

AKTI VIII. MEĐUNARODNOG KOLOKVIJA O PROBLEMIMA RIMSKOG PROVINCIJALNOG UMJETNIČKOG STVARALAŠTVA

AKTEN DES VIII. INTERNATIONALEN KOLLOQUIUMS ÜBER PROBLEME DES PROVINZIALRÖMISCHEN KUNSTSCHAFFENS

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON PROBLEMS OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL ART

LES ACTES DU VIII^{ÈME} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL SUR LES PROBLÈMES DE L'ART PROVINCIAL ROMAIN

ZAGREB 5.-8. V. 2003.

RELIGIJA I MIT KAO POTICAJ RIMSKOJ PROVINCIJALNOJ PLASTICI

RELIGION UND MYTHOS ALS ANREGUNG FÜR DIE PROVINZIALRÖMISCHE PLASTIK

RELIGION AND MYTH AS AN IMPETUS FOR THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL SCULPTURE

LA RELIGION ET LE MYTHE COMME INSPIRATION POUR LA SCULPTURE ROMAINE PROVINCIALE

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Odsjek za arheologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu
Sva prava pridržana

Nakladnik
Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga
Jurišićeva 10, Zagreb

Za nakladnika
Ana Maletić

Sunakladnici
Odsjek za arheologiju Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
Arheološki muzej, Zagreb

Recenzenti
prof. dr. sc. Aleksandar Durman
prof. dr. sc. Tihomila Težak Gregl

Motiv na naslovnici
Reljef Dijane kipara Maksimina iz Prološca kod Imotskog. Arheološki muzej – Split
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PROVINCIALE

UREDNICI
MIRJANA SANADER
ANTE RENDIĆ MIOČEVIĆ

SURADNIK
DOMAGOJ TONČINIĆ

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THE PAMPHILI OBELISK: TWO NOTES ON PHARAONIC ELEMENTS IN DOMITIAN IDEOLOGY

BY EMANUELE M. CIAMPINI

Religious elements are clear evidence of relations between Rome and Egypt; in the first century B.C., the Iseum Campense became the greatest temple dedicated to Isis outside the Land of the Nile, decorated with statues and materials brought from ancient towns, such as Heliopolis and Sais. In addition to genuine Egyptian materials, we find also a monument like the obelisk known as Pamphili or Pamphilius¹, whose texts have been composed in Rome from Egyptians who were still able to express the forms of pharaonic semantic.²

DIVINE MOTHERS OF DOMITIAN

Like pharaonic ones, the Pamphili Obelisk celebrates Domitian as the legitimate pharaoh, son of deities to whom the monument was dedicated. The inscriptions show the Emperor as son of the solar deities, such as Rê-Harakhti, while a female role is played by goddesses like Isis, Hathor, Wadjet, Mut, and Nekhbet. The same we find on the obelisk pyramidion;³ the power and the divine nature of the pharaoh as child-god was embodied in it, showing in this way the deep relation between Roman and Ptolemaic ideology.

The role of the goddesses is pointed out by an inscription which states: “The two Ladies (Uadjet and Nekhbet, patronesses of Lower and Upper Egypt) give

their breast to his (Domitian’s) mouth, the two Nurses are on his bands, and the Hathors play the tambourine around him. It is given to him the great duty (the kingship) that the Lady of mankind (Hathor) has created, while her ureus is on her head.”⁴ Here are stressed some key-figures for kingship: at first Isis as actress in the myth of Osiris, whose death is a topic in the growth of royal models and for the unity of the country, as shown by Graeco-Roman tradition in which the relics of the god are buried in the 42 Egyptian districts;⁵ then her role can be related with the transmission of father’s power to his son Horus. In the text it can be noted that a group of goddesses are related to the legitimization of the king: Hathor, Mut, and above all Nekhbet and Uadjet are expression of kingship which is the focus of *mammisis*, the structure where, since the Late Period, the king born as a son of the divine couple, or as the son of the great goddess.

This role of some goddesses as mothers of the king is a late theology elaboration, whose growth can be dated to the Ptolemaic period, even if its origin is surely earlier (see below); some texts of *mammisis* show such a situation, the structure of the birth in Dendera, where the dynastic deities Nekhbet and Uadjet are at both sides of Isis nursing the king. Here the divine mother says, “I suckle my baby, in order that he could vindicate his father; I nourish him as king, son of the king of Lower and Upper Egypt”⁶; Uadjet answers to her,

¹ K. Lembke, *Das Iseum Campense. Studien über den Isiskult unter Domitian*. Archäologie und Geschichte, Band 3 (Heidelberg 1994) 20–21.

² Texts: J.-Cl. Grenier, *Les Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques de l’Obélisque Pamphili, Un témoignage méconnu sur l’avènement de Domitian*. Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome – Antiquité. Tome 99.2, 1987, 937–961. – Lembke (note 1) 210–215 (55) Taf.15–17. – E.M. Ciampini, *Gli obelischi iscritti di Roma*. (Rome 2004).

³ Grenier (note 2) 958 n.40.

⁴ Grenier (note 2) 945; Ciampini (note 2) 167.

⁵ H. Beinlich, *Die Osirisreliquien. Zum Motiv der Körpergliederung in der altägyptischen Religion*. Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 42 (Wiesbaden 1984).

⁶ Fr. Dumas, *Les Mammisis de Dendera* (Le Caire 1959) 128 (10–11) pl. LX, II.

“I am the beautiful nurse of the fair baby, the nurse of the august child; I am behind you (Isis), embracing your body”, while Nekhbet states, “I am the beautiful nurse who suckles her son without being tired, day and night”⁷.

This scene is flanked by the solar god Rê-Harakhti who gives a palm-branch to the child suckled by Hathor, saying, “I establish to you (Hathor?) endless jubilees, for hundred of thousands of cycle of solar disc”, and Hathor answers, “Oh Rê-Harakhti, I have nursed your heir as beautiful child, I renew him as your majesty”⁸. Here we find the same actors of the Domitian text, and we have to note the figure of Rê-Harakhti who plays a central role in the legitimization of the Emperor.

Graeco-roman tradition about divine mothers can be traced back to the New Kingdom, when the mature state was able to create a complex model of legitimization. During the Eighteenth Dynasty a mythological elaboration was composed about the Divine Birth of the Pharaoh: in the funerary temple of queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari (west Thebes) and in the temple of Luqsor, dated to Amenhotep III, scenes and texts describe the divine origin of the king who is son of the Theban god Amon-Rê, lord of the Karnak temple and chief of the gods.

This myth is an elaboration of Theban theologians who created a narration in which, through different episodes (Amon-Rê decides to have a son, his incarnation as human father of king, conception and birth of pharaoh), the ideology stresses the legitimization of the living ruler. With Amon-Rê, many gods act in the choral narration elaborated by the Theban clergy; among them we note the couple Uadjet and Nekhbet, dynastic patronesses and mothers of the king who confirm his power by means of milk: with it they suckle the young king, giving to him the divine nature of ruler; at the same time, their milk is a topic in the resurrection of the dead pharaoh since the Pyramids Texts (third millennium B.C.)⁹. Thus suckling is an expression of the royalty of the triumphant king.¹⁰

In the Amenhotep III version of the Divine Birth (Luqsor temple) the king is nursed by two cows that say, “We nourish you as king of Upper and Lower Egypt, you being alive and your heart happy on the throne of Horus; may you conduct the livings and rule over the Two Lands in triumph, like Rê forever and ever!”¹¹. In the southern rooms of the same temple, Amenhotep III is followed by two goddesses: the first is Mut, while the name of the second, now destroyed, can be reconstructed by a fragmentary epithet as Wadjet¹²; according to the text, they give to him access in the temple of father Amon and endless years. Thus, it is confirmed the divine nature of kingship, related with deities who symbolize here the two halves of the country.

THE “KA” CALLED FLAVII

Kingship’s legitimization is a topic in the Pamphili Obelisk, becoming part of propaganda relating to the predestination of the Emperor. This aspect, whose echo seems recognizable in the coronation ritual just exposed, is joint with patterns of an ancient royal tradition; in it the power of the king comes from the divine father and from that element which embodies the abstract concept of kingship. The texts call this personification “royal ka”, expression of pharaoh’s legitimization since his birth. This doctrine can be traced back at least to the XVIII dynasty, when Theban kings stressed the relationship with their father Amon-Rê, as shown in the Divine Birth just noted. This conception is the core of the decoration of Luqsor temple, which can be considered a kingship’s shrine. The renewal and legitimization of royal power was described in the decoration of the temple dated to Amenhotep III; during the ritual the union of the king with his “royal ka” became the frame of an abstract model. In the Luqsor doctrine it is the “royal ka” who ties the living ruler with his ancestors; in them the Egyptian tradition saw the royal past of the present king, as shown in the funerary ritual performed

⁷ Daumas (note 6) 128 (12–13; 14–15).

⁸ Daumas (note 6) 128 (3–4; 7–8) pl. LX, I.

⁹ For the royal suckling see W. Seipel, *Säugen*. In: W. Helck/W. Westendorf (Hrsg.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie V* (Wiesbaden 1987) 340.

¹⁰ J. Leclant, *Sur un contrepois de menat au nom de Tabarqa. Allaitement et ‘apparition’ royale*. In: *Mélanges Mariette. Bibliothèque d’Étude 32* (Le Caire 1961) 263–266.

¹¹ H. Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs. Studien zur Überlieferung eines altägyptischen Mythos*. *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 10* (Wiesbaden 1964) 30 (text XII Lc; scene 12) and note (a). A similar scene can be recognized in Graeco-roman mummies: Daumas (note 6) 6 (12–13; 14–15); the cows are here identified with Hesat and Sekhather.

¹² H. Brunner, *Die städtischen Räume des Tempels von Luxor*. *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo – Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 18* (Mainz am Rhein 1977) 44 Taf. 74 (scene XVIII, 37).

in honor of ancient pharaohs. Past and present of kingship are identified with Osiris, which is the dead king, and Rê-Harakhti, the solar deity as expression of living power grown up by ancestors. With the accession to the throne, the human pharaoh becomes the temporary incarnation of an eternal concept; owning the “royal ka”, he is legitimated as king of Lower and Upper Egypt, son of the Creator god¹³.

Echoes of these conceptions seem to be heard on the monument of Domitian, on which we read: “he has raised up this obelisk in true granit for his father Rê-Harakhti, so that mankind can see the monument he made, and the names of kings of Lower and Upper Egypt who were on the throne of Horus could be established, and the world could be healthy at the time of that dynasty whose name is Flavi”,¹⁴ while another text evidences the relations of Domitian with his ancestors: “he takes the kingship from his father Vespasian the god and from his brother Titus the god”.¹⁵ Both sentences tie the living ruler with the ancient kings of Lower and Upper Egypt, and with the father and brother who had taken the imperial power before him; in this doctrine the sun god Rê-Harakhti plays the role of kingship’s source, the same we have just noted in one scene of the mammisis of Dendera (see above).

All these elements are grouped on an obelisk, that is a monument which since the third millennium B.C. celebrates the bond of pharaoh with the solar god; thus the obelisk confirms the power of Domitian as pharaoh and ruler of the whole Empire. In the first century propaganda, Egyptian patterns can be used in imperial ideology, becoming part of a wider program in which old elements are transformed according to the necessities of specific forms of kingship.

Such a situation makes the Egyptianizing tendencies of the Emperor a coherent expression of pharaonic ideology in the inscriptions of the obelisk: Domitian uses a classical phraseology with some lexicographical nuances which stress this attitude, such as the pharaonic titulary. Indeed, he is one of the few Roman emperors to have the complete series of five names; but it is striking that

his whole pharaonic titulary is attested only on Italian obelisks (Rome and Benevent¹⁶).

One of the texts just noted makes a clear connection among monuments, ancient kings of Lower and Upper Egypt, and the Flavii dynasty; thus the obelisk is conceived as something which renders the names of the Emperor ancestors everlasting, creating a strong connection between past and present, that is the pharaonic model of divine rule and the Domitian power which is extended over the world. Also noteworthy is the particular use of the word “ka”, which has been just noted to play a central role in the royal doctrine; according to the late use of the Egyptian language, it can be considered a synonym for “name”,¹⁷ and the text of Domitian shows clearly its correspondence with “gens”, a concept in which the relation of a single with his family group is expressed.

This particular use of the word covers two different semantic fields: on the one hand it is related to the family’s name, and more generally, with the ancestors of the living ruler; on the other hand, it can denote the same family, that is the “gens”, in which it may be reflected the Egyptian concept of kingship. The mention of Vespasian and Titus in the last text may offer an element of Roman interpretation of the Egyptian royalty; the origin of Domitian’s power, according to this inscription, is the kingship of the imperial ancestors who were the owners of a divine authority before him. The superhuman nature of the Emperor is stressed by the epithet “the god” which follows the names of Vespasian and Titus; the divine kingship, embodied by the living pharaoh, makes him after the death a form of solar god.¹⁸

The legitimization in Domitian’s inscriptions uses an imperial interpretation of pharaonic elements: we have just seen the use of the term “ka” which expresses the core of divine kingship, but the same can be said for another Egyptian pattern. In the royal funerary belief of the New Kingdom the ka of the father is shown introducing the dead king to deities: in the tomb of Amenhotep III (Valley of the Kings, Thebes west) the “royal ka” of the king’s father Thutmose IV is depicted with the son greeted by the sky-goddess Nut;¹⁹ in this

¹³ On meaning of «royal ka» in the Egyptian doctrine of the New Kingdom see L. Bell, *The New Kingdom «Divine» Temple: the example of Luxor*. In: B.E. Schafer (Hrsg.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (London, New York 1997) 137–144.

¹⁴ Grenier (note 2) 939.

¹⁵ Grenier (note 2) 943.

¹⁶ J.-Cl. Grenier, *Le protocole pharaonique des empereurs romains. Analyse formelle et signification historique*. In: *Revue d’Égyptologie* 38, 1987, 82 note 2.

¹⁷ P. Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexicon. A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu*. *Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta* 78 (Leuven 1997) 1079; it is to note here that the «ka» is related with the royal name since the New Kingdom texts; the ambivalence seems to be often conscious in ptolemaic period.

¹⁸ Bell (note 13) 144.

¹⁹ E. Hornung, *Tal der Könige. Die Ruhestätte der Pharaonen* (Zürich, München 1982) 14.

situation we find the elements noted in the ideology of Domitian, that is the ruler and the ancestor who gives him the power and legitimization as heir.²⁰

The attitude of Domitian toward Egyptian traditions may reflect the diffusion of Isiac cult in the Empire; at the same time, his legitimization uses phraseology partially coherent with ancient forms, as shown by the central role of Isis and other divine mothers.²¹ The use of Egyptian models could be related with the growth of a pharaonic titulature of the Roman rulers, as shown since Augustus, when the royal Egyptian names used to be considered a way to express the role of the Emperor as manifestation of the supreme power (see the use of

Autokrator in the so-called coronation name).²² The divine nature of the Emperor is celebrated in the Egyptian temple where he is an image of gods;²³ however, we have to note that the imperial ideology in Egypt has particular forms: evidence of this can be recognized in the chapel of the imperial insignia installed in the Luqsor temple, the same which we have just seen as kingship shrine of the New Kingdom.²⁴ In the Roman interpretation which stresses the divine nature of the ruler, we note the ideological elaboration of Domitian: in using ancient forms of legitimization, the Emperor chose to raise up a single obelisk, celebrating in this way his divine nature according to the pharaonic patterns.²⁵

EMANUELE CIAMPINI

UNIVERSITÀ CÀ FOSCARI, DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ E DEL VICINO ORIENTE,
SEZIONE DI ARCHEOLOGIA, PALAZZO BERNARDO, S. POLO 1977, I-30125 – VENEZIA
ECIAMPINI@TISCALI.IT

²⁰ It is to note that legitimation and condition of heir are the focus even in the Osirian succession, see above.

²¹ L. Kákosy, *Probleme der Religion im römerzeitlichen Ägypten*. In: W. Haase/H. Temporini (Hrsg.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*. Teil II: *Principat*. Band 18 Religion – 5. Teilband (Berlin, New York 1995) 1915–1916. – G. Hölbl, *Altägypten in Römisches Reich. Der Römische Pharaon und seine Tempel I. Römische Politik und altägyptische Ideologie von Augustus bis Diocletian, Tempelbau im Oberägypten* (Mainz am Rhein 2000) 35.

²² J.-Cl. Grenier, *Traditions pharaoniques et réalités impériales: le nom de couronnement du Pharaon à l'époque romaine*. In: L. Criscuolo/G. Geraci (Hrsg.), *Egitto e Storia antica dall'ellenismo all'età araba. Bilancio di un confronto. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale*. Bologna 31 agosto – 2 settembre 1987 (Bologna 1989) 403–420.

²³ See his connection with apotropaic deities such as Tutu: D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton 1998) 120.

²⁴ M. el-Saghir/Cl. Galvin/M. Reddé/H. el-Sayed/G. Wegner, *Le champ romain de Louqsor (avec une étude des graffites gréco-romains du Temple d'Amon)*. *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 83 (Le Caire 1986) 31.

²⁵ For the original position of obelisk in the temple see Lembke (note 1) 25 (plan). On the theological implications of a single obelisk see now L. Bell, *Divine Kingship and the Theology of the Obelisk Cult in the Temples of Thebes*. In: H. Beinlich/Arno Egberts/R. Gundlach/D. Kurth/St. Wenig (Hrsg.), 5. *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung*. Würzburg, 23.–26. September 1999. *Ägypten und Alte Testament* 33.3 (Wiesbaden 2002) 17–46.