

CLSK6002

# Isis; Power, Religion and Femininity.



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**‘She was “cleverer than millions of gods”  
and a better of guardian of Egypt’s borders  
“than millions of soldiers”’**

## Abstract

The ancient Egyptian goddess Isis was a central figure in mythology and religious practices throughout ancient Egypt. Her influence and significance were spread across a number of different aspects of ancient Egyptian life. This study investigates the place of Isis within ancient Egyptian notions of power, religious practices and ideas of womanhood. This study uses as a focus the ancient Egyptian statue of the goddess Isis from Saqqara which was placed in a tomb within the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty in the reign of Amasis II (570- 526 BC).<sup>1</sup> The research uses a materialities approach to investigate the statue, offers an investigation of the myths of Isis, presented in Plutarch's *Moralia Isis and Osiris*, and provides an analysis of Isis within the love poems of the New Kingdom. This study reveals that Isis presented a figure of authority both political and religious as a co-ruler with Osiris and that she had a significant role to play as representing the ideal of womanhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Goddio and Masson- Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

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## **Title Page's Photographic Plate and Quotation**

### **PLATE**

Isis statue, 26th Dynasty SAQQARA, British Museum, code: CG38354

Goddio, F. and Masson-Berghoff, A. (2016) The BP exhibition Sunken Cities Egypt's  
Lost Words. United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson Ltd. p. 152.

### **QUOTATION**

Pinch 2002, p. 151.

## Introduction

When thinking of Isis, initially her position within Egypt and as a goddess is considered. Precursors for the Isis and Osiris myth were set up by 1570 BC and continued until 529 when her temple at Philae was closed.<sup>2</sup> Isis' reign as goddess ran throughout ancient Egypt and into other ancient cultures.<sup>3</sup> The worship of Isis incorporated a number of aspects; she was the mother of the god Horus and therefore was worshipped for the fertility of women and of the harvest.<sup>4</sup> Isis was worshipped because she mummified Osiris bringing him back to life to become god of the underworld.<sup>5</sup> Isis was worshipped through songs, poems, statues and sculptures, paintings, feasting and dancing.<sup>6</sup> It was performed at all levels of ancient Egyptian society from the highest elite to the poorest members of society.<sup>7</sup> Isis is associated with Osiris and Horus, and therefore the throne and power meant that Isis was more accessible for men to worship rather than a goddess which related only to female aspects of life.<sup>8</sup>

The act of worship today is experienced differently to how to ancient Egyptians would experience it. Worship for the ancient Egyptian was an all-encompassing way of life.<sup>9 10</sup> The feasting and dancing could last many days, with songs and poems being performed whenever people came together.<sup>11 12</sup> Furthermore, statues within the home of the ancient Egyptians provided direct contact with the gods or goddesses, daily interaction with the

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Stevens 2009, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 2016.

<sup>5</sup> El Mahdy 1989, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 2016

<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson 2003, p. 146- 149.

<sup>8</sup> Tyldesley 2012, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Wilkinson 2003, p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkinson 2003, p. 149.

statue made the experience personal.<sup>13 14</sup> It is through understanding worship and the variety of ways of its performance that we can appreciate the goddess Isis.

Much of the evidence surrounding the ways of worshipping Isis come from what is left in tombs and burials.<sup>15</sup> This affects how we see ancient Egyptian worship and it is important to remember that Egyptian worship was not solely carried out in a tomb.<sup>16</sup> To limit our understanding of how ancient Egyptians worshipped by focusing only on funerary rituals would be a mistake. Images of worship from tomb walls and sarcophagi help to provide more of a living image of worship, yet the images on Egyptian tombs are idealised, perhaps to improve their chances of getting into the afterlife, and do not necessarily reflect what actually happened.<sup>17</sup>

For the ancient Egyptians, religion had a persistent influence on them and they greatly believed that their actions and decisions in life would be judged by the deities.<sup>18</sup> The gods and goddesses exerted a moral sway over the ancient Egyptians in that there was a belief that certain behaviours would be well received and others would result in punishment.<sup>19</sup> While people worship different gods and goddesses they were all interwoven.<sup>20</sup> Religion was such a big part of ancient Egypt that there is no evidence for atheism<sup>21</sup> where people did not participate in religious practices. Atheism in the ancient world has been researched by Tim Whitmarsh.<sup>22</sup> It would have been a part of the lives of the ancient

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<sup>13</sup> Walls 2005, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Robins 2001, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Kiger 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkinson 2003, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Robins 1997, p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> Brewer and Teeter 2007, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Brewer and Teeter 2007, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Brewer and Teeter 2007, p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> Foster 2009, p. viii.

<sup>22</sup> Whitmarsh 2016, p. 54.

Egyptians from before they were born with worship of a fertility god and until they died after preparing for the afterlife.

An understanding of the cyclical nature of many aspects of ancient Egyptian life is essential to an appreciation of ancient Egyptian society. Desert surrounded most parts of Egypt,<sup>23</sup> it was not invaded by surrounding countries during its establishment, and this led to the construction and maintaining of a unique Egyptian value system.<sup>24</sup> The land of Egypt was exceedingly prosperous, a contributing factor to this would be the river Nile that brought so much life and nourishment into Egypt.<sup>25</sup> The river Nile was a main advantage for the development of trade and imports.<sup>26</sup> The Nile created the idea of a cyclical lifestyle together with the sun for the ancient Egyptians; the flooding of the Nile and the growing of the crops repeated year after year.<sup>27</sup> The Egyptians found this cyclical motion in many other aspects of life, a prominent one of these cycles being birth, death and then rebirth.<sup>28</sup> The idea of death, for the ancient Egyptians, was a transitional stage in life.<sup>29</sup> Within this cycle, Isis worked as the goddess who opened the door to the afterlife because of the part she played in securing Osiris' place in the afterlife.<sup>30</sup> The belief within ancient Egypt was that Isis brought Osiris back from the dead and from there he became the god of the underworld.<sup>31</sup> Due to the role that Isis played within this myth, she became a respected and enduring goddess.

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<sup>23</sup> Kemp 2006, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Kemp 2006, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Kemp 2006, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Kemp 2006, p. 308.

<sup>27</sup> Kemp 2006, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Brewer and Teeter 2007, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Wilkinson 2003, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 27.

As soon as one begins to research the goddess Isis it becomes apparent that her role was by no means simple or limited to one arena. She holds meaning in many different aspects of ancient Egyptian life and in many different ways. To fully appreciate her complexity and significance in the ancient Egyptian world requires an investigation on different levels. Isis figures in the art and iconography of ancient Egypt, her exploits are recorded in myth, and she features as a muse in the love poems shared between ancient Egyptian lovers. This research attempts an exploration of all three areas of evidence.

To complete this research I modelled the use of a case study and a materialities approach on the 2016 article by Zinn. Zinn has presented an analysis of a seemingly insignificant object found in ancient Egypt.<sup>32</sup> She argues that despite it being a small, lacklustre bowl, it embodies an array of essential aspects of Egyptians funerary beliefs and reflects ritual importance.<sup>33</sup> She uses a materialities approach to demonstrate how the different material aspects of the bowl reveal different insights into Egyptian beliefs surrounding society.<sup>34</sup> This article beautifully illustrates how a close analysis of an object, using a materialities approach can explain so much. I have chosen to use this approach in a study of the statue of Isis found in the Saqqara tomb. The form of the statue, the material it is made from, technologies that have been applied to it, its artistic qualities, stylistic details and forms, as well as the inscription can perhaps reveal a wealth information about the complexity of Isis and her place in Egyptian life.

Isis has become the enduring and central figure in the ancient Egyptian world because she, along with her brother-husband Osiris, is one half of the political power structure that governs ancient Egypt, she governs the transitions to the afterlife within the religious

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<sup>32</sup> Zinn 2016, p. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Zinn 2016, p. 205.

<sup>34</sup> Zinn 2016, p. 205.

sphere and provides a model of the significance, value and importance of the woman in the ancient Egyptian world.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Mark 2016.

## Literature Review

This research is focused around the Isis statue, initially seen in the British Museum *Sunken Cities Egypt's Lost World's* exhibition. This book provides a clear image of the Isis statue and some basic information about the how the statue was situated within the belief system of ancient Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

Plutarch's *Moralia Isis and Osiris* is a main source that this research will use, in order to look at the myth surrounding the origin of Isis and her position in the ancient world.

Despite Plutarch being Greek and writing the text just over 500 years after the statue had been made,<sup>3738</sup> his composition of the text is the most complete and is trusted by many scholars.<sup>39 40 41</sup> The *Moralia Isis and Osiris* is used to explore the character of Isis and describes how Isis cares for her brother- husband Osiris when he gets put in a coffin and floated down the river Nile.<sup>42</sup> It describes how Osiris is dismembered and how Isis parades Osiris' body throughout Egypt to encourage the people of ancient Egypt to make the most of their own lives.<sup>43</sup> The text also allows us to examine the example that Isis sets for women in Egypt and how this can be transferred to family life.<sup>44</sup> This text is important for the research into Isis as it gives the reader an indication into the standard which Isis sets within the ancient world. Ancient Egyptian beliefs changed relatively little throughout its long history, from 4000 BC until the Roman period,<sup>45</sup> and therefore

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<sup>36</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 152- 153.

<sup>37</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Jackson 2016, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Richter 2001, p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.18.

<sup>43</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.18.

<sup>44</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Mark 2016.

Plutarch's blueprint for how important Isis was around 100 AD,<sup>46</sup> can provide us with an insight into the way in which Isis would have been looked at in ancient Egypt.

This research considers the Love Poems from Lise Manniche's *Sexual Life in ancient Egypt*. These were written in the New Kingdom, 1580- 1085 BC, and inform their readers about the ways in which the ancient Egyptians expressed their love.<sup>47</sup> These poems inform us how women were considered within ancient Egypt and men and women related to each other in courtship.<sup>48</sup> In these poems references to Isis helped them express their love. Many of these ideologies and attitudes towards women will have developed over time.

One of the main scholars for this research is Gay Robins. Robins' book *The Art of Ancient Egypt* includes chapters on a variety of topics. Chapter 1 places the position and function of art with ancient Egypt, giving an insight into the ways the ancient Egyptians viewed and considered art.<sup>49</sup> This chapter helps to understand why art was so important to the ancient Egyptians and brings both Isis and Osiris into the framework of ancient Egyptian art.<sup>50</sup> The chapter helps us to understand the principles of ancient Egyptian art and includes information of the materials and techniques that were used and applied.<sup>51</sup> Chapter 2 brings in the context of the king in ancient Egypt, this is appropriate for this research because Isis was an important figure to all of those on and surrounding the throne.<sup>52</sup> The chapter also gives us insight into Isis' position in early dynastic period.<sup>53</sup>

Chapters 11 and 12 contextualise the fashions of ancient Egyptian art, sculpture and tomb

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<sup>46</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Manniche 1987, p.74.

<sup>48</sup> Manniche 1987, p.74.

<sup>49</sup> Robins 1997, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Robins 1997, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Robins 1997, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Robins 1997, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> Robins 1997, p. 30.

layout in specifically the Third Intermediate Period, with a second on the specifics of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>54</sup>

Robins' work *Egyptian Statues* investigates materials and techniques used when making statues.<sup>55</sup> The book has a focus on the poses, context and function of deity statues.<sup>56</sup> The consideration of deities is extremely important as it, again, sets the background of the Isis statue. This book provides a complete understanding of how to approach statues within ancient Egypt and thus is extremely important for my research.

The article *Cult statues in ancient Egypt* by Robins explains how statues form a relationship between humans and the divine in the ancient world, describing how statues were bodies for the divine and the deceased in the tomb.<sup>57</sup> Here, Robins explains how statues are a way of connecting with the gods and she links a variety statues with cult activity and their position within temples.<sup>58</sup> Although the Isis statue was found in a tomb, it is likely to have been in a temple before being placed in a tomb, thus making it important to understand how people may have connected with the Isis statue in its previous temple location.

Klemm and Klemm in *The Building Stones of Ancient Egypt: a Gift of it Geology* provide extensive research into the geology and ancient quarrying of the ancient Egyptians.<sup>59</sup>

They identify sources for much of the stone engineering projects but also for the statuary.

<sup>60</sup> Their work was vital in identifying the type of stone the statue is made out of, where the material was found and the type of construction it would have been used for.

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<sup>54</sup> Robins 1997, p. 195 – 229.

<sup>55</sup> Robins 2001, p. 9 – 12.

<sup>56</sup> Robins 2001, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Walls 2005, p. 1 – 2.

<sup>58</sup> Walls 2005, p. 1 – 2.

<sup>59</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001, p. 633.

<sup>60</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001, p. 633.

Judith Butler is a feminist philosopher but within *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, she approaches phenomenology with feminist theory.<sup>61</sup> The phenomenological approach looks at how social agents are created and is useful for this research when considering individual aspects that make up the statue of Isis. The method of phenomenology is a stimulating way to approach the statue of Isis because it offers an insight into looking at the statue the same way the ancient Egyptians did. By looking at the statue in this way we can gain a better insight into how the ancient Egyptians considered the statue.

Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall's, *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, looks at the relationship between people and things.<sup>62</sup> This approach encourages scholars to look at the life an object has had, in order to gain an understanding of the human processes that were applied to it. It is useful in this study to apply this approach to the statue for an expansive view of the way in which Isis travelled within and was influential through different aspects of Egyptian life in her statue form.

Geraldine Pinch's *Egyptian Mythology, A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses and Traditions of ancient Egypt* helps us to characterise myth and further understand it.<sup>63</sup> This is a key piece of scholarship for this research because it helps to categorise and explain the Plutarch myth and its relevance to Isis in the ancient world.

This paper is arranged to first provide an introduction to the statue of Isis from Saqqara that offers a focus for the study. Then follows a section on the historical context which centres on the Third Intermediate Period, Saqqara and the tomb individual. An exploration of Isis in myth follows which a close analysis of Plutarch *Moralia Isis and*

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<sup>61</sup> Butler 1988, p. 520.

<sup>62</sup> Gosden and Marshall 1999, p. 169.

<sup>63</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 2.

*Osiris*. Isis in literary texts is further investigated in a section focusing on Isis within ancient Egyptian love poems. Finally, anthropological perspectives are considered in a section that views the statue and practices of worship with a phenomenological lens. The statue is further viewed using a biographical approach. Finally, the threads from this multi-layered approach are drawn together in a conclusion.

## **The Statue of Isis from Saqqara**

The Isis statue, CG38354, currently situated in the Cairo museum, it is the main primary source for this research.<sup>64</sup> The statue provides an insight into the importance of Isis through the material it is made of, the processes applied to it and the stylistic features presented. These physical aspects demonstrate the effort that the ancient Egyptians would go to in order to worship their goddess. The statue also allows us to look into the period the statue was made reflecting the importance of Isis due to the difficulties of the period.<sup>65</sup>

The statue is of the goddess Isis sat on a traditional throne with a low back.<sup>66</sup> The goddess is wearing a long dress and is holding the ankh symbol in her right hand. Her eyes are open and lips are slightly smiling. The goddess is wearing a headdress of two cow's horns with a solar disc between them. Around the base of the statue on the left, front and right hand side, there is an inscription written in hieroglyphs. It says 'Isis, mother of the god, great in magic, mistress of the Two Lands.'<sup>67</sup> The statue is 90 cm high and is made out of a dark stone.<sup>68</sup> This Greywacke siltstone, is known as Bekhen-stone.<sup>69</sup> It is metamorphic sedimentary rock.<sup>70</sup> Statues would have been cut from a rectangular block, had a shape drawn onto it in accordance to the Egyptian proportional measurements and then carved into.<sup>71</sup> Tools used were 'copper and stone chisels of varying hardness, and

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<sup>64</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>65</sup> Robins 1997, p. 195.

<sup>66</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>67</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>68</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>69</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001, p. 633.

<sup>70</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001, p. 633.

<sup>71</sup> Robins 2001, p. 9.

later bronze and iron'.<sup>72</sup> The Isis statue has a satin polish; this would have been created by a process of being rubbed with stones and sand.<sup>73</sup>

Klemm and Klemm, identify evidence of extensive quarrying in this area over a period covering 4000 BC and 300AD, from Pre-dynastic to the later Roman period.<sup>74</sup> This covers the period of when the statue was made and provides enough time for the carving techniques to be specialised. Greywacke is found over large parts of the eastern dessert over the Nile and the Red Sea.<sup>75</sup> However, Klemm and Klemm only identify deposits at the Wadi Hammamat of a suitable quality for use in construction, other deposits being more brittle.<sup>76</sup> This suggests that the statue CG 38354 could be made from greywacke from the Wadi Hammamat deposit, which was 90km away from the Nile, because the ancient Egyptians knew that the material was not brittle.<sup>77</sup> Egyptian engineering was clearly very highly developed and logistical problems such as this were able to be overcome in order to utilise the different rock and stone of their choice for their various monumental building projects. Greywacke was an important material, it was used for sarcophagi and the finest carved sculptures in Egyptian antiquity.<sup>78</sup> This embeds the statue of Isis with more meaning which will be looked into later in the research. Whilst this did not make transportation of the material, and therefore object, easy, it did ensure that the material could be used throughout Egypt. This, paired with the embedded beliefs in the material, may explain why it was used throughout Egyptian antiquity.

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<sup>72</sup> Hartwig 2015, p. 192.

<sup>73</sup> Hartwig 2015, p. 192.

<sup>74</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001. p. 633.

<sup>75</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001. p. 633.

<sup>76</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001. p. 633.

<sup>77</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001. p. 634.

<sup>78</sup> Klemm and Klemm 2001. p. 634.

The statue CG 38354 shows Isis sitting on the throne with a low back and no spaces between her body and the back of the throne.<sup>79</sup> The fact that there are no spaces between Isis and the throne emphasises the idea that Isis and the throne are one. Isis depicted in such a way on the throne embodies ideas of power and authority in Ancient Egyptian artistic traditions.<sup>80</sup> The throne is a representation of power and the hieroglyphic sign for Isis was the throne.<sup>81</sup> This clearly demonstrates that Isis embodied the throne and is great symbol of power.<sup>82</sup> Tyldesley, goes on to say that Isis was the ‘living throne’ and because she was mother to Horus, the divine king, she was also considered mother and protector of all of Egyptian kings.<sup>83</sup> Tyldesley suggests that any image of Horus sitting on Isis’ knee can be interpreted as Horus sitting on the throne.<sup>84</sup>

Isis is sat holding the ankh in her right hand.<sup>85</sup> The ankh was the sign of life,<sup>86</sup> or known as the ‘key of life’.<sup>87</sup> It can be found as early as the Early Dynastic Period (3150 – 2613 BC) and one of the grandfathers of Egyptology Budge connects it with Isis from her belt buckle, ‘Budge equated the ankh with the *tjet*, the “know of Isis”’.<sup>88</sup> A ceremonial girdle thought to represent female genitalia and symbolizing fertility’.<sup>89</sup> It is significant that Isis is holding a sign of fertility and life force, it helps modern historians view Isis in the same way she would have been in ancient Egypt. It also helps us to position her within the hierarchy of the Egyptians and to see the effects that she had on those who worshipped

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<sup>79</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 152-153.

<sup>80</sup> Tyldesey 2012, p. 50.

<sup>81</sup> Tyldesey 2012, p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Tyldesey 2012, p. 50.

<sup>83</sup> Tyldesey 2012, p. 50.

<sup>84</sup> Tyldesey 2012, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>86</sup> Robins 1997, p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> Mark 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Mark 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Mark 2016.

her. Robins informs her readers that there are many representations of queens holding the ankh sign despite it being habitually held by deities and kings.<sup>90</sup> This further helps to reinforce the representation of power behind the symbol. This power is taken to another level of understanding and application by Mark; ‘The ankh has always been associated with life, the promise of eternal life, the sun, fertility, and light’.<sup>91</sup> This, paired with the fact that she is sat on the throne, reinforces the power that Isis held within ancient Egypt during this time.

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<sup>90</sup> Robins 1997, p. 43.

<sup>91</sup> Mark 2016.

## Historical Context

The statue comes from the reign of Amasis (570 -526 BC),<sup>92</sup> this is situated at the end of the Third Intermediate and by some scholars is considered as a part of the Late Period.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>94</sup> <sup>95</sup> This research looks at the position of Egypt in politics, art and the funerary sphere. It is important to carry out the research in the way because it gives a great context and background to the statue, helping our understanding of the environment the statue was situated in.

It would be fair to say the Third Intermediate Period was not easy for the ancient Egyptians. The Great Power that was ancient Egypt, was slowly starting to fall and become conquered.<sup>96</sup> Egypt was left weak after an attack from the Sea Peoples resulting in lost of territories in Syria, Palestine and Nubia.<sup>97</sup>

It was usual for figurines of Isis to be found within tombs of the Third Intermediate Period. ‘... a set of small gold figures, including a Sakhmet, an Isis figure and a Ptah in a shrine.’<sup>98</sup> This is from Wendjebaendjeds. In 1891, a tomb from Thebes was found, with 153 burials in. ‘Besides these coffins were other burial goods. There are 110 shabti boxes filled with shabti’s, 77 Osiris figures which mostly contained a papyrus, one Isis figure and one Nephthys figure.’<sup>99</sup> It is fair to suggest that there may have been more Isis figures within the original tomb if the tomb it had not opened within antiquity with the purpose of looking for wealthy goods to put back into circulation. In the tomb of

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<sup>92</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>93</sup> Johnson 1997, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Robins 1997, p. 210.

<sup>95</sup> Shaw 2000, p. 364.

<sup>96</sup> Shaw 2000, p. 364.

<sup>97</sup> Shaw 2000, p. 364.

<sup>98</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 101.

<sup>99</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 94.

Sheshonq, a high priest and son to king Osorkon II, there are many amulets of deities including, a number high qualities wedjats made of gold and lapis lazuli and a heart scarab were found.<sup>100</sup> The vast amount of Isis figures showing up demonstrate her importance slightly more. The precious materials that are described alongside these figures increase their influence.

The Third Intermediate Period was an era of increased devotion to Osiris and Isis; 'Isis became a model wife, in addition to protecting the dead and guaranteeing them regeneration.'<sup>101</sup> As said above, the Third Intermediate Period was one of political unrest. Potentially this was defied, by the elites such as the tomb owner, by making statues and monuments celebrating religion in an attempt to unify Egypt. This turning back to religion during difficult times in ancient Egypt, was one of the main reasons Egypt was able to keep its core cultural values for such a long period of time. This is supported by Robins, who suggests that Isis and Horus had such popularity within the Delta because of the removal of a royal family.<sup>102</sup> Depictions of Isis tending to Horus and the successes of kingship can be found on monuments, jewellery and amulets throughout Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period.<sup>103</sup> This demonstrates how Isis became far reaching in a time of political peril. The replacement of the royal family with the god and goddess family is extremely logical.

By the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Egypt regained some political stability after political disruption in earlier dynasties of the Third Intermediate Period. A continuous line of rule was

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<sup>100</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 102 - 103.

<sup>101</sup> Robins 2000, p. 199.

<sup>102</sup> Robins 2000, p. 199.

<sup>103</sup> Robins 2000, p. 199- 200.

established by Psamteki I.<sup>104</sup> This stability was extremely prosperous for Egypt and resulted in ‘such a quantity of high quality large-scale royal and private monuments...’

<sup>105</sup> Grajetzki informs us that ‘the finest sculptures and reliefs come from the north’.<sup>106</sup>

The 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty was characterised by a revival in the arts,<sup>107</sup> where producers of prior periods inspired the artists. The bringing back of older art styles is reinforced by the return of canopic jars and shabtis which had fallen out of fashion towards the end of the First Intermediate Period.<sup>108</sup>

During the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty traditional art was coming back into the focus for the ancient Egyptians; ‘Statue poses at this period are traditional, standing, kneeling and block statues being the most common; seated figures are less frequent.’<sup>109</sup> The Isis statue being seated is a demonstration that it is important because of its uniqueness. This could reflect the interests of the individual preferring seated statues, or it could be related to Isis’ position with antiquity and myth.

The statue was found in Saqqara, the burial ground of Memphis.<sup>110</sup> Memphis was a principal religious and sacred site throughout ancient Egyptian history and was a centre for agriculture and trading.<sup>111</sup> Not only was Memphis a thriving city, but the burial grounds were also significant, it had the oldest and largest pyramid fields. This site was famous from the early Dynastic period to the Christian era.<sup>112</sup> Specifically, in the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the tombs in Saqqara changed slightly to become less appealing to tomb

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<sup>104</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 109.

<sup>105</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 109.

<sup>107</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 109.

<sup>108</sup> Grajetzki 2003,, p. 112.

<sup>109</sup> Robins 2000, p. 226.

<sup>110</sup> Snape 2014, p. 170.

<sup>111</sup> Snape 2014, p. 170.

<sup>112</sup> Wilkinson 2000, p. 124.

robbers.<sup>113</sup> They improved to a vault, built below a deep shaft which, when the body was placed in the tomb, was filled up with sand, this prevented grave diggers as it made it more difficult.<sup>114</sup>

The statue was discovered in the tomb of a member of the ancient Egyptian elite. He lived with the official title of ‘Superior of the Seal’ and ‘Superior of the Palace’.<sup>115</sup>

During this period, the role of kingship had lessened, getting millions of years in the afterlife instead of an eternal life. This is not the only change in the funerary sphere for those at the top of the hierarchy; ‘A large number of amulets had previously been a mark of kingship. Here they appear on the same scale in the tomb of a person other than the king.’<sup>116</sup> The position between the kings and the elite had clearly become more balanced, this gives us great insight into our statue. The tomb individual was clearly very important and his association with Isis may have elevated his status when preparing for the afterlife and during the afterlife, because of his close connection Isis in his resting place.

As modern historians we know that the tomb that Isis was found in came from a wealthy person because of the three statues that we know were found in there and because of the rich material and high quality in which they were made. By looking at the period we can further suggest that ‘The normal container for the mummy of a high official is a heavy anthropoid sarcophagus, often inscribed with Pyramid texts, ‘Book of the Dead’ chapters and other funerary texts.’<sup>117</sup> In order for the tomb owner to have access to the types of materials he would have needed a high status which is provided by his position as

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<sup>113</sup> Baines and Malek 2000, p. 151.

<sup>114</sup> Baines and Malek 2000, p. 152.

<sup>115</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 103.

<sup>117</sup> Grajetzki 2003, p. 112.

superior of the seal and superior of the palace.<sup>118</sup> This would have given him access and resources to pay for the texts to help his transition into the afterlife.

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<sup>118</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

## *Moralia, Isis and Osiris*

Plutarch was born around 45 AD and died in 120 AD, he was born in central Greece but taught philosophy in Rome, after studying philosophy in Athens.<sup>119</sup> Plutarch wrote on many topics such as ethics, morals, philosophy and religion.<sup>120</sup> Through his writing he retells many aspects of the ancient world.

Plutarch wrote the *Moralia, Isis and Osiris* roughly 500 years after the statue was carved, yet his account of the ancient myth is considered by scholarship to be very reliable and being the most complete example surrounding Isis and Osiris.<sup>121 122 123</sup> Jackson enlightens us that Plutarch was aware of different strands within the ancient myth and therefore tried to recreate the most rounded without contradictions or inconsistencies.<sup>124</sup> Jackson goes on to say that Plutarch aimed to create an academic explanation of the myth not just another version of it.<sup>125</sup> From this we can see that Plutarch was putting together information that was available to complete academic work. However, it is important to remember its later context when looking at Isis and her portrayal. Plutarch's presentation of the myth therefore can be considered a useful reference when considering difficulties in translation and fragmentation of earlier texts.

There are references to Isis' actions within ancient Egypt, but these do not provide a clear retelling compared to Plutarch's account. The pyramid texts do refer to Isis attempting to find Osiris' body.<sup>126</sup> The spells tell us that Isis' magic was thought to save the king, the

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<sup>119</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1

<sup>120</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1

<sup>121</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Jackson 2016, p. 13.

<sup>123</sup> Richter 2001, p. 192.

<sup>124</sup> Jackson 2016, p. 13.

<sup>125</sup> Jackson 2016, p. 13.

<sup>126</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 150.

same way it had saved Osiris.<sup>127</sup> Isis and motherhood can be found in the Coffin Texts spell 148, relating to Isis protecting and bringing up Horus.<sup>128</sup> By the New Kingdom, Isis was often depicted in the solar barque with Ra her magic was described in New Kingdom hymns, informing us that her magic was used to protect Osiris' body from Seth.<sup>129</sup> Richter's article on *Plutarch on Isis and Osiris: Text, Cult and Culture* looks at the reason behind why Plutarch expressed ideas on the divine and structure in the *Moralia Isis and Osiris*. Richter believes that Plutarch uses the Isis myth because it allows him to renegotiate the traditional way in which the Greek cult is looked at, because of the Egyptian background that Plutarch gives the Greek cult. Plutarch's philosophy does run as an undercurrent within the *Moralia Isis and Osiris*. Many scholars believe that is because of the wisdom that comes out of the culture of Egypt, that Plutarch was able to use the Isis cult to reflect philosophical speculation. The myth is still considered 'a relatively accurate account of the cultic practices associated with Isis in the Pharaonic period'.. It is due to scholarly opinion such as this one that justifies why Plutarch's account is suitable to be used in this dissertation.

Within Egyptology, myths are seen as 'stories about gods, myths are sacred stories, myths are stories that explain the way the world is, or myths are simply traditional stories that hand on collective knowledge or experience.'<sup>130</sup> I think that all of these are very suitable and fit the category of Plutarch myth, but the *Moralia, Isis and Osiris* has the main function of demonstrating the morals and values that the people in ancient Egypt were to live by. The function of the *Moralia, Isis and Osiris* is important for this research

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<sup>127</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 150.

<sup>128</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 150.

<sup>129</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 150.

<sup>130</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 1.

because it provides a way in which to read and understand the myth. With the knowledge that the main function of the myth is to reflect morals and values of ancient Egypt, it is easier to comprehend the influence that Isis had within the myth and her function because of the morals and values that she portrays.

Isis carries with her many associations of motherhood. The *Moralia Isis and Osiris* is written for Plutarch's mistress who was a priestess of the Greek Isis cult. The extract, which this research looks at, informs its readers of the process that Isis went through in order to look after Egypt whilst Osiris was away at war. Through Osiris' absence, Isis remains loyal to Osiris and bears his child. Isis' actions here are not to be considered lightly, she is still extremely proactive and strong. This truly demonstrates the role of women in ancient Egypt. Details of the myth show several other examples of Isis as a mother not only to her own child Horus, but also to the child of the queen of Byblus and to some extent Egypt as a whole. Plutarch's text presents Isis as mother most clearly and shows the womanly aspect of Isis that is so much part of her identity.

Isis embodies wise womanhood, she symbolises the female side of the right order. Plutarch introduces Isis, alongside the concept and ideology of 'Truth' and the importance of finding truth, suggesting that finding the truth about gods is a 'hallowed',<sup>131</sup> form of worship. Before Plutarch even reaches the Isis and Osiris myth, he sets Isis up to be a very pure and righteous goddess. 'A goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom, to whom, as her name at least seems to indicate, knowledge and understanding are in the highest degree appropriate'.<sup>132</sup> Despite this grand introduction of Isis, Plutarch

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<sup>131</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>132</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

understands Isis to be a Greek word.<sup>133</sup> This causes some deliberation on whether or not this is the Egyptian goddess Isis or whether Isis blended into a Greek goddess. The Greeks may well have adopted the Egyptian goddess and made her more Greek, moulding her to suit Greek sensibilities.

The Isis presented in Plutarch's account is related to the seated Isis in the statue, despite the time difference. The goddess as a whole, incorporated more aspects to her function and worship over time. This makes her more applicable and relevant to the people of the ancient world and Egypt because she was thought to have influence over different aspects of life and their surroundings. This would result in more people worshipping Isis for different causes. Plutarch gives an indication into Isis' function in the ancient world.<sup>134</sup>

'(t)he goddess collects and puts together and gives into the keeping of those that are initiated into the holy rites.'<sup>135</sup> This informs the reader that Isis is a goddess that passes on and keeps together information for future generations, leaving it in the hands of those who can be trusted. It is interesting that Plutarch, by writing this book, is following Isis' practice of passing along the religious beliefs, therefore making his research and writing and potentially reading of his work, a sort of worship to Isis.

Isis' cult and worship was very strict. Plutarch indicates the type of people that surround Isis, who worship Isis and describe what they do and what is expected from them.<sup>136</sup>

'those that are initiated into the holy rites, since this consecration, by a strict regimen and by abstinence from many kinds of foods and from the lusts of the flesh, curtails licentiousness and the love of pleasure, and induces a habit of patient submission to the

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<sup>133</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>134</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>135</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>136</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

stern and rigorous services in shrines'.<sup>137</sup> Those who worshipped Isis had to give up sexual pleasures and be aware and considerate of the situations they got into.<sup>138</sup>

Plutarch's mistress was a part of the Isis cult, whilst a mistress in the ancient world was not unusual, what is surprising is that Plutarch and his mistress would have had a sexual relationship. A sexual relationship within the Isis cult was not allowed, bringing into question whether these rules were as strict as Plutarch makes them out to be.

Isis is a character of power who exerted considerable power in her own right. Plutarch retells that whilst Osiris was travelling and civilising the world, Typhon (Typhon is the Greek version of the Egyptian god Seth) did not attempt a revolution because Isis 'was in control, was vigilant and alert'.<sup>139</sup> The way in which Typhon treats Isis, is very telling about what people thought of her and demonstrates that she is extremely able bodied to rule whilst Osiris is away. Typhon chose not to try to claim the throne whilst Isis was on it, this suggests that within the myth Isis had a lot of support and a strong powerbase. It is important that Osiris is removed in this situation and that Isis power structure can stand alone from the relationship between them. In order for the individual and autonomous authority of Isis to be acknowledged. It also highlights that Typhon did not have a problem with the deities of the ancient world, just that he wanted power. As a shared sacred narrative the details of the myth stand as explanations for and examples of the relationships and behaviours, in this case related to power. To the ancient Egyptians the myth was a part of their history. The example that Isis provided here would have been an example to all of those in power or trying to get into a place of power, was a way of how to manage power, how to stay in power and how to act when there is a potential threat.

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<sup>137</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>138</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.2

<sup>139</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.13

Isis demonstrates solidarity and a close connection with women.<sup>140</sup> At this stage, Osiris is in a coffin which a tree has grown around, which the king of Byblus cut and was using to support the roof of his house.<sup>141</sup> The myth tells us that Isis was sat crying in Byblus and was comforted by the queen's maidservants. Isis, 'treated them with great amiability, plaiting their hair for them and imparting to their persons a wondrous fragrance from her own body.'<sup>142</sup> This kindness caught the attention of the queen and after Isis had got the queen to trust her, Isis became the nurse to the queen's baby.<sup>143</sup> This extensive networking that Isis carried out demonstrates the length that Isis will go to in order to become closer to finding Osiris. This could also show the value of female community in ancient Egypt. From this position of trust Isis revealed that she was a goddess, asked if she could take the wood surrounding the chest.<sup>144</sup> 'Magical and literacy texts stress the cunning and determination of Isis'.<sup>145</sup> In both these examples of Isis, the reader is able to create an image of the lengths that Isis is willing to go to in order to get Osiris back. The continued effort that Isis goes to may provide insight into what was expected from the women of ancient Egypt when it came to family concerns. It may also reflect the extent to which the ancient Egyptians believed Isis could change their lives because of the effort she put into finding Osiris.

Isis encourages the ancient Egyptians to appreciate their lives, using Osiris' death as a motivator. Plutarch gives us great insight into the way Isis wanted people to live when carrying the chest which encased the dead body of Osiris through areas of Egypt.<sup>146</sup> Once

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<sup>140</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.16

<sup>141</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.15

<sup>142</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.15

<sup>143</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.16

<sup>144</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.16

<sup>145</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 151.

<sup>146</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.17

Isis had secured the chest containing Osiris' body she took it throughout Egypt before leaving it to rest in the variety of potential tombs throughout Egypt.<sup>147</sup> The body 'is carried around in a chest, it is not a reminder of what happened to Osiris, as some assume; but it is to urge them, as they contemplate it, to use and to enjoy the present, since all very soon must be what it is now and this is their purpose in introducing it into the midst of merry-making.'<sup>148</sup> Here, Plutarch tells us that when Isis carried the chest containing Osiris, it was not an act of mourning, rather to encourage the ancient Egyptians to live their lives.<sup>149</sup> This may be Plutarch's way of demonstrating that Isis is a goddess because she is able to religiously rise above the hurt of Osiris death, to use it as an example for people to enjoy their lives. This message is something that many scholars reflect on Egypt, that it is not a culture consumed by death but a culture that lives boldly and in fullness.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, this is supported by Pinch, who informs us that in *Moralia Isis and Osiris*, 'Plutarch suggested that the all-powerful Isis allowed herself to be portrayed as a woman of sorrows to console suffering humanity'.<sup>151</sup> This understanding and this section of Plutarch's writing gives us great insight into the type of goddess that Isis was. She wanted people to live life to the fullest, rather than mourning for what they don't have. Plutarch presents Isis as knowing how to make death more bearable by fully living life.

Plutarch presents Isis as being consistent. Typhon has found Osiris' chest and cuts his body into fourteen sections and spreads them throughout Egypt.<sup>152</sup> Isis goes out to find

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<sup>147</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.17

<sup>148</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.17

<sup>149</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.17

<sup>150</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 12.

<sup>151</sup> Pinch 2002, p. 151.

<sup>152</sup> Plu. *Mora.* 1.18

Osiris' body parts.<sup>153</sup> An important detail in this section would be that on her search she sails in a boat of papyrus and because Isis has sailed on the Nile, crocodiles no longer attack others travelling on the boat out of fear and or respect.<sup>154</sup> Plutarch presents the papyrus boat as a sign of the effect that Isis has had on the world and the way in which this would have helped those travelling on the Nile. Stories of how Isis changed Egypt continue throughout Plutarch's account of Egypt. The effect that the ancient Egyptians believed Isis had in ancient Egypt could be a contributing factor as to why she was worshipped by so many. The crocodiles not attack because they feared and respected Isis, this demonstrate how much Isis was able to overcome. Isis demeans the crocodiles in the Nile paired with the bold way in which she steps out in order to find Osiris, means that in the ancient world she may have been considered a role model. From a feminist perspective, some people potentially think that she is held back by the fact she is searching for her husband, but it is through this searching that she demonstrates her individuality and strength of being able to stand alone and not be led by a man. This message was as prevalent throughout Egyptian history because the extent to which religion impacted the ancient Egyptians changed. Isis' consistency would have made a great and positive impact on the people of ancient Egypt in their daily lives because her worship still continued. Isis demonstrates that it is acceptable to stand alone and her loyalty to Osiris and to her own happiness may have been a real motivator for workforces when trying to achieve something. This aspects of the relationship between Isis and Osiris, reflects the steadfast nature of Isis' love and devotion to Osiris and the enduring quality of the stone. Another important message from this section is her loyalty to Osiris,

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<sup>153</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.18

<sup>154</sup> Plu. *Mora*. 1.18

this is something that potentially made the partnership of Osiris and Isis so important to the individual people. Isis never gives up on Osiris, this bond would have been a prime example and probably would have had great impact on Egyptian family units and the roles that individuals played.

## Love Poems

This research considers Isis' position within the love poems. Manniche informs her readers about the love poems from the New Kingdom within Egypt. These texts are helpful when considering Isis because they reflect the attitudes to courting and relationships within ancient Egypt. As already mentioned, Isis was a role model for relationships because of the central place of her relationship with Osiris in the myths that permeated the cultural consciousness of Ancient Egypt. The relationship was characterised by the mutual respect and devotion

While these poems were written in the New Kingdom, they still reflect a great deal about Isis. Although not always directly mentioned, the goddess is referred to within the poems. When considering these Love Poems it is important to remember the ancient Egyptian context and how this may be very different to modern concepts of love and marriage. A prime example of this was the understanding that within many of the Love poems, lovers refer to each other a brother and sister.<sup>155</sup> In a modern context, the idea of incest is taboo, yet in ancient Egypt referring to each other as siblings was a demonstration of feeling close to another person and emphasising equality.<sup>156</sup> This idea can be seen reflected in the ancient Egyptians representation of the sibling relationship between Osiris and Isis.<sup>157</sup>

The authors of the love poems generally writes from three potential viewpoints, a male lover, a female lover and the poet's own voice in the third person.<sup>158</sup> Within all of the voices that are found throughout the love poems, there is a repetition of references to goddesses. Goddesses often are asked for their help or are thanked for their help. Loved

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<sup>155</sup> Manniche 1987, p. 78.

<sup>156</sup> Mysliwiec 2004, p. 146.

<sup>157</sup> Manniche 1987, p. 78

<sup>158</sup> Manniche 1987, p.74.

ones are also compared and likened to gods and goddesses. Many of these references within the poems refer to Isis, as well as other goddesses.

One of the poem lines indicates that the ancient Egyptians valued what women had to say. ‘Look, she is like a star goddess arising at the beginning of a happy new year; brilliantly white, bright skinned; with beautiful eyes for looking, with sweet lips for speaking; she has not phrase too many.’<sup>159</sup> This final phrase of this line is ambiguous. This could be interpreted to mean that the woman was admired for the many worthwhile things she had to say however, it could also be interpreted to mean that she was admired because she did not talk too much. While there is emphasis on the woman’s looks and beauty, there is also reference to her speaking. This individuality is very forward thinking, especially when considering that ancient Egyptian positions of power were filled my men and passed on to men, it is only in the later periods of Egyptian history that women in power become more prominent. This line of the poem includes a link to the goddess Isis and goddess Hathor. The male lover uses the simile to describe the female lover as ‘a star goddess arising’. This could be referencing Isis because Taylor informs his reader that Isis is depicted wearing a starry dress. \*ref page 63\* The description of the female makes it clear that the female is beautiful, this ideal is reinforced by the reference to Isis, because Isis is a demonstration of the ideal. This further reinforces that the relationship between Osiris and Isis is what the ancient Egyptians recognized as an ideal or archetype. The many comparisons to Isis are carried out in this way, some are more direct, but in this example the subtle references demonstrate that Isis was a key figure in courtship and in the relationship for both men and women.

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<sup>159</sup> Manniche 1987, p. 75.

## Anthropological Section

This research has already explored the meaning of the statue and what it represented in the ancient world. This section will look at the function of the statue and using a different approach, an anthropological perspective. These include phenomenology and a biography of the object. These approaches allow for a deeper exploration of the statue and how the statue functions as an ‘aesthetic product’.<sup>160</sup>

It is important to look at the statue from an objective viewpoint. The section considers what the statue is in terms of art. John Baines has made a study of Egyptian art within Melinda Hartwig’s *A companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*. Baines enlightens his readers that statues, such as the statue of the goddess Isis are aesthetically formed.<sup>161</sup> He goes on to say that the upper classes controlled wealth and, by extension, art.<sup>162</sup> The knowledge provided by Baines explains a deal about the approaches behind the statue, the wealthy wanted aesthetic looking objects and at a basic level that is what this statue is. However, the statue is also inscribed with meaning.

By looking at the Isis statue through a phenomenological perspective, we can gain a great perspective into the part that Isis played within Egypt. Phenomenology theory aims to illuminate the ‘way in which social agents *constitute* social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign.’<sup>163</sup> It is by applying this theory to the statue of Isis that we can gain a greater understanding of how people interacted with her. By examining the inscription around the base of the statue we can understand the attitude with which people approached her, it says ‘Isis, mother of the god, great in magic,

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<sup>160</sup> Hartwig 2015, p.2.

<sup>161</sup> Hartwig 2015, p.3.

<sup>162</sup> Hartwig 2015, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> Hartwig 1988, p. 519.

mistress of the Two Lands.’ The description demonstrates the ways that Isis was considered, as a ‘mother’, as ‘great’ and as a ‘mistress’. She was considered a mother because she was mother to Horus and as a deity her role of mother extended to encompass the whole of Egypt. Many examples of this can be found within the Plutarch section and the complete myth *Moralia Isis and Osiris*. Isis was thought to be great in magic, this may be because of the role that she played in assuring Osiris’ position in the afterlife and the magic she used to look after Horus while he was growing up. Isis is referred to as ‘mistress of two lands’ and this refers to her position in hierarchy, her close connection to the throne and Egypt being united under one ruler. It is interesting that Isis was thought to be the ‘mistress of two lands’, because when Egypt was united, it was considered to be time of great prosperity. Taking into consideration the research previously presented on Isis, it is no surprise that Isis was linked with prosperity. Due to Isis being described in this way, it can be suggested that she embodies the inscription and therefore performs these functions for the ancient Egyptians.<sup>164</sup> Butler goes even further to suggest ‘to be a woman is to *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman’.’ this is a reference to an idea from Simone de Beauvoir that Butler is exploring.<sup>165</sup> This, applies to Isis because she is considered wife, sister and mother within Egypt. It is through the example that the myth sets, women have *become* women through following the example that Isis sets. Isis is clearly an import cultural force, perhaps the most important in ancient Egypt, for presenting an image of womanhood. Butler asserts that it is precisely through such iconic and mythic characters

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<sup>164</sup> Bulter 1988, p.521.

<sup>165</sup> Bulter 1988, p.522.

that cultural notions of gender are shaped and perpetuated. Isis' central place in the sacred narratives of Egypt make her an important influence.

The second approach used to consider the statue is a materialities approach, looking at the biography of an object. 'if we consider material culture in its different moments of production, exchange and consumption, then little is left out, especially once each of these is set within its social contexts and consequences.'<sup>166</sup> By exploring the processes that took place on the statue, we can gain more of an understanding of the experiences that the statue would have had. Gosden goes on to explain that 'the central idea is that, as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other.'<sup>167</sup> This relationship between society and the statue, is the main function of this research and through this perspective it will be explored.

The statue began life in ancient Egypt in the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The material comes from Wadi Hammamat, this is most likely the place from which the stone was mined. Egypt had a highly developed industry for the production of religious and magical statuary and that the community at Wadi Hammamet were involved in sourcing and providing material for this specialist work. Once the material had been mined, it was cut into a rectangular block and the material was carved, with tools such as chisels.

Greywacke was a popular material for statues during this period. 'One of the hallmarks of the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasties statuary is the virtuoso treatment of stones such as schist, granite, basalt and diorite. The smooth, polished, rounded forms give the end product plasticity

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<sup>166</sup> Gosden and Marshal 1999, p. 169.

<sup>167</sup> Gosden and Marshal 1999. P. 170.

and softness that belies the hard nature of the material.<sup>168</sup> All of the rocks are hard rocks, which would explain the high-quality carving techniques used on the Isis statue.

The statue of Isis depicts her in a sheath dress,<sup>169</sup> yet many fertility gods and goddesses were depicted as naked, such as Osiris.<sup>170</sup> However for Isis wearing the dress she is wearing in the statue is a signifier of her social status and power.<sup>171</sup> The ancient Egyptians were used to seeing people without clothes, as nakedness was not always associated with sexuality or in a sexual way.<sup>172</sup> Although the statue of Isis does not depict her as naked, Isis' figure is still clearly visible, and this concept was thought to leave more to the imagination and perhaps emphasize her sexuality.<sup>173</sup>

The statue may then have taken either of two different paths. One of the paths taken may have included a close connection with the king. In Josephson's article, *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period Reviewed*, Josephson has found an object extremely similar to the Osiris statue found alongside the Isis statue in the tomb. Josephson also talks about Bothmer, a scholar who was a specialist in ancient Egyptian art. Josephson retells Bothmer's analysis of the statue; 'Its execution, with remarkable attention to detail, persuaded Bothmer to advance the possibility that it was a king's offering.'<sup>174</sup> Bothmer refers to a statue of Osiris, the comparisons between the style of the statues cannot be denied. As a result of this is, it is clear that the Isis statue came into contact with high individuals within ancient Egypt. It is also possible that the statue of Isis was part of a

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<sup>168</sup> Robin 1997, p. 226.

<sup>169</sup> Goddio and Masson-Berghoff 2016, p. 153.

<sup>170</sup> Mysliwiec 2004, p. 113.

<sup>171</sup> Mysliwiec 2004, p. 113.

<sup>172</sup> Manniche 1987, p. 88.

<sup>173</sup> Manniche 1987, p. 88.

<sup>174</sup> Josephson 1997, p. 7.

King's offering; it has the 'remarkable attention to detail' described by Bothmer and statues of Isis and Osiris were often paired together in temple settings.

Another potential life that the statue may have lived would include one in a temple. The Isis statue could have come from a royal offering to be placed in a temple or it could have been made directly for the temple. The theory of statues being made directly for temples is supported by Bothmer, who informs us that Late Period statues were meant for temples.<sup>175</sup> The chosen material for the Isis statue is also suitable for placement in a temple. Lloyd informs us that 'harder stones ... were more resistant to the accidental damages that might occur in the semi-public but well- travelled courts and halls of a temple.'<sup>176</sup> I think that, whether the statue came into contact with the king is ambiguous but that the Isis statue most probably was at some point in its life within antiquity placed in a temple. If it had been placed in a temple, it is reasonable to suggest that it could have been a temple dedicated to Isis. In this environment, the temple would have been well maintained, which along with the resilient stone, may be a contributing factor to the good condition of the statue today. In a temple the statue most probably would have been in a positive and religious environment. The interaction between the Isis statue and its potential worshippers is extremely interesting. The human- statue interaction would have been a continuous cycle, with the Isis statue acting as a source of religious comfort. Temples generated wealth through the numbers of visitors attracted and the quality of the statuary may well have contributed to this. This would have further increased the wealth of those within the temple and by extension the entire cult.

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<sup>175</sup> Josephson 1997, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> Lloyd 2010, p. 994.

The statue was eventually placed in the tomb of the ‘Superior of the Seal’ ‘Superior of the Palace’. The statue may have moved tombs, but this is unlikely. To be placed in a tomb was unusual for such a statue. Lloyd informs us that very few statues were made for private tombs, but that they were made for temples.<sup>177</sup> This is supported by Bothmer who informs us that ‘Late Period sculptures were not meant for tombs but temples.’<sup>178</sup> This strongly indicates that the statue of Isis being in a tomb is extremely unusual and brings into question why it was placed in there? Had something changed in ancient Egypt to result in the statue being taken out of circulation? Josephson indicates that it may not have been as uncommon for typical temple statues to be found in a tomb if they were of deities.<sup>179</sup>

It can be assumed that the statue was situated within the tomb of the individual until it was excavated in 1905. Between 1905 to 2016/17 the position of the statue in the modern world is unknown. The statue may have been in collections and studied by Egyptologists, geologist and art historians.

The statue was part of a display at the British museum and perhaps other museums throughout the world with its final resting place being the Cairo museum. Although the statue has potentially found its resting place for many years, this is still likely to change because of developing ideas concerning modern museum displays. New interests in specific goddesses or time periods and potentially new finds from ancient Egypt will inevitably affect the content of the collection. Yet at the same time, it could be sold off and put into a private collection.

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<sup>177</sup> Lloyds 2010, p. 944.

<sup>178</sup> Josephson 1997, p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> Josephson 1998, p. 2.

One of the ways the statue's life has continued would be through this research. Through the exploration of Isis and the statue, this research has developed the function of the statue beyond its original role. It has now become an object of study. With this in mind, maybe the statue's original function of allowing those who come into contact with the statue, a closeness to the goddess Isis, is still in some way perpetuated. Plutarch was correct in his thinking that knowledge of the origin of the god is a form of hallowed worship, maybe focussed research such as this can be understood as a form of modern day worship.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated the importance of the goddess Isis within ancient Egypt with a focus on her position within the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The statue of Isis found in the Saqqara tomb, embodies and incorporates many aspects of the goddess and has provided the starting point for this investigation. This study set out to determine how and why Isis was such an enduring figure in the ancient Egyptian world and to investigate her position in the power structure, the religious sphere and as a model of womanhood. This study does not discuss the position of Isis in relation to any other deities in the Egyptian pantheon other than Osiris, however it does give insight into the way in which Isis was considered within ancient Egypt in the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The focus on Isis has meant that this research does not provide much detail about the wider political and historical context of the New Kingdom. This aspect would be important for an evaluation of the changes in practices of the worship of Isis over time, but it does not fit within the scope of this study. If the debate on Isis' position within ancient Egypt is to move forward, a better understanding of Isis and magic would increase an understanding of the role Isis played within ancient Egypt. It would be important to include this because of the important role that magic played within ancient Egypt. It would also be interesting to consider the relationship between Isis and Hathor, and to understand another Egyptian goddess with whom Isis has links.

The results of this investigation show that Isis had great influence upon the daily lives of the ancient Egyptians in these significant and varied roles. The detailed analysis of the statue of Isis found in the Saqqara tomb demonstrates that the materiality of the object can reveal very pertinent and significant information about the meaning of and beliefs

about Isis held by the people of ancient Egypt. It became clear that Isis is a multidimensional goddess whose meaning extends into several areas of the Egyptian world. Her enthronement reflects her political authority and power, and her links to Osiris, as co-authority. The ankh connects her to fertility and the life cycle and speaks of her role in helping people transition to the afterlife. It also confirms her significance for women and motherhood. The enduring quality of the stone from which she is carved matches her enduring qualities as a goddess.

The centrality of the goddess Isis has been shown to be particularly important in times of political turmoil such as during the Third Intermediate Period and Late Period when her popularity surged. Her presence in an elite tomb in the prestigious burial ground of Memphis, known as Saqqara, attests to her importance in the highest levels of society. The myths of Isis are key to understanding how the ancient Egyptian people related to her. They tell the stories of her life and reveal her character and personality. The myths provide knowledge of who Isis was and provide an explanation as to how and why she was worshipped. The myths appear to show a goddess conscious of her influence as a role model. She speaks directly to the ancient Egyptian people with a message of the value of life. What comes across most strongly is her astonishing endurance and determination and her loyalty to her husband and her people. She demonstrates great self-discipline and expects the same of her devotees. Throughout the myths, Isis mostly acts alone and as such demonstrates a strong sense of independence. The myths also paint a picture of an archetypal mother, who is loving, nurturing and protective to all, connected to her association with motherhood is her solidarity with women. The sisterhood she

demonstrates is a striking feature of the stories and it is this personal aspect, which makes her accessible and allows ordinary women to connect with her.

The presence of the goddess Isis in ancient Egyptian poetry reveals another role. She epitomises one half of the perfect couple. Isis and Osiris in many ways appear as the ancient celebrity ‘power couple’. They provide a model for marriage that extended throughout all strata of ancient Egyptian society. The relationship between Isis and Osiris featured mutual love, respect, loyalty and a degree of equality. Isis was never a meek and subservient wife, but was, as the myths show her to be, autonomous, independent and able to act on her own authority.

The results of the anthropological section provided a new perspective of Isis and her relationship to art. The phenomenological approach allows us to interpret the way the statue of Isis was considered by the inscription carved into it and informs that Isis embodies the inscription. The evidence from this study suggests that Isis was justifiably a key part of ancient religion and is imperative when looking at examples set for the ancient Egyptian women and those in power. While the statue embodies many aspects of Isis, it can also be said to embody Isis herself. As an embodiment of the goddess, the statue offers worshippers the opportunity to interact with the goddess, participate with her in rituals, and to perform their identity as worshippers. This phenomenon of the statue is active in many different settings, be it temple or tomb.

Throughout the statue’s life, from its creation to its final placement in a museum collection, it has been an object of veneration. It has been an object of value as an embodiment of the goddess in a temple setting, it formed part of an elite grave

assemblage, and it has been a prized object within a museum collection. Finally, here, it is the prime focus of academic study.

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