

Isis, 'Great of Magic

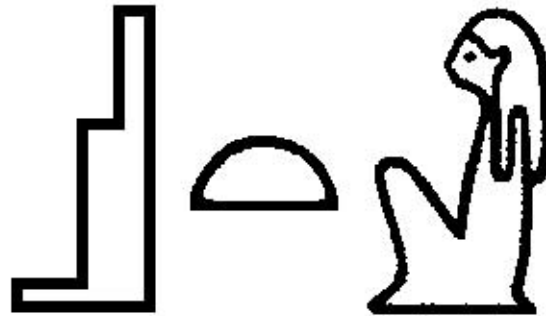


My Isis statue by 'JBL'...

Isis didn't have an ancient city of origination, she wasn't even attested until the 5th dynasty. But she went from these obscure origins to being the most famous goddess: "Evidence of veneration of the goddess has been found as far apart as Iraq and England, with temples being built to Isis in Athens and other Greek cities and later in many parts of the Roman Empire as well as in Rome itself. The cult of Isis rivalled those of the traditional Greek and Roman gods, and its importance and persistence is seen in the fact that her worship continued at Philae until the 6th century AD - long after most of Egypt and the wider Roman world had been converted to Christianity." (*The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, by Richard Wilkinson, page 149)

In the detail below you can see both Isis' 'throne' hieroglyph in the far upper right, as well as the horns and solar disk originating from Hathor, a goddess whose roles and iconography Isis subsumed. "What is initially puzzling in this scene at Karnak is the identity of the goddess. Neither Hathor, nor for that matter, any of the other goddesses we have seen linked with serpent power is shown here. Rather, leading the king in all her fiery snake glory is none other than Isis, more familiarly known as the sister-wife of

Osiris and Madonna-like mother of Horus. Yet here we see her with a uraeus snake rearing up on her brow..."(*Hathor Rising*, by Alison Roberts, page.54) The following isn't the scene at Karnak, but we can see she has the uraeus:



Detail of Isis from Stela of Irethoreru
Third Intermediate Period,
XXV Dynasty, ca. 775-653 B.C.E.
07.422, Brooklyn Museum

Hieroglyphs for the goddess Isis
Decoding Egyptian Hieroglyphs
by Bridget McDermott

"Most of the myths relating to the goddess stress her magical ability and one in particular - in which she learns the true name of Re - stresses her position of the greatest of the gods in terms of magical knowledge and power. In this myth Isis creates a snake which bites Re, and the stricken sun god is only healed of the snake's venom when he reveals his true name to her and thus further enhances her power."(*Wilkinson, page 147*) Knowing his true name gave her power over Re.

Isis also makes declarations of her power in the Metternich stela:

ink 3s.t ntr.t nb(.t) ḥk3 ỉr ḥk3 3ḥ dd mnḥ mdw

"I am Isis the goddess, the possessor of magic, who performs magic, effective of speech, excellent of words."

(From *The Mechanics of Egyptian Magical Practice*, by Robert Ritner, page 34)

She revives Osiris, conceives Horus the younger and protects the dead with her magic. For instance, her 'Tyet' amulet was placed in the mummy wrapping:



"First was a red jasper "knot of Isis." According to the Book of the Dead, whoever wears such a knot will have the protection of Isis and her son Horus and will be welcomed into the next world. The red represents the blood, magic, and power of Isis..." (*Ancient Egyptian Magic*, by Bob Brier pages 193-194)

As archetypes for the earthly magician, Isis and Thoth possess what Jan Assmann calls "the radiant power (*akhu*) of speech." (*The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, page 154)

This 'effectiveness of speech' propelled by power enables magical creation. In my understanding, Thoth is the mind of magic, while Isis is the heart of magic.