

## ◀ VLT 01 | 1313

### INTRODUCTION

**W**elcome to the Mystery Cults series for the Amazons vs Valkyries adventure setting. The religious cults presented here are just a few of the hundreds that exist in this setting. Some are dedicated to chthonic gods that are almost forgotten, while others worship new deities, such as Alexander the Great. These cults are most common in Greece and the Greek colonies, but also exist in Egypt, Persia, Rome, and Carthage. Even in less civilized lands druids, witch doctors, and other religious leaders join together, keep secrets, pursue common goals, and organize themselves in a hierarchy.

### MYSTERY CULTS

Mystery cults are secret societies that exist within religious institutions. Like other secret societies, their existence is well known, but their rituals, lore, and objectives are concealed. Only the initiated are allowed access to these secrets.

**Levels of Initiation.** Cult membership is divided into a hierarchy of at least twenty degrees or ranks. Some cults have more than sixty ranks. Only the high priestess (or priest) is privy to all the cult's secrets.

**Exclusivity.** None of these cults require their members to disavow or deny other deities and cults. In fact, many people are simultaneously members of multiple cults.



**Cult Secrets.** Only the initiated know the true name of the cult's deity, and they are forbidden to speak it to anyone outside the cult. At each level of initiation, a different true name is revealed to the member with only the high priestess knowing the actual true name of the deity. Mystery cults also harbor many other secrets and esoteric lore. Some examples are listed on the table below.

**Initiation Fees.** Although membership in most cults is open to everyone, initiation rites have fees. These fees offset the cost of the ritual and help support the temple and its ambitions. The amount of the fee increases with each degree and depends on many factors, including how much the applicant can afford and how much the cult leaders desire the new member.

**Initiation Times.** Most cults conduct initiations once per year. Common dates include the first full Moon after the Winter Solstice, the Spring Equinox, and the Summer Solstice. The process usually involves preliminary ritual purification, eating sacred foods, and confessing of wrong doing. This takes at least three days and sometimes up to two weeks. The actual ceremony begins at sundown and continues until sunrise. During the ritual, the initiates consume psychoactive substances and venture into a deep cavern where they have unnerving encounters with deities and demons.

**Membership Advantage.** Besides access to secret lore and powerful associates, being a cult member has other perks. Membership can mean that your business wins a lucrative contract from a trade guild or local magistrate. It could mean that your child is educated by an expensive Greek tutor, or your competitor suffers a tragic setback.

**Leadership and Members.** Cult hierarchies are separate from temple priesthoods. While most leadership positions within the cults are occupied by priestesses (or priests), not all temple priestesses are members of the mystery cult. Likewise, most cult members are not priestesses or employed by the temple; they are private citizens, lawyers, merchants, stage actors, lords, scribes, and princesses.

## D20 Secret Lore

1	Facts about mythical events
2	Location of an entrance to the Underworld
3	Location of a gate to another dimension
4	Location of a prison holding a demon or deity
5	Formula for creating magical items
6	Rare spells
7	Facts about other planes in the multiverse
8	Facts about a mythical beast
9	Facts about distant lands
10	The true ambitions of a major political figure
11	Archaic or extinct language(s)
12	Secret of navigating the tunnels of Europa
13	Lore of a lost or forgotten civilization
14	Location of a legendary magic item
15	Clues or answer to a puzzle or riddle
16	Location of a sacred site
17	Lore about a humanoid or monstrous race
18	Lore of a lost, magic-like technology
19	Location of a magical island
20	Lore about the Amazons Vs Valkyries conflict



## THE CULT OF ISIS

**Domains:** Life, Fertility, Protection, Magic, Prophecy, War, the Moon, and the Sky

**Location:** Egypt, Kush, Greece, Phoenicia, Rome, Carthage

**Cult Secrets:** Resurrection, Fertility, Healing

Isis, The Great Lady, Lady of Heaven, Mistress of Magic, The Many Named, The Star of the Sea, and the Mother of Gods is an ancient goddess, having been worshiped since the times of the Old Kingdom. Stories tell that she is more clever than a million gods, more effective in battle than a million soldiers, and is considered one of the most compassionate gods because she has known suffering in a way that many other gods haven't, so it isn't surprising that her worship has remained strong throughout the years, and, more recently, has spread throughout the Mediterranean after the Greeks conquered Egypt.

She is one of the most complex figures in Egyptian divine literature, being featured in many stories and myths. The story of her journey to resurrect her twin brother and soulmate, Osiris, is the most well-known of her stories. But she is also known as being the greatest Sorceress, for she used her powers to obtain the Ineffable Name – Ra's true name. In astrology, she is associated with the moon and the star Sirius; in Egyptian the star Sirius is known as Sothis or "Soul of Isis" and signals the annual flooding of the Nile river to bring fertility to the land.

Isis possesses powerful magic that makes even Anubis, god of death, subject to her whims. Therefore, people pray to her on behalf of the sick and dying and at night, it's believed she visits the sick, brushing them gently with her wings as she heals them with magical incantations. As a powerful magician, Isis can choose to take on any shape she desires, but often chooses forms that align with aspects of her worship or history: a kite, cow, snake, crocodile, scorpion, or swallow for animal forms or a beautiful queen, pregnant girl, or a widow devastated by grief and sorrow in human form.



Typically, Isis is depicted as a beautiful woman in a sheath dress holding a papyrus scroll or ankh, with a headdress of cow or ram horns with a full moon between them or a crown topped by a throne. She is also shown carved in black stone as a mother holding her newborn son to her breast similar to the classic 'Madonna' sculpture or depicted as a widow, mourning and crying for her lost love on urns and in sculpture. In her role as protector of tombs she is sometimes depicted as having wings like a kite instead of arms. The tyet, a looped shape similar to the ankh, is seen as Isis's emblem, and is often used as a funerary amulet to confer her protection on the wearer.

Isis accepts all into her worship, including women and slaves, making her a very popular goddess. Priestess and clergy members are held in high esteem by the communities they serve. She is especially fond of women, single mothers, orphans, occultists, and mariners. She is said to enjoy offerings of milk, honey, flowers, incense, and candles.

### RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GREAT MOTHER

Some people believe that Isis is an aspect of or the name given to the Great Mother in Egypt, although those who worship the Great Mother are quick to point out the differences between the two, the biggest being that the Great Mother is always associated with the Earth, while Isis is associated with the sky. Isis only comes into conflict with the Great Mother when the Great Mother's plans puts her children's children, the Pharaohs and their families, in danger.

## THE OSIRIS TALE

Isis' most well-known legend is that of the resurrection of Osiris. Osiris and Isis' treacherous brother, Set, murdered and dismembered Osiris. Isis searched the land to find the body parts and used her magic to put them together and breathe life into his body so that she and Osiris could be together one last time before he left to rule the underworld. A son, Horus, was born posthumously and Isis protected the child against Set until Horus was old enough to fight. After Horus was born, Set returned and cut the body of Osiris into 14 pieces, which he scattered along the Nile. Once again, Isis went in search of them, but this time she buried each piece where she found it, allowing it to fertilize the land.

## THE TEMPLES

Temples and shrines to Isis are spread throughout the Mediterranean and Northern Africa. In Africa, temples range from Alexandria to Kush, over 600 miles away, drawing worshipers from throughout the Mediterranean and Northern Africa. Because Isis's cult is closely tied to those of male deities such as Osiris, Min, or Horus, shrines and temples to her are often found wherever her family is worshiped, especially in her role as the mother of Horus. However, as her worship spreads throughout Greece, she is often worshiped in conjunction with other goddesses, especially Aphrodite, Demeter, Persephone, and Artemis.

Her major temple is part of the Osiris complex of temples located in Abydos. She also has major temples in Alexandria, Cairo, Athens, and Philae far to the south. The Kushites built temples in Meroe and almost every town in Egypt has a shrine dedicated to her and her son. Isis also has temples in many Greek towns and she is worshiped in Rome and Carthage.

## THE FESTIVALS

While Isis is involved in many rituals and festivals, the act of dressing and making offerings of food to an idol of Isis each morning in her temple is the most common form of worship for the goddess. In Egyptian style temples, the idol is secluded and only seen by priestesses, while Grecian-style temples put the idol in a public place that everyone can see and worship. Every town has unique local customs centered around the worship of Isis and Horus, so any village is likely to have its own unique way to venerate their goddess.

**Khoiak:** The oldest festival featuring Isis is an elaborate series of rites performed across Egypt for Osiris during the month of Khoiak (approximately mid-September to mid-October by Gregorian calendar), where two women act out the roles of Isis and Nephthys, singing or chanting in mourning for their dead brother, which can be read in the *Festival Songs of Isis and Nephthys* and *Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*. Common rituals include recreating Isis' search for the pieces of Osiris, with each day having a specific piece being found (head, eyes, jaw, etc.) or the creation of a seeded effigy of Osiris that is watered for two weeks before being planted, symbolizing Isis burying him after the birth of Horus in order to fertilize the land. In several areas raising the Djed pillar, a stylized imitation of a tree without leaves around which are linked ears of grains, circularly and in steps, is performed at the end of the month, as a symbol of the land's fertility.

**Amesysia:** Egyptians across the country celebrate her birthday, the Amesysia, by carrying the local cult statue of Isis through their fields to celebrate her powers of fertility.

**Philaen Worship:** The priests at Philae hold a festival every ten days when the cult statue of Isis visits the neighboring island of Bigeh, which was said to be Osiris's place of burial, and the priests perform funerary rites for him.

## THE OATH OF THE GREAT LADY

Initiates into the Cult of Isis are taken to a chamber where the mysteries of Isis are revealed using an elaborate tablet of bronze with enamel and silver inlay as an altar. The tablet is covered with hieroglyphics and inscriptions concerning mystical knowledge and an occult system of sacrifices, rites and ceremonies that are taught to the initiate. However, those who take the Oath of Isis are the chosen few who are visited by Isis herself and enlightened by her in the ways of magic and life.

### TENETS OF THE GREAT LADY

Isis is the protector of her family. Her tenets focus on her aspects of healing and protection. While she has no issue with fighting to protect family, everything should be done to achieve that goal, fighting should not be for personal gain or glory.

**Family.** Always protect and help your family: children and loved ones. Do not be afraid to cut ties with those who betray you, though: they don't deserve your love or mercy.

**Compassion.** Show those weaker than yourself compassion. Care for the young, weak, sick, and abandoned. Be especially kind to expecting mothers and grieving widows.

**Power.** Use your power, either magically, temporally, or physically, to protect family and those who are less powerful than yourself. Search out power and knowledge to achieve your goals.

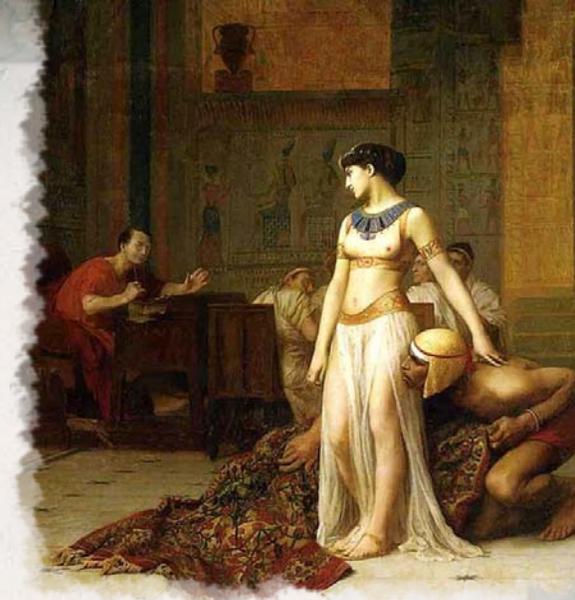
**Wisdom.** Act with wisdom to protect what you have and defeat enemies in the most efficient ways. Never lose sight of what you want to accomplish and who you need to protect.

### CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options:

**Interpose.** Use a reaction to activate this ability when an ally you can see within 30 feet of you would take damage. You take the damage instead.

**Motherly Love.** When you use your Lay on Hands feature, you can also grant the target temporary hit points equal to half of the amount of hit points you healed. These temporary hit points last until the creature finishes a long rest, or until you use this Channel Divinity option again.



### OATH OF THE GREAT LADY SPELLS

#### Paladin

#### Level Spells

3 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Sanctuary, healing word</i>
5 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Lesser restoration, warding bond</i>
9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Mass healing word, revivify</i>
13 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Divination, death ward</i>
17 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Raise dead, greater restoration</i>

### MOTHER'S PROTECTION

Starting at 7<sup>th</sup> level, you and friendly creatures within 10 ft. gain resistance to necrotic damage. This range increases to 30 feet at 18<sup>th</sup> level.

### MOTHER'S SHIELD

Starting at 15<sup>th</sup> level, as a reaction you can cast *sanctuary* on yourself, as well as one friendly creature you can see within 30 feet. If an enemy succeeds at its saving throw to ignore the sanctuary effect and inflicts damage, it suffers psychic damage equal to half your paladin level. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

### AVATAR OF ISIS

At 20<sup>th</sup> level, as an action, you directly channel Isis' power. For 1 minute, you gain the following benefits: Kite wings sprout from your back, giving you a flying speed of 90 feet. In addition, you can cast *plane shift* once per day. While in this form, you add your Charisma bonus to your armor class. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

## APPENDIX: ISIS' ITEMS OF POWER

### BOOK OF BREATHING

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a cleric paladin, or priestess)*

This text is Isis' writings on how to reach the Field of Reeds in the afterlife, resurrect the dead, and control the undead. Sometimes this text is also known as the *Book of the Dead*. There are many legends regarding this book's existence and location. If the book were discovered, the Cult of Isis would do anything within their power to keep its dangerous secrets from being abused by the power-hungry or deranged.

While attuned to this item, you can cast *dominate monster* as if using a 9<sup>th</sup> level spell slot, though it only affects undead creatures. After being used 3 times, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

You can also use this book to cast *plane shift* and *resurrection*. Once used, each of these properties can't be used again until the next dawn.

### KNOT OF ISIS (GREATER)

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a priestess of Isis)*

This Tyet was soaked in Isis' menstrual blood, which stained it red, and acts as protection from undead when held by the living. While attuned to this item, you can Turn Undead as a 5<sup>th</sup> level cleric. Once used, this property cannot be used again until the next dawn.

### KNOT OF ISIS (LESSER)

*Wondrous item, uncommon*

When placed on the body of a dead creature, this talisman prevents *animate dead* spells and any other effect including vampirism that would cause the corpse to rise as an undead.

### VEIL OF ISIS

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

The veil hides the mysteries of the universe. Those who wear the veil must make a DC25 Wisdom saving throw to retain their sanity. If they succeed, they can cast magic as if they were a sorceress of 3 levels higher than their current level.



## CREDITS

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