

Serapis was broken down in A.D. 395, "there was found in it, engraven on stones, certain characters, which they called hieroglyphics, having the form of crosses. Both the Christians and pagans, on seeing them, thought they had reference to their respective religions; for the Christians who affirm that the cross is the sign of Christ's saving passion, claimed this character was peculiarly theirs, but the pagans alleged that it might appertain to Christ and Serapis in common" (Butcher 1975: 219).

Alexandrians prostrated themselves before Serapis (Osiris) or Christ impartially during the first century and the first half of the second century (Meinardus 1965: 112 f.). The similarity between the two religions was strong enough to produce an ambiguous state shared by both Egyptian natives and outsiders. For example, when the Roman emperor Hadrian visited Egypt, he wrote a letter to the consul Servians in A.D. 134 saying, "they who worship Serapis are Christians, and some who call themselves Bishops of Christ are devoted to Serapis ... the very Patriarch himself, when he came into Egypt, is maintained by some to have worshipped Serapis, by others Christ" (Fowler 1901: 7).

A Ritual Death

It has been mentioned that for almost 20 years (A.D. 48 to 68) – the period between St. Mark's two visits to Alexandria – no violence or hostility between the believers of the old and new religions was recorded in history. However, on the second visit of St. Mark to Alexandria in A.D. 68, an event occurred. By this event, it is meant the ritual death of St. Mark which happened on a day in which both Christians and the followers of Osirian religion were celebrating, separately, some religious festivals. In the year A.D. 68, it happened that Easter fell on the same day as the Serapis festival. The followers of Serapis (Osiris) were celebrating the Serapis festival in the Serapion. At the same time, Christians were celebrating Easter. No reference in historical records regarding the motives or causes that drove believers of Serapis to punish and kill St. Mark (Butcher 1975: 23). However, according to historical records, "St. Mark was seized, dragged with a rope around his neck in the street, and then incarcerated for the night. In the following morning the same ordeal was repeated until he gave up the ghost" (Atiya 1968: 27). The corpse of St. Mark was buried in the church of Baucalia in Alexandria. And for many centuries, the election of the Alexandrian patriarchs took

place at his tomb (Butcher 1975: 23). "The co-existence of naïve mythology among the masses and a sophisticated theology among an elite of theoreticians, *both* serving to maintain the same symbolic universe, is a frequent historical phenomenon" (Berger and Luckman 1967: 112, italics in the original).

The death of St. Mark, which implied notions of suffering and sacrifice, might be thought of as a critical historical event which motivated the followers of the new religion to distinguish themselves from others and to declare themselves as unique believers of the Savior God (Christ) despite the fact that both religions conveyed one message or meaning: salvation in otherworldly life based on morally and socially guided behavior in this worldly life.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate that hierarchically opposed relationships between elements and concepts which form the cosmological system of ancient Egypt explain stable and changing qualities of that system. Archaic Egyptian cosmology is culturally ordered and historically transformed. Historical transformation, however, is understood in terms of diachronic relationships between elements of the cosmological belief system. In other words, the mythical cosmology as a set of hierarchical relationships between concepts or categories is characterized by its internal diachrony that is based on the changing relation between its concepts. Within this theoretical context, archaic Egyptian cosmology had been developed and transformed from a natural system concerned with the problem of the creation of the world into a social cosmology that deals with human problems related to the meaning of this life as well as to the eternal meaning and destiny of man in the afterlife.

Meanings of cosmological concepts and historical events are realized through the elicitation of hierarchical relationships between oppositions in which specific concepts enjoy a high or distinct value. This paper concludes that for archaic Egyptian cosmology, the polarity of invisible/visible is the principle upon which other polarities or sets of oppositions are built. This conclusion does not support Lyle's statement that the polarity of brightness/darkness is the common ground upon which old-world cosmology is constructed.

Old-world cosmology is inseparable from myth or religion. As a matter of fact, archaic cosmology constituted the core foundation of religion in which