VALENTINO GASPARINI – RICHARD L. GORDON

EGYPTIANISM

APPROPRIATING 'EGYPT' IN THE 'ISIAC CULTS' OF THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD[*]

Summary: When dealing with Isis, Serapis and the other members of the so-called '*gens isiaca*', scholars have hesitated whether to emphasize their (indisputable) historico-geographic origin in the Nile valley or their (no less indisputable) character as Graeco-Roman cults. We thus find these deities referred to as 'Egyptian', 'Graeco-Egyptian', 'Graeco-Roman', 'Greek', 'Roman' and, again, 'Oriental', 'Orientalized Roman', and so on. Each of these definitions is evidently partial, which is one reason for the growing preference for the less specific terms 'Isiac gods' and 'Isiac cults'. Yet even these elide the problem of how these cults were perceived in relation to Egypt. This article aims to challenge the terms of the conventional dichotomy between Egyptian and Graeco-Roman, by exploring the many specific contexts in which 'Egypt' was appropriated, for example, by institutions, intellectuals (e.g. 'Middle-' and Neo-Platonists), Christian apologists, late-antique encyclopedists, etc. Starting with the comparandum 'Persianism' recently highlighted in relation to the cult of Mithras, the paper will explore the various interests and aims involved in the construction of ideas of Egypt, which might even involve more than one 'Egyptianism' at the same time. Each of our nine suggested 'Egyptianisms' is the creation of numerous 'producers', who adapted what they knew of 'Egypt' ('foreign', 'exotic', 'other') to create their own religious offers. Our basic model is derived from the Erfurt project *Lived Ancient Religions*, which inverts the usual representation of ancient religion as collective ('*polis* religion', 'civic religion') in favour of a perspective that stresses individual agency, sense-making and appropriation within a range of broader constraints.

Key words: appropriation, Egyptianism, Isiac cults, lived ancient religion, Persianism

This paper sets out to challenge one of the dominant paradigms in the traditional conceptualization of the so-called 'Egyptian cults' in the Graeco-Roman world, namely that they should be studied as a unified 'movement' that passed from one ancient high culture into a largely passive receptive culture.

Since the days of Georges Lafaye (1854–1927),[1] the fundamental aim has ordinarily been to reconstruct a system of belief and practice by collecting and emphasizing the elements of coherence and homogeneity that would alone justify the assumption of a single cult. It might display variation, there might be aberrant forms, but essentially it is historically defensible, indeed requisite, to treat these cults as a unified historical phenomenon. In our view, several convergent factors have supported this traditional working assumption.

The first is purely contingent, but not for that reason to be under-estimated: the very project of writing an historical account of a long-term phenomenon where there are so many unknowns, where the material, though in some ways extensive, is yet both lacunate and disparate, has almost invariably seemed to require an approach that emphasizes coherence rather than disparity, and to legitimate a process of selection and omission in the composition of synthetic work that has generated a purely modern construct with no satisfactory correlate in antiquity. Archaeological reports and epigraphic publication are permitted to emphasize diversity and variability; synthesis, however, requires a story, a unified sense. Despite the survival of a massive array of secondary texts evoking and traducing numerous aspects of 'Egyptian religion',[2] selected texts such as Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Book XI have played (and continue to play) an inordinate role in this synthesis.

Beyond that extremely important factor, we can point to two major 'models for coherence', the one primary, though occluded, the other acknowledged but nowadays disavowed.

MODELLING COHERENCE:
'EARLY CHRISTIANITY' AND 'ORIENTAL RELIGIONS'

The primary model is the received history of early Christianity, which proceeds from the Pauline corpus through the Gospels to the Didache to Justin in an unbroken sequence of reports of a single set of claims. An essential feature of this narrative is the claim that a self-conscious form of Jesus-movement developed very early, rejecting its roots in Judean practice, and produced a recognizable form of Catholic belief and practice which is what we mean by 'early Christianity'. To be sure, this received version is still promulgated in confessional contexts, but has now very few adherents among non-confessional historians.

The conventional view that we can speak straightforwardly of a single pre-Eusebian 'Church' has been undermined by many factors:[3] a) the disputes over the

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[1] LAFAYE, G.: *Histoire du culte des divinités d'Alexandrie: Sérapis, Isis, Harpocrate et Anubis hors d'Égypte, depuis les origines jusqu'à l'école néoplatonicienne* [BEFAR XXXIII]. Paris 1884.

[2] See above all HOPFNER, T.: *Fontes historiae religionis Aegyptiacae* (parts 1–5, pp. 932). Bonn 1922–1925 = CLEMEN, C. (ed.): *Fontes Historiae Religionum* 2.1–5.

[3] A convenient introduction in LUTTIKHUIZEN, G. P.: *La pluriformidad del Cristianesimo primitivo.* Cordoba 2007. Cf. also EHRMANN, B. D.: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture.* Oxford 2011²; BRAKKE, D.: *The Gnostics.* Cambridge, MA 2010; REBILLARD, É.: *Christians and Their Many Identities*

contents and integrity of the 'authentic' Pauline corpus; b) the likelihood of extensive re-writing and re-edition even of 'authentic' letters; c) scepticism regarding the formation of the canon; d) the creation of a distinction between text and 'community'; e) the debate over the 'parting of the ways'; f) efforts at radical post-dating of the Gospels and the pastoral epistles; g) the emergence of the term 'Christianities' in order to evade the traditional notion of 'heresy'; h) the recognition of the unscrupulous methods employed by bishops in the 2nd century CE to elbow possible competitors out of positions of authority; i) the realization that early Christians moved in and out of their confessional identities; j) the long struggle even among leaders to form a Christian 'macro-identity'; k) awareness of the existence of non-Mediterranean Christianities; and so on. It would indeed be fair to say that there has occurred a veritable paradigm-shift within the study of early Christianity.[4] If the traditional (confessional) conception of a single Christianity is no longer tenable, what is the likelihood that a coherent 'cult of Isis' could have existed in the conditions of the ancient 'pagan' world, which laid no stress whatever on uniformity and coherence?

The second primary model is of course the old spectre of the 'oriental religions', called into being in the France of the early Third Republic, and elaborated into historical actors by Franz Cumont in 1906. Although his model lost much of its authority early in the last quarter of the previous century,[5] and despite the efforts of a trilateral research-project, *Les religions orientales dans le monde gréco-romain*, organized between 2005 and 2009 by Corinne Bonnet, Jörg Rüpke and Paolo Scarpi with the deliberate intention of producing alternative ways of conceptualizing the relevant material,[6] it has proved exceptionally difficult to dislodge the category 'oriental cults' entirely. It has indeed proved much easier to expose its colonialist and orientalist underpinnings than to suggest convincing alternative categorizations.[7] Questions of specialist personnel, types of media, communication and culture contact, small-group religion ('associazionismo'), the significance of 'mysteries', all have been mooted with

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in Late Antiquity. Ithaca 2012; NICKLAS, T.: *Jews and Christians?* Tübingen 2014; VINZENT, M.: *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels.* Leuven 2014; VINZENT, M.: Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2.1 (2016) 103–124.

[4] O'LOUGHLIN, T.: The Early Church. In COHN-SHERBOK D. – COURT, J. M. (eds): *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World.* Sheffield 2001, 124–142.

[5] Above all, MACMULLEN, R.: *Paganism in the Roman Empire*. New Haven 1981; LANE FOX, R.: *Pagans and Christians.* Harmondsworth 1986. Cf. the introduction by C. Bonnet and Fr. Van Haeperen in CUMONT, FR.: *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain. Conférences faites au Collège de France en 1905.* Paris 1929. Ed. C. BONNET and F. VAN HAEPEREN [Bibliotheca Cumontiana, Scripta Maiora 1]. Torino 2006. i–lxxiv.

[6] BONNET, C. – BENDLIN, A.: Les 'religions orientales' : approches historiographiques / Die ‚orientalischen Religionen' im Lichte der Forschungsgeschichte. *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 8 (2006) 151–273; BONNET, C. – RÜPKE, J. – SCARPI, P. (eds): *Religions orientales – culti misterici: Neue Perspektiven – nouvelles perspectives – prospettive nuove* [Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 16]. Stuttgart 2006; BONNET, C. – RIBICHINI, S. – STEUERNAGEL, D. (eds): *Religioni in contatto nel Mediterraneo antico. Modalità di diffusione e processi di interferenza. Atti del III colloquio "Le religioni orientali nel mondo greco e romano"* [Mediterranea 4]. Roma–Pisa 2008.

[7] The proceedings of the final conference held in Rome in 2006 (BONNET, C. ET AL. [eds]: *Les religions orientales.* Rome–Brussels 2009) were particularly disappointing in this respect: see R. L. GORDON's review: Coming to Terms with the 'Oriental Religions'. *Numen* 61 (2014) 657–672.

more or less plausibility as possible ways forward. The series *Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain* (1961–1990), directed by Maarten J. Vermaseren explicitly in order to continue Cumont's project, played an ambiguous role throughout:[8] on the one hand, the lack of clear direction among the 113 titles (in many more volumes) perfectly mirrored the lack of scholarly consensus about the meaningfulness of the category; on the other, the successful production of up-to-date corpora of archaeological material seemed to legitimate the inference that here indeed were unified historical movements that truly could function as the subject of sentences transitive and intransitive, albeit mainly through the device of making the deities the main actors. Jaime Alvar Ezquerra has indeed gone so far as to claim that at least the three 'big' cults (those of Isis, Mater Magna and Mithras) were well on the way to establishing themselves as independent religions (comparable to Christianity) prior to Constantine.[9]

The organization of international conferences devoted to the cult of Mithras, the first of which was held at Manchester already in 1971[10] (not to mention the *Journal of Mithraic Studies*),[11] and more recently the series of international conferences of Isis Studies, begun by Laurent Bricault in 1999[12] (quite apart from the Isiac corpora and the on-going volumes of *Bibliotheca Isiaca*),[13] while providing a very welcome

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[8] Cf. BONNET, C. – BRICAULT, L.: Introduction. In BONNET, C. – BRICAULT, L. (eds): *Panthée. Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire* [RGRW 177]. Leiden–Boston 2013, 1–14.

[9] ALVAR EZQUERRA, J.: *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation, and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis, and Mithras* [RGRW 165]. Leiden–Boston 2008, 5.

[10] HINNELLS, J. R. (ed.): *Mithraic Studies*. Manchester 1975.

[11] London, vol. 1: 1976; vol. 2: 1977–1978; vol. 3: 1980. The *JMS* claimed to represent a field extending from Vedic India to the contemporary Parsis focused upon a pluriform deity Mitra, Miθra, Μίθρας/-ης, Mithras, Miiro …, cf. ADRYCH, P. – BRACEY, R. – DALGLISH, D. – LENK, S. – WOOD, R.: *Images of Mithra*. Oxford 2017.

[12] BRICAULT, L. (ed.): *De Memphis à Rome. Actes du 1er Colloque international sur les études isiaques, Poitiers – Futuroscope, 8-10 avril 1999* [RGRW 140]. Leiden–Boston–Köln 2000; BRICAULT, L. (ed.): *Isis en Occident. Actes du IIe Colloque international sur les études isiaques, Lyon III, 16-17 mai 2002*, [RGRW 151]. Leiden–Boston 2004; BRICAULT, L. – VERSLUYS, M. J. – MEYBOOM, P. G. P. (eds): *Nile into Tiber, Egypt in the Roman World. Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11–14 2005* [RGRW 159]. Leiden–Boston 2007; BRICAULT, L. – VERSLUYS, M. J. (eds): *Isis on the Nile. Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies, Liège, November 27–29 2008* [RGRW 171] Leiden–Boston 2010; BRICAULT, L. – VERSLUYS, M. J. (eds): *Power, Politics and the Cult of Isis. Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies, Boulogne-sur-Mer, October 13-15 2011* [RGRW 180] Leiden 2014; GASPARINI, V. – VEYMIERS, R. (eds): *Individuals and Materials in the Greco-Roman Cults of Isis. Agents, Images and Practices. Proceedings of the VIth International Conference of Isis Studies, Erfurt, May 6-8 – Liège, September 23-24 2013*. 2 vols [RGRW 187]. Leiden–Boston 2018; BONNET, C. – BRICAULT, L. – GOMEZ, C. (eds): *Les mille et une vies d'Isis. La réception des divinités du cercle isiaque de l'Antiquité à nos jours* [Tempus – Antiquité]. Toulouse, forthcoming.

[13] BRICAULT, L.: *Myrionymi: les épiclèses grecques et latines d'Isis, de Sarapis et d'Anubis* [Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 82]. Stuttgart 1996; BRICAULT, L.: *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques (IVe s. av. J.-C. - IVe s. apr. J.-C.* [Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 23]. Paris 2001; BRICAULT, L.: *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques* [Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 31]. 3 vols. Paris 2005; BRICAULT, L. (ed.): *Sylloge Nummorum Religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* [Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 38]. Paris 2008; BRICAULT, L. (ed.): *Bibliotheca Isiaca I.* Bordeaux 2008; KLEIBL, K.: Iseion. *Raumgestaltung und Kult-*

forum for archaeological reports and both synthetic and analytical work, incidentally promoted the idea that these two at least were indeed quasi-religions. That is to say that the risk inherent in the inappropriate use of these invaluable instruments lies in the implication, whether intended or not, that the cults of Mithras and Isis represented not just options within the broader Graeco-Roman polytheistic spectrum, but sui-generis systems of religious belief and practice.[14]

THE 'LIVED ANCIENT RELIGION' APPROACH

It is an integral part of the 'oriental religion' perspective that it endorses, and promotes, a grand narrative about religious change in the Graeco-Roman world, and particularly the Roman Empire. It is precisely the limitations and perspectives imposed by grand narratives that the *Lived Ancient Religions* project at the University of Erfurt (2012–2017) aimed to expose.[15] Hence the choice to avoid talking about 'cults' and 'religions' so far as possible and to focus upon embodied practices, everyday experiences, emotions, expressions and interactions related to the emergent field of 'religion'.

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praxis in den Heiligtümern gräco-ägyptischer Götter im Mittelmeerraum. Worms 2009; VEYMIERS, R.: Ἵλεως τῷ φοροῦντι. *Sérapis sur les gemmes et les bijoux antiques* [Mémoires de la Classe des Lettres de l'Académie royale de Belgique. Collection in-4°, 3ᵉ série, t. I, no. 2061]. Bruxelles 2009; BRICAULT, L. – VEYMIERS, R. (eds): *Bibliotheca Isiaca II.* Bordeaux 2011; Podvin, J.-L.: *Luminaire et cultes isiaques* [Monographies instrumentum 38]. Montagnac 2011; BRICAULT, L. – VEYMIERS, R. (eds): *Bibliotheca Isiaca III.* Bordeaux 2014; BRICAULT, L. – DIONYSOPOULOU, E.: *Myrionymi 2016. Épithètes et épiclèses grecques et latines de la tétrade isiaque.* Toulouse 2016; SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER, A.: *Le sistre isiaque dans le monde gréco-romain : analyse d'un objet cultuel polysémique. Typologie, représentations, significations.* 3 vols. Doctoral thesis, University of Toulouse II Jean Jaurès 2017; BRICAULT, L. –VEYMIERS, R. (eds): *Bibliotheca Isiaca IV.* Bordeaux, forthcoming; BRICAULT L. – DROST, V.: *Les monnaies romaines des Vota Publica à types isiaques* [Suppl. Bibliotheca Isiaca II]. Bordeaux, forthcoming.

   [14] Cf. DUNAND, FR.: Culte d'Isis ou religion isiaque ? In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Isis on the Nile (n. 12) 39–54 (focusing only on the cult of Isis in the Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt). See also the preface by V. PIRENNE DELFORGE in GASPARINI–VEYMIERS: Individuals (n. 12) ix–xiii.

   [15] Cf. RÜPKE, J.: Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis Religion'. *Mythos* 5 (2011) 191–203; RAJA, R. – RÜPKE, J.: Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the 'Lived Ancient Religion' Approach. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1.1 (2015) 11–19; RAJA, R. – RÜPKE, J.: Archaeology of Religion, Material Religion, and the Ancient World. In RAJA, R. – RÜPKE, J. (eds): *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World.* Malden–Oxford–Chichester 2015, 1–26; RÜPKE, J.: Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflections on History and Theory of Religion. *Religion* 45 (2015) 344–366; RÜPKE, J.: *Pantheon. Geschichte der antiken Religionen.* München 2016 [now edited and translated in English and Italian: *Pantheon. A New History of Roman Religion.* Princeton 2018; *Pantheon. Una nuova storia della religione romana.* Roma 2018]; RÜPKE, J.: *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome.* Ithaca 2016; LICHTERMAN, P. – RAJA, R. – RIEGER, A.-K. – RÜPKE, J.: Grouping Together in Lived Ancient Religion. Individual Interacting and the Formation of Groups. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3.1 (2017) 3–10; ALBRECHT, J. – DEGELMANN, C. – GASPARINI, V. – GORDON, R. L. – PATZELT, M. – PETRIDOU, G. – RAJA, R. – RIEGER, A.-K. – RÜPKE, J. – SIPPEL, B. – URCIUOLI, E. R. – WEISS, L. (eds): Religion in the Making. The Lived Ancient Religion Approach. *Religion* 48.4 (2018) 568–593, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2018.1450305; GASPARINI, V. – PATZELT, M. – RAJA, R. – RIEGER, A.-K. – RÜPKE, J. – URCIUOLI, E. R. (eds): *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics.* Berlin–Boston, forthcoming.

Although the project members were regular classicists or ancient historians with a special interest in religion, a central aim has been to combine forces in our international conferences with scholars of Judean religion and early Christianity in order not to reproduce the disciplinary barriers that have protected – and isolated – Classical Studies. Our focus has been on choices, strategies and aims of individual human agents in concrete situations rather than on 'movements', 'spread', 'expansion', 'diffusion', 'success'. This has involved trying to defamiliarize material culture, looking at inscriptions, buildings, sites as themselves potential agents ('the agency of things') in providing affordances, but also closures. It has also meant looking specifically at authorial micro-strategies in constructing religious narratives and perspectives; thinking about 'priestly' and sub-priestly roles (themselves highly problematic terms in this context), not so much within the relevant institutional or political framework(s) but in terms of self-definitions and choices of identity, options, potential gains and risks;[16] and the relation between multiple identities, group-formation, textuality and religious experience in different contexts and different periods. Much of this can be summarized as a concern for the creative engagement with tradition(s) viewed for one reason or another as life-relevant, which is the leitmotiv of the new journal (*Religion in the Roman Empire*, published by Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen) established to continue the work of the project now that the funding period has ended.

The *Lived Ancient Religions* approach as a whole has therefore no special interest in historiographical constructs such as 'oriental religions' or 'Isiac cults', let alone purely modern fabrications such as 'Mithraism', and is indeed in principle opposed to such terminology and the narratives they imply. One of us, however, (Gasparini) has a special interest in producing an account of the 'Isiac cults' that might conform to the general aims of *Lived Ancient Religions*. This project views 'Isis' as a pragmatic resource available to emergent or self-styled small-scale religious providers, and explores how this resource was selected and instrumentalized by other agents, whether individuals, families, groups, cities or even larger groups. Its basic inspirations are Michel de Certeau's concepts of "bricolagiste appropriation" and "re-contextualisation", which also involve creative distortions of what is received, the filtering of materials through indigenous grids, and re-valorization of meanings into contexts and associations current in the source-culture.[17]

Our immediate aim in this paper is to suggest one possible alternative to the top-down holism of most synthetic work on the 'Isiac cults', especially in the Roman Empire, by emphasising the sheer diversity of individual choices attested or implied by the physical remains, the epigraphic record, and the literary documentation relating to the 'Isiac cults'. To put the matter crudely, we ask: What did people in the Mediterranean world actually do with these deities? How did they make sense of them? What did they respond to? What selections did they make?

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[16] See now also the quite independent work of WENDT, H.: *At the Temple Gates*. New York 2016.
[17] We see no reason to echo the various criticisms of de Certeau, which seem to us either misguided or irrelevant to our purpose.

'PERSIANISM'

Pragmatically, we borrow an idea from a recent article by one of us (Gordon) suggesting that we can rephrase the reception in the Graeco-Roman world of a tradition about Mithra(s) (or better Mithrases) in terms of a much wider process of constructions of 'Persianism'.[18] Rather than assume the existence of 'a cult' received from the Greek East, or, as most people now seem to think, 'a cult' concocted in Italy that jumped out of the head of Martin Nilsson's 'religious genius', we can propose (a) the essential mediation of individual religious agents, whom we may as well call 'Weberian mystagogues', able and interested to form their own small groups on the basis of a loose (Iranian) tradition;[19] and (b) a constant process of 'filling the void' by selectively recycling bits and pieces of what was taken to be authentic Persian lore, from reports of Achaemenid customs and religious practice, the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha, 'Chaldaean' astronomy, combined with local invention and personal story-telling.

Much of the Iranian material reported by later authors must have been recycled from earlier writings. Nor can it be excluded that among the more or less authentic Mazdean (rather than Zoroastrian) material available in Greek, there was an account of a 'solar' Mithras which could have been the origin of the ideas that provided the basic inspiration to the leaders of small groups that we conventionally call 'the Roman cult of Mithras'. Certainly, it is curious that Plutarch's source in *De Iside et Osiride* 46 (369e) (ca. 125 CE) specifically mentions Mithrês, alone of all the *yazatas*, and assigns him a cosmic-moral location 'between' light and darkness, (knowledge) and ignorance. There is therefore some reason to suppose that Mithra, Mithres, or Mithras did feature in some capacity in the accounts of Persian religion mediated to the Graeco-Roman world. If so, there is no reason why the search for 'authentic' Iranian motifs and features should stop at any given historical point. Above all, though, it is important to stress that within the context of innumerable small-groups led by autonomous 'mystagogues', under ancient communicative conditions, it is quite impossible that there could have existed a unified tradition in terms of which the same account of the 'meaning' of the bull-killing scene, the same account of salvation, of eschatological expectations, initiations and all the other elements that regularly appear in works on 'the cult of Mithras' could have been held together. The reports of 'Mithraic belief' purveyed by Euboulus and Pallas (2nd century CE) could all be 'true' in some sense, if we assume that Mithraic 'belief' and ritual practice was an open house, constantly open to individual expansion and imaginative construction in the light of other knowledge and pre-occupations.

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[18] GORDON, R. L.: *Persae in spelaeis Solem colunt*: Mithra(s) between Persia and Rome. In STROOTMAN, R. – VERSLUYS, M. J. (eds): *Persianism in Antiquity*. Stuttgart 2017, 279–315. The volume is revelatory of the extent and range of ancient interest in the Persian mirage. A good summary of the issues can be found in LAHE, J.: Hat der römische Mithras-Kult etwas mit dem Iran zu tun? Überlegungen zu Beziehungen zwischen dem römischen Mithras-Kult und der iranischen religiösen Überlieferung. *The Estonian Theological Journal / Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* n.s. 2 (67) (2014) 78–110.

[19] GORDON, R. L.: Individuality, Selfhood and Power in the Second Century: The Mystagogue as a Mediator of Religious Options. In RÜPKE, J. – WOOLF, G. (eds): *Religious Dimensions of the Self in the Second Century CE*. Tübingen 2013, 146–172.

One of the main stimuli to such exploration, though of course not the only one, was the idea of Persia (i.e. 'Persianism'). The claims by the scholiast tradition, bizarre as they sometimes are, might equally reflect this cacophony of interpretations. What held such groups together – and many of course failed – was the will and example of the mystagogue on the one hand and the practice of common eating on the other.

'EGYPTIANISM'

There can be no doubt that the situation in relation to Egypt and the 'Isiac cults' is far more complex than that of Persianism and the worship of Mithra(s) or Mithrases. For want of a better term, we will use the form 'Isiac cults', which deliberately downplays the issues of origin and cultural ascription and emphasizes rather the fact that these gods together constitute a sort of family, the so-called *gens isiaca*. This is our label for the worship in one form or another of a dozen or so deities in the Graeco-Roman world over the 800-odd years between the early 3rd century BCE and the early 6th century CE, who were understood to have been originally worshipped in Egypt and to belong to the same mythical and liturgical group or 'family', namely (Herma-)Anubis, Apis, Boubastis, Harpocrates, Horus, Hydreios, Isis, Neilos, Nephthys, Osiris and Serapis.[20]

What we call 'Egyptianism' is not so much an agent's (or emic) category as a heuristic device to enable historians to build different forms of reception and appropriation into their models of cultural exchange operating concurrently or successively. Whereas it is often supposed that we have to choose at least between the terms of a binary option (Egyptian or Graeco-Roman),[21] the concept of 'Egyptianism' allows us to re-instate Graeco-Roman agents' beliefs about the possible implications of their cult, to trace their efforts to validate or explore the notion that Isis and the other gods of her 'family' were Egyptian deities, to examine how these internal claims impinged upon intellectuals, and how their views in turn affected (or failed to affect) later writers and the encyclopaedic or commentator tradition. From the point of view of the interpretation of the 'Isiac cults' as a religious phenomenon, 'Egyptianism' has

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[20] Cf. BRICAULT, L.: Bilan et perspectives dans les études isiaques. In LEOSPO, E. – TAVERNA, D. (eds): *La Grande Dea tra passato e presente. Forme di cultura e di sincretismo relative alla Dea Madre dall'antichità a oggi. Atti del Convegno di studi, Torino, 14-15 maggio 1999* [Tropi Isiaci 1]. Torino 2000, 91; MALAISE, M.: *Pour une terminologie et une analyse des cultes isiaques* [Mémoires de la Classe des Lettres de l'Académie royale de Belgique. Collection in-8°, 3ᵉ série 35]. Bruxelles 2005, 29–31, with some criticism in V. GASPARINI's review in *Topoi* 16 (2009) 483–487, esp. 486; BRICAULT, L. – VEYMIERS, R.: Quinze ans après. Les études isiaques (1997–2012): un premier bilan. In BRICAULT, L. – VERSLUYS, M. J.: *Egyptian Gods in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean: Image and Reality between Local and Global. Proceedings of the IIⁿᵈ International PhD workshop on Isis studies, Leiden University, January 26-2011* [Suppl. to Mythos 3 n.s. 2012]. Palermo 2012, 1–23, esp. 5–6.

[21] We thus find in literature these deities referred to variously as 'Egyptian', 'Nilotic', 'Alexandrian', 'Memphite', but equally as 'Graeco-Roman', 'Greek', 'Roman'. Even in the rare cases, e.g. in the work of Kathrin Kleibl, in which an attempt has been made to bridge this dichotomy, for example by using the label 'Graeco-Egyptian', one of the (at least) three 'angles' of our triangle is omitted.

the welcome effect of reminding us that ancient literary or even archaeological evidence cannot be used as 'sources' without regard to the interests being played out in the process of reception or to the origins of the initial information.

How many 'Egyptianisms' do we need within the framework of the 'Isiac cults'? Granted that from the perspective of Lived Ancient Religion each agent constructed their own ideas of Egypt according to their own specific agendas, for the purposes of synthesis we need to simplify this diversity. To that end, we suggest we need at least nine different conceptions of Egyptianist enterprise:

1) The very first episode of Isiac appropriation that it is possible to detect in our sources took place at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE within the institutional framework of the Ptolemaic elites. The 'foundational impulse' which allows us to differentiate between 'Isiac' and 'non-Isiac' is directly linked to the religious politics of the Macedonian-Greek court established in Alexandria shortly after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE. Although we may doubt the extent to which any one individual was responsible, it is difficult not to follow the sources explicitly ascribing this initiative to Ptolemy I Soter (reigned 305–282 BCE).[22] The founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty can properly be considered the first religious entrepreneur to appropriate, of course with assistance, a specific idea of Egypt and Graeco-Egyptian gods. Drawing upon the expertise of both Greek and Egyptian religious specialists, namely Timotheus of Athens and Manetho of Sebennytos, he effected a mediation between Pharaonic Egyptian tradition and Hellenistic culture. This included at least three elements: the construction *ex novo* of the figure of Serapis, a markedly Hellenized version of the Memphite cult of Osiris-Apis;[23] the gradual reconstruction of Isis by dint of exclusion (e.g. Isis' power as a magician) and innovation (e.g. Isis as healing goddess and worker of marvels); and probably the introduction of elements selected from Greek mystery-cults (no doubt the contribution of the Eleusinian hierophant Timotheus).[24] The politico-cultural requirements of members of the Ptolemaic court shaped and adapted Egyptian traditions. A clear example is the attribution to Isis for the first time of mastery of the sea during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos, a motif modelled on Arsinoe-Aphrodite *Euploia*, a cult in honour of Arsinoe II, his sister-wife (279–270 BCE).[25] Moreover, recent research suggests that the process of reshaping

[22] Tac. *Hist*. 4. 83–84; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 28 (361f–362a); Numen. *apud* Orig. *Contra Celsum* 5. 38. Clem. Alex. *Protr*. 4. 48. 2–3 rather refers to Ptolemy II Philadelphos.

[23] See BORGEAUD, PH. – VOLOKHINE, Y.: La formation de la légende de Sarapis: une approche transculturelle. *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (2000) 37–76 and BELAYCHE, N.: Le possible 'corps' des dieux : retour sur Sarapis. In PRESCENDI, FR. – VOLOKHINE, Y. (eds): *Dans le laboratoire de l'historien des religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Borgeaud.* Genève 2011, 227–250.

[24] This is disputed. Many scholars postpone the introduction of mystery features in the 'Isiac cults' to the Imperial period, and it must be admitted that epigraphic references to μύσται are not found before the 2nd century CE: cf. recently BREMMER, J. N.: *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* [Münchner Vorlesungen zu antiken Welten 1]. Berlin–Boston 2014, 110–125. However, this is to ignore what seem to be references in e.g. the 'aretalogy' from Maronea (*RICIS* 114/0202: end of the 2nd – beginning of the 1st century BCE) and in the stele of Meniketes (*RICIS* 308/1201: end of the 2nd century BCE), though again their significance is not undisputed.

[25] BRICAULT, L.: *Isis, Dame des flots* [Aegyptiaca Leodiensia 7]. Liège 2006, 22–36.

Isis' iconography was the result of a series of appropriations from the iconography of the Lagid queens during the 3rd century BCE: the *basileion*, which seems to be found already as an attribute of Berenice II (wife and cousin of Ptolemy III Euergetes, reigned 246–222 BCE), is attested as an attribute of Isis only at the beginning of the 2nd century BCE;[26] the fringed shawl knotted between the breasts (known in German as the '*Knotenpalla*'), adopted for Isis no later than 217 BCE, was a fashion worn at the same period by Arsinoe III (wife and sister of Ptolemy IV Philopator, reigned 221–204 BCE);[27] the so-called 'corkscrew' or 'Libyan' locks, fashionable already at the end of the 4th century BCE and adopted by Cleopatra I (wife of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, reigned 204–181 BCE), seem to have been transferred to Isis somewhat later.[28]

2) Although such Ptolemaic experiments were evidently successful among the Greeks living in Egypt, other groups in Egypt demanded the inclusion of themes associated with the former Pharaonic tradition (which we may refer to as 'Osirian', so as to differentiate it from the 'Isiac'). This involved a completely different set of appropriations and occlusions, and a different process of 'theological' and iconographic hybridization.[29] Similar trends can be sporadically detected during the Hellenistic period outside Egypt. An excellent example is the use of selected Pharaonic Egyptian iconographic themes as markers of cultural difference in a few Punic contexts in the western Mediterranean during the 3rd and the 2nd centuries BCE. Cases in point are the 'Lybian mercenaries', the inhabitants of the islands of *Cossura* and *Melita* (Malta), the cities of *Iol* and *Icosium* in North Africa, and *Baria* in the Iberian Peninsula, who, faced with Carthaginian or Roman domination, struck coins with Osirian themes, although the deities depicted were not actually worshipped.[30] The coinage of Malta is especially instructive here:[31] one issue of double *shekels* combines – on the obverse – the head of a local goddess (Astarte, Hera, Juno?), represented in veil and diadem, while on the reverse we find a purely Pharaonic mummified Osiris between winged Isis and Nephthys, together with the Punic name of the island (*'nn*) (fig. 1a). Another issue combines Egyptian, Greek and Punic elements (head of Isis wearing a Pharaonic crown, a Punic caduceus [or sign for Tanit], and the Greek legend Μελιταίων) on the obverse, while on the reverse we find a four-winged kneeling male

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[26] VEYMIERS, R.: Le *basileion*, les reines et Actium. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Power (n. 12) 195–236.

[27] MALAISE, M. – VEYMIERS, R.: Les dévots isiaques et les atours de leur déesse. In GASPARINI–VEYMIERS: Individuals (n. 12) 470–508.

[28] BIANCHI, R. S.: Images of Isis and Her Cultic Shrines Reconsidered. Towards an Egyptian Understanding of the *interpretatio graeca*. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS–MEYBOOM: Nile into Tiber (n. 12) 485–487; MALAISE–VEYMIERS: Les dévots isiaques (n. 27).

[29] See below, pp. 587–603.

[30] GASPARINI, V.: « Frapper » les dieux des autres. Une enquête sur quelques émissions numismatiques républicaines des aires siculo-africaine et ibérique entre hégémonie et reconnaissance identitaire. In BEDON, R. (ed.): Confinia. *Confins et périphéries dans l'Occident romain* [Caesarodunum 45–46]. Limoges 2011–2012 [2014], 97–132.

[31] GASPARINI: Frapper (n. 30) 128–129, nos 16 and 17.

Fig. 1. *Melita*. Double *shekels*, AE, late 3rd – early 2nd century BCE.

From top to bottom:
a) Veiled and diademed female head right / Mummy of Osiris standing facing between winged figures of Isis and Nephthys, *'NN* in Punic characters above (from Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. Mail Bid Sale 78, lot 245, 14-5-2008);
b) Head of Isis left, wearing *uraei*, grain ear, Greek legend Μελιταίων / four-winged kneeling male figure left, wearing the Egyptian double crown and holding a sceptre and a *flagellum* (from Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. Mail Bid Sale 73, lot 97, 13-9-2006).

figure, wearing the Egyptian double crown and holding a sceptre and a *flagellum* (fig. 1b).[32] This is a fine example of how easily, and how early, iconographic themes and traditions selected from very different and very remote repertoires could be appropriated, combined and shaped according to the local aims and needs.

3) Our third Egyptianism is linked to the larger appropriation of the 'Isiac cults' in the Greek and Roman world (a) during the remainder of the 3rd century BCE and (b) at the end of the 2nd and first half of the 1st century BCE. We prefer to interpret this Egyptianism not as two waves of diffusion into the Mediterranean (the idea of 'diffusion' is, of course, incompatible with the idea of appropriation),[33] but as

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[32] Cf. C. SFAMENI in BRICAULT: Bibliotheca Isiaca (n. 13) 171–174, with bibliography. Despite the existence in the Pharaonic iconographic tradition of similar four- or even six-winged figures, the style and the kneeling position of the god (?) rather recall similar archaic and orientalizing Greek or Etruscan parallels, adapted by inserting Egyptian attributes.
[33] For the image of waves, see BRICAULT, L.: La diffusion isiaque: une esquisse. In BOL, P. C. – KAMINSKI, G. – MADERNA, C. (eds): *Fremdheit – Eigenheit. Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom. Austausch und Verständnis* [Städel Jahrbuch 19]. Stuttgart 2004, 548–556. The metaphor still enjoys considerable favour, e.g. quite recently MOYER, I.: The Memphite Self-Revelations of Isis and Egyptian Religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Aegean. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3.3 (2017) 318–343, esp. 338.

a complex process of reception by different agents acting in different social frames: mainly in important Greek *emporia* (such as Delos, Demetrias or Argos) by Egyptians trying to respect Egyptian themes and norms, and later by Greeks, Eastern freedmen and Italian *negotiatores* who extended their operations into the central and western Mediterranean, initially to Campania, Rome and the south-eastern coast of the Iberian peninsula.[34] This process is clearly marked by a gradual theological 'downsizing', during the late Republic and early Empire, which led for example to the partial decline of Serapis.[35] As a case-study we can cite here the documentation from *Carthago Nova* and *Emporion*, at the western end of the Mediterranean, which seems to show that it was a freedman (from the eastern Mediterranean) and an Alexandrian, Titus Hermes and Noumas, who decided, over the span of at most a couple of generations between the late 2nd and early 1st centuries BCE, to invest large sums of money into building a *megarum* and a richly adorned temple to the Isiac gods, thus introducing these cults into *Hispania* for the very first time.[36] Their project was made possible by the Mediterranean connectivity created by Roman hegemony from the mid-2nd century BCE, which stimulated long-distance trading, centred upon Alexandria, Delos, Sicily and *Puteoli*. The two men must have controlled huge economic resources, been firmly embedded in the local social (and political) scene, and in all probability enjoyed the approval of the local authorities. However, there is as yet no evidence that their temple acted as any kind of bridge-head for further appropriations of the Isiac cults into the hinterland: we have indeed to wait until the Augustan period before further evidence is found in *Hispania*. The available documentation suggests not so much a process of 'diffusion' as sporadic appropriations under specific local conditions.

4) Our fourth Egyptianism is the set of Hellenistic Euhemerist interpretations of Egypt and its gods. We can cite here already Leon of Pella (4th century BCE, a contemporary of Euhemerus),[37] and somewhat later Aristeas of Argos (3rd century BCE)[38] and Apollodorus of Athens (ca. 180–110 BCE).[39] There is also a notice by Varro – probably from his *De gente Populi Romani* (43 BCE) –, according to which Isis

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[34] Cf. GASPARINI, V.: Iside a Roma e nel Lazio. In LO SARDO, E. (ed.): *La lupa e la sfinge. Roma e l'Egitto. Dalla storia al mito. Catalogo della mostra, Roma, 11 luglio - 9 novembre 2008.* Milano 2008, 100–109; GASPARINI, V.: Les cultes isiaques et les pouvoirs locaux en Italie. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Power (n. 12) 260–299, esp. 297.

[35] MALAISE, M.: *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie* [ÉPRO 22]. Leiden 1972, 162–170; cf. GASPARINI: Iside (n. 33) 287–288 and 296–299, stressing already "l'extrême spécificité des dynamiques de diffusion des cultes isiaques en Italie : il n'y existe pas de paradigme de fonctionnement universel. Au contraire, les cultes isiaques sont façonnés de manière variable selon les caractéristiques spécifiques des acteurs locaux (…), influencées par le nombre, le rôle mais aussi l'origine des acteurs locaux, en fonction des différents contextes et de l'époque où ils apparaissent".

[36] ALVAR J. – GASPARINI, V.: The *gens isiaca* in *Hispania*. Contextualising the *iseum* at *Italica*. In BRICAULT–VEYMIERS: Bibliotheca Isiaca IV (n. 13) forthcoming.

[37] Fragments in Min. Fel. *Octav.* 21. 3 and August. *Civ. Dei* 8. 5 (*FGrH* 659 F 5 and T 2a).

[38] Ap. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1. 21. 106–107.

[39] Ap. Athenag. *Leg. pro Chr.* 28. 4 (*FGrH* 244 F 104).

was an Ethiopian queen and Serapis an Argive king named Apis.[40] During the 50–30s BCE, possibly drawing on some of these sources,[41] Diodorus Siculus uses a number of different strategies for the mythical narratives of his *Bibliotheke*,[42] including the so-called 'Palaephatus rationalization', i.e. interpreting supernatural events as natural phenomena, and the 'allegoresis', i.e. explaining divine entities by scientific and philosophical doctrines (including etymology). But his favourite interpretative method is assuredly the depiction of gods as human kings and heroes who have benefitted mankind, i.e. Euhemerism.[43] The Egyptians

> "say that there were other gods who were earth-born, mortal in the beginning, but through their intelligence and their universal benefaction for mankind have obtained immortality, and some of them had been kings in Egypt as well".[44]

It has been convincingly suggested that this interpretation of the Egyptian deities as 'deified culture-heroes' was closely linked to Diodorus' own agenda, influenced by the historical transition from Roman Republic to Empire, Isis' growing popularity in Rome, Caesar's deification, late Hellenistic ruler-cult and Diodorus' personal inclination towards monarchy.[45] Such rationalizing efforts were roundly dismissed by Plutarch and Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE), albeit for entirely different reasons.[46]

5) The genesis and development of Roman imperialism is itself inextricably connected with the Hellenistic construction of a cultural idea of an imaginary East including "making meaning with Egypt" and its gods.[47] This phenomenon cannot be

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[40] Ap. Augustin. *De civ. Dei* 18. 3, 5, 37, 39, 40. Cf. ROLLE, A.: *Dall'Oriente a Roma. Cibele, Iside e Serapide nell'opera di Varrone.* Pisa 2017, 193–208. See also Jerome, *Chron. a Abr.* 271, probably using Varro as his source.

[41] These sources are, however, not included in MUNTZ, C. E.: The Sources of Diodorus Siculus, Book 1. *Classical Quarterly* 61.2 (2011) 574–594 and MUNTZ, C. E.: *Diodorus Siculus and the World of the Late Roman Republic.* New York 2017, 21–26.

[42] MUNTZ: Diodorus (n. 37) 108–131.

[43] Specifically on Euhemerism see WINIARCZYK, M.: *The Sacred History of Euhemerus of Messene* [Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 312]. Berlin 2013 and HAWES, G.: *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity.* Oxford 2014.

[44] Diod. 1. 13. 1, translation from MUNTZ: Diodorus (n. 37) 113.

[45] SULIMANI, I.: *Diodorus' Mythistory and the Pagan Mission. Historiography and Culture-Heroes in the First Pentad of the Bibliotheke* [Mnemosyne Suppl. 331]. Leiden 2011 and MUNTZ: Diodorus (n. 37) 133–214.

[46] Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 22–23 (359d–360b); Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1. 21. 106–107. Cf. HANI, J.: *La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque.* Paris 1976, 131–141; HARDIE, P. R.: Plutarch and the Interpretation of Myth. *ANRW* II.33.6 (1992) 4763–4764; RICHTER, D. S.: Plutarch on Isis and Osiris: Text, Cult, and Cultural Appropriation. *TAPA* 131 (2001) 203; DE SIMONE, P.: *Mito e verità. Uno studio sul 'De Iside et Osiride' di Plutarco.* Milano 2016, 90–91.

[47] On the 'Eastern mirage', see e.g. VERSLUYS, M. J.: Making Meaning with Egypt: Hadrian, Antinous and Rome's Cultural Renaissance. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Egyptian Gods (n. 20) 25–39 and VERSLUYS, M. J.: Orientalising Roman Gods. In BONNET–BRICAULT: Panthée (n. 8) 235–259. See also, *passim*, MANOLARAKI, E.: Noscendi Nilum cupido. *Imagining Egypt from Lucan to Philostratus.* Berlin–

clearly distinguished from the 'Egyptomania' triggered already in the late 60s BCE by Pompey's successes in the Eastern Mediterranean, which made the Mediterranean into a 'Roman lake'. In bringing the East to Rome, it has been suggested, Pompey was contributing towards his universalistic goal of integrating and unifying the *oikoumene*.[48] When, more than a century later, Vespasian had again to fight in order to unify a Mediterranean divided by the wars of the "Year of the Four Emperors" (69 CE), he found in Egypt and its gods (viz. Serapis) an appropriate figure to enable him to acquire the *auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam* he needed to legitimize his rise to power.[49] And when Hadrian was attempting to construct a pan-Hellenic Empire uniting East and West (121–132 CE), we find him re-Egyptianising the figure of Isis through a sort of *interpretatio aegyptiaca*.[50] Such 're-authentification' of course could only be undertaken on the basis of an Egyptianist perspective.

6) The selectivity of this authentication process can be most clearly grasped in the fact that it never included Isis' former (Pharaonic) qualities as a magician:[51] in the western Mediterranean she was understood as much as anything else as a goddess of healing and worker of marvels, as in Ovid's wonderful story of the transformation of Iphis into a boy.[52] Meanwhile, Egypt itself, already in the Hellenistic period designated as the originary home of astrology,[53] was now turned into the homeland of magic and alchemy: Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) and Apuleius refer to 'Apollobex the Copt' as a famous magician, whose work was used by the philosopher Democritus (ca. 460–370 BCE).[54] By the time of Lucian's *Philopseudes* (3rd quarter of 2nd century CE) it was obvious that any credible magician had to be an Egyptian,[55] while Apuleius hit upon the droll idea of having an Egyptian *propheta* revive a dead man so that he can reveal the identity of the person (actually his own wife) who murdered him.[56]

Boston 2013. On the propriety of the term 'imperialism', see now HARRIS, W.: *Roman Power. A Thousand Years of Empire.* Cambridge 2016, 33–37.

[48] For example in the case of the construction of the *Euripus-Nilus* in the Campus Martius: GASPARINI, V.: Bringing the East Home to Rome. Pompey the Great and the Euripus of the Campus Martius. In VERSLUYS, M. J. – BÜLOW-CLAUSEN, K. – CAPRIOTTI VITTOZZI, G. (eds): *The Iseum Campense from the Roman Empire to the Modern Age. Temple – Monument – Lieu de Mémoire* [Papers of the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome 66]. Rome 2018, 79–98.

[49] Suet. *Vesp.* 7. Cf. BRICAULT, L. – GASPARINI, V.: I Flavi, Roma e il culto di Isis. In BONNET, C. – SANZI, E. (eds): *Roma, la città degli dèi. La capitale dell'Impero come laboratorio religioso.* Rome 2018, 121–136.

[50] Cf. VERSLUYS: Making Meaning (n. 47).

[51] GORDON, R. L. – GASPARINI, V.: Looking for Isis 'the Magician' (ḥkꜣy.t) in the Graeco-Roman World. In BRICAULT–VEYMIERS: Bibliotheca Isiaca III (n. 13) 39–53.

[52] Ovid. *Met.* 9. 666–797.

[53] On 'Nechepso' and 'Petosiris' see FUENTES GONZÁLEZ, P. P.: Néchepso-Petosiris. In GOULET, R. (ed.): *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques 4: De Labeo à Ovidius.* Paris 2005, 601–615, cf. HEILEN, S.: Some Metrical Fragments from Nechepso and Petosiris. In BOEHM, I. – HÜBNER, W. (eds): *La poésie astrologique dans l'Antiquité.* Paris 2011, 23–93 and MOYER, I. S.: *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism.* Cambridge 2011, 208–273.

[54] Plin. *N.H.* 30. 9; Apul. *Apol.* 90.

[55] Lucian. *Philops.* 31. 34–36.

[56] Apul. *Met.* 2. 27–29.

About the same time, Marcus Aurelius' army was supposedly saved during the campaign against the Quadi in 172 (or 171) CE by the intervention of the *hierogrammateus* Arnouphis, who called up a rainstorm by means of incantations.[57] Late-antique attempts to differentiate between 'low' and 'high' Egyptian magic, such as Heliodorus' scene of Kalasiris' rejection of a request to use his magical powers for love-magic, hardly altered the stereotype.[58] As for alchemy, techniques of dyeing, tempering, and changing colour, that is, metallurgical processes involving the fundamental principle of the mixture of substances (later taken up by the theurgic tradition on the hieratic art) were very widespread in Egypt. Statues and divine images (such as Bryaxis' Serapis in the late-antique accounts by Athenodorus' and Rufinus)[59] were said to have been produced in this way and animated through the ceremony of the "Opening of the mouth". Egyptian ritual procedures of animation of statues stimulated an intense intellectual and religious discourse, particularly during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.[60] In this literature, alchemy (together with astrology and magic) was presented as a sort of initiation process, knowledge of which was kept secret by the Egyptian priests who promoted demonic religious practices and induced people to believe that statues were actually alive.

7) Our seventh Egyptianism covers the appropriation of Egypt and the 'Isiac cults' into Middle and Neoplatonism. In one of his last works, *De Iside et Osiride* (ca. 120 CE), Plutarch represented Isis, as the female principle in Nature, rejoicing at her impregnation by the Logos of God; alternatively, Osiris is the origin, Isis the receptive element and Horus the *apotelesma*, the perfect achievement.[61] In the mid-2nd century CE, Numenius of Apamea argued that the 'wise nations', including the Egyptians, created their initiations, teachings and temple-foundations in full accord with Plato's conceptions.[62] The famous story of Plotinus' (ca. 204–270 CE) encounter with

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[57] Dio Cass. 71. 8. 2–4; *Suda, s.v.* Ἄρνουφις; *AE* 1934, 245 = *RICIS* 515/0115. The historicity of the rainstorm(s), though of course not the magical intervention, is confirmed by the well-known representations on the Column of Marcus Aurelius (scenes XI and XVI): see e.g. KOVÁCS, P.: Marcus Aurelius' Rain-Miracle: When and Where? *Študijné Zvesti Archeologického ústavu Sav* 62 (2017) 101–111.

[58] Hld. 3. 14–16. The date of this novel is disputed, but recent opinions have tended to support a 4th-century date, cf. BOWERSOCK, G. W.: *Fiction as History*. Los Angeles 1994, 149–160; BREMMER, J. N.: Transformation and Decline of Sacrifice in Imperial Rome and Late Antiquity. In BLÖMER, M. – ECKHARDT, R. (eds): *Transformationen paganer Religion in der Kaiserzeit*. Berlin 2018, 215–256, here 228.

[59] Athenod. ap. Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 4. 48. 4–6; Rufinus, *HE* 11. 23. Cf. BELAYCHE (n. 22).

[60] We may cite here especially Numenius of Apamea (2nd half of the 2nd century CE) and the alchemical literature of the same period: the treatise of Isis to her son Horus, the Corpus Hermeticum, the Chaldean Oracles, the Four Books attributed to Democritus, the works of Maria the Jewess and Ostanes, and later Pebichius, the papyri of Leyden and Stockholm and – in particular – Zosimus of Panopolis (2nd half of the 3rd century CE). See MARTELLI, M.: Graeco-Egyptian and Byzantine Alchemy. In IRBY, G. L. (ed.): *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Science, Medicine, Technology*. London 2016, 217–231.

[61] Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 53 (372e–f) and 56 (373e–374a), followed by Apul. *De deo Soc.* 15. Cf. HANI (n. 46) esp. 225–252; PEPIN, J.: Utilisations philosophiques du mythe d'Isis et Osiris dans la tradition platonicienne. In *Sagesse et religion. Colloque de Strasbourg (octobre 1976)*. Paris 1977, 51–64; BIANCHI, U.: Plutarch und der Dualismus. In *ANRW* II.36.1 (1987) 350–365; DE SIMONE (n. 46) esp. 101–116.

[62] Numen. fr. 1 des Places, cf. FREDE, M.: Numenius. In *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987) 1034–1075; FUENTES GONZÁLEZ, P. P.: Nouménios d'Apamée. In GOULET, R. (ed.): *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques 4: De Labeo à Ovidius.* Paris 2005, 724–740; STAAB, G.: Numenius. *RfAC* 25 (2013) 1172–1197.

an Egyptian priest in the *Iseum Campense* at Rome, who materialized the philosopher's *daimon* and, astonished to find it a very god, exclaimed: "μακάριος εἶ!", fits perfectly into the same process of enhancement, and of course re-interpretation, of Egyptian 'wisdom'.[63] Similar claims continue into late antiquity, for example in Proclus (412–485 CE),[64] Damascius (ca. 462–538 CE),[65] Lactantius Placidus (5th–6th century CE)[66] and Aeneas of Gaza (ca. 450–518 CE). In his dialogue between Aegyptus (an Alexandrian), Euxitheus (a Syrian) and Theophrastus (an Athenian), the latter expounds Platonic and Egyptian philosophies, arguing, again in a long tradition, that Plato had introduced the philosophy of the Egyptians to the Greeks, and in particular the doctrine of the transmigration of the souls.[67]

8) Yet another area of very diverse appropriation can be found in the context of 'early Christianity'. Here so-called 'heretics' drew freely on the imaginative resources offered by the *gens isiaca*: an excellent example is the use made of Egypt by the late 1st-century Gnostic Naassenes, who regarded that country as the oldest civilization after the Phrygians, and the first to invent mysteries and *orgia* of all the gods, including those of Isis, and to recognize the order of the cosmos: for them, the phallus of Osiris stood for the principle of orderly reproduction of and in the universe.[68] In the so-called 'Catholic' tradition, on the other hand, the vicissitudes of Osiris, Isis, Seth, Anubis and Horus, were a handy club with which to beat 'paganism': "what a bad example to humans!", exclaims Firmicus Maternus, "and anyway, why weep over the harvest, why mourn the regenerating seed?".[69] Those hideous tales of incests, adulteries and violence were so inacceptable that, as early as Minucius Felix' *Octavius* (early 3rd century CE), the object of Isis' quest is no longer her brother and husband Osiris, but – clearly modelled on Demeter's search for Persephone – her son Harpocrates.[70] Finally, the Sybil of *Sibylline Oracles* Book 5 (a Jewish/Christian text probably originally composed during the reign of Hadrian but receiving its final place in the edited collection only during the 6th century CE) represents herself as the sister of Isis but threatens destruction upon Egyptians, guilty of "worshipping false gods, and stones, and beasts (…), gods of stone and clay that had no sense" (vs. 103 and 636).[71]

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[63] Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 10.

[64] Procl. *In Rem Publicam* 37 (II 56–57 Kroll). See now BALTZLY, D. – FINAMORE, J. – MILES, G.: *Proclus. Commentary on Plato's Republic.* Cambridge 2018.

[65] Damascius, *De prim. princip.* 89 and 111. See AHBEL-RAPPE, S.: *Damascius' Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles.* Oxford 2010, 309–314 and 385–389.

[66] Lact. Placidus, *Commentar. in Statii Theb.* 1. 717–720 (Sweeney).

[67] Aeneas, *Theophr.* 7. 1, 10. 1 and 12. 1. See GERTZ, S. – DILLON, J. – RUSSELL, D.: *Aeneas of Gaza: Theophrastus, with Zacharias of Mytilene: Ammonius.* London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney 2012.

[68] Hippol. *Ref. haer.* 5. 7. 22–23.

[69] Firm. Mat. *De errore* 2. 7.

[70] Min. Felix, *Octav.* 21; Lact. *Epit.* 23 and *Inst. Div.* 1. 17 and 21; Arnob. *Adv. nationes* 1. 36. 6. Cf. TAISNE, A.-M.: Le culte isiaque dans l'*Octavius* de Minucius Felix. *Vita Latina* 40 (1998) 29–37, esp. 34–35; BRICAULT, L.: *Gens isiaca* et identité polythéiste à Rome à la fin du IVe s. apr. J.-C. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Power (n. 12) 338–339; SFAMENI GASPARRO, G.: Identités religieuses isiaques : pour la définition d'une catégorie historico-religieuse. In GASPARINI–VEYMIERS: Individuals (n. 12) 74–107.

[71] The first three books of the Sibylline Oracles are introduced, translated and commented in BUITENWERF, R.: *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting, with an Introduction, Translation,*

9) The ninth, and final, Egyptianism suggested here is the extensive late-antique encyclopaedic tradition of *lexica* and *scholia*. Johannes Lydus (490 – ca. 565 CE) explains why Egyptians deemed the ibis to be sacred to Hermes (i.e. Thot) by giving an elaborate account of its symbolic anatomy (the black and white plumage being an image of the *logos* before and while being spoken) and a comparison with the human heart (based on their shared relationship with water).[72] Pseudo-Nonnus (6th century CE) alludes to the statuettes he (and Gregory of Nazianzus before him) allegedly saw in Alexandria, with a dog's head, a cat's head and a hawk's head, which, he complains, are the "bizarre and composite monsters" that both the Egyptians and the Greeks used to venerate.[73] Finally, Isidore of Seville (560–636 CE) focuses again on Hermes (here identified with Anubis), who is supposed to have invented the lyre by using the shell of a tortoise left in the fields by the receding Nile[74] and who is depicted with a dog's head since, he says, among the Egyptians this animal was reputed as the most intelligent and acute species.[75] For her part, Isis (as Io) invented both hieratic and demotic signs[76] and invented the sistrum, which received her name and was used by Amazons when they were called up to do battle.[77]

MATERIAL CULTURE

Though long, the previous section offers but an abbreviated and simplified sketch of the range of constructions of Egypt and its gods at all cultural levels, constructions that are by no means mutually exclusive. Our main concern has been to point up the way in which a variety of agents, including small-time religious entrepreneurs, using diverse materials mediated orally, in iconography and through texts, capitalized on the symbolic charge of Egypt, by turns 'incorporating' and 'othering' what they found. We now shift the focus by looking more closely at material culture.

Thanks to the recent publication of Molly Swetnam-Burland's *Egypt in Italy*,[78] we now dispose of an excellent account of Greek and Roman cultural products refracting Egyptian culture and religion, appropriated through complex processes of recommodification. The author brilliantly shows how Egyptian artefacts and Egyptian-inspired motifs assumed strategic and situational roles as signifiers of political authority, religious power, elite social status, etc., constantly taking on new decorative, symbolic and religious functions. Rather than stressing their status as Egyptian imports or local emulations of Egyptian artefacts, her model foregrounds the biography of such

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and Commentary. Leiden 2003 and LIGHTFOOT, J. L.: *The Sibylline Oracles, with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books.* Oxford 2007.

[72] Johan. Lydus, *De mens*. 4. 76.
[73] Ps.-Nonnus, *Comm. in Greg. Naz. serm*. 5. 28.
[74] Isidor. *Etymol*. 3. 22. 8.
[75] Isidor. *Etymol*. 8. 11. 49.
[76] Isidor. *Etymol*. 1. 3. 4–5 and 8. 11. 84.
[77] Isidor. *Etymol*. 3. 22. 12.
[78] SWETNAM-BURLAND, M.: *Egypt in Italy. Visions of Egypt in Roman Imperial Culture.* Cambridge 2015.

objects, the agency behind their re-invention and re-interpretation, and the symbolic
capital employed and gained in these processes of adoption, adaptation and re-seman-
ticization. By no means all Egyptian imports or imitations (Malaise's "*pharaonica*"
and "*pharaonica* d'imitation", when in association with the Isiac cults, or "*aegyptia-
ca*", when not)[79] represent expressions of Isiac religious preferences. More often, as
Swetnam-Burland stresses, "the representation of an imaginary imported statue com-
municated aspiration, telegraphing a financial status and wordly taste belied by the
economic reality".[80] The remainder of our contribution briefly outlines five distinct
strategies in relation to objects of different kinds.

1. Egyptian Inscribed Texts

Only a very small number of religious specialists outside Egypt had knowledge of
hieroglyphic, hieratic or demotic script, let alone the ability to compose meaningful
texts in the language. Visitors to the temple of Isis in Pompeii, for example, could not
read the Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription that was originally part of a sculpture in
the round produced immediately after Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt, and
then re-used as a sort of stele in front of the temple at least during its second and last
phase (62–79 CE) (figs 2a–b).[81] Such texts (which Apuleius refers to as *litterae igno-
rabiles*, 'unknown signs')[82] were rather understood allegorically as an allusion to the
homeland of the Isiac gods, evoking the sheer antiquity (and enigmatic quality) of
Egyptian wisdom, thus laying claim to its religious capital. In the same vein, still in
Pompeii, the *mensa sacra* on a greywacke slab recording a dedication by Psammeti-
chus II to Atum (594–589 BCE) was re-used as a threshold block by the owner of the
House of the Double Lararium, thus openly displaying his 'foreign' cultural interests
and, to a degree, sacralising his own private *domus* (fig. 2c).[83]

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[79] MALAISE: Pour une terminologie (n. 20) 201–210. *Contra* GASPARINI's review (n. 20) 486–487.

[80] SWETNAM-BURLAND (n. 78) 28.

[81] Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 1035. See recently POOLE, F. (ed.): *Il Nilo
a Pompei. Visioni d'Egitto nel mondo romano. Catalogo della mostra, Torino, Museo Egizio, 5 marzo –
4 settembre 2016.* Torino 2016, 114, no. 83.

[82] Apul. *Met.* 11. 22: *et iniecta dextera senex comissimus ducit me protinus ad ipsas fores aedis am-
plissimae, rituque sollemni apertionis celebrato ministerio ac matutino peracto sacrificio, de opertis adyti
profert quosdam libros litteris ignorabilibus praenotatos, partim figuris cuiuscemodi animalium concepti-
sermonis compendiosa verba suggerentes, partim nodosis et in modum rotae tortuosis capreolatimque
condensis apicibus a curiosa1profanorum lectione munita: indidem mihi praedicat quae forent ad usum
teletae necessario praeparanda.* "Then the very kindly old man, putting his right hand in mine, took me
straight to the very doors of the spacious shrine. There, after the service of the opening of the temple had
been celebrated with exalted ceremony and the morning sacrifice performed, he brought out from the
hidden quarters of the shrine certain books in which the writing was in undecipherable letters. Some of
them conveyed, through forms of all kinds of animals, abridged expressions of traditional sayings; others
barred the possibility of being read from the curiosity of the profane, in that their extremities were knotted
and curved like wheels or closely intertwined like vine-tendrils. From these writings he indicated to me the
preparations necessary for the rite of initiation" (transl. in GWYN GRIFFITHS, J.: *The Isis-Book (Metamor-
phoses, Book XI)* [ÉPRO 39]. Leiden 1975, 97).

[83] Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 468. Cf. SWETNAM-BURLAND (n. 78) 32;
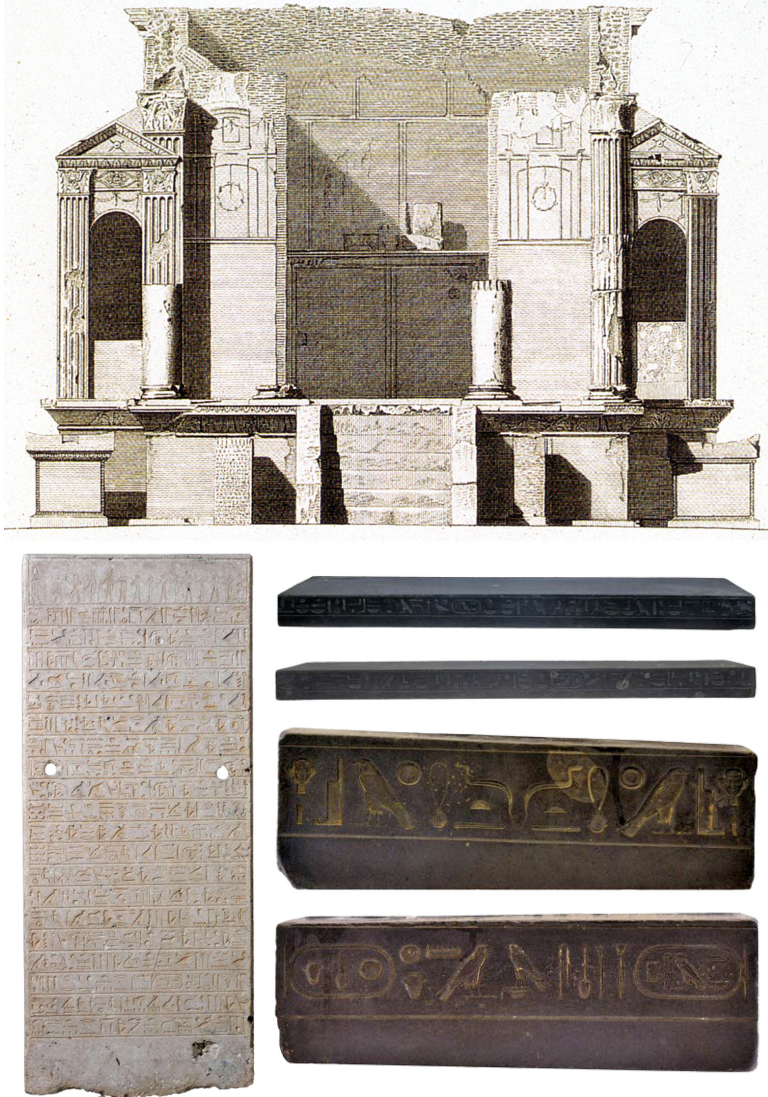POOLE (n. 81) 161, no. 131.

Fig. 2. Pompeii, 62–79 CE.

From top to bottom, from left to right:
a) The façade of the temple of Isis, with Egyptian hieroglyphic stele left of the staircase, drawn by Francesco La Vega and engraving by Carlo Nolli (after DE CARO, S.: *Il santuario di Iside a Pompei e nel Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Guida rapida.* Le collezioni del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Napoli 2006, 26);
b) Egyptian hieroglyphic stele from the temple of Isis, end of the 4th century BCE (after POOLE [n. 81] 114, no. 83);
c) Greywacke *mensa* with dedication by Psammetichus II to Atum (594–589 BCE) from the threshold of the House of the Double Lararium, Pompeii (after POOLE [n. 81] 161, no. 131).

When original material was lacking, the same function was served by specially-manufactured objects, whose 'text' was never intended to be read, but to confer prestige upon the sanctuaries or ritual contexts they were associated with. The performativity of such artefacts, which are normally dismissed as products of 'Egyptomania',[84] was not at all diminished by the absence of what we would call authenticity. The effort expended in making such productions plausible varied considerably. The well-known *Mensa Isiaca* or *Tabula Bembina* (figs 3a–b),[85] found in Rome at the beginning of the 16th century, or the temple-shaped bronze base found in 1760 close to the vestibule of the Temple of Isis and Mater Deum at Herculaneum (figs 3c–d),[86] both dated to the 1st century CE, present pseudo-hieroglyphic texts and semasiographs which, despite being influenced by the Hellenistic tradition and lacking syntactic meaning, in general respect the Pharaonic iconographic conventions (e.g. the disposition of juxtaposed scenes divided in horizontal registers) and the orientation and framing of the hieroglyphs. This suggests the presence in Italy of groups of Egyptian artisans commissioned to 'Egyptianize' the main Isiac sanctuaries in the peninsula.[87]

In other cases, it is likely that the authors of such artefacts were Roman copyists who had no particular interest in producing credible Egyptian texts and iconographies. The offering-tables held by the pseudo-Egyptian priests on two marble altars from Rome now in the British Museum represent fanciful hieroglyphics (figs 4a–b), just as the images beside them are pseudo-Egyptian.[88] The now missing base found in 1789 by Gavin Hamilton in Pantanello (Tivoli), which formed part of the inventory of the Villa Hadriana,[89] presents a sistrum, a bird (probably an ibis), a snake and a hieroglyphic text which has been metamorphosed into a few evocative geometric designs without the slightest attempt to remain faithful to the putative original(s) (fig. 4c, no. 1).

[84] Cf. DE VOS, M.: *L'egittomania in pitture e mosaici romano-campani della prima età imperiale* [ÉPRO 84]. Leiden 1980; HUMBERT, J.-M.: L'égyptomanie : actualité d'un concept de la Renaissance au postmodernisme". In *Egyptomania. L'Égypte dans l'art occidental 1730-1930*. Paris 1994, 21–25; MALAISE: Pour une terminologie (n. 20) 214–220, with further references; *Il culto di Iside a Benevento. Pubblicato nell'ambito della mostra 'Egittomania. Iside e il mistero', Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 2007*. Milan 2007; DE CARO, S. (ed.): *Egittomania. Iside e il mistero. Catalogo della mostra, Napoli, 12 ottobre 2006 – 26 febbraio 2007*. Milan 2006; BRAGANTINI, I.: The Cult of Isis and Ancient Egyptomania in Campania. In BALCH, D. L. – WEISSENRIEDER, A. (eds): *Contested Spaces. Houses and Temples in Roman Antiquity and New Testament*. Tübingen 2012, 21–33.

[85] Museo Egizio di Torino, inv. no. C 7155. See now BUDISCHOVSKY, M.-C.: La figure de Pharaon dans la *Mensa Isiaca* et ses avatars italiens. Du temple pharaonique au temple isiaque. In GASPARINI–VEYMIERS: Individuals (n. 12) 322–329, with further bibliography.

[86] Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 1107. Cf. GASPARINI, V.: La 'palaestra' d'Herculanum: un sanctuaire d'Isis et de la Mater Deum. *Pallas* 84 (2010) 229–264, esp. 233, with references (n. 43).

[87] Cf. ROULLET, A.: *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome* [ÉPRO 20]. Leiden 1972, 18–20.

[88] British Museum of London, inv. no. 1805,0703.212-213. See BRICAULT, L. – VEYMIERS, R.: Les autels égyptisants du Museum Odescalchum : essai de biographie culturelle, forthcoming, with further bibliography.

[89] Recorded in 1804 by ROCCHEGGIANI, L.: *Raccolta di cento tavole rappresentanti i costumi religiosi civili, e militari degli antichi Egiziani, Etruschi, Greci e Romani tratti dagli antichi monumenti*. Roma 1804, vol. I, pl. LXXVIII, no. 1. Cf. BRICAULT–VEYMIERS: Les autels (n. 88).

Fig. 3. From top to bottom:

a–b) The *Mensa Isiaca*. Photograph and engraving by Enea Vico (1559) (after Bonacini, P. [ed.]: *Museo egizio.* Torino 2015, 21, no. 1 and Leospo, E.: *La mensa isiaca di Torino* [ÉPRO 70]. Leiden 1978, pl. XXXII); c–d) Temple-shaped bronze base found in 1760 close to the vestibule of the Temple of Isis and Mater Deum at Herculaneum, 1st century CE (after De Caro [n. 84] 126, no. 83).

Fig. 4. From top to bottom:

a–b) Marble altars with Egyptian-like figures, 2nd century CE (© 2017 Trustees of the British Museum);
c) On the left, base with fanciful hieroglyphics found in 1789 by Gavin Hamilton in Pantanello as part of the inventory of the Villa Hadriana (after ROCCHEGGIANI [n. 89] vol. I, pl. LXXVIII, no. 1].

Finally, three terracotta 'Campana' plaques (81–96 CE), now preserved in three different museums, probably show two Roman masked actors surrounded by at least twenty-two Egyptian-like motifs evoking the idea of hieroglyphs, but without cartouches and without any recognizable meaning (figs 5a–b).[90]

2. Egyptian Funerary Rituals

Imitation Egyptian funerary rituals are also instructive in this connection. A good example is an alabaster vessel with an inscription by Nebneteru on the *recto* and the funerary of P. Claudius Pulcher on the *verso* (fig 6a).[91] The original was made in the 9th or 8th century BCE, but imported to Italy and there re-inscribed in the late 1st century BCE. The use of such an urn for the ashes of a deceased person is however completely at odds with Egyptian funerary usage: the Egyptian artefact has simply been appropriated into a quite different set of funerary customs. Similarly, Pharaonic-period statuettes of Osiris and *ushabtis* were actually part of an individual's investment in the afterlife. The latter, in particular, were intended to serve the owner as workers in the hereafter. The inclusion of such objects in several burials of imperial date, especially in Gaul, Northern Italy and Eastern Europe (fig. 6b), might imply *some* knowledge of the Egyptian tradition, although without the name, essential in Egypt, they could not possibly have performed the required function correctly.[92]

Turning now to inscriptions, the authors of funeraries that invoke Isiac deities were equally selective.[93] The deceased are virtually never assumed to be going to Hades but the authors drew upon what they knew of Egyptian beliefs, sometimes employing specific formulae such as εὐψύχι and δοῖ σοι ὁ Ὄσειρις τὸ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ. We thus find individuals combining the (Egyptian) idea of receiving Osiris' 'efflux' of immortality with the quite different notion of being heroised in the Isles of the Blessed or combining Osiris with the Roman *Dii Manes*, as in Iulia Politike's inscription on the *via Nomentana* (fig. 7).[94]

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[90] SPIER, J. – POTTS, T. – COLE, S. E. (eds): *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World.* Los Angeles 2018, 273–274, no. 172, with bibliography. They are now housed in the August Kestner Museum in Hannover (inv. no. 2008.233), the Louvre (inv. no. REC 1341 / MNE 604) and the British Museum (inv. no. 1805,0703.316).

[91] Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. N 386-D 34-MR 889. Cf. SWETNAM-BURLAND (n. 78) 25–28.

[92] A thorough study of this custom is a desideratum. As for some of the figurines of Osiris from Gaul, see LECLANT, J.: Osiris en Gaul. In GAÁL, E. – KÁKOSY, L. (eds): *Studia Aegyptiaca I. Recueil d'études dédiées à Vilmos Wessetzky à l'occasion de son 65ᵉ anniversaire.* Budapest 1974, 263–285. Some of these items are listed in BRICAULT: Atlas (n. 13).

[93] GASPARINI, V.: 'I will not be thirsty. My lips will not be dry'. Individual Strategies of Re-constructing the Afterlife in the Isiac Cults. In WALDNER, K. – GORDON, R. L. – SPICKERMANN, W. (eds): *Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire* [PAwB 57]. Stuttgart 2016, 125–150.

[94] *CIL* VI 20616 = *ILS* 8171 = *RICIS* 501/0198. Cf. GASPARINI: I will not be thirsty (n. 93) 129–130, with further references.

Fig. 5. From top to bottom:

a) Photograph of the terracotta 'Campana' (81–96 CE) with comic actor and Egyptian-like motifs preserved in the August Kestner Museum in Hannover (after SPIER–POTTS–COLE [n. 90] 273, no. 172);
b) Drawing of the similar terracotta 'Campana' preserved in the British Museum (© 2017 Trustees of the British Museum).

Fig. 6. From top to bottom:

a) Egyptian alabaster vessel (9th or 8th century BCE) re-used as urn for the ashes of P. Claudius Pulcher (late 1st century BCE) (after SWETNAM-BURLAND [n. 78] 26, fig. 1.2a–b);
b) *Ushabtis* from the necropolis of *Tannetum* (after PERNIGOTTI, S.: Antichità egiziane del museo 'Gaetano Chierici' di paletnologia. Reggio Emilia 1991, 146–148, tavs. XXXIII–XXXV).

Fig. 7. Iulia Politike's epitaph *RICIS* 501/0198 (after LUNI, M. – GORI, G.: *1756–1986.*
Il Museo Archeologico di Urbino, I. Storia e presentazione delle collezioni Fabretti e Stoppani
[Quaderni del Palazzo Ducale di Urbino 4]. Urbino 1986, 100, fig. 1).

Finally, mummification and pyramid tombs were of long-term interest to Romans
(see e.g. Isidore of Seville, 560–636 CE).[95] For a few well-off individuals, this was the
Egyptian custom that best matched their requirements: apart from C. Cestius' monu-
mental pyramid by the Porta S. Paolo in Rome (late 1st century BCE) (fig. 8a),[96] we

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[95] Isidor. *Etymol.* 15. 11. 4: *Pyramides genus sepulchrorum quadratum et fastigiatum ultra omnem
excelsitatem quae fieri manu possit, unde et mensuram umbrarum egressae nullam habere umbram dicun-
tur. Tali autem aedificio surgunt ut a lato incipiant et in angusto finiantur sicut ignis; PUR enim dicitur
ignis. Hos Aegyptus habet. Apud maiores enim potentes aut sub montibus aut in montibus sepeliebantur.
Inde tractum est ut super cadavera aut pyramides fierent, aut ingentes columnae conlocarentur.*
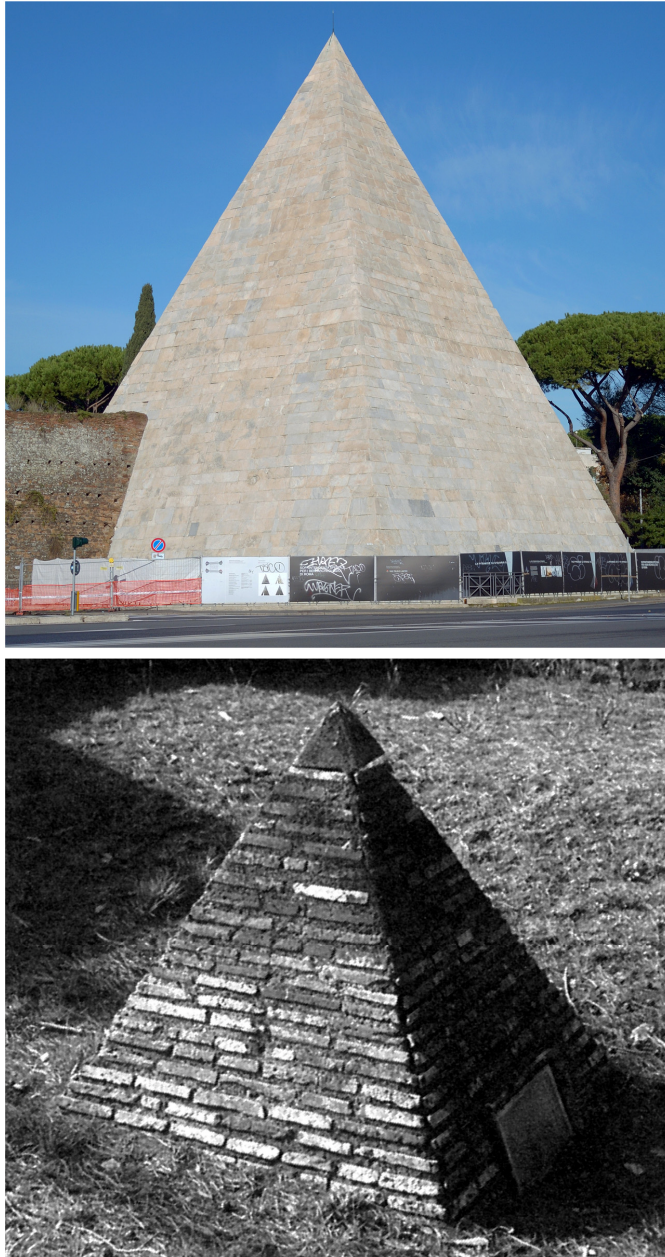[96] *CIL* VI 1374a = *ILS* 917. Cf. SWETNAM-BURLAND (n. 78) 84–89.

Fig. 8. From top to bottom:

a) C. Cestius' pyramid by the Porta S. Paolo in Rome (late 1st century BCE)
(© Creative Common Community CC BY-SA 4.0);
b) Tib. Claudius Eumenes' pyramid in the Isola Sacra cemetery in Portus by
Ostia (69–98 CE) (after CARROLL [n. 97] 232, fig. 69).

can cite that of the Gaul Tib. Claudius Eumenes (69–98 CE), who was buried with his wife and three children in a small brick-built pyramid in the Isola Sacra cemetery in Portus by Ostia (fig. 8b).[97] On the other hand, mummification or embalming are seldom attested outside Egypt,[98] though there is a case at *Carnuntum* (Pannonia) of a mummified body in a sarcophagus preserved by means of a process attested in Late-Antique Egypt.[99] A statuette of a dog (h. 6 cm), interpreted as Anubis, was found in the same burial.

3. Pharaonic 'Ear-Stelae' and Graeco-Roman 'Ohrenweihungen'

From at least the New Kingdom, deities such as Amun-Re, Hathor and Horus were honoured in Egypt by the dedication of so-called 'ear-stelae', whose massed ears (up to 376 on a single stele) were intended to ensure the deity's capacity and willingness to listen to the prayers of supplicants (figs 9a–b).[100] In the Fayoum, the god Mestasytmis (*msḏrwy-sḏmwy*, 'the listening ears'), shown with a couple of huge auricles, personified this concept (fig. 9c).[101]

   The Graeco-Roman custom of dedicating marble slabs with ears carved on them ('*Ohrenweihungen*') was directly inspired by this Egyptian tradition (fig. 9d–f).[102] The earliest attestations date from the 2nd to 1st centuries BCE. If we look at the provenance of the examples connected to the Isiac gods, however, we find a particularly strong concentration in *Macedonia* (where more than a half of the nineteen dedications have been found); other examples are very sporadic.[103] Such a patchy distribution is typical of the selective appropriation of Egyptian tradition in the 'Isiac cults'. Moreover, whereas in Egypt, where worshippers had no access to the temple, individual communication with the deity was impossible, in Greece such ears were intended to provide individual assurance of divine attention.

   We might also note here the use of *tabulae ansatae* in three such dedications, which probably helped to give the ears a more 'Roman' look (fig. 9g).[104]

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[97] *IPOstie*-A 60. Cf. CARROLL, M.: *Spirits of the Dead. Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe.* Oxford 2006, 232, fig. 69.

[98] CHIOFFI, L.: *Mummificazione e imbalsamazione a Roma ed in altri luoghi del mondo romano.* Roma 1998.

[99] Museum Carnuntinum, Petronell, inv. no. 3978. Cf. CHIOFFI (n. 98) 71, no. I.5 − 34. Date: 3rd–4th century CE.

[100] See TOYE-DUBS, N.: *De l'oreille à l'écoute. Étude des documents votifs de l'écoute : nouvel éclairage sur le développement de la piété personnelle en Egypte ancienne* [BAR International Series 2811]. Oxford 2016.

[101] Without inv. no. Cf. WAGNER, G. – QUAEGEBEUR, J.: Une dédicace grecque au dieu égyptien Mestasytmis de la part de son synode (Fayoum, époque romaine). *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 73 (1973) 41–60.

[102] GASPARINI, V.: Listening Stones. Cultural Appropriation, Resonance, and Memory in the Isiac Cults. In GASPARINI, V. (ed.): Vestigia. *Miscellanea di studi storico-religiosi in onore di Filippo Coarelli nel suo 80° anniversario* [PAwB 55]. Stuttgart 2016, 555–574.

[103] GASPARINI: Listening Stones (n. 102) 566–571, cat. nos 5–*14.

[104] GASPARINI: Listening Stones (n. 102) 566–567, cat. no. 3; 570–571, cat. nos 15–16.

Fig. 9. Egyptian 'ear-stelae', stele of Mestasytmis and Graeco-Roman '*Ohrenweihungen*'.

From top to bottom, from left to right:
a) Egypt (© Creative Common Community CC BY-SA 3.0);
b) Memphis (Ramesside period) (© 2017 Trustees of the British Museum);
c) Fayoum (1st century CE) (after WAGNER–QUAEGEBEUR [n. 101] pl. I);
d) Thessaloniki (1st century BCE – 1st century CE) (after DESPINIS, G. – STEPHANIDOU-TIVE-RIOU, T. – VOUTIRAS, E. [eds]: *Κατάλογος γλυπτών του Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου Θεσσαλονίκης, II.* Thessaloniki 2003, 317, pl. 465);
e) Thessaloniki (beginning of the 1st century BCE) (after DESCAMPS-LEQUIME, S. [ed.]: *Au royaume d'Alexandre le Grand. La Macédoine antique. Catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, 13 octobre 2011 – 16 janvier 2012.* Paris 2011, 606, no. 379);
f) Italy (2nd–3rd century CE) (© Wellcome Library, London);
g) Delos (2nd–1st century BCE) (after ZAPHIROPOULOU, P.: *Δήλος: μαρτυρίες από τα μουσειακά εκθέματα.* Athina 1998, no. 227).

4. Re-styling Egyptian Gods

Jörg Rüpke has recently observed with regard to what he calls 'Isism' (which largely corresponds to our concept of 'Egyptianism') "is not held together by some meta-physical instance called Isis, but by communication of individuals who decide to frame their religious action as communication with such a goddess, and who thus gain agency and collective identity in ever more specific forms".[105] By employing such communication through a variety of different objects and texts (i.e. attributes, materials, epithets, formulae, etc.) involving specific deities such as Isis, individuals could enlarge their own agency, strengthen social relationships and thus reinforce their shared cultural identity.

The case of Anubis allows us to illustrate that (fig. 10).[106] The mosaic (probably produced during the 4th century CE) shows Anubis (here without his usual attributes and represented as a shepherd with his *pedum*) guarding a herd of wild or imaginary animals, including a sphinx. This representation, which is unparalleled, is undoubtedly influenced by a mixture of 'pagan' and Christian themes, evoking associations with the myth of Orpheus and probably intending to communicate to the people visiting the hall a peaceful and cheering but also exotic vision of the Hereafter.

We find a quite different process in Egypt itself (though apparently not outside), where a variety of Egyptian gods (mainly Anubis and Horus, (figs 11a–e) but also Apis, Bes, Harpocrates, Tutu and several others) are sometimes represented as dressed as Roman soldiers with a *paludamentum*, occasionally riding a horse,[107] more often standing with the typical Imperial muscle cuirass with *pteryges* and holding a spear and a *parazonium*,[108] or even as an enthroned Emperor wearing the *paludamentum* and a crown.[109] It is now recognized that these military accoutrements bestow attributes of power and supremacy associated with the Emperor, the army and the ideology of victory.[110] Images such as these convey a clear sense of the choices open to

[105] RÜPKE, J.: Theorising Religion for the Individual. In GASPARINI–VEYMIERS: Individuals (n. 12) 61–73.
[106] MURGIA, E.: Un *pastiche* iconografico: Anubi pastore tra gli animali. In FONTANA, F. – MURGIA, E. (eds): Sacrum facere. *Atti del II seminario di archeologia del sacro. Contaminazioni: forme di contatto, traduzione e mediazione nei sacra del mondo greco e romano, Trieste, 19-20 aprile 2013.* Trieste 2014, 281–300, with further bibliography.
[107] Louvre, inv. no. E 17410. Cf. GRENIER, J.-CL.: L'Anubis cavalier du Musée du Louvre. In DE BOER, M. B. – EDRIDGE, T. A. (eds): *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren* [ÉPRO 68]. Leiden 1978, I 405–408.
[108] Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, inv. no. F 1950/3-7. Cf. BUDISCHOVSKY, M.-C.: *Anubiaca.* In BRICAULT: Bibliotheca Isiaca I (n. 13) 23–30, here 25; British Museum of London, inv. no. 1868,0523.1. Cf. FLUCK, C. – HELMECKE, G. – O'CONNELL, E. R. (eds): *Egypt. Faith after the Pharaoh.* London 2015, 65. There is a similar but fragmentary example in the British Museum, inv. no. 1868,0523.2; Pushkin Museum, inv. no. I.1 a 2794. Cf. BECK, H. – BOL, P. C. – BÜCKLING, M. (eds): *Ägypten Griechenland Rom. Abwehr und Berührung.* Frankfurt a.M. – Tübingen 2005, 617–618, no. 197.
[109] British Museum of London, inv. no. 1912,0608.109. Cf. recently DYER, J. – O'CONNELL, E. R. – SIMPSON, A.: Polychromy in Roman Egypt: A Study of a Limestone Sculpture of the Egyptian God Horus. *Technical Research Bulletin* 8 (2014) 93–103.
[110] KANTOROWICZ, E. H.: Gods in Uniform. *PAPhS* 105.4 (1961) 368–393; GRENIER, J.-CL.: *Anubis alexandrine et romain* [ÉPRO 57]. Leiden 1977, 39–40; MALAISE, M.: Anubis et Hermanubis à

Fig. 10. Mosaic from *Ariminum* (4th century CE?) with Anubis as shepherd
(after MURGIA [n. 107] 299, fig. 3 and 298, fig. 1].

individuals in imagining these deities, of the sheer variety of ideas that might go into the production of 'Egyptian' religion, in Egypt as well as abroad, and of the energies invested in maintaining the plausibility of these communicative strategies.[111]

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l'époque gréco-romaine. Who's who?. In BRICAULT–VEYMIERS: Bibliotheca Isiaca III (n. 13) 85–88; PEREA YÉBENES, S.: Una nota complementaria sobre Anubis θωρηκτής. *Aquila legionis* 12 (2009) 133–146, here 144. Compare the different interpretations in WILL, E.: *Le relief cultuel gréco-romain. Contribution à l'histoire de l'art de l'Empire romain.* Paris 1955, 270; SEYRIG, H.: Antiquités syriennes 89. Les dieux armés et les Arabes en Syrie. *Syria* 47 (1970) 101–107; VENIT, M.: *Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria. The Theater of the Dead.* Cambridge – New York 2002, 144–145; NAEREBOUT, F.: *Cuius regio, eius religio*? Rulers and Religious Change in Greco-Roman Egypt. In BRICAULT–VERSLUYS: Power (n. 12) 36–61, with extensive bibliography.
[111] See ALBRECHT ET AL. (n. 15).

Fig. 11. From top to bottom, from left to right:

a) Anubis as a soldier riding a horse (after VEYMIERS, R.: Nouveaux visages des dieux en Égypte gréco-romaine. In QUERTINMONT, A. [ed.]: *Dieux, genies et demons en Égypte ancienne. À la rencontre d'Osiris, Anubis, Isis, Hathor, Rê et les autres.* Paris–Morlanwelz 2016, 135–145, here 144, fig. 12);

b) Anubis standing as a soldier (after *Égypte romaine. L'autre Égypte.* Paris 1997, 229, no. 250);

c) Horus standing as a soldier (after DYER–O'CONNELL–SIMPSON [n. 110] 95, fig. 4);

d) Horus enthroned as Emperor (after DYER–O'CONNELL–SIMPSON [n. 110] 94, fig. 1);

e) Horus standing as Emperor (after BECK–BOL–BÜCKLING [n. 112] 618, fig. 31.197).

5. Pharaonic and 'Isiac' Sistra

The Egyptian sistrum was a musical and ritual instrument, usually made of copper alloy and often decorated on the top with the figure of a female cat, representing the Egyptian mother-goddess Bastet nursing her kittens.[112] It was introduced fairly early among the attributes of Isis into the Graeco-Roman world: the recent *corpus* by Arnaud Saura-Ziegelmeyer lists a good 188 examples, together with 127 Pharaonic-period and 27 'uncertains', giving a total of 342 objects.

As we would expect, these sistra reveal a whole variety of appropriations. At least six examples from Pompeii (I 2, 6; VI 9, 15; VII 2, 18; VIII 7, 28; IX 8 b; the provenience of the sixth is uncertain) feature a bitch or she-wolf nursing her puppies, instead of a cat (fig. 12a).[113] This might suggest a purely local appropriation, but there are three others from Greece which are very similar: that from Corinth seems to show the same iconography,[114] while two others from Ambracia carry a bitch but no puppies.[115] The very early date of these last (probably 2nd century BCE) should be noted. Another example now in Milan shows a female cat breastfeeding an anthropomorphic kitten (fig. 12b).[116] Two others, one of them found in the Tiber at Rome, show the she-wolf nursing twins, evidently Romulus and Remus (figs 12c–d).[117]

CONCLUSION

This contribution has been an exercise in deconstruction – deconstruction of the idea of '*the* cult of Isis', of a quasi-religion constructed in modern scholarship by dint of careful selection of images, texts and documents that are deemed to instantiate it. We

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[112] Cf. SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13). We are most grateful to the author for allowing us to consult his work before publication.

[113] Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. nos 109669, 19480, 76944, 76946, 2387, 1st century CE: cf. SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) I 437–452 (type Pompeii II nos 1–3, 5–6). The sixth exemplar (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 118250) is now published in CORALINI, A.: *Pompei. Insula IX 8. Vecchi e nuovi scavi (1879–).* Bologna 2018, 262–263. Two further uncertain examples are: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. s.no. (2397), cf. SAURA-ZIEGEL-MEYER (n. 13) I 385 (type Imperial I 5); Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. s.no., 1st century CE: cf. SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) I 470 (type *Varia Pompeiana* 3). It is admittedly often difficult to distinguish cats from dogs here.

[114] Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles, inv. no. A909a, imperial period. It was donated to the museum by Franz Cumont at the end of the 19th century. See also SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) I 323 (type Fragments Bès no. 8).

[115] Archaeological Museum of Arta, inv. no. 5642-5643, 2nd century BCE: cf. SAURA-ZIEGEL-MEYER (n. 13) I 346–350 (type Ambracia nos 1–2).

[116] Soprintendenza della Lombardia, Milan, inv. no. 1748, Imperial period: cf. SAURA-ZIEGEL-MEYER (n. 13) I 485 (type Serpents no. 1).

[117] British Museum, inv. no. 1893.0626.1, 1st–2nd century CE: cf. SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) I 477–481 (type *Lupa Romana* no. 1); Museo Nazionale degli Strumenti Musicali, Roma, inv. no. IG 1007, Imperial period: cf. SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) I 477–481 (type *Lupa Romana* no. 2). See also the discussion of this material in DULIÈRE, C.: Lupa romana: *recherches d'iconographie et essai d'intérpretation.* Brussels 1979, 121 and SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER (n. 13) II 62–63.

Fig. 12. From top to bottom, from left to right:

a) Sistrum from Pompeii with bitch nursing puppies (after SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER [n. 13]
III 33, fig. 27];
b) Sistrum preserved at Milan with female cat breastfeeding an anthropomorphic kitten
(after SAURA-ZIEGELMEYER [n. 13] III 34, fig. 28);
c–d) Sistrum from Rome with she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus (after SAURA-ZIE-
GELMEYER [n. 13] III 35, fig. 29).

do not suggest that such efforts are in any way dishonest or calculating – synthetic
presentations used to be considered the way to deal with this material. Nevertheless,
they are, in our view, based on a misapprehension of the conditions of reception and
appropriation in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, and of the multifarious interests
and perspectives of the agents of such appropriations. Instead of *constructing* 'Isiac
cult' as a quasi-organic 'movement' spreading by a sort of 'epidemiological contami-
nation',[118] our approach suggests that we should rather be attempting to emphasise

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[118] BRICAULT, L.: Cultes orientaux, égyptiens, alexandrins, osiriens, isiaques, …: identités plu-
rielles et *interpretations variae*. In NIKOLOSKA, A. – MÜSKENS, S. (eds): *Romanising Oriental Gods?
Religious Transformations in the Balkan Provinces in the Roman Period. New Finds and Novel Perspec-
tives. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Skopje, 18-21 September 2013.* Skopje 2015, 19–25,

the *diversity* of evidence for Graeco-Roman reception of 'Egypt' and draw conclusions about agency, interests and experience from that point of view.[119] We thus wholeheartedly support Giulia Gasparro's recent suggestion that we abandon the idea of 'diffusion' and adopt the notion of 'continuous creation' used by J. M. Pailler.[120]

For the ancient historian, abandoning attempts to write the 'Isiac cults' into a grand narrative of religious change in the Empire, a project ineluctably shot through with teleological temptations, means opening oneself to detail, to difference, to the messiness of surviving evidence, means paying close attention to the signs of personal choice, idiosyncratic interpretations, and treating appropriation as the norm instead of as 'deviation'. It also means trying to find ways of incorporating literary texts into our models and heightening our awareness of their own situatedness, their own *Tendenz*. As an historical phenomenon the 'Isiac cults' have no hard edges; as Rüpke's 'Isism' implies,[121] there is no clear boundary between belonging to, say, an association of *melanephoroi*, offering a sacrifice to one or more of this group of divinities, abstaining from sexual activity for a while, finding parades and processions alluring, asking Isis or Serapis for help and dedicating a votive in a temple, constructing an 'Egyptian' garden, buying an 'Egyptian' object, hoping for Osiris' blessing in death. All these, and many other options, are activities available within the ambit of these divinities, all of them open to personal interpretation, individual styling, and private instrumentalization. 'Permanent creation' has to be taken literally, not just as a matter of choices by religious specialists or providers but as regards every choice made within this subfield of cultural action, which, like so much else in the Graeco-Roman world, effortlessly spans our conventional dichotomy between secular and religious.

The idea of 'Egyptianism(s)' is thus a heuristic device to break the back of this component of the traditional grand narrative, by implication too a refusal to accept that *the* big question in the history of religion in the Empire is necessarily the establishment of a Christianity as *Reichsreligion*. Our ninefold scheme is of course a mere compromise between, on the one hand, the impulse to treat history as essentially narrative, and thus inevitably bound to schemata and distance, and, on the other, respect before the quiddity of individual texts and objects, each of which amounts to or implies a counter-story to the kind of sense-making required by teleology. The main aim has been to emphasize that the 'Isiac cults' cannot be meaningfully disconnected from the wider problem of the reception and appropriation of Egypt itself in the Graeco-Roman world. For Egypt was not merely, not even primarily, a real place,

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here 23 = BRICAULT, L.: La molteplice identità degli dèi d'Egitto nel mondo Greco-romano. *Chaos e Kosmos* 15 (2014) 1–15, here 7. On the metaphor of 'contagion' and the 'epidemiological approach' in the cult of Isis see also WOOLF, G.: Only Connect? Network Analysis and Religious Change in the Roman World. *Hélade* 2.2 (2016) 43–58, esp. 51–53.

[119] See also VERSLUYS, M. J.: Egypt as Part of the Roman *koine*: Mnemohistory and the Iseum Campense in Rome. In NAGEL, S. – QUACK, J. F. – WITSCHEL, C. (eds): *Entangled Worlds. Religious Confluences between East and West in the Roman Empire. The Cults of Isis, Mithras, and Jupiter Dolichenus.* Tübingen 2017, 274–293, esp. 279.

[120] SFAMENI GASPARRO, G.: Il culto di Iside nel mondo ellenistico-romano tra 'diffusione' e 'creazione' continua. Per un nuovo modello interpretativo. *Mare Internum* 8 (2016) 13–20, here 14.

[121] See *supra* n. 105.

producer of grain, taxes and rebellion, but a place of the mind, to be moulded and reworked in every possible direction, an endeavour in which people and objects from Egypt played a minor but significant role, shifting about like buoys torn from their place of anchorage.

Valentino Gasparini
Department of Humanities: History, Geography and Art
Charles III University of Madrid
Spain

Richard L. Gordon
Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies
University of Erfurt
Germany