# Propagation of the Cult of Sarapis and Isis in Greece

### Franciszek Sokolowski

## I. A New Inscription from Thessalonica

HARLES EDSON published in his recent fascicule of the *Inscriptiones Graecae* an inscription from the city of Thessalonica recording the introduction of the cult of the Egyptian gods to Opus.¹ This testimony, together with other writings on stone, was found during the excavation of the sanctuary of Sarapis soon after World War I but published only now. The inscription in question, although commented on and partly restored by Edson and Klaffenbach, needs further investigation as a curious piece of ancient religious propaganda. The text, with some supplements of my own, reads as follows:

I-II CENTURY COPY OF AN EARLIER TEXT

ν λειτείαν ποτὶ Εὐρύνομον· καθυπνώς ας δὲ πάλιν καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἰδών,
10 ν καὶ ἐπεργεθεὶς τάν τε ἐπιςτολὰν εὖρε ὑπὸ τῷ ποτικεφαλαίῳ
ν καθὼς αὐτῷ ἐτεκμάρθη· ἐπανελθὼν δὲ ἀνέδωκε τὰν ἐπιςτολὰν

<sup>1</sup> IG X 2 fasc.1 255. On the Sarapieion in Thessalonica see S. Pelekides, 'Απὸ τὴν πολιτεία καὶ τὴν κοινωνία τῆς ἀρχαίας Θεςςαλονίκης (Thessalonica 1934); C. B. Welles, AJA 42 (1938) 249–51; C. Edson, HSCP 51 (1940) 125–37, HThR 41 (1948) 153–204; P. M. Fraser, "Two Studies on the Cult of Sarapis in the Hellenistic World," OpusAthen 3 (1960) 37–39; L. Vidmann, Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapicae (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 28, Berlin 1969) nos.107–26; R. Merkelbach, ZPE 10 (1973) 46–54.

Εὐρυνόμωι καὶ ἀνήνγειλε τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιταχθέντα· Εὐρύνομος δὲ τὰν ἐπιςτολὰν λαβὼν καὶ ἀκούςας τὰ ὑπὸ Ξεναινέτου λεγόμενα ν παρ' αὐτὸν μὲν τὸν καιρὸν ἀπόρως εἶχε διὰ τὸ καθὼς ἐπάνωι

15 [διας]αφεῖται εἶμεν αὐτοῖς ἀντιπολειτείαν ποτ' αὐςωτούς· ἀναγγοὺς δὲ [νν τὰν ἐπιςτ]ολὰν καὶ ἰδὼν τὰ γεγραμμένα ςύμφωνα τοῖς π[ρό]- [νν τερον ὑπ' αὐτ]οῦ εἰρημένοις ὑπεδέξατο τὸν Σάραπιν καὶ τὰν Εἰςιν [καὶ μετὰ τὸν ξενιςμ]ὸν ἐν τᾶι οἰκίαι τᾶι Σωςινείκας ἐν τοὺς οἰκ[ου]- [ν ροὺς θεοὺς παραλαβοῦςα ἔ]θυε Σωςινείκα τὰς θυςίας χρόν[ον τινά·]

20 [νν μετὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτᾶς θάνατον Εὐν]όςτα ὰ Σωςιβίου θυγατριδᾶ π[αρε]- [ν δίδου καὶ διεξᾶγε τὰ μυςτήρια τῶ]ν θεῶν ἐν τοὺς κ[αὶ] ἀμετό[χ]ους [ν τῶν ἱερῶν· Εὐνόςτας δὲ ὕςτερον ἐν ἀρρωςτ]ἰαν ἐμπεςο[ύςα]ς προέθυε [ὑπὲρ αὐτᾶς τὰς θυςίας —————————] ιο.ρμ..μ..

The document reveals that a certain Xenainetos came from the city of Opus to the shrine of Sarapis in Thessalonica to obtain advice on some problem, probably a matter of health. During his sleep in the dormitory, he dreamed that Sarapis approached him and put under his pillow a written message for Eurynomos, a man from Opus, whom the god charged with receiving him and his sister Isis into the city.2 Having awakened and fallen asleep again, Xenainetos had the same dream. He was perplexed by this vision because of enmity existing between him and Eurynomos. The record uses the term αντιπολιτεία, meaning opposition on the score of ideas or policy.3 Having returned home, Xenainetos conveyed the message of Sarapis to Eurynomos, who read it, talked with the messenger, and in spite of his embarrassment, after some hesitation decided to comply with the will of the god. Sarapis and Isis were installed in the house of a certain Sosinike.4 The document describes later the sequence of priestesses in the service of the Egyptian gods.

We find different methods of spreading the cult of Sarapis, but this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> On similar cases of the gods' apparitions see Hdt. 6.105; Paus. 1.28.4; 8.54.7; Plut. Them. 30. Cf. F. Pfister, RE Supplb. 4 (1924) 299; Merkelbach, op. cit. (supra n.1) 50.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Arist. Pol. 20.5,5; 23.10,14; 28.14,1; Plut. Caes. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For the names of the persons cf. IG IX.1 194,30; ibid. 271,13; SIG<sup>3</sup> 962,35; 1059 1 10, II 18.

document from Thessalonica exemplifies what scholars are accustomed to call 'Himmelsbriefe', or letters sent from heaven.<sup>5</sup> Other letters supposedly from gods and used as a means of disseminating religious ideas and cults may serve to clarify the background of our text. (1) Aristides in his Sacred Talks reports that once he was ordered in a dream to seek advice on behalf of the health of his nurse, Philoumene, in Pergamum. Entering the sanctuary he found a letter at the feet of Asklepios' statue, probably prescribing the cure. (2) Pausanias reports (from the archives of the sanctuary in Epidaurus) the story of Phalysios, the founder of the cult of Asklepios in Naupactus (10.38.13). Informed of this man's blindness, Asklepios appeared to the poetess Anyto in a dream and handed her writing-tablets with the order to submit them to Phalysios for reading. When the blind man opened the tablets, his sight was restored. (3) This report recalls a detail from the story of the introduction of Sarapis into Delos. For a long time this cult had no decent sanctuary. Apollonios, the grandson of the founder, built the temple in spite of all manner of difficulties. In a critical moment Sarapis came to him in sleep and ordered him to search for some writing hidden in the frame of the door which should instruct him where and how to build the temple.7 (4) Among the papyri of Zenon there is a letter of a certain Zoilos about the construction of a temple of Sarapis in some coastal city.8 Consulting the god on behalf of the health of Apollonios, the finance minister of the Ptolemaic administration, Zoilos was approached by Sarapis in his sleep and was ordered to urge his sick master to build a sanctuary, dedicate a holy precinct, and install a priest to offer the sacrifices. Zoilos neglected to accomplish the mission and was himself punished with sickness. He was unable to transmit the order of the god until he recovered.

From lines 5 and 17–18 of the inscription from Thessalonica we learn that Sarapis sent a message to Opus asking that he be received into the city. The verb  $\dot{\upsilon}\pi o\delta \dot{\epsilon}\chi \epsilon c\theta \alpha \iota$  (lines 5 and 17) has an important

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See A. Dieterich, Kleine Schriften (Leipzig/Berlin 1911) 234–51; O. Weinreich, ArchRW 10 (1907) 566–67= Ausgewählte Schriften I (Amsterdam 1969) 5–6; Sykutris, RE Supplb. 5 (1931) 206.

<sup>6 2.394</sup> Κ.: καὶ ἄμα λαμβάνω τινὰ ἐπιςτολὴν πρὸ ποδῶν κειμένην τοῦ Διὸς ᾿Αςκληπιοῦ.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> IG XI.4 1299,56-58. Cf. H. Engelmann, Die delische Sarapisaretologie (BeitrKlPhil 15, Meisenheim am Glan 1964) 11; A. D. Nock, Conversion (Oxford 1933, repr. 1961) 51-54.

<sup>8</sup> P.Cair.Zen. 59034. Fraser, op.cit. (supra n.1) 54 no.12.

history in the spread of Greek cults. Leto, mother of Apollo, wandered about looking for a place where she could give birth to her son. Nowhere did she find hospitality until she came to Delos.9 Euripides' Bacchae describes the wandering of Dionysos through various lands in search of hospitality.<sup>10</sup> We know something about the reception of Asklepios in Athens when he came there from Epidaurus about 420 B.C. Sophocles had been appointed as host to receive the god, and in reward for this service he was given after his death and heroization the title Dexion, 'Receiver'. Pausanias relates different kinds of welcome experienced by Demeter during her search for Kore. A certain Phytalos, a native of Attica, offered the goddess hospitality and was given in reward a fig tree. 12 It was a common belief in antiquity that gods sometimes visited human beings, especially the good and just ones. 13 We read in an inscription from Mantinea that the priestess of Demeter after the procession with the statue "received the goddess into her own house."14 Livy gives us the description of the welcome and reception of the Mother of the Gods in Rome during the second Punic war (29.11.6-7). On the advice of the oracle of Delphi an embassy was sent to Galatia to bring the holy stone of the goddess, and an optimus vir (P. Scipio) was appointed to receive it in Rome. Another story of the reception of gods is reported by Diodorus (8.32.2). The Locrians, waging war against Croton, asked their mother city, Sparta, for help. The Lacedemonians, knowing the great strength of the Crotonians, refused to intervene militarily but offered instead to give the Dioscuri as helpers. The Locrian ambassadors took the reply as a good omen, accepted the aid, sacrificed and organized a reception for the gods on their ship, and sailed back home.

#### COMMENTARY

LINES 18–19. The restoration is based on *P.Lond*. I 125.11:  $\dot{\eta}$  θεὸς  $\dot{\eta}$  καλουμένη οἰκουρός. Sarapis was at first accepted as a god of the family of Sosinike, then some time later outsiders also joined this cult.

<sup>9</sup> Hymn. Hom. Ap. Del. 48-49. Cf. Pfister, op. cit. (supra n.2) 316.

<sup>10</sup> Lines 769-70: τὸν δαίμον' οὖν τόνδε . . . ὦ δέςποτα, δέχου πόλει τῆδε.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Cf. SIG³ 1096 n.5. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Der Glaube der Hellenen² II (Basel 1956) 222f. L. Beschi, Annuario 29–30 (1967–68) 424–28.

<sup>12</sup> Paus. 1.37.2. Cf. 1.14.2; 2.18.3, 35.4; 7.27.9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Od. 17.485-87. Paus. 8.2.4. NT Ep.Hebr. 13.2.

<sup>14</sup> IG V. 2 265,21: ὑπεδέξατο καὶ τὰν θεὸν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν οἰκίαν καθώς ἐςτιν ἔθος τοῖς ἀεὶ γινομένοις ἱερεῦςι.

Lines 21–22. G. Klaffenbach proposed the reading  $\kappa[\alpha\tau]\alpha\mu\epsilon\tau\delta\chi ovc$ . The right supplement, I think, should be  $\kappa[\alpha\iota]$   $\dot{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\tau\delta\chi ovc$ . The familial cult had been opened to people not closely related. Cf. Dittenberg. SIG³ 1125.11:  $A\iota\dot{\omega}v$ ...  $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta o\lambda\hat{\eta}c$   $\dot{\alpha}\mu\dot{\epsilon}\tau o\chi oc$ . For the mysteries in the circles of Sarapis and Isis consult Th. Hopfner, RE 8 (1935) 133ff, and L. Vidmann, Isis und Sarapis bei den Griechen and Römern (RelVers Vorarb 29, Berlin 1970) 124–38.

Lines 22–23. The verb  $\pi\rho o\theta \dot{\nu}\epsilon\nu\nu$  means here 'sacrifice in the name of somebody else'. See on the subject my Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure (Paris 1955) 125.

## II. Sarapis in Magnesia

We find another kind of propagation in the decree of Magnesia on the Maeander connected with the installation of the cult of Sarapis. This text has been published by many scholars, but without full explanation.<sup>15</sup> I propose to read this document as follows:

Text

## --- τὰ μὲν ἄλλα εἶναι]

[πάντα κ]αθότι καὶ το[ι̂ς ἱερεῦςι τῶν θεῶν ὅςοις θύε]ται ἐν τῶι ἐνιαυτῶ[ι ἐκάςτωι δημοςίαι· τὰ δὲ θύματα] [τ]ῶι θεῶι παραςτήςου[ςι ἀπὸ τοῦ εἰςιόντος ἐνιαυ]-

- τοῦ οἱ οἰκονόμοι Φαρςαλ[ίωι θύειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου, ἐν ἑκάςτηι]
   [τ]ῶν ἑορτῶν παριςτάντες [τὸ εἰς τὴν θυςίαν μεμεριςμέ] [νο]ν· τὰ δὲ θυθέντα καταναλιςκέ[τ]ω[ςαν ἐν τῶι ἱερῶι· κατὰ]
   [δ]ὲ τὸν ἄλλον χρόνον προςμιςθούςθωςαν οἱ [θυςιάζοντες]
   [τ]ὰ ἱερὰ καθότι γέγραπται· καταςτήςει δὲ κ[αὶ ἱερέα ἐν τῶι]
- 10 [τ] εμένει τῶι ἀνατεθέντι τῶι θεῶι· λήψεται δ[ὲ τῶν θυομένων] [ἔ]ν τῶι τεμένει ἀφ' ἐκάςτου ἱερείου ςκέλος καὶ [τῶν τιθεμένων] [τ]ῶι θεῶι τὰ τρίτα μέρη· ἐν ἄλλωι δὲ τόπωι μὴ [ποιείτω ἱε]- [ρ]ὸν Σαράπιδος· εἰ δὲ μή, ὀφειλέτω τῶι δήμωι δ[ραχμάς —] [κ]αὶ ὁ τόπος ἔςτω τῆς πόλ[εω]ς· φαινέτω [δὲ ὁ χρήιζων ἐπὶ τῶι]
- 15 [ή]μίσει πρὸς τοὺς εὐθύνο[υ]ς, οἱ δὲ εὔθυνοι {καὶ οἱ εὔθυν[οι} εἰςαγόν]- [των] εἰς τὸ καθ' ἑξάμηνον παραγινόμενον δ[ικαςτήριον· ἀφαι]- [ρείτω]ςαν δὲ οἱ οἰκονόμοι ἐκ τῶν ξυλίνων ὤ[νῶν δραχ]- [μ]ὰς τρεῖς [κ]αὶ ἐκ τῶν ςιτηρῶν [ὧ]νῶν δ[ραχ]μὴν μ[ίαν καὶ ἀ]- [πο]δότωςαν τῶι ἱερεῖ· ἐξουςία δὲ ἔςτω τῶ[ι] δή[μωι ἄραί τι τοῦ]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> O. Kern, Die Inschriften von Magnesia (Berlin 1900) 99; Dittenberg. SIG<sup>2</sup> 554; Sokolowski, op.cit. (supra p.445) 34; Fraser, op.cit. (supra n.1) 53 no.8; Vidmann, op.cit. (supra n.1) no.294.

2 rest. Sokolowski. 3 Sokolowski: ὅcα δὲ δεῖ θύειν Dittenberger. 4 Sokolowski. 5–6 Sokolowski: οἱ τὰ θύματα τῶν ἄλλ]ων Dittenberger. 6–7 Sokolowski. 8 Sokolowski: οἰκονόμοι Kern: ἱερεῖc Stengel. 9 Sokolowski: νεωκόρον Dittenberger. 10 rest. Stengel: τεθυμένων Kern: καιομένων Dittenberger. 11 Sokolowski: διδομένων Stengel. 12–13 Sokolowski: βωμ]όν Kern. 16–17 Sokolowski: λαμβανέτωταν Kern. 21–31 Sokolowski.

The city of Magnesia is acknowledging the cult of Sarapis as a public institution and a certain Pharsalios as its official priest. This man earlier dedicated to Sarapis a precinct, probably on his own property, and planned to build a temple there. The city guarantees him victims for sacrifice during the feasts, grants the right to collect certain cultic requirements, and pays him with money from the sale of wood and food. On the other hand, Pharsalios agrees to appoint an auxiliary priest and to build something (I think a temple) in the precinct dedicated to Sarapis. He accepts also the obligation to build the chapel nowhere else than in the delimited place, or he will be fined and the potential site confiscated. This curious stipulation means that Pharsalios had been thwarted in his attempt to install the cult in a site other than the one agreed upon. Any misunderstanding on this point will be tried by a tribunal coming to Magnesia from abroad.<sup>16</sup>

The dedication of the precinct, the building of the temple or chapel and the appointment of a priest figure as items in other documents related to the spread of the cult of Sarapis. So in Delos Apollonios, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This detail seems to indicate that Pharsalios was a foreigner in Magnesia. Cf. IG VII 3172,90.

grandson of the founder of the cult, had been facing long-time opposition in building a suitable temple to his god.<sup>17</sup> The Zoilos mentioned above (cf. n.8) was urged by Sarapis to build something (probably a temple), to dedicate a precinct and to appoint a priest for the sacrifices. A fragment of an inscription from Ephesus mentions someone who accomplished all three requirements: ίδρύςατο κατὰ πρόςταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ ἱερὸ[ν] νας καὶ τὸν ναὸν ωἰκοδόμης εν, καὶ τὸ τέμενος ανέδειξεν ίερον, τοῦ θεοῦ προςτάξαντος, ίερεὺς γενόμενος Γλαυκίας Μενεκράτους.<sup>18</sup> The clause about the building of a temple in the decree of Magnesia can be illustrated by an inscription from Syria.<sup>19</sup> Three brothers, all priests of Sarapis, owned the precinct of their god in the city: τέμενος ιδιόκτητον.<sup>20</sup> Certain people erected there statues or steles, paying taxes to the city, and the priests, fearing encroachment of the authorities on their property, protested and succeeded in winning their point. The tax in question was to be paid in the future not for placing the dedication but for the monument itself. We have another testimony of the opposition shown to the introduction of the Sarapis cult into the city of Histria.<sup>21</sup> The acceptance of this cult had been sharply debated and resisted in the council; the decision could not be taken until an embassy had been sent to the oracle of Apollo in Chalcedon for advice on this question.

#### COMMENTARY

LINE 3. For the supplement cf. Dittenberg. SIG<sup>3</sup> 1015=my Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure nos. 1,5; 73,10 and 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> IG XI.4 1299. SIG<sup>3</sup> 663 and 664. Cf. supra n.7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> J. Keil, Ang Wien (1954) 217 no.3. Fraser, op.cit. (supra n.1) 37 n.4. But see also L. Robert, BullEp 1955, 193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> P. Roussel, Syria 23 (1942–44) 21–32. Fraser, op.cit. (supra n.1) 53–54 no.11. IGLSyr 1261. Cf. G. Klaffenbach, Philologus 97 (1948) 376–78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> For this term cf. IG XII suppl. 37 n.124,18: ἔχων [δὲ χωρί]ον [ἰ]διόκτητον . . . κατεςκεύαςε καὶ ἐν τούτ[ω τέμενός] τε καὶ ναῦον.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> D. M. Pippidi, Studii Classice 6 (1964) 108-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Histria, Monografie Arheologică 1 (Bucharest 1954) 477 lines 17-18.

participants were entertained, and perhaps for this reason meat from the sacrifices could not be exported from the sacred precinct.

LINE 8. O. Kern restored here olkovóμοι because he was thinking of the lease of the cult by these state officials; Dittenberger guessed at victims which the oikonomoi were furnishing. Both opinions seem mistaken because of the middle form of the verb  $\pi poc μιc θοῦc θαι$ . P. Stengel restored leρe lc, thinking of priests who sometimes furnished additional requisites for use in the sacrifices.<sup>23</sup> I suppose that the leρe are victims which were usually bought by people wanting to celebrate a private sacrifice; I therefore read θνcιάζοντεc.<sup>24</sup>

LINE 9. In my edition of this text in 1955 I restored  $i \in \rho \in \alpha$ , and I prefer to retain this reading. Pharsalios, the founder and main priest of the cult had to appoint an auxiliary, as happened in many other religious groups and cults. Such a priest in the service of Sarapis in Delos was called  $i \cdot \phi \iota \in \rho \in \iota^{26}$  My supposition is based on the rule in line 12, according to which the priest, *i.e.* the main priest, receives two-thirds of all dedicated parts of victims; one-third went certainly to the auxiliary priest. Such an arrangement was made between the priests serving as partners in the same cult. 27

Lines 12–13. I read  $\iota_{\epsilon\rho\delta\nu}$  instead of  $\beta\omega\mu\delta\nu$  as proposed by Kern. I think that the building of a temple or chapel was more important for the establishment of a cult than that of an altar. See above p.447.

LINES 21ff. I think that the lease of this cult was introduced some time later.

LINE 26. For the verb as restored cf. IG XII.2 511 a 1-6, SIG<sup>3</sup> 1096 n.7.

LINE 27. On meals in the cult of Sarapis consult A. Salač, BPW 34 (1914) 253–55; A. Hofler, Der Sarapis Hymnus des Aelius Aristides (TübBeitr 27, Stuttgart-Berlin 1935) 95; H. C. Youtie, "The κλίνη of Sarapis," HThR 41 (1948) 9–29 (= Scriptiunculae I [Amsterdam 1973] 487–507).

Lines 29-31. For the supplements cf. SIG<sup>3</sup> 664,8; 783, 36; 1218,8-9.28

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<sup>28</sup> Hermes 49 (1914) 95 and BPW 16 (1896) 686.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Cf. Sokolowski, op.cit. (supra p.445) 2,9. Idem, Lois sacrées des cités grecques (Paris 1969) 55,7 and 16; 65,88. OGIS 199,36; 339,36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Cf. Sokolowski, op.cit. (supra n.24) 87, the commentary.

<sup>26</sup> M. Guarducci, Annuario 30-32 (1952-54) 178. Cf. Vidmann, op.cit. (supra p.445) 51.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. HThR 50 (1957) 136ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> I thank Professor Herbert C. Youtie for kindly reading this paper and for helping me with his admirable knowledge.