



**Key episodes of the Osirian myth in Plutarch's *De Iside and Osiride* and in Greek and Demotical Magical Papyri: How do the sources complement each other?**

**Panagiota Sarischouli**

**in**

**Proceedings of the 28<sup>th</sup> Congress of Papyrology**

**Barcelona 1-6 August 2016**

Edited by Alberto Nodar & Sofía Torallas Tovar

Coedited by María Jesús Albarrán Martínez, Raquel Martín Hernández,  
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**Scripta Orientalia 3  
Barcelona, 2019**

Coordinación y edición: Alberto Nodar – Sofía Torallas Tovar

Coedición: María Jesús Albarrán Martínez, Raquel Martín Hernández, Irene Pajón Leyra,  
José Domingo Rodríguez Martín, Marco Antonio Santamaría

Diseño de cubierta: Sergio Carro Martín



Montserrat



Publicacions  
de l'Abadía  
de Montserrat



Universitat  
Pompeu Fabra  
Barcelona

Primera edición, junio 2019

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Ausiàs Marc 92-98 – 08013 Barcelona

ISBN 978-84-9191-079-4 (Pamsa)

ISBN 978-84-88042-89-7 (UPF)

Edición digital

<http://hdl.handle.net/10230/41902>

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**Key episodes of the Osirian myth in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* and in Greek  
and Demotic Magical Papyri:  
How do the sources complement each other?\***

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The Osirian myth is believed to entail one of the most popular tales of love, envy and revenge in ancient Egyptian mythology. Surprisingly, however, although the basic form of the myth had already been established by or even before the 24<sup>th</sup> century BCE, no ancient Egyptian source provides us with a complete and coherent account of it. Parts of the myth –which have survived in some form for over 4000 years– can be found in a rich variety of Egyptian and Greek texts<sup>1</sup> that include different, and occasionally contradictory, versions of events.

As religious metaphors appear to have been far more significant in Egyptian tradition than a cogent narrative, many of the Egyptian hymns, mortuary, and ritual texts that relate of Osiris' betrayal and murder by his brother Seth provide us with an unusual amount of scattered details that create a shifting and confusing sequence of scenes. In fact, the evidence resembles a puzzle whose pieces should be rearranged to form a cohesive and continuous story. Egyptologists and classicists alike, unanimously accept that the most complete ancient exposition of the Osirian myth is to be found in Plutarch's religio-philosophical treatise *On Isis and Osiris* dating from the first quarter of the second century CE.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the popular

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\* My warmest thanks is due to Ágnes T. Mihálykó and Franziska Naether for their valuable comments and kind suggestions regarding the use of ancient or later Egyptian sources for interpreting Plutarch's narrative of the Osiris legend. Of course, within the limited space of an article, it is very difficult to pay adequate attention to the wealth of evidence available. Thus, the present paper does not go through the whole narrative of Plutarch, but only focuses on a series of key episodes of the Osirian myth, which are not inclusive but substantially representative of the interweaving of sources. A much more thorough attempt to wed the traditional interpretation of Plutarch's treatise *On Isis and Osiris* with the comparative study of Egyptian literary and semi-literary sources, and especially the Greek and Demotic magical papyri, is presented in Sarischouli (2020).

<sup>1</sup> The following list, though not complete, embraces the most significant ancient sources for the Osiris legend (set in roughly chronological order):

- i. The Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts
- ii. The Middle Kingdom Coffin texts (esp. Spell 148)
- iii. The New Kingdom spells of the Book of the Dead
- iv. The Great Hymn to Osiris (recorded on the Stela of Amenmose dating from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)
- v. The 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Contendings of Horus and Seth (recorded on the Papyrus Chester Beatty I)
- vi. The 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Shabako Stone
- vii. Herodotus' Histories (esp. book 2)
- viii. The 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Metternich Stela (and other cippi)
- ix. The Songs of Isis and Nephthys (recorded on Pap. Bremner-Rhind cols. 1-17 dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE)
- x. The Ptolemaic Triumph of Horus (inscribed on the walls of the Temple of Horus at Edfu)
- xi. Diodorus Siculus' The Library of History (esp. book 1.13-27)
- xii. Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* (esp. chapters 12.355 D to 19.358 D)
- xiii. Greek and Demotic magical papyri.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of Plutarch's text is mine; see Sarischouli (2020) chapter 2.3.

Egyptian narrative mode, the Greek Plutarch (and, to a lesser extent, Diodorus Siculus) put all his efforts into composing a single, meaningful story.

As is demonstrated in the above source list (see n. 1), the influence of the myths surrounding the sacred trinity Osiris-Isis-Horus is reflected, among others, in the corpus of Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, which are believed to be our latest sources of information on the Osirian myth. Modern scholarship holds that Greek and Demotic magical papyri share many common features regarding both their mythological themes and motifs as well as the ritual methodology to be followed; generally, the magical background of both Greek and Demotic spells and rituals is believed to have been emphatically Egyptian.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, although specific phrases or other material in the Demotic magical texts may date back as far as the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties, the language of the texts indicates that the original composition of most of them dates to the first three centuries CE. Similarly, the production, copy and circulation (which naturally resulted in the interpolation of the original manuscripts) of the vast bulk of the Greek magical texts are also believed to have occurred during the same period of time.<sup>4</sup> The physical texts, however, are mostly dated a bit later. Thus, apart from a few earlier exceptions,<sup>5</sup> the majority of both Greek and Demotic magical papyri that have survived into modern times date from the third to the fourth/fifth centuries CE, while sporadic examples of Greek magical papyri date even as late as the sixth to seventh centuries.

The present paper focuses on a series of veiled allusions not only to well known, but also to forgotten or vague details of the myth's plot, which are recorded in both Greek and Demotic magical papyri unearthed from the sands of Egypt. These allusions usually form part of the so-called *historiolae*, i.e. short narratives used by the authors of magical recipes who aimed at reminding the invoked gods of a situation in their own past similar to the one in which the principal was at present in order to acquire ritual power while performing magical acts.<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I will employ some of these narratives to enrich or even to elucidate the context of certain key episodes in Plutarch's account of the myth.<sup>7</sup>

Let us first turn to Plutarch's narrative: Plutarch does not convey the Hellenized version of the Egyptian myth, in the form it had acquired by the second century CE, when he wrote his treatise, but a much older picture of the Osiris and Isis cult that goes back to the period

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<sup>3</sup> For example, by editing the justly famous Demotic magical papyrus of London and Leiden (pBM EA 10070 + P.Leiden I 383), Griffith and Thompson (1904) 12 were able to deduce that «even where there are reasons for believing that the demotic is a translation from the Greek, the original source, in relation to magic at any rate, was probably Egyptian».

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Brashear (1995) 3414.

<sup>5</sup> Although the list is not exhaustive or definitive, the following Greek magical papyri are generally thought to date prior to the turn of the second to third centuries CE: PGM XL, dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE; PGM CXI (= Suppl.Mag. II 70), dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE; XX and CXVII (= Suppl.Mag. II 71), dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE; CXXII (= Suppl.Mag. II 72), dated from the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE; XVI and CIII, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE; LVII, LXXII and LXXXV, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE; XII, XVIIb, XXXII, LXIX, and LXXVII, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE; cf. also VI, XIc, XXI, XXXIV, LIX, LXVIII, LXXI, CX dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE. Note that the dates of the texts differ slightly from those proposed by Betz (1992<sup>2</sup>), as a thorough re-edition (including re-dating and re-translation) of the Greco-Egyptian magical formularies is under preparation through an international project funded by the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society (see the project website at [http://neubauercollegium.uchicago.edu/faculty/magical\\_knowledge/](http://neubauercollegium.uchicago.edu/faculty/magical_knowledge/) [last accession 26/10/2018]).

<sup>6</sup> On the use of *historiolae* in Greco-Egyptian magical texts, see e.g. Frankfurter (1995); Brashear (1995) 3438-3440; Faraone (1995) 299 n. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Greek (PGM) and Demotic (PDM) magical texts are cited according to the numeration followed by Betz (1992<sup>2</sup>). Quotations from the PGM and PDM follow the translations of H.-D. Betz's international team of scholars, who rendered the Greek and Egyptian texts into an easy-to-read English. For the upcoming re-edition and re-translation of the PGM and PDM, see n. 5 above.

between the fifth and second centuries BCE.<sup>8</sup> The Greek writer begins his narration of the myth<sup>9</sup> with the birth of the five gods of the complete Osirian cycle (i.e. including the birth of Horus) on the five epagomenal days. When Osiris became the earthly King of the Egyptians, Plutarch says, one of his brothers named Seth –whom the Greeks called Typhon– set a vicious plot in motion while trying to steal the King’s throne: having secured the assistance of seventy-two conspirators and the Queen of Ethiopia, Seth invited the unsuspecting Osiris to a banquet; during the course of an intentionally evil game shut his brother in a chest, which the conspirators threw into the Nile, thus causing the good King to drown soon afterwards. The chest ended up flowing into the sea through the Tanitic mouth of the Nile and the waves washed it up on the shore of Phoenicia near the city of Byblos where Isis, who had been continually searching for her brother-consort, was finally able to spot it. Without revealing her divine identity, the goddess assumed the role of wet-nurse for the youngest son of the King of Byblos and would have made the young prince immortal, had its mother not broken the spell by crying out when she saw the goddess bathing the child in purifying flames in order to burn away its mortality. Isis then revealed who she really was to the King and Queen of Byblos and returned the chest with Osiris’ body to Egypt, where she decided to hide it in the swamps of Buto in order to protect it from Typhon’s hatred. Typhon, however, aided by chance, found the corpse and cut it up into fourteen pieces, which he scattered in different places throughout Egypt so that Typhonic animals<sup>10</sup> or the forces of nature might eventually erase every trace of Osiris’ body. Far from being discouraged, Isis began to search for the precious remains by scouring the swamps in a papyrus boat. Indeed, she found them all, except for the phallus, which had been devoured by some fish species of the Nile. The goddess erected a tomb for each member of her lover that she found; she thus sought to protect her dead lover’s body from Typhon’s malevolent designs. As for the lost phallus, she made an effigy of it and established a festival in its honour. According to Plutarch’s account, Isis had by this time already given birth to her son Horus-Harpocrates,<sup>11</sup> but according to the Egyptian Great Hymn to Osiris she conceived Horus by the revived corpse of her brother-consort (see also the discussion below). By concluding his narrative, Plutarch relates of Osiris’ return from the Other World to prepare the Elder Horus (a different manifestation of the same divine persona) to take revenge on Typhon for his father’s murder and to claim the throne of Egypt. Indeed, Horus prevailed in the final battle against his evil uncle or brother.<sup>12</sup> Typhon-Seth, however, dragged him before a tribunal making charges against the legitimacy of Horus’ succession in the office of Osiris. Through the intervention of Hermes-Thoth, the

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<sup>8</sup> The diversity and early date of the sources Plutarch used in composing his narrative of the Osiris legend are discussed in detail in Sarischouli (2020) chapter I.3. As it is demonstrated in the relevant chapter, Plutarch’s sources can be divided into three main chronological groups: (i) authors of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE; among them, most notably being Eudoxus of Cnidus (mentioned by name more than any other author) as well as Hecateus of Abdera, followed by Hellanicus of Lesbos and Heraclides Ponticus; (ii) authors of the Ptolemaic era, most notably the Egyptian historian and archpriest Manetho of Sebennytos (Plutarch’s most important source) and Timotheus, the Athenian «expositor of sacred law»; (iii) although the references to authors of the early Roman period are few in number or importance, we may name Ariston of Alexandria (fl. in the late 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE) and Hermaios of Hermopolis (probably fl. in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE).

<sup>9</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 355 D-358 D.

<sup>10</sup> Both in Greek and Demotic magical papyri, many animal species (especially, potentially harmful ones like the boar or the scorpion, but also some harmless species like the ass, the pig, the antelope or the aardvark) are thought to be associated with Typhon-Seth; these species are known as Typhonic animals or beasts.

<sup>11</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 357 F. By contrast, Plutarch’s later reference to Harpocrates (358 D-E) creates confusion to the reader.

<sup>12</sup> Horus and Seth are sometimes thought to be nephew and uncle, and sometimes brothers (see the discussion below).

gods finally recognized Horus as the legitimate son and thus rightful heir of Osiris and he was able to assume the rule of Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

The next step in our analysis is to take a closer look at the occurrence of certain key episodes of the myth in the Greek and Demotic magical papyri. The discussion will be structured around the following major topics:<sup>14</sup>

1. The erotic passion that Isis and Osiris felt for each other.
2. The adultery that Osiris committed with Nephthys.
3. The enmity between Seth and Osiris and between Seth and Isis.
4. Isis' anguished search for her lover's dead body.
5. The magical rituals that Isis performed on her brother-consort in order to restore him to life.
6. The posthumous impregnation of Isis by Osiris.
7. The Byblos episode.
8. The love of Isis for her son Horus resulting in the association of both divinities with healing powers.
9. Osiris' murder and dismemberment by his brother Seth.
10. Osiris' death by drowning.
11. Fish and crocodiles attacks on Osiris' dead body.
12. The loss of Osiris' male member.

The erotic love between Osiris and Isis represents one of the basic themes of the Osirian myth. Already in the ancient Egyptian texts, Isis and Osiris were said to experience a timeless sexual attraction for each other. Plutarch, however, was until relatively recently the only – Greek or Egyptian– source to mention that Osiris and Isis had already had sexual intercourse in their mother's womb; that is, even before being born.<sup>15</sup> Although the Greek magical papyri remain silent about this miraculous incident, Quack (2004) identified an Egyptian mortuary papyrus text dating from the Ptolemaic period,<sup>16</sup> which confirms Plutarch's sayings. However, there seems to be contradicting evidence in a Greek magical rite to acquire an assistant demon;<sup>17</sup> in line 16, Isis is referred to as a 'holy maiden' (ἁγνή Κούρα). If the expression were to be understood in its ordinary, literal sense, the reference would be at variance with Plutarch's statement regarding the goddess's prenatal sexual activity. However, this attribute seems to be better linked to Isis' well-known identification with Korē-Persephone<sup>18</sup> rather than to her virginity. In the Greek and Demotic amatory rituals, the

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<sup>13</sup> On the subject, see Sarischouli (2020) commentary on 358 D.

<sup>14</sup> There are also a few more scenes of rather minor importance, in which Plutarch's narrative differs from the traditional –Greek or Egyptian– sources; on these scenes and their occasional parallels in Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, see the comments section in Sarischouli (2020).

<sup>15</sup> See Plu. *De Is. et Os.* 356 A: Ἱσιν δὲ καὶ Ὀσίριν ἐρώντας ἀλλήλων καὶ πρὶν ἢ γενέσθαι κατὰ γαστρὸς ὑπὸ σκοτῶ συνεῖναι, «Isis and Osiris, enamoured of each other even before they were born, consorted together in the darkness of the womb».

<sup>16</sup> Pap. New York MMA 35.9.21, col. xvi. 3: «Oh (du), mit dem zusammen ich das erste Mal gemacht habe im Leib seiner Mutter»; for the translation, see Quack (2004) 329-330. The same papyrus text confirms (col. xiii.14-15), in accordance with Plu. *De Is. et Os.* 356 D, that Osiris was 28 years old at the time of his death; see Quack (2004) 330-332.

<sup>17</sup> PGM LVII 1-37.

<sup>18</sup> Persephone was also called Korē, meaning 'girl' or, with reference to virginity, 'maiden'. It is well known, on the one hand, that Demeter had already come to be identified with Isis by Herodotus' time (see *Hdt.* 2.59.6 and 2.156.21; cf. also *D.S.* 1.25.96; 5.69.1; *Apollod.* 2.9). In the Greek mythic tradition, on the other hand, Demeter and her daughter Persephone were usually seen as one deity. Actually, Persephone was her mother's youthful double; in this sense, the daughter was believed to be a personification of the young corn, while the mother

sexual attraction between Isis and Osiris is regularly compared to the erotic desire that the male agent of a fetching charm or love spell aimed at arousing to his female victim; numerous magical rituals exist, in which the practitioners invoke Isis to inflame a woman's heart with such passion for the spell's agent as she herself loved Osiris, her brother and bedfellow.<sup>19</sup>

Although they were gods, the Osirian divinities were believed to have the same passions and needs as mortal beings. Evidently, Osiris and Isis' relationship also had its problems as any human relationship does. Plutarch refers four times to the adultery that Osiris committed with Nephthys.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Greek writer goes so far as to explain to the reader that Osiris had consorted with his other sister Nephthys out of ignorance, i.e. confusing her with Isis, probably because the two of them, being twins, must have borne an amazing resemblance to each other.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, in the ancient Egyptian sources Osiris is commonly seen as the sexual consort of both Isis and Nephthys. To name but one famous example, the Songs of Isis and Nephthys demonstrate at best that both Isis and Nephthys had feelings of sexual attraction towards their common brother, and not the slightest intention of hiding them.<sup>22</sup> This means that, in Egyptian mythical tradition, a sexual encounter between Osiris and Nephthys was not seen as adultery, which would have to be justified to his legitimate wife. Interestingly enough, Osiris' adultery with Nephthys is differently narrated in a Coptic love spell of attraction dated as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the rest of Egyptian sources, this text presents Isis to have been emotionally rocked and heartbroken by her husband's infidelity; the goddess –much like any human would do– addresses her complaints to her father Thoth<sup>24</sup> bringing forth feelings of sadness, despair and resentment combined with sexual jealousy and rage.<sup>25</sup> A similarly negative, even though dubious, reference to Osiris' adultery with

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embodied a personification of the corn of last year, which enabled next year's planting; on the subject, see Frazer (1925) 397-398; Burkert (1985) 160.

<sup>19</sup> See PGM IV 1390-1495; VII 385-389; VII 862-918; XXXVI 283-294; LXII 1-24; CXXII 15-25 (= Suppl.Mag. II 72, col. i. 15-27); CXXII 26-50 (= Suppl.Mag. II 72 col. ii. 1-25); Suppl.Mag. I 38 and 51; PDM xiv 428-450; lxi 112-127.

<sup>20</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 356 E, 366 B-C, 368 E, 375 B.

<sup>21</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 356 E: αἰσθομένην δὲ τῇ ἀδελφῇ ἐρώντα συγγεγονέναι δι' ἄγνοιαν ὡς ἑαυτῇ τὸν Ὅσιριν etc. «when Isis found that Osiris had loved and consorted with her sister out of ignorance, in the belief that she was Isis herself...».

<sup>22</sup> See Pap. Bremner-Rhind 2.6-9; for the translation of the text, see Faulkner (1936) 123. Griffiths (1970) 316 n. 2 cites further references to Egyptian love songs.

<sup>23</sup> PGM IV 94-153; the love spell is mostly written in Old Coptic (Sahidic and Bohairic), while only a small part of it is written in Greek. Essential reading for the love spell of PGM IV 94-153 is LiDonnici (2003) 151-152; Love (2016) 150-189, esp. 151-158 (for the *historiola* of Isis, Thoth, and Osiris' adultery). Brashear (1995) 3497 considers this spell to have been part of the larger divination included in lines 88-153 of PGM IV.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly to the information found in PGM IV 94-153, Plutarch also attributes Isis' parentage to Hermes (the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian Thoth); see Plu. De Is. et Os. 352 A-B and 355 F to 356 A. Although in Egyptian religious belief Geb is known to have been the father of Isis, PGM IV 2241-2358 (an apotropaic prayer to Selene dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) also attests to Hermes-Thoth being the father of Isis (see ll. 2289-2290).

<sup>25</sup> The magical text reads as follows (ll. 95-105): «Her father, Thoth the Great, came in unto her and asked her, “O my daughter Isis, dusty maiden, why are your eyes full of tears, your heart full of sighs, and [the ...] of your garment soiled? [Away with] the tears of your eyes!”. She said [to him], “He is not with me, O my father, Ape Thoth, Ape [Thoth], my father. I have been betrayed by my female companion. I have discovered [a] secret: yes, Nephthys is having intercourse with Osiris ... my brother, my own mother's son”. He said to her, “Behold, this adultery against you, O my daughter Isis”. She [said] to him, “It is adultery against you, O my father, [Ape] Thoth, Ape Thoth, my father; it is pregnancy proper for me myself”...».

Nephthys is also found in a Greek seductive spell of separation<sup>26</sup> dated to the fifth century CE.<sup>27</sup>

The Greek magical papyri add a further, interesting dimension to the erotic role played by Isis and Nephthys since we can trace at least three cases, in which the two sisters are merged into a single figure named Senephthys or similarly.<sup>28</sup> This fusion seems to confirm that Nephthys was viewed as an opposite reflection of her twin sister,<sup>29</sup> which is probably what Plutarch meant when he referred to Osiris' ignorance.

Apart from the close connection between Isis and Nephthys, the, usually tumultuous, relations between the other siblings of the Osirian cycle is only rarely illustrated in the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri. Thus, even though we find numerous references to Osiris' murder and dismemberment by Seth, there are only two explicit references to the enmity between Osiris and Typhon-Seth and merely one to the enmity between Isis and Typhon-Seth, whereas there are no references at all to Horus' feelings against his sworn enemy Seth.<sup>30</sup> To be more precise, in two Greek seductive spells of separation, we find allusions to the well-known enmity between the two brothers.<sup>31</sup> One of these texts (PGM XII 365-375) recalls not only the enmity between Typhon and Osiris, but also (with a variant formula) the –debatable by many– enmity between Typhon and Isis in order to either effect a breach between two men's friendship or even love for each other, or (by applying the variant formula) to cause separation between husband and wife.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly enough, Plutarch's narrative completely tallies with the information recorded in later Egyptian sources that relate of Isis' forgiving stance towards her defeated brother,<sup>33</sup> thus, according to Plutarch, the goddess did not put Typhon to death when he was handed

<sup>26</sup> The so-called *διάκοπος* was a type of spell used for separating a desirable woman or (more rarely) man from their partners.

<sup>27</sup> PGM CXXVIa-b (= *Suppl.Mag.* II 95).

<sup>28</sup> See PGM XII 201-269 (preparation of a magical ring dated to the mid to late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE): the practitioner is to impersonate Osiris, Isis and *Ēsenephys* in order to strengthen the magical powers of the ring; PGM LXII 1-24 (love spell of attraction dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE): the practitioner is to recall the love of Osiris for his sister Senephthys in order to attract the target; PGM CXXII 51-55 (= *Suppl.Mag.* II 72 col. ii 26-30, migraine spell dated to the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE and CE): the practitioner is to threaten Osiris, Amun and *Ēsenephys* with headaches in order to acquire their help for the sufferer.

<sup>29</sup> Apart from their joint sexual relationship with Osiris, the two sisters shared their affection for Horus; thus, Isis and Nephthys were also often merged into a two-in-one mother-figure for the child-god Horus. See, for example, *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* 5.5: «your young son Horus, the Sisters' child, is before you». The text is recorded on Pap. Berlin inv. no. 3008 (TM 57089), a papyrus written in Hieratic script and dated to the Ptolemaic period; for the translation of the text, see Lichtheim (1980) vol. III, 119. On the merging of Isis and Nephthys, cf. also Griffiths (1970) 316 n. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Griffiths (1960) 17 argues that the references to the conflict between Horus and Seth, in which Osiris is absent, are more common in the surviving texts of the earlier pyramids compared to the references in the texts of the later pyramids, while the references to the conflict between Osiris and Seth, including those in which Horus is also involved, are generally more frequent. Regarding the conflict between Osiris and Seth, the contribution by Budge (1911) vol. II, 77, although dated, still remains valuable. The struggle of Horus against Seth is described in detail in two Egyptian papyri dating from the Ramesside period: Pap. Chester Beatty I, and Pap. Sallier IV recto.

<sup>31</sup> See PGM XII 365-375, dated to the mid to late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE, and CXXVIa-b (= *Suppl.Mag.* II 95), dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.

<sup>32</sup> The Greek text reads (ll. 372-374): δότε τῷ δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα μάχην, πόλεμον, καὶ τῷ δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα ἀηδίαν, ἔχθραν, ὡς εἶχον Τυφῶν καὶ Ὅσιρις. (εἰ δὲ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν καὶ γυνή· ὡς εἶχον Τυφῶν καὶ Ἰσίς). For the translation, see Betz (1992<sup>2</sup>) 166: «Give to him, NN, the son of her, NN, strife, war; and to him, NN, the son of her, NN, odiousness, enmity, just as Typhon and Osiris had (but if it is a husband and wife, “just as Typhon and Isis had”»).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pap. Sallier IV 2.6-3.5.

over to her restrained in manacles but set him free to go where he pleased.<sup>34</sup> Although subtly, a Greek magical rite to acquire an assistant demon<sup>35</sup> seems to confirm that Isis took a conciliatory attitude towards the dispute between her brothers; thus, addressing the invoked spirit, the practitioner declares that he, quite obviously unlike Isis, «will not break [the] bonds with which you bound Typhon».<sup>36</sup> We may also note that Diodorus Siculus' account differs at this point from that of Plutarch; according to him (1.21.3), Isis avenged Osiris' murder with the aid of her son Horus, and «after slaying Typhon and his accomplices became queen over Egypt».

Plutarch's assertion (356 E) that Isis learned which direction Osiris' chest had taken from a group of children playing in the precinct of a temple is not confirmed by other sources.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, in the Greek and Demotic magical papyri we often find references to Isis' anguished search for her lover's dead body; in the Greek texts, it is usually Hermes –and not the playing children– that comes to Isis' assistance in her search for Osiris. The texts recall a series of *ad hoc* invented stories (*historiolae*), mostly to ensure the principal of the divination's efficacy, without offering further details about the actual search process.<sup>38</sup>

For ancient Egyptians, Osiris was the god of the Resurrection and the Afterlife. In the Pyramid Texts, Osiris is said to have been restored to life by his mother Nut assisted by the sun god Ra.<sup>39</sup> By contrast, later Egyptian mortuary texts relate that Osiris was brought back to life through the magical rituals performed on him by his sister-consort aided by Nephthys, Anubis and Thoth. Isis –after fitting the pieces together and reconstituting Osiris' body– performed the first-ever rite of embalming, which gave the murdered god eternal life;<sup>40</sup> thus, the image of Isis and Nephthys mourning on either side of Osiris' sarcophagus is reproduced in numerous objects belonging to Egyptian funerary furniture. Probably Plutarch's well-known commitment to rationalism in religious matters makes him reluctant to include any reference to the procedure of resurrection after death.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly enough, however, the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri are also extremely ungenerous in their portrayal of the recomposition of Osiris' body. To the best of my knowledge, only one Greek spell,<sup>42</sup> being in itself very fragmentary and missing its title (and therefore its exact purpose), recalls Isis'

<sup>34</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 358 D: τὸν Τυφῶνα δὲ τὴν Ἴσιον δεδεμένον παραλαβοῦσαν οὐκ ἀνελεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ λῦσαι καὶ μεθεῖναι, «Isis, however, did not put Typhon to death, when he was delivered to her in chains, but released him and let him go». Later on, Plutarch provides a cosmic explanation for Isis' attitude; see Plu. De Is. et Os. 367 A.

<sup>35</sup> PGM LVII 1-37.

<sup>36</sup> The Greek text reads (ll. 4-5): οὐ διαρρήξω [τὰ] δεσμά, οἷς ἔδησας Τυφῶνα.

<sup>37</sup> Although debated by many, Stadler (2004) sees a parallel between Plutarch's narrative about the divinatory powers of the children and the situation described in Pap.Wien D. inv. no. 12006 recto (dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE); see especially Quack's review (2005) of Stadler's edition of the text, but also Stadler's reply (2006) to Quack's review. On the character of the text, see Naether (2010) 333-336; cf. also Sarischouli (2020) commentary on 356 E.

<sup>38</sup> See PGM IV 2373-2440 (4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE), a charm to increase business efficiency, which claims that Hermes himself made the same charm to help the wandering Isis; PGM XXIVa 1-25 (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE), an oracle divination, which claims that the suggested method for acquiring an oracle is the same one that Hermes and Isis used when Isis was seeking Osiris; PDM xiv 1-92 (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE), a bowl divination in which the practitioner is to claim that the vessel divination he is using is that of Isis when she was searching for Osiris; PDM xiv 851-855, a vessel inquiry in which the practitioner is to identify the vessel used in a bowl divination with that of Isis while she was seeking Osiris.

<sup>39</sup> Isis and Nephthys appear only rarely in this role in the Pyramid Texts (cf. PT 592a, 616, 631, and 1981b-c).

<sup>40</sup> Egyptian sources contain numerous references to Osiris' resurrection, which show that there are many different versions to this part of the story; on the subject, cf. e.g. Sarischouli (2020) chapter 3.1.

<sup>41</sup> On Plutarch's approach to the resurrection of Osiris, see e.g. Brenk (2002).

<sup>42</sup> PGM VII 993-1009, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.

miraculous intervention in her consort's rebirth from the dead. Applying a method well-known in magical literature, the text alludes to an impressive –even though self-created– episode of the Osirian myth in order to ensure the spell-operator of the ritual's efficacy: Isis herself used the same spell when she fitted Osiris' separated members together in order to bring him back to life. To make the spell's efficacy appear even more persuasive, the text includes a further, *ad hoc* invented, short story: allegedly, the Greek demigod of medicine Asclepius<sup>43</sup> admitted, upon seeing Osiris being restored to life through the magical power of the spell, that he himself could not have put together someone who had already been dead, not even with the help of Hebe, the Greek goddess of eternal youth.<sup>44</sup>

According to the Egyptian accounts of the myth, when Isis revivifies Osiris' dead body, she couples with him and miraculously conceives Horus. The Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts refer to Osiris as the one who initiates the conception of his son.<sup>45</sup> By the time of the New Kingdom, however, we find Isis adopting the primary role in the copulation and acting first as a male; although the goddess is not said to have produced the semen initiating the birth process, she is believed to have done all the rest on her own.<sup>46</sup> This rather unusual change of sexual roles takes an even more clear shape in an Egyptian religious papyrus text dated to the Ptolemaic period (304-180 BCE),<sup>47</sup> in which Isis boasts of her masculine abilities: «I am your sister Isis. There is no other god or goddess who has done what I have done. I have played the part of a man though I am a woman, in order to make your name live on earth, since your divine seed was in my body».<sup>48</sup> There is perhaps an echo of the scene in a Greek love charm dated around the turn of the first century BCE and CE;<sup>49</sup> the principal is instructed to anoint his or her face with a facial ointment, recalling (ll. 4-6) the love of Isis who impregnated herself with the dead Osiris' semen with the following words: «You are the perfume with which Isis anointed herself when she went to the bosom of Osiris, her husband and brother, and you gave charm to her on that day». Another Greek love spell of attraction<sup>50</sup> informs us as to what happened when Isis finally found the dead body of her beloved (ll. 1471-1476): «Isis came, holding on her shoulders her brother who is her bedfellow, and Zeus came down from Olympus and stood awaiting the phantoms of the dead»; though not explicitly stated in

<sup>43</sup> Eitrem (see Preisendanz, PGM app. crit. ad loc.) suggests that Asclepius here is presented to act in place of Anubis who is known to have introduced the practice of mummification by helping Isis to embalm Osiris' body. However, it also seems plausible that Asclepius is simply referred to as a personification of the miracle-working physician.

<sup>44</sup> The reference to Hebe is another interesting feature of this spell; in the Greek mythical tradition, Hebe, the daughter of Hera and Zeus, was believed to have had the ability to restore eternal youth. Thus, she is said to have granted Iolaus' wish to become young again for one day, when he was about to fight against Eurystheus as Heracle's charioteer; see E. Heracl. 847 and Ov. Met. 9.400.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, PT 632a-c: «your sister comes to you, rejoicing for love of you. You (i.e. Osiris) have placed her (i.e. Isis) on your phallus and your seed goes into her».

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the description provided by The Great Hymn to Osiris (Stela Paris Louvre C 286 dating from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty): «Mighty Isis who protected her brother, who sought him without wearying, who roamed the land lamenting, not resting till she found him, who made a shade with her plumage, created breath with her wings, who jubilated, joined her brother, raised the weary one's inertness, received the seed, bore the heir, raised the child in solitude». The English quotation follows the translation of Lichtheim (1976) vol. II, 83. As a picture speaks a thousand words, the interested reader might also consult the scene depicted in a famous relief from the temple of Seti I at Abydos (built between 1290 and 1213 BCE), which portrays Isis in the form of a falcon with outstretched wings copulating with the supine Osiris; the image is reproduced in Otto / Hirmer (1966) pl. 17; cf. also pl. 20 for a similar relief from the Hathor temple at Dendera.

<sup>47</sup> Pap. Louvre 3079 I col. cx. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Bergman (1968) 132 n. 1 and 274-275 n. 6; Goyon (1967).

<sup>49</sup> PGM CXXII 26-50 (= Suppl. Mag. II 72, col. ii. 1-25).

<sup>50</sup> PGM IV 1390-1495, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.



the text, the reference to Osiris as Isis' bedfellow insinuates the miraculous postmortem conception of Horus.

Turning to Plutarch's text, we find that the Greek writer tersely confirms that Isis had consorted with Osiris after his death. We are, however, confronted with confusing and contradictory information regarding the time of Horus' conception. To be more precise, in (modern) chapter 18 of his treatise Plutarch refers to Isis proceeding from Byblos (where she found Osiris' dead body enclosed in the trunk of an erica-tree) to the Delta swamps around Buto, where her son Horus was –by this time already– being reared (see 357 F: τῆς δ' Ἰσιδος πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν Ὠρον ἐν Βούτῳ τρεφόμενον πορευθείσης)<sup>51</sup> by Leto (cf. 366 A: ὃν ἐν τοῖς ἔλεσι τοῖς περὶ Βοῦτον ὑπὸ Λητοῦς τραφῆναι λέγουσιν).<sup>52</sup> Surprisingly enough, however, at the end of the following chapter, Plutarch explicitly states that Isis gave birth to Harpocrates<sup>53</sup> who was «prematurely delivered and weak in his lower limbs»<sup>54</sup> having had consorted with Osiris «after his death».<sup>55</sup> One may suggest that Osiris suffered two deaths: one when he actually died by drowning (being locked alive in the chest that was thrown in the Nile River), while his second death occurred when his body was posthumously dismembered by his brother Seth. Osiris' members were once again thrown into the Nile to be swept away by the currents or to be eaten by crocodiles and fish. Isis, however, collected the members of her beloved, and was then able to fit the pieces together and reconstitute his body. Although most of the ancient sources relate of the posthumous conception of Horus, it is difficult to infer from the context whether his conception took place after the first (the real one) or the second death of the god, which corresponds to the desecration of his corpse.<sup>56</sup> It appears that the same confusion is reflected on Plutarch's narrative.<sup>57</sup>

The famous episode that Plutarch sets in the Phoenician city of Byblos is missing from the early Egyptian myth.<sup>58</sup> Although most likely not Plutarch's invention,<sup>59</sup> Isis' sojourn in

<sup>51</sup> A reference in PDM lxi 79-94 (dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE) confirms Isis and Horus' stay in the swamps: the spell, which aims at tracing a thief, alludes to Isis and Horus' concealment from their enemies in the papyrus swamps of Buto. Horus' stay in the swamps earned him the epithet *pa-Hr-m-athu*, meaning 'Horus-in-the-swamps'; a Greek transliteration of this epithet (Πααρμαθ) is found in a dream-sending procedure written in Greek (PGM XII 107-121, at 111).

<sup>52</sup> The Egyptian texts confirm that the child-god was nursed by a cobra goddess named Wadjet (also known as Uto or Buto), whom the Greeks identified with Leto.

<sup>53</sup> The name Harpocrates is the Hellenized form of the Egyptian *Hor-pa-Khered*, meaning 'Horus-the-Child'. Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Harpocrates from Harsiese or Harsiësis (in Egyptian *Hor-sa-Iset*, 'Horus, son of Isis [and Osiris]').

<sup>54</sup> Cf. also the narrative in Pap. Chester Beatty I, 3.7-8, which seems to be in agreement with Plutarch's account, as it describes Horus as a young infant with bad breath. Plutarch's description of Harpocrates' weak limbs is probably connected to the assimilation of the *Pataicos*-figures with Horus in his form as a young sun god; see Sarischouli (2020) commentary on 358 D-E; cf. also Griffiths (1960) 106; (1970) 354 n. 1. To make things even more complicated, Plutarch later (373 B-C) states that it was Horus the Elder who had been born maimed in the darkness as his procreation by Isis and Osiris occurred when the gods were still in the womb of Nut-Rhea.

<sup>55</sup> See Plu. De Is. et Os. 358 D-E: τὴν δ' Ἰσιν ἐξ Ὀσίριδος μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν συγγενομένου τεκεῖν ἠλιτόμηνον καὶ ἀσθενῆ τοῖς κάτωθεν γυίοις τὸν Ἄρποκράτην. On Horus' posthumous conception, see also Sarischouli (2020) commentary on 358 D-E.

<sup>56</sup> On the two deaths of Osiris, cf. also Guillhou (1998).

<sup>57</sup> The form of Horus that avenges his father's death and takes over the throne of Egypt (as described in Plu. De Is. et Os. 358 B-D) has been conceived and born before Osiris' death. This aspect of Horus is usually called Harwer/Haroeris (Arouëris by Plutarch), meaning 'Horus the Elder' or, more precisely, 'Horus the Great'; he was born after the intrauterine union of Isis and Osiris, who had fallen in love with each other when they were still only embryos in their mother's womb (see Plu. De Is. et Os. 356 A). By contrast, in the Heliopolitan family tree, Horus the Elder is the son of Geb and Nut, like the rest of his siblings, which means that he is an uncle to the young Horus.

<sup>58</sup> See Griffiths (1980) 28-34.

Byblos should probably be ascribed to a Greek source that was familiar not only with the Osirian myth, but also with both Phoenician and Greek mythological lore. The so-called Byblos episode (as described in *De Is. et Os.* 357 A-D) relates a series of miraculous events that took place when the chest containing Osiris' dead body reached the homonymous city. Plutarch's narrative begins with the heather that rapidly grew around the chest, and concealed it within its trunk, while the trunk was later set up as a pillar to support the roof of the palace in Byblos; it also includes a fascinating scene with magical elements, during which Isis attempts to bestow immortality on the youngest son of the Byblite queen through a nightly ritual wherein the goddess holds the baby over the hearth fire.<sup>60</sup> A symbolic reminder of the Byblos-episode probably occurs in a Greek papyrus text<sup>61</sup> dating back to the late first century BCE and thus indicating the existence of a (probably Greek) source prior to Plutarch;<sup>62</sup> despite the papyrus' fragmentary state, both its form and content have been exhaustively discussed in several papers.<sup>63</sup> While not unanimously, most experts seem to agree that the text is a healing incantation intended to becalm either the fire of fever burning within the patient or his burning skin-condition. Koenen (1962) is probably right in identifying the restored [παῖς μ]υστοδόκος in l. 3 of the papyrus text as Horus-the-Child to whom Isis is known to have afforded protection from various afflictions, and thus the text seems to remind the sufferer that «the most majestic goddess' child» who «was set aflame as an initiate» had also triumphed over fire. Indeed, the maternal affection that Isis cast upon her son Horus is often referred to in Egyptian religious and magical literature;<sup>64</sup> the most impressive accounts are recorded in the Metternich Stela, which belongs to a group of magico-medical *stelae* known as the Cippi of Horus or Stelae of Horus on the crocodiles. In Egyptian tradition, Isis was especially venerated as a protector of children, and her name was often invoked in Demotic iatromagical spells to cure childhood or other afflictions, and save humans (young or old) from various misfortunes that were, in large part, believed to be caused by the wrath of Seth.<sup>65</sup> Whereas invocations to Isis are surprisingly missing from iatromagical spells

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<sup>59</sup> Most modern commentators of Plutarch's treatise ascribe the episode of Isis' sojourn in Byblos to Plutarch's source rather than himself; see Griffiths (1970) 320-321 and Froidefond (1988) 266 n. 4. Morenz (1954) 278 also expresses the same opinion.

<sup>60</sup> The scene strongly resembles that of the Greek myth relating of Demeter's attempt to burn away Demophoon's mortal elements that is described in the *h.Hom. H.Cer.* 148-255. On the subject, see Sarischouli (2020) commentary on 357 A-B.

<sup>61</sup> PGM XX 4-12.

<sup>62</sup> There are two more sources (somehow later than Plutarch), which connect Osiris' last journey to Byblos: our first source is Lucian of Samosata writing in the middle and second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE; Lucian conveys information about an annual religious rite, in which a religious delegation set out from the center of Osiris' cult in Abydos to bring likenesses of the god's relics to Byblos as a reminder of the god's last journey to the city (*Luc. Syr.D.* 7.454-455). The second source is PDM xiv 150-231, a Demotic lamp divination dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE, which includes a reference (l. 179) to «the great sea, the sea of Syria, the sea of Osiris».

<sup>63</sup> See Maas (1942); Merkelbach (1958) 85-86, no. 1046; Koenen (1962); Henrichs (1970) 204-209; Daniel (1988); Dickie (1994); Ritner (1998); Faraone (1995); (2000); Lehnus (2007) and Collins (2008); cf. also the forthcoming re-edition of the text by Zellmann-Rohrer (2020).

<sup>64</sup> Actually, there is a whole series of myths known as "myths of the Delta regions", in which Isis – or other goddesses syncretized with her – protect their young son. Interestingly enough, the child involved in the myths of the Delta regions is not always Horus himself; sometimes he is Apis, at others Anubis. On the subject, see Morenz / Schubert (1954) 31-35.

<sup>65</sup> To name but a few examples: PDM xiv 1097-1103 is a spell to heal an eye disease, in which the practitioner identifies himself with Isis claiming that the same spell was used to heal Horus, the son of Isis; PDM xiv 594-620 is a spell to cure a (scorpion?) sting, in which the sufferer identifies himself with Isis and calls the oil to heal the paralyzed limb and act as a remedy, for the goddess shall employ the same oil for the sting of her foster-son Anubis; PDM xiv 554-562 is a remedy spell for a dog bite, in which the practitioner threatens the dog with the magical powers of Isis, unless it extracts its venom and removes its saliva from the bite.

written in Greek,<sup>66</sup> Horus is often being invoked in both Greek and Demotic healing spells and rituals.<sup>67</sup>

The usually well-informed Plutarch remains silent in regard to both Isis and Horus' connection to healing powers, even though the epithet *Λογία* attributed to Isis<sup>68</sup> occurs in a series of late Ptolemaic and Roman inscriptions<sup>69</sup> reflecting the wide-spread belief in the goddess's protection of mothers and newborns,<sup>70</sup> while the second Hymn to Isis by the mid-second century CE Cretan poet Mesomedes also refers to Isis' role as birth helper. The most interesting explanation as to how Horus became associated with medicine comes from Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century BCE. Diodorus explains<sup>71</sup> that Horus was believed to have become a benefactor of the race of men through his healings and his oracular responses,<sup>72</sup> «having been instructed by his mother Isis in both medicine and divination».<sup>73</sup>

The present paper comes to an end with a brief discussion on Osiris' murder and dismemberment by his envious brother Seth as well as the events that preceded and followed this heinous act. As one might have expected, we often find repulsive references to Osiris' murder and dismemberment in the magical rituals,<sup>74</sup> usually in the form of threats,<sup>75</sup> which

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<sup>66</sup> It should be noted, however, that the overwhelming majority of healing spells or other types of iatromagical papyri that have survived up to the present day are anyhow written in Demotic; this fact probably reflects the interweaving of medicine and curative magic that dates back to the most ancient Egyptian traditions. On the relation between magic and ancient Egyptian medicine, see e.g. Györy (2011) and Jacq (1985) 106-127. For an investigation of the phenomenon in Roman Egypt, cf. Draycott (2011). Nonetheless, in various Greco-Egyptian rites associated with initiation and/or interaction with the spirit world, we often find references to the so-called Isis band, a black linen cloth, that was used as a ritual blindfold (PGM I 42-195; IV 154-285) or was wrapped around the practitioner's neck or hand (PGM VII 222-249; VIII 64-69; CII 1-17 frs. E, D, C). The Isis band (also known as black of Isis) was hoped to afford divine protection to those coming into physical contact with gods, demons and spirits.

<sup>67</sup> For example, the practitioner invokes Horus to act against the venom of the scorpion sting in PGM XXVIIIa, b, and c, and against the dog bite in PDM xiv 585-593. Horus is being invoked to calm fever in Suppl.Mag. I 34, and to remove fever in PDM xiv 1219-1227. The practitioner impersonates Horus to empower a prayer for a revelation of a remedy in PDM xii 21-49, and to strengthen a spell for removal of poison in PDM xiv 563-574.

<sup>68</sup> The attribution of this particular epithet to Isis is probably due to her association with the Greek Artemis as the Egyptian goddess had absorbed the qualities and attributes of many other (Greek or Near Eastern) goddesses. Both Xenophon of Ephesus (fl. sometime in the late 1<sup>st</sup> or the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE) and Achilles Tatius (fl. in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE) relate of Isis' assimilation with Artemis in their novels.

<sup>69</sup> See IG X, 2 1 97; SEG 34 622, 626/627; EKM 1. Beroia 36.

<sup>70</sup> For Mesomedes, see Whitmarsh (2013) 154-175.

<sup>71</sup> See D.S. 1.25.7: τὸν δὲ Ὡρον [...] τὴν τε ἰατρικὴν καὶ τὴν μαντικὴν ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς Ἰσιδος διδαχθέντα διὰ τῶν χρησμῶν καὶ τῶν θεραπειῶν εὐεργετῆν τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος.

<sup>72</sup> For Horus' presence in Greek and Demotic oracular divinations, the interested reader might consult the following texts: the practitioner invokes Horus to assist him in lamp divinations (PGM XXIIb 27-31), in bowl divinations (PDM xiv 1-92 and 528-553), in requests for dream oracles (PGM VII 250-254; 359-369), in a charm for divine alliance and direct vision (PGM IV 930-1114) as well as in a *praxis* for acquiring foreknowledge and memory (PGM III 424-466).

<sup>73</sup> In the course of his narrative, D.S. 1.25.6 also relates the story of Isis having discovered the drug that gives immortality in order to save her young son Horus who had been found dead under the water; the child had been the object of plots fashioned against him by the Titans who were also said to have collaborated with Typhon-Seth in the murder of Osiris (see D.S. 4.6.3).

<sup>74</sup> The practitioner in the magical papyrus of Turin alludes to another method of annihilating the dead body of Osiris; unless his will prevails, he will «cast fire into Busiris (the city mostly associated with the god's grave) and burn up Osiris»; on the text, see Gardiner (1935) 12 n. 17, 16-17, 39. Also of interest is DT 188, a curse tablet found in Rome, in which the practitioner, trying to escalate the anger of the gods, charges his victim (ll. 10-12) with the imaginary accusation of being «the one who burned the papyrus boat of Osiris and who ate the sacred fish»; a parallel text is found in PGM LVIII 1-14, esp. 5-14, a Greek spell to inflict harm dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE. Moreover, a subtle allusion to Osiris' dismemberment occurs in a Demotic vessel divination (PDM

were intended to intimidate the invoked deities and spirits so that they would comply with the practitioner's commands.<sup>76</sup> A characteristic example of this type of mythical reminder occurs in a Greek restraining charm,<sup>77</sup> which is expected to effectuate every demand (εἰς πάντα ποιῶν, «works on everything»). It should be noted, however, that the sophisticated plan with the chest, which –according to Plutarch– Typhon-Seth had devised and successfully employed to murder his brother, is not recorded in any of the Egyptian sources; there are also no direct references to it in the Greek or Demotic magical papyri.<sup>78</sup> From Plutarch's account, we may conclude that Osiris was alive, at least until Seth's fellow-conspirators cast the tightly sealed chest into the river. This means that the god's death occurred by drowning. Indeed, there exist numerous Egyptian texts that attest to Osiris' death by drowning, although they differ as to the exact place where the drowning occurred.<sup>79</sup> Greek and Demotic magical papyri refer to the same episode adding interesting details to Plutarch's narrative. Thus, in a Greek revelatory charm known as “Hermes' ring”,<sup>80</sup> the practitioner threatens Anubis, Osiris and Horus (ll. 271-278) that, unless they carry out his orders, he will shout the following in the port of Busiris, revealing that Osiris «remained in the river 3 days and 3 nights, Hesiēs,<sup>81</sup> that he was carried by the current of the river into the sea, that he was surrounded by the waves of the sea and by the mist of the air».<sup>82</sup> Hence, the papyrus text brings forth a hitherto unknown piece of information, namely that the god's body was floating in the river for three days and three nights before it ended up in the sea, which washed it up on the shore of Phoenicia. While the god's belly is said to have already been eaten by fish (ll. 278-282), the practitioner threatens Osiris that, unless he is obeyed, he will let the fish devour his whole body, and even threatens to take Horus («the fatherless boy») away from his mother.

As far as the fish attack on the corpse is concerned, several Egyptian sources confirm the fact that, while the god's body was in the river, it was attacked by both fish and crocodiles.<sup>83</sup> Plutarch (358 B) explicitly states that the only part of Osiris' body that was never recovered

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xiv 627-635, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE), while a partial parallel passage written in Old Coptic is found in PGM IV 1-25, esp. ll. 10-15, a revelatory spell dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.

<sup>75</sup> On the use of threats against the gods in Egyptian magical practice, see Altenmüller (1977); cf. also Sauneron (1966) 40-42; Olsson (1939); Cumont (1930) 244-245, esp. nn. 71, 80; Hopfner (1928) 315, 339-340, 344-346; Grundz. Wilck. 124-125.

<sup>76</sup> References to Osiris' murder can be found in PGM I 247-262; IV 154-285; V 213-303; VII 940-968; XII 14-95, 121-143; XXXVI 1-34; LVII 1-37; LXXVIII 1-14.

<sup>77</sup> PGM XXXVI 1-34.

<sup>78</sup> Though the Egyptian texts often refer to Seth's confederates as *sm3yt*, the specific reference to his seventy-two fellow-conspirators and Asô, the queen of the Ethiopians, is found only in Plutarch's account (356 B-C). D.S. 4.6.3 names the Titans as Typhon-Seth's confederates in the murder of Osiris, while in a magical rite aimed at acquiring an assistant demon (PGM LVII 1-37) it is the Giants who are mentioned as being Typhon's fellow-conspirators (ll. 7-8).

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, incantation 5, Metternich Stela: «Do not raise your faces, you who are in the water, at the passing of Osiris by you. Let him by to Djedet (i.e. Busiris), with (your) mouths covered, your gullets blocked. Back, rebel! Do not raise your faces against the one who is on the water. It is Osiris».

<sup>80</sup> PGM V 213-303 dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.

<sup>81</sup> The word Ἑσιῆς represents the Greek transliteration of the Demotic epithet *ḥsy* meaning ‘praised’, which was regularly applied to Osiris, the Drowned One, but was also used of the sacred dead. See, for example, PGM IV 850-929, a future-revelation rite dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE, in which Osiris Hesiēs is referred to (ll. 875-876) as having been ‘carried away by a river’ (Gk. ποταμοφόρητος); PGM XII 14-95, a magical ritual with manifold use dated to the mid to late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE, in which the practitioner invokes (ll. 80-81) Ousiris Hesiēs to force the spell's victim «to do such-and-such a matter». Cf. also PGM III 1-164, esp. 1; V 213-303, esp. l. 270, where the epithet Hesiēs is applied to the sacred dead in general (and not specifically to Osiris).

<sup>82</sup> For the translation, see Betz (1992<sup>2</sup>) 105.

<sup>83</sup> See e.g. CT VII, 201k [991]: «I am that crocodile whose tongue was cut out because of the mutilation of Osiris».

was his male member,<sup>84</sup> although he himself subsequently admits that this was a later addition to the myth's plot.<sup>85</sup> According to Plutarch, it was the fish that were responsible for the loss of Osiris' phallus,<sup>86</sup> as Typhon-Seth was believed to have exercised his control over the so-called Typhonic animals (see n. 10 above). The loss of Osiris' male member is missing from the most ancient Egyptian versions of the Osiris legend,<sup>87</sup> while later versions (including Plutarch but not the magical papyri) relate that Isis fashioned a replacement phallus out of gold. Probably based on the story of Osiris, the embalmers have also sometimes amputated the phallus of the deceased and replaced it by a gilded wooden obelisk. The loss of Osiris' phallus has been, among others, interpreted as an act of Typhonic retribution for the adultery Osiris committed with Nephthys. However, the loss of this particular member seems to affect the logical progression of the storyline since, as we have already seen, Isis' activities with regard to the corpse of Osiris culminated in the posthumous conception of Horus.

By comparing Plutarch's account to the Egyptian references to the myth, we observe that certain scenes of his narrative are unparalleled in the most ancient Egyptian records. By contrast, Greek and Demotic magical texts –especially those dating from the last years of Ptolemaic rule or the first two centuries of the Roman period– seem to almost always bear out Plutarch's exposition of the myth; this is neither coincidental nor arbitrary since Plutarch's treatise *On Isis and Osiris* is believed to have been mostly based on Late Period and Ptolemaic sources (see n. 8 above). Plutarch's narrative of the Osirian myth is also, in large part, confirmed by later magical texts, meaning texts, which are dated between the third and the fourth/fifth centuries CE. This fact indirectly indicates that the original form of the magical texts hardly changed by time. Thus, a focused analysis of Greco-Egyptian magical papyri can provide significant potential for our existing knowledge of the Isis and Osiris cult. Of course, the magical texts *per se* cannot replace the literary sources as they cannot be relied on to reconstruct a comprehensive narrative of the Osirian myth. However, even though their references to the myth are almost always hidden among the twists and turns of magical literature, there are ways of pulling the relevant information up from the sources in order to bring the pieces of the puzzle together. The study of the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri along with the comparative investigation of ancient Egyptian and Greek or Latin literary

<sup>84</sup> See 358 B: μόνον δὲ τῶν μερῶν τοῦ Ὀσίριδος τὴν Ἴσιν οὐκ εὗρειν τὸ αἰδοῖον· εὐθὺς γὰρ εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν ῥιφῆναι καὶ γεύσασθαι τὸν τε λεπιδωτὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν φάγγρον καὶ τὸν ὀξύρυγχον, [ὡς] οὐδὲ μάλιστα τῶν ἰχθύων ἀφοσιοῦσθαι· τὴν δ' Ἴσιν ἀντ' ἐκείνου μίμημα ποιησαμένην καθιερώσαι τὸν φαλλόν, ᾧ καὶ νῦν ἑορτάζειν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, «they say that the only part of Osiris' body, which Isis did not find, was his male member; for as soon as it was thrown into the river Nile, the lepidotus, the phagrus and the oxyrhynchus had fed upon it; fish that the Egyptians loathe most. But in its place Isis made a likeness of the member and consecrated the phallus, in honour of which the Egyptians even at the present day celebrate a festival». Diodorus Siculus also confirms (1.21.5) that Isis recovered all the pieces of Osiris' body except the privates; cf. also 1.22.6.

<sup>85</sup> See Plu. *De Is. et Os.* 365 C: καὶ γὰρ ὁ προστιθέμενος τῷ μύθῳ λόγος, ὡς τοῦ Ὀσίριδος ὁ Τυφὼν τὸ αἰδοῖον ἔρριπεν εἰς τὸν ποταμόν, ἢ δ' Ἴσις οὐκ εὗρεν, ἀλλ' ἐμφορὴς ἄγαλμα θεμένη καὶ κατασκευάσασα τιμᾶν καὶ φαλληφορεῖν ἔταξεν. For the translation of the text, see Griffiths (1970) 175: «further, the story which is added to the myth tells us how Typhon threw the male member of Osiris into the river and how Isis failed to find it, but after producing and preparing an identical image instructed that it should be honoured and carried in phallic processions».

<sup>86</sup> The attack on Osiris' phallus probably explains the Egyptians' abstinence from certain species of fish, unless this particular detail in Plutarch's narrative was, conversely, fashioned because of the Egyptians' repugnance for fish.

<sup>87</sup> Since the Egyptian tradition relates that Isis managed to revive the god's member with her witchcraft, one may suggest that the ancient Egyptian sources might have recorded only the temporary loss of Osiris' phallus. Indeed, some Egyptian texts report that the god's phallus was actually found, along with all the other parts of his body, and was preserved as a relic at Mendes or Dendera; see, for example, Pap. Jumilhac IV 16. 21-23.

works (among which Plutarch's treatise holds a prominent place) can help classicists, Greek papyrologists and Egyptologists fill in information from one source to the other and thus provide modern scholarship with an even more complete picture of the Osirian myth.

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