

Isis and *Mater Magna* in Aquileia

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In order to address the topic of the so-called Oriental cults in Aquileia, it is necessary to start with a terminological and conceptual introduction which entails substantial consequences on the methodological level.

As is known, the definition of ‘Oriental cults’ was formulated by Belgian scholar Franz Cumont: in 1906, he published a volume with the title *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, which was dedicated to studying the cults of *Mater Magna*, Isis/Serapis, *Mithra*, *Iuppiter Dolichenus*, *Sabazios etc.*⁽¹⁾.

Cumont’s assumption was that the so-called Oriental religions complied with the spiritual needs, and above all with the individual requests of the worshippers, especially from the 2nd to the 4th century AD, thus allowing the religious evolution which would then culminate into Christianity⁽²⁾. The reason behind such spiritual needs would have been that, from the 3rd to the 4th century AD, the Roman Empire had to face an unprecedented crisis on the political, economic and cultural level, which in time brought about its dissolution⁽³⁾; this was a very popular idea from the historiographic model of the first decades of the last century. According to the scholar, on a historic and religious level the cults originating from the Hellenistic East maintained a certain original ‘purity’ and focused on the subject of individual salvation through mystic connotations; such features anticipated Christian mysteries and determined the effacement of Greek-Latin paganism⁽⁴⁾.

Despite the abundant criticism raised by this approach, amongst which the most important was the one by Toutain, who published *Les cultes païens dans l’Empire romain*⁽⁵⁾ in 1911, Cumont’s work represented an almost undisputed reference point for about a century⁽⁶⁾. An essential contribution towards overcoming the assumptions in Cumont’s work was the research by Pettazzoni’s and Brelich’s comparative-historical school, which resulted into the series *Etudes Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l’Empire Romain*, coordinated by Maarten Vermaseren, and based on the interdisciplinary study of literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources on a regional

(1) CUMONT, 1906. See also BONNET, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006.

(2) Cf. BONNET, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. XV-XVII, VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 159, BRICAULT, PRESCENDI, 2009, p. 63.

(3) CUMONT, 1929², p. 14-15. See also VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 164-168.

(4) CUMONT 1906, p. 305. See also BONNET, 2006, p. 8-9, BONNET, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. XL-XLI, VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 166.

(5) Cf. MACMULLEN, 1981, PAILLER, 1989, BONNET, 2001, p. 330-331, VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 165.

(6) Cf. PAILLER, 1989, BONNET, 1997, p. 1-67, PAILLER, 1999, VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 159.

basis⁽⁷⁾. However, it is only with Walter Burkert's 1987 *Ancient Mystery Cults* that Cumont's equating of Oriental religions and mystery religions is finally shattered⁽⁸⁾. As a matter of fact, initiation in a Greco-Roman polytheistic system did not imply a mystic and exclusive dimension, and mystery cults were subject to ritualistic rules just like other civic cults⁽⁹⁾.

Cumont's definition generates multiple problems. On the one hand, for the Romans the 'East' was a geopolitical and astronomical concept which didn't apply to the cultural sphere⁽¹⁰⁾; what distinguished one cult from the other were their public or private foundations rather than a possible foreign origin⁽¹¹⁾. On the other hand, this classification would group together cults which didn't have much in common when it comes to the timeline of their introduction into the official Roman *pantheon*, and to their ritualistic practices, clergy and religious authority, regardless of their possible link with a mystic aspect⁽¹²⁾.

Starting from these conclusions, new research perspectives have been developed; these take into consideration that the Roman one is above all a 'social' religion, tied to the community and not to the individual. Thus, the so-called 'Oriental cults' must be analysed within the religious, civic and community system in which they were practised.

If a distinction is to be made amongst the different types of cults within Roman society, it is advisable rather to use the juridical categories belonging to Roman thought, such as *sacra peregrina*, foreign cults, and *sacra patria*, ancestral cults⁽¹³⁾; however, even the *sacra peregrina*, within which the so-called 'Oriental cults' can be placed, must be studied based on their foundations, i.e. in their characteristics of *sacra publica* or *sacra privata*⁽¹⁴⁾. Nor can these cults be considered as an immutable and, so to speak, coded reality altogether, immune from the transformations of the society that puts them into practice, as it emerges from the evolution of ritualistic practices.

For this reason, recent studies have been guided by four survey paradigms: the topography of cults, aimed at identifying their urban visibility; the archaeological and epigraphic documentation of the cults, in order to identify their characteristics, timeline and foundations; the participants to the cults, both priests and worshippers, to clarify their juridical conditions and role in the cult's organisation; and, lastly, the ritualistic practices of the cults, in order to verify their possible 'indigenous' specificity⁽¹⁵⁾.

(7) Cf. PAILLER, 1989, p. 100-103.

(8) BURKERT, 1987, p. 4-11. See also BONNET, 2006, p. 8-9, BONNET, PIRENNE-DELFORGE, PRAET, 2009, p. 7, BELAYCHE, 2013.

(9) Cf. BURKERT, 1998, p. 375-381, PIRENNE-DELFORGE, SCARPI, 2006, p. 159-160, MARCHESINI, 2012-13, p. 10, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 111.

(10) Cf. BELAYCHE, 2000, p. 1-35 e 567-569, BELAYCHE, 2013, p. 74.

(11) Cf. DUBOURDIEU, SCHEID 2002, p. 60-61, SCHEID, 2009, p. 11-39, VAN HAEPEREN, 2011, p. 107-109.

(12) MUZZIOLI, 2008.

(13) FEST. P. 268L. See also VAN ANDRINGA, VAN HAEPEREN, 2009, p. 23, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 302.

(14) Cf. BONNET, 2006, p. 8.

(15) Cf. VAN ANDRINGA, VAN HAEPEREN, 2009, p. 26.



Fig. 1 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inscription from the area of Beligna (Lupa 18698).

The application of such paradigms to the context of Aquileia, which up to now has been researched in a non-systematic and mostly non-homogeneous way when it comes to the so-called ‘archaeology of the sacred’⁽¹⁶⁾, is destined to produce highly interesting results, but at the same time cannot be completed with just one contribution. In this article, I will present a rereading of the documentation relating to the cult of *Mater Magna* and the Isiac cults.

As far as the locating of the Metroac temple is concerned, the various suggestions are based solely on reused materials and are strongly circumstantial⁽¹⁷⁾. Nonetheless, a comprehensive evaluation of the places of discovery and reuse of the materials has allowed to narrow down three areas of the ancient town as possible locations of the Metroac temple: namely, the area of Beligna⁽¹⁸⁾ (figures 1-2), in the southern part of town, the area of Monastero⁽¹⁹⁾, in the north-east of Aquileia, and the area by the Battistero of Aquileia, in the heart of the modern town⁽²⁰⁾.

The arguments supporting the two most viable hypotheses, which are the area of Monastero and the area of the Battistero, are equivalent from a ‘quantitative’ point of view and only differ when considering the topo-

(16) Cf. MASELLI SCOTTI, 2002. See also BELAYCHE, REBILLARD, 2007, p. 139.

(17) Cf. FONTANA, 2004, p. 404-406, ZACCARIA, 2008a. See also CCCA IV, 1978, p. 90-96, DE FRANZONI, 2007-2008, p. 36-64 e 99-165.

(18) *CIL* V, 795a = *CIL* V, 934 = PAIS 1115 = *InscrAq* 286 = ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 751-752, n. 12 = EDR116875 = Lupa 18698. See also FAVARETTO, 1970, p. 183-186, DE FRANZONI 2013, p. 220-221.

(19) FONTANA, 1997, p. 187-189, MASELLI SCOTTI, 2002, p. 142, FONTANA, 2004, p. 404-406, ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 750, n. 10.

(20) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 744, n. 3, p. 744-745, n. 4.



Fig. 2 Aquileia, *Attis's* sculpture from the area of Beligna (FAVARETTO 1970).

graphic value of the sacred building. Placing the *Metroon* in Monastero relates it, on one side, to the fluvial port and the so-called 'Eastern section' of the ancient town⁽²¹⁾, and on the other side to the city walls and especially with the Eastern town gate⁽²²⁾. On the contrary, the area to the south of the Forum bears no specific characterisation when it comes to urban topography, as it hosted the residential parts of town, but it attracts attention for the concentration of reused Metroac inscriptions found here⁽²³⁾. According to Claudio Zaccaria, who published the inscriptions, their presence under the Battistero can be explained with a sort of intentional reuse of sacred materials from a pre-existing temple in a paleochristian sacred building; this should be interpreted as a form of exauguration, carried out especially towards those cults which were felt to be in strong contradiction and competition with Christianity. Specifically, I am referring to the orders against the display of pagan cults, which brought about a systematic elimination of pagan expressions of such cults, especially after Theodosius's edicts, as they were considered impure⁽²⁴⁾. Amongst these, it's worth pointing out the measures issued in 391 AD precisely in Aquileia⁽²⁵⁾. Thus, there would be a direct relation amongst the presence of Chromatius and Rufinus, the most ancient phase in the life of the Battistero in Aquileia (end of 4th - beginning of 5th century AD) and the reuse of inscriptions for Cybele and Bellona in the foundations of the building⁽²⁶⁾.

(21) FONTANA, 2004, p. 406-409, MASELLI SCOTTI, 2009, p. 151.

(22) Cf. ZEVI, 1997, p. 435-471 (Ostia). See also FONTANA, 2001, c. 98, FONTANA, 2004, p. 405, VAN HAEPEREN, 2011, p. 112.

(23) ZACCARIA, 2008a, ZACCARIA, 2008b.

(24) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 756-757.

(25) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.11. See also ZACCARIA, 2008b, p. 195.

(26) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 757-758.



Fig. 3 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. The inscription *Atte Papa* (Lupa 13432).



Fig. 4 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inscription discovered under the Battistero with the formula *locus datus decreto decurionum* (EDR117386).

This is not the right place to contribute to that discussion: it wouldn't be functional to the objective of this article, which is, as previously stated, evaluating the visibility of the sacred place in the urban fabric. As a matter of fact, both places were 'central' in the life of this town, even though they were very different. However, it is important to remember that up to now, in the area around the Battistero, even recent excavations have highlighted how the area was mainly destined to residential construction⁽²⁷⁾. A minor clarification is also necessary when it comes to the process of *exauguratio*, the ritual in the Roman juridical procedure following an *inauguratio* that needed to be modified, i.e. to turn a place that was previously consecrated into a profane place⁽²⁸⁾. If there was indeed a Metroac temple in the area to the south of the Forum, the inscriptions were reused even in the construction site of the Battistero: they had become profane because the cult place had been abandoned, and quite early on, rather than a deliberate act of destruction and exauguration. Thus, even in this instance, it would be more cautious not to establish a direct topographic link between reuse and the existence of a temple.

As far as the documentation on the cult's typology and timeline is concerned, the epigraphic *dossier* is a lot clearer than the archaeological materials: the latter should be the object of a systematic review⁽²⁹⁾. With the exception of the inscription *Atte Papa* (figure 3), dating back to the late republican age, the cult's timeline seems to start from the Claudio-Neronian age: that

(27) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 741, MANDRUZZATO, SCOTTI, 2012.

(28) Cf. THLL ss.vv. *exauguratio*, *exauguro*, *ThesCRA* III, s.v. *Consecration*, *Foundation rites*, p. 304-306.

(29) Cf. DE FRANZONI, 2007-2008. See also MASELLI SCOTTI, 2002.

is, the moment when the Metroac cult was reorganised, even in Rome⁽³⁰⁾. A Claudian timeline for the public cult in Aquileia would be coherent with the urban development of the town, which saw an important moment of urban renewal above all in the area between the Forum and the fluvial port. The fact that the cult was public – it would be superfluous to doubt it, as the cult of the *Mater* was officially introduced in Rome, and since the very beginning, in 204 BC, it was integrated into the Trojan cycle of the origins, thus giving it the status of ancestral and protective deity – is attested by one of the inscriptions discovered under the Battistero, which still bears the formula *locus datus decreto decurionum*⁽³¹⁾ (figure 4). When it comes to the inscription for *Attis* by someone from the Greek islands, this obviously cannot count as evidence towards an official presence of the Metroac cult and thus cannot refer to a place of cult dedicated to it⁽³²⁾. However, it is still unmistakable that the cult, in its private and individual form, was introduced, or better it appeared amongst the cults in Aquileia, thanks to *Theudas* himself. On the contrary, it is still not clear where this act of personal devotion was placed, nor to which deity in Aquileia (a deity endowed with the necessary characteristics to welcome this *visiting god*) this sacred space was dedicated.

With regard to the participants to the cult, the documentation offers little information; there is no mention of priesthood, apart from the *antistites*, a sort of representative for the cult who guarded the gates, whereas the worshippers are mostly freedmen, women and men⁽³³⁾. In any case, the priesthood for *Mater Magna* was public, both in Rome and in other Roman cities; besides the *sacerdotes*⁽³⁴⁾, who took care of processions and sacrifices, it also entailed the Archigalli, who were Roman citizens and carried out a prophetic function, by recommending a *taurobolium*⁽³⁵⁾; the first priestesses attested in Rome were *libertae* of Livia and Claudius⁽³⁶⁾. We do not find any trace of these figures in Aquileia, just like no trace is left of the Phrygian celebrations in the month of March, nor the ‘Roman’ ones in April (4th and 10th), nor of any Taurobolia; however, it is possible that the urban calendar was respected with regards to the cult of the *Mater*, which configured itself from the start as the ‘identity’ cult of the Roman state⁽³⁷⁾. The existence of a college of *dendrofori*, who were involved in the March celebrations which were dedicated to *Attis*’s life, seems to confirm this hypothesis⁽³⁸⁾.

(30) TURCAN, 1989, p. 50, ZEVİ, 1997, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 43.

(31) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 744-745, n. 4. See also SCHEID, 1998, p. 23-26, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 299.

(32) Cf. GHEDINI, 1990, p. 256-257, FONTANA, 1997, p. 86-98. See also BOFFO, 2003, p. 532 and nt.10, ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 755, DE FRANZONI, 2013, p. 216-217.

(33) Cf. DE FRANZONI, 2007-2008, p. 36-64, ZACCARIA, 2008a.

(34) VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 40-41, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 299-300. See also VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 41-43, VAN ANDRINGA, VAN HAEPEREN, 2009, p. 34, VAN HAEPEREN, 2011, p. 113, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 99, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 299.

(35) Cf. VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 101.

(36) VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 304

(37) DIO CASS. 54.2.3. Cf. VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 44-45.

(38) CIL V, 1012, PAIS 6686, ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 755, ZACCARIA, 2008b, p. 193. See also VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 101.

Up to the age of Claudius, two forms of known celebrations were dedicated to the *Mater*: the Phrygian ones, in March, were organised by a priest and a priestess who couldn't be Roman by birth, whereas the 'Roman' ones were organised by the *aedilis curulis*; starting from the age of Claudius, the 'Phrygian' celebrations entered the official calendar as well⁽³⁹⁾. There is no reason to think that a different form of cult was practised in Aquileia, but the relative epigraphic documentation is scarce. Some *ex visu/viso, ex imperio* formulas⁽⁴⁰⁾ are not necessarily attributable to a form of *incubatio*, and it is quite possible that the responses were dispensed by the *antistites*, probably appointed by the priests, as mentioned in one of the inscriptions from Aquileia dating back to the 2nd century AD⁽⁴¹⁾.

And now for the Isiac cults.

Locating the place of cult is, perhaps, the least problematic issue. As a matter of fact, the relative literature identifies with unanimous consensus the area of Monastero, north-east of town, as the area dedicated to Isiac cults; several attempts to find a more precise location, still subject to small variations, brought about less and less generic indications⁽⁴²⁾. Thus, the sanctuary would have been located, just like other *Isea/Serapea* from the imperial age, in the vicinity of the port and in relation to the buildings appointed for storing and trading wheat, in an area that could be considered urban during the Empire, regardless of the late-republican walls, which were already partially abandoned in the Julio-Claudian phase⁽⁴³⁾.

I will not examine the archaeological and epigraphic evidence, as it has been almost all published⁽⁴⁴⁾; I will just point out that nowadays there is agreement on the fact that Isiac cults were officially introduced in Aquileia during the Flavian age, and since the beginning their cornerstone was the Alexandrine couple, venerated for its ties with the imperial house regardless of possible forms of private worship, as to whose nature it remains hard to determine how their significance as an actual cult compares to their cultural value⁽⁴⁵⁾.

The worshippers, men and women, were either simple people or freedmen⁽⁴⁶⁾. There are still many uncertainties regarding some important aspects of liturgy and the participants to the cult, which could allow to understand, even in broad terms, what daily life was like around the sanctuary and which were the main celebrations in the north-Adriatic town. An allusion to a 'spe-

(39) Cf. BORGEAUD, 1996, p. 132-134, BELAYCHE, 2000, p. 572, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 40-41, VAN HAEPEREN, 2011, p. 467-484, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 99, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014b, p. 299.

(40) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 748-749, n. 7 and 749, n. 8.

(41) ZACCARIA, 2008a, p. 748-749, n. 7.

(42) FONTANA, 2010, p. 102-105, REBAUDO, 2013, p. 353-360, GIOVANNINI, 2014, p. 143-146.

(43) Cf. BUDISCHOVSKI, 1977, p. 121, VERZÁR BASS, 1998, p. 215, BUDISCHOVSKI, 2000, p. 246, VERZÁR BASS, 2000, p. 155, FONTANA, 2010, p. 105, FONTANA, 2015, p. 59.

(44) Cf. MURGIA, 2010. See also DOLZANI, 1956, DOLZANI, 1977, GIOVANNINI, 2014, p. 143-146, FONTANA, 2010, p. 108 e 113.

(45) Cf. GIOVANNINI, 2001, GIOVANNINI, 2002, GIOVANNINI, 2005. See also FONTANA, 2010, p. 117-118.

(46) Cf. FONTANA, 2010, p. 296-307.



Fig. 5 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inscription to the *thea epiphanés* offered by the sacred scribe *Arnouphis* (EDR117382)



Fig. 6 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inscription *ex visu* of *T. Flavius Castus* (Lupa 18611).

cialistic' type of priestly practice is found in a bilingual inscription to the *thea epiphanés*, the 'goddess that manifests herself', identified as Isis; the latter was perhaps offered between 168 and 171 AD by the *hierogrammateus* (sacred scribe) *Arnouphis* and by someone called *Terentios Preiskos*⁽⁴⁷⁾ (figure 5). Aside from this epiclesis for the goddess, which refers to a form of ritualistic apparition, there is no other trace of such practices in Aquileia, with the possible exception of the inscription *ex visu* of *T. Flavius Castus* some decades later⁽⁴⁸⁾ (figure 6). The data seem to suggest that, at least from the 2nd century AD, there were forms of epiphany of the goddess within the sanctuary, if not oracle practices, as attested in several *Iseal/Serapea*⁽⁴⁹⁾. Just like in Rome, in Aquileia the Isiac priesthood was entrusted with spe-

(47) Cf. BRUSIN, 1931, c. 75, *AE* 1934, p. 64, n. 245, BRUSIN, 1934, p. 165-167, n. 3, BRUSIN, 1948, c.75-79, PANCIERA, 1957, p. 90, PASCAL, 1964, p. 44, nt. 4 and p. 47-48, VIDMAN, 1969, p. 274-275, n. 61, MALAISE, 1972, p. 10, BUDISCHOVSKI, 1977, p. 124-125, Aq 25, MORA, 1990, p. 394 n. 42 e 433 n. 327, *InscrAq* 234, GIOVANNINI, 2001, p. 296, nt. 56, LETTICH, 2003, p. 181-182, n. 238, BRICAULT, 2005, 515/0115, *Cromazio* 2008, p. 210 and 220, V.2 (G. LETTICH), FONTANA, 2010, p. 296-297, Aq.02, EDR117382.

(48) Cf. BRUSIN, 1934, p. 164-165, n. 1, *AE* 1934, p. 64, n. 243, PASCAL, 1964, p. 46, nt. 4, VIDMAN, 1969, n. 612, MALAISE, 1972, p. 9-10, BUDISCHOVSKI, 1977, p. 120, Aq 13, MORA, 1990, p. 411, n. 162, *InscrAq* 232, GIOVANNINI, 2001, p. 296, nt. 56, BRICAULT, 2005, 515/114, FONTANA, 2010, p. 300, Aq.06, FONTANA, 2015, p. 61, EDR073254, Lupa 18611. See also BRICAULT, 2013, p. 416-418

(49) Cf. BRICAULT, 2005, 202/0340, 202/0245, 202/283 (Delos), BRICAULT, 2005, 101/0221 (Athens) and BRICAULT, 2013, p. 269, 411-413 (Rome).

Fig. 7 Aquileia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inscription of a stolist (*InscrAq 727*)



cialised, permanent and hierarchical clergy of Egyptian inspiration, which was independent from Roman authority⁽⁵⁰⁾: amongst them appeared a stolist, i.e. a priest that adorned the statue of the goddess and prepared it for daily liturgy⁽⁵¹⁾ (figure 7). Of course, unlike the priests of *Mater Magna*, this did not constitute a public priesthood, even though Acerra displays a *sacerdos publicus deae Isidis et Serapidis*⁽⁵²⁾ and in Ostia the sanctuary is public⁽⁵³⁾.

The issue remains open.

There is still one last point to clarify regarding the mysteric nature of the Isiac and Metroac cults. If one uses the mysteries of Eleusis and Samothrace as models, as they have a foundation value (at least in the first case) and as their initiatic component is decisive and salient, then the problematic aspects become predominant⁽⁵⁴⁾. In fact, in the cult of the *Mater*, the characteristic aspect is the mystical, 'enthusiastic-orgiastic' element which utilised an induced sacred delusion (through a specific ritualistic practice, with dance, drums, and cymbals) to seek contact between human and divine⁽⁵⁵⁾. A mysteric aspect, characterised by initiation and eschatological tension, is very rarely attested at the epigraphic level, and only in *Clemens Alexandrinus* (second half of the 2nd century AD) and *Firmicus Maternus* (337-350 AD) when it comes to literary sources⁽⁵⁶⁾. The link between the *taurobolium*, which was probably already introduced during the Claudian age, as a ritual that substituted human castration, and a mysteric aspect is still to be demonstrated, even though one cannot exclude, in the late imperial age, especially

(50) Cf. RÜPKE, 2005, p. 34, *ThesCRA V, s.v. Personnel de culte. Monde romain. Personnel of cult, cult instruments*, p. 66-146 (S. ESTIENNE), VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 44.

(51) Cf. *IG XIV 2338*, PAIS 226, *InscrAq 727*, MALAISE, 2003, p. 436, BRICAULT, 2005, 515/0125, FONTANA, 2010, p. 116-117, nt. 83, FONTANA, 2015, p. 62. See also CALDERINI, 1930, p. 137, PANCIERA, 1957, p. 90, nt. 242, BOFFO, 2000, p. 129, BOFFO, 2003, p. 538, ZACCARIA 2007, p. 403, PESAVENTO MATTIOLI, ZACCARIA, 2009, p. 280.

(52) BRICAULT, 2005, 504/0701, BRICAULT, 2005, 503/1123, 1125 e 1127 (Ostia). See also STEUERNAGEL, 2004, p. 219, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 44.

(53) MAR, 2001, VAN HAEPEREN, 2011, p. 110-111.

(54) Cf. SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2006, p. 189. See also VAN ANDRINGA, VAN HAEPEREN, 2009, p. 32.

(55) Cf. SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2003, SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2006, p. 198.

(56) Cf. SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2006, p. 198-202, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 107-109. *Contra* BORGEAUD, 1996, p. 162.

by analogy with Mithraic rituals, that contact with the sacrificed bull's blood could have had the generic meaning of spiritual change⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The *status* of Isiac cults is less complex but equally ambiguous. Other than the Osirian mysteries, which do not require any form of initiation, only Apuleius wrote about the existence of an initiatic procedure in stages, which would take Lucius into a select circle of adepts⁽⁵⁸⁾. However, even in this case there is no mention of otherworldly salvation, even though there is an explicit form of initiation. As a matter of fact, Lucius's new life and the success he is destined to achieve under the protection of the goddess are mundane, i.e. success in the legal profession and material wellbeing⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Thus, the evidence for the 'Oriental cults' in Aquileia contribute to showing that they had little to do with the 'fast track' which, according to Cumont, these cults would have represented in order to 'réunir les peuples dans le sein d'une Eglise universelle'⁽⁶⁰⁾.

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(57) Cf. DUTHOY, 1968, BORGEAUD, 1996, p. 156-158, MCLYNN, 1996, p. 312-330, VAN HAEPEREN, 2006, p. 45-46, ALVAR, 2008, p. 261-275, CAMERON, 2011, p. 159-163, VAN HAEPEREN, 2014a, p. 108-109.

(58) AP. 11.23.2-4. Cf. SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2006, p. 192-194.

(59) Cf. SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2003, SFAMENI GASPARRO, 2006, p. 194.

(60) CUMONT, 2006³, p. 314. See also PIRENNE-DELFORGE, SCARPI, 2006, p. 159, VAN HAEPEREN, 2007, p. 160.

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