

Hymns of Isidoros from the Temple of Isis at Narmouthis in Egypt (after 96 BCE)

Source: V.F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972), with adaptations.

Hymn 1

Oh wealth-giver, Queen of the gods, Hermouthis, Lady,
All-powerful Good Fortune, greatly renowned Isis,
Deo, highest discoverer of all life,
 manifold miracles were your care that you might bring
 livelihood to mankind and morality to all;
 and you taught customs that justice might in some measure prevail;
 you gave skills that men's life might be comfortable,
 and you discovered the blossoms that produce edible vegetation.
 Because of you heaven and the whole earth have their being;
 (10) And the gusts of the winds and the sun with its sweet light.
 By your power the channels of Nile are filled, every one,
 At the harvest season and its most turbulent water is poured
 On the whole land that produce may be unfailing.
 All mortals who live on the boundless earth,
 Thracians, Greeks and barbarians,
 Express your fair name, a name greatly honoured among all, but
 Each speaks in his own language, in his own land.
 The Syrians call you: Astarte, Artemis, Nanaia,
 The Lycian tribes call you: Leto the Lady,
 (20) The Thracians also name You as Mother of the gods,
 And the Greeks call you Hera of the Great Throne, Aphrodite,
 Hestia the good, Rheia and Demeter.
 But the Egyptians call you 'Thiouis' because they know that you, being One, are all
 Other goddesses invoked by the races of men.
 Mighty One, I shall not cease to sing of your great Power,
 Deathless Saviour, many-named, mightiest Isis,
 Saving from war, cities and all their citizens:
 Men, their wives, possessions, and children.
 (30) As many as are bound fast in prison, in the power of death,
 As many as are in pain through long, anguished, sleepless nights,
 All who are wanderers in a foreign land,
 And as many as sail on the Great Sea in winter
 When men may be destroyed and their ships wrecked and sunk . . .
 All these are saved if they pray that you be present to help.
 (35) Hear my prayers, Oh one whose name has great Power;
 Prove yourself merciful to me and free me from all distress.

Isidorus wrote it.

Hymn 2

Hail, Good Fortune, greatly renowned Isis, mightiest
Hermouthis, in you every city rejoices;
Oh Discoverer of Life and Cereal food because of which all
mortals delight because of your blessings.
All who pray to you to assist their commerce,
prosper in their piety forever;
all who are bound in mortal illnesses in the grip of death,
if they but pray to you, quickly attain your renewal of life.
How truly the Agathos Daimon, mighty Sokonopis,
(10) dwells as your temple-mate, that good Bestower of wealth,
Creator of both earth and the starry heaven,
and of all rivers, and very swift streams;
and Anchoes your Son, who inhabits the height of heaven,
is the rising Sun who shows forth the light.
All indeed who wish to beget offspring,
if they but pray to you, attain fruitfulness.
Persuading the gold-flowing Nile, you lead it in season
over the land of Egypt as a blessing for men.
Then all vegetation flourishes and you apportion to all
(20) whom you favour, a life of unspeakable blessings.
Remembering your gifts, men to whom you have granted wealth
and great blessings which you give them to possess all their lives,
all duly set aside for you one tenth of these blessings
rejoicing each year at the time of your festival.
Thereafter you allow them, as the year rolls round again,
everyone to rejoice in the month of Pachon.
Joyful after your festival, they return home
reverently and are filled with the sense of blessedness that comes only from you.
Grant a share of your gifts also to me, Lady Hermouthis,
(30) your suppliant, happiness and especially the blessing of children.

Isidorus wrote it. Hearing my prayers and hymns, the gods
have rewarded me with the blessing of great happiness.

Hymn 3

Oh Ruler of the Highest Gods, Hermouthis, Lady,
Isis, pure, most sacred mighty, of mighty name, Deo,
Oh most holy granter of good things, to all men
who are righteous, you grant great blessings: to possess wealth,
a life that is pleasant, and most serene happiness:
material gain, good fortune, and happy soundness of understanding.
All who live lives of greatest bliss, the best of men:
sceptre-bearing kings and those who are rulers,
if they depend on you, rule until old age,
(10) leaving shining and splendid wealth in abundance
to their sons, and sons' sons, and men who come after.
But the one whom the heavenly Queen has held the most dear of princes,
rules both Asia and Europe,
keeping the peace; the harvests grow heavy for him
with all kinds of good things, bearing fruit . . . ,
and where indeed there are wars and slaughter
of countless throngs, your strength, and godly power
annihilates the multitude against him; but to the few with him it gives
courage.
Hear me, Good Fortune, when I pray to you, Lady,
(20) whether you have journeyed into Libya or to the south wind,
or whether you are dwelling in the outermost regions of the north wind ever
sweetly blowing,
or whether you dwell in the blasts of the east wind where are the risings of
the sun,
or whether you have gone to Olympus where the Olympian gods dwell,
or whether you are in heaven above, a judge with the immortal gods,
or whether having mounted the chariot of the swift-driving sun,
you are directing the world of men, looking down on the manifold
deeds of the wicked and gazing down on those of the just.
If you are present here too, you witness men's individual virtue,
delighting in the sacrifices, libations and offerings,
(30) of the men who dwell in the district of Suchos, the Arsinoites,
men of mixed races who all, yearly, are present
on the twentieth of the month of Pachon and Thoth, bringing a tenth for you
and for Anchoes, and Sokonopis, most sacred of gods, at your feast.
Oh Hearer of prayers, black-robed Isis, the Merciful,
and you Great Gods who share the temple with Her,
send Paeon to me, healer of all ills.

Isidorus wrote it.

Hymn 4

Who built this holy temple to greatest Hermouthis?
What god remembered the All-Holy One of the Immortals?
He marked out the sacred shrine as a high Olympos.
For Deo Highest, Isis Thesmophorus,
for Anchoes the Son, and the Agathos Daimon, Soknopis,
Immortals all, he created a most just haven.
A certain one, they say, was born a divine King of Egypt;
he appeared on earth as Lord of all the World,
rich, righteous, and omnipotent;
(10) he had fame, yes, and virtue that rivalled the gods'
for to him the earth and sea were obedient,
and the streams of all the beautiful-flowing rivers,
and the breath of the winds, and the sun which shows sweet light,
and on his rising is visible to all.
The races of winged creatures with one accord would listen to him
and he instructed all who heard his voice.
The fact is clear that the birds obeyed him
as those who have read the sacred scriptures
speak of this leing once entrusting a written message to a crow
(20) and she flew off with the letter, bearing his utterance (?)
[or: she returned bearing a verbal message together with a written reply].
It is so for he was not a mortal man, nor was he son of a mortal man
but as offspring of a god, great, and eternal,
even of Souchos, all powerful, very great, omnipotent,
and the Agathos Daimon, he the son appeared on earth as a King.
The maternal grandfather of this god is the Distributor of Life,
Amman, who is Zeus of Hellas and Asia.
For this reason all things heard his voice, all things
that move on earth and the races of winged heavenly creatures.
What was the name of this one? What ruler,
(30) what king, or who of the Immortals, determined it?
Why the one who nurtured him, Sesosis, he who has gone to the Western Heaven,
gave him a fair name, 'Son of the Golden Sun.'
When the Egyptians say his name in their language they call him "Porramanres, the Great, Deathless."
I have heard from others a miracle that is a riddle: how he 'navigated on the desert by wheels and sail.'

Reliably learning these facts from men who study history, I myself have set them all up on inscribed pillars and translated for Greeks the power of a Prince who was a god, (40) power such as no other mortal has possessed. Isidorus wrote it.