

A Foreign Goddess
The History of the Cult of Isis

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter One: <i>The Cult of Isis</i>	8
Chapter Two: <i>The Cult of Isis and the City of Pompeii</i>	26
Chapter Three: <i>The Cult of Isis and Rome</i>	43
Conclusion:	62
Appendix:	65
Works Cited:	75

Abstract

Due to expansion and trade, religions in antiquity were allowed to reach beyond their original borders. As early as Egypt's 19th Dynasty, the goddess Isis had established herself within the Egyptian pantheon and had a lasting appeal with her followers. The Isaic religion had great success within the Mediterranean and established cult sites in many port cities throughout the ancient world. The cult of Isis arrived on the shores of Italy in during the second century BCE and continued to thrive well into the Christian era. Despite the cross-cultural contact that the cult experienced, the mythology and ideology of the cult remained constant from its beginnings.

Résumé

En raison d'expansions territoriales et des échanges commerciaux, les religions durant l'Antiquité ont pu s'étendre au-delà de leurs frontières initiales. Aussi tôt que la 19^{ième} dynastie Égyptienne, la déesse Isis était établie dans le panthéon Égyptien, tandis que l'adoration de ses disciples était indéniable. Le culte d'Isis a eu un grand succès dans la Méditerranée alors que des nombreux sites religieux ont été dédiés dans son honneur à travers plusieurs ports dans le monde ancien. La vénération d'Isis est arrivée sur les rives de l'Italie durant le deuxième siècle av. J. C. et a continué de prospérer même durant l'époque Chrétienne. Malgré les contacts avec différentes cultures et religions, la mythologie et l'idéologie du culte sont demeurées constantes depuis ses origines.

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Introduction

From an early date Isis and Osiris were integral to the Egyptian pantheon. Isis was key to eternal life. The goddess had a devoted and enduring following. The cult migrated around the Mediterranean, with sites established in Samaria, Greece, and Italy. Jaime Alvar theorized that the cult of Isis did not offer its followers a true understanding of the universe. To Alvar, Hellenization is what transformed the Isaic cult into a mystery cult with rituals and an understood religiosity. I plan to prove that although the cult did experience cross-cultural contact, that from the evidence of the Isaic cult in Italy we can see that the mythology of the cult did not alter over time. While Isis came to symbolize many things, I plan to show that at its core the cult remained constant from its founding in Egypt well into the Roman empire.

I will begin by detailing the origins of Isis wherein I will discuss her creation, mythology, and the cult within Egypt. In addition, I will discuss the evolution of the cult in Egypt to determine if changes within the Isaic mythology occurred prior to the cult's expansion outside of Egypt. Within this discussion, I will analyze the relationship of Isis with her husband Osiris, later to be known as Serapis, and I will detail how their two cults were intertwined throughout their histories. With regard to Isis and Osiris, I will look at primary sources and archaeological remains. This will lead into a discussion pertaining to the cults in Italy.

My second chapter will focus on the city of Pompeii and briefly discuss Herculaneum. While I plan to disprove Alvar's theory that the cult of Isis required Hellenization to lay the foundation for a proper cult, I do believe that the image of Isis was altered over time. As a result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, the temple of Isis in Pompeii was encased in ash. The Iseum of Pompeii is the only remaining Isaic temple in situ and it is unique amongst Roman temples. In my discussion, I shall provide a description of the temple, the temple's artwork, and

items that were discovered in the temple grounds. Lauren Hackworth Peterson argues that despite the anomalies of the Iseum in Pompeii that it is, in fact, a Roman temple. With my review of the evidence I will disprove this theory and show that the Iseum was a perfect blending of cultures within antiquity. The chapter will not only focus on the importance of Isis in the public sphere but will highlight how the mystery religion had permeated domestic life as well. By inspecting the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum, I plan to prove that all levels of citizenry were active members in the Isis cult. My last chapter will be a discussion pertaining to the cult of Isis and its history in the city of Rome.

The cult of Isis is thought to have arrived in Rome during the second century BCE. However, it is not until the late Republic that we begin to hear of the cult of Isis within the city of Rome. We know that the cult had a successful following within Rome by 88 BCE due to coinage and a funerary inscription that were discovered within the city limits. Like Pompeii, it appears that all levels of citizenry were welcome to become initiates in the mystery religion however, dissimilar from Pompeii, was how the cult became a political target. In the later days of the Republic, the cult of Isis became tangled in the web of Roman politics. The cult survived numerous attempts of suppression prior to the establishment of the empire. It was argued by Ziehen that the cult faced five such attempts. I plan to argue that there were, in fact, four suppression attempts that occurred in the years 58, 53, 50, 48 BCE. Takács hypothesized that these attempts to dismantle the cult all took place while the senate experienced periods of political weakness. While I agree with Takács, I plan to expand her argument and show how Julius Caesar was fundamental to these rulings by the Senate.

Subsequent to my discussion of Isis in the late Republic, I will detail how following the assassination of Caesar the cult of Isis became mired in Roman politics. The cults of Isis and

Serapis were no longer a threat due to their foreign status and their connection to Egypt. Isis evolved to symbolize Cleopatra, the enemy of Octavian and Rome. After the defeat of Cleopatra and Antony following the battles of Actium and Alexandria, I plan to show how Octavian proclaimed his victory through his building program, artistic mediums, legislation, and literary commissions. Octavian would not let the Roman people forget that he (Rome) had been victorious over the living incarnation of Isis, Cleopatra. I shall round out this discussion by analyzing the actions of Tiberius, Octavian's heir, who once again attempted to suppress the cult of Isis within Rome.

In discussing the endurance of the Isaic religion, I shall look at the cult's history until the second century CE where I will examine imperial involvement with the cult and how the political stigma that had once been affiliated with the cult of Isis had dissipated. From archaeological and epigraphical evidence dating to the second century, in conjunction with literary evidence, we know that followers of Isis continued to hail from all levels of Roman society, including the emperor.

Each chapter will contribute to the discussion of how the cult of Isis evolved within Italy. In addition, I will show that despite the fact that the Iseum of Pompeii and statuary of Isis was modified to incorporate elements of Greek and Roman culture that at the core of the mystery religion, Isaic mythology remained constant. From its origins in Egypt well into the Roman empire Isis was a goddess for all people, essential in assisting her followers achieve life after death.

Chapter One

The Cult of Isis

In the introduction of his work *Religions in the Greco-Roman World*, Jaime Alvar claims that eastern religions within Rome had no pretensions in that they neither functionally nor organizationally offered a complete account of the world or the meaning of life.¹ Alvar theorized that when the cults of Isis and Serapis, along with those of Cybele and Mithras, came into contact with Greek religion, that these eastern religions were transformed. The Hellenization of these cults is what allowed them to develop an ‘inner-directed religiosity, the mystery cult’ with specific and characteristic demands upon the body and ethical character.² The evolution of these cults was directly linked to Hellenization and, as a result, offered followers an understanding of the world and the functional place of the god or goddess therein. As there are few surviving sources detailing the inner workings and beliefs of the Isaic cult, it is difficult to determine if the cult of Isis conforms to Alvar’s hypothesis.

This chapter will explore the history and trajectory of the cult of Isis. I will address Isis’ origins, the story of her birth, and the evolution of the Isaic cult in Egypt. I will then discuss the mythology of Isis and the expansion of her cult in the ancient Mediterranean. Lastly, I will analyze the most prominent ancient works regarding the cult of Isis: Diodourus Siculus, Plutarch, and Apuleius. By evaluating the texts, in addition to exploring the history and evolution of the cult of Isis, I believe I can further discern how those living in ancient Italy would have regarded the Isaic cult. I will demonstrate that Alvar’s theory is not applicable to the cult of Isis.

Isis in Egypt

¹ Alvar and Gordon, 3.

² Ibid, 4.

In Egyptian mythology, with creation the ordered world was brought into being. Prior to the creation, there had only been the primeval waters, Nun. From these waters, a mound appeared and from this mound the creator god was created. Several accounts were conceptualized as to how the creator god brought all into existence but one of the most popular versions is that he masturbated, and from this the first divine couple, Shu and Tefnut, was born. This divine couple then birthed Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky. From the earth and the sky came Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, and Set(h).³

As early as 1275 BCE, Isis was regarded as a goddess of fertility as well as a guardian of those passing to the underworld.⁴ According to John H. Taylor, when a body was prepared for its journey to the underworld four amulets were placed on the corpse. These were the *djed pillar*, the *tit* (Isis knot), the heart amulet, and the headrest. The spell that would be uttered to activate the powers of the *tit* amulet is now known as Spell 156:

You have your blood, O Isis; you have your power, O Isis; you have your magic, O Isis. This amulet is a protection for this Great One, which will drive away whoever would commit a crime against him.’⁵

Isaic funerary iconography was first discovered in Egypt’s Nineteenth Dynasty in the tomb of Pharaoh Sety I (1294- 1279 BCE). Isis and her sister, Nephthys, were painted on the door at the entrance of his tomb.⁶ We further know that Isis was integral to the process of the soul passing to the underworld from the Papyrus of Ani, as Isis appears as one of the deities to sit in judgment of Ani.⁷ Further in the papyrus, we see Osiris, who is labeled as the Lord of Eternity, enthroned

³ Allen 1988: 8-9.

⁴ See the Papyrus of Ani; Taylor 2010: 28. For Papyrus from the 20th and 21st Dynasties see Papyrus of Nodjmet (Spell 17), Papyrus of Muthetepty (Spell 151).

⁵ Spell 156, ‘for a knot-amulet of red Jasper’. For an example see Ani’s Book of the Dead Papyrus; Taylor 2010: 41.

⁶ Robins 2008: 169.

⁷ Papyrus of Ani, Spell 125. See Taylor 2010: 88.

in the hall of judgment where is he attended by Isis and Nephthys.⁸ According to Alvar's theory, the cults of Isis and Osiris required interaction with Greek civilization to facilitate cosmic order and organization within the cult. The Papyrus of Ani disproves this theory. In the Egyptian cults, as well as abroad, Isis and Osiris were intrinsically linked. As brother and sister, husband and wife, their stories and cults were intertwined.

Isaic Mythology

In order to comprehend Isis, it is imperative to explore her relationship with her husband and partner, Osiris. While Alvar's theory pertaining to the Hellenization of the cults of Isis and Osiris remains questionable, his description of the world 'mythology' is exemplary. According to Alvar, myth can be understood as an explanatory account of heavenly bodies and the forces of nature. i.e. the cosmic order; the relationship between human beings and their social environment, and lastly, a story about the afterlife, the eschatological order.⁹ When discussing mythology, I will be employing Alvar's definition.

Aside from papyrus, funerary monuments, and statuary, there is sparse primary source material from Egypt pertaining to Isis. Our knowledge of the cults of Isis and Osiris hail from sources recorded centuries later by Greeks and Romans. Their information is therefore questionable, however these works provide enough insight for us to discern how the ancient Egyptians would have regarded Isis and Osiris, and what it meant to be a member in the Isaic cult.

Diodorus Siculus provides one of the most complete accounts of the origins of Isis. His story begins by discussing the etymology of the name,

⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁹ Ibid, 23.

As for Isis, when translated the word means “ancient,” the name having been given her because her birth was from everlasting and ancient.¹⁰

Diodorus then proceeds to give a more detailed description of Isis and her husband Osiris,

These two gods, they hold, regulate the entire universe, giving both nourishment and increase to all things by means of a system of three seasons which complete the full cycle through an unobservable movement, these being spring and summer and winter; and these seasons, though in nature most opposed to one another, complete the cycle of the year in the fullest harmony.¹¹

According to Diodorus Siculus, Isis and Osiris were integral to the running of the universe.¹² He further claims that once the universe and world had been created, it needed to be governed and this ‘supreme power’ was given to Isis from Osiris.¹³ They were deities of great importance and their connection was further reinforced through their mythology.

The most common Isis myth is the story where Isis seeks to recover the body of Osiris. Osiris is tricked by their brother, Set,¹⁴ and is convinced to climb into a coffin at a dinner party. The coffin is tossed into the Nile, to be later retrieved by Set, who proceeds to dismember Osiris and scatter his body parts throughout Egypt. Isis begins her quest to locate her husband, traveling along the Nile. She retrieves all of Osiris’ body, save for the phallus, and proceeds with an elaborate burial that will honor him and the Egyptians.¹⁵ Isis places all the recovered body parts together (and fabricates a new phallus), and begins the ritual of resurrection. Osiris is reborn as the lord of the underworld and it is at this moment that Isis is impregnated with their son, Horus. Isis was then designated a fertility goddess, goddess of the moon, papyrus, medicine, and oracular

¹⁰ Diod. Sic. 11.4

¹¹ Diod. Sic. 12.5.

¹² Diod. Sic. 1.11.7.

¹³ Diod. Sic. 17.12-13.

¹⁴ Known in Diodorus Siculus text as Typhon.

¹⁵ Diod. Sic. 1.6-20.

powers.¹⁶ As the Nile played a significant role in Isaic mythology, the cult adopted rituals that incorporated its water. In later Isaic mythology, Isis was not only affiliated with the Nile but was associated with water voyages, ships, and merchants.¹⁷

Isis and Serapis in the Ancient Mediterranean: From Egypt to Italy

The Isis cult spread around the Mediterranean due to trade and merchants. According to Pausanias, there was a temple of Isis in Troezen in the 5th century BCE.¹⁸ Most frequently, when a temple to Isis was constructed, a temple dedicated to Osiris (later Serapis) would have been built in close proximity. While the cult of Isis continued to gain followers in new regions, it maintained success within Egypt.

In order to lessen tensions with the local population, upon the commissioning of his new city Alexandria, Alexander the Great ordered a temple to be built and dedicated to Isis.¹⁹ Following Alexander's death and the beginning of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, more religious modifications were made to satisfy all of Alexandria's Greek and Egyptian inhabitants. Under Ptolemaic rule, Osiris was replaced by the god Serapis. Isis and Serapis were then named the patron deities of Alexandria. With these amendments to Osiris, Isis came to embody many of Osiris' characteristics and abilities, most notably control of the soul after death. Eventually over time, literature would return to using the name of Osiris; however, in the early expansion of the cult, we most frequently see temples dedicated to Isis and Serapis.

¹⁶ 1.25.10-13.

¹⁷ Pausanias implies that when Isis cried due to her mourning for Osiris, that the Nile flooded. The inundation being integral to the fertility in Egypt is again linked with her association as a fertility goddess. See Paus. 33.18.

¹⁸ Paus. 32.6.6-7.

¹⁹ Arr. *Alex.* 3.1.5-2.2.

Archaeological remains of Iseums and Sarapeums throughout the ancient Mediterranean show that the cult sites were never far apart even if the gods were worshipped independently. In Samaria, Eleazar Sukenik discovered *discouri* reliefs that belonged to a temple of Isis and Serapis.²⁰ In addition to Troezen, Greece had two notable Isaic cult sites. In Dodona a temple was dedicated to Isis and Serapis.²¹ In Delos there were two temples for Isis, one where she was to be worshiped independently and another that she shared with Serapis.²² In addition, they shared this sacred space with Anubis, a deity who would often be affiliated with Isaic worship. Both in mythology and in the tangible world, Isis and Serapis (Osiris) were intertwined.²³

There were two possible trade routes that provided the cult its access to Italy, the first from Alexandria to Puteoli and the second from Alexandria to Delos, to Sicily. From Sicily it eventually made its way to the mainland. We know that Delos had an active Italian population as early as the first half of the second century BCE.²⁴ From 166 to 88 BCE the names of Italians begin to appear among those who made dedications to the goddess Isis.²⁵ The likelihood is that merchants and traders from both Alexandria and Delos brought the cult of Isis to Italy as archaeological and epigraphical evidence pertaining to Isis has been found in both Puteoli and Sicily.²⁶ Bronze coins bearing the image of Isis have been discovered in Syracuse that date to the second century BCE.²⁷ Puteoli offers little to no physical evidence, but an inscription dated to the second century BCE, CIL 10.1781, indicates that there was construction for the wall of a temple dedi-

²⁰ Jacobson 2001: 101; Sukenik 1942: 66.

²¹ Merriam 1884: 86.

²² Walker 1979: 256; Paus. 1.18.4.

²³ Ledge even argued that he believed worshippers came to believe that Isis, Serapis, and Horus were three persons within one god. See Ledge 1917: 608.

²⁴ Heyob 1975: 10. See Hatzfield 1912; Tran Tam Tinh 1964.

²⁵ Ibid. Hatzfield 1912: 141-142.

²⁶ Ochsenschlager 1966: 206.

²⁷ Salem 1938: 58.

cated to Serapis.²⁸ Lauren Hackworth Peterson notes that although the Sarapeum at Puteoli has continued to elude archaeologists, the inscription confirms the existence of the temple. She further posits that the temple likely existed prior to the ordinance of 105 BCE and that worship of Egyptian deities in Puteoli was definitely established prior to 105.²⁹ While Peterson does not make a direct claim that Isis is another possible Egyptian deity worshipped at Puteoli, due to the proximity of Isis and Serapis at other sites, it is logical to assume that Isis would have been worshipped in Puteoli alongside her husband, Serapis. Tran Tam Tinh estimates that by 110/9 BCE there was an Isaic temple in Naples³⁰, that the cult arrived via Puteoli, and that the Iseum at Pompeii was already constructed and in use.³¹ If this were correct it would further enforce the conclusion that where one was worshipped the other was as well.

When the cults of Isis and Serapis appeared in Rome, their temples were again built side by side.³² The cult of Isis would have several cult sites within ancient Italy, the most notable in Rome and the city of Pompeii. While little to no information remains about the inner workings of the Isaic cult, Plutarch's *Moralia: Isis et Osiris* is the most descriptive source to survive.

Rituals and Practices of the Isaic Cult

In Plutarch's narrative, Isis is a goddess of wisdom. In order for followers to achieve this wisdom, they must study and investigate the sacred objections. To Plutarch, seeking wisdom is more important than temple service. Plutarch mentions Typhon, who is a syncretized version of Set,

²⁸ See Tran Tam Tinh 1968: 26-27.

²⁹ Peterson 2006: 245.

³⁰ Although no temple remains have been discovered, a base of a statue with an inscription has. The statue was dedicated by M. Opsius Navius Phanniaunus and it was to the gods Apollo-Horus and Harpocrate. Harpocrate had been syncretised the Isis, see Diod Sic 1.25.

³¹ Tran Tam Tinh 1972.

³² *SHA* 18.27; Cass. Dio. 47.15.4; See Platner 1929.

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. For Isis is a Greek word, and so also is Typhon, her enemy, who is conceited, as his name implies because of his ignorance and self-deception. He tears to pieces and scatters to the winds the sacred writings, which the goddess collects and puts together and gives into the keeping of those that are initiated into the holy rites, since this consecration, by a strict regimen and by abstinence from many kinds of food and from the lusts of the flesh, curtails licentiousness and the love of pleasure, and induces a habit of patient submission to the stern and rigorous services in shrines, the end and aim of which is the knowledge of Him who is the First, the Lord of All, the Ideal One.³³

The goal described is to gain knowledge of Serapis (Osiris) and the afterlife. Access to Serapis and eternal life can be achieved through Isis and worship. In the Papyrus of Hunefar (1280 BCE), Osiris is referred to as the ‘Lord of All’.³⁴ In the Papyrus of Ani, Osiris in Spell 125 is called the ‘Lord of Eternity’. In the Papyrus of Nakht (1350-1290 BCE), a couple worships Osiris in what was their earthly home, hoping it will be recreated in the netherworld. Plutarch’s description of Osiris as the Lord of All is therefore not a new concept. What is most fascinating about that passage is that even though her husband is regarded as the ultimate god, it is only through Isis that you may achieve life after death.

In order to achieve the wisdom of Isis, it was imperative to visit a temple of Isis. The Iseion, according to Plutarch, promised knowledge and comprehension of reality,

The name of her sanctuary, the Iseion, clearly offers recognition and knowledge of what really exists; for it is so called to indicate that we shall know what really exists if we approach the sanctuaries of the goddess with reason and reverence.³⁵

As the Isaic faith was a ‘mystery religion’ one had to be initiated into the rites in order to learn the ritualistic secrets. Plutarch states that Isis will only reveal the divine mysteries to those who ‘truly and justly have the name of ‘bearers of sacred vessels’ and ‘wearers of sacred robes’.³⁶

³³ Plut. *Mor. Isis et Osiris* 2.1.

³⁴ See spell 22; Taylor 2010: 21.

³⁵ Plut. *Mor. Isis et Osiris* 2.1.

³⁶ Plut. *Mor. Isis and Osiris* 3.1.

Plutarch proceeds with detailing the description of priests and followers of Isis as well as some of their religious practice,

it is true that most people are unaware of this very ordinary and minor matter: the reason why the priests remove their hair and wear linen garments. Some persons do not care at all to have any knowledge about such things, while others say that the priests, because they revere the sheep, abstain from using its wool, as well as its flesh; and that they shave their heads as a sign of mourning, and that they wear their linen garments because of the colour which the flax displays when in bloom, and which is like to the heavenly azure which enfolds the universe. But for all this there is only one true reason, which is to be found in the words of Plato: “for the Impure to touch the Pure is contrary to divine ordinance.” No surplus left over from food and no excrementitious matter is pure and clean; and it is from forms of surplus that wool, fur, hair, and nails originate and grow. So it would be ridiculous that these persons in their holy living should remove their own hair by shaving and making their bodies smooth all over, and then should put on and wear the hair of domestic animals.³⁷

The robes were an easy marker for identifying one as a follower or a priest of Isis. Ovid in the *Amores* says ‘And make it not your business to ask into what happens at linen-clad Isis’ temple’.³⁸ The physical appearance of Isiac priests was documented throughout ancient Italy as murals depicting them appeared in the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum.³⁹

Not only were the followers of Isis expected to present themselves in a particular manner, but instructions were given as to what cult members could eat. Plutarch states that the priests did not eat pork and that they felt repugnance for things that were of such a superfluous nature.⁴⁰ In addition to abstaining from pork and specific types of fish, priests and initiates would often fast. Although a later source, Libanius mentions that Isis followers often stayed abstinent with food by fasting.⁴¹ According to Plutarch, simply dressing in the guise of Isis and abstaining from food did not make one a true follower of Isis,

³⁷ Plut. *Mor. Isis and Osiris* 4.

³⁸ Ovid *Amores* 25-26.

³⁹ See the House of Octavius Quartio from Pompeii.

⁴⁰ Plut. *Mor. Isis and Osiris* 5.

⁴¹ Lib. *Orat.* 18. 28.171.

having a beard and wearing a coarse cloak does not make philosophers, nor does dressing in linen and shaving the hair make votaries of Isis; but the true votary of Isis is he who, when he has legitimately received what is set forth in the ceremonies connected with these gods, uses reason in investigating and in studying the truth contained therein.⁴²

Isis provided the path to knowledge, however as we see here, it was the responsibility of the initiates to seek this truth and wisdom through study and ritual.

Isis was often assimilated with various Greek and Roman goddesses. As she was affiliated with wisdom in Plutarch's work, it is unsurprising that she would be syncretized with Athena. According to Plutarch, a statue of Isis / Athena was found in Sais, Egypt that bore the inscription 'I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered.'⁴³ It appears that Isis was altered slightly over time, to be expected with cross-cultural contact, but not to the extent that Alvar suggested. She was a protective and fertility goddess in ancient Egypt. The image of Isis as a healer, protector, and a mother goddess carried throughout the ancient Mediterranean.⁴⁴ Her connection with the afterlife remained and according to CJ Bleeker, Isis was not only a mother goddess but also a savior goddess.⁴⁵ In addition to Plutarch, our most noteworthy source on Isis comes from Apuleius. His work, *Metamorphosis*, provides insight as to how those living in the second century CE would have regarded the goddess.

Isis as a Salvific Goddess

At the center of Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* is the character Lucius, whose fascination and attempts at magic transform him not into his desired choice of bird, but into an ass. This leads

⁴² Plut. *Mor. Isis and Osiris*. 3.1.

⁴³ Plut. *Mor. Isis and Osiris*. 9.

⁴⁴ Gasparro 2005: 40.

⁴⁵ Bleeker 1963: 1

him on a journey with much lamenting and reflection. When Lucius is at his most desperate moment, he prays and then falls asleep. It is then that he has a vision of Isis,

I had hardly closed my eyes when suddenly from the midst of the sea a divine face emerged, displaying a countenance worthy of adoration even by the gods.⁴⁶

The divine figure is noted as having a disc above her head that glowed like the moon, coils of snakes,⁴⁷ and to be wearing a gown of linen. The Isaic priests wore white linen robes, snake iconography was often attributed to mother goddesses, and Isis was often referred to as ‘the moon’.⁴⁸ The female figure then begins to speak,

Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages; mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses. With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld. My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names.⁴⁹

The goddess then proceeds to list all the names that have been attributed to her in every culture before finally stating that her true name is Queen Isis.⁵⁰ Again, we see that not much has changed as Isis claims to be the queen of the dead and mistress of the elements. This was not a Hellenized version of Isis. These aspects of her character were known and revered in Egypt. In the following passages we begin to see how in the eyes of Apuleius, Isis was not only a protective and fertility goddess, but was also a means of salvation.

⁴⁶ Apul. *Met.* 11.3.

⁴⁷ Snakes to the Egyptians were symbols of rebirth. Spell 87 from the Egyptian Book of the Dead speaks of the Sata-snake, who is reborn each day. See the Papyrus of Ani.

⁴⁸ Diod. Sic. 1.11.1.

⁴⁹ Apul. *Metamorphosis* 11.5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Sympathetic to the plight of Lucius, Isis insists she will help him. Isis then explains to Lucius that his life is now pledged to her.⁵¹ This agreement extends beyond his natural life, as she will provide him with everlasting life. It is his responsibility that he continue to worship her,

Moreover you will live in happiness, you will live in glory, under my guardianship. And when you have completed your life's span and travel down to the dead, there too, even in the hemisphere under the earth, you will find me, whom you see now, shining among the shades of Acheron and holding court in the deep recesses of the Styx, and while you dwell in the Elysian fields I will favor you and you will constantly worship me. But if by assiduous obedience, worshipful service, and determined celibacy you win the favor of my godhead, you will know that I—and I alone—can even prolong your life beyond the limits determined by your fate.⁵²

The last statement is what is most enticing, that Isis alone can prolong his life beyond limits. Lucius awakes from his dream and sees a procession to honor the 'savior goddess'.⁵³ Lucius notes that those in the procession are carrying lamps, torches, and candles. Serapis is again acknowledged, as pipers are said to have then played music for the deity.⁵⁴ The linen robes and shaved heads of the followers of Isis are once again noted,

Then the crowds of those initiated into the divine mysteries came pouring in, men and women of every rank and age. They shone with the pure radiance of their linen robes; the women's hair was anointed and wrapped in a transparent covering, while the men's heads were completely shaven and their skulls gleamed brightly—earthly stars of the great religion. All together made a shrill ringing sound with their sistrams of bronze and silver, and even gold. Next came the foremost high priests of the cult, tightly garbed in white linen cinched at the breast and reaching to their feet.⁵⁵

From this passage we can infer that the cult of Isis was open to everyone. As Plutarch noted, it was imperative for initiates not only to don the garb of the cult but to partake in their rituals. Apuleius provides us with the slightest glimpse of what one of these rituals would have looked like.

⁵¹ Apul. *Metamorphosis* 11.6.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Apul. *Met.* 11.9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Apul. *Met.* 11.10.

The ritual proceeds with the procession of gods, and is followed by Lucius receiving his salvation.

And now drew near the promised blessings of the everbenign goddess, and there approached the priest who carried my destiny and my very salvation. In his right hand he held, decorated exactly according to the prescription of the divine promise, a sistrum for the goddess, a crown for me; and it was fitting that it should be a crown of victory, by Hercules, since now, after enduring so many great toils and passing through so many perils, by the providence of the great and mighty goddess I would overcome Fortune, who was so savagely battering me. I did not, however, dash forward in an unrestrained rush under the influence of my sudden joy, because, obviously, I was afraid lest the peaceful progression of the rites be upset by the sudden rush of a four-footed beast. Instead, with calm and almost human steps, I slowly edged my body little by little through the crowd, which doubtless by divine guidance made way, and crept gently inward. But the priest, who, as I could tell from the facts, remembering the oracle he had received in his dream and marveling at the coincidence with the instructions he had received, stopped at once and spontaneously stretched out his hand and held the wreath of roses right in front of my face. I trembled, my heart jumped and beat rapidly, and the wreath, which gleamed with the lovely roses woven into it, I took up with greedy mouth and, eager for the promised results, most eagerly devoured. The heavenly promise did not fail me: at once my ugly animal form slipped from me.⁵⁶

It is through the help of Isis that he was led to the procession in which he was able to shed his animalistic form. Lucius was able to overcome another deity, Fortune, due to Isis. The crowd stands in amazement as they have just witnessed Lucius transform back into a man and they all begin to give praise to Isis. The high priest tells Lucius that he was taken under the protection of the 'Savior goddess'.⁵⁷

The procession arrives at the seashore where the chief priest consecrates a ship that is decorated in Egyptian imagery. He then names and dedicates the ship after Isis.⁵⁸ From this, the go to the temple of Isis where Apuleius provides a detailed account as to what would have taken place,

⁵⁶ Apul. *Met.* 11.12-13.

⁵⁷ Apul. *Met.* 11.15. Apuleius was not the only author during the second century CE to refer to Isis as a saviour. See Xenophon of Ephesus *Long.* 1.6.

⁵⁸ Apul. *Met.* 11.16.

When we arrived at the temple itself, the chief priest and those who carried the divine images and those who had already been initiated into the awesome inner sanctuary were admitted into the goddess's private chamber, where they arranged the lifelike effigies in their prescribed places. Then one of this group, whom everyone called the scribe, stationed himself before the door and summoned the company of the *pastophori*—the name of a consecrated college—as if calling them to an assembly. Then from a lofty platform he read aloud from a book verbatim, first pronouncing prayers for the prosperity of the great Emperor, the Senate, the knights, and the entire Roman people, for the sailors and ships under the rule of our world-wide empire. Then he proclaimed, in the Greek language and with Greek ritual, the opening of the navigation season. The crowd's acclamation which followed confirmed that his words had been auspicious to all. Then, steeped in joy, the people brought forward boughs and branches and garlands and kissed the feet of the goddess, who stood on the steps, fashioned of silver. They then dispersed to their own homes.⁵⁹

Here is where we are provided with a possible glimpse of the ritual related to this procession. As different festivals would have required different rituals, we remain unaware of what occurred during the vast majority of initiates' visits to the temple. This is the launching of the navigational season. From this we understand that the cult's connection with water continued into the second century CE. What is most interesting to note from this passage is that the priest spoke in Greek. There are two possibilities, the first that the cult was in fact Hellenized and adopted the Greek language as integral to the cult. The second, more likely possibility, was that when Isis was promoted to the patron deity of Alexandria, many Greeks began to worship the goddess. In addition, we know that the other possible point of entry to Italy was from Delos, where the initiates would have spoken Greek. This is therefore just an evolution that gradually happened over time.

Returning to Apuleius, following a dream with a high priest, Lucius waits for the temple of Isis to open and it is in this passage that we are given a description of the temple,

Then the gleaming white curtains were drawn apart and we prayed to the venerable vision of the goddess, while a priest made the rounds of the altars arranged about the temple, performing the ritual with the appointed prayers and sprinkling water from a libation-vessel filled from within the sanctuary.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Apul. *Met.* 11.17.

⁶⁰ Apul. *Met.* 11.22.

This is one of the few descriptions we have in a primary source of a temple to Isis. While there is little said, we know there would have been curtains, which could possibly imply that the temple had windows, or that they were used in the entrance, and that there was more than one altar. Also water was present within the temple as the libation vessel was filled within the sanctuary.

Lucius throughout this time impatiently waits to be initiated into the cult. While he is now a follower of Isis, he has not yet received the divine rites. The high priest tells him that when a follower is deemed ready, Isis will appear to them. In addition, she will say which priest is to perform the ceremony. When Isis appears to Lucius and tells him the high priest Mithra will perform his induction, Lucius is thrilled. He rushes to meet Mithra and is then brought to the temple,

After the ceremony of opening had been celebrated with the prescribed ritual and the morning sacrifice had been completed, he brought out from the secret part of the sanctuary some books inscribed with unknown characters. Some used the shapes of all sorts of animals to represent abridged expressions of liturgical language; in others, the ends of the letters were knotted and curved like wheels or interwoven like vine-tendrils to protect their meaning from the curiosity of the uninitiated. From these books he read out to me the preparations which had to be made for the initiation. Then, since the occasion demanded it, as the priest said, he escorted me to the baths nearby, surrounded by an escort of devotees. When I had taken the customary bath, he began by asking the gods' favor and then cleansed me with purificatory sprinkling. He took me back to the temple, with two-thirds of the day now past, and put me right in front of the goddess's feet. Secretly he gave me certain instructions too holy for utterance, and then openly, with all the company as witnesses, he ordered me to restrain my pleasure in food for the next ten days, not to partake of animal food, and to go without wine.⁶¹

Lucius does as he is instructed and is then granted access to the knowledge of the divine mysteries. Most notable, is the way that Apuleius' describes this moment,

⁶¹ Apul. *Met.* 11.22-23.

Then all the uninitiated were dismissed, I was wrapped in an unused linen robe, and the priest took me by the hand and led me to the innermost part of the sanctuary. Perhaps, my zealous reader, you are eager to learn what was said and done next. I would tell if it were permitted to tell; you would learn if it were permitted to hear. But both ears and tongue would incur equal guilt, the latter from its unholy talkativeness, the former from their unbridled curiosity. Since your suspense, however, is perhaps a matter of religious longing, I will not continue to torture you and keep you in anguish. Therefore listen, but believe: these things are true. I came to the boundary of death and, having trodden the threshold of Proserpina, I travelled through all the elements and returned. In the middle of the night I saw the sun flashing with bright light. I came face to face with the gods below and the gods above and paid reverence to them from close at hand.⁶²

It is possible that Apuleius was, in fact, a member of the cult of Isis and did not wish to reveal the cult's secrets or that he was simply basing his information from what was known pertaining to the cult of Isis at that time. The initiation took three days in which Lucius celebrates with food and a party. Still reveling from his initiation, Isis instructs Lucius to go to Rome. When he arrives in the Port of Augustus, he notes that Isis is worshipped in Rome under the name *Campensis* for that is where her temple was located in the city.⁶³ Book XI of Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* has Isis at the forefront. It is only in the latter part of the book that Osiris is mentioned.

Lucius is once again visited in his sleep where he comes to the realization that he does not know the secrets of Osiris,

I had been steeped in the mysteries of the goddess, but I had not yet been enlightened by the mysteries of the great god and supreme parent of the gods, Osiris the unconquered. Although the nature of his deity and cult was connected, even unified, with that of Isis, there was still a very great distinction in the rites of initiation. Therefore I ought to perceive that I was also being sought as a servant of the great god as well.⁶⁴

This passage is exceedingly important as it emphasizes that the cults were connected. Most fascinatingly is that the language used to describe Osiris is not that different from what has previ-

⁶² Apul. *Met.* 11.23.

⁶³ Apul. *Met.* 11.26.

⁶⁴ Apul. *Met.* 11.27.

ously been seen. Again, we see that Isis is extremely powerful, but it is Osiris who is regarded as the great god.

Even though the story of Lucius is a fictional work, it does provide us with insight as to how Romans may have viewed Isis at this time. Of all the gods Apuleius could have chosen to be the ‘all encompassing’ god, he chose Isis. Isis must have gained enough of a following by the second century that Apuleius knew his audience would have knowledge of the goddess. He provides us with a basic description of an Isis temple as well as the ritual for the *navigium isidis*. We know from later works, such as St. Augustine’s *City of God*, that the cult of Isis continued to have a strong presence in the Roman empire well into the third and fourth centuries CE. It is therefore quite likely that the cult of Isis had gained enough of a following by the second century that it would make sense for Apuleius to have her as the central deity in Book XI of his *Metamorphosis*.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the cult of Isis had an established ideology while in Egypt. Rituals were established, prayers created, and art commissioned to gain favor with the goddess. From the 19th Dynasty onwards, Isis had a presence within Egypt and the greater cosmological order. Her importance only continued to grow with the construction of Alexandria and her elevation to patron deity of the city. Her relationship with Osiris, and eventually Serapis, was cemented in the minds of their followers as their cults travelled together throughout the ancient world. With new followers and new cultures, modifications were made with language in order to not discriminate against any initiates. The cult continued to promote the same ideology from its origins in Egypt well until the second century CE in the Roman Empire. Although the primary sources are few,

the authorship stipulates that their retelling of the cult of Isis is how the Egyptians viewed the cult. When we compare this to the work of Apuleius, whose work was written for Romans and part of whose story takes place in the capital, we see that although our knowledge of the cult is limited, that it has changed little throughout its lengthy history. Now that we have explored the nature of the cult, and what the cult of Isis offered initiates, I shall explore the cult's history in city of Pompeii.

Chapter Two

The Cult of Isis and the City of Pompeii

On August 24, 79 CE, according to Pliny the Younger, Mount Vesuvius erupted with catastrophic affects. Infamously, the city of Pompeii was buried under ash and cinder, and all remaining inhabitants who had not previously fled were killed. In truth, much of the city had already been badly damaged in a severe earthquake seventeen years prior. This was noted in Seneca's *De Terrae Motu* wherein he states that Pompeii and its surrounding regions had been laid low by an earthquake.⁶⁵ As a result of the poor quality of Pompeii's building materials the majority of the city was reduced to rubble. Reconstruction of the city was slow and a significant portion of buildings were abandoned. In the post-earthquake world of Pompeii, one building given particular attention by the city's residents was the Temple of Isis.

A local resident named Numerius Popidius Ampliatus privately funded the rebuilding of the temple in the name of his son Numerius Popidius Celsinus. This act was received with such gratitude that his son, then only six years old, was enrolled among the town councilors (*decuriones*) of Pompeii. That the Temple of Isis was the only Pompeian temple fully repaired in 62 CE may be seen as a testament both to the personal devotion and ambition of Numerius Popidius Ampliatus. At the same time, it speaks to the apparent popularity of the cult of Isis. In this chapter, I shall explore how the cult of Isis rooted itself in Pompeian life. I will first provide an analysis of the temple of Isis wherein I will discuss the reconstruction project of the temple, the political ramifications, and what this meant to the inhabitants of the city. I will then provide a detailed discussion of the temple proper. Lastly, Apuleius wrote that when Lucius took part in the procession of Isis for the *navigium isidis* that all were welcome to become followers of the goddess and

⁶⁵ Sen. *Ter. Mot.* 6.1

eventual initiates in her divine mysteries. In order to discern if this was in fact correct, I shall analyze the villas of those who lived in Pompeii and Herculaneum. By investigating the murals, *lararia*, statues, and dedications to Isis and their place within the home I will demonstrate that Apuleius' statement was true.

The Temple of Isis

Due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, we have a preserved model of an Isaic temple. Pompeii is the only location within Italy that still has a standing Iseum. The Temple of Isis in Pompeii was of great significance to the ancient Pompeian's and it was deemed equally important when Pompeii was rediscovered in 1748 as it was one of the first buildings to be disinterred. Shortly after its discovery several remains were recovered that evoked the world of Egypt.⁶⁶ It was confirmed as a temple dedicated to Isis on July 20 1765 when Francesco la Vega uncovered a dedicatory inscription belonging to the precinct's entrance,⁶⁷ CIL 10.846, (Fig. 2),

N(umerius) Popidus N(umerii) f(ilius) Celsinus
aedem Isidis terrae moto conlapsam
a dimfa,emtp p(ecunia) s(ua) restituit hunc decuriones ob liberalitatem
cum esset annorum sexs ordini suo gratis adlegerunt

Numerius Popidius Celsinus, son of Numerius, with his own money rebuilt from the foundation the Temple of Isis collapsed from the earthquake. For his munificence, the decurions accepted him to their order without further obligation, although he was only six years old.⁶⁸

The Iseum that remains was the second temple dedicated to Isis at Pompeii (Fig. 1). This was the temple that was built following the earthquake of 62 CE. The first Isaic temple has been thought

⁶⁶ Peterson 2006: 22.

⁶⁷ Peterson 2006: 18.

⁶⁸ As translated from la Rocca, de Vos and de Vos 1994: 166.

to be pre-Augustan or Augustan but the exact date is unknown.⁶⁹ Construction of the city following the earthquake is a debated topic. John J Dobbins argues that much of Pompeii, including the forum in which the temple of Isis is located, was reconstructed following the 62 CE. He hypothesized that those living in Pompeii would not have known that Vesuvius would erupt in 79 CE and therefore would have attempted to rebuild the forum and city life.⁷⁰ W. Jongman contested this theory and stated that renovation of public buildings was postponed, save for recreational buildings and the temple of Isis.⁷¹ While Dobbins' theory regarding reconstruction of the entire forum is most plausible, much of the forum remained in shambles following the earthquake and the majority of buildings that were reconstructed used poor building materials. Regardless of whose theory is correct, we know that the temple of Isis was given particular attention.

The motivation of Celsinius' father requires further exploration. It is possible that the dedication and donation were done by Ampliatus in order for Celsinus to acquire a position in the *ordo* once he came of age. Tran Tam Tinh speculated that Ampliatus was an aristocrat, but Peterson, la Rocca, de Vos and de Vos, and Zanker all argued that he was a freedman. Peterson claims that the evidence to support that he was an aristocrat is dubious at best.⁷² More fascinating is that this was the temple he chose to make the donation to. This was a strategic move on the part of Ampliatus and he would have no doubt greatly considered which temple would garner his son the most prestige. The fact that the temple of Isis was the building that he chose implies that the building held a level of important to the city of Pompeii prior to 62 CE. By Celsinius being granted permission to join the *ordo* signifies that the *decuriones* appreciated this gesture and re-

⁶⁹ For pre-Augustan dating see V. Tran Tam Tinh, 1964; For post-Augustan dating see N. Blanc, H. Eristov and M. Fincker 2000.

⁷⁰ Dobbins 1994: 634.

⁷¹ Jongman 1991: 213-215.; Peterson 2006: 54.

⁷² Peterson 2006: 243; la Rocca, de Vos and de Vos 1994: 166-167; Zanker 1998: 126-127; Tran Tam Tinh 1964: 41-19.

garded the reconstruction of the Temple of Isis as a notable and distinguishable act of public service.

The Temple of Isis at Pompeii

The temple is located near Pompeii's Triangular Forum. It occupies a fairly small space and is wedged between the back of the Large Theater, the Samnite Palestra and the small Temple of Zeus Melichios. The temple's location suggests its level importance for Pompeians as this was a highly trafficked area. The theatregoers and those conducting business in the forum would have passed by the temple regularly. According to Peterson, the setting housed a cluster of buildings primarily devoted to Hellenic culture. She posits this was appropriate for Isis as the worship of Isis in Italy was not entirely Egyptian, but had been Hellenized through Greek channels.⁷³ As was discussed in chapter one, the cult of Isis did have temples in Greece and Greek initiates. The Greek language had integrated itself into Isaic ritual and, as we shall see, influenced the art of the cult inside of Italy. Isis and the temple at large promoted the idea that Isis was an exotic foreign goddess. As shall be discussed shortly, the temple itself differed quite significantly from other temples.

Although we do not know the physical appearance of the first Iseum, the reconstructed temple at Pompeii is unique in its appearance. Traditional Roman temples were modeled after Etruscan temples that had a *pronaos*, a deep front porch, a *cella* and were entered through a door from the porch. Smaller temples had a single *cella* while larger temples would have three long, narrow, contiguous chambers, each entered from the porch.⁷⁴ The Temple of Isis at Pompeii has elements of a Roman temple but it is not entirely traditional. Lawrence Richardson argued that

⁷³ Peterson 2006: 26.

⁷⁴ Ramage and Ramage 2009: 43.

the displays of unique features of the temple were ‘in almost every way an anomaly’ and that the ‘building materials were the cheapest and not readily available’.⁷⁵ Peterson disagrees with Richardson’s theory, and claims instead that the temple blends traditionally Roman forms with some Egyptian and Greek imagery.⁷⁶ As was common with most Roman temples, walls delimit the sanctuary space dedicated to the deity. The temple is located near the center of a peristyle and is raised on a podium, accessed by a narrow flight of stairs. Its *pronaos* displayed six columns with typical Corinthian capitals. More peculiar are the *aediculae* at either side of the temples facade (Fig. 3) and the secondary entrance to the temple at its south side (Fig. 4). Although Peterson deems the building as a ‘Roman’ temple, these elements distinguish it from the standard Roman model.⁷⁷ The *cella* is shallow, wider than it is deep. There is a high podium extending along the entire width of the *cella* wall that was used to display the cult statues.⁷⁸ On the exterior of the *cella* back wall is a niche (Fig. 5) that contained a statue of Bacchus accompanied by an inscription declaring that N. Popidius Ampliatus, father of Celsinus, dedicated the statue.⁷⁹

The temple itself was constructed of brick and tufa, and was originally covered in stucco, much of which survives on the back wall (Fig. 5).⁸⁰ This was an imitation of ashlar masonry that was traditional of the first Pompeian style.⁸¹ The features that indicate the temple was dedicated to an Egyptian deity include a roofless enclosure located in the southeast corner of the courtyard, known as a *purgatorium*⁸² (Fig. 6). The building demarcates a subterranean room containing a

⁷⁵ Richardson 1988: 281; 285.

⁷⁶ Peterson 2006: 27.

⁷⁷ Mau 1902 suggested that Anubis and Harpocrates (Horus) were displayed in these niches. Anubis was often worshipped in close proximity to Isis and Horus was her son with Osiris.

⁷⁸ Two bases were recovered but the statues themselves have never been found.

⁷⁹ *N(umerius) Popidius Ampliatus / pater p(ecunia) s(ua)* ; Numerius Popidius Ampliatus, father, with his own money. CIL 10.847. For further descriptions of the temple see Moorman 2007: 138.

⁸⁰ Moormann 2007:141.

⁸¹ Dating from 200-80 BCE.

⁸² Often called a *purgatorium*. See Wild 1981.

basin for water from the Nile, an integral part to the cult of Isis.⁸³ This building too was covered in stucco. The main differentiation between the temple and the *purgatorium* is that the *purgatorium* was covered in artwork that was representative of Isis and other Roman deities, including Venus, Mars, Perseus, Andromeda, and cupids. The principal altar for the precinct stands before this structure.

The exterior of the temple was decorated in the first Pompeian style and the portico features were painted decoration in the fourth Pompeian style. Although the frescoes are fragmentary, enough survives that we are able to discern the pattern that would have been present. The middle zone of each wall is dominated by a red field and depicts broad panels separated by *aediculae*. The bottom of each *aedicula* contains a small horizontal panel displaying relatively common themes such as still life, a sacral-idyllic landscape, and a ship battle.⁸⁴ Within the red⁸⁵ centres are small sacral-idyllic landscapes and a single figure connected to Isaic ritual. Examples are a priest wearing the mask of Anubis,⁸⁶ and a priestess with a sistrum (Fig. 7).⁸⁷ A painted frieze of acanthus leaves are depicted with miniature figures,⁸⁸ some of which are carrying Egyptian symbols. This imagery includes but is not limited to a cow with a lotus on its head and a child holding a sistrum. When viewed as a whole, the paintings of the portico display a recognizable Fourth-Style pattern punctuated with only a smattering of small-scale Isaic images.⁸⁹ Also completed in the fourth style are the two rooms (5 and 6) that were added in the post-

⁸³ Moormann 2007:143.

⁸⁴ The cult of Isis was often linked with ships and ships were named after her. See Lucian *The Ship or the Wishers*.

⁸⁵ Egyptian blue and purple are noticeably absent from the color scheme at the Temple of Isis in Pompeii. Complying with the post-earthquake Pompeian style. See Moormann 2007:174; F. Delamare, G. Monge and M. Repoux 2004: 89-108.

⁸⁶ Priests and Isaic ritual was often infused with the presence of the god Anubis. See Tert. *Apology* 23; *SHA Commodus* 7, *Caracalla* 9, *Pescennius Niger* 11; Juv. 6.534; Diod. Sic. 1.87; Ovid *Amores* 8; Jos. *Antiquities* 4.

⁸⁷ A rattle used in Isaic worship. See Tert. *Apology* 23; Ovid *Amores* 8; Stat. *Silvae* 3.101-103.

⁸⁸ The flower that is associated with the Corinthian capital, native to Greece. Further indicating that Hellenization had occurred.

⁸⁹ Peterson 2006:31.

earthquake construction. They were added on the west side of the sanctuary. Room 6 has been identified as the *telesterion*, *curia Isiaca*, and *Ekklesiasterion*- a room for the sacred images, ritual banquets, and the reunion of initiates.⁹⁰ The central image on the south wall of the room displays the image of Io's arrival in Egypt and reception by Isis. Here is an example of cross-cultural contact. Due to syncretization, and the fact that in the final moments of Io's mythology she arrives in Egypt, Isis and Io were frequently depicted together in the Greco-Roman world (Fig. 8).⁹¹ Adjacent to this room is the *sacrarium* (room 5), which takes its name from the type of objects and images found within it. Jean Claude Golvin postulates that this room was used to instruct new cult members.⁹² Egyptian deities and motifs adorned the walls, and many ritual objects were found here. The imagery found in this room distinguished itself from the paintings throughout the sanctuary not only by their subject matter, which was nearly entirely Egyptian, but also their composition. On the north wall, right of a niche, heraldic snakes approach a wicker basket adorned with a moon, an Isaic symbol (Fig. 9).⁹³ It is possible that the image represents the rite of *inventio Osiridis* held every November, that celebrated the resurrection of Osiris at the hands of Isis and the consequent revival of vegetation. If this were a marker for the event, it would indicate that the Pompeians had accepted Isis as a mother-goddess, capable of renewal and giving life.

When entering the temple, visitors were greeted by an image of Isis and Osiris seated on a rocky crag (Fig. 10). The figures are rendered with an almost loose brushwork and appear to

⁹⁰ Sweetnam-Burland 2002: 125; Peterson 2006: 32.

⁹¹ This tradition stemmed back to Manetho, the speculated creator of Serapis at the behest of the Ptolemies. This was discussed in Callimachus 58; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9.686; Propertius 2. 24.4

⁹² Golvin 1994: 204; Moormann 2007: 175.

⁹³ Isis tows a boat that contains sacred water from the Nile, symbolic of her husband/brother Osiris.

float against a plain white background. This style of imagery recalls that of domestic shrines or *lararia*.

Sculptures and small portable objects of veneration also adorned the temple. None of the cult statues survive, but three nearly intact statues were discovered behind the temple, among them a statue of Isis (Fig. 11). What is most interesting to note is that although a significant portion of the temple was decorated in Egyptian motifs, the statue of Isis displays Greek aesthetic chronology. The statue dates to the Neronian period (54-68 CE) and was sculpted in the *kourai* style that was utilized in Greece's Archaic Period (600-400 BCE). The *kouroi* and *korai* were often used in sanctuaries and as votive offerings. The *kouroi* were thought to be representative of Apollo, who was often equated with Isis' son Horus.⁹⁴ The garment she is wearing is representative of the *peplos* mixed with elements of the *chiton* and her hairstyle was done in the Daedalic Style, the artistic style that proceeded Greece's the Archaic Period. In addition, there is an emphasis placed on her status as a fertility goddess as her nipples are visible through the material of her garment.

Although she is dressed as a Greek goddess, she is holding an *ankh* in her left hand, an Egyptian symbol for life. As the temple was located in a 'Hellenic' part of the city, it is possible that the statue was sculpted with Greek traits in order to maintain the Greek elements in this region of Pompeii. It is again possible that the earliest worshippers of Isis in Pompeii were those from Greece and, therefore, the statue was created in the Archaic style to honor the original followers. Regardless, it provided passersby with a constant reminder that Isis was a foreign goddess since she was not presented as a traditional Roman goddess. In addition to the statue of Isis,

⁹⁴ Pedley 2007: 176.

statues of Bacchus and Venus were uncovered.⁹⁵ Peterson notes that the presence of Venus within the sanctuary of Isis reinforces the syncretic spirit between the two deities and it suggests an overt identification among Pompeians with Isis.⁹⁶ The temple itself and its statuary were unique in that it was not inherently Roman. It was a combination of Egyptian and Greco-Roman design.

The temple of Isis in Pompeii, although constructed for a Roman audience, housed copious objects, both ritualistic and decorative, that hailed from Egypt. Excavators at the site found a sphinx, the feet from an Egyptian statue, two statues of divinities, and a canopic urn.⁹⁷ The surviving imports include a 26th Dynasty ushabty figurine,⁹⁸ a small faience Ptolemaic statue of a male divinity and an early Ptolemaic inscription from Herakleopolis to the upheaval of Egypt just after the conquest of Alexander the Great.⁹⁹ Molly Sweetnam-Burland argues that these objects were highly valued by the Pompeians involved in the Isis cult because of their location within the temple. The inscription was displayed in the *pronaos* of the temple, affixed to the outer wall of the *cella*.¹⁰⁰ A unique feature of the temple of Isis at Pompeii is the walls that surround the temple. Currently, a doorway separates the temple from the street. I believe that in ancient Pompeii this would have been left open. The cult of Isis was placed under the category of ‘mystery cult’ because one had to be initiated into the cultic rituals and practices. In order to entice and intrigue citizens and travellers to Pompeii, placing the inscription within a visible distance would have been a brilliant tactic. The inscription was in a foreign language, with symbols and

⁹⁵ Isis was often syncretized with the traditionally Roman goddess, Venus. Many examples can be seen in domestic settings in Pompeii, see house VI.14.27.

⁹⁶ Peterson 2006: 36.

⁹⁷ None of which survive today. See D. D’Errico, *Materiali di produzione egiziana*, in: S. De Caro (ed), *Alla ricerca di Iside: analisi, studi e restauri dell’Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli* (Rome 1992) 77-80; Molly Sweetnam-Burland, *Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts: ‘A Taste for Aegyptiaca in Italy’ Case Studies: Aegyptiaca in and Around Pompeii and Rome*, 16.

⁹⁸ An Egyptian figurine that would have been buried with the dead.

⁹⁹ Sweetnam-Burland, *Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts*, 16; Di Maria, *Aquisizioni minori*; D’Errico, *Materiali di produzione egiziana*.

¹⁰⁰ Sweetnam-Burland, 128; *Pompeianorum Antiquitatum Historia* I 173.

imagery that were uncommon. The temple itself, despite Peterson's theories, I believe was an anomaly and was not a true Roman temple. Exotic elements were integrated into its architecture and it therefore seems appropriate to presume that the inscription would have been visible from the street.

While the other objects were not as prominently displayed, they still provided high symbolic value. The ushabty figurine was buried in front of the temple proper along with ash and the remains of fruit and vegetables.¹⁰¹ The faience statue was found in or near the small shrine in the *sacrarium*, and likely venerated as the image of a god, similar to a statuette of a *Lar* in a family shrine.¹⁰²

Isis in domestic Pompeii and Herculaneum

Painted and sculpted images of Isis appear in several *lararia* and domestic shrines around Pompeii. A *lararium* was usually reserved for Roman household gods and spirits such as the *lares*,¹⁰³ the *penates*,¹⁰⁴ and the *genius*.¹⁰⁵ *Lararia* were not solely reserved for domestic deities, it also served major Roman gods.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore quite interesting that Isis appeared in a setting previously reserved for Roman gods. Despite the outward displays of exoticism in the Temple of Isis, it appears that to the Pompeians she was adopted as a Roman goddess. When appearing in Pompeian *lararia*, Isis is often syncretized with Fortuna. Isis and Fortuna were often syncretized in areas where trade took place and close to ports. As Fortune was associated with luck and Isis with water and abundance, it is no surprise that the two were often combined into a single entity.

¹⁰¹ PAHI 172. ; Sweetnam-Burland 2015: 32.

¹⁰² Sweetnam-Burland 2015: 130.

¹⁰³ The protectors of the family. See Clarke 1991: 8.

¹⁰⁴ The gods of the ancestors.

¹⁰⁵ The guardian and procreative spirit of the household's paterfamilias.

¹⁰⁶ Peterson 2006: 43-44.

It was logical to depict Isis in the domestic sphere as she could support the *lares*, *penates*, and the *genius* in protecting the family, its business, and its regeneration.¹⁰⁷

Themes and imagery often represented in the homes of Pompeii and Herculaneum are sphinxes, statues of Pharaohs, crocodiles, papyrus plants, and *pinakes*, which correspond to real Egyptian-looking material, as seen in the gardens of the Casa Di D. Octavius Quartio.¹⁰⁸ The house underwent thorough renovations following the earthquake of 62 CE, and in this reconstruction acquired Isaic iconography.¹⁰⁹ The imagery from the house of Octavius Quartio depicts a priest, recognizable from his white garment, fringed shawl and clean-shaven head,¹¹⁰ the sistrum held in his right hand, and the *situla* hanging from his right wrist.¹¹¹ This depiction of the priest matches what the literary sources claim Isaic priests to have looked like in their appearance and in their clothing.¹¹² In addition to the frescoes, according to Spinazolla, a glazed terracotta lamp showing Isis, Harpocrates, and Anubis, two glazed terracotta statues, one of Bes and another of a pharaoh, and a marble group showing an ibis biting a snake were discovered.¹¹³

Augustine noted that Romans often invoked protection from three deities in the liminal space between the interior and exterior of their homes.¹¹⁴ The surviving frescoes from the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum suggest that many chose to seek protection from Isis.¹¹⁵ Not all believe that Isaic imagery indicated that the homeowner worshipped Isis. Bragantini states that to some historians, such as Söldner, Egyptian imagery is now dismissed and regarded as manifesta-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Sweetnam-Burland 2015: 132; Not all believe the imagery within the garden of the Octavius house is related to Isis, see Patterson 2006: 46.

¹⁰⁹ Clarke 1991: 194.

¹¹⁰ Except for a tress descending from the top of his head onto his right ear.

¹¹¹ See Priest of Isis, fresco (4th style) from House of Loreius Tiburtinus, Pompeii.

¹¹² Ovid *Amores* 25-26; Plut. *Mor. Isis et Osiris* 3-4; Philostratus *Letters*.

¹¹³ See Pompei alla Luce degli Scavi Nuovi di via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910- 1923).

¹¹⁴ Aug. *City of God* 4.8.

¹¹⁵ Sweetnam-Burland argues that we should not assume that the home owner was a member of the cult of Isis even if their home displayed Egyptian and Isaic artifacts.

tion of generic ‘exoticism’ devoid of deeper implications.¹¹⁶ Sweetnam-Burland agrees with this notion and emphasizes that Egyptianizing elements in the household do not indicate that the owner was a member of the cult of Isis.¹¹⁷ Bragantini argued that for painted images or statuettes in domestic shrines, it is imperative to distinguish between those appearing in a ‘representative’ area of a house and those gracing ‘service’ areas. She infers that the former is intrinsically important as it indicates the *domini* as devotees of the cult of Isis, whereas the latter was worshipped by the servants.¹¹⁸ As was discussed earlier, arguments have been made that N. Popidius was a freedman and a member of the Isaic cult. If we adhere to Bragantini’s theory, it is interesting to note that the placement of murals, frescoes and *lararia* in villas in Pompeii indicate that all levels of citizenry partook in the Isaic cult, not only freedmen and women. This would give further weight to the claim that Apuleius makes in Book XI of the *Metamorphosis*.

In the peristyle of the House of the Gilded Cupids, there are two domestic cult installations, both datable to the last decades of the city’s life.¹¹⁹ Next to the *cubiculum*, for which the house is named, is an *aedicule* shaped as a temple on a podium. Bronze statues were found here of the Capitoline triad Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. In addition to the triad, the two *Lares* and Mercury were discovered.¹²⁰ At the opposite corner of the peristyle is a shrine for Egyptian deities Isis, Anubis, and Osiris. On the socle are painted two snakes converging towards an altar with offerings.¹²¹ Most importantly to this study is that there are clear and accurate depictions of objects and instruments that were integral to the cult of Isis. A sistrum, two cists (one with a

¹¹⁶ Bragantini 2012: 25.

¹¹⁷ Peterson 2006: 42-43.

¹¹⁸ Bragantini, The Cult of Isis and ancient Egyptomania in Campania, 2012: 21.

¹¹⁹ Bragantini 2012:22; August Mau divided the various mural painting schemes into four Pompeian styles. While his model has been refined, it remains the standard in our analysis of mural paintings in the Roman world and allows us to date many of the murals from Pompeii and other Vesuvian sites. See Kleiner, 2010: 40; Ramage and Ramage 2009: 94-105.

¹²⁰ F. Seiler 1992: 714-846; Bragantini 2012: 22.

¹²¹ A common imagery in *lararia*.

crescent moon)¹²², a *patera*, a *situla*, and a *uraeus*¹²³ were all displayed on the peristyle. Isis herself is depicted with a sistrum in her right hand and a *situla* in her left, similar to the statue found in the temple grounds. She is accompanied by Osiris, also holding a sistrum in his right hand and a cornucopia in his left. In addition to her husband, Anubis stands by her side. Next to the deities is the officiating priest in front of the altar. Additional finds at the site continue to emphasize the connection to the Isaic cult. An alabaster statuette of Horus, Isis and Osiris' son, a large glazed terracotta lamp on whose disc Isis, Harpocrates and Anubis are pictured.¹²⁴

One of the most interesting murals depicting an Isaic ritual comes from Herculaneum (Fig. 12). The wall painting is one of the only full paintings we have to depict any ritual of the cult. In the background the high priest stands and watches over the priests and cult members. The priests, who are easily identified by their white linen robes and shaved heads, perform the ceremony. The head priest appears to be holding a water jug and the figure to his right is holding a sistrum. What is most interesting about this painting is that it depicts people of varying ages, sex, and skin-tone. Some appear to look more Egyptian in their guise while others appear more Roman. We remain unaware if this mural was commissioned in order to shed light onto the ritualistic practices of the Isaic cult, but it assists us in that it is clear that the cult was indeed open to all.

A wall mural of Isis, Serapis, and Harpocrates still stands in the House of the Amazons at Pompeii. It depicts the deities standing inside a temple surrounded by a garden with marine landscape in the background.¹²⁵ Bragantini posits that the presence of a masonry altar in front of the painted shrine indicates that a domestic cult was performed for these deities in this represented

¹²² This is similar to the imagery that was displayed in the Temple to Isis at Pompeii. See Fig. 9, *Navigum Isidis*.

¹²³ A musical instrument, two snakes, libation bowl, a bucket shaped vessel, and a sacred cobra.; See Bragantini 2012: 22; Peterson 2006: 45.

¹²⁴ Bragantini 2012: 22.

¹²⁵ Isis was often associated with water due to her cults early origin stories involving the Nile in Egypt and in later Roman writings was often again affiliated with water and ships. This will be elaborated on more extensively in the following section.

area of the house.¹²⁶ This house is unique in that a second image was also discovered in the service area. Bragantini therefore argues that in the House of the Amazons Isis was worshipped not only by the homeowners but by slaves as well.¹²⁷ The image was painted on a wall in a corridor on the way to the latrine. The presence of an altar underneath the image indicates that this was used as a cult image.¹²⁸ This image of Isis is not as blatantly Egyptianized as others as she appears to have been syncretized with Fortuna.¹²⁹ As has been mentioned, the location of these objects and murals has led scholars to different interpretations to their meaning and placement. While Sweetnam-Burland and Bragantini emphasize the location of the images, Tran Tam Tinh suggests that equal emphases should be given to each monument and mural. From the discoveries of murals depicting Isaic ritual, to very specific cult objects appearing in frescoes and murals, it seems quite clear that the Isaic religion did not only have a public presence in Pompeii but was active in the domestic sphere as well.¹³⁰ In addition to the arguments regarding the imagery in the homes, observations have been made that it is not the imagery that indicates if the owner or slaves were cult members, but rather the proximity of the home to the temple. This has been a theory applied to the House of Acceptus and Euhodia, in whose *lararium* Isis-Fortuna was depicted. This argument could be applicable to particular homes, however, as we have seen, the presence of Isis in the home, for both slaves and homeowners alike, is a solid indication that they were initiates or sought to be initiates in the Isaic cult. If they had been close in their geograph-

¹²⁶ Bragantini 2012: 22; PPM IV 1993: 168-197.

¹²⁷ There is an ideology that Isaic worship was limited to the lower classes of citizenry in Italy however Pompeii disproves this theory. It is possible that the majority of cult members in the capital were freedmen and women, however in Pompeii, all ranks of society partook in the Isaic cult.

¹²⁸ Bragantini 2012: 22.

¹²⁹ Fortuna's cult suggested good fortune due to sexual intimacy, Varro *De Lingua Latina* 6.17. The sexual aspect of the cult is likely what caused the assimilation of Isis and Fortuna, as the literature often promotes the Isaic cult as hyper-sexualized. In addition, the cult of Fortuna was very popular among slaves, freedmen, and freedwoman. Some speculate that is not the sexual connect but rather than sailors required good fortune on their journeys and as Isis was affiliated with ships and water that the assimilation was a natural pairing. See Golvin 1994: 243.

¹³⁰ Patterson 2006: 46; See Tran Tam Tinh 1964.

ical proximity to the temple, that would have been a perk rather than a requirement. In addition to being depicted as an Egyptian goddess, in homes throughout Pompeii Isis was syncretized with Io, Ceres, and Fortuna. At The House of the Moralist at Pompeii, a marble statue that has been labelled as Isis-Diana was discovered.¹³¹

The cult of Isis appears to have appealed to all levels of citizenry within Pompeii. The rebuilding of the Iseum, in addition to the promotion of Celsinus, implies that the temple was important to a significant portion of the city's population. A cult whose devotees comprised the lower strata of society would not have been awarded the city's first reconstruction project. Peterson goes as far as saying that influential people, members of the elite and the aristocracy of Pompeii were adherents of the Isaic cult. An example is Eumachia who was a wealthy woman from Pompeii who is remembered for donating the funds to construct the largest building in the Pompeian Forum, now known as the Building of Eumachia. Cooley dates the building to the late Augustan Period or early in the reign of his successor Tiberius.¹³² Cooley also concluded that Eumachia was a priestess in the cult of Isis / Ceres. Men and women of means were active members of the cult of Isis and it is clear that they did not hide this from their fellow citizens.¹³³

Conclusion

It is impossible for us to make comparisons between the Iseum at Pompeii and other temples belonging to the goddess as no other temple with artwork has survived. We must solely rely on the information handed down to us via primary sources. What we are able to discern from the physical remains in Pompeii is that in Pompeii Isis was a foreign goddess adopted by those

¹³¹ Ibid. For Isis conflation with Diana see Heyob 1975: 67.

¹³² Cooley 2004: 204.

¹³³ For women's involvement in ancient religion see Heyob 1971: 110.

living in the southern Italian city. The history of the cult of Isis in Pompeii is relatively unknown until 62 CE when the temple was reconstructed following the catastrophic earthquake that leveled the city. We can infer due to the resulting promotion of Celsinus that the temple of Isis was regarded as an important monument in the city and that the *ordo* were appreciative of his financial contribution.

The cult and temple grounds did not hide the foreign aspects of the cult and the goddess herself. Egyptian iconography, inscriptions, and votives were on display to the passerby in the Pompeian Forum. This promoted the idea that the cult was fantastical and mysterious, possibly assisting in recruiting new initiates. In addition to being depicted as an Egyptian goddess, Isis was syncretized with local deities and even had the city's patron deity, Venus, present in her temple. She had been adopted by the community as a Roman goddess. This idea is only further emphasized when we analyze the homes in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Slaves, homeowners, and the elite of the city alike were members of the Isis cult. This is evident from the dedications that have been found in the *lararia* as well as slave-quarters. She was a goddess who appealed to the masses, just as Apuleius recorded in the late second century. The cult of Isis in Pompeii came to a screeching halt with the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. We do not know how the cult would have continued to function and if Isis would have continued to hold such a level of prominence among the inhabitants of Pompeii. Where the cult did have a longstanding history was in the capital of the empire, in the city of Rome.

Chapter Three The Cult of Isis and Rome

Shortly following the arrival of the Isaic cult in Southern Italy, the mystery religion made its way to Rome. Similar to Pompeii, Isis was accepted by the Roman people, but the history of the cult in Rome is a tumultuous one. The latter days of the Roman Republic were full of political turmoil and senatorial moments of weakness. Due to epigraphical and archaeological evidence, we are convinced that the Isaic cult had established a following in Rome by the first century BCE. It is in 59 BCE that political suppressions of the Isaic cult began. In an attempt to distract the Roman populous from the political strife occurring in the capital, the senate intervened in the religious sphere. Isis was an easy target as she was a foreign goddess relatively new to Rome, and in the eyes of several Roman authors, was a symbol of un-Roman characteristics. Politics would continue to serve as the impetus behind these suppressions of the Isaic cult well into the early empire. In this chapter I will explore the world of Roman politics and the cult of Isis. This will consist of analyzing the attempts at suppression in the late Republic and in the early empire; how Isis came to represent Cleopatra; and how despite countless attempts, the cult managed to survive well into the second century within the city of Rome and its suburbs.

Isis in the Roman Republic

Comparable to Pompeii, very little is known concerning the initial Roman reaction to Isis and her cult. In the latter days of the Republic, Isaic imagery was present in Rome as coins de-

picting sacred imagery to Isis were in circulation in the capital city. Coins dating to the 80s BCE depict images such as the lotus flower, crocodile, ibis, pyramid, and sistrum.¹³⁴

A funeral inscription from *regio VIII*, the Capitoline region, sheds insight as to who may have been followers of Isis within Rome. The date of the inscription is contested, while Degraasi has dated it to 58 BCE, and Malaise to 48 BCE, Coarelli places it between 90 and 60 BCE.¹³⁵ Takács argues that Coarelli's dating is the most convincing as he used onomastic evidence given by the inscription as well as stylistic characteristics. The inscription provides the names of thirteen Roman citizens, the majority of whom were freedmen and women, and some who were freeborn Roman men.¹³⁶

A. Caecili(us) A. l(ibertus) Olipor I Cn. Caecili A. [l(iberti)] Silo- nisI Caeci[li]a A. et Cn. l(iberta) Asia I A. Caecili A. Cn. l(iberti) Alessandri I Polla Caecilia Spuri [f(ilia)] I A. Cae[c]ili A. f(ili) Pal(atina) Rufi I T. Sulpici T. f(ili) {Caecili} sac(erdotis) Isid(is) Capitoli(nae) I Porcia T. l(iberta) Rufa {sac(erdos)} Sulpici {Capi- toli(nae)} I T. Porcius T. f(ilius) Col(lina) Maxsimus I T. Sulpici- us T. l(ibertus) Primus I C. Valerius C. l(ibertus) [P]hilar[g]urus I Q. Lolius Q. [f(ilius) H]or(atia) Rufus I D. Aurelius D. l(ibertus) Stella (?) I H(oc) m(onumentum) <h>e(redes) non seq(uetur)

From the inscription we know that those listed belonged to six *gentes*: the Caecilia, Porcia, Sulpicia, Valeria, Lollia, and Aurelia. The only family in the list to not hail from an illustrious Roman family is the Lollia. With freedmen and women listed amongst those descending from historical Roman families, it is apparent that as in Pompeii, the cult of Isis was appealing to all levels of citizenry.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Alföldi 1954: 28.

¹³⁵ Takács 1995: 51-52.

¹³⁶ Takács 1995: 53.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Despite acceptance within varying classes of Roman society, the cult began to face suppression in the 50s BCE when the senatorial class began to target the cults of Isis and Serapis. The most notable dates for persecutions of the Isaic cult are 59, 58, 53, 50, and 48 BCE.¹³⁸

59 BCE is the most questionable of all of the dates attributed to the suppression of the Isaic cult. Politically, 59 BCE saw Caesar pass his agrarian law, as well as removal of those who disagreed with his notion.¹³⁹ In addition, Caesar took effort to establish friendships with Ariovistus whom he now regarded as an ally and Ptolemy of Egypt, who was now also regarded as an ally after paying a significant bribe.¹⁴⁰ Although it appears that the informal alliance between Caesar, Pompey Magnus, and Lepidus was successful in 59 BCE, we know that there was political discord in the capital as Cicero compiled a pamphlet in secret that targeted the three men.¹⁴¹ The edict of 59 BCE that targeted the cult of Isis was conjectured by J. Ziehen who made a textual emendation to the work of Cicero.¹⁴² The passage was changed from *iacet enim ille sic ut phocis Curiana stare videatur* into *ut prae hoc Isis Curiana stare videatur*.¹⁴³ Takács states that as the original Ciceronian letter does not in fact mention Isis, it should be disregarded.¹⁴⁴ Pina Polo further argues that if we believe the sequence of events as recorded by Tertullian in his *Ad Nationes*, that the order of affairs must have commenced with the senatorial decree against the worship of Egyptian gods.¹⁴⁵ This was followed by the actual destruction of the altars and the razing of the new shrines ordered by the consul Galbinius or by order of the two consuls in the

¹³⁸ Cic. *Att.* 2.17.2.; Tert. *Apol.* 6.8; *Nat.* 1.10.17-18; Arnob., *Nat.* 2.73; Cassius Dio 40.47.3-4; Val. Max. 1.3.3; Cassius Dio. 42.26.1-2.

¹³⁹ *ARS* 91; Cic. *Vat.* 21; Liv. *Per.* 103; Cass. Dio. 38.6.1-4.

¹⁴⁰ Caes. *BGall.* 1.31-32; Plut. *Caes.* 19.1; App. *Gall.* 16.1; Cic. *Rab. Post.* 4; Caes. *BCiv.* 107.2; Suet. *Caes.* 54.3.

¹⁴¹ Cic. *Att.* 2.6.2; Cass. Dio. 39.10.1-3.

¹⁴² Moehring 1959: 293.

¹⁴³ Ziehen 1898: 341.

¹⁴⁴ Takács 1995: 60-62.

¹⁴⁵ Tert. *Apol.* 6.8.

beginning of 58 BCE rather than 59 BCE.¹⁴⁶ The evidence for a suppression attempt in 59 BCE is minimal. Ziehen may have wished to provide further background as to why the attempt of suppression in 58 BCE may have occurred by indicating that Cicero wrote of Isis in 59 BCE. Takács is correct in her assessment that the changes should be ignored, as Ziehen's argument remains dubious at best.

Political instability was exceedingly evident in 58 BCE. Tribune of the Plebs, P. Clodius Pulcher, formed an armed gang of slaves and occupied the temple of Castor;¹⁴⁷ Memmius and Domitius attempted to prosecute Caesar for his activities as consul;¹⁴⁸ and in August of 58 BCE, Clodius was accused of plotting to murder Pompey Magnus.¹⁴⁹ In addition to these events, Caesar's campaign in Gaul began, the Tribune Anistius attempted to prosecute Caesar (albeit proving to be unsuccessful while Caesar was absent from Rome), and in Egypt the Roman ally Ptolemy was forced from Alexandria due to uprisings and his daughter Bernice was instilled as queen of Egypt.¹⁵⁰ Although a later source Tertullian claimed that 58 BCE, in addition to the political turmoil of Rome, also placed a ban on the worship of Isis, Serapis, and other eastern deities,

The consuls Piso and Gabinius, no Christians surely, forbade Serapis, and Isis, and Arpocrates, with their dogheaded friend, admission into the Capitol-in the act casting them out from the assembly of the gods-overthrow their altars, and expelled them from the country, being anxious to prevent the vices of their base and lascivious religion from spreading.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Pina Polo 2014: 259; Turcan 1989: 88; Takács 1995: 63.

¹⁴⁷ Cic. *Dom.* 54; *Sest.* 34; *Pis.* 9; Cass. Dio. 38.13.2.

¹⁴⁸ Suet. *Caes.* 23.1; *Ner.* 2.2.

¹⁴⁹ Cic. *Sest.* 69; *Pis.* 28; *Mil.* 18; 37.

¹⁵⁰ Plut. *Caes.* 15.5; App. *Gall.* 1.6; Suet. *Caes.* 23.1, 25.1; Plut. *Pomp.* 49.13-14; Cass. Dio. 39.12.1-2.

¹⁵¹ Tert. *Apol.* 6.8.

The notion that this event occurred persisted well into the Roman empire as it was later recorded by Arnobius,

What! have you not introduced into the number of your gods the Egyptian deities named Serapis and Isis, since the consulship of Piso and Gabinius?¹⁵²

While neither source was contemporary with the date in question, it is intriguing that both would mention it. The language Tertullian uses is particularly fascinating as he refers to their ‘lascivious religion’. No doubt his Christian bias influenced the diction of his work, but it is possible that his religion was the motivation for recording this date as well. Both Tertullian and Arnobius were men of faith and in order to highlight the positive aspects of Christianity, it is possible that they refer in their works to periods of Roman history when the senate chose to target pagan and ‘lascivious’ religions. Although their reason for mentioning this event is to promote Christianity, the fact that it is mentioned in both sources gives weight to the notion that in 58 BCE there was an attempt to remove the cult of Isis and Serapis from Rome. We know that this was unsuccessful due to a decree in 54 BCE that again attempted to ban the worship of Isis in Rome and ordered the destruction of private Isiac shrines and altars.¹⁵³ Rome’s political struggle would continue to be seen into 53 BCE and would witness another attempt to dismantle the cult of Isis within Rome.

53 BCE proved to be a turbulent year for Roman politics with Galbinius convicted of extortion,¹⁵⁴ riots erupting at Licinus’ notion that Pompey be appointed dictator,¹⁵⁵ and the death of

¹⁵² Arnob. 2.73.

¹⁵³ Heyob 1975: 18.

¹⁵⁴ App. *BCiv* 2.24; Cass. Dio 39.55.5-6, 63.1-5, 46.8.1.

¹⁵⁵ Cic. *Fam.* 8.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 54.3-5.

the triumvir, Crassus.¹⁵⁶ Caesar and Magnus continued to be targeted by fellow politicians while former consuls were being convicted. Why, then, in the midst of this turmoil would they chose to target the cults of Isis and Serapis? According to Cassius Dio,

with regard to Serapis and Isis, was a portent equal to any; for the senate had decided to tear down their temples, which some individuals had built on their own account. Indeed, for a long time they did not believe in these gods, and even when the rendering of public worship to them gained the day, they settled them outside the pomerium.¹⁵⁷

From Dio's passage it is clear that the previous attempts to suppress the cult had failed and that Roman citizens were funding temples themselves in order to worship Isis and Serapis. The dating of Dio's passage requires further investigation. Takács argues that this passage is referencing the year 53 BCE. It could be argued that Dio is, in fact, writing about events that occurred in 54 BCE as Book XL begins with the discussion of Caesar's second voyage to Britain, which took place in 54 BCE. It is possible that Dio is discussing events that began in 54 BCE and carried into 53 BCE. Regardless, it is evident that in this time period, the Isis cult was again a topic of conversation amongst the senatorial class. The attacks against the cults of Isis and Serapis would continue to fail as the senate would endeavor in 50 BCE and 48 BCE to again eradicate their presence within Rome.

The power held by Caesar and Magnus continued to be a topic of intense discussion in 50 BCE. Marcellus attempted to persuade the senate to fix an end date to Caesar's command (although he was opposed by Curio).¹⁵⁸ Curio began to insist that Pompey relinquish his power at

¹⁵⁶ Plut. *Pomp.* 53.8-10; Cass. Dio. 40.26.1-27; Luc. 1.103-111, 8.431-439.

¹⁵⁷ Cass. Dio 40.47.3.

¹⁵⁸ Cic. *Att.* 7.1.5, 7.5; *Fam.* 8.11.3, 13.2; Caes. *BGall* 8.53.1-2.

the same moment as Caesar,¹⁵⁹ and Pompey in turn discussed the possibility that he would lay down his command if Caesar would agree to the same terms.¹⁶⁰ In December of 50 BCE the senate voted strongly in favor that Pompey and Caesar should relinquish their commands.¹⁶¹ The consuls swiftly voted and insisted, without the formal agreement of the senate, that Pompey defend Italy against Caesar, leading Caesar to send envoy insisting he would fight, if necessary. Despite the political turmoil, according to Valerius Maximus the senate again voted and ordered that the temples of Isis and Serapis be demolished.¹⁶² The temples were said to have been destroyed and those that remained moved outside of the *pomerium*. It is compelling to see that during the years where the political strife in Rome was beginning to take a toll that the politicians felt they needed to divert the public's attention from the disarray in the senate. Although not contemporaneous to the event, Valerius Maximus' work is dated to the reign of Tiberius who, as we shall see, also sought to ban the Isaic cult in Rome. It is possible that he was referencing this moment of history in order to support the ban proposed by his emperor. As Tiberius had a connection to the cult of Isis, the date and decree that Valerius Maximus recorded is plausible. 48 BCE would be the last attempt to suppress the cult prior to the reign of Octavian Augustus.

With Caesar having marched across the Rubicon in 49 BCE, he was now officially at war against the senate. In 48 BCE the armies of Caesar and Pompey took up positions around Dyrrachium,¹⁶³ and on August 9th Caesar decisively defeated the army of Pompey near Pharsalus.¹⁶⁴ This resulted in Pompey fleeing to Egypt where he was subsequently executed by the order of

¹⁵⁹ Liv. *Per* 109; Plut. *Caes.* 30.1-2; App. *BCiv.* 2.27

¹⁶⁰ App. *BCiv.* 2.28.

¹⁶¹ Caes. *BGall.* 8.52.4-5; Plut. *CatMin.* 51.6-7; *Caes.* 30.4-6; *Pomp.* 58.4-10; *Ant.* 5.6-7; App. *BCiv.* 2.30; Cass. Dio 40.62.3-4.

¹⁶² Val. Max. 1.3.4.

¹⁶³ Caes. *BCiv.* 3.41.1-42.5; Luc. 6.1-28; Cass. Dio 41.49.1-50.1.

¹⁶⁴ Caes. *BCiv.* 3.85.1-97.5, 99.1-5; Cic. *Lig.* 9; *Phil.* 2.71, 14.23; Luc. 7.1-872; Plut. *Caes.* 44.1-46.4; *Pomp.* 68.5-73.11; App. *BCiv.* 2.69-82.

the Egyptian government as he disembarked from his ship.¹⁶⁵ Caesar was then appointed dictator for the second time and while in Egypt formed a new alliance with Cleopatra.¹⁶⁶ According to Cassius Dio bees began to settle next to the statue of Hercules on the capital. The soothsayers believed that sacrifices to Isis may have been taking place in this location as well and gave their opinion that all temples of Isis and Serapis should be destroyed.¹⁶⁷ We know that this action was carried out because Dio notes that in the process of demolition a shrine to Bellona was discovered. This passage indicates that the previous attempts to eliminate Isis and Serapis from Rome had been entirely unsuccessful since the cults still had temples to be razed. I believe that Caesar was the common link and the real reason behind all the attempts to rid Rome of the cults of Isis and Serapis.

Caesar had established a relationship with the leaders of Egypt and was constantly challenging the senatorial class of Rome. The senate therefore deliberately chose the cults of Isis and Serapis as they were patron deities from Egypt and this was a direct action against Caesar. In 58, 54/53, 50, and 48 BCE we see that the senate was experiencing moments of weakness. Inner turmoil and political upheaval had asserted itself amongst the senatorial class. The Triumvirate had been regarded as a threat since 59 BCE and it is therefore unsurprising that the senate would wish to fight back. In order to remind the Roman people of Caesar's allegiance to Egypt and to highlight his negative aspects the senate chose to target the cults of Isis and Serapis. By 48 BCE we see that Caesar is in open rebellion against the Roman senate and had defeated the beloved Roman general Pompey Magnus. Not only was Pompey assassinated by the Egyptians but Caesar then aided Cleopatra and entered into a formidable alliance with the foreign queen. Despite

¹⁶⁵ Caes. *BCiv.* 3.102-5, 103.1, 3.103-2, 104.3; Luc. 8.159-471; App. *BCiv* 2.83, 2.84-86; Cass. Dio 42.2.4-6, 42.3.1-42.5.7.

¹⁶⁶ Cic. *Phil.* 2.62; Plut. *Caes.* 51.1, 48.5-9; *Ant.* 8.4-5; Cass. Dio 42.14.1-21.2, 42.34.1-35.2; App. *BCiv* 2.90.

¹⁶⁷ Cass Dio. 42.26.1-2.

the political life of Rome during 48 BCE, the senate still took the time to pass a law demanding that the temples of Isis and Serapis be destroyed. Following the assassination of Caesar and Octavian's rise to power, Isis once again became a focus of Roman politics. No longer was Isis simply a foreign and exotic goddess, she came to embody and represent the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra.

Isis and Octavian

In 43 BCE Octavian Caesar, Marc Antony and Marcus Lepidus came together to form an alliance. According to Cassius Dio, these men commissioned a temple dedicated to Isis in the city of Rome in 43 BCE.¹⁶⁸ While it should be noted that there is no evidence that the temple was ever constructed, the fact that Cassius Dio mentions it is note worthy and interesting. It is possible that this action was done to appease the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, whose aid was sought against the murderers of Caesar. Takács argues that the triumvirate wished to dedicate a temple to honor the deified Caesar and his consort, Cleopatra. While I believe that Takács is likely correct, I postulate that in addition to appeasing Cleopatra, there were other motivations for commissioning the temple. By ordering the construction of a temple for a goddess banned by the Roman senate, the Triumvirate were asserting themselves in the political world as supporters of Caesar. Octavian and Antony strove to maintain ties to Caesar and this action would have assured the public that they had not abandoned him, even in death.¹⁶⁹ Although there are no archaeological remains to support the notion that the temple was ever constructed, it would seem to fit into the grand scheme of what the Second Triumvirate wished to display to the Roman people.

¹⁶⁸ Cass. Dio 47.15.4.

¹⁶⁹ Heyob 1975: 19; Takács 1995: 57-58.

The mere act of ordering the temple to be built would have been an indicator that the Second Triumvirate would not support the senate, and would seek justice for the assassination of Caesar.

Following the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE, Antony departed for Egypt where his affair with Cleopatra swiftly began. Cleopatra was the symbol of an earthly Isis to the Egyptians. Her new consort was to be regarded as the embodiment of Dionysus/Bacchus.¹⁷⁰ It did not take long for these associations to escape the boundaries of Egypt and become gossip within the social circles of Rome. Antony's victory over the Armenians in 34 BCE had guaranteed him a triumph.¹⁷¹ It was customary for Roman's to present their spoils to the god Capitoline Jupiter. Neglecting Roman tradition, Antony approached an enthroned Cleopatra, dressed in the garb of Isis, and made the offerings to her. Plutarch recorded that it was from this moment that Isis was to be officially acknowledged as 'the new Isis'.¹⁷² While it could be argued that this imagery was a concoction of Plutarch and Cassius Dio, knowing that Octavian would be victorious over Antony, I believe this to be unlikely. Isis, as we have discussed, was connected with Pharaoh's and leaders from Egypt as early as the 19th Dynasty. At the onset of the Ptolemaic Dynasty she became one of the patron deities to Alexandria, the city in which Cleopatra resided. It would be highly unsurprising that Cleopatra would choose to emulate Isis in her attire. Cleopatra was now not only the symbol for Isis but, in the eyes of Romans, regarded as a temptress who managed to convince the staunchly Roman Antony to abandon tradition.

The rapport between Octavian and Antony began to diminish quickly. Octavian knew it was time to strike against Antony and rallied his troops. In a speech to his men, Octavian communicated that Antony could no longer consider himself to be a true Roman. Octavian directly

¹⁷⁰ Cassius Dio 50.5.2-3; 50.25.2-4.

¹⁷¹ Plut. *Ant.* 50.6-7; Cass. Dio 49.40.3-4.

¹⁷² Cass. Dio. 49.40.3; Plutarch. *Antony* 54.6.

states that Antony's character has been altered because he has taken up with the wench Cleopatra who paraded herself as a version of Isis.¹⁷³ From the language that Dio uses it appears that Cleopatra and Isis were interchangeable. The attack on Antony's character gave way to the war between Octavian and Antony and Cleopatra's forces. With the aid of Agrippa, Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra following the battles of Actium and Alexandria.

Following his victory, Octavian continued his anti-Egyptian (Cleopatra and Antony) campaign. The impression that he was the conqueror of Egypt was an image he would promote during his reign throughout the reaches of his empire. By commissioning literary works¹⁷⁴ and utilizing building campaigns to promote his propaganda, Octavian ensured that the Roman population would never forget that Rome had conquered the living Isis, a foreign goddess and a foreign queen.

Isis, Art, and the Early Empire

On August 1st 30 BCE Octavian was victorious over Marc Antony and Cleopatra following the Battle of Alexandria.¹⁷⁵ The conqueror of Egypt began his propagandistic art program to ensure that all Roman's were aware that Egypt had succumbed to the strength of Rome. As was customary, a triumph was given for Octavian in the city of Rome. In addition to this very public celebration, pronouncements of Egypt's defeat began to surface in everyday Roman life, primarily through monetary exchange and coinage.¹⁷⁶ In addition to coinage, Octavian began his building campaigns both in Rome and in Egypt. Interestingly, however, the motivations behind each of these campaigns differed exceedingly. In Egypt, Octavian wished to usher in a period of peace

¹⁷³ Cass. Dio. 50.25.1-5.

¹⁷⁴ Verg. *Aeneid* 8.696-728.

¹⁷⁵ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 75-77; Cass. Dio. 51.10.

¹⁷⁶ See Swetnam-Burland; See, e.g., BMCRE I, nos. 650-55.

and for Egyptians to accept him as their new ruler required Octavian to incorporate himself into Egyptian history and assert his claim as part of the natural order. In Rome, Octavian wished to display his dominance over Egypt and guarantee that Romans would never forget that he had vanquished Antony and Cleopatra, foreigners who claimed to be living gods.

Octavian's triumph was held on August 13, 14, and 15 of 29 BCE and it celebrated his victories in Illyria, Alexandria, and Egypt. The suicide narrative of Cleopatra, noted by Plutarch,¹⁷⁷ led to an adjustment in the triumph where common practice was for the conquered to be killed at the end of the procession.¹⁷⁸ With Cleopatra dead, her effigy was displayed in the triumph, accompanied by her surviving children, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene. Cassius Dio notes, 'in a kind of way she was there with other prisoners.'¹⁷⁹ Propertius, who claimed himself to be an eyewitness of the event, mentions 'her arms bitten by the sacred snakes and her body drawing in the hidden poison that brought oblivion'.¹⁸⁰

Coins, as mentioned earlier, played a pivotal role in evidencing the celebration of Rome's victory over Egypt. Egypt became recognizable on coinage by a variety of motifs that symbolized its culture. Examples of these emblems are sistrums, the ibis, the lotus, and wheat. The majority of these symbols held a connection to Isis and by extension, Cleopatra. In addition, recognizable features and deities such as the Nile, the Sun, the Moon, the Apis, Isis, Osiris, and Serapis began to appear on coins.¹⁸¹ Coins depicting Octavian and Agrippa, along with a chained crocodile and the legend *AEGYPTO CAPTA* (Fig. 13) were in circulation in Rome and the provinces following the Battle of Alexandria. This imagery clearly conveyed the message to all levels

¹⁷⁷ Plut. *Ant.* 85.

¹⁷⁸ Beard 2007: 114-115.

¹⁷⁹ Cass. Dio. 51.22.4-9; Beard 1998.

¹⁸⁰ Prop. 3.11.53-4.

¹⁸¹ Stevenson 1964: 13.

of citizenry Octavian's view of Egypt as a conquered nation. Notably, he took actions to 'pre-serve' Egyptian culture in the city of Rome, but as we shall see, his motives were entirely political.

Prior to his assassination Julius Caesar had envisioned a building program that would have ushered the Roman Republic into a new era. Inspired by what he had seen in Alexandria, he built temples housing statues in the city of Rome, notably among them a statue of Cleopatra as Isis in the temple of Venus Genetrix.¹⁸² Octavian, following the defeat of Cleopatra and Antony, moved forward with the plans initially commissioned by Caesar. Diana Kleiner claims, 'while Octavian wanted Rome to be as impressive as Alexandria, he also wanted the capital of his empire to be distinctly Roman'.¹⁸³ Octavian knew that it would be political suicide to attempt to replicate Egyptian architecture in the city of Rome, as his predecessor had desired. Octavian instead used art and architecture as a political tool. The temple of Venus Genetrix, built in 52 BCE, was not entirely complete at the time of its inauguration in 46 BCE. The temple was completed under Octavian¹⁸⁴ and he allowed the gilded statue of Cleopatra to remain inside the temple as a reminder to the Roman people of the power he held over her. In addition to completing the works initiated by his great-uncle, Octavian undertook a monumental building program of his own. According to the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* he built and or repaired eighty-two temples in the city of Rome alone.¹⁸⁵ One of the most notable being the Agrippan Pantheon. The pantheon is dated to 27 BCE due to an inscription on the facade of the Hadrianic temple,

M.AGRIPPA.L.F.COS.TERTIUM.FECIT',

¹⁸² Diod. Sic. 51.22.3; Kleiner 2005: 200.

¹⁸³ Kleiner 2005: 201.

¹⁸⁴ Cass Dio. 43.22.2; *Res Gestae* 4.12.

¹⁸⁵ Aug. *Res Gestae* 20; Goldsworthy 2014: 223-224.

Marcus Agrippa consul for the third time made this.

Since we are able to date Agrippa's third consulship, the Pantheon's construction has been attributed the date of 27 BCE.¹⁸⁶ According to Cassius Dio the pantheon housed statues of many gods, most notably one of Venus, the patron deity of the *Julii*. In a deliberate move, Octavian had pearls belonging to Cleopatra placed on each of the Venus statues in the Pantheon, trophies and further evidence of his Actium victory.¹⁸⁷

The public sphere was littered with examples of Rome's power over Egypt and Octavian's increasing control over the way in which foreign cults would be regarded by the Romans. The triumphal arch Octavian erected in 30 BCE displayed Cleopatra dressed as Isis and Marc Antony dressed as Dionysus / Bacchus.¹⁸⁸ The control that Octavian, representing Rome, had over Cleopatra and Egypt as a whole was ever-present and began to move beyond the public sphere into the private lives of Rome's inhabitants.

Roman fascination with Egypt was spurred by current events, an interest which was shared in both the public and private spheres.¹⁸⁹ Literary works began to allude to the death of Cleopatra and ancient authors explored the pantheon of Egyptian deities. Egyptian imagery, such as pharaohs, exotic animals, worshippers, and deities began to appear in frescoes and in luxury-ware.¹⁹⁰ The varied representations of Egyptian culture, due to their abundance, have become difficult to categorize. Magdalene Söldner has argued that visual motifs occasionally can be representations of celebration of Egyptian religion and culture. However, the remainder of examples we have can be regarded as a form of ancient colonialism, a celebration of Rome's control of

¹⁸⁶ Cass. Dio 27.2

¹⁸⁷ Kleiner 2005: 227.

¹⁸⁸ Cass. Dio 50.5.2-3; 50.25.2-4; Plut. *Ant* 54.6.

¹⁸⁹ Swetnam-Burland 2015: 82.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 83.

Egypt.¹⁹¹ This is a vast difference from how we saw Egyptian elements incorporated into the lives of Pompeii's citizens.

As anti-Egyptian sentiment began to move beyond the public sphere, it found a footing in domestic life. For Octavian and the imperial family, the home provided another artistic opportunity to display his success over Cleopatra (or Isis) and the fallen Roman hero, Marc Antony. Livia's home in Rome provides an interesting example. Io is depicted on wall murals and many have debated that this imagery of Io could, in fact, be depicting the goddess Isis, i.e. Cleopatra.¹⁹² The Casa Di Augusto, Aula Isaica, and the Villa Farnesia are teeming with examples of imperial success. In addition to murals of Io / Isis, there is an image of an infant Dionysus; the two deities that were ascribed to Cleopatra and Antony.¹⁹³ The strained relationship between Octavian and his daughter Julia (wife of Agrippa) is well documented. It is due to this that Kleiner posits that the Egyptian motifs and decorations used in the Villa Farnesia were perhaps at the behest of Julia in order to antagonize her father.¹⁹⁴ Regardless of her motivations, it is evident that Egyptomania had asserted itself in various artistic forms in Rome.

Legislation and the Early Emperors

28 BCE saw the beginnings of Octavian's efforts to revive ancient Roman piety.¹⁹⁵ It was this year that Octavian prohibited the worship of Egyptian gods in the *pomerium*.¹⁹⁶ Later, Egyptian rites were forbidden within a one-mile radius of the city of Rome.¹⁹⁷ However, this did not

¹⁹¹ Söldner 1999: 95–113.

¹⁹² Clarke 1991: 52. See F. Kleiner, 2010; Balch 2008.

¹⁹³ See Kleiner 2010; Ramage and Ramage 2009; Kleiner 2005

¹⁹⁴ Kleiner 2005: 173-175.

¹⁹⁵ See Heyob 1975; Goldsmith 2014.

¹⁹⁶ Cass. Dio. 53.2.4;

¹⁹⁷ Cass. Dio. 54.6.6.

dissuade the Roman populace from participating in the Isis cult. In 7 BCE Rome suffered a fire and underwent major administrative reorganization. Octavian redrew the former *vici* and created two hundred and sixty-five boundaries, which in turn were grouped into fourteen larger regions.¹⁹⁸ Local magistrates were in charge of the cults centred on crossroad shrines dedicated to the gods of the region. An inscription has been found that dates to 1 CE. It was erected by Lucius Lucretius Zethusan, a freedman,

To Mercury, to the eternal god Jupiter, to Juno the Queen, to Minerva, to the Sun, the Moon, Apollo, and Diana, to Annona Ops, Isis, and Pietas, to the divine fates, that it may go well, propitiously and prosperously for Emperor Caesar Augustus, for his [power] and that of the Senate and People of Rome, and for the Nations¹⁹⁹

From this inscription we can gather that the efforts made by Octavian and those closest to him had not prevented those living in Rome from participating in the foreign cult. Rome's citizens had disregarded the imperial interference with the cult and continued to practice their faith. The mission to tarnish and dismantle the cult did not end with the reign of Octavian, but was continued by his successor.

In 19 CE Tiberius issued a decree that the temple of Isis in the city of Rome be razed. In his *Antiquities*, Josephus provides an interesting narrative detailing the deception of an innocent woman named Paulina at the hands of the Isaic priests and a man named Mundus.²⁰⁰ Paulina is tricked and has sex with Mundus. After realizing that his wife had been misled, Paulina's husband, pleads to Tiberius. Tiberius then rules that the priests shall be executed, Mundus will be

¹⁹⁸ Goldsmith 2014; Lott 2004.

¹⁹⁹ The inscription was located on the banks of the Tiber River and was dedicated by Lucius Lucretius Zethus, freedman of Lucius.

²⁰⁰ Jos. Ant. 18.65-80

exiled, and that temple of Isis be destroyed and the cult statue thrown into the Tiber River.²⁰¹

While the narrative of Josephus is highly entertaining, it seems unlikely that this would be the true reason for Tiberius' order. The foreign nature of the cult was an aspect that was highlighted by the senate in the late Republic, and Isis became the symbol of the foreign queen Cleopatra during the reign of Octavian. The notion of creating a 'Roman' image was something that Octavian had strived for and this attempt was continued by Tiberius. Josephus' tale is likely just a salacious story that provides a 'reason' why Tiberius wished to ban the cult of Isis in 19 CE. Despite the countless attempts to rid Rome of Isis, her cult continued to survive. We know from later sources that emperors in the later first century, as well as the second century CE, had connections to the Isaic cult.

Isis in the First and Second Century

The cult of Isis continued to survive in the capital well into the second century. Several emperors were documented as being members of the Isaic faith and partaking in the cultic rituals. Although Otho had a short reign, January - April of 69 CE, Suetonius does provide a biography for the emperor. Suetonius states that Otho was a participant in the rites of Isis and publicly donned the linen garments prescribed by the cult.²⁰²

The year of the four emperors yielded not only a new emperor but the beginnings of a new, and relatively short-lived dynasty. Vespasian was declared emperor on July 1, 69 CE in Alexandria, a city whose patron deities were Isis and Serapis. John Scheid speculates that Vespasian reconstructed the temple to Isis in the city of Rome following his return to the capital.²⁰³ It

²⁰¹ Jos. *Ant.* 18.65-80; Tert. *Apol.* xvi; Suet. *Tib.* 36; Tac. *Ann.* 2.85

²⁰² Suet. *Otho* 12.1.

²⁰³ Scheid 2016: 132.

would provide a possible explanation as to why his son Domitian was involved with the cult. Suetonius regarded the cult of Isis as a ‘fickle superstition’ when detailing a story of Domitian hiding in the temple dressed as one of the priests of Isis.²⁰⁴ While we do not know if Domitian himself was an initiate in the cult of Isis, it is possible he had connections to the religion if we are to take Suetonius’ narrative as historically accurate. Cassius Dio claims that following the fire of Rome in 80 CE, Domitian restored the temple in the Campus Martius which indeed was outside of the *pomerium*.²⁰⁵ What is most interesting is that from the reign of Tiberius until the reign of Otho, there is little to no mention of Isis and her cult in Rome. Now, we see that emperors are openly participating in the cult and or are ensuring its survival within the city of Rome. The imperial and political stigma that had been attached to the cult of Isis in the late Republic and early empire was replaced by imperial acceptance and support.

Rabun Taylor credits Hadrian with the construction of a Sarapeum in the city of Rome, and believes that the religion was then supported later by Marcus Aurelius.²⁰⁶ As we have seen, temples and places of worship for Isis and Serapis were often combined in the Roman world and when acts of suppression took place often both cults were targeted. It is therefore quite possible that the Sarapeum would also have served as a cult site to Isis. In addition to the possible building of the Sarapeum, a statue of Isis, now in the Capitoline museum, has been dated to the Hadrianic period.²⁰⁷ Most fascinatingly, this statue, unlike the statue of Isis discovered in Pompeii, has been Romanized. The statue depicts Isis with a Roman hairstyle with her hair covered by a veil, a mark of a respectable woman in Roman society.²⁰⁸ Compared to the statue found in Pompeii,

²⁰⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 8.3.

²⁰⁵ Cass. Dio. 66.24.2.; Eut. 7.23

²⁰⁶ Taylor 2004: 223-266.

²⁰⁷ 117-138 CE; See Appendix.

²⁰⁸ Sen. *Cont.* 2.7.6

whose nipples are quite visible, this statue has concealed the body of the goddess by sculpting her with a large robe that displays the traditional knot of Isis.²⁰⁹ It is possible that in order for the cult of Isis to have survived in Rome that the goddess needed to conform to Roman standards of propriety and modesty. In regard to this statue, Isis was depicted as a conservative goddess in traditional Roman dress.

Outside of Rome, Hadrian dedicated a Sarapeum in Ostia in 126 CE. As Isis was also worshiped at Ostia Antica, it is possible that once again they shared a religious space.²¹⁰ A statue of Isis now sits in Ostia's museum and it has been labeled as a 'Pharian Isis'. The statue was carved from grey marble and closely resembles the statue of Isis found in Rome. Similarly to the Roman statue, it dates to the second century. Although the head is missing, it appears to conform to the more conservative model as the body is heavily robed and the knot of Isis is present.

While there is no archaeological evidence to support the notion that Marcus Aurelius had ties to the cult of Isis, as Taylor notes there is epigraphical evidence.²¹¹ The Palazzo della Molara in Piazza delle Tre Cannelle contained a marble base with the inscription '*Serapi Conservatori*'.²¹² In addition, in the foundations of the Palazzo Capranica-del Grillo, a Greek inscription was discovered which said 'For the safety of Emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus the Great Augustus, to Zeus Helios the Great Serapis.'²¹³ A further inscription, CIL 6.570, which is now lost, stated:

Serapidi deo [invicto imp(erator) Caes(ar)] M. Aurelius Antoninu[s Pius Felix Aug(ustus), pont]ifex
max(imus), tribunic(ia) pote[st(ate) . . .] aedem . .

²⁰⁹ See Walters 1988.

²¹⁰ Statues and inscriptions discussing Isis have been both both in Ostia and in Portus although no temple has ever been found.

²¹¹ Taylor 2004: 234; CIL 6.570.

²¹² CIL 6.573.

²¹³ IG 14.1024 = *IGRR* 2.101.

While there is no direct mention of Isis, the connection between the deities has been well established. It is, therefore, entirely plausible that Isis may in fact have been worshipped at the Sarapeum. Even if we are to disregard the epigraphical evidence pertaining to the second century CE, it is clear from the archaeological evidence found in Rome and Ostia that the cult of Isis had persisted well until the reigns of Hadrian and possibly Marcus Aurelius.

Conclusion

The cult of Isis had established itself in Rome in the latter days of the Republic. The foreign goddess and leader of a mystery cult became the target of several attempts of suppression. The goddess and her partner Serapis were caught in the midst of political turmoil between the senate and the First Triumvirate. This would continue during the reign of Octavian following his defeat of Marc Antony and Cleopatra, the earthly embodiment of Isis. Through several artistic and political mediums, Octavian managed to present a defeated image of Cleopatra and, by extension, Isis. The foreign goddess was no match for the emperor of Rome. Although Tiberius attempted to eliminate the cult once again in 19 CE and emulate his adopted father's piety, his attempt did not come pass. The stigma that had been attached to the cult of Isis weakened in the later first century CE and by the reign of Hadrian, had all but vanished. The appearance of the goddess had been altered in order to appear more Roman in her guise, but as we know from the discussion in chapter one, the cult would continue to thrive without changes to its ritualistic practices and beliefs until the Christian era. The cult of Isis had differing histories in Pompeii and Rome and due to the political life of the capital that the cult experienced such a vastly different reception by the elite and senatorial class of Rome.

Conclusion

As a result of expansion and evolution, the cult of Isis managed to have a longstanding history in the ancient world. The Egyptians accepted Isis as a significant goddess during the 19th Dynasty and her importance only continued to expand. With the arrival of Alexander the Great and the beginning of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, Isis was promoted to a patron deity in the city of Alexandria where she gained new followers and cult initiates.

The cults of Isis and her partner Serapis had great success throughout the Mediterranean, establishing cult sites in Samaria, Greece, and Italy. We know from archaeological and epigraphical remains that the Isaic cult was practiced in Italy as early as the second century BCE and we know from the written work of St. Augustine that the cult continued to be practiced in Italy well into the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

From its origins in Egypt, the cult of Isis had an established concept of the universe. Isis had a recognized place in the pantheon and was venerated by her followers. In addition, she was attributed with discoveries in medicine, magic, and nature. The very core of the cult remained unchanged over time as we have seen from the work of Apuleius who wrote about the cult of Isis during the second century BCE. Hellenization did not play a factor in terms of ritual and mythology but it did have an effect on the appearance of Isis in Southern Italy.

As a result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, we have a preserved temple of Isis. The murals and statues from the temple have been disinterred, restored, and placed in museums. Although the cult statue from the Iseum in Pompeii was never found, one statue of Isis remains where she is presented in an Archaic style; her hair and clothing emulating the Greek style of statuary dated to 600-400 BCE, despite the fact that the statue was created centuries later. The

temple itself was neither entirely Egyptian, Greek, nor Roman but was presented as a *mélange* of the three cultures. The temple highlighted its foreign status by displaying Egyptian relics. Greek aspects were depicted in the statue of Isis as well as depicting Io in the temple murals. To show how Isis had been accepted by the Roman people, a statue of the Roman goddess Venus was discovered in the temple grounds. Despite her foreign status, Isis was accepted not only in the public sphere of Pompeii but in the domestic lives of the city's inhabitants. From the frescoes, *lararia*, and statues that have been discovered in the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum, we can confidently state that the cult of Isis was very present in domestic life. The locations of these discoveries have shed further light on the fact that all levels of citizenry partook in the cult of Isis and that it is clear that in Pompeii the cult was open to everyone.

The cult of Isis had success in Rome with the common people but was caught in the web of Roman politics. In the late Republic, the cult of Isis was thought to have been suppressed a minimum of five times. I would argue that it was, in fact, four times and that the common thread throughout these suppressions was Julius Caesar. Following his assassination and Octavian's rise to power, Isis was no longer solely a symbol of a foreign religion. Isis came to embody and represent the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. Following his victory over Cleopatra and Marc Antony, Octavian sought to remind the people of Rome that that he had defeated the living incarnation of Isis. Through legislative, artistic, and literary mediums, Octavian continued to suppress the Egyptian queen, even in death, and by extension the cult of Isis. Isis had been woven into Rome's political web and this would continue in 19 CE when Tiberius attempted to once again dismantle the Isiac cult in Rome. The endeavors made by the senators, Octavian and Tiberius would all prove to be unsuccessful as the appeal of Isis continued to attract followers, thus assuring the cult's survival.

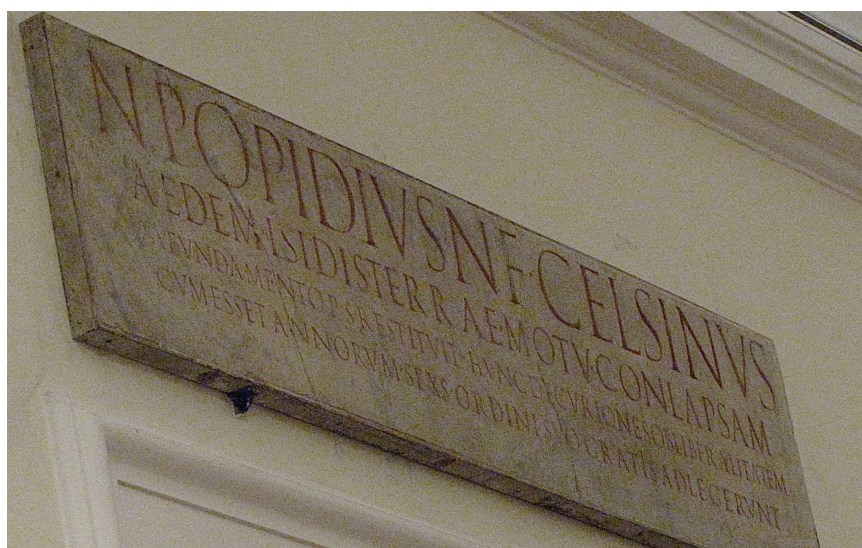
We know from the works of Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, and Apuleius what was alluring about Isis and her mysterious religion. She offered followers a chance of salvation and eternal life. By the reign of Otho, we see that the political stigma that had previously been affiliated with the cult of Isis had dissipated as the emperor himself was rumored to be an initiate in the Isaic faith. Following his reign, Domitian, Commodus, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius were all thought to have been members or to have constructed monuments to Isis and/or Serapis. The statuary of Isis found in the second century indicates that the appearance of Isis had been modified to meet Roman standards of dress. However, we know from the primary sources that in terms of cultic ritual and mythology nothing had changed. Its adaptability and acceptance of anyone as an initiate allowed the cult of Isis to survive political turmoil and establish a successful cult within Italy.

Appendix One
Chapter 1

1. The Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



2. Numerius Popidius Celsinus Inscription, Museo Archeologico di Napoli.
Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



3. Aediculae Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky.



4. South side, Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky.

5. South side, Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



6. Purgatorium, southeast courtyard of the Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky.



7. A sistrum discovered in Pompeii, Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



8. Isis' Reception of Io, Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



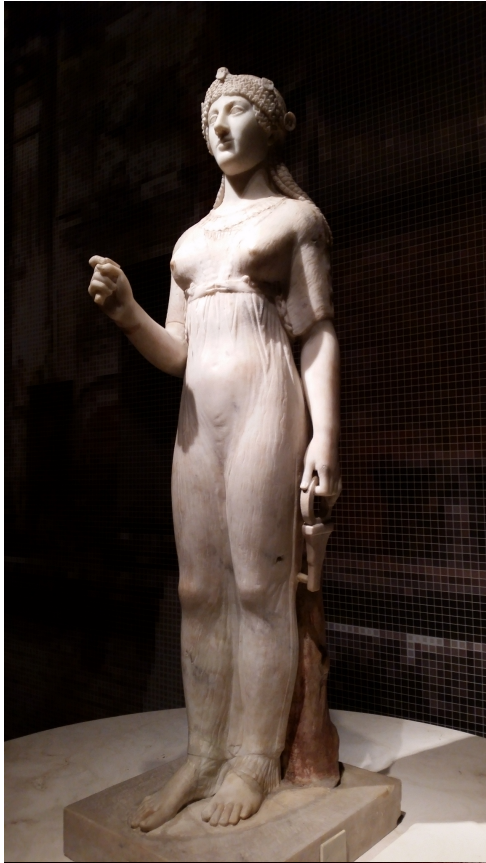


9. *Navigum Isidis*, from the north wall of the *sacrum* (room 5) of the Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico di Napoli. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky.



10. Osiris enthroned, from the west wall of the *sacrum* (room 5) of the Temple of Isis, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico di Napoli. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky.

11. Statue of Hellenized Isis, Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky



12. Wall Painting from Herculaneum, Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal. Photo: Laura Sirkovsky

13. *AEGYPTO CAPTA* coin Photo: Classical Numismatic Group.



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