Religious Flows in the Roman Empire – The Expansion of 'Oriental Cults' (Isis, Mithras, Iuppiter Dolichenus) from East to West and Back Again

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Introduction
The spread of the so-called 'oriental cults' within the Roman Empire is a singular phenomenon in the religious history of the ancient world. The way in which people in the Roman Empire took over foreign cults from the East and adapted them to their own religious needs was a counter-current to the general stream of influences which at that time went from a politically stronger western military power (i.e. Rome) to the East (i.e. Asia minor, Syria and Egypt). The study of these 'religious flows' within the Imperium Romanum is the subject of a recently established project within the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe" at Heidelberg University which also organized this conference. In order to understand the specific and general developments which formed this process the symposium focused on three different case studies: the cult of Isis which, originating from Egypt, spread widely over the Roman Empire; the (Roman) cult of Mithras, being of a more problematic origin since it is still debated how much real basis it had in the Orient; and the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus, which had developed from the worship of local god in the north Syrian town of Doliche. As it was the explicit aim not to study one single case in isolation the lectures were organized according to topics, not simply according to specific cults. Given the multitude of sources often in different languages and of disparate nature (literary texts, inscriptions, paintings. reliefs, statues and small finds) it was important to assemble specialists from different areas. The speakers therefore consisted of Classicists, Ancient Historians and Archaeologists as well as Egyptologists (with a special emphasis on Late Period specialists).

Papers
The first section dealt with general questions. As JOACHIM FRIEDRICH QUACK (Heidelberg) stressed in his introductory remarks there are some starting points for innovative research in this field, such as taking into account hitherto neglected sources (e.g. the demotic texts) as well as studying a longer time period to gain diachronic depth. It is also still important to do case studies in order to find out if and to what extent the cults in question are actually comparable and can therefore be subsumed under one overarching concept of 'oriental cults' as has been traditionally been done following the model which Franz Cumont created more than a century ago. These points were taken up in the paper by JAIME ALVAR (Madrid) who raised again the question whether the cults termed as 'oriental' really have anything to do with 'the Orient'. The alternative term 'mystery cults' which is also often used for them has its problems too, since it has been transferred from certain Greek cults like that of the Eleusinian Demeter. Apart from such conceptional matters, core problems and questions for future research were approached, for instance the reasons why these cults were so successful in different regions and how exactly they have been adapted and integrated in the local as well as the imperial religious systems. Among the advantages these cults had in common Alvar named the spiritual hope for a life after death conveyed by them (which is, however, still under discussion in the case of the Roman cult of Isis and Serapis due to a lack of attestation; and the same could more or less be said of the other cults) and the possibilities of personal promotion even for people with a lower social status.

The second section took a look at the (presumed) places of origin of the cults and their diffusion throughout the Empire, the latter being much better attested than the former in the cases of Iuppiter Dolichenus and especially Mithras. With regard to Isis, LAURENT BRICAULT (Toulouse) presented the evidence of coins depicting members or at-

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tributes and symbols of the Isiac circle. He could base his deductions on his recently published corpus of coin types with Isiac motives. In the whole Mediterranean area at least 239 cities minted coins with Isiac elements, a large number of them located in Asia Minor. In his paper Bricault concentrated on the chronological developments during the Hellenistic period, the earliest emissions being from the 2nd half of the 3rd century BC. It was pointed out that the majority of minting cities were ports, and that the appearance of Isis on coins was partly due to strong political or economic influence from the Ptolemaic dynasty, e.g. in Syria and Rhodes, but does not necessarily reflect the actual popularity of the cults in the different regions. Although closely connected to the Ptolemaic religious 'propaganda', Sarapis could not gain an equal status during the Hellenistic period. ENGELBERT WINTER (Münster) presented the results of his recent excavations at the ancient site of Doliche in northern Syria (modern Turkey) which is supposed to be the place of origin of the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus, housing its 'central sanctuary'. As the earliest finds from the hilltop site date from before the middle of the 1st millennium BC, it is assumed that the worship of the god flourished there from the iron age onwards, yielding interesting evidence for a specific sacrificial practice. The sanctuary was probably monumentalized in the Roman imperial period when the cult was exported to the West through the agency mostly of soldiers. Depictions of the god from the Roman period at Doliche show a marked variety: whereas some exhibit a strong connection with the local iconographic tradition, others seem to be western 'imports'. It seems therefore possible to postulate a continuity of cult at Doliche over a long time-span. The specific appearance of the cult of Mithras in the eastern regions of the Roman world was the subject of a paper by CHRISTIAN WITSCHEL (Heidelberg). Whereas many modern scholars have postulated an eastern origin for the cult which was presumably based on Persian roots there is still rather little archaeological evidence (despite some new finds) for it in the whole Greek-speaking part of the Imperium Romanum. That raises the question whether the worship of Mithras in the East could have been a – rather late – 'backward flow' of a western 'invention' which was brought there by soldiers and other people from the West. However, things are not that easy: On the one hand, recent excavations in the Near East seem to show that at some sites the veneration of Mithras in its Roman form started quite early (i.e. in the later 1st century AD); whereas there also existed a tradition of venerating a specifically solar Mithras in Asia minor which reached back into the late hellenistic period. And on the other hand some quite clearly marked local characteristics in the way Mithras was conceptualized may be detected in the eastern evidence. This section was completed by some observations of MICHAEL BLOEMER (Münster) on the development of the worship of Iuppiter Dolichenus from a local cult to an imperial religion. The discussion was again focused on the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Since the publication of the *Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni* many new discoveries have been made in Anatolia and Syria, for example in the sanctuary at Doliche itself (see above). Only scant epigraphic attestations have been preserved, and the material thus mainly consists of iconographic depictions of the god, who is usually standing on a bull, wearing a military dress and holding a double axe. However, many other local Anatolian storm gods were presented in almost the same manner as Iuppiter Dolichenus and can hardly be distinguished from him iconographically, which forms a problem for the whole analysis of the eastern evidence. The men who brought the cult to the West were not oriental auxiliary forces, but Roman soldiers. The question why exactly the local Baal of Doliche (and not one of the many other storm gods) was favoured in this way cannot be answered at the moment.

The third section concentrated on the iconography and the visual presentation of the gods. It started with a paper by MIGUEL JOHN VERSLUYS (Leiden), which was concerned in its first part with some theoretical considerations on the meaning of concepts like 'Roman' and 'otherness/foreignness'. Since the Roman culture itself not only consisted of various originally different groups and elements, but its material culture was also a product of a pluralistic system, it is

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rather hard to define the term 'Roman' (leaving aside the legal concept) as opposed to 'the other'. This was followed by a discussion on the setting of the Flavian *Iseum Campense* in Rome in its historical context. According to VERSLUYS the sanctuary was closely linked to Flavian imperial and dynastic propaganda: Vespasian had been in Egypt when he was proclaimed Emperor and could therefore refer back to Augustus who had also come as victor from Egypt to Rome. Together with the museum-like Flavian *Templum Pacis* the Iseum represented the extension of the Empire till its outermost borders. The iconographic section was continued by a presentation of the many facets of mithraic imagery by DARIUS FRACKOWIAK (Heidelberg). After a short introduction into the previous typological and iconographical studies the question was raised how the concept of 'foreignness' was visually expressed and whether there were any real 'oriental' elements in the images of Mithras. Using the example of the main cultic scene, the tauroctony, it was demonstrated that no direct archetypes for this motive can be found in the Orient. The iconography of the bull killing scene was probably generated in Athens in the 5th century BC, and one can follow its later development until the early imperial period. The mithraic iconography in general does show a lot of local variations, but almost all of the motives are of Greco-Roman origin and real oriental elements are extremely scarce. RALF KRUMEICH (Bonn) ended the section with a paper on the images of Iuppiter Dolichenus. The god was represented in a westernized form wearing a *paludamentum* not only in the West but also at his 'home town' Doliche, which can be interpreted as a 'backward flow' of a transformed visual concept. On silver votives from the north-western provinces he is even depicted in the completely traditional manner of the Roman state god Iuppiter Optimus Maximus. Here the semi-nude god is dressed with a cloak, and only the inscriptions enable us to identify him as Dolichenus. However, there were also quite oriental looking images like a relief from Rome, where the god is shown as an old bearded man wearing earrings. Obviously, there was no linear development of 'Romanisation' in the visual representation of the god, but rather a coexistence of many different concepts, often depending on the cultural background of the dedicants.

Since extended textual sources for the cults of Iuppiter Dolichenus and Mithras are more than scarce, the fourth sections on lingual concepts was wholly dedicated to texts in different languages (Egyptian languages including Demotic, Greek and Latin) dealing with Isis and her circle, especially Osiris. To start with the four Greek hymns of Isidorus in the Egyptian temple of Medinet Madi were discussed and interpreted by IAN MOYER (Ann Arbor), considering the local background as well as hints within the texts, for instance on the author's self-presentation in the fourth hymn. Moyer pointed out the different forms, main subjects and intentions of these compositions: While the first and third hymns are addressed mainly to a universal form of Isis similar to the one in the Greek aretalogies, the second hymn focuses much more on the local context and deities like (Isis-)Thermuthis and Sokonopis, whereas the fourth one is not addressed to Isis at all but to the original founder of the temple, Pharaoh Amenemhet III, and thereby includes a strong native and traditional aspect. It can thus be demonstrated that in the Medinet Madi hymns local traditions and new Hellenistic influences don't oppose each other but are interwoven into a complex net of poetic statements, presenting a fine example of 'glocalisation'. MARTIN STADLER (Würzburg/Tübingen) further stressed the phenomenon of Isis' growing universality in the period of Greek and Roman dominion over Egypt by presenting the unpublished Demotic papyrus Vienna D.6297 + 6329 + 10101 that contains the remains of a long composition probably connected to Isis, although her name is not preserved. A goddess is called „mistress" over a number of places, inside Egypt as well as elsewhere, and is identified with foreign goddesses. Similar Egyptian lists for Isis are known especially from Graeco-Roman times, but they are not as extended as the Vienna papyrus, and restricted to Egypt itself. This text, however, combines traditional Egyptian hymns with later Hellenistic influences. With regard to the comparable texts in different languages,

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Stadler tried to reconstruct a stemma of these hymns to Isis. The importance of the Demotic sources was again demonstrated in the paper by JOACHIM FRIEDRICH QUACK (Heidelberg). He concentrated on Egyptian myth of Osiris and tried to fill the gap between older hieroglyphic attestations of parts of the story and the coherent reports of Greek and Latin authors with unpublished as well as hardly known sources. The main focus was on the core tradition of the divine body-parts of the god that had been symbolically distributed over the land, and then reassembled by Isis, thereby representing Egypt as a whole made of its single parts. After discussing different variations and the evolution of the concept within Egypt, Quack brought up evidence for its extension to places outside its homeland, especially the Eastern Mediterranean and Nubia, where the corpse or members of Osiris are localised by some texts, dating at least from early Ptolemaic times onwards. The political implications of this development are quite clear: By claiming that parts of the body of *the* Egyptian god Osiris had been distributed so far away these regions were integrated into a larger cultural, political and religious *oikoumene*. Geographical or cult-topographical matters also played a central role in the contribution of SVENJA NAGEL (Heidelberg), who concluded the section with a paper on hymns to Isis, similar to the large one presented by Stadler. These texts call her with many names connected with a series of different places, often in a geographical order. These names are in many cases those of other goddesses, thereby identifying Isis with them. On the other hand, the textual sources also present her as „the one" or „the only one", which should mean that Isis is the one goddess comprising all others. Although the main focus of the paper lay on Egyptian texts of the Graeco-Roman period, comparable sections from Greek and Latin sources were quoted as well. In a second step, the ancient Egyptian tradition of such formulas was pursued in earlier periods and in texts presenting other deities in quite a similar way. Nonetheless, the evidence shows quite clearly that it was Isis who had the predominance throughout the whole of Egypt, and carried a reflection of the Egyptian cult into the West.

The final section of the conference was concerned with the structure and equipment of the different sanctuaries of 'oriental' cults and the rituals connected with them. Continuing with Isis and at the same time jumping from Egypt to the West, KATHRIN KLEIBL (Innsbruck) tried to demonstrate the theatrical elements of the Egyptian cults within their Roman contexts. To support her interpretation of Roman sanctuaries of Isis under this aspect she first gave an overview of the characteristics of the Roman theatre. From archaeological as well as literary sources we gain an insight into the festive and imaginative performances of Isiac rituals. In Kleibl's view the possibility of a personal transformation and promotion, or an Apuleian 'metamorphosis' within the cult community met with people's needs. After these observations a further glance was cast at the architectural framing of the rites in the sanctuaries, which included large courts and an elevated sanctuary in order to direct the eyes of the adherents towards the staged cult statue. A close topographical connection of theatre and Isis temple, as can be found in Pompey and elsewhere, adds to the evidence. Remaining within the analysis of sacred space, the following paper by FLORENCE SARAGOZA (Bordeaux) paid attention to the Pompeian *Iseum* and especially its painted wall decoration. She demonstrated that adapted elements from traditional Egyptian temple scenes can be recognized, but in a modified form: For instance, officiating priests, thereby taking the place of the Egyptian Pharaoh, are depicted on the portico walls, but without facing an opposing deity as direct recipient. Instead, they are directed to the shrine of Harpocrates. After giving a general overview of the paintings and their supposed placement Saragoza concentrated on the so-called '*purgatorium*' or water crypt that is an important feature of other *Isea* as well. She discussed its meaning in relation with the Egyptian nilometers and the use of sacred 'nile water' in the cult. Thereafter the focus was placed on the sanctuaries of Mithras. In his paper ANDREAS HENSEN (Heidelberg) tried to demonstrate that besides a remarkable unity in the topography, architecture and design of the *mithraea* there was also a great local or regional diversity. While

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ancient authors report that the sacred act of Mithras killing the bull was located in a natural cave, only few sanctuaries were indeed constructed inside real caves. However, if there were no natural caves or rocks, an artificial cave-situation had to be imitated by building the sanctuary in the shape of a cellar. Regional differences can be observed by comparing Italy and the Northwestern provinces: In the former region the *mithraea* were often integrated into other buildings whereas in the latter case they were mainly situated in areas at the edge of the settlements. The dimensions of such a *mithraeum* could differ enormously. Whereas some could only accommodate about ten persons, others were constructed for much larger groups. Some interesting aspects of the cultic rituals were presented by MARLEEN MARTENS (Zellik), who started her contribution with some theoretical thoughts on the function and meaning of ritual depositions in sanctuaries. In the second part of her paper she discussed the extraordinary finds from her recent excavations at Tienen in Belgium. There she discovered a *mithraeum* which not only contained some small ritual depositions within the proper temple-building, but also a huge ritual deposition in the temenos around it. This deposition contained hundreds of ceramic vessels and thousands of animal bones, especially from cocks. Due to the fact that it was filled and closed within a few days, it can be interpreted as the remains of a grand mithraic feast. It is also noteworthy that there is no archaeological evidence for the sacrifice of bulls. However, it has to be emphasized that it is still difficult to reconstruct the actual rituals taking place in the sanctuaries. The last paper of the workshop by RICHARD GORDON (Erfurt) dealt with the staging of religious experience in the mithraic temple and with the Roman 'construction' of this mystery cult. He hinted at the symbolic and cosmic connotations of the cult images and the conception of the sanctuaries, which allowed for innovative forms of 'condensation' and 'narrativity'. This in turn raises the question why a 'foreign' god presumably coming from Persia was chosen for this 'creation' instead of a familiar Roman god. It seems plausible to argue that no fixed meanings were attached to a 'new' god like Mithras who was therefore much more open to innovations. The creators deliberately generated an exotic flavour for the cult without making it really oriental right from the start.

Concluding remarks

The symposium addressed many core problems of recent research on the cults in question, starting with a re-evaluation of the traditional model which postulates a coherent group of 'oriental cults' and/or 'mystery religions'. Since the single cults which were taken into consideration show much variation in themselves and quite a lot of differences between them it seems difficult to create a common terminology. It thus became clear that we should not only compare the cults with each other but that we also have to differentiate between varying forms within the cults themselves. Therefore, it is important to study local forms of textual and visual expression as well as ritual practice and architectural setting individually in order to enhance our understanding of the relations and contrasts between single places or communities on the one hand and overarching concepts on the other.

One of the central questions which is still hotly debated is the one aiming at the function of the supposed 'oriental' origin of certain deities. A second aspect of this problem is valid for all the cults under discussion: Did the western or 'Roman' conceptions of these gods result from a sort of new 'creation' or just from a transformation and adaptation of already existing beliefs and practices? For the Egyptian cults, a deeper understanding of the link between late Egyptian and Hellenistic or Roman evidence could be gained by the presentation of unpublished material, as well as by including sources in all the different languages used in Egypt and others parts of the Mediterranean, and comparing them with earlier traditions. The scarcity of textual evidence in the case of the other cults must be compensated by an even more detailed and attentive scrutiny of archaeological remains.

Conference overview:

I Introduction – What was 'Oriental' about the Oriental Cults in the Roman Empire?

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Monica JUNEJA (Heidelberg): Welcoming address

Joachim Friedrich QUACK/Christian WITSCHEL (Heidelberg): „Why Oriental Cults Again? New Perspectives on Religious Flows in the Roman Empire“

Jaime ALVAR (Madrid): „The Oriental Cults in the Roman Empire“

II Origins and Diffusion of Oriental Cults in the Imperium Romanum – Agents and Participants

Laurent BRICAULT (Toulouse): „The *gens Isiaca* in Greco-Roman Coinage“

Engelbert WINTER (Münster): „Der Kult des Iupiter Dolichenus und seine Ursprünge. Neue Funde und Forschungen im 'Zentralheiligtum' bei Doliche“

Christian WITSCHEL (Heidelberg): „The Cult of Mithras in the East – a Backward Flow of a Western Invention?“

Michael BLOEMER (Münster): „From Local Cult to Imperial Religion – the God of Doliche in the East“

III The Visual Conceptualization of Oriental Gods and their Worshippers

Miguel John VERSLUYS (Leiden): „Egypt as Part of the Mediterranean *koine*: a Study in Mnemosyne“

Darius FRACKOWIAK (Heidelberg): „The Many Facettes of Mithraic Imagery“

Ralf KRUMEICH (Bonn): „Zwischen Orient und Okzident. Bilder des Iuppiter Dolichenus und seiner Adoranten“

IV The Transfer of Linguistic Concepts within the Oriental Cults: The Example of Isis

Ian MOYER (Ann Arbor): „Isidorus at the Gates of the Temple: Mediating between Traditions in the Egyptian Countryside“

Martin STADLER (Würzburg/Tübingen), „On the Universality of Isis – a New Source on Isiac Religion from Roman Egypt“

Joachim Friedrich QUACK (Heidelberg), „Resting in Pieces and Integrating the *oikoumene*. On the Mental Expansion of the Religious Landscape by Means of the Body Parts of Osiris“

Svenja NAGEL (Heidelberg): „One for All and All for One? Isis as *una quae es(t) omnia* in the Egyptian Temples of the Graeco-Roman Period“

V Changing Forms of Sacred Space, Sanctuaries and Rituals

Kathrin KLEIBL (Innsbruck), „An Audience in Search of a Theater – The Staging of the Divine in Sanctuaries of Graeco-Egyptian Gods“

Florence SARAGOZA (Bordeaux): „Exploring Walls: On Sacred Space in the Pompeian Iseum“

Andreas HENSEN (Heidelberg): "*Spelaea et templa Mithrae*. Unity and Diversity in Topography, Architecture and Design of the Sanctuaries“

Marleen MARTENS (Zellik/B): „Sanctuaries of Mithras in the Northwestern Provinces: Unity and Diversity in Depositions, Finds and Practices“

Richard GORDON (Erfurt): „Persia and Rome: Staging Religious Experience in the Mithraic Temple“

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