

# The diffusion of the cult of Isis from Egypt across the Mediterranean world.

A study of the diffusion of the cult of Isis from Egypt across the Mediterranean world through the analysis of the Temple of Isis at Philae, the Temple of Isis at the Campus Martius in Rome, and the temple of Isis at Pompeii.

By Matteo Tognocchi

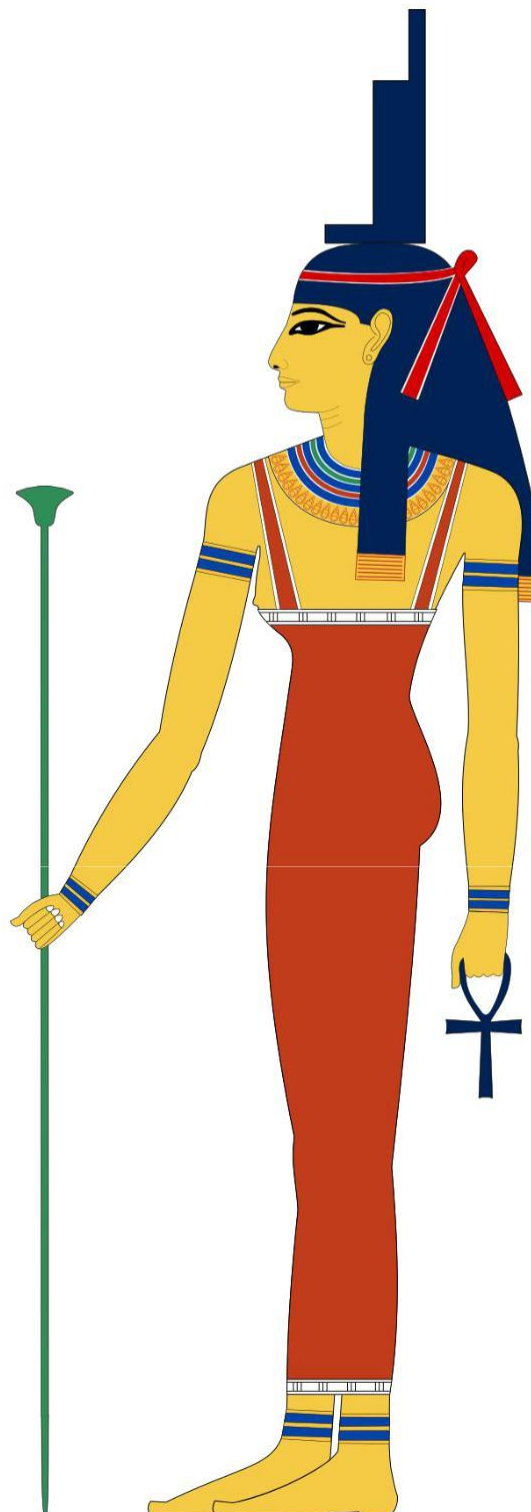


Image on cover: Composite Image of Isis' iconography ([www.upload.wikimedia.org](http://www.upload.wikimedia.org))

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# 1 Introduction:

## 1.1 Introduction:

In this thesis I aim to treat the process of diffusion of the cult of Isis across the Mediterranean world that took place from the fourth century BC onwards. In order to do this, I will introduce the topic by generally analyzing in the next chapters the academic perspectives and theories that have been developed by authors and experts of the argument, by also putting in comparison what they write and think about it, so that I can broadly explain the frameworks that have been developed about the argument. In order to do this, I will compare some of the chapters written by these authors where they tell about the concepts of the cult of Isis and its diffusion. I will then focus on analyzing the information regarding three different temples of Isis located in Egypt and in Italy, namely the temples of Philae in Egypt, and Rome and Pompeii in Italy, in order to understand if the persistence or variation of characteristics of the cult during its diffusion are visible from material data, architectural features, and eventually textual evidence related to these sanctuaries.

In this introductory chapter I will present my research question, along with the methodology that I will apply in order to analyze the data that I will go through, and explain why the study of this thesis can be relevant in the understanding of the spread of the cult of Isis across the Mediterranean world. I will then generally explain what is known about the cult dedicated to Isis and its diffusion across the Mediterranean world, and introduce the temples that I will discuss in this work, in order to introduce the reader to the topic.

## 1.2 The research questions, the methodology applied to reply them, and the academic relevance:

The main research question that I aim to reply to with this thesis is:

**Which differences and/or similarities can we find concerning the Isis sanctuaries from Egypt and Roman Italy up to Roman times?**

Along with this, I also aim to reply to the following two sub-questions:

- **Can we spot an evolution or change in the architectural elements of the temple of Isis after its spread across the Mediterranean world?**
- **Is it possible to find evidence for possible persistence or changes in the aspects of the cult of Isis that might have taken place after the diffusion of it across the Mediterranean world, by analyzing the material culture, art, and architectural aspects of temples of Isis located in different parts of it?**

I think that since the cult of Isis diffused across the Mediterranean world and was followed by members of different social classes in Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman contexts, the general study of it could be useful in gaining knowledge about the spirituality and some aspects of these culture(s). More specifically, the detailed analysis and comparison of features of different Temples of Isis may give insight about possible features that might have been a constant element of these structures, or about the changes and evolutions that the model of a temple dedicated to the goddess might have underwent during its diffusion. I think that this study can be relevant, in a modest measure, to the academic research regarding the diffusion of the cult of Isis, since to my knowledge there are not many studies

where different Isiac temples, and especially temples from different geographical areas and from different time periods are compared, and this is what I aim to do with the case studies I will treat in this thesis. Making a comparison of different temples could thus lead to expand the knowledge regarding what is known about the development of the structures where Isis was worshiped and possibly about her cult itself.

In order to reply to these questions, in the second chapter I will first go through the theoretical analyses made by Bommas, Woolf, Versluys, and Bricault in some of the chapters they wrote in regards of the cult of Isis, its diffusion, and its position in different social, political, and geographical contexts. I will first summarize the data they wrote about, which will be useful in the understanding of the development and diffusion of the cult, and later I will aim to understand their approaches which, if possible, I will later try to apply, at least in part, when analysing the data coming from the temples. In the third chapter I will write about the information that is known in regards of the excavations of the sites of these temples, in order to give the reader an overview of the archaeology of these. I will also tell about the temple's history and features, and after this I will discuss their similarities and differences, in order to understand if we can or cannot find characteristics that are visible in these different temples located in geographical areas during different periods of time, and therefore if some constituted a constant feature of the temples.

### 1.3 Who is Isis?:

Isis was an important goddess of the ancient Egyptian pantheon, whose cult spread from Egypt throughout the Greek and Roman world. As established by the priests of Heliopolis, she was a daughter of Nut and Geb, along with Nephthys, Set, and Osiris. She also was the wife of the latter, and she assisted him in the ruling of Egypt.

## EGYPTIAN GODS FAMILY TREE

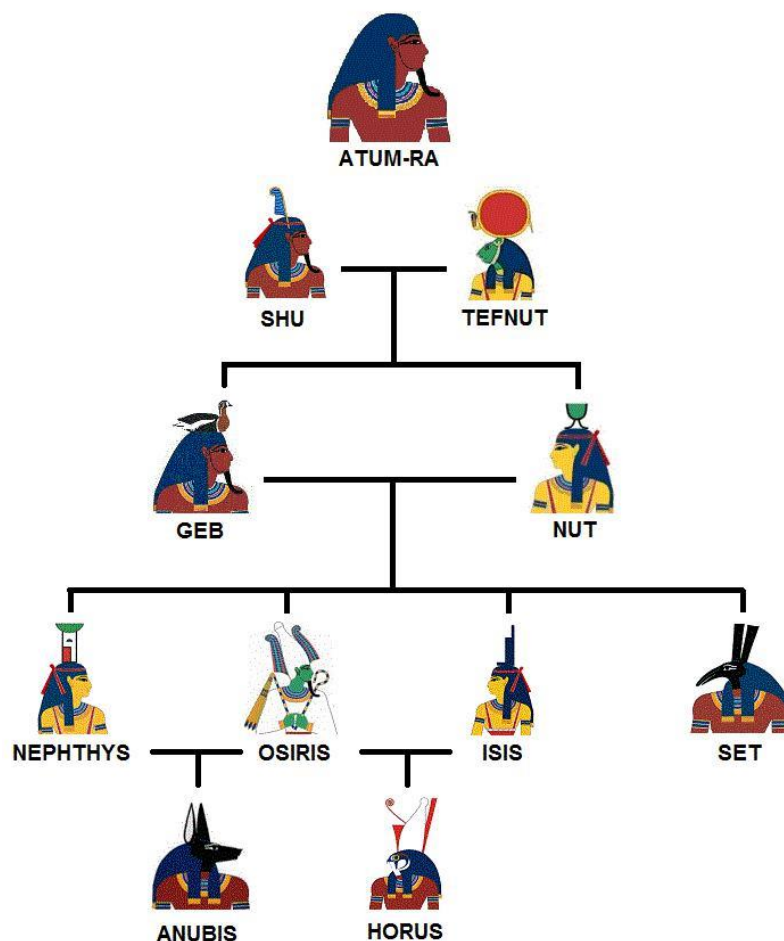


Fig. 1.1: The genealogy of Egyptian gods (www.pinterest.com)

She was thought to be the vital connection between royalty and deities, since the pharaoh was regarded to be the living form of Horus governing Egypt. Isis was one of the most important characters of the cycle of myth surrounding Osiris' death and resurrection, in which she resurrects her husband, who had been previously killed and whose body had been thrown in the Nile by Seth in order to become pharaoh himself. In order to do this, she found Osiris' body in Byblos, and later reassembled it using her magical powers, after Set had dismembered it and dispersed the parts across Egypt, and later gave birth to Horus, who had been conceived with the slain king. She hid in the marshes of the Nile delta with Horus, until the moment when he would have been grown enough to avenge his father (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Isis-Egyptian-goddess>), finally becoming pharaoh of Egypt. Therefore, Isis was considered to be the perfect representation of the traditional Egyptian mother and wife, and the protection she gave to her child made her a symbol of protection (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Isis-Egyptian-goddess>).



Fig. 1.2: From left to right: Horus, Osiris, and Isis (www.upload.wikimedia.org).



Fig. 1.3: Isis nursing Horus. (www.upload.wikimedia.org).

She was also regarded to be the most powerful magician amongst all the ancient Egyptian gods, and thus she was often invoked in order to protect the dead and the sick.

"There are no references to Isis before the 5th dynasty (2465–2325 BCE), but she is mentioned many times in the Pyramid Texts (c. 2350–c. 2100 BCE), in which she offers assistance to the dead king. Later, as ideas of the afterlife became more democratic, Isis was able to extend her help to all dead Egyptians" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Isis-Egyptian-goddess>).

#### 1.4 The spreading of the cult of Isis:

Although "the intense contact between Greeks and Egyptians in Egypt and in the Aegean from the archaic to the classical periods meant that Isis had featured in many cultural encounters long before the Hellenistic epoch" (Woolf 2014, 75), the cult of Isis mainly started spreading across the Mediterranean through merchants and travelers, who established shrines and temples in Greek port cities around the end of the fourth century BC, such as in Delos, which was a starting point for the diffusion of the cult in Italy. After the conquests of Alexander the Great later in that century, the Hellenistic kingdoms were established across the Mediterranean world and the Near East.



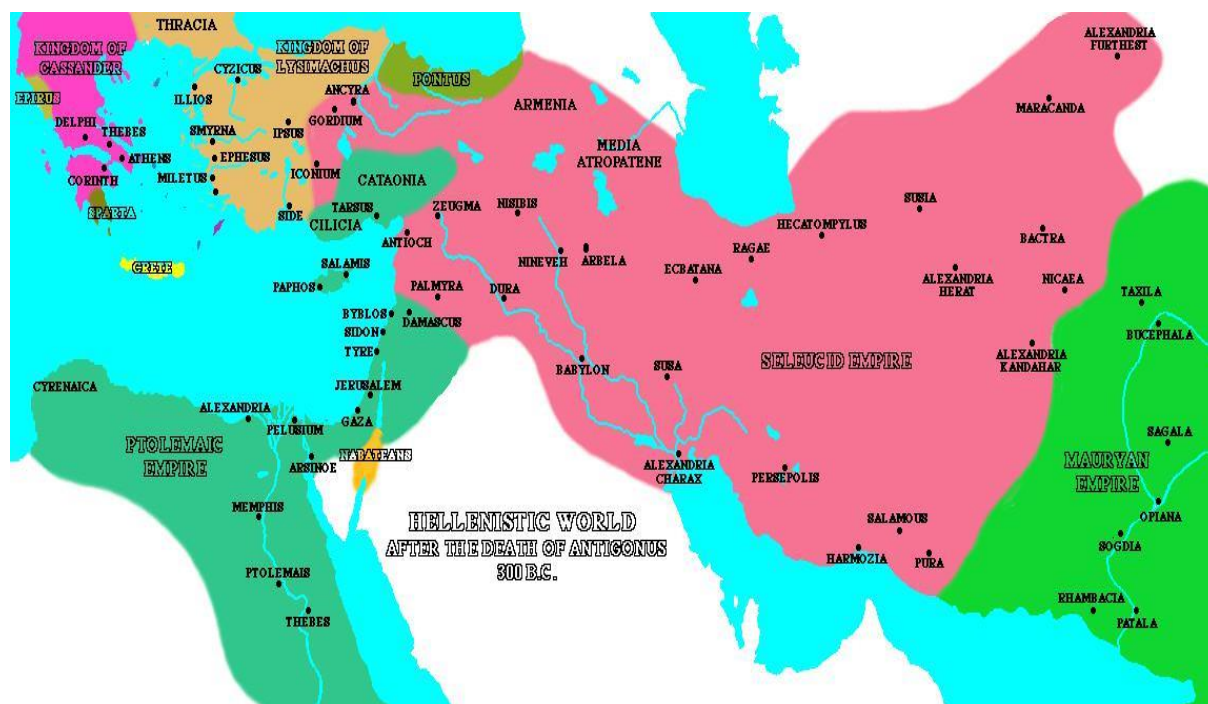


Fig. 1.4: Map of the Hellenistic world at 300 B.C. ([www.herculean.files.wordpress.com](http://www.herculean.files.wordpress.com))

Amongst these was Ptolemaic Egypt, where non-Greek and Greek people and religions came into close contact, the latter often under a process of syncretization. In the last three centuries BC the environment that characterized the Hellenistic kingdoms encouraged the diffusion of religious traditions throughout the Hellenistic world. These religions adapted well to the new people and cultures that embraced these, and amongst them were the cults of Serapis and Isis, from which a Hellenized variant was designed by the Ptolemies (Woolf 2014, 77). The cult diffused also in the Near East, from Asia Minor as far as Iran, in the areas under Seleucid control, although the cult disappeared in the areas which were conquered later by the Parthian empire (Ma 2014, 133-134). The cult of Isis, along with the one of Serapis, diffused to remote Aegean islands, inner Greece and modern Turkey during the second century B.C. (Bommas 2012), and from the island of Delos to Italian harbor cities such as Puteoli and later Ostia (Bommas 2012). Romans and Greeks were attracted by the exotic origins and symbolism of the cult of Isis, although the latter got strongly Hellenized during its diffusion out of Egypt.

Around the second century BC, the cult of Isis reached Roman Italy and the sphere of influence of the Roman empire, as one of the many religions that were brought to Rome as the Roman Republic expanded its territory in the last centuries BC. In the first century BC, altars and shrines dedicated to Isis were built on the Capitoline Hill, at the heart of Rome, by privates. This constituted a problem, since the independence of Isis' cult from the control of Roman authorities made it potentially unsettling to the latter (Beard *et al.* 1998, 161). These shrines were put off in the 50s and 40s BC, during the crisis of the Roman Republic, although the cult of Isis was not banned from the city. After the Final war of the Roman Republic (32-30 BC), shrines dedicated to Isis were banned within the pomerium, Rome's inner sacred

boundary, although the cult was allowed outside this area (Orlin 2010, 211). Egyptian cults, including the one of Isis, were expelled from Rome under Tiberius' rule, although they became more accepted later in time. For example, in the first century AD, the Flavian emperors treated Isis, along with Serapis, as a patron goddess of their rule. Although it was integrated into Roman culture, the cult of Isis developed features that underlined its Egyptian origin.

## 1.5 The temples:

The temple of Isis of Philae in Egypt was originally located on Philae, an island located in the Aswan Low Dam reservoir, Egypt. It was then dismantled and moved to Agilkia island, where the temple is now found, during the UNESCO Nubia campaign project, which was meant to protect complexes like this before the termination of the Aswan High Dam in 1970. It was built during the reign of Nectanebo I between 380 and 362 BC and renovated in the following centuries by Ptolemaic and Roman chiefs of state. During the Ptolemaic Kingdom, a temple complex was built on the island, and the principal deity remained to be Isis, although there were also other temples dedicated to other deities in this complex. Egyptologists believe the Isis temple of Philae to be the last location where Ancient Egyptian religion was practiced until Christian times.



Fig. 1.5: A view of the Temple of Isis of Philae ([www.crystalinks.com](http://www.crystalinks.com))

The temple of Isis at Pompeii is located on the Via del Tempio di Iside, and functioned as an Hellenized Egyptian temple in a Roman colony. The monument that can still be seen today is actually a reconstruction of an original Isis temple that was damaged in an earthquake in 62 AD. In 79 AD, when the Vesuvius erupted, the temple of Isis was the only temple to have been completely rebuilt. The main devotees of this Iseum are thought to have been slaves, freedmen, and women. The architecture of this temple is a fusion of Egyptian, Roman, and Greek features, and its walls were decorated with colorful frescoes representing theatrical

scenes, divinities and mythological characters.



Fig. 1.6.: A view of the cella of the Temple of Isis at Pompeii ([www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com))

The temple of Isis and Serapis in the Campus Martius of Rome was a double temple dedicated both to Serapis and Isis. The Iseum campense, the temple of Isis, was divided from the Serapeum by a plaza. The architecture of these two temples was a fusion of Hellenistic and Egyptian (or, more correctly, Egyptianizing) architectural styles. It has been suggested that the complex was built right after the Triumvirate's vote in 43 BC, or during Caligula's reign between 37 and 41 AD. After the complex had been destroyed by the great fire of 80 AD, it was rebuilt by Domitian and later in time restored by Severus Alexander. The structure might have been closed during the persecutions of pagans in the late Roman Empire in the 4th century, and later dilapidated by a fire in the 5th century AD, although parts of it might have remained undestroyed until the Middle Ages.



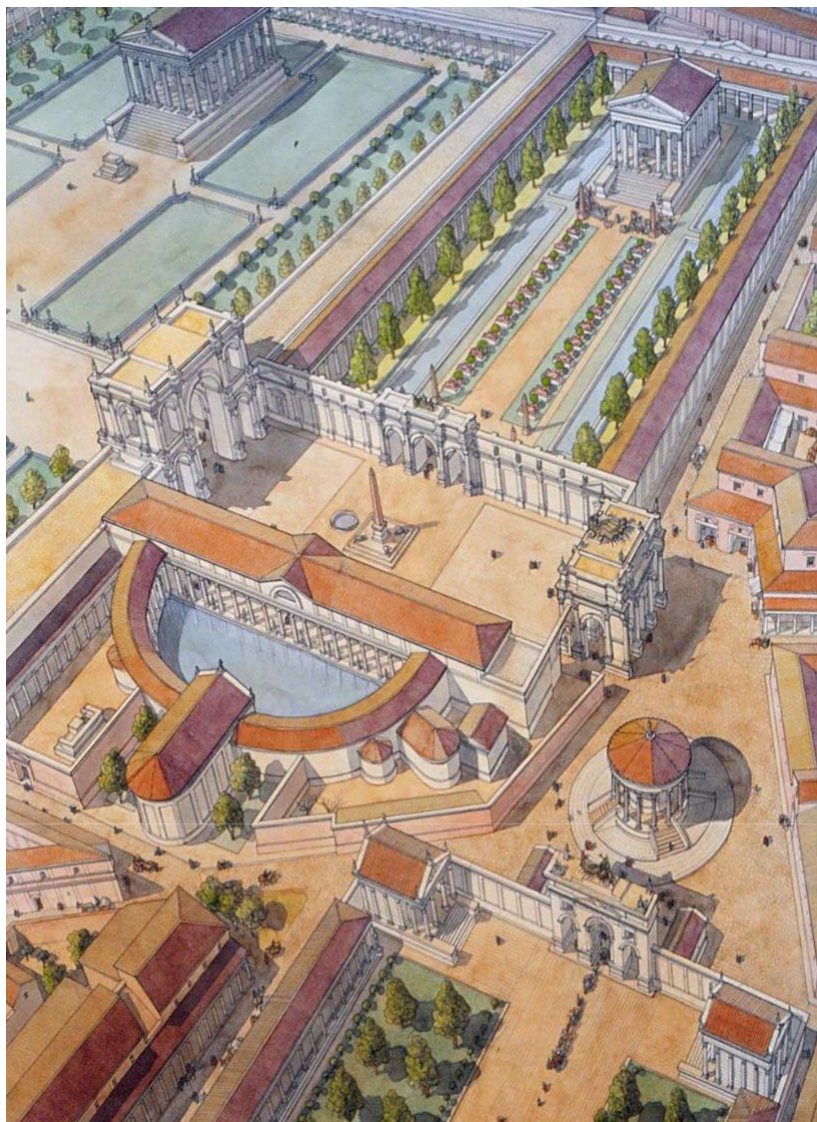


Fig. 1.7: A drawing of the Temple of Isis and Serapis at the Campus Martius in Rome ([www.jeanclaudegolvin.com](http://www.jeanclaudegolvin.com))

## 2. Theoretical approaches:

### 2.1 Introduction:

In this chapter I will discuss the information that I investigated in three chapters written by experts of the cult of Isis, in order: Bommas, Woolf, Versluys and Bricault. In these chapters, they give insight about the cult of Isis in different contexts of the Mediterranean world, and about its diffusion in it. Apart from using this information in order to give the reader a general idea about the nature of the cult in the Mediterranean world during different periods before reading the third, more context-specific chapter, I also employ it in order to understand which methods these different authors used in order to study the cult, and thus to understand if and how I could be inspired these in order to analyze the specific case studies of the next chapter.

### 2.2 Bommas' analysis of the cult of Isis in *Isis, Osiris, and Serapis*:

In *Isis, Osiris, and Serapis*, Bommas discusses the diffusion of Egyptian cults, such as the one dedicated to Isis, from Alexandria to the rest of the known world. He states that in the past Egyptologists had little interest in investigating the development of the original cult of Isis into its Hellenistic form, although the process started in Egypt itself. It is known that in Roman Egypt both the Hellenistic and the original Isis were worshipped at the same time. One of the most important temples was the one at Philae, where a notable number of decorations was added during Roman times. Bommas writes that "Philae is regarded as a major late cult centre in Egypt, and it is here that the latest datable hieroglyphic and Demotic inscriptions are found, the former celebrating the 'birthday' of Osiris (24 August 394) and the latter a dedication from 2 December 452, written by two priests of Isis" (Bommas 2012).

Bommas follows by telling about Apuleius, explaining that he described Rome as the "sacrosanta civitas" for the devotees of the cult of Isis. He puts in the list of major Roman temples of Isis the Iseum at the Field of Mars/Campo Marzio, specifically named Iseum Campense. Apuleius is said to have stated that the temple was called Campensis, and that the temple was adored by the people of Rome. It is also the third location where the protagonist of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucius, was initiated into the mysteries of the goddess. The building, as many other Egyptian temples, "contains areas that can be identified as living space for pilgrims, especially since the process of initiation into the mysteries of Isis sometimes took several weeks" (Bommas 2012) The Iseum Campense is also one of the biggest temples dedicated to Egyptian gods located outside of Egypt, having a court measuring around 275 meters in length. This gave enough space to recreate Egyptian environments out of Egypt. For example, a decoration of a column representing feeding of Crocodiles has been found at the Iseum Campense, where thus in Bommas' opinion crocodiles may have lived inside its precinct. Frescoes at Pompeii, instead, show Ibises being present during Isiac ceremonies, suggesting that these might have been kept at least in the named city. A lot of antiquities were transported from Egypt to the Iseum Campense for

the amusement of initiates, devotees, and visitors.

Bommas in the end explains that In Rome festivals dedicated to Isis were organized in accordance to civic calendars and thus were attended by a great number of people. Amongst these, "The *navigium Isidis* (*ploiapharia*) was a spring festival that took place during the full moon in March or April, and marked the annual redeployment of the navy after the winter storms had passed" (Bommas 2012).



Fig. 2.1: Fresco representing children in procession for the *Navigium Isidis* now found at the Vatican museums ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))

### 2.3 Woolf's analysis of the cult of Isis in *Isis and the Evolution of Religions*:

In *Isis and the Evolution of Religions* Woolf explains that the cult of Isis is part of the plurality of religions that replaced a world of religious diversity between the middle of the first millennium BC and the middle of the first millennium AD in the Mediterranean, but also in the Near East and beyond (Woolf 2014, 62). He then states that the language of the mystery cults was developed first at Eleusis, was then appropriated by Greek sanctuaries, and in the end adopted by mystery cults such as the one dedicated to Isis (Woolf 2014, 64). Woolf explains that a process of translation (*interpretatio*) was used in order to equate parallel cosmological orders (cults) and underline the equivalence of distinct traditions, and that this is visible in texts such as in Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* (Woolf 2014, 65). These new cults were identified by Greeks and Romans by using vague terms for collectives, or were called by the name of their main deity, such as *Isiaci* for the cult of Isis (Woolf 2014, 66), although it is not very clear if these terms were used by the worshippers of these religions, and if they considered themselves to really be a distinct community (Woolf 2014, 66-67). Woolf explains

that in antiquity, a person might have participated in more than one cult, with no sign of social dissonance, as it is pointed out in *The Golden Ass*, where Lucius' 'choice' of Isis completes his previous decisions, instead of replacing them (Woolf 2014, 69). Woolf follows Smith in believing that "almost every religion in the Near East existed in two forms which he characterized as 'locative' (based in the original homeland, controlled by priestly hierarchies, yet undergoing successive changes under the influence of Greek cities and foreign empires) and as 'utopian' (a religion practiced abroad by members of diasporas, led by charismatic individuals and often making use of a different repertoire or rituals)" (Woolf 2014, 73). The utopian cults attracted believers from outside the original ethnic group, and became religions of transcendence. He tells that Isis in Bronze Age Egypt was worshipped in an 'ethnic polytheism', and that in the age of empires "her worship divided between diasporic forms abroad and continued cult within" (Woolf 2014, 75), although this opinion might be elaborated. He then writes that the cult of Isis took part of many cultural contacts that took place between Egyptians and Greeks in the Aegean and in Egypt from the Archaic period to the Hellenistic epoch, especially because her religious center in the Delta of the Nile was easily accessible. Woolf also explains that the myth of Demeter's hunt for Kore was thought to have similarities with the myth of Isis' hunt for Osiris, and that the Egyptian goddess was associated with navigation. These facts favored her in becoming one of those deities that were brought abroad by members of the Egyptian diaspora (Woolf 2014, 76). Furthermore, he explains that the cult of Isis during the third and second centuries BC was mainly based in Sicily, Cyprus, Greek cities around the Aegean, and in some locations around the Black Sea, while during the last century BC and the first centuries AD it spread across the Western Mediterranean, in Central Italy and beyond the Alps. Here, the cult was characterized, as other diasporic cults were, by an inclination towards utopian and universalizing forms, an organization conducted by new charismatic religious authorities, and the transformation of rituals from the sacred environment and symbolism in which these were developed (Woolf 2014, 76). Following again Smith, Woolf suggests that the mythical and cosmological components of the cult became both more complex "in the new relations established with a series of prominent cults of goddesses around the Mediterranean", and simpler "in the effective loss of most members of the Egyptian pantheon, and apparently most of its original rituals" (Woolf 2014, 76). In this process, the cult of Isis adopted at an uncertain and possibly later date the concept and language of the mysteries, with Isis' previous connection with the myth of Kore and with Demeter having most likely made this last acquisition easier.

Woolf subsequently explains the step in which the Hellenization of Isis took place as a cultural project organized by the Ptolemaic monarchy during the third century BC in order to refashion the Isiac cult. This process required experts in Greek religion and Egyptian priests, who provided knowledge of ritual and representational conventions, considered the potential reactions of the audiences, along with what Greek and Egyptian elements had to be preserved, in order to create a new goddess that would have been meaningful in terms of both Greek and Egyptian religion (Woolf 2014, 77). This project was an important factor in the turning of the cult of Isis from just locative into universalizing although still locative in



this case.

Woolf writes that simple correlations between universalizing and locative version of Greek Isis created in Egypt following Ptolemaic imperial ambitions, and her cult overseas can be rejected. This is because Isis had already begun to be worshipped outside of Egypt because of former diasporas of Egyptians and Greeks. Thus, “The subsequent success of her new features in the diaspora was an accidental consequence then, one of little practical use to Ptolemaic monarchs or to the priestly hierarchy in Egypt” (Woolf 2014, 79). In any case, as a casual and un-planned consequence of the Ptolemaic religious project, the refashioning of Isis into a Greco-Egyptian style would have had surely attracted Greeks fascinated by Egypt and Egyptians living in Greek cities. “it is...clear that we are not dealing with two separate entities, locative and utopian transformations of the same ancestral cult, that followed distinct trajectories following the utopianizing moment” (Woolf 2014, 80). Woolf points out that diasporic cults such as the one dedicated to Isis filled the gaps between locations in which locative cults were based, and connected them. Woolf explains that Isis was syncretized in Noricum with the deity Noreia, and undertook domestication when she was installed in Rome, being associated both with mystery cults and public festivals.



Fig. 2.2: A marble statue of Isis-Noreia from Virunum, Noricum, now found at the StateMuseum of Carinthia - Rudolfinum ([www.lupa.at](http://www.lupa.at)).



Some cities allowed the public cult of Isis, while others even tolerated or sponsored the building of Isis' temples. He suggests that localizing processes are to be treated as 'running alongside' globalizing ones, although the terms utopian, universalizing, global, and diasporic, even while being connected, are not to be confused and to be taken as synonyms (Woolf 2014, 85).

According to Woolf, Isis worshippers were amongst the first groups that were persecuted in Rome. He explains that the cult did not really extend beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, that its epigraphy and iconography is mostly located within urban environments, and that Isis "seems to have colonized existing niches within the religious ecology of the empire without significantly disrupting it" (Woolf 2014, 88), although she was considered to be more than a civic goddess according to at least her initiated worshippers. Following Gellner, Woolf explains that a cult should present a elements or risk in order to attract and excite new worshippers, and that this element in the cult of Isis could have been the fact that its leaders were not called from propertied classes such as magistrates or priests, and this fact usually made the romans feel diffident (Woolf 2014, 91). "It is difficult to escape the conclusion that what horrified Romans about Isis cult was the same thing that made it fascinating, an alien view of the world and a kind of power they had not come to expect from Venus, Ceres, Juno and the rest. Adding her to the system changed that system, and changed its participants" (Woolf 2014, 91-92).

## 2.4 Versluys' and Bricault's analysis of the cult of Isis in *Isis and Empires*:

In *Isis and Empires* Versluys and Bricault want to clarify that the cult of Isis should not be seen as an exotic outsider of Hellenistic and Roman religious systems, but as an important constituent of these (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 8). They explain that the relationships between the Isiac family and rulers was a complex one, and that the circumstances that led to the coupling of Isis and Serapis are not certain (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 8-9). Their point is that the idea of their cult was established to unite Egyptians and Greeks should be abandoned (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 9). They tell that the identification of Isis with a female sovereign was taken up many times, beginning with Arsinoë II, and then with Cleopatra III, Berenice I, Cleopatra VII, and Faustina the Younger.



Fig. 2.3 (left): Late Ptolemaic queen in the guise of the goddess Isis, now found at Yale university art gallery ([www.artgallery.yale.edu](http://www.artgallery.yale.edu))

Fig. 2.4 (right): Head attributed to Arsinoe II, represented as an Egyptian divinity ([www.upload.wikimedia.org](http://www.upload.wikimedia.org))

“The way in which the Ptolemies employed the Egyptian gods, notably Isis, at the end of the 3rd century BC was clearly aimed at presenting themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Pharaohs” (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 10).



Fig. 2.5.: Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II next to the goddess Isis represented on a relief at the Temple of Isis at Philae ([www.commonswikimedia.org](http://www.commonswikimedia.org))

Bricault and Versluys write that the Ptolemies attention towards Isis was an attempt to tranquilize her priests and to legitimise their political power. Thus, they built and financed temples, such as the temple of Philae (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 10). They also write that, by the way, Isis was invoked also by indigenous rulers, such as Ankhonnophris and Haronnophris when they rose against the Ptolemaic dynasty at the end of the 3rd and at the start of the 2nd century BC in Thebes. Likewise, Cleopatra's self-identification with Isis has been perceived as an attempt to trigger local sentiments in order to fight Rome (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 11). Isiac elements were also used in the affirmation of the Ptolemaic identity outside of Egypt. For example, when the Ptolemaic princess Cleopatra Selene married the Mauretanian king Juba II, a wave of Isiac motifs were brought in the local royal coinage, such as sistrums and basileions, and the named queen was probably identified with Isis herself on some representations depicted on coins (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 11-12).





Fig. 2.6: Coin from Caesarea, Mauretania representing Juba II on a side and a basileion and a sistrum, 20 B.C.-24 A.D. ([www.vcoins.com](http://www.vcoins.com))

The authors tell that even in the Roman world there were a number of political and ideological declarations that made use of Isiac symbolism, such as the presence of a basileion on the Amphipolis' Augustan coinage, or the dedication of restored or newly built sanctuaries during Caracalla's campaigns over the Danube in 213-214 AD (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 12). "The tutelary aspect of the Isiac couple is likewise evident from the special privileges granted at times of tensions, conflicts and crisis" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 13). For instance, when a great famine struck Rome in 189 AD, Rome depended on a fleet bringing important wheat supplies from other areas of the empire, a fleet that was put under protection of Isis and Sarapis (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 13-14). The boat arrived in Italy in 190 AD, and the emissions of coins showing Commodus standing on the left, "with the kalathos-crowned Sarapis and the sistrophoros Isis standing on the right facing him" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 14) in 192 AD recall this event.



Fig. 2.7: A.D. 192 Aureus coin representing on the right side Commodus on the left with Serapis and Isis on the right ([www.numismatics.org](http://www.numismatics.org))

The authors then treat the relationship between politics, the cult of Isis, and small communities, by for instance explaining that the cult of Isis might have been linked to Italians living in Delos who had come back to Italy. In their opinion, this is because when Mithridates' troops looted Delos in 88 BC, many Italian merchants left the island. A Roman inscription dated to the first half of the first century BC contains the names of thirteen people, among them two priests of Isis *Capitolina*, and of six gentes, including four who had representative in Delos. Thus, it is very likely that there were contacts between the Roman and Delian members of these families, and therefore this could be an indication for their statement (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 20).

Versluys and Bricault underline that "1. the cults of Isis are often about *diasporas and connectivity* and are therefore preferably analysed on both a "local" and a "global" level, and 2. the cults of Isis are often about *symbolic culture* and are therefore preferably analysed in terms of appropriation instead of diffusion" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 25). The authors underline that in their volume they study the cult of Isis (and Sarapis) while considering that there is a lot of information to study about the relations between Egyptian gods, power, and politics, and that "it is indeed most useful to focus on the specific nature of the Hellenistic and Roman Empire(s) as the context for the development of the cults of Isis. This "specific nature" revolves around characteristics like facilitating connectivity and the development of universalism" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 26).

The two experts also tell that "from the middle of the first millennium BC onwards, Isis developed from a quintessentially Nilotic, Egyptian goddess into a kind of pan-Mediterranean symbol that everybody in the *oikumene* could make meaning with" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 26). They think that it is needed to focus on the prehistory of the Hellenistic and Roman Isis in order to discover how she adopted the characteristics that empowered her to become this symbol, and to understand how the different kinds of meanings attributed to Isis are related and connected to each other. By analyzing the culture of ancient Egypt since The Old Kingdom, which in Versluys' and Bricault's opinion functioned as a cultural starting point for almost all later periods of the history of Egypt, they describe a canonization that took place around 600 BC, explaining that it was the temple that was placed in the core of what would have been considered Egyptian, and that "the concept of Egyptian religion as a hidden, special kind of knowledge and wisdom that was maintained by priests obtained a central role in the definition of "Egypt" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 27-28). They write that Assmann calls this concept *Geheimnisreligion*. Therefore, by taking in consideration the notion of symbolic cultures, Egypt was symbolically perceived as *Geheimnisreligion*, and thus when the Greeks were developing the Eleusian mysteries, they structured the rituals according to this symbolic culture's value. Subsequently, this Greek perspective was assimilated by Egyptians in order to make Isis attractive in the Mediterranean environment and to characterize her, giving finally birth to the concept of Egyptian mysteries (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 28).

Bricault and Versluys then focus on the concept of connectivity, explaining that the Hellenistic and Roman environments had a high degree of increasing interconnectivity. The

latter was very important in regards of Egyptian symbolic culture and therefore the cult of Isis, because it defined the environment where the cult of Isis developed, was canonized and associated.

They explain that from the first quarter of the first millennium BC onwards Isis became a goddess of the family, being identified with the figures of mother (of Horus) and wife (of Osiris). After the Saitic period, she then becomes associated with kinship, when Nectanebo I declared her to be his tutelary deity, and later on by the Ptolemies. Isis was then assimilated in the Italic peninsula with Fortuna, who embodied a notion of good fortune. In the western Roman empire, Isis-Fortuna became the most popular version of the goddess. This development of Isis towards the concept of fate is strongly linked to the conception of Isis as a mystery goddess.

Therefore the authors think that connectivity and symbolic culture are very important in the understanding of the Hellenistic and Roman Isis, "as they describe why 1. Isis could be translated and subsequently be appropriated into so many different contexts and why, simultaneously, 2. Isis would often, in one way or other, return to being associated with ideas about "Egypt" (Bricault and Versluys 2014, 33). These ideas of Egypt varied during time, and were often related to the contexts in which these developed, and with time, the ethnic concepts of the cult of Isis turned to be symbolic and cultural concepts.

## 2.5 Discussion of the authors' methods:

After having gone through the information written in regards of the cult of Isis and its diffusion across the Mediterranean world by Bommas, Woolf, Versluys, and Bricault, it is finally possible to point out which are the methods that they used in order to approach it. Bommas makes a general description of the presence of the cult of Isis across the Mediterranean world. He introduces Isiac temples found in Egypt, and uses the evidence of inscriptions to determine the late presence and use of the temple of Philae. He then focuses on the Iseum Campense of Rome, citing textual evidence, such as the one from Apuleius, in order to describe the role of the temple in the roman world and to give some insight about it. He also analyzes some decorations of this temple, along with features found in the Isiac temple of Pompeii, in order to aim to understand what could have happened inside these buildings.

Woolf studies the processes that cult of Isis underwent during its diffusion across the Mediterranean world. He states that during its diffusion, the cult of Isis adopted the language of the mysteries that had been developed at Eleusis, and that it was equated with cults from other traditions that were thought to be parallel. These equations led to the complication and simplification of different features of the cult. The renovated cult was then identified with new collective terms, such as Isiaci in the roman world. Additionally, Woolf tries to understand the role of the worshipper in regards of the cult, for example by referring to literary evidence, such as Apuleius'. He follows by making a distinction between the locative and utopian forms of the cult. Woolf also aims to understand the cult by identifying the different historical stages of the cult that led it to be assimilated across the ancient

Mediterranean until the first centuries AD. He analyzes the process of Hellenization that the cult underwent during its diffusion that was planned by the Ptolemies in order to make the cult meaningful both for Greek and indigenous Egyptian audiences, and makes a geographical analysis of the presence of the cult across the Roman empire, also by referring for example to the presence of iconography and epigraphy that has been found in relation of the cult. In the end, Woolf underlines the importance of the double coin mechanism of attraction and repulsion towards the cult found in the Roman people that provoked the consequent interest in it and therefore diffusion.

Versluys and Bricault aim to explain the relationship that existed between the cult of Isis and Hellenistic and Roman rulers and how the latter employed the first and its symbology in order to execute their different political plans and to control the Egyptian indigenous population. They do this by analyzing the identification of female rulers with the deity, the building of temples ordered by rulers in order to legitimize their political power, the use of some of the goddess' symbols in different coinages, and political declarations and acts made in honor of the goddess. They also focus on the importance of studying the relationship between the cult of Isis, politics, and small communities. Later they engage in the role of connectivity that characterized the Hellenistic and Roman worlds and allowed the diffusion of the cult across these and the appropriation of it and of its symbology by the different people that lived in them, while underlying the importance of analyzing the cult both on global and local scale, and to study the nature of the contexts in which the cult developed, which were characterized by interconnectivity, in order to better understand it. The authors think that in order to understand how Isis became a pan-Mediterranean symbol, it is needed to understand the prehistory of the Hellenistic and Roman Isis. This is done first by studying the role of her cult in Egypt, where since when the temple became the center of Egyptian culture (around 600 BC), the hidden knowledge regarding it was kept by priests, and this should be understood because it led to the interpretation of the cult as a secretive and symbolic rite by Greek culture. The authors finally tell that on the basis of this interpretation the Greeks developed the Eleusian mysteries, that were the inspiration for the refashioning of the cult that happened later in Egypt and that finally led to the birth of Egyptian mysteries.

## 3 The temples:

### 3.1 The Temple of Isis of Philae:

#### 3.1a The moving of the site from the island of Philae to Agilkia island:

Between 1899 and 1902, the Aswan low Dam was built at the former first cataract of the Nile, in order to store annual flood water and increase dry season flows, which would support the development of irrigation, along with population increase in the area of the lower Nile. The height of the Aswan low dam was increased in two occasions, from 1907 to 1912, and from 1929 to 1934, and this led to the flooding of the Island of Philae. Although the structures found on the island of Philae were physically safe due to the strengthening that was applied to the foundations of the temples and architectural supporting structures, the colors of the temples' reliefs and the island's vegetation were washed away, and the temples' bricks with time became encrusted with silt and debris carried by the river Nile. The structures were not excavated, since from antiquity the temple structures of the island were basically intact, but the situation of the buildings worsened with each inundation.

In order to try to save the structures of Philae from the constant destructive action of the waters of the Nile, in 1960 UNESCO started a project, in which it was considered to build three dams and create a separate lake with lower water levels.

A large coffer dam was constructed, made of two rows of steel plates, with 1 million cubic meters of sand tipped between them.

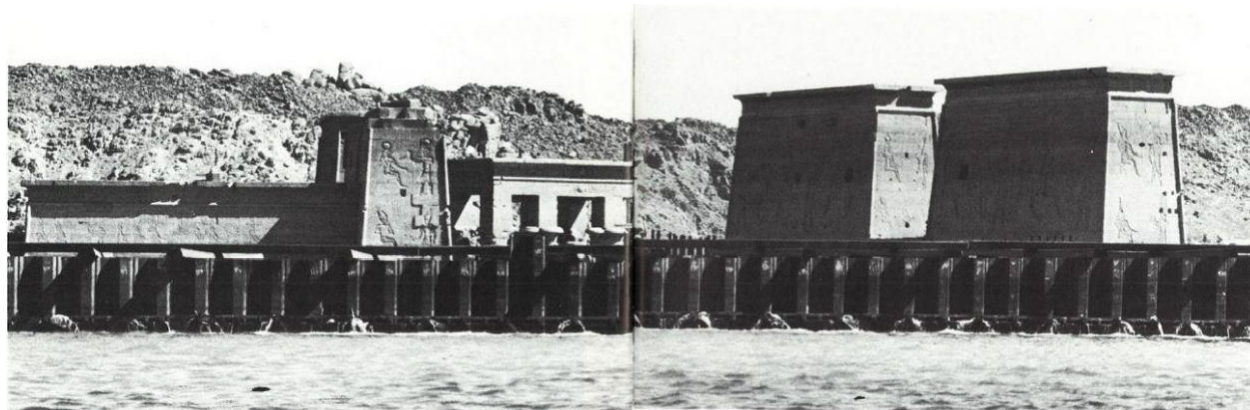


Fig. 3.1: Part of the sheet piled coffer dam that surrounded the island of Philae (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 160-161)

Any water that leaked was pumped away. Afterwards, the buildings were cleaned and measured with the use of photogrammetry, which enabled to exactly reconstruct the original size of the building blocks that were employed in antiquity. Next, every structure was dismantled into circa 40,000 units, and subsequently moved to the nearby Agilkia island, situated around 500 meters away, before the completion of the Aswan high dam of 1970.

#### 3.1b The history of the site and its features:

The site of the island of Philae was an ancient settlement and a temple complex dating mostly to a span of time between the Late Period and Roman Egyptian times have been



found. Philae was one of the most important cultic centers of Osiris and Isis in Upper Egypt and Nubia. The island is now submerged in the lake between the modern Aswan High Dam and the first Aswan Dam, and thus, the monuments that were located on it were transported to the nearby Agilkia island for their presentation.

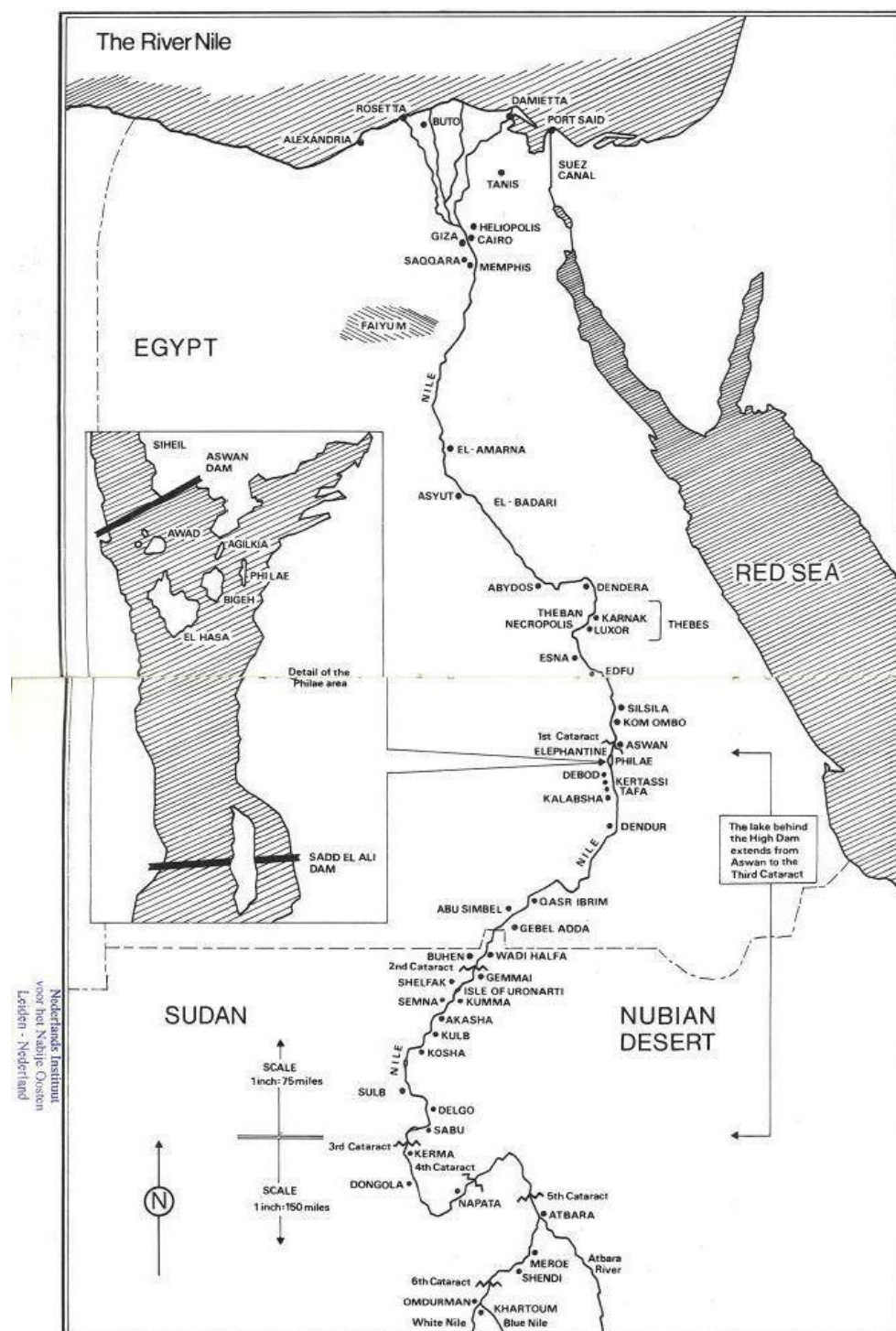


Fig. 3.2: Map of Egypt with detail of the Philae-Agilkia area (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976,20-21).

Philae housed more than a dozen monuments, of which at least two-thirds were temples built and decorated during the Ptolemaic era, while most of the remaining part dates to the time of Augustus to Nero. Amongst the different temples, "the main temple complex of

Philae is the Great Temple of Isis located in the center of the island (Kockelmann 2012, 3). The earliest reference to Isis found in Philae is found in an inscription on the columns of "a small kiosk built in the name of Psammetik II" (Haeny 1985, 202), which is also "the earliest structure which definitely belongs to Philae" (Haeny 1985, 202), although, according to Arnold, "the building does not necessarily attest that a cult of Isis existed before the temple foundation under Amasis" (Arnold 1999, 76). It is possible to "assume that her cult was introduced...when Saite troops re-established the southern frontier of Egypt in the cataract region" (Haeny 1985, 202) (around 595-589 B.C.). The Saitic temple of Isis was founded by Pharaoh Amasis, who "became, above all, the founder of the cult of Isis on PHILAE, perhaps as a side branch of the Osiris cult, which had a much older tradition on the island of Biggeh, west of Philae" (Arnold 1999, 88). It was considerably smaller than its Ptolemaic-Roman successor: it consisted of three rooms along the axis, the last being the sanctuary, and had the dimensions of 5.5 x 15.3 m.

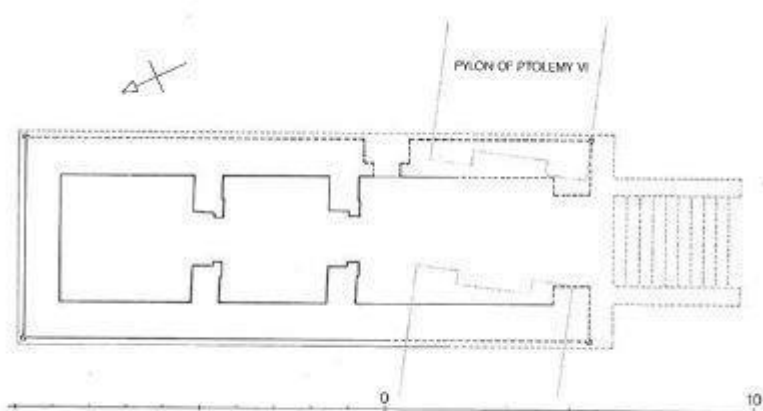


Fig. 3.3: "Plan of the chapel of Amasis for Isis on Philae under and behind the second pylon of the Ptolemaic temple" (Arnold 1999, 88).

The plan of promoting Isis' cult on Philae may go back to Nectanebo I or Ptolemy I. The most ancient still-standing temple buildings derive from the time of Nectanebo I: "A gate of the Late Period temple complex of Isis was integrated into the first pylon of the Ptolemaic Isis temple" (Kockelmann 2012, 3), and was "certainly planned to provide the precinct of Isis with an impressive main entrance" (Haeny 1985, 204), while a kiosk from the same period was restored under Ptolemy II and re-erected in the southwestern area of the island. The temple of Amasis was probably demolished under Ptolemy II, Philadelphus, when the new temple was built right behind the old structure (Arnold 1999, 88).

The "Ptolemaic-Roman cult of Isis and Osiris on Philae attracted numerous pilgrims and visitors" (Kockelmann 2012, 7), who left a great number of graffiti and votive inscriptions in Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Meroitic.



Fig. 3.4: Demotic graffiti found on the Temple of Isis of Philae (www.webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu)

In Hellenistic times the Ptolemaic-Roman Temple of Isis was visited by devotees coming from Asia Minor, Crete, and Greece, while during Roman times it was mainly reached by Nubian and Egyptian pilgrims (Kockelmann 2012, 7). It was also seldom visited by individuals of elevated status, such as governors, and Ptolemaic kings.

From the fourth to the sixth century Christianity became gradually prevalent in the region of Aswan and Philae. Regardless, traditional Egyptian temple cults kept existing on the island for more than another century, being the last Egyptian cults to survive (Kockelmann 2012, 7). "Priests of Isis left Demotic graffiti as late as the fifth century CE, and the cult image of Isis was still worshipped in 451/452 CE" (Kockelmann 2012, 7), as it is proved by an agreement between the Blemmyes, the Nobades, and officer Maximinus. Although traditional cults were prohibited and their followers were condemned to prosecution in 391 AD due to the promulgation of the edict of Theodosius I, the official end of Egyptian cults at Philae came around the sixth century AD, "when the Temple of Isis was officially closed by general Narses on orders of emperor Justinian" (Kockelmann 2012, 8). The pronaos of the abandoned Temple of Isis was later transformed into a church of St. Stephanos by bishop Theodorus (Kockelmann 2012, 8).



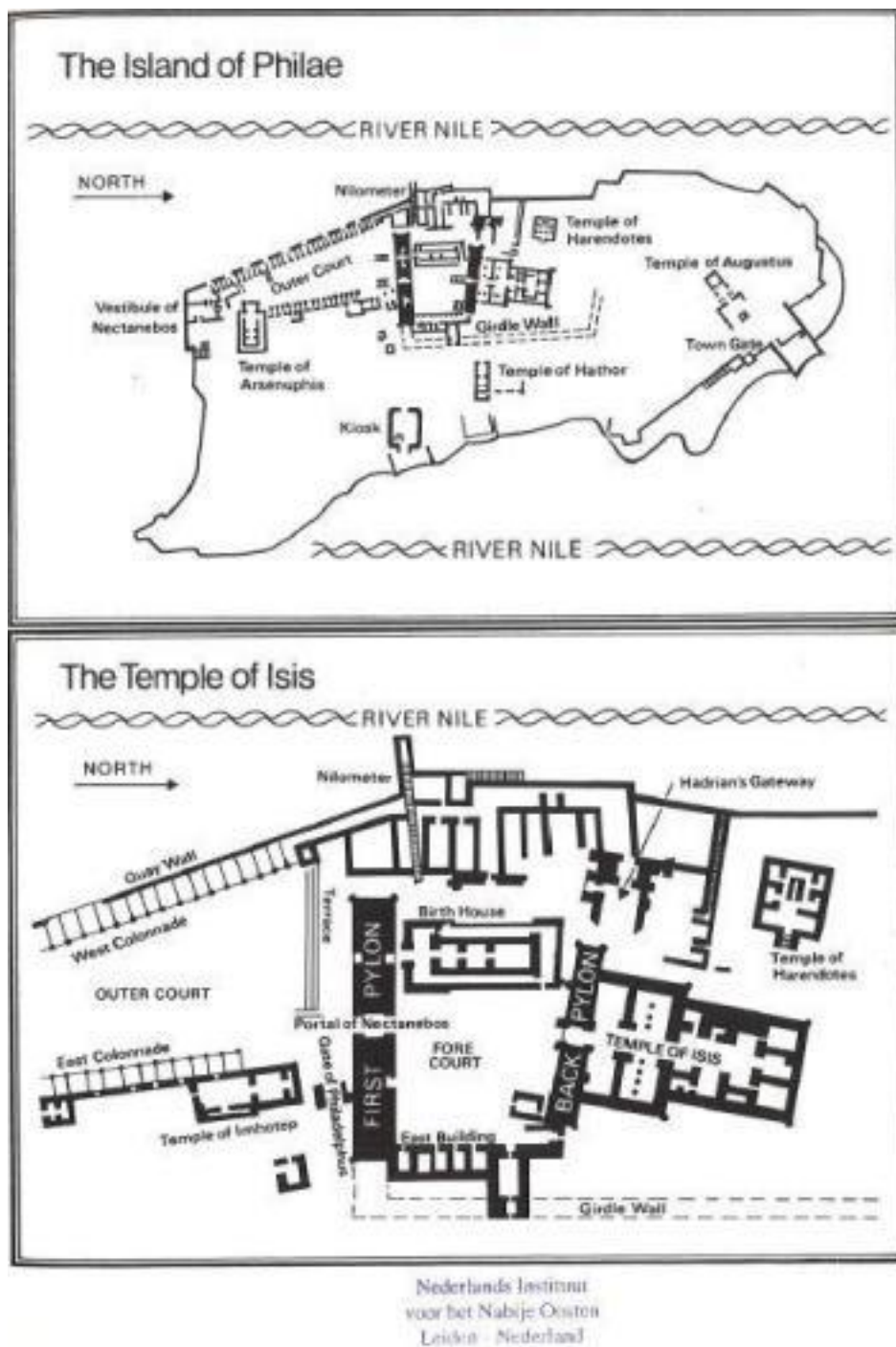


Fig. 3.5: Above, map of the Island of Philae with the structures found on it; below plan of the Temple of Isis of Philae (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 121)

In front of the Temple of Imhotep stands the Gate of Philadelphus, which, as stated, may have been erected during the 30th Dynasty for the Late Period Temple of Isis (Kockelmann 2012, 4). It was later decorated by Ptolemy II and subsequently Tiberius, and attached to the Ptolemaic first pylon of Isis. Isis' temple was also provided with a platform, although it is uncertain when this was done (Haeny 1985, 220).

The first great pylon of the Temple of Isis bounds the north side of the outer court of Philae. "This is 150 feet broad and 60 feet high, consisting of two towers with a gate between them.

Deep grooves for flag-poles are cut on either side of the portal" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 141). The structure was begun by Ptolemy II, Philadelphus, and essentially completed by Ptolemy III, Euergetes I, although the decorations were worked for a much longer period and eventually never finished.



Fig. 3.6: View of the first pylon of the Temple of Isis of Philae from the outside ([www.themaritimeexplorer.ca](http://www.themaritimeexplorer.ca))

On the front of the temple's eastern or right tower a huge figure of Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos is found, grasping a group of enemies by the hair and holding his club for the deadly stroke (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 141). To the left of the scene Isis is depicted watching the sacrifice with Hathor and the falcon headed Horus. Above stand two reliefs: On the left Neos Dionysos offers incense to Horus the child and Isis, while on the right he presents the crown of Lower and Upper Egypt to Horus and Nephthys. On the left or western tower of the pylon Neos Dionysos is depicted in the same stance executing his enemies once more while Horus, Isis, and Hathor look on (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 141). Above this the Pharaoh is represented in the presence of Isis, Hariesis, and Unnefer (the name given to Osiris after he resurrected). The reliefs have been severely damaged by the industrious Copts, the Egyptian Christians. Reliefs of small Nile figures giving offerings are found along the whole length of the first Pylon's base (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 141). The main gateway passing through this Pylon was the one built by Nectanebos. "On either side of the gateway Coptic crosses have been carved into the sandstone, and in the thickness of the doorway there appear reliefs of Nectanebos in the presence of various gods and the goddess Isis" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 141).

Beyond this gateway stands a large, paved, trapezoidal forecourt linked to the sanctuary, which was probably modelled on the basis of Hellenistic public spaces plans, and arranged in

order to receive visitors during festivities.



Fig. 3.7: A view of the Temple of Isis of Philae's inner forecourt, with its second pylon on the front, and part of the birth house on the left ([www.traveltoeat.com](http://www.traveltoeat.com))

On the western or left side of the forecourt lies the Birth-house, which features scenes of Horus' birth and the childhood. The Birth-house is a very important feature of Ptolemaic temples.





Fig. 3.8: A view of the Temple of Isis of Philae's birth house (mammisi) ([www.ancientegypte.fr](http://www.ancientegypte.fr))

In the structure, the Hawk of Horus, wearing the double crown of Lower and Upper Egypt, stands in a papyrus thicket. Below, Isis carries the newly born Horus in her arms, while the gods Thoth, Nekhbet, Wezet, and Amen-re surround her protectively (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 144). Three sides of the Birth-house are surrounded by a colonnade, whose columns have floral capitals crowned by sistrum capitals with Hathor heads. Reliefs of Ptolemies VI, VIII, X, and Tiberius, in the presence of various gods, are featured in the screen walls between the columns (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 144). On the eastern or right side of the forecourt of the Temple of Isis stands a gallery of columns with palm leaf and floral capitals which support a cornice, supporting a row of uraeus-serpents (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 144). "The use of different capital types in the same building part or row of columns has a forerunner in the 30th Dynasty but is a peculiarity of Ptolemaic temples" (Arnold 1999, 149). Although the inscription assign the building of the structure to Ptolemy VIII, Euergetes II, the carvings on the walls represent Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos, before the gods (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 144). "Six doorways lead through the rear wall of the colonnade to small rooms which were used for practical purposes connected with temple worship" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 144): "One room served as a laboratory for the sacred ointments, one was a priestly courtroom, and another was a library" (Arnold 1999, 202). The forecourt is bounded on the south side by the rear of walls of the first Pylon and the rear of the main gateway. On the western tower Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos, stands before Osiris, Isis, and other gods, and below this, two priests carry in procession two sacred boats (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 145). On the eastern tower, Ptolemy XII, Neos



Dionysos, is represented standing before Amun, Mut, and other deities. "A small doorway in this Pylon leads to a room with reliefs showing Ptolemy IX, Soter II, before Isis, Hathor and Horus, and his Queen and the Princess Cleopatra before Isis" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976. 145). Another small doorway features on its surface reliefs of Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos, along with the standards of the nation. This passage leads to a stairway leading to the roof, from which a general view of the island can be taken. In the south-east corner of the forecourt stands the granite altar of Taharqa, the Ethiopian Napatan Pharaoh around 670 B.C..

The second great Pylon forms the northern wall of the forecourt. It is 40 feet high, 105 feet broad, and is set at a different angle to the first Pylon (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 145). The gateway between the towers is reached by an inclined plane of shallow steps. "At the base of the right or eastern tower part of the granite foundation of the island protrudes and this has been carved into a stela on which Ptolemy VI, Philometor, and his Queen Cleopatra

II stand before Isis and Horus. An inscription refers to the grant of the *Dodekaschoinoi* made to Isis, which brought the priests of Philae into parity with the priests of Elephantine, who had received a similar grant. '*Dodekaschoinoi*' is the Greek for 'twelve *schoinoi*', a *schoinos* equaling about seven miles, The *schoinos* was not a measurement of area but of length, so presumably meant seven miles of the river Nile, including the arable land" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 145-147). This "'Dodekaschoines-Stela" of the year 158, cut into the rock at the second pylon, attests that the building project was concluded by Ptolemy VI" (Arnold 1999, 190).



Fig. 3.9: The Dodekaschoines-Stela (www.traveltoeat.com)



On the western or left tower incense is offered and sacrificial animals are dedicated to Horus, Hathor, and other deities by Ptolemy XII, Neos Dionysos. Above this are two reliefs, representing Neos Dionysos presenting a wreath to Nephthys and Horus, and offering incense and pouring water on an altar in the presence of Isis, Osiris, and Horus. These representations are terribly mutilated (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 147). The eastern tower features similar scenes but in a much better condition of preservation. Like in the first Pylon, both towers have grooves for flag-staffs. The entrance between the towers show Ptolemy VIII, Euergetes II, highly defaced before a series of deities which are equally defaced. The eastern side of the door features an inscription to the Christian Bishop Theodorus. The doorway enters a small open court, which is the proper of the Temple of Isis, and which leads to her sanctuary. Amelia Edwards described it like so:

"Here is a place in which time seems to have stood as still as in that immortal palace where everything went to sleep for a hundred years. The bas-reliefs on the walls, the intricate paintings on the ceilings, the colours upon the capitals are incredibly fresh and perfect. These exquisite capitals have long been the wonder and delight of travelers in Egypt. They are all studied from natural forms – from the lotus in bud and blossom, the papyrus, and the palm. Conventionalised with consummate skill, they are at the same time so justly proportioned to the height and girth of the columns as to give an air of wonderful lightness to the whole structure. But above all, it is with the colour – colour conceived in the tender and pathetic minor of Watteau and Lancret and Greuze – that one is most fascinated. Of those delicate half-tones, the careful facsimile in the 'Grammar of Ornament' conveys not the remotest idea. Every tint is softened, intermixed, degraded. The pinks are coralline; the greens are tempered with verditer; the blues are of a greenish turquoise, like the western half of an autumnal evening sky" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 148).

"Under Ptolemy VIII, a granite naos was dedicated to the main sanctuary of Isis and another in the northwestern side chapel. A third naos of Ptolemy VIII was discovered in 1886, reused in a Coptic church" (Arnold 1999, 202). At one time the court had a colonnade on its western and eastern sides, and the open space could be shaded from the sun through a velarium of awning that was withdrawn or drawn across the opening by cords. This small court was separated from the vestibule located beyond it by screen walls uniting four columns, while other four columns behind these supported the roof of the hall. "Three small antechambers, flanked by dark rooms, lead to the sanctuary which is lit by two small windows. It still contains the pedestal placed here by Ptolemy III, Euergetes I, and his wife Berenice for the image of Isis in her sacred bark" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 149).



Fig. 3.10: An inside view of the Temple of Isis of Philae's inner sanctuary with its altar ([www.planetware.com](http://www.planetware.com))

The Osiris chambers surround the sanctuary and are reached by a short staircase on the temple's west side which brings to the roof and then descends to a room where the Nile god offers milk libations to the Ba' or soul of Osiris sitting in the shape of a bird (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 149-150). In the second room Osiris' falcon-headed mummy is depicted, while in the third room Emperor Antoninus, who built the room, and the god Shu stand before Osiris and his sisters Nephthys and Isis. On the roof there is another room showing Nephthys and Isis by Osiris' naked body lying on a bier (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 150). The falcon-headed Harsiesis and the frog-headed Heket stand by the bier beneath which are depicted four canopic jars for the god's entrails. On the other wall are represented Osiris' corpse, amongst marsh vegetation with a priest pouring consecrated water, while Anubis stands by Osiris' bier beside which kneel Nephthys and Isis.

The outer walls of the temple are covered with reliefs mostly dating from the reign of Tiberius. On the temple's western side near the second Great Pylon is a gateway and a ruined vestibule built by the Roman emperor Hadrian. "On the lintel the Emperor stands before Osiris, Isis and Harsiesis. Within the gateway Marcus Aurelius stands before Osiris and below offers grapes and flowers to Isis" (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 152). Nephthys and Isis are showed on the uncompleted vestibule presenting in order the crown of Lower Egypt and the crown of Upper Egypt to Horus. On one wall Osiris is depicted in a relief while being carried on a crocodile's back across the Nile. Isis is showed in a relief on the northern wall, along with Nephthys, Horus, Hathor and Amun worshipping the Hawk-god rising over the river beneath Bigeh island (MacQuitty and MacQuitty 1976, 152).

## 3.2 The Temple of Isis at the Campus Martius:

### 3.2a The excavations at the site:

Today nothing can be seen of what is eventually preserved of this complex, that lays buried under the modern buildings on via di S. Ignazio and via S. Stefano del Cacco in Rome.

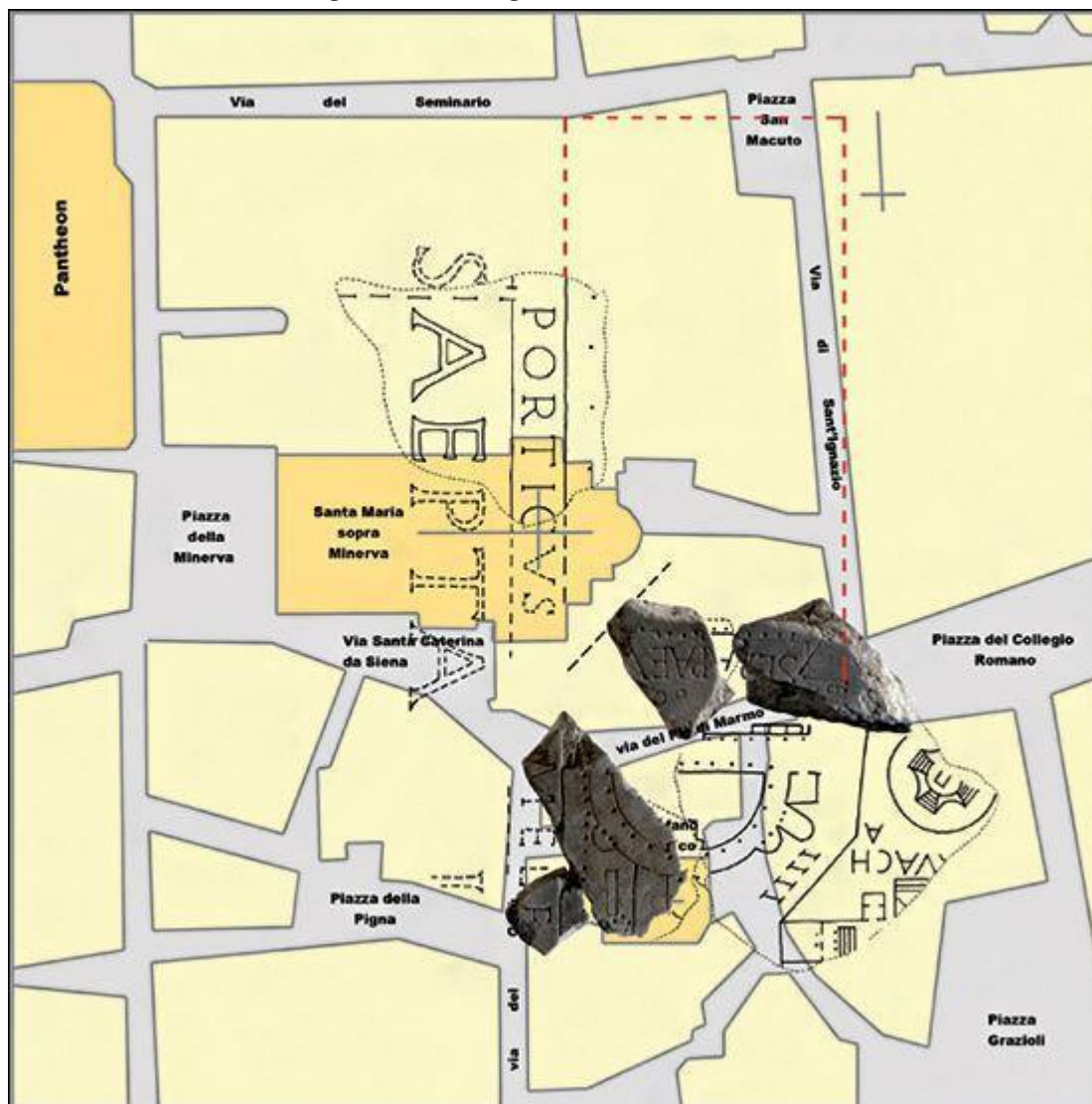


Fig. 3.11: Position of the Temple of Isis and Serapis at the Campus Martius in the modern city plan of Rome ([www.stadtbesichtigungen.de](http://www.stadtbesichtigungen.de))

However, the archaeological and artistic findings that have been retrieved in the area, between 1374 and 1833, are many, and most of these are kept in Rome (Lanciani 1985, 432). In 1374 the first obelisk was found near the apse of the Minerva, and is now located on the fountain in front of the Pantheon. In 1435 Eugenio IV found the two lions of Nektanebo I that can now be seen in the Egyptian museum of the Vatican, along with the two lions made of black basalt now found in the Capitoline museum. In 1440 a colossal group of fluvial divinities was retrieved and the recovered again. The Tiber of the Louvre and the Nile of the Braccio Nuovo Vaticano seem to have been discovered during the pontificate of Leone X (Lanciani 1985, 432), and certainly it was him who ordered the transport of these to the

Vatican.

In 1556 Giovanni di Fabi found in the area of the Iseum Campense a statue of Oceano, and sold it to Cardinal Farnese. It is now found in Naples.



Fig. 3.12: Nile of the Braccio Nuovo, now found at the Vatican Museums ([www.museivaticani.va](http://www.museivaticani.va))



Fig. 3.13: Statue of Oceano, now found at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples of Naples (Farnese collection) ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com))



In 1719 an Isiac altar was found in the Biblioteca Casanatense, and is now found in the Musei Capitolini.



Fig. 3.14: Altar dedicated to Isis, now found in the Musei Capitolini ([www.museicapitolini.net](http://www.museicapitolini.net))

The dates of the retrieval of the obelisks of Urbino's spheristerion, of Villa Albani and Villa Minerva are instead unknown. In 1858 Pietro Tranquilli, while restoring his house near the apse of the Minerva, found the following objects: a sphinx made of green granite in the form of Hattsepsut, sister of Tutmosis III (now found in the Museo Barracco);

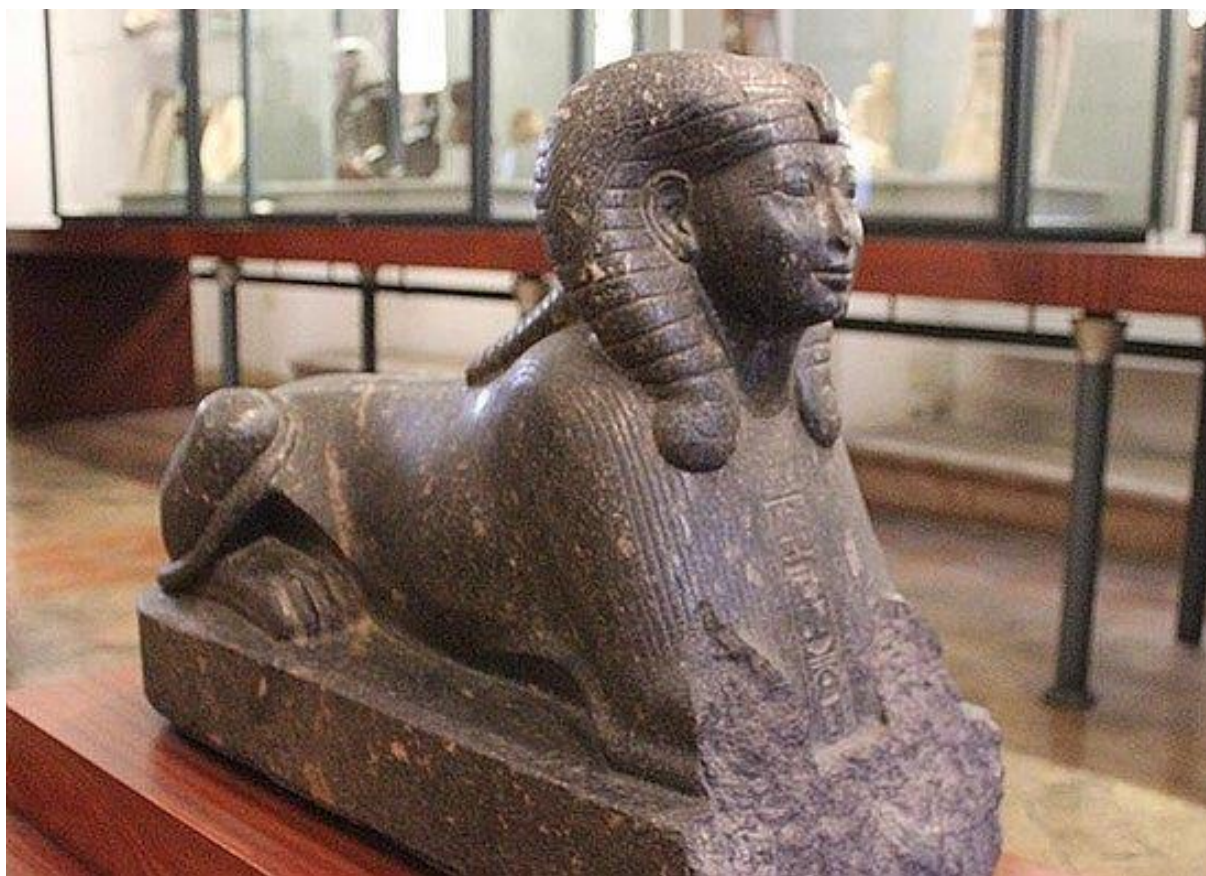


Fig. 3.15: Granite sphynx in the shape of Hattsepsut, now found in the Museo Barracco of Rome ([www.media-cdn.tripadvisor.com](http://www.media-cdn.tripadvisor.com))

a group with the Hathor cow that feeds the young pharaoh Horemheb; a statue of the great dignitary Uahabra (now found in the Archaeological museum of Florence); a column of the temple of Isis with Isiac processional high reliefs; a papyrus flower shaped capital; and finally, a fragment of a red granite bas-relief, now found in the Museo delle Terme (Lanciani 1985, 433). In 1859 Augusto Silvestrelli, owner of the house located next to the previous one, on the same side of Via di S. Ignazio, found five other capitals in the same style and size, that Lanciani believes to be found in the Museo Etrusco Vaticano. In 1883 Lanciani asked the Archaeological commission of Rome to do excavations in the street sector in front of the houses of the Tranquilli and of the Silvestrelli, where he knew that other works of art were lying at the moment. The excavations began on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. The first object that appeared was a black basalt sphinx with the features of pharaoh Amasis, and then, the obelisk with the name of Ramses the Great that was found in Piazza dei Cinquecento at the time Lanciani wrote this information in 1897, and then moved in the gardens near via delle terme di Diocleziano in 1925 where is now found. Later, two dog-headed statues with the inscriptions of pharaoh Necthorheb, made of black porphyry, a red granite crocodile, a candlestick pedestal, and another column of the temple with reliefs and part of the capital were found. All these objects can now be seen in the vestibule of the Capitoline museum. Later in time, the individuation of some structures and mobile findings that can be attributed to the Iseum and the Serapeum of Campus Martius in Rome was then possible following the

works of restoration and consolidation of the complex of the Seminario and later because of the subsequent archaeological excavations that took place in it. The restoration of the “Insula Dominicana complex”, which began in 1975, had the purpose of adapting the ancient buildings of the Convent of the Dominicans for the new prestigious seats of the Libraries of the House of Representatives, of the Senate and of the Offices for the parliamentary commissions of the Chamber and of the Senate. Insula Dominicana is the name used to indicate the complex of buildings that was built starting from 1200 around Santa Maria sopra Minerva church for the functioning of the church itself and of the Dominican convent.

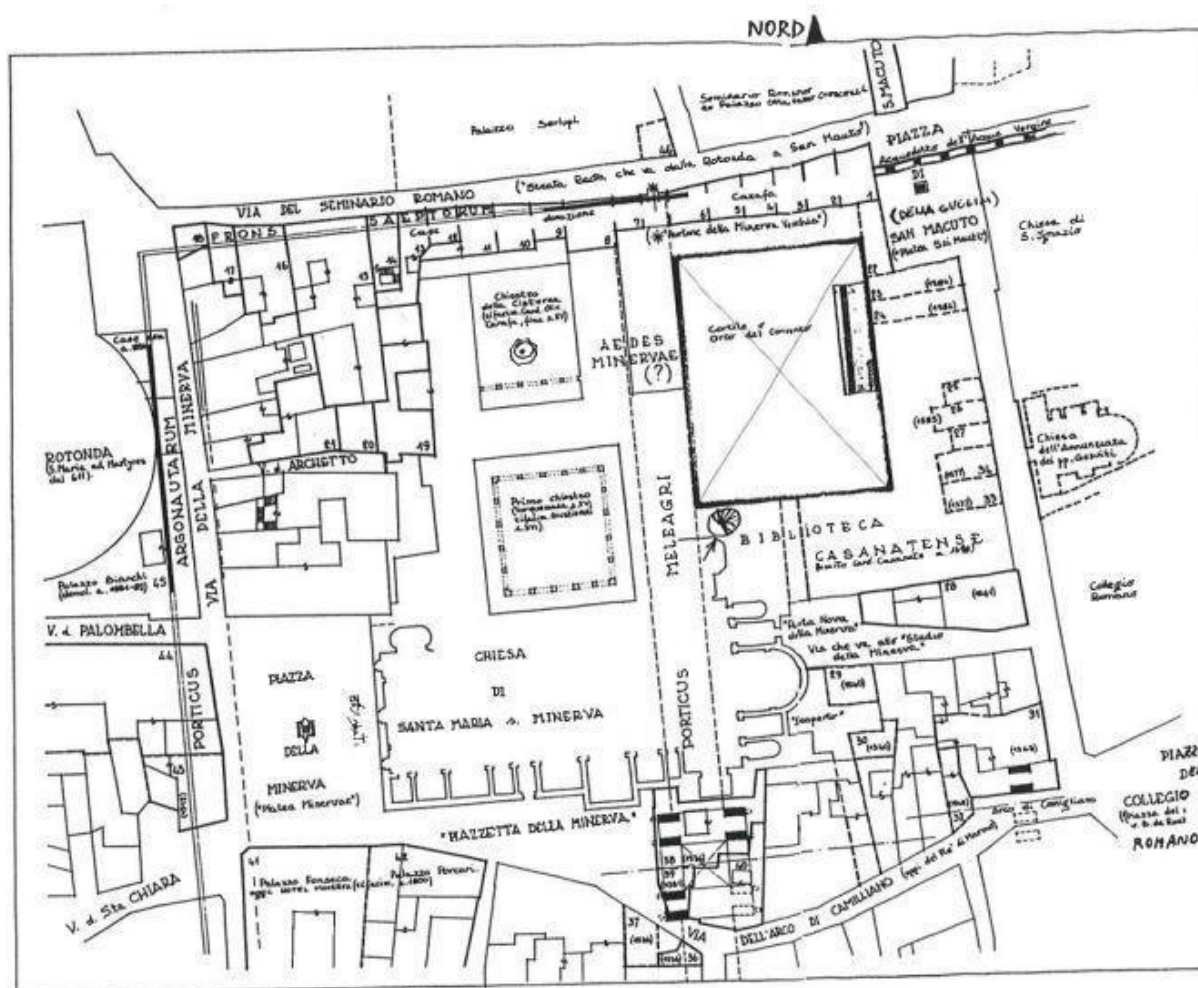


Fig. 3.16: Plan of the complex of buildings of the Seminario (Alfano 1998, 179)

It was during these drastic and imposing works that Roman findings came to light, which allowed the recovery of knowledge regarding structures buried by a plurisecular residential continuum of buildings. The information regarding the retrievals carried out in such circumstances are not complete, since these discoveries were the product of the encounter with archaeological findings that took place outside of an archaeological and scientific environment, and which lacked therefore a complete documentation.

It was only in 1991 that archaeological investigations took place, which aimed the recovery

of that part of the Campus Martius site that could be still investigated through stratigraphic excavations (Alfano 1998, 177). During the aforementioned modern restorations, some wall structures were discovered in the basement of the eastern wing of the Corpo Giustiniano. The biggest wall, labeled as wall R1, has a north-south course and is long 17,73 and thick 2,44 m (Alfano 1998, 181).

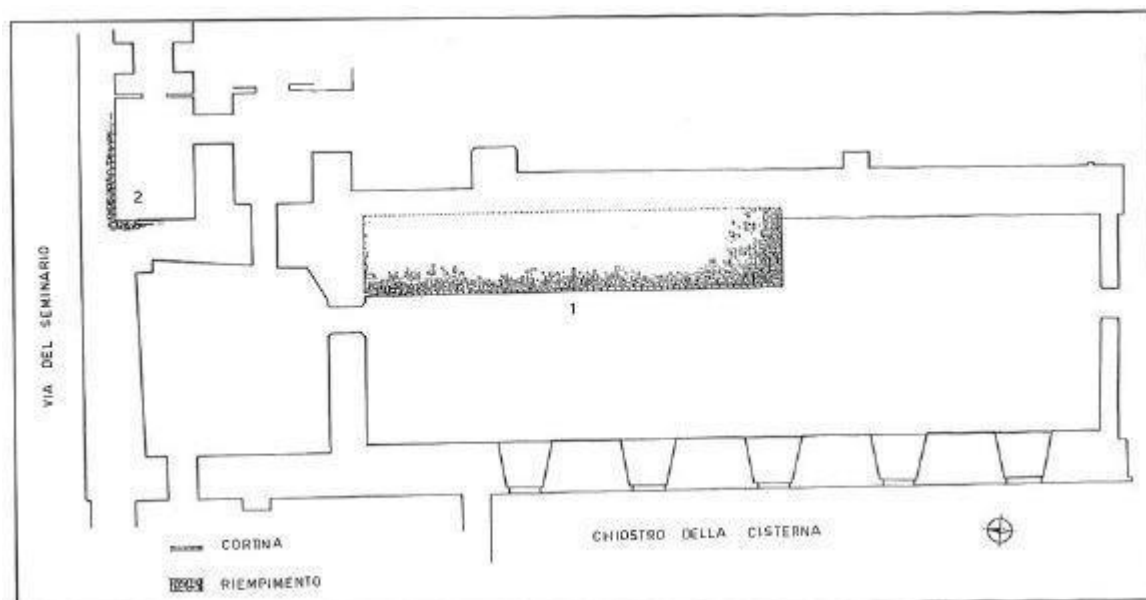


Fig. 3.17: Plan of wall R1 (indicated with number 1), found in the basement of Palazzo del Seminario/Seminario building (Alfano 1998, 179).

According to Alfano, it is possible that this structure was the perimeter of the Iseum Campense, or more precisely, the fence side between the temple of Isis and the Saepta (Alfano 1998, 182). This is because, still according to Alfano, the wall R1 is on the same alignment of the “arco Giano alla Minerva” that marked the southern end of the enclosure of the Iseum, and is parallel to the remains of the Porticus Argonautarum, with whom it shares some similarities in the workmanship of the curtain wall and in the materials (Alfano 1998, 182). This wall might have been part of the restoration ordered by Adrian, which interested great part of the buildings in the Campus Martius, and amongst these surely the Saepta (Alfano 1998, 182-184). Again, according to Alfano, the wall R1 might also have been part of the aqueduct that, directed towards the south, was heading towards the *termae* and the Baths of Agrippa, and that at the same time marked the border between the Iseum and the Saepta (Alfano 1998, 184-185).





Fig. 3.18: The Roman wall R1 inglobated in modern structures (Alfano 1998, 183)

The research regarding the archaeological excavation that started in 1991 had to take in account different requirements of unscientific character (Alfano 1998, 186-187). First among all the choice and the delimitation of the area of excavation that were established by the managers of the completion of the restoration works of Palazzo del Seminario and of its garden (Alfano 1998, 187). Other notable impediments were the “containment armor” of the excavation area, which was necessary in order to sustain the earth of the garden and the foundation walls of the “Biblioteca Casanatese”, the latter already not very stable by itself; the creation of a not diggable area for the safeguard of the garden, which was subject to environmental protection for the presence of rare plants and of the tallest palm tree of Rome; and finally the ground water which tends to richly come to surface in the whole historical center of Rome, even at heights higher than minus 6,00 m, the height that had to be reached in order to reach the trampling level of the early Imperial age (Alfano 1998, 187).

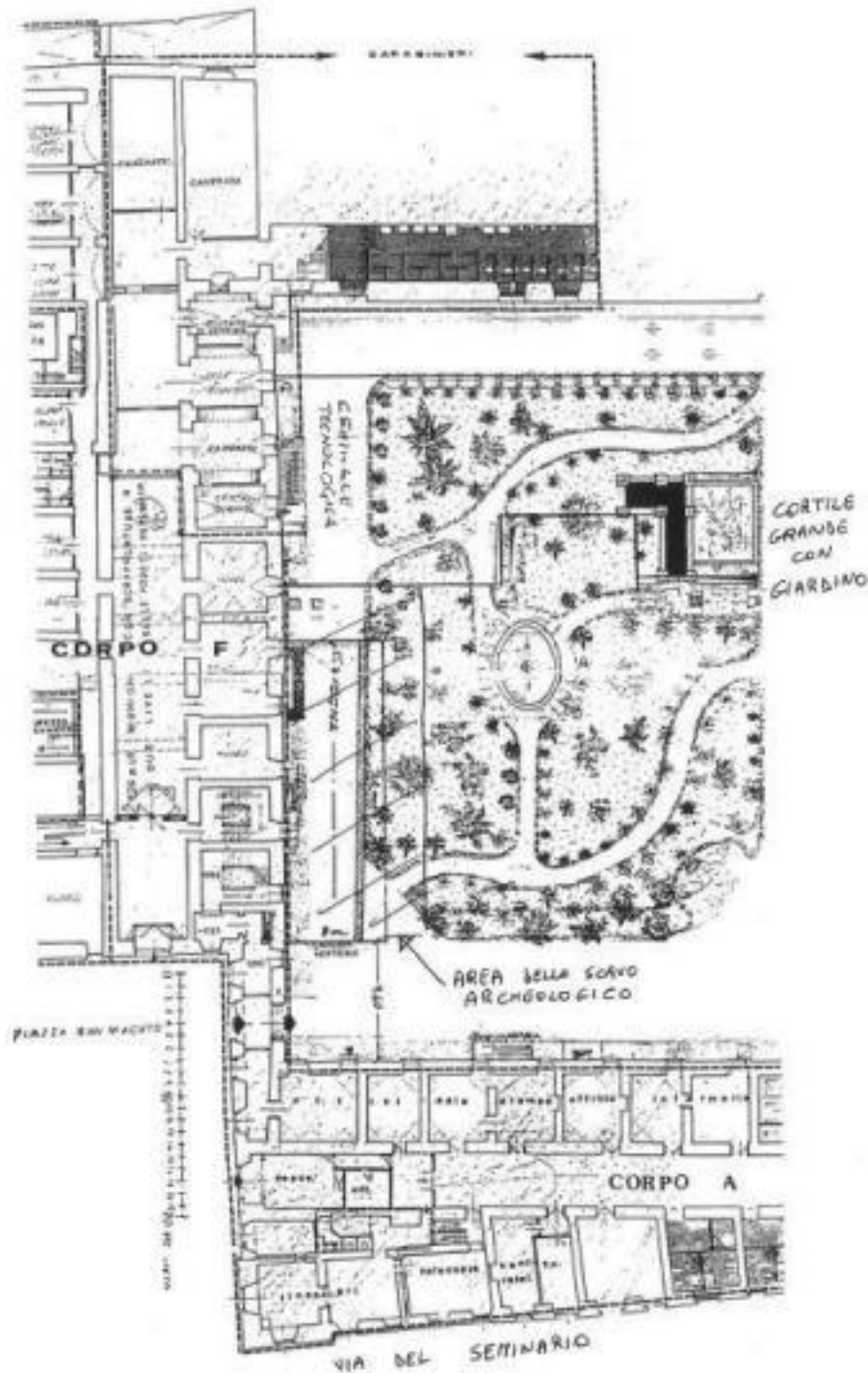


Fig. 3.19: Palazzo del Seminario's great courtyard with garden, with the area where the archaeological excavations took place indicated with an arrow (Alfano 1998, 188).

Despite these heavy limits the excavation gave results regarding topographic, archaeological and historic values, also because this was the first scientific excavation that has been conducted on the temple complex of the Iseum.

The stratigraphic reading of the area led to the individuation of phases of use and of abandon from the Roman period (end of the Republican period) until the time of the excavation. Through the findings and the structures the following phases were clearly

identified: 1700-1800; 1600; Renaissance; Middle Ages; Early Middle Ages; Roman period (end of the Republican period, different phases of the Imperial period) (Alfano 1998, 187). In 1992 the second campaign of excavation took place, which consisted in the investigation of a limited part of the excavation area, immediately close to the foundations of the Biblioteca Casanatense, and that here is denominated area II. This was an area on particular interest because it is likely that the Casanatense may follow the course of the oriental perimetric wall of the Iseum, or even that it may be founded on it.

After the excavation of the first layers where ceramic material dated to the Middle Ages and to the Renaissance was found, the structures related to the foundations of the Biblioteca Casanatense were recognized (Alfano 1998, 190). Below these, some walls dated to the Roman period that had not been demolished during the 1700s constructions were found, and these were used as an ulterior point of resistance during the excavation of the foundation. These are two walls of brick curtain: the first one, which was denominated R3 is parallel to the Biblioteca Casanatense, while the second, which was called R4, structurally linked to the first and perpendicular to it, is directed towards the east.



Fig. 3.20

Fig. 3.21

Fig. 3.22

Fig. 3.20: The façade of wall R3 and the steps of the foundation (Alfano 1998, 191)

Fig. 3.21: Wall R3 and the foundations (Alfano 1998, 191)

Fig. 3.22: Wall R3 seen from the actual trampling level (Alfano 1998, 191)

These walls are completely different from R1 and R2 in regards of materials (type of bricks, the module, and mortar) and construction technique. The walls of area II, vertically preserved for circa 2,50 m, have their nucleuses formed by cemented flakes of tuff and the vestments of brick curtain (Alfano 1998, 190). The bricks are rather tall, 4 cm, and have a module of 29-30 cm (Alfano 1998, 192). Many coating holes and traces of plaster have been detected. The foundations, for a total of 77 cm, are rubble foundations, and end with two steps composed of rows of bricks. The whole wall R3 and its foundations are based on mortar and big blocks of flint. The northern facing side of wall R3, with north-south course,

could make think of a passage in the enclosure of the Iseum, although in comparison to the walls R1 and R2 these structures of area II appear to be characterized by dimensions that are too modest in order to be interpreted as perimetric walls. The possibility to continue the investigations and to find the prosecution of the enclosure towards the north was irredeemably compromised by other underground constructions that were realized in modern times (Alfano 1998, 192).

In the area I, below the modern layers and the ones dated to the Middle-ages, some other roman walls were found. Amongst the most important structures, an imposing brick wall with north-south course/direction, and parallel to the Casanatense, has to be pointed out. This wall, which here we will call R5, although being highly damaged and partly collapsed, at the time of the excavation was still preserved for the length of 5,00 m, the height of 2,00 m, and a thickness of not less than 1,00 m (Alfano 1998, 192). The curtain was very well made, and had “bipedal” bricks (yellow and pink bricks, with an height between 4 and 3,5 cm; grey mortar of 2 cm with traces of joints sealing in the upper part). In the ruins of the collapsed wall R5, the brick curtain presented notable traces of plaster for a visible thickness of 7 cm, and conserved for the length of 50 cm, of white-yellowish color. Under the plaster layer, grey mortar of a notable quality was found, with red and tuff grains included in it. The foundations were 1,00 m deep, and were made for circa 55 cm of a mixture of brick flakes (yellow and red) and tuffs sunk in the mortar, while for the next 30 cm of a bed of pozzolan, grey hydraulic lime, and rare little yellow tuff blocks (Alfano 1998, 192). These foundations lay over an earth layer thick 32 cm, which covers all the trampling floor made of opus signinum/cocciopesto (Alfano 1998, 192). Wall R5, in some traits resulted to be broken “in two points”, with a collapse on the right and another on the left of the line of foundation (Alfano 1998, 193). According to Alfano, these breakages unequivocally indicate that the collapse had taken place due to the effect of a seismic wave, and not due to the demolishing intervention of humans (Alfano 1998, 193).

In antiquity, wall R5 had a marble coating, and this, according to Alfano, is demonstrated by the sequence of holes for mounting clips registered on its curtain, the wedges with traces of marble, and the marble plates with remains of mounting clips that were found in relation to it. This marble decoration was constituted by a figurative relief of big dimensions, which was found in small and middle to big fragments (Alfano 1998, 193).

At the height of minus 6,00 m a flooring in opus signinum was brought to light. This was pertinent to an internal area, which was destined only to the passage of people and light goods, and not to the transit of carriages. The signinum extended across the whole excavated sector, and some surveys suggest that it might have extended across the whole area comprising the great courtyard with garden (Cortile Grande con Giardino) and the courtyard of the cistern (Cortile della Cisterna) (Alfano 1998, 193). It is the most ancient flooring of the temple complex, and is constituted by a solid plan in opus signinum and cocciopesto (Alfano 1998, 193-194). The signinum, or cocciopesto, is a flooring made with brick debris, mixed with reddish lime, very resistant to humidity. The surface of the Iseum's signinum, at the time of its finding, was homogeneously consumed, like if it had been used



as a trampling floor without coating (Alfano 1998, 194). It had a variable thickness between 18 cm and 24 cm, and was composed of medium sized brick flakes (max 6-7cm), which make up 90% of the mass, and of rare fragments of marble. The medium gray mortar binded the conglomerate and made it very stiff. Below the opus signinum layer, the statumen was identified, which was predisposed with river pebbles and basalts in order to ensure the draining of infiltration waters below the pavement. By looking at the foundation it was possible to establish that the structure was unitary, and that it had been built without a solution of continuity (Alfano 1998, 194). This is an opus signinum realized in accordance to all the rules indicated by Vitruvius, and not a simple nucleus. Indeed, the presence of ceramic and marble fragments make the floor a coating itself, and not a preparation for another coating (Alfano 1998, 194).

It is and it was of great interest the presence of little channels and conducts for water that run across all the flooring of the Iseum, above and under the signinum, because of its importance in the correct topographic reconstruction of the temple, but also and especially for studying the meaning that the presence of water had in buildings of Alexandrine inspiration or implant in the Campus Martius. According to Alfano, in the Iseum Campense, as in Iseums and Serapeums in general, the water had a role that was certainly not marginal. Still according to her, within the enclosure of the temple, the presence of an Euripus was very likely, which conferred to the complex a characterizing Egyptian-Nilotic setting (Alfano 1998, 194). Also, in the opus signinum pavement, traces of lead pipelines were spotted, the latter which had been taken away in a period following the abandonment of the temple (Alfano 1998, 195). Even faucets have been found, which according to Alfano, are analogous to the ones that had been found in Pompei and dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The bottom of the small canals and of the flooring in signinum was formed of bipedal bricks, which appeared to be worn out, leached and with ample fissures/cracking, which are the evidence for the presence and of the flowing of water for a long period. The signinum was also cut by a canal with an east-west direction and which enters in a smaller little channel with a north-south course, the latter which terminated in a profound well deep more than 2,00 m from the trampling level of minus 6,00 m (Alfano 1998, 195). The inspection which regarded areas outside the limits of the excavation, towards the west, led to the individuation of a travertine structure (Alfano 1998, 196). This was made up by a stairway, made up of two steps, which descends towards the little canal with north-south direction across its whole length, and a travertine plateau which extended towards the west, at the height of the upper step. Also big broken marble blocks were identified (Alfano 1998, 196). After the analysis of these findings, it was established that the Iseum's pavement was made up of a big plateau/slab made of marble and travertine, which was interrupted by canals to which it was possible to access by descending marble steps, and by a robust opus signinum (Alfano 1998, 197-198). The latter was both the base of the marble coating and the pavement itself without marbles in the areas of service (Alfano 1998, 198). The numerous bipedal bricks found over the floor in signinum were dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D (Alfano 1998, 198).

At the end of the excavation, these phases of construction and abandonment were hypothesized:

Phase A: Roman walls R3 and R4 in area II, the opus signinum floors along with the system of canals, and the travertine floor in the western area.

Phase A1: The part of Opus Signinum which in a trait looked to be very consumed, as if it had been exposed to a lot of trampling.

Phase B: The 50 cm landfill/burial of the signinum flooring. The foundation of wall R5 from area I are based on this landfill layer with earth mixed with greyish mortar and containing a great density of materials: Glasses, some bones, tesserae, many pieces of frescoes, brick fragments, and medium mortar blocks of a violet colour.

Phase C: The foundations of wall R5 in area I, which were deep 1,00 m, were cut in earth layer that covers the flooring of phase A. This layer was composed of masonry debris.

Phase D: Construction of wall R5 in area I.

Phase E: Abandonment phase of the building featuring wall R5. Landfill/burial of the area. Traces left by the floods of the Tiber.

Phase F: Collapse of wall R5 following an earthquake. The wall broke: the upper part had fallen towards east, while the inferior part had broken slightly above the foundations, and, while having been sustained by an earth layer relative to phase E, it had gotten inclined.

Phase G: The collapsed or inclined Roman walls had undergone an ulterior burial/landfill.

Phase H: In the earth layer(s) relative to phase G and phase H, an excavation had been conducted in order to make a cemetery which featured earthen graves.

Phase I and later:

Medieval buildings related to the convent and to private properties. Constructions from the 1600s and the 1800s (Alfano 1998, 200).

Amongst the findings that were retrieved in this excavation which can be dated to the Roman period(s), the many fragments of a huge white marble bas-relief featuring Egyptianizing motifs have to be underlined (Alfano 1998,201). The recovered fragments were of different sizes, on average 40x50 cm, and represent: a huge male figure; the face, seen from profile, of a man in natural size; a hand holding typically pharaonic long sceptres;

a great serpent-uraeus; the feathered wings of Egyptian deities; the crown of Isis-Sotis; the head of a falcon; a huge foot; the womb/stomach and part of the chest of a colossal male

figure (Alfano 1998, 201). The fragments featured different thickness (from 5 to 10 cm). According to Alfano, these Egyptianizing reliefs come unequivocally from works realized in Rome. These are well made, and it is evident in her opinion that these were a part of an important and imposing area of the Iseum (Alfano 1998, 201).

Amongst the architectural decorations that were found there were: marble antefixes and clay figures, also featuring Egyptianizing motifs; acanthus flower shaped capital fragments; column parts; black/white elements and fragments of mosaic(s); many small fragments of plaster painted with colors; medium and small fragments of polychrome marbles of great quality (green Egyptian breccia, red and yellow antique, serpentine, african, imperial porphyry, "bigio", "pavonazetto", "portasanta", ecc.) (Alfano 1998, 201). Amongst the other findings that were retrieved in the Roman layers, lamps, coins, glasses, dices, many ceramics (a little number of sigillatas) were found (Alfano 1998, 201).

Alfano wrote in 1995 that at the time of her writing the findings were kept in a warehouse that had been made available by the House of representatives (Camera dei deputati), waiting for the completion of the studies and elaborations that took place at the time, and therefore a subsequent permanent exposition at S. Macuto (Alfano 1998, 202). The wall structures of area I were covered with sand, pozzolan, and other materials meant to preserve these before the filling with earth and definitive cover/burial. After the reconstitution of the trampling floor, the excavation area came back to be part of the carriageable street of the courtyard with garden of the buildings of S. Macuto (Alfano 1998, 202).

### 3.2b The history of the site and its features:

The cult of Isis arrived in Rome during the II century B.C.: this is proven by two inscriptions found in the Capitolium which mention two *sacerdotes Isidis Capitolinae* (Vigliarolo 2015, 1-2). The cult generated a crowd of adepts, initiated into its mysteries. With time, the cult places dedicated to the cult of Isis evolved from simple areas into big temple structures, such as the Iseum in the Campus Martius, the biggest sanctuary in Rome dedicated to the cult. "It is often called Isis Campensis, and, when named together with the Temple of Serapis, Iseum et Serapeum" (Richardson 1992, 211). This building dedicated to the goddess had an history characterized by a huge popular following contrasted by an alternated clash with Roman institutions. Already during the half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., Isis Capitolina was the main reason for some political fights: the historian Cassio Dione affirmed that in 52 B.C. the Senate ordered the demolition of all the private temples dedicated to Isis that were located within the area enclosed by walls of Rome. "By the time of Lucan the cult of Isis had been officially accepted, very likely under Caligula, and if the temple had not been already standing for a century, it must have been built then" (Richardson 1992, 211). The construction of the Isis Campensis is thought to have happened in 43 B.C., ten years after the ban coming from the Senate, if we interpret another evidence coming from Cassio Dione, and the commissioners were the protagonists of the second triumvirate, who, with high probability, kept following the construction program begun by Julius Caesar in the area of the Campus Martius (Vigliarolo 2015, 2). After not many years after its construction, the

Iseum was again at the center of repressions and temporary suspensions, such as the one from Agrippa in 21 B.C., and the one from Tiberius, who arrived to execute the priests of the cult. The cult was reintroduced by Caligula, and the Isis Campensis was completely rebuilt under Domitian after the fire which happened in 80 A.D. After this, the cult and the temple kept existing in Rome until the end of the Imperial Age of Rome (Vigliarolo 2015, 2). We know the exact location of the Iseum thanks to a passage from Juvenalis that collocates it near the *Saepta Iulia*, but mostly thanks to three fragments of the *Forma Urbis Romae* that allowed to rebuild the plan dimensions of the temple (220x70 mt.).

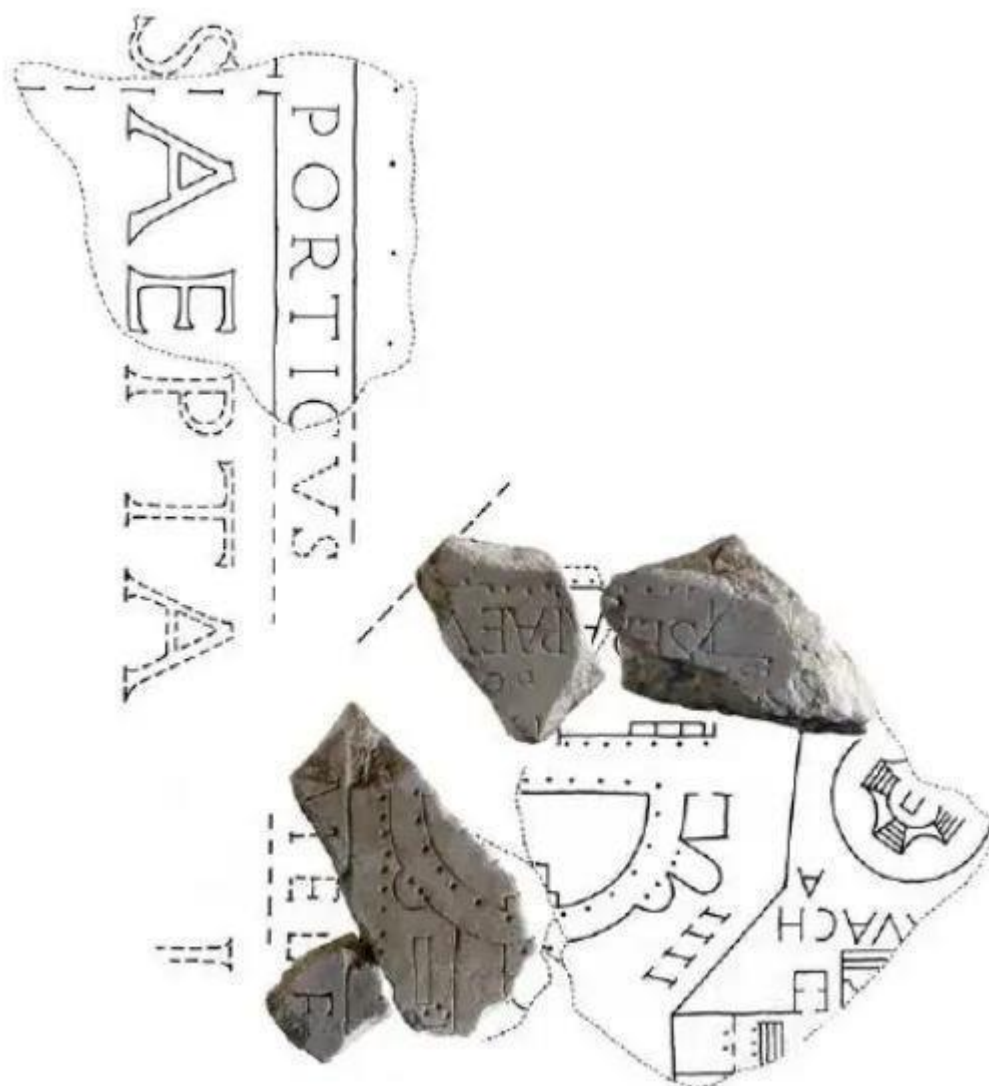


Fig.3.23: Fragments of the Formae Urbis Romae that allowed the rebuild the plan dimensions of the temple (Vigliarolo 2015, no page number)

The complex structure of the temple follows a North-South axis, actually enclosed on the North by piazza S. Macuto and via del Seminario, on the East by via di Sant'Ignazio, on the South by via S. Stefano del Cacco, on the West, in part, by via di Santa Caterina da Siena (Vigliarolo 2015, 2). "The sanctuary was divided into three parts. In the centre of the southern part was a semi-circular exedra, probably a water basin, surrounded by a porticus with statues of the Egyptian gods. The much larger (approximately 140 x 65 m) northern part



of the sanctuary consisted of a temple garden, decorated with all kinds of Aegyptiaca, in which there was a naos for Isis and perhaps one for Sarapis. The entrance to these two parts was formed by an in-between court with in the entre the so-called obelisk of Domitian and on either side two gates which formed the impressive entrance to the sanctuary” (Versluys 2002, 354).



Fig. 3.24: The obelisk of Domitian, now found in Piazza Navona (www.upload.wikimedia)

The southern part, which contained the famous statues of Nile and Tiber, probably erected in the basin, seems to have had a Graeco-Roman identity. The typical Egyptian features were mostly found in the northern temple garden. In the monumental entrance, the rebuilder of the complex, Domitian, was presented as a divine pharaoh through the inscriptions on the obelisk (Versluys 2002, 354).

Martial calls the sanctuary "memphitica", relating it with the Serapeum of Memphis. This is because the structure was bounded by walls, as it was for Egyptian temples, and the inner distribution of buildings and monuments followed patterns typical of Egyptian and-or Hellenistic temples, of which the Isis Campensis seems to have been a synthesis (Roulet 1972, 24). As already said, common features can be found between the Iseum Campense and the Serapeum of Memphis, and thus the plan of the latter can be used to give conclusion about the Iseum Campense. The main complex of structures in the Serapeum of Memphis was characterised by two temples linked by a straight dromos. The entrance to the dromos was from the side, and along the structure, there stood a mixture of Egyptian and Hellenistic statues (Roulet 1972, 24). Thus, these features of the Serapeum can be underlined: a temple at each end of the dromos, a side entrance, a hemicycle, a mixture of Egyptian and Hellenistic elements, and the presence of small chapels along the dromos. "The same characteristics appeared in the Iseum Campense, which, in spite of interpretations and the addition of other elements, deserved the designation "memphitica" (Roulet 1972, 25). "The two entrances of the Iseum Campense were from the sides, at right angles to the main axis of the temple. The principal entrance was on the eastern side. This archway was still standing in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and was known as "Arco di Camigliano" (Roulet 1972, 25). This arch was destroyed during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and has been identified with the Arcus ad Isis that is carved on the sarcophagus of the Haterii.

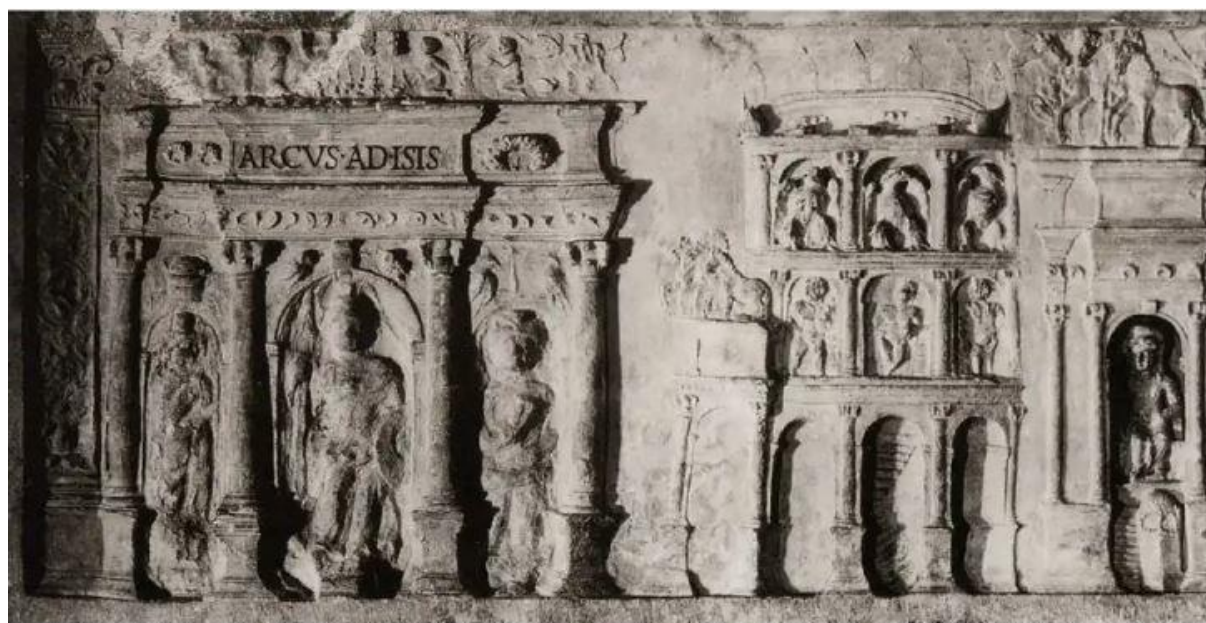


Fig. 3.25: A view of a section of the Tomb of the Haterii's reliefs, featuring the Arcus ad Isis (Vigliarolo 2015, no page number)

On the western side, the other gateway of the Isis Campensis opened onto the portico of the Saepta Iulia. Between these two entrances stood a central courtyard, which is now occupied by via Pie di Marmo. The *Formae Urbis Romae* shows two objects in its center, "which Iversen thinks were a round fountain and the obelisk now in the Piazza Navona, bearing a hieroglyphic dedication to Domitian" (Roullet 1972, 25-26). On the long axis of the temple, on either side of this courtyard, there were the entrances, south, to the Serapeum, and north, to the Iseum. "The marble plan gives little or no indication about these four entrances that led into the courtyard, and to the Serapeum and the Iseum" (Roullet 1972, 26). The Arco di Camigliano, the eastern gateway, is only indicated in part on the *Forma Urbis Romae*. Hülsen believed that it had only one single arch. Gatti gave it three arches, while Lundström two. North of the central courtyard there were Egyptianizing and Egyptian statues connected with the cult of Isis, while in the courtyard area and south of it, Hellenistic pieces were present. "The Iseum stood, presumably, opposite to the Serapeum, at the very north end of the temple, inside a second larger courtyard surrounded by a portico. The marble plan indicates part of this portico and some of its columns, which, compared with the columns of the Serapeum itself, seem quite colossal" (Roullet 1972, 27). "The colonnade consists of a series of Egyptianizing columns with lotiform capitals" (Roullet 1972, 27). The profile, the capitals, the carvings on the shaft, and the material were meant to recall the columns found in the halls of the Egyptian temples. Inside the courtyard, under the portico, there must have stood numerous small "chapels", in the spaces between the columns. The pavements of some of these chapels were found in via del Seminario in 1642, while other fragments were seen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the convent of the Dominicans, and in via di Sant'Ignazio in 1858 (Roullet 1972, 27). The portico sheltered baboons, and this is confirmed by the finding of a pair of them in 1883, and it is known also of an Apis bull. Along the middle of the courtyard, a dromos must have run towards the entrance of the temple of Isis. "It was bordered with pairs of lions, sphinxes, and small obelisks, a late reminder of the original Egyptian dromos bordered with sphinxes. The avenues of sphinxes, before and between temples, were an innovation of the New Kingdom in Egypt. The formula was extensively used in the Late Period and, in Roman times, the most famous of avenues of sphinxes must have been that leading to the Serapeum of Memphis" (Roullet 1972, 29). The sphinxes were alternated with lions. In the Iseum Campense, there were also obelisks along the avenue. The Iseum Campense's cella was built in the prostyle tetrastyle type, and elevated on a platform. "Five steps flanked by low walls led to the pronaos of the sanctuary. At the bottom of the steps stood a pair of low figures, one on each wall...At the top of the steps, on either side of the entrance of the temple, there were two symmetrical pseudo-Egyptian standing statues, with the double crown. The facade comprised four columns with what seem to be Corinthian capitals. Above them there was an architrave, with a solar disc and uraei, supporting a heavy semicircular pediment. On the tympanum, Isis-Sothis was riding a dog among six stars. Above the pediment, three falcons with the double crown stood as acroteria. Behind the front columns opened the door of the sanctuary. Above the door a double lintel was carved with a winged solar disc...and a frieze of uraei" (Roullet 1972, 31-



32). Inside the sanctuary stood a great Hellenistic statue of Isis, presumably on a pedestal or a bench at the back of the cella, along with her usual attributes (situla and sistrum). Based on the depictions of this statue found on coins, It has been suggested that it might have been similar to the statue of Isis that is currently found in the Capitoline museums (Ensoli and La Rocca 2000, 172)



Fig. 3.26: Statue of Isis in the Capitoline Museums ([www.upload.wikimedia.org](http://www.upload.wikimedia.org)).



Even if there are very few examples of Egyptian statues of Isis that certainly came from the Iseum Campense, the sanctuary was full of Egyptian statues of some other kind.

### 3.3 The temple of Isis at Pompeii:

#### 3.3a The excavations at the site:

At the excavations of Pompeii it was found "in 1764 a temple with Egyptian-themed decorations that allowed excavators to identify it almost immediately as a temple of Isis...in a city block that also included a portico, a large theater, and a smaller concert hall, all explored between 1764 and 1769" (Rowland 2014, 88). The excavations of the Temple of Isis kept going on for some more time, as "In 1770...the excavators were centering their efforts on the temple of Isis. Thanks to a frieze showing a procession in honor of the goddess and a series of other painted ornaments and decorative stuccoes, there was little doubt about the identity of the building" (Rowland 2014, 108-110). Unfortunately, as most of the other excavation of the time, this was not scientifically documented as it happened for other excavations that were conducted in the area of the temple in the future.

We can tell what could have been likely visible of the temple in 1781 by looking at the account published in the same year by William Thomas Beckford, who visited it:

"We were now conducted to the temple, or rather chapel, of Isis. The chief remains are a covered cloister; the great altar on which was probably exhibited the statue of the goddess; a little edifice to protect the sacred well; the pediment of the chapel, with a symbolical vase in relief; ornaments in stucco, on the front of the main building. . . . We next observe three altars of different sizes. On one of them is said to have been found the bones of a victim unconsumed, the last sacrifice having probably been stopped by the dreadful calamity which had occasioned it" (Rowland 2014, 110).

In regards of subsequent excavations in the area of the temple of Isis, Varone tells that Elia conducted an excavation in the 1950s at the temple of Isis at Pompeii, and that she discovered the signs of two huts along the ambulatory (ambulatory) west of the portico, one of a circular-elliptic shape and the other rectangular, of the type of the huts found on the Palatine. He also tells that near the south-west angle of the peribolos, a primitive mural structure was found, with rectangular rows of sarnese limestone, alternated to vertical planks of white travertine from the Lattari mountains without mortar. The signs of the two huts, although having been discovered in a layer slightly below the one of the wall, were indeed put in relation with the latter, and Elia saw in these the characteristics of an early village, which was defended from the steep part of the hill from a though wall. This thus permitted the identification the location of the primitive implant of the city, which can be dated, in Elia's opinion, to the middle of the IX century B.C. (Varone 1989, 226). Varone writes that due to works of consolidation and of arrangement of the peribolos and of

the temple of Isis itself, in that circumstance, a series of trenches was arranged in the area between the end of 1988 and the start of 1989. Two trenches were arranged west of the area which had been already inspected by Elia, one at the height of the of the previously cited wall structure, and one at the level of the traces of the huts, respectively therefore in the area immediately contiguous to the crypt of the Great theater (*sacrarium*), and in the curia Isiaca or ecclesiastérion.



Fig 3.27: Temple of Isis at Pompeii, *sacrarium*. Trench: particular of the overlying walls (Varone 1989, 227).

In the first trench, of a size of 4x4 m, a wall section appeared that in Varone's opinion had to be put in relation with the previously cited wall, since it has a structure similar to it and is arranged on the same axis. It was based on the foundations directly in the sterile layer, at an height of -3,40 m below the trampling level at the time of the excavation, and was thick 38 cm, formed by big squarish limestone blocks, with orthostates alternated in horizontally disposed planks. It showed traces of plaster on the upper part both on the northern and southern sides, which interrupted in a regular manner at the height of - 1,31., more or less in correspondence of the division between layers 3 and 4. Above this wall run, in the same east-west direction, another superficial small wall made of badly connected stones (Varone 1989, 227).



Fig. 3.28: Temple of Isis at Pompeii, *sacrarium*. Trench: the wall made of limestone blocks (Varone 1989, 228).

The stratigraphy of the area, for as much discernible as it was, showed through the retrieved materials that it had undergone profound derangements in antiquity, due to the building of the primitive wall itself, or of other elements (Varone 1989, 228). In layer 4, for example, fragments of archaic ceramic were retrieved, together with plaster and Campanian ceramic fragments, while in layer 5, fragments of Campanian ceramic, bucchero, painted ceramics and of miniature crockery were found. The most recent fragments that were retrieved in layer 5, did not permit to date the latter before the Hellenistic period, and neither the wall could be dated before it (Varone 1989, 228).

The excavation that was executed in the ecclesiastérion, with a dimension of 3x3 m, was conducted until the reach of the sterile layer, which was found at an height of - 1,87, and excavated until the height of - 2,27 (Varone 1989, 228-229). Already in the first layer, the presence of a little wall with a east-west course was spotted, which spanned across the whole extension of the trench, had a thickness that varied between the 18 and 30 cm, and was related in regards of dating to a group of other equally superficial walls, like the one that was already cited, which appeared in different parts of the temple's area (Varone 1989, 229). This wall, formed by lava stones, tuff stones, and limestone stones, which were weakly tied together with mortar, laid on another wall structure, which appeared at almost the same height in all the width of the western part of the trench, and thus with a north-south course. The last wall was made of lava stones of a bigger size, which were tied together with mortar in a much more regular manner, and was thick 60 cm (Varone 1989, 229).

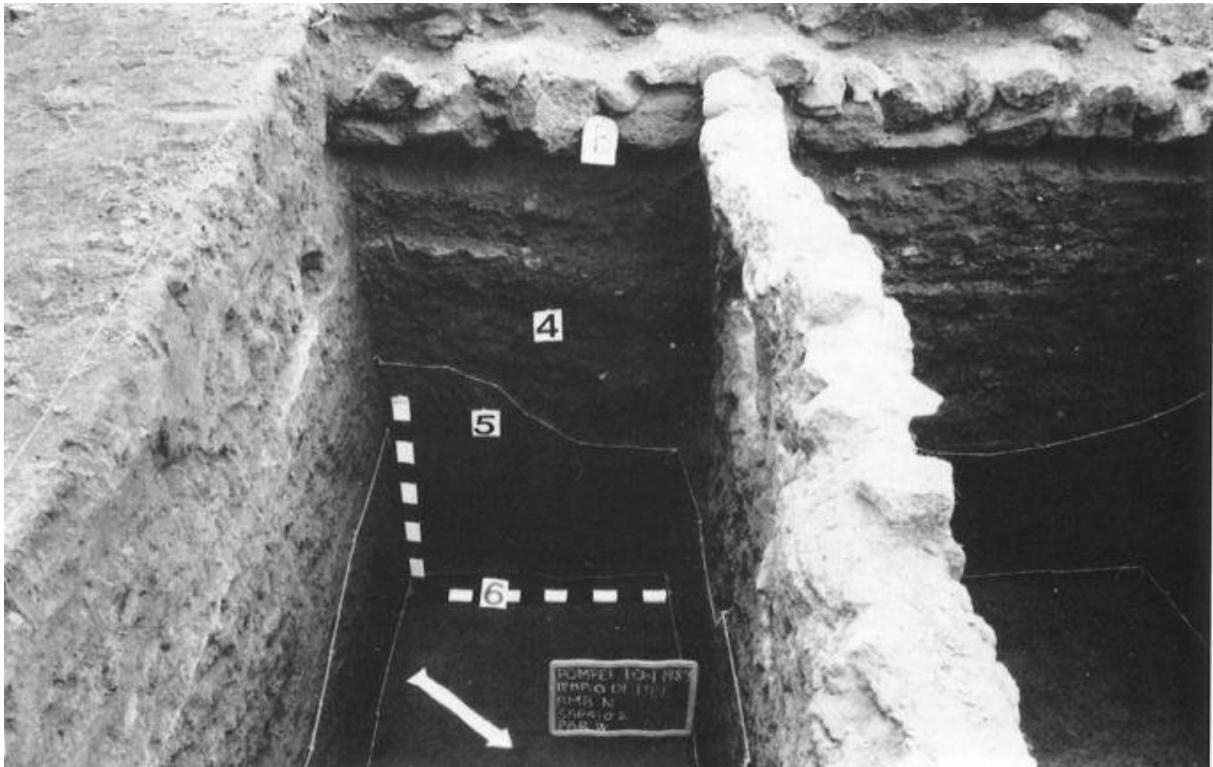


Fig. 3.29: Temple of Isis at Pompeii. *Ekklesiasterion*. Trench: wall structures seen from the east (Varone 1989, 228)

Despite the superficiality of these structures, the materials that were retrieved in stratigraphic succession showed signs of ancient mixing, which seem to have occurred during the first Hellenistic age. In the last not sterile layer, the fifth, in fact, which is found between - 0,77 m and - 1,87 m, in addition to Campanian ceramics, animal bones and teeth, achromatic miniaturistic fragments, and a remarkable bronze statuette of Hercules of medium-Italic type, which wields a clave with the right hand and has the skin of the nemean lion on his left arm, also bucchero fragments and fragments of even more ancient impasto pottery, the latter also with incised decorations, were retrieved (Varone 1989, 229).





Fig.3.30: Temple of Isis at Pompeii. *Ekklesiasterion*. Bronze statuette of Hercules retrieved in layer n. 5 (Varone 1989, 229).

In the previous layer, which spanned from - 0,53 m until a maximum of - 1,49 m, architectural terracottas, architectural elements in stone, miniaturistic jars/pottery, and small heads of terracotta statuettes were retrieved, which were interpreted as a "pendant" to a statuette of "tanagrina" which was retrieved in layer 3 of the trench (Varone 1989, 229). Varone tells that these trenches permitted to foresee; thanks to the terracottas, to the miniaturistic pottery, and other; the existence in the same area or in the immediate vicinity of a sanctuary already in the first Hellenistic age (Varone 1989, 229). The presence of the Hercules bronze statuette, suggested and supported the already discussed existence of a cult of Hercules in the pre-Roman age on the volcanic terrace of the Triangular forum area. Still, Varone precises that, (at the time of this excavation), the urbanistic situation of the area before the monumental arrangement of the II century B.C., when also the Temple of Isis was built, remained unknown. Thus, in his opinion, the pre-existence of (another) sacred zone besides the one of the Doric temple, which could have been subsequently incorporated in the one of the Temple of Isis should not be excluded (Varone 1989, 229).

### 3.3b The history of the site and its features:

The cult of Isis arrived in Pompeii quite early, most likely around 100 BC from Puteoli, and it is peculiar that in a city like Pompeii, which was mainly of the Samnite culture, it instantly gained many converts (Nappo 1998, 89). The temple of Isis at Pompeii is the only well preserved building of Egyptian nature in the area of the Vesuvius (Moormann 2007, 137).

"Little remains of the original temple, which was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 62, and completely rebuilt in unusual circumstances, as described by the inscription found on the entrance door: 'N(umerius) Popidius N(umeri) f(ilius) Celsinus aedem Isidis terrae motu conlapsam a fundamento p(equonia) s(ua) restituit; hunc decuriones ob libertalitem, cum esset annorum sexs, ordine suo gratis adlegeretur' (Numerius Popidius Celsinus son of Numerius, paid for the Temple of Isis to be rebuilt from its foundations, which had collapsed as a result of the earthquake. To repay his generosity, the decurions accepted him into the order free of charge, although he was only six years old). This inscription provides a great deal of information. It indicates the concern of a father to pave the way for his six-year-old son to enter politics and hold the most important offices in the town because he, as a freedman, could never hold public office" (Nappo 1998, 89).



Fig. 3.31: Temple of Isis at Pompeii. Dedicatory inscription of Numerius Popidius Celsinus, now found at the Archaeological Museum of Naples ([www.museoarcheologiconapoli.it](http://www.museoarcheologiconapoli.it))

The fact that a wealthy Pompeian freedman chose to restore the sanctuary dedicated to Isis rather than a temple dedicated to the traditional deities, in order to achieve his goals, is also indicative of the importance of the cult of Isis in Pompeii. It even tells us that the decurions, the leading assembly of the town, appreciated Numerius' act so much, that it was eager to include his son, who would have been a free man in the future, into the *curia*, in spite of his young age (Nappo 1998, 90). The inscription also makes clear that the earthquake was so intense that the structure of the temple had to be rebuilt from the foundations. The temple built by Numerius was most likely identical to the previous one, since the liturgy of the cult required specific spaces and rooms.

Scholars, as in this case, have usually connected the strong worshipping and following of the cult of Isis to people outside of elite circles, namely to slaves, freedmen, and women. Although it may be very likely that the benefactor of this temple came from servile class, Petersen proposes "that the temple has more to offer than would be suggested by its deceptively simple categorization as a freed slave's act of munificence for the city's disenfranchised inhabitants. The Iseum, when reactivated within the cultural context of Pompeii, proves integral to the city" (Petersen 2006, 25-26).

The temple of Isis at Pompeii is located in the Triangular Forum, and occupies a relatively small place, packed between the small temple of Zeus Meilichios, and the back of the Large Theater, which was named Samnite Palestra. "The setting, within a cluster of buildings devoted primarily to Hellenic culture, was highly appropriate for Isis, for the worship of the

goddess in Italy was not entirely Egyptian and foreign but had become Hellenized through Greek channels" (Petersen 2006, 26-27).



Fig.3.32: Map of Pompeii with the position of the Temple of Isis (www.pinterest.com).

The temple was constructed of tufa and brick, and its entire surface was in the first place covered in stucco, most of which can still be found on the back of the temple. The stucco was worked for the most part in imitation of ashlar masonry, as was typical of the First Style of Pompeiian wall decoration (Petersen 2006, 28). "It would seem that this choice of materials was a first-century C.E. evocation of the earlier First Style, making the appearance of the Iseum consistent with public buildings in Pompeii" (Petersen 2006, 28-29).

The building "consists of a podium temple surrounded by a portico, with a large open room on the west side. On the south side, next to the outer rim of the municipal theatre, is a set of rooms with various functions; these south rooms mostly are not open to the portico apart from the doors" (Moormann 2007, 137).



Fig. 3.33: The shrine of the Temple of Isis at Pompeii surrounded by the columns of the portico. It is possible to see the bricks that were employed in the construction of the temple by looking at the columns (www.ancient.eu)

The sanctuary with the portico is the model for an ordinary Roman temple type, which is known from the middle republican era onwards. The temple overall artfully mixes traditional Roman forms with some Egyptian images. The entrance to the temple complex from the street is relatively small and insignificant, it does not give an instant view of the temple building itself but into the eastern corridor of the portico, along with the door that gives access to the private areas of the temple (Moormann 2007, 137). It was closed by a door with three panels, of which only the central one could be opened, as indicated by the hinges found (Nappo 1998, 90). From outside, the temple seems to be totally isolated by a high wall that was decorated with a red plinth and a white upper part, which was framed to imitate an isodomic work (Nappo 1998, 90).

The portico is very unusual: by looking at the disposition of its columns, it is possible to observe that the eastern colonnade counts six columns, the western one seven, while the northern and the southern aisles eight columns each (Moormann 2007, 137). “The central intercolumnium on the east is much wider than the other ones, which suggests that the niche in the east wall of the precinct, with its depiction of Harpocrates, communicates with the *συννάοι θεοί*, Isis and Osiris, in the cella of the temple” (Moormann 2007, 137). The columns of this intercolumnium stand against pilasters. The extra column on the west side is placed in front of the niche featuring the statue of Dionysus in the rear of the temple.

The front walls of the podium and the back of the temple are bound at the north side by the penultimate column counted from the west, and at the south side by the fourth and the



third column counted from the east. It is possible to conclude that the architecture of the sanctuary and its portico has been arranged precisely. The façade runs in line with the northern side of the cella-podium of the temple, and the Nilometer is perfectly aligned with the main features of the building. The various bases and altars seems to have been arranged more unmethodically, apart from the two little altars below the front podium of the Iseum, which are in line with the column with pilaster in the middle of the eastern aisle (Moormann 2007, 140).

"The temple proper, relatively small by Pompeian standards, is located near the center of a peristyle and is raised on a podium, accessible by a narrow flight of stairs. Its pronaos displayed the usual columns with Corinthian capitals (in this case six). More idiosyncratic, however, are the aediculae at either side of the facade and the secondary entrance to the temple at its south side, distinguishing the Temple of Isis from the typical Roman model" (Petersen 2006, 28). Additionally, the cella of the temple is a little shallow, wider than it is deep; "a high podium extending along the entire width of the cella's back wall was used for the display of the cult statues" (Petersen 2006, 28). A niche that contained a statue of Bacchus, along with an inscription telling that N. Popidius Ampliatus, father of Celsinus, dedicated the statue, is found on the exterior of the cella's back.

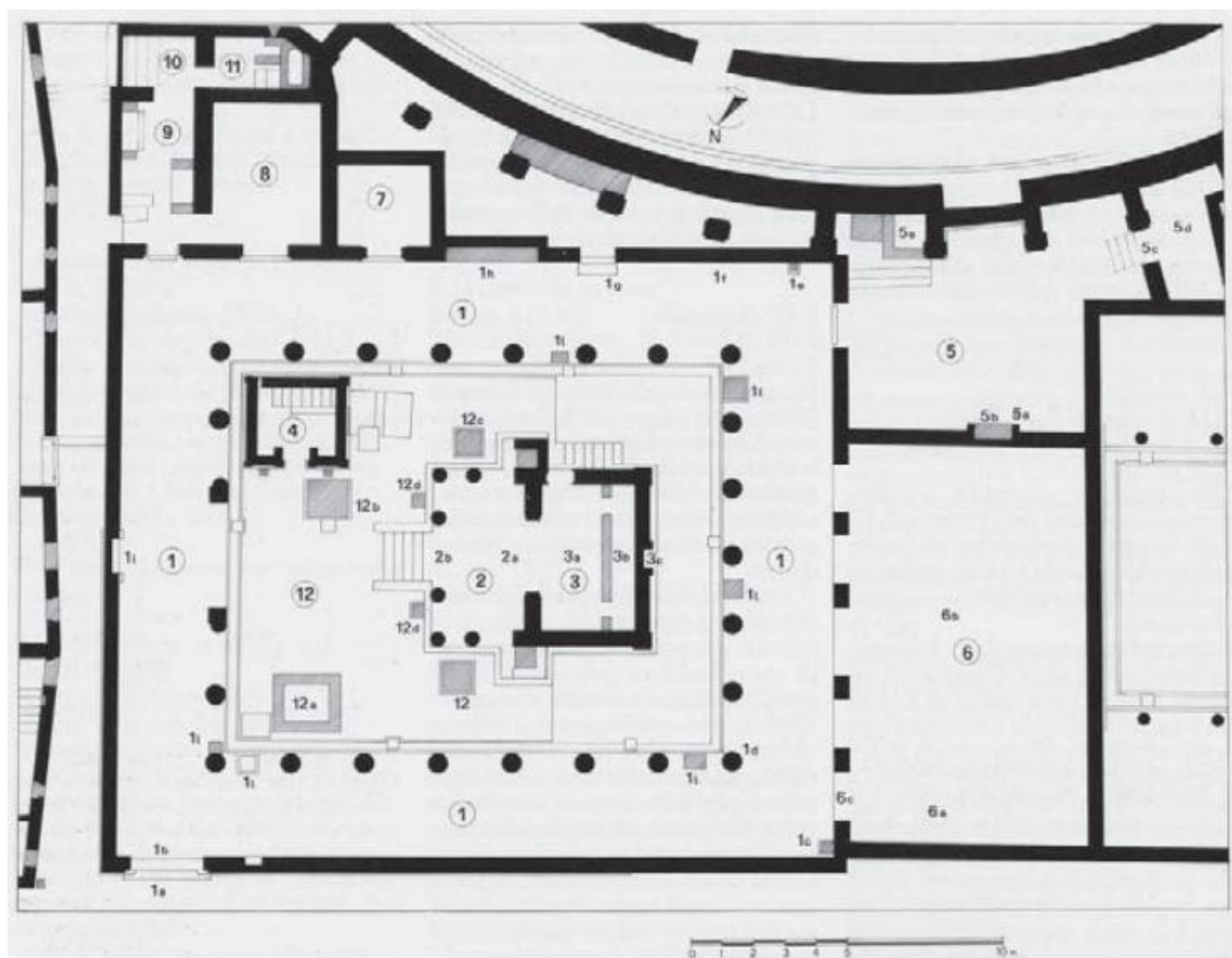


Fig. 3.34: Plan of The Temple of Isis at Pompeii (Moormann 2007, 139)

As already stated, The Iseum is stuccoed in the First Pompeian style, although the murals probably date to the post-62 period. While the front walls and the end walls of the porticoes have stucco reliefs featuring architectural schemes of the Fourth Style, the outer walls imitate blocks through stucco reliefs. The top of the whole portico's decoration is formed by a scroll. Nappo writes that the end walls of the porticoes were decorated with Egyptian landscapes alternated with characters from the court of Isis in the center of panels with a red background, which were separated by architectural compartments with pictures of still lifes and naval battles (Nappo 1998, 90). "The panels were bordered at the top by a magnificent continuous frieze of plant volutes on a black background, with characters and animals associated with Isis" (Nappo 1998, 90). Petersen states that the middle part of these walls is divided from the upper part by a painted frieze of acanthus, rendered against a black background, and that miniature figures are depicted within the scrolls of acanthus, some of which carry symbols of Egypt (for example, a small child holding a sistrum, and a cow with lotus on its head) (Petersen 2006, 31). The four walls of the porticoes repeat this schematic program, and "when viewed as a whole, the paintings of the portico display recognizable Fourth-Style patterns punctuated with only a smattering of small-scale Isiac images" (Petersen 2006,31). Moormann tells that "the inner walls show two tiers of fake-marble plates that create a rich and austere atmosphere. Figural motifs are almost completely absent. This mode reflects the traditional look of marble temples, as we see in the cellae of the Temple of Juppiter and that of Apollo at Pompeii. The floors, partly in opus sectile, partly in opus tessellatum, are only known from 18th- and 19th-century illustrations. They probably date to the beginning of the 1st century AD, in any case from before Popidius Celsinus' reconstruction of the building" (Moormann 2007, 141). The walls on the sides of the exterior of the Nilometer feature a stucco imitation of blocks, while the front side features stucco reliefs with garlands, similarly to those found in the portico, also bearing Egyptian cult utensils such as the hydria and the sistrum. The panels that flank the door are decorated with figures of Isis standing on tiny consoles. Additionally, cult ministers were depicted in the frieze over the entrance. The exterior sidewalls feature panels framed in stucco relief depicting floating mythological couples (Mars and Venus, Andromeda and Perseus); the other walls depict Erotes (Moormann 2007, 142-143).



Fig. 3.35: Temple of Isis at Pompeii, eastern side wall of Nilometer with Mars and Venus (Moormann 2007, 142)

The back wall instead has an imitation of isodoma blocks made in stucco reliefs. In Moormann's opinion, the decorative arrangement of the temple as a whole shows the combination of profane and cult-specific motifs taken from Greek mythology that have nothing to do with Egypt. Therefore, "the portico that constitutes the precinct around the temple and the Nilometer has a rich and multicoloured paratactic panel decoration that contrasts with the white decorations of the shrine and the small precinct for the water of the Nile" (Moormann 2007, 143).

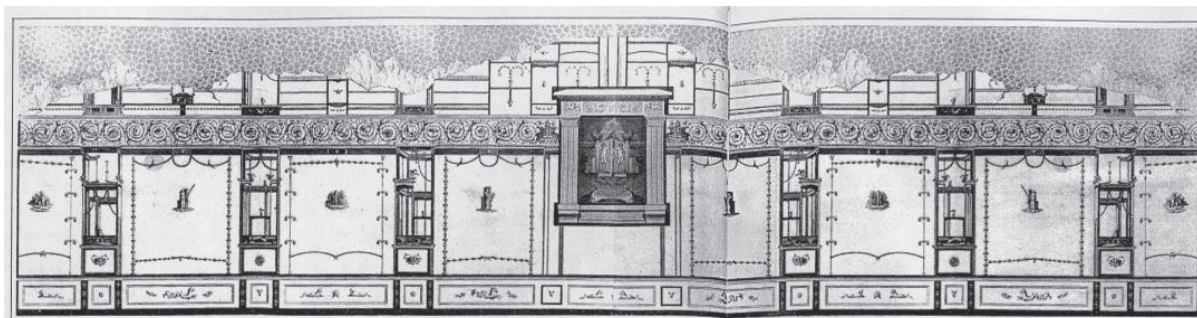


Fig. 3.36: Temple of Isis at Pompeii, precinct's eastern wall on 18<sup>th</sup> century engraving (Moormann 2007, 144)

A roofless enclosure, often called *purgatorium*, found in the south east corner of the courtyard, is one of the features which signals that this temple was dedicated to an Egyptian deity (Petersen 2006, 29-30). "This structure demarcates a subterranean room containing a basin for the lustral Nile waters, a fundamental element for the cult of Isis, and resembles a temple in miniature, with a pediment at the front and pilasters flanking the entrance and trimming the corners of the entire building" (Petersen 2006, 30). This *purgatorium* was also covered in stuccowork, while combining images that relate specifically with Isis at the front, with imitation ashlar masonry on the backside (Petersen 2006, 30). These isiac images included statues of Isiacs at either side of the entrance, and an Isiac procession in the architrave. However, on the long sides, images of Roman deities, namely Mars, Venus, Perseus, Andromeda, and Cupids, evoke the trends of contemporary Pompeiian decorative ensembles of both public and domestic spaces (Petersen 2006, 30). The principal altar for the precinct stands before this structure.

"From the west portico, five arched doorways led into a large rectangular room. This large room, which was practically intact when excavated, was richly decorated: the black mosaic floor in the north sector was inlaid, in white tesserae, with the names of Numerius Popidius Celsinus, his father Ampliatus and his mother Corelia Celsa, to commemorate their generosity" (Nappo 1998, 91). The walls were decorated in the 4th style, and featured seven large panels, depicting Nile landscapes and two representing scenes from the myth of Io: Io being received in Egypt by Isis, and Argo being watching over Io (Nappo 1998, 91). Along with many objects related to the cult, including a sistrum, the remains of a female *acrolith*, supposedly Isis, were found in this room. This room has been interpreted in different ways, but it probably was the room where worshippers of Isis gathered and ritual banquets were held. The west portico gave access to another room behind the Large theatre buildings, which was covered in white plaster, and which portrayed figures and scenes related to the cult of Isis in no particular order. "This room probably served for religious instruction and as a store for sacred ornaments and vestments; in fact, a large number of religious objects were discovered there" (Nappo 1998, 91).

Although no temple cult statue survives from the temple, three nearly intact sculptures of deities have been found in the area behind the temple and of the western side of the portico. Among these, a statue of Isis holding an ankh in her right hand and a sistrum in her left has been found (Petersen 2006, 34). Isis appears Hellenized, represented in an archaic Greek manner, and not depicted in an Egyptian traditional style, although the sculpture is dated to the Neronian period (54-68 A.D.). The two other statues depict traditional Roman deities, Venus and Bacchus, and, at first impact, may seem out of place within the context of a temple dedicated to an Egyptian deity. However, Roman sanctuaries were often polytheistic, and not the exclusive domain of a given god. Additionally, Romans often combined the attributes of foreign deities with traditional ones, a syncretism that conceptually and visually incorporated other deities in the Roman pantheon (Petersen 2006, 34-36). Such is the case for Bacchus/Dionysus, who since the fifth century B.C. could be identified with the Egyptian god Osiris, and this link might explain the placement of this



sculpture within the single niche behind the temple's cella (Petersen 2006, 36). Meanwhile, an image of Venus Anadyomene stood in the southwest corner of the portico, of the type found in a limited number of Pompeian domestic shrines and gardens. "Venus shown wringing her hair might take on special meaning in the context of Pompeii's Iseum; the life-giving waters of the Nile were integral to Isiac ritual, and Venus shown after the bath just might make subtle reference to the importance of water in Isiac worship. Although the appearance of Venus within the city's Iseum seems fitting enough, it is also important to bear in mind that Venus was the patron goddess of Roman Pompeii. The very presence of the city's goddess within an Egyptian sanctuary not only reinforces the syncretic spirit between these two gods, but more than that, it suggests an overt identification among Pompeians with Isis. Venus and Isis have come together here, sharing the same space, perhaps as Pompeii's guardians" (Petersen 2006, 36-37).

Egyptian imported goods were also discovered within the temple complex, of which three survive today. A statue of a male Egyptian deity, a hieroglyphic inscription, and a figurine of Paef-hery-hesu (a servant figure which was buried with the dead) have been found within the temple complex. These all date to a period well before the building of the first Temple of Isis at Pompeii, and even before the earliest evidence for the worship of the Egyptian goddess in Campania (2nd century B.C.) (Petersen 2006, 37). The worshippers of the Isiac cult could have seen these Egyptian objects as particularly necessary to the temple and its rituals, probably as legitimizing or authenticating the worship of Isis. In any case, the temple broadly projects an image of being first and foremost a Roman temple.

## 4 Comparison and discussion of the features of the temples:

It is possible to say that the method that I employed, which was defined by the analysis of the architectural and artistic features of the temples, and in some instances by the reference to textual evidence, could generally reflect the method of Bommas, who inspected this kind of information in order to investigate the cult. The approaches that were employed by Woolf, Bricault, and Versluys in their chapters that were analysed in the second chapter are related to reasoning and questions that are of a too broad and too deep level to be reflected by the approach that I could have applied in a thesis of this dimension, although the data that is treated in it could be used in studies of greater and higher level.

By comparing the features of these three temples, it becomes possible to understand if and which temple features that were present in an Egyptian temple were adopted in the building and arranging of temples found in other regions of the Mediterranean, in these case Italy.

Apparently the adoption of an outer wall enclosing the temple complex is an adoption of Hellenized Iseums in Italy, since this feature is not found at least in the Temple of Isis at Philae. The temple at Philae had a forecourt, and the two main sanctuaries/naos of the Iseums in Italy were found inside an enclosed courtyard. Therefore it is possible to assume that, although arranged and positioned in a different manner, the courtyard element was a part of all these temples, although it is difficult to know if the adoption of court was a reference to the Temples of Isis in Egypt or to Egypt in general, since these were featured also in Hellenistic architecture.

Isis' temple of Philae's main sanctuary was accessed by steps, and thus the structure was elevated on a platform. The two Italian Iseums' cellae were elevated on a podium. Thus the element of the elevation of the most inner structure is an element that we find in all three temples, although it is difficult to say if the adoption of it was an intended imitation of Egyptian elements or a coincidence, since elevated cellae are typical also of Hellenistic buildings.

The Temple of Isis of Philae features two great pylons, and this feature was clearly not adopted in the building of Iseums in Italy. Philae's temple's pylons featured two gateways, which served in the first as main entrance to the temple's forecourt and in the second as main entrance to the sanctuary (or better, the the inner court before it). Instead, the Iseum Campense had an entrance found in a courtyard that could be accessed by other two main entrances positioned at opposites sides, while the Iseum at Pompeii had a small side entrance. Thus it is possible to assume that the positioning of the entrance in Temples of Isis in different geographical areas and during different periods had not pre-established rules and was probably more related to the architectural style adopted and/or to the setting of the temples.

The Temple of Isis on Philae, as the one at Pompeii, does not have a dromos, but this was present in the Iseum Campense. It is possible to assume, as explained before, that the dromos might have been inspired by the Serapeum of Memphis, and thus that the adoption

of it was at least a reference to Egyptian temples in general. Although not found in the Temple of Isis at Philae specifically, it could have been interpreted as an element of Isiac Temples when in relation to a Serapeum.

The Temple of Isis of Philae (or the Island of Philae in general) featured a Nilometer, and this was found also in the Iseum of Pompeii, but it is not possible to certainly establish if this was featured in the Iseum of the Campus Martius. It is possible to say that the Nilometer was an element adopted at least in some of the Mediterranean, or at least Italic, Temples of Isis and which came directly from Egypt, although while in the first case it was mostly used for practical reasons related to the environmental setting, in the second it was most likely used in relation to cultic practices and in the re-enactment of the distant Nilotic environment. The Iseum of Pompeii also features a purgatorium, an element clearly coming from Egypt but that is not found in the Temple at Philae, thus being probably more a reference to Egypt in general than to the Egyptian Temples of Isis themselves. In any case, the Iseum Campense featured at least conduits of water that run across its floor, which might have been connected to the presence of a nilometer and/or purgatorium. The presence of these elements related to water in the temples are evidence for the important role that water had, even if in different manners, in the cult of Isis both in its indigenous and exported version, and at least in some of its Temples across the Mediterranean.

No statues are found in the Temple of Isis of Philae, and thus the presence of statuary elements in the two Iseums in Italy might just have been mostly linked to local taste in regards building arrangement. The Italic Iseums had sculptures that featured elements coming both from the Graeco-Roman pantheon and from the Egyptian one, although mostly represented in a Graeco-Roman/Hellenistic manner. Thus, there is probably no influence from Egyptian temples of Isis in this regard, but probably only an influence from Egypt in general and from its cosmology in regards of the exotic symbols represented in a local fashion.

Isis' Temple on Philae was decorated with (once painted) reliefs, in which gods and rulers, even the ones from the Roman period, were depicted in an Egyptian local fashion, while the Iseum Campense and the Iseum of Pompeii were decorated with paintings and stucco reliefs which often featured Egyptian elements but represented in a Graeco-Roman manner. It is possible to say that the decoration of walls with symbols related to the cult, in a way or another, remained a feature of Iseums after their arrival of the cult in Italy, although it is difficult to establish if this was necessarily connected to the worship of Isis itself, since paintings and stucco reliefs were widespread in Italy and were an element of Hellenistic/Graeco-Roman design. It seems that, while the Temple of Isis on Philae was decorated with reliefs arranged in a manner and in an order that would make sense if seen from an indigenous Egyptian perspective, the wall decorations in the Iseums of Italy featured, as they did with the sculptures, Egyptian-izing elements not necessarily in a way that would have had a meaning in the perception of an Egyptian, but mostly in order to evoke an Egyptian environment and to make the believers and the visitors of the Italian Iseums feel at least connected to the origins of the cult.

It seems that in the building and arrangement of these Iseums in Italy, there was no explicit intention to exactly imitate architectural and artistic features found in the Temples of Isis in Egypt, or at least in the one at Philae. It was instead the reference to the Egyptian environment and mythology and re-evocation of these that was aimed through the adoption of symbolic elements, such as nilometers or sculptural elements, and through other symbolic elements in the painting decoration, although most of the time being represented a Graeco-Roman fashion. Thus, the architectural re-adaptation and re-fashioning of the Temple of Isis in Italy seems to somehow follow in parallel the almost total re-fashioning of the cult that took place when it got out of Egypt, and that was noted in the second chapter. It also probably reflects the spiritual approach of the cult, at least in the Graeco-Roman environment, where apparently the presence and meaning of elements, no matter in which fashion represented, was most important, rather than how these precisely looked and/or if these looked as they did in Egypt. Furthermore, it seems that the reference to Egypt made by artistic symbols found in decorations and in the adoption of some structural elements (eg. Nilometer) was seen as important, probably in order to underline at least the provenance of the cult. It is also possible to say that, although during the Roman period the Mediterranean world witnessed one of the most important periods in regards of interconnection and mobility, many people did not travel to Egypt, and that thus those symbols might have been enough in the re-evocation of Egypt, at least in the perception of a great part of Italic followers of the cult.



## 5 Conclusions:

### 5.1 Conclusion:

In this thesis the theme of the diffusion of the cult of Isis from Egypt across the Mediterranean was treated by first analyzing the Temples of Isis at Philae, Pompeii, and in the Campus Martius at Rome one by one, and then by comparing their characteristics and features, in order to understand if some of these kept being an important element of the structural model of an Isiac temple over the centuries and in different geographical areas, and/or if variations could be noticed. Before doing this, the topic was introduced by first specifying which were the research question and sub research questions that would be answered and why it would be relevant to do so. Secondly, It was broadly explained which would have been the methodology that would be used, and a general explanation about what is known about the cult of Isis, its diffusion in the Mediterranean world, and the temples where she was worshipped that were treated in this work was given.

Followingly, the information regarding the cult of Isis that is treated in *Bommas' Isis, Osiris, and Serapis*; *Woolf's Isis and the Evolution of Religions*; and *Versluys' and Bricault's Isis and Empires*; along with the methods they employed to investigate the cult, was explained.

Therefore, Bommas' broad analysis of the diffusion of the cult, which featured analysis of architectural elements; Woolf's investigation of different processes that defined the cult during different historical stages in different geographical areas, and of the role of the believer of Isis; and Bricault's and Versluys' inquiry of the relationship between the cult of Isis and political rulers, of the role of connectivity that defined the Hellenistic and Roman worlds and that stimulated the diffusion of the cult across the Mediterranean and beyond, of the global and local versions of Isis, and of the Prehistory of the cult was inspected. Subsequently, the history of the excavations, the history, and the architectural features of the Temples of Isis at Philae, at Pompeii, and at the Campus Martius in Rome has been investigated. Philae's temple, with its overall indigenous Egyptian features such as the pylons, the Osirian chambers, the birth house, and the reliefs found on its walls on which Egyptian gods along with Ptolemaic and Roman rulers are depicted in an indigenous manner, and its architectural elements featuring a touch of Hellenistic features, such as the columns found in its eastern gateway was investigated. Then, The Iseum Campense, characterized by its position next to the Serapeum of the Campus Martius, its Egyptianizing features such as its dromos, its lions and sphinxes statues, its obelisks; and its Graeco-Roman features such as the portico has been reviewed, while underlying that it is not verily simple to completely say which features the structures might or might have not featured, since the temple lays nowadays under the streets of the center of the Italian capital. It was written about the Temple of Isis at Pompeii; its reconstruction financed by a freed man, and thus about the relation between this process and the social context of the Roman world; the peculiar arrangement of the columns found in its portico; its prostyle tetrastyle central temple; its paintings in Pompeian style and stucco reliefs depicting Egyptianizing motifs, themes, and symbols in a Graeco-Roman fashion; and its Egyptianizing features such as its Nilometer and

its Purgatorium, thus underlying the fact that for the exception of small elements the structure was mostly arranged in a Roman style.

Afterwards, The features and characteristics found in these three temples of Isis were put in comparison. By doing this, it has been pointed out that the courtyard was an element that can be found in all the temples, although planned in different manners. It is also possible to spot the element of elevation in all of the structures, since both the Italian Iseum's cellae and Philae's temple's main sanctuary were elevated and accessed by steps. It was noted that the Pylon element, which is found in the Temple of Isis of Philae and in many structures of ancient Egypt, was not adopted at the Iseums in the Campus Martius at Rome and at Pompeii, the first having an entrance found in a courtyard which was accessed by two entrances at its two sides, and the latter being accessed by a small entrance found on a side of the wall that surrounded it. A dromos was present in the Iseum Campense, an element not featured in the Temple of Isis at Philae but most likely inspired by the Serapeum of Memphis, thus not representing a standard element of an hypothetical structural model of the temple of Isis. Instead, a nilometer is found for sure at both the still-standing temples of Isis at Philae and at Pompeii, although most likely being used in the first case for utilitarian purposes connected to the presence of the river Nile which now covers Philae island and surrounds Agilkia island, and being used in connection of rite as an evoking element of the Egyptian environment in the latter. It is not known if a nilometer was present in the Iseum Campense, but several conducts for water were found during the excavation of now buried sections of the structure, thus at least underlying the persistence of the importance of the element of water regarding the cult dedicated to Isis. For the rest, the majority of structural elements and decorations found in the two Iseums found in the Italian peninsula, with some exceptions found in the Iseum Campense, are of a Graeco-Roman fashion, although often featuring artistic elements related to Egypt, Egyptian cosmology, and the cult of Isis; albeit always represented in a local style. Instead, the Temple of Isis at Philae was almost entirely characterized by local Egyptian architectural and artistic elements, even when representing Roman rulers, with the exception of some features such as the arrangement of some of its columns.

## 5.2 Replying to the Research questions:

The moment to reply to the raised research questions has finally come.

- Which differences and/or similarities can we find concerning the Isis sanctuaries from Egypt and Roman Italy up to Roman times?

The temple of Isis at Philae featured a forecourt enclosed by two pylons and placed in front of the main sanctuary, while the main cellae of the Iseum Campense and of the Temple of Isis at Pompeii were surrounded by a columned courtyard surrounded by a portico. Thus, the courtyard element can be similarly found in all of these temples, although arranged in different manners. Nilometers, which were an element found in different structures of

Egypt, such as the Iseum at Philae, and/or at least features related to the presence of water in the temple, such as the conducts found in the Iseum Campense, persisted in the model of the Iseum when this type of structure was built in Italy. Other Egyptian elements were adopted in the Iseums in Italy, which regardless are not present in the Temple of Isis at Philae, such as the dromos, which was featured in the Iseum Campense but inspired from the Serapeum of Memphis. Also, Egyptian-izing sculptures were adopted in the Iseum Campense and the Iseum of Pompeii, while apparently no statue is found in the Temple of Isis at Philae. The element of wall decoration, found in the Temple of Philae in the form of once painted and now discolored reliefs made in an Egyptian fashion; and in the two Iseums of Pompeii and in the Campus Martius in Rome in the form of stucco decorations, reliefs, and paintings featuring Egyptian-izing features represented mostly in a Graeco-Roman style; remained an important element of the Temple of Isis also when the latter became an element of Italic cities, although, as explained, in a different style. Thus, this would stand for both the persistence of the wall decoration element and a change in the arrangement of it. It has to be pointed out that it is not possible to know if the adoption of this element in the Italic Iseums was inspired by Egyptian temples of Isis, such as the one at Philae, or was just interpreted as a feature of the local architectural and artistic style(s), since wall decorations were found also in the local temples of local deities.

For the rest, the Iseums of Italy featured architectural and artistic elements which were characteristic of local styles, such as the porticoes, the cellae, and the stucco works, and thus the adoption of these can be interpreted in this case as a change in the architectural model of the Temple of Isis that happened when it became a part of the life of Italian centers.

- Can we spot an evolution or change in the architectural elements of the temple of Isis after its spread across the Mediterranean world?

When considering the architectural elements found in the Temples of Isis and the data that was investigated in this thesis, it is possible to recognize the adoption of new structural elements by the Iseums of Italy which were characteristic of Graeco-Roman (local) style, accompanied by the persistence of some features that persisted in the evolution of the model of the temple of Isis from Egypt to at least Italy. An evolution can be supposed in regards of the element of the Nilometer found (at least) at Pompeii, since this was not used in regards of the presence of the Nile, as it most certainly was in the case of the Temple at Philae, but most likely as a part of the ritual. Another change can be seen in the adoption of wall decorations, which, although being present in the Temple of Isis at Philae in a purely local Egyptian style, in Italy wall decorations were arranged in a local manner. Even the courtyard element changed, from being located in front of the main temple, being surrounded by pylons, and featuring a birth house in Philae, to surrounding the cellae of the Italic temples, featuring a portico, and even as dromos in the Iseum Campense.

- Is it possible to find evidence for possible persistence or changes in the aspects of the cult of Isis that might have taken place after the diffusion of it across the Mediterranean world, by analyzing the material culture, art, and architectural aspects of temples of Isis located in different parts of it?

The presence of small rooms found behind the rear wall of the colonnade of the temple of Isis of Philae, which were used for practical purposes connected to the temple rituals and worship, one being a library, another a laboratory for the sacred ointments, and a priestly courtroom has been indicated. Furthermore, by investigating the literature that was consulted in the making of this thesis, the presence of different rooms with various functions in the Temple of Isis at Pompeii has been recorded. It appears that, while the decorations found in these have been investigated, the interpretation regarding their use appears to be still debated. Apart from this, a room that probably served for religious purposes and the storing of sacred ornaments was identified. Unfortunately it is very difficult to understand from this data if these rooms which apparently were used by the priesthood and purely related to the cult itself were used in a similar or different way. Thus, a more specific analysis of these rooms, could probably lead to a better understanding of this matter.

It has to be pointed out that, when looking at aspects related to the cult itself and its ritualistic, it is very difficult to determine which aspects persisted and changed during the diffusion of the cult across different geographical areas and different periods. Surely, it is possible to suppose that certain elements, such as the Nilometer and the Purgatorium in the case of Pompeii, were elements that were very likely a part of the ritual of the cult, but it is difficult to precisely establish in which way the believers and the priesthood engaged with these by looking at the archaeological and architectural elements. I suggest that textual evidence related to the cult may turn out to be helpful in doing so, but unfortunately this is scarce, since, in the Graeco-Roman world, the cult of Isis was a mystery religion, characterized by knowledge and secrets that were meant to be secretly kept by its priesthood and initiated believers, and who thus did not write about it. Therefore, it is possible to assume that new research consisting of the comparison of the possibly available literature regarding the cult and of the rites conducted in these structures, with a deeper analysis architectural and artistic features found in these, could give insight about what actually happened inside the temples. This may be much less easy than it may seem, first because texts regarding ancient spirituality and cults can be very difficult to be accessed, very cryptic, and very difficult to be understood, often requiring the intervention not only of archaeologists, but also of specialists such as Egyptologists and experts of ancient religions.

## Abstract:

In this thesis the theme of the diffusion of the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis from Egypt across the Mediterranean world is treated, by investigating some of the approaches that have been employed by Bommas, Woolf, Bricault, and Versluys in their analysis of the theme; and by examining the features of the Temple of Isis of Philae, the Temple of Isis at the Campus Martius in Rome, and the Temple of Isis at Pompeii. While the Temple of Isis at Philae mostly features architectural elements that are typical of indigenous Egyptian temples, the Italian Iseums of Pompeii and of the Campus Martius feature elements meant to evoke the Egyptian environment and elements of the cult of Isis that are represented in a Graeco-Roman fashion. After comparing the different characteristics of these structures, it emerges that the element that can be found in Egyptian temples of Isis (or in at least, the one at Philae) that persisted in the Temples of Isis when these were built in Italy, was the Nilometer, which was featured at the Temple of Isis at Pompeii, although it is not possible to know with certainty if this was featured in the Iseum Campense by looking at the archaeological evidence. In any case, many conducts for water were found in the latter structure, which could have been likely linked to the presence of a Nilometer or of other elements connected to water, and this would underline the persistence of at least the importance of the presence of water in the concept of the Iseum, and thus likely also in the practice of the cult. However, It has to be underlined that in the case of Philae, the Nilometer was with most probability used in connection to the presence of the river Nile in the vicinity of the structure, while in Italic temples this would have been an element related to the ritual of the cult. Other Egyptian-izing features, such as the dromos of the Iseum Campense, and the purgatorium of the Temple of Isis at Pompeii, were not present at the Temple of Isis at Philae, thus probably being features meant to evoke the concept of Egypt in general more than reflecting the characteristics of Egyptian Iseums. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the almost-total refashioning of the concept of the Iseum when this kind of structure was built in at least Rome and Pompeii might be a reflection of the refashioning of the cult that took place after it diffused out of Egypt.



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