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THE PREFECTURE OF EGYPT IN THE EQUESTRIAN HIERARCHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF *DIVUS* IN THE IMPERIAL TITLE

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Abstract

After the conquest of Egypt Augustus transformed Egypt into a personal domain, which he managed directly through a delegate from the equestrian order, namely *Praefectus Aegypti*. The prefecture of Egypt was one of the top functions of the equestrian career, being, in our opinion, the only external prefecture of the equestrian hierarchy. The value of this equestrian function was overwhelmingly important especially for the Roman economy, but also for *fiscus Caesaris*. Egypt was at the time of the Augustan Age and not only, the granary of the ancient world, therefore the management of this special province was one of the most important equestrian functions, on which Rome itself depended.

Moreover, the fact that Egypt was the domain of Augustus, which he managed with the help of the equestrian order, which had also become a true economic order, enabled the first *princeps* to take the phrase *pater patriae* in his title, as he was a true father of the Romans, ensuring their safety and food, just like a pharaoh. Augustus becomes *DIVUS*, the godlike one, drawing inspiration from the political culture of Egypt, being certainly influenced by Cleopatra's personality, her luxury and her divine-religious justification. Cleopatra's suicide with the poison of cobras, the symbol of her protective goddess, caused Augustus to apply the religious justification of his regime, and the prefect of Egypt was the best agent for the Romanization of the pharaonic cult.

Praefectus Aegypti was the penultimate function in the equestrian hierarchy leading to the ultimate of these functions, the most important one, namely *praefectus Praetorii*, a kind of prime minister of Augustan Rome. If the ultimate equestrian function ensured the imperial governance, the penultimate one could be considered a kind of deputy prime minister of the same Augustan Rome, because this equestrian official represented the emperor in Egypt, having his authority in this Roman possession. One can say that the Egyptian prefecture trained the Roman knights who were to become the heads of the Roman government, thus being crucial for both the emperor and the equestrian order in its entirety.

Keywords: Roman Egypt, equestrian order, hierarchy, importance, impact, cult of personality.

Introduction

The creation of the prefecture of Egypt is an innovation of Augustus, being the best example of what was a *legatus Augusti*=delegate of the imperial power, the prefect of Egypt was such a delegate of the imperial power, who was leading this veritable civilization conquered by Augustus in the last civil war. With the help of this function to which he delegated his imperial power, Augustus built his cult of personality, especially the particle of *DIVUS*, which is not specific to European civilization, but has a strong tradition in the Ancient East, especially in the Egyptians, where the monarch, absolute despot, pharaoh, was the messenger of the gods on earth, a son of the gods. Therefore, Augustus is not called *DIVINUS*=of divine origin, but *DIVUS*=the one similar to the gods, thus preserving the Roman republican humanity.

The Prefecture of Egypt was an institution with a quadruple role for Augustus, being for these reasons, one of the most effective and useful, for the imperial power. The four roles I noticed were:

1. economic;
2. military-administrative;
3. ideological-propagandistic (the basis of *DIVUS* is laid here in the Roman administration of Egypt);

4. of foreign policy (we are not wrong when we consider the Egyptian prefecture as a veritable foreign intelligence service, by the importance it had in representing the emperor).

1. *Praefectus Aegypti* in the hierarchy of *ordo equester* and the construction of *DIVUS*

The creator of the World Rome needed a strong and highly organized administration to manage this superpower of Antiquity, therefore the echelon of officers of the Roman army was best suited for the coordination of this Augustan central administration.

Augustus' central apparatus was ruled by the peaks of *ordo equester*, grouped into *praefecti* and *procuratores*, including *praefectus Aegypti* which was a knight, appointed directly by Augustus, with duties of provincial governor, perhaps even more important, having a prestigious role in the hierarchy of *ordo equester*. (Cizek 2002:253-254).

The secret of Augustus in the creation of what was called the cult of personality and therefore the appellation of *DIVUS*, but also that of *PATER PATRIAE* was the creation of administrative services served by the army. The Augustan *Imperium* was mostly on the army, for he was the supreme commander of the army, an army that he involved socially, economically, administratively, but especially politically, which ensured the success of his policies and reforms, because *Princeps* was on the same rank as *Populus Romanus* itself, as regards the legislative work. Also with *ordo equester* he created the Augustan propaganda and ideology. (Pétit 1974:36-39)

Titled *PATER PATRIAE*, Augustus was established as a new Romulus, a *reconditor Urbis*, *Imperator*, and Augustan victory was the victory of all Rome, for he represented Rome. Also, all his creations were universal, *Pax Augusta* was *Pax Deorum* as well.

DIVUS became his cognomen, demonstrating that he possessed a *genius*, an oriental influence, only that he was not the son of the gods, but similar to the gods. With all these ideological and imagological components, Augustus built a military monarchy, therefore Egypt conquered and pacified quite easily was considered his personal possession, not that of the state. Being a kind of good or personal fortune, Augustus could manage it as he wished, and his option for *ordo equester* was the best, because he could name his loyalists among the rank of military officers, or those eager to advance in career, demonstrating that he trusted the Roman officers. This trust was rewarded with top and bottom, because *praefectus Aegypti* pacified the territory of the new possession, but also increased it, and retained the valuable elements for the Romans in Cleopatra's administration. (Pétit 1974:36-39)

The fact that he entrusted his power by delegation to a knight in the management of Egypt was in fact tantamount to the militarization of his personal possession, which was a key province for Rome's food security, the kingdom of the Nile being at that time the granary of Rome. (Luttwak 2013:22)

Within the hierarchy of the most illustrious of knights, or *virii eminentissimi*, *praefectus Aegypti* was among the most important imperial functions, because it also had a financial and economic role. Not many knights could have been *praefecti*, that is, to hold the highest offices, so that in the equestrian hierarchy the one who governed Egypt was second in the hierarchy of prefectures, after the praetorian prefect, a true prime minister, but before *praefectus Annonae* or *Praefectus Vigili* and others. (Poma 2002, 2009:185-186)

So, if *praefectus Praetorii* was the last step that a knight could achieve in his career, *praefectus Aegypti*, was the step next to it, so we are not wrong when we say that if the praetorian prefect was the second man in the Roman state, after the emperor, the Egyptian prefect was the third, and at the same time, a kind of foreign minister, since the praetorian prefect was the prime minister of Augustan Rome, the Egyptian prefect was both foreign and economic minister. The economic role of the Egyptian prefecture was the greatest of all the prefectures, because it was in the equestrian hierarchy before that of *Annonae*, correct by the way, because the *Roman Annona* was dependent on Egypt. Also, if the praetorian prefecture was organized as a secret service as well, especially internally, the information was equally important for the Egyptian prefecture, since Rome was everywhere thanks to Augustus, so the Egyptian prefecture was also an intelligence service, but external.

Praefectus Aegypti was part of the Roman provincial government, but also central because he managed the possession of the first of the citizens, or *Princeps*. He was on the same rung as the provincial governors of *ordo senatorius*, due to the role of Rome as a granary, but also a source of countless resources that Egypt had. (Poma 2002, 2009: 185, 194)

Therefore, as it is clear from all the above, the prefecture of Egypt was one of the most important in the equestrian hierarchy, playing *de facto* and *de iure* the role of the true viceroy of Rome. But at the same time it was for the army a possibility of accession between the few and the elected, for the senators a position that kept them in check, and for Augustus a creation that demonstrates his role as a political-administrative genius.

2. The role of Egypt's prefecture in the Augustan politics

The Egyptian prefecture was the creation of Augustus to manage Egypt captured from Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius, after the Battle of Actium. The first prefect of Egypt was appointed from among his faithful, namely Caius Cornelius Gallus, who had previously served also in Egypt, but as *praefectus fabrum*, being the key man who helped Augustus in his confrontation with Marcus Antonius. Augustus praised Gallus' loyalty and appointed him at the head of his new administrative creation, *praefectura Aegypti*, even keeping an inscription from that period, from which we see how the equestrian function was first called:

CIL III 141475

C. CORNELIUS CN. F.

GALLUS, EQ. R. POST REGES

A CAESARE DEIVI F. DEVICTO

PRAEF. ALEXANDRIAE ET AEGYPTI PRIMUS.

Caius Cornelius Cnaeii filius

Gallus, Eques Romanus post reges

A Caesare Deivi Filio devicto

Praefectus Alexandriae et Aegypti primus. (Davenport 2019:171)

Caius Cornelius Gallus, son of Cnaeus, a Roman knight, by Caesar's son, being the conqueror of kings, was the first prefect, after kings, of Alexandria and Egypt. –our trans.

The first prefect was from his appointment a challenge for both orders, but also a balance between them, since behind him was Augustus. (Davenport 2019:173)

So, one can highlight very well the political role that the prefect of Egypt had, which was *Princeps'* interface in his relationship with the old conservative aristocracy, the governor of the main ancient Roman provinces, included in the *ordo senatorius*, but also with the equestrian administrative functions grouped in the *ordo equester*.

With the Egyptian prefecture, *Princeps* begins what was called *concordia ordinum*, for he was in the midst of them, keeping the balance between the influences of the two orders in Roman politics.

The economic role was paramount, because Egypt was above all a province, even though its owner was Augustus himself. That is why he chooses a military administration for his possession, as well as for the whole Rome, for this is how his political genius imagined the empire of Rome, organized with military rigor, which led him to rethink the army "as a guardian of the peace, and order of the new Rome." (Rostovtzeff 2003:49)

It can be said that the Egyptian prefecture appeared as a result of the military reforms of Augustus, being perhaps his masterpiece, through which he managed to depoliticize the army, but subordinating it to him, in all aspects, actually involving it in politics, but in his politics, so in a unitary way, because the state was him. (Augustus 2009: 203-209)

Tacitus called in his work the prefecture of Egypt, as the *arcana dominationis=the mystery of power* – our trans., because *praefectus Aegypti* had by law *imperium ad similitudinem proconsulis*, which guaranteed Augustus total control over him, but also over the army. In Egypt, thanks to his prefecture Augustus began to be represented on the temples as a veritable pharaoh who offered offerings to the gods of the place. In other words, the Egyptian prefecture was for personal use, as was Egypt, of the emperor in all its aspects. (Havener 2019:130-146) All this served to create the ideological foundations of DIVUS, but not only. The fact is that all four of the roles mentioned above had about the same weight for Augustus, so we cannot say that one of the roles was more important than another. (Havener 2019:130-146)

Egypt is the one who inspired Augustus in all his propaganda, whose pivot was the cult of his personality, because from Egypt he was inspired to be present on monuments, coins, public acts, infrastructure works. The fact that he ruled Egypt not by his own person, but by an equestrian prefect, was meant to respect precisely the local traditions of the pharaohs and the mentality of the Egyptians, who were led by the pharaohs through the viziers. (Goldsworthy 2014:288-289)

Augustus took care of his personal possession, as well as all of Rome, as a true father. Rome's strategic resource was his, precisely wheat, which was a quantity on which Rome was dependent in Egypt. When Augustus conquered it, he decided to leave here three legions with which, in addition to overseeing the new conquest, he also did many works to raise him in the minds of Egyptians, but which also served Rome. Thus he cleaned the canals of the Nile in order to facilitate a better navigation of the ships with wheat for Rome, he built a city in Alexandria which he called Nikopolis, in remembrance of his victory at Actium and above all he took care, also

with the help of the Roman army, of the exploitation of the resources of the subsoil, especially of the precious metals. (Powell 2016:76-78)

Although Egypt was *stricto sensu provincia Caesaris*, Augustus officially establishes it as the *Praefectura Aegypti* to reward *ordo equester*, but also to subordinate the treasure of this personal province to (Faoro 2011:1-40) himself, to Rome but also to the army, he being the one who instituted several treasures: *aerarium Saturni* (the treasure of the state - our consideration), *aerarium militare* (the treasure of the army – our consideration) and *fiscus Caesaris* (the emperor's treasure – our consideration). The fact that Augustus provided food for all of Rome from one end to the world to the other, and Egypt was the main basis of the supply of wheat made him a true father of the homeland.

Always *praefectus Aegypti* was strictly controlled by Augustus, precisely because of its profound importance, especially since it was the first to demonstrate Augustus' concern for the supply of wheat to a universal Rome. (Eck 2003:78-84)

By a super human intelligence Augustus was *Divus* through everything he thought and put in practice in the foundation of his policy. *Pax Romana* was provided mostly by ensuring the welfare, the food resources in particular, which were guarded by the army and managed by it as well, but at the command of the god-like one. That is why Augustus is a model even today through the stability created in a world, which like ours, was in disintegration and in a political-economic re-establishment.

Conclusions

The Prefecture of Egypt was a unique creation, one of the most effective Augustan creations, in addition to *Pax Augusta* and military governance. It is not wrong to consider it the synthesis of all his achievements because he had the valences of all.

It ensured the food security of the Romans, implicitly of social peace, it was an opportunity for *ordo equester* to demonstrate its administrative capabilities, gather information from a world that was not specifically Roman, provide diplomatic relations between Rome and all of Africa around Nile and beyond, but above all justify and maintain the imperial pomp and cult of personality.

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