

---

# Rosetta

Abdelwahed, Y. (2016); 'Two Festivals of the God Serapis in Greek Papyri'

Rosetta **18**: 1 – 15

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue18/Abdelwahed.pdf>

---

# TWO FESTIVALS OF THE GOD SERAPIS IN GREEK PAPYRI<sup>1</sup>

*Dr. Youssri Abdelwahed*

*Minia University*

## **Abstract**

The cult of the god Serapis and the sanctuaries dedicated to his worship in Egypt and elsewhere has extensively been studied by scholars.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the *kline* associated with Serapis has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion.<sup>3</sup> However, the festivals associated with the god have not yet been properly covered so far. This paper deals with two festivals of the god Serapis, the Serapia, attested in Greek papyri uncovered from Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period. The first festival started on 26 Khoiak, while the second began on 30 Pharmuthi. The paper attempts to reconstruct the two celebrations in the light of Greek papyrological documents. It argues that the Serapia of Khoiak is a continuation of the Pharaonic and Ptolemaic festival of Osiris, whereas in Pharmuthi another aspect of the god Serapis, closer to the Greek Zeus, appears to have been celebrated.

Tacitus has stated that the god Serapis was introduced from Sinope under Ptolemy I Soter, who gave him a great influence in Alexandria, where he became a Hellenised deity and served as an instrument of official religious policy.<sup>4</sup> Yet the god Serapis was initially Osiris-Apis, a funerary deity mainly honoured at Memphis. He was particularly associated with Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld and fertility. In his Greek aspect, however, Serapis was given the attributes and traits of Zeus,

---

<sup>1</sup> For citation of papyri and inscriptions, we adhere to the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which is available at: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser 1960a. On the Alexandrian Serapeum: Botti 1895; Wace 1944; Rowe 1946; Rowe and Rees 1957; Schwartz 1966; Grimm and McKenzie 2004; McKenzie, Gibson, and Reyes 2004; Sabotka 2008; McKenzie 2009. On the Serapeum at Luxor: Golvin et al 1981, 1986. On the Serapea in the Roman world: Wild 1984. On the Serapeum at Rome: Taylor 2004. On the Serapeum at Ephesus: Akurgal 1973. On the Serapeum at Ostia: Bloch 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Montserrat 1992; Koenen 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *History* 4.83-84.

Dionysus, Pluto, and Kronos. This complex deity attained high popularity in the Roman period, when he was frequently associated with the goddess Isis.<sup>5</sup>

There are simultaneously two main distinct festivals held in honour of the god Serapis: the Serapia on 26 Khoiak (Julian: 22 December) and the Serapia on 30 Pharmuthi (Julian: 25 April). The name of the festival of Serapis is often designated in papyri as Serapia,<sup>6</sup> Serapeia, or even Serapieia.<sup>7</sup> Although the two festivals of the Serapia carried the same name, they occurred at different dates in the year. This means that the two celebrations should be separated from each other, although they were dedicated to the same deity.

Let us first consider the Serapia of Khoiak. In addition to the festival and public procession of the god Soknebtunis *alias* Kronos at Tebtunis, the account of the temple of Soknebtunis refers to the Serapia in Khoiak (Χοΐακ ἀγνίας Σαράπιδος).<sup>8</sup> Like the festival of Sokar, the Serapia of Khoiak appears to have been related to the sacred mysteries of Osiris in Khoiak as it is annually held on 26 Khoiak, as two other texts of the same kind suggest.<sup>9</sup> According to a papyrus of AD 138 the Serapia was celebrated at Soknopaiou Nesos on 26 Khoiak (καὶ τῆς Σαραπίοι ἡμερῶν) and lasted for eight days, indicating that the Serapia began in Khoiak and continued early into Tybi. It was thus a relatively long celebration.<sup>10</sup>

The festival of Khoiak is also confirmed in other religious documents, written in Greek or hieroglyphic. *P.Hib* I.27, a Ptolemaic calendar for the Saite nome, mentions 26 Khoiak as the festival of the god Osiris, in which the journey of Osiris and the sail of his golden ship are conducted (Ὁσίρις περιπλεῖ καὶ χρυσοῦν πλοῖον ἐξάγεται).<sup>11</sup> In the festival calendars of the temples of Edfu and Esna, 26 Khoiak is honoured as the day of Sokar, a funerary deity assimilated with Osiris. In the festival calendar of Dendera, however, the festival of Osiris is celebrated on 24 and 25 Khoiak and that

---

<sup>5</sup> Bonnet 1952: 649-55.

<sup>6</sup> *SB* XIV.11329.6.

<sup>7</sup> *P.Sarap.* 89c.4. Serapieia is a festival of Serapis also attested at Tanagra (*JG* 7.540).

<sup>8</sup> *P.Tebt.* II.298.8 = *W. Chrest.* 90.

<sup>9</sup> *SB* VI.9199.19, *W. Chrest.* 92.ii.27.

<sup>10</sup> *Stud.Pal.* XXII.183.73.

<sup>11</sup> *P.Hib.* I.27.60-2.

of Sokar on 26 Khoiak.<sup>12</sup> The festival of Sokar was a traditional celebration that enlivened the life of Theban inhabitants from the Pharaonic down to the Roman period. However, the history of Sokar and his feasts first appeared c. 3000-2686 BC. The mysteries of Osiris and the festival of Sokar were linked together because they were both gods of the necropolis. In cultic terms, the festival of Sokar was influenced by the rites and festivals of Osiris.<sup>13</sup> From the Ptolemaic period Sokar became a form of Osiris and the festival of Sokar was assimilated into the Khoiak mysteries of Osiris. Thus the Khoiak festival of Osiris was lengthened and began on 12 Khoiak and lasted until the end of the month.<sup>14</sup> Like Serapis, Sokar only had 26 Khoiak as his feast day.<sup>15</sup> On 30 Khoiak, however, the erection of the *Djed* pillar was celebrated.<sup>16</sup> The slight difference in date does not mask the relationship of these interconnected festivities, which were meant to commemorate the journey of the god Osiris before his corpse was found by his wife Isis. The resurrection of Osiris and his interment took place on the festivals of Osiris, Sokar, and Serapis in Khoiak. In the Serapia of Khoiak/Tybi, the god Serapis is honoured on 26 Khoiak as Osiris and this appears to be a continuation of the ancient Egyptian festivals of Osiris in Khoiak.

The sacred journey of Osiris, presumably held in Khoiak, was also celebrated at Canopus (modern Abu Qir) near Alexandria, because the sacred ship of Osiris (ἱερὸν πλοῖον τοῦ Ὀσερίου) is similarly mentioned in an inscription, which dates back to the third century BC and was uncovered at Canopus.<sup>17</sup> A temple dedicated to Osiris was located at Canopus; it was built under Ptolemy III Euergetes and his wife Berenice. Numismatic evidence confirms that this temple was built in Egyptian traditional style with a two-towered pylon as its facade-entrance.<sup>18</sup> Equally important, Sarapion *alias* Isidoros, a priest of Antinous at Antinoopolis, dedicated an altar to the temple of Serapis at Canopus,<sup>19</sup> which was famous for its healing abilities and oracles, implying that the temple exceeded its local importance.<sup>20</sup> The archaeological material brought to light during the excavations of Canopus implies a strong

---

<sup>12</sup> Alliot 1949: 244-5; Sauneron 1962: 16.

<sup>13</sup> Gaballa and Kitchen 1969: 1-76.

<sup>14</sup> Chassinat 1966: 69-73.

<sup>15</sup> Fairman 1954-5: 182-92.

<sup>16</sup> Gaballa and Kitchen 1969, 71.

<sup>17</sup> OGI 56.51.

<sup>18</sup> Abdelwahed 2015: 70-3.

<sup>19</sup> Letronne 1974: 444-6.

<sup>20</sup> Strabo 17.1.17.

presence of Egyptian and Hellenistic cults in the town.<sup>21</sup> Alexandria was connected to nearby Canopus by the Canopic canal, whereas the two sites were connected to the Nile Valley by the Canopic branch of the Nile. Early in the Roman period, pilgrims and revellers from Alexandria and elsewhere visited Canopus on public feast days. During that time, the Canopic canal 'was crowded day and night with shipping where men and women play flutes and dance without restraint with the people of Canopus'.<sup>22</sup> Recent excavations of the canal yielded a considerable number of oblatory dishes, votive barques, and lamp dishes, apparently evidence of such celebrations.<sup>23</sup> The sacred ship of Osiris mentioned earlier in the text might have sailed in the Canopic canal during the Serapia of Khoiak.

As part of this article, I wish to argue that the festival of Serapis (ἑορτὴ τοῦ Σάραπις) mentioned in a papyrus of the second century AD refers to the Serapia of Khoiak rather than that of Pharmuthi. According to this papyrus, the festival of Serapis is marked with a public procession (πέμψις).<sup>24</sup> This statement accords with the passage of Achilles Tatius:

It chanced to be the time of the sacred month of the great god whom the Greeks call Zeus, and the Egyptians Serapis, and a torch procession took place. And this was the greatest spectacle I ever saw; for it was evening and the sun had set, but night was nowhere to be seen – rather another sun had arisen, refracted into countless fragments. For then the city vied with the sky for beauty.<sup>25</sup>

This torch-procession brought the cult of Serapis into the public space, as it exited the *temenos* and marched into the city. Although the processional route and activities of this festival are unknown, it must have been a spectacular event, like the Grand Procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus held 'in the stadium' of Alexandria<sup>26</sup> or the procession of Attis and the Magna Mater in imperial Rome from the Palatine

---

<sup>21</sup> Goddio 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Strabo 17.1.17.

<sup>23</sup> Goddio and Clauss 2006: 195-7.

<sup>24</sup> *BGU* III.845.18-19.

<sup>25</sup> Achilles Tatius 5.2.

<sup>26</sup> Athenaeus 5.197d-203b; Rice 1983.

temple, through the city, to the Gaianum or the Phrygianum.<sup>27</sup> It was to this torch-procession that an edict of AD 215 of Caracalla refers, which ordered the expulsion of all the Egyptians who came from the *chora* to reside in Alexandria:

At the festival of Serapis and on certain other feast days (Σαραπείοις καὶ ἑτέροις τισὶν ἑορτασίμοις ἡμέραις), the Egyptians [of the *chora* who] are accustomed to bring down bulls and other animals for sacrifice, or even on other days, are not to be prohibited for this.<sup>28</sup>

The Egyptians of the *chora* travelled to Alexandria to attend the festival of Serapis and perform sacrifices, suggesting that the Serapeion had more than local importance. By bringing bulls and other sacrificial animals, they effectively participated in the Serapia. The participants probably performed supplications at the Serapeion for the health and benefit of other relatives and friends who stayed in the *chora*.<sup>29</sup> For instance, a papyrus of AD 108 describes the festival of Serapis as a 'beautiful' one (τοῖς καλοῖς Σαραπείοις), where the sender, Heliodoros, tells the receiver, Selene, that he makes obeisance (*proskunyma*) to the god Serapis for her and her adopted children.<sup>30</sup> The sacrifice of bulls, geese, and other animals to Serapis at Alexandria is also confirmed in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.<sup>31</sup> Although bulls are frequently offered as sacrifice at many major festivals, the fact that Serapis was thought of as an incarnation of the dead Apis bull probably provides the rationale for their sacrifice by the Egyptians of the *chora*. A list of animals is offered as forced contributions by each village of the division of Herakleides in the Arsinoite for the festival of Sarapis.<sup>32</sup> The application is official since it is registered by the *komogrammateus*. The large number of the beasts, 10 calves and 20 pigs, suggest that they are intended for a large celebration in the metropolis. Bulls, calves, and young pigs are offered as sacrifices in the festival of Serapis, which was a suitable occasion for worshippers and visitors to make devotions to the god Serapis.

---

<sup>27</sup> Salzman 1990: 164-9.

<sup>28</sup> *P.Giess.* I.40.ii.21-3 = *Sel.Pap.* 215.

<sup>29</sup> On the *proskynemata* of Dorotheos and Ammonios uncovered from the Serapeion: see Kayser 1994: 236-7.

<sup>30</sup> *P.Sarap.* 89c.

<sup>31</sup> *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.25 = Conybeare 1912.

<sup>32</sup> *P.Petaus* 40.

Although the passage of Achilles Tatius does not explicitly mention the name of the sacred month of the festival of the god Serapis, I wish to argue that it is Khoiak for in the early fourth century AD a sacrifice was offered in the Alexandrian Lageion in connection with the Serapia on 26 Khoiak (ταῦτα τῆ β... τοῦ Χοΐακ. καὶ τῆ κς τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνὸς ἦζεν τὴν ἱεράν ἐν τῷ Λαγαΐῳ).<sup>33</sup> Since the Lageion was located near the Serapeion, the sacrifice was offered to Serapis as Osiris in the nearby structure, which late sources call ‘the stadium’. Dio Chrysostom criticised the Alexandrians’ behaviour at the horse races, which occurred in a building he calls ‘the stadium’.<sup>34</sup> In AD 69 Vespasian visited the Serapeion and the adjacent Lageion.<sup>35</sup> Three years later, Titus also visited the buildings in the same order, emphasising the connection between the two structures.<sup>36</sup> The Lageion was thus used as an arena for sacrifices during the festival of Serapis on 26 Khoiak.<sup>37</sup>

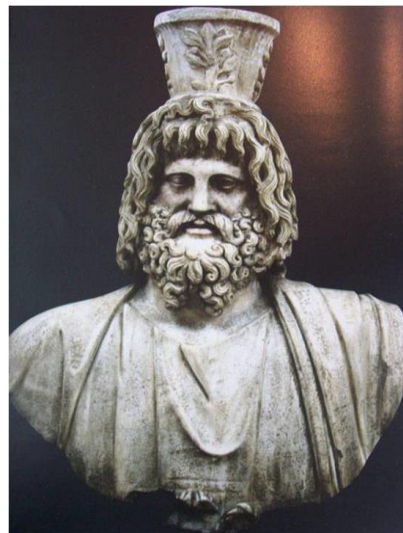


Figure 1. The anthropomorphic statue of Serapis in the form of Helios-Zeus.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *SB* III.6222.32-33.

<sup>34</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32. 41-3.

<sup>35</sup> Henrichs 1968 : 51-80; *P.Fouad* I.8.10 = *SB* 16.12225.

<sup>36</sup> *P.Oxy.* XXXIV.2725.20-21.

<sup>37</sup> *SB* III.6222; Humphrey 1986: 505-12.

<sup>38</sup> Savvopoulos and Bianchi 2012: 131.



Figure 2. The statue of Apis dedicated to ‘Serapis and the *sunnaoi theoi*’ by the Emperor Hadrian in the Alexandrian Serapeion.<sup>39</sup>

Although the Serapia of Khoiak appears in documents as a continuation of an ancient Egyptian festival, it cannot be exclusively associated with a particular ethnic or legal group in Graeco-Roman Egypt. At Alexandria, for example, Serapis was the main deity of the city, yet his sacred precinct included classical and traditional Egyptian architectural and sculptural features. The co-presence of an anthropomorphic statue of Serapis in the form of Helios-Zeus (figure 1) and an Apis statue under Hadrian (figure 2) seems to reflect the biculturalism not only of the architecture of the Serapeion, but of the cult itself.<sup>40</sup> The participation of the Egyptians in the procession of Serapis does not mean that the festival only represented an Egyptian cultural identity. The temple of Serapis and his torch-bearing procession must have served all worshippers of the deity, regardless of their ethnic or legal identities. Like Isis, Serapis transcended the particularity of his local origin and became a cosmopolitan deity.<sup>41</sup> Cinerary urns from Hadra contain the ashes of sacred delegations, *theoroi*, dispatched by various Greek cities outside Egypt to participate in festivals at Alexandria, to offer sacrifices at Alexandrian shrines, or simply to announce forthcoming festivals celebrated in their homelands.<sup>42</sup> It is possible that the *theoroi* who came to Alexandria had partaken of the torch-bearing procession of Serapis, an important event in the city’s religious life. So the

<sup>39</sup> McKenzie 2007: 185, fig. 312.

<sup>40</sup> Kayser 1994 : 176-9.

<sup>41</sup> Plut. *De Is et Os.* 66; Bonneau 1964: 319-24, 353-4, 426-35.

<sup>42</sup> Rönne and Fraser 1953: 84-94; Fraser 1960b: 159-61; Cook 1966: 23-34.



festival of Serapis might have provided an occasion for bringing different groups together.<sup>43</sup>

The festival of Serapis is also confirmed in the *chora* and is characterised with a number of rites. In the early second century AD, the Serapia of Khoiak was marked with libations of wine (σπονδή) at the temple of Soknopaiou Nesos.<sup>44</sup> In a private letter of AD 128/9 Kollouthos asked Marius to deliver a basket of dried fruit probably to be used during the festival of Serapis.<sup>45</sup> In AD 217/18 palm branches were also distributed to the participants in the festival of Serapis at the entrance-pylon of the Serapeion at Oxyrhynchus:

To Eutyches who distributes branches under the pylon of the Serapeion by the Great Icon.<sup>46</sup>

The use of the word pylon here says nothing about its architectural style or physical appearance. In Greek papyri, pylon is the general word for 'gateway'.<sup>47</sup> Although the sanctuaries built for Serapis, the Serapea, in Egypt and elsewhere usually followed Graeco-Roman layout, they also incorporated Egyptian architectural features.<sup>48</sup> That the gateway of the Serapeion took the shape of pyla of traditional Egyptian temples, with either two towers like the Augustan temple at Kalabsha or a single trapezoidal tower like Nero's South Temple at Karanis remains a possibility. Since the material of the Great Icon is unidentified, it refers to an unknown work of art executed by the pylon. The pylon of the Serapeion was used as reference point in religious festivals associated with the temple. Eutyches was perhaps the temple's door keeper, a priest, or servant. Like many other celebrations, the festival of Serapis is marked with libations of wine, the use of dried fruit, and the distribution of palm branches.

A late third-century AD papyrus gives an account of payments to a trumpeter, comedian, dancer, herald, the dog-headed one, and the doorkeeper of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Roullet 1972; Davies 2011: 21-53.

<sup>44</sup> *P. Tebt.* II.298.70.

<sup>45</sup> *SB XIV.*11329.

<sup>46</sup> *P. Oxy.* XLIII.3094.43-44: Εὐτύχει θαλοδοτοῦντι ὑπὸ τὸν πυλῶνα τοῦ Σαραπείου πρὸς τῇ μεγάλῃ εἰκόνι; Turner 1952.

<sup>47</sup> Husson 1983: 243-6; Abbas and Abdelwahed 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Wild 1984: 1739-1851; Akurgal 1973, 163-4.

Serapeion at Oxyrhynchus in return for their duties in the festival of Serapis.<sup>49</sup> Since the papyrus speaks of gifts to ‘the dog-headed one’, who refers to ‘the official who took the part of Anubis in the festival’,<sup>50</sup> it must have included a public procession. The presence of this κυνώπιος suggests that we are dealing with the Serapia of Khoiak. This official also appears in the procession of Isis in Rome.<sup>51</sup> An apprentice boy at Oxyrhynchus is given two days as holidays during the festival of Serapis.<sup>52</sup> In the second century AD two hundred crowns termed *sarapiakoi* (σαραπιακοί) were probably worn by the participants in the public procession associated with the festival of Serapis.<sup>53</sup> The Serapia was thus an elaborate carnival to which dancers, trumpeters, comedians, musicians and pilgrims came.

Having explored the Serapia of Khoiak/Tybi, let us now turn to the Serapia of Pharmuthi. Unfortunately, the Serapia of Pharmuthi is less documented in papyri. Yet a number of papyri confirm that this festival took place between the end of Pharmuthi, presumably 30 Pharmuthi, and continued early into Pachon. For instance, a papyrus of 105/101 BC gives 10 Pachon as the date when the Serapia ends. This simply means that the celebration of the Serapia lasted for a number of days in Pharmuthi/Pachon. The Serapia of Pharmuthi/Pachon is attested in papyri from the first century BC to the early fourth century AD. In the late second and early first century BC the kleruchs of 7 arourai and the katoikoi (ἡ σύνοδος τὸ τῶν ἑπταρούρων καὶ ἐπικεφάλαιον τῶν κατοίκων καὶ τὴν ἱερωνίαν) assembled to participate in the Serapia at Kerkeosiris, indicating that wealthy Egyptians and settlers of Graeco-Macedonian origin celebrated the Serapia.<sup>54</sup> This is a testimony of the diffusion of the cult of Serapis in the late Ptolemaic period.

In AD 215/216 the archive of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Ptolemais Euergetis gives an account of the expenses on the occasion of the Serapia of Pharmuthi: 10 drachmas on olive-oil for anointing the statues; 7 drachmas on olive-oil for lighting lamps in the *sekos*; 4 drachmas on perfumes and incense; and 4 drachmas on the

---

<sup>49</sup> SB IV.7336.42.

<sup>50</sup> Wormald 1929: 242.

<sup>51</sup> Apul. *Metamorphoses* XI.11.

<sup>52</sup> P. Oxy. XXXI.2586.42 (AD 264).

<sup>53</sup> P. Alex. 22.4.

<sup>54</sup> P. Tebt. I.119.25, 30-33. The meaning of the word ἱερωνία is dubious.

carriage of fruit-trees and palm branches.<sup>55</sup> Like the Serapa, a festival of Kronos *alias* Sobek was also celebrated at this Roman temple and called for by the gymnasial and bouletic elites.<sup>56</sup> This reflects the incorporation of traditional festivals into Roman sanctuaries. The Serapia of Pharmuthi has, in Francoise Perpillou-Thomas' view, a political sense.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the Ptolemaic period, Serapis was thought of as an embodiment of the royal power, and this character was emphasised under Roman rule.<sup>58</sup> As previously mentioned, Serapis was honoured by Roman Emperors during their visits to Egypt. The attestation of the Serapia in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which mainly celebrated formal festivals such as the birthday of Rome and of the imperial family, suggests that the Serapia of Pharmuthi/Pachon had an official character.<sup>59</sup>

The calendar of Philocalus and the *Menologium Rusticum* confirm that the Serapia was also held in Rome on 25 April (30 Pharmuthi).<sup>60</sup> It is likely that the Serapia on 30 Pharmuthi is related to the festival of the Eleutheria, which was celebrated on 1 Pachon at Soknopaiou Nesos (Παχῶν α Ἐλευθερίοις).<sup>61</sup> Like Serapis, the god Zeus-Eleutherios is frequently associated with Isis,<sup>62</sup> and texts from the early Roman period frequently mention Zeus-Eleutherios as a title of the Roman Emperor.<sup>63</sup> This connection emphasises the distinction between the Serapia of Khoiak/Tybi and the Serapia of Pharmuthi/Pachon in the local calendar. The god Serapis honoured at the end of Pharmuthi seems to be a Hellenised god, who was equated with Zeus and was perhaps designed as master of the universe. Even on imperial coins, Serapis is often portrayed as a funerary god. At his side sits the three-headed dog Cerberus, guardian of the underworld, and on his head is the kalathos of Pluto.<sup>64</sup>

The Serapia of Pharmuthi/Pachon was an opportunity of a bonus (εἰς λόγον ἑορτικῶν Σαραπίοι) given to two groups of slaves, who respectively received 1000 and 1600

---

<sup>55</sup> BGU II.362.xii.16-18.

<sup>56</sup> BGU II.362.vi.22-4 = *Sel.Pap.* II.404.

<sup>57</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 132.

<sup>58</sup> Fraser 1960a; 1-54.

<sup>59</sup> BGU II.362.xii.8.

<sup>60</sup> CIL I<sup>2</sup> 256 and 280-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Stud. Pal.* XXII.183.iv.81.

<sup>62</sup> SB III.7257.2 (12 BC): in association with Isis-Thermouthis at Dendera; OGIS II.569.1 (first century AD): in relation with Isis; SB V.8420.2 = *IG Philae* 142 (7 BC) in the temple of Isis on Philae.

<sup>63</sup> *P. Oslo.* II.26.39 (5/4 BC).

<sup>64</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 133.

drachmas in AD 315.<sup>65</sup> The present given at the Serapia of Pharmuthi/Pachon (Σαραπίους ἑορτικόν) is also mentioned in a second-century AD papyrus that gives expenditures on a number of local festivals.<sup>66</sup> This is one of the oldest references to the word ἑορτικός, which is widely used, especially in the plural (ἑορτικά), in lease contracts of the fifth and sixth century AD.<sup>67</sup> This bonus was probably given to slaves in return for their duties during the festival of Serapis. In an apprenticeship contract of a slave who plays the *aulos*, one finds the expression κιθαριστηρίους Σαραπιακοῖς or ‘the performers of the kithara of Serapis’.<sup>68</sup> This implies that slaves were employed to play the flutes and kitharas during the Serapia. It is to be noticed that the contract begins from Pharmuthi, the month at the end of which the Serapia took place. Although the context of the papyrus is unknown, the document shows certain activities or rites particularly associated with the festival of Serapis. Not surprisingly, the slave-flautists dedicated to the god Serapis, *dicati magno sarapi tibicines*, also figure in the procession of Isis in imperial Rome.<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusions

Two annual festivals of the god Serapis existed in Graeco-Roman Egypt: the Serapia on 26 Khoiak (Julian: 22 December) and the Serapia on 30 Pharmuthi (Julian: 25 April). The Serapia of Khoiak is a continuation of the Pharaonic and Ptolemaic festival of Osiris; it is confirmed in reliefs at traditional temples like Esna, Edfu, and Dendera, where Serapis was honoured on 26 Khoiak as Osiris. The Serapia of Khoiak celebrates the traditional dimension of the divinity, and is confirmed by the archives of village temples like Soknopaiou Nesos. In the Roman period, the Serapia of Khoiak-Tybi continues as a celebration for Osiris. Although the festival was mainly celebrated by the non-Hellenised part of the population, this does not mean that it only expressed the identity of those legally-defined as Egyptian. The Serapia on 26 Khoiak is characterised with a sacrifice in the Alexandrian Lageion and with a public procession in Alexandria and elsewhere in the *chora*. The Egyptians of the *chora* were not precluded from travelling to Alexandria to participate in the Serapia and brought bulls and other animals for sacrifice, as the edict of Caracalla confirm. In

---

<sup>65</sup> *P.Stras.* VI.559.12-15.

<sup>66</sup> *P.Ross.Georg.* II.ii.41.34.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. *P.Stras.* I.40.49 (AD 569). Cf. *P.Oxy.* IV.724.5-6 (AD 155).

<sup>68</sup> *BGU* IV.1125.25.

<sup>69</sup> *Apul. Metamorphoses* XI.9.

Pharmuthi-Pachon another aspect of the god Serapis, closer to the Greek Zeus, seems to have been celebrated. The Serapia of Pharmuthi-Pachon is mainly celebrated by small Graeco-Egyptian bourgeoisie and wealthy land owners, who then give a bonus to their slaves in return for their duties. The festival probably had an official, political character since it is confirmed in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Ptolemais Euergetis and in the calendar of imperial Rome.

## Bibliography

Abbas, E. and Abdelwahed, Y. 2014. 'The Domestic Pylon in the Light of Greek Papyri', *Rosetta* 15, 1-27.

Abdelwahed, Y. 2015. *Egyptian Cultural Identity in the Architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC-AD 325)*. Oxford: Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 6.

Akurgal, E. 1973. *Ancient Civilizations and Ruins of Turkey: From Prehistoric Times until the End of the Roman Period*. Istanbul.

Alliot, M. 1949. 'Le culte d'Horus à Edfou au temps des Ptolémées I', *BdE* 20, 244-5.

Bloch, H. 1959. 'The Serapeum of Ostia and the Brick-Stamps of 123 A. D. A New Landmark in the History of Roman Architecture', *AJA* 63 (3), 225-40.

Bonneau, D. 1964. *La Crue du Nil, divinité égyptienne: à travers mille ans d'histoire (332 av.-641 ap. J.-C.) d'après les auteurs grecs et latins, et les documents des époques ptolémaïque, romaine et byzantine*. Paris.

Bonnet, H. 1952. *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*. Berlin.

Botti, G. 1895. *L'Acropole d'Alexandrie et le Serapeum d'après Aphthonius et les fouilles. Mémoires présenté à la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie*. Alexandria.

Chassinat, É. 1966. *Le mystère d'Osiris au mois de Khoiak*. Cairo.

Cook, B. F. 1966. *Inscribed Hadra Vases in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York.

Conybeare, F. C. 1912: *Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. London and New York.

Davies, G. 2011. 'Before Sarcophagi', in Elsner and Huskinson (eds.), *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*. Berlin and New York, 21-53.

Fairman, H. W. 1954-5. 'Worship and Festivals in an Egyptian Temple', *BJRL* 37, 182-92.

Fraser, P. M. 1960a. 'Two Studies on the Cult of Serapis in the Hellenistic World', *Opusc. Athen.* III, 1-54.

Fraser, P. M. 1960b. 'Inscriptions from Ptolemaic Egypt', *Berytus* 13, 159-61.

- Gaballa, G. A. and Kitchen, K. A. 1969. 'The Festival of Sokar', *Orientalia* 38, 1-76.
- Goddio, F. 2007. *Underwater Archaeology in the Canopic Region in Egypt: Topography and Excavations of Heracleion-Thonis and East Canopus (1996-2006)*. Oxford.
- Grimm, G. and J. S. McKenzie 2004. 'Architectural Fragments excavated in the Serapeum in Alexandria in c. 1900', *JRS* 94, 115-21.
- Goddio, F. and Clauss, M. 2006. *Egypt's Sunken Treasures*. Munich and New York.
- Golvin, J.-C., Abd El-Hamid, S., Wagner, G. and Dunand, F. 1981. 'Le petit Sarapieion romain de Louqsor', *BIFAO* 81, 115-48.
- Golvin, J.-C., Abd El-Hamid, S., Wagner, G. and Dunand, F. 1986. 'Le petit Serapeum de l'époque d'Hadrien', *Dossiers Histoire et Archéologie* 101, 66-8.
- Henrichs, H. 1968. 'Vespasian's Visit to Alexandria', *ZPE* 3, 51-80.
- Humphrey, J. H. 1986. *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing*. London.
- Husson, G. 1983. *Oikia. Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Égypte d'après les papyrus grecs*. Paris.
- Kayser, F. 1994. *Recueil des Inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d'Alexandrie impériale (Ier-IIIe s. apr. J.-C.)*. Cairo.
- Letronne, J. A. 1974. *Recueil des Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de l'Égypte I*. Paris.
- McKenzie, J. 2007. *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt (c. 300 BC to AD 700)*. New Haven and London.
- McKenzie, J. 2009. 'The Serapeum of Alexandria: Its Destruction and Reconstruction', *JRA* 22, 772-82.
- McKenzie, J., Gibson, S. and Reyes, A. T. 2004. 'Reconstructing the Serapeum in Alexandria from the Archaeological Evidence', *JRS* 94, 73-114.
- Perpillou-Thomas, F. 1993. *Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine d'après la documentation papyrologique grecque*. Leuven: *Studia Hellenistica* 31.
- Rice, E. E. 1983. *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*. Oxford.

- Rönne, T. and Fraser, P. M. 1953. 'A Hadra Vase in the Ashmolean Museum', *JEA* 39, 84-94.
- Roullet, A. 1972. *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome*. Leiden.
- Rowe, A. 1946. *Discovery of the Famous Temple and Enclosure of Serapis at Alexandria*. Cairo: *Supplément aux ASAE*, cahier 2.
- Rowe, A. and Rees, B. R. 1957. 'A Contribution to the Archaeology of the Western Desert: IV. The Great Serapeum of Alexandria', *BJRL* 39 (2), 485-520.
- Sabottka, M. 2008. *Das Serapeum in Alexandria: Untersuchungen zur Architektur und Baugeschichte des Heiligtums von der frühen ptolemäischen Zeit bis zur Zerstörung 391 n.Chr.* Cairo.
- Salzman, M. R. 1990. *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. Berkely, Los Angeles and Oxford.
- Savvopoulos, K. and Bianchi, R. S. 2012. *Alexandrian Sculpture in the Graeco-Roman Museum*. Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Graeco-Roman Museum Series 1.
- Sauneron, S. 1962. *Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna: aux derniers siècles du Paganisme*. Cairo.
- Schwartz, J. 1966. 'La fin du Serapeum d'Alexandrie', in A. E. Samuel (ed.), *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles*, New Haven, 97-111.
- Taylor, R. 2004. 'Hadrian's Serapeum in Rome', *AJA* 108 (2), 223-66.
- Turner, E. G. 1952. 'Roman Oxyrhynchus', *JEA* 38, 78-93.
- Wace, A. J. B 1944. 'Greek Inscriptions from the Serapeum', *BFA* 2, 18-23.
- Wild, R. A. 1984. 'The Known Isis-Sarapis Sanctuaries from the Roman Period', *ANRW II* (17.4), 1739-1851.
- Wormald, F. 1929. 'A Fragment of Accounts Dealing with Religious Festivals', *JEA* 15, 239-242.