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Divine commands, authority, and cult: Imperative dedications to the Egyptian gods

Abstract

This article presents the dedications made to the Egyptian deities “in accordance with divine command” in the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The gods of Egypt exhorted and, if disobeyed, demanded from their adherents the performance of specific actions. As it is demonstrated by “imperative dedications” this communication between gods and worshippers was disclosed in public. First, the article examines the imperative expressions in use, the syntax and style of dedicatory language, and proposes a typology of “imperative dedications” in the framework of Isiac cults. Moreover, it is argued that imperatives constituted a means for the promotion of Isiac cults; most often, the Egyptian gods requested the execution of ritual acts, which either improved and embellished already-founded Isiac cults, or advanced the introduction of Isiac divinities in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world. Finally, it is asserted that “imperative dedications” constitute an important testimony for Graeco-Roman attitudes regarding the Egyptian gods. They are indicative of a complex relationship between these gods and their adherents, since the distance presupposed by the issuing of a command did not preclude the creation of close ties between the Isiac divinities and their worshippers.

Keywords: Egyptian gods, Isiac cults, epigraphy, imperatives, dedications

Introduction

Diodorus Siculus (3.6.2) asserts that “human nature is not capable of disregarding divine commands”.¹ The extant sources for the Hellenized divinities of Egypt support his statement. The introduction myth of the Sarapis cult in Alexandria employs the themes of divine order, temporary resistance, and compliance to the will of the god.² A corresponding narrative

pattern is also detected in the case of Zoilos, who, when he disregarded Sarapis’s commands, fell ill and recovered only by executing the god’s orders.³ The recipients of commands from the Isiac deities, however, were far more numerous than these celebrated cases. They left the traces of their communication with the imposing divinities of Egypt in public places, thus demonstrating their acknowledgement and obedience to them.

The use of imperative language in the framework of Isiac cults, although noted by scholars such as Nock, Bömer, and van Straten, had not been the subject of systematic study before Renberg’s thesis (2003).⁴ Renberg’s excellent dissertation is an exhausting and most comprehensive study of the type of dedications which he names “*viso/iussu*” inscriptions and refer to the dream, vision, or message of the god that prompted them. Renberg copiously gathers and perceptively analyses the available Greek and Latin epigraphical evidence. The present article aims at furthering issues relating specifically to Egyptian cults that are raised in Renberg’s thesis, but due to the thesis’s scope (an all-encompassing study of the dedications made to more than 100 gods) are not treated sufficiently.

The Isiac imperative: A primarily inscriptional formula

In the Greek-speaking world, divine imperatives were divulged either via epiphanies experienced by individuals or, most frequently, via the institutionalized voice of an oracle.

¹ I wish to thank the *OpAthRom* reviewers for their comments. Following their suggestions I have included several improvements in the manuscript.

² This version of the introduction myth is narrated by Tacitus *Hist.* 4.83–84; Plut. *Mor.* 361e9–362d7; *Scholia* Dionysii per. *Orb.Descrip.* 255.1–28.

³ *P.Cair.Zen.* 1.59034; see also Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 46–48 and Pfeiffer 2008a, 396–400, with references to previous bibliography on this much-discussed text; Renberg & Bubelis 2011, 179–193.

⁴ Nock 1972, I, 45–48, 74–77; Bömer 1990, 207–208; van Straten 1976.

The Isiac gods, however, were focused predominantly on individuals, on a straightforward and unmediated contact with their worshippers, who themselves became recipients of the gods' commands.⁵

This communication between gods and humans, especially from the Hellenistic period onwards, retreated from the private sphere and attained a public dimension.⁶ Isiac imperatives had to be repeated in public, as an accessible to all testimony made by the worshipper. The most suitable means for expressing these concepts was not primarily literature, but inscriptions.

The imperative relationship between the Egyptian gods and their adherents was epigraphically structured in two ways. The majority of the worshippers preferred to underline the *divine order itself* and they concurrently used the expressions *κατὰ πρόσταγμα*, *κατ' ἐπιταγήν*, and *κατὰ κέλευσιν*. Specifically, most of the extant imperatives were articulated with the term *κατὰ πρόσταγμα*; the expression *κατ' ἐπιταγήν* was less frequently used, while the formula *κατὰ κέλευσιν* does not seem to constitute a popular imperative expression (see below). Thus, regarding the expressions in use, imperative dedications to the Egyptian gods are in accordance with the concurrent, general tendencies in the dedicatory language: from the Hellenistic period onwards dedicants focused on the commandment and not the medium of communication.⁷

Some worshippers, however, did not wish to emphasize the divine command, but the fact that it was transmitted through a vision. Accordingly, there evolved an additional structuring of the imperative relation between Isiac gods and men; it underscored the epiphany itself and was expressed with the formulae *κατ' ὄναρ*, *καθ' ὄραμα*, *κατὰ χρηματισμόν*, and *κατὰ τὴν μαντείαν* (see below).

The same tendencies could be detected in the Latin imperative dedications. Most of the Latin-speaking worshippers of the Egyptian gods preferred to stress the commandment itself, using terms such as: (*ex*) *imperio*, *ex monitu*, *ex praecepto*, *iussu*, *divino mandato*. When they wished to underline the vision, they used the expression *ex visu/ex viso*. Compared to the Greek evidence, however, the surviving Latin imperatives are by far less and are dated only during the Imperial period.⁸

The scarcity of the Latin evidence does not allow for a general treatment, since imperative dedications to the Egyptian gods in the Latin-speaking world, although widespread, were quite rare.

The ambiguity of the terms referring to the commandment or the dream is emphasized by Renberg, who delineates the problems arising from scholarly assumptions regarding their meanings.⁹ He points out that often the distinctions between them were not as sharp as modern scholars have assumed. For example, terms that were almost unquestionably related with dream revelation, such as *ἐπιταγή* may well refer to an oracle. However, the "vague references" and the ambiguity of the formulae used does not necessarily demonstrate an ambiguity of the experience of the dedicant. In my opinion, the ambivalence should be primarily linked to epigraphic conventions. Renberg places much emphasis on the exceptions to scholarly assumptions. In this framework, he asserts e.g. that a *κατ' ὄναρ* dedication could have been made by a dedicant after a dream which he did not have himself, but another (a priest or relative) on his behalf.¹⁰ Indeed, there is one such documented case. Based on this single instance Renberg asserts that there might also be other instances, when dedications were made in similar circumstances, but this was not stated by the dedicants. One cannot, of course, exclude this possibility. Nevertheless it is also important to note that the majority of the extant evidence does not record such cases. In my view this may occur for two reasons: either because the experience was indeed unsolicited or because, even if the communication with the divine was mediated, this was not considered as an important fact by the dedicant. One should also not underestimate epigraphic conventions, either on an ecumenical or on a local scale. These conventions demanded that this type of experience, when recorded epigraphically, should be concise and homogenous. Given the fact that a practice develops into a convention, because it has specific advantages and it is considered to be easily understood by the majority, it should be assumed that for the majority of the literate population imperative formulae were not regarded as ambiguous or unclear. Thus, a dedication that was made *κατ' ὄναρ* must have signified that the god to whom the dedication was made appeared in what was perceived as a dream (of sleep or of waking reality) and issued commands addressed to the dedicant.

The papyrological evidence relating to the imperative aspect of the Egyptian divinities is scant. All the papyri with imperative formulae come from Egypt, where, however, imperative expressions enjoy a peculiar status; they were used more

⁵ Cf. Moyer 2011, 168; Renberg 2003, 305–306.

⁶ On the epigraphic habit see the seminal study of MacMullen 1982; on the problems of distinguishing between private and public cult see Aneziri 2005, 219–222.

⁷ Cf. Renberg 2003, 67.

⁸ *Divino mandato*: RICIS 501/0122; *Isidis imperio*: RICIS 113/1007, 113/1011, 508/0401, 503/0901, 601/0202; *ex imperio Isidis*: RICIS 113/1012; [*Isidi*]... *ex imperio*: BIs I 609/0501; *iussu dei Ne[tonis?]*: RICIS 603/0101; *iussu dominae Isidi Bulae*: RICIS 602/0301; *ex monitu eius*: RICIS 514/0401, 515/0501; *ex praecepto S[arapidis?]*: RICIS *703/0302; *ex visu*: RICIS 501/0138, 501/0153, 509/0101, 515/0114,

612/0402, 613/0202; *ex viso*: RICIS 501/0116; *ex viso collegio*: RICIS 501/0112; *ex voto et iussu*: RICIS 602/0202.

⁹ Renberg 2003, 17–27.

¹⁰ Cf. Renberg 2003, 38, 141.

often by kings than gods, even if these gods were principally connected with the Ptolemaic kingship, such as Sarapis and Isis (see below).

The extant literature does not often stress the imperative nature of Isiac deities. Peculiarly, those authors who wished to expand on the nature of these divinities did not usually associate the use of imperatives with them.¹¹

Regardless of the medium on which Isiac imperatives were recorded, what was stressed was the fact that the offerings to the gods were not made due to the dedicants' own initiative; they were dictated by a god. In the following section will be presented the ways in which these commands were articulated.

Imperative dedications to the Isiac deities during the Hellenistic and Imperial periods

DEDICATIONS STRESSING THE DIVINE COMMAND

The adherents of the Isiac deities used two inscriptional formulae, in order to express the idea of a dedication made in accordance with a divine command, while also stressing the act of commandment itself: *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* and *κατ' ἐπιταγήν*.¹² The choice of one in favour of the other was influenced either by local inscriptional conventions (the epigraphic customs of specific areas or sanctuaries),¹³ by the restrictions imposed by the medium itself (e.g., the stone on which the inscription was carved), or by other factors which are unknown to us (and might be related for instance to the stylistic preferences of the dedicant).

The *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* dedications to the Isiac deities

The formula *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* (with its grammatical, syntactical, and dialectical variations) is the earliest of the imperative expressions used in the worship of the Egyptian deities.¹⁴ From the early 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD the worshippers of the Isiac gods employed the *prostagma* formula in order to express the act of making an offering after a divine command. The vast majority of the imperative dedications dated to the Hellenistic period are articulated with the *prostagma* formula, whereas only three of these use the expression *κατ'*

ἐπιταγήν.¹⁵ The *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* formulation did not cease during the Imperial period; from the 1st century AD however, the imperative expressions at hand multiplied, and the relatively uniformity of expression of the Hellenistic period was replaced by a multiplicity of choices for the formulation of the imperative message (with the expression *κατ' ἐπιταγήν* being also highly popular).¹⁶ In total, 64 imperative dedications to the Isiac deities, using the formula *κατὰ πρόσταγμα*, are known to us from the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, thus making the *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* phrasing the most frequent of the imperative formulae in dedicatory inscriptions to the Egyptian deities.¹⁷

The *prostagma* imperative also has a wide geographical distribution; it is found in Athens, Demetrias, Lindos, Tenos, Chalke, Kos, Ephesos, Soloi, and Tyros. The case of Delos should be underlined: Delos holds a conspicuous place in the imperative geography of the Isiac cults, with almost two out of three imperative dedications using the *prostagma* formula being dedicated there.

The simplest phrasing of a *prostagma* dedication includes the name of the dedicant in the nominative case, the name(s) of the god(s) to whom the dedication is made in the dative case and then the imperative expression, e.g.,

Δείνων Χαιρήμονος

[Σ]αράπιδι, Ισιδι, Ανού[βιδι]

[κα]τὰ πρόσταγ[μα] (*RICIS* 202/0602)

(Deinon, son of Chairemon, [makes this dedication]
to Sarapis, Isis [and] Anubis, following a command)

The reversal of the above syntax is quite rare, but not unattested (e.g., *RICIS* 315/0201); in other cases, the proxies of the gods wished to place their name(s) in a conspicuous place at the beginning of the text, and the imperative expression was emphatically placed at the end.¹⁸

¹¹ Plutarch, e.g., in *De Is. et Osir.* does not emphasize the commanding features of the Isiac gods; see however Juv. *Sat.* VI.526.

¹² For the evolution of these formulae as part of inscriptional language see Renberg 2003, 67–94.

¹³ This is especially emphasized by Renberg 2003, 215–232.

¹⁴ For the evolution of the term and its strong relevance to cults originating in Egypt see Renberg 2003, 180–182.

¹⁵ From a total of 65 extant dedications which emphasize the imperative message and are dated to the Hellenistic period, 60 use the *prostagma* formulation.

¹⁶ On the differences between the Hellenistic and the Imperial periods as regards lexical preferences in dedicatory language see Renberg 2003, 191–192.

¹⁷ *Κατὰ πρόσταγμα* imperative dedications (cited in chronological order): *RICIS* 401/0604, *304/0603; *BIs* II 305/2003; *IAlexPtol* 21; *RICIS* 401/0601, 402/0801, 304/0602; *IAlexPtol* 53; *RICIS* 204/0337, 101/0206, 202/0602, 112/0705, 204/0501, 204/1004, 315/0201, *Graff Abyd* 419; *RICIS* *101/0220, 114/0204, 302/0203, 204/1009; *BIs* II 305/2002; to these should be added the Delian *prostagma* dedications, which are all dated to the Hellenistic period (see below).

¹⁸ E.g., *RICIS* 114/0204, 202/0602, 204/1004.

There are few cases where the devotees of the Isiac cults preferred such succinct phrasing. Some of them recorded the type of dedication, especially if it was expensive or impressive,¹⁹ while others wished to name explicitly the gods who issued the command.²⁰ As a rule, the *prostagma* dedications follow common epigraphic conventions and embody popular inscriptional formulae such as the *ὑπέρ* clause. In these cases as well, the imperative expression is normally placed at the end of the text.²¹ In contrast to the private dedications to the Isiac deities from Egypt in which the *ὑπέρ* clause often refers to the royal couple, in the *prostagma* dedications from the rest of the Hellenistic world the same clause retains its traditional meaning: it refers primarily to individuals with whom the dedicant has close ties (family members or friends).²²

The first extant dedication which includes an imperative expression in the framework of Isiac cults was an offering to Sarapis. At the beginning of the 3rd century BC, a Rhodian named Moschion founded in Soloi (Cyprus) a sanctuary of Priapos, following a command of Sarapis.²³ The second earliest imperative dedication comes from Kaunos: it is a *prostagma* offering to Sarapis, Isis and Theoi Adelphoi, which also associates in an early stage the Ptolemaic royal household with the Isiac divinities.²⁴ Finally, in an inscription from Ephesos, a city which had close ties with the Ptolemaic kingdom during the 3rd century BC, a priest called Glaukias founded a sanctuary and a temple after receiving a divine command.²⁵ Although the name of the god who issued the order cannot be discerned, the expressions *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* and *προστάξαντος τοῦ θεοῦ* indicate that the god was probably Sarapis.

Dedications such as the above foreshadow a certain trend regarding Isiac cults in general and the cult of Sarapis in particular. It is noteworthy that, in the 3rd century BC inscriptions, when the divine agent issuing the command is explicitly mentioned, it is most frequently Sarapis.²⁶ Although the evidence is admittedly scanty, it is not unreasonable to suggest that in the early stages of the dispersion of the Sarapis cult in

the cities of the Hellenistic world, Sarapis appeared as a commanding god and the expression his adherents preferred to use during this period was the *κατὰ πρόσταγμα* imperative. In the following centuries, the god, and the other Isiac divinities, appeared systematically to individuals and demanded the execution of acts which pertained primarily to the development and evolution of their worship, such as the introduction of their cult and the repair or embellishment of existing sanctuaries.

The Delian *kata prostagma* dedications

From the three Sarapieia of Delos survive 47 imperative dedications, the vast majority of which (45 of 47) use the *prostagma* formula.²⁷ They are dated from the end of the 3rd century BC to the first decades of the 1st century AD, when, after the siege and invasion of the island by Mithridates, the cultic activity on Delos gradually withered.

The well-known *Delian Chronicle* (*RICIS* 202/0101), the text referring to the foundation of the Sarapis cult on the island, is itself a *prostagma* offering, the earliest of those from Delos (cf. l. 1: ὁ ἱερεὺς Ἀπολλώνιος ἀνέγραψεν κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ). The priest Apollonios II, who, according to the *Chronicle*, experienced Sarapis's dream epiphanies quite regularly, was ordered by the god to record the adventurous introduction of the cult in the island and the god's power, as this was proved with unquestionable miracle acts.²⁸

The text must have exerted a profound influence on the later Delian dedications to the Egyptian gods. Its "canonistic" power is evident not only concerning the religious mentality, but also the inscriptional language. The expression *κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ*, emphatically placed as a heading at the beginning of this extensive text, evolved into a fixed formula in almost all the imperative dedications of Delos up to 167/6 BC. Some of them are dated only a few years after Apollonios's dedication: at the end of the 3rd, or the beginning of the 2nd century BC, a certain Mnesikleides dedicated a stele to Sarapis, Isis, and Anubis, the "victorious" gods, "in accordance with the order of the god."²⁹ The inscription follows the syntax of the first line of the *Chronicle* and has been adjusted to the demands of a succinct private dedication (with the addition of

¹⁹ E.g., *RICIS* 112/0705, *304/0603, 401/0604.

²⁰ E.g., *RICIS* *101/0220, 204/0501, 302/0203.

²¹ E.g., *RICIS* 304/0602, 401/0601.

²² E.g., *RICIS* 101/0206; for the various uses of *hyper* in a religious context see Suk Fong Jim 2014, *passim* and esp. pp. 618–627.

²³ *RICIS* 401/0604.

²⁴ *BIs* II 305/2003.

²⁵ *RICIS* *304/0603; Keil 1954, 222 dates the inscription between 244–204 BC; he believes that Isiac cults were introduced in Ephesus via Ptolemaic state propaganda, and thus assumes that the dedication was made when the Ptolemies had direct control of the city. Bricault (*RICIS* II, no. *304/0603, p. 433) dates it to the early 3rd century BC. For the role of state propaganda and individual initiative in the diffusion of Isiac cults see Bricault 2008.

²⁶ Cf. *RICIS* 202/0101, 202/0122, 202/0124, 202/0129, *304/0603, 401/0604; Sarapis and Isis: *LAlexPtol.* 21.

²⁷ Cited in chronological order: *RICIS* 202/0101, 202/0122, 202/0124, 202/0129, 202/0146, 202/0149, 202/0150, 202/0152, 202/0164–66, 202/0168, 202/0170, 202/0173, 202/0176, 202/0178, 202/0179, 202/0180, 202/0183, 202/0185, 202/0186, 202/0199, 202/0200, 202/0385, 202/0416, 202/0423–24, 202/0433, 202/0236, 202/0242–43, 202/0252, 202/0263, 202/0287–88, 202/0322, 202/0225; *BIs* II 202/0439; *RICIS* *202/0434, 202/0362, 202/0372, 202/0340–41, 202/0349, 202/0357, 202/0360.

²⁸ For the *Chronicle* see Roussel 1915–1916, 71–83; Fraser 1960, 22–23; Bruneau 1970, 459–461; Engelmann 1975; Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 48–49; Moyer 2011, 142–207 makes a revised interpretation of the aretology.

²⁹ *RICIS* 202/0122.

the ὑπὲρ clause). A contemporary, but more impressive offering uses the same formula. The Tenian Ktesias dedicated a cylindrical pillar on a base, after the command of the god, which bore the copper head of an animal.³⁰ The text is followed by five verses in archaic style, which the speaking animal addresses to the passer-by. The combination of poetry and prose is also attested in the *Delian Chronicle*, which was engraved on a stele erected in close proximity to Ktesias's pillar.

The use of the genitive case to denote the god is found in almost all dedications up to the end of the independence of Delos. It is noteworthy that this imperative formulation which personifies the divine command is rarely attested outside Delos.³¹ The frequency of this expression on Delos might be related to the formulative effect of the *Delian Chronicle*. In order to estimate the influence of this important text we should first take into account the conspicuous place which it held in the sanctuary. Moreover, its impression on the worshippers can be related to the content of the *Chronicle* itself. It is an impressive and unique *encomium*, a text which must have evoked the emotions of the worshippers, while also bringing to the foreground practical considerations: supernatural events were combined with real and the final triumph of the god was then acknowledged as a historical fact,³² the consequences of which were still felt by his adherents visiting his sanctuary some decades later. The influence of such a text would not have been easily marginalized and maybe this is the reason why later dedicants tried to imitate its style.

The imperative dedications continue after the Athenian domination of the island, indicating that imperatives had evolved into a structural element of Isiac cults on Delos. However, the homogeneity exhibited by the Delian evidence before 167/6 BC is not retained; after this date no inscription survives using the expression κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ. The diversifications in inscriptional language might be related to the political and social transition, from Delian to Athenian rule.³³

The Athenian occupation generated modifications not only concerning the administration of the island, but also its cult. Sarapieion C was administered by the Athenian state: the dating of the texts was adjusted to Athenian inscriptional patterns and the priest of Sarapis, now an Athenian citizen, is referred to in the date-section of the offering to the Isiac deities.³⁴

Furthermore, a massive marble stele testifies to the fact that the Athenian control of Delos had a considerable effect

on Isiac cults—at least as far as Sarapieion A was concerned.³⁵ The inscription, which has survived almost intact, combines two texts. The first is a letter from the Athenian generals to the *epimeletes* of Delos and the second a *senatus consultum* translated into Greek, which chronologically precedes the letter. According to the stele, the Athenians of Delos disturbed the performance of cultic acts in Sarapieion A and the Athenian *epimeletes* ordered its closing. The priest of Sarapis, Demetrios, who was most probably a descendant of Apollonios I, addressed the senate and asked for its mediation. The senate decided that the cult of the Egyptian gods should continue undisturbed and ordered the opening of the sanctuary. If we accept the dating of the inscription to 165 or 164 BC,³⁶ then the events to which it refers should be dated prior to this, that is, shortly after the Athenian occupation. Although the exact causes of the dispute are not known,³⁷ the inscription suggests that the Athenian presence on Delos did not leave the cult of the Egyptian deities untouched. In this framework it can be assumed that the effects of the Athenian presence also reached inscriptional language; the expression κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ would have alluded to the pre-Athenian status of Delos and consequently it was abandoned and replaced by the simple *prostagma* formulation.

The expression “according to the order of the god” is not the sole peculiarity of the Delian imperative dedications. Only in Delos is the expression κατὰ πρόσταγμα διὰ ὀνειροκρίτου attested.³⁸ The dedicatory formula reveals some ritual aspects of the Isiac cults, which are not normally highlighted in such succinct texts. The god appeared in a dream and gave a message to his or her worshipper. The worshipper, however, was either perplexed or not capable of decoding it. For this reason he/she turned to a professional dream interpreter, who then elucidated the divine will.³⁹

The κατ' ἐπιταγὴν dedications to the Isiac deities

The second most popular imperative expression, which stressed the Egyptian gods' commands, is κατ' ἐπιταγὴν. Although this type of imperative formula was not unknown to the dedicants of the Hellenistic age, the extant evidence sug-

³⁰ *RICIS* 202/0124.

³¹ Specifically, only in one dedication from Ephesos (*RICIS* *304/0603).

³² For the trial and its possible allusions to Egyptian mythology and Homer see Moyer 2011, 175–192.

³³ Cf. also Renberg 2003, 187–188.

³⁴ E.g., *RICIS* 202/0236, 202/0242.

³⁵ *CE* 14.

³⁶ Proposed by Habicht 1997, 256. For the problems concerning the dating see Bricault (*RICIS* 202/0195); see also Martzavou 2014, 177–184.

³⁷ According to Roussel 1913, 317–320, the Athenians attempted to shut Sarapieion A because they regarded it as a rival sanctuary to Sarapieion C which they controlled. See also Moyer 2011, 197.

³⁸ *RICIS* 202/0340–41.

³⁹ For the services offered by dream interpreters, which might not be directly referred in imperative dedications, see Renberg 2015, 241–242.

gests that it gained wider popularity primarily during the Imperial period.⁴⁰

From the Hellenistic period survive only three imperative dedications using the *epitage* formula. The earliest is dated to the 3rd century BC and comes from Chersonesos in Krimaia. It is an offering, possibly of an altar, to the Isiac triad, Sarapis, Isis, and Anubis, by Charmippos.⁴¹ The first editors of the inscription, Y.G. Vinogradov and M.I. Zolotarev,⁴² believed that it referred to the introduction of the cult of the Egyptian gods to Chersonesos, by a member of the local aristocracy. Their assumption seems to be reasonable, given the parallels from other cities of the Hellenistic world relating to the introduction patterns of the Isiac gods: in Alexandria, Delos, Opus, and possibly Ephesos and Soloi, Egyptian cults were introduced through imperative formulae addressing individuals. In all these cases the imperative expression used is *κατὰ πρόσταγμα*; only in the Chersonesos inscription is the imperative *κατ' ἐπιταγήν* attested in such an early period and in the framework of an introductory inscription.

Dedications of this type were quite popular in Macedonia. There the dedicants who wished to emphasize the divine command (and not the divine epiphany) used exclusively the *epitage* formula. The majority of the extant inscriptions are found in the Sarapieion of Thessaloniki, a sanctuary where the imperative power of the Isiac gods seems to have been strongly felt. A celebrated example is the so-called *Miracle of Thessaloniki*, an inscription referring to the introduction of the Sarapis cult in the city of Opus in west Locris.⁴³ The orders issued by Sarapis and Isis constitute the narrative axes of the story retold by the inscription. A certain Xenainetos came from the city of Opus to the Sarapieion of Thessaloniki, where Sarapis paid one of his nocturnal visits. He ordered him to find one of his fellow citizens, called Eurynomos, and tell him that the god was charging him with the reception of Sarapis and Isis in his city. Sarapis announced that he would leave a letter with instructions in order to deliver it to Eurynomos. When Xenainetos woke up, he was amazed, but reluctant, since Eurynomos was his political adversary. Consequently, for some time he defied the god's orders. Then the god appeared to him again and ordered him to obey. Xenainetos executed the god's

commands (cf. l. 12: τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιταχθέντα), and some time later, Eurynomos introduced the cult to the city.

The inscription recording the arrival of Sarapis in Opus is dated to the 1st century AD, but it is a copy of an older text which has been dated to the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 2nd century BC. The fact that the priests of Sarapis decided to replace the old inscription is indicative of its importance. Such dedications in temples served multiple goals. The priests or other members of the priestly personnel might have recited them (maybe together with other popular myths, such as the arrival of Sarapis in Alexandria). The temple visitors must have read them, since they were usually erected in conspicuous spots at the sites. These myths, written or oral, could have exerted a canonizing influence, which both cultivated a special spiritual climate, and exemplified a certain ritual behaviour to the worshippers.

In this sense, it might not be coincidental that at least four additional imperative dedications were made at the Sarapieion of Thessaloniki during the first centuries AD.⁴⁴ The exclusive use of the term *κατ' ἐπιταγήν* in these dedications could be attributed to the canonizing power of the *Miracle of Thessaloniki*, which, as in the case of the *Delian Chronicle*, inspired other dedicants and consolidated the inscriptional vocabulary relating to imperatives.

The κατ' ἐπελευσιν dedications to the Isiac deities

The *κατὰ ἐπελευσιν* formula is only rarely attested in the extant evidence. It should be regarded as an exception and not as a parallel expression to the other imperative formulae that stress the divine command. The surviving inscriptions are dated to the Imperial period. Two of them were found in Rome and another in the Roman colony Comama in Pamphylia Secunda.⁴⁵

DEDICATIONS STRESSING THE DIVINE EPIPHANY

The Isiac worshippers who wished to underline the epiphany itself, that is, the divine vision and not the divine command, primarily used the expressions *κατ' ὄναρ* or *κατ' ὄνειρον* and *καθ' ὄραμα*, and rarely *κατὰ χρηματισμόν* and *κατὰ τὴν μαντείαν*.⁴⁶ In this type of dedications the commandment is alluded to by use of the prepositional phrase *κατὰ* + noun, which, for the Greek-speaking population, connoted an agent issuing the imperative message, the message itself and its addressee. These formulae underscored the event which preceded the dedication and is usually only implied in the inscriptions: the divine epiphany during which the god commands

⁴⁰ *RICIS* 115/0302 (3rd century BC), *115/0303 (1st century BC); *IAlexImp* 56 (29 BC); *RICIS* 113/0570 (1st–2nd century AD), 101/0222 (c. AD 120), 113/0555 (2nd century AD); 113/0566–67 (2nd–3rd century AD), 113/0206 (2nd–3rd century AD); dated to the Imperial period: *RICIS* 105/0894, 301/0601, 305/1403, 113/0203, 303/0201. For the prominence of the *epitage* formula during the Imperial period see Renberg 2003, 70, 193–194.

⁴¹ Vinogradov & Zolotarev 1999, 358–364.

⁴² Vinogradov & Zolotarev 1999, 358–364.

⁴³ *RICIS* 113/0536; Dunand 1973, 42–44; Merkelbach 1973, 49–54; Sokolowski 1974, 441–445; Bricault 2013, 81–83; Aliquot 2014, 138–139.

⁴⁴ *RICIS* 113/0570, 113/0566–67, 113/0555.

⁴⁵ *RICIS* 501/0153–54; *BLs* I 312/1601.

⁴⁶ For the use of these formulae in dedicatory inscriptions see Renberg 2003, 39–67 (*ὄναρ*, *ὄνειρον*, *ὄραμα*), 95–112 (*χρηματισμός*, *μαντεία*).

the execution of an action in honour of himself/herself or another divinity.

The κατ' ὄναρ and καθ' ὄραμα dedications to the Isiac deities

It is not surprising that the dedications made “after a command pronounced in a dream” are commonly found in the Isiac temples practising incubation. The majority of this type of imperative dedication comes from the Sarapieion of Thessaloniki.⁴⁷

Imperative dedications of this type are also attested in other cities, but they are less frequent in comparison to the κατὰ πρόσταγμα and κατ' ἐπιταγήν. The divergence (approximately one of the seven dedications underlines the dream-vision) suggests that the individuals of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods who wished to record the dream element of the communication between themselves and the Egyptian gods were only few.

The κατὰ τὴν μαντείαν and κατὰ τὸν χρησμόν dedications to Isiac deities

The phrase κατὰ τὴν μαντείαν is one of the most popular of the prepositional phrases used in private dedicatory inscriptions.⁴⁸ Isiac cults, however, are differentiated from this inscriptional custom; the term κατὰ τὴν μαντείαν, or the synonym κατὰ τὸν χρησμόν, are rarely used to denote the imperative nature of the Egyptian gods.⁴⁹

Isiac imperatives and the promotion of the cult of the Egyptian Gods

The majority of imperative dedications to Isiac deities are concise and typified. The dedicants present themselves and state the names of the gods to whom the offering is made; they sometimes explicitly mention the type of their dedication and finally they declare that the commemorated act took place following the order of one of the Egyptian gods. The time and the place of the order, the reasons which prompted it and the situation at which the order had been issued are usually left untold.

Although limited, the narratives that play on the theme of imperatives reveal the often omitted prehistory of the dedications. The Zoilos papyrus, the *Miracle of Thessaloniki*, the *Delian Chronicle*, and the introduction myth of the Sarapis cult in Alexandria, as recited by Plutarch and Tacitus, employ a similar imperative pattern, which could have formed the intellectual background of the brief imperative dedications: the Egyptian gods appear in dreams and visions experienced by individuals. The epiphanies are recurrent, persistent, and gradually more intense; in most cases they command the performance of a specific ritual or give instructions for other actions.

Imperative dedications are heirs of a long-standing Egyptian tradition, which was expressed principally in the *Königsnovelle*. This literary genre exalted the pharaoh's religious and military role and a common narrative pattern would include the king's involvement—typically following a divine order—in constructing and restoring Egypt's monuments. However, when this motif is used in the framework of the Graeco-Roman *oikoumene*, a major change occurs: the pharaoh as addressee of the divine command is replaced by a private individual.⁵⁰

Thus, one of the Egyptian gods may appear in a dream and command the building of a sanctuary, temple, or altar in his/her honour⁵¹ or in honour of other gods (e.g., *RICIS* 401/0604). One of the most conspicuous examples is the construction of the small shrine of Harpocrates in the Alexandrian Sarapieion after the command of Sarapis and Isis (*IAlexPtol* 21).⁵²

The orders of the Isiac divinities might also extend to the embellishment and, if needed, repair of existing cultic centres. In an Athenian dedication it is commanded that the dedicant should offer a statue of Asclepius (*RICIS* 101/0222), and in Pergamon Isis orders her *hieraphoroi*, her servants who bore the sacred objects in processions, to construct a series of statues not only of the Egyptian deities (Sarapis, Isis, Anubis, Harpocrates, Osiris, and Isis), but also of “kindred” divinities such as Helios, Ares, and the Dioskouroi.⁵³

The orders of the Isiac gods were not confined to undertaking building enterprises. They demanded the public honouring of the people who supported their cult—either the priests

⁴⁷ Καθ' ὄραμα: *RICIS* 113/0513, 202/0223, 202/0380; κατ' ὄναρ/ὄνειρον: *RICIS* 47.114/0207, 618/1003, 306/0501; *RICIS* 113/0534, 113/0523, 113/0531, 113/0573; five out of ten such dedications were found in the Thessaloniki Sarapieion.

⁴⁸ Guarducci 1967, 125.

⁴⁹ *RICIS* 104/0103, 402/1005. It should be noted that from the Hellenistic period these terms, which were traditionally linked to oracular responses, acquired additional connotations and could refer to dream epiphanies experienced by individuals (cf. Renberg 2003, 99–101).

⁵⁰ For the connection between commandments in the Egyptian cults and *Königsnovelle* see Moyer 2011, 170–175 (for the major themes of *Königsnovelle* see p. 172; for the adjustments and transformations of the narrative pattern outside of Egypt see pp. 173–174).

⁵¹ Building of a sanctuary: *RICIS* *304/0603; construction of an altar: *RICIS* 202/0360, 204/1004, 315/0201, 113/0534.

⁵² *IAlexPtol* 21; Moyer 2011, 170.

⁵³ *RICIS* 301/1202; the offering of statues after a divine command was quite popular: see also *RICIS* 501/0153, 306/0501, 501/0154, 113/0573; repairs and/or additions to temples: *RICIS* 304/0602, 202/0146, 202/0124, 202/0225; cf. *IGGR* I.5.1162.

and cult personnel (e.g., *RICIS* 104/0103), or the kings who provided for them (cf. *RICIS* 114/0207). Sometimes they appointed specific individuals for officiating in activities relating to cult, such as the Cretan dream interpreter stationed at Memphis, who offered his services to the pilgrims after the direct command of the god (*IMètr* 112).

There were also additional actions which were not left to the worshippers' initiative. So, Achilles, a pilgrim to Abydos, underlines in his graffito that he visited the site after a dream epiphany (*GraffAbyd* 238; see also 419). Crispinos, a soldier of the first Lusitanian cohort, received in a dream the order to organize a banquet in honour of *kyrios* Sarapis, most probably a reference to the ritual *kline* of Sarapis (*IPaneion* 59bis).

Especially in periods of personal crisis such as illness, the gods would propose a treatment and subsequently, a reciprocal offering. This is probably the case in *RICIS* 401/0601: the plaque supports two statuettes which may be depictions of the children of the dedicant who are also expressly named in the text. A celebrated case is that of Demetrios of Phaleron, who, after his eye illness was cured by Sarapis, wrote an extensive treatise on his dream epiphanies (Diogenes Laert. 5.76). A papyrus from the Zenon archive might also reflect the same cultural atmosphere (*PCairZen* III 59462, 263–229 BC): there, a certain Dromon requests the famous Attic honey as a treatment for his eye condition after the command of the god (κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ)—most probably a reference to Sarapis.

The content of the dedications, as far as it can be discerned from the surviving evidence, points in a specific direction. The Egyptian gods issued commands primarily in order to launch their cults, a process which can take various forms: from the introduction of their cults to new cities, to the decoration of their temples.

This, however, does not exclude the fact that such dedications, apart from promoting the cult would also serve other goals. Such may have been the case of the *Delian Chronicle*. Moyer, for instance, recently challenged the *communis opinio*, according to which the text, as all aretalogies, addressed the Greek world and the praise of the god was a means of promoting his cult.⁵⁴ Contrary to this view, he interpreted the *Chronicle* in the context of the rivalry between the three Delian Sarapieia. He asserted that the qualities of the god and the prestige of the priest of Sarapieion A, who repeatedly had the privilege of direct communication with the god, were directed primarily to the adherents of this specific sanctuary. Moyer's suggestion and the more traditional approach are not mutually exclusive; the same text may evolve multiple functions, operating on a local and at the same time international level.

Thus, the praise of the god could be viewed as a response to an intra-Delian conflict, but, at the same time, it could still address the multinational inhabitants or visitors of the island.

It is in the framework of the imperative dedications as a means of launching the Egyptian cults in the Graeco-Roman world that the scarce evidence for imperative dedications from Egypt should be examined.⁵⁵ The comparatively small number of imperative offerings from the Ptolemaic kingdom could be associated with the function of the imperatives. Imperative speech constituted a means of propagating the cults of the Egyptian gods in the cities of the Hellenistic world. Moreover, it was especially used in those cities that the new cults were met with reservation or even hostility. In Egypt however the situation differed; there, the kings themselves, members of the royal household, the Ptolemaic élite and high magistrates were also responsible for the promotion of the cult. Apart from individual initiative, the temples of Sarapis and Isis were also financed by state funds,⁵⁶ their portraits were placed on coins—an important distinction, given the conservative nature of Ptolemaic coinage iconography,⁵⁷ and the queens of Egypt were related to, or equated with, Isis in the framework of royal cult.⁵⁸

Imperatives and the relationship between the Egyptian gods and their worshippers

A.D. Nock and F. Bömer, who briefly dealt with imperative dedications in different studies, interpreted them in the framework of the introduction of oriental deities in the Greek world, and the consolidation of the institution of kingship in the Hellenistic *oikoumene*.⁵⁹ They correlated the increasing hierarchization of Hellenistic societies with the increasing hierarchization of the relationship between men and gods and regarded imperative language as reflective of this change. This view was developed further by H.W. Pleket.⁶⁰ Pleket accepted the influence of oriental forms of religiosity and of the political systems of the East; nevertheless, he showed that traces of this mentality could also be detected during the Classical period. He underlined the fact that the view of gods as command-

⁵⁴ Moyer 2011, 194–207.

⁵⁵ Four imperative dedications survive from Egypt: *IAlexPtol* 21, 53; *GraffAbyd* 419; *IAlexImp* 56; cf. also Renberg 2003, 183.

⁵⁶ See also Bricault 2013, 91–94.

⁵⁷ Svoronos 1904, 1123–1124; *SNRIS* 84; Mørholm 1991, 109; Lorber 2012, 218–219; Landvatter 2012, 87–88.

⁵⁸ The bibliography on this subject is extensive: see Le Corsu 1978; Quaegebeur 1988; Koenen 1993; Pfeiffer 2008b, 67–68; Plantzos 2011.

⁵⁹ Bömer 1990, 207–208; Nock 1972, I: 47–48, 74–77.

⁶⁰ Pleket 1981, 152–192.

ing rulers and of men as dependent and obedient subjects was more frequent in periods of crisis, and especially of personal crisis. The difference with the Hellenistic religious mentalities, however, lies in the fact that men envisioned their gods as rulers not only in periods of crisis. Their absolute power and authority thus became one of their basic qualities in matters relating to everyday life.

The assumptions of these scholars were disputed by G.H. Renberg, who expressed his scepticism concerning the association between social and religious hierarchies. Renberg proposed that the growing number of imperatives as part of the dedicatory language does not point to changes in the religious mentality of individuals, but “the initial appearance, sharply increased production, and eventual disappearance of *viso/ius-su* dedications followed the general epigraphic trends of the Classical, Hellenistic, Imperial and Late Antique periods.”⁶¹ Apart from the importance he attributed to general epigraphic trends, he argued that the choice of command terminology for the structuring of dedicatory inscriptions was often dictated more by regional and local factors than by conscious preferences of the dedicants.⁶²

Renberg’s scrutiny of the epigraphic evidence is in every respect useful and thought-provoking. In order, however, to reach judgements regarding the religious mentalities and the relationship between gods and worshippers, individual cases should be studied, not only on a diachronic and synchronic level, but, most importantly, as part of a wider cultic nexus, which collectively formed modes of communication between a god and his/her adherents. As far as the Egyptian gods are concerned, dedications commissioned with divine demand or prompting are indicative of a complex and multifaceted relationship between these gods and their devotees. Moreover, the proliferation of evidence of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, pointed to by Renberg, need not be taken as evidence which should weaken the position of Nock, Bömer, and Pleket. The Hellenistic period also signifies a kingship era for the Mediterranean. It is a period when social life is transformed, due to the inclusion of the king, his *oikos* and court, and members of the élite associated with him; an aspect of this transformation seems to have been hierarchization.

As regards the relationship between the Egyptian gods and their devotees, then, imperative dedications first testify to the fact that the Egyptian gods were envisaged as commanding divine figures.⁶³ Their authoritative features were also emphasized in other types of dedications. A round base from Sarapieion A on Delos, dated between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC, was dedicated

to king (βασιλεύς) Osiris.⁶⁴ Epithets denoting kingship were also attributed to Sarapis, Isis, Anubis, and Horus.⁶⁵ Isiac divinities were also addressed as *rulers* (ἡγεμόνων), at least from the second half of the 2nd century BE. Moreover, the noun *tyrant* is attributed to Isis in the aretology of Kyme and the absolute power of the goddess is expressed with the formulation “sovereign of every land.”⁶⁶ Thus, Isis was perceived as giving commanding orders, functioning as a benefactor, and determining human lives.⁶⁷ Similar is the usage and meaning of the epithet sovereign (κύριος/κυρία), which articulated the superiority of the Isiac divinities in the power balance between gods and human.⁶⁸ Finally, epithets such as παντοκράτωρ and κοσμοκράτωρ constituted the superlative expression of this authoritative relationship.⁶⁹

These gods who founded and/or developed their relationships with humans via imperatives, and, when left unattended, proclaimed their anger, were characterized by epithets manifesting their power.⁷⁰ In the Hellenistic and Imperial periods these qualities were articulated with similar terms for both the earthly and the divine authority. An indicative example is the term *prostagma*, which concurrently acquired both religious and political connotations.⁷¹ Thus, a common political and

⁶⁴ *RICIS* 1248; Osiris is also addressed as king in *RICIS* 302/0204, 308/0302.

⁶⁵ Sarapis: *RICIS* 301/0403, 308/0302; Isis, Anubis: *RICIS* 308/0302; Horus: *RICIS* 302/0204, 113/0545; cf. also *RICIS* 202/0170, 101/0401, where Anubis is called ἡγεμόνων.

⁶⁶ *RICIS* 302/0204, l. 4–5.

⁶⁷ See also *RICIS* 701/0103: τύραννος αἰῶνος μόνη; for a penetrating analysis of the freedom and slavery dipole in the cult of Isis, see Versnel 1990, 52–95.

⁶⁸ Sarapis as κύριος: *RICIS* 203/0801, 304/0203, 501/0217; *LAlexProl* 34; *IFayum* III 153; *ILouvre* 90, 92; *IOasis* 56.10; Milne, *MusCair* 9208; *LAlexImp* 44; *IGRR* I.1275; in Imperial papyri *kyrios* has evolved into a fixed epithet of the god in the expression τὸ προσκίνημά (σου) ποιῶ παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Σαράπιδι (which is attested in 87 extant texts, cf. www.papyri.info); Apis: *RICIS* 402/1002; in the Kyme aretology (*RICIS* 302/0204) Isis is called *kyria* sovereign of all elements of nature; for Isis addressed as *kyria* see also *RICIS* 309/0401, 311/0101, 202/0304, *IFayum* 3.173; *IGR* I,5 1090, 1305–1306, 1309; *OGIS* 180, 184–186, 188–191, 196, 717; *IOasis* 56.10; *Pan dés.* 69; *IPhilae* 14, 15, 21–22, 26, 28–30, 32–35, 37–38, 40–42, 44–50a, 51–53, 55–59, 61–63, 68, 70, 75, 82, 85, 92–93, 100, 105, 110–111, 117–119, 124, 129, 132–133, 136, 148, 152–153, 156, 160, 171, 249, 262–263, 273, 286, 288–289, 306–307, 321; *SB* I: 4116; *IThSy* 306, 328; *LAlexImp* 60; *Von Debod* III 128, L363, III 143, L374; for a survey of the epithets attributed to Isiac divinities see Bricault 1996.

⁶⁹ Isis παντοκράτωρ: *RICIS* 102/1702; Sarapis κοσμοκράτωρ: *RICIS* 501/0126.

⁷⁰ Isiac divinities were not the only who structured their relationship with their adherents via imperatives; in the confession and atonement context of the so-called “confession inscriptions”, especially local gods of Asia Minor, primarily during the Imperial period, persecuted those humans who did not obey their orders, see Chanotis 2009, 116, 146–148.

⁷¹ Cf. Posidonius Fr. 133: τὸ δὲ πρόσταγμα διττόν· ἢ γὰρ παρὰ θεῶν ἢ παρὰ ἀνθρώπων; the basic reference work for the subject remains Lenger 1964

⁶¹ Renberg 2003, 160.

⁶² Renberg 2003, 230–232.

⁶³ Cf., also Renberg 2003, 165, 182.

religious terminology evolved, referring to both divine and human agents.

The systematic use of imperatives in Isiac cults, the attribution of epithets denoting power and authority, and the evolution of myths which featured the commanding nature of these divinities, point to the fact that they were perceived as holding a raised position in the cosmic hierarchy. Their elevated status however did not preclude expressions of closeness or attachment to them. On the contrary, *distance* and *proximity* between the Egyptian gods and their adherents seems to have coexisted. An analogous correlation between distance and proximity is also evident concerning Ptolemaic kings and their subjects. Kings distanced themselves from their subjects in order to promote and advertise their superior status, while at the same time they consistently presented themselves using epiphanic conventions, with which their subjects were familiarized.⁷²

Imperative dedications are suggestive of a close relationship between the Egyptian gods and the dedicants.⁷³ Thus, Isiac divinities are proven to be “manifest” (ἐπιφανείς) and “inclined to give ear” (εὐήκοοι/ἐπήκοοι):⁷⁴ their power is not speculative, but it is proved by their presence and interventions in the *oikoumene*.

Despite their usual brevity, the dedicatory texts themselves bear witness to the fact that these divinities tended to appear frequently to individuals;⁷⁵ sometimes, however, the worshippers’ testimony could be reinforced by additional means, such as the representation of divine feet.⁷⁶

Although epiphanies were common from the Archaic period, the prerogative of direct communication with the divine was reserved for specific individuals: mainly prophets, poets, and those considered as god-possessed. Imperative dedications suggest that the Egyptian gods demanded a different type of worshipper. Thus, although those traditionally favoured with the privilege of immediate contact with the divine were still abundant, in the Hellenistic period many of the Isiac adherents also attained it, without this action generating changes in their social standing. The majority of the dedicants to the Isiac

deities were not priests or members of the cult personnel and their status, when detectable, does not differ from non-imperative dedications. The difference lies in their cultic behaviour; they experienced a special relationship with the divine, which they were called to demonstrate in public, thus expressing their pride for having been contacted by a god.⁷⁷

Imperative speech in its more intense and commanding forms might have led to becoming a passionate, most loyal worshipper. Scholars have often highlighted the apostolic character of Isiac, and other, cults which came from the East,⁷⁸ without, however, demonstrating sufficiently the role of imperative dedications in the structuring of the apostolic mentality. Imperative dedications prescribe a definite course of action to the worshipper, one which cannot be eschewed. Ptolemy I, Ptolemy IV, Zoilos of Aspendos, Apollonios II of Delos, Xenainetos, and Eurynomos in Opus, the unknown-to-us introducers of the cults of the Egyptian gods to the cities of the Hellenistic world, cannot be described as apostles in the sense of preachers, but nonetheless they were involved in apostolic activity. Their actions contributed to the propagation, promotion, and consolidation of Isiac cults. They behaved not as individuals on their own initiative, but consented to divine commands, thus revealing a deeper connection between themselves and the gods.

The close bond between Isiac deities and their worshippers, as this is reflected in the self-presentation of the devotees, is especially evident in Egypt. Aspects of the cult, which in other parts of the Hellenistic world evolved with moderation, appeared more intensively in Egypt. These extreme forms of religiosity developed in specific geographical and cultural conditions. Although the adherents of Isis, Sarapis, and the other Isiac gods are not typically characterized as *douloi* or *hierodouloi*, some graffiti from the Sarapieion of Memphis refer to the *douloi* of Sarapis and Isis.⁷⁹ The graffiti were carved on the sphinxes decorating the *dromos* of the Sarapieion, and they are dated between 275–175 BC. It seems that in this case the term *doulos* is used metaphorically; the writers of the graffiti are not slaves or members of the cult personnel,⁸⁰ but pilgrims who are expressing their passion for the cult.

Such expressions of devotion are aligned with the spiritual and religious atmosphere of the Memphis Sarapieion. Indeed it was there that the phenomenon of *katoche* mainly evolved. *Katoche* referred to the binding, both personal and geographical, of an individual to the cult of Sarapis. Unfortunately, the Sarapieion archive does not clarify the reasons that made some-

and esp. pp. xxiii–xxiv (definition and uses of *protagmata* in Ptolemaic Egypt).

⁷² See Caneva 2015, 69–71.

⁷³ van Straten 1976, 17; Renberg 2003, 297, 299.

⁷⁴ For Isis ἐπήκοος see: *RICIS* 102/1101, 113/0529, 113/0551, 115/0201, 202/0197–0198, 202/0262, 202/0302, 202/0361, 202/0363, 202/0365, 302/0201, 501/0139; Sarapis is called ἐπήκοος in: *RICIS* 115/0201, 202/0197–0198, 202/0363, 304/0901, 501/0113, 501/0126, 503/1201, 617/0301, 704/0304; and ἐπιφανής in: *RICIS* 202/0263; for Osiris ἐπήκοος: *RICIS* 104/0206. Anubis is also addressed as ἐπήκοος (*RICIS* 202/0197–0198, 202/0363) and so is Harpocrates (*RICIS* 202/0198, 202/0363).

⁷⁵ Cf. Renberg 2003, 299.

⁷⁶ A popular practice, especially in Macedonia during the Imperial period, cf. *RICIS* 113/0203–04, 113/0206, *113/0303, 113/0555–57; Christodoulou 2011, 16–22.

⁷⁷ Cf. Renberg 2003, 300–301.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Nock 1988, 77–98.

⁷⁹ *SEG* 49. 2260, 2261; see Nachtergaele 1999, 347–353.

⁸⁰ Nachtergaele 1999, 351–352; for the term (*hierodoulos*) see recently Caneva & Pizzi 2015.

one a *katochos*, since *katoche* is referred as a customary state and not as an institution that demands further explanation. Scholars have postulated a variety of motives: from economic and legal to religious.⁸¹ The rationale and the significant or minor changes in status that *katoche* involved are beyond the scope of this paper. Despite the ambiguity however, fragments of the written record suggest that, at the least, the *katochoi* either already had or in the process of *katoche* gradually evolved a close relationship with Isiac divinities.⁸² In the framework of this relation imperative messages delivered to humans were also implied. It is assumed that the *katochoi* experienced successive epiphanies, in which the gods themselves ordered their stay at the temple.⁸³ In this instance, the imperative message is not connected with the execution of ritual acts, that is, with a *brief* proof of the obedience of the worshippers, but with the devotion of the worshippers to the gods *for as long as the gods may have wished*.

Conclusion

The structuring of commanding relations between the Egyptian gods and their adherents (a god that orders and a worshipper who obeys) usually presupposes and entails the creation of a bond between them. A divine call that is perceived as persisting and demanding reveals on behalf of the worshipper a preoccupation or fascination with specific divinities—without necessarily excluding others from the attribution of cult. The popularity of imperative dedications suggests that, in the Hellenistic and Roman *oikoumene*, the Egyptian divinities were envisaged as gods who, either in a positive or sometimes in a negative way, but definitely actively, proved their interest and concern for human affairs.

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⁸¹ For the *katochoi* of Memphis, their social, legal, and religious status and their activities see Delekat 1964, 176–181; Legras 2011, 101–271.

⁸² See e.g. *UPZ* 4.8–9, 14.14–20, with Wilcken's commentary in *UPZ* p. 126.

⁸³ Merkelbach 1995, 73.

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