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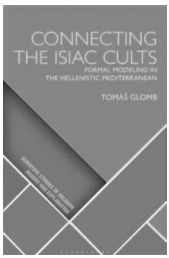
Tomáš Glomb, *Connecting the Isiac Cults: Formal Modeling in the Hellenistic Mediterranean*.



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Tomáš Glomb's *Connecting the Isiac Cults: Formal Modeling in the Hellenistic Mediterranean* examines the spread of the Greco-Egyptian cults, particularly those of Isis and Sarapis, across the Mediterranean in the early Hellenistic period (from the end of the fourth century BCE to the second century BCE). The study combines formal modeling techniques with traditional historiography to explore the underlying factors and dynamics that contributed to the diffusion and success of these cults during the period of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Glomb provides an important contribution to current research on the Isiac Cults and their dissemination mechanisms in the ancient Mediterranean, based on network theories and a longue durée approach.

The book is the author's dissertation and consists of 178 pages and 20 figures in black and white, which are mainly maps created with GIS to visualize the geographical distribution of the cults in the studied area. The book is structured into six chapters, including an introductory chapter and a conclusion highlighting the overarching methodological approach with respect to for further research perspectives. A brief appendix discusses the Ptolemaic influence in the places studied. An e-publication already appeared in 2022 at Bloomsbury Academic Publishing: https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/connecting-the-isiac-cults-9781350210691/.

The main question of the book is: What potential influence did the Ptolemaic dynasty have on the individual factors of the early spread of the Isiac cults in the ancient Mediterranean? By employing geospatial modeling, mathematical modeling, and network analysis, Glomb argues that, at

* I would like to disclose that I am personally acquainted with the author of the book under review and have previously co-authored a scholarly study with him. However, this review has been conducted independently, and my assessment is based solely on academic criteria. My evaluation aims to provide an objective and professional analysis of the author's scholarly contribution.

least in the Hellenistic Aegean and western Asia Minor, the political structures established by the Ptolemies played a decisive role in the regional dissemination of the Isiac cults.

After a brief introduction, the second chapter explores the characteristics of Isis and Sarapis, focusing on their significance during the rule of the Ptolemies. Isis, originally a protective deity assisting the deceased pharaoh, evolved into a universal goddess associated with motherhood and fertility. By the Hellenistic period, she had acquired additional maritime and salvific aspects. Probably these aspects facilitated the widespread adoption of her cult across the Mediterranean, particularly among sailors and merchants. Sarapis, unlike Isis, has no deep-rooted Egyptian past. Likely derived from the Osiris-Apis cult of Memphis, he was rebranded under Ptolemy I and elevated as a dynastic deity. It is commonly accepted that the Ptolemies actively promoted Sarapis alongside Isis in Egypt, incorporating them into their ruler cult. By pairing Isis with Sarapis, the Ptolemies reshaped Egyptian religious traditions to fit their political agenda, reinforcing their legitimacy as rulers of a multicultural empire.

Having acknowledged the Ptolemies' commitment to the Isiac cults, chapter three reviews the academic debate on the spread of these cults, which is based on a discussion that has continued for over a century. The discussion has been significantly shaped by two opposing models: Franz Cumont's imperialistic theory and Peter M. Fraser's counterargument. Cumont, writing in the early 20th century, proposed that the spread of the Isiac cults was primarily a result of deliberate Ptolemaic political and religious propaganda. He argued that the Ptolemies actively promoted the cult of Isis and Sarapis to unify the various ethnic groups in Egypt and extend their influence across the Mediterranean. According to this view, they encouraged the worship of these deities in their territories and among their allies, with political ambition being the principal driver of the cult's expansion. Fraser, writing in the 1960s, strongly opposed Cumont's interpretation. He argued that the spread of the Isiac cults was not a top-down process orchestrated by the Ptolemies but rather a spontaneous development driven by merchants, traders, and private religious initiatives. Fraser's analysis of archaeological and epigraphic evidence showed that early attestations of Isiac worship outside Egypt were often linked to private individuals or associations rather than official state actions. He emphasized that, in cities such as Athens and Delos, private cults preceded any public or state involvement. Furthermore, he highlighted the geographical and chronological inconsistencies in Cumont's theory, pointing out that the Ptolemies did not systematically establish Isiac temples in their possessions.

Fraser's critique of Cumont's "imperialist theory" dominated the academic debate for decades and created two contrary camps. By throwing the

baby out with the bathwater, he overlooked how Ptolemaic policies indirectly facilitated cult expansion through trade, military presence, and migration. The idea of "spontaneous" diffusion oversimplified the process, ignoring how cults followed established Ptolemaic networks. Fraser also dismissed long-term developments, failing to see that religious adoption often lagged behind political or economic activity. To this day, the dichotomy has prevented a more nuanced understanding of the process, which recent scholarship, notably by Laurent Bricault[1], has sought to rectify. However, Fraser's arguments have not been fundamentally challenged. The research presented in this book re-evaluates the debate on the spread of the Isiac cults and goes beyond the long-standing polarization between Cumont's imperialist theory and Fraser's reaction to it.

In two case studies, the author tests innovative methods using formal modeling to evaluate the complex influences of the spread of the Isiac cults in the ancient Mediterranean. These studies, on the regions of the Hellenistic Aegean Sea (chapter four) and the western coast of Asia Minor (chapter five), were previously published in *PLOS One* as independent analyses.[2] Both regions were selected due to the significant political and economic influence exerted upon them by the Ptolemaic dynasty, making them suitable for comparison in studying the early spread of Isiac cults. The reason for the author's decision to re-publish both studies in the monograph is that the compilation makes it possible to discuss them together and thereby reveal common historical patterns despite regional differences. Moreover, discussion of them is placed in a broader historical context and methodological perspective, integrating their results into a unified analytical framework in the final chapter (six).

The study of the diffusion of the Isiac cults is based on the extensive collection of sources in the *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques (IVe s. av. J.-C.—IVe s. apr. J.-C.)* and of the *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques: RICIS I-III*.[3] To operationalize key factors, the study geocoded archaeological evidence of Isiac cults, differentiating between

1 Laurent Bricault, *Les cultes isiaques dans le monde greco-romain* (Belles Lettres, 2013).

2 Tomáš Glomb, Adam Mertel, Zdeněk Pospišil, Zdeněk Stachoň, and Aleš Chalupa, "Ptolemaic Military Operations Were a Dominant Factor in the Spread of Egyptian Cults across the Early Hellenistic Aegean Sea," *PLOS One 13,* no. 3 (2018): e0193786; Tomáš Glomb, Adam Mertel, Zdeněk Pospišil, and Aleš Chalupa, "Ptolemaic Political Activities on the West Coast of Hellenistic Asia Minor Had a Significant Impact on the Local Spread of the Isiac Cults: A Spatial Network Analysis," *PLOS One 15,* no. 4 (2020): e0230733.

3 Laurent Bricault, *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques*: *IVe s. av. J.-C.—IVe s. apr. J.-C.* (Diffusion de Boccard, 2001); Laurent Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques: RICIS* I-III (Diffusion de Boccard, 2005).

isolated artifacts (e.g., inscriptions, archaeological objects) and structural evidence (e.g., temples). The spatio-temporal focus was inspired by Bricault's definition of the first wave of the spread (from 333/2 until 88 BCE) but places the end of the evidence no later than the second century BC, well before Mithridates' military interventions on the island of Delos. This is a debatable decision, but it is also partly due to the nature of the source material, since many testimonies can only be roughly dated to a century. Another decision was made regarding the start of the dissemination. Although the first cults of Isis in Athens and Eretria, founded by Egyptians, are already documented in the late 4th century BCE, the case studies focuse on the spread of the cults from Alexandria during the Ptolemaic period in order to examine the possible role of the Ptolemies in this process.

Case study 1 (chapter four) investigates the spread of the Isaic cults across the Aegean Sea. The author constructs a quantitative framework to test how different political, economic, and geographic factors shaped the cult's dissemination. The quantitative analysis is modelled on the ancient maritime transportation network and measures centrality values by means of the network analysis of individual ports in order to derive a proxy for the strategic importance of specific ports within the network. The transportation network is not derived from the Stanford geospatial network model of the Roman world (ORBIS), which is designed on too large a scale; rather, the author has modelled a new, more suitable network based on ancient navigational guides which is more suitable in terms of detail and scale. With this approach, shorter sea routes, called cabotage by Fernand Braudel, are taken into account.[4] Political influence is assessed through the presence of long-term Ptolemaic military garrisons, which are geocoded on the basis of epigraphic and archaeological evidence. Economic factors are modeled by estimating the dependency of Aegean islands on Egyptian grain imports. This is achieved through a detailed environmental model that evaluates climate, soil quality, and topography to estimate agricultural productivity, while historical population data provide estimates of local food demand. By comparing production and consumption, the model identifies islands that were likely dependent on grain imports, offering a proxy for economic connections to Egypt. The environ-

4 See also the study by Lindsey Mazurek on the significance of cabotage in the dissemination of the Isiac cults in the ancient Mediterranean. Lindsey Mazurek, "Material and Textual Narratives of Authenticity? Creating Cabotage and Memory in the Hellenistic Eastern Mediterranean," in *Across the Corrupting Sea. Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek (Routledge, 2016), 39–61.

mental model developed by the author is highly innovative and, despite some uncertainties, adds another factor to the analysis by identifying a potential market for Egyptian grain.

By applying a multivariate statistical analysis, Glomb was able to evaluate and compare the possible impacts of the individual factors of the spread. The results are highly relevant. The mathematical model shows that the spread of the Isiac cults emerged as a multivariate and interconnected processes. The dominant factor was the placement of Ptolemaic garrisons. These garrisons secured the maritime sea routes between Alexandria and the Aegean for soldiers, merchants and migrants. The Ptolemaic troops were likely to have contributed to the spread of the cults, as is also indicated by the epigraphic evidence from the island of Thera. A second, albeit subordinate factor was the import of Egyptian grain. An important outcome of this case study is that it shows that it is possible, to a certain extent, to use quantitative methods to disentangle and weigh the processes and factors of diffusion that played a larger role in the context of cultural transmission.

Case Study 2 (chapter five) builds on the findings of the Aegean case study, which identified a significant correlation between the influence of the Ptolemies and the spread of the Isiac cults, and examines whether similar patterns can be observed in Asia Minor. The methodology follows a three-step process: constructing a transportation network, identifying and geocoding Ptolemaic-controlled or influenced cities, and applying statistical analysis to evaluate spatial correlations between Isiac cult sites and political factors. This time, the transportation network model integrates maritime and inland routes. Inland roads were reconstructed using the Roman road network as a proxy, assuming that major Hellenistic cities were connected by equivalent pre-Roman routes. Nodes representing Hellenistic ports and settlements were selected from databases such as Pleiades.org and cross-checked with historical sources. The final network allowed for calculations of travel time between cities, taking into account differences in maritime and land transport speeds. The findings support the hypothesis that Ptolemaic activities created favorable conditions for cultural transmission in multiple regions of the Hellenistic Mediterranean. The results also suggest that Seleucid political boundaries may have acted as a barrier to inland diffusion, as Isiac cult evidence is mostly absent in Seleucid-controlled areas. These conclusions align with the earlier case study on the Aegean, reinforcing the argument that Ptolemaic political engagement indirectly shaped the cult's expansion beyond Egypt.

It should be noted that the hypothesis that the spread of the Isiac cults was significantly influenced by the Ptolemies is affected to a certain extent

by the methodological-theoretical approach chosen. Thus, detailed analyses of individual factors for dissemination, such as the possible influence of the Island League, diplomatic missions and specific battles, are beyond the focus of the study (see pages: 2, 64, 68f.). However, this is in line with the author's deliberate methodological approach, which understands the spread of cults as a long-term process and examines the significance of Ptolemaic influence over a historical period.

In summary, the book offers a groundbreaking and inspiring study that not only provides a new understanding of the early dissemination of the Isiac cults and addresses the complexity of related research questions using an innovative mix of methods, but also, due to the author's excellent knowledge of historical sources, offers profound contextual insights into the early phases of the Isiac cults outside of Egypt. It also reveals pitfalls in the development of research and shows how two seemingly opposing models limited understanding of the phenomenon of cult dissemination. In addition, the study opens up important new perspectives for the study of transcultural diffusion processes in the long durée using computational methods. The book is written in accessible language and allows readers who are not familiar with the subject and the methods to follow the research process in a clear and straightforward manner. In particular, the method used is described step by step, which helps the reader to follow the author's process of gaining knowledge in a transparent way. The summaries of the results of the individual chapters contribute significantly to this clarity. The author's sensitive language takes into account complex interrelationships and explains various nuances involved, but also sets out clear and tangible results. All in all, this book is a very welcome contribution to the field of ancient religion that will inspire future research with its innovative approaches.

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