[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Pp-semi-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-semi-indef) [Template:Infobox deity](/wiki/Template:Infobox_deity)

**Isis** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:Lang-grc](/wiki/Template:Lang-grc) [Template:IPA-el](/wiki/Template:IPA-el); original [Egyptian](/wiki/Egyptian_language) pronunciation more likely "Aset" or "Iset"<ref name=HED/>) is a goddess from the [polytheistic](/wiki/Polytheism) [pantheon](/wiki/Pantheon_(religion)) of [Egypt](/wiki/Ancient_Egypt). She was first worshiped in [Ancient Egyptian religion](/wiki/Ancient_Egyptian_religion), and later her worship spread throughout the [Roman Empire](/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome#Roman_Empire) and the greater [Greco-Roman world](/wiki/Greco-Roman_world). Isis is still widely worshiped by many [pagans](/wiki/Modern_paganism) today in diverse religious contexts; including a number of distinct [pagan religions](/wiki/List_of_Modern_pagan_movements), the modern [Goddess movement](/wiki/Goddess_movement), and interfaith organizations such as the [Fellowship of Isis](/wiki/Fellowship_of_Isis).

Isis was worshipped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was the friend of [slaves](/wiki/Slave), [sinners](/wiki/Sin), [artisans](/wiki/Artisan) and the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers.[[1]](#cite_note-1) Isis is often depicted as the mother of [Horus](/wiki/Horus), the falcon-headed deity associated with king and kingship (although in some traditions Horus's mother was [Hathor](/wiki/Hathor)). Isis is also known as protector of the dead and goddess of children.

The name Isis means "Throne".[[2]](#cite_note-2) Her headdress is a throne. As the personification of the throne, she was an important representation of the pharaoh's power. The pharaoh was depicted as her child, who sat on the throne she provided. Her [cult](/wiki/Cult_(religious_practice)) was popular throughout Egypt, but her most important [temples](/wiki/Egyptian_temple) were at Behbeit El-Hagar in the [Nile delta](/wiki/Nile_delta), and, beginning in the reign with Nectanebo I (380–362 BCE), on the island of [Philae](/wiki/Philae) in Upper Egypt.

In the typical form of her myth, Isis was the first daughter of [Geb](/wiki/Geb), god of the Earth, and [Nut](/wiki/Nut_(goddess)), goddess of the Sky, and she was born on the fourth [intercalary day](/wiki/Intercalary_day). She married her brother, [Osiris](/wiki/Osiris), and she conceived Horus with him. Isis was instrumental in the resurrection of Osiris when he was murdered by [Set](/wiki/Set_(mythology)). Using her magical skills, she restored his body to life after having gathered the body parts that had been strewn about the earth by Set.[[3]](#cite_note-3) This myth became very important during the Greco-Roman period. For example, it was believed that the [Nile River](/wiki/Nile_River) flooded every year because of the tears of sorrow which Isis wept for Osiris. Osiris's death and rebirth was relived each year through rituals. The worship of Isis eventually spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, continuing until the suppression of [paganism](/wiki/Paganism) in the Christian era.[[4]](#cite_note-4) The popular motif of Isis suckling her son Horus, however, lived on in a Christianized context as the popular image of [Mary](/wiki/Mary_(mother_of_Jesus)) suckling her infant son [Jesus](/wiki/Jesus) from the fifth century onward.[[5]](#cite_note-5)

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## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[Template:Hiero](/wiki/Template:Hiero)

The Greek name version of Isis is close to her original, Egyptian name spelling (namely *Aset*).<ref name=HED/> Isis' name was originally written with the signs of a throne seat (Gardiner sign *Q1*, pronounced "as" or "is"), a bread loaf (Gardiner sign *X1*, pronounced "t" or "tj") and with an unpronounced [determinative](/wiki/Determinative) of a sitting woman. A second version of the original was also written with the throne seat and the bread loaf, but ended with an egg symbol (Gardiner sign *H8*) which was normally read "set", but here it was used as a determinative to promote the correct reading. The grammar, spelling and used signs of Isis' name never changed during time in any way, making it easy to recognize her any time.<ref name=HED>Harry Eilenstein: *ISIS: Die Geschichte der Göttin von der Steinzeit bis heute*. BOD, Norderstedt 2011, ISBN 3-8423-8189-1, p. 9 - 10.</ref>

However, the symbolic and metaphoric meaning of Isis' name remains unclear. The throne seat sign in her name might point to a functional role as a goddess of kingship, as the maternal protector of the ruling king. Thus, her name could mean "she of the kings' throne". But all other Egyptian deities have names that point to clear cosmological or nature elemental roles (*Râ* = the sun; *Ma'at* = justice and world order), thus the name of Isis shouldn't be connected to the king himself.<ref name=HED/> The throne seat symbol might alternatively point to a meaning as "throne-mother of the gods", making her the highest and most powerful goddess before all other gods. This in turn would supply a very old existence of Isis, long before her first mentioning during the late Old Kingdom, but this hypothesis remains unproven.<ref name=HED/> A third possible meaning might be hidden in the egg-symbol, that was also used in Isis' name. The egg-symbol always represented motherhood, implying a maternal role of Isis. Her name could mean "mother goddess", pointing to her later, mythological role as the mother of Horus. But this remains problematic, too: the initial mother-goddess of Horus was Hathor, not Isis.<ref name=HED/>

## Principal features of the cult[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

### Origins[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|Isis depicted with outstretched wings (wall painting, c. 1360 BCE)](/wiki/Image:Ägyptischer_Maler_um_1360_v._Chr._001.jpg)

Most Egyptian deities were first worshipped by very local cults, and they retained those local centres of worship even as their popularity spread, so that most major cities and towns in Egypt were known as the home of a particular deity. However, the origins of the cult of Isis are very uncertain. In fact, Egyptologists such as [Maria Münster](/wiki/Maria_Münster)<ref name=MMU>Maria Münster: *Untersuchungen zur Göttin Isis: vom Alten Reich bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches. Mit hieroglyphischem Textanhang* (= *Münchner ägyptologische Studien*, Vol. 11). Hessling, Berlin 1968, p. 158 - 164.</ref> and [Jan Assmann](/wiki/Jan_Assmann)<ref name=JAI>Jan Assmann: *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Ägypten*. Beck, München 2003, ISBN 3-406-49707-1, p. 56 - 59.</ref> point to the lack of archaeological evidences for a goddess 'Isis' before the time of the late Old Kingdom of Egypt.<ref name=MMU/>

The first secure references to Isis date back to the [5th dynasty](/wiki/Fifth_dynasty_of_Egypt), when her name appears in the sun temple of king [Niuserre](/wiki/Niuserre) and on the statue of a [priest](/wiki/Priest) named *Pepi-Ankh*, who worshipped at the very beginning of [6th dynasty](/wiki/Sixth_Dynasty_of_Egypt) and bore the title "high priest of Isis and Hathor".<ref name=MMU/> Also, according to Veronica Ions book "Egyptian Mythology" from 1981 on page 56, "Isis (or Eset) was also originally an independent and popular deity whose followers were established in pre- dynastic times in the northern Delta, at Sebennytos."

### Classical Egyptian period[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[thumb|upright|Isis nursing Horus (](/wiki/Image:Egypte_louvre_029.jpg)[Louvre](/wiki/Louvre))

During the [Old Kingdom](/wiki/Old_Kingdom_of_Egypt) period, Isis was represented as the wife or assistant to the deceased pharaoh. Thus she had a funerary association, her name appearing over eighty times in the pharaoh's funeral texts (the [Pyramid Texts](/wiki/Pyramid_Texts)). This association with the pharaoh's wife is consistent with the role of Isis as the spouse of Horus, the god associated with the pharaoh as his protector, and then later as the deification of the pharaoh himself.

But in addition, Isis was also represented as the mother of the "four sons of Horus", the four deities who protected the [canopic jars](/wiki/Canopic_jar) containing the pharaoh's internal organs. More specifically, Isis was viewed as the protector of the [liver](/wiki/Liver)-jar-deity, [Imsety](/wiki/Imsety).[[6]](#cite_note-6) By the [Middle Kingdom](/wiki/Middle_Kingdom_of_Egypt) period, as the funeral texts began to be used by members of Egyptian society other than the royal family, the role of Isis as protector also grew, to include the protection of nobles and even commoners.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

By the [New Kingdom](/wiki/New_Kingdom) period, in many places, Isis was more prominent than her spouse. She was seen as the mother of the pharaoh, and was often depicted breastfeeding the pharaoh. It is theorized that this displacement happened through the merging of cults from the various cult centers as Egyptian religion became more standardized.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) When the cult of [Ra](/wiki/Ra) rose to prominence, with its cult center at [Heliopolis](/wiki/Heliopolis_(Ancient_Egypt)), Ra was identified with the similar deity, Horus. But Hathor had been paired with Ra in some regions, as the mother of the god. Since Isis was paired with Horus, and Horus was identified with Ra, Isis began to be merged with Hathor as *Isis-Hathor*. By merging with Hathor, Isis became the mother of Horus, as well as his wife. Eventually the mother role displaced the role of spouse. Thus, the role of spouse to Isis was open and in the Heliopolis pantheon, Isis became the wife of Osiris and the mother of Horus/Ra. This reconciliation of themes led to the evolution of the [myth of Isis and Osiris](/wiki/Legend_of_Osiris_and_Isis).[[6]](#cite_note-6)

### Temples and priesthood[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

<gallery> File:Temple of Isis at Philae. The Court. 1893.jpg|*Temple of Isis at Philae*. The Court. 1893. Wilbour Library of Egyptology, [Brooklyn Museum](/wiki/Brooklyn_Museum) File:S10.08 Philae, image 9654.jpg|[Philae](/wiki/Philae), Egypt. Temple of Isis., n.d. [Brooklyn Museum](/wiki/Brooklyn_Museum) Archives File:S10.08 Philae, image 9650.jpg|[Philae](/wiki/Philae). Temple of Isis. Columns., n.d. Brooklyn Museum Archives File:S10.08 Philae, image 9661.jpg|[Philae](/wiki/Philae). Temple of Isis., n.d., Brooklyn Museum Archives </gallery>

Isis worship typically took place within an [Iseum](/wiki/Temple_of_Isis_(disambiguation)). In Egypt, Isis would have received the same sort of rituals as other Egyptian Deities, including daily offerings. She was served by both priests and priestesses throughout the history of her cult. By the Greco-Roman era, the majority of her priests and priestesses had a reputation for wisdom and healing, and were said to have other special powers, including dream interpretation and the ability to control the [weather](/wiki/Weather), which they did by braiding or not combing their hair.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The latter was believed because the Egyptians considered [knots](/wiki/Knot) to have magical powers.

The cult of Isis and Osiris continued at [Philae](/wiki/Philae) up until the 450s CE, long after the imperial decrees of the late 4th century that ordered the closing of temples to "[pagan](/wiki/Pagan)" gods. Philae was the last major ancient Egyptian temple to be closed.[[7]](#cite_note-7)

## Iconography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

### Associations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[Template:Hiero](/wiki/Template:Hiero)

Due to the association between knots and magical power, a symbol of Isis was the *tiet* or [*tyet*](/wiki/Tyet) (meaning *welfare*/*life*), also called the *Knot of Isis*, *Buckle of Isis*, or the [*Blood*](/wiki/Blood) *of Isis*, which is shown to the right. In many respects the *tyet* resembles an [ankh](/wiki/Ankh), except that its arms point downward, and when used as such, seems to represent the idea of [eternal life](/wiki/Immortality) or [resurrection](/wiki/Resurrection). The meaning of *Blood of Isis* is more obscure, but the *tyet* often was used as a funerary [amulet](/wiki/Amulet) made of red [wood](/wiki/Wood), [stone](/wiki/Rock_(geology)), or [glass](/wiki/Glass), so this may simply have been a description of the appearance of the materials used.[[8]](#cite_note-8)[[9]](#cite_note-9)[[10]](#cite_note-10) The star [Sopdet](/wiki/Sopdet) ([Sirius](/wiki/Sirius)) is associated with Isis. The appearance of the star signified the advent of a new year and Isis was likewise considered the goddess of rebirth and reincarnation, and as a protector of the dead. The Book of the Dead outlines a particular ritual that would protect the dead, enabling travel anywhere in the underworld, and most of the titles Isis holds signify her as the goddess of protection of the dead.

### Depictions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[thumb|upright|Isis nursing](/wiki/Image:Egypt.IsisHorus.01.png) [Horus](/wiki/Horus), wearing the headdress of [Hathor](/wiki/Hathor).

In art, originally Isis was pictured as a woman wearing a long sheath dress and crowned with the [hieroglyphic](/wiki/Hieroglyph) sign for a *throne*. Sometimes she is depicted as holding a [lotus](/wiki/Nymphaea_caerulea), or, as a [sycamore](/wiki/Sycamore_fig) tree. One pharaoh, [Thutmose III](/wiki/Thutmose_III), is depicted in his tomb as nursing from a sycamore tree that has a breast.

After she assimilated many of the roles of Hathor, Isis's headdress was replaced with that of Hathor: the horns of a cow on her head, with the solar disk between them, and often with her original throne symbol atop the solar disk. Sometimes she also is represented as a cow, or with a cow's head. She is often depicted with her young child, Horus (the pharaoh), with a [crown](/wiki/Crown_(headgear)), and a [vulture](/wiki/Vulture). Occasionally she is represented as a [kite](/wiki/Kite_(bird)) flying above the body of Osiris or with the dead Osiris she works her magic to bring him back to life.

Most often Isis is seen holding an [ankh](/wiki/Ankh) (the sign for "life") and a simple lotus staff, but in late images she is sometimes seen with the sacred [sistrum](/wiki/Sistrum) rattle and the fertility-bearing [*menat*](/wiki/Menat) [necklace](/wiki/Necklace), items usually associated with Hathor. In [*The Book of Coming Forth By Day*](/wiki/Egyptian_Book_of_the_Dead) Isis is depicted standing on the prow of the [Solar Barque](/wiki/Solar_Barque) with her arms outstretched.[[1]](#cite_note-1)

## Mythology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

### Sister-wife to Osiris[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[left|thumb|upright|*Isis Nursing Horus*,](/wiki/Image:Egyptian_-_Isis_Nursing_Horus_-_Walters_481530.jpg)[[11]](#cite_note-11) the [Walters Art Museum](/wiki/Walters_Art_Museum)

During the [Old Kingdom](/wiki/Old_Kingdom) period, the pantheons of individual Egyptian cities varied by region. During the [5th dynasty](/wiki/Fifth_dynasty_of_Egypt), Isis entered the pantheon of the city of [Heliopolis](/wiki/Heliopolis_(Ancient_Egypt)). She was represented as a daughter of Nut and Geb, and sister to Osiris, [Nephthys](/wiki/Nephthys), and Set. The two sisters, Isis and Nephthys, often were depicted on coffins, with wings outstretched, as protectors against evil. As a funerary deity, she was associated with Osiris, lord of the underworld, and was considered his wife.

[thumb|upright|Rare](/wiki/Image:GD-FR-LouvreEG126.JPG) [terracotta](/wiki/Terracotta) image of Isis [lamenting](/wiki/Lament) the loss of [Osiris](/wiki/Osiris) (eighteenth dynasty) [Musée du Louvre](/wiki/Musée_du_Louvre), [Paris](/wiki/Paris) A later myth, when the cult of Osiris gained more authority, tells the story of [Anubis](/wiki/Anubis), the god of the underworld. The tale describes how Nephthys was denied a child by Set and disguised herself as her twin, Isis, to seduce him. The plot succeeded, resulting in the birth of Anubis.

In fear of Set's retribution, Nephthys persuaded Isis to adopt Anubis, so that Set would not find out and kill the child. The tale describes both why Anubis is seen as an underworld deity (he becomes the adopted son of Osiris), and why he could not inherit Osiris's position (as he was not actually the son of Osiris but of his brother Set), neatly preserving Osiris's position as lord of the underworld.

The most extensive account of the Isis-Osiris story known today is Plutarch's Greek description written in the 1st century CE, usually known under its Latin title *De Iside et Osiride*.[[12]](#cite_note-12) In that version, Set held a banquet for Osiris in which he brought in a beautiful box and said that whoever could fit in the box perfectly would get to keep it. Set had measured Osiris in his sleep and made sure that he was the only one who could fit the box. Several tried to see whether they fit. Once it was Osiris's turn to see if he could fit in the box, Set closed the lid on him so that the box was now a coffin for Osiris. Set flung the box in the Nile so that it would drift far away. Isis went looking for the box so that Osiris could have a proper burial. She found the box in a tree in [Byblos](/wiki/Byblos), a city along the Phoenician coast, and brought it back to Egypt, hiding it in a swamp. But Set went hunting that night and found the box. Enraged, Set chopped Osiris's body into fourteen pieces and scattered them all over Egypt to ensure that Isis could never find Osiris again for a proper burial.[[13]](#cite_note-13)[[14]](#cite_note-14) Isis and her sister Nephthys went looking for these pieces, but could only find thirteen of the fourteen. Fish had swallowed the last piece, his [phallus](/wiki/Phallus). With Thoth's help she created a golden phallus, and attached it to Osiris’s body. She then transformed into a [kite](/wiki/Kite_(bird)), and with the aid of Thoth’s magic conceived Horus the Younger. The number of pieces is described on temple walls variously as fourteen and sixteen, one for each [nome](/wiki/Nome_(Egypt)) or district.[[14]](#cite_note-14)

### Mother/Sister of Horus[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

Yet another set of late myths detail the adventures of Isis after the birth of Osiris's posthumous son, [Horus](/wiki/Horus). Isis was said to have given birth to Horus at Khemmis, thought to be located on the Nile Delta.[[15]](#cite_note-15) Many dangers faced Horus after birth, and Isis fled with the newborn to escape the wrath of [Set](/wiki/Set_(mythology)), the murderer of her husband. In one instance, Isis heals Horus from a lethal scorpion sting; she also performs other miracles in relation to the [*cippi*](/wiki/Cippi), or the plaques of Horus. Isis protected and raised Horus until he was old enough to face Set, and subsequently become the pharaoh of Egypt. In some stories, Isis is referred to as Horus' sister.

### Magic[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

It was said that Isis tricked [Ra](/wiki/Ra) into telling her his "secret name" by causing a [snake](/wiki/Serpent_(symbolism)) to bite him, the antidote to whose venom only Isis possessed. Knowing his secret name thus gave her power over him. The use of secret names became central in many late Egyptian magic spells. By the late Egyptian historical period, after the occupations by the Greeks and the Romans, Isis became the most important and most powerful deity of the Egyptian pantheon because of her magical skills. [Magic](/wiki/Magic_(paranormal)) is central to the entire mythology of Isis, arguably more so than any other Egyptian deity.

Isis had a central role in Egyptian magic spells and ritual, especially those of protection and healing. In many spells her powers are merged with those of her son Horus. His power accompanies hers whenever she is invoked. In Egyptian history the image of a wounded Horus became a standard feature of Isis's healing spells, which typically invoked the curative powers of Isis' milk.[[16]](#cite_note-16)

## Greco-Roman world[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

### ''Interpretatio graeca''[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[thumb|Isis *(seated right)* welcoming the](/wiki/File:Pompeii_-_Temple_of_Isis_-_Io_and_Isis_-_MAN.jpg) [Greek heroine](/wiki/Greek_hero) [Io](/wiki/Io_(mythology)) as she is borne into Egypt on the shoulders of the personified Nile, as depicted in a Roman wall painting from [Pompeii](/wiki/Pompeii)

Using the comparative methodology known as [*interpretatio graeca*](/wiki/Interpretatio_graeca), the Greek historian [Herodotus](/wiki/Herodotus) (5th century BCE) described Isis by comparison with the Greek goddess [Demeter](/wiki/Demeter), whose [mysteries](/wiki/Mystery_religions) at [Eleusis](/wiki/Eleusinian_mysteries) offered initiates guidance in the afterlife and a vision of rebirth. Herodotus says that Isis was the only goddess worshiped by all Egyptians alike.[[17]](#cite_note-17) [thumb|left|upright=.5|Terracotta figure of Isis-Aphrodite from](/wiki/File:Isis-Aphrodite_Louvre_E28004.jpg) [Ptolemaic Egypt](/wiki/Ptolemaic_Egypt)

After the conquest of Egypt by [Alexander the Great](/wiki/Alexander_the_Great) and the [Hellenization](/wiki/Hellenization) of the Egyptian culture initiated by [Ptolemy I Soter](/wiki/Ptolemy_I_Soter), Isis became known as [*Queen of Heaven*](/wiki/Queen_of_heaven_(antiquity)).[[18]](#cite_note-18) Other Mediterranean goddesses, such as Demeter, [Astarte](/wiki/Astarte), and [Aphrodite](/wiki/Aphrodite), became identified with Isis, as did the Arabian goddess [Al-‘Uzzá](/wiki/Al-‘Uzzá) through a similarity of name, since etymology was thought to reveal the essential or primordial nature of the thing named.[[19]](#cite_note-19) An alabaster statue of Isis from the 3rd century BCE, found in [Ohrid](/wiki/Ohrid), in the [Republic of Macedonia](/wiki/Republic_of_Macedonia), is depicted on the [obverse](/wiki/Obverse_and_reverse) of the Macedonian 10 [denar](/wiki/Macedonian_denar) banknote, issued in 1996.[[20]](#cite_note-20)

### Isis in the Roman Empire[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[thumb|upright|Roman Isis holding a sistrum and](/wiki/File:Isis_Musei_Capitolini_MC744.jpg) [oinochoe](/wiki/Oinochoe) and wearing a garment tied with a characteristic knot, from the time of [Hadrian](/wiki/Hadrian) (117–138 CE)

[Tacitus](/wiki/Tacitus) writes that after the [assassination of Julius Caesar](/wiki/Assassination_of_Julius_Caesar), a temple in honour of Isis had been decreed, but was suspended by Augustus as part of his program to restore [traditional Roman religion](/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome). The emperor [Caligula](/wiki/Caligula), however, was open to Eastern religions, and the [*Navigium Isidis*](/wiki/Navigium_Isidis), a procession in honor of Isis, was established in Rome during his reign.[[21]](#cite_note-21) According to the Jewish historian [Josephus](/wiki/Josephus), Caligula donned female garb and took part in the mysteries he instituted. [Vespasian](/wiki/Vespasian), along with [Titus](/wiki/Titus), practised [incubation](/wiki/Incubation_(ritual)) in the Roman [Iseum](/wiki/Campus_Martius). [Domitian](/wiki/Domitian) built another Iseum along with a [Serapeum](/wiki/Serapeum). In a [relief](/wiki/Relief) on the Arch of Trajan in Rome, the emperor appears before Isis and Horus, presenting them with votive offerings of wine.[[21]](#cite_note-21) [Hadrian](/wiki/Hadrian) decorated his villa at [Tibur](/wiki/Tibur) with Isiac scenes. [Galerius](/wiki/Galerius) regarded Isis as his protector.[[22]](#cite_note-22) [thumb|left|Ruins of the Temple of Isis in Delos](/wiki/File:Temple_of_Isis,_Delos_02.jpg) The religion of Isis thus spread throughout the [Roman Empire](/wiki/Roman_Empire) during the formative centuries of Christianity. Wall paintings and objects reveal her pervasive presence at [Pompeii](/wiki/Pompeii), preserved by the [eruption of Vesuvius](/wiki/Eruption_of_Vesuvius) in 79 CE. In Rome, temples were built (such as the [Temple of Isis and Serapis](/wiki/Temple_of_Isis_and_Serapis)) and obelisks erected in her honour. In Greece, the cult of Isis was introduced to traditional centres of worship in [Delos](/wiki/Delos), [Delphi](/wiki/Delphi), [Eleusis](/wiki/Eleusis) and [Athens](/wiki/Ancient_Athens), as well as in northern Greece. Harbours of Isis were to be found on the Arabian Sea and the Black Sea. Inscriptions show followers in Gaul, Spain, Pannonia, Germany, Arabia, Asia Minor, Portugal and many shrines even in Britain.[[23]](#cite_note-23) Tacitus interprets a goddess among the Germanic [Suebi](/wiki/Suebi) as [a form of Isis](/wiki/%22Isis%22_of_the_Suebi) whose symbol *(signum)* was a ship.[[24]](#cite_note-24) [Bruce Lincoln](/wiki/Bruce_Lincoln) regards the identity of this Germanic goddess as "elusive".[[25]](#cite_note-25) The Greek antiquarian [Plutarch](/wiki/Plutarch) wrote a treatise on *Isis and Osiris*,[[26]](#cite_note-26) a major source for Imperial theology concerning Isis.<ref name=RichterTotAPA>D.S. Richter, "Plutarch On Isis and Osiris: Text, Cult, and Cultural Appropriation", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (2001) 131:191–216</ref> Plutarch describes Isis as "a goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom, to whom, as her name at least seems to indicate, knowledge and understanding are in the highest degree appropriate... ." The statue of Athena in [Sais](/wiki/Sais) was identified with Isis, and according to Plutarch was inscribed "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered."[[27]](#cite_note-27) At Sais, however, the patron goddess of the ancient cult was [Neith](/wiki/Neith), many of whose traits had begun to be attributed to Isis during the Greek occupation.

The Roman writer [Apuleius](/wiki/Apuleius) recorded aspects of the cult of Isis in the 2nd century CE, including the *Navigium Isidis* and the [mysteries of Isis](/wiki/Mysteries_of_Isis) in his novel [*The Golden Ass*](/wiki/The_Golden_Ass). The protagonist Lucius prays to Isis as *Regina Caeli*, "Queen of Heaven":

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote) [thumb|upright|Isis in black and white marble (Roman, 2nd century CE)](/wiki/File:Wien_KHM_Isis_I_158.jpg)

According to Apuleius, these other names include manifestations of the goddess as [Ceres](/wiki/Ceres_(mythology)), "the original nurturing parent"; Heavenly Venus *(Venus Caelestis)*; the "sister of [Phoebus](/wiki/Phoebus)", that is, Diana or [Artemis](/wiki/Artemis) as she is [worshipped at Ephesus](/wiki/Temple_of_Artemis); or [Proserpina](/wiki/Proserpina) (Greek [Persephone](/wiki/Persephone)) as the triple goddess of the underworld.[[28]](#cite_note-28) From the middle Imperial period, the title *Caelestis*, "Heavenly" or "Celestial", is attached to several goddesses embodying aspects of a single, supreme Heavenly Goddess. The *Dea Caelestis* was identified with the [constellation Virgo (the Virgin)](/wiki/Virgo_(constellation)), who holds the [divine balance of justice](/wiki/Libra_(constellation)).

### Greco-Roman temples[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

On the Greek island of [Delos](/wiki/Delos) a [Doric](/wiki/Doric_order) Temple of Isis was built on a high over-looking hill at the beginning of the Roman period to venerate the familiar trinity of Isis, the Alexandrian [Serapis](/wiki/Serapis) and [Harpocrates](/wiki/Harpocrates). The creation of this temple is significant as Delos is particularly known as the birthplace of the Greek gods [Artemis](/wiki/Artemis) and [Apollo](/wiki/Apollo) who had temples of their own on the island long before the temple to Isis was built.

In the Roman Empire, a well-preserved example was discovered in [Pompeii](/wiki/Temple_of_Isis_(Pompeii)). The only sanctuary of Isis *(*[*fanum*](/wiki/Fanum) *Isidis*) identified with certainty in [Roman Britain](/wiki/Roman_Britain) is located in [Londinium](/wiki/Londinium) (present-day London).[[29]](#cite_note-29)

### Late antiquity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

The cult of Isis was part of the [syncretic](/wiki/Syncretism) tendencies of religion in the Greco-Roman world of [late antiquity](/wiki/Late_antiquity). The names Isidoros and Isidora in Greek mean "gift of Isis" (similar to "[Theodoros](/wiki/Theodore_(name))", "God's gift").

The sacred image of Isis with the Horus Child in Rome often became a model for the Christian [Mary](/wiki/Mary_(mother_of_Jesus)) carrying her child [Jesus](/wiki/Jesus) and many of the epithets of the Egyptian Mother of God came to be used for her.[[30]](#cite_note-30)

## Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

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## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

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[Template:Wikisource1911Enc](/wiki/Template:Wikisource1911Enc)

* [Ovid](/wiki/Ovid), [*Metamorphoses*](/wiki/Metamorphoses) i.588–747
* [*Eusebius*](/wiki/Eusebius)*,* [*Chronicon*](/wiki/Chronicon_(Eusebius)) *32.9–13, 40.7–9, 43.12–16*

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* *Rosalie David (1998) Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*
* [*Lewis Spence*](/wiki/Lewis_Spence) *(1990) Ancient Egyptian Myths and Legends*
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* [*Template:Cite book*](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)

## *External links[*[*edit*](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)*]*

[*Template:Commons category*](/wiki/Template:Commons_category)

* [*Britannica Online Encyclopedia*](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295449/Isis)
* [*Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0104%3Aentry%3Disis-bio-1)
* [*The Golden Bough by James Frazer*](/wiki/S:The_Golden_Bough/Isis)
* [*The Laments of Isis and Nephthys*](/wiki/S:The_Laments_of_Isis_and_Nephthys)

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