

ROSI CRUCIAN
DIGEST

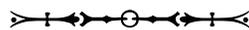
VOLUME 88 NUMBER 1 2010

ISIS

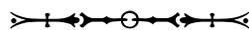
Each issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* provides members and all interested readers with a compendium of materials regarding the ongoing flow of the Rosicrucian Timeline. The articles, historical excerpts, art, and literature included in this *Digest* span the ages, and are not only interesting in themselves, but also seek to provide a lasting reference shelf to stimulate continuing study of all of those factors which make up Rosicrucian history and thought. Therefore, we present classical background, historical development, and modern reflections on each of our subjects, using the many forms of primary sources, reflective commentaries, the arts, creative fiction, and poetry.



This magazine is dedicated to all the women and men throughout the ages who have contributed to and perpetuated the wisdom of the Rosicrucian, Western esoteric, tradition.



May we ever be worthy of the light with which we have been entrusted.



From grieving wife, to savior Goddess, to Universal Mother, Isis has been with us from human origins in Africa, and remains with us in many forms today. Perhaps no mystical figure has enjoyed such widespread appeal and transcultural effect as the Queen of Heaven, Isis. In this issue we trace her origins, the spread of her devotion from Egypt to the Greco-Roman world, and her legacy today.

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AN ISIS TIMELINE

Katherine Schaefers, M.A.

The journey from the ancient Egyptian myths of Isis as the grieving wife gathering the parts of her slain husband Osiris to the Universal Goddess of the pervasive Isis Mysteries in the Roman Empire is traced by the author in this timeline. The Isis Mysteries were the most widespread mystery school of antiquity, and the Temple of Isis at Philae was the last major pre-Christian shrine to be closed in the sixth century CE. Ms. Schaefers received her M.A. from the University of Leiden, specializing in the Gnostic movements and the Isis Mysteries in the classical Mediterranean world. She is an instructor at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, California, and volunteers at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

To the unconquerable Isis

—Inscribed on a statue of Isis found within the church of St. Ursula, Cologne, Germany.¹

The Mysteries of Isis were one of the most pervasive religious movements in the Greco-Roman world. From Nubia to Greece, Rome, and parts of modern Turkey, to the Northern provinces along the Rhine and Danube rivers, and even to London, the Isis Mysteries enjoyed popularity unrivaled by any competitor. Its iconography would form a springboard for budding Christianity, while its rituals and traditions would be preserved within esoteric schools such as the Gnostics, Neoplatonists, and Pythagoreans. At the core was the deity herself, Isis—an Egyptian goddess known in the very

oldest of times as the Mistress of Heaven, Mistress of the House of Life, Mistress of the Two Lands, Mistress of Shelter, and the Great Lady. Nevertheless, why did Isis, apart from every other Egyptian goddess, grow to such popularity? What was the evolution and journey of the mysteries, and why do they remain at the heart of so many of today's philosophies?

The Egyptian Goddess

Twenty-seventh – Fourth Centuries BCE

- Isis had a special connection to Lower Egypt, where it is believed she may have originated. The Egyptian word for Lower or Northern Egypt was *Tā-meh* or “Flax Land.” Flax was used to make the Egyptians’ primary fabric—linen. The other plant that grew along the Nile, papyrus, was used famously for



Isis Lactans (Isis Nursing Horus), cast bronze, Ptolemaic period (332-31 BCE). From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

paper, but was also an ingredient in a type of toothpaste, and the stem was fried and eaten as a delicacy. Isis had dominion over these two plants, but also over barley and wheat, staples of the Egyptian diet that were used for creating beer and bread respectively. Isis, as the Greek writers Herodotus (fifth century BCE) and Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE) would write later, was indeed a fertility goddess, but that was just one of her many roles. Both writers affirmed, as did Plato (fifth-fourth centuries BCE) that Isis at her shrine at Saïs was identified with the Goddesses Neith and Athena.

- Isis's primary role was as a compassionate divine mother to her son Horus, and as the protector of earthly family life. Isis or *Auset*, as her ancient Egyptian name implies, was the "Throne" of Egypt. The mother of Horus, and consequently of Egypt's Pharaohs, she was also the "Lady of the House of Life" and "Mistress of Magic." To outsiders, like the Greeks, Isis represented mystery, fertility, and her worship, as evidenced in Plato, was of the utmost antiquity.
- From the Greek historian Plutarch (46-120 CE) we are given the story of Isis and Osiris; where Isis is portrayed as a devoted wife and mother, but also as the



The Altar of Isis at Philae. Photo by Schorle/
Wikimedia Commons

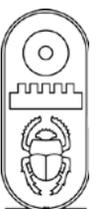
personification of human grief. *The Lamentations of Isis*, found in Egypt's most archaic records, the *Pyramid Texts* (ca. 2400 BCE / Dynasty IV or V) relates the sorrow of Isis as she learns of her husband's death and dismemberment. Her tears were thought to cause the yearly flooding of the Nile—the life-force of Egypt. Plutarch also notes a remarkable inscription at the Shrine of Isis at Saïs, testifying to the growing universality of the Goddess: "I am all that hath been, and is, and shall be; and my veil no mortal has hitherto raised."²

- Isis's husband, Osiris, represents death, but also rebirth when paired with Isis. Together they symbolized and created balance, or *Ma'at*, which was at the core of Egyptian thought. There were temples dedicated to Isis throughout Egypt, including major centers at Busiris and Philae. The temple at Philae hosted one of Isis's major celebrations centered on the yearly Nile inundation. Isis was the giver of life, the symbol of the Nile's annual reawakening.
- Isis's trait of compassion was a key to her popularity in Egypt and beyond. With outstretched wings, she represented protection to those on their journey to the eternal field of reeds, ruled by Osiris. Isis was the loving wife that gave life to her husband and expressed joy for his resurrection. She was the one who burned incense for her child Horus, and nurtured and supported him. Isis's adherents from Egypt, and then later in the Greco-Roman world, were drawn to these ideals of a nurturing mother and loving wife.

With the arrival of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, Isis and the nature of her worship would take on a whole new breadth of meaning.

Ptolemaic Isis, Out of Egypt Fourth – First Centuries BCE

- Ptolemy I (323-284 BCE) adopted the office of Pharaoh from Alexander the



Great, who had just previously driven the Persians from Egypt. For the next three hundred years, and culminating with the reign of Cleopatra VII, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt from Alexandria. As ruler of a newly-freed nation seeking direction, Ptolemy felt compelled to address the meshing of the Greek and Egyptian worlds that his reign represented. He devised a unique solution.

Ptolemy employed two theological experts—Manetho, an Egyptian priest, and Timotheus, from an Athenian priestly family of Eleusis—to centralize and merge the religious philosophies of his



Isis (on the left, holding a sistrum), Serapis (wearing a modius), the child Harpocrates (holding a cornucopia), and Dionysos (holding the thyrsus). Marble relief, last quarter of the second century CE. Found at Henchir el-Attermine, Tunisia. Louvre. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.

kingdom. Isis received a new consort, Serapis (the Ptolemaic version of Osiris). Alexandria became a place of learning with a new library and museum instated. Isis, the traditional “Lady of the House of Life,” presided over the museum, and was worshiped there. Horus, Isis’s son, became associated with Apollo, and her counterpart Osiris became Serapis, a Greco-Egyptian amalgamation of Osiris/Zeus/Dionysus and Ptah. For the next three hundred years, Isis and Serapis were seen as true counterparts to more recognizable Greek deities. Isis was losing her exotic mystique and adopting a more warm familiarity amongst the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Egypt. Her adherents were becoming more diverse, and so would her practices.

- The Greek world, adjusting to Macedonian rule outside of Egypt, readily accepted the deities emerging from Egypt and recognized them as counterparts to their own gods and goddesses. The Isis mysteries were identified with those of Eleusis and Isis herself was worshiped in traditional centers such as Delphi and Delos.

The spread of Isis’s cult from Ptolemaic Egypt appears largely due to the influence of Italian merchants, who may have carried the faith to the Greek island of Delos, the commercial center of the Aegean, sometime in the first few centuries CE. Shortly thereafter, a priest named Apollonius would set up a temple to Isis’s counterpart, Serapis. On Delos, there remains a large free-standing stone (the Aretalogy of Serapis) that attests to the presence of Egyptian priests during the third century BCE. From Delos, temples began to arise all over the Mediterranean. Isis’s more famous temples at Philae and Herculaneum were also constructed during this period.

- The next mention of the Isis mysteries comes via senatorial decrees against the cult in 182 BCE, and then again in 58, 53, and 48 BCE. Sometime during these latter three



Fresco illustrating Io being welcomed into Egypt by Isis (sitting, holding a snake and with a crocodile at her feet). Io is carried by a river god, setting her down at Kanopus, near Alexandria. Roman fresco from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

decrees, the doors to an Isis temple were beaten down. These actions may have been in response to the Isis mysteries' independent priesthood and its devotion to a personal, caring, and most importantly, foreign deity—factors that represented a threat to Rome's increasingly powerful political and adamantly traditionalist elite.

On March 15, 44 BCE, just a few years after the last decree, Julius Caesar was assassinated for dallying too much with this new societal shift in the form of Cleopatra VII. Cleopatra often identified herself with the combined goddess Isis-Hathor (mother goddess of love and beauty) and held parades and rituals in traditional Egyptian style, primarily at the Temple of Dendera. As the Romans were still a republic, they did not take kindly to Caesar's flaunting of Cleopatra and her Egyptian ways, but most notably to hints that he might crown himself King in Egypt, and perhaps also in Rome.

Isis in the Greco-Roman World

First Century BCE – Sixth Century CE

- Under the reign of Octavian Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE), the first Roman Emperor, the mysteries of Isis are called "obscene" and are initially not well received. Augustus had recently fought and defeated Mark Antony, Cleopatra, and the Egyptian Navy at the Battle of Actium, and was not very

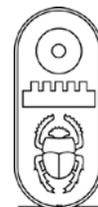
inclined to immediately adopt and appreciate Egyptian customs. Soon after, though, he did instate a lasting peace throughout the newly-formed Roman Empire, and a friendlier hand was offered to Isis and her mysteries.

Augustus instated a Roman policy that assured the newly-formed empire dominance in the Mediterranean for centuries afterward. By harmonizing foreign deities into its own religious system, the Roman pantheon became acceptable to many of the conquered and integrated cultures. This system of syncretism, or the meshing of traits to create something new, while retaining elements of the originals, defined Isis's spread through the Greco-Roman world. As bitter memories of Cleopatra and Mark Antony faded, the Roman populace appeared eager to embrace Isis and her worship, although in a much more Roman way. Mystery religions were already well established by this time.

- The Roman Isis Mysteries had as its predecessors those of Eleusis, Dionysus,



Statue of Cleopatra VII, late Ptolemaic period. One of only seven known statues of the renowned Ptolemaic Pharaoh to have survived to the present day, in a pose designed to display her political power. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.





Ruins at Eleusis, looking toward the legendary “Cave of Pluto (Hades).” Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

and Mithras from Greece. With a format already in place, the allure of truly antique Egyptian knowledge, and a scholarly resume direct from Alexandria, the worship of Isis exploded.

- Diodorus of Sicily (first century BCE) was of the opinion that two of the known world’s most ancient deities would also be the most long-lived—Isis, the moon, and Osiris, the sun. To the newly-forming Roman society, sense had to be made of Egypt’s plethora of deities. As per Diodorus, the Greeks would often appropriate the most famous gods and heroes of Egypt. As was seen a few centuries earlier under Ptolemy I, Isis and Osiris were decreed to be on the top of the hierarchy. Isis was identified with Hera, Selene, Demeter, Artemis, and other major Greek deities. Both Diodorus and Herodotus preserve claims of the Eleusinian and Demeter mysteries as originating from those of Isis. Diodorus even confidently states that the priestly families of Eleusis at Eumolpidae are Egyptian because they are the only Greeks who “swear by Isis.” When Greece came under Roman dominion, the amalgamated Greek Isis would again merge, this time with Roman counterparts.

- During the reign of Gaius Caligula (37-41 CE), the mysteries were state-sanctioned, and a favorite of Gaius; he would become an initiate and was fond of participating in parades. The mysteries also enjoyed prosperity under Vespasian (69-79 CE) and Titus (79-

81 CE). Isis and her counterpart Osiris (at this point firmly identified as Serapis) would become official state deities, reinforcing the power and position of the emperors, as Isis had once done in Pharaonic times.

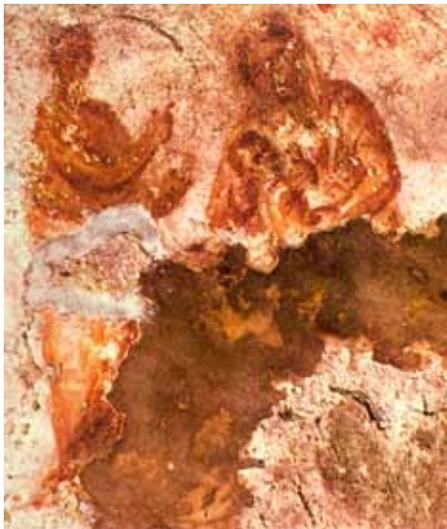
- For the Roman world, Isis represented antiquity, fertility, motherhood, and imperial power all rolled up in one. She was goddess of the Moon and dwelled in the star Sirius (*Sothis* in Greek). Apuleius (125-180 CE), the author of one of the only known glimpses inside the Isis mysteries in *The Golden Ass*, praises Isis as a “perpetual comfort of humanity,” and by her power over life “nourishes the whole world and bears a great



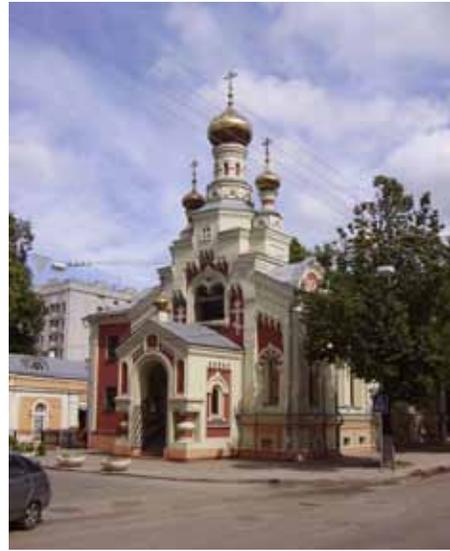
Roman statue of Isis, black and white marble, first half of the second century CE, found in Naples, Italy. Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. The Romanization of the Egyptian Isis is complete with her vesture and iconography. Photo by Gryffindor/Wikimedia Commons.

compassion to the troubles of the miserable as a loving mother would.” Earlier in Egypt, under Ptolemy III, Isis had gained a nationwide holiday with the rising of Sirius. This festival represented the beginning of the Nile flood, the summer solstice, and the birth of a new year. Isis appealed to all. Her wings were both protective and symbolic of sails. Isis the Navigator cast off from the shore of Alexandria, and set foot on Delos and on Italy. She was the Queen of Heaven, and on earth was the ideal mother, giver of life, love, and prosperity.

- Devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, begins to grow among Christians in the early centuries. One of the earliest examples of this is the work *The Protevangelium of James* (ca. 150 CE), which, although not included in the Christian New Testament, included many of the elements of Marian veneration, including her being raised in the Temple, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and other themes. Late in the second century, the earliest known image of the Virgin was painted in fresco in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome.



The Virgin and Child with Balaam the Prophet, late second century, Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome. The image depicts her nursing the Infant Jesus, reminiscent of Isis nursing Horus. This is the earliest known image of Mary and the infant Jesus, independent of the Magi episode. The figure at the left appears to be the prophet Balaam pointing to a star (outside the frame). The reference to the star is from Numbers 24:17 in the Hebrew Scriptures.



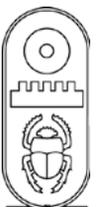
Eastern Orthodox “Our Lady, Joy of All Who Sorrow” Church, nineteenth century, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. The title is reminiscent of Isis’s appellation in *The Golden Ass*: “Perpetual Comfort of Humanity.” Photo by Bestalex/ Wikimedia Commons.

It depicted the Virgin suckling the child Jesus, strongly reminiscent of images of Isis suckling Horus.

- During the fourth - sixth centuries CE, the mysteries of Isis and other competing movements declined, due in part to the spread of Christianity.

- As early as the third century, the title *Theotokos* (Godbearer) began to be used for Mary by Christian writers. At the Christian Council of Ephesus (431), this title was officially sanctioned by the Imperial Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, and others. This served to promote the veneration of Mary throughout these areas, and to identify her with Isis.

- Correspondingly, temples to Mary the Theotokos began to be built throughout the Christian world, including St. Mary of Blachernae (Constantinople) built by the Empress Pulcheria, ca. 450 CE, and Santa Maria Maggiore (Rome, fourth - fifth centuries), and the Church of Mary in Ephesus, which was probably built for the Council.³ The popularity of this dedication has continued.





Theotokos Joy of All Who Sorrow, icon of Mary, 1888, St. Petersburg, Russia.

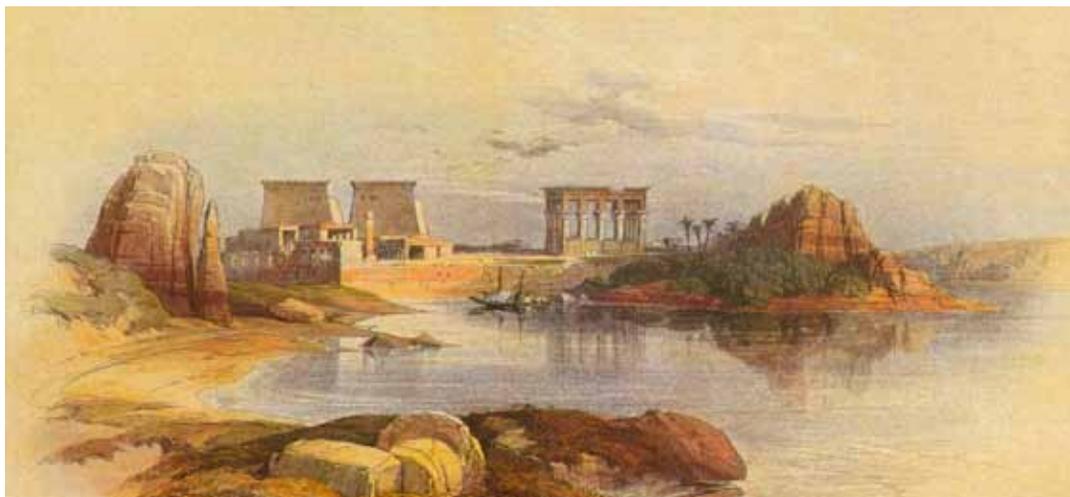
- The inheritance from the Mysteries of Isis to the Cult of the Virgin was well on its way, as many of the characteristics of Isis, including *Queen of Heaven* and *Joy of All Who Sorrow* were transmitted through Mary the Godbearer throughout the ensuing history of Christianity. While there is no exact count as to how many churches, shrines, schools, and other Christian institutions are named for her today, it is certainly one of the most popular dedications in the world. The legacy of Isis is well enshrined.
- The Egyptian Isis temple at Philae, built during Ptolemaic times, would be

the last to be closed in the sixth century, as the Roman Emperor Justinian (ruled 527-565 CE) closed the last of the pre-Christian temples within the empire. It was converted into a church of the Virgin Mary, which was subsequently closed in Muslim Egypt during the seventh century. There is speculation that the Temple of Isis in London, attested to have been rebuilt in the second century CE,⁴ may have survived somewhat past this date, as Britain had been lost to the empire in the fifth century.

- Today, Isis is well represented by revivals of her mysteries among neo-pagans, and also in popular culture. As the Goddess movement has emerged in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, she has become a powerful symbol of the universal nurturing and salvific Source of All.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Greek: *Isidi inui[te]*.
- ² Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 9, 354C (from the *Moralia*). Available at The Internet Sacred Texts Archives at www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plu/pte/pte04.htm.
- ³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blachernae; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_di_Santa_Maria_Maggiore; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Mary.
- ⁴ www.roman-britain.org/places/londinium.htm; www.britannia.com/history/londonhistory/.



David Roberts, *Island of Philae, Looking Down the Nile*, 1838, lithograph. The Philae Temple as seen from the south.

THE EPIPHANY OF ISIS

Lucius Apuleius

From the *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*, translated
by William Adlington (1566) and adapted for modern readers.

The *Metamorphoses* of Lucius by Lucius Apuleius, better known as The Golden Ass, is the only Roman novel to survive today. With parallels in the tradition of the Greek novel, this work is often considered the first “novel,” and inspired many later episodic romances such as *Don Quixote* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. The present selection is assumed to be autobiographical, as Lucius describes the epiphany of Isis, most probably from his participation in the Isis Mysteries themselves. It is clear in this passage that over several millennia, Isis has been transformed from her supporting role to Osiris and Horus in the Osirian Mysteries, to the Universal Queen of Heaven, representing the totality of Divinity in the Isis Mysteries which had spread throughout the Greco-Roman world by the second century CE.

As the story has unfolded, through unfortunate contact with magic, Lucius has been transformed into an ass. Having failed to cure himself of this transformation, he finally invokes the Goddess, and in this passage, he describes her advent and bountiful remedy for his condition.

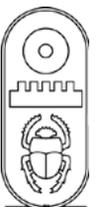


How by Roses and Prayer Apuleius Returned to His Human Shape

As midnight approached as I slept my first sleep, I awoke with sudden fear and saw the Moon shining bright, as when she is full and looking as though she had leapt out of the sea. Then my thoughts led me to the idea that it was the most secret time, when the goddess Ceres had most strength and force, considering that all human things are governed by her providence: and not only all beasts private and tame, but also all wild and savage beasts who are under her protection.

All bodies in the heavens, the earth, and the seas, are increased by her increasing motions and are diminished by her diminishing motions. As weary as I was of my cruel fortune and calamity, and even though it was very late, I found good hope of being delivered from all my misery and of sovereign remedy, in invocation and prayer to the excellent beauty of the Goddess, whom I beheld shining before my eyes. Then, I arose with a joyful face, shaking off my animal-like and drowsy sleep. Moved by a great affection to purify, I plunged myself seven times into the water of the sea—seven being a number quite favorable to holy and divine things, as the worthy and sage philosopher, Pythagoras, has declared.

Henry Fuseli, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act IV, Scene I. A wood: Titania, queen of the fairies, Bottom, fairies attending, etc., 1796. The character of Bottom is one of many literary legacies from *The Golden Ass*.



Lucius's Prayer

Then, with a weeping countenance, I made this prayer to the powerful Goddess, saying:

O blessed Queen of heaven! Are you the Lady Ceres, the original and motherly nurse of all fruitful things on earth, who inhabits the land of Eleusis? Are you she who, after finding your daughter Proserpina, conceived such great joy that barren and unfruitful ground was made fruitful again? Or are you the celestial Venus, sister to the God Phoebus, now worshiped within the Temples of the Isle of Paphos and the sacred places of Ephesus? Venus, who in the beginning of the world coupled together all kinds of things with an engendered love, by an eternal propagation of humankind? Venus, who nourishes so many people by the generation of beasts? Ahh...in light of the deadly howlings you are displaying, it is clear that you are the dreaded Proserpina! You have the power to stop and put away the invasion of the hags and ghosts that appear unto humans, and to keep them down in the closures of the earth.

You, who are diversely worshiped, you who illuminate all the borders of the earth by your feminine shape! You,



Michael Bull, F.R.C., *Isis and Lucius*.

nourishing all the fruits of the world by your vigor and force! With whatever name or fashion it is lawful to call upon you, I pray you, please end my great travail and misery, and deliver me from the wretched fortune that has pursued me for so long.

Grant peace and rest from my adversities, if it pleases you, as I have endured too much labor and peril. Please remove from me my shape of an ass, and return me to my pristine estate. And if I have offended in any point of divine majesty, let me die rather than live, for I am fully weary of my life.

The Goddess Appears

When I had ended this prayer, finding my pleas to the Goddess brought to light, I most fortunately fell asleep. Whereupon, a divine and venerable face appeared to me, worshiped even by the gods themselves.

Little by little, I seemed to see the whole figure of her body rising out of the sea and standing before me. So then I set my mind to describe her divine semblance, whether the poverty of my human speech might suffer me, or whether her divine power would grant me proper eloquence in the task.

First, her great abundance of hair was dispersed and scattered about her neck. On the crown of her head she bore many garlands interlaced with flowers, and in the middle of her forehead was a glassy compass, resembling the light of the Moon. In one of her hands she bore serpents, and in the other, sheaves of corn.

Her garment was of fine silk and radiated a diverse array of colors, which sometimes appeared yellow, sometimes rose, and even sometimes aflame. And at other times (which troubled my spirit sorely), it even appeared dark and obscure, covered with a black robe in manner of a shield, with subtle pleating at the skirts. The welts were enticingly attractive, and here and there



Isis Finial, polychromed iron, late period Egypt, twenty-seventh to thirty-first dynasties (ca. 525-332 BCE). Finials were carried on long staffs, and marked the place of an important person in a procession, or a section for gathering. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

the stars could be glimpsed. In the middle of them was placed the Moon, which shone like a flame of fire. Encircling the robe was a coronet or garland made with flowers and fruits.

Her right hand held a brass timbrel, which gave a pleasant sound. In her left hand was a gold cup, from which the serpent Aspis emerged and lifted up his head with a swelling throat. Her fragrant feet were covered with shoes, which were interlaced and wrought with victorious palm. And so her heavenly form, breathing out the pleasant spice of fertile Arabia, chose with compassion to utter these words to me in her divine voice:

Behold Lucius I am come; your weeping and prayers have moved me to provide solace to you. I am she who is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of powers divine, Queen of heaven! I am the principal of the celestial Gods, the light of the goddesses. At my will, the planets of the air, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the silences of hell are disposed. My name, my divinity is adored throughout the

world in diverse ways, through various customs and under many names.

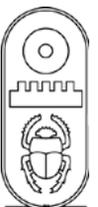
The Phrygians call me the Mother of the Gods; the Athenians, Minerva; the Cyprians, Venus; the Candians, Diana; the Sicilians, Proserpina; the Eleusians, Ceres. Some Juno, others Bellona, others Hecate. And principally, the Ethiopians in the East, and the Egyptians who are excellent in all manner of ancient doctrine and who worship me by their proper ceremonies and customs, call me Queen Isis.

Behold, I am here to take pity of your fortune and tribulation; I am present to favor and aid you. Leave behind your weeping and lamentation and put away all your sorrow. Rather, look upon the healthful day that is ordained by my providence, and therefore be ready to attend to my commandment.

The day following tonight is dedicated to my service, by an eternal religion. After the tempests of the sea have ceased, my priests and ministers customarily offer in my name a new



Bust of Isis-Sothis-Demeter, white marble, Roman artwork, second part of Hadrian's reign, ca. 131-138 CE. From the gymnasium in the Villa Adriana, near Tivoli, discovered in 1736. Collection of the Gregorian Egyptian Museum. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons. Isis was identified with all of the major Goddesses of the Mediterranean world, and assimilated their attributes.



You will live blessed in this world, and you will live gloriously by my guidance and protection.

ship as a first fruit of my navigation. I command you not to profane or despise the sacrifice in any way. Tomorrow the High Priest, following in procession under my divine guidance, shall carry a garland of roses next to the timbrel in his right hand. Follow my procession among the people, and when you come to the priest, make as though you would kiss his hand, but instead snatch at the roses. When this is done, I will rid you of the skin and shape of an ass, a kind of beast I have long time abhorred and despised.

Above all, beware and do not doubt me or have any fear, even as difficult as it may seem for these events to be brought to pass. Because in the same hour that I have come to you, I have also commanded the Priest a vision of what he shall do, and all the people by my commandment shall be compelled to give you place and to say nothing!

Furthermore, do not worry about whether any person shall abhor your ill-favored and deformed figure, as you will be among so fair and joyful ceremonies and in such good company that this will not be cause for concern. Nor would anyone in attendance be so foolhardy as to blame and reprove your sudden restoration to human shape, lest in doing so they should gather or conceive any sinister opinion. Also know this for sure: that the rest of your life until the hour of death shall be bound and subject to me!

And do not regard it as an injury to be always in my service, since it is by my countenance and benefit that

you will become a human. You will live blessed in this world, and you will live gloriously by my guidance and protection. When you descend to Hades, that subterranean place where you will see me shining (as you see me now) in the darkness of Acheron, and reigning in the deep profundity of Styx, you will worship me as one who has been favorable to you. And if I perceive that you are obedient to my commandment, adhere to my religion, and merit my divine grace, then know that I will prolong your days above and beyond the time that the fates have appointed and the celestial planets ordained.

When the divine Image had spoken these words, she vanished away! Upon awakening, I arose, feeling the various parts of my body mixed with fear, joy and sweat, and I marveled at the clear presence of the powerful goddess. And while being sprinkled with the water of the sea, I recounted in order her admonitions and divine commandments.



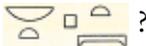
Royal Sistrum. Sistra were used by women in Egyptian Temple worship since early dynastic times, particularly in the rites of Goddesses. Isis, mother and creator, was often shown holding a water container (the flooding of the Nile) and a sistrum. Sistra are still used today in the Liturgies of the Alexandrine Christian Tradition (Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean). From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

THE EGYPTIAN MYSTERIES: ISIS

Arthur Versluis, Ph.D.

Extracted from *The Egyptian Mysteries*, by Arthur Versluis; first published by Penguin. Copyright © Arthur Versluis 1988

Drawing upon Vedic, Buddhist, Greek, Roman, and Hermetic texts, the author examines the place of Isis in the ancient Egyptian Mystery tradition—in many respects the origin of Western tradition—not as an isolated phenomenon, but in the light of the great traditions still in existence. By setting the Mystery tradition in the context of the primordial tradition, its relation to our present era begins to emerge. To understand the modern world and our place in the cosmos, it is necessary to understand the Mysteries. Arthur Versluis, author of numerous books and articles, serves as Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. He is the founding President of the American Association for the Study of Esotericism, and a leader in the scholarship of Esotericism in North America.

Perhaps no God or Goddess has ever enjoyed the worship and celebration of so many throughout the ancient world, from the earliest times up to and through the time of Christianity, as did Isis. Indeed, even after Isis herself had “vanished” under that name, “She of the Many Names” continued under the guise of the Virgin Mary, Who in turn assumed many of the functions that Isis had served in earlier epochs. Both, like Kanzeon Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, “hear the cries of the world”—both are the “compassionate deliverers of the world’s suffering.” But who is Isis, the *regina coeli*, Queen of Heaven, whose sign in Egyptian was  ?

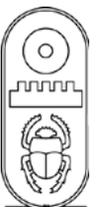
For an answer we turn, first, to the myth of Isis and Rā, found in the Turin Papyrus,¹ in which Isis is seen as blackmailing the poisoned Sun God Rā into revealing his

most secret, sacred Names of Power in return for an antidote. For in this tale we can see the principal Essence of Isis: she is Mediatrix between the Celestial and the terrestrial.



Olga Deulofeu, S.R.C., *Isis*.

In the text in question, Isis is defined as “She Who loved the Gods; She Who was wearied of men; She Who loved best the realm of the spirits.”² In other words, Isis, though necessarily partaking of the highest realms—those of the Gods and of Rā—was none the less most closely affiliated with the mediate subtle realm, the world of spirits (*bhuvah*), the Atmosphere, the Vast Sea in which the temporal world was precipitated like a tiny island. Isis is the Queen of the subtle realm, and therefore in her own way “mistress of the Earth . . . like Rā . . . (and) of like rank and power in Heaven,”³ for she rules the essences of herbs and animals and all sentient things. According to the myth under consideration, Isis hid a dart in Rā’s path, and when he encountered it he fell mortally poisoned, and was revitalised only by divulging to Isis, the Great Sorceress, his True Names. Within



this tale we begin to glimpse the nature of Isis, elucidated by the Qabalistic teaching that each of the Sephiroth, when emanated, “spilled over” into disequilibrium, and were later returned to Divine Order, and that each of the Sephira corresponded to aspects of the Divine Names. For both the Qabala and the tales of Isis refer to the emanation of temporality from the Real, to the essential superstructure of Creation, mediate between “above” and “below.”



Votive relief honoring Isis, Osiris, and Horus, Ptolemaic period (332 – 31 BCE), limestone. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

That Isis, then, should have a mediate place in the Egyptian theogony is only proper, for she, like Egypt herself at that time, lay mediate between the primordial past and the secular, materialist future, between the sacred and the profane. Although in the myth under consideration Rā is depicted as being senile and decrepit, obviously, since Rā cannot in his nature change, it must be something else which is being suggested. In fact, it is not Rā Who becomes senile, but rather man who becomes blind to Rā. In this tale, in other words, we see not the senescence of Rā, but the senescence of Egypt herself, and her blindness to Rā,

a blindness remedied by Isis, who acts as intermediary or bridge between man and the Sun to which he is ever more blind. Isis, in sum, not fundamentally different from the Sun, is rather a manifestation of the Divine Compassion accessible to man in an age of waning faith and wisdom.

Hence Isis said: “I have revealed to mankind mystic initiations. I have taught reverence for the Gods; I have established the temples.”⁴ Now needless to say these are ultimately the actions of the Divine Sun inherent within Creation and within humanity, from whom Isis cannot be separate. However, within a given historical period certain incarnations or manifestations of the Divine are of far more aid than others. They speak to a given age and need, and so it was—and perhaps is—for Isis. As is said in the litany *Praises of Rā*, “Thou art indeed Isis.”⁵ When Isis—or any—bestows blessings upon man, it is Rā who bestows them.⁶

From this we can begin, too, to see the relation of Isis to Nephthys, her sister and consort of Typhon, the latter being a reflection and aspect of Isis, just as Isis is an aspect of Rā. According to Plutarch, Isis is that which is manifest; Nephthys is, or rules, that which is unmanifest.⁷ Nephthys, then, is that of the subtle realm which is unmanifest, which is outside the pale of the temporal realm, whereas Isis is “she of the green wings and the crescent moon” and, while including Nephthys as one aspect of her, nevertheless pertains more the “world below the moon,” the world of generation and of living beings. Nephthys, on the other hand, is the “shade” of Isis; she manifests the residues or traces of the living world, representing decay, dissolution.

The Rising of the Nile

Isis’s sign was Sothis, the dog-star, which signified her power, for that star was associated with the rising of the Nile, and the coming of life anew each year. This

association was reinforced by her companion Hermanubis, the Divine Messenger, who lives between the Divine and the earthly realms, whose dog-head is half black and half gold,⁸ and whose barking separates stranger from friend.⁹ The name “Sothis” derives from a trinity of Gods: *Seth*, or Typhon, the principal power of darkness, ignorance, anger and destruction; Osiris; and his consort, *Isis* herself. In this one star is, then, an intricate glyph of Osiris being overcome by Seth, found by Hermanubis, rescued and restored by Isis, all condensed into its cyclical pattern, marking the heat of summer and the cold depths of winter, the rising and the falling of the Nile: all life.

An even clearer indication of Isis’s nature can be glimpsed from two tales related by Pausanias of men who had dared to profane her temples. In both tales, a profane man, who had no right to enter, burst into the temple out of curiosity: one on his own account, the other on behalf of a Roman governor. Both entered during festival time; both found the shrine filled with spectres. The first returned to Tithorea, where he died; the other returned to the Roman governor,



Wall relief of Isis in east upstairs, temple of Edfu, Egypt. Photo © 2009 Rémi/Wikimedia Commons.

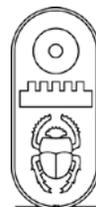
told his tale, and then immediately expired as well. Pausanias thereby concludes that “it is ill for mankind to see the Gods in bodily shape,” echoing Homer.¹⁰ While the tales do not divulge anything of the Mysteries themselves, they do corroborate our observation that Isis’s domain was essentially the subtle realm, the realm of “spectres,” and that sacred Knowledge is self-protecting.

The only remaining account, *in toto*, of that which could be lawfully revealed of the Mysteries, and the Mysteries of Isis in particular, is that of Apuleius in his novel *The Golden Ass*. Although, clearly, we cannot reproduce that tale in its entirety here, despite its worthiness, we can at least distil from it the general characteristics of an initiation, as well as of Isis herself. For from this account we can see quite clearly that even at that late date—even in the second-century-AD Rome of Apuleius—the power of Isis was unabated, immense, able to inspire her worshippers with visions of her splendour, with the inexpressible plenitude and gratitude of reception into the Divine.

Then from the Ocean She Rises...

Apuleius’ account of the Mysteries is to be found in Book XI, beginning when, having been exhausted by his miseries, driven to the very edge of the sea by his troubles and enchantments, “at land’s end,” the hero Lucius immerses himself seven times in the ocean and with tear-stained face turns to the orb of the Full Moon as it emerged from the waves of the sea. In dire straits, bereft of all hope, he addresses Isis, She of the Moon, Queen of Heaven:

“whether you be Ceres, motherly nurse of all growth . . . or celestial Venus, who in the first moment of Creation mingled the sexes in the generation of mutual desires . . . or the sister of Phoebus . . . or Proserpine . . . whose triple face has the power to ward off the assaults of ghosts and to close the cracks in the Earth . . . dispensing your radiance



when the Sun has abandoned us.” (Italics mine)

Then from the ocean she rises, such beauty as words fail to approach: upon her head is a chaplet of flowers in the midst of which is a circlet—a softly glowing moon supported by two vipers that rise from the Earth, near blades of corn. Her garments are many-hued: yellow, white,



Landscape with Temple, ca. first century BCE – first century CE. Roman fresco from the temple of Isis in Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Naples). Photo by Wolfgang Rieger/Wikimedia Commons.

red, while around them falls a softly shining black cape, passing over her left shoulder, a cape spangled with stars, a crescent moon breathing forth from the centre. In her right hand is the triple chord of the sistrum;¹¹ in her left hand a golden boat, above which rises the head of an asp from its sacred coils.

To poor Lucius (whose true nature, by virtue of his name, is light), still entrapped in the body of an ass, she speaks:

“Behold, Lucius—moved by your prayer I come to you—I, the natural mother of all life, mistress of the elements, first child of time, Supreme Divinity, Queen of those in Hell, First of those in Heaven, the manifestation of all the Gods and Goddesses—I, who govern by my nod

the crests of light in the sky, the purifying wafts of the ocean, and the lamentable silences of Hell—I, whose single Godhead is venerated over all the Earth under manifold forms, varying rites, and changing names.”

She admonishes Lucius to “only remember Her,” for by keeping the remembrance “fast in his heart’s deep core” he should, if he remains faithful, after death live on praising Her in the Elysian fields, for “if you are found to merit My love by your dedicated obedience, religious devotion, and constant chastity, you will discover that it is within My power to prolong your life beyond the limits set to it by Fate.”¹²

Solace to the Troubled Human Soul

It is quite certain that we have here not simply a literary account of the Mysteries nor, as with Firmicus Maternus, a bitter diatribe by a Christian against the “pagans,” nor the distanced, impersonal account of Plutarch, but the words of an eyewitness, sympathetic of Isis as She really was, seen through the eyes of Her worshippers. And though Her worshippers were drawn from every class, we have here an account by one of the literati, a scholar, who had found serenity not in the “bitter cross of anxiety,” as the Roman phrase had it, but in the folds of the Great Goddesses’ robes. Here, unmistakably, we have a true religious experience, one which speaks to, gives solace to, the troubled soul of man, for whom neither scholarship nor earthly delights offer any lasting comfort. It is for this reason that Apuleius’ account is so moving.

The account of his initiation builds to a kind of universal climax: the populace throngs into the city as the sun rises—all are jubilant, buoyant as Lucius himself, who knows that his deliverance is imminent. The colourful pageant goes on, women dressed in the white vestures of spring, scattering balm and flowers,

while others bear mirrors upon their backs, walking before the Goddess so that all approach her Image. Musicians play upon their pipes; poets recite; the shaven initiates walk behind in a great band, dressed in purest white, shaking sistras of brass, silver and gold, with the priests in the rear, carrying the Great Lamp and the altars. Behind all follow the Gods themselves: the Messenger of Heaven and Hell, Anubis, face half black and half gold, bearing his rod in his left hand, followed by a Cow, emblem of the Mother of all, and last of all one bearing the sacred symbol of the Supreme Deity, inexpressible, veiled in the Deep Silence of true religion.

A Wealth of Symbols

Throughout Apuleius' account we find a wealth of descriptions of the Mysteries and of sacred symbology: the sistrum with its three chords, for the three worlds; the sacred uraeus, the asps which symbolise the coiled serpent of Sakti entwined around Siva (or of Isis coiled round Osiris); Isis arising from the Great Ocean; the golden barque of Rā, the Sun, in which the dead find life eternal, a kind of immortality; the gooseneck prow of the sacred barque, signifying the unerring homeward path which Isis and Rā represented. Indeed, the list is long, the symbolism intricate.

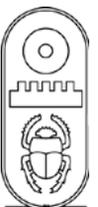
But what of the initiation itself? Of that, Lucius can say little: not because he would not, but because he cannot, not least because the power of the Goddess is to bestow death as well as life, punishment as well as weal—and yet from his tale the essence of the event, the turning, can be inferred; we can see there the immense gratitude and serenity, the joy and universal harmony which it bestows, not only upon him alone, but upon all in the populace, to each according to his need. As Apuleius says: “At midnight the Sun shone in all his full splendour. I could tell you more, but you would not understand.”

The Sun shines at midnight: in this we see the essence of the ‘Black Rite’¹³ of the ancient Egyptians, of the entry into death itself which lies at the heart of the Mysteries—for “initiation is a kind of voluntary death with but the slightest chance of redemption.” Initiation bestows a redemption in the Sun, the Divine Sun which appears in the very depths of human despair, when egoism is transcended, when the world of form, subtle and dense, drops away—then, at midnight, comes that of which nothing more can be said: Divine Plenitude overwhelming.

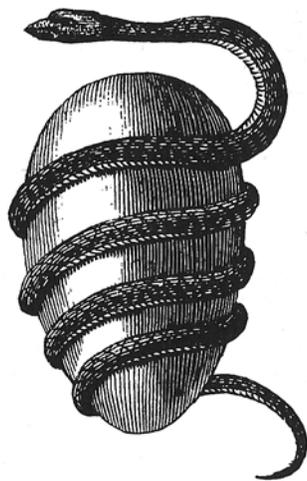
Isis, then, is the principal generative force, associated with the healing herbs and the powers of medicine, with the growth



Shiva, from the Ellora Caves, Maharashtra, India. Photo © 2009 WL Nozomiiqel/Wikimedia Commons.



of wheat and corn (the domestication of which marked the inception of Egypt herself, and delineated the entrance into the present historical epoch), being mediatrix, meeting point as it were of the Gods and the temporal world. Hers is the self-motive power of generation,¹⁴ of which agriculture is the outward manifestation, and of which the green wings and crescent moon are symbol.¹⁵ The root of Her name is closely affiliated with the Egyptian root *pr*, which implies house, or home, suggesting that She is Mistress within



Orphic Egg sketch, from Jacob Bryant, *A New System* (London, 1775). From the collection of the Rosicrucian Research Library.

the Houses of the Gods. As Cassiopeia, she reclines head downwards upon the night horizon. One of her names, too, was Isis Pelagia: she of the waves. Hence as Venus she was envisioned as riding above the ocean of temporality. Yet she was also Ge-Meter, or Earth-Mother, which in Greek became Demeter.¹⁶

One of the most suggestive characteristics of Isis, however, is her relation to the coiled serpents or asps with which she is always associated, for the serpent is almost universally a symbol of the vital force, the coiled essence of life itself, rising up the spine to the crown

of the head. This attribution of the life-force to the serpentine form is particularly true within Tantric tradition, in which *kundalini*, the Serpent of Life, who slumbers at the base of the spine, in the realm of generation, is awakened as it rises up the *susumna*, the sacred channel, axis of the body, through the aperture of Brahma, conferring liberation upon the adept.

Although we cannot of course say that Isis is Sakti, nor that Osiris is Siva, the central pole around which the coiled serpent, Sakti, is slumbering, yet none the less the two pairs are incontrovertibly interrelated: it is not, after all, insignificant that the constellation Cassiopeia—She of the Throne, Mulier Sedis—should circle round the Pole with the passage of the year, just as Isis, with whom she is associated, hovered over the slain Osiris to reinvigorate him after his death and dismemberment.

Siva and Sakti

What, then, is the relationship between Siva and Sakti? Essentially, it is that between power (Sakti) and power-holder (Siva), between activity and the quiescent centre. Siva is the power-holder (*saktimān*), and Sakti is the power, the Great Mother of the Universe. Siva is pure consciousness; Sakti is Mind, life, matter. Neither can exist without the other: like Osiris and Isis, they were “joined together in the Womb” as One; they are Divine Reality, from which, when we overlay name and form (*nama* and *rupa*), mind and matter, the cosmos arises. Hence Isis is “She of Many Names,” and so, according to the *Kubrika-tantra*, it is not Brahma, Visnu and Rudra who create, but their *saktis*.¹⁷ Activity is the nature of *prakriti*,¹⁸ for which reason the female is depicted above the male in Tantric representations, just as Isis, in Egyptian iconography, hovered above the prone Osiris.

To continue the Tantric imagery, in the Earth-centre called the *Muladbara-*

cakra, Kundalini Sakti manifests as a serpent coiled round a self-produced phallus (*Svayambhulinga*): indeed, the word “kundali” means “coiled” or *in potentia*, and she is said to produce the phenomenal world by the “veiling” (*maya*) of pure consciousness of herself as Consciousness—“spiralling forth” spontaneously, thereby creating the “Eggs of Brahma” (*Brahmānda*) by turning back upon Herself once, forming a coil or loop.

In Greek symbolism, which derived from the Egyptian, this form was termed the “Orphic Egg.” When she turns back upon herself for a third time, the pyramid shape is said to be formed (*Srngātaka*). Like Isis, She is a “receptacle of that continuous stream of ambrosia which flows from Eternal Bliss”¹⁹(from Brahman through Siva). She, the “world-bewilderer,” is “bright as millions of moons” and “by her in this world-egg (*Brahmānda*) illumined.”²⁰ Like Isis, her symbol is the white lotus which floats upon and arises out of the mire of dense matter, and yet is pure and unsullied.

In brief, we can see from this discussion that there is indeed a direct correspondence between the metaphysics of Tantrism and the symbology of ancient Egypt, and that the former can

shed a great deal of light upon the latter, of which is left, as prophesied, “only carvings in stone,” the merest outward signs. But no doubt the two traditions descended from a common source, in the indefinitely ancient past, perhaps through the Chaldees; certainly in the Near East.

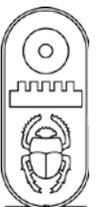
Regardless of their apparent differences, the two traditions are virtually identical in symbology, correspondences which, though arising out of universal truth, nevertheless point to a temporal unity as well. Essentially the Egyptian Mysteries, like the *yoga* of Tantrism, consisted in the “return” or “retracing” of the creation of the cosmos inwardly, so that just as in the Beginning (which always is, being supratemporal) there was only Bliss—pure Consciousness—so too the mortal who “sheds this mortal coil” (or perhaps more accurately, releases it) recapitulates inwardly and inversely the Creation, attaining through her, the Creative Power, union with the Primordial.²¹

It is interesting, while considering this parallelism between the Tantric tradition and the ancient Egyptian, to note that a predominant symbol of Isis was the Cow (Nut), not only because she is a manifestation of the abundance of the Earth, and because she is emblematic of the shift

from the primordial Golden Age to the traditional agriculture of ancient Egypt (based upon wheat, barley and cattle)—being therefore symbols of Isis and of traditional civilisation, both of which lie mediate between the “above” and the “below” but also because the two horns of the cow suggests the horns of the waxing moon, the duality of



Sanctuary of Isis-Magna Mater, Mainz, Germany. Photo © 2003 Martin Bahmann/Wikimedia Commons.



The Great Mother of all ten thousand things cannot vanish;
it is only we who become blind to her wisdom and solace.

the world of generation as well. And the symbol of the sacred cow reappears in the *Upanisads*, where speech is likened to a celestial cow, of which the first two udders are of the Gods (*svāhā, vasāt*), the third is that of man (*hanta*), and the fourth is that of the fathers (*pitṛ*), and termed *svaddhā*.²² The vital breath is her bull; Mind is her calf. And so once again we see the perennial Trinity: Osiris, the bull; Isis, the cow; and Horus, the calf.

Various Traditions Can Illumine One Another

Now we must, throughout consideration of these matters, keep in mind that although we speak in dualistic terms of Siva and Sakti, of Osiris and Isis, these are not separate entities but rather aspects or emanations of one another, and of the Supreme Lord, Isvāra, himself an emanation of the Divine Sun. Indeed, this is perhaps the central error of the modern in turning to ancient metaphysics: the false attribution of literalism and dualism to the traditional—like the Chinese Taoist teaching of *yin* and *yang*, for which mere dualism would be anathema, unthinkable, such teaching belonging as it does to the world of primordial unity. As a result, the various traditions can illumine one another, in so far as each is a reflection of the same principial unity—and this illumination is especially necessary today, due to modern fragmentation and incomprehension.

In any event, having examined Isis's significance in terms of cosmology, and in terms of the initiation of Lucius, it is apparent that, however magnificent the metaphysical implications of her



Wooden statue of Quan Am Nhin Mat Nhin Tay (Quan Am of 1,000 Eyes and 1,000 Hands) (The Bodhisattva Kanzeon/Quan Yin), ca. 1656. But Thap Pagoda in Bac Ninh Province of Northern Vietnam. Photo by DoktorMax/Wikimedia Commons.

as Creator, it is evident that her power and historical longevity (in the fourth century AD when Christianity was finally able to destroy the remnants of the religions of antiquity, Hers was still the predominant sect) was due to her answering a primordial need within man, an answer to individual longing. She, the *Magna Mater*, the Holy One, was the healer of man, She Who Resurrects, She Who Comes to the Aid of the Suffering, and who with them suffered, sitting “lowly and tearful” by the well of Byblos, She, humanity's never-absent *sanctum*, from Whom even the Gates of Hell were opened to those who were truly penitent.

And it was here that her true and unassailable religious power lay, not in

her cosmological meaning, but in the revelation of her Divine Mercy, her love, in her role as healer and comforter. In fact, it was common practice in ancient Egypt to sleep in her temples and, by virtue of the influences therein, to be healed, or to obtain a vision of her (aspects of the same Mercy). Essential to her working, though, was the element of surprise, of Divine Lightning. Like Kanzeon Bodhisattva her healings appeared when least expected, and when the future looked most dim; for then the Opening was there, so that the Divine might “burst forth,” illuminating and resurrecting life even as through the lamenting Isis Osiris could be resurrected from fragmentation and death.

And it is here, in individual revelation, in the dynamism of her infinite power, in the bestowing of peace and harmony upon those in distress, that Isis’s power still resides, still manifests, if one only has unswerving faith, dedication and devotion. The Great Mother of all ten thousand things cannot vanish; it is only we who become blind to her wisdom and solace. Yet when we turn back she is still there, as she was for Lucius, beckoning, alluring, welcoming.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Le Papyrus de Turin*, Pleyte, Rossi, 1869; 31ff. in E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), vol. I, 360.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 131ff., in Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, I, 361ff.

⁴ R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca; London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 59.

⁵ Inscribed on the walls of the royal tombs, XIXth Dynasty; Thebes. Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, I, 329.

⁶ We speak in the present tense because the same principal relation between man and God, revealer

and revelation, obtains now as in the ancient past: it is only our present incapacity to see which separates us from that ancient and purer unity which Rā represented.

⁷ *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, trans. G.R.S. Mead (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1906), vol. I, 284.

⁸ See Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Book XI.

⁹ Plutarch, *De Isis et Osiride*, XIV.7, XLIV.4.

¹⁰ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book X, Chapter XXXII.9.

¹¹ The sistrum of Isis, a sacred rattle which traditionally was said to contain four rattles, for the four elements, also contained three rods which “sang” the triple chords when the sistrum was moved. Hence the sistrum partook of the fourfold elementarities and of the “three worlds” of Hermetic cosmology. No doubt the three chords possessed harmonic and hence simultaneously symbolic significance of a Pythagorean kind. See Plutarch, *De Isis et Osiride*, LXIIIff. on the sistrum and its symbolism.

¹² Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Book XI.

¹³ Mead, *Hermes*, III, 149ff.

¹⁴ Plutarch, *De Isis et Osiride*, LXII.1.

¹⁵ See Tran Tam Tinh, *Essai sur le culte d’Isis à Pompeii* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1964), pl. XIV; XLX.

¹⁶ *Diodorus Siculus*, I.12.3–7.

¹⁷ *Kubrika-tantra*, I.1.

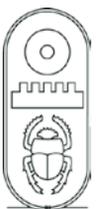
¹⁸ *Samkhya-Pravacana Sutra*, III.66.

¹⁹ A. Avalon (John George Woodroffe), *The Serpent Power* (London, 1919), 346.

²⁰ Ibid., 351.

²¹ The path of *kundali*, of *sakti-yoga*, is traditionally differentiated from that of *dhyana-yoga*, from which the modern Zen Buddhism is derived, principally because in the former *siddhi* or powers are accumulated, the path being more gradual, whereas in the latter Liberation “takes place” in a flash (though not thereby denying the necessity of years of training and discipline).

²² *Brhad-arānyaka Upanisad*, V.9.1.



APULEIUS IN THE UNDERWORLD: A FOOTNOTE TO *METAMORPHOSES*, CHAPTER 11

John Carey, Ph.D.

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John Carey is based at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, where he teaches Celtic languages and literature. His articles have appeared in many publications including *Temenos*, *Avaloka*, and *Gnosis*. In this commentary on Chapter 11 of *The Golden Ass*, he connects Lucius's experiences with the ancient Egyptian concept of the *Amduat*, demonstrating the Egyptian tradition contained within the *Isis Mysteries*.



The high point of the eleventh book of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* is undoubtedly the moment when the protagonist Lucius, who has suffered throughout most of the narrative in the form of an ass, miraculously regains his human appearance during a festival of Isis. What follows, although an anticlimax in merely narrative terms, has a vivid interest of its own: we are told how the grateful youth became a student of the mysteries of Isis, and was at last rewarded with enlightenment. The veiled passage in which he refers to this epiphany runs as follows:

... Igitur audi, sed crede, quae vera sunt. Accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine per omnia vectus elementa remeavi, nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine, deos inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proxumo. Ecce tibi rettuli, quae, quamvis audita, ignores tamen necesse est.

“Listen then, but believe, for my account is true. I approached the boundary of death and treading on Proserpine's threshold, I was carried through all the elements, after which I returned. At dead of night I saw the sun flashing with bright effulgence. I approached close to the gods above and the gods below and worshipped them face to face. Behold, I have related things about which you must remain in ignorance, though you have heard them.”¹

Much has been written about these suggestive lines, and it is not my purpose to recapitulate all of the relevant scholarship here. Rather, I take as my point of departure the views of J. Gwyn Griffiths who in his exhaustive commentary on the eleventh



Statue of Isis-Aphrodite, terracotta, Ptolemaic dynasty. Louvre Museum. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.

book has repeatedly drawn attention to points in which Apuleius's account reflects native Egyptian tradition. In the case of the present passage Griffiths has argued for a connection between Lucius's revelation and ancient Egyptian doctrines of the afterlife, particularly the descriptions of the sun god's nocturnal journey through the underworld, which are found in certain funerary treatises.²

Further evidence of such a connection is furnished by the rituals which follow the epiphany, in which Lucius successively dons twelve cloaks,³ then appears to the populace wearing a radiate crown and holding a torch.⁴ Not only do I find Griffiths's position persuasive, but I believe that it can be taken further: the purpose of this note is to suggest that in hinting at the mysteries of Isis, Apuleius was actually paraphrasing an Egyptian text.⁵

Themes similar to those which we glimpse in Apuleius's cryptic description can be found in many Egyptian funerary writings. Thus we find the following at the beginning of a spell in the Book of the Dead:

Secrets of the nether world, mysteries of the god's domain: seeing the disk when he sets in life in the west and is adored by the gods and the blessed in the nether world. . . . As for every blessed one for whom this roll is used, his soul goes forth with men and gods; it goes forth by day in any form it wishes to assume. It is not kept away from any gate of the west in going in or out. It prevails among the gods of the nether world, for it is one who cannot be repelled. These gods surround it and recognize it. Then it exists like one of them. . . . It knows what befalls it in the light; it exists as a blameless soul.⁶

The similarities here are suggestive; but a closer parallel can be found. One of the most important and widely disseminated accounts of the sun's night journey was the work known as the *Amduat*, first written



Text from the walls of the Tomb of Thutmose III (KV34), 18th Dynasty. The tomb contains the earliest known complete version of the *Amduat*. Photo © 2002, Hajor/Wikimedia Commons.

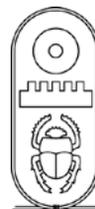
circa 1500 BCE. Not too long thereafter an abridged version was produced, and this proved extremely popular: it has been found carved in several tombs, and there are a great many papyrus copies. In summarizing the original *Amduat*, the reviser abstracted the names and magic words which it was most useful for the deceased to know, omitting descriptive passages and speeches placed in the mouths of supernatural beings; but he also added sections at the beginning and the end.⁷ Here are the lines which appear as the conclusion of the shorter version:

*The beginning is light,
the end is primeval darkness.
The sun's path westward,
the secret schemes which this god achieves.*

*The chosen clues, the secret writing
of the underworld,
which is not known by anyone
save the chosen.*

*Thus is that image made,
in the secrecy of the underworld,
invisible, imperceptible!*

*Whoever knows these secret images
is well provided for, is an initiate.
Always he goes in and out of
the underworld,
always he speaks to the Living Ones,
as has been proved true, millions of times!⁸*





Pendant of King Osorkon II, with Isis, Osiris, and Horus; gold, lapis, and red glass; 874–850 BCE (22nd Dynasty). Photo © Guillaume Blanchard/Wikimedia Commons.

Nearly everything in Apuleius's description is here as well: the statement that only the initiate can understand the secrets being discussed, the journey into and out of the underworld, the privilege of communing with the gods, the assertion of truth. The only significant omission is the lack of any direct reference to the sun's night journey—but this is of course the subject of the Amduat as a whole.

On the strength of these correspondences I propose that the mysteries into which Apuleius was initiated retained strong links with the pharaonic past, and that the abridged version of the Amduat was one of the scriptures from which he was instructed. The wonders which he experienced are, indeed, closed to us; but I think that he may have told us a little more than he intended.⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis Book* (*Metamorphoses*, Book XI), J. Gwyn Griffiths, ed.

and trans., (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 98–99.

² Comments in Apuleius, *The Isis-Book*, 292–308. See especially the discussion of the sun seen at midnight on page 303: “This remarkable phenomenon is presented, on the first level, as something bizarre. Yet it admirably suits the situation in the Book of Amduat, where the sun-god is depicted as voyaging through the twelve hours of the night in the Osirian underworld. This, in fact, is the crucial point in determining the exact Egyptian context...” Similar arguments may be found in the work of earlier scholars: thus Willi Wittmann, *Das Isisbuch des Apuleius* (Stuttgart: W Kohlhammer, 1938), 111–19; and R. Reitzenstein, “Zum Asclepius des Pseudo-Apuleius,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 7 (1904) 393–411: 406–8.

³ *The Isis-Book*, 98–99; on p. 309 Griffiths points out the evident link between the twelve cloaks and the twelve underworld regions traversed by the sun god. Cf. Wittmann, *Isisbuch*, 114; Reitzenstein, “Zum Asclepius,” 408.

⁴ *The Isis-Book*, 100–101. On p. 315 Griffiths comments that “in this cult the initiate can be identified with none other than Osiris, but here, after a ceremony which depicts the visit of the sun-god to the Osirian realm of the dead, the triumph over the dead is fittingly symbolized by an Osiris-figure with solar attributes. An identification with the god is therefore present.”

⁵ It is noteworthy that Apuleius mentions books in hieroglyphic script which were kept in Isis's shrine, and describes a priest reading from them to his disciples (Griffiths, *The Isis-Book*, 96–97). On p. 285 Griffiths observes that “Apuleius begins the *Metam.* with a description of an Egyptian papyrus roll, and there is every reason to believe that he was acquainted with papyri in which various Egyptian scripts were used.”

⁶ Thomas George Allen, trans., *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 22. I have slightly adjusted Allen's punctuation and capitalization in order to make this excerpt read more smoothly.

⁷ On the wider use of such passages, which he calls “preliminary and terminal rubrics,” see Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 2.

⁸ Erik Hornung, ed. and trans., *Das Amduat: Die Schrift des Apuleius verborgenen Raumes*, Teil III: Die Kurzfassung, Nachträge (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1967), 35. Have translated Hornung's German; he gives the hieroglyphic text of the passage in question on pp. 25–26.

⁹ For more on the survival into late antiquity (and beyond) of the doctrines of the Amduat, see my article “The Sun's Night Journey: A Pharaonic Image in Medieval Ireland,” forthcoming in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994).

ISIS: THE SAVIOR GODDESS

Caitlin Matthews

From *Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom, Bride of God*, by Caitlin Matthews, © 2001 by the author, reprinted by permission of Quest Books, the imprint of the Theosophical Publishing House (www.questbooks.net).

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine from exile in the West, Caitlin Matthews explores her many ancient forms worldwide as a post-feminist archetype for the future, showing us the way to a practical spirituality grounded in daily life, sacred marriage, and the natural world. In this excerpt, the author demonstrates the central role of Isis in the Sophia Tradition—the Divine Wisdom Tradition—elements of which are shared by the Rosicrucian and Martinist paths. Caitlin Matthews, a well known teacher of Western spirituality and Celtic folklore, is author of over thirty books.

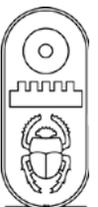


Isis holding a sistrum and an oinochoe, marble, Roman artwork from the Adrian period, 117-138 CE, Villa Adriana near Tivoli, Italy. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, 2006, Wikimedia Commons.

The connections between Isis and Sophia are very significant and show us Sophia's strongest links to the ancient goddess tradition. Isis is a Savior Goddess par excellence, one who combines the elements of the Black Goddess and the Hellenic philosophies that went to create the definitive Sophia.

Isis had been a potent goddess as early as the third millennium BC. She was the sister-wife of Osiris, with whom she mated in the womb of their mother, Nuit, the sky goddess. Theirs was an eternal balanced partnership and may stand as a model for the ideal Sophianic relationship to the Divine Masculine. Isis was primarily the Lady of the House of Life, the possessor of the ankh, which was the symbol both of divine authority and also the key to the house of life itself. Her name in Egyptian was really Auset (Isis is a Hellenized version), which means "throne." The hieroglyph that represents Isis is the throne, and this image shows her as literally the power of the earth, of which the royal seat is but a representation. Pharaohs were established on the throne of Isis. The dead went into the Otherworld, their sarcophagi guarded by Isis with her wings outstretched. Was it a memory of this image that caused the author of the Pentateuch to write, "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms?"¹

The cult of Isis was wide ranging and deeply rooted in the classical world. She epitomized the Great Mother, as well as



taking on the attributes of lesser goddess forms and subsuming them into her cult. In her aretalogy or self-praise, Isis utters as comprehensive a list of her abilities as any that appear in the mouth of wisdom in the Bible:

*I gave and ordained laws for men,
which no one is able to change...
I am she that is called goddess by
women...
I divided the earth from the heaven.
I showed the paths of the stars.
I ordered the course of the sun and the
moon.
I devised business in the sea.
I made strong the right.
I brought together women and men.
I appointed to women to bring their
infants to birth in the tenth month.
I ordained that parents should be loved
by children.
I laid punishment upon those disposed
without natural affection toward
their parents.
I made with my brother Osiris an end to
the eating of men.
I revealed mysteries unto men.
I taught men to honor images of the
gods...
I made the right to be stronger than gold
and silver.
I ordained that the true should be
thought good...
I am the Queen of rivers and winds and
sea.
No one is held in honor without my
knowing it.
I am the Queen of war.
I am the Queen of the thunderbolt.
I stir up the sea and I calm it.
I am in the rays of the sun...
I set free those in bonds...
I overcome Fate.²*

This comprehensive list enumerates the pagan virtues as understood in the ancient world. Isis shows herself in the likeness of Maat, or Demeter



Ptolemaic Coin, Ptolemaic period. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Thesmophorus as an upholder of justice, a lawgiver, and creator as well as one who reforms the nature of spirituality and even fate—*heimarmene*, most feared by the ancients for its capricious convolutions. Significantly another aretalogy says of her, “Thou didst make the power of women equal to that of men.”³

The turning point in Isis’ career happened when Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. The Ptolemaic dynasty, founded by Ptolemy I, a Macedonian, brought a Greek influence to bear upon Egypt. The Ptolemaic dynasty immediately assimilated itself to Egyptian modes of kingship, but the assimilation of Egyptian and Greek religious traditions was more difficult. The Greeks were keen to understand the universal language of symbolic correspondence between their own deities and those of the Egyptians. Ptolemy I appointed two priests to modify the disparate polytheisms into a coherent order: Manetho, an Egyptian, and Timotheus, a Greek.

The long history of Egyptian tradition had, over the centuries, accommodated itself to some strange inconsistencies, which these two ironed out, incorporating Greek concepts and deistic analogies that made Egyptian worship more ecumenical.⁴

Plutarch takes up the Egyptian Isis and Hellenizes her in his study *Isis and Osiris*. The Greek-Egyptian experience is truly a catalyst

in this study of wisdom, for the strong character of Isis the Goddess became the Sophianic touchstone of both Hermeticism and Gnosticism, as well as a major influence within Neopythagorean philosophy.

Search for Osiris

The myth of Isis is typified chiefly by her long search for the body of her husband/brother, Osiris, who is riven in pieces by Set, his opponent. Isis' long task is the reassembling of Osiris' body and the magical conception of her child, Horus, through whom the teachings of the gods will be vindicated. Plutarch speaks of this esoteric wisdom: "The Egyptians place sphinxes before their shrines to indicate that their religious teaching has in it an enigmatical sort of wisdom."

In Saïs, the statue of Athene, whom they believed to be Isis, bore the description: "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my veil no mortal has yet uncovered." The statue of Neith at Sais betokens the nature of Isis, whose mantle she is: the mysteries of the Goddess are eternal and ever renewing. It is not given to any mortal to view these mysteries in their totality, save only in part and by the light of their own understanding.

The Goddess Neith, once venerated as the Creating Mother, who wove the loom of the sky with her shuttle, was associated with another creating god, Khnum, who made the gods on his potter's wheel.⁵ This



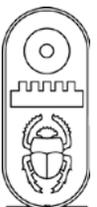
Illustration of Plutarch from the *Nuremberg Chronicles*, 1493.



Isis-Aphrodite, first century, Alexandria. Isis assimilated the characteristics of many Mediterranean Goddesses. Photo by Bibi Saint-Pol/ Wikimedia Commons.

association of a veiled goddess with an artificer god prefigures the gnostic Sophia and her son, the Demiurge.

In the *Hermetica*, Horus asks his mother, "How did earth attain to the happy lot of receiving the efflux of God?" And Isis answers, "Mighty Horus, do not ask me to describe to you the origin of the stock whence you are sprung; for it is not permitted to inquire into the birth of gods. This only I may tell you, that God who rules alone, the fabricator of the universe, bestowed on the earth for a little time your great father, Osiris, and the great goddess Isis, that they might give the world the help it so much needed."⁶ Here, we see the Hermetic concept of godhead of artificer; exactly the same term is used to describe Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8: "As for the robes, those of Isis are variegated in their colors; for her power is concerned with matter which becomes



everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end.”⁷

Isis was the great saving Goddess under whose many-colored cloak were subsumed the attributes and abilities of myriads of lesser deities. Plutarch comments, “There are those who declare that Isis is none other than the Moon; for this reason it is said that the statues of Isis that bear horns are imitations of the crescent moon, and in her dark garments are shown the concealments and the obscurity in which she in her yearning pursues the Sun (Osiris).”⁸

The black Isis is none other than the Black Goddess, Isis in her role as esoteric instructor as well as in her sorrowful mantle of mourning. Generally, the Black-Goddess aspect of Isis is polarized upon Nephthys, her sister, who was originally Mistress of Heaven and the Underworld, but these roles became later split, with Isis as Queen of Heaven.⁹

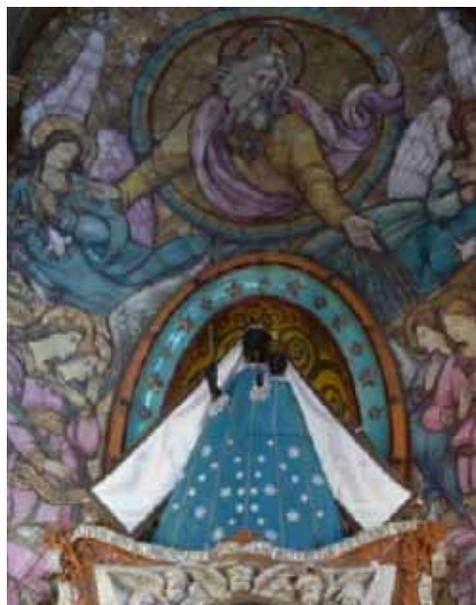
Isis is the skillful avoider of the net in which Set attempts to trap her. The net was seen as the symbol of the Adversary of Wisdom, for it was believed to exist in the Underworld where the dead had to learn its every part: the poles, ropes, weights, and hooks, whose names they had to learn in order to become “true fishers.” In other words, the initiate was supposed to learn about the net of life in order not to be caught in its toils, but to learn how to fish for real nourishment.

Isis and Christianity

With the onset of Christianity as the Roman state religion in the fourth century, the cult of Isis declined only in name, for the potency of her ritual worship flowed into the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom the same qualities, divine works of mercy, and love are attributed. Like the fertile waters of the Nile that brought life to Egyptian people then as now, the Goddess herself returns to enliven her people. Now that we are

experiencing a reappraisal and reverence for the Goddess, it is only right that we should approach her once again, in whatever form she appears to us.

The statues of Isis suckling Horus formed the early iconic model for all subsequent Madonna-and-child images of Christian tradition. The Roman emperors, prior to Christianizing Constantine, venerated Isis, as is shown in a mural at Philae where Augustus is depicted offering

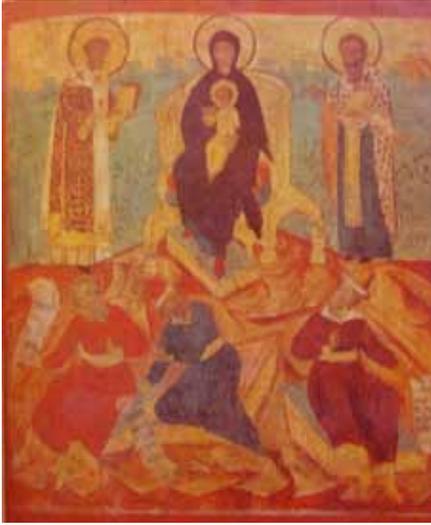


The Black Madonna de la Daurade, Basilica of the Daurade, Toulouse, France. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives. The present statue of the Black Madonna is a second exact copy of the original, which has been attested in this location since at least the tenth century. The current building was completed in the nineteenth century, however, there has been a church dedicated to the Virgin on the spot since 410 CE, when the Emperor Honorius allowed the then existing Temple to Apollo to be converted into a Christian church.

Isis myrrh, while Tiberius offers milk and incense, as well as animals sacred to Isis.

Without any reservation one can transpose this nativity to that stable frequented by three kings!¹⁰

As Isis is the sister-spouse of Osiris, so the Gospel of Philip observes, “Mary is the name of his (Jesus’) sister and his mother and it is the name of his partner.”¹¹ Mary inherits



Icon of the Akathist of the Theotokos, fresco detail, 1644, Church of the Deposition of the Robe of the Mother of God, Moscow Kremlin, Russia. Photo by Shakko, Wikimedia Commons.

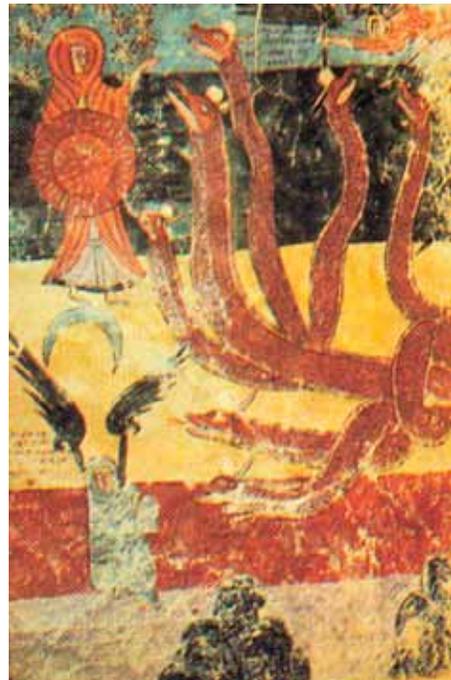
the role of *Nympha Dei* (bride of God) from Isis, along with numerous other titles, the most important correlation being “Throne of the King,” as Mary is called in the Eastern Orthodox Akathist Hymn.¹²

Isis is opposed to Set and all his works in much the same way that Mary is opposed to the serpent of Satan. “The adversary who spies on us lies in wait for us like a fisherman.”¹³ Statues of Isis show her crowned with the moon and with a crocodile under her feet—the infamous Set thrown down. This image is translated in its entirety in the Book of Revelation where Mary is similarly depicted, only as the moon crowned with the sun and with the moon under her feet, trampling on the serpent representing Lucifer. Mary’s veil of sunlight is the true *doxa* or glory of Sophia.

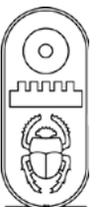
The *Beatus Apocalypse* of Ferdinand I of Spain illustrates the Woman Clothed with the Sun, the Christianized Isis. In her form as the Lower Sophia, totally black and with her eagle’s wings ready to lift her to safety; one of the heads of the seven-headed dragon about to devour her bears in its jaws a net to entrap her.

The identification between Set and Typhon was readily made in Hellenic Egypt.¹⁴ It is surprising that Nephthys, the sister of Isis and her mirror image, should not have partaken of Set’s nature. She remains on Isis’ side as Black Goddess to her Sophia throughout her battle with Set, just as Ge Melanthe does with Hera in her battle against Zeus.

The House of the Net was the title of the God Thoth’s temple. The term *net* was used in a symbolic sense to denote that which shuts humankind “into the limitations of the conventional life of the world” and which keeps us from memory of our true selves.¹⁵



The Woman Clothed with the Sun, Beatus of Liébana, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Codex of Ferdinand I, eleventh century, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. The Woman Clothed with the Sun appears in Revelation 12. Upper left, we see her in her glory with the moon under her feet, assailed by a seven-headed dragon. Lower left, she appears again as the Black Goddess with wings (in some copies she is completely black), while one of the heads spews forth a flood with which to drown her. However, “the earth helped the woman” and swallowed the waters so that she was able to fly to safety. The retreat of Sophia to a safe place is a continual theme in her mythos. This episode is paralleled in the stories of both Isis and Leto. These two images of Sophia show her in her glorious and veiled guises.



Here the veil of Sophia keeps the unprepared from experiencing initiations that will overturn their world. This veil is usually seen as an entrapping net, as when Tiamat was trapped in a net by Marduk.¹⁶ So Zeus sought his mother Rhea in marriage until she assumed serpent form; but he bound her in “the Noose of Hercules” and united with her. In contradistinction to the entrapping net is the protective veil of Isis, the veil of Neith.

In the Panathenaea the famous Peplum, Veil, Web, or Robe of Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, was borne aloft like the sail of a galley; but this was the symbol only of the Mysteries. Mystically it signified the Veil of the Universe, studded with stars, the many-colored Veil of Nature, the famous Veil or Robe of Isis, that no “mortal” or “dead man” has raised, for that veil was the spiritual nature of man himself, and to raise it he had to transcend the limits of individuality, break the bonds of death, and so become consciously immortal.¹⁷

That same veil was inherited by Isis from her mother, Nuit the Sky Goddess, whose body arches over the heavens with a veil of stars. The veil of sunlight that Mary wears in Revelation is truly the doxa of Sophia, the glory that was once that of Isis.

The Peplos was one of the names of heaven, according to the hymns of Orpheus.¹⁸ It was said to have been woven by Persephone, when her mother left her in a cave to learn the arts of embroidery and weaving. Persephone was seen as presiding over creation, and her web is the weave of Heaven itself. This continual reference to the garment or veil of wisdom reminds us that Sophia is found everywhere, under the forms of nature or else hidden in the symbols and images that speak to the heart. This is the veil that cannot be rent asunder by rape, only by personal understanding.

Isis was a way shower through the mysteries of spirituality. The famous



Title page from John Price's Latin edition of Apuleius's novel *Metamorphoses, or the Golden Ass* (Gouda, Netherlands, 1650).

Pharos of Alexandria, the lighthouse that was one of the seven wonders of the world, was dedicated to Isis Pelagia, Queen of the Sea. It is indeed like a pharos that she appears across the sea to Lucius Apuleius.

Lucius Apuleius (AD 120-180) was an initiate of the mysteries of Isis about which he wrote in his allegorical story, *The Golden Ass*, in which Lucius tells how he was accidentally transformed into an ass by his girlfriend, the servant of a Thessalian witch. The antidote to this unfortunate condition is the eating of roses.

However, the asinine Lucius is taken away before he is able to be transformed and spends a year in the shape of an ass. After thrilling and frightening adventures, he is condemned to become the object of an obscene spectacle: to mate publicly in the arena with a condemned female criminal. He makes his escape and finds himself by the sea. A full moon rises



Michael Bull, F.R.C., *Isis*.

over the waves and he purifies himself seven times in the sea and addresses Isis, imploring her to help him.

She appears crowned with the headdress of the moon and two vipers, with cornstalks woven in her hair. Her multicolored robe is woven with flowers and fruit, and her black mantle is embroidered with stars and the moon. She carries a sistrum in her hand and addresses Lucius: “I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are.”¹⁹

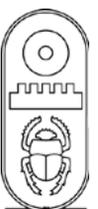
The next day turns out to be the *Navigium Isidis*, the annual dedication and launching of a ship to Isis. During the ceremonial procession, Lucius is instructed to go forward and eat of the rose garland borne by the high priest. Isis says, “Only remember, and keep these words of mine locked tight in your heart, that from now onwards until the very last day of your life you are dedicated to my service. It is only right that you should

devote your whole life to the Goddess who makes you a man again.”²⁰

Lucius is duly transformed and receives the three rites of initiation, which bring him fully into the worship of Isis and Osiris. He upholds the reticence of the initiate in his reported initiations and speaks in veiled language of his revelation of Isis: “I approached the very gates of earth and set one foot on Persephone’s threshold, yet was permitted to return, rapt through all the elements. At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon: I entered the presence of the gods of the underworld and the gods of the upperworld, stood near and worshipped them.”²¹

This allegory of Lucius’ transformation is a mystery story. Its inclusion of the labors of Psyche reinforces the nature of initiation. Lucius intends to be transformed briefly into an owl, the bird of wisdom, but instead, due to his irregular life, becomes transformed into an ass, the beast of foolishness. Like Bottom of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, he undergoes mockery and degradation; he is brought into close relations with the fairest women who, in his human condition, he would have longed to embrace. He is cast in the part of Typhon the Ass to experience to the full his disordered lusts. Isis teaches him wisdom and continence and finally shows herself his Savior Goddess.

What then is the task of Isis? Plutarch tells us, “(Typhon or Set) tears to pieces and scatters to the winds the sacred writings, which the Goddess collects and puts together and gives into the keeping of those that are initiated into the holy rites.”²² Isis is then the reassembler of lost knowledge. To us also is entrusted the sacred task of reassembling the scattered wisdom of the Goddess into a body of knowledge. This image is a compelling one





Cover page of Volume II of Athanasius Kircher's *Mundus Subterraneus*, 1664. Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus (Mercury) are pointing the student toward Isis-Artemis as the source of wisdom. Photo by Badseed/Wikimedia Commons.

for contemporary women who have no goddess heritage to draw upon. Let them look to Isis and know her as queen of their search, who will take off her crown, wrap her hair in a scarf, and go out looking with them.

If we leave Isis here, it is not farewell. We will meet her again in other guises and other centuries, coming over the seas of time in visionary splendor as brilliant as ever Lucius saw. Sophia now stands at the point of embarkation, leaving behind her self-evident salvific status to go into strange countries. She goes as a traveler, as a pilgrim goddess, wearing a cloak that will not draw attention to herself, in the mode of all women traveling alone. During this exile, Sophia

will emerge from each culture and country until a cumulative image of Divine Wisdom arrives back on the shores of consciousness as Isis returning, with much baggage besides.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Deuteronomy 37:27.
- ² C. Frederick Grant, *Hellenistic Religions* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 132-133.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ⁴ R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 46-53.
- ⁵ Manfred Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 74.
- ⁶ Walter Scott, ed., *Hermetica*, 4 vols. (Boulder, CO.: Hermes House, 1982), 493-494.
- ⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 5, trans. by F. C. Babbitt (London: Heinemann, 1957), 181.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ⁹ James A. Robinson, *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 236.
- ¹⁰ Witt, *Isis*, 63.
- ¹¹ Bentley Layton, trans., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987), 335.
- ¹² *The Akathist Hymn and Little Compline* (London: Faith Press, n.d.), 18.
- ¹³ David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 109.
- ¹⁴ Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 177-193.
- ¹⁵ G.R.S. Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes*. vol. 1 (London: John Watkins, 1964), 41.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Taylor, *Selected Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 305.
- ¹⁹ Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, translated by Robert Graves (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1950), 228.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ²² Plutarch, *Moralia*, 9.

AFRICAN DARK MOTHER - OLDEST DIVINITY WE KNOW

Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, Ph.D.

From *dark mother: african origins and godmothers*, originally published by Authors Choice Press, 2001. © 2001 by the author.

Dr. Birnbaum is on the core faculty of the Women's Spirituality program at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. She is a Sicilian/Italian woman and feminist cultural historian with a focus on the vernacular history of women and other subaltern classes. In this excerpt, she links the oldest deity of human culture, the dark mother of Africa, with Isis and the Black Madonnas of Europe and elsewhere. In accord with the latest findings of anthropology, she emphasizes the African origins of all humans and the legacy found on African migration paths—namely, the values of sharing and caring, justice with compassion, equality, and transformation—which were transmitted to all continents from 60,000 BCE to the present, as part of the primordial tradition. [Editor's Note: Dr. Birnbaum deliberately writes in a style using very few capitals, emphasizing essential equality.]

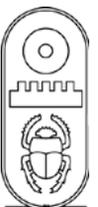
An image of the bird-headed african snake goddess in the orant position (arms upraised in celebration) dated 4,000 BCE, has been called an image of our creatrix. Angeleen Campra's doctoral study of Sophia has taught me that *generatrix* is the more appropriate term. The image is held in the Department of Egyptian Antiquities of the British Museum. Preceding this anthropomorphic image were her signs—the color ochre red and the pubic V. Her characteristics are those of a bird and a snake, yet she is a woman. With legs firmly planted in the earth, her arms celebrate the universe, and her breasts offer nurturance to all life. Why hasn't she been acknowledged?



Black-topped pottery, fired upside down with the top buried in sand. Naqada II culture (3500–3200 BCE). This deprived the clay of oxygen and resulted in the distinctive coloration. Excavated from a grave at Badari, probably used to hold grain. An image of a hunting dog attacking an ibex was scratched onto the vessel in ancient times. From the Collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Slave traders, slaveholders, and imperialists (european, arab, and north american) enslaved Africa's peoples. African resources were stolen, african treasures sacked, icons and other art objects were looted and taken away. African traditions were appropriated, destroyed, distorted, or suppressed. What remains in Africa today is what could not be stolen: the memory of the dark mother in rock engravings, cave paintings, other art, and rituals.

Along with her early signs connoting generation of all life, african prehistoric art associates the dark mother with the





Detail from a Neolithic carving from the Tassili (Algeria). Photo ©2006 Gruban / Wikimedia Commons.

earth's fruitfulness; she is depicted with corn showering down between cow's horns. Women are often depicted dancing. Men are painted running with antelopes, elephants, rhinoceroses, lions, and giraffes. In regions of the Hoggar, Tadrart Acacus, and above all in the Tassili, "we have some twelve thousand paintings done between the fifth and first millennia, which includes the most beautiful renderings of the human form that prehistory can show."¹

In the neolithic era, a black-topped red polished ware appeared in Nubia and elsewhere. "These vessels (nearly all open bowls) have a dark red exterior and a shiny black interior, the black extending also to the outside for half inch to an inch below the rim. The red was achieved by painting the surface with red ochre before firing, while the black seems to have been imparted by placing the vessel, directly after firing, rim downward, in a mass of densely smoking material such as leaves or straws."² This technique, characteristic of the pottery of northeastern Africa, was subsequently known as far away as India.³

During the millennium before Jesus, continuing into the first five hundred years thereafter, the major divinity of the mediterranean world appears to have been Isis of Africa, dark mother of many names. Great mother of the mediterranean, Isis inherited a long matristic tradition of Africa whose

signs were the color red ochre and the pubic V, as well as spirals and circles, and human identification with animals. Scholarship since the 1960s has recovered what the ancients knew: Isis was an african deity, whose origins were in Nubia, or upper Egypt. Nubia, at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles, was an african region whose civilization flourished for "more than five hundred years before the building of the great pyramids of Egypt."⁴

In her sanctuary at Philae in Africa, Isis was black. Metaphor of the dark mother of humanity and precursor of black, as well as church-whitened, madonnas of christian Europe,⁵ her civilization at Meroe, Nubia, from 100 BCE to 400 CE conveys her values. Region of inner Africa best known to the ancients, it was called Ethiopia, a name given in antiquity to "all parts of Africa occupied by dark-skinned peoples." Egyptian artists utilized a "red-brown paint for the skin color of Egyptian men, yellow for Egyptian women, and a dark brown or black for all Nubians." Greeks and romans called Ethiopia (the area south of Egypt) the "Land of the Burnt Faces," and called the Sudan "Land of the Blacks."⁶ Ethiopia today comprises Nubia.⁷ Although nubians resemble other peoples of the Sudan, they are unique in speaking an ancient group of languages unrelated to the arabic of their neighbors.⁸ Egypt built some of its massive

monuments in Nubia, notably the great rock temples of Abu Simbel, but Nubia gave the dark mother Isis to Egypt, and the rest of the world.⁹

The little island of Philae in Nubia was known as “Holy Island,” as well as “Interior of Heaven,” and “City of Isis.”¹⁰ In the 1960s, William Y. Adams, leading nubologist, anthropologist, archaeologist, and UNESCO expert, supervised the salvaging of Nile artifacts and treasures during the construction of the Aswan dam. Adams considers veneration of Isis to be “one of history’s most important ideological transformations.” Within the microcosm of Nile lands, worship of Isis became “the first truly international and supra-national religion, no longer claimed as the proprietary cult of any one ruler but sanctioned by and conferring its blessings upon several. Philae became a holy city and place of pilgrimage alike for all classes and all nationalities: Meroites, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and desert nomads.”¹¹ Worship “of the age-old fertility goddess of Egypt,” for Adams, anticipated the role of “Christianity and Islam on the larger stage of the Middle Ages.”¹²

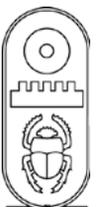
The city of Meroe, site of the kushite royal court, was the center of an empire “that included not only much of Nubia, but also regions far south of modern-day Khartoum. Meroitic culture was strongly connected with central African traditions although it made use of Egyptian styles, to which it added graeco-roman elements.”¹³ Study of nubian archeology and history has established the centrality of the dark mother Isis, who is considered to have exemplified african matrilineal traditions. “It was only through the royal women that Nubian rulers inherited the throne. All kings and queens had to be born to a queen, usually the ruler’s sister.”¹⁴ The seamless fit between religion and daily life in Africa is suggested by the fact that an african woman, as priestess of the dark mother, was “Mistress of Heaven,” as well as “Mistress of the House.”¹⁵



Saite Coffin of Tahure (Twenty-sixth Dynasty). The eyes look toward the East, and the rising sun. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Eyes of Isis inside tombs of egyptian pharaohs looked to eternity; e.g., that of Khnumnakht (100-100 BCE), whose sarcophagus is now in New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her eyes can be seen on the many amulets worn to this day by mediterranean peoples to ward off the “evil eye.” The ubiquity of the belief in the “evil eye” may convey the wide-spread popular appeal of the dark mother, as well as patriarchal anxiety before the mother’s riveting gaze.¹⁶

Veneration of Isis, according to R. E. Witt, spread from her center in Nubia to Afghanistan, the Black Sea, and Portugal, to northern England.¹⁷ By the first century of the common era, one of her largest temples outside Africa was located in Rome, while others were located at Ostia and Pompeii. At Philae in Nubia, Isis is invoked: “Hail Queen, mother of god.” At Ostia, outside Rome, Italy, she was celebrated on the 5th of March, when sailors returned to the sea, naming their boats and ships for her. Women of Rome, after immersing themselves in the icy Tiber, proceeded on their knees all along the river



edge to the Pantheon, today a gathering place for feminists.

The image of Isis most popular at the height of the roman empire appears to have been that of Isis nursing her child, Horus. Besides queen of the sea, Isis was considered queen of heaven and of earth, and was easily transmuted into the christian holy mother. Legions of the roman empire, whose ranks were drawn from subordinated dark peoples of three continents, carried images of african Isis, as well as images of Isis melded together with west asian divinities Cybele, manna, and Astarte all over the known world, from Africa to Asia, to Rome, France, England, to the Danube.¹⁸ At Benevento, where a great iseo flourished in the roman epoch, her followers were later called witches.¹⁹

In October 1999, when Wally [ed: the author's husband] and I visited the sanctuary of Isis at Philae, I remembered Lucius Apuleius' description. Roman citizen of Athens who studied at Carthage and lived in the interior of Morocco, Lucius said he was awakened by "all the perfumes of Arabia," when Isis appeared and said, "I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are."

Worshipped by many names throughout Africa, Asia, and greek and roman empires, she was known as Isis, Hathor, Ma'at, Artemis, Demeter-Persephone, Hera, Mother of Corn, Juno, and Hecate. She was Lilith of west Asia and Kali of India. Hymns invoked her as "the one who rises and dispels darkness," solar ruler who "smites her enemy," whose radiance "fills the earth with gold-dust."²⁰

The memory of the ancient african mother is recalled today in the poetry of Luisah Teish, african american poet and writer who traces her heritage to Egypt, which she calls the "mystical cradle of civilization" and finds Isis in yoruba goddess Yemonja, mother goddess who "nurtures us through the cycles of Life." She also finds Isis in yoruba's Oshun, goddess of love, art, and sensuality who "represents the Erotic in Nature." Africa, for Teish, is a continent where "deities walk among human beings and dance is worship." Acknowledging african diasporas, Teish finds reverence for the earth in african ibo beliefs and in native american "need to walk in balance." Teish's poems praise yoruba Yemonja as "mother of the night, the great dark depth, the bringer of light" who is related to Isis and Hathor. She considers the implications of the many manifestations of the dark mother: "The Horned Cow, the many-teated Sow, the queen bee, the Mothertree, the Pregnant



David Roberts (1796–1864), *View of the Island of Philae, Nubia, 1838.*

Womb, the Grain-seed broom, the candle's wick, the matrix, and woman, you are my daughter."²¹

The civilization of the dark mother of Africa is glimpsed at Meroe in Nubia, region of upper Egypt in the area called Ethiopia. Egypt, despite eurocentric misconceptions aligning the country with the "Orient" or the "Near East,"²² is an african country shaped by the Nile, river that carries african peoples and products back and forth along a north-south axis, particularly between Egypt and Nubia. In the ancient civilization of nubian Meroe, matrilineal succession was the custom, yet genders co-existed peacefully. Some queen mothers ruled alone, many ruled with husbands or sons. In mother-centered cultures of Africa, religions also co-existed peaceably. At Meroe, the religion of Isis honored the religion of the lion-headed god called Apedemek as well as that of Amun. Priests and priestesses of each religion shared in the political and economic administration of Meroe.

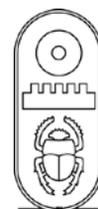
An egalitarian civilization that nurtured all life, Meroe was a noted center of learning and commerce that spread its prosperity to all peoples. Every day, in the temple called Table of the Sun dedicated to goddesses and gods, africans offered food and other life-sustaining goods. "Those in need could come at any time and take freely of the offerings."²³ This ancient african tradition, persisting over

millennia, is recalled today in San Francisco in the vibrant community services of Rev. Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial Church.

The Table of the Sun at Meroe was the precursor of roman temples to Cerere (Ceres), grain goddess of Rome, where the poor would come for free wheat. This ultimately african celebration of wheat is kept to this day in Italy in mid-August at the christian festival of the assumption of the virgin into heaven. On August 15, when we were in Sicily, we went to her festival at Gangi, in the mountains of northwest Sicily when many hundreds of emigrant workers come with their family on this date every year. We brought home a triple cluster of wheat from this festival, that celebrates pagan wheat goddesses, and put it on the front door of our Berkeley home.

In Rome, the temple of wheat goddess Ceres became the church of Santa Maria di Cosmedin, a church with a black madonna. In the early historic epoch, a sculpture that connotes roman male appropriation of Isis was placed at the entrance to this church. The legend of this sculpture (called Bocca della verità, or Mouth of truth) has it that the mouth of truth will bite the hand of anyone who tells a lie. Contemporary italian feminists, enacting the dark mother's legacy of truth and justice, have placed replicas of the Bocca della verità in theaters where people can deposit written denunciations of corrupt mafia chiefs and political officials.

The interior of Santa Maria di Cosmedin (Rome), prepared for the Byzantine Divine Liturgy. The ancient temple dating from the sixth century, was originally part of the Greek community of Rome, and is shared today by the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek-Melkite Catholic Church. The Greek-Byzantine Churches inherited much from the Mystery Schools and the Egyptian-Hermetic Tradition, and continue the Isis-like veneration of Mary. The title "Cosmedin" comes from the Greek Kosmos, meaning both "the Cosmos," and "beautiful adornment." Photo © 2007 by Till Niermann/Wikimedia Commons.

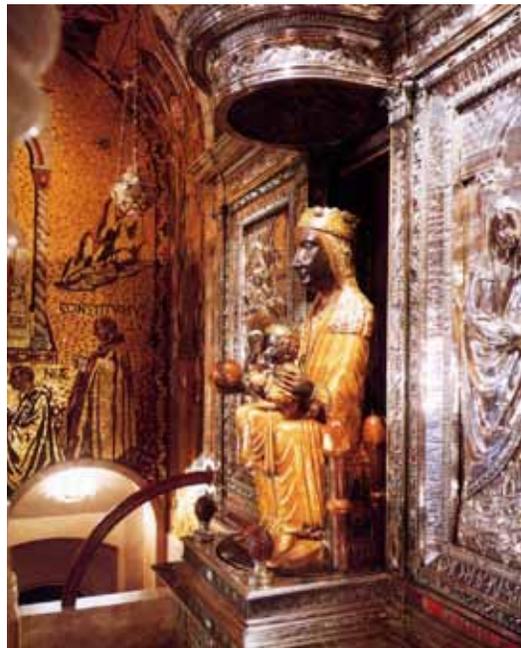


Italian evidence of veneration of the african dark mother may be found in icons of Isis in the national museum at Naples, and icons at Pompeii, Benevento, Palestrina, Aquileia, Verona, and in Rome. Much of the evidence of the widespread veneration of african Isis in the roman epoch was destroyed by the volcanic eruption that laid waste to Pompeii.²⁴ In 1997 the Isis exhibit at Milan documented the vast arc of veneration of Isis in late antiquity and early christianity, an arc that extended from Africa to Europe, to the Ukraine, to India.

After christianity was established in 323 CE, church fathers, aiming to obliterate pagan beliefs, destroyed Meroe in 450 CE. What was it they found so threatening in this african civilization that identified so strongly with nature, particularly the Nile? “Every year the land arose from the watery flood richer and more full of life; every year the migratory birds swooped down into the marshes for food and rest. A great order, ancient and ever renewing, sustained Egypt while nations rose and fell all around it.... Nature worked patiently, bore richly, and sustained continually. The human order which grew out of that great original natural magic was as unique as its setting.”²⁵

This grounding in a constant and sustaining earth may help us understand why egyptians attained an extraordinary level of artistic, architectural, and moral excellence. “The ‘gods’ and ‘goddesses’ of Egypt literally sprang from the soil and the water of the river, and literally were one with the air and the creatures which flew through it, all interweaving into the phenomenon of the country itself.” Everything, and every creature, was imbued with the force of life: “The hieroglyphic word for beetle means ‘to be.’ The beetle and sun are both analogs of the same force, not symbols.” For the earth-bonded person, in Africa, Sicily, and elsewhere, “The name of the thing and the thing itself are the same.”²⁶

Earth-bonded theology is not ponderous. In one egyptian creation story, the creator Amun runs around honking after laying an egg. Africans, who regard their deities familiarly, call Amun the “Great Cackler.” Similarly, africans attributed animal characteristics to humans, and human characteristics to animals, identifying divinity with animal and human forms.²⁷ Sometimes the goddess was a cow named Hathor, other times she was a woman with a Hathor headdress. Horus, son of Isis, could be a hawk, sometimes a man with a hawk’s head, or a child in the arms of his mother.²⁸ Harmony between humans and animals characterized ancient Africa, as did harmony between men and women, a contentment visible in many depictions of embracing couples. Seeing life as a spiral, africans believed new life came from death.



The Black Madonna at Santa Maria de Montserrat Benedictine Monastery in the Montserrat Mountains in Catalonia. In the fifteenth century, the Basque soldier Iñigo de Loyola hung up his military equipment before this image and began the pursuit of mysticism, founding a religious order which followed a policy of practical mysticism (“Contemplatives in Action”), deeply devoted to Mary. The evening hymn sung each night before this Black Madonna begins, “Rose of April, Dark Lady of the Mountain Chain...”

Isis melded with Ma'at, african goddess whose name connotes mother,²⁹ and with Sekhmet, whose name means “powerful one.” Ma'at had a feather on her head that signified justice. Many representations of Isis (as well as of Ma'at) have feathers. Feathers, an egyptian guide advised us, connote equality, since they are the same, back and front. When a person died, his or her heart, the seat of intelligence, would be weighed on a scale balanced by the feather of Ma'at. If the heart was not as light as the feather, the soul would be lost to Apet, the devourer.

Ma'at, or mother, embodied truth, ethics, justice, and righteous behavior.³⁰ Sekhmet, the fierce aspect of the african dark mother, was a woman with a lion's head. Hundreds of statues of Sekhmet were found in the temple of Mut in Karnak. Like Isis, Sekhmet originally carried a sun disk on her head and an ankh, signifying



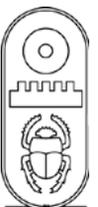
Goddess on a coffin fragment, Twenty-second Dynasty (1064-717 BCE). Many aspects of different Goddesses are combined in this protective image: the headdress of Isis, the face of Sekhmet, the color of Wadjet, and the wings of Mut. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

life, in her hand. The ankh is said to prefigure the christian cross, although the christian symbol has no female oval.³¹

African Isis melded with anatolian Cybele, sumerian Inanna, canaanite Astarte, and roman Diana. Isis' distinguishing images were a throne, a boat, sails, and the annual flooding of the Nile. Often depicted with outstretched wings, Isis harks back to the paleolithic bird and snake goddess of Africa. Attesting to african migrations' carrying african beliefs to all continents, a contemporary native american figurine is that of a venerated woman with wings. A 20th century sicilian artist depicted comari, women who bonded together in memory of the mother, sheltered by protective wings of Isis.

In antiquity, at Byblos in west Asia, african Isis was identified with the canaanite goddess Astarte. With hellenization, Isis became the great mother; her consort Osiris, or “the great black,” became Zeus, Pluto, and Dionysus. The enduring truth of Isis, whose civilization centered in nubian Meroe, may be that she embodied veneration of all life...trees are sacred, so are birds, crocodiles, the dung beetle, the hooded cobra, and all living creatures.

R.E. Witt, historian, following the transformation of a “purely African faith into a world religion,” points out that african veneration of Isis became greek, then graeco-roman³² as greek and roman empires swept through Africa, Europe, and Asia. After 332 BCE, when Alexander of Macedonia conquered Egypt, Alexandria in Africa became the capitol of an empire that stretched from the Nile to the Danube, a city where africans, asians, europeans, jews, and greeks mingled, where Osiris became Aesculapius, or Serapis, healing god of Greece and Rome, and Isis, blending with anatolian Cybele, canaanite Astarte, and graeco-roman goddesses, became great mother of the Mediterranean.³³



All over the known world in the first centuries of the common era, slaves and noble women venerated african Isis as a divinity who “prevailed through the force of love, pity, compassion, and her personal concern for sorrows.”³⁴ Before christianity did so, the religion of Isis promised life after death. Isis centers have been found throughout the roman empire; in Gaul, Portugal, Spain, Britain, Germany, and Italy, particularly in places that later became sanctuaries of black madonnas.³⁵

In Italy, Isis was a mother divinity associated with healing; the 6th century BCE temple to Isis at Pompeii is located next to a temple of Aesculapius, or Serapis.³⁶ A significant characteristic of Isis, one later associated with the christian madonna, was that she was a compassionate mother. In the christian epoch her son Horus was represented as a christ figure. Isis is often depicted with a laurel wreath and two prominent ears, symbolizing that she listened with both ears to the prayers of all those who came to her, an image that can be found to this day in italian folklore.

Water, always associated with Isis, held a sacred quality: holy water, holy rivers, and holy sea. The serpent, identified with Isis; was always sacred. Hathor, was associated with regeneration. The cow, another image of Isis, became sacred in India. Music, associated with Isis, was conveyed by the image of Isis carrying a sistrum, a rattle still heard in african music today. Isis and wheat, in the roman epoch, became Ceres and wheat. In the christian epoch Isis became santa Lucia, whose images always carry a sheaf of wheat. The olive tree, associated with Isis, has today become symbol of nonviolent transformation. Italy’s contemporary nonviolent left political coalition is named: L’Ulivo, or the olive tree.³⁷

Mistress of religion in Egypt, Isis was god the mother, yet in Isis there was no division between feminine and masculine. She was beloved by women and men, young and old,



Isis giving milk, the favorite image of the Goddess for the Roman world. Collection of the Louvre. Photo © 2007, Rama/Wikimedia Commons.

and all social classes. Her statue at Philae, created between the second and first centuries before Jesus, carries the sistrum in one hand and the ankh in the other. In her 600 BCE image in the Museum of Cairo, Isis is figured as a black nursing mother, who bears a startling resemblance to christian images of the nursing madonna.

Veneration of Isis, her spouse Osiris, and son Horus persisted in all the pharaonic dynasties, a 3,000 year old history when belief in Isis spread from Meroe and Alexandria to “the whole Mediterranean basin.”³⁸ In Italy and other latin countries where the holy family is a focus of devotion, the trinity of Isis and her husband and child became the popular christian trinity of Maria, Joseph, and Jesus, popular trinity that differs from the motherless trinity—father, son, and holy ghost—of canonical christianity.

At african Memphis, hymns praised Isis as a civilizing, universal divinity who had ended cannibalism, instituted good laws, and given birth to agriculture, arts and letters, moral principle, good customs, and justice. Mistress of medicine, healer of human maladies, sovereign of earth and seas, protectress from navigational perils and war, Isis was “Dea della salvezza per eccellenza...veglia anche sulla morte,” divinity of salvation par excellence, who also watches over the dead.³⁹



Amulet bearing the name of Vizier Paser, with Isis and Hathor; gold, gold leaf and amazonite, New Kingdom. Excavated from the Serapeum of Memphis. Collection of the Louvre. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.

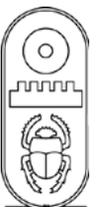
The signal relevance of the dark mother Isis to our own time may be that she signifies nonviolent transformation. The cosmology and psychology of this value of nonviolence may be realized if we understand that in Isis, who gave “light to the sun,” there was no division of female from male, and no separation of one female from another. Her sister Ma’at, with whom she melded, was goddess of truth. Isis and Ma’at epitomized order in nature, a principle carried forward by Pythagoras and his followers in the greek period, and by scientists thereafter. In the african civilization of Isis, human beings and social justice were joined.

Each human was judged at death by Ma’at’s feather of justice, and by the negative confession: “I have not committed iniquity....I have not oppressed the poor.... I have not

defaulted.... I have not caused the slave to be ill-treated.... I have not murdered.... I have not made any to weep.... I have not falsified the beam of the balance.”⁴⁰ Values of the isiac negative confession suggest why, in the 20th century, Simone Weil held that hebrew scriptures were indebted to egyptian sacred writings.⁴¹

Isis was appropriated by Greece and Rome in cults of Hera, Demeter, Fortuna, Ceres, and Juno, and by christianity in cults of saints—notably Lucia.⁴² Roman emperors and christian fathers destroyed her temples, but the legacy of the african dark mother, despite attempted obliteration and suppression, has persisted in art. The memory may be glimpsed in Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, african in appearance, who bear a startling resemblance to Isis and to the many black madonnas in this region of France.⁴³

For Jean Leclant, egyptologist at the Academy of France, “Isis, mother of Horus, triumphant, but at the same time broken-hearted, prefigures the Madonna col Bambino of the christian religion.”⁴⁴ Black madonnas of Europe, and other dark female divinities of the world, may be the most tangible evidence we have of the deep and persistent memory of the african dark mother. Her continuing legacy is marked by passionate identification with the oppressed and with values of justice with compassion, equality, and transformation. In the christian epoch, Isis’ temple at Pompeii was succeeded by many sanctuaries of black madonnas. At Pomigliano dell’Arco, rituals venerating the black madonna are fervent. At Montevergine, suggesting how her icons carry the history of the subaltern, the black madonna is called black slave mother. At Foggia, where peasant communists would come in pilgrimage to her, the black image is called l’Immacolata.⁴⁵ Black madonnas may be found throughout Italy, as documented in my book, *Black Madonnas*, and throughout the world....



In Sicily, on first migration paths from Africa, the memory of Isis is everywhere. Dozens of icons of Isis along with Bastet, her cat familiar, may be seen in sicilian museums. At carnival time, throughout the christian epoch to the present, figures of Isis and her cat express the laughter of subaltern peoples at church and state.

In Africa in the fifth century of the common era, nubians and their neighbors took up arms to prevent forced dedication to christianity of temples of Isis at Philae. Yet by the middle of the sixth century, byzantine emperors had imposed a patriarchal version of christianity as state religion on Nubia. When, less than a century later, islamic invaders took Egypt, nubians resisted but finally negotiated a treaty in which they kept christianity and political sovereignty. In the 15th century when Nubia fell to arab nomads, islam became the state religion. Yet, in Africa, underneath patriarchal religions of christianity and islam, the memory persists to this day of the ancient dark mother.⁴⁶

Glimpsed in daily and festival rituals, the memory may be closer to bodily resonance than to cognitive remembrance. The memory has persisted in Africa in contemporary rituals, as well as in rituals in all lands reached by african migrants, which is to say all continents of the world. Victor Turner, in fieldwork among the ndembu, a mother-centered culture of northwest Zambia, describes a

girls' puberty ritual when a young woman is separated from her mother and her childhood dies. The ritual is enacted under a milk tree that exudes milky white latex. Echoes of this ritual of the separation of mother and daughter may be found in many of the world's myths, notably the myth of Demetra and Proserpina. For the ndembu, the milk tree is said to be, not symbolize, milk, lactation, breasts, and nubility. It is also the place "where the ancestress slept," where the novice's grandmother, mother, and all ndembu women, were initiated into womanhood, and where the tribe began. For the ndembu, the milk tree is the principle of matrilineage, mother-centeredness, and is the whole ndembu nation.

The memory of the dark mother also persists in contemporary african popular beliefs. For the yoruba of Africa, the spiral, sign of the mother, determines life. Everything is constantly moving in a spiraling motion. "The whole life span of a man or a woman is a journey. That is our belief...All movements are journeys. We are progressing, we are moving."⁴⁷ In this movement, yoruba women have a strong sense of their own power, enabling them to accommodate to male insecurities. For example, two wives wrap the hair of a transvestite priest of Agemo in female style.⁴⁸ Yoruba women are economically independent, and become dramatically so when they reach menopause,



Black Madonna and Child of Tindari, Sicily, eleventh-twelfth centuries. The inscription is from the Song of Songs 1:5 in the Hebrew Scriptures: "I am black and beautiful..." Photo © 2006 Clemensfranz/Wikimedia Commons.



Fausto and Felice Niccolini, painting of the Temple of Isis in Pompeii. Published in *Le case e i monumenti di Pompei* (1854-1896).

or when they become grandmothers, at which time they declare independence from domestic work.

The civilization of Isis has bequeathed to contemporary africans, and to other earth-bonded peoples, a “high degree of tolerance towards the gods and the religious practices of those they encountered.” It has been common practice in Africa simply to incorporate the gods of others into their own pantheon “with an all-inclusiveness that saw all deities as one more manifestation of the same overarching principle.”⁴⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ Burchard Brentjes, *African Rock Art*, Anthony Dent, trans., (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1965), 71.

² William Y. Adams, “Ceramics,” in *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 127. The priority of africans in making tools was underlined in the recent discovery of a 2.3 million year old “tool factory” in Kenya. See “Ancient tool ‘factory’ linked to pre-humans,” *The Vancouver Sun*, May 6, 1999.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See Adams, *Africa in Antiquity*, “Foreword,” by Michael Botwinick. See Jocelyn Gohary, *Guide to the Nubian Monuments on Lake Nasser* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1998). See page 14 for Meroe, where women held high status. On our 1999 visit to Nubia in Upper Egypt, we noted that in the small temple to the queen at Abu Simbel, she is of equal stature with the king. She wears the Hathor head dress of cow horns surmounted by a sun disk with the two plumes (connoting equality), and holds the sistrum against her breast.

⁵ See Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, and Politics in Italy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

⁶ *Ibid.* 13.

⁷ Adams, *Africa in Antiquity*, “Geography and Population of the Nile Valley,” 17.

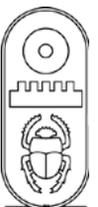
⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ See “Goddesses,” in *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*, Anne K. Capel and Glenn E. Markoe, eds., (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with Cincinnati Art Museum, 1996), 121ff.

¹⁰ See John H. Taylor, *Egypt and Nubia* (London, The British Museum Press, 1991).

¹¹ William Y. Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 338.

¹² *Ibid.*



¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵ Capel, *Mistress of the House*, 9

¹⁶ See Lawrence DiStasi, *Mal Occhio (evil eye), the Underside of Vision* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981).

¹⁷ R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World, Aspects of Greek and Roman Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). For the higher respect given to women in ancient Egypt than to women in the high culture of Greece, see Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Stephen Quirke and Jeffrey Spencer, eds., *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt* (London, British Museum Press, 1992). 196.

¹⁹ "Guardate bene Iside sembra una Madonna," *La Curiosità, la Repubblica*, 29 agosto 2000.

²⁰ Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass: The Transformations of Lucius...A New Translation by Robert Graves from Apuleius* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951), 264-266.

²¹ See Luisah Teish, "Introduction," in *Carnival of the Spirit: Season Celebrations and Rites of Passage* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 22. See also, Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 1992), 22.

²² See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

²³ D. Jean Collins, "The Message of Meroe," *Gnosis* (magazine), Spring 1990, no. 15.

²⁴ Stefania Adamo Muscettola, "La decorazione architettonica e l'arredo," Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Province di Napoli e Caserta, *Alla ricerca di Iside. Analisi, studi e restauri dell'Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli* (Napoli, Italia: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, 1992).

²⁵ Michael Crisp, "The Spirit of Egypt," *Gnosis* (magazine), Spring 1990, no. 15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Sylvia Schoske, ed., "Votive Figurines," in *Egyptian Art in Munich* (München: Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst München, 1993), 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., "Figure of the goddess Mut," 52.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., "Standing statue of Sekhmet," 38.

³² Witt, *Isis*. See also, Muscettola, *Alla ricerca di Iside, Analisi, studi e restauri dell'Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli* (Roma, Arti S.p.A., 1992).

³³ Witt, *Isis*, 69. Although Witt echoes some eurocentric notions ("Our western World's Graeco-Roman and Christian civilization has emerged and taken shape out of the cultural melting pot of the Near East."), he presents a great deal of evidence for the theme of this book that Africa was the origin of modern humans whose demic migrations left a significant african legacy to world civilization; e.g., "From Memphis and Alexandria the cult of Isis and her Temple Associates shed an incalculable influence on other rival faiths, including even Christianity." (preface). Witt, a lecturer in Classics at Queen Mary College, University of London, where he specializes in greek and roman religion, has written an indispensable book, first published in 1971, for the education of contemporary classicists and others who denounce "afro-centrism." A Witt sampling: "Egypt for its inhabitants was the Black Land." (14). "Throughout the 4,000 years of Egyptian history every Pharaoh was the incarnation of the youthful Horus, and therefore was the son of Isis, the Goddess Mother who had suckled and reared him." (15). "Herodotus, [who] had earlier stayed in Egypt and had written about its religion...concluded that its gods had been appropriated by the cities of Greece." (16). "Later antiquity could think of Isis as the Egyptian soil which the Nile commingles with and fructifies." (19). "Already in the Ptolemaic age she was known at Philae as Isis of the Innumerable Names. Now, however, she was identified with all the purely anthropomorphic goddesses of the Graeco-Roman Pantheon...Demeter and her daughter Persephone... Pallas Athena...Aphrodite and Venus...Hera... Artemis...Wisdom (Sophia)..."(20). "In Italy itself the Egyptian faith was a dominant force. At Pompeii, as the archaeological evidence reveals...Isis played a major role. In the capitol, temples were built in her honor...obelisks were set up, and emperors bowed to her name. Harbours of Isis were to be found on the Arabian Gulf and the Black Sea. Inscriptions show that she found faithful followers in Gaul and Spain, in Pannonia and Germany. She held sway from Arabia and Asia Minor in the east to Portugal and Britain in the west and shrines were hallowed to her in cities large and small...Beneventum, the Piraeus, London." (21). "The friend of slaves and sinners, of the artisans and the downtrodden, at the same time she heard the prayers of the wealthy..." (23). "The cult of Isis had its cradle in northeast Africa, in Egypt and Ethiopia." (23).

"To understand ancient Egyptian religion at all, and especially the religion of Isis, we must recognize the sacredness of life in all its forms for the whole Nile civilization." (25). "...the cult of animals doubtless followed after the worship of sacred tree..." (26).

“Animals were generally symbols of divinity.” (28). “...the ankh...a case of an Isiac symbol prefiguring a characteristically Christian token, the cross.” (32). “Throughout the long history of Egyptian religion Isis and her brother-husband remained complementary deities.” (36). “...Byblos in Phoenicia...where Egyptian antiquities have been unearthed was a point of economic and religious contact between Phoenicia and the Nile country. It was there that Osiris was assimilated to Adonis (Thammuz) and Isis herself into Astarte (Istar, Ashtaroth).” (43). “...rites of Dionysus and Demeter bore the closest resemblance to those of Osiris and Isis.” (67). “...in the Cyclades Isis was blended with Artemis...” (68). “But Isis on Delos is even more than an Egyptian turned Greek. For besides her identification with Aphrodite, Tyche, Nike, Hygieia...and Artemis, she is also invoked as Astarte of Phoenicia, as the Mother of the gods, and as the Great Mother.” (68-69). “The obelisks formerly belonging to the Iseum Campestre are now in the Squares called Pantheon, Dogali, Minerva, and Navona [in Rome].” (87). Among the holy servants of Isis, “The Synod of the Wearers of Black... paid particular devotion to Isis as ‘the black-robed queen.’” (97). “Isis and her companion gods from Egypt gained a foothold in Italian cities by a readiness to take a comparatively low rank...friend of the masses...her home hard by the business and trading center dear to the common man.” (136-137).

“Herodotus states that the first people to institute festivals, processions, and religious presentations were the Egyptians...and the Greeks have got their knowledge from them.” (165). “Isis was an insidiously dangerous foe for Christian theologians because she was believed to give her worshippers their daily bread.” (180). “The ritual of the Christian Church owes a considerable and unacknowledged debt to the Egyptian religion that preceded it in the Graeco-Roman world.” (184). “In the theology and art of Gnosticism Horus and Christ could easily be blended.” (218). “In the middle of the first century AD Isiacism, far from being dead, was in the ascendant.” (259).

“The evidence is unimpeachable that the places where Paul preached cultivated the faith of Isis.” (261). “Augustine...remarks that no idolatry is more profound and more superstitious than that of Egypt.” (262). “... agape is a cult name for Isis, who in Egyptian tradition as old as the Pyramid Texts personifies tenderness, compassion and divine love.” (266). “Clearly the Pauline view of Isiacism was penetratingly critical. Paul’s world was a patriarchy, his religion was Christological and monotheistic, and God was found in fashion as a man. Isis was female, Isis was the champion of idolatry, and Isis was the lover of the Nile menagerie. And yet the Pauline and the Isiac faith had at least one common characteristic. Each swept aside racial and

social distinctions. “There is neither Greek nor Jew... Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.’ Change Christ to Isis...and the words are still true.” (268). “Giordano Bruno...was convinced that the wisdom and magic-born religion of ancient Egypt excelled the fanatical theology that burnt dissident thinkers as heretics...the unfrocked monk, perished on 1 February 1600 for his intransigent denial that Christianity was unique.” (269).

³⁴ Schoske, *Egyptian Art in Munich*, 60.

³⁵ Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *dark mother: african origins and godmothers* (Lincoln, NE: Authors Choice Press, an imprint of iUniverse, Inc., 2001), chapter 4.

³⁶ *Superintendenza Archeologica per le Province di Napoli e Caserta, Alla ricerca di Iside. Analisi*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16

³⁸ “Iside, Mito Mistero Magia,” *Archeologia Viva*, marzo-april 3 1997.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Asphodel P. Long, *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions, The Search for the Female in Deity* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1993), 85. See also David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses, Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴¹ For Weil, see Birnbaum, *dark mother*, chapter 2.

⁴² Birnbaum, *dark mother*, chapter 5.

⁴³ See Ladislav Segy, *African Sculpture Speaks*, 4th edition, enlarged (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., a subsidiary of Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1969, 1975), 7. See also Birnbaum, *dark mother*, chapter 4.

⁴⁴ “Iside in Mostra a Milano. Un’inedita rassegna a Palazzo Reale,” *Archeologia Viva*, marzo-april 1997. In the hostile protestant environment of the United States, it is remarkable that memory of Isis can be found at all; one significant source for the memory in the United States is Hilda Doolittle’s (H.D.) *Helen in Egypt*. I am indebted to Clare Fischer for presenting this theme to our women’s group.

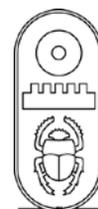
⁴⁵ See Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas* (see note 5).

⁴⁶ Quirke & Spencer, *British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*. For Egyptian interchange with sub-Saharan Nubia, see 39-41, 202-19.

⁴⁷ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women & Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995). 32.

⁴⁸ M. Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 72, 130.

⁴⁹ See Anna Joyce, “Dark Mother as Symbol of Resistance in Haiti, A Historical Overview,” term paper for class, Dark Mother, *California Institute of Integral Studies*, Spring, 2000.



CLEMENCE ISAURE: THE ROSICRUCIAN GOLDEN ISIS

Grand Master Julie Scott, S.R.C.

Isis, in one of her many manifestations, was present at the transmission of the Rose+Croix Tradition from the Rosicrucians of Toulouse to H. Spencer Lewis and the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, in August 1909. Grand Master Julie Scott traces the fascinating story of this Golden Isis from the Middle Ages to the beginnings of this phase of Rosicrucian work.



Henri Martin, *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours* (detail). Reprinted with the permission of the Capitole, Toulouse, France.

In 1909 a young H. Spencer Lewis stood before this painting, *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure (the Golden Isis) to the Troubadours*, contemplating its mystical meaning, when the Grand Master of the Rosicrucians of Toulouse presented himself and directed H. Spencer Lewis to the next step in his initiation into the Rosicrucian tradition, which eventually led to the founding of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC.

Why in this place, the *Hall of the Illustrious* in Toulouse's Capitole (city hall), and before this painting, did the Grand Master choose to present himself

to the American mystic who would later re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America as the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis? The answer goes back to the ancient mystery traditions, perpetuated by our Order and so beautifully symbolized in this painting.

Who Was Clemence Isaure?

The name *Clemence* means clemency or mercy, and *Isaure* means Isis of gold, or Golden Isis. Several sources describe Clemence Isaure as an actual person, who lived in the Territory of Oc in the late 1400s and early 1500s, whose beauty and talent were rare and inspiring. Others say she was a fictional character created to perpetuate the feminine traditions of earlier times.

According to legend, following the death of her troubadour love, who praised her through his beautiful songs and whom she adored, Clemence Isaure took a vow of chastity and silence. Before doing so, however, she established an endowment for the city of Toulouse to re-establish the poetry contests of the *Gai Savoir*, a poetry society established in 1323, through a new group called the *Jeux Floraux*.

Antoine-Augustin Préault, statue of Clemence Isaure, marble, 1846. Part of the series of famous women in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. Photo © 2008 by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.





The Occitan Cross.

Clemence Isaure symbolized noble action, beauty, and wisdom inspired through poetry. Above all, she represented the perpetuation of the ancient mysteries, especially those associated with the feminine and particularly with the goddess, Isis.

The Mysterious Territory of Oc

In the Middle Ages, the southern half of what is now France, parts of Spain, and Monaco were called Occitania or the Territory of Oc. Today this region is referred to as the Languedoc (the language of Oc) or L'Occitanie. The vibrant Occitan culture allowed equal rights for women and men, encouraged understanding and dialogue between all faiths, provided excellent education for its citizens, and was very peaceful and prosperous.

Drawing heavily on older mystical traditions, the first versions of Kabbalah emerged from this area in the early twelfth century. The Cathars, a sect of Christian mystics whose beliefs most likely originated from the traditions of Old Europe and Manichaeism (Persian Gnosticism), also lived in the Languedoc and other parts of Europe beginning in the eleventh century.

The kings of northern France (a separate country at the time) and the Roman Catholic Church wanted the wealth, land, and converts of the Languedoc, especially of the Cathars, so these two powerful forces plotted against the people of Oc, resulting in their persecution and the near extinction of the Occitan traditions,

at least their public presence, in the 1200s. As many as 500,000 people of the Languedoc, including Christians, Jews, and other mystics, may have been murdered during the twenty-year Albigensian Crusade and the century-long Inquisition that followed.

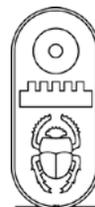
The troubadours, who sang in the language of Oc, found a veiled way to perpetuate the Occitan traditions and their source, the ancient mysteries, through poetic symbolism. While the troubadours appeared to be singing about the love of a man for a woman, they were really referring to the laws of spiritual love. They were expressing the bliss of union with the Divine and the peace that results from this communion. One of the symbols the troubadours used to represent the inner desire of the soul for this mystical union was the rose.

The *Gai Savoir* and *Jeux Floraux*

Following the intense persecution in the area, in 1323 seven individuals in Toulouse, known as the seven troubadours, founded a mystical society called the *Gai Savoir*, meaning “happy knowledge.” The exoteric mission of



The Troubadour Singing to His Love. The Hall of the Illustrious in Toulouse's Capitole displays a series of three murals depicting a troubadour singing to his Love—as a young man, as a middle-aged man (as illustrated here), and as an elderly man. The woman, representing the eternal tradition, remains forever young in the series. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.



this society was to make the world a happier and better place through poetry. Though veiled, the esoteric meaning of their poetry was clear for those with eyes to see.

The seven troubadours circulated a letter to all the poets in the Languedoc, inviting them to present their poetry at a contest the following May (1324). The panel of seven judges chose the winners, who were awarded a violet (its color symbolic of the highest mystical degree), a marigold (representing the philosophical gold), and the wild rose.

The *Gai Savoir* operated as an Order, with a philosophy and rules that they called “the laws of love.” They gathered together the ancient mystical traditions that had been scattered over the centuries, preserved and discreetly perpetuated them.

During the Wars of Religion in France during the 1500s (a century of horrible wars between the French Catholics and Protestant Huguenots), the *Gai Savoir* became dormant. The group later reappeared in the form of the *Jeux Floraux*, with the allegorical discovery of a tomb, similar to the way in which Christian Rosenkreuz’s tomb was found and opened.



The First Meeting of the Jeux Floraux, the Very Joyful Company of the Seven Troubadours, May 3, 1324, by Jean-Paul Laurens, 1912. Exhibited on the Grand Staircase leading up to the *Hall of the Illustrious* in the Capitole, Toulouse, France.¹

The tomb, which was discovered in Toulouse, was that of Clemence Isaure, the allegorical founder of the *Jeux Floraux*. Flowers were also found in this tomb, alluding to the floral prizes earlier awarded by the *Gai Savoir*. The basilica where the tomb is said to be located, called *La Dourade*, is on the site of the first Visigoth temple in Gaul, a previous temple to Minerva (Isis), and today is dedicated to “the black Madonna,” with a beautiful statue of her overlooking the main chapel.

The Rosicrucians Announce Their Presence in France

In 1623, following the publication of the three Rosicrucian manifestos in 1614, 1615, and 1616, the Rosicrucians announced their presence in France by plastering the walls of Paris with mysterious and intriguing posters.

We, the Deputies of the Higher College of the Rose-Croix, do make our stay, visibly and invisibly, in this city, by the grace of the Most High, to Whom turn the hearts of the Just....

He who takes it upon himself to see us merely out of curiosity will never make contact with us. But if his inclination seriously impels him to register in our fellowship, we, who are judges of intentions, will cause him to see the truth of our promises; to the extent that we shall not make known the place of our meeting in this city, since the thoughts attached to the real desire of the seeker will lead us to him and him to us.

Following this and the influence of the Enlightenment, Napoleon and Egyptosophy, Freemasonry, Martinism, Theosophy, Magnetism, and other traditions, the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a flowering of Rosicrucian orders in France. These included the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse (in the Languedoc) and the *Rose+Croix* of France.



Poster for the
Rosicrucian
Salons, 1892.

Clemence Isaure—the Painting

From 1892 to 1897 under the direction of Joséphin Péladan (who had strong ties to the *Jeux Floraux* and the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse), the *Rose+Croix* of France organized the Salons of the *Rose-Croix* in Paris. These salons, which hosted tens of thousands of guests each year, presented music and Rosicrucian ritual, as well as art. Well-known composer and Rosicrucian Erik Satie was named the musical director of the Order of the *Rose+Croix* in the early 1890s. Claude Debussy, Satie's friend and one of France's greatest composers, was also a Rosicrucian.

The Rosicrucian Salons exhibited the works of many painters of the Symbolist movement, including Henri Martin from Toulouse, whose paintings were exhibited in 1892. That same year Martin was commissioned to create a number of paintings for the *Hall of the Illustrious* in Toulouse's Capitole. He chose as his theme—the *Jeux Floraux*.

One of these paintings is *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours*. In it, Clemence Isaure shows the seven troubadours the charter of the *Jeux Floraux*, which includes the rose and the cross. She is accompanied by three Muses and by the goddess Minerva, the Egyptian Isis.

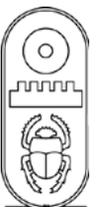
H. Spencer Lewis and *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours*

In 1908, twenty-four-year-old H. Spencer Lewis had a mystical experience in which he was directed to seek out the Rosicrucians in France. Not knowing exactly where to begin, he wrote to a Parisian bookseller who had recently sent him a catalog of mystical books, to ask if he might be able to help him in his quest. The bookseller suggested that H. Spencer Lewis come to Paris.

Following many synchronistic events, H. Spencer Lewis was able to travel to Paris a year and a half later. After meeting with the bookseller and passing many tests and trials, through many cities in France, H. Spencer Lewis was mysteriously handed a note directing him to go to the *Hall of the Illustrious* in the Capitole of Toulouse at a particular time. He was to speak of this to no one.



Henri Martin,
The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours.
Reprinted with the permission of the Capitole, Toulouse, France.



There he silently stood on that day, before this painting, contemplating its mystical meaning. A man in the gallery made a sign (a Rosicrucian sign) that he had seen at other points on his journey. H. Spencer Lewis said to him, “Pardon, Monsieur, but I believe I am addressing a gentleman who has some information for one who is seeking Light.”

The man replied “Yes” in French, and then asked him why he chose to study this painting in particular. H. Spencer Lewis replied, “Because, Monsieur, it seems so beautiful, so wonderful, and expresses what I believe. I see in it a very mysterious meaning, a symbol of—”

Satisfied with this answer the man then handed H. Spencer Lewis a note with instructions on how to proceed. This man was the Grand Master of the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse, who was probably Clovis Lassalle, a well-known photographer (of historic buildings and archival documents) and mystic of Toulouse. Through the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse, the *Jeux Floraux*, and the Archaeological Society of Midi, Grand Master Lassalle was associated with those who had directed H. Spencer Lewis on his initiatory journey, including the Parisian bookseller and those who would later initiate H. Spencer Lewis into the Rosicrucian tradition.

At midnight on August 12, 1909, H. Spencer Lewis received his mystical initiation into the Rosicrucian tradition, in a Rosicrucian Lodge in an ancient chateau



H. Spencer Lewis, 1915.



Clovis Lassalle, Grand Master of the Rosicrucians of France, 1915.

outside of Toulouse. Here he also accepted the charter to re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America, thereby perpetuating the ancient mysteries that so significantly contributed to it, beautifully symbolized by the inspiring image of Clemence Isaure, the Rosicrucian Golden Isis.

ENDNOTE

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THE VEIL OF ISIS: THE EVOLUTION OF AN ARCHETYPE HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

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The image of the Veil of Isis has persisted through the centuries from ancient Egyptian Saïs—where Athena and Isis were identified as one—to the present day. Originally, a symbol of wisdom, initiation, and the Mysteries, it has successively become an image of protection, of the secrets of nature, of hidden history and truths to be revealed. In each historical context the Veil is an invitation to delve further into the truths which have been hidden in plain sight from the eyes of those who will not see.

The origins of the Veil of Isis are lost in the mists of time, however, we can pick up the trail of the story in the important late dynastic Egyptian city of Saïs, where the Divine Feminine was very much revered and active.

Saïs, the provincial capital of the fifth Nome of ancient Egypt in the western Nile Delta near the Mediterranean, was dedicated to the Goddess Neith. Saïs rose to prominence in the Twenty-fourth

The Goddess Neith, Lady of Saïs, Saite Period (664-525 BCE). Although missing her arms, which were made separately, this is one of the finest representations of the Goddess. The shape of her body and the smile on her face betray her date as during the Saite Period, when she was venerated as the Goddess of the Egyptian Capital. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

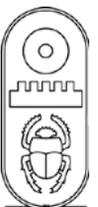


Dynasty (eighth century BCE) and during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (seventh-sixth centuries BCE), to which it gives its name: The Saite Dynasty.

Saïs's patroness, Neith, was known as a goddess of war, but more importantly, since her name can mean "water," she was identified with the primordial waters out of which all manifestation arose—the Mother of all things. Because of this, she was also patroness of the household arts, especially weaving, of nursing mothers, as she is the "nursing mother," and of wisdom. As "The Weaver" she weaves all of the manifested cosmos into being on her loom. In her role as the primordial source of all things, she transcended gender to encompass all.¹

Assimilation of the Goddesses into One

Another claim to fame of Saïs was the nearby "grave of Osiris," and Osirian Mysteries were carried out on an adjacent island in the delta. It was natural therefore for Isis and Neith, both very ancient goddesses, to be assimilated to one another. Further, Greek visitors to Saïs such as Herodotus, Plato, and Diodorus Siculus also identified this Neith-Isis with Athena, holding that Athena built the city before she founded Athens, and that when Athens and Atlantis were destroyed by the great flood, Saïs survived. Thus the triple Goddess Neith-Isis-Athena was worshiped at the goddess's shrine at Saïs, a combination of very ancient feminine divinities.²





Bas-relief sculpture of the Roman goddess Minerva (Athena) recovered from the ruins of Herculaneum (Area Sacra Suburbana), ca. first century BCE—first century CE. Collection of the Herculaneum Deposito Archeologico. Photo by Ken Thomas/Wikimedia Commons.

Plutarch, in commenting on the truths hidden in Egyptian religion, recounts that this shrine contains a most striking inscription:

“And the shrine of Athena at Saïs (whom they consider the same as Isis) bears this inscription, ‘I am all that hath been, and is, and shall be; and my veil no mortal has hitherto raised.’”³

This ties together the universality of the divinity of Isis—consonant with her identity with Neith, the Primordial Source of all that is, with the evocative symbol of the Veil of Isis, concealing unglimpsed mysteries. It is that symbol, the Veil covering the Source of All from our gaze, that has inspired philosophers, mystics, and artists for two millennia.

The Veil in Religious Symbolism

In religious imagery, the Veil of Isis was translated into Christian terms, easily understandable given the substantial parallels

between both the Egyptian and the Universal Isis, and the Virgin Mary. A particular example of this veil imagery occurred in the Roman Capital, Constantinople. On several occasions, in the ninth, tenth and fourteenth centuries, the Virgin was seen in the Church of Blachernae spreading her veil over The City in protection from invasion and epidemics.⁴

A feast-day was established for this “Protection of the Theotokos (God-Bearer)” on October 1, and has become one of the most popular feasts among Slavic Byzantine (Orthodox and Catholic) Christians, still celebrated today, called *Pokrov*, or Holy Protection, and today transferred in Greece to “Ochi Day,” October 28, when, in 1940, Greek Prime Minister Metaxas rejected Mussolini’s ultimatum.⁵

This icon of the protective veil of the Virgin seems to have also spread to Western Europe and Roman Catholicism in the “Virgin of Mercy” image, showing the Virgin Mary spreading open her cloak/veil which covers and protects those who are kneeling beside her. The first known instance of this image is from Italy in about 1280.⁶

The Veil of Nature

The Veil of Isis has also become an image of the secrets of nature, philosophy, and history.



Russian Icon of the Holy Protection (Pokrov), late fourteenth century.



Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Virgin of the Franciscans* (Virgin of Mercy), ca. 1280. The first known version of this image in the West. National Gallery of Sienna. Photo: The Yorck Project/Wikimedia Commons.

Even in ancient times, there was controversy over how to describe nature and nature's secrets. Heraclitus reputedly taught "Nature loves to hide itself."⁷ Pierre Hadot, a modern philosopher and cultural historian, identifies two approaches prevalent throughout the Western European Medieval, Renaissance, and modern periods, for discovering the "secrets of nature."⁸ The "Promethian" approach was seen as "stealing Nature's secrets," much as the mythic Titan stole the Fire of the Gods. Along this path is mechanistic technological work, which seeks to dominate nature. The "Orphic" approach, on the other hand is one of creative, artistic union with nature, in order to discover her secrets through an initiatic gnosis.

Artemis of Ephesus

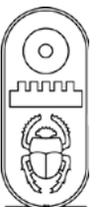
One further ancient Goddess was destined to be assimilated to Isis at the dawn of the modern world. From as early as the Bronze Age, the Goddess Artemis

(Diana for the Romans) was worshiped at her magnificent temple in Ephesus (near modern-day Selçuk in Turkey). The Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and contained a statue of the goddess which undoubtedly pre-dated Hellenic culture, to which great cultic significance was attached.⁹

She is covered by dozens of milk-giving breasts—*polymaston*¹⁰—indicating that she is the source of all life.¹¹ The Greco-Roman manifestation of this Goddess is probably an assimilation of the older Anatolian "Mistress of Nature and Life" who was worshiped in the same area.¹² We can consider the parallel imagery with the ancient Egyptian Neith, the Primordial source of all Being, "nursur of crocodiles."



Artemis of Ephesus, marble and bronze. Roman copy of an Hellenistic original of the second century BCE. Albani Collection. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.



Auguste Puttemans (1866-1927), *Statue of Isis*. The statue was given to President Herbert Hoover by the people of Belgium in 1922. It is currently located at the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in West Branch, Iowa. Photo by Ammodramus/Wikimedia Commons.



At the beginning of the sixteenth century, this representation of Artemis as an allegory for Nature resurfaces in the art of the Italian Renaissance. Raphael uses the *polymaston* Artemis of Ephesus figure in his 1508 “Philosophy,” as part of his Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican. Niccolò Tribolo created his marble “Nature” with this design in 1529 at the Château de Fontainebleau in France.

Scholars, artists, and esotericists from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century followed the identification of Artemis and Isis (already the Universal Goddess of the Isis Mysteries) made in the ancient world to represent Nature.¹³

The writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were quick to adopt this association. The Jesuit esotericist Athanasius Kircher refers to the Veil of Isis as a symbol of Nature’s Mysteries in *Oedipus Aegypticus* (1650s),¹⁴ and uses the image of the polymastic Isis/Artemis in the frontispiece to his *Mundus Subterraneus*, Volume II (1664).¹⁵ This example is followed by many.

Hadot suggests that Kircher’s reference to Isis’s Veil as Nature’s Secrets is at the very foundation of the Egyptomania of the Romantic and modern periods.¹⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, this identification was complete with all its parts: Nature, all nurturing, in the figure of an Egyptian Goddess covered by the Veil of Isis, hiding her secrets.¹⁷

The Unveiling of Isis

As the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries progressed, and the exploration of science grew rapidly in Western consciousness, it was a natural step to conceive of this as “Removing the Veil.” One of the first instances of this image in art is in Gerardus Blasius’s *Anatomy of Animals* (1681).¹⁸ Hadot describes the frontispiece:

“Here we see Science, represented in the form of a young woman with a flame above her head, symbol of the desire for knowledge,¹⁹ a magnifying glass, and a scalpel in her hands, unveiling a woman who has four breasts on her chest. Nature also bears the symbols of the seven planets on her chest. On her right arm, which bears a scepter, perches a vulture, a reminder of the first types of images of Nature, discussed earlier. Other animals are gathered around her, and at her feet we see two putti, the symbols of scientific labor: one of them is dissecting an animal; the other examines entrails while looking at Nature with admiration.”²⁰

This basic imagery would set the stage for the respectful unveiling of Isis, revealing the Secrets of Nature. This would be repeated in various designs by Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1687), Peter Paul Rubens (1620), as well as many others.

Hidden in Plain Sight

For civic celebrations in 1814 and 1825, the philosopher and polymath Goethe used an emblem created by the Weimar drawing school, *Genius Unveiling a Bust of Nature*. The symbolism of Nature was clearly the same as the polymastic Isis. For Goethe, the key to understanding nature is intuition, grasping the all:

*Nature gives all with generosity and
benevolence.
She has no pit
Or shell
She is all at once*²¹

And in another place:

*If you succeed in making your intuition
First penetrate within,
Then return toward the outside,
Then you will be instructed in the best way.*²²

Goethe uses the phrases *offenbares Geheimnis* and *öffentliches Geheimnis*, more or less a “secret in broad daylight,” reminiscent of “Hidden in Plain Sight”:

*O mountain of unexplored bosom,
Mysterious in broad daylight,
Above the astonished world.*²³

And,

*Nothing is within, Nothing is
without,
What is inside is also outside.
Seize, then, with no delay,
The sacred mystery in broad
daylight.*²⁴

Genius Unveiling a Bust of Nature, 1825, Weimar, Germany. Collection of the Frankfurt Goethe Museum.

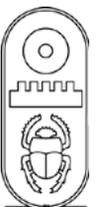
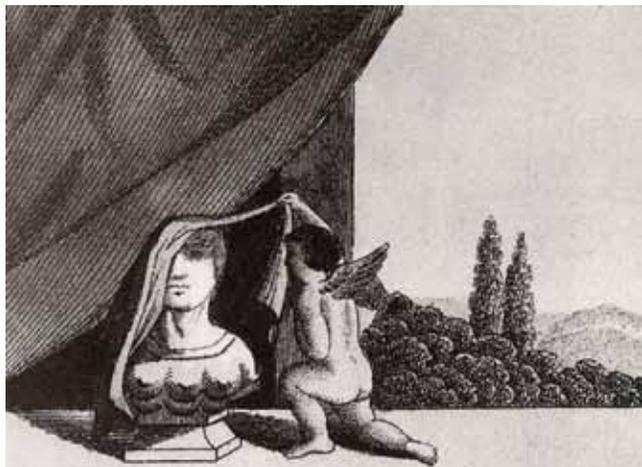
The Universal Isis

Through the romantic period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Veil of Isis and Unveiling Nature through intuition and Gnosis continue to be important themes.

Karl Leonhard Reinhold, a Masonic writer, writing on the Hebrew Mysteries, follows a well-known Masonic theme: the Hebrew Mysteries are actually the Egyptian Mysteries in a new manifestation. In this process he identifies the Isis of Saïs with YHVH in the Burning Bush who proclaims “I am Who Am.”²⁵ In the English version of the passage in Exodus, the parallel is not as clear, however, in the Septuagint Greek version, created by the Jewish initiates in Alexandria in the second century BCE, the identification is more obvious, as the Voice from the Burning Bush says, “Ego eimi ho On,” “I am Being.”

Unusual as this may sound to conventional monotheists, it is well attested as far back as Ancient Egypt, as a modern scholar of Egyptian religion points out:

“That is the situation in Ramesside theology. The unity of God is realized as neither preexistence nor a (counter-religious) monotheistic concept, but as latency, as a ‘hidden unity,’ in which all living plurality on earth has its origin and whose inscrutable nature can be experienced and stated only in its manifestations, the ‘colorful reflection’ of



the polytheistic divine world...This idea occurs also in the Corpus Hermeticum: all names are those of one god.”²⁶

The version of the inscription at Saïs reported by the fifth century Neoplatonist Proclus (412 – 485 CE) continued to exert great influence on philosophers, artists and mystics. Erik Hornung, a leading modern scholar of Egyptian religion and its continuing influence, comments on the importance of these lines:

“Schiller again used this text, which was found ‘on a pyramid at Saïs,’ in his essays ‘The Mission of Moses’ (1790) and ‘On the Sublime.’ And in his ‘Critique of Judgment’ (1790), Kant states, ‘Perhaps there has never been a more sublime utterance, or a thought more sublimely expressed, than the well-known inscription upon the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): “I am all that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face.”’ For Beethoven, who had it standing framed on his desk, and for many other contemporaries, this quotation was the embodiment of Egyptian wisdom.”²⁷

Isis Today

Throughout the journey of millennia, Isis has taken on many forms, and incorporated all of the Divine within her, ultimately becoming the manifestation of the Source of All. Today, she is present practically everywhere one would look. A simple Google internet search on her name yields 21,900,000 sites or pages dealing with myriad aspects of Isis, from neo-Egyptian religious groups, to clothing lines. This is a respectable total for a divinity whose last ancient temple at Philae was closed almost 1500 years ago.

The Loving Mother of Horus, the Savior Goddess, the Queen of Heaven: Isis still holds her Veil protectively over her children after thousands of years. No



Michel Erhart or Friedrich Schramm, *Virgin of Mercy*, from the Church of Our Lady in Ravensburg, ca. 1480, limewood, original colors with some over-painting. Photo by Andreas Praefcke/Wikimedia Commons.

one has lifted the Veil because there is no need to. The Mysteries the Veil conceals are Hidden in Plain Sight, open to all those who have eyes to see and ears to hear her message through the ages, as true today as in ancient Saïs:

*I am what is, and what will be, and what
has been,
No one has lifted my veil.
The fruit I bore was the Sun.*²⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ “Neith” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neith>.

² For more information, see “Saïs” and “Neith” at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sais> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neith>, to which these introductory paragraphs are indebted.

³ Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 9, 354C (From the *Moralia*). Available at The Internet Sacred Texts Archives <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plu/pte/pte04.htm>.

⁴ See “Protection of the Mother of God” at Orthodox Wiki http://orthodoxwiki.org/Protection_of_the_Mother_of_God.

⁵ See “Protection of the Mother of God” at Orthodox Wiki http://orthodoxwiki.org/Protection_of_the_Mother_of_God and “Ochi Day” at Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochi_Day.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protection_of_the_Mother_of_God.

⁷ Heraclitus Fragment 123; see also Fragment 208: "Nature loves to hide." See also William Harris, "Heraclitus, the Complete Fragments," available at <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf>.

⁸ Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 91-98.

⁹ Robert Fleischer, *Artemis von Ephesos und der erwandte Kultstatue von Anatolien und Syrien*. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

¹⁰ "many breasted"

¹¹ "Temple of Artemis at Ephesus" at Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemis_of_Ephesus.

¹² Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1964), 179.

¹³ Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 236-237.

¹⁴ Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegypticus*, vol. 1 (Rome: 1652-1654), 191.

¹⁵ Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 237.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Jean-Baptiste Boudard, *Iconologie tirée de divers auteurs* (Parma: 1759); second edition, vol. 3 (Vienna, 1766), 1; and H. Lacombe de Prével, «Nature» in *Dictionnaire iconologique* (Paris: 1779); cited in Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 372-373, n. 28 and 29.

¹⁸ Gerardus Blasius, *Anatome Animalium* (Amsterdam, 1681), Frontispiece Engraving.

¹⁹ Hadot, *Veil of Isis*: See A. Goesch, Diana Ephesia (Frankfurt; New York: P. Lang, 1996), 224, citing Cesare Ripa, "Intellecto," in *Iconologia* (Padua: P. P. Tozzi, 1611), available at <http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/Ripa/Images/ripatoc.htm>.

²⁰ Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 239.

²¹ J.W. von Goethe, "Certainly: to the Physicist" in "God and the World," *Goethes Werke*, 1, 3, (Weimar: 1887-1919), 105. Translation in Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 253.

²² J.W. von Goethe, "Genius Unveils the Bust of Nature" in *Goethes Werke*, 1, 4, pg. 127.

²³ J.W. von Goethe, "Winter Journey in the Harz" (1777). Translated in Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 256, from J.-F. Angelloz in H. Carossa, *Les pages immortelles de Goethe* (Paris: Corrêa: 1942), 125.

²⁴ J.W. von Goethe, "Epirrhema" in *Goethes Werke*, 1, 3, pg. 88. Cited and translated in Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 256.

²⁵ K. L. Reinhold, *Die hebräischen Mysterien oder die älteste religiöse Freymaurerey* (Leipzig,

1787), 202; See Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 97-199; See also Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. S.K. Langer (New York: Harper, 1953), 96-97. In Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, 267-268. It is interesting to note that the Eastern Orthodox Icon type "The Unburnt Bush" (*Neopalimaya Kupina*), depicts a stylized mandala of the flames, within which, unconsumed, is the Virgin Theotokos (Mary) holding the Christ child, much as an Isis-Horus image. The Icon's Feast is September 4.

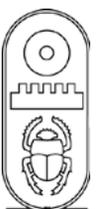
²⁶ *Corpus Hermeticum* 4:10; *Asclepius*, Section 20.

²⁷ Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 134.

²⁸ Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 1, 30, translated in Hornung, *Secret Lore*, 134.



Isis in the Guise of a Sycamore Tree Suckles the Pharaoh Thutmose III, Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1426 BCE), tomb of Thutmose III. The traditional founding of the Rosicrucian tradition dates from the Pharaohs Hatshepsut and Thutmose III uniting all of the priesthoods and Houses of Life under Hatshepsut's Vizier Hapuseneb.





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