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Prospettive nuove, Im Rahmen des trilateralen
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- 1 This collection is based on the results of the second meeting, in September 2005, of a trilingual (German, French and Italian) research project on the Oriental religions in the Graeco-Roman world. As such it follows the outcomes of a meeting in January of that same year (for which see the papers in *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 8 [2006], p. 149-272),

whose main activity had been to “*déconstruire* le concept et la catégorie des « religions orientales »” (p. 7). As C. Bonnet explains in her short but clear introduction, the papers of the present volume focus, because of the need to “*reconstruire* sur des bases nouvelles” (p. 9), on three specific issues with their interrelated questions. The three parts of the volume, each put in context by a separate introduction (each in a different language), follow this division.

- 2 The first part (‘Pratiques, agents’), introduced in German by Ph. Borgeaud and J. Rüpke, is based on the question of whether, or to what degree, the multifarious religious functionaries (the term ‘priest’ is avoided where possible) who were active in the cults generally assembled under the header ‘Oriental’ were organised and institutionalised in a different manner than those belonging to ‘non-Oriental’ forms of religion. This section opens with an insightful paper by Rüpke – based on his 2005 study of Rome’s *fasti sacerdotum*, encompassing eight centuries – that argues that the respective forms of organization of religious actors and specialists is not a sufficient base to draw conclusions about cultic typology (i.e. ‘Oriental’ or ‘non-Oriental’). His expressed aim is “dieser Frage in einem prosopographischen Zugriff nachzugehen” (p. 13), and the main part of his discussion is related to the spread of functionary terminology. This is followed by a contribution by C. Steimle, who shows how different cult groups that were active within the context of the sanctuary of the Egyptian gods at Thessaloniki expressed their “gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung” from each other through adherence to different deities. F. van Haepere argues that the degree of cultic intervention by official Roman authorities depended not on whether the cult was ‘Oriental’ or ‘non-Oriental’, but on a distinction between ‘public’ vs ‘private’ forms of religious activity. A. Schäfer’s paper is about Dionysiac associations as an urban phenomenon, with its focus on Ephesus and the Danube region. At the end of this paper, he presents – together with A. Diaconescu and I. Haynes – some relevant new findings from the sanctuary of Liber Pater at Apulum.
- 3 The second part (‘« Une théologie » en images ? Isis et les autres’), introduced in French by P. Cordier and V. Huet (who present a thoughtful critique of previous approaches from Cumont via Scott Ryberg and Will to Elsner and Gordon), is constructed around various questions concerning the role of images in the way cults ‘worked’ and ought to be understood, and asks whether there were actual differences in this regard (and if so what sort of differences) in the ‘Oriental’ as opposed to the ‘non-Oriental’ cults. L. Bricault proposes “une lecture polysémique” (p. 90) in his discussion of how the imagery of the polymorphic Isis relates to her divine nomenclature. E. Sanzi writes about the relation between Jupiter Dolichenus and a variety of other gods and goddesses “nel patrimonio iconografico” of the cult, although whereas the relevant inscriptions are properly presented, unfortunately there are no illustrations of the actual votive triangles added. F. Prescendi looks briefly at the ubiquitous image of the tauroctony in the cult of Mithras and makes the point that this “atto di violenza” (p. 119) ought not to be referred to – as it traditionally has been – as an act of sacrifice from the Roman perspective. N. Belayche starts her paper with the observation that “s’il est une région de l’Empire où le label cumontien de « religions orientales » peut apparaître paradoxal, c’est le Proche-Orient” (p. 123), and goes on to argue that the divine representations in these cults are hardly more ‘Oriental’ in the Orient than elsewhere, but that their “traits iconographiques sont plus souvent empruntés aux « canons » de la *koinè* hellénistique, elle-même façonnée d’emprunts à l’Orient”

(p. 130). S. Wyler discusses a fresco with Dionysiac imagery from Lanuvium, found in 1977 but published only in 2002, and S. Estienne reflects in a very interesting paper on the contribution made by the ‘foreign cults’ to the definition of the “normes rituelles romaines” (p. 147).

- 4 The third part (‘Les cultes à mystères’), introduced in Italian by V. Pirenne-Delforge and P. Scarpi, is constituted of papers that are responding to the project’s hypothesis that the ‘equation’ between ‘Oriental cults’ with ‘mystery religions’ is in itself a reaction “à la nécessité de traduire, en termes analogiques, une « étrangeté » par rapport aux modèles grecs et romains les plus habituels” (p. 9). One of the key problems to be investigated is that of terminology, and I. Chirassi opens with a study of *magos* and *pharmakis*. G. Sfameni Gasparro deals with the relation between the notions of mystery cults and Oriental cults while arguing against the need for scholarly “battaglie iconoclaste” (p.181) in this context. A. Coppola looks at the way the early Ptolemaic kings used mystery cults in their religious policy, and A.-F. Jaccottet focuses on the multivariety (and the vocabulary applied) within the whole of the so-called ‘Dionysiac mysteries’, while she says that referring to them with this very term is “un abus de langage” (p. 228): “il y a des associations dionysiaques sans mystères, tout comme il y a des mystères dionysiaques sans association” (p. 219). Finally, G.-B. Lanfranchi replies to one of the project’s side questions of ‘which Orient?’ with a study of the different ways in which the cult of Inanna/Ištar spread through the world of the Ancient Near East in the first millennium BC.
- 5 There are two indices, *rerum* and *locorum*, at the end of the volume, followed by Abbildungen / images / immagini – even here the project’s trilinguality is strictly adhered to. I feel that the separate introductions to the individual sessions can sometimes be a bit abstract, and it is a pity that they do not explicitly guide the reader to how the papers that follow are actually dealing respectively with the questions posed and the theoretical observations made. A list of abbreviations would have been handy too for most students (*SIRIS*, *ILLRP*, *JWE*, *ICUR*, *RICIS* and *CIMRM* can hardly be viewed as common but by specialists). But in conclusion it must be said that what are relatively short papers deal often handsomely with what are relatively big questions. They do not aim to provide exhaustive overviews, but manage very well in opening up some important new lines of thought in the study of what is *still* commonly known, for good or for worse, as the ‘Oriental cults’.

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