
BY

HORST R. MOEHRING
Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A.

1. The Isis Cult in Rome. — The worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis was spread throughout the Mediterranean world by sailors and merchants 1). It reached Syracuse at the beginning of the third century B.C. During the year 105 B.C. the municipality of Pozzuoli decided to perform certain types of work in front of the local Serapeum 2). During the time of Sulla a college of pastophori was founded in Rome 3). There the cult was very persistent, in spite of repeated attempts to suppress it. Between the years 59 and 48 B.C., the Senate issued five different orders to tear down the altars and statues of the cult (in 59, 58, 53, and 48).

The edict of 59 was conjectured by J. ZIEHEN on the basis of a textual emendation in Cicero. He changed the passage: *iacet enim ille sic ut phocis Curiana stare videatur* 4), into: *ut prae hoc Isis Curiana stare videatur*. ZIEHEN believes that the official campaign against the Egyptian cult was accompanied by private demonstrations, resulting in attacks on Isis believers and the destruction of statues and altars, and that some act of this kind may have caused a public scandal:

...vielleicht hatte die heimliche Zerstörung eines Isisbildes im Frühjahr 59 gerade Anlass zu öffentlichem Skandal gegeben, so dass der Fall eine ephemere Sprichwörtlichkeit erlangte; wir können dann wohl verstehen, wenn Cicero von Pompeius schreibt: *iacet ille sic, ut prae hoc Isis Curiana stare videatur* 5).

3) APULEIUS, *Metamorphoses* xi, 30.
4) CICERO, *Ad Att. ii*, 17, 2.
This textual emendation and interpretation is accepted by O. Seeck 1), who adds some further evidence from Tertullian 2), according to which the altars of the Egyptian divinities had been destroyed, on order of the Senate, before the consulate of Gabinius, i.e. not later than 59 B.C., but later had been restored by the mobs. When Gabinius took office, the populace demanded a declaration of him in favor of the Isis cult, but the consul refused. Evidently, his successors in office were less steadfast, for five years later, in 53 B.C., a new decree against the cult was issued by the Senate.

Seeck explains the name of Isis Curiana from the name of its probable donor, Quintus Curius, who in 70 B.C. was expelled from the Senate and who later became an associate of Catiline. This would agree with the testimony of Dio Cassius, according to which the oldest sanctuaries of the Egyptian divinities in Rome were established by private persons 3).

After Caesar's death, the triumvirs decided in 43 B.C. to erect a temple of Isis, "undoubtedly to gain the favor of the masses" 4), but nothing came of it. The Alexandrian divinities were associated with the name of Antony, who had shown himself an enemy of the Roman people and state. Furthermore, Octavian was on principle opposed to the foreign cults. His religious attitude found its expression not only in the prohibition of foreign rites 5), but also in an active support of the native religion, as evidenced in the Augustan Revival, for which Horace composed his Carmen Saeculare.

2. The Persecution of A.D. 19. — In A.D. 19 Tiberius once more suppressed the Isis cult. Our main source for this persecution is Tacitus, who at the end of his discussion of the events of that year speaks of the Egyptian and Jewish rites:

Actum et de sacratis Aegyptiis Judaicisque pellendis factumque patrum consultum ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam venerentur, coercendis illic latrociniis et, si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum; ceteri cederent Italia nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus euisissent 6).

2) TERTULLIAN, Ad Nat. i, 10.
3) DIO CASSIUS xl, 47, 3.
4) CUMONT, p. 82.
5) In 28 B.C. the erection of altars to Alexandrian gods was forbidden inside the boundaries of the pomerium. In 21 B.C. Agrippa extended the prohibited area to a radius of a thousand steps around the city of Rome.
6) TACITUS, Annales ii, 85.