

Exploring the Mystery of Sirius – the Bright Isis and the Dark Nephthys

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"The soul of Isis is called Dog by the Greeks."
- Plutarch

Sothis is the ancient name of the star Sirius, attributed by the Greeks. In Egypt it was so significant that the whole calendar was based on its cycle, and the first appearance of the Dog Star on the eastern horizon (its heliacal rising) marked the beginning of a new year. This phenomenon was of an enormous significance for the ancient Egyptians who built their monumental temples so that they would face the horizon into the direction of Sirius rising. An example of such sanctuary is the temple of Isis in Dendera – the ancients believed the Dog Star to be the soul of Isis. And like Osiris was the consort of the Queen of Gods, so the companion of Sothis on the night sky was the star Orion. Sirius itself was called by the Egyptians Sept, while Orion bore the title Sah. The etymology of the title "Dog Star" is quite ambiguous and complex, and the associations with the divine figures stretch back to ancient Sumer, through Egypt, to Rome. In the Greek mythology, for instance, the star was believed to have been placed in the sky by Zeus, the dog being the faithful companion of the great hunter Orion.

But before we proceed to the further discussion, it is essential to mention the basic facts and the history of this mysterious star, and to be more specific: a group of stars. Sothis, which is located in the "Big Dog" constellation is the brightest star in the night-sky. It is a binary star which consists of blue-white main sequence dwarf star (Sirius A) and a faint white dwarf companion (Sirius B). Sirius B is enormously hot and its radiation is much stronger than that of the Sun. The temperature of this star exceeds 10.000 degrees. However, its size makes it "so dark" that it emits not much light. Some apparent orbital irregularities in Sirius A and B suggested also the existence of Sirius C. This has not been confirmed yet, but scholars seem to support this theory. What is interesting, Isis as Sirius was depicted by the Egyptians in a barque with two companions. Perhaps they represented Sirius B and C. The ancient astronomy might seem primitive to the modern man, but in fact the ancients had quite specific and broad knowledge about the star in question. While discussing the role of Sothis, it is essential to mention the Dogon tribe from Mali who knew about the existence of Sirius B thousands of years before the modern astronomers made this observation in 1862. They were also in possession of other detailed information, such as e.g. the orbital length of Sirius B around Sirius A, which is fifty years. It is also worth to notice that they claimed existence of another star near Sirius. They called it Emme Ya (meaning: "sun of women"). For further information on this subject I recommend the famous book by Robert Temple: *The Sirius Mystery*.

Getting back to the main subject of this essay, let us discuss the association of the main Egyptian goddess with this most mysterious star of the ages. Isis herself perfectly fits the Mother Goddess archetype. She is the daughter of Nut and Geb; sister of Set, Nephthys, and Osiris; mother of Horus. She was often identified with Athene, Selene, Tethys, or Persephone, and her cult might be traced even further. As the consort of the main god in the pantheon, she rules with him over the earthly kingdom. She is the mother and the queen, with such attributes as fertility and maternity. This is also linked with Sirius itself that was rising at the time of the Nile flooding. The water fertilized barren earth and brought forth crops and abundance. The Egyptians, however, believed that Sirius itself is

the source of vital emanations. Isis is also a friend of the dead. As we can read in *The Book of the Dead*, she is the giver of life and food to the dead. She can also be one of the judges who measure the worth of human souls after death. She is depicted with wings spread, which was the sign of protection over the dead. It was her who conducted the burial ceremony of her husband after he was murdered by Set. Isis was worshipped also as the ruler of magic. She could treat diseases with herbs and send healing dreams onto a suffering person. She united opposing principles: birth and burial, life and death. Hence we can conclude that the key to her nature might be found in exploration of these mysteries.

Just as the companion of Sothis is Sirius B, so the dark counterpart of Isis is her dark sister Nephthys. While Isis represents birth, growth and vitality, her sister stands for death, decay and stagnation. She is the darkness complimentary to the light of the Queen of Gods. While Isis is the day, Nephthys is the night. She is the bareness of the desert, opposed to the fertility of nature. Once again we encounter here a theory that the ancients interpreted all this in a symbolic and literal way. Even though the rising of Sothis, as we have already mentioned, was associated with the life-giving overflowings of the Nile, these days were at the same time the hardest and the most deadly in the year. This was because of extremely high temperatures of the summer solstice. In the literal sense the Egyptians believed that the soul of a deceased person goes to Nephthys and to the heavenly barque. When the dead visit Nephthys, their "double" (ka) is written in the sky and immediately starts to rotate like the Sun. At this time it leads to Duat (the Egyptian underworld) and is the pure life on the horizon as Sah (Orion) and Sept (Sirius). It was therefore thought that the stars were originally the houses of the dead souls.

In order to gain deeper insight into the mysterious nature of Isis and Nephthys, we will analyze the role of two deities to which they are both related: Anubis and Osiris. The myth about Nephthys and Osiris describes how she assumed the shape of her sister by a magic spell, got Osiris drunk on wine and seduced him. From this union she gave birth to Anubis. He was depicted as a man with the head of a jackal or as a black dog accompanying Isis. The god of the dead and mummification. Therefore if we associate him with the "Dog Star," we might come to certain conclusions. Plutarch writes: "By Anubis they understand the horizontal circle which divides the invisible part of the world, which they call Nephthys, from the visible, to which they give the name of Isis; and as this circle equally touches upon the confines of both light and darkness, it may be looked upon as common to them both." Again, we might try to analyze this theory in a literal way, that is - correlating with the astral phenomena associated with the star Sirius, or in a more symbolic and metaphysical way. In the first case the circle of Anubis could refer to the orbit of Sirius B around Sirius A, which circles around it and guards it as a dog. As the god of death and the underworld, meaning the hidden, he might be also linked with the supposed third star of Sirius C. If we take a closer look at the metaphysical meaning of the circle symbol and refer it to Anubis, several theories might be put forward. On the one hand, the circle could represent the wholeness - elements of light and death united, which is represented by Sirius A and B united in the same group. This would also symbolize the harmony between them, as each element of this universum would be located at the same distance from the centre. By the orbit we might mean the concept of time and cycle. What is interesting, the mummification process, the patron of which was Anubis, usually took seventy-two days, which is exactly the same time as the "journey" of the star Sothis through the underworld kingdom of Duat, i.e. behind the visible horizon. This could again refer to the concept of wholeness, as Anubis would guide the adept through the whole and symbolic period of death. "Time" in most mythologies is what gives birth to everything, but also to which all returns. On the other hand, as we can read in the above-mentioned quotation, as the intermediary between light and death, Anubis might illustrate transgression beyond the barrier of eternity and the mastery over it. Moreover, Plutarch gives also the Persian description of the Dog Star which is reputedly surrounded by fifty gods who constitute the shape of an egg (an ellipse) on which the "gods of light" oppose the "gods of darkness" - which is the symbol of wholeness, as well as the core of being. In this case the role of Anubis as the psychopomp allows for the interpretation of the circle as a form of a symbolic gate to the world of darkness and the unknown. Considering his mercurial / active nature, this period would stand for the journey into the underworld and resurrection.

Perhaps some additional light could be shed by the analysis of Isis' husband, Osiris. The Egyptian papyrus calls him "Lord in the perfect black," and the Trismegistic treaty *Virgin of the World* refers to

"The Black Ritual" connected with the "black" Osiris as the highest stage of initiation – the ultimate mysteries of Isis. As Robert Temple writes, "the Black Ritual" probably referred to the concept of the Night which was an object moving in the sky together with other mysteries which orbited in a harmonic way. It reputedly had less light than the Sun and "weave the web with fast light" – which could suggest a correspondence to the mysteries of Sirius B. But what further sense may this have?

In ancient Egypt the black colour (khem) was the symbol of death and night. Osiris, the lord of the underworld, was also called the black god. Deities of necropolis and death, such as Anubis, were also connected with this colour. But black in Egypt also meant life and resurrection – because of the colour of fertile mud near the Nile. In darkness humans died and were transformed to a new life after death. In this sense the black colour refers to the concept of immortality and transgression beyond dualities. What is interesting, the Egyptian sign "tchet" (snake) has two meanings: "snake" and "flesh," as well as the sign "ara" which represents a cobra: "snake" and "the goddess." Probably for this reason later the Greeks presented Sirius with the symbolism of the snake, which is an obvious representation of eternity and immortality.

More information might be found in the analysis of the name, and more specifically: the transcription of the name Osiris. The oldest and the simplest form of this transcription consists of two hieroglyphs, from which the first depicts a throne and the other an eye. This would translate the name as "the throne of the eye" (what is curious, the Bozo tribe in Mali, Dogon's cousins, describe Sirius B as the "Eye Star"). The name of the goddess Isis probably means "the throne," and in the astral sphere her counterpart is Sirius. The word "Osiris" might be also a misspelled transcription of the Egyptian name "Asar" or "Usar." This could also mean "The Eye Power" or "The One Who Sees the Throne." On the one hand, this implies a person who sees the true nature of the star Sothis which has a dark, invisible companion, both in metaphorical and literal sense. On the other hand, if we compare it to another title of the Black God, we could draw even more surprising conclusions. The word "hen" means "to behave like a Beast," and the word "henti" – "a person like beast." Henti is one of Osiris' names, as well as an animal which is an archetypal companion in legends about the Dog Star. Another title of Osiris was "Unnefer," deriving from the root "ur" – "open, appear, create, and manifest." When we gather all these facts together, we might suggest a theory that the Black Ritual, which was the greatest mystery of the cult of Isis and Sothis, referred to the one who is aware of both sides of the universe: the bright and the dark one, and through the exploration of the unknown, on the path of the beast, creates oneself out of the new universe. What is significant, the symbols of the eye and the throne correspond to the last initiatory level on the Tree of Night, the Thaumiel qlipha: the place where the magician becomes an absolute root, the Eye of the Dragon and the Throne of Lucifer. And in fact, it is the place of the ultimate mystery which is to lead an adept to creation of a completely new world.

According to ancient Egyptians, Sirius and Orion radiated emanations which gave life to gods, humans and animals, the creatures which arise from the seed of soul. They believed that the seed which gives energy to the world emanates from the Sirius system. The seed is the symbol of the very centre of existence, just like a point / circle / root / or the core. It contains all potentiality and creative activity. Of course, this essay is mostly speculative, and many clues suggested here are aimed at encouraging the reader to carry on their own research into this matter. The Sothis mystery, as we have already noticed, refers to the most important goals of the left hand path – reaching to the root of existence, uniting the light and darkness within and outside, and acquiring the power by which a magician might become the creator of their own universe: a kind of a closed space, which is active eternally and maintains unlimited potentiality. These are the mysteries which transgress beyond the boundaries of time, death, and doubt – so that we could rise and cast the bright red light through the vast recesses of space – just as the Sothis star during its heliacal rising.



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