SARAPIS AND THE APIS BULL

A. THE APIS BULL AND OSIRIS

Sarapis was more than simply a Hellenized Osiris, even in the earliest stages of his development. The proof lies in the variety of gods identified with Sarapis, and the differences between the names and the physical appearances of Sarapis and Osiris. According to the most common theory in ancient and modern accounts, Sarapis was a fusion of Osiris with the Apis bull of Memphis. The last four letters of Sarapis’ name have lent authority to this view ever since Nymphodorus of Syracuse, in the late fourth century B.C. (Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, I, 21, 106) derived “Sarapis” from Σοφός “Απιδος, the tomb of the Apis bull, through the intermediate form “Soroapis”. The third-century Phylarchus (Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride, 362B-C) accepted the god’s origin in the bull of Memphis; his contemporary Aristeas of Argos (Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, I, 21, 106) also derived “Sarapis” from “Apis”, but he meant the Apis who was legendary king of Argos. Athenodorus of Tarsus in the first century B.C. (Clement of Alexandria, Protrepticus, IV, 48) wrote that the statue of Sarapis was made from a combination of materials from the burial of Osiris and Apis. According to Callimachus (Fr. 84, Pfeiffer) and Strabo (XVII, 1, 31), the Apis bull was the same as Osiris; according to Diodorus (I, 85, 4), the soul of Osiris was changed after his death into the Apis bull. Plutarch in a number of passages (De Iside et Osiride, 359B, 362C-D, 368C) referred to the Apis as the “image” of Osiris’ soul.

1 UPZ, pp. 25-29.
2 Compare Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride, 362C.
3 σώθετον ἀπὸ τῆς Ὀσίριδος καὶ τῆς Ἀπιδος γενόμενον Ὀσίραπις.
4 τοῦ Ἀπίδος, δὲ ἐστιν ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ Ὀσίρις.
5 τελευτήσαντος Ὁσίριδος εἰς τούτον ἡ ψυχὴ μετέστη. Compare Diodorus, I, 21, 10.
B. Osiris-Apis and Sarapis at Memphis

The terminology of the Serapeum papyri enabled Wilcken to prove that "Sarapis" was equivalent to "Osorapis", the Greek transliteration of the Egyptian name Wsir-Ḥp, Osiris-Apis. The shrine of the bulls is called the Serapeum, τὸ Σαραπεῖον, repeatedly in these documents, and the term "Osorapis" clearly refers to the souls of the dead Apis bulls whose souls have become part of Osiris. The "Curse of Artemisia", written in the middle of the fourth century B.C., uses the form "Oserapis" to refer to the Osirified bull god even before the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Wilcken argued that not only the name but also the divine personality of Sarapis was an extension of that of Osorapis of Memphis, citing Sarapis' functions as a god of oracles and healing, attested for the Apis bull by a stela from the second century B.C. which shows the bull standing beside an altar, accompanied by an inscription that alludes to the interpretation of dreams. The same is true of Sarapis' identification with the sun, since in some documents Apis is called the son of Re. The Apis bull was also considered a god of fertility and of the dead, as were both Osiris and Sarapis, and he was also associated with particular intimacy with the Pharaoh. In addition, his popularity made the Apis bull an appropriate focus for a cult intended to draw together the various elements of the Ptolemaic population: according to Plutarch (De Iside et Osiride, 380D) he was one of the most popular gods of the Egyptians, and Greeks not only could read about him in Herodotus (III, 27-28), but in subsequent centuries flocked in great numbers to his oracle.

It is tempting to observe that many of these attributes seem to apply to the Apis bull, not necessarily to the Osorapis who developed into Sarapis, but this would involve too rigid an analysis, for "what

1 UPZ, i.
2 UPZ, pp. 88-89.
3 C. Edgar, Greek Sculpture (CGC, Nos. 27425-27630: Cairo, 1903), 27567: ἐνόπτων κρίνω τοῦ θεοῦ πρόσταγμα ἡξον· τυχάςει Κρής ἐστιν ὁ κρίνων τάδε.
5 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
6 Ibid., pp. 33-34.