

Name: <<\* HUEN, Chung Yuen Ian \*>>

Student ID: <<\* 1010160800 \*>>

Professor: Professor Mu-chou Poo

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## **The myth and religious aspects of Osiris and a comparative analysis with Dumuzi from Sumeria**

### **Executive Summary**

Osiris was one of the most important deities in Ancient Egypt. He was the ruler of the underworld and his judgment was believed to determine whether a soul would gain eternal life or perish. The paper seeks to study this god and will begin by examining the story of the Osiris myth via the study of the literature including Egyptian and later Greek texts. Then, the symbols of Osiris will be explored. Afterwards, the paper will focus on how the god symbolizes the vegetation and fertility of the Egyptian land and how is that linked to the conceptualization of his deity. Then, the study will examine how the people would worship and conduct themselves so as to be in eternity with Osiris. The paper will then turn its attention to the myth of Dumuzi. The focus here would be to compare the two myths and point to some of the similarities and differences of the stories. Then an examination of how these gods are related to fertility and agriculture will be conducted. The paper will end with a conclusion, summarizing the points put forth in the paper.

## INTRODUCTION

The great American author Mark Twain wrote in his autobiography, “If everybody was satisfied with himself there would be no heroes.”<sup>1</sup> Liken the saying to the history of mankind, as human beings organized themselves into societies through the invention of agriculture, they gained the awareness of the limitation of resources and the ephemeral nature of one’s lifetime. To combat this reality, humans developed beliefs, myths and rituals which seek to explain the unexplainable and lengthen one’s existence to eternity. Such is the beginning of religion. Religious stories usually evolve around “heroes” whose power could lead humans away from the grim fact of reality. This paper intends to examine the cult of a particular “hero” from one of the earliest civilizations: the religion of Osiris of ancient Egypt. Osiris was worshipped as the god who ruled the underworld and the dead souls would be able to exist for eternity along with him. The symbols that Osiris represented and how they transformed to meaning dying, resurrecting and living forever would allow the student historian to gain a much deeper understanding on the psyche and belief of the ancient Egyptians.

The study is structured as follows: firstly, it will put forth the origin and actual story of the Osiris myth. Secondly, the religious symbolisms and belief system of the followers of the cult will be elaborated and examined. The focus of this section will be on how Osiris became the god of the dead and everlasting life. Thirdly, there will be a comparative analysis between Osiris and that of the Mesopotamian god Dumuzi. Finally, the paper will conclude with a general statement on the nature of this deity.

## STORY OF OSIRIS

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<sup>1</sup> Twain M, Griffin B, Smith HE. *Autobiography of mark twain*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2010

Until the present day, there is yet a known complete written version of the story of Osiris from the Egyptian times. As Bleeker wrote, there is “nothing but allusions to the Osiris myth.”<sup>2</sup> The lack of anything written is due to the fact that “Egyptians never felt an inner need to relate this myth.”<sup>3</sup> Bleeker continued to explain that for the ancient Egyptians, “religiosity was not bound up with the knowledge of a certain doctrine, but with the celebration of certain rites which somehow were rooted in myth.”<sup>4</sup> As such, one could only piece together the story via a set of circumstantial evidence.

In his note on the Origin of Osiris, Colin Baly gives the bare bone of the god’s story by stating that “Osiris was a king, the father of Horus, who inherited his kingdom, and he was killed either by drowning or by being knocked down by his brother Seth”<sup>5</sup> After his death, his wife and sister Isis along with his other sister Nephthys “made an unsuccessful attempt at rescue.”<sup>6</sup> Isis tried to resuscitate Osiris as it was written that ‘I (Isis) restored wind to his nostrils so that he would live’<sup>7</sup> Nephthys, although she was “the wife of Seth”<sup>8</sup> played an “essential part in the care of the dead Osiris.”<sup>9</sup> “The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys”<sup>10</sup> illustrated the love between Osiris and his sisters and their sadness upon realizing his death. Geb, who was the god of the earth and the father of Osiris, “was grieved at the fate of his son”<sup>11</sup>

Isis then “erected the limpness of the weary (phallus); she received his seed; she formed his heir.”<sup>12</sup> Their son would be Horus who avenged his “father’s death”<sup>13</sup> by killing Seth and

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<sup>2</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):6

<sup>3</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):6

<sup>4</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):7

<sup>5</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4):221

<sup>6</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4):221

<sup>7</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):13

<sup>8</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):11

<sup>9</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):11

<sup>10</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):3

<sup>11</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):10

<sup>12</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):9

would be awarded “his father’s rights.”<sup>14</sup> Horus was worshipped as a great pharaoh and god in ancient Egypt. To illustrate the fluidity of the plot of this genre of myth in the era, there was also an “elder Horus, a sky-god, who formed a pair with Seth”<sup>15</sup> This would be puzzling for the modern reader as we were led to understand that Horus was an arch enemy of his uncle Seth who was the murderer of Horus’ father. Bleeker, continuing with his story of Osiris, states that “his resurrection, which is again not explicitly mentioned, but understood.”<sup>16</sup>

We have an extended version of the story of Osiris through the writings of Diodorus, who composed his works around 60 BCE. Dismemberment of Osiris was mentioned by Diodorus as he wrote “Isis recovered pieces of the body”<sup>17</sup> after he was murdered by Seth. In his description of the myth, he made an implication that Osiris was cut into many pieces and were scattered around Egypt. According to Griffiths, inserting “Greek ideas into Egyptian religion had become very popular by the time of Diodorus”<sup>18</sup> and this may account for the differences in the original Egyptian plot versus the Greek author’s story. We only have a full extended account of the myth from the Greek historian Plutarch<sup>19</sup> who lived from 40 AD to 120 AD during the Roman Empire. Plutarch preserved a tradition that Seth killed Osiris and subsequently tore Osiris’ corpse “into fourteen pieces which he then scattered all over Egypt”<sup>20</sup> However, the portrayal of Osiris by Plutarch must be understood in the context that it may vary from the actual Egyptian understanding of the myth, as Baly states that the story from the “Pyramid Texts is not that of Plutarch”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):8

<sup>14</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):8

<sup>15</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):11

<sup>16</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):8

<sup>17</sup> Griffiths JG. 97. diodorus siculus and the myth of osiris. *Man*. 1948;48:84

<sup>18</sup> Griffiths JG. 97. diodorus siculus and the myth of osiris. *Man*. 1948;48:84

<sup>19</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:177

<sup>20</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):13

<sup>21</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4):221

## RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM AND BELIEF SYSTEM

Bleeker wrote that “the ancient Egyptians...held death in equal abhorrence as most other peoples”<sup>22</sup>, it would be natural for them to find a deity that would be able to offer eternal existence to their souls. The deity in their culture was Osiris. That he were to become the god of the dead had much to do with what he represented. In one aspect Osiris was portrayed as a fertility god. He was illustrated as “Labdanum-bearing Cistus”<sup>23</sup> and the symbol of the tree was essential for the ancients’ conception of life. The rise of agriculture led to the development of civilization and the branch or vegetation was a symbol of growth and continuation.

Linking Osiris with agriculture, Bleeker could conclude that the Lamentation of the death of the god was related to the annual cycle of Egypt and therefore his death can be considered as to “have occurred during the harvest”<sup>24</sup> between Osiris and agriculture. The dying and rising motif can be paralleled by the agricultural process of growth and harvest (death) and rebirth (another cycle). Diodorus further elaborated the relationship between Osiris and agriculture as he stated that “he was the first to stop men from eating each other. When Isis had discovered wheat and barley growing wild, he devised how to cultivate them.”<sup>25</sup> He also “discovered the vine and first taught mankind how to make wine from it.”<sup>26</sup> Here the myth had a combination of Osiris as the vegetation itself and him as the wise leader who taught the people how to farm. The mixture of these aspects illustrates the belief of the ancients and shows how they attempted to explain agriculture with the supernatural forces around them. Because their well-being was dependent on the methodology of farming, they worshipped the inventor of it. Moreover, their continual

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<sup>22</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):1

<sup>23</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4): 222

<sup>24</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):15

<sup>25</sup> Griffiths JG. 97. diodorus siculus and the myth of osiris. *Man*. 1948;48:84

<sup>26</sup> Griffiths JG. 97. diodorus siculus and the myth of osiris. *Man*. 1948;48:84

livelihood rested upon the fertility of the soil and therefore they worshipped the one who would be able to provide it. All of these features were embodied in Osiris.

The god was also “connected with a goat or ram at Mendes”<sup>27</sup> and the ancient Egyptians had the “habit of clean shaving both the kings and the gods wore long thin false beards with curled tips not unlike a matted goat's beard.”<sup>28</sup> Sheep was considered to symbolize fertility as the ancient Egyptians relied on their milk and wool for everyday consumption. Moreover, their manure was used to fertilize the land. Tobin further illustrated the fertility aspects of Osiris in his article *Mytho-theology of Ancient Egypt* by linking the god to agriculture and that he also taught his countrymen “the principle of natural life and its continuity.”<sup>29</sup> Tobin stated with no uncertain terms that Osiris “was the actual power and force of fertility”<sup>30</sup> and that he was responsible for “growing grain and the vegetation of the land”<sup>31</sup> In the mind of an ancient Egyptian, a “man's life (was) also seen as part of the wider manifestation of the power of universal life”<sup>32</sup>, therefore if Osiris was responsible for the fertility of the land, the demonstration of his power could also be extended to continuing the life or existence of the dead. This aspect and belief of Osiris would be one of the many factors that molded him into becoming the god of or for the dead.

Another conception of Osiris that led people to see him as the god of the dead was his relationship with the Nile which was often called the "great efflux of Osiris."<sup>33</sup> The Nile made agriculture possible in Egypt and its annual floods brought fertility and liquidity to the soil. As Tobin pointed out, it was the water “which gave the land its fertility and allowed it to produce”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4):222

<sup>28</sup> Baly TJC. A note on the origin of osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1931;17(3/4):222

<sup>29</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>30</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>31</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>32</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>33</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>34</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

and that Egyptians belief in that “abstract source of fertility and life which was contained within the water.”<sup>35</sup> According to Delia in her piece *The Refreshing Water of Osiris*, Plutarch was said to have written that the “Egyptians equated Osiris with the Nile river”<sup>36</sup> It was believed that Osiris could “control the inundation of the Nile”<sup>37</sup> The ancient Egyptians believed order was the reason of the rise of their civilization and therefore they craved for it. The annual flooding of the Nile was well timed and the Egyptians were able to enjoy the results. The Nile was both the giver of life but also posed potential threats of devastating floods. The embodiment of Osiris possessing both the fertility nature of the river and the ability to control it illustrate the belief in the ancient Egyptians on the tension between these two realities. As stated the “ancient Egyptians associated water with life”<sup>38</sup> and therefore it was believed that by “absorbing the vital fluid of Osiris, the deceased might partake of the god's immortality.”<sup>39</sup> One could observe how the Egyptians transformed a physical reality into a corresponding religious symbol. As water was associated with water, when an individual absorbed such a life source, he would be able to enter into eternal life. This aspect was further elaborated by Plutarch as he described a particular ritual of the Osiris cult where the text would urge believers to “wash [your hands in this] fresh [water] which your father Osiris has given to you”<sup>40</sup> In another legend, the “rise of the Nile water was believed to have been caused by the tears of Isis.”<sup>41</sup> This fits well with the timing of the annual harvest which would be followed by the flood. As the harvest symbolized the death of Osiris, Isis would lament and her tears would cause the rise of the Nile water.

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<sup>35</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>36</sup> Delia D. The refreshing water of osiris. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1992;29:182

<sup>37</sup> Griffiths JG. 97. diodorus siculus and the myth of osiris. *Man*. 1948;48:84

<sup>38</sup> Delia D. The refreshing water of osiris. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1992;29:184

<sup>39</sup> Delia D. The refreshing water of osiris. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1992;29:183

<sup>40</sup> Delia D. The refreshing water of osiris. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1992;29:182

<sup>41</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):15

It has been demonstrated that Osiris was representative of the idea of fertility for Egypt through being the symbol of vegetation, the ram and the Nile. The ancient Egyptians worshipped him as the ruler of the underworld was due to his ability to give life in the nature realm. As “Egyptians tended to express abstract concepts in concrete form”<sup>42</sup>, the symbolism embodied in Osiris was solidified into a tangible figure. Due to the fact that the ancient Egyptians believed that the “universe was ... an actual living organism,”<sup>43</sup>, the fertility aspects of Osiris was therefore “also the symbol of the ideal terrestrial kingship.”<sup>44</sup> In fact “ancient Egyptians could not conceive of a deity otherwise than in the shape of a king.”<sup>45</sup> Tobin illustrated with a strong statement saying that “the political world and the world of nature were for the Egyptian one and the same order, and the unity of that order was aptly represented in the figure of the god Osiris.”<sup>46</sup> Such representation gave the figure of Osiris a concrete personification of a king who was the giver of life on this earth and therefore by ancient Egyptian logical extrapolation, also the provider of eternal life in the world of the dead. The god was therefore more “closely connected with the life and experience of each individual”<sup>47</sup> which contributed to the popularity of the cult for the belief in the existence of eternal life.

Given the factors mentioned above, Osiris was believed to be “the god of individual immortality”<sup>48</sup>. The eternal life of Osiris was first “connected with the kingship as the deified figure of the dead pharaoh, and also with the life of nature, and also, eventually, with the eternal life of each individual.”<sup>49</sup> It could be observed that immortality was originally reserved for the

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<sup>42</sup> Delia D. The refreshing water of osiris. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1992;29:182

<sup>43</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>44</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>45</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):16

<sup>46</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>47</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>48</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>49</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:177



pharaohs who were believed to be the descendents of Horus who was the son of Osiris. The immortality was passed on through the blood line. As time went by, people of high office and noblemen also came to the belief that they could attain eternal life via Osiris. Eventually this belief was extended to the general public. Osiris was therefore believed to be the provider of “the rebirth and immortality of the individual”<sup>50</sup> Egyptians were particularly concerned with their well-being after they passed away and they had many ideas as to where souls would end up. One of the destinations of the dead is “in the Western Land with Osiris”<sup>51</sup> which could illustrate the strong relationship between the Egyptians’ conception of life after death and Osiris.

Given the strength of this link, funeral rituals revolved around the “dramatizations and reenactments of the elements of the Osiris myth”<sup>52</sup>. Because every Egyptian would like to attain eternal life like Osiris, and “live in the Underworld together with him,” therefore, each dead person was “identified with Osiris, (and) even called an Osiris”<sup>53</sup>. It is because of this that “none was so consistently thought of as a mummy as Osiris.”<sup>54</sup> In fact, the desire to be Osiris for the dead was so strong that sometimes it could even be “difficult to discover who actually is being mourned: the god or a certain deceased human being.”<sup>55</sup> At the extreme, rituals performed would “appear to have been a full repetition of the process followed by Osiris himself.”<sup>56</sup>

Beyond performing rituals that would identify the deceased with the passion that Osiris had gone through, the ancient Egyptians also believed in certain moral codes that would allow their souls to be with Osiris. This is due to the fact that the ancient Egyptians believed that the

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<sup>50</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>51</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>52</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>53</sup> Yahuda AS. The osiris cult and the designation of osiris idols in the bible. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. 1944;3(3):196

<sup>54</sup> Yahuda AS. The osiris cult and the designation of osiris idols in the bible. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. 1944;3(3):196

<sup>55</sup> Bleeker CJ. Isis and nephthys as wailing women. *Numen*. 1958;5(1):5

<sup>56</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

“individual is accepted into the next life only because he has been judged as righteous and justified before Osiris.”<sup>57</sup> Osiris was an “inspiration and hope to thousands of his devotees”<sup>58</sup> and it is believe that an “individual whose life had not been lived in accordance with what was demanded by Maat (god of order) could expect to find no place in the wider order of existence after death.”<sup>59</sup> Since the ancient Egyptians believed that their civilization was born out of the order of the Nile and the lands around it and that the terrain beyond was observed to be chaotic, they had the strong conviction that their survival was based on the maintenance of this order. Therefore, in order for an individual to attain eternal life with Osiris, he himself must also lead a life of order in order to join the god in his world of the dead. For the ancient Egyptians, there was “no need for specific moral codes to be detailed by the gods.”<sup>60</sup> The acts of morality should be self evident. One should not “defraud the widow, the orphan, or the poor”<sup>61</sup> or “in any way to harm others or to offend the gods.”<sup>62</sup> He should be “kind and generous”<sup>63</sup> and “benefit and help to those around him.”<sup>64</sup>

It has been demonstrated that the cult of Osiris was at its core a symbol of fertility and the provider of agricultural life. This symbol was further elaborated with him as a dying and resurrecting wise king. This process then provided a way for individuals to attain eternal life like Osiris by going through the same death and resurrection process (in funeral rituals) and also by observing the natural law of order (Maat).

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<sup>57</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:178

<sup>58</sup> James EO. *Folklore*. 1932;43(4):449

<sup>59</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

<sup>60</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

<sup>61</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

<sup>62</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

<sup>63</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

<sup>64</sup> Tobin VA. Mytho-theology in ancient egypt. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. 1988;25:180

The paper will turn its attention to the comparative analysis of Osiris and the god Dumuzi from the neighboring region of Mesopotamia.

#### COMPARISON WITH DUMUZI

Given the proximity of time and distance between the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures, it would not be surprising to find some commonality in the deities they worshipped. For example, it has been illustrated by Smith the Mesopotamian god Ashur could have some relationship with Osiris as the former “was closely associated with a tree round which metal bands were placed”<sup>65</sup> and the latter involved “a story of a tree growing round the chest which held the body of Osiris.”<sup>66</sup> Smith posited that there could be a “common root from Syria.”<sup>67</sup> This analysis, however, would focus on the fertility aspects of Osiris and therefore the god to be used for comparison in this case from Mesopotamia would be Dumuzi, who was also called Tammuz. This god is sometimes also known as Damu who had the “power...that rises in trees and plants.” Moreover, Dumuzi was sometimes referred to as the grain and also the shepherd where the power is in the production of milk. Therefore, Dumuzi can be observed as a manifestation of “new life in nature, its fertility and abundance”<sup>68</sup> This corresponds very closely with Osiris as the symbol of the god of fertility.

In terms of the myth of Dumuzi, there are certain similarities and contrasts with Osiris that could be examined. The details of the narrative were passed down according to “an oral tradition that is alluded to in earlier inscriptions and texts of the third millennium BCE.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Smith S. The relation of marduk, ashur, and osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1922;8(1/2):44

<sup>66</sup> Smith S. The relation of marduk, ashur, and osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1922;8(1/2):44

<sup>67</sup> Smith S. The relation of marduk, ashur, and osiris. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. 1922;8(1/2):44

<sup>68</sup> Jacobsen T. Toward the image of tammuz. *History of Religions*. 1962;1(2):190

<sup>69</sup> Miller NF. Symbols of fertility and abundance in the royal cemetery at ur, iraq. *American Journal of Archaeology*. 2013;117(1):128

Dumuzi was believed to be “the faithful shepherd” and “the sustainer of life”<sup>70</sup>. This would correspond well with the myth of Osiris. He had an additional title of shepherd which Osiris did not share but the commonality rested in their lordship over fertility. Dumuzi was an early “king of Uruk”<sup>71</sup>, therefore, like Osiris he was a great ruler who provided the livelihood for the populace. He was married to Inanna who was the “mother goddess at once sister, mother and beloved of the shepherd Dumuzi.”<sup>72</sup> The common theme of incest was shared in this story (Osiris married his sister Isis) though the Mesopotamian story went further and had Inanna as Dumuzi’s mother as well. Along with Dumuzi, Inanna was “associated with love and fertility”<sup>73</sup> However, unlike Isis, Inanna had a darker side where Wright pointed out that she was the “destruction of all who seek the fruit of the tree, she gathered all things mortal into her store”<sup>74</sup> This aspect of Inanna may be an illustration of the mirror image of Dumuzi who was described to be carefree with his provision for the populace.

Just as Osiris died in his story, Dumuzi also underwent death where “both Inanna and Dumuzi travel to the underworld; Inanna visits temporarily, but Dumuzi dies for good.”<sup>75</sup> The difference in this case lied in the couple travelling together to the underworld while Isis was not part of the process of Osiris’ death. The death of Dumuzi was a “recurring tale of brevity and loss-the never ending wrong”<sup>76</sup> which corresponded well with the myth of Osiris where death in the fertility god was illustrated to imply the ephemeral nature of the agricultural cycle. With

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<sup>70</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):56

<sup>71</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):56

<sup>72</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):55

<sup>73</sup> Miller NF. Symbols of fertility and abundance in the royal cemetery at ur, iraq. *American Journal of Archaeology*. 2013;117(1):128

<sup>74</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):57

<sup>75</sup> Miller NF. Symbols of fertility and abundance in the royal cemetery at ur, iraq. *American Journal of Archaeology*. 2013;117(1):132

<sup>76</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):57

Dumuzi, “death was required to save or sustain life”, and therefore “he was the scapegoat.”<sup>77</sup> This is paralleled in the worship of Osiris where his death was an example for all who would desire to seek eternal life.

One aspect of the story of Dumuzi that was dramatically different from Osiris was from a version of the Yale tablet. That account described Dumuzi as aloof and “dressed himself in a noble garment, seated himself loftily on (his) seat.”<sup>78</sup> Inanna was furious at his attitude and “gave the shepherd Dumuzi into their (demons) hands.”<sup>79</sup> The text then described Dumuzi’s face turning pale and pleaded to the sun god Utu who was the brother of Inanna.<sup>80</sup> This version of the story showed a form of punishment from the mother Inanna on the arrogant Dumuzi and therefore allowing the demons seize him. Noticeably absent in the Osiris myth was Isis taking part in his death.

After Dumuzi’s death, there were also lamentations from two female figures which corresponded well with the myth of Osiris. Kramer recounted that Dumuzi’s “spouse Inanna was indeed weeping for him in the Eanna, and that his sister was indeed lacerating her body racked with agony.”<sup>81</sup> His sister by blood would be the goddess Geshtinnanna (The Grape Vine) and “she seems equally to share with Innana in his intimate affections.”<sup>82</sup> Innana’s lamentations were described as “The Most Bitter Cry”<sup>83</sup> and her cries would involve lines such as “I cling like the apple to the bough”<sup>84</sup> and “cling like the grape to the stalk.”<sup>85</sup> These verses pointed to a strong

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<sup>77</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):57

<sup>78</sup> Kramer SN. "Inanna's descent to the nether world" continued. *Proc Am Philos Soc*. 1950;94(4):363

<sup>79</sup> Kramer SN. "Inanna's descent to the nether world" continued. *Proc Am Philos Soc*. 1950;94(4):363

<sup>80</sup> Kramer SN. "Inanna's descent to the nether world" continued. *Proc Am Philos Soc*. 1950;94(4):363

<sup>81</sup> Kramer SN. The death of dumuzi: A new sumerian version. *Anatolian Studies*. 1980;30(, Special Number in Honour of the Seventieth Birthday of Professor O. R. Gurney):6

<sup>82</sup> Wright GRH. Dumuzi at the court of david. *Numen*. 1981;28(1):59

<sup>83</sup> Jacobsen T. Toward the image of tammuz. *History of Religions*. 1962;1(2):194

<sup>84</sup> Jacobsen T. Toward the image of tammuz. *History of Religions*. 1962;1(2):196

fertility undertone in the cult which was illustrative of the nature of the early agricultural society. Therefore, the “Inanna-Dumuzi stories not only celebrate life but also address death through their lamentations”<sup>86</sup> and this further described the realities of farming as it involved not only birth and growth but also death and rebirth. This corresponded to a certain extent of the reign and death of Osiris which was illustrative of a similar cycle in agriculture.

The legend of Dumuzi was briefly described here and certain comparisons were made. In terms of similarity, both Dumuzi and Osiris were fertility gods and their lives were about the provision of livelihood to the populace. Because the cycle of agriculture involved the birth and death of the vegetation, their myths also brought forth that aspect of farming by including stories of their passing away. Both were married to their sisters, in Dumuzi’s case, Inanna was also his mother. The ways they died were quite different: in Osiris’ story, Isis, his wife was not part of the process while according to the Yale tablet, Dumuzi had to stay in the underworld because of his brawl with Inanna. Both gods had two female figures lamenting their deaths. Both of the figures were sisters of the deceased. Further research could be conducted to gain a better understanding on the prevalence and importance of the motif of a dying god and subsequent lamentations from his two closest female companions.

## CONCLUSION

The paper intends to examine the myth of the Egyptian god Osiris and conduct a comparative analysis with the Mesopotamian deity Dumuzi so as to gain a better insight into the psyche and mind set of the ancient Egyptians. The story of Osiris was strongly linked with the daily life in ancient Egypt. The ancients had to face two major uncertainties: their livelihood and

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<sup>85</sup> Jacobsen T. Toward the image of tammuz. *History of Religions*. 1962;1(2):196

<sup>86</sup> Miller NF. Symbols of fertility and abundance in the royal cemetery at ur, iraq. *American Journal of Archaeology*. 2013;117(1):132

the conditions of their afterlife. The cycle of agriculture was about birth, growth, death and rebirth and the story of Osiris followed the same pathway. Therefore the provider of fertility must also go through death and then resurrection to fully manifest their understanding of the farming cycle. Since fertility is the provider of life on this earth, the ancient Egyptians by extension saw Osiris as the provider of eternal life as well. The amalgamation of the two features created the cult of Osiris and the god was believed to be the ruler of the underworld. It is interesting to note that while the uncertainty of the daily lives of the modern individual is substantially lower than that of an ancient Egyptian, our knowledge or ignorance of the afterlife continues to be the same as his. An intriguing study for the future would be to compare ancient Egyptian life with the present society and the cult of Osiris with the major religions of the world today. No doubt one could gain substantial insight on the grounds upon which the current and prevalent faiths were founded.

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