

Journey to the West: The Presence of Serapis in Germania Inferior



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To find a place of Egyptian religious, the modern Dutch person does not need to travel far. The RMO in Leiden houses an entire temple that once stood near Taffeh in Nubia, which they have received from Egyptian authorities after the Netherlands helped in a campaign to preserve monuments in Nubia. While the temple has been used to shelter people and animals, it was originally erected during the reign of Augustus, during which it served as a place of worship for the goddess Isis.¹ Even though the temple had not always stood at the location where it stands today, other religious artefacts for Egyptian gods from almost two millennia ago have been found in this region, the province Germania Inferior of the Roman Empire. This is the case for the god Serapis.

In oversimplified terms, Serapis was a syncretistic god originally created in Egypt as a god meant to unite the Egyptian and Greek people who had come to live in Hellenized Egypt. Inspiration for crafting this god was drawn from a number of other existing gods, resulting in a distinct divinity that was comprised of both Egyptian and Greek traits. While the god was mostly worshipped in Egypt, it is problematic to argue that Serapis *is* Egyptian. He came into being as a result of the involvement of Greek colonizers, after all.

Much later, the Serapis cult had made its way over to the North-Western corner of the Roman Empire, including the region that used to be called Germania Inferior. This is evident from a number of inscriptions and monuments that have been found in this province depicting and mentioning Serapis. This phenomenon led to the formation of the main research question for this thesis, which is as follows:

What can be said about the presence of Serapis inscriptions and depictions in the Roman province of Germania Inferior?

For one, we are dealing with a god whose worship originated in Egypt but whose identity largely shaped by Greek influence. Somehow, depictions and mentions of Serapis had then made its way over to the north-western corner of the Roman Empire. This suggests that there was at the very least a small group of people who were dedicated enough to Serapis to continue his worship in the other side of the empire. Therefore, besides simply the existence of depictions and references in Germania Inferior, it is also interesting to consider the people that were involved in bringing these elements to the province.

In this thesis, I will examine the inscriptions and sculptures that are related to the god Serapis in two distinct ways. I will look at both the expression and experience of Serapis worship. I have a total of two subquestions that will be answered in order to make a better claim about the main research question. The subquestions will be as follows:

1. *Where and in which contexts in Germania Inferior have inscriptions, statues, coinage and other finds been found that mention or depict Serapis?*
2. *What statements can be made about the worship of Serapis in Germania Inferior?*

In order to answer the first subquestion, I will look at the different types of finds that have been done related to this god. I will look at inscriptions, searching for both Latin and Greek inscriptions, and I will look at sculptures that have been identified as Serapis. This will be done by consulting the following databases: the Heidelberg database, the Epigrafische database Claus Slabi (or EDCS), the Ubi Erat Lupa, and the Année Epigraphique. Furthermore, I will examine the literature for known statuettes of Serapis that have been found in Germania Inferior. One of these sources will be the book

¹ RMO website, retrieved: <https://www.rmo.nl/en/collection/highlights-collection/temple-of-taffeh/> on 21st of March, 2024.

by Kater-Sibbes, titled *preliminary catalogue of Sarapis monuments*.² Due to the fact that this book is over 50 years old, and therefore does not include more recent finds, the finds discussed in this book will be expanded upon by a variety of more modern sources. Lastly, to consider the spread of coinage with Serapis iconography, online coin databases will be accessed in order to make statements about these types of finds.

I will consider the context of each of these finds. For this part, I will consider the nature of the find, if Serapis has been mentioned in combination with other gods, and the identity of the people involved in erecting the altars or monuments. Secondly, I will create a number of maps in the program QGIS. This map will show the locations of all the finds and differentiate between the types of finds.

Furthermore, I will consider the finds done in Germania Inferior and compare them to finds that have been done elsewhere in the Roman Empire. I will count the number of inscriptions that have been found in each province. As a final consideration, I wish to compare the amount of Serapis finds to finds relating to one other god originating from Egypt, his consort Isis, who is often mentioned in combination to Serapis.

Secondly, in order to answer the second subquestion, I take a step back to define how religion was conceptualized in the Roman Empire, and to what extent modern researchers may make statements about it. One aspect I want to focus on is how Serapis worship was experienced, instead of expressed (which will be treated in the first subquestion). I will examine three different case studies of foreign Serapis monuments that have in the past been discussed by other researchers. These include the Serapis temple on Delos, the Serapeion in Ostia and the recent findings related to a Serapis altar in Herwen-Hemeling. Examining these, I will attempt to explain how the religion was experienced by those who were active worshippers at these locations. Using a multidisciplinary approach, I will then cite a reference study with a modern participant sample that deals with the experience of religion in a non-native area that may not properly accommodate foreign religions.

Finally, I will take both of these subquestions and the information I have obtained to conclude what general statements may be made about the presence of Serapis in Germania Inferior. Next to this, I will offer directions for future research, focusing on multidisciplinary research.³

Part 1: Status Questionis

Part 1.1: Who is Serapis?

The origin of Serapis

Serapis first emerged during the Ptolemaic occupation as a syncretistic god with both Egyptian and Greek characteristics. It is unknown how he was created specifically, seeing as the god was enshrouded in legends nearly as soon as he was created. A widely accepted story is that he was introduced by Ptolemy I Soter around 306 BC, who had received a dream of a god who was unknown

² Kater-Sibbes 1973.

³ I would like to extend my thanks to multiple people who have helped me in writing this thesis. Dr. Christel Veen was kind enough to provide more information about the Herwen-Hemeling site when meeting with her to view the sculptures from the same site that she was working on. Dr. Marenne Zandstra tracked the Serapis mould that was said to be in Museum Kam according to Kater-Sibbes. Furthermore, Dr. Paul Beliën from the Dutch Central Bank provided more clarity about a coin that was said to be found in Arnhem with a depiction of Serapis. Last but certainly not least, I deeply appreciate the support I have gotten from my thesis supervisors. Firstly, I wish to thank Dr. Rien Polak for providing a large number of resources for crafting the maps on QGIS, as well as notifying me of any information he came across that may be of use to writing this thesis. Secondly, I wish to thank Dr. Stephan Mols for his directions in writing this thesis as well as helping me search for relevant sources.

to him. When a statue bearing this dream figure's likeness was made and transported to Alexandria, it was recognized by the counselors of Ptolemy as being an image of the god Pluto.⁴ The Egyptians called this god Serapis, as is reflected by the words of Plutarch: "In fact, men assert that Pluto is none other than Serapis."⁵ While some details of the creation story may vary, a large number of sources agree on this narrative in broad lines.

The name of the god is as contested as the story of when he came into creation. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche argue that the name is a Greek translation of the Egyptian name Osor-Hapi, who was yet another god worshipped at Memphis and had already been in existence before Serapis was first mentioned.⁶ On the other hand, Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama believe the name Asar-apis to be more accurate for the god, because he took on the name of two ancient African deities associated with healing, named Ausar and Apis.⁷ Another view was presented by Stefan Pfeiffer: when an Apis bull died, it transformed into Osiris-Apis. This specific deity is believed to have been made "Greek", which resulted in the god Serapis.⁸

Asante and Mazama also offer an explanation as to why the deity was Hellenized. They look at the god through a post-colonial perspective and found that connections between the deities Ausar and Apis had been drawn as far back as 1300 BC, and that the name had been taken by the Greeks to create a god in their image to control the Egyptians (or Kemetians, as they are referred to by the authors).⁹ In other words, Serapis may be considered to be a product of the colonization of Egypt by the Greeks.

The creation of Serapis

The topic as to why Serapis was created in the first place remains a contested one. In general, a widely accepted hypothesis involves the attempt of the Ptolemies to unite their heterogeneous subjects. However, Dunand and Zivie-Coche do not agree with this view. They believe the Ptolemies had no intention to fuse with the Egyptian population and instead enjoyed their own privileges in foreign territories.¹⁰ For instance, they had dominant roles in administrative, economic, military and cultural domains. Furthermore, they had their own jurisdiction. It would take over a century before this proposed mixing would happen more. Other signs of the Ptolemies not being preoccupied in the slightest to mix with the Egyptian population may be seen in the banning of mixed marriages.¹¹ Keeping these facts in mind, it seems unlikely that Serapis was created in order to mix with the Egyptian population.

Dunand and Zivie-Coche propose a different argument as to why the god was created. Serapis and Isis were both related to the royal family at an early date. The practice of royalty seeking divine ancestry was already in practice with people such as Alexander the Great claiming Heracles and Dionysos as his ancestors. By selecting a god who was in part Greek and in part Egyptian, it channeled two separate aspects. For one, the Ptolemies carried on the tradition of other great figures of history

⁴ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 214.

⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 361F.

⁶ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 215.

⁷ Asante & Mazama 2009, 375.

⁸ Pfeiffer 2008, 389-390.

⁹ Asante & Mazama 2009; Though I acknowledge the reasoning the authors used in presenting the origins of Asar-apis, it remains a fact that most papers still use the name Serapis to refer to the god who was created (or was appropriated by the Greeks?) during the Ptolemaic Greek occupation. Throughout the rest of my thesis, I shall continue referring to this god with the name 'Serapis'.

¹⁰ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 219.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

and paid tribute to their origins. On the other hand, by choosing a god with Egyptian roots, it allowed them to emphasize the new power that they put in place in Egypt.¹²

Furthermore, the new capital Alexandria did not yet have a polis god. Selecting a polis god would have been an instrumental part of the Greeks in creating a new polis. While existing Greek and Egyptian cults would be a part of the city, it was Serapis who became the most important god of Alexandria. Along with him, his sister-wife Isis and the child god Harpocrates would make up a triad that would spread far past Alexandria.¹³ Serapis was especially beloved among Greek cities and communities, with the cult spreading far beyond Egypt's borders in later times.¹⁴

Functions of Serapis

Besides the name, the god's specific identity is likewise an intriguing subject. Plutarch has written about this subject, listing several of Serapis' identities, some of which he speaks favorably about. He claims most priests he met have informed him that Serapis is the conjunction of Osiris, the lord of the Underworld, and the bull Apis into one.¹⁵ Notably, these are both Egyptian gods. As mentioned before, Asante and Mazama argue that Serapis encompassed the identities of Ausar and Apis. They stress the healing attributes of both of these deities, Ausar being the lord of eternal life and resurrection, and Apis being the restorer of life.¹⁶ Because of his healing function, Serapis may also be associated with Asklepios, who is a Greek healing deity.¹⁷

The link between Serapis and Osiris does not stop there, however. While Osiris remained the predominant god for a long time, Serapis was considered to be a Hellenized version of the god. This also explains the strong link he has with the functions he has in common with Osiris.¹⁸ Another element that comes into play here is the wife of Osiris, the goddess Isis. Serapis was oftentimes associated with her. Ptolemy III and his wife used the depiction of Serapis and Isis on their coins, associating himself and his wife to the divine couple.¹⁹

Another element strongly associated with Serapis is water. Robert Wild wrote an entire book connecting both Isis and Serapis to the use of water in their worship.²⁰ He claims that almost sixty percent of the Isis and Serapis sanctuaries known to him have some sort of water presence.²¹ There specifically is a link with the water from the river Nile, which was the very water that nourished the crops in Egypt.²² This is one of the aspects Serapis is linked to, namely the annual flooding of the Nile and, by extension, the fertility of the land.

Interestingly, since Serapis is also linked to navigation at sea. This sea water does not seem to encapsulate the same functions as the Nile water did. Sea water, after all, was no good for watering crops.²³ On the other hand, sea water was associated with nautical travelling. Serapis was considered a protector of travelers by sea, possibly to his association to the port of Alexandria.²⁴

Serapis seems to have been a popular deity with the military. Most findings of Isaic cults were done along military routes. Army soldiers were a mobile social category that allowed the far spread of

¹² Ibid., p. 219.

¹³ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 219-220.

¹⁴ See part 1.3, *Serapis in Roman Times*.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 362D.

¹⁶ Asante & Mazama 2009, 375.

¹⁷ Nicgorski 2014, 154.

¹⁸ Asante & Mazama 2009, 218.

¹⁹ Ibid., 218.

²⁰ Wild 1981.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Wild 1981, 62.

²³ Ibid., 62.

²⁴ Nicgorski 2014, 154.

religions to other parts of the Roman Empire.²⁵ Many soldiers were originally from Egypt and the East, where they would have initially come into touch with these deities.²⁶

Appearance of Serapis

Serapis is typically Greek in appearance, showing similarities to Greek gods such as Zeus with his bearded face and curly hair.²⁷ He is usually identified by a specific headpiece called a *kalathos* or *modius*. This is a measure used for measuring bushel or grain, referring to his agrarian and fertility functions.²⁸ Despite his link to Apis, Serapis did not appear in a bovine or hybrid form. This mixing of human and animal features was typical for Egyptian deities.²⁹ Interestingly, these physical depictions link back to the description that Asante and Mazama gave of the god: while in theory the god might have been presented as one to unify the Greeks and Egyptians, he appeared as a Greek god.³⁰ In Roman times, Serapis was sometimes portrayed with a snake's body to emphasize his connection to Agathos Daimon, a serpentine deity associated to fertility, grain and health.³¹ Next to this, Serapis in Roman times is often portrayed with five distinct spiral curls on his forehead.³²

Besides Serapis' appearance, it is important to consider the attributes that he is portrayed with. Next to the defining *kalathos*, Serapis became associated with the sun due to his connection to gods such as Zeus and Helios. He may also appear with a three-headed dog at his side, a clear reference to Cerberus, the dog of Pluto, in order to emphasize his role as a chthonic god.³³ Furthermore, a famous attribute of Serapis is the ceremonial Nile Cubit, which is a portable nilometer used for measuring the Nile's clarity and water level. This attribute is strongly linked to Serapis' function as the bringer of the annual Nile flood.³⁴ Despite these attributes referring to specific functions of the deity, his main defining feature remained the *kalathos*.³⁵

Part 1.2: Other Egyptian Deities

Isis

Isis is most well known for her involvement in what we often refer to as 'the myth of Osiris'. It is important to note that care must be used to refer to myths in the ancient Egyptian culture, since thus far no full narrative of the myth can be found in Egyptian sources.³⁶ She is the wife and sister of Osiris, who was a benevolent king to the Egyptians. However, his brother Seth managed to kill him by cutting him up in many pieces. Isis travelled through Egypt to find these pieces, put them together and bury them. Next to this, she had intercourse with the deceased body of Osiris, through which Harpocrates (meaning "Horus the child") was conceived. This child then went on to defeat Seth and thereby avenge his father.³⁷

²⁵ Nicolae 2012, 131.

²⁶ Ibid., 131-132.

²⁷ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 216-217.

²⁸ Ibid., 216-218.

²⁹ Ibid., 216-217.

³⁰ Asante & Mazama 2009, 375.

³¹ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 216-217.

³² Nicgorski 2014, 154.

³³ Ibid., 154. This image of Serapis alongside a three-headed dog is famously attributed to the 3rd century B.C. sculptor Bryaxis.

³⁴ Ibid., 153-154.

³⁵ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 216-221.

³⁶ Van Dijk 1995, 1697.

³⁷ Ibid., 1702.

Isis is often connected to family values, which may reflect the value that Romans placed on family.³⁸ Furthermore, due to her role in the myth, she is associated to a number of other aspects of life. For instance, she is associated with social relations, especially the position of the wife. Next to this, she is associated with some other broad domains. These domains include the moon, the overseeing of the sea and the land, and the celebration of grief. This final element is reflected by her presence in dreams being seen as a bad omen.³⁹

Isis is strongly associated with women and freedmen, in part due to the feminine and motherly characteristics associated with the goddess.⁴⁰ With this, she was also compared to other female gods with nurturing qualities, such as Demeter.⁴¹ Besides Demeter, there are also parallels between her and another Egyptian goddess, Hathor. Isis is known to wear the same headdress as Hathor had, namely a sun disk with cow horns.⁴² Despite Isis being popular with women, in terms of epigraphic evidence, only 29.5% of inscriptions to her in western provinces such as Germania Inferior are believed to have been dedicated by women.⁴³

Harpocrates/ Horus

The name of Harpocrates means “Horus the child”, referring to the infant form of the Egyptian god Horus.⁴⁴ In full, he may be referred to as “Horus-the Child with his finger in his mouth”.⁴⁵ Harpocrates represents the first rays of the rising sun, thereby associating him with the identity of a sun god. He is also often portrayed with uraeus, a double crown or the *hemhem* crown, all symbols of royalty.⁴⁶ Harpocrates is often mentioned alongside Serapis and Isis. These three gods are all from Egypt, and they specifically have a large cult presence in Alexandria. From there, the cult spread out far beyond the city, including through the Roman Empire.⁴⁷

However, due to the spread of his image, his origin slowly became forgotten. Because he was often portrayed with a finger to his lips, Harpocrates became associated with silence in Roman times.⁴⁸ By extension, the rose also became associated with silence. Furthermore, Harpocrates was related to the cornucopia and to abundance, just as Serapis was. Over time, the child god became less divine and was portrayed more human.⁴⁹

Part 1.3: Religion in the Roman Empire

Roman Religion

Roman religion is, for a large part, defined by polytheism. The Romans were well-known for adopting foreign deities into their own pantheon, creating a belief system that is accommodating to a plurality of divinities with many different powers and capabilities.⁵⁰ These different deities also have their own iconographic representations, usually tied to their abilities.⁵¹ However, this religious system must not

³⁸ Alvar 2008, 47.

³⁹ Ibid., 49-52.

⁴⁰ Takács 1995, 6-7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

⁴² Ibid., 36.

⁴³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁴ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 345.

⁴⁵ Hall 1977, 55.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55-56.

⁴⁷ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 220.

⁴⁸ Hall 1977, 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁰ Pironti & Perfigli 2018, 71-102.

⁵¹ Ibid., 102.

be understood as a static one in which multiple gods exist, but rather as a flexible network in which different gods and deities are complexly interconnected.⁵²

Furthermore, the Roman pantheon reflects the dynamic between religious and social contexts. Specifically, the *civitas* (the political and social organisation) and the *familia* (the family relations) were both important predictors and products of Roman religion.⁵³ The gods were conceptualized as having a similar social organization as humans did, meaning they lived in an urban environment and had Roman qualities.⁵⁴ Furthermore, ritual is an important practice in Roman religion, where specific steps would be followed in order to properly respect these gods.⁵⁵

Sarolta Takács argues that the *do ut des* principle is important to consider when examining the presence of Roman religion in archaeological finds such as inscriptions. This principle refers to the exchange of favors between people and deities: inscriptions may have been dedicated to a specific god in return for fulfilling a favor from the dedicator.⁵⁶ It is vital to be aware of this principle when interpreting archaeological finds: a dedication must not be seen as proof of the presence of a cult nor personal worship of the dedicator.

Serapis in Roman Times

The family of Isis was reconverted into a new one, the *gens isiaca*, in which Serapis played the role of the paterfamilias. He had replaced Osiris in the position of the husband of Isis, and Harpocrates became the new Horus.⁵⁷ This new family was then seen as a mirror for the Ptolemaic royal family, and over time became a widespread symbol throughout the Roman Empire.⁵⁸ Serapis therefore became directly associated to both Alexandria and the Ptolemaic ruler, granting him a political position. This was especially the case for Serapis but not as much for Isis, whose functions as a mother-goddess and her similarities to Demeter may have sooner explained her popularity as opposed to a political explanation for her success.⁵⁹

The cult of Serapis was believed to have been brought to Italy from the island of Delos, where a temple had stood that will be discussed in part 3 of this thesis. While merchants were at first accredited for this introduction, Takács confirmed that a far wider demographic was known to have worshipped the Isiac cult and, by extension, Serapis. These people include women, slaves and freedmen, traders, soldiers, and members of the imperial family. Nevertheless, epigraphical data shows that it was mostly administrative employees and military officials who named these gods in their inscriptions.⁶⁰ These groups of people came into contact with Alexandria and consequently allowed for the spread of the cult of Serapis into the rest of the Roman world.⁶¹

In general, the cult of Serapis saw a considerable expansion as the Roman Empire grew. This happened especially under Hadrian, who was known to be an appreciator of Egyptian culture in general.⁶² Temples to Serapis were constructed and restored, along with an increase of iconographic presence on coinage that was spread throughout Rome and her provinces. Next to this, Serapis became

⁵² Pironti & Perfigli 2018, 72-73.

⁵³ Ibid., 89-90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 90-92.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 93-95.

⁵⁶ Takács 1995, 143.

⁵⁷ Bricault 2018, 226.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 226-227.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁶⁰ Takács 1995, 4-6.

⁶¹ Bricault 2018, 227.

⁶² Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 221.

associated with different symbols and functions. For instance, he became a sun god by being mentioned alongside gods such as Zeus and Helios.⁶³

As mentioned before, one of the most prominent functions of Serapis was that of a healing deity. Vespasian was received as the New Serapis when he visited Alexandria after he was made emperor, where he performed a healing miracle.⁶⁴ He was approached by a blind and a lame person, who sought healing at Serapis' command. The people around the emperor motivated him to attempt to heal them, and this attempt turned out to be successful.⁶⁵ Vespasian may have acquiesced due to his desire to obtain more support for his rulership in Egypt, it is unlikely that this also involved his standing for other Romans.⁶⁶ Besides, it is unknown how this miracle was received by the people in Rome or those in Egypt.⁶⁷

Specifically, Serapis was quite well-known in *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium*, where modern-day Cologne lies.⁶⁸ The introduction of his and Isis' cult there likely happened after the second half of the second century. Takács argues that this may have happened as a direct result of the trends concerning the worship of these deities in Rome. Concretely, some emperors showed personal interest in these two deities which spurred others, even in the provinces, to accept their adoption into the emperor's pantheon.⁶⁹

Syncretism in Roman Religion

There are several examples of religious syncretism in the Roman provinces besides Serapis. The Celtic depictions of the joint Mercury and Rosmerta are an example of this. Jane Webster takes a post-colonial approach in her article, in which she compares Mercury and Rosmerta to examples from other colonial contexts.⁷⁰ Mercury is naturally a renowned Roman god, but the identity of Rosmerta remains much of a mystery. There is some evidence that she is an indigenous goddess instead of merely an aspect of Mercury.⁷¹

Taking inspiration from studies done about eighteenth-century settlements in South Africa and Virginia, and of post-Columbian Latin America, Webster argues that different groups of people accept syncretism in different ways. For instance, the military and indigenous elites in the Western provinces may have sooner accepted the "marriage" of Mercury and Rosmerta, while indigenous non-elites may have had more resistance.⁷²

But how was syncretism received in general? Were these syncretic gods *real* gods in the eyes of the people? Interestingly, there are primary sources that describe syncretism in a way. One such a source is Tacitus, who in his work *Germania* defines syncretism as the Roman interpretation of foreign deities.⁷³ It was overall seen as a way of adopting foreign deities into the Roman pantheon.⁷⁴ Thus, at the very least, it could be said that these syncretic deities were accepted as real deities by the forces driving them to be included in the Roman pantheon.

Another source is Plutarch, who has written an essay about Isis and Osiris in which Serapis is specifically mentioned. Though his knowledge of Egyptology was limited, Plutarch phrased the

⁶³ Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2002, 221.

⁶⁴ Luke 2010, 78-79.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 79-80.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁸ Takács 1995, 137.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁷⁰ Webster 1997, 326-327.

⁷¹ Ibid., 327.

⁷² Ibid., 328.

⁷³ Tacitus *Germania* 46.

⁷⁴ Webster 1997, 331.

identity of Serapis as being a conjunction of Osiris and Apis into one, in which Apis is “the bodily image of the soul of Osiris”.⁷⁵ In this instance, the identity of Serapis seems to be viewed as a specific aspect of two already existing deities coming together, almost like an epithet.

Lived Religion

One important framework that may be used to study the experience of religion in the Roman Empire is called “lived ancient religion”, as discussed in the book “Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World”.⁷⁶ The term encapsulates how people experience religion in their daily lives. A big challenge about studying this lived religious experience in ancient religion is, naturally, the fact that the people we study are no longer alive, and cannot directly be asked about their experiences.⁷⁷

The concept was first introduced by Meredith McGuire, who emphasizes that using mass surveys may not be the way to learn more about this topic:

“Realizing the complexities of individuals' religious practices, experiences, and expressions, however, has made me extremely doubtful that even mountains of quantitative sociological data (especially data from surveys and other relatively superficial modes of inquiring) can tell us much of any value about individuals' religions.”⁷⁸

She states that when asking someone about their “religion”, they may present a cookie-cutter answer that does not fully encompass their relationship with religion or spirituality.⁷⁹ Quantitative approaches such as mass surveys will not reflect the true and specific situation of a person, and therefore, McGuire proposes that to discover more about a person’s practices, an in-depth interview will be a better tool.⁸⁰

McGuire came to her conclusions within her own discipline, which was sociology. She has interviewed people about the religious and spiritual practices that they utilized in their lives, making sure not to mention the word “religion” in many of these interviews. The interviews resulted in in-depth information about the interviewees, and demonstrated that while people may use a certain label for themselves, the way they practice their religion may be very different from the way in which others who identify with that same religion do it. For instance, someone who identifies as a Christian may have more similarities with Buddhists than with some other Christians.⁸¹

As mentioned previously, McGuire emphasizes the need for in-depth interviews as opposed to mass surveys. For ancient studies, this complicates things. It would mean that we would need to stick to case studies and that we need to be careful making general statements. Unfortunately, we continue to make assumptions in order to attempt to understand lived ancient religion. One assumption that is important to step away from is the idea of there being one singular experience of religion. At the same time, there is relatively little information we have about religious life roughly two millennia ago. This lack of information would mean that applying stricter criteria in examining the little information we have will result in a drastic reduction of information that we may use. In short, while lived religion is a promising term, it is much more applicable to sociology than to classical studies.

⁷⁵ Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 362D.

⁷⁶ Gasparini et al. 2020.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁸ McGuire 2008, 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Furthermore, McGuire wishes to step away from an institutionalized image of religion.⁸² However, this reasoning may be contra intuitive for people whose religious practices fit with the institutionalized variant. While this hypothetical group will be much smaller, and the people and case studies discussed in this thesis will likely be comprised of a variety of practitioners, this is still an important critique to keep in mind.

In “Religious Individualisation in Historical Perspective”, the authors note that the term *religious individualisation* may be used to emphasize the individuality in experiencing religion, even in ancient times.⁸³ The term encompasses a number of different semantic notions originating from differing disciplines that focus on the personal choices, creativity, deviance and experience that encompass or underlie the practice of religion.⁸⁴ It is a phenomenon that does not only exist in a single region or time period, but as a universal process that emerges as a result of someone’s religious experiences.⁸⁵

Religion on the road

Due to the fact that Serapis worship was practiced across the Roman Empire, it is important to evaluate the known information we have on the experiences of travelers with religion in general. Ian Rutherford has recently investigated the personal experiences of pilgrims in the Roman Empire.⁸⁶ He maintains the following definition for pilgrimage:

“Pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place to participate in a system of sacred beliefs.”⁸⁷

In other words, the motivation for pilgrims to be on the move in the first place has to do with religion. They are travelling for the very purpose of participating in a form of religion. For the remainder of this chapter, it is important to keep this definition in mind and realize that other travelers might have had other purposes besides participation in religion to travel. Thus, their experiences with religion on the road may differ.

In his article, Rutherford specifically mentions the term *experience* a number of times. He then refers to several experiences that are of relevance to the Greco-Roman pilgrimage. One of these is the enhanced religious experience due to the proximity to the deity itself, who is believed to manifest him or herself at a temple.⁸⁸ Next to this, pilgrims are required to perform certain ritual handlings in the sanctuary, causing a bond to be created with the other pilgrims. This communal feeling uniting a group of people is referred to as *communitas*.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the journey itself may be experienced as a religiously significant event.⁹⁰

For educated pilgrims, visiting sacred places was considered an intellectual experience that also triggered an emotional response.⁹¹ Literary sources such as Plutarch and Pausanias may be interpreted as texts targeted to intellectual tourism of the elite.⁹² However, Rutherford mentions the visitors of a sanctuary were not a homogeneous group. The majority of the people would have been

⁸² McGuire 2008, 5.

⁸³ Suitner, Mulsow, & Rüpke 2020, 43-44.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁸⁶ Rutherford 2020, 137.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 139.

⁸⁹ Rutherford 2020, 139.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 139-140.

⁹¹ Ibid., 140-141.

⁹² Ibid., 141.

ordinary people, with only a fraction of the visitors being part of the elite. Major reasons for visiting these sanctuaries had to do with the functions of the gods being worshipped there: he here names the example of the Mamnonion at Abydos where Serapis is also worshipped. Healing was among one of the major motivations for visiting the sanctuary.⁹³

Furthermore, an important element that Rutherford discusses in his chapter is the process of leaving one's own community. This would require people to leave their life (and religion) which they are accustomed to behind, causing them to become a stranger abroad. After the settlement period that can be characterized as "leisurely worshipping their god", they become a part of a new community entirely, which becomes a homogeneous group as a result.⁹⁴ Rutherford relates this final point to the *communitas* term, calling the new mixed group an "antistructure".⁹⁵ While these terms thus far have been discussed in relation to the pilgrims, they could also be used to explain the experiences of ordinary people who practice any sort of religion. Rutherford concludes his paper by saying that the pilgrims' experiences must have varied greatly.⁹⁶

Religion in the Roman army

Ian Haynes discusses the Romanization of Religion in the Roman Imperial Army. He opens his article by naming the phenomenon of the *feriale*, a calendar that includes the official religious ceremonies including those dedicated to the Imperial Cult, festivals that were significant to the military, and the *feriae publicae*.⁹⁷ Due to a recruit's involvement in military religion, a similar phenomenon to the aforementioned creation of an "antistructure" takes place. Soldiers would bring their own religions and those of the army with them, and these religions were undoubtedly promoted to the regions they travelled to.⁹⁸

Interestingly, not only deities that existed before the army were involved in military religion. Military *genii* were considered to be spirits that had a large influence on the lives of the soldiers, and they were associated with a variety of elements surrounding the men, such as buildings or specific units.⁹⁹ The *feriale* itself was another constant reminder of their identity as a soldier of the Roman army: important days recorded in it were festivals such as those related to Mars or celebrations of grand victories by military heroes.¹⁰⁰

In addition, Haynes discusses the survival of religious beliefs in regiments where the ethnicity of soldiers was everchanging:

"If it can be shown that, once all the soldiers from a regiment's original homeland had retired, their gods continued to be worshipped by new recruits of a different cultural background, it might be possible to argue for the existence of regimental traditional worship."¹⁰¹

This citation perfectly encapsulates a debate concerning this topic. Haynes himself is of the opinion that religious beliefs could have survived in specific circumstances. This might have been the case for

⁹³ Ibid., 141.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁹⁷ Haynes 1993, 141-142.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 143. This phenomenon is referred to as a type of romanization by Haynes, though it is important to realize the outdated nature of the term. It suggests a passive role being played by the native people while in reality, a complex interaction likely took place in the existing of different cultures in the same space and time.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 144.

dedications to a fallen soldier, for which the commanding officer included something that the fallen soldier himself had considered to be important.¹⁰² Moreover, the lack of temples or shrines to accommodate the soldiers in their life does not reflect a lack of tolerance from the officials for their individual reflections, but can sooner reflect the lack of space and inadequate possibilities for religious practice in a fort.¹⁰³

Haynes then addresses the Syrian regiments specifically. He describes how Romanized forms of gods from the pre-Roman Syrian pantheon became popular throughout the empire. This was partly due to the influence of Syrian auxiliaries. However, Haynes does not believe this reflects a continued variation of the original Syrian traditions.¹⁰⁴ He discusses the deity Dolichenus in detail, and concludes that due to the lack of dateable evidence, no conclusions may be drawn about any continuation of Syrian traditions specifically. This is the case because Dolichenus rose in popularity in the rest of the army as well, and it is therefore difficult to separate the general rise in worship that was observed to the continued worship after the original Syrian recruits were retired.¹⁰⁵ He argues that to make a good statement about the survival of religion in the army, it is vital to examine a lesser known deity.¹⁰⁶ You may argue, however, that the rise in popularity of the god itself, in whatever form, may be seen as a type of continuation. The recruits who were the original practitioners may have played a part in the spread of this religion, and they may have demonstrated the “correct” way to worship.

In short, Haynes concludes that due to their presence in the army, soldiers are introduced to many different religions.¹⁰⁷ For one, they will interact with religious worship for gods tied to the army as a whole. Secondly, gods native to the region where they serve will also be introduced to them. Lastly, an important category of gods will be the gods that the soldiers grew up with.¹⁰⁸ Haynes believes that the interaction with all these different religious ideas and practices would shape the soldiers and it could even change their cultural identities. This is a process that would take a long time, several decades as Haynes believes, because loyalty to their original religion could remain for a very long period of time. It is important to note that this process would differ per individual, but also per regiment.¹⁰⁹

While Haynes speaks specifically about the soldiers, it is possible that these theories may be generalized to other populations, such as merchants or the families of soldiers. They too would have dealings with different cultures and therefore different religious beliefs and practices. While there is a difference between soldiers and pilgrims, whose religion is arguably an even more fundamental aspect of their being, the mechanisms and processes that underlie both groups may be generalized to an even wider audience.

Part 1.4: Summary

In short, this thesis will deal with the god Serapis. He is a syncretic god, and can be considered to be the result of the Greek colonization of Egypt. This is shown by the fact that he is Greek in appearance, but has the qualities of several existing Egyptian gods. Serapis may be most similar to Osiris, the lord of the Underworld. He is considered to be an aspect of the god, which is partly reflected in the fact that he is said to be married to Isis, who was previously famously paired with Osiris. Furthermore, Serapis

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 144-145.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 145-149.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Haynes 1993, 157.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

is related to qualities such as healing, the overflowing of the Nile and its resulting fertility of the land, and to navigation on water.

Serapis proved to be a suitable candidate for being included into the Roman pantheon. Lived religion and individual experiences were important in the practicing of Roman religion. Next to this, religious practices from a large number of cultures were widespread over the Roman Empire. Soldiers may have brought this Graeco-Egyptian religion to the north-western corner of the empire, where his presence could be seen even in Germania Inferior. It is unknown whether his worship concerned a continuation of old traditions, or the complete reformation into a more unified religious practice associated with the Roman army.¹¹⁰ In the next part of this thesis, I will analyze the specific finds from Germania Inferior. These results will be discussed in relation to the aforementioned literature in order to explore whether the old traditions related to Serapis have continued to exist in far corners of the Roman Empire.

Part 2: The Analyses

Part 2.1: Methods

For the analyses that were conducted for this portion of the master thesis, the focus will be on the tangible evidence of Serapis' presence in Germania Inferior. Several categories of archaeological finds will be considered in order to reflect the presence of Serapis: inscriptions, small monuments such as statuettes and intaglios, and coinage. Due to the different nature of each of these types of finds, a short introduction will be provided for each type that will consequently help with the interpretation of these finds.

Each find will first be considered separately. This means that all finds that have been ascribed to Serapis will be analyzed separately, in order to provide clarity about the context of the find and its possible dedicator or owner. Consequently, new conclusions have been drawn about some of the items. Some items that have previously been attributed as depicting Serapis have been examined further by curators who have subsequently drawn the conclusion that these finds were wrongly identified in the past. I have made note of such developments, and I have included their discussions in this part of the thesis. However, these finds have been excluded from the maps and analyses.

Next, the locations of the finds have been considered. While most recent finds were well-documented and could be located to a specific point, this is sadly not the case for many of the older items. It was possible to discern a general location for some of these older finds, but the context of some finds could only be located to a large region or even none at all. The locations were used to create a series of maps. These maps vary in scale, and some maps may therefore contain different information than other maps. For instance, on the maps depicting the entirety of Germania Inferior, finds that could only be located in Cologne will be included, while they may be missing on the separate map of Cologne itself due to a lack of a specific find location within the city.

Finally, the inscriptions of Serapis will be considered in the grander context of the entire Roman Empire. The total number of Serapis inscriptions per province will then be compared to the total number of Isis inscriptions, whose cult was closely related to that of Serapis. Then, percentages will be calculated based off the total number of votive inscriptions and the total number of inscriptions of each province. The specificities on what has been done for these tests will be explained later.

Now, the sources and instruments used for the upcoming analyses will be introduced. Firstly, the main sources for the inscriptions will be introduced. For the most part, the inscriptions discussed in this

¹¹⁰ Haynes 1993, 145-149.

thesis were found on votive stones. A votive stone was often used as a thankful gesture to one or more gods that the builder vowed to honor before accomplishing something. These inscriptions will be considered as reflecting the public sphere of Serapis worship.

The inscriptions on votive stones are partially found on online databases. For the present research, the following databases were consulted to gather the inscription data:

- Heidelberg
- Epigrafische database Claus Slabi, or EDCS
- Ubi erat lupa
- Année épigraphique

A total of three inscriptions will be discussed from the Heidelberg database, and one from a museum exhibition containing a recent find that has not yet been added to the database. Due to the fact that no new inscriptions were found in the EDCS database, this one will be excluded from the descriptive results. However, some pictures taken from this database will be used to discuss the results. Finally, no relevant new inscriptions were found in ubi erat lupa and année épigraphique. I will use the following known spellings in my searches: Serapis, Sarapis and Asar-apis. Next to this, I will consider what epithet is used for each mention.

Secondly, information about the statuettes and other monuments of Serapis was mostly taken from two books. The book *Roman Period Statuettes in the Netherlands and beyond* by Christel Veen was used to learn more about the Serapis bust found at Naaldwijk.¹¹¹ Next to this, Kater-Sibbes' *Preliminary catalogue of Serapis monuments* was used to determine what other monuments were furthermore found in Germania Inferior.¹¹² These statuettes may be used to make statements about personal worship, and may therefore more accurately reflect Serapis worship than votive stones can.

Lastly, coins minted in Germania Inferior will be used in this analysis. These coins will be placed in the context of its time, and the iconography accompanying Serapis will be examined. The following three coin databases were used to find information about coinage containing Serapis in Germania Inferior: Ptolemaic Coins Online, Online coins of the Roman Empire, and Roman Provincial Coinage online. A specific coin found in Arnhem, the Netherlands, will be mentioned because I came across it during my research, though it will be excluded from the analyses.

I will proceed to plot the archaeological finds from these databases into several maps made using the program QGIS. These maps will show where each inscription and artefact was found. Next, this data will be considered using these following parameters: the types of finds, the context of the finds, and the dating of the finds. For each find, the type, context and general dating will be considered. Finally, I will use the information gained from this analysis to make general claims about the presence of Serapis artefacts in Germania Inferior.

Part 2.2: Serapis Inscriptions in Germania Inferior

Based on the Heidelberg database, a total of three inscriptions related to Serapis have been found in Germania Inferior. These three inscriptions will now be discussed, along with one inscription that was found in Herwen-Hemeling. However, it is important to note that the details pertaining to the context of the Herwen-Hemeling inscription will be touched upon in part 3 of this thesis.

HD028510

¹¹¹ Veen 2023, 91-92.

¹¹² Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163-164.

This votive inscription was found in Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium, which is located near modern-day Cologne in Germany. Specifically, it was found in Blaubach, in the Blaubach-Ecke Weissbüthen Strasse that has been destroyed in the Second World War. It reads as follows:

I O M ET SERA
PI ET GENIO
LOCI L CAESI
VS FLORENTI
NVS BF COS
PRO SE ET SV
IS V S L M
IMP COMM
II ET V[]O II COS

The inscription begins with the naming of three deities: Jupiter Optimo Maximo, the protective spirit of the location, and Serapis himself. Next to the deities, three other persons are also named in the inscription: L. Caesius Florentinus, Verus, and Commodus. Caesius Florentinus, a *beneficiarius consularis*, dedicated this altar to the three gods in honor of him making a vow to himself and his people in the year that Commodus was the emperor for two years and Verus was a consul for two years. Because the dates of Commodus' reign are known, this inscription could easily be dated to 179 A.D..¹¹³

Laurent Bricault believes that the association between Jupiter, Serapis and a local spirit have to do with trading on the Rhine, which may have been supervised by Florentinus. Serapis here fulfills a protective role related to navigation.¹¹⁴ Sarolta Takács expands upon this, saying that both Isis and Serapis were connected to shipping and the transportation of goods, specifically the *annona*.¹¹⁵ Moreover, she states that the inclusion of Serapis in the votive inscription is related to Arnouphis' rain miracle that supposedly took place in 172 A.D.. This miracle occurred when the legion XII Fulminata was surrounded by the Quadi while they had no access to water. Heavy rainfall allowed them to drink again, which then resulted in the Roman legion becoming victorious over the Quadi. This event caused an increased interest in the cults of Isis and Serapis, and related these gods to a protective function.¹¹⁶

HD075434

The second inscription in the database was also found in Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium. It was found on the *Domkloster* site, on a slate of marble that replaced one wall of a house.¹¹⁷ The inscription reads as follows:

SOLI SERAPI
CVM SVA CLINE
IN H D D
DEXTRINIA IVSTA
L DEXTRINI IVSTI
FILIA AGRIPP D D

¹¹³ Bricault 2005, 702.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 702.

¹¹⁵ Takács 1995, 140.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹⁷ Bricault 2005, 703.

On this inscription, Serapis is mentioned with a peculiar epithet: Sol Serapis, referring to a function that is related to the sun. Specifically, Serapis and his seat are mentioned in the inscription. Dextrina Justa, the daughter of L. Dextrinus Justus, dedicated the statue (and the base on which the text was inscribed) as a gift. It is not known who her father was exactly. Bricault remarks that the abbreviation of INHDD¹¹⁸, referring to the imperial family, was not accepted before the second half of the second century. While the dating of the inscription is of the second century, this observation then makes it more likely that the inscription was written in the second half of the second century.¹¹⁹

Takács also discusses the mentioning of Sol and Serapis in the same dedication. While Dextrina Justa did not specify if she was referring to *Sol indiges* or *Sol invictus*, Takács believes she is referring to *Sol indiges*. Furthermore, Takács remarks that Sol and Serapis are both connected to the fertility cycle, though their connotations differed. Sol is most often associated with the heavenly sphere, though Serapis, through his relation to Osiris, is associated with the Underworld.¹²⁰

HD082722

The third inscription from the Heidelberg database is from the Forum Hadriani, situated in the Dutch city Voorburg:

I O M SARAPI
ISIDI FRVGIFERO
CAELESTI FORTVN
BONO EVENTO
FELICITATI LARI
VIALI E[] GENIO
LOCI L LVCRETIVS
PAL FAVSTINIAN
| LEG I M P F PRO SE

SVISCIE R V L CONSAC

Here, Serapis is once again named with a number of other deities, namely Jupiter Optimo Maximo, Isis, the Lari, and the local spirit. The possible altar was erected by Lucius Lucretius Faustianus, from the Palatina tribe, who served as *centurion legionis* for the 1st legion of Minerva Pia. The inscription was written as a celebration of him and his people fulfilling and consecrating his vow. Jupiter Serapis is called *frugifer* in this inscription, meaning “fruit-bearing”. This refers to his function as a god of fertility. All the other gods invoked in this inscription deal with fertility, prosperity and protection as well.¹²¹ Joanneke Hees argues that the inscription may be dated from 89 to 212 A.D., due to the abbreviation “P F”, meaning *pia fidelis*, a nickname associated with the legion since 89 A.D.. Furthermore, the mention of a *tribus* in the inscription suggests a *terminus ante quem* of 212 A.D., the year in which the addition of *tribus* became obsolete when Caracalla granted citizenship to all free people of the Roman Empire.¹²²

¹¹⁸ This abbreviation stands for: *in honorem domus divinae*. Inscriptions referring to an imperial dynasty as *domus divinae* emerged in the time of Tiberius.

¹¹⁹ Bricault 2005, 703.

¹²⁰ Takács 1995, 138-139.

¹²¹ Hees 2006, 127-128.

¹²² *Ibid*, 128.

Bricault remarks that the CIL believes this inscription is a forgery, while he considers this text to be authentic. He also specifies that the legion mentioned in the inscription was confirmed to be in Bonn. In the final line, it remains unknown what the R means exactly.¹²³

Hees wrote her thesis on the excavations at Forum Hadriani, and mentions that the excavator Reuven at first believed that the bases of two statues there could have held the likeness of Isis and Serapis, though he later modified his theory.¹²⁴

Inscription from Herwen-Hemeling

The next inscription was found in Herwen-Hemeling. It has not yet been included in the Heidelberg database. It will be shown in the Valkhof museum from the 17th of May 2024 until the 30th of March 2025, in an exposition called *Offeren aan de goden in Herwen-Hemeling*. This exhibition includes a plethora of finds done at Herwen-Hemeling, where a temple complex was located. The present inscription was among those finds.



Image 2.1: Serapis altar displayed in the Valkhof museum in Nijmegen. Picture taken by author.

Lucius Firmius Marcellinus was the son of Lucius and Centurio from the 30th legion. He was originally from Cremona, in Northern Italy, specifically from the tribus Aniensis. Lucius Firmius Marcellinus dedicated a votive stone to Jupiter Serapis.¹²⁵

The inscription reads as follows:

¹²³ Bricault 2005, 705-706.

¹²⁴ Hees 2006, 73.

¹²⁵ Retrieved from: "https://www.instagram.com/p/CrBWIOcloYp/?img_index=1"

I O M
SERAPI SAC
RVM [L?] FIRMI
VS L FIL ANIEN
SIS MARCELLI
NVS CREMO
NA > LEG XXX [VV]
V S L M

As I mentioned before, the inscription is not yet included in any online database. Because this votive altar is part of a site where multiple votive altars have been found and is currently still being investigated, the decision was made to discuss this inscription in more detail in part 3 as one of the case studies.

Conclusion

A total of four inscriptions to Serapis have been found in Germania Inferior. These include three inscriptions from the Heidelberg database, and one as of now unpublished inscription from Herwen-Hemeling. Three of these inscriptions were dedicated by military men, and one of them by a woman from Cologne. It is not known whether Dextrina Justa, the female dedicator, had any relations to military personnel.

Only general statements and speculations can be made as to why these votive stones were dedicated to Serapis. The context, if not specifically mentioned, can be inferred by the epithets and other gods mentioned alongside Serapis. For instance, the inscription from Cologne dedicated by Dextrina Justa refers to Serapis as “Sol Serapis”. *Sol indiges* and Serapis both are connected to the fertility cycle, and the reason Dextrina Justa may have invoked the name of Serapis may have had something to do with this.

Furthermore, on the inscription from Voorburg, Jupiter, Isis, the Lari and the local spirit are all named alongside Serapis. Elements that they have in common include fertility, prosperity and protection. Next to this, it is mentioned that the dedicator Lucius Lucretius Faustianus was celebrating him and his people fulfilling a vow. Because of the nature of this dedication, it is more likely that Serapis was named due to his associations to prosperity and protection, not so much the aspect of fertility.

Another element that was seen on two of the inscriptions is the abbreviation “V S L M”. It stands for *votum solvit libens merito*, which may be translated to: "discharges the vow freely, as is deserved." It is a common text on votive altars, and it is seen on the Cologne inscription dedicated by L. Caesius Florentinus and the Herwen-Hemeling inscription dedicated by Lucius Firmius Marcellinus. It is speculated that this first inscription was related to the trade on the Rhine and the Amouphis rain miracle, reflecting Serapis' functions as protector and naval navigator.

Lastly, the inscription at Herwen-Hemeling was found in a temple complex where multiple religious finds have been done. The dedicator, Lucius Firmius Marcellinus, was related to the military: his father had served in the 30th legion. Due to the surplus of finds in the same context as this inscription, it will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis. For now, however, we may conclude that it fits well in the pattern of the other finds: the inscription is votive in nature, and it is closely associated to the military.

In conclusion, the four inscriptions may all be connected to specific functions of Serapis. These functions differ from one another, but the reasons for addressing Serapis in the inscriptions may be discerned by looking at the contexts of these finds. However, two things are important to note. The number of inscriptions discussed is quite low, and it is important to be careful while interpreting these

inscriptions. Secondly, the inclusion of Serapis on the inscriptions does not reflect a permanent worship. Takács argued that the inscriptions she discussed must be seen in the light of the *do ut des* principle, which is the transactional basis of Roman religion.¹²⁶ It may be entirely possible that these dedicators promised their votive stones to Serapis in return for a favor from the god. Outside of this exchange, they may have had nothing to do with Serapis. In short, it is problematic to deduce the existence of a cult of worship from the presence of inscriptions of a deity.

Part 2.3: Artefacts of Serapis in Germania Inferior

Next to the inscriptions, several statuettes and busts have been found of Serapis. I will describe each statuette and bust mentioned in the literature that was, at some point in time, identified as Serapis. However, due to the fact that some of these sources are dated, more information is added debunking the information found in previous sources. This was done to provide a topical overview of Serapis finds in Germania Inferior, clarifying which statuettes and busts are no longer believed to be Serapis artefacts.

Firstly, however, it is important to consider the nature of different types of artefacts. The ancient Egyptians believed that statuettes of gods were believed to house the actual god itself.¹²⁷ This idea may have lived on in later centuries for religions that were Egyptian in origin. At the same time, there are examples of statuettes that were kept as curiosities. One such an example is described by Christel Veen, who described a non-religious figurines as a young African man holding the ears of an elephant.¹²⁸ While this statuette was not religious in nature, and for the most part depictions of deities are respected in the Roman World, it shows that statuettes could also be kept for an aesthetic purpose. Despite the respect being shown to a religious statuette, there is also a small chance it did not reflect personal worship.

Secondly, decorative finds will have likely appealed to people for both of these reasons as well. An example could be an intaglio with a depiction of Serapis. These intaglio's could be used as an authenticator for letters, but likewise as a piece of jewelry.¹²⁹ These intaglios would be connected to a certain individual, and it was in a way a means of communication. While choosing to portray Serapis on an intaglio would likely be a personal choice, they were viewed by other people and therefore cannot be considered as fully private objects.

In short, it is important to consider the type of artefact when examining these objects. In the next portion, artefacts from Germania Inferior that are related to Serapis will be discussed. The identification of the artefact will be disclosed then, as will the approximate context. Implications for the specific nature of each artefact will be considered later.

Chloritslate head

Kater-Sibbes mentions a chloritslate head of Serapis having originally belonged to a statuette found in Cologne in 1894, near the Weyertor.¹³⁰ The right side of his head remains, but the left side and part of the back are missing. Due to the early date on which it was found, very little documentation remains of the chloritslate head. This piece is described as being an "Alexandrian chlorite slate" in the *Bonner Jahrbücher*.¹³¹ This yearbook seems to describe acquisitions from the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, describing the Serapis head as one of the individual purchases of Roman antiquities.¹³²

¹²⁶ Takács 1995, 143.

¹²⁷ Engelmann 1975, 12.

¹²⁸ Veen 2018, 56.

¹²⁹ For an example, see: <https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=142394>.

¹³⁰ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163.

¹³¹ *Bonner Jahrbücher* 1900, 277.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 277.

Serapis-Ammon head

Kater-Sibbes also describes a marble head of Serapis-Ammon being found. The find location is uncertain, but it is thought to be Cologne. Currently, this head is lost.¹³³

Lamp cover

In the Aachener Straße, in Cologne, another find related to Serapis was done: a bronze cover of a lamp. On it is a relief, containing a bust of Serapis.¹³⁴

Terracotta statuette lamp

A red-yellow terracotta statuette that served as the base for a lamp was found in a grave-field in the Luxemburger Strasse in Cologne. This statuette is of Serapis rising out of a calyx.¹³⁵ No image of this find was available, and therefore it is uncertain what type of calyx is meant by Kater-Sibbes. However, it is very likely that this concerns the sepal of a flower.¹³⁶

Red jasper intaglio

In the Hohenzollernring in Cologne, a red jasper intaglio with Serapis was found. Here, the god is seated on a throne in between Isis-Fortuna and Hygieia-Salus.¹³⁷

Enthroned statuette

A bronze statuette of Serapis enthroned was, also, presumably found in Cologne. It is currently lost.¹³⁸

Xanten red jasper intaglio

In Xanten, where the Roman colony known as Colonia Traiana was located, a red jasper intaglio with the bust of Serapis was found.¹³⁹

Xanten carnelian intaglio

A second intaglio was found in Xanten, in the year 1978. Seeing as the source of the aforementioned red jasper intaglio was written in 1973, this carnelian intaglio had been found after the red jasper intaglio. This intaglio features the portrait of Serapis with a kalathos on his head, an eagle with spread wings below him, and two palm branches that come together below the eagle. It is unknown to what period this can be dated.¹⁴⁰

Vechten limestone head

A limestone head of Serapis was found in the castellum at Vechten. The head used to be fixed to the upper part of the back of the throne, but the throne itself is missing. Furthermore, the head is adorned with two volutes.¹⁴¹

¹³³ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³⁵ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163.

¹³⁶ An example of Serapis in combination with a calyx can be found with the National Archaeological Museum ID: NAM, X 16775.

¹³⁷ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁴⁰ RMO database: M 1893/2.2.

¹⁴¹ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 164. The head is currently in the PUG-collection.

Vechten sardonyx intaglio

Known in the RMO database as VF 858, this sardonyx seal stone features the bust of Serapis, facing left. It was found in Vechten, and dated to 100 to 250 A.D.¹⁴² It is described as being a sealing stone that may have been used to seal letters. Next to this, it is mentioned in the RMO database that the interaction between the depiction on the seal and the type of stone caused magical properties to be invoked and consequently imbued the object with more meaning.

Terracotta mould

A terracotta mould for the head of either Jupiter or Serapis was reported to be located in Museum Kam, in Nijmegen, by Kater-Sibbes.¹⁴³ Its find location was unknown. However, after contacting dr. Marenne Zandstra, curator to the Valkhof museum who manages the now research location Museum Kam, this turned out to be outdated information. Currently, the mould is identified as Jupiter, and it may be found in the collection of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.¹⁴⁴

In the end, the mould was identified as Jupiter due to the beard and the curling hair. It was supposed to be used as either a mould that could a small statuette or could be placed as an attachment onto another object such as a vase. It was originally found at the Holdeurn, and the mould was made of the ceramics type called *Nijmeegs-Holdeurns*. However, due to the identity of the figure being Jupiter instead of Serapis, it will not be included in the map.

Bronze bust from Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf

In Naaldwijk, a bust of Serapis was found and is currently in the collection of Naaldwijk-Holland College. It is described as a “solid cast statue that once stood on a pedestal”.¹⁴⁵ It likely dates from the 2nd of 3rd century.¹⁴⁶ Lourens van der Feijst believes the bust was possibly placed in a lararium, a small shrine for the house gods and spirits. This means that the bust may have had a significant religious meaning to its owner.¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, the bust was found in a rural settlement, and a few other finds were done in this context that are rare for a settlement of this kind in the region. Besides the Serapis bust, a head of Jupiter, a bust of Mars and a relief of Venus or Ariadne were found here. Contrary to the bust of Serapis, Van der Feijst believes these other statuettes had a decorative function.¹⁴⁸

Christel Veen also makes mention of this bust.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, she provides more information about the context in which it was found. The Hoogwerf location was known in antiquity as Helinium, and the first excavations were prompted after a bronze hand was discovered in 1933, likely belonging to a statue of an emperor.¹⁵⁰ Holwerda, who conducted this first excavation, concluded that the location used to be a settlement. More recent excavations in 1977, 2003-2004 and 2006 revealed two to four farmsteads that could be dated from the early Roman period to the 4th century. The location had good contacts with the Romans in 175 to 190, as is evident by the strong increase in imported pottery, the presence of Roman coins, and certain inscription fragments. Next to this, differences in stone appearance and different building techniques may also be observed.¹⁵¹

¹⁴² RMO database: VF 858.

¹⁴³ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 164.

¹⁴⁴ Inventory number: e 1944/1.82. Online catalogue: <https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=133541>.

¹⁴⁵ Derks 2008, 141.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Van der Feijst 2007, 72-73.

¹⁴⁸ Van der Feijst 2007, 73.

¹⁴⁹ Veen 2023, 92.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 91

Due to inscription fragments and stamps found at the site, it is highly likely that the *Classis Germanica* had a base at Naaldwijk. Specifically, this may have been the *Classis Augusta Germanica Pia Fidelis*, of which the headquarters were located just south of Cologne.¹⁵²

Conclusion

A total of 11 artefacts that can be ascribed to Serapis have been found in Germania Inferior. The majority of them, six in total, were found in Cologne. Two were found in both Xanten and Vechten, and one was found in Naaldwijk. These artefacts differ in nature, too. Statuettes, lamps and lamp covers, and intaglios were found in Germania Inferior. In total, five statues were found, three in Cologne, one in Vechten, and one in the rural settlement at Naaldwijk. Furthermore, a lamp and lamp cover were found in Cologne. Lastly, a total of four intaglios were found, one in Cologne, two in Xanten, and one in Vechten.

As mentioned before, it is important to keep the nature of these objects in mind. Due to the fact that statuettes were an important part in religious worship for Egyptians, and the fact that some of these statues may have been housed in *lararia*, they may reflect religious practice in a personal and private domain. Lamps and lamp covers, on the other hand, may have contained a depiction of Serapis that was decorative in nature. Lastly, intaglios were often bound to a single individual, and while they can reflect personal religious practice, possessing an intaglio with Serapis' likeness would not have been entirely private in nature due to the intaglios applications outside of the household.

Part 2.4: Coins types with Serapis in Germania Inferior

Generally, Romans viewed their coinage as “monuments in miniature”.¹⁵³ Designs were changed frequently with inscriptions relating to Roman culture, history and religion. These designs were all dependent on the people who minted these coins, but the messages were to be received by a wider audience.¹⁵⁴

The following coin types were all found in the Online Coins of the Roman Empire (or OCRE) database.¹⁵⁵ This is an online database that can be accessed by anyone. The search terms “Serapis” and “Sarapis” were used, along with the search for the Germania region. There were a total of two results, both minted in Cologne.

RIC V Postumus 282

Postumus struck this aureus coin type in Cologne, with his own head and laureate on the obverse of the coin, and Serapis on the reverse. Postumus is identified by the inscription: POSTVMVS PIVS AVG. Serapis is draped, standing before a vessel while raising his right hand and holding a scepter in his left hand. Serapis is accompanied by the inscription: SERAPI COMITI AUG. This coin type was dated to 260 to 269 B.C..

RIC V Postumus 329

This antoninianus is quite similar in terms of iconography as the coin type RIC V Postumus 329. As was the case for the previous coin type, this coin type was also struck by Postumus in Cologne. On the obverse, the bust of Postumus is portrayed radiate and draped, possibly cuirassed. With the text SARAPI COMITI AUG¹⁵⁶, Serapis is shown draped while once again raising his right hand and

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 91-92.

¹⁵³ Rowan 2019, 2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ OCRE accessed from: <https://numismatics.org/ocre/>.

¹⁵⁶ Either this text or a slight variation is portrayed on the coins. Alternative texts are: SARAPIDI COMITI AUG or SERAPI COMITI AUG.

holding a scepter in his left hand, with a vessel in the background. This coin type was likewise dated to 260 to 269 B.C.. Interestingly, a total of 21 objects of this coin type were found.

The Serapis coin from Arnhem

Formerly known as inventory number DNB 1960-0180, this coin was reported to be found in Arnhem, the Netherlands, and is currently in the NNC database belonging to De Nederlandsche Bank. It was minted by Ptolemy IV Philopator between 219 and 217 B.C., meaning it can be dated to pre-Roman Empire. The coin is a tetradrachm, and it was made in Alexandria. It shows the jugate busts of Zeus Serapis and Isis on the obverse, draped and wearing a laurel and corn wreath. On the reverse of the coin, an eagle standing on a thunderbolt is portrayed with a double cornucopiae.

Due to the lack of information on the context of the coin, Paul Beliën was approached. He is the conservator of the National Numismatics Collection of the Nederlandsche Bank. He has since informed me of an error in the database. After accessing the old inventory books, there seems to have been a mistake registering this coin in the online database. The coin was not found in Arnhem, but was bought in 1960 at a Swiss auction. This same error had occurred for two other types, and the errors have since been corrected in the database.

This particular case illustrates an unexpected side effect to this detailed method of approach. It is only natural for people to make small mistakes, but it is important to consider that these errors may transfer to digital tools such as databases. While we have the tendency to blindly trust digitalized databases, even these are prone to error as was demonstrated by this Serapis coin from Arnhem. The database has since been adapted, but references to this particular coin having been found in Arnhem still remain on the internet.

Conclusion

In total, two coins were minted in Germania Inferior with the likeness of Serapis. Both of these shared the same authority, namely Postumus. The depictions of Serapis seem to have been very similar, with slight variations of the head and portrait of Postumus. Furthermore, these coins can be distinguished by their denomination: one is an aureus, and one is an antoninianus. Both are quite valuable coin types.

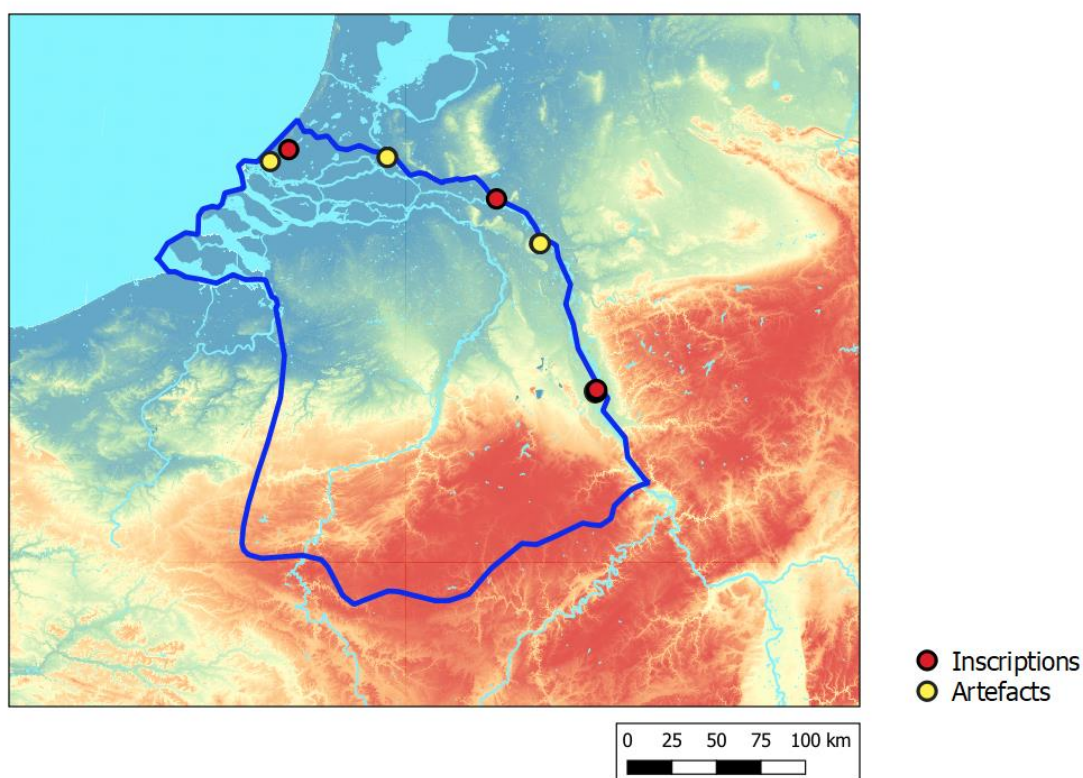
When examining the total coins Postumus produced, it can be seen that there are a total of 392 types included in the OCRE database. A vast amount, and the two Serapis coins are but a small percentage of this grand total. Therefore, it is unlikely that the existence of these two coins reflected any form of worship from Postumus.

Part 2.5: Maps

Now, several maps will be presented. These maps will show the location of Serapis finds within the borders of the province Germania Inferior. Due to the nature of the finds, the following categories were used to distinguish between the types of finds:

1. Serapis inscriptions.
2. Serapis artefacts. These include all the busts, statuettes, gems, the lamp, the lamp cover, and the intaglios that were found and could be located with moderate precision.

No coin mints were included in this map. As mentioned before, the terracotta mould of Jupiter that was kept in museum Kam will not be included in this map either. The rest of the finds have been located to precise sites in which the finds have been done. Plotting in all these finds, the following map was made as a result:



Map 1: Serapis finds in Germania Inferior.

As shown in the legend, the inscriptions are all marked by red dots, and the artefacts have been marked by yellow dots. One first observation will be evident to even a layman: most of the finds are concentrated near the limes, that runs for a large part along the Rhine. For one, this is because of the concentration of colonies, castellums and other settlements being high around the limes. Due to the fact that water and specifically rivers were the main route for transportation, it is logical that the people chose to settle near the water. Next to this, the Rhine was a natural border for the Roman Empire. It also made sense for soldiers to be stationed here in order to properly defend the limes.

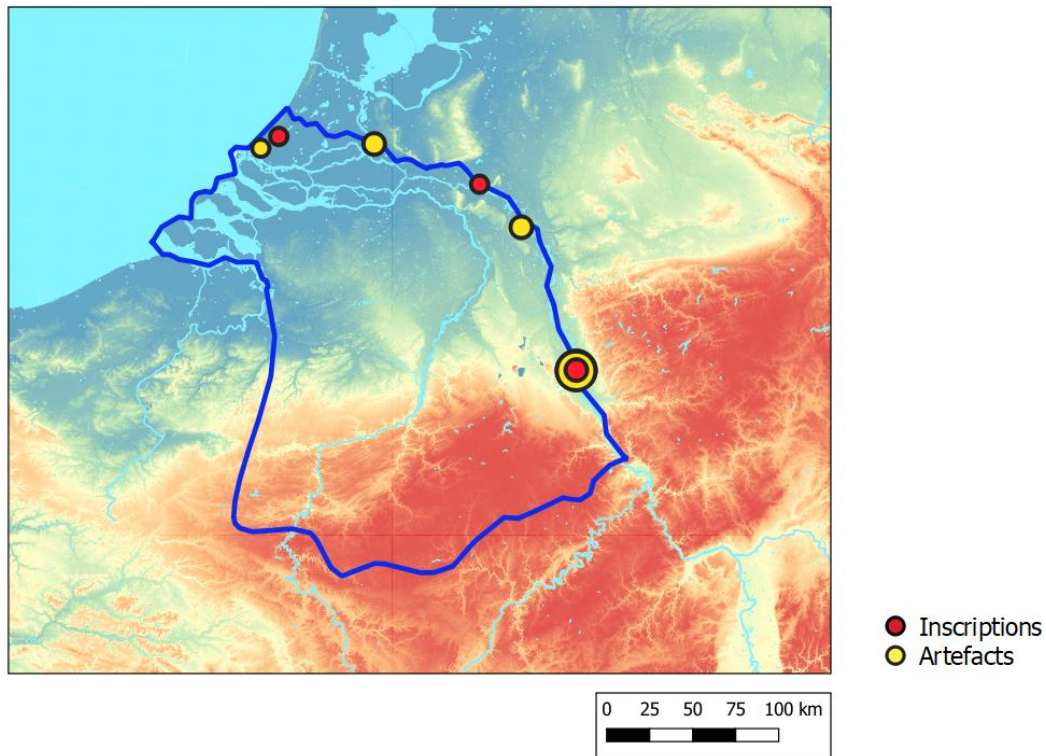
Furthermore, the reason that archaeologists started to excavate these regions was because the broad locations for a number of these settlements were known and not discovered accidentally. Excavation of these regions started happening already around the turn of the 19th century. To an extent, it was only recently that the heritage act was established in the Netherlands, through which it became possible to better excavate accidental finds.¹⁵⁷

The only find that was not found close to the water is the inscription from Forum Hadriani, modern-day Voorburg. However, Hees writes that in 47 A.D., the channel of Corbulo was created by the soldiers of Cnaeus Domitius Corbulo. This caused the area to be better accessible for the transport of goods, due to the fact that the infamous North Sea could be avoided, while continuing to be an attractive place to live due to the location of Forum Hadriani on top of a beach ridge. In other words, during the time the colony was active, there was easier water access than what currently appears on the map.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Specifically, the Heritage Act was established on the 9th of December, 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Hees 2006, 13-14.

In order to reflect the quantity of objects present at each location, the following map was made:



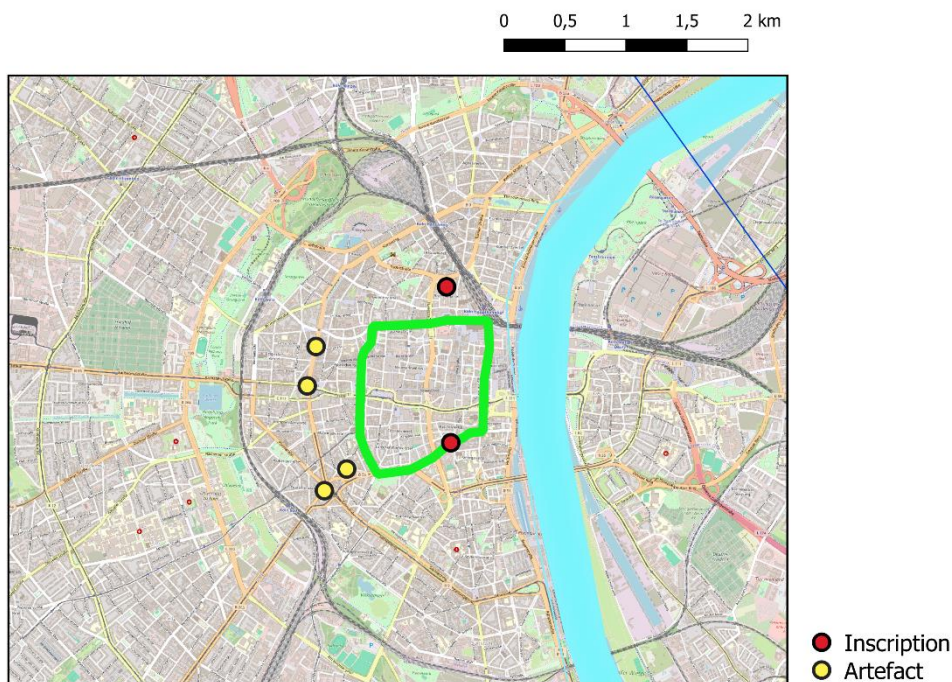
Map 2: Quantification of Serapis finds in Germania Inferior.

This map clearly reflects that the majority of finds have been done in Cologne, with notably more artefacts having been found than inscriptions. A total of six artefacts were found in Cologne alone, with some of their specific find locations being unknown. Next to this, most inscriptions have been found in Cologne: two have been found here in total. Compared to this, only one from Voorburg and one from Herwen-Hemeling were found.

It is interesting to keep in mind where the people would have mostly lived in the province. The locations where Serapis finds have been found are all located near the Rhine. While other colonies located more inland do exist, an example being Atatuca Tungrorum that was located in Tongeren, no finds relating to Serapis have yet been done here. This can be explained by the fact that relatively more excavations have happened along the limes. Therefore, the lack of Serapis finds away from the limes cannot be explained simply by stating that there was a lack of a cult in southern Germania Inferior.

Another noticeable aspect from the previous maps is the observation that many of the finds were done in Cologne. To provide a better overview of what the distribution of finds was in CCAA, another map has been made. It is important to realize that not all the finds have been documented in this map, due to the lack of a specific find location:

1. The Serapis-Ammon head that was presumably from Cologne.
2. The enthroned statuette that was presumably found in Cologne.
3. The two coins minted by Postumus.



Map 4: Serapis finds in Cologne

The two artefacts of which precise find locations are not known have not been included in this map. This map shows the locations of the inscriptions and other artefacts, with the former CCAA surrounded by a green border. This shows that the finds have actually not been done inside the colony itself. All but one inscription were found outside the border of the colony, the exception being one inscription that seems to have been found on the border. Still, the finds were likely done within half a kilometer from the boundaries of the CCAA. It is important to note, however, that a general spread may be shown with this map, but specific find locations are not known. For instance, the lamp cover from the Aachener Strasse could have been found in its shown location (the second yellow dot from the top), but the street stretches far out westward. Kater-Sibbes did not provide a more specific location than the street name.¹⁵⁹

Conclusions

All in all, the four maps show the spread of Serapis inscriptions and artefacts in Germania Inferior. The general locations of the finds are mostly concentrated around the rivers running through the upper part of the province where most larger colonies and settlements were located. It is important to note that these finds have been done because of the fact that a great number of excavations have occurred around the limes. Furthermore, because the Serapis cult was popular among soldiers, it is logical to connect the existence of many of these finds to places where soldiers were stationed.

Considering the inscriptions, a total of four inscriptions have been found in Germania Inferior. Specifically, two have been found in Cologne, one has been found in Voorburg, and one has been found in Herwen-Hemeling. With the exception of one inscription from Cologne, all of the inscriptions were dedicated by military men. This exception, the Domkloster inscription, was dedicated by Dextrina Justa. While her father is named on the inscription, it is not known whether he served in an

¹⁵⁹ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163.

army and could therefore explain the reasoning of Dextrina Justa to dedicate an inscription to Serapis. Because of the link she draws between Serapis and Sol, she may refer to the function of Serapis as a fertility god. Furthermore, due to the fact that this inscription can be dated to the second half of the second century, her choice for dedicating an inscription to Serapis may be related to the general popularity of the god.

Next to this, the nature of the artefacts found in Germania Inferior must be considered. The statuettes likely had a religious function, but there is a chance they served primarily as decoration. The lamp and lamp cover likely had a decorative function. Lastly, the intaglios may reflected a conscious decision by its owner to portray Serapis. However, due to the fact that these would have been seen in public and that Serapis was a popular deity, this is more difficult to interpret. As mentioned before, a total of five statuettes were found: three in Cologne, one in Vechten, and one in Naaldwijk. It may therefore be possible that private worship of Serapis was conducted at these locations. Furthermore, a lamp and lamp cover were found in Cologne, which may reflect the popularity of the god in this city as he was used as a decoration. Lastly, four intaglios were found: one in Cologne, two in Xanten, and one in Vechten. Their owners may have wanted to communicate their respect or worship of the god in these places.

Taken together, the presence of the more public inscriptions and generally more private artefacts was clearly present around the limes region. This was likely the case because of the popularity of Serapis in general but especially among the army, who were for a large part stationed along the limes. The lack of finds inland does not mean that there were no Serapis worshippers there at all, because excavations have generally been conducted more by the limes. This means that the information taken from these finds may only be used to draw careful conclusions about the specific contexts of each finds, not to make general statements about the (lack of) Serapis worship in Germania Inferior.

Part 2.6: Serapis and Isis inscriptions in all provinces

In the following part, I will be comparing the number of Serapis inscriptions found in Germania Inferior to the amount of Serapis inscriptions found in the rest of the provinces of the Roman Empire. This will be done to provide a clear reference for the number of finds done in Germania Inferior. For the purpose of this analysis, the data from the Heidelberg database will be used. Furthermore, I will include the recent find from Herwen-Hemeling in this analysis as well. This will amount to one more inscription found in Germania Inferior, and therefore one more inscription in total.

Using the number of Serapis inscriptions from each province, two percentages were calculated per province. First, the ratio of Serapis inscriptions to the total number of votive inscriptions was calculated. Seeing as all Serapis inscriptions were votive in nature, the decision was made to compare this to the total number of votive inscriptions to discern the popularity of the deity compared to other deities. Secondly, the ratio of Serapis inscriptions to the total number of inscriptions of the province was calculated. The same thing was done for Isis inscriptions.

Names

In the present analysis, I included inscriptions with names that were a clear reference to Serapis. Names of ordinary people may be used to discern the families in which Serapis may have been an important deity. For instance, people have been named Sarapiôn, Sarapias or Sarapodôros, amongst other variations. These names could reflect a close connection to the deity, in any case from the perspective of the parents.¹⁶⁰ Willy Clarysse argues that there are two motives in which names are given to a child, namely the parents wish to name their child after something with a specific meaning,

¹⁶⁰ Clarysse 2018, 219.

or the name fits within a certain name-mould already. Furthermore, Clarysse and Mario Paganini specify that during the Roman period, name variations of Serapis were most common among “the elite of Alexandrians, Antinoites, civil officials, councillors, gymnasium members and metropolitans.”¹⁶¹ This list does not typically include military personnel, who had dedicated a large number of the inscriptions in Germania Inferior, but they do occur. Since a person being named after Serapis does reflect a certain closeness to the deity from their parents at the very least, I have chosen to include these people named after the god.

*Tables*¹⁶²

The following table includes the total number of Serapis inscriptions, the total number of votive inscriptions, and the total number of inscriptions for each Roman province. Provinces that have been completely included in the EDH database have been marked with green. The ratios that are noticeably higher than the others have been marked with red. The provinces without any votive inscriptions have been marked with grey. Lastly, the last row with the total values concerns sum scores of all provinces taken together for the number of Serapis, Isis, votive and all inscriptions. On the other hand, the mean percentages of votive, Serapis and Isis inscriptions were displayed here.

¹⁶¹ Clarysse & Paganini 2009, 80.

¹⁶² I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Polak for his help in constructing these tables.

Province	Serapis	Isis	Votive	Total	Votive %Total	Serapis %Votive	Serapis %Total
Achaia	2	3	133	1283	10,4	1,5	0,2
Aegyptus	5	1	10	167	6,0	50,0	3,0
Africa Proconsularis	6	5	220	4440	5,0	2,7	0,1
Alpes Cottiae	0	0	293	475	61,7	0,0	0,0
Alpes Graiea	0	0	10	76	13,2	0,0	0,0
Alpes Maritimae	0	0	28	413	6,8	0,0	0,0
Alpes Poeninae	0	0	79	201	39,3	0,0	0,0
Aquitania	0	0	63	426	14,8	0,0	0,0
Arabia	0	0	8	234	3,4	0,0	0,0
Armenia	0	0	0	3	0,0	0,0	0,0
Asia	0	1	15	491	3,1	0,0	0,0
Baetica	4	9	225	3016	7,5	1,8	0,1
Barbaricum	0	0	23	172	13,4	0,0	0,0
Belgica	0	0	300	1712	17,5	0,0	0,0
Bithynia et Pontus	0	0	13	289	4,5	0,0	0,0
Britannia	3	3	967	4471	21,6	0,3	0,1
Cappadocia	0	0	1	66	1,5	0,0	0,0
Cilicia	0	0	1	70	1,4	0,0	0,0
Corsica	0	0	0	46	0,0	0,0	0,0
Creta	0	0	4	66	6,1	0,0	0,0
Cyprus	0	0	1	34	2,9	0,0	0,0
Cyrene	0	0	1	88	1,1	0,0	0,0
Dacia	12	13	1402	3582	39,1	0,9	0,3
Dalmatia	7	9	883	7647	11,5	0,8	0,1
Epirus	0	0	22	138	15,9	0,0	0,0
Galatia	0	0	5	208	2,4	0,0	0,0
Germania inferior	4	12	1481	3496	42,4	0,3	0,1
Germania superior	2	9	1685	6832	24,7	0,1	0,0
Hispania citerior	7	8	354	4685	7,6	2,0	0,1
Iudaea	2	1	5	187	2,7	40,0	1,1
Lugdunensis	1	1	69	596	11,6	1,4	0,2
Lusitania	0	3	153	1583	9,7	0,0	0,0
Lycia et Pamphylia	0	0	3	61	4,9	0,0	0,0
Macedonia	4	12	150	1321	11,4	2,7	0,3
Mauretania Caesariensis	0	0	35	1124	3,1	0,0	0,0
Mauretania Tingitana	0	2	13	291	4,5	0,0	0,0
Mesopotamia	0	0	1	12	8,3	0,0	0,0
Moesia inferior	7	4	553	1973	28,0	1,3	0,4
Moesia superior	4	4	349	1476	23,6	1,1	0,3
Narbonensis	0	5	138	1403	9,8	0,0	0,0
Noricum	1	5	534	2771	19,3	0,2	0,0
Numidia	3	1	76	2644	2,9	3,9	0,1
Pannonia inferior	3	2	974	3134	31,1	0,3	0,1
Pannonia superior	9	19	1378	4259	32,4	0,7	0,2
Raetia	0	4	206	1012	20,4	0,0	0,0
Regnum Bospori	0	0	16	78	20,5	0,0	0,0
Roma	6	15	69	4392	1,6	8,7	0,1
Sardinia	0	1	1	228	0,4	0,0	0,0
Sicilia, Melita	1	0	1	193	0,5	100,0	0,5
Syria	0	0	20	406	4,9	0,0	0,0
Thracia	0	0	40	396	10,1	0,0	0,0
Latium et Campania (Region I)	11	12	43	2598	1,7	25,6	0,4
Apulia et Calabria (Region II)	1	2	8	761	1,1	12,5	0,1
Bruttium et Lucania (Region III)	1	1	2	246	0,8	50,0	0,4
Samnium (Region IV)	1	0	16	649	2,5	6,3	0,2
Picenum (Region V)	0	2	6	171	3,5	0,0	0,0
Umbria (Region VI)	0	1	9	348	2,6	0,0	0,0
Etruria (Region VII)	1	2	51	651	7,8	2,0	0,2
Aemilia (Region VIII)	0	1	12	211	5,7	0,0	0,0
Liguria (Region IX)	0	0	10	145	6,9	0,0	0,0
Venetia et Histria (Region X)	1	11	99	1156	8,6	1,0	0,1
Transpadana (Region XI)	0	0	35	165	21,2	0,0	0,0
Total	109	184	13302	81468	11,4	5,1	0,1

Table 2.1: Number of Serapis inscriptions per province.

By looking at the number of Serapis inscriptions found per province, two provinces jump out at first, these provinces being Dacia and Latium et Campania. They respectively hold 12 and 11 of the total number of Serapis inscriptions found. However, taking into account the total number of inscriptions from each of these provinces, it becomes noticeable that the amount of Serapis inscriptions found in Dacia are only a small fraction compared to the total number of inscriptions found in these provinces. For Latium et Campania, this percentage equals to 25.6%. While this is quite high, the percentages in some other provinces are much higher. Looking at the percentages of Serapis inscriptions among the total number of votive inscriptions, the one province whose votive inscriptions all mention Serapis is Sicilia. Only one votive inscription was found here, and it mentions Serapis.

Furthermore, two other provinces are noticeable due to the fact that half the inscriptions mention Serapis. These are Bruttium et Lucania, with a total of two votive inscription and one Serapis mention, but also Aegyptus. A total of 10 votive inscriptions were located here, with 5 of them naming Serapis. Furthermore, these inscriptions make up a total of 3% of all inscriptions found in Aegyptus. These high percentages despite the larger quantity of votive inscriptions found in the province is not surprising, considering the god first grew in prominence here and the best practice of his worship would have been experienced here. Lastly, a high percentage of votive inscriptions mentioning Serapis was found in Iudaea.

Looking at Germania Inferior, only 0.3% of all votive inscriptions mention Serapis. This amounts to a total of 0.1% of all inscriptions in the province. This is partly explained by the total number of inscriptions being very high in Germania Inferior. Interestingly, the percentage of votive Serapis inscriptions is much smaller than the average displayed at the bottom of the table. On the other hand, the percentage of Serapis inscriptions compared to the total number of inscriptions seems much closer to the average percentage of Serapis inscriptions in the Roman Empire. This can partly be explained by the fact that there are some obvious outliers, most notably the 100% of Sicilia. When removing this one province, a mean of 3.6% of all votive inscriptions containing a mention of Serapis remains. At the same time, it is important to mention that 42.4% of the total number of inscriptions in Germania Inferior are votive in nature, which is remarkably high. These numbers demonstrate that the results of both these percentages and those of Isis should be interpreted carefully, due to the fact that the means may be heavily influenced by a handful of outliers and different reference numbers for each province.

Then, the same method was applied to inscriptions about Isis. The results are shown in the following table:

Province	Serapis	Isis	Votive	Total	Votive %Total	Isis %Votive	Isis %Total
Achaia	2	3	133	1283	10,4	2,3	0,2
Aegyptus	5	1	10	167	6,0	10,0	0,6
Africa Proconsularis	6	5	220	4440	5,0	2,3	0,1
Alpes Cottiae	0	0	293	475	61,7	0,0	0,0
Alpes Graiea	0	0	10	76	13,2	0,0	0,0
Alpes Maritimae	0	0	28	413	6,8	0,0	0,0
Alpes Poeninae	0	0	79	201	39,3	0,0	0,0
Aquitania	0	0	63	426	14,8	0,0	0,0
Arabia	0	0	8	234	3,4	0,0	0,0
Armenia	0	0	0	3	0,0	0,0	0,0
Asia	0	1	15	491	3,1	6,7	0,2
Baetica	4	9	225	3016	7,5	4,0	0,3
Barbaricum	0	0	23	172	13,4	0,0	0,0
Belgica	0	0	300	1712	17,5	0,0	0,0
Bithynia et Pontus	0	0	13	289	4,5	0,0	0,0
Britannia	3	3	967	4471	21,6	0,3	0,1
Cappadocia	0	0	1	66	1,5	0,0	0,0
Cilicia	0	0	1	70	1,4	0,0	0,0
Corsica	0	0	0	46	0,0	0,0	0,0
Creta	0	0	4	66	6,1	0,0	0,0
Cyprus	0	0	1	34	2,9	0,0	0,0
Cyrene	0	0	1	88	1,1	0,0	0,0
Dacia	12	13	1402	3582	39,1	0,9	0,4
Dalmatia	7	9	883	7647	11,5	1,0	0,1
Epirus	0	0	22	138	15,9	0,0	0,0
Galatia	0	0	5	208	2,4	0,0	0,0
Germania inferior	4	12	1481	3496	42,4	0,8	0,3
Germania superior	2	9	1685	6832	24,7	0,5	0,1
Hispania citerior	7	8	354	4685	7,6	2,3	0,2
Iudaea	2	1	5	187	2,7	20,0	0,5
Lugdunensis	1	1	69	596	11,6	1,4	0,2
Lusitania	0	3	153	1583	9,7	2,0	0,2
Lycia et Pamphylia	0	0	3	61	4,9	0,0	0,0
Macedonia	4	12	150	1321	11,4	8,0	0,9
Mauretania Caesariensis	0	0	35	1124	3,1	0,0	0,0
Mauretania Tingitana	0	2	13	291	4,5	15,4	0,7
Mesopotamia	0	0	1	12	8,3	0,0	0,0
Moesia inferior	7	4	553	1973	28,0	0,7	0,2
Moesia superior	4	4	349	1476	23,6	1,1	0,3
Narbonensis	0	5	138	1403	9,8	3,6	0,4
Noricum	1	5	534	2771	19,3	0,9	0,2
Numidia	3	1	76	2644	2,9	1,3	0,0
Pannonia inferior	3	2	974	3134	31,1	0,2	0,1
Pannonia superior	9	19	1378	4259	32,4	1,4	0,4
Raetia	0	4	206	1012	20,4	1,9	0,4
Regnum Bospori	0	0	16	78	20,5	0,0	0,0
Roma	6	15	69	4392	1,6	21,7	0,3
Sardinia	0	1	1	228	0,4	100,0	0,4
Sicilia, Melita	1	0	1	193	0,5	0,0	0,0
Syria	0	0	20	406	4,9	0,0	0,0
Thracia	0	0	40	396	10,1	0,0	0,0
Latium et Campania (Region I)	11	12	43	2598	1,7	27,9	0,5
Apulia et Calabria (Region II)	1	2	8	761	1,1	25,0	0,3
Bruttium et Lucania (Region III)	1	1	2	246	0,8	50,0	0,4
Samnium (Region IV)	1	0	16	649	2,5	0,0	0,0
Picenum (Region V)	0	2	6	171	3,5	33,3	1,2
Umbria (Region VI)	0	1	9	348	2,6	11,1	0,3
Etruria (Region VII)	1	2	51	651	7,8	3,9	0,3
Aemilia (Region VIII)	0	1	12	211	5,7	8,3	0,5
Liguria (Region IX)	0	0	10	145	6,9	0,0	0,0
Venetia et Histria (Region X)	1	11	99	1156	8,6	11,1	1,0
Transpadana (Region XI)	0	0	35	165	21,2	0,0	0,0
Total	109	184	13302	81468	11,4	6,2	0,2

Table 2.2: Number of Isis inscriptions per province.

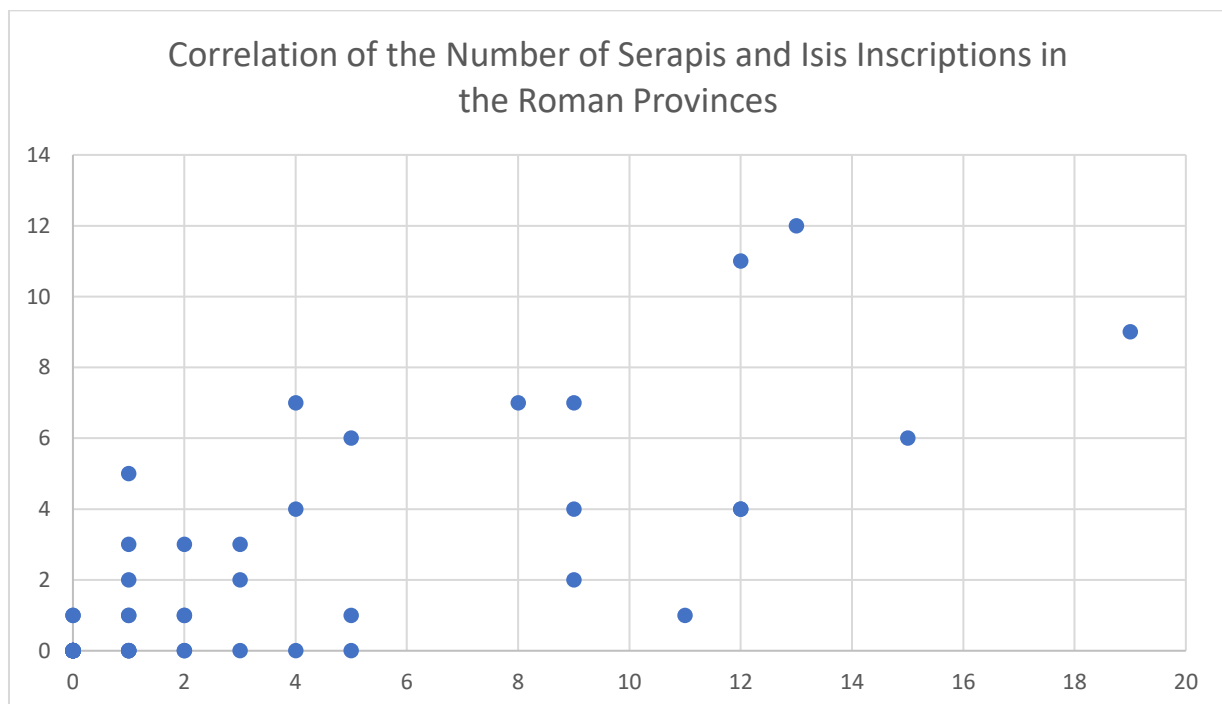
Here, once again, differences may be observed between the absolute number differences and the percentages. According to the high percentages, it is Sardinia that has a total of 100% of votive inscriptions naming Isis, whereas the actual value of votive inscriptions is only 1. Still, the number of inscriptions is quite high in a number of other provinces such as in Dacia, Germania Inferior, Latium et Campania, Pannonia superior, and Roma. Only for Latium et Campania and Roma, this high observed value makes up a large percentage of the votive inscriptions in these provinces, with respective percentile values of 27.9% and 21.7%.

Next to the aforementioned provinces, high percentages of Isis inscriptions among the total number of votive inscriptions were observed in Iudaea, Apulia et Calabria, Bruttium et Lucania, and Picenum. More than 20% of votive inscriptions in these provinces mention Isis. Interestingly, only 10% of inscriptions in Aegyptus named Isis. This may be explained by the fact that the EDH contains only Latin inscriptions, and no Greek inscriptions nor other depictions of the deities. Isis was a popular god in Egypt long before Serapis even emerged, and her popularity in this province may sooner be reflected in other types of depictions.

When examining Germania Inferior, once again low percentages for both the votive and grand total may be observed for Isis when comparing these to the mean percentages, despite her being named in inscriptions three times more often than Serapis in this province. This once again may be explained by the large total of (votive) inscriptions in Germania Inferior, as well as the presence of a few outliers.

Correlation

Next, a correlation can be calculated. As may be observed from both tables, there seemed to be a relation between the number of Serapis inscriptions and Isis inscriptions in the provinces. To confirm a relation, a correlation was calculated. This correlation shows that the number of Serapis and Isis inscriptions indeed correlate quite strongly together ($r=.780$). This can be seen in the following graph, in which the number of Serapis inscriptions are shown on the y-axis and the number of Isis inscriptions are shown on the x-axis:



Graph 1: Correlation graph of Serapis and Isis inscriptions.

This correlation shows that there is a positive relation between the number of inscriptions for the two gods in the Roman provinces. In other words, when there are fewer Serapis inscriptions, there tend to be fewer Isis inscriptions as well, and vice versa.

Conclusion

After calculating the percentages for the number of inscriptions for Serapis and Isis for each province, the result reflects that there are significant differences per province. Non surprisingly, a large percentage of Serapis inscriptions was found for Aegyptus. Next to this, large percentages of Serapis inscriptions were found in Sicilia, Bruttium et Lucania, and Latium et Campania. However, due to the total number of votive inscriptions being respectively 1 and 2, these results are not as telling as some of the other percentages.

Furthermore, a large quantity of Isis inscriptions were found in Sardinia, Latium et Campania, Roma, Iudaea, Apulia et Calabria, Bruttium et Lucania, and Picenum. When taking into account the total number of votive inscriptions for these provinces, it becomes clear that the high percentages for Latium et Campania and Roma are most interesting due to the high number of total votive inscriptions. Despite these differences in percentages between both gods, the correlation between the number of inscriptions for both gods in the provinces was very high. This means that a low number of inscriptions for one god likely meant that the number of inscriptions of the other god in that province was likely also low. All in all, the results from the previous analyses show us that the number of inscriptions found in each province may give valuable insights about the spread of Serapis and Isis inscriptions throughout the Roman Empire.

Part 3: Experience of Serapis Worship

For this next section, I will examine three different case studies of Serapis sanctuaries that have been found in foreign contexts. The examination will be done in line with the Lived Religion theory and Rutherford's examination of pilgrimage in the Roman Empire.¹⁶³ By using case studies, it is possible to examine specific situations in more detail and, as a result of this, careful yet general conclusions may be drawn.

The first case study will deal with a temple to Serapis that was built on the Greek island of Delos between 280 to 200 B.C., relatively closer to the emergence of the god than any Roman depictions of the god. The second case study, the Serapeum in Ostia, is much closer to the Roman Empire in both time and space. The final case study will be about a recent find relating to Serapis in the Netherlands, namely the discovery of a temple complex in Herwen-Hemeling. Besides the case studies, a sociology study about the experiences of immigrants with religion will be discussed. Finally, I will consider the information gathered from both the case studies and the sociology study to draw conclusions on what may be said about the experience of Serapis worship in the Roman Empire away from Egypt, emphasizing the possible religious experience in Germania Inferior.

Part 3.1: Serapis sanctuaries in foreign contexts

Case study 1: Serapis in Delos

One account of a temple to Serapis being built outside of Egypt is from between 280 to 200 B.C., on the island of Delos. A long inscription has been found on a column retelling the story of how the

¹⁶³ McGuire, M.B. 2008; Rutherford 2020.

temple was built by an Egyptian priest.¹⁶⁴ The founder of the cult of Serapis on the island was a priest that is known to us as Apollonius I. He had come from Memphis to a land where the cult of Serapis was still unknown, carrying only a small statue in which the god was believed to live in accordance with Egyptian religion.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, only an Egyptian would have possessed the right knowledge to practice Serapis worship correctly.¹⁶⁶ In the early stages of the cult of Serapis on Delos, there were a few factors that made the location less than desirable for practicing the religion. For one, practicing the religion took place in a fully Greek environment and a temple had not yet been erected to properly honor Serapis.¹⁶⁷ The Delian inscription did include some details about how the religion was practiced, including the use of incense, the chanting of divine miracles and the joint ritual meals.

Eventually, Apollonius II, who was the grandson of Apollonius I, was able to obtain a plot of land in order to build a temple for Serapis. Before this moment, Serapis had lived in the statue that Apollonius I had brought from Egypt. However, Serapis himself had appeared in Apollonius II's dream to notify him of a suitable location to build the temple. This location, a rubbish dump before, was transformed into holy ground because Serapis had "chosen" the location himself. This could also be interpreted as Serapis choosing to become a god of the less fortunate.¹⁶⁸

This arrival of the cult of Serapis on Delos wasn't met with positive reactions, however. Although Apollonius II had obtained the necessary permits to build the temple, a conservative Delian group pressed charges against him. This was done because the introduction of a new and foreign god was not desirable to this group.¹⁶⁹ Winning the lawsuit was, in fact, a reason for Apollonius II to erect the column, as a token of appreciation for Serapis, whom he believed had positively influenced the outcome of the lawsuit by tying the tongues of the accusers.¹⁷⁰

From this case study, two important matters arise. The first matter is that of Apollonius I coming to a land where the worship of Serapis was not known and the land was not equipped to deal with this religion. Engelmann believes that Apollonius I might have come to Delos to become more wealthy, without the support of the Ptolemies. We know this much, because the Ptolemies would have ensured a temple of Serapis being built on Delos.¹⁷¹ Apollonius I had been a priest in Memphis before, though he was not a missionary. A missionary would not have established a temple on rented grounds.¹⁷² Instead, he would have likely belonged to the lower priest caste, who would have occupations outside of priesthood in order to bring home a salary.¹⁷³ These facts combined indeed make it likely that Apollonius I was a devout follower of Serapis, despite not being a high-ranking priest, and he had come from Memphis in the hopes of earning more money.

Furthermore, although it was Apollonius I who brought the faith with him to Delos, two generations continued to worship Serapis after his death, despite there not being a temple for all this time. The family was in possession of the small statue in which Serapis lived for several generations, this likely being one of the only physical ties to the religion.¹⁷⁴ This familial aspect of the religion is once again referred to by the inscription, in which Apollonius II relates the opponents in the lawsuit to Seth and his comrades who had opposed Osiris.¹⁷⁵ While Seth had succeeded in killing Osiris in the

¹⁶⁴ Engelmann 1975, 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

¹⁶⁹ Engelmann 1975, 2.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

most well-known Egyptian myth, Isis raised his son Horus (or Harpocrates) in secret. This child grew up to avenge his father and gain victory over Seth.¹⁷⁶ In this part of the inscription, Apollonius II relates his own victory in bringing Serapis to Delos, after his father and grandfather had not yet managed to build a temple for the god. The good people had once again come out victorious over the villains.

In short, this column can tell us a number of things. For one, that a temple of Serapis had indeed been erected outside of Egypt, and that this had already happened in the 3rd century B.C.. Even though missionaries did exist, this temple had been built by the descendant of someone from the lower priest caste who did prioritize searching for fortune over remaining in Memphis near his religion. Until Serapis himself chose the location of his temple by communicating his wishes through the dream of his priest, the god had lived in a small statue that had remained in the family for at least three generations. This generational aspect is also interesting: the son and grandson of the original priest chose to continue their worship of Serapis instead of dedicating themselves to a god who had already been introduced in Delos. In short, there was something special about Serapis that made him better for this family than the gods whose religious tools and locations were more readily available.

Case study 2: Serapeum of Ostia

A second structure dedicated to Serapis was the so-called Serapeum of Ostia. This temple was dedicated by Caltilius in 127 A.D. on the day of Hadrian's birthday, specifically in the seventeenth insula in the third region.¹⁷⁷ This Serapeum was part of a complex of structures that seemed to have been built around the same time.¹⁷⁸ The important difference between this sanctuary to Serapis and that of Delos is that the Serapeum is located in one of Rome's prominent port cities, and has been constructed centuries after the sanctuary in Delos. Part of the inscription reads as follows: IOVI SERAPI, or "Jupiter Serapis". While Serapis himself is a deity associated with shipping and would be an excellent fit for a harbor town such as Ostia, the addition of IOVI to the name suggests a more general deity being invoked.

In Ostia, the cults of both Serapis and Isis were involved in a period of vast growth in the second and third centuries. In that same time, the harbor itself grew too and saw an influx of people from all over the Empire.¹⁷⁹ Not only the temple, but numerous inscriptions and statuettes from private contexts support the hypothesis that Serapis was a well-known and well-liked deity in Ostia.¹⁸⁰ While Portus, another prominent port close to Rome, is also believed to have been home to a Serapis sanctuary, to this date the Serapeum in Ostia remains the only temple found in either port.¹⁸¹

In the literature, oftentimes the existence of an "Oriental quarter", a neighborhood in which many people from "oriental countries" would have lived.¹⁸² However, this term is problematic in the sense of its specific definition. Merriam-Webster refers to the adjective as "of, relating to, or situated in the Orient".¹⁸³ Furthermore, Merriam-Webster relates the term mostly to "Asia and especially eastern Asia", which does not include Egypt, an African country. Previously, the term "orient" was understood as several regions located to the east or south-east of Europe.¹⁸⁴ This term used to be

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷⁷ Bloch 1959, 238.

¹⁷⁸ Bloch 1959, 226.

¹⁷⁹ Mols 2007, 227.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 227-229.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸³ Merriam-Webster (n.d.). "Oriental".

¹⁸⁴ Merriam-Webster (n.d.). "Orient".

understood from a Eurocentric perspective, thereby making it unsuitable to use with its previous definition.

Ignoring the semantics of the word for the moment, and assuming the old definition of regions to the east and south-east of Europe as being “oriental”, there is still not enough evidence to conclude the Serapeum stood in one such a quarter. Stephan Mols writes about this assumption made by previous scholars. He describes that some people believed the whole quarter of the Serapeum was influenced by Egyptian mariners, in part due to *aegyptiaca* that have been found in the area.¹⁸⁵ While he believes it is certainly likely that worshippers of Serapis would have wanted to live in the vicinity of the Serapeum, he disagrees with the conclusion that there was such a thing as an “oriental quarter”.¹⁸⁶

To better understand the area around the Serapeum, it is important to consider the hypothesized nature of the buildings. For one, they could be public or private. The Caseggiato del Serapide, a sacellum or small shrine, is thought to be a private structure only reserved for a handful of people.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, this sacellum can be dated to between 205 and 209 A.D., marking the time of construction to the reign of Septimius Severus.¹⁸⁸ The Serapis cult became a general Roman cult during the time of the Severi. The widespread popularity of Serapis therefore made this a clear connection to the date on which the sacellum was built.

In contrary to the Caseggiato del Serapide, there are other nearby structures that were constructed at the same time as the Serapeum. One of these is the Terme della Trinacria.¹⁸⁹ Due to the link between the religious collegium, Serapis, the thermal complex and the horrea on the same block as the Serapeum, a connection was assumed. Mols again challenges this hypothesis by pointing out that these assumptions were based for a large part on proximity and orientation of the structures.¹⁹⁰ However, these spatial factors may also be associated with the boundaries of the insula and general population increases in Ostia.¹⁹¹

Lastly, the position of the Serapeum in the city of Ostia should be considered. It was located relatively close to the town’s center, roughly 275 meters from the forum, in contrary to other cults from Asia or Africa. Most of these cults were located on the outskirts of the town, while the Serapeum was located near the river bank of the Tiber.¹⁹² This prominent location not only shows the importance of the god in the town, it also shows the close connection Serapis has to shipping.

In sum, the Serapeum in Ostia makes for a relevant case study. For one, the construction can be dated to the birthday of Hadrian in 127 A.D., close to the height of the Roman Empire. Secondly, the general location has sparked a lot of debate concerning the sanctuary’s relation to other nearby buildings, though these connections are heavily debated. However, due to the existence of the sanctuary and the presence of privately-owned statuettes to the deity, it may be assumed that there was indeed a Serapis cult in Ostia. There are two reasons why this deity seems a fitting match for the port. Firstly, Serapis is connected to Egypt, and Ostia being a port city has likely seen its fair share of travelers from Egypt, of which some of them may have chosen to live in Ostia. Secondly, Serapis is connected to shipping and nautical navigation. The close proximity of the temple to the Tiber, on which plenty of ships would have sailed with business in or from Rome, likely invoked the god’s protective qualities for the passengers on these vessels.

¹⁸⁵ Mols 2007, 229.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁹⁰ Mols 2007, 229-230.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 230.

Case study 3: Serapis in Herwen-Hemeling

Right now, the inscription from Herwen-Hemeling has not been included in any of the online databases. A visit to the museum exhibition *Offeren aan de goden in Herwen-Hemeling* in the Valkhof Museum was necessary to gather the information that is known to the public at the current date.¹⁹³

As mentioned before, Lucius Firmius Marcellinus was the son of Lucius en Centurio from the 30th legion. He was originally from Cremona, in Northern Italy, and he dedicated a votive stone to Jupiter Serapis.¹⁹⁴ He did this in a significant location, namely Herwen-Hemeling. In Roman times, this temple complex was located just between the two branches of the Rhine, the Mighty and the Lower Rhine.¹⁹⁵ The inscription is as follows:

I O M
SERAPI SAC
RVM [L?] FIRMI
VS L FIL ANIEN
SIS MARCELLI
NVS CREMO
NA > LEG XXX [VV]
V S L M

When visiting the votive altar at the museum, there are details about the stone that cannot be taken from any database. On the top of the stone, there is a small flat surface with small pieces of bread or fruits carved from stone. These represented the actual offers that would have been made at the temple complex, specifically at the larger stone in front of the temple where offers were generally burned for the gods.

¹⁹³ The current date being: 23rd of May, 2024.

¹⁹⁴ Retrieved from: "https://www.instagram.com/p/CrBWIOcloYp/?img_index=1"

¹⁹⁵ Virgil refers to the Rhine as *bicornis*, meaning "with two horns" (Virgil, Aeneid 8.727).



Image 3.1: A view of the Serapis votive stone at the Valkhof Museum. Note the small stone breads and fruits on top of the votive stone.

Secondly, the exhibition featured other objects beside this votive stone. The site from which all the artefacts from the exhibition came from was a temple complex, with many votive stones dedicated to a variety of gods including Hercules Magusanus and Mercury. In other words, gods with different levels of popularity and with different origins. The inscription for Hercules Magusanus was found in what is believed to have been in one of the walls of a temple. Halfway the second century, the temple was restored by a commander of the *cohors II civium romanorum*, who was originally from North Africa (ex Africa). It is mentioned that this person also restored one or more of the statues.

Besides votive stones, a remarkable skeleton of a bovine was shown. Its bones were spread over a large surface of which not all were in their original context. The skull and underjaw were separated and turned away from each other. The archeologists believe that this must have been done by human interference, and they concluded that this may have been an unknown ritual. Due to the presence of other votive stones at the temple complex, it is unlikely that this bovine had anything to do with Serapis in particular, whose origins lie in a bovine god.

Another intriguing find at the complex is the funnel-shaped water basin for ground water that was in use in the third century. It had likely been roofed at some point. It is suspected that it served a ritual function. This was believed because of the descent the visitor had to make to reach the water: from the ground level, small steps descended towards this basin to collect the water from. The stones used for these stairs were reused votive stones, with signs of decoration and inscriptions on these steps. The usage of votive stones as steps is remarkable, because it would be considered disrespectful to step on former altars: it would be insulting to the god and desecrating their altar.

When the basin fell into disuse, the altar dedicated to Mercury ended up in there. While Serapis is only one of the many gods venerated at this temple complex, it is still interesting to see that there is a clear water source that would have been used for rituals at the complex. Water is, after all, an important element in the worship of Serapis.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Wild 1981, 62.

In short, while not much is yet known to the public about the temple complex at Herwen-Hemeling, the Serapis inscription has been made public. He was worshipped here along with a number of other gods, each with different countries of origin. Furthermore, a bovine skeleton and a water basin that both likely played a role in rituals have been found at the site. While a lot remains unknown about the site, it is evident that an altar to Serapis has stood there and was honored along with a plethora of other deities.

Part 3.2: Immigrant religion in the modern world

Taking a step back from the case studies, it is essential to consider non-native religious experiences on a broader scale. One way to do this is to examine what modern sociologists and anthropologists write about the topic in relation to modern-day people who are practicing their religion in a context that does not automatically cater to their religious practices. Wendy Cadge and Elaine Ecklund contribute to this discussion by researching the religion of immigrants.¹⁹⁷ Specifically, they review the published research of modern-day sociologists regarding the topic of post-1965 immigrants to the United States.

They specify that the focus of these previous studies was on individual experiences and local religious organizations, the “lived religion” approach that can also be applied to the ancient world. However, while Cadge and Ecklund praise this individualistic approach, they believe the weakness of recent research is caused precisely by this method: the lack of a systematic comparison between different case studies and a general synthesis of these pieces of information.¹⁹⁸

Early researchers concluded that after the first generation, immigrants would take on more of the culture of the host country and thereby abandon their native language and traditions while keeping their religion.¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, religion may help some immigrants to transition into the American culture by asserting pride in their heritage, thereby securing their identity and taking up a place in America’s multicultural society.²⁰⁰ The American culture also allows a partial retention of ones prior culture.²⁰¹ In other words, it was shown that some immigrants had abandoned parts of their culture, while other research has shown that they took pride in the other aspects of the culture that they kept practicing.

Furthermore, concerning the generalizability of case studies, little research has been done. However, sociologists suggest that macro-level religious institutions may influence singular case studies, whereas other sociologists have argued that several case studies come together to shape the general religious institution. At the same time, research has shown instances of second-generation immigrants bringing a broader focus of matters such as ethnicity to American evangelicalism, a religious movement “native” to the United States.²⁰² In other words, it remains unknown whether we can use a top-down or bottom-up approach in order to draw conclusions about the generalizability of case studies.

In short, research shows that in the United States, immigrants with religions that deviate from the norm religions being practiced in the country will have different ways of adapting to their new culture. With this, it is important to consider if someone is a first-generation immigrant or if their family has already spent several generations in a region. Next to this, it is unknown how case studies can reflect macro-level religious institutions, but a connection is believed to exist. As was introduced

¹⁹⁷ Cadge & Ecklund 2007.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 361-363.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 363.

in part 1 of this thesis, lived religion remains a vital concept in studying religion because of the variability in religious experiences.

It is instrumental to reflect on this information with regards to studying the ancient world. While the cultures discussed in the article by Cadge and Ecklund are all modern ones, the cultures and religions from the ancient world do not exist anymore. However, the article does emphasize the importance of considering lived religion and, therefore, individual experiences. Furthermore, it may be important to consider how a local cult of a foreign religion may have manifested in one of the Roman Provinces. These views, taken from an article with a focus on modern religious experiences of immigrants, may therefore be carefully applied to the ancient world.

Part 3.3: Discussion

In foreign areas, there was a difficulty in worshipping Serapis because of specific natively Egyptian elements his worship required. These include the Egyptian people, who are said to be the only ones able to properly worship the god, but also water that was preferably taken from the Nile.²⁰³ While Serapis worship definitely existed in territories outside of Egypt, the worship there may have been experienced as lacking. However, there are two important things to note. Firstly, while some practices may not have been feasible, others remained perfectly accessible for Serapis worshippers. An example of this is statuettes, that can house the god. Examples of these statuettes have been found in Germania Inferior.²⁰⁴ Secondly, the religion spread far past the Egyptian border over time. This partly happened due to necessity, when worshippers such as Apollonius I moved to Delos out of possible monetary concerns.²⁰⁵ While worshipping Serapis with just a statuette may not have been ideal, making sacrifices in terms of rituals used to worship a deity was the reality for many people. This extends far beyond the cult of Serapis and may in fact be generalized to many other deities who have a clear place of origin, to which traditions and rituals may have been specifically bound to.

Part 4: Synthesis

Part 4.1: General discussion

The research question at the beginning of this thesis will now be answered. The main research question was as follows:

What can be said about the presence of Serapis inscriptions and depiction in the Roman province of Germania Inferior?

The two sub-questions were as follows:

1. *Where and in which contexts in Germania Inferior have inscriptions, statues, coinage and other finds been found that mention or depict Serapis?*
2. *What statements can be made about the worship of Serapis in Germania Inferior?*

First, the answers to the two sub-questions will be discussed, and using the answers to these two questions, I will answer the main research question.

²⁰³ Wild 1981, 62.

²⁰⁴ Kater-Sibbes 1973, 163-164.

²⁰⁵ Engelmann 1975, 11-12.

Firstly, several different types of finds have been done mentioning or depicting Serapis. A total of four inscriptions were found, a total of 11 depictions on statuettes and other artefacts, and depictions on two different coin types. In total, these are not many finds. To offer some perspective, a total of three inscriptions from Germania Inferior were found in the Heidelberg database, while a total of 3495 inscriptions are included in the database for this province. This is less than 0.1% of all inscriptions.²⁰⁶ It is therefore important to keep in mind that any statements made on these finds must be interpreted carefully.

It is also important to keep the nature of the mention or depiction of Serapis in mind. For instance, an inscription is concerned with an outward depiction of the god and a message to those who read the inscription. On the other hand, a statuette is more closely associated to personal worship of the god, specifically when accounting for the fact that the religious cult of Serapis originally came from Egypt. In Egyptian religion, it was believed that the god lived inside statues of himself, and therefore statuettes may be considered to be more “religious” than inscriptions would be.

As mentioned before, there were a total of four inscriptions. Three of these inscriptions were dedicated by military men, and one of them by a woman in Cologne. There was a cult for Serapis and Isis in Cologne, and it is logical to think that the choice of including Serapis on the votive stones was for a large part due to his popularity. Furthermore, Serapis was a popular god to administrative employees and military officials. At the same time, it is important to remember that inscriptions on votive stones were made in order to fulfill a promise to a deity. A dedicator would have asked a deity to grant him or her a favor, and once this deity did, the dedicator would erect the votive stone. It is logical to think that a dedicator would ask the help of a deity that had authority in the domain in which the dedicator required help. For instance, Serapis was associated with healing, and a votive stone may be promised to Serapis in return for healing. This does not reflect an active worship, but rather a business-like exchange.

To further support this point, Takács argues that the two mentions of Serapis on inscriptions from Cologne must be seen in the context of the rest of the inscription:

“The two votive inscriptions, one from a *centurio* and the other from a *beneficiarius*, start off with *Iuppiter optimus maximus*. It is clear that for these two men Isis and Sarapis were only two among many other deities. The other gods had no place, however, on the dedications of private individuals whether they were initiated or only making good on a promise given exclusively to Isis or Sarapis.”²⁰⁷

While Serapis was matched in the inscription to the specific functions that have been ascribed to him, in truth, he could be replaced by any god who served the same purposes as he did. Why Serapis was chosen to appear on these votive inscriptions likely has to do with his increasing popularity in the Roman Empire, Cologne being especially relevant to this discussion. Serapis’ increasing importance was partly reflected by a cult to both him and Isis being established in Cologne.²⁰⁸

Secondly, a total of eleven artefacts have been discussed. The types of finds that were included here were statuettes and busts, intaglios, a lamp and a lamp cover. There were a total of five statues, one lamp, one lamp cover, and four intaglios. Because of the nature of each of these finds, it is important to remember that statuettes were most likely the type of find connected the closest to

²⁰⁶ At the same time, it is important to realize that the Heidelberg database does not include all inscriptions. This is reflected by the fact that the Herwen-Hemeling inscription has not yet been included in the database.

²⁰⁷ Takács 1995, 144.

²⁰⁸ Takács 1995, 137.

personal and private worship. While the other types of artefacts may have belonged to other active worshippers, it is also likely that they served a decorative purpose.

When comparing the total number of Serapis inscriptions in Germania Inferior to other provinces of the Roman Empire, it turned out that more inscriptions were found than expected in Aegyptus and Latium et Campania. Furthermore, the percentages of Isis inscriptions were high in Latium et Campania and Roma. Furthermore, a high correlation between the number of Serapis and Isis inscriptions demonstrates that they were likely to have similar numbers of inscriptions in each province.

From the case studies, a number of things became clear. First, there were certain necessities tied to proper Serapis worship. Elements included the involvement of an Egyptian person and water, specifically from the Nile. However, in foreign territory, this was not always feasible. We still see temples and altars being dedicated to Serapis, as well as the presence of statuettes which were likewise important in his worship. Therefore, we may conclude that people tried to worship the deity to the best of their ability, even when there was a lack of proper material to do so. Furthermore, Cadge & Ecklund provide some unique insights on how religion is experienced by modern-day immigrants.²⁰⁹ Worshippers of Serapis who had come from Aegyptus would have had different experiences adapting to new cultures. This is similar to the perspective offered by Haynes.²¹⁰ While it is unknown how case studies precisely relate to general religious institutions, there certainly is a connection between the two. For now, however, we must remain careful on how this connection manifests specifically.

In conclusion, two main questions were proposed in order to better understand the spread of a foreign religion. Firstly, the spread of physical proof was used in order to determine where finds related to the god Serapis have been found. Secondly, by examining the context and broader cultural traditions, an attempt was made to discuss the experience of this religion. To answer the main research question, there certainly is a presence of Serapis in Germania Inferior. Depending on the type of find, these may reflect personal worship but also a general popularity for the god. This is especially the case for Serapis, who is known to have had a surge in popularity. Furthermore, it is important to note that any worship of Serapis in Germania Inferior may not have been able to fully adhere to the proper practice. Due to the presence of Serapis finds, we may still conclude that attempts were made to accommodate as well as possible to the worship of Serapis.

Part 4.2: Future research

A possibility for future research is to use the method described in this thesis to further investigate the spread of religions throughout the Roman Empire. This method could be applied to any god, though it is most intriguing to use this method with provincial gods to discover their spread throughout the Roman Empire. Next to this, the spread of Serapis inscriptions, statuettes and monuments may be applied to other provinces of the Roman Empire to learn more about the spread of these artefacts. As was done in the present thesis, it is fundamental that the context of each find is discussed. While information regarding one type of find (such as inscriptions) is quite easily accessible in a database, it takes further research to be able to place these finds within their contexts, and even more to find information about other types of finds such as statuettes and monuments.

One other possibility for future research is the use of isotope analysis.²¹¹ Isotope analysis may provide information about the sourcing of metals by using specific ratios of isotope values from a sample, and comparing these values to reference data. This method may provide useful information

²⁰⁹ Cadge & Ecklund 2007.

²¹⁰ Haynes 1993.

²¹¹ For an example about lead isotope analysis, see: Carroll et al. 2021.

about where the material was sourced from, and this may in turn provide us with information about the origin of the find. If the Serapis find is associated with a burial, this isotope analysis may also be applied to the remains of the deceased in order to discover information about the mobility of this person in life.²¹² In short, there are plenty of opportunities to further study the spread of different religions through the Roman Empire.

As for my concluding remarks, this research demonstrated that all Serapis finds in Germania Inferior were found in the limes region. These finds include inscriptions, statuettes, intaglios, a lamp and a lamp cover. Additionally, case studies have indicated that Serapis worship initially required Egyptian elements such as an Egyptian priest or water from the Nile. However, it is evident that Serapis worship continued even in the absence of those elements. While it is impossible to infer the experience of a Serapis worshipper from Germania Inferior from the presence of a Serapis artefact, the fact of the matter is that some individuals maintained their worship practices on the other side of the Roman Empire. The worship and valuation of Serapis had thus made its way west, to be continued far from his place of origin.

²¹² For an example about how isotope analysis may be used to learn about the mobility of people, see: Kootker et al. 2022.

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