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***Oh my God! You're in the Army Now:
An Analysis of the Horus-in-Uniform Images***

Jeff Cutright

Guanmei International School

Dongguan Guangdong, China

cutrij@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The author argues that images of the Egyptian deity Horus, dressed as Roman soldiers, are works of Roman propaganda. While the focus here is on the statue from the British Museum, EA 36062, the argument applies to similarly attired images of Horus. Several Egyptian cults spread across the empire, but were rarely depicted as soldiers, and for this reason, one must ask why Horus was shown in this way. The proposal is that such images intended to tell the native Egyptian viewer that since Horus was a servant of the empire through enrollment in the army, the viewer should be also.*

KEY-WORDS: Mythology, Horus, Egypt

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1. Introduction

In this paper I want to offer an interpretation of a small statuette dated from the first to third century from the British Museum which depicts the Egyptian god Horus attired as a Roman army officer while retaining enough of his native characteristics to allow for easy identification of this avian-headed deity.¹ The representation of Horus shows him with both Roman and Egyptian features. I will argue that he allows for several interpretations using discrepant identities which focuses on all levels of society and how the members react to Roman elements of culture.² The statuette can also be considered a creolization of the deity, in a manner similar to the analysis performed by Webster regarding, in particular, the horse goddess Epona in Roman Gaul.³ I will argue below that the Horus-in-uniform statue is best seen .as a refined piece of imperial propaganda in that it demonstrates Roman domination over Egypt in both politics and religion.

From the neck down, Horus is Roman; from the neck up, he is Egyptian. It is as if Horus, a long-attested and highly venerated deity has joined the Roman army. I will argue that this is exactly the message that the unknown creator of this figurine intended to convey. I will argue further that discrepant experiences offer the best interpretative method to explain the apparent incongruities inherent in this statuette which combines zoomorphic (falcon's head) and anthropomorphic (soldier's uniform) characteristics.

2. Description of the statuette

Although the foremost purpose of this essay is to suggest an interpretation for the image-type noted above, which might be extended to other deities-in-uniform, I want to give a brief description of the statue, specifically, BM EA 36062 since the image contributes to the interpretation.⁴ One obvious fact is that Horus' right arm is

¹ Peacock 2000, 436; as do other, similar, images of Horus (see for example, Kantorowicz 1961, 371, Fig. 8; 372, Fig. 10).

² Mattingly 2007, 18, 520- 522.

³ Webster 2001, 221.

⁴ British Museum Website, last accessed 16 January, 2020, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=125570&partId=1&searchText=Horus%20in%20Roman%20military%20costume

missing. Moreover, based on the information from the British Museum website, the provenance and dating of the statue, other than it is from Egypt during the Roman period, are unknown.⁵ Nonetheless, some inferences concerning the Horus-in-uniform statuette can be made.

Not content to show him as a common soldier, the artist shows Horus in the uniform of a Roman army officer.⁶ The bronze, relatively small figurine, only 48.5 cm tall, sports a simple cuirass frequently worn by Roman officers.⁷ His toga or cloak is present and wrapped around his left arm. Furthermore, the garment is apparently fluttering in a fairly stiff breeze since it is partly extended behind his arm. Horus' feet are essentially together, and offer no hint of movement. The god appears to be stationary, perhaps ready to speak to troops in an *allocutio* pose of address.⁸ The famous statue of Augustus shows a similar pose, although there are several messages present in the emperor's image, such as his intimate connections with Roman deities.⁹ Horus' left arm is also extended in what might have been a gesture of some sort. The missing right arm is indeed unfortunate since, if present, it would illuminate the reason for the wind-blown cloak and raised left arm. Horus is also wearing military boots, which together with his armored upper body, completes his Roman uniform and depiction as a soldier.

Though clearly a Roman officer, Horus retains Egyptian features as well. The falcon head is most striking. The head identifies the statuette as one of the numerous Egyptian avian deities, even though no inscription is present. Horus' headgear is an Egyptian-style headdress, identical to that worn by deities, kings and commoners in Egypt for millennia.¹⁰ In Egyptian myth, Horus served as a guardian for his worshippers, especially the king with whom he had been associated for some thirty centuries before the Roman period,¹¹ though Hornung cautions against assuming that the very early depictions as being certain representations of Horus.¹² The headgear links the god in the statue to this protective aspect which is important in Egyptian

⁵ British Museum website EA 36062.

⁶ Stoll 2011: 465, see also his Plate 25.5 caption.

⁷ British Museum website EA 36062.

⁸ Kantorowicz 196, 371 citing von Bissing, and p. 372, Fig. 11.

⁹ Zanker 1988, 190, Fig. 148a.

¹⁰ Wilkinson 2003, 200, 203.

¹¹ Wilkinson 2003, 201; Silverman 1991, 68 – 69.

¹² Hornung 1982, 103.

iconography. For example, one of the magnificent statues of King Khafre shows the wings of the falcon, representing Horus without anthropomorphic attributes in that case, wrapped about the king's head in a protective grip.¹³ Even an illiterate local viewer would likely be cognizant of this important component of Horus' aretalogy. As noted above, Egypt had several important avian deities, which to some extent at least resembled Horus. The headgear helps the viewer to identify the god. Stoll comments that the depiction of Horus might create contact between the soldiers and the locals,¹⁴ which suggests that this statuette might well be a localized "Horus-of-the-Camp" portrayal.¹⁵

3. Roman or Egyptian?

My thesis for paper is that the Horus-in-uniform figurine is an effort to display the domination and superiority of Roman ways. In this section I will address the question of creating *Romanitas* for the viewer/worshipper of the statue as well as showing that Horus serves the emperor. If this hypothesis is correct, Horus is placed in Roman attire and this shows that he serves the empire though from his own position of authority as an officer of the Roman army. How does an Egyptian god dressed as a soldier accomplish this? First, I need to discuss some facets of Egyptian religion, then argue how these local aspects were manipulated for Roman political purposes.

The priesthoods of Egyptian deities played an important role in politics due to their influence among the people and the wealth stored in the temples. After Egypt was added to the Roman Empire, the government countered these authoritative priesthoods by "various forms of control and integration".¹⁶ Rome exerted control over the temples and priesthoods even to the level of individual priests.¹⁷ The micromanagement of the Egyptian cults presumably extended to that of Horus. Those powerful priests needed to be brought under the control of the Roman government. How would the priests of the Horus cult perceive a statue dressed as a Roman officer?

¹³ Malek 2000, 106, figure caption 107.

¹⁴ Stoll 2011, 464, Plate 25.5 p. 465.

¹⁵ Frankfurter 1998, 98.

¹⁶ Beard, et al 1998, 339.

¹⁷ Beard, et al 1998, 340.

Outfitted as a Roman officer, Horus testifies to Roman power, not limited to political domination but to religious control as well. Horus retained his protective role, for both ruler and the ruled as he had done for millennia though he did so now in the capacity of a Roman soldier.¹⁸ However, as a Roman army officer with authority over the soldiers in the camp, the god was also under the authority of the state. This multi-faceted deity demands a discrepant identities interpretation. Priests and troops could view the statue in quite distinctive ways.

Religious officials should have seen Horus at the time as being subservient to Roman power presumably including Roman deities as well.¹⁹ The Romans had subjugated Egypt in a political sense, but also had manipulated the Egyptian pantheon, at least the zoomorphic Horus and similar deities. Whether by choice or by coercion, Horus was a subordinate of the emperor, as all soldiers were.²⁰ Regardless of the level of familiarity with Egyptian religion, the viewer could not help but notice the implication of the god in military uniform.

4. Possible responses to the statue

Webster proposed that native deities can be interpreted as creolizations, similar to the phenomenon evident in language contact.²¹ One might also view Horus in this guise as a creolization. He can be seen as the result of a negotiation between the local cult and power relations manifested by the Roman government. However, the divinity shown in the statue can also spawn interpretations that span the whole social spectrum, whereas Webster's creolization theory focuses on the lower classes.²²

Despite the military dress, Horus was one of many zoomorphic deities in Egypt. As Henig asserts, an "artist had a key role in rendering regional religious beliefs acceptable in the wider Empire".²³ However, in the case of deities from Egypt who combine human and animal characteristics in their usual depiction, no such acceptance would be forthcoming from elites. Roman elites in particular disparaged the notion. These elites defined the normative religious iconography of Rome; their deities were

¹⁸ Wilkinson 2003, 200.

¹⁹ Scheid 2003, 143-144.

²⁰ Mattingly 2007: 176; Shotter 2004: 81.

²¹ Webster 2001, 221.

²² Webster 2001, 221, 223; Mattingly 2007, 521, 526 though the latter's focus was Roman Britain.

²³ Henig 1984, 58.

anthropomorphic.²⁴ A few examples of their attitudes toward the Egyptian zoomorphic deities illustrates the point.

After Augustus had defeated Egyptian resistance in 30 BC, he toured several places in the new province. One of which was the residence of the sacred Apis bull in Memphis. Cassius Dio reported that the emperor “declined to enter the presence of Apis, remarking that he was accustomed to worship the gods, not cattle”.²⁵ Augustus’ contemporary Vergil wrote that the Egyptians “worshipped monstrous gods and barking deities of every kind” (*omnigenumque deum mostra et latrator Anubis*).²⁶ While not Horus specifically, jackal-headed Anubis was another zoomorphic god, who was also sometimes portrayed in a military attire.²⁷ Somewhat prior to the *Aeneid*, Cicero denigrated the “insane mythology of the Egyptians” (*Aegyptiorumque in eodem genere dementiam*).²⁸ At least among the elites, zoomorphic deities were not highly regarded.

In an interesting and sharp contrast, Horus’ divine mother, Isis, enjoyed a widespread adoration, including several sanctuaries and temples in Rome itself.²⁹ She retained her Egyptian characteristics and appearance but was anthropomorphic, unlike her son. Therefore, while a Hellenized Isis, was perfectly acceptable to Roman upper-class sensibilities, her son Horus who was shown as a zoomorphic god was not. Interestingly, Horus as an infant called Harpocrates, often shown on his mother’s lap, was acceptable and enjoyed a wide dispersion in the Roman Empire.³⁰ Isis’ cult was sufficiently popular as to include all social levels. Indeed, Isis was the primary deity involved in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*.³¹ In the passage, Anubis is also mentioned in the procession where he is described as the “messenger between the gods above and those below the earth” reflecting the relationship of Anubis with the deceased.³² Isis and her adherents clearly had no problem with the jackal-headed god. Furthermore,

²⁴ Rives 2009, 264 – 265.

²⁵ Cassius Dio *The Roman History* 51.17.

²⁶ Virgil *Aeneid* 8. 698.

²⁷ See e.g. Kantorowicz 1961, 373, Fig. 12.

²⁸ Cicero *De Natura Deorum* I, XVII. 43, page 45.

²⁹ Price 2000: 291, Ferguson 1970, 74

³⁰ Cristea 2015, 115 -116,118, 130; Rives 2009, 271; Henig 1984, 114.

³¹ Ferguson 1970, 107 -108; Rüpke 2007, 90 - 93, where he gives an extensive passage from the novel’s translation by Hanson.

³² Rüpke 2007, 92; Hornung 1982, 275.

Isis' consort Serapis, a Hellenized form of the Egyptian god Osiris, was also accepted and like his wife, was found in York.³³ Indeed, Serapis was subject to *interpretatio romana* in that he was considered a form of Jupiter.³⁴ However, because of his avian features Horus was not, though Ferguson reports that a different statue of Horus-in-uniform was found in Gloucestershire,³⁵ and this suggests that the worshippers of this Horus depicted in BM EA 36062 were rank-and-file troops, who hailed from many parts of the empire and were “the most enthusiastic fishers in the polytheistic pool”.³⁶ The whole point of this discussion is that for elite Romans, at least those for which there are primary sources, zoomorphic deities were at best ridiculous. That is not to say that non-elites would have felt the same but, unfortunately, I have no textual evidence that addresses the matter. However, to place this argument in terms of discrepant experiences, I would conclude that at the elite end of the Roman social scale, Isis was accepted, while Horus was not. On the lower end, both could be accepted so long as the viewer was not too indoctrinated in Roman elite-defined “normal” religious iconography.

5. Kantorowicz' interpretations of deities in uniform

In this section I will consider in more detail the analysis of deities in uniform offered by Kantorowicz since he gave the most extensive study, as far as I know, of these images, though I will focus attention on Horus. As noted previously, Horus in a Roman uniform, among other deities, is hardly unique. Numerous figurines of Horus as a soldier, among other Egyptian deities, are also attested.³⁷ In the most detailed study of uniformed deities that I know of, Kantorowicz points out that, particularly in the Roman period, the Egyptians had “predilection for representing their own Graeco-Egyptian gods in military guise, a custom which almost certainly goes back to the Hellenistic-Ptolemaic era”.³⁸ Based only on the photographic evidence in his article that assertion is certainly correct. Nonetheless, Kantorowicz laments that the numerous

³³ Henig 1984, 114-115; Peacock 2000, 438.

³⁴ Ferguson 1970, 36-37, 229 Plate 79.

³⁵ Ferguson 1970, 213.

³⁶ Mattingly 2007, 521.

³⁷ Kantorowicz 1961, 368, Fig. 10; 372, Fig. 12; Ferguson 1970, 213; Frankfurter 1998, 3.

³⁸ Kantorowicz 1961, 369.

statues of deities in uniform (not limited to Horus of course) is “difficult to explain”.³⁹ The interpretations offered in that essay include only the position that they represent “soldier gods” and that they were thought to be leaders of their own cult with reference to the Christian period.⁴⁰ Finally, Kantorowicz proposes that while emperors imitated deities, *imitatio deorum*, frequently attired as soldiers, the gods imitated the emperors, *imitatio imperatorum*.⁴¹ However, it seems that this hypothesis is not applicable to the Horus-in-uniform statue under consideration here.

For instance, to my knowledge, no Roman emperor ever portrayed himself as a zoomorphic deity. As discussed above, given the attitude that Roman elites held toward such divinities, one should not expect to find such a depiction. Moreover, BM EA 36062 is not shown as an emperor, though he is indeed a Roman officer, a servant of the emperor. I must conclude that notions of *imitatio deorum* and *imitatio imperatorum* do not apply.

6. Possible interpretations of the Horus-in-uniform images

One might postulate that Horus-in-uniform is an example of *interpretatio romana*. However, even this idea does not apply here. As Rives points out, *interpretatio* was the notion that “different peoples worshipped the same gods: the names, images, myths and cult practices were what varied, not the deities”.⁴² While in some cases *interpretatio* is clearly applicable, such as the deities of the Greek pantheon, the Horus statue under consideration represents neither the names, myths, nor cult practices as applied to the deity shown in this figurine. Only Egyptian locals might recognize this Horus as their long-attested protective god, even depicted as a Roman soldier. Elite Romans would presumably be repulsed, or amused.

For these reasons, I propose that the discrepant identities idea is the best interpretative method. The statuette should have created different responses depending on the viewer and is a good example of a discrepant experience since one could experience distinct reactions to the image. There were, at least, three possible reactions

³⁹ Kantorowicz 1961, 380.

⁴⁰ Kantorowicz 1961, 380.

⁴¹ Kantorowicz 1961, 383.

⁴² Rives 2007, 144.

to this rendition of the god, depending on the degree of acquaintance the worshipper had with the Horus cult.

One is that Horus in the Roman uniform established a sense of solidarity between the divine and mortal worlds, especially with mortal soldiers as Stoll has suggested, so far as such a relationship was possible.⁴³ In addition to his protective aspect, Horus also possessed a warrior component in his aretalogy. In Egyptian mythology, Horus fought a long and difficult battle with his brother and fellow deity Seth, who had killed their father, the god Osiris, in a contest over who would rule the Egyptian cosmos.⁴⁴ Long and difficult battles were a possible occurrence for any soldier. Therefore, this Horus in a sense shared a common experience with the troops.

Another potential response is that the Horus in this statuette provided continuity with the ancient Egyptian religion. As Rives points out, Rome generally encouraged such continuity, although the deities were frequently “Romanized”.⁴⁵ Images of Horus as a child, briefly remarked on above, was often adorned with several attributes of Egyptian cult symbols but our Horus-in-uniform statuette, and ones like it, lack such symbols other than the headgear.⁴⁶ The focus here would be on the military dress. The statue of Horus here is Romanized in a very specific fashion. He was shown in servitude to the emperor, which leads to a third possible response - imperial propaganda.

As a Roman officer, this Horus owed allegiance to the Roman state and ultimately, to the emperor. Each year soldiers would make vows of loyalty to the emperor as well as Roman deities such as Jupiter-Best-and-Greatest.⁴⁷ The statuette portrays an Egyptian deity in Roman military costume. The propagandizing value of this artwork lies with the dual domination of the Egyptian world. Not only is Egypt controlled politically, some Egyptian deities must serve in the Roman military, and be subject to the emperor. A viewer of the statuette would have noticed the implication. Although Horus-of-the-camp would offer his protection to his devotees, possibly soldiers as Stoll asserted, he did so as a subject of the emperor.⁴⁸

⁴³ Stoll 2011, 464.

⁴⁴ Hornung 1982, 103; Wilkinson 2003, 198-199, 203.

⁴⁵ Rives 2009, 261, 269.

⁴⁶ Cristea 2015, 115, 117.

⁴⁷ Southern 2007, 134,137.

⁴⁸ Stoll 2011, 465.

Why should Roman domination be mirrored in a statue of Horus? By showing Horus as a soldier, he is established as a subject of the Roman state, as mentioned previously. He still held authority – after all he was a Roman officer – and still retained protective ability. Nevertheless, he was himself subject to the authority of Rome.

So were Egyptians. I have already discussed Roman attitudes, at least those of the elite, toward the zoomorphic deities of Egypt. However, Romans, again elites since I have no sources of information concerning non-elites, Egyptians were thought of with some contempt. For example, Pliny the Younger wrote in *Panegyricus* that Egypt was *Superbiebat ventosa et insolens natio*, a vociferous and insolent nation.⁴⁹ In the praise of his emperor Trajan, Pliny described a disastrous drought in Egypt which raised the issue of Egyptian arrogance toward the Romans whom they fed thanks to the massive grain exports to the city. Pliny chided the Egyptians for their arrogance using “superiebat” to describe them as a boastful garrulous and insolent nation. One reason for showing a long-venerated, highly honored deity such as Horus in the guise of a Roman soldier might have been to demonstrate his subjugation to the “*ventosa et insolens natio*” to encourage the Egyptian people’s acquiescence to Roman rule.

I should point out that I am not claiming that this statuette was created by an official of the Roman state; I have no evidence of that nor do I have evidence of who made the statue. However, the responses to the statuette discussed above raise the question who might have worshipped this form of Horus. The simple answer is of course “soldiers,” as noted above. Stoll asserts that Horus-in-uniform, among others, reflects “the influence of their worshippers in the military” but I would argue there is more to it than that.⁵⁰ As discussed above, the identities of the viewers of the statue are uncertain since the provenance of the art work is unknown (other than Egypt). Reactions to the statue would depend upon the social class and background of the viewers. As Cristea points out, the military was certainly of an important vector for the dissemination of foreign deities, but so were “merchants, representatives of the imperial administration, and slaves”.⁵¹ While I would agree that soldiers would likely have viewed the Horus-in-uniform figure, for reasons argued above, but that does not exclude non-military worshippers.

⁴⁹ Pliny *Panegyricus* 31: 2, pp. 388-389; Morwood 2005, 184.

⁵⁰ Stoll 2011, 464.

⁵¹ Cristea 2015, 122.

7. Conclusion

In this short study I have considered a variety of interpretations for the statuette of Horus-in-uniform, BM EA 36062. Webster's creolization, Mattingly's discrepant experiences/identities and Kantorowicz' imitation perspectives have been discussed though not dismissed as interpretative bases. I did point out that Kantorowicz' idea of *imitatio* does not lend itself to adequate interpretation of the Horus statue and similar images. The notion of a creolized deity suggests that Horus was a negotiation between Roman and local sensibilities toward the divine. Depending on who was viewing the image, I would subscribe to this idea, but emphasize that for locals, several messages would be conveyed. Mattingly's notion of discrepant experiences allows for multiple interpretations by elites and non-elites. Indeed, non-elite locals would receive the message that their highly respected deity was subjugated to the authority of Rome and its emperor. They should be too.

In summary then, the responses to the statuette were that Horus was like a fellow soldier, though of course divine, but one who could "relate" to the common soldiers' experiences. Furthermore, Horus was a local manifestation of the national god and encouraged continuation of the cult. Nevertheless, this Horus did so as an officer, subject to his superiors, which was also the position of Egypt, and possibly shown as encouragement for local Egyptians to accept their situation as part of the Roman Empire.

An obvious extension to this work is to examine additional Egyptian deities in the uniform of Roman troops. For reasons explicated above, I proposed that the Horus-in-uniform BM EA 36062 was an illustration of imperial propaganda. The claim can be extended to all zoomorphic Egyptian deities were placed under the discipline of the army and subjugation to the emperor. If it stands scrutiny, the hypothesis illuminates Roman notions of potential opposition to the government because those zoomorphic deities were so foreign to elite Roman sensibilities regarding divinities.

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