

**Response to ‘The River and Religion: How did the Nile facilitate and influence popular religion? By Jo McConaghy**

**500 words excluding title page and explanatory note at end of text**

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This is a very interesting topic with a clear, succinct writing style. The arguments are well-presented, engaging and flow logically. Some of the material was new to me, particularly the linking of the gods Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Seth with the Nile and surrounding land. I know that Osiris and Seth represented the fertile and desert areas respectively, but was not aware that Isis and Nephthys represented bands of land spreading out from the Nile, relying on Osiris for fertilisation. I would like to have learned a little more about this.

The masculinisation of the fertility and abundance of the both the Black Land and the Nile was also new to me, plus possible feminine counterparts - Taweret is given as an example. (I know of two goddesses connected to the Nile - Anuket (associated with the First Cataract) and Satet, (guardian of the Nile source))

A few general observations are:

- the locations of Upper and Lower Egypt are given as south of Aswan and north of the cataracts respectively in second paragraph. However, Upper Egypt extends from the First Cataract at Aswan to just south of Memphis, and Lower Egypt extends from the Memphis area to the Mediterranean Sea, including the Delta \*.
- the many examples of duality, necessary to maintain *ma'at*, apparent throughout the work could perhaps be emphasised more. The black/red land, Upper/Lower Egypt, Hapi's head dress of papyrus/lotus (representing lower/upper Egypt), the activities of male/female gods and the Nile as a life-giving/life-taking force. The Nile supported life, not just for growing crops, but was a source of food (fish). Conversely, in addition to causing death by flooding, it also caused disease, schistosomiasis (bilharzia) and malaria. Those who worked at the riverside (e.g. laundrymen) faced mortal danger from crocodiles and other animals. If a person drowned in the Nile, they were accorded special status after death, perhaps because of Osiris's death and resurrection in the Nile.

- With regard to the religious consequences of a poor flood, the Egyptians were very slow to record troubling/negative events. The Famine Stela is cited in the text, and two other examples are the depictions of emaciated figures on the Unas Causeway and the autobiographical text of Ankhtifi of Moalla, who claims to have fed the starving, possibly in an attempt to restore *Ma'at*.
- The success/failure of the annual inundation affected all, not just non-elites and, as mentioned, the Pharaoh's reign and reputation depended on successful inundations. This was partly due to the fact that the taxation system was based on crop yields, which funded big state projects, amongst others. It would be interesting to know the steps taken to restore *Ma'at* when disaster struck.
- Due to the precarious nature of the Nile flood - is there evidence of personal devotion to the Nile gods, e.g. the presence of amulets, statuettes in domestic/burial situations?

Finally, I thoroughly enjoyed this paper, which is original, well thought-out and well-written. It made me look differently at the Nile.

\* Ikram, S. (2009). *Ancient Egypt*, Lower Egypt. Cambridge and New York. Cambridge University Press 2009. See page 9 for areas included in Upper and Lower Egypt