

### 3. THE ISIACI MYSTERIES

The mysteries surrounding the goddess **Isis** are some of the most important and closely-guarded secrets of Neapolis. The goddess was associated with **the moon**, and once you realise how powerful and involving the moon rituals organised by the **alessandrini** community who lived in Naples during the Roman period were, - night-time rituals linked to the waxing and waning of the moon – you understand how much the Neapolitans loved the moon and the night.

Ancient tradition has it that the ruins of a Roman villa in Marechiaro (the “**Palazzo degli Spiriti**” or House of Spirits) are the site of mysterious happenings, nocturnal visits and magnetic forces.

Isis was the bride and sister of **Osiris**, and shared in his pain and glory. She was the most popular goddess in ancient Egypt, and was better known in the Hellenic world than Osiris himself. Legend has it that Isis, with the help of her sister Nephthys, put Osiris’s body back together again, thus bringing him back to life. That is why she was the **goddess of magic and the afterlife**.

It is not easy to find traces of her original personality because mythology often depicts her as profoundly human, a faithful wife, a loving mother, and benefactor of Egypt. She was considered the **goddess of fertility** who could influence men, animals and plants.

Isis was pictured in different ways: as a **cow** with Hathor, or with **cow’s horns** enclosing the sun, or with a **falcon** icon, or as a woman with **bird’s wings**. This image of her as a winged woman was often painted on sarcophaguses, lifting the soul of the deceased in her wings to take it to a new life. Usually, however, she is depicted as a woman who is clothed and holds a **lotus** in her hand and has a **throne** hieroglyphic on her head, both symbols of fertility. Her symbol is a **tyet**, also known as the knot of Isis, and it probably indicates the resurrection and eternal life.

The cult of Isis has left its mark on Neapolitan culture. You can see it in the horseshoe which is often used, along with a horn, to ward off bad luck. The horseshoe, in fact, is none other than a symbol of Isis’s horn and the ancient image of the maternal womb and the half-moon, both of which are symbols of women’s fertility.