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"O MOTHER OF THE GODS AND MEN"

SOME ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS IN EMPEROR
JULIAN'S DISCOURSE ON THE MOTHER OF THE GODS

Abstract

The personality of emperor Julian (332 -363) has always inspired scholars to write polemic against or to extol him. This is certainly the result of said emperor's conversion from Christianity to the religions of Classical Antiquity which already in his life-time gave him the nick-name Apostata. Quite a lot has been written about Julian's relationship to the Christians, but not so much about his interest in the mystery religions about which he actually wrote two learned Discourses on Helios-Mithras and on Cybele, the Mother of the Gods. These two Discourses are to be seen as a part of the emperor's policy regarding religions, where he as Pontifex Maximus attempted to organize a resistance against Christianity which he considered impious, hostile against the Roman empire and a threat against Greek culture and education.

This work presents Julian's involvement in the mystery religions, especially the one of Cybele and Attis. This cult has been accused to be an obscene and absurd religion, and Julian's interest in the Mother of the Gods has by certain scholars been taken as an evidence for his disordered mind. In this work the cult is however viewed from a different angle and the sources are scrutinized out from a historical-critical method.

Julian seems to be using the mystery religions as a political instrument when he not only makes them a part of the Neoplatonic cosmology but also tries to model a religious organization after a Christian pattern, where he himself should become the leader and the King Philosopher.

The Discourse of the Mother of the Gods is to be regarded as an exegesis and a pastoral letter from the Pontifex Maximus Julian, where he in an allegorical form interprets the myth of Cybele and Attis and expounds the soteriological aspects in it. Cybele becomes a providence for the souls and for the whole existence, including the Gods of the Neoplatonic cosmology.

Key words: Emperor Julian, Mystery religions, Cybele, Attis, Helios-Mithras, Neoplatonism.