

Plutarch, *Moralia: Isis and Osiris*

[351] [p. 7]

1. All good things, my dear Clea,¹ sensible men must ask from the gods; and especially do we pray that from those mighty gods we may, in our quest, gain a knowledge of themselves, so far as such a thing is attainable by men.² For we believe that there is nothing more important for man to receive, or more ennobling for God of His grace to grant, than the truth. d) God gives to men the other things for which they express a desire, but of sense and intelligence He grants them only a share, inasmuch as these are His especial possessions and His sphere of activity. For the Deity is not blessed by reason of his possession of gold and silver,³ nor strong because of thunder and lightning, but through knowledge and intelligence. Of all the things that Homer said about the gods, he has expressed most beautifully this thought:⁴

Both, indeed, were in lineage one, and of the same country,

Yet was Zeus the earlier born and his knowledge was greater.

Thereby the poet plainly declares that the primacy of Zeus is nobler since it is elder in knowledge and in [p. 9] wisdom. e) I think also that a source of happiness in the eternal life, which is the lot of God, is that events which come to pass do not escape His prescience. But if His knowledge and meditation on the nature of Existence should be taken away, then, to my mind, His immortality is not living, but a mere lapse of time.⁵

2. Therefore the effort to arrive at the Truth, and especially the truth about the gods, is a longing for the divine. For the search for truth requires for its study and investigation the consideration of sacred subjects, and it is a work more hallowed than any form of holy living or temple service; and, not least of all, it is well-pleasing to that goddess whom you worship, a goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom, to whom, f) as her name at least seems to indicate, knowledge and understanding are in the highest degree appropriate. For Isis is a Greek word,⁶ and so also is Typhon, her enemy, who is conceited, as his name implies,⁷ because of his ignorance and self-deception. He tears to pieces and scatters to the winds the sacred writings, which the goddess collects and puts together and gives into the keeping of those that are initiated into the holy rites, since this consecration, by a strict regimen and by abstinence from many kinds of food and from the lusts of the flesh, [352] curtails licentiousness and the love of pleasure, and induces a habit of patient submission to the stern and rigorous services in shrines, the end and aim of which is the knowledge of Him who is the First, the Lord of All, the Ideal One. Him does the god urge us to seek, since He is near her and with her and in close communion. The name of her shrine also clearly promises knowledge and [p. 11] comprehension of reality; for it is named Iseion,⁸ to indicate that we shall comprehend reality if in a reasonable and devout frame of mind we pass within the portals of her shrines.

¹ The priestess for whom Plutarch composed his collection of stories about the [Bravery of Women \(Moralia, 242E ff.\)](#).

² Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, [780F-781A](#) and [355C](#), *infra*.

³ Cf. Themistius, *Oration xxxiii*. p365 B-D.

⁴ *Iliad*, XIII.354; quoted also in *Moralia*, 32A, and *Life and Writings of Homer*, II.114.

⁵ Cf. [Moralia, 781A](#).

⁶ Plutarch is attempting to connect "Isis" with οἶδα, *know*, and "Typhon" with Τυφῶν, *puff up*. See, however, [375C](#), *infra*.

⁷ Cf. [355E](#), *infra*.

⁸ As if derived from οἶδα, *know*, and ὄν, *being*.

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3. Moreover, many writers have held her to be the daughter of Hermes,⁹ and many others the daughter of Prometheus,¹⁰ because of the belief that Prometheus is the discoverer of wisdom and forethought, and Hermes the inventor of grammar and music. b) For this reason they call the first of the Muses at Hermopolis Isis as well as Justice: for she is wise, as I have said,¹¹ and discloses the divine mysteries to those who truly and justly have the name of "bearers of the sacred vessels" and "wearers of the sacred robes." These are they who within their own soul, as though within a casket, bear the sacred writings about the gods clear of all superstition and pedantry; and they cloak them with secrecy, thus giving intimation, some dark and shadowy, some clear and bright, of their concepts about the gods, intimations of the same sort as are clearly evidenced in the wearing of the sacred garb.¹² For this reason, too, the fact that the deceased votaries of Isis are decked with these garments is a sign that these sacred writings accompany them, c) and that they pass to the other world possessed of these and of naught else. It is a fact, Clea, that having a beard and wearing a coarse cloak does not make philosophers, nor does dressing in linen and shaving the hair make votaries of Isis; but the true votary of Isis [p. 13] is he who, when he has legitimately received what is set forth in the ceremonies connected with these gods, uses reason in investigating and in studying the truth contained therein.

4. It is true that most people are unaware of this very ordinary and minor matter: the reason why the priests remove their hair and wear linen garments.¹³ Some persons do not care at all to have any knowledge about such things, while others say that the priests, d) because they revere the sheep,¹⁴ abstain from using its wool, as well as its flesh; and that they shave their heads as a sign of mourning, and that they wear their linen garments because of the colour which the flax displays when in bloom, and which is like to the heavenly azure which enfolds the universe. But for all this there is only one true reason, which is to be found in the words of Plato:¹⁵ "for the Impure to touch the Pure is contrary to divine ordinance." No surplus left over from food and no excrementitious matter is pure and clean; and it is from forms of surplus that wool, fur, hair, and nails originate and grow.¹⁶ So it would be ridiculous e) that these persons in their holy living should remove their own hair by shaving and making their bodies smooth all over,¹⁷ and then should put on and wear the hair of domestic animals. We should believe that when Hesiod¹⁸ said,

[p. 15] Cut not the sere from the green when you honour the gods with full feasting,
Paring with glittering steel the member that hath the five branches,

he was teaching that men should be clean of such things when they keep high festival, and they should not amid the actual ceremonies engage in clearing away and removing any sort of surplus matter. But the flax springs from the earth which is immortal; f) it yields edible seeds, and supplies a plain and cleanly clothing, which does not oppress by the weight required for warmth.

⁹ Cf. [355F](#), *infra*.

¹⁰ Cf. [365F](#), *infra*, and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.106.1, 21 (p382, Potter).

¹¹ *Supra*, [351F](#).

¹² Cf. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, No. 754 (not included in the third edition), or *Altertümer von Pergamon*, VIII.2, p248, no. 326; also [Moralia, 382C](#).

¹³ Cf. Herodotus, II.[37](#) and [81](#).

¹⁴ In Saiis and Thebaïs according to [Strabo, XVII.40 \(p812\)](#).

¹⁵ *Phaedo*, 67B; Cf. [Moralia, 108D](#).

¹⁶ Cf. Apuleius, *Apology*, chap. 26.

¹⁷ Cf. [Herodotus, II.37](#).

¹⁸ *Works and Days*, 742-743. The meaning of these somewhat cryptic lines is, of course, that one should not pare one's nails at table; cf. also *Moralia*, ed. Bernardakis, vol. VII. p90.

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It is suitable for every season and, as they say, is least apt to breed lice; but this topic is treated elsewhere.¹⁹

5. The priests feel such repugnance for things that are of a superfluous nature that they not only eschew most legumes, as well as mutton and pork,²⁰ which leave a large residuum, but they also use no salt²¹ with their food during their periods of holy living. For this they have various other reasons, but in particular the fact that salt, by sharpening the appetite, makes them more inclined to drinking and eating. To consider salt impure, because, as Aristagoras has said, when it is crystallizing many minute creatures are caught in it and die, is certainly silly.

[353] It is said also that they water the Apis from a well of his own, and keep him away from the Nile altogether, not that they think the water unclean because of the crocodile, as some believe; for there is nothing which the Egyptians hold in such honour as the Nile. But the drinking of the Nile water is [p. 17] reputed to be fattening and to cause obesity.²² They do not want Apis to be in this condition, nor themselves either; but rather they desire that their bodies, the encasement of their souls, shall be well adjusted and light, and shall not oppress and straiten the divine element by the predominance and preponderance of the mortal.

6. As for wine, those who serve the god in Heliopolis bring none at all into the shrine, b) since they feel that it is not seemly to drink in the day-time while their Lord and King is looking upon them.²³ The others use wine, but in great moderation. They have many periods of holy living when wine is prohibited, and in these they spend their time exclusively in studying, learning, and teaching religious matters. Their kings also were wont to drink a limited quantity²⁴ prescribed by the sacred writings, as Hecataeus²⁵ has recorded; and the kings are priests. The beginning of their drinking dates from the reign of Psammetichus; before that they did not drink wine nor use it in libation as something dear to the gods, thinking it to be the blood of those who had once battled against the gods, and from whom, when they had fallen and had become commingled with the earth, they believed vines to have sprung. c) This is the reason why drunkenness drives men out of their senses and crazes them, inasmuch as they are then filled with the blood of their forbears. These tales Eudoxus says in the second book of his *World Travels* are thus related by the priests. [p. 19]

7. As for sea-fish, all Egyptians do not abstain from all of them,²⁶ but from some kinds only; as, for example, the inhabitants of Oxyrhynchus abstain from those that are caught with a hook;²⁷ for, inasmuch as they revere the fish called oxyrhynchus (the pike), they are afraid that the hook may be unclean, since an oxyrhynchus may have been caught with it. The people of Syenê abstain from the phagrus²⁸ (the sea-bream); for this fish is reputed to appear with the oncoming of the Nile, and to be a self-sent messenger, d) which, when it is seen, declares to a glad people the rise of the river. The priests, however, abstain from all fish; and on the ninth day of the first

¹⁹ Plutarch touches briefly on this subject in *Moralia*, 642C.

²⁰ Cf. [Herodotus, II.37](#), and [Moralia, 286E](#).

²¹ Cf. *infra*, [363E](#); *Moralia*, 684F, 729A; and Arrian, *Anabasis*, III.4.4.

²² Cf. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, XI.10.

²³ Cf. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 97 and 98, who says that Pythagoreans would have nothing to do with (p17) wine in the day-time. See also the critical note on the opposite page. The critical note to the Greek text reads: ἡμέρας] ἱερέας Moser; ὑπηρέτας Michael, but cf. Diogenes Laertius, VIII.19 οἴνου δὲ μεθ' ἡμέραν μὴ γεύεσθαι.

²⁴ Cf. [Diodorus, I.70.11](#).

²⁵ Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, II. p153, Hecataeus no. B 11.

²⁶ Cf. [Herodotus, II.37](#).

²⁷ Cf. [Strabo, XVII.1.40 \(p812\)](#); Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.46; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, II.39.5 (p34 Potter); also [358B](#) and [380B](#), *infra*.

²⁸ Cf. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.19.

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month, when every one of the other Egyptians eats a broiled fish in front of the outer door of his house, the priests do not even taste the fish, but burn them up in front of their doors.²⁹ For this practice they have two reasons, one of which is religious and curious, and I shall discuss it at another time,³⁰ since it harmonizes with the sacred studies touching Osiris and Typhon; the other is obvious and commonplace, in that it declares that fish is an unnecessary and superfluous food, and confirms the words of Homer, who, in his poetry, represents neither the Phaeacians, who lived amid a refined luxury, nor the Ithacans, e) who dwelt on an island, as making any use of fish, nor did even the companions of Odysseus, while on such a long voyage and in the midst of the sea, until they had come to the extremity of want.³¹ In fine, these people hold the sea to be derived from purulent [p. 21] matter, and to lie outside the confines of the world and not to be a part of it or an element, but a corrupt and pestilential residuum of a foreign nature.³²

8. Nothing that is irrational or fabulous or prompted by superstition, as some believe, has ever been given a place in their rites, but in them are some things that have moral and practical values, and others that are not without their share in the refinements of history or natural science, as, for example, that which has to do with the onion. f) For the tale that Dictys, the nurseling of Isis, in reaching for a clump of onions, fell into the river and was drowned is extremely incredible. But the priests keep themselves clear of the onion³³ and detest it and are careful to avoid it, because it is the only plant that naturally thrives and flourishes in the waning of the moon. It is suitable for neither fasting nor festival, because in the one case it causes thirst and in the other tears for those who partake of it.

In like manner they hold the pig to be an unclean animal,³⁴ because it is reputed to be most inclined to mate in the waning of the moon, and because the bodies of those who drink its milk break out with leprosy and scabrous itching.³⁵ [354] The story which they relate at their only sacrifice and eating of a pig at the time of the full moon, how Typhon, while he was pursuing a boar by the light of the full moon, found the wooden coffin in which lay the body of Osiris, which he rent to pieces and scattered,³⁶ they do not [p. 23] all accept, believing it to be a misrepresentation, even as many other things are.

Moreover, they relate that the ancient Egyptians put from them luxury, and self-indulgence, to such a degree that they used to say that there was a pillar standing in the temple at Thebes which had inscribed upon it curses against Meinis,³⁷ their king, b) who was the first to lead the Egyptians to quit their frugal, thrifty, and simple manner of living. It is said also that Technactis,³⁸ the father of Bocchoris,³⁹ when he was leading his army against the Arabians,

²⁹ Cf. *Moralia*, 729A.

³⁰ Plutarch does not explain this elsewhere (cf. [363E](#), *infra*), but the reason may be that given by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII.6.34.1 (p850 Potter), that fish do not breathe the same air as other living creatures.

³¹ Homer, *Od.* IV.369 and XII.332. Cf. also *Moralia*, 730C, D. The facts are as stated, but the deduction that fishing was despised in Homeric times is not warranted.

³² Cf. *Moralia*, 729B.

³³ Cf. [Aulus Gellius, XX.8](#).

³⁴ Cf. [Herodotus, II.47](#).

³⁵ Cf. *Moralia*, 670F; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.16; [Tacitus, Histories, V.4](#).

³⁶ Cf. [358A](#), *infra*.

³⁷ Usually known as Menes. The name is variously written by Greek authors as Min, Minaeus, Menues, Menas. According to tradition he was the first king of Egypt. His reign is put *circa* 3500 or 3400 B.C. Cf. [Herodotus, II.4](#). In [Diodorus, I.45](#), is found this same story.

³⁸ Tefnakhte (also spelled Tnephachthos or Tnephachtho by Greek writers), after much fighting, made himself king of Lower Egypt *circa* 725 B.C.

³⁹ Bekneranef, king of Egypt *circa* 718-712 B.C., was according to Greek tradition, a wise and just ruler. An apocryphal story about him may be found in Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, XII.3.

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because his baggage was slow in arriving, found pleasure in eating such common food as was available, and afterwards slept soundly on a bedding of straw, and thus became fond of frugal living; as the result, he invoked a curse on Meinis, and, with the approval of the priests, had a pillar set up with the curse inscribed upon it.

9. The kings were appointed from the priests or from the military class, since the military class had eminence and honour because of valour, and the priests because of wisdom. But he who was appointed from the military class was at once made one of the priests and a participant in their philosophy, c) which, for the most part, is veiled in myths and in words containing dim reflexions and adumbrations of the truth, as they themselves intimate beyond question by appropriately placing sphinxes⁴⁰ before their [p. 25] shrines to indicate that their religious teaching has in it an enigmatical sort of wisdom. In Saïs the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered."

Moreover, most people believe that Amoun is the name given to Zeus in the land of the Egyptians,⁴¹ a name which we, with a slight alteration, pronounce Ammon. But Manetho of Sebennytus d) thinks that the meaning "concealed" or "concealment" lies in this word. Hecataeus⁴² of Abdera, however, says that the Egyptians use this expression one to another whenever they call to anyone, for the word is a form of address. When they, therefore, address the supreme god, whom they believe to be the same as the Universe, as if he were invisible and concealed, and implore him to make himself visible and manifest to them, they use the word "Amoun"; so great, then, was the circumspection of the Egyptians in their wisdom touching all that had to do with the gods.

10. Witness to this also are the wisest of the Greeks: e) Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus, Pythagoras, who came to Egypt and consorted with the priests,⁴³ and in this number some would include Lycurgus also. Eudoxus, they say, received instruction from Chonuphis of Memphis, Solon from Sonchis of Saïs, and Pythagoras from Oenuphis of Heliopolis. Pythagoras, it seems, f) was greatly admired, and he also greatly admired the Egyptian priests, and, copying [p. 27] their symbolism and occult teachings, incorporated his doctrines in enigmas. As a matter of fact most of the Pythagorean precepts⁴⁴ do not at all fall short of the writings that are called hieroglyphs; such, for example, as these: "Do not eat upon a stool"; "Do not sit upon a peck measure"; "Do not lop off the shoots of a palm-tree";⁴⁵ "Do not poke a fire with a sword within the house."

For my part, I think also that their naming unity Apollo, duality Artemis, the hebdomad Athena, and the first cube Poseidon,⁴⁶ bears a resemblance to the statues and even to the sculptures and paintings with which their shrines are embellished. For their King and Lord Osiris they portray by means of an eye and a sceptre;⁴⁷ [355] there are even some who explain the meaning of the name as "many-eyed"⁴⁸ on the theory that os in the Egyptian language means "many" and iri

⁴⁰ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, V.5.31, chap. 5 (p664 Potter).

⁴¹ Cf. [Herodotus, II.42](#).

⁴² Cf. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Hecataeus (60), No. B, 8.

⁴³ Cf. Diodorus, [1.96](#) and [98](#); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.69.1, chap. 15 (p356 Potter); *Moralia*, 578F, and [Life of Solon, chap. xxvi. \(92E\)](#).

⁴⁴ For these precepts cf. [Moralia, 12E-F](#), and [Life of Numa, chap. xiv. \(69C\)](#); Athenaeus, X.77 (452D); Iamblichus, *Protrepticus*, chap. xxi. (pp131-160); Diogenes Laertius, VIII.17-18.

⁴⁵ Cf. [365B](#), *infra*, and Xenophon, *Anabasis*, II.3.16.

⁴⁶ Cf., for example, [381F](#) and [393B](#), *infra*, and Iamblichus, *Comment. in Nichomachi⁹ Arithmetica*, 14.

⁴⁷ Occasionally found on the monuments; cf. [371E](#), *infra*.

⁴⁸ Cf. [Diodorus, I.11](#).

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"eye"; and the heavens, since they are ageless because of their eternity, they portray by a heart with a censer beneath.⁴⁹ In Thebes there were set up statues of judges without hands, and the statue of the chief justice had its eyes closed, to indicate that justice is not influenced by gifts or by intercession.⁵⁰

The military class had their seals engraved with the form of a beetle;⁵¹ for there is no such thing as a [p. 29] female beetle, but all beetles are male.⁵² They eject their sperm into a round mass which they construct, since they are no less occupied in arranging for a supply of food⁵³ than in preparing a place to rear their young.

11. b) Therefore, Clea, whenever you hear the traditional tales which the Egyptians tell about the gods, their wanderings, dismemberments, and many experiences of this sort, you must remember what has been already said, and you must not think that any of these tales actually happened in the manner in which they are related. The facts are that they do not call the dog by the name Hermes as his proper name, but they bring into association with the most astute of their gods that animal's watchfulness and wakefulness and wisdom, since he distinguishes between what is friendly and what is hostile by his knowledge of the one and his ignorance of the other, as Plato⁵⁴ remarks. Nor, again, do they believe that the sun rises as a new-born babe from the lotus, c) but they portray the rising of the sun in this manner to indicate allegorically the enkindling of the sun from the waters.⁵⁵ So also Ochus, the most cruel and terrible of the Persian kings, who put many to death and finally slaughtered the Apis⁵⁶ and ate him for dinner in the company of his friends, the Egyptians called the "Sword"; and they call him by that name even to this day in their list of kings.⁵⁷ But manifestly they [p. 31] do not mean to apply this name to his actual being; they but liken the stubbornness and wickedness in his character to an instrument of murder. If, then, you listen to the stories about the gods in this way, accepting them from those who interpret the story reverently and philosophically, d) and if you always perform and observe the established rites of worship, and believe that no sacrifice that you can offer, no deed that you may do will be more likely to find favour with the gods than your belief in their true nature, you may avoid superstition which is no less an evil than atheism.⁵⁸

12. Here follows the story related in the briefest possible words with the omission of everything that is merely unprofitable or superfluous:

⁴⁹ Cf. Horapollo, *Hieroglyphics*, 1.22.

⁵⁰ Cf. [Diodorus, I.48.6](#).

⁵¹ The Egyptian scarab, or sacred beetle. Cf. [Pliny, Nat. Hist. XXX.13 \(30\)](#).

⁵² Cf. [381A](#), *infra*. The idea that all beetles are male was very common in antiquity; cf., for example, Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.15; Porphyry, *De Abstinencia*, IV.9.

⁵³ They are σκατοφάγοι. [Thayer Note: a piece of Loeb edition prudery, unhelpful to those with no Greek. Σκατοφάγοι = eaters of excreta.]

⁵⁴ Cf. Plato's *Republic*, 375E, and the note in Adam's edition (Cambridge, 1902). Thayer's Note: As I type this, my own dog [Pliny](#) is sound asleep two feet away from me: this despite the constant senseless barking of another dog next doors, a horrible fiend who regularly runs out of her house growling and gnashing her teeth at nothing at all — yet once when a burglar was loose in the neighborhood and ran thru her yard vaulting the fences and chased by police, she was seen to have stood gazing on the scene in an absent-minded sort of way. (I'm not too sure that Plutarch himself believes in the watchfulness and wakefulness of dogs, either: see [324B](#).)

⁵⁵ Cf. [368F](#) and [400A](#), *infra*.

⁵⁶ The sacred bull.

⁵⁷ Both Cambyses and Ochus are said to have killed the sacred bull Apis; cf. [368E](#), *infra*, and [Herodotus, III.29](#), for Cambyses; for Ochus, [363C](#), *infra*, and Aelian, *Varia Historia*, IV.8. In *De Natura Animalium*, X.28, Aelian says that both Cambyses and Ochus were guilty of this offence.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Moralia*, [164E](#), [165C](#), [378A](#), [379E](#).

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They say that the Sun, when he became aware of Rhea's intercourse with Cronus,⁵⁹ invoked a curse upon her that she should not give birth to a child in any month or year; but Hermes, being enamoured of the goddess, consorted with her. Later, playing at draughts with the moon, he won from her the seventieth part of each of her periods of illumination,⁶⁰ and from all the winnings he composed five days, and intercalated them as an addition to the three hundred and sixty days. e) The Egyptians even now call these five days intercalated⁶¹ and celebrate them as the birthdays of the gods. They relate that on the first [p. 33] of these days Osiris was born, and at the hour of his birth a voice issued forth saying, "The Lord of All advances to the light." But some relate that a certain Pamytes,⁶² while he was drawing water in Thebes, heard a voice issuing from the shrine of Zeus, which bade him proclaim with a loud voice that a mighty and beneficent king, Osiris, had been born; and for this Cronus entrusted to him the child Osiris, which he brought up. It is in his honour that the festival of Pamyliia is celebrated, a festival which resembles the phallic processions. f) On the second of these days Arueris was born whom they call Apollo, and some call him also the elder Horus. On the third day Typhon was born, but not in due season or manner, but with a blow he broke through his mother's side and leapt forth. On the fourth day Isis was born in the regions that are ever moist;⁶³ and on the fifth Nephthys, to whom they give the name of Finality⁶⁴ and the name of Aphroditê, and some also the name of Victory. There is also a tradition that Osiris and Arueris were sprung from the Sun, Isis from Hermes,⁶⁵ [356] and Typhon and Nephthys from Cronus. For this reason the kings considered the third of the intercalated days as inauspicious, and transacted no business on that day, nor did they give any attention to their bodies until nightfall. They relate, moreover, that Nephthys became the wife of Typhon,⁶⁶ but Isis and Osiris were enamoured of each other⁶⁷ and consorted together in [p. 35] the darkness of the womb before their birth. Some say that Arueris came from this union and was called the elder Horus by the Egyptians, but Apollo by the Greeks.

13. One of the first acts related of Osiris in his reign was to deliver the Egyptians from their destitute and brutish manner of living.⁶⁸ This he did by showing them the fruits of cultivation, by giving them laws, and by teaching them to honour the gods. b) Later he travelled over the whole earth civilizing it⁶⁹ without the slightest need of arms, but most of the peoples he won over to his way by the charm of his persuasive discourse combined with song and all manner of music. Hence the Greeks came to identify him with Dionysus.⁷⁰

During his absence the tradition is that Typhon attempted nothing revolutionary because Isis, who was in control, was vigilant and alert; but when he returned home Typhon contrived a treacherous plot against him and formed a group of conspirators seventy-two in number. He had

⁵⁹ Cf. [Moralia, 429F](#); [Diodorus, I.13.4](#); Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evang.* II.1.1-32.

⁶⁰ Plutarch evidently does not reckon the ἔνθι καὶ νέα (the (p31)day when the old moon changed to the new) as a period of illumination, since the light given by the moon at that time is practically negligible. An intimation of this is given in his *Life of Solon, chap. xxv (92C)*. Cf. also Plato, *Cratylus*, 409B, and the scholium on Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 1186. One seventieth of 12 lunar months of 29 days each (348 days) is very nearly five days.

⁶¹ Cf. [Herodotus, II.4](#).

⁶² What is known about Pamytes (or Paamytes or Pammytes), a Priapean god of the Egyptians, may be found in Kock, *Com. Att. Frag.* II. p289. Cf. also [365B](#), *infra*.

⁶³ The meaning is doubtful, but Isis as the goddess of vegetation, of the Nile, and of the sea, might very naturally be associated with moisture.

⁶⁴ Cf. [366B](#) and [375B](#), *infra*.

⁶⁵ Cf. [352A](#), *supra*.

⁶⁶ Cf. [375B](#), *infra*.

⁶⁷ Cf. [373B](#), *infra*.

⁶⁸ Cf. [Diodorus, I.13-16](#).

⁶⁹ Cf. Diodorus, [I.17.1-3](#); [18.5-6](#); [20.3-4](#).

⁷⁰ Cf. [362B](#), [364D-F](#), *infra*, and Herodotus, [II.42](#) and [144](#).

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also the co-operation of a queen from Ethiopia⁷¹ who was there at the time and whose name they report as Aso. Typhon, having secretly measured Osiris's body c) and having made ready a beautiful chest of corresponding size artistically ornamented, caused it to be brought into the room where the festivity was in progress. The company was much pleased at the sight of it and admired it greatly, whereupon Typhon jestingly promised to present it to the man who should find the chest to be exactly his length when he lay down in it. They all tried it in turn, but no one fitted it; then Osiris got into it and [p. 37] lay down, and those who were in the plot ran to it and slammed down the lid, which they fastened by nails from the outside and also by using molten lead. Then they carried the chest to the river and sent it on its way to the sea through the Tanitic Mouth. Wherefore the Egyptians even to this day name this mouth the hateful and execrable. Such is the tradition. They say also that the date on which this deed was done was the seventeenth day of Athyr,⁷² when the sun passes through Scorpion, d) and in the twenty-eighth year of the reign of Osiris; but some say that these are the years of his life and not of his reign.⁷³

14. The first to learn of the deed and to bring to men's knowledge an account of what had been done were the Pans and Satyrs who lived in the region around Chemmis,⁷⁴ and so, even to this day, the sudden confusion and consternation of a crowd is called a panic.⁷⁵ Isis, when the tidings reached her, at once cut off one of her tresses and put on a garment of mourning in a place where the city still bears the name of Kopto.⁷⁶ Others think that the name means deprivation, e) for they also express "deprive" by means of "*koptein*."⁷⁷ But Isis wandered everywhere at her wits' end; no one whom she approached did she fail to address, and even when she met some little children she asked them about the chest. As it [p. 39] happened, they had seen it, and they told her the mouth of the river through which the friends of Typhon had launched the coffin into the sea. Wherefore the Egyptians think that little children possess the power of prophecy,⁷⁸ and they try to divine the future from the portents which they find in children's words, especially when children are playing about in holy places and crying out whatever chances to come into their minds.

They relate also that Isis, learning that Osiris in his love had consorted with her sister⁷⁹ through ignorance, in the belief that she was Isis, f) and seeing the proof of this in the garland of melilote which he had left with Nephthys, sought to find the child; for the mother, immediately after its birth, had exposed it because of her fear of Typhon. And when the child had been found, after great toil and trouble, with the help of dogs which led Isis to it, it was brought up and became her guardian and attendant, receiving the name of Anubis, and it is said to protect the gods just as dogs protect men.⁸⁰

15. Thereafter Isis, as they relate, learned [357] that the chest had been cast up by the sea near the land of Byblus⁸¹ and that the waves had gently set it down in the midst of a clump of heather. The heather in a short time ran up into a very beautiful and massive stock, and enfolded and

⁷¹ Cf. [366C](#), *infra*.

⁷² November 13. Cf. also [366D](#) and [367E](#), *infra*.

⁷³ Cf. [367F](#), *infra*.

⁷⁴ Cf. Herodotus, II.91 and 156, and [Diodorus, I.18.2](#).

⁷⁵ Cf. E. Harrison, *Classical Review*, vol. XL pp6 ff.

⁷⁶ Cf. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.23.

⁷⁷ The word kopto, "strike," "cut," is used in the middle voice in the derived meaning "mourn" (*i.e.* to beat oneself as a sign of mourning). Occasionally the active voice also means "cut off," and from this use Plutarch derives the meaning "deprive."

⁷⁸ Cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Oratio* XXXII p364 D (660 Reiske), and Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, XI.10, *ad fin*.

⁷⁹ Nephthys; cf. [366B](#), [368E](#), and [375B](#), *infra*.

⁸⁰ Cf. [Diodorus, I.87.2](#).

⁸¹ Cf. [Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, II.1.3](#).

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embraced the chest with its growth and concealed it within its trunk. The king of the country admired the great size of the plant, and cut off the portion that enfolded the chest (which was now hidden from sight), and used it as a pillar to [p. 41] support the roof of his house. These facts, they say, Isis ascertained by the divine inspiration of Rumour, and came to Byblus and sat down by a spring, all dejection and tears;⁸² she exchanged no word with anybody, save only that she welcomed the queen's maidservants and treated them with great amiability, plaiting their hair for them b) and imparting to their persons a wondrous fragrance from her own body. But when the queen observed her maidservants, a longing came upon her for the unknown woman and for such hairdressing and for a body fragrant with ambrosia. Thus it happened that Isis was sent for and became so intimate with the queen that the queen made her the nurse of her baby. They say that the king's name was Malcander; the queen's name some say was Astartê, others Saosis, and still others Nemanûs, which the Greeks would call Athenais.

16. They relate that Isis nursed the child by giving it her finger to suck instead of her breast, c) and in the night she would burn away the mortal portions of its body. She herself would turn into a swallow and flit about the pillar with a wailing lament, until the queen who had been watching, when she saw her babe on fire, gave forth a loud cry and thus deprived it of immortality. Then the goddess disclosed herself and asked for the pillar which served to support the roof. She removed it with the greatest ease and cut away the wood of the heather which surrounded the chest; then, when she had wrapped up the wood in a linen cloth and had poured perfume upon it, she [p. 43] entrusted it to the care of the kings; and even to this day the people of Byblus venerate this wood which is preserved in the shrine of Isis. d) Then the goddess threw herself down upon the coffin with such a dreadful wailing that the younger of the king's sons expired on the spot. The elder son she kept with her, and, having placed the coffin on board a boat, she put out from land. Since the Phaedrus river toward the early morning fostered a rather boisterous wind, the goddess grew angry and dried up its stream.

17. In the first place where she found seclusion, when she was quite by herself, they relate that she opened the chest and laid her face upon the face within and caressed it and wept. The child came quietly up behind her and saw what was there, and when the goddess became aware of his presence, she turned about and gave him one awful look of anger. e) The child could not endure the fright, and died. Others will not have it so, but assert that he fell overboard into the sea from the boat that was mentioned above.⁸³ He also is the recipient of honours because of the goddess; for they say that the Maneros of whom the Egyptians sing at their convivial gatherings is this very child.⁸⁴ Some say, however, that his name was Palaestinus or Pelusius, and that the city founded by the goddess was named in his honour. They also recount that this Maneros who is the theme of their songs was the first to invent music. But some say that the word is not the name of any person, but an expression belonging to the vocabulary of drinking and feasting: "Good luck be ours in things like this!", f) and that this is really the idea expressed [p. 45] by the exclamation "maneros" whenever the Egyptians use it. In the same way we may be sure that the likeness of a corpse which, as it is exhibited to them, is carried around in a chest, is not a reminder of what happened to Osiris, as some assume; but it is to urge them, as they contemplate it, to use and to enjoy the present, since all very soon must be what it is now and this is their purpose in introducing it into the midst of merry-making.⁸⁵

⁸² Cf. the similar account of Demeter in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (ii.), 98 ff.

⁸³ At the end of the preceding chapter.

⁸⁴ Cf. [Herodotus, II.79](#); [Pausanias, IX.29.3](#); Athenaeus, 620A.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Moralia*, 148A; [Herodotus, II.78](#); Lucian, *De Luctu*, 21.

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18. As they relate, Isis proceeded to her son Horus, who was being reared in Buto,⁸⁶ and bestowed the chest in a place well out of the way; but Typhon, who was hunting by night in the light of the moon, happened upon it. [358] Recognizing the body he divided it into fourteen parts⁸⁷ and scattered them, each in a different place. Isis learned of this and sought for them again, sailing through the swamps in a boat of papyrus.⁸⁸ This is the reason why people sailing in such boats are not harmed by the crocodiles, since these creatures in their own way show either their fear or their reverence for the goddess.

The traditional result of Osiris's dismemberment is that there are many so-called tombs of Osiris in Egypt;⁸⁹ for Isis held a funeral for each part when she had found it. Others deny this and assert that she caused effigies of him to be made and these she distributed among the several cities, pretending that she was giving them his body, in order that he might receive divine honours in a greater number of cities, b) and also that, if Typhon should succeed in overpowering Horus, he might despair of ever finding [p. 47] the true tomb when so many were pointed out to him, all of them called the tomb of Osiris.⁹⁰

Of the parts of Osiris's body the only one which Isis did not find was the male member,⁹¹ for the reason that this had been at once tossed into the river, and the lepidotus, the sea-bream, and the pike had fed upon it;⁹² and it is from these very fishes the Egyptians are most scrupulous in abstaining. But Isis made a replica of the member to take its place, and consecrated the phallus,⁹³ in honour of which the Egyptians even at the present day celebrate a festival.

19. Later, as they relate, Osiris came to Horus from the other world and exercised and trained him for the battle. After a time Osiris asked Horus what he held to be the most noble of all things. When Horus replied, "To avenge one's father and mother for evil done to them," c) Osiris then asked him what animal he considered the most useful for them who go forth to battle; and when Horus said, "A horse," Osiris was surprised and raised the question why it was that he had not rather said a lion than a horse. Horus answered that a lion was a useful thing for a man in need of assistance, but that a horse served best for cutting off the flight of an enemy and annihilating him. When Osiris heard this he was much pleased, since he felt that Horus had now an adequate preparation. It is said that, as many were continually transferring their allegiance to Horus, Typhon's concubine, Thueris, also came over to him; and a serpent which pursued her d) was cut to pieces by Horus's men, and now, in memory of this, the people throw down a rope in their midst and chop it up. [p. 49] Now the battle, as they relate, lasted many days and Horus prevailed. Isis, however, to whom Typhon was delivered in chains, did not cause him to be put to death, but released him and let him go. Horus could not endure this with equanimity, he laid hands upon his mother and wrested the royal diadem from her head; but Hermes put upon her a helmet like unto the head of a cow.

Typhon formally accused Horus of being an illegitimate child, but with the help of Hermes to plead his cause it was decided by the gods that he also was legitimate. Typhon was then overcome in two other battles. e) Osiris consorted with Isis after his death, and she became the mother of Harpocrates, untimely born and weak in his lower limbs.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Cf. [366A](#), *infra*.

⁸⁷ Cf. [368A](#), *infra*. [Diodorus, I.21](#), says sixteen parts.

⁸⁸ Cf. Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.* V. p198 B.

⁸⁹ Cf. [359A](#), [365A](#), *infra*, and [Diodorus, I.21](#).

⁹⁰ Cf. [Diodorus, I.21](#).

⁹¹ Cf. [365C](#), *infra*.

⁹² Cf. [Strabo, XVII.1.40 \(p812\)](#).

⁹³ Cf. [Diodorus, I.22.6](#).

⁹⁴ Cf. [377B](#), *infra*.

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20. These are nearly all the important points of the legend, with the omission of the most infamous of the tales, such as that about the dismemberment of Horus⁹⁵ and the decapitation of Isis. There is one thing that I have no need to mention to you: if they hold such opinions and relate such tales about the nature of the blessed and imperishable (in accordance with which our concept of the divine must be framed) and if such deeds and occurrences actually took place, then

Much there is to spit and cleanse the mouth,

as Aeschylus⁹⁶ has it. f) But the fact is that you yourself detest those persons who hold such abnormal and outlandish opinions about the gods. That these accounts do not, in least, resemble the sort of loose fictions and frivolous fabrications which poets and writers of prose evolve from themselves, after [p. 51] the manner of spiders, interweaving and extending their unestablished first thoughts, but that these contain narrations of certain puzzling events and experiences, you will of yourself understand. Just as the rainbow, according to the account of the mathematicians, is a reflection of the sun, and owes its many hues to the withdrawal of our gaze from the sun and our fixing it on the cloud, [359] so the somewhat fanciful accounts here set down are but reflections of some true tale which turns back our thoughts to other matters; their sacrifices plainly suggest this, in that they have mourning and melancholy reflected in them; and so also does the structure of their temples,⁹⁷ which in one portion are expanded into wings and into uncovered and unobstructed corridors, and in another portion have secret vesting-rooms in the darkness under ground, like cells or chapels; and not the least important suggestion is the opinion held regarding the shrines of Osiris, whose body is said to have been laid in many different places.⁹⁸ b) For they say that Diochites⁹⁹ is the name given to a small town, on the ground that it alone contains the true tomb; and that the prosperous and influential men among the Egyptians are mostly buried in Abydos, since it is the object of their ambition to be buried in the same ground with the body of Osiris. In Memphis, however, they say, the Apis is kept, being the image of the soul of Osiris,¹⁰⁰ whose body also lies there. The name of this city some interpret as "the haven of the good" and others as meaning properly the "tomb [p. 53] of Osiris." They also say that the sacred island by Philae¹⁰¹ at all other times is untrodden by man and quite unapproachable, and even birds do not alight on it nor fishes approach it; yet, at one special time, the priests cross over to it, and perform the sacrificial rites for the dead, and lay wreaths upon the tomb, which lies in the encompassing shade of a persea-tree¹⁰², which surpasses in height any olive.

21. c) Eudoxus says that, while many tombs of Osiris are spoken of in Egypt, his body lies in Busiris; for this was the place of his birth; moreover, Taphosiris¹⁰³ requires no comment, for the name itself means "the tomb of Osiris." I pass over the cutting of wood,¹⁰⁴ the rending of linen,

⁹⁵ Cf. *Moralia*, 1026C, and *De Anima*, I.6 (in Bernardakis's ed. vol. VII p7).

⁹⁶ Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*, Aeschylus, no. 354.

⁹⁷ Cf. [Strabo, XVII.1.28 \(p804\)](#).

⁹⁸ Cf. [358A, supra](#), and [365A, infra](#).

⁹⁹ The introduction of Diochites here is based upon an emendation of a reading found in one MS. only. The emendation is drawn from Stephanus Byzantinus, a late writer on geographical topics.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. [362C](#) and [368C, infra](#).

¹⁰¹ Cf. [Diodorus, I.22](#), and Strabo, XVII. p803, which (p53) seem to support the emendation "Philae." Others think that the gates (the MS. reading) of Memphis are meant.

¹⁰² The persea-tree was sacred to Osiris.

¹⁰³ Cf. Strabo, XVII.1.14 (pp799 and 800). Tradition varies between Taphosiris and Taposiris, and there may be no "tomb" in the word at all.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. [368A, infra](#).

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and the libations that are offered, for the reason that many of their secret rites are involved therein. In regard not only to these gods, but in regard to the other gods, save only those whose existence had no beginning and shall have no end, the priests say that their bodies, after they have done with their labours, have been placed in the keeping of the priests and are cherished there, d) but that their souls shine as the stars in the firmament, and the soul of Isis is called by the Greeks the Dog-star, but by the Egyptians Sothis, and the soul of Horus is called Orion, and the soul of Typhon the Bear.¹⁰⁵ Also they say that all the other Egyptians pay the agreed assessment for the entombment of the [p. 55] animals held in honour,¹⁰⁶ but that the inhabitants of the Theban territory only do not contribute because they believe in no mortal god, but only in the god whom they call Kneph, whose existence had no beginning and shall have no end.

22. Many things like these are narrated and pointed out, and if there be some who think that in these are commemorated e) the dire and momentous acts and experiences of kings and despots who, by reason of their pre-eminent virtue or might, laid claim to the glory of being styled gods, and later had to submit to the vagaries of fortune,¹⁰⁷ then these persons employ the easiest means of escape from the narrative, and not ineptly do they transfer the disrepute from the gods to men; and in this they have the support of the common traditions. The Egyptians, in fact, have a tradition that Hermes had thin arms and big elbows, that Typhon was red in complexion, Horus white, and Osiris dark,¹⁰⁸ as if they had been in their nature but mortal men. Moreover, they give to Osiris the title of general, and the title of pilot to Canopus, from whom they say that the star derives its name; f) also that the vessel which the Greeks call Argo, in form like the ship of Osiris, has been set among the constellations in his honour, and its course lies not far from that of Orion and the Dog-star; of these the Egyptians believe that one is sacred to Horus and the other to Isis.

23. I hesitate, lest this be the moving of things immovable¹⁰⁹ and not only "warring against the long years of time," as Simonides¹¹⁰ has it, but warring, too, [p. 57] against "many a nation and race of men" who are possessed by a feeling of piety towards these gods, and thus we should not stop short of transplanting such names from the heavens to the earth, [360] and eliminating and dissipating the reverence and faith implanted in nearly all mankind at birth, opening wide the great doors to the godless throng, degrading things divine to the human level, and giving a splendid licence to the deceitful utterances of Euhemerus of Messenê, who of himself drew up copies of an incredible and non-existent mythology,¹¹¹ and spread atheism over the whole inhabited earth by obliterating the gods of our belief and converting them all alike into names of generals, admirals, and kings, who, forsooth, lived in very ancient times and are recorded b) in inscriptions written in golden letters at Panchon, which no foreigner and no Greek had ever happened to meet with, save only Euhemerus. He, it seems, made a voyage to the Panchoans and Triphyllians, who never existed anywhere on earth and do not exist!

24. However, mighty deeds of Semiramis are celebrated among the Assyrians, and mighty deeds of Sesostris in Egypt, and the Phrygians, even to this day, call brilliant and marvellous exploits "manic" because Manes,¹¹² one of their very early kings, proved himself a good man and

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Moralia*, 974F. Thayer's Notes: For a modern and more detailed view, see [R. H. Allen, Star Names, s.v. Orion](#).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. [Diodorus, I.84, ad fin.](#), for the great expense often involved.

¹⁰⁷ That is, to die, and thus to lose their claim to divinity; cf. [360B](#), *infra*. This is common Euhemeristic doctrine.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. [363A](#) and [364B](#), *infra*.

¹⁰⁹ Proverbial: cf. e.g. Plato, *Laws*, 684D.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Bergk, *Poet. Lyr. Graec.* III., Simonides, no. 193, and Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca*, II. p340 in *L. C. L.*

¹¹¹ Doubtless ἡ ἱερὰ ἀναγραφή (sacra scriptio); see Diodorus, [V.41-46](#), and [VI.1](#).

¹¹² Cf. Herodotus, [I.94](#), [IV.45](#), and W. M. Ramsay, *Mitteilungen des deutsch. arch. Instituts in Athen*. VIII.71.

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exercised a vast influence among them. Some give his name as Masdes. Cyrus led the Persians, and Alexander the Macedonians, [p. 59] in victory after victory, almost to the ends of the earth; yet these have only the name and fame of noble kings. c) "But if some, elated by a great self-conceit," as Plato¹¹³ says, "with souls enkindled with the fire of youth and folly accompanied by arrogance," have assumed to be called gods and to have temples dedicated in their honour, yet has their repute flourished by a brief time, and then, convicted of vain-glory and imposture,

Swift in their fate, like to smoke in the air, rising upward they flitted,¹¹⁴

and now, like fugitive slaves without claim to protection, they have been dragged from their shrines and altars, and have nothing left to them save only their monuments and their tombs. Hence the elder Antigonus, d) when a certain Hermodotus in a poem proclaimed him to be "the Offspring of the Sun and a god," said, "the slave who attends to my chamber-pot is not conscious of any such thing!"¹¹⁵ Moreover, Lysippus the sculptor was quite right in his disapproval of the painter Apelles, because Apelles in his portrait of Alexander had represented him with a thunderbolt in his hand, whereas he himself had represented Alexander holding a spear, the glory of which no length of years could ever dim, since it was truthful and was his by right.

25. ¹¹⁶Better, therefore, is the judgment of those who hold that the stories about Typhon, Osiris, and Isis, are records of experiences of neither gods nor men, but of demigods, e) whom Plato¹¹⁷ and Pythagoras¹¹⁸ [p. 61] and Xenocrates¹¹⁹ and Chrysippus,¹²⁰ following the lead of early writers on sacred subjects, allege to have been stronger than men and, in their might, greatly surpassing our nature, yet not possessing the divine quality unmixed and uncontaminated, but with a share also in the nature of the soul and in the perceptive faculties of the body, and with a susceptibility to pleasure and pain and to whatsoever other experience is incident to these mutations, and is the source of much disquiet in some and of less in others. For in demigods, as in men, there are divers degrees of virtue and vice. f) The exploits of the Giants and Titans celebrated among the Greeks, the lawless deeds of a Cronus,¹²¹ the stubborn resistance of Python against Apollo, the flights of Dionysus,¹²² and the wanderings of Demeter, do not fall at all short of the exploits of Osiris and Typhon and other exploits which anyone may hear freely repeated in traditional story. So, too, all the things which are kept always away from the ears and eyes of the multitude by being concealed behind mystic rites and ceremonies have a similar explanation.

26. As we read Homer, we notice that in many different places he distinctively calls the good "god-like"¹²³ [361] and "peers of the gods"¹²⁴ and "having prudence [p. 63] gained from the

¹¹³ Adapted from Plato, *Laws*, 716A.

¹¹⁴ From Empedocles: cf. H. Diels, *Poetarum Philosophorum Fragmenta*, p106, Empedocles, no. 2, 4.

¹¹⁵ Plutarch tells the same story with slight variations in *Moralia*, 182C.

¹¹⁶ In connexion with chapters 25 and 26 one may well compare 418D-419A and 421C-E, *infra*, and Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.* IV.21-V.5.

¹¹⁷ Cf. 361C, *infra*.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, VIII.32.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Stobaeus, *Eclogae*, I.2.29.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Moralia*, 277A, 419A, and 1051C-D; and von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II.1103 (p320).

¹²¹ The vengeance which he wreaked on his father Uranus.

¹²² Homer, *Il.* VI.135 ff. If φθόρον is read ("destructions wrought by Dionysus") there would be also a reference to the death of Pentheus as portrayed in the *Bacchae* of Euripides. Cf. also *Moralia*, 996C.

¹²³ The word is found forty-four times in Homer.

¹²⁴ Homer employs this expression sixty-two times.

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gods,"¹²⁵ but that the epithet derived from the demigods (or daemons) he uses of the worthy and worthless alike,¹²⁶ for example:

Daemon-possessed, come on! Why seek you to frighten the Argives
Thus?¹²⁷

and again

When for the fourth time onward he came with a rush, like a daemon;¹²⁸

and

Daemon-possessed, in what do Priam and children of Priam
Work you such ill that your soul is ever relentlessly eager
Ilium, fair-built city, to bring to complete desolation?¹²⁹

The assumption, then, is that the demigods (or daemons) have a complex and inconsistent nature and purpose; wherefore Plato¹³⁰ assigns to the Olympian gods right-hand qualities and odd numbers, and to the demigods the opposite of these. b) Xenocrates also is of the opinion that such days as are days of ill omen, and such festivals as have associated with them either beatings or lamentations or fastings or scurrilous language or ribald jests have no relation to the honours paid to the gods or to worthy demigods, but he believes that there exist in the space about us certain great and powerful natures, obdurate, however, and morose, which take pleasure in such things as these, and, if they succeed in obtaining them, resort to nothing worse.

Then again, Hesiod calls the worthy and good [p. 65] demigods "holy deities" and "guardians of mortals"¹³¹ and

Givers of wealth, and having therein a reward that is kingly.¹³²

c) Plato¹³³ calls this class of beings an interpretative and ministering class, midway between gods and men, in that they convey thither the prayers and petitions of men, and thence they bring hither the oracles and the gifts of good things.

Empedocles¹³⁴ says also that the demigods must pay the penalty for the sins that they commit and the duties that they neglect:

Might of the Heavens chases them forth to the realm of the Ocean;
Ocean spews them out on the soil of the Earth, and Earth drives them

¹²⁵ See Homer, *Od.* VI.12.

¹²⁶ Cf. [415A, infra](#).

¹²⁷ *Iliad*, XIII.810.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* V.438, XIV.705, XX.447.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* IV.31.

¹³⁰ Plato, *Laws*, 717A, assigns the Even and the Left to the chthonic deities, and Plutarch quite correctly derives his statement from this.

¹³¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 123 and 253. Cf. [Moralia, 431E, infra](#).

¹³² *Works and Days*, 126, repeated in [417B, infra](#).

¹³³ *Symposium*, 202E. Cf. also *Moralia*, [415A](#) and [416C-E, infra](#), and [Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiq. I.77](#).

¹³⁴ Part of a longer passage from Empedocles; cf. H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, I. p267, Empedocles, no. 115, 9-12. Cf. also *Moralia*, 830F.

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Straight to the rays of the tireless Sun, who consigns them to Heaven's Whirlings; thus one from another receives them, but ever with loathing;

until, when they have thus been chastened and purified, they recover the place and position to which they belong in accord with Nature.

27. d) Stories akin to these and to others like them they say are related about Typhon; how that, prompted by jealousy and hostility, he wrought terrible deeds and, by bringing utter confusion upon all things, filled the whole Earth, and the ocean as well, with ills, and later paid the penalty therefor. [p. 67] But the avenger, the sister and wife of Osiris, after she had quenched and suppressed the madness and fury of Typhon, was not indifferent to the contests and struggles which she had endured, nor to her own wanderings nor to her manifold deeds of wisdom and many feats of bravery, nor would she accept oblivion and silence for them, but she intermingled in the most holy rites portrayals and suggestions and representations of her experiences at that time, and sanctified them, both as a lesson in godliness and an encouragement for men e) and women who find themselves in the clutch of like calamities. She herself and Osiris, translated for their virtues from good demigods into gods,¹³⁵ as were Heracles and Dionysus later,¹³⁶ not incongruously enjoy double honours, both those of gods and those of demigods, and their powers extend everywhere, but are greatest in the regions above the earth and beneath the earth. In fact, men assert that Pluto is none other than Serapis and that Persephonê is Isis, even as Archemachus¹³⁷ of Euboea has said, and also Heracleides Ponticus¹³⁸ who holds the oracle in Canopus to be f) an oracle of Pluto.

28. Ptolemy Soter saw in a dream the colossal statue of Pluto in Sinopê, not knowing nor having ever seen how it looked, and in his dream the statue bade him convey it with all speed to Alexandria. He had no information and no means of knowing where the statue was situated, but as he related the vision to his friends there was discovered for him a much travelled man by the name of Sosibius, who said that [p. 69] he had seen in Sinopê just such a great statue as the king thought he saw. Ptolemy, therefore, sent Soteles and Dionysius, who, after a considerable time and with great difficulty, and not without the help of divine providence, [362] succeeded in stealing the statue and bringing it away.¹³⁹ When it had been conveyed to Egypt and exposed to view, Timotheus, the expositor of sacred law, and Manetho of Sebennytus, and their associates, conjectured that it was the statue of Pluto, basing their conjecture on the Cerberus and the serpent with it, and they convinced Ptolemy that it was the statue of none other of the gods but Serapis. It certainly did not bear this name when it came for Sinope, but, after it had been conveyed to Alexandria, it took to itself the name which Pluto bears among the Egyptians, that of Serapis. Moreover, since Heracleitus¹⁴⁰ the physical philosopher says, "The same are Hades and Dionysus, to honour whom they rage and rave," people are inclined to come to this opinion. In fact, those who insist that b) the body is called Hades, since the soul is, as it were, deranged and inebriate when it is in the body, are too frivolous in their use of allegory. It is better to

¹³⁵ Cf. 363E, *infra*.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Moralia*, 857D.

¹³⁷ Müller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.* IV. p315, no. 7.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* II.198 or *Frag.* 103, ed. Voss. Thayer's Notes on 'dream': If in the account of the cult of Serapis that follows, Plutarch seems confused, he has good reason to be: no one yet has been able to get to the bottom of it. For further data — and further bewilderment — see [Bevan's House of Ptolemy, p43 ff.](#)

¹³⁹ Cf. *Moralia*, 984A; [Tacitus, Histories, IV.83-84](#), who tells the story more dramatically and with more detail; (p69)Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, IV.48 (p42 Potter); Origen, *Against Celsus*, V.38.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Diels, *Frag. der Vorsokratiker*, I.81, Heracleitus no. 14.

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identify Osiris with Dionysus¹⁴¹ and Serapis with Osiris,¹⁴² who received this appellation at the time when he changed his nature. For this reason Serapis is a god of all peoples in common, even as Osiris is; and this they who have participated in the holy rites well know. [p. 71]

29. It is not worth while to pay any attention to the Phrygian writings,¹⁴³ in which it is said that Serapis was the son of Heracles, and Isis was his daughter, and Typhon was the son of Alcaeus, who also was a son of Heracles; nor must we fail to condemn Phylarchus, who writes that Dionysus was the first to bring from India into Egypt two bulls, c) and that the name of one was Apis and of the other Osiris. But Serapis is the name of him who sets the universe in order, and it is derived from "sweep" (*sairein*), which some say means "to beautify" and "to put in order."¹⁴⁴ As a matter of fact, these statements of Phylarchus are absurd, but even more absurd are those put forth by those who say that Serapis is no god at all, but the name of the coffin of Apis; and that there are in Memphis certain bronze gates called the Gates of Oblivion and Lamentation,¹⁴⁵ which are opened when the burial of Apis takes place, and they give out a deep and harsh sound; and it is because of this that we lay hand upon anything of bronze that gives out a sound.¹⁴⁶ More moderate is the statement of those who say that the derivation¹⁴⁷ is from "shoot" (*seuesthai*) or "scoot" (*sousthai*), meaning the general movement of the universe. d) Most of the priests say that Osiris and Apis are conjoined into one, thus explaining to us and informing us that we must regard Apis as the bodily image of the soul of Osiris.¹⁴⁸ But [p. 73] it is my opinion that, if the name Serapis is Egyptian, it denotes cheerfulness and rejoicing, and I base this opinion on the fact that Egyptians call their festival of rejoicing *sairei*. In fact, Plato¹⁴⁹ says that Hades is so named because he is a beneficent and gentle god towards those who have come to abide with him. Moreover, among the Egyptians many others of the proper names are real words; for example, that place beneath the earth, to which they believe that souls depart after the end of this life, they call Amenthes, the name signifying "the one who receives and gives." e) Whether this is one of those words which came from Greece in very ancient times and were brought back again¹⁵⁰ we will consider later,¹⁵¹ but for the present let us go on to discuss the remainder of the views now before us.

30. Now Osiris and Isis changed from good minor deities into gods.¹⁵² But the power of Typhon, weakened and crushed, but still fighting and struggling against extinction, they try to console and mollify by certain sacrifices; but again there are times when, f) at certain festivals, they humiliate and insult him by assailing red-headed men with jeering, and by throwing an ass over the edge of a precipice, as the people of Kopto do, because Typhon had red hair and in colour resembled an ass.¹⁵³ The people of Busiris¹⁵⁴ and Lycopolis do not use trumpets at all, because these make a sound like an ass;¹⁵⁵ and altogether they [p. 75] regard the ass as an unclean animal dominated by

¹⁴¹ Cf. [356B](#), *supra*, and [364D](#), *infra*.

¹⁴² Cf. [376A](#), *infra*, and Pauly-Wissowa, s.v. Sarapis (vol. I. A, col. 2394).

¹⁴³ Cf. [Cicero, De Natura Deorum, III.16 \(42\)](#).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Pauly-Wissowa, *l.c.*, col. 2396-2397, for other etymologies. The derivation from *sairein* (sweep) is wholly fanciful.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. [Diodorus, I.96](#), and [Pausanias, I.18.4](#), with Frazer's note.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. [Moralia, 995E-F](#); Aristotle, *Frag. 196* (ed. Rose); or Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 41.

¹⁴⁷ This derivation (from *seuesthai* or *sousthai*) is also fanciful.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. [359B](#), *supra*, and [368C](#), *infra*, and [Diodorus, I.85.4-5](#).

¹⁴⁹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 403A-404A, suggests various derivations of the name Hades.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. [375E-F](#), *infra*.

¹⁵¹ Cf. [375D](#), *infra*.

¹⁵² Cf. [361E](#), *supra*.

¹⁵³ Cf. [359E](#), *supra*, and [364A](#), *infra*; for Kopto cf. [356D](#).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Moralia*, 150E-F.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, X.28.

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some higher power because of its resemblance to Typhon,¹⁵⁶ and when they make cakes at their sacrifices in the month of Paῖni and of Phaophi they imprint upon them the device of an ass tied by a rope.¹⁵⁷ [363] Moreover, in the sacrifice to the Sun they enjoin upon their worshippers not to wear any golden ornaments nor to give fodder to an ass. It is plain that the adherents of Pythagoras hold Typhon to be a daemonic power; for they say that he was born in an even factor of fifty-six; and the dominion of the triangle belongs to Hades, Dionysus, and Ares, that of the quadrilateral to Rhea, Aphroditê, Demeter, Hestia, and Hera, that of the dodecagon to Zeus,¹⁵⁸ that of a polygon of fifty-six sides to Typhon, as Eudoxus has recorded.

31. b) The Egyptians, because of their belief that Typhon was of a red complexion,¹⁵⁹ also dedicate to sacrifice such of their neat cattle as are of a red colour,¹⁶⁰ but they conduct the examination of these so scrupulously that, if an animal has but one hair black or white, they think it wrong to sacrifice it;¹⁶¹ for they regard as suitable for sacrifice not what is dear to the gods but the reverse, namely, such animals as have incarnate in them souls of unholy and unrighteous men who have been transformed into other bodies. For this reason they invoke curses on the head of the victim and cut it off, and in early times they used to [p. 77] throw it into the river, but now they sell it to aliens.¹⁶² Upon the neat animal intended for sacrifice c) those of the priests who were called "Sealers"¹⁶³ used to put a mark; and their seal, as Castor records, bore an engraving of a man with his knee on the ground and his hands tied behind his back, and with a sword at his throat.¹⁶⁴ They think, as has been said,¹⁶⁵ that the ass reaps the consequences of his resemblance because of his stupidity and his lascivious behaviour no less than because of his colour. This is also the reason why, since they hated Ochus¹⁶⁶ most of all the Persian kings because he was a detested and abominable ruler, they nicknamed him "the Ass"; and he remarked, "But this Ass will feast upon your Bull," and slaughtered Apis, as Deinon has recorded. But those who relate d) that Typhon's flight from the battle was made on the back of an ass and lasted for seven days, and that after he had made his escape, he became the father of sons, Hierosolymus and Judaeus, are manifestly, as the very names show, attempting to drag Jewish traditions¹⁶⁷ into the legend.

32. Such, then, are the possible interpretations which these facts suggest. But now let us begin over again, and consider first the most perspicuous of those who have a reputation for expounding matters more philosophically. These men are like the Greeks who say that Cronus is but a figurative name for Chronus¹⁶⁸ (Time), Hera for Air, and that the birth of Hephaestus symbolises the change of Air into Fire.¹⁶⁹ And thus among the Egyptians such men say that Osiris is the [p. 79] Nile consorting with the Earth, which is Isis, and that the sea is Typhon into which the Nile discharges its waters and is lost to view and dissipated, e) save for that part which the earth takes up and absorbs and thereby becomes fertilized.¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Moralia*, 150F.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. 371D, *infra*.

¹⁵⁸ As the chief of the twelve gods presumably; cf. [Herodotus, II.4](#).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. 359E, *supra*, and 364A, *infra*.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. [Diodorus, I.88](#).

¹⁶¹ Cf. [Herodotus, II.38](#), and [Diodorus, I.88](#).

¹⁶² "To Greeks," says [Herodotus, II.39](#). Cf. Deuteronomy xiv.21, "Thou shalt give it (*sc.* anything that dieth of itself) unto the stranger that is in thy gates . . . or thou mayest sell it unto an alien."

¹⁶³ Cf. [Herodotus, II.38](#), and Porphyry, *De Abstinencia*, IV.7.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. [Diodorus, I.88.4-5](#).

¹⁶⁵ 362F, *supra*.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. 355C, *supra*, and [Aelian, Varia Historia, IV.8](#).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. [Tacitus, Histories, V.2](#).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. [Cicero, De Natura Deorum, II.25 \(64\)](#).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. 392C, *infra*.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 366A, *infra*.

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There is also a religious lament sung over Cronus.¹⁷¹ The lament is for him that is born in the regions on the left, and suffers dissolution in the regions on the right; for the Egyptians believe that the eastern regions are the face of the world, the northern the right, and the southern the left.¹⁷² The Nile, therefore, which runs from the south and is swallowed up by the sea in the north, is naturally said to have its birth on the left and its dissolution on the right. For this reason the priests religiously keep themselves aloof from the sea, and call salt the "spume of Typhon"; and one of the things forbidden them is to set salt upon a table;¹⁷³ also they do not speak to pilots,¹⁷⁴ because these men make use of the sea, and gain their livelihood from the sea. This is also not the least of the reasons why they eschew fish,¹⁷⁵ and they portray hatred by drawing the picture of a fish. At Saïs in the vestibule of the temple of Athena was carved a babe and an aged man, and after this a hawk, and next a fish, and finally an hippopotamus. The symbolic meaning of this was:¹⁷⁶ "O ye that are coming into the world [p. 81] and departing from it, God hateth shamelessness." The babe is the symbol of coming into the world and the aged man the symbol of departing from it, and by a hawk they indicate God,¹⁷⁷ by the fish hatred, as has already been said,¹⁷⁸ because of the sea, and by the hippopotamus shamelessness; [364] for it is said that he kills his sire¹⁷⁹ and forces his mother to mate with him. That saying of the adherents of Pythagoras, that the sea is a tear of Cronus,¹⁸⁰ may seem to hint at its impure and extraneous nature. Let this, then, be stated incidentally, as a matter of record that is common knowledge.

33. But the wiser of the priests call not only the Nile Osiris and the sea Typhon, but they simply give the name of Osiris to the whole source and faculty creative of moisture,¹⁸¹ believing this to be the cause of generation and the substance of life-producing seed; and the name of Typhon they give to all that is dry, fiery, and arid,¹⁸² in general, and antagonistic to moisture. b) Therefore, because they believe that he was personally of a reddish sallow colour,¹⁸³ they are not eager to meet men of such complexion, nor do they like to associate with them.

Osiris, on the other hand, according to their legendary tradition, was dark,¹⁸⁴ because water darkens everything, earth and clothes and clouds, when it comes into contact with them.¹⁸⁵ In young people the presence of moisture renders their hair black, while greyness, like a paleness as it were, is induced by [p. 83] dryness in those who are passing their prime.¹⁸⁶ Also the spring-time is vigorous, prolific, and agreeable; but the autumn, since it lacks moisture, is inimical to plants and c) unhealthful for living creatures. The bull kept at Heliopolis which they call

¹⁷¹ For Cronus as representing rivers and water see Pauly-Wissowa, XI.1987-1988.

¹⁷² Cf. *Moralia*, [282D-E](#) and 729B.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 685A and 729A.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 729C.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. [353C](#), *supra*.

¹⁷⁶ There is a lacuna in one MS. (E) at this point (God hateth . . . of departing from it). The supplement is from Clement of Alexandria; see the critical note. The critical note to the Greek text is: θεός . . . δ' ὁ γέρων is supplied from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, V.41.4 (p670 Potter): θεο . . . γέρων or δεογέρων. If it were not for the lacuna in E, it would be possible to emend ὃ γινόμενοι καὶ ἀπογινόμενοι εὐόικαμεν.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. [371E](#), *infra*.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. [353C](#), *supra*.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Porphyry, *De Abstinencia*, III.23.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, V.50.1 (p676 Potter), and Aristotle, *Frag.* 196 (ed. Rose).

¹⁸¹ Cf. [365B](#), *infra*.

¹⁸² Cf. [369A](#) and [376F](#), *infra*.

¹⁸³ Cf. [359E](#) and [363B](#), *supra*.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. [359E](#), *supra*.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Moralia*, [950A](#).

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium*, V.1 (780B 6).

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Mneuis,¹⁸⁷ and which is sacred to Osiris (some hold it to be the sire of Apis), is black and has honours second only to Apis. Egypt, moreover, which has the blackest of soils,¹⁸⁸ they call by the same name as the black portion of the eye, "Chemia," and compare it to a heart;¹⁸⁹ for it is warm and moist and is enclosed by the southern portions of the inhabited world and adjoins them, like the heart in a man's left side.

34. They say that the sun and moon do not use chariots, but boats¹⁹⁰ in which to sail round in their courses; d) and by this they intimate that the nourishment and origin of these heavenly bodies is from moisture. They think also that Homer,¹⁹¹ like Thales, had gained his knowledge from the Egyptians, when he postulated water as the source and origin of all things; for, according to them, Oceanus is Osiris, and Tethys is Isis, since she is the kindly nurse and provider for all things. In fact, the Greeks call emission *apousia*¹⁹² and coition *synousia*, and the son (*hyios*) from water (*hydor*) and rain (*hysai*); Dionysus also they call Hyes¹⁹³ since he is lord of the nature of moisture; and he is no other than Osiris.¹⁹⁴ In fact, Hellanicus seems [p. 85] to have heard Osiris pronounced Hysiris by the priests, for he regularly spells the name in this way, deriving it, in all probability, e) from the nature of Osiris and the ceremony of finding him.¹⁹⁵

35. That Osiris is identical with Dionysus who could more fittingly know than yourself, Clea? For you are at the head of the inspired maidens of Delphi, and have been consecrated by your father and mother in the holy rites of Osiris. If, however, for the benefit of others it is needful to adduce proofs of this identity, let us leave undisturbed what may not be told, but the public ceremonies which the priests perform in the burial of the Apis, when they convey his body on an improvised bier, do not in any way come short of a Bacchic procession; for they fasten skins of fawns about themselves, and carry [Bacchic wands](#) *θύρσους*, 'thyrsi' f) and indulge in shoutings and movements exactly as do those who are under the spell of the Dionysiac ecstasies.¹⁹⁶ For the same reason many of the Greeks make statues of Dionysus in the form of a bull,¹⁹⁷ and the women of Elis invoke him, praying that the god may come with the hoof of a bull;¹⁹⁸ and the epithet applied to Dionysus among the Argives is "Son of the Bull." They call him up out of the water by the sound of trumpets,¹⁹⁹ at the same time casting into the depths a lamb as an offering to the Keeper of the Gate. The trumpets they conceal in Bacchic wands, as Socrates²⁰⁰ has stated in his treatise on *The Holy Ones*. Furthermore, [p. 87] the tales regarding the Titans and the rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regeneration. [365] Similar agreement is found too in the tales about their

¹⁸⁷ Cf. [Diodorus, I.21](#); Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.* III.13.1-3; Strabo, XVII.1.22; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, XI.11. Thayer's Notes: Cf. Celsus, de Medicina [I.3.37](#); II. [1.1-2](#), [1.8-9](#), [8.24](#), [8.40](#), [8.42](#); [V.26.6](#); [VII.14.8](#) — although for various different reasons. Celsus does, however, at one point specifically associate autumn with dryness ([prooem.6](#)).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. [Herodotus, II.12](#).

¹⁸⁹ Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica*, I.22.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, V.41.2 (p566 Potter); Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.* III.11.48.

¹⁹¹ *Il.* XIV.201.

¹⁹² Cf. Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, I.78.

¹⁹³ Cf. the name Hyades of the constellation.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. [356B](#), [362B](#), *supra*, and [365A](#), *infra*.

¹⁹⁵ See [366F](#), *infra*.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. [Diodorus, I.11](#).

¹⁹⁷ A partial list in Roscher, *Lexikon d. gr. u. röm. Mythologie*, I.1149.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Moralia*, 299A, where the invocation is given at greater length; also Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca*, III. p510 (L. C. L.).

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *Moralia*, 671E.

²⁰⁰ Müller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.* IV. p498, Socrates, no. 5.

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sepulchres. The Egyptians, as has already been stated,²⁰¹ point out tombs of Osiris in many places, and the people of Delphi believe that the remains of Dionysus rest with them close beside the oracle; and the Holy Ones offer a secret sacrifice in the shrine of Apollo whenever the devotees of Dionysus²⁰² wake the God of the Mystic Basket.²⁰³ To show that the Greeks regard Dionysus as the lord and master not only of wine, but of the nature of every sort of moisture, it is enough that Pindar²⁰⁴ be our witness, when he says

May gladsome Dionysus swell the fruit upon the trees,
The hallowed splendour of harvest time.

b) For this reason all who reverence Osiris are prohibited from destroying a cultivated tree or blocking up a spring of water.

36. Not only the Nile, but every form of moisture²⁰⁵ they call simply the effusion of Osiris; and in their holy rites the water jar in honour of the god heads the procession.²⁰⁶ And by the picture of a rush they represent a king and the southern region of the world,²⁰⁷ and the rush is interpreted to mean the watering and fructifying of all things, and in its nature it seems to bear some resemblance to the generative member. Moreover, when they celebrate the festival of the Pamyliia which, as has been said,²⁰⁸ is of a phallic member, they expose and carry about a statue of which the male member is triple;²⁰⁹ for the god is the Source, and every source, by its fecundity, multiplies what proceeds from it; and for "many times" we have a habit of saying "thrice," c) as, for example, "thrice happy,"²¹⁰ and

Bonds, even thrice as many, unnumbered,²¹¹

unless, indeed, the word "triple" is used by the early writers in its strict meaning; for the nature of moisture, being the source and origin of all things, created out of itself three primal material substances, Earth, Air and Fire. In fact, the tale that is annexed to the legend to the effect that Typhon cast the male member of Osiris into the river, and Isis could not find it, but constructed and shaped a replica of it, and ordained that it should be honoured and borne in processions,²¹² plainly comes round to this doctrine, that the creative and germinal power of the god, at the very first, acquired moisture as its substance, and through moisture combined with whatever was by nature capable of participating in generation.

d) There is another tale current among the Egyptians that Apopis, brother of the Sun, made war upon Zeus, and that because Osiris espoused Zeus's cause and helped him to overthrow his enemy, Zeus adopted Osiris as his son and gave him the name of Dionysus. It may be demonstrated that the legend contained in this tale has some approximation to truth so far as [p. 91] Nature is concerned; for the Egyptians apply the name "Zeus" to the wind,²¹³ and whatever is

²⁰¹ [358A](#) and [359A](#), *supra*.

²⁰² That is, the inspired maidens, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

²⁰³ Callimachus, *Hymn to Demeter* (vi.), 127; *Anth. Pal.* VI.165; Virgil, *Georg.* I.166.

²⁰⁴ *Frag.* 153 (Christ). Plutarch quotes the line also in *Moralia*, 745A and 757F.

²⁰⁵ Cf. [366A](#), [371B](#), *infra*, and 729B.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VI.31.1 (p758 Potter).

²⁰⁷ Such a symbol exists on Egyptian monuments.

²⁰⁸ [355E](#), *supra*.

²⁰⁹ Cf. [371F](#), *infra*, [Herodotus, II.48](#), and Egyptian monuments.

²¹⁰ Homer, *Od.* V.306, and VI.154. It is interesting that G. H. Palmer translates this "most happy."

²¹¹ *Ibid.* VIII.340.

²¹² Cf. [358B](#), *supra*.

²¹³ Cf. [Diodorus, I.12.2](#).

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dry or fiery is antagonistic to this. This is not the Sun, but it has some kinship with the Sun; and the moisture, e) by doing away with the excess of dryness, increases and strengthens the exhalations by which the wind is fostered and made vigorous.

37. Moreover, the Greeks are wont to consecrate the ivy²¹⁴ to Dionysus, and it is said that among the Egyptians the name for ivy is chenosis, the meaning of the name being, as they say, "the plant of Osiris." Now, Ariston,²¹⁵ the author of *Athenian Colonization*, happened upon a letter of Alexarchus, in which it is recorded that Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Isis, and is called not Osiris, but Arsaphes, spelled with an "a," the name denoting virility. f) Hermaeus²¹⁶, too, makes this statement in the first volume of his book *The Egyptians*; for he says that Osiris, properly interpreted, means "sturdy." I leave out of account Mnaseas's²¹⁷ annexation of Dionysus, Osiris, and Serapis to Epaphus, as well as Anticleides²¹⁸ statement that Isis was the daughter of Prometheus²¹⁹ and was wedded to Dionysus.²²⁰ The fact is that the peculiarities already mentioned regarding the festival and sacrifices carry a conviction more manifest than any testimony of authorities.

38. Of the stars the Egyptians think that the Dog-star is the star of Isis,²²¹ because it is the bringer of water.²²² [366] They also hold the Lion in honour, and they [p. 93] adorn the doorways of their shrines with gaping lions' heads,²²³ because the Nile overflows

When for the first time the Sun comes into conjunction with Leo.²²⁴

As they regard the Nile as the effusion of Osiris,²²⁵ so they hold and believe the earth to be the body of Isis, not all of it, but so much of it as the Nile covers, fertilizing it and uniting with it.²²⁶ From this union they make Horus to be born. The all-conserving and fostering Hora, that is the seasonable tempering of the surrounding air, is Horus, who they say was brought up by Leto in the marshes round about Buto;²²⁷ for the watery and saturated land best nurtures b) those exhalations which quench and abate aridity and dryness.

The outmost parts of the land beside the mountains and bordering on the sea the Egyptians call Nephthys. This is why they give to Nephthys the name of "Finality,"²²⁸ and say that she is the wife of Typhon. Whenever, then, the Nile overflows and with abounding waters spreads far away to those who dwell in the outermost regions, they call this the union of Osiris with Nephthys,²²⁹ which is proved by the upspringing of the plants. Among these is the melilotus,²³⁰ by the wilting and failing of which, as the story goes, Typhon gained knowledge of the wrong done to his bed. c) So Isis gave birth to Horus in lawful wedlock, but Nephthys bore Anubis

²¹⁴ [Diodorus, I.17.4.](#)

²¹⁵ Müller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.* III. p324.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* IV. p427.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* III. p155.

²¹⁸ Cf. Jacoby, *Frag. Gr. Hist.* 140, no. 13.

²¹⁹ Cf. [352A](#), *supra*.

²²⁰ Cf. [Herodotus, II.156](#).

²²¹ Cf. [359D](#), *supra*, and [376A](#), *infra*.

²²² In the Nile.

²²³ Cf. *Moralia*, 670C; Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica*, I.21.

²²⁴ Aratus, *Phaenomena*, 151. The Dog-star rises at about the same time.

²²⁵ Cf. [the note on 365B](#), *supra*.

²²⁶ Cf. [363D](#), *supra*.

²²⁷ Cf. [357E](#), *supra*.

²²⁸ Cf. [355E](#), *supra*, and [375B](#), *infra*.

²²⁹ Cf. [the note on 356E](#), *supra*.

²³⁰ Cf. [356E](#), *supra*.

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clandestinely. However, in the chronological lists of the kings they record that [p. 95] Nephthys, after her marriage to Typhon, was at first barren. If they say this, not about a woman, but about the goddess, they must mean by it the utter barrenness and unproductivity of the earth resulting from a hard-baked soil.

39. The insidious scheming and usurpation of Typhon, then, is the power of drought, which gains control and dissipates the moisture which is the source of the Nile and of its rising; and his coadjutor, the Queen of the Ethiopians,²³¹ signifies allegorically the south winds from Ethiopia; for whenever these gain the upper hand over the northerly or Etesian winds²³² which drive the clouds towards Ethiopia, d) and when they prevent the falling of the rains which cause the rising of the Nile, then Typhon, being in possession, blazes with scorching heat; and having gained complete mastery, he forces the Nile in retreat to draw back its waters for weakness, and, flowing at the bottom of its almost empty channel, to proceed to the sea. The story told of the shutting up of Osiris in the chest seems to mean nothing else than the vanishing and disappearance of water. Consequently they say that the disappearance of Osiris occurred in the month of Athyr,²³³ at the time when, owing to the complete cessation of the Etesian winds, the Nile recedes to its low level and the land becomes denuded. As the nights grow longer, the darkness increases, e) and the potency of the light is abated and subdued. Then among the gloomy rites which the priests perform, they shroud the gilded image of a cow with a black linen vestment, and display her as a sign of mourning for the goddess, inasmuch as they regard both the cow and the earth²³⁴ [p. 97] as the image of Isis; and this is kept up for four days consecutively, beginning with the seventeenth of the month. The things mourned for are four in number: first, the departure and recession of the Nile; second, the complete extinction of the north winds, as the south winds gain the upper hand; third, the day's growing shorter than the night; and, to crown all, the denudation of the earth together with the defoliation of the trees and shrubs at this time. On the nineteenth day f) they go down to the sea at night-time; and the keepers of the robes and the priests bring forth the sacred chest containing a small golden coffer, into which they pour some potable water which they have taken up, and a great shout arises from the company for joy that Osiris is found. Then they knead some fertile soil with the water and mix in spices and incense of a very costly sort, and fashion therefrom a crescent-shaped figure, which they clothe and adorn, thus indicating that they regard these gods as the substance of Earth and Water.

40. When Isis recovered Osiris and was watching Horus grow up²³⁵ [367] as he was being made strong by the exhalations and mists and clouds, Typhon was vanquished but not annihilated;²³⁶ for the goddess who holds sway over the Earth would not permit the complete annihilation of the nature opposed to moisture, but relaxed and moderated it, being desirous that its tempering potency should persist, because it was not possible for a complete world to exist, if the fiery element left it and disappeared. Even if this story were not current among them, one would hardly [p. 99] be justified in rejecting that other account, to the effect that Typhon, many ages ago, held sway over Osiris's domain; for Egypt used to be all a sea,²³⁷ and, for that reason, b) even today it is found to have shells in its mines and mountains.²³⁸ Moreover, all the springs and

²³¹ Cf. [356B](#), *supra*.

²³² Cf. *Moralia*, 898A, and [Diodorus, I.39](#).

²³³ The month of November. Cf. [356C](#), *supra*.

²³⁴ Cf. [366A](#), *supra*.

²³⁵ Cf. [357C-F](#), *supra*.

²³⁶ Cf. [358D](#), *supra*.

²³⁷ Cf. [Herodotus, II.5](#); Diodorus, [III.3](#), and [I.39.11](#).

²³⁸ Cf. [Herodotus, II.12](#).

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wells, of which there are many, have a saline and brackish water, as if some stale dregs of the ancient sea had collected there.

But, in time, Horus overpowered Typhon; that is to say, there came on a timely abundance of rain, and the Nile forced out the sea and revealed the fertile land, which it filled out with its alluvial deposits. This has support in the testimony of our own observation; for we see, even today, as the river brings down new silt c) and advances the land, that the deep waters gradually recede and, as the bottom gains in height by reason of the alluvial deposits, the water of the sea runs off from these. We also note that Pharos, which Homer²³⁹ knew as distant a day's sail from Egypt, is now a part of it; not that the island has extended its area by rising, or has come nearer to the land, but the sea that separated them was obliged to retire before the river, as the river reshaped the land and made it to increase.

The fact is that all this is somewhat like the doctrines promulgated by the Stoics²⁴⁰ about the gods; for they say that the creative and fostering spirit is Dionysus, the truculent and destructive is Heracles, the receptive is Ammon, that which pervades the Earth and its products is Demeter and the Daughter, [p. 101] and that which pervades the Sea is Poseidon.²⁴¹

41. But the Egyptians, by combining with these physical explanations some of the scientific results derived from astronomy, think that d) by Typhon is meant the solar world, and by Osiris the lunar world; they reason that the moon, because it has a light that is generative and productive of moisture,²⁴² is kindly towards the young of animals and the burgeoning plants, whereas the sun, by its untempered and pitiless heat, makes all growing and flourishing vegetation hot and parched, and, through its blazing light, renders a large part of the earth uninhabitable, and in many a region overpowers the moon. For this reason the Egyptians regularly call Typhon "Seth,"²⁴³ which, being interpreted, means "overmastering and compelling." e) They have a legend that Heracles, making his dwelling in the sun, is a companion for it in its revolutions, as is the case also with Hermes and the moon. In fact, the actions of the moon are like actions of reason and perfect wisdom, whereas those of the sun are like beatings administered through violence and brute strength. The Stoics²⁴⁴ assert that the sun is kindled and fed from the sea, but that for the moon the moving waters from the springs and lakes send up a sweet and mild exhalation.

42. The Egyptians have a legend that the end of Osiris's life came on the seventeenth of the month, on which day it is quite evident to the eye that the period of the full moon is over.²⁴⁵ f) Because of this the [p. 103] Pythagoreans call this day "the Barrier," and utterly abominate this number. For the number seventeen, coming in between the square sixteen and the oblong rectangle eighteen, which, as it happens, are the only plane figures that have their perimeters

²³⁹ *Od.* IV.356. Cf. also Strabo, XII.2.4 (p536), and XVII.1.6 (p791).

²⁴⁰ Cf. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II.1093 (p319).

²⁴¹ Cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, [I.15 \(40\)](#), [II.28 \(71\)](#); and Diogenes Laertius, VII.147.

²⁴² Cf. 658B, *infra*.

²⁴³ Cf. [371B](#) and [376A](#), *infra*.

²⁴⁴ Von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II 663. Cf. also Diogenes Laertius, VII.145; and Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum*, 11.

²⁴⁵ Fourteen days, or one half of a lunar month, before the ἔνη καὶ νέα, if the lunar month could ever be made to square with any system of chronology!

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equal their areas,²⁴⁶ bars them off from each other and disjoins them, and breaks up the ratio of eight to eight and an eighth²⁴⁷ by its division into unequal intervals.

Some say that the years of Osiris's life, others that the years of his reign, were twenty-eight;²⁴⁸ [368] for that is the number of the moon's illuminations, and in that number of days does she complete her cycle. The wood which they cut on the occasions called the "burials of Osiris" they fashion into a crescent-shaped coffer because of the fact that the moon, when it comes near the sun, becomes crescent-shaped and disappears from our sight. The dismemberment of Osiris into fourteen parts they refer allegorically to the days of the waning of that satellite from the time of the full moon to the new moon. b) And the day on which she becomes visible after escaping the solar rays and passing by the sun they style "Incomplete Good"; for Osiris is beneficent, and his name means many things, but, not least of all, an active and beneficent power, as they put it. The other name of the god, Omphis, Hermaeus says means "benefactor" when interpreted.

43. They think that the risings of the Nile have some relation to the illuminations of the moon; for [p. 105] the greatest rising,²⁴⁹ in the neighbourhood of Elephantinê, is twenty-eight cubits, which is the number of its illuminations that form the measure of each of its monthly cycles; the rising in the neighbourhood of Mendes and Xoïs, which is the least, is six cubits, corresponding to the first quarter. The mean rising, in the neighbourhood of Memphis, when it is normal, is fourteen cubits, corresponding to the full moon. [c]

The Apis, they say, is the animate image of Osiris,²⁵⁰ and he comes into being when a fructifying light thrusts forth from the moon and falls upon a cow in her breeding-season.²⁵¹ Wherefore there are many things in the Apis that resemble features of the moon, his bright parts being darkened by the shadowy. Moreover, at the time of the new moon in the month of Phamenoth they celebrate a festival to which they give the name of "Osiris's coming to the Moon," and this marks the beginning of the spring. Thus they make the power of Osiris to be fixed in the Moon, and say that Isis, since she is generation, is associated with him. For this reason they also call the Moon the mother of the world, and they think that she has a nature both male and female, as she is receptive and made pregnant by the Sun, d) but she herself in turn emits and disseminates into the air generative principles. For, as they believe, the destructive activity of Typhon does not always prevail, but oftentimes is overpowered by such generation and put in bonds, and then at a later time is again released and contends against Horus,²⁵² who is the terrestrial universe; and this is never completely exempt either from dissolution or from generation. [p. 107]

44. There are some who would make the legend an allegorical reference to matters touching eclipses; for the Moon suffers eclipse only when she is full, with the Sun directly opposite to her, and she falls into the shadow of the Earth, as they say Osiris fell into his coffin. Then again, the

²⁴⁶ That is: $4 \times 4 = 16$ and $4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16$; so also $3 \times 6 = 18$ and $3 + 6 + 3 + 6 = 18$. **Thayer's Note:** More generally, 16 and 18 represent solutions $(x=4, y=4)$ and $(x=3, y=6)$ of the hyperbolic equation $xy = 2x + 2y$ which in modern terms has an infinity of solutions; Plutarch is saying that $(x=4, y=4)$, $(x=3, y=6)$, and $(x=6, y=3)$ are the only *integral* solutions. To his positive solutions we would add today three more, at $(x=0, y=0)$, $(x=1, y=-2)$ and $(x=-2, y=1)$: they are symmetrical to Plutarch's set with respect to the two asymptotes, and in terms of geometry represent one null and two imaginary rectangles. In theory, to find any others we are suddenly transported into the very difficult realm of Diophantine equations; but that these are the only five integral solutions can be seen instantly by inspecting the graph. Plutarch's square, and one of his two symmetrical rectangles, are shaded.

²⁴⁷ That is, $1/8$ of a number added to itself: thus $16 + (16/8) = 18$. Eighteen, therefore, bears the epegdoon relation to sixteen, which is broken up by the intervention of seventeen, an odd number.

²⁴⁸ Cf. 358A, *supra*.

²⁴⁹ Besides the famous ancient Nilometer at Elephantinê, others have been found at Philae, Edfu, and Esna.

²⁵⁰ Cf. 359B and 362C, *supra*.

²⁵¹ Cf. *Moralia*, 718B, and Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, XI.10.

²⁵² Cf. 358D, *supra*.

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Moon herself obscures the Sun and causes solar eclipses, always on the thirtieth of the month; e) however, she does not completely annihilate the Sun, and likewise Isis did not annihilate Typhon.

When Nephthys gave birth to Anubis, Isis treated the child as if it were her own;²⁵³ for Nephthys is that which is beneath the earth and invisible, Isis that which is above the earth and visible; and the circle which touches these, called the horizon, being common to both,²⁵⁴ has received the name Anubis, and is represented in form like a dog; for the dog can see with his eyes both by night and by day alike. And among Egyptians Anubis is thought to possess this faculty, which is similar to that which Hecatê is thought to possess among the Greeks, for Anubis is a deity of the lower world as well as a god of Olympus. f) Some are of the opinion that Anubis is Cronus. For this reason, inasmuch as he generates all things out of himself and conceives all things within himself, he has gained the appellation of "Dog."²⁵⁵ There is, therefore, a certain mystery observed by those who revere Anubis; in ancient times the dog obtained the highest honours in Egypt; but, when Cambyses²⁵⁶ had slain the Apis and cast him forth, nothing came near the body or ate of it save only the dog; and thereby the dog lost his primacy and his place of honour above that of all the other animals. [p. 109] There are some who give the name of Typhon to the Earth's shadow, into which they believe the moon slips when it suffers eclipse.²⁵⁷

45. [369] Hence it is not unreasonable to say that the statement of each person individually is not right, but that the statement of all collectively is right; for it is not drought nor wind nor sea nor darkness,²⁵⁸ but everything harmful and destructive that Nature contains, which is to be set down as a part of Typhon. The origins of the universe are not to be placed in inanimate bodies, according to the doctrine of Democritus and Epicurus, nor yet is the Artificer of undifferentiated matter, according to the Stoic doctrine,²⁵⁹ one Reason, and one Providence which gains the upper hand and prevails over all things. The fact is that it is impossible for anything bad whatsoever to be engendered where God is the Author of all, b) or anything good where God is the Author of nothing; for the concord of the universe, like that of a lyre or bow, according to Heracleitus,²⁶⁰ is resilient if disturbed; and according to Euripides,²⁶¹

The good and bad cannot be kept apart,
But there is some commingling, which is well.

Wherefore this very ancient opinion comes down from writers on religion and from lawgivers to poets and philosophers; it can be traced to no source, but it carried a strong and almost indelible conviction, and is in circulation in many places among barbarians and Greeks alike, not only in story and tradition but also [p. 111] in rites and sacrifices, to the effect that the Universe is not of itself suspended aloft c) without sense or reason or guidance, nor is there one Reason which rules and guides it by rudders, as it were, or by controlling reins,²⁶² but, inasmuch as Nature brings, in

²⁵³ Cf. [356E](#), *supra*.

²⁵⁴ Cf. [375E](#), *infra*.

²⁵⁵ Plutarch would connect κύων, "dog," with the participle of κυῶν, "be pregnant." If the animal were a bear, we might say, "bears all things . . . the appellation of Bear," which would be a very close parallel.

²⁵⁶ Cf. [the note on 355C](#), *supra*.

²⁵⁷ Cf. [373E](#), *infra*.

²⁵⁸ Cf. [364A](#), *supra*, and [376E](#), *infra*.

²⁵⁹ Cf. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II p1108, and Diogenes Laertius, VII.134.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Diels, *Frag. der Vorsokratiker*, I p87, no. B51. Plutarch quotes this again in *Moralia*, [473F](#) and 1026B.

²⁶¹ Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*, Euripides, no. 21, from the *Aeolus*; quoted again in *Moralia*, 25C and [474A](#).

²⁶² The language is reminiscent of a fragment of Sophocles quoted by Plutarch in *Moralia*, 767E, and [Life of Alexander, chap. vii.](#) (668B). Cf. Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*, Sophocles, (p111)no. 785. "A task for many reins and

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this life of ours, many experiences in which both evil and good are commingled, or better, to put it very simply, Nature brings nothing which is not combined with something else, we may assert that it is not one keeper of two great vases²⁶³ who, after the manner of a barmaid, deals out to us our failures and successes in mixture, but it has come about, as the result of two opposed principles and two antagonistic forces, one of which guides us along a straight course to the right, while the other turns us aside and backward, that our life is complex, and so also is the universe; and if this is not true of the whole of it, d) yet it is true that this terrestrial universe, including its moon as well, is irregular and variable and subject to all manner of changes. For if it is the law of nature that nothing comes into being without a cause, and if the good cannot provide a cause for evil, then it follows that Nature must have in herself the source and origin of evil, just as she contains the source and origin of good.

46. The great majority and the wisest of men hold this opinion: they believe that there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the Artificer of good and the other of evil. There are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daemon, e) as, for example, [p. 113] Zoroaster²⁶⁴ the sage,²⁶⁵ who, they record, lived five thousand years before the time of the Trojan War. He called the one Oromazes and the other Areimanius;²⁶⁶ and he further declared that among all the things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance, and midway between the two is Mithras: for this reason the Persians give to Mithras the name of "Mediator." Zoroaster has also taught that men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius. They pound up in a mortar a certain plant called omomi at the same time invoking Hades²⁶⁷ and Darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines. f) In fact, they believe that some of the plants belong to the good god and others to the evil daemon; so also of the animals they think that dogs, fowls, and hedgehogs, for example, belong to the good god, but that water-rats²⁶⁸ belong to the evil one; therefore the man who has killed the most of these they hold to be fortunate.

47. However, they also tell many fabulous stories about their gods, such, for example, as the following: Oromazes, born from the purest light, and Areimanius, born from the darkness, are constantly at war with each other; [370] and Oromazes created six gods, the first of Good Thought, the second of Truth, the third of Order, and, of the rest, one of Wisdom, one of Wealth, [p. 115] and one the Artificer of Pleasure in what is Honourable. But Areimanius created rivals, as it were, equal to these in number. Then Oromazes enlarged himself to thrice his former size, and removed himself as far distant from the Sun as the Sun is distant from the Earth, and adorned the heavens with stars. One star he set there before all others as a guardian and watchman, the Dog-star. Twenty-four other gods he created and placed in an egg. b) But those created by Areimanius, who were equal in number to the others, pierced through the egg and made their way inside;²⁶⁹ hence evils are now combined with good. But a destined time shall come when it is decreed that Areimanius, engaged in bringing on pestilence and famine, shall by these be

rudders too" (πολλῶν χαλινῶν ἔργον οἰάκων θ' ἄμα).

²⁶³ The reference is to Homer, *Il.* XXIV.527-528, as misquoted in Plato, *Republic*, 379D. Cf. also *Moralia*, 24A (and the note), [105C \(and the note\)](#), and [473B. *Moralia*, 600C](#), is helpful in understanding the present passage.

²⁶⁴ The casual reader will gain a better understanding of chapters 46 and 47 if he will consult some brief book or article on Zoroaster (Zarathustra) and the Persian religion.

²⁶⁵ That is, one of the Persian Magi or Wise Men.

²⁶⁶ Cf. *Moralia*, 1026B, and Diogenes Laertius, *Prologue*, 2.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Prologue*, 8.

²⁶⁸ Cf. *Moralia*, [537A](#) and 670D.

²⁶⁹ It is plain that the two sets of gods became intermingled, but whether the bad gods got in or the good gods got out is not clear from the text.

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utterly annihilated and shall disappear; and then shall the earth become a level plain, and there shall be one manner of life and one form of government for a blessed people who shall all speak one tongue. Theopompus²⁷⁰ says that, according to the sages, one god is to overpower, and the other to be overpowered, each in turn for the space of three thousand years, and afterward for another three thousand years they shall fight and war, and the one shall undo the works of the other, c) and finally Hades shall pass away; then shall the people be happy, and neither shall they need to have food nor shall they cast any shadow. And the god, who has contrived to bring about all these things, shall then have quiet and shall repose for a time,²⁷¹ no long time indeed, but for the god as much as would be a moderate time for a man to sleep. [p. 117] Such, then, is the character of the mythology of the sages.

48. The Chaldeans declare that of the planets, which they call tutelary gods,²⁷² two are beneficent, two maleficent, and the other three are median and partake of both qualities. The beliefs of the Greeks are well known to all; they make the good part to belong the Olympian Zeus and the abominated part to Hades, and they rehearse a legend that Concord is sprung from Aphrodîtê and Ares,²⁷³ d) the one of whom is harsh and contentious, and the other mild and tutelary.

Observe also that the philosophers are in agreement with these; for Heracleitus²⁷⁴ without reservation styles War "the Father and King and Lord of all," and he says that when Homer²⁷⁵ prays that

Strife may vanish from the ranks of the gods and of mortals,

he fails to note that he is invoking a curse on the origin of all things, since all things originate from strife and antagonism; also Heracleitus says that the Sun will not transgress his appropriate bounds, otherwise the stern-eyed maidens, ministers of Justice, will find him out.²⁷⁶

e) Empedocles²⁷⁷ calls the beneficent principle "friendship" or "friendliness," and oftentimes he calls Concord [p. 119] "sedate of countenance"; the worse principle he calls "accursed quarreling" and "blood-stained strife."

The adherents of Pythagoras²⁷⁸ include a variety of terms under these categories: under the good they set Unity, the Determinate, the Permanent, the Straight, the Odd, the Square, the Equal, the Right-handed, the Bright; under the bad they set Duality, the Indeterminate, the Moving, the Curved, the Even, the Oblong, the Unequal, the Left-handed, the Dark, on the supposition that these are the underlying principles of creation. For these, however, Anaxagoras postulates Mind and Infinitude, Aristotle²⁷⁹ Form and Privation, f) and Plato,²⁸⁰ in many passages, as though obscuring and veiling his opinion, names the one of the opposite principles "Identity" and the other "Difference"; but in his *Laws*,²⁸¹ when he had grown considerably older, he asserts, not in

²⁷⁰ Jacoby, *Frag. Gr. Hist.*, Theopompus, no. 65.

²⁷¹ The meaning of the text is clear enough, but the wording of it is uncertain.

²⁷² The translation is based on an emendation of Wyttenbach's, which makes the words refer to Chaldean astrology (p117) (*i.e.* the planet under which one is born). Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, V.29.

²⁷³ That is, from Love and War.

²⁷⁴ Diels, *Frag. der Vorsokratiker*, I p88, no. B 53.

²⁷⁵ *Il.* XVIII.107, but Plutarch modifies the line to suit his context.

²⁷⁶ Cf. *Moralia*, 604A; Origen, *Against Celsus*, VI.42; Diels, *Frag. der Vorsokratiker*, I p96, no. B 94.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p232, Empedocles, no. 18; p239, no. 17, l.19; and p269, no. 122 (= *Moralia*, 474B).

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Moralia*, 881E, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.5 (986A 22).

²⁷⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.9 (90B).

²⁸⁰ *Timaeus*, 35A; Cf. *Moralia*, 441F.

²⁸¹ Plato, *Laws*, 896D ff.

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circumlocution or symbolically, but in specific words, that the movement of the Universe is actuated not by one soul, but perhaps by several, and certainly by not less than two, and of these the one is beneficent, and the other is opposed to it and the artificer of things opposed. Between these he leaves a certain third nature, not inanimate nor irrational nor without the power to move of itself,²⁸² as some think, [371] but with dependence on both those others, and desiring the better always and yearning after it and pursuing it, as the succeeding portion of the treatise will make clear, in the [p. 121] endeavour to reconcile the religious beliefs of the Egyptians with this philosophy.²⁸³

49. The fact is that the creation and constitution of this world is complex, resulting, as it does, from opposing influences, which, however, are not of equal strength, but the predominance rests with the better. Yet it is impossible for the bad to be completely eradicated, since it is innate, in large amount, in the body and likewise in the soul of the Universe, and is always fighting a hard fight against the better. So in the soul Intelligence and reason, the Ruler and Lord of all that is good, is Osiris, b) and in earth and wind and water and the heavens and stars that which is ordered, established, and healthy, as evidenced by season, temperatures, and cycles of revolution, is the efflux of Osiris²⁸⁴ and his reflected image. But Typhon is that part of the soul which is impressionable, impulsive, irrational and truculent, and of the bodily part the destructible, diseased and disorderly as evidenced by abnormal seasons and temperatures, and by obscurations of the sun and disappearances of the moon,²⁸⁵ outbursts, as it were, and unruly actions on the part of Typhon. And the name "Seth,"²⁸⁶ by which they call Typhon, denotes this; it means "the overmastering" and "overpowering,"²⁸⁷ and it means in very many instances "turning back,"²⁸⁸ and again "overpassing." c) Some say that one of the companions of Typhon was Bebon,²⁸⁹ but Manetho says that Bebon was still another name by which Typhon was called. The name signifies "restraint" or "hindrance," as much as [p. 123] to say that, when things are going along in a proper way and making rapid progress towards the right end, the power of Typhon obstructs them.

50. For this reason they assign to him the most stupid of the domesticated animals, the ass, and of the wild animals, the most savage, the crocodile and the hippopotamus.

In regard to the ass we have already²⁹⁰ offered some explanation. At Hermopolis they point out a statue of Typhon in the form of an hippopotamus, on whose back is poised a hawk fighting with a serpent. By the hippopotamus they mean to indicate Typhon, d) and by the hawk a power and rule, which Typhon strives to win by force, oftentimes without success, being confused by his wickedness and creating confusion.²⁹¹ For this reason, when they offer sacrifice on the seventh day of the month Tybi, which they call the "Coming of Isis from Phoenicia," they imprint on their sacred cakes the image of an hippopotamus tied fast. In the town of Apollonopolis it is an established custom for every person without exception to eat of a crocodile;²⁹² and on one day they hunt as many as they can and, after killing them, cast them down directly opposite the

²⁸² Cf. [374E](#), *infra*.

²⁸³ Cf. [372E](#) and [377A](#), *infra*.

²⁸⁴ See [the note on 365B](#), *supra*.

²⁸⁵ Cf. [368E](#), *supra*.

²⁸⁶ Cf. [367D](#), *supra*, and [376A](#), *infra*.

²⁸⁷ So also in the Egyptian papyri.

²⁸⁸ Cf. [376B](#), *infra*.

²⁸⁹ Cf. [376A](#), *infra*.

²⁹⁰ *Supra*, [362F](#).

²⁹¹ The text and significance of this passage are none too clear.

²⁹² Cf. [Herodotus, II.69](#); [Aelian, De Natura Animalium, X.21](#); Strabo, XVII.1.47 (p817).

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temple. And they relate that Typhon escaped Horus by turning into a crocodile, and they would make out e) that all animals and plants and incidents that are bad and harmful are the deeds and parts and movements of Typhon.

51. Then again, they depict Osiris by means of an eye and a sceptre,²⁹³ the one of which indicates forethought and the other power, much as Homer²⁹⁴ in [p. 125] calling the Lord and King of all "Zeus supreme and counsellor" appears by "supreme" to signify his prowess and by "counsellor" his careful planning and thoughtfulness. They also often depict this god by means of a hawk; for this bird is surpassing in the keenness of his vision and the swiftness of its flight, and is wont to support itself with the minimum amount of food. f) It is said also in flying over the earth to cast dust upon the eyes of unburied dead;²⁹⁵ and whenever it settles down beside the river to drink it raises its feather upright, and after it has drunk it lets this sink down again, by which it is plain that the bird is safe and has escaped the crocodile,²⁹⁶ for if it be seized, the feather remains fixed upright as it was at the beginning.

Everywhere they point out statues of Osiris in human form of the ithyphallic type, on account of his creative and fostering power;²⁹⁷ and they clothe his statues in a flame-coloured garment, [372] since they regard the body of the Sun as a visible manifestation of the perceptible substance of the power for good.²⁹⁸ Therefore it is only right and fair to condemn those who assign the orb of the Sun to Typhon,²⁹⁹ to whom there attaches nothing bright or of a conserving nature, no order nor generation nor movement possessed of moderation or reason, but everything the reverse; moreover, the drought,³⁰⁰ by which he destroys many of the living creatures and growing plants, is not to be set down as the work of the Sun, but rather as due to the fact that the winds and waters in the earth and the air are not seasonably tempered when [p. 127] the principle of the disorderly and unlimited power gets out of hand and quenches the exhalations.³⁰¹

52. b) In the sacred hymns of Osiris they call upon him who is hidden in the arms of the Sun; and on the thirtieth of the month Epiphi they celebrate the birthday of the Eyes of Horus, at the time when the Moon and the Sun are in a perfectly straight line, since they regard not only the Moon but also the Sun as the eye and light of Horus.

On the waning of the month Phaophi they conduct the birthday of the Staff of the Sun following upon the autumnal equinox, and by this they declare, as it were, that he is in need of support and strength, since he becomes lacking in warmth and light, c) and undergoes decline, and is carried away from us to one side.

Moreover, at the time of the winter solstice they lead the cow seven times around the temple of the Sun and this circumambulation is called the Seeking for Osiris, since the Goddess in the winter-time yearns for water; so many times do they go around, because in the seventh month the Sun completes the transition from the winter solstice to the summer solstice. It is said also that Horus, the son of Isis, offered sacrifice to the Sun first of all on the fourth day of the month, as is written in the records entitled the Birthdays of Horus.

²⁹³ Cf. [354E](#), *supra*.

²⁹⁴ Homer, *Iliad*, VIII.22.

²⁹⁵ Cf. [Aelian, De Natura Animalium, II.42](#), and Porphyry, *De Abstinentia*, IV.9.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* X.24.

²⁹⁷ Cf. [365B](#), *supra*.

²⁹⁸ Cf. [393D](#) and 477C, *infra*.

²⁹⁹ Cf. [372E](#), *infra*.

³⁰⁰ Cf. [367D](#), *supra*.

³⁰¹ Cf. [369A](#), *supra*.

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Every day they make a triple offering of incense to the Sun, d) an offering of resin at sunrise, of myrrh at midday, and of the so-called cyphi at sunset; the [p. 129] reason which underlies each one of these offerings I will describe later.³⁰² They think that by means of all these they supplicate and serve the Sun. Yet, what need is there to collect many such things? There are some who without reservation assert that Osiris is the Sun and is called the Dog-star (Sirius) by the Greeks³⁰³ even if among the Egyptians the addition of the article has created some ambiguity in regard to the name; and there are those who declare that Isis is none other than the Moon; for this reason it is said that the statues of Isis that bear horns are imitations of the crescent moon, and in her dark garments are shown the concealments and the obscurations in which she in her yearning pursues the Sun. For this reason also they call upon the Moon in love affairs, e) and Eudoxus asserts that Isis is a deity who presides over love affairs. These people may lay claim to a certain plausibility, but no one should listen for a moment to those who make Typhon to be the Sun. (372) But now let us take up again the proper subject of our discussion.

53. Isis is, in fact, the female principle of Nature, and is receptive of every form of generation, in accord with which she is called by Plato³⁰⁴ the gentle nurse and the all-receptive, and by most people has been called by countless names, since, because of the force of Reason, she turns herself to this thing or that and is receptive of all manner of shapes and forms. She has an innate love for the first and most dominant of all things, which is identical with the good, and this she yearns for and pursues; f) but the portion which comes from evil she tries to avoid and to reject, for she serves [p. 131] them both as a place and means of growth, but inclines always towards the better and offers to it opportunity to create from her and to impregnate her with effluxes and likenesses in which she rejoices and is glad that she is made pregnant and teeming with these creations. For creation is the image of being in matter, and the thing created is a picture of reality. [373]

54. It is not, therefore, out of keeping that they have a legend that the soul of Osiris is everlasting and imperishable, but that his body Typhon oftentimes dismembers and causes to disappear, and that Isis wanders hither and yon in her search for it, and fits it together again;³⁰⁵ for that which really is and is perceptible and good is superior to destruction and change. The images from it with which the sensible and corporeal is impressed, and the relations, forms, and likenesses which this take upon itself, like impressions of seals in wax, are not permanently lasting, but disorder and disturbance overtakes them, b) being driven hither from the upper reaches, and fighting against Horus, whom Isis brings forth, beholden of all, as the image of the perceptible world. Therefore it is said that he is brought to trial by Typhon on the charge of illegitimacy, as not being pure nor uncontaminated like his father, reason unalloyed and unaffected of itself, but contaminated in his substance because of the corporeal element. He prevails, however, and wins the case when Hermes,³⁰⁶ that is to say Reason, testifies and points out that Nature, by undergoing changes of form with reference to the perceptible, duly brings about the creation of the world.[p. 133] c) The birth of Apollo from Isis and Osiris, while these gods were still in the womb of Rhea, has the allegorical meaning that before this world was made visible and its rough material was completely formed by reason, it was put to the test by Nature and brought forth of itself the first creation imperfect. This is the reason why they say that this god was born in the

³⁰² Cf. [383A-end](#), *infra*.

³⁰³ An attempt to connect Ὀσίρις and ὁ Σίριος? Cf. [Diodorus, I.11.3-4](#).

³⁰⁴ Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 49A and 51A; also *Moralia*, 1014D, 1015D, and 1023A.

³⁰⁵ Cf. [358A](#), *supra*.

³⁰⁶ Cf. [368E](#), *supra* (2x nt. 306; ook achter 'Horus').

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darkness a cripple, and they call him the elder Horus;³⁰⁷ for there was then no world, but only an image and outline of a world to be.

55. But this Horus is himself perfected and complete; but he has not done away completely with Typhon, but has taken away his activity and strength. Hence they say that at Kopto the statue of Horus holds in one hand the privy members of Typhon, and they relate a legend that Hermes cut out the sinews of Typhon, and used them as strings for his lyre, d) thereby instructing us that Reason adjusts the Universe and creates concord out of discordant elements, and that it does not destroy but only cripples the destructive force. Hence this is weak and inactive here, and combines with the susceptible and changeable elements and attaches itself to them, becoming the artificer of quakes and tremblings in the earth, and of droughts and tempestuous winds in the air, and of lightning-flashes and thunderbolts. Moreover, it taints waters and winds with pestilence, and it runs forth wanton even as far as the moon, oftentimes confounding and darkening the moon's brightness; according to the belief and account of [p. 135] the Egyptians, e) Typhon at one time smites the eye of Horus, and at another time snatches it out and swallows it, and then later gives it back again to the Sun. By the smiting, they refer allegorically to the monthly waning of the moon, and by the crippling, to its eclipse,³⁰⁸ which the Sun heals by shining straight upon it as soon as it has escaped the shadow of the earth.

56. The better and more divine nature consists of three parts: the conceptual, the material, and that which is formed from these, which the Greeks call the world. f) Plato³⁰⁹ is wont to give to the conceptual the name of idea, example, or father, and to the material the name of mother or nurse, or seat and place of generation, and to that which results from both the name of offspring or generation.

One might conjecture that the Egyptians hold in high honour the most beautiful of the triangles,³¹⁰ since they liken the nature of the Universe most closely to it, as Plato in the *Republic*³¹¹ seems to have made use of it in formulating his figure of marriage. This triangle has its upright of three units, its base of four, [374] and its hypotenuse of five, whose power is equal to that of the other two sides.³¹² The upright, therefore, may be likened to the male, the base to the female, and the hypotenuse to the child of both, and so Osiris may be regarded as the origin, Isis as the recipient, and Horus as perfected result. Three is the first perfect odd number: four is a square whose side is the even number two; but five is in some ways like to its father, and in some ways like to its mother, being [p. 137] made up of three and two.³¹³ And panta (all) is a derivative of pente (five), and they speak of counting as "numbering by fives."³¹⁴ Five makes a square of itself, b) as many as the letters of the Egyptian alphabet, and as many as the years of the life of the Apis.

Horus they are wont to call also Min, which means "seen"; for the world is something perceptible and visible, and Isis is sometimes called Muth, and again Athyri or Methyer. By the first of these names they signify "mother," by the second the mundane house of Horus, the place and receptacle of generation, as Plato³¹⁵ has it, and the third is compounded of "full" and "cause"; for the material of the world is full, and is associated with the good and pure and orderly. c)

³⁰⁷ Cf. [356A](#), *supra*.

³⁰⁸ Cf. [368E](#), *supra*.

³⁰⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 50C-D.

³¹⁰ Cf. [393D](#), *infra*.

³¹¹ Plato, *Republic*, 546B-C.

³¹² Cf. [429E](#), *infra*.

³¹³ Cf. [Moralia, 264A](#), and Rose, *Plutarch's Roman Questions*, p170.

³¹⁴ Cf. [387E](#) and [429D-F](#), *infra*.

³¹⁵ Plato, *Timaeus*, 52D-53A. Cf. also *Moralia*, 882C and 1023A.

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57. It might appear that Hesiod,³¹⁶ in making the very first things of all to be Chaos and Earth and Tartarus and Love, did not accept any other origins but only these, if we transfer the names somewhat and assign to Isis the name of Earth and to Osiris the name of Love and to Typhon the name of Tartarus; for the poet seems to place Chaos at the bottom as a sort of region that serves as a resting-place for the Universe.

This subject seems in some wise to call up the myth of Plato, which Socrates in the *Symposium*³¹⁷ gives at some length in regard to the birth of Love, saying that Poverty, wishing for children, insinuated herself [p. 139] beside Plenty while he was asleep, and having become pregnant by him, gave birth to Love, d) who is of a mixed and utterly variable nature, inasmuch as he is the son of a father who is good and wise and self-sufficient in all things, but of a mother who is helpless and without means and because of want always clinging close to another and always importunate over another. For Plenty is none other than the first beloved and desired, the perfect and self-sufficient; and Plato calls raw material Poverty, utterly lacking of herself in the Good, but being filled from him and always yearning for him and sharing with him. The World, or Horus,³¹⁸ which is born of these, is not eternal nor unaffected nor imperishable, but, e) being ever reborn, contrives to remain always young and never subject to destruction in the changes and cycles of events.

58. We must not treat legend as it were history at all, but we should adopt that which is appropriate in each legend in accordance with its verisimilitude. Whenever, therefore, we speak of material we must not be swept away to the opinions of some philosophers,³¹⁹ and conceive of an inanimate and indifferentiated body, which is of itself inert and inactive. The fact is that we call oil the material of perfume and gold the material of a statue, and these are not destitute of all differentiation. We provide the very soul f) and thought of Man as the basic material of understanding and virtue for Reason to adorn and to harmonize, and some have declared the Mind to be a place for the assembling of forms and for the impression of concepts, as it were.³²⁰

[p. 141] Some think the seed of Woman is not a power or origin, but only material and nurture of generation.³²¹ To this thought we should cling fast and conceive that this Goddess also who participates always with the first God and is associated with him in the love³²² of the fair and lovely things about him is not opposed to him, [375] but, just as we say that an honourable and just man is in love if his relations are just, and a good woman who has a husband and consorts with him we say yearns for him; thus we may conceive of her as always clinging close to him and being importunate over him and constantly filled with the most dominant and purest principles.

59. But where Typhon forces his way in and seizes upon the outermost areas, there we may conceive of her as seeming sad, and spoken of as mourning, and that she seeks for the remains and scattered members of Osiris and arrays them, receiving and hiding away the things perishable, b) from which she brings to light again the things that are created and sends them forth from herself.

The relations and forms and effluxes of the god abide in the heavens and in the stars; but those things that are distributed in susceptible elements, earth and sea and plants and animals, suffer

³¹⁶ *Theogony*, 116-122.

³¹⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, 203B.

³¹⁸ Cf. 373D, *supra*.

³¹⁹ Cf. 370E, *supra*, and Diogenes Laertius, vii.134.

³²⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, ii.4 (429A 27).

³²¹ Cf. *Moralia*, 651C, and 905C.

³²² Cf. 372E, and 383A, *infra*.

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dissolution and destruction and burial, and oftentimes again shine forth and appear again in their generations. For this reason the fable has it that Typhon cohabits with Nephthys³²³ and that Osiris has secret relations with her;³²⁴ for the destructive power exercises special dominion over the outermost part of matter which they call Nephthys or Finality.³²⁵ But the creating [p. 143] and conserving power distributes to this only a weak and feeble seed, c) which is destroyed by Typhon, except so much as Isis takes up and preserves and fosters and makes firm and strong.³²⁶

60. In general this god is the better, as both Plato and Aristotle conceive. The creative and conserving element of Nature moves toward him and toward existence while the annihilating and destructive moves away from him towards non-existence. For this reason they call Isis by a name derived from "hastening" (*hiemai*) with understanding,³²⁷ or being borne onward (*pheromai*), since she is an animate and intelligent movement; for the name is not a foreign name, but, just as all the gods have a name in common³²⁸ derived from two words, "visible" (*theaton*) and "rushing" (*theon*), d) in the same way this goddess, from her understanding and her movement, we call her Isis and the Egyptians call her Isis. So also Plato³²⁹ says that the men of ancient times made clear the meaning of "essence" (*ousia*) by calling it "sense" (*isia*). So also he speaks of the intelligence and understanding as being a carrying and movement of mind hastening and being carried onward; and also comprehension and good and virtue they attribute to those things which are ever flowing and in rapid motion, just as again, on the other hand, by means of antithetical names they vilified evil; for example, that which hinders and binds fast and holds and checks [p. 145] Nature from hastening and going they called baseness, or "ill-going" (*kak-ia*), and helplessness or "difficulty of going" (*apor-ia*), and cowardice or "fear of going" (*deil-ia*), and distress or "not going" (*an-ia*).³³⁰

61. Osiris has a name made up from "holy" (*hosion*) and "sacred" (*hieron*);³³¹ for he is the combined relation of the things in the heavens and in the lower world, e) the former of which it was customary for people of olden time to call sacred and the latter to call holy. But the relation which discloses the things in the heavens and belongs to the things which tend upward is sometimes named Anubis and sometimes Hermanubis³³² as belonging in part to the things above and in part to the things below.³³³ For this reason they sacrifice to him on the one hand a white cock and on the other hand one of saffron colour, regarding the former things as simple and clear, and the others as combined and variable.

There is no occasion to be surprised at the revamping of these words into Greek.³³⁴ The fact is that countless other words went forth in company with those who migrated from Greece, and persist even to this day as strangers in strange lands; f) and, when the poetic art would recall some of these into use, those who speak of such words as strange or unusual falsely accuse it of using barbarisms. Moreover, they record that in the so-called books of Hermes it is written in

³²³ Cf. [356A](#), *supra*.

³²⁴ Cf. [the note on 356E](#), *supra*.

³²⁵ Cf. [355F](#) and [366B](#), *supra*.

³²⁶ Cf. [356F](#), *supra*.

³²⁷ Cf. [351F](#), *supra*.

³²⁸ Cf. Plato, *Cratylus*, 397D.

³²⁹ *Ibid.* 401C.

³³⁰ Cf. [376D](#), *infra*. It is impossible to reproduce these fanciful derivations in an English translation. Most of them may be found in Plato, *Cratylus*, 401C-415E. Note that Plutarch would connect the abstract suffix *-ia* with the shorter stem of εἶμι "go."

³³¹ Cf. [382E](#), *infra*.

³³² Cf. Porphyry in Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.* III.11.2.

³³³ Cf. [368E](#), *supra*.

³³⁴ Cf. [362D-E](#), *supra*.

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regard to the sacred names that they call the power which is assigned to direct the revolution of the Sun Horus, but the Greeks call it Apollo; and the power assigned to the wind some call Osiris and others [p. 147] Serapis; [376] and Sothis in Egyptian signifies "pregnancy" (*cyesis*) or "to be pregnant" (*cyein*): therefore in Greek, with a change of accent,³³⁵ the star is called the Dog-star (*Cyon*), which they regard as the special star of Isis.³³⁶ Least of all is there any need of being very eager in learning about these names. However, I would rather make a concession to the Egyptians in regard to Serapis than in regard to Osiris; for I regard Serapis as foreign, but Osiris as Greek, and both as belonging to one god and one power.

62. Like these also are the Egyptian beliefs; for they oftentimes call Isis by the name of Athena, expressive of some such idea as this, "I came of myself," which is indicative of self-impelled motion. b) Typhon, as has been said,³³⁷ is named Seth and Bebon and Smu, and these names would indicate some forcible and preventive check or opposition or reversal.³³⁸

Moreover, they call the loadstone the bone of Horus, and iron the bone of Typhon, as Manetho³³⁹ records. For, as the iron oftentimes acts as if it were being attracted and drawn toward the stone, and oftentimes is rejected and repelled in the opposite direction, in the same way the salutary and good and rational movement of the world at one time, by persuasion, attracts and draws toward itself and renders more [p. 149] gentle that harsh and Typhonian movement, c) and then again it gathers itself together and reverses it and plunges it into difficulties.

Moreover, Eudoxus says that the Egyptians have a mythical tradition in regard to Zeus that, because his legs were grown together, he was not able to walk, and so, for shame, tarried in the wilderness; but Isis, by severing and separating those parts of his body, provided him with means of rapid progress. This fable teaches by its legend that the mind and reason of the god, fixed amid the unseen and invisible, advanced to generation by means of motion.

63. The [sistrum](#) (rattle) also makes it clear that all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about, and never to cease from motion but, as it were, to be waked up and agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid. d) They say that they avert and repel Typhon by means of the sistrums, indicating thereby that when destruction constricts and checks Nature, generation releases and arouses it by means of motion.³⁴⁰

The upper part of the sistrum is circular and its circumference contains the four things that are shaken; for that part of the world which undergoes reproduction and destruction is contained underneath the orb of the moon, and all things in it are subjected to motion and to change through the four elements: fire, earth, water, and air. At the top of the circumference of the sistrum they construct the figure of a cat with a human face, and at the bottom, below the things that are shaken, e) the face of Isis on one side, and on the other the face of Nephthys. By these faces they symbolize birth and death, for these are the changes and movements of the elements; and by [p. 151] the cat they symbolize the moon because of the varied colouring, nocturnal activity, and fecundity of the animal. For the cat is said to bring forth first one, then two and three and four and five, thus increasing the number by one until she reaches seven,³⁴¹ so that she brings forth in all twenty-eight, the number also of the moon's illuminations. Perhaps, however, this may seem somewhat mythical. f) But the pupils in the eye of the cat appear to grow large

³³⁵ Plutarch attempts to connect κύων, "dog," with the present participle of κυῶν, "to be pregnant."

³³⁶ Cf. [359C-E](#) and [365F](#), *supra*.

³³⁷ [367D](#) and [371B](#), *supra*.

³³⁸ Cf. [371B](#), *supra*.

³³⁹ Frag. 77.

³⁴⁰ Cf. [375B](#), *supra*.

³⁴¹ Cf. Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 242 (p343 A 5 ed. Bekker).

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and round at the time of the full moon, and to become thin and narrow at the time of the wanings of that heavenly body. By the human features of the cat is indicated the intelligence and the reason that guides the changes of the moon.³⁴²

64. To put the matter briefly, it is not right to believe that water or the sun or the earth or the sky is Osiris or Isis,³⁴³ or again that fire or drought or the sea is Typhon, but simply if we attribute to Typhon³⁴⁴ whatever there is in these [377] that is immoderate and disordered by reason of excesses or defects; and if we revere and honour what is orderly and good and beneficial as the work of Isis and as the image and reflection and reason of Osiris, we shall not be wrong. Moreover, we shall put a stop to the incredulity of Eudoxus³⁴⁵ and his questionings how it is that Demeter has no share in the supervision of love affairs, but Isis has; and the fact that Dionysus cannot cause the Nile to rise, nor rule over the dead. For by one general process of reasoning do we come to the conclusion that these gods have been assigned to preside over every portion of what is good; and whatever there is in nature that is fair and [p. 153] good exists entirely because of them, inasmuch as Osiris contributes the origins, and Isis receives them b) and distributes them.

65. In this way we shall undertake to deal with the numerous and tiresome people, whether they be such as take pleasure in associating theological problems with the seasonal changes in the surrounding atmosphere, or with the growth of the crops and seed-times and ploughing; and also those who say that Osiris is being buried at the time when the grain is sown and covered in the earth and that he comes to life and reappears when plants begin to sprout. For this reason also it is said that Isis, when she perceived that she was pregnant, put upon herself an amulet³⁴⁶ on the sixth day of the month Phaophi; and about the time of the winter solstice she gave birth to Harpocrates, c) imperfect and premature,³⁴⁷ amid the early flowers and shoots. For this reason they bring to him as an offering the first-fruits of growing lentils, and the days of his birth they celebrate after the spring equinox. When the people hear these things, they are satisfied with them and believe them, deducing the plausible explanation directly from what is obvious and familiar.

66. And there is nothing to fear if, in the first place, they preserve for us our gods that are common to both peoples and do not make them to belong to the Egyptians only, d) and do not include under these names the Nile alone and the land which the Nile waters, and do not assert that the marshes and the lotus are the only work of God's hand, and if they do not deny the great gods to the rest of mankind that possess no Nile nor Buto nor Memphis. But as for Isis, and the gods associated with her, all peoples own them and are [p. 155] familiar with them, although they have learned not so very long ago to call some of them by the names which come from the Egyptians; yet they have from the beginning understood and honoured the power which belongs to each one of them.

In the second place, and this is a matter of greater importance, they should exercise especial heed and caution lest they unwittingly erase and dissipate things divine³⁴⁸ into winds and streams and sowings and ploughings, developments of the earth and changes of the seasons, as do those who regard wine as Dionysus and flame as Hephaestus. And Cleanthes³⁴⁹ says somewhere that the

³⁴² Cf. [367D](#), *supra*.

³⁴³ Cf. [363D](#) and [364D](#), *supra*.

³⁴⁴ Cf. [364A](#) and [369A](#), *supra*.

³⁴⁵ Frag. 63.

³⁴⁶ Cf. [378B](#), *infra*.

³⁴⁷ Cf. [358D](#), *supra*.

³⁴⁸ Cf. *Moralia*, 757B-C.

³⁴⁹ Frag. 547.

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breath of air which is carried (pheromenon) through the crops and then suffers dissolution (phoneuomenon) is Phersephone;Φερσεφόνην)', and a certain poet has written with reference to the reapers,³⁵⁰

Then when the sturdy youth come to sever the limbs of Demeter.

e) The fact is that these persons do not differ at all from those who regard sails and ropes and anchor as a pilot, warp and woof as a weaver, a cup or an honey mixture or barley gruel as a physician. But they create in men fearful atheistic opinions by conferring the names of gods upon natural objects which are senseless and inanimate, and are of necessity destroyed by men when they need to use them. It is impossible to conceive of these things as being gods in themselves; f)

67. for God is not senseless nor inanimate nor subject to human control. As a result of this we have come to regard as gods those who make use of these things and present them to us and provide us with things everlasting and constant. Nor do we think of the gods as different gods among [p. 157] different peoples, nor as barbarian gods and Greek gods, nor as southern and northern gods; but, just as the sun and the moon and the heavens and the earth and the sea are common to all, but are called by different names by different peoples, so for that one rationality which keeps all these things in order [378] and the one Providence which watches over them and the ancillary powers that are set over all, there have arisen among different peoples, in accordance with their customs, different honours and appellations. Thus men make use of consecrated symbols, some employing symbols that are obscure, but others those that are clearer, in guiding the intelligence toward things divine, though not without a certain hazard. For some go completely astray and become engulfed in superstition; and others, while they fly from superstition³⁵¹ as from a quagmire, on the other hand unwittingly fall, as it were, over a precipice into atheism.

68. Wherefore in the study of these matters it is especially necessary that we adopt, as our guide in these mysteries, the reasoning that comes from philosophy, and consider reverently b) each one of the things that are said and done, so that, to quote Theodorus,³⁵² who said that while he offered the good word with his right hand some of his auditors received it in their left, we may not thus err by accepting in a different spirit the things that the laws have dictated admirably concerning the sacrifices and festivals. The fact that everything is to be referred to reason we may gather from the Egyptians themselves; for on the nineteenth day of the first month, when they are holding festival in honour of Hermes, they eat honey and a fig; and as they eat they say, "A sweet [p. 159] thing is Truth." The amulet³⁵³ of Isis, which they traditionally assert that she hung about her neck, is interpreted "a true voice." c) And Harpocrates is not to be regarded as an imperfect and an infant god, nor some deity or other that protects legumes, but as the representative and corrector of unseasoned, imperfect, and inarticulate reasoning about the gods among mankind. For this reason he keeps his finger on his lips in token of restrained speech or silence. In the month of Mesorê they bring to him an offering of legumes and say, "The tongue is luck, the tongue is god." Of the plants in Egypt they say that the perseia is especially consecrated to the goddess because its fruit resembles a heart and its leaf a tongue. The fact is that nothing of man's usual possessions is more divine than reasoning, especially reasoning about the gods; and nothing has a greater influence toward happiness. d) For this reason we give instructions to

³⁵⁰ Cf. *The Life and Poetry of Homer*, chap. xxiii. in Bernardakis, vol. VII.

³⁵¹ See [the note at the end of chapter 11](#) (355D, *supra*).

³⁵² Cf. *Moralia*, 467B.

³⁵³ Cf. [377B](#), *supra*.

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anyone who comes down to the oracle here to think holy thoughts and to speak words of good omen. But the mass of mankind act ridiculously in their processions and festivals in that they proclaim at the outset the use of words of good omen,³⁵⁴ but later they both say and think the most unhallowed thoughts about the very gods.

69. How, then, are we to deal with their gloomy, solemn, and mournful sacrifices, if it be not proper either to omit the customary ceremonials or to confound and confuse our opinions about the gods by unwarranted suspicions? Among the Greeks also many things are done which are similar to the Egyptian ceremonies in the shrines of Isis, and they do them at [p. 161] about the same time. e) At Athens the women fast at the Thesmophoria sitting upon the ground; and the Boeotians move the halls of the Goddess of Sorrow and name that festival the Festival of Sorrow,³⁵⁵ since Demeter is in sorrow because of her Daughter's descent to Pluto's realm. This month, in the season of the Pleiades, is the month of seeding which the Egyptians call Athyr, the Athenians Pyanepsion, and the Boeotians Damatrius.³⁵⁶ Theopompus³⁵⁷ records that the people who live toward the west believe that the winter is Cronus, the summer Aphroditê, and the spring Persephonê, f) and that they call them by these names and believe that from Cronus and Aphroditê all things have their origin. The Phrygians, believing that the god is asleep in the winter and awake in the summer, sing lullabies for him in the winter and in the summer chants to arouse him, after the manner of bacchic worshippers. The Paphlagonians assert that in the spring he bestirs himself and sets himself free again.

70. The season of the year also gives us a suspicion that this gloominess is brought about because of the disappearance from our sight of the crops and fruits that people in days of old did not regard as gods, but as necessary and important contributions of the gods toward the avoidance of a savage and a bestial life. [379] At the time of year when they saw some of the fruits vanishing and disappearing completely from the trees, while they themselves were sowing others in a mean and poverty-stricken fashion still, scraping [p. 163] away the earth with their hands and again replacing it, committing the seeds to the ground with uncertain expectation of their ever appearing again or coming to fruition, they did many things like persons at a funeral in mourning for their dead. Then again, even as we speak of the man who buys the books of Plato as "buying Plato," and of the man who represents the poems of Menander as "acting Menander," even so those men of old did not refrain from calling by the names of the gods the gifts and creations of the gods, b) honouring and venerating them because of the need which they had for them. The men of later times accepted this blindly, and in their ignorance referred to the gods the behaviour of the crops and the presence and disappearance of necessities, not only calling them the births and deaths of the gods, but even believing that they are so; and thus they filled the minds with absurd, unwarranted, and confused opinions although they had before their eyes the absurdity of such illogical reasoning. Rightly did Xenophanes³⁵⁸ of Colophon insist that the Egyptians, c) if they believed them to be gods, should not lament them; but if they lamented them, they should not believe them to be gods. Is it anything but ridiculous amid their lamentations to pray that the powers may cause their crops to sprout again and bring them to perfection in order that they again be consumed and lamented?

71. This is not quite the case: but they do lament for their crops and they do pray to the gods, who are the authors and givers, that they produce and cause to grow afresh other new crops to

³⁵⁴ The regular proclamation (εὐφημεῖτε) used by the Greeks at the beginning of any ceremony.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Pausanias, IX.8.1, and Preller, *Griechische Mythologie* 4, i.752, note 3; but the matter is very uncertain.

³⁵⁶ The month sacred to Demeter.

³⁵⁷ Frag. 335.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, i.44, Xenophanes, no. A 13; also *Moralia*, 171D, 228E, and 763D; and Heracleitus, no. B 127 (Diels, i.103).

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take the place of those that are undergoing destruction. Hence it is an excellent saying current [p. 165] among philosophers that they that have not learned to interpret rightly the sense of words are wont to bungle their actions.³⁵⁹ For example, there are some among the Greeks who have not learned nor habituated themselves to speak of the bronze, the painted, and the stone effigies as statues of the gods and dedications in their honour, d) but they call them gods; and then they have the effrontery to say that Lachares stripped Athena,³⁶⁰ that Dionysius sheared Apollo of the golden locks, and that Jupiter Capitolinus was burned and destroyed in the Civil War,³⁶¹ and thus they unwittingly take over and accept the vicious opinions that are the concomitants of these names.

This has been to no small degree the experience of the Egyptians in regard to those animals that are held in honour. In these matters the Greeks are correct in saying and believing that the dove is the sacred bird of Aphroditê, that the serpent is sacred to Athena, the raven to Apollo, and the dog to Artemis – as Euripides³⁶² says,

e) Dog you shall be, pet of bright Hecatê.

But the great majority of the Egyptians, in doing service to the animals themselves and in treating them as gods, have not only filled their sacred offices with ridicule and derision, but this is the least of the evils connected with their silly practices. There is engendered a dangerous belief, which plunges the weak and innocent into sheer superstition, and in the case of the [p. 167] more cynical and bold, goes off into atheistic and brutish reasoning.³⁶³ Wherefore it is not inappropriate to rehearse in some detail what seem to be the facts in these matters.

72. The notion that the gods, in fear of Typhon, changed themselves into these animals,³⁶⁴ f) concealing themselves, as it were, in the bodies of ibises, dogs, and hawks, is a play of fancy surpassing all the wealth of monstrous fable. The further notion that as many of the souls of the dead as continue to exist are reborn into these animals only is likewise incredible. Of those who desire to assign to this some political reason some relate that Osiris, on his great expedition, divided his forces into many parts, which the Greeks call squads and companies, and to them all he gave standards in the form of animals, [380] each of which came to be regarded as sacred and precious by the descendants of them who had shared in the assignment. Others relate that the later kings, to strike their enemies with terror, appeared in battle after putting on gold and silver masks of wild beasts' heads. Others record that one of these crafty and unscrupulous kings,³⁶⁵ having observed that the Egyptians were by nature light-minded and readily inclined to change and novelty, but that, because of their numbers, they had a strength that was invincible and very difficult to check when they were in their sober senses and acted in concert, communicated to them and planted among them an everlasting superstition, a ground for unceasing quarrelling. b) For he enjoined [p. 169] on different peoples to honour and revere different animals; and inasmuch as these animals conducted themselves with enmity and hostility toward one another, one by its nature desiring one kind of food and another another, the several peoples were ever defending their own animals, and were much offended if these animals suffered injury, and thus

³⁵⁹ Cf. *Moralia*, 707F.

³⁶⁰ The gold was removed by him from the chryselephantine (p165)statue of Athena in the Parthenon; cf. [W. B. Dinsmoor, *Amer. Journ. Arch.* xxxviii \(1934\) p97.](#)

³⁶¹ July 6, 83 B.C., according to *Life of Sulla*, chap. xxvii (469B). The numerous references may be found in Roscher, *Lexikon der gr. und röm. Mythologie*, ii.714.

³⁶² Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*; Euripides, no. 968.

³⁶³ See [the note on 355D](#), *supra*.

³⁶⁴ Cf. [Diodorus, I.86.3.](#)

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* I.89.5 and 90.

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they were drawn on unwittingly by the enmities of the animals until they were brought into open hostility with one another. Even today the inhabitants of Lycopolis are the only people among the Egyptians that eat a sheep; for the wolf, whom they hold to be a god, also eats it. And in my day the people of Oxyrhynchus caught a dog and sacrificed it and ate it up as if it had been sacrificial meat,³⁶⁶ because the people of Cynopolis were eating fish known as the oxyrhynchus or pike. c) As a result of this they became involved in war and inflicted much harm upon each other; and later they were both brought to order through chastisement by the Romans.

73. Many relate that the soul of Typhon himself was divided among these animals. The legend would seem to intimate that all irrational and brutish nature belongs to the portion of the evil deity, and in trying to soothe and appease him they lavish attention and care upon these animals. If there befall a great and severe drought that brings on in excess either fatal diseases or other unwonted and extraordinary calamities, the priests, under cover of darkness, in silence and stealth, lead away some of the animals that are held in honour; and at first they but threaten and terrify the animals,³⁶⁷ d) but if the drought still persists,[p. 171] they consecrate and sacrifice them, as if, forsooth, this were a means of punishing the deity, or at least a mighty rite of purification in matters of the highest importance! The fact is that in the city of Eileithiya they used to burn men alive,³⁶⁸ as Manetho has recorded; they called them Typhonians, and by means of winnowing fans they dissipated and scattered their ashes. But this was performed publicly and at a special time in the dog-days. The consecrations of the animals took place at indeterminate times with reference to the circumstances; e) and thus they are unknown to the multitude, except when they hold the animals' burials,³⁶⁹ and then they display some of the other sacred animals and, in presence of all, cast them into the grave together, thinking thus to hurt and to curtail Typhon's satisfaction. The Apis, together with a few other animals, seems to be sacred to Osiris;³⁷⁰ but to Typhon they assign the largest number of animals. If this account is true, I think it indicates that the object of our inquiry concerns those which are commonly accepted and whose honours are universal: for example, the ibis, the hawk, the cynocephalus, and the Apis himself, as well as the Mendes, for thus they call the goat in Mendes.³⁷¹ f)

74. There remain, then, their usefulness and their symbolism; of these two, some of the animals share in the one, and many share in both. It is clear that the Egyptians have honoured the cow, the sheep, and [p. 173] the ichneumon because of their need for these animals and their usefulness. Even so the people of Lemnos hold larks in honour because they seek out the eggs of the locust and destroy them; and so the people of Thessaly honour storks,³⁷² because, when their land produced many snakes,³⁷³ the storks appeared and destroyed them all. For this reason they passed a law that whoever killed a stork should be banished from the country. The Egyptians also honoured the asp, the weasel, and the beetle, since they observed in them certain dim likenesses of the power of the gods, [381] like images of the sun in drops of water. There are still many people who believe and declare that the weasel conceives through its ear and brings forth its young by way of the mouth, and that this is a parallel of the generation of speech. The race of

³⁶⁶ Cf. [353C](#) and [358B](#), *supra*; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, xi.27, and Juvenal, xv.35.

³⁶⁷ Cf. Mitteis und Wilcken, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, i. p125.

³⁶⁸ Cf. [Diodorus, I.88.5](#).

³⁶⁹ Cf. [359D](#), *supra*; Diodorus, [I.21.5](#); [83.1](#) and [5](#); [84.7](#).

³⁷⁰ Cf. [362C-D](#), *supra*.

³⁷¹ Cf. [Herodotus, II.46](#); [Diodorus, I.84.4](#); [Strabo, XVII.1.19](#).

³⁷² Cf. Aristotle, *De Mirabilibus Ausc.* 23 (832A 14); [Pliny, Natural History, X.31.62](#); Stephanus Byzant. s.v.

Θεσσαλία.

³⁷³ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, II.39.6; Plutarch's source may have been Theophrastus, Frag. 174.6 (Wimmer, vol. III p220).

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beetles has no female,³⁷⁴ but all the males eject their sperm into a round pellet of material which they roll up by pushing it from the opposite side, just as the sun seems to turn the heavens in the direction opposite to its own course, which is from west to east. They compare the asp to lightning, b) since it does not grow old and manages to move with ease and suppleness without the use of limbs.

75. The crocodile,³⁷⁵ certainly, has acquired honour which is not devoid of a plausible reason, but he is declared to be a living representation of God, since he is the only creature without a tongue; for the Divine Word has no need of a voice, and [p. 175]

through noiseless ways advancing, guides

By Justice all affairs of mortal men.³⁷⁶

They say that the crocodile is the only animal living in the water which has a thin and transparent membrane extending down from his forehead to cover up his eyes, so that he can see without being seen; and this prerogative belongs also unto the First God. In whatever part of the land the female crocodile lays her eggs, well she knows that this is destined to mark the limit of the rise of the Nile;³⁷⁷ for the females, being unable to lay their eggs in the water and afraid to lay them far from it, have such an accurate perception of the future c) that they make use of the oncoming river as a guide in laying their eggs and in keeping them warm; and thus they preserve them dry and untouched by the water. They lay sixty eggs³⁷⁸ and hatch them in the same number of days, and those crocodiles that live longest live that number of years: the number sixty is the first of measures for such persons as concern themselves with the heavenly bodies.

Of the animals that are held in honour for both reasons, mention has already been made of the dog.³⁷⁹ The ibis,³⁸⁰ which kills the deadly creeping things, was the first to teach men the use of medicinal purgations when they observed her employing clysters and being purged by herself.³⁸¹ d) The most strict of the priests take their lustral water for purification from a place where the ibis has drunk:³⁸² for she does not drink [p. 177] water if it is unwholesome or tainted, nor will she approach it. By the spreading of her feet, in their relation to each other and to her bill, she makes an equilateral triangle.³⁸³ Moreover the variety and combination of her black feathers with her white picture the moon in its first quarter.

There is no occasion for surprise that the Egyptians were so taken with such slight resemblances; for the Greeks in their painted and sculptured portrayals of the gods made use of many such. e) For example, in Crete there was a statue of Zeus having no ears; for it is not fitting for the Ruler and Lord of all to listen to anyone. Beside the statue of Athena Pheidias placed the serpent and in Elis beside the statue of Aphroditê the tortoise,³⁸⁴ to indicate that maidens need watching, and that for married women staying at home and silence is becoming. f) The trident of Poseidon is a symbol of the Third Region where the sea holds sway, for it has been assigned to a demesne of

³⁷⁴ Cf. [the note on 355A](#), *supra*.

³⁷⁵ Cf. [Herodotus, II.69](#).

³⁷⁶ Euripides, *Troades*, 887-888; cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1007C.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 982C; [Aristotle, Hist. Animalium, V.33 \(558A 17\)](#).

³⁷⁸ Cf. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, [ii.33](#), v.52.

³⁷⁹ *Supra*, [355B](#) and [368F](#).

³⁸⁰ Cf. [Diodorus, I.87.6](#).

³⁸¹ Cf. [Aelian, De Natura Animalium, ii.35](#); [Pliny, Natural History, x.40 \(75\)](#).

³⁸² Cf. *Moralia*, 974C; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, vii.45.

³⁸³ Cf. *Moralia*, 670C.

³⁸⁴ Cf. *Moralia*, 142D; [Pausanias, VI.25.2](#).

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less importance than the heavens and the air. For this reason they thus named Amphitritê and the Tritons.³⁸⁵

The Pythagoreans embellished also numbers and figures with the appellations of the gods. The equilateral triangle they called Athena, born from the head and third-born, because it is divided by three perpendiculars drawn from its three angles. The number one they called Apollo³⁸⁶ because of its rejection of plurality³⁸⁷ and because of the singleness of [p. 179] unity. The number two they called "Strife," and "Daring," and three they called "Justice," for, although the doing of injustice and suffering from injustice are caused by deficiency and excess, Justice, by reason of its equality, intervenes between the two. [382] The so-called sacred quaternion, the number thirty-six, was, so it is famed, the mightiest of oaths, and it has been given the name of "World" since it is made up of the first four even numbers and the first four odd numbers added together.

76. If, then, the most noted of the philosophers, observing the riddle of the Divine in inanimate and incorporeal objects, have not thought it proper to treat anything with carelessness or disrespect, even more do I think that, in all likelihood, we should welcome those peculiar properties existent in natures which possess the power of perception and have a soul and feeling and character. It is not that we should honour these, but that through these we should honour the Divine, since they are clearer mirrors of the Divine by their nature also, so that we should regard them b) as the instrument or device of the God who orders all things. And in general we must hold it true that nothing inanimate is superior to what is animate, and nothing without the power of perception is superior to that which has that power – no, not even if one should heap together all the gold and emeralds in the world. The Divine is not engendered in colours or in forms or in polished surfaces, but whatsoever things have no share in life, things whose nature does not allow them to share therein, have a portion of less honour than that of the dead. But the nature that lives and sees and has within itself the source of movement and a knowledge of what belongs to it and [p. 181] what belongs to others, has drawn to itself an efflux and portion of beauty from the Intelligence "by which the Universe is guided," as Heracleitus³⁸⁸ has it. c) Wherefore the Divine is no worse represented in these animals than in works of bronze and stone which are alike subject to destruction and disfiguration, and by their nature are void of all perception and comprehension. This, then, is what I most approve in the accounts that are given regarding the animals held in honour.

77. As for the robes, those of Isis³⁸⁹ are variegated in their colours; for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end. But the robe of Osiris has no shading or variety in its colour, but only one single colour like to light. For the beginning is combined with nothing else, and that which is primary and conceptual is without admixture; wherefore, when they have once taken off the robe of Osiris, d) they lay it away and guard it, unseen and untouched. But the robes of Isis they use many times over; for in use those things that are perceptible and ready at hand afford many disclosures of themselves and opportunities to view them as they are changed about in various ways. But the apperception of the conceptual, the pure, and the simple, shining through the soul like a flash of lightning, affords an opportunity to

³⁸⁵ An effort to derive these names from τρίτος, "third."

³⁸⁶ Cf. [the note on 354E](#), *supra*.

³⁸⁷ Cf. [393B](#), *infra*.

³⁸⁸ Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, i.86, Heracleitus, no. B 41.

³⁸⁹ Cf. [352B](#), *supra*.

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touch and see it but once.³⁹⁰ For this reason Plato³⁹¹ and Aristotle call this part of philosophy the epoptic³⁹² or [p. 183] mystic part, inasmuch as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of Reason proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple, and immaterial principle; e) and when they have somehow attained contact with the pure truth abiding about it, they think that they have the whole of philosophy completely, as it were, within their grasp.

78. This idea at the present time the priests intimate with great circumspection in acquitting themselves of this religious secret and in trying to conceal it: that this god Osiris is the ruler and king of the dead, nor is he any other than the god that among the Greeks is called Hades and Pluto. But since it is not understood in which manner this is true, it greatly disturbs the majority of people who suspect that the holy and sacred Osiris truly dwells in the earth and beneath the earth,³⁹³ f) where are hidden away the bodies, of those that are believed to have reached their end. But he himself is far removed from the earth, uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death; but for the souls of men here, which are compassed about by bodies and emotions, there is no association with this god except in so far as they may attain to a dim vision of his presence by means of the apperception which philosophy affords. But when these souls are set free and migrate [383] into the realm of the invisible and the unseen, the dispassionate and the pure, then this god becomes their leader and king, since it is on him that they are bound to be dependent in their insatiate contemplation and yearning for that beauty which is for men unutterable and indescribable. With this beauty Isis,³⁹⁴ as the ancient story declares, [p. 185] is for ever enamoured and pursues it and consorts with it and fills our earth here with all things fair and good that partake of generation. This which I have thus far set forth comprises that account which is most befitting the gods.

79. If, as I have promised,³⁹⁵ I must now speak of the offerings of incense which are made each day, one should first consider that b) this people always lays the very greatest stress upon those practices which are conducive to health. Especially in their sacred services and holy living and strict regimen the element of health is no less important than that of piety. For they did not deem it proper to serve that which is pure and in all ways unblemished and unpolluted with either bodies or souls that were unhealthy and diseased.³⁹⁶ Since, then, the air, of which we make the greatest use and in which we exist, has not always the same consistency and composition, but in the night-time becomes dense and oppresses the body and brings the soul into depression and solicitude, c) as if it had become befogged and heavy, therefore, immediately upon arising, they burn resin on their altars, revivifying and purifying the air by its dissemination, and fanning into fresh life the languished spirit innate in the body, inasmuch as the odour of resin contains something forceful and stimulating.

Again at midday, when they perceive that the sun is forcibly attracting a copious and heavy exhalation from the earth and is combining this with the air, they burn myrrh on the altars; for the heat dissolves and scatters the murky and turgid concretions in the surrounding atmosphere. In fact, physicians seem to [p. 187] bring relief to pestilential affections by making a large blazing fire, for this rarefies the air. d) But the rarefaction is more effective if they burn fragrant woods, such as that of the cypress, the juniper, and the pine. At any rate, they say that Acron, the

³⁹⁰ Cf. Plato, *Letters*, vii.344B.

³⁹¹ Plato, *Symposium*, 210A.

³⁹² Cf. [Life of Alexander, chap. vii](#) (668A).

³⁹³ Cf. [375D](#), *supra*.

³⁹⁴ Cf. [372E](#) and [374F](#), *supra*.

³⁹⁵ [372C](#), *supra*.

³⁹⁶ Cf. the Roman taboo in [Moralia, 281C](#).

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physician in Athens at the time of the great plague, won great repute by prescribing the lighting of a fire beside the sick, and thereby he helped not a few. Aristotle³⁹⁷ says that fragrant exhalations from perfumes and flowers and meadows are no less conducive to health than to pleasure, inasmuch as by their warmth and lightness they gently relax the brain, which is by nature cold and frigid. If it is true that among the Egyptians they call myrrh "bal," and that this being interpreted has the particular meaning "the dissipation of repletion," then this adds some testimony to our account of the reason for its use. e)

80. Cyphi³⁹⁸ is a compound composed of sixteen ingredients: honey, wine, raisins, cyperus, resin, myrrh, aspalathus, seselis, mastich, bitumen, rush, sorrel, and in addition to these both the junipers, of which they call one the larger and one the smaller, cardamum, and calamus. These are compounded, not at random, but while the sacred writings are being read to the perfumers as they mix the ingredients. As for this number, even if it appears quite clear that it is the square of a square and is the only one of the numbers forming a square that has its perimeter equal [p. 189] to its area,³⁹⁹ f) and deserves to be admired for this reason, yet it must be said that its contribution to the topic under discussion is very slight. Most of the materials that are taken into this compound, inasmuch as they have aromatic properties, give forth a sweet emanation and a beneficent exhalation, by which the air is changed, and the body, being moved gently and softly⁴⁰⁰ by the current, acquires a temperament conducive to sleep; and the distress and strain of our daily carking cares, as if they were knots, these exhalations relax and loosen without the aid of wine. [384] The imaginative faculty that is susceptible to dreams it brightens like a mirror, and makes it clearer no less effectively than did the notes of the lyre which the Pythagoreans⁴⁰¹ used to employ before sleeping as a charm and a cure for the emotional and irrational in the soul. It is a fact that stimulating odours often recall the failing powers of sensation, and often again lull and quiet them when their emanations are diffused in the body by virtue of their ethereal qualities; even as some physicians state that sleep supervenes when the volatile portion of our food, gently permeating the digestive tract and coming into close contact with it, b) produces a species of titillation.

They use cyphi as both a potion and a salve; for taken internally it seems to cleanse properly the internal organs, since it is an emollient. Apart from this, resin and myrrh result from the action of the sun when the trees exude them in response to the heat. Of the ingredients which compose cyphi, [p. 191] there are some which delight more in the night, that is, those which are wont to thrive in cold winds and shadows and dews and dampness. For the light of day is single and simple, and Pindar⁴⁰² says that the sun is seen "through the deserted aether." But the air at night is a composite mixture made up of many lights and forces, even as though seeds from every star were showered down into one place. Very appropriately, therefore, they burn resin and myrrh in the daytime, for these are simple substances and have their origin from the sun; c) but the cyphi, since it is compounded of ingredients of all sorts of qualities, they offer at nightfall.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ Cf. Rose, *Aristoteles Pseudepigraphus*, p233.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Müller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.* ii p616 (Manetho, frag. 84). An interesting note in Parthey's edition (pp277-280) describes the different kinds of cyphi mentioned in ancient writers, and gives in modern terms recipes for three.

³⁹⁹ Cf. 367E, *supra*.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. *Moralia*, 1087E.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 45D, and Quintilian, IX.4.12.

⁴⁰² Pindar, *Olympian Odes*, i.6.

⁴⁰³ Some think the essay ends too abruptly; others think it (p191) [?]