

A Gleaming Ray: Blessed Afterlife in the Mysteries

FREDERICK E. BRENK

Recently, looking at the “mysteries” with eschatological spectacles has come in for something of a beating. Rather, stress has been on the cults’ concern to satisfy the less romantic and spectacular needs of mundane life. The devil’s advocate will now attempt to demonstrate that behind apparently innocent iconography may lie preoccupations about a blessed afterlife.

The Egyptians anticipated Plato in arriving at the true purpose of *eros*, the vision of the Form of the Beautiful. At least that appears to be Plutarch’s opinion in his *Erotikos*, the dialogue on love. Fine, faint effluvia (ἀπορροαί) of the truth lie scattered about in Egyptian mythology, but it takes a keen nose to track them down (762a). The Egyptians have three Eros’s, *Pandemos* (earthly), *Ouranios* (Heavenly), and a third Eros which is the Sun (*Helios*). As the solar radiance gives nourishment, light, and growth to all things, so the gleaming ray and warmth of love nourish and enlighten the soul (764c). Plutarch apparently is speaking of the archaic Egyptian religion and not of the Hellenistic and Roman mysteries of Isis. Still, it is difficult to believe that, like a recent scholar, he did not keep glancing over his shoulder at more contemporary religion.¹

The reference in the *Erotikos* to Egyptian mythology might be Plutarch’s blowing his own horn for *On Isis and Osiris*. The treatise was intended to serve the needs of a friend, Klea, a devotee of the Isiac mysteries, who supposedly wanted “background information.” Thespiai and the nearby Valley of the Muses, the setting for the *Erotikos*, had a long tradition of Isism, dating apparently from the refoundation of the festival of the Muses (*Mouseia*) by Ptolemaios IV Philopator and Arsinoe III.²

¹ At least that is the criticism of W. Burkert in M. W. Meyer, “Mysteries Divine,” *Numen* 39 (1992) 235–38. R. A. Wild, “The Known Isis–Sarapis Sanctuaries from the Roman Period,” in *ANRW* II.17.4 (1984) 1739–1851, notes the enormous enthusiasm for Isis and Sarapis in the 2nd cent. A.D., with 22 new foundations known (1834–36).

² See P. Roesch, “Les cultes égyptiens en Béotie,” in L. Criscuolo and G. Geraci (eds.), *Egitto e storia antica* (Bologna 1989) 621–29 (625)—contested somewhat by D. Knoepfler,

Moreover, Thespiiai had a close relationship with the "Roman colony" of Corinth, where Isism was very strong. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, at Kenchreai, the southern port of Corinth, Isis liberates the hero, Lucius, from his asinine shape and un-Platonic comportment.³

At any rate, in the passage referred to from the *Erotikos*, Egyptian mythology alludes to the Platonic similes of the cave and of the sun as the phenomenal counterpart to the Good of the intelligible world. The goal (*telos*) of the soul is the "beatific" or blessed vision of the Forms, and above all, of the Form of the Beautiful (and Good). Plutarch might have startled the shade of the sleeping, or, hopefully, contemplating, master, with his next outplatonizing twist. The sun, in the *Erotikos*, diverts our vision to the sensible world, away from the intelligible, which is our destiny. But his next thought is quite Middle-Platonic: In this world we see only beautiful mirror images of beautiful realities (ἔσοπτρα καλῶν καλὰ 765b).⁴ It may be surprising to learn that Egyptian religion coincided so nicely with the thought of the Middle Academy. But *On Isis and Osiris* reveals how all these mysterious, and at first sight barbarous, myths, rites, and symbols conform to the principal tenets of Plutarch's Middle Platonism.⁵

Though quite clear about the soul's destiny in Platonism, Plutarch's treatise remains rather murky about a person's ultimate fate in "Egyptian mythology." He might have used sources in which Osiris and his devotees eventually receive a blessed solar immortality. Such an eschatology would coincide with Plutarch's own description of the sun as the visible symbol of a God identified with Being and the Good, which is found at the conclusion

"Sept années de recherches sur l'épigraphie de la Béotie (1985-91)," *Chiron* 22 (1992) 411-503 (436-37).

³ See J. Leclant, "Aegyptiaca et milieux isiaques: Recherches sur la diffusion du matériel et des idées égyptiennes," in *ANRW* II.17.3 (1984) 1692-1709 (1703-04). The initiations described by Apuleius are full of problems. No inscriptions from the Hellenistic period clearly indicate mysteries, and in Egypt there were no initiations, but mysteries are alluded to in the *Andros Hymn* 11-12, the *Kyme Aretalogy* 22, and the *Maroneia Aretalogy* 23; see M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim 1985) 2, 5, 61. However, they seem to be attested for the Imperial period in Diodoros (1. 20) and Plutarch (*Isis and Osiris* 361d). See L. Vidman, *Isis und Sarapis bei den Griechen und Römern* (Berlin 1970) 125-38; and *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* (Berlin 1969) nos. 295, 326, 390, 758; M. Malaise, "Contenu et effets de l'initiation isiaque," *AC* 50 (1981) 483-98 (486); C. Froidefond, *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales* V.2 (Paris 1988) 68-74.

M. Marcovich, "The Isis with Seven Robes," *ZPE* 64 (1986) 295-96, relates the seven robes to the seven heavens or planetary orbits. Apuleius describes his initiation rite at Rome (*per omnia uectus elementa remeai* 11. 23 [285]) as a trip through the "elements," viewing the sun and the "lower and higher gods"; see J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Apuleius of Maduros. The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, *EPRO* 39 (Leiden 1975) 301-08. Graeco-Roman readers would probably be influenced by Platonic eschatological voyages.

⁴ R. Seaford, "I Corinthians XIII.12," *JThS* 35 (1984) 117-20, citing *On Isis* 382a, relates the mirror image to the mysteries.

⁵ Octavian was less benign than Plutarch. "Accustomed to worship gods, not cattle," he refused to visit the Apis bull at Memphis (Kassios Dion 51. 16. 5; Suet. *Aug.* 93); see D. J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (Princeton 1988) 266.

of *The E at Delphi*. This identification might create problems, too, since Osiris, like the mythological Apollo, or the visible sun, could only in a remote way resemble the supreme god. But forcing Plato on Isis in a Procrustean bed is not limited to Plutarch alone. The Platonic allegorization of Egyptian religion may have begun in the Hellenistic period, possibly among native priests. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, also, the trials of Lucius and his ultimate release through Isis probably is a Platonic allegory of the soul's entrapment in the world we love, its release through appreciation of the intelligible realities, and its expectation, in the next life, of the blessed vision of the Form.⁶

Recently the eschatological importance of the mysteries has been seriously challenged.⁷ Cumont-like excess merits scepticism. But were the mysteries largely concerned with the mundane cares of this life rather than the more horrendous possibilities of the next? The newer methodology is strongly archaeological, sociological, and minimalist, far removed from Cumont's detection of afterlife symbolism everywhere and the use of later sources to interpret earlier phenomena.⁸ But not even a metempsychosisist dedicates an ex-voto for salvation received in the next life. Moreover, should our civilization collapse, leaving little or no literature, one dreads what interpretation future scholars would give the bare, ruined choirs of Christianity and tumbled-down synagogues of Judaism.⁹

The "secularist" approach tends to put Isis in the shadows. But Early Imperial people had sharper eyes than we. Effortlessly they recognized astrological and eschatological allegory in famous authors, in architecture, and in sculpture, where we remain unperceptive or perplexed. Third-century Neoplatonists clearly had no difficulty in unearthing eschatological allegory in Homer. However, evidence does exist for an earlier period. For Plutarch—if the attribution of a certain fragment is correct—Kirke's bewitching of Odysseus' companions into swine signified metempsychosis into this world; his swimming to land at Phaiakia, the soul's struggle toward its otherworldly *telos*.¹⁰ More questionable is whether Vergil's gates of ivory and horn at the end of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* might allude to

⁶ The Platonic framework with Osiris the First God, as in Plutarch, makes Apuleius' account of Isism suspicious; cf. N. Fick, "L'Isis des *Métamorphoses* d'Apulée," *RBP* 65 (1987) 31–51; and M. J. Edwards, "The Tale of Cupid and Psyche," *ZPE* 94 (1992) 77–94, esp. 83–86.

⁷ W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA 1987) in general tends to downplay this aspect. See the reviews by R. Beck, *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 266–70; R. Turcan, *RHR* 206 (1989) 291–95 and F. E. Brenk, *Gnomon* 61 (1989) 289–92.

⁸ Burkert (previous note) is somewhat inconsistent, minimizing eschatology at times, e.g. at 13–16, 23–24 ("the pagan evidence for resurrection symbolism is unconvincing at best" [23]), but underscoring it in the Eleusinian and Dionysiac mysteries at 21–22. On Egypt and mysteries see 40–41.

⁹ See for example, J. D. Crossan, "Bias in Interpreting Earliest Christianity," *Numen* 39 (1992) 233–35.

¹⁰ So P. R. Hardie, "Plutarch and the Interpretation of Myth," in *ANRW* II.33.6 (1992) 4743–87 (4774).

astrological–eschatological lore on souls entering and exiting this world through the signs of Cancer and Capricorn.¹¹ As already noted, Apuleius, though in the second century, could easily metamorphose a depressing Greek novel into a magnificent allegory of the soul's escape from our worldly prison and our bodily tomb.¹²

In the realm of sculpture, two of the great Augustan monuments in the Campus Martius, the Solarium and Ara Pacis, apparently underscored the astrological implications of Augustus' conception under the sign of Capricorn.¹³ Possibly, here, too, Capricorn functions as a soul "gate." Recently the statuary of the Aedes Concordiae, another Augustan monument, has been convincingly interpreted as an astrological expression of cosmic harmony.¹⁴ The decoration of Augustus' own mausoleum, the obelisk of the Solarium, and—at least for later beholders—its proximity to the Iseum Campense suggest the ascent to the divine in Hellenistic Egypt. Motifs associated with the pharaohs and, in particular, their assimilations to Horos and Osiris, appear in the *cella* of the Mausoleum (*atef* crown with *uraei*—symbol of the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt—and a cornice with motifs similar to that below the funeral bed of Osiris in the Temple of Dendera and in Ptolemaic friezes). Such motifs suggest that Octavian's mausoleum was intended to do more than underscore a special relationship with Egypt.¹⁵ Especially in a mausoleum they evoke eschatological aspirations.¹⁶ In a new allegorical interpretation of the Tazza Farnese, the figures interpreted as Isis, Horos, a sphinx, and the Nile are an expression of creation according to the Hermetic tractate, *Poimandres*. The scene symbolizes the soul's return to the sidereal realm and union with God. In

¹¹ F. E. Brenk, "The Gates of Dreams and an Image of Life: Consolation and Allegory at the End of Vergil's *Aeneid* VI," in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* VI, Coll. Latomus 217 (Brussels 1992) 276–94 (286). However, Vergil might actually have written (6. 894–96): "comea, qua *falsis* facilis datur exitus umbris / . . . / sed *vera* ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes." See G. T. Cockburn, *Phoenix* 46 (1992) 362–64.

¹² See, for example, Edwards (above, note 6).

¹³ Or having the Moon in Capricorn as his natal sign; on the horoscope, see E. Buchner, *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus* (Mainz 1982) 35–38 (= *MDAI[R]* 87 [1980] 345–48); M. Schütz, "Der Capricorn al Sternzeichen des Augustus," *AA* 37 (1991) 55–67; S. Berti, "Gli orologi pubblici nel mondo antico: il caso di Atene e di Roma," in M. F. Santi (ed.), *Archeologia e astronomia* (Rome 1991) 83–87 (85–87).

¹⁴ B. A. Kellum, "The City Adorned: Programmatic Display at the *Aedes Concordiae Augustae*," in K. A. Raafaub and M. Toher (eds.), *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley 1990) 276–307, esp. 279–80, 294–96.

¹⁵ See M. de Vos, *L'egittomania in pitture e mosaici romano-campani della prima età imperiale*, EPRO 84 (Leiden 1980) 74; frontispiece, tav. XLI.

¹⁶ See also J. Pollini, "Man or God: Divine Assimilation and Imitation in the Late Republic and Early Principate," in Raafaub and Toher (above, note 14) 334–63; P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988) esp. 230–38, 297–339; J. R. Fears, "Ruler Worship," in M. Grant and R. Kitzinger (eds.), *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome* II (New York 1988) 1009–25, esp. 1014–18.

another interpretation, the cup represents an astrological allegory of the Augustan age.¹⁷

Thus, symbolism neither entirely nor exclusively religious could prepare the way for Isis.¹⁸ Nero's Golden House, too, seems to be a complex and magnificent symbol of cosmic and eschatological realities.¹⁹ Once again the tracks lead to Egypt, the land of living death, but also of luxuriousness struggling against temporality. They lead to Antonius and Kleopatra, to the divine Alexandros, and to the pharaohs—haunting spectres, if not gods blazing light. The octagon room of the Domus Aurea was perfectly illuminated at the equinoxes, with the unique orientation for Rome of an east–west axis. Not only was Nero's great-grandfather, Cnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, a friend of Antonius and Kleopatra, but Nero himself was directly descended from the triumvir, as was his relative Caligula, also not lacking in solar brilliance. The Egyptophilia of Nero's grandfather, Germanicus, led him not only to Alexandria, in A.D. 19, but far up the Nile to Elephantine.

Nero's own Egyptophilia, or Egyptomania as Seneca suspected, would certainly have benefitted the practice of Isism among Roman upper society. The Alexandrian Chairemon, a member of the Mouseion of Alexandria who understood hieroglyphics and Egyptian religion, had been in the circle of the young Nero. Ptolemaios, another Alexandrian, was the astrologer of Nero's wife Poppaea, whose family had erected an Isiac *sacellum* at Pompeii. Though Nero supposedly disliked cults, he apparently venerated the memory of his ancestor, Marcus Antonius.²⁰ Antonius almost certainly must have portrayed himself as Osiris, since his queen, Kleopatra, had so seriously assimilated herself to Isis. The sources present her own death as an obsessively planned and passionately enacted assimilation to the goddess. Unforgettably she passed to a better life from within the very precinct of Isis, leaving upon her breast the marks of an attribute and form of the divinity, the *uraeus*.²¹

¹⁷ E. J. Dwyer, "The Temporal Allegory of the Tazza Farnese," *AJA* 96 (1992) 255–82 (271, 279); as an allegory of the Augustan Golden Age, consult J. Pollini, "The Tazza Farnese: *Augusto Imperatore 'Redeunt Saturnia Regna!'*," *ibid.* 283–300.

¹⁸ At Ephesos, cistophoric coinage (88–48 B.C.) depicting the headdress of Isis might have played a similar role. R. E. Oster, "Ephesus as a Religious Center under the Principate, I: Paganism before Constantine," in *ANRW* II.18.3 (1990) 1662–1728 (1679–80) notes official recognition, citing G. Hölbl, *Zeugnisse ägyptischer Religionsvorstellungen für Ephesus*, EPRO 73 (Leiden 1978) 20, 27.

¹⁹ J.-L. Voisin, "Exorient sole (Suétone, *Ner.* 6): D'Alexandrie à la *Domus Aurea*," in *L'Urbs: Espace urbain et histoire (Ier siècle av. J.-C. – IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.)*, MEFRA Suppl. 98 (Paris and Rome 1987) 509–43; D. Hemsoll, "The Architecture of Nero's Golden House," in M. Henig (ed.), *Architecture and Architectural Sculpture in the Roman Empire* (London 1990) 10–38.

²⁰ Voisin (previous note) 522–30; Hemsoll (previous note) 26–33.

²¹ Treated by F. E. Brenk, "Antony–Osiris, Cleopatra–Isis: The End of Plutarch's *Antony*," in P. A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition* (London and New York 1992)

The Flavian Emperors, too, assisted the diffusion of Egyptian religious symbolism. Domitian attempted to immortalize himself in the Egyptian manner, though his divinization was linked with the exaltation of the dynasty. The obelisk chosen for this purpose was erected next to the Iseum Campense and the Serapeum, which he had added to the Iseum. He also erected two obelisks before the tomb of Augustus, and allowed a local citizen to erect two others within the precinct of Isis at Beneventum. The inscriptions radiate Egyptian soteriology, on side II (6): “. . . the greatness of his name reaches the height of the celestial vault and his glory extends to the rays of the sun”; on side III (1–3) we learn that the soul of the divinized Titus has flown off to heaven. Throughout, the names Horos, Re-Horakhty, and Isis appear.²²

The close link between public ideology and private devotion to Egyptian religion appears in a slightly later period, when the beloved, and now divinized Antinoos, was honored by Hadrian with the “Serapeum” at the Villa Hadriana near Tivoli.²³ Here, too, are powerful intimations of Egyptian immortality.²⁴ Like the Iseum Campense, which suggests to some the *Serapieion* at Memphis, the Serapeum at Tivoli evokes the religious atmosphere of Hellenistic Egypt.²⁵ The Serapeum not only sheltered eight “colossal” statues of Antinoos, portrayed as Osiris, but also a colossal bust of Isis–Sothis and in the center of the “bridge” the double bust of Osiris–Apis (Sarapis) resting on a lotus base. The motif of “the god on the flower” evoked the birth and awakening of the sun—thus symbolizing the power of rebirth of the god as recipient of the cyclic energy of both Osiris and Apis. There were also two colossal “Telemons” of Osirantinoos, probably in the interior corners of the pavilions.²⁶ Over the tomb of Antinoos—now considered to have been located elsewhere, in Rome—Hadrian erected an

159–82; and “Plutarch’s Life ‘Markos Antonios’: A Literary and Cultural Study,” in *ANRW* II.33.6 (1992) 4347–4469 and 4895–4915.

²² J.-C. Grenier, “Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques de l’obélisque Pamphili: Un témoignage méconnu sur l’avènement de Domitien,” *MEFRA* 99 (1987) 937–61 (937–45, 959–61; 943, fig. 3).

²³ Osiris’ death was not by drowning, though, as stated by J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult*, EPRO 40 (Leiden 1980) 22, for Memphis. Cf. P. Vemus, “Le mythe d’un mythe: La prétendue noyade d’Osiris. De la dérive d’un corps à la dérive du sens,” *Studi di Egittologia e di Antichità Puniche* 9 (1991) 19–34.

²⁴ See J.-C. Grenier, “La décoration statuaire du ‘Serapeum’ du ‘Canope’ de la Villa Adriana,” *MEFRA* 101 (1989) 925–1019 (= idem, *La décoration statuaire du ‘Serapeum’ du ‘Canope’ de la Villa Adriana* [Rome 1990]); and M. De Franceschini, *Villa Adriana: Mosaici, Pavimenti, Edifici* (Rome 1991) 297–314.

²⁵ The Memphitic connection of the Iseum Campense is suggested by A. Roulet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome*, EPRO 20 (Leiden 1972) 24–25, 27–30, pl. XII, figs. 18–19; figs. 347–52. On the *Serapieion* (sic) at Memphis, see Thompson (above, note 5) 22–23, 212–65. However, Professor Grenier is sceptical of this connection.

²⁶ Following Grenier’s reconstruction (above, note 24) 941, 955, fig. 6; 963, fig. 7; 970, fig. 8; 974, fig. 9; pls. XV–XVIII, XXVII, XL; cf. pls. XIX, XXIX–XXXVI.

obelisk, undoubtedly intended, by association with Osiris, to allude to eternity and immortality.²⁷

Neither was Mithraism so occupied with bull-slaying as to be unconcerned with soteriology. Some recent scholars see the religion at a very early period concerned with "salvation" in the next life.²⁸ In this interpretation the tauroctony itself depicts the soul's triumph over space and time. In the later Empire, the Emperor Julian the Apostate claimed that the scope of "this holiness" "is the ascent of the soul." Kelsos (Celsus), in the mouth of Origen, speaks of the soul's flight "through the spheres of the fixed stars and the planets."²⁹ In this view, the Neoplatonist interpretation of Mithraism is to be taken at face value. Thus, the ladder of the Mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia is suggestive. So too is the solar ray which in some tauroctonies appears in the path of *apogenesis* (rebirth), while Cancer and Capricorn are the gates of the soul's entry and exit to and from this world.³⁰ An example is the solar ray in the Barberini fresco, which emanates from Sol, passes through Capricorn (the place of the soul's ascent and return) and through Cautes' torch—who should be associated with the soul's ascent from this world—to Mithras.³¹

Behind the Platonic allegories and the allusions of eternity and divinization in religious-political architecture, however, is a whole strain of Egyptian religion in which Osiris and those assimilated to him receive immortality, in particular, celestial immortality.³² Already in the Fifth and

²⁷ J.-C. Grenier and F. Coarelli, "La tombe d'Antinoüs à Rome," *MEFRA* 98 (1986) 217–53. Coarelli (252, 253) understands Antinoos as divine and assimilated to Apollo at the end of the inscription. P. Derchain, "Un projet d'empereur," in D. Mendel and U. Claudi (eds.), *Ägypten im afro-orientalischen Kontext* (Festschrift P. Behrens) (Cologne 1991) 109–24, attempts to refute Grenier and Coarelli, who located the obelisk in Rome.

²⁸ See R. Gordon, "Authority, Salvation and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras," in J. Huskinson, M. Beard, and J. Reynolds (eds.), *Image and Mystery in the Roman World* (Gloucester 1988) 45–80, esp. 56–58; R. Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras*, EPRO 109 (Leiden 1988) esp. 40–43, 92–99 and "The Mithras Cult as Association," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 21 (1992) 3–13; R. Turcan, "Le sacrifice mithriaque: Innovations de sens et de modalités," in J. Rudhardt and O. Reverdin (eds.), *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 27 (Vandoeuvres-Genève 1981) 341–73 and *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain* (Paris 1989) 193–241; R. Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein 1984) 237–40; and D. Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford 1989) 60–62. For the iconography, see R. Vollkomer, "Mithras," in *LIMC* VI.1 (1992) 583–626 and VI.2 (1992) 325–68.

²⁹ Origen, *Against Kelsos* 6. 22; cf. Beck, *Planetary Gods* (previous note) x.

³⁰ See F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris 1942) 35–42, figs. 2, 3.

³¹ Beck, *Planetary Gods* (above, note 28) 93–94; R. Turcan, "Salut mithriaque et sotériologie néoplatonicienne," in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (eds.), *La sotériologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero Romano*, EPRO 92 (Leiden 1982) 173–89 (183).

³² Griffiths (above, note 23) esp. 8–13, 26–29, 38–40, 64–65, 98–107, 148–49, 156–57; and "Osiris," in W. Helck and W. Westendorf (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV (Wiesbaden 1982) 623–33 (629–30); K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near*

Sixth Dynasties (ca. 2500[or 2300]–2300[or 2100] B.C.), Osiris had solar associations. Though nothing in the earlier myth of Osiris should put him in orbit, he inherited the celestial hereafter and became associated with Orion.³³ In traditional Egyptian theology the gods must be renewed each day to retain their eternal youth. In many passages such rejuvenation or resuscitation is the true meaning of a blessed death (*Pyramid Text* 1975): “O Osiris, the King, you have gone, but you will return, you have slept [but you will awake], you have died, but you will live.”³⁴ The soul as Ba, represented as a small bird with the head and arms of the deceased, can follow the Sun-God. But as a mummy it must await the Sun’s return, and call out his name, until the body is resuscitated. This cyclical concept reflects the unending process of the body’s life in death as though in sleep. As Osiris is revived in sleep, so is the king, in this denial of death (*Pyramid Text* 134): “O King, you have not departed dead, you have departed alive; sit upon the throne of Osiris, your sceptre in your hand, that you may give orders to the living . . .”³⁵ But there are different conceptions from this “corporeal” one. There is also transformation into another form, including that of a star. Undoubtedly, Greeks and Romans would associate Egyptian catasterism with more familiar types of the soul’s divinization and immortality. A compulsive tendency seems to have existed to sublimate into a higher, Platonic form the traditional salvation of an Egyptian eschatology threatened with chaos.

Like Greek and Roman religion, Egyptian beliefs were not exempt from creeping democratization. In the *Coffin Texts* and *The Book of the Dead*, Osiris secures triumph over death for all, kings and commoners, who identify themselves with him. Osiris became a savior-god. His fate, which led to final triumph after suffering and death, is a pattern which human believers can achieve.³⁶ Osiris, though, could even take a very active role as a savior-god.³⁷ The *Oath of the Mystes* powerfully expresses the initiate’s hopes for overcoming mortality:

East (Kevelaer 1986) 88–93; S. Cauville, *Essai sur la théologie du Temple d’Horus à Edfou I* (Cairo 1987) esp. 239–42. F. Dunand, “Du séjour osirien des morts à l’au-delà chrétien: Pratiques funéraires en Égypte tardive,” *Ktèma* 11 (1986) 29–37, esp. 30–32, notes how Greek and Egyptian salvation beliefs merge.

³³ Griffiths (above, note 23) 13, 65.

³⁴ R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford 1969) 285; E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca 1982; London 1983) (= *Der Eine und die Vielen: Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen* [Darmstadt 1971]) 160; illustrations (ca. 1500–1100 B.C.) in R. Wullemann et al., *Passage to Eternity* (Belgium 1989).

³⁵ Faulkner (previous note) 40; Griffiths (above, note 23) 67.

³⁶ Griffiths, “Osiris” (above, note 32) 629, without *Pap. BM 10507*.

³⁷ M. Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507: Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum III* (London 1987) col. VII, pp. 43–45; comment, pp. 101–02, and 129–31 (*Pap. BM 10507* is late Ptolemaic in date); Hornung (above, note 34) 143–96, esp. 143–47; V. A. Tobin, *Theological Principles of Egyptian Religion* (New York 1989) 103–24, 125–52.

... and day from night
and sunrise from sunset, and [life
from] death, and birth from [corruption].

... καὶ ἡμέραν ἐκ νυκτός]
[καὶ ἀνατολήν ἀπὸ δύσεως καὶ [ζωήν]
[ἀπὸ] θανάτου καὶ γένεσιν ἀπ[ὸ] φθοράς]. (12–14)³⁸

For Augustus and early Roman emperors Egyptian religion and soteriology was literally and figuratively bathed in sunlight. Many Isis–Osiris texts reflect the rays of the solar god, for example a line in the Bremner–Rhind papyrus (312–11 B.C.):

To thee belongs sunlight, O thou who art equipped with rays. Thou shinest at the left hand of Atum. Thou art seen in the place of Re. (10. 6)³⁹

In *The Hymn of Isidoros* (at the latest first century B.C.), Isis mounts “the chariot of the swift-driving Sun” (III 25).⁴⁰ The Isis of the *Kyme Aretalogy* is not more modest: “I am she who rises in the Dog Star (9), . . . laid out the paths of the stars, . . . set the course for Sun and Moon (13–14), . . . I am in the rays of the sun.” (44)⁴¹

More closely linking salvation and resurrection with the sun are *Pap. BM 10507*:

I will live again when I have looked upon your face, Osiris, foremost in the West . . . (II 20); you will enter the darkness; it will become light for you (XII 8); Osiris . . . He will cause you to be rejuvenated eternally. [They will favour you forever. They will cause you to be rejuvenated eternally, Isis and Nephthys] (XII 21–22).⁴²

Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris* is faithful to the solar or stellar aspects of Osiris, Isis, and other Egyptian deities, without in these passages

³⁸ Toti (above, note 3) 19.

³⁹ Col. 5. 10. See R. O. Faulkner, “The Bremner–Rhind Papyrus, I,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 22 (1936) 121–40 (125), with other references to Re, the Solar Disk, and the nocturnal sun (cols. 10. 6; 10. 20; 16. 14–16, 27) 125, 128, 130–31. Similar, too, is *Pap. BM 10507* I 11, while Osiris’ power is stressed in X 15, X 19; cf. Smith (above, note 37) 35, 49, 60, 117–18.

⁴⁰ V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidoros and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto 1972) 50–51, 57.

⁴¹ Toti (above, note 3) 5–10 (*Andros Hymn*), 79–80 (*III Hymn of Isidoros*). The solar and Sothis–Seirios aspects of Isis were represented on the façade of the Iseum Campense (solar disk, Isis on Dog Star): Roulet (above, note 25) 31–32, fig. 22; Turcan, *Cultes* (above, note 28) 110, pl. IXa.

⁴² Smith (above, note 37) 37, 51–52; comment, 71–72, 125–26, 129 (double brackets indicate *Pap. Harkness* parallels). In the Bremner–Rhind Papyrus: “Lie with thy sister Isis” (5. 25); “Raise thee up, O Osiris” (17. 1) (Faulkner [above, note 39] 125, 132). In *Pap. BM 10507*, cf. II 22, IV 7, V 6, VIII 2, VIII 7, IX 7 (Smith [above, note 37] 38–40, 45, 47; comment, 87–88, 102–03).

communicating the soteriological tone of the Egyptian texts. At birth (355e) "the Lord of all advances into the light." Osiris is sprung from the Sun (355f), while Isis is Sothis (the Dog Star) (359d, 375f–376a); again, Horos (Osiris) is Orion (359e).⁴³ Or, the *logoi* of the gods reside in the heaven and the stars (375b). Not exactly a savior figure, Osiris becomes, rather, the Platonic form of the Good—whose visible image in Platonic philosophy, and elsewhere in Plutarch, is the sun (372c, 374d).

On Isis and Osiris incorporates aspects from the traditional Greek mysteries, such as the Eleusinian and the Dionysiac, through allusions to the "Orphic" myth.⁴⁴ Such additions to traditional Egyptian religion suggest the eschatological bent of Greeks who propagated the Hellenistic and Roman worship of Isis. The phenomenon also appears in other cults, such as that of the Ephesian Artemis.⁴⁵ A torch on coins in the years 48–27 B.C. suggests the introduction of nocturnal mystery rites.⁴⁶ In the Salutaris procession (A.D. 104), even the golden Artemis carries a torch.⁴⁷ Heroic and divine cult of humans in the first century B.C.—shortly to be followed by the Imperial—had encroached upon devotion to the goddess. One wonders whether aspirations implicitly associated with heroization and divinization did not cry out for fulfillment even in the ancient cult of Artemis.⁴⁸

⁴³ Plutarch says "Horos," but according to Heliopolitan theology, Osiris; so J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Swansea 1970) 353 n. 6 and 371–72.

⁴⁴ Dionysos, 356b, 364d; Plouton, 361e, 382e; Persephone, 364e; Orphism, noted in Griffiths (previous note) 419, 423, 478. See also M. Marcovich, "The Gold Leaf from Hipponion Revisited," *ZAnt* 40 (1990) 73–78, esp. 76; C. Segal, "Dionysus and the Gold Tablets from Pelinna," *GRBS* 31 (1990) 411–19, who cites the talk of F. Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions," for the congress, *Masks of Dionysos*, but see now F. Graf, "Textes orphiques et rituel bacchique: A propos des lamelles de Pélinna," in P. Borgeaud (ed.), *Orphisme et Orphée* (Hommage J. Rudhardt) (Geneva 1991) 87–102; A. Bottini, *Archeologia della salvezza* (Milano 1992) esp. 125–57; L. Zhmud, "Orphism and Graffiti from Olbia," *Hermes* 120 (1992) 159–68, esp. 168; F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1974) 79–98; G. Casadio, "Dioniso e Semele: Morte di un Dio e risurrezione di una donna," in F. Berti (ed.), *Dionysos: Mito e mistero* (Ferrara 1991) 361–77, esp. 368–69.

Note also K. Clinton, "The Eleusinian Mysteries: Roman Initiates and Benefactors, Second Century B.C. to A.D. 267," in *ANRW* II.18.2 (1989) 1499–1539, esp. 1516–19; and "Hadrian's Contribution to the Renaissance of Eleusis," in S. Walker and A. Cameron (eds.), *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire*, *BICS* Suppl. 55 (London 1989) 56–69, esp. 58. Also valuable is A. Schachter, "Policy, Cult, and the Placing of the Greek Sanctuaries," in A. Schachter (ed.), *Le sanctuaire grec*, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 37 (Vandoeuvres–Genève 1992) 1–57, esp. 6–7.

⁴⁵ On *μυστήρια* for Artemis of Ephesos see Oster (above, note 18) 1711–13; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* IV (North Ryde, Australia 1987) 94–95; and S. R. Llewelyn and R. A. Kearsley, *ibidem* VI (1992) 196–202 (Kearsley).

⁴⁶ S. Karwiese, "Ephesos," *RE* Suppl. XII (Stuttgart 1970) 248–363 (311; see 284–87).

⁴⁷ G. M. Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos: Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London 1991) 111.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Rogers (previous note) 113; Oster (above, note 18) 1728.

The relation between the soteriological aspects of Isism and women dressed as the goddess is not clear. But women's desire to be frozen forever in marble assimilation to the goddess, especially in funerary monuments, is impressive.⁴⁹ As the shades of death drew nigh, Kleopatra, with obsessive passion, gradually transformed herself into Isis. Destiny, or the goddess, admirably obliged. She was not alone. Numerous inscriptions suggest the desire for Isis' protection in death as in life (*dis manibus Hortensiae sacerdoti Isidi*) or even demand a fine to Isis (or Serapis) if the tomb is broken into (*habebit sacra Isidis illius quieta irata or habebit Isidem iratam*).⁵⁰

The Temple of Isis at Pompeii reveals the deceptiveness of "first sight."⁵¹ Here we can possibly reconstruct how worshippers were successively drawn deeper and deeper into the profundities of Egyptian religion and thus transformed. "Foreign" religions have an uncanny knack of entering in sheep's clothing. Or do the wolves become sheep? The temple precinct was not as suggestive of Egypt as was the Iseum at Rome, where a long "dromos" and hemicycle Serapeum might recall the *Sarapieion* at Memphis.⁵² However, the temple itself resembles other Hellenistic temples of Isis, including that at Alexandria and the temple of the Iseum Campense.⁵³ Like temples for other "oriental" cults, the Iseum at Pompeii had a number of exotic rooms.⁵⁴ Thus, the external architecture, at first sight entirely Graeco-Roman, contains a number of "mystery"

⁴⁹ Representations in E. J. Walters, *Attic Grave Reliefs that Represent Women in the Dress of Isis*, *Hesperia* Suppl. 22 (Princeton 1988); J. Eingartner, *Isis und ihre Dienerinnen in der Kunst der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Leiden 1991).

⁵⁰ Vidman, *Sylloge* (above, note 3) nos. 473; 52, 346 (to Serapis), 464–65.

⁵¹ The new catalogue supersedes previous treatments: S. De Caro et al., *Alla ricerca di Iside: Analisi, studi e restauri dell'Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli*, Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Province di Napoli e Caserta (Naples 1992) esp. 2–4. However, older works will be cited here: O. Elia, *Pompei III–IV: Le pitture del Tempio di Iside*, Monumenti della pittura antica scoperti in Italia. Sezione terza: La pittura ellenistico-romana (Rome 1941) 1–5, fig. 2; V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Essai sur le culte d'Isis à Pompéi* (Paris 1964) 30–39, pls. I, II; M. Lytton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity* (London 1974) 199–200; L. Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore 1988) 80–85, fig. 4; Turcan, *Cultes* (above, note 28) 105–09 (106, fig. 2); J.-M. Croisille, "Paysages et natures mortes au temple d'Isis à Pompéi," in D. Porte and J.-P. Néraudau (eds.), *Res Sacrae* (Brussels 1988) pl. I. The date of the earlier temple is unknown, perhaps as late as 50 B.C. according to Richardson 82 n. 17.

⁵² Two reliefs depicting striking Egyptian and pseudo-Egyptian sculptures may represent the Iseum façade (Turcan *Cultes* [above, note 28] 110, pl. VII; Roulet [above, note 25] pl. XIII, figs. 20–21). However, see note 25 above, with Grenier's reservations.

⁵³ Following the pattern of Greek funerary temples of the necropolis of Hermopolis Magna; Roulet (above, note 25) 30–31, figs. 23, 24.

⁵⁴ Little seems to be known about the Isieion (so spelled at Memphis); Thompson (above, note 5) 22–23, 31, 168, 192.

features.⁵⁵ These are a so-called Megaron or Purgatorium with an underground space—in the form of a highly decorated *aediculum*—a Sacrarium (a kind of sacristy, or initiation hall), and the largest room, the Telesterion, Curia Isiaca, School, or Ekklesiasterion (according to different theories)—for presenting the initiates, sacred representations, ritual meals, and meetings—and the Pastophorion (rooms possibly for the residence of the priests, and of the laity during the fasting period before initiation). The use of the Purgatorium (or Megaron) and its underground room is very uncertain. Possibly it stored “Nile water” and was used for ablutions, or, according to another theory, was a kind of incubation oracle for receiving prophecies.⁵⁶

The painting, like the architecture, innocently Graeco-Roman in appearance, becomes more dangerously religious as one “zooms in” on a world continually more mysterious and Egyptian in imagery and theme. The Porticus—like the Ekklesiasterion, in the Pompeian Fourth Style—first attracts the viewer into the religious Isism of Hellenistic Egypt. In the Porticus a kind of *aediculum* was decorated with a large painting (95 × 107 cm) depicting Harpokrates. The Praxitelean statue of the youthful god incongruously receives worship from an Egyptian priest holding forth two candelabra.⁵⁷ A beautiful painted acanthus frieze forms the upper portion of the panels. Here, fantastically woven into the tendrils, seed pods, and flowers—along with various animals—are a jackal, cobra, bull, cow, hippopotamus, and even a baby Harpocrates on a lotus.⁵⁸

The numerous sacro-idyllic scenes, with their frequent funerary monuments or shrines in either *quadretti* (small rectangle) or *emblemata* (small inserts against the red decorated panels), begin to entice the viewer deeper into the exotic piety of Hellenistic Egypt. Alternating *emblemata* supposedly represent the solemn procession of the *Pompa Isidis*. But in fact the statuary poses of the isolated personalities, depicted against a simulated stone backdrop, suggest, rather, figures from a monument. They are strikingly Egyptian in dress, with two exceptions. The *zakoros* and the *hierogrammateus*, with ostrich feathers attached by a band to his head, *spondophoros*, and *hierodoulos* are all sufficiently sympathetic. Only

⁵⁵ Actually the architecture is quite revolutionary. It includes a false arch in the pediment, Eastern elements, and Isiac or Egyptian motifs—untypical of contemporary Roman style; cf. Lytleton (above, note 51) 199–200.

⁵⁶ Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 34; Elia (above, note 51) 5.

⁵⁷ Catalogue 1.5 (40–41, 116); Elia (above, note 51) 7–8, fig. 7; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 135, pl. V.

⁵⁸ Catalogue 1.31 (48, tav. VIII), 1.37 (50, tav. VIII), 1.42 (50–51, 119), 1.49 (52–53), 1.54 (52–53), 1.55 (52, 54); other animals (some more than once) are lioness, female goat, goose (?), wolf, galloping horse, lion, gazelle, leopard—besides a pygmy. This type of frieze, frequently religious, was studied by J. M. C. Toynbee and J. B. Ward Perkins, “Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art,” *PBSR* 18 (1950) 1–43, esp. 2, 8–9, 10 and pl. VI.1, 3 (Iseum); they omit the Harpokrates in VI.1 and *uraeus* in VI.2

Anubis gives one pause. Despite the artist's manful struggle, even this congenial jackal resists syncretism's imperfect fits.⁵⁹

As one entered the Sacarium a large painting evoked a familiar Graeco-Roman *lararium*. Isis sat enthroned, with Osiris-Serapis-Horos beside her, reclining on a rock.⁶⁰ Benign and approachable, they wear lotus flowers on their heads, while "Osiris" is pictorially framed by two *uraei*, also wearing the lotus headpiece. The majestic and self-confident poses offer reassurance of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. The vision is a comforting one of gods to be encountered, where evil exists no more and every tear is dried. Scattered about the Sacarium, as though to be innocuous, are more disturbing smaller representations of Egyptian gods. Re's symbol—the dung beetle or scarab, Khe-pre—crawled around Isis and Osiris enthroned. Other inhabitants lurking in the room were the enthroned dwarf god Bes, the Apis bull, a baboon (the symbol of Thot, god of magic and wisdom), Anubis as jackal, Khnum, the god of the cataracts, as a ram, a vulture (symbol of Nekhbet, primordial god of Upper Egypt), an *ichneumon* crouching toward the right (the symbol of Horos), and a cat (symbol of Bast, the goddess of Bubastis in the Delta). Elsewhere were Toth as the ibis, and Sakhmet represented as a coiled *uraeus* (the sacred serpent) crowned with the lotus (symbol of Wadjet, the goddess of the Delta).⁶¹

The Hellenistic *sfumatura* of another fresco in the Sacarium, the "Inuentio Osiridis," only scantily veils its radically Egyptian theme. Isis stands erect in a barque, between two huge hoary heads dripping water, which undoubtedly are personifications of the upper and lower Nile.⁶² Behind her she tows yet another barque, the prow of which terminates in a male head. Upon the barque rests the square coffin of Osiris, decorated with the falcon.⁶³ In the lower register, a kind of *lararium*, two huge snakes writhing protectively around a *cista mystica* frame the mystic basket.⁶⁴ Above, Isis returns upon the barque Sothis, accompanied by the cadaver of Osiris, which she found through her arduous searching and reassembled

⁵⁹ Catalogue 1.36 (49), tav. VII; Elia (above, note 51) 5–20; figs. 9–15, 161–21b, tav. V.1–2; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 136, pls. II–V.

⁶⁰ Catalogue 1.71 (59); Elia (above, note 51) 20–21; fig. 25. Only the Serapis part survives; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 145, pl. VIII.1 (167 × 176.8 cm).

⁶¹ In general, the descriptions of the catalogue—sometimes contradicting earlier authors—have been followed here: 1.71–79, 1.84 (58–60, 62). Cf. Elia (above, note 51) 22; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) pls. VII, IX.2; Turcan, *Cultes* (above, note 28) 109.

⁶² V. Sampaolo, "La decorazione pittorica" (catalogue 60 n. 1), treats the distinguishing crowns.

⁶³ Catalogue 1.74 (59–60, engraving, 85); Elia (above, note 51) 22, fig. 26; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 37, pl. X.1. Cf. Plutarch, *On Isis* 357f–58b (Griffiths [above, note 43] 339–40).

⁶⁴ Cf. Apul. *Met.* 11. 11: *cista secretorum . . . celans operta magnificae religionis.*

with her own hands.⁶⁵ The scene probably recalled the procession of the sacred water, symbol of the regenerated Osiris in the Isiac ceremonies.⁶⁶

The unfamiliar scene is somewhat unfamiliarly portrayed. Isis' protection, so it intimates, extends beyond the ordinary concerns of this life to the unexperienced voyage hereafter.⁶⁷ The enormous serpents evoke Isis' own *uraeus* form, in her special role as goddess of the dead.⁶⁸ One might recall a striking room at Pompeii. At the time of the restoration of the Villa of the Mysteries in the early Augustan period, the *tablinum* next to the room of Dionysiac scenes was redecorated with Egyptian motifs. These included a pteriform Isis as protectress of the dead, with the *uraeus*—as depicted in pharaonic crowns and decorations—and with Seth.⁶⁹ The juxtaposition of Dionysiac and Isiac scenes may not be coincidental. Nor, possibly, is it by chance alone that precisely in this period Dionysos and his train apparently retreat before the exotic Egyptian gods.

In the Ekklesiasterion most of all one begins to communicate with the mysterious world of Hellenistic and Egyptian Isism. This time, the "otherness" of foreign ideas and iconography does not rear an ugly head, but rather the painting dazzles with the incredible beauty and mystery of Hellenistic Egypt. Two large paintings, "Io, Argos, and Hermes" and "Io at Kanopos," in spite of snake, *sistrum*, and *situla* in the latter, reflect the early Greek statuary style of painting.⁷⁰ The double occurrence in the temple precinct of the Io-theme, quite rare in Graeco-Roman painting, is striking, particularly since the Io at Kanopos occupies a commanding position in the Ekklesiasterion. One picture suggests Hermes' freeing of Io from torment and persecution by killing the spy, Argos. The second, through the horns

⁶⁵ The falcon painted on the box, according to Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 65 n. 4, represents Osiris, who as a falcon flew from the barque Sektet to heaven; see T. G. H. Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Chicago 1960) ch. 77.

⁶⁶ So V. Sampaolo, "La decorazione pittorica" (catalogue 60).

⁶⁷ At the same time possibly meant to allude to the *Ploiaphesia* (*Nauigium*), the opening of the sailing season, and success on the sea. See M. Malaise, *Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiens découverts en Italie*, EPRO 81 (Leiden 1972) 279–80, no. 47, pl. 44; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 99–100, pl. X.1; P. Bruneau, "Isis Pélagia à Délos, (Compléments)," *BCII* 87 (1963) 301–08 (esp. 307); R. Brilliant, *Pompeii AD 79: The Treasure of Rediscovery* (New York 1979) 95 (warships in the Iseum). *Naumachiai* appear frequently in the Porticus (catalogue 1.20, 1.23, 1.25, 1.29, 1.39, 1.41, 1.44, 1.47 [44, tav. VI]). Undoubtedly Isis sailed with the Ptolemaic fleet.

⁶⁸ F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée*, EPRO 26 (Leiden 1973) pls. XXVI–XXVIII; III pl. XV; V. Tran Tam Tinh, "Etat des études iconographiques relatives à Isis, Sérapis et *Sunnaoi Theoi*," in *ANRW* II.17.3 (1984) 1710–38, pl. XI. Cf. E. Hornung, *Ägyptische Unterweltbücher* (Zurich and Munich 1972; 2nd ed., 1984) 27–29, and 74–75.

⁶⁹ De Vos (above, note 15) 12, pls. III–VII.

⁷⁰ Catalogue 1.69 (165.5 × 147 cm [57–58, tav. XIV]), 1.63 (150 × 137.5 cm [35, 55–56, tav. X, XVI]); cf. Elia (above, note 51) 27–30, tav. A, tav. B. R. Merkelbach, "Der Isiskult in Pompeii," *Latomus* 24 (1965) 144–49, sees "salvation" aspects in Dionysos–Osiris associations (146).

still remaining on Io, depicts the very moment at which Isis releases the heroine from her beastly shape. The iconography thus foreshadows the transformation in Apuleius' Isis-book, in which Lucius, through the intervention of Isis, is restored from ass form back to human shape. Platonic allegorical interpreters would not be stretched to find a true meaning: The devotee, through the mercy of the all-powerful Isis, will be liberated from immersion in the phenomena of this world and from the necessity of perpetual metempsychosis in the next, and will view forever, in the intelligible sphere, the perfect Good and Beautiful.

How different the sacro-idyllic scenes! In the Ekklesiasterion six or seven very large tableaux exude a delicate, haunting, and mystical Hellenistic style.⁷¹ These paintings contrast strikingly with the Egyptian representations of Isis and other divinities in the Villa Farnesina Romana. Though the Farnesina frescoes are beautifully executed and mysteriously serious, they are also playful and decorative, undermining the religious tone.⁷² In the *emblemata* of the Ekklesiasterion the landscape was arranged around a sacred edifice such as a funerary monument, temple, or "sacred portal" and usually set upon a rocky islet shaded by trees and surrounded by water. Mountains and deep valleys faintly appear in a background sprinkled with sparse vegetation and enhanced with the rare appearance of an isolated animal or human being. The *emblemata*, as indicated by their modern names, reflect the cult of Isis: "Sacred Portal of Neith," "Funerary Monument of Isis-Hathor," "Tholos Temple of Hathor," "Funerary Monument of Osiris," "syncretist cult of Osiris-Adonis-Nile" (which was celebrated at Kanopos).⁷³ The Nile seems to flow through the Heptanomide of Upper Egypt, north of the Thebaid, coursing from mountain passes to glide silently among numerous small sanctuaries.⁷⁴ Viewed with religious awe, the magnificent sacral architecture and breathtaking nature of these

⁷¹ Between 125 × 120 and 210 × 122 cm in size; e.g., catalogue 1.62 (tav. IX), 1.66–68 (tav. XI–XIII), 1.70 (tav. XV). Possibly the seated divinity in 1.66 and 1.67 is Isis (Sampaolo, catalogue 56, 57).

⁷² See I. Bragantini and M. de Vos, *Le decorazioni della villa romana della Farnesina*, Museo Nazionale Romano: Le pitture II.1 (Rome 1982). The painted Isis candelabra of the Villa (Bragantini, tav. 37–38, 45, 50, 95; esp. 50) contrast with the simplicity, more religious pose, and characteristic Isis knot of their Pompeian sisters (catalogue 1.57–60 [54–55, tav. III]); Elia (above, note 51) 23, fig. 27.

⁷³ Catalogue 7.16 (82, 85); Elia (above, note 51) 12–13; tav. I; Croisille (above, note 51) 124–43 (127).

⁷⁴ Elia (above, note 51) 30; Croisille (above, note 51) 126. See also K. Schefold, "Signification de la peinture pompéienne," in G. Cerulli Irelli et al. (eds.), *La peinture de Pompéi I* (Paris 1993) 35–46, esp. 42–45, painting under Nero and Vespasian; and W. T. Peters, "Le paysage dans la peinture murale de Campanie," *ibid.* 277–91, esp. 284 on the Iseum.

frescoes intimate that the mysteries of life and of the goddess are ultimately indistinguishable.⁷⁵

The most astonishing scene again is a piece of initial deception. Through the transparent veil of romantic Hellenism, suddenly an Egyptian theme strikingly and irresistibly evokes death and a blessed afterlife. This relatively large painting, "The Adoration of the Mummy of Osiris" or "The Tomb (σόρος) of Osiris," in its own way is more strikingly Egyptian than "The Finding of Osiris."⁷⁶ Like two colossal stelai, anthropoid mummy cases form a sacred portal at the composition's center. Three steep steps approaching them, typical of Egyptian sanctuaries, reach to the middle of the "portal." Beneath the gate, a coffin—or mummy case—appears, erect. Upon it a phoenix perches, the bird of the Sun par excellence, sacred to Osiris, and the symbol of rebirth.⁷⁷ Below the case, a *hierogrammateus*, whose head is decorated with ostrich plumes, extends a tray of offerings.⁷⁸ Beyond this unusual "sacellum," an ithyphallic god, either Min or Ptah, is saucily propped up against a "ceppus." Ribbons are tied tightly around the stelai, while those around the "coffin" seem already loosened as though about to fly asunder. The central scene, bathed and highlighted with sunshine, stands out against the misty background of the distant mountains.

⁷⁵ K. Scheffold, *La peinture pompéienne: Essai sur l'évolution de sa signification* (Brussels 1972) (= *Pompejanische Malerei: Sinn und Ideengeschichte* [Basel 1952], with some revisions) offered a strong eschatological interpretation: "above all, Isis promises eternal life" (87); F. Le Corsu, "Un oratoire pompéien consacré à Dionysos-Osiris," *RA* (1967) 239–54, sees prominent symbols of death and resurrection, and Isis linked with Dionysos (254). Other scholars are more reserved.

⁷⁶ Catalogue 1.68 (111.5 × 188.8 cm [56–57, tav. XIII]); cf. Elia (above, note 51) 33–34, tav. C; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) pl. X.1.

⁷⁷ For the interpretation see Sampaolo (catalogue 57), citing Merkelbach (above, note 70) 148–49; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 65 n. 4; and A. Tammisto, "PHOENIX. FELIX. ET. TU: Remarks on the Representation of the Phoenix in Roman Art," *Arctos* 20 (1986) 171–225, esp. 174–86, 180 n. 24.

The exact nature of the crown in the impressionistic "Adoration" fresco is difficult to determine. Lunar crescent and sun disk, *uraeus*, *hemhem* crown, or simply some generic fantasy? E. Vassilika, *Ptolemaic Philae* (Louvain 1989) 293–325, reproduces the huge assortment found at Philai. The crowns closest to the "Adoration" bird's are the rush and *hemhem* crowns (301–04; cf. 84–95). Roman attitudes toward Egyptian crowns are discussed by L. Kákosy, "Die Kronen im spätägyptischen Totenglauben," in G. Grimm et al. (eds.), *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten*, *Aegyptica Treverensia* 2 (Mainz 1983) 57–60, esp. 57–58 (Taf. 1, 3; 2, 2–3; 3, 4), 59. Somewhat similar is the tiny crown on Arsinoe II in coins; see O. Mørkholm et al., *Early Hellenistic Coinage* (Cambridge 1991) pl. XVIII, 294–95. Something similar appears in some iconography of Isis; cf. Tran Tam Tinh, "Isis," in *LIMC* V.1 (1990) 761–96 and V.2 (1990) 501–26 (Isis 61, 96, 252b; on Isis in the "Inventio Osiridis" at Pompeii, 77). Also on a minister in the cult, see Dunand (above, note 68) III pl. XI.2.

Elia (above, note 51) 34, unconvincingly, saw Isis as a "sparrow-hawk" about to resuscitate Osiris. *Pace* Tran Tam Tinh and Sampaolo, the outer mummy case is surely closed (tied with a yellow ribbon), not open. Its generic rather than Egyptian look may be significant.

⁷⁸ Plutarch, *On Isis* 366e–f; Elia (above, note 51) 33–34; Malaise (above, note 67) 271, 280–81, no. 45, and pl. 45; Tran Tam Tinh (above, note 51) 65–66, pl. X.2.

In such an unreal atmosphere, a sudden, unexpected, and supernatural transition from death to life seems to await Osiris and all who follow his mysteries.⁷⁹

The temple, then, fits a pattern of religious imagery in the early Imperial period. Seemingly innocent and innocuous iconography, veiled in familiar garb, only gradually begins to reveal its deeper meaning. Isis, the mystagogue attentive not to shock, gingerly guides the initiate into her mysteries.⁸⁰ Statuary and sacro-idyllic painting in Hellenistic form establish a comforting distance between the viewer and the real Egypt, yet tease with an exotic touch. In fact, they have much in common with the Serapieion in Egypt: Apis bull, Bes, Anubis, Dionysos with panther, Aphrodite, peacocks, lions, Ibis, Ptah, satyrs, marine lions and horses, *uraei*, sphinxes, and lotus flowers.⁸¹ To establish even closer ties with ancient and Ptolemaic Egypt the temple displayed an Egyptianized Dionysos, a hieroglyphic plaque, an *ushabti*, a squatting male deity, and it put an *ankh* into the hand of Isis.⁸² Little by little, then, the architecture and painting of the temple unfold an "Egyptian" experience in which existence transcends ordinary life and ultimately death itself. In a sudden illumination, conditioned perhaps by Greek philosophy and public ideology, one might realize that good will ultimately triumph over evil, that the

⁷⁹ Except for last clause, Elia (above, note 51) 33–34: "a striking expression of the deepest and most consoling meaning of the Isis religion . . . resurrection, redemption, and survival after death in a better world."

⁸⁰ For something similar see L. H. Kant, "Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin," in *ANRW* II.20.2 (1987) 671–713, esp. 682–90; L. V. Rutgers, "Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity," *AJA* 96 (1992) 101–18.

⁸¹ See catalogue 77, and numbers 1.1, 1.12–13, 1.16–19, 1.32, 1.36, 1.51, 1.56, 1.62, 1.64, 1.68, 1.72, 1.77–79, 1.81, 1.84, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1, 6.3. Missing are a Kerberos, falcon with head of a bearded man, mermaid, and a lion ridden by Dionysos. 3.4–6, portrait busts, apparently of women members of the imperial family, correspond with the Ptolemaic statues and busts in the Serapieion. Cf. Thompson (above, note 5) esp. 212–13.

⁸² Dionysos, 3.9 (D. D'Errico, "Materiali di produzione egiziana," catalogue 77–79 [70]); plaque, beginning of Ptolemaic period, probably from Herakleopolis, vindicating the rights of the local god Herishaf, and his native clergy (6.1 [78]) from last phase of pharaonic Egypt. The *ushabti* of Paef-hery-hesu (mummiform figure, dating to 664–525 B.C.) (6.3 [79]), contains the formula (ch. 6 of *The Book of the Dead*), "May Osiris shine forth, Known to Re, Heard by (?) Ammon," and mentions Paef-hery-hesu, "justified" for the afterlife. The male deity (6.2 [10.3 × 14.2 × 14.2 cm], 79, tav. XVII) in blue faience wears the *usekh* necklace. The Isis (3.2 [105 × 85 × 42 cm], 65, 68) contains Greek archaizing and Egyptian features. Among the latter are: imitation of the *usekh* necklace, right foot rigidly pushed forward, lotus or Hathor crown on head (so S. A. Muscettola, "La decorazione architettonica e l'arredo," catalogue 63–76 [68]). Note, too, the lotus cup candelabra (5.4, 74).

The papers given at the meeting, "Giornata di Studi: 'Alla ricerca di Iside,'" Naples, June 4, 1993, by S. De Caro, J.-P. Grenier, F. Zevi, V. Sampaolo, S. Adamo Muscettola, M. de Vos, and F. Coarelli should be published soon.

devotion paid to these strange, yet comforting gods, could bring eternal salvation and blessedness.⁸³

Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome

⁸³ Professors Roger Beck of Erindale College, University of Toronto, Mariette de Vos of the Università di Trento, and Jean-Claude Grenier of the Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III generously read the manuscript and offered indispensable information, corrections, and suggestions. Thanks are due as well to Mary Hopkins of Milwaukee for many improvements with the text.