

THE HELLENISTIC ERA AS AN AGE OF PROPAGANDA: THE CASE OF ISIS' CULT

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The ecumenism of the Hellenistic era provides the most appropriate framework for the undisturbed communication and circulation of people, as well as ideas and worldviews that prove to be decisive in defining the overall character of this period. People move on from the organised social and religious life of the city-state, to a world of unlimited freedom, change and constant wandering, more and more enhanced by their “centrifugal” tendency, which proves to be decisive for their life, as well as for their overall way of thinking¹. The people of that time are scattered within the limits of the Hellenistic oecumene and blended with the aborigines of the East². Communication between the various areas of the oecumene, despite the endless antagonistic warfare between the Successors, is easier than in earlier times. This becomes even more intense during the imperial ages and the enforcement of the “*pax romana*”. At that time, an unprecedented movement of populations takes place, gradually contributing, along with a plethora of epoch-making events occurring, to the practical transformation of the traditional world.

1. On the distinction between “centripetal” and “centrifugal” society, see SMITH 1993a, p. 101. SMITH 1993b, pp.131-132.

2. On wandering during this period, see MARTIN 1987, pp. 3, 9-10, 17-19, 23-24, 29, 59, 62-64, 66-68, 75, 77-79, 81, 83, 92-93, 109, 123, 140. MARTIN 1994a, pp.125-131. See, also, NOCK 1965, pp.33-34. 66. 168-169. DIETERICH 1966, pp. 185-193. NILSSON, 31974, vol. II, pp. 20-21. 25-26. 29, 35-36, 54, 302. JONAS 1992, pp. 6-8. TURCAN 1999, pp. 4, 6, 16-17, 18, 25, 98, 132, 139, 166,248. BESKOW 1980, pp. 14-15. GREEN 1990, pp. 39, 64, 73-74, 80, 85, 312, 329, 330, 590, 595-596. ROSTOVITZ 1941, vol. I, pp. 79, 133, 145, 158-159, 168, 249, 501. vol. II, pp. 690, 741, 762-764, 781, 923, 1043, 1054-1055, 1061-1063, 1066, 1074-1077, 1095, 1112-1113, 1238-1260. HÄGG 1992, pp. 108-115.

Some of the wandering people of this era are also the agents of different cults of eastern origin³. Among them, the priests of Isis, already moving into the Greek domain from the 4th century BC, play a leading role. These priests, as well as all the agents of the so-called eastern cults, usually follow the paths of the time's merchants and initially settle in the places of their residence. The first cores of the cultic societies are gradually formed in important trade centres of insular, as well as continental Greece (Delos, Piraeus, Thessalonica, and more)⁴. Travellers who are away from their country often feel the need to worship their home deities. In the beginning, the fulfilment of their religious needs is limited within the narrow framework of the cultic associations (*thiasoi*), which they make sure to establish in a place at the moment of their settlement. For a long period they remain strangers, speaking a language incomprehensible to the Greeks and performing cultic rites that are strange and unusual to the locals.

In time, the strategy of the representatives of this cult changes. The strategy of isolation gives way, resulting in an ever increasing tendency for communication with other social groups of the areas in which they are spread. This fact contributes to the development of ideal potentials of adaptation to the conditions of these areas. In this way, these cults gradually drop their distinguishing local character; this seems natural, considering that they are part of the system that defines each historical era. It is thus perfectly normal that they are affected by the "spirit of the times". Furthermore, in this way they are exported from the limited environment of their birthplace, Egypt, where signs of hellenisation of Isis' cult first appear. Meanwhile, sanctuaries –small in the beginning– devoted to Isis and Sarapis are soon built in these places⁵. Of course, in this case we should bear in mind another yet factor of special importance to their propagation: the lack –at least on the first place– of official political support, which is a very essential factor for the confirmation of their presence in a foreign environment. This fact contributes to the adjustment of this cult to the local *interpretatio*, which makes it

3. On itinerant priests during the Hellenistic age, see VIDMAN 1970, pp. 33-37,43-44. BURKERT 1983, pp. 111-119. BURKERT 1987, pp. 32-44. FURLEY - BREMMER 2001, vol. I, pp. 222-223. See, also, the so-called Isis-Aretalogy in "Life of Aesop", in: TOTTI 1985, pp. 56-59.

4. On the propagation and the place of the cult of Egyptian deities in Delos, see ROUSSEL 1916. VIDMAN 1970 pp. 11-12, 45. DUNAND 1973, vol. II, pp. 83 -115. BASLEZ 1977. MORA 1990, vol. I , pp. 3-176. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 102-103 and n. 22. MERKELBACH 1995, pp. 122-127. MIKALSON 1998, pp. 229-232, 235-238. Selectively, we mention, concerning the role these cults play within the area of Piraeus, DOW 1937, pp. 184-186. DUNAND 1973 vol. II, pp. 4 - 17, 132-153. SIMMS 1985, pp. 197-208. SIMMS 1989. GARLAND 1987, pp. 126-128, 133-134. PARKER 1996, pp. 160, 243, 337. Thessalonica is a *par excellence* cosmopolitan centre of the time, and for this reason very early accepts the cult of Isis and Sarapis within its cultic environment; see MAKARONAS 1940. EDSON 1948. WITT 1970. DUNAND 1973, vol. II, pp.53-61, 132-153. DESPINIS-STEPHANIDOU-TIBERIOU - VOUTIRAS 1997, vol. I, pp. 46, 62-68,89-91, 111-115,139-142, figs. 54-57, 121-124, 127-129, 130-134, 150,213-229,313

5. See WILD 1984.

acceptable to its new environment⁶. Of course, we should not forget that there also exists the opposite case, in which a cult, or a set of cults, becomes widely spread and dominant from the beginning of its appearance at a foreign environment, due to the support of the country's political leaders. As a typical example of this case we can refer to the import and dominance of Greek deities (e.g., Demeter, Dionysus) in Ptolemaic Egypt⁷. The strategy of the country's leaders, having to do with methods of propagation of their personal cult, contributes not only to the acceptance of the above deities in the Egyptian environment, but also to their employment as a factor of construction of the syncretistic form of Isis, according to the ecumenical and syncretistic character of the time⁸.

The above factors contribute to a gradual development of the cult of the goddess; it becomes more and more flexible in the centres of diaspora of the Hellenistic world, and therefore more adjustable to the conditions of the greater oecumene. This adjustability, as well as the employment of elements which are dominant within the overflowing concepts of the time, constitutes the "passport" for their transition from the narrow framework of the traditional kinship associations that develop in various commercial centres of the time to the greater area of the Greco-roman oecumene. Besides, it is addressed to people living in an ecumenical background, where they are no more committed to the traditional structures of the socio-religious way of thought. Of course, an essential means of facilitating the propagation of all these doctrines related to Isis' cultic environment is the use of the Greek language, the *lingua franca* of this era⁹. In this way, the various cultural traditions of the different peoples of the broader oecumene

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6. On the importance of this phenomenon, see BERGMAN 1969. BLOCH 1976, pp. 32ff. WILL 1981. SCHENK 1989. On the definition of the term "*interpretatio*", see GRAF 1991, pp. 7-11.
7. On the cult of Demeter in Egypt during the Greco-roman ages, see NILSSON ³1974, vol. II, pp. 94-95. SKOWRONEK - TKACZOW 1979. THOMPSON 1988. HERMANN 1999(2000). Regarding the cult of Dionysus during the dynasty of the Ptolemies, see FRASER 1972, vol. I, pp. 197, 201-207, 211-212. NOCK 1972, vol. II, pp. 796 - 797. GRIFFITHS 1970, *passim*. GREEN 1990, pp. 158-160, 397, 591, 649. KOCH 1993, pp. 493, 497, 499, 603.
8. DUNAND 1973, vol. I, pp. 27-108. DUNAND 2000, pp. 41-64. PANTOS 1987. On the phenomenon of syncretism, we selectively mention: BARDRY 1961. RINGREN 1969. BIANCHI 1970. CAPPS 1975. MARTIN 1983. MARTIN 1987, pp. 3-8. COLPE 1987. ATHERTON 1989, pp. 331-334. PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 85-130. On the ecumenical magnitude of Isis during the Greco-roman period, see LECLANT 1986.
9. Regarding the use of language as a means of establishing one's position, TRIVERS (1981, p.33) writes: "The most important thing to realize about systems of animal communication is that they are not expected to be systems for the dissemination of truth. Instead, they are expected to be systems by which individual organisms attempt to maximize their fitness by communicating to others things that may be true or false". MARTIN interprets the above words to mean that, "from the viewpoint of [human] evolutionary psychology, language did not evolve as a system for disseminating truth, but as a system for maximizing fitness through communication, i.e., as propaganda" (personal communication, 8/24/2002). On the importance and the role of the Greek language as the *lingua franca* of the time, see NILSSON ³1974, vol. II, pp. 21-23. BUBENIK 1989. GREEN 1990, pp. 312-316. GEHRKE 2000, pp. 19,113-114. MARTIN 1994b, p. 222. BOWERSOCK 1990, pp. 1-13.

come closer and there is a successful blend of the traditional and the novel, naturally under the absolute domination of the former. Of course, they make sure to underline in every way their eastern origin, which is most of the times a very crucial factor for their successful acceptance. The area of the East has a special appeal to people, and therefore constitutes an especially attractive element to them.

The individual of this time is particularly influenced by the options that are available within the broader oecumene¹⁰, where he is not any more subject to the commitments of the limited local way of thinking. He becomes more tolerant towards anything that is foreign to his local tradition and tries to get to know it. The boundaries between the “we” and the “others” become more and more flexible in comparison to the previous way of thinking. This phenomenon becomes even more obvious within areas of the Hellenistic world, which are characterised by a certain development of a syncretistic environment. A characteristic example of this case are the Athenians, when they settle on Delos after 161 BC. Having kept all these cults that are propagated in their patrimonial territory in a state of exclusion, they now start knowing them better and being attracted by them. We reckon this behaviour to be normal, considering their everyday and unprejudiced interaction with the members of all these foreign communities. The environment in which they had been living created the appropriate conditions for this behaviour. Their acquaintance with the cultic environment of these foreign cults, hesitant at first, radically influenced their way of thought. The agents of the cults, who make their presence known everywhere, take on the task of demonstrating all their particularities and their characteristics, in order to help those who wish to comprehend the “foreign”¹¹.

Isis’ cult is particularly appealing to the people of the Greco-roman oecumene, for it offers, like the rest of the eastern cults, an alternative form of religiosity. They offer hope for something different to many social groups which had previously been on the margins of socio-religious life. They declare ideas previously unknown to the people of the Greco-roman world. Those who enter her cultic environment like to believe that with the help of the goddess they can overcome their everyday problems. The pessimistic way of thinking of the people of this time and the disappointment from the lack of communication with the traditional deities are factors that consolidate their reversal. Their interest is followed by curiosity, that leads to the attraction of new members within the Egyptian cultic communities. They consider their destiny in this ecumenical environment to be the salvation of the cosmos. For this reason, her priests are initially concerned with attracting new supporters, and then teaching them about the funda-

10. See SMITH 1982 pp. 53-65, esp. p. 56.

11. See FERGUSON, pp. 357, 385. POLLITT 1965. VIDMAN 1970, pp. 10-12,36-37,38, 48-49, 54-56, 59, 62, 168, 171. DOW 1937, pp. 202-213. PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 4, 89-92. HABICHT 1998, pp. 334-335. MIKALSON 1998, pp. 208-209, 229-237, 275-277.

mental truths of their religious life. Their eagerness towards the propagation of their religious beliefs to people who do not belong to their own environment is enhanced mainly by the philosophy of the Cynics, who play an important role in this era's way of thought. The representatives of this philosophical group considered, according to the testimony of Epictetus, the propagation of one group's beliefs to the people of the entire oecumene as their higher duty¹².

The attraction of new supporters is achieved by impressive strategies¹³. Besides, this is one of the most common ways of propaganda used by the agents of this cult, in order to convince desperate human beings of the effectiveness of these deities¹⁴. This is evidenced by the doctrines of all these cults, and especially by the overall formulation of the goddess's character. The more convinced people become that this particular deity can offer them what they desire, which is harmony, order and security in every part of their life, the more successful her cult becomes. Besides, the agents of her cult very well know that the one who will propagate the new message of one's cult in the best way will acquire the greatest power within the diaspora. Propaganda should be considered as the art of persuading¹⁵. The most usual strategy in this case is the use of the notion of power, which is a very important factor of divine intervention in the life of humans. In this case, we have a redefinition of this element that has always been a quality of the divine world. Of course, it should not escape our attention that the power of this cult is always formed directly according to the frame within which it is developed. Therefore, Isis' character during the Hellenistic era radically differs from that of the Olympian deities of the traditional Greek city-states; this goddess is capable of overcoming all the malicious powers that tyrannise peoples in their everyday life, and

12. See Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae* 3, 22, 46.1-47.1. See, also, Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, 1, 26, 6. 11. Lucianus, *vitae Auctio*. cf. GOODMAN 1994, pp.32-37.

13. We could use in this context the term "meme" as a factor of cultural transmission; see MARTIN 2001, esp. pp. 295-296, where he mentions –quoting R. Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene* [Oxford -New York, 1989 (1976), p.192])– that “‘memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation’. The subordination of the individual to a group that shares many of the same memes is a social principle of inclusive fitness that governs rules of social formation and maintenance and that provides a ‘powerful force of social cohesion’”.

14. On the strategy of propaganda employed by all these cults to attract believers, see HARDER 1994. FORSTER 1947. FRASER 1960. DIETERICH 1966, pp. 197-209. NOCK 1965, pp. 16, 83-97, 126. NOCK 1972b. SOKOLOWSKI 1974. DUNAND 1983, pp. 75-79. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 40-41. GOODMAN 1994, pp. 2-3, 43-45, 46, 125. PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 50-51 and n.167. TAKÁCS 1995, pp. 5-7, 49. EGELHAAF-GAISER 2000, pp.17, 113, 219-222, 259, 479. Furthermore, see ROTHKRUG 1987.

15. See CHARLESWORTH 1979, p. 364. See also Plato, *Leges* 951a: *τοῖς περὶ τὸν πόλεμον ἀντίστροφον ἀποδιδόντες δόξης παρασκευήν, ἐλθόντες δὲ οἴκαδε διδάξουσι τοὺς νέους ὅτι δεύτερα τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐστὶ νόμμα τὰ περὶ τὰς πολιτείας, θεωροῦς δὲ ἄλλους ἐκπέμπειν χρεῶν τοιούσδε τινὰς τοὺς νομοφύλακας παρεμένους· ἂν τινες ἐπιθυμῶσι τῶν πολιτῶν τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων πράγματα θεωρῆσαι κατὰ τινα πλείω σχολήν, ἀπειργεῖτω μηδεὶς τούτους νόμος.. Furthermore, on the propagandistic use of the texts in the Greek City-State, see LEWIS 1996. pp.127-153.*

mainly Fortuna¹⁶. This constitutes another yet reason for the attraction of people. Another sign of propagandistic strategy on behalf of these cultic groups is the use of such notions as brotherhood, isonomy and equality, which are dominant in the doctrines of various philosophical trends of the time¹⁷.

Among the factors of impression and attraction of new followers are also the agents' declarations concerning the personal appearances of Isis and her calls to her believers, who feel that they are her "chosen" ones, and simply obey¹⁸. Personal calls aiming at the salvation of humans are another yet strategy that we encounter in the cults of this era. The "spirit of the times" offers the ideal grounds for their rapid development. The epigraphic statements αναφορές "κατ' ἐπιταγήν" and "κατά πρόσταγμα" are "termini tecnici" that demonstrate the absolute will of this deity¹⁹. The establishment of sanctuaries, the believers' entrance in their cultic communities, as well as their behaviour in general, are always regulated according to the divine epiphanies. Besides, this is the definitive factor of the formulation of this time's religious beliefs²⁰. Dreams, through which personal communication between these deities and the people of the time is achieved, constitute another yet characteristic aspect that can be considered as part of all these strategies followed by the agents of this particular cultic group²¹.

16. MARTIN 1995a. MARTIN 1995b. KAJANTO 1981, pp. 502-558. FERSUSON 1970, pp.77-87.

17. Concerning "brotherhood" during this time, see Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7,11. Plutarch, *The Fortune of Alexander* I, 329C-D. Cf. MARTIN 2003, p. 91 (in this volume). On "isonomia" see GREEN 1990, p. 454. NOCK 1972c. See, also, Aristotle, *fr.*575 Rose: Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος (ἔστιν) ὡς πολυγράμματος: Ἀριστοφάνης Βαβυλωνίους, ἐπισκώπων τοὺς ἐστιγμένονες· οἱ γὰρ Σάμιοι καταπονηθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν τυράννων σπάνει τῶν πολιτευομένων ἐπέγραψαν τοῖς δούλοις ἐκ πέντε στατήρων τὴν ἰσοπολιτείαν, ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῇ Σαμίων πολιτείᾳ.

18. See Diodorus Siculus I, 25, 2-4: Ἰσιν... κατά τοὺς ὕπνους τοῖς ἀξιοῦσι διδόναι βοηθήματα, φανερώς ἐπιδεικνυμένην τὴν τε ἰδίαν ἐπιφάνειαν καὶ τὸ πρὸς τοὺς δεομένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων εὐεργετικόν. Artemidoros, *Oneirokr.* 2, 39.

19. Concerning the term "κατ' ἐπιταγήν", see IG II/III 2 3, 1 4991. 1-3, 4919, 1-5 (Asclepius). IG, X 2, 1 88-89, 91-92, 104, 1-3 (Isis-Sarapis), *Kyzikene, L. Dascylius* 2093, 3 (Isis Karpophoros). About the term "κατά πρόσταγμα", see IG, XI, 4, 1223. 1-4, 1230. 1-3, 1231. 1-3, 1232. 1-3, 1233. 1-4, 1234. 1-5, 1236. 1-3, 1237. 1-3, 1238. 1-3, 1246. 1-5, 1247. 1-10, 1249. 1-7, 1251. 1-3, 1-4, 1253. 1-5, 1256. 1-3, 1257. 1-4, 1262. 1-4, 1263.1-4, 1299, 1-93, esp. II.1-2. *IdiCos* (ed. Segre), 149. 1-4, *NSEr* (ed. Maiuvi), 449, 1-4. *SEG* 1 (1941), 25: 1121.1-4, 1122.1-3. See also, DUNAND 1973, vol. III, p. 156. cf., as well as other similar terms, like "χρηματισμός". According to DUNAND 1973, vol. III, p.156. 3), "le correspondant de est 'oraculum'; c'est qu'emploie Apulée, *Met.* XI, 7, 13, pour désigner la révélation d' Isis à Lucius". Cf. also *P. Cair. Zen.* 59034, l. 4. τὸν Σάραπιν χρηματίζειν IG XI 4, 1299, l. 13-14: ὁ θεός μοι ἐχρημάτισεν. See, also, PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 118, and n. 215.

20. On the establishment of the sanctuary of Sarapis in Delos, see ROUSSEL 1916, pp. 239-245. ENGELMANN 1975, VIDMAN 1970, pp. 35-36. DUNAND 1973, vol. II, pp. 85-87. PAKKANEN 1996, p. 50, n. 157. See, also, IG XI, 4, 1299 = CE, 1.

21. The Greeks paid special attention to the appearance and the interpretation of dreams. They considered

Of course, we should not assume that entrance in this cult takes place from one moment to the next. Such a decision should be subject to everyday reservations, discussions, as well as pressures by family members. Joining such a cultic group during this era is a decision that brings radical changes to one's way of thinking. This person is now part of a group which differentiates him from his previous lifestyle²². For this reason, they face the hostility and distrust of the state authority. To the latter, they belong to the social margin. We must bear in mind that the propagation of these cultic groups does not substitute for the existing traditional religion of the Greco-roman oecumene. This reality is proven by statistical surveys carried out within the contemporary research. It is certain that the state representatives use the current beliefs of their cultic life, as well as the dominative religious beliefs related to their deities, in order to amplify their personal power and their authoritarian pursuits.

Of course, we must mention that they affect a significant part of the empire's population, but not the whole. This is proven by all those statistical surveys concerning the propagation of the eastern cults during this period²³. Their propagation and prevalence is depended on the historical circumstances and the support of certain people, often political rulers, which is important for their presence within the religious status quo of the time. A very crucial role is played by all these beliefs that formulate the people's way of thought, as well as by their conformist behaviour towards the holders of political power²⁴. The latter element is dominant in the case of the presence of all these cults

dreams as a manifestation of the gods' personal intervention, aiming to settle the various problems of their life. On their special role in the everyday religious life of the believers' of the Greco-roman era, suggestively see MARTIN 1987, pp. 48-50. MARTIN1994c. VERSNEL 1987. FOX 1986, pp. 102-167. KYRTATAS 1990. On the presence of Asclepius in dreams, see WILCKEN 1927, vol. I, pp. 349-374, esp. nos 77-80. NOCK 1965, pp. 90-91. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 191-192. See, also, Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Discourses*. On the importance and the role of dreams in the cult of Isis and Sarapis, see VERSNEL 1990, p. 40 and n. 3. MERKELBACH 1995, pp. 210-224.

22. See MARTIN 1994a, pp. 128-129. Cf. See, also, BURKERT 1987, pp. 44-48.

23. See MORA 1990, vol. II, pp. 113-161. MORA 1994. Concerning the propagation of Isis' cult during the imperial ages, see MALAISE 1984, pp. 1615-1619. 1629-1631. TAK ÁCS 1995, pp. 5-7.

24. Regarding to that, see Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 17: *tunc ex his unus, quem cuncti grammatea dicebant, pro foribus assistens coetu pastophorum - quod sacrosancti collegii nomen est - velut in contionem vocato indidem de sublimi suggestu de libro de litteris fausta vota praefatus principi magno sentuque et equiti totaque Romano populo, nauticis navibus quaeque sub imperio mundi nostratis reguntur, renunuiat sermone rituque Graeciensi πλοιαφέσια.* Cf. GRIFFITHS 1975, pp. 266-267. PACHIS 1997, pp. 243-244. The above strategy was necessary for the followers of the foreign cults within the Roman empire. This way, they have to show everyday, especially in performing their ritual duties, their obedience to the moral values that guarantee the stability and prosperity of the Roman society. Another characteristic example of this strategy are the inscriptions devoted by the followers of Cybele and Attis after the performance of the taurobolium / criobolium. The relative inscriptions are devoted "pro salute" of the rulers or other individuals, most usually of the emperor. Besides, according to the perception of the time, the emperor represents the state, as well as his denizens, and therefore his personal prosperity is an expression of the

within the realm of Rome. In this way, the original doubt and disapproval of the Roman authority is successfully turned into curiosity in the beginning, and finally into approval of their entrance into the centre of the city's religious life²⁵.

The above strategy of the religious agents of the Egyptian deity has its parallels in politics. It constitutes another yet phenomenon of the Hellenistic system that reveals the multipart nature of this historical period. Besides, the agents of this era try to construct more and more sophisticated propaganda mechanisms, in order to achieve their goal, which is the propagation of their totalitarian and theocentric trends²⁶. Among the strategies they apply to impress their denizens is the erection of magnificent buildings, already from the beginning of the Hellenistic era. The notion of magnitude which is adjusted to the ecumenical spirit of the time, succeeds the notion of harmony and *metron*²⁷. The coins that were circulated within the kingdoms of the Successors, as well as during the imperial ages, constitute another yet clear example of the strategy used by the surroundings of the political men of the time. They use perceptions that originate from the domain of religion, in order to legitimate their reason of existence, as well as the absolute power of their representatives²⁸. Besides, the connection between religion and politics is immediate and is further reinforced during such times as the Hellenistic period. Their circulation has such a great impact that, according to the assumption of a contemporary researcher, coins hold a position similar to that of the media today²⁹. Similar is also the behaviour of the group of the so-called "Corporation of Technitai of Dionysos" («artists» or «craftsmen» of Dionysos), whose presence is testified not only in continental Greece, but in the rest of the Successors' kingdoms as well. Their job is to transmit, through their overall behaviour, the ideals of the cult of their patron deity, and mainly of the Athenian state, which is their starting point for their wandering in the Hellenistic world³⁰. The period of the second century BC, which coincides with the

overall prosperity of the empire. Concerning all these inscriptions of the cult of Cybele/Attis, see DUTHOY 1969, pp. 25, 31, 50-51, 69-72.

25. See TAKÁCS 1995, pp. 71-206. PACHIS 1997, pp. 245-246.

26. Concerning the ruler cults during the Hellenistic era, see KOMERMAN 1901. WALBANK 1993, pp. 52-55, 99-101, 295-306. GEHRKE 2000, pp. 85-86, 124-125, 211-213, 239-240, 272-273. HABICHT 1970, pp. 44-45, 51, 166-167, 223-225, 229, 232. NOCK 1972d. NILSSON ³1974, vol. II, pp. 132-185. GREEN 1990, pp. 398-406.

27. On the architecture of the Hellenistic ages, see SCHNEIDER 1967, vol. I, pp. 126-131. GREEN 1990, pp. 94-100, 571-578. LING 1996, pp. 577-585. See, also, CHARBONNEAUX-MARTIN-VILLARD 1973.

28. According to MARTIN, "the primary goal of any group is to maintain itself (while its stated goal is secondary to that requirement). Consequently, anything produced by any group will be related to that primary goal, i.e., will grow out of its own self-interest to propagate itself. Thus, myth (or ideology, or theology, etc.) is always, at least to some extent, propaganda (personal communication, 8/30/2002).

29. CHARLESWORTH 1979, p. 366-367. See, also, FLEISCHER 1996. ZANKER 1988.

30. On the corporation of the so-called "artists" or "craftsmen" of Dionysos (*thiasos* of *Technitai* of Dionysos), see STEPHANIS 1988. MIKALSON 1998, pp. 117-122, 262-264, 271-272, 280-282, 306, 314.

so-called second Athenian hegemony, offers them the ideal framework for the evolution of all these ideas, in order to achieve their goal³¹.

All these propagandistic strategies found their ideal form of expression in the hymns that formed a representative example of the Hellenistic way of expression³². They are a very common means of praising the rulers of the time, that provides the ideal framework for the evolution of all these theocentric trends that characterise this period³³. The same phenomenon later, during the Roman ages, finds another ideal way of expression in the panegyric speeches that are delivered in honour of the Roman emperors³⁴. Besides, it is a time which becomes even more receptive to such expressions that reinforce the position of the superior rulers and administrators of the Greco-roman oecumene.

Of course, we should not forget that at the same time hymns play a very crucial role in peoples' cultic life during the Greco-roman period. Among them, it is worth mentioning those hymns that come from the cultic environment of Sarapis and Asclepius³⁵. These particular deities appear in this case as omnipotent gods who can decisively affect the forces of nature and help people to overcome their everyday problems. This fact is further reinforced within the surroundings of the cultic doctrines of this time. The notion of divine victory is a common place, already since the beginning of the Hellenistic period. The "invincible Sarapis" is the only one who has the power to end the numerous problems of the mortals and lead them to salvation³⁶. Salvation for the people of the entire oecumene is related to the decisive divine power³⁷.

The goddess that has a special place in people's cultic life, due to her above attributes, is Isis. This fact contributes even more to the existence of a whole series of hymns, the so-called *Aretalogies*, devoted to her by her followers³⁸. Their special impor-

31. On the propagandistic strategy of the Athenians during this period, see *IG II²* 1134.16-28,41-46. Cf. MIKALSON 1998, pp. 262-264. GRANDJEAN 1975, pp. 95-98.

32. On the importance of hymns during the Greco-roman period, see FURLEY-BREMER 2001. BREMER 1981.

33. On the hymns in honour of the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms, see NOCK 1965, pp.83-84. FRASER 1972 vol I, pp.191, 615, 666, 673-673. DUNAND 1991p. 206. GREEN 1990, pp. 179-182. KOENEN 1993, pp. 89-113. GELZER 1993, pp.143-144, 147,148. See, also, Theocritus, *Idyllia* 17: 'Εγκώμιον εἰς Προλεμαῖον.

34. See BORNE 1934. BURDEAU 1946. WALLACE - HADRILL 1981. GRUBER 1988.

35. Concerning the hymns devoted to Sarapis, see ENGELMANN 1975. Concerning the hymns devoted to Asclepius, see FURLEY-BREMER 2001, vol. I, pp. 207-214, 227-240, 243-244. Vol. II, pp. 161-167,180-192, 198-202.

36. Concerning "Sarapis invictus", see VIDMAN 1969, nos 374, 393, 407, 583, 669, 685, 685, 700, 792, 797. VIDMAN 1970, pp. 116-117, 144, 147, 173. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 200-201. See, also, WEINSTOCK 1957.

37. On the significance of salvation for the people of the Hellenistic era, see BLEEKER 1963. MALAISE 1980, pp. 100-103. SFAMENI GASPARRO 1985. SANZI 1996. VERSNER 1990, p. 45 and n. 17. SMITH 1990, pp. 85-143. See also BIANCHI-VERMASEREN 1982.

38. Concerning the texts of the Aretalogies, see VERSNER 1990, p. 41 and n. 6. TOTTI 1985.

tance for the peoples' cultic life is evidenced by the existence of a special priestly order, that of the "aretalogoi", that we find within the surroundings of the sanctuaries of Egyptian deities in Delos³⁹. These texts were used as effective means of propaganda and for the spread of cults, principally of the Egyptian divinities, in the Greco-Roman world. But in order to understand their specific meaning, we will have to follow a methodology other than the one applied so far, to help us in a complete in-depth deciphering of its true meaning. Therefore, the inquiry of contemporary research should not be limited to or focused on the problem of the provenance of the Aretalogies, but rather on the spirit and the views that are transmitted by means of these texts, unveiling this age's way of thought. It is clearly a matter of texts that are addressed to the people of the Hellenistic world. This element alone is sufficient for the proper understanding of these testimonies. In this way, we can comprehend the agents and the receivers of all these beliefs that are intimately related to the overall way of thought of the era in which they evolve. Thus, we can avoid their unilateral use, which leads research to ideological generalisations, as well as to confusion rather than enlightenment. For this reason, we must always bear in mind that we are obliged to progress in the correct understanding of the sources and especially to track down the reasons for their production. In addition, we must bear in mind that at any historical period of humanity, every single factor depends absolutely on all others and all together form a concrete whole. This whole process is like the making of a complicated mosaic, which does not fully represent the picture we intend, unless we put all the tesserae in the right place. Accordingly, only with presupposition are we able to see beyond the narrow boundaries where the texts restrict us. These, undoubtedly, are the necessary presuppositions for a complete and as much as objective a study as possible⁴⁰.

The ideas that are referred to in these texts are based on soteriological promises of the divinities that have the capacity to offer a solution to the diverse and serious problems of the people of this era. They are addressed to people who live in some organized social whole, as well as to those who wander and seek to find some new social environment, where they will feel secure and stable. These kinds of views offer the people of this age a way out of their desperate situation, and because of that these texts will have to be considered as writings of "some enlightened man or men" of the time, who use the principle tendencies of the time and apply them in a masterly way to the demands of the people. At the same time, they express the ideology of those religious groups that can be considered as corresponding to the socio-political ideology of the time. Naturally, if we bear in mind the historical facts of similar cases, these texts

39. On the "aretalogoi" of Delos, see DUNAND 1973, vol. III, p. 313. ROUSSEL 1916, pp. 60, 119,120. See also, *IG XI*, 4, 1263, 1-2. *ID*, 2072,1-2.

40. LEASE 1994, pp. 454-455, 466-467. Cf. also, NIKOLAIDES 2001, pp. 18-19. MARTIN 2000a, p.52, where he mentions: "...the amassing of... acontextual data has been most often in service to the culturally shaped, that is, common-sensical or propagandistic", and 54.

exploit the authenticity of their eastern provenance.

The goddess's self-definition in these texts is one aspect of her so-called Aretalogies. Their particular form should be considered as another yet conscious employment of the agents of the cult that functions as a means of acquaintance with, as well as entrance to, a new environment⁴¹, while, at the same time, it is a means of persuasion and reassurance to all those who question her active and effective role for the sake of all mankind. Finally, it is a means of guidance, aiming to teach the deeper meaning of her doctrines to the people of the time. Besides, this is the strategy of the agents who constitute determinative factors for the propagation of these cults. They find new expressions of divine power, related to the attributes of super-human powers, thus differentiating these cults from their overall social context⁴². For this very reason, the authors of the hymns picture the deities they praise in such a way that they exceed the usual standards of the Olympic pantheon. Besides, this is what the people of the time needed more than anything else.

Omnipotence is considered as one of the special characteristics of the spirit of the Hellenistic Age⁴³. The ecumenical vastness imposes the quality of universal and divine power. The expression of hyperbolic divine power, the first and foremost motive for the writing of an Aretalogy, made the hymn not only popular, but also a par excellence means of cultic propaganda during the Greco-Roman period, especially in the case of Isis. This divine omnipotence finds its absolute expression in the henotheistic character of the goddess, that begins to be formed increasingly as time goes on within a polytheistic environment. This is apparent principally in the texts of the Aretalogies, which echo the absolutist spirit of the time, which forms the way of thinking of the political-religious reality of the Hellenistic years. The agents of the cult adapted these texts to the socio-political spirit of the time. The goddess is presented with the qualities of an absolute ruler, to whom mortals appeal with a feeling of absolute submission. This form is directly related to the formation of political authority and the equivalent world-view that started to crystallize with the beginning of the so-called imperial period⁴⁴.

Another category is formed by the aretalogical texts where the believers, and not the goddess, praise her beneficial influence⁴⁵. In this case it is very easy to understand

41. In this category belong the following "Aretalogies", Kyme (1/2nd AD), cf. TOTTI 1985, p.1-4, nr.1a. Isis-Aretalogy of Diodor of Siculus, I, 27 (1st c.BC), cf. TOTTI, p. 4, nr 1b Ios (2/3rd c. AD), Thessaloniki (1/2nd c. AD), Andros (late 1st. c. BC), cf. TOTTI, pp. 5-10, nr. 2. Cyrene, Hymn of Carpocrates from Chalkis (3rd c. AD), cf. TOTTI, pp.15-16, nr.6.

42. See MARTIN 2000b, pp. 141-142. MARTIN 2003, p. 92-93 (in this volume).

43. MARTIN 2003. Divine omnipotence is also expressed by the term "*arete*", in relation to "*dynamis*"; see NOCK 1925, pp. 85-86. GRANDJEAN 1975, pp. 6-7. PREUX 1978, pp. 655, 658. PLEKET 1981. p.157. PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 118-119.

44. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 50-83. On the political situation during the imperial era, see PRICE 1984.

45. In this category belong the following Isis-Aretalogies: Aretalogy of Maroneia (about 100 BC), cf. TOTTI

the meaning and the cultic role of these Aretologies as public proclamations of faith in Isis and even as manifestations of gratitude for her salvific qualities. Confession of faith was considered proof of submission to this divine power on which personal life directly depends, as was especially clear from the morphology of particular texts, resulting in a particular typology to be formed. The believer praises in a special way, as a thanksgiving for the assistance she has offered him to overcome the problems of everyday life. Isis' overall figure causes for the individual of the time a feeling of respect as well as intimacy. She is the one to whom he can appeal for help in every difficult moment of his life. The above factors, as well as the notion of "sympathy" that develops between the goddess and the people, particularly contribute to her popularity in the Greco-roman world⁴⁶. In this way, the believer's personal relation with the deity is further strengthened. His tactics are a special way of expression, according to the *do ut des* practice⁴⁷. He thus, in his turn, consciously or not, becomes another means of propagation of the divine cult to the people of his surroundings. It is a most obvious evidence of the divine omnipotence, as well as a fine example of an emic testimony of an insider⁴⁸.

Besides, the virtues of the gods, and especially –in this case– of Isis, were related, to the power and the granting of offers to people, resulting in a radical change of their life and way of thinking. In this way, the agents of the cult aim to legitimize the divinity in the eyes of the people, because it was represented as omnipotent and mainly a benefactor of humanity. These are the main factors for the transition from an «*anomic*» to a «*nomic*» situation for mankind⁴⁹. Proselytism of new believers justified the tendency to accent even more the wanderings of divinities, aiming to the propagation of their cultural goods⁵⁰. This fact contributes, in this case, to the evolvement and establishment of the theory concerning the fundamental role of «cultural heroes»⁵¹ in the development of civilisation; this is evidenced also by the fact that they present the goddess as acting

1985, pp. 60-61, nr. 19. Hymn of Isis from Oxyrhynchos, *POXy*, 1380 (2nd c. AD), TOTTI, pp. 66-75, nr 20. Hymns of Isidoros from Medinet Madi (Narmouthis in Fayum)(I-IV), cf. TOTTI, pp. 76-82, nr. 21-25, Hymn of Mysomides (3rd c. AD), TOTTI, pp. 83-84, nr. 25, Sarapis Aretalogy from Delos (about 200 BC), *IG*, XI 4, 1299, cf. TOTTI, pp. 25-28, nr. 11.

46. BIANCHI 1979, p. 5. BIANCHI 1982, p. 5. Cf. Also, on the meaning of the Stoic doctrine about "cosmic *sympatheia*", see GREEN 1990, pp. 596-598.

47. BREMER 1998.

48. About the terms of "emic"/"etic", see McCUTCHEON 1999. PIKE 1999. PADEN 2000, p. 335. WIEBE 2000, p. 363.

49. About the use of the terms "nomic"/"anomic", see BERGER 1969.

50. See HENRICH 1984. Euhemerism is one of the most decisive factors of this time for the formation of these ideas. On this phenomenon, see, NILSSON ³1974, vol. II, pp. 182, 283- 289, 406. GREEN 1990, *passim*. PAKKANEN 1996, pp. 105 and n. 131.

51. KLEINGÜNTHER 1933. A. Brelich, *Gli eroi greci. Un problema storico-religioso* (Roma, 1978), pp. 139-151, 165-185, 198, 287-288, 330. BRELICH 1987, pp. 139-151, 165-185, 198, 287-288, 330. PACHIS 1998, pp.78-79, 105-115, 127.

like the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms, who inscribed their beneficial acts in inscriptions, in order to proclaim their political charity to their subordinates, as well as to the people of the entire world⁵².

We can therefore consider these aretalogical texts to be as a means of consolidation of the way of thought that this cult promotes before the complete presentation of her *hieroi logoi* during the second century AD. Their authors use these texts as a constant reminder of all the divine beneficial acts in favour of humankind, reinforcing even more their submission to the divine will⁵³. People had to submit entirely to their benefactors, who are agents of continuous order and harmony. This belief is imported in the realm of religion in accordance to similar beliefs, dominant in the political life of the Hellenistic kingdoms⁵⁴.

This fact becomes even more important when it is taken into account that Isis is a deity who is known for her omnipotent, as well as philanthropic nature, expressed in her providence *ὑπέρ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου*⁵⁵. These traits are related to the dominant trends and ideas of this era. Thus, the concept of "providence", originating from the domain of stoic discourse, finds its ideal expression in the omnipotent personage of Isis⁵⁶. Besides, divine providence is the primary precondition for the prevalence of order and harmony over chaos⁵⁷.

The influence of these beliefs that are related to the beneficial actions of all these deities, among which is Isis, is a planned strategy of the propagators of cults, in order to achieve their goal. In addition, the representation of her acts in these texts, as well as

52. See GEHRKE 2000, pp. 83-84, 108, 148, 253-254, 219. BRINGMANN 1993, p.7, KOENEN 1993, pp. 41, 44, 48-50, 53, 61-63, 107. See, also, *OGIS*, I. 90 (*SEG* 8,463, 33.1357, cf. n.45): ... *τοῦ τήν Αἴγυπτον καταστησαμένου καί τὰ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς εὐσεβοῦς, τοῦ τὸν θίον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπαναρθώσαντος* ...

53. See MÜLLER 1961, p. 87.

54. Polybius, *Histor.* 5, 11,6: *βασιλέως δὲ τὸ πάντας εὖ ποιοῦντα, διὰ τὴν εὐεργεσίαν καὶ φιλανθρωπίαν ἀγαπώμενον, ἐκόντων ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ προστατεῖν.*

55. Concerning Isis' providence for humans, see Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 15: *en ecce pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae prouidentia gaudens Lucius de sua Fortuna triumphat.* cf. also XI, 5: *iam tibi prouidentia mea inlucescit dies salutaris.* XI, 18: *deae prouidentis adorabile beneficium.* See GRIFFITHS 1975, p. 253. See, also, the characterization of Isis as "*πρόνοια*" in *P.Oxy* 1380, 43-44. Cf. GRENFELL-HUNT 1915, pp. 196,210. BRICAULT 1996, p. 62. MERKELBACH, 1995, p. 99.

56. On the Stoic notion of "universal providence", see GREEN 1990, pp. 634, 635, 640-641, 645,646. SCHNEIDER 1967-1969, vol. II, 580, 594, 601. CUMONT 1960, pp. 17, 85-86. LONG ³1997, pp. 184, 238-239, 271. NILSSON ³1974, vol. II, pp. 260, 705. See, also, Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3,92. Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 45. 369A, 67. 377F. Cf. GRIFFITHS 1970, pp. 469,533.

57. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 147,2-3: *..ὁ τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν ἀγαγών, ὁ τὰ ἄμικτα ἔθνη καὶ θηριώδη πάντα ἡμερώσας* ... In this work, written in 41 AD., Philon praises Augustus not only as the main factor of the restoration of order and harmony in the entire state, but also as factor of harmony in the entire nature, against the forces of chaos. Regarding to the emperor as a factor of providence for his citizens, see M. C. CHARLESWORTH 1979, pp. 373-378.

the various adjectives ascribed to her during the entire Greco-roman period, sufficiently demonstrate the ultimate goals of their creators⁵⁸. They seek to provide the people of the time with the feeling that a breakthrough from this tough situation is indeed possible. Listening to all these stories about the miraculous and beneficial qualities of these gods, the people of this time had to make a choice whether to accept this cult or not. Man seemed increasingly powerless against the absolute will of the divinities that were alone able to offer him, by means of their omnipotence, absolute salvation. This is, as will be mentioned below, an essential element, directly related to the general ideology of her cult. Their acceptance and influence were naturally greater when the psychological state of the hearer allowed it. Besides, each person interprets the same fact in an entirely different way, some being deeply affected by it while other payed no attention to it at all.

Apuleius' book is another explicit example of propaganda in the second century AD. Especially the narration of the 11th book of his "*Metamorphoses*" states that only the goddess can help people overcome the vicissitudes of their lives. The overall structure of this book aims more, compared to the other books of this work, at pointing out to the reader the crucial and salvific divine intervention of Isis. The glorious appearance of the goddess is the most indisputable evidence of her absolute power. This is the foremost evidence of the loyalty of her devotees to the goddess that rules peoples' lives, as well as decisively affects the course of nature and the cosmos. This is also the aim of Lucius' prayer to Isis. It is an example of personal piety, aiming to stress her unlimited power⁵⁹.

Of course, all this can also be examined from another aspect, related to the construction of a particular ideology, in accordance to the general background of the time. This can be understood in relation to the declaration, as implied in this specific text, of the downfall of the status of "slavery" (*servitium*) to passions and the achievement of freedom (*libertas*), with the decisive intervention of the goddess⁶⁰. We must wonder, in this case, whether this freedom has as its price for the followers of those cultic groups submission to the absolute will of the deities, and especially to the authority of the priests, who hold the role of the "mediator" between the believers and the divine world, and due to this fact they are the only ones who have the capacity to offer salvation to

58. Regarding to the divine epithets, see, VIDMAN 1969, s.v. "Isis". DUNAND 1973, vol. III, index, I: Noms de divinités", II: "épithète d'Isis". RONCHI 1974-1977, vol. III, sv. "Isis". BRICAULT 1996, pp. 11 - 95. PAKKANEN 1996, s.v. "Epithet(s) of Isis". cf. also p. 107, where the author mentions that "the frequent epithet with the prefixes, *pan-* and *poly-* underline the sentiment that she was seen as a powerful and mighty goddess in the hymns and areatalogies of this period".

59. See Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 2, 25. cf. GRIFFITHS 1975, pp. 114-123. 319-325. BERRETH 1931), pp. 11-37. On the place of prayer in people's religious life, see VERSNEL 1981.

60. See GRIFFITHS 1975, p. 248. EGELHAAF-GAISER 2000, pp. 83-85.93. VERSNEL 1990 pp. 88-95, 204.

believers. This is what the priest of the cult declares to Lucius, according to Apuleius text. He assures him: «*but to be safer and better equipped, enrol your name in this holy military service, whose solemn oath you were asked to take not long ago, and vow yourself from the moment to the ministry of our religion. Accept of your own free will the yoke of service. For when you have begun to serve the goddess, then will you better realise the result of your freedom*»⁶¹. Thus, a definitive ideology of thought and overall activity of all these cults is created, related to the concept «*extra cultus nulla salus*». The devotees' entrenchment and clear distinction from the rest of the society becomes even easier within the new religious groups of this era. They constitute the new forms of society, in which devotees live according to a radical way of social arrangement and relation to the other members of these societies.

The absolute connection to and dependence on divine will has another significant implication for believers lives. Isis' authoritative demand towards Lucius, «*but especially, remember and even hold enshrined deep in your heart, that the remaining course of your life, even to the limit of your last breath, is dedicated to me*» is an explicit expression of this reality⁶². Therefore, they are obliged to praise the benevolence of these deities, converting, at the same time, as many believers as possible. This is another strategy of the agents of the cult, related to the active participation of all those who have turned to this cultic environment. They set a permanent example for the rest, especially those whose are hesitant or critical towards all these novel –for the traditional status– cults⁶³.

Apart from these texts, a propagandistic role is played by these groups' complicated cultic life, a great novelty for the Greeks and the Romans. Those cults' everyday life is another yet means of impressing people and attracting them to their cultic environment. Usually, most of the believers attracted by the doctrines of these cults are not so much influenced by the sacred texts, which they usually only partly know, but rather by the community's everyday life.

The believer enters the surroundings of the sanctuaries, where he is confronted with Isis' omnipotence. An important role in this process is played not only by the various cultic texts, but also by the offerings of her believers. The latter constitute another yet explicit form of propagation and constant reminder of the deities' power, as well as

61. Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 15: *quo tamen tutior sis atque munitior, da nomen sanctae militiae, cuius non olim sacramento etiam rogabar, teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. Nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis.* See also GRIFFITHS 1975, pp. 88-89 (whose translation is cited), 254-256.

62. Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 6: *plane meminere et penita mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminos ultimi spiritus vadata.* Also see GRIFFITHS 1975, pp. 163-164.

63. See Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 15: *videant interreligiosi, videant et errorem suum recognoscant.* Cf. also J. G. GRIFFITHS 1975, pp. 86-87, 252. WITTMANN 1938, pp. 79, 85. See, also, VERSNEL 1990, pp. 199, n. 353, 200-203.

their decisive influence on the lives of the people of the time⁶⁴. This custom can also be found in the Greek world, in a smaller scale, of course, already since very ancient times, and is so widespread at this time, that W. Burkert righteously characterises all these cults of the Greco-roman ages as «votive»⁶⁵. As a typical example, among the numerous findings from that era, it is worth mentioning the case of the anaglyph of Isis' sanctuary in Dion⁶⁶. This anaglyph presents the goddess in a fully hellenised form, holding on the one hand a sheaf of wheat, which relates to her salvific intervention in the world of production and birth, as well as to her representation as the “founder” of fruits⁶⁷. The above concept plays a catalytic role to the religious thought of the people of the Hellenistic era, and constitutes the primary form of religio-political propaganda during this period⁶⁸. Similar is the position of the representations of the goddess, who, in her henotheistic form, offers the believers a feeling of absolute security. Moreover, in many cases where there are no such texts, this role is played solely by the iconography of these cults, as a “*libro di immagini senza didascalìa*”⁶⁹. All the above particularly reinforce the feelings of gratitude and trust, that are expressed by the believers' faith and obedience to the omnipotent deities.

64. The practice of dedicatory offering is another yet expression of personal religiosity, exercised especially during the Greco-roman period. The devotees' custom of making offers to the gods as a sign of piety is a phenomenon particularly widespread in the Greek and Roman world. The concept of *do ut des* is dominant in this way of religiosity and communication of mortals with the divine world. On this phenomenon, see VAN STRATEN 1981. MARTIN 1994a pp. 131-133. FORSÉN 1996.

65. BURKERT 1987, p. 12.

66. PANDERMALIS 1982. PANDERMALIS 1997. PANDERMALIS 1999, pp. 89-117. WILD 1984, pp. 1841-1842. EGELHAAF-GAISER 2000, pp. 173, 348.

67. Concerning this relief of Isis-Demeter, see PANDERMALIS 1999, p. 89. PACHIS (forthcoming) Cf. also the Aretalogies of Kyme, l. 7: ἐγὼ εἰμί ἢ καρπὸν ἀνθρώποις εὐροῦσα. ἃ καὶ θροτοῖς ἔδειξα καὶ καρποὺς βίου. Καὶ τὴν γῆν σπόρῳμην ποιήσασα· ἅπαντα τὸν βίον [ἅπα]σι [π]ορ[ί]ζεις, πανταχῇ τελ.. κ... [ἐ]πινοοῦσα τὴν δρόσον καὶ τὰ [φ]υ[σ]όμενα πάντα. σ ἴν τῆ[ς] γῆ[ς] κ[υ]ρία ἀ[γ]ο[ί]ς πλημμύραν ποταμῶν ... [ἐ]πα[ν]αγάγεις. Πλουτοδότι βασίλεια θεῶν ... μεγαλόννυμε Ἰσι, Διοῖ ... καὶ πάντων Τε φύσιν εὐανθέα εὔρεο καρπῶν .. σῆι δυνάμει Νείλον ποταμοὶ πληροῦνται ἅπαντες ὄρηι ὀπωρηγῆι, καὶ λαβρότατον χεῖθ' ὕδωρ γαῖαν ἄσαν ἐπι, ἴν' ἀνέγλιπος καρπ' ὅς ὑπάρχη. Ἰσι μεγίστη, Ἐρμούθι ... ζωῆς καὶ καρπῶν εὐρέτρια, ... Νείλον χροσιροῦσαν πειθοῦσ' ἀνάγεις κατὰ [ῶ]ρας] Αἰγύπτου ἐπὶ γῆν ἀνδράσιν εὐτερπλήν. Εὐάνθει τότε καρπὸς ἅπας καὶ πᾶσι μερῖ[ς] οἷσι θέλεις, ζωὴν παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν. Γῆν φασὶ πάντων νητέα γενηθῆναι· ταύτη δὲ σὺ θυγάτηρ ἐσπάρης πρόωτη <ι>, κείθι γὰρ πρώτον τοὺς καρποὺς ἐξέφηνας· Τριπτόλεμος δὲ τοὺς ἱεροὺς δράκοντας σου καταζεύξας ἄρματοφορούμενος εἰς πάντας Ἑλλήνας διέδωκε τό σπέρμα See, also, HENRICHS 1984, pp.142-145.

68. On the similar propaganda tendency of Athens during the 5th century, see MARTIN 1990, who aptly remarks that: “*The sheaf of wheat, prominently displayed in the architectural adornments of the Eleusinian sanctuary and, according to Hippolytus at the height of the initiation ceremony itself [Hippol., haet. 5, 38-41], remained a religio-economic emblem of Eleusinian identity and power in the context of Athenian dominance*” (p. 251) (the italics are mine). See also PACHIS 1998, pp. 176-196.

69. See BIANCHI 1984 p. 2121. PACHIS 1994, pp. 236, 254.

The priests of Isis' cult, as permanent representatives of the goddess among people, reinforce this reality and appear, during the sacred rituals, dressed in a similar way to that of the goddess, according to the iconography of this cult⁷⁰. This mutual relationship between the divine and the human world was achieved during these sacred rites. A similar method of propaganda for the cult of Isis, especially during the imperial ages, is the so-called "egyptomania", which is dominant in Rome, as well as in the rest provinces of the Roman state⁷¹. Another explicit evidence of the dynamic presence of Egyptian deities in the Roman empire are the coins circulated during this period. Besides, it is the time during which the Roman authority not only accepts, as mentioned above, Isis' cult, but also employs its doctrines, in order to establish its totalitarian state ideology, proving, at the same time, the absolute connection and dependence of the provinces on the Roman central authority, under the shield of Isis' divine protection⁷². This way, the fullest and absolute expression of divine power is presented in the most characteristic way. This begins to be expressed from the first centuries AD onward by means of henotheistic tendencies that start to dominate the religious texts of the time that present and propagate the divine nature in this way⁷³. The period of Late Antiquity contributes even more to the autocratic and unilateral form of divine power and its influence on human life, which we can understand more adequately if we also consider the centralism and the absolute spirit of political power during the same time.

The attempt of the agents of these cults to present an as much as possible complete summary of cultic ideology will be completed during Late Antiquity with the writing of complete mythological texts and will form one more means of propaganda that this time is more related to the way of thinking of the people of Late Antiquity⁷⁴. During this time, what is needed is no more the texts of the Aretalogies and other similar texts, but more intricate and completed means of propaganda, and these are, of course, the cultic myths. The older methods of propagation of ideas and proselytism that aimed to make the views of these groups known are abandoned, because these cults are now assimilated by society. Their authors present in this way a more complete and naturally more concentrated form of power, that corresponds to the gradual formation of the equivalent political power. For this reason, the agents of these cults take care to adapt the facts they present to the complex setting of this time. This way, the

70. See about EIGENARTNER 1991.

71. Concerning the so-called phenomenon of "Egyptomania", see KÖBERLEIN 1962. VOS 1980. WILD 1981, pp. 87, 230.

72. See TAK ÁCS 1995, pp. 41-51, 112-203.

73. On the "henotheism" of this period, see VERSNEL 1990, pp. 35-37, 194, where he aptly mentions that: "...henotheism never developed into a structural religious, let alone cultic, phenomenon in the pre-Hellenistic period. The dogmatic elevation of one god is a feature of Hellenistic and later religiosity", p. 235.

74. Regarding this, see McCUTCHEON 2000, pp. 199, 202-205. MARTIN 2000b, pp. 50-51. Also, see: n. 28.

divinities are presented as connecting and dominating in the wider cosmic firmament, overcoming the powers that originate from that place, with the concept of knowledge and wisdom, but principally as dominating in the realm of death and supplying absolute certainty for blessedness after death to the members of their groups. This way, their cult is even more adapted to the needs of the people of the time to rid themselves of the needs of earthly reality, which constitutes, according to the dominating views of the age, a place of uncertainty and decay. The above situation can directly be compared to the creation, by the doctrines they offer during this period, of the “utopian” environments, within which people will be able to find the ideal environment that will rid them of their ever-growing problems, resulting to the transformation of this era, according to E. R. Dodds, into «an age of anxiety»⁷⁵. Besides, the cults that are spread during the Greco-roman ages, were, according to J. Z. Smith, «‘utopian’, in the strictest sense of the word»; they were cults «of ‘nowhere’», cults «of transcendence»⁷⁶. The example of the «ascent of the soul», dominant in many of the cults and the religious systems of late antiquity, is a regulative factor for the formulation of the ideology of this period⁷⁷. Humans, in the middle of all these strategies and ideologies declared by the agents of these cults, feel that they can rise, through this strategy, on the world of the “fixed” stars, a place of eternity. As Smith characteristically mentions: «[h]ellenistic man experiences himself to be an exile from his true home, the Beyond, and he constantly seeks for ways to return... Man was no ‘longer a part of anything *except the universe*»⁷⁸. These cults, especially during late antiquity, adjust all their related doctrines, according to the cosmic environment, and especially to the utopian ideas⁷⁹. According to the presentation of Apuleius, Isis is the indisputable «*orbisque totius dominam*»⁸⁰, and above the “malevolent” and “blind” Fortuna, that was every individual’s nightmare during this time⁸¹. This fact further reinforces their omnipotent and regulative power. This can also be found in other similar deities of the time, such

75. See about DODDS 1990.

76. See SMITH 1971 esp. p. 238.

77. On the idea of ascent of the soul during Late Antiquity, see COLPE 1967a. COLPE 1967b. CULIANU 1982. CULIANU 1983. P. COULIANO 1984. COULIANO 1991. SMITH 1993c. SMITH 1993d. SMITH 1993e. About the “ascent” issue in Mithras cult, see GORDON 1976. BECK 1978. BECK 1988. BECK 1994. BLANCHI 1979b. MERKELBACH 1982. COULIANO 1994. On the role and the significance of this topic in Hermetism, see PESTE 2002.

78. See SMITH 1993d, pp. 162-163. See also JONAS 1992, pp. 241-265, esp. p. 247.

79. Concerning the utopian perceptions during Late Antiquity, SMITH 1990, pp. 110, 121-142. SMITH 1993a, pp. 100-103. SMITH 1993b, pp. 130-142, 147-151, 160-166, 169-171. SMITHf, pp. 185-189. SMITH, pp. 291-294, 308-309. GREEN 1990, pp. 384, 392-395, 529.

80. Apuleius, *Metamorph.* XI, 7. Cf. GRIFFITHS 1975, p. 170. cf. also XI,5: *elementorum omnium domina*. See also the text of Aretalogy of. Kyme, l. 3: *ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ἢ τύραννος πάσης τῆς χώρας*, cf. TOTTI 1985, p. 1, nr. 1a. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 50-83.

81. SFAMENI GASPARRO 1997a. SFAMENI GASPARRO 1997b. VERSNEL 1990, pp. 4-50, 84.

as Mithras, who is considered as a cosmic ruler (*kosmokrator*) «capable of seizing control of just those fundamental structures of space and time»⁸². This is another means of attracting the people of the time in the environment of these cults, by promises for the overcoming of all difficulties, thus leading to a state of mundane prosperity and, above all, posthumous blessedness. Of course, we should not forget about the fact that all these beliefs constitute the most ideal form of support to the political rulers of the time, in order to create an artificial state of prosperity, as S. A. Takács puts it, in a time «of greatest anxiety and political weakness»⁸³. The worse the condition of the state mechanism, the more all these doctrines of the eastern cults are fortified, contributing to the creation of a protective shield against the criticality of the time.

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82. BECK 1988, pp. 34-42. ULANSEY 1989, p. 124. See also *CIMR* I, 860; II, 1472.

83. TAKÁCS 1995, p. 124.

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