



CONTEXTUALIZING “ORIENTAL” CULTS

New Lights on the Evidence between
the Danube and the Adriatic

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb
Regional Museum Ptuj Ormož

15-17 September 2022

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New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic

There are numerous traces of so-called “Oriental” cults in the territory of the Roman provinces in Southeast Europe (Dalmatia, Pannonia, Moesia, Dacia, Thracia, Macedonia). The cults of Isis, Mithras, Cybele among others were accepted and incorporated in the religious systems of these provinces in the Roman period. Cult officials and communities of followers are well attested and remains of temples and cult statues are often monumental. The coastal cities of the Adriatic and the great river ports were the main cult centres. The contacts with Italic regions and imperial propaganda, as well as customs and preferences of the local population were important preconditions for the appropriation of those cults in the aforementioned territory. Cults were appropriated differently from one place to the next, depending on the particular manner of transmission and the varied circumstances within the Roman provinces of Southeast Europe. In the process of being inserted into new local societies and contexts, these cults often underwent adjustments and transformations. New values and meanings could be adopted, thus leading to specific provincial forms of traditional cults.

After the Skopje Symposium (*Romanising Oriental Gods*, 18-21 September 2013) the need to assemble once again became evident, in order to explore novel perspectives on this topic. The aim of our Symposium is to examine and debate further how the “Oriental” cults manifested themselves in the respective regions, on the basis of particularities of epigraphic and material evidence. Attention will be given to the dissemination and development of these cults in various contexts – historical, political, topographic, civic, economic, military – in the aforementioned provinces. Naturally, one of our main objectives is to encourage the presentation of new

findings. Therefore, we gathered an international group of specialists on the “Oriental” cults in different Roman contexts, to present the results of their research. We would like to dedicate our Symposium to the late professor Petar Selem (1936-2015), prominent Croatian scientist, who spent his lifetime researching „Oriental“ cults.

Inga Vilogorac Brčić

CONTEXTUALIZING „ORIENTAL“ CULTS
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the Danube and the Adriatic

15th September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, ZAGREB UNIVERSITY

Morning (Chair: Bruna Kuntić-Makvić)

9:00–9:30 Welcome, introduction

Political and social context

9:30–10:00 Anja Ragolič, *Mithraism in Poetovio: old data, new findings*

10:00–10:30 Ljubica Perinić & Ivan Radman Livaja, *“Orientals” and “Oriental” cults in Southern Pannonia: is there a correlation?*

10:30–11:00 Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas, *„Oriental” cults in Moesia Superior through the eyes of their worshippers*

11:00–11:30 Inga Vilogorac Brčić, *Cults of Isis and Imperial cult*

ZAGREB ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Afternoon (Chair: Ante Rendić-Miočević)

Private context and ritual practice

15:00–15:30 Aleksandra Nikoloska, Duško Temelkoski & Olivera Jandreska, *The sculpture of Faustina, Isis, and the trade of grain in Styberra*

15:30–16:00 Arnaud Saura-Ziegelmeier & Dan Deac, *Music in Isiac contexts*

16:00–16:30 Palma Karković Takalić, *Monuments dedicated to Leo and Fons from Golubić (Bosnia and Herzegovina). A particular form of worship of Mithra's cult in the territory of Raetinium?*

16:30–17:00 Željko Miletić, *Architectural elements on the tauroctonies from the diocese of Pannonia*

17:30–18:30 Tour of the museum

16th September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, ZAGREB UNIVERSITY

Morning (Chair: Boris Olujić)

Impulses and methodology

- 9:00–9:30 Laurent Bricault & Richard Veymiers, *Les cultes de Mithra: un état de la question*
- 9:30–10:00 Gabrielle Kremer, “Oriental” gods as a romanizing factor?
- 10:00–10:30 Csaba Szabó, *Religious communication and space sacralisation in the mithraea. Case studies from Daciae and Pannoniae*

Symbolism

- 10:11–11:30 Eleni Tsatsou, *Alexander the magician: Receptions of Alexander the Great in the Roman provinces in Southeast Europe – The testimony of amulets and inscriptions*
- 11:30–12:00 Mirna Cvetko, *Born from a rock. Altar to Petra Genetrix from Salona*

REGIONAL MUSEUM PTUJ – ORMOŽ

Afternoon (Chair: Gabrielle Kremer)

Topographic context

- 17:30–18:00 Nirvana Silnovic, *Contextualizing Mithras cult in the Roman province of Dalmatia*
- 18:00–18:30 Szilvia Bíró & Ottó Sosztarits, *Iseum – A cohabitation: The micro-topographical and functional environment of the Isis sanctuary in Savaria in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD*
- 18:30–19:00 Christoph Hinker, *Archaeological finds from a small cave in Carinthia (Austria) as indicators for the worship of Mithras at a rural site in southern Noricum*

17th September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES, ZAGREB UNIVERSITY

Morning (Chair: Laurent Bricault)

Case studies

- 9:00–9:30 Perikles Christodoulou, *Osiris in Thessaloniki. Revisiting the votive relief to Osiris mystes*
- 9:30 – 10:00 Annareta Touloumtzidou, *Isiaca from graves in Thessaloniki*

Poster discussion

- 10:00-10:40 Tatjana Kuznicov & Igor Krnjeta, *Mithras followers in Dalmatia*
Ivona Lodoli, *Cults of Isis in Upper Pannonia*
Ema Odorčić, *Sabazius' monuments found in Croatia*
Klara Petroci, *Cult of Harpocrates in Pannonia*

Exhibition announcement

- 10:40-11:40 Wolfgang David, *Mysterium Mithras: Annäherungen an einen römischen Kult* (Archaeological Museum Frankfurt, November 2022)

ABSTRACTS

Anja Ragolič

Mithraism in Poetovio: old data, new findings

Mithraism, which spread widely across Pannonia in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, found ardent followers in Upper Pannonia's second largest city, Poetovio (present-day Ptuj). At least five mithraea were located in the city, but it is believed that there were more of these temples within the territory of Poetovio. Many inscriptions (and reliefs) provide interesting information about the dedicators, their origins, social status, and in several cases even employment. Some of them also provide data referring to the hierarchical structure within the cult.

Ljubica Perinić & Ivan Radman-Livaja

“Orientals” and “Oriental” cults in Southern Pannonia: is there a correlation?

Our main aim is to investigate whether the origin of the votaries and their dedications to an ‘Oriental cult’ were in any correlation. All the votive inscriptions from Southern Pannonia will be analysed from the geographical point of view and by social and gender categories, in order to determine straightforwardly if the social profile of worshippers and/or their ethnic origin leaned towards a certain oriental deity. Since all the votive inscriptions will be collected, it is to be hoped that different connections between devotees and the cult should be established, like for instance the link between dedicants and particular deities or social positions of devotees, their origins, as well as all the elements of identity which might be obtained or deduced by analysing votive inscriptions.

Inga Vilogorac Brčić

Cults of Isis and imperial cult

Roman literary, epigraphic and material evidence clearly demonstrate that certain Roman emperors had an affinity for “Oriental” gods. Since the relationship between the Imperial cult and “Oriental” cults, especially of Isis and Sarapis, Mater Magna and Mithras, has not been studied up to this point, I shall present and interpret its epigraphic evidence since it is the only reliable source. Closest possible relation is attested by dedications of officials of the Imperial cult (*flamines*, *flaminicae* or *seviri Augustales*). I shall also consider inscriptions with the honorific emperor’s attribute *Augustus/Augusta* beside the name of the “Oriental” divinity since it testifies to the official character of their cult and also underscore their eminent role as protectors of Roman emperors. Since Imperial cult in “Oriental” provinces, including Egypt, just as in the city of Rome, was organized in a different way, I’m considering only the testimonies from Italic regions and western provinces of the Empire. On the basis of 117 inscriptions I will try to demonstrate the nature and the reasons of the relation of the named “Oriental” gods and the Imperial cult at specific territories and in certain periods.

Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas

**“Oriental” cults in Moesia Superior through the eyes
of their worshippers**

In the Roman period of reign, many “Oriental” cults were confirmed in different localities of the province Moesia Superior, which was in pre-Roman period inhabited by indigenous people of Celtic, Thracian and Illyrian origin. However, after the Roman victory of the aforementioned territory, the demographic picture of the province changed through centuries, namely because of the constant presence and migration of the Roman army, officials and administratives, foreign traders, artisans and travellers and numer-

ous immigrants from the “Orient”. Due to the known Roman votive and funerary monuments, found primarily in the important economic, military, political and religious centers of the Roman province Moesia Superior like Singidunum, Viminacium, Naissus, Timacum Minus, different localities on the Danube limes etc., it is possible to follow the diffusion of certain “Oriental” cults and particularly the relation of their worshippers towards them. Epigraphical and archaeological material allow us, to some extent, to analyze and interpret the ritual practices which were performed depending on the cult in question (either in small, closed communities or in the more urban centers and confirmed sanctuaries). In this paper, we propose to explore certain “Oriental” cults from Moesia Superior, the connection and the religious attitude of their worshippers towards them and to present some new interpretations about the mentioned.

Aleksandra Nikoloska, Olivera Jandreska & Duško Temelkoski

**The sculpture of the Faustina, Isis, and the trade
of grain in Styberra**

During the 2021 excavations held by NI Institute and Museum Prilep on the Agora, sector of the Tyche temple in Styberra, a remarkable discovery of a portrait bust was made. It is of Faustina Minor dressed in an Isis garment with the knot on the chest, portrayed as an initiate of cult of the Egyptian Goddess. The identification of this portrait is additionally confirmed with the connection of the new Augusta to Isis Faria of Alexandria, patron and protectress of the fleet, ensuring safe arrival of grain.

Prior studies show that Styberra reached its urban flourishing during the Antonine and Severan dynasty. It was an administrative centre of the Deriop region, an important strategic zone and a supplier of grain for the Macedonian army, known from the historical sources. Other recent findings from the Agora such as the

mensae ponderirae and ara dedicated to Hermes provide more specific insights. Based on the available archaeological data this paper focuses further on the context of the erection of the imperial bust and the purpose of the building, as well as the connection of the Egyptian cults and the trade of grain in Styberra.

Arnaud Saura-Zieglmeyer & Dan Deac

Music in Isaic contexts

"Nam dextra quidem ferebat aereum crepitaculum, cuius per augustam lamminam in modum baltei recurvatam traiectae mediae paucae virgulae, crispante brachio trigeminos iactus, reddebant argutum sonorem." (*Apuleius, Met.* XI. 4).

"For in her right hand she bore a bronze rattle in which few rods in the middle, thrust across a thin sheet of metal that was curved like a belt, emitted a tinkling sound when the arm made three quivering jolts." (Trans. John Gwyn Griffiths 1975, 75).

When Lucius shares his experience on the appearance of Isis in the *Metamorphoses*, he diligently describes the goddess' *sistrum* held in her right arm. A series of iconographic evidence portray this instrument in the Balkan provinces, from northern Macedonia and eastern Moesia Inferior and to western Pannonia and southwestern Dalmatia. These evidence comes in a variety of forms: instruments themselves, amulets in the shape of a *sistrum*, votive monuments depicting them, ceramic moulds, coins and even mural paintings. This paper explores these items, advancing an answer on the importance the *sistrum* played in the Isiac cults along the Balkan-Danubian provinces.

Palma Karković Takalić

**Monuments dedicated to Leo and Fons from Golubić
(Bosnia and Herzegovina). A particular form of worship
of Mithra's cult in the territory of Raetinium?**

Roman *municipium Raetinium* was located in the area of the present-day Golubić (Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina), along the left bank of river Una (Roman province of Dalmatia). Raetini were a Iapodic community, gradually romanised after Octavian's victory in the *Bellum Illyricum* in 35 BC. The relationship between the indigenous and the Romans is best reflected in the group of monuments erected in honour of Bindus Neptunus, by local authorities (*praepositus, princeps Iapodum*), soldiers and private. They suggest a certain preservation of the autochthonous elements in the society of Raetini during the 1st and the 2nd centuries AD. They also suggest that the river Una was very important in the spiritual and economic life of its citizens. The area was famous for the iron mines and the river must have had a significant role in the traffic and export of these goods.

In the southern territory of Raetinium, along the river Una, several monuments related to the cult of Mithras have also been found. Two unusual devotions to Leo and Fons may indicate particular aspects of worship of Mithra's cult in that area. The aim of this paper is to study Mithraic monuments in the specific economic and social context of the municipality of Raetinium as well as in the wider area of Iapodic territory.

Željko Miletić

**Architectural elements on the tauroctonies
from the Diocese of Pannonia**

The workshop provenance of the tauroctony scene and other mythical episodes framed by architectural elements are discussed. First of all, Mithraic monuments follow the general trend in art,

especially the sepulchral ones, at the end of the Principate and in the 4th century. The tauroctony decoration mirrors the monumental architecture of the imperial palaces, reflecting the idea of parallelism of the rule position of Mithras and emperors, which is illustrated by other episodes as well. During more than a century of development of Mithraism, visual image of the cave in which the bull was killed, occasionally is replaced by the artistic landscape of sacral architecture. As in Renaissance art, where Christian scenes of Biblical age are wrapped up in the modern scenery, similar anachronism appeared in Mithraism. Finally, different levels of the Mithraism (myth, cosmology, liturgical evocation) were contaminated and hybridized, which also led to the introduction of architectural components into mythical scenes.

Laurent Bricault & Richard Veymiers

Les cultes de Mithra: un état de la question

Dans un monde rempli d'une multitude de dieux, Mithra, que l'on dit venir de Perse, rencontra dès la fin du I^{er} siècle de notre ère un succès fulgurant qui perdura plus de 300 ans d'un bout à l'autre de l'Empire romain et attira des dizaines de milliers d'adeptes. Phénomène à la fois global et local, le culte de Mithra est aujourd'hui connu par près de 150 sanctuaires découverts tout autour de la Méditerranée, plusieurs milliers de reliefs et de statues, plus de 1 000 inscriptions et des centaines d'artefacts de petite taille. Chaque année, de nombreuses fouilles viennent enrichir nos connaissances, révélant images, textes et lieux de culte. Cette très riche documentation, l'abandon des grilles de lecture christiano-centrées, la prise en compte de questionnements nouveaux sur les polythéismes antiques amènent à revoir entièrement les idées reçues et les fantasmes romantiques hérités du XIX^e siècle qui encombrant encore trop souvent la littérature relative au culte de Mithra dans l'Empire romain.

Gabrielle Kremer

“Oriental” gods as a romanizing factor?

Roman cults with “Oriental” origins appeared in north-western Pannonia already at the turn of the 1st to the 2nd c. AD. In Carnuntum, one of the military centers at the Danube Limes and capital of Pannonia Superior, several sanctuaries and a huge number of votive monuments testify the presence of cults like Iuppiter Dolichenus, Iuppiter Heliopolitanus, Isis, Serapis, Mithras and others. Their relevance will be analysed by considering the historical-political as well as the social-religious and topographical contexts. A special attention is given to interrelationships with other – also official – cults, which may be observed until Late Antiquity.

The provocative or even paradoxical title refers to the hinterland of the military centers, where “Oriental” cults seem to be of above-average importance for certain local communities. This contribution questions the role and significance of these cults in a region that has preserved strong local characteristics over a long period of time.

Csaba Szabó

Religious communication and space sacralisation in the mithraea. Case studies from Daciae and Pannoniae

Among the sacralised spaces – commonly known as sanctuaries – of the Roman Empire during the Principate, the mithraea, sacralised spaces dedicated to Mithras represent a specific case study not only because of their specific inner architecture, but also the religious knowledge associated with the inner geography of the mithraea. The sacralised spaces of Mithras were analyzed mostly as tools or agents in the religious narrative of the cult or as architectural entities. Recent studies are focusing now on these buildings in a holistic view, uniting various methodologies – cognitive and

cultural-historical approaches too – interpreting the archaeological material, small finds, archaeobotanical sources, visual sources and narratives, worshippers as agents in religious communication.

In this paper, I will focus on the archaeologically attested and published sanctuaries of Mithras from the Danubian provinces, especially those from the two Pannoniae and Daciae, introducing this holistic, global view in the interpretation of the space, where objects and humans are active agents in space sacralisation and religious communication.

Eleni Tsatsou

Alexander the magician: Receptions of Alexander the Great in the Roman provinces in Southeast Europe – The testimony of amulets and inscriptions

The study of the gem-amulets provides us the opportunity to come closer to the way that ordinary people of antiquity thought and felt, helping us to form a more accurate idea of the ancient world. Nevertheless, the fragmentary way, without any context, that most of these objects found their way into our time is perhaps the reason that we don't fully understand how they are functioning. This lack of understanding, together with the non-standard iconographic types and forms of speech that are often found on them, led the early modern scholars to study them outside of the frame of religion and include them in the magical category. However, recent textual and iconographic parallels testify to widespread beliefs in certain gems' ritual and religious properties, calling into question the certainty of the magical characteristics of these objects.

A large number of them depict newly invented deities (Sarapis, Harpocrates) and deities that are related to the "Oriental cults" (Isis, Mithras, Cybele) that during the Greco-Roman times were accepted in the Greco-Roman religious system. Their appearance on the gem-amulets raises some significant question: In what way

were the gem-amulets understood by their users? Did their use provide the means to construct a certain religious identity and express certain religious beliefs? Were they connected with a particular cult and used in actual ritual practice? What was the relationship between the new religious developments of the Greco-Roman period and the spread of the amulets in the provinces of Southeast Europe?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn mainly to the gem-amulets that come from documented contexts in the Balkans and, applying systematic and constructed scientific methods, analyze, interpret and present them. Since 2019 a research program concerning the study of the Greco-Roman gem-amulets that are found in the wider area of Northern Greece has begun. In my paper I will give an overview of this research program and its preliminary results, aiming to increase interest in this subject among the scholarly community in the Balkans. The ultimate goal of my paper is to extend the boundaries of the area of the research, trying to find ways to collaborate with scholars from the Southeast Europe in order to study all the gem-amulets from documented context in the area, and develop, if possible, an expanded database that will integrate them.

Mirna Cvetko

Born from a rock. Altar to Petra Genetrix from Salona

In 1884, at the position of Jankovača in Salona, a Roman sacrificial altar was found. This altar is today kept in the Archaeological Museum in Split (inv. no. AMS A-871). An inscription on the altar indicates that the monument was dedicated to Petra Genetrix. As the monument has only been sporadically mentioned in scholar literature so far, the intention of this paper is to analyze the formal characteristics of the altar, as well as the very character of its votive dedication, and put it in the wider context.

Nirvana Silnović

Contextualizing Mithras Cult in the Roman province of Dalmatia

The cult of Mithras was one of the most dominant of the “Oriental” cults in the Roman province of Dalmatia. The rich archaeological evidence, scattered all over the province, attests to the cults’ presence from ca. second half of the second century CE until the end of the fourth/beginning of the fifth century CE. Given the sheer number of the Mithraic localities (over 40), and the appearance of the cult almost simultaneously as in the rest of the Roman Empire, it is not surprising that the cult has received much attention in Croatian scholarship. However, the contributions have mainly focused on analyzing the iconography of the figural monuments in their search of origins or “doctrine” of the cult, following the main trends in the discipline. Thus, the Mithraic temples, i.e. mithraea, have not received much attention. Moreover, there is no systematic study related to the topography, architecture, and design of Mithraic temples in general. The present paper, therefore, aims to analyze architecture of mithraea in Dalmatia and to offer their wider topographical contextualization. After brief discussion of their typology and architectural details, the paper will explore the relationship of the location of mithraea and their immediate surroundings. Particular attention will be given to the proximity of natural resources, road connections, urban or centers of other importance. The typological and topographical analysis will allow us to discern possible regional patterns and local preferences.

Szilvia Bíró & Ottó Sosztarits

Iseum – A cohabitation: The micro-topographical and functional environment of the Isis sanctuary in Savaria in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD

The monumental architectural remains and the unique frieze on the facade of the Iseum in Savaria are dated to the turn of the 2nd and

3rd centuries. Little is known, however, about the preceding period of the temple, given the lack of grand architectural and sculptural finds. The only evidences proving the existence of an early Iseum are the so-called altar of Barbius, and the Isiac frescoes that had already been disposed of and buried within the sacred precinct by the mid-2nd century. Certain finds from the same layers as these frescoes suggest that some industrial complexes existed in the immediate vicinity of the early sanctuary. These complexes indicate the unique topography and extensive network of the Iseum even before it was expanded and rebuilt in stone later.

Christoph Hinker

Archaeological “finds from a small cave in Carinthia (Austria) as indicators for the worship of Mithras at a rural site in southern Noricum

Since 2017 archaeological finds from a site at the Gradišče, a hill near St. Egyden in Carinthia (AT), are examined by the Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAW) in cooperation with the Landesmuseum Kärnten (P. Gleirscher). Most of the remains were recovered within an ash-rich cultural layer, which spread at the bottom of a small cave or rock shelter. The pottery consists of tableware, especially drinking cups, but also lamps and special types of vessels like snake vessels and *turibula* were found. Also noteworthy are fragments of a small bull figure made of terracotta and the broken tip of a palm leaf-shaped votive sheet made of silver. Around 320 coins found in the cave and its immediate vicinity date from the 2nd to the 5th century AD (ÖAW, Institute for the Study of Ancient Culture). The archaeozoological range of domestic animals is characterised by a high proportion of very young piglets. The contextual examination of the finds suggests that the archaeological site at Gradišče is probably to be identified as a cult place with the remains of the consumer behaviour practiced in the course of celebrations and meals.

The question which deity was worshipped there can't be answered clearly on the basis of the available sources. An image of a god or an altar with inscription weren't found in the area of the rock shelter. A comparison with similar Roman provincial sites which can be connected to such sources, suggests that the site at Gradišče is maybe to be associated with the cult of Mithras. The state of research on Mithraism in southern *Noricum* is primarily based on the evaluation of the relevant epigraphic material (EDH HD051713, lupa.at/5759.5824) and relief images (lupa.at/5859–5861), especially those from the urban area of *Virunum*. The remains of material culture from the sanctuary at Gradišče allow now for the first time to develop a more detailed idea of the common meal as an identity-creating element of a small rural cult community in southern *Noricum*.

Perikles Christodoulou

Osiris in Thessaloniki. Revisiting the votive relief to Osiris mystes

A stele of the late 3rd / early 2nd century BCE from the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki is dedicated to Osiris mystes – the Initiator. It shows a sacrifice scene. A woman and a man, who must be identified as initiates to the cult of Osiris, are flanking an altar. Between them, and on a higher level, stands a young man who leans on a pillar. There is no consensus for his identification. Some scholars see a statue or an epiphany of Osiris, some others believe that he is a mortal. This paper attempts to resolve the question by examining the iconography of the intriguing relief, placing it into the context of the sanctuary and of the Isiac cults in general and, ultimately, by analyzing its historical and ideological background.

Annareta Toulountzidou

Isiaca from the roman cemeteries of Thessaloniki

The Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki is one of the earliest in Greece and in the Mediterranean in general, since it was most probably established in the early 3rd century BC, and one with the longest life span, probably surviving as late as the 4th century AD. Due to its significant number of finds (sculpture and inscriptions), which reveal important information regarding the cult of Isis, Sarapis, Osiris, Harpocrates, and Anubis, it holds an important position in Isiac studies.

Thus far, the impact of the cult of the Isiac deities in various aspects of the life of the citizens of Thessaloniki has been examined mainly under the scope of the finds from the sanctuary itself. In this paper, the focus will be laid on a neglected category of finds, the Isiaca from the city's cemeteries, namely old and new finds of various forms and materials, like funerary monuments bearing Isiac symbols, gold jewellery in the form of Isiac symbols, a cup with an acclamation to Zeus Serapis, as well as terracotta figurines and magical gems with images of Egyptian deities.

The typology of the Isiaca and the deities relevant to them will be discussed in comparison both to similar objects from other regions and to the finds of the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki. Further to the above, the funerary assemblages in which the Isiaca were unearthed will be examined in order to approach the initial function of these objects in everyday life and to estimate the purpose behind their placement in a funerary environment. In the case of funerary monuments with Isiac symbols, the accompanying inscriptions – surprisingly without Isiac connotations – are discussed with a view to decipher the social and cultic status of their owners, whether they were priests or devotees of the Isiac cults.

Given the considerable number of excavated graves from both cemeteries of Thessaloniki, within a century of rescue excavations conducted by the Archaeological Service, the Isiaca constitute an extreme rarity which should be explained as it contrasts with the

significant finds from the Isiac sanctuary itself. Do they reflect a more restrained impact of the Isiac cults in the city than the finds from its sanctuary seem to suggest? Was there a particular reason for not furnishing the deceased with imperishable Isiaca or not inscribing the Isiac affinities in a funerary monument? In an attempt to answer such questions and to apprehend the rarity of Isiaca in funerary contexts, Isiaca from cemeteries in other cities of Greece, in which the presence of an Isiac sanctuary is also confirmed, will also be considered.

CONTEXTUALISING „ORIENTAL“ CULTS

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