1. Egyptian gods in the Diaspora Revolt

Any discussion of Hadrian's role in favouring religious pluralism cannot avoid surveying the situation in Egypt in the Second century AD. This chapter will take into consideration the role of Egyptian gods, in particular Serapis, in the religious life of Egypt from the end of the reign of Trajan to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and will explore the possible overlaps between the cult of Serapis and the rise of Christianity. The documents will be tested against the hypothesis that Hadrian's religious policy of pluralism gave the early Christian communities an opportunity to flourish.

The Diaspora Revolt (AD 116 – 17) had implications and repercussions that affected Egyptian religion. A rebellion in Judea was provoked by the dedication of a statue to Jupiter-Serapis by the *Legio III* of Lusius Quietus,¹ and the *Historia Augusta* talks about a Jewish revolt generated by the discovery of the body of the Apis Bull in Egypt.² Serapis or Osirapis, a fusion of Osiris and the Apis Bull, was essentially the sacred bull of Memphis after its death, a combination god which had existed in Egypt since Pharaonic times as a god of the underworld and a symbol of the annual resurrection of nature. Under the Ptolemies, Apis was assimilated by or associated with various Hellenistic deities – including Zeus, Helios, Dionysos, Hades and Asklepios – to form Serapis, a Hellenised god of the sun (Helios), fertility (Dionysos), the underworld and...

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¹ The *vexillatio* of the *legio III Cyrenaica* dedicated a statue with the inscription *(I)ovi O(ptimo) M(aximo) Sarapidi pro salute et victoria* (*CIL* III 13587 = *ILS* 4393). The date is uncertain, as the statue could be of either Trajan or Hadrian. See Firpo 2005, 107–116. According to a comment by Hippolytus Romanus (III century) to Mt 24,21, the legion of Quietus put a statue of Kore in the temple of Jerusalem. On the Diaspora Revolt see Ben Zeev 2005.

² *HA Hadr*, 12,1. Fündling 2006, 599 thinks the episode took place at the time of Hadrian’s trip to Gaul (somewhere between 121 and 125), and believes (in my view incorrectly) that neither the Jewish revolt nor the early part of Hadrian’s reign can be linked to this passage. On a probable trip of Hadrian’s to Egypt at the very beginning of his reign, see Capponi 2010.
healing (Aскlepios and Hades), who eventually became being the most popular god in Egypt and the patron deity of the city of Alexandria.³

Egyptian documents lend further support to the view that the Jews attacked Egyptian religion during the Diaspora Revolt and destroyed many pagan temples, possibly including parts of the Alexandrian Serapeum.⁴ The iconoclastic attitude of the Jews against pagan images and temples explains why the documents describe them as ἀνώσιοι, ‘impious’. The author of PΟxy 4.705 stated that: ‘Our one hope and final expectation depended on the banding together of the villagers of the nome to fight against the impious Jews’, and a letter of the epistrategos of Apollonopolis-Heptacokia to the prefect Rammius Martialis attributes responsibility for the disasters in Egypt to the ‘impious Jews’.⁵ When the Jews lost in battle, the Greeks offered sacrifices to the gods⁶ and, when the revolt was suppressed, they instituted an annual memorial.⁷ Eudaimonis, the mother of the strategos of the Apollonopolite nome, wrote in a letter: ‘Be sure that I shall pay no attention to God until I get my son back safe’, as if the god in question was directly involved in the war.⁸

One may wonder what part the Egyptian Christians decided to take in the Diaspora Revolt. After the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 and the capture of Masada in 74 it was not a good idea to support the Jews, who had a bad reputation as rioters and anti-imperial rebels despite the apologetic efforts

3 See a description of Serapis in Macr. Sat. 1,20,13: Eidem Aegypto adiacens civitas, quae conditorem Alexandrum Macedonem gloriatur, Sarapin atque Isn cultu paene attonitae venerationis observat. Omnem tamen illum venerationem soli se sub illius nomine testatur inpendere, vel dum calathum capitis eius infigunt, vel dum simulachro signum tricipitis animantis adiungunt quod exprimit medio eodemque maximo capite leonis effigiem: dextra parte caput canis exoritur, mansueta specie blandientis: pars vero laeva cervicis rapacis lupi capite finitur, easque formas animalium draco conectit volumine suo, capite redeunte d dei dexteram qua conpecit monstrum (‘In the city on the borders of Egypt which boasts Alexander of Macedon as its founder, Serapis and Isis are worshipped with a reverence that is almost fanatical. Evidence that the sun, under the name of Serapis, is the object of all this reverence is either the basket set on the head of the god or the figure of a three-headed creature placed by his statue. The middle head of this figure, which is also the largest, represents a lion’s; on the right a dog raises its head with a gentle and fawning air; and on the left the neck ends in the head of a raving wolf. All three beasts are joined together by the coils of a serpent whose head returns to the god’s right hand which keeps the monster in check.’) On Serapis as the Ptolemaic patron god of Alexandria, in place of the original patron deity Agathos Daimon, see Bell 1954, 19–22, who also interprets Serapis as a protector of sea travellers. On Serapis and Alexandria, see also Fraser 1960, 19, Stambaugh 1972, 1–53 and Tran Tam Tin Nh 1982, 115–116.

4 On damage to buildings and roads during the Diaspora Revolt, see Applebaum 1951 and 1962 and Smallwood 1976, 399.

5 Smallwood 1976, 58.

6 CPJ 2.439.8–10.

7 CPJ 2.450.ii.33–35. The festival was still celebrated in 202.

8 CPJ 2.442.25–28.
of Josephus and the early rabbinic schools. At least some Christians, moreover, probably saw the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem as an opportunity to cut their Jewish roots and build a separate identity that might be more acceptable throughout the empire. The sudden disappearance after the Diaspora revolt of the documents concerning the Egyptian Jews suggests that there was not much continuity between the Jewish and the Christian communities in Egypt, as the former was virtually obliterated while the latter expanded.9

Although the Egyptian documents do not talk explicitly about the position of the Christians in the Diaspora Revolt, we might suspect they did not support the Jews. According to Justin, in fact, in the Bar Kochba revolt of 132–5, the Christians supported Rome, and even suffered violence on the part of the Jewish rebels for doing so.10 It is likely that a good number of Christians in Egypt wanted to be seen as independent from Judaism, and thus did not support the Jews. Paradoxically, they may have been on the side of Serapis.11

9 BEN ZE’EV 2005, 266 states that the consequences of the Diaspora Revolt ‘equalled or even surpassed those of the two more famous Jewish wars of 66–70 and 132–5’.
10 Just. I Apol. 31.6; Eus. HE 4,8.4. Jer. Chron. 201 Helm; Oros. 7,13.4. GALIMBERTI 2007, 150 note 156 rightly notes that in Justin (Dial. 9,3) the conversation between Jews and Christians on the Bar Kochba Revolt is a sign that it was still a topical issue in his time.
11 A passage in the book on dreams by Artemidorus of Daldis (Oneirokritika 4,24) says that a στρατοπεδάρχης (praefectus castrorum) fighting against the Diaspora Revolt at Cyrene had written on his sword the Greek letters ιωθ, iota for Ioudaiois, κappa for Kurenaiois, and θbeta for θανατος to form the message: “death to the Jews of Cyrene”, according to the interpretation by DEL CORNO 1975, 338 note 34. STRASSI 2008, 89–90 suggests an identification with the stratopedarches mentioned in PMich 8.478.26. It is impossible not to think of the Greek ιχθος (with a chi instead of the kappa), the ‘fish’ that became a symbol of Christ and a catchword of the Christians. The earliest known reference to the fish as a Christian symbol is in Clement of Alexandria (150–215, in Paed. 3,11), where he recommends his readers engrave their seals with the dove or fish. That a soldier of the Roman army had Christian sympathies is unsurprising, since many Roman soldiers appear in the New Testament as Christian converts or god-fearers. Acts 10,1–22 presents the centurion Cornelius, a god-fearer from Caesarea. In Acts 27, 43 a centurion is willing to save Paul. A devout soldier features in Acts 10, 7. PMich 8.483 and 484 portrays a centurion of the legio XXII Deiotariana called Julius Clement, in Alexandria at the time of Hadrian. In 484.1, a letter from the centurion to his brother Arianus, there is the chi-rho symbol, possibly the abbreviation of the word ‘centurion’, ξιροντάρχης. In l. 14 the writer mentions the ‘good pilot’ ἄγαθος κυβερνήτης, an image often used to describe Christ.
2. Hadrian and Serapis

Abundant evidence indicates that Hadrian played a major role in the restoration work on buildings destroyed in the Diaspora Revolt. For this reason he was hailed as saviour and benefactor both in Egypt and in Cyrenaica. An inscription on Mons Claudianus shows that the emperor celebrated his victory over the Diaspora Jews by erecting a temple to Zeus-Helios-Serapis ‘on behalf of safety and eternal victory’. There is also a debate over whether or not Hadrian restored the Alexandrian Serapeum, possibly damaged in the war. In any case, Hadrian portrayed himself as the saviour and defender of Serapis. Coins of Hadrian show the emperor clasping hands with Serapis, sitting in the Serapeion, and even assimilated with Horos and Serapis himself, while the empress Sabina is represented as Serapis’ wife Isis. A portrait of Serapis in the animal form of a bull was also found in Hadrian’s villa at Tibur, an important centre for Hadrian’s symbolic system of images. Furthermore, after Hadrian left Britain in 122, he received news from Egypt regarding trouble over the Apis Bull, which suggests that he was still expected to protect the cult at that time.

According to Galimberti, a major turning point in the religious policy of Hadrian was 124/5, when the emperor joined the Eleusinian mysteries and subsequently promoted mysteries elsewhere, including early forms of Christianity. At this date he also seems to have passed an edict in which he prohibited persecutions of Christians. A controversial passage in the Historia Augusta reports that Hadrian built temples without images, which were used for the veneration of different spiritual deities and which were also attended by Christians:

‘Every seven days, when he [sc. Alexander Severus] was in the city, he went up to the Capitolium, and he visited the other temples frequently. He also wished to build a temple to Christ and give him a place among the gods – a measure, which, they say, was also considered by Hadrian. For Hadrian ordered a temple without an image to be built in every city, and because these temples, built by him with this intention, so they say, are dedicated to no particular deity, they are called today merely Hadrian’s temples. Alexander, however, was prevented from carrying out this purpose, because

12 Applebaum 1951.
13 OGIS 2.678, 421. The inscription is dated to 23 April 118. A temple to Serapis and Isis as Tyche at Mons Claudianus is also documented in a proskynema; see Shelton 1990.
16 See Elena Calandra in this volume.
17 As Birley 1997, 245 put it, ‘Hadrian may be assumed to have inspected the animal about which there had been so much trouble’.
18 Galimberti 2007, 151–153 and see the chapters by Galimberti in this volume.
those who examined the sacred victims ascertained that if he did, all men would become Christians and the other temples would of necessity be abandoned.\footnote{19}{HA Alex. Sev. 43,5–6: Capitolium septimo quoque die, cum in urbe esset, ascendit, templum frequentavit, Christo templo facere voluit eumque inter deos recipere, quod et Hadrianus cogitasse fertur, qui templam in omnibus civitatibus sine simulacris iuserat fieri, quae bodieque idcirco, qui non habent numina, dicuntur Hadriani, quae ille ad hic parasse dicebatur; sed prohibitis est ab his, qui consulentes sacra repperant omnes Christianos futuros. Si id fecissent, et tempula disserenda. See Galimberti 2007, 149 note 153 for literature on the historicity of this information. Modrzejewski 1997, 307–312 believes that a similar turning point took place in Alexandria and that Hadrian supported Christians, as does Jakab 2001, 63–65.}

In Egypt, indeed, Hadrian built new temples, where Serapis and Isis were worshipped along Hellenic gods such as Helios, Zeus Hypsistos, Dionysos, Saturn, Asklepios, Ceres-Demeter-Kore.\footnote{20}{See, for instance OGIS 2.678, the dedication around AD 118 of a temple to Zeus-Helios-Serapis by Hadrian on Mons Claudianus, to commemorate his victory over the Jews.} This was in order to promote the integration of the Alexandrian and Egyptian religion with the Graeco-Roman pantheon and ultimately to foster loyalty to the empire. All these gods were deities of the underworld and symbols of resurrection and salvation and could be associated with Christ – at least in the eyes of the pagans.\footnote{21}{Bell 1954, 20–22 on the ritualistic aspects of Serapis. See for instance the oath formula, found in PSI 10.1162 ‘by the god who separates earth from heaven and light from darkness and day from night and the world from chaos and life from death and birth from decay’. Other mystical characteristics of the cult were meals and the so-called katochê, that is, segregated life in the temple of Serapis as a form of spiritual purification. The story of the Carthaginian martyrs Sâtyros, Perpetua and Felicitas who were led to their execution dressed as priests of Saturn and priestesses of Ceres is emblematic of this confusion. Passio Perpetuae 18, 4. On the similar iconography of Serapis and Christ, see below, note 30.}

Apparently, Hadrian himself noticed an overlap of Egyptian Christianity with the worship of Serapis. In a letter to his brother-in-law Servianus, transmitted in the Historia Augusta, the emperor laments that,

‘The land of Egypt, the praises of which you have been recounting to me, my dear Servianus, I have found to be wholly light-minded, unstable, and blown about by every breath of rumour. There, those who worship Serapis are, in fact, Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are, in fact, devotees of Serapis. There is no chief of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not an astrologer, a soothsayer, or an anointer. Even the Patriarch himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, by others to worship Christ.’\footnote{22}{HA QT 8, 2: Aegyptum, quam mihi laudabas, Serviane carissime, totam didici levem, pendulam et ad omnia famae momenta volitantem. Illie qui Serapem colunt Christiani sunt, et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi episcopos dicunt. Nemo illic archisynagogus Iudaeorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christiamorum presbyter non mathematicus, non haruspex, non...}
It has long been orthodox to believe that this letter is completely spurious. However, both in his recent book on Hadrian and in the present volume, Galimberti suggests that it contains some clues to Hadrian’s authentic religious policy. The letter shows clearly that Hadrian was surprised by the presence of Christians in the Serapeum, as if this was an anomalous situation, different from the developments of Christianity in the rest of the Mediterranean. This ‘Egyptian anomaly’ is worth further investigation.

3. A cosmopolitan temple

From the times of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–246 BC), the Serapeum hosted the famous library which in turn housed, among other famous texts, the Greek Bible ‘of the Seventy’, or Septuaginta. This translation was the most important sacred text for the Egyptian Jews and, later, became the version of the Bible used by the Christians. Other copies of the Bible were presumably kept in the Great Synagogue of Alexandria, until its destruction in the Diaspora Revolt under Trajan, and as late as AD 197, the Christian apologist Tertullian states that the Serapeum still contained the library and the Septuagint. The importance of the Septuagint as a core text defining the identity of the Jewish and Christian communities in Egypt should not be underestimated. In my view, it is likely that the presence of the Septuagint made the Serapeum a holy place for both Jews and Christians.

Serapis and the Serapeum had a special relationship with the Greek translation of the Bible since the times when Demetrius of the Phaleron, the director of the library and the promoter of the translation under Philadelphus, regained his sight thanks to a miracle of Serapis and composed paeans to the

\[ \text{aliptes. Ipse ille patriarcha cum Aegyptum venerit, ab aliis Serapidem adorare, ab aliis cogitur Christum.} \]

23 For the earlier literature on the debate on the authenticity of this letter, see Galimberti’s contribution to this volume.
24 On the Septuagint as the highlight of the library, see the Letter of Aristeas, written by a Jew of Egypt possibly in the Second century BC. On the importance of the Serapeum and Serapis for the Jews, see Mussies 1979. On the library in the Serapeum and the translation of the Bible, see Collins 2000.
25 On the destruction of the synagogue, see the Talmud of Jerusalem: \( ySuk \ 5,55–58b \). See also \( ySuk \ 5, 51a; ySuk \ 5, 55a \). We do not know where the synagogue was, but we can hypothesise that it was in a Jewish quarter, the Delta being the most famous. We may also hypothesise that Hadrian might have built a pagan temple on the foundation of the Great Synagogue as a sign of his success in quelling the Diaspora Revolt. Under Cyril (412–444) many synagogues were closed (Socr. \( HE \ 7, 13 \) ) and were then converted to churches, including one named after St George.
26 1Apol. 18, 8: \[ \text{Ita in Graecum stilum exaperta monumenda reliquit. Hodie apud Serapeum Ptolemaei bibliothecae cum ipsis Hebraicis litteris exhibentur;} \] for the date see \( OCD^1 \ 1487 \).
god which were long sung in his sanctuaries. The temple, moreover, was in the Jewish quarter, the Delta, and evidence shows that the Serapeum attracted both Jews and Christians as late as the fourth century, when the lamp workshop near the temple manufactured pagan, Christian and Jewish lamps. Finally, Rufinus, writing in 402, provides details about the temple, which he saw two or three decades earlier. There were hexedrae and quarters for the Egyptian priests (pastophoria) but also houses (domus) in which temple keepers or those called ‘the ones who make themselves pure (ἀγνεύοντες) had been accustomed to gather.’ Among these people might have been Jews and Christians.

The iconography of Serapis as a Greek bearded god with sun-rays around his head like Helios, ram’s horns like Ammon, a serpent encircling his sceptre like Asklepios, the horn of plenty in his left hand like Pluto, a club like Herakles, a sceptre in his left hand and the right hand raised as a sign of majesty like Zeus, presents strong points of contact with the iconography of Christ. Serapis also appears as a sacrificial bull and, alternatively, a shepherd, which recalls the image of Christ as both a sacrificial lamb and as the ‘good shepherd’. In addition, the so-called ‘Serapis aretalogies’, a genre of religious poetry popular in Egypt, speak of the miracles performed by Isis and Serapis in tones and language similar to those used in Christian literature for Mary and Jesus. In particular, the beginning of the aretalogy of Isis, with the words ἐγὼ εἶμι followed by the liturgical epithets, was taken and used in the Christian liturgy.

Some Christian documents have provoked debate among scholars because they contain allusions to the worship of Serapis. PMich 3.213, of the Third century, presents the words τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος commonly used by Christians.

27 Diog. Laert. 5.76.
29 Rufin. HE 11.23.
30 I have reworked the description of Serapis offered by TRÁN TAM TÍNH 1982, 115. On the iconography of Christ as a case of religious competition with the image of earlier pagan gods, see MATHEWS 2005 passim.
31 On the Christian use of Greek sacrificial concepts and imagery, see the recent stimulating book by PETROPOULOU 2008.
32 TRÁN TAM TÍNH 1982, 117 notes that ‘no kinship is guaranteed’ between the Isiac formulations and the analogous Christian ones. The epithets of Isis and Sarapis attested in documents have been listed by BRICAULT 1996. HARKER 2008, 67 n. 88 notes that some Sarapis miracles are included in the sources of the Principate, e.g. Dio 77,15,1, a vision of Geta appeared to Caracalla in the temple of Serapis; Dio 79,7,3 states that a fire miraculously appeared in the Serapeum shortly before Caracalla’s death, but did not damage the temple. See Serapis miracles in literature related to the Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs, CPJ 2.157; 2.154 set in the Serapeum; SB 6.9213. See also the “Isis aretalogies” in which all the goddesses of the world are merely names for the one true goddess Isis (e.g., POxy 11.1380). On Serapis and Isis as important elements in Christian self-definition see TRÁN TAM TÍNH 1982.
but begins with an invocation to Serapis. Epithets such as κόριος or θεός in Egyptian papyri were often used with reference to Serapis who, as a god of healing and the underworld, is often addressed in prayers for the sick. 33 The proskynema, the genuflection traditional in the worship of Serapis, was soon adopted and continued by Christians in their own acts of devotion, 34 and a hitherto neglected Second-century letter from the Fayum, BGU 3.714, from a certain Tasoucharion to her brother Neilos, mentions a proskynema to Serapis, and prayers for the safety of the recipients, along with greetings (ll. 15–16) from a certain ἀπα Σατορνεύλος. 35 The title ‘Αρ(ρ)α’ was an honorific title for Christian monks and priests of high rank, and is likely also to be Christian in our document. 36 The document, therefore, is important as it shows clearly that in the Second century Christians of the Fayum respected Serapis and performed the proskynema to the god. The earliest Christian letter quoted by Naldini in his collection of Christian documents, PMich 8.482, is dated 23 August 133 and probably comes from Alexandria. Here, the anonymous writer tells his brother (ll. 15–17): ‘If you wish to come and take me with you come, and wherever you take me, I will follow you and as I love you the god will love me’. 37 In another Second-century document, PMich 8.493, a certain Sabinus writes to his mother and his wife in Karanis that he is awaiting to be tried by the new chief-judge in Alexandria and (ll. 14–15) that, ‘with god’s help I shall leave without

33 Such as in POxy 14.1678 of the Third century, in which Dius prays to the god to save his sister. For Christian expressions such as ἐλεηθησαί ύπο τοῦ θεοῦ and χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ in apparently ‘pagan’ papyri, cf. Bell 1944, 193 no. 17 and 18. On the epithets of Christ see Hurtado 2003, on Christian nomina sacra featured in the Antonine period see Hurtado 2006, 95 ff. in which he argues that nomina sacra originated from abbreviations in the Septuagint. See Suppl. Gr. 1120 of AD 66–175, PMich inv. 1571 of 175–225, PChester Beatty II + PMich inv. 6238 of 80–150, PBodmer II + Inv. Nr 4274/ 4298 of 90–130, PBodmer 14 and 15 of 125–190, POxy 50.3523 of 150–175.

34 In the early Second century, Claudius Terentianus writes to Tiberianus, a veteran of the Roman army, that ‘everyday I do a proskynema in your name to the lord Serapis and to the gods venerated in the same temples’. PMich 8.476; Strassi 2008, no. 11; see also PMich 8.477, 478. Sasnos, a Greek of the Second or Third century (WChr 116 p. 147) advises: “Worship the divine, offer sacrifice to all the gods, make a pilgrimage to every shrine and leave behind a proskynema, hold especially in esteem the gods of the fathers and worship Isis and Serapis, the greatest of the Gods, the redeemers, the good, the well-pleasing, the benefactors”. On the Christian use of the proskynema see Youthe 1978, 265–268; New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 3 (1983) 77 f.; 4 (1987) 59–62. Geraci 1971, and the commentary to POxy 55.3809.3–7.

35 BL 1.61, 11.20. See the same characters in BGU 2.601 and 602, and PGiss 197. Cf. BGU 3.801 = Chapa 1998 no. 3, another letter of Tasoucharion to Nilus.

36 See Naldini 1998, 38. PBon 44 (SB 5.7616), another Second-century letter, from Agathos Daimon to Kronion, probably from Tebtunis, mentions both the proskynema to Serapis and (l. 4) a θεός Eustathios as beloved by both the writer and the recipient. See Coppola 1933, 666. BL 3.191.

These documents are (convincingly) regarded as ‘Christian’, because of their tone and the echoes of the Gospels that they contain. However, one cannot exclude that the unnamed ‘god’ they refer to is the Alexandrian god par excellence, Serapis, who is commonly invoked in Second and Third-century documents of Alexandrian origin.

The Egyptian worship of Serapis certainly played a role in preparing a spiritual background for the diffusion of Christianity. The Egyptians, who were trained to celebrate the annual sacrifice and resurrection of Serapis for the redemption of their sins, became genuinely interested in the story of the resurrection of Jesus and Christian communities emerged, above all in the area of the Fayum. Both the literary texts and the documents show that the Antonine period was a turning point for the diffusion of Christianity.\(^3^9\) It cannot be a coincidence that Minucius Felix in the *Octavius* (2.4) rebuked his friend Caecilius who, on the way to the shore of Ostia, after seeing an image of Serapis, ‘raised his hand to his mouth as is the custom of the superstitious common people, and pressed a kiss on it with his lips’. Minucius Felix saw the devotion to Serapis as unsurprising and common among lower-class Christians, though an impulse that should be discarded as ‘vulgar’.

### 4. The earliest churches in Alexandria

Mark is traditionally credited for evangelising Alexandria during his visits there in the middle of the First century AD when he converted Annianus, who became the first bishop around 62. However, this tradition, recorded by Eusebius in the early Fourth century, is commonly regarded as a later construction diffused by the Church of Rome.\(^4^0\) Our knowledge of the growth of Christianity in Egypt in the Second and Third centuries, therefore, comes mainly from the papyrological documentation. Christian manuscripts of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John on papyrus codices, in the form of modern books, survive from the Second century, and reflect the spread of the new faith.

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\(^{3^8}\) 493.14–15 σὺν θεῷ ἐν τάξι ἀπαλαγήσομαι.


\(^{4^0}\) Eus. HE 2, 16 and 24. For Jer. *De viris illustr.* 8, St Mark died in the eighth year of Nero, that is, 61. For the legend of Mark as a later construction imposed by Rome: Pearson 1986, 210.
outside Alexandria.\footnote{Bell 1944, 199 ff; Roberts 1979, 12–14.} In the Third century Antonius Dioskorus is described as a Christian in an official text dealing with minor public offices in Arsinoe (Medinet el-Fayum),\footnote{Van Minnen 1994.} while Eusebius\footnote{HE 6, 11, 3 and 7, 24, 6.} indicates that there were Christians in Antinoopolis (el-Sheikh ‘Ibada) at about this time, and that a conference was held at Arsinoe by Dionysius for the presbyters and teachers from surrounding villages. Later, in the period 330–350 the number of churches mentioned in the documents dramatically increased and the diffusion of monasteries reshaped the geography of the countryside.\footnote{Pearson 1986, 235–306 on the early development of monasticism in Egypt. Bagnall and Wipszycka studied the spread of Christian names in the population and assert that by 312 18 per cent of the population was Christian. Bagnall 1982; 1987 and 1993, 53–54; 264, 278; Wipszycka 1986, 173–181; 1988, 164–165. On Byzantine Egypt see now Bagnall 2007.}

Not much is known about the earliest Christian churches in Alexandria. The \textit{ekklesia} of Theonas, the cathedral built by the patriarch Peter I (AD 300–11) and named in honour of his predecessor, is described as a \textit{basilica}\footnote{Athan. Chronicon Prævium 11 (PG 26, col. 1356D).} and is generally identified with the Mosque of One Thousand Columns in the western part of the city, an area close to Christian cemeteries.\footnote{McKenzie 2007, 240 (however, this hypothesis is not proven).} According to McKenzie, this church was newly built and did not enshrine an earlier religious building. However, it is interesting to note that the rabbinical sources describe the Great Synagogue of Alexandria as a grand \textit{basilica} (with a Latin word). Although this is a mere hypothesis, it would be indeed attractive to think that the Theonas church was built on the synagogue’s foundations.\footnote{The size and splendour of the synagogue were the subjects of glowing descriptions in the schools of Palestine and Babylonia: “He who has not seen it, has not seen the glory of Israel”, said the rabbis (jSuk 51b). It was a vast Hellenistic-style edifice where the officers of the Alexandrine congregation would wave a flag to signal congregants on distant benches when to respond. The building is described as a \textit{basilica} with columns and 70 seats, holding 100,000 worshippers, and as a double \textit{stoa}. See Midr. Teh. on Ps. 93.}

Another early church is the so-called church of Boukolou or Baukalis, near the martyrrium and the underground tomb of St Mark.\footnote{Act. Marc. 5 (PG 115 col. 168 A); McKenzie 2007, 240.} The origins and location of the Boukolou church are mysterious. According to the \textit{Acts of St Mark}, this church was built ‘in the area beside the sea under crags called Boukolou’.\footnote{Act. Marc. 5 (PG 115, col. 168 A) Boukolou \textit{topoi}; Calderini–Daris 1988, I, 105, 173; II, 62–64 on Boukolon \textit{kome}; Gascou 1998, 37–39, 43–44; McKenzie 2007, 240–242; the church was enlarged under Constantine, and was the see of the presbyter Arius.} For Pearson, the martyrdom of St Mark took place in the north-
western quarter of Alexandria, near the beaches where the Jewish community lived by the Kibotos harbour – part of the Eunostos harbour – in the Delta quarter.\textsuperscript{50} Interestingly, Strabo states that from before the foundation of Alexandria boukoloi (‘herdsman’) lived in the area of Rhakotis near the Alexandrian Serapeum in the Delta quarter.\textsuperscript{51} But a search for boukolo shows that, while in Greece the term indicated an adept of Dionysos, in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt it could mean ‘devotee of Serapis’.\textsuperscript{52} As a matter of fact, Serapis was often represented as either the sacrificial Apis Bull or as a shepherd.

This information suggests that the site of the church of Boukolou could have been the site of an earlier temple to Serapis. This should not surprise us, as evidence exists of other early Christian churches in Alexandria built on Serapis shrines. Further documents seem to indicate that there was some connection between the neighbourhood of the boukoloi and the cult of Serapis.\textsuperscript{PHeid 7.400, two Second-century letters from Sempronius to Satornila, mention the proskynema to Serapis and a ‘quarter of the boukoloi’ (ll. 15–16), probably in Alexandria,\textsuperscript{53} while a Third-century letter from Ptolemais to Zosimos\textsuperscript{54} mentions a place called Boukolia in Alexandria alongside a proskynema to Serapis.\textsuperscript{55} We must now, therefore, investigate the identity of the boukoloi.

5. The revolt of the Boukoloi

A pressure group called ‘Boukoloi’ troubled Egypt around 172, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, in a major revolt that was quelled by Avidius Cassius. In 175, however, Avidius Cassius went to Alexandria and was declared emperor by his troops in the East,\textsuperscript{56} and in 176 Marcus Aurelius spent the winter in Alexandria quelling the sedition.\textsuperscript{57} Dio’s description, summarised by Xiphilinus, depicts the Boukoloi in violent tones, as transvestites and cannibals:

‘The people called the Bucoli began a disturbance in Egypt and under the leadership of one Isidorus, a priest, caused the rest of the Egyptians to revolt. At first, arrayed in women’s garments, they had deceived the Roman centurion, causing him to believe that they were women of the Bucoli and were going to give him gold as

\textsuperscript{50} Pearson 2004, 109–110
\textsuperscript{51} Strabo 17,1,6.
\textsuperscript{52} LSJ s.v.; UPZ 57.
\textsuperscript{54} WChr 21 (BGU 2.625).
\textsuperscript{55} SelPap 1.120.
\textsuperscript{56} See a letter of Avidius Cassius preserved on papyrus, SB 10.10295; Bowman 1970.
\textsuperscript{57} As is suggested by CIL III 6578, a statue base of 176 found in Alexandria, with a dedication to Marcus Aurelius by a tribune of the Legio II Traiana.
ransom for their husbands, and had then struck him down when he approached them. They also sacrificed his companion and after swearing an oath over his entrails devoured them. Isidorus surpassed all his contemporaries in bravery. Next, having conquered the Romans in Egypt in a pitched battle, they [the Bucoli] came near to capturing Alexandria, too, and would have succeeded had not Cassius been sent against them from Syria. He contrived to destroy their mutual accord and to separate them from one another (for, because of their desperation as well as their numbers he had not ventured to attack them while they were united) and thus, when they fell to quarrelling, he subdued them.'  

It has been noted that the portrayal of the *Boukoloi* is similar to the characterisation (in Dio 69.13) of the Jews in the Bar Kochba Revolt of 132–5: a small revolt that spread to the rest of the country, people committing atrocities against the Romans, a special general being sent from another field of operations, the extraordinary strength of the enemy due to their unity and desperation, and the winning strategy of dividing to conquer. The atrocities committed by the *Boukoloi*, such as cannibalism and torture, recur in Dio’s description (68.32) of the Jews in the Diaspora Revolt. However, these analogies must be read as propaganda and by no means imply any Jewish presence in the revolt of the *Boukoloi*. According to Winkler, the story of the *Boukoloi*, far from being an impartial account, must be read from the point of view of Roman fear of Alexandria and, indeed, the story shows literary elements taken from contemporary fiction, such as Achilles Tatius and Lollianus who characterised the *Boukoloi* as ‘desperadoes’.

Most probably, the revolt of the *Boukoloi* was not simply a native revolt against Roman rule by dissatisfied Egyptian farmers and herdsmen of the area of the Delta. Dio understood and reported that these people were a specific political group called ‘Herdsmen’, but the term did not (only) indicate real herdsmen. Most probably, the *Boukoloi* were a political and religious group of

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58 Dio [Xiphilinus] 72,4: καὶ οἱ καλοῦμενοι Βουκόλοι κατὰ τὴν Αἰγύπτου κινηθέντες καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Αἰγύπτους προσαποστήσαντες ὑπὸ ἱερεῖ τινα [καὶ Ἰσιδόροφ, πρώτον μὲν ἐν γυναικείοις στολαῖς τὸν ἐκατόντυργκον τὸν Ῥωμαίον ἡπατηκότες ὡς δὴ γυναίκες τῶν Βουκόλων καὶ χρυσία δόσουσα αὐτῷ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνδρῶν προσσίντα σφίζε κατέκοψαν, καὶ τὸν συνάντα αὐτῷ καταθέρασαν ἑπὶ τὴν τὴν περιφρώγον αὐτοῦ συνόμοσαν καὶ ἑκεῖνα κατέθραγγον ἦν δὲ Ἰσιδόροφ ἀνδρὶ πάντων τῶν καὶ ἢ αὐτὸν ἄριστος· ἐπειτα ἐκ παρατάξεως τοὺς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ῥωμαίους νικήσαντες μικροῦ καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν εἶλον, εἰ μή Κάσσιος ἢ Σορίας πεμβόλεις επ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ στρατηγήσας ὤστε τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους σφόν ὁμόνοιαν λύσας καὶ ἀν’ ἀλλήλους ἀποχώρησας, διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀπόμοιαν καὶ τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῶν ὄπω εὐθάρρησαν συμμπλῆν ἄθροίς αὐτῶν, οὗτο δὲ στασιάσαντες ἔχειρώσατο. See also HA M. Ant. 21,2; HA Avid. Cas. 6,7 on Bucolic.

59 See Millar 1985, 412.

60 Winkler 1980, 177; for Rutherford 2000, 109: ‘The human sacrifice here is strongly reminiscent of the Scheimtod in Achilles Tatius, and the possibility arises that Cassius Dio, or his source (possibly Marius Maximus), was influenced by contemporary fiction.’

61 Alston 1999 sticks to the interpretation of the *Boukoloi* as herdsmen and rural classes.
anti-Roman fighters and martyrs – possibly adepts of Serapis, as the Egyptian meaning of the term *boukolos* suggests – and this idea would help to explain why the leader of the revolt, Isidorus, was a priest. The cult of Serapis had inspired earlier Alexandrian riots against Roman emperors, and many allusions to Serapis feature in the *Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs* and related literature. It is thus possible that the *Boukoloi* were Egyptian anti-imperial militants, possibly including lower-class men with a common religiosity based on the idea of martyrdom. An interesting piece of evidence is a fragmentary Second-century document from the Fayum, *SB* 14.11650, probably an oracle, which predicts that ‘when the moon will be in the constellation of Leo (…) there will be a taqaw¶ in Egypt (…) and there will be death for the *Boukoloi*’. It is worth noting that oracles were usually associated with Serapis.

The years of the revolt of the *Boukoloi* were a time of anti-imperial revolts elsewhere, especially the revolt of Avidius Cassius, a revolt in which the Christians may have participated along with other rebels. According to Eusebius, by 171/2 in the hills of Phrygia, Montanus and two prophetesses had organised an insurrectional group and urged Christians to become martyrs. Hippolytus Romanus (*In Dan.* 4.18 f) quotes the case of a group of Christians led by a bishop who withdrew to the desert waiting for the imminent return of Christ. The governor believed them to be brigands and was about to send the army against them when his (Christian?) wife convinced him not to do so.

After the revolt of Cassius, some who had made predictions ‘as if inspired by the gods’ (in the plural) were banished. Obviously, their predictions were against the Roman emperor and in favour of Cassius. The *Historia Augusta*...
states that a man predicted that when he fell from a tree and turned into a stork, fire from heaven and the end of the world would follow. He did fall, allowing a stork to emerge from his vest, and was promptly arrested, although Marcus Aurelius mercifully pardoned him. According to Dio, however, the emperor was so clement that after the death of Avidius Cassius he asked the Senate for a universal amnesty and put no rebel to death.

Montanism and other millenarian movements such as those mentioned above expected the end of the world, and this led to behaviour that might be considered as politically subversive. Although a connection between such movements and the revolt of Avidius Cassius cannot be demonstrated, there are striking similarities between the movement of the Boukoloi in Egypt and the Circumcelliones and Donatists in Fourth-century Northern Africa. According to recent studies, anti-imperial movements based on the idea of martyrdom (of the Maccabaean type) were common in the lower classes in Northern Africa even before the Fourth century, thus we may be looking at a phenomenon of longue durée that involved both the Boukoloi and Christians in Egypt, and their African counterparts.

The second great issue of Christian apologetic literature took place in such a framework when, after the revolt of Cassius, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus were travelling in the East. At least five apologists defended Christianity in works addressed to the emperor and his heir. Apollinaris recalled episodes in which Christian soldiers remained loyal to Marcus Aurelius on the Danube in 175. At roughly the same time, Melito, bishop of Sardis, complained about new Roman decrees that ordered the expropriation of Christian property and the persecution of Christians, and asserted the loyalty of Christians to the empire. In 177, Athenagoras said that no slave would accuse the Christians, even falsely, of murder or cannibalism (although, according to Eusebius, these charges had actually been made against Christians by slaves from the persecuted churches of Lyons and Vienne in the summer of the same year). Finally, in 180 or 181, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, alludes (To Autolycus 1,11) to the revolt of

66 HA M. Ant. 13,6.
68 Epiph. Haer. 49,1; Tert. Fug. 9,4; Eus. HE 5,6,18–19. On Montanism, see Hirschmann 2005 and Tabbernee 2007. On the anti-imperial movement of the Circumcelliones in Fourth-century North-Africa that is ultimately that of the Donatists, see Cacitti 2006, according to whom (p. 4), the term circumcelliones designated deviation from the canonic rule, characterised by the anti-social behaviour of individuals or groups of a monastic or a clerical nature. They distinguished themselves by their extreme poverty, itinerant habits and the exercise of violence directed against the establishment of justice, and by peculiar liturgical customs.
69 Cacitti 2006, 14.
70 For an analysis of the works of these apologists, see Grant 1988.
71 Athen. Leg. 35; Eus. HE 5,1,14.
Cassius and pleads for the loyalty of Christians to the emperor. Two decades later, Tertullian\(^{72}\) still spoke of the loyalty of Christian soldiers to Marcus Aurelius, and reiterated that no Christians had supported Cassius.

All of these apologetic works may well have reflected some laws passed in 176–180 that punished Christians (along with other rebels) for their supposed participation in the revolt of Avidius Cassius. The participation of some Egyptian Christians in the revolt links them to the Boukoloi, as the revolt of the Boukoloi de facto helped Cassius to become emperor. In other words, the Boukoloi, willingly or not, were deemed responsible for the rising of Cassius against the emperor.\(^{73}\) It is not impossible that at least some Egyptian Christians, like the Boukoloi, celebrated anti-imperial revolution as a religious mission and martyrdom as a value. As a matter of fact, evidence shows that martyrdom and the cult of the corpses of martyrs were especially valued in Egypt: as late as the Fourth century, St Anthony exhorted Egyptian Christians to stop keeping the mummies of relatives and martyrs at home.\(^{74}\)

6. The end of the Serapeum and the normalisation of Egyptian Christianity

Soon after the suppression of the revolt of the Boukoloi, the Alexandrian Serapeum was burned down. Clement of Alexandria\(^{75}\) mentions ‘the akra which they now call Rhakotis, where stands the honoured sanctuary (hieron) of Serapis’ as reconstructed by 190, while Jerome states that the templum (that is, the actual sanctuary) was burned in 181.\(^{76}\) The destruction of the Serapeum may be a further indication that the Boukoloi were connected with the worship of Serapis.

While Athanasius was patriarch (328–73) many churches were erected in the city and by 375 the city had almost twelve, according to Epiphanius. These included the Caesareum, a church built on the earlier temple to Augustus, the

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\(^{72}\) Apol. 5,6; 35,9.

\(^{73}\) Minucius Felix (Oct. 30,5) and Tertullian (Apol. 9,9) struggled to defend Christians from the accusations of infanticide and cannibalism, all accusations previously weighed against the Boukoloi; see Winkler 1980, 81–82 and also Eus. HE 5,1,14. Naturally, however, these were stereotypical accusations directed against the anti-imperial rebels, whoever they were.


\(^{75}\) Protr. 4,42 and 47.

\(^{76}\) Jer. Chron. 208 Helm. The Serapeum was rebuilt between 181 and 215/16, when it miraculously survived a fire during the reign of Caracalla. It is possible that the Serapeum was the Pantheon built by Severus in 205 McKenzie 2007, 195–203 and note 130 p. 402. Indeed, the name Pantheon would be appropriate for the Serapeion, as other gods were worshipped there together with Serapis.
Kaisareion, and another built on a temple to Hadrian, the Hadrianon. Other churches include the Kyrinos, Theonas, Baukalis, St Mark, Pieirios, Serapion (notably), the Persia, Dizya, and the church of Annianos. The temple of Dionysos was converted into a church in honour of Theodosius’ son Honorius and was also called the church of Cosmas and Damian. Other churches were erected by Theophilus, such as a church in honour of Theodosius, one to Raphael on Pharos, the church of Three Young Men, and one dedicated to Mary in the Eastern part of the city. Many of these churches may have been temples to Serapis and pagan sanctuaries.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 established new dogmas and rules for the Christian religion and under Theodosius Christianity became a state religion. At this point, Christians could not afford to tolerate local aberrant variants of the cult, and even the Egyptians had to conform to the standards imposed by the church. The destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria in 391 by Theodosius (385–412) and the Alexandrian bishop Theophilus marked the beginning of a new era:

‘The governor of Alexandria and the commander-in-chief of the troops of Egypt assisted Theophilus in demolishing the heathen temples (...) All the images were accordingly broken in pieces, except one statue of the aforementioned god, which Theophilus preserved and set up in a public place; “Lest,” said he, “at a future time the heathen should deny that they ever worshipped such gods”.’

Among the ‘heathens’ mentioned in this passage, we should perhaps count the descendants of the Boukoloi and the radical Alexandrians who had supported the anti-imperial revolt of Avidius Cassius. Egyptian Christianity was normalised, and its anomalous behaviours erased. The site of the Serapeum hosted a new church to St John the Baptist.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that during the Roman period and at the time of Hadrian, the Alexandrian Serapeum could have been attended by both Jews and Christians. The presence of the Septuagint in the library of the Serapeum probably made this temple holy for Egyptian Jews and, above all, for Christians. Documents also show that Christians in Egypt often worshipped Serapis. A Second-century letter shows Tasoucharion, a woman from a Christian

78 MCKENZIE 2007, 232–233 thinks that most of these churches were new buildings and did not reuse previous structures.
79 SOCR. HE 5,16.
community of a certain Apa Satorneilos, making the customary genuflection to Serapis. This, in turn, lends support to the view (also supported by Galimberti) that the core of Hadrian's letter to Servianus concerning the Christian presence in the Alexandrian Serapeum is reliable. After the end of the Diaspora Revolt and the obliteration of the Jewish communities in Egypt, Hadrian's policy of religious pluralism and his favourable attitude towards mystery cults may have created more space for the development of early Christianity.

This paper has also hypothesised that the Boukoloi, who were the protagonists of an anti-imperial revolt in the 170s and were partly responsible for the rise of Avidius Cassius, were not (or not only) 'herdsmen', but also a political and religious group based on the worship of Serapis. Due to the overlaps and affinities between Christian revolutionary movements and the Boukoloi, some Christians were accused of fomenting Cassius' revolt, hence the efforts of some apologists to prove that Christians had always been loyal to Marcus Aurelius. The involvement of at least some Egyptian Christians in the movement of the Boukoloi and the rise of Cassius may be real and may be compared with other millenarian or 'heretic' movements in the Near East and in Northern Africa which participated in anti-imperial revolts.

The cults of Isis and Serapis, with their 'purification, abstinence, and initiation rituals – elements not foreign in other mystery cults – had unintentionally paved the way for the successful integration of Christianity'.

These cults presented a universalist doctrine that abolished ethnic and social barriers, promised a happy existence in the eternal afterlife, celebrated martyrdom and imposed precepts of continence and abstinence, including a daily liturgy and, also, often castration. Most of these elements were borrowed and developed by Egyptian Christianity. In this respect, Eusebius reports the rumour that Origen, who lived an ascetic life and longed for martyrdom, had castrated himself in order to emulate the evangelical precept that 'there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'. Indeed, castration was an element of the Serapis cult, and Egyptian Christianity tolerated and even took on some aspects of this cult, thus, Origen's Christian attitude is close to that of 'extremist' Serapis worshippers.

Hadrian indeed favoured religious pluralism in Egypt. He built pluralistic temples in which different yet similar gods were associated and avoided persecutions against Christians, and this could be one reason for the appearance and spread of Christian texts in Antonine Egypt. An indication of this policy of religious pluralism may be the promotion of the cult of Antinous, an entirely new cult that was added to the already crowded Graeco-Roman pantheon. The

81 TAKACS 1995, 204.
target audience for the cult of Antinous was the Greek élites, while the lower classes (excluding, naturally, the Jews) were left with Serapis, Christ, or the other gods. The amazing spread of the cult of Antinous suggests that Hadrian’s religious pluralism worked on a universal level and acted as a unifying factor for the empire. However, Hadrian’s policy of religious pluralism eventually backfired on the empire, because it gave space to anti-imperial movements which periodically rose against the emperors. Avidius Cassius took advantage of these heterogeneous pressure groups and used them to promote his own rise as an alternative emperor, although his coup eventually failed. The triumph of Christianity in Egypt may be regarded as one vast, yet unpredictable, result of the religious pluralism that Hadrian had first promoted.

The rise of Christianity as a tolerated, then official, religion in the Fourth century imposed a normalisation of worship in Egypt. Naturally, Isis and Serapis worshippers in Alexandria and elsewhere did not simply turn into Christians and forsake old convictions. The cults co-existed up to the moment of active Christian intervention, which took the form of imperial edicts and, in the case of Alexandria, under Theodosius involved the physical annihilation of temples honouring Isis and Serapis. The destruction of the Serapeum in 391 put an end to all forms of religious pluralism. All the Pantheons which had been subsidised by Hadrian were systematically destroyed, or converted into churches.

In the fifth book of his *Histories*, Tacitus states that, when Titus entered the temple of Jerusalem in 70, all the gods (in the plural) escaped:

> ‘The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the Gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure’.

According to the passage in the *Historia Augusta* mentioned above, Tacitus may have wanted to represent the temple of Jerusalem as a kind of *Pantheon* similar to the temples without icons inaugurated by Hadrian where a plurality of ‘invisible’ or ‘spiritual’ gods were worshipped. He may also have spontaneously associated the Jewish temple of Jerusalem with the aniconic pantheons attended by Christians in his time. The ‘Christian Virgil’ Prudentius sounds even more sarcastic than Tacitus when he mocks the pathetic crowd of pagan gods and phantoms (*laruas*) that lurked behind the doors of Roman *Capitolia*:

> “ipse magistratum tibi consulis, ipse tribunal | contulit auratumque togae donauit amictum, | cuius religio tibi displicet, o pereuntum adsertor diuum, solus qui

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84 Theodoret. *HE* 5,22.
85 Tac. *Hist*. 5,13: *Apertae repente delubri fores et audita maior humana vox excedere deos; simul ingens motus excedentium*. Prof. E. Gruen pointed out the sarcasm of this passage in the Classics seminar in Durham in 2007.
C. Symm. 1,622–631: “It is he that conferred on thee the office of consul and the judgement-seat, and gave thee the gold-wrought toga to wear, he whose religion does not win thy favour, thou upholder of gods outworn, who alone dost plead for the restoration of those tricks of Vulcan and Mars and Venus, old Saturn’s stones and Phoebus’ prophetic frenzies, the Ilian Mother’s Megalesian festival, the Bacchic rites of the Nysian god, the farcical ceremonies of Isis ever mourning for her lost Osiris, which even her own bald-heads must laugh at, and all the goblins which the Capitol by custom keeps within it.”

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