

The Two Angels in John 20.12: An Egyptian Icon of Resurrection

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The scene with two angels that Mary Magdalene sees in John 20.12 could have been visualized as an icon of resurrection by the first readers of the Fourth Gospel, especially by those familiar with the iconography of the Isis cult which was spread over the Roman Empire. Using traditional exegetical, hermeneutical, historical, and iconographic methods, this article stresses the importance of the resurrection in John 20, as corroborated by the motif of Isis and Nephthys flanking Osiris while mourning his death and assisting him in his resurrection.

Keywords: John 20.12, Isis cult, resurrection, angels, cultural context

The twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John begins with Mary Magdalene going to Jesus' tomb, followed by a switch of focus to Peter and the beloved disciple going to the same location (20.2–10). It is clear that the three of them knew the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. In v. 11, the narrator returns to Mary Magdalene, who, while mourning at the tomb, looked in and saw 'two angels sitting in white,¹ one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had been lying' (20.12). That their positions could be recognized is obvious from the story, as Peter and John are reported to have seen 'the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin which had been on his head, which was not lying with the linen cloth, but rolled up in a separate place by itself' (20.5–7).

1 Most manuscripts read ἐν λευκοῖς καθεζομένους ('in white sitting'), several read these words in a different order: καθεζομένους ἐν λευκοῖς (κ and the Coptic Bohairic traditions); usually the former reading together with the plural of ἐν λευκοῖς is taken as a reference to white clothes. The reverse order could be an (additional) argument for interpreting ἐν λευκοῖς as a reference to light. Although stronger when interpreted as 'light', even the clothes of the angels may witness to life's victory over death when read in the context of

The fact that there are two angels seems significant for John;² the other gospels give slightly different reports.³

‘And they said to her: “Woman, why are you crying?”’ (20.13). The messengers only ask why she is crying. Is that their message? Or is it a rhetorical question, implying an imperative not to cry?⁴ Mary Magdalene explains that she is searching for her *Lord* (20.13) and after a significant double turn (20.14, 16),⁵ she meets Jesus. He sends her to his brothers, to whom she witnesses: ‘I have seen the Lord’ (20.18). If the angels’ question expresses that there is no reason for Mary Magdalene to cry, does the scene communicate *why* she should not cry? Their appearance in white indicates that something ‘supernatural’ is going on.⁶ But even without reference to their heavenly appearance, by flanking the place where Jesus *had* been lying, the messengers mark an *empty* space. According to Ridderbos, the angels are there ‘to mark—as it were—the *emptiness* of that space’.⁷ Indeed, Mary Magdalene realizes that Jesus is *not* there—even in her tears. Should this emptiness change her tears into a *risus paschalis*—and if so, how?

Of this empty space between the two angels and the ‘divine reality’, Witherington III says: ‘God’s activity is involved in this emptiness between them. *There is a void, but it is not devoid of meaning.*’⁸ The two angels, and the empty space they mark, function thus not only on a narrative level within the story: they might also have communicated even more to certain readers of the Fourth Gospel.⁹ Realizing how much the Fourth Gospel is loaded with

2 This paper refers without distinction to ‘the Fourth Gospel’ as well as ‘the Gospel of John’ and ‘John’.

3 Mark speaks about ‘a young man sitting on the right side’, Matthew has an angel of the Lord sitting on the stone, and Luke mentions two men in shining clothes. This disparity is even more significant if John knew the synoptics; cf. F. Neiryck, ‘John and the synoptics’, *L’evangile de Jean: Sources, redaction, théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Leuven: Leuven University, 1977) 73–106.

4 Contrast R. H. Strachan, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Significance and Environment* (London: Student Christian Movement, 3rd ed. 1941): ‘These angels make no reply to Mary’s complaint. They do not help her to believe in the resurrection as in Matt. xxviii. 5, 6’ (327).

5 R. Bieringer, ‘“They have taken away my Lord”: Text-Immanent Repetitions and Variations in John 20:1–18’, *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation* (ed. G. Van Belle; BETL 223; Leuven: Peeters, 2009) 609–30, esp. 626.

6 U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ThHNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998) 327–8.

7 H. N. Ridderbos, *Het evangelie naar Johannes: Proeve van een theologische exegese. Deel 2: hoofdstuk 11–21* (Kampen: Kok, 1992) 304: ‘om a.h.w. de *ledigheid* van die plaats te markeren’ (italics his).

8 B. Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988) 178 (italics mine).

9 This void could be taken as a starting point for an apophatic reading; cf. Chatelion Counet’s deconstructive apophatic approach in P. J. E. Chatelion Counet, *De sarcofaag van het Woord: Postmoderniteit, deconstructie en het Johannesevangelie* (Kampen: Kok, 1995).

meaning, this article studies the two angels and the space between them, searching for how they may be understood symbolically.

Most scholarly publications either omit to mention the two angels or minimize their role.¹⁰ This is sometimes linked to the thesis that the scene is incomplete.¹¹ As Frey has it, the angels in John 20.12 are not, unlike in Mark 16.6, turned into ‘Verkündigern der Osterbotschaft, sondern nur zu “Mäeuten” der Trauer um Jesus’. Rather, the scene breaks off, since the angels do not respond to Mary’s question and Mary turns away.¹² Others suggest that the angels’ white clothes, their number, or simply their presence in the empty tomb emphasize Jesus’ resurrection as supernatural.¹³ Dietzfelbinger likewise claims that their presence merely ensures that this was really *Jesus’* tomb, then asks about the two angels: ‘Do they have a function beyond this?’¹⁴

1. The Egyptian Context as One Context for the Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel, even in Antiquity, was already being read in different contexts. These contexts therefore provide the Gospel with meaning beyond the hermeneutical frameworks of authorial intention and that of the text itself (the latter possibly supplying various textual contexts according to what was accepted as Holy Writ). Although the narrative setting is the natural and appropriate context for the first reading of a text, a second reading within a specific situation, or one which pays special attention to one aspect of the commonly accepted, often generalized, ‘original’ setting, can shed new light, corroborating elements from the first reading and showing aspects which ‘at first sight’ were overlooked. It is important to take into

10 Recently, e.g., U. C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 846.

11 Neiryck states: ‘The christophany is not merely an alternative version which is added to the angelophany, but the vision of the angels is toned down and ‘truncated’ in favor of the christophany’ (‘John and the Synoptics’, 106).

12 J. Frey, “‘Ich habe den Herrn gesehen’ (Joh 20,18). Entstehung, Inhalt und Vermittlung des Osterglaubens nach Johannes 20’, *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes: Festschrift für Jean Zumstein zu seinem 65. Geburtstag = Études sur Matthieu et Jean* (ed. A. Dettwiler and U. Poplutz; AThANT 97; Zürich: TVZ, 2009) 267–84, esp. 276.

13 G. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Nashville: Nelson, 2nd ed. 1999) 374; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (xiii–xxi): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970) 989; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Leicester: IVP, 1991) 640; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (The Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1972) 604; J. R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 996; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium II: 13–21* (HThKNT 4; Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 373.

14 C. Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Teilband 2: Johannes 13–21* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare 4/2; Zürich: TVZ, 2nd ed. 2004) 331: ‘Kommt ihnen noch eine weitere Funktion zu?’.

account not only different reader groups, but also the effect of the process of re-reading the story, by which the reader, 'on reflection', has become aware of the complete narrative and therefore also pays extra attention to the symbolism within it.¹⁵

One important example of a reader group for the Fourth Gospel is the subset of readers who, like its author, were acquainted with the OT. Along with the Jewish liturgy and calendar of the first centuries CE,¹⁶ the OT background is an important source which contributes to the theological meaning of the Fourth Gospel, and of this passage.¹⁷

The present article, however, focuses on what we shall call the 'Egyptian context'. Originally a geographical term, here 'Egyptian' broadly denotes the atmosphere of Egyptian influence all over the Roman Empire. As the Isis cult is the most important ingredient of this context to be discussed in this article,¹⁸ let us make clear that the Isis cult itself is not the context for reading the Fourth Gospel. The readers of the Fourth Gospel were Christians and those within Christian communities, some of whose members might have had, in addition to a general knowledge of the Isis cult and Egyptian culture, a deeper familiarity with this context, for instance, because they converted from the Isis cult to Christianity. Others also, even potentially the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel, may not only have known about the Isis cult but also have been aware of the parallel discussed in the present article. It is argued that the image, motif, or 'icon' of Isis and Nephthys flanking a bier, to which this article will turn, was sufficiently contemporary and conspicuous in the first centuries CE that John's description of Mary Magdalene seeing the two angels would recall it. Moreover, as will become clear, since both John's description and this Egyptian pictorial constellation address the theme of (mourning and) 'resurrection', this link is offered as a possible perception of the text in Antiquity.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to make some remarks with respect to the meaning of 'resurrection'. It is hard to grasp the concept of rising again,¹⁹ but

15 See I. J. de Hulster, 'Relegere: Rereading as a Hermeneutical Tool' (forthcoming).

16 Cf. D. Monshouwer, *The Gospels and Jewish Worship: Bible and Synagogal Liturgy in the First Century C.E.* (ed. J. P. Boendermaker and K. Deurloo; Vught: Skandalon, 2010).

17 See I. J. de Hulster, 'Extending the Borders of Cultural Memory Research', *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis* (ed. N. P. Lemche, P. Carstens, and T. Bjørnung Hasselbalch; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2012) 95-135, esp. 113-14 and I. J. de Hulster, 'The Two Angels in John 20.12: The Old Testament Background' (forthcoming) which links these two angels with the cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant, sustaining this argument by showing that it is possible to view ἄγγελοι in John 20.12 as winged beings like the cherubs. Interestingly, the Egyptian motif discussed below has also been applied to the cherubs on the Ark; R. Eichler, 'הַפְּקִיד כְּרוּבֵי הָאָרוֹן', *Tarbiz* 79/2 (2011) 165-85.

18 Even though Hellenized, the Isis cult never lost its Egyptian atmosphere, see: E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1993) 252.

19 References to Jesus' resurrection are not meant as a statement regarding the different traditions of resurrection, related to the NT use of either active forms of ἀνίστημι or passive forms of ἐγείρω (rising or raising; *Auferstehung* or *Auferweckung*).

resurrection clearly has to do with overcoming death, in both the Jewish²⁰ and the Egyptian tradition.²¹ Assmann explains resurrection with the idea of three human realms: life, death, and the Elysian world, a state of immortality that one enters after life. At first, only a king could enter the Elysium, since the realm beyond death, like a royal realm in life, is beyond the ordinary human realm.²² Assmann gives as a common denominator for Christ's and Osiris's resurrection, that both 'opened a realm beyond the realm of death' in the presence of the divine.²³ Not everyone agrees with such an assessment, arguing for more differentiation between the various religious traditions; the Christian idea of resurrection is then denied for Osiris.²⁴ Part of the disagreement might be rooted in how the textual evidence is applied to both Osiris and Horus and the roles Horus and Isis have in resuscitating Osiris. Assmann argues in this context for a unity between father and son (Osiris and Horus), and concludes that Osiris was raised from death in a physical sense with the help of Isis, and in a social sense with the help of Horus, as a son guaranteeing the continuity of kingship.²⁵ Acknowledging different nuances and that the present idea of resurrection has

20 The Hebrew Bible has the eschatological notion of resurrection as overcoming death, as J. Levenson expresses in the subtitle of his book: *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory over Death* (New Haven: Yale University, 2006).

21 According to J. Assmann ('Resurrection in Ancient Egypt', *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* [ed. T. Peters, R. J. Russel, and M. Welker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 124–35) Egypt is the original source of ideas about resurrection, later found in Early Judaism, Hellenized mystery cults, and Christianity.

22 Assmann, 'Resurrection', 135.

23 Assmann, 'Resurrection', 135.

24 The main sceptics are Theissen and Wedderburn. G. Theissen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen: Eine Theorie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 4th ed. 2008), summarizing 'Es sind sterbende Gottheiten, die dem Tod durch Kompromisse etwas "Leben" abringen' (96). A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against its Graeco-Roman background* (WUNT 44; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), focuses on the relation between baptism and resurrection; in comparison with the Graeco-Roman religion (and its reception of Egyptian material), he underlines that Paul's language and ideas are unique (expressed in the phrase 'union with Christ'). In Pauline studies, some do argue for influence from 'the Osiris cult', whereas others deny such influence, for example N. Perrin, 'On Raising Osiris in 1 Corinthians 15', *TynBul* 58 (2007) 117–28. Despite the debate on influence, a comparison is possible. Various comparisons have been made between the 'myths' of Christ and Osiris, e.g., R. G. Bonnel and V. A. Tobin, 'Christ and Osiris: A Comparative Study', *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity* (ed. S. Israelit-Groll; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 1–29, concluding that the Osiris myth as part of the first-century religious atmosphere generally may have influenced Christianity; and e.g., R. Groger, 'Osiris e Hórus: Protótipos do Jesus da Fé?', *Kerygm@* 5 (2009) 20–45 mainly attacking the designation 'myth' for the Christ event. Wedderburn denies Jesus' resurrection as an historical event, but underlines the 'once-for-all' character as the crucial distinction between Christ and Osiris.

25 Assmann, 'Resurrection', 129–31. Cf. D. Balch, *Roman Domestic Art and the Early House Churches* (WUNT 228; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 78 with references to the scholarly

mainly been shaped by Christian tradition, for our present comparative purposes we shall keep to the term ‘resurrection’.²⁶ Within the Gospel of John, it is important to realize that Jesus’ resurrection, like (or possibly even more so than) his death, can only be understood as part of his glorification and its relevance for salvation in the present that is marked by the experience of his presence, the Spirit, and loving community.²⁷

2. The Egyptian Context: Its Presence and Importance

Within the ‘Egyptian context’, this article focuses on the Isis cult and its reception.²⁸ Obviously, the ‘Isis cult’ does not have a direct relationship with

debate and, for instance, to Diodorus Siculus I.25.6 which uses the word ἀνάσθησθαι in the sense of ‘she [Isis] caused him [Horus] to rise from death’.

26 From now on and in the remainder of this article the term ‘resurrection’ is used to mean both the Judaeo-Christian and the Egyptian concepts of return from/triumph over death.

27 H. W. Attridge, ‘From Discord Rises Meaning: Resurrection Motifs in the Fourth Gospel’ and U. Schnelle, ‘Cross and Resurrection in the Gospel of John’, *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. C. R. Koester R. Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 1–19 and 128–51 respectively. Cf. nn. 52–3 (below).

28 Spread of the ‘Isis cult’ led to local adaptations and its Egyptian character was sometimes adduced as exotic. Cf. M. Malaise, *Pour une terminologie et une analyse des cultes isiaques* (Mémoire de la Classe des Lettres, Académie Royale de Belgique: Collection in 8°; Série 3: 35. Bruxelles: Classe des Lettres, Académie Royale de Belgique, 2005); M. Malaise, ‘La diffusion des cultes isianiques: un problème de terminologie et de critique’, *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World; Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11–14 2005* (ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys; RGRW 159; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 19–39; A. Cadotte, *La romanisation des dieux: l’interpretatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire* (RGRW 158; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 50–1 *et passim*; M. J. Versluys, ‘Aegyptiaca Romana: The Widening Debate’, *Nile into Tiber* (ed. L. Bricault, M. J. Versluys, and P. Meyboom) 1–14; F. Dunand, ‘Culte d’Isis ou religion isiaque?’, *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies, Liège, November 27–29 2008* (ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys; RGRW 171; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 39–54.

Other elements from Egyptian religion and culture have been linked with the Fourth Gospel; for example, the Memphite theology of creation has been linked with the prologue of the Fourth Gospel; cf. J. Dieleman, *De wereld in evenwicht: Goden en mensen in het Oude Egypte* (De Oudheid; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2006) 53 (focusing on the idea that the cosmos came into existence because Ptah pronounced his picture of creation; he unfortunately leaves this without further references). See also H. A. Schlögl, *Das Alte Ägypten: Geschichte und Kultur von der Frühzeit bis zu Kleopatra* (Munich: Beck, 2006) 43; R. K. Bultmann, ‘Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannes-Evangelium’, *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (ed. R. K. Bultmann and E. Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr, 1967) 10–35, esp. 21–2; J. Kügler, ‘Der Sohn im Schoß des Vaters: Eine Motivgeschichte zu Joh 1,18’, *BN* 89 (1997) 76–87, esp. 79–81; T. Schneider,

Christianity,²⁹ but it was a cult thriving in the Roman Empire of the first century,³⁰ having been spread by sailors³¹ throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. In its reception, Isis was identified with Artemis.³² The Isis cult might be regarded as

‘Die Geburt des Horuskindes: Eine ägyptische Vorlage der neutestamentlichen Weihnachtsgeschichte’, *ThZ* 60/3 (2004) 254–71.

29 One could argue that there were ‘meeting points’ where there might have been influence. The clearest case seems to be the influence from Isis lactans on the portrayal of Maria lactans; see L. Langener, *Isis lactans—Maria lactans: Untersuchungen zur koptischen Ikonographie* (Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten 9; Altenberge: Oros, 1996).

30 See e.g., R. Merkelbach, *Isis regina, Zeus Sarapis: Die griechisch-ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995); L. Bricault, *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes Isiaques (IV^e s. av. J.-C.—IV^e s. apr. J.-C.)* (Mémoires de l’académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres NS 23; Paris: De Boccard, 2001) esp. 54–9; M. Bommas, *Heiligtum und Mysterium: Griechenland und seine ägyptischen Gottheiten* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005); H. Omerzu, ‘Die Himmelsfrau in Apk 12: ein polemischer Reflex des römischen Kaiserkults’, *Apokalyptik als Herausforderung neutestamentlicher Theologie* (ed. M. Becker and M. Öhler; WUNT 2/174; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 167–94, esp. 179–87; cf. E. J. Walters, *Attic Grave Reliefs that Represent Women in the Dress of Isis* (Hesperia Supplements 22; Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1988). The Isis cult existed at least till the third century in the Roman Empire (e.g., J. Eingartner, *Isis und ihre Dienerinnen in der Kunst der römischen Kaiserzeit* [Mnemosyne Supplement 115; Leiden: Brill, 1991]); according to some much longer (Langener, *Isis lactans*, 115–16 claims till the seventh century). In Philae the cult gradually adopted more Christian elements during the fifth century, but it was still being honoured as an Isis cult location in the second half of the sixth century (see n. 50).

31 Related to this aspect is, for example, the type Isis Pharia or Isis Pelagia, also named ‘Isis des flots’, representing Isis holding a sail; see: L. Bricault, *Isis, Dame des flots* (Ægyptiaca Leodiensia 7; Liège: C.I.P.L., 2006). Isis Pharia was also a motif on coins, e.g., J. Goddard, *Roman Provincial Coins: Egypt—Cyprus* (Sylloge nummorum Graecorum 12: The Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow: Part 2. Oxford: Oxford University, 2007) numbers 3990, 4046, 4078, 4093, 4101, 4158, 4179, 4198, 4209, 4210.

32 G. Hölbl, *Zeugnisse ägyptischer Religionsvorstellungen für Ephesus* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain 73; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 59–66, 79–86 (esp. 84–6); Merkelbach, *Isis regina*, 347–63; cf. R. Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (BZAW und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 80; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996) 116. R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997) states: ‘well before the beginnings of the Christian era the assimilation between Isis and Artemis had been achieved’ (145, cf. 141–51). K. Tate and B. Olson, *Sacred places of goddess* (San Francisco: CCC, 2005) 104, refer to statues in Ephesus which bore the names of both Artemis and Isis. They probably had in mind the statue of Isis found in the Artemision, an Isis statue with the name of Artemis, or the inscription fragment 2912 probably mentioning both Artemis and Isis; see *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* (ed. R. Merkelbach et al.; 10 vols.; published by Kommission für die Archäologische Erforschung Kleinasien bei der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Bonn: Habelt, 1979–84), numbers 1231, 1503, and 2912. As further evidence, theophoric names referencing Isis may be mentioned, e.g., *Inschriften von Ephesos*, number 4352 with one of the first century CE occurrences of Isidor. G. H. R. Horsley, ‘The Inscriptions

a religious competitor of early Christianity.³³ Granted the identification of Isis and Artemis, such an ‘Isis context’ would be even stronger if the Fourth Gospel was composed in Ephesus,³⁴ as is often assumed.³⁵

Because of the prominence of the Isis cult, comparisons have been made between the Isis cult and early Christianity³⁶ and with the Gospel of John in particular.³⁷ Not only did the Isis cult spread over the Eastern Mediterranean, the Gospel of John is supposed to have reached Egypt early. An important piece of evidence for this might be the Fourth Gospel fragment in the John Rylands

of Ephesos and the New Testament’, *NT 34/2* (1992) 105–68 underlines the importance of this material.

- 33 Cf. H. Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) 51–3.
- 34 In the book of Acts, Artemis is an important element of the Ephesian context in which the gospel is preached (19.21–41). Cf. R. Beile, *Zwischenruf aus Patmos: Der zeitgeschichtliche Rahmen der Johannes-Apokalypse und seine Folgen; eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, rev. ed. 2005) 36, 103–10. For the later Christian tradition it is striking that it was in Ephesus (431) that the Church accepted Mary as θεοτόκος; cf. the reception of ‘Isis lactans’ in ‘Maria lactans’ (n. 29 above).
- 35 See e.g., U. Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (UTB 1830; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd ed. 1998) 486; R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. F. J. Moloney; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2003) 206; F. Siegert, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt: Wiederherstellung und Kommentar* (Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008) 46–62. Cf. S. van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (NTSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

The coin motif ‘Isis Pharia’ is also documented for the coastal city of Ephesus: J. Goddard, *Roman Provincial Coins: Spain—Kingdoms of Asia Minor* (Sylloge nummorum Graecorum 12: The Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow: Part 1. Oxford: Oxford University, 2004) number 1731.

- 36 E.g., D. L. Balch, ‘Suffering of Isis/Io and Paul’s Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1): Frescoes in Pompeian and Roman Houses and in the Temple of Isis in Pompeii’, *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003) 24–55; and (though less convincing): E. A. McCabe, *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008).
- 37 For instance with regard to the ἐγὼ εἰμι (metaphoric) statements, see S. Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock: Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-bin-Worte* (NTSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008) esp. 181–99; for 18.5 e.g., Merkelbach, *Isis regina*, 113–19 (esp. 114 n. 2). As 20.11–18, in its OT context, would have a link with Song 3 (see: S. Van Den Eynde, ‘Love, Strong as Death? An Inter- and Intratextual Perspective on John 20,1–18’, *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [ed. G. van Belle; BETL 200; Leuven: Leuven University, 2007] 901–12 and J. Zumstein, *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* [AthANT 84; Zürich: TVZ, 2nd ed. 2004] 286; cf. for the theme of love: A. Reinhartz, ‘To Love the Lord: An Intertextual Reading of John 20’, *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation* [ed. F. Black, R. Boer, and E. Runions; Semeia Studies 36; Atlanta: SBL, 1999] 53–69), a similar motif might echo in the context of the Isis cult (cf. e.g., Merkelbach, *Isis regina*, 71–130, 199–224, 266–304, 340–6, also with other possible connections between the Isis cult and the Fourth Gospel).

Library (Manchester), which was found in Egypt. This piece has been dated to the first half of the second century.³⁸ This argument would be stronger, if there were evidence that the history of this fragment (as part of a copy of the Gospel) started in Egypt (or that the fragment reached Egypt early). As well as this fragment, many more papyri with parts of the Fourth Gospel have also been found in Egypt.³⁹ It is not strange that some have suggested an Egyptian origin for the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁰

3. The Egyptian Context: 'Resurrection' as Meaning

Besides the above considerations concerning the Isis cult, for the further development of this article it should be noted how much emphasis John puts on 'seeing' (e.g. John 1.14; 9; 14.9; 17.24; 20.24–29).⁴¹ Therefore, the following analysis draws on visual elements available in the context of the first communication of the Fourth Gospel.

Morris trivializes the reference to the place and posture of the angels in John 20.12, pointing out: 'We should not put too much emphasis on the position of the angels; there is no reason for thinking that they did not move'.⁴² On the contrary, this section shows how the beings designated as angels relate to the resurrection precisely because of their positions.

Within the Egyptian context, the portrayal in particular of Isis with her sister Nephthys⁴³ provides a striking parallel of figures opposite to one another (sitting or standing, sometimes winged),⁴⁴ flanking a bier or a deceased person or mummy (sometimes in an upright position). In line with Warburg's *Mnemosyne*, there is an iconological⁴⁵ similarity in motif between John 20.12 and the images of Isis and Nephthys mourning Osiris and assisting him in his resurrection (see Fig. 1). According to Assmann, it is the wailing lamentation of Isis and

38 <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/specialcollections/collections/stjohnfragment/> (accessed 1 April 2009). Cf. B. M. Metzger, 'Recently Published Greek Papyri of the New Testament', *Biblical Archaeologist* 10/2 (1947) 25–44, esp. 38–41.

39 Brown, *Introduction*, 202. Cf. also Michaels, *John*, 37.

40 E.g., A. M. Perry, 'Is John an Alexandrian Gospel?', *JBL* 63 (1944) 99–106.

41 Cf. D. Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses', *JBL* 129 (2010) 115–27, esp. 117–20.

42 L. Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 5th ed. 2000) 698.

43 Their names indicate their iconographic attributes: Isis, lady of the *throne*; Nephthys, lady of the *house*.

44 The angels in John 20.12 might have been pictured as winged, although this feature is not explicitly described (nor necessarily implied in the word ἄγγελοι) and therefore open to interpretation.

45 Iconology is understood (as by Warburg) as the history of images/motifs/constellations. Cf. A. Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (ed. M. Warnke and C. Brink; Gesammelte Schriften / Aby Warburg. Studienausgabe 2. Abt. Bd. 2/1; Berlin: Akademie, 3rd ed. 2000).

Nephthys that proves powerful enough to reanimate Osiris's body.⁴⁶ Even though flanking also occurs in several other contexts, this iconological comparison also shares the main point of both scenes: resurrection, alongside mourning, the tomb setting, and so on.

The motif of Isis and Nephthys assisting Osiris in his resurrection was employed in Egyptian tombs as a symbol of resurrection, by those seeking to secure their own afterlife (as in Fig. 2).⁴⁷ This composition shows Isis and Nephthys seated on both sides of the bier mourning Osiris, and Nephthys in the frieze as a figure with wings. Isis and Nephthys can also be represented as kites (Fig. 3). In this form they flank a mummy wearing an Osiris mask, which serves to identify it with Osiris's death and resurrection. Even more striking than merely flanking the bier, they explicitly sit at both ends of the bier: 'one at the head and the other at the feet' of the corpse. Moreover, the bier itself, being a lion bed, has head and foot ends, marked by the lion's head and the lion's tail.⁴⁸ The bird motif was also used for the three main roles of the composition. Figure 4 shows two kites flanking Re's *ba*, represented by a bird with a ram's head. The same flanking construction occurs with Isis and Nephthys as human figures flanking a winged scarab, another symbol of resurrection (Figs. 5 and 6).⁴⁹ Figure 7 shows another example of Isis and Nephthys mourning and in another scene assisting Osiris in his resurrection. Figure 8 stems from Syria and provides evidence that the motif, in slightly different form, was not limited to Egypt.

The iconological evidence given above for the motif can be dated far earlier than the text of John's Gospel. Although it cannot be denied that the Isis cult would have changed over the centuries, it is striking that this motif was found in later centuries as well. Similar drawings are known from the Isis temple in Philae (Figs. 9 and 10), which co-existed with Christianity.⁵⁰ The motif of Isis

46 Assmann, 'Resurrection', 126. Or as C. J. Bleeker, 'Isis and Nephthys as Wailing Women', *Numen* 5/1 (1958) 1–17 (esp. 17) puts it, they resuscitate his creative power.

47 So Ramses III; C. N. Reeves and R. H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Valley of the Kings: Tombs and Treasures of Egypt's Greatest Pharaohs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 8. For the images, it should be noted that the sources often do not provide information on the size of the images/objects; the present article does not mention the sizes of images, deeming medium and date of more importance for the iconographic approach taken here.

48 The bed is clearly visible in Figs. 11 and 14; the tail in Figs. 3 and 8.

49 On the scarab (dung beetle) as symbol of resurrection: O. Keel and T. Staubli, *'Im Schatten Deiner Flügel': Tiere in der Bibel und im alten Orient* (Freiburg im Üchtland: Bibel + Orient Museum, 2001) 58–9.

50 Cf. J. Hahn, 'Die Zerstörung der Kulte von Philae. Geschichte und Legende am ersten Nilkatarakt', *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (ed. J. Hahn, S. E. Himmel, and U. Gotter; RGWR 171; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 204–43. Dijkstra provides a more nuanced image of the history, discussing the transition to 'Christian Philae'. He shows that the Egyptian cults at Philae came to an end about 456/457 or shortly after (J. H. F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A*

and Nephthys assisting Osiris in his resurrection not only decorated walls of tombs or mummy cartonnages (such as the second century CE example from Deir el-Medineh—Fig. 11), where few would see it, but it also appears on coins (Fig. 12), a medium which provides evidence for a wider distribution of the motif. A variant is also known from oil lamps; although Diana appears to be in the place of Nephthys, the motif is otherwise the same.⁵¹ These two examples of small media make the case that this motif was indeed widespread. A related motif, symbolizing resurrection by means of the image of Isis (and Nephthys) protecting the Horus child, is also known from other coins, as well as from amulets (Fig. 13). These media indicate the dispersion and appropriation of these motifs and, moreover, of these flanking figures which mourn and mark resurrection. Together with the evidence from Philae, various drawings from Dendérah dated 80 BCE to 30 CE (Figs. 14–16) provide evidence that this motif was known and conspicuous in the first century.

Taken together, the iconological similarities and the historical-geographical coincidence between, in the first instance, Isis and Nephthys flanking the bier of someone rising from the dead, and, secondly, the description in John 20.12 of ‘two angels sitting in white, one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had been lying’, make a compelling case. We suggest that readers of the Fourth Gospel may have been familiar with the Isis cult and therefore could have understood the description of John 20.12 as an ‘icon of resurrection’.⁵² This is not to say that these readers would have been unaware of the differences between John’s description and the Egyptian ‘icon of resurrection’, such as most obviously Jesus’ absent body, Jesus’ victory over death without help of others, and furthermore the unique, once-for-all nature of his resurrection in opening ‘the realm beyond death’. Nevertheless, our argument is that they may have

Regional Study of Religious Transformation [298–642 CE] [OLA 173; Leuven: Peeters, 2008] 343). Afterwards, some groups, such as the Blemmyes nomads, might still have been attracted to the site for its Egyptian religion (evidence is given for 567; *Philae*, 347). The visible ‘pagan remains’ demanded a solution; a church was built in the temple complex. The temple of Philae is, remarkably, still visible today.

51 See J. J. Herrmann, ‘Demeter-Isis or the Egyptian Demeter? A Graeco-Roman Sculpture from an Egyptian Workshop in Boston’, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 114 (1999) 65–123, esp. 82–4, showing such a lamp (British Museum, inventory number GR 1987.4–2.21) in his Fig. 14. A similar lamp is mentioned in *LIMCV*, 1, p. 775. These lamps were made in the second/third and in the first century CE, respectively.

52 We have shown ourselves aware of the problems involved in using the term ‘resurrection’ (see end of §1). It needs to be emphasized that it is first and foremost the similarity in pictorial expression that has been underlined. Despite discussion of the term’s application to the Egyptian context, this pictorial constellation is best described as an ‘icon of resurrection’. Beyond that we agree on the differences between usage of this term in the Egyptian and Christian contexts.

recognized important similarities between the two images. This hypothesis is even stronger if the Fourth Gospel was written in Ephesus. If this is the case, not only might readers familiar with the Isis cult have received the text as an allusion to this motif, but, one is even tempted to ponder, the Gospel's author also might perhaps have consciously phrased this verse to echo this iconography of Egyptian origin.

Two additional remarks, one on mourning and the other on a possible link with Gnosticism, round off this section.

1. The paragraphs above focus on the element of resurrection. It is clear that the aspect of *mourning* could have been worked out as a further parallel. It should be noted, however, that it is Mary Magdalene who mourns, while the angels wonder at her weeping, as their message is Jesus' resurrection. The mourning, though, underlines the point that Jesus' death is absolutely real and therefore also suggests that resurrection transforms the body, distinguishing it from a process of either returning from death and dying again, as with Lazarus,⁵³ or cyclically dying and rising again, as with Osiris.

John's account of Mary Magdalene seems to have been problematic within the discussion about gender roles in the Early Church. The Fourth Gospel might be read as evidence of the discussion because it mixes Mary's visit to the tomb with that of Peter and John. Moreover, it does not report any reaction by the disciples to Mary's testimony of her encounter with the risen Lord. Setzer assumes this gender issue to be symbolic of the Orthodox–Gnostic struggle.⁵⁴ Gnostic circles⁵⁵

53 Cf. C. R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 132—this parallel is beyond the scope of this article. Meanwhile, it should be stressed that Lazarus' death: (a) 'foreshadows' the reality of Jesus' death (cf. P. F. Esler and R. Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: Social-scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006] esp. 146–9); (b) is nevertheless linked with future resurrection (cf. 11.24), and (c) underlines the importance of Jesus' resurrection and the believer's personal faith for overcoming death in the present (R. Zimmerman, 'The Narrative Hermeneutics of John 11: Learning with Lazarus How to Understand Death, Life, and Resurrection', *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* [ed. C. R. Koester and R. Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008] 75–101).

54 Cf. C. Setzer, 'Excellent Women: Female Witness of the Resurrection', *JBL* 116 (1997) 259–72. Gospel of Thomas' logion 114 might reflect this as well.

55 We are aware of the problems with this term (cf. e.g., D. Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2010]; B. A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007]; and H.-F. Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* [WUNT 225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008]), but setting aside for a moment these attempts to split hairs, the author, perhaps unfashionably, assumes the term to be sufficiently understandable for the present purpose.

would have had more room for the role of women.⁵⁶ This leads to the second point.

2. Besides suggesting the Isis cult as a possible background for understanding John 20.12, the motif of Isis and Nephthys flanking Osiris while assisting him in his resurrection appears elsewhere as well. Possibly in the context of an Isis mystery cult, it might have gained meaning as a metaphor of re-birth in initiation rituals.⁵⁷ Marjorie Venit interprets the early second-century CE tomb fresco of Figure 17 as the bier of an initiate in the Isis cult; and she makes a case that Figure 18, which adds the standing version of the motif to that portraying the figure horizontally, shows how someone is initiated, or *reborn* into the mystery cult.⁵⁸ This example, although again found in a tomb, is corroborated by other striking evidence of familiarity with this motif and its significance in later Christian or Gnostic sources.⁵⁹ The strict contrast between Christian and Gnostic is highly questionable in these cases, as there are amulets with NT scenes on one side and motifs from Egyptian religion on the other side.⁶⁰ The motif of Isis and

56 E. H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random, 1979) e.g., 48–69. However, E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983) 323–33, shows how the Gospel of John presents a balanced view of male and female. Likewise, J. P. Boendermaker and D. Monshouwer (*Johannes: De evangelist van de feesten* [Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993] 56) describe Mary Magdalene as ‘de vrouwelijke discipel, toonbeeld van de gemeente’ (‘the female disciple [who is] a role model for the congregation’).

57 The ritual of ‘rebirth’ was practised in the Isis cult. Again, despite Wedderburn’s scepticism about possible influence from mystery cults on Christianity (n. 24 above), examples of comparison between the two should be considered here; cf. for the issue of baptism addressed by Wedderburn the case argued by B. Pearson (‘Baptism and Initiation in the Cult of Isis and Sarapis’, *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White* [ed. S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross; JSNTS 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999] 42–62) for the importance of baptism in the Isis cult.

58 M. S. Venit, ‘Referencing Isis in Tombs of Graeco-Roman Egypt: Tradition and Innovation’, *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt; Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies, Liège, November 27–29, 2008; Michel Malaise in Honorem* (ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys; RGWR 171; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 89–119, esp. 107–13. Interestingly, the two goddesses (or their priestess avatars) in the central niche are replaced by male figures in the left niche.

59 According to Mastrocinque these would be Gnostic, as he categorizes forms of syncretism, especially with Egyptian religion, as Gnostic in contrast to Christian (A. Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* [Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005] 216).

60 An example could be the amulet from the British Museum (dated to possibly around 300–25), which A. A. Barb (‘Three Elusive Amulets’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 [1964] 1–22) describes as a ‘Judeo-Christian amulet’, calling ‘one side Christian and the other Gnostic’ (10, in line with the categorization of Mastrocinque in the previous footnote). The ‘Christian’ side probably shows in four rows: Jesus’ Ascension, his birth with shepherds and magi, healing scenes, and a depiction of the miracle at Cana referring either to the

Nephthys flanking Osiris and assisting him in his resurrection is also known from amulets that can be catalogued as Gnostic amulets.⁶¹ Other than the scene in the Tigrane tomb, which Roman-Hellenistic influence has provided with a Roman bed (Fig. 17), these amulets still have the lion bed and the other elements of the traditional Isis–Osiris–Nephthys scene (Figs. 19 and 20); the latter even has both Isis and Nephthys and the birds. This Gnostic evidence may provide further evidence of familiarity with this motif.

In sum, a number of the readers (and possibly even authors or editors) of the Gospel of John may be assumed to have been familiar with the Isis cults. The (Hellenistic versions of the) Isis cult provides a striking visual parallel with John 20.12. Both underline the themes of mourning and resurrection. Reception of the Fourth Gospel in Gnostic circles would have further strengthened the recognition of this parallel.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The angels whom, according to John 20.12, Mary Magdalene sees in the empty tomb are usually ignored beyond the narrative level of the resurrection account given in John 20.1–18. Only a few scholars have explored the meaning of the angels and the space between them. On the narrative level, the angels can be regarded as something supernatural, their question can stress Mary Magdalene's sorrow and distress, and the empty place between them could be filled with the message of the resurrection. If more meaning is suggested, such usually draws on a familiarity with the OT.

This article has presented arguments demonstrating that certain readers of the Fourth Gospel would have been familiar with influences from Egypt, as acknowledged by other scholars, and in particular, that one visual element would have been contemporary and conspicuous in the Roman Empire, spread by the (Hellenistic versions of the) Isis cult; that is, Isis and Nephthys flanking a bier. Further, focusing on this well-known visual expression, this article has compared John 20.12 with the motif of Isis and Nephthys mourning Osiris and assisting him in his resurrection. Besides presenting this iconological comparison, the present article has also corroborated the link historically by pointing out the presence of this motif in the first centuries CE. The various media (frescos, reliefs, coins, amulets, oil lamps) which carry the motif indicate how widespread this constellation was. Its reception in Gnostic circles might also have contributed to an awareness of this motif among readers of John.

Eucharist or to the possible wedding context of the amulet. It also has Septuagint-style inscriptions. The 'Gnostic' side shows Horus, combined with Jewish and Christian symbols and inscriptions (10–17 and Plate 2a–b).

61 Cf. C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (University of Michigan Studies: Humanistic Series 49; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1950)—and Fig. 19.

Readers familiar with the motif of Isis and Nephthys flanking Osiris are assumed to have recognized it in the description of the angels in John 20.12. Tentatively, it has even been pondered whether the Gospel's author himself would have consciously phrased this verse to echo this Egyptian motif. If this is the case, this might perhaps have highlighted the differences between the resurrections of Jesus and Osiris, such as the assistance Osiris received versus Jesus' resurrection as part of his glorification, having overcome death in his own death on the cross.

Thus, assuming its readers' familiarity with the Isis cult, we strongly suggest that John 20.12 has been read as an icon of resurrection. This iconographic connection affirms and deepens the meaning of the text, and we have shown that it can also be confirmed through other forms of exegesis. Thus, the Fourth Gospel's early historical context, in which the Isis cult played a significant role, also confirms the two angels as an icon of mourning and resurrection. Finally, although at the narrative level it is not until Mary Magdalene recognizes the risen Jesus that she can testify to having seen the Lord, when one re-reads John 20.12, aware of the complete narrative and focusing on the symbolic level, this 'Egyptian context' points out why the space between the angels is empty and thus confirms that Mary Magdalene can change her mourning tears into a *risus paschalis*, an Easter laugh.⁶²

62 Every effort has been made to secure necessary permissions to reproduce copyright material in this work, though in some cases it has proved impossible to trace copyright holders. If any omissions are brought to our notice, we will be happy to include appropriate acknowledgments.



*Figure 1. Detail from a woman's coffin of painted cartonnage belonging to the priestess Tentmutengebtiu. The top scene shows Isis (to the left, as lady of the throne—see the head dress) and Nephthys (to the right, as lady of the house) flanking Osiris in the form of a djed pillar. The lower scene depicts Horus (left) and Thoth (right) purifying the deceased woman with water. This sarcophagus from Thebes, now in the British Museum (EA 22939), is dated to about 900 BCE. © Trustees of the British Museum, used with kind permission; detail as in: Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2nd ed. 2003) 201*

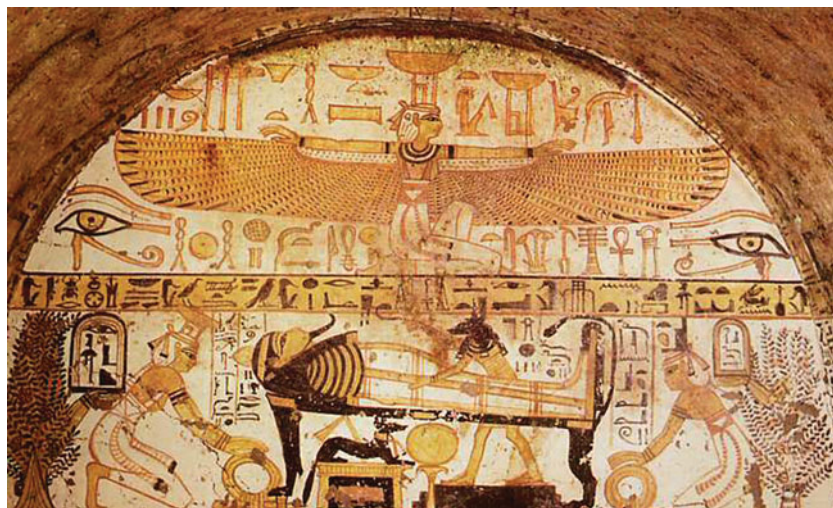


Figure 2. Fresco 2 in the tomb of craftsman Khabekhenet at Deir el-Medina, dated to the 13th century BCE, depicting Nephthys and Isis mourning Osiris (upper register shows a winged Nephthys as lady of the sky). Cf. Alexandre Piankoff, *Mythological papyri. Vol. 1, Texts (Egyptian Texts and Representations 3; Bollingen Series 40/3; New York: Pantheon, 1957) 51* (Fig. 34). Colour image: <http://jfbgradu.free.fr/egypte/LES%20TOMBEAUX/LES%20HYPOGEES/VALLEE-DES-ARTISANS/vallee-des-artisans07.php3?r1=5&r2=3&r3=0> (accessed 18 Feb. 2011)



Figure 3. Wall painting of the upper register of the west side of the south wall of the tomb of craftsman Sennedjem depicting Isis and Nephthys as kites flanking the mummy with an Osiris mask (13th century BCE). Source: G. Andreu, ed., *Les artistes de Pharaon: Deir el-Médineh et la Vallée des Rois* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2002) 307. A similar image is known from the tomb of Nefertari (wife of Ramses II), Valley of the Kings, 13th century BCE. © Photo courtesy of photographer Georges Poncet, www.georges-poncet.fr/

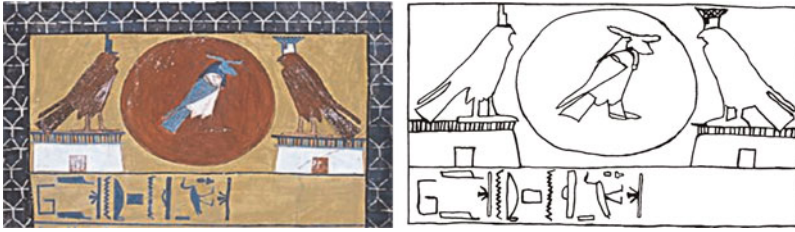


Figure 4. Ceiling painting in the tomb of King Siptah (Valley of Kings 47), 12th century BCE, showing the Ba of Re as ram-headed bird, flanked by Isis and Nephthys as kites. Cf. B. M. Bryan, 'Steatite Figures of Amenhotep III: An Example of the Purposes of Minor Art', *Chief of Seers: Egyptian Studies in Memory of Cyril Aldred* (ed. E. Goring; *Studies in Egyptology*; London: Kegan Paul International, 1997) 60–82, esp. 67–8, 74 n. 53. Colour image: http://www.kv5.de/html_german/data_kv47_german.html (accessed 18 Feb. 2011); © Francis Dzikowski. Line drawing by author



Figure 5. Pectoral of Sheshonq II, 9th century BCE, found at Sheshonq's tomb in Tanis (now in Cairo Museum). Winged scarab flanked by seated Isis and Nephthys. Cf. E. Feucht-Putz. 'Die königlichen Pektore: Motive, Sinngehalt und Zweck' (PhD diss., Munich, 1967) Plate XV, fig. 51. Colour image: <http://jfbradu.free.fr/egypte/LA%20RELIGION/MOMIFICATION/amulettes.php3> (accessed 18 Feb. 2011)



Figure 6. Pectoral of Ptahemheb, c. 1275 BCE, from Memphis (now in British Museum, EA7865). Scarab flanked by standing Isis and Nephthys. Source: postcard from the British Museum; © 2006, Trustees of the British Museum

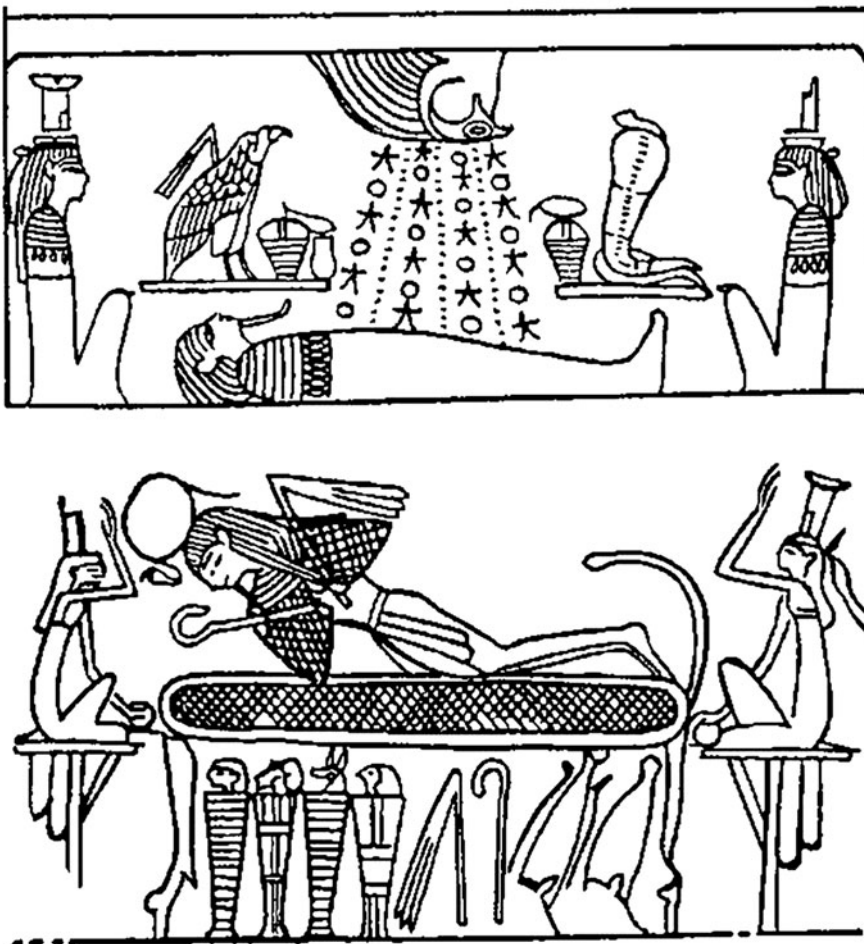


Figure 7. Two fragments of papyri with Isis and Nephthys seated and flanking Osiris, while mourning his death and assisting him in his resurrection. Dated to 1070–945 BCE. Source: O. Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus (Orte und Landschaften der Bibel 4/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) 724, figs. 492–3. See also: N. Rambova in Piankoff, *Mythological papyri*, 65 and 57 (figs. 53 and 42). Image used with permission*

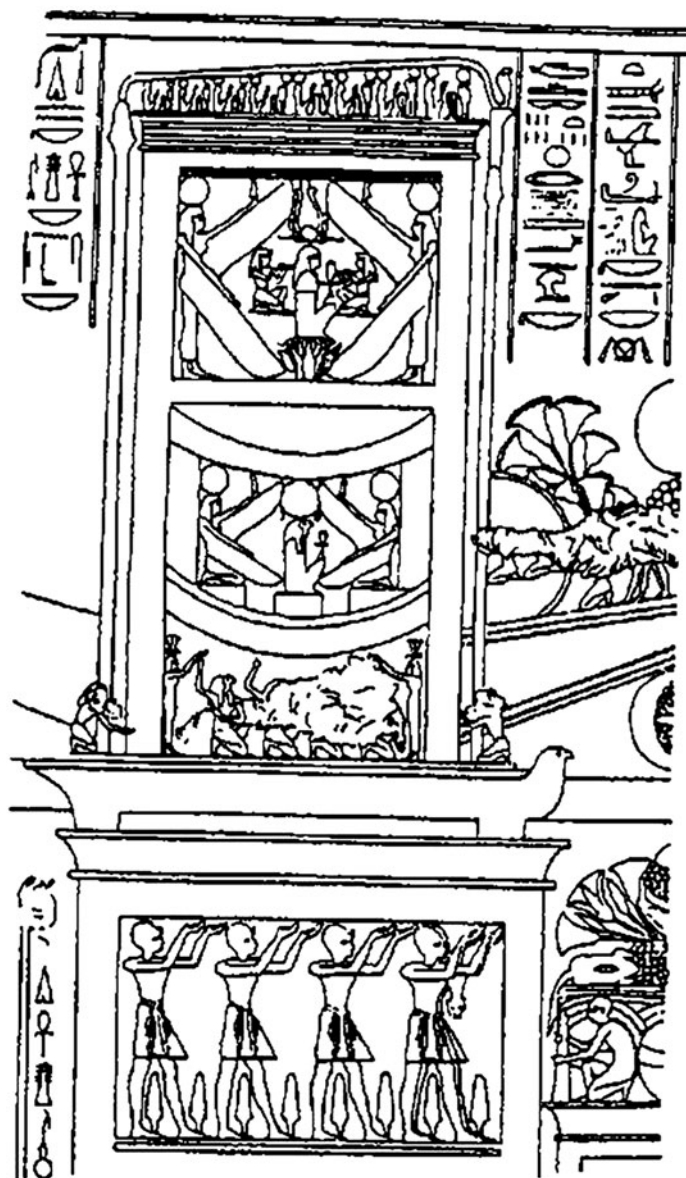


Figure 8. Ivory from Arslan Tasch, c. 1000 BCE, depicting the Horus child on a lotus flanked by two winged figures. Source: O. Keel, 'Die Herrlichkeitserscheinung des Königsgottes', *Mythisches in biblischer Bildsprache: Gestalt und Verwandlung in Prophetie und Psalmen* (ed. H. Irsigler; Qd 209; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004) fig. 52 (cf. also figs. 48, 49, and 51). Image used with permission

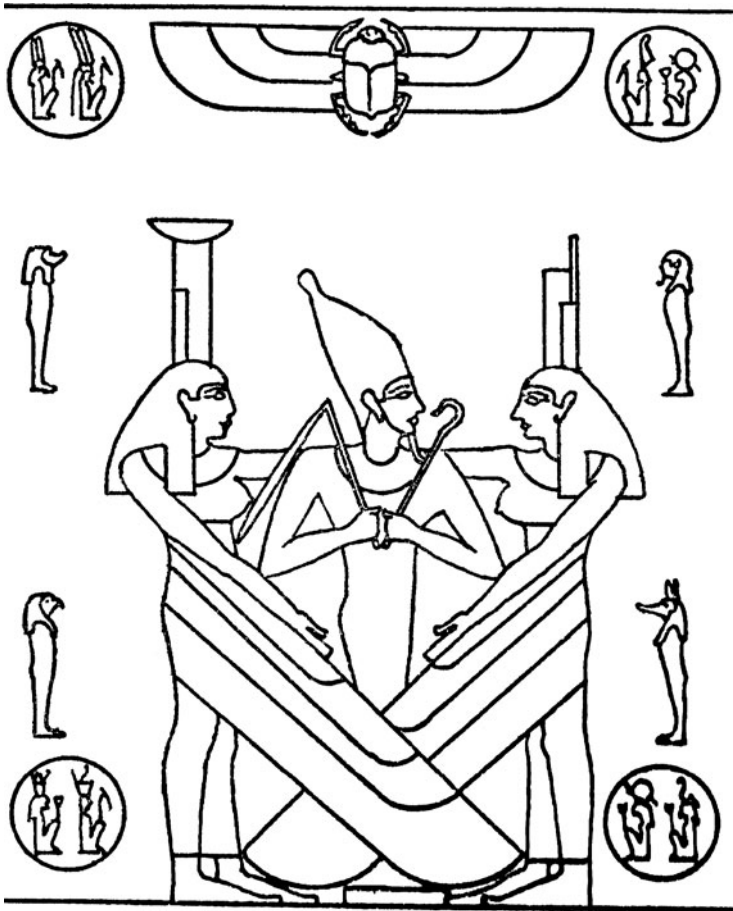


Figure 9. Bas-relief at the eastern wall of the hall to the naos terrace of the temple in Philae, depicting Osiris standing between Isis and Nephthys. After: G. Bénédite, *Le temple de Philae 1: Textes hiéroglyphiques (Mémoires publiées par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire, Ministère de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts 13; Paris: Leroux, 1893) Plate XXXVIII (detail on the left-hand side of the door)*

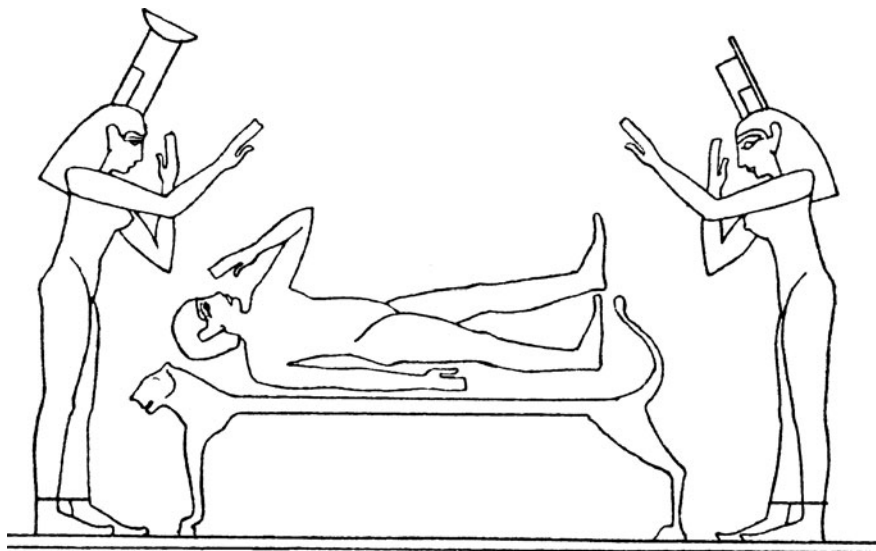


Figure 10. Bas-relief at the southern wall of the naos of the temple in Philae, depicting Isis and Nephthys bewailing the death of Osiris. After: Bénédite, Le temple de Philae, Plate XL (middle band, left side)



Figure 11. Painted coffin cartonnage belonging to Cratès with, in the lower register, Cratès identified with Osiris flanked by Isis and Nephthys. From Deir el-Medineh (now in the Louvre; E14542ter), dated to Roman Egypt (30 BCE–392 CE), probably 2nd century CE. Height: 75cm. © 2010, Musées du Louvre/Georges Poncet, <http://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/masque-plastron-de-crates> (accessed 25 March 2012)



Figure 12. Bronze coin of Melita (Malta), 218–175 BC (28mm; 12.39g). Obverse: veiled female head. Reverse: Osiris between winged Isis and Nephthys. Cf. Henry Clay Lindgren, *Ancient Greek Bronze Coins: European Mints from the Lindgren Collection* (San Mateo: Chrysopylon, 1989) Plate 29, item 659 (more examples can be found on: <http://coins.mos.net.au/romancoins.htm>, and http://www.bio.vu.nl/home/vwielink/WWW_MGC/Punic_map/Melita_map/Melita.html, both accessed 18-02-2011). Colour image: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.htmlid=81082> (accessed 5 Jan. 2012) Photo courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. www.cngcoins.com. For a line drawing of a similar coin: A. della Marmora, *Memoria sopra alcune antichità Sarde ricavate da un manoscritto del XV secolo* (Torino: Stamperia Reale, 1853) 136, fig. a (offprint from *Memorie della R. Accademia scienze di Torino: Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 2nd series 14 [1854] 101–252)



Figure 13. Cornelian gem found at Tharros (Sardinia) with Isis (mirrored or together with Nephthys) flanking the Horus child on lotus. Line drawing: Della Marmora, *Sopra alcune antichità Sarde*, Plate A, fig. 41. For similar gems from Sardinia, Ibiza, Spain, Tunesia, and Cyprus: <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/scarab/scarab11.htm>, esp. items 11/118–11/125

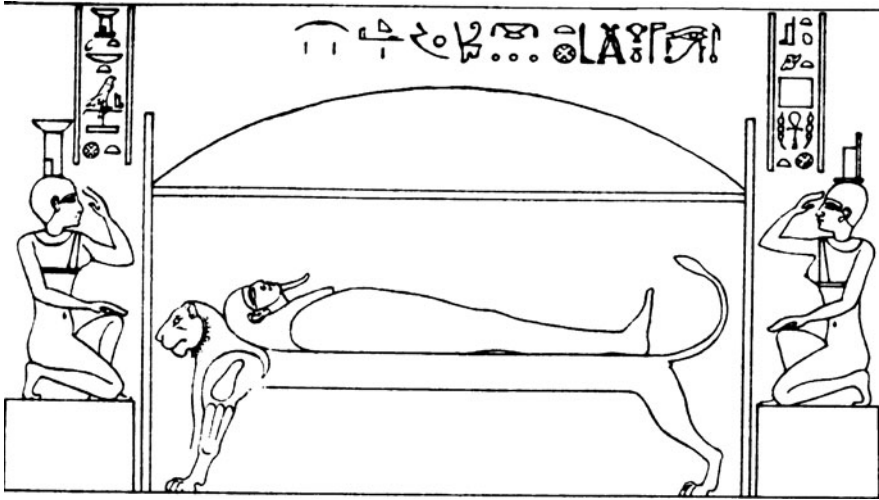


Figure 14. Fragment from a wall painting of Isis and Nephthys flanking Osiris, while mourning his death and assisting him in his resurrection. Found at Dendérah, dated 80 BCE–30 CE. Source: A. Mariette, Dendérah: Description générale du grand temple de cette ville: IV (Paris: Franck, 1873) Plate 69: Grand Temple, chambre de la terrasse. Osiris du sud, chambre N^o. 3; left part (cf. O. Keel, Gott weiblich: Eine verborgene Seite des biblischen Gottes [Freiburg im Üchtland: Bibel + Orient Museum, 2008] Fig. 17). Different versions of the motif Isis and Nephthys flanking Osiris are frequent in Dendérah (see below)

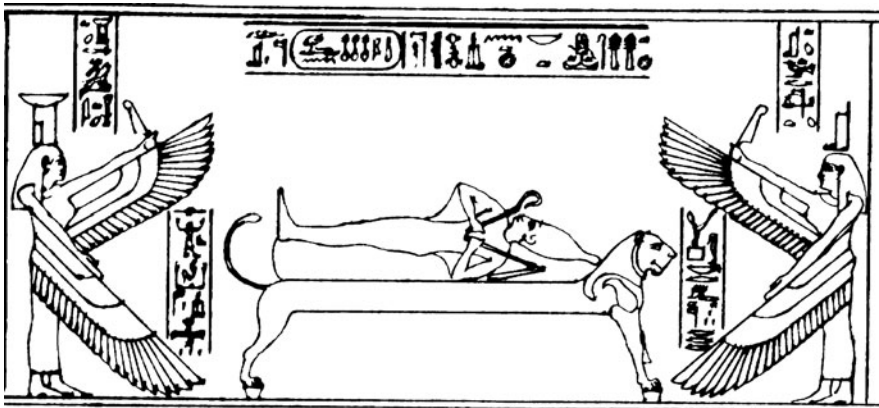


Figure 15. Grand Temple, chambres de la terrasse. Osiris du nord, chambre N^o. 1: Isis and Nephthys as winged figures flanking Osiris, while assisting him in his resurrection. Source: Mariette, Dendérah, Plate 73



Figure 16. Grand Temple, chambres de la terrasse. Osiris du nord, chambre N^o. 1: Isis and Nephthys (sitting on the left side and standing on the right side) flanking Osiris, while assisting him in his resurrection. Source: Mariette, Dendérah, Plate 90



Figure 17. Fresco from the central niche of the Tigrane Tomb (Alexandria), first half of the 2nd century CE. The fresco depicts a mummy on a bier, flanked by Isis and Nephthys. Source: M. Venit, 'Isis in Tombs of Alexandria and the Egyptian Chora: Tradition and Innovation', *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies*, Liège, November 27–29 2008 (ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys; RGRW 171; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 89–119, esp. 109, fig. 12 (black-and-white). Photographer: Marjorie S. Venit who kindly granted permission to use this image and provided the colour photograph for the digital version of the present article



Figure 18. Fresco from the left niche of the Tigrane Tomb (Alexandria), first half of the 2nd century CE. The fresco depicts a male holding palm branches, flanked by two jackals and by two 'winged, nemes-headdressed, trousered males'. Source: Venit, 'Isis in Tombs of Alexandria and the Egyptian Chora', 110–11, fig. 13 (black-and-white). Photographer: Marjorie S. Venit who kindly granted permission to use this image and provided the colour photograph for the digital version of the present article



Figure 19. Green jasper amulet (Staatliche Kunstsammlung Kassel 142, line drawing by author based on various photos), dated to the 2nd century CE. The obverse depicts Isis and Nephthys flanking the mummy of Osiris on a lion (bed); Anubis stands behind the lion with Osiris. Cf. P. Zazoff, ed., *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen*: Berlin, Braunschweig, Göttingen, Hamburg, Hannover, Kassel, München. Band 3: Braunschweig, Göttingen, Kassel. 1: Text; 2: Tafeln (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970) Text: 231; Tafeln: plate 102, Kassel 142



Figure 20. Green jasper amulet from Egypt (now in the Kelsey Museum, KM26061), possibly dated to the 1st century CE. The obverse depicts Isis and Nephthys flanking the mummy of Osiris (upright). The three are standing on a boat and are flanked by two birds (kites or hawks?). © Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan. Line drawing by author. Cf. C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (University of Michigan Studies: Humanistic Series 49; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1950) 253 + Plate I, 2. Colour image kindly provided by the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology