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# **The Harpokratia in Graeco-Roman Egypt**

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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to reconstruct the festival of the Harpokratia and its significance in the Graeco-Roman period based on Greek papyri uncovered from Egypt and other material and written evidence. Despite the popularity of the cult of the god Harpokrates in the Graeco-Roman period, this article suggests that the festival had a local rather than a pan-Egyptian character since it was only confirmed in the villages of Soknopaiou Nesos and Euhemeria in the Arsinoite area. The Harpokratia was celebrated in Tybi and was marked with a banquet of wine and a bread and lentil-meal. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the festival was the purificatory public procession, which was a suitable moment for different worshippers to address the god for the fulfilment of their supplications.

Keywords: Harpokrates, Harpokratia, the Arsinoite nome, Graeco-Roman Egypt.

## Introduction

The paper starts with a brief discussion of the literature on the god Harpokrates to highlight the views found in current literature on the subject and the contribution of this article. It then introduces the figure of Harpokrates and evidence in art, and then briefly explains the theological development and different associations of Harpokrates in the Graeco-Roman period. The significance of the festival from Greek papyri will be the final element presented in the article.<sup>1</sup>

There has been much discussion on child deities in ancient Egypt, whose birth was associated with the ruler's royal legitimacy and hereditary succession.<sup>2</sup> Like Heka-pakhered and Ihy, respectively the child incarnations of the god Horus at Esna and Dendera, Hor-pakhered, also known as Harpokrates, was a child-form incarnation of the god Horus.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have approached Harpokrates from different perspectives. Given their multitude and popularity, the stylistic evolution and content of the magical stelae called *cippi* have received the bulk of academic attention.<sup>4</sup> Terracotta figurines and clay sealings with the figure of Harpokrates have been used as evidence that the god was paramount in the domestic sphere.<sup>5</sup> Gem-amulets depicting Harpokrates on the lotus blossom emphasised his solar background.<sup>6</sup> The statuettes of Harpokrates holding/riding the goose have been interpreted in terms of a simple, generic subject.<sup>7</sup> However, they also personified Dionysus/Harpokrates triumphing over evil. Dionysus is linked to rebirth, and hence, in Egypt, to Harpokrates.<sup>8</sup> According to the Orphic mysteries, Dionysus-Zagreus

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<sup>1</sup> In this monograph on public and private festivals in Graeco-Roman Egypt, Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 88-89 gives only passing comments on the Harpokratia.

<sup>2</sup> Hall 1977; Yoo 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Budde 2010: 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Seele 1947; Scott 1951; Bakry 1967; Brentjes 1971; Sternberg-El Hotabi 1987, 1994, 1999; Ritner 1989; Abdi 2002; Draycott 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Milne 1906.

<sup>6</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner 1885.

<sup>8</sup> Ridgway 2006.

was dismembered by the Titans and restored to life from his heart, while Horus the Child was born from Isis and Osiris after the latter is dismembered by his brother Seth and was reborn by Isis.<sup>9</sup> Depictions of Dionysus/Harpokrates show him with the typically Egyptian side-lock of childhood.<sup>10</sup> The material evidence of Harpokrates found abroad testified to his integration into religious life in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>11</sup> So far, no serious discussion of the festival associated with Harpokrates (referred to as Harpokratia in Greek papyri) has appeared. This paper focuses on the reconstruction of the Harpokratia and its significance, in the light of Greek papyri and other material evidence, to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the cult of the child deity in Graeco-Roman Egypt.<sup>12</sup>

### **Harpokrates: Iconography and Theological Development**

Harpokrates is the Greek transliteration of the Egyptian *Hr-p<sup>3</sup>-Hrd* or Hor-pa-khered, 'Horus the Child'. In other words, it is the *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian god Horus in his boyish appearance.<sup>13</sup> Hor-pa-khered is also transcribed into *Hrpkrꜥ* in Phoenician and Aramaic texts.<sup>14</sup> The personal names related to Harpokrates were rarely given to Egyptian children.<sup>15</sup> Only a few examples are known, such as Psyphis son of Harpokras (a short form of Harpokrates), a priest of the fifth tribe of the gods at Tebtynis and one of the fifty exempted persons who is mentioned in a notice of birth in AD 49-50.<sup>16</sup> A mummy label dated to AD 100 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, belongs to Artemidora, daughter of Harpokras.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most famous Harpokras is the

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<sup>9</sup> Marabini Moevs 2005: 81-2.

<sup>10</sup> Kozloff 1980; Tran Tarn Tinh Jaeger, and Poulin 1988; Ridgway 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Barret 2011, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout the article, I use the texts and translations of Greek papyri as they appear in the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri. If I use a different text than that of the DDbDP, I record this in the footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Perdrizet 1921: 28; Forgeau 2010: 24, 48, 334.

<sup>14</sup> Degen 1970; Muchiki 1994: 127.

<sup>15</sup> Cooney 1972: 290.

<sup>16</sup> *P. Tebt.* II.299.

<sup>17</sup> Allen 1913: 197, no. 5.

Egyptian physician from Memphis, who, upon the request of Pliny the Younger, was probably granted Roman and Alexandrian citizenship under Trajan.<sup>18</sup>

The Egyptian hieroglyph determinative for child is a nude figure sitting with hand to mouth (Egyptian *hrd*).<sup>19</sup> This is connected to the iconography of the child god Harpokrates, who is shown wearing the Horus-lock on the right side of his head, and appears with the right index touching his lips, a conventional simplification of the childish habit of thumb-sucking.<sup>20</sup> Classical writers thought that the portrayal of Harpokrates with a finger to his mouth was a symbol of silence; hence Harpokrates was regarded as the god of silence and the guardian of secrets.<sup>21</sup> This mistaken interpretation persisted into the Renaissance Period, when Harpokrates was particularly associated with the peach tree, a symbol of silence, since its leaves resemble a tongue.<sup>22</sup> The *signum harpocraticum*, which is the name given to this gesture by art historians following the Renaissance artists and scholars, was also used by German scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a symbol of intellectual retreat or political sagacity.<sup>23</sup> In an Egyptian context however, it is a gesture of childhood alongside nudity, the Horus-lock and the crouching posture.<sup>24</sup> Surviving sculptures represent the nude, chubby Harpokrates wearing royal or divine headgear such as the *pschent*, *hmhm*, *shuti*, lotus bud, modius, ivy wreath, solar disc, moon with crescent, or a topknot tied with ribbon.<sup>25</sup> In the Pharaonic period, Horus the Child was linked with emblems of royalty, abundance, and light such as the *heka* sceptre, *nekhekha* flail, the *pschent*, *hmhm* and *shuti* crowns, quiver, sistrum, palm-leaf, the lotus, pomegranate, the pot, small shrines, and the torch.<sup>26</sup> These emblems continued to be

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<sup>18</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 10.5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Gardiner 1957, Sign List A12, 443.

<sup>20</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

<sup>21</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.688, 692; Plut. *De Is. et Os.*: 68. Cf. 545-7. See Matthey 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Chastel 1985; Ingman and Ingman 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Mulsow 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Hadzisteliou-Price 1969: 101.

<sup>25</sup> Bliquez 1972: pl. 43:1-2; Ballet 1982: pl. IV.a-b; Bunson 2002, 109.

<sup>26</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

associated with the god in the Graeco-Roman period. In addition, the cornucopia began to appear with the god, emphasising his association with abundance.<sup>27</sup> Harpokrates is shown on *cippi* and temple reliefs dominating noxious beasts and reptiles such as crocodiles, lions, hippopotami, and serpents as he could ward off the evil powers of these creatures.<sup>28</sup> His associations with solar, chthonic, and oracular deities such as Amun, Khonsu, Serapis, and Tithoes justified his appearance with the ram, goose, dog, bull, and sphinx.<sup>29</sup> In the Graeco-Roman period, animal connections with Harpokrates also included solar, prophetic, and hunted animals such as the cock, peacock, dolphin, horse, camel, donkey, and elephant reflecting the different associations of his cult.<sup>30</sup>

The image of Horus the Child depicted with his finger in his mouth first appeared in the Pyramid Texts.<sup>31</sup> In Coffin Text Spell 148, through Isis' prayers to Re, the child Horus received a place in the solar boat and a *mehen*-snake like Re.<sup>32</sup> In Coffin Text Spell 760, Isis enabled Horus to become lord of the night sky, namely the moon god who follows the sun god.<sup>33</sup> From the end of the New Kingdom onwards, Horus the Child became a deity with his own cult, where he is shown in the temples dedicated to his mothers, Isis and Hathor, like other child deities.<sup>34</sup> The cult of Horus the Child is attested in the Twenty-first Dynasty in the Theban area.<sup>35</sup> He was assimilated with the moon-god Khonsu in Karnak, where he was called 'the great, the first of Amun', a title originally held by Khonsu.<sup>36</sup> Harpokrates also held the same title in a graffiti at Wadi Hammamat, dating back to Darius

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<sup>27</sup> Bonner 1946: 45; Malaise 1991: 13-35; Malaise 1994: 373-83; Hall 1977, pl. XXIV-XXIX.

<sup>28</sup> Budge 1904: 267-74; Draycott 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Ballet 1982; Gardner 1885; Quaegebeur 1977.

<sup>30</sup> El-Khashab 1984; Litinas 2002: 105.

<sup>31</sup> Pyramid Texts 663c-664a = Sethe 1908: 364-5. Cf. Meeks 1977: 1004.

<sup>32</sup> Gilula 1971; O'Connell 1983.

<sup>33</sup> Coffin Text Spell 760 = De Buck 1956, 390.

<sup>34</sup> Tran Tarn Tinh, Jaeger, and Poulin 1988.

<sup>35</sup> Budde 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Budge 1909: 277.

I, where he wears the *shuti*-crown characteristic of Amun and Min, emphasising his solar associations.<sup>37</sup>

Since the Late Period, child-deities were worshipped in the cult centres of important mother goddesses, such as Isis and Hathor, as their sons.<sup>38</sup> As a child of the divine triads, they symbolised the cyclical rejuvenation of the universe and the legitimate succession of the reigning pharaoh.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the different epochs of ancient Egyptian history, Horus the Child remained the most prominent of all child deities. He was the physical manifestation of the young sun-god, who was usually visualised as a child sitting or standing on the lotus blossom as shown on coins, gem amulets, and material objects.<sup>40</sup> Harpokrates is depicted upon the lotus flower in gem-amulets like Nefertem, who appears in Egyptian sculpture crouching on the lotus blossom.<sup>41</sup> In both cases, the god symbolises his role as the newly-born sun-god arising from the water of chaos.<sup>42</sup> This belief has been mirrored on an offering or ivory-toilet spoon, now in the British Museum (EA5957), which depicts Harpokrates supporting a mussel-shaped scoop and standing on the lotus blossom.<sup>43</sup> Horus the Child was syncretised and identified with other child solar deities like Ihy, Khonsu, Harsomtus, and Heqa.<sup>44</sup> Harpokrates was closely associated with the figure of the solar child, who symbolised cosmic renewal and was usually depicted sitting on the lotus flower.<sup>45</sup> The periodical renewal of divine and political life was believed to be

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<sup>37</sup> Ballet 1982: 77, pl. iv.a.

<sup>38</sup> Budde 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Te Velde 1971: 83.

<sup>40</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

<sup>41</sup> Hall 1977: 55, pl. xxiv.2.

<sup>42</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

<sup>43</sup> The object is interpreted as an offering spoon by Masson (Masson 2015: 3, Fig. 4), but it is described as a toilet spoon on the BM website: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?assetId=319278001&objectId=118976&partId=1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=319278001&objectId=118976&partId=1).

<sup>44</sup> Yoo 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Endreffy 2014.

realised and perpetuated by the king's birth as a child deity of the mother goddess in the *mammisi* of Egyptian temples.<sup>46</sup>

Harpokrates transcended his Egyptian origin through his association with other deities which secured new followers for his cult in the Graeco-Roman period, when he grew in importance in temple and popular cults.<sup>47</sup> Harpokrates was popular in different areas across Egypt in the Ptolemaic period. As the son of Isis and Serapis, his cult was well-established in Alexandria, where he once had a Harmotieum.<sup>48</sup> In Pelusium, he was worshipped in the form of the prophetic Zeus-Kasios.<sup>49</sup> In the Menelaite nome, Harpokrates took the form of a child with a crocodile's body.<sup>50</sup> He was also venerated at Koptos and Wadi Hammamat as the son of Isis and Min.<sup>51</sup> At Aphroditopolis, he was paired with Harmotes (Horus-of-the-Two-Eyes).<sup>52</sup> The fame of Harpokrates was at its greatest in the Arsinoite area, where his terracotta figurines indicated his popularity among the peasantry.<sup>53</sup> Harpokrates was associated with Isis and Serapis in Tebtynis, and with Isis and Pramarres at Soknopaiou Nesos.<sup>54</sup>

In the Roman Period, Harpokrates attained the peak of his popularity in Egypt and his cult spread, in the shadow of Isis and Serapis, into different regions of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>55</sup> Although surviving material culture of Harpokrates, in a multitude of types, was uncovered at every Graeco-Roman site in Egypt, there are few references to his worship

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<sup>46</sup> Assmann 2001: 116-119.

<sup>47</sup> Barret 2011, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> *BGU* VI.1216.43-7.

<sup>49</sup> Ach. Tat. 3.6; Bonner 1946.

<sup>50</sup> Totti-Gemünd 1995: 285, figs. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Ballet 1982.

<sup>52</sup> *BGU* VI.1216.43-7.

<sup>53</sup> Cooney 1972: 288.

<sup>54</sup> Nachtergaele 1985: 227-8.

<sup>55</sup> On his cult at Delos: Barret 2011, 2015. Bacteria: Lecuyot 1998. Ostia: Bakker 1994, 207. North Africa: Nagel 2012.



in the written sources. He was rarely the principal deity to whom a temple was dedicated.<sup>56</sup> Harpokrates was a *sunnaos theos* only, and in imperial inscriptions he is usually found together with Isis, but they also appear separately in Egyptian inscriptions.<sup>57</sup> A number of terracotta figurines of Harpokrates have come to light from different sites in Egypt and abroad, mostly in domestic contexts.<sup>58</sup> He was essentially 'the favourite god of the house and of the lower classes' in Egypt and, perhaps, elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Although Harpokrates is often depicted with Isis and Serapis, he equally appears with Anubis, Nephthys, Tithoes, Hermanubis, Dionysus, Demeter, Aphrodite, Eros, Euthenia, Selene, and Helios in the Graeco-Roman period.<sup>60</sup> Harpokrates was also assimilated with the ram of Mendes, the ithyphallic Min, Sobek, Helios, Sol, and Herakles.<sup>61</sup> The connections with myriad deities emphasised the different associations of the god Harpokrates, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **The Associations of Harpokrates**

Harpokrates was recognised in Egypt and abroad as the son of Isis and Serapis. A third-century AD inscription from Chalkis records that Harpokrates was the first to make *adyta* and sanctuaries for the gods; to devise measures and numbers and produce the sistrum for Isis; and devised the ways to hunt all kinds of animals.<sup>62</sup> He established rulers for cities at all times and presided over the upbringing of children.<sup>63</sup> With the aid of the Muses, he

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<sup>56</sup> Milne 1906: 40.

<sup>57</sup> Tran Tarn Tinh, Jaeger, and Poulin 1988.

<sup>58</sup> Rübsam 1974: 83, 157.

<sup>59</sup> Mercer 1942: 130; Barret 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Dow and Upson 1944, 68-9; Lecuyot 1998: 114-15; Cristea 2014, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Griffiths 1970: 43-44; Melkerbach 1995, 89; Cristea 2013. Cf. Hdt. 2.113.

<sup>62</sup> Harder 1943.

<sup>63</sup> Tran Tarn Tinh, Jaeger, and Poulin 1988.

established hymns and dances of men and women.<sup>64</sup> He invented the mixing of wine and water as well as flutes and pipes.<sup>65</sup>

Harpokrates had strong magical and prophetic connections. Herodotus mentioned the oracle of Apollo/Horus,<sup>66</sup> and Diodorus recounted that Horus/Apollo learned medicine and divination from his mother Isis and benefited people by his oracular and healing abilities.<sup>67</sup> The two names Horus and Harpokrates denote one God.<sup>68</sup> According to Plutarch, the birth of Harpokrates is the same as that of Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, and the avenger of his father.<sup>69</sup> Harpokrates and other forms of the god Horus like Harphenesis, Harpebekis, and Horus-of-the-Camp also occur in oracle petitions.<sup>70</sup> In the third-century AD inscription from Chalkis, the title *astromantis* “astrologer” is given to Harpokrates.<sup>71</sup> *Astromantis* was interpreted in terms of the divination called *lychnomantia*, the prophecy using the light of lamps in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>72</sup> Harpokrates-Horus-Apollo was the god of the sun and all the light that comes from the sun, the most significant astrologer in antiquity.<sup>73</sup>

Harpokrates was also a god of abundance and nature, particularly in rural communities.<sup>74</sup> He was associated with the proliferation of agricultural products, and usually appears with emblems of fertility.<sup>75</sup> The terracotta figurines known as ‘Harpokrates and the pot’, where he holds a pot with one hand and places his other in it so as to take food, is probably

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<sup>64</sup> Dio. Sic. 1.27.

<sup>65</sup> Nock 1949: 221.

<sup>66</sup> Hdt.: 2.83.

<sup>67</sup> Dio. Sic.: 1.25.7.

<sup>68</sup> El-Khachab 1971.

<sup>69</sup> Plut. *De Is. et Os.*: 19, 358 E.

<sup>70</sup> Ryholt 1993.

<sup>71</sup> Harder 1943. For a review of this book: Nock 1949.

<sup>72</sup> Betz 1986: 10, 15, 1738, 56; Pinch 1994: 80; Wilburn 2012: 90-93; Valdes 2013, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Totti 1988; Podvin 1999.

<sup>74</sup> Tran Tarn Tinh, Jaeger and Poulin 1988.

<sup>75</sup> Milne 1945: 90, El-Khachab 1971.

related to food production in Egypt.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Harpokrates received the Greek name Karpokrates ‘Lord of the Cereals/Harvest’.<sup>77</sup> As the personification of the young sun-god and the producer of the vegetation of agricultural products, cereals, and fruits, Harpokrates was considered as the deity of rejuvenescence.<sup>78</sup> The correlation between Harpokrates and fertility was also emphasised in Graeco-Roman wall paintings and numismatics. The god appears with the sphinx god Tithoes in a mural representation of an alcove of a Karanidian house with a lotus blossom.<sup>79</sup> An Alexandrian coin of Antoninus Pius in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, shows the figure of Harpokrates in a temple façade with all the symbols of fertility such as papyrus, lotus, and cornucopia.<sup>80</sup>

Harpokrates similarly possessed apotropaic abilities. Together, the small amulets worn around the neck in the shape of the *cippi* of Horus/Harpokrates<sup>81</sup> and the pendants of Harpokrates, uncovered from houses in Egypt, Herculaneum, and Israel confirm the domestic cult of Harpokrates.<sup>82</sup> Like Bes, Harpokrates was a protective deity associated with the family, particularly babies, toddlers, children, and the home.<sup>83</sup> He was the god to whom the inhabitants turned for protection from potential evil forces, aggressive wild animals, venomous scorpions and snakes, which were Sethian representatives of the forces of chaos.<sup>84</sup> Thus, one magical spell dating to between the fourth and fifth centuries AD urges friendly deities to:

...protect his house with those who live here from all evil, from every kind of witchcraft, from spirits in the air and from the human eye; from terrible toil, from the bites of scorpions and snakes.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Matthey 2011: 554.

<sup>77</sup> Sittig 1913: 242-5.

<sup>78</sup> Webb 1945, 369.

<sup>79</sup> Gazda 1983: 39, fig. 68; Abdelwahed 2016c: 48, fig. 37.

<sup>80</sup> Milne 1945: 90, pl. xiii.11.

<sup>81</sup> Ritner 1989; Abdi 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Egypt: Simpson 1949: 63; Herculaneum: Tran Tam Tinh, 1984, 1971, 21-22; Israel: Fischer and Jackson-Tal 2003: 40.

<sup>83</sup> Dunand 1979: 41-2; Abdalla 1991; Cristea 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Draycott 2011: 125.

<sup>85</sup> *POslo*. I.5.

Since the protection from ‘the bites of scorpions and snakes’ is the theme of the *cippi* of Horus/Harpokrates, it can be premised that Harpokrates was one of the deities invoked in this magical formula. Harpokrates defeated disease and healed the bites and stings of poisonous animals.<sup>86</sup> This healing function of the god is the core of the *cippi*,<sup>87</sup> which protected the owner/bearer/living viewer from poisonous creatures through the magical spells and figures carved on them.<sup>88</sup> The earliest known *cippi* date back to the Twenty-Second Dynasty, yet they attained popularity in the Graeco-Roman period, where monumental *cippi* were set up in temples or private houses.<sup>89</sup> Small *cippi* amulets pierced and worn around the neck or wrist had a similar apotropaic function,<sup>90</sup> as do the pendants of Harpokrates in Egypt and elsewhere,<sup>91</sup> or the black glass paste engraved with the figure of Harpokrates and the word *charis* or ‘apotropaic charm’ in the Michigan Collection.<sup>92</sup> The celebrants perhaps wore or carried the *cippi*, at least the small and light ones, in the procession associated with the Harpokratia. The representation of the festival of Sokar-Osiris in Thebes on a *cippus* of Horus the Child seems to suggest that some *cippi* were carried around in the procession of certain religious festivals.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Harpokratia in Greek papyri**

There is no evidence of a festival for the god Horus the Child prior to the Graeco-Roman period. Moreover, the calendars of Egyptian temples in the Graeco-Roman period, like those at Kom Ombo and Edfu, do not include a festival in connection with the god Hor-

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<sup>86</sup> Lecuyot 1998: 113; Schneider 2004: 258-9.

<sup>87</sup> Oriental Institute No. 16881. Seele 1947: 45, pl. I.A.

<sup>88</sup> Ritner 1989.

<sup>89</sup> Seele 1947; Scott 1951.

<sup>90</sup> Draycott 2011; West 2011: 137, 145.

<sup>91</sup> For a silver pendant of Harpokrates from Tell Basta: Simpson 1949: 63. For glass pendants of Harpokrates outside Egypt: Fischer and Jackson-Tal 2003; Farhi 2016.

<sup>92</sup> The Michigan Collection, No. 26104 (Bonner 1946: 56, pl. xii.9).

<sup>93</sup> Museum of Seized Antiquities, Cairo, Citadel, Inventory No. 379 (Kákosy and Moussa 1998).

pa-khered in Tybi.<sup>94</sup> Yet the closest parallel in the calendar of Esna is ‘the festival of Heqa, the child god’ on 18 Tybi.<sup>95</sup> Heqa is the local form of the child-god of the divine triad at Esna; he is equivalent to Ihy at Dendera and Hor-sema-tawy (Horus-Uniter-of-the-Two-Lands) at Edfu.<sup>96</sup> Despite the close connection between Ihy and Hor-pa-khered, it seems that the evidence for the Harpokratia only appeared in Greek papyri from the Graeco-Roman period.<sup>97</sup>

Broadly speaking, Greek papyri often give the festivals’ names, dates, venues, and, in some cases, all or some of their religious practices.<sup>98</sup> In the case of the Harpokratia, surviving papyri unfortunately do not provide a complete picture of the religious accounts of the festival. Although no direct reference is made in the papyri to clarify the motivations for the Harpokratia, the papyri highlight some of the religious practices within the festival, which are not available in other material evidence. Literary sources and material objects featuring Harpokrates may help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge left from the surviving papyri. When studied in combination, the material evidence helps to reconstruct the Harpokratia and its significance in the Graeco-Roman period.

The Harpokratia is the name given in Greek papyri to the festival held in honour of the god Harpokrates. Unfortunately, there is limited reference to the Harpokratia in Greek papyri; it only occurs in three papyrological documents in connection with two villages in the Arsinoite nome, Soknopaiou Nesos and Euhemeria.<sup>99</sup> These sites are located respectively on the north and south shores of Lake Qarun. The settlements flourished in the Graeco-Roman period, where material evidence shows that they were multicultural milieus where Egyptian and Graeco-Roman deities (including Amun, Osiris, Serapis,

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<sup>94</sup> Grimm 1994; Coppens 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Sauneron 1962: 17.

<sup>96</sup> Yoyotte and Chuvin 1988.

<sup>97</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993.

<sup>98</sup> Abdelwahed 2015, 2016a.

<sup>99</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 88-89.

Horus, and Dioscuri) appeared side by side.<sup>100</sup> A *cretula* showing Soknopaios as a crocodile with a falcon's head points to religious syncretism of Sobek and Horus at Soknopaiou Nesos.<sup>101</sup>

Greek papyri confirm the performance of the Harpokratia only in these two sites, despite the popularity of the cult of Harpokrates in the Arsinoite nome, as a private god of the home, and his appeal amongst the lower strata of society in Graeco-Roman Egypt.<sup>102</sup> The Harpokratia is first confirmed in a fragmentary papyrus from Philadelphia in 247 BC in an account of expenses, perhaps on festivities, in *artabas* and *choinikes* from the archive of Zenon.<sup>103</sup> It is also mentioned in a letter of the Roman veteran Gemellus to his son Sabinus in AD 108.<sup>104</sup> The festival is finally mentioned in an account of expenses by the priests of Soknopaiou Nesos in relation to a number of festivals held in the village in AD 138.<sup>105</sup> Despite the huge gap in time period, the three surviving papyri suggest that the festival of the god Harpokrates endured for nearly four centuries. It began early in the Ptolemaic Period and lasted at least until the mid-second century AD, if not later. In Soknopaiou Nesos, the Harpokratia is confirmed on 16 Tybi, but it seems that the festival was held on 14 Tybi at Euhemeria.<sup>106</sup> Nothing can be confirmed about the discrepancy in dates between the two villages.

It seems that the Harpokratia represented the climax of the cult of the god Harpokrates. In other words, it was the time in which all the divine functions and attributes associated with the child deity (solar, prophetic, apotropaic, and fertility), which are invoked in different forms of surviving visual and material objects (including iconography, *cippi*, terracotta figurines, gems, amulets, and coins) could be manifested at one event.

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<sup>100</sup> Rübsam 1974: 154-72.

<sup>101</sup> Davoli 2014: 67, fig. 7b.

<sup>102</sup> Lüdeckens 1964: 229.

<sup>103</sup> *PSI* VII.861.9-10.

<sup>104</sup> *P.Fay.* 117.11.

<sup>105</sup> *SPP* XXII.183.113.

<sup>106</sup> *P.Fay.* 117.

Religious festivals with public processions provided the celebrants with festive moments in which they could approach and communicate with the god for the fulfilment of their desires and needs, which of course differed from one celebrant to another. The celebrants used to bring down bulls and other animals for sacrifice during the nocturnal festival of Serapis, which was held in Pachon at Alexandria and represented a religious momentum in the life of the inhabitants.<sup>107</sup>

The majority of ancient Egyptians were illiterate peasant farmers, but this does not necessarily mean that they were ignorant of their religious beliefs. A quick look at material remains from Egyptian villages in the Arsinoite nome and beyond would clearly reveal that the peasants had knowledge of the details of their own religious life. The villagers spent a surprisingly high proportion of their meagre incomes on spells, amulets, and rituals purchased from women and men with specialised magical knowledge.<sup>108</sup> In contrast with festival activities that took place inside temple enclosures, which the common people may not have had access to,<sup>109</sup> the populace had no barrier to participate in festivals that included public processions associated with what we now call Egyptian and Graeco-Roman deities.<sup>110</sup> At Soknopaïou Nesos, the dromos of the main temple of Soknopaios extended into the south end of the settlement. Built on top of a natural hill, it was a monumental processional route and the spectacular scene for public processions during the numerous local feasts of the village.<sup>111</sup> The Harpokratia appears in *SPP* XXII.183 as one of the festivals listed in the local calendar of Soknopaïou Nesos.<sup>112</sup> It was an important festive moment in the life of the inhabitants of the village, one of whom exploited the festival to make use of a nome official by giving him food gifts.<sup>113</sup> It seems

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<sup>107</sup> Abdelwahed 2016b.

<sup>108</sup> Wilburn 2012: 54-94.

<sup>109</sup> Baines 1997: 233-4.

<sup>110</sup> Abdelwahed 2016a, 2016b.

<sup>111</sup> Davoli 2014.

<sup>112</sup> *SPP* XXII.183.113.

<sup>113</sup> *P.Fay.* 117.

that the public procession of the Harpokratia was an opportunity for the participants to approach the deity for fulfilling their desires.

The three surviving papyri mentioning the Harpokratia provide insights into some of the religious practices within the festival. A taxing-list of 110 BC mentions that the holdings of the temple of Harmotes and Harpokrates at Aphroditopolis amount to 130 arourae for making a 'bread and lentil-meal' of the two greatest gods.<sup>114</sup> Undoubtedly, the bread and lentil-meal were connected with some cult or ritual practice in honour of Harmotes and Harpokrates, particularly since the lentils mentioned in the papyrus recall Plutarch's statement that lentils were particularly offered to Harpokrates.<sup>115</sup> Yet it remains uncertain whether the bread and lentil-meal associated with Harpokrates was a ritual part of the Harpokratia. In AD 138, 'one jar of wine for the Harpokratia on 16 Tybi' is mentioned in an account of expenses by the priests of Soknopaiou Nesos, presumably used in the banquet associated with the festival of Harpokrates.<sup>116</sup> In 260 BC, a taxing-list for the different villages of Phebichis in the Herakleopolite nome mentions that 'the one who boils the lentil soup (*phakepsos*)' had to pay 4 (drachmas?), presumably in connection with his profession.<sup>117</sup> In AD 98, there was a guild of lentil-meal makers operating in Memphis, where two of its members, Petosiris and Petermouthis, signed a contract to serve as tax-farmers.<sup>118</sup> In AD 228/233, Aurelius Chigas, 'the one who boils the lentil-soup' in Hermopolis Magna, paid 16 drachmas as taxes, presumably in connection with his job.<sup>119</sup> The presence of a guild of lentil-meal makers suggests that lentil-meals were popular in Graeco-Roman Egypt. So much so that a commercial association was established on the basis of this profession, the members of which were liable to a taxation amount of 16 drachmas and could act as tax-farmers in the Roman Period.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *BGU* VI.1216.43-7.

<sup>115</sup> Plut. *De Is. et Os.*: 377c.

<sup>116</sup> *SPP* XXII.183.v.113 = Capron 2008: 142-3.

<sup>117</sup> *P.Hib.* I.112.77 = *P.Bodl.* I.58.77.

<sup>118</sup> *P.Bour.* I.13.

<sup>119</sup> *P.Lond.* III.944.2-4.

<sup>120</sup> *P.Bour.* I.13; *P.Lond.* III.944.2-4.



The festival of the Harpokratia was an opportunity for the Roman veteran Lucius Gemellus to present gifts to the official Elouras, the royal scribe who became deputy for Erasos, the strategos of the division of Themistos:

If you think it well, send him an artaba of olives and some fish, as we want to make use of him. Send us for the house some...and olives, for they have no fresh olives at the house. Send the...since Erasus is going to celebrate the festival of Harpokrates so soon on the 14th, and send him the cabbages (?). Load all the animals with cabbage and we will send him five...of cabbage and as much to the house...<sup>121</sup>

The celebration of the Harpokratia by Gemellus shows his commitment to the Egyptian cult. For Gemellus, the Harpokratia probably had no special meaning in connection with his previous military position. However, the terracotta figurines of the rider Harpokrates, which are known only from the Arsinoite area especially in the second and third centuries AD, is often explained by the influence of the Thracian god Heron, often shown on horseback.<sup>122</sup> Gemellus wanted to exploit Elouras by offering him gifts in the form of olives, fish, and cabbage. It is unclear if this conforms to a general practice of exchanging gifts on the occasion of this festival. In all cases, the presence of the *strategos* shows the potential use of power of an Egyptian festival to attract customers.<sup>123</sup>

In AD 138, 96 drachmas were spent 'for buying spices for the preparation of the *kyphi* for the god Harpokrates' in connection with the Harpokratia at Soknopaiou Nesos.<sup>124</sup> Recipes for *kyphi*, written in hieroglyphs, are inscribed on the jambs of the doors of the so-called laboratories at the Ptolemaic temples of Horus at Edfu and Isis at Philae.<sup>125</sup> *Kyphi* had many uses in Graeco-Roman Egypt. It was the most famous of all scents. It also had

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<sup>121</sup> *P.Fay.* 117.

<sup>122</sup> Parlasca 1982.

<sup>123</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 89.

<sup>124</sup> *SPP XXII.*183.iii.49.

<sup>125</sup> Manniche 2006.

spiritual, magical, and therapeutic effects.<sup>126</sup> Like perfumed oils or fats,<sup>127</sup> the *kyphi* was probably used for anointing the image of the deity during the daily temple ritual or in preparation for the public procession. In this case, the *kyphi* might have been purchased for the god Harpokrates, perhaps in connection with the anointment of his image by the priests in daily temple ritual or in preparation for the procession of the Harpokratia at Soknopaiou Nesos.<sup>128</sup>

As a purity requirement for public processions of the gods, the priests anointed the divine images of deities with high quality oil, as was the case for the public procession of the god Soknopaios.<sup>129</sup> There is a hieroglyphic word *kꜣp*, which is a compound aromatic, consisting according to Plutarch of sixteen ingredients, which became popular in Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period, and was known to the classical writers in the form *kyphi*.<sup>130</sup> It seems that it was prepared locally, and would thus be more abundant and less expensive than imported myrrh.<sup>131</sup> Plutarch mentions that the Egyptians used to burn resin and myrrh in the daytime, for these are simple substances and have their origin from the sun; but the *kyphi*, since it is compounded of ingredients of all sorts of qualities, they offer at nightfall.<sup>132</sup> Although nocturnal festivals and public processions associated with Egyptian deities are confirmed in the Graeco-Roman period, such as the Lychnokaia of Athena/Neith<sup>133</sup> and the Serapeia of Serapis,<sup>134</sup> Plutarch's statement is insufficient in itself to suggest that the public procession associated with Harpokrates was held at night, particularly given the solar associations of the god.

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<sup>126</sup> Yébenes 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Manniche 2009.

<sup>128</sup> *P.Bru.x. Inv. E. 7537.i.1-6= SB VI.1.1-6 = Capron 2008: 159.*

<sup>129</sup> *P.Louvre I.4.iv.91-4= Capron 2008 : 153-4.*

<sup>130</sup> Plut., *De Is. et Os.*: 80.

<sup>131</sup> Sayed 1984: 49.

<sup>132</sup> Plut., *De Is. et Os.*: 80.

<sup>133</sup> On the nocturnal festival of lamps associated with Athena-Neith, see: Abdelwahed 2015; Smoláriková 2017.

<sup>134</sup> On the night procession of Serapis at Alexandria, see: Abdelwahed 2016a.

Purificatory public processions (*hagneutikai komasiai*) of the goddess Isis Nephremmis and Harpokrates at Nesos Gunaikon are confirmed in a papyrus of AD 166. These are associated with the temple of Soknopaios in the village, and were held on 26<sup>th</sup> Epeiph, when 24 *artabas* of wheat were consumed, perhaps in relation to a banquet.<sup>135</sup> According to the same papyrus, the festival of the foundation of the temple of the goddess Isis Nephremmis occurred on 1<sup>st</sup> Tybi, when 12 *artabas* of wheat are similarly consumed.<sup>136</sup> The celebration of the foundation of the temple of Isis Nephremmis and the Harpokratia in Tybi may suggest a connection between the two festivals. The same public procession of Isis also occurs in Pathyris in the Hermonthis nome in 127 BC, but this time in connection with the goddess Isis Nemetos.<sup>137</sup> It seems that the purificatory public procession began as a celebration in honour of the goddess Isis, but later on, Harpokrates found his place in the public procession as the son of Isis.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

The Harpokratia is the name given in Greek papyri uncovered from Graeco-Roman Egypt to designate the festival associated with the child deity Harpokrates. Despite the popularity of the cult of Harpokrates throughout Egypt, the Harpokratia was a local celebration held at Soknopaiou Nesos and Euhemeria. Surviving evidence only comes from these areas, and no other evidence for the festival exists elsewhere, or prior to the Graeco-Roman period. The Harpokratia began early in the Ptolemaic period and lasted at least until the mid-second century AD. Unfortunately, the three surviving papyri documenting the Harpokratia do not constitute sufficient evidence for the motivations behind the festival. Yet other written sources and material evidence confirm that the cult of Harpokrates had many appealing features that potentially triggered the celebration. Harpokrates popularly operated in the magical sphere as a god whose divine abilities

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<sup>135</sup> *P.Louvre* I.4.iii.74-5 = Capron 2008: 151.

<sup>136</sup> *P.Louvre* I.4.iii.79-80= Capron 2008: 154.

<sup>137</sup> *BGU* III.993.iii.4.

<sup>138</sup> Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 88-89.

encompassed the fulfilment of dreams. He was also the guarantor of the fecundity of agricultural products. As the child manifestation of the god Horus, Harpokrates was thought of as the protector of young children; this is why he appears in the domestic space in terracotta figurines and religious paintings. That the Arsinoite area was an agricultural society is insufficient to suggest that the connection of Harpokrates with agricultural products was the main incentive for the appearance of the Harpokratia. Rather, it is more convincing to suggest that the Harpokratia was a celebration of Harpokrates' diverse capabilities: as the guarantor of the productivity of arable lands, the fulfiller of dreams, and the protector of young children.

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