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By

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ABSTRACT

Early in this century, Franz Cumont's book Les Religions Orientales dans la Paganisme Romaine argued that by later antiquity, the eastern faiths wielded a greater allure than their western counterparts. The great old deities of the Graeco-Roman pantheon had become dry remnants of a tradition rapidly being supplanted by virile and living mystery cults. Since then, Cumont's assertion has been harshly criticized from many quarters. Most recently, Ramsey Macmullen has scorned the "Spiritual-Fortitude, Spiritual-Weakening" school of interpretation as simplistic and shallow.

His harsh tones are not well taken. A critical analysis of the extant evidence left by literary and archaeological sources reveals much truth in Cumont's 1906 thesis. The example left by the penetration of Isis and Sarapis into Rome is particularly germane in this regard. This process of diffusion clearly reveals an intense spiritual thirst among Rome's inhabitants. The sick and dying gods of the old age were no longer sufficient.

We returned to our places, these kingdoms,
but no longer at ease there,
in the old dispensation,
with an alien people clutching their gods.

T.S. Eliot

TO MY WIFE MARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Producing this work has been one of my life's great learning experiences. I need to thank many of those who have helped along the way. The thesis, in its entirety, is dedicated to my lovely wife Mary. Without her, I simply would not have finished. My parents have provided much love and support. I owe them everything. Also, many thanks to Grandma Leinweber, who has likewise helped me immensely. Thanks again, to all my beloved family.

Here at Michigan State, Jace Crouch has provided good insights, bibliographical information, and cassette tapes of the Grateful Dead. His commitment to human spirituality's historical significance has provided a source of inspiration for my own work. Gordon Morrell and Chris Hamel have always given me sound advice, academic and otherwise.

I am also deeply grateful to Dr. David Loromer for his gracious cooperation, under less than ideal conditions. His good guidance and keen insights were a most useful resource. Finally, it has been an honor and privilege to work with Dr. Eleanor Huzar. Her belief in elegance of style, and solidity of content, is indicative of the finest scholastic tradition. In this regard, she has set for me a standard which I can only hope to someday attain. I thank her for all her help and support.

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Introduction

The current century has witnessed much scholarship focusing on Egyptian religion in the Graeco-Roman world. Yet important questions remain unresolved. In his 1983 article "Cultes Égyptiens hors d'Égypte," Francois Dunand discusses these lingering problems.[1] Among the important issues he describes is that of interpreting the Egyptian cults in their new, hellenistic context. The central focus of this problem asks to what extent were the oriental cults genuinely oriental, and what remained of the older religious tradition?[2] The question has received little direct treatment. One notable exception is a study by Dutch scholar Vandebeek. In a 1946 work, he argued that the Greek Isis was almost completely Greek and little of the old Pharonic heritage remained.[3]

In large part, this historiographical debate has resulted from the classic work of French scholar Franz Cumont, and his still definitive 1906 volume Les religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romaine.[4] Cumont had argued

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[1].Francoise Dunand, "Cultes Égyptiens hors d'Égypte; nouvelles voies d'approche et d'interpretation," in Studia Hellenistica, 27, (1983), 75.

[2].ibid.,pg.86.

[3].Vandebeek, I, "De Interpretatio Graeca van de Isisfigur," in Studia Hellenistica, 4, Louvain, 1946.

[4].Cumont, Franz, Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romaine, (Paris: 1906).

that the incoming oriental cults were freshly exotic replacements for what were increasingly perceived as dry and cold ancient faiths.[5] Cumont's opponents immediately began attempting to display the superior hellenistic component of Graeco-Oriental religions. Vandebeek is just one example.[6] More recently, Ramsey Macmullen has critiqued Cumont. Referring to him as the "high priest of oriental cults," Macmullen labels Cumont's assertion as the "Spiritual-Fortitude, Spiritual-Weakening" school of interpretation.[7]

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[5].A second major question, though beyond the scope of this work, merits at least peripheral attention here. This concerns the extent to which the oriental cults penetrated into the various provinces. Cumont had, probably erroneously, seen the diffusion of the eastern cults as a geographically universal process. After Les Religions Orientals was published, J. Toutain tried to show that archaeological evidence simply does not support Cumont in this regard. Many of the Empire's more rural regions offer no evidence whatsoever of eastern cults. cf. Toutain, J., Les Cultes Païens dans l'Empire Romain, (Paris: 1911), vol. 2., 5-34; Cumont's review of Toutain in Revue de l'histoire des Religions, LXVI (1912), 125-129; for a sound critique and summary of the problem, see Heuten, G., "La diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Occident," in Revue de l'histoire des Religions, 104, 1931, 409-16; finally, Macmullen, Ramsay, Paganism in the Roman Empire, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 116.

[6].From the French summary which concludes Vandebeek's article: "Il y a peu d'années on considerait comme un dogme historique la théorie de Fr. Cumont et de son école: l'Orient avec sa vitalité religieuse exubérante a submergé l'Occident religieusement peu développé et passif." 145.

[7]."The terms of description themselves are useless as too vague; useless a second time as normative according to prejudices which are not divulged, perhaps never examined; and useless a third time as applied to a population whose moral attributes and inner thoughts are not only almost entirely hidden from us but not even investigated through such few data as could be used." Macmullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire, 123.

But the question remains: Why were the Greeks, then the Romans, increasingly led to desert their traditional faiths for foreign gods?[8] Does the syncretism of the period reflect mere absorption of the Egyptian deities by a cosmopolitan, hellenized world? Or was there a sharp and clearly defined infusion of the eastern cults into the West?[9]

According to Dunand, the most recent decades of historical scholarship have not sufficiently addressed such interpretative questions. This is largely due to a significant shift in methodological approach. In 1961, V. Wessetzsky produced Die ägyptischen Kulte zur Römerzeit in Ungarn.[10] It was the first volume in a useful and important

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[8].Dunand praises Cumont for raising the issue. However, he also cautions that "...les réponses qu'il proposait se situaient au niveau d'une psychologie un peu élémentaire: ces religions exercent une 'force d'attracation,' elles `aggisent sur les sens,'...Nous ne sommes pas sortis de cette vision qui oppose la `froideur' de la religion gréco-romaine à la `seduction' des cultes orientaux."Dunand, 92; cf. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 23.

[9].A.D. Nock, in words similar to those of Cumont, argues:"The Capitoline gods meant nothing to them (the religiously zealous of the lower class), not even the patriotic emotions which they inspired in skeptical Senators. They worshipped Isis and the Syrian goddess and were so lacking in any feeling of Roman propriety as to erect shrines to their favorite deities on the Capitol, which was like holding a Salvation Army meeting in the square before St. Peter's." Nock, A.D., Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo, (Oxford, 1935), 123.

[10].Wessetzsky, V., Die ägyptischen Kulte zur Römerzeit in Ungarn, Leiden, 1961.

publication Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain (EPRO), edited by M. J. Vermassen. The series has given increased weight to archaeological evidence. Moreover, it has somewhat limited itself to empirical data and largely focused on regional studies. The wealth of evidence EPRO has offered to the field provides opportunities to address the broader questions which have again been raised.

This paper's central contention is that the penetration of the Egyptian cults into Italy cannot be understood apart from an ethos of syncretism characterizing the period. Moreover, the invaluable addition of modern, hard-nosed empirical scholarship seems to have affirmed the assertions of earlier synthetic works. An analysis of oriental religions' diffusion into Rome clearly displays the "allure" described by Cumont. Despite frequent reactionary efforts of the Senate and other conservative elements in Roman society, the new and foreign deities swept rapidly into the Empire. That percentage of any population which always tends to fervent theism was, in Italy, clearly more attracted to the new and exotic eastern gods. The example of Isis and Sarapis typifies this widespread and frequent occurence. Between the post-Hannibalic period and Nero's death, Sarapis and Isis passed from obscurity into major theological components of Roman society. Indeed, the old gods were already on their deathbeds. It was only a

question of which eastern faith would come to dominate the new religious age.

The diffusion of Isis and Sarapis into Italy can be divided into three stages. First, faith in the gods penetrated into Italy much as it had earlier come to Greece. Second, there was a period in which the Egyptian cults were intensely politicized and viewed by conservatives with hostility. Finally, by the end of the Julio-Claudian period, Roman society adjusted and the Alexandrian deities became major and standardized fixtures of religious life.

THE SOURCES

In an analysis of Sarapis and Isis in Rome, scholars must largely draw on scattered references in the literary sources, and shadowy evidence unearthed by modern archeology. There are few truly direct statements made by the ancients. While clearly a central feature of Roman life, religion was often mentioned only in passing by the various ancient authors. Moreover, the zealotry associated with later antiquity's mystery cults was too frequently found only among society's unlettered members. Often historians must glean significance from second and third hand accounts, rendered by generally hostile or condescending pens. Nonetheless, by pulling together the fragmented extant evidence, scholars can learn and understand much.

Several invaluable works shed important light on general characteristics and attributes of the Egyptian

cults.[11] Some of these works comprise our most direct contemporary accounts of Isis and Sarapis. Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride provides some of the most thorough treatment of the mythological origins of the deities, and the way they were perceived by the Hellenistic World. Diodorus Siculus' On Egypt (20-25,83-88,96) also offers important information in this regard. Similarly, the second chapter of Herodotus gives eyewitness glimpses into religion and culture along the Nile. Equally worthwhile is Apuleius' Metamorphoses. Here, the journeys of poor Lucius provide some of our most candid glimpses into the largely obscure rites and customs of the Isis cult.[12] Several of Juvenal's satires (6,8,9,13) make scornful reference to various customs and characteristics found in Egyptian religion.

Later Antiquity's Christian writers also provide relatively thorough and specific treatment. Often these took the form of apologetics, designed to display Christianity's inherent superiority. Jesus was depicted as

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[11].The numerous, specific citations providing relevant insights are sporadic at best. No attempt has been made to compile a systematic and comprehensive listing of such varied passages. For a full listing of known literary references regarding Egyptian cults in the Roman Empire, see Michel Malaise, Les Conditions de Pénétration et de Diffusion des Cultes Égyptiens en Italie, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 495-505.

[12].As with Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride, Apuleius Metamorphoses is invaluable as a whole. For this work, chapters 11-13 have been drawn on extensively for their description of the sacred ceremonies.

superior to the various combinations of ancient gods produced by syncretism. Hence, these Christian works inadvertently informed subsequent generations about the old pagan deities being condemned. Tertullian's Apologeticus (Apology to the Roman Governors) (11,8) and Firmicus Maternus' De Errore Profarum Religonum (13) both distinguish Sarapis from other "saints." St. Augustine of Hippo, in his immortal De Civitate Dei (XVII,4,5), also offers passing but significant commentary, particularly on the god's relationship to harvest and corn. Rufin of Aquileai's Ecclesiastical History (XI,23) gives information as to Sarapis' link to sun-worship, and also to his role as a god of fertility.

As to the actual history of Isis and Sarapis in Rome, the evidence is even more scattered. Brief but important passages found in Plutarch's Alexander (LXXVII) and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandri (VII,26), have prompted some debate as to dating Sarapis' origin. Tacitus (Historia, IV) gives us a controversial account of the cult statue's arrival in Alexandria, as does Plutarch's ever useful De Iside et Osiride (28). In modern commentaries, Wilcken's Urkenden der Ptolemaerzeit provides some documentation of the god's early development in a Memphis shrine to Apis.[13] Equally important is Roussel's Les Cultes Egyptiens a Delos du IIIe

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[13].Wilcken, U., Urkenden der Ptolemäerzeit, (Berlin: 1927,) pg.19.

a Ier Siecle. This provides the best archaelogical evidence of Egyptian religion's diffusion into the Aegean island, which acted as an intermediary between Alexandria and Rome.[14]

As for the cults' penetration into Italy, the sources are again numerous, though scattered. Frequently the examples offered by the arrival of other foreign faiths can be instructive in this regard. Livy faithfully provides general commentaries regarding the religious climate of Rome, both during the Hannibalic invasion (XXV,1), and during the Republic's decline (XLIII,13). (Such insights are sorely lacking in Polybius.) It is also Livy (XXIX,10) who gives us the major account of Cybele's introduction to Rome in 205 B.C. Dionysus of Halicarnassus (II,19) chronicles the debacle surrounding the arrival of the Bacchic rites.

Unfortunately, the presence of Sarapis and Isis worship is not as clearly documented at this early stage. Much detective work must be applied to the shadowy references to slaves, painters and other Alexandrians living in Rome during the early second century B.C. Valerius Maximus (IX,14,3) tells us of a slave named "Serapio" living in the

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[14].Roussel, P., Les Cultes Égyptiens à Delos du IIIe à Ier Siècle, (Paris: 1916); for an excellent treatment of the Egyptian cults' diffusion into Greece, see Thomas Brady's "The Reception of the Egyptian Cults by the Greeks, (330-30 B.C.)," in University of Missouri Studies, vol. 10, (Columbia Missouri: 1935).

city in 138 B.C. In Epistulae ad Atticum (XI,4;X,17,1), Cicero also provides similar information. Likewise with Pliny, Naturalis Historia (VII,10;XXI,7).

The late Roman Republic is not much better. The period of Marius and Sulla offer little hard evidence. Plutarch (Marius, XVII;XXXI,1) tells us of Marius' receptiveness to the Syrian gods, and of Sulla's odd name of Felix (Sulla,IX,6). Regarding the turmoil surrounding the cult of Isis during the fifties and forties, Cicero's De Domo Sua (33,89), De Legibus (II,8), and De Haruspicum Responsis (II), all provide candid, eloquent and hostile insights. Contemporary fragments from Varro have been preserved in Tertullian's second century A.D. work Ad Nationes (I,10,18), while Tertullian himself reports on incidents in Apologeticus (VI,8).

More substantial evidence marks the final decades of the first century B.C., and then the reign of Augustus. Cassius Dio (43), Suetonius (Caesar, 76) and Appian (Bella Civilia, 2, 148), report Caesar's flirtation with hellenistic style monarchy. Similarly, Plutarch (Antony 50;54,6) tells us of Antony's flirtation with deification. Moreover, the religious overtones of Actium are implied in Virgil's Aeneid (VII,675-713). For the events of the Principate, Suetonius and Cassius Dio continue to be the most thorough sources. Dio (51,16;52,36) and Suetonius (Augustus, 93) tell us of Augustus' attempt to restore to

Rome her traditional religion. Here we also read of Augustus' penchant for Apollo (Suetonius, Augustus, 18,70;Cassius Dio,53,1,3), which is sometimes said to reveal the seeds of Emperor worship.

Sources offer still more solid information for the remainder of the Julio-Claudian period. Indeed, although there is scant reference to Egyptian deities, it is probably safe to assume the gods were thriving peacefully. But this was not always the case. A variety of sources refer to the persecution of Jewish and Egyptian believers in A.D. 19. Of these, Suetonius' Tiberius (36) and Tacitus' Annales (II,85), merely report the persecution. From Flavius Josephus (Antiquates Judaicae, XVIII,65-85) however, we read the rather dubious tales allegedly compelling the governmental actions.

With Caligula, there is also much evidence, though it is still not enough, and must be pieced together from sporadic and often casual references. It seems clear the Emperor was fond of oriental faiths, especially Egyptian. Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride reports that Gaius established the Isiac festivals in Rome (13). Archeological evidence has also revealed a room under the Palatine, full of Egyptian religious iconography. Datum from the excavation have been recorded in Monumenti della pittura antica, Rome: II., Le pitture dell'aula isiaca de Caligola, a work produced in 1936. Seneca (De

Tranquillitate Animi 14,9) notes the ritual sacrifices of exotic birds he performed daily. Flavius Josephus (Flavius Josephus, Antiquitates Judaicae, XIX) gives accounts of the bizarre compulsions of the Emperor. These fragmented bits of evidence have prompted many questions regarding Caligula's religious beliefs.

Precious little information is given regarding Isis and Sarapis in Rome during this period. Hence, studies are dependent on more general imperial attitudes regarding the foreign cults. Many of the same sources are relevant for our study of religions during the reign of Claudius. Suetonius (Claudius, 22, 1) and Tacitus (Annales, 11, 15), state that Claudius sought a return to Augustan religious policy. Moreover, Cassius Dio (40, 6, 6-7) asserts that the new emperor abolished the colleges, while Flavius Josephus (Antiquitates Judaicae, XIX, 5, 3) speaks of Claudius' desire for religious toleration. Josephus (Bellum Judaicum, 7), and Tacitus' Annales (14, 31) report the temple to dedicated to the Emperor at Camuldonum, in Britain. A vaguely documented persecution of the Jews also occurred during this period, probably the one mentioned in Acts, 18:2. It is mentioned all too briefly, by Suetonius (Claudius, 25) and Cassius Dio (60, 6, 6).

For Nero, there are again few overt references to Isis and Sarapis, but some to general religious activity. By now, the Egyptian deities were a dominant force in Roman

theism. Suetonius and Tacitus provide our major accounts of the Neronian period. From Suetonius' biography Nero (56), we read that the Emperor harbored no particular love for any religion. Eusebius (Praepartio Evangelica III, 4), asserts that one of Nero's teachers had been Chaeremon of Naucratis, a former director of the library at Alexandria. The Einsiedeln Ecologues (4,5,87), based on a tenth century text and published in 1879, are often attributed to Nero's contemporary Calpurnicus Siculus, though this cannot be proven.[15] In these fragments, Nero is depicted as the sun, which some scholars have interpreted as a return to the hellenistic style monarchy flirted with by Antony and Caligula.

The various sources are insufficient to respond satisfactorily to the important questions concerning Isis and Sarapis in Rome. Yet when extant evidence is gathered into a cohesive whole, the dominant western fascination for oriental deities is more than clear.

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15. Poetae Latini Minores, ed. by E. Baehrens, 5 vols., 1879-83, iii.

THE PENETRATION INTO ITALY

In 1960, P.M. Fraser published "Two Studies on the Cult of Sarapis in the Hellenistic World."[1] The article has had a major impact. While providing fresh insights on many specific levels, perhaps Fraser's most sweeping achievement was to drive the final coffin nail into the embattled imperialistic theory. This theory had declared that Sarapis was invented by Ptolemy I. The cult's immediate popularity was then used by the monarch to achieve a more facile control of his subjects. The imperialistic theory produced a great litany of believing scholars.[2] While few doubted the cult's genuine appeal, a good bit of emphasis was still placed on the function of political intercourse between nations. One such historian was the great French scholar Franz Cumont, who wrote that "l'action politique de la dynastie égyptienne tendait à faire reconnaitre partout des divinités dont la gloire etait en quelque sort liée à celle

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[1].Fraser, P.M., "Two Studies on the Cult of Sarapis in the Hellenistic World," Opuscula Atheniensia, 3 (1960) 1-54.

[2].Not all scholars have viewed the issue in black and white terms. Vidman wrote that "aber nicht einmal diese antiimperialistische Theorie, obwhol sie in der letzen Zeit einen grossen Biefall gefunden hat, ist allgemein anerkannt. Die Wahrheit liegt etwa in der Mitte: Die ptolemäische Herrschaft ermöglichte doch das Eindringen des Kultes in fremde Lander, auch wenn man von keinem direkten Eingriff aus der Macht sprechen darf." Vidman, Ladislav, "Isis und Sarapis," in Die Orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich. ed. by Maarten J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 123.

de leur maison."[3] Similarly, Thomas Brady asserts that "While Isis and Ammon were brought to Athens by Egyptians living in the Peiraeus for business reasons, Sarapis came in largely as a result of political events."[4]

Fraser, however, declares that "the theory of Ptolemaic inspiration must be abandoned in its entirety. The cult spread spontaneously, unaffected by political factors."[5] He goes on to assert; "the cult of Sarapis was spread in the main through private action, by traders, mercenaries, priests and travellers who had acquired a personal interest in the cult."[6] The article concludes by wondering if the cult was not, in fact, resisted by various states, merely because it represented Alexandria.[7]

I will use Fraser's basic assumptions as a framework with which to examine the cult of Sarapis in Republican Italy, focusing on two basic questions: When did the god reach Italy, and how did this development happen? A subsidiary question involves the extent to which Roman

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[3].Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 74.

[4].Brady, 21-22.

[5].Fraser, 47.

[6].ibid., 49.

[7]."The cult was evidently no more popular in Ptolemaic possessions than elsewhere, indeed rather the reverse. The situation in Cyprus and Cyrene may well make one wonder whether there was not a resistance to the cult in Ptolemaic possessions, just because Sarapis symbolized Alexandria." Fraser, 46-49.

politics effected he spread of the god onto the Italian peninsula.

Three central themes seem evident. First, the religious evolution described by Fraser occurred in Rome after the Second Punic War. During this period the trickle of evidence concerning Sarapis becomes more substantial. Second, the cult was indeed spread by "traders, mercenaries, priests and travellers." Finally, the Senate greeted the Alexandrian cults with suspicion and vainly sought to battle the encroaching foreign elements in Roman life.

HOW AND WHEN DID THE CULTS COME TO ROME?

A full century ago, French historian Georges Lafaye wrote a short article entitled "L'Introduction Du Culte De Sérapis à Rome."[8] One of the article's more important assertions was that there was a period between popular acceptance of the cult and official awareness of the cult. This period, according to Lafaye, was between 150-80 B.C.[9] However, the conditions affecting change are evident a full half century earlier -- in the latter years of the Second Punic War.

The early second century witnessed great changes in

8.Lafaye, Georges, "L'Introduction du Culte de Sérapis à Rome," in Revue de l'Histoire des Religions 11 (1885) 327-29.

9.Lafaye, 328.

Italian religion, almost certainly involving the Alexandrian deities. (In Sicily, the appearance of Sarapis and his consort Isis occur even earlier.) The first known formal establishments of the cult appear towards the end of the second century. By the beginning of the first century B.C., it was a force to be reckoned with. How much can we know about this important transformation in Roman religion?

Clearly Isis and Sarapis gained adherents on the Italian peninsula during the period subsequent to the great Hannibalic invasion. Indeed, in so many ways, the war was a watershed in Roman history, and the following decades were to leave Rome forever changed. The great influx of peoples coming into Italy permanently altered the social and economic structure of what had heretofore been a relatively homogeneous world. The political effect of these developments accounted for the rise of the Gracchi and culminated in the very downfall of the Republic itself. Yet the impact upon religion was no less pivotal and no less significant.

But we must first consider Sicily. The island has revealed much important evidence concerning Isis and Sarapis' arrival in Italy. As with the Italian peninsula itself, dating the god's diffusion into Sicily has sparked debate. Moreover, the problem is something of a double edged sword. There is not only the question of just when the god came to the island, but also the problem of

ascertaining the degree to which Sicily served as an intermediary between the Alexandrian deities and Rome.

For many years scholars assumed that the Alexandrian deities were introduced to the West by the Syracusan tyrant Agathocles. Gaining control of Syracuse in 317 B.C., Agathocles' expansionist policies soon made him a Hellenistic style monarch over much of eastern Sicily. Around 300 the tyrant wed the daughter of Ptolemy II, Theoxena. During the heyday of the imperial theory, when scholars generally assumed that Ptolemaic policy purposely nurtured the cult of Sarapis, the wedding of Agathocles and Theoxena was seen as the point of contact between Sarapis, Isis and the West.[10]

This notion was first introduced by Wilcken, whose work is still generally regarded as the seminal force in modern studies of Sarapis. Aside from offering what remains the accepted view concerning the god's origins, Wilcken forged the imperialistic theory and with it, the notion that Agathocles had brought Sarapis to Italy.[11] The weight of Wilcken's reputation persuaded a full generation of scholars to accept this view. Nock wrote: "it certainly does appear that Agathocles introduced the worship in Sicily

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[10]. For primary source accounts of Agathocles see Diod. Sic., 19-21; Just., 22-23.

[11].Wilcken, Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit 1, 82.

on marrying Ptolemy's daughter."[12] Salem also believed that Alexandrian deities were brought to Italy, "probably in the train of Theoxena, wife of Agathocles and step-daughter of Ptolemy Soter."[13] Thomas Brady, though voicing some of caution, maintained: "literary evidence connects a knowledge of the cult at least with Agathocles."[14] Franz Cumont accepted the theory as well.[15]

Fraser's work seems to have all but discredited this formerly common view. He asks of Brady; "what does he mean by literary evidence?"[16] In citing "literary evidence," Brady had referred readers to the Pauly-Wissowa (I, 748-757) where, in fact, Sarapis is not mentioned at all. Clearly the Agathocles thesis remains unable to withstand scholarly scrutiny.[17] But Fraser's sweeping assertion that "little of the evidence for Sicily is anterior to the first century B.C. and nothing whatsoever connects it with Agathocles,"

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[12].Nock, A.D., Conversion, 55.

[13].Salem. "Ennius and the Isiaci Coniectores," in Journal of Roman Studies 28, (1938) 57-59, 58.

[14].Brady, 9.

[15].Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 75.

[16].Fraser, pg.47.

[17]."L'ipotesi che il matrimonio di Agatocle con Teossena, figliastra di Tolomeo Soter, celebrato intorn al 306 A.C., abbia agevolato la introduzione del culto pubblico delle divinita egizie in Siracusa appare molto seducente, ma purtroppo resta indimostrabile...Manganaro, G., "Ricerche di epigrafia siceliote. I. Per la storia del culto divinita orientalia in Siclia," Siculorum Gymnasium, XIV,2, (1961), 176

has perhaps overstated the point.[18] Some of the earliest evidence for the cult's presence in Italy is found in Sicily.[19]

Sarapis and Isis appeared on Sicilian coins in 212 B.C.[20] Sometime around this same period, an altar found in Tauromenium mentions the Alexandrian pair.[21] The early date of the altar and its equation of Isis with Hestia seems to verify Cumont's assertion that during the heyday of the Hellenistic age, Sicily was already more than half hellenized.[22] Fraser himself has left the altar's origins in doubt, claiming that it is either late Hellenistic or Roman. The general date of the inscription, however, seems to be a matter of mutual consensus. There also exist coins, pressed in Catana (Catania) in the early second century,

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18. ibid., 47.

19. "Fraser, riassumendo in breve i termini del problema, riconosce la mancanza di elementi concreti che autorizzino l'attribuzione ad Agatocle di una volonta politica nel promuovere il culto degli dèi egizî. Questa pur doverosa cautela, peraltro, si accompagna ad una semplificazione certo eccessiva del problema nella conclusione che 'little (sc. del materiale sicilano) is anterior to the first century B.C." Gasparro, Guilia Sfameni, I Culti Orientali In Sicilia,(Leiden: 1973), 3-4.

20. Manganaro, Giacomo,"Ricerche di antichita e di epigrafia Sicelote," in Archeologica Classica, 190-91.

21. Heybob, Sharon Kelly, The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Graeco-Roman World,(Leiden: 1975), 11; Inscriptiones Graecae(IG),14.443.

22. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 75.

bearing the images of Sarapis and Isis.[23] Fraser consulted E.S.G. Robinson, who ascribed a 175 B.C. date to the coins.[24]

This relatively substantial body of evidence seems solidly to refute Fraser's claim that we have little cause to place the cult of Sarapis in Sicily "anterior to the first century." It is clear that Alexandrian deities were a presence in Sicily by the end of the third century and that during the second century the new gods gained a sizeable number of adherents. By Cicero's time, the great orator referred to the Serapeum at Syracuse as being the "celebrimus et religiosissimus locus" of the town.[25]

If the imperialistic theory is entirely discredited, it follows that the spread of the gods happened naturally over a period of years. It follows that the cult of Sarapis must have existed in Sicily earlier in the third century than Fraser and others have claimed. At the same time, there seems to be a general consensus that Sicily played only a minor role in the diffusion of Sarapis north into Italy. The Greek city-states on the island had been both more hellenistic and closer to Alexandria. Hence, they had come into contact with the new god first. But except for Sicilian ports which served as intermediaries in trade

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[23].Salem, "The Isiaci Coniectores," 58.

[24].Fraser, 47.

[25].Cic., Verr., II. 2.26.

between the East and the West, the link between Egyptian gods and the Romans must be considered largely separate from Sicily.[26]

Yet if the earlier part of the third century had left Rome relatively unmolested by the dramatic changes sweeping the East, the calm was at best a temporary respite. The period's latter decades were to witness fundamental and permanent changes in the very fabric of Roman life.

The religious desperation which gripped the Roman people during the Hannibalic War cannot be overemphasized. The same is true for the first great waves of foreign influence. Livy tells us that in 213 B.C. Rome swarmed with a host of religious charlatans preying upon fearful citizens who "were seized with such a passion for superstitious observances, and those from the most part introduced from foreign countries, that either the people or the gods seem to have undergone a sudden change."[27] These swindlers came to the attention of the authorities, who strove to act in the public's behalf. Even at this early date however, the foreign cults must have been popular. A group of aediles and triumvirs were physically threatened upon trying to rid the Forum of these foreign priests. The

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[26]."Le roule joue par cette île (Sicily) dans la diffusion isaiaque semble donc réduit et de toute façon ne se serait exercé que par l'intermédiaire de Pouzzoles, étroitement liée à Syracuse, où du reste vivaient de très nombreux Putéolans." Malaise, Les Cultes Éyptiens, 263.

[27]. Livy, XXV, I.

Senate then took up the task, but probably achieved no more effective results.[28]

It is clear that these priests of doubtful integrity and intention represent the coming torrent's first trickle. An M.S. Salem article has addressed questions raised by references to these religious charlatans haunting the shadows of the great Roman temples. If correct, his calculations place adherents of Sarapis' consort Isis squarely in Rome during the first half of the second century B.C.[29] In question is a reference from Cicero's De Divinatione which states "non habeo denique nauci Marsum augurem, non vicanos haruspices, non de circo astrologos, non Isiacos coniectores, non interpretes somniorum;"[30]

Salem points out that early editors of Cicero had often attributed this passage to the great Roman poet Ennius (239-136). Admittedly the words are not metrical and it is senseless to attribute them, literally, to Ennius. Yet Salem maintains that "the possibility that they contain a more or less close paraphrase of Ennius is suggested by the use of 'non habeo...nauci,' a phrase which Cicero never

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28.M. Aemilio praetori urbis negotium ab senat datum est, ut eis religionibus opulum liberaret...et edixit ut...ne quis in publico sacrove loco novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret.ibid.,XXV,I.

29.Salem, "The Isiaci Coniectores," 57-59.

30.Cic., Div., 1.58.

used.[31] Moreover, the passage is linguistically Italian (Marsus augur, de circo astrologi), so Greek origin is virtually impossible to claim.[32] Salem is not arguing for the Ennian origin of this Ciceronian passage. Indeed, there is simply not enough conclusive evidence to do so. The article's strength lies in its successful refutation of a school of scholarship which had rejected the passage's Ennian origin on merely chronological grounds.[33] It was thought that Ennius could have had no knowledge of Isis.

We know, however, that Rome in the early years of the second century B.C. was well acquainted with alien gods. We have already noted Livy's account of fraudulent foreign priests and the Senate's action against them in 213 B.C. More, the Syrian goddess Cybele, the Magna Mater, was brought to Rome in 204.[34] In 186 the Greek rites of Bacchus, newly introduced, induced such raucous behavior in the streets that the Senate was compelled to forbid all further celebration of the rites.[35]

Salem has asserted that "it is extremely probable that

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[31].Salem, "The Isiaci Coniectores," 56.

[32].ibid., 56.

[33].Bothe, F.H., Poetae Scenici Latinorum, I (Halberstadt, 1832), 62 f.

[34].Livy, XXIX, 10.

[35].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 282; for "Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus" see C.I.L., 1, 196 and X, 104; cf. Dion. Hal., Ant. Rom., II, 19.

in the wake of the Isiaci coniectores came the true priests and pious worshippers."[36] It is difficult to believe otherwise, despite the paucity of evidence. Few if any religions are greeted by literate contemporaries with full and immediate documentation. Christianity itself was scarcely mentioned by non-Christian authors until a century or so after the death of Christ. Moreover, we have much evidence concerning the "religious crisis" and heavy influx of foreign faiths which characterized Rome after the Second Punic Wars.[37] All of the charlatans listed in the passage are obscure social misfits, not likely to elicit much serious consideration from the mainstream of Roman society. So if arguments are to be posed as to the impossibilty of the Ennian origin of Cicero's words, chronology should not be among them. It is entirely possibly, even probable, that vagabond disciples of Isis were a presence in Rome in the early second century before Christ.

Indeed, more evidence exists clearly indicating the presence of individual Alexandrines in Rome during the second century B.C. From a few scattered bits of literary evidence, we can piece together an image of the great city's emerging diverse and cosmopolitan character. The once tiny town on the Tiber was rapidly becoming the cultural center of the Mediterranean world. Even by the middle of the

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[36].Salem, "The Isiaci Coniectores," 59.

[37].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 282.

second century, we have evidence that Rome harbored artists from around the ancient world, including Alexandria.[38]

An important early example comes to us from the account of Ptolemy VI Philometer (186-145 B.C.). This monarch succeeded to the Egyptian throne in 180 and married his sister Cleopatra II in 175. During a power struggle, Philometer was forced to flee from his brother Ptolemy VIII Eugertes. His escape brought him to Rome, where he urgently solicited protection from the Senate. Diodorus tells us, however, that during his stay in Rome, Philometer felt more inclined to stay with an Alexandrian artist (Demetrius the Topographer) living in Italy than with other equally hospitable Romans.[39]

More significant is a brief passage in Gaius Valerius Maximus. Here, we learn that Cornelius Scipio (consul in 138 B.C.), was dubbed "Serapio" because of his striking resemblance to a slave of the same name.[40] Georges Lafaye notes that the rather "proletarian" label is particularly ironic, since Cornelius Scipio was a staunch aristocrat who had led the Optimates' attack on Tiberius Gracchus.[41]

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[38].Pliny the Elder tells us of a painter named Serapion.Plin., HN., XXXV, 113.

[39].Diod. Sic., XXXI, 18.

[40].Val. Max., IX, 14, 3.

[41]..."le sobriquet de `Sérapion,' bien loin d'exposer Scipion aux risées de la foule, contribua à le rendre populaire.Lafaye,328-29; cf. Pliny, HN., VII,10 and XXI,7.

Lafaye concludes that the passage from Valerius Maximus provides a precise date in the history of religions: by 138 B.C. worshippers of Serapis could be found in Rome -- even if those worshippers were largely foreign slaves.

In fact, slaves seem to have played a key role in the cult's initial introduction into Rome. It was only natural that many of them practiced foreign religions. By the time of Cicero, such slaves appeared fairly frequently. Cicero owned a slave named "Egypt," whom he held in high regard.[42] Moreover, in a letter to his friend Atticus, Cicero speaks of a messenger named "Isodorus" who has brought news.[43] In another passage of the letters to Atticus, Cicero refers to a slave named "Serapion" who is to deliver a message.[44]

Commerce provided the other important avenue by which Sarapis came to Italy. The Italians had become massive consumers of eastern goods.[45] The resulting increased interaction between East and West could only enhance the cultural exchanges which served to bring Sarapis and Isis to Rome.[46] The trade route between Delos and Puteoli seems

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[42].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 317; Cic., Fam., XVI,1 5,12; Att., VII, 15, I; XII, 37,I; XII,3,2.

[43].Cic., Att., XI,4.

[44].Cic., Att., X,17,1.

[45].Rostovtzeff,M., The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World,(Oxford: 1941), v.2, 918.

[46]."Des Égyptiens ont pu apporter leurs cultes dans les villes portuaires, grecques ou italiennes, où ils s'établissaient, généralement à des fins commerciales;

particularly crucial. Indeed, this is the very same route by which the Apostle Paul brought Christianity into Rome.[47] As the traditional birthplace of Apollo, Delos was already an important religious center in the Graeco-Roman world. The enormously important work of Roussel has revealed much about the presence of Egyptian cults on the island.[48] His work has shown that Delos housed one of the ancient world's most thriving cults consecrated to Sarapis and Isis.

There were many sailors on the island. After the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C., Delos emerged as one the Aegean's chief ports. Italian merchants and sailors flooded Delos.[49] Here undoubtedly, many learned of the Alexandrian deities. In one telling example, an Italian family on Delos, the Aemilii, presented a cult idol to the priestly attendants of Sarapis.[50] Isis herself became known as a protector of navigation. In a bas-relief found on a marble

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c'est des `marchands égyptiens' du Pirée, des Éyptiens de Értrie;c'est sans doute aussi ce qui se passe en Campanie, ou à Ostie." Dunand, 78.

47.Paul stayed on one of the Cyclades, the string of islands surrounding Delos. An Alexandrian boat had docked for the winter. (The boat had the twin deities Castor and Pollux adorning it as figureheads.) In the spring they set sail. After brief stops at Syracuse and Rhegium, they entered Puetoli. From there, it was only a short journey to Rome.Acts 28: 1-14.

48.Roussel, Les Cultes Égyptiens à Delos.

49.Ferguson, William Scott, Hellenistic Athens:an Historical Essay, (New York: 1969), 355; Laidlaw, W.A., A History of Delos, (Oxford: 1933), 203.

50.Ferguson, Hellenistic Athens, 395.

floor, and on a lamp, she is seen giving her coat to a sailor.[51] To the weary seafarer between dangerous voyages, such an image would seem particularly compelling. After their long months at sea, the great and beautiful Delian goddess may indeed have elicited a heartfelt thank-you from the sailors.

Much of the Italian presence on Delos seems to have come from Campania, Puetoli in particular. Most of Rome's imports and exports from the East passed through Puteoli.[52] Since Delos was one of the East's major ports, something of a cultural bond was soon fostered between the two cities. Writing about 125 B.C., the Roman poet Lucilius described Puteoli as the "little Delos."[53] The oriental cults would have rapidly arrived in Italy through such direct contact. Certainly a pool of merchants and sailors would have established a cult to honor their newfound faiths in the homeland.[54] Moreover, many eastern foreigners had by now

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[51].Bruneau, Phillipe, "Isis Pelagia A Delos," in Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique, 85 (1961) 435-436; see also, Taylor, Lily Ross, The Cults of Ostia, (Boston: 1912), 71.

[52].Strab., 3, 145.,17,793; Plin., HN, 36,70.

[53].Luc., Carm. Rel., III,143.

[54]."A peine arrivées, elles recontrerent déjà -- chose merveilleuse -- des vieux amis qui leur avaient rendu des honneurs à Alexandrie, à Delos. Les premier contact fut facile. Les indigènes se rendaient vite compte que ces divinités venues d'Orient leur apportainet, en outre des cérémonies somptueuses exotique, une spiritualité nouvelle, une conception oecuménique de la religion. Plusieurs se joignaient aux anciens fidèles orientaux." Tran Tam Tinh,

certainly come west.

Rome's indigenous population soon acquired a taste for the incoming oriental cults. At first the new faiths seem to have taken root in urban areas.[55] The more remote rural areas no doubt remained less influenced by this dramatic change in Graeco-Roman religion. But in the larger cities an increasingly exotic blend of world cultures provided that eclectic allure which had already proved so compelling throughout the hellenized world. In Ostia, a Serapeum was dedicated in 123 B.C.[56] In Campania, the cult also seems to have been established relatively early. A law in 105 B.C. provided for the construction of walls in front of a Serapeum at Puteoli.[57]

Elsewhere on the peninsula, Sarapis and Isis also seem to have appeared early in the first century. The fertile archaeological excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum have revealed much evidence concerning the presence of Egyptian gods in those cities prior to A.D. 79. Still, questions

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Les Cultes des Divinités Orientales en Campanie: en dehors de Pompéi, de Stabies et d'Herculanum, (Leiden: 1972), xviii.

55.Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 375.

56.ibid., 243;cf. Taylor, 66.

57.Tinh, Le Culte des Divinités Orientales en Campanie,(Leiden: 1972),3;cf. CIL,10.1781; Nock doubts that the temple in Puteoli was "due in any measure to Italians returning from Delos," and asserts that most Italians living on Delos were fairly conservative. But he offers no evidence whatsoever to support this claim. Nock, Conversion, 67.

remain regarding the cult's initial development during the Republican period. Neither city has unearthed the wealth of specific priestly inscriptions or religious documents for which scholars had hoped.[58] Moreover, while the sites abound in various statuary displaying oriental stylistic elements, this does not clearly indicate the extent to which eastern sects flourished as vibrant, living faiths. During the second century B.C., Italy was flooded with new trade goods coming from the hellenized world. But Lily Ross Taylor warns that much Egyptian iconography dating from this period may well have been mere decoration, purchased by Romans for aesthetic reasons.[59]

Nonetheless, evidence would seem to indicate the establishment of Egyptian cults in Pompeii and Herculaneum by sometime in the early first century B.C. Cumont asserts that a temple to Sarapis, destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 62, had been built in Pompeii around 105 B.C. This would imply the near simultaneous construction of Egyptian temples

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[58]."Pompéii est different. Si les autres Cités abondent en inscriptions, Pompei, elle, est très avare de manifestations de ce genre...les murs longeant les rues sont couverts d'inscrptions politiques et de programmes électoraux...mais les épigrammes religieux sont bien rares. Prenait-on les choses sacrées au sérieux, ou l'éruption du Vésuve a-t-elle interrompu ici l'enthousiasme religieux qui se manifestera dans les autres villes d'Italie sous les Empereurs plus attachés au culte d'Isis." Tran Tam Tinh, Essai sur le Culte d'Isis à Pompéi, (Paris,1964), 9.

[59].Taylor, 11.

in Pompeii and Puteoli.[60] Cumont pointed out decidedly similar architectural styles marking the two separate temples. Tran Tam Tinh, however, maintains a slightly more cautious stance. Citing artistic and architectural style, he asserts only that evidence of the cult pre-dates Sulla's founding of the Roman colony there in 80 B.C.[61] At Herculaneum, the evidence is even more problematic. As at Pompeii, there are virtually no documents or inscriptions providing specific, literary information.[62] However, a wealth of beautiful frescoes and statuary, some depicting actual religious rites, betrays the existence of an Egyptian cult, roughly corresponding to that of Pompeii.

Except for Agathocles, the imperialistic theory was never seriously applied to the cult of Sarapis in Italy. Nonetheless, an analysis of the cult's initial diffusion into Italy clearly follows the Hellenistic pattern described by Fraser and others. The rapid rise of Sarapis in Italy must be predominantly attributed to his popularity among the various classes, more vigorous cultural and economic intercourse and a world increasingly receptive to new and foreign ideas. What little role the state actually played was negative, reactionary and even repressive. The

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60. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 76.

61. Tran Tam Tinh, Le Culte des Divinités Orientales à Herculaneum, (Leiden: 1971), 10.

62. ibid., 4.

penetration of Sarapis and Isis into Italy was clearly a product of popular culture.

THE ORIENTAL ALLURE

The turbulent years following Hannibal's invasion were marked by a major infusion of foreign elements into Latin culture. This trend continued after the war, with foreign slaves and merchants playing a key role. By the final decades of the second century, the cults of Sarapis and Isis had gained adherents among the native population. In the early first century B.C., Egyptian cults could be found in some of Italy's largest and most important cities. This religious evolution would continue throughout the latter decades of the Republican period.

But why did these Egyptian cults prove so hypnotically attractive? In order to answer this question, we must examine mystery cults in general and the Egyptian faiths in particular.

Mystery and religion cannot be separated. The dogged belief that there is some reality beyond man's ability to rationally understand comprises the very core of theism. When a faith loses that element of the miraculous and the unknown, the people turn elsewhere. This is what happened in Rome. The mystery cults were the dominant faiths of later paganism because they offered the most vibrant divine experience. The great deities of the Italian past continued to play an important role in civic tradition. But it was the new and exotic foreign sects which compelled the most zealous segments of Roman society. Here, the common man or

woman experienced the full fascination of religious excitement.

The final decades of the Republic were marked by increased apathy toward the traditional faith. Franz Altheim rightly notes that "towards the close of the Republic, then, things had reached such a pitch that the attention of the age was diverted not only from the principal figures of the Greek world of gods, but also from the revered institutions of native Roman religion."[1] The great Capitoline temple was burnt in 83 B.C., and was not fully restored for twenty-one years.[2] Cicero also describes the Roman mood at this time as indifferent. He tells us that the old cults had become largely irrelevant in practical affairs. The auspices were mere pawns in political struggles, and the augural discipline was no longer favored with widespread respect.[3] Similarly, Livy frankly concedes that by the first century B.C., men no longer believed that gods could disclose future events.[4]

It seems apparent that Roman society had encountered

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[1].Altheim, Franz,A History of Roman Religion,trans. by H. Mattingly, (London:1938), 331.

[2].Nock,A.D.,"Religious Development from the close of the Republic to the Reign of Nero," in Cambridge Ancient History,10, 496.

[3].Cic., Div., I, 16, 29; see also Lily Ross Taylor's fine chapter "Manipulating the State Religion," in Party Politics in the Age of Caesar, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1964), 76-97.

[4].Livy,XLIII,13,I.

another religious crisis, equal in scope to the one just following the Second Punic War. The earlier watershed however, had produced an infusion of new deities, like the Magna Mater and the Bacchus rites. But, according to scattered literary references, the new theological climate now verged on agnosticism. Was this in fact the case? Only to a degree. Certainly Rome at this time was developing the kind of intellectual cynicism which had gripped Greece a few centuries earlier. Sophisticated hellenistic philosophies were serving to undermine the legitimacy of the traditional deities. Yet other evidence clearly indicates what was, in fact, a renewed religious zeal among several sectors of Roman society. Moreover, these newfound religious feelings manifested themselves in a virtual rejection of the old gods, and a hearty embracing of the new eastern sects.

This great shift was characterized and facilitated by the development of syncretism. Syncretism was the practice of fusing two or more formerly distinct gods into one relatively homogeneous whole. In point of fact, it was little more than an intermediate phase in the blurry transition between polytheism and monotheism. Frequently, the merged deities hailed from what had been vastly different cultures and geographical regions. In the late centuries of antiquity, syncretism provided Mediterranean religion with an increasingly universal quality. Certainly this paved the way for the monotheism which evolved.

The Egyptian gods Sarapis and Isis are among the best examples of this fascinating phenomenon.[5] Both had their origins in the ancient faiths of the Nile. Isis was an important goddess from the old Pharonic faith. She was given hellenized features by the Greeks. The origins of Sarapis were more complex. The generally accepted theory asserts that he was a fusion of the god Osiris and the Apis bull.[6] Upon the death of each Apis, the bull's spirit was believed to merge into the more generalized soul of Osiris. Eventually, workers building the tombs housing the mummified Apis bulls began worshipping the dead beasts proper. Consequently, a new collaboration between the two gods was created, called Osiris-Apis. When the Macedonians came to rule Egypt, the term was bastardized to "Osarapis," and finally, "Sarapis."[7]

As would the Christian church only a few centuries

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[5]."Serapis offre à chacun l'aspect ou philosophique qu'il desire." Bonneau, Danielle, La Crue du Nile: Divinité Égyptienne à travers mille ans d'histoire (332 av. 641 ap. J.C., (Paris: Libraire C. Klinck Sieck, 1964), 321;"It (the Isiac faith) was, or at least it became, a complex religion with a wealth of mythological, philosophical, and eschatological elements which, though never systematized and brought into agreement, yet offered to all classes of believers something which their religious aspirations craved." LaPiana, "Foreign Groups in Rome," in Harvard Theological Review, 20, (1927), 303.

[6].For information on the Apis bull, see Diod. Sic., 84,85,88,96.

[7].Wilcken, Urkenden der Ptolemäerzeit, 19; Bevan, E.R., The House of Ptolemy: a history of Egypt under the Ptolemaic dynasty,(Chicago:Argonaut, 1927), 40-41.

later, the Egyptian cults cut across political and cultural lines, greatly contributing to the period's new and eclectic zeitgeist.[8] This enabled newly-created deities like Sarapis and Isis to undermine established paganism. By the later Imperial Period, Lucius, in The Golden Ass, was warmly greeted as a fellow disciple of Isis in both Rome and Africa.[9] Apuleius also describes a procession of Isis devotees comprised of men and women of all ages and class (viri feminaeque omin dignitatis et omnis aetatis).[10] This egalitarian quality appealed to the mass populace. Many inscriptions reveal that most adherents of the Egyptian cults in Rome were freedmen and poor people of oriental extraction.[11] Similarly, both LaPiana and Cumont point out

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[8]."There is no doubt that the adherents of the cult of Isis throughout the Empire had a certain consciousness of forming a religious unit, distinct from all others and in their opinion better than these because their religion claimed to be a superior and universal synthesis of the whole religious wisdom of the past. The Isiac believer and initiate was received, wherever he went, by the confraternities of his religion without distinction of race or caste." LaPiana, 337.

[9].Apul., Met., XI,29.

[10].ibid.,XI, 29;cf. Schmitt, Paul, "The Ancient Mysteries in the society of their time, their transformation and most recent echoes," in The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks, ed. by Joseph Campbell, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), 93-119.

[11].C.I.L. VI, 2247;Of the early Imperial Period LaPiana wrote: "Toward Rome, where the Egyptian gods had splendid temples and shrines, patronized by the emperors, served by numerous priests and officials and Isiac societies, and worshipped by a motley throng of foreigners, slaves and freedmen, as well as by ladies of the old and new Roman aristocracy, the eyes of all devotees of the goddess

the Isiacs called themselves "soldiers," and were part of a collective community.[12] This is similar to imagery and custom employed by early Christians.[13]

Egyptian religion had not been altogether unknown to the Romans, even in far earlier periods. Early Greek colonies on the peninsula have displayed some awareness of the Nile's ancient deities. Greek colonial sites at Cumae and Ischia have unearthed scarabs, referring to Ammon or Ammon-Ra, buried in the graves of children.[14] These scarabs date from between the eighth and sixth century B.C.[15] By and large however, Egypt's bizarre deities were seen as strange and even repulsive by the Graeco-Romans. In a world where gods had evolved into human-like beings, eastern animism seemed crude and primitive. Western culture was steeped in the glory and brilliance of Apollo, or the sensual and erotic heat of Aphrodite. The idea of worshipping dog-headed Anubis must have seemed little less than appalling.

We know, however, that the Egyptians were extremely

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throughout the Empire were turned." LaPiana, "Foreign Groups in Rome," pg.308; see also, 292.

[12].LaPiana, 357; cf. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 156.

[13].See St. Paul's use of this imagery in 1 Cor. 9:7; Philippians, 2:25;2 Tim. 2:3-4;Phil, 1:2.

[14].Tinh, Divinitiés Orientales en Campanie, 1.

[15].ibid., 1.

serious about the worship of animals. Diodorus Siculus tells us that anyone unfortunate enough to kill a cat in Egypt would pay with his life.[16] Similarly, Herodotus asserts than anyone who killed an ibis or a falcon, even unintentionally, had to die.[17] Indeed, the ibis was a particularly important image in Egyptian religious iconography. The sacred bird has been linked with other gods, including Isis and Osiris.[18] Ibises are depicted on two frescoes at Herculaneum, walking in the scene of a holy shrine.[19]

These customs clearly offended the more pious holders of the Graeco-Roman tradition. Even in the imperial period, when Egyptian religion had gained more widespread acceptance, sardonic Juvenal would still write:

> What won't those mad Egyptians use for Gods?
> One district worships the green crocodile,
> another ibises gorged full on snakes,
> and in another, apes are still the style...
> Here cats, there riverfish are thought divine,
> dogs too! but our Diana gets no mention
> where eating leeks and onions are made sin.

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[16].Diod. Sic., I, 83.

[17].Hdt., 2, 65.

[18].In Egypt, probably more than four million of these birds were mummified and interred in the Necropolis north of Saggarah. They were embalmed at the rate of about 10,000 annually. Smelik, K.A.D., "The Cult of the Ibis" in Studies in Hellenistic Religions, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 225-243.

[19].Tran Tam Tinh, Les Cultes à Herculaneum, cat. no 58,59 (fig. 40,47).

How shrewd to make a shrine of one's own garden.[20]

But if certain elements of Egyptian religion were offensive to mainstream western culture, other aspects could seem particularly attractive. The Nile gods represented one of mankind's most ancient faiths, undoubtedly shrouded in as much mystery then as now. Drifting sand had already begun to bury the majestic temples, lending an ancient air of mysticism to the old holy places.[21] Moreover, a pleasing aesthetic quality permeated Egyptian art which, as we have already noted, was a frequent presence in Italy. Statues were often imported from the Alexandria or sculpted in conscious imitation of Egyptian style.[22] Still, the diffusion of Isis and Sarapis would probably have been impossible without the creation of hellenized iconography for the deities. For example, the well-known statue of Sarapis (frequently attributed to the sculptor Bryaxis) offered an austere hellenistic exterior.[23] This helped

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[20].Juv. Sat., XV, "Those Mad Egyptians,: trans. by Jerome Mazzaro, Ann Arbor, 1965;Cumont notes that "Parmi les vegetaux, l'oignon est particulierement sacré. La raison supposée en est qu'il provoque le `flatus ventris,' c'est à dire l'expulsion des demons malfaisants avales avec la nourriture." Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 74., ff. #11.

[21].Strab., XVII,32.

[22].Tinh, Isis à Pompei, 4.

[23].Amelung, W., "Le Sérapis de Bryaxis," in Revue Archeologique, II, (1903), 1759; Cumont asserts that the statue was "...fut une des dernières créations divine du

homegenize Egyptian religion while managing to preserve those foreign features which Romans found attractive.[24]

Yet in many important ways, the cults were to retain their Egyptian flavour, far into the Imperial Period. LaPiana reminds us that "the Hellenistic cult, though it made use of the Greek language, remained essentially an Egyptian cult and kept its traditional rites and ceremonies."[25] He notes that Roman inscriptions indicate that the sacred objects of the holy temples were generally maintained by Alexandrians and Egyptians.[26] Thomas Brady points out that the Egyptian spelling of the Sarapis' name always remained Egyptian.[27] Apuleius also reveals that the cults did not relinquish significant portions of their Egyptian heritage. In Metamorphoses, his hero Lucius meets up with an Isiac priesthood obviously well-versed in Egyptian language and custom. LaPiana asserts that this implies that an intimate knowledge of ancient Egyptian ritual and liturgies was necessary to become a priest of the

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génie hellénique. La tête majestuese, d'une expression à la fois sombre et bienveillante...rappelait le double caractère du dieu qui régnait à la fois sur la terre feconde et sur le lugubre royaume des morts." Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 72.

[24].Amelung, 1759.

[25].LaPiana, 305.

[26].C.I.L., XIV,352;c.f. C.I.G., 5973, XIV-917.

[27].Brady, 10.

sect.[28]

The new deities of the age were often accompanied by the miraculous and the bizarre, the dark and scandalous. Sarapis himself had been born in an ancient Memphis tomb and was frequently associated with death, the greatest mystery of all. This was a logical extension of his connections with Osiris.[29] Diodorus Siculus notes that Sarapis was equated with both Osiris and Pluto, the Greek god of the underworld.[30] Plutarch's important De Iside et Osiride refers to the death aspect of Sarapis, and links the god with Pluto/Hades.[31] Similarly, there were those in Plutarch's day who believed the word Sarapis literally meant "coffin of Apis."[32] A worshipper of Sarapis was considered

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[28].Apul., Met., XI,22; LaPiana, 305.

[29].We are also told of some attempts to make Osiris the son of Zeus and an Egyptian girl from Thebes.cf. Diod. Sic., On Egypt, 25; "Serapis et Osiris furent ou identique des l'origine, ou identifes immediatement." Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 70.

[30].Diod. Sic., On Egypt, 25.

[31].Plut., De Is. et Os., 28.

[32].ibid.,XXIX; Diodorus tells of an ancient link between Osiris and the Apis bull. This focuses on the famous tale of Osiris' dismemberment. According to this account, Isis gathered up all the various pieces save her husband's reproductive organ. She then delivered one to each Egyptian district for burial. Individual priests were instructed to choose a local animal to represent Osiris, and the Apis bull was selected as a more universal embodiment of the god.cf. Diod. Sic., On Egypt,XXI,XXII;cf. August. De civ. D, XVIII, 5.

an omen of Alexander the Great's death.[33] Moreover, Apuleius describes rituals overtly centering on death.[34] His Greek adherents often depicted Sarapis with wheatstalks and Cerebus (the afterlife and fertility).[35]

Closely linked to this death aspect were strange rituals of which we know but little. Such secret mysteries undoubtedly added greatly to the shadowy, exotic allure of the eastern cults. Our best source for information in this regard is Apuleius. His protagonist Lucius is transformed into an ass after seducing a powerful sorceress' young servant. Seeking to regain his original shape, Lucius encounters Isis and the vast network of her followers. After the goddess restores his human form, Lucius becomes a fervent devotee, undergoing initiation into her cult. The ceremony clearly involved some rite of symbolic death. Lucius tells us that he entered the threshold beyond death,

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[33].Plut., Alex., LXXVIII;cf. Arr. Anab., VII,26. Sarapis is now believed to have made his appearance during the early years of Ptolemaic reign in Egypt. Hence, his appearance in Persia during the campaigns of Alexander seems anachronistic. This account has led some to believe that Sarapis was really the Babylonian deity "Shar-Apsi."(cf. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 70) More plausible is the theory that the deity referred to in the narratives was some now unknown god whom men of Plutarch's or Arrian's time would have equated with Sarapis.Stambauugh,John, Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies, (Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1972), 9-11;cf. Brenk, Frederick, In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives, (Leiden: Lugdini Batavorum, 1977), 198.

[34].Apul., Met., XI,23.

[35].Hani, Jean, "Sarapis Dieu Solaire," in Revue des Études Grecques, I, 83 (1970), 52.

where he encountered and worshipped many gods.[36] The next day he emerged and was presented to onlookers in brightly colored, exotic garb, decorated with flowers and various animals. In his right hand was a torch. Most important, on his head he wore an impressive headdress, implying the radiant sun.[37]

Evidently this ritual symbolized some kind of death and resurrection. Earlier, in chapter 21, Apuleius had referred to the initiation ceremony as a "voluntary death."[38] (The ceremony itself is, in theory, not entirely unlike the coffin rituals involved in modern masonic liturgy.) Moreover, the Lucius account clearly brings to mind St. Paul's imagery regarding the Christian's death to self and subsequent rebirth.[39] Also, the ritual described in Metamorphoses bears some connection to an Egyptian myth concerning the death and resurrection of Osiris. This important myth comes to us from Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride.[40] As a mortal Pharaoh, Osiris is tricked by enemies into lying down in a coffin, whereupon the lid is suddenly sealed and the entire box thrown into the Nile. Isis ultimately retrieves her brother/husband, and Osiris

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[36].Apul., Met., XI,23.

[37].ibid.,XI,24.

[38].ibid.,XI,21.

[39].Romans, 6:5-11; I Cor. 15:42.

[40].Plut., De Is. et Os., 11-15.

becomes a major god of both fertility and the afterlife. Plutarch asserts that one of Osiris' first acts was to bring cultivation to the barren land.[41] Hence, the mythological link between funerary rites and resuscitation.[42]

Another important component of the initiation ritual described by Apuleius are symbolic references to the sun. The sun was a traditional part of the Egyptian afterlife. The Egyptians believed that the sun traveled through the underworld at night. This corroborates the blinding and brilliant image of the spirit realm which Lucius narrates.[43] Moreover, Sarapis was also frequently linked with the sun. Weber has asserted that Sarapis was initially considered a son of the god Helios, then a manifestation of Helios himself.[44] Indeed, there was an entire sub-sect of Sarapis centering around the sun. Perhaps the crucial account of

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[41].ibid., 13.

[42].Also from Plutarch we learn that a holy ceremony marked the flooding of the Nile. In the holy rites, a jar of Nile water headed a procession honoring Osiris and fertility. Moreover, at the "Pamylia" festival, a statue wielding a greatly exaggerated phallus was carried. This iconography seems to have been related to the Osiris myth.Plut., De Is. et Os., 36;see also, Peuckert, Will-Erich, Geheimkulte, (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984), 497.

[43].Apul., Met., XI,23.

[44].Weber, Drei untersuchungen zur ägyptischgreischer Religion, 1911, 8; "On a pensé pendant longtemps avoir affaire là à une conception purement grecque et sans racine dans la théologie égyptienne...(mais) Sarapis avait d'bord été fils d'Helios, comme Osiris, son modele, avait été fils de Rê et, à l'epoque tardive, etait devenu Rê. Sarapis, en somme avait suivi le même chemin." Hani, 52.

the solar cult comes to from Rufin's Ecclesiastical History(XI,23). Each year, on a certain day following the Nile's annual flood and the New Year, a festival was held at Alexandria. The temple was structured so that at a precise moment in this festival, a single ray of sunshine would strike the god's image, which normally was nestled in shadows and darkness. Hani argues that this ceremony symbolically united Sarapis with the sun. In terms of Egyptian theology, the deities of Osiris and Re had been merged.[45]

Other important attributes gave the eastern gods tremendous appeal among Graeco-Roman adherents. Clearly the mysteries were the faiths which brought exciting new tales of mystic dreams, visions and other miraculous occurrences. The older pagan deities had their glories as well, but those days were now well into the past. The pantheon had become too associated with the literary and the traditional. The new faiths now seemed to promise the most tangible benefits.

Mystic dreams and miracles were common themes among the mystery cults. Often these are linked to the founding of a new sect, or the establishment of a temple in a new location. Earlier centuries had had miraculous accounts

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45."Le sens d'un tel rite est clair. Il s'agissait, en somme, d'une reanimation de la statue, d'une `unio mystica' de Sarapis avec son père, c'est à dire, en terms de theologie égyptienne, d'Osiris avec Rê." Hani, 53.

rendered to lend credibility to Greek or Roman gods.[46] The new Hellenistic deities continued this trend.[47] Both Tacitus and Plutarch, for example, offer miraculous accounts of Ptolemy I's introduction to Sarapis.[48] Both these accounts describe a beautiful supernatural figure who appeared before the monarch and asks that his image be transported from a temple in Sinope.

These factors combined to give the Alexandrian cults the appeal necessary for widespread acceptance. Initially however, the cults' popularity was dispersed chiefly among the lower stratum of Roman society. The gods had come to Italy on the backs of foreign slaves and the merchant class. They soon gained a following among native Italians, albeit not necessarily the upper classes. Concerning the cult of Isis, Cumont has wryly noted that it was first popular among "les femmes pour qui l'amour est une

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[46].Reportedly, miracles were often involved in the establishment of new cults or significant changes in religious custom. For example, Castor and Pollux are introduced at the Battle of Lake Regillus (Livy, 2:20;42,5; cf. Dion. Hal., Ant. Rom., 6:13,1-2.). Mithras was said to have been born from a rock (Jerome, Adversus Iovinianum, 1,7). Similarly, Christianity offers Peter's vision at Joppa to sanction the eating of unclean food among the Jews (Acts 10: 9-29).

[47].There are these kinds of mystic elements in the biblical writings of Luke, who was himself a hellenized Jew. eg., Luke 1:8-13, 3:25-27, 24; Acts 9:3-10, 16:6-11;see also, John 20: 19-26. Consider also Paul: "Lo! I tell you a mystery." I Cor. 15:51.

[48].Tac., His., IV, 83;cf. Plut., De Is. et Os., 28.

profession."[49] This corroborates what we know from Strabo concerning the existence of prostitutes in Egyptian temples.[50] Indeed, the practice was not at all unknown in other eastern religions. The Bible frequently mentions this custom, particularly in conjunction with Baal. Similarly, the poet Catullus (c.84 B.C.-c.54 B.C.) has recorded that the new cults attracted young women, not all of whom reflected virtue and piety.[51] In one poem, he tells of an encounter with a young woman. Enamored with her in an openly flippant way, he brashly and falsely proclaims his ownership of a crew of litter bearers. The young enchantress is impressed but nonetheless opportunistic. "Aw please Catullus," she begs. "Just a little while, lend me your boys. I'd kinda like to ride down to Sarapis' temple."[52] Written sometime in the mid first century B.C., Catallus' poem reflects the cult's growing popularity -- at least among some segments of the populace.

In fact, the tendency of the eastern cults to offer an element of sexual voyeurism is significant. The existence of prostitutes in the temples undoubtedly was highly

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[49].Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 84.

[50].Strab., XVI, 1, 20, 745.

[51].Solmsen, Friedich,Isis among the Greeks and Romans,Cambridge, 1979, 28;for a more thorough discussion of morality in Egyptian cults, particularly that of Isis, see Heybob, 111-127.

[52].Catullus. Gaius Valerius Catullus:the Complete Poetry,10:26, trans. by Frank Copley, Ann Arbor, 1957.

repulsive to some, highly compelling to others. But at the very least, the practice seems to have produced a new zeal for religion.[53] Simultaneously damning the shrines of the Great Mother, Ceres and Isis, Juvenal wonders in what temple women did not offer themselves for sale.[54] Such evidence supports the denigrating view of the mysteries in general; that they were too frequently mere excuses for indulging in the exotic sensuality associated with the East. This is somewhat similar to accusations contemporaries launched at the early Christian church.[55]

In point of fact, sexual titillation may have been part of the allure described by Cumont. This corroborates many popular conceptions, and probably misconceptions, about what constitutes the exotic flavour of eastern mysticism. Plutarch tells us that Isis embodies the cosmic female force

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[53].Heybob notes that, in fact, the cult of Isis came to encourage chastity in young women. She asserts that Propertius (2.33,2.) and Tibullus (1.3, 25-26.) both describe ten day periods of sexual abstinence which women adherents of the goddess would observe. Moreover, Herodotus tells us that it was the Egyptians who first spoke against having intercourse with a woman in a temple, and encouraged people to wash themselves after sex before entering holy places.(Hdt., 2.64.) Her point is well-taken. But, particularly for the cult's early days in Rome, there is much more evidence to support the other extreme. Heybob, 116.

[54].Juv., Sat., 9, 22-25.

[55].Benko, Stephen,Pagan Rome and the Early Christians, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); cf. Macmullen, Ramsay, Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400,(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

of nature.[56] Plutarch also compares some rites focusing on the Apis bull to the notoriously carnal Bacchic rites.[57] Moreover, an Isis aretology from Cyme states: "I (Isis) compelled women to be loved by men...I devised marriage contracts."[58] Also, an Isis love spell is preserved in the "Great Magical Papyri of Paris."[59]

In Rome, Ovid cites the temple of Isis as being a good place for young men to meet women.[60] More significant is the account Josephus gives of the assassination of Caligula, who, at least in some respects, seems a clear example of one who used the cults to provide a medium with which to entertain his own deviance.[61] We are told that the Emperor had devised certain unique rites in which he would appear as a woman.[62] And when he was assassinated, Caligula was

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[56].Plut., De Is. et Os., 53.

[57].ibid.,35.

[58]."Isis Aretology from Cyme, (25-30)," in Grant, Frederick C., Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism, (Indianapolis: Liberal arts Press, 1953), 131-33.

[59]."Great Magical Papyri of Paris (Bibliotheque Nationale, 574, 94-153), in The Ancient Mysteries: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World, ed. by Marvin W. Meyer, (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 174-75.

[60].Ov., Ars Am., 3.633-37.

[61].The bizarre relationship between Caligula and the mysteries are described at length by Josephus:cf. Jos., AJ., XIX;cf. Unnik, Bill, "Flavius Josephus and the Mysteries," in Studies in Hellenistic Religions, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1972, 256.

[62].ibid.,XIX,30.

taking a lonely short-cut on the way to the baths. He desired to inspect some young Asian boys organized into a choir, performing at another of his unorthodox rites.[63]

The Egyptian cults were living and vibrant faiths. In this respect, they stood in frank contrast to the older Pantheon. The grand old Graeco-Roman gods had their day. But by now, they were no longer in position to compete with the hypnotic eastern faiths. Hence the spread of Sarapis and Isis into Rome. Their diffusion was greatly aided by heady, compelling and frequently bizarre features produced by popular theism. As such, the Alexandrian deities typify Hellenistic religion. It was the various mystery cults which offered would-be adherents fresh tales of miracles and tangible, physical manifestations of religious experience. They offered profound theological responses to great questions regarding death and the afterlife. Furthermore, they could be provocative and alluring. Finally, they provided colorful ceremonies and pomp, greatly enhancing the sometimes dreary world of the common man. Such attributes must not be underestimated.

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[63].ibid.,XIX,104.

THE LATE REPUBLIC AND PRINCIPATE

By the late decades of the Republic, the Egyptian cults had gained a large and fervent flock. The populist tendencies of the cult were exacerbated by the period's sharply divided political climate. It was perhaps inevitable that the popular new faiths would figure into the epoch's major power struggles. As Rome's leadership split into factions, the Egyptian cults were used as propoganda tools. To the conservatives, Sarapis and Isis symbolized much that was wrong with the country, and foreign influence was damned. To those calling for change, the gods were a means of gaining support. Finally, the allure of hellenistic monarchy attracted some of Rome's greatest men, sowing the seeds of the Imperial Cult.

The cults of Sarapis and Isis seem to have flourished during the Sullan period. Here again however, the evidence is less than satisfactory. What emerges from the shadowy images is a continuing theological evolution transforming the old order. The well-known College of Pastaphores is said to have been founded during the reign of Sulla.[1] Moreover, other evidence also seems to indicate a leniency toward foreign cults during this period.[2] It is significant that by now, Roman leadership was familiar

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[1].Apul., Met., XI,30.

[2].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 365.

enough with oriental faiths to make political use of them. Moreover, the eastern military escapades of the period contributed to the foreign ambience creeping into Italy.

Plutarch tells us that Marius had placed great trust in a certain Syrian prophetess named Martha and was not adverse to the Mater Deum.[3] When Sulla wanted his troops to march against Rome, he revealed that the Cappadocian goddess Ma-Bellona had appeared to him in a dream and called him to battle.[4] Equally intriguing are the actions taken by Sulla upon his return in 82 B.C.[5] After the completion of his campaigns, he placed himself under the patronage of Venus, also taking up the surname "Felix."[6] Felix bears close resemblance to the Latin word "Felicitas."[7] This seems to indicate a linking between Venus and Tyche/Fortuna. Frescoes dating from this period have been found at Pomepii, which was populated by many veterans of Sulla's campaigns. In one scene, Venus holds an olive branch in her left hand, in her right a scepter. In another scene, Venus stands among a cluster of elephants. On each side of her is an

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[3].Plut., Mar., XVII; XXXI,I.

[4].Plut., Sull., IX,6.

[5]."Sylla, à ses debuts, fit preuve d'un éclectisme religioux influencé par l'ambiance des milieux orientaux où il séjourna, et il n'hésita point à recourir aux dieux orientaux eux-mêmes."Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 362.

[6].ibid., 363.

[7].Baldson,J. "Sulla Felix," in Journal of Roman Studies 41 (1951), 1-10.

attendant wielding a horn of plenty. The imagery here, according to Malaise, brings to mind the image of Isis Fortuna. The cornucopiae held by her attendants do, in fact, represent the two chief attributes of Tyche: bounty and good fortune. Furthermore, the elephants surrounding Venus offer her an eastern flavor lacking in earlier renderings. Of course, a leap of faith is required to make the transition from merely Venus in an exotic setting to a clearly conceived Venus/Isis. But as Malaise prudently notes, this is at least another important example of the ongoing process of syncretism.[8]

The urban mass of disciples further fueled the cults' political ramifications in the struggle between optimates and populares. Indeed, Isis seems to have been frequently associated with anti-government factions of the later Republic. Such involvement is evident in several different ways. Coinage has often been used for propaganda purposes and frequently reflects popular culture at a given time and place. In this light, the numismatic studies of A. Alfoldi take on added significance. His work has shown a series of Isiaci symbols minted onto coins during the 80's and the

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[8]."Nous n'avons aucnue preuve directe de la dévotion du dictateur pour la déesse égyptienne mais la confiance qu'il plaça dans une Vénus assurant sa bonne fortune pouvait fournir une justification théologique à un eventuel appui des Isiaques." Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 364.

70's B.C.[9] These images clearly indicate a sound and thriving cult by the mid-first century B.C. More, he argues that these coins reflected subversive propaganda, produced by a revolutionary faction of Populares involved with the cult of Isis.[10]

Other evidence also indicates a subversive element in the Alexandrian cults at Rome during the declining years of the Republic. During the first century, the Senate implemented a series of measures designed to limit and even persecute the cult. This is not surprising. Foreign cults were generally forbidden in Rome.[11] Populist sects elicited far greater zeal and devotion than the austere state-cults officially sanctioned by Rome. In the turbulent times of the late Republic, such grass-roots movements posed a special threat. Moreover, Sarapis and Isis hailed from a nation not yet controlled by Rome.[12]

In 59 B.C. a period of turbulence began which surrounded the cult of Isis and her altars in Rome. Varro,

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[9].Alfoldi, A. "Isiskult und Umsturzbewegung im letzen Jahrhundert der Römischen Republik," Schweizer Munzblatter, 5 (1954), 26-30;cf. Heybob, 15.

[10].Alfoldi,28-30;cf.Heybob, 15.

[11].Cass. Dio, II,26.

[12]"...ce culte avait été fondé, soutenu, propagé par les Ptolemees;il venait d'un pays qui, à la fin de la republique, fut presque constamment hostile à l'italie. Il sortiat d'Alexandrie, une ville dont Rome sentait et craignait la supériorité."Cumont, Les Religions Orientales,76-77.(Note the reference to the imperialistic theory);cf. Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 315.

in a passage quoted by Tertullian, tells us that the Senate tore down some shrines which had been defiantly raised by the masses.[13] Much of this trouble may have centered around the political agitator Clodius. He had recruited mobs from the slums and organized them into disruptive gangs.[14] Cicero specifically states that foreigners comprised the majority of these forces.[15] Similarly, a certain Usia Prima, was a priestess of Isis. Her father, Rabirus Postumus Hermodorus, was a freedman from Egypt.[16]

The foreign element of this political unrest exacerbated Roman inclinations towards xenophobia. Cicero declared "let no one have gods separately; nor let them cultivate in private new and strange gods unless publicly summoned.[17] Again Tertullian reports that the consuls Piso and Gabinus not only kept Egyptian gods from the capitol,

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[13]."Ceterum serapem et Arpocratum et Anubem prohibitos Capitolio varro commemorat eorumque aras a senta diectas nonnisi per uim popularium restructas."Tert., Ad Nat., I.10,17; cf. Malaise, Les Cultes Egyptiens, 365.

[14].LaPiana, 292.

[15].An tu populum Romanum esse putas illum qui constat ex iis qui mercede conducatar...Multitudinem hominum ex servis, ex conductis, ex facinorosis, ex egentibus congregatam."Cic., Dom., 33,89.

[16].C.I.L. VI, 2246;cf. LaPiana, 292.

[17]."Separatim nemo habessit deos; neve nevos sive adrenas, nisi publice adscitos privatim colunto."Cic., Leg., II,8;cf. Guterman, Simeon, Religious Toleration and Persecution in Ancient Rome, (London: Aiglon Press), 30.

but overthrew their altars.[18] In 58 B.C., the consul Gabinius defended the erection of the altars, and disagreed with the Senate. Ultimately however, the government's will was deemed more substantial than the `impetus vulgi,' and Gabinius ordered the altars destroyed.[19] Another incident occurred during the Ludi Megalenses games of the year 56 B.C. These festivities were of a civic and religious nature, and foreigners were traditionally excluded. Clodius however, who presided over the games as curule aedile, had one of his mobs invade the theater. Only the intervention of the consul Lentulus prevented utter massacre. Cicero reports that the games were polluted (polluti sunt) because Clodius' band was composed chiefly of foreigners and slaves.[20] Rocked with civic unrest, Rome desperately abolished all remaining collegiate associations in 56. Finally, in the early forties, Caesar dissolved all guilds except the most ancient ones.[21]

But like other more notorious religious persecutions tried by Rome, these feeble attempts at tearing down the newly constructed temples of Isis and Sarapis entirely

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[18].Serapidem et Isidem et Arpocratem cum suo cynocephalo Capitolio prhoibitos, id est curia deorum pulsos, Piso et Gabinius consules non utique Christiani eurersis ram aris eorum abdicaurunt turpium et otiosarum susperstitionum uitia cohibentes." Tert., Apol., VI,8.

[19].Tert., Ad Nat., I,10,18;cf. Heybob, 18.

[20].Cic., Har., Resp., II; cf. LaPiana, 291-292.

[21].Suet., Iul., 42.3;cf. Heybob, 19.

failed to achieve the intended purpose. Ironically, the senatorial actions merely provide the most concrete evidence concerning the strong presence of Alexandrian gods at the end of the Republican period. It is at this point we can definitely ascribe to the cults a tangible, major role in the spiritual life of ancient Italy. By 42 B.C., the Second Triumvirate ordered the construction of a temple to Isis and Sarapis in Rome.[22] This act was designed to appease the populace, particularly after the turbulent political and military events which had characterized the previous year.

In the struggle between Antony and Octavian, the political implications of the differing religious systems became even more marked. For political propaganda, the struggle between Rome's two leading strongmen took on grandiose theological and cultural aspects. Cleopatra's influence upon Antony was crucial in this regard.[23] She reigned over a land where rulers had, for century upon century, been revered as gods. Plutarch tells us that

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22.Cass. Dio, 47,15,4; cf. Nock, "Religious Developments," 471-472.

23."Of the several leaders who might have dominated the east, Antony was probably the one most susceptible to Cleopatra's policies. Four times married, endlessly involved with women, he was always ready for a fresh conquest. He had known Cleopatra in her youthful beauty and in the dazzling brilliance of her position as Caesar's mistress...she was fascinating: charming, dramatic, skilled in all the arts of captivating men." Huzar, E.G., Mark Antony: A Biography, (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 189-90.

Cleopatra was associated with both Isis and Aphrodite.[24] As her alliance with Antony developed, Cleopatra posed with Antony for various painting and statues. In 38 B.C., Antony declared himself Dionysus. Dio Cassius states that in statues, he was depicted as Dionysus or Osiris, and she as Isis or Selene.[25] Moreover, in 34 B.C., after defeating the Armenians, Antony presented his spoils to Cleopatra, who sat on her throne dressed as Isis.[26] By traditional Roman custom, he should have offered the fruits of his conquest to the Capitoline Jupiter.

Given the political climate of the day, Antony's bold deviation from Roman tradition was painted in the grimmest of colors by Octavian. He could portray Actium as almost a Homeric struggle between both gods and men. The deities of the East were pitted against the deities of the West. On the eve of battle, Octavian's speech to the army denounced Antony for having embraced Egypt's customs and religions.[27] Later, in Virgil, Actium is depicted in almost apocalyptic proportions. Describing the buckle of Aeneas, Virgil offers what is really a portrayal from Actium. In a corner of the

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[24].Plut., Ant., 54.6.

[25].Cass. Dio, 50.5,2-3;25.2-4; cf. Heybob, 21.

[26].Cass. Dio, 49.40,3; Plut., Ant., 50;cf. Huzar, Eleanor G., "The Literary Efforts of Mark Antony," in Aufsteig und Niedergang der römischen Welt, II, 30.1., 1982, pgs. 654-657.

[27].Cass. Dio, 50.24-30.

scene, the Nile awaits the return of conquered Antony. On one side are seen Augustus and the traditional gods of the Roman hearth. On the other, Antony, followed by a swarm of oriental deities. At his side is the dog-headed Anubis and various alien beings.[28] Other poetry from this period also treats Egypt harshly.[29] Bonneau has pointed out that Roman poets seems to make almost mocking reference to the Nile's apparent failure to flood just subsequent to Actium.[30] It was as though the mystical, life source of the ancient culture had been made impotent.[31] Sextus Propertius describes Antony and Cleopatra fleeing to the Nile's "muddy canals" in an embarrassing and tragic aftermath of defeat.[32]

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[28].Verg., Aen., VIII, 675-713;cf. Altheim, 350.

[29].One exception to this is taken from the poet Tibullus (48?-19 B.C.), who refers to the Nile as a god: `Nilus Pater.' Tib., Elegies, I,7,23; cf. Bonneau, 329.

[30].Naphatali Lewis point out that Isis, like Osiris, was often associated with the Nile. In the procession which celebrated the annual river's rising, a cup of the "new water" was carried ceremoniously in a golden vase of Isis. Moreover, a hymn to the goddess associated her with the flood. This ceremony eventually became associated with the Christian archangel Michael.POxy, 1830, as cited in Lewis, Naphatali, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 85.

[31]."There is a ample evidence in all this that fundamental aspects of the Hellenistic god-king were now being assumed by the Romans; in a sense Antony is the last of the Hellenistic monarchs." Fishwick, Duncan, The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 48.

[32].Prop., Elegies, III,XI,51;cf. Bonneau, 330.

In a sense, Actium had been a struggle between the new forces challenging Rome and the older, traditional society. At least, that was the way the battle was described by its victors. Hence, it was only fitting that after Antony's defeat, Augustus should attempt to enforce a return to the older, more austere religion of his fathers.[33] Cassius Dio states that after Actium, Augustus strictly forbade the presence of Egyptian cults inside the pomerium.[34] He also narrates a conversation between the fledgling emperor and his confidant Maecenas who advises the new ruler to promote the old Roman ways. These measures were not solely the product of philosophical or theological rationale. Augustus is also warned that individuals bringing new religious ideas into Rome may well nurture foreign views of government, from which conspiracies could arise.[35]

Suetonius tells us that Augustus only favored the eastern cults he inherited from far distant ancestors. All others he rejected. This is why he was receptive to the Eleusinian mysteries, but when travelling in Egypt neglected

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[33]."Si le vainquer d'Actium avait été Antoine, Isis et Sérapis eussent fait avec lui une entrée triomphale à Rome, mais ils furent vaincus avec Cléopâtre, et Auguste, devenu le maître de l'Empire, témoinaga une aversion profonde aux dieux protectuers de ses ancien ennemis." Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 77.

[34].Cass. Dio, 53,2.

[35].Cass. Dio, 52,36; cf. Guterman, 31; Lewis asserts that Egypt was treated fairly leniently after Actium. He believes this is due to Egypt's potential as a breeding ground for further conspiracy. Lewis, 85.

to visit the sacred bull. He also praised his grandson for not offering prayers at Jerusalem.[36] In particular, Augustus sponsored Apollo, who was placed beside the capitoline deities as chief god of the state.[37]

But elements of eastern theology now seemed deeply ingrained in Roman society. Ironically, Augustus himself provides sound evidence of this fact. LaPiana's assertion that Augustus' censure of the Egyptian cults only made the converts more earnest rings true.[38] In 30 B.C., the temples of Isis and Sarapis were again to be destroyed. But no workman could be found to strike the first blow.[39] This indicates a widespread reverance for Egyptian deities. Even private shrines to the Egyptian gods were forbidden. In 28 B.C. they were banned from the Pomerium. In 21 the law was expanded to include a full mile around the city.[40] This was due to a revolt which occured during Augustus' absence from the city. The followers of Isis sparked a melee which led Maecenas to enact even stricter censure.[41]

The new measures proved temporarily effective, at least

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[36].Suet., Aug., 93;Cass. Dio, 51.16,5.

[37].Altheim, 351.

[38].LaPiana, 291.

[39].Val. Max., 1,33;cf. Tinh, Isis à Pompéii, 22;cf. Witt, 223.

[40].Nock, Conversion, 74.

[41].Lapiana, 293.

on the surface. Dionysus of Halicarnassus reports that with the exception of the Magna Mater, the mystery rites were largely performed in private.[42] Furthermore, oriental religious themes appear very infrequently in the pottery from this period.[43] However, eastern images which appear in some wall murals dating from the Principate period. The Camapana Reliefs show scenes of Graeco-Roman myths and rituals, with eastern themes appearing sporadically. Nock tells us that these oriental images have virtually no theological significance, and can be compared to the "Egyptian landscapes in contemporary art or Chinese landscapes in the eighteenth century."[44] This perhaps understates the significance of such occurrences. The presence of oriental themes in the period's art clearly indicates the eclectic climate fostering syncretism.

But this eclecticism was not evident merely in idylic wall-paintings. Even with Augustus posing as the new Romulus, re-building mythical Rome, there was no stopping the flood of foreign influence. Italian consciousness had been irrevocably altered by its continual contact with the Hellenistic world. Theologically, this was manifest in an increasing deification of leaders. The worship of kings and pharaohs was an ancient and established custom among many of

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[42].Dion. Hal., Ant. Rom., 2,19.

[43].Nock, Conversion, 124.

[44].ibid., 124.

the eastern societies. The practice had been adopted by Alexander the Great, subsequently becoming customary among many hellenistic rulers. This was particularly true in Egypt. Here, full millennia of monarch worshipping had readied the indigenous population to bow before the Ptolemies.

Much of our evidence for the origins of the Emperor's cult comes from the turbulent years preceding Actium. Antony and Cleopatra personally donned the iconograpy of hellenistic and Egyptian deities.[45] But Caesar was the first Roman leader to flirt with divinity. Clearly he toyed with the notion of creating an eastern style monarchy, perhaps one modeled after the Ptolemies. Moreover, he was offered hints of divinity by the Senate. These honors came after Caesar's great triumphs at Thapsus and Munda.[46]

After Thapsus, a chariot was set on the Capitol facing Jupiter. Alongside it was a bronze statue of Caesar which seems to have had one foot resting on a globe.[47] While the significance of such symbolism is not certain, the ramifications seem evident. After Munda, Hellenistic influences are even more visible. Receiving news of

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[45]."There is ample evidence in all this that fundamental aspects of the hellenistic god-king were now being assumed by Romans; in a sense Antony is the last of the Hellenistic monarchs." ibid., 48;

[46].ibid., 56.

[47].Cass. Dio, 43,14,6.

Caesar's triumph, the Senate decreed that the morrow's Parilia should be celebrated simultaneously with the victory.[48] In the processional launching the games, an ivory figure of Caesar was to be carried, accompanied by other gods.[49] More significant is an account from Appian in which Caesar places a gold image of Cleopatra beside the statue of Venus in a temple.[50] And after the Ides, that the people originally desired to bring Caesar's corpse into the temple of Jupiter for burial.[51]

Even Augustus, who claimed to champion traditional Roman virtue, seems to have been affected by hellenistic notions of a semi-deistic monarchy. Certainly, immediate and overt creation of an imperial cult would have been both politically unwise and incompatible with his conservative Roman posturing. Nonetheless, Rome's first emperor clearly attempted to associate his position with the gods, however cautiously. Here is found the basis for the deification of Rome's Emperors which would characterize later periods. In particular, Augustus liked Apollo. Indeed, his great

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[48].The Parilia celebrated the gods and goddesses Pales, patrons of the flocks and fields. A prayer to the Pales is found in Ovid, Fasti, 4,721. By Cicero's day the games were celebrated as representing the foundation of Rome. Cic. Div., 2,98.;cf. Varro, Rust., III,2.I,9.

[49].Cass. Dio, 43, 45, 2; Suet., Iuv, 76,1.

[50].App., BCiv., 2, 148.

[51].ibid.,2,148;Suetonius reports that after Caesar's death, a comet shot through the sky. Suet., Iuv., 88.

triumph at Actium was achieved near the temple of Apollo Actium. In commemoration of his victory, he enlarged the old sanctuary. He also founded the new city of Nicopolis and began the quinquennial games.[52] The Temple of Apollo was consecrated and erected next door to Augustus' own home.[53] But this was by no means the first time the principate had aligned himself the immortals. After the Peace of Brundisium, he had arrived at a peace banquet dressed as Apollo.[54]

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[52].Suet., Aug., 18; Strab., 7,7,6.

[53].Cass., Dio. 53,1,3.

[54].Suet., Aug., 70; cf. Huzar, "Literary Efforts of Antony," 656.

If hellenistic influence had made subtle inroads into Roman faith and religious custom, the early imperial government continued to take action against the major oriental cults. By and large Tiberius continued the conservative policies of his predecessor. The Emperor himself seems to have been a skeptic, but he vigorously promoted the old faith.[1] In Egypt, he was politically astute enough to have himself depicted in reliefs, offering hommage to local deities.[2] Still, Tacitus tells us the Emperor forbade the deification of a statue.[3]

Actions taken against the Egyptian cults provide our best evidence for their existence in Rome. In A.D. 19 an important and severe persecution shed much light on the nature of eastern cults in Rome during the period.[4] Tacitus

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[1]"...le nouvel empereur fut peu intéresse par la vie religieuse. S'il n'est point complètement athée, le successuer d'Auguste est un sceptique gagné à l'astrologie, convaincu que tout obéit à la fatalité, et fort influencé par son astrolgue Thrasylle."Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 390;cf. Suet., Tib., 14.

[2].Nock, A.D., "Religious Developments from the Close of the Republic to the Death of Nero," in The Cambridge Ancient History, 10, 495.

[3].Tac., Ann., 4.52.

[4].There has been some discussion as to the accuracy of the A.D. 19 date. Smallwood points out that details offered in both Tacitus and Dio place the events firmly in 19. But in giving his account, Josephus refers to the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, hence implying a date nearer to 30. The great majority of scholars seem to have accepted the earlier date. cf. Smallwood, E. Mary, "Some Notes of the Jews

states that both the Egyptian and Judaic cults were banished. A military draft was used as a pretext, exiling many of the superstitious to Sardinia. The others were ordered to leave Italy unless they renounced their faith within a fixed period of time.[5] Similarly, Suetonius asserts that Egyptians and Jews were banished from Rome and forced to burn their religious garments. And while he specifically cites only Jews as being subject to the draft, Suetonius does say that those of the same race or similar beliefs were also expelled from the city.[6]

Unfortunately, neither Suetonius or Tacitus offered any kind of specific explanation as to why these persecutions occured. Consequently, scholars have had to consider a set of intriguing, though rather dubious accounts offered by Josephus.[7] In one of these narratives, the beauty of a Roman noblewoman named Paulina greatly fascinated the knight Decius Mundus. Decius tried but failed to seduce Paulina. Subsequently, he bribed a priest of Isis to tell Paulina that the Egyptian god Anubis desired her company for an

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under Tiberius," in Latomus, 314-315;Heidel, W.A., "Why were the Jews Banished from Italy in A.D. 19," in American Journal of Philology, 41 (1920), 28-47;Nock, Conversions, 74;Guterman, 149;also, Tac., Ann., II ,85, 5;Suet., Tib., 36; Cass. Dio, lvii, 18 5a; Joseph., Ant. iud., XVIII, 65, 81-5;Philo, In Flaccum, 1, Legatio ad Gaium, 23-24..

[5].Tac., Ann., II, 85, 5.

[6].Suet., Tib., 36.

[7].Joseph., Ant. Jud., XVIII, 65-80.

evening at the temple. Paulina's husband Saturnis granted permission. Decius, disguised as Anubis, met her at the Iseum and obtained as a god that which eluded him as a mortal. Afterwards, his pride inflated by the experience, Decius revealed his true identity to Paulina, who tells her husband Saturnis. When word of the scandal reached Tiberius, the temple was demolished, the cult statue thrown into the Tiber, and the priests involved were crucified.[8] Curiously, Decius was merely banished.

Paulina's story is placed alongside a similar anecdote, this one involving the Jews. Here, a Roman woman named Fulvia was swindled into offering gold and purple to four Jewish men, believing her gifts would adorn the great temple in Jerusalem. Instead the men kept the valuables. Fulvia told her husband. (Her husband, coincidentally, was also named Saturnis, like Paulina's husband in the account of the Egyptian cults.) Again, news of the misdeed reached Tiberius, who subsequently punished the entire Jewish community in Rome.

The accounts described by Josephus have sparked much debate. And despite the ink spilled, questions remain. For example, why does Josephus take pains to distinguish between

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[8]..."ce fait rapporté par Flavbius Josephus est partiellement confirmé par la decouverte dans le Tibre de six sistres, quatre pres du Ponte sisto et duex pres du Pont unberto, c'est à dire sur la frange orientale du Champ de Mars." Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 393;cf. Bissing, F. von, "Sul tipo dei sistri trovati nel Tevere," in Bulletin de la Societe d'Archeologie d'Alexandrie, 31 (1937), 211-224.

the two separate cults, while Tacitus and Suetonius link them together in a single sentence? Unnik asserts that "He (Josephus) was not after the telling of a juicy story, as is often thought, but he wanted his readers to see the true reasons of what had happened and the differences between the two cases."[9] In this assertion, Unnik concurs with Heybob, who also argues that the Jewish historian sought to clearly differentiate the differences between the faiths.[10] Unnik notes that the priests of Isis allowed themselves to be bribed, whereas the Jewish swindlers were apparently outcasts from Israel, acting independently. Hence, the Jewish faith proper cannot be held accountable for the wrongs done unto Fulvia, unlike the Paulina account.[11]

It hardly seems likely that Jewish and Egyptian religion were seen as one and inseparable by the Romans. Yet the two were more closely linked than many would suppose. Indeed, in the spirit of syncretism characterizing

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[9].Unnik, W.C., "Flavius Josephus and the Mysteries," in Studies in Hellenistic Religions, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, Leiden: 1979, 244-279, 256.

[10].Heybob, 118.

[11]."What do we learn here of Josephus' attitude towards this particular form of religion? The story is not told to demonstrate the religions superiority of Judaism over the Egyptian cult; that may be a consequence, but not the real objective. Josephus wanted to safeguard his religion against a misunderstanding that might follow a Senatus-Consultum." Unnik, 258.

the age, Sarapis became linked with the biblical Joseph.[12] In fact, this tie stemmed from ancient Egyptian myth, where both Joseph and Osiris were seen as givers of agriculture. Moreover, the Jewish tribe of Joseph was associated with the bull, recalling both Apis and the biblical golden calf.[13] Referring to this link, Tertullian, in A.D. 197, wrote that " for this Serapis was formerly called Joseph from the family of the saints."[14] Similarly, Rufinus of Aquileai (c.345-401) links Joseph and Sarapis, citing their common association with grain.[15] So too does Firmicus Maternus in his De Errore Profanarum Religionum, which urged the eradication of paganism.[16] Moreover, St Augustine's De Civitate Dei describes the origins of Sarapis just subsequent to an account regarding Joseph.[17] This may have been Augustine's attempt to differentiate between the commonly linked Sarapis and Joseph.

This evidence is not offered to imply that Tacitus and Suetonius were aware of these specific links between Judaic and Egyptian faiths. But two millennium of biblical imagery

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12.Mussies, Gerard, "The Interpretation Judaica of Sarapis," in Studies in Hellenistic Religions, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, Leiden: 1979, 189-214.

13.Deuteronomy, 33;17.

14.Tert., Apol., II, 8; cf. Mussies, 194.

15.Ruf. Aquil., Hist. Ecc., XI, 23.

16.Firm. Mat., Err. Prof. rel., 13.

17.August., De civ. D, XVIII, 4, 5.

have tended to make Judaism even more distinct from "paganism" than it actually was. Many Jews from the period were not the culturally and theologically distinct individuals popular Christian images often portray. The two religions were from the same corner of the Mediterranean, and had both arrived in Rome during the same period of exposure to foreign gods. Jews and Egyptians were often fully hellenized and contributing to the hybrid cults being produced by syncretism. For example, in 139 B.C., the Jews were banished from Rome for proselytizing their cult of Jupiter Sabazius.[18] If we accept Unnik's assertion that the Josephus accounts seek to educate non-Jews as to the distinctions between Jewish practice and Egyptian practice, it follows that many Greeks and Romans did not, in fact, clearly understand the differences. This phenomenon may have been similar to common modern western notions of Buddhism, which categorize a vast plethora of oriental faiths under one all-purpose label. So it is at least plausible that Tacitus, while making general distinctions between Jewish and Egyptian faiths, could also have viewed the two as essentially the same.

Heidel and Smallwood offer different explanations for

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[18].Val. Max., 1,3,3. Jupiter Sabazius was a Phrygian deity sometimes associated with Dionysus. He manifest some Jewish characteristics. "Fellman, Rudolf, "Der Sabazios Kult," in Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich, ed. by M.J. Vermeseren, (Leiden: 1979), 316-340.

the persecutions of Tiberius:[19] Heidel asserts that actions begun in 19 stemmed from Tiberius' attempts to prevent eastern-style prostitution from creeping into Rome. Both Paulina and Fulvia, he believed, were being lured into forms of temple prostitution. He notes that Tacitus connects the Jews so closely with the Egyptians, they seem to be perceived as identical.[20] Moreover, strict measures taken by the Senate to eliminate the apparent presence of prostitution among women of the equestrian class.[21] While his argument seems plausible in the case of Paulina and Decius, there is less certainty in his analysis of the account of Fulvia and the Jews. He notes that Fulvia's gifts to the four men were gold and purple. In some oriental societies, gold and purple were woven into temple hangings by prostitutes.[22] Heidel offers the possibility that Fulvia was being enticed into this form of religious servitude.

In 1956, E. Mary Smallwood refuted Heidel and offered a more plausible explanation. By the New Testament period, there is virtually no reference to temple prostitution, at

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[19].op. cit., above, 68-9, ff.#. 4.

[20].Tac., Ann., II, 85.

[21].ibid.,II, 85.

[22].Among the reforms of King Josiah: "He broke down the tents of the sodomites, that were in the house of Jehovah, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah." II Kings 23;7.

least in biblical societies.[23] She argues that the fundamental reason for the expulsion of A.D.19 was that the Jews were converting many Romans to Judaism.[24] Her argument is based on equally thin evidence, a single reference given by Cassius Dio.[25] But it seems credible, since this was a period still stressing the Augustan reforms and promoting traditional Roman religion.[26] Seneca reports a general suspicion of alien beliefs around this time.[27] And actions had been taken against the Jews in 139 B.C.[28] They were perceived to be as dangerous and unorthodox as the Egyptians.

The debates caused by the highly questionable accounts of Flavius Josephus seem academic. These tales are entirely too anecdotal and charming to be taken seriously as motives for Tiberius to launch a major persecution. On the other hand, they provide invaluable clues as to the general

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[23]."He who said `My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves,' would hardly have passed over in silence immorality practiced in the name of religion;St Paul, who was disgusted by the standards of morality at Corinth, would surely have been filled with even greater indignation, and would have expressed his feelings on the subject, had similar customs defiled the Temple." Smallwood, 318.

[24].ibid., 319.

[25].Cass., Dio, 57, 18, 5a.

[26].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 390.

[27].Sen., Epist., 108, 22.

[28].Val. Max., 1,3,3.

nature of the charges raised against both Jewish and Egyptian cults in Rome. The accusations of sexual laxity and financial swindling are reminiscent of charges launched at oriental cults during the Republican period. The stories are indicative of popular misconceptions about the oriental sects, and consequently cannot be disregarded as irrelevant.

Clearly the Egyptian cults and eastern allure were now gaining converts in the upper echelons of Roman society. This is perhaps the single most important revelation of the Josephus accounts concerning Paulina and Fulvia. Indeed, the very year Tiberius launched his persecutions, Germanicus visited the ancient lands of the Nile.[29] Here he sought out the sacred Apis bull and observed a fast in honor of the occasion.[30] Given Germanicus' rank, the visit may well have had political implications.[31] Still, the oriental cults were attracting the top levels of Roman leadership. Indeed, the son of Germanicus who was to finally bring Egypt's gods and the notions of hellenistic monarchy into the Eternal City.

Caligula was born in A.D. 12. Much of his youth was

29.Ootgeheim, J., Germanicus en Égypte," in Les Études Classiques, 27 (1975), 241-57.

30.Pliny, HN, VII, 185; Solin., XXXII, 19; Amm. Marc., XXII, 14, 8.

31."On ne peut s'empêcher de songer que Germanicus par son voyage en Égypte cherchait la sympathie des Égyptiens, laquelle aurait pu lui être d'un grand secours dans une lutte éventuelle contre Drusus, le fils de Tibére." Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 394.

spent at his grandmother Antonia's house, daughter of Antony. Only at the age of nineteen did he go to live with his adopted father Tiberius.[32] Thus, the young Caligula was raised in an environment somewhat acquainted with the Orient.[33] Perhaps this led Caligula to introduce many overtly eastern pratices into Rome. There is some uncertainity as to the extent Caligula was influenced by Egyptian beliefs. It seems clear however, that he was far more susceptible to eastern ideas than his two predecessors.[34]

Caligula lost his sanity after a bout with illness in 37.[35] His insanity may have made Caligula eager for the heightened glory heaped upon oriental rulers. He quickly displayed inclinations toward hellenistic monarchy. He began by declaring Tiberius a god, but the Senate discouraged this initial act.[36] Also, Caligula introduced the oriental practice of prostration.[37] Later, a band of Alexandrian Jews visiting Rome were denounced by the

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[32].Suet., Cal., 10.

[33].Plut., Ant., 87.

[34].En effet, Caligula voulut introduire à Rome une monarchie absolue et théocratique où l'Emperuer est à la fois une maître et un dieu comme en Égypte." Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 396.

[35].Philo, Legatio ad Gaium, 14,22.

[36].Sen., Apocol., 2.

[37].Cass. Dio, 59, 27.

Emperor for their people's general reluctance to admit his divinity.[38]

But to what extent were these significant breaks with Augustus and Tiberius the result of specifically Egyptian sentiment? The evidence seems to indicate that Caligula harboured a special fondness for the refined and exotic Nile culture. For example, he surrounded himself with servants, most of whom were Egyptian.[39] Moreover, he brought a beautiful obelisk to Rome from Egypt.[40] Such behavior clearly seems to imply a penchant for Egypt. But how much can we know about the Emperor's personal religious beliefs?

It was Caligula who estasblished the Isiac festival in Rome.[41] Similarly, both Suetonius and Dio report that one of the new ruler's first acts was to build his own temple on the Palatine.[42] It seems clear that this was the famous temple of Isis on the Campus Martius, constructed in 38.[43] The motives for Caligula's erection of this important shrine

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[38].Philo, Leg., 353.

[39].ibid., 166.

[40].Plin., HN, 36, 64.

[41].Malaise, Les Cultes Egyptiens, 400;cf. C.I.L., I, 2.,pg.333;Plut., De Is. et Os., 13.

[42].Seut., Cal., 22;cf. Cass. Dio, 59,28.2.

[43].Heybob, 24;cf. Wissowa, G., Religion und Kultus der Romer, 2ed. ed., (Munich: 1912), 353; Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 79.

have sparked some debate.[44] To what degree was the Emperor a fervent devotee of the oriental/Egyptian cults? Was he, as some have claimed, a closet disciple of Isis? While the evidence is shadowy, there is ample cause to assume that this was, in fact, the case.

Early in this century the Instituto Poligrafico of Rome published a work focusing on antique Italian painting. The second volume of this publication was consecrated to the decoration of a room preserved under the palace of Domitian.[45] The findings have produced a brief but important analysis by Franz Cumont, who provides both a lucid description of this important find and a sound, plausible interpretation.[46] He notes that masonry dates the

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[44]."Caligula, indeed, gave to Isis her first public temple, and under him the dramatic festival of Osiris was established in Rome, but his conduct hangs together with his notable contempt for the established tradition and did not raise the general standings of the Egyptian deities in Rome." Nock, Conversion, 124;"...erst unter Caligula konnte sich der Kult freier entwickeln. Unter diesem Herrscher wurde der Isisgottesdienst in den Staatskult übernommen." Vidman, "Isis und Sarapis," 135;"Kaum aber war Caligula zur herrschaft gekommen, verkündete er die staatliche Anerkennung dieses kultes und errichte den grossen Tempel des Isis Campenis auf dem Marsfeld. Dies bedeutete den endgültigen Einbruch der ägyptischen Kulte nach Rom. Caligula hat die Schleusen so weit geöffnet, dass an ein Verbot später nicht mehr gedacht werden konnte." Koberlein, E., Caligula und die ägyptischen Kulte, (Beitrage zur klassichen Philologie, Heft 3, Meisenheim an Glan, 1962), 12-13;cf. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, pgs.240-241.

[45].Monumenti della pittura antica, Rome: II., Le pitture dell'aula isiaca di Caligola, 1936 (XIV).

[46].Cumont, Franz, "La Salle Isiaque de Caligula au Palatin," in Revue de l'Histoire des Religions, 114 (1936), 127-129.

room's walls sometime between the reign of Augustus and Nero. Moreover, the decorations manifest much overtly Egyptian iconography, some recalling scenes from Apuleius.[47] Cumont asserts that of the period's Emperors, only Caligula would have constructed such a room.[48]

Other acts betray Caligula's religious sympathies as well. Clearly he was attracted to the exotic rites of the East. Much of this may have stemmed from his upbringing. Tacitus tells us that the persecution of his mother by Tiberius made a permanent mark on the young Roman.[49] Hence, loyalty to his unique family heritage governed his early political career. Jean Colin has shown that Caligula's choices for consuls reveal a general sympathy for the old factions surrounding Mark Antony.[50] This corroborates what we know from the literary sources. Suetonius tells us that Caligula forbade the annual celebration of Actium which had

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[47].Cumont, "La Salle Isiaque," 127;cf. Apul., Met., XI, 11.

[48]."Entre le regne d'Auguste et celui de Neron, quel empereur peut avoir ainsi consacré dans son palais du Palatin un oratoire luxueux aux divinitiés de l'Égypte? On ne peut songer à Tibere, qui fut aussi hostile qu'Auguste aux mysteres alexandrins et qui, à la suite d'un scandale, persecuta cruellement les isiaques. Mais l'espirit fantasque de Caligula voulut adorer ce que son predecesseur avait brulé." Cumont, "La Salle Isiaque," 128.

[49].Tac., Ann., VI, 24,3.

[50].Colin, Jean, "Les consuls du César-Pharon Caligula et l'Héritage de Germanicus," in Latomus, 13 (1954), 394-416.

been observed by Augustus and Tiberius.[51] Cassius Dio says that consuls who dared to celebrate Octavian's victory were deposed.[52] Moreover, Gaius wanted to be considered a descendant of Antony, not Augustus.[53]

But Caligula's affections for Antony provide only a small portion of the evidence indicating his fascination with the eastern cults. Koberlein has pieced together scant references, attempting to prove that the Roman ruler was a fervent devotee of the Egyptian faiths, particularly Isis.[54] The work was not without its critics, but its overall argument remains important and well-supported.[55] Clearly, Caligula's reign marks a departure from the conservative, pro-Roman policies which had followed Actium. Here, now, is a ruler strongly swayed by the exotic allure of the East, and the cosmopolitan, eclectic spirit of the day.

Also curious was Caligula's attraction and subsequent marriage to his sister Drusilla.[56] This recalls the mythical bonding between Osiris and Isis, or even Zeus and Hera. Koberlein had asserted that this union reflects

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[51].Suet., Cal., 23.

[52].Cass., Dio, 59, 20,2.

[53].ibid., LIX,20,2.

[54].cf., 82, ff., #45.

[55].see Gavin Townend's review of Koberlein in Journal of Roman Studies, 54, (1964), 203.

[56].Suet., Cal., 15, 24;Cass. Dio, 59, 9,2.

Gaius' commitment to the brother/sister unions familiar in Ptolemaic political culture. Indeed, Suetonius notes that early in his reign Caligula had his sisters' names instereted along with his in the various civic oaths.[57] When Drusilla died, the bereaved Caligula decreed divine honors, implying his sister had achieved a place in the Pantheon.[58] Moreover, the Emperor followed established royal Egyptian funerary rituals to mourn her passing.[59]

Of course, the presence of incest in royal families does not prove a conscious linking with the hellenistic monarchs of the East. But other evidence is equally compelling. In Herculaneum, wall murals depict Caligula dancing, another activity frequently associated with eastern religions.[60] More important is Caligula's declaring himself a god, while still living.[61] The day of his accession, March 18, was treated as a re-founding of Rome.[62] Furthermore, we know that the Emperor desired to be given the Ptolemaic titles of Soter, Euergetes and Epiphanes.[63]

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[57].Suet. Cal. 15.

[58].Cass. Dio, 59, II.

[59].Suet., Cal., 24.

[60].II Samuel 6;14.

[61].Phil., Leg., 75, 162;Suet., Cal., 56; Cass. Dio, 59, 26,2.

[62].Nock, "Religious Developments," 496.

[63].Phil., Leg., 22, 188.

Caligula even had his own temple built housing a statue. Each new day the image was clothed like the Emperor himself.[64] Finally, Alexandrian coins show the Emperor with brilliant rays of sunlight emanating from his head, and also a half-moon.[65] Koberlein believes this linking of the sun and moon symbolizes the Hellenistic deities Helios and Selene, and the holy marriage of Caligula with the moon-goddess.[66]

Equally intriguing is an apparent link between Caligula and the ancient Egyptian myth of the Phoenix Bird.[67] Koberlein notes that during the death of Tiberius, the Bird was seen in Egypt.[68] Hence, he posits a connection with the ancient legend and Gaius' practice of sacrificing exotic

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[64].Suet., Cal., 22,3;Cass., Dio, 59, 26,2; This ritual is markedly similar to the ritual described by Jean Hani in his article "Sarapis Dieu Solaire."

[65].Koberlein, 20.

[66].In Suetonius, we read that one night when the moonlight was particularly compelling, Gaius invited the moon-goddess to make love in his bed.Suet. Cal. 22.

[67].Er (the Phoenix Bird) gilt...als die Seele des Re oder die seele des Osiris. Er steht in enger Beziehung zur sonne, er ist der Sonnenvogel...Der Phonix ist der Vogel des Osiris und seines Sohnes Horus, den jeder lebende Pharao verkorpert. Wie Osiris sich in Horos selbst regeneriert...so bestattet auch der Phönix seinen Vater in dem Ei, welches den keim zu neuem Leben in sich trägt." Koberlein, 18;cf. Habaux, Leroy, Le Mythe des Phenix, (Paris:1939);Cass. Dio, 58, 27.

[68].Cass. Dio, 58,27; Tac., Ann., VI, 28.

birds in bizarre rituals.[69] Seneca tells us that different sorts of sacrifices were brought daily to the Emperor.[70] Suetonius states that the sacrifice of birds was a characteristic feature of the new regime. He also asserts that in the rituals, Caligula would sprinkle himself with blood.[71]

As with Caligula's marriage to Drusilla, the rites involving exotic birds do not clearly or necessarily imply Egyptian worship. Yet Gaius displayed a radical departure from the conservative Roman policies of Tiberius. Above all, Caligula's sanity was questionable. Indeed, the bizarre mystery rituals he concocted frequently breached the bounds of good taste. The Suidas mentions his fascination for mysterious ceremonies.[72] Some unorthodox rites he contrived catered to his homosexual orientation.[73] Finally, there was much eastern, hellenistic imagery in the various omens which foretold the Emperor's death. Suetonius reports that before his assassination, the ruler was tormented by strange dreams and a play about the

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[69].The Phoenix Bird's appearance was said to represent the dawning of a new era, such as the accession of a new monarch. Ancient sources often seem to depict these birds as peacocks.cf. Ovid, Met., XV, 385; Achil. Tat., III,25.

[70].Sen., Tran., 14, 9.

[71].Suet., Cal., 57.

[72].Suid., I.

[73].Josep., Ant. Jud., XIX.

underworld had been rehearsed that morning by a group of Ethiopian and Egyptian actors.[74]

Caligula's reign was a short one. In a sense, his promotion of the oriental gods was an abberation, for his successor Cladius immediately returned to the Augustan policy. Nonetheless, by now the Egyptian cults were fully integrated into Roman life. A full century before, the cults had enjoyed substantial popularity. But they had encountered stiff resitance from conservative Romans, who resented them as foreign and subsersive. But by the mid first century A.D., Sarapis and Isis were becoming standard features of Roman religion, much as the Greek gods had been adopted centuries before.

A hundred years earlier, Cicero had asserted the inherent compulsion of a people to seek national identity through their own unique religion.[75] Now, however, Roman faith had virtually yielded to the new cults. Hence, when Claudius tried to re-assert the religious policies of Augustus, he found that times had changed.[76] The cults were

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[74].Suet., Cal., 54, 57.

[75]."Sua cuique civitate religion est, nostra nobis." Cic., Flacc., 28.

[76]."Augustus and Tiberius had used religion to enlarge their control of the state. Caligula had misused it for self-glorification. Claudius could readily return to the Augustan model. The temper of the times called both for conservative traditionalism in Roman cults and oecumenical tolerance in accepting the foreing gods of the empire. The result was a blend in which conservatism was tempered by innovation." Huzar, Eleanor G., "Claudius-The Erudite

far too popular.[77] Moreover, decades had passed since the Principate replaced the Republic, and the traditional beliefs were slowly becoming obscured. Caligula's successor posed as an Augustan conservative, but with far less urgency.

Little evidence is extant concerning the status of Egyptian cults during Claudius' reign.[78] But we can tell much concerning Roman attitudes toward foreign religions. Claudius forbade the collegia, which were traditional bastions of subversive behavior.[79] Indeed, Tacitus tells us that the Emperor was generally disdainful of foreign religions.[80] This is corrorborated by much information in the sources. Suetonius tells us that Claudius sought a return to the traditional Roman policies of Augustus.[81] Tacitus asserts that he actively promoted the ancient art of

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Emperor," in Aufsteig und Niedergang der römischen Welt, II, 32.1., 1984, 649.

[77]."Cependant Claude sut aussi comprendre l'attraction exercé sur les âmes par les cultes à mysteres, au lieu de les combattre tous systematiquement, il eut l'idée d'acclimater à Rome ceux qui etaient déjà, en quelque manière, associés à la tradition romaine." Beaujeu, 45.

[78].Suetonius reports that Claudius bestowed favors on a certain Harpocras, probably an Egyptian. Suet. Claud., 28;see also, Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 402.

[79].Cass. Dio, 60,6,6-7.

[80].Tac. Ann., 11, 15.

[81].Suet. Claud., 22.

divinitation.[82] Moreover, he founded a temple to Venus in the Sicilian city of Eryx. The original sanctuary at this site was said to have been constructed by Aeneas, which suited handsomely contemporary analogies regarding the re-birth of Rome.[83] Finally, Claudius displayed reluctance to accept divine status, although he did receive such accolades in Britain.[84] There, a temple was built for him at the city of Camuldonum.[85]

Yet Claudius seems, for the most part, to have delivered the religious tolerance he promised.[86] There were some important exceptions. He attempted the elimination of human sacrafice among the Druids of Gaul.[87] Similarly, Suetonius tells us the Jews were expelled from Rome due to continual disturbances instigated by "Chrestus."[88] Claudius also brought the Eleusinian Mysteries to Rome, though the identification of Ceres with Demeter "might make the action

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[82].Tac. Ann., 11,15.

[83].Suet. Claud., 25;Verg. Aen., V, 759;see also, Nock, "Religious Developments," 499;Huzar, "Claudius," 649.

[84].Lewis points out that when Claudius died, he was declared a god in Egypt.cf. POxy, 1021 as cited in Lewis, 89.

[85].Josep., B.J., 7;Tac., Ann., 14, 31;cf. Fishwick, vol. 1, pt.2, 195.

[86].Joseph., Ant. Iud., XIX, 5,3.

[87].Plin., H.N., 29.53-54,30,13; cf. Huzar, "Claudius," 649.

[88].Suet, Claud., 25; This is almost certainly the incident referred to in Acts 18;2, and also mentioned by Cassius Dio, 60,6,6;cf. Guterman, 149-150.

appear to be no more than the addition of a foreign ceremony to the old cult."[89]

But the most significant action taken by the Emperor regarding foreign cults was his promotion and institutionalization of the Phrygian deities Cybele and Attis.[90] Indeed, during the Augustan period, great emphasis had been placed on the mythical Trojan origins of Rome. This naturally led to an increased emphasis on the Magna Mater.[91] LaPiana notes that this is the only faith known to have been legally introduced by the Senate under Claudius.[92] When the Great Mother had come to Rome, she remained essentially a foreign rite. The eunuchs performed the ceremony privately, and no Roman could join the priesthood.[93] During the reign of Claudius, the priesthood of the Phyrigian cults started having Roman names.[94]

89.Nock, "Religious Developments," pg.499; The Eleusinian Mysteries stemmed from a cult of Demeter at Eleusis. Based on the well-known myth of Kore's six month captivity in the underworld, the rites were associated with the seasons and harvests. cf. Clem. Al., Exhortation to the Greeks, 2:21; Anobius of Sicca, The Case Against the Pagans, 5.26.

90.Lys., Mens., IV,59;cf. Cumont, Les Religions Orientales, 51-52.

91.Nock, "Religious Developments," 499;Among the temples with Augustus had restored was the shrine of Cybele on the Palatine.Augustus, Res Gestae, 19.

92.LaPiana, 296.

93.Nock, Conversion, 68-69.

94.Ferguson, J., The Religions of the Roman Empire, (New York: 1970), 28.

There is equally sparse evidence concerning the presence of Egyptian cults in Rome during the reign of Nero. Hence, we must continue to look at more general policies regarding foreign religions in the city, assured that Isis and Sarapis were there as well. We know that Nero despised most religious views, though he was said to favour the Syrian goddess Atargatis. Still, he was fully capable of urinating on her statue, lest anyone think him a zealot.[95] He examined some entrails shortly before his death, but to little end.[96]

Nero's close circle of friends and family included individuals well-acquainted with Egyptian ways. One of Nero's teachers was Chaeremon of Naucratis. Little is known of this individual save that he had been director of the library at Alexandria.[97] More important, Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina seems to have had family who worshipped Isis. In Pompean excvations, the home of her cousin Poppaeus Habitus was discovered. In its garden were beautiful Egyptian religious symbols.[98] When Sabina died, Nero did not burn her body in traditional Roman fashion.

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[95].Suet., Nero, 56;for Atagartis, see Luc., Syr D; Apul., Met., 8,9.

[96].Suet., Nero, 56.

[97].Chaeremon's work is no longer extant, but it is mentioned by Porphyry. Porph., Abst., 4, 6, in Eus., Praep. Evang., III, 4.

[98].Tinh, Isis à Pompéi, 48-49;cf. Colin, 410; Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 404.

Instead, he had her corpse spiced, as was done in the Orient.[99] This evidence clearly displays the relative nonchalance which eastern culture now elicited from Rome.

More important still is the apparent attraction for oriental despotism which appeared later in Nero's reign.[100] Indeed, the Emperor was fairly charmed by the hymns offered him by a band of Alexandrians, and he sent to Egypt for more singers.[101] More important are images which we find in the Einsiedeln Eclogues. Published in 1879 from a tenth century manuscript, a passage from these rare documents repeats Vergil's phrase while describing Nero: "tuus iam regnat Apollo." (Your Apollo is king at last.)[102] Similarly, a skit on the death of Caligula depicts Phoebus comparing Nero to the great Sun.[103]

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[99].Tac., Ann., XVI, 6, 2.

[100].Malaise, Les Cultes Égyptiens, 403.

[101].Suet., Nero, 20.

[102].The Einsiedeln Eclogues are sometimes attributed to Calpurnicus Siculus, though this cannot be proven. The text is found in Poeti Latini Minores, ed. by E. Baehrens, 5 vols., 1879-83, iii;Eclogues, 4,5,87; see also, Ferguson, Religions of Rome, 46.

[103].Sen., Apocol., 4, 1, 5, 25.

CONCLUSION

Contrasts created by the gradual rise of one theistic system, and the gradual decline of another, provide Rome's religious history with a fascinating eclectic mixture. Recent studies, like those of EPRO, have carefully documented these complex shadings. Macmullen likened this collage of peoples and customs to a "good rich Irish stew."[104] His point is well taken. But the reality of paganism's increasing universalism, and the ultimate triumph of the oriental sects, must not be overlooked.

In 1906, Cumont argued that oriental cults offered a superior sacred experience. Nearly a century later, Les Religions Orientales dans la Paganisme Romaine remains an important portrait of the eastern allure which transformed western religion. More, intense scrutiny of the sources shows the basic accuracy of Cumont's views. A case study of Isis and Sarapis in Rome reveals a popular appeal sorely lacking in the older deities. There must be some reason the Alexandrian pair easily survived so many political and cultural obstacles.

The Hannibalic invasions had profoundly disturbed Roman society. In the turmoil's wake, a great religious hunger was revealed. Filling this spiritual void, foreign cults flooded Rome. Of these incoming gods, Sarapis and Isis were

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[104].Macmullen, Paganism in Rome, vi.

among the most successful. A psychological attraction enabled them to challenge the popularity of native deities. Subsequently, Egyptian influences became an issue in late Republican political struggles. Seeking stability, the first Emperor attempted to return Rome to the idyllic faith of her past.

But during the Julio-Claudian decades, the conservative policies of Augustus became obsolete. The initial years of the Empire had been filled with images taken from the great Roman pantheon. It had been a concerted effort to re-affirm the mythological grounding which had helped make Rome the Mediterranean's dominant power. But it was too late. The Graeco-Roman faiths would continue their long and slow demise. Sweeping, mysterious shifts which had changed religions after the Hellenistic Age would continue. The West would ultimately forsake its old gods entirely, for a new hybrid sect from the East.

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