Some Remarks about the Religion of Persians in Egypt

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Around thirty years ago, Pierre Grelot wrote: *Les Perses et autres Iraniens qui séjournent en Égypte pratiquent naturellement le culte de leurs dieux nationaux.* Although such a statement may seem reasonable at first glance, the sources are ambiguous on this matter. Research on Iranian religion in the time of the Achaemenids frequently met with difficulties in the interpretation of sources, which led some scholars to propose radically different conclusions. There are reasons to believe that the religious environment of ancient Western Iran was quite diversified. It was a territory where the influences of different religions were merging together: in Fars the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, for instance, provide evidence of cults of not just Iranian gods, but of Elamite ones as well. It is also likely that Iranian religion of the time was a mixture of different Mazdaean concepts and Old Ira-

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1 P. GRELOT, Documents araméens d’Égypte, *LAPO 5*, Paris 1972 [= Documents araméens], p. 332. This opinion is repeated in almost the same words by E. LIPINSKI, Un culte de X’an et de Haṭya à Éléphantine au V e siècle av. n.è., *FolOr* 22, 1981–1984 [= *FolOr* 22], p. 5.

2 The term ‘Iranian religion’ is employed here as a general term for all religious phenomena of the time of the Achaemenid Iran and before. Issues connected with the religions of Achaemenid Persia are very debatable. Therefore, naming them ‘Iranian religion’ should not cause controversies. I avoided the use of ‘Mazdaism’, denoting the cult of Ahuramazda, unless I specifically wanted to refer to it.

3 For various different scholarly debates on Achaemenid religion see an introduction to the recent article by B. LINCOLN, À la recherche du paradis perdu, *HistRel* 43/2, 2003, pp. 139–141.

nian cults and customs. Moreover, it is possible that the official religion of the ruling dynasty was considerably different from the religious beliefs of Iranians in various parts of the empire. Persians who arrived in Egypt from the sixth century onwards clearly came from a multicultural society in which knowledge about foreign gods was not atypical. They brought with them a religion that was probably still decentralized and undogmatic, and that would more than likely accommodate new deities and forms of worship. Thus, Grelot’s claim that Persians arriving in Egypt would have faithfully followed an inherited set of religious traditions must be qualified.

Let us begin with a discussion of the Persian kings’ generally receptive approach towards foreign gods. This approach is often described as ‘tolerance’, although it was not tolerance in our modern sense. Many scholars agree that the Achaemenids had some sort of universal policy towards foreign cults, dictated, no doubt, by various political, religious, and administrative demands. In religious terms, this probably meant that Persian kings acknowledged the cult of the leading gods of a given land. After entering a new territory, a conquering ruler would proclaim the sanction of his power from the god of the land, whoever he was: Marduk in Babylonia, Yahweh in Judah or Re in Egypt. Muhammad A. Dandamaev assumes that most religions of the time were characterized by the complete absence of the concept of false faith or of any forms of heresy, and the total absence of racial hatred or any feeling of the superiority of one people over another. Therefore, individuals, although faithful to their own gods, simultaneously worshipped gods of the land in which they arrived. Of course, Dandamaev’s opinion is somewhat too idealistic: intolerance and feelings of superiority were always present, especially between conquerors and conquered. However, in the ancient Near East, the existence of many different gods and divine entities was accepted commonly and naturally.

5 For example, it is uncertain whether Cyrus and Cambyses were followers of any Iranian cult, especially in the light of recent opinions about strong Elamite influence upon them: D.T. Potts, Cyrus the Great and the Kingdom of Anshan, in: V. Sarkhosh Curtis, S. Stewart (eds.), Birth of the Persian Empire, Vol. I, London 2005, pp. 7–28; M.W. Waters, Cyrus and Achaemenids, Iran 42, 2004, pp. 95, 99. There is clear evidence for the worship of Iranian cults among the Persian royal family from Darius onwards. There is no place here to review the whole discussion about Achaemenid religion. However, the reader might consult with B. Lincoln, Religion, empire, and torture. The case of Achaemenian Persia, with a postscript on Abu Ghraib, Chicago 2007, and the bibliography therein, which gives a good impression of recent trends in these studies.


8 Dandamaev, Lukonin, Culture and social institutions, p. 359.

9 Dandamaev, Politique religieuse, p. 198. This theory was repeated in Dandamaev, Lukonin, Culture and social institutions, p. 359.
The same royal policy, which appears to have been widespread throughout the empire, was apparently adopted by the Persian rulers in Egypt. The exception to this practice seems to be provided by the possible destruction of Egyptian temples, which supposedly took place during Cambyses’ invasion. Although some of the temples may have been damaged during the conquest, this was due to the general circumstances of the invasion. Generally, scholars agree that there is some truth in classical authors’ writings about the destruction of Egyptian temples. However, they do not hold Cambyses responsible for this war damage. On the other hand, some later sources mention the return of the divine statues (which were taken by Achaemenid kings) to temples by Ptolemy. But this may be only an effect of Ptolemaic propaganda. Regardless of the disturbances caused by war, the normal royal approach to religion in Egypt probably did not differ from procedures in other satrapies.

By introducing this policy, Cambyses, the first Persian conqueror of the country, wanted to present himself as a pharaoh and a legitimate heir of the Saite kings. On inscriptions he is presented with all the traditional titles and formulae, including ‘son of Re’. Egyptian sources clearly show that Cambyses followed previous pharaohs in participating in temple rituals and other religious duties. This policy was possible thanks to the advice of Udjahorresnet, an admiral, a physician, and a prominent official of the Saite kings who introduced Cambyses, and then Darius, to Egyptian tradition and religious

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13 See for example, a recent study on the subject, by SERRANO DELGADO, CdE 79, pp. 36–38. There are also references to titles and names of Persian pharaohs.
sults. Cambyses took care of the temple of Neith at Saïs, which was Udjahorresnet’s hometown, but the king also participated in funerary rituals of the sacred Apis bull and left several inscriptions testifying to his devotion to Egyptian deities. Darius I, who had Udjahorresnet as his advisor as well, followed a similar policy. This king commissioned, for example, the building of a large temple of Amon–Re at the El-Khârga Oasis and the restoration of the sanctuary of Neith at Saïs. Darius is mentioned in several documents and inscriptions, with proper pharaonic titles, as a follower of different Egyptian deities. In general, sources depict him as a pharaoh of good reputation. And although the evidence about his successor Xerxes is scant, we can assume that he, too, continued the policy of presenting himself as a legitimate Egyptian pharaoh.

As suggested above, Cambyses’ and Darius’ success in appropriating Egypt’s pantheon for their own political needs would have been impossible without a comprehensive knowledge of ancient Egyptian religion and the customs connected with it. Receptive though they were to different forms of worship, the Persians were obviously foreigners in Egypt, and therefore were subject to limitations in acquiring such sacred lore. In spite of this, they managed to transform themselves into Egyptian pharaohs, with all the religious consequences, and without bigger dissonances. It is worth stressing that according to Udjahor-

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17 This can be confirmed, for example, by the inscriptions from Wadi Hammamat, Posener, Première domination perse, pp. 121–124 (Nos. 27–30). For a discussion on this matter, see: Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, pp. 545–547, 963–965. The activity of Artaxerxes I is also confirmed by the inscriptions from Wadi Hammamat, Posener, Première domination perse, pp. 125–128 (Nos. 31–33). There is also a very scant piece of information about Darius II’s doings in Egypt, e.g. his cartouche in El-Khârga, see: Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, pp. 602–603, 981–982. For a general view of Egyptian culture, administration, and institutions under the Persian rule, see e.g.: M.F. Gyles, Pharaonic policies and administration, 663 to 323 B.C., The James Sprunt studies in history and political science 41, Chapel Hill 1959, pp. 67–71; J.H. Johnson, The Persians and the Continuity of Egyptian Culture, in: H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuijpt, M.C. Root (eds.), Achaemenid history VIII: Continuity and change. Proceedings of the last Achaemenid History Workshop, April 6–8, 1990, Ann Arbor; Michigan, Leiden 1994, pp. 149–159.
resnet’s claims (based on an inscription at his naophoros), he considered himself personally responsible for creating Cambyses’ Egyptian royal titles and instructing the king in the cult of Neith, for example. It is likely that each Persian king had Egyptian advisors who supplemented their knowledge about Egypt. Egyptians were employed in administrative offices, including satrap’s chancery. Therefore, Persian officials in every position had an opportunity to consult people who had been educated in Egyptian religious matters. It is safe to assume that Persians in Egypt could have had fairly thorough knowledge about the worship of Egyptian gods.

While the evidence of the Persian kings’ acknowledgement of the Egyptian religion is plentiful, the beliefs of ordinary, rank-and-file Persians in Egypt are harder to document. Only a few sources confirm the worship of Iranian religion among Persians in this country. One of the Elephantine papyri provides a confirmation of the presence of Iranian priests in Egypt. The papyrus documents of a donation made by Ananiah, a Jew from Elephantine, to his wife Tamut, on 30th October 434 B.C., contain the names of two Magi, Mithrasarah (Mtrsrh mgšy’) and Tāta (Tt mgšy’), who witnessed the event.

Two Greek papyri from the third century B.C. provide further evidence of the existence of Iranian cults in Egypt. Both mention Mithraea (Μιθραεα) located in Egypt. This evidence comes from a period later than the Persian domination, although the cult of Mithra could have been introduced into Egyptian territory during the Achaemenian period.23

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21 He could be identical with Mithrasarah son of Mithrasarah, who witnessed another document from 446 B.C., see: PORTEN, YARDENI, TAD 2, p. 37 (B 2.7), cf. COWLEY, Aramaic papyri, p. 38 (No. 13); PORTEN, Elephantine papyri, p. 187 (B 29). Such an opinion was expressed also by LIPIŃSKI, FolOr 22, p. 8. This could be the evidence for a 12-year presence of this magus in Egypt.


23 Such an opinion was expressed already by Boyce and Grenet, cf. M. BOYCE, F. GRENET (eds.), A History of Zoroastrianism III: Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman rule, Histoire de l'Iran sous l’Empire Persan, 1991 [= HistO] 1.8.3, Leiden 1991, p. 359. There was another hypothesis by Michaélidis, who suggested that in Memphis, near today’s village of Mitrahine (or Mit-Rahineh), the sanctuary of Mithra already existed in the fifth century B.C., see: G. MICHAÉLIDIS, Quelques objets inédits d’époque Perse, ASAE XLIII, 1943 [= ASAE XLIII], pp. 99–100. However, the only basis for this statement was a small figurine of a bull, described later in the present paper, which was more credibly attributed to the cult of Apis by J. Yoyotte, La provenance du cylindre de Darius [BM 89.132], RAAO XLVI, 1952 [= RAAO XLVI], p. 167, n. 5. Therefore, this object cannot be evidence for the existence of Mithraeum in Memphis during the Persian period. Michaélidis’ theory was reinforced by Dandaea, who gave another example of an object probably connected with Mithra’s cult in Egypt, i.e. the so-called Memphis stela (vide infra, n. 84), which was probably also found in Misrahine, see: DANDAMAË, LUKONIN, Culture and social
It is also likely that another important Persian deity, the goddess Anāhītā, was worshipped in Egypt. A sculpture which probably depicts this goddess was found in Egypt and probably comes from the Memphis region, where it was carved around the second half of the fourth century B.C. The object, a female figure carved against a background in high relief, is quite small (c. 15 cm high). The figure has a Persian dress. However, the composition is perhaps that of an Egyptian cippus and some features suggest an Egyptian artistic influence. In fact, this depiction cannot be compared with any other object representing Anāhītā from the Achaemenid period, because no such depictions are known. One possible example, the cylinder seal from Gorgippa showing a female standing on a lion, however, significantly different from the present example. Therefore it cannot be certain, whether the object in question really presents the goddess Anāhītā.

Further documentation of Persian religion can be provided by seals used by Iranians in Egypt. Several seals have been found which appear to be similar to those in Iran. Depictions on seals frequently had a religious significance. Their iconography has largely Assyrian and Babylonian prototypes. The seal of Bagamarazdiya (inscribed in Aramaic bgmrzdý) is an example of an unexcavated object presumably found in Upper Egypt, and comes from the collection of Noël Aimé-Giron. It depicts, among other things, a hero wearing an Assyrian garment and a tiara on his head. On the right side of the hero, there
is a solar disc. This object does not provide detailed evidence of the beliefs of its owner, but it is certainly a product of Iranian (or Mesopotamian) tradition.

An interesting corpus of clay objects with seal impressions from Achaemenid times was found by W.M.F. Petrie in the palace of Apries at Memphis in Egypt. Some of these seal impressions depict a typical image of hero between two animals or creatures (‘heroic control,’ according to M.B. Garrison and M.C. Root) [Nos. 27, 29–31], which is quite common among Persian seals. There is one particular impression, which presents a seated figure with some royal attributes, who looks at two other figures stretching their hands over an animal and with a kind of winged symbol above the scene [No. 39]. It is certainly a depiction of some kind of religious ritual involving an offering of the animal. The human figures on this seal have beards, and are therefore not Egyptians, but probably inhabitants of Western Asia. The winged symbol, which is significantly different from the Egyptian winged disc, is different from the regular Persian winged symbols as well. At least one of the royal regalia on the seal could be an Egyptian one (flail or scepter). A bow, which accompanies the king, could suggest that this is a Persian ruler. The seal in question was recognized as Greek by Petrie. However, Garrison and Root most likely are right in attributing this to Persians. Because of the ambiguity of the symbols, the scene cannot be certainly identified either as a Persian or an Egyptian ritual (the latter seems to be less probable).

Another seal from Petrie’s corpus depicts a winged hero (this fragment is significantly damaged, so the image is not clear) and a bearded human figure with a crown, a bird-like body and legs, a scorpion’s tail, and the head of a bull protruding from the bird-like body. This figure is holding a stretched bow [No. 46]. These apparently Iranian motifs are accompanied by a kind of Egyptian floral border. The possible religious meaning of this seal remains unclear, but it is certainly connected with Persian ideas. However, it is noticeable that these objects include certain Egyptian motifs. It would seem that the seals from Petrie’s finding were made in Egypt, in a manner similar to the designs common in the heart of the Empire. These Egyptian elements are the effect of the influence of Egyptian art, but it is difficult to attribute any religious significance to them.

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28 A heroic motif is one of the oldest figural representations in western Asiatic imagery. It certainly bore some religious meaning, and in Achaemenian times was probably connected with the person of the king. However, there are plenty of interpretations and hypotheses about this symbol. Therefore it is impossible to link it with an exact form of a cult. For the meaning of the hero motif on Achaemenian seals, see especially: Garrison, Root, Jones, Seals I, pp. 53–60.


30 See the typology of images in Garrison, Root, Jones, Seals I, pp. 60–61.

31 Ibid., p. 36; Petrie, Wainwright, Mackay, Meydum and Memphis, III, p. 42.

Papyri, another valuable addition to our discussion, contain Iranian proper names. An
interesting question arises with respect to another papyrus from the late fifth century B.C.,
which is a letter of complaint against the Egyptians addressed to the heads of the Eleph-
tine Jewish community. The letter describes the governor of the province of Thebes as
*Mzdyzn*, i.e. Mazdayazna, which can mean ‘Mazdaean’ or ‘Mazda believer’, usually an
epithet given to Zoroastrians in *Avesta* and in Sassanian times; but in this context, it is
a proper name. Generally, a name is not likely to indicate a person’s religious beliefs. In
the Achaemenian case, this issue is discussed in detail by Rüdiger Schmitt, who concludes
that unless the first use of a particular name can be identified, the name cannot be used as
evidence for the religion of its holder.

The case of Iranian names in Egypt is especially difficult – in most cases only the name
can indicate whether someone can claim an Iranian ethnicity. And the majority of Ira-
nian names have a meaning connected with religion. In Egyptian Aramaic papyri there are
c. 135 Iranian names, like Artabanu (‘Rtbnw, ‘Having the Luster of Truth’), Artavarziya
(‘Rtwrzy, ‘Performing Truth’), Bagadana (Bgdn, ‘Gift of Baga’), Bagazušta (Bgzwsít, ‘Be-
loved of Baga’), Haumayasa (Hwmys, ‘Desirous of Haoma’), Mihravahišta (Mtrwšt, ‘Having
Mithra as the Best’), etc. Slightly more than half of these names are theophoric,

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33 Porten, Yardeni, TAD 1, p. 56 (A4.2), cf. Cowley, Aramaic papyri, pp. 132–135 (No. 37); Grelot,
Documents araméens, pp. 387–391 (No. 97).

34 Ibid., p. 399, n. 333. This name appears on the seal of Aryəramma in the phrase ‘*ryrmm […] br mzdyšn*
“Aryəramma […] the son of Mazdayašna”, which confirms that it is a proper name, see: M.B. Garrison, P. Dion,
The Seal of Aryan in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, *JNES* 58/1, 1999, pp. 4, 5, 17. For other occur-
cences, see: in Persepolis Treasury Tablets (PTT 4:8): G.G. Cameron, Persepolis Treasury Tablets, *OIP* 65,
Chicago 1948, p. 88; in various tablets of Persepolis Fortification Archive: R.T. Hallock, Persepolis Fortifica-
tion Tablets, *OIP* 92, Chicago 1969, p. 727. It can be also a label of Persian ethnicity, according to B. Porten,
Archives from Elephantine: the life of an ancient Persian military colony, Berkeley 1968, p. 55. However, such
a label would equate a ‘Mazdaean’ with a ‘Persian’, which would mean that every Persian is a ‘Mazda believer’,
least for Elephantine Jews during Persian period. This is quite unlikely. In a newer article, Porten does not
seem to share this opinion any more. See: Id., Persian Names in Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt (=
Persian Names), in: S. Shaked, A. Netzer (eds.), *Iran-Judaica V: studies relating to Jewish contacts with Persian
culture throughout the ages*, Jerusalem 2003, p. 175. On the stela of Arebsun from the third century. B.C. there
is a curious form of *dynmzdymnš/dynmzdysnš* ‘Daenamazdayašniš (?)’, see: H. Donner, W. ROLLIG, Kanaaănisch-
che und aramaische Inschriften, Vol. 1. 5 (erweiterte und überarbeitete Auflage), Wiesbaden 2002, p. 64,
No. 264; A. LEMAIRE, VII. Cappadoce: 2. Arebsun II: stèle b (n° 7753), in: Textes araméens d’Anatolie d’époque

35 R. Schmitt, Name und Religion. Anthroponomastische zur Frage der religiösen Verhältnisse des
Achaemenidereiches, in: J. Kelless (ed.), *La religion iranienne à l’époque achéménide. Actes du Colloque de

36 In some cases, in the demotic documents, Persians are additionally identified by using the foreigner de-
determinative, see: J.H. Johnson, Ethnic considerations in Persian period Egypt (= Ethnic considerations), in:
E. TeeTler, J.A. Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, *SAOC* 58,

37 See: Porten, Persian Names, pp. 169, 181–186. An index of proper names and their description is pro-
vided also by Grelot, Documents araméens, pp. 455–508. For Iranian names in Egypt, see also: J. Tavner, Zu
History VI: Asia Minor and Egypt: Old cultures in a new empire*, Leiden 1991 (= Achaemend History VI),
while a number of the remaining ones can also be connected with religion or religious ideas (like Bagaina – *Bgyn*, ‘Baga-like/Divine’, Ramnadaina – *Rmndyn*, ‘Satisfying the Soul’). Unfortunately, these papyri, which are mostly contracts and letters, are silent about the religious beliefs of these people. Moreover, we cannot exclude the possibility that sometimes Iranians did not bear Iranian names in Egypt. Indeed, there is some evidence that they could adopt Egyptian names. The Aramaic papyri also provide evidence for people with a Persian patronymic and an Egyptian forename: Hori, son of Bagabaga (*Bgbg’*), Hori, son of Vana (*Wnh*), Petese, son of Misdaya or Mait (*Myt*), and Pakhe, son of Bagadata (*Bgd’t*). Iranians could also have an Aramaic name (e.g. Naburai, son of Vištana) or Akkadian name (e.g. Mannuki, son of Bagaina). Not only did Iranians bear Persian forenames, but we also have examples of people of different ethnicities with such name combinations, like Babylonians (e.g. Bagadata, son of Nabukudurri), Arameans, Egyptians, and Jews. The above examples clearly show that names are not always a reliable indication of ethnicity, especially in such an ethnically diversified country as Egypt in the Persian period. If anything, they only justify the very weak conclusion that it is likely for the majority of Iranians in Egypt to come from an Iranian culture background, with Iranian religious traditions. However, this evidence remains ambiguous regarding the question of whether Iranians kept their native traditions in Egypt. Rather, it gives an overall picture of a multicultural society under different cultural influences.

An interesting, albeit incomplete, source is the votive stela from Aswan, cited by many scholars, and previously dated to the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (458 B.C.):
1. This shrine [brzmd]n’ PN
2. the chief of the army of Syene made
3. in the month of Sivan that is Mehîr
4. year seven of Artaxerxes the king
5. [to] DN the god. Peace [drwt]
6. [?]

It was ordered by an unidentified commander of garrison of Syene, and documents the
dedication to an unknown deity (the text is damaged) of an object which in Aramaic is
described as brzmdn’ (Old Persian loanword) and interpreted as *brazmâdâna – ‘shrine’
or ‘temple’. 47 Because of the extent of the damage, the god’s name is illegible, which makes
proper interpretation quite difficult. Despite that, Mary Boyce believed the dedicated
temple was a Zoroastrian sanctuary.48 According to André Lemaire, on the other hand, the
commander of the garrison can be read as Widranga and the god’s name as Osirnahty
‘Osiris the powerful’, which would change the date of the object to 398 B.C. (seventh year
of Artaxerxes II). 49 If this is the case, the stela of Aswan would constitute proof of the
establishment of an Egyptian god’s temple by a Persian commander, perhaps in order to
make an alliance with the new ruler of Egypt, Amyrtaeus, who had revolted against the
Achaemenids a few years earlier. 50 However, this reading, in turn, is questioned by Beza-
lel Porten. 51 According to him, the surviving letter traces definitely exclude Lemaire’s
reading. However, Günter Vittmann has recently suggested that the remaining letters from
the god’s name at least confirm that the divinity mentioned on the stela is Egyptian. 52
Nevertheless, the Aswan stela cannot be taken with any certainty as evidence that an
Egyptian cult was supported by a Persian commander.

We find a similar situation with yet another Aramaic text from Elephantine, which is
a grant of house to Miptahiah, daughter of Mahseiah, issued on November 17, 446 B.C. 53
The fragment in question is ambiguous because of a lacuna. It consists of a name of a priest

47 PORTEN, YARDENI, TAD 4, p. 234; A. LEMAIRE, Recherches d’épigraphie araméenne en Asie Mineure et en
Égypte et le probleme de l’acculturation [= Recherches d’épigraphie], in: SANCISI-WEERDENBURG, KUHRT (eds.),
48 Ibid., loc. cit.
49 LEMAIRE, Recherches d’épigraphie, pp. 200–201. This seems to be accepted by BRIANT, From Cyrus to
Alexander, pp. 982–983; JOHNSON, Ethnic considerations, p. 213.
50 Lemaire suggested this as an example of ‘Egyptophilia’, see: LEMAIRE, Recherches d’épigraphie, p. 201.
For a different opinion, supportive of Lemaire’s reading, see: JOHNSON, Ethnic considerations, p. 213; BRIANT,
From Cyrus to Alexander, p. 983.
51 PORTEN, YARDENI, TAD 4, p. 234. Vittmann also confirms that according to Porten’s facsimile Lemaire’s
reading is not possible, see: VITTMANN, Ägypten und die Fremden, pp. 270–271.
52 Ibid., pp. 133, 270–271. This scholar thinks that the remaining letters form the Egyptian word nht ‘strong/
enormous’, the usual epithet of Egyptian deities.
53 PORTEN, YARDENI, TAD 2, pp. 34–37 (B2.7), cf. COWLEY, Aramaic papyri, pp. 37–41 (No. 13); GRELOT,
Documents araméens, pp. 184–189 (No. 36); PORTEN, Elephantine papyri, pp. 186–187 (B29).
of uncertain god (line 15). E. Lipiński proposed reading: Marva-Jana, fils de Palțô, prêtre des dieux X’an et Hāțya, which would be an obvious evidence for a cult of Iranian gods. The same fragment A.E. Cowley read: ... b. Palțô, priest of the gods Khnum and Sati, and P. Grelot: Mardûk fils de Palțô, prêtre des dieux Hānu et ‘Attî. In their edition of Aramaic texts, B. Porten and A. Yardeni partially avoid discussion by giving the reading of Harudj son of Palṭu, priest of H[...]. the god. Because of ambiguity and disagreement between scholars, this text cannot be evidence in the present study.

Contrary to most of the previous sources, the following examples will provide evidence for the influence of Egyptian religious ideas on Iranians. A very well known case of two Persian brothers, Atiyawahí and Ariyawrata, is also connected with some religious meaning. The two brothers are known mainly on the basis of inscriptions from Wadi Hammamat. Atiyawahí, son of Artames and lady Qandjou, was a governor of Coptos and bore the title of ‘saris of Persia’. He left inscriptions dated to 486–473 B.C., in which he invoked the Egyptian god Min. His brother, Ariyawrata, who was later the saris of Persia, left inscriptions with invocations to Horus, Isis, and Amonrasont. He also took an Egyptian surname, Dā-hr (Djedher) and translated his title into Egyptian equivalents. It is likely that Ariyawrata made offerings to Horus, which is confirmed by the lid of a perfume jar with his name in cuneiform found in Edfu. A votive bull from the Persian period was probably another offering by an Iranian official to an Egyptian god. This object, which was found in Egypt, bears an inscription with the name of Mithrobaios. It was probably offered to Apis of Memphis.

54 Lipiński, FolOr 22, pp. 5–8.  
55 Cowley, Aramaic papyri, p. 38.  
56 Grelot, Documents araméens, p. 187.  
57 The line according to their reading is: hrws br pltw kmr [zy] h.[.]/. 'lh', Porten, Yardeni, TAD 2, p. 37 and Porten, Elephantine papyri, p. 186.  
60 Ibid., pp. 125–126 (No. 31), 127–128 (No. 33).  
63 This object was published by Michaelidis, ASAE XLIII, p. 99, Pl. VI.  
64 It was suggested by Yoyotte, RAAO XLVI, p. 167, n. 5. Similarly Brient, From Cyrus to Alexander, p. 949; Bresciani, SCO 7, p. 140; Serrano Delgado, Cde 79, p. 46. However, in the first publication this object is linked with the cult of Mithra, see: Michaelidis, ASAE XLIII, pp. 99–100.
However, these seemingly simple cases of Persians who worshipped Egyptian gods, which would suggest that these people absorbed different beliefs, do not yield to such an obvious interpretation. In the view of Pierre Briant, which seems to be generally accepted, they are not examples of Egyptianization in the strict sense. Briant suggests that Persian officials imitated the policy of the kings towards local cults. For Atiyawahi and Ariyawrata it was rational to appeal to the god of Coptos, Min, and similarly some Persians expressed respect for Apis.65 As stated above, according to Dandamaev, such tolerance was not limited to Persians only, but was a general phenomenon of the ancient Near East. Foreigners not only sustained their faith in their own gods, but also worshipped deities of the land they inhabited.66 As Dandamaev noticed, Aramaeans, Phoenicians, Greeks, Cilicians, Jews, and Iranians lived in Persian Egypt together with indigenous people, and they often worshipped both their own and alien gods and even changed their names, adopting foreign ones, or used Egyptian names together with their own names.67

It appears that in most cases Persian worship of Egyptian deities was independent of the official royal policy towards indigenous cults, being instead based on the general attitude towards local gods in the ancient Near East (from which this imperial policy probably originated). Respect for local gods was not a feature which was unique to Persians, and it was quite usual in this period. In Egypt this attitude was shared by both earlier and later foreign dynasties (e.g. Ptolemies and Romans),68 and all foreign inhabitants of this land.69 Therefore it is very difficult to find out what the real beliefs of these several mentioned Persians were. Not all of these cases testify to official donations or declarations. It is also possible that small gifts for temples, like a figurine of a bull or a perfume jar, could be just private, personal gifts. Even an official religious declaration was not contrary to personal beliefs. Moreover, the worship of Iranian gods did not exclude the worship of Egyptian gods at the same time. In fact, it would be too complicated to suspect simple officials or even ordinary Persians of a sophistication equal to the kings, claiming that they worshipped certain gods sincerely, and others only officially. In the case of Atiyawahi, Ariyawrata, and Mithrobaios there is no evidence that they were followers of any religion other than Egyptian religion. Therefore the simplest conclusion is that they worshipped

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65 Briant, Éthno-classe, pp. 166–167; Id., From Cyrus to Alexander, p. 482. Also supported by Johnson, Ethnic considerations, p. 213.
66 Dandamaev, Politique religieuse, p. 198; Dandamaev, Lukonin, Culture and social institutions, p. 359. In fact Briant based his theory on Dandamaev’s hypothesis, see: Briant, Éthno-classe, p. 167.
67 Dandamaev, Lukonin, Culture and social institutions, p. 314.
69 To present a detailed evidence for this statement is beyond the scope of the present study. However, the reader may consult, for instance, the recent study of Kaplan, MHR 18, pp. 20–21. An excellent impression of foreign activity is offered by the recent work of Wittmann, Ägypten und die Fremden. There are many examples of objects connected with various foreigners, like Libyans, Phoenicians, Arameans, Carians, Arabs, and Greeks. A significant number of these objects might be linked with Egyptian religion.
for the most part local gods, even if they did it partly in order to better assimilate with Egyptians.

The art of the Persian period in Egypt is an important source for religious ideas shared by Iranians in this country. Egyptian influence upon Persian imperial art is well documented. Moreover, art in Egypt commissioned by the kings had produced several objects, which might be examples of shared Persian and Egyptian artistic features. These are the Canal stelae\(^71\) of Darius I and the statue of this king from Susa.\(^72\) The Egyptian influence, though probably only indirect, is also noticeable in Achaemenian glyptic depictions.\(^73\)

At least one private Egyptian stela can be attributed to a man with Persian origins. This is the stela of Djedherbes, son of Artam, carved during the First Persian Domination (525–404 B.C.).\(^74\) This stela exhibits features typical of objects influenced by both Egyptian and Persian art. Its most important religious symbol is the winged sundisc, which is placed in a lunette of the stela. It differs from regular Egyptian depictions of such symbols in that it has a feathered tail and two symmetrical tendrils or ribbons, which end with

\(^70\) The most important work on this subject is a study by M.C. Root, The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire, \textit{AI. Troisième série. Textes et mémoires} 9, Leiden 1979 [= King and Kingship], where she describes in detail the dependence of Persian art on Near Eastern visual culture and enumerates numerous Egyptian prototypes for different Persian kinds of imperial depictions.

\(^71\) See e.g.: Posener, Première domination perse, pp. 48–87; M. Roaf, The subject peoples on the base of the statue of Darius, \textit{CDAFI} 4, 1974 [= \textit{CDAFI} 4], pp. 79–84; Root, King and Kingship, pp. 61–68; Gozzoli, Writing of history, pp. 116–121.


\(^73\) Egyptian motifs probably reached Persian seals from Neo-Assyrian or Syrian art, see e.g.: Garrison, Root, Jones, Seals I, pp. 83–84. Perhaps an example of a more direct influence is the seal ANE 128865 from the British Museum (with a falcon and decoration of \textit{wdfr}–eyes of Horus), see: R.D. Barnett, D.J. Wiseman, Fifty Masterpieces of Ancient Near Eastern Art in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, The British Museum, London 1969, p. 95 (No. 49); Merrillees, Cylinder Seals VI, p. 78 (No.86), Pls. XXXI, XXXV. But it might be the seal of Udjahorresnet. Another known seal of an Egyptian individual named Ahmose (ANE 89585) bears a hieroglyphic inscription of his name. Next seal, ANE 129596, is decorated with hieroglyphs of possible apotropaic meaning. See: ibid., pp. 65–66, 77–78, 119, Pls. XXII, XXXI; M. Giovino, Egyptian hieroglyphs on Achaemenid period cylinder seals, \textit{Iran} 44, 2006 [= \textit{Iran} 44], pp. 105–107. Another example is the seal RB1 (impressed on clay tags LB 904, LB 905, YBC 17070, AO 20320, and AO 21425), which depicts an Egyptian royal cartouche with feathers, flanked by two birds and with winged disc above. The name in the cartouche is illegible. It was published by Henkelman, Jones, Stolper, \textit{ArtA} 2004.001, pp. 17–20. See also other possible examples in: B. van de Walle, J. Duchesne-Guillemin, Un sceau-cylindre irano-égyptien, \textit{JEOL} 16, 1959–1962, pp. 72–77; Giovino, \textit{Iran} 44, pp. 107–114.

\(^74\) First published by I. Mathieson et al., A stela of the Persian period from Saqqara, \textit{JEA} 81, 1995 [= \textit{JEA} 81], pp. 23–41.
spirals. A very similarly depicted winged disc can be seen on the stela of Shallūfa, one of the Canal stelae of Darius I. Both objects share a combined Persian and Egyptian origin. The winged disc on the Djedherbes stela is not a typical ‘Persian’ winged disc (comparing to examples from Persepolitan reliefs, which have a more Egyptianized form than in earlier Persian art). The Egyptian features of this winged disc are, for example:

1) The specific shape of the topmost feathers (the alular quills). The alular quills on the Persepolitan examples are simple straight lines, which spread the whole length of the wing. On typical Egyptian stelae, the alular quills spread only from the disc to the end of top register or row of these small feathers (coverts). The same is true of the Djedherbes and Shallūfa stelae.

2) Egyptian winged discs have three registers (or rows) of feathers, Persepolitan discs four, the Djedherbes and Shallūfa stelae three.

3) The shape of the Egyptian disc is usually without a circle or hoop around the disc itself, contrary to the Persepolis’ examples, which have very clear hoops. The Djedherbes disc is similar to the Egyptian ones. The tail and two ribbons are the ‘Persian’ elements on the Djedherbes winged disc. It is clear then that the winged disc on the Djedherbes stela bears both Egyptian and Persian features.

The Egyptian meaning of the winged disc is quite broad. Generally, it is a symbol of the god Horus, who usually manifests himself in the form of a falcon. The winged sun is a mixed form of a sun disc of Re and Horus’ falcon wings. However, it may also be a symbol related to certain Persian religious ideas. The winged disc with a tail and tendrils is a sign which frequently appears on Persepolis’ reliefs and Achaemenian seals, although its exact meaning remains a matter of debate. Traditionally, it has been maintained that

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75 Ibid., p. 28.
76 This stela was published by J. MÉNANT, La stèle de Chalouf, RecTrav 9, 1887, pp. 131–157. But see also: P. LECQ, Un problème de religion Achéménide: Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah? [= Problème de religion], in: Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin Emerito Oblata, Acta Iranaica 23, Hommages et opera minora IX, Leiden 1984, p. 314, Pl. XLVII, Fig. 45; POSENER, Première domination perse, pp. 63–81, Pls. V–XIII; ROAF, CDAFI 4, pp. 79–83.
77 Such mixed features appear to be usual for funerary stelae commissioned by foreigners in Egypt. See for example the winged disc on Aramaean stela of Abah and Ahatabu ordered by their son, Absali, in 482 B.C., P. MUNRO, Die spätägyptischen Totenstelen, Glückstadt 1973, pp. 155 (n. 2), 170; VITTMANN, Ägypten und die Fremden, pp. 106–107.
78 For more on Egyptian winged discs, see e.g.: A.H. Gardiner, Horus the Behdetite, JEA 30, 1944, pp. 23–60; M. Werbrouck, À propos du disque ailé, CdE 16, 1941, pp. 165–171; W. Westendorf, Die Flügelsonne aus Ägypten, AMI 7/19, 1986, pp. 21–26.
this symbol represents Ahuramazdā. A rival theory of Aliрезa Shapur Shahbazi is also worth considering, because it explains the difference between two kinds of this symbol: first, with a human figure emerging from a winged circle, and second, plain, without a human bust (like on the Djedherbes stela). According to Shahbazi the winged circle alone represents a concept of the Iranian Farnah (Avestan Airyānem Xvārənāh), an idea which combines fortune and glory. This symbol protects all Iranians (including rulers and heroes).80 The visual features of the winged disc from Djedherbes’ stela might link it with the Iranian religious symbolism. It is also likely, however, that the ambiguity of this particular winged disc representation may be intentional. Being neither exclusively Egyptian nor Persian, it appears instead to be a marriage of both religious traditions.

In its upper register, the stela depicts the mummy of the deceased accompanied by the gods: Anubis, Isis, and Nephthys, something not extraordinary on the typical Egyptian funerary stela.81 The lower register of the stela, however, is very unique: it represents two figures standing before offering tables and a seated figure of a Persian dignitary of high rank (likely the father of the owner of the stela – Artam).82 Inscriptions on the stela are formulae addressed to Osiris. In addition, they include names of the owner, his father and mother: Tanofrether. This provides us with a piece of evidence of a union between Persian and Egyptian.83 Djedherbes was certainly an aristocrat in Egypt under Persian rule, although we have no information about his title or rank, if there were any. His Egyptian name, funerary scene, and inscriptions testify that he considered himself an Egyptian. However, an ambiguous winged disc and an offering scene with a Persian dignitary may suggest that Djedherbes wanted to identify himself with Persian authority and the Persian ruling class of Egypt.84

Yet another object is known, which shares mixed Persian and Egyptian features. This is a stone head from Memphis (Strasbour 1604), currently in the Strasbourg Egypto-logical Institute.85 It is a depiction of a bearded man with Egyptian hairstyle and probably with double Egyptian crown, (the upper part of crown is damaged). Claude Traunecker suggests that the depiction represents the syncretic deity of Ahuramazdā–Atum.86 However, his belief is based on a comparison between Darius’ statue from Susa (where the king invokes Atum), and the Achaemenid concept of god Ahuramazdā. The belief is not well justified, because Atum is not the only Egyptian god invoked by Achaemenid rulers on

80 SHAHBAZI, AMI 13, pp. 128, 143.
81 MATHIESON et al., JEA 81, pp. 28–29.
82 Ibid., pp. 29–33, 38. For the analogy see the seal from the Murašū archive, as was noted by P. BRIANT, Images perses de Babylone et d’Égypte: un rapprochement, La Lettre de Pallas 4, 1996, pp. 20–21; Id., From Cyrus to Alexander, p. 722, Fig. 62.
83 MATHIESON et al., JEA 81, pp. 33–38.
84 Apart from the Djedherbes stela, one should mention the so-called Memphis stela (it depicts a funerary scene of a Persian dignitary; now in Berlin, Ägyptologisches Museum, No. 23721). First published by BISSING, ZDMG 84, pp. 226–238. However, it has recently been shown by Muscarella that this object is a mere forgery: MUSCARELLA, Memphis Stela, pp. 109–121. There are also references to earlier secondary literature.
85 C. TRAUNECKER, Un portrait ignoré d’un roi perse: La tête « Strasbourg 1604 », Transœufhratène 9, 1995, pp. 101–117, Pls. IV–V. This object, like some of those already described, probably originated from Mitrahine.
86 Ibid., pp. 115–116.
Egyptian monuments. In addition, they appeal to other deities on monuments in other parts of the empire. Other objects from Achaemenid times that combine images of Ahuramazdā and another deity are completely unknown. Therefore it is more likely that ‘Strasbourg 1604’ is just a depiction of a Persian king, and does not bear any religious associations other than the ordinary portrayal of a pharaoh. This object certainly provides evidence for interaction between Persian and Egyptian culture, but probably not in the religious sphere.

An important phenomenon in the Achaemenid Empire is the spread of the cult of the Egyptian god Bes. There are numerous examples of findings of different representations of Bes in jewelry, sculpture, glyptic etc. throughout the Persian Empire. These findings can be generally divided into two groups: objects of Egyptian origin (or of foreign workmanship but indistinguishable from Egyptian prototypes), and images of Bes included in foreign iconography (in this case Iranian). Although the former group can be linked with Egyptians, who in large numbers traveled to different parts of the empire (e.g. craftsmen working in Persepolis), the latter certainly testifies to some popularity of Bes among various peoples of the empire, which might have included Iranians as well. Such depictions are clear evidence that the Egyptian divinity, Bes, became a part of the religious world of the western parts of the empire. According to Kamyar Abdi this process started after the 490s B.C., at first involving only imperial troops, and then also the elite and ordinary Iranians. It is impossible to distinguish within the objects from Egypt connected with the cult of Bes those, which belonged in the past to Iranian individuals. Such artifacts would not be different from the ones owned by Egyptians themselves. Nevertheless, it is likely that the cult of Bes was popular among Persians in Egypt as well. The common character of this god could better contribute to the wider range of his influence than that of the other cults of more sophisticated and elite Egyptian deities. The influence of the cult of Bes within the populations in the rest of the empire supports such a hypothesis.

Some evidence for the reception of Egyptian religious concepts among Persians might be provided by classical texts of Hellenistic and Roman times. A number of classical writers claim that the authorship of several ideas, teachings, and treatises was of Persian Magi, most notably ‘Zoroaster’ and ‘Ostanes’. Obviously, the context and the content of these opinions make it very difficult to connect them with any source in original Iranian or Mazdaean concepts. It has been suggested that pseudo-Ostanes’ writings were produced by the circle of Alexandrian scholars. In fact, many of the concepts attributed by classical

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88 There are different objects, including a number of unprovenanced examples, which were found within the western parts of the empire. Bes is sometimes included in seal imagery (like on the unprovenanced seals from the British Museum, ANE 89133 and ANE 89352). See: Abdi, *ArsOr* 32, pp. 141, 147–148, Figs. 8–9; Mer-Rillees, Cylinder Seals VI, pp. 64–65, 74, Pls. XXI, XXVIII.
90 Such a suggestion was put forward by Abdi, with the reference to Iranians in the whole empire: *ibid.*, p. 151. It should be the truer in Egypt itself.
writers to the Magi might have had their source in Egyptian thought and religion. It is thus possible that this attribution was an effect of the post-Achaemenid activity of some figures, who called themselves ‘the Magi’, and created spurious works, which consisted of a mixture of Egyptian and Iranian traditions. As there is evidence for the activity of the Magi in Egypt in the Achaemenid period, it is likely that some of their successors were heavily influenced by the Egyptian thought, and gave beginning to this mixed tradition.91

CONCLUSION

The Persian kings treated Egyptian religion with a respect and devotion worthy of a pharaoh. They acknowledged the cult of the leading gods of the country, which is confirmed by royal monuments and inscriptions of the time invoking these deities. It is an obvious consequence of their policy, which had the imitation of indigenous rulers as its goal. However, a respect and esteem for local religious traditions appears to be quite common among the ancient Near Eastern societies. In applying such a policy, the Persian monarchs were most likely guided by political needs, and other, most likely, purely opportunistic reasons.

It seems that a similarly respectful approach to indigenous cults was adopted by imperial officials, from satraps down to local clerks. One might consider whether this was in imitation of kings, in obedience to royal instructions, or motivated by a genuine respect for local deities. There can be no doubt that their attitude was at least in part a consequence of an attempt to win the favors of Egyptians and to cooperate peacefully with the native population. However, some of the discovered objects connected with Persian individuals could be taken as instances of private religious practice.

It must be also considered that Egyptian culture was highly influential in antiquity, and Iranian individuals were living under this influence for many years. According to Herodotus, the Persians more than other men accept foreign customs.92 Although this might be a statement reflecting some stereotypical construction of a ‘barbarian’, it could indicate a real interest in foreign cultures among the Persians. Thus, it seems more likely that some of them also accepted certain elements of Egyptian religious culture during their stay in this country.

For some scholars it was only natural to expect that the Persians in Egypt followed their own Iranian religious tradition.93 However, the sources which support such an as-

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92 Herodotus 1.135: ξεινικά δὲ νόμαια Πέρσαι προσέινται ανδρόν μάλιστα.
93 Like Grelot mentioned in the beginning of the present paper: GRELOT, Documents araméens, p. 332. The main scholar who argues that Persians were not a subject of Egyptianization in religious sense is Briant, cf. supra, n. 65 (also for opinion of his supporters).
SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE RELIGION OF PERSIANS IN EGYPT

Sumption are very rare and ambiguous. There is only one document, which certainly testifies to the presence of the Magi in Egypt. The Magi might have been present in Egypt for approximately 120 years of the First Persian Domination, and the existence of only one document from this period confirming their presence should be rather surprising. It is even more surprising because we have a large corpus of texts from Egypt of the time. Apart from proper names, no source univocally mentions the name of an Iranian god. There is only a small number of artistic artifacts which can be linked with certain Iranian deities. The collections of Iranian names from documents from Egypt are quite confusing because of the context. If these texts are read literally, they list examples of people of various ethnicities and from different cultures, interspersed with each other, who bore names not always connected with their actual ethnicity (or who were descendants of mixed unions). Therefore proper names cannot be evidence for religious attitudes in Egypt. The Persian presence in this country left only scant remains in the terms of religion, almost without significance among the numerous sources of that time.

On the other hand, there are several well-documented examples of the Persians who were connected with the cult of Egyptian gods. Generally, scholars are inclined to interpret this behavior as an imitation of the policy of the kings towards indigenous cults. However, there is no evidence that these Persians worshipped the Iranian gods as well. Some objects, which were made for the Persians, could be linked with a private cult of the Egyptian deities. The Djedherbes stela is a clear evidence for mixed Persian-Egyptian unions. The stela combines religious depictions of Egyptian and Persian imagery, with the dominance of the former. Similarly, the inscription on this object invokes local gods. Such mixed unions are perhaps confirmed by the evidence of proper names. Therefore it is likely that there were Persian-Egyptian families, and their children, like Djedherbes, were raised mostly within the Egyptian culture and religion. Moreover, it seems that religious elements of the Egyptian and Iranian tradition did not exclude each other, but coexisted, as certified by certain objects (the Djedherbes stela and some royal objects, like the Canal stelae). It was probably possible for people of Iranian origin to worship Iranian and Egyptian gods simultaneously, or even to worship only Egyptian gods. The widespread cult of Bes, clearly an Egyptian deity, among the population of the empire, is a strong evidence for the popularity of the Egyptian religion among foreigners.

Sources which deal directly or indirectly with the religion of the Persians in Egypt are very scant. One is only able to present a small group of artistic artifacts and written sources. These sources can confirm both attitudes among the Persians, i.e. the veneration of their own, Iranian religion or the worship of Egyptian deities. Taking into account the limitation of the material, one must consider that it certainly does not show a representative view of the situation, but only its vague reflection. One cannot be sure, whether one

94 Cf. supra, n. 20
95 Especially the perfume jar of Ariyawrata and the bull figurine of Mithrobaios. Cf. supra, n. 62–64.
96 Cf. supra, n. 74.
97 Cf. supra, n. 40.
98 Cf. supra, n. 87.
is dealing with sources about religious activities dictated by some political or administrative needs, or with a testimony of a real faith. Nevertheless, the sources, though scant, show that the Persians in Egypt were not necessarily faithful to their native cults, but in addition worshipped local deities. The evidence for this latter practice is limited, however, and for a reason, because if the Persians participated in Egyptian religious life, they probably would have employed the same objects and gone to the same temples as the Egyptians. Only those few artifacts and texts which bear Iranian personal names can be distinguished from the collection of remains connected with religious life in Egypt of the Persian period. On the other hand, it should be easy to identify sources connected with Iranian religion against the background of Egyptian culture. Unfortunately, traces of Iranian cults in Egypt are very rare and usually not clear. This is quite surprising because in the satrapy of Egypt the Persians held all the key ranks and offices and, apart from officials of different levels, there were numerous Iranian people in the civil and military staff, including a significant number of soldiers. In spite of this, they did not produce much evidence which would confirm the worship of their native cults. Therefore it is possible that among the Persians and other people of Iranian origin in Egypt interest in their home religion decreased, and many of them apparently joined the worshippers of Egyptian gods. It is very likely that Egyptian culture, including religion, strongly influenced the conquerors.

It can be concluded that the religious situation in Egypt under the Persian rule was as multicultural as its whole society. Therefore the Iranians probably sometimes kept their own religious practice, which they brought with them from the lands of Iran. However, it is more likely that a majority of them actually began to worship Egyptian gods as well, and even abandoned their native cults to some extent.

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