JAN ASSMANN

RELIGIO DUPLEX

How the Enlightenment Reinvented Egyptian Religion

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Amicis caris

Martin Mulsow, Sarah and Guy Stroumsa

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Contents

Foreword

This study investigates the differences between public and arcane doctrine, freely available and restricted ideas about the divine, profane and initiated forms of social life, the God of the Fathers and the philosophers' god. My interest in these matters has two roots. Both reach a long way back in my intellectual biography, and they also have something to do with my own 'double life' as Egyptologist and cultural scientist. The first goes back to the project on the topic of 'secrecy' that Aleida Assmann and I (in my role of cultural scientist) investigated in a series of conferences organized some fifteen to twenty years ago by the research group, Archaeology of Literary Communication; the proceedings were subsequently published in three volumes (*Veil and Threshold*, vol. 1: *Secrecy and the Public Sphere*, 1997; vol. 2: *Secrecy and Revelation*, 1998; vol. 3: *Secrecy and Curiosity*, 1999). The second, Egyptological aspect derives from the friendly debate, carried out in the 1980s between Erik Hornung and myself, about the problem of an ancient Egyptian monotheism, a debate in which the question of an esoteric tradition of mono- or pantheistic ideas in the context of ancient Egyptian polytheism also played a role (*Monotheism and Cosmotheism: Ancient Egyptian Forms of 'Thinking the One' and their European Reception History*, 1993). This interest was sustained throughout my research on the reception of Egypt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, documented in *Moses the Egyptian* (1997/98) and *The Magic Flute* (2005). Above all, it was my preoccupation with Mozart's opera and an important aspect of its cultural-historical environment, Viennese free-masonry, which first opened my eyes to the immense importance

assigned to Egypt in late eighteenth-century masonic circles as the (supposed) prototype of a culture split between public sphere and mystery cult, exoteric and esoteric religion. I coined the term *religio duplex* to indicate this entire complex of ideas, interpreting *The Magic Flute* as an *opera duplex*. In my book on Mozart's opera, I lacked the space to retrace in any detail the history of this idea from antiquity through to Mozart's lodge and masonic investigations into Egyptian and other mysteries. This study will endeavour to make good that omission.

My work on the study began in early 2004 at the International Research Centre for Culture Sciences (IFK) in Vienna. At the Austrian Grand Lodge, I am deeply indebted to Dr Rüdiger Wolf for placing rare archival materials at my disposal. The study was completed in early 2010 during a two-week stay at the research library in Friedenstein Castle. The library's director, Prof. Martin Mulsow, kindly placed at my disposal the arcana of his private library as well as the riches of the Gotha collection, drawing my attention to many passages and byways in the labyrinth of baroque erudition that would otherwise have escaped my notice. That is why I dedicate this book to him, alongside my friends in Jerusalem, Sarah and Guy Stroumsa, with whom I proposed some years ago (and subsequently researched) the thesis that the history of religion was discovered in the seventeenth century (ARG 3 [2001]). In April 2010 I was invited to present the most important findings of this study during a short guest professorship at Graz University, and to discuss them with colleagues and students there; for that opportunity, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Irmtraud Fischer. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Hans-Joachim Simm and Claus-Jürgen Thornton for originally accepting this study for publication in the *Verlag der Weltreligionen*, and especially to Claus-Jürgen for the extraordinary care he took in editing the manuscript. I owe many references and comments in this book to his scrutiny, and it is only at his express wish that they have not been individually acknowledged.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the endnotes:

ARG	Archiv für Religionsgeschichte
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JF	*Journal für Freymaurer*
KV	Köchelverzeichnis
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*

Introduction

Should we not say that Spinoza took his [doctrine] from these Egyptians?

P. E. Jablonski[1]

To introduce the theme of dual religion, I want to bring two scenes to mind. The first took place in the year 1654. On 11 November of that year, the thirty-one-year-old Blaise Pascal, a mathematician of genius and seeker after God who was suffering from deep depression at the time, and probably tuberculosis as well, had a religious experience that fundamentally changed his life. Wanting to hold fast to this experience under all circumstances, to preserve it from the vicissitudes of memory and fortune, he noted the essentials on a piece of parchment, which he then sewed into his coat so that it would always lie close to his heart. The note was discovered after his death by his manservant. It reads:

In the year of Grace, 1654,

On Monday, 23rd of November, Feast of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of others in the Martyrology,

Vigil of St. Chrysogonis, Martyr, and others,

From around half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve.

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars.

Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

God of Jesus Christ

Deum meum et Deum vestrum.

'Thy God shall be my God.' [Ruth 1:16]

Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except God.

He is to be found only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

'Righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.'

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I have separated myself from Him

Dereliquerunt me fontem aquae vivae [They have abandoned me, the source of the living waters.]

'My God, wilt Thou leave me?'

Let me not be separated from Him eternally.

'That is the eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and the one whom Thou has sent, Jesus Christ.'

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

I have separated myself from Him; I have fled from Him, denied Him, crucified Him.

Let me never be separated from Him.

We keep hold of Him only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Renunciation, total and sweet.

Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my [spiritual] director. Eternally in joy for a day's training on earth.

Non obliviscar sermons tuos. [I shall not forget what you have taught me.] Amen.[2]

In the course of two hours of intense religious turmoil, Pascal thus threw himself into the arms of the God of the Fathers and turned his back on the philosophers' and scholars' god.

The second scene played out 126 years later, in July 1780, in the house of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in Wolfenbüttel. He had just been paid a visit by the young businessman and writer Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Lessing welcomed his fellow freemason as a brother. The fol-

lowing morning, Lessing sought to entertain his guest; Jacobi was still busy and gave his host something to read while he was waiting. It was Goethe's poem 'Prometheus', not yet published at the time. Questioned on it afterwards by Jacobi, Lessing confessed: 'The orthodox concepts of the divine are no longer for me. I cannot stand them. *Hen kai pan!* I know nothing else. That's where this poem is tending, too; and I must confess I like it a lot.' Jacobi: 'Then you would be more or less in agreement with Spinoza.' Lessing: 'If I am to call myself by anybody's name, then I know none better.'[3] Lessing thus rejects the God of the Fathers (if we are permitted to identify 'the orthodox concepts of the divine' with this idea of god), declaring his allegiance to the philosopher's god instead. This split, this tension, this either/or stamped the religious history of the European Enlightenment. Jacobi himself suffered from it throughout his life, and spoke of a *salto mortale* that he had to make in order to be able to think the one God *and* the other god.[4]

The tension between two notions of god – the philosophers' god and the God of the Fathers – was encapsulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the opposition between natural religion and revealed (or positive) religion, between reason and faith. What was understood by natural religion was a kind of monotheistically or rather pantheistically conceived primordial religion, a Spinozism *avant la lettre*. The scholars' and philosophers' god, far from having sprung fully formed from a modern, secular age, was thus deemed the most ancient knowledge of humankind; it was certainly anything but a pallid philosophical construct. The formula *hen kai pan* – literally, 'one-and-all' or 'all-one' – is generally traced back to Heraclitus, who reportedly taught that 'all is one'.[5] But another antecedent lay closer to hand in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: many scholars thought they could demonstrate this pantheistic primal religion of all-oneness in ancient Egypt, a 'discovery' to which Lessing's *Hen kai pan* possibly alludes.[6] In his imposing work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, the Cambridge Platonist and Hebraist Ralph Cudworth had drawn on hundreds of sources to reconstruct all the theologies of the ancient world, including the theology of ancient Egypt. His aim was to prove that all religions essentially boil down to a monotheism of all-oneness.[7] Although he wrote the work in English, a language that few scholars could understand at the time, it was translated into Latin in 1733 by no less a figure than Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, and so made accessible to the European scholarly world.[8] In this work, Cudworth presented the idea of all-oneness as the quintessence of ancient Egyptian religion and theology, or rather: *one* Egyptian theology, for there were two:

a 'publick' and an 'arcane theology'. According to Cudworth, all ancient religions are two-faced, as it were. They have an outer face, in the form of the official religion, and an inner face, in the form of mysteries, and the original model or prototype of all these dual religions is the religion of the ancient Egyptians. It was from them that Heraclitus borrowed the idea of all-oneness.

Cudworth's may be considered the classic account of the idea of *religio duplex*. The expression itself does not occur in his writings, however. As Martin Mulsow pointed out to me, it was first coined by Theodor Ludwig Lau (1670–1740), who introduced it in his text *Meditationes, Theses, Dubia philosophico-theologica* to refer to the distinction between rational religion (*religio rationis*) and revealed religion (*religio revelationis*).[9] Like Cudworth before him, Lau begins by making clear that there has never been any such thing as atheism; an awareness and veneration of god are basic endowments of humankind. In principle, only *one* religion exists, since there is only *one* reason and only *one* god.[10] There is no end to philosophical and theological statements, however, and these represent modifications of the one truth and theology. They are all more or less true (*plus vel minus veriores*) and differ from each other only in degree, not in kind, insofar as they all bear some relation to the one truth, from which they deviate to a greater or lesser extent. The 'first, oldest, most general and most rational religion is belief in god (*Deismus*).'[11] Religions like 'Judaism, paganism (*Gentilismus*), Christianity, Islam and countless other forms of divine knowledge and religious sects' have emerged from this primordial religion over the course of time. In spite of all their historically conditioned differences, they all concur in affirming: 'Deus est! Deus existit!' (Thesis X); 'God was when no religion yet existed. For god is of eternity, but religion is temporal, historical, and accidental in relation to god' (Thesis XI).[12] And with that, he arrives at Thesis XII: 'Religio duplex: Rationis & Revelationis' – 'Religion is dual: as religion of reason and as religion of revelation'. Reason teaches that god exists and is one in his being. This form of divine knowledge is simple: it satisfies reason. 'Reason worships god as the creator, conserver and governor of the universe through a cult that is as inward as possible. Its book is this universe.'[13] Whoever worships god in this way, reading his signs in the universe, will think and live in peace. 'Here there is no perturbation of the spirit due to sins and eternal fire.'[14] Hell and the devil are equally unknown. Death does not exist, for all things come from god, and since god is eternal, so too are things. Souls migrate from bodies and are united with the world-soul.[15] So much for the religion of reason. The religion of revelation, by contrast, teaches that both Testaments,

the Old and the New, are the book of God. God is three-in-one (*triunus*). Adam and Eve, the first humans, fell after they tasted of the forbidden fruit and were exiled from Paradise. That is how sin entered into the world (*Peccatum hinc intrasse Mundum*). God's son, born of a virgin, died on the cross to save us from sin. This Gospel is preached to all. Those who accept it will gain entry into heaven; those who reject it will be consigned to hell (*Recipientibus illud, Coelum: Spernentibus, Infernum*). So much for the religion of revelation. One religion is simple and transparent (*plana et perspicua*), the other more difficult and mysterious (*difficilior et mysteriosa*). Both are true, but they are perfect in varying degrees. The most perfect and excellent religion, however, is the 'Religio quia Dei, & Christi', the religion of God and Christ, which ought by rights to designate the religion of revelation, but which Lau, after everything that has gone before, evidently takes to mean the religion of reason.[16] Thinking back to Pascal's nocturnal epiphany, one could connect the first religion to the philosophers' and savants' god, the second to the God of the Fathers.

The thirteenth thesis further refines the idea of God's two books, an idea which underlies the conception of both religions or of *religio duplex*.[17] God manifests himself in the world in two ways: universally and particularly. Universally in creation: that is the basis of rational religion, and it is common to all peoples. Particularly through 'divine speeches, angels, appearances, visions, inspirations, dreams, oracles, predictions, prophecies, miracles, Holy Scripture: those are the foundations of revealed religion and reserved for particular nations, especially the Jewish and the Christian.'[18] The fourteenth thesis pursues the principle of division into the human world. As God's creatures, all humans are his people. This people, however, can be separated into two categories: the unknown and the known. The unknown people inhabit the visible and invisible spheres of the universes, whereas the known people have our globe as their temporary dwelling place. The known people are split, in turn, between the chosen people and the other nations. The Jews and Christians are the elect. The remaining nations, although not chosen, are still God's people; for they recognize and worship God from creation, whereas the chosen (double) people recognize him from revelation. Knowledge from the book of nature comes earlier, however; the book of scripture appeared later.[19] Natural religion, supported by the book of nature, is thus older and more primordial than revealed religion, which draws from the book of scripture. The latter is twofold as well, being divided into the Old and the New Testaments. 'Now, in a general and abstract sense, all are believers in god (*Deistae*),

worshippers and adorers of god, lovers of religion!'[20] This great text from the beginning of the eighteenth century already gives almost exactly the same meaning to the idea of dual religion as that which our investigation, steering a path through Lessing, Mendelssohn, and various more recent positions, will arrive at. It is an idea which still offers a highly topical contribution to peace and understanding between religions.

The *duplex* in Lau's twelfth thesis is to be understood predicatively, not attributively. He is not talking about a twofold religion, but saying that religion exists in two forms: as (natural) religion of reason and as revealed religion. When Lau typifies one as coming earlier and the other as coming later, he anticipates the distinction between primary and secondary religions introduced by the Heidelberg scholar of religion, Theo Sundermeier.[21] We are dealing here with two different forms of religion, rather than with one religion that has two different faces or two religions coexisting within one and the same culture.

In this latter sense, however, the idea makes an appearance at roughly the same time as Lau's thesis, in a work by the polymath Jacob Friedrich Reimmann, entitled *Idea Systematis Antiquitatis Literariae Specialioris sive Aegyptiacae Adumbrati*.[22] He summarizes his comprehensive enumeration of the various disciplines of ancient Egyptian science in the sentence: 'Suffice it to say that the philosophy of the Egyptians as a whole was twofold (*duplex*): exoteric and esoteric.'[23] Here, too, *duplex* is predicative, not attributive. But the predicate of duality in this passage refers not to two separate forms of philosophy, but to philosophy in two forms: one public and visible, the other secret and accessible only to the initiated (although here, too, the distinction between reason and faith or nature and revelation always resonates more or less discernibly).

It might be supposed that the God of the Fathers and the philosophers' god could perhaps also be accommodated in such a philosophy or religion – one on the exoteric level, the other on the esoteric. In the context of the *religio duplex* model, then, the secret or esoteric side of religion does not simply represent one 'heterotope' among other heterotopes segregated from the general, public sphere (such as intimacy, carnival, ritual or masonic lodge), but constitutes the Other of the public and general culture that is defined by this very binary opposition. The model of *religio duplex* is consequently based not simply on a pluralism internal to a culture, but on a *dualism*. With that, nothing has yet been said about the ideological interpretations, social consequences and political institutionalizations of this dualism; these can vary from epoch to epoch and from society to society.[24]

Where does this idea of a dual religion come from, and how did ancient Egyptian culture come to be seen as the source and inventor of this type of religion? That is the question to which the first chapter of this book is devoted. In the second chapter I investigate how this idea was articulated in the seventeenth century, with a prelude in the twelfth century. The third chapter deals with the political refunctioning of *religio duplex* in the eighteenth century, while the fourth retraces the dialectic of Enlightenment and mystery in late eighteenth-century freemasonry. Taking its cue from Lessing and Mendelssohn, the fifth chapter illuminates the decisive reinterpretation of the idea of dual religion in the sense of an opposition between particularity and universality. We have already seen this process at work in Theodor Lau, and here the idea assumes a form which can claim a certain topicality for us today, as I show by juxtaposing it with more recent positions. The study concludes with a 'prospectus', in which I attempt to follow the idea of *religio duplex* through to the present and demonstrate its continuing relevance, as well as with a 'retrospectus', where I look for traces or foreshadowings of dual religion in the ancient Israelite and ancient Egyptian religions.

Even though the idea of dual religion rests on a misunderstanding, as far as its derivation from Egyptian religious history is concerned, there are still certain features, in the ancient Egyptian as well as in the ancient Israelite religion (and in a wealth of other religions, if this question were to be pursued systematically), which indicate a kind of double-sidedness or complementary dualism within a single religion. To be sure, these phenomena were completely unknown to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the concept of dual religion was first developed. That is why I have chosen not to deal with them in the first chapter. Instead, I cast a backward glance at the evidence in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Egyptian tradition which, from today's vantage point, may be interpreted as aspects of dual religion, even though they played no part in the debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

I should admit in advance that the term *religio duplex* surfaces only a single time in the sources examined here, in the aforementioned Lau. Unlike the monumental, four-volume work of Ernst Feil, which investigates the incidence and meaning of the word *religio* in a plethora of texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, this study is not a contribution to the history of concepts. I follow several stations in the development of an idea that I myself have dubbed *religio duplex*, and which appears under different labels and descriptions in the texts I investigate. The entire discourse on Egypt as *religio duplex* and model for the 'new mysteries' in the absolutist state of

the eighteenth century would have remained a marginal phenomenon of merely antiquarian interest, at best, had it not taken a new turn through Reinhold and Schiller – and, in a different way, through Lessing and Mendelssohn – which can also claim relevance for the present and which merits broader public interest. We are dealing, on the one hand, with a reconstruction of European religious history that draws on the idea of *religio duplex* to connect the 'depth current' (Klaus Müller) of ancient – and especially Egyptian – cosmotheism with a Western tradition influenced by Christianity and monotheism; and, on the other hand, with the widening or rechannelling of this 'depth current' into a 'religion of humankind' of concealed truth, which, for Mendelssohn, represents the common goal of all religions. In this form, the model seems pertinent to our own time as well, in which the cultures and therefore religions of this earth have drawn together in such a way that none of them can afford to claim sole possession of absolute and universal truths. Religion has a place in our globalized world only as *religio duplex*, that is, as a religion that understands itself as one among many and has learned to see itself through the eyes of the other, without losing sight of the concealed god or the concealed truth that forms the vanishing point of all religions.

1

Egyptian Foundations
The Dual Meaning of Signs

Religio Duplex and the Endgame of Egyptian Culture

Although the idea of 'dual religion' ultimately derives from ancient sources, it represents a construction of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which, so far as ancient Egyptian culture is concerned, rests mainly on misconceptions. Before we turn to address this idea in its own right, three points need to be considered. First, there were certain characteristics of Egyptian culture which sanctioned their interpretation as *religio duplex*. Second, the Greeks – who can ultimately be held responsible for this interpretation – could still experience Egyptian culture in full flower and receive answers to their questions about it. And, third, there is much evidence to suggest that the Egyptians who were interrogated by the Greeks in this way themselves set out to disseminate an image of their culture as a *religio duplex*, a religion split between popular and elite culture. It may therefore have been the Egyptians of this late period who put into circulation many apparent misunderstandings. The idea of Egyptian religion as *religio duplex* would then be a Greco-Roman confabulation, rather than the product of a one-sided Greek projection of native ideas and institutions onto the Egyptian world.[1] We should therefore begin by looking more closely at the interlocutors.

On the Greek side, we find a slew of research into Egyptian culture that almost merits the title of an Egyptology.[2] The second book of the *Histories* of Herodotus, who travelled to Egypt around 450 BCE, offers a comprehensive description of the country, with excurses into its history, religion, customs and mores, geography and chronology.

The four-volume history of Egypt by Hecataeus of Abdera, who lived in Alexandria towards the end of the fourth century BCE, must have been even more wide-ranging. Diodorus of Sicily, a contemporary of Cicero, imported large sections of this book into his *Historical Library* (*Bibliotheca historica*).[3] Strabo devoted the seventeenth book of his *Geography* to Egypt.[4] These works deal very extensively with Egypt, shedding light on its state, system of government, religion, culture, history, customs, geography, mythology and much else besides. Despite the occasional expression of bemusement and disapproval, they are all marked by a tone of fascination and admiration. This positive appraisal is perhaps most noticeable in Hecataeus (as cited by Diodorus). It was this representation of ancient Egyptian culture that was to exert by far the greatest influence on the Enlightenment view of Egypt.

Hecataeus of Abdera numbered among the many Greek scholars and philosophers invited to Alexandria by Ptolemy I (367/366–283/282 BCE), with the aim of acquiring intellectual prestige in the Hellenistic world for his newly founded capital. His history of Egypt was meant to provide the Macedonian ruler who commissioned it with an historical past on which he could base his project of a Hellenistic-Egyptian pharaonic dynasty. At the same time, the work was intended to hold up a mirror to Ptolemy, reflecting back the model of an enlightened monarchy. Strikingly, Hecataeus (or Diodorus) fails to mention the divine status which the Egyptians traditionally associated with the office of pharaoh. He depicts the king as a man duty-bound to uphold strict laws and to adhere to a daily routine prescribed right down to the minutiae; a sovereign who excels his subjects through his extraordinary virtues, his extensive education, and the rigorous example of his conduct, at best, but not through any divine attributes.[5] This image of the ideal ruler must be set in the context of contemporary Greek political theory, which distinguished between freedom and despotism and placed the law on the side of freedom and democracy, whereas despots were deplored for ruling without regard for existing laws. Against the background of this alternative, Hecataeus – like Plato, Isocrates and other conservative political theorists before him – recommends Egypt as a third way that unites monarchy and the law.[6] In the heyday of absolutism, this image of Egypt could therefore be advanced as a counter-model to the absolutist state. So it was that, 2,000 years later, Hecataeus's Egypt could once again serve as a mirror for princes. At the behest of Louis XIV, Jean-Bénigne Bossuet wrote his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681) as a guide- and textbook for the dauphin, hence under conditions comparable to the

Alexandrine Museum. Egypt was described there as the school of wise lawmaking and politics, a land which envisaged the happiness of the people as its supreme goal and strictly committed the king to upholding the law.

With Egypt's annexation by Rome as a crown colony, the country forfeited its political interest for the Greeks. Now religion – and the culture of writing, believed to stand in the closest possible connection to that religion – moved to the forefront of attention. Among the most important works of Greek Egyptology to have survived from this period are Plutarch's treatise, *De Iside et Osiride* (*On Isis and Osiris*),[7] and the text known since the Renaissance by the title *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (*On the Egyptian Mysteries*),[8] written by the Neoplatonist Iamblichus and stylized as the reply of an Egyptian priest, Abammon, to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*.[9]

To be sure, the Greek 'Egyptologists' had no first-hand knowledge of Egyptian religious affairs. They were ignorant of the language and unable to read the writing. For this reason, modern Egyptology has tended to dismiss this literature as an authentic source on Egyptian religion. What is thereby overlooked, however, is the fact that those who contributed to this Egyptological discourse included Greek-writing Egyptians who were well-versed in Egyptian writing, language and religion: above all, the priests Manetho of Sebennytos[10] (first half of the third century BCE) and Chaeremon of Alexandria (first century CE).[11] While their works are now mostly no longer extant, Plutarch, Iamblichus and others could still consult them, and authentic information may well have found its way into their writings by this route. The image of Egypt that the Greek 'Egyptologists' handed down to us may thus contain more genuinely Egyptian ideas and motifs than we realize.

To this Greco-Egyptian 'Egyptological' canon was added, in late antiquity, a fairly extensive religious Greco-Egyptian primary literature, above all the 'magical papyri'[12] and the treatises of the Corpus Hermeticum.[13] This literature mostly purports to be translated from the Egyptian, but it is so strongly steeped in Neoplatonic terminology and motifs that the Egyptian content has tended to be dismissed as a masquerade.[14] However, Iamblichus expressly points out that the 'Hermetic' writings, in being translated into Greek, were equally brought 'into the language [i.e., conceptual vocabulary] of the philosophers'.[15] This means that the situation could be exactly the opposite of that assumed by later scholars: the Greek content, not the Egyptian, could be the 'packaging'. At any rate, the Egyptian elements in this discourse, too, are being assessed quite differently today.[16]

The Greek-language literature that flowed from Egyptian quills was unmistakably guided by propagandistic intentions: it was motivated by the desire to present Greeks and others with as impressive an image of Egyptian culture as possible. The authors would have been members of the educated, Greek-speaking former upper class. At the time, these were primarily priests. Under the conditions of foreign rule, beginning with the conquest of Egypt by the Persians in 525 BCE and continuing – and, in many respects, worsening – under the Macedonians and Romans, the native Egyptian elite had been forced to come to terms with the loss of its political power, which had now passed into the hands of the occupying forces. Whereas the Persians had still ruled the land in collaboration with the Egyptians, the Greeks immigrated in vast numbers to Egypt and established themselves as a new ruling class.[17] The Egyptian elite reacted to its loss of political influence and social standing with a process of inner emigration, retreating into the sanctified space of the temple. This led, on the one hand, to a clericalization of Egyptian culture, whose standard-bearers were now to be found above all in the priesthood, and to a structural transformation of religion, on the other hand. The religious traditions now expanded into an immensely complicated system consisting of ritual, learning and grammatology, a kind of arcane glass-bead game which – through the virtuosity with which they played it, the intellectual and spiritual prestige it conferred upon them, even and especially in the eyes of the Greeks, and the magical-spiritual claims to power they asserted through it – could to a certain extent compensate the sacerdotal elite for the political interests they had been forced to relinquish. This transformation most clearly left its mark on the culture of writing, which will be examined more closely in the next chapter. The stock of hieroglyphs increased tenfold; learning to write accordingly meant embarking on a decades-long process of initiation into a highly complex world of knowledge; and mastery of writing came to be regarded as a high art. Shut off in the sanctuary of the temple, the clericalized Egyptian culture for many centuries proved remarkably adept at resisting the pressure to Hellenize, even as it paid for its inner emigration by losing contact with the wider community.

This inner emigration of the elite, its self-imposed isolation from the outside world, finds its clearest expression in temple architecture. In earlier times, temples had formed nodal points in a network of avenues along which the deities, periodically leaving the precincts which sheltered them from their impure surroundings, were drawn through the city. These religious processions transformed the popu-

lace into a huge festive crowd, sometimes swollen by pilgrims from abroad.[18] Since the people were forbidden from setting foot in the temples, these festivals provided the only opportunity for more general religious participation; that is why there were so many of them in ancient Egypt. If the traditional religion exhibited any characteristics of a *religio duplex*, then they are to be found in the split between an exclusive everyday cult and communal festive rites. In the Ptolemaic period, however, the temples were transformed into fortress-like precincts, enclosed by high walls, within which the divine processions now took place. Having retreated into the temples, Egyptian culture took on many of the features of an 'enclave culture' (Mary Douglas[19]), which we also see emerging around the same time in sectarian movements in Judaism. These include xenophobia, stricter purity laws, dietary taboos and other forms of self-exclusion from the general culture.[20]

We can easily imagine the Egyptian priests presenting their religion to their Greek visitors as a *religio duplex*. The first questions posed to them by the Greeks would naturally have concerned the more bizarre or even repulsive aspects of Egyptian religion: the holy animals, the theriomorphic gods, and certain cruel or obscene rituals and feast-day customs, such as those described by Herodotus. All that, they would have been told, is put on only for the benefit of the uninitiated; behind it, there stands a deep wisdom which the people know nothing about. The taint of a certain elitist, undemocratic arrogance, which clings to the idea of *religio duplex* from first to last, may be explained by the situation of a politically disqualified and socially degraded elite struggling for status, prestige and recognition. Thomas Mann depicted this problematic aspect of *religio duplex* with unsurpassable pithiness in a scene from the final novel in his Joseph tetralogy. 'I may not think', he has Akhenaten say, 'what I cannot teach.' Tiy, his scheming mother, counters with the principle of *religio duplex*: 'The office of teacher need not darken knowledge. Never have priests taught the multitude all they themselves know. They have told them what was wholesome, and wisely left in the realm of the mysteries what was not beneficial. Thus knowledge and wisdom are together in the world, truth and forbearance.' Akhenaten rejects this as arrogant: 'No, there is no arrogance in the world greater than that of dividing the children of our Father into the initiated and the uninitiated and teaching double words: all-knowingly for the masses, knowingly in the inner circle.'[21] That is the arrogance contained in the idea of *religio duplex*, and it may very well have shaped the mentality of the later Egyptian priesthood.