

**The Effects of Greco-Romanization on the Worship of Isis  
in the Ancient Mediterranean**

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## **Abstract**

The expansion of the Hellenistic and Roman empires brought their people into direct contact with a variety of cultures. Exposure to foreign deities had a significant impact on the role of religion in ancient world, especially as the Greeks and Romans adapted them to fit the ideals of their own societies. After its spread outside of the boundaries of ancient Egypt, the worship of Isis became one of the most popular mystery religions in the ancient world. Within Egypt, however, it appears that the role of Isis was relatively static. The interpretation of archaeological evidence, such as temple remains, physical objects used in connection with cult practices, and artistic representations of the deity can be used to piece together information about how the worship of Isis changed after its interaction with the Greek and Roman worlds, both within Egypt and as it spread throughout the ancient Mediterranean.

## Introduction

For thousands of years, people have been curious about the intangible world of the divine and have taken part in some form of religion to connect themselves to it. In the ancient world, political and economic turmoil often led people to seek a religion in which they could escape from the troubles of everyday life. The official religions of the Roman Empire, including that of emperor worship, were often more politically than spiritually motivated, leading many Romans to become disenfranchised with the approved forms of worship.

As the Greeks and Romans came into contact with other cultures, either through an influx of foreigners into Greece and Rome themselves or through military conquests during imperialistic periods, they adapted many foreign gods. Mystery religions became especially popular, providing worshippers with a connection to the divine through rituals acts, and a promise of salvation from the trials of everyday life, as well as salvation in the next life. The term *mysteria* is of Greek origin, and simply means “initiation” (Turcan 1996), a ceremony which was an important aspect of these cults. While mystery religions have held the interest of scholars since ancient times, the first modern scholar to really look comparatively at these religions in the Roman world was Franz Cumont, a Belgian archaeologist and historian whose works, published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, formed a basis for modern research of Roman pagan religions. This paper will look at the worship of Isis as adapted by both the Hellenistic world and Roman Empire, with an emphasis on archaeological evidence, including temple remains, artistic representations of the goddess, and other items connected to the rituals and ceremonies of her cult. The primary focus of this paper is how and why these physical aspects of the

religion changed in response to contact with the Greco-Roman world, both in the culture of origin and as it spread throughout the ancient Mediterranean world (Figure 1).

## **Background**

The syncretism of eastern and western cultures is considered by some scholars to have truly begun when Alexander the Great took over his father's campaigns in Asia Minor and central Asia in 334 BCE. After conquering these lands, many Greek citizens emigrated to settlements in their vast new empire. It was here that they first came into contact with eastern culture and beliefs. Although they formed the ruling elite, this new world was by no means Classical Greece; the fusion of cultures produced a new environment, that of the Hellenistic world, a term first used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to refer to the culture that developed after the conquests of Alexander and flourished, at least politically, until Octavius' victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE. Although Greece was no longer the dominant power after this, Hellenistic influences were certainly felt in Mediterranean culture all the way up to the fall of the Roman Empire. Because Greece was the imperialistic power in this region immediately before Rome, it is inevitable that the worship of Isis came into contact with Rome through a Hellenistic filter. The Roman people were especially open to foreign deities, and aspects of these mystery religions were appealing to Roman citizens. In the world of ancient Rome, religious rituals and observances were a part of everyday life and the gap between human and divine was not unbridgeable. The soul was a source of hope in the inhospitable realm of Earth, a piece of the light of the heavens captured within oneself, a personal link to another world; mystery religions offered a type of salvation that would

help the soul find its way back to its heavenly home. These secretive cults accepted initiates regardless of origin or social status. Mystery religions, including that of Isis, promised salvation to their adherents, not only a salvation after death, but also from everyday misfortunes. Adherents to these religions were inducted into the mysteries through a series of secret initiation rites which transformed the initiate into someone capable of obtaining salvation (Claus 2000:11-14).

## **Methodology**

Using a variety of written sources, I analyzed the reports of the archaeological remains of temples dedicated to the worship of Isis. I also examined the artistic iconography of her cult. A study of what little written documentation of the practices that exists will also be a useful addition to the archaeological focus of my research. My field school in Pompeii, Italy, the time that I spent living in Rome, and my trip to Egypt for undergraduate research will also be important, in that I was able to observe a number of temples firsthand and compile a photographic record of some temples. I can use these observations in comparatively analyzing the effects of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds on the worship of Isis in the Mediterranean.

My analysis will focus on the different architectural and artistic styles present depending on where the temple is located. In the culture of origin, I would think that there might be some Greco-Romanization, but that styles would essentially be static. However, in Greece, Rome or regions where the Greeks or Romans introduced the religion, the styles could, as I see it, go several different ways. The architecture and art might remain true to the culture of origin, perhaps in an attempt to maintain a level of tradition and authenticity, despite the variety of cultures the religion was introduced to. The physical remains of the cult may also be heavily Hellenistic or Roman, since they were the cultures that were often carrying this religions far from Egypt; it would seem logical that this would have influenced the means of building and decorating the temples, at least in some small way. By comparatively analyzing architectural and artistic styles relating to these religions throughout the ancient Mediterranean, I will demonstrate which of the above scenarios holds most true for the worship of Isis.

## **Results**

### **The History of the Egyptian Civilization**

The great civilization of the ancient Egyptians was one of the most durable in history, lasting over three thousand years from its first unification until the demise of ancient Egyptian culture during the early Christian era. Throughout the majority of its history, Egypt was ruled by kings known as pharaohs, who were grouped into thirty-one dynasties. The Egyptian civilization was considered to have had three peaks: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom, when cultural and technological advances flourished. The first signs of agriculture and towns appeared in Egypt around the sixth millennium BCE. Societies developed differently in two distinct regions, Upper and Lower Egypt. It was in this early predynastic period that large towns began to form and the classic Egyptian concept of the divine authority of the leader emerged. Around 3000 BCE, the powerful region of Upper Egypt conquered their northern neighbors and unified Egypt for the first time. Despite this unification, strong local customs persisted, including religious practices. It was during this early dynastic period that the great pyramids were built at Giza by the pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. During the Old Kingdom, royal power was absolute and Egyptian civilization had gained prestige throughout the ancient world, as archaeological evidence from other civilizations shows.

Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, however, the government faced economic problems due to the vast sums spent on the construction of tombs and temples. For almost one hundred years, during a time known the First Intermediate Period, various factions supported by the north or the south fought for control of the country; it was reunified in 1980 BCE. Shortly after this the Middle Kingdom began, and the central

government developed two administrative units, one in Upper and one in Lower Egypt, which helped to bring a peace and prosperity to the region which lasted for almost 1000 years. In 1630 BCE, Egypt was invaded by the Hyksos and was under foreign domination for the first time. This was the Second Intermediate Period, which lasted until the invaders were defeated in battle in 1539 BCE.

Then the New Kingdom began and Egypt began a policy of imperial expansion. This was the period of Akhenaten, the heretical king who switched the state religion to a form of monotheism; Tutankhamun, the boy king made famous by Howard Carter's discovery of his untouched tomb; and Ramesses II, also known as Ramesses the Great, who had one of the longest and most prosperous reigns of any pharaoh and set the standard for subsequent rulers. The New Kingdom was followed by a period of political unrest, separatism, and numerous dynasties, each under a different ruler. The kingdom of Kush to the south took advantage of this fragmentation and overran most of Egypt. This Third Intermediate Period lasted for almost 400 years. During the Late Period, Egypt shifted from the hands of native to Persian rulers repeatedly, from 664-332 BCE.

It was at this point that Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great of Macedon; thus Egypt passed into his hands. Following his death a few short years later, Egyptian rule passed to one of his generals, Ptolemy I, who established the last canonical dynasty in Egypt. During this time, there was a heavy Greek presence in Egypt, especially in the newly-founded capital city of Alexandria in the Nile Delta. The Ptolemaic rule ended in 30 BCE with the death of Cleopatra VII; after this, Egypt was a Roman province for over 600 years, until it was conquered by an Arab general, bringing Egypt into the Islamic world (Silverman 2003:20-39).

### **The Role of Isis as a Deity**

The myth surrounding the worship of Isis and her consort Osiris was told in many disconnected, sometimes even contradictory, versions throughout the history of Egyptian civilization. The most complete rendition of the original myth of the goddess Isis comes from Plutarch and was written ca. 118-119 CE. It tells the story of how Isis' brother/husband Osiris was tricked into a coffin by his evil brother Seth; the coffin was then cast into the Nile. It ended up in Babylon, where a tree grew around it. This tree was then cut down and made into a pillar in the king's palace. After much lamenting and wandering, Isis recovered the coffin her husband's body was in and returned it to Egypt. Seth, however, rediscovered his brother's body and cut it to pieces, scattering them across Egypt. Isis again searched for her husband's remains; she recovered the parts and erected a temple wherever a piece was found (Plutarch 1970:135-147). In some versions of the story she, with the assistance of magic and several other gods, resurrected Osiris long enough to become impregnated by him with Horus. Osiris became the god of the underworld and Horus became the sun god. Because of her associations with them, Isis was seen as a great protector and loyal wife and mother (Lesko 1999:161-162).

### **Pre-Dynastic and Old Kingdom**

In tribal Africa, the throne of the king is known as the mother of the king; it therefore makes sense that the ancient Egyptian word for throne was "Aset," which transliterated to "Isis." The goddess was often depicted with the hieroglyph for throne on her head (Figure 2), becoming the personification of the power that transforms a prince

into a king (Lesko 1999:156). It was during this period that she was first mentioned as a loyal wife and mother in the Pyramid Texts, a collection of religious spells written in the third millennium BCE to assist the pharaoh on his journey through the afterlife (Tripolitis 2002:26). These texts actually predate the pyramids, although the first mention of Isis did not occur until the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, or about 2500 BCE. By the end of the Old Kingdom, Isis played a powerful role in the revival and reassembly of Osiris, and became renowned for her magical powers (Lesko 1999:158-159).

The earliest extant temples, built during this time, were often mortuary temples connected to the pyramids (Figure 3). Pre-Dynastic and Old Kingdom temples not associated with pyramids were typically small and made of materials that did not endure the tests of time, such as mudbrick and reeds (Lesko 1999:204). Egyptian temples were both functional and highly symbolic, often using architectural features to represent aspects of the Egyptian creation myth. At the beginning of time, a mound of earth emerged from the ancient waters of existence. After some time, a hawk or falcon landed on a single reed which was growing on the mound. Because this area was sacred, it needed protection, and a simple wall surrounded it. A typical Old Kingdom mortuary temple included an entrance hall followed by an open courtyard, surrounded wholly or in part by a colonnade. This courtyard served both a functional and a symbolic purpose. Practically, it was a transitional area between the more public outer area of the complex and the sacred inner sanctuary. The columns, found mostly in the forecourts of Old Kingdom temples, also had religious significance. Because they were usually constructed and decorated to represent various plants, such as the lotus, the palm, and the papyrus, they also probably symbolized the reeds which grew on and around the original

mound of earth. Behind the courtyard in Old Kingdom temples were shrines containing statues of the dead king, as well as storage areas and an inner sanctuary. This basic plan formed the basis for later temple architecture (Wilkinson 2000).

### **Middle Kingdom**

During the First Intermediate Period, there was a great amount of social instability due to Old Kingdom overspending. This seemed to shake people's faith in an invincible god-king. They began to turn to the old gods, specifically those of the afterlife, such as Osiris, who offered better things to come. During this patriarchal period, Isis' popularity was eclipsed by that of Osiris, and she was not always mentioned in the funerary texts dating to this time. It seems that Osiris took over her abilities to resurrect the dead (Lesko 1999:166-167); Isis was instead praised more in association with the earth's fertility and the inundation of the Nile (Lesko 1999:169). She was associated with Soped, or Sothis, now called Sirius, the star whose appearance heralded the rising of the Nile (Lesko 1999:156). After seventy days of summer heat, the rising waters were perhaps connected with the tears Isis shed during her long search for Osiris. This association with the Nile can still be seen in a relief at her temple at Philae, depicting the Nile god Hapi pouring water into the great river (Figure 4).

It was from this period that the first evidence of Isis being worshipped at a temple was found, although she still did not have any complexes dedicated specifically to her (Lesko 1999:155). Despite the widespread building of temples, few survive to present day because they were often used as quarries for building materials or incorporated into later structures. From the few examples that do survive, it seems that it was at this point

that the pillared court was developed as an addition to the Old Kingdom temple architecture. These forerunners of the great hypostyle halls were small, often containing only four columns. Symmetry of the temple plan also became an extremely important concept during the Middle Kingdom, and a tripartite shrine was frequently located in the rear of the temple and held statues of the three main deities honored there (Figure 5). These design principles were carried over into the New Kingdom (Wilkinson 2000:22-23).

### **New Kingdom**

Isis enjoyed an immense revival of popularity during the New Kingdom, perhaps due to the high status of women, such as Nefertiti, in the royal family during the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. At this point, more stories about the goddess were written down than ever before, praising her many virtues and powers (Lesko 1999:170). During this period, more artists began to depict her wearing the cow horns and sun disk typically associated with the goddess Hathor (Figure 6). This may represent an assimilation of the two goddesses, or perhaps was only used to add to the power of Isis by comparing her with another great deity (Lesko 1999:179). It may also relate to a version of the myth of Isis and Osiris recorded by Plutarch, in which he relates that after Horus had captured Seth he presented him, bound, to his mother Isis. Instead of killing Seth, she freed him and let him go; enraged, Horus grabbed his mother and ripped the diadem from her head, at which point Hermes (who is sometimes equated with Anubis in Hellenistic times) came forward and placed a cow-headed helmet on her head (Plutarch 1970:147). During the New Kingdom, Isis is typically present in the Book of the Dead, a kind of later form of

the Pyramid Texts which helped guide the deceased through the afterlife (Lesko 1999:179). In illustrations, Isis is often depicted standing behind Osiris at the judgment of the dead (Lesko 1999:167-168) (Figure 7).

Most extant temples in Egypt date to the New Kingdom or to the Ptolemaic period. By this point, a definite architectural canon had been developed in regards to the construction of temples (Figure 8). Because most temples were located close to the Nile, the primary means of transportation in ancient Egypt, the complex was often entered through a landing quay. From here a processional way, often lined with sphinxes and small way stations, led to the temple proper. This area was typically surrounded by enclosure walls, which served as both actual and metaphorical defenses; in addition to protecting the temple during times of strife, it also separated that sacred space from the chaotic, profane world located outside of the complex. In front of the massive entrance pylon there were typically two obelisks, massive stone monuments meant to represent a petrified sunbeam; their inscriptions commemorated victories, jubilees, and other important events. The temple itself was entered through a massive pylon or gateway, which seems to have developed, at least in some form, during the Old Kingdom. The pylon served as a physical defense, but also had an apotropaic function in that it repelled the forces of chaos and evil that lived beyond the temple compound. An interesting similarity occurs between the form of the pylon and the hieroglyph “akhet” or “horizon” (Figure 9), and because of the east-west axis of most temples, the sun would rise each day over the temple pylons, just as it did over the actual horizon. These pylons were traditionally decorated with scenes of the king smiting his enemies, a theme that had been represented since the earliest dynasties. Behind this was an open colonnaded courtyard,

the symbolism of which has already been discussed. This was followed by a hypostyle hall, a dark space filled with columns, perhaps meant to mimic, as mentioned earlier, the reeds of the swamp where the Egyptian creation myth took place. They may also represent the columns that, in Egyptian mythology, supported the sky over the earth. Beyond the hypostyle hall was the inner sanctuary itself, where the statue of the deity was kept in a shrine, or naos. This was typically surrounded by storage rooms and other chambers, including one for the sacred barque, the miniature boat on which the image of the god traveled when it was brought outside of the temple complex (Wilkinson 2000).

### **Late Period**

Following a short Persian rule, the last native rulers of Egypt were Nectanebo I and II, who ruled from about 380-342 BCE. They were especially devoted to Isis, and began a great temple to her at Behbeit el-Hagar in northern Egypt, perhaps the first temple to be dedicated exclusively to her (Lesko 1999:182). It was finally completed during the reigns of Ptolemy II Philadelphos and Ptolemy III Euergetes I, and showed a clear continuity of design from the Late Kingdom (Figure 10). The temple at Behbeit el-Hagar was unique in that it was composed almost entirely of granite, quite possibly the only of its kind in ancient Egypt. It fell victim, however, to either an earthquake or quarrying by later dynasties, although many of the carved blocks of stone still remain at the site (Figure 11) (Wilkinson 2000:27, 104-105).

## **Ptolemaic Period**

Following the Late Period, Egypt was again under foreign rule until it was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. He founded Alexandria in the Nile Delta in 331 BCE, and laid out a plan of the city, indicating which sanctuaries should be constructed where. It is interesting to note that Isis was the only non-Greek deity included in Alexander's original plans (Mikalson 2005:210). Following his death nine years later, Egypt passed into the hands of one of his generals, Ptolemy I Soter, who established the last canonical dynasty in Egypt. The Ptolemies, beginning with Ptolemy I Soter, transformed and Hellenized Osiris in order to create a syncretic god that could be worshipped by local Egyptians, the Macedonian soldiers located in Egypt, and Greek settlers there. This new god, whom they called Serapis, became the patron deity of their dynasty. Ptolemy I Soter had the Egyptian priest Manetho, as well as two Athenians, the Eumolpid Timotheus and Demetrius of Phaleron, develop a mythology, a ritual, and liturgical hymns for Serapis. He, like Osiris, was the god of the underworld, but now also bestowed prosperity and healing on his followers. Despite the Ptolemies' efforts, Serapis was not worshipped by many Egyptians, but primarily by Greeks living in Alexandria; however, Serapis was seen as the consort of Isis as they spread together throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world (Mikalson 2005:201). Because the Ptolemies needed to be considered legitimate successors to the pharaohs, they also sought to appease the local population, who were still extremely devoted to their Egyptian gods, including Isis (Mikalson 2005:211). The best way of doing this was by submitting to the wishes of the priesthood, an extremely powerful faction of society. For this reason, little change occurred in the structures of the temples to purely Egyptian deities (Malek 2003:12-13).

This can certainly be seen in Roman coins associated with Isis in Alexandria. Because much of ancient Alexandria is now underwater, there is very little evidence as to what buildings from the Ptolemaic period there looked like; numismatic evidence is almost the only way for archaeologists to reconstruct those structures. The Pharos lighthouse, of which Isis Pharia was the patron deity, is depicted on numerous coins, both with (Figure 12) and without Isis (Figure 13). Some scholars believe that the image of Isis Pharia represents, not just the idea of the goddess, but an actual statue that stood next to this wonder of the ancient world. A Hellenistic statue believed to represent Isis Pharia was found in a villa near Naples, and is now in Budapest (Figure 14); the proposed statue that stood at the harbor of Alexandria may have looked quite similar to this example. It may also have been the massive statue of Isis that was lifted from the Bay of Alexandria in 1962 (Darwish 2007:1) (Figure 15).

The temple of Isis in Alexandria is also represented on coins from the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian (Figure 16). The entrance to the temple is a traditional Egyptian pylon with vertical lines representing flagstaves, although it does have the window openings typical of the Ptolemaic period. Despite this addition, it is obvious that this temple was constructed in accordance with ancient Egyptian architectural canons, with very little Hellenistic influence. The Isis-Harpocrates shrine (Figure 17), depicted on coins from the reigns of Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, is shown as having a two-stepped podium with two columns topped by papyrus-flower capitals. The pediment is in the form of an arch, rather than the more traditionally Hellenistic triangular form. Within the building is a statue of Isis, wearing an Egyptian headdress and robe, suckling Harpocrates. Aside from the headdress, the statue is stylistically

Hellenistic. The style of the temple, however, seems to be an interesting evolution of ancient Egyptian architecture; common since ancient times, reed and mat huts featured a roof stretched over an arched frame. This shallow-arched roof continued to be a common Egyptian architectural feature well into Ptolemaic and Roman times (Handler 1971:57-62).

During this period Isis was still venerated as the mother of Horus, and the Ptolemaic temple at Kom-Ombo, jointly dedicated to Horus and Sobek, features an interesting relief of Isis giving birth to (Figure 18) and nursing the young Horus (Figure 19). The temple to Hathor at Dendara also features many images of Isis, perhaps because of the earlier association made between the two goddesses. The ceiling paintings in the outer hypostyle hall are of a symbolic chart of the heavens and signs of the zodiac. There is a scene depicting numerous deities, including Isis, riding in a barque through the heavens (Figure 20). Isis is also shown several times in the crypts below the temple, where the treasures were kept; she is shown seated beside Hathor (Figure 21). On the rear wall of the temple at Dendara are massive reliefs depicting Cleopatra VII, who identified herself as the “new” Isis (Mikalson 2005:212) and her son Caesarion making offerings to Isis (Figure 22). Located behind the temple of Hathor is a small temple dedicated to Isis (Figure 23). The original cella of the temple was constructed during the reign of Nectanebo I; this was in ruins by the Augustan Period, when the building that is extant today was constructed over the remains. Its four-columned hypostyle hall dates to the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (r. 180-145 BCE), while the outer hall and colonnaded ambulatory were built under Ptolemy IX Soter II (r. 116-81 BCE) and Ptolemy X Alexander I (r. 114-87 BCE) (Hölbl 2001). The layout of this temple is very

unusual in that the main part of the complex, including its small colonnaded forecourt and the hypostyle hall, face the east, while the sanctuary itself is oriented to face the north, opening onto the temple of Hathor (Figure 24). The sanctuary contained a statue of Osiris that was supported by the arms of Isis and her sister Nepthys; this, however, no longer remains (Wilkinson 2000:151). The whole interior of the sanctuary is decorated with detailed reliefs (Figure 25). On the southern exterior wall of the temple is another relief of the pharaoh making offerings to Isis (Figure 26).

The greatest temple to Isis was built during the Ptolemaic period on the island of Philae in southern Egypt (Figures 27 and 28). Philae was the main cult center for the worship of Isis throughout the Mediterranean, and worshippers from as far away as Rome made pilgrimages to this sacred place. The entrance to the main temple was preceded by a colonnaded forecourt, unique in that no two floral capitals on the columns are alike (Figure 29). The first pylon, built by Ptolemy XII, depicted the standard scenes of the ruler conquering his enemies (Figure 30). Through the first pylon was the second courtyard, followed by a second pylon. Within this courtyard was a Roman mammisi, or birth house (Figure 31). It was here that the birth of the children of the gods, in this case the birth of Horus, was celebrated. The screen walls between the Hathor-headed columns were a common feature of birth houses, meant to shield the interior from view. The first row of columns in the hypostyle hall only contained two columns, one on each side and removed from the entrance; because of this, the openness of hall seemed to form an interesting combination of hypostyle hall and peristyle (Figure 32). Beyond the hypostyle hall was the entrance to the chambers of the inner temple. The sanctuary still contains the barque pedestal dedicated by Ptolemy III and his wife (Wilkinson 2000:214)

(Figure 33), although the pink granite naos that once held the sacred image of Isis within the temple proper is now located in the Louvre (Figure 34) (Ziegler 1990:82).

### **The Hellenistic World**

As early as the fifth century BCE, Herodotus equated Isis with Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture (Mikalson 2005:200). Because of Isis' association with the yearly inundation of the Nile, Isis also had ties to life, fertility, and agriculture. The two goddesses also both searched for a loved one who had descended to the underworld: in the case of Isis, her husband Osiris; and in the case of Demeter, her daughter Persephone, who was abducted by the god of the underworld. It was in this manner that Isis first became fused with a foreign goddess. Pre-dating Herodotus' historical linking of the two goddesses was an interesting burial found at Eleusis, where the mystery religion of Demeter and Persephone was celebrated. A grave found there from the Late Geometric Period (c. 750 BCE) contained an Egyptian porcelain statuette of Isis, as well as scarabs, beads, vases, fibulae, and jewelry. These discoveries are now housed at the National Museum of Athens (Mylonas 1961:61).

During the Greco-Roman period, Isis began to transcend local cult centers; instead, diverse local goddesses became manifestations of the same deity. Her universality is expressed in Apuleius' "Metamorphoses, or The Golden Ass" written in the second century CE. Although basically a work of fiction, numerous inscriptions and fragments indicate that the information on the Isiac religion and its initiation rites were largely factual (Tripolitis 2002:29). Isis' syncretism with other goddesses is conveyed in the following passage spoken by the goddess:

*Here I am, Lucius, roused by your prayers. I am the mother of the world of nature, mistress of all the elements first-born in this realm of time. I am the loftiest of deities, queen of departed spirits, foremost of heavenly dwellers, the single embodiment of all gods and goddesses...The whole world worships this single godhead under a variety of shapes and liturgies and titles...But the peoples on whom the rising sun-god shines with his first rays – ...the Egyptians who flourish with their time-honoured learning – worship me with the liturgy that is my own, and call me by my true name, which is queen Isis (Kraemer 2004:440).*

During the Hellenistic era, there were massive migrations of people who settled in the new lands conquered by Alexander. As they left their homes, they must have felt a sense of aloneness and detachment. Isis often became a supportive and consoling goddess to these people. She was always depicted as a very human deity, both in that she rarely took any form other than human, and that she remained a devoted and loving wife and mother. This also made it easy for everyday people to identify with her (Lesko 1999:182). She offered liberation from the trials of everyday life, an aspect that she did not have in her original Egyptian form, but one that seemed to develop during Hellenistic times (Lesko 1999:186). It was at this point that her role as a mystery goddess seemed to develop.

Apuleius' work is one of the only texts that mentions the initiation rites of Isis, and still only briefly describes it. After the goddess revealed to Lucius in a dream that it was time for him to be initiated into her cult, he purchased items necessary for the ritual, sparing no expense. He then bathed, and was purified with water, presumably sacred water from the Nile. For the next ten days Lucius had to abstain from eating animal flesh and drinking wine. When the ten days were over, he was clad in a new linen garment and

led into the inner sanctuary. While the events that took place in that sacred space overnight were too secret to divulge, he claimed to have come near to death and stood in the presence of the gods and goddesses. The next morning the rites were completed, and that day was considered Lucius' new birthday, the day he was reborn into salvation through the mysteries (Kraemer 2004:449-450).

It was this Hellenistic Isis who spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. Because of her earlier association with the Nile and her navigation of it during her search for Osiris, Isis Pelagia ("Our Lady of the Waves") became especially popular as the protective goddess of sailors and merchants, both Greek and Egyptian (Mikalson 2005:206). Greek merchants carried the cult of Isis abroad as early as the fourth century BCE, possibly from earlier settlements they established in the Fayum and the Nile Delta (Lesko 1999:185). Often the Isiac cult centers outside of Egypt were busy ports or towns located on trade routes, where the people were much more receptive to foreign influence (Heyob 1975:14); however, by the end of the Hellenistic era, Isis had temples and devotees in almost every Greek city throughout the Mediterranean (Mikalson 2005:201). One of the earliest Isiac temples was at Piraeus, Athens' harbor city. The Athenians allowed Egyptians to purchase land to build a sanctuary there ca. 332/331 BCE (Mikalson 2005:201). There was also a prestigious temple dedicated to Isis on the slope of the Acropolis (Turcan 1996:81), as is recorded on a marble block found on the southern slope (Figure 35).

Her cult enjoyed a special popularity at Delos, where the earliest mention of Egyptian deities on the island is an inscription to Isis dating to the late fourth or early third centuries BCE. Egyptian merchants traded with the inhabitants of Delos, although

according to an inscription found at Serapeum A, the religion was brought to the island by Apollonios, a priest from Memphis. His grandson, Apollonios II, constructed the first of three temples on Delos dedicated to an Egyptian deity, Serapeum A, built around 220 BCE (Bruneau 1970:461) (Figures 36 and 37). This was the second non-Greek style temple built on the island, after the synagogue (Bruneau 1983:220-221). The temple was built on a bend of land on the right bank of the Inopos, a small river on Delos, and was just downstream from a reservoir (Bruneau 1970:459). The staircase opening onto the street led to a tiled courtyard which contained the small temple, which was slightly elevated and constructed over a crypt-like room. The sacred water that always played such an important role in Egyptian religion came, via a small canal, from the reservoir of the Inopos (Bruneau 1983:221); this stream was believed to have sprung from the Nile, as mentioned in Callimachus' "Hymn III: To Artemis" (Bruneau 1970:17). This may explain the presence of the crypt under the temple; perhaps it was, in actuality, a reservoir for the water used during rituals (Figure 38). Three other altars and an offering "trunk" also stood in the courtyard, which was bordered on the north and south by colonnades, behind which there were rectangular rooms. In the north and east walls of the northern room there were niches, seemingly intended to hold lamps, or perhaps the associates of Serapis, such as Isis. To the west of the courtyard was a trapezoidal room lined with benches inscribed with dedications to the gods (Bruneau 1983:220-221). These meeting rooms for the faithful and for the practice of foreign rituals were distinctly non-Greek, in terms of the use of sacred space.

Slightly east of Serapeum A was Serapeum B, also a private temple which today lies mostly in ruins (Figures 39 and 40). The date of its construction is unknown. At the

top of the stairs, to the left, was a large room with three marble altars decorated with horns; at a slightly higher level there was a small temple and a rectangular structure. The east part of this was bordered by a portico, under which there was another crypt-like room, possibly a sacred reservoir (Bruneau 1983:223).

In 180 BCE, Serapeum C (Figure 41) became the official sanctuary to the Egyptian deities, and seems to have been in use until the second century CE. More than 170 inscriptions found there attest to its prosperity, including a pair of votive ears offered to Isis Epékoos (“who listens”), to indicate that the goddess hears the prayers of the worshippers (Bruneau 1983:227-228) (Figure 42). The temple complex was entered from the south; the entryway opened onto a long trapezoidal space, bordered by a portico (Figure 43). From the entrance, one could reach the forecourt; from there, a tiled dromos characteristic of Egyptian temples, which consisted of an avenue of sphinxes alternating with small altars, led to the temple in the southern portion of the Serapeum. This temple has not been positively identified; R. Vallois believed it to be a Metroon. Metroons were temples dedicated to the mother goddess, Cybele, Rhea, or Demeter; given the assimilation between Isis and Demeter, the latter would be the most logical choice (Bruneau 1983:227-229). However, Bruneau puts forth a convincing argument that this building may actually have been the temple to Isis within the Serapeum. The Athenian inventories, or lists of the “treasures” of temples, from 157/156 and 156/155 BCE, mentioned an item found in the dromos near the temple of Isis. The structure generally regarded as the temple of Isis, which will be discussed in more detail later, was quite far from the dromos in the temple complex and was not built until circa 130 BC (Bruneau 2006:509). In the northern part of Serapeum C was a tiled courtyard, bordered on the

south and west by a portico. A small temple, constructed partially of bluish marble, still stands in the northern end of the courtyard, and was dedicated to Serapis. At the eastern edge of the courtyard was what has been generally accepted as the temple of Isis, the façade of which is now restored (Figure 44); it was built by the Athenian people in 130 BCE, perhaps as a collective offering, if Bruneau's new theory is to be accepted. It had a recessed portico with two Doric columns between the end pilasters; the tympanum contained the bust of a person or deity, and the acroteria, or the ornaments at the top or both ends of the pediment, represented a woman running, or perhaps Nike. At the back of the cella was a large Hellenistic ex-voto statue of Isis, also dedicated by the Athenians. If Bruneau's hypothesis that the temple in the southern part of the complex is the temple dedicated to Isis, then this building was perhaps an Athenian ex-voto constructed after the officialization of Serapeum C. Immediately north of this temple to Isis was a temple dedicated to Serapis, Isis, and Anubis. In front of the temple of Isis is a small quadrangular monument decorated with roses, another horned altar. This altar contains holes on the upper surface, probably for offerings of incense (Bruneau 1983:227-229).

The cult of Serapis was a private one until the Delians lost their independence to Athens in 166 BCE (Walters 1988:3), after which time it became an official public cult (Heyob 1975:7). Evidence from an inscription found in Serapeum A suggests that Serapis had trouble gaining support on Delos at first, possibly because he was the patron deity of the Ptolemaic imperialists (Turcan 1996:82-83). Dedications from within Serapeum C, built ca. 215/214 BCE (Mikalson 2005:201) give a good indication of the kind of cultural melting-pot the island was; over sixteen deities, both Greek and Egyptian, are mentioned (Mikalson 2005:206.) Many Roman *negotiatores* subscribed towards the

building of the Serapeum, and offerings made by them to Isis and Anubis have also been found (Turcan 1996:83). It is not known how Serapeum C was affected by the invasion of Mithridates in 88 BC; it was either destroyed or abandoned. The temple to Isis was repaired using materials from the rest of the complex, although this restoration might have been done at a later date. It seems that it was again in use during the Roman Imperial period, as attested by the discovery of a Corinthian lamp depicting Isis Pelagia dating to the second century CE (Figure 45), as well as a relief from the early first century CE of the same goddess (Bruneau 1970:462-463) (Figure 46). Little is known of the rituals that went on in the Serapeums, whether private or official; one fragment, found in Serapeum C, mentions the use of wine and the carrying of embroidered vestments. It also seems that, as in other Egyptian temples throughout the Greco-Roman world, water played an important role. Banquets were also mentioned in the inscription from Serapeum A, and an ex-voto to Isis depicts a banquet scene. This could certainly explain the function of the benches in the meeting room of Serapeum A (Bruneau 1970:465).

### **The Roman World**

While there is evidence of Isis at Syracuse as early as its capture by Marcellus and the Romans in the late third century BCE, including bronze coins depicting Serapis and Isis and a profile of Isis wearing the basileion (Turcan 1996:83), this does not seem to be the major point of contact between Romans and the worship of the Egyptian goddess. It seems that Delos was the major link between Egypt and the Italian peninsula; when the island was sacked by Mithridates of Pontus in 88 BCE, many Italian merchants returned to their native lands, especially Campania in the south. It was at this time that Egyptian

traders began travelling directly to Puteoli to deal with the Italian Peninsula (Turcan 1996:85). There are reports of a temple to Serapis and Isis in Puteoli ca. 105 BCE (Takács 1995:58) (Figure 47).

Her worship reached the bustling Roman city of Pompeii around the same time, and gained immediate popularity, as evidenced by numerous inscriptions and private *lararia* in which the goddess was worshipped (Nappo 1998:89), as well as the presence of a temple to Isis (Figure 48). Excavated in 1764 and 1765, it is the best surviving temple to the goddess throughout the Roman Empire, although it is not the first temple to be built to Isis in Pompeii. The original temple was destroyed in the earthquake of 62 CE, and the present temple was rebuilt over its foundations. An inscription over the door records that it was rebuilt by N. Popidius Celsinus, the six year old son of N. Popidius. This was certainly a political move by a wealthy freedman; because he could not hold public office, he rebuilt an important temple in his young son's name, and for this, the *decurions*, the leading assembly of the town, accepted N. Popidius Celsinus into their ranks without charge (Nappo 1998:89-90).

The complex is walled in from the surrounding neighborhood, perhaps homage to the tall walls of Egyptian temples which separate the sacred from the profane world surrounding it. These walls were decorated in the fourth style and feature priests and priestesses of Isis, as well as scenes of Egypt (Figure 49) (Tran Tam Tinh 1964:35). The small entrance through the red and white walls was a three-paneled door; hinges found indicate that only the middle panel could be opened. The temple features an unusual portico in which the number of columns differs from side to side: eight on both the north and south, seven on the west, and six on the east (Figure 50). The columns were

constructed of brick and had no base, but were placed directly on the paved tuff stylobate, or floor, of the temple. The bottom portion was covered in a thick layer of red plaster and the fluted upper portion was covered in white plaster. The intercolumnation was wider between the third and fourth columns on the east side, and the columns were actually pillars with engaged half-columns. This was the main entrance to the pronaos through which the worshippers would enter. The capitals used in the portico were of composite Tuscan style, borrowed from Rome's neighbors to the north. Six small altars filled in the spaces between these columns, and the end walls were decorated with fourth style frescoes, including scenes of Egypt.

A staircase led up to the pronaos (Figure 51), which featured Corinthian columns that supported an entablature below what may have been a saddle roof. On each side of the large entrance there was a small altar, one for Harpocrates and one for Anubis. The shrine itself was not very deep. Along the sides of the shrine were six tuff shelves to house religious images, with a large bench along the back wall for the statues of Isis and Osiris. There was also a small back door located in this wall, through which there was an outside staircase that the priests could use to access the temple. An interesting feature of this shrine is the presence of two large stucco ears on the back wall to indicate that the deities were listening to the worshippers' prayers (Nappo 1998:91); this was often used in Egyptian temples as well, including the temple of Hathor at Dendara, and a votive offering of the same was found in Serapeum C at Delos. The altar, horned like those at Delos, was off center from main axis of the temple, so as not to hinder processions. Altars of this type can also be seen in frescoes found at nearby Herculaneum (Figure 52) (Tran Tam Tinh 1964:333-34). Excavation journals reveal that "the ashes and burnt

bones of the victims...” were found on top of the altar. Normally the remains of the sacrifices, as well as offerings, were placed in the sacred well in the north-east corner of the complex (Nappo 1998:91). At the time of the eruption it was filled with dates, chestnuts, walnuts, figs, pine cones, charred hazelnuts, and fragments of Egyptian idols.

In the south-east area of the portico was a small building which contained a basement shrine (Figure 53), the function of which is debated. Some scholars, such as Ernest Breton, believe it is a purgatorium which held Nile water brought back from Egypt. Others, like Georges Lafaye and Alexandre Moret, refer to it as a megaron, in reference to an inscription found at Ostia that mentions a room where candidates for initiation would sleep, waiting for a dream from Isis to indicate they were ready to join the cult (Tran Tam Tinh 1964:34).

Unlike Egyptian and Greek temples, the storage areas of the temple of Isis at Pompeii were not within the temple proper, but were instead located behind the temple. Five arched doorways behind the west portico led into a room that was probably the ekklesiasterion, used as a gathering place for worshippers and where ritual banquets were held (Nappo 1998:91); this use may be attested to by the chicken bones found there during excavations (Tran Tam Tinh 1964:37). This room was elaborately decorated with frescoes in the fourth style, including Nilotic landscapes and myths relating to Isis (Figures 54 and 55). The mosaic floor recorded the names of N. Popidius Celsinus and his family. The marble head of an acrolith, a statue whose naked parts, such as head, hands, and feet, were constructed of marble, while the draped parts were made of wood, was found within this room (Figure 56), as well as other cult objects, including a bronze sistrum (Figure 57). Also accessible from the west portico was a second room, perhaps a

sacrarium, whose walls were covered in white plaster and randomly decorated with images and scenes of Isis. This room was probably a storeroom that also doubled as an area where religious instruction took place; a large number of religious artifacts were found here during excavations, including numerous statues, both of Isis and other deities (Figure 58) (Nappo 1998:90-91). Five other small rooms were located in the south-east of the temple complex and were probably sleeping rooms for the priests, and were also used for preparing food and dining (Tran Tam Tinh 1964:38).

When Rome annexed southern Italy, they came into direct contact with the cult of the Hellenistic Isis (Takács 1995:5). When it reached the capital city, it received a mixed reception. Because of Isis' very human role as loyal wife and mother, she was endeared to the class of society whose daily concerns focused on domestic life (Heyob 1975:52). Mystery religions were also extremely appealing to those who found the state religion to be dry and meaningless. Their emphasis was on individual worship and salvation, rather than the Greco-Roman forms of civic religion. Also, their festive rights and sense of mysticism must have been intriguing to the masses (Heyob 1975:14). Evidence suggests, however, that Isis was not so readily accepted by the ruling classes, who at the time viewed foreign cults as hotbeds for political upheaval and rebellion (Heyob 1975:36).

The earliest evidence of an Egyptian presence in Rome itself dates to 90 BCE, when the denarii of an auxiliary mint contained control marks in the forms of the basileion and the lotus flower; coins from 79 BCE depict sistra. This does not necessarily indicate a religious presence, because other secular items were seen on these coins as well. It does, however, suggest that slaves of Alexandrian origin may have been working at the mint during this time; they must certainly have brought their religious beliefs with

them as well (Turcan 1996:85-86). Between 65 and 48 BCE, numerous shrines dedicated to Isis were destroyed within Rome (Roullet 1972:2). She was obviously popular with the Roman peoples, though, because in 50 BCE, none of the workmen would lay hands on the holy walls of Isis and Serapis, and the consul, L. Aemilius Paulus, had to begin destroying the temple himself. The goddess' popularity obviously continued until October 43 BCE, when the triumvirs Marc Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian promised to build a temple dedicated to Isis and Serapis to increase public approval. However, following the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE and defeat of Marc Antony and Cleopatra VII, Octavian no longer supported these Egyptian deities (Turcan 1996:87), perhaps because of his extreme dislike of Cleopatra, who identified herself with Isis and who also seduced Marc Antony, the husband of Octavian's sister. In fact, some accounts say he viewed her rites to be "pornographic" and capable of destroying the moral fiber of Rome (Silverman 2003:135). In 28 BCE, he outlawed the worship of foreign deities within 100 paces of the pomerium, the area inside the boundary established by the official foundation rite of the city (Scheid 2003:61, 63). However, at this time, unlike earlier, private chapels were not destroyed. While Augustus was in Sicily in 21 BCE, his son-in-law Agrippa drove Egyptian cults, which, according to Cassius Dio, "were again invading the city" out from the pomerium; they were also banned in the suburbs within a radius of 7 ½ stadia (or .83 miles) of the urbs (Turcan 1996:87-88.)

However, as Turcan points out, persecution only creates and strengthens perseverance, and a sanctuary of Isis on the Campus Martius became an important center of the Egyptian religion within Rome. This temple, however, was destroyed by Tiberius in 19 CE, following a scandal involving a knight, Decius Mundus, who paid the priests to

assist in his seduction of a noblewoman who worshipped there. The statue of Isis was thrown into the Tiber River, and the temple, cultic instruments, and Isiac vestments were burnt (Turcan 2000:123). The worship of Isis was eventually embraced by the emperor Caligula, who rebuilt the temple to Isis, the Iseum Campense, on the Campus Martius in 38 CE. The emperor Otho, who ruled for three short months in 69 CE, was also a worshipper of Isis (Turcan 2000:124). Her greatest early imperial supporters were without question the Flavian emperors, especially Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, who especially revered this foreign goddess. Vespasian was proclaimed emperor by the army in the East, and was acknowledged as such by Serapis when he visited Alexandria. However, the Senate had not proclaimed him emperor, a claim which Vitellius made following the death of Otho (Turcan 1996:90). During the battle in Rome on 19 December 69 CE between the supporters of his father Vespasian, and the praetorians and peoples of Rome who supported Vitellius, Domitian escaped the city, disguised among a fleeing band of the priests of Isis (Le Glay 2001:241), possibly from the Iseum on the Capitoline Hill (Roulet 1972:37). Vespasian and Titus spent the night in the Iseum Campense before their victory in the Jewish Wars in 70 CE. This temple is depicted on the reverse of many sesterces minted in 71 CE (Figure 59). The Iseum Campense was destroyed during the great fire of 80 CE, but was rebuilt by Domitian (Le Glay 2001:250.)

Unless Domitian completely re-planned the temple after the fire, which is unlikely, the coin probably depicts how the Iseum look for the majority of its existence (Figure 60). This Iseum Campense was an obvious fusion of Hellenistic and Egyptian sanctuaries. The positions of the sanctuaries are based largely on what discoveries were

excavated where. To the north of the central courtyard, there were primarily pieces connected to the worship of Isis, mostly in the Egyptian style, including the remains of a statue brought from Behbeit el-Hagar (Figure 61); to the south, there were more Hellenistic pieces, such as a recumbent Tiber (Figure 62). It was surrounded by the high walls characteristic of Egyptian temples, perhaps, as in Pompeii, to separate the sacred from the profane. The two side entrances were located within arches, which were a definite Roman architectural influence, and opened on to a courtyard separating the temples of Isis and Serapis. Within this courtyard was what may have been a round fountain and an obelisk, probably the same that is now located in the Piazza Navona (Figure 63), bearing an inscription to Domitian, “beloved of Isis and Ptah: maybe he live like Ra” and a depiction of Isis crowning him as emperor.

The Iseum, located at the northern end of the complex and connected to the courtyard by a dromos, was within a second courtyard surrounded by a portico. The numerous granite columns (Figure 64) with marble lotiform capitals (Figure 65) that have been excavated are most likely from this portico; the large intercolumnation on the marble plan suggests that the columns were extremely large, larger than the columns used in the Serapeum in the southern part of the complex. Numerous small chapels were contained in the recesses between these columns. A Roman low-relief from a tomb along the Appian Way at Ariccia depicts ritual dancers performing in front of Egyptian divinities seated under a portico (Figure 66). The Iseum Campense was probably the only temple in Latium large enough to be depicted like this. The fact that granite baboons from the reign of Nectanebo II (Figure 67), much like those depicted on the tomb, were excavated under the western portico seems to support this theory. The

dromos leading to the Iseum was much like an avenue of sphinxes, a New Kingdom innovation used extensively in Late Period and Roman times. At Ptolemaic and Roman temples, the sphinxes often alternated with recumbent lions, as at the Iseum Campense. Small obelisks also lined the dromos.

The details of the sanctuary itself are known primarily from the coins minted during the rule of Vespasian. It featured the architecture typical of most Iseums of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, both within Egypt and throughout the Mediterranean. It had a prostyle of four columns with what seem to be Corinthian capitals, and was built on a raised platform. The pronaos was reached by way of five steps contained with end walls; at the bottom of these stood a pair of figures, perhaps recumbent lions, sphinxes, or baboons. At either side of the top of the stairs were two Egyptianizing statues wearing a double crown. Above the columns was an architrave decorated with a solar disc and uraei, the sacred serpent on the headdress of Egyptian royalty and deities; this architrave supported a large semi-circular pediment. Within the tympanum was Isis-Sothis riding a dog, with stars decorating the rest of the space, meant to indicate the heavens. Above the pediment were three acroteria in the form of falcons wearing the double crown of Egypt. Behind the portico was the door to the sanctuary; the double lintel above the entrance was carved with a winged solar disc and a frieze of uraei. The large statue of Isis that stood within the temple was Hellenistic in style, and most likely stood on a bench or pedestal at the back of the cella. She probably held her usual attributes of sistrum and situla, as is indicated by her raised right hand and lowered left hand. It seems that during the Roman period, very few statues of Isis that stood within temples were actually Egyptian in style, even within Egypt (Roullet 1972:23-32) (Figure 68). She was typically depicted as a

well-dressed woman of the Greco-Roman world, and usually wore a flowing white dress, often with a distinctive knot at the chest, perhaps meant to resemble the Egyptian ankh (Figures 69 and 70).

Egyptian deities within Rome were also supported by the emperor Caracalla, who was given the title “Philosarapis” or “beloved of Serapis” while he was in Alexandria. Caracalla’s mother, Julia Domna, is depicted on denarii, the reverse of which shows Isis with the infant Horus (Turcan 1996:93) (Figure 71). This is perhaps homage to the ancient Egyptian view of Isis as the mother and “throne” of the king, and Julia Domna may be stressing her importance in the role of mother to the emperor. Another ancient Egyptian connection, that of Isis with Sothis, is depicted on coins from Hadrian’s reign, in which the goddess is riding the dog Sothis (Turcan 1996:91), much like in the tympanum of the Iseum Campense.

After its acceptance in Rome, the worship of Isis began to spread throughout the Roman Empire, primarily along major rivers and trade routes; there is evidence of her worship in present-day eastern Europe, Germany, Spain, France, and even far away as North Africa and Roman Britain. An earthenware jug dating to the latter half of the second century CE and inscribed with the words “From London at the temple of Isis” attests to her presence in Roman Britain’s primary city (Figure 72). An altarstone dedicated to the goddess has also been discovered (Figure 73), although the temple itself still eludes archaeologists (Museum of London).

Even during Roman times, temples to Isis were constructed within her homeland, including that at Ras el-Soda near Alexandria (Figure 74). It was built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE by the charioteer Isidorus, possibly as thanks for healing his broken foot, which is

represented as a carving set on a pedestal within the temple. The temple was built on a raised pedestal, and the stairway lead to the portico with four Ionic columns. In addition to the carved foot, several statues were found within temple, including Osiris Canopus, Hermanubis, Harpocrates, and a large statue of Isis (Figure 75). In front of the platform where these statues sat was a small altar flanked by two protective sphinxes. The upper floor, reached by a stairway on the eastern side of the temple, contained rooms where the priests slept. The lack of marble tiling along the walls seems to indicate that this area was occupied by couches. The remains of a terra cotta water pipe, as well as two vessels to transport water, were also found within the temple (Research Egypt).

Once Christianity was legalized and the number of its followers began to increase, other religions began to die out throughout the Roman Empire. After Theodosius the Great's victory over the pagan coalition on 6 September 394 CE (Turcan 2000:125) and the declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, Egyptian religions no longer enjoyed the "freedom of the city"; although, according to Rutilius Namatainus, a Gaul living in Falerii, the peasants there still celebrated Osiris in connection with new crops in 417 CE (Turcan 2000:125). The most famous temple to Isis, at Philae, continued to operate under the Nubian Blemmyes into the sixth century CE (Frankfurter 1998:64). In 577 CE, the temple was converted into a Christian church (Figure 76) and the last stronghold of the old Egyptian religion met its end (Macquitty 1976:90).

## **Conclusions**

It seems that, given the results of the comparison between state sponsored Egyptian temples associated with the goddess Isis both before and after Egypt was under

Greco-Roman rule, very little changed in the architectural styles of the official temples. One of the only things that did change in association with the temples was, as Isis grew in popularity, numerous temples focused primarily on her, rather than attaching a chapel for her worship to a larger temple complex dedicated to another deity. To gain the support of the priesthood, a very powerful faction of society, the Ptolemaic rulers did not force their artistic canons or religious beliefs upon the native Egyptians. However, during the Roman period, private temples to Isis were constructed in the Greek style by Romans living in Egypt. As the worship of Isis spread outside of Egypt, Greek and Italian merchants and sailors interacted with one another and ideas were exchanged between the two cultures; the Italian peninsula was strongly influenced by the Hellenistic world, especially in its temple architecture. This can be seen in Pompeii, where the temple of Isis is an obvious fusion of Greek and Roman design principles. Other temples, such as those at Delos and the Campus Martius in Rome, incorporated some aspects of Egyptian architecture, such as the dromos, although the temple itself was primarily Hellenistic in style. The statuary associated with temples was varied as well. During the Greek and Roman periods, the official cult statue located within the sanctuary was Hellenistic in style; this was even the case in Roman Egypt. Other statuary, such as the numerous examples found from the Iseum Campense, were Egyptian in style; they did not, however, seem to serve a religious purpose, but perhaps were imported or executed more for aesthetic reasons, to create an atmosphere within the temple complex. Thus, while the Greeks and Romans had little influence on the architecture associated with the official temples to Isis within Egypt, they facilitated her spread throughout the Greek world and

later the Roman Empire, establishing her as an extremely popular cult deity whose temple architecture and artwork primarily reflected the cultures in which they were located.

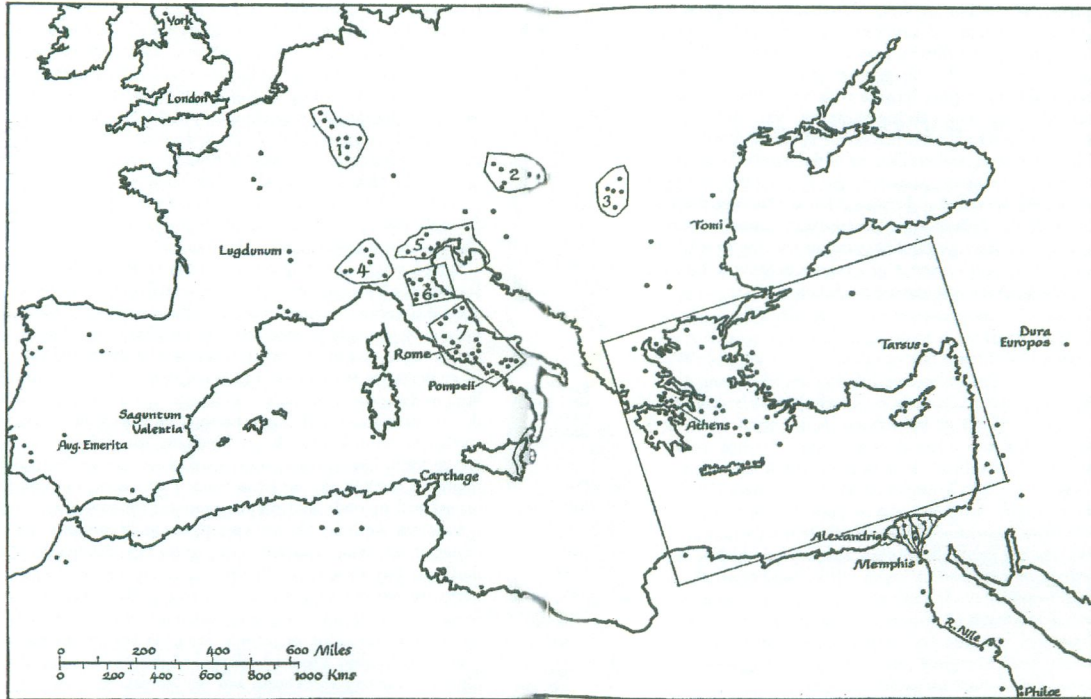


Figure 1: Sites at which there is evidence of the worship of Isis (Witt 1971: Figure 1).



Figure 2: Isis with her typical attribute of the throne on her head, from the rear wall of the temple of Hathor at Dendara (Photo by author).

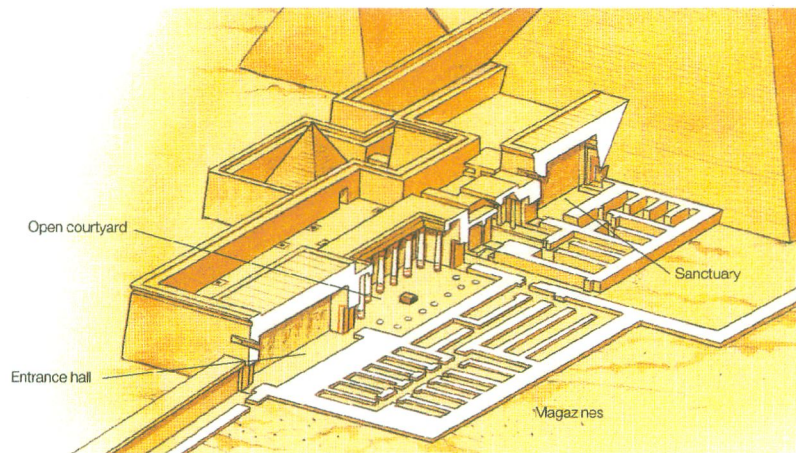


Figure 3: Plan of a standard Old Kingdom temple plan, featuring the entrance hallway, the courtyard, and the sanctuary (Wilkinson 2000:21).



Figure 4 – The god Hapi pouring water into the Nile, from the temple of Isis at Philae (Photo by author).

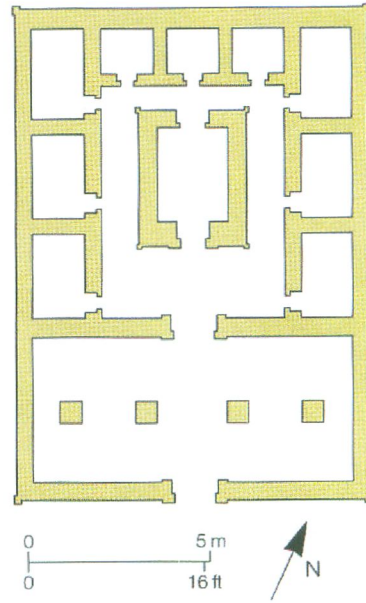


Figure 5: A standard New Kingdom temple plan, with the pillared forecourt and tripartite shrine (Wilkinson 2000:23).

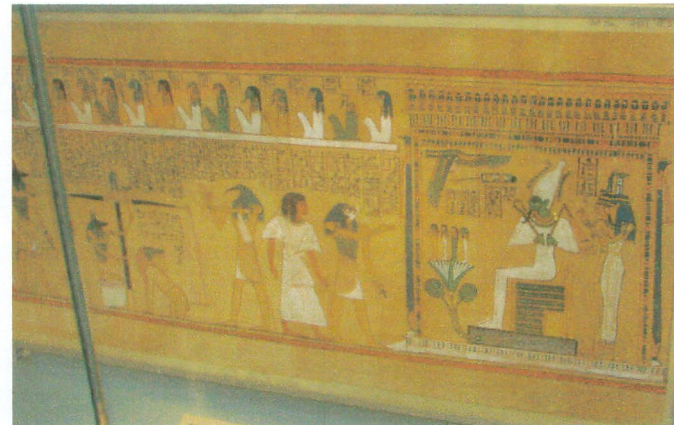


Figure 7: A 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty version of the Book of the Dead for the scribe Hunefer. Isis is seen standing behind Osiris' throne, next to her sister Nephthys (Photo by author).

Figure 6: A Ptolemaic statue of Isis wearing the horns of Hathor (Witt 1971: Plate 3).

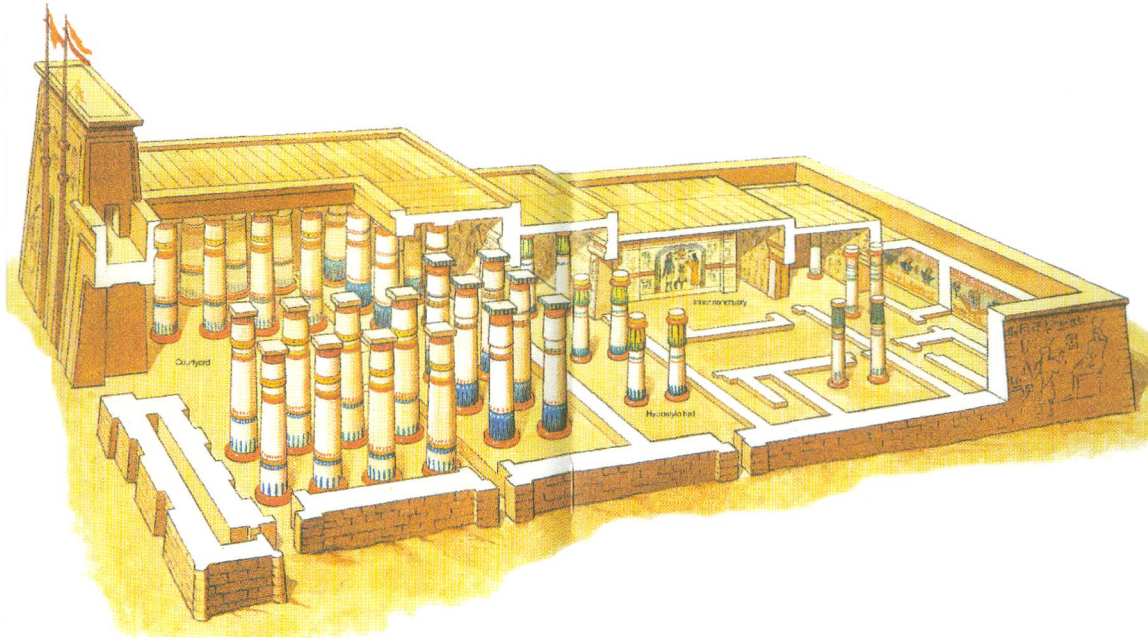


Figure 8: A standard New Kingdom temple plan. Note the entrance pylons, the hypostyle hall, and the inner sanctuary surrounded by storage rooms (Wilkinson 2000:24-25).

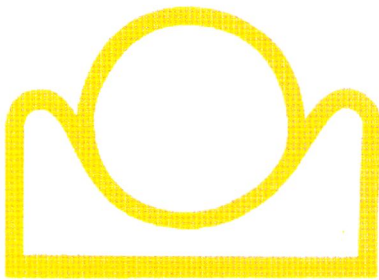


Figure 9: The hieroglyph for "horizon." Note the similarity to the pylon (Wilkinson 2000:77).

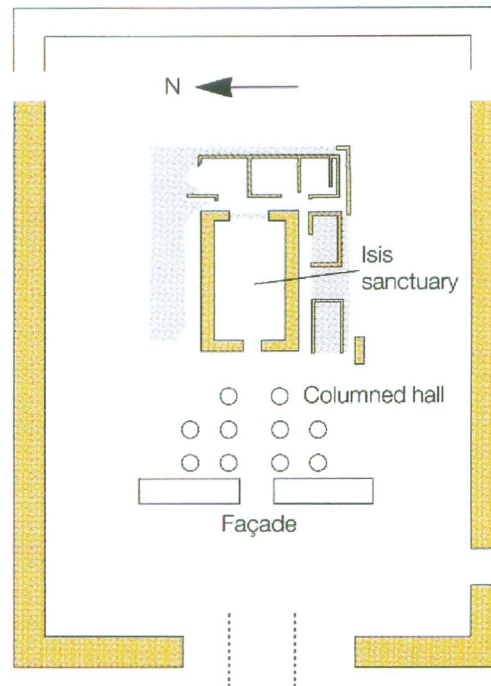


Figure 10: Plan of the temple of Isis at Behbeit el-Hagar in northern Egypt (Wilkinson 2000:104).



Figure 11: One of the massive carved granite blocks from the temple of Isis at Behbeit el-Hagar (Wilkinson 2000:27).



Figure 12: A coin minted in Alexandria during the Roman period, depicting Isis Pharia next to the lighthouse (Handler 1971: Plate 11, Figure 2).



Figure 13: A coin minted in Alexandria during the Roman period, depicting the Pharos lighthouse (Handler 1971: Plate 11, Figure 2).



Figure 14: A statue from Naples, which may depict Isis Pharia (Handler 1971: Plate 12, Figure 27).



Figure 15: A colossal statue of Isis found in the Bay of Alexandria (Witt 1971: Plate 13).



Figure 16: A coin minted in Alexandria during the Roman period depicting the entrance pylon to the temple of Isis (Handler 1971: Plate 11, Figure 4).



Figure 17: A coin minted in Alexandria during the Roman period depicting the shrine of Isis and Harpocrates (Handler 1971: Plate 11, Figure 6).



Figure 18: A relief from the temple at Kom-Ombo of Isis giving birth to Horus (Photo by author).



Figure 19: A relief from the temple at Kom-Ombo of Isis nursing Horus (Photo by author).



Figure 20: Ceiling painting from the temple of Hathor at Dendara. Isis is depicted on the left, riding in a sacred barque through the sky (Photo by author).



Figure 21: Relief from the crypt at the temple of Hathor at Dendara. Isis is seated on the right, while Hathor is on the left (Photo by author).



Figure 22: Relief on the rear wall of the temple of Hathor at Dendara, depicting Cleopatra VII and her son Caesarion making offerings to Isis (Photo by author).

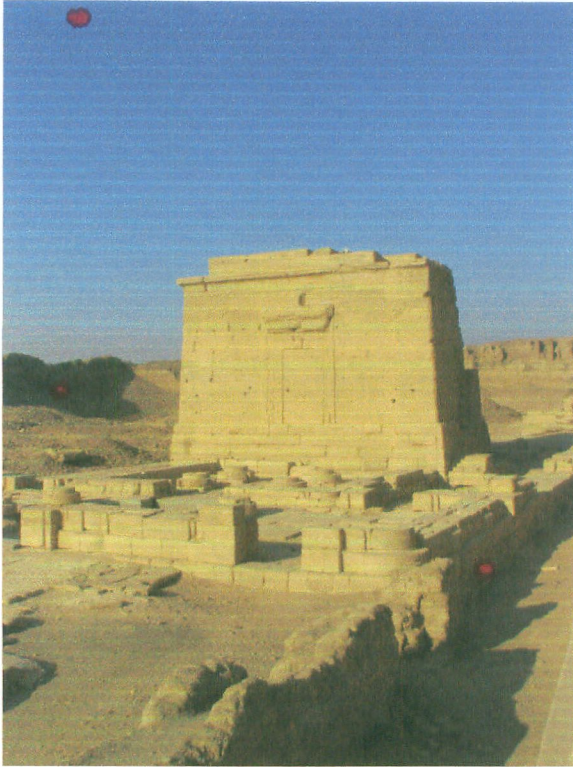


Figure 23: The forecourt and sanctuary of the temple of Isis at Dendara (Photo by author).

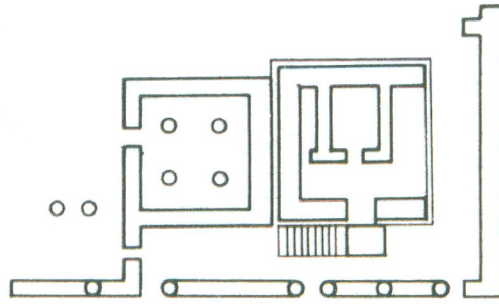


Figure 24: Plan of the temple of Isis at Dendara. Note the small forecourt and how the sanctuary is constructed on a different axis than the rest of the temple (Cenival 1990s:171).

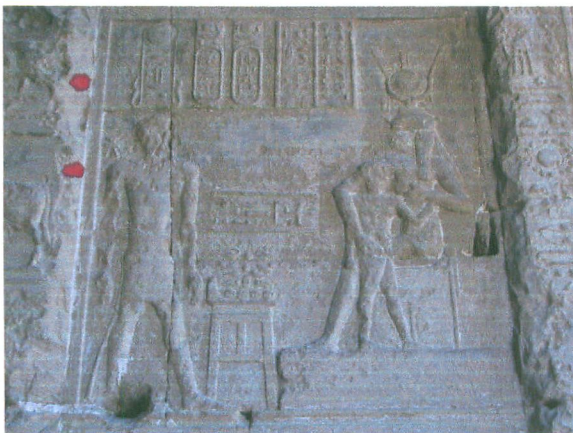


Figure 25: Relief from within the sanctuary of the temple of Isis at Dendara, depicting offerings made to the goddess (Photo by author).



Figure 26: Relief from the rear wall of the sanctuary of the temple of Isis at Dendara, showing offerings made to Isis (Photo by author).



Figure 27: The temple of Isis at Philae. Features of the temple are (from left to right): the second pylon, the mammisi, the first pylon, and the exterior wall of the colonnaded forecourt (Photo by author).

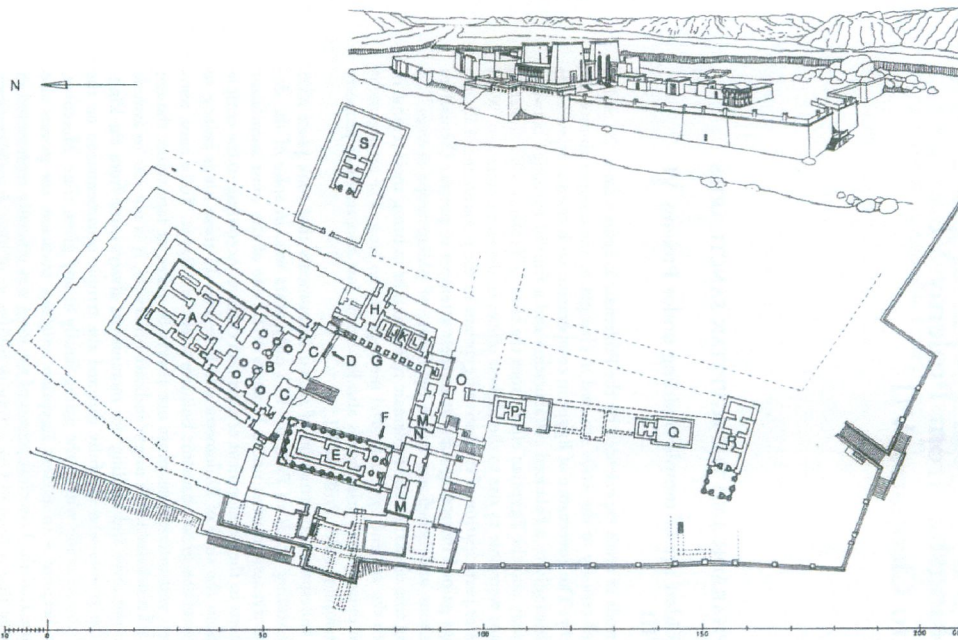


Figure 9.1 The temples of Philae, c. AD 100, according to Haeny (1985): 225, Fig. 4.  
 A Temple of Isis of Ptolemy II; B Pronaos and Peristyle; C Second Pylon; D Dodekaschoinos Stele; E Birth House; F Wall with Philensis Decrees; G East Colonnade; H 'Gate of Tiberius'; I Library; J Cleaning Room; K Courtroom; L Laboratory; M First Pylon; N Gate of Nectanebo I; O Gate of Philadelphos; P Temple of Imhotep; Q Small Temple; R Temple of Arensnuphis; S Temple of Hathor (symbols for architectural elements are my own).

Figure 28: Plan of the temple of Isis at Philae (Hölbl 2001: Figure 9.1).



Figure 29: The colonnaded forecourt at Philae; note the different floral capitals (Photo by author).



Figure 30: The first entrance pylon at Philae, decorated with scenes of Ptolemy XII smiting his enemies (Photo by author).

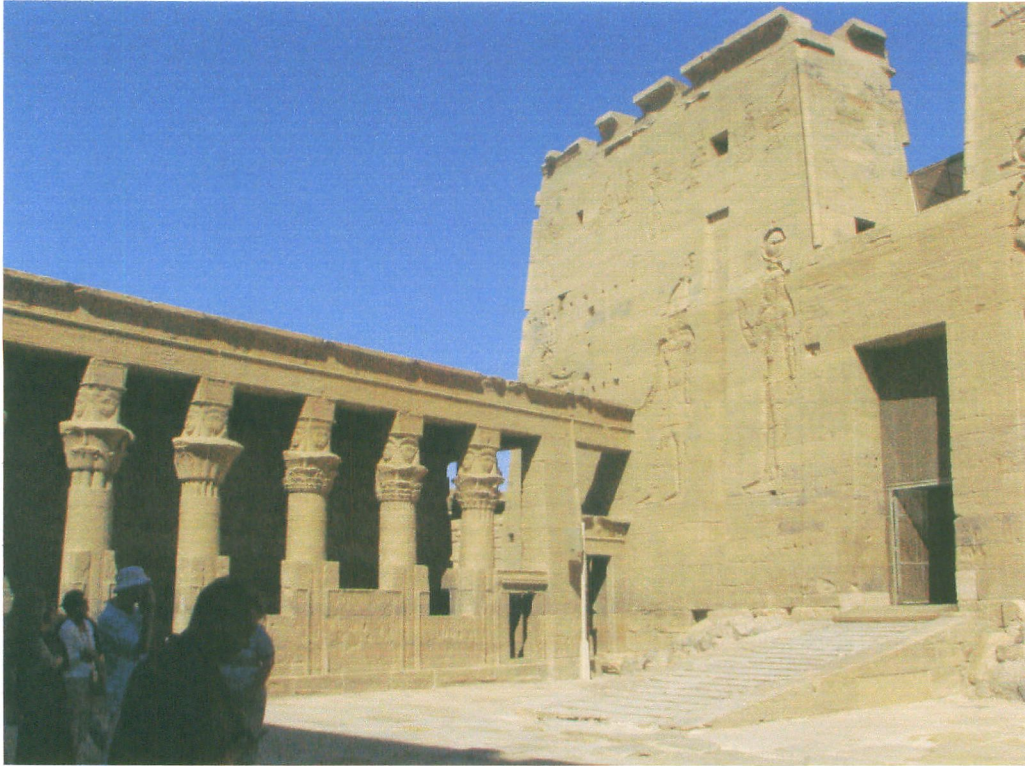


Figure 31: The second courtyard at Philae, with the second pylon on the right and the Roman mammisi on the left (Photo by author).



Figure 32: An early artist's depiction of the hypostyle hall at Philae (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/philae4.htm>).

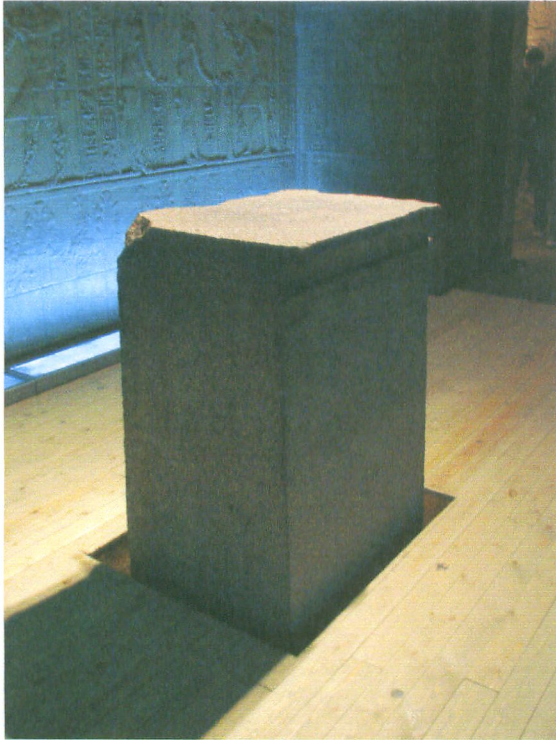


Figure 33: The barque pedestal within the sanctuary at Philae (Photo by author).

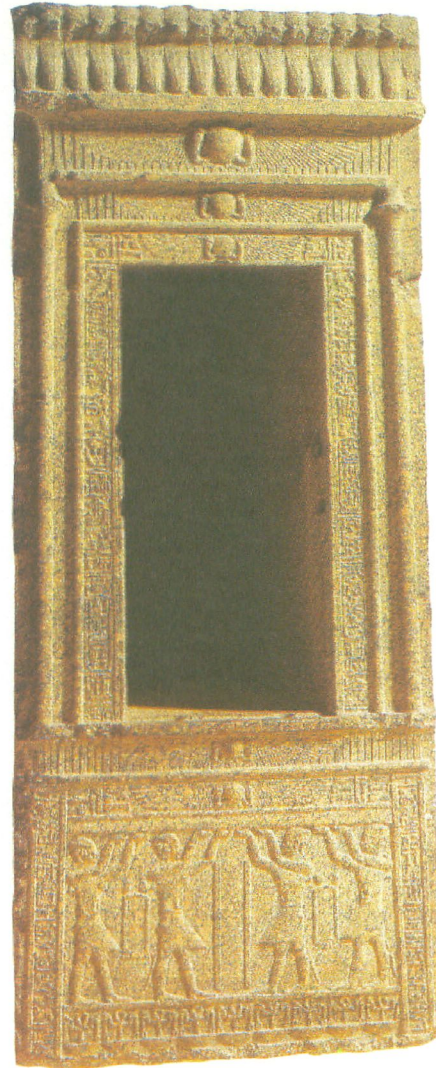


Figure 34: The pink granite naos from the temple of Isis at Philae (Ziegler 1990:82).

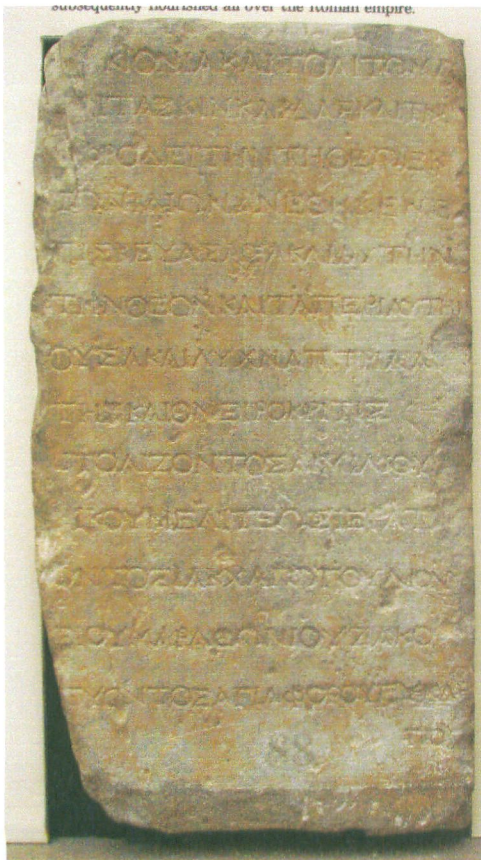


Figure 35: A marble block from the south bank of the Acropolis that mentions the temple to Isis in Athens, now housed in the British Museum (Photo by author).



Figure 36: Serapeum A at Delos. The tiled courtyard is in the center, with the stairway to the pronaos on the right and the room lined with benches on the left (Roussel 1916: Figure 1).

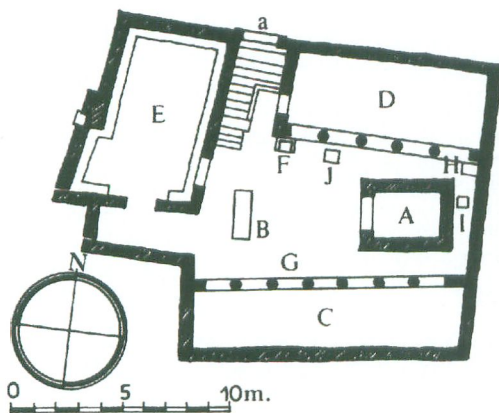


Figure 37: The plan of Serapeum A; the main points are A: the pronaos; B, F, H, and J: altars and the offering trunk; C and D: the rooms behind the colonnade; E: the room lined with benches; and I: the canal from the Inopos (Bruneau 2006: Figure 1 of *Deliaca VIII*).

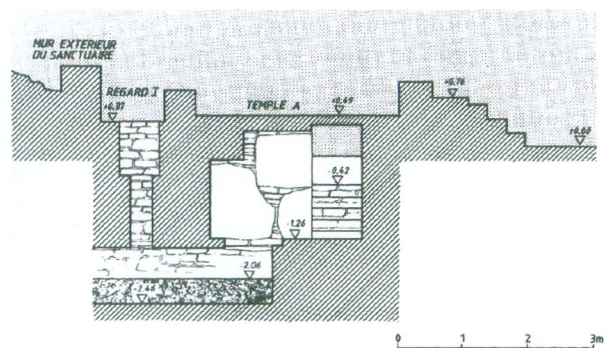


Figure 38: The crypt located below Serapeum A (Bruneau 2006: Figure 3 of *Deliaca VIII*).



Figure 39: Serapeum B at Delos. On the right is the stairway leading to the temple proper; the altars can be seen in the background on the left (Roussel 1916: Figure 5).

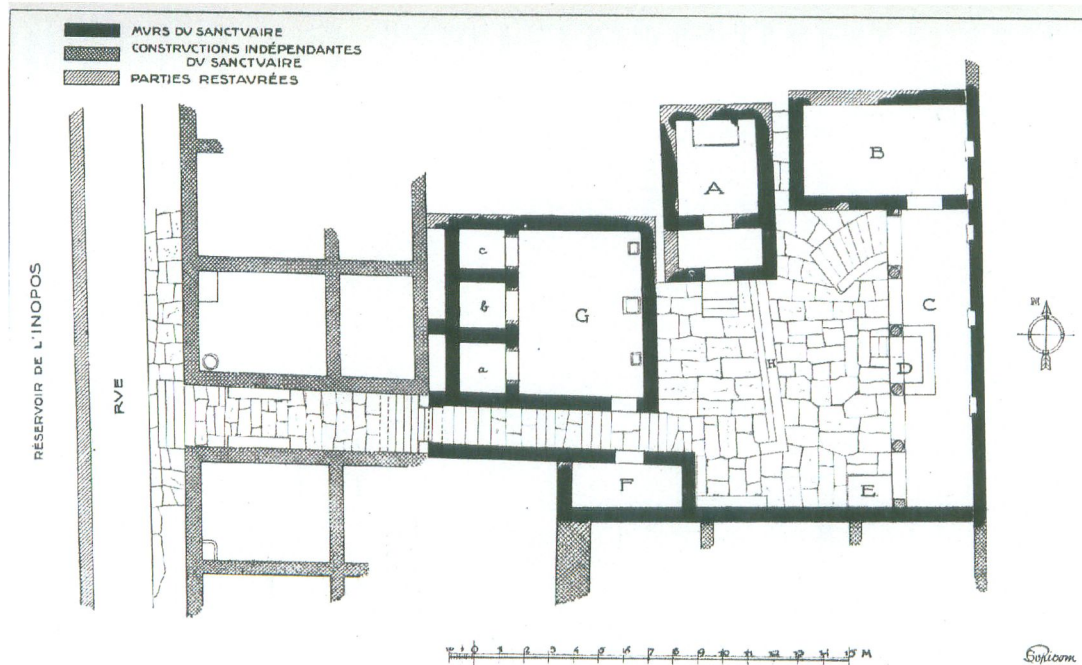


Figure 40: Plan of Serapeum B. The black walls are those of the sanctuary, while the light gray walls are the reconstructed portions. The dark gray walls are those that are independent of the sanctuary (Roussel 1916: Plate 2).

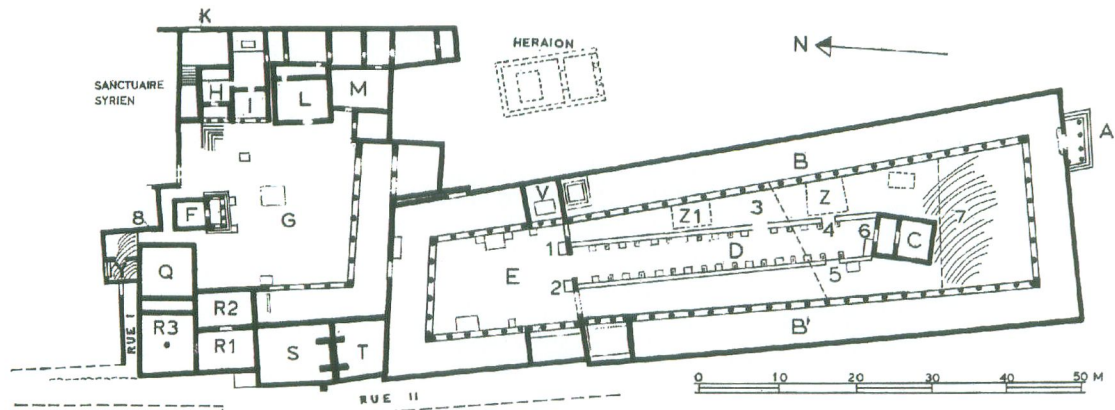


Figure 41: Plan of Serapeum C at Delos. Highlights include A: Entrance. B: Portico. C: Unidentified temple, possibly to Isis. D: Dromos. E: Forecourt. F: Temple to Serapis. G: Second courtyard. H: Temple to Serapis, Isis, and Anubis. I: Temple of Isis (Bruneau 2006: Figure 1 of *Serapeion C de Délos: Dromos et Temple C*).

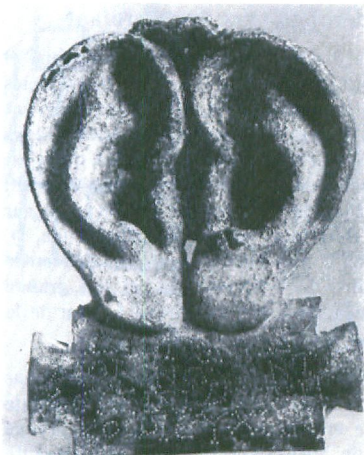


Figure 42: Votive ears dedicated to Isis (Bruneau 1970).



Figure 43: The portico of Serapeum C, featuring the dromos leading to Temple C, possibly dedicated to Isis (Roussel 1916: Figure 8).



Figure 44: Temple I at Delos, possibly the official temple to Isis; or, if Bruneau's theory is to be accepted, an Athenian ex-voto to Isis built after the officialization of Serapeum C (Roussel 1916: Figure 10).



Figure 45: A Corinthian lamp depicting Isis Pelagia found at Delos (Bruneau 2006: Figure 1 of *Isis Pélagia à Délos*).

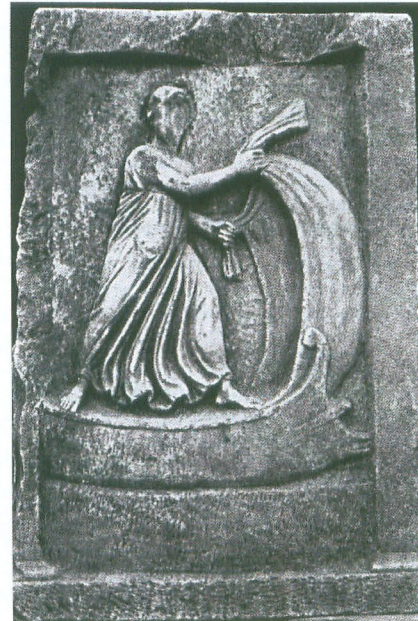


Figure 46: Relief of Isis Pelagia from Delos Delos (Bruneau 2006: Figure 3 of *Isis Pélagia à Délos*).



Figure 47: A lamp decorated with images of Isis (center), Harpocrates (left), and Anubis (right), possibly from Puteoli. Now at the British Museum (Photo by author).

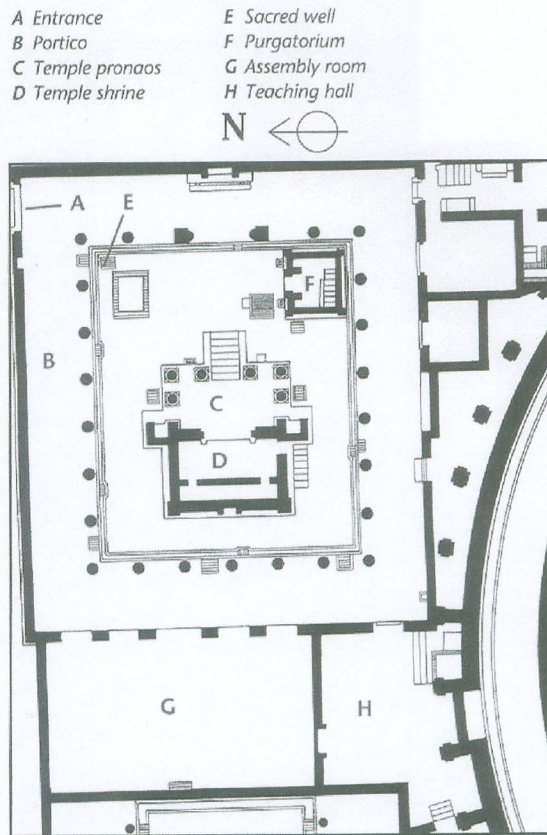


Figure 48: Plan of the temple of Isis at Pompeii (Nappo 1998:89).

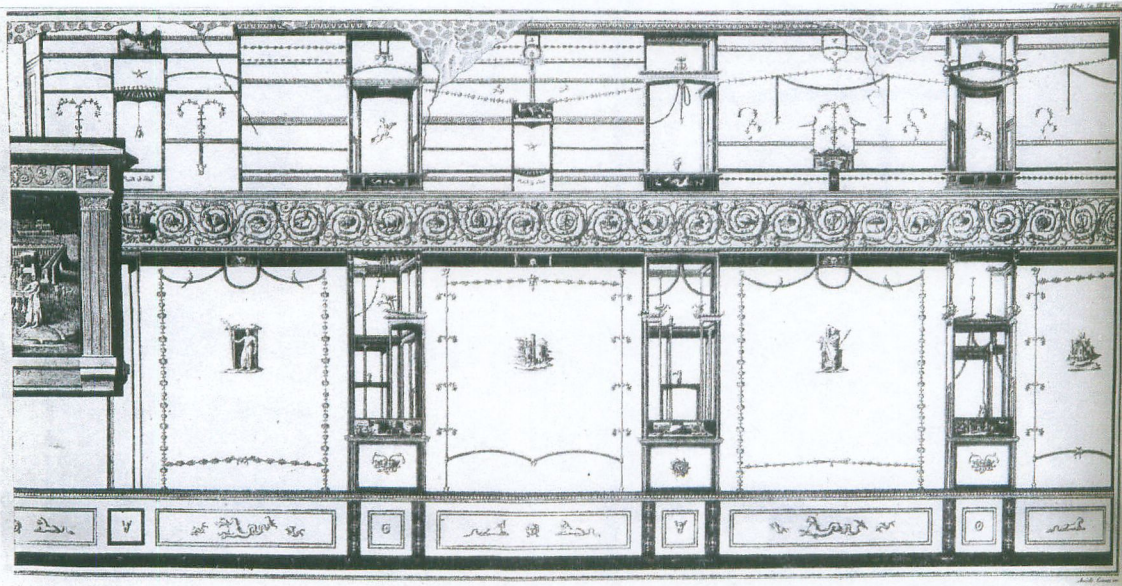


Figure 49: Fourth style wall painting from the enclosure walls of the temple of Isis at Pompeii (Tran Tam Tinh 1964: Plate II, 2).



Figure 50: The portico surrounding the pronaos of the temple of Isis at Pompeii. Between the two columns in the center of the picture is a small altar; behind it is the well (Photo by Giacomo Brogi, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Brogi,\\_Giacomo\\_\(1822-1881\)\\_-\\_Pompei\\_-\\_Tempio\\_d'Iside\\_-\\_n.\\_5038\\_-\\_ca.\\_1870.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Brogi,_Giacomo_(1822-1881)_-_Pompei_-_Tempio_d'Iside_-_n._5038_-_ca._1870.jpg))



Figure 51: The pronaos of the temple of Isis at Pompeii (Photo by author).



Figure 52: A fresco from Herculaneum depicting an Isiac ritual; note the horned altar in the foreground (Tran Tam Tinh 1964: Plate XXIV).

Figure 53: The building in the south-east corner of the portico at Pompeii, which may be either a megaron or a purgatorium. In front of this is the altar (Photo by author).



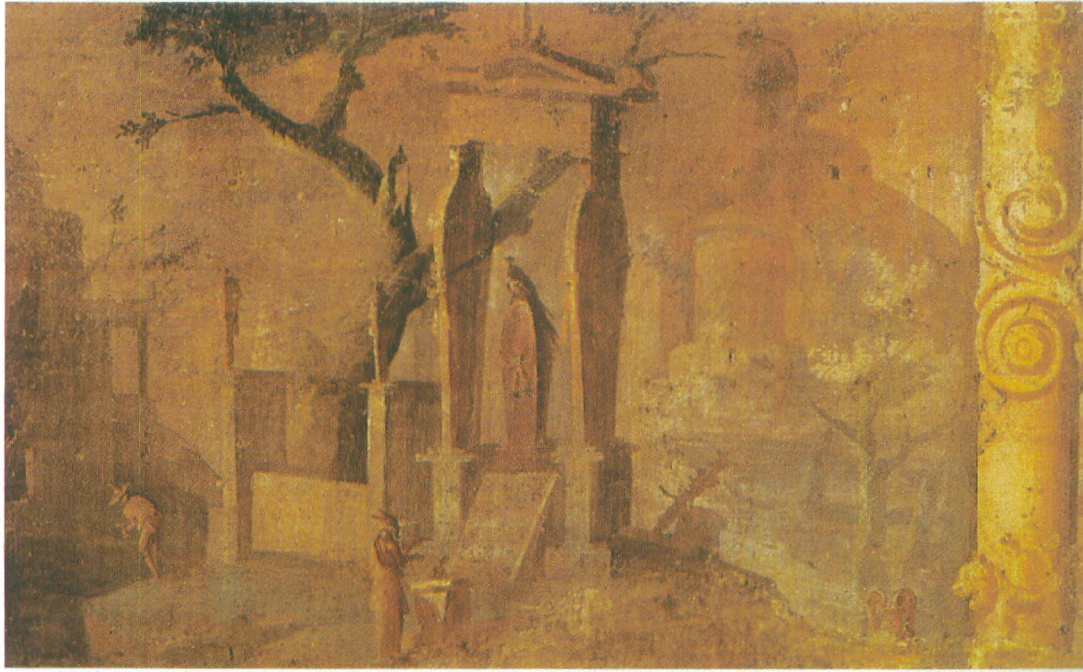


Figure 54: Fresco from the ekklesiasterion at Pompeii, depicting the sarcophagus of Osiris with a priest performing sacrifices before it (Nappo 1998: Page 90).



Figure 54: Fresco from the ekklesiasterion at Pompeii, depicting Isis welcoming Io to Egypt after she is persecuted by Hera for her love affair with Zeus (Nappo 1998: Page 91).



Figure 56: Marble head of an Isis acrolith found at Pompeii (Nappo 1998: Page 89).



Figure 58: A marble statue of Isis, depicted in a slightly archaic style, from Pompeii (Nappo 1998: Page 89).



Figure 57: A bronze sistrum found in the temple of Isis at Pompeii (Nappo 1998: Page 91).



Figure 59: Coin minted in Rome during the rule of Vespasian, depicting the Iseum Campense (Turcan 1996).

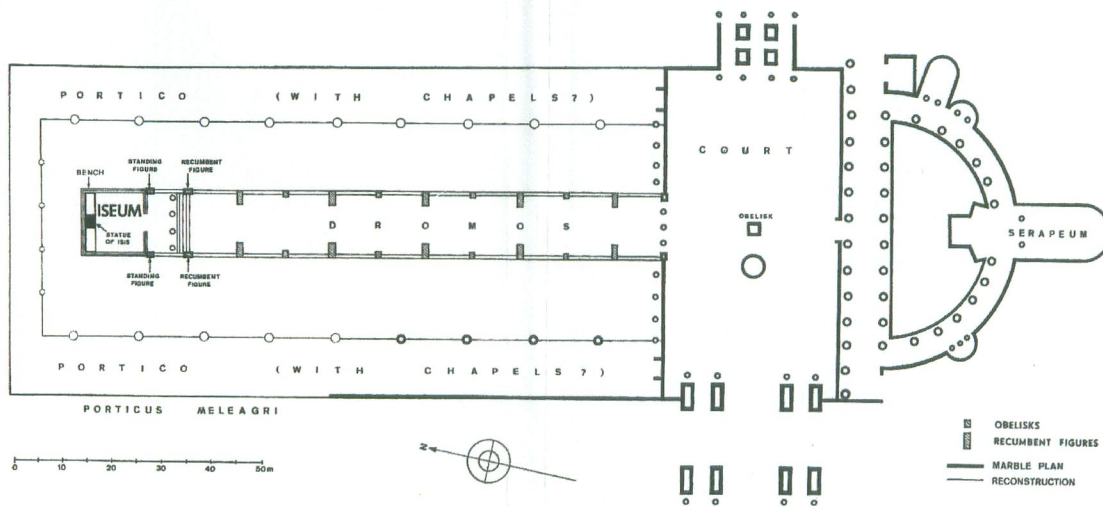


Figure 60: Plan of the Iseum Campense, based largely on where specific items were excavated. Note the dromos leading the the Iseum, all located within a portico, similar to Serapeum C at Delos (Roulet 1972: Figure 352).

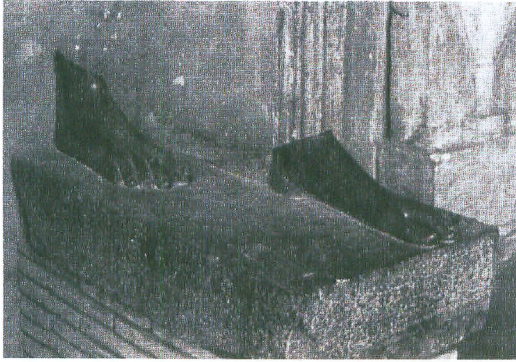


Figure 61: The feet are all that remain from a statue brought to the Iseum Campense from Behbeit el-Hagar (Rouillet 1972: Plate CLXX, Figure 243).



Figure 62: A Hellenistic statue of the personification of the Tiber, the river that runs through Rome. From the Iseum Campense

([http://www.louvre.fr/lv/oeuvres/detail\\_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673225846&CURRENT\\_LL\\_V\\_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673225846&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder\\_id=9852723696500819&bmLocale=en,](http://www.louvre.fr/lv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673225846&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673225846&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500819&bmLocale=en,))

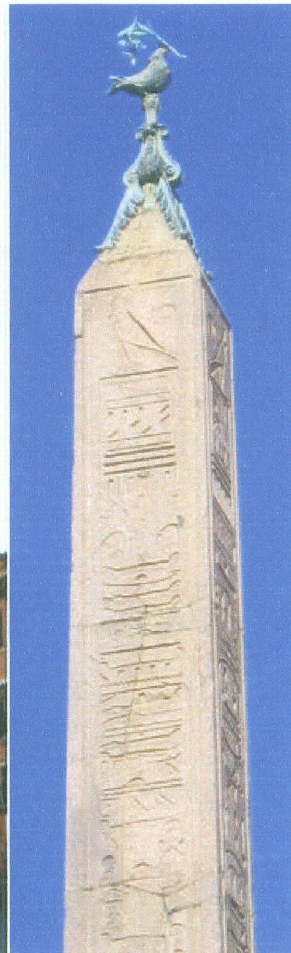


Figure 63: The obelisk at the Piazza Navona, originally from the central courtyard of the Iseum Campense. The dove at the top is from Pope Innocentius X (Photo by Roberto Piperno, <http://www.romeartlover.it/Obelisks.html>).



Figure 64: A massive granite column, probably from the portico of the Iseum Campense ([http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi\\_per\\_sale/museo\\_capitolino/cortile/colonna\\_con\\_rilievi\\_egittizzanti](http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/museo_capitolino/cortile/colonna_con_rilievi_egittizzanti)).

Figure 65: A fragment of a marble campaniform capital from the Iseum Campense ([http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi\\_per\\_sale/museo\\_capitolino/cortile/fragmento\\_di\\_capitello\\_campaniforme](http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/museo_capitolino/cortile/fragmento_di_capitello_campaniforme)).

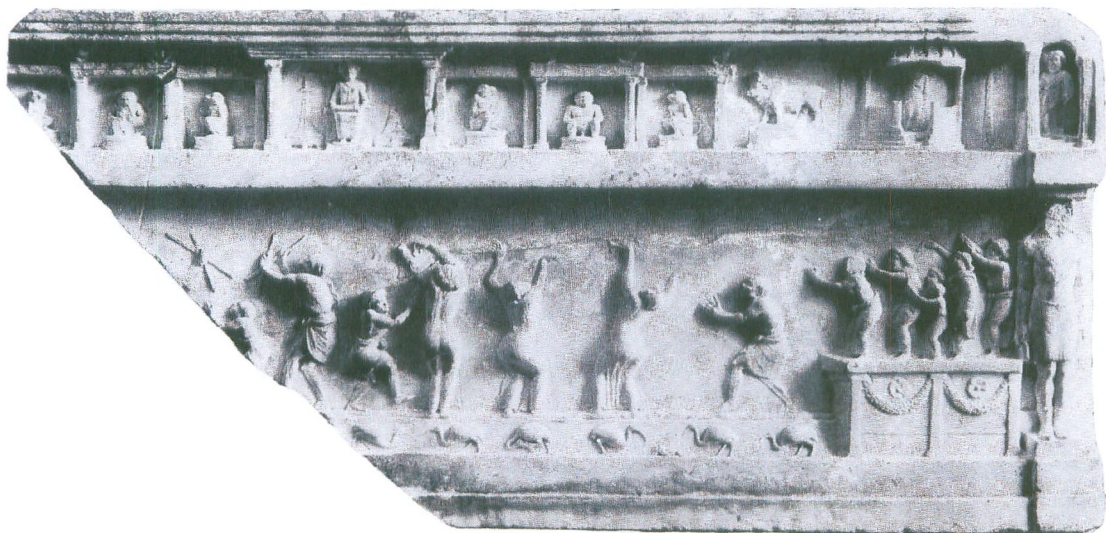


Figure 66: A low-relief from a tomb along the Appian Way depicting ritual dancers performing in front of Egyptian deities contained within a portico (Roulet 1972: Plate XIII, Figure 20).

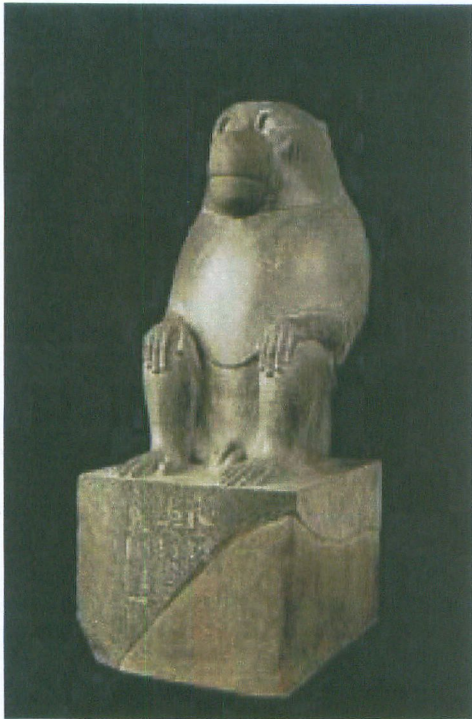


Figure 67: Granite baboon found in the Iseum Campense, from the reign of Nectanebo II ([http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi\\_per\\_sale/museo\\_capitolino/cortile/cinocefalo](http://www.museicapitolini.org/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/museo_capitolino/cortile/cinocefalo)).

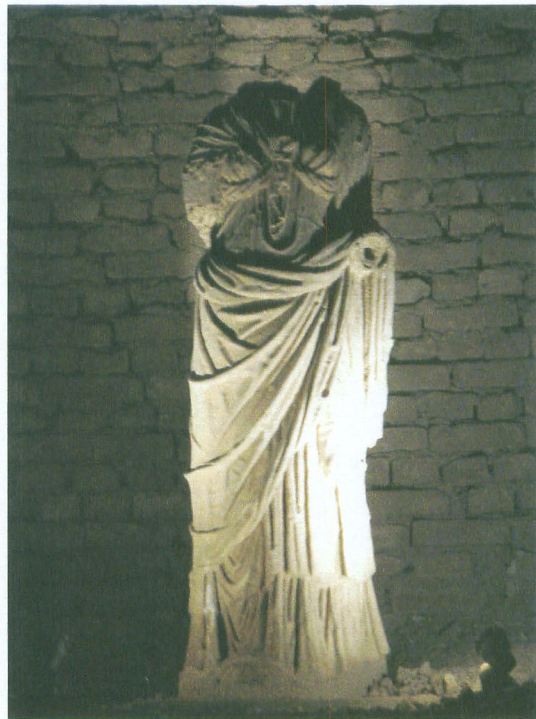


Figure 68: Hellenistic statue of Isis at the Serapeum in Luxor (Photo by author).

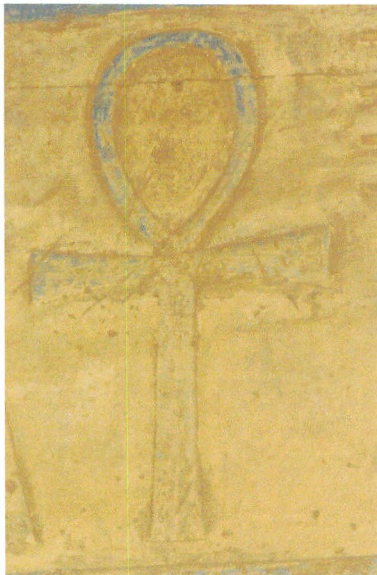


Figure 69: Ankh from the temple of Amun at Karnak (Photo by author).



Figure 70: Statue of Isis, made in Italy during the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, now in the British Museum (Photo by author).

Figure 71: The reverse of a denarius from the reign of Caracalla. It depicts Isis with Horus, and may have been minted to emphasize the role of Julia Domna, who is depicted on the obverse, as the imperial mother ([http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/sear5/s6606.html#RIC\\_0577](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/sear5/s6606.html#RIC_0577)).



Figure 72: Altarstone from London which mentions the temple of Isis there (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/RWWC/object/s/record.htm?type=object&id=477505>).

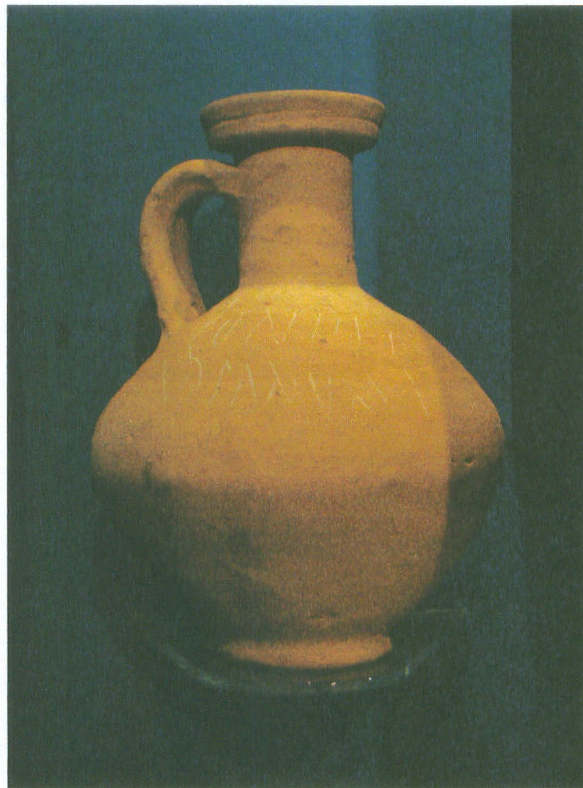


Figure 73: Pottery jug from London with the inscription "Londini ad Fanum Isidis" ("At London, at the temple of Isis") (Photo by author).



Figure 74: The Hellenistic style temple of Isis at Ras el-Soda; note the raised pronaos and Ionic columns (Photo by Dan Diffendale, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dandiffendale/2342280934/>).



Figure 75 (left): The statue of Isis from the temple at Ras el-Soda, executed in the style typical of Isis throughout the Greco-Roman period (Walters 1988: Plate 52a).



Figure 76 (right): A Christian altar carved within the hypostyle hall at the temple of Isis at Philae, the last stronghold of Egyptian religion (Photo by author).

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