

## SOPHIA the Sacred Feminine

adapted from a talk given by J. M. Jeffrey

Sophia was revered in the Neolithic Era,  
veiled in the past 5,000 years,  
and is now gradually being Unveiled in a new era of recognition of  
the Sacred Feminine.



The following is one of many invocations, about archetypal Tarot images and the flow of creation, written by Stephan Hoeller, in his book *The Royal Road*.

"Through the central gate of being, we enter into the palace of the heart. We call upon the faithful helpers of sympathy and sincerity to aid our passage to the inner worlds.

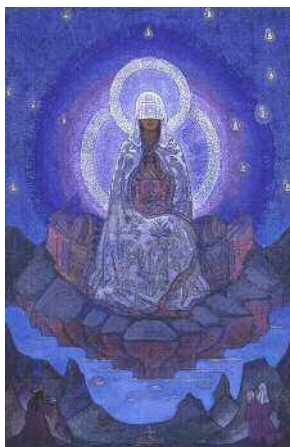
Humbly we bow towards the Mother of all creation.... that reigns at the centre of our being. We contemplate the glorious beauty of the Oneness that resides at the heart of all creatures - in the trees, plants and animals. .... May our minds be ever aware of this magnificence and ours heart irradiated with her Love."

As you know, the word Sophia means wisdom - as for example in the Greek words Theo-Sophia - Divine Wisdom. Scholars have made the distinction between the twin concepts of Logos (the masculine or divine Yang expansive power of the universe) and Sophia (the divine feminine, or Yin receptive power). These terms are attributed to Gnosticism, at the time of the early Christians. It is interesting to note that God is often called the Logos (or the Word) and the other half of the archetype is simply ignored and not even mentioned.. Therefore, when you see or hear the word *Logos*, think of *Sophia* who is left out — and remember that the One gave birth to the two. Hence Sophia is one half of an indivisible whole.

I shall explore how this archetypal or primordial energy (sometimes called the Goddess) has been perceived in the world. ***(This energy is of course beyond gender as we know it.)*** The Goddess is within us all. Both men and women could think of Her as being the Divine Feminine aspect of the Universal Self. First the Goddess or Sophia was actively worshipped, then hidden or disguised - now re-emerging in new forms. These three themes will be intertwined and the subject viewed from a Western and Middle Eastern perspective. Also, it is important to state that **I will be exploring universal symbolism and not individual religious doctrines, old or new.**

I have delved into several books, especially *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom - The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul*, by Caitlin Matthews. (Cover painting shown below, by Nicholas Roerich, "The World Mother". I will also paraphrase quotes from the book *The Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler, on the topics of our relationship to the earth as Mother or Goddess and how this relates to land ownership, etc.

I would like to start with a quote by Dr. Rupert Sheldrake - the author of *The Rebirth of Nature*. In this book he examines the breakdown of reverence for Nature and the earth and I shall paraphrase some of his comments.



“In archaic mythologies, the Great Mother was the original source of the universe and its laws. She was the ruler of fate, time, wisdom, justice, love, - birth, death and rebirth. She was Mother Earth, Gaia or Queen of the Heavens. Our very word for matter is derived from the same root as the Latin word for mother. The earth was sacred both as a source of life and as a receiver of the dead. Even today, people still want to be buried or have their ashes scattered, in their native land. We still have a yearning for this tie with the earth. On weekends, people leave the cities en masse, to experience a natural form of relatedness in the country, once again.”

Contrast this with the scientific world view after Newtonian physics, when the world came to be seen like a vast machine and God, like an all-powerful Engineer.

Even most religions and philosophies of today do not fully support the idea of sanctity of the earth. God, when given credence by sceptics, is often portrayed something like a computer programmer, a distant indifferent, objective, rational force of impersonal law (rather than being intrinsic to all Life). Sacred places have become myth or romance ---- given respect if an indigenous person says that this or that place is sacred - but certainly not a rational, advanced science-based person!

How did we lose contact with the World Soul, with earth wisdom or Sophia? Archaeologists tell us that in 7,000 Before the Common Era. societies lived in settlements that were not fortified, where art and agriculture (not weapons) were their chief pre-occupation. (You can read much about this in *The Chalice and Blade*.) People in those times mostly shared their resources and revered the earth.

However, between 4,000 and 5,000 B. C. this way of life was shattered by waves of invaders. This was part of the new wave of thinking that Madame Blavatsky called the Fifth Race, or **Fifth Wave** of Consciousness as I call it, as the word 'Race' was inclusive of all races. (Misunderstanding of the words *Race and Aryan* has caused enough mischief on web-sites.)

This new way of life spread out from central Asia and their ideas eventually spread everywhere. Their warrior gods dethroned the goddesses, first of all demoting them to being consorts of male Gods. Sky-gods (like Jehovah, Jupiter, Zeus and Thor) came to rule. Fortified cities, warring empires, slavery, hierarchical structures with a patriarchal head, became almost global. Compassion and caring for the earth was denigrated, e.g. the goddess Ishtar, Queen of Heaven and Earth, is mentioned in the Bible as the Whore of Babylon. Yet archaeologists have discovered goddess sites near or underneath thousands of religious sites the world over. (Some archaeologists have encountered anger when doing so!)

Here is an example of the previous Fourth Wave consciousness in a quote from a Nez Perce Indian Elder, a hunter-gatherer of North America, when he was first presented with the idea of agriculture. Think of aboriginal ideas during this quote. The elder said: "My young men will never work [at agriculture]. Men who work [in this way] cannot dream and wisdom comes in dreams. You ask me to plough the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's breast? Then when I die I cannot enter her body and be born again. It is bad law and my people cannot obey it. We must wait here in the place of our ancestors and be ready to meet in the body of our mother. (End of quote from *The Rebirth of Nature*.)

This is an excellent illustration of just how far removed this aboriginal way of being is from our Western economic rationalist thought. The middle way between these two views is often hard to find, but worth the struggle. Regarding modern agriculture, it has taken three decades for ideas like Permaculture (differing from mono-culture) to even begin to be accepted, let alone implemented on a wide scale.

The rich oral tradition, including the songs and art of most aboriginal people is steeped in awareness of the cyclic processes of Nature. This can be seen as a Yin or more-feminine view of life that was once all pervasive. **(I say a more-feminine view, as nothing in the universe is wholly masculine or feminine as shown in the Yin/Yang symbol.)** Yet in our time, the polar opposite of this ancient way of being is predominant. It involves a more-masculine outlook based on linear thinking, i.e. where everything is viewed in straight lines and one thing progresses to another, ever onwards and upwards. A very clear example is the Olympic Games motif - *Faster, Higher, Stronger*. But this is a delusion. (Just think of the Stock market.) With linear thinking, there is no thought of what happens in the ebb-tides or down-times, for instance when athletes are affected by chronic fatigue and steroid abuse. (Speak to doctors who treat them and they will tell you.) Any overly-Yang state automatically leads to an ultra-Yin state of inertia. This is a balancing law of Nature, which counts for little in our type of society.



The quote from the Nez Perce Indian reminded me of when Uluru (above) was leased to the local Aboriginal people of Central Australia. A ceremony was held, at which they said they would *prove* that the area belonged to them. They did this by singing songs handed down to them, over hundreds of generations. This was their genuine proof. Yet in the past, this did not carry much weight with bureaucrats in Canberra, until the Mabo ruling about Land Rights. I also saw on television recently an Aboriginal painting of a district showing all the features of the land, the water holes, etc. and it was said to be the equivalent of a Land Title Deed. This illustrates the importance of understanding these differing approaches regarding reconciliation.

Again we are discussing two completely opposite modes of thinking, one which was almost obliterated, as outlined in *The Chalice and the Blade*. Yet this is exactly how all the Neolithic cultures operated. And it is how they were wiped out, as you can read in the same book. It is so simple. All you have to do is take a map of the land, draw lines on it, allocate parts to specific people, (the unproductive land was mostly allocated to the indigenous people), and then declare that tax and rates have to be paid on that land. This happened in Australia, Canada, U. S. A., etc. Instantly you have introduced the necessity for money, formal employment and also class divisions, based on ownership of land, formerly collectively organized. What is more, women were mostly excluded from this process. This fact is now causing massive problems in Africa, as they were the ones who co-ordinated the family farms.

In our era, Communist Stalinism reimposed collective ownership. However, it was done through domination and without reverence for Nature - and so was doomed to failure. (Anything overly-Yang is bound to collapse, just as anything overly-Yin leads to inertia.) In England this process was completed when Roman Law gradually took over the agrarian Saxon/British societies (but it took a long time). Thus when Australia was colonized, they thought, how could the Aborigines not appreciate this modern way of organizing society?

Humanity could return one day to communal ownership, via shares in co-operatives or similar methods we haven't even thought of. However, most people have not yet evolved to stage when sharing can be done consciously and freely. Esoteric teachings maintain that this will become *common-place* in the next sub-cycle of our vast Fifth Wave of evolution, said to be in full swing in the year 2800. The keynotes of *Sharing and Community* are beginning to emerge. We have made some progress towards this in Australia, one country where this sub-cycle of evolution is coming to birth, but it is like one step forwards and two steps backwards.



If you want to know what Goddess-centred peoples were like, you could read about the South African bush people. Laurens Van der Post appreciated that they still retain an innocent, gentle, guileless approach to the earth, to animals and to each other. Some of them now work as shearers and the loving way they handle the sheep is a sight to see. You don't have to go to archaeological digs to discover how the world once was. As the Bush People said: "you only have to come and talk to us." (The above photo shows a similar connection to an eagle nursed back to health.) A new attitude to animal welfare is now emerging, alongside the cruelty of factory farming with its sow, veal and chicken cages. Vegetarian meals and free range options are becoming a response to this need for increased compassion.

Teachings about the evolution of consciousness, state that mankind was destined to travel from a state of unconscious wholeness, into our currently fractured, analytical state of mind – and then onto another higher spiral of conscious wholeness - i.e. back to Sophia or the Goddess, but in an informed way.

In ancient times, the marriage of the Queen or King to the land (or the earth) was considered as the Sacred Marriage. Every seven years or so, this marriage had to be renewed. (Our newly elected Prime Ministers are still credited with breaking droughts and this is the same principle.) The Eleusinian Mysteries of old contained rituals in which the gods were represented by the priests and priestesses. They dramatized the sacred wedding of the gods Zeus and Demeter. (*Demeter is shown welcoming Persephone, in this painting by Frederick Leighton.*)

In our churches, we have the ceremony of taking bread and wine. Ken Wilbur, in his book *Up From Eden* states that this rite of *sharing bread and wine* was originally a ceremony for the Goddess, incorporated by Christianity – and then they stated that only men could perform it! Consider that Demeter stood for agriculture, hence wheat or bread. While blood, symbolized by wine, was always pertinent to the Goddess, blood being required to create the embryo.



In *Isis Unveiled* by Madame Blavatsky, it states that the ritual of bread and wine is one of the oldest rites in antiquity. Ceres (the goddess especially related to Grain, hence the word cereal) represents the generation of life from the seed. While Bacchus (wine) was the fruit of the vine. Remember Jesus also said "I am the True vine" - same universal archetype. This ceremony came from a completely different source to the later patriarchal churches. Perhaps all the bread and wine rituals were once conducted by priestesses, or at least with all the participants sharing equally. This was once common and I have had strong inner guidance that it will be so again in the future.



Another symbol of the Goddess that travelled throughout history, changing from a female to male emphasis is that of the dove. Even today doves are released as symbols of peace and freedom. The dove was once sacred to the Aphrodite and Ishtar - manifestations of the Goddess Sophia and they decorated the temples of Mesopotamia. Hence it is most revealing that the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit that came down to Christ on his baptism, was then declared to be a male energy - but not in all branches of the Church. For example, not in the holistic, inclusive Church of the East, which spread from Egypt to Japan –and which most people don't even know existed, due to our social conditioning.



**Archetypes, such as the Holy Spirit are of course neither male nor female, being part of the Causal Level of Oneness which unifies both opposites.**

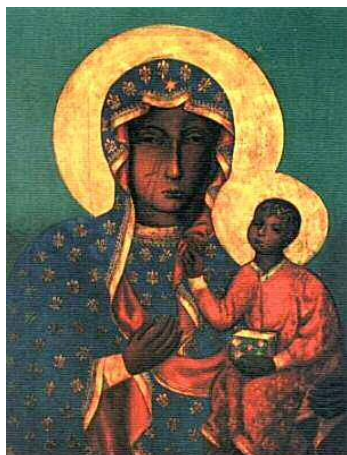
By the time of Mary in Bethlehem, she was required, after the birth of Jesus, to sacrifice doves on an altar, as a purification rite after the "sin" of birth. Just like the Snakes in Ireland (symbol for the Druids), the former symbols of the Goddess had become that which had to be killed or sacrificed - hence St. Patrick killing the *snakes*.



To quote again from Sophia by Caitlin Matthews: "In our era, Sophia has been silent and veiled, unlike her partner, Logos, who goes forth speaking opening."

In the Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary was sometimes portrayed as being black-skinned, e.g. in grottoes containing the Black Madonna. This used to puzzle me greatly, until I realized that a Black Mary is the Goddess darkened or eclipsed. To illustrate this point, the cathedral of Chartres in central France, once contained an image of the Black Madonna. It was kept in a cave underneath its medieval structure. This cave had its own altar and holy well of healing waters. The whole cathedral is dedicated to Mary and its windows portray her story. It was said to have housed the relic of Mary's veil.

The Black statue at Chartres was a figure with a child in its arms. It was called Our Lady Beneath the Earth (or the hidden Goddess). The original statue was said to be carved at the order of a Gaelic prince and was of Druidic origin - Chartres once being a centre of sacred assembly for the Druids. This portrayal of the Black Goddess or Mary was revered for a long time. Then in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the well and her altar were walled up by priests who objected to her popularity. Amazingly, this statue came to a sorry end, when it was burned in the Cathedral square during the French Revolution.



There is a unique Pauline Fathers Monastery in Australia on the main highway to Goulburn, past the Berrima turn-off, with a sign to Penrose Park. (To me, from the natural features present, it is possible that it was originally an aboriginal sacred site.) It has a Black Madonna at the altar in the chapel, called *Our Lady of Jasna Gora*, embraced by a huge angel (shown below). This painting was protected (when Hitler was determined to destroy it, but could not) and was also slashed at one stage, which to me, represents the wounding of the Sacred Feminine. The stained-glass windows of the church are glorious.

There are also a large number of grottoes dedicated to our Lady of Mercy in the grounds, from every country in the world. In the grottoes, you can literally see all the universal symbols discussed in this talk. Well worth a long visit - take your own food. It is open every day, for everyone. (See their website [www.paulinefathers.org.au](http://www.paulinefathers.org.au))



(From *The Chalice and Blade*.) The Great Goddess or Sophia did not disappear, as archetypes can never be destroyed. She simply withdrew, like a stream in a desert that goes underground, only to reappear at yet another spring. The Goddess whose worship was at the core of a more peaceful and equal society, was no longer the supreme principle governing the world, but she was still a force to be reckoned with. Hence Jesus too became the child of the Divine Mother and like earlier divine children became a symbol of the regeneration of Nature, every Spring at Easter. As you know, the word Easter is taken from Eostre the name of a Goddess. The Master Jesus would of course stand for renewal in every way.

Just as with the ancient religions, Jesus too became the consort, i.e. the bridegroom of Mother Church. The baptismal font and the chalice were both part of ancient rites celebrating the vessel, the container of life, the womb of Nature. Holy Water is likewise, a remnant of the old Holy Wells, as places of healing, as still revered today at Lourdes in France. The day chosen for the birth of Jesus was the time of the Winter Solstice, and this was the day when the Goddess gave birth to the physical Sun. By the way, it was also the birth day of Mithras, revered Roman figure. This same process of taking over the old ways, yet not giving them any recognition, occurred all over the world. (This does not imply that the mythology of the Sun/Son Gods did not represent the lives of real people, as atheists insist.)



Medieval priests *acquired* the Goddess and called her the Mother of God, after failing to stamp her out for hundreds of years. Hence the worship of Mary sprang up everywhere, taking over the last remaining sacred groves, caves, wells, holy days, festivals, etc. The ancient Goddess stood for abundance, fruitfulness and the celebration of life on earth. However the new Virgin Goddess, as projected onto Mary, were portrayed as not having conceived Jesus in the normal way, let alone celebrating life and relationships. The emphasis was so vastly different. As far as the Sacred Feminine is concerned, this is a tragic loss, especially to women.

Nevertheless Mary remains a revered person, both in the East and the West. (Kwan Yin was the result of a union of Buddhism and Christianity along the Silk Road.)



In *Isis Unveiled* (on p. 209) you can find a list of the qualities of Isis and similar goddesses that were later transferred to Mary, by Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria. Under the new Christian Roman Empire, the local Egyptian Governors insisted that their own gods and goddesses be integrated into the new system. Hence the Goddess was still present, even if in a form diminished of power. The obvious difference is that Mary was relegated to a place outside the masculine Trinity of God.



The Fifth wave of consciousness (the historical era), which devalued Sophia, is of course based on notions of political power. For the new way of the world aimed for control - especially over:

- men of lesser rank in the new hierarchical systems
- the lives of most women, except those at the top,
- all matters of fertility, in order to boost their populations,
- and marriage laws that ensured property inheritance.

In all the patriarchal religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and even the Baha'i faith, all the gods or prophets are God-like men like Abraham, etc., whereas before, the Saviours were often women Goddesses. (Yet the Self is of course gender-less.)

The image of Isis and Horus worshipped in Rome as a symbol of the sacred feminine changed into Mary and Jesus about the same time in history - similar story of sacrifice - same archetypal meaning. Thus the midnight blue image of Isis standing on a crescent moon, became Mary, who like Isis was the Queen of Heaven, among other things. The portrayal of Isis with Horus in her arms became Mary with the baby Jesus. In the tomb of Ramses can be found the figure of a woman bedecked with stars, giving birth to the Sun. The Sun God was later portrayed as Jesus the son of God, rather than Osiris.

Stating this is not meant to detract in any way from the person of Mary. For in esoteric terms, Mary was a great soul (who being blessed with the presence of the Master Jesus and undergoing with him, a life of profound sacrifice) went through one



of the major Initiations. Rather, what I am discussing is how Mary was viewed in psychological terms, i.e. what images of the God-Self were projected onto her.

**It was vitally important that these archetypes were transferred to the new religion of the day and that humanity was not bereft of them.**



We assimilate the meaning of such symbols, in our own lives, by first of all recognizing them in an admired and loved person. Mythological truths (just as important as historical truths) become intertwined, as civilizations rise and fall. No other Master revered the feminine in the same way as Jesus did.

The ancient goddesses were also sometimes Virgins, not in a sexual sense, but rather by being whole or inviolate unto themselves. In mythology, they followed their sun god/king, son or daughter, after his/her death or sacrifice, into the underworld to redeem, save or resurrect them once again to the light. In a cosmic sense, this is a symbol of our journey from the Mother (the Tao or Oneness) into manifestation, often involving death to knowledge of the Divine Self - resulting in many trials - sacrifices and eventual resurrection, or reabsorption into the Great Light.



### **The Sufi Master Ibin Al-Arabi**

I would now like to include the account of the Sufi mystic and Great Master, Ibin Al-Arabi, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote of a mystical state, in which he contacted on the inner planes, a devotee of the Goddess Sophia. Al-Arabi was known to be an illumined person who could converse with the spirit of the Prophets in many miraculous ways. He was originally the pupil of two female Sufi mystics, Jasmine of Machina and Fatima of Cordova. (This was when Christians, Muslims and Jews all still lived together in a high-point of peace and cultural exchange in Spain during the reign of the Moors.) He thus attained simultaneous awareness of many levels of existence.

At the age of 36 he went to Mecca and while there he fell in love with the daughter of his host. She (like Beatrice with Dante) became a catalyst for deepening his spiritual awareness. For a deep personal love can be an *initiatory* experience to transcendent Love. The young girl's name Nizam, but she died when quite young, so they never married. Just as with Dante, she had filled his mind with love and poetic inspiration.

He wrote that while he was on pilgrimage, he fell into a profound interior state, thinking about the nature of love, human and divine. He felt the hand of a girl on his shoulder. He turned around and at first, thought he was seeing a vision of his beloved Nizam, but then (in his mind) she turned into a priestess. He described her as a daughter of the Greeks, without ornament, but exuding a radiant source of light.

He knew that she was linked to Sophia, called Saint Sophia by later Greek Orthodoxy. (His knowledge of Western and Eastern culture was very wide.) Ibin El Arabi engaged in a mystic dialogue with this radiant being about his spiritual journey - the possibility of ultimate knowledge - and the vulnerability of a faithful believer in Wisdom. The modern psychologist Carl Jung, was later to call such an experience, an Inner Dialogue – i.e. a valid way of tapping the subconscious or the higher mind.

It is significant that Sufis consciously used such psychological techniques hundreds of years before the illumined poet Rumi. It is also interesting to note from a psychological perspective, that it was love for the young girl Nizam that triggered this experience. Carl Jung might have said that Nizam became a true anima figure, i.e. *a bridge to his own soul* and his own divine feminine or Sophia aspect.

Quite naturally being such a highly developed soul, Ibin Al-Arabi was able to use ‘falling in love’ to indeed fall into Love itself, Love with a capital L. Ultimately this is what every experience of human love is all about - a call to a deeper knowing that in essence we *are* Love.

### Finding the lost Grail



(Again from the book on *Sophia*) In our search for our lost Grail (or Sacred Feminine) we are condemned to wander through the desolation of war, famine and chaos,, seeming to be powerless to stop it. In the Arthurian legends (with their powerful archetypal images) the kings or leaders did not speak out against this. They had to wait until the knights of King Arthur (symbols of men and women of compassion with the will to find the Grail or the True Way) asked the right questions. Questions such as: “Why is mankind always at war? Why are so many people starving and without clean water? Why is the world in continual chaos? What is wrong with our King or governments who are so powerless to stop it? Why are they not speaking out?” (Remember the Grail King was dumb.)

The loss of paradise, the absence of wisdom and our inability to grieve for what we have lost, are the themes of our Grail search. We have lost the vision of the Ladies of the Lake and those who have found it again are not sufficient in number or power (as yet) to heal the land. The finding of the sick or wounded Grail King (or the wounded masculine bereft of the nurturing sacred feminine) and realizing his plight, is where humanity is now. The next step is feeling compassion for his/our plight and then asking the right questions. We trivialize the grail-quest if we think of it only in terms of personal spiritual attainment. **For it represents the merging of spiritual ideals with physical needs, such as real hunger on our planet and hence the need for collective healing.**



This lovely image portrays an Undivided Wholeness containing both the masculine and feminine, and the fruit thereof, which can represent anything brought to birth, as the result of the Sacred Marriage of the more-spiritual masculine and feminine energies with in us all.

To complete this talk - a short meditation on the Goddess:

*Lead us oh gracious Goddess to Thy limitless love  
and to truth and to union with Thee -  
to the heart of eternal bliss.  
In Thy love we remain forever more.*

### **Bibliography:**

***Sophia , Goddess of Wisdom - The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul***, by Caitlin Matthews, Thorsons. (Cover Nicholas Roerich "The World Mother".)

**I highly recommend that you purchase this marvellous book, which covers a vast area of Goddess wisdom from many cultures, of which I have only scratched the surface.**

***The Chalice and the Blade by Riane Eisler.*** See [www.rianeeisler.com](http://www.rianeeisler.com) This book changed my life as it put so much incomprehensible history in context. A must read. From my perspective (not the author's) it ties in with esoteric teachings about tides of consciousness, moving from the Fourth cycle of evolution (Neolithic Age) to the Fifth tide or wave (the present Age) which swept all before it. But what was lost in the process? And what happened to the Sacred Feminine?

***The Royal Road***, by Professor Stephan Hoeller, Quest Book. Invocations were adapted slightly to suit the purpose of this talk and to emphasize themes.

**Tarot Images from the Universal Waite Pack**, which contains the traditional archetypal symbols, in beautiful colours. U. S. Games Systems Inc.

***The Rebirth of Nature.*** by Dr. Rupert Sheldrake, who aims to unite scientific insight with ancient wisdom. He is a biologist who proposes the reality of morphic fields and morphic resonance - unifying patterns and processes in Nature.

***Up From Eden*** by Ken Wilbur - a classic about the unfolding of consciousness.

***Isis Unveiled***, by Madame Blavatsky. Vol. II - page 44 - Bread and Wine rituals; and Vol. II page 209 for Chart on correlations of Mary with Isis.