

Entangled Worlds: Religious Confluences between East and West in the Roman Empire

Edited by
SVENJA NAGEL,
JOACHIM FRIEDRICH QUACK,
and CHRISTIAN WITSCHERL

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The Cults of Isis,
Mithras, and Jupiter Dolichenus

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List of General Abbreviations Used Throughout the Volume

Latin sources are cited by using the short titles of the *Index* of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Greek sources are in general cited by using the short titles in the *Greek-English Lexicon* of LIDDELL, H. G./SCOTT, R./JONES, H. S. Epigraphic Corpora of Greek and Latin inscriptions are cited according to the list of abbreviations in F. BÉRARD et al., *Guide de l'épigraphiste. Bibliographie choisie des épigraphies antiques et médiévales*, Paris ⁴2010, 19f. (see also http://www.antiquite.ens.fr/IMG/file/pdf_guide_epi/abbreviations_guide.pdf); as well as that in the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Papyri are mostly cited by the inventory number of the respective collections, or, for the Greek and Demotic papyri and ostraca, according to the rules presented in OATES, J. F., et al., *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*; see <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>. For Egyptian papyri, inscriptions and other sources cf. furthermore HELCK, W./WESTENDORF, W. (Eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie I*, Wiesbaden 1975, XVII–XXXIV; as well as the LGG.

CCCA	VERMASEREN, M. J., <i>Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque I–VII</i> (EPRO 50), Leiden 1977–89.
CCID	HÖRIG, M./SCHWERTHEIM, E., <i>Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni</i> (EPRO 106), Leiden 1987.
CIMRM	VERMASEREN, M. J., <i>Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae I–II</i> , Den Haag 1956/60.
Dend.	CHASSINAT, É./DAUMAS, F./CAUVILLE, S., <i>Le temple de Dendara I/III</i> , al-Qāhira 1934/35.
Edfou I	ROCHEMONTEIX, M. DE CHALVET et al., <i>Le temple d'Edfou I</i> (2ème ed. rev. et corr. par S. CAUVILLE/D. DEVAUCHELLE) (<i>Mémoires publiées par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire</i> 10), al-Qāhira 1984–87.
Edfou III	CHASSINAT, É., <i>Le temple d'Edfou III</i> (<i>Mémoires publiées par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire</i> 20), al-Qāhira 1928.
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain.
Imperium der Götter	Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe (Ed.), <i>Imperium der Götter. Isis – Mithras – Christus. Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich. Ausstellungskatalog Karlsruhe</i> , Darmstadt 2013.
ILSlov I	M. LOVENJAK, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Sloveniae I: Neviodunum</i> , Ljubljana 1998.
KRI	KITCHEN, K. A., <i>Ramesside Inscriptions I–VIII</i> , Oxford 1975–90.
LGG	LEITZ, C. (Ed.), <i>Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen I–VIII</i> (<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i> 110–116, 129), Leuven 2002/03.
PGM	PREISENDANZ, K. (Ed.), <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , Leipzig 1928–41.
RGW	<i>Religions in the Graeco-Roman World</i> .
RIC	MATTINGLY, H. et al., <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage I–X</i> , London 1923–94.
RICIS	BRICAULT, L., <i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques I–III</i> , Paris 2005.
RICIS Suppl. I	BRICAULT, L., <i>RICIS Supplément I</i> , in: L. BRICAULT (Ed.), <i>Bibliotheca Isiaica I</i> , Bordeaux 2008, 77–130.
RICIS Suppl. II	BRICAULT, L., <i>RICIS Supplément II</i> , in: L. BRICAULT (Ed.), <i>Bibliotheca Isiaica II</i> , Bordeaux 2011, 273–316.

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RICIS Suppl. III	BRICAULT, L., RICIS Supplément III, in: L. BRICAULT/R. VEYMIERS (Eds.), <i>Bibliotheca Isiaca</i> III, Bordeaux 2014, 139–195.
SIRIS	VIDMAN, L., <i>Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacaе et Sarapiacae</i> (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 28), Berlin 1969.
SNRIS	BRICAULT, L. (Ed.), <i>Sylloge nummorum religionis Isiacaе et Sarapiacae</i> , Paris 2008.
SNRIS Suppl. I	BRICAULT, L., SNRIS Supplément I, in: L. BRICAULT/R. VEYMIERS (Eds.), <i>Bibliotheca Isiaca</i> III, Bordeaux 2014, 245–284.
Wb	ERMAN, A./GRAPOW, H., <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> I–VII, Berlin 1926–63.

Introduction: Religious Confluences in the Roman Empire; or: Why ‘Oriental Cults’ Again?

Why to produce yet another volume on the religious history of the Roman Empire and especially on the so-called ‘oriental cults’? After all, the last decades have seen the publication of a number of good surveys and introductory essays on various aspects of religious life in the Imperium Romanum,¹ including the peculiar appearance of cults that originally were and sometimes remained – at least from a certain perspective and in certain circumstances – ‘foreign’ or ‘non-institutionalized’ ones.² More specifically, the latter phenomenon has been treated extensively in a whole series of studies that was initiated in the 1960s: starting under the title *Études préliminaires aux cultes orientales dans l’Empire romain* (EPRO) and later renamed as *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* (RGW), the series has by now reached more than 180 volumes.³ In addition, regarding the three cults envisaged in this volume (i.e. those of Isis, Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus), we have experienced a lively series of conferences on the cult of Isis in the Roman Empire⁴ as well as regular meetings on Mithraic studies⁵ and a number of general studies on this cult,⁶ recently joined by intensive research on the origins and

¹ A number of good introductory and general essays on religious life in the Roman Empire have been published in the last years, cf. BEARD/NORTH/PRICE, *Religions of Rome*; SCHEID, *Introduction*; RÜPKE, *Religion*; ID., *Roman Religion*, RIVES, *Religion*; ANDO, *Matter of the Gods*; NORTH/PRICE, *Religious History*. The broad range of gods venerated in the Roman Empire, and especially the cults of Mithras, Isis, Magna Mater and Jupiter Dolichenus, were also the subject of a large exhibition in the *Badisches Landesmuseum* at Karlsruhe in 2013/14; for which see the catalogue ‘Imperium der Götter’.

² The supposed ‘foreignness’ of the cults in question, often regarded as part of the so-called *sacra pergrina*, constitutes a problem in itself, as it was a rather fluid notion with no clearly defined boundaries; cf. BENDLIN, *Pragmatik religiösen Verhaltens* (and also below n. 18).

³ One of the most recently published volumes in the series RGW, BRICAULT/BONNET, *Panthée*, contains a number of papers that are highly relevant for our subject.

⁴ BRICAULT, *De Memphis à Rome*; BRICAULT, *Isis en Occident*; BRICAULT/VERSLUYS/MEY-BOOM, *Nile into Tiber*; BRICAULT/VERSLUYS, *Isis on the Nile*; BRICAULT/VERSLUYS, *Power, Politics*.

⁵ HINNELL, *Studies in Mithraism*; VOMER GOJKOVIĆ, *Mithraskult*; MARTENS/DE BOE, *Roman Mithraism*. For an overview of Mithraic studies in the last decades, see BECK, *Mithraism since Franz Cumont*, and ID., *Mithraism after ‘Mithraism since Franz Cumont’*.

⁶ MERKELBACH, *Mithras*; CLAUSS, *Cultores Mithrae*; BECK, *Religion of the Mithras Cult*; GORDON, *Roman Army*; CLAUSS, *Mithras*; GORDON, *Mithras*; HENSEN, *Mithras*. The classic study of CUMONT, *Mystères des Mithra*, has been recently re-edited by N. BELAYCHE and A. MASTROCIQUE (with a useful introduction into the historiographical background of CUMONT’s work). In addition, some important regional studies on Mithraism have been produced in the last years; cf. FRACKOWIAK, *Fremde Götter* (for the Germanic provinces); SCHULTE, *Mithras in Gallien* (for Northern Gaul); KLÖCKNER, *Mithras auf der Iberischen Halbinsel* (for *Hispania*); SICOE, *Stein-*

diffusion of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus.⁷ So, to repeat the initial question: why did we initiate yet another project on this subject?

On the one hand, the intensive research carried out during the last years on the so-called 'oriental cults' has reached an important phase. There are by now some very useful corpora of data especially for the cult of Isis thanks to the work of Laurent Briault and his group,⁸ which make the production of an overall synthesis much easier.⁹ At the same time new and exciting discoveries have occurred all around the Roman world which might help to advance our understanding of these religious phenomena significantly. For the cult of Isis, the demotic Egyptian sources provide a rich new input, and much is still to be gained from papyri which remain unpublished at the moment.¹⁰ Regarding the cult of Mithras, recent archaeological fieldwork has led to the detection of new temples and interesting objects¹¹ – both on a large scale like inscriptions¹² and wall-paintings,¹³ but also with regard to 'small finds' like pottery and ani-

denkmäler aus Dakien (for *Dacia*); GRIFFITH, Mithraism in Imperial Rome (for Rome); WHITE, Mithraism at Ostia (for Ostia; cf. also RIEGER, Heiligtümer; STEUERNAGEL, Kult). We await a new comprehensive study on the 'oriental cults' in Ostia by R. MARCHESINI.

⁷ For some recent summaries of our knowledge on the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, see the papers in BLÖMER/WINTER, Iuppiter Dolichenus (esp. BLÖMER, Iuppiter Dolichenus; COLLAR, Commagene) as well as SANZI, Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus. The research in Doliche itself has been undertaken by our colleagues from the University of Münster (Germany); see <http://www.doliche.de/> (cf. further below n. 15) and <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/forschung/projekte/c9.html>; for a more recent project on the distribution of Syrian cults within the Roman Empire, see <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/forschung/projekte/b2-20.html>. The processes through which the (Roman) cult of Jupiter Dolichenus was created and diffused throughout the Imperium Romanum have also been intensively debated in recent scholarship; cf. below n. 32.

⁸ See BRICAULT, Atlas, as well as RICIS and SNRIS. In contrast, the corpora of epigraphic and archaeological sources for the cults of Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus are more or less outdated by now. This is especially true for VERMASEREN's CIMRM, which definitely needs to be replaced by a new corpus in the near future, but also for the more recent CCID, as there are serious doubts concerning some of the criteria used to gather the material; for the latter, see the remarks by M. BLÖMER, in this volume pp. 96–112.

⁹ Cf. now NAGEL, Ausbreitung des Isis-Kultes; as well as EAD., Gesichter der Isis; and the paper by S. NAGEL, in this volume pp. 207–231.

¹⁰ DOUSSA, Imagining Isis; QUACK, Ich bin Isis; ID., Lobpreis; ID., Isis, Thot und Arrian; KOCKELMANN, Praising the Goddess; STADLER, Spätägyptische Hymnen. Cf. also the papers by M.A. STADLER and J.F. QUACK, in this volume pp. 232–243 and 244–273.

¹¹ For a list of the most recent archaeological discoveries connected to the cult of Mithras, see BECK, Mithraism after 'Mithraism since Franz Cumont', 7–14; KLENNER, Breaking News; and CLAUS, Mithras, 183 f. Furthermore it should be mentioned that some older excavations of important sanctuaries of Mithras have received an exhaustive scientific treatment only in recent years, such as the 'Walbrook temple' in London (SHEPHERD, Temple of Mithras) or the 'Mithräum am Ballplatz' in Mainz (HULD-ZETSCHKE, Mithraskult in Mainz).

¹² To cite just a few examples: One of the most intriguing epigraphic finds of the last decades is a bronze tablet discovered in Virunum (*Noricum*) which exhibits an inscription containing a (complete?) list (*album*) of the followers of one Mithraic community: AE 1994, 1334; cf. the detailed commentary by PICCOTTINI, Virunum. In Inveresk (Scotland) two altars for Mithras and Sol were found which point to the existence of the northernmost sanctuary of Mithras known today; see TOMLIN, Inscriptions, 441–444 nos. 5–6 (= AE 2011, 678/79). The excavations of a Mithraeum in Lucus Augusti/Lugo (*Hispania citerior*) have yielded an inscribed altar that throws new light on the expansion of the cult in Roman Spain: AE 2006, 663; cf. ALVAR/GORDON/RODRIGUEZ, Lugo. The

mal bones which help us to analyse the ritual context of specific sanctuaries by using up-to-date archaeological techniques.¹⁴ In the case of Jupiter Dolichenus the excavations of a large sanctuary on the Dülük Baba Tepesi near Doliche in Commagene, the (supposed) ‘homeland’ of this god, have shed new light on the question of the origins of the cult as it was known in the Roman Empire,¹⁵ whereas recently discovered sanctuaries of the god in places as far apart as Vindolanda (near Hadrian’s Wall in *Britannia*) and Balaklava (on the Crimean peninsula) have provided us with fresh insights into the diffusion of the cult and its local organization.¹⁶

side reliefs of another recently detected altar dedicated to *Deus Invictus Imperator* from Burginatum/Alt-Kalkar (*Germania inferior*) show some very interesting symbols of Mithraic art: AE 1999, 1098; cf. GORDON, Viewing Mithraic Art. At the other end of the Mediterranean, a casual find of an inscribed Mithraic relief at Perge (in the province of *Lycia et Pamphylia*) has led to the identification of the first securely attested Mithraeum in the whole of Asia minor: I.Perge I 248. Finally, new research has also led to the rehabilitation of some Mithraic inscriptions which have long been known but have been regarded as suspicious in earlier scholarship – such as an altar from Rome that has been ‘rediscovered’ in South Africa and contains a unique dedication (in Greek) to Helios Mithras as *astrobrontodaimôn*: IG XIV 998 = IGUR I 125; cf. GORDON, *Mithras Helios*.

¹³ The most spectacular discoveries of Mithraic wall-paintings (dated to the 4th century AD; some of them showing motives up to now totally unknown in Mithraic art) have occurred in Hawarte in *Syria*; cf. GAWLIKOWSKI, Mithraeum at Hawarte. Some other wall-paintings found within Mithraic sanctuaries have received a fresh treatment in recent years (see MADARASSY, Bemalte Kultwand); especially the very important ones from the Mithraeum in S. Maria Capua Vetere; cf. GORDON, Mithraic Body.

¹⁴ Cf. the contributions to two collective volumes focusing on ‘small finds’ and animal bones from sanctuaries of Mithras and other gods: MARTENS/DE BOE, Roman Mithraism; and LEPETZ/VAN ANDRINGA, Archéologie du sacrifice animal. Of special interest are ‘rubbish dumps’ containing huge amounts of pottery and bones like those detected around the Mithraeum at Tienen in *Germania inferior* (MARTENS, Rethinking ‘Sacred Rubbish’; EAD., *Mithraeum* in Tienen; cf. also ULBERT/WULFMEIER/HULD-ZETSCHKE, Ritual Deposits; and the papers in SCHÄFER/WITTEYER, Rituelle Deponierungen); as well as complete assemblages of plates and vessels which were used for cultic purposes, such as those that have been found in front of a Mithraeum at Riegel in *Germania superior* (MAYER-REPPERT, Fundmaterial). With regard to animal bones, a rich array of material has been excavated in a Mithraeum at Septeuil in *Gallia Lugdunensis*; cf. GAIDON-BUNUEL/CAILLAT, Honorer Mithra en mangeant. A very important single find is a cult vessel discovered at Mainz which is decorated on both sides with scenes depicting ritual processions within the cult of Mithras. The detailed interpretation of these scenes is disputed, however; cf. the divergent analytic models presented by HULD-ZETSCHKE, Mainzer Krater; BECK, Ritual; GORDON, Ritual and Hierarchy.

¹⁵ For a summary of the excavations on the Dülük Baba Tepesi, see WINTER, Kult des Jupiter Dolichenus; and esp. the contribution by E. WINTER, in this volume pp. 79–95. One of the most spectacular finds in Doliche has been the discovery of a stele dating to the Roman period but showing the god in a traditional iron-age iconography: BLÖMER, Stele von Doliche. For the Commagenian background of the cult, cf. the papers in WAGNER, Gottkönige am Euphrat. Some other new finds of inscriptions and reliefs have enlarged our knowledge of the worship of Jupiter Dolichenus in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, some of them seemingly results of a ‘backward flow’ (or ‘reflux’) of religious concepts which had been further developed in the West; cf. FACELLA/WINTER, Neue Inschriften; and for the most important of these discoveries, a votive relief from Perrhe, BLÖMER/FACELLA, Weihrelief für Jupiter Dolichenus (= SEG 56, 2006, 1840).

¹⁶ In Vindolanda a Dolichenum has been discovered inside the walls of the Roman fort, which is a very unusual location: BIRLEY/BIRLEY, Dolichenum; ID., New Dolichenum (see also AE 2010, 790–792). Balaklava: SARNOWSKI/ZUBAR/SAVELJA, Inschriftenfunde; SARNOWSKI/SAVELJA, Balaklava (see also AE 1998, 1154–1163). Another important new epigraphic find from Cilurnum/

On the other hand, some fresh theoretical and methodological approaches are now at hand which could be relevant for the study of the cults in question. Our project was part of a 'Cluster of Excellence' (*Exzellenzcluster*), which has been established at the University of Heidelberg in 2007 and was at that time called *Asia and Europe in a Global Context. Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows*.¹⁷ Such a background provides a specific outlook as well as analytic parameters which can inform the research on some of the most popular cults within the Roman Empire. It might direct us towards a better understanding of processes of adaptation and transformation of originally 'foreign' cults as one of many historic examples in which a desire to fill a real or perceived void in the 'mental map' of contemporary societies, or for acquiring a package of (fascinating) new knowledge, leads to the appropriation of what once had been regarded as the 'Other'.¹⁸ On a broader level one can remark that in some instances such cultural or religious 'flows'¹⁹ move in accordance with the political or economic dominance of one specific power over other entities, either imposed by a colonial authority or sought after by the subjects themselves as part of a program of 'modernisation'.²⁰ In other cases, however, like in the Roman Empire, such flows can – at least partially – also run counter to the general trend of (military) expansion.²¹ Here, some members of the dominant power (i.e. the 'Romans' – in itself an instable and shifting group) were attracted by religious phenomena which were perceived (or even constructed) as belonging to an 'alien' culture that was older than their own and thus worthy of some veneration but now subject to their political superiority. At this point it might be fruitful to

Chesters demonstrates that Jupiter Dolichenus was still venerated in *Britannia* in AD 286, thus proving that the cult did not come to an end in the middle of the 3rd century: AE 2005, 923 = RIB III 3299. At some places the re-interpretation of older discoveries has been fruitful for a better understanding of the sanctuaries of Jupiter Dolichenus and the surrounding religious landscape in general. A case in point is Carnuntum in *Pannonia superior*; cf. KANDLER, Heiligtum; as well as HUMER/KREMER, Götterbilder; and KREMER, Götterdarstellungen. For the situation in Rome, cf. BELLELLI/BIANCHI, *Orientalia sacra urbis Romae*; RÜPKE, Immigrantenreligion. For a comprehensive treatment of the sanctuaries of Jupiter Dolichenus known through archaeological and epigraphic evidence, see now SCHWARZER, Heiligtümer.

¹⁷ See <http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/de/startseite.html> (the Cluster has now been re-named as "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: The Dynamics of Transculturality"). For our sub-project (D7), entitled "From the Orient to Rome and Back Again. Religious Flows and the Expansion of 'Oriental Cults' in the Roman Empire", see <http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/de/forschung/d-geschichte-kulturerbe/d7.html>.

¹⁸ On the conceptualisation of the 'Other' in the Roman Empire, see the observations by M. J. VERSLUYS, in this volume pp. 274–293; as well as VERSLUYS, *Aegyptiaca Romana*.

¹⁹ For the concept of 'religious flows', cf. WITSCHER, 'Orientalische Kulte', 20–22. The use of this analytical tool (which is only one among a number of others!), should not, however, be understood as a deliberate return to older models of 'diffusion' and 'acculturation' which have often operated with the notion of an unilateral and one-directional transfer of religious (and other) phenomena from one (fixed) cultural entity to another. Such an approach is rightly criticized by VERSLUYS, *Orientalising Roman Gods*, 241 f. (and n. 15), 251.

²⁰ These observations are of course related to the broader issue of 'Romanisation', a concept which has been hotly debated in recent years; cf., for example, SCHÖRNER, Romanisierung; HINGLEY, Globalizing Roman Culture; MATTINGLY, Imperialism; MANN, Frage der Romanisierung.

²¹ For some recent attempts (not always successful in our eyes) to use modern network theories in order to explain the rapid expansion of specific cults within the Roman Empire, cf. COLLAR, Network Theory; EAD., Military Networks; EAD., Religious Networks.

bring in comparative material from more recent periods: Modern (western) fascination with Buddhism, for example, can provide us with interesting models for interpreting the material we know from the ancient world.²²

At the same time, we can expect not only to benefit from the insights of our colleagues from Modern and Contemporary (Global) History, but also to add a substantial input of our own in order to confer more depth to the current debates on ‘religious confluences’ and also to the broader theme of ‘cultural hybridity’. Since we treat a period of Antiquity with political, socio-economic and cultural conditions quite different from those in modern times, we hope to make clear what part of the observed phenomena might be classified as ‘universal’ and which other parts are more specific to certain periods or epochs because they are conditioned by a peculiar political and cultural environment. Furthermore, we try to study religious developments over a long period of time (from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity) and are thus able to come up with a broad historical perspective which is sometimes lacking in the analysis of contemporary religious phenomena.

More specifically, one of our central aims is to use a global approach when looking at the different ‘foreign’ cults within the Roman Empire studied here (regardless whether we treat them as a more or less coherent group of ‘oriental cults’ or not) by not focusing on one of them in isolation, but by studying them together and in comparison with each other. It is obviously impossible nowadays for a single scholar to master the whole range of literary, papyrological and epigraphic sources as well as the numerous archaeological finds from the Roman Empire; and also the testimonies (many of them dating to much older periods) from the real or supposed ‘homelands’ of the cults in question which were situated in different parts of the ‘East’ (Asia minor, Syria, Persia, Egypt etc.). The requirements of linguistic competence and detailed knowledge of very different cultures are beyond the reach of any one person. Thus, the natural solution is to establish some kind of cooperation between the various scientific disciplines that are concerned with these phenomena. By combining contributions from Ancient Historians, Classical Philologists and Roman Archaeologists as well as Egyptologists in this volume we hope to gain mutual benefits and to sharpen our eyes for similarities as well as differences between the phenomena that are brought into focus.

One last – and very important – problem comes into play here. At least since the time of Franz Cumont it has been common to speak of ‘oriental cults’ as an overarching category,²³ and despite growing criticism in recent scholarship²⁴ this is still a model favored by many scholars who deal with the religious landscape of the Roman Em-

²² See BAUMANN, *Global Buddhism*.

²³ CUMONT, *Religions orientales*; this classic work is now to be consulted in the re-edition of 2006 with a very helpful historiographic introduction by C. BONNET and F. VAN HAEPEREN. For further studies on the history of the concept of ‘oriental cults’, cf. BONNET, *Religions orientales*; BONNET/BENDLIN, *Approches historiographiques*; BONNET/PIRENNE-DELFORGE/PRAET, *Religions orientales*; BONNET/OSSOLA/SCHIED, *Rome et ses religions*.

²⁴ In addition to the literature cited in the previous note, cf. BONNET/RÜPKE/SCARPI, *Religions orientales*; BONNET/RIBICHINI/STEUERNAGEL, *Religioni in contatto*; WITSCHER, ‘*Orientalische Kulte*’.

pire.²⁵ Such an approach often implies the – rather problematic – claim of a general structural similarity between religious phenomena that were characterized by quite heterogeneous origins (both in time and in place) and later evolutions. It also takes the risk of introducing a kind of ‘orientalist’ discourse by which an undifferentiated picture of an exotic ‘Orient’ with a vibrant religious life – allegedly superior to the ‘coldness’ of traditional Roman religion²⁶ – is constructed.²⁷ Other elements which were supposedly shared by all or most of these cults have also come into discussion in recent years. It has been questioned, for example, what part (if at all) ritual complexes which might be characterized as ‘mysteries’ (such as rites of initiation) have played within the cults belonging to this supposed group;²⁸ and whether it is appropriate to classify them as ‘mystery cults’ or even as ‘mystery religions’ *in toto*.²⁹ It is equally disputed if and to what extent these cults offered some promise of salvation to their followers (and might thus be called ‘religions of salvation’ or ‘*Erlöser-Religionen*’) – either in this world or with regard to a life after death.³⁰ Following recent trends in religious studies dealing with the Roman Empire,³¹ we are not convinced that such a (perceived or real) unity of ‘oriental cults’ ever existed. We rather intend to check the validity of these concepts by paying careful attention to the many discrepancies encountered in case studies; and to be open-minded with regard to the possible variety of the final results.

²⁵ For example by TURCAN, *Cultes orientaux*; and especially by ALVAR, *Romanising Oriental Gods*; ID., *Religiones orientales*. Cf. also the contribution by J. ALVAR, in this volume pp. 23–46. The theses of ALVAR have provoked a number of dissenting statements; see e.g. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Eschatologie*, 158–160; VERSLUYS, *Orientalising Roman Gods*, 239, 257–259.

²⁶ The idea that the ‘traditional’ Roman religion was mainly characterized by a strict obedience to the rules of ritual and was therefore not able to capture people emotionally was originally developed by Georg WISSOWA and is still widely repeated today, although it is quite problematic in itself; cf. BENDLIN, *Emotion und Orient*.

²⁷ For the concept of ‘Orient’ that was relevant for CUMONT and his contemporaries (and also for the discourse of ‘orientalism’ developed in the 19th century), cf. BONNET/VAN HAEPEREN, in: CUMONT, *Religiones orientales*, XXX–XXXIX; STROUMSA, *Orientalism*; BURKERT, ‘Orient’; VERSLUYS, *Orientalising Roman Gods*. For modern views on the notion of ‘Orient’ with regard to the ‘oriental cults’, see BELAYCHE, *Romanité*; EAD., ‘Orient’.

²⁸ That some kind of ‘mysteries’ (mainly defined by esoterism and initiation: SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Misteri e culti orientali*, 186 f.; BREMMER, *Mysteries*, XII) were a central aspect of the cult of Mithras has long been an undisputed assumption (cf. also below n. 40), but is now called into question by GORDON, *Mithras-Forschung*, 240 f. In the case of Isis, the role and significance of a ‘mystery component’ within the cult are hotly debated; cf. the divergent positions of J. ALVAR and esp. of J. STEINHÄUER, in this volume pp. 23–46, esp. 29–31, and 47–78; as well as BREMMER, *Mysteries*, 110–125. The discussion centres very much on the (disputed) value of the image presented by Apuleius in book XI of his *Metamorphoses*; for which cf. the papers in KEULEN/EGELHAAF-GAISER, *Isis Book*; and now KEULEN et al., *Isis Book*. In contrast, there is no evidence for the existence of mysteries within the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus.

²⁹ For some major contributions to this debate, cf. BURKERT, *Mystery Cults*; SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Misteri*; EAD., *Misteri e culti orientali*; BOWDEN, *Mystery Cults*; BREMMER, *Mysteries*.

³⁰ On the question of the soteriology within the so-called ‘oriental cults’, see the pertinent remarks by SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Eschatologie*; but also BECK, *Ritual*, 173–178; and J. ALVAR, in this volume pp. 31–33.

³¹ See above n. 23–24.

The first case study presented in this volume (containing three papers) focuses on the origins and diffusion of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus in the Roman Empire, for which different models are presented here.³² The expansion of the cult(s) of Isis and Osiris is the subject of the next part of the book which also deals with forms of textual transfer from Egyptian languages (especially Demotic) to Greek and Latin.³³ Then the different forms in which the gods were conceptualized through images are discussed in some detail in the following three papers.³⁴ The so-called ‘oriental cults’ are characterized by a rich repertoire of visual expressions which show a wide array of iconographic variations.³⁵ Although some forms of standardization are detectable, there are no signs of a mechanical reproduction of a small number of central (cult) images. We are instead confronted with continuing processes of rearranging given motives as well as creating new designs;³⁶ and – especially in the representation of Jupiter Dolichenus – also with constant alterations between an ‘orientalising’ and a ‘westernising’ or ‘Romanising’ mode of depiction.³⁷ The last section of the book concentrates on the variability in the setting, architectural design and décor of the sanctuaries of Isis³⁸ and Mithras,³⁹ and also on the rituals that were staged within these temples.⁴⁰

³² Whereas many scholars (especially those connected to the ‘Münster school’; cf. above n. 7) propose that Doliche, a small town in the region of Commagene from which the god took its name, was the actual homeland of the cult (containing its ‘central sanctuary’ or ‘*Hauptheiligtum*’, the origins of which date back to the early Iron Age; see above n. 15) from which it was supposedly diffused to the West especially by the agency of members of the Roman army, an alternative model is presented by M. L. DÉSZPÁ, in this volume pp. 113–181 (see also ID., *Klio* 96 [2024] 749–756). The role of soldiers in spreading the ‘masculine’ cults of Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus has been intensively discussed (and modified) in recent years; for the cult of Mithras, see the comprehensive study of GORDON, *Roman Army*; for the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, see COLLAR, *Military Networks*; HAENSCH, *Angehörige des römischen Heeres*.

³³ Cf. above n. 9–10 and also I. MOYER, in this volume pp. 182–206; supplemented by MOYER, *Egypt*, and STADLER, *Einführung*, 16 f., 108–112. See now also a volume on the interactions between Egyptian and Greek literature in general: RUTHERFORD, *Greco-Egyptian Interactions*.

³⁴ See in general BRICAULT/PRESCENDI, *Théologie en images*; MOORMANN, *Divine Interiors*, 149–187; for the cult of Isis, cf. NAGEL, *The Goddess’s New Clothes*.

³⁵ For the rich visual repertoires (‘*Bilderwelten*’) in the cult of Mithras, see D. FRACKOWIAK, in this volume pp. 294–328 (cf. also above n. 13). In addition to the many large-scale depictions of Mithras and his myth there are also a lot of miniature images of the god; see GORDON, *Miniature Reproductions*.

³⁶ The pronounced variety of visual compositions and iconographic motives has been especially well studied with regard to the central cult images in the cult of Mithras which show many different side scenes; cf. GORDON, *Panelled Complications*; SCHOFIELD, *Iconographic Variation*. A remarkable new find of a relief showing the ‘standard’ tauroctony but also some rather unique additional motives is now kept in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem but was probably produced somewhere in Northern Syria: DE JONG, *Mithraic Tauroctony*. See also above n. 13 for the discovery of extraordinary wall-paintings with no connection to the known ‘canon’ of Mithraic art in a Mithraeum at Hawarte.

³⁷ See the article by R. KRUMEICH, in this volume pp. 329–352; and also KRUMEICH, *Dokumente orientalischen Selbstbewusstseins*; cf. further above n. 15.

³⁸ See the papers by K. KLEIBL and F. SARAGOZA, in this volume pp. 353–371 and 372–383 (with special reference to the temple of Isis at Pompeii). A comprehensive study of Isiac sanctuaries has recently been published by KLEIBL, *Iseion*. On the Isea in Rome and Beneventum, two important sites in Italy, cf. LEMBKE, *Iseum Campense*; QUACK, *Iseum Campense*; BÜLOW CLAUSEN, *Flavian Isea*. One of the most spectacular finds in recent years has been the discovery of a sanctuary

It emerges quite clearly from the case studies presented in this volume (and elsewhere) that the cults in question had no fixed doctrinal core or ‘theology’ which was then spread unaltered over long distances in time and space.⁴¹ Instead, their basic structures, rituals⁴² and outward appearance were constantly adapted to the needs and expectations of their followers in different parts of the Roman Empire.⁴³ In this context,

of Isis (Panthea/Régina) and Mater Magna at Mainz; cf. WITTEYER, Heiligtum; EAD., Rituelle Niederlegungen (and AE 2004, 1014–1023 = RICIS II 609/0501–0509).

³⁹ The architecture and infrastructure of Mithraea are extensively treated by A. HENSEN, in this volume pp. 384–412. For further studies on the setting and layout of Mithraic sanctuaries, cf. BECK, Rock-Cut Mithraea; SCHATZMANN, Topographie von Mithras-Heiligtümern; KLÖCKNER, Mithras; GORDON, Mithras-Heiligtümer. There is now a comparable analysis of the known sanctuaries of Jupiter Dolichenus: SCHWARZER, Heiligtümer.

⁴⁰ In the cult of Isis, Osirian rituals based on Egyptian models still played a central role in Roman sanctuaries (cf. QUACK, Iseum Campense; NAGEL, Ausbreitung des Isis-Kultes), and the *Isia*-festival with its celebration of the discovery of Osiris (*inventio Osiridis*) was integrated into the Roman calendar, see e.g. MALAISE, Conditions, 227; PERPILLOU-THOMAS, Fêtes d’Égypte, 94–100. Furthermore, derivatives of the Egyptian daily temple ritual seem to have been conducted in Isiac sanctuaries (according to some sources), cf. DUNAND, Culte d’Isis, 197–202; NAGEL, Kult und Ritual. Individual, local forms of cult practices can be observed, for instance, in the sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna at Mainz, cf. above n. 38. Various kinds of ritual definitely also played an important role in the cult of Mithras, but we don’t know very much about the details (and some of the more explicit information is conveyed by outsiders like Christians and thus remains at least partially dubious). In addition, we have to account for the fact that there seems to have been quite a lot of freedom for the leading figures within a given Mithraic community to shape the rituals according to their own views (cf. GORDON, Mithras-Heiligtümer, 217; and below n. 43 and 46). There is no doubt that the collective cultic meal celebrated in the Mithraea was of central importance for the followers of the god; cf. KANE, Mithraic Cult-Meal; HULTGÅRD, Repas cultuels. This observation has been confirmed by recent analyses of animal bones that were found in sanctuaries of Mithras (see above n. 14); they can show that particularly young pigs and poultry (especially cocks) were consumed. Rather problematic is the nature of the sacrifices that were performed within (and also outside?) the Mithraea, as our sources give no details on them. This is also true for a complex of rituals that is commonly labelled as ‘initiations’, although they are not described as such from an emic perspective; cf. GORDON, Ritual and Hierarchy, 258–266; ID., Mithraic Body; BREMMER, Mysteries, 125–138. A characteristic feature of Mithraic rituals is their strong connection to (or even a kind of re-enactment of) the mythical stories that had developed around the god; cf. BECK, Ritual, 145–149. They also often took the form of a dramatic or theatrical staging with effects of light and darkness (cf. GORDON, Viewing Mithraic Art, 241–244); the performative aspects of the cultic procedures (including processions of various groups, for which see the wall-paintings in the Mithraeum under S. Prisca at Rome: VERMASEREN/VAN ESSEN, Excavations) are thus quite obvious. In contrast, we know nearly nothing about the rituals that were performed by the worshippers of Jupiter Dolichenus; but the design of some of the sanctuaries seems to demonstrate that collective meals played an important role in this cult too (see SCHWARZER, Heiligtümer, 181 f.).

⁴¹ This statement is not undisputed, however; for a divergent view regarding the cult of Mithras, see BECK, Ritual, 158 (and n. 61: “I maintain that Mithraism did indeed have doctrinal norms [as I would prefer to call them] ...”), 171 f. But see also ID., Beck on Mithraism, XXII: “That Mithraism had anything like a systematic and coherent body of teaching, transmitted to the initiates as a necessary element of the mysteries or guarded by the Fathers as *arcana*, I no longer consider tenable”.

⁴² Cf. GORDON, Mithraic Body, 297, on the character of ritual complexes in the cult of Mithras: “my opinion is that initiatory tests were not standardized between temples, and that each Mithraic community devised its own forms of initiation with reference to certain ‘sacralized moments’ in the myth of Mithras”.

⁴³ See BEARD/NORTH/PRICE, Religions of Rome, 278; as well as the remarks by GORDON, Ritual and Hierarchy, 258 f., on Mithraism: “it may very well be that different Mithraic communities con-

it is important to keep in mind that these cults were ‘optional’ or ‘elective’.⁴⁴ People were not obliged to take part in them (as, for example, in the imperial cult), but could consciously decide to join in by selecting their preferred cult out of a broad range of religious choices. In addition, the adherents of these cults (especially those of Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus) were normally organized in rather small groups around a sanctuary with reduced dimensions, thus creating an ‘intimate’ atmosphere for the worshippers. Such ‘small group cults’ (*Gruppenreligionen*)⁴⁵ seem to have been especially open (and attractive) for religious innovation and appropriation which were initiated by creative individuals within these groups.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the religious phenomena we are dealing with – which might be labelled as ‘universal cults’ as they were present in many different regions of the Mediterranean – were also characterized by a certain degree of uniformity, which made them recognizable throughout the Roman Empire and created a sense of belonging (and membership) for their followers.⁴⁷ When looking at these cults from a broad perspective, we are therefore confronted both with a remarkable standardization of some important organizational,⁴⁸ ritual, architectural and

structed their own particular rituals in keeping with their understanding of the requirements. There would then be not one Mithraic ritual system but many, each presenting slightly different value commitments”; further ID., *Religious Options*, 398, on the specific form of ritual that has been revealed by the excavation of the Mithraeum at Tienen (see below n. 63): “[this is] one of the many indications of the extent to which the cult was adapted to local needs and usages”. But cf. also BECK, *Mithraism after ‘Mithraism since Franz Cumont’*, 6 f., 15 f.

⁴⁴ For the concept of ‘elective’ or ‘optional’ cults, see BEARD/NORTH/PRICE, *Religions of Rome*, 275; GORDON, *Religious Options*.

⁴⁵ The model of ‘small group cults’ has been developed in the contributions to RÜPKE, *Gruppenreligionen*; see esp. RÜPKE, *Integrationsgeschichten*.

⁴⁶ The idea that the specific structures within the ‘small group cults’ were shaped to a high degree by individual ‘religious entrepreneurs’ (or ‘mystagogues’, as he prefers to call them) has recently been put forward by GORDON, *Individuality* (see esp. 161f.: in this context “small scale innovation, re-interpretation and reflection were both inevitable and normal”; of special importance was “the power exercised by the mystagogue to construct religious experience as he ... deems appropriate”). Although such processes are not easily recognized in our sources, the rather specific setting and décor of many Mithraea (and the divergent ritual practices that seem to have been performed within them; see above n. 42–43) can best be explained by the initiative of individuals who were responsible for the conceptualization of a sanctuary and are sometimes explicitly attested in building or votive inscriptions: GORDON, *Mithras-Heiligtümer*, 213–215; ID., *Mithras-Forschung*, 241 f. On the (difficult) question of who might have been the institutionalized ‘leader(s)’ of Mithraic communities, see MITTHOF, *Vorstand der Kultgemeinden*.

⁴⁷ The relative homogeneity of the cults in question is stressed by J. ALVAR, in this volume pp. 26–28.

⁴⁸ A case in point is the system of ‘grades’ within the cult of Mithras (seven of them are attested by Hier. epist. 107, 2). Regardless of the question how the function of these grades might be interpreted (for divergent positions, see MERKELBACH, *Weihegrade*, and CLAUSS, *Grade*), it seems certain by now that they were established early in the development of the Roman cult of Mithras and that this system was geographically widespread (cf. GORDON, *Ritual and Hierarchy*, 248–253). Nevertheless, some of the grade-names are attested much more often than others, and we can also detect a degree of regional variety in these denominations, as is best demonstrated by the graffiti in the Mithraeum at Doura Europos (see FRANCIS, *Graffiti*; FRACKOWIAK, *Weihegrade*, 232 f.; BREMMER, *Mysteries*, 134).

iconographical elements (like the ‘icon’ of the tauroctony in the cult of Mithras),⁴⁹ and at the same time with a large range of variations, some of them presenting highly individual creations.⁵⁰ There was thus a constant tension between the poles of the ‘universal’ and the ‘particular’ (on the local level) within these cults.⁵¹

On the other hand, we have to recognize that besides using a global approach the specificity of each cult and its historical development should also get more attention. To give just one example: Looking at the veneration of Isis it has become apparent during the last years that there is a strong link between the Graeco-Roman form(s) of the cult and genuine Late Period Egyptian roots.⁵² Especially the demotic sources have proved to be of crucial importance in this respect. They have allowed us to connect the concept of Isis as a supreme deity much better to the situation in Egypt itself during the Late Period. Besides that, it has become increasingly clear that there were elaborate Egyptian mythological tales about the wars of the gods taking place mainly in Asia, and that the Greek accounts such as those written by Diodorus and Plutarch ultimately rely

⁴⁹ For the visual representation of the tauroctony in the cult of Mithras and its iconographic archetypes, see TURCAN, *Mithra tauroctone*; FARAONE, *Mithraic Bull-Wounding Scene*; BOSCHUNG, *Mithras*; and D. FRACKOWIAK, in this volume pp. 304–308.

⁵⁰ A good example for such a highly individual creation is a small Mithraic ‘plaque’ that was found in St. Albans (Verulamium in *Britannia*). It was fabricated in the later 2nd century AD by reusing and re-cutting a silver coin of the Augustan period. The image on the reverse was changed into an illustration of the rock-birth of Mithras; and two new legends were added, one (in Greek) saying *Mithras Oromasdēs / Phrēn*, the other (in Latin) dedicated to *D(eo) M(ithrae)* (CIMRM I 827 = RIB II 1, 2408.2). The direct identification of Mithras with the highest Persian and Zoroastrian god Oromasdes/Ahura Mazda is only found here in a Roman context, and this fact might point to the existence of small and rather ‘esoteric’ circles within the cult that consisted of well-educated individuals who developed fanciful speculations about the cosmological and ‘Persian’ nature of the god (cf. GORDON, *Mithras Helios*, 184f.; and also above n. 12). It might be added that *Phrēn* is likely to be a rendering of name of the Egyptian sun-god, see PEREA YÉBENES, *Demon mégico*; VON LIEVEN, *Soul of the sun*, 56; QUACK, *Zauber ohne Grenzen*, 195. The recourse to a specifically Egyptian form would enhance the impression that this plaque was produced in a highly learned esoteric circle. In some exceptionally well documented cases the initiative of individuals in spreading new religious ideas can even be demonstrated on the ground. One such person was Q. Axius Aelianus, equestrian *procurator* in *Dacia* around AD 235 (cf. PISO, *Fasti Provinciae Daciae*, 227–235 no. 102). He erected a number of votive inscriptions in his administrative headquarters at Sarmizegetusa, including one dedicated to Mithras *invictus*, Mars Camulus, Mercurius and Rosmerta (AE 1998, 1100). This is a rather peculiar combination, as Mithras is here addressed together with three Celtic gods which were particularly venerated in Northern Gaul. Aelianus seems to have encountered the worship of these gods during one of the previous posts in his career when he was *procurator rationis privatae per Belgicam et duas Germanias* (see CIL III 1456 = ILS 1371). The combination of Mithras with Celtic gods, especially Mercurius, is also quite typical for this region, especially for *Germania superior* (see below n. 63); and it is thus conceivable that Aelianus brought this idea with him when he came from Northern Gaul to *Dacia* – a good example for the transfer of religious concepts over quite a long distance by the action of a single individual.

⁵¹ For the model of the ‘universal’ (or the ‘general’) and the ‘particular’, see – with special reference to the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus – the contribution by M. L. DÉSZPA, in this volume pp. 167–172; cf. also KAIZER, *Oriental Cults*.

⁵² Cf. NAGEL, *Ausbreitung des Isis-Kultes*, who has also pointed out that in some Isiac sanctuaries in central Italy and North Africa a direct dependence from cultic communities in Egypt or Alexandria can be observed.

on them.⁵³ By contrast, in Mithraic studies there is a lively debate about the question whether the cult of Mithras was a more or less direct inheritance from the ancient Iran (as it was envisaged by Roman authors who tended to locate the origins of the cult somewhere in 'Persia' and even attributed the establishment of the cult to Zoroaster), perhaps transmitted or transformed by a group of *magi* in late Hellenistic Asia minor;⁵⁴ or whether it was in most parts a western 'construction' or 'invention' that had only occurred in the late 1st century AD in Italy.⁵⁵ This question is not really solvable in the current state of our knowledge, but it should at least be remarked that we have no firm evidence that might link the Roman cult of Mithras as we know it from the Flavian period onwards in a more or less direct way to its supposed ancient Persian roots – at this point we seem to be confronted with a situation quite different from the one which recent studies have delineated regarding the cult of Isis.⁵⁶ In the case of Jupiter Doli-

⁵³ See the references given above in n. 10. Unfortunately, as the studies of BOMMAS, Genese, and ID., Isis, Sarapis and Osiris demonstrate, there are still some modern scholars who seriously neglect the demotic sources when writing about the worship of Isis and Osiris in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

⁵⁴ The main problem with this model is the fact that the number of sanctuaries and monuments from the Eastern Mediterranean and especially from Asia minor (cf. also above n. 12) which can definitely be connected with the Roman cult of Mithras is exceedingly low (and some of this evidence is rather late). This general picture has not been altered in recent years despite some interesting new finds, above all from Roman Syria; cf. GORDON, Syrie.

⁵⁵ A good summary of this debate is presented by R. GORDON, in this volume pp. 413–420; for some other recent contributions, see BECK, Genesis; JACOBS, Herkunft; GORDON, Entstehung; WITSCHEL, Ursprünge; VERSLUYS, Orientalising Roman Gods, 248–250; LAHE, Mithra in Kleinasien; GORDON, Mithra(s) between Persia and Rome. In this context it should be noted that some Mithraea that have been claimed to be very early (i.e. to have been founded before the later 1st century AD) in studies on Mithraism have now been shown to be rather later or essentially undated; this is true for both the West and the East. See, for example, Nida/Heddernheim, Mithraea III and IV (dated by HULD-ZETSCHKE, Nida, to the late 1st century AD; but cf. the convincing refutation of this early chronology by GORDON, Roman Army, 392 f., 398 with n. 98); Mainz, 'Mithraeum am Ballplatz' (cf. HULD-ZETSCHKE, Mithraskult in Mainz, with the criticism presented by R. GORDON, Klio 92 [2010] 253–256); or the Mithraeum at Ad Enum/Mühlalt am Inn (in *Noricum*): the first phase of this sanctuary which was detected in the 1970s was attributed by its excavator to the late 1st century AD (GARBSCH, Mithraeum), but this hypothesis has now been corrected by STEIDL, Mithraeum, esp. 77, who would rather date the foundation of the Mithraeum to the mid-2nd century AD. For the situation in the East, see the two Mithraea in Doliche (Syria) which were first given a founding date in the late 1st century BC or the early 1st century AD by SCHÜTTE-MAISCHATZ/WINTER, Mithräen, and ID., Doliche, 79–187; but this date seems far too early, as GORDON, Mithras in Dolichê, has shown. An early date has also been proposed for the installation of a Mithraeum into the vaults of an administrative building near the harbor of Caesarea maritima (*Palaestina*; cf. BLAKELY, Caesarea Maritima), yet again this is rather doubtful; see PATRICH, *Caesarea Maritima*, 103, 217. In the current state of our evidence it thus remains true that the Roman cult of Mithras is not securely attested before the last quarter of the 1st century AD, i.e. the Flavian and Trajanic periods. See the acute statement of GORDON, Roman Army, 391: "So far from showing a clear trace from east to west, or radiating out from central Italy, the earliest archaeological/epigraphic evidence for the cult appears more or less simultaneously around 100 AD at several widely separated sites".

⁵⁶ As GORDON, Who Worshipped Mithras?, 462 (referring to Porph. antr. 6), has rightly observed: "Whereas the relation between homeland and periphery is epigraphically and archeologically transparent in the case of the other 'oriental religions', it is quite obscure in the case of Mithras. His homeland was indeed 'Persia', but this is most likely a disembodied, purely notional, locus,

chenus, the majority of scholars still believe in a more or less direct connection between the veneration of the god as we encounter it in many parts of the Roman Empire from the early 2nd century AD onwards and its (supposed) ‘homeland’ in Commagene, i.e. in the small town of Doliche to which the name of the god seems to refer and where a large sanctuary of the local deity has been excavated in recent years.⁵⁷ However, even in this case it is not certain whether we should really assume a straight and rapid ‘export’ of a local North Syrian weather god to the West or a rather more complex process of (re)creating a new religious phenomenon in different parts of the Empire.⁵⁸

We can thus observe some rather fundamental divergences between the cults treated in this volume. But there were also significant differences within the single cults, as their appearance and structure varied from region to region and sometimes even from place to place, as has already been remarked above.⁵⁹ For this reason, we also intend to trace these internal variations down to the local or even individual level, because we have to reckon with the possibility that a ‘universal’ cult like that of Isis and Serapis, although diffused throughout most parts of the Roman Empire, meant rather different things to people in different areas. For example, in a few regions of Greece the local temple of Serapis played a major role in the manumission of slaves,⁶⁰ whereas this aspect was quite unknown in most other areas. This is more likely to be linked to the specific socio-economic situation in certain places than to an overarching and specific connection between Serapis and a concept of ‘liberty’.⁶¹ With regard to Mithras, certain sources seem to indicate that the cult was enriched with divergent concepts, including some rather ‘intellectual’ ones.⁶² On the other hand, there is by now quite a lot of epigraphic and archaeological evidence especially from the north-western provinces of the Imperium Romanum demonstrating that the cult of Mithras was often embedded in local religious and ritual practices.⁶³ The latter observation raises the question of how

a land of caves, mountains, running water, flowers, where Zoroaster the mage could found a religion”.

⁵⁷ See above n. 15.

⁵⁸ For an alternative model regarding the development of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus presented in this volume by M. L. DÉSZPÁ, see above n. 32.

⁵⁹ Cf. also PRICE, *Homogénéité et diversité*; RIEGER, *Lokale Tradition*.

⁶⁰ See RICIS I, pp. 63–118.

⁶¹ VIDMAN, *Isis und Sarapis*, 24, has tried to explain these inscriptions by referring to a specific ‘Greek’ feature of Sarapis.

⁶² For divergent interpretations of central concepts which seem to have been current within the cult of Mithras, see Porph. abst. 4, 16, 1–4 (one of the most interesting *testimonia* on the cult, referring to the nearly unknown authors Euboulos and Pallas). Heavily debated is the question whether the Platonic versions of the Mithraic ‘ideology’ which turn up in some (literary) sources are genuine to the cult (and thus might represent some rather intellectual interpretations which could have been developed in certain small circles within the cult; cf. e.g. MERKELBACH, *Mithras*) or whether these were interpretations of outsiders not directly connected to the cult, as has been argued by TURCAN, *Mithras Platonius*, and FAUTH, *Plato mithriacus*. Cf. also GORDON, *Helios Mithras*, 180–189, on cosmological and other speculations with regard to Mithras (see further above n. 50).

⁶³ Three examples for this phenomenon are the prominent position of Mercurius (himself a version of an indigenous divinity) in some Mithraea in *Germania superior* (see HENSEN, *Mercurio Mithrae*); the insertion of Mithraic temples into the local sanctuaries of water gods in Northern Gaul (cf. SCHULTE, *Mithras in Gallien*); and the specific collective rituals (including a big feast for more than 100 people, thus superseding the number of the local Mithraic community considerably) con-

much ‘exoticism’ or ‘foreignness’ the adherents of these cults really wanted – or at least the majority of them, as we have seen that individuals or small groups were always capable of creating their own (textual or visual) conception of a specific god that could be highly original.⁶⁴ But with regard to a large part of our source material, especially the epigraphic attestations of these cults, it has to be stated that there is often hardly anything beyond the name of the deity itself that is substantially different from the ‘mainstream’ of Graeco-Roman votive offerings. How were the followers of ‘oriental cults’, then, affected by the fact that the god they venerated was supposed to have been imported from a distant region somewhere in the ‘East’?⁶⁵ And what did this mean in regions like *Pannonia* or *Germania* where the Greek and Roman gods were themselves ‘foreigners’, or at least foreign names imposed on or given to local deities?⁶⁶

This volume has originated in an international conference that was held at the *Internationales Wissenschaftsforum Heidelberg* (IWH) in November 2009. We have to apologize for the very long delay in publishing this book, which is entirely our fault, but we hope that the final result may compensate for the extended period of its production. We would like to thank the IWH for the hospitality during the conference as well as the Cluster of Excellence *Asia and Europe in a Global Context* of Heidelberg University for providing the necessary funds. In the process of editing we were supported by project member Darius Frackowiak, M. A., as well as by the following student assistants: Isabelle Diez, Lena Nüchter, Felix Schulte, Tim Wittenberg, Elena Hertel. Invaluable assistance in improving the English language in various papers was given by Elizabeth O’Keffee and especially by Richard Gordon; further help was provided by Rodney Ast. To all these persons and institutions we would like to offer our warmest thanks.

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nected to the Mithraeum at Tienen in *Germania inferior* (see MARTENS, Rethinking ‘Sacred Rubbish’; but also GASSNER, Grube). Cf. in general SPICKERMANN, *Mysteriengemeinde*; VAN ANDRINGA/VAN HAEPEREN, *Le Romain et l’étranger*; GORDON, *Roman Army*, 401 f.

⁶⁴ See above n. 50.

⁶⁵ On the ‘attraction of the exotic’, see WITSCHER, ‘Orientalische Kulte’, 33; GORDON, *Individuality*, 164 f. (and also above n. 18). VERSLUYS, *Orientalising Roman Gods*, 236, has stressed the importance of studying such ‘orientalising’ discourses: “Not because these cults were Oriental – indeed they were very much part of the Hellenistic and Roman systems in which they were functioning – but because they often were made Oriental in those contexts” (see further *ibid.*, 242 and 259). But cf. also NAGEL, *Ausbreitung des Isis-Kultes*, who has shown that authentic Egyptian objects were not used as mere exotic ‘décor’ in Iseum in Italy and elsewhere (see above n. 38) but were an integral part of the sanctuaries and can be interpreted as evidence for a profound knowledge of original Egyptian theology and cultic rites in these western contexts.

⁶⁶ On the so-called ‘*interpretatio Romana*’ (in itself a disputed concept), cf. the critical remarks of VAN ANDRINGA, *Dieux indigènes*.

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JAIME ALVAR

The ‘Romanization’ of ‘Oriental Cults’

Introduction*

This paper offers an overview of the religious phenomena known collectively as the ‘oriental cults’, with special regard to the recently intensified debate over the validity of this category. Although an association between ‘the decline of paganism’ and a growing ‘oriental influence’ had been a familiar *topos* at least since the late Enlightenment, it was Franz Cumont who in 1906 first developed a detailed account of the role allegedly played by cults from Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and Persia in the religious development of the Roman Empire in his book on “Les religions orientales dans l’Empire romain”. Despite considerable scepticism on its first appearance, and again in the 1930s, his scenario gradually acquired classic status as the dominant *grand récit* about the ‘decline’ of paganism and the ‘rise’ of Christianity.¹

Over the past four decades, however, criticism of Cumont’s scenario has become increasingly vocal. In a study devoted to the cult of Mithras published in 1975, Richard Gordon began the deconstruction of Cumont’s system, by showing that there was no good reason to believe in a substantial continuity between the Iranian god *Miθra* and the Roman cult of Mithras.² Since then, opinion has been divided, though the scales seem now to have tipped in favour of discontinuity.³ Gordon’s aim, however, was not so much to reject all of Cumont’s claims as to ask how the cult of Mithras might appear if we refer only to the empirical – primarily archaeological and epigraphical – evidence. But in the wake of this scepticism, a whole variety of criticisms have led to the rejection of virtually all of Cumont’s hypotheses not only about the cult of Mithras but of other religious phenomena as well.⁴

The work of an international group of scholars organized by Corinne Bonnet, Jörg Rüpke and Paolo Scarpi in the first decade of this century has developed this critique to the point at which Cumont’s tentative edifice has become unrecogniza-

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¹ My point of reference is the fourth edition of CUMONT, *Religions orientales*, published in 1929; now re-edited (in a fifth edition) by BONNET/VAN HAEPEREN, *Religions orientales*.

² GORDON, *Doctrines of Mithraism*. The Swedish Iranist Stig WIKANDER had already shown some of the weaknesses in Cumont’s account in 1950 (see WIKANDER, *Études*), but his work had little impact, since he claimed that the cult of Mithras must have been created in the Danube area.

³ The long-standing doyen of Mithraic Studies, Maarten J. VERMASEREN, for many years saw himself as Cumont’s intellectual heir. It was therefore particularly important that in 1980, apparently under the influence of Reinhold MERKELBACH, he began to argue in favour of the idea that the cult of Mithras was a new creation in Rome; see VERMASEREN, *Mithras*.

⁴ Cf. BECK, *Mithraism*; id., *Religion of the Mithras Cult*; LANCELLOTTI, *Attis*.

ble.⁵ The conclusion of their project was a conference held in 2006 at the Institut Historique Belge in Rome in order to celebrate the centenary of the publication of “*Les religions orientales*”.⁶ The present contribution is based on a paper that I published in Spanish in the Proceedings of that conference,⁷ explaining my reservations about the complete dismantling of the category ‘oriental cults’ as rather vaguely conceived by Cumont (though I make no attempt to defend his term ‘oriental *religions*'). My own account is considerably indebted to Cumont, while taking into account the most relevant recent criticisms. I persist in believing that his general taxonomy is correct and that it is upon the ruins of his scenario that we should construct a more effective framework.⁸ Like Cumont, I concentrate my attention on the western Mediterranean.

Generally speaking, the differences in detail between each of these cults have encouraged scholars not to make the effort to think globally about these religious phenomena but to focus on learned minutiae of limited import, on the assumption that hyper-specialized knowledge would relieve them of the need to think about wider issues. It is thus all too easy to follow the majority and ignore dissenting opinions. The result is the proliferation of highly technical publications uninterested in conceptual problems. On the other hand, work of this kind can help us define some basic features capable of sustaining a grouping similar to that established by Cumont a century ago. Consequently, I do not think that we have two different methodological tendencies here, namely Cumont versus the ‘moderns’, but can see them as complementary developments. I therefore believe that Cumont’s positions, based on the advances made by comparative religious studies at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, have not been completely invalidated.⁹ The major reservation here, obviously enough, is the historiographical background to the very term ‘oriental religions’, which has been brilliantly illuminated by Corinne Bonnet and Françoise van Haepere in their introduction to the fifth edition of “*Les religions orientales*” in 2006, as well as in Bonnet’s commentaries on Cumont’s correspondence.¹⁰

I would like to start by taking a critical look at one or two claims that appear in some of these recent publications. How far does the critique really extend? How plausible is the sharp rejection of the traditional claims made by academics Maria Grazia Lancellotti calls “nostalgic scholars”?¹¹ What are the consequences of

⁵ See, for example, the collective volume BONNET/RÜPKE/SCARPI, *Religions orientales*.

⁶ BONNET/PIRENNE-DELFORGE/PRAET, *Religions orientales*.

⁷ ALVAR, *Campo de ruinas*.

⁸ See also BONNET/PIRENNE-DELFORGE/PRAET, *Religions orientales*, 14: “On reconnaîtra à Franz Cumont le mérite d’avoir (...) forgé un savoir spécialisé sur lequel nous bâtissons le nôtre, quitte à en saper d’abord certains fondements”.

⁹ Cf. SMITH, *Drudgery Divine*.

¹⁰ BONNET/VAN HAEPEREN, *Introduction historiographique*. See esp. BONNET, *Grand atelier* and BONNET, *Religions orientales*; PRAET, *Franz Cumont*; Id., *Teleologie*; Id., *Symbolisme*; Id., *Oriental religions*. I am especially sympathetic to the approach briefly sketched in PAILLER, *Religions orientales*.

¹¹ LANCELLOTTI, *Attis*, 166: “a considerable number of nostalgic scholars continue to remain faithful to [Frazer’s obsolete pattern of the dying god]”.

abandoning our classificatory categories? I cite just a couple of examples. First of all, the editors of the Proceedings of the 2006 Rome conference, though they question the very concept of 'oriental religions', nevertheless continue to use the term, *without* inverted commas, in the title of the publication.¹² Again, in the online edition of the journal *Trivium*, Jörg Rüpke argues:¹³

Der Begriff der ‚orientalischen Religionen‘ entstammt dem kulturellen Milieu und dem Erkenntnisinteresse der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert. Mittlerweile orientiert sich die Erforschung der Diffusion ritueller Praktiken und religiöser Vorstellungen und ihrer Präsenz im griechisch-römischen Raum an Begriffen wie *Integration* oder *kulturellem Austausch* und verbindet sich mit Fragen nach *kulturellen* und *religiösen Identitäten* in einer multiethnischen wie multikulturellen Welt. Der Blick richtet sich auf *unterschiedliche Ebenen* wechselseitiger Durchdringung, Wahrnehmung und Erscheinungsbild solcher Kulte, auf *unterschiedliche Strategien* der Aneignung ebenso wie auf *beide Richtungen* des kulturellen Austauschs – von Ost nach West wie West nach Ost.

I subscribe to these words, but confess that it disconcerts me to see that, though the editors reject the concept, can nevertheless not avoid using it. It seems, then, that even those who reject the category continue to accept its existence. The problem however goes deeper than mere nomenclature. The very first sentences of the contribution by William van Andringa and Françoise van Haeperen to the Proceedings of the 2006 Rome conference volume make this quite clear:¹⁴

Les 'cultes orientaux' n'existent plus. Ces cultes, enfermés depuis longtemps dans une catégorie restrictive, reprennent (...) leur indépendance pour se disperser dans le foisonnement divin propre au polythéisme. Malgré la disparition de la catégorie des 'cultes orientaux', il reste encore un critère permettant de rassembler ces cultes entre eux: Isis, Sabazios, Magna Mater, Mithra, il s'agit chaque fois de cultes d'origine étrangère, de *sacra peregrina* introduits à diverses époques à Rome et dans les cités du monde romain, que les cultes aient été ou non reconnus officiellement lors de leur installation.

For me, however, the loose category *sacra peregrina* fails to do justice to the category Cumont marked out as 'oriental religions'. The titles that I have given to the two books in which I have developed my thinking concerning the 'oriental cults' make my position clear enough. The first, "Los Misterios: Religiones 'orientales' en el Imperio Romano", was published in 2001, in Spanish; the second, "Romanising Oriental Gods", was published in 2008, in English.¹⁵ My contribution to the present volume is based on these previous studies.

I am convinced that the terms in which a given concept is expressed are decisive for understanding the intellectual construction that lies behind it. It is therefore important to use the most appropriate terms. Refining the terminology used by his predecessors, Cumont created a clear and precise designation – in the absence of an ancient term – for a group of religious phenomena that in his view were sufficiently

¹² BONNET/PIRENNE-DELFORGE/PRAET, Religions orientales. More precisely, they conceive of Cumont as having invented "un signe conventionnel" that now requires modification if we are to construct a more satisfactory concept.

¹³ BONNET/RÜPKE, Einleitung.

¹⁴ VAN ANDRINGA/VAN HAEPEREN, Formes d'intégration, 23.

¹⁵ ALVAR, Misterios; Id., Oriental Gods.

similar to warrant such categorization. Though his paradigm was criticized in different ways already on publication of “Les religions orientales” (mainly by conservative Catholics) and again in the 1930s,¹⁶ it was generally accepted for nearly eighty years, until Ramsay MacMullen’s frontal assault in 1981 (at once taken up into Anglo-American scholarship), Aline Rousselle’s argument in 1989 that ‘the oriental religions’ are not so much a historical fact as a field of study invented by Cumont, and the reception into Classical Studies of Edward Said’s attack on western ‘Orientalism’.¹⁷ In my view, the recent attacks have mainly been directed against the expressions Cumont used, such as “religions”, “Levantins”, “missionnaires”, “dévotion sensuelle, colorée, et fanatique”, “incomparable seduction” rather than against his fundamental thesis.

How are we to decide whether, and how far, the religious practices identified by Cumont indeed amount to a unified phenomenon? Since the trend in research over the past few decades has been to deny any close connection between the cults named by Cumont, and instead to stress their singularity, I will here need to re-examine his concepts if I am to be able to argue for a slimmed-down version of his position, what we might call a ‘Cumont light’. My overall claim is that there are indeed sufficient common factors to allow me to defend a more or less solid, albeit no doubt still controversial, set. At the same time I am aware of the difficulty of generalising about all three (or four) cults in question: after all, one of them, that of Mater Magna, was officially admitted to the Roman *pantheon* already in 206 BC, received a temple on the Palatine, and was subject to official re-organisations in the Julio-Claudian and early Antonine periods; whereas the Isiac cults reached Rome in the early first century BC, but were subject to intermittent repression until the later Julio-Claudian period before the Flavian foundation of the *Iseum Campense*; in contrast, the cult of Mithras, unheard of before the late first century AD, remained a purely small-group phenomenon unnoticed by the elites who were of such importance in the formation of official local *panthea*. The regional patterns of distribution, membership, and local styles of these three major ‘oriental’ cults also differed quite markedly. But if I am to try and argue in favour of an overall perspective, I need to ignore many of these detailed historical differences.

Which Cults Are We to Include Among the ‘Oriental Religions’?

The first and basic issue is the selection of the deities whose cults seem to have been sufficiently elaborated and typologically similar to warrant grouping them together in this slimmed-down version of Cumont’s concept. No one now, for example, still defends Cumont’s decision to include astrology and magic in his scheme, which were mere remnants of the nineteenth-century discussion of

¹⁶ On the initial reception of “Les religions orientales”, see BONNET/VAN HAEPEREN, Introduction, xliv–lx; on the 1930s: *ibid.*, lxi–lxviii; BICKERMANN, Review of Cumont; SCHNEIDER, Grundlagen; NILSSON, Problems.

¹⁷ MACMULLEN, Paganism; ROUSSELLE, Transmission décalée. On the influence of Said in Classical Studies, see Burkert, ‘Orient’, 105 f; VERSLUYS, Orientalising Roman Gods, 237–239.

'religious decline'. As far as I can see, the only grouping that can now be defended is limited to Isis and the Isiac cults, Cybele and Attis, and Mithras. The cults of the other gods of oriental origin that established themselves, widely or regionally, in the Roman Empire, such as Jupiter Dolichenus, Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Yahweh, Sabazius, Men or *theos hypsistos*, did not share the same features, and therefore should be excluded from the grouping. For Cumont, the Syrian cults were important as a means of importing astral religion into the Graeco-Roman world, but they must be excluded from a new typology inasmuch as none of them shows the slightest evidence of having developed mysteries, which was otherwise a central criterion for him – indeed so central that he included an appendix on the Bacchic mysteries in the fourth edition of his book in 1929. His feeble justification for this step was that the latter acquired "un caractère à demi oriental", which no one now accepts.¹⁸

The reason for treating the cults of Isis and the Isiac cycle, Cybele and Attis, as well as Mithras as a coherent set of 'oriental' cults is that they alone developed the key features of initiation, mystery, salvation, mobility and universality to a point at which we may properly call them '(proto-)religions' in their own right.¹⁹ Even though these features appear in different forms in each case, and in different degrees, I think that they nevertheless merit being classified as 'mystery cults' whose central claim was otherworldly salvation for the individual initiate. I will discuss these criteria successively in the following five sections, and then move on to the more general problem of the historical situation of the 'oriental cults' in the Roman Empire.

'Oriental' Origins

Work on the 'oriental religions/cults' has been so intense that we cannot expect new theoretical insights or new hypotheses regarding the contents of these cults. All the concepts taken up here are thus very familiar, even if judgements about them differ. The first major issue concerns the term 'oriental' itself, which played such an important role in Cumont's construction. It is now generally agreed that these cults, as practised in the Roman Empire, seem to have very little or nothing to do with the forms of worship of the respective divinities in their homelands (which might be classified as the 'Orient'). Magna Mater was subjected to a lengthy process of domestication in Rome, and the cult was completely remodelled during the reigns of Claudius and Antoninus Pius.²⁰ Once the cult of Isis was appropriated outside Egypt it underwent extensive Hellenization, amplified by the creation of the god Serapis.²¹

¹⁸ CUMONT, *Religions orientales*⁴, 195–204 (citation on p. 195).

¹⁹ Although the early Jesus-movement in some ways fits with my model, I do not include it in my discussion here, since it would greatly increase the number of variables one has to take into account.

²⁰ Cf. ALVAR, *Escenografía*; BORGEAUD, *Mère*.

²¹ This is now the overwhelming consensus, particularly among specialists in the archaeological and epigraphic material, e.g. DUNAND, *Syncrétisme*; BRICAULT, *Isis*; KLEIBL, *Iseion*; SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Face of Isis*; VERSLUYS, *Orientalising Roman Gods*. DOUSA, *Imagining Isis*, is a useful summary of continuities and discontinuities in the praise tradition; cf. also KOCKELMANN, *Praising*

Worship of Mithras was subjected to a process of transformation too, both in Anatolia and in Rome, during the second half of the first century A.D., resulting in a cultic figure that had virtually nothing to do with Iranian *Miθra*, despite the occasional use of certain Iranian names and formulas.²² Therefore, in one way or another, and with greater or lesser intensity, this group of cults, which originated from different regions in Asia minor, the Near East and Egypt, went through a process of adaptation or transformation that enabled them to expand throughout the Hellenistic-Roman Mediterranean world. They thus ceased to be authentic ‘oriental religions’ and were transformed into something new and different.²³ I thus see them, with Richard Reitzenstein, as representing a Hellenistic form of oriental spirituality.²⁴

Since the gods adopted in the Mediterranean *koine* did not have the same characteristics or rites as in their original socio-religious contexts but were more or less profoundly altered in order to adapt to their new habitat, it is appropriate to mark a distance from Cumont’s construction by placing the term ‘oriental’ in inverted commas. This tactic, which I used in my first book, “Los Misterios”, is intended to mark the fact that the term refers primarily to the origin of the theonym, much less to the religious content.²⁵ I am not persuaded by Christoph Auffarth’s suggestion that we should abandon use of the term ‘oriental’ altogether on the grounds that it does not include all of the cults originating in the eastern part of the Empire, which are far too heterogeneous to be subsumed in a single category. Auffarth attempts to demonstrate his point by setting the introduction of the cult of Aphrodite/Venus in Rome against that of Magna Mater.²⁶

An den beiden Beispielen wird deutlich: Es gibt Kulte aus dem Orient, die man unter die O[rientalischen] R[eligionen] zählt, andere nicht. Weder die historische Herkunft noch die aktuelle Semantik erklärt, warum die Kategorie so eingeteilt ist. Die orientalischen Religionen/Kulte bilden kein Corpus einer klar definierbaren Gruppe von Religionen, die durch ihre Herkunft, ihre Sprache, ihre Praktiken untereinander gleiche und von den anderen griechisch-römischen Kulturen getrennte Merkmale ausgebildet haben.

In my opinion, it is more reasonable to use the term ‘oriental’ as just one of a bundle of features characteristic of a limited set of cults over a limited time-span rather than treat it in isolation and object that it then has no coherent referent.

the Goddess, on six newish Demotic ‘hymns’, who points out that “Egyptian hymnic material [for Isis] in Egypt is astonishingly scarce” (p. 1). But cf. also the papers by M.A. STADLER and J.F. QUACK, in this volume pp. 232–243 and 244–273.

²² Cf. CLAUS, Mithras; BECK, Mithraism; Id., Mysteries of Mithras.

²³ ALVAR, Marco ideológico.

²⁴ REITZENSTEIN, *Mysterienreligionen*, 94–96.

²⁵ In ALVAR, *Misterios*, I argued that ‘oriental religions’ and mystery cults are not equivalents. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Culti orientali*, 184, n. 9 misrepresents my position in claiming that I treat them as such).

²⁶ AUFFARTH, *Religio migrans*, 335.

Initiation and Mysteries

In my typology of the cults treated here as a group, it is crucial that they all seem to have had a mystery component.²⁷ For most scholars nowadays, exemplified by Walter Burkert,²⁸ the term 'mysteries' can only be used with regard to cults, or even individual rituals, within the context of the broader system designated 'Roman/civic religion'. However, the introduction of the term 'religions of Rome', by the authors of perhaps the most significant contribution to the topic in the past twenty years, encourages me to defend the claim that the 'oriental' cults to a degree fall outside that supposed 'system'.²⁹ As I argue below, taken individually these cults had the makings of a religion in which initiatory experience played a central role, but in historical and pragmatic terms they only achieved the status of cults.

In my two books on this subject, I regularly referred to the cults treated here as 'mysteries', following a well-established pattern in the relevant scholarship since Cumont.³⁰ Analysis of the sources by some of the most innovative recent research shows that terms corresponding to *mysteria* and *mystai* are only documented sporadically with regard to the 'oriental cults'.³¹ I have two comments on these observations. On the one hand, I would trace the scarcity of explicit evidence to the general precept of silence regarding the contents of the ritual, or revealing divine epiphanies. Such a requirement is explicitly documented in the cult of Isis and maybe inferred from the lack of explicit information deriving from the two other cults.³² In general, the prohibition concerned divulging details considered to belong

²⁷ Fully explicit is only v. 22 of the Kyme aretology (RICIS II 302/0204): ἐγὼ μύησεις ἀνθρώποις ἐπέδει[ι]ξα ("I have revealed initiations to mankind"); same reading of the last word in the fragmentary version from Thessalonica, though the remainder is lost (RICIS I 113/0545); cf. the version from Ios v. 22, reading ἀνεδει[ι]ξα (RICIS I 202/1101). But already in the much earlier version in verse from Maroneia/Thrace (late 2nd century BC), we read that together with Hermes Isis invented writing, and among these texts ἃ μὲν ἱερὰ τοῖς μύσταις ("the sacred ones for the initiates ...") (RICIS I 114/0202, l. 23). On the significance of this shift of meaning of ἱερὰ from "hieroglyphs" to "sacred texts", see GRANDJEAN, *Nouvelle arétologie*, 76–78. The reference to Isis celebrating with male and female members of Bacchic *thiasoi* in the Chalcis version (RICIS I 104/0206, l. 8) surely points in the same direction.

²⁸ BURKERT, *Mystery Cults*. The author compares the initiation experience to that experienced by pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela (p. 10).

²⁹ BEARD/NORTH/PRICE, *Religions of Rome*. Although I have some sympathy with this tactic, I understand 'religion' in the Marxist sense as the entire symbolic system of a given ideological superstructure. From that point of view, the expression 'Roman religion' includes all the religious practices performed within the socio-cultural entity named 'Rome' together with its extensions over time and space in the furtherance of Empire.

³⁰ See esp. TURCHI, *Religioni misteriosofiche*; PETTAZZONI, *Misteri*; BIANCHI/VERMASEREN, *Soteriologia*; TURCAN, *Cultes orientales*; SCARPI, *Religioni dei misteri* I, xi–li; BOWDEN, *Mystery Cults*; and most recently BREMMER, *Initiation*.

³¹ See esp. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects*; Ead., *Misteri e culti orientali*. Cf. also the paper by J. STEINHAEUER, in this volume pp. 47–78.

³² Apul. met. 11, 23, 5: *dicerem si dicere liceret, cognosceres si licet audire* ("I would tell you if it were permitted to tell; you would learn if it were permitted to hear"; tr. J.A. HANSON). There may be a deliberate teasing of the audience here ("You would like to know, wouldn't you?"), but the joke depends on there being a widespread belief that such an oath of secrecy was required, cf. TILG, *Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, 101.

to the essence of the ritual proceedings.³³ Secondly, it is by no means necessary to suppose that initiation was the sole means of joining or becoming a member of these cults. There is no indisputable evidence that membership in the 'oriental cults' necessarily involved initiation into mysteries.³⁴ The evidence of Book 11 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* has wrongly been taken as paradigmatic and to be generalised.³⁵ It is far from certain that the tests to gain access to the different Mithraic grades were interpreted as specifically initiatory rites.³⁶ There is also no reason, in my view, to interpret the rites of *taurobolium* and *criobolium* in the cult of the Mater Magna as an initiation even if it was surely conceived as a mystery.³⁷

I have no difficulty in allowing that degrees of personal involvement could have been very varied.³⁸ Similarly, patrons could pay for a small temple or chapel to be constructed wherever they desired, without this necessarily implying the existence of an entire cultic community of *mystai*. There may have been many places of worship where there was no comprehensive or 'normative' form of cult. There is a good example at Panóias in *Hispania citerior*, where initiatory rites may well have been celebrated in a large open-air shrine dedicated to Serapis during the residence there of the senator C. Calpurnius Rufinus (late second/early third century AD); however, it is highly unlikely that in this remote community in modern Portugal there was anyone capable of fully understanding the inscriptions, particularly those in Greek, one of which explicitly mentions *mysteria*.³⁹

On the other hand, it would be going too far to claim that a given cult was different in each place, i.e. that there simply was no 'standard' practice. If that were the case, it would not have been possible to recognize fellow-members of a cult, such as that of Isis or of Mithras, in places located at different extremes of the Empire. Indeed, the relative iconographic homogeneity within these cults induces me to think quite the opposite. The difference between Alexandria and Panóias does not imply that there was a continuum of local versions of the cult (meaning we

³³ BORGEAUD, *Mystères*, 134 reminds us of the basic meaning of *μύειν*, i.e. keeping one's mouth (and eyes) closed.

³⁴ BORGEAUD, *Mystères*, 132, explicitly differentiates between mysteries and initiation.

³⁵ Apul. met. 11, 19–30; cf. ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 336–344. On the perennially contentious issue of Isiac mysteries, the consensus view among Classicists is well represented by BURKERT, *Mysterien der Ägypter*, 16: "[Die Griechen] haben dies [d.h. ägyptische Rituale usw.] aus der eigenen Optik gesehen, und was sie übernahmen, haben sie ganz den eigenen Formen angepasst, eben als *mysteria*". QUACK, *Königsweihe*, suggests a possible model of 'democratisation' of royal initiation that might account for what little is known of Graeco-Roman Isiac initiations. No one doubts that there was a degree of direct transmission of information and even practices (see e.g. MOORMAN, *Temple of Isis*); the central problem is the limits of legitimate inference and generalisation to be drawn from the tricky major 'source' we have, i.e. Book 11 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

³⁶ ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 365–381.

³⁷ BORGEAUD, *Mère de Dieux*, 156–168; ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 261–276.

³⁸ BURKERT, *Mystery Cults*, 21.

³⁹ CIL II 2394 = AE 1997, 860, cf. ALVAR/MUÑIZ, *Cultes égyptiens*, 91 f.; KLEIBL, *Iseion*, 296–299 Kat.-Nr. 37; ALVAR, *Cultos egipcios*, 138–146 nos. 192–198. For a reconstruction of the ritual itinerary, see the full account by ALFÖLDY, *Mysterien*.

would have to speak of 'the *cults* of Isis'). They simply mean that conditions on the ground imposed different ritual practices, all belonging to the same cult. Calpurnius Rufinus did not invent a local version of the cult of Serapis at Panóias, he just applied standard practice to a pre-existing sanctuary (though admittedly we do not have much information on that matter).

To summarize my argument, what characterizes these cults in terms of ritual practice is the existence of a concept of 'mystery'. Mysteries do not require to have been celebrated everywhere, and, given their expense, emphasised several times by Lucius in Apuleius, must anyway have remained relatively uncommon. Nor can we say that the precise contents of such celebrations were everywhere the same in each 'oriental cult'. For my typology, it is enough to notice that the idea and practice were available within their framework. We can also allow that mystery celebrations became more common during the Principate, even to the point of connoting a privileged religious 'club', just as we know that initiatory experience (albeit mainly relating to Eleusis) became a significant theme in the Second Sophistic.⁴⁰

The Issue of 'Salvation'

The third conceptual element of my typology is the capacity of the gods of the mysteries to grant salvation. The traditional claim has been that this salvation mainly concerned the afterlife. Common terms for these cults are accordingly 'soteriological religions' or 'religions of salvation'.⁴¹ The topic has for a considerable time been hotly debated. The dominant view in the field is probably now that 'salvation' was both contingent and (mainly) this-worldly, and thus had little or nothing to do with *post mortem* expectations.⁴² Only a minority still believes that it also implied some sort of life after death.⁴³ Some have even inverted the Apologetic trope of the diabolic precedent and argued that the 'oriental cults' may have borrowed from Christianity.⁴⁴ I must here declare for the minority. I am convinced that the Isiac cults offered their followers not only success in life on earth but also a blessed afterlife. Here the evidence of book 11 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* – even if it is a sort of pastiche of second-century mystery-discourse – is surely decisive.⁴⁵ Regarding Mithras, we have the explicit evidence of Celsus, and of Euboulos and Pallas (cited by Porphyry), that souls were thought to descend to earth at birth and ascend back to heaven at death.⁴⁶ Moreover, the

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. VERSNEL, *Römische Religion*, 61–65; BELAYCHE, *Évolution*, 35–39.

⁴¹ ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 122–142; Id., Pablo; SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Après Lux Perpetua*, 149.

⁴² The most influential voice here has been that of Giulia SFAMENI GASPARRO, e.g. in *Soteriology; and Strategie di salvezza*.

⁴³ E.g. BRENN, *After-Life*.

⁴⁴ The diabolic precedent resurfaces in the debates between Catholic and Protestant scholars of the mysteries: ALVAR/MARTÍNEZ MAZA, *Controversia*.

⁴⁵ ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 123 f.

⁴⁶ Celsus ap. Orig. Cels. 6, 22; Euboulos and Pallas: Porph. antr. 6; 24; abstin. 4, 16, 1–6. VERMASEREN's reading of l. 14 at S. Prisca: *et nos servasti eternali sanguine fuso* (VERMASEREN/VAN ESSEN, *Excavations*, 217–221) has proved unverifiable: PANCIERA, *Materiale epigrafico*, 103 note**

linking of the grade-structure to a planetary system at the mithraeum under S. Prisca in Rome and the Mitreo di Felicissimo in Ostia strongly suggests belief in a soul-journey at the end of which the initiates expected to enter the gates of heaven.⁴⁷ As for the Phrygian cult, the joyous festival on the 25th of March, which in the fourth century AD acquired the name *Hilaria* and is explicitly said to have celebrated Attis' resurrection as a model for his followers, may well have been understood in the same manner much earlier.⁴⁸

This salvation needed to be earned not just by initiation but by pain and suffering. Firmicus Maternus transmits two lines of Greek supposedly spoken by a priest to worshippers after a night of mourning over an 'idol', perhaps representing Attis: θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσωσμένου / ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σῶτήρια ("Mystai be of good courage! – the god has been saved. For (now) we shall be released from our travail").⁴⁹ The connection between the dead god now 'saved' and the 'salvation' of the initiates suggests to me that the latter primarily connotes *post mortem* expectations and that the *ponoi* refers to this vale of tears where we are condemned to suffer. As for Mithraism, we can cite the text from the mithraeum of Santa Prisca which seems to refer to the initiate taking on the "commandments of the gods" (*atque perlata humeris ... m[a]xima divum*);⁵⁰ or the Emperor Julian's reference to Mithras imposing "commandments" on the initiated: if they keep to them, they will have a safe anchor-cable in this life and when the times comes to depart, "good hopes (for the future life) with a well-disposed god as your guide" (μετὰ τῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος ἡγεμόνα θεὸν εὐμενῆ καθιστάς).⁵¹ Already in the mid-

(continuing on to p. 105); for what could still be seen after the cleaning carried out by the Soprintendenza in 1977, see ANON., *Iscrizione metriche*, pl. XXXII (l. 2).

⁴⁷ S. Prisca, 'Procession of the Seven Grades': VERMASEREN/VAN ESSEN, *Excavations*, 155–160 (upper layer) and 167–169 (lower layer). One should however note that the texts simply state that each grade is to be "protected" (*sub tutela*) by a planet, and that the planets are not in any recognised order of distance from the earth. Mitreo di Felicissimo (Ostia, reg. V, ins. IX.1): BECATTI, *Mitrei*, 105–112 with pl. XXIV.1–XXV. In his paper of 1996, Roger BECK accepted the idea of an afterlife (BECK, *Mystery Religions*, 132), but now argues in favour of an imaginary ascent in this life; see e.g. BECK, *Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 43, 83 f., etc.

⁴⁸ Firm. err. 3, 1–2, with TURCAN, *Firmicus Maternus*, 191; cf. Macr. Sat. 1, 21. VERMASEREN, *Cybele and Attis*, 119–123, is still one of the best discussions of the topic. For a more detailed analysis of belief in the afterlife in the Phrygian cults, see ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 136–142.

⁴⁹ Firm. err. 22, 1. These lines can be understood in several different ways, however, depending on one's conception of 'mysteries'. TURCAN, *Firmicus Maternus*, 129, translates: "Soyez confiants, ô mystes: le dieu est sauvé / et pour nous le salut sortira de nos peines"; SCARPI, *Religioni dei misteri II*, 293 CA B10: "Coraggio, iniziati, poiché il dio è stato salvato: anche per noi ci sarà salvezza dagli affanni"; SANZI, *Firmico Materno*, 151: "Non temete iniziati del dio che è stato salvato, infatti per noi ci sarà salvezza dai mali".

⁵⁰ VERMASEREN/VAN ESSEN, *Excavations*, 204 f., l. 9. VERMASEREN's reading *t[ul]i[-]* between *humeris* and *maxima* is extremely doubtful, and therefore it is not clear as to whether the utterance is that of a worshipper or Mithras; cf. ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 154 n. 40.

⁵¹ Iul. or. 10 [Caes.] 336C (= 2, 2, 71 LACOMBRADÉ): (Hermes speaking): δέδωκα τὸν πατέρα Μίθραν ἐπιγνῶναι· σὺ δὲ αὐτοῦ τῶν ἐντολῶν ἔχου ... ("I have granted you to know Father Mithras; keep his commandments and you will have an anchor-cable ..."). The recent commentators agree that the reference here is to the promises of the mysteries: ROSEN, *Julian*, 323, and BRINGMANN, *Kaiser Julian*, 147 think Julian must (recently) have been initiated; even SMITH, *Julian's Gods*, 163, who argues that

second century AD, Justin the Martyr speaks of instructions for keeping to moral standards (*dikaioopraxia*) within the cult.⁵²

Another topic on which I disagree with recent trends of scholarship is the issue of 'dying and rising gods'.⁵³ Attis and Osiris are surely not mere personifications of the lifecycle of plants; but I am inclined to allow the possibility that some adherents may have understood them in these terms. After all, Herodotus had already identified Osiris with Dionysus,⁵⁴ and Diodorus attributes some of Dionysus' exploits to Osiris.⁵⁵ In turn, Isis is identified with Demeter.⁵⁶ One of the themes of Plutarch's *De Iside* is that the Egyptian mysteries and the Eleusinian mysteries are parallel to one another.⁵⁷ The parallelism between Attis and the crop-cycle is explicit in later texts.⁵⁸ In the case of Mithras, however, we can hardly define the tauroctony as a reference to the annual cycle of crops, and anyway that should refer to the bull and not to the god.⁵⁹

In the light of all this, I accept that the 'oriental cults' discussed here at least sometimes required the individual involved in them to pass an initiatory rite in order to become a formal member. It would also be acceptable to think that this initiatory rite required a certain preparation and that only the priests were able to decide who was to be chosen, and the moment at which the initiation was to be carried out. Initiates were forbidden to divulge knowledge of the mystery. At the same time, they obtained this-worldly benefits and the possibility of a blessed *post mortem* life, provided that they had lived in accordance with some clearly-established moral guidelines. To my mind, this promise was the most appealing aspect of going through the initiation process.

Julian's Hymn to the Sun draws on the Chaldaean Oracles, thinks he is here alluding to Mithraism as known to us. The idea of a god as an anchor-cable is however Platonic: Plat. leg. 10, 893B 3–4.

⁵² Iust. Mart. dial. tryph. 70, 1.

⁵³ It was long believed that J.Z. SMITH, *Dying and Rising Gods*, and M.S. SMITH, *Death*, had definitively shown that this motif was based simply on a misinterpretation of ancient Near-Eastern sources. The question has been re-opened by METTIGER's excellent monograph, *Riddle of Resurrection*. A good overview of the debate is to be found in BONNET, *Mort des hommes*.

⁵⁴ Hdt. 2, 42, 2; 2, 144, 2.

⁵⁵ Diod. 1, 14–18. As GRIFFITHS, *De Iside*, 56, 429 f. observes, Plutarch explicitly states (Is. 13 [356A–B]; cf. ibid. 35 [364D–365A]) that the achievements of Osiris explain why the Greeks identified him with Dionysus; see also FROIDEFOND, *Isis et Osiris*, 67–92. Ancient sources on this topic are collected by MERKELBACH, *Isis Regina*, 37–55.

⁵⁶ Diod. 1, 25, 1; 96, 5.

⁵⁷ Plut. Is. 13 (356A–B) with GRIFFITHS, *De Iside*, 309. Much more important is the claim that ancient wisdom underlies both traditions; cf. VAN NUFFELEN, *Rethinking the Gods*, 55–71.

⁵⁸ E.g. in Firm. err. 3, 3: *amare terram volunt fruges, Attin vero hoc ipsum volunt esse quod ex frugibus nascitur, poenam autem quam sustinuit hoc volunt esse quod falce messor maturis frugibus facit* ("they claim that the earth [i.e. Cybele] loves grain [i.e. Attis], they claim that this Attis is himself the fruit of the grain, and the punishment he undergoes is what the harvester does to the ripe grain with his sickle"); see also Hippol. ref. 5, 9, 8–9, which cites the Naassene hymn in which Attis is called "harvested green ear of grain", with LANCELOTTI, *Attis*, 123–125, 137–142. Porphyry associated Attis with the spring flowers, Adonis with the ripe grain (frg. 358 SMITH).

⁵⁹ ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 93–106.

Mobility

Although in important respects I adhere to Cumont's model, I accept that recent work has successfully reformulated many of the problems in question. By criticising the conceptual foundations of Cumont's orientalism, Hegelianism, fixation on theology, occlusion of developments in Greece proper, worries about the 'rise of Christianity', the way has been cleared for re-conceptualising the entire problem of the 'oriental cults'. Bonnet and Rüpke have crisply summarised the new situation:⁶⁰

So ist eine Tendenz zu religiöser Differenzierung und ein starker Drang zum Universalismus festzustellen, die sich parallel zueinander und auch ineinandergreifend enorm entwickelten.

'Differentiation' here involves two developments in the later Hellenistic and then the Roman world, namely the increase in the availability and diversity of religious information and thus new options for practice and institutionalisation, and the corresponding growth in the opportunities open to religious specialists, whether part-time or full-time.⁶¹ The increase in information had a great deal to do with the creation of the Hellenistic kingdoms in the aftermath of Alexander's conquests, the intensification of contacts with the lands of the former Achaemenid Empire, the translation of indigenous texts and traditions into Greek, and the opportunities this provided – the story of the involvement of Timotheus, probably an Eleusinian Eumolpid, and the Egyptian priest Manetho in the development of the new god Osarapis provides a perfect illustration of the possibilities now opening up.⁶² Another aspect of differentiation is the development of small-group religious practice, which largely depended on the enthusiasm and commitment of individuals with certain resources behind them yet outside the group able to command access to more prestigious civic priesthoods to start up and continue such efforts.⁶³ As for the western Mediterranean, we should think not so much of what Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have called the 'religion of the extractive landscape' as of the long-term religious effects of municipalisation and provincial organisation imposed by the political centre, and the role of city and village elites in reworking local *panthea*.⁶⁴

'Universalization' on the other hand denotes the process of consciously claiming the general applicability of religious concepts in place of the traditional focus upon the individual *polis* or *civitas*. The specifically local character of gods had been stressed in the Archaic and Classical periods as well as in early Hellenistic times. In the later Hellenistic period, but even more under the Roman Empire these locally-defined gods continued to be worshipped, but now some other gods that were not linked to one specific place proved ideal for small-group religion, since they could

⁶⁰ BONNET/RÜPKE, Einleitung.

⁶¹ Cf. RÜPKE, Charismatics or Professionals?; Id., Organisationsmuster.

⁶² Tac. hist. 4, 83–84; Plut. Is. 28 (361F–362B), with GRIFFITHS, *De Iside*, 393–401; FRASER, *Alexandria I*, 200, 246–254 (on Manetho, see *ibid.* 505–511); MOYER, *Limits*, 84–141.

⁶³ On this topic, cf. EGELHAAF-GAISER, Kulträume; EGELHAAF-GAISER/SCHÄFER, Religiöse Vereine; GUTSFELD/KOCH, Vereine; RÜPKE, Gruppenreligionen; STEINHÄUER, Religious Associations.

⁶⁴ HORDEN/PURCELL, *Corrupting Sea*, 429–432 and SCHEID, *Aspects religieuses*.

be adapted to local conditions while at the same time retaining a certain overall coherence. If Asclepius was the forerunner of this development, and offshoots from, imitations of or references to the cults at Eleusis were fairly widespread in southern Greece in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (and even, in the later Antonine period, adapted as far afield as Abonouteichos by Alexander, the founder of the cult of Glykon), the great beneficiary of this new religious landscape surely was the cult of Dionysus.⁶⁵ The 'oriental gods' played in the same league: their cults were established with their own prerogatives and vows wherever there were religious specialists prepared to meet – and generate – specific demand. It is important to note that universalist tendencies were compatible with local particularities, as is, for example, clear from the structural and decorative differences between the temples and shrines of the Egyptian gods dispersed throughout the Empire.⁶⁶ All this has been modelled by Christoph Auffarth under the general heading of '*religio migrans*', which he rightly understands as the result not just of the mobility of persons and ideas but also of a shift in the conception of divinity, which we may call 'symbolic mobility'.⁶⁷

The contribution of migrant individuals to the dissemination of the 'oriental cults' has long been the subject of debate. Already in the late nineteenth century it was assumed that merchants from the eastern Mediterranean played a major role in this process, which seemed to be supported by the archaeological discoveries on the island of Delos.⁶⁸ The implication was that the 'oriental cults' were mainly a phenomenon of cities on the coast rather than in the interior. Dirk Steuernagel has recently denied this assumption, at least with regard to the cases of Ostia and Puteoli: the cults of these gods in the ports were not necessarily established earlier than those in the interior.⁶⁹ In the case of Isis and Serapis, even where the cult came directly from Alexandria, the archaeological evidence does not necessarily suggest typical Egyptian features. In the case of the late-Republican Serapeum of Ampurias (Temple M) in *Hispania citerior*, for example, almost nothing evokes Egypt: the statues of Serapis, Isis and Harpocrates are completely Greek in style.⁷⁰ Yet Νουμᾶς/Numa son of Numenius, who paid for the extensions of the sanctuary in Phase II (mid first century BC), describes himself in his bilingual inscription as an

⁶⁵ Eleusis: GRAF, Lesser Mysteries; JOST, Mystery Cults 151–155. Dionysus: JACCOTTET, Choisir Dionysos.

⁶⁶ See now the inventory assembled by KLEIBL, *Iseion*, cf. also BRICAULT, Atlas.

⁶⁷ AUFFARTH, *Religio migrans*; cf. Auffarth/Baslez/Ribichini, *Appréhender les religions*, 57–62. The model distinguishes between two categories, which seem often to correspond to temporal phases: the religion of migrants (*religio migrantium*) and a mobile religion (*religio translata*). See also RÜPKE, 'Reichsreligion'?

⁶⁸ ROUSSEL, Cultes égyptiens.

⁶⁹ STEUERNAGEL, *Kult und Alltag*; Id., *Hafenstädte*.

⁷⁰ ALVAR/MUÑIZ, Cultes égyptiens, 70–72; ALVAR, *Cultos egipcios*, 95–101 nos. 125–138; KLEIBL, *Iseion*, 299–301 Kat.-Nr. 38; PUCCIO, *Cultes isiaques*. The sole Egyptian items at Ampurias are a fragmentary relief of a sphinx and two broken lamps, one showing Harpocrates with a *cornucopia*, the other Anubis with his palm-frond and *caduceus* (ALVAR, *Cultos egipcios* nos. 130, 135/36).

Alexandrian.⁷¹ It is true that in some *Isea*, such as those in Pompeii and Beneventum, and also in the *Iseum Campense* in Rome, a great deal of effort was made to evoke Egypt,⁷² but generally speaking both in North Africa and in the western Roman Empire, such efforts, if they were made at all, were secondary, and did not extend to the permanent architecture. The cult-statues, especially of Isis, were deliberately Hellenized. Much the same is true of the Phrygian cults and Mithraism. Where 'oriental' themes were stressed, they functioned primarily as signs to arouse attention and to satisfy the curiosity of the public.

(Proto-)Religions?

In my books on this theme, I argued that the cults discussed here were potentially capable of becoming full-fledged religions, even though in practical terms they remained dependent upon the major institutions of paganism, and were prevented from achieving their potential by the fourth-century imperial legislation culminating in the decrees of Theodosius I over the period 392–95 AD.⁷³ I start from Clifford Geertz's well-known definition of religion:⁷⁴

[Religion is] a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in [human beings] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic.

I understand this to imply that actual religions constitute cultural systems that can devolve into diverse sub-systems that reflect at the level of the *imaginaire* the real conditions of existence of specific social groups. Each such group orders the world into meaningful but also negotiable patterns specific to itself. This knowledge is passed on, through the process of social integration, to every member of the community, each of whom in turn appropriates it, thereby avoiding the need for each individual member to provide a personal explanation for every element that

⁷¹ CIL II 6185 = AE 1991, 1116 = RICIS II 603/0701 (with commentary); the restorations are to some extent conjectural: ALVAR, *Cultos egipcios* 98–100 no. 133. This means that Numas cannot be directly compared to the priest Apollonius from Memphis whose grandson built *Serapeum A* on Delos: the latter explicitly says that his grandfather simply practised the cult privately when he arrived on the island in the early third century BC (IG XI 4, 1299, ll 2–6 = LONGO, *Aretalogie*, 106–116 no. 63 = TOTTI, *Textes*, 25–28 no. 11 = RICIS I 202/0101).

⁷² Pompeii: MOORMAN, *Temple*; KLEIBL, *Iseion*, 277–286 Kat.-Nr. 29; cf. also the paper by F. SARAGOZA, in this volume pp. 372–383. Beneventum (where the temples themselves have not been scientifically excavated): MÜLLER, *Isiskult*; MALAISE, *Inventaire*, 294–305. *Iseum Campense*: MALAISE, *Inventaire*, 187–215; LEMBKE, *Iseum Campense*; with the comments of QUACK, *Iseum Campense*, who attempts to show that the inventory of the northern complex, so far as it survives, is largely consistent with Egyptian norms.

⁷³ ALVAR, *Misterios*; cf. Id., *Oriental Gods*, 4–6.

⁷⁴ GEERTZ, *Cultural System*, 4. Roger BECK explicitly invokes GEERTZ as a major inspiration in his analysis of Mithraism: BECK, *Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 67–72.

crops up in that symbolic system. The practical aspect of this process is Bourdieu's 'habitus', knowing how to act in a wide range of pragmatic situations.

Apart from institutions of various kinds, mythic discourse is a major means of transmitting such cultural patterns of meaning. The sheer diversity of this discourse constitutes a highly flexible interface between lived experience and cultural expectations. It provides a usable grid of symbolic resources, responsive to historical change, for imposing meaning on reality. Though many of these resources are indirect, myth often asserts a distinguishable ethical norm.⁷⁵ There are many ways of conceptualising myth.⁷⁶ Insofar as it composes a coherent symbolic system for a society, I see its crucial contribution as offering (a) an account of the basic conditions of production and reproduction of the social system;⁷⁷ (b) the nature of the relationship between the divine order and human life; and (c) a sketch of the eschatological system. These three spheres compose the subsystem of beliefs that, together with values or ethical norms (whether legally enforceable or not) as well as rituals, constitute the 'religious system'.

What I want to suggest is that the 'oriental cults', given that they centred their appeal on an ambitious mythical narrative that attempted to encompass all three of spheres named above and explicitly wove them into a single way of representing the world for adherents, were implicitly capable of creating their own distinctive religious cultures. Precisely inasmuch as they instituted a coherent set of beliefs, values and ritual practices largely independent of the dominant mythological schemes of Graeco-Roman civic cult, it is tempting to see them as potential loose cannons that one day might have broken free of the Graeco-Roman 'inherited conglomerate'.⁷⁸ In this connection it is interesting to note the evidence for occasional co-operations or 'joint-ventures', particularly between the Isiac and the Phrygian cults.⁷⁹

Marginality and Integration in Tension

It seems clear that different social groups responded in different ways to the stimuli derived from the presence of the new religions. My starting point is the conviction that the mystery cults of the 'oriental gods' were a Hellenistic-Roman re-creation. This was the most important step – first, the Hellenization, and then the Romanization process. During the process of their organization in the Mediterranean, outside of their original socio-religious contexts, these cults managed to maintain over a longer period a significant ambiguity: on the one hand, attractive exoticism, and on the other, assimilation into the cultural patterns of the Roman Empire. This ambiguity enabled them to gain followers, and to integrate themselves into new social environments. They thus took advantage of the open

⁷⁵ I discuss this at somewhat greater length in ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 17–23.

⁷⁶ Cf., for example, MOHN, *Mythostheorien* and CSAPO, *Theories*.

⁷⁷ GOTHÓNI/PENTIKÄINEN, *Mythology*; CÈBE, *Chaos et cosmos*.

⁷⁸ ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, 21.

⁷⁹ For some examples, see GASPARINI, *Palaestra*; WITTEYER, *Rituelle Niederlegungen*.

‘religious market’ within the Roman Empire.⁸⁰ Though it has been rejected by some scholars, this concept seems to me an useful shorthand for a complex process of de-traditionalisation of religious choice in urban environments, the development of elective cults, and individual initiatives in elaborating such offers on the supply side. In order to get followers to commit themselves to the new sanctuaries it was necessary to offer them solutions to spiritual anxieties by means of a comprehensible language and a degree of exoticism. The variable intensity of such ‘orientalism’ was simply a matter of group strategy. In the Iberian peninsula, for example, there is no trace of exoticism in the architectonic elements of the four confirmed Isiac sanctuaries that have been excavated.⁸¹

It further appears that these cults offered socially mobile individuals the means of moving into statuses such as ‘priesthoods’ and membership of specifically religious confraternities (*synodoi*, *collegia tenuiorum*) from which civic cult would usually have excluded them.⁸² The process of Romanizing ‘oriental gods’ thus offered an avenue of relative social promotion by providing access to religious titles and roles that would have been out of reach of modestly prosperous *liberti* and their immediate descendants within the organisation of official or civic religion.⁸³ Though this aspect is by no means confined to the ‘oriental cults’ in the sense I use the term, the sheer number of individual groups suggests that this was an important motive for many leading adherents, who could even imitate their social superiors in bestowing funds, furnishings and whole buildings.⁸⁴

When we turn to consider the processions organized within the framework of the Isiac and Metroac cults,⁸⁵ we can again appreciate the dialectical relationship between marginality and integration: such processions had an ambivalent function, serving on the one hand to give more cohesion to the group that displayed itself to the public, while on the other hand they may have served as effective propaganda to attract new members. Insofar as they were restrictive, they staged their otherness vis-à-vis civic cult; yet by moving through the streets in the cities of the Empire they asserted their claim to integration. And as their membership rose in social status, these two cults also began to attract members of the city elites, above all

⁸⁰ The term ‘religious market’ was first introduced by NORTH, *Religious Pluralism*.

⁸¹ KLEIBL, *Iseion*, 42f., 294–301 Kat.-Nr. 36–38 (she is, however, not aware of the recent excavations at Itálica); ALVAR, *Cultos egipcios, passim*, esp. nos. 69 (Itálica), 200 (Baelo Claudia), 125 (Ampurias), 192 (Panóias/Vila Real)

⁸² A *senatus consultum* passed between AD 41 and 69 explicitly permitted the foundation of *collegia tenuiorum* for religious purposes, which were not subject to the restrictions upon ordinary *collegia* under the *lex Iulia* and the Augustan edict; see DE ROBERTIS, *Diritto associativo*, 253–259.

⁸³ On marginality of various kinds, see e.g. TURCAN, *Cultes orientaux*, 23. Not a single priest or cult official of the Phrygian cults during the first century AD is known to have been a free-born Roman citizen; their social status seems only to rise in the Antonine period: SCHILLINGER, *Entwicklung*, 345.

⁸⁴ VERSNEL, *Römische Religion*, 61–65 rightly singled out two factors, ‘religious innovation’ (*Botschaft*) and ‘organisation’ (*Gemeinde*), as the key to the success of the ‘oriental cults’.

⁸⁵ In the cult of Mithras public processions seem to have been unknown. The now well-known feast at the Tienen mithraeum in *Germania inferior*, however, was attended by well over one hundred people around AD 275 and suggests that we need to think of other forms of public profiling than processions; cf. MARTENS, *Mithraeum in Tienen*.

from the Flavian period onwards, and were thus able to embark on a quite new form of integration, that afforded by serious discursive treatment, of which the best-known example is Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (written c. AD 120),⁸⁶ which in turn enabled them to become interesting to Gnostics and Neoplatonists.⁸⁷ We find the same phenomenon emerging in relation to Mithras.⁸⁸

A major constituency of the Phrygian and Isiac cults was undoubtedly women.⁸⁹ Women were able to occupy more active roles in these two cults than in the context of civic religion and were able to reach levels of responsibility that, unless they were very wealthy, they would never otherwise have been able to reach.⁹⁰ Perhaps this would have been incentive enough for some to want to be initiated. In my view however, the majority of the initiated women would have wanted to look for ways to alleviate their religious anxiety in an environment that also facilitated their social integration into groups belonging to different strata of society.⁹¹ The epigraphic evidence may appear to indicate that these groups were composed mainly of men; however, this evidence needs to be treated with great caution, since the social and financial power of men provided them with the means of taking part in epigraphic culture to a degree quite different from women. Similar considerations apply to the issue of priestly roles available to women in these cults: although theoretically one might assume that such roles should have been appealing to women who possessed a comfortable socio-economic position, the epigraphic evidence suggests that the social background of women priests was not very high.

Other oppressed or marginalized groups, such as slaves, were, I would guess, mainly interested in the specifically religious offer made by the 'oriental cults', i.e. in Weberian terms, the 'salvation-goods' both this-worldly and other-worldly.⁹² Their limited appearance in the epigraphic record must be considered a reflection of relative poverty and unfamiliarity with epigraphic culture, which came to be so important higher up the social scale. I would like to stress this point, because far too often we focus on economic factors as being the most obvious explanation, and

⁸⁶ For a discussion of Plutarch's sources (above all Manetho, Hecataeus of Abdera, Apion and Posidonius), see the Introduction to GRIFFITHS, *De Iside*, 75–100.

⁸⁷ For Attis, see e.g. SFAMENI GASPARRO, Interpretazione gnostiche; TURCAN, *Attis platonicus*; NORTH, Power and its Vicissitudes. Isiac cults: SFAMENI GASPARRO, Hellenistic Face of Isis. On the late-antique philosophisation of religion, see now ATHANASSIADI/MACRIS, Philosophisation; VAN NUFFELEN, Rethinking the Gods.

⁸⁸ TURCAN, Salut mithriaque.

⁸⁹ Cf. HEYOB, Cult of Isis; SANDERS, Kybele und Attis, 283.

⁹⁰ There have, however, been some recent attempts, e.g. by SCHULTZ, Women's Religious Activity, to emphasize the active roles accorded to women in Roman religious contexts.

⁹¹ In some way, at least for the early moments of the expansion of these cults, we could apply VERNANT's words concerning the cult of Dionysus: "Le Dionysisme s'adresse à ceux qui ne peuvent entièrement s'encadrer dans l'organisation institutionnelle de la *polis* (...) (femmes, esclaves...). Il a offert un cadre de regroupement à ceux qui se trouvent en marge de l'ordre social reconnu" (VERNANT, *Mythe*, 268 f.).

⁹² The historical record includes one particularly surprising motive for initiation, namely to acquire freedom: in the year 101 BC, a slave of Q. Servilius Caepius (cos. 106 BC) castrated himself in order to qualify as a *gallus* for Magna Mater. He was promptly deported and prohibited from returning to Rome (Obseq. 44 a); cf. THOMAS, Magna Mater, 1522.

forget about socio-cultural environments in which the epigraphic culture did not possess such high symbolic value.

Conclusion

On my reading, then, the ‘oriental cults’ were situated in an enduring tension between the establishment of new religious forms, including new offers of salvation, and the temptations of assimilation. As long as they remained confined to marginal social groups, the messages of salvation remained primary. At any rate in the case of the two cults with the earliest diffusion in the Roman Empire, the Phrygian and the Egyptian, however, the interest of the Roman authorities, after an initial period of intermittent repression, lay in reducing their alterity and assimilating them to the pattern of civic religion. As they gradually acquired civic status, and the socio-economic status of their members rose, these cults appealed less to the marginal groups and more to those who were better integrated. This in turn provoked a dissonance between the search for new forms of religious expression and the desire to conform to received notions of this-worldly salvation. The solution was found in transmuting the desire for radical salvation into the symbolic world of the purely exotic. ‘Legitimate’ exoticism thus became a means of channelling and domesticating the socio-religious discontent of marginal groups.

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Osiris *mystes* und Isis *orgia* – Gab es ‚Mysterien‘ der ägyptischen Gottheiten?

Einführung

Beschäftigt man sich mit ‚Mysterienkulten‘ in der griechischen und römischen Antike, so kommt man nicht umhin, auch den Komplex der sog. ‚orientalischen Religionen‘ zu behandeln. Fester Bestandteil der Phänomene, die unter diesen beiden Begriffen spätestens seit dem 19. Jh. in der Forschungsliteratur gefasst wurden, waren von Beginn an die Kulte der ägyptischen Gottheiten und unter diesen vor allem der Kult der Isis.¹ Die Existenz von ‚Mysterien‘ wurde als gemeinsames Element und eines der Hauptmerkmale der ‚orientalischen Religionen‘ dargestellt, und auf diesem Wege wurde eine feste kategoriale Verbindung zwischen den einzelnen unter diesem Begriff zusammengefassten Kulturen geschaffen. Diese einmal etablierte Tradition wurde dann über die Zeit hinweg fortgeführt und meist wenig kritisch rezipiert. Selbst jüngste Publikationen machen den Kult der Isis nicht nur zu einem zentralen Bestandteil der Gruppe der ‚orientalischen Religionen‘, sondern gehen zudem davon aus, dass es sich hierbei in erster Linie um einen ‚Mysterienkult‘ gehandelt habe.²

Was jedoch genau unter dem Terminus ‚Mysterien‘ zu verstehen ist, wurde – ganz im Gegensatz zur häufigen Verwendung des Begriffes – nur selten eingehender untersucht.³ Im Folgenden soll diese Problematik am Beispiel der ‚Mysterien‘ im Kult der ägyptischen Gottheiten erörtert werden. Dabei ist zu überprüfen, ob derartige Kultformen tatsächlich anhand archäologischer und epigraphischer Zeugnisse belegbar sind. Anschließend soll diskutiert werden, ob es sinnvoll ist, im Falle der ägyptischen Gottheiten überhaupt von ‚Mysterienkulten‘ oder ‚Mysterienreligionen‘ zu sprechen. Der erste Teil dieses Aufsatzes ist daher dem Begriff ‚Mysterien‘ und seiner Verwendung in der Sekundärliteratur gewidmet, um zu erhellen, was sich dahinter eigentlich verbirgt. Danach sollen Entstehung, Verbreitung und Benutzung des Begriffes sowie dessen Anbindung an das Konzept der ‚orientalischen Religionen‘ untersucht werden, um dann in einem weiteren Abschnitt die epigraphischen und literarischen Zeugnisse, die Aufschluss über die

¹ Als ägyptische Gottheiten werden hier hauptsächlich die Trias Isis, Serapis und Anubis bzw. Harpokrates und Osiris bezeichnet.

² So etwa jüngst ALVAR, *Oriental Gods*, der neben Isis auch Kybele und Mithras als ‚orientalische Götter‘ bezeichnet.

³ Eine gute Übersicht über die antike Etymologie von ‚Mysterien‘ und die damit verbundenen Termini bietet in ihrer Einleitung WALDNER, *Dimensions*.