

PRIESTS AND TEMPLE PERSONNEL IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS [KAPŁANI I PERSONEL ŚWIĄTYŃ W EGIPCIE PTOLEMEJSKIM. ASPEKTY SPOŁECZNE I GOSPODARCZE]

For decades, the ancient Egyptian religion have attracted scholarly interest and captured the public imagination. Each year thousands of tourists arrive to Egypt to visit the Giza pyramid or monumental temple buildings in Karnak and Luxor, while number of scientific publications has been devoted primarily to beliefs, mythology and ritual practices. To date, however, far too little attention has been devoted in surveys to priests who were responsible for proper functioning of multiple temples and chapels in Egypt. This project aims to fulfil that gap in current research by investigating the social and economic role of priests in Ptolemaic Egypt. Through a critical analysis of evidence this project aims to expand our knowledge of (a) priestly functions and their hierarchy, (b) all religious and non-religious activities undertaken both in and outside sanctuaries, (c) their economic status: property, sources of income, financial affairs, (d) social relations, and (e) ethnic composition. Priests belonged to one of the most significant groups of the ancient Egyptian society and formed native elite within the Ptolemaic kingdom. Hence, study on activities of temple staff will significantly contribute to develop our understanding of temple functioning and will throw light on social and economic relations in the Ptolemaic state.

Unlike in contemporary great religions: Christianity, Judaism or Islam, Egyptian priests were not religious leaders who performed pastoral role preaching rules of faith to the believers. In ancient Egyptian sanctuaries, designation “priests” was applied to all functionaries who served deity by performing both religious and non-religious tasks in temples. Priests and temple personnel in ancient Egypt can be divided into numerous categories varying with different cults. Besides priests who fulfilled strictly religious role in temples: performed offering and daily sacred rituals, attended festival and processions, temples employed also officials who were for example in charge of temple finances and administration. This study hopes to reveal all priestly occupations and functions carried out in temples of Ptolemaic Egypt.

The research is based on different categories of sources. Papyri and ostraca (pieces of pottery on which writing has been preserved) are the most idiosyncratic evidence for Egypt. Papyrological material consists of various types of texts: petitions, complaints, contracts, tax records, wills, receipts, and so on. These documents are excellent for study on society and economy and they inform about financial transactions, income, property, tax, everyday and family life, and other public and private affairs. While much smaller in number than papyri, the epigraphic evidence constitutes another highly important source body for reconstructing the history of Egypt under the Ptolemies. Remarkably, papyri, ostraca and inscriptions that survived from Ptolemaic Egypt have been written both in the Greek language and the Egyptian language in Demotic and Hieroglyphic writings which permits to obtain a balanced picture of temple personnel in this period. Finally, this research also involves archaeological sources and literary evidence such as works of ancient Greek authors that often support information provided by papyri and inscriptions.