APPENDIX 7

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE EAGLE IN CONNECTION WITH OSIRIS AND THE NILE FLOOD (Ch. IV, n. 83)

In the Roman period the eagle is not only found with Zeus but also with Sarapis1. It may even be found with Osiris Canopus (see fig. 69a–c)2. In most of these cases the eagle carries a bust of Sarapis or one or two Canopi on its back and it spreads its wings widely as if flying. It has been assumed that this type of 'flying' eagle should be distinguished from the usual Ptolemaic and Roman eagles and that, deriving from the Syrian eagle, it especially symbolised apotheosis3. However, it seems doubtful that this rigid distinction really existed. In the first place the eagle was already a symbol of apotheosis before the time of the Seleucid kings. In the second place the two types of eagles may be found beside each other on the same tombs4. The eagle which carries Titus to heaven on the arch of Titus has its wings lowered. The Ptolemaic eagle may also, therefore, have symbolised eternity. The eagle's connection with Sarapis and Osiris Canopus may have been based on various factors. In the first place it may simply derive from the assimilation of Sarapis with Zeus-Amon, from whom Sarapis also adopted the ram's horns5. In the second place the eagle could in Egypt have had an affinity with the mythical Phoenix, which was also the bird of heaven and eternity. The Egyptian Phoenix,

1 See W. Hornbostel, Sarapis (1973) (EPRO 32) 219 ff., figs. 174, 176, 190.
2 For fig. 69a see G. Dattari, Numi Augg. Alexandrini (1901) pl. XI, 823; for fig. 69b Dattari pl. XI, 2504, SNG Copenhagen 1974, pl. XIV, 553, BMC Alexandria, pl. XVIII, 1134 (for a variant of this motif with the eagles facing each other, from the reign of Marcus Aurelius, see Dattari 3622; J.G. Milne, Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) (repr. 1971) pl. II, 2553); for fig. 69c see Dattari, pl. XI, 3623; SNG Copenhagen 1974, pl. XIV, 553.
3 See Möbius 25, Jucker (o.c. in Ch. IV, n. 82) 138 ff.
4 See Ch. IV, n. 82; and e.g. the Khasneh, see McKenzie, pls. 3, 5, 6, 79: eagles with wings down; McKenzie, pls. 2, 4, 7: eagles with wings raised. For the arch of Titus see E. Nash, Bildlexikon zur Topographie des antiken Rom (1961–62) I, pl. 144.
5 See Ch. IV, nn. 76, 77 and Hornbostel (o.c. in n. 1) 182, figs. 117 and 198, and the examples of Sarapis with eagle given above in n. 1.
the *benu* bird, was the solar bird, and was a symbol of rejuvenation, revival and eternity\(^6\). In hieroglyphic writing the Nile flood was represented by the *benu* bird, depicted like a kind of heron, sitting on a perch. This bird also sits in the sacred Ished tree guarding over Osiris’ tomb (see fig. 80)\(^7\). The Nile flood, which was believed to be the efflux of Osiris’ body, came forth from Osiris’ tomb\(^8\). At Philae Osiris was assimilated with the *benu* and his tomb on the island of Bigeh was called the House of the Phoenix\(^9\). The coming of the Nile flood could be announced by the Phoenix\(^10\). So Osiris and his Graeco-Roman counterpart Sarapis were intimately connected with the Nile flood and with the Phoenix. Moreover, the eagle on Ptolemaic coins, which represents the sovereign, is often accompanied by a cornucopia or a lotus flower, both symbols of the regenerative powers of the Nile flood\(^11\). In these cases, therefore, it is clear that the eagle, symbol of the sovereign, is also presented as lord of the Nile flood. In this respect it is also interesting to note that, according to Diodorus I 19, 2, the Nile could be called ‘eagle’, because its waters sweep down at the time of the flood with tremendous speed and violence. The true explanation of this designation may perhaps be sought in the concept of the eagle as lord of the flood rather than in any kind of popular aetiology.

It seems then that on Ptolemaic coins the eagle represented the sovereign also as lord of the flood. This was possible on the one hand because the sovereigns were traditionally associated with

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\(^6\) For the Phoenix see e.g. Herodotus II 73; Van den Broek 251 ff., 402; Peters, Thiersch 88 ff. For the *benu* LA IV, 1033 ff., s.v. Phônix, cf. above Ch. III, n. 50.

\(^7\) See respectively Bonneau 86; A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (1950) 470, G32; and Ch. IV, n. 112.

\(^8\) See Ch. IV, n. 113.

\(^9\) See Junker 1 ff.; Kâkosy 187 ff.; and Ch. IV, nn. 112, 113.

\(^10\) See Merkelbach 16, n. 21, and below in this appendix.

\(^11\) For the eagle as representative of the sovereign see Ch. IV, n. 76, Möbius 24 ff. For the cornucopia which was an important attribute of Isis and the Ptolemaic sovereigns, especially the queens, and symbolised the fertility of the Nile flood which they bestowed on the country, see *SNG Copenhagen* 1977, e.g. pls. VII, VIII, reproducing coins of Ptolemy III with Zeus-Amon on the obverse, below nn. 154, 155, 166; Jucker (o.c. in Ch. IV, n. 82) 150 ff.; Möbius 26 ff., pl. VI; Thompson 1973, 31 ff., 54 f., 83; Charbonneaux 1957, 135 ff.; Fraser I, 241 ff.; Rice 203 ff. For the lotus as symbol of the fertility of the Nile flood and as head-gear of Isis and Osiris, see Ch. III, n. 105, figs. 18, 48, 71, 75; *BMC The Ptolemies*, pls. XVI, 9; XIX, 2–3; XX, 3–4, reproducing coins of Ptolemies V and VI.