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Jean-Luc Fournet

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Horapollon

JEAN-LUC FOURNET

Horapollon is known as the author of a treatise on the HIEROGLYPHS (*Hieroglyphica*), the only one in all preserved Greco-Latin literature. He seems to belong to a family originating from the Thebaid (Egypt), hypothetically reconstructed with the help of various literary sources and one papyrus: his homonymous grandfather (end fourth/beginning fifth century CE) taught Greek grammar in Alexandria and Constantinople; his father Asklepiades wrote (lost) works on pharaonic history and religion; and his uncle (and father-in-law) Heraiskos was a pagan philosopher. Horapollon himself taught philosophy in the last third of the fifth century in Alexandria and, after being tortured and suffering a reverse of fortune, finally converted to Christianity. So Horapollon was a member of the pagan intelligentsia that attempted to resist Christianity (now the state religion) by exalting the old, secular Hellenism and concomitantly defending the dying pharaonic culture (the last known use of hieroglyphics dates from 394). This biculturality accounts for the *Hieroglyphica*: while about half of the hieroglyphic signs dealt with by Horapollon are more or less correct (which implies a real, even though superficial and deficient, knowledge of this writing), the exegesis he gives of them, purely allegorical, relies on traditions of late Hellenism.

Though this treatise was of no help to modern scholars (before Champollion) in deciphering hieroglyphics, it nevertheless nourished the artistic repertoire of the Renaissance and the vogue of the emblematic literature.

SEE ALSO: Alexandria (Egypt); Egyptomania, eastern; Egyptomania, western; Hellenism, Byzantine; Paganism, Byzantine.

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