

INDUCTION INTO THE MYSTERY OF “STAR-TALK”: The Case of the Isis Cult During the Graeco-Roman Age

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THE DISCOURSE OF “STAR-TALK” IN THE MYSTERY CULT OF ISIS DURING THE GRAECO-ROMAN AGE

Cognitive sciences can provide new and previously unnoticed possibilities for framing historical investigations, so that historians can identify relevant real-world variables that have escaped the simplifying and “presentist” biases of contemporary experimentalists. Recent advances in cognitive sciences have highlighted how the very processes through which people acquire a sense of themselves and shape their identity are determined by specific, universal cognitive principles and operations.² The investigation of these processes could help us understand both the way of thinking and the attitude of the adherents of the Isis cult during the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*, always based on the data of this particular theoretical approach.

Thus, combining readings from Plutarch and Apuleius based on the methodology suggested by Roger Beck,³ it is possible to reconceptualize the study and

1 I would like to thank R. Beck, L. H. Martin, Y. Papadoyannakis and the editor of this volume A. Chalupa for their extremely helpful suggestions and criticisms.

2 The importance of this innovative theoretical proposal for the study of religions of Antiquity can be better understood, if we take into consideration Luther H. Martin, “The Ecology of Threat Detection and Precautionary Response From the Perspectives of Evolutionary Psychology, Cognitive Science and Historiography: The Case of the Roman Cults of Mithras” (paper presented at the workshop on “The Ecology of Threat Detection,” sponsored by the University of South Africa and held at Tilodi game park, January 2011), who so aptly says: “the work of cognitive scientists and that of historians must be complementary. As Simon Baron-Cohen has counseled, any scientific search for valid generalizations must ‘step out of time’ since, ‘at a minimum’, those which ‘have been confirmed to occur in the present’ also ‘must have occurred in the past’” (p. 3). See also Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin, eds. *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History and Cognition* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004); Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen, eds. *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography* (London: Equinox, 2011).

3 Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

understanding of this particular cult, which will contribute to the overcoming of obstacles regarding the understanding of the other “alternative cults” of the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*.

Key to the above-mentioned approach to the Isis cult is Plutarch’s 2nd century AD text *De Iside et Osiride*,⁴ where we read:

[N]or did she (i.e. Isis) allow the contests and struggles which she had undertaken, her wanderings and her many deeds of wisdom and bravery, to be engulfed in oblivion and silence, but into the most sacred rites (*teletais*) she infused images (*eikonas*), suggestions (*hyponoias*) (underthoughts, according to Beck) and representations (*mimēmata*) of her experience at that time, and so consecrated at once a pattern (*didagma*) of piety and an encouragement (*paramythion*) to men and women overtaken by similar misfortunes.⁵

In light of Beck’s cognitive approach to the study of the Mithras cult, Plutarch’s text can be the key to a redefinition of the Isis cult. Beck’s insight may form the basis of our own approach to the cult of Isis during the so-called Imperial Age. As a consequence of the specific Graeco-Roman religious and intellectual milieu which was infused with cosmic symbolism, amply manifested in the cosmic environment that is described in the cosmology of Claudius Ptolemy (mid-2nd century AD), the Isis cult is invested with a symbolic dimension and cosmic symbolism.⁶

Unlike the Mithras cult where information of decisive importance is given by Porphyry in his *De antro nympharum*,⁷ we must extrapolate for the Isis cult this information from indirect sources and the way these sources relate to the Graeco-Roman view of the *oecumene*. The description of Apuleius, in his novel *Metamorphoses* regarding Lucius’ process of initiation into the Isis cult can supplement Plutarch’s account and can help fill in the incomplete cosmological information relevant to the environment of the Isis cult.⁸ After all, both writers are known for their common philosophical and devotional preferences; at the same time, as contemporaries, they naturally shared a common way of viewing the world.⁹

4 Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 27, 361de = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 158–159, 390–392.

5 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 2, 10, 62, 136.

6 Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 7–8; Roger Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1988), 38, n. 79; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 33, n. 16, 18, 61, 113, 179–180, 236.

7 Beck, *Planetary Gods*, passim; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 16–17, 41–50, 81–87 and passim.

8 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.23 = Griffiths, *IB*, 96–99, 286–308.

9 Griffiths, *IB*, 48–49, 53–54, 141, 347, 351; Jean Hani, *La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1976); Nancy Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 228,

Thus Plutarch’s text, as well as that of Apuleius are of particular importance for the study of the Isis cult during the Graeco-Roman era, because it is through these that the mystery form, which the structure of this cult acquired during the 1st century AD, is manifest. This transformation of the worship of Isis into a mystery cult is an element of vital importance as it shapes the form of the cult during the Imperial Age. Moreover, this mystery form not only constituted an essential component of and complement to the overall structure of this cult, but it was also related to the actualization of certain rituals, participation in which was not confined just to those who were part of the Isis’ original Egyptian devotional cultic environment.¹⁰ This form, however, constitutes one side of the overall structure of the cult, which is related to its rituals and festivals.¹¹ This element differentiates this particular cult from the cult of Mithras, which constitutes the example *par excellence* of mystery cult of the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*.¹²

An important characteristic of the context of the Isis cult during the Imperial Age is the goddess’s transformation into a cosmic deity who controls, with her absolute and determinative power, the movement of the whole heavenly firmament.¹³

281–282, 314–315, n. 22; Italo Gallo, ed. *Plutarco e la religione. Atti del VI Convegno plutarco* (Ravello, 29–31 maggio 1995) (Napoli: M. D’Auria Editore, 1996); Luc Van der Stockt, “Plutarch and Apuleius: Laborious Routes to Isis,” in *Aspects of Apuleius’ Golden Ass III: The Isis Book*,” eds. Wytse H. Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2012); Ellen D. Finklepearl, “Egyptian Religion in *Met.* 11 and Plutarch’s *PDIO*: Culture, Philosophy, and the Ineffable,” in *Aspects of Apuleius’ Golden Ass III: The Isis Book*, eds. Wytse H. Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2012).

- 10 Ugo Bianchi, “Iside dea misterica. Quando?” in *Perennitas: Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich/Promossi dalla Cattedra di Religioni del mondo classico dell’Università degli Studi di Roma* (Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1980), 18, 28–35; Panayotis Pachis, “Imagistic Modes of Religiosity in the Cult of Isis/Sarapis during the Graeco-Roman Age,” in *Imagistic Traditions in the Graeco-Roman World: A Cognitive Modeling of History of Religious Research*, eds. Luther H. Martin and Panayotis Pachis (Thessaloniki: Editions Vantias, 2009), 206–220; Panayotis Pachis, *Η λατρεία της Ισιδας και του Σάραπι. Από την τοπική στην οικουμενική κοινωνία* (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis Publications, 2010), 283–288, 358. See also Peter Van Nuffelen, “Words of Truth: Mystical Silence as a Philosophical and Rhetorical Tool in Plutarch,” *Hermathena* 182 (2007): 21–28; Douglas L. Gragg, “Do the Multiple Initiations of Lucius *Metamorphoses* Falsify the Ritual Form Hypothesis?” in *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography*, eds. Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen (London: Equinox, 2011).
- 11 Griffiths, *IB*, 31–47, 79–85, 167–233; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1995), 147–161, 181–186; Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 114–119.
- 12 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 3.
- 13 See Turcan, “Isis gréco-romaine et l’hénothéisme féminine,” in *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World*, eds. Laurent Bricault, Miguel J. Versluys, and Paul G. P. Meyboom

This very idea is further amplified during this time, when perceptions about the representatives of the divine world undergo a change generally. These deities, Isis being among them, become transformed from protectors of nature and the production of earthly goods into cosmic and omnipotent supernatural beings. Thus Apuleius characterizes her as *regina caeli*.¹⁴ This particular cosmic image of the goddess is presented throughout the eleventh Book of his *Metamorphoses* which could be considered as the “chronotropic template of the Isis’ book.” The tactic applied by Apuleius in adjusting the way of expression of his age could be deemed supplementary to the so-called “adventure” and “everyday time” that usually dominates in the various novels of the time. In this way he adjusts the overall narration and the cult of Isis as well to the overall way of expression during the Imperial Age.¹⁵

In the same spirit, the text of the Aretologies of Cyme, Thessaloniki (1st–2nd century AD),¹⁶ Casandrea (Nea Potidea, Chalkidiki) (2nd century AD)¹⁷ and Ios¹⁸ (2nd–3rd century AD) reads: “I [Isis] appointed the paths of the stars. I regulated the passage of sun and moon.”¹⁹

These testimonies are further supported by Isis’ representations of this age in which she appears as a cosmic deity and more specifically as the “Heavenly Panthea Goddess” (*Ourania Panthea thea*). This further supports Apuleius’ characterization of Isis as *elementorum omnium domina*.²⁰ Such a representation of Isis as a cosmic

(Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2007); Panayotis Pachis, *Religion and Politics in the Graeco-Roman World: Redescribing the Isis-Sarapis Cult* (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis Publications, 2010), 187–193, 305–313.

- 14 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 = Griffith, *IB*, 74–75, 141. The same theme is also found in the so-called magical astrological gems during the Late Antiquity, see about Doro Levi, “Aion,” *Hesperia* 13 (1944); Ennio Sanzi and Carla Sfameni, eds. *Magia e culti orientali per la storia religiosa della tarda antichità* (Cosenza: Edizioni L. Giordano, 2009), 166–169.
- 15 Roger Beck, “*Divino quadam stellarum consortio coniunctum*. The Astrological Relationship of Lucius to the Priest of Isis as a ‘Chronotropic’ Template for Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11,” in *Conventus ex dissonis I: Scritti in onore di Aldo Setaioli*, eds. Carlo Santini, Lorian Zurli, and Luca Cardinali (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2006).
- 16 Maria Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1985), no. 1–2: Ἐγὼ ἄστρον ὁδοῦς ἔδειξα.
- 17 Laurent Bricault, *Bibliotheca isiacae I* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2008), 106, no. 113/1201: Ἐγὼ ἄστρον ὁδοῦς ἔδειξα.
- 18 *RICIS* 202/1101: Ἐγὼ ἄστρον ὁδοῦς ἔδειξα.
- 19 About the connection of Isis with the stars see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.25 = Griffiths, *IB*, 322.
- 20 According to this data, Isis is considered to be the indisputable *elementorum omnium domina*. See Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5, 7 and 25 = Griffiths, *IB*, 320–325. See also Pachis, *Religion and Politics*, 184–187.

deity comes from a fresco in Pompei, Italy,²¹ in which she is represented stepping with one of her feet on the heavenly sphere. Next to her one can see the steering wheel of a ship, through which her absolute dominance, not only on the cosmic firmament but also on the whole earth and sea is implied. Her absolute dominance is thus indisputable. The same idea is also portrayed on an altar in Confinium, South Italy, where the goddess is represented as Isis-Fortune and Victory, standing again on the heavenly sphere.²² The presence of this particular notion is directly connected with the image of Isis as Fortune (*Tyche*) on inscriptions coming from the West part of the Empire. On them, Isis is referred to as “*thea epekeos Isidi Tyche*”;²³ in this way she is honored as the absolute regulator of people’s life and of the whole cosmic firmament. This perception acquires particular significance especially when we take into account Apuleius’ characterization of the goddess as “*elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis*,”²⁴ a fact that implies her connection to time.

One should not forget to mention at this point the statues of Osiris coming from Rome, where the Egyptian god of the underworld is portrayed as the ruler of time, obviously connected to eternity. The Figure of Osiris from the sanctuary of the Syrian deities (2nd century AD) and on a gem from the Janiculum Hill (2nd–3rd century AD) are also characteristic of this. Of importance is another headless figurine of *Osiris Chronocrator* in Rome where the god is represented with a human trunk. A snake entwines his body as many as seven times, another symbol of eternal time.²⁵ These representations of time are related to the fact that Isis is considered to be the goddess who arranges the eternal and harmonic movement of the cosmos.²⁶ The transformation of chthonic Isis into an almighty cosmic

21 Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 576, fig. 99 = Ermanno A. Arslan, ed. *Iside: Il mito, il mistero, la magia* (Milano: Electa, 1997), 441, no. V 67, pl. VII; Stefano de Caro, ed. *Egittomania: Iside e il mistero. Catalogo della mostra (Napoli, 12 ottobre 2006-26 febbraio 2007)* (Milano: Electa, 2006), 184–185, no. III 50.

22 Michel Malaise, *Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiens découverts en Italie* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1972), 53, no. 1: *Isi Victrici sacr(um). C. Pontius C.L. / fidelis, sevir aug(ustalis), / ex imp(erio)*; Pachis, *Religion and Politics*, 305.

23 See *RICIS* 113/0531, 113/0566, 113/0514, 113/0515; *SIRIS*, 634 = *RICIS* 515/1001: *Ειστύχη Ἴερος*.

24 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 = Griffiths, *IB*, 74. See about Athenagoras, *Legatio* 22.8 = William R. Schoedel, ed. and trans. *Athenagoras: Legatio et De resurrectione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 52: *περὶ τῆς Ἰσιδος, ἣν φύσιν αἰῶνος, ἐξ ἧς πάντες ἔφυσαν καὶ δι’ ἧς πάντες εἰσὶν, λέγουσι*. Cf. also Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 245.

25 See Arslan, *Iside*, 231, no. IV 227, 234, no. IV 231; Fausta Manera and Claudia Mazza, eds. *Le collezioni egizie nel Museo nazionale romano* (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2001), 49, no. 8, 53, no. 12, 56, no. 14.

26 According to this data, Isis is considered to be the indisputable *elementorum omnium domina*. See Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 and 7: *orbisque totius dominam*, 11.25 = Griffiths,

deity during the Late Antiquity becomes even more important since Isis is a deity known for her omnipotent as well as philanthropic nature, as expressed in her providence for the entire firmament, a representation related to the dominant trends and ideas of this era.²⁷ Thus, the concept of “providence,” originating from the domain of Stoic discourse, finds its ideal expression in the powerful personage of Isis.²⁸ Besides, divine providence is the primary presupposition for the prevalence of order and harmony over chaos.²⁹

*IB, 320–325: Tu quidem sancta et humani generis sospitatrix perpetua, semper fovendis mortali-
libus munifica, dulcem matris adfectionem miserorum casibus tribuis. Nec dies nec quies nulla ac
ne momentum quidem tenue tuis transcurrit beneficii otiosum, quin mari terraque protegas
homines et depulsis vitae procellis salutarem porrigas dexteram, qua fatorum etiam inextricabiliter
contorta retractas licia et Fortunae tempestates mitigas et stellarum noxios meatus cohibes. Te
superi colunt, observant inferi, tu rotas orbem, luminas solem, regis mundum, calcas tartarum.
Tibi respondent sidera, redeunt tempora, gaudent numina, serviunt elementa. Tuo nutu spirant
flamina, nutriunt nubila, germinant semina, crescunt germina. Tuam maiestatem perborrescunt
aves caelo meantes, ferae montibus errantes, serpentes solo latentes, beluae ponto natantes. At ego
referendis laudibus tuis exilis ingenio et adbibendis sacrificiis tenuis patrimonio; nec mihi vocis
ubertas ad dicenda, quae de tua maiestate sentio, sufficit nec ora mille linguaeque totidem vel
indefessi sermonis aeterna series. Ergo quod solum potest religiosus quidem, sed pauper alioquin,
efficere curabo: divinos tuos vultus numenque sanctissimum intra pectoris mei secreta conditum
perpetuo custodiens imaginabor.*

- 27 Concerning Isis’ providence for humans, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5: *iam tibi providentia mea inlucescit dies salutaris*; 11.15: *en ecce pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae providentia gaudens Lucius de sua Fortuna triumphat*; 11.18: *deae providentis adorabile beneficium*; Griffiths, *IB*, 253. See also the characterisation of Isis as πρόνοια, in *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI.1380, 43–44 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 196 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 65, no. 20. Cf. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XI (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 196, 210; Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 99; Laurent Bricault, *Myrionymi: Les épicleses grecques et latines d’Isis, de Sarapis et d’Anubis* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1996), 62.
- 28 See *SNRIS*, no. 03 (Asia Minor, Lydia, Blaundus, Juda II, 20–25 AD); no. 03b (Asia Minor, Lydia, Blaundus, Juda II, 20–25 AD); no. 03c (Asia Minor, Lydia, Blaundus, Juda II, 20–25 AD); no. 04 (Asia Minor, Lydia, Blaundus, Juda I, 20–25 AD); no. 02 (Asia Minor, Lydia, Traleis, 134–136 AD); no. 03 (Asia Minor, Lydia, Traleis, 134–136 AD); no. 03a (Asia minor, Caria, Iasos, 151–200 AD ?); no. 02 (Mauretania); no. 07 (Mauretania).
- 29 Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 147.2–3: ὁ τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν ἀγαγὼν, τὰ ἔθνη καὶ θηριώδη πάντα ἡμερώσας. In this work, written in 41 AD, Philo praises Augustus not only as the main factor of the restoration of order and harmony in the entire state, but also as a factor of harmony in the entire nature, against the forces of chaos. Regarding the emperor as a factor of providence for the citizens, see Martin P. Charlesworth, “The Virtues of a Roman Emperor: Propaganda and the Creation of Beliefs,” in *Ideologie und Herrschaft in der Antike*, ed. Hans Kloft (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), 373–378.

Analogous ideas are also mentioned in the hymn that comes from the ancient Thessalic city of Gomphoi, today in the Museum of Volos.³⁰ Isis is presented in this hymn not only as the goddess of blossoming fields but also, in a unique way, as the ruler of the entire vegetation.³¹ It should not escape our notice that this area is the major source of grains for the Greek mainland and therefore are heavily dependent on the absolute will of the dominant nature deities. People offer to their gods everyday oblations and prayers in order to gain their support and absolute and determinative interference.³²

The text of Mesomedes, dating back to the reign of Hadrian, constitutes another characteristic testimony about the Isis cult.³³ In this text she is characterized as the Lady of Nature as well as the absolute regulator of the eternal succession of the seasons.³⁴ This is the reason why the goddess is also characterized by her cosmic nature during this period.³⁵ This text describes the intense and ceaseless cosmic movement in the cyclical dance of the seasons in honour of Isis. That intense rhythm of the cosmic dance is implied by the presence of the Curetes, the madding escorts of Rhea.³⁶ The presence of these goddesses as well as of Cronus, deities of earth and vegetation, constitutes an evidential element for the content of this text.³⁷

The respective image that one can find in the representations of the *patera of Parabiago* that dates from the 4th century AD reinforces our position.³⁸ In this

30 See Werner Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros und verwandte Texte* (Berlin: Weidenmann, 1930), 132–136.

31 *Hymn of Gomphoi*, 1–2: καρπὸν [ἀνθῶν] = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 2 (1925), no. 359 = Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 135 = *SIRIS* 92 = *RICIS* 112/0201.

32 See Panayotis Pachis, *Ἴσις Καρποτόκος I: Προλεγόμενα στον συγκρητισμό των ελληνιστικών χρόνων* (Thessaloniki: Editions Vaniias, 2003), 19, 32, 67.

33 See Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 143–147.

34 See *Hymn of Mesomedes*, 5–8 = Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina*, 198 = Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 145 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 83, no. 25: ἀ βαθύκερος Ἴσις, ἅτ' ἔαρος ἄτε θέρεος ἄτε χειματος ἄγει νεογόνους ἡνίας.

35 See Robert Turcan, “Isis gréco-romaine.”

36 See *Hymn of Mesomedes*, 15–19 = Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina*, 198 = Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 145 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 84, no. 25: οἱ Ῥέας Κούρητες ὁ τε Κρόνιος ἄμητος, ἄστα διφρηλάτα πάντα δι' ἀνακτόρων Ἴσιδι χορεύεται.

37 For Cronus and his connection to fertility, see Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II: Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1993), 90–227. Cf. also *CIMRM*, index, s.v. Saturnus.

38 About the *patera di Parabiago* see Alda Levi, *La patera d'argento di Parabiago* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico della stato, 1935); Aldo Levi, “La lanx di Parabiago e i testi orfici,” *Athenaeum* (n.s.) 15 (1937); Maarten J. Vermaseren, *The Legends of Attis in Greek and Roman Art* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1966), 27–28; Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Cult and the Cult* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 72 and pl. 53; Luisa

image, Rhea-Cybele, an analogous nature deity, is depicted on her chariot which is dragged by lions in the cosmic environment. This space is delineated by the presence of the dancing Curetes, and of Aeon-Cronus surrounded by the Zodiac cycle. This image of the Aeon-Cronus, whose body is surrounded by a snake, constitutes the reflection of the Eternal Time in accordance with the ideas of the Late Antiquity.³⁹

The characterization of Isis as *bathykerōs* in this hymn also associates her with the devotional epithet of Isis-Moon.⁴⁰ This divine epithet and the whole affinity

Musso, *Manifattura sontuaria e committenza pagana nella Roma del IV secolo: indagine sulla lanx di Parabiago* (Roma: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 1983), 13, 15, 22–29, 87–88, 106–148; Panayotis Pachis, “Γαλλαῖον Κυβέλης ὀλόλυγμα (*Anthol. Palat.* VI 173): L’element orgiastique dans le culte de Cybele,” in *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M. J. Vermaseren*, ed. Eugene J. Lane (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996), 215, 218; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 73, pl. 10.

39 For the relevant representations, see Arslan, *Iside*, 231, no. IV 227V, and 234, no. IV 231. See also Manera and Mazza, *Le collezioni egizie*, 49, no. 8, 53, no. 12, 56, no. 14; Valentino Gasparini, “Iside a Roma e nel Lazio,” in *La Lupa e la Sfinge. Roma e l’Egitto dalla storia al mito*, ed. Eugenio Lo Sardo (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2008), 106; Giovanni Casadio, “From Hellenistic Aion to Gnostic Aiones,” in *Religion im Wandel der Kosmologien*, ed. Dieter Zeller (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999).

40 Wilhelm Drexler, “Isis,” in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie II.1*, ed. Wilhelm H. Roscher (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1890–1894), 437–438; Friedrich Zimmermann, *Die ägyptische Religion nach den Darstellung der Kirchenschriftsteller und die ägyptischen Denkmäler* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1912), 48; Friedrich Schwenn, “Selene I,” *RE* II.A.1 (1921); Franz Cumont, *L’Égypte des astrologues* (Bruxelles: La Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1937), 169, n. 2; Theodor Hopfner, *Plutarch über Isis und Osiris II* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 197; Godwinus Vandebeek, *De interpretatio graeca van de Isis figuur* (Louvain: Bibliotheca Universitatis, 1946), 127–128; Griffiths, *PDIO*, 463; Griffiths, *IB*, 111–112, 114–115, 124–125, 130, 166; Yves J. Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétalogie d’Isis à Maronée* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1975), 58; Bricault, *Myrionymy*, 64–65; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “The Hellenistic Face of Isis: Cosmic and Saviour Goddess,” in *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World*, eds. Laurent Bricault, Miguel J. Versluys, and Paul G. P. Meyboom (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2007), 43, n. 11. See also Hecataeus Abderitas, *Aegyptiaca*, *FHG* II, fr. 7 [p. 388] = Hecataeus Abderitas, *Aigyption* (?), *FGrH* 264 F, fr. 1 [p. 12–13]; Manethon, *Fisicón Epitome* = *FGrH* 609 F, frg. 82 [p. 99–100] = Diogenes Laertius, *De vita et moribus philosophorum*, *Prooemium* 10 = Hopfner, *Fontes*, 73; Diodorus Siculus 1.11.1 = Eusebius Caesariensis, *Preparatio evangelica* 3.3.1 (*PG* XXI, 164bc) and 1.25.1 (*PG* XXI, 64d–65a); Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.2 and 5; Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 52; Porphyrius, *De imaginibus* = *apud* Eusebius Caesariensis, *Preparatio evangelica* 3.11.49 (*PG* XXI, 93cd–114d) = Hopfner, *Fontes*, 470–471; Suidas, s.v. δογματίζει; *SIRIS*, 320, v. 2; *Aretalogy from Maroneia*, 18 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 61, no. 19; *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380, 72–73, 104 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 197, 213, 216 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 66–67, no. 20; Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.30 and 45 = Hopfner,

of the text supports her absolute cosmic character.⁴¹ The goddess is not only the goddess of rural fertility and Lady of Nature (according to the hymn of Gomphoi); she is actually represented as a dominant cosmic deity. This image of the goddess is further amplified by the usage, in this text, of the term *difrelatai*.⁴² This term, in combination with the above characterization of the goddess, corresponds to relevant representations of the Moon, which leads her celestial chariot. According to the same text, the goddess is portrayed riding on her cosmic chariot around the eternal cycle of the seasons.⁴³ For a start, Isis-Moon constitutes, according to the teachings and ideology of this period, the necessary complement to Sarapis (Osiris)-Sun.⁴⁴ In addition, the term *pyrigenes* is relevant to the characterization of Isis found in the text of her Hymn from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the terms *ploutodoteira*⁴⁶ and *karpophoros*⁴⁷ could constitute characteristic features of her fecundity. Finally, the reference to the succession of the seasons is a typical idea of this period and implies the Zodiac cycle, a route that the Moon and the Sun follow daily in their celestial journey. We also find this kind of representations

Fontes, 698; Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 44.368d, 52.372d = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 186, 202, 465, 500–501; *Hymn of Mesomedes*, 5 = Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina*, 198 = Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 146 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 83, no. 25.

- 41 For the relevant representation of the goddess as a cosmic deity, see Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 576, fig. 99 = Arslan, *Iside*, 441, no. V67, pl. VII ; de Caro, *Egittomania*, 184–185, no. III 50.
- 42 See also *Hymn of Mesomedes*, 5–8 = Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina*, 198 = Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros*, 145 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 83, no. 25: ἀ βαθύκερος Ἴσις, ἅτ' ἔ(ι)αρος ἄτε θέρεος ἄτε χειμάτος ἄγει νεογόνους ἡνίας.
- 43 See Panayotis Pachis, *Δήμητρα Καρποφόρος. Θρησκεία και αγροτική οικονομία του αρχαιοελληνικού κόσμου* (Athens: Hellenica Grammata, 1998), 19, 32, 67; Pachis, *Religion and Politics*, 309. A similar image, this time about the route of the Sun, is found in a passage of Euripides (frg. 941, 3–946 = Nauck, *Fragmenta Euripidea*, 663–665 = TrGF V2 937–938, 1022) where τόνδ' ἡγοῦ θεὸν ... πυριγενῆς δὲ δράκων ὁδὸν ἡγεῖται [ταῖς] τετραμόρφους ὥρας ζευγνὺς ἀρμονία πολύκαρπον ὄχημα και Γαῖα μήτηρ Ἑστίαν δὲ σ' οἱ σοφοὶ βροτῶν καλοῦσιν ἡμένην ἐν αἰθέρι ἀεὶ τι καινὸν θύη θεοῖς. We believe that the relevant terminology Euripides uses in this passage can perfectly fit the image of Isis.
- 44 The above mentioned ideas find their ideal expression in the connection of the goddess with the Moon and Tyche. For this reason the goddess is characterized as ταυρῶπις, πολυώνυμος and σότεια. See Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.46, who informs us that: τὴν Τύχην οἱ Ἕλληνας γράφουσι βουπρόσωπον εἶναι.
- 45 See *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380, 248–249 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 200, 220 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 74, no. 20: σὺ κ[αί] φωτὸς και φλ[ε]γγμάτων κυρία.
- 46 *SIRIS* 165 = *RICIS* 203/0602.
- 47 *SIRIS* 317 = *RICIS* *301/0601.

of the Moon in the depictions of the Mithraic iconography, where the goddess is portrayed on a chariot that is going around the cosmic firmament.⁴⁸

All the references cited above provide us with the opportunity to approach the Isis cult, and especially the ritual of initiation into this cult, in an innovative way, i.e. “in the mode of cognition.” Initiation, as a “turning point,” offered initiates a chance to acquire a personal relationship with Isis, who as the *elementorum omnium domina* had the power to save them from the revulsions of the impious *Tychē* (*Fortuna*), manifesting to them a new dynamic strategy of being. In this way the cult’s adherents come to acquire mystical knowledge about the cosmic order as a result of their personal choice and actually transform their whole existence and orientation in life; all of which signified a possibility for them to overcome the apparent chaos that dominated the world. It should not escape our notice that the overall way of preparation and realization of Lucius’ initiation, the hero of Apuleius’ narration, is articulated as “mystagogy.” The meaning of this term, according to Beck, is “inducting in a mystery”⁴⁹ (*mystagogein*), and in this way “the initiate gets to know his [or her] mysteries in the context of the life and physical environment.”⁵⁰

It is apparent that the personal bonds between the initiator and the initiate are reinforced, a fact of decisive importance for the life of the adherent. Plutarch’s text leads us to understand that just as the “underthoughts” (*hyponoias*), “mental representations,” and their visual realization (*eikonas*) include but are not limited to material icons, so the realization of the ritual (*mimēmata*) include but are not limited to mimetic rituals. Therefore, according to Beck, this “mode of cognition,” which constitutes a “doctrine” for this cult gives the initiator the opportunity “to recapture and express this knowledge, in a propositional language,” which he defines as “star talk” and which is directly related to Hellenistic astronomy.

This “language, if language it is, is the idiom of the mysteries, not just of the icons”;⁵¹ “it is [a] medium.”⁵² In this way, the manifestation of this knowledge should not be regarded as an esoteric reading restricted to a learned minority, but rather as readily accessible to a general audience. This opinion is further amplified by Boll’s position,⁵³ who wrote:

It presupposes a learned education neither with the writer nor the readers: a person knew the twelve signs of the zodiac and the most important constellations of the sky as well as the twelve months that are known today. He can have reckoned on

48 See *CIMRM*, index, s.v. *Luna*.

49 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 42, 62, 65, 128, 129.

50 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 2.

51 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 161.

52 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 8.

53 Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1914), 103.

what for a reader would also be the true, no less advanced, indeed childish cosmology.⁵⁴

This particular view of the symbols of the Mithras and Isis cults, which are directly connected to the world-view of the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*, finds its best expression in Dan Sperber’s theoretical approach, which Beck follows in his study of the Mithraic cult. According to Sperber, the cultural phenomena which religion is directly related to, constitute a complex of mental as well as public representations. The former pertain to the stellar world and the latter to the expressions of mental representations in the common world: the observable ritual. “[A] ‘pairing’ of sign and meaning ‘in a code structure’ is the key criterion: [the] language [of star talk] meets it.”⁵⁵ This theoretical approach finds its application in Plutarch’s testimony, following Beck’s redefining view. As he so aptly concludes: “[o]nly by metaphoric licence do symbols mean,”⁵⁶ or to be more accurate, the “symbols *evoke*. And to say that symbols evoke is really just another way of speaking of the apprehension of symbols by the cognizing agent when the object of cognition is made the grammatical subject.”⁵⁷ In this way: “the initiate apprehends whatever the symbols evoke,” or intimate.⁵⁸

So, the ritual of initiation, as described in Apuleius’ account, can be incorporated into the framework of “star-talk”; it can also be directly connected with the “underthoughts” (*hyponoias*) that are mentioned in Plutarch’s text and are related to the overall cosmological world-view, that is used, according to Mastrocinque, as the “esperando” of the Graeco-Roman age.⁵⁹ Therefore, this tactic of Apuleius could be directly connected to a kind of evocation, through which the character of Lucius, as a representation of every initiate of this period, could comprehend the symbols, as those are expressed throughout the “mystagogy.”

It should be noted here that the space where the adherents’ initiation takes place can be identified with the “image of the world” in which the adherent actualizes his (her) cosmic journey. Initially, he (she) goes down – always according to Apuleius’ narration – to the Underworld, the realm of Osiris, and then ascends through the planets (*elementa*), according to the dominant cosmological view of

54 Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 252 (whose translation we follow). About the importance of astrology during the Graeco-Roman age see also Bert Selzer, “*Eadem spectamus astra*: Immortality as Common Ground Between Pagan and Christian Monotheism,” in *Monotheism Between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity*, eds. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (Leuven: Peters, 2010).

55 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 157.

56 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 158.

57 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 159

58 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 159.

59 See about Attilio Mastrocinque, *Studi sul mitraismo: Il mitraismo e la magia* (Roma: G. Bretschneider, 1998), 147.

this era.⁶⁰ In this ascent he (she) reaches the space of the fixed stars, the realm of Sarapis (=Helios/Horus) and of Isis, who is considered as the *elementorum omnium domina* and *regina caeli*.⁶¹

The whole initiation process was accompanied by several sensory stimuli (visual, auditory, olfactory) amplifying the adherents' experience moving within the cosmic space. After all, the communicative practices of human societies, just like rituals and visual arts, are based on mental representations that intentionally or not, convey a meaning. The means through which the meaning of a representation is conveyed is not restricted to the natural environment; it also includes the "representational environment" that symbolic systems generate within human minds, which can transform the perceived world. In this light, both symbolic systems and their representational relationships are not independent; they are dependent on the cosmic and cultural context in which they have developed.

In the symbolic mental mappings that are found in Apuleius' account, we also find experiences of the symbolic transition of the initiate from the microcosm to the cosmic macrocosm, where he will eventually gain salvation from his mortal nature. Moreover, Isis is the goddess who "guides the errant stars of heaven"⁶² and gives *hominibus vagis vitam*.⁶³ As a matter of fact, this journey was taking place symbolically at a vertical level, with intermediate stops on the seven planets that surround the earth, as well physically within the environment of the cults' temples. The metaphorical conception of movement in space and time is, according to the cognitive approach, largely reliant on the basic structures of the human body and brain and, by extension, on the special nature of the human somatic experience.

Lucius appears after his initiation to the other members of the cult dressed in a cloak that bears the symbols of the cosmic environment in which Isis prevails.

60 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.23 = Griffiths, *IB*, 96–99, 286–308. See also Jan Bergman, "Per omnia omnia elementa remeavi. Réflexions sur l'arrière-plan égyptien du voyage de salut d'un myste isiaque," in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'impero Romano*, eds. Ugo Bianchi and Maarten J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1982). About *elementa*, or "cosmic *stoicheia*," according to Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 78, n. 187. See also Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 6 (Nauck 60 = Arethusa 8): ὄν ὁ Μίθρας ἐδημιούργησε, τῶν δ' ἐντὸς κατὰ συμμετρους ἀποστάσεις σύμβολα φερόντων τῶν κοσμικῶν στοιχείων καὶ κλιμάτων.

61 Ioan P. Culiano, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1983), 5–15; Ioan P. Culiano, "The Mithraic Ladder Revisited," in *Studies in Mithraism*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Roma: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 1994); Jacques Flamant, "Sotériologie et systèmes planétaires," in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'impero Romano*, eds. Ugo Bianchi and Maarten J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1982); Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 73–85; Roger Beck, "The Mithras Cult as Association," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 21 (1992): 5–6; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 340.

62 Claudianus, *De consulatu Stilichonis* 1.63. This text refers to the cult of Mithras but it could also be used, *mutatis mutandis*, for the cult of Isis.

63 *CIMRM* 823. Cf. also Martin, "The Anti-Individualistic Ideology," 128, 139.

He is now dressed in all the symbols that characterize the space of the goddess’ dominion, a fact that proves the relationship of their acquired kinship. In this way Lucius’ ritual appearance could in fact be equated with Isis’ theophany according to Apuleius who writes that “around the embroidered hem and on the surface of the (goddess’) cloak twinkling stars were scattered, and in their center a full moon was breathing, fiery flames.”⁶⁴

This system of symbols mentioned in the above two cases, i.e. in Lucius’ as well as in Isis’ appearance, can be deemed to be a “star-talk” that is understood not only by the initiate but also by all members of this cult. Finally, his full integration into the cultic community and amplification of his communication with its members take place during a common meal. These practices, along with the initiation, constitute tactics of “ritualized stabilization,”⁶⁵ through which his entrance to the “safe site” of the Isis cult is accomplished.

The astrological descriptions that are related to the “horotropic template of the Isis cult” could be considered, *mutatis mutandis*, equivalent to the cave of the Mithraic cult as an “image of the world.” Furthermore, what is created within the “liturgical environment” of those cults – which is equivalent to the material world – is the appropriate conditions for the creation of “a cognized environment,” according to Beck,⁶⁶ or “a ‘mental’ or ‘cognitive map’,” according to Martin.⁶⁷ As Martin argues, “these maps could be considered as ‘cognitive navigation’ and as such, have been largely accepted for humans as memory-related firings of hippocampal neuronal ensembles, even for highly abstracted representations of space, i.e., representations independent of sensory input.”

THE DISCOURSE OF “STAR-TALK” IN THE FESTIVE AND DAILY LIFE OF ISIS CULT DURING THE GRAECO-ROMAN AGE

The existence of “a cognized environment” within the cult of Isis during Graeco-Roman times may find application not only in the process of mystery rites but

64 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11.4: *per intextam extremitatem et in ipsa eius planitie stellae dispersae coruscabatur earum media semenstris luna flammeos spiribat ignes.* = Griffiths, *IB*, 72–75, 130–132. Cf. also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.3: *et ecce pelago medio venerandos diis etiam vultus attollens emergit divina facies; ac debinc paulatim toto corpore perlucidum simulacrum exculso pelago ante me constituisse visum est.* = Griffiths, *IB*, 72–73. See also Wilhelm Gundel, “Zodiakos,” *RE* X.A.19 (1972), 603–604; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 235 (whose translation we follow in the above mentioned text of Apuleius).

65 Martin, “The Ecology of Threat Detection,” 12.

66 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 141–148.

67 Martin, “The Ecology of Threat Detection,” 18, n. 15.

also in daily cultic life. The latter form of this cult is part of a rich ritual framework that completes the complex system of this cult with a number of feasts. This can be seen in textual and epigraphical testimonies as well as in archaeological monuments.

The elaborate ritual of the cult that takes place daily or at regular intervals can be integrated into the context “of an ability to apprehend a culture’s artefacts and structural activities.”⁶⁸ At the same time, this ability can be understood, according to Plutarch’s testimony, as a visual realization in the iconography (*eikonas*) as well as in their performative realization in the rituals (*mimēmata*) of this cult. So, as Beck so aptly suggests, “one might think of the central term *hyponoiai* (literally ‘underthoughts’) as the realization of the mysteries in the mode of cognition, just as their visual realization is the icon (*eikonas*) and their performative realization the ritual (*mimēmata*). The latter two are public representations, the former private representations of the thinking and experiencing mind.”⁶⁹ In this way, “[d]octrine, we might say, is that central term *hyponoia*, the ‘under-thought’ which is the realization of the mysteries in the mode of cognition, just as their visual realization is the icon and their performative realization the ritual.”⁷⁰

Participation in the rituals of the cult acquires meaning with an “assimilation of the believer to the holy symbols by habituation by re-cognition.”⁷¹ As Beck maintains, “[m]inds wander, and in the ritual context the acceptance of a set of conventions (‘let this be so’) is what matters, not belief (‘this really, really is so’), however strongly held. The sense of access to some alterative representation of space afforded by ritual is temporary, provisional, and intermittent. This is not intended as a religious statement about humanity’s limitations in approaching the divine. Rather, it is meant as a factual, verifiable statement about the experiencing of ritual. Neurocognitively, the altered mental of the participant in ritual is indeed intermittent and inchoate.”⁷² In this way, all these symbols would be made by “the ritual . . . ‘visible and actual’. And that is a matter of commitment to the symbols and what they symbolize.”⁷³

We should not of course forget that the overall structure of all those sanctuaries of the cult and especially their iconography is directly connected

68 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 136.

69 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 136. About “surmise” (ὑπονοῆσαι) see also, Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 99–101, 133–136.

70 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 62.

71 See Proclus, *In Platonis Republicam commentarii* 2.108.17–30: συνδιατίθεσθαι τοῖς ἱεροῖς συμβόλοις. Cf. Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 151, 237, where he says, citing Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 31: “[t]he most obvious lesson of recent cognitive work is that recall is not storage in reverse, and comprehension is not expression in reverse. Memory and communication transform information.”

72 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 151.

73 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 152.

to the existence of symbols through which the basic principles of the teachings are being imprinted, usually through a polysemical and a metaphorical way of thinking.⁷⁴ This is better understood when we take into consideration Beck’s position who mentions: “we should bear in mind that ‘doctrine’, formulated as a set of propositions, is sometimes just a proxy – a necessary scholar’s proxy – for describing what is apprehended by the initiates not as information imparted in propositional form, but in other modes altogether. Truly to comprehend the ‘meaning’ of the Mysteries was to experience them by sight, hearing, and action . . . and its ritual. Only thus would that extraordinary array of visual symbols ‘make sense’.”⁷⁵ All these can be considered to be a complete system of symbols, which constitute “a language of instruction” and a distribution of the basic teachings that impinge decisively on the way of thinking and living of the believers of this specific cult.⁷⁶

The sanctuary of Isis in Dion constitutes a characteristic example for the meaning of symbols.⁷⁷ This particular sanctuary is part of a complex of sanctuaries found in the eastern part of the archaeological site and near the river Daphiras. It holds a central position between the two nearby sanctuaries of Aphrodite Hypolympidia and Tyche, and, according to the testimonies found in the site (*in situ*) is dedicated to the cult of Isis Lochia. This sanctuary is a four column Ionian temple, built on a tall podium which seems to follow the usual architectural models of the goddess’ sanctuaries found throughout the Graeco-Roman world. We can compare this specific temple with, for example, the one found at the archaeological site of Pompei.⁷⁸

74 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 57–58, 99, 143, 151, 158, 163. For the use of “metaphor” see also Edward Slingerland, *What Science Offers to Humanities: Intergrating Body and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), *passim*.

75 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 62.

76 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 154–155. Cf. also Robert Turcan, “Feu et sang: À propos d’une relief mithriaque,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 130 (1986): 220.

77 *RICIS* 113/0219; *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 48 (1998), 788. See also Dimitrios Pandermalis, “Ein neues Heiligtum in Dion,” *Archäologische Anzeiger* 1982; Dimitrios Pandermalis, *Δίον: Η Ανακάλυψη* (Athens: Adam Publications, 1999), 89–117; Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos, “Macédonie,” *Bulletin épigraphique* (in *Revue des études grecques*) 112 (1999): 634; Robert A. Wild, “The Known Isis-Sarapis Sanctuaries of the Roman Period,” *ANRW* II.17.4 (1984): 1841–1842; Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, *Kulträume im römischen Alltag: Das Isisbuch des Apuleius und der Ort von Religion im kaiserzeitlichen Rom* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), 173, n. 348; Panayotis Pachis, “*Hominibus vagis vitam*: The Wandering of Homo Hellenisticus in an Age of Transformation,” in *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Equinox, 2008), 388–389.

78 About the temple of Isis in Pompei see Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 44–47, 71, 76–84; Wild, “The Known Isis-Sarapis Sanctuaries,” 1809–1810; [Anonymous], *Alla ricerca di Iside: analisi, studi e restauri*

At the forefront of this temple was a carved screen that portrays the goddess in a frontal pose that enhances her gallant and omnipotent figure. This carved screen dates back to the second century BCE. On the upper right of the carved screen we find the following inscription:

Σαράπιδι Ἴσιδι	To Sarapis, Isis
Ἀνούβιδι	and Anubis
Καλλίμαχος	Callimachus
καὶ Κλήτα [.]	and Clela [.]
χαριστήριον	for thanks-offering
τῆς πλανητέας	to the wandering (deity).

The element that makes both the inscription and the carved screen especially important is Isis' designation as *planetea*. This devotional adjective is an *hapax legomenon*, with respect to the Isis cult during the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*. The importance of this specific adjective is supported by the fact that it underlines the henotheistic yet syncretistic figure of the goddess as Isis – Luna (*vaga*).

In the beginning of the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius describes the prayer of Lucius – the protagonist – to the Moon. It is a supplication of a hero, who is in despair, to the Moon, by calling her by the names of all the fertility deities of the Mediterranean area.⁷⁹ The fertility deities are directly connected to the Moon, already since the early Neolithic era. The succession of the phases of the Moon (waxing and waning) could be connected to the everlasting cycle of life and death. It is possible that the writer, at this point in his account, follows the spirit of such ideas that dominated the Roman world, which reached their peak with the influence of the Stoic worldview.⁸⁰ After all, Apuleius is a clear-cut example of this cultural tradition, which he respects and follows.

dell'Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli (Roma: ARTI, 1992), 338–345; Nicole Blanc, Hélène Ersitove, and Myriam Fincker, “A fundamento restituit? Reflections dans le temple d’Isis a Pompei,” *Revue Archéologique* 2 (2000); De Caro, *Egittomania*, 86–119; Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 14–15, 205, 256, 304–308; Pachis, *Η λατρεία της Ισιδας και του Σάραπι*, 302–302, n. 2 (where relevant bibliography).

79 See about Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.2 = Griffiths, *IB*, 70–73, 114–123.

80 Henri Le Bonniec, *Le Culte de Cérès à Rome, des origines à la fin de la République* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1958), 192. See also Servius, *ad Vergilius Georgica* 1.5 = George Thilo and Hermann Hagen, eds. *Maurus Servius Honoratus: Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii Carmina commentarii* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1881), 201: [*Stoici*] *item, eandem Dianam, eandem Cererem, eandem Proserpinam dicunt.*

If we take into consideration the identification of Isis with the Moon,⁸¹ a matter known already since the time of Hecataeus of Abdera,⁸² then the above-mentioned connection becomes clear and is reinforced until Late Antiquity, when the goddess is transformed into an almighty cosmic deity.⁸³ In this way her almighty cosmic form is manifested, since with her decisive influence she adjusts the course not only of nature but also of the whole cosmic firmament. Isis’ majestic henotheistic form is stressed, a form that dominates the whole Graeco-Roman world already since the beginning of the imperial age. Her multi-faceted character contributes to her characterization as *myrionymos* in the imperial texts, as it becomes clear from the terminology that Apuleius uses in describing the goddess.⁸⁴

An expression of this multi-faceted character that Isis acquires during the Graeco-Roman age is her connection to Sirius, the constellation of Dog. This results in her worship as Isis-Sothis, according to contemporary testimonies. In the Egyptian tradition of the goddess’ cult, Isis is for the first time connected to this particular star, which is located near Orion; in Egypt the star is known as Sōthis, while in Greek it is known as *Seirios* (Sirius in Latin).⁸⁵ The Greeks also ascribe to this star the name *astrokyōn*, according to Horapollon, an Egyptian writer

81 About the connection of Isis with the Moon see Drexler, “Isis,” 437–438; Zimmermann, *Die ägyptische Religion*, 48; Schwenn, “Selene”; Cumont, *L’Égypte des astrologues*, 169, n. 2; Hopfner, *Plutarch II*, 197; Vandebek, *De interpretatio graeca*, 127–128; Griffiths, *PDIO*, 463; Griffiths, *IB*, 111–112, 114–115, 124–125, 130, 166; Grandjean, *Une nouvelle aréologie*, 58; Bricault, *Myrionymi*, 64–65; Sfameni Gasparro, “The Hellenistic Face of Isis,” 43, n. 11; Pachis, *Religion and Politics*, 181.

82 See about Diogenes Laertius, *De vita et moribus philosophorum* 1.10, 4–5 = *FHG II* 7 = Hopfner, *Fontes I*, 60: θεοὺς δ’ εἶνα ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην, τὸν μὲν Ὅσιριν, τὴν δ’ Ἴσιν καλουμένην. Cf. also *FHG II* 80 = Hopfner, *Fontes I*, 73.

83 See Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 52.372d = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 202, 500–501: τὴν δ’ Ἴσιν οὐχ ἑτέραν τῆς σελήνης ἀποφαίνοντες. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus 1.11.1 = Eusebius Caesarensis, *Preparatio Evangelica* 3, 2.6 (PG XXI, 161c–164bc) = Hopfner, *Fontes IV*, 477; Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 8 = Hopfner, *Fontes IV*, 520; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I.21.11–12 = Hopfner, *Fontes IV*, 598.

84 See about Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride*, 21.359cd = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 20–21; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 = Griffiths, *IB*, 74–77, 137–157. See also *RICIS* 309/0102, 515/1402 = *SIRIS* 639 = Michel Malaise, *Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiennes découvert en Italie* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1972), 17, no. 2 (Sublavo [Chiusa-Sabiona]); Michel Malaise, *Conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiennes en Italie* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1972), 90, 344; *RICIS* 602/0101, 603/1101; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “The Hellenistic Face of Isis.” Cf. Laurent Bricault, “Isis Myrionyme,” in *Hommages à J. Leclant III: Études Isiaques*, eds. Catherine Berger, Gisèle Clerc, and Nicolas Grima (Le Caire: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1994); Bricault, *Myrionymi*; Panagiota Sarischouli, *Πλουτάρχου Περί Ίσιδος και Οσίριδος. Ο Μύθος* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2011), 134–135, 258–261.

85 See about Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 61.375f = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 216–217, 521.

of the 5th century AD from Nicopolis of Egypt,⁸⁶ while the Romans also call it *Canicula*. According to astronomical measurements, this star can be seen in the sky between 17–19 of July. These ideas can be found in the age of the Middle Kingdom, during which the astral calendars are invented. In those calendars the “decans”⁸⁷ hold a dominant position and they are connected to the astral deities. These particular deities were rising and traveling in the sky for a period of ten days. Among them Sōthis (Sirius) holds an important position.

In the Pyramids Texts,⁸⁸ we find for the first time that the goddess acts decisively on the emergence of Sōthis.⁸⁹ Sources of Late Antiquity deem the star Sōthis as decan of the constellation of Cancer.⁹⁰ The appearance of Sōthis is the main

86 Horapollon, *Hieroglyphica* I.3 = Sbordone, *Hori Apollinis Hieroglyphica*, IV 577 = Hopfner, *Fontes* IV, 577. See also Timotheus (Rhodius), *Ad Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica* 22, 517 = Rudolph Merkel and Heinrich Keil, eds., *Apollonii Argonautica: scholia vetera e codice Laurentiano* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1854), 419 = Hopfner, *Fontes* I, 75: εἶναι δὲ τὸ ἄστρον οἱ μὲν [τοῦ] Ὠρίωνος κυνός, οἱ δὲ τῆς Ἡριγόνης, οἱ δὲ τοῦ Ἄλκυονέως, οἱ δὲ τῆς Ἴσιδος, οἱ δὲ Κεφάλου, οἱ δὲ κύριον, ὡς Τιμοσθένης φησὶν. 84.

87 See about Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 20, 36; Wilhelm Gundel, “Dekane,” *RE Supl.* VII (1940); Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), passim. See also Panagiota Sarischouli, “Fragment of an Anonymous Astrological Treatise: Another Apotelesmatikon,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 52 (2006), 194 (where relevant bibliography); Sarischouli, *Πλουτάρχου περί Ἴσιδος και Οσίριδος*, 260; Beck, *Ancient Astrology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 68, 88; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C.H.Beck, 2007), 72–74, 75–76, 116, 176, 312; Joseph-Henriette Abry, “Les diptyches de Grand: noms et images des décans,” in *Les tablettes astrologiques de Grand (Vosges) et l’astrologie en Gaule romaine. Actes de la table-ronde du 18 mars 1992*, eds. Joseph-Henriette Abry and André Buisson (Paris: De Boccard, 1993); Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “Le gemme magiche come oggetto d’indagine storico-religiosa,” in *Bolletino di Numismatica. Sylloge Gemmarum Gnosticarum I*, ed. Attilio Mastrocino (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello Stato and Libreria dello Stato, 2003), 41–43; Maria G. Lancellotti, “Le gemme e l’astrologia,” in *Bolletino di Numismatica. Sylloge Gemmarum Gnosticarum I*, ed. Attilio Mastrocino (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato and Libreria dello Stato, 2003), 115–124; Ennio Sanzi, “Magia e Culti orientali X. Osservazioni storico-religiose su alcune testimonianze in lingua copta relative ad iside, Sarapide, agli dei *synnaoi* ed Alla magia,” in *Bibliotheca Isiaca II*, eds. Laurent Bricault and Richard Veymiers (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2011), 233.

88 *Pyramid Texts* §632 = Kurt Sethe, *Die altägyptische Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums I* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), 341; Sarischouli, *Πλουτάρχου περί Ἴσιδος και Οσίριδος*, 84.

89 See about Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 22.359e, 61.376a = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 150–153, 216–217, 521.

90 See Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri* 4.22.11; Hephaestio (Astrologus Thebanus), *Apotelesmatica* 1.69 = David Pingree, ed. *Hephaestionis Thebani libri tres I* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1973) 11.

cause for the beginning of the annual Nile floods, according to ideas in Memphis already since the age of the 1st Dynasty.⁹¹ In some texts coming from Entfou, Dendera and Assuan, Isis is addressed as “the heavenly Sōthis that causes Nile’s tide in the first day of the year.” The first day of the month Thoth (19th July) is distinct for its sacredness and it is considered to be the New Year’s Day for the Egyptians.⁹² The connection of the river’s flooding with the beginning of the New Year declares a fact of cosmogonic significance. The same ideas prevail during the reign of the Ptolemaic dynasty.⁹³

The Isis-Sōthis cult acquires wide popularity throughout the Roman Empire, especially during the Imperial Age.⁹⁴ The Isis-Sōthis relationship to the star of Sirius could be deemed as a kind of “catasterism.”⁹⁵ As proof, we can mention her depictions on coins and amulets dated from this period, as well as the central depiction of the goddess’ drum in Rome’s Campus Martius.⁹⁶ A carved representation (end of 2nd century AD) coming from the area Savaria in Pannonia

91 The Nile is part of Nun, i.e. of the primordial ocean. The Nile’s tide is the par excellence present of the goddess because it creates the ideal conditions for the growth of grains. *Pyramid Texts* §632 = Kurt Sethe, *Die altägyptische Pyramidentexte*, 341.

92 Porphyrius (*De antro nympharum* 24 [Nauck 72 = Arethusa 22–24]) informs us regarding this important fact of the Egyptian country as follows: Αἰγυπτίοις δὲ ἀρχὴ ἔτους οὐχ ὁ ὕδροχόος, ὡς Ῥωμαίοις, ἀλλὰ καρκίνος. πρὸς γὰρ τῷ καρκίνῳ ἡ Σῶθις, ἦν κυνὸς ἀστέρα Ἑλληνες φασί. νομηνία δ’ αὐτοῖς ἡ Σῶθεως ἀνατολή γενέσεως κατάρχουσα τῆς εἰς τὸν κόσμον. See also Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 22.11–14 [Nauck 71 = Arethusa 22]: καὶ ἔχουσι γε ἐφεξῆς αἱ θέσεις τῶν ζῳδίων. ἀπὸ μὲν καρκίνου εἰς αἰγόκερων ... Σελήνης (sc. οἶκον) λοιπὸν καρκίνον.

93 Decisive role for the final identification of Isis with this particular constellation plays Ptolemy III and his wife Berenice. In the Decree of Kanopos, enacted by Ptolemy and Berenice, this constellation is characterized as the “Isis’ star.” Pachis, *Ἴσις Καρποτόκος*, 204–205, n. 78 (where relevant bibliography), 280, n. 83–84.

94 About Isis-Sōthis see also Gisèle Clerc, “Isis-Sothis dans le monde romaine,” in *Hommages à M. J. Vermaseren I*, eds. Margreet B. de Boer and T. A. Edridge (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1978); Vincent Tram tan Tinh, “Isis,” *LIMC* V.1 (1990): 787, no. 320–331, and *LIMC* V.2 (1990): 523–524, fig. 321–325a; Pachis, *Ἴσις Καρποτόκος*, 336; Pachis, *Ἡ λατρεία τῆς Ἴσιδας*, 65 (where relevant bibliography), 334, 360–361.

95 About *catasterism* see Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion*, 46–50, 65–68, 78, 84–86, 97, 99, 107; Karl Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie* (München: C.H.Beck, 1926); Peter Green, *From Alexander to Actium: The Hellenistic Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 595–597, 631, 635, 639, 641–642, 645; Anthony A. Long, *Ἡ Ἑλληνιστικὴ Φιλοσοφία. Στωϊκοί, Ἐπικουρείοι, Σκεπτικοί* (Athens: M.I.E.T., 1997), 344–347; Pachis, *Ἴσις Καρποτόκος*, 279, 292; Katharina Volk, *Manilius and His Intellectual Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), *passim*.

96 See about Gisèle Clerc, “Isis-Sothis,” 255; Tram tan Tinh, “Isis,” *LIMC* V.1 (1990): 787, no. 328; Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 587, fig. 111.

(Hungary) indicates the dissemination of Isis-Sothis cult in the northern districts of the Roman Empire.⁹⁷ This is also, well documented by the hymn to the goddess that comes from the area of Oxyrhynchus, where we read: κυρία Ἴσι, μεγίστη θεῶν, πρῶτον ὄνομα Ἰοῖ Σῶθι.⁹⁸

In the Aretalogies of Diodorus Siculus,⁹⁹ of Ios, Kyme, Thessaloniki (1st century AD), Cassandrea (Nea Potidea, Chalkidiki) (2nd century AD), Telmessos (Lycia, Asia Minor), the goddess declares “I am (i.e. Isis) she who rises in the Dog Star.”¹⁰⁰ The use of the term *epiteleisthai* (i. e. rise of a star), according to the Aretalogies’s texts, is another concrete reference to Isis’ connection to the emergence of the star. It should be noted here that the terms *epiteleisthai* and *epitolē* (rising of a star) belong to the special terminology used by the writers of this period in order to declare the rising of the stars in the heavens.¹⁰¹ The goddess’ connection to this terminology and especially in the context of one of her Aretalogies, can constitute one further proof for her very important role in determining the year; which also implies her omnipotent imposition onto Destiny/Fate.¹⁰²

97 See about Vilmos Wessetzky, *Die ägyptischen Kulte zur Römerzeit in Ungarn* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 32–34; Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 588, fig. 112; Tram tan Tinh “Isis,” *LIMC* V.1 (1990): 787, no. 322.

98 See about *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380,8–10 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 196, 203–204 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 69, no 20.

99 Diodorus Siculus 1.27: ἐγὼ εἰμι ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄστρῳ τῷ ἐν τῷ κυνὶ ἐπιτέλλουσα.

100 (...) ἐγὼ εἰμι ἢ ἐν τῷ τοῦ Κυνοῦς ἄστρῳ ἐπιτέλλουσα. See about *RICIS*, 302/0204; *RICIS*, 113/054 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, no. 1, v. 2; Bricault, *Bibliotheca isiacca* I, 105–107, no. 113/201; *RICIS* 306/0201. Cf. also the Aretalogy of Andros (1st century AD), *RICIS* 202/1801 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 5, no. 2, v. 6, where Isis declares: Ἀστροφόρος λάμπω συ[ν]ο[μ]ό[δ]ο[ρο]μος ἐν Κυνοῦς κύκλωις.

101 See about Hesiodus, *Opera et dies* 383, 567; Euripides, *Phoenissae* 1116; Ptolemaeus, *Almagest* 8,4; Hippocrates, *Aër* 2; Theophrastus, *De causis planetarum* 2.19.4; Aristoteles, *Historia animalium* 602a26; Geminus, *Introductio ad Phaenomena* 13.3 = James Evans and J. Berggren, eds. *Geminus’s “Introduction to the Phenomena”: A Translation and Study of a Hellenistic Survey of Astronomy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 200–201. See also Tim Hegedus, “The Magi and the Star in the Gospel of Matthew and Early Christian Tradition,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59 (2003), 83.

102 About Isis connection with Fate see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.15 = Griffiths, *IB*, 240–256. See also Gertrud Herzog-Hauser, “Tyche,” *RE* VII.A.2 (1948): 1643–1689; Iiro Kajanto, “Fortuna,” *ANRW* II.17.1 (1972); Martin P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion II: Die hellenistische und römische Zeit* (München: C.H.Beck, 1974), 200–210; Luther H. Martin, “Fortuna,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995); Luther H. Martin, “Tyche,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995); Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “Daimon and Tychê in the Hellenistic Experience,” in *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks*, eds. Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen,

The identification of Isis-Sothis with Sirius, as (Pseudo) Eratosthenes (3rd century BC) informs us, contributes to the identification of the goddess with the constellation of Virgo during the Graeco-Roman era.¹⁰³ We should keep in mind that this identification is related to the beginning of the New Year and Sirius’ consideration as the first decan of Cancer.¹⁰⁴ This particular identification of Isis with Sirius is implied on representations of the goddess, such as in that in the Dion relief, on which we find her holding wheat. This symbol implies the fruits of the earth

and Lise Hannestad (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997); Sfameni Gaparro, “The Hellenistic Face of Isis,” 52, 57; Pachis, *Τσις Καρποτόκος*, 22, 56–57, 317–324, 336, 348. See also Isis’ epithet, Ἰσιτύχη in *RICIS* 113/0216, 114/1902, 501/0139, 504/0216; *RICIS* 515/1001 = *SIRIS*, 634. Vladislav Vidman, *Isis und Sarapis bei den Griechen und Römern* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970), 98; Françoise Dunand, *Le culte d’Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1973), I.92, n. 3, I.93, II.57, II.78, II.81 and n. 7, II.142 and n. 3, II.179, II.206, III.16–17, III.102, III.104, III.271–272 and n. 2, III. 334 and n. 1; Malaise, *Inventaire Préliminaire*, 16, no. I (MAMMA); 17,1 ; 28, no. II.4; 95, no. I.1 (PRAENESTE [Palestrina]); Michel Malaise, *Pour une terminologie et une analyse des cultes isiaques* (Bruxelles: Academie Royale de Belgique, 2005), 143–144, 147, 168, 175–176, 186, 214; Turcan, “Isis gréco-romaine,” 77. See also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.12 and 15 = Griffiths, *IB*, 233,241–244. Regarding the representations of Isis as *Fortuna* see also Tram tan Tinh, “Isis,” *LIMC* V.1 (1990): 784–786, no. 303–318, and *LIMC* V.2 (1990): 520– 523, fig. 303–319a; Malaise, *Inventaire Préliminaire*, 7–8, no. 6, 17, no. 1, 28, no. 4, 33, no. 9–10, 34–35, no. 2–6, 40, no. 2, 255, 10bis, and 10ter, 273; pl. 39; Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 573–576, figs. 95–98; Arslan, *Iside*, 113–114, figs. III 30–32, 265–269, figs. IV 293–299, 441, fig.V 67, 442, fig. V 68, 446, fig. V 76, 489, fig. V 147, 499, fig. V 182, 553, fig. VI 4, 584, fig. VI 47. De Caro, *Egittomania*, 127, fig. II 86, 176, figs. III 28 and 30; 177, fig. III 31, 180, fig. III 40, 185, fig. III 51; Pachis, *Religion and Politics*, 191–193, 262–268, Luca Graverini, “*Prudentia* and *Providentia*, Book XI in Context,” in *Aspects of Apuleius Golden Ass III: The Isis Book. A Collection of Original Papers*, eds. Wytse H. Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2012); Friedmann Drews, “ASINUS PHILOSHOPHANS: Allegory’s Fate and Isis’ Providence,” in *Aspects of Apuleius Golden Ass III: The Isis Book*, eds. Wytse H. Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2012).

103 (Pseudo)Eratosthenes in his work *Catasterismoi* I.9–12, informs: οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτήν (sc. τὴν Παρθένον) φασὶν εἶναι Δήμητρα διὰ τὸ ἔχειν στάχυν, οἱ δὲ Ἴσιν, οἱ δὲ Ἀτάργατιν, οἱ δὲ Τύχην. Cf. Franz Boll, *Sphaera: Neue Griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), 209; John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 215; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 237–238.

104 (Pseudo) Eratosthenes in his work *Catasterismoi* (1.4.24) says: τῷ μὲν πρώτῳ δεκανῶ παρανατέλλουσι (paranatelley) θεὰ τις ἐπὶ θρόνου καθεζομένη καὶ τρέφουσα παιδίον, ἦν τινες λέγουσι τὴν ἐν ἀτρίῳ θεὰν Ἴσιν τρέφουσαν Ὠρον. See also Boll, *Sphaera*, 210; Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis*, 109–110; Bouché-Leclercq, *L’Astrologie grecque* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1899), 226. Cf. Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 237, n. 57.

and, at the same time, constitutes one of the most distinct characteristic symbols of Virgo, since wheat (*spica*) is the brightest star of this constellation.¹⁰⁵ This fact reinforces the idea regarding the polysemy of the symbols in her iconography and is of decisive importance for the formation of both the overall way of thinking and the devotional life of the people. After all, we should not forget the various representations of the goddess as *Isis lactans*, in which a star is located above the goddess' head, while her son Horus holds wheat.¹⁰⁶

All the above-mentioned elements are of great importance for the overall spirit of this era. "Star-talk" is becoming a frame of reference, through which the people shape, by a symbolic polyvalence, both the monuments and the performances of this time, but also their overall way of thinking and their religious expression.¹⁰⁷ A characteristic example of this case could be the presence of an iconographical element in the representation of Isis at Dion, namely her hat (*petassos*) which Isis wears as the *planetea* goddess. In addition, her hat may represent the heavenly firmament, in which she enforces her omnipotence.¹⁰⁸ This position may be further amplified if we take into account the representation of Isis as the Moon and the Sun who emerges from the heavenly dome. This particular moment of the Sun's emergence could be associated to the term *epiteleisthai* and *epitole* (i.e. rising of a star) that we find in the Aretalogy of Isis from Kyme and Thessaloniki.¹⁰⁹ This element can amplify the integration of the representation from Dion within the context of concepts relevant to the horoscope of the particular period. This view is supported if we take into account Beck's argument, that the "horoscope is a determination (a) of the positions of each of the planets (Sun and Moon included), both in celestial longitude (i.e. zodiacal sign and degree

105 See (Pseudo) Eratosthenes in his work *Catasterismoi* 1.4.24: παρανατέλλουσι δὲ καὶ Στάχυς. Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 237, 244.

106 Boll, *Sphaera*, 211; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 237. About *Isis lactans* see Vincent Tram tan Tinh and Yvette Labrecque, *Isis lactans: Corpus ses monuments greco-romains d'Isis allaitant Harpocrate* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1973); Vincent Tram tan Tinh, "Du nouveau Isis lactans," in *Hommages à M. J. Vermaseren III*, eds. Margreet B. de Boer and T. A. Edridge (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1978); Tram tan Tinh, "Isis," LIMC V.1 (1990): 777–779, no. 211–248; LIMC V.2 (1990): 514–516, no. 216–248; Hans W. Müller, "Isis mit dem Horuskinde," *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 14 (1963).

107 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 162.

108 See about Turcan, "Isis gréco-romaine."

109 Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 2, no. 1. See also *Geoponica* I.8.1–2, according to Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque II: Les Textes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1938), 179: ἡ τοῦ Κυνὸς ἐπιτολή γίνεται διαφανούσης εικοστῆς τοῦ Ἰουλίου μηνός. χρῆ δὲ παρατηρεῖν, ἐν ποίῳ οἴκῳ οὔσης τῆς σελήνης ἢ τούτου γίνεται ἀνατολή. ἐν Λέοντι οὔσης τῆς σελήνης, ἐὰν ἀνατολή γένηται τοῦ Κυνός, σίτου φορὰ πολλή καὶ ἐλαίου καὶ οἴνου ἔσται καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων εὐωνία. Cf. also Beck, *Ancient Astrology*, 11, 110; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 254–256.

of sign) and relative to the local horizon, at a particular moment in (quotidian) time; and (b) of the longitudes (as above) of the points of the ecliptic then (i) rising, (ii) culminating, (iii) setting, (iv) at ‘lower culmination’.”¹¹⁰ In this way the simultaneous depiction of the Moon and of the Sun in the Dion relief could imply their meeting on the cusp of Cancer and Leo at the northern point of the sky.¹¹¹ This can be confirmed by Porphyrius who wrote that “Numenius and his pupil Cronius assert that there are two extremities in the heavens: the winter tropic than which nothing is more southern, and the summer tropic than which nothing is more northern. The summer tropic is in Cancer... since Cancer happens to be closest to us upon earth, it has, with good reason, been assigned to the Moon, which is nearest to the earth,”¹¹² who also mentions that “from Cancer to Capricorn we have first of all, which is the house of Leo.”¹¹³

The cusp of Cancer and Leo is a cardinal point in “star-talk” during the Graeco-Roman age. The interpretation of the emergence of the constellation of Dog in the firmament is considered to be one of the most important indexes of seasonal and astronomical time. This is the reason it is directly related to the beginning of the New Year (or, more particularly, of theso-called Sothiac year).¹¹⁴ This fact is confirmed by Porphyrius who writes that: “[b]ut for the Egyptians the beginning of the year is not Aquarius as it is for the Romans, but Cancer. For near Cancer is Sothis, which the Greeks call the dog star. And for them, the tendency of Sothis, which makes a beginning of genesis to the Cosmos, is the New Year.”¹¹⁵ According to Manilius, this declares the Moon’s position (in what “house”) at the moment of Sirius’ emergence.¹¹⁶ This always depends on the

110 Beck, “*Divino quadam stellarum consortio coniunctum*,” 88.

111 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 218, 254–255.

112 Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 21.5 (Nauck 71 = Arethusa 22): Νουμήμιος καὶ ὁ τοῦτου ἐταῖρος Κρόνιος δύο εἶναι ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄκρα, ὧν οὔτε νοτιώτερον ἐστὶ τοῦ χειμερινοῦ τροπικοῦ οὔτε βορειότερον τοῦ θερινοῦ. ἐστὶ δ’ ὁ μὲν θερινὸς κατὰ καρκίνον, ὁ δὲ χειμερινὸς κατ’ αἰγόκερων. καὶ προσγειότατος μὲν ὦν ἡμῖν ὁ καρκίνος εὐλόγως τῇ προσγειοτάτῃ Σελήνῃ ἀπεδόθη. See also Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 42, n. 91, 93; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 86.

113 Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 22 (Nauck 71 = Arethusa 22): ἀπὸ μὲν καρκίνου εἰς αἰγόκερων. πρῶτα μὲν λέοντα οἶκον Ἡλίου.

114 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 254–255.

115 Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 24 (Nauck 72 = Arethusa 22–24): Αἰγυπτίους δὲ ἀρχὴ ἔτους οὐχ ὁ ὑδροχόος ὡς Ῥωμαίοις, ἀλλὰ καρκίνος. πρὸς γὰρ τῷ καρκίνῳ ἡ Σῶθις, ἣν κυνὸς ἀστέρᾳ Ἕλληνας φασί. νουμημία δ’ αὐτοῖς ἡ Σῶθις ἀνατολῆ, γενέσεως κατάρχουσα τῆς εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

116 Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.403: *qua nullum terris contenta Canicula cursu, qua nullum Terris violentius advenit astrum nec gravius cedit. Nunc horrida frigore surgit, nunc vacuum soli fulgentem deserit orbem: sic in utrumque movet mundum et contraria reddit.* About Manilius and his thought in context of his intellectual background see George P. Goold, ed. and trans.

observer's latitude.¹¹⁷ The peak of the star's appearance coincides with the first days of August, when it can be seen in all *klimata*.¹¹⁸

The presence of the Sun however, can be of great importance with decisive consequences for the people. After all, each symbol that we find in the domain of the devotional world, as well as in the everyday life, is always surrounded by manifold interpretations. Hence, the position of the Sun-Sarapis at the highest point of the goddess' head can also be connected to the period of the year that is characterized as *hopōra* (late July – early September). It is for this reason that Sirius is characterized as the star of *hopōras*, which is associated with the dominion of its creative powers on earth.¹¹⁹ In the calendar of the agricultural areas of the ancient world, this period coincides with the Sun's entrance in the constellation of Leo and the appearance of Sirius, which constitutes one of the *paranatellonta* of Leo.¹²⁰ It is for this reason that, according to the prevailing "star-talk" of the Graeco-Roman period, their emergence is closely associated. Manilius mentions that Sirius is closely associated with the high temperatures of summer, when the star makes its appearance.¹²¹ During this period rising of the Nile's level is being observed and, thus, the star is deemed forerunner of the river's flood, and it is for this reason that Plutarch calls the star "*hydragōgos*."¹²² It should not escape our

Manilius: Astronomica (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Volk, *Manilius and His Intellectual Background*. Cf. also Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 252, n. 18.

117 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 255.

118 Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 78, n. 187; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 253; *Klimata*, according to Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 78, n. 187, are: "astronomically...latitudes; hence, in the symbolic context of the mithraeum, stations from north to south – perhaps from the miming of a progress from the gate of descent in Cancer at the universe's far north to the gate of ascent in Capricorn at the south." See also Beck, *Ancient Astrology*, 31–33, 104–107, 139, 147; von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie*, 95, 179.

119 See about Homer, *Ilias* 22.27. Homer, *Odyssea*, 11.192. Xenophon, *Historia Graeca (Hellenica)* 3.2.10. Aristophanes, *Aves* 709. Herodotus, 4.109.

120 According to Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 20, n. 46, "[t]he paranatellonta are those constellations which lie to the north or south of the zodiac ... and which 'rise alongside' the signs of the zodiac. They are hence, in a sense, surrogates of the zodiac signs or constellations." About the "southern paranatellonta to the summer quadrant of the zodiac," see Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 197, fig. 7. See also Aratus, *Phaenomena* 559–732; Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.32–709; Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 20, 22, 28, 40, n. 84; Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 161, 197, 203, 255–256.

121 Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.396–400 = Goold, *Manilius: Astronomica*, 34–36.

122 See Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride*, 38.366e = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 176–177, 444–445: τῶν δὲ ἄστρων τὸν σείριον Ὀσίριδος νομίζουσιν ὑδραγωγὸν ὄντα καὶ τὸν λέοντα τιμῶσι καὶ χάσμασι λεοντείσι τὰ τῶν ἱερῶν θυρώματα κοσμοῦσιν, ὅτι πλημμυρεῖ Νεῖλος ὡς δὲ Νεῖλον Ὀσίριδος ἀπορροῆν, οὕτως Ἴσιδος σῶμα γῆν ἔχουσι καὶ νομίζουσιν οὐ πᾶσαν, ἀλλ' ἥς ὁ Νεῖλος ἐπιβαίνει σπερμαίνων καὶ μινύμενος.

notice that, as the same author mentions, Sirius is one of the adjectives that characterize the Sun and in many cases it is identified with Osiris.¹²³ After all, the representation of the Sun is one more symbol that declares the beginning of the Nile flooding, which is usually depicted along with a lion and a star, as the sun enters the constellation of Leo during this period.¹²⁴

It is the position held by the “all-seeing” Sun in the entire cosmic firmament with beneficent results for the people’s lives. Its presence is justified, in this case, by the identification with Osiris and, later, with Sarapis, who after all constitutes one of the most honored deities in the Dion relief. The interrelation between Sarapis and the Sun is one of the most dominant concepts of this period, which acquires great popularity especially during the Late Antiquity. This feature of the Sun is another loan from Osiris, whom Sarapis succeeds during the dissemination of the Egyptian deities’ cults in the Graeco-Roman world. It is in this capacity that he affects the fructification of the whole nature. The beneficent effect of the Sun’s vivifying rays is of great importance for the smooth growth of the crops.¹²⁵ They lead to the success of the annual harvest by making the fields full of mature fruit that constitute the *par excellence* example of the dominion of powers of life and harmony. This period coincides with the summer’s peak, during which the harvest has been concluded and the fruits have been accumulated in the warehouses. The results of the divine donation and blessing are now obvious to people, a fact that fills them with joy and strength to continue the hard struggle for their everyday survival.

In one of the representations on the floor of the mithraeum of Felicissimus in Ostia, Italy,¹²⁶ which is related to the Mithraic hierarchic grade of Leo, we see the depiction of a sistrum, a necessary component of the liturgical equipment

123 Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 52.372d = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 202–203, 500: εἰσι γὰρ οἱ τὸν Ὅσιριν ἄντικρυς ἥλιον εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι Σείριον ὑφ’ Ἑλλήνων λέγοντες.

124 Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 38.366a = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 176–177, 444–445, mentions: ὅτι πλημμυρεῖ ὁ Νεῖλος ἡελίου τὰ πρῶτα συνερχομένοιο λέοντι. Plutarchus also mentions in another work (*Quaestiones convivales* 5.670C) that: ὅτι Νεῖλος ἐπάγει νέον ὕδωρ ταῖς Αἰγυπτίων ἀρούραις ἡλίου τὸν λέοντα παροδεύοντος. Cf. also Aratus, *Phaenomena* 151. See also Roger Beck, “In the Place of the Lion: Mithras in the tauroctony,” in *Studies in Mithraism*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Roma: «L’Erma» di Bretschneider, 1994); Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 214–216.

125 Diodorus Siculus 1.11.5 refers to the role of Isis and Osiris over the seasons and nature. See also Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 245, n. 123. Cf. also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 = Griffiths, *IB*, 74–75, 140–141: *natura parens*; and Proclus, *Commentary on Timaeus* 21e = Diehl, ed. *Procli Diadochi Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 1.98: ὄν καρπὸν ἔτεκον, ἥλιος ἐγένετο.

126 See about CIMRM 299; Giovanni Becatti, ed. *Scavi di Ostia II: I Mitrei* (Roma: La Libreria dello Stato, 1954), 107, fig. 22; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein/Ts.: Hain, 1984), 295, fig. 38.

of Isis priesthood.¹²⁷ Therefore, the presence of the sistrum in the context of this specific Mithraic grade is not without reason. According to the astrological ideas that hold a very important position in the Mithraic cult, the day of this star's emergence is characterized as the "Day of Leo" and constitutes the most important celebration of Mithraism, since it is on this day that the tauroctony is taking place, the most important and salvific event of the cult. After all, the grade of Leo, which is characterized by his fiery nature, is connected with the solar character of Mithras and with the act of tauroctony, which has salvific results for the whole nature and for the people and their lives.¹²⁸

The appearance of Sirius, according to the prevailing astrological ideas of this period, constitutes evidence for the restoration of regularity from the irregularity in the overall cosmic rhythm.¹²⁹ This process allows us to understand the importance of Dion relief and of the overall space of the goddess' sanctuary for the believers of this cult. The beginning of Nile's flooding, which is connected to the prevalence of fertility and harmony as the dominant element in contrast to drought and chaos, is implied. All these constitute symbolic signs in the integration of this particular sanctuary, as well as of the overall chronotropic template of Isis cult in the context of a special cosmic space/time.

Returning to the space of the central sanctuary of Isis at Dion it is worth mentioning some more elements that are directly connected to the devotional life of Isis' devotees, as well as of the other Egyptian deities. The findings from this area and mainly the epigraphical testimonies show the special importance of their cult in this area. Of course, in order to understand some elements of the liturgical life of the cult in this city of Macedonia, we should mention that in front of the altar, which is situated in the frontal part of the sanctuary (*sub divo*), a corridor (*dromos*) is created that represents the Nile. The symbolic importance of the river Daphiras in Dion implies the significance of the Nile and its flooding in the cult of the goddess. They are signs of the victory of the powers of life

127 Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 63.376cd = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 218–219, 525–527: ἐμφαίνει καὶ τὸ σεῖστρον, ὅτι σεῖσθαι δεῖ τὰ ὄντα καὶ μηδέποτε παύεσθαι φορᾶς, ἀλλ' οἶον ἐξεγείρεσθαι καὶ κλονεῖσθαι καταδαρθάνοντα καὶ μαραινόμενα. Τὸν γὰρ Τυφῶνα φασὶ τοῖς σεῖστροις ἀποτρέπειν καὶ ἀποκρούεσθαι δηλοῦντες, ὅτι τῆς φθορᾶς συνδεούσης καὶ ἰστάσης αἰθῆς ἀναλύει τὴν φύσιν καὶ ἀνίστησι διὰ τῆς κινήσεως ἢ γένεσις. We find an analogous image in Apuleius' narration (*Metamorphoses* 11.6 = Griffiths, *IB*, 76–77) according to which Isis warns Lucius as follows: *Nam meo monitu sacerdos in ipso procinctu pompae roseam manu dextera sistro cibaerentem gestabit coronam. Incunctanter ergo dimotis turbulis alacer continuare pompam mea volentia fretus et de proximo clementer velut manum sacerdotis osculabundus rosis decerptis pessimae mihique iam dudum detestabilis beluae istius corio te protinus exue.* See also Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 262.

128 Beck, "In the Place of the Lion;" Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 214, 216, 254–255.

129 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 254, n. 21.

and harmony against those associated with drought and disorder. This is confirmed by the various findings that are associated with the measuring of the river’s level, as well as counting the number of the underground crypts that are located within the goddess’ sanctuaries.¹³⁰ Its importance, in this case, is further reinforced by the location of the sanctuary, which is placed by the river Daphiras. The priests of the cult took advantage of the natural environment of this sanctuary and managed to bring the water of the river, through plumbing installations, into this area as well as into water-tanks (*perirrhanteria*) that are situated in the areas of the sanctuaries dedicated to Isis-Tyche and Aphrodite. Thus, every time the climatic conditions allowed it, the water level of “dromos”-Nile could rise. Archaeologists who study this part of the sanctuary believe that the river’s level exceeded, in these cases, the height of the altar.

It is well known that the Nile had great importance for both the economic and the religious life of Egypt. The Nile was identified with Osiris and, later, with Sarapis, who were considered to be a “source of life.” The connection of Osiris (Nile) with Isis (earth), being accomplished exactly when the flood occurs, gains great importance because it is the only way for the creation of “new life.” This is particularly significant for the teaching of this cult in the local environment of Egypt, as well as in the ecumenical environment of the Graeco-Roman world. The floods occurred during the summer and constituted a period of feasts in honor of the god, as well as of great joy and happiness for the people.¹³¹ In this way, the appropriate conditions are created for the generation of feelings of security, since this vital element was a constant guarantee for the earth’s fertility and the well-being of people. This happens because the Nile’s floods constituted the most explicit expression of Osiris’ imposition on the powers of drought and death, leading to the creation of life.

130 About the crypts see Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship*, 34–54, 72–76, 83–84, 86, 134–135, 154–155, 190–206, 214–219, 276–280; Panayotis Pachis, *Το νερό και το αίμα στις μυστηριακές λατρείες της ελληνορωμαϊκής εποχής* (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1988), 38–44; Kathrin Kleibl, “Water-Crypts in Sanctuaries of Graeco-Egyptian Deities,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists (31 August – 2 September 2006, Budapest)*, eds. Kata Endreffy and András Gulyás (Budapest: Universit  E tv s Lor nd, 2007); Caitlin E. Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos: A Study in Hellenistic Religion* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2011), 131–135.

131 This is better understood particularly when we take into consideration Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 39.366f = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 448–453) who mentions that the discovery of Osiris (Nile) by Isis brings joy to all people in Egypt. Cf. also Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 2.9 = Robert Turcan, *Firmicus Maternus, L’erreur des religions pa ennes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 80, 81, 188: *et cum veram viam salutis inveneris gaude et tunc erecta sermone libera procama: ε ρηκαμεν συγχ ιρωμεν, cum ab his calamitatibus post paenitentiam tuam summi dei fueris indulgentia liberatus*. See also Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 157–158.

Isis connection with earth fertility conduces to her identification as the “main source of life and blissfulness” for the whole mankind.¹³² In this context Apuleius characterizes her as *omnipotens rerum parens*,¹³³ as she is represented holding the horn of abundance, a symbol that brings her closer to earthly fertility and the affluence coming from the Nile’s flood. Her omnipotence ability could be understood if we take into consideration the text of the Papyrus of Oxyrhynchus, where Isis “allows the Nile to rise and flood the whole country (i.e. Egypt).”¹³⁴ Therefore, the usage of the term *anagō*, according to the text of this hymn, declares the goddess’ ability to restore the river’s flood, which Plutarch associates with the Egyptian myth, by saying that the word *kyōn* is connected to birth: “the power in charge of the earth is called Sirius by some, and by others, in Egyptian, Sothis. It (Sothis) means pregnancy (*kyēsisi*) or to be pregnant (*kyein*); and so, with a modification of the word, the star which they regard as peculiar to Isis is called dog (*kyōn*) in Greek.”¹³⁵

We read in the references that come from the text of the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus (early 2nd AD) that the city of Boubastis is considered to be the center of worship and the place where the ritual takes place on this particular day, which denotes the beginning of the New Year.¹³⁶ The connection of Isis with nature and the seasonal cycle, according to the text of the above Hymn, shows her absolute domination

132 See Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 9.9: πρὸς δὲ τοὺς μύστας Ἴσιν τὴν γῆν καὶ Ὅσιριν τὸν Νεῖλον καταγγέλλουσι, τὰ πράγματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι μεταλαμβάνοντες ποθεῖ γοῦν ἀπόντα ἢ θεὸς καὶ χαίρει συνόντι; *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 183–186 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 199, 219 = Totti *Ausgewählte Texte*, 71, no. 20: σὺ πάντων ὑγρῶν καὶ ξηρῶν, <θερμῶν> καὶ ψ[υχ]ρῶν. ἐξ ὧν ἅπαντα συνέστηκεν, εὐρέτρια π[ά]ντων ἐγενήθης. Cf. also Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines*, 199–201.

133 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 = Griffiths, *IB*, 74–75, 140–141.

134 *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 125–126 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 198, 217 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 68, no. 20: τὸν Νῆλον (sic!) ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χώραν ἐπανάγουσα.

135 Plutarchus, *De Iside et Osiride* 61.375f–61.376a = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 216–217, 521: τὴν μὲν γῆν οἱ μὲν Σείριον οἱ δὲ Σῶθιν Αἰγυπτιστί. σημαίνει δὲ κύησιν ἢ τὸ κύειν. διὸ καὶ παρατροπῆς γενομένης τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἑλληνιστί κύων κέκληται τὸ ἄστρον, ὅπερ ἴδιον τῆς Ἴσιδος νομίζουσιν. See also Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum* 24 (Nauck 72 = Arethusa 22–24): Αἰγυπτίους δὲ ἀρχὴ ἔτους οὐχ ὑδροχόος, ὡς Ῥωμαίοις, ἀλλὰ καρκίνος. πρὸς γὰρ τῷ καρκίνῳ ἢ Σῶθις, ἦν κυνὸς ἀστέρα Ἑλληνες φασί. Νομηνία δ’ αὐτοῖς ἢ Σώθεως ἀνατολή, γενέσεως κατάρχουσα τῆς εἰς τὸν κόσμον. See also Aratus, *Phaenomena* 329–335. Cf. also Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 98, n. 234. In this context see also Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 21.359cd = Griffiths, *PDIO*, 150–151: καλεῖσθαι κύνα μὲν τὴν Ἴσιδος ὑφ’ Ἑλλήνων, ὑπ’ Αἰγυπτίων δὲ Σῶθιν. About the connection of Isis with the Constellation of Dog (Sirius) see the Aretalogy of Andros (1st century AD) *RICIS*, 202/1801 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, no 2, v. 6, where she characteristically says: ἀστροφόροις λάμπω, συνομόδρομος ἐν Κυνὶ κύκλοις.

136 *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380, 49–51 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 1196, 210–211 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 65, no. 20.

over nature as well as over the cosmic firmament and highlights the fact that she is the one who guarantees people’s well-being and good fortune throughout the year.¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

The so-called eastern cults offered alternative modes of religiosity to people of the Graeco-Roman world who live, in J. Z. Smith’s words, in the age of “everywhere” according to the ecumenical context of this era.¹³⁸ These cults, especially during Late Antiquity, adjusted all their teachings to the cosmic environment, and especially to utopian ideas.¹³⁹ According to the presentation of Apuleius, Isis is the indisputable “*orbisque totius domina*,”¹⁴⁰ and dominant over the “malevolent” and “blind”

137 It is her (i.e. Isis) who τὰ νόμιμα καὶ ἐνιαυτὸν τέλειον παρέδωκας, according to the believer who praises the omnipotence of Isis in the above text. See about *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380, 204–205 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 199, 219 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 72, no. 20. Cf. also *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* XI 1380, 194–196 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 199, 219 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 71, no. 20. Cf. also Reinhold Merkelbach, *Isisfeste in griechisch-römischer Zeit: Daten und Riten* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1963), 19.

138 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Here, There and Anywhere,” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 329–334.

139 Concerning the utopian perceptions during Late Antiquity, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 110, 121–142; Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Wobbling Pivot,” in *Map is not Territory*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 100–103; Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Influence of Symbols on Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand,” in *Map is not Territory. Studies in History of Religions*, Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 130–142; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?” in *Map is not Territory. Studies in History of Religions*, Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 147–151, 160–166, 169–171; Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Temple and the Magician,” in *Map is not Territory*, Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 185–189; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Map is not Territory.” In *Map is not Territory*, Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 291–294, 308–309. Green, *From Alexander to Actium*, 384, 392–395, 529.

140 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.7 = Griffiths, *IB*, 170. Cf. also 11.5: *elementorum omnium domina*. See also the text of Aretalogy of Kyme, I.3: ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ τύραννος πάσης χώρας, cf. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 1, no. 1; Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1990), 50–83.

Fortuna, that was every individual's nightmare.¹⁴¹ This fact further reinforces her omnipotent and regulative power. This can also be found in other similar deities of the time, such as Mithras, who was considered a cosmic ruler (*kosmokrator*) "capable of seizing control of just those fundamental structures of space and time."¹⁴² This is another means of attracting people of the time to the environment of these cults, with the promise of overcoming all difficulties, thus leading to a state of mundane prosperity and, above all, posthumous blessedness. It is within this context that the "star-talk," suggested by R. Beck, is integrated, and this constitutes a special way of approaching the concepts of those cults. This way of expression does not advocate something recondite addressed only to the wise and selected experts but it is a common way of expression during this period. The symbolism of this language is distinct for its evocative power. In this framework, the symbols of those cults, and in this case, the cult of Isis, are distinguished for their polyvalence, evocative or intimate feelings for the people of the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*.¹⁴³

141 Sfameni Gasparro, "Daimon and Tychê;" Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "Iside Fortuna dell'età arcaica e divinità sovrane del mondo ellenistico-romano," in *Le forme dell'età arcaica nel Lazio e in Italia e la loro posterità. Atti del 3. Convegno Internazionale di Studi archeologici sull'antica Preneste (Palestrina, 15–16 ottobre 1994)*, ed. Bruno Coari (Palestrina: Comune di Palestrina, Assessorato alla Cultura, 1997); Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I*, 4–50, 84.

142 Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 34–42; David Ulansey, *The Origins of Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 24. See also CIMRM 860, 1472. On Isis *kosmokrator*, see Grandjean, *Une nouvelle aréologie*, 69–70; Griffiths, *IB*, 156–157; Merkelbach, *Isis regina-Zeus Sarapis*, 577, fig. 99, pl. VII; Arslan, *Iside*, 441, no. V 67; De Caro, *Egittomania*, 184, no. III 50; Joseph J. V. M Derksen and Maarten J. Vermaseren, "Isis Kosmokrator," in *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: Studi in onore di A. Adriani III*, eds. Nicola Bonacasa and Antonino Di Vita (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1984), 430–432; Miroslav Marcovich, "The Isis with the Seven Robes," in *Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism*, edited by Miroslav Marcovich (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1988), 52–55; Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I*, 83–95. See also *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus*, XI 1380, 144 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 198, 217 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 69, no. 20: τὸ μετέωρον κρατεῖς and ἄνασσα τῆς οἰκουμένης. *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus*, XI 1380, 121 = Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 198, 217 = Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, 68, no. 20). See also Caracallas' appellation as *cosmocrator*, Sarolta Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995), 116–117.

143 Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 159.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

- ANRW* = Temporini, Hildegard, and Wolfgang Haase, eds. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1972–
- CIMRM* = Vermaseren, Maarten J., ed. *Corpus inscriptionum monumentorum religionis Mithriacae I–II*. Haag: Martinus Nijhof, 1956–1960.
- Griffiths, *IB* = Griffiths, J. Gwyn, ed. and trans. *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis Book (Metamorphoses, Book, XI)*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975.
- Griffiths, *PDIO* = Griffiths, J. Gwyn, ed. and trans. *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride: With an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970.
- FGrH* = Jacoby, Felix, ed. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker I–III*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1923–1958.
- FHG* = Müller, Karl, and Theodor Müller, eds. *Fragmenta historicorum graecorum I–V*. Paris: Ambrosio Firmin Didot, 1966–1967 [1st edition 1841–1870].
- LIMC* = *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*. Zürich and München: Artemis, 1981–1999.
- PG* = Migne, Jacques Paul, ed. *Patrologia graeca I–CLXI*. Paris: Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1857–1866.
- RE* = Pauly, August, and Georg Wissowa, eds. *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894–1980.
- RICIS* = Bricault, Laurent, ed. *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques (RICIS) I–III*, Paris: De Boccard, 2005.
- SIRIS* = Vidman, Ladislav, ed. *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis isiacae et sarapiacae*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969.
- SNRIS* = Bricault, Laurent, ed. *Sylloge nummorum religionis isiacae et sarapiacae (SNRIS)*. Paris: De Boccard, 2008.
- TGrF* = Kannicht, Richard, ed. *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta II: Euripides*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004.

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SUMMARY

Roger Beck's proposition that promoted modern cognitive theories in the case of Mithraism, opened new horizons in the study of the Graeco-Roman period cults. Following Beck's example, we will present the cognitive paths that were followed by Isis' cult during its dissemination in the Graeco-Roman *oecumene*. Plutarch's and Apuleius testimonies could serve as a starting-point for the interpretation of the Isis' cult representations in the monumental and iconographic remains, which served as a kind of language, i.e. a "star-talk." These particular ideas according to Plutarch's testimony – and, by extension, their projection to the external world – could be considered as "images" and "thoughts" of the general astrological world view at that time. The followers' overall ritualistic activity can be considered, in this case, as a set of "imitations," which conform to the symbolic way of thinking of the participants not only in the process of mystery rites but also in the daily cultic life of the Isis cult. In this way, the liturgical context of this cult created the appropriate conditions for a "cognized environment." Therefore, the participants could apprehend the evocation, through the production of cognitive and underlying neuronomic processes, of all the symbols and representations of Isis cult.

KEYWORDS

star-talk, Isis cult, Plutarch, Apuleius, astrology, cognition, cognized environment, evocation, Isis-Sēlēne, Isis-Sōthis, Dog-Star, Day of Leo, constellation of Cancer, Nile, Osiris

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