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Heliopolitan Capitolia: From Greek Games to Christian Pilgrimage

Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive study of the Capitoline games celebrated at Heliopolis in Roman Syria. As a prelude, documents referring to competitions held at Alexandria and Berytus shall be removed from relevant sources dealing with this contest. Coins and late antique accounts suggest that Heliopolis had its own games only after Septimius Severus separated it from Berytus to make it an independent colony. The Heliopolitan Capitolia were modelled on the Roman Capitolia, and linked to local cults, particularly to the triad composed of Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury. In spite of its ecumenical status, the festival does not seem to have had great success, but it had a role in inter-city rivalries as well as in the making of a site of Christian pilgrimage near Heliopolis. The games, which had once been a strong factor of political and religious integration of the Severan colony in the Roman world, eventually contributed to shape the enduring image of the city as a haven of diehard pagans in Late Antiquity.

Keywords: Roman Syria, Heliopolis, Greek games, Capitolia, theatre, martyrdom

We all know the famous statement by Louis Robert about the proliferation of Greek-style games (ἀγῶνες) throughout the East under the *Pax Romana*:¹ ‘Sous l’Empire, ce fut une prolifération de nouveaux concours. La paix augustéenne s’étendit partout et, pour la plupart des provinces grecques, elle se prolongea fort avant dans le III^e siècle. Ce fut une explosion agonistique.’ Here it will be argued that the ‘agonistic explosion’ was also born from war, by bringing together the evidence for the competitions which were held at Heliopolis in Syria (modern Baalbek in Lebanon) in honour of the local triad during the Roman period. The relevant sources have not been collected so far, which may explain why divergent views emerge from the literature, especially when we are looking for the name of the emperor who granted the right to organise a contest modelled on the Roman Capitolia to the city. In all

1 Robert 1984, 38 (= Robert 1989b, 712 and 2007, 270).

likelihood, to say it at the outset, Heliopolis did not receive such a gift before Septimius Severus separated the town from Berytus (Beirut) and made it an independent colony in 194 CE, to thank its inhabitants for their support during the civil war against Pescennius Niger, while punishing the citizens of Berytus for their defection. To support this idea, the available evidence on the Heliopolitan Capitolia will be reviewed in chronological order, from the early Roman period to the triumph of Christianity.

By focusing on a relatively unknown example, the following case study will not only provide an opportunity to have a fresh look at the relationship between Greek games, politics, and inter-city rivalries – or struggles fostered by ‘la gloire et la haine’, again in Louis Robert’s words² – that characterised public life in the Roman East until Late Antiquity. It shall also draw attention to the integration of festivals into the building of proper religious identities by cities which benefited from the favour of imperial power after the civil war of the 190s CE. In the case of Heliopolis, the reasons why the local Capitolia were only moderately popular must be addressed, as well as the role of these games in the emergence of a new regional topography of Christian holiness.

1 Before the Capitolia

Two documents, one literary, the other epigraphic, have been included in the file of the Heliopolitan games. If one accepts them, the creation of the festival would date back at the latest to the reign of Hadrian. However, they deal much more likely with contests respectively held at Alexandria in Egypt and at Berytus in Syria.

1.1 The speechless Hipparchion

A Greek proverbial anecdote tells of the misfortune a singer playing cithara experienced at the beginning of a contest in a theatre: the artist, called Hipparchion, was overtaken by stage fright and stood speechless. The story was first assumed to belong to the collection of proverbs by Zenobius, a Greek sophist who taught rhetoric at Rome under Hadrian:³

2 Robert 1977 (= Robert 1989b, 211–249 and 2007, 673–703). On the relationship between Greek games and politics under Roman rule, see most recently van Nijf 2012a.

3 Zenobius 2.35, ed. von Leutsch and Schneidewin 1839, 41–42.

ἄφωνος Ἴππαρχίων· κατὰ τοὺς προπάτορας ἡμῶν δύο κιθαρῳδοὶ διάσημοι ἐγένοντο, Ἴππαρχίων καὶ Ρουφίνος· καὶ δὴ ἀγῶνος ἐνστάντος πενταετηρικοῦ ἀγομένου ἐν Ἡλίου-πόλει κατὰ τὸ ἔθος, Ἴππαρχίων ἀχανῆς ἔστη ταραχῇ τῇ περὶ τὸ θέατρον.

‘Hipparchion speechless: at the time of our forefathers there were two celebrated citharodes, Hipparchion and Rufinus. And at the beginning of penteteric games held in Heliopolis according to the custom, Hipparchion stood open-mouthed at the uproar in the theatre.’

The *Suda* entry s. v. Ἴππαρχίων ἄφωνος (ι 518) has an abridged version, lacking topographical information:

δύο ἐγένοντο κιθαρῳδοὶ, Ἴππαρχίων καὶ Ρουφίνος· καὶ ἀγῶνος ἐνστάντος ὁ Ἴππαρχίων ἄφωνος ἔστη.

‘There were two citharodes, Hipparchion and Rufinus; and at the start of a contest Hipparchion stood speechless.’

H. Winnefeld and E. Honigmann related both extracts to the theatre and competitions at Heliopolis.⁴ In fact, as soon as 1887, the passage supposedly ascribed to Zenobius, which was thought to hint at the Syrian town, had been convincingly corrected and attributed by O. Crusius to the collection of proverbs called *De proverbiis Alexandrinorum*.⁵ The same scholar considered it a fragment of a genuine work of Plutarch. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff saw the whole collection of the Alexandrian proverbs as a mere compilation taken from an author named Seleucus (first half of the first century CE), and unduly ascribed to Plutarch.⁶ In any case, the anecdote takes place in Egypt, not in Syria, since the best manuscript tradition of the *De proverbiis Alexandrinorum*, drawn from the *recensio Laurentiana*, provides the phrase ἐν Ἰουλιουπόλει instead of ἐν Ἡλιουπόλει in the medieval and so-called *recensio Parisina* of Zenobius.⁷ So the text should be read as follows:⁸

4 Winnefeld 1914, 151 n. 1: ‘die Verbindung solcher Aufführungen mit periodischen Festspielen ergibt sich aus Zenobius, *Paroem. Cent. II 35*.’ Honigmann 1924, 719: ‘Das Bestehen des römischen Theaters in H. bezeugt auch das Sprichwort von dem ἄφωνος Ἴππαρχίων, einem Kitharoiden, der darin bei den 5jährigen Festspielen auftreten sollte, beim Anblick der Menge aber keinen Ton hervorbrachte.’

5 Crusius 1887 and 1895.

6 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1889, 24, cf. *Suda* s. v. Σέλευκος (σ 200). Crusius 1895, 4–8, and 1910, 109–110, still maintains that the *De proverbiis Alexandrinorum*, although based on Seleucus, either contains or may contain material added by Plutarch. More recently, Sandbach 1969, 404–405, followed U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and accordingly included the collection among Plutarch’s pseudepigrapha.

7 The medieval Zenobius recension also omits the participle ἀποσιωπήσας at the end.

8 *De proverbiis Alexandrinorum* 24, ed. Crusius 1887, 13.

ἄφωνος Ἴππαρχίων· κατὰ τοὺς προπάτορας ἡμῶν δύο κιθαρωδοὶ διάσημοι ἐγένοντο, Ἴππαρχίων καὶ Ρουφίνος· καὶ δὴ ἀγῶνος ἐνστάντος πενταετηρικοῦ ἀγομένου ἐν Ἰουλιόπολει κατὰ τὸ ἔθος ὁ Ἴππαρχίων ἀχανῆς ἔστη ταραχῆ τῇ περὶ τὸ θέατρον ἀποσιωπήσας.
 ‘Hipparchion speechless: at the time of our forefathers there were two celebrated citharodes, Hipparchion and Rufinus. And at the beginning of penteteric games held in Juliopolis according to the custom, Hipparchion stood open-mouthed and mute at the uproar in the theatre.’

Here Juliopolis is another name for Nicopolis, the suburb that Octavian founded east of Alexandria on the site of his victory over Antony. Quadriennial games, located ‘at Alexandria’ in agonistic inscriptions,⁹ were said to be held at this Egyptian Nicopolis by Strabo (17.1.10) and Dio (51.17), in imitation of those at Nicopolis on the site of Actium.¹⁰ This takes us far away from Syria. A Latin inscription from Baalbek will lead us back to this Roman province, if not to Heliopolis.

1.2 Honours for a Berytan agonothetes at Heliopolis

An honorific inscription for an agonothetes, i. e., president of games, is engraved on a statue base found at Baalbek in the courtyard of the great Heliopolitan sanctuary (fig. 1).¹¹

M(arco) Licinio Sex(ti) / fil(io) Fab(ia) Pompennae Potito Urba/no sacerdoti I(ovis) O(ptimi) M(aximi) H(eliopolitani) donato / equo publico a divo Hadriano de/curioni pontifici agonothetae IIviro / quinquennali flamini munerario / honorato decurionalibus ornamentis dec(urionum) dec(reto) M(arcus) Licinius Fyrmus / [Fron]tonianus libertus sexvir.

‘To Marcus Licinius Pompenna Potitus Urbanus, son of Sextus, of the Fabian tribe, priest of Jupiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus, granted the public horse by the deified Hadrian, decurion, pontifex, agonothetes, duumvir quinquennalis, flamen, sponsor of a gladiatorial show, honoured with decurional insignia by a decree of the decurions, Marcus Licinius Fyrmus Frontonianus, freedman, sevir.’

Urbanus’ curriculum vitae interestingly combines the priesthood of Jupiter with imperial favour and various municipal offices, liturgies, and honours. According to the mention of the ‘deified Hadrian’, it is to be dated sometime after 138 CE, most probably under Antoninus Pius (138–161). In the volume of the *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie (IGLS)* devoted to Baalbek

⁹ Moretti 1953, nos. 65, 67, 68.

¹⁰ Hanson 1980; Remijsen 2014, 192–193; Remijsen 2015, 35.

¹¹ *IGLS* 6.2791 (Hajjar 1977, 87–89 no. 76). In line 2 *Pompenna* is a second *nomen* rather than a *cognomen*, cf. Solin and Salomies 1994, 146, with *AE* 1983.54 (Rome): *C(aio) Pompennae Valenti*. In line 9 the photograph here reproduced, and unpublished until now, shows that *[Fron]tonianus* is quite certain, contrary to Y. Hajjar’s opinion.



Fig. 1: Statue base with Latin honorific inscription IGLS 6.2791. © Author Archive.

and the Bekaa Valley, J.-P. Rey-Coquais linked the liturgy of agonothetes to Heliopolis.¹² ‘La charge d’agonothète atteste l’existence de concours à Héliopolis dès le II^e siècle; les grands concours capitolins d’Héliopolis, attestés par les monnaies, datent seulement de Caracalla.’ In the same direction Y. Hajjar stated:¹³ ‘La mention de la charge d’agonothète dans une inscription datant du 2^e siècle, postérieurement à la mort d’Hadrien, prouve l’existence, dès cette date au moins, de concours publics à Héliopolis-Baalbek.’ Z. Sawaya, though somewhat cautious, does not seem to exclude the possibility that the games at which Urbanus presided were already the Capitolia.¹⁴

¹² Rey-Coquais 1967, 109.

¹³ Hajjar 1977, 89.

¹⁴ Sawaya 2009, 276.

F. Millar, who argued strongly that Heliopolis was included in the colonial territory of Berytus until the reign of Septimus Severus, connected Urbanus' municipal *cursus* with the Roman colony of Berytus,¹⁵ but did not comment on the location of the festival. In my opinion, Urbanus likely presided over games held at Berytus, the chief-town of the city, not at Heliopolis. Agonistic epigraphy shows that Berytus held its own festival in the second century CE.¹⁶ At the same time, particularly thanks to the generosity of the Herodian kings, Berytus had all the buildings necessary for hosting athletic, artistic (theatre, amphitheatre, presumably bath-gymnasium complexes),¹⁷ and maybe equestrian events (*circus*),¹⁸ which was perhaps not yet the case for Heliopolis.¹⁹

To sum up, there is no evidence from the early Roman period to prove that Heliopolis held its own games before Septimius Severus made it an independent colony in 194 CE.

2 Games and the city

Bronze coins struck at Heliopolis in the middle of the third century under the emperors Valerian (253–260) and Gallienus (253–268) provide valuable information about the nomenclature, features, and audience of local games officially labelled as 'Capitoline'.²⁰ They raise the questions of when and why this contest was first celebrated in the colony founded by Septimius Severus.

2.1 *Certamen sacrum Capitolinum oecumenicum iselasticum Heliopolitanum*

The full name of the contest, more or less abbreviated on the reverse of coins, was *certamen sacrum Capitolinum oecumenicum iselasticum Heli-*

¹⁵ Millar 1990, 19 (= Millar 2006, 178).

¹⁶ *SEG* 48.1844 (honours for the pantomime Julius Paris, Apamea in Syria, 117–138 CE); *Laph2007* 12.214, 12.920 (honours for the athlete T. Aelius Aurelius Menandros, Aphrodisias, 138–169 CE); *SEG* 46.1469 (honours for a pantomime?, Magnesia on the Maeander, 176–180 CE).

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 19.335–337; 20.211–212, about the benefactions of Agrippa I and II. See also the Latin dedication from Berytus republished by J. Aliquot in Yon and Aliquot 2016, 45–47 no. 51.

¹⁸ Humphrey 1986, 491–492; Curvers 2015; Curvers et al. 2015–2016; Held and Kotitsa 2016, with a hypothetical Augustan date of the earliest phase of the hippodrome in Berytus.

¹⁹ Heliopolis: Wiegand 1921–1925, vol. 1, 42–43, fig. 20 (theatre, largely covered by the Palmyra Hotel since the nineteenth century, and undated); Brünenberg 2014 (Severan baths).

²⁰ Most recently Sawaya 2009, 274–277.



Fig. 2: Bronze coin from Heliopolis: Valerian/agonistic crown.

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politatum (fig. 2), i. e., ἱερὸς Καπετώλιος οἰκουμενικὸς εἰσελαστικὸς Ἡλιοπολίτης ἀγών. We can start with that name to describe the organisation of the Heliopolitan Capitolia. An agonistic competition was originally labelled 'sacred' (*sacer*, ἱερός) when prizes awarded by the organisers of the contest were limited to natural elements (crowns, apples), as in the four great games of the Greek *periodos* (Olympia, Pythia, Isthmia, Nemeia). Under Roman rule, prizes could combine crowns and money.²¹ Moreover, winners in 'sacred' competitions enjoyed the privileges of 'sacred victors' (ἱερονίκα); as such, they were exempt from some taxes including liturgies. Considering the 'eiselastic' (*iselasticus*, εἰσελαστικός) character of the games, victors were also rewarded in their hometowns with a ceremonial procession and a monthly pension.²²

The label 'Capitoline' (*Capitolinus*, Καπετώλιος) implies that the contest was set up according to the model of its namesake, the permanent and penteteric festival that the emperor Domitian successfully established at Rome in 86 CE.²³ On the series of Heliopolitan coins with agonistic types, three impressive prize-crowns from which palms emerge represent the three major types of events – gymnastic, equestrian, musical (fig. 3). The term 'sacred' does not imply in itself that the Heliopolitan Capitolia had a spe-

²¹ Remijsen 2011.

²² On this triumphal entry and the title 'eiselastic', see Robert and Robert 1961, 149–150 no. 221; Robert 1984, 43–44 (=Robert 1989b, 717–718 = 2007, 275–277).

²³ Caldelli 1993; Rieger 1999; cf. Suetonius, *Domitian* 4: 'He also established a quinquennial contest in honour of Jupiter Capitolinus of a threefold character, comprising music, riding, and gymnastics, and with considerably more prizes than are awarded nowadays.'



Fig. 3: Bronze coin from Heliopolis: Gallienus/agonistic crowns.
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Fig. 4: Bronze coin from Heliopolis: Valerian/two temples and agonistic crowns.
© Bibliothèque nationale de France.

cial religious significance. However, the link between the local games, cults, and sanctuaries is obvious. Heliopolitan coins show either a single or three crowns over the two main Heliopolitan temples (fig. 4). Jupiter's ear of corn and Mercury's caduceus are also associated with agonistic motifs such as prize-crowns and tables (fig. 5). Mercury, facing Tyche, civic Fortune (fig. 6), stands out as the god 'who presides over the games' (ἐναγώνιος).²⁴ His vis-

²⁴ Jessen 1905; Paul 2013, 129–136, especially 130 n. 514; cf. *I Aph2007* 12.920 (τὸν ἀγώ[νιον], i. e., Hermes).



Fig. 5: Bronze coin from Heliopolis: Valerian/agonistic crown, ears of corn, caduceus.
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Fig. 6: Bronze coin from Heliopolis: Gallienus/Mercury facing Tyche.
© Bibliothèque nationale de France.

ible, and hitherto unrecognised, prominence in this agonistic context contrasts with the Roman games and underlines the multi-faceted character of his cult at Heliopolis.²⁵ From now on, it can be said that the Capitolia appear as an event where the Heliopolitans were likely to claim their own civic and religious identity in a truly independent way, while also displaying their allegiance to Rome.

²⁵ Aliquot 2009, 207–212.

Last but not least, the epithet ‘ecumenical’ (*oecumenicus*, οἰκουμηνικός) points out that the Heliopolitan Capitolia were not intended as a standalone event, but fitted into a wider network of festivals.²⁶ Like any contest of this kind, they had to be announced ‘worldwide’, so that the circle of their participants was not limited by origin or ethnicity. Sometimes it has seemed relevant to associate the label *oecumenicus* or οἰκουμηνικός with the emperors and their rule over the Roman empire as the whole ‘inhabited world’ (οἰκουμένη). This epithet indeed has an unquestionable imperial connotation. However, one should not overinterpret its meaning in an agonistic context. The ‘world’ of Greek games only included a little part of the West, except for Rome, Neapolis, and Carthage. Moreover, the fact that imperial permission was always required when a new festival was founded makes it unnecessary to assume any specific connection between the emperors, the imperial cult, and ecumenical games. So the most attractive explanation still is that the festivals designated in this way were expected to admit attendees (competitors, city delegations) from all over the ‘world’ as opposed to contests with merely a city or province-wide pool of participants.²⁷ On an individual basis, it all depended on the attractiveness of such festivals, which could ultimately prove disappointing, as we shall see later.

The situation could still look promising at the opening of the Capitolia. The emperors themselves had already given great importance to the Heliopolitan cult, which functioned around a public oracle that radiated all over the world from the great urban sanctuary of the Bekaa Valley.²⁸ Henceforth the new contest offered the city an unprecedented opportunity to undertake diplomatic missions, to attract visitors, to organise a fair, to demonstrate loyalty towards Rome, and to strengthen its cohesion around a religious core. Moreover, each ecumenical festival, to which all the cities of the Greek world were invited, was in itself an emanation of the universe. It was in such circumstances that the unity of the Roman empire and the union of its cities and provinces were most clearly evident. Cities were usually invited to send representatives to take part in common rituals associated with a ‘joint

26 It is worth mentioning here a research project initiated by O. M. van Nijf and C. G. Williamson (University of Groningen): ‘Connecting contests’, <http://www.connectedcontests.org/>

27 On οἰκουμηνικός as an epithet of contests, see Robert 1984, 44–45 (=Robert 1989b, 718–719 = 2007, 277–278); van Nijf 2006, 233–234 and van Nijf 2012a, 87, 92–93, with critical comments by J. Nollé and C. P. Jones.

28 The following remarks complete a detailed analysis of divination at Heliopolis: Aliquot 2010.

sacrifice' (συνθυσία).²⁹ The late antique writer Macrobius may refer to this kind of practices in his *Saturnalia*:³⁰

Huius templi religio etiam divinatione praepollet, quae ad Apollonis potestatem refertur, qui idem atque sol est. Vehitur enim simulacrum dei Heliopolitani ferculo, uti vehuntur in pompa ludorum Circensium deorum simulacra, et subeunt plerumque provinciae proceres, raso capite, longi temporis castimonia puri, ferunturque divino spiritu, non suo arbitrio, sed quo deus propellit vehentes, ut videmus apud Antium promoveri simulacra Fortunarum ad danda responsa.

'Divination, too, plays a preponderant role in the temple's cult, and that is related to the power of Apollo, who is identified with the sun. The image of the god of Heliopolis is carried on a litter, like the images of the gods in the procession at the Circus games, and the leading men of the province usually bear the load, their heads shaved, their bodies kept ritually pure by long sexual abstinence: they are borne along by the god's spirit, carrying the image not where they choose but where the god moves them, as we see the images of the Fortunes brought out at Antium to give oracular responses.'

In other words, provincial religious dignitaries coming from outside the city were involved in a ceremony similar to the procession that went down from the Capitol to the Circus Maximus during the Roman games (*ludi Romani*).³¹ Now, if one relates Macrobius' comparison to the organisation of a festival such as the Heliopolitan Capitolia, it might be concluded that these men were identical with the official envoys (συνθῦται, θεωροί) who used to take an active part in the opening feasts of Greek games. It may then be tempting, going a step further, to put on the same level the participation of the Syrian cities to the local rituals and the many representations of the Tychai and other emblematic deities of Near Eastern towns which are depicted on the ceiling of the peristyle in the temple of Bacchus at Heliopolis.³² All of this would be in keeping with the ecumenical vocation of the Capitolia.

29 Robert 1982, 233 (= Robert 1989a, 796); Jones 1998; van Nijf 2012a, 71–77; Remijsen 2015, 292. See also Robert 1984, 45 (= Robert 1989b, 719 = 2007, 278): 'En chacun de ces concours (œcuméniques) la ville qui le célèbre (i. e., le sacrifice commun) ne fait pas seulement une somptueuse parade de muscles, de chants et de paroles; en ces jours elle cède au rêve de l'Universalité; elle représente l'Oikouménè, le Monde. L'Empire romain manifeste sa cohésion par les formes de l'hellénisme dans la ferveur de la foule panhellénique.'

30 Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.23.13, ed. and translated by Kaster 2011, vol. 1, 300–303 (translation here slightly modified).

31 On the *pompa circensis*, see Fless 2004, 49, with basic bibliography; Latham 2016.

32 Bacchus temple: Wiegand 1921–1925, vol. 2, 1–89; Aliquot 2009, 289–291; Fani Alpi 2016, 57–74. The identification of all the divinities represented here would deserve a thorough examination.

2.2 A Severan foundation?

The question of the epoch when the Heliopolitan Capitolia were established has only received quick and conflicting answers up to now. H. Winnefeld and E. Honigmann dated their inauguration under Caracalla on the basis of an erroneous interpretation of the coins: ‘es gibt unter diesem Kaiser [Caracalla] zuerst Münzen mit drei Preiskronen und den Beischriften COL · IVL · AVG · FEL · HEL und CERTamen SACRum CAPitolinum OECumenicum ISElasticum HELiopolitanum’;³³ ‘Unter ihm [Caracalla] begann wohl auch die Aufführung gymnischer Spiele in H., die durch Münzen mit drei Preiskronen und der Legende COL IVL AVG FEL sowie CERTamen SACRum CAPitolinum OECumenicum ISElasticum HELiopolitanum unter ihm, Valerianus, Gallienus und Gordianus bezeugt sind.’³⁴ J.-P. Rey-Coquais, who believed that games had already been celebrated in Heliopolis in the middle of the second century CE, also regarded this specific contest as a gift from Caracalla to the city:³⁵ ‘Caracalla fonde à Héliopolis de grands “concours sacrés, œcuméniques, capitolins, isélastiques”, qu’ évoquent légendes et types de nombreuses monnaies.’ While agreeing with Rey-Coquais’ idea that games had already been held in Heliopolis earlier, Y. Hajjar simply observed that the Heliopolitan coins with agonistic types date from a later period:³⁶ ‘De tels concours étaient jusqu’ici connus pour le 3^e siècle par des monnaies frappées à Héliopolis sous Gordien III, Valérien et Gallien.’

Recently, Z. Sawaya challenged the dating of the numismatic evidence, which he related to imperial victories over the Sasanians and the Germans in 256/257 CE:³⁷

‘Contrairement à ce que Hajjar signale, les légendes qui les commémorent ne figurent qu’au revers des monnaies de Valérien I et de sa famille. Ces types font donc allusion aux concours publics qui ont eu lieu à Héliopolis pour célébrer les victoires de Valérien I et de Gallien sur les Perses et les tribus germaniques. Mis à part ces monnaies, les concours d’Héliopolis ne seraient attestés qu’une seule autre fois, sur une inscription trouvée à Baalbek datée du II^e siècle apr. J.-C., mentionnant un certain Marcus Licinius, prêtre de Jupiter et agonothète [JGLS 6.2791, discussed above]. Il me semble donc que ces concours n’étaient pas périodiques, puisque même sur les six émissions des Sévères, émises toutes dans un intervalle de dix-huit ans, aucune monnaie n’y fait allusion.’

³³ Winnefeld 1914, 150–151.

³⁴ Honigmann 1924, 718.

³⁵ Rey-Coquais 1967, 38.

³⁶ Hajjar 1977, 89 n. 1.

³⁷ Sawaya 2009, 276; cf. 263.

D. O. A. Klose had already more or less expressed the same idea:³⁸ ‘On the occasion of Valerian’s Sasanian campaigns, Ancyra, Tarsus, and Syrian Heliopolis minted coins referring to their festivals, now bearing the rank of Actia or Capitolia.’

It could be accepted that the agonistic coins of Heliopolis were struck between the year when Valerianus II was incorporated into the imperial college in 254 and his death in June 258, but nobody can deny that Valerianus’ titles, *Imp(erator) Caes(ar) P(ublius) Lic(inius) Valerianus P(ius) F(elix) Aug(ustus)*, actually belong to a reigning emperor, and seem to be echoed in the laws of May 258 where the young prince is officially associated with his grandfather Valerian and his father Gallienus.³⁹ Now, regardless of chronology, it should be remembered that the cities were far from mentioning on coins all the festivals they organised.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the numismatic evidence only provides a *terminus ante quem* for the creation of the Heliopolitan Capitolia; by no means can agonistic coins be used in this case to assess the periodicity of the contest, especially because they were seemingly struck at the same time and because Heliopolis did not issue any coin after Gallienus.

R. Ziegler, for his part, assumed that the Capitoline games held in the Near East were granted to cities which had received the status of Roman colonies and the *ius Italicum* from the Severi (apart from Heliopolis: Laodicea, Sidon, and Tyre).⁴¹ This certainly does not fit all cases. In the East, Capitoline or isocapitoline games were celebrated in cities which never had colonial status, or sometimes clearly acquired it later than the time of the Severi. In Asia Minor, only one Roman colony, Olbasa in Pisidia, founded by Augustus, definitely organised such a contest under the Severi.⁴² At Aphrodisias, free city of Caria, the Capitolia Gordianeia Attaleia are first mentioned on coins of the city under Gordian (238–244), and later in a catalogue of victories dated between 253 and 257.⁴³ Again in Caria, Antioch on the Meander held Gallieneia Capitolia under Gallienus.⁴⁴ The Greek city of Perge in Pamphy-

³⁸ Klose 2005, 132.

³⁹ On chronology, see Christol 1997, 249–252; Feissel 2004, 355.

⁴⁰ E. g., Strasser 2004b, 194, about the Actia at Bostra: ‘Il arrive cependant que les premiers témoignages monétaires sur un concours soient bien postérieurs à sa fondation, même à cette date et dans cette partie du monde grec.’ It should be noted that neither Antioch in Syria nor Alexandria in Egypt ever struck coins with agonistic types. More generally, on the gap between the ‘agonistic explosion’ and numismatic evidence: Nollé 2012.

⁴¹ Ziegler 1985, 147–151.

⁴² *IGR* 3.411–414; Milner 1998, nos. 134, 144, 145.6, 145.7, for the ἀγών (Σεουήρειος) Αὐγούστειος Καπετώλειος πενταετηρικός πολιτικός.

⁴³ Roueché 1993, 171–181.

⁴⁴ Nollé 2009, 43–44 and n. 231.

lia established a new isocapitoline festival in honour of the emperor Tacitus in 275/276.⁴⁵ An unknown city, maybe in Bithynia, organised Commodeia isocapitolia in the middle of the third century CE.⁴⁶ In Egypt, Capitoline and isocapitoline games are attested after the grant of city councils to the nome metropoleis c. 200 CE: a herald already competed in the isocapitoline contest at Hermopolis under Septimius Severus or his son Caracalla; but at Antinoopolis and Oxyrhynchus, Capitolia were first held later, in 268 and 273 CE respectively.⁴⁷ All of the above testimonies confirm that Capitoline games are documented in the East only from the Severi onwards.

As regards the Near East, references to Capitolia are extremely doubtful in the coinage of Tyre,⁴⁸ and totally lacking at Sidon.⁴⁹ Ziegler's proposition is thus above all consistent with the evidence available for Laodicea in Syria. Between 194 and 197/198 CE, the city, which had supported Septimius Severus in the civil war, became a Roman colony under the name of the *colonia Septimia Laodicea Severiana*, received the *ius Italicum*, and started celebrating Capitolia;⁵⁰ in contrast, Antioch, which had followed Pescennius Niger, temporarily lost its civic status and the right to organise competitions, particularly the Olympia. One could easily imagine a similar scenario for Heliopolis and Berytus. The lack of information on the Berytan games after Marcus Aurelius suggests – though it cannot be proven – that Severus deprived Berytus of the right to celebrate its own festival. On the other hand, as the jurist Ulpian of Tyre stated in the first book of his *De censibus*, Heliopolis was rewarded at the same time with all the privileges associated with the *ius Italicum* for its loyalty to the African emperor (*Dig.* 50.15.1.2: *Est et Heliopolitana (colonia) quae a divo Severo per belli civilis occasionem Italicae coloniae rem publicam accepit*). It therefore seems likely that Septimius Severus also approved the introduction of Capitolia in the *colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis* after the grant of the *ius Italicum*. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the festival was upgraded step by step to the highest rank until the reign of Valerian and Gallienus.

The city and its cults may have benefited from the prestigious status of the games. However, the high position of the Heliopolitan competitions is

45 Şahin 2004, nos. 334 and 336: Τακίτειος μητροπολίτειος ἰσοκαπετώλιος; cf. Erol-Özdizbay 2012, 213 with relevant civic coins.

46 Moretti 1953, no. 87.

47 Remijsen 2014, 194; Remijsen 2015, 114–115.

48 Despite Ziegler 1985, 148 n. 9, and Sawaya 2009, 276–277.

49 On the Sidonian contests, see Robert 1936a, 274–278 (= Robert 1969b, 1029–1033); Riggsby 2007, with *Bull. ép.* 2010.596.

50 Meyer 1987–1988, 62–63; Strasser 2004a, 144.

in sharp contrast with their relatively low success, which requires some comment. Indeed, agonistic epigraphy has not provided any mention of the local Capitolia up to now.⁵¹ Arguments from silence are always tricky, but this certainly does not mean that nobody entered nor that the prize-money was worth too little to enable people to set up an inscription about themselves. The fact is that Heliopolis represented a detour for any competitor coming from outside the region. Moreover, the prestige associated with the games was likely so small that it was not worth boasting about having won. Otherwise, given the correlation between prestige and epigraphic visibility in the broader agonistic context, we would expect to see the Heliopolitan Capitolia mentioned on inscriptions scattered around the Roman world.

3 Death on stage in the city of the Muses

The Capitolia continued at Oxyrhynchus under Constantine, and at Rome at least until the middle of the fourth century.⁵² At Heliopolis, the story of the martyrdom that the mime Gelasinus endured in the theatre suggests that the local games were still celebrated a hundred years after they were established. During a parody of baptism, the actor was suddenly converted to Christianity and climbed out of the tub that served as a baptismal font. The crowd of spectators became angry, dragged him out of the theatre, and stoned him to death. His parents took away his body to Mariamme, his home village, and built him a shrine. The Antiochene historian Malalas (sixth century), the *Chronicon Paschale* or *Easter Chronicle* (seventh century), and the Egyptian Coptic bishop John of Nikiu (late seventh century) tell the facts much the same way, with inconsistencies and differences apparently resulting from chronological distance.⁵³ Together, they shed a harsh light on religious struggle in the city of the Muses,⁵⁴ as well as showing how a site of Christian pil-

51 Competitors would be expected to report victories at Heliopolis or display Heliopolitan citizenship, all things that have never been found in the epigraphic documentation. On the issue of multiple citizenship among athletes and artists, see van Nijf 2012b.

52 Remijsen 2015, 117–118, 145–146.

53 On the overall historical value of the texts dealing with Gelasinus' martyrdom, from Malalas to the medieval Byzantine synaxaria: Weismann 1975; Noret 1983. More recently, on the theme of conversion on stage, e. g., Elm 2006; Webb 2008. P.-L. Gatier also points out to me the edifying (and naturally undated) story of the actor Gaianus, who was amputated with both hands and both feet after blaspheming against the Virgin in Heliopolis, according to John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 47.

54 *IGLS* 6.2831, with Aliquot 2009, 293–294, for the restoration Μουσῶν τε [κτ]ίσμα, 'foundation of the Muses'; cf. *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 32, where Heliopolitan flute players are inspired by Muses of Lebanon.

grimage developed from an event probably organised during the Capitolia, the only contest known in the Phoenician city.

Malalas, as often, has a confused chronology, asserting that the event took place under an emperor oddly called ‘Maximus Licinianus’ – a kind of mixture of Maximinus Daia (310–313) and Licinius (308–324):⁵⁵

ἐν δὲ τῇ αὐτοῦ βασιλείᾳ ἐχαρίσατο ἐλευθερίαν τοῖς χριστιανοῖς εἰς τὸ μὴ κρύπτεσθαι αὐτούς, ἀλλὰ δημοσιεύειν. συνέβη δὲ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας ἐν Ἡλιουπόλει τῆς Φοινίκης μαρτυρῆσαι τὸν ἅγιον Γελάσινον· ἦν γὰρ μῖμος δευτερός καὶ εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸ παιγνίδιον πανδήμου ἀγομένου· καὶ πλήθους θεωρῶντος ἔβαλον αὐτὸν εἰς βουττιν μεγάλην βαλανείου γέμουσαν ὕδατος χλιαροῦ, καταγελῶντες τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ δόγματος καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς Γελάσινος ὁ μῖμος βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἀνελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ βουττίου καὶ φορέσας ἱμάτια λευκὰ οὐκέτι ἠνέσχετο θεατρίσαι, λέγων ἐπὶ τοῦ δήμου ὅτι ‘χριστιανὸς εἰμι· εἶδον γὰρ δύναμιν θεοῦ φοβερὰν ἐν τῷ βαπτίζεσθαι με ἐν τῷ βουττίῳ καὶ χριστιανὸς ἀποθνήσκω.’ καὶ ἀκούσας ταῦτα ὁ δῆμος ὅλος ὁ θεωρῶν ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ τῆς πόλεως ἐμάνη σφόδρα· καὶ ὀρμησάντες ἐκ τῶν βάθρων εἰς τὴν θυμέλην ἐκράτησαν αὐτὸν καὶ σύραντες αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ θεάτρου, ὡς φορεῖ τὰ λευκὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, λιθοβολήσαντες ἐφόνευσαν αὐτόν, καὶ οὕτως ἐτελειώθη ὁ δίκαιος, καὶ λαβόντες τὸ λείψανον αὐτοῦ οἱ ἐκ τοῦ γένους αὐτοῦ ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸ εἰς τὴν κώμην τὴν λεγομένην Μαριάμμη, ὅθεν ὑπῆρχεν, ἔξω οὖσαν Δαμασκοῦ τῆς πόλεως ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἡμίσεος μιλίου. καὶ ἐκτίσθη αὐτῷ εὐκτήριος οἶκος.

‘In his reign he bestowed freedom on the Christians, so that they did not have to hide but could come out publicly. In the time of his reign there occurred the martyrdom of St. Gelasinus at Heliopolis in Phoenice. He was second mime and came on to give a comic turn during a public festival. In the presence of a crowd of spectators they threw him into a large bath-house tub full of warm water, to parody Christian belief and holy baptism. Gelasinus the mime was baptised, and when he came out of the tub and put on white robes he refused to continue performing and said before the people, “I am a Christian, for I saw a tremendous vision of God in my baptism in the tub and I will die a Christian.” When they heard this, all the people watching in the city theatre became violently enraged. They rushed down from their seats to the stage, took hold of him and dragged him out of the theatre just as he was, wearing white robes, and they stoned him to death. That is how the just man died. Taking his corpse, his relatives conveyed it to the village known as Mariamme, where he came from, which was half a mile outside the city of Damascus; and a prayer house was built in his honour.’

The *Chronicon Paschale* is less precise than (but not inconsistent with) Malalas on the location of Gelasinus’ native village ‘outside Heliopolis.’ It is also a bit confused about the Roman province where Heliopolis was located: Syria Phoenice and not yet Phoenice Libanensis. Nevertheless, this chronicle helps to date the martyrdom to 297 CE exactly:⁵⁶

ἔτους σξθ’ τῆς εἰς οὐρανοῦς ἀναλήψεως τοῦ κυρίου καὶ τῶν προκειμένων ὑπάτων ἐμαρτύρησεν ὁ ἅγιος Γελάσινος ἐν τῇ Ἡλιουπολιτῶν πόλει τῆς Λιβανησίας, ὅστις ἦν μῖμος

55 Malalas 12.50, ed. Thurn 2000, 241–242, translated by Jeffreys et al. 1986, 171 (modified).

56 *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. Dindorf 1832, 513, translated by Whitby and Whitby 1989, 3–4.

δεύτερος, ἀγώνος πανδήμου θεάτρου ἀγομένου, καὶ πλήθους θεωρῶντος ἔβαλον αὐτὸν οἱ ἄλλοι μῖμοι εἰς βουττὴν μεγάλην βαλανείου γέμουσαν ὕδατος χλιαροῦ, καταπαίζοντες τοῦ δόγματος τῶν χριστιανῶν καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς Γελάσιος ὁ δεύτερος μῖμος βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἀνελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ βουττίου, φορέσας ἱμάτια λευκά, οὐκέτι ἠνέσχετο θεατρίσαι, λέγων ὅτι ‘χριστιανὸς εἰμι· εἶδον γὰρ δόξαν φοβερὰν εἰς τὸ βουττὴν, καὶ χριστιανὸς ἀποθνήσκω.’ καὶ ἀκούσας ταῦτα ὁ λαὸς ὁ θεωρῶν ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ τῆς Ἡλιοπολιτῶν πόλεως ἐμάνη σφόδρα· καὶ ὀρμήσαντες ἐκ τῶν βάρων εἰς τὴν θυμέλην, κρατήσαντες τὸν ἅγιον Γελάσιον ἔξω τοῦ θεάτρου, ὡς φορεῖ τὰ λευκὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, λιθοβολήσαντες ἐφόνευσαν αὐτόν, καὶ οὕτως ἐτελειώθη ὁ δίκαιος, καὶ λαβόντες τὸ λείψανον αὐτοῦ οἱ ἐκ τοῦ γένους αὐτοῦ ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸ εἰς τὴν κώμην τὴν λεγομένην Μαριάμμη, ὅθεν ὑπῆρχεν, ἔξω Ἡλιούπολεως, καὶ ἐκεῖ ἔκτισαν αὐτῷ εὐκτῆριον οἶκον.

‘In the year 269 from the Ascension to heaven of the Lord and under the aforementioned consuls, St. Gelasius was martyred at the Heliopolitan city in Libanensis. This man was second mime and, while a public theatrical contest was being held and the populace was watching, the other mimes threw him into a great tub from the bath-house, full of warm water, in mockery of the doctrine of the Christians and the holy baptism. And the same Gelasinus, the second mime, after being baptised and coming up from the tub, clad in white robes, no longer tolerated being on stage, saying, “I am a Christian; for I saw an awesome glory in the tub, and I will die a Christian.” And when they heard this the people who were watching in the theatre of the Heliopolitan city were exceedingly enraged; and they rushed from the seats onto the stage, forced St. Gelasinus out of the theatre still wearing his white robes, and stoned and slaughtered him, and so the just man died. And his kinsmen took his corpse and carried it away to the village called Mariamme from which he originated, outside Heliopolis, and they built a prayer house for him.’

There is not much to be drawn from John of Nikiu, except for the location of Mariamme:⁵⁷

‘There was a man named Gelasinus of the village of Mariamme, which is near to Damascus, about one mile distant. And he lived in the midst of a large population who were devoted to the worship of idols and dwelt in the city of Heliopolis in Lebanon. And at that time they were assembled in a theatre, and they had brought actors with them. They put cold water into a large brazen vessel and thus began to mock all who came to the holy baptism of the Christians. And one of these actors went down into the water and was baptised, and when he came out of the water they clothed him in a white garment; for till this incident he had been an actor, but after he came forth from the water he refused to pursue the avocations of an actor or to play the mimic again, and said: “I wish to die in the Christian religion on behalf of Christ”; and added: “I saw a great miracle while I made a mock of holy baptism.” And when he had gone but a little way from the place of that water, all who were there were filled with wrath and indignation; for they were worshippers of idols. And they went down from the theatre and seized that holy man and stoned him. And he received the crown of martyrdom which fadeth not away, and he was enrolled with the holy martyrs. And his relatives came with many Christians and took his body and buried it in the village and built a church over the place where his body was buried. Now the man’s name was Gelasinus. May God have mercy on us through his intercessions.’

⁵⁷ John of Nikiu 77.78–82, translated from Ethiopic by Charles 1916, 66.

Previous research has not related Gelasinus' martyrdom to the Heliopolitan Capitolia.⁵⁸ The different versions of the story, however, use technical terms which appear to be specific to the musical programme in this kind of competition. The actor took part in 'a comic turn during a public festival' (τὸ παιγνίδιον πανδήμου ἀγομένου), according to Malalas, or in 'a public theatrical contest' (ἀγῶνος πανδήμου θεάτρου ἀγομένου), in the *Chronicon Paschale*. The adjective πάνδημος, either alone or accompanying the term ἀγών, highlights the public dimension of this event, which happened during a contest that was literally 'open to all the civic community' and its guests.⁵⁹ Solo dances performed by pantomimes were introduced in the musical programme of the Capitolia at Rome as well as in other Greek games from the second half of the second century CE onwards, especially in Syria.⁶⁰ Mime too was integrated into the formal agonistic programme of the festivals at the same time, though more discreetly.⁶¹ But speaking mimes and silent pantomimes also took part in side events at the theatre during official games.⁶² In describing Gelasinus' show, Malalas prompts us to adopt the latter interpretation. The term he uses, παιγνίδιον (or παιγνίδιον in a manuscript variant), is a diminutive of παίγνιον, to be understood here in the sense of 'comic performance'.⁶³ As it never appears in official records, this word probably denotes a playful interlude rather than a competitive event.

Whatever the kind of event in which he was involved, Gelasinus surely was a skilled professional and a member of a theatre troupe. As a 'second mime' (μίμος δεύτερος) playing along with other mimes (οἱ ἄλλοι μίμοι),⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Winnefeld 1914, 151 n. 1. I was even reluctant to do so, without giving an explanation.

⁵⁹ On πάνδημος; Robert 1961, 9 n. 1. For the phrase πάνδημος ἀγών in an agonistic context, cf. for example Euripides, *Alcestis* 1026 (ἀγῶνα γὰρ πάνδημον εὐρίσκω τινάς).

⁶⁰ Strasser 2004b, especially 211 for the Roman Capitolia; Garelli 2007, 204–208. In Syria, close to Heliopolis, pantomime events were included at Damascus in the programme of the Sebasmia in the second and third centuries CE. See *CIL* 14.4624a–b, with Strasser 2004b, 197–202 and Aliquot 2008–2009, 82–83: twin honorific inscriptions for the pantomime Pylades from Scythopolis, who became a decurion of Damascus.

⁶¹ Poljakov 1989, no. 110; cf. Robert 1936b, 244–251 (= Robert 1969a, 680–687); Webb 2012, 235–236.

⁶² Strasser 2004b, 211–212, about such popular and non-competitive entertainments given at the Olympia in Antioch under Commodus, according to Malalas 12.6.

⁶³ The traditional mime theory, as stated by Plutarch, *Quaestiones conviviales* 7.8 (*Moralia* 712e), distinguishes between two generic categories, a shallow form of buffoonery termed παίγνιον, and a more dramatically elaborated form termed ὑποθέσις. See the classical discussion by Reich 1903, especially 417–422, with updated remarks by Garelli 2007, 128–132.

⁶⁴ The phrase μίμος δεύτερος implies the idea of a hierarchy between different actors, perhaps under the direction of a chief mime (ἀρχιμίμος, *archimimus*). For a good parallel, cf. *AE* 1993.912 (Augusta Emerita, Lusitania), epitaph of Cornelia Nothis, freedwoman of Publius

he played a secondary role in a short skit, obviously that of a silly character, a *stupidus*. His stage name was perfectly adapted to his professional specialisation, as was customary among actors:⁶⁵ derived from the term γελασίος, it meant ‘laugher’, and also referred to a ‘dimple’ in the cheek, produced by smiling;⁶⁶ it was not very popular, except as a nickname of the famous philosopher Democritus of Abdera (c. 470–380 BCE);⁶⁷ moreover, it was commonly given to slaves and freedmen in the Roman period.⁶⁸ All these reasons made it an extremely suitable name for a comic actor. Eventually, a telling detail: Gelasinus came from a village called Mariamme and located in the immediate vicinity of Damascus,⁶⁹ Heliopolis’ neighbouring city. This points again at the close regional influence of the Heliopolitan Capitolia.

The martyrdom of Gelasinus was the first in a long series of persecutions that multiplied at Heliopolis from the fourth to the sixth century CE. This dramatic episode can therefore be considered as a key element in the elaboration of an enduring image of the city as a lair of pagan savages.⁷⁰ There is no other Christian known who would certainly have been martyred during the Capitoline games, but the theatre stage may have been used as a torture chamber for some. During the restoration of traditional cults under Julian the Apostate (361–363), a group of Christian virgins were reportedly raped here in public before their guts were thrown to the pigs.⁷¹ On a broader scale, as Gelasinus’ story suggests, the long-lasting celebration of the Capi-

and *secunda mima* of Sollemnis and Halyus. See further Chaniotis 1990, 91 and Carter and Edmondson 2015, 542, with bibliography.

65 About actors onomastics and specialisation, see, e.g., Chaniotis 1990, 97; Strasser 2004b, 198–201.

66 Contrary to what Weismann 1975, 48 suggests, it is useless to connect the name of Gelasinus to *gelasianus*, even though this term is associated with mimes in Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* 23.301 (*mimos, schoenobatas, gelasianos*).

67 For Democritus’ nickname and reputation in the Roman period: Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.20; *Suda* s.v. Γελασίσιος (γ 108) and Δημόκριτος (δ 447); on the popular metamorphosis of the philosopher from atomist to laugher, see Beard 2014, 92–94.

68 Solin 2003, 829 identifies ten persons by the name of Gelasinus in Rome, including four slaves and freedmen. The published volumes of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (1–5c) have only five.

69 This Mariamme waits to be discovered in Damascene. It needs to be distinguished from the homonymous town (today Mariamin) to the north-west of Emesa (cf. Honigmann 1930a; *IGLS* 5.2106–2115). There is no compelling reason to follow Honigmann 1930b, who wonders if there were two villages of the same name near Heliopolis and Damascus. Equally unconvincing are the proposals by Weismann 1975, 46–47 (identification of Mariamme with a homonymous place near Antioch) and Ghadban 1985, 309 (location of Mariamme at Ras Baalbek in northern Bekaa Valley).

70 Hajjar 1985, 379–383; Chuvin 1991, 39–40, 145–150, 186–187; Aliquot 2009, 120–126.

71 Sozomen 5.10.6; Cassiodorus, *Historia tripartita* 6.12.5.

tolia had an impact in the advent of a new regional topography of holiness,⁷² by fostering the creation of a site of Christian pilgrimage outside Heliopolis.

Conclusion

As argued here, Greek games were not held at Heliopolis before Septimius Severus. The creation of a local contest most probably followed the grant of the *ius Italicum* to the Syrian town. The competitions were modelled on the Roman Capitolia, and closely linked to the cult of the Heliopolitan triad, especially Mercury's. In the background, the issue of games was related to old rivalries between Heliopolis and Berytus for control over the great Heliopolitan sanctuary. For the emperors – maybe Septimius Severus himself –, the grant of the Capitolia was not only a symbolic gift designed to increase artificially the prestige of the newly founded colony. It was also a very concrete approach to ensure regular income for the Heliopolitan gods and citizens. In addition, for the *colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis*, entering the great network of cities celebrating ecumenical games meant that the city could make people forget its barbarian origins in the most beautiful way, by standing as an emanation of the universe and by hosting, at least for the duration of the festival, representatives from the whole Greek world united in common competitions and rituals.

Somewhat ironically, the Heliopolitan Capitolia seem to have had only halftone success in the third century CE. The imperial favour allowed Heliopolis to fully recover its own cults at the expense of Berytus, but it did not suffice to guarantee the attractiveness of its games on a global scale. Perhaps the festival had been founded too late, in a world that was already saturated with contests, and, above all, in a city located a little too far away from the most prestigious agonistic centres of the Roman East. On the other hand, it offered a perfect platform to Christians seeking martyrdom. In this sense, it had a pioneering role in the making of the pilgrimages for which Heliopolis still was sadly renowned until the reign of Justinian. The games which had once been a strong factor of integration of the Severan colony in the Roman world finally contributed to the political and religious discrimination of its citizens in Late Antiquity.

72 Gatier 2012; Aliquot 2015.

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Religion in the Roman Empire

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Religion in the Roman Empire (RRE) is bold in the sense that it intends to further and document new and integrative perspectives on religion in the Ancient World combining multidisciplinary methodologies. Starting from the notion of 'lived religion' it will offer a space to take up recent, but still incipient research to modify and cross the disciplinary boundaries of 'History of Religion', 'Anthropology', 'Classics', 'Ancient History', 'Ancient Judaism', 'Early Christianity', 'New Testament', 'Patristic Studies', 'Coptic Studies', 'Gnostic and Manichaean Studies', 'Archaeology' and 'Oriental Languages'. It is the purpose of the journal to stimulate the development of an approach which can comprise the local and global trajectories of the multi-dimensional pluralistic religions of antiquity.

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