

# CONTEXTUALIZING “ORIENTAL” CULTS. NEW LIGHT ON THE EVIDENCE BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND THE ADRIATIC

Numerous testimonies of what has currently been subsumed under the term “oriental cults” were found in the Roman Danubian provinces; cults originally of Egyptian, Anatolian, Syrian and Iranian origin were well accepted and integrated into the religious system during the Roman imperial period. They were received differently in different places, depending on the particular method of transmission and on the various historical and social circumstances under which they were adapted or transformed. By integrating new values and meanings, specific provincial forms of traditional cults were created.

Ten years ago, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts with the co-organizers, the Universities of Toulouse and Leiden, hosted the conference “Romanizing Oriental gods. Religious Transformations in the Balkan Provinces in the Roman Period; New Finds and Novel Perspectives” in Skopje (September 18–21, 2013). Scientists dealing with “oriental” cults in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire gathered here for the first time. The meeting was extremely successful, and on that occasion it was determined that researchers should come together at regular intervals.

The Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Ancient History of the Institute of Croatian History agreed to be the initiator and main organizer of the international scientific symposium “CONTEXTUALIZING ‘ORIENTAL’ CULTS. New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic”, which was held in Zagreb and Ptuj on 15–17 September 2022. The co-organizing institutions were the Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès, the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Research Centre for Cultural Heritage “Cvetan Grozdanov” of Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and the Provincial Museum of Ptuj – Ormož. The objectives of the Symposium were to investigate and dis-

cuss the manner in which "oriental" cults manifested themselves in the Danubian and Balkan provinces, based on the characteristics of epigraphic and material sources. Attention was paid to the spread and development of the mentioned cults in different contexts – historical, political, topographical, civil, economic, and military. The presentation of the latest findings, material and epigraphic evidence and remains of architecture in South-Eastern Europe was one of the main goals of the Symposium. Presentations and discussions created precious new knowledge and conclusions, and the goal was achieved, among other things, that the monuments from the Balkans and the Danube are included in a wider scientific context. It was confirmed that various aspects of "oriental" cults and their testimonies in the areas mentioned require further study. The international character of this meeting, whose participants were from several countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, North Macedonia, Greece, Hungary and Romania), enabled an extremely cohesive and dynamic academic and cultural exchange.

Two years after the Symposium, we collected the scientific contributions of most of the participants. Some of them concern various aspects of the acceptance of "oriental" cults in general. John Scheid, in the article *"Oriental" Deities in the Urban Context*, writes about the shrine complex at the crossroads near the church of S. Martino dei Monti on the Esquiline in Rome. He reconstructs the religious center where there were also holy places of "oriental" gods. In the article *Not only Mithras – Reflections on Sanctuaries of the High and Late Roman Empire on private Ground, with Particular Consideration of Noricum and Pannonia*, Peter Scherrer considers the private sphere of "oriental" cults and the ways in which they were practiced outside the context of the *sacra publica*, in the sanctuaries of Noricum and Pannonia. Gabrielle Kremer, in the article *"Oriental" Gods as a Romanizing Factor? A Case Study from the Danube Limes*, evaluates the material and epigraphic evidence of "oriental" cults in the hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona. She aims to trace how the implantation and apparent dominance of the Mithras cult occurred in relation to the two limes sites. In the article *Cult of Anatolian Local Gods in Moesia Inferior through the Eyes of their Worshippers*, Nadežda Gavrilović gives an overview of the followers of Anatolian cults in Upper Moesia and, based on that, considers the reasons why some of these cults were extremely popular there during the Roman imperial era.

Five scholars deal with the cult of Mithras and its specifics in the context of "oriental" cults. In the article *Cult of Mithras, Slaves, Portorium and Salinae in Dacia*, Françoise van Haeperen offers a new interpretation of inscriptions dedicated to the god Mithras from Apulum found in 2010. At the same time, she defines the network of Mithras' followers there. In the article *Mithras and the Imperial Cult*, Inga Vilogorac Brčić provides an overview of epigraphic sources that testify to the connection between the imperial and Mithraic cults. She judges the reasons for these connections and the extent to which they encouraged the acceptance and spread of the Mithras cult in certain areas and in certain periods. In the article *The Mithraeum from Colonia Sarmizegetusa: on the Limits of Materiality of Religion*, Csaba Szabó tried to answer the hitherto unexplained questions related to the Mithraeum in Sarmizegetusa and to contextualize its rich material and epigraphic sources in the light of new research. In the article *Invicto Mithrae Spelaeum fecit: Mithraic Temples in the Roman Province of Dalmatia*, Nirvana Silnović examines Mithraic shrines in Dalmatia, which were otherwise in the background of

scientific research compared to the rich artistic and epigraphic material. She gives a refreshed overview of Mithras' Dalmatian sanctuaries, trying to dispel the prejudice about their rural and poor character. Palma Karković Takalić in the article *Monuments Dedicated to Leo and Fons from Golubić (Bosnia and Herzegovina). A Specific Form of Worship of Mithras' Cult?* discusses altars with dedications to the Lion and the Source, related to the cult of Mithras. She offers a new reading of the inscriptions, dating and interpretation, among other things, based on the findspot.

Five articles are devoted to Egyptian cults. Szilvia Bíró and Otto Sosztarits in the article *Iseum – a Cohabitation: the Micro-topographical and Functional Environment of the Isis Sanctuary in Savaria in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD* provide a micro-topographical and functional interpretation of the fourth largest Isis temple in the Roman world – the one in Savaria (Szombathely, Hungary). In the article *Locating Dionysus at the Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki* Perikles Christodoulou discussed religious practices and cult adherents in the Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki. Dan Deac and Arnaud Saura-Ziegelmeyer in the article *The Presence of the Sistrum in the Balkan and Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire* investigated all the evidence of the sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument that testifies to the cult of Isis. They discuss its importance in cult rites and the importance of its depiction in the spread of Egyptian cults. In the article *Faustina the Younger, Isis, and the Grain Trade in Styberra*, Aleksandra Nikoloska, Olivera Jandreska and Duško Temelkoski publish the sensational find of a large statue of Empress Faustina - Isis, which was found in Styberra (Prilep, Macedonia). They discuss the context of the find and the importance of the grain trade in Stibera, which was controlled by the Antonines who symbolically erected the statue of Faustina in the guise of Isis at the Agora. In the article *Isiaca from the Roman Cemeteries of Thessaloniki*, Annareta Touloumtzidou presents the material and epigraphic sources of Egyptian cults from the Roman necropolis in Thessaloniki. She judges the context in which they were found and the cult of Isis in Thessaloniki in general.

One article is devoted to the cult of the Great Mother: *Mater Deum Magna Idaea and the Imperial Cult in Latin Inscriptions*. The author Wolfgang Spickermann provides an overview and an evaluation of all the monuments that testify to the connection between the imperial cult and the cult of the Phrygian Cybele, the Roman Great Mother. The last article, *Epigraphic Testimonies of Jupiter Dolichenus: Iatric Aspects*, deals with the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. Vladimir Petrović presents three inscriptions from Upper Moesia, Numidia and Dacia, which prove that Dolichenus was also worshipped as a healer.

The publication is intended for the international scientific public, to whom it presents the latest findings and conclusions about the so-called "oriental" cults. We would like to dedicate the Proceedings to the late Professor of the Department of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Petar Selem (1939–2015), who spent his scientific career dealing with "oriental" cults.

*The editorial board*

