

## Isis Etymology by Keith Ponsford

- Sister-wife of Osiris. The cow was sacred to her; and she is represented with two long horns from one stem at the top of her head. She is said to have invented spinning and weaving. (Egyptian mythology.)

*“Inventress of the woof, fair Lina [flax] flings  
The flying shuttle thro’ the dancing strings.  
Taught by her labours, from the fertile soil  
Immortal Isis clothed the banks of Nile.”*

Darwin: Loves of the Plants, c. ii.

- Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, names Osiris, Isis, and Orus amongst the fallen angels (book i. 478).
- Isis, Herodotus thinks, is Deme'ter (Ce'rs).
- Diodo'ros confounds her with the Moon, Demeter, and Juno.
- Plutarch confounds her with Athe'na (Minerva), Proserpine, the Moon, and Te'thys.
- Apule'ius calls her the mother of the gods Minerva, Venus, Diana,
- Proserpine, Cers, Juno, Bello'na, Hecate, and Rhamnu'sia [Nem'esis].
- Some maintain that Isis was at one time the protectress of Paris, and that the word Paris is a contraction of the Greek *Para Isdos* (near the temple of Isis), the temple referred to being the Panthéon or church of St. Geneviève. We are told, moreover, that a statue of Isis was for a long time preserved in the church of St. Germain des Prés, but was broken to pieces by Cardinal Briçonnet because he saw certain women offering candles to it as to the Virgin.
- Lockyer says, “Isis represents the idea of rising or becoming visible, Osiris of disappearing.” Thus the rising moon, a rising planet, the coming dawn, etc., is Isis; but the setting sun, the waning moon, a setting planet, evening, etc., is Osiris.

*“Now the bright moon beams kissed the water, ... . and now  
the mountain and valley, river and plain, were flooded with  
white light, for mother Isis was arisen.”*

Rider Haggard: Cleopatra, chap. iii.

- The Latin Thamesis (the broad Isis, where isis is a mere variation of esk, ouse, uisg, etc., meaning water). The river Churn unites with the Thames at Cricklade, in Wiltshire, where it was at one time indifferently called the Thames, Isis, or Thamesis. Thus, in the Saxon Chronicle we are told the East Anglians “overran all the land of Mercia till they came to Cricklade, where they forded the Thames.”
- In Camden's Britannia mention is made of Summerford, in Wiltshire, on the east bank of the “Isis” (cujus vocabulum Temis juxta vadum, qui appelltur Summerford). Canute also forded the Thames in 1016 in Wiltshire. Hence Thames is not a compound of the two rivers Thame and Isis at their junction, but of Thamesis. Tham is a variety of the Latin amnis, seen in such words as Northampton, South-ampton, Tam-worth, etc. Pope perpetuates the notion that Thames = Thame and Isis in the lines:

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*“Around his throne the sea-born brothers stood;  
Who swell with tributary urns his flood:-  
First the famed authors of his ancient name,  
The winding Isis and the fruitful Thame!  
The Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned;  
The Loddou slow, with verdant alders crowned;  
Cole, whose dark streams his flowery islands lave;  
And chalky Wey that rolls a milky wave;  
The blue transparent Vandalis appears;  
The gulphy Lee his sedgy tresses rears;  
And sullen Mole that hides his diving flood;  
And silent Darent stained with Danish blood.”*

Pope: Windsor Forest

- He'll never set the Thames on fire. He'll never make any figure in the world; never plant his footsteps on the sands of time. The popular explanation is that the word Thames is a pun on the word temse, a corn-sieve; and that the parallel French locution He will never set the Seine on fire is a pun on seine, a drag-net; but these solutions are not tenable. There is a Latin saw, “Tiberim accendre nequaquam potest,” which is probably the fons et origo of other parallel sayings. Then, long before our proverb, we had “To set the Rhine on fire” (Den Rhein anzünden), 1630, and Er hat den Rhein und das Meer angezündet, 1580.
- There are numerous similar phrases: as “He will never set the Liffey on fire;” to “set the Trent on fire;” to “set the Humber on fire;” etc. Of course it is possible to set water on fire, but the scope of the proverb lies the other way, and it may take its place beside such sayings as “If the sky falls we may catch larks.”

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- Isis Cricket Club was named after the river Isis (Thamesis) which acts as a boundary to the east of Queens College Cricket Ground. But Isis was also an Egyptian Goddess, and the verses below reveal law that all Isis players should probably know:-
- Isis was the Egyptian Goddess of fertility (motherhood) and creation.
- Over time Isis had many names and played many roles in history and myth.
- Isis is the Greek form of an ancient Egyptian word that is perhaps associated with a word for "throne."
- Isis was the daughter of Geb the Earth God – and Nut the Sky Goddess.
- In the Pyramid Texts (c. 2350-c. 2100 BC), she is the mourner for her murdered husband, the god Osiris. In her role as the wife of Osiris, she discovered and reunited the pieces of her dead husband's body, was the chief mourner at his funeral, and through her magical power brought him back to life.
- In a comparatively early period of Egyptian history, Isis assimilated many primitive Goddesses, including Nekhebet, Vatchet, Net, Bast and in particular Hathor.
- Her cult was popular throughout Egypt, but her most important sanctuaries were throughout the Nile delta.
- It is impossible to limit the attributes of Isis as she became all-embracing.
- The last Egyptian temples to Isis were closed around 550 A.D., after the onset of Christianity.
- Many say that Isis evolved into the Greek Goddess Artemis Diana of Ephesus.
- Isis was represented as a woman with the hieroglyphic sign of the throne on her head, either sitting on a throne, alone or holding her child Horus, or kneeling before a coffin. Occasionally she was shown with a cow's head.
- As mourner, she was a principal deity in all rites connected with the dead; as magician, she cured the sick and brought the dead to life; and, as mother, she was herself a life-giver.
- Her original headdress was an empty-throne chair, but became horns and also as seen on the current Isis Cricket Club logo.
- She was also seen as kneeling and having wings.
- Symbols linked with Isis are the tut, knot or buckle and the sustrum, which is a kind of rattle.
- Isis hid her son, Horus, from Seth, the murderer of Osiris, until Horus was fully grown and could avenge his father. She defended the child against many attacks from snakes and scorpions. But because Isis was also Seth's sister, she wavered during the eventual battle between Horus and Seth, and when Isis pitied Seth she was beheaded by Horus during their struggle.
- Despite her variable temperament, she and Horus were regarded by the Egyptians as the perfect mother and son. The shelter she afforded her child gave her the character of a goddess of protection.



Fine large statue of Isis shown suckling the infant Horus. The goddess is seated on a block throne, the sides of which are decorated with scale pattern apart from a panel containing an udjat eye and neb sign of lordship.

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- Her chief aspect was that of a great magician, whose power transcended that of all other deities. Several narratives tell of her magical prowess, with which she could even outwit the creator god Atum, and her magic was created with a rod.
- She was invoked on behalf of the sick, and, with the goddesses Nephthys, Neith, and Selket, she protected the dead.
- The cult of Isis spread throughout Egypt. In Akhmim she received special attention
- as the "mother" of the fertility god Min. She had important temples throughout Egypt and Nubia. By Greco-Roman times she was dominant among Egyptian goddesses, and she received acclaim from Egyptians and Greeks for her many names and aspects.
- Several temples were dedicated to her in Alexandria, where she became the "patroness of seafarers." From Alexandria her cult was brought to all the shores of the Mediterranean, including Greece and Rome after 4 B.C.
- In Hellenistic times the mysteries of Isis and Osiris developed; these were comparable to other Greek mystery cults.



(Researched and written by Keith Ponsford)