

The Mourning Goddess Unveiled

“Dumuzi, the lover of your youth, year upon year, you decreed for him perpetual mourning.”¹

A widespread mythological tradition tells of a mourning goddess who roams the world distraught over the death or disappearance of her beloved consort. The mourning goddess is regularly described as wandering abroad with tattered clothes and her hair unbound or disheveled. In several exemplars of the myth, the mourning goddess searches for her paramour in vain. In other versions of the story the goddess’s mourning is replaced by joy when she finds her missing lover or, alternately, conceives his son posthumously.

For Western readers the myth of the mourning goddess is likely most familiar from the Greek traditions surrounding Aphrodite. Aphrodite’s passion for the ill-fated Adonis is attested as early as Sappho (ca. 600 BCE) and, in a fragment attributed to the melancholy poet of Lesbos, one finds an early reference to the ritual lamentations that distinguished that god’s cult:

“He is dying, O Cytherean, the tender Adonis! What shall we do? Beat your breasts, young maidens, and tear your tunics!”²

Bion, writing in the mid-second century BCE, composed a lengthy poem recounting the tempestuous love affair between the goddess and beautiful youth. In his account it is the goddess Aphrodite herself who bloodied her breasts while mourning Adonis’s death:

“But Aphrodite, having let down her hair, rushes through the woods mourning, unbraided, unsandalled; and the thorns cut her as she goes and pluck sacred blood. Shrilly wailing, through long winding dells she wanders, crying out the Assyrian cry,

¹ Lines 46-47 from *The Gilgamesh Epic* as translated in C. Woods, “The Sun-God Tablet of Nabu-aplaidina Revisited,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 56 (2004), p. 63.

² Fragment 152 as translated in R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996), p. 144.

calling her consort and boy. Around her floated her dark robe at her navel; her chest was made scarlet by her hands; the breasts below, snowy before, grew crimson for Adonis.”³

It will be noted here that Aphrodite herself is described as wandering the land with disheveled hair.

The wailing rites alluded to by Sappho and Bion betray the telltale influence of the archaic cult of the Sumerian god Dumuzi (Tammuz), whose proverbial lamentations are first attested in Mari during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800-1600 BCE) but which doubtless go back much further still, likely to the dawn of civilization itself.

Lamentations for the Sumerian god were widespread throughout the ancient Near East as attested by the testimony of the Biblical prophet Ezekiel, who wrote as follows of the abominations then current at Jerusalem: “Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.”⁴ Not unlike the god himself, such rites proved very difficult to eradicate and were still being celebrated by the Sabeen women of Harran as late as the tenth century CE.⁵

It is evident, moreover, that the origins of Aphrodite’s cult are to be sought for in the ancient Near East. According to Homer, Hesiod, and Herodotus, the goddess came to Greece from Cyprus. Yet this too, most likely, was simply a recent import from the mainland of Asia. Walter Burkert summarized the evidence as follows:

“Behind the figure of Aphrodite there clearly stands the ancient Semitic goddess of love, Ishtar-Astarte, divine consort of the king, queen of heaven, and hetaera in one. This Semitic, or more precisely Phoenician, origin is already asserted by Herodotus. The decisive evidence, however, comes from those correspondences in cult and iconography which go beyond mere sexuality; this deity is androgynous...Astarte is called Queen of Heaven just as Aphrodite is called the Heavenly, Urania; Astarte is worshipped with incense altars and dove sacrifices as is Aphrodite and Aphrodite alone. Ishtar is also a

³ Epitaph on Adonis, lines 19-27 as quoted in J. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 123-125.

⁴ *Ezekiel* 8:14.

⁵ B. Alster, “Tammuz,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1569.

warrior goddess, and again Aphrodite may be armed and bestow victory...The connection with the garden and the sea is also present in both cases.”⁶

Ishtar herself, of course, was widely revered as the Queen of Heaven throughout the ancient Near East, a direct result of her identification with the planet Venus. As *Urania*, Aphrodite was clearly understood as a celestial power. Indeed, there is much reason to believe that Aphrodite originally represented the planet Venus.⁷ If so, it follows that there might be a celestial dimension behind traditions of the mourning Aphrodite. Certainly it is significant to find that, in ancient Mesopotamia, the planet Venus was known as the “star of lamentation” (*Mul ta-nu-qa-ti*).⁸

The Semitic Ishtar and Greek Aphrodite share a notable affinity with the Sumerian goddess Inanna, like Ishtar, explicitly identified with planet Venus. It was Inanna herself who was said to have mourned Dumuzi by beating her breasts:

“She destroys her breasts (as if beating) a drum. She cries bitter tears. She pulls out her hair (like reeds). She cries bitter tears.”⁹

Evident throughout the Sumerian traditions describing the lamentations for Dumuzi is the fact that the cosmos itself was thrown into confusion by the tragic events in question. In the following hymn Inanna’s tortured lamentations cause the heavens to quake or “rumble”:

“She of lament, she of lament struck up a lament...The hierodule of heaven, Inanna, the devastatrix of the mountain...she who causes the heavens to rumble...she who shakes the earth.”¹⁰

Inanna’s ability to shake heaven and earth is a recurring theme in Sumerian tradition.

The following passage is one of dozens that could be cited in this regard:

⁶ W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 152-153.

⁷ E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 91-112.

⁸ F. Stephens, “Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar,” in J. Pritchard ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, 1969), p. 384. See also E. Reiner & D. Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens, Part Three* (Groningen, 1998), p. 155.

⁹ M. Cohen, *Sumerian Hymnology: The Eršemma* (Cincinnati, 1981), p. 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

“You make the heavens tremble and the earth quake. Great priestess, who can soothe your troubled heart? You flash like lightning over the highlands; you throw your firebrands across the earth. Your deafening command...splits apart great mountains.”¹¹

Other archaic traditions leave little doubt that the mourning goddess’s plaintive lamentations were celestial in nature, however they are to be understood from the standpoint of natural science. A Sumerian hymn finds Dumuzi’s mourning sister Geshtinanna telling him that “my hair will whirl in heaven for you like a hurricane” (the word translated as “hurricane” here is *mar-uru*₅, denoting “floodstorm, deluge, tempest”).¹² That this mythic tradition originated in a celestial apparition is suggested by another passage from the same hymn, wherein the mourning goddess’s cries are given equally concrete form:

“Geshtinanna cried toward heaven, cried toward earth. (Her) cries covered the horizon completely like a cloth and were spread out like linen.”¹³

Such ideas were not confined to ancient Mesopotamia. In ancient China, for example, the phrase “celestial mourning” (*t’ien sang*) was used to describe cometary apparitions.¹⁴ Why this should be the case is readily deducible: A comet presents the appearance of long, disheveled hair, the latter being a conspicuous feature of mourning women around the globe: “When we see a picture of a comet some of us are immediately reminded of a woman with long, straight hair being blown back behind her.”¹⁵

The mourning goddess is a familiar figure in ancient Egypt as well. Indeed, the Egyptian traditions surrounding Isis offer a classic portrait of the mourning goddess and, as such, provide a wealth of detail about the natural events that inspired the mythological theme in question (Greek emigrants to Egypt identified Aphrodite with Isis, doubtless because they recognized certain striking parallels between the two goddesses).

¹¹ D. Wolkstein & S. Kramer, *Inanna* (New York, 1983), p. 95.

¹² Line 67 from “Dumuzi’s Dream,” *ETCSL*. See also B. Alster, “The Mythology of Mourning,” *Acta Sumerologica* 5 (1983), p. 6.

¹³ B. Alster, *Dumuzi’s Dream* (Copenhagen, 1972), p. 81. Line 241 of “Dumuzid’s dream,” *ETCSL*.

¹⁴ K. T’ieh-fu, “A Summary of the Contents of the Ma-Wang-Tui Silk-Scroll Book ‘Assorted Astronomical and Meteorological Prognostications,’” *Chinese Studies in Archaeology* 1 (1979), p. 66.

¹⁵ C. Sagan & A. Druyan, *Comet* (New York, 1985), p. 122.

Allusions to the mourning Isis are attested from all periods of Egyptian literary history. That said, no coherent account of the myth remains. Rather, what remains are brief allusions to Isis's travails in the wake of Osiris's tragic murder at the hands of Set. In most references to the myth in Egyptian texts the context is often thoroughly obscure and difficult to fully understand apart from the clues provided by analogous traditions surrounding mourning goddesses from other cultures.

Isis is most famous, perhaps, as the mourning goddess who wandered the world while lamenting the death of Osiris. A hymn to Osiris from the middle of the second millennium BCE offers a general summary of this archaic mythological theme:

“Isis, the powerful, the protector of her brother [i.e., Osiris], who searched for him without wearying, who traversed this land in grief and did not rest until she had found him, who spread shadows with her feathers and created a breeze with her wings, who sent up a cry, the mourning-woman of her brother, who summoned the dancers for the weary of heart, who received the semen and created a heir [i.e., Horus], who nursed the child in solitude, one knew not where...He [Horus] came out garlanded at the command of Geb and assumed rule over the Two Banks, the White Crown firm on his head; he took possession of the entire land, sky and earth were under his supervision...what the sun encircles was subject to his will...The whole world rejoices, their hearts are glad, their breasts are in rapture, their faces rejoice, as each one worships his (Horus's) beauty...The son of Isis, he avenged his father...The disaster is gone, the slanderer has fled, the land is in peace under its lord. Maat is firmly established for her lord...Rejoice, Wennefer! The son of Isis has received the crown, the office of his father was awarded to him in the hall of Geb.”¹⁶

Evident here are the basic outlines of the Egyptian myth of beginnings, wherein Osiris's tragic death throws the world into confusion and chaos, an event alluded to here simply as “the disaster.” Isis's mourning occurs against the mythological backdrop of this apocalyptic disaster and is characterized by a period of wandering, tortured wailing, and lamentations (indeed, in the so-called “Songs of Isis and Nephthys” the event is

¹⁶ J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 145-147.

remembered as a “great mourning” among the gods and is expressly associated with a “disturbance” in the order of the sky).¹⁷ Other notable components of the myth include Horus’s posthumous conception and birth, Isis’s hiding of the infant god within the bulrushes of Chemmis, and his eventual triumph and enthronement as Osiris’s legitimate heir.

In ancient Egypt, as around the globe, mourning rites were typically deemed the special province of women, who lamented the dead while wearing their hair unbound or otherwise disheveled in some manner.¹⁸ This custom is evidently described in the following account from the Pyramid Texts:

“The Souls of Buto dance for thee, they beat their flesh for thee: they hit their arms for thee; they dishevel their hair for thee.”¹⁹

Similar ritual practices are alluded to in the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus from several millennia later (fourth century BCE). There, in a passage referencing Osiris’s murder—remembered as “Great mourning and an evil deed, the like of which has never been”²⁰—one reads of Isis and Nephthys that: “They mourn for thee in dishevelment (?), the hair of their heads disordered (?).”²¹ Equally relevant is the fact that the two mourners are specifically invoked as the “long-haired ones.”

That Isis mourned for Osiris while wearing her hair disheveled may be taken for granted. Indeed, the goddess’s disheveled hair is a point of emphasis in several archaic Egyptian traditions. Witness the following passage from the Egyptian Book of the Dead wherein Isis is described as having “disarranged” hair:

¹⁷ See line 2, 2 and 2, 20 in R. Faulkner, “The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus—I,” *JEA* 22 (1936), p. 123.


¹⁸ C. Manassa, *The Late Egyptian Underworld* (Wiesbaden, 2007), p. 30 observes “During a period of mourning, the hair would be completely undone and allowed to hang freely.”

¹⁹ PT 1974a-1974e as translated in D. Abou-Ghazi, “Bewailing the King in the Pyramid Texts,” *BIFAO* 66 (1968), p. 160.

²⁰ Line 14, 29 in R. Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²¹ See line 9, 21 in R. Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 127. C. Manassa, *op. cit.*, p. 31 translates as follows: “They mourn for you with (their) wigs, being disheveled of head.”

“I am Isis. You found me when I had disarranged the hair of my face and my scalp was disordered.”²²

Here the word translated as “disarranged” is *psḥ*, denoting hair in disarray but also “distracted.”²³ The word translated as “disordered,” in turn, is *ḥḥ*, determined with the hair sign elsewhere employed in Egyptian terms for “mourning”: .²⁴ Yet as Faulkner pointed out, citing PT 392d, a “related verb means ‘to make a disturbance’”—a cosmic disturbance if we are to judge by the passage in question.²⁵ This is but one of several clues pointing to the possibility that Isis’s disheveled hair produced an apocalyptic “disturbance” or “storm” afflicting the cosmos (see below).

The mourning goddess’s lamentations are elsewhere said to have produced a disturbance in the northern heaven. Thus a Coffin Text alludes to a crying (*jnw*) that “arises in the northern heaven/lamenting in Chemmis.”²⁶ But Chemmis is the very location associated with Isis’s lamentations *in illo tempore*! The word translated as “crying” here, moreover, elsewhere denotes “uproar, tumult.”²⁷

Yet another passage from the Coffin Texts hints at the possibility of some sort of natural disaster associated with “mourning” hair. Witness the following passage, wherein mourning hair is expressly linked to the rumbling (*nḥm*) of the earth: “on this night when the earth rumbles, and when the hair is in mourning.”²⁸ The mourning goddess in question here is evidently Hathor, addressed as “the mistress of the Northern sky,” i.e., the very sector of the sky associated with Isis’s lamentations in Chemmis.

²² R. Faulkner, *The Papyrus of Ani* (San Francisco, 1994), plate 10.

²³ R. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1991), p. 94.

²⁴ R. van der Molen, *A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Leiden, 2000), p. 741.

²⁵ R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1970), p. 251. The same word also occurs in PT 1701, which James Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 229 translates as “gods of disorder.”

²⁶ J. Borghouts, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348* (Leiden, 1971), p. 172. It will be noted that the word translated as “crying” here, *jnw*, is elsewhere translated as “uproar, tumult.” See R. van der Molen, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ R. van der Molen, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁸ CT IV:178 as translated by H. Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata* (Leuven, 1996), p. 356 offers a virtually identical translation.

Isis's disheveled appearance is also deducible from the Egyptian tradition that she wandered the land like a beggar.²⁹ Monuments from the first millennium BCE attest to the general theme of Isis's period of wandering:

"I concealed the child, hiding him for fear of what that 'Cursed One' (i.e., Seth) would do. I left him there [alone] and wandered about as a beggar woman."³⁰

The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus alludes to the same events in the following passage: "I hid me in the bulrushes to conceal thy son in order to avenge thee...I walk alone, wandering in the bulrushes."³¹

The curious traditions surrounding the mourning Isis raise a host of questions. What does it mean that Isis's hair became disheveled while mourning for Osiris or that she wandered the world like a beggar?

In order to solve the puzzle presented by the mythological traditions surrounding Isis as a wandering mourner, it is instructive to compare them with the equally archaic Egyptian myth of the wandering Eye. Indeed, there is much reason to believe that the two myths represent variations upon a common theme, one describing a spectacular natural cataclysm at the dawn of history.

According to the latter myth, the Eye of Horus once departed from the great god and went on a destructive rampage which threatened to destroy the world. This mythological theme is most familiar, perhaps, from a text known as the "Destruction of Mankind," one of the oldest mythological narratives to survive from ancient Egypt.³² There Hathor is dispatched by Re to punish mankind:

"Then mankind plotted something in the (very) presence of Re...Then they [Re's advisors] said in the presence of his majesty: 'May thy Eye be sent, that it may catch for

²⁹ T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959), p. 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³¹ R. Faulkner, "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, I" *JEA* 22 (1936), p. 126.

³² W. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 2003), p. 289.

thee them who scheme with evil things...It should go down as Hathor.’ So then this goddess came and slew mankind in the desert.”³³

The destructive campaign of the raging Eye was commonly mythologized as a “bloodbath” waged by the warrior-goddess Hathor or her alter ego Sakhmet. Indeed, in the same text we read: “Hathor will wade in the blood of mankind as Sakhmet.”³⁴ The testimony of this text, as also of the earlier Pyramid and Coffin Texts, is that the Eye’s rampage occurred at the Dawn of Time—i.e., *in illo tempore* when the ancient celestial gods still ruled on earth.³⁵

Although this particular text dates to the New Kingdom,³⁶ the myth of the raging Eye-goddess is attested already in the pyramid of Unis (circa 2350 BCE) and alluded to repeatedly throughout the three thousand years of Egyptian history. In Unis’s pyramid we read that the flame from Horus’s Eye produced an all-encompassing storm:

“I [Horus] will put flame in my eye, and it will encompass you and set storm among the doers of (evil) deeds, and its fiery outburst among these primeval ones. I will smite away the arms of Shu which support the sky.”³⁷

In addition to shaking heaven from its foundations, the raging Eye is said to have let loose a “storm” (*nšn*) on the evil-doers. The word *nšn*, according to Caminos, denotes “rage of heaven” or a “convulsion of the sky.”³⁸ As for how we are to understand the “storm” in question, it is certainly relevant to note that the word *nšn* is used throughout the Coffin Texts to denote an apocalyptic storm.³⁹

In light of the Egyptian traditions hinting at a cosmic disturbance associated with Isis’s disheveled hair (*thth*), it is significant to note that the raging Eye of Horus is specifically

³³ J. Wilson, “Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction,” in J. Pritchard ed., *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton, 1958), p. 4.

³⁴ A. Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind...,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000), p. 291.

³⁵ A. Spalinger, *op. cit.*, p. 261. See also E. Hornung, “Exploring the Beyond,” in E. Hornung & B. Bryan eds., *The Quest for Immortality* (New York, 2002), p. 33.

³⁶ S. Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London, 1992), p. 164 dates it to the time of King Tut. See also A. Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind...,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000), p. 259, who observes: “We are forced to date this literary narrative to Dynasty XVIII at the earliest.”

³⁷ *PT* 298-299.

³⁸ R. Caminos, *The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon* (Rome, 1958), p. 131.

³⁹ See here *CT* 4:40; 4:396; 5:210; 6:306; 7:376.

linked to a convulsion of the sky marked by unruly or “upraised” hair. This tradition is alluded to in several obscure passages from the Coffin Texts. Witness the following passage from Spell 335: “I raised up the hair from the Sacred Eye at the time of its wrath.”⁴⁰ The seemingly incongruous reference to “hair” in conjunction with a stellar Eye is addressed—if not fully clarified—by a gloss appended to the spell in question:

*“What is the Sacred Eye at its time of wrath? Who raised the hair from it? It is the right Eye of Rē when it was wroth with him after he had sent it on an errand. It was Thoth who raised the hair from it.”*⁴¹

Here the catastrophe-bringing “wrath” (*nšn*) of the raging Eye is explicitly linked to its “hair” (*šnw*).

Equally important is the fact that, in a variant tradition, the raging Eye is described as “bemoaning.” Witness the following passage:

*“This is the right eye of Rē, when it raged against him, after he had sent it out. It was Thoth, however, who caused the hair to be lifted from it, when it was brought to him alive, safe, and sound, without being exhausted at all. Another saying. It is his eye. It was sick because it was bemoaning its fellow. Then Thoth stood up to spit on it.”*⁴²

The statement that the raging Eye was “bemoaning its fellow” while separated from its owner suggests the possibility that it shared a fundamental affinity with the mourning goddess Isis. The same tradition also hints at the possibility that the Eye’s “bemoaning” had reference to its disheveled hair.

A direct connection between the raging Eye and extraterrestrial “mourning” is also discernible in various traditions describing its pacification at the hands of Shu. This idea informs Spell 75 from the Coffin Texts, wherein Shu boasts about his success in quelling the storm associated with the raging Eye:

⁴⁰ CT IV: 238.

⁴¹ CT IV: 239-240.

⁴² Spell 17 from the Book of the Dead as translated by J. Griffiths, “Remarks on the Mythology of the Eyes of Horus,” *Chronique d’Egypte* 33 (1958), pp. 184-185.

“I [Shu] have extinguished the fire, I have calmed the soul of her who burns, I have quietened her who is in the midst of her rage. I am he whom the flame of fire burns, but its fiery blast is not against me; (I am he) who makes the soul of her who burns to travel, and who makes the pain of the flame of her who is in the midst of her rage, (even she) the fiery one who severed the tresses of the gods.”⁴³

The phrase translated here as “tresses of the gods” is *smwt ntrw*.⁴⁴ Yet the former word means “mourning” as well as “lock of hair” and thus Borghouts translates the passage in question as “the flame (*wšwš.t*) which removes (*wḏr.t*) the mourning of the gods.”⁴⁵ (Harco Willems translated the phrase likewise). According to the testimony of this particular Coffin Text, then, the raging Eye of Horus played a pivotal role in the apocalyptic events remembered as the “mourning of the gods.”

Especially significant is the fact that the disaster remembered as the “mourning of the gods” was associated with a period of primeval darkness. Witness the following spell from the Magical Text of Papyrus Leiden, a text which dates from the early Middle Kingdom:

“Beware of the mourning of the gods! For then primeval darkness will set in, the heaven<s?> will be united and the water of the earth will be robbed.”⁴⁶

The phrase translated here as “primeval darkness” is *kkw smšw*. As Erik Hornung has documented, the phrase in question evidently has reference to a terrifying period of darkness that afflicted the cosmos *in illo tempore*:

“Eine ihrer Kategorien [Nun] ist auch die Finsternis (*kkw*, hieros deleted) bzw. vor allem die ‘vereinigte’=zusammengeballte Finsternis (*kkw smšw*, hieros deleted). Sie ist vor der Schöpfung und umgibt weiterhin deren äußerste Grenzen...Eine Finsternis, die nicht von dieser Welt ist, sondern der abgründigen Urwelt angehört—daher findet sich *kkw smšw* auch, soweit ich sehen kann, niemals als Bezeichnung einer bloß irdischen Dunkelheit,



⁴³ CT 1:378-384.

⁴⁴ R. van der Molen, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

⁴⁵ *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I* 348 (Leiden, 1971), p. 73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

sondern nur im Zusammenhang mit der Welt vor und außerhalb der Schöpfung und der Unterwelt.”⁴⁷

With reference to the phrase *kkw smꜣw*, it is relevant to note that the word *smꜣ* means “locks of hair” and is determined with the following sign: .⁴⁸ The word translated as “mourning” in the aforementioned passage from the Magical Text of Papyrus Leiden— “Beware of the mourning of the gods! For then primeval darkness will set in”—is *sꜣmt*, likewise determined with . In his commentary to this particular spell, Borghouts raises the possibility that there is some etymological relationship between *smꜣ* and *sꜣmt*. If this surmise can be substantiated, it stands to reason that the natural events remembered as the “mourning of the gods” were inextricably linked to the primeval darkness *kkw smꜣw* that afflicted the cosmos *in illo tempore*. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence supporting this proposition, both within Egypt and without.

The word *šmꜣ* elsewhere denotes a demonic horde of chaos-agents associated with Isis and/or Sakhmet.⁴⁹ Thus, in the sacred hymns to the goddess at Dendara, Isis is invoked as “the leader of the *šmꜣyw*-demons, who rises on the New Year festival in order to open a beautiful year.”⁵⁰

In light of our earlier discussion with regard to the *kkw smꜣw* as a period of primeval darkness, it is deducible that Isis’s *šmꜣyw*-demons have some reference to the terrifying powers of darkness and chaos that allegedly haunted the epagomenal days associated with the Egyptian New Year’s rites. It was during this liminal five-day period, according to Anthony Spalinger, that “the agents of the goddess Sekhmet were sent not merely to harm but also virtually to annihilate man.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ E. Hornung, “Chaotische Bereiche in der geordneten Welt,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 81 (1956), p. 29.

⁴⁸ R. van der Molen, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

⁴⁹ H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien* (Berlin, 1911), p. 7.

⁵⁰ C. Leitz, “Die Nacht des Kinder,” *ZÄS* 120 (1993), pp. 139-140: “die Gebieterin der *šmꜣyw*-Dämonen, die aufgeht am Neujahrsfest (wpt-rnpt), um ein schönes Jahr zu eröffnen.”

⁵¹ A. Spalinger, “Some Remarks on the Epagomenal Days in Ancient Egypt,” *JNES* 54 (1995), p. 33.

The Egyptian New Year's rites, like end of the year rituals elsewhere around the globe, were understood to serve as "the great annual repetition of the general crisis and potential catastrophe."⁵² As Jan Assmann has noted, such primal fears were endemic in ancient Egyptian culture:

"[Ideas of global catastrophe] are not specifically Late Period conceptions, but very old and very real anxieties based on multifarious historical and personal experiences (famine, epidemic, revolution, foreign rule etc.). The persistence of this theme in quite diverse areas of Egyptian literature reveals the obsessional nature of these anxieties."⁵³

With respect to the origin of such obsessional fears, Egyptologists have been almost uniformly silent. Yet as Arent Wensinck recognized many years ago, the curious beliefs regarding the ominous phenomena and potential global catastrophe attending the New Year reflect archaic conceptions regarding an all-engulfing Darkness *in illo tempore* that was widely believed to threaten to end the world:

"This material speaks for itself; not only is each New Year a memorial of the creation but it is a repetition of it, and the creation itself is regarded as a kind of New Year. Indeed the last expression is the right one. New Year belongs to cosmogony, New Year and creation are the reflection one of the other...Finally we come to the relation between New Year and the chaos that precedes the cosmos and without which the latter cannot come into existence...Only when the Tehom is beaten back, or—in mythological language—when Tiamat is defeated, does the world order begin...It is a struggle of life and death between the powers of darkness and light, of confusion and order, of Evil and Good... The end of the cosmos is seen in an eclipse of the sun, when the very existence of the god of order is threatened and the world is abandoned to the powers of darkness."⁵⁴

As we have documented elsewhere, there can be little doubt that the Egyptian fears of apocalyptic disaster have reference to the terrifying events associated with the raging Eye of Horus *in illo tempore*. Here we would simply note that Isis's *šmꜣyw*-demons are

⁵² John Darnell, "Hathor Returns to Medamud," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 22 (1995), p. 190.

⁵³ J. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom* (London, 1995), p. 54.

⁵⁴ A.J. Wensinck, "The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology," *Acta Orientalia* (1923), pp. 169-188.

frequently mentioned together with the *hꜣtyw*, the latter being a demonic horde associated with the plague wrought by the raging Eye.⁵⁵ An early magical incantation addressed the *hꜣtyw* as follows: “(From the Book of Epagomenal Days...Seized are you, *hꜣtyw*-Demons, helpers of Sachmet, who come forth from the Eye of Rē̄, messengers throughout the districts, who bring about the slaughter/bloodbath (*šꜣd*), who create uproar, who speed through the land, who shoot their arrows from their mouths.”⁵⁶

Here there can be little question but that we have reference to the apocalyptic disaster associated with the raging Eye. It was Sakhmet, after all, who brought about the primeval bloodbath (*šꜣd*). In the aforementioned *The Destruction of Mankind*, it was this goddess who was represented as wading in the blood of her victims: “Hathor will wade in the blood of mankind as Sakhmet.”⁵⁷ And it was Sakhmet herself who was capable of unleashing a terrible plague (*jꜣdt*) during the liminal period associated with the New Year rituals if certain ritual precautions were not observed.⁵⁸

Yet there is also an explicit connection between the *hꜣtyw*-demons and “mourning,” much as we found to be the case with respect to the analogous *šmꜣyw*-demons. Thus it is that the word *hꜣty.w* denotes unbound hair as a sign of mourning.⁵⁹ This curious confluence of terminology suggests that there might be some sort of relationship between the apocalyptic disaster wrought by the raging Eye and its attendant *hꜣtyw*-demons and the disheveled *hꜣty.w* hair otherwise characteristic of the mother goddess’s “mourning.” (The fact that the raging Eye itself was associated with equally anomalous “hair” is consistent with this hypothesis).

That there was a celestial dimension to the demons in question is evident from their mention in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, as in later texts.⁶⁰ Witness the following

⁵⁵ C. Leitz, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

⁵⁶ *Papyrus Leiden* I:346 as translated in C. Leitz, *op. cit.*, p. 247: “Gegrüßet seid ihr, *hꜣtyw*-damonen, Gehilfen der Sachmet, die herauskommen aus dem Auge des Re, Boten durch die Gaue, die ein Gemetzel (*šꜣd*) anrichten, die Aufruhr schaffen, die durchs Land eilen, die ihre Pfeile von ihren Mündern abschießen.”

⁵⁷ As quoted in A. Spalinger, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

⁵⁸ M. Raven, “Charms for Protection during the Epagomenal Days,” in J. van Dijk ed., *Essays on Ancient Egypt* (Groningen, 1997), p. 275.

⁵⁹ J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy* (Leiden, 1960), p. 207.

⁶⁰ Isis’s demonic horde naturally recalls the demonic *gallu* associated with Inanna/Venus.

passage: “You sit upon the bronze throne of heaven, you summon the *ḥꜣtyw*, you rule the *ihmw-sk* [i.e., the Imperishable Stars, commonly identified with the circumpolar stars].”⁶¹

It is relevant to note the fact that, elsewhere in the Pyramid Texts, a similarly spelled word denotes a “night demon.” Here, too, the context is explicitly celestial in nature:

“The doors are opened...arise, remove your earth, shake off your dust, raise yourself, that you may travel in company with the spirits, for your wings are those of a falcon, your gleam(?) is that of a star, the night-demon(?) will not bend over you...Cross the sky to the Field of Rushes, make your abode in the Field of Offerings among the Imperishable Stars.”⁶²

Behind the guise of the “night-demon” it is probable that we should see a reference to the chaos-agents who threatened to destroy the world *in illo tempore*. Be this as it may, it is relevant to note that a related word is employed to describe a storm-like disturbance that attended the catastrophic events attending Creation: “Mount up to me in your name of *Rē*, that you may dispel the cloudiness [*ḥꜣtj*] of the sky until *Ḥarakhti* shows himself.”⁶³

A similar conception is evident in the Coffin Texts, wherein *ḥꜣtj* denotes the cloudiness attending the primeval Dawn: “Heaven is opened, the cloudiness is driven away from it.”⁶⁴

In an insightful study of the Wandering Eye myth, John Darnell remarked upon the fact that, in Egyptian rituals designed to commemorate the catastrophic events in question, dancers greeted the Eye goddess with “wagging hair” upon her return: “[the wagging hair was a] representation of the ‘verkehrte Welt’ which occurs at the time of the New Year.”⁶⁵ Darnell’s deduction is doubtless correct, but this naturally begs the question why wagging or disheveled hair would be linked to the topsy turvy world that characterized the period preceding the New Year? From our vantage point the answer is perfectly obvious: The purposefully disheveled hair of the dancers was thought to

⁶¹ CT VI:107d as translated by C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei* (Wiesbaden, 1994), p. 241.

⁶² PT 748-749.

⁶³ PT 1449. See also the Book of the Dead, 280,10; and 283, 2.

⁶⁴ CT VII:393 (*wbꜣ biꜣ ḥsr ḥꜣty m dr.f*). See also H.M. Stewart, “Traditional Egyptian Sun Hymns of the New Kingdom,” *BIA London* 6 (1967), p. 65, wherein *ḥꜣty* denotes the “cloudiness” dispelled by Re.

⁶⁵ J. Darnell, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

emulate or evoke the wildly disheveled hair of the mourning goddess Isis/Venus—hair that had produced a “great storm” darkening the skies and plunged the world into chaos *in illo tempore*. Indeed, Isis and Nephthys are specifically said to have mourned Osiris by shaking or “wagging” their tresses or locks: “often called ‘they of the hair locks (*hnskty.w*)’ as they perform their lamentation for Osiris.”⁶⁶

The Egyptian beliefs regarding the ominous portents marking the end of the old year, although they appear bizarre and more than a little irrational to modern readers, are far from unique. Indeed, analogous beliefs are attested around the ancient world. Sacred traditions from the New World offer a case in point:

“The peoples of ancient Mesoamerica keenly observed the sky and used the calendar to predict solar and lunar eclipses, the cycles of the planet Venus, the apparent movements of the constellations and other celestial events. To them, these occurrences were not the mechanical movements of innate celestial bodies but constituted the activities of gods, the actual recapitulation of mythical events from the time of creation...Among the Postclassic Maya of Yucatan, the end of the 365-day vague year was an especially dangerous time and, according to the colonial *Cantares de Dzitbalché*, was equivalent to the destruction and re-creation of the world. Thus much of the imagery in the Yucatec new year rites also appears in Maya creation mythology. Similarly, the completion of the Aztec fifty-two year cycle was marked by an anxious vigil: if new fire was not successfully drilled, the terrifying star demons of darkness, the *tzitzimime*, would reassert control over the world.”⁶⁷

It will be noted that the *Tzitzimime*, as “terrifying star demons of darkness,” were not only thought to haunt the liminal period associated with the end of the year, they threatened to usher in a disaster heralding the destruction of the world—namely, an all-encompassing Cosmic Night. The observations of a native chronicler are representative in this regard: “If no fire could be drawn, then there would be the end of the human race,

⁶⁶ C. Manassa, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ K. Taube, *Aztec and Maya Myths* (Austin, 1993), p. 15.

and that the night and darkness would be perpetual...and *tzitzimime* would descend, creatures that were very ugly and terrible and would eat humans.”⁶⁸

How, then, are we to understand the terrifying *Tzitzimime*? According to B.C. Brundage, the *Tzitzimime* were conceptualized as female demons (stars) displaying wildly disheveled hair:

“Sculptural representations as well as paintings in the codices give us a clear picture of how the Aztecs envisaged the demonic. Let us take as examples those supernatural beings called the *tzitzimime* ... These particular demonic beings lived in the night sky and were a constant threat to men, especially during eclipses. One source has it that they were originally stars and fell from their noble stations to become four lords in the underworld. But more commonly it was thought that, with the final destruction of the world, the *tzitzimime* would appear to initiate the shambles in which the last men were to be destroyed. One representation shows Tzitzimitl as a skeleton with talons instead of hands and feet and every bony joint defined as a skeletal mouth. The monster has a rattlesnake for a penis, wears earrings of human hands and a necklace of bloody hearts alternating with hands. The hair is madly disheveled. Generally the *tzitzimime* are said to be women; in fact they are called female demons. When viewed in the singular Tzitzimitl is an eerie goddess in the night sky.”⁶⁹

As a terrifying star-demon with madly disheveled hair, ushering in a period of apocalyptic darkness *in illo tempore*, it is impossible to ignore the striking parallels between Tzitzimitl and the raging Eye-goddess of ancient Egypt, the latter expressly described as having disheveled hair and playing a pivotal role in ushering in a period of apocalyptic darkness in pre-Creation times. The resemblance between the Aztec *Tzitzimime* and Sakhmet’s *hꜣtyw*-demons—the latter specifically identified as “stars”—is especially striking.

⁶⁸ Martin Ucelo as quoted from D. Mosquera, “Nahuatl Catechistic Drama,” in B. Sell et al eds., *Nahuatl Theater, Vol. 1* (Norman, 2004), p. 76.

⁶⁹ B. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Austin, 1979), p. 62.

Tzitzimitl's necklace of human hands and hearts, likewise, recalls the garland of hands and heads worn by the Ugaritic goddess Anat, often compared to the Egyptian Sakhmet.⁷⁰ An early hymn preserves an eerie portrait of the raging Anat, wading in blood and gore:

“And behold! ‘Anatu fought in the plain, slaughtered between the two cities, She smote the people of the sea-shore, silenced the men of the sunrise. Beneath her were heads like lumps of earth, on her were hands like locusts...She attached the heads to her chest, tied up the hands in her girdle. She plunged her knees in the blood of the guards, her buttocks in the gore of the warriors.’”⁷¹

Ancient India provides another point of comparison, where the goddess Kali mirrors Sakhmet and Anat in her seemingly boundless appetite for destruction. Kali, too, wears a necklace of human heads:

“Hindu texts referring to the goddess are nearly unanimous in describing her as terrible in appearance and as offensive and destructive in her habits. Her hair is disheveled, her eyes red and fierce, and she has fangs and a long lolling tongue, her lips are often smeared with blood, her breasts are long and pendulous, her stomach is sunken, and her figure is generally gaunt. She is naked except for several characteristic ornaments: a necklace of skulls or freshly cut heads, a girdle of severed arms, and infant corpses as earrings.”⁷²

Like Anat, Kali delighted in war and was often described as dancing over the prostrate corpse of her consort Shiva. Kali's dancing, moreover, is said to have brought the world to the very brink of destruction:

“The dread mother dances naked in the battlefield, Her lolling tongue burns like a red flame of fire, Her dark tresses, fly in the sky, sweeping away sun and stars. Red streams

⁷⁰ M. Smith & W. Pitard eds., *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Vol. II* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 161-178.

⁷¹ CTA 3:B.2-43 as translated in J. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 10.

⁷² D. Kinsley, “Blood and Death Out of Place,” in J. Hawson and D. Wulff eds., *The Divine Consort* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 144-145.

of blood run from her cloud-black limbs, And the world trembles and cracks under her tread.”⁷³

As this last passage indicates, Kali’s wildly disheveled hair was explicitly linked to an apocalyptic disaster involving the obscuration of the sun. Indeed, an epithet of the goddess referred to her as the “terrible night of destruction.”⁷⁴ Alf Hiltebeitel, with reference to a similar episode in the mythic career of the analogous Indian goddess Draupadi, observes that the goddess’s “disheveled hair is thus itself an image of the Kalaratri, the Night of Time, the night of the dissolution (*pralaya*) of the universe.”⁷⁵

David Kinsley, like Hiltebeitel, likewise sought to interpret Kali’s disheveled hair by reference to some undefined apocalyptic cosmic disaster and yet neither scholar bothered to ask how such a widespread motif could have arisen in the first place apart from an historical precedent:

“Kali’s unbound hair may also have a broader, indeed cosmic, significance, suggesting dissolution itself. Considering Kali’s identification with the cremation ground and death, her loose hair may suggest the end of the world. Her hair has come apart and flies about every which way; order has come to an end; all has returned to chaos. The ‘braidedness’ of social and cosmic order comes to an end in Kali’s wild, unbound, flowing hair.”⁷⁶

In order to understand the historical origin—and original celestial context—of the ominous behavior ascribed to Kali, Anat, Isis, and Sakhmet, it is instructive to consider analogous mythological traditions from ancient Mesopotamia, where the Sumerian Inanna was described as a raging warrior hell-bent on inciting disaster and chaos. The hymn *in-nin me-ḥuṣ-a*, otherwise known as “Inanna and Ebih,” celebrates the goddess as follows:

⁷³ R. Tagore, *Sacrifice and Other Plays* (Bombay, 1917), p. 109.

⁷⁴ D. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 87.

⁷⁵ A. Hiltebeitel, “Draupadi’s Hair,” in M. Biarreau ed., *Autour de la déesse Hindoue* (Paris, 1981), p. 207.

⁷⁶ D. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (Delhi, 1998), p. 84.

“Great queen Inanna, expert at fomenting wars, destroyer of the enemy country...like a lion you have filled heaven and earth with your roaring, and you have made the people quake.”⁷⁷

Inanna’s warrior-prowess also forms a prominent theme in the hymn known as in-nin ša-gur₄-ra. There Inanna is described as a terrifying warrior “clothed in awe-inspiring radiance,” whose wrath unleashes a powerful flood which brings widespread destruction.⁷⁸ In fact, the goddess’s path of destruction is said to extend “from the sunrise to the sunset.”⁷⁹ A recurring epithet of the planet-goddess in these early texts—*an al-dúb-ba ki šig-ga*, “[she] who shakes the sky and makes the earth tremble”⁸⁰—emphasizes her destructive nature.

Elsewhere in the same hymn the warrior-goddess is said to come “from the sky”:

“Inanna, your triumph is terrible...[break in text] The Anunna-gods bow down their nose, they hurl themselves to the ground...you come *from* heaven.”⁸¹

The hymn of Išme-Dagan paints a classic picture of Inanna as war-goddess. There, too, she is said to shake heaven while in the midst of her raging: “Holy Inana was endowed by Enlil and Ninlil with the capacity to make the heavens shake, to make the earth tremble...to shout with wide open mouth in battle and combat and to wreak carnage (?).”⁸²

As can be seen from this brief summary, Inanna/Venus is depicted as an awe-inspiring numinous power, to be feared as well as propitiated. The following passage is representative in this regard: “Agitation, terror, fear, splendour, awe-inspiring sheen are yours, Inanna.”⁸³

⁷⁷ Lines 5-9 in J. Black et al., “Inana and Ebih,” *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>) (Oxford, 1998-), hereafter *ETCSL*.

⁷⁸ Å. Sjöberg, “in-nin ša-gur₄-ra. A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna...,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1976), p. 181.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189. Italics in the original translation by Å. Sjöberg.

⁸² Lines 7-8 of “Inana and Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan K),” *ETCSL*.

⁸³ Line 161, Å. Sjöberg, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

In the final analysis, it is evident that the cosmic disaster occasioned by the mourning planet-goddess Inanna is indistinguishable from the “storm” associated with her warring. Thus it is that Sumerian texts describe heaven and earth as being shaken as a result of her “storm” (ud huš): “Then Inana, the fierce storm...made the heavens tremble, made the earth quake.”⁸⁴ Yet the very same language is used to describe the terrible effects wrought by Inanna while in the midst of her lamentations:

“She of lament, she of lament struck up a lament...The hierodule of heaven, Inanna, the devastatrix of the mountain...she who causes the heavens to rumble...she who shakes the earth.”⁸⁵

While reading the Sumerian literary descriptions of Inanna/Venus an obvious question presents itself: To what extent does the mythological imagery associated with Inanna accurately reflect the natural history and visual appearance of the planet Venus as experienced by the skywatchers and scribes of ancient Mesopotamia?

It is significant to note that an early Sumerian hymn describes Inanna as having disheveled hair:

“(The hair of) my head was disheveled—I straightened it, My locks were loosened—I tightened them.”⁸⁶

This passage forms a striking parallel to the aforementioned passage from the Book of the Dead describing the disheveled mourning goddess Isis: “I am Isis. You found me when I had disarranged the hair of my face and my scalp was disordered.”⁸⁷

As we noted in our discussion of the Egyptian tradition, the word translated as “disordered”—*thth*—is determined with the hair sign elsewhere employed in Egyptian

⁸⁴ “The death of Ur-Nammu (Ur-Namma A),” lines 204-205. *ETCSL*.

⁸⁵ M. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁸⁶ Lines 13-14 from “A *balbale* to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana C),” as translated in Y. Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature* (Jerusalem, 1998), p. 98. J. Black et al, *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/>) (Oxford, 1998), translate the passage as follows: “My head was in disorder, I have arranged it; my aureole was detached, I have readjusted it (?).”

⁸⁷ R. Faulkner, *The Papyrus of Ani*, plate 10.

terms for “mourning”: 𒀭.⁸⁸ Yet a “related verb means ‘to make a disturbance’”—a cosmic disturbance, in fact, translated as “disorder” by James Allen.⁸⁹

In the Sumerian passage quoted above the verb denoting the “disordering” of Inanna’s hair is *suḥ₃*. Yet the very same word also signifies “confusion, disorder, chaos,” denoting a cosmic disturbance of some sort.⁹⁰ The latter conception is evident in the final paragraphs of the Sumerian hymn “Enki and the world order,” wherein we find Enki attempting to appease an angry Inanna by recounting all the powers that he has granted her. War, as usual, is presented as Inanna’s special purview. A curious passage finds Enki announcing to the planet-goddess that he made her “tangle straight threads” while in the hurly-burly of battle.⁹¹ The Sumerian word translated as “tangle” here is *suḥ₃*—the very word which denotes the confusion/disorder promoted by Inanna/Venus. Significantly, the same word reduplicated denotes the frenzied *mêlée* of battle⁹² and an apocalyptic darkening of heaven.⁹³

It is telling to find that the planet Venus, as Inanna, was said to “stir confusion and chaos.”⁹⁴ The latter phrase is *suḥ₃ igi suḥ₃-suḥ₃-suḥ₃*, wherein *suḥ₃* signifies “confusion, disorder, and chaos.”

It is evident, moreover, that the cosmic disturbance associated with Inanna/Venus produced an apocalyptic darkness. Thus, a passage in “A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna” credits the planet-goddess with the power to make the midday light turn to darkness. The passage in question reads as follows:

“When you are angrily staring that which is bright gets dark, you turn midday light to darkness.”⁹⁵

⁸⁸ R. van der Molen, *op. cit.*, p. 741. On the meaning of “disheveled” for *thth*, see J. Darnell, “A Midsummer Night’s Succubus,” in S. Melville et al eds., *Opening the Tablet Box* (Leiden, 2010), p. 114.

⁸⁹ R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1970), p. 251.

⁹⁰ J. Halloran, *The Sumerian Lexicon* (Los Angeles, 2006), p. 239.

⁹¹ *Lines 440-441.*

⁹² The word is translated as “*mêlée*” in line 25 of “A *tigi* for Inana (Inana E),” *ETCSL* for example.

⁹³ See line 82 of “The lament for Sumer and Urim,” *ETCSL*.

⁹⁴ Line 18 in Å. Sjöberg, “in-nin šà-gur₄-ra. A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna...,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1976), pp. 161-253.

Such imagery is extremely difficult to explain by reference to the familiar Venus, needless to say. That said, it is consistent with the planet's role in ancient astronomical omens which point to an intimate connection between Venus and the sudden onset of darkness: "As clearly stated in the omen texts, the responsibility for such feats [i.e., the darkening of the daylight] is Ištar's."⁹⁶

It is doubtless because of the cosmic disaster wrought by Inanna/Venus that ancient words denoting "mourning" often convey the sense of "darkness" or a darkening of the heavens or sun. The Sumerian term *su-mu-ug* is representative in this regard, denoting "darkness; misfortune, calamity, mourning."⁹⁷ And so it is that Babylonian astronomers described an eclipse of the sun by the term *ér*, denoting "mourning."⁹⁸

This overlap in terminology suggests that the "confusion/disorder" incited by Inanna/Venus was somehow connected to the aforementioned "tangled" threads, however the latter are to be conceptualized. The fact that the same word—i.e., *suḥ₃*—is elsewhere⁹⁹ employed to describe the tangled or disordered hair of Inanna/Venus enables us to deduce the answer: It was the disheveled "hair" of the planet Venus that signaled the onset of cosmic confusion and disorder.

Here a remarkable parallel can be found in Old Europe. In his classic four-volume study of ancient Germanic religion and folklore, Jacob Grimm devoted a chapter to a witch-like goddess named Holda, whom he identified with Venus. Holda was especially feared around the time of the turning of the New Year, when she and her horde of demonic followers would haunt the night skies "in the so-called 'twelfths' between Christmas and New Year."¹⁰⁰ Holda herself was distinguished by her horribly disheveled hair, whence derived her epithet *Werra*, denoting disheveled, tangled, disordered, and confused.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Line 177 in Å. Sjöberg, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁹⁶ J. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Winona Lake, 1997), p. 69.

⁹⁷ Å. Sjöberg, "in-nin šà-gur₄-ra. A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna..." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1976), p. 212. See line 17 from "A hymn to Inana (Inana C)," *ETCSL* for Inanna's specific association with this term. In the very next line Inanna is said to stir "confusion and chaos" while inciting the devastating flood.

⁹⁸ D. Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* (Groningen, 2000), p. 4.

⁹⁹ Line 13 of "A *balbale* to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana C)," *ETCSL*.

¹⁰⁰ J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, Vol. 1 (Gloucester, 1976), p. 273.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Interestingly, however, Holda shared another specific trait with Inanna/Venus: She was thought to tangle the threads of weavers at the time of New Year. According to Grimm: “And that notion of *tangled thread and hair*, which prevails about Bertha and Holda, may after all be akin to this.”¹⁰²

To return to the Egyptian testimony: It is our opinion that the curious traditions surrounding the disheveled mourning goddess Isis can only be understood by reference to the analogous traditions surrounding Inanna, Kali, and other ancient goddesses. It was the disheveled hair of the mourning goddess that was conceptualized as an apocalyptic “storm” bringing “confusion” and “disorder” to the cosmos *in illo tempore*. In her commentary on the mourning Isis, Colleen Manassa came close to deducing the correct answer: “The disheveled hair represents the chaos of death.”¹⁰³

If the findings of modern psychology have taught us anything it is that patterned belief-systems do not arise out of thin air. Rather, they stem from associated memories that have their origin in objective stimuli in the natural world. Presented with the universal mythological motif of the mourning goddess wandering with disheveled hair and threatening to blot out the light of the sun we would recognize a celestial prototype—namely, the planet Venus while moving on an erratic orbit and displaying a wildly disturbed atmosphere.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁰³ C. Manassa, *The Late Egyptian Underworld* (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 30-31.