

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC (IN ENGLISH)

The aim of the proposed research project is to present the ideological and religious dimension of the Late Antique heliolatry, i.e. worship of the solar deity, on the basis of available Greek and Latin literary sources. The so-called late antique solar theology was (and sometimes still is) perceived by researchers of ancient Roman religion as the most sophisticated form of ancient polytheism. Due to a minor role of the solar god (Greek *Helios* and Roman *Deus Sol*) in ancient worship and mythology, appearance of the motives related to him in literature, iconography and on coins were considered surprising. This phenomenon used to be interpreted in the context of "orientalization" of the Greco-Roman religion, which was to be the consequence of the collapse of traditional beliefs. In the light of such formulated assumption, the imperial cult of the Sun (in Greek sources *Helios Megistos*; in Latin *Deus Sol Invictus*) has been regarded as an adoption of the peripheral (Semitic) beliefs, which then, through the process of *interpretatio Romana*, was incorporated into the system of Greco-Roman polytheism. However, with the advancement of research on solar deities in the Late Antiquity this theory has become increasingly questionable. It is often pointed out that there is no convincing evidence for eastern provenance of Late Antique Sun worship. Furthermore, it has been stated that the recognition of *Sol Invictus* to be Semitic cultural borrowing stemmed from the ideological attitude (imperialist and postcolonial) of the researchers from the first half of twentieth century towards culture of the later Roman Empire.

The main task of this project is to present the different dimensions of late-antique solar cult, which in turn will help to deepen our understanding of the religious experience of the Roman people in the Late Antiquity. In my research I suggest to move away from the stereotypical perception of the Sun worship as a foreign element in Greco-Roman culture (that prevailed in earlier literature of the subject) for the view explaining increasing popularity of the Sun god in the Late Antiquity via ability of polytheistic system for internal transformation, adaptation and revitalization. The ascent of heliolatry would therefore be closely associated with the specificity of the cultural period in the history of the Roman Empire known as "the Age of Anxiety" which is characterized by the need to find a universal religious factor bonding the imperial cultural center and periphery.

The analysis and interpretation will encompass texts belonging to different literary genres, which refers, directly or indirectly, to heliolatry. The sources are: rhetorical speeches - *Panegirici Latini*, *De errore profanarum religionum* by Firmicus Maternus; religious poetry and philosophical treatises – *The Orphic Hymns*, *Hymn to Helios* by Proclus, *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis, Julian the Apostate's *Orationes*; ancient novel – *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus; scientific works: *Mathesis* by Firmicus Maternus, *Saturnalia* by Macrobius; magical formulas and prayers from the collection of *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.

On the basis of listed literary sources various spheres of influence of heliolatry will be presented. This will allow to properly locate and determine the scope of influence of so-called solar theology in complex religious landscape of Late Antiquity. Attention will be paid to the following issues: (1) relationship between Sun cult and imperial power; political theology of the late Roman Empire; Empire as a reflection of the cosmic order; (2) Helios-Sol as an omniscient god and guarantor of social order; ethical values associated with heliolatry (3) hermeneutics of magical formulas addressed to Helios (4) heliolatry as revitalization of polytheism; syncretic nature of solar theology.