Roman Isis and the Pendulum of Tolerance in the Empire

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of Isis, ostensibly the "sacred mother," as a political tool in Egypt and (especially) in Rome. Through an analysis of primary and secondary source materials, it is established that Isis' treatment by Roman politicians represented a running discourse on the contemporary political relationship between Rome and Egypt, and, at times, on Rome's complex negotiation of foreign influences on its own society. Following the deaths of the first two Roman emperors, Isis was gradually elevated from the status of pariah to an acclaimed goddess within the Roman pantheon who was deemed worthy of beneficence and protection from the imperial government.

This investigation of the religion of Isis in Rome from the Late Republic through the Early Empire encapsulates the inseparability of religious tolerance from fluctuating political climates. By analyzing the political rationale behind the oscillations between the persecution and tolerance, or even promotion of this decidedly un-Roman goddess, it becomes apparent that hostility resulted from governmental disdain for Isis' home country and also from the need to sway public opinion, while tolerance arose from harmony with Egypt, smooth trade relations, and the need to mollify Rome's diverse and dynamic lower-to-middle class population, many of whom were brought or emigrated from Egypt, Libya, and the Levant.

(For full text, go to http://inquiry.uark.edu/.)

Mentor Comments

David Fredrick targets the substantial quality of the research conducted by Jasmine Merced in this paper.

In scope, argumentation, and finish, this is an outstanding thesis, which certainly could serve as the basis for a paper at a professional conference. The core of Jasmine's analysis is generated around the idea that Isis was not simply a goddess for foreigners and women that the Roman government first supressed, then tolerated, and finally promoted. Rather, Isis had a sustained ideological function in Roman politics of the late Republic and early Empire, serving as the Oriental "Other" (in Edward Saïd's terms), through which the Romans could both express their reaction to immediate political events and think through larger issues of cultural identity. She makes a strong argument that periods of suppression of the Isis cult in the late Republic are tied to Rome's troubled political relationship to Egypt, and this allows us to anticipate the initially perplexing status of Isis in the Augustan period. Essentially, Augustus was compelled to take a necessarily ambiguous approach to Isis. With one eye on the senatorial elite, he suppressed her public worship as corrupt and effeminate. With his other eye on lower class Romans, whose interests he largely supported, he diffused Egyptian imagery through public and private art, and in fact his suppresion of the cult was never as thorough as it might have been. The thesis is remarkable for its theoretical approach – Saïd's work has not been widely used in classics – and for its attention to the political complexities of the late republic and the corresponding nuances of Augustus' treatment of Isis. The thesis references an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary works, including works in Italian. Jasmine's thesis research was supported by a SURF Undergraduate Research Award, and included a semester at the University of Arkansas Rome Center for Architecture and the Humanities, where she was able to visit and photograph many of the remains of ancient Egyptian culture and Isis worship in Italy.

Roman Isis and the Pendulum of Religious Tolerance in the Empire

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By

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This investigation of the religion of Isis in Rome from the Late Republic through the Early Empire encapsulates the inseparability of religious tolerance from fluctuating political climates. By analyzing the political rationale behind the oscillations between the persecution and tolerance, or even promotion of this decidedly un-Roman goddess, it becomes apparent that hostility resulted of governmental disdain for Isis' home country and the need to sway public opinion, while tolerance arose from harmony with Egypt, smooth trade relations, and the need to mollify Rome's diverse and dynamic lower-to-middle class population, many of whom were brought or emigrated from Egypt, Libya, and the Levant.

Introduction

History and modern culture would have been drastically different had Marc Antony and Cleopatra VII been victorious at the Battle of Actium during their struggle against Rome in 31 BCE. Isis, the Egyptian goddess of whom Cleopatra claimed to be a living incarnation, would have prevailed as mother of the gods; the foundling Christian religion would have had to contend with another already-established salvation religion; the borders of the political world would have evolved differently. But Actium was lost, and soon thereafter, the war. The grandeur and glory of the ancient Egyptian culture simply became the spoils of war in another conquest by the Roman Empire.

Ancient Rome's use of Egyptian material culture as a tool for propaganda is evident even today. A stroll down many modern Roman streets reveals a ubiquity of Egyptian motifs on monuments and architecture of political, religious, and secular natures from ancient through Baroque and into the 20th century. Egyptian obelisks, original or reconstructed, ornament the Italian Parliament building, certain public squares, and even some Christian churches. The first pair of obelisks were brought to Rome by the first emperor, Augustus Caesar, in 10 BCE (Claridge 264), and no fewer than fifteen more were plundered from Egypt. Some were remade from damaged originals, and others were even manufactured from scratch as recently as the 1950s.[1]

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[1] The "Marconi" obelisk stands today in the EUR (*Esposizione Universale Roma*) district of Rome, constructed during the Fascist period of Italy, and was dedicated to Italian inventor Gugliemo Marconi. It was placed in a square whose design intention was to "express in daring and grandiose masses and lines the essential characteristics of Roman architecture" (Wise). It is interesting to observe that an obelisk was deemed by Fascist Italy to be an integral part of the Roman architectural landscape.

Fig. 1 (left).   Anthropomorphic statue of the Nile in front of the *Palazzo dei Senatori*, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.
Fig. 2 (right). Via della Conciliazione, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.

Two of the most prominent anthropomorphic representations of Egypt's Nile River still appear in Bernini's *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* fountain in *Piazza Navona* (Harris 112) and in Michelangelo's 16th century CE redesign of the *Piazza del Campidoglio* (Claridge 236). The latter includes an ancient statue of the Nile (Fig. 1) inserted into the fountain in front of the *Palazzo dei Senatori*, which makes a pair with a statue representing the Tiber on the opposite flank. Sphinxes line the perimeter of the *Piazza del Popolo*; Egyptian lions appear throughout the city; artifacts abound in the countless museums; the *Via della Conciliazione* is lined with new obelisks which double as lampposts and leads to the *Piazza San Pietro* in Vatican City (Fig. 2). Whispers of Egyptian culture have permeated the city for over two thousand years.

Material artifacts were only one facet of culture available for adoption. Philosophical and ethical ideas, political institutions, and religious beliefs and practices were also plundered, and were either provisionally marginalized, depending on circumstances and need, or subsumed into the fabric of the Empire, either in whole or in part. Isis, the predominant Egyptian deity in Rome, was one of the most salient representations of Egypt within Rome during a period of intense political conflict within and between these two countries. As such, in Rome, Isis became an easy target of propagandistic exploitation by the Roman political machine during periods of dissention and transformation.[2]

For example, according to Josephus, a 1st century CE Jewish historian, the second Roman emperor Tiberius mandated the demolition of Isis' temple in Rome (Donalson 96) and her cult statue thrown into the Tiber River (138) in 19 BCE. This was a result of a fiasco in which a Roman matron and follower of Isis, Paulina, was tricked into dining and having sex with a man purported to be a manifestation of Anubis, an Egyptian deity closely related to the Isis cult. Paulina was deceived by priests of Isis whom were bribed

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[2] Here, and throughout this paper, the use of "Rome" always refers to the *city* of Rome. The terms "Empire" or "Republic" will be used to refer to the entire land holdings of which the city of Rome was the political seat.

by Mundus, a man in love with Paulina (Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaice* 18.65-80). Because the priests, as representatives of Isis and of Egypt, had wronged a proper Roman matron (and more importantly, her husband), Tiberius retaliated by attacking Isis, in addition to crucifying the priests (18.76), while Mundus, the instigator, was only banished (ibid).[3] Banishment was an appropriate punishment for Mundus in this period of Roman history, as elite men were not typically subject to corporeal punishment at that time.

The physical acts of destroying Isis' temple and statue were socially important to "protect" citizens of Rome from the cult; the ostentatious shows of disdain were more symbolically important as the political vehicle to underscore the crimes of non-Roman priests by scourging their mistress, Isis. Compare this to the punishment of living entombment for any of the Vestal Virgins who were considered to have brought real and imminent danger to Rome if they were impure (Hornblower 1591). It was not the Roman goddess Vesta who was punished; rather, her own priestesses were put to death for their own misconduct. A more modern comparison can be drawn with issues relating to the unethical actions of a few priests within the Roman Catholic Church – it is neither cult statues nor churches that are destroyed based on the actions of the clergy. These comparisons clearly demonstrate how Isis was perceived and treated differently by the ancient Romans. The "Paulina Incident" shows that Isis was considered a scapegoat of her priests, and we will soon see how she was made into a scapegoat for her entire home country and its government.

This paper will examine the evolution of Isis, ostensibly the "sacred mother," as a political tool in Egypt and (especially) in Rome. Through an analysis of primary and secondary source materials, I will establish that Isis' treatment by Roman politicians represented a running discourse on the contemporary political relationship between Rome and Egypt, and, at times, Rome's absolute rejection of foreign influences on its own society. Finally, I will demonstrate that, following the deaths of the first two Roman emperors, Isis was gradually elevated from the status of pariah to an acclaimed goddess within the Roman pantheon who was deemed worthy of beneficence and protection from the imperial government, and whose festivals were eventually incorporated into the Roman religious calendar.[4]

This investigation of the religion of Isis in Rome from the Late Republic through the Early Empire encapsulates the inseparability of religious tolerance from fluctuating political climates. By analyzing the political rationale behind the oscillations between the persecution and tolerance, or even promotion of this decidedly un-Roman goddess of antiquity, it becomes apparent that hostility flowed out of governmental disdain for Isis' home country and the need to sway public opinion, while tolerance arose from harmony with Egypt, smooth trade relations, and the need to mollify Rome's voting citizens, many of which were brought or emigrated from Egypt, Libya, and the Levant.

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[3] Though Josephus is the only ancient source that describes these events, no modern scholar seems to doubt the validity or accuracy of the events described in Josephus' account.

[4] Isis had several festivals per year in Rome and throughout the empire, but she was often depicted on the official Roman calendar as the frontispiece for November along with Serapis or Harpocrates or Anubis, because November was "associated with the [main] festival of Isis, celebrated (in the fourth century) from 2 October to 3 November" (Salzman 64).

To understand how Isis became such an intense focus of Roman political discourse, we must first look at her religious development and dissemination throughout the Mediterranean. From there, we will examine Isis' introduction to Rome (ca. 90 BCE) through the first fifty years of imperial rule (27 BCE – 37 CE) and conclude with a brief overview of her gradual political acceptance from the third Roman emperor onward.

Isis and the Orient

Let us take a moment to place Isis within the socio-cultural context of Greece and Rome. Though there are no records of Isiac persecutions in Greece, this does not mean that she was simply admitted into the culture and summarily adopted by local Greeks. From the Bronze Age (around 2000 BCE), Greeks were identifiable as a distinct culture via the concurrent application of five traits: 1) the use of a new architectural form with rounded ("apsidal") ends, 2) individual burials instead of communal graves, 3) a new pottery style later called "Minyan ware" which was made on a potter's wheel, 4) use of the horse, and 5) the use of the Greek language.[5] Though this may be a projection into the past of what constituted Greek society, it allows for clear guidelines which are ascertainable in the archaeological record.

Ideas of Roman national identity are harder to ascertain because of Rome's continual expansion into different geographic regions that covered a wide variety of cultures. As we shall see, the vague distinctions of what it meant to be Roman were a constant source of anxiety, and efforts to define and maintain cultural purity often led to conflict, and sometimes bloodshed. Isis fit into neither the Greek nor the Roman notions of aboriginality and thus it is necessary at this juncture to establish ancient and contemporary perceptions of *otherness* in order to properly assess the reactions of Isis' presence within Greece and Rome.

The Isis that Romans worshipped bore a tenuous resemblance to the ancient Egyptian deity (Fig 3). Her temple form and her statuary had evolved to appear less conspicuously foreign, yet she always maintained the key aspects that identified her as a *foreign other*, such as being depicted with a sistrum (rattle), holding a vase containing water from the Nile, an "Isis-knot" between her breasts, etc. It was not, however, that Isis herself was *foreign* which was problematic; other non-native gods were worshipped within the city of Rome with varying degrees of acceptance. Many cults with a specific geographical tag of their place of origin were attacked and expelled from Rome with as much vehemence as was Isis in the Late Republic and Early Empire: this troublesome tag was "Asia".

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[5] Summarized from Camp, page 13.

To the Romans, imported religions such as Judaism, Christianity, or the cults of Cybele or Mithras from Persia (modern-day Turkey and the Middle East) and other Oriental regions were highly suspect and were regularly subject to close observation, tight regulation, and in several cases, harsh discipline.[6] Egypt, as a cultural melting pot and transcontinental bridge between Africa and Asia, was viewed with similar skepticism.

We must keep in mind that the coast of Asia Minor and nearby islands were settled by the Greeks from as early as the 8th century BCE, and "Eastern goods flooded the Greek world, causing something approaching a revolution in the arts" (Biers 132). The establishment of some of the most renowned cities of the ancient world such as Pergamum, Mytilene, Miletus, Ephasus, and Halicarnassus ensued from Greek colonization. The wealth of natural resources in those regions led to observations of the east being full of extravagant luxury. As 5th century BCE Greek historian Herodotus notes: "soft lands tend to breed soft men" (Herodotus 9.122), and soft men were subject to harsh ridicule by their peers.

Fig 3.   Roman Isis. Capitoline Museum, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.

Similar conceptual models of ancient Eastern opulence continue even today. Consider for a moment the depiction of the Persian king Xerxes in Warner Bros.' 2007 film "300" which depicts the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE (Fig. 4). Xerxes drips with gold and precious jewels, freely distributes wealth to gain loyalty and entice Greek traitors, and his 'tent' is a picture of exotic and depraved ostentation. Conversely, the Spartans were presented as indefatigable and stalwart heroes with no need or desire for the excesses of the Persian east – heroes whose defection could not be purchased for any amount of gold or promises of fame and power.

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[6] "Oriental" (east) as opposed to "Occidental" (west). No cultural nuances are implied by the use of these terms; only to demonstrate geographical distinctions.

Fig 4.   Scene from Warner Bros.' "300".

After Alexander the Great's expansion of the Greek empire to include Asia as far as India's border, the Greeks more readily migrated to Asia and therefore became analogously associated with extravagance. The perceived excesses of Asia led to a demonstrable cultural dichotomy between residents of east and of the west, and such divisions naturally led to notions of 'us' as a people inherently distinct from 'them'.

This is not to suggest that all facets of Asian culture were thought to be dangerous to the Roman way of life; rather, *prima facie* many aspects were tolerated, and some even welcomed, such as the arts, commercial exchanges, political alliances, etc. Asian *religions* within the city of Rome, on the other hand, caused a great deal of concern to which Rome's politicians responded with a clear sense of patriotic superiority over the *foreign other*, emphasizing that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Saïd 5).

With the political management of imported religions and continued exposure to the Orient came the development of an image of the *other*. It was a concerted political spin, perhaps, which highlighted the differences between Romanness and un-Romanness and reinforced how the Roman way was better. The result is that "what gave the Oriental world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex set of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West" (Saïd 40). This set of fabricated opinions was disseminated to the Roman population as a whole – a population which had regularly received injections of cultural and ethnic diversity, either in legends accepted from the period of the kings or the early empire (from colonization, slave-taking, expanded trade relations), or from historical events. Therefore, the fabricated image of the Orient both defined cultural and ethnic divides to the Roman citizenry, and projected perceived differences to Rome's foreign visitors and naturalized inhabitants. Hence, in the creation of the images of the *other*, Romans were also defining themselves while reminding the *other* that, though they might live in Rome, or were perhaps even born and raised in Rome, that they were not true Romans.

Roman attitudes towards the East illustrate "a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (Saïd 12). In the case of Egypt, the intention never appears to be one of understanding. The presence of Egyptian religion in Rome generated a political drive to control and exploit during the Late Republic and Early Imperial periods and to incorporate thereafter. Both were the result of political motivations bound up with the regulation of social order and perceptions of exteriority.

As Geertz suggests, "[r]eligion is sociologically interesting not because, as vulgar positivism would have it, it describes a social order […] but because, like environment, political power, wealth, jural obligation, personal affection, and a sense of beauty, *it shapes it*" (Geertz 119, emphasis added). It is then the ability of religion to shape and form social order that is problematic. To the Roman politician, that social order must be Roman in origin and Roman in practice.

Historically, though, that was not always the case. In the early days of Rome (8th – 6th centuries BCE), when it was still just a series of hilltop villages, it lacked its own definitive set of cultural and religious norms, so they 'borrowed' and adapted certain facets of established customs from their regional neighbors. For example, they adopted the Etruscan practice of divination via *haruspices* (entrail reading of sacrificial animals). Livy, Roman historian of the late 1st century BCE and early 1st century CE, notes the impressive religious devotions held by the Etruscans, and offers insight as to why this particular practice was embraced by the Romans: "*[Etruriae] gens itaque ante omnes alias eo magis dedita religionibus quod excelleret arte colendi*" (Livy 5.1.6).[7] Also, as we shall shortly see, the Greeks had been inhabitants of many southern areas on the Italian peninsula and adjacent islands, and therefore, had been influential on the Roman development of their social and religious practices.

In both cases, Rome had absorbed and refashioned appropriated practices and deities to match their own concept of what it meant to be Roman. In essence, despite the Roman's later aversion to external influences on social order and religious practices, until approximately 400-300 BCE, they freely expropriated such ideas and adapted them to complement their own beliefs of what was suitable for their fledgling society.

Through this we discover the first of two possible reasons for the political war against Isis in the Late Republic and Early Empire: Isis worship threatened the patriarchal systems that prevailed throughout Rome. The established government was a two-party political system in which one party, the *Optimates*, represented the interests of Rome's elite, and the other party, the *Populares*, represented the interests of the poor. This was not, however, a formal system of two parties, but rather two rather loosely defined but recognizable political persuasions that tended to focus around different sets of families in the political classes (knights/equestrians and senators).

Rome's disenfranchised (slaves, freedmen, women, foreign visitors, low-born, etc.), were the most frequent adherents to the cult of Isis, and comprised the significant portion of the population. The cult of Isis did not bar anyone from full participation,

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[7] "And therefore the Etruscan people were especially given to religious practices before all other peoples, because they excelled in the arts of cultivating these ancient rituals". Translation by author.

regardless of race, social status, economic means, or gender. The vast numbers of underprivileged participating in a "mystery cult" whose rituals were predominantly held in private settings definitely caused worries of subversion.

Worship by women, particularly, was a source of anxiety because in Roman society, women were always subject to *patria potestas* (controlling authority) of their *paterfamilias*. Prior to marriage, a woman's *paterfamilias* was her father or another designated man in charge of her care; when she married, *patria potestas* would either stay with her father or be transferred to her husband: "In the most common form of early Roman marriage a daughter would pass from her father's control into the *manus* (hand) of her husband, losing membership in her own *gens* (family) to enter his" (Fantham 227). In either case, a woman was always under the authority of a man.

Isaic practice had directly challenged this subjugated role of women and allowed women to fully participate in the religion whereas Roman religion was conducted primarily by men. "Literature of the period (written by men) often blames women for practicing a strange religion different from that of their husbands. … The cult [of Isis] stressed the equality of women and men" (Jeffers 251), further challenging the dominance of men over women. A prayer to Isis proclaims that "You have made the power of women equal to that of men (Ocyrhynchus Papyrus 1380)" (ibid), a statement which would have been seen to threaten the stability of the male-dominated society.

The practices of the worshippers were under the purview of Egyptian priests, practices that bled into their individual daily lives. Women, including matrons, were encouraged to practice periods of abstinence; public penances were common; adherents wore clothing of linen that visually demarcated them from Romans who adhered to the more traditional and acceptable cults. In essence, the Egyptian priests, with their set of ritual guidelines, were exerting control over a portion of Roman citizens (and their slaves), and "the combination of emotionalism, private assembly, popular priests, and a treasury was perceived as a threat to political stability. In contrast, the activities of the state cult had always been controlled by the upper class (from whose ranks its priests were elected) and funded by the Senate and later, the emperor. Upper-class Romans feared that the oriental cults would undermine their authority over the lives of the lower class" (Shelton 408). With gender and status irrelevant to acceptance into Isaic community in Rome, priorities subtly shifted, the shackles of roles within Roman society loosened (if only in their minds), and this collectively held a danger to the status quo of social order in Rome if allowed to spread unchecked.[8]

The second reason for Isis' persecution was that Egypt was far away, too far away to smite in a satisfying way when its government was misbehaving. Without television, radio, or the internet, news and opinions circulated in more face-to-face ways: criers in fora or the circulation of letters and speeches through the networks of elite families. Another means of disseminating opinion were displays of aggression against existing representations of Egypt within Rome. In either case, action against the *other* made visible and tangible the dissatisfaction of Roman leadership with Egypt.

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[8] Though participation in the cult was not hindered by status or gender, "cult offices were held by both women and men, but the higher offices seem to have been held mostly by men" (Shepard Kramer 243).

Despite the political anxieties that Isis elicited in Rome, followers refused her absolute banishment, so she remained there, either hidden in private homes or partially exposed in discreet but public settings. Politicians often made shows of trying to eject her from Rome, yet either due perhaps to her political utility for leaders of the *Popularis* persuasion, or due to outcries of her followers, they failed. From Isis' first excursion outside of Egypt, her temple and her statuary forms evolved, resulting in the not-quite-Egyptian worship of a not-quite-Egyptian deity, and with the tenacity of a chameleon, she gradually blended into her new surroundings while maintaining just enough exoticism to conserve interest and permit recognition of origin. These transitions were politically inspired; their precedents were set in Egyptian antiquity, and evolved into traditions held by Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman societies.

Isis in Ancient Egypt

Though modern societies perceive Isis as one of the most prominent goddesses of Egyptian antiquity, prior to Ptolemaic rule she was only one of many gods, with her primary distinctions being the sister-wife of Osiris (king of the gods) and mother of Horus (legitimate successor to the king). As a result, these distinctions inextricably tied Isis to notions of kingship legitimacy, and Egyptian pharaohs publicly regarded her as their mother, thereby securing their rule by divine right. Every pharaoh of Egypt "was the incarnation of the youthful Horus, and therefore was the son of Isis" (Witt 15). As early as 2350 BCE, the Pyramid Texts advised the pharaoh to "Raise thyself up, O king. Thy water belongs to thee, thine abundance belongs to thee, thy milk belongs to thee, which is in the breasts of thy mother, Isis" (Pyramid Texts 413§ 734). Her early pharaonic association with kingship can be traced to her Egyptian name, Aset. In hieroglyphics, 'Aset' is represented by and is the same word for 'throne': ⌶⌒. The name 'Isis' was given by the Greeks (Witt 15), and was perhaps a mispronunciation of Aset.

The first temple dedicated exclusively to Isis was comparatively late in Egyptian history, tracing back "no further than the Pharoah Amasis (26th Dynasty, late 6th century [BCE])" (Frankfurter Religion 234). Temples dedicated specifically to Isis become widespread only in Greco-Roman times, but prior to that, she was worshipped most often together with Horus and Osiris, and other times with Hathor, another Egyptian goddess with whom she syncretized.

Depictions of Isis and Hathor began to merge near the 17th and 18th Dynasties (1580-1069 BCE), when they both started be depicted wearing "the traditional queen's regalia of uraeus, double feathers and vulture crown, so that the precise distinction between mortal queens and the immortal goddesses becomes deliberately blurred" (Tyldesley 197). Egyptian queens assumed more obvious associations with their own "divinity" when Queen Tiy (c. 1398-1338 BCE) "adopt[ed] the cow horns and sun disc in her headdress, gradually became regarded as the female counterpart of the semi-divine king" (Tyldesley 201). The queen's assumption of divine accoutrements mirrored the expansion in legal and property rights enjoyed by Egyptian women. At this time, married or single women were given "the right to inherit, purchase and sell property and slaves as she wished […] to make a valid legal contract, borrow or lend goods […] initiate a court case [… and] live alone without the protection of a male guardian" (Tyldesley 37).

This contrasted sharply with Greek perceptions regarding gender equality in which "wives in Athens were not permitted to make important social and financial decisions without the supervision of a guardian" (Fantham 72). Gender inequality in Greece was less delineated by social status than by some perceived inherent feminine flaw: "as between male and female the former is by nature superior and ruler, the latter inferior and subject" (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b, p513). These ideas of female inferiority were expressed in the legislations of Solon, in which "restricted the walks, feasts, trousseax, mourning, food, drink, and sexual activity of women, and also later by the institution of γυναικονόμοι ("supervisors of women"), special magistrates appointed to maintain feminine *eukosmia* ("decency" or "good order"). For whereas the male nature credited itself with possessing sufficient sobriety and self-control to maintain its own *eukosmia*, the female nature was not so credited" (Carson 156). The advent of the Greek language, customs and laws into Egypt facilitated the slow erosion, but not disappearance, of women's rights (Tyldesley 44), even more so after the Roman presence. Egyptian women "were nowhere near as emancipated as their Dynastic forebears had been" (ibid), though ongoing adherence to local traditions still allowed them to maintain some degree of freedom. Hence, Egyptian women, before Hellenistic rule of Egypt, had greater rights, liberties, and perceived status – to the point of sole female rule over the country – than either Greek or Roman women, in any ancient period.[9]

Isis was a favorite among Egyptian women due to her role as divine mother and wife. Hence, the ongoing level of liberties held by women held since the earlier Dynastic periods led to a greater importance for Isis in the Late Period (664-332 BCE), during which her status transitioned from a "relatively restricted role as a member of the Egyptian pantheon to a more universal recognition as mother goddess or earth mother" (Tyldesley 253). As we shall see, during and after the Ptolemaic period, the composition of Isis' followers expanded as her realms of divine authority increased.

Egypt had suffered from several civil wars and foreign invasions throughout its history, and was conquered thrice by the Persians.[10] During Persia's final occupation of Egypt, Alexander the Great of Macedonia, having conquered Persia and deposed Darius III from Egypt, was received as liberator of Egypt and was given pharaonic rule.

Isis in Greece

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[9] Women as sole rulers in Egypt were: Queen Nitocris (6th Dynasty, 2181-2160), Queen Sobeknofru (12th Dynasty, 1777-1773), Queen Hatchepsut (18th Dynasty, 1473-1458), Queen Nefertiti (18th Dynasty, 1338-1336), and Queen Tworset (19th Dynasty, 1188-1186). Summarized from Tyldesley 208-241; dates of reign from Shaw 480-481. This list includes female pharaohs, and does not consider women who ruled Egypt during the Ptolemaic dynasty.

[10] Egypt was conquered the first time by Persian King Cambyses II in 525 BCE, whose successors ruled until 404 BCE; next by Artaxerxes III in 343 BCE until his assassination in 338 BCE, and finally by Darius III in 335 BCE, who ruled until deposed by Alexander of Macedonia.

From as early as the 3rd – 2nd millennium BCE, Greece and Egypt had a long history of amicable relations prior to Greek sovereignty. Frescoes discovered in the Nile Delta suggest that Egypt and the early Minoan cultures had relations as early as the late 3rd or early 2nd millennia BCE (Biers 48, Bourriau 215). An 11th-10th century necklace depicting Horus seated on Isis' lap was discovered in Eritrea, and was imported from Egypt (probably) via Cyprus (Fig. 5). Even Homer (c. 8th century BCE) hints at friendship ties between the Mycenaean Greeks and Egyptians in Book 4 of *The Odyssey*, in which he describes the homeward journey of Menelaus and Helen. They amassed wealth during that voyage from various countries, including Egypt (Homer 4.85-7); Helen had received gifts of a slave from an Egyptian (4.130-2), "a golden spindle and a silver basket with gold-rimmed wheels" (4.137-9), and Menelaus was given "two silver baths, two tripods, ten bars of gold" (4.134-5). Homer also wrote that "Men [in Egypt] know more about medicines than any other people on earth, for they are of the race of Paeeon, the Healer" (4.256-8), alluding to a Greek admiration of Egyptian knowledge and education.

An alternate version of Helen's whereabouts during the legendary Trojan War was later given by Euripides (c. 480-406 BCE) in *Helen*, in which Helen was secreted to the shores of Egypt by the Greek gods, and was held safe in the court of Egyptian king Proteus, "the man [Zeus] had judged to be the most virtuous of all mortals, so that I could keep my marriage with Menelaos undefiled" (Euripides Helen 47-50) by Paris, Trojan prince. After the Trojan War, Menelaos retrieves Helen, safe and unsullied, from Egypt. Both the Homeric version and this version of the story relate a cooperative atmosphere between the Greeks and Egyptians. Dates for the Mycenaean period of Greece vary among scholars, but we can tentatively place them within an average of 1600-1100 BCE.

Cultural ties between Greece and Egypt continued to increase during the 1st millennium BCE. Greece expanded its territories by colonizing southern portions of the Italian peninsula and Sicily (collectively called *Magna Graecia*) in the 8th century BCE. Thence, "*nel corso di quel periodo Orientalizzante nel quale la penisola italiana fu investita e trasformata profondamente nella struttura sociale delle sue comunità dall'ondata della colonizzazione greca e, insieme a essa, del commercio fenicio*" (Ministerio 13).[11] Therefore, Greece and Phoenician influences in Italy facilitated the introduction, awareness, and eventual settlement of Egypt's culture into the west with its continuing ties.

Fig. 5. Necklace made of faience beads representing Isis and Horus. 11th-10th centuries BCE. Eritrea Museum, Eritrea. Photo by author. 2005.

Back in Egypt, Pharaoh Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE) granted land settlements astride the Nile to the Greek mercenaries whom had helped him secure his throne. Later, pharaoh Amasis (570-526 BCE) moved them to Memphis (Lloyd 372), where he used them as his personal bodyguards. These mercenaries "were the first foreigners to live in

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[11] "during the Orientalizing period in which the Italian peninsula was beset and profoundly transformed in the social structure of its communities through the waves of Greek colonization and, together with that, from Phoenician commerce". Translation by author.

Egypt, and it is thanks to their residence there that we Greeks have had some connection with the country" (Herodotus 2.154). Herodotus' statement suggests that there was a period where the connection between the two countries had dissipated or disappeared. Whether he refers to a connection beyond trade or to dwindling trade in the preceding centuries is unknown. Egypt had experienced a time of civil wars, hence Psammetichus I's need for Greek mercenaries, which may suggest an Egyptian preoccupation that resulted in less contact.

In the later 7th and 6th centuries BCE, Greek and Egyptian ties grew stronger "through various interrelated media of exchange and communication: commerce, mercenaries, and elite level guest friendship and gift exchange" (Tanner 126). These ties resulted in what might be called low-levels of cultural exchange, in which increased presences of Egyptians in Greece (and vice versa) introduced facets of Egyptian culture into the eyes and minds of local Greeks on a daily basis, particularly in port towns, where cultural barriers were most permeable due to constant exchange of Mediterranean trade goods and the constant presence of foreign merchants and travelers.[12]

Fig. 6.   Late Hellenistic statue, probably the portrait of a Ptolemiac princess attired as Isis. Musei Capitolini Centrale Montemartini, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.

The Egyptian gods first took up residence in Piraeus, the port city of Athens, by the early 5th century BCE.[13] Though the earliest evidence for an Egyptian god in Piraeus is Ammon and his syncretized counterpart Zeus-Ammon in 400-350 BCE (Von Reden, chart 31), Isis arrived shortly thereafter in the mid-4th century, when "on the very eve of the Hellenistic period, before 332/1, the Athenians allowed Egyptians, probably merchants, to purchase land for Isis in Piraeus, a sanctuary intended only for Egyptian worshippers" (Mikalson 201). Hence, Isis, despite having a least one sanctuary in Greece, was worshipped predominantly by Egyptians, though we cannot discount the possibility of her worship by Greeks. This needs to be qualified, however. In order for Isis to have been accepted by local Greeks,

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[12] See Lloyd 372-374 for descriptions of Greek settlements around the Nile Delta in the 7th-6th centuries BCE.

[13] This assumption is made based on the lack of any datable material or literary evidence confirming the presence of Egyptian gods within Greece prior to Ammon and Zeus-Ammon in 400-350 BCE, because the presence of the gods must surely have preceded extant evidence. This assumption follows from Witt's assertion that "the two big problems for the Egyptian cults (and the same is true of others) are the nature and value of the documentation and the chronological systemization […] as so often happens with Egyptian objects on European objects on European sites […] reliable data about find spots cannot always be provided" (Witt Review 281).

aspects of her cult must have adapted to appear not so outside the realm of Greek religious expectations (Fig. 6), particularly the worship of gods-as-animals and the practice of mummification. There were little or no racial tensions towards the Egyptians, though their culture was quite different from their own; there were only curiosities that were acknowledged with hardly any condescension due to the immemorial antiquity of Egyptian civilization.[14]

During the period before Hellenistic rule over Egypt, Isis had already taken flight across the Mediterranean. Herodotus identified Isis with the Greek goddess Demeter (Herodotus 2.59), which "facilitated the popularity and expansion of her cult and enhanced her role as wife and mother […] By the mid-4th century, inscriptions of Isis were found in Athens and other parts of Greece" (Tripolitis 27). We must be cautious, however, to overestimate her popularity in Greece at this time. Though she was one of the most appealing imported gods, she was still a very minor player in the Greek pantheon. It cannot be said with any amount of authority that she was worshipped by anything more than a small percentage of the Greek population during the 4th century BCE.

We can glean contemporary tensions concerning the entry of foreign deities into Greece from the play *The Bacchae* by Euripides (480-406 BCE), in which Dionysus, an Eastern god, overcomes Pentheus, a Greek man who "incorrectly assessed Dionysus' menace" (Saïd 57). When meeting Dionysus, disguised as an initiate of his own cult, Pentheus cross-examines him about the cult:

Pentheus:	Are we the first to whom you've brought this divinity of yours?
Dionysus:	Outside Greece, everyone is already dancing for him.
Pentheus:	That's because foreigners have so little sense compared to us.
Dionysus:	In this case more, much more. They just have different customs.
Pentheus:	You practice this cult by night or by day?
Dionysus:	Mostly at night. Darkness lends solemnity.
Pentheus:	Darkness is just a filthy trap for women.
Dionysus:	Some people can dig up dirt in daytime too.
Pentheus:	You'll have to be punished for this—this wicked cleverness.
Dionysus:	And you for stupidity, for irreverence to the god.

(Euripides Bacchae 481-490)

Pentheus' impudence against Dionysus resulted in punishment by Dionysus. When Pentheus secretly viewed the mystery rites, his own mother dismembered him, along with other cult initiates, in a Bacchant frenzy. Agave (Pentheus' mother) is told; "He *did* turn out like you—with no reverence for the god. And so he tied everyone together in one injury [to the god]—you women, and himself. As a result, he ruined my house and me… If there is anyone who despises the divine, he should look at this man's death and believe in gods" (Euripides Bacchae 1303-5, 1325-6). Euripides "was surely affected by the new aspect that the Dionysian cults must have assumed in the light of the

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[14] Summarized from Isaac, pp 354-359.

foreign ecstatic religions of Bendis, Cybele, Sabazius, Adonis, and Isis, which were introduced from Asia Minor and the Levant and swept through Piraeus and Athens during the frustrating and increasingly irrational years of the Peloponnesian War [431-404 BCE]" (Saïd 56). Here we see a manifested reluctance, a natural hesitance and perhaps fear, of the introduction of foreign gods, even before Hellenistic dominance. It is interesting to note that, despite Euripides' assertion that Bacchus (aka Dionysus) hailed from Asia Minor, he actually was a Greek god whose earliest attestation appears on a votive inscription in a Minoan sanctuary (Burkert 31).

The most significant changes to the worship of Isis in the Mediterranean occurred in the decades after Alexander the Great had liberated Egypt from Persian rule (332 BCE) and assumed pharaonic rule. His rule was short-lived, as his victory over the Persians was followed by his death less than a decade later, in 323 BCE while on a campaign in Babylon (Lloyd 396) to eradicate the Persian threat once and for all.

Prior to his death, however, he founded Alexandria in 331 BCE (Lloyd 404), a new city 20 miles west of the Nile delta, which soon became "the most spectacular city in the Hellenistic world" (ibid). Alexander planned this city to be a union of Greek and Egyptian cultures, a center of learning, and a trade hub of the Mediterranean and beyond: "*un fulcro comerciale di vitale importanza nei traffici non solo dei prodotti dell'Egitto, ma anche di quelli che vi giungevano dall'interno dell'Africa e, lungo le coste del mar Rosso, dall'Arabia e dall'India*" (Ministero 14).[15] Alexander's plans for the city were successfully implemented, and his successors ruled Egypt from Alexandria until the conquest of Rome.

After his death in 323 BCE, the fabric of the empire Alexander had woven threatened to unravel, as he had not named an heir. His half-brother, Arrhidaeus, was named king, and Perdiccas, a commander of Alexander's battalion (Hornblower 1138), was named regent. Perdiccas allocated significant sections of the empire to Alexander's generals, and Ptolemy, later called Ptolemy *Soter* ("Savior"), was given Egypt, though his rule was not deemed official until 305 BCE. The allocations were not satisfactory to the other generals, and the War of the Successors ensued. These battles were fought by the Antigonids (the 'unitarians' who wished to keep the empire intact) and the 'separatists' (the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Lysimachos), all of whom "were determined to carve out their own kingdoms" (Lloyd 396), all of whom were either Alexander's kin or generals.

The War of the Successors resulted in a tripartite division of Alexander's empire: The Antigonids ruled Macdeon and assumed control over neighboring cities on the Greek mainland[16]; the Seleucids governed large sections of Asia Minor, and the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, Cyrene, Cyprus (a Ptolemaic province), and the Levant up to the Syrian border. Egypt's influence greatly increased after these large kingdoms were carved out, becoming a threat to the other kingdoms, which resulted in intermittent and tenuous alliances between the Macedonian and Seleucid kingdoms. Battles to wrest Egypt from Ptolemy were met with failure "by Egypt's geography rather than by Ptolemy himself"

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[15] "a commercial fulcrum of vital importance in the traffic not only of Egyptian products, but also of those things that arrived from the African interior, the distant coasts of the Red Sea, from Arabia and from India". Translation by author.

[16] This control was tenuous, as the cities often did not recognize Macedonia as their ruler. (Lloyd 396)

(Lloyd 396), but constant fighting between the kingdoms did not cease until Rome's rise to power and ultimate subjugation of Greece.[17]

Ptolemy I, perhaps as a continuation of the Egyptian late pharaonic tradition, adopted and Hellenized the Egyptian trinity: Isis, Osiris (renamed Serapis), and Horus (renamed Harpocrates), thereby modifying the Egyptian version of these deities "in order to bring together Egyptian and Greek beliefs and practices" (Jeffers 97). It is important to note, however, evidence indicates that the Hellenized trinity "won only limited popularity with the Egyptian population in the third century [BCE], and that it was to the *upper classes* of the Greek population that it mainly appealed" (Fraser 260, emphasis added). Recognizing the social class of the Greeks who worshipped these Hellenized deities will be critical when we turn our attention to the dissemination of the trinity in the Roman Republic and Empire.

Of the numerous deities in the Egyptian pantheon, Ptolemy I's choice to Hellenize Isis, Osiris and Horus, was the most logical, both culturally and politically. Not only did Isis already have a presence on main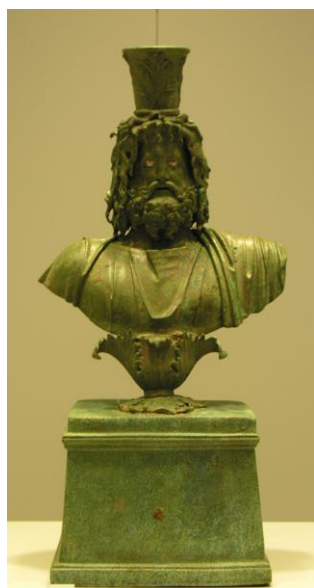land Greece, thereby making her less of a shocking introduction to the Greeks, but also the Egyptians held these gods to be legitimizers of the throne. Thus the Ptolemaic Dynasty arrogated the pharaonic tradition of rule by divine right by conjoining familiar social and spiritual themes, one of which included the divine Egyptian and Greek traditions of brother-sister marriages (like Isis and Osiris, and Zeus and Hera, respectively); the Egyptian version went further by securing divine succession for their children (like Horus) and applying these divine ideals to mortal rulers.

Osiris (hereinafter Serapis) also acquired a significant following among the Greeks; he was not only Isis' husband, but he ruled the underworld, and healed "much like Asclepius, the sick and injured through incubation and dreams in his sanctuaries" (Mikalson 201).[18] Culturally, his "cult statue was Greek, not Egyptian, in form" (ibid) (Fig. 7), and politically, he "was made the patron of [the Ptolemaic] dynasty" (ibid). The modified dual cultural and political aspects enabled Serapis, and other gods similarly Hellenized, to travel throughout Greece, despite regional political animosities between the bickering factions of Alexander's successors.

Fig 7. 2nd century CE bust of Serapis. National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Photo by Author. 2005.

At this point, temples to Isis and Serapis appeared throughout Greece and "in Athens Serapis first appeared in 215/4, worshipped by non-Athenians, but by 158/7 an Athenian was serving as his priest on Delos" (Mikalson

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[17] Events summarized from Lloyd 395-8, 482 and Hornblower 105, 1381.

[18] From this point, we will predominantly be considering the Hellenized, and later Romanized, versions of Osiris. Therefore, we will use his new name, unless the specific Egyptian version of the god is intended. Note that Egyptians continued to worship their native version of Osiris and for the most part, ignored Serapis.

201).[19] This shows that Greeks had not only taken up their worship, but that the appointed clergy was no longer exclusively Egyptian. Temples to Isis and statuary of Egyptian deities had been iconographically and ideologically transformed into an amalgamation of Egyptian and Greek, concurrently making them somewhat familiar and beguilingly exotic.

The early Hellenistic period reflects changes in cultural and aesthetic ideals, in which "revolutionary approaches [to sculpture] appear alongside the derivative" (Pedley 350). Depictions of allegory, often placed within theatrical scenery, verisimilitudinous portraiture, expressions of emotion, and personification in early Hellenistic statuary speak to a change in the way Greeks viewed themselves and the world around them.[20]

In the High Hellenistic phase (c. 250-150 BCE), we find curious characterizations of Greek enemies, particularly in the "Gaul and his Wife" (Fig. 8) and "Dying Gaul" (Fig. 9) statues. The former, which depicts a Gallic man committing suicide after having killed his wife to avoid her slavery, "the barbarian is portrayed as the noble hero" (Pendley 352); the latter, with broken sword and broken appearance, is pitiable. "The Late Hellenistic phase, from around 150 BC onward, saw a resurgence of Classicism, which corresponded with the Roman conquest of Greece and the shipment of countless Greek statues from Greece to Italy" (Pedley 350). A palpable sense of humanity arises in the arts, extolling the highs and lows of human emotion, while offering transient glimpses of the idealism which was prevalent in the Classical period (ca. 5th century - 323 BCE).

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[19] Pausanias, 2nd century CE Greek geographer, attests temples to Isis at Megara in Attica (Pausanias 1.41.3), Corinth (2.2.1), Phliasia (2.13.7), Troezen (2.32.6), Hermion – to both Isis and Serapis (2.34.10), two precincts each to Isis (Isis Pelagian and Egyptian Isis) and Serapis (Serapis and Serapis "in Canopus") in Acrocorinth (2.4.6), Laconia (3.22.13), Thebes – to both Isis and Serapis (4.32.6), Bura in Achaia (7.25.9), statuary of Pentelic marble in Achaia (port of Aegeira) (7.26.1); and Tithorea near Phocis – "the holiest of all [precincts and shrines] made by the Greeks for the Egyptian goddess" (10.32.13). His account is by far incomplete, as he fails to record known temples or shrines in several regions, including Athens, Piraeus, Delphi, and Delos.

[20] Summarized from Pedley 350-2.

Fig. 8. "The Dying Gaul". Capitoline Museum, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.
Fig. 9. "The Gaul and his Wife". *La Sapienza* Cast Museum, Rome. Photo by author. 2007.

Literature, in addition to sculpture and the other arts, underwent transformation in the Hellenistic period as well. For example, poetry "could find constant intrinsic interest in topics and attitudes drawn from 'low' life, rural and urban, matters vulgar and even grotesque, while still preserving rigorously an archaizing style and language which were becoming more and more remote from the vernacular" (Easterling 3). The political upheavals due to the creation of Alexander's empire, and its subsequent dissolution created a vacuum of social identity which "gave many Greeks a sense of separation from their roots and their past" (ibid). This resulted in a reinvention of the arts on a more personal level, in which "unprecedented freedom for innovation" (ibid) enabled artists and writers to more fully express emotional extremes and feature lower-class or foreign subjects hitherto absent from artistic expression.

Traditional Greek gods were tied by epithet and location; the Poseidon who was worshipped in Sounion was distinct but not completely different from the Poseidon who was worshipped in Athens (Mikalson 33). In addition to being tied by epithet and location, they most often represented specific emotions or facets of human existence, such as love, war, occupations, etc., yet the Egyptian deities had a "certain flexibility in divine roles" (Shafer 23), which facilitated their multifaceted appeal. Isis was originally associated with Demeter by Herodotus, yet she continued to be syncretized with other Greek goddesses (Aphrodite, Hera, Tyche, etc.) and their divine attributes, eventually resulting in the evolution of Isis into a more "universal" goddess.

Despite the inseparable integration of religion into Greek (and later, Roman) politics, it can hardly be said that the acceptance or rejection of new deities into the

pantheon happened exclusively due to political seesawing. In addition to the Hellenized elements of Isis discussed so far, she was also considered patroness of sailors, agriculture, both domestic and commercial arts, and much more.[21] Such attributes considerably added more attraction for Isis, resulting in more adherents, despite the political attempts to suppress the religion at the time.

Mikalson sums up how Isis was accepted in Greece:

"By the end of the Hellenistic period, Isis, usually with Serapis, had sanctuaries and devotees in virtually all Greek cities everywhere, and her devotees were identifying her in long *aretologies* (lists of "virtues" *aretai* in Greek) with many of the Greek goddesses and were crediting her with power over and protection of virtually all aspects of human life and even with the initial structuring of the cosmos and all elements in it. Unlike a Greek god or goddess, Isis alone, now could, for her devotees, fulfill virtually all their religious needs. Of all the gods we have encountered, Isis alone opens the way of concepts of monotheism for her worshippers – she can be thought of as the goddess who encompasses and incorporates all other deities and their powers." (Mikalson 201)

Isis on the Italian Peninsula and the Tyrrhenian Sea

At the time the Greeks assumed control of Egypt, Rome was a comparatively young republic, having been established only 4 centuries earlier, and was plagued both by internal patrician-plebian conflict as well as by frequent warring with various local tribes to the north, west, and south.[22] As previously mentioned, Greece had colonized many southern portions of the Italian peninsula in the 8th century BCE, as well as several islands in the Mediterranean Sea. With them, they brought their social values, trade relations, and applied their old customs to a new landscape.

The first region to adopt the new religion of Isis and Serapis was Greek Sicily, most likely during the reign of Ptolemy I in Alexandria in the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE.[23] On the mainland, Isis, and Serapis were already in Campania "in the second

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[21] "Isis was known as mistress of the heavens, the earth, the sea, and even the underworld. More powerful than Fate, she was ruler of the universe, all-powerful and all-seeing. All civilization was her creation and her charge. Isis established laws that can never be broken, and was the lawgiver and the champion of justice. She invented navigation, gave speech to mankind, introduced the art of writing, spinning and weaving, and instructed all people in the cultivation of the land. She gave to mankind all that makes life comfortable and worthwhile. Isis was both protectoress and aide. She gave safety to the sailor struggling on the high seas, protected the wanderer in a foreign land far from home. Freed the prisoner, healed those who were sick, and gave comfort to those in distress" (Tripolitis 28).

[22] The traditional date for the founding of Rome is 753 BCE.

[23] Based on the reference to Ptolemy's stepdaughter: "*La prima regione in Italia ad adottare la nuova religione fu la Sicilia greca con Atagole, probabilmente allorchè questi sposò Teoxena, la figliastra di Tolomeo I Sotèr*" (Ministerio 14): The first region in Italy to adopt the new

century BCE, when there were close economic ties between Delos and Ptolemaic Egypt" (Takas 269), which resulted in the presence of Egyptian traders who worshiped Isis in the Greek regions of Italy. Politically speaking, "Campanians and even Romans had served in the Ptolemaic forces already in the third century" (Fraser 89), which shows that in addition to Greece, the Early Republic of Rome, or at least its people as hired hands, were present in Egypt.

As Rome grew into a military power, Rome had gradually but certainly dominated many local tribes, such as the Sabines, the Etruscans, the Latin League, and the Samnites. Yet until the Pyrrhic War (280-275 BCE), in which Rome came directly into conflict with the Greeks (and especially the city-states of Magna Graecia), Rome was still a fairly small state itself. But "[b]y the end of the Pyrrhic war, the entire region [of Magna Graecia] was under Roman domination" (Hornblower 912). One tangential result of this war was the recognition of other Mediterranean countries of the need to develop or maintain good diplomatic relations with Rome. Egypt expressed such by the establishment of a permanent Egyptian embassy in Rome in 273 BCE (Lloyd 421).

In the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries BCE, Alexander's successors on the Greek mainland continued their trends of avarice and discontent, which led to infighting, conspiracy, and regular skirmishes amongst each other. The only exception was the Egyptian territory, whose weakened state and geographical distance from mainland Greece restrained them from outward hostilities. The other generals "continued their rivalries […] and they did not hesitate to appeal to Rome against one another" (McDonald 66). Having been exhorted to aid various factions – in offense, defense, or retaliation – Rome had unknowingly been given the role of a policing agency over the Greeks, and by "167 BC no one escaped the penalty of Roman peace" (ibid).

The Antigonids, headquartered in Macedonia, increased the enmity between themselves and Rome by supporting Hannibal against the Romans in the Second Punic War with Carthage. This War coincided with Rome's First Macedonian War versus the Antigonids. Aware of the precarious nature of fighting two wars on two different fronts, Rome appealed to its Greek allies, the Aetolians, to aid in the battles. They decided that the Romans would fight by sea, the Aetolians by land, and a treaty was signed in which "the Aetolians should retain the land and buildings in any places captured in allied operations [in Macedonia] and that the Romans should seize any other kind of booty … Rome needed slaves to serve the landowners who were members of the senate" (Adcock 111). Subsequently, the costs of maintaining the hard-fought peace and order had indebted Greece to Rome, and the final campaigns to straighten out the problems of Greece, called the Third Macedonian War, were conclusive:

> "In the course of the second century BC, Rome was drawn across the
> Adriatic to Greece, at first in struggles with the Macedonians under their
> king, Philip V. Though he was defeated in 197 BC, enmity continued off
> and on until Macedon was finally broken at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC.
> Later, the Romans had to contend with the Achaean League, which their

religion was Greek Sicily with Agathocles [tyrant of Syracuse], probably when Theoxena, Ptolemy I Soter's stepdaughter, was given to him in marriage. Translation by author.

general, Mummius, defeated, before then sacking the League's leading city, Corinth. From this moment (146 BC) Rome ruled Greece" (Pedley 338)

From this point forward, we will contend exclusively with Roman and Egyptian relations; with Greece having been conquered and is assets assimilated into Rome's holdings, the voice of Greece as an independent nation falls mute until 1829 CE. The year after Rome subsumed Greece, its presence on the Alexandrian political, social, and economic stages increased: "From [145 BCE] onwards Alexandria was overshadowed politically by Rome, and we find that numerous Romans appear in Alexandria on political errands. From about the same time the changed economic situation in the Mediterranean increased the importance of Italy as a market for Alexandria" (Fraser 89). Egypt, though part of the Greek territories, "retained something of its power and position while its rivals had been humbled by Rome" (Charlesworth 9) until Cleopatra's death in 30 BCE. The Romans were admirers of Greek culture – if not the trade interruptions due to their internal political enmities – and offered both amnesty and limited citizenship to many who pledged loyalty to Rome.

The Late Republic

The initial phase in Roman history began at its foundation ca. 753 BCE, during which time "kings" ruled, and ended with the creation of the Republic (ca. 510-509 BCE). The Republican period is marked by increases in Roman trade, facilitated by the Tiber River and port towns, and by regional expansion. The Republic was a system in which elected officials replaced the monarchial ruler. The most prominent feature of the Republican period was its ability to conquer its regional rivals and assimilate them into a loose confederation of city-states with Rome as leader. These indigenous and settled populations had their own social cultures and religious practices. Rome, however, allowed each region religious autonomy, and interfered only in cases of perceived danger to "national" security.

"Indeed part of the success of the Romans as imperialists was their tolerance, acceptance and even takeover of the gods of their enemies" (Blond 182) until the first decades of the 1st century BCE. This early leniency could either be ascribed to Rome's preoccupation with wars (1st, 2nd, 3rd Punic Wars; 1st, 2nd, 3rd Macedonian Wars; Social Wars; Mithridatic Wars, etc.) and a host of internal conflicts, but perhaps it is better explained by recognizing that Rome "had imposed order upon Italy under loose confederate conditions" (McDonald 151), and not more strict regulations. For example, only a Senate-declared 'state of emergency' allowed Rome to dictate instructions to its allies. Such was the case in 186 BCE when the Senate demanded the orgiastic worship of Bacchus, which was imported from Greece, to cease. Concern over the private assembly of these *foreign* worshippers rose and the Senate declared these rites the *Bacchanalian Conspiracy* – "an illegal association to subvert the Italian confederacy" (McDonald 84). The Senate chose to "proclaim an emergency, give the consuls powers of martial law, and pass detailed orders to the allies" (ibid). A little later in 139, the government "evicted the first Jewish immigrants into Italy for proselytising" (Cary 312) yet tolerated the presence

of synagogues in the 1st century BCE (ibid). Hence, the Senate's desire to suppress foreign influences on Rome manifested in religious repression.

The cult of Isis "was established at Rome by Sulla's day, no doubt at first as a private and secret cult" (Scullard 207) shortly after the Social War (91-87 BCE). This was an uprising against the dominance of Rome by its allies primarily because of the Rome's refusal to give voting rights to the allies. The campaigns of Sulla, the consul of Rome, in the south and east "brought a fresh wave of Hellenism to Rome: we have to think not only of Greek models, but of the actual presence of Greek craftsmen in the city" (McDonald 139).

In the late 3rd century BCE, Rome "had a long history of giving citizenship to Italian communities, either with the vote (*optimo iure*) or without the vote (*sine suffragio*)" (Hornblower 334), but citizenship grants had dwindled by the 2nd century BCE. Though Rome had militarily won the Social Wars, and "by 89 BC all surviving cities were Roman colonies of *municipia*" (Hornblower 912), Rome had conceded to the allies' demands and instituted the *lex Iulia*, the law by which citizenship was extended to allied states "who had for the most part remained loyal" (Hornblower 334). Hence, the number of Roman citizens boomed, and as a result, new social, cultural, and religious diversity was injected into the constituency of the Roman population. Because the Greeks in *Magna Graecia* had already worshiped Isis over a century by that time, this extension of citizenship not only automatically made citizens of worshippers outside of Rome, but also paved the way for Isis' gradual introduction into Rome.

The Late Republic: Population

We have already established the cultural diversity of the free Roman population, and we must now look to population numbers and to the silent portion of the population – women, the lower classes, and slaves. During the Late Republican period (late 2nd/early 1st century BCE), Rome suffered major political disruptions and civil wars. At the end of the Republic, there were approximately 750,000 to 1,000,000 people in Rome, based on a number 250,000 adult male citizens and extrapolating the population numbers of their wives, children, and several hundred thousand slaves.[24] There were as many as "2,000,000 slaves in Italy at the close of the republic" (Hornblower 1415). The privileged and wealthy were a distinct minority, as the majority of denizens were poor and often disenfranchised. In the city, there were fewer women than men as well as fewer children in relation to adults. Rural populations migrated to Rome in the 2nd century BCE and we must recall the influx of slaves from previous Roman conquests.[25]

The city of Rome, therefore, had become a cosmopolitan city whose people came from many different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This population was comprised of citizens, both natural and naturalized, foreign traders from as far as India, freedmen (manumitted slaves or slaves who had bought their freedom), as well as

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[24] "The figure 250,000 is derived from the numbers cited as receiving grain doles in 46 B.C. (320,000), 45 B.C. (150,000), 44, 29, 24, 23, and 12 B.C. (250,000), 5 B.C. (320,000), 2 B.C. (200,000), and A.D. 14 and 37 (150,000)" (Stambaugh 336 n1).

[25] Population estimates summarized from Stambaugh 89-90.

purchased or pillaged slaves from nearly everywhere in the known world. Slaves were taken by Rome from countries they had vanquished with no particular preference toward ethnicity or race.

Unlike Greek and Egyptian slavery practices, Roman slaves were regularly freed, either by buying their freedom or by a formal release from their masters.[26] Manumitted slaves were granted citizenship (though they could not hold political office), yet children born to a freedman could both become citizens and had the ability to hold office. The most highly prized slaves were those educated elite – the ones which became tutors to the children of the Roman elite, whose skills in the arts or commerce enriched their master's households with culture, beauty, knowledge, or hard cold cash.

In the aftermath of Roman campaigns in Greece and Asia Minor, many Greeks were taken as slaves, many from the elite who were already adherents to the cult of Isis. We know at this time that Isis was still extremely popular in Athens because a shrine was constructed to her on Athens' most sacred location, the Acropolis.[27] In this way, Roman slave owners permitted the entry of Isis into their own homes via the beliefs and practices of their slaves.

Women, on the other hand, crossed a different set of cultural divides. They could be free, wealthy, and educated, yet they were always under the domain of the *patria potestas*. The paterfamilias "carried the right of life and death over the entire household, which included his children and other slave and freed dependents" (Fantham 227). The tight control exerted over their daily lives could have fostered in them the need for emotional and spiritual release as well as offer them a semblance of power over their own destiny. In the early stages of Isis worship in Italy, both women and men were able to hold office, yet "as the cult sought respectability in the larger society, it progressively removed women from leadership" (Jeffers 251). Isis offered her worshippers salvation in the form of an afterlife, something the state religion did not promise in addition to a more personal relationship with the deity. "The compassionate goddess and loving mother who listened to the prayers of the lowliest individual and who grieved for the suffering of humankind won the personal devotion of Roman citizens as the stern, inaccessible deities of the state religion could not" (Shelton 400). Despite the male assumption of higher offices within the cult, Isis' appeal did not dwindle; rather, it continued to increase among the majority population muct to the consternation of the elite minority.

Jeffers eloquently describes the appeal of the eastern cults to Rome while intriguing us with contemporary, if somewhat problematic comparisons to the American religious landscape:

> "The expectations of the mystery religions were quite a change from the Roman state religion, whose gods made no demands on the individual and promised him or her no personal rewards. The new cults promised Romans an

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[26] The rising number of manumitted slaves inundating Rome resulted in such concern that "Augustus felt it necessary to have a law passed restricting to one hundred the number of slaves to whom freedom could be given by will." (Moore 226)

[27] "Sometime before the middle of the first century [BCE], a modest shrine for the divine Egyptian import Isis was established on the south slope of the Archaic Spring House, beside an even smaller Temple of Themis" (Hurwitt 277)

afterlife, a sense of belonging and an emotional excitement absent from the state religion. However, formal initiation into the cult was usually too expensive for most to afford. Numerous religious groups in American history have featured elements of mystery religions and offered similar promises of special knowledge, a sense of purpose, and special access to the divine. They often feature ecstatic experiences, even orgiastic rituals. More extreme forms have included Jim Jones's cult in Jonestown, Guyana, the Heaven's Gate cult in San Diego, California, and David Koresh's Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas" (Jeffers 98).

Via slave trade, manumission, immigration, and foreign visitors, ambassadors and merchants continuously traveling in and out of the city, Rome experienced increasingly frequent infusions of diversity from the entire known world. Consequently, "the population of Rome included, of course, many people of non-Roman birth … for whom the eastern cults were 'native' religions; but Roman citizens, too, were attracted to these cults, especially in times of crisis and despair when the state religion seemed unable to provide hope and comfort" (Shelton 392). Rome was on the road to becoming a truly cosmopolitan city in the ethic diversity, religious composition, and cultural variations of its inhabitants.

The Last Gasps of the Republic

We have thus far have established: 1) Isis' association with divine and secular political power developed since ancient Egyptian times and continued through the Ptolemaic period of Alexandria, 2) Rome had become a military and political force in the Mediterranean by means of dispute settlement and conquest, 3) By the beginning of the 1st century BCE, Rome's citizen, visitor, and slave populations were extremely diverse, and 4) Isis was already present in Rome at the end of the Social War (91-88 BCE).

With the exception of the singular fact that Isis was in Rome in Sulla's time, there is an echoing silence in the literary and archaeological records about Isis in Rome from the Social War until shortly after Rome became arbiter of Egyptian dispute resolution in 80 BCE, when Roman consul Lucius Cornelius Sulla settled problems of Ptolemaic succession by establishing "Ptolemy XI as joint ruler with and husband of stepmother Cleopatra Berenice" (Hornblower 1273) when "Ptolemy IX Soter II died without legitimate male issue" (Lewis Life 12). Even this, though, was not Rome's first intervention in Egyptian politics: the precedent was set in 168 and again in 164 BCE, when Roman assistance was sought and delivered to arbitrate succession between Ptolemy VI and VIII (Hornblower 1272). We will soon notice that the rising level of Roman assistance in Egypt runs parallel with the exertion of power over Egyptian presences within Rome and how the political climate of Egypt bore a direct relationship to Isis' treatment in Rome.

Ptolemy XI murdered his wife and in turn was assassinated by the Alexandrians (Hornblower 1273). Ptolemy XII ("Auletes") succeeded his father in 80 BCE, and grateful for the ongoing Roman assistance in the securing and maintenance of his throne, he cultivated the friendship of the Romans. We may wonder, then, with Roman/Egyptian

relations being friendly, why "in 65 B.C.E. five Isiac sanctuaries in Rome were summarily destroyed [on order of the Senate]" (Petersen 40). No literary evidence offers an explanation *why* these actions occurred, but a careful examination of the context may reveal what contemporary writers have failed to record.

Cilicia, a region in Asia Minor which "was disputed between the Seleucids and Ptolemies in the Hellenistic period" (Hornblower 330), became a stronghold of pirates who tormented the Mediterranean during the period of Rome's Social War and afterward. These pirates had interrupted trade between Italy, Egypt, and Iberia. In 67 BCE, the *leges Gabinae* was enacted, which "established a command against the pirates (for Pompey)" (Hornblower 850), after which Pompey "reduced the areas from which pirates were able to operate" (1185) in less than three months.

Also enter Mithridates, a Persian whose expansionist propensities during 89-63 BCE claimed portions of Asia Minor and Greece from the Romans while Rome was preoccupied with the Social War and other political and military issues. Mithridates "presented himself both as a civilized philhellene—he consciously copied the portraiture and actions of Alexander the Great—and as an oriental monarch" (Hornblower 991), and was summarily defeated by Pompey in 66 BCE (1216), but not before he orchestrated the slaughter of an immense number of Roman citizens in Asia Minor.[28]

In the minds of the Roman population, and especially the politicians, the problems regarding Cilician pirates and the three Mithridatic wars once again highlighted the troublesome east, that uncontrollable Orient, something that needs to be constantly whipped into line. In this light, the destruction of Isis' temples in Rome in 65 BCE can perhaps be seen as a manifestation of frustration and ire against the Orient in general. "The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe" (Saïd 63), a closed field that they heard about via the mouthpieces of the politicians in the fora.

After the destruction of Isis' five sanctuaries by senatorial mandate in 65 BCE, the "Senate could hardly keep Isiacs from attending to their goddess, for all five sanctuaries were rebuilt within 17 years" (Petersen 40). From this, we can easily see that at least for a small percentage of the citizenry, the problems in the east bore little or no relationship to individual religious practices, needs or ideologies.

Back in Egypt, Ptolemy Auletes had continued hardships due to familial contestation of his rule and also experienced severe backlashes from the Alexandrian people due to his amicable relationship with Rome. Open hostility towards Auletes began in 63 BCE, despite Egyptian concern over Rome's obvious preference to him: "Diodorus, who was in Alexandria in 60, tells us that the fear of Rome was such that every sign of respect was shown to Italians in the city for fear of giving a pretext for war" (Fraser 124). Knowing who was able to help him secure his throne, Auletes "had purchased Roman recognition of his position in Egypt by a gigantic bribe of six thousand talents (59 B.C.)" (Oost 99), gaining him the title of 'Friend of the Roman People'. Auletes also "allowed Cyprus, the last Ptolemaic possession, now held as an appendage

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[28] "For they [the people of Cos] had sheltered Roman citizens in the temple of Aesculapius at the time when, on the orders of king Mithridates VI of Pontus, these were being massacred in every island and city in Asia" (Tacitus, *Annales*, 4.13).

by his brother, to fall a prey to his new protectors" (Fraser 124), a decision which did not well either with the remnants of his family, or with the Egyptian people. The bribe, which was paid in part by the Alexandrian people (ibid), the concession of Cyprus, which "had regularly been involved in the civil wars of the last Ptolemies during which they played musical chairs between the island and Egypt" (Oost 102), the installation of Auletes' chief creditor Gaius Rabirius Postumus as *diocete*s (Chief Treasurer)" (Smith 512), and other pro-Roman legislations quickly "led to [Auletes'] expulsion by the Alexandrians in 58 BCE" (Hornblower 1273).[29]

Auletes' forced exile must have been taken as an affront to Rome and required some demonstration of anger against Egypt, for coincidentally "in 58 B.C. altars to Isis on the Capitol were destroyed by the consuls" (Scullard 207). Once again, "they were very soon reinstated 'owing to the violence of the people's intervention' (Varr. From Tert., *Nat.*, 1, 10, 17)" (Turcan Gods 121). This may be connected with the struggle between the *Optimates* and *Populares*, as the *Optimates* controlled the senate, but legislation was passed in the *comitia tributa*, whose agenda could be (and often was) controlled by *Popularis* tribunes. Though *comitia* were technically assemblies of Roman people who would vote on proposals put forth by magistrates, they "were far from democratic" (Hornblower 372). The *comitia plebis tributa* "discriminated against both the urban *plebs*, who were confined to only four of the 35 tribes, and the rural population, who lived too far from Rome to attend [the *comitia*] in person" (ibid). Therefore, with a remote semblance of democracy the *Optimates* could out-vote any *Populares*. Therefore, the bipartisan animosities could be played out with the Roman landscape as its battlefield.

The reinstatement of Isis' altars, along with the rebuildings after the 65 BCE mass demolitions of Isis' temples, clearly shows that the political mandates were going contrary to the wishes of a significant portion of Rome's population. This, however, can be explained in terms of the political recognition of perceived seditiousness that participation in such a cult could entice:

> "Part of the appeal of these cults and religions may have been their slightly subversive nature. The traditional cults of the Graeco-Roman cities were so much a part of the traditional power structures of those cities that to reject the cults was implicitly a political act as well as being of religious significance. Cities and citizens tended to define themselves through participation in religious events" (Alston 317).

It is crucial at this point to recall that Isis at this point had been thoroughly Hellenized; it is unlikely that Roman citizens would have adopted her had she remained totally Egyptian. Her form and temple were, for the most part, Greek with Egyptian elements. Only in name and origin was she exclusively Egyptian.

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[29]Rabirius was later imprisoned for extortion by Auletes, who was seeking to placate his people lest he be exiled again. Rabirus escaped, and Cicero later defended him for extortion in Egypt under the *lex Julia*. Unable to pay the fine, Rabirus probably was banished, but was later recalled by Julius Caesar (Smith 312).

Auletes arrived in Rome in 57 BCE (Smith 512), "where his restoration became a mainstream political issue, and through heavy expenditure, in 55 he was restored by A. Gabinus, Roman governor of Syria" (Hornblower 1273). Gabinus subsequently "left behind him those troops who had imposed order on the Alexandrians" (Fraser 90). This did not bode well for the improvement of the Alexandrian sentiment towards Rome: "Romans and Roman influence were uniformly disliked in Alexandria […] This hostility to Rome was essentially political and not racial in origin, and we are able to witness for the first time the emergence of Alexandria of something like a common movement against the intruder" (Fraser 90). The feeling was probably mutual, as we see increased acts of aggression against the most prominent Egyptian symbols in Rome at the time: Isis and Serapis.

Though it may seem odd for political acts to be a direct cause for religious persecution; there are historical precedents, and such acts have continued into recent history. Take for example the Crusades, which began as a political need to unify warring regional kings against a common enemy, or the backlash against the American Muslims following the events of September 11, 2001, or the ongoing Chinese repression of the Buddhist religion within historical Tibet.[30] There are countless examples throughout global history of religious persecution disguised as actions based on political need.

The exact construction dates of the temples to Isis and Serapis are unknown, but they existed in Caesar's time, for Catullus (Roman poet, ca. 84 BCE – ca. 54 BCE) refers to the Serapeum: "*'quaeso' inquit 'mihi, mi Catulle, paulum istos commoda; nam volo ad Serapim deferri'*" (Catullus X, 25-27).[31] Various scholars contend that Isis shrines and statues were also destroyed by senatorial mandate in 53, 50 and 48 BCE (give or take a year in either direction for each); Turcan succinctly describes the general course of events:

> "Far from being disheartened, Isiac militants had chapels privately built, but the Senate ordered their destruction in 53 BC. Three years later, the Senate again ordered the demolition of the temples of Isis and Serapis, but no workman dared put his hand to the task. Removing his toga praetexta, the consul seized an axe and struck the sanctuary doors (Val. Max., 1,3,4). Two years (48 BC), as prodigies had affected the Capitol, the augurs recommended razing the sacred enclosures of the Egyptian gods that had been built on the hill, where a 'priest of Isis Capitolina' perhaps officiated (CIL, 6, 2247). The fact that an exile managed to escape his would-be killers thanks to Isiac costume and the mask of Anubis is evidence of the respect shown to the Nilotic gods (Val. Max., 7,3,8; App., *bc*, 4, 47)" (Turcan Gods 121).

Continuing scholarly disputes about the precise dates of specific events will hinder further direct dating parallels between political actions and acts of aggression

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[30] For fascinating accounts of the Muslim experience in America following 9/11, see "War on Error" by Melody Moezzi. University of Arkansas Press. 2007.

[31] "Please, my Catullus, oblige [your litter] to me for a little while, for I want to be carried to the temple of Serapis". Translation by author.

against Isis. It will suffice to say that at least three separate instances of shrine destructions occurred between 54 and 47 BCE, during periods of ongoing Ptolemaic situations, Roman civil war, and Roman political and military aid to Egypt. These acts of persecution were not inspired by Isiac dogma, nor were they concerns about the Roman population turning away from the established state religion, or resulting from direct political disputes with Egypt.[32] Rather, they represented attacks on the perceived threats of the loss of cultural identity, Rome's current political tensions, and a visible manifestation of frustrations toward yet another sequence of instabilities caused by the untamable Orient.

The politics of the Late Roman Republic were predominantly bipartisan, consisting of *populares* (liberals) and *optimates* (conservatives), whose distinctions were "one of procedure in exercising government over the people, as between dictatorial 'advisory' authority and aggressive 'executive' power" (McDonald 139). Their constant bickering and legislative roadblocks resulted in the creation of an initially secret coalition (ca. 60-59 BCE) called the First Triumvirate, which included Gaius Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompey Magnus, and Marcus Licinius Crassus. This partnership was uneasy at the start, for each of the three men held different political views. Caesar was in the *Populares* camp; Pompey (at first) was an *Optimate*, as was Crassus, who was one of the wealthiest men in the period. The tendency for the *Populares* to be for the lower-class and disenfranchised masses often directly conflicted with the proposed legislations of the *Optimates*, whose primary goals were to secure the interests of the wealthy aristocracy. It can easily be inferred that many actions decreed by the *Optimate*-majority senate attempted to discredit the *Populares* with the people, including, but not limited to, acts of aggression against unsanctioned religions that were popular with them, such as that of Isis.

Caesar "wanted a freer hand than the strict senatorial procedures of the Optimates would allow" (McDonald 167). Pompey, as we have seen, had several large military triumphs in the east and was well regarded as both a military leader and politician. Crassus sought to annex Egypt, but his plan was overruled (Hornblower 857), and later he went to war against the Parthians in 53 BCE, where he was defeated and killed at the Battle of Carrhae. Crassus' death led to stronger tensions between Caesar and Pompey, as the two were then wrestling for greater rule. The First Triumvirate attempted to solidify their mutual dependence with marriages between the families, and after the death of Pompey's wife (Caesar's daughter, Julia) in 54 BCE, Crassus' death in 53 BCE, and Caesar's continued absence from Rome during his Gallic campaigns, the Triumvirate fell apart.

Due to the concern of the possibility that any individual praetor or consul could seize too much power, the situation arose there was "no consul or praetor or prefect of the city that had any successor, but at the beginning of the year the Romans were absolutely without a government in these branches" (Cassius Dio XL.46.3) in 52 BCE.[33] Cassius

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[32] The term "'[r]eligion' may be misleading: the Romans worshipped gods as it suited them and a Roman could worship Juno one day and Isis another without conflict." (Alston 308)

[33] "οὔκον οὔθ' ὕπατος οὔτε στρατηγὸς οὔτε πολίαρχός τίς σφας διεδέξατο, ἀλλὰ ἄναρκτοι κατὰ τοῦτο παντελῶς οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τὰ πρῶτα τοῦ ἔτους ἐγένοντο".

Dio notes that: "It seems to me that the decree regarding Serapis and Isis passed near the end of last year was as equal a portent as any, for the senate decided to tear down their temples which some people had built on their own account" (XL.47.3).[34] There are several interesting facets to his statement: 1) use of the plural ναοὺς ('temples') asserts that there were separate temples to Isis and Serapis, even if they were somehow conjoined and considered one sacred precinct (as they were later in the Campus Martius); 2) construction was undertaken by private citizens; 3) at a time when the predominantly *Optimates* senate needed support from the people, they opted to destroy privately-constructed temples; and 4) Cassius Dio perceived the destruction of those temples as an evil portent.

Pompey demanded that Caesar disband his army because his political term as proconsul had been completed. Caesar refused, and Pompey responded by "ram[ming] a resolution through the senate declaring Caesar a public enemy if he refused to lay down his command" (Lewis Civ 279) in 50 BCE. Caesar knew that without his armies, he would be defenseless against his enemies in Rome, so he refused the ultimatum.

Caesar's famous XIIIth Legion marched across the Rubicon in January 49 BCE and camped there until Caesar learned of the Senate's decision (Jiménez 68). The XIIIth, led by Marc Antony, was commanded to head toward Rome and secure various towns surrounding it (ibid). Caesar's movements were too swift for Pompey to muster his armies to defend the city, so Pompey "issued a declaration of civil war and abandoned Rome the same night, Cicero the next day. At the urging of Pompey, most *optimate* families and thousands of others fled south from the capital on the Appian Way into Campania and beyond" (69). Pompey had gone south to Brundisium and subsequently fled to Greece to claim his troops and raise ally support. Caesar secured Rome and made plans to defend vulnerable areas and grain shipments from Pompey's inevitable retaliation and attempts to weaken Caesar's hold and turn the people against him via empty stomachs.[35]

Ptolemy Auletes died in 51 BCE, and "his will named as his joint successors his eldest daughter, Cleopatra, then eighteen, and his eldest son, Ptolemy [XIII] then a lad of nine or ten; and Rome was named their guardian" (Lewis Life 13). In 49 BCE, Cleopatra attempted to remove her brother from rule but failed and she fled to Syria where she raised allies. Returning with armies in 48 BCE, she camped on the eastern edge of Egypt while her brother and his ministers went to oppose her near Pelusium.[36]

In the same year, Caesar decisively defeated Pompey in the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey fled to Egypt, confident of asylum and military support because "Ptolemy XIII, a boy of 13 strongly influenced by his chief minister, a eunuch named Ponthius, had supplied him with 50 ships and 500 men just a year earlier for the war against Caesar"

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[34] "δοκεῖ δὲ ἐμοιγε καὶ ἐκεῖνο τὸ τῷ προτέρῳ ἔτει, ἐπ᾿ ἐξόδῳ ατοῦ, περί τε τὸν Σάραπιν καὶ περὶ τὴν Ἴσιν ψηφισθὲν τέρας οὐδενὸς ἧττον γενέσθαι · τούς γὰρ ναοὺς αὐτῶν, οὓς ἰδίᾳ τινὲς ἐπεποίηντο, καθελεῖν τῇ βουλῇ ἔδοξεν".

[35] Because of Pompey's location in Greece, he was able to easily intercept grain shipments from Egypt and Africa, though at the time, Sicily and Sardinia were the most important provider of imported wheat and particularly critical during Caesar's altercation with Pompey (Jimènez 82).

[36] Summarized from Jimènez 169.

(Grenier 162). Pompey arrived in Egypt on 28 September 48 BCE (Hornblower 1216). Ptolemy and his advisors sought to "curry favor from Caesar, and to avoid any possible retaliation by Pompey should they simply refuse him refuge" (Jiménez 170), and assassinated Pompey. They decapitated him, took his consular ring, and presented both to Caesar when he arrived in Alexandria. Plutarch reports Caesar's response to Ptolemy's offering: he "turned away from him in loathing, as from an assassin; and when he received Pompey's signet ring on which was engraved a lion holding a sword in its paws, he burst into tears" (Plutarch 80). Lucan holds a different version of Caesar's reaction: he "squeezed out groans from his happy breast, not able to conceal his mind's conspicuous joy except by tears, and he destroys the tyrant's savage service, preferring to lament his son-in-law's torn-off head than be in debt for it" (Lucan 205). Regardless of Caesar's true feelings toward seeing the severed head of his nemesis, Pompey, he was infuriated at Ptolemy for having ordered the murder of a consul of Rome, and needing time to procure money to pay his armies, Caesar decided to remain in Alexandria to arbitrate the quarrel between Ptolemy and Cleopatra.

Cleopatra saw an opportunity to regain her throne in Caesar, and at great risk, she secreted herself from exile into Caesar's quarters in the Alexandria palace to meet with him. Though there is much debate about the romanticized version of Caesar's and Cleopatra's initial meeting commonly portrayed on the silver screen; it will suffice to say that they developed a relationship and that Caesar authoritatively placed Cleopatra on the throne along with her brother Ptolemy XII, so that he would "share the throne with Cleopatra in the way that their father wished" (Jiménez 173). This arrangement was obviously not suitable for Ptolemy, and a 5-month engagement known as the Alexandrian War ensued. Caesar fought against Ptolemy to uphold "Rome's" decision; he won the war, "left a substantial Roman garrison behind him" (Fraser 90) after the war, continued his relationship with Cleopatra, and in 47 BCE, became a father for the first time. Though paternity of Cleopatra's first child Caesarion has never been definitively established, the important thing is that it didn't really matter: Cleopatra had asserted that her child was Caesar's, named the child after him, and those two facts were in the minds of the Roman people. Caesar remained with Cleopatra until late 47 BCE, at which time he acceded to senatorial discontent over his political decisions and his extended stay in Egypt, and returned to Rome.

Let us recall the approximate dates for the three separate destructions of Isis' shrines and alters in Rome: 53 to 47 BCE. This range takes us from the establishment of the First Triumvirate and Crassus' failed attempt to annex Egypt to the Egyptian assassination of Pompey through the birth of Caesarion. Several wars between Romans and between Rome and Egypt would seem to explain the Senate's move to destroy the shrines of Isis and Serapis, the visible signs of "Egyptian" influence in Rome.

Shortly thereafter, Cleopatra visited Rome with Caesarion, and the intimate ties between 'Imperator' and 'Queen' resulted in an growing concerns of an 'Imperator' turned 'King' – an anathema to the Romans, who feared above all else the return to despotic monarchy. Cleopatra had become a symbolic vehicle through which a Roman ruler would don the diadem. She had fashioned herself as Isis incarnate, "was addressed as the New Isis" (Blond 90), and had therefore indelibly tied Isis' fate to her own. Caesar supported this Cleopatra-as-goddess image in Rome:

"Caesar ordered a gilt-bronze statue of Cleopatra placed beside that of Venus Genetrix, clearly associating her with the founder and protecting goddess of the Julian *gens*. The incident is significant in that Caesar not only implied that the Egyptian Queen was to be part of his family, but also elevated a human being, for the first time in Rome, to the level of a goddess […] For all that was suggested, there is no surviving record of any objection to Cleopatra's statue" (Grenier 213).

Roman concern over Caesar's rise to 'King' was partially realized, as he exercised supreme power from 49 until 45 BCE while holding the consulship, and later, dictatorship, of Rome. In 44 BCE, he was named dictator for life, to which his political opponents responded with a plot to assassinate him. The conspiracy was completed on the Ides of March, and the struggle for ultimate power of Rome rejoined. Cleopatra, with expeditious stealth, returned to Alexandria to observe from a safe distance the political struggles of Rome to ascertain the fate of her own country. Caesar, the man who placed her on the throne, had been assassinated as tyrant; it would remain to be seen how the mandates of a tyrant would hold.

In his will, Caesar adopted his grand-nephew Octavian, then 18 years old, and bequeathed onto him his entire estate as well as full rights to his name. To fill the gap of leadership over Rome, Caesar's general Marc Antony, along with Octavian and Lepidus, formed the Second Triumvirate, an "official commission exercising supreme authority" (McDonald 171). This coalition began as unsteady as the first, for Marc Antony had attempted to deprive Octavian of the monetary portion of his inheritance. Quarrels ensued, but they had established an uneasy truce in order to share power instead of bringing Rome back into another civil war.

Isis received a respite from persecution and was "temporarily recognized by the triumvirs in 43" (Scullard 207) and subsequently the triumvirs "promised to build a temple to Isis and Serapis to win favour with the populace" (Turcan Gods 121) at the Republic's expense. The order was never brought to fruition. Despite the broken promise, "worship of Isis in Rome was [officially] established by Antony in 43 BC" (Alston 313). So in 43 BCE we finally see the official recognition of Isis in Rome. And, not surprisingly, the context is highly political: it could be argued that this recognition was intended to dramatize the loss of power by the Senate and the *Optimates* by putting Isis' power and influence in Rome on display.

The Roman territories at this time were vast, and the triumvirs divided administration of the regions between them, with "Antony taking the East, Octavian and Lepidus taking the west" (McDonald 171). Consequently, Antony willingly and perhaps eagerly chose to oversee the Orient and associate himself with the excessive opulence of the East. To solidify political ties, Octavian gave Antony his sister Octavia in marriage in 40 BCE. The Second Triumvirate, in an increasingly complicated tale of suspicion and treachery, ended the same way as the first one – in civil war. Marc Antony went to Egypt to seek support from Cleopatra for the impending war with Octavian. Cleopatra, then 29, wooed Marc Antony; they fell in love, and "in 33, if not already in 37, he consented to become Cleopatra's Prince Consort by Greek dynastic law, although such a marriage was

not valid under Roman law" (Cary 296). In 37 BCE, Octavian had sent his sister (Marc Antony' wife) Octavia to Alexandria in an attempt to remind him of his obligations back in Rome; Marc Antony sent her home (Cary 295). Openly at odds with each other, Antony and Octavian prepared for battle while the Republic braced for yet another civil war.

Octavian used all of the propagandistic tools at his disposal in Rome to turn popular opinion against Antony. Antony made things easy for Octavian because his policies were clearly against the better interests of Rome:

> "[Caesarion] was now proclaimed King of Kings, and his mother Cleopatra was named Queen of Kings; together the were to rule Egypt and Cyprus. Under them the three children of Antony and Cleopatra were to govern parts of the East, whether Roman territory, client-kingdoms or even the lands of foreign kings. Alexander Helios (the Sun), aged six, received Armenia, Parthia and Media, his twin sister Cleopatra Selene (the Moon) got Cyrenaiza and Libya, while the two-year-old Ptolemy Philadelphus obtained Syria and Cilicia … Had all these transfers of territory been carried onto effect, the result would have been to form an empire within the Roman Empire, and in all probability to disintegrate the Roman dominions into two rival states" (Cary 295).

Between these "Donations of Alexandria", Antony's affront to his good Roman wife Octavia via his divorce in 32, the publication of his will which revealed his desire to be buried in Alexandria next to Cleopatra, the rumor that he "intended to make Cleopatra the Queen of Rome and to transfer the seat of Roman government to Egypt" (Cary 296), it was not difficult to sway the opinion of those who had formerly been Antony's supporters in Rome. Back in Egypt, "Antony won the affection, if not the respect, of the Alexandrian people (particularly those with his own tastes), but this was an exception, explicable partly as due to respect for Cleopatra, and acceptance of the high rank she had bestowed on him, and partly to his own winning personality" (Fraser 90). His popularity in Alexandria, however, did not help him circumvent the storm that was heading his way from Rome, as Octavian had declared war on Cleopatra and Egypt in 31 BCE.

Antony and the Egyptian fleet were conquered by Octavian's forces led by general Agrippa in the decisive battle at the Battle of Actium. Antony and Cleopatra retreated to Alexandria with Octavian and his general Agrippa hot on their heels. Antony and Cleopatra had committed suicide instead of being captured by Octavian. Cleopatra's suicide led to a joy-filled poem by Horace, which calls all Romans to rejoice in her death while claiming her suicide more noble than being captured by Augustus for parading in his inevitable triumph:

Drink, comrades, drink; give loose to mirth!
With joyous footsteps beat the earth,
And spread before the War-God's shrine
The Salian feast, the sacrificial wine.

Bring forth from each ancestral hoard
Strong draughts of Caecuban long-stored,
Till now forbidden. Fill the bowl!
For she is fallen, that great Egyptian Queen
With all her crew contaminate and obscene,
Who mad with triumph, in her pride
The manly might of Rome defied,
And vowed destruction to the Capitol.

As the swift falcon stooping from above
With beak unerring strikes the dove;
Or as the hunter tracks the deer
Over Haemonian plains of snow;
Thus Caesar came. Then on her royal State
With Mareotic fumes inebriate,
A shadow fell of fate and fear;
And thro' the lurid glow
From all her burning galleys shed
She turned her last surviving bark, and fled.

She sought no refuge on a foreign shore.
She sought her doom : far nobler 'twas to die
Than like a panther caged in Roman bonds to lie.
The sword she feared not. In her realm once more,
Serene amongst deserted fanes,
Unmoved 'mid vacant halls she stood;
Then to the aspic gave her darkening veins,
And sucked the death into her blood.

                                        (Horace XXXVII 68-9)

Because Antony had previously "declared *urbi et orbi* that Caesarion (Ptolemy Caesar) was the legitimate son of Julius Caesar" (Cary 295), Octavian had the child murdered, while the children of Antony and Cleopatra were allowed to live. With the last of the Ptolemaic royal line dead and the children either killed or taken into custody, Octavian "converted Egypt into a Roman province under a prefect responsible to himself, and carried off the royal treasure which Cleopatra had recently replenished by confiscations and by the seizure of hitherto untouched temple funds" (Cary 297). Thus ended the civil war, and the Roman Republic. The Roman Republic and the independence of Egypt ceased to exist at the same time, confirming the close relationship

between Egyptian and Roman politics. Taken in this light, an independent Egypt was somehow a sign or gauge of the continued existence of the *Res Publica*.

Isis during the Reign of Augustus (27 BCE - 14 CE)

With Egypt finally having been annexed by Rome and the power struggles for supreme rule leaving no one else standing, Octavian (hereinafter "Augustus") became emperor after a brief period in which Augustus, working under the established rules and procedures in Roman law, and assumed political domination by combination of his existing offices and powers; this produced the illusion of a continued republic. Augustus then set forth a campaign to reshape Rome with copious allusions to its glorious past. Augustus "seduced the army with bonuses, and his cheap food policy was successful bait for civilians" (Tacitus 32), thereby securing the support of the people.

Augustus began a program of social and urban programs and reforms, which changed the fabric of Rome's physical and abstract landscapes. The former included new building projects in the sacred and secular realms, and the latter included what he intended to be a restoration of traditional Roman morals and traditions, through which he sought to eject foreign influences from Rome, especially religious ones. Augustus recognized that "Isis, like Cleopatra, was seductive [and that the] gods of Egypt threatened to undermine the new moral foundations of a society which Augustus hoped to establish by legislation. From this vantage point, it may be suggested that Augustus might have been more successful if instead of requesting sophisticated women to worship archaic abstractions of female virility, he had co-opted the cult of Isis and exploited her as an example of a faithful wife and loving mother" (Pomeroy 224). Augustus, however, chose to try to expel her due to her foreignness and inextricable association with Cleopatra, and perhaps to promote a carefully mixed political message. On the one hand, the "Roman revolution" succeeded: the grain dole, debt cancellation, and the settlement of veterans all went forward (Augustus' *Popularis* in practice); on the other, one of the lost potent symbols of lower-class influence, Isis, was suppressed and/or expelled (Augustus' *Optimate* in imagery).

The City of Rome as seat of the empire had political need to enforce cultural purity. Though this appears to speak against the idea of bringing Egypt's material culture into Rome, it actually reinforces the idea of returning to true Roman ideals, because a common tradition of many civilizations, also true in Rome, was to erect trophies on the locations of victory and to plunder the vanquished. As Augustus was striving to expel social and religious facets of foreign culture from Rome, he was bringing in the material culture as *spolia*, as visual reminders of his conquest over Egypt in the name of Rome.

An exhaustive account of Augustus' accomplishments during his 41 years of rule is beyond the scope of this paper; it will suffice to say that he revitalized nearly all facets of private and public life, undertook massive building projects, and performed grand overhauls on domestic and foreign policy. Let us focus on those things that directly relate to religion, Isis, and Egypt.

Augustus was a brilliant tactician who knew how to manipulate the media to garner favorable public opinion. One such tactic was his commissioning of Virgil to write what later became known as the *Aeneid* – a romanticized account of the foundation

of Rome that contained semi-historical passages concerning Augustus' role in the protection of Rome from foreign influences. In this poem, in which Augustus saved the Roman people from worshipping "barking dogs" – a direct allusion to Egyptian religion – he portrays the Battle of Actium on a shield given to Aeneas, progenitor of Rome's founders. It describes Augustus on one end of the battlefield; on the other was "Antony, Conqueror of the East, Fresh from the Red Sea, [who] marshaled his armies, a rich mélange of all the Orient's might From Egypt to Bactria, and in his convoy – To his eternal shame – was his Egyptian wife" (Virgil XIII.782-7). In a concerted effort to completely alienate Egypt and Cleopatra from the sympathies of the Romans, he continued: "Among them the Queen, rattling Egyptian timbrels, Called up her warships, still unaware Of the twin snakes at her back. Barking Anubis And monstrous gods of every description Fought against Neptune, Minerva, and Venus" (XIII.797-801). The obvious clashing of the gods was also subtly nuanced to evoke anger at the Egyptians. Venus was the guardian of the Julian family, and considered the mother of Aeneas, whose descendants included Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar (albeit by adoption). "Virgil diffused the ugliness of this very human struggle for political dominance by making it parallel with a divine struggle" (Takács 269), forcing the Roman readers to ally themselves with the Roman deities of their homeland, and therefore, with Augustus. "Barking Anubis and monstrous gods of every shape" were described as attacking not only the mother of Caesar, beloved of the people, but also of Augustus, the man who ended the civil war and finally brought peace to the realm.

Despite scholarly debates regarding Virgil's possible sarcastic tone throughout the poem, in this epic, Augustus' patron god was Apollo, god of sun. It then becomes an interesting "coincidence" that the first two obelisks that Augustus had plundered from Egypt were from Heliopolis (literally, "city of the sun"), and that, above all possible material culture available for despoiling, Augustus began with obelisks, which are symbols of the Egyptian sun-god, Ra. Further, "symbols of *aegypto capta* adorned Octavian's coins, and reliefs of Isis featured in his temple of Apollo, all speaking to an Egypt now controlled and contained in Roman conquest. It would be a bit of an understatement to say that images of Egypt could be highly politicized" (Petersen 40). Augustus succeeded in projecting two important themes of his political agenda and decoration of the city: demonstrating his support by the sun gods (whatever country they hail from) and demonstrating his genius in the conquest of an ancient and great country.

The approach toward Isis and Egypt seems profoundly contradictory during this period of material expropriation from Egypt: she was actively persecuted within Rome for the next half century while at the same time "Egyptian artistic motifs were used even more extensively than before [the Battle of Actium]" (Takács 269). Augustus worked to develop agricultural settlements throughout Africa in order to reduce Rome's dependence on Egyptian grain, and in 28 BCE, he "prohibited Egyptian cults within the pomerium" (Turcan Gods 121). "The new regime, just as had the Senate much earlier, saw in these cults a danger of alienation, the dissolution of society, and the creation of secret cults" (Zanker 109).

Despite the prohibition of Isaic worship in Rome, Isis' large sanctuary on the Campus Martius was "constructed early in Augustus's reign (ca. 20-10 BCE), [and] makes clear that Egyptian cults had become quite fashionable despite official opposition"

Fig. 10. Inscription above doorway to Isis' temple in Pompeii. Photo by author. 2007.

(Petersen 40). Agrippa, now a Roman consul, " forbade anyone to practice [the worship of Isis and Serapis], 'even in the suburbs, this side of an eighth half-stade', that is, less than a kilometer" (Turcan Gods 121) from Rome in 21 BCE. Here we see a subtle shift in the political approach towards Isis, in which two disparate goals are attained: the suppression of Isis in the form of banning her worship, which confirms Senatorial prestige and the return of good old Rome, and the choice not to remove or destroy her tangible presence in Rome, which confirms his role as patron to the everyday Roman. Literary evidence recalls no temple, shrine, or altar destructions during Augustus' reign as emperor, so notwithstanding the official mandates which kept the goddess but made outlaws of the worshippers. We can, however, conclude that worship continued within Rome since the structures were intact—even within walking distance of Agrippa's pantheon.[37]

Outside of the city of Rome, however, her worship was left alone. For example, Pompeii, a prosperous port and resort-town, had hosted a large temple to Isis since its establishment as a Roman colony in 80 BCE. Isis was continually worshipped in Pompeii – her temple extended, rebuilt and restored as need be – throughout the entire political upheaval in Rome. The temple was rebuilt by a freedman in his freeborn son's name after the earthquake in 62 CE, basically gifting the 6-year-old with something that no freedman could have: a political career. The inscription above the temple doorway (Fig. 10) reads: "Numerius Popidius Celsinus, son of Numerius, restored the Temple of Isis from the ground up, after it had been totally destroyed by an earthquake. The Town Council, coopted him into their assembly when he was only six years old, without charge, in consideration of his generosity" (Translation by author).[38] Augustus', and later, Tiberius' focus appears to have settled on the maintenance of purity and morality of

Rome proper, allowing other regions to continue as before.

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[37] Agrippa commissioned the construction of the pantheon to commemorate the victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. The sacred precinct to Isis and Serapis lies partially beneath modern-day *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, which is just across the street from the pantheon.

[38] "*N POPIDIVS N F CELSINVS / AEDEM ISIDIS TERRAE MOTV CONLAPSAM / AFVNDAMENTO P(ecunia) S(ua) RESTITVIT. HVNC DECVRIONES OB LIBERALITATEM / CVM ESSET ANNORVM SEX ORDINI SVO GRATIS ADLEGERVNT*".

The conquest of Egypt and banishment of Isis ironically led to an increased visual presence of Egypt in Rome not only encouraged by, but implemented by, Augustus, even in his own home: "a whole panoply of Egyptianizing ornament, already present in the House of Livia and found in more developed form in some rooms of the House of Augustus, seems to take precedence over the architecture. Carefully painted lotus-bud capitals and friezes, palmettes, rosettes, and symbols of the cult of Isis appear everywhere" (Clarke 52). Roman domiciles served very different functions than they do today. Whereas many contemporary societies consider the home a private place to rest and get away from the world, Romans conducted business there, meeting with their clients, making deals, having business dinners and so on. Their homes were open to all clients and business associates. Augustus' decoration of his house on the Palatine with Egyptian motifs was a political statement of his successes in the East and the power he commands; the vanquished Egypt was reduced to being gazed upon at will by its conqueror. Additionally, the connection between Augustus and the lower classes, upon which his power over the elite classes partially rested, was subtly reinforced.

In addition to the use of Egyptian motifs in Roman homes, other forms of Egyptian art began to take a presence on the Roman landscape via the political introduction of Egyptian material culture. Augustus brought the first obelisks from Heliopolis (a region of modern-day Cairo) in approximately 10 BCE. His ability to transport the obelisks spoke to a great degree of his power and wealth, as the manpower required for the safe transport and erection of the obelisks were Herculean.

Egyptian obelisks were most often created in pairs to decorate temple entrances; these first two obelisks brought in by Augustus were separated immediately upon arrival in Rome. One decorated the *spina* of the Circus Maximus, a prominent location which would be in the gaze of the Roman people regularly (today in *Piazza del Popolo*), and the other was used as the *gnomen* of sundial built adjacent to his own mausoleum (today in *Piazza di Montecitorio*.[39] The sundial, due to the swampy lands of the Campus Martius upon which it was built, sank and lost accuracy quickly, but the visual presence of Egypt at the emperor's burial chamber remained for centuries.

Augustus successfully navigated the precarious waters of not denigrating the Egypto-philic preferences and actions of his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, while suppressing the preferences and actions of his potential nemeses, Marc Antony and Cleopatra VII. He also did not depricate Isis' ability to represent the lower classes in Rome and their political/economic needs. Therefore, Augustus' "inclusion of these originally Egyptian monuments equipped with Latin inscriptions into Rome's visual landscape expressed both Augustus' claim to power and Rome's political superiority" (Takács 270), hence promoting his and his adoptive father's grandeur and triumphs in conjunction with those of Rome.

The obelisks, the Egyptianizing motifs in his house on the Palatine, even his policy of Egypt being an imperial province over which he personally governed, all show not an affinity towards Egypt, but a demonstrated subservience of Egypt to him and the empire. All that "stuff" was an ongoing triumphal march for him; he placed Egypt on show as the vanquished and contrasted that with his (propagandizing efforts of)

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[39] Summarized from Claridge 192, 264.

reinstating "true Roman values". His seemingly antithetical approach of simultaneously subverting Isis while adopting Egyptianizing elements shows how well Augustus balanced the needs of the Empire and the needs of his "real" constituency.

Concerned over the troublesome Egypt, "August retained Egypt as his private estate, forbade senators to visit it without leave, and entrusted its governance to a humble knight, Cornelius Gallus, who owed all to him" (Charlesworth 12). Egypt was far too rich and far too important to be left to any but the most trustworthy person. He initially appointed Cornelius Gallus to govern, but "he was apparently recalled, and because of the insolence to which his pride had encouraged him, was interdicted from the house and provinces of Augustus. He was then indicted (and condemned?) in the senate, and driven to commit suicide (27/6 BC)" (Hornblower 395). From then on, Augustus managed Egypt himself, though in his mind, and in the minds of other politicians, "Alexandria" and "Egypt" were not interchangeable terms. The former was politically dangerous, and the latter was a region whose natural resources were an asset to Rome. Even the title of the prefect showed this distinction:

> "In the Roman period Alexandria was not treated as part of the Imperial province of Egypt either in title or in law. Its official nomenclature was 'Alexandria ad Aegyptum', or, in Greek, normally Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἧ πρὸς Αἰγύπτωι, "Alexandria by Egypt', not 'Alexandria in Egypt', and the full title of the Prefect of Egypt was 'Praefectus Alexandreae et Aegypti'. Similarly, in official documents, Romans writing in Alexandria speak of journeying *to* Egypt" (Fraser 107).

Prior to Egypt's annexation in 30 BCE, "there is no evidence for regular imports [of grain] from Egypt" (Brunt 26). Though it would not be until 70 CE when Rome depended primarily on Egypt for its grain, its shipments increased proportionally to the population growth of Rome. This leads us to two facets of imperial rule that defined the authority of the emperors: grain and water, both of which were closely associated with Egypt, both of which were under the perceived divine purview of Isis.

Augustus had also carefully staged how he was perceived in Egypt. Cassius Dio reports: "When Augustus was in Egypt, he revered the majesty of Serapis" (Gibbon 39), hence expressing his recognition of Serapis as patron saint of the Ptolemies, which was important because Augustus was now officially the Ptolemy of Alexandria. He did not, and could not, openly revere Isis in Alexandria due to her close association with Cleopatra, Isis-incarnate. Later in his reign, however, he acknowledged her importance, and dedicated to her a new sanctuary at Dendera (Arnold 69). Additionally, "a shrine with Isis *galactotrophousa* ["divine milk-feeder"] is opened by none other than Augustus, who offers her the gift of myrrh" (Witt Ancient 63). This shrine was constructed in Philae, her most sacred sanctuary in Egypt.

The Beginnings of the Imperial Cult

Shortly after the death of Caesar, the members of the Second Triumvirate elected "to build a temple and institute a state-cult in honour of *divus Iulius*" (Cary 288). Thus

the post-mortem apotheosis of Caesar paved the way for the 1 January 42 BCE edict proclaiming Augustus *divi filius* (son of a god) (ibid). Intentional or not, "the Ptolemaic ruler concept and its myth of succession and dynastic rule captured existing political realities at Rome" (Takács 276). Augustus was also deified after his death; it would not be until Caligula that the assumption of divine honors during a lifetime would be asserted.

Festivals were held to honor the deified rulers in Rome, sacrifices were made to ensure their health, games were regularly celebrated in their honor, images were revered in private household shrines, and countless other activities, large or small, were established to signify both religious support and demonstrable agreement to his actions.[40] The creation of the imperial cult was therefore a manifestation of the existing interdependence between politics and religion as well as the growing interchangeability of emperor and empire. The health of Augustus bespoke the health of the Empire, and making offerings to one showed a desire for the other's continued triumphs. Overall, the successful foundation of the imperial cult reflected a response to the intrinsic change in the needs of Rome as it shifted from Republic to Empire:

> "The development of the imperial cult was a way of trying to understand and make room for imperial power in the traditional local urban panthea of Greek cities. The increased interest in Eastern cults and mystery religions is part of the same phenomenon in which the religious community of the city becomes less important as the new community of the empire became more influential. These are gradual developments, but in a world in which religion and politics were so closely linked, such a fundamental political change as the development of the Roman empire was bound to affect the religious outlook of all the inhabitants of the empire and lead to attempts to define their place within this new world. The religious developments of this period are intimately connected with the changes in political and social life that came about with the creation of the Roman Empire" (Alston 318).

Isis in Augustan Literature

As with the changes that occurred during the Greek transition to Hellenism, we see in Rome a similar explosion of art, both material and literary, in the Late Republic and Early Empire. In an attempt to redefine Roman culture in the Empire, literature demonstrated itself as a unifying element in the sense of developing a revised national identity. It is personal and raw and full of human emotion, though the influence of Augustan classicism and restraint was often a subtle damper, and depictions of Isis varied between a heroine and a societal bane.

Unlike traditional Roman religion, which was presided over by a select (and often elite) group of people, Isis' worshippers, "men and women alike, actually took part in the cult instead of watching a ceremonial performance by others" (Scullard 361). This characteristic of Isis placed her worship in direct public view: festivals included

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[40] Summarized from Beard 206-7.

processions throughout the streets, adherents wore white linen, priests were tonsured, and penitents performed their atonements outside the temple and on the banks of the Tiber.

In Rome, we see the Egyptian gods appearing with increasing frequency in contemporary literature. Ovid, for example, asks his mistress to ward off a potential lover with a lie: "Pretend you have a headache, or make Isis your excuse, then you can plead religious abstention" (Ovid I.1.72-3), and to protect his girlfriend Corinna "who got pregnant – and rashly tried an abortion. Now she's laying in danger of her life" (II.13.1-2) and continues "In mercy, Goddess: through one spare both of us; in your Hands her life lies – and mine in hers. She has kept your hold days, a regular worshipper, Asperged by the eunuch priests With dripping laurel-switches—and your compassion for girls in labour is well-known" (II.13.15-20).

While Ovid's attitude toward Isis is mostly favorable, he is one of the few that can be said of. Tibellus at first rages against Isis for the abstinence of his girlfriend Delia (Tibullus 1.2.23), then later prays to Isis to cure his illness: "*Nunc, dea, nunc succurre mihi (nam posse mederi picta docet templis multa tabella tuis), ut mea votives persolvens Delia voces ante sacras lino tecta fores sedeat; bisque die resoluta comas tibi dicere laudes insignis turba debeat in Pharia*" (Tibullus 1.2.27-34).[41]

Other authors bore witness to the more esoteric public rituals of the cult. Juvenal writes: "At daybreak, in winter, our devout woman will break the ice on the Tiber to plunge into it three times and will dip her shivering head into the eddies; then, naked and shuddering, she will drag herself on her bloodied knees the length of the Field of the Proud king" (Juvenal 122). Despite the spectacularly unrealistic notion of ice on the Tiber, Juvenal's sarcasm and loathing for the cult continued with "if a wife fell short of the strict observance of the holy days, there could always be some sort of arrangement with the priest of Osiris: 'A fat goose, a little cake, and the god lets himself be corrupted!' (Juv., 6, 540f)" (Juvenal 123). Propertius refers to Egyptian religion as a curse and to Isis as a cruel goddess, Diodorus Siculus refers to her as a healer: the variations appear to be endless, which mirrors the double-edged attitude toward Isis reflected in the ambiguous use of her in official imagery.

But let us say that the works of most authors were not sanctioned by Augustus as Virgil's *Aeneid* was. Both the official and unofficial works, however, demonstrated how "Latin literature constitutes a crucial site of contest over the distribution of power in the Roman world as well as a social practice with real historic consequences of its own" (Habinek 6).

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[41] "Now, goddess, help me now, for the many pictures in your temples show that you are able to heal. My Delia, paying the price of my vow, shall sit in front of [your] sacred doors clothed in linen, and twice daily, with hair loosened, shall speak your praises, distinguished in the crowd of the [adherents of] Pharos, as she should be". Translated by author.

Isis After Augustus

Tiberius, in general, followed Augustus' agenda of cultural purification within Rome, identifiable via "his destruction of the temple of Isis in A.D. 19, his expulsion of the Jews, his attitude to the Druids, and his driving out Chaldaean astrologers early in his reign" (Scullard 359). He also ordered "thousands of [Isis] worshippers deported from the city of Rome. There is little doubt that Tiberius intended to totally purge Rome of the foreign goddess" (Pomeroy 224), and his actions following the "Paulina scandal" have already been described (p. 2-3).

Also following Augustan tradition, Tiberius harshly banned Isis from Rome while putting up a shot of worshiping her in Egypt, thereby placating the Egyptian portion of the Empire. He is depicted on the exterior walls presenting the divine Triad "with milk and incense, and makes various gifts to Isis: a collar, geese and gazelles" (Witt 63) at Isis' most sacred sanctuary on the island of Philae in Egypt.

While Augustus had an express need to pursue a complex and contradictory policy with respect to Isis (a trend continued by his immediate successor Tiberius), this gradually yielded with successive emperors to acceptance and promotion, relative to the decreasing likelihood that the Senate would actually try to replace the imperial system. We see this shift of imperial hostilities toward Isis change into a more engaged and relaxed mutually-beneficial relationship via the actions and policies of subsequent emperors. As grew emperor expressed more favor towards Isis, public opinion improved, and as Isis worship expanded and gained more prestige, her "support" of the emperor lent a divine approval to his rule.

Caligula succeeded Tiberius, and shortly thereafter, shrines dotted the hills of Rome and the surrounding countryside, emperors minted coins depicting the Egyptian gods and their temples, empresses were depicted as Isis, senators sought initiation into the cult, and many other examples of the political acceptance of Isis were prevalent. Once Egypt became the primary source of grain to Rome in 70 CE, Rome never fully outgrew its dependency on Egypt for food; and Isis, as symbol of the fertile Nile, may have enjoyed a fortuitous revival based on the need to feed the growing population of Rome.

Alston succinctly summarized the increased favor the later Roman emperors bestowed onto Isis:

> "Caligula rebuilt the Iseum Campense and Nero introduced Isaic festivals into the Roman calendar. Domitian once more rebuilt the Iseum Campense while the Iseum at Beneventum, where his portrait as pharaoh was exhibited, may have been constructed during his reign. Rome had three large Isea: the Campense, one in Regio III and one on the Capitol; there were also smaller temples on the Caelian, Esquiline and Aventine Hills" (Alston 313)

Subsequent emperors increased Isis' visibility and prestige throughout the Roman landscape, culminating in a "Golden Age" of sorts for Isis during from 208 until Constantine, whose 313 CE Edict of Milan legalized the previously-contraband Christian religion. Later emperors granted Christians increasing levels of power until the

Christians, previously persecuted for their beliefs, zealously oppressed all other religions in the empire until the "pagan" religions were forced underground. The religions of Isis and Mithras (another important Eastern cult) proved to be serious contenders to Christianity for religious supremacy in the empire, and as such, were specifically targeted. The Theodosian Code, established in 438 CE, "aimed to shut down pagan sanctuaries in the Roman Empire" (Frankfurter Pilgrimage 234); the last recorded Isaic festival is recorded in this century. Scholars argue that Christianity's failure to suppress Isis in this period resulted in the elevated role of the Virgin Mary and an ensuing syncretism with Isis.

Cybele: Compare and Contrast

In order to place the actions for or against Isis into proper perspective, let us take a moment to review another imported Oriental goddess, Cybele. She arrived in Rome from Asia Minor in 204-5 BCE (Hornblower 416), and "was the first deity from the East to be officially consecrated by the Romans within their walls" (Turcan Cults 28). Like the Isaic priests, priests of Cybele were immediately recognizable on the streets of Rome. While the Isaic priests were tonsured, Cybele's priests wore their hair long (Turcan Cults 20). "Because this goddess was served by castrated priests, the Roman Republic did not allow its citizens to be initiated" (Jeffers 98), nor were citizens allowed to "enter the annexes occupied by these eunuchs and take part in the frenzied 'orgies'" (Turcan Cults 37). She had a temple built on the Palatine which was destroyed by fire, rebuilt in 111 BCE, and again in 3 CE by Augustus "[not] in marble, but only in tufa (peperino)" (Zanker 109), and she had a festival during April on the official Roman calendar (Turcan Cults 37).

In Cybele we see an Oriental goddess who was better incorporated into Roman religion in early on in the Republic. Though she was never expelled from Rome, as was other Oriental deities, there were legislations in place that prevented participation by the Roman population. Her cult, as well as the Sibylline Books, were controlled by the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* – a priestly college comprised mostly of Roman elite males whose primary function was to consult the Books upon senatorial request.[42] Thus we see another Oriental cult that was tightly controlled, yet was not persecuted, as was Isis. From this we may conclude that Cybele's presence was not met with as much anxiety due to its ability to be tightly controlled by Roman politics, its failure to assert class and female equality, and perhaps even its disassociation from Egypt.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have looked through our own Western perceptions, and through the lenses of ancient and modern Western authors, at the continuous swings of attitude toward Isis, an Oriental goddess from Egypt. She was exalted by pharaohs and Ptolemies, rejected by the Late Republicans and two Roman Emperors, exalted by later emperors, and rejected from Constantine onwards. As we have seen, a detailed review of

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[42] Summarized from Hornblower 418, 1289.

history and societal perceptions surrounding the cult of Isis has revealed how Roman politics through the Late Republic and the early part of the Roman Empire swung from acceptance to persecution, and how such swings are understandable only in terms of enforcing political might, fearing that Oriental ideologies might infect western culture, and presenting images of the conquered as well as the triumph of a good deal of the *popularis* agenda—a triumph that Augustus both disguised with his suppression of Isis and her imagery and recognized with his promotion of Isis and her imagery.

Modern cultures have a tendency to look at certain conflicts where religion is involved as purely religious in nature, but this thesis has revealed that we must look past the superficial appearances of religious conflicts to the underling social, political and economic causes and conditions. Only in this way might more constructive ways of understanding and dealing with conflict may be revealed.

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