

MERCHANTS, SOLDIERS AND SLAVES.  
THE SOCIAL AFFILIATION OF THE PROPAGATORS OF ISIS  
AND SARAPIS CULT IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE,  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

By

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Although much has been said about the Egyptian gods in the Graeco-Roman world, there is still a significant lack of works concerning their worshippers. We know rather well people who have been referred to in literary texts, like Lucius of Corinth, the protagonist of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Yet this article concentrates on all those people who have been passed over in silence, the authors of inscriptions addressed to the gods of the Nile and the ones who are only mentioned once in our evidence.

My inquiry has focused on material coming from Italy and the European and African provinces of the Roman Empire – with the exception of Greece and Egypt. The cult of the Egyptian gods in Egypt was an effect of thousands of years of religious tradition, so it needs special studies. The Egyptian religion arrived in Greece much earlier and under different circumstances than in Rome. The Hellenic culture so influenced the incoming cult that it took a very different shape than the cult of Egyptian deities in Italy, where it started proliferating in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Some scholars have even stated that the *interpretatio Romana* of the cult in question was closer to its original than *interpretatio Graeca*<sup>1</sup>.

Within the so defined limits the research material consists of 645 inscriptions, most of them published in a recent work of L. Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques (RICIS)*. However, they must be supplemented by several *tituli* published in *L'Année Épigraphique*, and by some published by L. Vidman in his *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae (SIRIS)* that were omitted by Bricault.

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<sup>1</sup> Vidman 1970: 17 f.; Wild 1981: 4, 150.