphazard inclusion of religious and ritual material stands outside of imperial categorisation. The writers and collectors of the *PGM* show that they do not require cultic apparatus to mediate their

experience of the divine, but instead show an increased interest in direct, personal communication with one god.

3.5 *Sociological Definitions of Magic, Religion and Popular Piety*

In this next section, I discuss the relationship between the *PGM* and the social structure of Roman Egypt. To establish an interpretative framework, I review key sociological theories with regards to religious practices and their social framework. I shall outline those models that correlate religious behaviours and social tension within a post-enlightenment society (using Keith Thomas and Brian Levack) before contrasting these to theories drawn from modern African (i.e. Horton) in which the use of magic is not seen as incompatible with secular, urban living.

The distinction between religion and magic is a problem which has been subject to much contentious debate and to which there is no easy solution. Questions such as to what degree can magic express personal religiosity (particularly when divorced from its original context within temple rites and used by individuals for personal material gains) have been debated in Egyptology and elsewhere. Robert Ritner and other scholars of the late Egyptian period have often asserted that the decline of temple cult can be directly linked to the rise in the use of personal magic.⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, earlier scholarship argued that the proliferation of magic has been seen as a direct index of Egypt's political and cultural decline, resulting in its inevitable subjugation to a triumphant Christianity.⁴⁵⁹ Mainstream historical and theological studies of religions and religiosity at the beginning of the twentieth century used 'magic' as a pejorative label, most often depicted as a debased by-product of piety used by the lowest stratum of society⁴⁶⁰ Nevertheless, at the same time, the new disciplines of anthropology and comparative religions (and perhaps also influenced by the spiritualists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) took magical practices more seriously with scholars such as Frazer, Taylor, Durkheim, Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard interpreting magic within clear anthropological structures. Even so, it was perhaps not until the 1970s that magic came to be regarded as an important topic in its own right - as a system of comprehending the world and as an important

⁴⁵⁸ Ritner: 1989, p.103. Citing Cutro, S: 1984, p.731; Kadry, 1982, p.204; Kakosy:1977, col. 1110; idem., 1974, p.39; Bell:1953, pp.13 and 71-74

⁴⁵⁹ Bell: 1953, pp.71-74

⁴⁶⁰ "Magic, after all, is only the disreputable basement in the house of religion" – Bell: 1953, p.74. "Magic is a wild offshoot of religion; it attempts to coerce the forces that govern the fate of mankind... beside the noble plant of religion flourishes the rampant weed of magic" – Erman, A. *Religion*: 1905, p.148 cited in Hornung:1982, p.207

mechanism for alleviating certain pressures felt within society.⁴⁶¹ Yet, there remained a view that magic and religion were in essence two distinct spheres; a concept that, as I shall argue, seems inapplicable to the milieu of Roman Egypt.⁴⁶² For example, Frazer sought to define magic as an act which attempts to force supernatural aid whereas religion one placates the gods to bring about a desired effect.⁴⁶³ Similarly Durkheim⁴⁶⁴ proposed a private/communal polarity to distinguish magical and religious acts, whilst Malinowski⁴⁶⁵ emphasised the purpose of the acts themselves to be the main distinction between the two (i.e. magic is said to achieve a specific aim and religion in an end unto itself). The private/communal distinction between magic and religion, however ran up against the difficulty that there is no clear delineation between cultic and private magic. Within the priesthood, cult magic was performed within the 'private' confines of the temple, distinctly separate to the public sphere. Execration spells,⁴⁶⁶ for instance, were considered effective for the group and not just the individual, even though they were conducted in private.⁴⁶⁷

Another issue with the private/communal distinction between magic and religion is the fact that these divisions are socially determined (i.e. society will form a consensus as to which acts are magical and which are religious). Therefore, as argued by Marcel Mauss, magic must be described in terms of milieu rather than individual levels of experience, for without a consensus through which channels specific rituals are recognised as having power, magical acts would not otherwise be recognised, i.e. belief in magic is "supported by the magician performing the rite and the individual who believes in it".⁴⁶⁸ Magic can only exist within a milieu which allows for such a belief system and therefore magic is socially governed and cannot be viewed as an entirely

⁴⁶¹ Ankarloo and Clark: 1999,p.161.

⁴⁶² In fact, it may be argued that this conception of magic can be traced to early post-Reformation society, where the removal of the more magical elements within Christianity created a distinct boundary between religion and mysticism lodged itself within the consciousness of the society. By the 17th century, there was growing perception that those who believed in magic were uneducated village dweller, far removed from the intellectual elite (see Sir Thomas Browne's 'Vulgar Errors' or John Aubrey's 'Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme'). This remained the case in the 19th century also, however with many of the middle classes involved in astrology, automatic writing, spiritualism etc (not to mention the pervasive use of horoscopes in newspapers), it is clear that the belief in magic effects all strata of society.⁴⁶² In particular, astrology was taken very seriously by the educated classes (i.e. aristocrats, merchants and intellectuals and artists) as evidenced by the client listing of famous astrologers Forman, Lilly and Booker. Thomas:1973, p.382

⁴⁶³ Frazer: 1927, p.48–51.

⁴⁶⁴ Durkheim:1995,p.39–44

⁴⁶⁵ Malinowski:1954, p.87-90

⁴⁶⁶ Execration rituals (curse rituals) are a method of neutralising maleficent forces. Examples of such rites can be traced to the Old Kingdom, such as the Ritual of the Red pots. In the ritual, red pots used for funerary offerings and in some cases water purifications, are smashed. The act of breaking is symbolic of severing the magical efficacy of the object they symbolise (and may also function as a means to prevent the reuse of these sacred objects (Van Dijk: 1993, pp.185f.)

⁴⁶⁷ Dunand:2002, p.123

⁴⁶⁸ Meyer and Smith:1994, p.6

private act. Developing this theory further (i.e. that all magic is essentially communal whether conducted by an individual or by an orthodox religious channel), Levi-Strauss was able to explain the effectiveness of a spell described as killing a man through terms associated with the group and the relationship between the magician and the victim. In this example the physical status of the victim correlates to the disintegration of his social personality.

This process was also described by Evans-Pritchard in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, in which magic is employed to combat other mystical powers rather than produce changes favourable to man in the objective world.⁴⁶⁹ Evans-Pritchard maintained that magic could not be viewed in isolation from the social context which spawned it, or be viewed as an example of primitive, pre-logical thought. In his analysis of the Azande, he argues that magic supported specific social functions and could thus only be understood within that social context. Magic, witchcraft and oracles could all be viewed as part of a coherent and mutually supportive structure that ensured the continuation of these practices as a logical pre-requisite for navigating life's challenges. As magic was usually directed against opposing magic/witchcraft, the action transcends normal human perception and so cannot be easily disproved. Also within close-knit communities, the effects of a spell (particularly in the case of vengeance magic) can bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy as members of the aggrieved family seek to bring about the intended effect of the spell.⁴⁷⁰ In this way, a train of mutually supporting structures ensures a continuing belief in the effectiveness of magic – “Death is proof of witchcraft. It is avenged by magic. The achievement of vengeance magic is proved by poison oracle. The accuracy of poison oracle is determined by king's oracle which is above suspicion”.⁴⁷¹

Another argument against Durkheim's positioning of religion as communal and magic as anti-social is Horton's contention that gods are broadly comparable to any other form of magico-religious equipment. Within a context in which empirically tried techniques still leave a large margin of uncertainty as to the outcome, use of the gods is functionally identical to other forms of non-empirical methods. Therefore the decision of whether to employ solutions such as charms, medicines, or prayers is a matter of chance based on an individual's socio-cultural background.⁴⁷² This assertion that both secular and religious techniques may be utilised in both collective and private circumstances, effectively disassociates the link between socially approved goals and communal action and likewise anti-social goals with private magical actions.

⁴⁶⁹ Evans-Pritchard:1976, p.199

⁴⁷⁰ Also see Collins: 1974, p.34 for the explanation of the efficacy of magic due to 'volitional causation'..

⁴⁷¹ Collins:2003 , p.201-202

⁴⁷² Horton:1993, p.41

The nature of magical practices therefore eludes easy definition and it is possible to employ different methods of deconstruction based on sociological/institutional categories (i.e. sanctioned/non-sanctioned ritual acts and private/communal) or subjective/psychological categories (i.e. a Frazerian distinction based on coercive behaviour corresponding to magic and supplicatory behaviour to religion). As there is no agreed conception of magic, the categorisation of ritual behaviour as either religious or magical must be re-thought.⁴⁷³ More recent scholarship has preferred to view magic within a wide gamut of religious behaviour,⁴⁷⁴ rather than as a separate entity.⁴⁷⁵ If magic is equated to ritual, which holds fewer negative connotations, magic can be discussed more in terms of its symbolic and cohesive value. In this study, I avoid the problems inherent in defining magic by analysing the magical texts of the *PGM* within the framework of archives of evidence. Although this causes some difficulty when dealing with texts outside archival deposits (which could be classified as non-magical), this means that I do not define magical texts by the type of ritual activity attested within them and can thus distinguish matters that would traditionally have been classified as religious within magical texts.

Moving beyond definitions, historians have applied sociological models to the inter-relationship between social changes and attitudes towards magic. Below, I will summarise the main conclusions of Keith Thomas's seminal study of witchcraft accusation in the seventeenth century. I use Thomas as an example of the examination of witchcraft from a post-enlightenment perspective. I will contrast this to Horton's examples of the use of magic within increasing urbanised environments in modern Africa where magic is not seen in opposition to secular leadership.

In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas outlines a theoretical framework in opposition to the traditional stance associated with Malinowski, i.e. that magic is used as means of establishing control in circumstances where there are no viable alternatives or in high risk activities (such as

⁴⁷³ Collins:2003, p.18

⁴⁷⁴ "If you did invoke the gods' help for evil, what you were doing was both religious and magical; the realms were not distinct" Kieckhefer: 1989, p.37

⁴⁷⁵ Fraser argues that the earlier distinctions between religion and magic based upon the idea that all magic-religious behaviour outside Judeo-Christian monotheism were classified as magical, are incorrect (due to the lack of rigid boundaries between pagans and Christians during late antique period). He argues that monotheistic tendencies were increasing amongst pagan philosophical and magic circles. The previous concerns relating to coercion of the transcendent deity through ritual action and communication with daemons (which had been used to categorise these practices as magical rather than religious) can be reconciled as part of the same system when it is recognised that daemons are constrained by angelic influence if the ritual is performed correctly. "Magical applications of ritual are rendered legitimate through their inclusion of a wider spiritual and initiatory framework – an implicitly monotheistic framework." (Fraser:2009, p.135-139)

seafaring, warfare, incurable illness).⁴⁷⁶ In the words of Malinowski himself, magic is “to be expected and generally to be found whenever man comes to an unbridgeable gap, a hiatus in his knowledge or in his powers of practical control, and yet has to continue in his pursuit”.⁴⁷⁷ Magic, therefore, serves the function of relieving anxiety and frustration and gives the client confidence that they are taking decisive action to a given problem even though their control over the environment is weak.⁴⁷⁸ Implicit within Malinowski’s thesis is the 19th century notion of the pre-eminence of a scientific, positivist epistemology. Thus the decline of magic can be directly related to a rise in scientific thinking. Thomas, however, argues that the sociological function of magic is far more complex. Magic was often employed when a scientific solution was not available, but sometimes both scientific and magical solutions were used concurrently. Conversely, he argues that the abandonment of a magical solution is what allowed technology to develop. This is because magic, by necessity, is a conservative discipline, passed down as a tradition and rarely innovated to better suit the changing social needs of society.⁴⁷⁹ For Thomas, the reason for the decline in magic is not that it was replaced by technology (in fact Thomas states many instances where magic was abandoned before it could be replaced by another solution⁴⁸⁰), but because of a change in social attitudes. Thomas speculates that for the most part, people had become more optimistic and aspirational in their outlook. They could therefore endeavour to find a solution even if they did not understand how to achieve it in the present circumstances.⁴⁸¹ This increased optimism within society is attributed to improvements in technology, agricultural innovations and the development of insurance schemes to protect against misfortune (such as theft, loss, illness) in concert with a more diversified economic environment through the growth of new industries. These factors increased human confidence and control over their environment and reduced the necessity for magical intervention. Also with increased literacy rates and means of communication via newspapers, provinces were more closely in touch with the metropolis leading to a lessening of local isolation and parochial practices and increased conformity of ideas.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁶ Thomas:1973, p.777

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p.774

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p.775

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, p.786

⁴⁸⁰ As with the example of the 14th century Lollards who renounced the church’s supernatural protection before the arrival of a suitable substitution. The same is true of the profound eradication of the cults of saints and liturgies for the dead during the Reformation, as well as the decline in the use of witchcraft for healing purpose prior to the development of new cures and medical innovations.

⁴⁸¹ Thomas:1973, p.792

⁴⁸² Ibid, p.779

Further, the development of the social sciences allowed people to attribute interrelationships between causal factors. Sociology and psychology replaced witchcraft in allowing the victim to blame others for misfortune (for example, the social system or how s/he was raised). This new spirit of emancipation is seen as result from an Enlightenment world-view of the cosmos as a place which conforms to observable rules and where reason and rationality conquers all. With the decline in the acceptability of magic within intellectual enquiries comes a change in one's cosmology. The rise of Protestantism (and capitalism) have been seen as reinforcing this rationalistic world view in contravention to the magical. Changes in social structure led to the decline in magic.

Levack also aligns the use of magic to political and economic factors. Unlike Thomas, Levack takes a narrow view of magic, regarding magic as a largely rural phenomenon whose decline can be linked to urbanization. He accounts for this in two ways – firstly, agricultural settlements are usually inhabited by an uneducated and superstitious population and secondly, in close-knit environments, there is increased difficulty in avoiding those with whom there may be unresolved disputes.⁴⁸³ He correlates the growth of London (which had a population of half a million in the 17th century) with the decline in accusations of witchcraft.⁴⁸⁴ Both Keith Thomas and Levack connect the decline in magic to the rise of modernity in urban living, science and the spread of new social ideologies. Yet, witchcraft accusations did occur in large towns and cities (in fact some of the most notorious European witch hunts occurred in cities such as Loudon, Trier, Wurzburg and Bamberg⁴⁸⁵). Levack argues that urban centres were the locations of trials and that many of the witches were actually from rural areas. Levack dismisses the idea that accusations were based on social tensions, accounting for such outbreaks as aberrations related to either politically inspired sorcery⁴⁸⁶ or to counter plague-spreaders⁴⁸⁷.

Thomas and Levack view peaks in accusations of magic as due to observable sociological factors. For example, with the abolition of ecclesiastical and folk magic in the Reformation,

⁴⁸³ Levack:1987, p.120

⁴⁸⁴ Levack's explanation revolves around the concept that urban living leads to less personal contact and therefore lessens the potential for social friction to occur; he also attributes the decline to the practicalities associated with the use of folk-magic in which knowledge of the names are necessary (as in the rituals employed to catch a thief, which could not be expected to work if you did not know the people around you). As relations became more impersonal, the amount of personal conflict declined, reducing the necessity for witchcraft accusations and also because populations moved more freely and changed rapidly

⁴⁸⁵ Levack:1987, p.120

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, p.121

⁴⁸⁷ Plague was more likely in built up areas, thus accounting for the high concentration of this form of witchcraft accusation occurring in high density sectors. However, when neither plague nor politics appear to be the motivation for an accusation, Levack speculates that there is a case to be made for the stresses of adjusting to urban living as the precursor for an accusation. Levack:1987, p.122

individuals and whole communities supposedly felt themselves vulnerable to hostile supernatural forces and without protection from such maleficent forces. This resulted in a huge increase in witchcraft accusations.⁴⁸⁸ Periods of social upheaval are often accompanied by an increased use of magic as well as an increase in the fear of magical attacks. Against this backdrop, in the context of 16th century England, Thomas argues that industrial innovation led to a more individualistic and divided society, dissolving old social ties. Such changes brought with them social alienation and helplessness in which magic seemed the only possible recourse from social difficulties. As a result, there was an increased dependence on magical aid and a rise in witchcraft accusations (particularly against vulnerable groups)..⁴⁸⁹ This process was accompanied by the removal of the older established means of conflict resolution such as the manorial courts and religious guilds, which resulted in social dislocation and unprecedented accusations of maleficent magic.⁴⁹⁰

Thomas and Levack rely on Protestant categorisations of magic and religion, in which there is a sharp division between secular and religious views. An analysis of an African model proposed by Horton⁴⁹¹ whose study of the Kalabari in the Niger Delta provides a different understanding of the relationship between religious and social-structural innovations. Horton begins with traditional 'Durkheimian' view (expanded later by E.R. Leach⁴⁹²) that ritual belief should be interpreted as symbolic statements about the social order and as symbols of social solidarities.⁴⁹³ In his study of the Kalabari tribe, Horton describes a society whose political and religious structure were altered under British rule and whose ritual forms took on different symbolic meanings. Magic and ritual were not seen as means to solve issues where technology and science failed, but as part of the ideological fabric from which the structure of society is cut.

An example of this is given in the description of a ritual conducted by the chief to honour the dead of his bloodline.⁴⁹⁴ Aside from the house members belonging to this bloodline, a number of chiefs from other houses are expected to attend the congregation. Their role within the ceremony is to present sacrificial lambs as a gift to the feast-giving chief. The explanation they

⁴⁸⁸ Thomas:1973, p.594

⁴⁸⁹ Thomas argues that the lack of provision for the needy was accompanied by a sense of guilt on behalf of the community, as they were not upholding their Christian duty of charity to the poor. This led to encroaching feeling of resentment towards them, accompanied by the fear of beggar's curse. Thus explaining why so many the witchcraft accusations were levied against widows, the disabled and orphans -Thomas:1973, p.670-1 and also in Levack: 1987, p.135

⁴⁹⁰ Thomas:1973, p.672

⁴⁹¹ Horton, R: 1993

⁴⁹² Leach, R:1954, pp.12-14

⁴⁹³ Horton:1993, p.20

⁴⁹⁴ The political structure of the Kalabari state is made up of 'houses' led by chiefs, these are in turn subject to the royal segment which operates at state level. Horton:1993, p.21

offer as to their attendance is that they wish to pay respect to ancestral spirits and receive wealth and health in return. Functionally, their participation is a means by which they demonstrate their friendship and acceptance of the new chief. The ritual is used as a marker of social alignment.⁴⁹⁵

Another example where ritual is used to demonstrate factional allegiances is the performance of public Christian parades and church attendance by the clan chiefs. This plays on the association of Christianity with western ideology and imperial power. Although Christian ritual is used to display political alignment and status, when misfortune strikes the chiefs consult the indigenous ritual experts for a solution.⁴⁹⁶

At a face value then, the socio-religious structure of the Kalabari follows broadly a 'Durkheimian' lines (in that religious affiliation is not so much a statement of faith as it is a statement of belief in a particular socio-structural symbolism). However, Horton proposes that the co-ordination of god to group is more complex in a society made up of competing factions. Within these societies, he argues, each competing segment will have its own corresponding cult.⁴⁹⁷ At the lowest point in this structure, there are supernatural beings whose lack of association with any particular social group makes them ideal to consult at the individual level for individualistic concerns. An example given by Horton again comes from his studies of the Kalabari tribe, in which the competing concerns at village level and within that, those of the descent groups and the individual level, each have a corresponding set of cults. The village level is served by Cult of Founding Heroes, whose main concern is that of collective village welfare. Descent groups are serviced by one or more of their ancestor cults, leaving the Cult of the Water People to cater for individual concerns that may conflict with the interests of one or more of the group-level cults.⁴⁹⁸ In terms of how this cult structure relates to social structure, Horton proposes that where there are an increasing number of cults, there is a corresponding increase in the fragmentation of society. These cults are thus a disintegrative element where they appear in competition with the cult for collective welfare for the society as a whole.

With regards to the religious milieu of the *PGM*, the relationship of cult structure to social structure has the potential to further elucidate upon the socio-religious climate in Roman Egypt. Of particular interest is the explanation given for the emergence of new cults in encounters with neighbouring cultures. Here Horton parallels this process to that of natural selection – the

⁴⁹⁵ Horton:1993, p.21

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, p.22

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, p.35

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, p.36

adoption of 'alien' gods/cults will only come about until the appropriate 'want' situation arises.⁴⁹⁹ The ability of the god to become integrated within a different community is also dependent upon the characteristics of the god itself. If the identity of the god is intrinsically linked to a particular group, then the spread of their cult will be curtailed; likewise, a god whose cult is less bounded to a particular group of people will disseminate much more easily. An example of this can be seen in the wide dispersion and popularity of the cults of Vodun (who have no particular restricted social relevance) in comparison to the local nature of the Dahomean Clan Founding Heroes.⁵⁰⁰ The uptake of particular cults is also closely connected to social change. Horton refers again to the example of the Kalabari people's reaction to the emergence of Christianity. The acceptance of certain aspects of Christianity led to a decline in the Cult of Founding Heroes (which operated at the village level) but not to the decline in the Cult of the Water People (individual level) or Descent Group Ancestors (kinship groups within the village). Despite their view that the Cult of Founding Heroes was incompatible with Christian beliefs, the Kalabari persisted in maintaining that Christianity was compatible with their other local cults.⁵⁰¹ The sociological explanation for this inconsistency lies in the declining importance of self-identification with the village under British rule. Colonial government competition between villages so that the requirement for a cult that is totemic for welfare/identification at village level was reduced, though the cult of descent group and those servicing the individual still maintained an important function.

The parallels (particularly regarding the role of social structure and the uptake and disappearance of specific gods) between the Kalabari and the milieu described by the *PGM* offer some intriguing possibilities. Within the *PGM* we see an eclectic array of gods and supernatural beings from the indigenous pantheon as well as those from Greece, Jewish and Persian origins. These gods have lost much of the local identity from their original mythological depictions and are placed within a new idiom that is at once a complex and fragmentary expression of a new world view. This represents not just an expanded view of the world but also engagement with cultures beyond the local community. The magical texts therefore offer a commentary on the social structure of Roman Egypt.

A further example of the objectification of conquered lands by empire is described in Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* in which he describes the process of localising and positioning⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p.37

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p.39

⁵⁰¹ Horton:1993, p.38

⁵⁰² Mitchell uses the term 'enframing' to describe the imperial system of arranging people by (re-)configuring the spaces containing them to create particular order (cf. Mitchell: 1988, pps34 - 62)

people to conform to the imperial ‘world-view’.⁵⁰³ Although Mitchell’s discussion is based upon 19th Century European reactions to Egypt, both Ancient Rome and Western audiences expressed the desire to distinguish themselves from the Eastern ‘Other’ and render them an object of representation:

“To see without being seen confirmed one’s separation from the world, and corresponded at the same time to a position of power.”⁵⁰⁴

In contrast to the imposed order and classification by imperial ideology, the eclecticism, cultural diversity and chaotic lack of structure of the *PGM* articulates a resistance to imperial classification. Hence the tensions and disorder that are expressed with the spells could be argued to be reflective of anti-imperial sentiment and a desire for direct access to the divine without mediation of established channels of religiosity. One such example that demonstrates the link between social tensions and religious autonomy is the up-take of guardian spirits in America. In this modern example, the adaption of the concept of a guardian spirits from a multiplicity of religious influences, offers the individual a sense of belonging to something beyond the auspices of society and family whilst maintaining a sense of independence from any specific religious framework.⁵⁰⁵

In earlier generations in Egypt, religious knowledge was ordered on the Nome. This bonded communities within the Nome, endowing them with a regional sense of identity based on religious affiliations. However with imperial conquest bringing about a disruption of the pharaonic/Ptolemaic system of political and religious integration, it may be argued that there was a corresponding shift away from institutional religious bodies to a more open and eclectic religious mindset.⁵⁰⁶ The eclecticism of these texts runs against the tendency of imperial ideologies (Rome being, in my view, no exception) to objectify other cultures and imbue them with a constructed identity. Aspects of this imperial ideology begin with the act of differentiating between different groups. This labelling effectively ascribes a set of identities to the object. An example of this can be seen in the recognition of the Jewish community in Alexandria during the first Century AD. Here they were ascribed an identity that firmly categorised them as different

⁵⁰³ Mitchell:1988, pp.15-21

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, p26

⁵⁰⁵ Horton:1993, p.44

⁵⁰⁶ Parallels may be found in the political consequences of Imperial ideology for the politically minded citizen. For in the same manner as empire produced an expanded view of the political landscape for ‘imperial societies’ (and in doing so, inspired Seneca to formulate a model of citizenship that withdrew from institutional structures – cf Alston: 2010, p.311-312), so the eclecticism of the *PGM* may represent a ‘withdrawal’ from institutionalised religion and imperial homogenisation of indigenous culture.

and granted a marginalised status; hence the riots that followed.⁵⁰⁷ The expansion of the empire prompted Romans to reconceptualise the world in order to better understand their place in it (as seen for example in Agrippa’s map of the world depicted with inscriptions of Roman achievements).⁵⁰⁸ Pre-conquest cultures were often depicted as violent and devoid of the Roman virtue of *humanitas*, and thus conquest was lauded as bring these virtues and establishing civilisation in the Roman mould. With conquered Gaul, the Roman perception of its inhabitants changed to suit their model of *humanitas*. This reconceptualising of the newly civilised societies reduced them little more than artefacts of Imperial ideology.⁵⁰⁹ Thus it is observed that under an imperial system, certain types of knowledge, religious behaviours and identities are used to create a system of social location. Within this context, the magical papyri’s chaotic and culturally expansive approach, work in defiance of these imperial hegemonic tropes. The desire for self-identification outside of these narrow confines finds its expression in the *PGM*’s refusal to be categorised by this ideology of fixed social location. The use of a multitude of culturally heterogeneous gods within a world that is filled with capricious powers, therefore reflects society as it is perceived by the writers of the *PGM* under the new world order (i.e. chaotic, dangerous and ultimately malleable with the correct application of religious/magical knowledge).

3.6 Egyptian Conception of Magic

As discussed in the previous section, the application of labels such as ‘magical’ or ‘religious’ to ritual practices is anachronistic and breaks down under close scrutiny. This is even more apparent when examining the Egyptian conception of magic and religion, for which there no specific vocabulary for ‘religion’.⁵¹⁰ The closest approximation is the term *heka* (closely corresponding to our conception of ‘magic’). In this regard magic was viewed by the Egyptians as a form of energy existent outside of human agency to be harnessed and directed as necessary but essentially automatic and independent of any specific channel.⁵¹¹ Unlike Western perceptions of religion, *heka* has no moralistic dimensions and could be thought of as a technology⁵¹² freely

⁵⁰⁷ Alston:2011, p.328

⁵⁰⁸ Woolf: 1998, p.49

⁵⁰⁹ For examples of this see Woolf (1998, chapter 3) on Romanising of Gaul

⁵¹⁰ “From the Egyptian point of view we may say that there was no such thing as ‘religion’; there was only *heka*, the nearest English equivalent of which is ‘magical power’” Gardiner:1925, p.263

⁵¹¹ Thus the depictions in the tenth hour of Book of Gates (BpF 341-45), baboons and anthropomorphic deities holding out nets and using the magic therein to protect Re from his enemy Apophis - Hornung: 1982, p.208

⁵¹² An example of the automatic nature of *heka/akhu* is described in the Cairo Hymn to Amun in which the creative principle of Re’s words brings the gods into being. This would seem to suggest that magic existed before creation (CT III, 382e-383c) Hornung:1982 ,p.209

available as a gift from the gods to mankind to overcome the obstacles of existence.⁵¹³ The ontological basis for this power can be traced to the Heliopolitan and Memphite mythic canon⁵¹⁴ in which magic is a creative principle by whose agency the universe is brought into existence by the power of the creative word; in this way the universe is recreated anew each day. This creative power is seen as the preserve of the gods (and this creates a requirement to identify oneself as a deity when utilising magic), however the pharaoh (as an embodiment of the living Horus on this earthly plain) may use this power to maintain the cosmic status-quo (*Maat*) in the daily service of the gods. This role became mitigated to the priesthood as representatives of the pharaoh and thus we have the theological structures of ritual magic.⁵¹⁵

The role of magic (and the magician) within Roman Egypt is to bring a sense of control to the world. Magic works as a system for comprehending the universe, in the much the same way as either religion or philosophy. Despite often being disparaged as pre-logical and irrational, magic does have an observable logic based upon conceptions of cosmic sympathy⁵¹⁶ and causality.⁵¹⁷ Just as with philosophy and religion, magic represents another means of access to the divine (as a *techné*) and serves as a non-exclusive eclectic method of explaining the world.⁵¹⁸ Within the context of Egypt, the closest one can get to a concept of religion is the word for serving the gods (*sm*) which invariably required the application of *heka*, making a distinction between religious activity and magical activity untenable in the context of both temple magic and personal magic:⁵¹⁹

“I know the secret of the divine words and the conduct of Rituals.

I have practiced every magic without any of its laws escaping me.

Nothing has kept its secrets from me.

I see the Divine Light in all its manifestations”

Stele of the master craftsman, scribe, and sculptor Irtysen Middle Kingdom,

11th Dynasty, reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotpe (2033-1982 BC), in the

Louvre⁵²⁰

⁵¹³ Ritner: 1989, p.104. An example of this can be seen in the Instruction of Merikare “God has given magic to deflect the blinding effects of what happens”. However magic could also be used destructively to threaten the social order as with the magical attack against Ramses II (c.1184-1153BC).

⁵¹⁴ Englund, G. ‘Gods as a frame of reference on thinking and concepts of thought in Ancient Egypt’, pp.10-15

⁵¹⁵ Naydler: 1996, pp 125-128

⁵¹⁶ The idea of cosmic sympathy can be traced to Stoic philosopher Posidonius of Apamea (135-50 BC) who believed that all things are connected and can affect each other regardless of time or distance.

⁵¹⁷ Luck:2006, p.4

⁵¹⁸ The magician may associate themselves with one deity for the purposes of a specific spell and then claim they are another deity of different cultural canon in the next.

⁵¹⁹ Ritner: 1989, p.104

⁵²⁰ Jacq: 1998, p.71

Specifically within the *PGM*, there are many such examples of spells and prayers that are used for the purposes of personal revelation. It is by seeking to bring about a union with the divine as a method for manipulating reality for the benefit of the practitioner, these spells most closely resemble the parallel religious and philosophical movements towards individualistic and personal religious experience. Within these spells are both implicit and explicit parallels to the approaches to the divine and organisation of cosmos in Gnostic and Neoplatonic thought (for example, the Platonic idea that the sun is representative of the ultimate good,⁵²¹ the concept that *henosis* with the supreme deity is ideal in the afterlife, the celestial hierarchy of lesser intermediate beings, theurgic magic of Neoplatonists, the religious eclecticism of the Gnostic belief with regards to Jewish and Christian elements, the references to archons, and dualistic belief in infernal beings⁵²²). However, the contrast to the approach within the philosophic schools is that the revelations and initiation spells within the *PGM* demonstrate that it is possible to ‘know’ god and attain a divine status during one’s lifetime (whilst maintaining their essential identity) through magical rather than contemplative means (in contrast to the concept of *ekstasis* of the Neoplatonists in which the soul departs the mortal envelope and becomes one with the transcendent god⁵²³).

Those spells which demonstrate pietistic characteristics most often associated with religious activity have observable sub-categories. There are those spells which seek communion with a supreme deity (the identity of the supreme deity differs according to the spell) for a very specific goal, there are also those spells which append a ‘thanksgiving’ to the addressed god in the hope they will enact the wishes of the magician; and then there are spells with no specifically stated goal except for receipt of spiritual enlightenment. An example of the first category of spell (i.e. those spells for a personal introduction to the Sun-god for the purposes of gaining magical powers) can be seen in ‘Spell to establish a relationship with Helios’ (*PGM* III.494-611). This spell is by no means a simple introduction to the god, followed by a transfer of magical powers, but a process of internal transformation and *apotheosis*, reflecting a desire for a personal relationship with the divine but through the agency of magic.

“I have spoken your signs and symbols. Therefore, Lord, do the NN deed by necessity lest I shake heaven. Do the NN deed for me; you are the image, the

⁵²¹ Plato, *Republic* (509c)

⁵²² Smith:1994,pp.59-62

⁵²³ Reiss:1935,p.758

whole of the universe, [you] who, after being selected, guarded the holy place of the great king... lines 536-540

I invoke your holy name from every side. You who were begotten in every human body, inspire us... line 570

Come to me with a happy face to a bed of your choice, giving to me, NN, sustenance, health, safety, wealth, the blessing of children, knowledge, a ready hearing, goodwill, sound judgement, honour, memory, grace, shapeliness, beauty to/all who see me; you who hear me in everything whatsoever, give persuasiveness with words, great god.... I beg, master accept my entreaty, the offering to you which you commanded. In order that you might illuminate me with knowledge of things beloved by you/even after the kind restoration of my material body, I pray lord, accept this, my request..." (PGM III.536-589) (Fourth Century AD)

“εἰρηκά σου τὰ σ[ημ]εῖα καὶ τὰ παράσημα | διό, κύριε, ποιήσον τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶ[γμ]α ἀνάγκη, μὴ τὸν οὐ[ρ]ανὸν κινήσω, ποιήσον τὸ δεῖνα α [π]ρᾶγμα ἐμοί, ὁ τύπος, | τ]ὸ σύνολον τοῦ κόσμου ὃ <ς> κατ[α]κριθεὶς ἐφύλαξας<ς> τοῦ | | μεγάλου βασιλέως ἱερόν... [lines 536-540]

ἐπι-καλοῦμαί σου τὸ ἅγιον ὄ[ν]ομα πάνταθεν, ὁ γεν | νηθεὶς ἐν παντί πλάσμ[α]τι ἀνθρωπίνω ἐνπν[ε] | μάτισον ἡμᾶς... [line 570]

“ἐλθέ μοι || ἰλαρῶ τῶ πρ[ο]σώ[πω] ἐπ’ αὐτοθελ[ητῶ] κοίτη, διδουὲς ἐμοί, | τῶ δεῖνα, ζωὴν, ὑγείαν, σωτηρίαν, πλοῦτον, εὐτεκνίαν, | γνῶσ]ιν, εὐακοῖαν, εὐμένειαν, εὐβουλίαν, εὐδο | ξίαν, μνήμην, χάριν, μορφὴν, κάλλος πρὸς | | πάντας ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ὁρωντάς με, ὁ πᾶν ὅτι οὖν | ἀκο[ύ]ων μου, τῶν λόγων δὸς πεισμονήν, θεὲ μέγ[α]ς, τῶ ...λίσσομαι, ἀνάξ, πρόσδεξαι | μου τὴν λιτανείαν, τὴν πρὸς σὲ ἀναφ ορὰν προστά | ξας ἵνα με νῦν ἐρατῶν πρὸς σὲ τὴν γνῶσιν | |

ἐλλυ[χνιάσ]ης καὶ μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ὑλικοῦ σώμα | τος εὐμεν[ῆ] ἀποκ] ατάσιν, δέομαι, κύριε, πρόσδε | ξαί μου τήνδ[ε] | ἄξίωσιν..."

PGM III.576-589)

Following from these entreaties is a prayer of thanksgiving which has many close parallels to the Hermetic ‘Prayer of Thanksgiving’ found in the concluding paragraphs (*Asclep.41*) of the *Asclepius*. These parallels include the reference to the god as ‘father’ (*Asclep.41,16* and *PGM III.595*) and the receipt of divine knowledge for which the petitioners of both prayers thank the deity for allowing them to ‘know’ him (*Asclep.41,14* and *PGM.III.597*). By ‘knowing’ the god, both parties exclaim that they are eternal by virtue of divinisation (*Asclep 41, 24* and *PGM.III.600*). They both end with the analogy of the rebirth through the ‘womb’ of the deity as a symbol of the fecundity and creative principle of the deity (*Asclep.41, 26-30* and *PGM.III.601-610*). The tone of these prayers is reverential and suggest a desire to unite with the god, not merely for the furthering of personal goals but to receive personal inner transformation that becoming one with the deity would provide.

Other examples⁵²⁴ whereby communion with the supreme deity (who may in some contexts be Helios, in others Aeon, Hermes or Agathos *Daemon*, etc), will achieve both the material ends of the spell as well as attain personal spiritual development include *PGM VIII.1-63* and *PGM IV. 154-285*:

“Come to me. Lord Hermes, as foetuses do to the wombs of women. Come to me, lord Hermes, who collect the sustenance of the gods and men; [come] to me, NN, lord Hermes, and give me favour, sustenance,/victory, prosperity, elegance, beauty of face, strength of all men and women... Truly: ABRAXAS. I know you Hermes, and you know me./I am you and you are I...” *PGM VIII.1-63* (Fourth/Fifth Century AD)

ἔλ[θ]έ μοι, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, ὡς τὰ βρέφη εἰς τὰ<ς> κοιλίας τῶν γυναι[κ]ῶν. ἔλθέ μοι, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, συνάγων τὰς τροφὰς τῶν θεῶν | καὶ ἀνθρώπων, <ἐλθ>έ μοι, τῷ δεῖνα, κύριε Ἑρμῆ, καὶ δός μοι χάριν, τροφήν, νίκην, εὐνμερίαν, ἐπαφροδισίαν, προσώ[π]ου εἶδος, | ἀλκὴν ἀπάντων καὶ πασῶν... ἄληθῶς Ἄβρασάξ. οἶδά σε, Ἑρμῆ, καὶ σὺ ἐμέ | ἐγὼ εἰ<με> σὺ καὶ σὺ ἔγω...” *PGM VIII.1-63*

In this specific passage, the magician equates himself with the god Hermes (in this context, most likely the god Thoth rather than the Greek messenger god) and by identification with the

⁵²⁴ E.g. *PGM III.633-731*, *PGM IV. 1-25*, *PGM IV.52-85*

god and the accompanying ritual, the magician achieves *henosis*.⁵²⁵ However throughout the recitations of the spell, a reverential and religious tone is employed:

“I have been attached to your holy form.
I have been given power by your holy name.
I have acquired your emanation of the goods,
Lord, god of gods, master, *daemon*.
ATHTHOUI N THOOUTHOU I TAUTANTI LAO APTATO.”

Having done this, return as lord of a godlike nature which is accomplished through this divine encounter. *PGM IV 215- 220* (Fourth Century AD)

Ἵσυνεστὰ | θην σου τῆ ἱερῶ μορφῆ,
ἐδυναμώθην τῷ ἱερῷ σου ὀνό | ματι,
ἐπέτυχόν σου τῆς ἀπορροιας τῶν ἀγαθῶν |
κύριε, θεὲ θεῶν, ἄναξ, δαίμου
αθθουῖν θουθουῖ | ταυαντι λαω απτατω.
ταῦτα ποιήσα κάτελθε | ἴσοθέου φύσεως κυριεύσας τῆς διὰ
ταύτης τῆς συστά | σεως ἐπιτελουμένης ἀύθοπτικῆς λεκανομ
αντείας | ἅμα καὶ νεκουαγωγῆς.
PGM IV. 215- 220

There are also spells in which the process of divinisation via communion with a god, seemingly is for personal revelation rather than any specific material goal. One such notable example is the ‘Mithras Liturgy’, *PGM IV475-829a*:

... as I write these mysteries handed down [not] for gain but for instruction;
and for an only child I request immortality...[lines 475-479] “Hail O lord, O
Master of the water! Hail, O Founder of the earth! Hail O Ruler of the wind!
O Bright Lightener...Give revelation, O Lord, concerning NN matter. O lord,
while being born again, I am passing away; while growing and having grown, I
am dying; while being born from a life-generating birth, I am passing on,
released to death- as you have founded, as you have decreed, and have

⁵²⁵ Also following this methodology is a love charm (*PGM IV. 94- 15*: Spell for Attracting Women) in which the magician identifies himself as “the Great son of the Great God” in order to perform the ritual.

established the mystery. I am PHEROURA MIOURI'. *PGM* IV. 475-829
(late third century/early fourth AD⁵²⁶)

..., τάδε γράφοντι | τὰ <ᾠ>πρατα, παραδοτὰ μυστήρια, μόνῳ δὲ τέκν
ω | ἄθανασίαν ἄξιω... [lines 475-479]

ἴ κύριε, χαῖρε, δέσποτα ὕδατος, χαῖρε, κατάρχα | γῆς, χαῖρε, δυνάστ
α πνεύματος, λαμπροφεγ | | γῆ... χρημάτισον, κύριε, | περὶ τοῦ δεῖνα
πράγματος. κύριε παλιγενόμε | νος ἀπογίνομαι, αὐξόμενος και αὐξ
ηθεῖς | | τελευτῶ, ἀπὸ γενέσεως ζωογόνου γενόμε | νος, εἰς ἀπογενεσία
ν ἀναλυθεῖς πορεύο | μαι, ὡς σὺ ἔκτισιας, ὡς σὺ ἐνομοθέτησας καὶ | ἐ
ποίησας μυστήριον. ἐγὼ εἰμι φερουρα | μιουρι.' [lines 714-723] *PGM*
IV. 475-829

In this there are parallels to the previously mentioned prayers, in the mystical tone and most importantly, in the concept that receipt of the god-head will herald worldly success and spiritual rebirth. As with the Hermetic literature, implicit in these prayers for *gnōsis* of god is the underlying trend towards more individualistic approaches to the divine and the afterlife. However, whereas the Hermetic literature offers the promise of *gnōsis* without the mediation of the temple or external apparatus, the spells of the *PGM* still require a degree of associated ritual and the skill of a magician to perform the appropriate rites to achieve *gnōsis* for the benefit of the client. Therefore, *gnōsis* here is closer to the roots of traditional temple literature where enacting of the correct ritual knowledge will lead to divinisation via mechanical magical efficacy rather than through a philosophic transformation.

To summarise the above points, by examining the nature of traditional Egyptian conceptions of magic and religiosity, it is clear that there were no distinctions similar to modern classifications. Any application of the concepts of Durkheim, Frazer, Malinowski et al, fail when applied to those the spells from the *PGM* in which spiritual aspirations are clearly stated as a means of achieving the goal of the spell. From amongst these spells there are observable approaches used in the appeal to the divine – 1) those that appeal to a supreme deity or seek assimilation with the supreme deity in order to achieve a specific goal, 2) those that give a hymn of thanks whereby they demonstrate their knowledge of the god's 'hidden' names and attributes,

⁵²⁶ The dating of this text has been debated with suggested dates ranging from first century to fourth c.f. Brashear: 1973: p.3419

and 3) those spells for divine revelation where there is no stated objective for the spell except to be introduced to the supreme deity. Throughout all these categories of spell are deferential addresses to the supreme deity along the lines often ascribed to 'religious' sensibilities not previously associated with magical ritual. It would therefore be better to consider the spells as reflecting a continuity with the same magico-religious system of thinking as those expressed in temple literature. To conclude, the spells of the *PGM* represent a means of bringing order to a seemingly capricious universe, thereby offering personal empowerment and a sense of direct personal contact with the divine.

3.7 *Changing role of the magician*

Having discussed the features of the *PGM* and outlined the possible sociological pressures they exhibit, I will make discuss whether a linguistic and taxonomic analysis can yield further clarification on the users of these texts. In his linguistic analysis of the *PGM*, Nock made observations relating to the condition of the manuscripts (particularly the Paris book) that point to the way these texts were used and adapted, which in turn help to locate the milieu of the magicians. In his discussion of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, Nock observes that by virtue of the inserted glosses and variant readings of the methods and uses of sacred names, that the *PGM* were most likely working copies.⁵²⁷ For example there are frequent examples of spells for one particular aim, followed by alternative variations of the spell for the same ends, such as *PGM* III.483-88 and *PGM* 488-94.

Their citation of variant spells points to a fluidity in the way these texts were employed for the most efficacious outcomes. Other examples of variant spells are given in *PGM* IV which demonstrate a taxonomy with implicit references to earlier magical texts.⁵²⁸ For example, *PGM* IV.475-820 is placed between sequences of Homeric verses (with slight variations between them) from *Iliad* 10.472-564, designed to act as incantations against anger. Then in *PGM* IV.1924 and *PGM* IV.2186 there are references that relate to an earlier spell within the *PGM* IV entitled 'A spell for all occasions' (*PGM* IV.1595). Also in *PGM*.IV.2442-2890, we find a sequence of spells relating to Selene-Hecate collated into one section. Evidence for the compiler's use of other magical works and personal experience of variant methods is expressed in a personal statement at *PGM* IV.790 –795

⁵²⁷ Nock:1929, p.223

⁵²⁸ *Ibid*, p.221

“Many times have I used the spell, and have wondered greatly. But the god said to me: ‘Use the ointment no longer, but, after casting it into the river, [you must] consult while wearing the great mystery/of the scarab revitalised through the 25 living birds and consult once a month, at full moon, instead of 3 times a year.’” (Fourth Century AD)

“πολλάκις | δὲ τῆ πραγματεία χρησάμενος ὑπερεθαύ | μασα. εἶπεν δέ
μοι ὁ θεός, μηκέτι χρῶ | τῷ συγχρίσματι, ἀλλὰ ρίψαντα εἰς ποτ
αμὸν <χρη> | χρᾶσθαι φοροῦντα τὸ μέγα μυστήριον | | τοῦ κανθά
ρου τοῦ ἀναζωπυρηθέντος | διὰ τῶν κε ζῶων ὄρνεων, χρᾶσθαι | ἅπα
ξ τοῦ μηνός, ἀντὶ τοῦ κατα ` ἔτος γ', κατὰ | πανσέληνον.” *PGM*
IV.790-795

From the above examples (for which there are many further supporting examples throughout the *PGM*), it is possible to see that the papyri were working copies, in which the owner grouped similar variants of spells together, with later additions, repetitions and personal instructions and recommendations for particularly efficacious variations/methods.

Nock makes several deductions as to the identity of the magician, based on a linguistic analysis of the spells. The frequency in which metrical errors occurs throughout the *PGM* (such as *PGM* II.82 where the dactylic hexameters are interspersed with *vores magicae* and sections of prose⁵²⁹; and *PGM* IV.2241 where nearly every iambic trimeter is metrically faulty or completely collapsed⁵³⁰) is demonstrative of the author’s lack of knowledge or expertise in Greek literary conventions. Literary errors such as this argue against the idea that these spells were the product of redactions by Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus or other educated Greeks interested in magical books.⁵³¹ Further evidence of this is provided with the frequent use of the vocative Θεεῖ as well as phrases such as ὁ Θεός τῶν Θεῶν (*PGM*. IV.1147) which Nock maintains as “contrary to Greek linguistic feeling”.⁵³² Excluding an authorship couched in Greek literary and philosophic circles, Nock examines the possibility of a Ptolemaic element to these texts. However despite the appearance of seemingly Ptolemaic phrasings such as ‘it works on kings’, there are no definite markers for a specific pedigree (this specific phrase appears in Greek

⁵²⁹ Cf. Betz: 1992, p.15

⁵³⁰ Betz: 1992, p.78

⁵³¹ Nock: 1929, p.223

⁵³² Ibid, p.223

songs⁵³³). A literary analysis argues against the authors being from a high Greek literary or philosophical milieu, although the Greek sections do demonstrate a reasonable proficiency as well as acquaintance with rhetorical forms.

The importance of literacy in the practice of magic (at least ritual magic) is well attested. Amongst the categories of the dispensers of magic from the pharaonic period, there were the priests of Selkis (the scorpion goddess) who practiced medicinal magic but most often the papyri reference the lector priests who staff the ‘houses of life’ attached to the temples.⁵³⁴ These libraries, rather than in decline in the face of Roman financial impositions, flourished. The inventory of the library of the temple of Edfu shows that the range of subjects (liturgical, theological, technical, astronomical and magical) of interest to the clergy in the maintenance of the cult.⁵³⁵ Although the temples were storehouses of Egyptian religious tradition, the priesthood also had access to Greek language and culture (as evidenced by the archives of Namouthis which hold instructional texts written in Demotic and Greek and dating from first century BC).⁵³⁶ The majority of temple literature though would have remained Egyptian, with perhaps hymns and spells in Greek for Greek clients or Hellenized Egyptians.⁵³⁷ Magic required a high level of literacy and ritual knowledge and Dunand argues could only come from a priestly education. Only priests could threaten the gods, invoke powerful supernatural beings, and identify themselves with the god.⁵³⁸ Moreover the ‘Egyptian sorcerers’ described in Latin and Greek literature from the Roman period, were always from priestly origins, such as Pankrates described by Lucian as “a holy scribe from Memphis” (*Philopseudes*, 34) and Harnuphis who reportedly saved the Roman army from barbarian attack in 172 CE.⁵³⁹

We can make a number of tentative conclusions. Firstly that there is a prerequisite (by virtue of the literary transmission of these corpora) for knowledge of Greek and in some instances Demotic (the inclusion of Demotic spells obviously necessitated a priestly origin). Secondly, the literary mistakes in the Greek such as the frequent metrical errors and the inclusion of phrasing contrary to the norms of Greek literature point to an educated milieu but not one which was grounded in the Greek literary conventions (which would exclude the authorship of those from

⁵³³ Ibid, p.225

⁵³⁴ Dunand:2002, p.127

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p.233

⁵³⁶ Ibid, p.233

⁵³⁷ Ibid, p.127

⁵³⁸ See also Bowman:1996, p.189

⁵³⁹ Dunand:2002, p.316

the Greek philosophic schools⁵⁴⁰). Thirdly, since the temple libraries had access to many examples of Greek literary works, the likely origins of the magical texts were the temples.

In accounting for the increasingly Hellenised aspects of the magical texts, Frankfurter takes the view that over the course of the first to fifth centuries, the professional priesthood devolved into a two tier system in which the literary tradition serviced the needs of those in the cosmopolitan cities (hence the Hellenised aspects) whereas the non-literary magical artefacts (such as amulets and charms) provided ritual aid to the *Chora*. Frankfurter remarks that despite the decline of temples the local priesthood continued to act within the local community (for example as ritual specialists, dispensers of spells, renderers of festivals and mobilizers of a community for defence or revolt⁵⁴¹). Yet, by the third century the priests evolved from cultic specialist to a generalized function as a local healer, diviner, and purveyor of magic and manufacturer of amulets. Frankfurter bases this supposition on the model of the contemporary Ethiopian *debtera*,⁵⁴² whose role as a mediator of the grand traditions and dispenser of charms, rites of passage and magic to the community, endowed him with charismatic status. Frankfurter argues that the charismatic qualities of the priests, versed in written traditions, explain their continued local authority through the Roman period. However with increasing competition in the fourth century from charismatic ascetic figures such as Paul of Thebes and John of Lycopolis and the increasing Christian ritual literature by the mid to late fourth century may have meant that the production of amulets and sacred images would have devolved to local non-literate craftsmen.⁵⁴³

By the third century, Frankfurter posits, the priesthood had become divided into this two tiered system comprising of local ritual experts, unable to write Greek and the elite members of the priesthood who represented themselves along Hellenistic lines. These 'elite' members of the priesthood, (whom Frankfurter believes may be the authors of the wisdom texts such as the *Hermetica*) demonstrate personal conviction in the religious authority of the Egyptian tradition, though made accessible in Greek, and were no longer limited to particular temples and cultic service.⁵⁴⁴ The influence of Hellenism upon the priesthood (particularly with regard to the commoditisation of priestly office for status rather than service⁵⁴⁵) had the effect of creating a priesthood in which the specialist knowledge of hieroglyphics had diminished (e.g. Horapollon's the *Hieroglyphica* which shows various errors) and Egyptian religious literature was becoming

⁵⁴⁰ Nock:1929, p.222

⁵⁴¹ Frankfurter:1998, p.203

⁵⁴² See also Frankfurter:2001, p.499

⁵⁴³ Frankfurter:1998, p.215

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, p.222

⁵⁴⁵ Bagnall:1993, p.266

influenced by Greek literary style.⁵⁴⁶ This culminated in a ‘forced democratisation’ amongst the literate, of priestly knowledge. Regardless of this encroaching Hellenisation however, Frankfurter maintains that the self representation of the priestly elite was still authentically Egyptian, but by translating the religious traditions into a more Hellenistic form they sought to elevate their status above the local priesthood whose concerns were purely for the ritual needs of the community and service of the shrine. Moreover, they self-consciously appropriated the positive Roman stereotyping of them as *magoi* as a response to the financial decline of the temple and the increasingly itinerant role they were serving. Frankfurter argues that the cultural eclecticism of the *PGM* rather than pointing to origins outside of temple auspices, are products of a priesthood no longer constrained by the religious integrity necessary for temple rituals.

It seems to me, however, that Frankfurter’s theory of a two tier priesthood as a means of explaining the Hellenic influences in the magical literature is flawed and based upon many assumptions. Firstly he propagates a forced division between grand traditions and little traditions corresponding to urban and village locations. He then imagines the two traditions as being irreparably divorced from each other and dispensed by different classes of ritual expert (the urban and literate Hellenic-styled priest and the local illiterate Egyptian priest). This disregards the evidence for cultural assimilation in the extensive use of Greek language and literature within the temple libraries. Also the evidence from the spells themselves point to a culturally eclectic milieu, with knowledge of the ritual forms of temple tradition as well as the magical knowledge from other cultural areas (i.e. there are many examples within the *PGM* of instructions for creating a charm that demonstrate knowledge of crafting these ritual objects, accompanied by complex and highly syncretic incantations⁵⁴⁷). This milieu was highly syncretic and does not match Frankfurter’s attempted location of it in relative social and intellectual isolation, particularly if we consider the possibility of copying centres producing these spells for a wide distribution.⁵⁴⁸ Although the spells of the *PGM* undoubtedly have elements that are

⁵⁴⁶ Frankfurter:1998, p.223

⁵⁴⁷ One such example is from the Oxyrhynchus Archive (Papyri XII Spell 1478), which is a Gnostic Charm for victory (late 3rd-early 4th Century. A short Gnostic charm containing a prayer for victory of Serapammon in a race. The efficacy of the amulet depended on 10 or 1 magical symbols and the invocation of a mysterious deity whose name is written in larger letters. “Charm for victory of Serapammon son of Apollonius... Grant victory and safety in the race course and the crowd to the aforesaid Serapammon in the name of Sulicusesus.”

⁵⁴⁸ P.Oxy. 4468 is an example of an opisthographic roll from Oxyrhynchus dating to the first century AD, containing a magic formulary. Within the roll, two different styles of script are noticeable suggesting that the spells were compiled by at least two separate scribes. The author of the majority of the recto is also the same hand responsible for P. Leipzig inv.429 which is also a magic formulary published by Preisendanz as *PGM* LII. The Leipzig papyrus comes from Oxyrhynchus and it is possible that they belong to the same roll as 4468 (both contain remains of hexameter verses cf. *PGM* LII 2-4 and 4468 verso i) though there is no direct textual link. The presence of two different hands points to their origins from a copy centre.

traceable to temple origins (i.e. their existence as literary artefacts, the inclusion of demotic spells, the ‘mirroring’ technique from temple ritual use, the philosophy that correct knowledge gives access to the divine, etc), their cultural eclecticism and wide distribution outside temple auspices, argue very strongly against a limited cultural origin. The heterodoxy represented by the spells of the *PGM* do not conform to the structures or norms of imperial or pharaonic religion, rather they exist independently as a new way of formulating magico-religious concepts.

3.8 Conclusion

My analysis of the *PGM* sought to examine its elements thematically to apply sociological theories to the magical practices of Roman Egypt. Analysis of the *vores magicae* suggested that the use of recognisable deity names from culturally diverse origins demonstrated an eclectic religious milieu. I argue against the increased stratification of the heavenly planes suggested by Graf. Rather, the broad range of beings cited from diverse cultural influences show a confused but expanded world view. The plurality of religious references defies any neat categorisations that might seek to objectify conquered societies and as such are anti-imperial. The use of the *vores* allows the magician to exert control over lower deities through personal communion with a supreme deity. The lack of coercion over the Supreme god shows that the magician preserved personal pietistic sentiments towards the supreme deity. Knowledge of a deity’s hidden names demonstrated a personal closeness with the god in question. Such pietistic sentiments deny the typical Frazerian distinction of magic versus religion. The *vores magicae* appear to have developed from temple origins (i.e. the use of astrological symbols, the view expressed by Iamblichus that unintelligible words had *energeia*, which gave Egyptian idioms primacy over the Greek and the use of palindromes and cryptograms which can be paralleled to the use of mirroring in ritual tableaux). The use of cryptograms is evidence of literary rather than oral tradition (in much the same way as the amulets) and marks a continuation of temple practices within a new idiom.

Finally, the ability of the magician to be able to correctly pronounce these ‘foreign’ sounding words represented a means of increasing their prestige as purveyors of exotica and protecting their art from those outside their circles. In the more diversified milieu of Roman Egypt, the use of *vores* was a necessary means of protecting and continuing ritual forms (e.g. as seen in the symbolic mirroring techniques).

As with the creation of deities from the *voces*, the inclusion of *daemons* within the religio-magical system demonstrates an increasing religious plurality. The influence of other cultures is visible in an expanded view of the traditional Egyptian cosmos to include a large number of intermediary spiritual entities. This development reflects both a religious and sociological shift. The dramatic increase in population of the invisible world to include a heterodox mix of *daemons*, *archons*, the blessed dead, deities, a transcendent god etc, reflects an expanded but chaotic universe which crosses previous cultural boundaries. The greater number of intermediaries increased the number channels of approach to a transcendent god.

Of more specific interest is the use of assistant *daemons* to create a permanent link to the transcendent god. This demonstrates the use of magic to create a personal relationship with the divine. This is also reflected in the use of revelation spells which commonly have strong religio-mystic and reverential overtones. These revelations spells often invoke Jewish, Mithraic and Egyptian depictions of the 'supreme' god, not because they reflect any religious adherence to these particular religions but because individually they all share the same potential to 'know' god. Similarly, we find Neoplatonic and Gnostic characteristics in the spells, albeit adapted to reflect the idiosyncratic synthesis of Egyptian conceptions of and methods to achieve *henosis*. Thus the religious milieu is much akin to that of the Hermetic tradition.

It is possible to observe a number of different cultural influences at work in the *PGM*. The most striking aspect is the sheer diversity of deities from diverse origins with gods from Iranian, Greek, Jewish, Persian, and Egyptian traditions appearing in invocations as well as *personae dramatis*. The appropriation of these deities, removed from their original context and sometimes depicted in ways quite inappropriate to their traditional functions, demonstrates a disregard for their original religious milieu (in much the same way as Plutarch's de-localisation of Egyptian mythology in the *De Iside et Osiride*). A case in point can be made with hymn *PGM* I.262-347 in which Abrasax is placed amongst the Hellenic gods on Mount Olympus. The reconceptualising of gods into a new and unfamiliar context shows that the milieu of the *PGM* is an inclusive milieu. Heterogeneous materials from known cultures have been used create a different religious system. In *Magic in the Ancient World*, Graf sees an increased hierarchization of the invisible world but the broad range of deities/supernatural entities appearing in the spells represents a dynamic and shifting religious environment and not a rigidly structured hierarchy. Further, the inclusion of a Supreme deity does not necessarily institute a newly tiered systematisation of the afterlife, particularly as monism had been a part of Egyptian religious thinking since the Amarna period

and there is no specific evidence to suggest that society was any more hierarchical under Roman rule than it was under the rule of the Ptolemies or Pharaohs.

Although I disagree with Graf's assertion that the *PGM* reflect a structured conception of the cosmos, there is a loose organisation at work in the grouping of certain types of gods for particular functions. For example, it is often the case that binding spells and victory charms invoke the chthonic deities associated with chaos and death from the Greek and Babylonian panthea alongside the Egyptian Seth-Typhon. It might be argued that these types of 'competitive' magic or 'destructive' deities are symptomatic of a social malaise. Conversely, we also find that spells requiring healing, divination, revelation and introduction to the supreme deity call upon deities more closely associated with the heavens. The contents of the spells reflect the diversity of human fortunes and wishes in all societies.

The creation of new types of deity such as Abrasax is also a feature of the *PGM*. As discussed earlier, the iconography of Abrasax is unique. It may draw upon various sources but cannot be located within any of constituent religious influences of the *PGM*. The body of the god is a confusing and fragmentary array of heterogeneous parts of various animals coalescing in a form that is not human or animal. The use of snakes and cockerels in the body emphasises the chthonic and apotropaic nature of this deity (particularly in view of the use of Abrasax charms to avert misfortune). There is also an association with underworld deities and protective Abrasax gems counteract malign supernatural powers. Abrasax reflects a world that is competitive and heterogeneous. This is especially significant when it is considered that the deity has numerological interpretations as representing the 365 days of the year. By aligning Abrasax with numerical orderliness, the magician imposes some order on a disordered world. These conclusions also align with Douglas' model in which symbolism based on the human body are used to express different social conditions. In this instance, the fragmentary and chaotic bodily representation of Abrasax is aligned to a fragmentary and stratified society.

It is clear that the old categorisations of magic expounded by the Frazer (i.e. magic as cohesive/religion as placatory), Durkheim (magic as private and antisocial/religion as communal), Malinowski (magic is functional/religion is an end unto itself) *et al*, are not satisfactory within the context of Egyptian conceptions of magic/religion in which there are no such firm distinctions). A more appropriate means of categorising the *PGM* is to view them in the contexts as belonging to specific archives of evidence and to look at theories relating to god to group co-ordination.

Thomas and Levack view magic is symptomatic of social stress. Yet, the *PGM*, does not seem to reflect collapsing social structures. By contrast it demonstrates inclusiveness towards external cultural religious forms. Horton's⁵⁴⁹ study of the Kalabari in the Niger Delta offers a more sophisticated correlation between religious and social-structural innovations. The mechanism Horton offers is that in a society where there is competition between the individual, clan group and village group-levels, a corresponding set of cults will emerge to cater for the needs of each competing segment. Where the individual groups are in competition with each other, the cults themselves become disintegrating agents in opposition to the Village cult for collective welfare. However, in circumstances where there is low competition between segments of society, then the collective cult is adequate for everyone's needs and disintegration is unlikely to occur.⁵⁵⁰ Hence, with the rise in popularity of Christianity amongst the Kalabari, the cult associated at the village level was dropped as incompatible with Christian beliefs, but the cults servicing the clan and individual levels were maintained. Thus the decline in village level cult can be correlated to the decline in competition between villages.⁵⁵¹

Reading the *PGM* through this model, suggests a society in which the large number of supernatural beings with whom there are individual relations of power and among whom there is little sense of a rigid order indicates a high level of competition between individuals (as evidence by the number of spells for victory, to gain a lover and to hamper an adversary) and perhaps also of social uncertainty. However, it is important not to ignore the significance of the large number of revelation spells designed to achieve *gnōsis* with the transcendent deity. As previously discussed, the concept of monism in polytheism has its antecedents in earlier Egyptian thought, but the growth in popularity of the one god must have had a socio-structural connection. I propose therefore that the appeal of a 'collective' god reflects a changing social structure and expanded world view that came with Imperial rule. This would account for the declining importance (amongst the milieu of the *PGM*) of a specific god associated with regional temple cult and the expansion of the pantheon of gods to include gods from diverse origins and the existence of a transcendent god. In this sense, the religious world of the magical papyri is, indeed, imperial. Yet, the route between the individual and the supreme deity is difficult and disordered. The Supreme deity works through mysterious ways and the work of the deity and his /her/its servants can be arbitrary and dangerous. We should remember that the spells cast the magician as the controller, but for every perpetrator of a magical act, there is a victim, subject to

⁵⁴⁹ Horton:1993 1993

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, p.37

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, p.38

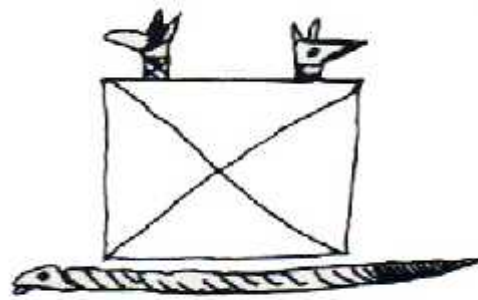
a wild magic far beyond their control that can, for instance, take away their sleep and force them to desire an individual beyond reason and convention. The arbitrary qualities of the magical world and the potentially devastating effects of its powers make it a world of fear and in this sense there can be no division between a world of magic and the world of the real with one acting as a reflection of the other. But the chaos of the magical is a fundamental element in the construction of the social imaginary of the ordinary folk of Roman Egypt. The number of options available to the magician and his or her clients demonstrates an increasing personalisation of religio-magic materials in which the relationship to a remote but all powerful single deity was crucial.

To summarise, through the deconstruction of the important features of the *PGM* (i.e. use of *voces*, wide variety of cultural religious/mythological form, etc) a psychology of the milieu which produced them and the society they inhabit emerges. Firstly, the inclusion of a broad range of religious influences, demonstrates an inclusive and culturally aware milieu. However the lack of systematisation of these forms into a coherent framework reflects a chaotic conception of the universe. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the spells shows an unwillingness to conform to categorisation which might demonstrate an anti-imperial sentiment. Even if this sentiment is not anti-imperial in the sense of actively seeking a rebellion from the imperial powers, the sources of power and the representation of the social world that we find in the spells is chaotic and dangerous. But this power was also real in that it was perceived as having real effects in the social world. There can be no surprise that our seemingly rational imperial authorities from time to time invested considerable energy in the suppression of magic.

The eclecticism of the *PGM* shows a desire for direct personal access to the divine without the mediation of orthodox channels of religiosity. The heterodoxy of these texts shows itself to be separate from institutional channels. There are a number of features of the texts which point to a derivation from temple ritual and a connection to Hermetic and Mithraic thought. The fact that the magical corpus offers the magician a way to access the divine without mediation from temple cult shows that as with the *Hermetica* the texts service a requirement for individual spiritual access. The (re-)emergence of a Supreme god in the *PGM* (the concept of Supreme deity often coincided in the pharaonic era with times of social disruption) could be construed as reflecting the new world order (i.e. the idea of a remote all-powerful emperor controlling matters in Roman Egypt) as well as a means to bring order to a chaotic world and control religious interactions. A system overseen by a transcendent god facilitates a more direct and accessible means of determining human relationships with the divine.

IÖERBĒTH
 IÖERBĒ
 IÖERB
 IÖER
 IÖE
 IÖ
 I

IÖPAKERBĒTH
 ÖPAKERBĒTH
 PAKERBĒTH
 AKERBĒTH
 KERBĒTH
 ERBĒTH
 RBĒTH
 BĒTH
 ĒTH
 TH



IÖSESESÖ
 ÖSESESÖ
 SESESÖ
 ESESÖ
 SESÖ
 ESÖ
 SÖ
 Ö
 S

IÖPĒMPS
 ÖPĒMPS
 PĒMPS
 ĒMPS
 MPS
 PS

Figure iii: Triangle word patterns in PGM VII.940-68



*GORGOPHONAS
 ÖRGOPHONAS
 RGOPHONAS
 GOPHONAS
 ÖPHONAS
 PHONAS
 ÖNAS
 NAS
 AS
 S

*"I conjure you all by the sacred name to heal Dionysius or Anys, whom Heraklia bore, from every shivering fit and fever, whether daily or intermittent [fever] by night or day, or quartan fever, immediately, immediately, quickly, quickly."

Figure iv: Example of triangle word pattern and illustration from PGM XVIIIb 1-7



Figure v: A carved gemstone charm depicting Abrasax

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate popular religiosity in Roman Egypt. Defining popular religiosity is problematic, in part because it reflects an artificial and modern division between a clerical religious group and a non-clerical groups. Previously, personal expressions of religiosity by the 'lay' demographic have been analysed in isolation or through their relationship to institutional frameworks. Much attention has been focused on institutionalised religion, and, indeed, on the institutions of religiosity, with a particular focus on the temples. Although the analogous use of 'Church/Temple' and state or lay was a feature of early scholarship on Egyptian religion, contemporary historians have been concerned to avoid importing modern conceptions into our understanding of Egyptian religion. The view of modern scholarship has been that there is no tangible distinction between institutional and popular religion, only domestic interpretations of temple ritual (Bagnall, 1993, p.261, Morenz, 1992, pp.81-109). Other commentators on the subject of the religio-magical literature of Roman Egypt (such as Fowden:1993, pp.188-192) conclude that such literature is the product of closed elite circles operating at the highest end of a two tier system of village ritual specialist and educated itinerant priest (i.e. 'grand' traditions versus 'little' traditions. Frankfurter: 1998, p.222 and Frankfurter: 2001, p.215). However, by examining the religious literature within the wider context of their socio-cultural framework, I have been able to establish a more complex picture of religious activity in Roman Egypt, and one which escapes a simple dichotomy between the 'temple-educated' priesthood or post-temple elite philosophers and local 'folk-lore' practices. In so doing, I have established a different context for the various texts, literatures and artefacts examined through which we can establish a *religio mentis*. These works are evidence of shifting social identities in Roman Egypt. The Roman period in Egypt is characterised by an increasingly individualistic approach to religion. As I have demonstrated, the development towards a more personal relationship with the divine seems to have been prompted not by the process of acculturation to Hellenic or Roman cultural traditions, but by increased social differentiation and fragmentation.

With assimilation into the Roman Empire, Egypt became an increasingly culturally heterogeneous society. Closer integration into 'Mediterranean society' led to an expanded world-view and increased exposure to diverse cultural traditions. It also led to social changes within

Egypt, which we can associate with the advent of the *metropoleis*, cultural changes, economic shifts, and a transformation of local elites. Although one would wish to avoid a simple cause and effect model (in part because changes in the *religio mentis* in the period can also be seen as a cause of social change), this increasing sociological plurality would seem to be related to the sense of cohesion within the wider social body which seems to break down as communities become more differentiated. The result is an increase in affiliations based on individuals rather than institutions.

Individuals sought new forms of religious identities to better make sense of the world in which they found themselves. These new forms were, of course, normally based on traditional religious forms.⁵⁵² Although the Ptolemaic/Pharaonic perception of a divine ruler was maintained into the Roman period, that Roman divine ruler was not identical to the Ptolemaic or Pharaonic figure. The latter was the lynchpin of a religious system and the symbol of religious and societal unification. The Romans operated a division between central administration and religious obligations in which the relationship between temple, gods and state was more complicated and fragmented. This is due in part to the absence of the Pharaoh-Emperor and in part to the different ways in which the relationship between Egypt and the Emperor were conceived. These changes were, however, gradual, and traditional representations of the Emperor-Pharaoh were common in the first century of Roman rule. Again, we should avoid a monocausal approach, seeing the changes in state-religious activity in parallel with a wider sociological and intellectual transformation of Egyptian society in a new imperial world and in local economic and social developments. Whatever the pattern of causality, such social conditions weakened the affiliation to larger society (as expressed in Douglas' model as weakening of the Group relationship) and encouraged an inverse increase in interactions between individuals (increase in Grid based relationships). It is within this framework that a more individualistic approach to divinity gave rise to the religious milieu that spawned the religious/philosophical/magical speculations of the authors of the *Hermetica* and the *PGM*.

In my second chapter I analysed selected texts from the philosophic *Hermetica* (*The Poimandres*, *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead* (Nag Hammadi Codex VI.6), *Definitions of Asclepius to King* (*Corpus Hermeticum XVI*), and *The Asclepius/The Perfect Discourse*). In previous analysis of the *Hermetica* the ethnic and philosophic origins of the text have been given primary consideration, particularly within the context of acculturation in the Roman Empire. However this approach neglects the

⁵⁵² Cf. Friedman:1990, 35-37

significance of the Hermetic writings as markers of a religious mentality in Roman Egypt. Scholars such as Fowden recognise the Egyptian antecedents of the texts but maintain that they are far removed from the temple and that they are the products of Hellenised but disenfranchised closed elite circles (possibly from the priesthood). The priestly connection of the *Hermetica*, in Fowden's view, disassociates the *Hermetica* from 'lay' religion and temple religion proper. In Chapter three, I also recognise that the Hermetic Corpus has strong native antecedents, drawing on the Thoth literature and other wisdom texts. This places the texts of the Corpus firmly within temple ritual traditions. The linguistic translation (i.e. the frequent use of Greek terms to express Egyptian philosophical concepts), rather than representing separate Alexandrian innovations are a means by which ideas that stem from temple traditions are expressed in a new idiom and to a new audience.

However, I argue that, the classification of these texts as 'philosophical' is inaccurate since they are not part of the philosophical, contemplative tradition, but reflect an approach to *gnôsis* which is magical. It is a modern conceit to divide the *Hermetica* between technical (magical) and philosophical tracts (as there was no such distinction within the body of thought represented in the surviving material) and I argue that they were part of a single system of thought which employed ritual/magical means to bring about *apotheosis*. This system is demonstrably Egyptian and therefore marks a continuity of traditional Egyptian religious forms in their approach. Although Fowden also agrees that the philosophical and technical *Hermetica* are unified by virtue of a shared principle which is that the purification of base metals is analogous to the purification of the soul, he stops short of fully identifying the Corpus as technical. The status of these texts as magical but individualistic, operates against the Weberian (and Protestant) teleological dichotomy of contemplative and individualistic religion as against ritualistic and communal practices.

Finally, the milieu described by the *Hermetica* is one in which the religious infrastructure was experiencing a slow decline. At the same time, there was an observable shift in religious activities which saw increased interest in personalised access to the divine using re-etymologised magical methods. These circumstances closely mirror the social interactions described by Douglas' Grid/Group model in which a weak connection to society as a whole (i.e. Group) is characterised by more individualistic approach to religion, whereas strong connections between individuals on a local basis (i.e. Grid) relate to increased reliance on magic. In relation to Roman Egypt, the evidence presented by the *Hermetica* reflects a milieu which integrates the diverse religious and philosophic influences. This cultural profusion is evident throughout the texts but

the medium by which religiosity is expressed is via magical (rather than contemplative) means. The society represented in the texts is culturally diverse and fragmentary and the milieu is eclectic, individualised and magical. This, when considered in the light of Douglas' model, demonstrates that the Group in Roman Egypt (i.e. the religious/political infrastructure) is weakened but Grid based relationships are strong (typified by strong use of magical aids). Douglas' analysis of the interrelationship between social structure and bodily symbolism/religious practices provides a non-causal explanation of religious behaviour. Thus, by maintaining the complexity of the contributing factors and religious behaviours a fuller picture of the *religio mentis* of Roman Egypt is revealed. This has allowed me to analyse the shifting religious mentalities without recourse to institutional explanation or to give primacy to any contributing factor.

My third chapter examined the Greek Magical Papyri (*PGM*), looking specifically at the small texts for applied charms as well as the hymns and larger magical papyri which deal with magico-religious concerns. I approached the deconstruction of these spells thematically looking at the use of *voces magicae*, *daemons*, and other diverse supernatural deities. In my analysis of the *voces*, I show that the inclusion of recognisable deity names from culturally diverse origins reinforces the argument that the religious milieu was highly eclectic. The second feature is that the development of deities based on recognisable sections of the *voces*, alongside a plethora of other supernatural beings, argues against the increased stratification of the heavenly planes proposed by Graf. Rather, the lack of a coherent framework (demonstrated by the seemingly random and confused placing of deities outside their original mythic context), show a complex and confused world view. Moreover, the refusal to conform to neat categorisations and orders may be argued to defy imperial ideologies of order, seeing the world as a place of randomness and disorder, of anarchy and inexplicable violence, and as such the texts are anti-imperial. Another feature of the use of *voces*, is that their use as an intercessor between the magician and the supreme god allowed the magician to exercise power without coercion. In this manner they preserve pietistic sentiments towards the supreme deity (not to mention that the knowledge of a deity's hidden names was a means of indicating a personal attachment with the god). These sentiments defy the typical Frazerian distinction of magic versus religion.

The implicit monism within the spells (due to the increased prominence of a transcendent god) also holds interesting clues to the changing perception of social identity (i.e. with the institution of a new imperial power and the lack of local leadership parallel the thinking of a distant transcendent deity). Another feature of the *voces magicae*, is that their structure and literary

associations point to their development from temple origins (i.e. the use of astrological symbols, the view expressed by Iamblichus that unintelligible words had *energeia*, the use of palindromes and cryptograms which can be paralleled to the use of mirroring in Egyptian ritual tableaux).

As is the case with the creation of deities from the *voces*, the inclusion of *daemons* within the religio-magical system is demonstrative of increasing religious plurality which reaches out across cultural boundaries. As with the *voces*, the disordered and pluralistic depiction of the *daemons* can be characterised as anti-imperial. Though of more specific interest is the use of assistant *daemons* to create a permanent link to the transcendent god. Here we see again the use of magic in order to achieve closeness with the divine, coupled with the strongly mystical and reverential undertone of the revelatory spells. The invocation of Jewish, Mithraic and Egyptian depictions of the 'supreme' god, are used not necessarily because they reflect adherence to these doctrines but because they are a rearticulation of shared tenets which focus on an ability to 'know' god.

A test case for this development is the unique iconography of Abrasax. The deconstruction of the different facets of Abrasax's iconography showed an emphasis on the god's chthonic and apotropaic nature. The association with underworld deities and the perceived necessity of protection against nameless and malign supernatural entities illustrates a view of the world as competitive and populated by dangerous entities. Abrasax's other association with numerology and as a calendar god representing the 365 days of the year, aligns Abrasax with numerical orderliness. In this way the frequent appearance within the *PGM* of a god of cosmic order, suggests a strong desire to impose an order on a chaotic world. These conclusions also align with Douglas' model in which symbolism based on the human body are used to express different social conditions. In this instance, the fragmentary and chaotic bodily representation of Abrasax is aligned to a fragmentary and unequal society. The inventiveness of Abrasax as a unique entity is evidence of the vitality of religious speculation. The vibrancy and creativity demonstrated here is part of a larger picture of a thriving religious milieu which sought to construct new cosmologies in response to the changing social circumstances. This stands in contrast to the comparatively static religion of the temple in which religious coherence and doctrine were necessary for the preservation of *Maat*.

The nature of the milieu described by the *PGM* is one in which magic was integral for achieving divine access but not, as some sociologists have argued, in their analyses of other social/historical contexts, symptomatic of collapsing social structures. The concept of magic operating as a form of anti-religion or a corruption of sanctioned ritual practices is one that is dependent upon a post-enlightenment view of religion. Within the socio-religious system of pre-

and post-Ptolemaic Egypt, magic was not the understanding of last resort or an alternative epistemological framework in a world that was increasingly under threat from the forces of modernity, but a means of representing a particularly complex and diverse social order. Furthermore, magic was not a degraded form of temple religion (symbolic of the decline in Egyptian religious institutions and traditions) nor was it the bastardised final locale of Egyptian religious traditions. These magical practices align very closely to the *religio mentis* that we find in the more elite and literary texts of the *Hermetica* and also connect closely to the diverse religious framework offered by Plutarch. Magic was a central element in contemporary religious practices with the magical texts therefore representing (to a fair extent) the religion of Roman Egypt.

The broad spectrum of cultural influences demonstrates a willingness to include external religious forms amid an increasingly competitive society. Yet, the lack of systematisation into a coherent framework reflects a chaotic cosmology. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the spells shows an unwillingness to conform to categorisation. This milieu is also one which has renewed interest in a transcendent deity. A system overseen by a transcendent god, it may be argued, facilitates a more direct and accessible means of establishing human relationships with the divine (without the necessity of confronting multiple deities for separate concerns). The declining importance (amongst the milieu of the *PGM*) of specific gods (notably those associated with regional temple cult) and the expansion of the pantheon of gods to include gods from diverse origins reflects a diversity of routes to the divine (the transcendent god) and an absence of orthodoxy within the religious traditions. In this way the number of options demonstrates increasing personalisation of religio-magic materials aligned with increased competition within segments of society. This is a world with transcendent powers, which can be manipulated and perhaps managed, but which does not (or risks not) making sense.

Analysis of the *PGM* has been undertaken by scholars such as Frankfurter, who argued that the authors of the *PGM* were members of the priesthood. Moreover they have explained the Hellenic influences in the magical literature by attributing them to urban, Hellenised literate priests and the Egyptian elements to local illiterate ritual expert. However, this argument runs contrary to the evidence for cultural assimilation marked by the extensive knowledge of Greek language and literature within the temple libraries. Also the evidence from within the spells themselves point to a culturally eclectic milieu, with knowledge of the ritual forms of temple tradition as well as the magical knowledge from other cultural areas. Moreover the evidence that these papyri were produced in copying centres argues against any specific geographical polarities. Frankfurter's analysis sees the magicians of the *PGM* as part of an institutionalised religious

framework. That the spells of the *PGM* reflect literary and ritual elements stemming from the temples is uncontested. However, their cultural eclecticism and wide distribution amongst the lay population argue against their classification as written by recently unconstrained priests. The heterodoxy represented by the spells of the *PGM*, therefore, do not conform to the structures or norms of imperial or pharaonic religion, rather they exist independently as a new way of formulating magico-religious concepts. My interpretation of the texts argues against any ethnic or class-based interpretation or dissemination of the magical texts. The texts are, in this sense, not particular in their Egyptian traditionalism, nor do they belong to the milieu of a Greek learned aristocracy. Indeed, the texts would seem to be primary evidence against such cultural-ethnic-class boundaries in Roman Egypt. The *religio mentis* cuts across such groups.

To summarise my findings across the range of literary archives of evidence, I have been able to contest the accepted view of lay piety in several ways. Firstly that the milieu of the *Hermetica* and *Graeco Magical Papyri* demonstrate that lay piety did have a distinctive form separate from temple traditions and domestic religion. Although the beliefs, approaches and practices appear seemingly nebulous and not part of coherent doctrine, they share an underlying ontology and approach to the divine. These characteristics can be described as:

1) An individual can achieve a personal relationship/*henosis* with the divine through both philosophical and magical means. This differentiates the religious milieu represented in the texts from analogous groups in which divine access is achieved either through contemplative (Gnosticism,⁵⁵³ Neoplatonism, and Pythagorism) or ritual (temple cultus and the initiation ceremonies of mystery religions) means. In creating a loose doctrine which allows *henosis* through allegorical magical practices, the milieu of the *Hermetica* and *PGM* refute previous delineations of magical/religious behaviours as defined by Protestant and Weberian teleology. They also represent a desire to use re-etymologised, traditional religious forms to express a personalised theology.

2) Correct ritual knowledge was essential to achieve access to the divine. This ritual knowledge is based upon temple texts. The cosmological model underlying the texts of the *Hermetica*, *PGM* and *De Iside et Osiride* share the common feature of a universe populated by many diverse supernatural entities (ranging from gods, daemons, great daemons, the dead, archons etc), ruled over by a distant, unknowable, Supreme deity. The plethora of entities do not conform to any specific pantheon or cultural canon but represent a blend of deities from across the ancient

⁵⁵³ Where unity with the divine is achieved through revelation.

world and some newer additions (e.g. Abrasax, Serapis). These deities are not always represented in their traditional sense but reflect a transformation of older religious forms in an altered social framework. Thus we find deities taking on more chthonic or mystical attributes.

3) This increased importance of a Supreme Being not only reflects the psychology of those governed by remote imperial ruler but also reflects an anti-imperial sentiment (in that godhood could be achieved those with the appropriate knowledge and is therefore not just the preserve of rulers). By mediating with the divine one can impose control on their environment and achieve a degree of divinisation whilst mortal.

4) Anti-Imperial sentiments appear as a feature of the milieu by virtue of the highly chaotic (and dangerous) formulation of the invisible and visible world pictured in the texts which defy any attempt at ordering. This milieu perceived their social environment as capricious, diversified and fragmentary.

5) Finally, I show that the heterodox circles of Roman Egypt were not necessarily made up of exclusive, closed circles of disenfranchised elites. The plurality of the influences cited (such as Gnostic, Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophies, early Christian, Hebraic, Babylonian and Hellenic mystery cults) demonstrate that they were actually highly inclusive and appropriative of other religious/mystical forms.

The literary evidence is therefore representative of a thriving milieu in which religious speculation was a means to make sense of the changing social identities and political environment under imperial rule. These heterodox groups sought to consolidate the profusion of religious forms into a system whereby ritual knowledge can affect direct and individualised paths to the divine (without the necessity of institutional apparatus). This transformation of religious values contributes to the discussion relating the decline of the temple. The innovations by these magical circles stand as testament to the shifting social movement of the period which sought to reconceptualise the new world into a new ontology. These texts are a feature of the period and stand in parallel to temple traditions though not in explicit opposition.⁵⁵⁴ This was a new world in which temple religion stood as a monument to the old world. As such, though respected, it took a secondary role to the new cosmologies created by a thriving religious milieu. This was a milieu that was more focused upon mentalities instead of institutions. The authors and collectors of the magical papyri were making sense of their world in new ways and their interpretations of their universe allow us insight into the world in which they lived.

⁵⁵⁴ The fact that the texts do not post-date the temples proves they were not the direct cause of the decline.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>Asclep.</i>	<i>The Asclepius</i>
BGU	Berliner griechische Urkunden
DIO	<i>De Iside et Osiride</i>
CH	<i>Corpus Hermeticum</i>
CT	<i>Coffin Texts</i>
<i>Def.Asclep.</i>	<i>Definitions of Asclepius</i>
<i>Iam.Myst.</i>	Iamblichus <i>On the Mysteries</i>
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JRH	Journal of Roman History
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
NHC	Nag Hammadi Corpus
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>P.Oxy.</i>	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
<i>P. Tebt.</i>	Tebtunis Papyri
<i>P.Lond.</i>	London Papyri
<i>P.Freib.</i>	Freiburg Papyri
<i>S.B.</i>	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i>
<i>S.E.G.</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>S.G.D.</i>	Jordan, 1985
YCS	Yale Classical Studies
YES	Yale Egyptological Studies

