

Individuals' Voluntary Contributions to Religious Buildings in Roman Egypt

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on individuals' voluntary contributions to the religious buildings in Roman Egypt through inscriptions on monuments, stelae, ostracas and papyri from the first century BC to the second century AD. The projects included the construction of new temples or parts of temples, rebuilding and renovating the demolished parts of temples, and work on the walls and gates surrounding the temples. It also analyzes the impact of these voluntary activities, such as alleviating social tensions in Egyptian society, stabilizing the Romans' rule, and providing places for worship and public services. The paper also discusses the Roman administration's attitude towards these voluntary architectural works, which was largely positive, as the Roman emperors—especially in the second century—encouraged citizens to contribute to construction.

Keywords: contributions, religious, temples, Roman, architecture.

Introduction

The Roman emperors were keen to encourage wealthy Roman citizens to establish public facilities at their own expense, in order to decorate and develop their cities and provinces. In the second century AD, this kind of civil reconstruction was observed in all cities of the empire. The rich everywhere competed to build temples, sports fields, theaters, waterways and other public utilities.¹

The philanthropists' donations throughout the Roman Empire helped to establish and decorate the public buildings, provide bathroom facilities, and built porticoes, public markets, and theaters. This work enhanced the reputations of the donors, and was recorded on the pedestals of statues of the donors. These statues were erected when a donor assumed a prominent public position.² They were built in large numbers throughout the Mediterranean basin, but most of them have now disappeared. The citizens of the provincial capitals used their wealth in this way to visibly preserve their social prestige, and to imitate the lifestyle in Alexandria. Of course, it was not only the citizens of the provincial capitals who donated, but other elements of society as well, each according to his motivations and financial capabilities. However, the main focus here will be the architectural activities with a humanitarian, charitable motive.³

¹ سيد الناصري، تاريخ الامبراطورية الرومانية السياسي والحضاري (القاهرة: دار النهضة العربية، ١٩٩١)، ٢٤١.

² Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 45.

³ سيد الناصري، الناس والحياة في مصر في زمن الرومان في ضوء الوثائق والآثار ٣٠ ق.م - ٦٤١ م (القاهرة: دار النهضة العربية، ١٩٩٥)، ١٢٥.

Contributions to Religious Buildings:

Religion was an essential part of the ancient Egyptian's life, and this was manifested by the embodiment of his life on the walls of temples. In addition, the influence of religion on the individual's life can be seen in religious statues and inscriptions. Hence, the religious life had a notable presence in architecture from the earliest Egyptian history. For example, the kings of the First and Second pharaonic dynasties built temples for the deities. Throughout the following eras, the Egyptians followed in their footsteps in building temples and other edifices for the deities. They erected statues, attributed sacred symbols to them, and offered them sacrifices in the course of religious rituals. These same religious influences played a role in architectural activity, prompting the Egyptians to construct tombs and places of worship out of stone, because these places were to be immortal, while palaces and dwellings, as perishable homes, were constructed with mud bricks.⁴

This study will focus on the important religious architectural works that were carried out by their owners under a religious influence, perhaps on behalf of the community. Indeed, such works may have been performed in order to provide services that the Roman administration failed to offer. The most important of these are the temples, their annexed buildings and their maintenance. Other religiously motivated contributions, such as statues of deities and altars, were presented out of personal interest as an attempt to satisfy the deities, obtain a privilege or facilitate the businesses and goals of the contributor. Their purpose was mainly to benefit the donor himself, not the society as a whole.

It is well known that when the Roman administration confiscated the lands of temples, the temples were compensated for their lost resources, as the state allocated for this purpose the proceeds of the Syntaxis, a tax collected from citizens for temples, or else they allocated areas of land to be exploited by priests for rent. The administration also allowed the temples to receive gifts and endowments from pious benefactors. However, these allocations were not sufficient to construct temples or to rebuild their destroyed sections. Hence, individuals had to establish some temples, and restore others, at their own expense. The local administrations of cities and provinces contributed to construction expenses, and some emperors established temples themselves.⁵ Some institutions, and individuals among the elite, established temples and their annexes in honor of emperors and officials, or even statues of these officials.⁶

This study is concerned mainly with the voluntary contributions of individuals and non-governmental institutions to the architectural activity of building temples, and other activities serving the society, to compensate for the social services that the Roman administration failed to provide.

⁴ تغريد عرفة، العمارة الدينية في مصر الوسطى في العصرين اليوناني والروماني (القاهرة: مكتبة مدبولي، ٢٠١١)، ٢٢، ٢١.
⁵ مصطفى كمال عبد العليم، مصر الرومانية (جامعة عين شمس: مكتبة سعيد رأفت، ١٩٧٢)، ٣٧.
⁶ عبد العليم، مصر الرومانية، ٤١، ٤٢.

It will also shed light on their motivation, which came out of their piety and the desire to become closer to the deities, as well as to serve the community as a whole. Contributions to the architectural works for the benefit of holy places included total or partial construction of a temple, developing and construction of the holy areas and the extensions surrounding the temple, providing part of the temple's accessories, such as the gate, or repairing the dilapidated parts of the holy places.

I: First Century BC Works

Professional associations and religious communities in Egypt during the Roman era had a role in the architecture and restoration of temples. For example, the cattle shepherds in the village of Nilopolis built the temple wall. The inscription stated that:

**"ὑπὲρ Καίσαρος Αὐτοκρά -
τορος θεοῦ ἐκ θεοῦ ἡ οἰκοδομή
τοῦ περιβόλου τῷ θεῷ καὶ κυρί -
ω Σοκνοπαίωι παρά τῶν ἐκ Νείλου-
πόλεως προβατοκτηνοτρόφων -
καὶ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τῶν τέκν -
ων εὐχὴν ἔτους ς Καίσαρος ..."**

*"On behalf of the deified emperor, son of the deified father, the cattle shepherds, their wives and sons built the wall surrounding the temple for the sake of the god Soknopaiou in Nilopolis in the sixth year of Caesar's reign."*⁷ This inscription was recorded on a stela from Soknopaiou Nesos dating to 24 BC.⁸

Some researchers have expressed doubts about the material ability of shepherds to construct or rebuild two walls of the temple of god Soknopaiou, but others maintain that it was possible because of the modest construction that had not cost much money.⁹ Even if these shepherds were poor, they apparently combined their resources to serve the deity and benefit their community. Whatever the case may be, the inscription shows the contribution of informal civil institutions in serving society and compensating for what the Roman administration neglected to do.

⁷ Étienne Bernard, *Recueil des inscriptions Grecques du Fayoum*, Tome 1, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 142-143, no. 73; Joseph Grafton Milne, *A history of Egypt under Roman rule*, Vol. 5 (London: Methuen & Company, 1898), 183-184, no. 1; *IG Fay.* II.107/108 (116 BC)

⁸ This stela was published by Fritz Kerbs. "Ägyptische Priester unter römischer Herrschaft," *ZÄS* 31, Leipzig (1983): 31-42; Jules Toutain. "Le culte du crocodile dans le Fayoum sous l'empire romain" *RHR* 71 (1915): 171-94; Youssri Abdelwahed. "The Soucheia of the Arsinoite Nome in Graeco-Roman Egypt," *Minia Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, (2016): 226.

⁹ Bernard, E., *Recueil des inscriptions Grecques du Fayoum*, 143.

It is well known that the Roman administration sought to control craftsmen by means of trade and professional unions that had the power to manage their internal affairs. In time, these unions became subject to the state supervision in many administrative and financial matters. These included registering their establishment, approving their own bylaws, and paying the taxes and other financial obligations of its members (the craft tax or the head tax).¹⁰ What was the stance of the Roman administration toward such donations from these institutions? Were the craft unions and other associations required to submit periodic reports on their revenues and expenditures, similar to those of temples?

Some documents¹¹ show that religious institutions and associations did report the names of their members and their properties. Some researchers assume that the professional associations were required to provide such declarations to the administration.¹² Assuming that this was true, what was the nature of these expenditures, and what was the position of the Roman administration regarding them? In view of the lack of documents, this study suggests that donations of the union or association members toward a specific voluntary work were not included in the union's or association's accounts, but were spent directly on the purpose they were intended for. The position of the Roman administration was positive in this regard, or at least not as negative as it was with the administration of temples. The priests also had a role in the religious architecture. For example, a high priest rebuilt a temple at the beginning of the Roman era, and the inscription on the doorstep of the temple stated that:

= "ὑπὲρ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος θεοῦ υἱοῦ Σεβαστοῦ]
θοτρῶς ἀρχιστολιστῆς καὶ προφήτης [Ἑρησιοῦ]
ἀνικοδόμησε τὸ Ἑρησίειον καὶ τὸ πρό[τυλον θεῶν]
μεγάλῳ μεγάλῳι , ἔτους ιη Κ[αίσαρος]

"On behalf of the Emperor Augustus, son of the deified Caesar, Thotrous-head of the priests concerned with vesturing the statues of gods and priests of the prophecies of Heresius (Horus, son of Isis)-rebuilt the temple and the gate of the Most Great God, Heresius, in the eighteenth year of Caesar's reign"¹³

This inscription was found on a limestone block in the village of El-Sheikh Ebada, the site of the ancient city of Antinopolis, during the excavation works carried out by the University of Rome mission in Egypt during the period 1995-1998. This work dates to the eighteenth year of the rule of Caesar Augustus, i.e., 12 BC.¹⁴

¹⁰ حسين محمد احمد يوسف، النقابات في مصر ابان عصر الرومان، دراسة وثائقية، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة، (جامعة عين شمس: كلية الاداب، ١٩٩٣)، ٦٧-٧٧.

¹¹ P.Fouad. 12 (AD 207).

¹² يوسف، النقابات في مصر، ٧٧.

¹³ André Bernard, *Les portes du désert: Recueil des inscriptions grecques d'Antinoopolis, Koptos, Apollonopolis Parva et Apollonopolis Magna*. (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984), 54, no. 1 = Iginio Crisci, *Antinoe (1965-1968). Missione archeologica in Egitto dell'Università di Roma*. (Roma : Istituto di studi del Vicino oriente, Universita, 1974), 119-121.

¹⁴ Bernard, A., *Les portes du desert*, 54.

It is worth noting that Augustus decided to confiscate the properties of temples and turned over their management to a civil official. Thus it is clear that, even though the priest was no longer officially in control of his temple, he performed this work voluntarily and willingly in an attempt to serve the gods and provide a place of worship for the individuals in his community. This example highlights clearly the role played by priests-personally as well as professionally-to avoid the neglect of religious architecture resulting from the policy of the Roman administration.

The previous inscription shows that the high priest Thotrous (which is an Egyptian name) took upon his own shoulders the costs of rebuilding the Temple of Horus and its gate. Unlike other inscriptions stating that the donor presented the temple and its inclusions, this inscription specifies the gate and the temple. This may be due to the fact that the donor provided only the temple and its pro-pylons, or monumental gateway, and not all the inclusions, such as the sanctuary and the wall surrounding the temple. Bernard lists some examples of pro-pylons (gates) which were presented by individuals, including those of the Temple of Heron, the Temple of Pnepheros in Theadelphia,¹⁵ and those of Temple of Pnepheros and Petesuchosin in Karanis.¹⁶

II: First Century AD Works.

It was mentioned earlier in this paper that the wall surrounding the temple was a frequent donation to the temples. An inscription found on a stone in Qift shows a person presenting a wall for the gods Isis, Harpocrates and Pan. The inscription states:

α"ὐπὲρ Τιβερίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ Ἰσιδι καὶ Ἀρποχράτη καὶ Πανὶ Θεοῖς μεγίστοις
τὸν περίβολον Παμίνης Παρθενίου καὶ Παρθένιος υἱός, ἔτους ἡ τιβερίου καίσαρος
Σεβαστοῦ."

*“On behalf of Emperor Tiberius Caesar Augustus, for the sake of the gods Isis, Harpocrates and Pan, Pamines the son of Parsinius and his son Parsinius presented the wall surrounding the temple, in the seventh year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar Augustus.”*¹⁷ Hence, this work dates to AD 20-21.

Similarly, the wall surrounding the temple of the gods Suchos and Amun in Akoris (now the village of Tahna Al-Jabal in Minia Governorate) was presented by individuals. This is illustrated by the partly obliterated inscription found by the Japanese Archaeological Mission during its excavations in Egypt in AD 1981:

¹⁵ Theadelphia (modern Batn Ihrit) is located on the western edge of Fayum Governorate, about 7 km south of the shore of Lake of Qarun. This village was established in the third Century BC. This village seems to have been largely abandoned by the by the early fourth century, may be as a result of problems in ensuring to its agricultural land continuous water supply. For more details see: Michael Sharp, "The Village of Theadelphia in the Fayyum: Land and Population in the Second Century" *The proceedings of the British Academy* 96, (1999): 159-192.

¹⁶ Bernard, A., *Les portes du desert*, 56.

¹⁷ Joseph Grafton Milne, 1905, *Greek Inscriptions, Catalogue général des Antiquités Egyptiennes du Musée du Caire*, (Oxford: Printed at the University Press by H. Hart, 1905), 28, no. 9286; Milne, *A history of Egypt*, 184.

"1 ὑπὲρ Γαίου
Καίσαρος
Σεβαστοῦ
4 Γερμανικοῦ
τὸ περίβο-
λος Σούχω
καί Αμμων[ι]
8 θεοὶς Μεγίστ[οις] "

"On behalf of Caesar Augustus Germanicus, the wall surrounding the temple (was presented) to the Great Gods Suchos and Amun."¹⁸

The loss of part of the previous inscription makes it difficult to identify the donor. However, the context and comparison with other inscriptions show that the donor sought to please the two main gods in Akoris. This work dates to the era of Emperor Caligula (AD 37-41).

Other individuals established a water reservoir to serve passers-by and travelers in the province of Koptos (Qift), during the reign of Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54). The following text was inscribed on the wall of the reservoir:

" ὑπὲρ Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος
Αὐτοκράτορος Πανὶ Τ...
...ιμεὸς προστάτης, "

"On behalf of Emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar, to the god Pan ... Sir T... yemius as the head and supervisor dedicated and presented this work."¹⁹ This work has no relation to religious architecture, but the religious motivation for it can be seen clearly.

The inscription states that this work is presented by the head or director of a religious association for the worship of the god Pan, who is identical with the Egyptian god Min, the guardian of travelers and the god of fertility and agriculture.

The importance of this reservoir for travelers can be easily appreciated. There were water wells and reservoirs in the commercial convoy stations, and perhaps this station in Koptos had one or more wells to provide safe water for travelers. Augustus himself built water tanks on the road between Qift and Myos Hormos, as well as rest houses, and assigned armed guards to protect the merchants and their convoys.²⁰

¹⁸ Étienne Bernand, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines d'Akôris*, Bibliothèque d'étude 103, IFAO (Le Caire, 1988), 5, no. 2; Paleological Association of Japan. Egyptian Committee. *Akoris: report of the excavations at Akoris in Middle Egypt, 1981-1992* (Kyoto: Koyo Shobo, 1959), 10-11, no. 2.

¹⁹ André Bernand, *De Koptos à Kosseir* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 37, no. 1.

²⁰ عبد اللطيف فايز، النقل والمواصلات في مصر في العصر البيزنطي الروماني (القاهرة: الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، ٢٠١٢)، ١٤٩، ١٥٤;

A woman built a temple for the goddess Hathor-Aphrodite, which is illustrated by an inscription on the frieze of Hathor's temple gate, located in Kom Ombo. The inscription consists of three lines distributed on three sections that form the upper part of the temple gate. It says:

= "1 ὑπὲρ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Δομιτιανοῦ "
-Σ]εβαστοῦ [Γερμανικοῦ] Καὶ τοῦ παντὸς Α[ὐτοῦ Οἴκου] αφ]-
- Ροδείτη θεᾷ Μεγίστηι Πετρωνία μάγνα καὶ τὰ ταύτης
2 τέκνα τὸ ἱερὸν Οἰκοδόμησαν ἐπὶ Γαίου Σεπτιμίου
-Ο]ύεγέτου ἡγέμονος , στρατηγούνοσ Ἀρτεμιδώρου ἔ-]
Τους ἔβδόμου Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος [Δομιτιανοῦ
3 Σεβαστοῦ Γερμανικοῦ....."

*"On behalf of Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus and his family, Petronia and her sons constructed this temple of the Great Goddess, when Gaius Septimus Vigitus was a prefect of Egypt and Artemidorus the Strategus in the seventh year of the reign of Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus"*²¹

According to this inscription, this work dates to the seventh year of the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-16). This temple of the goddess Hathor-Aphrodite is located in the south of the Great Temple of Kom Ombo.²² Although the inscription indicates that the work was on behalf of the emperor, it is clear that this introduction is only a standard preamble for registering a work. The main purpose and motive behind the work is piety and the pursuit of community service, as it does not indicate a gift or adulation to the governor.

Works and contributions were not limited to religious architecture-for example, constructing a wall surrounding a temple. They benefited society and its members in other ways. A woman named Isidora built, at her own expense, a well beside the wall surrounding the temple in Dendara. This work stemmed from her piety and charity. It was recorded in her name, as well as those of her husband and children, as an offering and endowment to the goddess. Certainly, people benefited from this well, and the inscription immortalized it on a panel on the wall of the temple. It reads:

Martin Pencival Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of Roman Empire*, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 21.

²¹ André Bernard, *De Thèbes à Syène*, Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, (Paris: 1989), 143-144, no. 193; René Cagnat, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*, avctoritate et impensis Academiae inscriptionvm et litterarvm hvmaniorvm collectae et editae, vol. I, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1901), no. 1287.

²² Bernard, A., *De Thèbes à Syène*, 143.

L1"ὑπέρ Αὐτοκράτορος
Καίσαρος Τραιανοῦ Σε-
= βαστοῦ Νεωτέρᾳ
L 4 θεᾷ μεγίστη ἰσιδῶ-
ρα Μεγίστου ἀπὸ Τεντύ-
ρων κατεσκε<δ>ύασεν ἐκ
τοῦ ἰδίου τὸ φρέορ καὶ τὸ
L8 περίβωλον ὑπέρ ἀτῆς καὶ
ὑπέρ Ἄρτβῶτος ἀνὲρ καὶ
τῶν τέκνων, τὸ προσκύ-
νημα Ἀπολλωνίου α-
L12 δελφὸς αὐτῆς
ἔτους ἁ αὐτοκράτορος
νέρουα καίσαρος <τ...λ.>=
Τραιανοῦ Σεβαστοῦ
L16 μηνὸς Παυνὶ ἡ ,
καὶ πολλὰ δαπανήσας ἰς τὸ
ἱερόν τῆς Νεωτέρας ἡ ἰσιδῶρα
εὐσεβίας χάριν....."

...

"On behalf of the Emperor Caesar Trajanus Augustus, Lady Isidora, daughter of Migitos of Tintra (Dendara), constructed the wall surrounding the temple in Dendara, as well as the well, at her own expense, for her, her husband Harnapotos, and their children, and for the sake of the worship of Apollonius, the honored brother of the goddess, in the first year of the reign of Emperor Nerva of Caesar Trajan Augustus on the eighth day of the month of Baouna, bearing many costs in favor of the temple of Nutera, out of piety and devoutness".²³

This work dates to the first year of the reign of Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117). The inscription confirms that Lady Isidora paid the costs of establishing and operating the wall and the well for the temple.²⁴

²³ Étienne Bernard, *Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte et de Nubie au Musée du Louvre*. Ed. du Centre National de La Recherche Scientifique (Paris, 1992), 76, no. 28. This inscription is found in a stela in the Louvre Museum at Paris, this stela bears no. C131 among the collection of La galerie d'antiquités égyptiennes au musée du Louvre (1852) no. C 131.

²⁴ Bernard, É., *Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte*, 77.

III. Works of the Second Century AD

Other people restored and repaired a part of a temple that had been destroyed or was about to collapse. For example, a person called Pansikos, who was the head of the Isis Society, rebuilt two walls surrounding the Temple of Harpocrates in Koptos (Qift), due to their collapse. This work dates to AD 149 during the reign of Emperor Antonius Pius (AD 138-191). The inscription reads:

" ὑπέρ τῆς Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Τίτου
Αἰλίου Ἀδριανοῦ Ἀντωνίνου Σεβαστοῦ
Εὐσεβοῦς τύχης Ἀρποκράτη θεῶι
4 Μεγίστωι τείχη β περιβόλου παλαιω-
θέντα Καθηρέθη καὶ οἰκοδομήθη
ἐπὶ Πανίσκου Πτολλίδος προστάτου Ἴσιδος
θεᾶς Μεγίστης....."

*"On behalf of the Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius, to the dignified god Harpocrates, these two walls surrounding the temple have been repaired and rebuilt, by Pansikos, the son of Ptolidus, head of the glorified group of the goddess Isis... ."*²⁵

The god Harpocrates was associated with the gods Amun and Isis in many worship contexts. Harpocrates' association with Isis is due to the fact that they formed with Serapis the triad favored by King Ptolemy I. There is an indication of two other inscriptions besides the one here-all dating to the time of Emperor Antoninus Pius. They all bear the name of Pansikos, the performer of this particular work of piety and the head of the Isis association.²⁶ He also carried out another work dating to the same era: the second part of another inscription states that he built two fences around a temple. The inscription reads:

ἰ "ἔτους ιβ Ἀντωνίνου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου δύο τείχη καθαιρεθέντα
(Καθηρέθη) οἰκοδομήθη ἐπὶ Πανίσκου Πτολλίδος προστάτης (προστάτου) Ἴσιδος
θεᾶς Μεγίστης, "

*"In the twelfth year of the reign of our Lord Antonius Caesar, two disintegrating fences were restored by Pansikos, son of Ptolidus, head of the Isis association, the glorified goddess".*²⁷

Despite our inability to know the nature of the second contribution of Pansikos and to which temple it was directed, there is no doubt that Pansikos himself paid the construction costs, and not on behalf of the Isis association, which makes one inclined to attribute this voluntary work to his personal motivation in order to satisfy the deities.

²⁵ Bernard, A., *Les portes du desert*, 217, no. 73; Milne, *A history of Egypt*, 189-190.

²⁶ Bernard, A., *Les portes du desert*, 219.

²⁷ Milne, *Greek Inscriptions*, no. 9286; Milne, *A history of Egypt*, 184 and 27, fig. 17.

Another example of a contribution to religious architecture is the reconstruction of a temple in Theadelphia in the Arsinoite nome, rebuilt by a demobilized soldier after its demolition. This temple was assigned to the god Amun, and it was founded in AD 156. An inscription on the architrave of the temple gate stated:

1" ὑπὲρ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Τίτου Αἰλίου Ἀδριανοῦ
=Ἀντωνίνου Σεβαστοῦ Εὐσεβοῦς καὶ τοῦ σύνπαντος Οἴ-
κου αὐτοῦ, ἐπὶ Σενπρωνίῳ Λιβελάρῳ ἐπάρχῳ Αἰγύπτου
4 Ἀμμωνιθεῶνι θεῶι Μεγάλῳ Γαῖος οὐαλέριος Κόππος, οὐετραυὸς λε-
γιωναρῆς Γ Κυραναικῆς, ἀνοικοδόμησεν τὸ ἱερὸν ἰδίαις δάπαναις ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ-
καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς Γαία(ς) οὐαλερία(ς) καὶ τῶν τέκνων, ἐπὶ ἀγαθῶι
ἔτους ιθ....."

"On behalf of the Emperor Caesar Titus Julius Hadrianus Antonius Augustus Pius and all of his family, and when Cinpronius Leblarius was the prefect of Egypt, somebody called Gaius Valerius Kotos-an ancient warrior in the 3rd Cyrenaica troop-rebuilt and restored a temple to the great god Amun, assuming the expenses for his sake, his wife, Jaya Valeria, and his children, and for good and benefit, in the nineteenth year of the aforementioned emperor's rule ...".²⁸

It is clear from the inscription preserved in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria under No. 17507 that the person who rebuilt the temple was called Gaius Valerius Kotos. He was a soldier in the Roman army, a resident of Theadelphia in the province of Arsinoe after his demobilization from the Roman military service.²⁹

Lesquier suggested that the demobilized soldier, Gaius Valerius Kotos was an old man, who had become a hermit in a religious association devoted to the god Amun. This is illustrated in his dedication of this work and the fact that he incurred the cost of rebuilding a temple dedicated to the cult of Amun.³⁰ Whatever his motive, the positive effect of his effort with respect to the demobilized soldiers can be seen. Many historians have agreed that they formed a burden on the other members of society, especially in smaller villages. The voluntary actions undertaken by some of them were an attempt to serve their neighbors and benefit the community.

²⁸ Étienne Bernard, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum. Tome II, la Méris"de Thémistos* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1981), 74-75, no. 124.

²⁹ الحسين احمد عبد الله، مصر في عصر الرومان: أصداء الإستغلال وأنشودة البقاء: دراسة في ضوء الوثائق البردية (القاهرة: عين الدراسات والبحوث الانسانية والاجتماعية، ٢٠٠٧)، ٧٧-٧٩؛

Richard Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: a Social History* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

³⁰ Jean Lesquier, *L'Armée Romaine d'Egypte, d'Auguste à Dioclétien*, Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, tome XLI (Le Caire, 1918), 280, no. 8; Bernard, E., *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum*, 76.

One must differentiate between some of the retired soldiers and the active forces who passed through the villages wishing to loot their resources and goods, after the Roman administration let them exploit the people. Some of the demobilized soldiers-despite the advantages and privileges they enjoyed, such as their exemption from taxes-were keen to establish good relations and coexist peacefully with their neighbors in the Egyptian villages. They were also motivated by a religious psychological factor: their age and a sense of the need to do charitable work to benefit others and become closer to the gods. This is shown clearly in the previous inscription. All these combined reasons led some of them to do voluntary works in the service of society.³¹ The value of the expenses that the volunteers incurred in building or maintaining the holy places must be emphasized. A document dating to the second half of the second century AD shows that the cost of building a temple gate was fifty drachmas. The glue used on the entrance door cost 19 drachmas, as shown in a list of expenses for repairing a temple in the province of Herakleopolis.³²

Discussion

This study examines the voluntary works of community members directed to religious architecture. These voluntary and charitable activities were not a general feature or a common phenomenon in society, but it can be said that they contributed-albeit in a relatively simple way-to alleviating some of the problems that resulted from Roman neglect in Egypt during this era. These activities also had some positive benefits for society and its members. The most important outcomes of these voluntary activities in Egypt can be summarized as follows:

A- Alleviating Social Tensions

The Roman administrative policy in Egypt was characterized by discrimination among different elements of society, granting privileges to some groups but not others, depriving the majority (the Egyptians in particular) of any privileges and even assigning them heavy burdens and obligations. These actions disrupted their lives and increased their anger and resentment against the groups that enjoyed the privileges and benefits of the country's goodness and wealth. This was the natives' attitude towards the demobilized soldiers.

One document³³ states that the native population's attitude towards the arrival of one of these privileged soldiers was characterized by passivity and alienation. The document-a letter from one brother to another-recommends a person coming to reside with them in the village of Karanis. The sender wishes his demobilized brother to welcome this person. It is clear that the sender expected that the newcomer would not be welcomed and might even be persecuted by the native population. Accordingly, the sender asked the recipient to protect the newcomer from them and provide him with stability and a quiet life. The text stated:

³¹ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 23, 172, 173.

³² *P.Oxy.* 20.2272 (AD 169); Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 139.

³³ *SB.VI.9636.* (AD 135-136).

“Receive with my recommendation the bearer of this letter, Terentianus, an honourably discharged soldier, and acquaint him with our villagers’ ways, so he isn’t insulted. Since he is a man of means and desirous of residing there, I have urged upon him that he rent my house for this year and next for sixty drachmas, and that he take a lease of my field for sixty drachmas, and I’d like you to use the one hundred and twenty drachmas to buy for me from our friend the linen-merchant by the temple in the city”

It can be concluded from the letter that the native population did not always welcome an incoming veteran with open arms, and they could not be expected to treat him well. This is because the soldiers had privileges whether they were actively serving or not. For example, they were able to impose obligations on the villagers for the benefit of the army, or to shift the responsibilities of the demobilized onto the villagers’ shoulders.³⁴

The policy of the Roman administration caused this social tension. Most of the people who enjoyed these privileged conditions boasted of their superiority over the villagers. However, some of the demobilized soldiers were aware of this fact, so they tried to improve their image, and show their generosity and desire to serve the community, by undertaking some project at their own expense. By doing so, they hoped to alleviate their neighbors’ anger and envy. This can be seen clearly in the architectural contributions of some of these demobilized soldiers.

Consequently, some of the distinguished new arrivals had a role-even if a minor one-in relieving the tension resulting from the Roman policy of discriminating between groups by undertaking voluntary work to serve the community. Perhaps some wealthy people did charitable works in order to align themselves with the population so as to protect their own interests in the provinces. For example, Aurelius Horion was an Alexandrian citizen who donated to help alleviate poverty in the province of Oxyrhynchus where he owned lands.³⁵ Thus, such donations may have sought to achieve social peace.

B- The Romans’ Stability and Rule:

The Romans ruled Egypt after Alexander the Great and his successors conquered the East. Emperor Octavius established the rules for the absolute monarchy of the Roman Empire and stabilized the conditions in the provinces. Augustus and his successors claimed that they sought to spread peace and prosperity among the Roman provinces, including Egypt. However, the Roman administration did not support these claims. Rome occupied Egypt only to deplete its resources and benefit from its wealth, which impoverished most elements of Egyptian society. The people of Egypt quickly became fed up with

³⁴ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 22-23; Silvia Strassi, *L’archivio di Claudius Tiberianus da Karanis*, Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete. Beiheft ; 26 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 69-71, 171.

³⁵ *P.Oxy. 705* (after AD 202); Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 31; Allan Chester Johnson, *Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian*. An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, ed. by T. Frank, vol. II (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936) 695-696.

Roman rule. Certain groups were heavily burdened with taxes, which made them flee from their homes to bushes and swamps. There, they formed gangs of pillaging, looting and banditry, as a form of revolt against Roman rule.³⁶

The voluntary works described in this paper helped the people to avoid the material and moral troubles caused by the Roman administration. The donors sought to provide the services the Roman administration neglected to offer, and to compensate those harmed by the burdens and obligations imposed on them by that administration. This helped to alleviate the inequality and totalitarianism of Roman rule. Consequently, if paradoxically, the voluntary charitable works contributed to the stability of Roman rule in Egypt.

The end result, from the Roman point of view, was that Egypt was a quiet province. Only a few small movements and rebellions disturbed the Roman peace.³⁷

C- Providing Places for Worship and Public Services:

The Roman administration's policy towards the temples and those in charge of their service in Egypt tried to submit these temples to the authority of a civil officer. This officer's job was to administer the properties of temples, which deprived them of the administrative and financial independence they enjoyed during the previous ages of Roman rule. Of course, this affected the architectural development of the temples, their activities, and the worship activities.

Certainly, some citizens were well aware of this situation, so they sought to contribute to the construction, restoration, and repair of temples out of religious motives, to become closer to the gods. Their devotion provided the places of worship for society after they were neglected by the Roman administration, which was mainly concerned with obtaining the greatest material benefits from Egypt.

The Roman Administration's Attitude towards Voluntary Architectural Works:

After the Roman conquest of Egypt, Augustus managed to establish the rules for autocracy of the Roman Empire, with the aim of settling the conditions in the provinces subject to the Romans such as Egypt and others. Virgil, the official poet of the Roman state, outlined the historical message of Rome under the rule of Augustus. He stated that Rome was destined to rule the peoples of the world for the good of all, and to spread peace and relieve the oppressed. He added that the emperor is the tool who accomplishes this sacred goal, he is the good shepherd of all, and he is the one who carries peace and good for all.³⁸

³⁶ عبد اللطيف احمد علي، مصر والامبراطورية الرومانية في ضوء الاوراق البريدية (القاهرة: دار النهضة العربية، ١٩٨٨)، ٢٠٥.
³⁷ الناصري، تاريخ الامبراطورية الرومانية، ٥٨.

³⁸ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 219.

While the Romans claimed this benevolent message, the reality contradicted it. Rome drained most of Egypt's resources and wealth, such as wheat, at the expense of its people. This exacerbated the poverty of most Egyptians. Meanwhile, wealthy Egyptians tried to support their society by voluntarily contributing to temples and other public works. The question here is the extent to which the Roman administration agreed and tolerated these voluntary activities of individuals and organizations for the benefit of society and its members. The stance of the Roman administration towards voluntary works in Egypt depended on the extent to which these works might harm their interests and colonial goals, and whether they violated any broader Roman policy.

The position of the Romans was largely positive in this regard, as the Roman emperors-especially in the second century-encouraged citizens to take part in construction projects. In addition, they urged the wealthy of Egypt and other Roman provinces to contribute to the construction movement and the establishment of religious places and theaters. Some emperors even took part themselves. For example, Emperor Hadrian contributed to many cities of Egypt. Although his actions were not voluntary and charitable, they stemmed from his responsibility for citizens.

Conclusion

This paper discusses individuals' voluntary contributions to religious buildings in Roman Egypt. The Roman emperors, pious or not, were keen to encourage wealthy Roman citizens to establish facilities at their own expense in order to decorate and reconstruct their cities and provinces. Hence, during the Roman period, individuals in all of the provincial capitals contributed to construction projects, each according to his motivations and financial capabilities. Religious influences played an important role in these architectural activities. Accordingly, the study is mainly focused on voluntary contributions to religious buildings, which were offered by individuals and institutions under a religious influence. Such works may have been undertaken to serve the society in ways that the Roman administration neglected.

When the Romans confiscated the lands of temples, they did compensate the temples for their lost resources, but this did not meet the total needs of the establishments. Hence, individuals had to build some temples and restore others at their own expense. The study deals with voluntary contributions to religious buildings under Roman rule from the first century BC to the second century AD, as revealed by inscriptions on the monuments, stelae and ostracas from that period. It appears, from the evidence discussed in the study, that contributions to religious buildings could be total or partial. They were directed towards building temples or parts of temples, adding walls surrounding them, constructing the extensions surrounding the temple such as water reservoirs, wells, and gates, and repairing the dilapidated parts of the holy places.

It is also evident from the study that professional associations and religious communities in Egypt during the Roman period had a role in the architecture and restoration of temples. Priests and women also contributed.

These voluntary activities were not a general feature or a common phenomenon, but where they did exist, they helped to alleviate many of the abuses and misconduct of the Roman rule in Egypt. They had many positive outcomes, including easing the social tensions caused by the heavy taxes and social discrimination imposed by the Romans. They contributed to the stabilization of Roman rule in Egypt, and provided places for worship and other public services. The attitude of the Romans towards these activities was largely positive, and the Roman emperors, especially in the second century AD, encouraged them, or at least did not discourage them.

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مساهمات الأفراد التطوعية في المباني الدينية في مصر الرومانية

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الملخص باللغة العربية

يهدف هذا البحث إلي التعرف علي مساهمات الأفراد التطوعية في المباني الدينية في مصر الرومانية. يشمل هذا البحث علي مساهمات الأفراد التي تمت من القرن الأول قبل الميلاد وحتى القرن الثاني قبل الميلاد. ويستعرض هذا البحث أهم الأعمال التطوعية التي قام بها الأفراد بدافع ديني لصالح الأماكن المقدسة مثل بناء معبد بالكامل أو جزء منه وأيضا ترميم معبد أو إصلاح المتهدم من المعبد، بالإضافة إلي بناء بوابات معبد أو بناء سور حول المعبد، وشملت هذه المساهمات بعض الأعمال الأخرى ذات الدافع الديني وتفيد المجتمع مثل إقامة آبار لتوفير الماء. وكان الدافع وراء هذه المساهمات التقرب من الآلهة وخدمة المجتمع. ويناقش هذا البحث أهم نتائج وأثار هذه المساهمات علي المجتمع، حيث ساهمت في تخفيف حدة الاحتقان المجتمعي، وساهمت أيضا في استقرار وضع الرومان وحكمهم، بالإضافة إلي دور هذه المساهمات في توفير أماكن للعبادة والخدمات العامة مما يخدم المجتمع تعويضاً عن الدور الذي تخاذلت عن القيام به الإدارة الرومانية. أما عن موقف الإدارة الرومانية من تلك المساهمات فقد كان إيجابيا حيث شجعت الإدارة الرومانية المواطنين والمؤسسات وخاصة في القرن الثاني علي البناء والتشييد.

الكلمات الدالة: المساهمات الدينية، المعابد الرومانية، العمارة.