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Cover: see Fischer, this volume, p. 82, *Fig. 15*.

PETRA PAKKANEN

Is it possible to believe in a syncretistic god?

A discussion on conceptual and contextual aspects of Hellenistic syncretism

Abstract*
This article will look into the phenomenon of syncretism from two different points of view. Firstly, syncretism will be discussed from a conceptual perspective in relation to elaborations on belief, an equally perplexing concept in the studies of ancient Greek religion. Secondly, a very selective example of the syncretism between the goddess Demeter and Isis as an object of veneration in Ptolemaic Egypt will be looked at more closely in order to bring the conceptual perspective into closer contact with the contextual one. It will be argued that syncretism can be regarded both as an essence of polytheistic religious systems in particular, and as a process of syncretization. Once a metaphorical understanding of syncretism is added to these views, believing in a syncretistic deity (Demeter-Isis in our case) appears doubtful since a new entity in a polytheistic belief-system would have entailed a fundamental change in the belief system itself as well as an introduction of totally new features to the conception of deities in general.

Concept

Studying syncretism is studying change, and change makes up a process. Culture as a whole is a syncretistic and continuous process. The term 'syncretism', particularly in European scholarly literature on religion[1] or in polemical religious writings, has had negative connotations. It has been considered to be a result of a decrease whereby a deprived stage is caused by the mixing of elements and so has damaged the original wholeness and purity. Thus, it has been seen as a negative change which includes corruption and scatters the original wholeness into lesser parts. This kind of thinking is based on a need to project the events of the past into an imaginary 'original' construction, to freeze the process into stable stages. Today, however, the negative overtones of syncretism seem to have been more or less overcome. The study of syncretism has seen a new wave of interest, probably due to attempts to understand contemporary life in a globalized world which is, in principal, surrounded by syncretistic phenomena: encounters between cultures, ethnicities and religious traditions. This has triggered a reappearance of the concept of syncretism and inspired new interest in it in regard to modern religiosity.[2] It has been associated with cultural dynamics or hybridization or with the global, intercultural process.

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[1] For different, positive overtones of the term especially in American anthropological parlance and use from the mid-20th century, see Steward 1995, 15–16. For the historical overview of the early use of the term, see Rudolph 2004 (1992), Pye 1993, 2–4; Leopold & Jensen 2004, 14–26; Pakkanen 1996, 86, and articles in the part 2 'The historical background of the term syncretism' in Leopold & Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion. A Reader* (2004).

[2] See volumes *Syncretism in Religion. A Reader* edited by A.M. Leopold & J. S. Jensen (2004) and earlier conference volumes on syncretism *Syncretism*, edited by S. Hartman (1969) and *Dialogue and Syncretism. An Interdisciplinary Approach* edited by J. Gort, H. Vroom, R. Fernhout & A. Wessels (1989). For religious syncretism in the ancient Mediterranean context, see esp. the 1999 volume *Les syncrétismes religieux dans le monde Méditerranéen antique* edited by C. Bonnet & A. Motte. Syncretism has also recently been used as an interpretive tool in literary criticism, for example, for late Victorian and Edwardian literature which stemmed from the then newly grounded study of religions and interest in ancient 'paganism'. This resulted in an attempt to reconcile ancient paganism with Christianity in the works of, for example, Thomas Hardy and Walter Peter. See e.g. Franke 2008, esp. Chapter 6.

The term 'syncretism' can, and probably should be, seen as a theoretical construct despite its lexical roots in Greek culture. Its use by ancient authors, Plutarch (*Mor*. 6.490b) in particular, has been disputed and continues to be referred to in almost all of the studies on ancient Greek syncretism.[3] It is clear that tracing back the etymology of the term 'syncretism' does not amount to understanding it as a phenomenon. Various types of syncretisms can be typologized and differentiated (and this has been extensively carried out within the study of ancient religions), but this would still be just a step further from defining the term. On the other hand, we have reason to ask whether we can really use the term advantageously because we do not seem to be in agreement as what it means. For this reason various scholars have proposed rejecting the term altogether as a tool in religious studies.[4] I propose, following some other scholars, to regard syncretism as a process.[5] In addition to this, I would also like to use it descriptively in order to denote the nature and state of certain religious systems such as Graeco-Roman polytheism. Syncretism can be normative in an essentialist sense, but in its process-sense (i.e. in the sense of it being a process) it can also explain the process of syncretization, the evolvement of religion in a syncretistic process of inter- or intracultural encounters. In both its essentialist sense, and in the sense of it being a process, the concept of syncretism may be used as a category of historical explanation, as a heuristic instrument for understanding. However, I tend to disagree with my earlier view[6] about syncretism not necessarily corresponding with contextual reality. That is why I am taking an opportunity later in this paper to test the relationship between 'conceptual' and 'contextual' syncretisms. If we regard syncretism as a process and also as a natural element inherent in all cultures and religions which have any sort of contact with other traditions (and hardly any culture can be entirely isolated, a vacuum pack), how does this help us to better study and hopefully understand religions in certain historically defined contexts?

The danger is that in its 'essentialist sense' the term syncretism easily becomes a category of its own which describes a construct and may be imposed on a religion without being derived from any specific history within that religious tradition. Therefore, we may ask whether the discourse on syncretism has provided the tools for recognizing the historical idiosyncrasy of a tradition which we study? Viewed from the cognitivist point of view of interpreting cultural understanding, for example T.E. Lawson & N. McCauley (1990), P. Boyer (1993) or S. Pinker (1994), the answer would be 'no', and the reason is that it is the human mind that is universally predisposed to certain types of selection. Hence, all syncretistic formations are consequences of cognitive shaping and not of historical or cultural causes or events.[7] "We are all unconscious syncretists... Man's being is simply syncretic being", wrote J. Kamstra in his study of Japanese Buddhism in the latter part of 1960s.[8] This ontological category of syncretism, a type of 'primal syncretism' does not sit easily with scholars of antiquity who tend to look for historical explanations as much as cognitive-conceptual ones. I have already suggested that the category of syncretism is applicable as a heuristic tool for discovering otherwise hidden antecedents of historical facts and to interpret these facts. In this way we aim to illuminate the religious processes of the past. Thus, in other words, syncretism in its process-sense is used as a heuristic tool to dig up traces of particular historical developments in the process of religious evolvement. I will be proposing that we widen the parameters of our understanding of syncretism in the following ways: From regarding syncretism as an inherent characteristic of certain cultural and religious situations (essence-sense) we should also look for historical, social and cultural reasons for certain types of amalgamation in a specific, idiosyncratic context. We should then ask why did this type of selection of features and the rejection of others take place in a process of evolvement of religion (process-sense). It is equally important to ask what has led us to recognize these features and reject the others in a syncretism we try to understand and describe, because religious traditions can and do operate in a common social matrix without necessarily merging into one another. Thus, we pay attention to the selectivity of syncretism, and selectivity itself is crucial in a syncretistic process.[9] It can be consciously controlled (by a state for example), or emerge unconsciously through the recognition and underlining of similarities which then become associated and finally amalgamated with each other. Scholars have, therefore, talked about unconscious and conscious modes of syncretism;[10] the latter has also been termed as an interpenetrating mode of the phenomenon, or 'creolization', adapting D. Bickerton's theory of linguistic acquisition.[11] In fact, the conscious syncretism refers more to the syncretism which is understood as a process, and unconscious syncretism refers to the concept understood in its essentialist sense. Related to the selectivity

[3] For a summary, see e.g. Graf 2005.
[4] See esp. Graf 2005, 8936–7 who would be ready to replace the term with, for example, 'hybridity'.
[5] See e.g. Berner 1979; Stewart 1995; Martin 1996; earlier esp. Pye already in 1971, 83–93 and *idem* 1996, 5–7, 9 underlining that syncretism is not synthesis, but rather an open-ended, dynamic situation.
[6] Pakkanen 1996, 86–87.
[7] See Martin 1996, 219–220.
[8] Kamstra 1967, 23–24, cited in English in Rudolph 2004 (1992), 73.
[9] See e.g. Pachis 2004, 173.
[10] E.g. Droogers 2004 (1995), 225 and Rudoph 2004 (1992), 73–75, 80; Graf 2005.
[11] Bastide 2004 (1960), 224–228. For Bickerton's study on creolisation (on Hawaiian sugar plantation), see Bickerton 1999.

of the syncretistic process is borrowing (in the sense first used by M. Herskovits in 1941) which includes a simple idea of a new unity being 'more than the sum of its parts', i.e. possessing distinctive qualities of its own as a result of a process of syncretization particularly in the cases where a new religion is created, as in the case of the icographic representation of Sarapis.[12] Finally, however, we should try not to see any syncretism as a stable end-product, but also take into account the processual nature of any historical syncretism, just as we are prone to regard our own globalized, hybridicized modern world as dynamic, syncretistic and changing, something we now call multiculturalism.[13] This notion deserves a brief elaboration, as the syncretism of ancient religions has also been equated with hybridization which is a concept used in postmodern discourse.

Postmodern discourse on hybridization arose as an antidote to the cultural differentialism of ethnic and national doctrines. It subverts nationalism because it lauds the transgression of boundaries, and therefore aims at dismissing identity politics and other claims of cultural purity and authenticity. Within the framework of globalism, hybridization has therefore been seen to go under various aliases mentioned above, such as creolization, crossover, and, indeed, syncretism.[14] Interestingly, in the recent discussion on globalization and multiculturalism, which often uses the terms 'syncretism' and 'cultural hybridity' almost interchangeably, the critique of hybridization seems to employ the older theoretical tools used in the attempts to conceptualize syncretism. It has been claimed that hybridization may conceal the asymmetry and unevenness in the process and in the elements of mixing.[15] Stable reflection points of comparison are again reclaimed for understanding the process of the contingent mélange of hybrid identities and cultural clusters. Sometimes these reflection points are even termed 'purities' or original forms of cultural differences, and acknowledging the historical conditions of the emergence of a new mixing is called for in the name of the normalization of new hybrid identities.[16] Similarly, the process towards hybridization and creolization is regarded as having been overestimated at the expense of recognizing more stable forms of cultural diversity in a state of encounter. This reclamation of older views on syncretism is an interesting reflection and critique of postmodern discussion, and as such justifies an attempt for the 'rehabilitation' of syncretism as a process and simultaneously as an essence of our parlance. Within this framework it seems justified to regard syncretism as a process and as an essence, to denote both the dynamic nature of cultural encounters and to describe the nature and state of certain religious systems, such as polytheism. This view brings together the earlier (and as it seems, reclaimed) view of syncretism as a descriptive concept and the new, postmodern view of it as a dynamic, ever-changing hybrid in a continuum of historical process. Historiographically, therefore, the conceptualization of syncretism has come full circle and gained new nuances *en route*. Thus, postmodern discussion has tended to use syncretism as a synonym for a hybrid in which 'original' forms are regarded as having been more or less lost or meaningless rejecting the older views of it as a mixing of old and new, rather static elements of religions and cultures in the situations of encounter. Finally, a critique of postmodern discussion tends to reclaim the creative meaning of cultural and historical backgrounds to the syncretistic encounters and views the new mixtures and hybrids as legitimate products of their contexts.

Hellenistic Graeco-Roman culture has often been seen to exhibit the features of historical multiculturalism; as an analogy to modern times this quality has even been called a globalizing movement of cultures and religions of the time.[17] Therefore, cultural encounters, involving the cosmopolitan, urbanized world with a more universal outlook are often located in this period. In terms of religion this all depended largely on Graeco-Roman polytheism. In the following section I will bring the concept of belief into the discussion on syncretism, because religious syncretism is a concept that has been easier to locate in a polytheistic religious system which is often perceived as a borrowing and exchange between a multifaceted cosmos of many different deities. Also, locating belief in polytheism has proved difficult within the framework of a monotheistic world view. This may also be

[12] For more details, see below p. 133.

[13] E.g. Graf 2005, esp. 8937 who would be ready to replace the term with a concept of 'hybridity'. For the critique of the use of the term 'cultural hybridity' in the anthropological parlance in particular, see Thomas 1996, 9, 11–12. Thomas condemns the term syncretism simply as "the term once employed in religious studies and anthropology" (p. 11), and prefers to see the differing range of past and present cultural creativity as equally legitimate products of their cultural and historical situations rather than as ranged along a continuum directed to cultural hybridization.

[14] Nederveen-Pieterse 2009, 55.

[15] Nederveen-Pieterse 2009, 55–56.

[16] See e.g. Beyer 2005, 419–420, 422, 428. He writes that (p. 423) "The construction of the purity, today as all the long in the human history, is itself a process of syncretisation." See also Thomas 1996, 11–12.

[17] See e.g. Dunand 1999, 99–100; Malaise 2005, 195–196 (for Hellenistic Egypt); Sfameni Gasparro 2004, 41–48; *eadem* 2007, 46–47. For the critique on using the modern framework of globalism and globalization as a direct interpretative framework for Hellenistic culture, see Pachis 2004, 163–164.

one reason why historically syncretism, like polytheism, has had negative overtones in the study of religions.[18]

Syncretism, belief and polytheism

Today we are guided to interpret ancient Greek religion as practice-oriented, for example Simon Price tells us: "practice, not belief is the key, and to start from questions about faith or personal piety is to impose alien values on ancient Greece."[19] As an object in the study of ancient religions, however, belief has recently made a slow reappearance after a long hiatus when it was almost totally rejected as a possibility for a serious interpretative target.[20] It is clear that our modern concept of belief is not applicable to ancient religions as it can only be located in our monotheistic Judaeo-Christian conceptualization of the term itself. Belief is, however, at the heart of our ordinary notion of intentional action.[21] Religion without belief is difficult to comprehend because we are accustomed to thinking that a religion must have beliefs in order to be a religion.[22] Nevertheless, belief connected to religion (religious belief) is traditionally regarded as having been fundamentally shaped by Western history, beginning with the rise of Christianity up to the contemporary understanding of it as exclusive and assertive.[23] The category of belief is not easily transferred (or even translated) from one culture to another, from the present to the past.[24] This in turn makes it difficult to impose our understanding of belief onto the past. For example, ancient Greek religion implicitly contained, presupposed and even necessitated simultaneous beliefs in co-existing and overlapping gods, deities, heroes, daemons and a variety of religious institutions. The study of ancient Greek beliefs is problematic because, it is argued, belief was "a dispositional element—a fact of socialization only infrequently subjected to sceptical reflection, a matter of unchallenged acceptance, not of debate."[25] Furthermore, we have a tendency to separate acts from mental processing; therefore we tend to think that belief can be expressed in actions, but primarily it depends on a state of mind. To 'believe' that the Greeks acted out their beliefs only in sacrifices and rituals is to underline a basic and fundamental difference in the religious conceptualization between their beliefs and ours. Naturally the material remaining from the past is scarce and often random, be it archaeological, textual, epigraphic, osteological etc., and therefore it tends to direct focus towards activities rather than beliefs. For example, we can never know what the ancient people thought when they sacrificed to gods, but by observing surviving material evidence we can get closer to obtaining knowledge about what they did and how they acted in cultic or ritual contexts.[26] When we are trying to understand ritual activity solely on the basis of archaeological material, we move within a skeleton or frame of performed past

[18] Looking at syncretism (from this perspective) is related to another discussion mentioned here only in passim, namely the recent critique towards the concept 'oriental religions' which has been much used over the last century, particularly in French scholarship on Graeco-Roman religions. Interaction and integration between diverse religious practices in Graeco-Roman and Roman culture seems to be a preferable approach to underlining separate oriental religious practices which were seen to infiltrate a more 'western' context. Thus, resembling features between religious practices of these cultural spheres are underlined rather than their differences being pointed out. This approach can be regarded as an exercize in attempting the deconstruction of the concept of 'oriental religions'. See e.g. Bonnet 2006, esp. 203–205.

[19] Price 1999, 3. Similarly, J. Scheid 2005, 209 who writes in his extensive study on Roman ritual entitled characteristically *Quand faire, c'est croire. Les rites sacrificiels des Romains* that "ritual is a form of thinking" because believing was implicit in the action and cannot be understood separately from it.

[20] An earlier exception is Yunis 1988, esp. 38–41, 42–58 who thinks that it is possible to infer, from the numerous and varying religious institutions of the *polis,* certain beliefs about the gods which at a minimum the worshipper must necessarily have held if he were to believe that the rituals had any religious significance. It should be noted that over the last decades of scholarship on Greek religion *polis* itself has provided framework for the Greek religion in general, and the so-called *polis*-religion has become a powerful interpretative model for the study of Greek religion. Within this model religious agency gains prominence while religious beliefs get largely excluded from the accounts of Greek religion. See esp. Kindt 2010, 25–26, also Pakkanen 2011, 102–103.

[21] Godlove 2002, 10.

[22] Cf. Smith, 1998 (1977), esp. v–vi, 39–45, 78–80; idem 1963, 170–192 and 1979 holding that faith, rather than belief, is the fundamental religious category whereas the idea of belief and believing as religiously important is a modern one and as such misleading. He argues that faith does not presuppose belief, but belief presupposes faith. See also Fitzgerald 2007. In the philosophy of religion believing on trust or faith is sometimes separated from believing on reason; see Zagzebski & Miller 2009, 478.

[23] See esp. Schmitt 1992, also Steward & North, forthcoming; more specifically regarding religious studies see Lopez 1998, 22–25, 33. Lopez (p. 33) writes: "Belief appears as universal category because of the universalist claims of the tradition in which it has become the most central, Christianity"; see also Derrida 1998, 19–20.

[24] See e.g. Frykenberg 1996, 9.

[25] Stewart & North, forthcoming.

[26] R. Osborne 2004, 5 writes: "The gingerly attitude of archaeologists towards deducing beliefs from the material record alone is compounded by a curious unwillingness to acknowledge the central importance of the dedicated object." Osborne is writing about dedications, offerings and votives, but he is right in observing the contradiction between the centrality of motives behind religious actions (beliefs) and the lack of attention they have attracted in the archaeological scholarship.

actions. The frame – the material evidence remaining at our disposal – naturally does not exhibit *per se* the other pole of the 'mythico–ritual' complex, namely the 'script' of belief or ideology.[27] It is worth remembering that as a concept 'cult' or 'religion' is more ideologically loaded than mere 'ritual'; they are regarded as reflecting larger conceptual frameworks, and thus are more firmly embedded in the wholeness of culture. They are more holistic concepts. Naturally ritual is more concerned with action in relation to material objects than cult or religion.[28] Therefore, archaeology's focus on ritual over religion is understandable. We have to employ caution in construing a complete picture of, say, prehistoric religion with panoplies of organized systems of beliefs and structured social institutions to support and keep them up.[29] Furthermore, no matter how careful we are when reviewing critical reviews of past historical understandings, we cannot escape the traps and lacunae, trammels and linguistic obstacles when it comes to translating terms such as 'belief' from one culture to another and from one period to another.[30] We should remember that 'belief', just as the word 'religion', does not have a Greek equivalent. Regardless of this, the study of ancient Greek religion has never been deemed impossible. Therefore, in trying to understand cultic phenomena of the past with the aid of an interpretative tool such as syncretism, we can employ a larger perspective and also speculate on beliefs.

In a principally polytheistic system the different gods, through their different characteristics, personalized names, individualized spheres of activities and so on, are nevertheless seen to have articulated a common semantic universe. In practice this took place through notions of comparability between other people's divinities with a pantheon of one's own. Similarities the different gods shared made their names mutually translatable, and this in turn produced the idea that gods are international, the same gods exist but with different names all over the known world.[31] This idea, or perhaps attitude, is clearest in the texts of Herodotus for whom it is natural that Greek and foreign gods can be translated into one another, like Greek and foreign words.[32] He writes, for example: "the Assyrians call Aphrodite 'Mylitta', the Arabians call her 'Alilat', and the Persians 'Mitra'" (1.131.3). Herodotus drew a similar parallel between Greek Demeter and Egyptian Isis, as we shall see below. The Greeks sought, both on a practical and a conceptual level, to redefine the plurality and multiformity of polytheism so that 'many gods' are not regarded as merging into 'the one' nor are they explained as emanations or aspects of the one.[33] Different gods simply reflect the same basic ideas of divinity in different forms in different places. Often these basic features have to do with natural phenomena, control over nature or guaranteeing its productiveness for humans. This is not merging the gods into a new deity, but drawing parallels and analogies between them to explain their characteristics. It seems that this type of syncretism is the most common variety of the phenomenon among the Greeks in general. It is also likely that a polytheistic system implicitly makes parallels between the gods possible, and probably even inevitable.[34] Thus, syncretism is often facilitated by polytheism, and this leads us to question whether we can understand belief in polytheistic systems.

Historically, polytheism was most often regarded as a lower stage in the progress of religious expression. In these studies there seemed to be one idea: retroprojection of a typical modern drive towards consistency upon a past or foreign mentality and logic.[35] In religious evolution polytheism was always seen as leading to a higher stage, monotheism, and its dismissal as depravity or as downright error was taken almost for granted not only among secular anthropologies of the nineteenth century but also in serious philosophical negotiations.[36] The evolution of religion, it was said, included stages that firstly involved animism and magic for example, then polytheism, and finally monotheism of which Christianity was ethnocentrically seen as the most ennobled representative. Pejorative tones, with which even the term polytheism seemed to resonate, were echoed from the very beginning of its appearance in the English language in the

[27] Cf., however, Insoll 2007, 9–10 advocating an acknowledgement of the element of numinous as a starting point also in the archaeological study of religion.

[28] Insoll 2004, 77–80 regrets the absence of religion in post–processual archaeology and regards that absence more as a reflection of the practitioners of post–processualism themselves rather than any limitations in the evidence they discus (p. 80). See also Kyriakidis 2007, 298; cf. Renfrew 2007, 109–110 with a notion of the link between 'archaeology of religion' and 'cognitive archaeology', and Fogelin 2007 who elaborates the dichotomy the archaeologists have created when considering ritual separate from religion and ritual, belief and action.

[29] Insoll 2004b, 3 and 2007, 2; also *idem* 2004, 12 noting that ritual is often treated as the description for religion itself in archaeological parlance.

[30] Frykenberg 1996, 9; cf. Derrida 2000, 29–31. Pouillon 1979, 1–4 elaborates the nuances of the verb 'to believe' particularly in the modern usage of English and French.

[31] Assman 2007, 24–25.

[32] Parker, 1996, 159; Harrison 2000, 209–212 (with the table of Herodotus' equation of Greek and foreign gods, p. 214).

[33] Vesrnel 2000, 84.

[34] For Dunand 1999, esp. 104–105 Hellenistic syncretism on a practical cultic level was basically a means to show the mutual recognisability between the deities of different ethnic groups and it did not entail changes in the fundamental belief in traditional deities. He writes (p. 105): "C'est pourquoi, plutôt que de 'syncrétisme', je préférais parler de 'coexistence des images'".

[35] Cf. Versnel 2000, 98.

[36] See e.g. Gladogow 1998, 321–330; also Funkenstein 1994, 99–102 who looks at William James as an exception to the rule.

beginning of the 17th century.[37] Polytheism was not seen as a true way of believing; it was much closer to atheism than to monotheism, which was regarded as the only way in which 'revelation' could materialize itself.[38] Consequently polytheistic rationale has provided a challenge to our understanding of the concept of belief in gods. Scholars brought up in a monotheistic tradition have often adopted its theocentric forms and models to explain the characteristics of religion, particularly belief. Polytheism is usually not considered to be concerned with questions of belief, but rather with cultic practice.[39] This reflects the basic difficulty in our attempts to understand polytheistic belief: orthopraxy is regarded as less valuable than orthodoxy because it does not contain the notion of 'truth' which, in turn, is to be found in the monotheistic system which prides itself on the possession of the unity in plurality. This may explain our inclination to imply a notion of transcendence to monotheism but exclude it from polytheism. In religious thinking transcendence is, of course, a (technical) value term expressing the supposed unique excellence of a chosen god who is absolute and infinite, the idea of something being exalted above or beyond physical things and finite spirits. It is also seen to provide the possibility for belief to actualize. In the case of Greek religion this leads to emphasizing practical rituals and cultic observances for the polytheistic gods, because classical polytheism is seen to exclude the idea of transcendence. This may well be one reason behind the reluctance to imply notions of belief to modern studies of ancient Greek religion. However, the opposition between polytheism and monotheism is more of a construction which is made to look mutually exclusive, and in reality the two explanatory structures in their principles are to be found equally in both polytheism and in monotheism. Xenophanes' *heis theos*, the greatest, Plutarch's divine, the god who orders all things, Plato's soul, even Hegel's *Geist* all include the ideas which resonate in monotheistic or pantheistic thinking within the system we have termed polytheism.

A problem regarding syncretism within the polytheistic system is that it has often been seen as a result of inter-religious encounters: traditions borrowing, adopting, loaning and blending to and from one another. When ancient religions are talked about, syncretism is first and foremost placed in a Hellenistic context within the Graeco-Roman world, which is regarded as having been cosmopolitan and multicultural in nature. We can therefore ask whether there can be intra-religious Hellenistic syncretism, a syncretism within one and the same religious polytheistic tradition where this tradition is already in itself a diverse amalgamation of differing forms of religious expression under one overarching religious framework? Syncretism, as we understand it in its essentialist sense, is implicit in this religion; in one significant sense it describes this religious tradition. Syncretism may occur between currents of one religion, between religion and an ideology, between gods and deities, between religion and culture.[40] In Graeco-Roman polytheism there was a multivocality[41] of attributes and symbols of deities which were easily exchanged, borrowed and integrated into a new context without explicit difficulty. This essentialist syncretism could be acted out in a process of syncretization which was most obvious in the cases of conscious creation of new deities (the iconography of Sarapis and Mithra, for example). Since syncretism is also understood here as an essence of this type of polytheistic system, it could hardly change the world view or fundamental, basic beliefs of the worshippers. The reason is that the integration of new (or foreign) beliefs, that are logically basic to their belief-system, requires reinterpretation of old beliefs within a new context and a re-configuration of basic religious insights in particular. In practise this would mean a profound change in the whole religious tradition.[42] Christianity offers a comparison with a difference: it does not tolerate a notion of any other gods but one, and hence it does not have syncretism as an essential characteristic, but it can be prone to change due to contacts with other religions and hence is open to syncretistic process. This can be seen to have taken place in Moonism or Creole traditions, for example.

The syncretism of Demeter and Isis

Diodorus Siculus famously pondered upon the similarities between Demeter and Isis. He wrote in *Hist.* 1.25.1: "In general, there is great disagreement over these gods. For the same goddess is called by some Isis, by others Demeter, by others Thesmophoros, by others Semele, by others Hera, while still

[37] "This Kindle of Monotheisme of the Heathen is as Rank Atheisme as their Polytheisme was proved to be", wrote Henry More in 1660; see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'monotheism'.

[38] For the earlier notions, e.g. Bishop Edward Reynolds' statement in his *Vanity of the Creature* from the year 1679 (1826), 8: "There is yet a bitter root of atheisme, and of polytheisme in the minds of men by nature." Revelation as such was regarded as the crucial factor in favour of Christianity in the early, 19th-century 'history of religions'. Schelling's central postulate in his works *Philosophy of Mythology* (1827) and *Philosophy of Revelation* (1829), both published posthumously in 1854, were attempts at a comprehensive analysis of the history of religions postulating that Christian revelation makes actual what was earlier only intuited, incompletely actualized and represented in myths of the ancient religions. See e.g. McCalla 1998, 6–8.

[39] See e.g. Assman 2007, 28–29.

[40] Droogers 1989, 13; Graf 2005, 8936.

[41] This term was first used by Victor Turner in 1969 (p. 8).

[42] Vroom 1989, 26, 32–33.

Fig. 1. Demeter–Io–Isis. /Roman Provincial, Imperial Period, AD 160–200. Place of Manufacture: Egypt (probably). Marble, Dolomitic from the Greek Island of Thasos. Height: 81 cm (31 7/8 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Paul E. Manheim 1970.242. Photograph © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 2. Marble relief representing a group of figures, from the left: A man, Isis (sometimes identified as Demeter-Isis), Cerberus, Sarapis, Harpocrates, Demeter (sometimes identified as Demeter-Isis, sometimes as Kore-Isis). Rome, Museo Capitolino. Photo: D-DAI Rom, Faraglia, Neg. no. 1941.2671.

others apply to her all these names." This was in the beginning of the Roman Imperial period, a time often regarded together with the Hellenistic period, as the heyday of Graeco-Roman religious syncretism. However, as we know, some four hundred years earlier (and this is a long time) Herodotus, when describing the Egyptian manner of performing rituals in comparison to those of the Greeks, had noted that "Egyptian Isis is called Demeter in the Greek language" (2.59),[43] and this relationship was asserted in the late fourth century by Leon of Pella.[44] We could speculate whether these authors 'academicized' reality and in this way created a syncretistic goddess for the generations of scholars studying ancient religions by making unconscious 'essential-syncretism' explicit.[45] In view of this, it is doubtful whether the adherents of the respective cults of Demeter and Isis would have been concerned at all about the observations of these writers on the similarities between the goddesses. However, we can still ask questions about the reasons and the potential consequences of this assimilation.

There was clearly a family resemblance between many Greek deities and those of oriental origin, and this puzzled the writers. There were also visual as well as textual representations of these similarities, particularly in the Hellenistic era.[46] If we look at the textual evidence from Hellenistic Egypt concerning the cult of the so-called goddess Demeter-Isis, we can note that there is no reference to the association in literary sources stemming from the cult of Demeter itself, not even from Hellenistic Egypt.[47] Isis is not mentioned in the preserved hymns for Demeter at all. J.J. Herrmann (1999) suggests that there might have been a strong sentiment among the Greek inhabitants of Egypt about Demeter as the "goddess of Eleusis pure and simple."[48] More importantly, Herrmann asks whether the equation between the goddesses could have primarily been the product of hegemonic aspirations on the part of the devotees of the cult of Isis. Or perhaps the identification could have been taken up by Greek intellectuals like Herodotus and Plutarch without having a real basis

[43] See also 2.59 and 2.156.

[44] Leo of Pella, *On the Gods in Egypt* as referred to by Witt 1971, 127–128 and mentioned by Herrmann 1999, 73. Merkelbach 1995, 61 explains that this text is said to have been a letter by Leon to Alexander the Great attested by Tertullian, *De Corona Militis* 7 (and appears in Jacoby's *FGrHist*. 659 F 8).

[45] Dunand 1999, 99 thinks that Herodotus' statement does not represent syncretism at all, but rather its meaning was to draw attention to the similarity between the goddesses in order to present the Egyptian goddess as understandable to the Greeks, to tell them who she is.

[46] A good source book for these aspects is Merkelbach 1995, esp. Ch. I, 3. On the theme of the much-discussed *interpretatio Graeca* of Isis, see especially Pachis 2004, with extensive and up-to-date bibliography; also Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 47–48.

[47] Hermann 1999, 74 who notes the two preserved hymns for Demeter, the one by Callimachus and the fragments of another by Philicus, come from the Egyptian soil (Alexandria). For the process of integration of the features of Demeter into the character of Isis in the Egyptian soil, see Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 47–48 with references (n. 21, p. 47), and for the less known Egyptian hymnographical evidence in the demotic texts praising Isis, see Kockelmann 2008.

[48] Herrmann 1999, 75.

in Greek religious practice in order to explain to their readers the basic characteristics of these deities.

Herrmann has made a catalogue of the representations of the goddess Demeter-Isis who appears in many variations with only one absolute constant feature, namely a veiled head and the presence of a tall torch and kalathos. The pieces, which number over 100, range in media from coinage to statues. They all have a strong connection with Hellenistic Egypt, having either been found there or formed there with the exception of three marble statues.[49] On the basis of a careful study of their attributes and appearance, either as individuals or as parts of group compositions, Herrmann concludes that the torch-bearing, veiled goddess need not be interpreted in a syncretistic sense at all: she seems to be Egyptian Demeter, not Demeter-Isis, often wearing the Isiac polos, crescent and a sundisc (see *Fig. 1*). When she was a part of a group of deities, it seems that Demeter and Isis were often associated, but they were usually brought together as separate and fully independent entities.[50] The relationship between the two goddesses was special and close, and it is worth asking how they came to be so closely associated. It does not take too much theorizing to see that they both had close associations with vegetation, fertility, death and (re-)birth, i.e. the basic elements of life. They became goddesses of agriculture and that role was regarded as one of the most important aspects of a divinity by the Greek and Egyptian theologians of the Hellenistic period. Therefore the iconic presentation of these aspects and underlining them was important.[51] This is particularly clear in the group presentations of the goddesses together or accompanied with other divinities. They retain their own attributes and identities on par with each other, and this is almost like a response to a need to underline their separateness and simultaneous sharing: we are two, but we are the same; we are two, and you should recognize the same in both of us (see *Fig. 2*). This is where selectivity, inherent in syncretism, plays an important role.[52]

Syncretism has also been understood as one possible reaction to situations of insecurity brought about by the movement of different religious systems.[53] Encounters between religious systems may threaten the ability of each to function, and syncretism works as a reaction to diminish open confrontations by dissolving the boundaries between traditions and thus ending the competition. In view of this, syncretism is regarded as a process.[54] Alternatively, it could be a response to the peaceful coexistence of two different traditions which live together, respecting elements of both by pointing out their mutual intersecting aspects when they operate in a common social matrix, but do not totally merge into one another. "Syncretism is one way of combining disparate domains in order to give at last one illusion of belonging and togetherness", writes André Droogers.[55] This is what may have happened in the Egypt of early Hellenistic times in the case of Demeter and Isis. It is worthwhile, therefore, to contextualize the period and tradition in which our goddess appeared.

The most famous 'syncretistic event' took place in the Nile valley from around 300 BC in the milieu of the Macedonian-Greek dynasty of Ptolemy Soter (I).[56] Plutarch (*Mor*. 5.361f–362a) and Tacitus (*Hist*. 4.83–84) as well as later writers such as Clemens of Alexandria (*Protr.* 4.48.1–6) relate a story about the creation of Sarapis and his cult.[57] They recount how Ptolemy himself was visited in a dream by a god who was later identified as Sarapis and as a consequence of this he invited the Egyptian and Greek specialists to create a new god along with the relevant cult and rituals. Manetho of Sebennetys represented the Egyptians, Timotheos was a member of the *genos* of the *Eumolpidai* belonging to the priesthood of the Eleusinian Mysteries. It is claimed that these two priests were Ptolemy's religious advisers and that it was they who together prepared the cult scheme of Sarapis. Bryaxis the sculptor is said to have cast the physical appearance of the god, and Demetrius Phalerum wrote hymns in honour of him as a response to being miraculously cured of his blindness.[58] This

[49] Herrmann 1999, 70.
[50] Herrmann 1999, esp. 80–82; also Malaise 1997, 9.
[51] See e.g. Pachis 2004, 182–183, 186.
[52] For the process of selection which regulates the identifications and assimilations between deities with similar functions within the framework of ancient polytheism, particularly in the case of Isis, see Martin 1983, 131–145.
[53] Esp. Berner 1978, see below, the next footnote, and *idem* 1979; also Droogers 2004 (1995), 223–227 on syncretism as an expression of power struggle in society.
[54] Berner 1978, 11–26; also Droogers 1989, 12, 17.
[55] Droogers 2004 (1995), 230.
[56] See the discussion on whether Ptolemy was the I, II or III in Stambaugh 1972, 6–10 which regards the date falling into the early years of the reign of Ptolemy I (323–283 BC) as plausible.
[57] For a detailed discussion of the legend related by Plutarch and Tacitus, see esp. Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 38–42. Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000 and Malaise 2005, 128–138 provide a critical reappraisal of the view that Sarapis was a conscious 'creation'. Instead, the authors show that the history of the god should be contextually located in the cult of Hellenized Memphite Osiris-Apis and the successive modifications in the cult, and in the creation of the iconographic representation of the god named Sarapis in Alexandria. The legend of the creation of Sarapis should be likewise contextualized within the framework of existing narrative tradition, such as Jewish motifs concerning the foundation of Jerusalem, ancient Egyptian motifs and various versions of tales about transportation of a divinity from a city to another (Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 42–45, 75–76). Dunand 1999, 105–106, 112 also expresses doubts about a total syncretism in the case of Sarapis.
[58] This detail comes from Artemidorus, *Oniroc*r. 2.44.11–18. For discussion on Demetrius of Phalerum's claimed role for the cult of Sarapis within the framework of the Egyptian onirism, see Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000, 49–53.

creation story may reveal a few details about the mechanism of syncretism which, if the legend were taken for truth, would appear as a conscious act probably influenced by political motives.[59] It should be remembered, however, that the legend derived from sources which relate it long after the cultic reality of the gods was well-established.[60] This aetiological element in the retrospective creation stories of the new cult tends to make syncretism more explicit and straightforward than what it may have been on the level of cultic practice. It also reflects the motivation of the teller, which in the case of Plutarch and Tacitus may have been to underline the Greek origin of a new deity. However, the iconography of the deity and its emergence is essential since it was important to provide people with a deity whose cult and appearance was easy to anchor to existing and differing, but in significant ways analogous traditions and cults.[61] People did not need to change their fundamental beliefs as the new deity incorporated the elements of the old ones in a new form. It is interesting to note the speculation about the role of the Eleusinian Timotheos in this process. Namely, it has been suggested that he was initially invited to Alexandria to advise the Egyptians on how to act correctly in the newly established Demetrian mystery cult of Alexandrian Eleusis in suburban Alexandria.[62] His duty would have been to observe that the rites were celebrated in accordance with those of the Attican Eleusis.[63] Ptolemy Soter wanted his Alexandria to be marketed as the 'Second Athens'.[64] If this was the case in Hellenistic Egypt, then the cultic 'purity' contained within the idea of a deity was respected and regardless of the creation of a new cult the deities and their cults were perceived as separate, yet analogous entities. Amalgamations of gods could exist and could be created by merging gods into one another for political and cultural advantage,[65] but the original gods were the ones who could be believed in more seriously due to their 'true' nature.

In the so-called Orphic hymns to Demeter, written over a long period of time between the fifth and third centuries BC the goddess is given, amongst many other epithets, names such as Universal Mother (*Panmeteira*) and Many-named Demeter (*Polyonymos*).[66] Similarly Isis, in the Greek hymns to her,[67] is hailed with similar epithets. One of these aretalogies (the praises of Isis) which is inscribed on the pilasters of the temple of Sakonotis and Thermouthis in Madinet Madi (Fayum), is attributed to Isidorus. He was a Hellenized Egyptian or a priest who might have been brought to Egypt to become a member of the Egyptian priesthood[68] during the reign of Soter II (116–107 BC and 88–81 BC) who, in turn, was interested in temple building and restoration. Isidorus is regarded as having been a supporter of the ruler, and in this light his hymn to Isis can be seen as a political and religious statement of loyalty.[69] It can also be seen as an expression of a fundamentally Egyptian identity of a local religious horizon with a cosmopolitan perspective towards the Greeks (and, hence, other peoples of non-local origin).[70] In the hymn[71] we read (ll. 14–24): "All mortals who live on the boundless earth, Thracians, Greeks, and Barbarians, express your fair name, a name greatly honoured among all. Each speaks in his own language, in his own land. The Syrians call you sovereign Astarte, Artemis, Nanaia, the people of Lydia call you sovereign Leto, the Lady, the Thracians also name you as Mother of the Gods, and the Greeks Hera of the Greta Throne, or Aphrodite, or Hestia the goodly, Rheia or Demeter." Here we can clearly see the parallels drawn between the goddesses, sovereign female deities to be found in all lands 'on boundless earth'. There is no Demeter-Isis but rather an Isis who is like Demeter and a Demeter who is like Isis. This idea is explicit also in another aretalogy for Isis, a long inscription from Maronea dated to the end of the second to the beginning of the first century BC.[72] After mentioning the pair Isis-Serapis the text states (ll. 19–20): "You are two, but you are called with many names by

[59] See esp. Malaise 2005, 128–139 also Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 65–66.
[60] See esp. Borgeaud & Volokhine 2000 and Malaise 2005, 128, 130–131.
[61] For a detailed discussion of the differing elements in the iconography of Sarapis, see Malaise 2005, 131–136. Borgeaud & Volokhine, esp. 75–76 state that Sarapis was in fact a new deity only in his appearance; as a cultic figure a Hellenized Memphite Osiris-Apis with an identical cultic sphere pre-dated the new Alexandrian god Sarapis.
[62] *Eleisinia* in Eleusis, an Alexandrian suburbia, is mentioned by Satyros in *POxy*. 2465, fr. 3, coll. 2. See also Merkelbach 1995, 61.
[63] Nilsson 1950, 94–95; Mylonas 1961, 203; Clinton 1974, 9; le Corsu 1977, 51 and Préaux 1987 (1978), 651.
[64] Merkelbach 1995, 61.
[65] E.g. Pachis 2004, 166, 170–172, 175 underlines the political motives in the syncretization of Demeter and Isis in Egypt.
[66] *Orphic Hymn to Demeter* 40. 1 and 3.
[67] There are some dozen Greek hymns to Isis, dated to the first century BC and they belong to the same genre as the so-called aretalogies to Isis; for details, see Vanderlip 1972, and especially regarding the epithets, Keysner 1932, 45–46; Malaise 1997, 187; Pakkanen 1996, 107–109.
[68] Vanderlip 1972, 14–15. Dunand 1973, 100 and Bricault 1990, 36 think that Isidorus was originally an Egyptian, whereas Müller (1961) leans towards the explanation that the author was a Greek priest of Isis. See also Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 48–49.
[69] Vanderlip 1972, 14–15.
[70] Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 51, 62.
[71] The text is published in *SEG* 8, 548–551; Bernand 1969, no. 175 (pp. 631–652); Totti 1985, no. 21–24 (pp. 76–82);Vanderlip 1972, esp. 9–16; see also Müller 1961. For a recent discussion, see Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 48–56.
[72] For the text, see Granjean 1975; Totti 1985, no. 19, pp. 60–61; also Sfameni Gasparro 2007, esp. 40–47.

men."[73] Likewise, the visual representations of the gods kept the epithets of Demeter and Isis separate even if they were depicted as one and the same figure. This was probably done in order to underline the similarity and the peaceful co-existence of two (or more) different deities who share similarities with each other.[74] Through these divine symbols people from different backgrounds could find similarities in each others' traditions, cults and religion and live together.

What are we to make of this? On reflection syncretism in Hellenistic Egypt appears as a mutual influence between different strains of religious tradition and/or between two or more different religions,[75] and it can be regarded in an essentialist sense as a characteristic of (especially) polytheistic traditions and also as a process of syncretization. Polymorphic and polysemic characteristics of our Hellenistic deities were anchored in the inner logic of polytheism. The main problem here is to find a way to solve the incompatibility between the theory (and theories) of syncretism and religious practice, i.e. the contextual reality of actualized belief systems. Belief is understood here to represent an element of religion, an important parameter which may be actualized in religious practices without necessarily being a prerequisite for these practices. Thus, I regard belief as part of religious discourse. A secondary question is determining whether belief in general is an innate universal category in our context. One aspect of (especially religious) belief is that it excludes the possibility of simultaneous and hence contradictory beliefs: nobody can believe that the earth is flat and round simultaneously, nor that I am here now and at the same time in another place.[76]

If we regard Hellenistic religion as a cultural system composed of multi-faceted religious elements which together formed a unity that we now call 'Hellenistic religion', then the meaning of each element is determined by the whole and they form a coherent functioning unit. This is a modified structuralist-functionalist understanding of religious tradition as a system. This would imply that its very functionality and coherence excludes the adoption of basic, fundamental religious beliefs that are incompatible with the ones held by the adopting tradition from the different religion unless the whole system changes.[77] Hellenistic religion is not, however, a closed coherent entity, instead we have perceived it as an open-ended entity in which even basic religious insights are related to one another in a loose fashion, mixed with each other relatively freely and in which the religious content is more or less a fluid configuration of beliefs. Certain coherence exists between these beliefs, or at least they are reconcilable in some interpretational scheme.[78] In brief, this type of religious tradition is itself syncretistic in nature. In postmodern terms it is a hybrid. Interpretation and re-interpretation took visual form in the representations of the goddesses Demeter and Isis in parallel with one another, and textual form in the hymns to the goddesses and in the aretalogies to Isis. Since we can nevertheless recognize the two individual goddesses either by their names or their visual attributes, no radical re-interpretation of old and new beliefs seems to have taken place. The basis of fundamental beliefs facilitated the existence of multiple gods in a polytheistic system, but polytheistic multivocality allowed changes in religious forms only within certain limits. New forms of deities had to be anchored within the known, accepted and established framework to be recognized and accepted. Fundamental beliefs provided a kind of 'grammar', a framework for religious expression, cult practice and the presentation of deities. Visual representations of them were adapted to better suit and respond to new cultural contexts by accommodating adaptations within a new framework. As a comparison, we could conceptually regard the fundamental beliefs as analoguous to *langue* and cultic expression as *parole* in F. de Saussure's well-known descriptive model of conceptual pairing in linguistics. *Langue*, or 'the language system' (cf. fundamental belief system) is the abstract system of values that makes speech possible, whereas *parole*, or 'speech' (cf. cultic expression) is the sum total of what people say- the concrete, actual use and the external manifestation of language.[79] In the case of Demeter and Isis the polytheistic structure of the belief system itself accommodated parallelization, but it did not easily create new beliefs, new gods or new goddesses to replace the old ones in the everyday cult practice. The connection of both goddesses with agriculture and fertility is preserved according to the 'rules' of the fundamental belief system; they provided the ground for parallelization and no new roles may have been allocated to the goddess who we often call Demeter-Isis. We should not, therefore, make syncretism too complex, but rather see it as a functioning coexistence

[73] Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 43–44 suggests that this declaration could be regarded as an expression of 'couple henotheism' which can also be seen as a radical expression of the religious mentality of the time by the person who engraved the aretalogy of Maronea. This mentality can be anchored to the complex phenomenon of religious syncretism.

[74] Dunand 1999, 99 points out that the total assimilation of the goddess Demeter-Isis is absent in the expressions of the practical cult of the deities (terracottas, monuments etc.) in Egypt and outside of it. For the iconographical expressions of the assimilation between the goddesses, see Pachis 2004, 172–173, 182.

[75] Cf. Vroom 1989, 26.

[76] Vroom 1989, 27.

[77] Vroom 1989, 29.

[78] Cf. Vroom 1989, 29.

[79] De Saussure 1971 (1916), 37–39, 159–160. Saussure further explains that (pp. 37–38) "*langue* and *parole* are then interdependent; the former is at the same time the instrument and the product of the latter. But all that does not prevent them from being two absolutely distinct things."

of different forms of religious traditions. The same divinity could generate diverse iconographical and onomastic representations because the polytheistic system provided flexibility. F. Dunand reminds us that in Hellenistic Egypt there was no problem in having coexisting gods and deities presented within one and the same context: there were images of Isis, Sarapis, Apis, Osiris, and others to choose from when one wished to make offerings, and this was as it had always been.[80]

G. van der Leeuw, in his *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1956),[81] pointed out the characteristics of transposition as a basic element in religious syncretism. This means that there can be change in religions due to their contacts with each other, but the form remains constant. In this regard there is a constant phenomenon, say a belief system, which represents 'reality' in the sense of Plato's ideas, and it can acquire different and varying appearances to represent it.[82] There is, however, one significant aspect in syncretism which may help us to finally understand the parallelization of the goddesses Demeter and Isis, and it is tied to the notion of the 'transpositionality' of syncretism. This is a metaphoric nature of syncretisism both as a process and as essence. Metaphor, as is well-known, is an analogy between two things or ideas, and this analogy is conveyed by the use of a metaphorical word in place of some other word. Linguistic metaphor is not a decorative flourish, but pervasive in everyday life, in thoughts and action. Metaphor is a mode of thinking, and our ordinary conceptual system is also fundamentally metaphorical.[83] Syncretistic process is a good example of this: it can be stimulated by the similarity of metaphors, meanings and patterns of different religious traditions.[84] We can compare the well-known elaboration of a metaphor by Aristotle with a situation of emerging identities between the goddesses Demeter and Isis: Aristotle exemplifies metaphor with a statement "Achilles is a lion" (*Rhet.* 1406b). Elements of this classic example have been sometimes termed as 'tenor' and 'vehicle', 'tenor' being an underlining idea and 'vehicle' the path through which the underlining idea is arrived at. So, the 'tenor' here is the strength, courage and nobility of Achilles, and the 'vehicle' is the idea of lion. Thinking of a lion does not itself, however, bring Achilles to mind. Therefore, metaphor is not the tenor or vehicle alone, but the sum of both, and moreover, the choice of vehicle alters the tenor: Achilles will forever be thought of not only as strong, courageous and noble, but also as 'lion-like'.[85] Cognitive categories are related to language, but are not reflected solely in language. Even though visual metaphors (sculpture, paintings etc.) certainly differ from the linguistic ones and are more open to interpretation,[86] they still have meaningful resonance in people's mind as purveyors of meaning. With Demeter and Isis we have both textual and visual evidence for their parallelization, and can therefore discern a syncretistic process which resonates with the laws of metaphorical constructions: Demeter is Mother and the provider of agriculture (among other roles of hers). Isis is Mother and giver of agriculture (among other roles). Demeter is like Isis. Isis is like Demeter. Demeter is Isis. Isis is Demeter. Parallelization is surely not the same as metaphor since the domain of the two entities is the same, unlike in metaphor. However, the quality of the goddesses—or 'tenor' to use the more technical term—of being a nurturer, giver of life and nutrition through earth, is transported to a new context without altering it. Demeter is now Isis-like and Isis is Demeter-like. They have not become a new goddess Demeter-Isis whose qualities would be different from the original. Transpositional elements have remained the same regardless of changes in appearance. "The same goddess is called by some Isis, by others Demeter" (Diod. Sic., *Hist*. 1.25.1). To take this a step further, we could name a basic belief in a goddess who gives life as a 'tenor', a transpositional element, which remains the same regardless of the change of names or attributes. Hence it is possible to believe in a goddess who gives life, in Demeter or in Isis, or in a polytheistic system involving both of them since a set of symbols and attributes to identify them work like metaphors and are available to believers to characterize and concretize the goddesses. They can be combined in various ways without altering the basic 'tenor' of the goddess being a mother, nurturer and the giver of life. In this regard it was secondary whether she was named Demeter or Isis since both would do.

Therefore, based on this argumentation I could answer my initial question that believing in a syncretistic goddess Demeter-Isis is problematic, since such a goddess would nevertheless display characteristics and attributes of the original goddesses and display their shared nature and symbolism. Becoming a new goddess with her own cult, tradition, belief system and rituals separate from the original two individual deities would have entailed more profound changes in the belief system and a new deity would not have become so easily anchored into the existing tradition. This conclusion was arrived at via a two-fold route. First, syncretism is regarded as

[80] Dunand 1999, 112, 115; see also Malaise 2005, 195–198.
[81] See esp. pp. 693–695.
[82] Vroom 1989, 26. Van der Leeuw's idealist position can be criticized on philosophical grounds.
[83] Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 3–4; in connection with understanding ancient Greek culture, see Cohen 2010, 7–10. Ruth Padel 1992, 9 reminds that metaphor as a term used by the Greeks first appears in the fourth century BC.
[84] Droogers 2004 (1995), 226.
[85] The terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle' were coined by I.A. Richards in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) esp. 3, 89–114; see Simms 2003, 62–69.
[86] Cohen 2010, 8.

being a dual-concept in which its normative, essentialist characteristics and its ability to explain historical and cultural processes are distinct from one another. The first one may explain a nature and state of certain religious systems or cultural encounters as well as the results of mixing, and could therefore be labelled as hybrid or hybridity in postmodern terminology. The second, syncretism as a process, can explain the process of syncretization, i.e. the evolvement of religion in a syncretistic process of inter- or intracultural encounters. In both of its meanings the concept of syncretism may be used as a category of historical explanation, as a heuristic instrument for understanding. The second route towards the conclusions was to test the compatibility of the outlined conceptual syncretism in a contextual setting related to the nature of the (potential) goddess Demeter-Isis. Testing the tenability of the conceptual syncretism within the framework of belief resulted in the view which shows that the process of the assimilation of the two goddesses can be followed as a process in which certain basic similarities of the deities are underlined, but it does not hold for the essentialist syncretism which would entail a new cult, tradition, and a belief system in a new goddess.

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