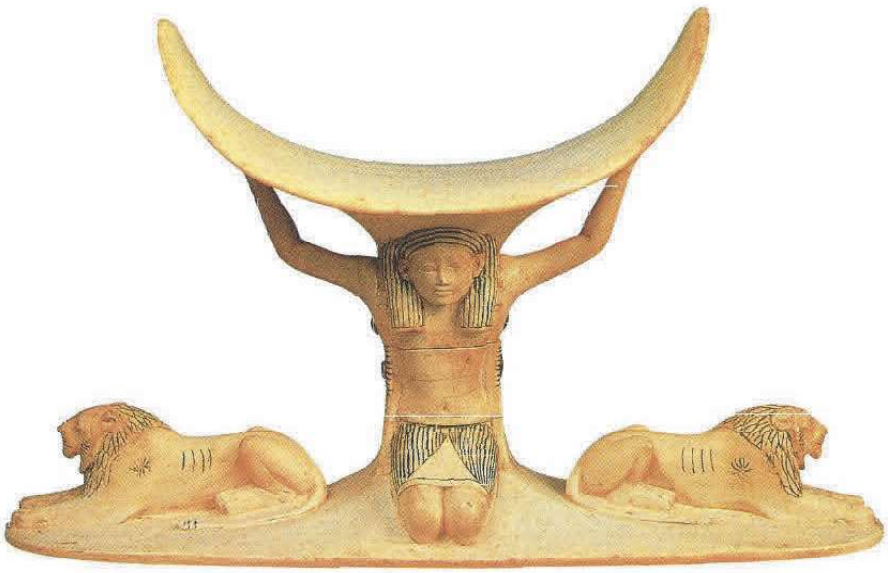


Ivory head-rest from the tomb of Tutankhamun showing the god ***Shu*** *who supported the head of the king – symbolically the sun – as it 'set' and 'rose' between the lions of yesterday and tomorrow. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

artifact the god kneels between two lions symbolizing Shu and Tefnut and the horizons of yesterday and tomorrow, to support the sleeper's head on his upraised arms, doubtless symbolic of his upholding the sun. Although not found frequently in three-dimensional representations, he does appear in amuletic form, usually kneeling with his arms raised – often supporting a sun disk.

Worship

Apart from early references in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, the cult of the air god is not actually attested until New Kingdom times when he is mentioned in many texts of differing kinds. His chief cult centre, which he shared with his consort Tefnut, was at the ancient Nay-ta-hut (modern Tell el-Muqdam) which the Greeks called Leontopolis or 'lion city' after the form in which the two deities were worshipped there. In the later Dynastic Period Shu was increasingly credited with powers that renewed the cosmos, as the god who filled the universe with the very air which was the breath of life. As a result Shu was incorporated into everyday religion in prayers and positive spells as well as certain magical texts where the 'poisons' of the god were conjured to defeat demonic threats.

Sia

Sia was the personification of perception and could be said to be the equivalent of the 'heart' or mind of the god Ptah which underlay creation in the Memphite theology. According to myth, Sia, like Hu – the god personifying spoken command or utterance – came into existence from drops of blood spilled from the cut phallus of the sun god Re. Hu also might be equated with the spoken creative word of Ptah, so that just as Ptah created everything through the two aspects of mind and word, the two deities Sia and Hu form a dyad which would seem to represent the same aspects of the mind and word of Re. Usually depicted in anthropomorphic form, during the Old Kingdom Sia was visualized as a kind of divine functionary who stood at the right side of Re and held the god's sacred papyrus scroll. In the New Kingdom too, Sia was depicted, along with Hu and other deities, accompanying the sun god in his underworld barque, as in a number of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Tatenen

Mythology

Tatenen was a Memphite god who first clearly appears in the Middle Kingdom, although he may be identical to an earlier deity known as Khenty-Tjenenet attested in Old Kingdom times. The god's name means 'risen land' and, like the Heliopolitan *ben-ben* (see p. 212), he symbolized the emerging of the primeval mound from the waters of original creation, though in a secondary sense Tatenen could also symbolize the emergence of the fertile silt from the Nile's annual inundation, and by extension the resultant vegetation. From Ramessid times Tatenen was associated with the great Memphite god Ptah and was often viewed as a manifestation of that god and fused with him as Ptah-Tatenen. As an earth god Tatenen could also symbolize Egypt itself and could be associated with the earth god Geb. His primeval aspect meant that he could be viewed as a bisexual deity and in one text he is called the creator and 'mother' of all the gods. Tatenen also had a chthonic aspect in which he was viewed as a protector of the deceased king in the netherworld. In the New Kingdom Litany of Re he is cited as the personification of the phallus of the dead king, perhaps based on a linguistic play on the idea of rising or risen conveyed in his name.

Iconography

Usually Tatenen was represented anthropomorphically as a bearded man with a headdress consisting of a sun disk with ram's horns and two plumes. Because he was a chthonic deity and linked to the emergence of vegetation, his face and limbs may be painted a dark hue of green or some other colour.

Worship

The cult of Tatenen is known to have flourished at Memphis, and although the god may be found in temples in other areas of Egypt, his own sanctuaries remained primarily in the Memphite area.

Wadj-Wer

A Hapy-like fecundity figure whose name means 'the great green', Wadj-Wer was long believed to



The god ***Wadj-Wer*** *(at right), his body covered in symbolic waves, in a procession of deities bringing offering-hieroglyphs into the sanctuary of the mortuary temple of Sahure, Abusir, 5th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Berlin.*

have personified the Mediterranean Sea, or the sea in general, but actually may have represented the large lakes and lagoons of the north Delta region. This conclusion is based on the fact that certain texts seem to describe the crossing of the 'great green' by foot – which could refer to travelling between nearly contiguous lakes – and some texts use the determinative sign for dry land rather than that for water in writing the term. In any event, the deity is attested as early as the Old Kingdom in the mortuary temple of the Pyramid of Sahure at Abusir, where he is depicted with water lines across his body along with other 'fecundity figures', and it is clear that he represents the rich yield of the area he represents. The god's protective underworld role also meant that he appears in the New Kingdom royal tombs, and he is clearly depicted in the monument Ramesses III made in the Valley of the Queens for his son Amenherkhepeshef. The god seems to have been represented in amulets, but these may also represent the combined Ptah-Tatenen.

Weneg

A little known god who appears in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts (PT 607, 952), Weneg was a son of the sun god Re and seems to symbolize order and stability by supporting the sky and thus preventing the chaos outside the cosmos from crashing down upon the world. In this aspect he bears a different yet related role to that of Re's daughter Maat and is also similar to the Heh deities which supported the sky. Weneg was also said to be a judge of other gods, again perhaps paralleling the judicial role of the goddess Maat.

MALE CHILD DEITIES

This category of deities includes a number of gods who overlapped considerably in both their mythology and worship. In some cases deities were revered in both child and adult forms, though this is relatively infrequent, and the so-called 'child deities' usually represented the young offspring of major deities. As such these child gods often played a role relating to the divine conception and birth of the king and some were associated with the mammisis or 'birth houses' of later temples.

Horus the Child

The name 'Horus the Child' was given to a number of related forms of divine infant. Most of these were the son of Osiris and the goddess Isis whom she bore in the papyrus marshes of Chemmis in the northern Delta and raised in secret there in fear of the god Seth. Occasionally, however, the infant god was included in temple groupings as the child of other divine parents – as at Medamud where he was the son of Montu and Raettawy. Already in the Pyramid Texts the god is referred to as 'the child with his finger in his mouth'; and in this form he was known as Har-hery-wadj or 'Horus upon his papyrus plants' and sometimes as 'Horus hidden behind the papyrus' in reference to the myth of his origins. The god was most commonly called Har-pakhered (Greek Harpokrates), which translates as 'Horus the Child' and was often depicted in this form seated on the lap of Isis, or standing, alone, as depicted in the amuletic plaques known as *cippi* of Horus. As Harsiese, 'Horus son of Isis', the god was clearly identified in his role as the goddesses' legitimate son and heir of Osiris. This is also true of the related names Horus iun-mutef or 'Horus pillar of his mother' and Har-nedj-itef (Greek Harendotes) or 'Horus saviour of his father'.



(Above right) King Iuput in the guise of ***Horus the Child*** *seated upon the lotus flower which rose from the primeval waters of creation. Detail of faience plaque, 23rd dynasty. Royal Museum, Scotland.*

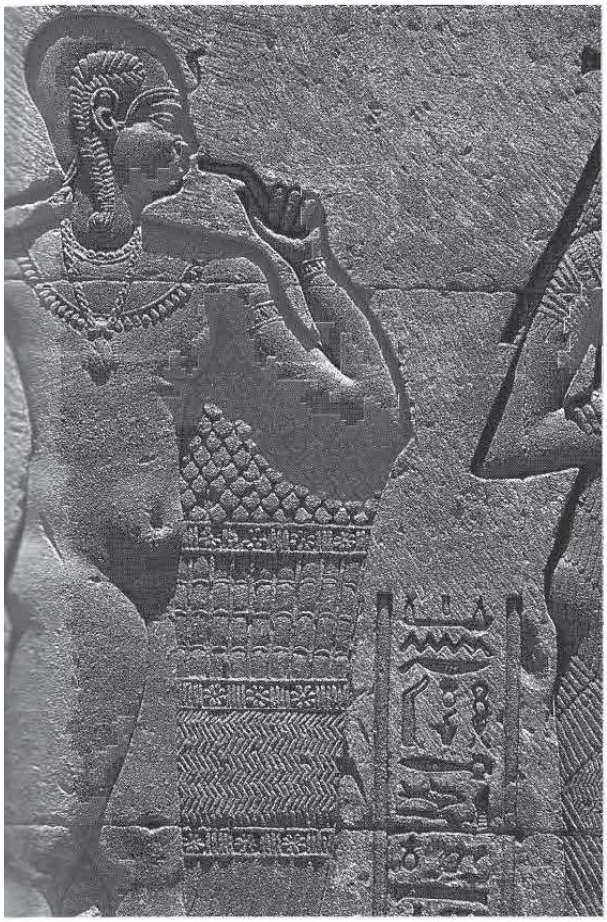


(Left) Cippus *or amuletic plaque of Horus depicting* ***Horus the Child*** *grasping noxious creatures and standing upon the heads of crocodiles beneath a mask of Bes. Such magical stelae symbolized the god's power to protect from, and to heal, the bites and stings of wild creatures. Ptolemaic Period. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Ihy

Mythology

Ihy was a child god, whose name was interpreted by the Egyptians themselves as 'sistrum player' or 'musician' and who personified the jubilation associated with the use of the sacred instrument (see p. 143). Another meaning of his name could be 'calf', referring to his relation to the cow Hathor who was usually held to be his mother – as at Dendera, and at Edfu where he appears as Harsomptus. Ihy was also regarded as the son of certain other deities, however, and could be associated in this way with Isis, Nephthys and even Sekhmet. While Horus was



*(Left) The child god **Ihy**, son of Hathor. Roman birth house, Dendera. Elsewhere, the god was sometimes regarded as the child of other deities.*

most commonly viewed as Ihy's father, the god was also said to be the offspring of Re. Although his mythological nature was primarily connected with music, he was also connected with the afterlife in some contexts. In the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead Ihy is called 'the lord of bread' and said to be 'in charge of the beer' in reference to offerings, but also possibly in allusion to ritual celebrations which involved intoxication in the worship of Hathor.

Iconography

The god was depicted as a naked boy, wearing the sidelock of youth and with his finger to his mouth. He is not always shown in diminutive size, however, and may be depicted at the same scale as his mother and other deities or the king appearing in the same scene. He may also wear the uraeus on his brow and is sometimes depicted holding the sistrum and the *menat* necklace which were his symbols and those of his mother, Hathor. Despite Ihy's usual depiction in anthropomorphic form, there is limited evidence of the god being depicted in the form of a calf.

Worship

As the son of Horus and Hathor, Ihy was one of the triad of deities worshipped at Dendera and this was his main cult site. A very early shrine in this location was rebuilt in the 4th dynasty by Khufu and specifically dedicated to Hathor and to Ihy. The god plays particularly important roles in the mammisi or birth house of Nectanebo I at Dendera where his divine conception and birth – and that of the king – were celebrated, and where 'mystery plays' in 13 acts concerning the divine birth appear to have been performed. A second birth house at this site built for Caesar Augustus celebrates the divine birth of Ihy as the son of Hathor.

Neferhetep

Not as well known as the child god Ihy, Neferhetep was also portrayed as an infant deity, the son of Hathor, in the town of Hiw near Nag Hammadi. The young god's name means 'perfect in conciliation', probably reflecting the mythological fact that the raging goddess Hathor was transformed into a gentle and loving mother. Neferhetep was also viewed as a divine ram and symbol of male potency. He was said to be loved by 'wives at the site of his beauty' in which beauty is a circumlocution for the god's phallus. The god thus functioned in two complementary aspects – as both a child and the power behind the child's conception.

Nefertem

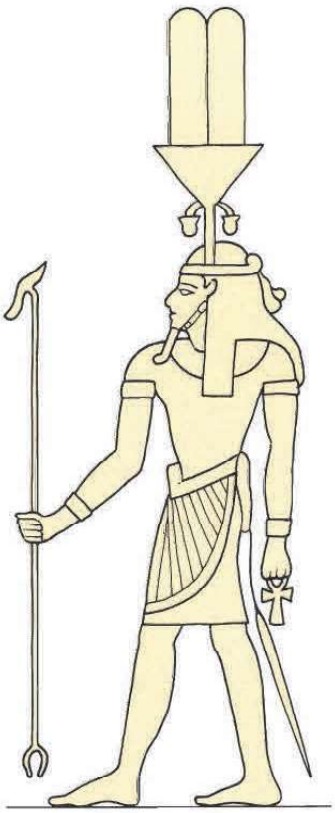
Mythology

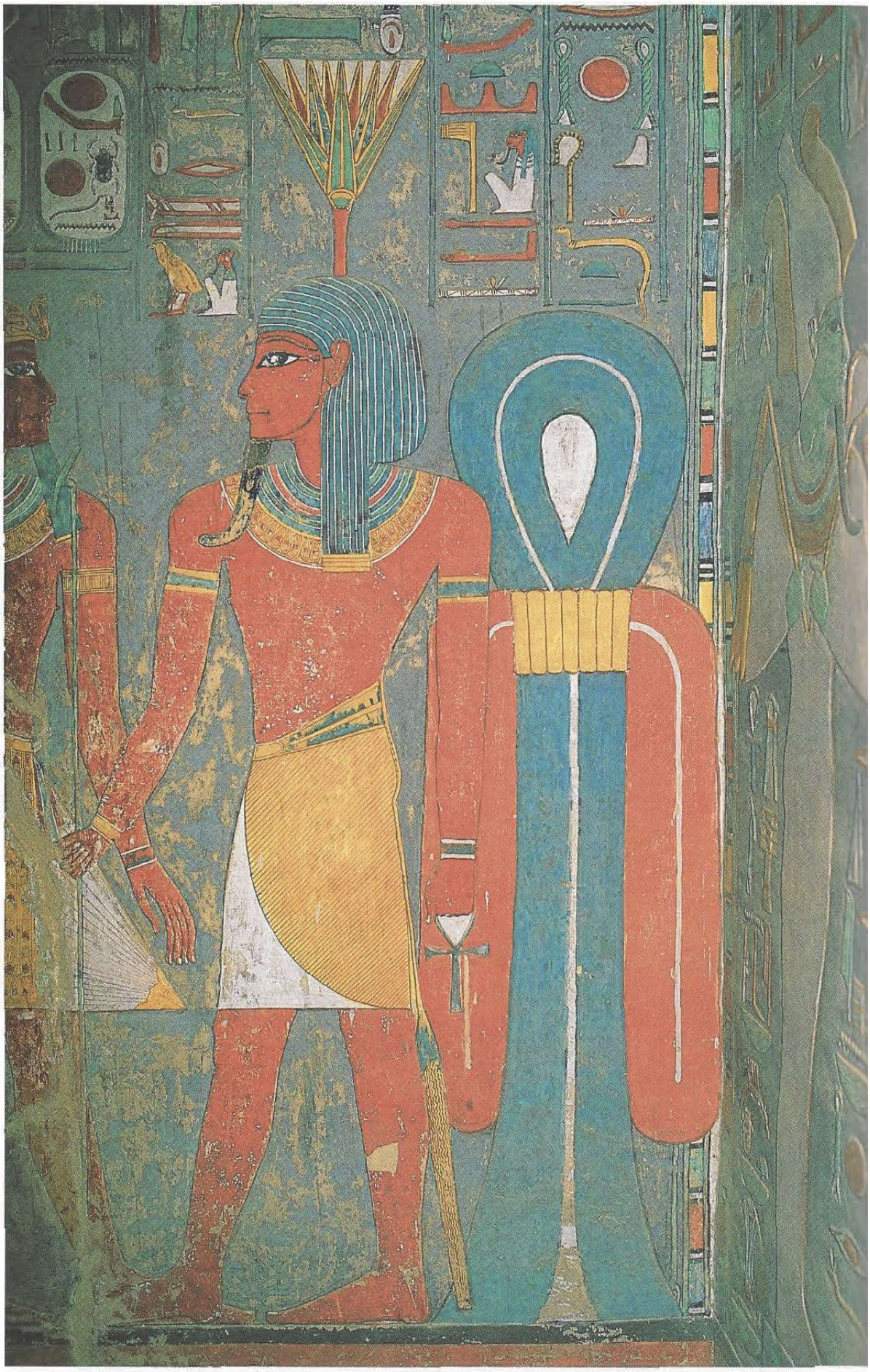
Nefertem is often thought of as the god of perfumes, but this association is a secondary one and he was primarily the youthful god of the lotus blossom which rose from the primeval waters according to Egyptian myth. Nefertem was thus not only identified with the blue lotus (*Nymphaea cerulea*) but also with the sun god who emerged from it, and his association with Re is common. In the Pyramid Texts he is called 'the lotus blossom which is before the nose of Re' (PT 266), showing that his association with perfume was an early and natural one. In later times Nefertem was also closely associated with Horus the son of Re and the two deities were sometimes merged. At Memphis, Nefertem came to be grouped with the pre-eminent god Ptah and his consort Sekhmet in a particularly important triad in which he was commonly viewed as their child. Other Egyptian cities also claimed Nefertem, however. At Buto he was the son of the cobra goddess Wadjet and he was also sometimes viewed as the son of the feline goddess Bastet.

Iconography

In his representations, Nefertem is usually depicted anthropomorphically as a male god wearing a lotus blossom upon his head. Sometimes this lotus headdress is augmented by two upright plumes and twin necklace counterpoises which hang at its sides. Occasionally Nefertem is also depicted as a lion-

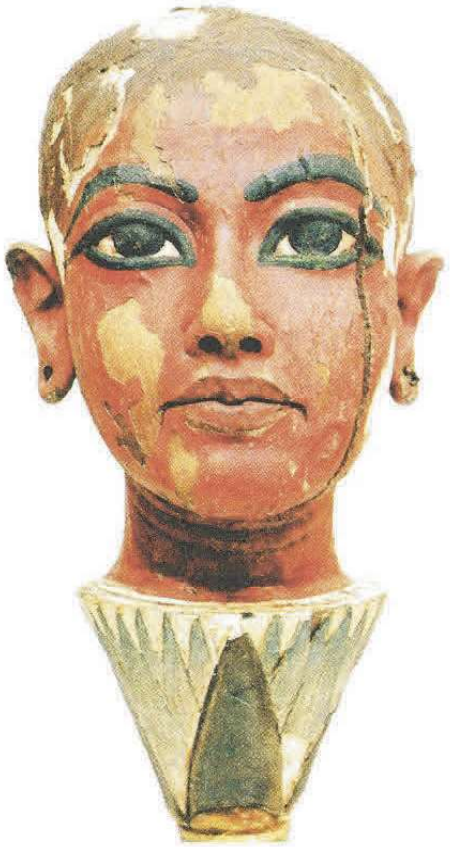
*(Below) The god **Nefertem** wearing his characteristic lotus flower headdress with the addition of twin plumes and necklace counterpoises.*





(Right) ***Nefertem****, whose lotiform headdress symbolized both his identity as 'lord of perfumes' and the regeneration and rebirth implicit in the lotus's mythic role in creation. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Horemheb, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

(Opposite above) This painted wooden head of Tutankhamun emerging from the blue lotus appears to depict the king as ***Nefertem****. Chapter 81 of the Book of the Dead provides a spell for the deceased to be reborn in the form of the lotus of this god. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



headed god (in reference to his leonine 'mother' Sekhmet) or standing on the back of a lion (perhaps also relating to his solar connections). In a few cases, depictions of Nefertem as a lion wearing his distinctive lotus headdress also are found. The god usually wears a short kilt and may hold a *khepesh* sickle sword – perhaps in association with one of his epithets, *khener tawy* 'protector of the Two Lands'. Because of his association with the primeval creation myths Nefertem may be represented as a child seated on a lotus blossom, and a variation on this motif is found in examples which show only the head of the god emerging from the lotus – as in the famous painted wooden example found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. In these images the association of Nefertem and the infant sun god is particularly close, and such depictions might be seen as representing the king as one or the other, or even both of these deities.

Worship

Nefertem's mythological characteristics meant that he was primarily a deity of royal and divine monuments. He was not commonly worshipped and, in fact, was popularly more often feared as the son of the ferocious Sekhmet. Amuletic 'divine decrees' of the Third Intermediate Period, made when a child was born, thus often promise to protect the child from manifestations of Nefertem along with other deities who were considered potentially harmful. On the other hand, a few protective amulets depicting the god were also made in this period.

Shed

Mythology

Shed, 'He who rescues' or 'the enchanter', was a protective god venerated mainly from New Kingdom times, though he is attested earlier. He was the master of wild beasts of the desert and river as well as weapons of war so that he was believed to provide protection from dangerous animals and martial harm as well as against illness and inimical magic. Shed was connected with Horus, sometimes appearing in the form Horus-Shed, to the extent that by the Late Period he was largely subsumed by the greater god.

Iconography

Shed was depicted as a child or young man, usually with a shaved head except for the sidelock of youth, wearing a kilt and sometimes with a broad collar and with a quiver slung over his back. He usually grasps serpents and wild, symbolically noxious animals and stands on the back of one or more crocodiles – essentially the same iconographic attributes found on *cippi* of Horus.

Worship

Shed was primarily a god of popular religion without his own temples and cultic service. He is attested in personal names, and representations of the god on protective plaques, pendants, etc, are known from a variety of contexts. Two stelae dedicated to Shed were found in a chapel in the workmen's village at Amarna showing the god's popularity and persistence in even that restrictive period.



The protective child god ***Shed*** *depicted grasping serpents and wild animals and standing on crocodiles. Pectoral, 18/19th dynasty. Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim.*

Female Anthropomorphic Deities

Amaunet

Mythology

Amaunet, whose name means 'the female hidden one', was the consort of Amun and one of the eight Hermopolitan gods (see p. 77) who represented aspects of the primordial existence before the time of creation. As this group of original powers consisted of four balanced pairs of male and female deities, and Amaunet's name is clearly derivative of that of her husband, it seems likely that she may have originally have been an artificially created complement to Amun rather than an independent deity. Mythologically, as the Pyramid Texts show, the shadow of Amun and Amaunet was a symbol of protection (PT 446), and it may have been for this reason that Amaunet entered the ideology of royal ritual as a protective, tutelary deity. The goddess appears in this role in the Akhmenu or festival hall of Tuthmosis III at Karnak and in Ptolemaic times she was shown nursing the infant figure of Philip Arrhidaeus at her breast as part of scenes depicting the king's enthronement which were carved on the wall of Karnak's inner sanctuary. In a typical contortion of Egyptian mythology, Amaunet as 'mother of Re' could also be the mother of her own consort, Amun in the form of Amun-Re.

Iconography

In representational works Amaunet is usually depicted as a goddess in human form, wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and carrying a papyrus-headed staff. The exact reason for this iconography is unclear, but at Karnak she is known to have been identified with the goddess Neith whose cult centre was in the Delta region. A colossal statue of the goddess set up in the temple of Amun at Karnak in the time of Tutakhamun is the most famous and imposing known representation of this goddess. A type of vulture amulet called '*amunet*' is probably not to be connected with Amaunet and, like the goddess Mut, her representations are normally anthropomorphic.



The temple of Amun at Karnak. Through the prominence of her husband Amun the goddess ***Amaunet*** *achieved additional stature at Karnak, which became one of her most important cult sites.*

Worship

Despite her probable origins as the female complement of Amun, at Thebes Amaunet was overshadowed by Amun's other consort, Mut, since at least the time of Senwosret I (12th dynasty) in Middle Kingdom times. However, Amaunet is known to have had her own priests at Karnak and to have found some prominence in rituals associated with the king's accession and Sed or jubilee festivals. Although she does not seem to have been widely worshipped outside the Theban area, Amaunet did maintain her identity into the later dynasties of Egyptian history as an important local goddess.

Anat

Mythology

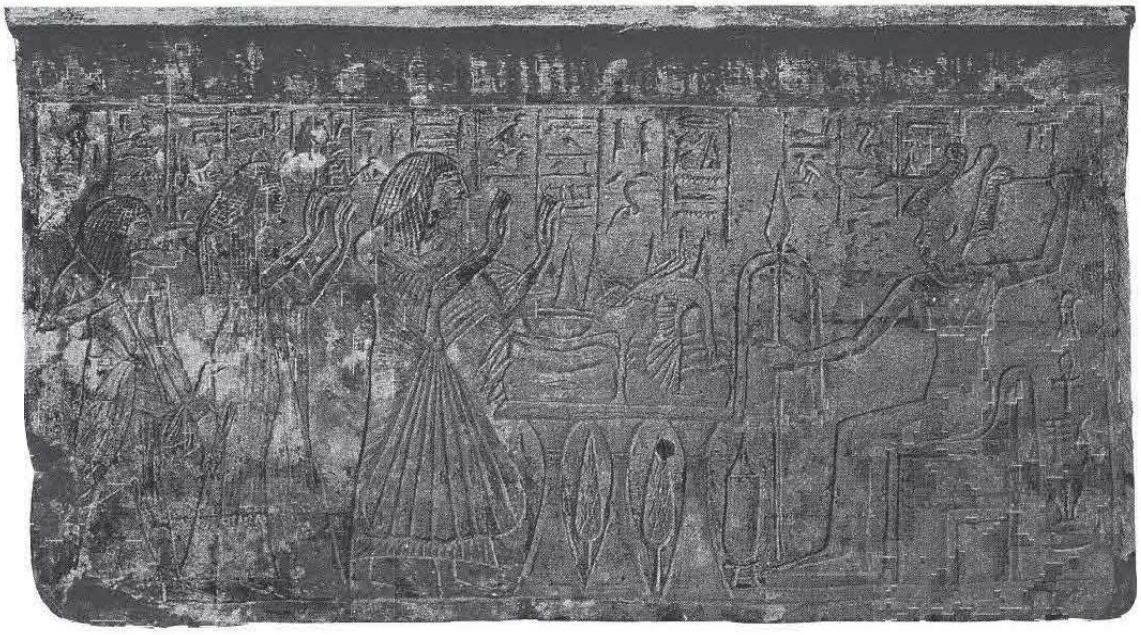
This goddess was one of a number of deities introduced into Egypt from the Near East. She was a warrior goddess particularly associated with the region of ancient Ugarit (modern Ras-Shamra) on the Syrian Levant; and although she was given titles such as 'mistress of the sky', and 'mother of the gods', Anat's nature was primarily martial. In the West Semitic myths relating to the goddess she ruthlessly sent an eagle to slay a youth named Aquat whose bow she coveted, and when she slew the monster Mot whom she fought, she vengefully hacked and burned his body before grinding his bones and scattering them in the fields. She thus became one of the patron deities of the military exploits of the Ramessid kings. A war hound of Ramesses II was called 'Anat in strength' (one of the daughters of that pharaoh was also called Bint-Anat or 'daughter of Anat') and the goddess was said to personally protect Ramesses III in battle. Anat was often referred to as a virgin, but she had a strong sexual aspect and was said to have united with Reshep and with Baal. In Egypt Anat was considered to be a daughter of Re and, like other Near Eastern goddesses, she was sometimes equated with Hathor – especially as the Egyptian deity could herself exhibit a violent aspect to her nature. Her aggression and foreign origin led to Anat being said to be one of the consorts of Seth, while her sexual aspect also led her to be associated with the fertility god Min.

Iconography

Representations of Anat usually reflect her mythological character, and she was characteristically depicted in the form of a woman holding a shield, spear and battle axe – often with one arm raised holding one of her weapons in a threatening gesture. She normally wears a long dress and a high crown similar to the White Crown of Upper Egypt but flanked by plumes on either side. Her iconography can sometimes reflect elements of the goddess Hathor with whom she was associated.

Worship

Anat is first attested in Egypt towards the end of the Middle Kingdom, but she seems to have been favoured by the Hyksos during their period of rulership in Egypt (one of whose kings took the name Anat-her), and by Ramessid times Anat was established as a fairly important goddess in the Delta region. In the Third Intermediate Period a large precinct was dedicated to the goddess in the temple of Mut at Tanis, and the name Anat-em-heb or 'Anat in her festival' was a theophorous name taken by Egyptians analagous to the older Hor-em-heb or Amen-em-heb 'Horus/Amun in his Festival'. Although the goddess was often associated with Astarte, the cult of Anat was clearly practised independently.



*The royal craftsman Qeh and his family worship the goddess **Anat** in her typical iconography. Lower register of the stela of Qeh from Deir el-Medina. 19th dynasty. British Museum.*

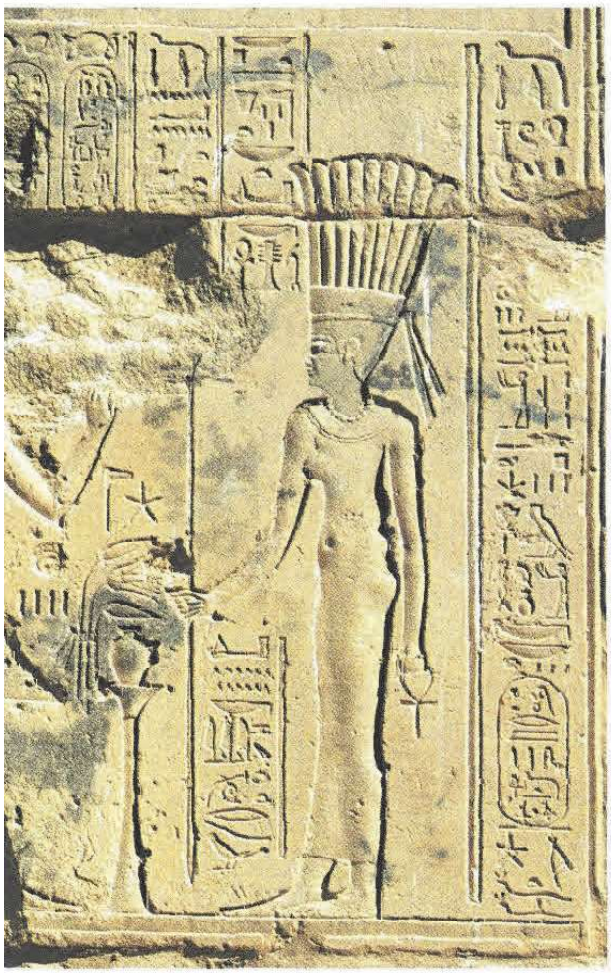
Anukis

Mythology

Anukis was the goddess of the southern border region of Egypt and particularly the cataracts of the lower Nile in the region of Aswan. She was worshipped since at least Old Kingdom times as a daughter of Re, but in Middle Kingdom times she was incorporated into the triad of Elephantine as the offspring of Khnum and Satis. The goddess's name is difficult to interpret but may mean 'embracer' with either the meaning of motherly embrace or crushing, strangling grip. It is also possible that these meanings indicate a dual nature similar to the known nature of Hathor – with whom Anukis was associated at Thebes. Like Hathor and certain other goddesses, Anukis was viewed in a mythologically maternal role towards the Egyptian king, and is sometimes given the epithet 'mother of the king'. The Greeks identified Anukis with Hestia, their goddess of the hearth.

Iconography

Representations of the goddess depict her as a woman wearing a headdress which consists of a low crown surmounted with a row of bound plumes, sometimes with streamers at the rear or a uraeus at the front. In addition to the ubiquitous *ankh*, the goddess is often shown holding a papyrus sceptre. Her sacred animal was the gazelle, and she is sometimes depicted with this animal or by means of it. In her maternal role she is sometimes shown nursing the figure of the king, as in the small Nubian temple of Beit el-Wali.



*The goddess **Anukis** wearing the plumed headdress which is her most characteristic attribute. Detail, decorated block, temple of Dakka, Nubia. Ptolemaic Period.*

Worship

In addition to the cult centres she shared with Khnum and Satis at Elephantine and Aswan, there was a temple dedicated to Anukis a little to the south of Aswan on the island of Sehel at the first cataract. She was worshipped throughout most of lower Nubia and appears in monuments such as the temple of Beit el-Wali along with other deities of the region. The popularity of the goddess is also attested in both male and female personal names such as 'beloved of Anukis' and '[he] of Anukis'.

Astarte

Mythology

Astarte was the West Semitic counterpart of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (the Sumerian Inanna) worshipped in Mesopotamia. Like Ishtar, she had both a benevolent and a terrifying aspect – she was a goddess of love and fertility, but also of war. This latter aspect was dominant in the goddess's Syro-Canaanite manifestation – she appears as a war goddess in the Hebrew Bible (I Samuel 31) and entered Egypt in this guise during the New Kingdom where she was particularly linked to the military use of chariots and horses. She is mentioned on the Sphinx Stela set up by Amenophis II (perhaps her first appearance in Egyptian texts) as being delighted with the young prince's equestrian skill and, like the Syrian goddess Anat, was believed to protect the pharaoh's chariot in battle. She was adopted into the Egyptian pantheon as a daughter of Re (or sometimes Ptah) and wife of the god Seth with whose fearsome and bellicose nature she could easily be equated. According to the fragmentary 19th-dynasty story of Astarte and the Sea, the goddess seems to have been involved in thwarting the demands of the tyrannical sea god Yam, though the details of this myth are lost to us. While the sexual aspect of Astarte does not seem to have been as pronounced in Egyptian religion as in her Canaanite homeland, it was probably not entirely absent in her Egyptian mythology.

Iconography

In Egypt, Astarte was usually portrayed as a naked woman on horseback brandishing weapons and wearing an Atef Crown (see p. 121) or a headdress with bull's horns. According to the Classical writer Philo, Astarte wore the horns of a bull as a symbol of domination; but Mesopotamian and Syrian gods



Ostracon with the image of an unidentified goddess in the form of a female winged sphinx and with a complex crown may well depict ***Astarte*** *in one of her Near Eastern forms. New Kingdom, from Deir el-Medina.*

and goddesses commonly wore horns as a sign of their divinity, so this attribute may not have had any special significance with Astarte. A number of depictions of an otherwise unidentified goddess wearing a horned helmet – as on ostraca found at the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina – may well represent this goddess.

Worship

A formal temple of Astarte existed in the Ramessid capital of Pi-Ramesse in the Delta, and there were doubtless a number of temples where the goddess was incorporated into the existing cult, such as that found at San el-Hagar, the ancient Tanis, where Astarte is known to have been worshipped along with the Egyptian deities Mut and Khonsu. While there is not a great deal of evidence from Egypt of the popular veneration of Astarte – as opposed to expressions of her tutelary role as a military deity – votive stelae showing worship of the goddess are known, and the appearance of her image or name on scarabs and ostraca may also indicate a level of popular acceptance.

Baalat

Baalat was goddess of the Canaanite and West Semitic area and feminine counterpart of the storm god Baal. Baalat means 'lady' or 'mistress' and like the word *baal* is often equated with a locality as in the title 'Baalat Gebel' – 'lady of Byblos'. In Egypt, the goddess was associated with Hathor probably because they were both linked with the products and resources of the region to the northeast of Egypt and also because of the Canaanite deity's proclivity for sexuality. At Dendera Hathor was in fact described as residing at Byblos. In the small temple of Hathor located at Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai, a sandstone sphinx was dedicated with both the name of Hathor in hieroglyphs and the name of Baalat in an early Semitic alphabetic script. Worship or recognition of Baalat in Egypt may have gone back as far as the time of the cedar wood trade with Lebanon during the reign of the 3rd-dynasty king Sneferu. However her assimilation with Hathor meant that she was rarely regarded as an independent deity and was probably of most interest to Egyptians working or trading in the outlying regions where she was commonly found.

Hathor

'Lady of Fragrance...
Sovereign, revered one...
The Two Lands are under your sway.'

From a hymn to Hathor

Mythology

One of Egypt's greatest goddesses, Hathor may possibly have originated in predynastic or early

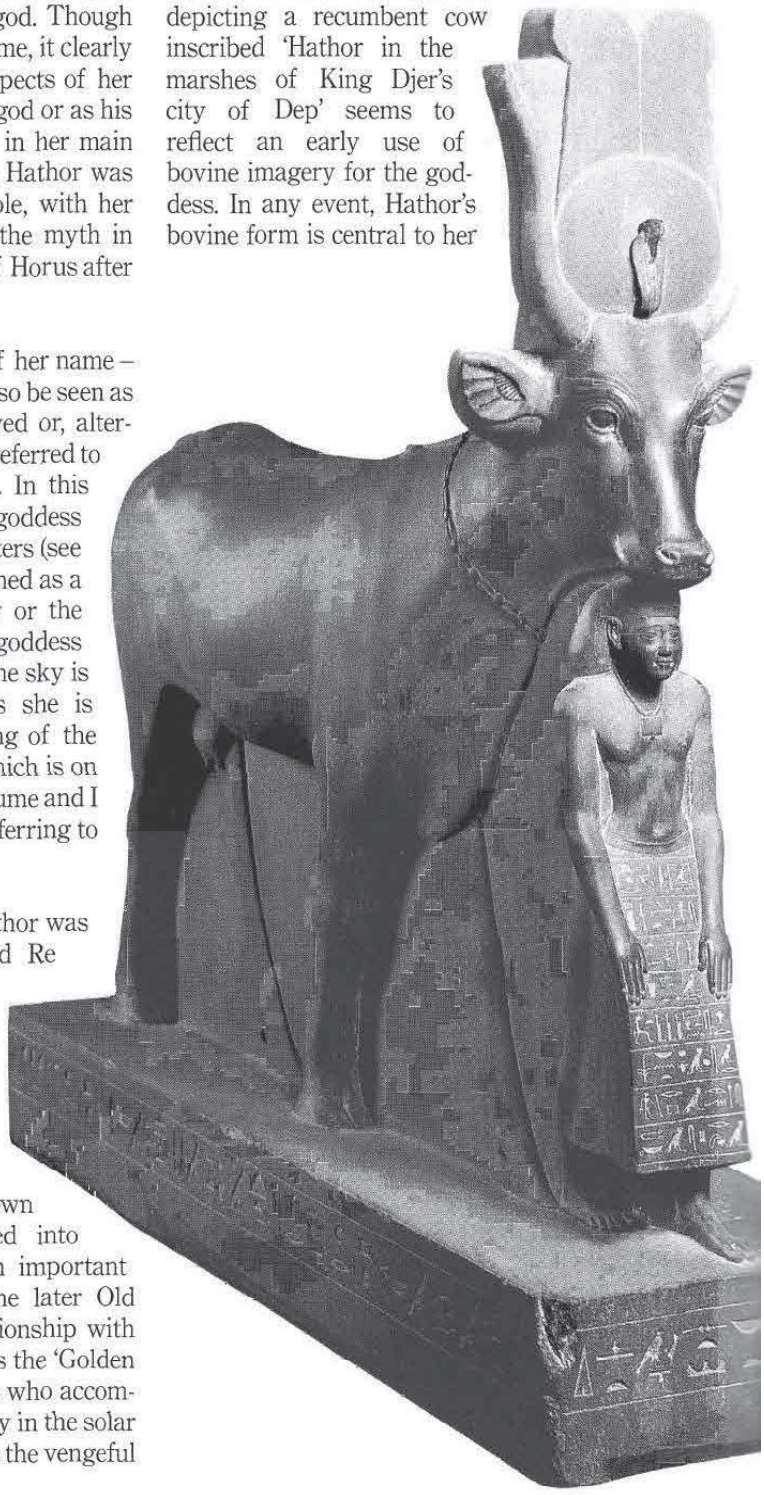
dynastic times, though most of the evidence for her dates to later periods. While she appears infrequently in the Pyramid Texts, she is of great importance in the Coffin Texts and later religious literature and is eventually found in so many contexts that only the most important can be considered here.

Mother or wife of Horus: The name Hathor was written as a composite hieroglyph showing a falcon within the hieroglyphic sign representing a walled building or courtyard and literally means 'the house of Horus', relating to the goddess's mythological role as mother of the ancient falcon god. Though this may not have been her original name, it clearly became one of the most important aspects of her identity and it is as the mother of the god or as his consort that Hathor was worshipped in her main cult centre at Dendera and elsewhere. Hathor was also protective and healing in this role, with her healing aspect probably a result of the myth in which the goddess restored the sight of Horus after his eye had been injured by Seth.

Sky goddess: From the written form of her name – as the house of Horus – Hathor may also be seen as the sky in which the great falcon lived or, alternatively, as the womb, metaphorically referred to as 'house', from which he was born. In this form, Hathor was both a solar sky-goddess and a goddess of the primeval sky-waters (see below), and she may also have functioned as a personification of the night-time sky or the Milky Way, though this aspect of the goddess is less clear. But her connection with the sky is obvious, and in the Pyramid Texts she is equated in this guise with the clothing of the ascendant king who states 'My kilt which is on me is Hathor, my plume is a falcon's plume and I will ascend to the sky...' (PT 546) – referring to both Hathor and Horus as sky deities.

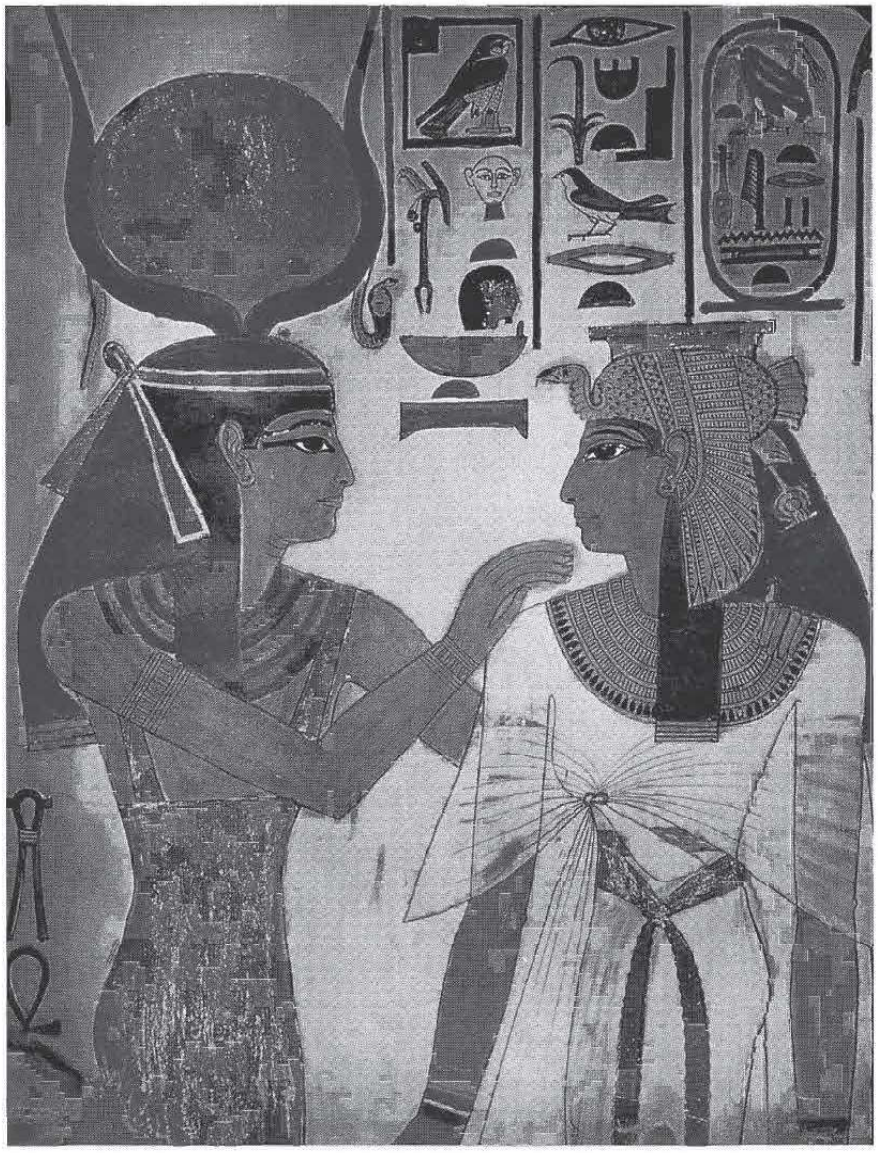
Wife or daughter and 'eye' of Re: Hathor was closely connected with the sun god Re whose disk she wears and whose wife, 'Eye' or daughter she was said to be. It has been suggested that the goddess was 'created' as a consort for the sun god as he rose to power at the beginning of the Old Kingdom, which fits well with much of the evidence we have of a relatively unknown goddess who is suddenly propelled into importance. Thus, Hathor played an important role in the royal sun temples of the later Old Kingdom, and her mythological relationship with the sun god was firmly established. As the 'Golden One' she was the resplendent goddess who accompanied the sun god on his daily journey in the solar barque, and she could also be feared as the vengeful 'Eye' of Re as seen in the story of the narrowly averted destruction of the human race by Hathor in her rage. In the Pyramid Texts Hathor assists the king in this role of 'Eye', however (PT 705) – preserving him by enabling his daily rebirth with the sun.

Cow goddess: Although Hathor is most probably not the cow-deity depicted at the top of the Narmer Palette as is often stated (see Bat), or the deity whose standard was the skull of a cow mounted upon a pole in predynastic times, an ivory engraving from the 1st dynasty depicting a recumbent cow inscribed 'Hathor in the marshes of King Djer's city of Dep' seems to reflect an early use of bovine imagery for the goddess. In any event, Hathor's bovine form is central to her

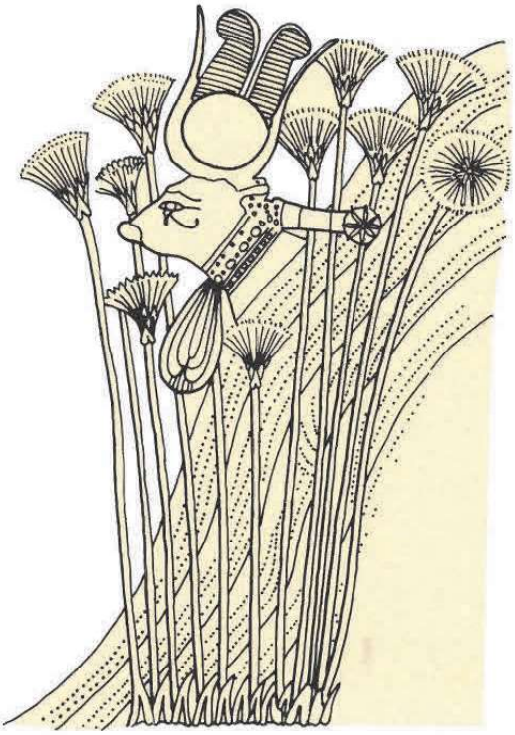


developed persona and it is in this form that she must be related to the primeval cow goddess Mehet-Weret, whom she seems to have assimilated by Middle Kingdom times. In her bovine form Hathor also protected the king and acted as a royal nurse, symbolically suckling the monarch even as an adult. The so-called 'seven Hathors' found in the Book of the Dead and elsewhere were aspects of the goddess usually depicted as seven cows (see p. 77).

Goddess of women, female sexuality and motherhood: Hathor was often described as the 'beautiful one' and was inextricably associated with love and female sexuality as well as with motherhood. Not surprisingly, the Greeks identified Hathor with Aphrodite and the goddess was especially venerated by Egyptian women. Mythologically, Hathor was perhaps chief among those goddesses who represented the female creative principle who were called the 'hand of Atum', in reference to the story of Atum copulating with himself at the time of creation. Her overt sexuality is seen in the story which recounts how Hathor cheered the dejected god Re by exposing herself so that the great god laughed and rejoined the company of the gods. One of her names was 'mistress of the vagina', and Hathor was associated with all aspects of motherhood and believed to assist women in conception, labour and childbirth.



Queen Nefertari (right) greeted by the goddess ***Hathor*** *in her fully anthropomorphic guise. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*

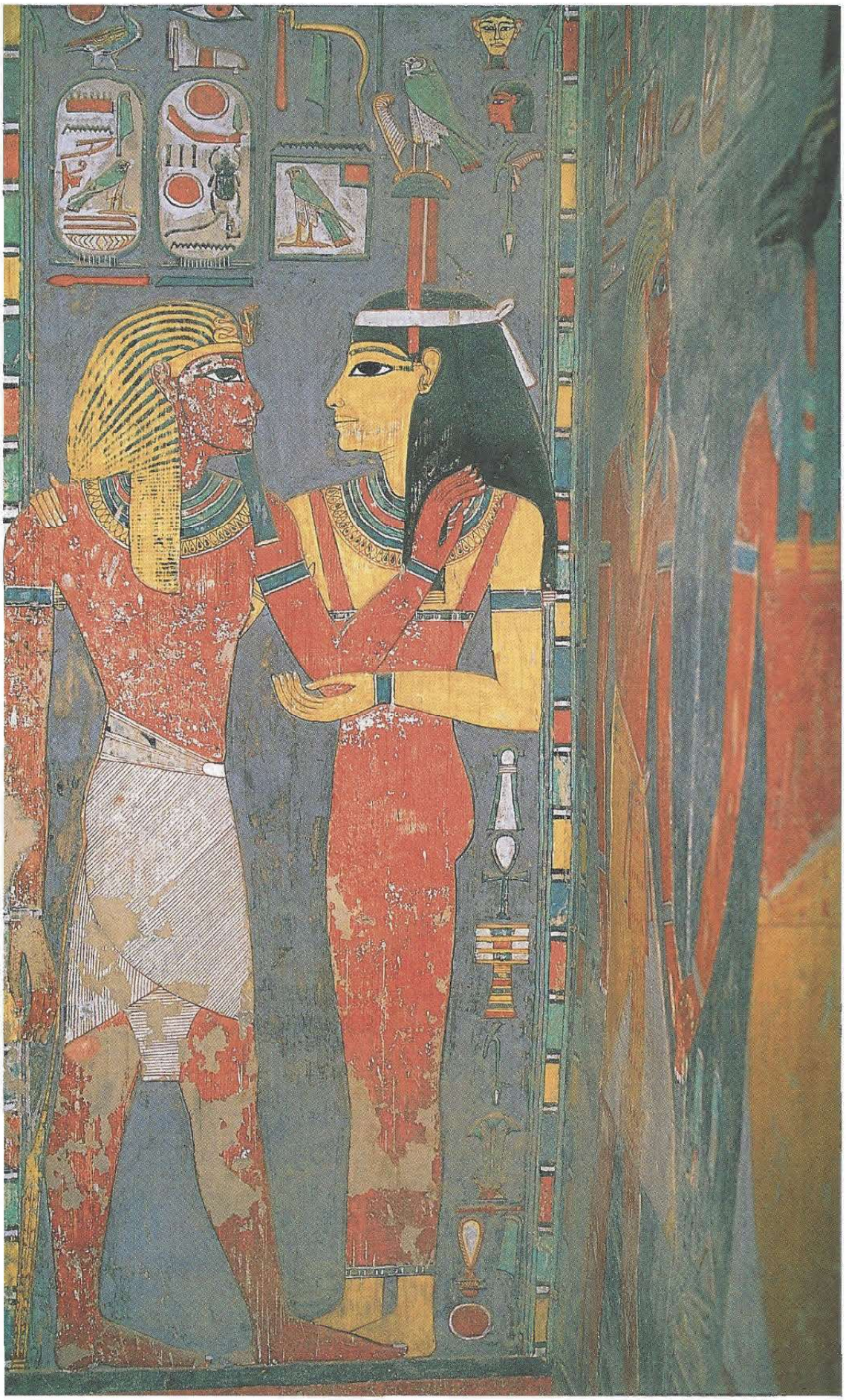


(Above) ***Hathor*** *emerging from a papyrus thicket at the base of the mountain, a motif particularly common in representations of the goddess from western Thebes.*



(Left) ***Hathor*** *in her bovine form protects the high official Psamtik in a manner reminiscent of the ancient motif of the king protected by the Horus falcon. 26th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Mother or wife of the king: A particularly important aspect of Hathor's maternal nature is the role she played as the mother of the king, which was often expressed by means of her identity as the nurturing bovine goddess discussed above. The Egyptian king was called the 'son of Hathor' perhaps both in this sense and also in the sense that Hathor was the mother of the falcon god Horus whose incarnation the reigning king was. Hathor was also the 'wife' of the king from an early date, and already in the 4th dynasty we find the king's chief wife acting as her priestess and probably being viewed as the earthly manifestation of the



Hathor *in the guise of 'Mistress of the West', and with the headdress-symbol of Imentet, embraces the king in the afterlife. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Horemheb, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

goddess. The relationship between Hathor and the king is particularly clear in the famous sculptural works from Menkaure's mortuary temple at Giza depicting Hathor with the king, which depict the goddess both in the role of a wife stood next to her husband and as a seated mother figure. Much later, in New Kingdom times, Hathor still remained a potent deity with whom royal wives were associated.

Goddess of foreign lands and their goods: In addition to her purely Egyptian roles, Hathor was also made a goddess of foreign lands as far apart as Byblos in the Lebanon in the north and Punt (probably northern Eritrea) in the south. As the patroness of foreign regions she oversaw trade and the acquisition of many mineral and other resources won from the deserts. In the Sinai, for example, the Egyptians mined turquoise, copper and malachite from the beginning of the Old Kingdom till New Kingdom times, and it was Hathor who acted as the protector and patroness of these remote mining areas. At such sites in the Wadi Maghara and later at Serabit el-Khadim and elsewhere, Hathor was specifically worshipped as 'the mistress of turquoise'. By extension, based on the similarity of colour, Hathor was also called 'mistress of faience'.

Goddess of the afterlife: Women aspired to be assimilated with Hathor in the afterlife in the same manner that men desired to 'become' Osiris, but the goddess's relationship to the deceased applied to men and women alike. From quite early times, especially in the Memphite region, she was worshipped as a tree goddess, 'mistress of the sycamore', who supplied food and drink to the deceased; and from at least the 18th dynasty she served as the patron deity of the Theban necropolis, where she protected and nurtured royalty and commoners alike, either in the form of the cow or as the anthropomorphic 'mistress of the west' who was often depicted welcoming the deceased to the afterlife with purifying and refreshing water. She was considered to receive the dying sun each evening and so it was a desire of the deceased to be 'in the following of Hathor'.

Goddess of joy, music and happiness: Although closely related to Hathor's aspect as a goddess of fertility, sexuality and love, her role as a provider of pleasure and joy was independent in itself. In a similar manner, while Hathor's relationship with music was clearly cultic in cases such as the ritual use of her rattle-like sistrum, it was also present in the use of music for the purposes of popular festivity and pleasure. Hathor was also associated with alcoholic beverages which seem to have been used extensively in her festivals, and the image of the goddess is often found on vessels made to contain wine and beer. Hathor was thus known as the mistress of drunkenness, of song, and of myrrh, and it is certainly likely that these qualities increased the goddess's popularity from Old Kingdom times and ensured her persistence throughout the rest of Egypt's ancient history.



Faience 'naos'-type sistrum decorated with the human-bovine face of ***Hathor****. 26th dynasty. British Museum.*

Iconography

Hathor was most often represented in anthropomorphic form as a woman wearing a long wig bound by a filet, or with a vulture cap with a low modius, surmounted by a sun disk between outward curving cow horns. In this form, in late representations, she is often indistinguishable from Isis, who took over many of her attributes and can only be identified by inscription. In her guise as mistress of the west Hathor wears a falcon perched upon a pole which served as the hieroglyphic sign for 'west'. Often she is depicted in a turquoise or red sheath dress or in a



The architectural use of ***Hathor****-headed columns such as this is known to have occurred from Middle Kingdom times and may have originated earlier. Ptolemaic Period. Temple of Isis, Philae.*

garment combining these colours, and at Edfu she is specifically called 'mistress of the red cloth'. She is one of the few goddesses to be depicted carrying the *was* sceptre, and she may hold a papyrus stem or sistrum as a personal attribute. But the goddess could also be represented in bovine form as the 'great wild cow', as a woman with the head of a cow, or as a composite human-bovine face. Hathor was particularly venerated in fully bovine form in the Theban area where we find monarchs such as Amenophis II, Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III depicted crouching under the belly of the cow goddess drinking from her udder, or standing before her bovine image. In the same area we also find Hathor depicted as a cow emerging from a papyrus thicket at the foot of the western mountain of Thebes. Usually only the head and neck of the cow are depicted in this form of the goddess and the motif is clearly expressed in the elegant gilded head of a cow found in the tomb of Tutankhamun which doubtless represented this aspect of Hathor. When depicted in the form of a pillar, Hathor's image was a fusion of bovine and human characteristics. The capital of the pillar was formed as an essentially female face, but it was triangular in shape to incorporate the face of a cow and with a cow's ears and a wig which curls at each side – perhaps in imitation of the bicornate uterus of the cow. In some contexts Hathor could also be represented in other zoomorphic forms – primarily as a lioness, or as a serpent, and even in plant form as a papyrus plant or sycamore tree.

Worship

The origins of the worship of Hathor are difficult to pinpoint. If she is not the goddess represented by the standard of the 7th Upper Egyptian nome, as seems likely, then the site later called Diospolis Parva (modern Hiw) was not a cult centre of the goddess from the Predynastic Period, as is sometimes suggested. The ivory artifact of the 1st dynasty mentioned above seems to show the antiquity of Hathor's worship, however. A temple of the goddess which continued through Roman times was first built at Gebelein (called by the Greeks Aphroditopolis) in the 3rd dynasty; and in the Old Kingdom several temples of the goddess are mentioned in the annals recorded on the Palermo Stone. The southern side of the valley temple of Khafre (Chephren) at Giza is known to have been dedicated to Hathor, and the title 'priestess of Hathor' becomes common from the 4th dynasty on. As time progressed, temples dedicated to Hathor were built throughout Egypt and also beyond Egypt's borders in Nubia, the mining regions of the Sinai, Byblos and other areas of Egyptian influence and control. In Egypt proper, important temples to Hathor were established at Atfih (also called Aphroditopolis by the Greeks), at Cusae, Deir el-Medina, and Dendera, her greatest cult centre. The annual high point of the developed cult of Hathor was the sacred marriage which took place between the goddess and Horus of Edfu in the third month of the summer season. Fourteen days before the appearance of the new moon, the statue of the goddess was taken from her shrine at Dendera and began the procession to the temple of Horus some 70 km (33 miles) to the south. Eventually, on reaching Edfu during the day before the new moon, the statues of Hathor and

Horus participated in various rituals before being placed in the birth house where they spent the night together. For the next 14 days the celebrations which followed this divine marriage represented one of the greatest religious festivals of ancient Egypt in which royalty, nobles and commoners alike participated.

From the 18th dynasty till the end of the Dynastic Period Hathor-head amulets are common. Amuletic figures depicting a walking or seated goddess holding a papyrus stem appear beginning in the Third Intermediate Period and may represent Hathor or Isis, though those showing the goddess with a cow's head certainly depict Hathor. In addition to these amulets and charms, many items of daily use, such as mirrors, perfume containers and cosmetic items, were decorated with the figure or symbols of Hathor according to her various roles. She was also commonly represented on *ex voto* objects, such as statues, stelae and offering vessels, which were left at her shrines and sacred areas as gifts and as requests for specific blessings. In her role as deity of sexuality and fertility, wooden and stone phalli were dedicated to Hathor and in at least one of her festivals a model phallus was carried in procession in formal reference to this aspect of her nature.

However, just as Hathor simply cannot be delimited in any of the individual forms or aspects described above, her worship was also often diverse and difficult to generalize. It must also be remembered that the worship of Hathor was so widespread that she was often regarded as a form of the indigenous deity in localities where she originally had no cult of her own. In this way, at Thebes Hathor was identified with Mut, and at Elephantine with Sothis. Despite the fact that by the end of Egypt's history Hathor was often assimilated with the goddess Isis, there remain many instances where the ancient deity still maintained her identity and continued to be venerated by the Egyptians with great affection.

Heret-Kau

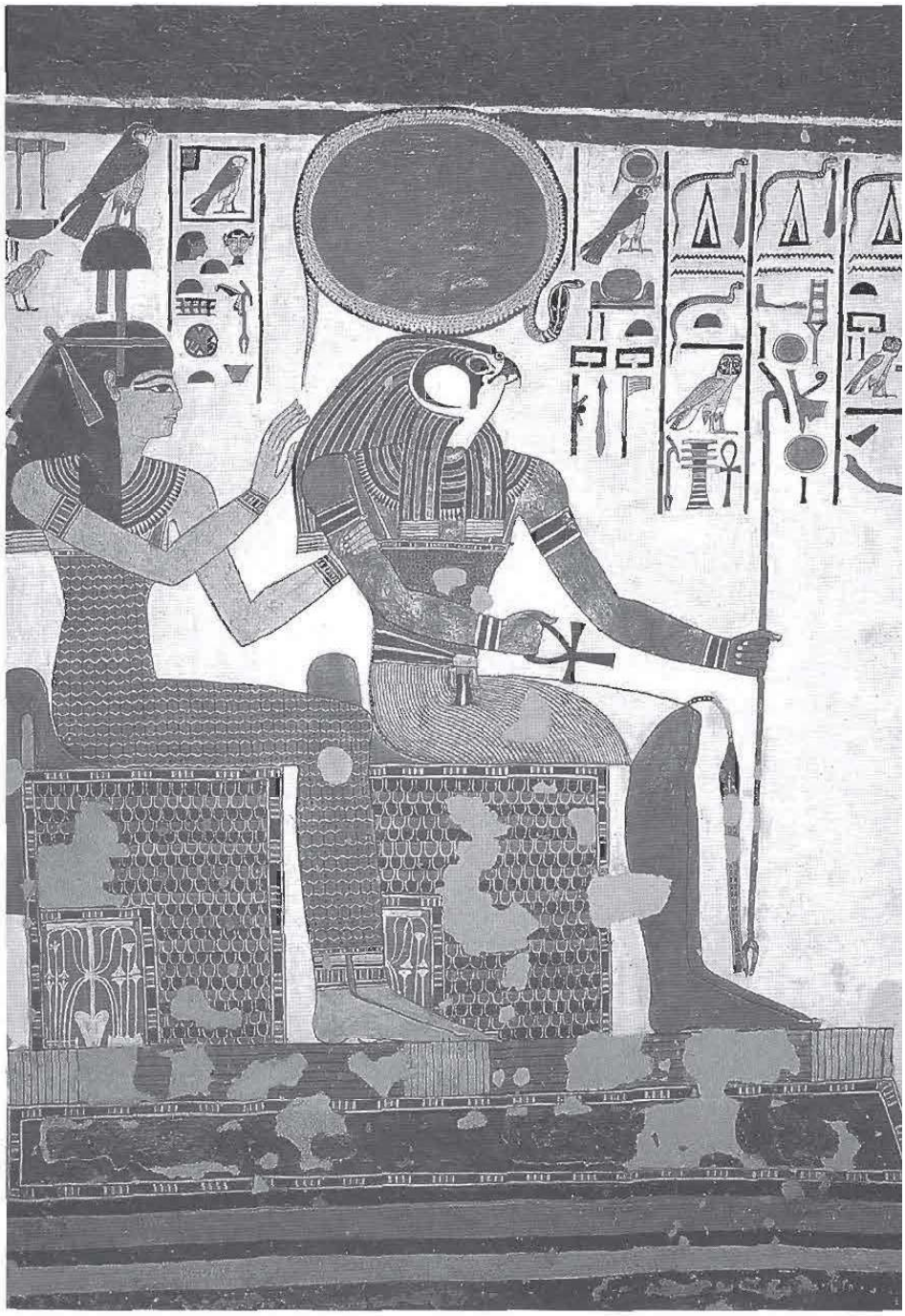
A little-known goddess whose name means 'she who is over the spirits', Heret-Kau seems to have been associated with the afterlife, but her exact nature and roles are uncertain. She was invoked in the foundation rituals of certain Lower Egyptian temples along with Neith and Isis, and a priest of the goddess is attested in Old Kingdom times, though little more is known of her cult.

Iat

A minor goddess of milk, this deity's name resembles *iatet*, an Egyptian word for milk. Iat was naturally associated with the nursing of infants and also, perhaps by extension, with their birth. She is mentioned in these ways in the Pyramid Texts where the king states 'my foster-mother is Iat, and it is she who nourishes me, it is indeed she who bore me' (PT 131). The goddess is seldom mentioned in Egyptian texts, however, and little is known about her.

Imentet

The goddess of the western regions of the dead, Imentet is recognized by the hieroglyphic sign for 'west' upon her head. She personified the necropoleis of the western side of the Nile Valley and is



The goddess Hathor depicted in the form of ***Imentet*** *(left), Goddess of the West, with Re-Horakhty. The falcon symbol on the head of the goddess represents the hieroglyphic sign for 'west'. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nerfertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*

depicted in various tombs welcoming and giving water to the deceased. Yet although she had an independent iconography, Imentet often appears to be no more than a manifestation of Hathor or Isis.

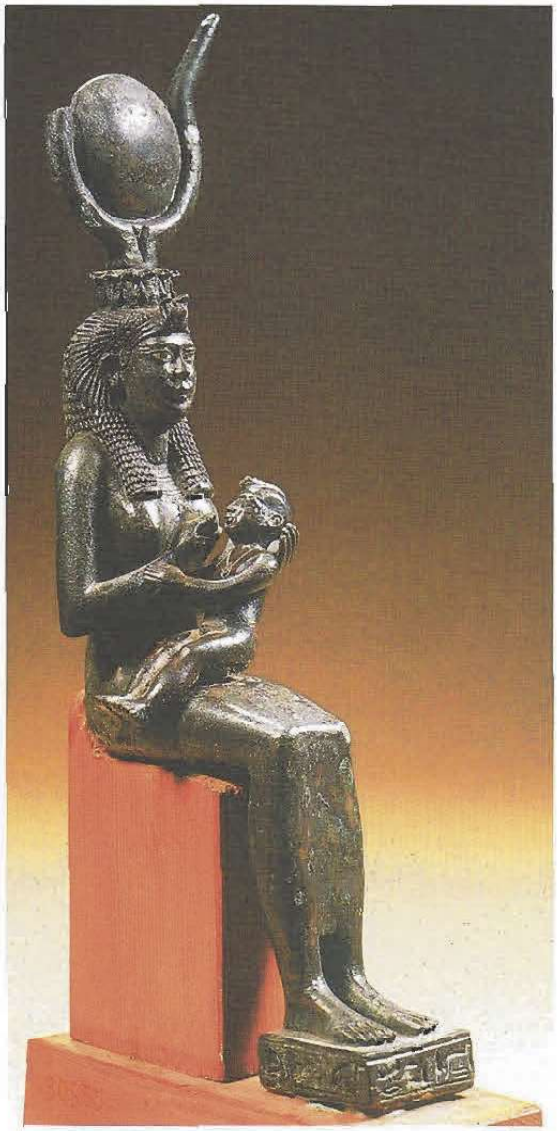
Isis

'Mighty one, foremost of the goddesses
Ruler in heaven, Queen on earth...
All the gods are under her command.'

From an inscription at Philae

Mythology

The origins of Isis, who in the later periods of history was to become Egypt's most important goddess, are shrouded in obscurity. Unlike the situation with so many deities, no town in Egypt claimed to be her place of origin or the location of her burial and there are actually no certain attestations of her before the 5th dynasty. Yet she is clearly of great importance in the Pyramid Texts where she appears over 80 times assisting the deceased king.



***Isis** nursing her son Horus, one of the most commonly depicted motifs in Egyptian art of the later periods. Bronze statuette, Ptolemaic Period, c. 300 BC. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

In the funerary texts of later periods her protective and sustaining roles were extended to nobles and commoners and her power and appeal grew to the point that she eventually eclipsed Osiris himself and was venerated by virtually every Egyptian. As time passed, and her importance grew, Isis merged with many other goddesses including Astarte, Bastet, Nut, Renenutet and Sothis, but her most important native syncretism was with Hathor from whom she took many of her iconographic attributes and mythological characteristics. Compared with some of Egypt's early cosmic goddesses, the mythological roles played by Isis are relatively restricted, yet they are immensely important roles which together personified her as a goddess of great power whose relationship with her followers was a personal one extending from this life into the afterlife itself.

Sister-wife of Osiris: According to the theology of the Heliopolitan sun cult, Isis and Osiris were both the children of Geb and Nut (see p. 18), but Isis became the wife of her brother and assisted him in ruling Egypt during his mythological kingship on earth. The myths concerning the two deities are extensive, and the fullest account is found in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, but after Osiris' death and dismemberment at the hands of his enemy Seth, Isis, along with her sister Nephthys, mourned inconsolably and began to search for her husband. Eventually the goddess found her husband's scattered parts and reunited his body (or in another version, she found his body enclosed in the trunk of a tree). Through her magic Isis revivified the sexual member of Osiris and became pregnant by him, eventually giving birth to their child, Horus. This underlying mythological role as the wife of Osiris is the basis of the importance of the goddess in all of her other aspects.

Mother and protector of Horus: A number of myths elaborate how Isis fled from Seth to the marshes of the Delta where she gave birth to her son Horus (see p. 201) at Khemnis or Akh-bity which means 'papyrus thicket of the king of Lower Egypt'. The Egyptians made literally hundreds of thousands of statues and amulets of the infant Horus nursing on his mother's lap in celebration of this mythic mother-child relationship showing the importance of the goddess's role as mother of Horus. After the birth of Horus various dangers threatened the young god, but throughout them Isis steadfastly cared for her son. She gained healing for him in one instance from a potentially lethal scorpion sting, which became the mythological basis for her healing powers and those associated with the so-called *cippi* or healing plaques of Horus the child. Isis continued to nurture and protect Horus until he was old enough to avenge his father and gain his rightful inheritance as king of all Egypt.

Mother of the king: As the wife of Osiris and mother of Horus, Isis was also the symbolic mother of the king who symbolically was the incarnation of the latter god. As early as the Pyramid Texts it is said that the king drinks milk from the breasts of his 'mother' Isis (PT 2089, etc.), and pharaohs of the New Kingdom and later periods had themselves depicted verbally and visually as the son of Isis. Because the goddess's name was written by means of the hieroglyphic sign for 'seat' or 'throne', it is possible that she originally was the personification of the power of the throne. Though many scholars feel that this may have been a later development, some have stressed that among some African tribes the throne of the chieftain is known as the mother of the king, and this anthropological insight fits well with what we know of the goddess.

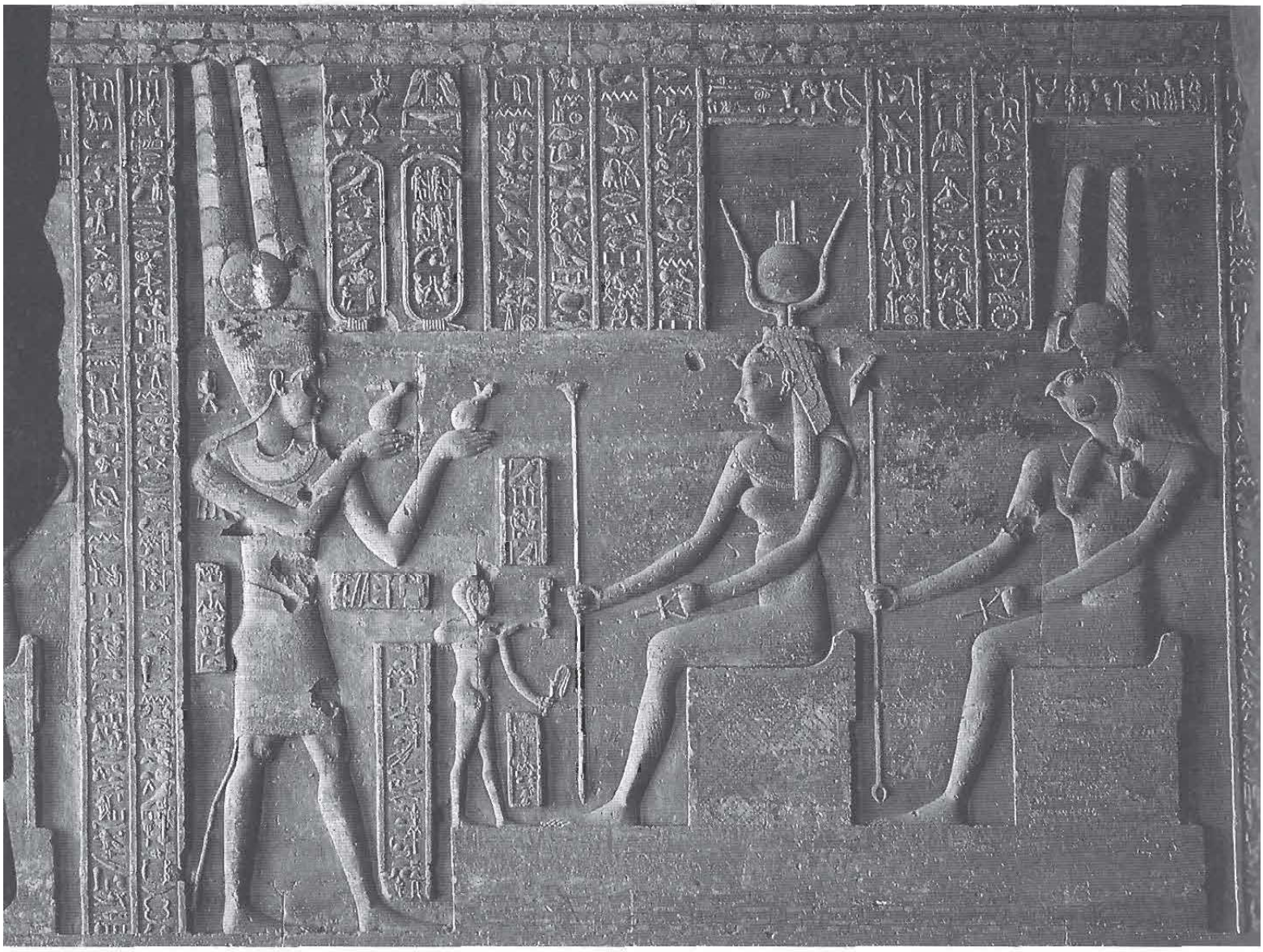
Goddess of cosmic associations: Although not originally a cosmic goddess, the great importance of Isis nevertheless led to several cosmic associations being made for her. She assumed the role of the 'Eye' of Re and according to Plutarch she was also venerated as a moon goddess, though it is more difficult to find substantiation for this claim. Isis was, however, closely equated with the star Sirius, just as Osiris was equated with the constellation Orion. In this role she merged with the goddess Sothis and was sometimes called Isis-Sothis. At the height of her development, as may be seen in the hymns dedicated to her in her temple at Philae, Isis was also ascribed powers of cosmic proportions. One hymn, which is not atypical, states that 'She is the Lady of Heaven, Earth and the Netherworld, having brought them into existence...'; and in a late aretalogy or list of her virtues, Isis is made to say, 'I separated the Earth from the Heaven, I showed the paths of the stars, I regulated the course of the sun and moon.'

Great of magic: Magic is central to Isis' many roles, for it is through magic that Osiris was revived, Horus conceived and protected, and the deceased – whether royal or commoner – assisted in the afterlife. The magic of Isis was also invoked in many spells for protection and healing – often imploring the goddess to come to the aid of a child or individual as if he or she were Horus himself. Most of the myths relating to the goddess stress her magical ability and one in particular – in which she learns the true name of Re – stresses her position as the greatest of the gods in terms of magical knowledge and power. In this myth Isis creates a snake which bites Re, and the stricken sun god is only healed of the snake's venom when he reveals his true name to her and thus further enhances her power.

Mourner, sustainer and protector of the deceased: Along with her sister Nephthys, Isis represents the archetypal image of the mourner in Egyptian literature and art. Both goddesses are mythically equated with the kite, a bird of prey with a particularly shrill piercing cry which has been thought to have been suggestive of the cries of women wailing



*The conception of Horus by **Isis** in the form of a hawk flying above the deceased Osiris. Isis is attended by the birth goddess Heket in the form of a frog at the foot of the funerary bier. Roman Period. Western roof chapel, temple of Hathor, Dendera.*



*The enthroned **Isis** (centre) and her son Horus receive offerings from the king. The goddess's headdress incorporates both the hieroglyphic sign for the throne and the horned sun disk. Roman Period. Temple of Hathor, Dendera.*

in mourning. The kite is also essentially a scavenging rather than hunting bird of prey that often wanders looking for carrion, and it is in this form that Isis was said to have searched for her murdered husband. The goddess was more than just a mourner, however, and through her great power Isis was able to function as the protector and sustainer of the deceased in the afterlife. Even in the Pyramid Texts she is said to care for the deceased, as she did for her own son Horus, and in the later periods of Egyptian history Isis becomes the supreme deity in this capacity, caring for the deceased in a personal way based on her character as a devoted mother.

Iconography

Isis is represented anthropomorphically in the form of a woman wearing a long sheath dress and crowned with either the hieroglyphic 'throne' sign which represents her name or, beginning in the 18th dynasty and most commonly in the later dynastic periods, with the horns and solar disk which she appropriated from Hathor. The attributes she frequently holds, the sistrum rattle and *menat* necklace, were also taken over from Hathor, but Isis often holds only the generic *ankh* sign and papyrus staff commonly depicted with other goddesses. While her most commonly depicted representational pose shows her standing upright, Isis is also depicted kneeling – often with her hand resting on the *shen* or eternity sign. In either of these positions the goddess may be shown in the guise of a mourner with one hand lifted to her face. Often her arms are outstretched and placed around the seated or standing figure of Osiris and sometimes her arms are winged. She is depicted in this manner on the sides or corners of royal sarcophagi of the 18th dynasty and in statues or representations where she shelters and supports Osiris. In one known instance a figure of Isis protecting an image of herself personifies the protective nature of the goddess. Isis may also be represented as a scorpion, in fully avian form, as a kite, and as a mother goddess she may be depicted

as a sow or in bovine form – in the latter case an analogue of Hathor or as the mother of the Apis bull. Finally, Isis could also be depicted in the form of a tree goddess, as in the tomb of Tuthmosis III in the Valley of the Kings where she appears as a personified tree, nursing the king at her breast which descends from one of the tree's branches. Amuletic depictions of Isis – usually in anthropomorphic form - or the symbol often called the Isis knot and known by the Egyptians as the *tyet*, were frequently placed on the mummy from New Kingdom times, and the goddess's protective power was doubtless utilized in amulets carried by many Egyptians in life also.

Worship

For a good part of Egyptian history it seems that Isis was not usually associated with any particular locality or worshipped in her own temples. Rather she was incorporated into the temples of other deities with whom she was associated. There are minor exceptions such as the chapel of Isis 'Mistress of the Pyramid' constructed at Giza in the 21st dynasty. However, the first important temple known to have been dedicated to the goddess, the Iseion – her temple at Behbeit el-Hagar in the eastern Delta – was not begun until the reign of Nectanebo II in the 30th dynasty, and only completed under Ptolemy III. Even here, as in her other later sanctuaries, Isis was venerated along with Osiris and Horus as was probably the case in earlier shrines which existed on the site. Other important chapels and temples of Isis were built at Dendera where the goddess was honoured by Augustus with a small independent sanctuary. This was at Deir el-Shelwit just south of Thebes where a small temple was also constructed for her in Roman times, and in her most famous temple on the island of Philae which was begun by Nectanebo I and grew under a series of Ptolemaic rulers and Roman emperors. The hymns inscribed there identify Isis with many other goddesses and show that she had successfully absorbed them as 'Isis in all her manifestations'. She was thus invoked in many spells of the later dynasties often tailored to her own character, as in spells and love charms to make a woman love a man as Isis loved Osiris, or to make a woman hate her present partner as Isis hated Seth.

Her influence was amazingly widespread. There was a temple of Isis at Byblos, where the goddess was equated with the local form of Astarte, from quite early times, though it is not known for certain whether the myth of Osiris' body being washed ashore at that site and the subsequent visit of Isis predates actual Isis worship at Byblos or not. Later, the worship of Isis became widespread in the Graeco-Roman worlds as one of the Eastern 'mystery religions', and the Classical writer Apuleius left a detailed description of the initiations into her cult. Evidence of veneration of the goddess has been found as far apart as Iraq and England, with temples being built to Isis in Athens and other Greek cities and later in many parts of the Roman Empire as well as in Rome itself. The cult of Isis rivalled those of the traditional Greek and Roman gods, and its importance and persistence is seen in the fact that her worship continued at Philae until the 6th century AD – long after most of Egypt and the wider Roman world had been converted to Christianity.



The goddess ***Isis-Aphrodite*** *combined the great Egyptian deity with the Greek goddess of love in a form which became popular throughout much of the ancient Mediterranean world. Terracotta figurine, c. 100 BC. University of Leipzig Museum.*



This grey granite statue of ***Iunit****, spouse of the Theban god Montu, is the first known representation of this goddess. 18th dynasty. Luxor Cachette statue. Luxor Museum.*

Iunit

A goddess of mainly localized importance in the Theban region, Iunit was incorporated into the local ennead of Karnak in New Kingdom times. Along with the goddess Tjenenyet, she was venerated as the consort of the ancient falcon war god Montu (see p. 203) in the town of Armant (Hermonthis) a little to the south of Thebes. Her name means 'She-of-Armant', and although the goddess first appears in reliefs dated to the reign of Mentuhotep III of the 11th dynasty, it is thought that she may have been worshipped there from very early times. It is perhaps possible, though not likely, that she is the goddess of the same name mentioned in the Pyramid Texts (PT 1066). The female deity Raet, also known from the Theban region, seems to be related to Iunit and may possibly represent a solar aspect of the goddess of Armant.

Iusaas

Iusaas was a Heliopolitan goddess whose name seems to mean 'she comes who is great' and who functioned as a feminine counterpart of the male solar-creator principle personified by Atum. Because of these associations Iusaas is depicted in anthropomorphic form as a woman with a scarab beetle upon her head. Like Nebet-hetepet (see p. 156) whom she resembles in function and who may be a different form of the same goddess, Iusaas played an important theological role as the embodiment of the female creative principle but was not important in terms of cultic activity or worship.

Khefthernebes

A minor goddess, Khefthernebes was a divine personification of the region of the Theban necropolis in New Kingdom times. She was overshadowed, however, by other female deities of the region such as Imentet, Meretseger and Hathor.

Maat

Mythology

The goddess Maat personified the concepts of truth, justice and cosmic order (Egyptian *maat*). She is known to have existed at least from the Old Kingdom and is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts where she is said to stand behind the sun god Re (PT 1582, *passim*), though it is not until the New Kingdom that we have evidence of her being called the 'daughter of Re'. The goddess was also associated with Osiris – who is said to be 'lord of *maat*' at an early date – and in later times she was subsumed to some extent by Isis, although according to Egyptian mythology the husband of Maat was usually said to be the scribal god Thoth. As the daughter of Re Maat was also the sister of the reigning king who was the 'son of Re', and the relationship of the goddess with the king was a vital one. Both the monarch's legitimation and the efficacy of his reign were ultimately based upon the degree to which he upheld *maat* and it was common therefore for kings to style themselves 'beloved of Maat'.

Her role was multifaceted but embraced two major aspects. On the one hand, Maat represented the universal order or balance – including concepts such as truth and right – which was established at the time of creation. This aspect is the basis of her relationship with Re – for she is the order imposed upon the cosmos created by the solar demiurge and as such is the guiding principle who accompanied the sun god at all times. The order represented by Maat must be renewed or preserved constantly, however, leading to the ritual presentation of Maat discussed below. As a natural corollary of her identity with right balance and harmony Maat also actively represented the concept of judgment. In the Pyramid Texts the goddess appears in this role in dual form, as 'the two Maats' judging the deceased king's right to the thrones of Geb (PT 317), and in the later funerary literature it is in the 'Hall of the two Truths' (the dual form of Maat) that the judgment of the deceased occurs. The gods themselves, acting as the judges of the divine tribunal, are called the 'council of Maat'.

Iconography

Maat was almost always depicted in fully anthropomorphic form as a goddess wearing a tall feather on her head. The feather alone could represent the goddess, however, as could the hieroglyphic sign also used to write her name which resembled a builder's measure or the plinth upon which statues of the gods were placed. In representations of the king presenting Maat to the gods, the diminutive image of the goddess is sometimes depicted in such a manner as to form a rebus of the name of the king himself. This is the case when Ramesses II presents the goddess holding a 'User' staff and crowned with a solar disk of Re in addition to her own tall plume in order to spell the king's throne name: User-Maat-Ra. In the vignettes from the funerary papyri and in other depictions Maat is featured in the ceremony of the weighing of the heart of the deceased on the scales of judgment. Usually the heart is depicted being weighed against the feather of Maat or in some cases a small image of the crouching goddess, and the figure of Maat sometimes surmounts the balance scale itself.

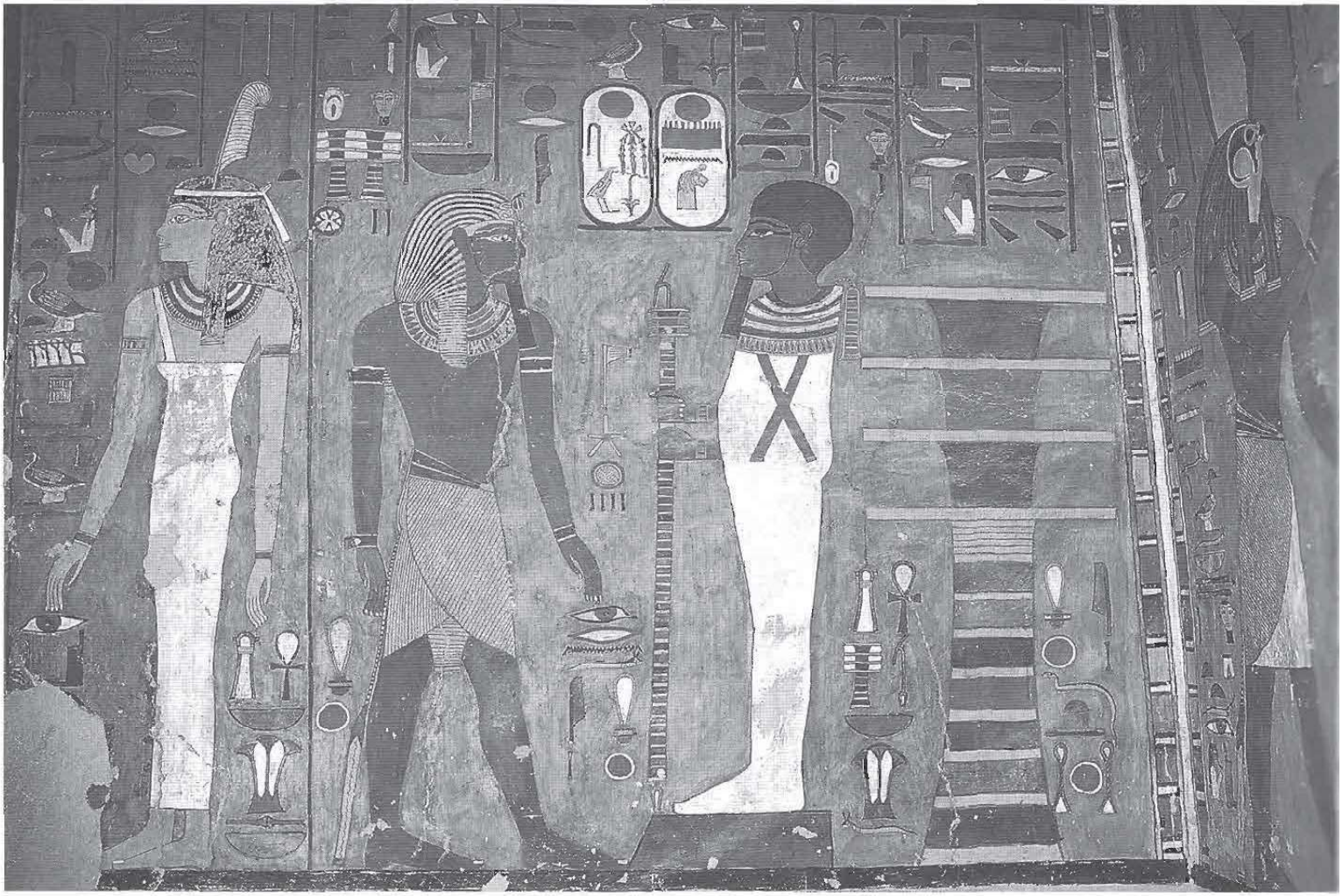
Worship

A small temple to Maat was built within the precinct of the Montu temple at Karnak but such

(Right) The image of ***Maat****, with outspread wings and kneeling on a hieroglyphic sign which could signify 'mourn', was utilized at the entrance to a number of later New Kingdom royal tombs. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Siptah, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

(Below) This gilded silver image of an unknown king presenting the image of ***Maat*** *represents the classic ritual of royal responsibility and adherence to order, justice and truth. 19th dynasty. Louvre, Paris.*





The pharaoh Horemheb stands between the goddess ***Maat*** *and the god Ptah, who, like certain other gods, could be called 'Lord of Truth'. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Horemheb, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

sanctuaries for the formal worship of the goddess are uncommon and Maat is usually depicted in the temples of other deities. Even the title 'priest of Maat' is often regarded as an honourific which may have been given to those who served as magistrates or who dispensed judicial decisions on her behalf and who apparently wore small golden images of the goddess as a sign of their judicial authority. Theologically, the most important manifestation of the veneration of the goddess was the king's ritual presentation of a small figure of Maat in the temples of the gods. In the New Kingdom Maat was offered especially to Amun, Re and Ptah, though she was also sometimes presented to her husband Thoth and was in effect offered to all the gods. Erik Hornung has pointed out that the equivalence of the presentation of the goddess with all other offerings can be seen in epithets of Maat such as 'food of the gods' and 'clothing' and 'breath', as well as in other statements which affirm that the gods 'live on Maat'. Likewise Emily Teeter has shown that most examples of the king presenting Maat are essentially identical to those in which the king presents food, wine or other forms of sustenance to the gods. At another level, the offering of the image of the goddess was also a tangible expression of the king's offering of his own work of maintaining *maat* in preserving order and justice on behalf of the gods.

Merhyt

A goddess associated with the Nile and with water. Merhyt may have also represented the two halves – north and south – of the Nile Valley, though little is known of her actual roles.

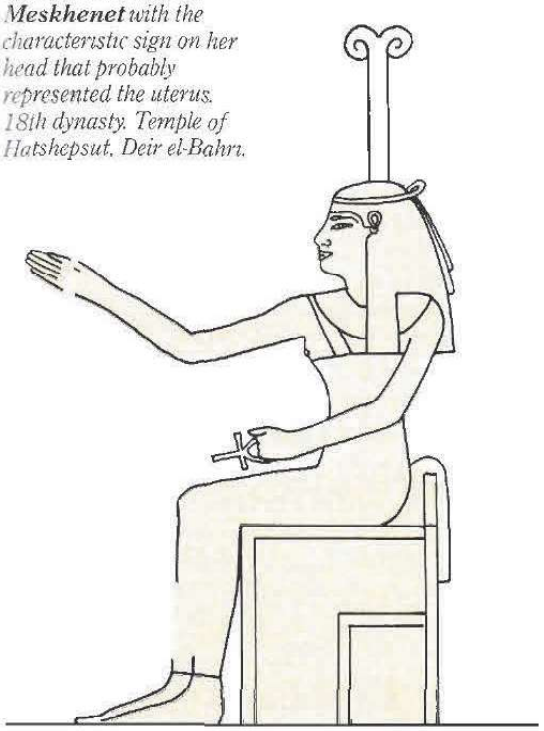
Merit

Merit was a minor goddess of music who was nevertheless credited as having helped in the establishment of cosmic order by means of her music, song and the gestures associated with musical direction.

Meskhenet

Mythology

A goddess primarily associated with childbirth, Meskhenet also affected other aspects of a person's



(Below) The goddess of childbirth and destiny ***Meskhenet*** *with the characteristic sign on her head that probably represented the uterus. 18th dynasty. Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahri.*

life according to Egyptian belief. Beyond presiding over an individual's birth, the goddess was said to decide the life destiny of the child. The Westcar Papyrus describes how the goddess assured the infants Userkaf, Sahure and Neferirkare, the first three kings of the 5th dynasty, that they would all come to rule Egypt. Meskhenet also played a role in the afterlife. She is often depicted in funerary vignettes close to the scales upon which the deceased's heart was weighed – in order to assist in the rebirth of the individual entering the afterlife.

Iconography

The iconography of this goddess depicts her in the form of a rectangular brick (upon which ancient Egyptian women squatted to give birth) with the head of a woman at one end. She may also be depicted anthropomorphically as a woman with a brick upon her head, though this form is less commonly found. A symbol having two loops at the top of a vertical stroke which was used to represent the goddess almost certainly depicted the stylized uterus of the cow.

Worship

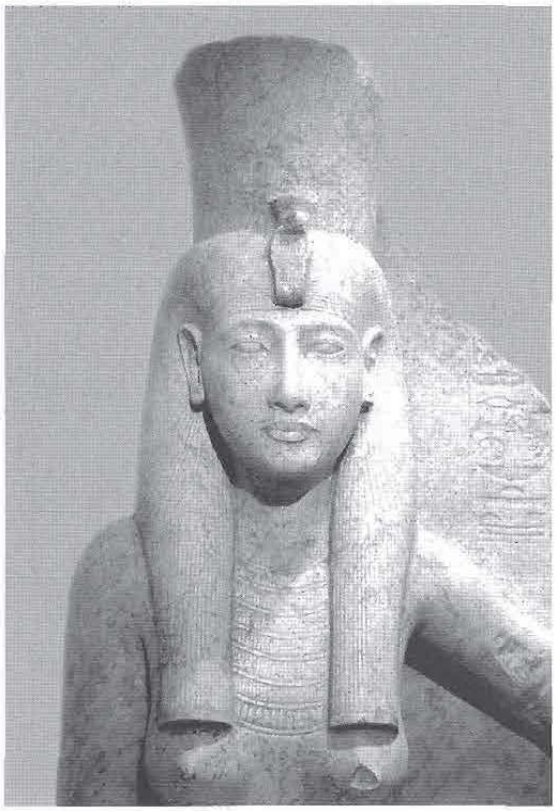
Although without a formal cult, Meskhenet was an important household deity and is mentioned in a number of known hymns and prayers. A text in the temple of Esna mentions four protective Meskhenets associated with the creator god Khnum, but apart from this there are few instances of the goddess's presence in temple settings except in ritual birth scenes.

Mut

Mythology

Mut was the great mother and queen of the gods who ruled in Thebes. Her origins are somewhat uncertain and while she is not known in textual or representational sources before the end of the Middle Kingdom, she may have been established in the Theban region or elsewhere at an earlier date. Some Egyptologists believe that Mut was virtually 'invented' as a wife for Amun while others feel that she was more likely a minor or little known deity who rose to prominence alongside the god. At some point, however, Mut displaced Amaunet, the original consort of Amun, to become the god's chief wife and the adopted mother of Khonsu in the great Theban triad. The goddess's name, which was written with the hieroglyphic depiction of the griffin vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), may possibly represent her earliest form, but this is doubtful as the word *mut* and the vulture used to write it mean 'mother' and this deity was regarded both generally as a mother goddess and as the mother of the king in particular. She was also identified with the Egyptian queen, and in the New Kingdom queens usually wore headdresses made in the form of the vulture which were also symbolic of divine motherhood.

From at least New Kingdom times, however, the primary mythological association of Mut was with the lioness. In this form she was the southern counterpart of the northern lioness goddess Sekhmet



Head of the goddess ***Mut****, detail of a calcite pair statue of Amun and Mut from the Luxor Cachette. Reign of Tutankhamun, reinscribed in the 19th dynasty. Luxor Museum.*



and was also related to the cat goddess Bastet – with whom she was joined as Mut-Bastet. Her leonine aspect also made her one of the goddesses regarded as a savage 'Eye of Re' along with Sekhmet, Tefnut and others. She was associated with Re in other ways and part of a ritual in her honour asserts that she was present 'at the splitting of the *ished* tree together with Re in Heliopolis'. Mut was also associated with the god Ptah of Memphis. Unlike most of Egypt's other major goddesses Mut played relatively little part in funerary beliefs, and her mythological sphere of influence was mainly centred on the world of the living. Nevertheless, she is described in some versions of Chapter 164 of the Book of the Dead as a goddess who delivers souls and bodies from 'the abode of the demons which are in the evil chamber', showing her power could also extend to the netherworld. A final aspect of Mut's absolute and rather terrifying power is seen in the fact that by the latter part of the New Kingdom rebels and traitors who plotted against the king were destroyed by fire in the brazier of Mut – perhaps portraying a goddess who not only protected the person of the king but also the state itself with a power which was as fierce as it was final.

Iconography

Although the earliest known representation of Mut – dating to around 1700 BC – depicts her as a lioness-headed goddess, her primary representational form in later times was anthropomorphic. In this female human form Mut is depicted wearing a dress often brightly coloured in red or blue and marked with a pattern suggestive of feathers. She is distinguished by the vulture headdress surmounted by either the White Crown of Upper Egypt or the Double Crown of the combined Two Lands – the only goddess usually depicted in this composite crown. In this form she may be depicted standing or enthroned – often holding a papyrus or lily-headed staff – with Amun and Khonsu (see illus. p. 30) or, in seated representations, nursing an infant to symbolize her motherly role. She is represented in this manner in many amulets, though these can usually only be distinguished from similar amulets of Isis by the presence of the crowns or an inscriptional label. Because of her leonine aspect Mut was sometimes depicted as lion-headed and is in essence linked with Sekhmet in the many famous lion-headed statues of that goddess that were placed in the precincts of the temple of Mut at Karnak. Interestingly, this leonine aspect is also mirrored in some images of Amun, as in one of the side chapels of the temple of Khonsu at Karnak where he was depicted in lion-headed, ithyphallic form. In some vignettes to Chapter 164 of the Book of the Dead, beginning in the 21st dynasty, Mut is also depicted as a composite deity with outstretched wings, an erect phallus and three heads – those of a vulture, lion and human. These some-



what bizarre images represented an aggressive deity 'mightier than the gods'.

Dedications to the goddess in the milder form of cat statuettes were extremely common, and a well-known informal New Kingdom painting which shows a cat with its arm around the neck of a goose perhaps also playfully suggests the familial relationship between Amun – whose sacred animal was the goose – and Mut in her feline form. It is interesting, however, that although Mut maintained her position as consort of Amun, in 'official' representations the relationship between the deities appears more familial than sexual. In sexual or fertility-related scenes Amun is portrayed with other 'younger' goddesses such as Isis and Hathor, but in formal scenes of power or matters of state it is Mut who is enthroned as the mature mother figure and powerful queen of the gods.

Worship

In Middle Kingdom texts Mut is called 'mistress of Megeb', a location in the tenth nome of Upper Egypt close to modern Qaw el-Kebir, but little more is known of her association with this area. She is also known to have had sanctuaries at Heliopolis and at Giza, and a large precinct at Tanis, in addition to her presence at Thebes. Yet although she was depicted along with her husband Amun on most of the major walls of the Great Temple at Karnak, and

*(Opposite) The goddess **Mut**, in lion-headed form, with the notched palm-branch of recorded time. Luxor Temple.*

*(Left) Gold bracelet with image of winged **Mut** from Meroe. National Collection of Egyptian Art, Munich.*

*(Below) The goddess **Mut** with horned sun disk, temple of Khonsu, Karnak. As the mythological mother of Khonsu, Mut played a part in the cult of that god along with Amun, his mythological father. 20th dynasty.*



in chapels and representations in many other temples throughout Egypt, Mut maintained a level of independence, and the goddess's main cult centre was her own 'Isheru' precinct to the south of Karnak Temple. The major part of her temple was constructed during the 18th dynasty, much by Amenophis III (who also set up the many statues of Sekhmet around its precincts), though construction was continued by rulers of later periods through Ptolemaic times. Mut participated in many of the great festival processions with her husband Amun and was transported in her own sacred barge for these occasions. She also exercised independent power in her own cultic rituals and ceremonies such as the important 'Festival of the Navigation of Mut' held on the great Isheru lake. Another of her important temple rituals both at her Isheru precinct and in her other sanctuaries was that known as the 'overthrowing of Apep', the inimical serpent who threatened the sun god. In this ritual wax models were made representing the physical enemies of Egypt which were identified by name before being destroyed. Mut is known to have had a temple oracle to which worshippers brought problems, and the 'Great Mother' was represented in many votive statues and amulets showing a high degree of personal veneration of the goddess.

Nebet-hetepet

A relatively minor Heliopolitan goddess whose name means 'mistress of the offering' or 'mistress of contentment', Nebet-hetepet was a feminine counterpart of the creator god Atum and her identity was similar to that of the goddess Iusaas also venerated at Heliopolis. Both goddesses personified the female principle represented by the hand with which Atum was said to grip his phallus in bringing the world into existence. Nebet-hetepet could be associated with Hathor and was venerated at several sites, but was primarily little more than a logical complement to the masculine deity of creation.

Nehemtawy

A minor goddess known mainly as the consort of the serpent deity Nehebu-Kau or of Thoth, Nehemtawy usually appears in anthropomorphic form and was frequently depicted in the shape of a goddess nursing an infant on her lap. In representations of this type she can usually only be distinguished from other nursing goddesses such as Isis and Mut by her headdress which is usually in the form of a sistrum. Little is known of the worship of the goddess other than that she was venerated with Thoth in his cult centres, especially that of Hermopolis in Middle Egypt.

Neith

Mythology

Neith is one of the most ancient deities known from Egypt. There is ample evidence that she was one of the most important deities of the prehistoric and Early Dynastic periods and, impressively, her veneration persisted to the very end of the pharaonic age. Her character was complex as her mythology continued to grow over this great span of time, and although many early myths of the goddess are undoubtedly lost to us, the picture we are able to



(Right) Bronze statuette of the goddess ***Neith*** *in characteristic pose. Originally the goddess would have held an* ankh *and staff. Late Period–Ptolemaic era. Harer Collection, San Bernardino.*

recover is still one of a powerful deity whose roles encompassed aspects of this life and the beyond.

Warrior goddess: While this aspect of her personality was perhaps overstated in some older studies of Egypt's deities, it is undeniable that Neith was associated with weaponry – either in a context of hunting or warfare or possibly both – from very early times. Her earliest emblems consisted of crossed arrows and bows and she was called 'mistress of the bow' and 'ruler of arrows'. Early Egyptian theophoric names such as 'Neith fights' and 'Neith is victorious' also underscore this bellicose aspect of the goddess's character, and from Old Kingdom times Neith could appear as one of the manifestations of the fierce 'Eye of Re'. In the Ramessid story known as the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth', Neith is a wise counsellor to whom Re himself appeals for help, though her aggressive nature is seen in her threat that she will grow angry and make the sky fall to the earth if her advice is not followed. The ancient Greeks identified Neith with Athena, probably primarily because of her warlike aspect, though there were other aspects of Neith which supported this association.

Creator goddess: In her cosmogonic role Neith was also identified with the waters of Nun which preceded creation, and with the process of creation itself. As such she was called 'great cow' or the 'great flood', and closely associated with the creator deity Mehet-Weret. The earliest extant reference to this role appears on the sarcophagus of the 19th-dynasty king Merenptah where Neith is said to be the creative force present at the very beginning, yet the idea was doubtless much older. In Roman times, texts inscribed in the temple of Khnum at Esna attempted to claim Neith as an Upper Egyptian deity who emerged from the primeval waters to create the world before travelling northward to found her Delta city of Sais. These same texts claim that Neith created both Re and the sun god's archenemy Apophis making her the original demiurge. Neith was also considered to have created mankind, and in the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth' she is specifically called Neith 'the eldest, mother of the gods, who illuminated the first face'.

Mother goddess: The metaphors of creation and birth clearly overlap and as mother of the gods, Neith is naturally seen as an archetypal mother figure. In the New Kingdom she was regarded as the mother of humans as well as gods, and a text dating from the 6th century BC states that it was she who invented birth. Amenophis II claims that he is one 'whose being Neith moulded' and in a similar manner it is Neith, along with the goddess Serket (another deity associated with motherhood), who supports the bed in which the queen and the god Amun embrace in the theogamies depicted in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri and in Luxor Temple. Already by Old Kingdom times Neith was regarded as the mother of the crocodile god Sobek and thus 'the nurse of crocodiles'. Although no male deity was firmly celebrated as the partner of Neith and it is sometimes said that she may have been a neutral, almost sexless deity not unlike the Near Eastern virgin goddess Anat or the Greek Athena, the evidence of Neith as a mother goddess militates against this view.

Goddess of Lower Egypt: Neith was certainly the most important goddess and perhaps the most important deity of Lower Egypt. Although she was sometimes called 'Neith of Libya', this reference may simply refer to the proximity of the Libyan region to the goddess's chief province in the western Delta. Her frequent representations wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt indicate that Neith came to personify the northern, Delta region or acted as tutelary goddess of the crown of that area. In the Pyramid Texts her aggressive nature is tied to this role in the statement, 'May the terror of you come into being...like the Net [Neith]-crown which is on the King of Lower Egypt' (PT 724). The temple of Neith at Sais was sometimes called the 'house of the bee' and the bee became an important monarchial symbol incorporated into the developed royal titulary often associated with Lower Egypt.

Funerary goddess: From Old Kingdom times (though rarely at first) Neith was associated with Egyptian funerary beliefs and rituals. In the Pyramid Texts she is said to watch over the deceased Osiris along with Isis, Nephthys and Serket (PT 606), and eventually the four goddesses were each assigned one side of the coffin with the responsibility of watching over the four canopic guardians known as the sons of Horus. In this role Neith was usually placed at the east side of the coffin as the protectress of Duamutef, guardian of the stomach of the deceased. Spells of the Coffin Texts equate the deceased with Neith in the underworld and also identify her as one of the judges of the dead (CT Spell 630). In the later 'Book of that which is beyond' Neith aids the king and Re himself in the underworld journey. Because Neith was also the inventor of weaving according to Egyptian myth, she was naturally associated with the funerary process as provider of the mummy bandages and shrouds.

Iconography

The first representational evidence for Neith is the early form of her emblem (two crossed arrows mounted on a pole) which occurs in predynastic times. The first anthropomorphic representations of the goddess herself occur somewhat later, in the Early Dynastic period, and these representations make Neith one of the earliest Egyptian deities



Two-dimensional representation of ***Neith*** *wearing the Red Crown mirrors the pose of the sculptural representation opposite. Detail, painted coffin. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



*The goddesses **Neith** (at left) and Nephthys before dual images of Osiris. Above her head, Neith wears one of the distinctive symbols used to write her name from early times. 20th dynasty. Tomb of Khaemwaset, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*

depicted in human form. At first, the goddess wears two bows on her head, and she is not depicted wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, the region with which she was most closely associated, until the 5th dynasty when she appears this way in the temple of Userkaf at Abu Ghurob. Her representations frequently depict Neith carrying only the *was* (power) sceptre and the *ankh* (life) symbol, but in her guise as warrior goddess she frequently holds a bow and arrow or a harpoon. Later in history Neith could also be portrayed in zoomorphic form. Herodotus records seeing the image of the goddess as a kneeling cow with a sun disk between its horns during her festival at Sais, and a bovine form of her image was also used at Esna. The goddess could also appear in serpentine form as protectress of the king or of Re, as may be seen in the Book of the Dead (BD 185) and in the gilded wooden cobra found in Tutankhamun's tomb. In her guise as mother goddess and as the mother of Sobek, Neith is shown in the nursing motif, and amulets show the goddess as a woman standing, suckling a small crocodile at each breast, or as a woman with a crocodile's head. At Esna Neith was associated with the Nile perch which could represent her because, according to myth, she turned herself into such a fish to swim in the primeval waters.

Worship

Neith's prominence in early dynastic times – as seen in 1st-dynasty labels, funerary stelae, and in the names of her priestesses and the contemporary queens such as Neithotep and Merneith – suggest the goddess was worshipped from the beginnings of Egyptian culture. In fact, the earliest portrayal of what is thought to be a sacred shrine in Egypt is associated with Neith. Her symbol stands in the enclosure of a reed-built sanctuary on an ebony label from Abydos which seems to depict a visit made by the 1st-dynasty King Aha to a sanctuary of Neith. Yet widespread depictions of Neith's standard on early pottery indicate the goddess was venerated over a considerable area, and she was doubtless the most important goddess of the Early Dynastic Period. This pre-eminence may have eventually been challenged, however, and the 5th-dynasty King Userkaf is believed to have re-emphasized the cult of Neith after the later rulers of the 4th dynasty had supplanted her with Hathor. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that Neith's



status continued to be high. By the Old Kingdom Neith also had a sanctuary at Memphis, and the Coffin Texts (Spell 408) also refer to her as 'mistress of Mendes', indicating an important presence there.

In the Middle Kingdom and early New Kingdom Neith seems to have lost some of her earlier status, but perhaps as a result of the Ramessid relocation of the capital to the Delta area, Neith regained importance in the 19th dynasty. She was credited with superlative powers in several texts, and in Ramesses II's coronation scene recorded in the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak it is Neith who stands next to the enthroned state god Amun. In post-New Kingdom times Neith naturally rose to particular importance in the 26th dynasty when kings of the great cult centre of Neith – the Delta city Sais (modern Sa el-Hagar) – ruled Egypt. The goddess received revenue from the Greek trading settlement at Naukratis, further enriching her impressive temple, which the Greek historian Herodotus described. Neith was highly venerated in other temples of the Graeco-Roman Period – especially at Esna – where she was worshipped with Khnum, and her great festival was celebrated on the thirteenth day of the third month of the 'summer' season each year. The worship of Neith thus spanned virtually all of Egypt's history and she remained to the end 'Neith, the great'.

Nephthys

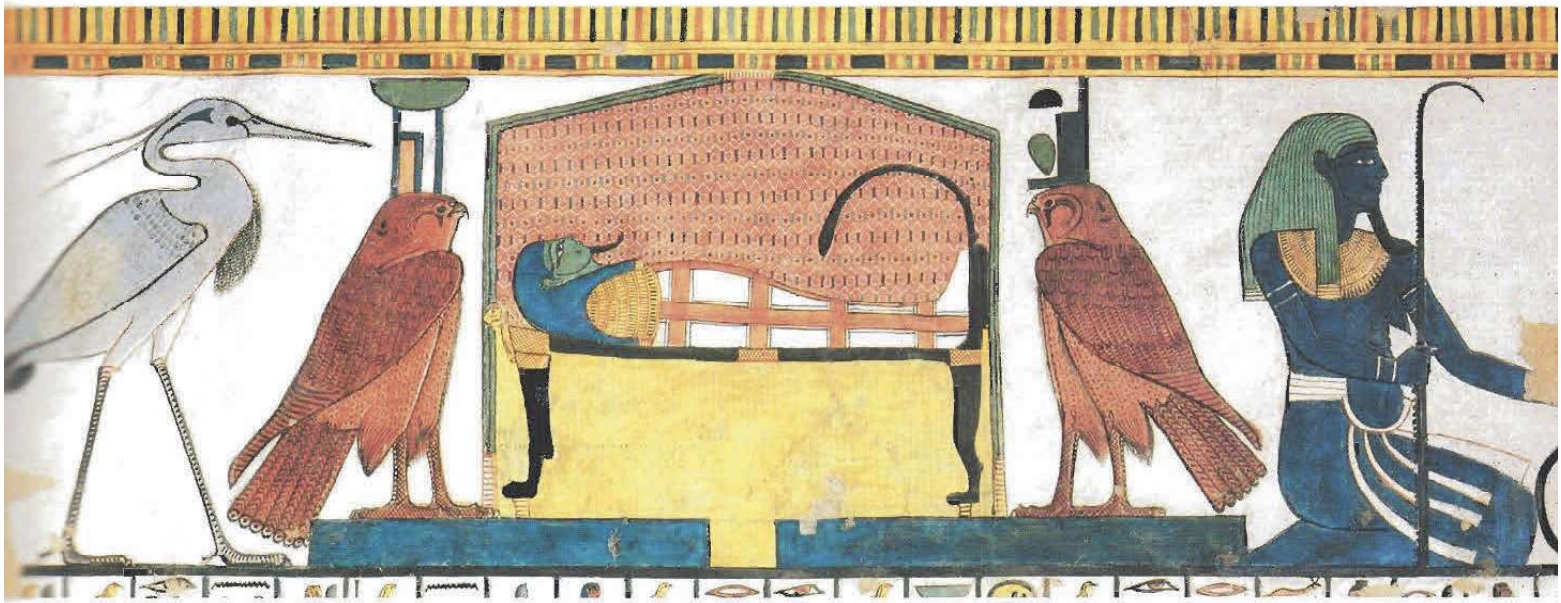
Mythology

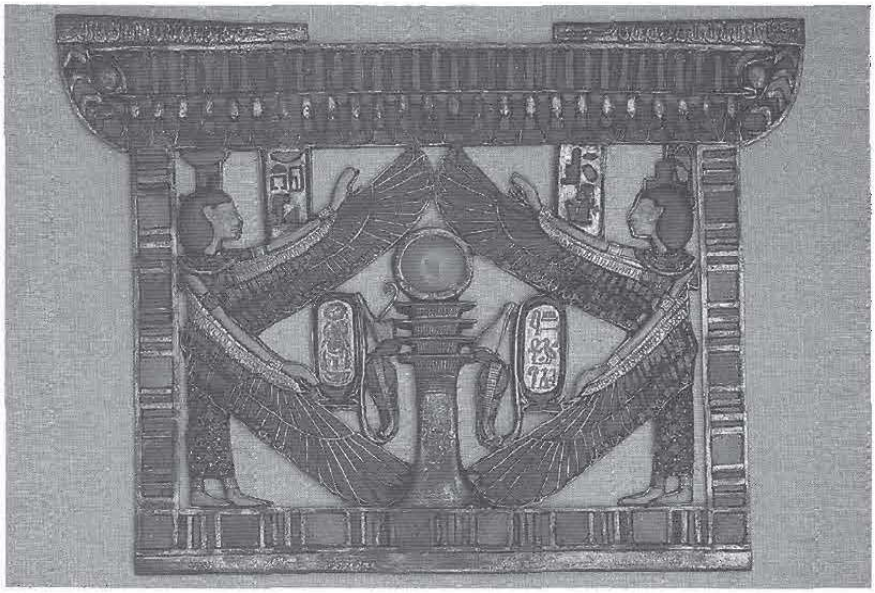
Nephthys was a funerary goddess who usually played a subordinate role to her sister Isis. She appears only in the myths of Heliopolis and nothing is known about her before her appearance there. The goddess's Egyptian name, *nebet-hut*, means 'mistress of the mansion' but gives us no real clue to her original identity. As the daughter of Geb and Nut, she was one of the four deities at the core of the Osiris myth, characterized as the nominal partner of the god Seth just as Isis was the wife of Osiris. According to one late story Nephthys also had a

(Below) Kneeling figure of ***Nephthys*** *with her hieroglyphic 'mistress of the mansion' headdress. Late Period. Brooklyn Museum of Art.*

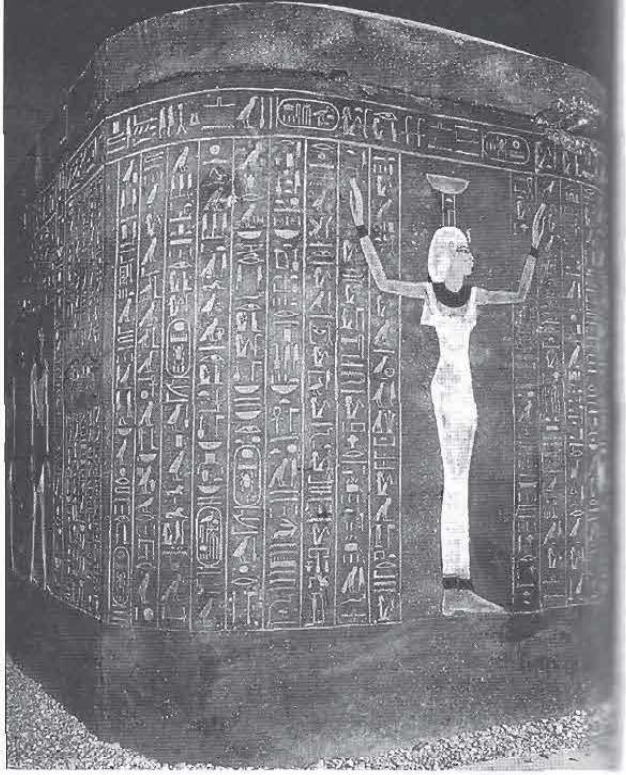
(Bottom) ***Nephthys*** *and Isis in the form of birds of prey watch over the mummy of Osiris. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*







(Above) Winged figures of ***Nephthys*** *and Isis protect the* djed *column of Osiris. Pectoral of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



(Above right) ***Nephthys*** *traditionally guarded the head of Osiris and was depicted on the head-end of coffins and sarcophagi. 18th dynasty. Sarcophagus of Tuthmosis IV, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

sexual liaison with Osiris resulting in the birth of her son Anubis. Her role in the Osiris myths is always supportive of Isis and Osiris and the goddess does not seem to ever take her husband's side in the mythical struggles. When Osiris is murdered, Nephthys mourns greatly and joins her sister in searching for the god and reassembling and guarding him when he is found. In the Pyramid Texts the goddess appears alongside Isis many times, usually with assertions that the two sisters assist, protect and support Osiris. Their roles were naturally applied to the king who is also said to be 'reassembled' by them as well as being 'conceived' and 'nursed' by the two goddesses, along with various other metaphors stressing their part in the king's resurrection or afterlife rebirth. Nephthys thus became one of the major deities held to be protectors of the dead and along with Isis she was one of the four guardian deities of the canopic jars and of other items of the funerary assemblage in royal and private burials alike. In the Late Period Nephthys was also linked with Anukis, though her primary association remained always with Isis.

Iconography

The usual manner of depiction for Nephthys is anthropomorphic as a female goddess distinguished only by the hieroglyphic symbols for her name which she wears on her head. Nephthys may also be represented as a kite, however, especially in the vignettes of funerary texts where the two sisters are sometimes depicted in this avian form guarding the body of Osiris. In human form Nephthys was represented at the corners or ends of sarcophagi, coffins and shrines for the protection of their contents and is usually placed at the head end of the deceased while Isis was positioned at the feet – although the two sisters are occasionally both depicted at the head of the deceased. In scenes where Osiris is depicted the two goddesses usually flank the netherworld god or his symbol, and when he is shown enthroned they both stand behind him in a position of protection and support.

Worship

Despite her important position in ancient Egyptian funerary beliefs and her widespread representation, Nephthys appears to have had no temples or formal cult of her own, though her association with Isis, Anukis and other deities led to the representation of Nephthys in their sanctuaries. Amulets of the goddess are quite common, but even these appear much later than those of other members of the Osirian drama. While one or two examples are known from the 22nd dynasty, no other amulets of the goddess are known to date before the 26th dynasty. After this time, however, Nephthys amulets appear on virtually every Egyptian mummy, usually alongside those of Isis.

Nut

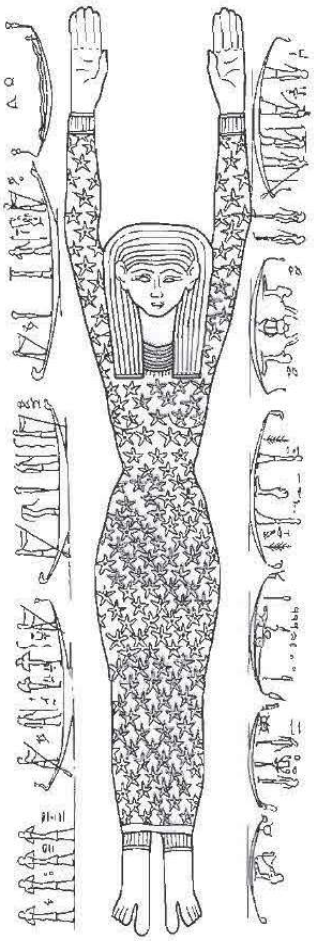
Mythology

The goddess Nut was primarily the personification of the vault of the heavens, though her character included many different aspects within this role. As a member of the great Ennead of Heliopolis she was the daughter of Shu and Tefnut – the deities of air and moisture who were the first offspring of the primeval demiurge Atum; and she herself represented the firmament which separated the earth from the encircling waters of chaos out of which the world had been created. Nut thus fulfilled an important cosmogonic role – she was not only the great sky whose 'laughter' was the thunder, and

whose 'tears' were the rain, but she was also the 'mother' of the heavenly bodies who were believed to enter her mouth and emerge again from her womb each day. The sun was thus said to travel through the body of the goddess during the night hours and the stars travelled through her during the day. This cosmic imagery was the basis of the assertion that the goddess was 'the female pig who eats her piglets'. Nut was nevertheless viewed in a positive manner, and the myth of the birth of her children was recorded by Plutarch who states that, fearing the usurpation of his own position, the sun god placed a curse on the sky goddess stopping her giving birth on any day of the 360-day year. The god Hermes (Thoth) came to Nut's aid, however, and won five extra days for the year enabling the goddess to bear her children.

Several scholars have suggested that Nut may originally have represented the Milky Way, as Spell 176 of the Book of the Dead refers to this broad band of stars which crosses the night sky and the following spell begins with an invocation of Nut, and some representations of the Ramessid Period show stars around the figure of the goddess as well as on her body. There is astronomical evidence which may support the equation. Ronald Wells has shown that in the predawn sky at winter solstice in predynastic Egypt the Milky Way would have looked remarkably like a stretched out figure with arms and legs touching the horizons in exactly the manner in which the goddess was often later depicted. Furthermore, at the time of the winter solstice the sun would have risen in the area of the goddess's figure – her pudendum – from which it would be imagined to be born, just as nine months earlier, at the spring equinox, the sun would have set in the position of the goddess' head – suggesting it was being swallowed.

Nut also became inextricably associated with the concept of resurrection in Egyptian funerary beliefs, and the dead were believed to become stars in the body of the goddess. According to Heliopolitan theology Nut united with her brother Geb, the earth god, to produce Osiris and those deities associated with him in the great mythic cycle of resurrection. In this way the priests of Heliopolis were able to incorporate the important netherworld god into their own solar religion and at the same time to strengthen the association of Nut with the concept of resurrection and rebirth. Nut is therefore an important deity in the Pyramid Texts, appearing there almost 100 times. She fulfilled a central role in the resurrection of the deceased king both as heavenly cow (PT 1344) – and as a funerary goddess who addresses the king as his 'mother Nut in her name of "sarcophagus"...in her name of "Coffin" and...in her name of "tomb"' (PT 616). In the later Coffin Texts similar ideas are elaborated for the non-royal deceased. Not surprisingly, in later times the roles of Nut and Hathor – also a cow deity and funerary goddess – were sometimes conflated. Hathor was thus sometimes viewed as a sky goddess and Nut sometimes replaces Hathor as the goddess of the divine sycamore tree who nourishes the deceased, although the connection of Nut herself with the coffin may have led to her association with wood and thus the sycamore tree.



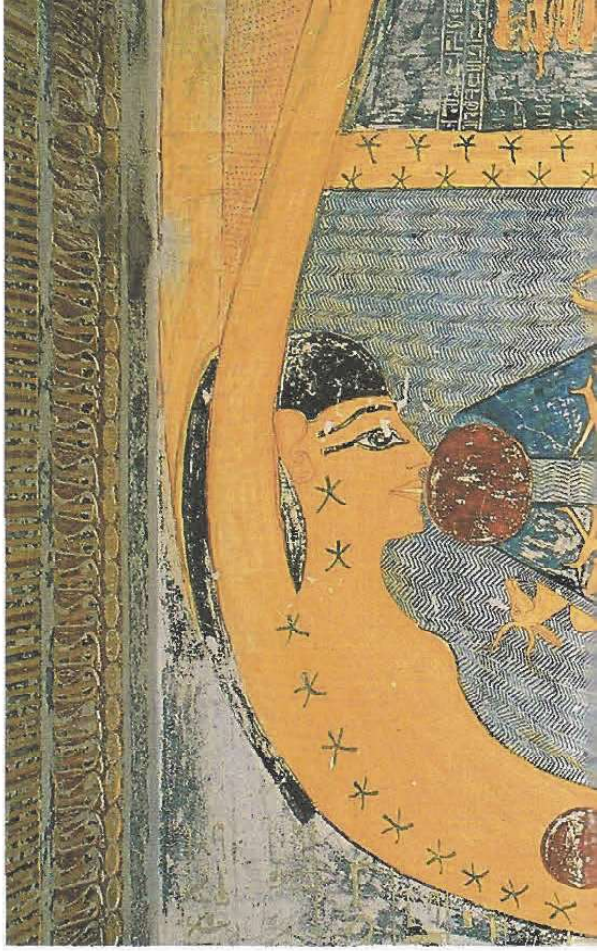
*(Below left) The outstretched figure of **Nut** was carved on the lids of some royal sarcophagi to unite with the deceased. 19th dynasty. Sarcophagus of Merenptah, reused by Psusennes I, from Tanis. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

*(Below) The goddess **Nut** with wings outstretched in a protective pose adorns this pectoral of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*





The figure of ***Nut*** *from the second gilded shrine of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



Iconography

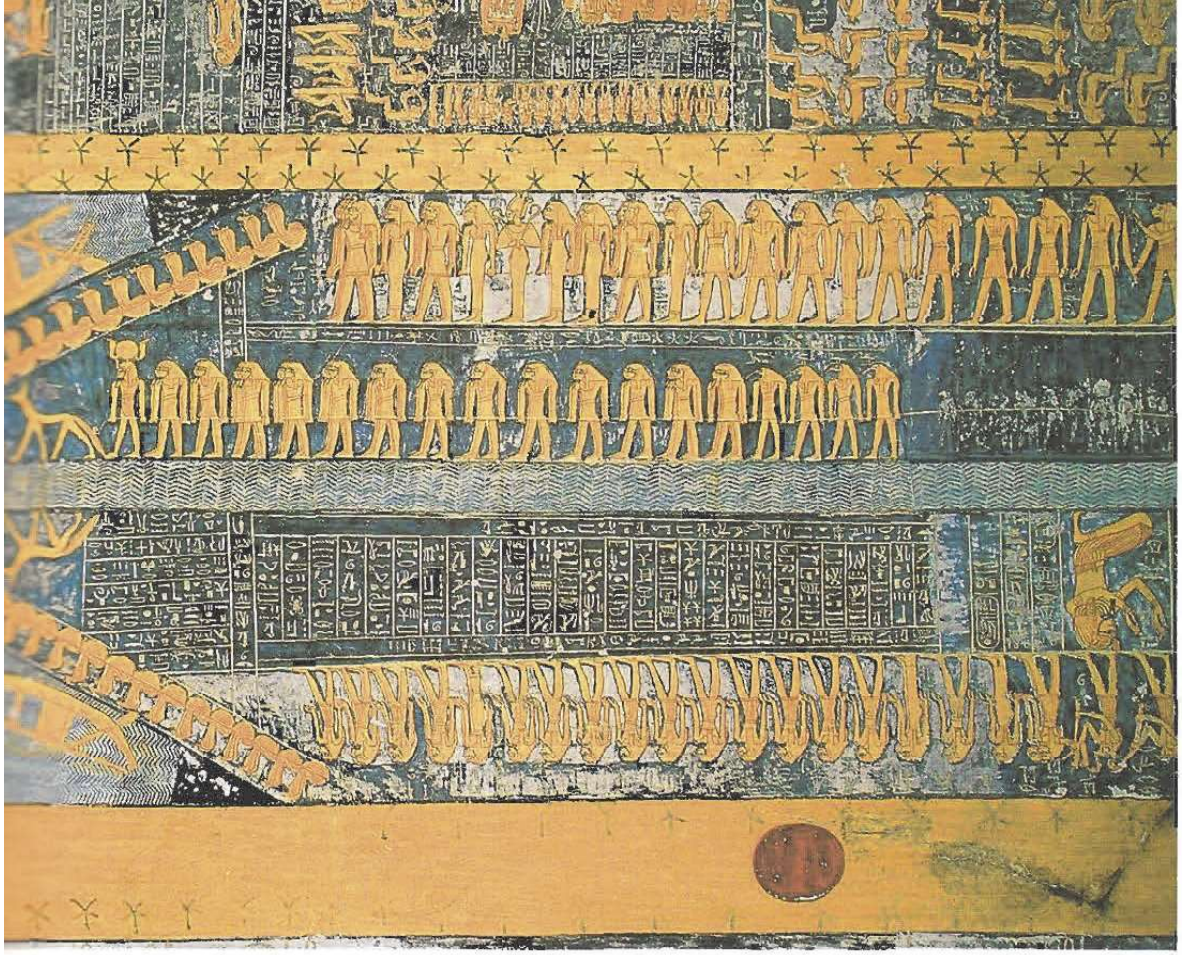
In most of her representations Nut was depicted in anthropomorphic form (often as a goddess identified by the circular water pot which she wore on her head, sometimes with the addition of the ceiling-like sky sign, as the hieroglyphic symbol for her name). She is often shown in profile, bending naked over the earth god Geb and sometimes supported by Shu, the god of the air, with her arms and legs bent down so that she touches the horizons with her hands and feet. Because of the conventions of Egyptian art in which the goddess's arms and legs seem to be held together, in these representations she appears as a narrow bridge across the sky (as would certainly be appropriate if she were equated with the Milky Way), though it is possible that she was imagined to cover the whole vault of heaven with her hands and feet respectively placed at the four cardinal points. On the ceiling of the burial chamber of the tomb of Ramesses VI in the Valley of the Kings, the goddess is depicted in two colossal profile images painted back to back separately representing the day and night sky.

Nut was also depicted *en face* on the undersides of the lids of coffins and sarcophagi – frequently showing the solar disk in the process of being swallowed or reborn. In these representations the depiction of the goddess was placed over the deceased so that a kind of union was achieved, and the coffin itself symbolically became the body of the goddess from whom the deceased would be reborn. The tomb of Tutankhamun may contain an interesting visual allusion to this idea for the young king is shown there with the goddess Nut directly after the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony and before he goes before the god Osiris, as though his depiction with Nut represents the transitional time in the coffin between burial and the afterlife. In the private tombs of Thebes and in vignettes in the Book of the Dead, Nut is also depicted as a goddess rising from the trunk of the divine sycamore to proffer life-sustaining water and nourishment in the afterlife.

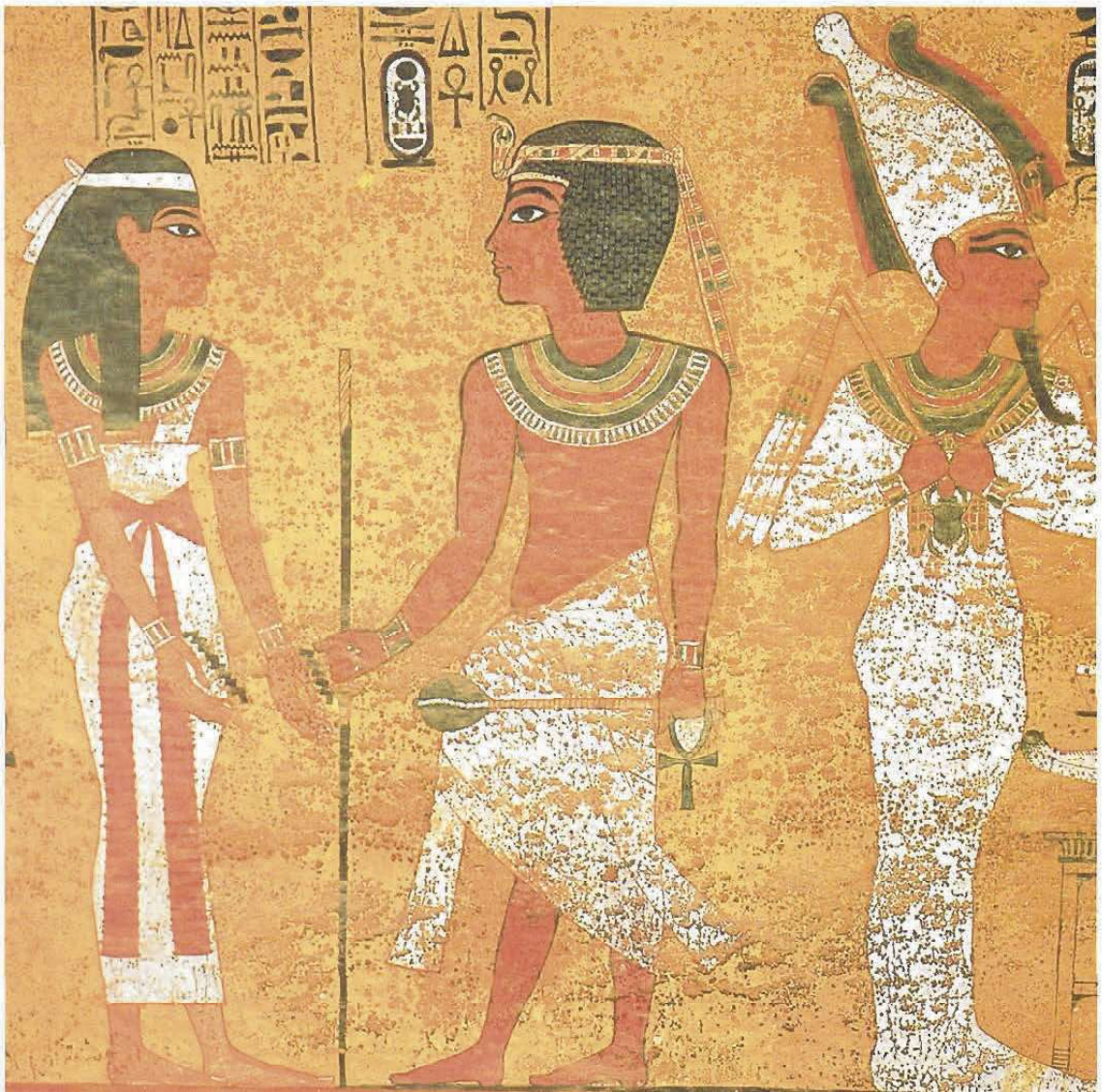
The goddess could also be depicted in zoomorphic form as the sky cow or sky sow. In her bovine form her four hooves were the cardinal points, and the sun god and stars are often shown sailing across the underside of her body. In this form the divine sky cow was also often shown supported by the air god Shu who stands with upraised arms beneath her, and by Heh gods (see p. 78) who support her legs which are the 'pillars of the sky'. Because Nut could also be regarded as a female pig, she was also represented in the form of a sow, sometimes shown with her young.

Worship

As with most cosmic deities, Nut had no cult or temples of her own, though she was depicted in astronomical ceilings and representations in many temples and tombs. Her place in popular religion, while probably very limited, is perhaps nevertheless seen in amulets of the sow, sometimes with her piglets, which appear in burials from the Third Intermediate Period onwards. Some of these amulets may have been worn in life and could stress the goddess's power in the area of fertility or as a deity of rebirth.



(Above) ***Nut*** *swallows the disk of the sun which travels through her body to be reborn the following day. The figures before the goddess tow the barque of the sun towards her. Detail, Book of the Day, 20th dynasty. Tomb of Ramesses VI, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*



(Right) ***Nut****, 'Mistress of Heaven', offers purifying water – in the form of wave-like lines which issue from her hands – to the deceased king on his entrance to the afterlife. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Tutankhamun, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

Qadesh

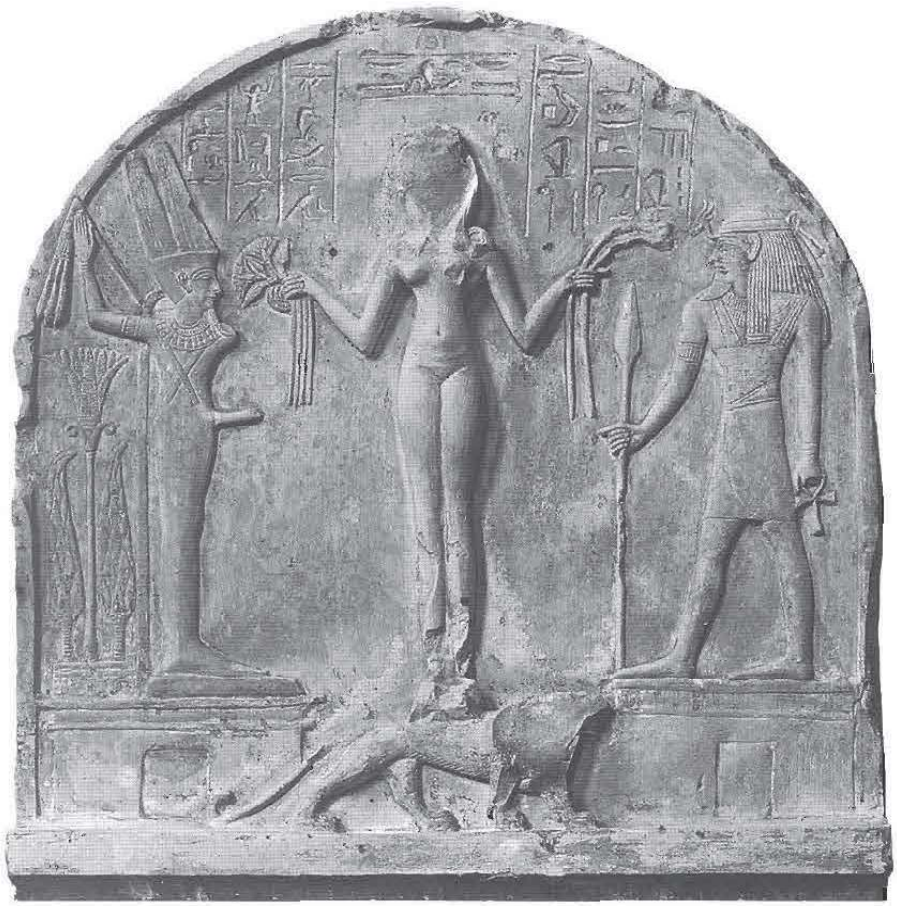
Mythology

Qadesh was a Syrian goddess of sacred ecstacy and sexual pleasure. Her Semitic name would seem to mean 'holy' and despite her Near Eastern orgins, the goddess was thoroughly assimilated into Egyptian religion in New Kingdom times to the extent that she was worshipped as part of a popular divine triad along with the fertility god Min and the Asiatic god Reshep. Qadesh was often linked with Hathor whom she resembled in some ways and with the inherently sensual Near Eastern goddesses Anat and Astarte, both of whom were known in Egypt.

Iconography

In Egyptian representations Qadesh is almost invariably depicted as a naked woman – shown frontally – holding lotus blossoms in her right hand and snakes or papyrus stems in her left hand, all of these being symbols of eroticism and fertility. Her similarities to Hathor meant that the iconography of her hairstyle and headdress sometimes approximate those of the Egyptian goddess. Frequently Qadesh is depicted standing on the back of a lion and in some representations she is flanked by Min on her right and Reshep on her left, the two gods usually being depicted standing on plinths or shrines which elevate them closer to the same height as the leonine-borne goddess.

Upper section of the stela of the royal craftsman Qeh from Deir el-Medina showing the goddess ***Qadesh*** *flanked by her consort, the Asiatic god Reshep (right), and the Egyptian fertility god Min (left) who was associated with the eastern desert regions. 19th dynasty. British Museum.*



Worship

In the Near East the cult of Qadesh involved the simulation of a sacred marriage between the goddess and her consort Reshep by her followers. It is not known whether similar rites were enacted in Egypt, where the cult of Qadesh was established at least as early as the 18th dynasty, but the goddess seems to have been fairly widely venerated. Her image is found on a good many 19th-dynasty votive and funerary stelae and she was worshipped in temples at Memphis and other locations.

Raet

By at least the 5th dynasty a female counterpart had been assigned to Re, the sun god, and the simple name of the goddess – the feminine form of the name Re – indicates that she was created to complement the sun god rather than having been a deity with an independent prior existence. In the Pyramid Texts the goddess is called Raet and though a fuller variant of her name was Raettawy, 'Raet of the Two Lands', it is uncertain at what point this form was first used. In later times she was addressed by the expanded titles 'Raet of the Two Lands, the lady of heaven, mistress of the gods', parallel to the superlative titles of her husband. Nevertheless, the goddess played a lesser role in Egyptian mythology than Hathor who was also viewed as the wife or daughter of Re. Raet is therefore not frequently represented pictorially and is usually depicted in a Hathor-like form as a woman wearing a solar disk with horns and a uraeus, sometimes with the addition of two feathers above the disk. A festival of Raet was held in the fourth month of the harvest season, and she was venerated, along with Montu and Harpokrates, in the Graeco-Roman temple of Medamud.

Renpet

A minor goddess who personified the year, and was recognized by the notched palm branch which was the hieroglyphic sign for 'year' which she wore on her head. Renpet was quite frequently depicted in temple and other scenes but had no important cult.

Satis

Mythology

The Upper Egyptian goddess Satis guarded the southern frontiers of Egypt in historical times and was also connected with the Nile. Her link with the upper reaches of the Nile perhaps caused her to be

associated with the annual inundation and with Elephantine in the area of Aswan which Egyptian mythology sometimes identified as the source of the Nile. Her name is first attested on stone jars found beneath the Step Pyramid at Saqqara (3rd dynasty), and by the 6th dynasty she is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts as purifying the deceased king with four jars of water from Elephantine. As 'mistress of Elephantine' Satis became the consort of Khnum and thus mother of Anukis, though a relatively early connection with the Theban god Montu is also known for Satis and the original consort of Khnum appears to have been the goddess Heket. When Khnum was identified with Re, Satis became an 'Eye of Re' and the goddess then sometimes assumed some of the characteristics of Hathor, the goddess more usually depicted in this mythological role. Satis was identified with the star Sirius, called Sothis, which heralded the Nile inundation each year. The Greeks identified Satis with Hera, the wife of Zeus.

Iconography

Satis is almost always depicted as a woman wearing the conical White Crown of Upper Egypt to which are attached antelope horns or plumes and a uraeus. Usually she wears a simple sheath dress and may carry an *ankh* or *was* sceptre as signs of her divinity rather than personal attributes. Early writings of her name use a hieroglyph representing a shoulder knot in a linen garment, but later writings use an animal skin pierced by an arrow. This latter symbol could have been assimilated from Anukis the huntress goddess who came to be seen as her daughter. The symbol is sometimes depicted with the goddess in representational works.

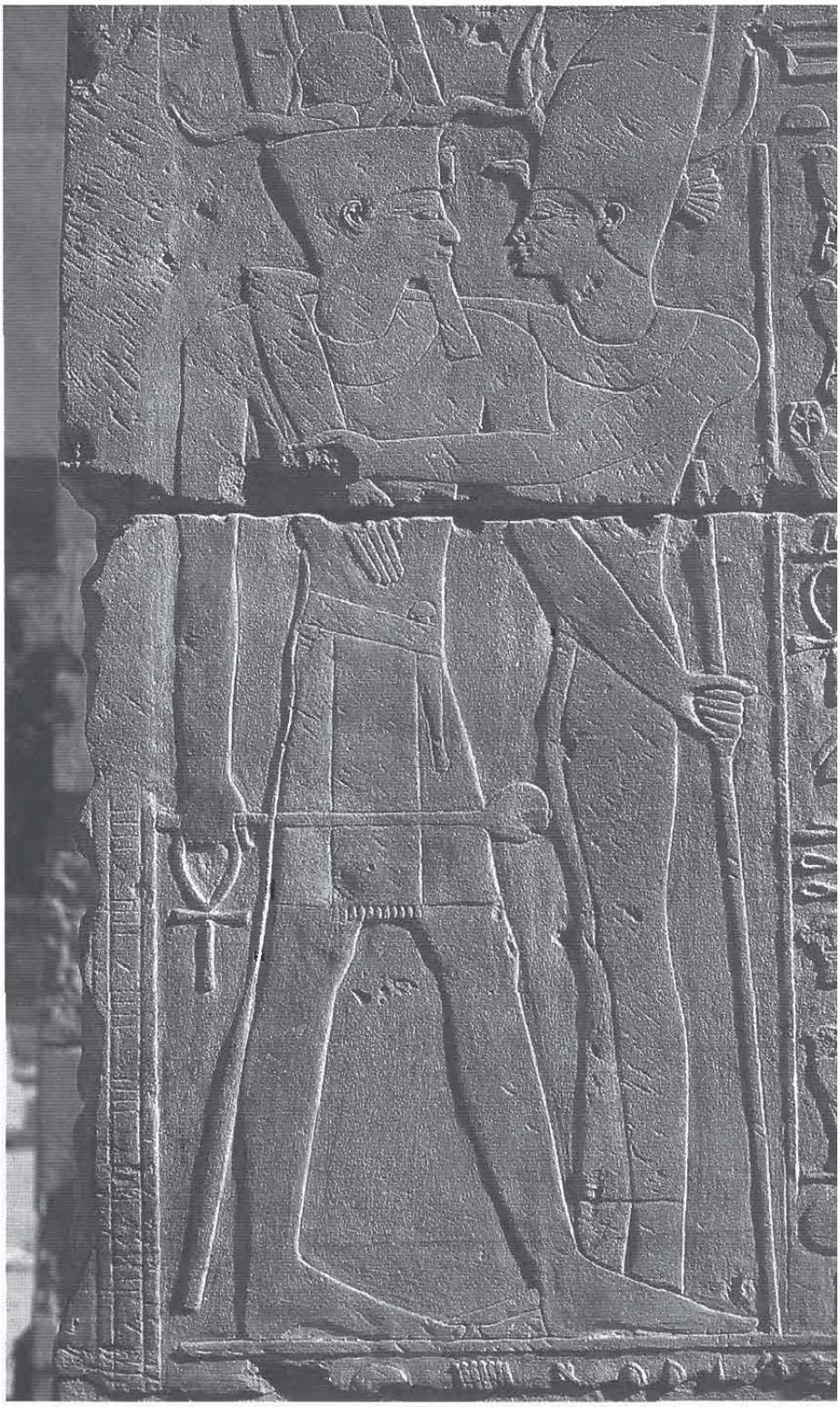
Worship

The principal cult centre of Satis was at Elephantine where her shrine was built on an early



(Left) Silver amuletic statuette of ***Satis****. Third Intermediate Period, 21st–24th dynasty. Harer Collection, San Bernardino.*

(Right) ***Satis*** *(at right) embraces Tuthmosis III. 18th dynasty. Carved block, temple of Satis, Elephantine.*



predynastic site. Research by Ronald Wells has shown that elements of the temple of Satis were carefully aligned with the position of the star Sothis or Sirius in the night sky, tying the goddess in this manner to the star's rising and the annual inundation of the Nile. It has also been pointed out that the goddess's temple was situated at a point where the waters of the inundation might be heard before they became visible in the lower reaches of the Nile, so that her function of protector of the borders could also be tied to that of guardian of the Nile's flood and its resultant fertility.

Serket

see p. 233, *Invertebrate and Insect Deities* section

Seshat

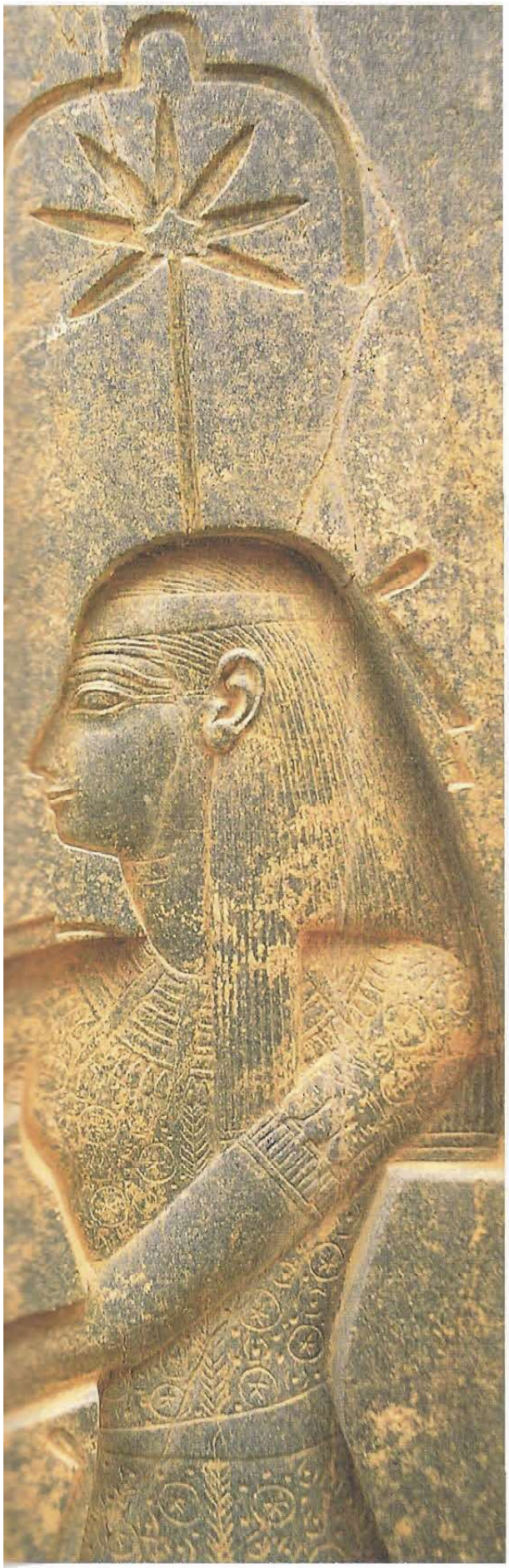
Mythology

Seshat (literally, 'the female scribe') was the goddess of all forms of writing and notation, including record keeping, accounting, and census taking as well as being 'she who is foremost in the house of books': the patroness of temple libraries and other collections of texts. The goddess is known from as early as the 2nd dynasty when she is attested assisting King Khasekhemwy in the ritual 'stretching the cord' ceremony, as Seshat was also the 'mistress of builders' and it was she who established the ground plan on the founding or expansion of every sacred structure. Beginning in the Old Kingdom Seshat is also found recording herds of different types of animals seized as booty, and from the Middle Kingdom she records the names of foreign captives in addition to their tribute, and in New Kingdom temple scenes she records the king's regnal years and jubilees on the leaves of the sacred ished or persea tree. Along with Nephthys, Seshat was said to restore the members of the deceased in the afterlife. The goddess was also associated with some few other deities, mainly the god Thoth whose sister, consort or daughter she was variously said to be. In New Kingdom times Seshat was parallelled by the goddess Sefkhet-abwy whose characteristics and attributes seem to be virtually identical to her own. It is unlikely, therefore, that she is really anything but a form of Seshat.

Iconography

Seshat was depicted in anthropomorphic form as a woman often wearing a leopard skin over her robe and with a headdress consisting of a headband with a tall extension upon which was an obscure emblem resembling a rosette or seven-pointed star. This 'star' is often surmounted by a bow or crescent moon-like symbol resembling downturned horns, which was itself sometimes crowned by two falcon





*The goddess **Seshat**, wearing her enigmatic emblem on her head and a stylized scribal palette on her shoulder, writes upon the notched palm leaf rib which denoted the word for 'year' in the hieroglyphic script and which was symbolic of recorded time. The goddess was said to inscribe the length of the kings' reigns in this manner at their accession. 19th dynasty. Luxor Temple.*

feathers. Usually the goddess holds a palm rib upon which the years were notched and which may terminate in a tadpole (the hieroglyphic number for 100,000) seated upon the *shen* (eternity) hieroglyph symbolizing an infinite number of years. In scenes where Seshat records the jubilees of the king, hieroglyphic signs for the festival are also suspended from the tip of the branch. When she is depicted alongside the king in the foundation ceremony, Seshat often holds the stake and mallet and stretches taut the line used to mark out the parameters of new buildings.

Worship

By her very nature Seshat was a deity of official building, recording and writing projects and she rarely appears outside of these contexts. She appears to have had no temple of her own, but by virtue of her role in the foundation ceremony she was a part of every temple building. In a similar manner she played no real part in popular religion, although she may have been held to be a patron goddess of sorts among scribes and builders.

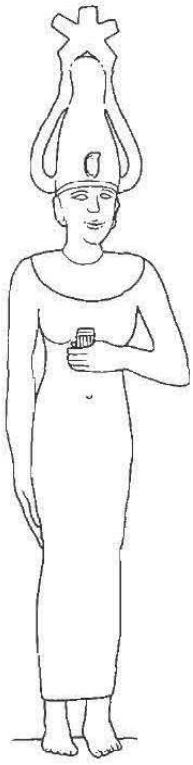
Sothis

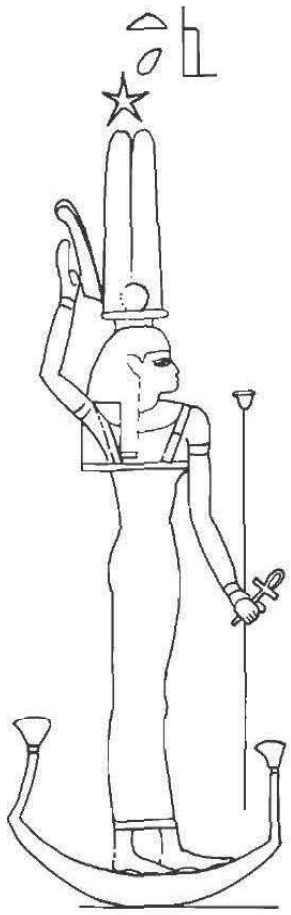
Mythology

The goddess who personified the bright, first magnitude star Sirius (the 'dog star') was called Sopdet by the Egyptians and Sothis by the Greeks. Her husband was Sah, god of the neighbouring constellation Orion, and her son Soped or Sopdu, another astral deity. The importance of Sirius for the Egyptians lay in the fact that the star's annual appearance on the eastern horizon at dawn heralded the approximate beginning of the Nile's annual inundation which marked the beginning of the agricultural year. Thus the goddess was called 'bringer of the New Year and the Nile flood' and became associated at an early date with Osiris who symbolized this annual resurgence of the Nile and who was also personified in the night sky by the neighbouring constellation Orion. Even as early as the Pyramid Texts Sothis was described as having united with the king/Osiris to give birth to the morning star, Venus, and through her association with the netherworld god she was naturally identified with Isis - eventually appearing at times as the combined goddess Isis-Sothis.

Iconography

Although the earliest known representation of Sothis – found on a 1st-dynasty ivory tablet of Djer from Abydos – depicts the goddess as a reclining cow with a plant-like emblem (perhaps representing the 'year') between her horns, she is almost invariably represented as a woman wearing a tall crown not unlike the White Crown of Upper Egypt but with tall, upswept horns at the sides and





(Above) The goddess ***Sothis*** *with her characteristic crown surmounted by a five-pointed star. Late Period bronze statuette. British Museum.*

(Above right) The combined ***Isis-Sothis*** *standing in the barque in which she crossed the heavens. Roman Period.*

surmounted with a five-pointed star. In this form Sothis had few iconographic attributes and is usually depicted as simply standing with arms at her sides or with one arm folded across her lower breast. On occasion the goddess could also be represented as a large dog, however, and in her form of Isis-Sothis she is also shown riding side-saddle on this symbolic animal on some of the coins minted at Alexandria in Roman times.

Worship

The star Sirius may have been worshipped as a cow-goddess in predynastic times, but eventually became identified with Isis and with Sothis. While Sothis was clearly a goddess of some importance in her own right, her increasing identification with Isis led to a lessening of her individual identity in later times. In the Old Kingdom she was important as a deity of the inundation and as an afterlife guide to the deceased king, yet by the Middle Kingdom she is identified as a 'mother' and 'nurse', and during the Graeco-Roman Period her assimilation with Isis was almost complete.

Tasenetnofret

A goddess with only fairly localized importance, Tasenetnofret was honoured at Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt as the consort of Horus and mother of Panebtawy. Her name means 'the good sister' or 'the beautiful sister' and she appears to be essentially a local manifestation of Hathor.

Tayet

Tayet was the goddess of weaving known from Old Kingdom times when she appears in the Pyramid Texts, where it is said that she is the king's mother who clothes him and lifts him up to the sky (PT 741), and that she guards the king's head, gathers together his bones, and grants him favour with other gods (PT 738). In later mythology Tayet was also said to weave the curtains or walls of the tent of purification in which the embalmers worked, but the most significant role played by this goddess is that she is the deity who provided the bandages in which the mummy was wrapped. The importance of these wraps to the ancient Egyptians and the proper burial procedure which utilized them is seen in the Middle Kingdom story of Sinuhe, where the hero of the tale is urged to return to Egypt by Senwosret I who reminds him that only there will he receive 'wrappings from the hands of Tayet' upon his death. The goddess was linked to Neith, who was also associated with weaving, and with Osiris, Isis and Nephthys because of her funerary role. Although she had no temples of her own, Tayet was honoured in sanctuaries of several deities with whom she was associated.

Tjenenyet

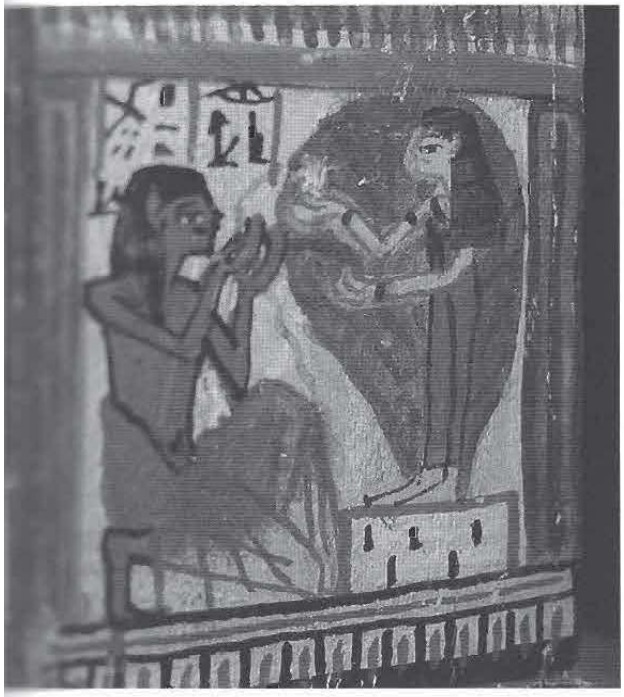
Tjenenyet is first attested by name on carved blocks dated to the 12th dynasty but may have existed prior to that time. She was worshipped, along with the goddess Iunit, as joint consort of the falcon deity Montu in the town of Armant (Hermonthis) and in the surrounding Theban region. In the Ramessid Period of the New Kingdom she rose to somewhat greater importance, but declined in later Egyptian history. Although sometimes thought to be the same as the goddess Raet, the association does not seem likely as the two deities are known to have been depicted together.

Tree Goddesses

Several Egyptian deities were associated with trees: Horus with the acacia, Osiris with the willow, Re with the sycamore and Wepwawet with the tamarisk, for example; but none of these male gods held associations with trees as closely as did a number of female deities. The sycamore was especially regarded as a manifestation of the goddesses Nut, Isis, and Hathor – who was given the epithet 'Lady of the Sycamore', and there were also a number of minor



tree goddesses. These deities were represented in a variety of ways. Images of trees labelled as goddesses are known and fully anthropomorphic personifications of tree goddesses are also found, though the most usual depiction consisted of a composite of the upper body of the goddess rising from the trunk at the centre of a tree. Many such representations show Hathor, Nut, or some other goddess reaching out from a tree to offer the deceased food and water. Sometimes only the arms of the goddess were shown proffering food or water, and in the well-known representation in the tomb of Tuthmosis III the king is shown being nursed at the breast of 'his mother Isis' in the form of a sycamore tree. The identification of several maternal deities as tree goddesses also meant that burial in a wooden coffin was viewed as a return into the womb of the mother goddess.



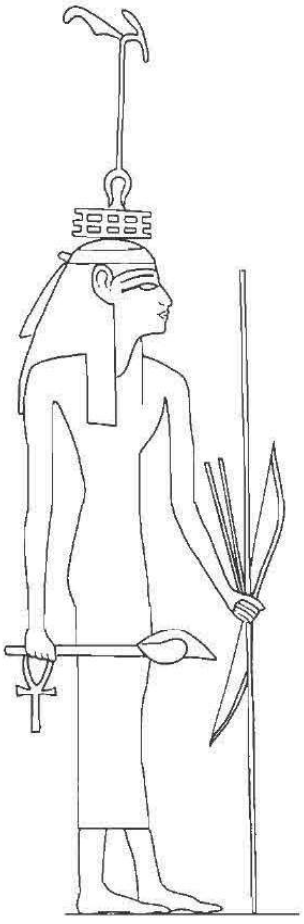
Female Anthropomorphic Deities

*(Left) A **tree goddess**, symbolized by her fruit-tree headdress, bestows offerings on the deceased. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Nakht, western Thebes.*

*(Below left) The deceased worships before a **tree goddess** who offers gifts. Canopic box. 19th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Berlin.*

Waset

This goddess, whose name (often written Wosret) means 'the powerful female one', is associated primarily with the Theban area and was possibly the earliest consort of the god Amun before the rise to power of Mut. Her name is that of the city of Thebes and she appears in the names of the three Middle Kingdom pharaohs of Theban origin called Senwosret (Sesostris) which means 'man of Wosret'. Waset may have originally been a form of the goddess Hathor, but she certainly took on her own identity as time progressed. She was depicted in anthropomorphic form as a goddess holding her symbol, the *was* 'power' sceptre to which a plume and ribbons were attached.



*(Left) The goddess **Waset**, as personification of the city of Thebes, could be depicted in a martial guise with bow, arrows and axe which symbolized the military might of the Theban pharaohs. Detail, New Kingdom relief carving. Western Thebes.*

Mammalian Deities

BOVINE DEITIES

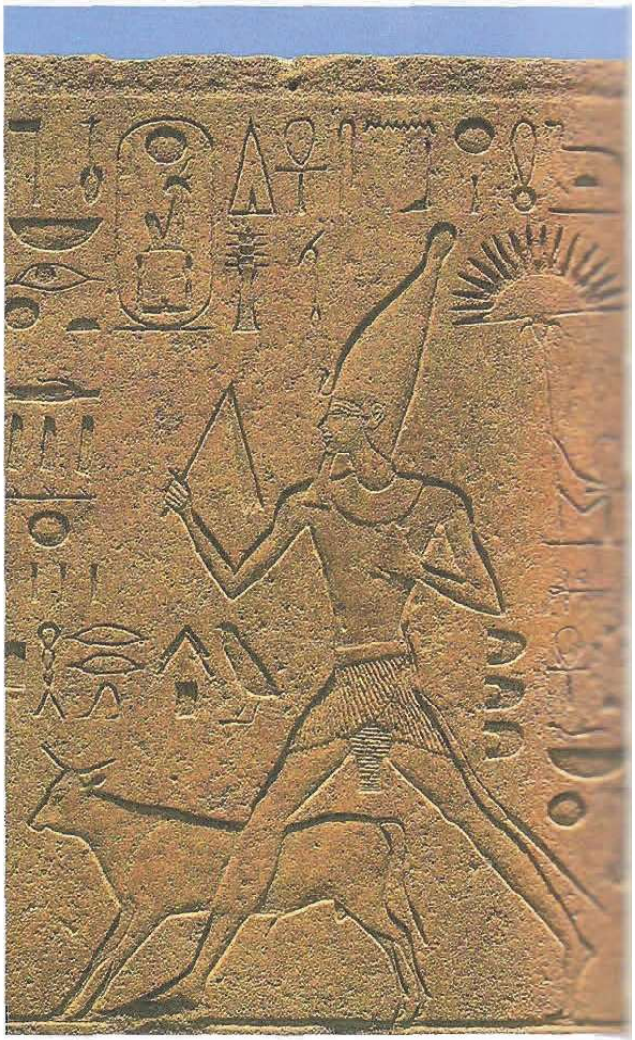
Egypt's bovine deities were among the most important of all her gods. They represented both male and female deities, some of which existed from the earliest periods of Egyptian history. Generally speaking, female bovine deities represented the powers of creation and fecundity, and a number of mother and sky goddesses were depicted in bovine form. Male bovine deities could have cosmic associations but generally represented the power and sexual potency embodied by the bull and were strongly tied to aspects of kingship and monarchical ideology.

Apis

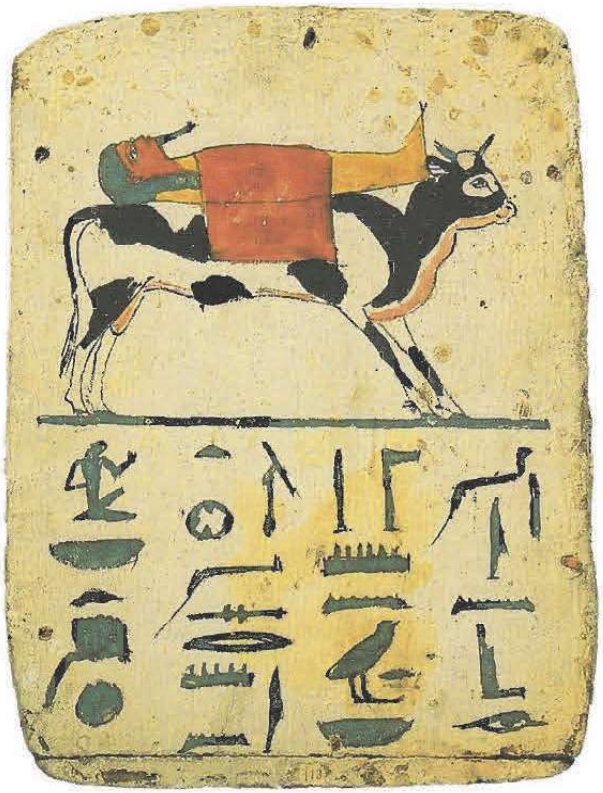
Mythology

Apis was the most important of the bull deities of Egypt and can be traced back to the beginning of the Dynastic Period. The origins of the god called by the Egyptians Hap are not entirely clear, but because his cult centre was at Memphis he was assimilated into the worship of the great Memphite god Ptah at an early date – first as the 'herald' or son of that god, and eventually as the living image or manifestation of the 'glorious soul' of Ptah himself.

There was only one bull representing Apis at a time and it was chosen after its predecessor's death by means of its appearance. According to Herodotus, the Apis bull was always black with particular markings (see Iconography) and with a scarab-like hump under its tongue and the hair of its tail being divided into two strands. Mythologically, it was said that the Apis bull was born of a virgin cow that had been impregnated by the god Ptah, and Apis' association with the Memphite god tended to stress the sacred bull's procreative power as a concrete expression of the creative power of Ptah. As chief of the Egyptian bull deities Apis was also closely linked to monarchical ideology where the physical power of the bull was stressed. The king's power was equated with that of the god, as when the pharaoh strode alongside the Apis bull in the performance of the Sed festival which aimed at the strengthening and rejuvenation of his powers.

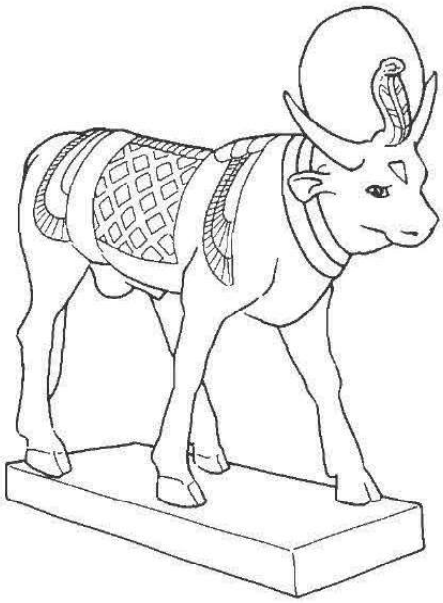


*(Above right) Hatshepsut, in her kingly role, depicted along with the **Apis** bull running the ritual 'race' of the Sed festival. 18th dynasty. Decorated block from the Chapelle Rouge, Karnak.*



*(Left) The **Apis** bull carries the mummy of the deceased. Footboard of a wooden coffin. 25th dynasty, c 700 BC. Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna.*

After his death Apis fused with Osiris, becoming the composite god Apis-Osiris or Osirapis (and later, in Hellenistic times, the anthropomorphically-depicted god Serapis). In this context the living Apis bull itself was sometimes called the *ba* of Osiris, and the process of assimilation with other deities also led to the composite Osiris-Apis-Atum-Horus. In some funerary texts Apis was said to thresh the grain in the afterlife, but it is usually his power and virility which are tied to the deceased – so that in the Pyramid Texts the deceased king claims the surging power of the bull's phallus as one of the ways in which he is said to be able to rise up to the heavens (PT 1313).



*Bronze statuette of the **Apis** bull showing stylized 'eagle's wings' and blanket on the bull's back as well as the sun disk and uraeus common on later images. Late Period. British Museum.*

Iconography

Apis is usually represented as a walking bull which, in post-New Kingdom times, was depicted with a sun disk (occasionally a lunar disk) between his horns – often with a uraeus rising from its base. One of the most important markings of the Apis bull was a white triangular blaze on its forehead which is often represented in silver on statues of the god. Apis also had special wing-like markings on his back called by Herodotus an 'eagle' but representing the hawk's or vulture's wings. In many depictions of the bull a rectangular cloth with a decorative diamond pattern is also shown on its back. In the latest periods Apis was represented on coffins in the form of a sacred bull running with the mummy of the deceased as it was taken to the tomb. Amulets of Apis in the form of a standing bull are rare, but votive bronzes of the bull, decorated with its distinctive markings, are quite common from the Late Period. Representations of Apis as a bull-headed man are known but are also rare, and there is an unusual class of scarab amulets with the head of a bull on the body of the beetle – probably relating it to the funerary aspect of Apis.

Worship

The 5th-dynasty Palermo Stone indicates that Apis was worshipped as early as the reign of Den in the 1st dynasty. The god is known to have been especially venerated at the site of Memphis throughout most of Egyptian history, and according to the

*Huge calcite embalming table used in the mummification of the divine **Apis** bulls. 26th dynasty. Ptah temple complex, Memphis.*



3rd-century writer Aelian, the god's cult was established in that location by Menes and continued until Roman times which clearly reflects a tradition of great antiquity for the Memphite cult of Apis. According to the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead, the divine bull was also worshipped at Sais and Athribis in the Delta.

In Memphis the Apis bull was kept in special quarters just south of the temple of Ptah where it was adored by worshippers and entertained by its own harem of cows. In addition to its participation in special processions and other religious rituals, the animal was utilized in the delivery of oracles and was regarded as one of the most important oracular sources in Egypt.

According to the Classical writers Herodotus and Plutarch, when the Apis bull reached its 25th year it was killed with great ceremony. It was then embalmed and buried in a great granite sarcophagus – some weighing as much as 70 tons – in the vast subterranean galleries of the Serapeum at Saqqara. The funeral ceremonies were extensive and it was said that in the Late Period, at the height of its worship, Egypt mourned for the deceased Apis as for the death of the pharaoh himself. The cow which had produced the Apis bull, known as the Isis cow, was also taken to Memphis at the time of the bull calf's selection and also kept under special circumstances to be eventually buried in the 'Iseum' not far from the Serapeum.

Bat

Mythology

Bat was an early cow goddess whose name means 'female spirit' or 'female power' and who appears to have been an important deity of the late predynastic and early historical times. It is difficult to pinpoint Bat's emergence in Egypt and it has been suggested, in fact, that she may have been imported from Mesopotamia. If, as seems likely, she is the goddess depicted on several predynastic objects (including the Narmer Palette), then her nature was almost certainly that of a celestial cow goddess. In any event, there are relatively few mythological references to her, and the earliest written evidence for the goddess is found in the Pyramid Texts which mention 'Bat with her two faces' – alluding to the double image of the goddess as seen in representations of her on sistra (see Hathor) and elsewhere. It has been pointed out that the mythology which developed around Bat may somehow have stressed the unity of Egypt, as her image is represented at the centre of a 12th-dynasty pectoral flanked by the reconciled Horus and Seth.

Iconography

Bat is seldom depicted in Egyptian art, though her iconography was distinctive and was an important



influence on the cult of Hathor. The goddess is depicted having a human head with bovine ears and horns – which grow from her temples rather than from the top of her head, and which curve inwards (rather than outwards as do Hathor's) giving the head a lyre-like appearance. Her head is often shown atop a pole or a 'body' resembling either a necklace counterpoise or a type of garment knot, so that the total image is suggestive of a sistrum or sacred rattle (see Hathor).

If Bat is the deity depicted at the top of the Narmer Palette, and also on the king's belt on that monument, she may also be the deity represented on an even earlier palette depicting a bovine head with outstanding ears taking the form of stars with stars attached to the tips of the horns and at the top of the head. This celestial-related iconography would also apply to the heads on the Narmer Palette which appear to look down on the depicted scenes from above.

In the Middle Kingdom the iconography of Bat was almost completely absorbed into that of Hathor, yet her particular image survives on many Hathoric columns.

Worship

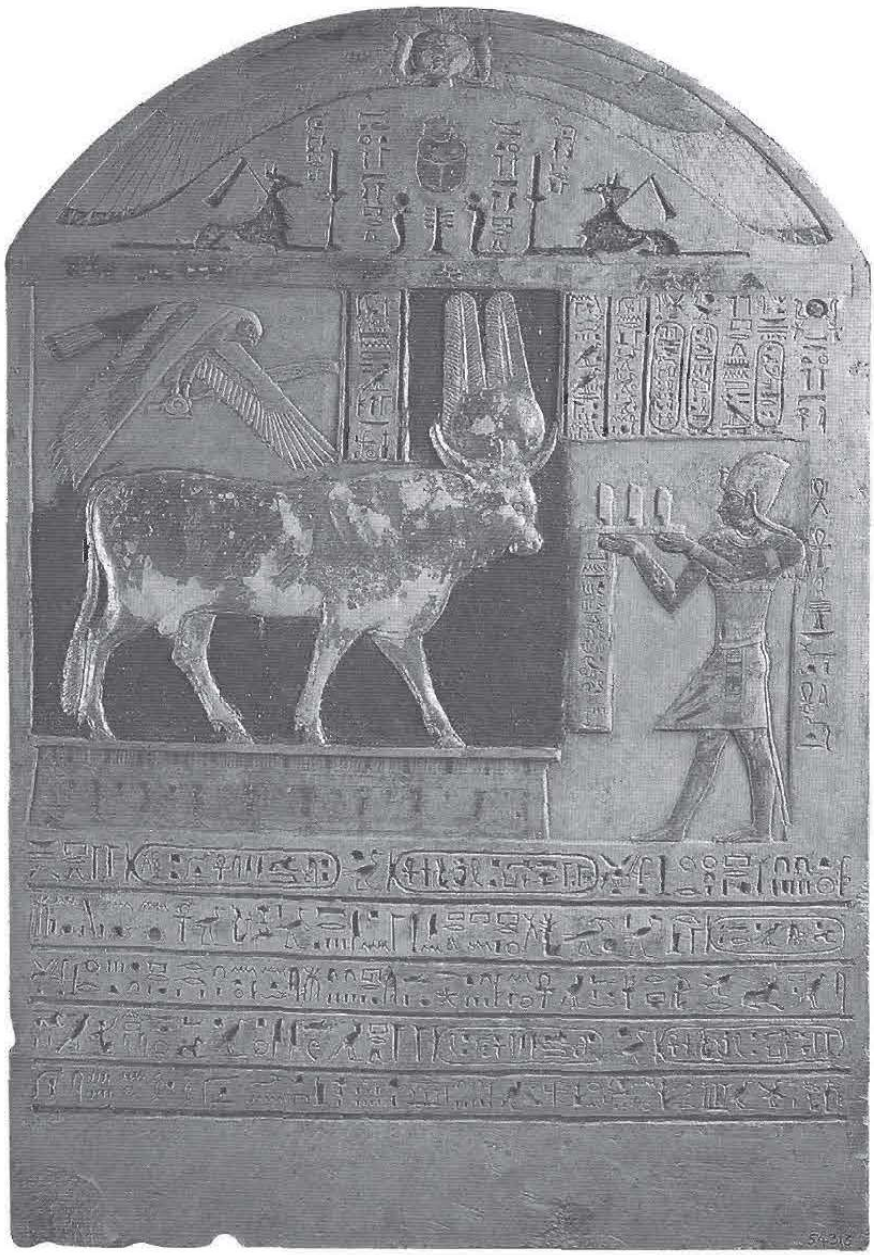
Whatever the situation regarding this goddess's early history, as the chief deity of the 7th Upper Egyptian nome (the area around modern Nag Hammadi, where her cult centre was known as 'the mansion of the sistrum') Bat was an important local goddesss for many hundreds of years. Eventually, however, in Middle Kingdom times, she was subsumed by Hathor, the greater goddess of the adjacent 6th nome of Upper Egypt, who took on her identity and attributes as an aspect of herself.

Buchis

Mythology

The sacred bull known to the Greeks as Buchis (in Egyptian *bakh, ba-akh* or *bakhu*) was worshipped in the area of Armant, the ancient Hermonthis, and elsewhere in the region of Thebes. The burial ground of these bulls, known as the Bucheion, lies

(Left) Head of a bovine deity most probably representing ***Bat****. Detail, Narmer Palette. Early Dynastic Period, c. 3000 BC. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



(Right) Limestone stela depicting a king offering to the ***Buchis*** *bull associated here with Montu. Ptolemaic Period, c. 181 BC. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

at the desert's edge at Armant, and although ravaged through time their discovery in 1927 revealed an impressive cemetery which seems to have functioned from New Kingdom times. Archaeological excavation presently provides evidence for well over 600 years of use from at least the time of Nectanebo II (*c.* 360 BC) to the time of the Emperor Diocletion (*c.* AD 300). The burial place of the cows who were the successive Buchis bull's mothers, known locally as the Baqariyyah, is also known at Armant. The legends of the Buchis bull were also long lasting, and as late as *c.* AD 400 the Roman writer Macrobius described the sacred animal with fanciful embellishments including the assertions that the bull changed colour every hour and had a coat of hair which grew backwards.

Iconography

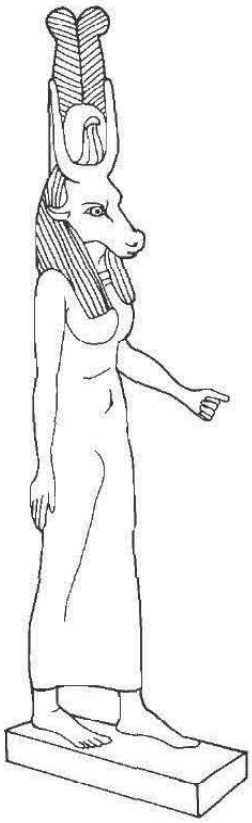
Although, according to one ancient author, the Buchis was an animal with a white hide and black face, it seems the bull could be of other colouring (perhaps the basis of the statement by Macrobius above), and it is not always easily distinguished from other sacred bulls. Amuletic images are particularly difficult to identify, but depictions of the bull god are known on stelae and from various other contexts from the 19th dynasty on.

Worship

Buchis was associated with Re and Osiris and particularly with the Theban god Montu with whom he was identified directly. As a result, although never as important as the Apis bull of Memphis or the Mnevis bull of Heliopolis, Buchis was highly revered in the Theban region and was worshipped not only at Armant but also at Thebes itself, and at the outlying sites of Tod and Medamud. It is unlikely that a separate bull was maintained at all of these locations and more probable that a single sacred animal travelled from site to site and was represented by a statue during times of its absence from any one sanctuary. As was the case with other sacred bulls, Buchis delivered oracles at his cult sites but was also famous for curing diseases, especially those of the eye. The Buchis bull was also renowned for its ferocity, which may have been a result of its association with the warlike Montu, and inscriptions at Medamud show that the animal participated in fights with other bulls which were staged in a special arena.

Hesat

Hesat was a cow goddess with a number of mythological associations. Her name may mean 'the wild one'– and as the wild cow she may have been worshipped from very early times. Already in the Pyramid Texts she appears as the mother of Anubis (PT 2080) and of the deceased king (PT 1029) who is characterized as her son in the form of a golden calf. She was also the divine nurse of the living king. The goddess was said to suckle a number of divine bulls and in particular was the mythical mother of the sacred Mnevis bull, and in



some texts, the Apis bull. At Heliopolis, the mothers of the Mnevis bulls were buried in a special cemetery dedicated to Hesat. Hesat also provided milk for humanity and was often named with Tenemit, the goddess of beer, through her power to quench thirst through the 'beer of Hesat'. In the Ptolemaic era Hesat was associated with Isis, and the goddess was honoured in the form of the sacred Isis-Hesat cow.

Mehet-Weret

Mythology

An ancient cow goddess whose name means 'Great Flood', Mehet-Weret was said to have risen from the waters of creation and to have given birth to the sun god Re whom she placed, as a solar disk, between her horns. This image of the cow who raises the sun disk into the sky also equates Mehet-Weret with the heavens and she is clearly viewed as a sky goddess in the Pyramid Texts, where the goddess represents the waterway of the sky which was sailed upon by the sun god and the king (PT 1131). The goddess of the great flood was closely associated with Neith and often identified with her. In later times she was also associated with Hathor as we see in the Book of the Dead (Spell 186), where both are referred to as the 'Eye of Re' (see p. 206). She could also be linked with Isis.



(Above left) Bronze statuette of the cow-headed goddess sometimes called ***Mehet-Weret*** *but more usually Isis, the mother of the Apis bull. Late Period. Petrie Collection, University College, London.*

Wooden images of the sky cow Isis-Mehet, or ***Mehet-Weret****, from one of the funerary beds of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Iconography

This goddess was almost invariably represented in bovine form. In the vignettes of the New Kingdom funerary papyri and in tomb paintings she is depicted as a sacred cow with the sun disk between her horns, kneeling on a reed mat and often wearing a ceremonial collar and decorated blanket and with a sceptre or flail rising from her back as a sign of her power and divinity. She is almost certainly the deity identified as Isis-Mehet (with Mehet probably being an abbreviation of Mehet-Weret) portrayed in the giant funerary couch of Tutankhamun made in the form of two slender cows each with a sun disk between its horns.

Worship

As a conceptualization of primeval creation Mehet-Weret appears to have had no independent cult of her own, though her importance as a power in the area of creation-birth-rebirth meant that she was commonly incorporated into funerary literature and representations.

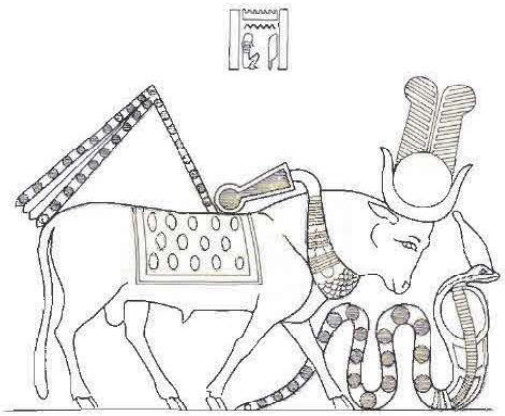
Mnevis

Mythology

The divine bull of Heliopolis which was known to the Egyptians as Mer-Wer (though the oldest form of the name as it appears in the Coffin Texts is Nem-Wer) and called by the Greeks Mnevis was originally an independent deity who was incorporated into the worship of the sun god at an unknown early date. Manetho claimed that the god's cult was introduced in the 2nd dynasty, but he appears in only a minor capacity as the 'bull of Heliopolis' in the Pyramid Texts. Yet at some point Mnevis came to be regarded as the *ba* or 'power' of Re and a manifestation of the combined Re-Atum and as such gained considerable importance. According to Plutarch the Mnevis bull was second only to the Apis bull of Memphis and was also accorded great respect and privileges. He provided oracles in the same manner as the more famous Apis, being regarded as the 'herald' who made known the sun god's wishes and decisions. Like the Apis bull, Mnevis is also mentioned on the Rosetta Stone as one of the recipients of Ptolemy V's largesse. In a clear effort to enhance the stature of Mnevis, the priests of Heliopolis claimed Mnevis to be the father of Apis. Although there are some known links between Mnevis and Osiris – as in dual names such as Mnevis-Osiris and Mnevis-Wennefer – these may be simply the result of an abstract fusion of the solar and netherworld deities rather than being based on any direct mythological association.

Iconography

As with the other sacred bulls of Egypt, there was only one Mnevis bull at any one time and the animal

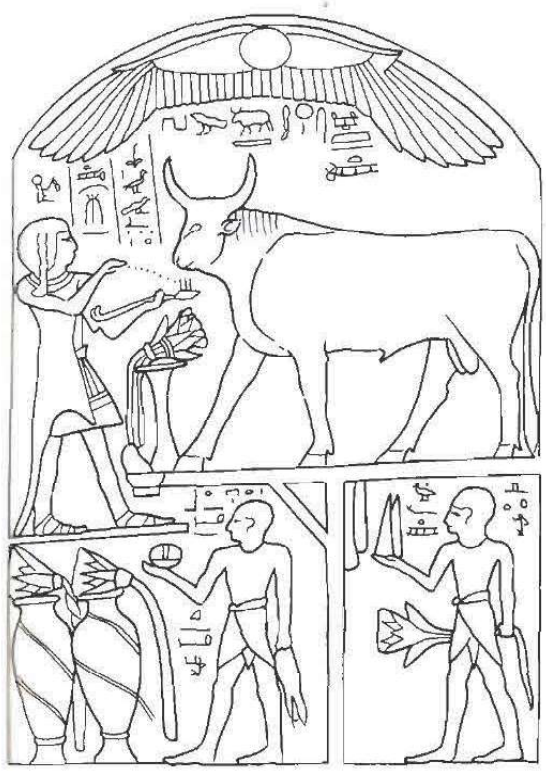


(Left) The ***Mnevis*** *bull with a later form of its name.* Meni, *redrawn from Champollion's* Panthéon Égyptien *of 1823.*

selected for the honour was usually one with a completely black coat without any markings whatsoever. For this reason, in his representations Mnevis wears a solar disk and uraeus between his horns which are usually his only attributes.

Worship

As well as being provided with his own bovine harem (consisting principally of two wives representing the cow goddesses Hathor and Iusaas), Mnevis was honoured with burial in a special cemetery. Because of his close association with the sun god, the Mnevis bull was one of the few deities apparently tolerated by Akhenaten who decreed that a cemetery for the divine animal was to be made in his capital of Akhetaten (the modern el-Amarna), though the site of such a burial has not been found. In later times the burial ground of the sacred Mnevis bulls is known to have been located to the northeast of the sun god's main temple at Heliopolis, and great ceremony accompanied the animals' interment there. A separate burial ground was also maintained for the mothers of the Mnevis bulls who were identified with the cow goddess Hesat. Mnevis was also honoured in other areas and appears, for example, in the Graeco-Roman temples of Dendera and Edfu. At the site of Soknopaiu Nesos in the Fayum there was a temple of Serapis-Osoromnevis, effectively combining the veneration of Osiris with Apis and Mnevis.



Shentayet

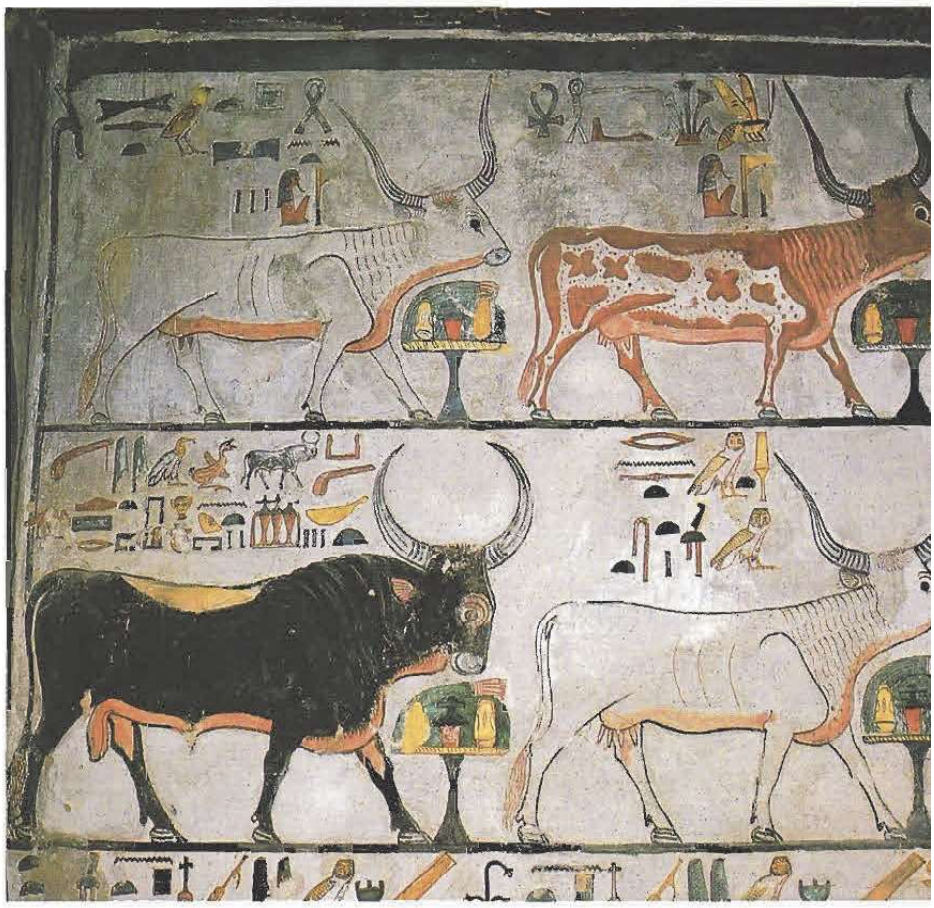
The name of this goddess means 'widow' but her origins are obscure. She was depicted as a cow or cow-headed woman but eventually assimilated to the goddess Isis under the name Isis-Shentayet. In this late form Shentayet was associated with the resurrection of Osiris and identified with the sarcophagus of the god.

Sky Bull (Bull of the West)

Found in vignettes of Chapter 148 of the Book of the Dead the Sky Bull was a mythical creature or deity associated with the heavens and with the afterlife and thus also called the 'Bull of the West'. The bull was said to be the husband of seven cows (see p. 77) which usually accompany him.

(Below left) Men-Wer, *the* ***Mnevis*** *bull, called 'The Herald of Re'. 18th dynasty. Stela of Qen, Egyptian Museum, Berlin.*

(Below) The ***Sky Bull*** *with three of the seven cows which constituted his harem. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*





Feline deity, tomb of Amenherkhepeshef, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.

FELINE DEITIES

A number of the feline deities found in the Egyptian pantheon were of great importance and no gods were more widely feared and respected. Although the majority were leonine in form, a great deal of variation occurs in the way these deities existed as lions or cats – and sometimes in both forms at different times or even in the same period. Egypt's feline deities could also be strongly malignant or benign, and many were associated in one way or another with the supreme power of the sun.

Aker

Mythology

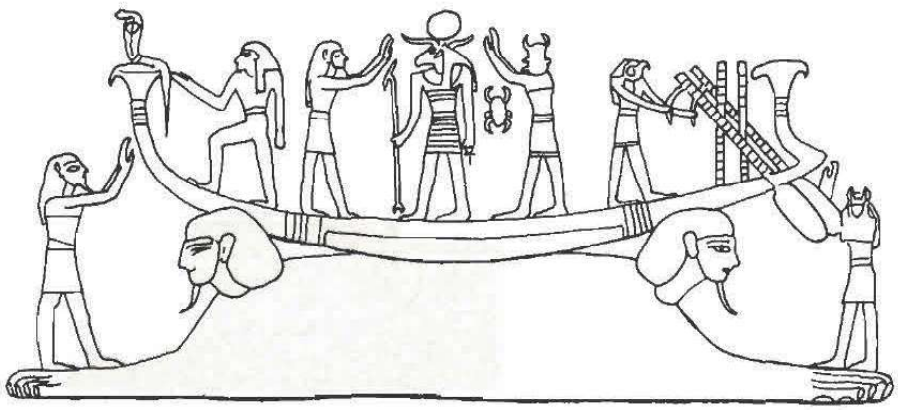
The earth god Aker was an ancient deity known in both singular (*aker*) and plural (*akeru*) aspects. In their plural form the Akeru were primeval earth deities of uncertain mythological origin. In the Pyramid Texts they are not described, but they appear in several apotropaic passages in which they are said to tremble before the king or to refrain from laying hold of him (PT 393, 658, 2202). On the other hand, the singular earth god Aker was said to open the gate of the earth to allow the king to pass into the underworld, and to protect the king by grasping or restraining the various serpent demons which threaten him (PT 504, 676). In later texts – such as the Book of Aker or Book of the Earth which was inscribed in the tomb of Ramesses VI in the Valley of the Kings, and the mythological papyri of the 21st dynasty – Aker was also said to imprison the coils of the great serpent Apophis when it was cut into pieces.

Iconography

In the earliest certain representations of Aker (and occasionally later), the god is simply represented as a strip of land with anthropomorphic heads at each end representing the entrance and exit of the underworld. Later the god is portrayed as the foreparts of two lions or sphinxes – representing the two horizons – joined back to back, and this is his most common iconography. The representation of the god thus resembles a kind of bowl or socket, and Aker was, in fact, associated with the socket which held the mast on the deck of the solar barque. In his double lion or sphinx form the god Aker appears along with other protective deities on Middle Kingdom apotropaic 'wands' where he is often shown holding knives as a symbol of his role as protector of the entrance to the underworld. In the vignettes of later funerary papyri the sun god is shown travelling over the back of the Aker image and Aker is depicted on either side of the underworld cave in which the 'flesh' of Sokar is contained.

Worship

Although the god Aker may possibly reach back into the Early Dynastic Period and is certainly viewed as a potent force by the time of the Pyramid Texts, he remained a cosmic-geographic type god for whom there was no independent cult. There is some evidence for his inclusion in popular religion, however. Aker may be intended in some of the instances in which the double-lion image was utilized as an amulet of protection or renewal; he certainly appears on the apotropaic wands discussed above; and the god was apparently believed to neutralize poisons in the body of anyone who was bitten by a snake or other venomous creature, or who had swallowed something harmful or repulsive.



*The evening form of the sun god sails through human-headed **Aker**. From the Book of the Earth, New Kingdom Papyrus.*

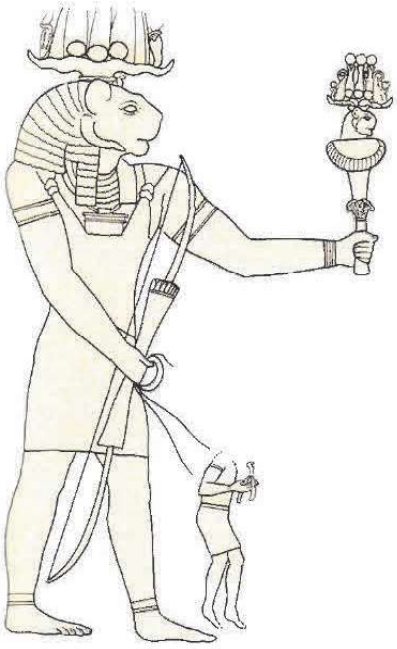
Apedamak

Mythology

An apparently indigenous lion deity of the Meroitic civilization to the south of Egypt, Apedamak is thought to have been a deity whose origins were independent of Egyptian religious thought, yet whose worship was incorporated into the Egyptian-influenced temples of the Sudanese region, and even some of the Egyptian-built temples of Nubia. In character, Apedamak was a god of war – a fact which integrated mythologically with the Egyptian concept of a killer lion deity of the southern regions – though in Egypt this vengeful lion was always viewed as a female deity (see Tefnut). Although Apedamak's independent nature and worship were clearly maintained without absorption into any purely Egyptian cult, the god is depicted alongside Egyptian deities such as Amun and Hathor in the 'lion temple' at Naqa, and he headed a unique triad which incorporated Isis and Horus as his divine consort and child.

Iconography

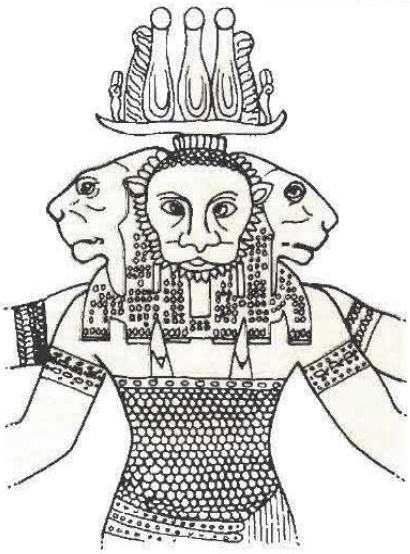
Apedamak was usually represented in the form of an anthropomorphic-bodied deity with the head of a lion, or even as a three-headed lion, though there



(Left) The lion god ***Apedamak*** *as a conqueror with bound captives. Detail of Meroitic relief, lion temple at Musawwarat el-Sufra, Upper Nubia.*



(Right) ***Apedamak*** *in the form of a serpent-lion. Detail, pylon relief from the lion temple at Naqa, Upper Nubia. Meroitic Period.*



(Far right) Three-headed form of ***Apedamak*** *with characteristic triple Atef Crown. Detail, Meroitic relief at Wadi Ban-Naqa, Upper Nubia.*

are cases where fully zoomorphic depictions of lions, and even serpent-lions, represent the god. Although he is sometimes said to have been depicted with the head of an elephant, there are no certain representations of the god in this form. In his semi-anthropomorphic depictions he may be shown holding a distinctive sceptre surmounted by a crouching lion, and most images of Apedamak depict him wearing the triple crown.

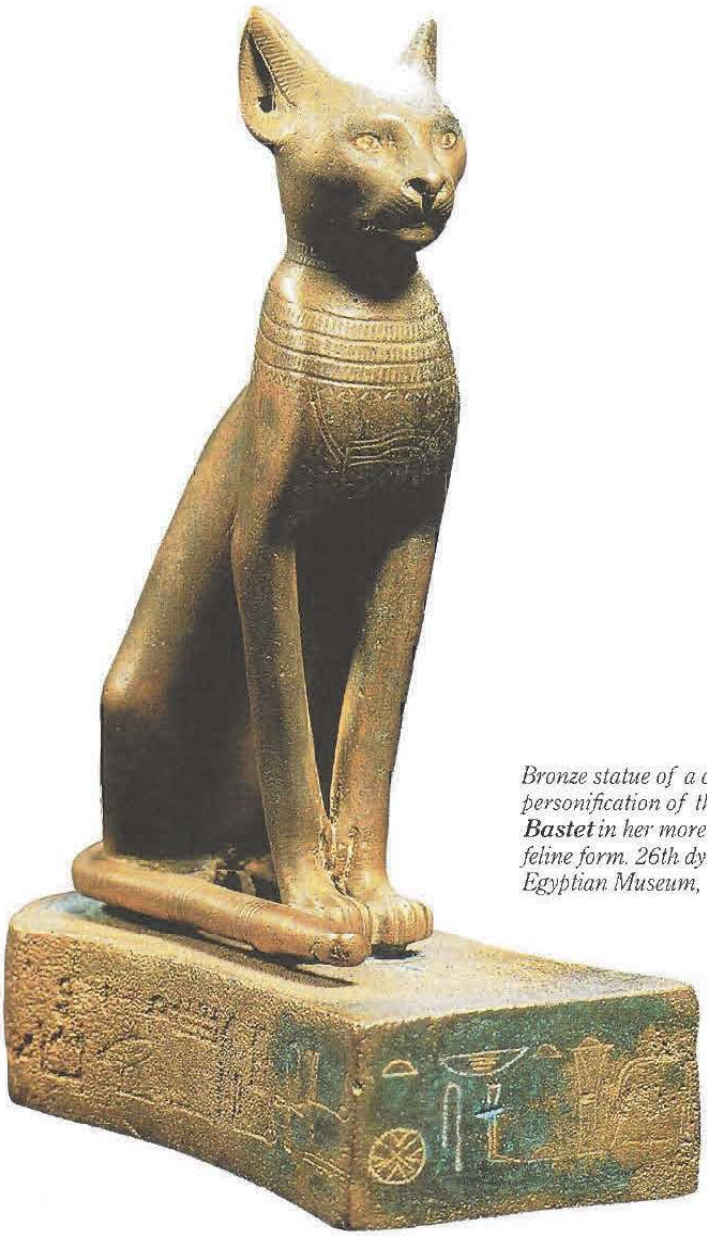
Worship

The main cult centres associated with Apedamak were at Musawwarat el-Sufra and Naqa, both of which are located in the desert east of the sixth cataract of the Nile in the Sudan. The vast temple complex at Musawwarat included the largest known temple of Apedamak which seems to have functioned from about 300 BC for over 750 years. Interestingly, and inexplicably, the inscriptions dedicated to the god in this temple were written in Egyptian hieroglyphs rather than in the Meroitic script. There were also 'lion temples' at Meroe and probably other sites in that region, though there is less evidence of Apedamak in northern Nubia; and it seems that the god was primarily worshipped as a tutelary deity of the more southerly area.

Bastet

Mythology

Originally a lioness deity, in the course of time Bastet became a cat or cat-headed goddess of milder nature, though both aspects of her personality seem to have then existed concurrently. In the Pyramid Texts where she appears in her dangerous form, Bastet already also appears as a mild-natured mother and nurse of the king (PT 1111); and in the



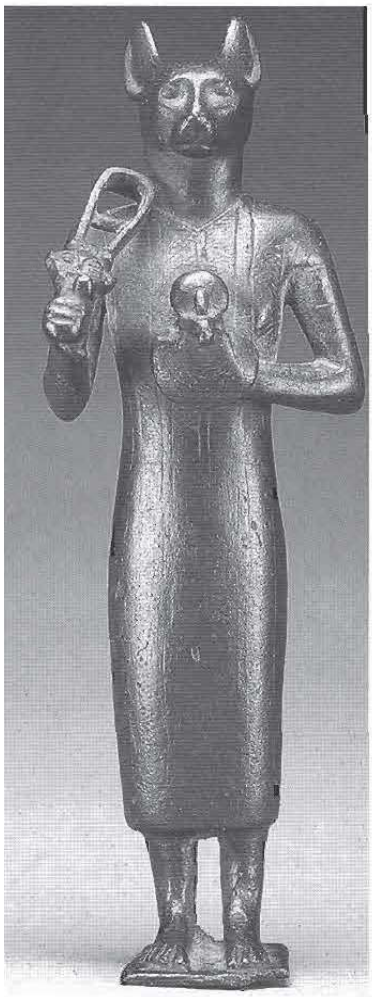
Bronze statue of a cat, personification of the goddess ***Bastet*** *in her more peaceful feline form. 26th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Coffin Texts she provides protection for the deceased, though her aggressive aspect is still seen. As with other lioness deities, Bastet was regarded as the daughter of the sun god and could be identified with the 'Eye of Re', but was also associated with the moon as the 'Eye of the moon'. Even when she was represented as a cat goddess she still retained her association with Re and became 'the cat of Re' who destroyed the sun god's serpent enemy, Apophis. Nevertheless, Bastet's developed nature was definitely not as aggressive as that of Sekhmet and although her own son Mahes reveals the savage leonine aspects of her origins, in later times the goddess is frequently found as a symbol of motherhood who was believed to protect women during pregnancy. The Greeks equated Bastet with their own goddess Artemis.

Iconography

In her earliest known form, as depicted on stone vessels of the 2nd dynasty, Bastet was represented as a woman with the maneless head of a lioness. The iconography of the goddess changed, however, perhaps as her nature began to be viewed as milder than that of other lioness deities. She was associated with the cat from Middle Kingdom times, and after the close of the New Kingdom she was usually depicted as a cat-headed woman. In this form Bastet is often portrayed holding the rattle-like sistrum, associated with Hathor, and sistra were thus sometimes decorated with the images of cats. In a similar manner, the goddess was also associated with the ritual *menat* necklace. Late Period amulets depicting lioness deities, while usually uninscribed, seem to often depict Bastet, especially those in which the goddess is shown holding a sistrum, *menat*, papyrus sceptre, or *wedjat* eye symbol. Often, especially in bronze statues of the goddess, she is shown with a small group of kittens at her feet. In her fully feline form as the cat of Re she was often depicted decapitating the Apophis serpent with a sharp knife.

Bronze statuette of ***Bastet*** *as a cat-headed woman holding a sistrum rattle and an aegis. Late Period–Ptolemaic Period. Harer Collection, San Bernardino.*



Worship

Bastet seems to have been an important goddess in fairly early times. The valley temple of Khafre at Giza records on its façade the names of only two goddesses: Hathor, representing southern Egypt, and Bastet, representing the north. The goddess's popularity grew over time and in the Late Period and Graeco-Roman times she enjoyed great status. The main cult centre of this deity was the city of Bubastis – Tell Basta – in the eastern Delta, and although only the outlines of the temple of Bastet now remain, Herodotus visited the site in the 5th century BC and praised it for its magnificence. The festival of Bastet was also described by Herodotus who claimed it was the most elaborate of all the religious festivals of Egypt with large crowds participating in unrestrained dancing, drinking and revelry. Cemeteries of cats mummified and buried in honour of Bastet have been found at Bubastis and at other sites such as Saqqara where Bastet held a tutelary position. Bastet was also venerated in southern Egypt where she was equated with Mut, the consort of Amun at Thebes.

Amulets of cats and litters of kittens were popular New Year gifts, and the name of Bastet was often inscribed on small ceremonial 'New Year flasks', probably to evoke the goddess as a bestower of fertility and because Bastet, like other lioness goddesses, was viewed as a protective deity able to counter the darker forces associated with the 'Demon Days' at the end of the Egyptian year.

Bes

see p. 102, *Male Anthropomorphic Deities* section

Mahes

Mythology

Although the word *mahes* is found in the Pyramid Texts in the sense of 'lion', it is not until the Middle Kingdom that theophoric names utilizing the term Mahes as the name of a god appear, and it is in the New Kingdom that references to the god first become common. He was said to be the son of Bastet or sometimes of Sekhmet and was called Miysis by the Greeks as well as Mios or Mihos. Although locally important, he was not particularly featured in Egyptian mythology, though he was said to aid the sun god in the fight against the serpent Apophis. Because of his nature Mahes was also viewed as a war god and a guardian of sacred places, and a late Greek text describes him as a god of winds, darkness and storm. He was associated and identified with several deities including Horus, Nefertem and the sun god himself.

Iconography

Mahes was depicted zoomorphically as a lion and also as a lion-headed man wearing a short kilt and various headdresses. Among these he may wear the sun disk and uraeus, the Atef Crown, or the floral headdress of Nefertem. As a lion man he is frequently shown holding a knife in his paws with a clump of lotus flowers – reminiscent of his connection with Nefertem – behind him.

Worship

The main cult centre of Mahes was the ancient Taremu (modern Tell el-Muqdam) which the Greeks called Leontopolis – 'lion city' – in the eastern Delta. Although the site is not well preserved and the temple ruins have not been conclusively dated, it appears that there was already a temple at Taremu in the 18th dynasty; but evidence of worship of the

god is primarily from later times. In the 23rd dynasty Osorkon III erected an important temple to him in the northern part of the main Bastet sanctuary at Bubastis, his mother Bastet's sacred town, and he was also worshipped in the town of Aphroditopolis in Upper Egypt. From these cult centres the god's worship spread southwards, and he is well represented in the Graeco-Roman temples of Upper Egypt as at Dendera, Edfu and Philae, and in Nubia where he appears at sites such as Dabod and Dendur. Worship of Mahes is also attested in the outlying oases of Bahariya and Siwa. In the practice of magic and popular religion Mahes is mentioned in amuletic papyri of the late New Kingdom, and in the Late Period he was frequently depicted in small amulets of glazed composition and sometimes of bronze.

Mekhit

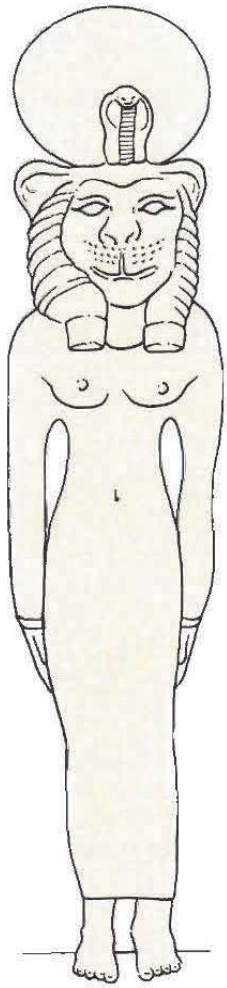
Mekhit was a lioness goddess of which relatively little is said in Egyptian mythology. Like the better known Sekhmet and Tefnut, Mekhit was one of the deities who could symbolize the vengeful 'Eye of Re' (see p. 206), though she may have also been associated with the moon. The goddess was the consort of Onuris and shared that deity's cult centre at This near Abydos.

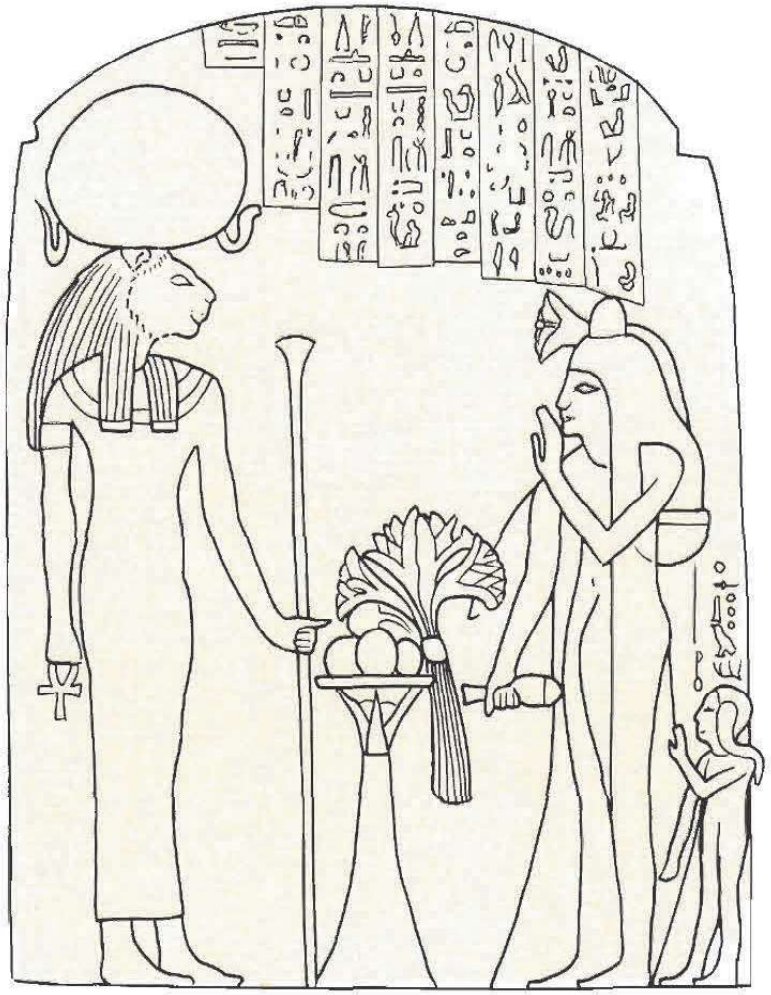
Menhyt

A lesser-known lioness goddess, Menhyt was worshipped in the area of Edfu in Upper Egypt and also in the Delta region where she was associated with the goddess Neith at Sais and also with Wadjet, the tutelary deity of Lower Egypt with whom she is linked in the Coffin Texts. Menhyt could function as the uraeus on the brow of the sun god so that, as with many leonine deities, she was also regarded as a solar figure.

Mestjet

A lion-headed deity known from only a single inscription, Mestjet was one of the many forms of the fierce 'Eye of Re' and as such provides a clear example of the multiple manifestations of certain deities. The stela on which the goddess's name occurs dates to the 21st dynasty and was found at Abydos, indicating that Mestjet was a specific form of the 'Eye' worshipped in that particular region.





(Below left) ***Mekhit****, the lioness consort of the god Onuris. Detail from a Late Period bronze dyad. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Budapest.*

(Below) *Stela depicting the veneration by a woman and her daughter of the lioness-goddess* ***Mestjet****, a form of the 'Eye of Re'. 21st dynasty.*

Mut

see p. 153, *Female Anthropomorphic Deities* section

Pakhet

Mythology

A fierce lioness goddess whose name means 'she who scratches' or 'tearer', Pakhet is known from Middle Kingdom times when she is described as a night huntress with sharp claws in the Coffin Texts. Pakhet was believed to instill terror in her enemies and must be grouped with the other leonine deities whose nature was, like Sekhmet, primarily aggressive. She was called the 'goddess at the entrance of the wadi', probably referring to the lion's habit of frequenting watering areas at the edge of the desert. The goddess was associated with a form of Horus as her partner, and identified with certain other goddesses such as Weret-Hekau, Sekhmet and Isis. Pakhet the huntress was naturally identified by the Greeks with their own goddess of hunting, Artemis.

Iconography

Pakhet was not widely depicted in Egyptian art, but she most usually appears in combined anthropomorphic-zoomorphic form as a lioness-headed woman. She has no special iconographic attributes, but amulets depicting a lioness goddess standing over the prostrate figures of captives usually appear to represent Pakhet.

Worship

The worship of Pakhet was somewhat localized and her chief realm of influence was the area near Beni Hasan in Middle Egypt. A rock-cut chapel to the goddess carved out of the limestone cliffs by Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III at that location is known by the Greek name Speos Artemidos (the cave of Artemis) due to Pakhet's association with that Greek goddess. A whole cemetery of sacred cats was dedicated to Pakhet in this area, though most of the burials appear to date to the Late Period. There is no surviving evidence for a cult for the goddess at Beni Hasan before early New Kingdom times, though it is probable that Hatshepsut honoured an established local deity and a formal cult of the goddess certainly seems to date to as far back as Middle Kingdom times. Amulets of the goddesses were worn in life, probably both for protection and fecundity.

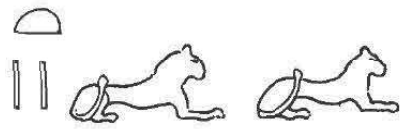
Ruty

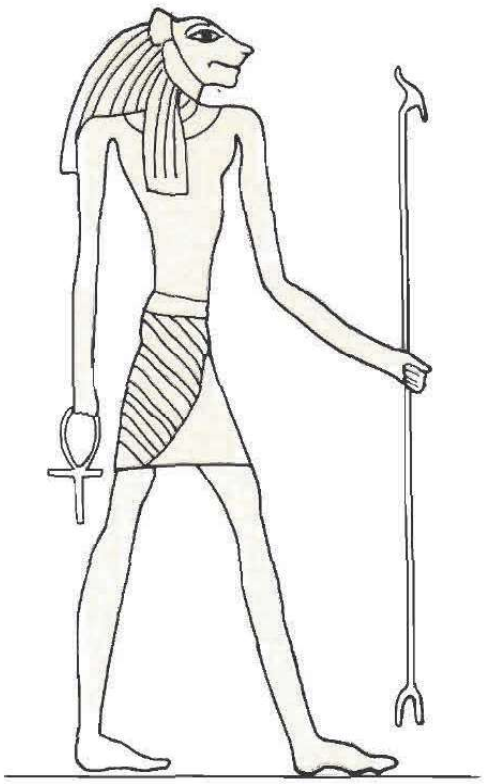
Mythology

The twin divine lion gods known as Ruty (Egyptian *ru.ty*, 'the pair of lions') were linked from early times with the Heliopolitan deities Shu and Tefnut (PT 447), but because lions typically inhabited the desert margins to the east and west of the Nile Valley, the animals came to be associated with the eastern and western horizons. The general identification of leonine deities with the sun god strengthened this association, and in the 17th chapter of the Book of the Dead Ruty thus became the double lion over whose back the sun rose each day. The twin lions were associated with a number of deities, however. In the Pyramid Texts they may be equated with Atum (PT 2081) and in the Coffin Texts we find associations with Geb, Nut, Re and other gods (CT I, 8; II, 204; II, 175; etc.). In the Book of the Dead they are equated collectively with Atum and also, individually, with Re and Osiris.

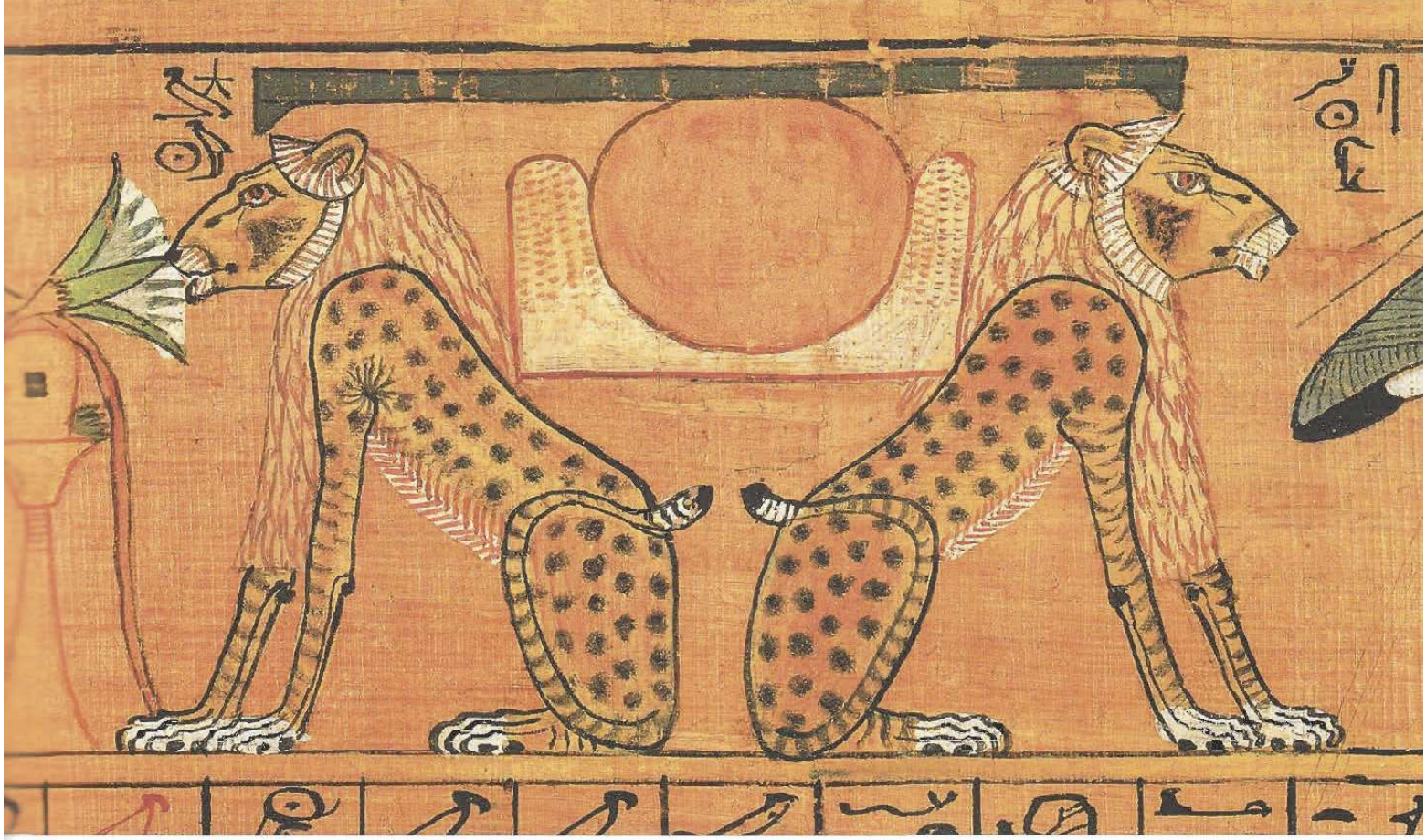
Iconography

Although Ruty could be depicted as a single lion or lion-headed god, the twin deity was most frequently shown as two lions, often positioned back to back and with the sun disk or horizon hieroglyph (*akhet*) depicted between them. Because the two animals respectively faced the sunset and sunrise they could thus replace the mountains on either side of the horizon hieroglyph in some representations. The well-known ivory headrest found in the tomb of





The twin lion deities called ***Ruty*** *may be depicted as two figures or as a single god with the dual name. 21st dynasty. Detail, relief from Tanis.*



Paired lions – here called 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' – may represent the twin lion god ***Ruty****, the double lion god Aker or other gods such as Re or Atum. 19th dynasty. Papyrus of Anhai, British Museum.*

Tutankhamun which has a figure of the air god Shu supporting the head of the king is flanked by small images of the lions of the eastern and western horizon, so that the king slept symbolically between the guardians of yesterday and tomorrow.

Worship

The original cult centre of Ruty was perhaps Nay-ta-hut, the Greek Leontopolis (modern Tell el-Yahudiya) in the Delta, but in the Old Kingdom the lion pair was also aligned with Heliopolis and may have been venerated at a number of other sites. Although an essentially cosmic deity, Ruty also entered popular religion. In amuletic form the two lions linked the wearer with the daily regeneration of the sun and thus had significance in both everyday life and in funerary contexts.

Sekhmet

Mythology

Sekhmet was the most important of Egypt's leonine deities. As with many Egyptian goddesses, she had two distinct aspects to her personality – on the one hand a dangerous and destructive aspect, and on the other a protective and healing aspect. Her name means 'powerful' or 'the female powerful one' and well suits the nature of the goddess as expressed in destructiveness, though it had equal implications for her other aspects. From early times Sekhmet was regarded as the daughter of Re and she became one of the most important manifestations of the 'Eye' of the sun god. In the version of the 'Eye' myth applying to Sekhmet (and also to Hathor), when Re became old and his human subjects began to plot against him he sent the fearsome goddess to punish them – leading to the near destruction of all humanity. Because Sekhmet was said to breathe fire against her enemies she was adopted by many Egyptian kings as a military patroness and symbol of their own power in battle, and bore martial titles such as 'smiter of the Nubians'. Even the hot desert winds were said to be the 'breath of Sekhmet'. The leonine goddess was also directly associated with plagues (often called the 'messengers' or 'slaughterers of Sekhmet'), and this too could be tied to the king's power. A passage in the Middle Kingdom story of Sinuhe states that the fear of the king overran foreign lands like Sekhmet in a time of pestilence. On the other hand, Sekhmet's power was used to protect the king in an almost motherly manner, and as early as the Pyramid Texts it is stated that the goddess conceived the king (PT 262, 2206). The goddess also had power to ward off pestilence and she could function as a healing deity, even being called 'Sekhmet, mistress of life'. Sekhmet was associated with a number of other deities. She was regarded as the consort of Ptah and mother of Nefertem at Memphis where she eventually absorbed a number of other, more minor deities as 'mistress of Ankhtawy'. Sekhmet was often closely associated with Hathor – especially as the Eye of Re – and was also linked with the Theban goddess



Granite statue of the goddess ***Sekhmet*** *depicted as a lioness-headed woman. New Kingdom. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Some of the hundreds of statues of ***Sekhmet*** *originally set up in the area of the temple of Mut at Karnak. New Kingdom.*

Mut, becoming in effect an aggressive manifestation or counterpart of that goddess, as well as being linked with Pakhet, the lioness goddess of Middle Egypt, and the cat goddess Bastet, among others.

Iconography

Sekhmet was most frequently depicted in semi-anthropomorphic form as a lioness-headed woman. She often wears a long wig and usually has a solar disk balanced atop her head in this aspect. The long dress worn by the goddess is often coloured red, and one of Sekhmet's epithets was 'mistress of red linen' symbolizing either her native Lower Egypt or her warlike nature. Sometimes her garment has a rosette pattern over each nipple and while this has been suggested to reflect patterns in the shoulder hair of lions it is perhaps more likely that the pattern reflects an astronomical symbolism of the 'shoulder star' of the constellation Leo which is marked in Egyptian astronomical paintings. During the reign of Amenophis III, hundreds of statues of Sekhmet were set up in the area of the temple of Mut to the south of the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak, and in the king's mortuary temple in western Thebes. These impressive statues, which were carved from hard black granite or diorite, often show the goddess either seated or standing with a papyrus sceptre – the symbol of her native Lower Egypt. Depictions of lion-headed goddesses wearing the Double Crown usually represent the fusion of Sekhmet and Mut. Sekhmet could also be depicted in fully zoomorphic form as a lioness, though this is relatively uncommon. The leonine head of the goddess (or that of certain other feline deities) was also represented on many examples of the so-called aegis – a metal collar surmounted by the head of a deity – which was used from New Kingdom times in cultic ceremonies for the propitiation of the divine.

Worship

Although the main cult centre of Sekhmet was at Memphis, the goddess had temples in many other areas. A sanctuary was built in her honour at Abusir (where she appeared in reliefs as early as the 5th dynasty), and she is represented in numerous temples up through the Graeco-Roman Period. Her association with other deities led to further cult centres, and there was a specific temple to the combined Sekhmet-Hathor, for example, at Kom el-Hisn in the western Delta. The priests of Sekhmet are known to have been organized for the cultic service of the goddess from Old Kingdom times and also appear to have played an important role in the magical aspect of medicine in later times, reciting prayers and spells over the sick along with the physical ministrations of the physicians. The formal rite of 'appeasing Sekhmet' was also performed by her priests to combat epidemics. In popular religion, the 'seven arrows of Sekhmet' which were believed to bring bad fortune were particularly feared, and many spells and charms were utilized for protection against the wrath of the goddess and her messengers. A spell called 'The book of the last day of the year' was recited over a piece of cloth which was worn around the neck at the potentially dangerous time of year's end, and on New Year's Day itself many Egyptians exchanged presents often in the form of amulets of Sekhmet or Bastet in order to pacify these goddesses. Statues of the goddess can still inspire feelings of awe or apprehension, and the famous statue of Sekhmet which now stands in the temple of Ptah at Karnak was broken early in the 20th century by local people who feared that it might harm their children.



Seret

The leonine goddess Seret is only meagrely attested, but a 5th-dynasty inscription shows that she had a presence in the 3rd Lower Egyptian nome. This area was inhabited by a predominantly Libyan population in early times, and it is possible that the goddess was of Libyan origin. Seret is sometimes called a 'goose goddess', but this is an error based on a misunderstanding of the writing of her name.

Shesmetet

The leonine goddess Shesmetet is generally believed to be a form of Sekhmet or Bastet but she may have originated as an independent deity, and it is possible that her epithet 'lady of Punt' reflects an origin in this African area to the south of Egypt. Shesmetet is attested in Egypt from the Early Dynastic Period, however, and is found in the Pyramid Texts (PT 262, 2206) where she is said to give birth to the king. In later funerary texts she also acts as the mother of the deceased. Shesmetet was associated with, or considered a personification of, the *shesmet* girdle – a belt with an apron of beads which was part of the attire of kings of the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom and also worn by certain deities such as the god Sopdu. The goddess was depicted in leonine form or as a woman with the head of a lion, and her potential ferocity meant that she was invoked as a protective deity in popular religion and in magical spells.

Tefnut

Mythology

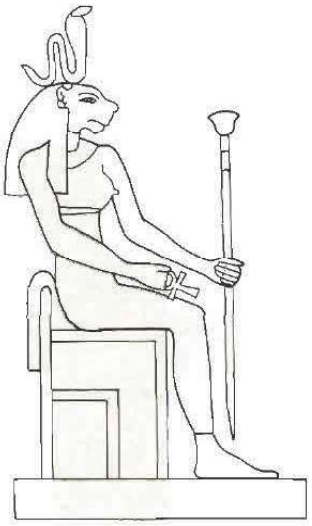
According to the Heliopolitan theology Tefnut was the daughter of Atum and the sister-wife of Shu, but she is a somewhat enigmatic deity. Her role in the cosmic scheme is usually said to be that of goddess of moisture and Tefnut certainly is associated with moisture in certain ways – she created 'pure water' for the deceased king from her vagina, for example (PT 2065), but her central identity may lie elsewhere. The goddess's name has no certain etymology, though it has been suggested to be an onomatopoeic representation of the sound of spitting as this is mythologically one of the ways in which the divine pair Shu and Tefnut were said to be created by Atum, and her name was represented by a pair of lips, spitting, in late texts. But the earliest evidence for Tefnut's original nature is found in the Pyramid Texts where James Allen has shown that it is perhaps possible that she represents the atmosphere of the lower world just as Shu represents the atmosphere of the upper – as it is said that 'the earth (Geb) is held up under Nut (the sky) by your arms, Tefnut' (PT 1405). According to one story Shu and Tefnut were said to be created in the form of two lion cubs which also gave the goddess a distinct leonine identity. Tefnut was thus an 'Eye of Re', and a late papyrus tells how she quarrelled with the sun god and taking leonine form flew in a rage to Nubia from where she was eventually persuaded to return by the god Thoth.

Iconography

Tefnut could be depicted in fully anthropomorphic form but was most often represented as a lioness or lioness-headed goddess in reference to her leonine associations. In human or semi-anthropomorphic form, she may wear a long wig and a solar disk and uraeus atop her head. Like other leonine goddesses, Tefnut was frequently represented on cultic aegises and counterpoises, sometimes together with her brother-husband Shu in an unusual dual-headed design. The goddess could also be depicted as a rearing serpent upon a sceptre, and sometimes as a lion-headed serpent.

Worship

The main cult centres of Tefnut were at Heliopolis where she had a sanctuary as one of the members of that city's great Ennead, and at Leontopolis (modern Tell el-Muqdam) in the Delta where she was worshipped with her brother-husband Shu in the form of a pair of lions. Amulets and plaques of Tefnut are known from the Late Period, but popular veneration of the goddess was probably mainly localized around her cult centres.



*The goddess **Tefnut**, depicted here with a large uraeus atop her head, was usually portrayed in leonine or leonine-human form but she could also be represented as a serpent, or as a lion-headed serpent.*

Tutu

A somewhat obscure apotropaic god venerated mainly in the Graeco-Roman Period, Tutu was called 'he who keeps enemies at a distance' and was believed to provide protection from hostile manifestations of deities and demons. The god was said to be the son of Neith, and was depicted in the form of a walking lion or as a composite deity with human head, the body of a lion, the wings of a bird and a tail which was a snake.

HIPPOPOTAMINE DEITIES

The hippopotamus was viewed quite ambivalently in ancient Egypt. The male animal was regarded as dangerous and destructive and was therefore often associated with the god Seth. The female hippopotamus, however, while possessing the same strength and destructive potential, was regarded benignly as a protective force and a symbol of motherhood. Already in the Old Kingdom there were at least three names or distinct forms of

the female hippopotamus deity: Ipet, Reret and Taweret. Generally their characteristics were similar and it is often impossible to tell them apart, yet it is not always clear whether they should be viewed as differing forms of the same goddess or as separate, if largely conflated, deities.

Ipet

Mythology

The benign hippopotamus goddess Ipet was a protective and nourishing deity. In the Pyramid Texts the king asks that he may nurse at her breast so that he would 'neither thirst nor hunger...forever' (PT 381–82) and in later funerary papyri she is called 'mistress of magical protection'. Her name means 'harem' or 'favoured place' and under the epithet Ipet-weret, 'the great Ipet', the goddess fuses to some degree with Taweret 'the great one', but she nevertheless maintains some independent characteristics. Ipet appears to have had a strong connection with the Theban area and it is possible that the goddess may have served as a personification of that city. In Theban theology she was considered the mother of Osiris and as a result her afterlife associations are clear in the funerary texts in which she appears.

Iconography

Ipet, like the other deities in this section, was usually depicted as a fusion of hippopotamus, crocodile, human, and lion, though the hippopotamine aspect of her appearance is primary. She was depicted as a female hippopotamus, usually standing upright on legs which have the feet of a lion. Her arms are often human in appearance though they usually terminate in leonine paws and she was also depicted with large pendent human breasts and the swollen belly of a pregnant woman. The back and tail of the goddess are those of a crocodile and sometimes this aspect is shown as a complete crocodile stretched over her back. Sometimes her representations appear to be apotropaic in nature, and in the vignettes of funerary papyri (as in Spell 137 of the Book of the Dead of Ani) the goddess is shown holding a torch and lighting incense cones to provide light and heat for the deceased.

Worship

Ipet was particularly venerated in the region of Thebes. She appears as a protective figure on the back of a statue of a 17th-dynasty ruler of the area, and although in most areas there was no cult associated with the goddess, a temple of Ipet was built just west of the temple of Khonsu within the complex of the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak in the Late Period and Ptolemaic times. According to Theban beliefs it was at this place that the goddess rested when she gave birth to Osiris.

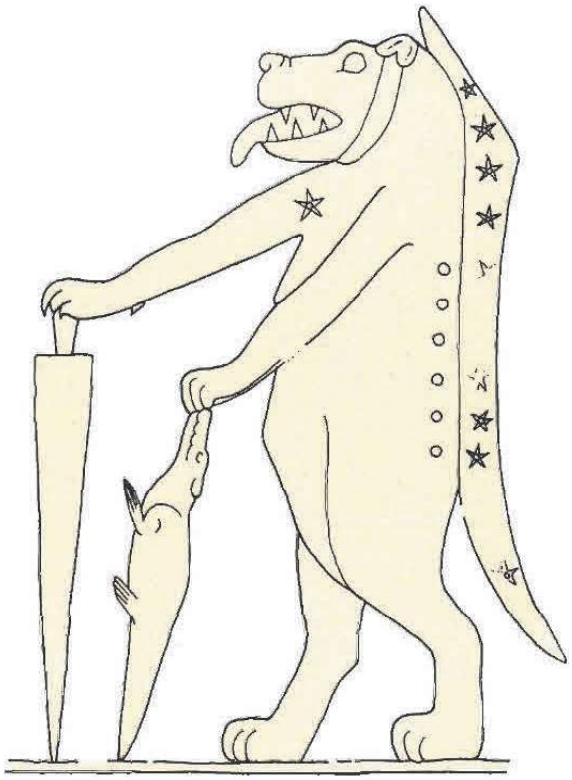
Reret

Mythology

The name Reret means 'sow', and under that name or Reret-weret 'the great sow', or in the form of Nebet-akhet 'mistress of the horizon' (an epithet also given to Taweret), the hippopotamus goddess represented one of the constellations of the northern sky as visualized by the Egyptians. This seems to have been the constellation we now call Draco in which the ancient pole star, Thuban, is situated; and in this role the stellar hippopotamus seems to have secured the 'imperishable' circumpolar stars which revolved around her. Perhaps due to her celestial associations Reret (and sometimes her other hippopotamine counterparts) was identified with the goddesses Nut and Hathor and was also seen as a protectress of the sun.

Iconography

The basic iconography of Reret – as a composite hippopotamus goddess with pendulous breasts and swollen belly – does not usually differ from that of her counterparts, though in astronomical contexts she takes on some specific attributes. While Reret may hold the knife, torch, *sa* or *ankh* signs found with all forms of the hippopotamus goddess, in astronomical paintings such as that on the ceiling of the tomb of Sethos I in the Valley of the Kings, she is frequently depicted holding a mooring post – sometimes in the form of a crocodile – to which is tethered one or more of the northern, circumpolar



*The constellation called 'Isis', **'Reret-weret'** or other names. Tomb of Pedamenope, western Thebes.*

constellations in the form of an ox. There are also variants which show the goddess holding a rope attached to a foreleg which symbolizes the same constellation. In these depictions marks on the chest or arm of the hippopotamus may have represented the ancient pole star Thuban.

Worship

Unlike Ipet, Reret does not seem to have enjoyed the service of a cult in her own name; and unless she is viewed as only a form of Taweret, neither did she have amulets or other evidences of popular veneration.

Shepet

Shepet was a female hippopotamine deity who appears to be a form or name variant of Reret or Taweret. In some cases, as in the Roman birth house at Dendera, the goddess appears with typical 'Taweret'-like iconography but with the head of a crocodile.

Taweret

Mythology

Taweret (Egyptian 'the great [female] one'), along with her counterparts, is attested since Old Kingdom times. She is the most commonly encountered form of the Egyptian hippopotamus goddesses and had a number of mythological associations. Sometimes the hippopotamus goddess was equated with Isis – for example, in some of the Late Period *cippi* – though the connection between the two deities is not always clear. More frequently Taweret is equated with Hathor whose headdress she often shares. In the vignette accompanying Book of the Dead Chapter 186 in the Papyrus of Anhai she stands together with the Hathor cow and seems to be identified with that goddess directly, as only Hathor is mentioned in the spell. An unusual stelae in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art shows Taweret offering before an image of Mut (sometimes seen as a form of Hathor) with the features of Tiye, wife of Amenophis III, a queen who seems to have associated herself with the hippopotamine goddesses for some reason. Because the male hippopotamus was associated with Seth in Egyptian religion, Taweret was called the 'concubine of Seth' who, according to Plutarch, had become one of the 'followers of Horus'. However, Taweret was also said to be the consort of the god Bes.

Iconography

Taweret is depicted with pendulous breasts and the swollen belly of a pregnant woman. The goddess usually wears a female wig which may be surmounted with a feathered headdress, a modius, or with horns and solar disk. She is usually shown with her mouth open or her lips pulled back to reveal rows of teeth in a grimace which perhaps emphasizes her protective function. The main attributes of the goddess are the *sa* symbol of protection, the *ankh* symbol of life, and the torch, the flame of which was intended both to dispel darkness and to expel inimical forces. Usually the *sa* symbol is the largest of these attributes and is placed on the ground before the goddess who rests one or both paws upon it. Variants of Taweret include forms of the goddess with the head of a cat or the head of a human woman, as seen in a carved wooden unguent jar in the form of Taweret (or Ipet) but with the features of Queen Tiye. A small faience figure (probably a copy of an 18th-dynasty object) is known of much later – Ptolemaic – date which follows this same form, but with the more pronounced facial features of the Amarna Period.

Worship

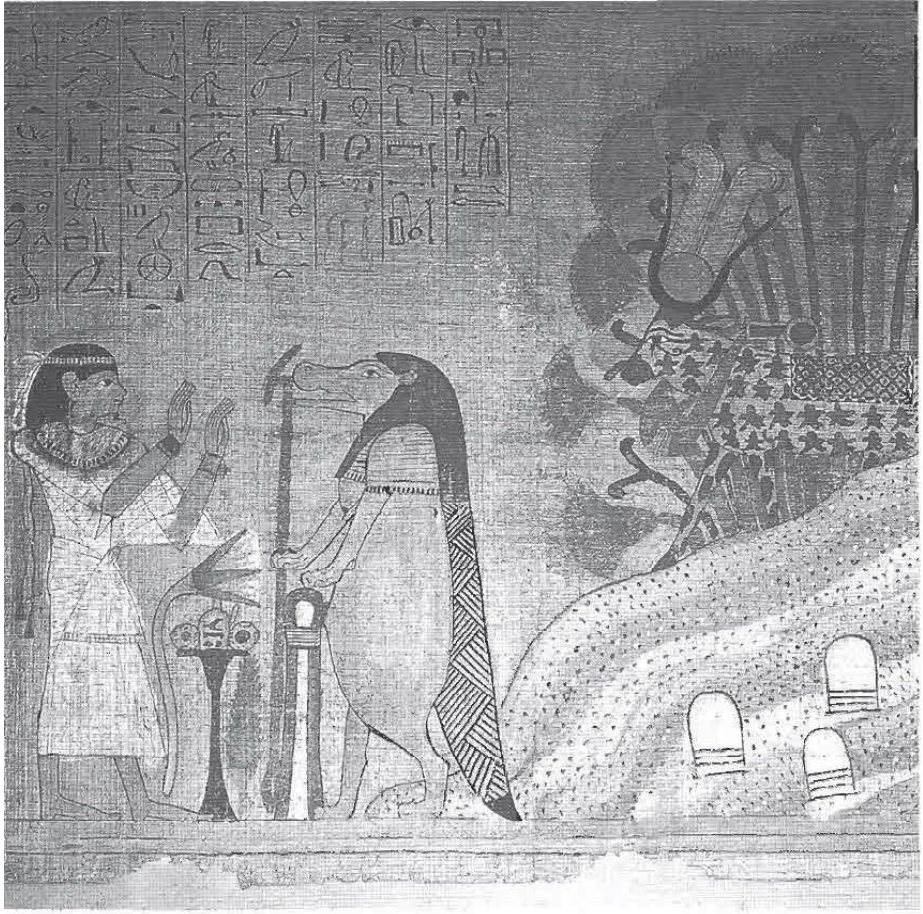
Although she appears in some late temple scenes as a protective deity and there is a temple dedicated to





(Above left) ***Taweret****, 'The Great One', stands with* sa *hieroglyphs of 'protection'. 26th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

(Above) Wooden statuette of Queen Tiye, wife of Amenophis III, in the form of ***Taweret****. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Turin.*



The deceased worships ***Taweret*** *and the goddess Hathor, in bovine form, who emerges from the hill representing the western necropolis of Thebes. The two deities, associated with childbirth and love respectively, and both having ties to the afterlife, were sometimes juxtaposed. Vignette to Spell 186, Book of the Dead of Userhatmose. 19th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

the related goddess Ipet (Opet) at Karnak, Taweret was one of the Egyptian deities who regularly had no formal cult. Nevertheless, judging by the number of images of the goddess that have survived, Taweret appears to have been one of the most popular of Egyptian household deities. The goddess is one of the earliest recognizable apotropaic deities and she is widely represented on amulets from Old Kingdom times onward. She was represented on beds, head-rests and other small items of furniture as well as on cosmetic items such as unguent pots and spoons, and on various items with fertility significance such as the so-called 'paddle dolls'. Faience vases, similar to the small jars in human form which were made to hold mother's milk, were made in the shape of the goddess with pouring holes at the nipples, probably to hold milk for magical use. Interestingly, large numbers of Taweret amulets were found in the excavated houses of Akhenaten's capital at el-Amarna, and Bes and Taweret images decorated some of the rooms there. In a similar manner, some of the houses in the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina in western Thebes contained a room with a bed-shaped altar and wall paintings depicting Bes, Taweret and naked women which may have been associated with childbirth rituals. In her role as a protective deity, Taweret spread as a result of Egyptian trade in the wider Mediterranean world and eventually entered the iconography of Minoan Crete, for example, where her form remains recognizable despite the modification of her role as a goddess of water.

CANINE DEITIES

Egyptian religion embraced a number of canine deities from ancient times. Some of these deities were clearly represented by the wolf while others – such as Anubis himself – were more generic and exhibit qualities of both the dog and the jackal. Regardless of their specific origin, canine deities frequently represent mortuary and afterlife concerns and almost all were eventually associated in some way with the cult of Osiris. In some cases, however, the connection between certain canine deities and the person of the king is clear.



(Above) Early slate palette representing unidentified canid. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago.

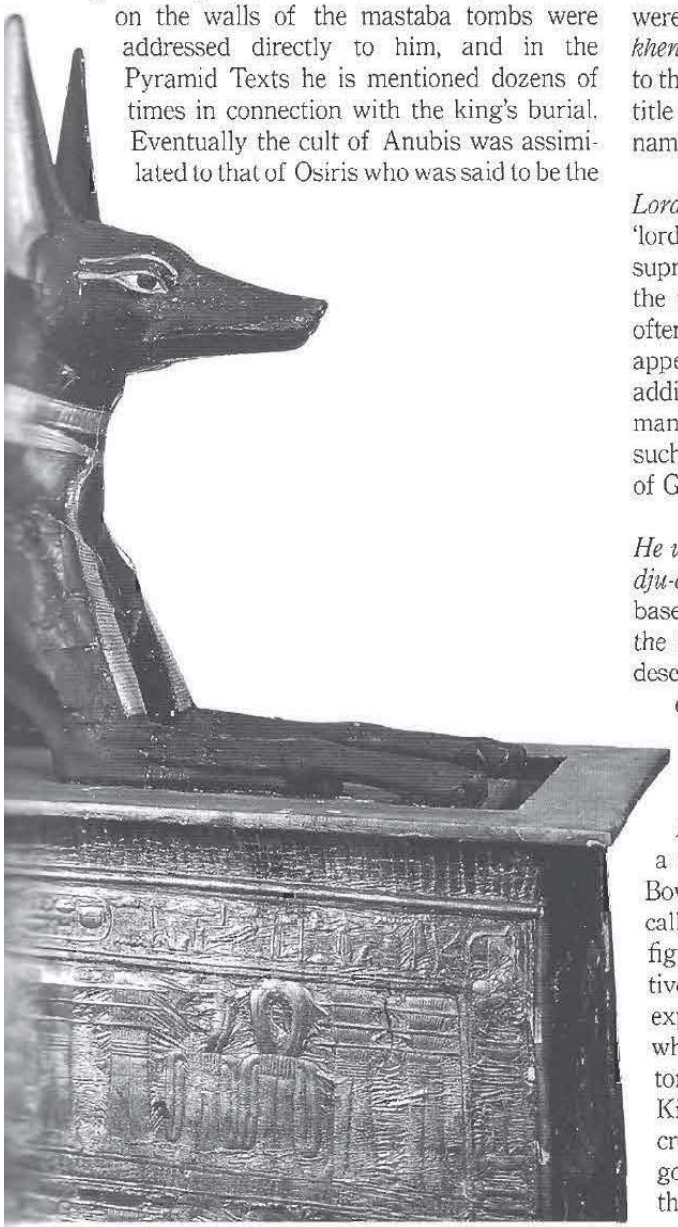
(Right) The ***Anubis*** *animal exhibits features of both the jackal and the dog and may represent a hybrid of the two. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



Anubis

Mythology

Before the rise of Osiris, Anubis was the most important Egyptian funerary god. Originally he appears to have been primarily concerned with the burial and afterlife of the king, though eventually this role was extended to incorporate all the dead. One Egyptian text derives the name of Anubis from a verb meaning 'putrefy', and his name was also linked to a word for 'king's son', perhaps in relation to Osiris, but these are probably later, contrived etymologies, and the original meaning of the name is unsure. The god's association with the dead probably originated in the habit of desert canines scavenging in the shallow graves of early cemeteries, and, as was common in Egyptian protective magic, the form of the threat was then utilized in order to provide protection for the dead. During the Old Kingdom the prayers carved on funerary stelae and on the walls of the mastaba tombs were addressed directly to him, and in the Pyramid Texts he is mentioned dozens of times in connection with the king's burial. Eventually the cult of Anubis was assimilated to that of Osiris who was said to be the father of Anubis who in turn was said to have wrapped the body of the underworld god, thus tying his role in mummification to the worship of Osiris. Differing myths have survived regarding the parentage of Anubis, however. In the Coffin Texts he is the son of the cow goddess Hesat, and also the son of Bastet. According to other stories he was the son of Seth or of Re and Nephthys while Plutarch records the tradition that he was the son of Nephthys but by Osiris and was subsequently adopted by Isis as her own son.



The central, mortuary character of Anubis is well illustrated in the epithets which were given to him. There were many of these, but some of the most frequently used titles of the god summarize much of his essential nature.

Foremost of the westerners: Because the majority of the Egyptians' cemeteries were constructed on the western bank of the Nile – the symbolic direction of the setting sun and the underworld – the deceased were referred to as 'westerners'. Thus, the epithet *khenty-imentiu,* 'foremost of the westerners', refers to the role of Anubis as the leader of the dead. The title was taken from the earlier canine deity of that name that Anubis superseded at Abydos.

Lord of the sacred land: The epithet *neb-ta-djeser* or 'lord of the sacred land' is similar in signifying the supremacy of Anubis over the desert areas where the necropoleis were located. The word *djeser* is often translated pure, so this epithet sometimes appears in translation as 'lord of the pure land'. In addition to this general epithet Anubis also bore many titles relating him to specific areas in Egypt such as 'lord of the White Land', meaning the area of Gebelein.

He who is upon his sacred mountain: Anubis *tepy-dju-ef,* 'who is upon his mountain', is a title probably based on the image of the jackal god watching over the burials of the dead from the heights of the desert cliffs overlooking the necropoleis. The expression was a general one relating to the high desert areas to the west of the Nile rather than any particular mountain.

Ruler of the bows: In the Pyramid Texts there is a reference to 'the Jackal, the Governor of the Bows,...Anubis' (PT 805), which refers to the so-called 'nine bows' – nine ethnically differentiated figures depicted as literal bows or as bound captives who represented the enemies of Egypt. This expression underlies the motif used in the seal which was placed upon the entrances to the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings in the New Kingdom and which showed the figure of Anubis crouching above the nine bows, symbolizing the god's control of evildoers who might endanger the burial or the underworld enemies of the dead.



(Above) ***Anubis*** *attends the mummy of the deceased. Detail, painted sarcophagus. 22nd dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

(Opposite left) ***Anubis*** *in fully anthropomorphic form. 19th dynasty. Temple of Sethos I, Abydos.*

(Opposite right) ***Anubis*** *in his typical hybrid form. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Tawosret, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

He who is in the place of embalming: Anubis *imy-ut* – 'who is in the place of embalming' – specifically referred to the role of Anubis in the embalming process and as master of the *per wabet*, the ritual tent or pavilion where embalming was carried out. Mythologically it was Anubis who embalmed the body of Osiris and the deceased king and who then protected it along with the containers in which the internal organs were preserved – a process known to have been carried out from at least the beginning of the 4th dynasty.

Foremost of the divine booth: The epithet *khenty-sekh -netjer* can symbolically refer to either the embalming booth or the burial chamber, or even to the shrine in which the coffin and sarcophagus were placed in New Kingdom royal burials. The god is often depicted in this role in his zoomorphic form atop funerary chests, and the statue of Anubis seated upon a gilded model shrine which was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun symbolized this epithet specifically.

During the Graeco-Roman Period Anubis was transformed in a number of ways and took up new roles, becoming something of a cosmic deity reigning over the earth and sky and being related to arcane wisdom as the bringer of light to humanity. In his original mortuary role he was also associated with the Greek Hekate and with Hermes Psychopompos who, in Greek mythology, conducted the souls of the deceased to the shores of the River Styx.

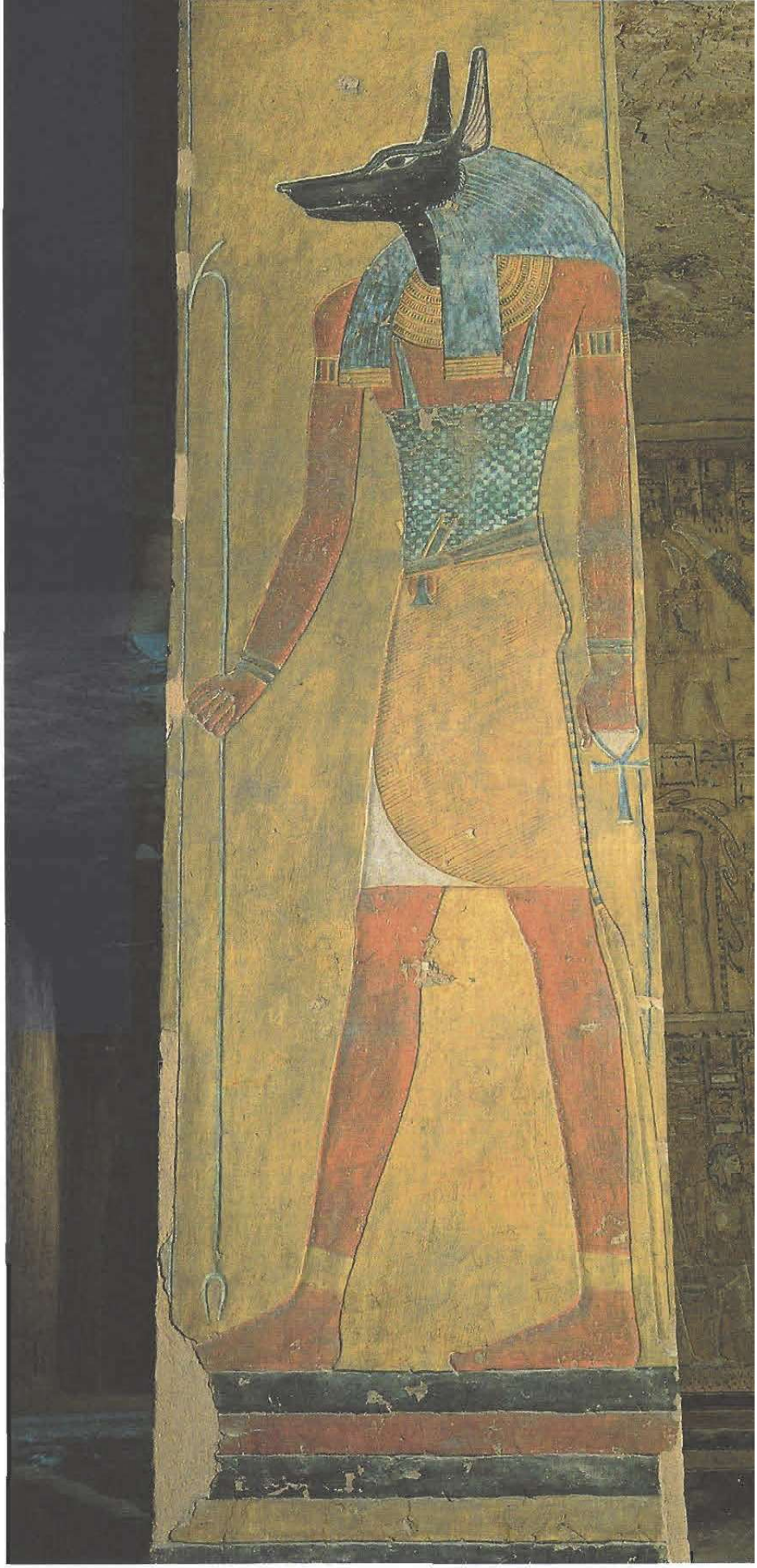
Iconography

The various roles played by Anubis are seen in the iconography and representation of the god. In zoomorphic form, the identity of the animal depicted in representations of Anubis is uncertain, as the term used by the Egyptians for him, *sab*, was used of the jackal and of other canines. The animal bears certain traits of the dog family such as the long muzzle, its round-pupilled eyes, five-toed forefeet and four-toed hind feet, while on the other hand, its



tail is wide and club shaped and characteristically carried down more like that of the jackal, fox or wolf. It is therefore possible that the original Anubis animal was a hybrid form, perhaps a jackal crossed with some type of dog. The black colouring of the animal was certainly symbolic and was connected with the discolouration of the corpse after its preparation for burial and the black colouration of the fertile earth which was itself a symbol of regeneration. In this animal form, Anubis is usually depicted lying on a shrine or simply as if he were doing so, with his ears erect, his legs stretched out before him, and his tail hanging down, vertically, behind him. Often he wears a collar and a ceremonial tie around his neck, and either a *sekhem* sceptre or flail (or both) may be depicted rising from his back.

Anthropomorphically, the god is depicted – with rare fully human exceptions – with the head of the Anubis animal on a human body and sometimes with a tail, though usually without specific items of insignia or other iconographic attributes. He is shown performing the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony on the mummy and statues of the deceased, attending the mummy in the tomb and escorting the spirit of the deceased into the underworld. He is frequently depicted weighing the heart of the deceased against the feather of truth in the presence of Thoth and also leading the deceased before Osiris. His mythical role in protecting Isis at the time of her giving birth to Horus and his relationship with the well-being of the king led to the appearance of Anubis in the *mammisi* or birth-houses of the Graeco-Roman Period. In very late representations, as on the walls of the catacombs of Alexandria, Anubis could be shown dressed in the



armour of a soldier in his protective role and with the lower half of his body in serpent form to reflect some of his later aspects.

Worship

Anubis was the chief deity of the 17th Upper Egyptian nome in Middle Egypt and its capital which the Greeks called Cynopolis or 'city of the dogs' (the modern el-Qeis), but his cult was recognized throughout Egypt and chapels and images of the god occur in mortuary temples and in tombs throughout the pharaonic period. The chapel of Anubis in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri may have given continuity to an earlier shrine of the god in that area and provides an excellent example of the continuing importance of the god long after his assimilation into the cult of Osiris. Because he was said to have prepared the mummy of Osiris, Anubis became the patron god of embalmers, and in the Memphite necropolis an area associated with the embalmers seems to have become something of a focal point for the cult of Anubis in the Late Period and Ptolemaic times and has been termed the Anubeion by modern Egyptologists. Masks of the god are known, and priests representing Anubis at the preparation of the mummy and the burial rites may have worn these jackal-headed masks in order to impersonate the god; they were certainly utilized for processional use as this is depicted representationally and is mentioned in late texts. The many two- and three-dimensional representations of Anubis which have survived from funerary contexts indicate the god's great importance in this aspect of Egyptian religion and amulets of the god were also common. The fragmentary royal annals preserved on the Palermo Stone show that in the Old Kingdom, statues of Anubis, called 'births' of the god, were also made to designate certain years, indicating his importance in yet another way.

Input

Input was the female counterpart of Anubis. Although she did not share the level of importance of her consort, she had her own cult in the 17th Upper Egyptian nome.

Sed

Sed was an ancient jackal-like god who may have been an independent deity or, alternatively, related in some way to the jackal god Wepwawet. The earliest textual attestation of the name Sed is found on the 5th-dynasty Palermo Stone, and he appears as the theophoric element in personal names up through the Middle Kingdom when he appears to be replaced by Wepwawet in this context. This and other evidence suggests the possibility that Wepwawet may have been an epithet of Sed in the same way that the feminine parallel Wepetwawet was an epithet of the goddess Neith, though this is uncertain. In any event, Sed was closely related to kingship ideology, and the ancient Sed festival or jubilee of the Egyptian king is thought to be named



The importance of ***Anubis*** *in ancient Egyptian funerary belief can be seen in the veneration accorded the god throughout much of Egyptian history. Of considerable importance long before the rise of Osiris, Anubis continued to be worshipped until the very end of the pharaonic period. 22nd dynasty. Tomb of Shosheng. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

after this god. Sed was also associated with Maat in certain ways and may have been viewed as a champion of justice similar to Maat herself.

Wepwawet

Mythology

Wepwawet was possibly the oldest of Egypt's jackal gods, being already represented on one of the standards preceding the king on the Narmer Palette at the dawn of Egypt's historical period and attested by name from the 3rd dynasty. The archaeological evidence indicates that the god's origins were probably in the region of Upper Egypt, but his worship soon spread; and in the Pyramid Texts he is even said to have been born in the Lower Egyptian shrine of the goddess Wadjet (PT 1438). Wepwawet translates as 'opener of the ways', but the meaning of the god's name is susceptible to a number of interpretations. Based on the god's frequently attested warlike character, it could refer to the opening of the ways before the king in terms of military conquest. In the context of the 'adze of Wepwawet' which was used in the 'opening of the mouth' ritual, it could also refer to the magical opening of the deceased king's eyes and mouth, and in funerary texts Wepwawet also 'opened the ways' in leading the deceased through the netherworld and the king to ascension (PT 1009). The title could be even understood in a cosmic sense as he is said to open the way for the sun to rise in the sky (PT 455). As 'leader of the gods', the image of Wepwawet went before the king and before other gods in many events and the name could possibly relate to his leading of these ritual processions. Finally, in the Memphite Theology we find the expression 'the opener of the body, Wepwawet', so that as a first-born the god could be seen as the opener of the way of the womb. Wepwawet and Anubis are sometimes confused – even in the ancient texts – but it is clear that they were independent deities. On the other hand, Wepwawet may have been synonymous with the god Sed who was depicted as a canid atop an identical standard in early times. In a less direct manner, Wepwawet was identified with the god Horus and could also be associated with the sun god in the form of Wepwawet-Re.

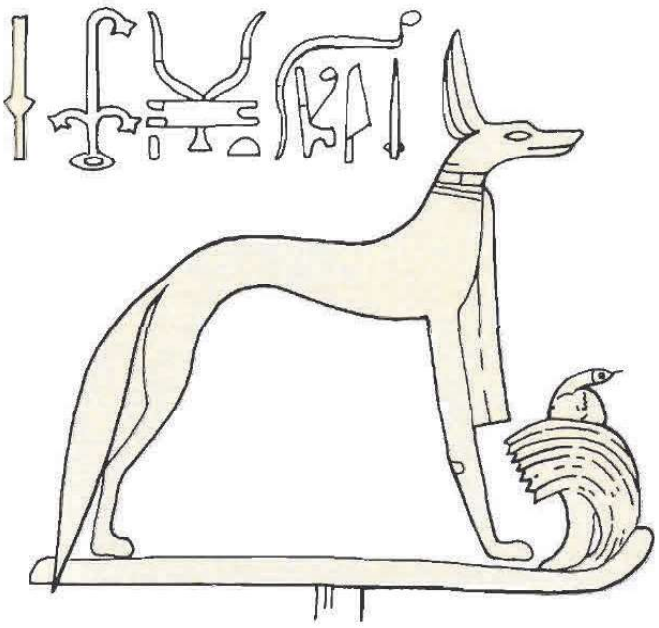
Iconography

Wepwawet was usually depicted in the form of a jackal or other wild canid and occasionally as a jackal-headed man. In zoomorphic form the god may be differentiated from Anubis when colour is present, as Anubis was usually depicted as black and Wepwawet, grey. When standing, the latter animal was also characteristically depicted with its sloping back legs together rather than apart. But as a jackal-headed man the god often appears indistinguishable from Anubis and can then only be differentiated by a naming text, if not by his attributes of mace and bow. In vignettes of the 138th chapter of the Book

King Wepwawetemsaf before ***Wepwawet*** *in hybrid form. Limestone stela from Abydos. 13th dynasty. British Museum.*



Wepwawet *in fully zoomorphic form on his characteristic standard. Detail, relief of Ramesses III.*



of the Dead Anubis and Wepwawet are depicted on either side of a representation of Osiris. As symbols of north and south or east and west are also usually depicted on each side, it seems clear that the two gods could have symbolic orientational significance – with Anubis often being linked to the north and Wepwawet the south. When depicted on his standard, Wepwawet usually has before him a peculiar bolster-like emblem called the *shedshed* which may have represented the royal placenta which was regarded as the king's 'double'.

Worship

In later historical times the major cult centre of Wepwawet was at Asyut in Middle Egypt which was called by the Egyptians Zauty and by the Greeks Lykopolis or 'wolf city'. The god was also venerated at Abydos in connection with Osiris. There Wepwawet went before the ritual funerary procession of the netherworld god, and on funerary stelae from this site it is common for the deceased to wish to 'behold the beauty of Wepwawet during the procession'. The god was also depicted on standards placed before the tomb in some depictions of funerary ceremonies. While infrequently found in expressions of popular veneration, Wepwawet appears in some theophoric names – as in the name of King Wepwawetemsaf of the 13th dynasty.

OVINE DEITIES

Most ovine deities were, in fact, male ram gods and the majority were tied to fairly specific locations. The greatest of these was the god Khnum of the region of Elephantine, though a number of lesser ram-gods enjoyed considerable status in their own areas. Due to the similarity of the onomatopoeic name of the ram '*ba*' and the *ba* spirit, a number of ram gods were worshipped as the *ba* of great gods such as Re or Osiris.

Finely carved limestone head of the curved-horned 'Amun ram' Ovis platyra. *29th dynasty–early Ptolemaic Period, c. 400–200 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*



Banebdjedet

Mythology

An ancient ram god of whom little is known in terms of his origins, Banebdjedet means 'the *ba* Lord of Djedet' (the city of Mendes). Because *ba*, the onomatopoeic word for ram, sounded like the word *ba* meaning spirit or soul, mythologically the god was supposed to have represented the soul of Osiris; and in the Late Period this association was widened to four manifestations – as the soul of Re, Osiris, Shu and Geb – an aspect of his nature which added considerably to his importance. As a ram god Banebdjedet was also credited with strong sexual powers and an account preserved in the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu states that the god Tatenen transformed himself into Banebdjedet in order to copulate with the king's mother so as to become the father of Ramesses. The god also appears in the somewhat later story from the reign of Ramesses V which is preserved in Papyrus Chester Beatty I and which tells the story of the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth'. In this tale Banebdjedet plays an important role in counselling the gods to seek the advice of Neith whose judgment in the dispute is eventually followed. The god was made famous in the writings of the Classical authors, especially the Greek geographer Strabo, the poet Pindar and the Roman historian Diodorus of Sicily.

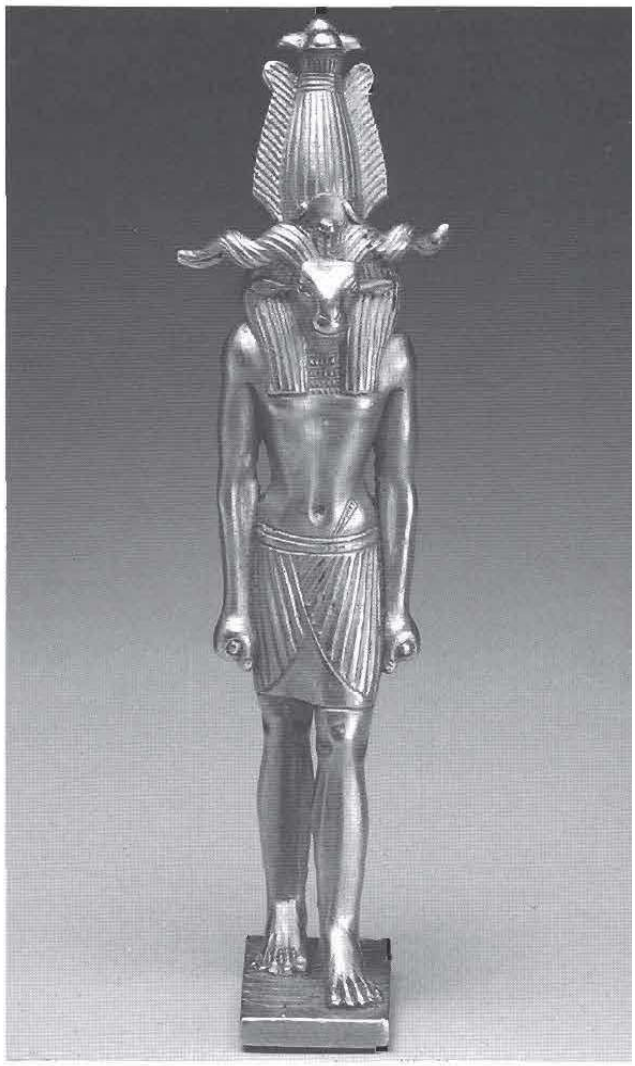
Iconography

Banebdjedet was depicted as either a ram or ram-headed man or, as is sometimes the case, as the head of a ram alone. From New Kingdom times he was often depicted as having four heads – two facing forward and two facing back – to symbolize his various aspects as the souls of the four gods he represented.

Worship

The main cult centre of Banebdjedet was at Mendes (modern Tell el-Rub'a) in the northeast Delta region where the god was worshipped along with his consort, the dolphin or fish goddess Hatmehyt, and his son Harpokrates. A cemetery with the sarcophagi for the burial of the sacred rams of the god has been excavated there, though little else remains of his cult. Although of considerable importance in the Delta region, Banebdjedet tended to be supplanted by other

ram deities in southern Egypt, though the god's mythology demonstrates a wide and lasting veneration. According to the Greek Pindar the ram was scandalously allowed to have intercourse with women in the course of its veneration, though this is not documented in Egyptian sources. Ram-headed amulets of the Late Period may represent this deity, and certainly do when they have four heads to depict the god's quadrapartite nature.



Exquisitely formed votive image of the ram god ***Heryshef*** *from the temple at Ehnasya. 25th dynasty. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

Heryshef

Mythology

The name of the ram god Heryshef – literally 'he who is upon his lake' – has been seen as suggesting a creator god who emerged from the waters of the first primeval lake, but could just as likely refer to a feature such as a sacred lake of the god's main cult centre. The Greek historian Plutarch rendered the god's name as 'Arsaphes', translating the word as 'manliness', though this seems to be based on an apparent etymology suggested by the procreative aspect which was an essential part of the god's nature. To the Greeks Heryshef was Herakles and so his major cult site, the Egyptian Hnes, was named Herakleopolis by them. Mythologically Heryshef became associated with both Osiris and Re and was known as the *ba* of these great gods. He was also associated with Atum who was linked with the sacred 'naret' (perhaps sycamore) tree of Hnes.

Iconography

Heryshef was usually represented as a long-horned ram or a ram-headed man. In zoo-anthropomorphic guise the god was depicted in a kingly pose wearing a royal kilt but with the head of a ram. Due to his association with Osiris, Heryshef was also frequently shown as a ram or a ram-headed man wearing the Atef Crown, and due to his links with Re he was also depicted in both forms wearing the disk of the sun god.

Worship

The main centre of worship for this god was the town of Hnes or Herakleopolis Magna near the modern town of Beni Suef in Middle Egypt. The god's cult is attested at this site as early as the 1st dynasty in the records preserved on the Palermo Stone, and Heryshef is known to have risen to considerable importance during the First Intermediate Period when Hnes served as the capital of northern Egypt – though the earliest temple structures that have been found so far at this cult site date to Middle Kingdom times. The temple of Heryshef was greatly enlarged in New Kingdom times, especially by Ramesses II, and appears to have thrived down to the end of the pharaonic period. In popular religion, Heryshef appears on ivory wands of the Middle Kingdom and is also doubtless the deity represented by many ram or ram-headed amulets of the later periods.

Kherty

Kherty, whose name means 'lower one', was a chthonic deity, a ram-god who inhabited the netherworld and who thus could act as a deity of hostility or protection. The god appears in the Pyramid Texts (PT 1308) where he is said to be the 'chin' of the king among many deities representing the deceased monarch's body, and in the Old Kingdom he was associated with Osiris as a benevolent partner of the underworld god who could aid in protecting the king's tomb. On the other hand, Kherty also exhibited a negative side and it was said that Re himself must protect the king from Kherty's malevolence (PT 350). Kherty was usually depicted as a ram, but may also appear in the form of a bull or a lion, and in any of these forms he could have associations with the sun god Re. Kherty's ovine form also led to his association with

the great ram god Khnum. The god's major cult centre seems to have been at ancient Khem or Letopolis, the modern Ausim, a little to the north of Cairo.

Khnum

Mythology

Khnum was one of Egypt's most important ram gods and was associated with the Nile and with the creation of life. Particularly linked to the first cataract, Khnum was said to control the inundation of the Nile from the caverns of that region, and as a result of this power as well as the inherent procreative power of the ram, the god was viewed as a personification of creative force. His association with the Nile and with its fertile soil perhaps contributed to his portrayal as a potter who was said to have shaped all living things upon his wheel. As a result of his creative ability and because the onomatopoeic word for ram – *'ba'*– was similar to the spiritual aspect or *ba* of living things Khnum was held to be the *ba* of Re. The sun god was thus depicted as a ram-headed being in his netherworld representations – and Khnum himself is sometimes called Khnum-Re. In a similar manner Khnum was also held to be the *ba* of the gods Geb and Osiris. At Esna Khnum was associated not only with the lion goddess Menhyt, but also with the goddess Neith. Khnum's association with the Nile made him 'lord of the crocodiles', probably suggesting his link to Neith who was mother of the chief crocodile god, Sobek. At Elephantine he was the head of a triad including the goddesses Satis and Anukis who were also associated with the same geographic area.

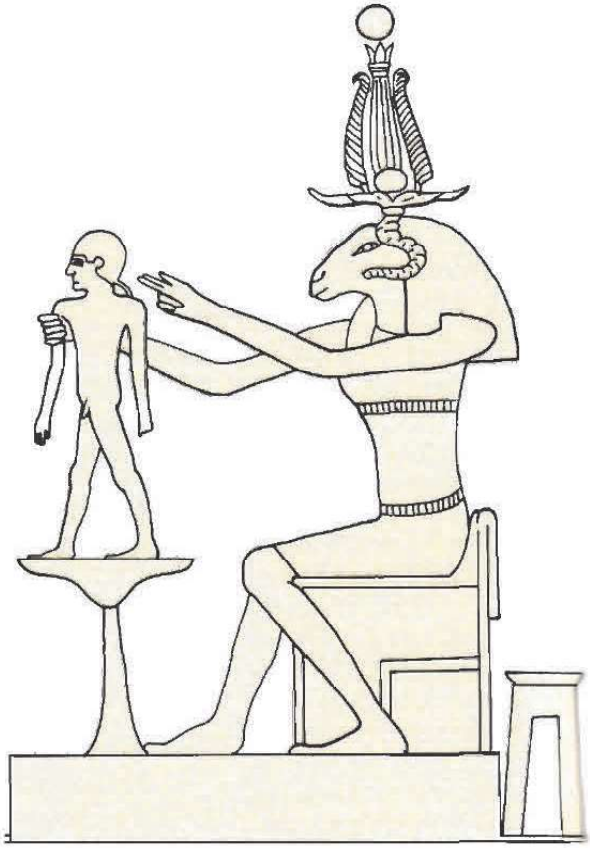
Iconography

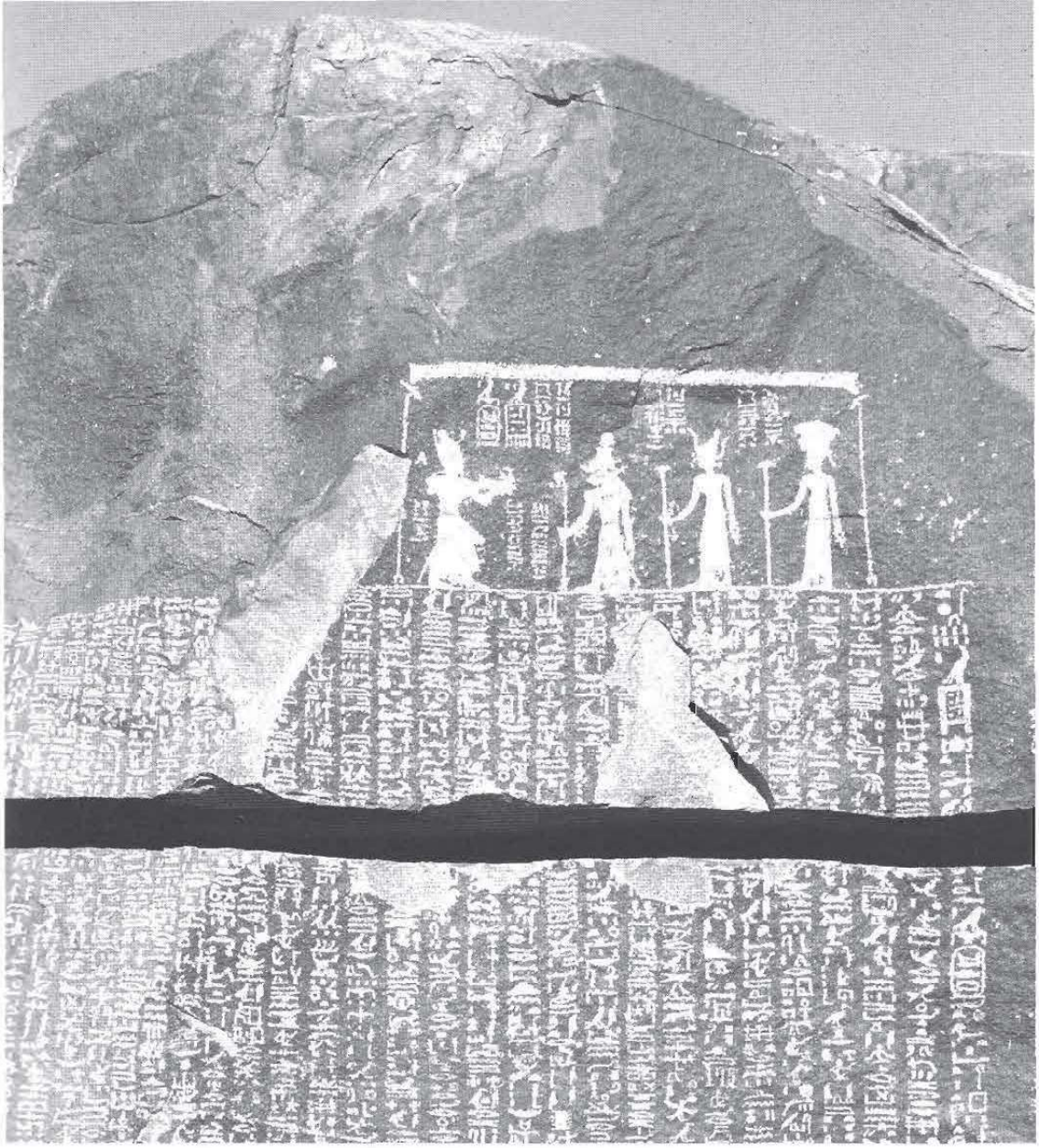
Khnum was most frequently depicted in semi-anthropomorphic form as a ram-headed god wearing a short kilt and a long, tripartite wig. Originally he was depicted with the horizontal, undulating horns of *Ovis longipes*, the first species of sheep to be raised in Egypt, but as time progressed he was also depicted with the short curved horns of the *Ovis platyra* ram (the 'Amun ram') and may thus have two sets of horns atop his head. He was also called 'high of plumes' and may wear two tall feathers, or the plumed Atef Crown, or the White Crown of Upper Egypt on his head. His most distinctive attribute, however, was his potter's wheel, with which he was often depicted moulding a child as a concrete representation of his creative work. This motif was naturally utilized in the mammisi or birth houses of temples where Khnum was shown forming the infant king, but the motif also



The god ***Khnum*** *as a ram-headed man with the undulating horns of the* Ovis longipes *ram. Decorated red sandstone block from a temple wall. 18th dynasty. British Museum.*

(Below) ***Khnum****, as creator, moulds an infant on his potter's wheel.*





The so-called 'Famine Stela' on the island of Sehel near Aswan contains a prayer to ***Khnum****, who is said to have ended a time of famine caused by low Nile floods. Ptolemaic Period.*

appears elsewhere. Khnum may also be depicted in the fully zoomorphic form of a walking ram as in many amulets and pectoral decorations, but these representations are often extremely difficult to distinguish from those of other ram deities such as Heryshef without inscriptional evidence.

Worship

The major cult centre of Khnum was the island of Elephantine at Aswan where he was venerated since early dynastic times. Mummified rams sacred to the god and buried in stone sarcophagi have been discovered there, but little survives of early cult structures. The best preserved temple of the god is that at Esna which, although it only partially survives, provides much information about the god and his cult in the many inscriptions carved on its walls. He was worshipped as the *ba* of Geb at Herwer near the modern town of el-Ashmunein, and as the *ba* of Osiris at Shas-hotep, the modern Shutb near Asyut. Khnum's role as 'potter of mankind' led to his widespread recognition as a god associated with childbirth, but his role as controller of the Nile also deserved veneration, and amulets of the god may have been made with either or both of these powers in mind. The so-called Famine Stela of Sehel Island near the first cataract preserves an appeal to the god at a time of famine caused by seven years of low inundations. The inscription dates to Ptolemaic times, but is a copy or forgery of a text from the time of the 3rd-dynasty king Djoser.

OTHER MAMMALIAN DEITIES

While deities taking bovine, feline, hippopotamine and ovine form represented most of the important mammalian deities of ancient Egypt, a number of more minor gods and goddesses took other animal forms. These were usually represented by actual animals such as the baboon and the desert hare, though the most important exception – the god Seth



The baboon was primarily a solar creature in Egyptian religion – as in the case of these animals depicted worshipping the sun god with Ramesses III at Medinet Habu – or a creature of Thoth. But the baboon could also exhibit a darker side in the form of the aggressive deity Babi.

– seems to have been of imaginary hybrid form and was also a deity of considerable standing.

Babi

Mythology

A fiercely aggressive baboon god known from Old Kingdom times, Babi is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts where he appears as the powerful guardian of the sky. The god's power is linked directly to his sexual potency and aggression, so that his phallus is said to be the doorbolt by which the sky is opened or closed, and is also said to be the mast of the underworld ferryboat. The king aspires to this god's power in the afterlife and is associated with the god directly so that it is said 'The king is Babi, Lord of the night sky, Bull of the baboons' (PT 516). The behaviour of the god is often clearly that of unrestrained aggression; he was said to live on human entrails and to murder unhesitatingly. In PT 1349 he is accused of having stolen the offering of a goddess and he is sometimes identified with Seth, the god of chaos and destruction. Yet despite Babi's vicious nature, his great power could be used to ward off snakes and other harmful creatures and even to control certain inanimate dangers. His virility could also be channelled positively, and in later periods when protective or healing spells associated specific deities with various parts of the body, Babi was the god usually associated with the penis. In the Book of the Dead the deceased seeks to become identified with Babi in the process of his transformation into an eternal son of Osiris.

Iconography

Babi was portrayed in zoomorphic form as a great male baboon with heavy mane and often with a prominent sexual member. In the Pyramid Texts he is specifically described as 'red of ear and purple of hindquarters' (PT 1349); and this colouration is sometimes applied in representations of the god, perhaps to differentiate him from the baboon of Thoth and to help stress his violent nature.

Worship

Although without a formal cult, Babi's appearances in the Pyramid Texts and later 'afterlife books' show his importance as a mythological force in Egyptian religion with spells existing both for protection from the god and for the utilization of his powers. Amulets thought to represent Babi may demonstrate that the god's power was sought both in life and for the afterlife.

Mafdet

Mythology

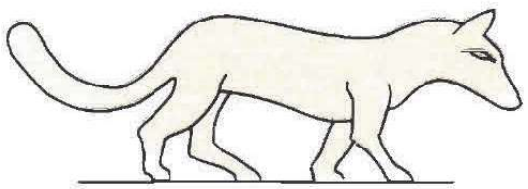
The goddess Mafdet (the meaning of whose name is not clear) was an ancient protective deity, attested from the 1st dynasty, who was associated with a feline or mongoose-like predator whose ferocity was believed to prevail over the attacks of snakes and scorpions. In the Pyramid Texts the goddess protects the sun god Re and also the deceased king from such dangers: 'Mafdet leaps at the neck of the *indief* snake...again at the neck of the serpent with raised head' (PT 438), and the teeth and claws of the Mafdet animal are thus likened to knives and the barbs of harpoons (PT 440–42, 1212) which are said to decapitate her enemies. In Middle Kingdom times Mafdet was depicted on various magical objects as an apotropaic deity, and from this same period she is sometimes paired with the scorpion goddess Hededet in her protective role. Destruction of harmful creatures could also be symbolic of the punishment of wrong doers: in the New Kingdom funerary works Mafdet appears in scenes of the afterlife judgment hall in the capacity of punisher or executioner.

Iconography

The identity of the animal by which Mafdet is usually represented is difficult to ascertain as different types of evidence suggest different possibilities. In some cases a feline predator seems to be intended, but in many others a smaller animal such as the civet, ocelot or ichneumon (the African mongoose) must be meant.

The goddess was also associated with the 'instrument of punishment' (PT 230) perhaps used in executions from very early times. This consisted of a pole, curved at the top, to which a knife was lashed with a length of rope and seems to have been car-

*The symbolic creature of the goddess **Mafdet** was perhaps the African mongoose.*



ried in royal processions as a symbol not unlike the later Roman *fasces* in form or function. In her zoomorphic form as the serpent-killing predator, Mafdet was sometimes shown running up the pole of this instrument. The solar association of the goddess – as protector of Re – led to the representation of the Mafdet animal with a solar disk – and sometimes a uraeus – atop its head.

Worship

Although she had no cult of her own, Mafdet is mentioned in several temple inscriptions – especially of the latest periods – and she was also invoked in magical rituals which utilized her mythological strengths in everyday life. A spell to counter the harmful effect of a demon or ghost that has survived from the 21st dynasty applied the assistance of the goddess in an interesting if somewhat bizarre manner. The spell was to be spoken over a phallus-shaped loaf inscribed with the name of the harmful supernatural being; this was then wrapped in fatty meat and given to a cat – as the animal consumed the magical loaf it was believed that Mafdet herself would destroy the influence of the malevolent power.

Seth

Mythology

Seth seems to have been originally a desert deity who early came to represent the forces of disturbance and confusion in the world. He is attested from the earliest periods and survived until late in the dynastic age, but the history of the god appears as tumultuous as his character. An ivory artifact carved in his distinctive form is known from the Naqada I Period (*c.* 4000–3500 BC), and the god appears on standards carved on the macehead of the protodynastic ruler Scorpion, indicating that he was certainly well established by this time. In the 2nd dynasty the figure of Seth appears on the *serekh* (the device in which the king's name was written) of Peribsen and together with Horus on the *serekh* of Khasekhemwy, indicating an equality at this time with the great falcon god. Yet after this the god seems to have lost some prominence, though in the Old Kingdom his importance is seen in his many appearances in the Pyramid Texts. By the Middle Kingdom Seth was assimilated into solar theology as the god who stood in the bow of the sun god's barque to repel the cosmic serpent Apophis, and was already incorporated into the Heliopolitan Ennead as the son of the sky goddess Nut, and the brother of Osiris, Isis and Nephthys. In the Hyksos Period Seth was identified by the foreign rulers with their own god Baal and rose to great importance as their chief deity. While not as important in the early New Kingdom, in the 19th and 20th dynasties the god was elevated as a kind of patron deity of the Ramessid kings – some of whom bore his name (e.g., Sethos 'man of Seth', and Sethnakhte 'Seth is mighty'). But evidence for Seth declines after the 20th dynasty, and his role as god of the desert and foreign lands led to his association in the later periods with Egypt's hated foreign enemies such as the Assyrians. By the 25th dynasty, in fact, widespread veneration of Seth had virtually ended, yet he remains a fascinating if ominous deity whose character and mythology reflect both negative and positive aspects.



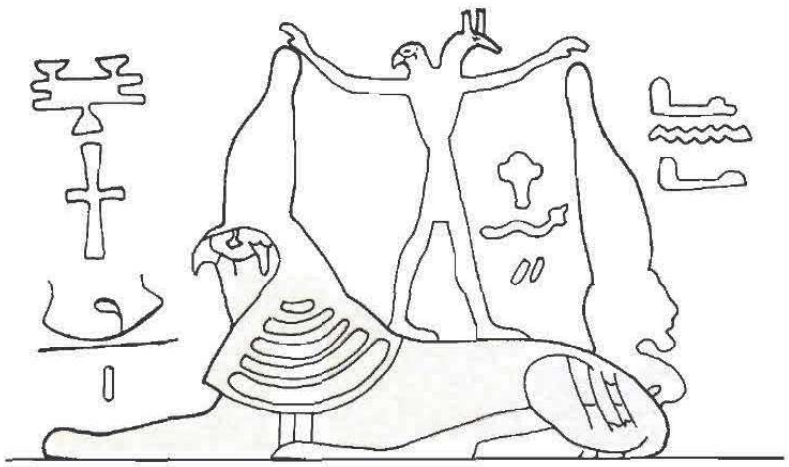
Ramesses III crowned by Horus and ***Seth*** *as the mythical heirs of Lower and Upper Egypt. 20th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

God of violence, chaos and confusion: Seth was the 'Red One', the ill-tempered god who personified anger, rage and violence, and who was often regarded as evil personified. As the god of chaos he opposed the harmony of *maat* (truth) and was a veritable dark side to the fabric of the universe. As a god of the desert or 'Red Land', he opposed and threatened the vegetation upon which life itself depended; and as the inimical foe of Osiris, rightful king of Egypt, he represented rebellion and strife. In Egyptian writing the Seth animal was used as the

determinative sign for many words connoting confusion and chaos at the personal, social and cosmic levels. These aspects are all reflected in Egyptian mythology. An early tradition claimed that at birth he savagely tore himself free from his mother (PT 205), and his mythical relationships are characterized by dispute and violence. According to legend he murdered his brother Osiris and then engaged in a bitter contest – lasting 80 years – with Osiris' son and heir Horus whom Seth challenged for the role of rulership. In this ongoing contest Seth put out the eye of Horus who in turn castrated Seth, doubtless an allusion to the suppression of the sexual power and violence of the god who was associated with rape and unnatural sexual desire. Although his sister Nephthys was said to be his wife, even she left him to become a 'follower of Horus' – as did the hippopotamus goddess Taweret who was also said to be a consort of Seth along with the violent Semitic goddesses Astarte and Anat. In the Pyramid Texts (PT 1521) Seth is also paired with the sometimes belligerent goddess Neith. The god's fearsome character is seen in Egyptian funerary literature of the New Kingdom where he is said to lurk in the netherworld and to seize the soul of the deceased, and his malevolent character was thought to be expressed in this world also: in all kinds of problems and crimes, in sickness and disease, as well as civil unrest and foreign invasion. He was associated with storms and bad weather of all types and was also thought to be the god of the wide, raging sea. Mythologically he could be identified with other malignant Egyptian deities including the great chaos serpent Apophis, and he was identified by the Greeks with their own rebellious god Typhon.

God of strength, cunning and protective power: The character of Seth was not entirely inimical, however, as he was also held to be cunning and of great strength and these qualities could be put to good use. One of his most common epithets was 'great of strength' and his sceptre was said to weigh the equivalent of some 2,000 kg (4,500 lb). He was the lord of metals; iron, the hardest metal known to the Egyptians, was called 'the bones of Seth'. In the Pyramid Texts it is the strength of Seth that the deceased pharaoh claims (PT 1145) and many living kings linked themselves to him. The warrior Tuthmosis III called himself 'beloved of Seth', for example, and Ramesses II is said to have fought like Seth at the great Battle of Kadesh. The strength of Seth is also utilized in representational motifs associated with kingship, as in the scenes carved on the thrones of statues of Senwosret I in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo which show Seth opposite Horus in the *sema-tawy* motif binding the symbolic emblems of the two halves of the land. Here the strength of the god as well as his juxtaposition with Horus is implicit in the scene. Even the gods utilized this god's help. Thus, although Seth could be identified with the chaos serpent Apophis, he also was the sun god's defender against the same monster, and a partially preserved myth tells how the strength and cunning of Seth were used to save the goddess Astarte from the baleful sea god Yam who had demanded her as tribute. Seth could also protect and help in other, more mundane ways. A diplomatic text which tells of Ramesses II's marriage to a Hittite princess explains how the king prayed to Seth to mitigate the severe weather conditions which were obstructing the princess's journey to Egypt, and the god's help was similarly sought by many common people for protection or the removal of adverse conditions.

Despite their inimical characters, the reconciled ***Seth*** *and Horus may be depicted as a combined deity with the heads of both gods.*



Iconography

Seth was originally depicted as an animal with a curved head, tall square-topped ears, and erect arrow-like tail. In the earliest clear examples of the creature it is depicted standing, though later representations often show it in a seated or crouching stance. The god's importance is clear in his representations. A 12th-dynasty pectoral now in the Myers Museum of Eton College shows the Seth animal in this representational form, in juxtaposition with the god Horus as emblems of the two kingdoms. The close association between Seth and the rulers of the Ramessid dynasties is also seen in monuments such as the statue in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo which depicts the crouching god overshadowing and protecting a king in exactly the same manner in which other monarchs were portrayed beneath the figure of the Horus falcon. The seated Seth animal appeared on the standard of the 11th Upper Egyptian nome – in later times impaled with a knife to counteract any potential harmfulness of the image. There are also scenes showing the sun god's barque being towed by Seth animals instead of the customary jackals.

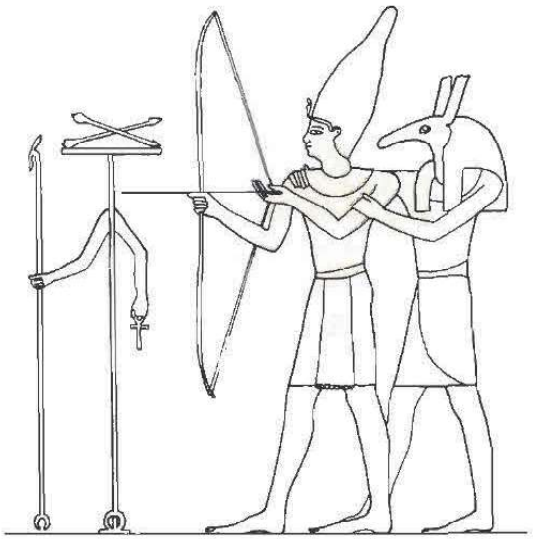
As time progressed Seth was also represented in semi-anthropomorphic form as a man with the head of the Seth animal, and this form of his iconography is particularly common in New Kingdom times. Images and amulets of the god sometimes show him wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt, or the

Double Crown of all Egypt which he claimed as his own. He may also be shown fused with Horus as a two-headed deity – symbolically binding the rulership of Upper and Lower Egypt. In the later periods sculptural representations of the god in this aspect were often changed into the form of more acceptable deities such as Thoth. Yet in some areas where his worship persisted the image of Seth was utilized until relatively late times. In the temple of Hibis in the el-Kharga Oasis the god is represented as a winged figure slaying the serpent Apophis, a depiction which some scholars believe may have provided the original inspiration for the Christian motif of St. George and the dragon. In addition to the Seth creature itself, a number of animals such as the antelope, ass or donkey, goat, pig, hippopotamus, crocodile, and certain fish were all regarded as symbolically noxious by the ancient Egyptians, so the god Seth could also be represented in the guise of any of these abhorred creatures. Sometimes such animals are used as visual circumlocutions for the god, just as in written texts he is often referred to indirectly as 'Son of Nut' rather than by name. In the first millenium BC, in fact, the Seth animal disappeared from art and writing, and the god was most frequently depicted as an ass with a knife in its head to render it harmless.

Worship

Despite the odious character of Seth, the god received considerable veneration in the course of Egyptian history. Even apart from those periods in which he was elevated to a special position, Seth had cult centres in various areas and particularly in Upper Egypt where he was often regarded as a patron deity of the region, symbolically balancing Horus in Lower Egypt. The earliest cult centre of the god was perhaps at ancient Nubt, the Greek Ombos, some 30 km (19 miles) north of Luxor, at the entrance to the Wadi Hammamat which controlled trade to the eastern desert regions, and it was in this area that Seth was said to have been born. He was particularly venerated in the 5th, 10th, 11th and 19th Upper Egyptian nomes, but Seth was also venerated in Lower Egypt, however, and especially in the area of the 14th nome which lay on Egypt's northeastern frontier. A cult centre of the god also existed in the royal city of Pi-Ramesses in the Delta.

Although not an aspect of the veneration of the god, the sacrifice or destruction of various Sethian animals was part of the religious activity which surrounded him. From early times a red ox representing Seth was sacrificially slaughtered, and a similar ritual of 'strangling the desert bird' is also known. Perhaps the most important rituals of this type involved the hippopotamus, and as early as the 1st dynasty there is evidence for the royal hippopotamus hunt in which, in its developed form, the king hunted and destroyed a wild hippopotamus as a symbol of the victory of Horus over Seth. The destruction of the hippopotamus became especially important in the later periods when widespread veneration of Seth had virtually ended.



*The god **Seth**, in his role as a martial deity, teaches Tuthmosis III the use of the war-bow. 18th dynasty. Detail of a relief, Karnak.*

Amulets of the god are not common, though some which are extant are finely made and were probably worn in life. Seth was frequently invoked or mentioned in magical spells, however, where his power was utilized against other inimical deities or against conditions which were relevant to the god's own mythology. Overall, however, for many Egyptians – over much of Egypt's history – Seth seems to have remained an ambivalent deity at best. Wax models were made of the god and then thoroughly destroyed in order to combat his influence, and in the Egyptian calendar the birthday of Seth was regarded as a particularly unlucky day.

Thoth

see p. 215, *Avian Deities* section

Wenet

Wenet was the patron goddess of the area of Wenu – later Hermopolis Magna – and the surrounding 15th Upper Egyptian nome. Known as 'the swift one', her sacred animal was the desert hare and the goddess was depicted as a hare, as a woman with a standard bearing a recumbent hare on her head, or even with a human body and the head of a hare. According to Plutarch the Egyptians venerated the hare on account of its swiftness and keen senses, but the animal's form was also taken by certain underworld deities and at the same time Wenet was sometimes depicted in the form of a snake, a creature with clear chthonic associations. Amulets made in the shape of the hare may have related to some aspect of the creature's nature or may have been symbolic of this goddess. Wenet's male counterpart, Wenenu, was sometimes identified as a form of Osiris or Re.

Avian Deities



Re in the form of a ram-headed falcon, and associated with Osiris, flanked by the mourning Isis and Nephthys as birds of prey. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Siptah, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.

FALCON DEITIES

From the very earliest times the falcon seems to have been worshipped in Egypt as representative of the greatest cosmic powers. According to this view, the eyes of the soaring bird were the sun and the moon and the speckled feathers of its underside were perhaps seen as the stars. Many falcon gods existed throughout Egypt, however, and only as time progressed were a good number of these assimilated to Horus, the most important of the group. The falcon also became important as a symbol of the king and as a god of kingship from early dynastic times.

Dunanwi

Mythology

Dunanwi (Egyptian for 'he who stretches out the claws'), god of the 18th Upper Egyptian nome, may have originally been a divinity in feline or other form, but was certainly known in the aspect of the falcon for most of Egyptian history. In the Pyramid Texts Dunanwi appears in several contexts, including that of the purification ritual in which the god represents the east in accompanying Thoth, Horus and Seth who together personify the four cardinal points (PT 27, etc.). From the end of the Old Kingdom, however, Dunanwi seems to have been assimilated with the falconiform god Nemty and is known only in that form thereafter. The falcon god Dunawi – 'he who stretches out the arms [wings]' – mentioned in the Coffin Texts (CT VI 126) appears to be a later form of the same god. Like most other local falcon gods, Dunanwi was also assimilated to Horus and, because his nome was adjacent to that of Anubis (the 17th Upper Egyptian nome), he appears in the Late Period as the combined Horus-Anubis.

Iconography

As depicted on the standard of his nome, the falcon god stands atop the standard's pole, often with wings outstretched. In some representations the bird's own wings are clearly extended, while in others the falcon appears to have a second set of wings which are stretched in addition to those folded over its back.

Worship

The repeated mention of Dunanwi in the Pyramid Texts might indicate at least a fairly wide level of recognition of the god in early times, but after his assimilation with Nemty and eventually with Horus, his veneration was mainly limited to that of a local god of his own nome.

Horus

Mythology

Horus was one of the earliest of Egyptian deities. His name is attested from the beginning of the Dynastic Period and it is probable that early falcon deities such as that shown restraining the 'marsh dwellers' on the Narmer Palette represent this same god. The Turin Canon, which provides some of our most important information on Egypt's early history, specifically describes the Predynastic rulers of Egypt as 'Followers of Horus'. But Horus appears in many forms and his mythology is one of the most extensive of all Egypt's deities. The following represent only the god's most significant aspects – and each subsumes a number of forms of the deity.

Sky god: This is the original form of Horus as 'lord of the sky' which preceded all others. The Egyptian word *her* from which the god's name is derived means 'the one on high' or 'the distant one' in reference to the soaring flight of the hunting falcon (if not a reference to the solar aspect of the god). Mythologically, the god was imagined as a celestial falcon whose right eye was the sun and left eye the moon. The speckled feathers of his breast were probably the stars and his wings the sky – with their downsweep producing the winds. It was in this form that Horus was apparently worshipped at some of Egypt's earliest sites such as Hierakonpolis and in which Horus assimilated a number of other local falcon gods.

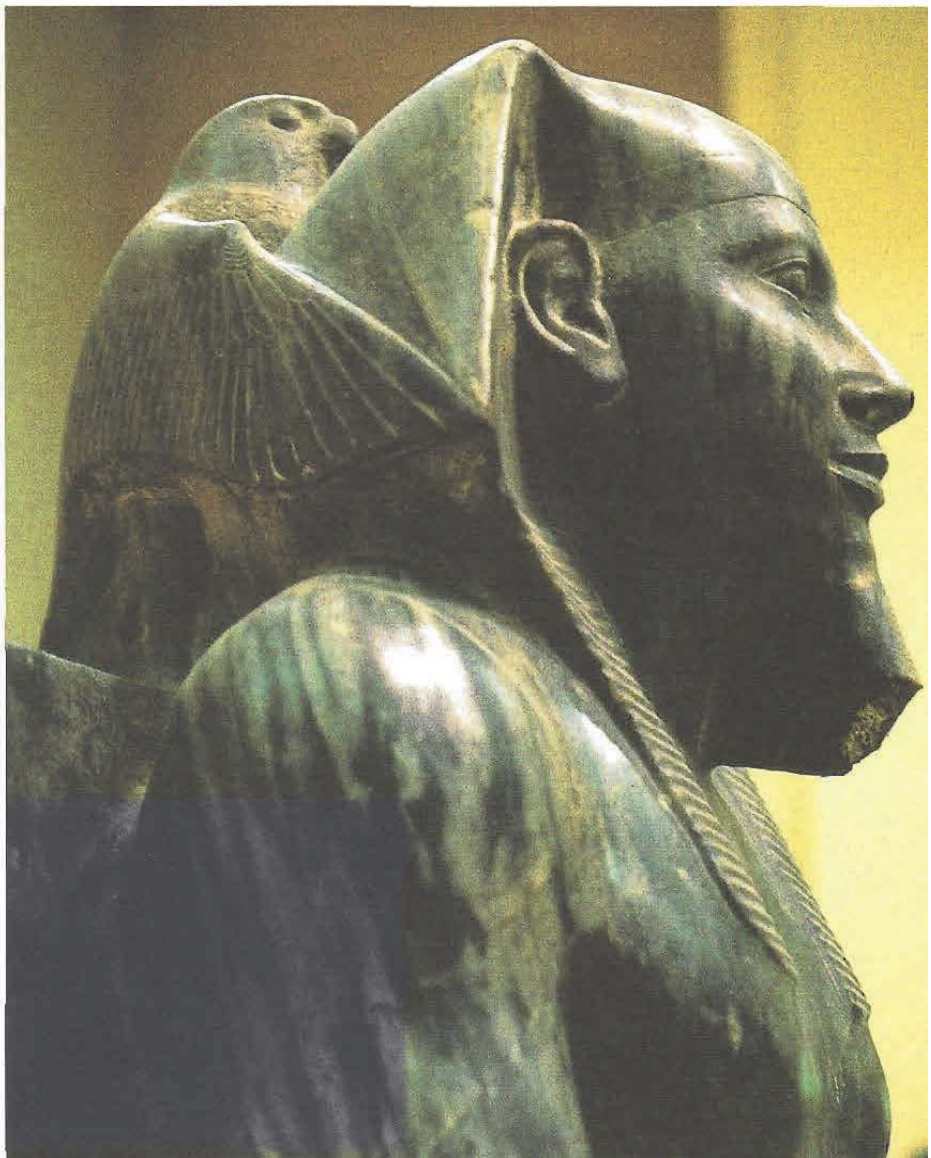


(Left) Golden head of an image of the ***Horus*** *falcon with polished obsidian eyes. From Hierakonpolis, one of the earliest cult centres of Horus. 6th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

the Osirian family in very different form – as a divine infant.

God of kingship: Horus was directly linked with the kingship of Egypt in both his falconiform aspect and as son of Isis. From the earliest Dynastic Period the king's name was written in the rectangular device known as the *serekh* which depicted the Horus falcon perched on a stylized palace enclosure and which seems to indicate the king as mediator between the heavenly and earthly realms, if not the god manifest within the palace as the king himself. To this 'Horus name' of the monarch other titles were later added, including the 'Golden Horus' name in which a divine falcon is depicted upon the hieroglyphic sign for gold, though the significance of this title is less clear. The kingship imagery is found in the famous statue of Khafre seated with the Horus falcon at the back of his head and in other similar examples. As the son of Isis and Osiris Horus was also the mythical heir to the kingship of Egypt, and many stories surrounding his struggle to gain and hold the kingship from the usurper Seth detail this aspect of the god's role. Harwer (Haroeris) 'Horus the Elder' was the mature god represented in these stories who battles the typhonic Seth for 80 years until the tribunal of the gods finally awards him his rightful place on the throne of all

(Below) The ***Horus*** *falcon, as tutelary deity, protects King Khafre. Detail, one of 23 statues from the valley temple of Khafre. 4th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



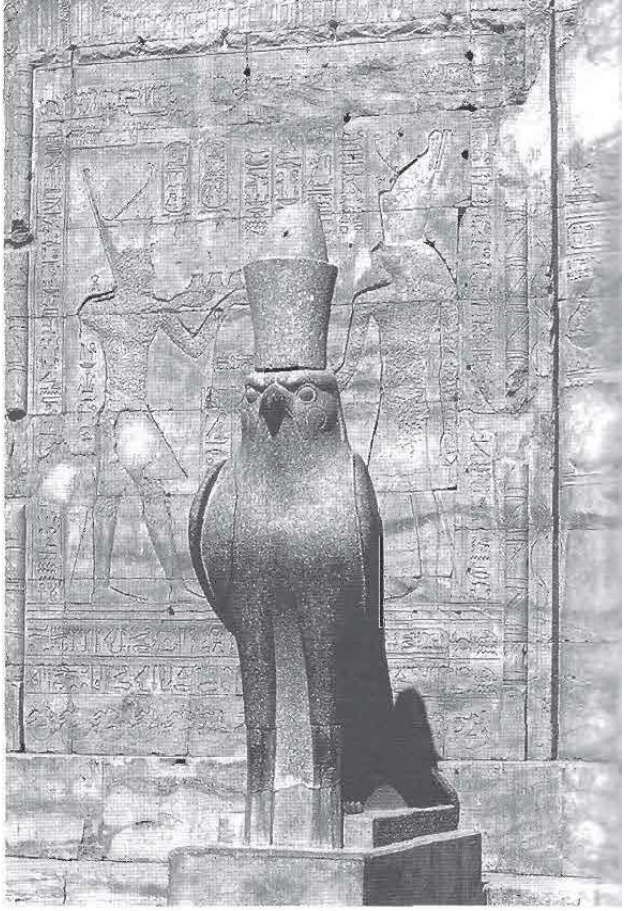
Sun god: As a natural outgrowth of his role as cosmic sky god Horus was also venerated more specifically as a solar god. An ivory comb of the 1st-dynasty king Den depicts a falcon in a boat riding on outstretched wings suggesting the falcon traversing the sky as the sun god. The Pyramid Texts specifically refer to Horus in solar terms as 'god of the east' and he appeared in at least three forms in this guise. As Horakhty or 'Horus of the two horizons' Horus was the god of the rising and setting sun, but more particularly the god of the east and the sunrise, and in the Pyramid Texts the deceased king is said to be reborn in the eastern sky as Horakhty (PT 4). Eventually, Horakhty was drawn into the sun cult of Heliopolis and fused with its solar god as Re-Horakhty. As Behdety or 'he of [the] *behdet*', Horus was the hawk-winged sun disk which seems to incorporate the idea of the passage of the sun through the sky. As Hor-em-akhet (Harmachis) or 'Horus in the horizon', Horus was visualized as a sun god in falcon or leonine form. By New Kingdom times, the Great Sphinx of Giza – originally a representation of the 4th-dynasty king Khafre – was interpreted as an image of Hor-em-akhet.

Son of Isis: Horus also came to be worshipped as the son of Osiris and the goddess Isis (see Male Child Deities), though either this god was originally a separate deity with whom the ancient falcon god was fused, or the falcon deity was incorporated into

Egypt. Finally, as Har-mau or Harsomptus, 'Horus the Uniter', Horus fulfills this role of uniting and ruling over Egypt, though he is sometimes identified as the son of Horus the Elder and Hathor in this role – as at Edfu and Kom Ombo – and called by the name Panebtawy 'Lord of the Two Lands'.

Iconography

In his original avian form Horus was depicted as a falcon (probably the lanner – *Falco biarmicus* – or peregrine – *Falco peregrinus*) shown two-dimensionally in profile except for the tail feathers which were turned towards the viewer according to the canons of Egyptian composite perspective. Early examples sometimes show the falcon leaning forward in a lateral position but the upright stance became standard as time progressed. Sometimes the falcon is shown in direct association with the Seth animal or one of his symbols – especially in the Late Period – as in the nome sign of the 16th Upper Egyptian nome where the falcon is depicted with its talons sunk into the back of an oryx – an ancient symbol of Seth. As the hawk-winged Behdety, the god became one of the most widespread images in Egyptian art, an image perhaps foreshadowed in the comb of Den (see above), and which became virtually ubiquitous as a motif used in the decoration of temple walls and stelae throughout Egypt. In the form of Horakhty he may appear as a falcon or even as a falcon-headed crocodile, and in fully anthropomorphic form Horus appears as an adult god or more usually as a child – the son of Isis. But it is in the combined zoo-anthropomorphic form of a falcon-headed man that the god most frequently appears, often wearing the Double Crown signifying his kingship over all Egypt.



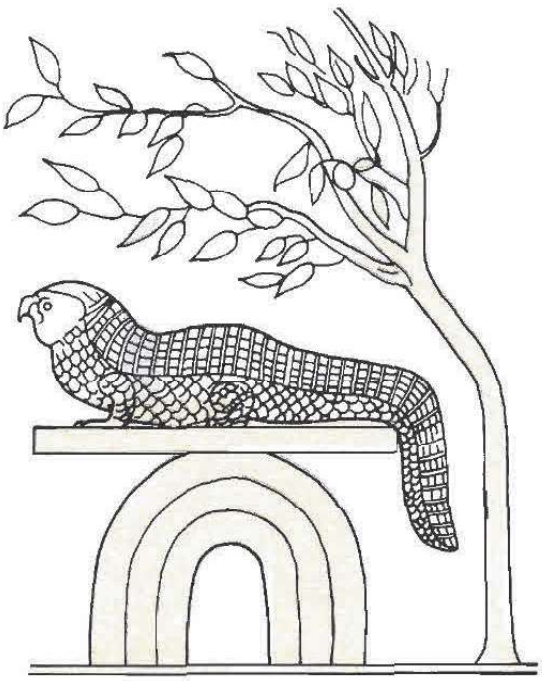
(Right) Colossal granite statue of the ***Horus*** *falcon wearing the Double Crown of Egyptian kingship. Ptolemaic Period. Temple of Horus, Edfu.*

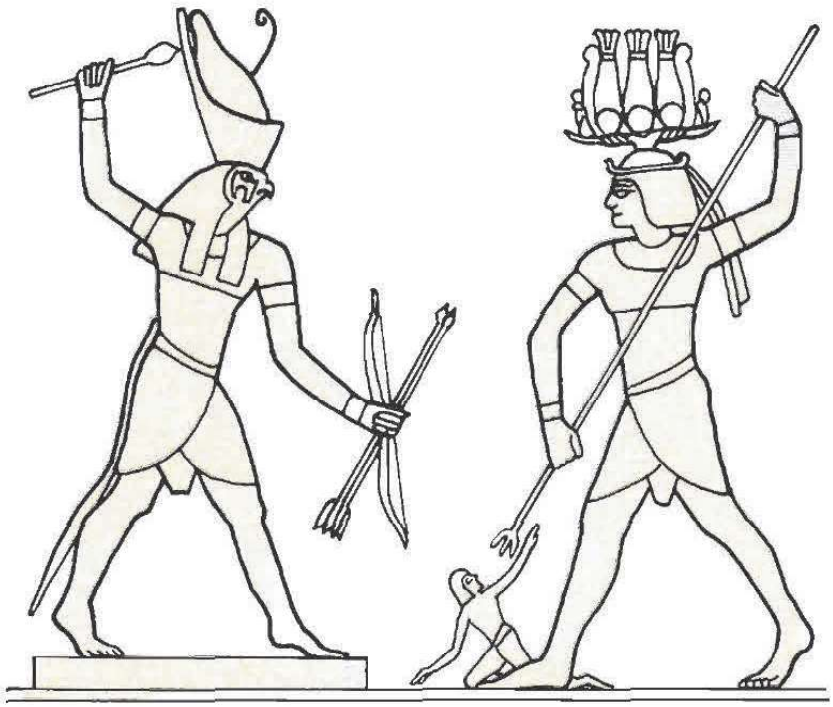
(Below) Falcon-crocodile god embodying aspects of ***Horus*** *and certain other deities. This hybrid god was worshipped in several areas of Egypt and Nubia. After Champollion,* Monuments de l'Egypte et de la Nubie, *1845.*

(Below right) Ptolemy VIII destroys a captive before ***Horus-Behdet****. Ptolemaic Period. Temple of Horus, Edfu.*

Worship

Because Horus was worshipped in many forms – and because he assimilated many other gods – it is difficult to summarize the sites associated with his worship effectively. It is clear, for example, that Horus was associated with the area of Nekhen in southern Egypt (the Greek Hierakonpolis or 'City of the Hawk') from very early times, and it seems likely





that the god was in fact the falcon deity worshipped there since the predynastic period. But Horus was worshipped along with other deities in many Egyptian temples, and important sites of his worship are known from one end of Egypt to the other. For example, in the north, the falcon god was particularly venerated in the Delta at the ancient site of Khem (the Greek Letopolis and modern Ausim) since at least the beginning of the Old Kingdom and was known there as Horus Khenty-irty or Khenty-khem, 'Foremost One of Khem'. Chapter 112 of the Book of the Dead tells how the Delta city of Pe (the historical Buto) was given to Horus as compensation for his eye which was injured by Seth, thus explaining this important centre of the god and the site of Behdet also became a centre of Horus worship in the Delta. In southern Egypt Horus enjoyed the attentions of his own cult along with his consort Hathor and their son Harsomptus in the important Ptolemaic temples at Edfu and also at Kom Ombo. At Edfu, the god's many ceremonies included the annual Coronation of the Sacred Falcon at the beginning of the 5th month of the Egyptian year in which an actual falcon was selected to represent the god as king of all Egypt, thus uniting the ancient falcon god with his form as Horus son of Osiris and with the king. Further south, in Nubia, we find temples to forms of the god at Quban (Horus of Baki), Buhen, and Aniba (Horus of Miam) as well as the inclusion of the god in many other monuments – as at Abu Simbel and elsewhere. As the object of popular veneration throughout Egypt Horus was often represented by amulets depicting him either in the form of a falcon or as a falcon-headed man (in either case often wearing the Double Crown). His widespread veneration is also seen in the many healing plaques or *cippi* which aimed to utilize his power.

Khenty-irty

Khenty-irty was a falcon god of Khem or Letopolis (modern Ausim), the capital of the second Lower Egyptian nome. Originally worshipped as Khenty-khem ('foremost of Khem'), the falcon god was eventually assimilated by Horus during the Old Kingdom. The meaning of his name Khenty-irty has been explained in different ways but may mean 'sharp-eyed one'. Like Khenty-khety, this god's veneration was mainly localized around his cult centre.

Khenty-khety

The god Khenty-khety was a local deity of the Lower Egyptian area of Kem-wer or Athribis (modern Tell Atrib). In the Old Kingdom he was largely absorbed by Horus and as a result was frequently called Horus Khenty-khety. Also called Horus Khenty-khai or Hor-merty, the god was usually depicted as a falcon-headed man, often holding two eyes representing the sun and moon, but he could also be depicted as a crocodile due to his early assimilation of the indigenous deity of that form. Although found beyond it, he was mainly venerated in his central cult area.

Montu

Mythology

Montu was the falcon-headed war god venerated in Thebes and its surrounding areas. Although he appears in the Pyramid Texts and in some archaeological contexts of Old Kingdom date, it was with the Theban rulers of the 11th dynasty that Montu rose to importance. Three rulers of this dynasty bore the birth name Montuhotep or 'Montu is content', and the god became a deity of national standing worshipped in his own right and also associated with Horus under the name 'Horus of the strong arm'. As the Middle Kingdom progressed, Montu also began to be viewed as an Upper Egyptian counterpart of Re of Heliopolis, due perhaps to the similarity of the name of his cult centre, Iuny, with that of Iunu or Heliopolis, and the two deities were worshipped as the combined Mont-Re. The god was thus later equated by the Greeks with Apollo. During the 12th dynasty, however, Montu's importance began to wane as the god Amun rose to power in the Theban area. Nevertheless, the war god's popularity continued with martially vigorous rulers of the New Kingdom such as Tuthmosis III and others who compared themselves to him as heroes who fought 'like Montu in his might'. Montu's consorts were the little-known Theban goddess Tjenenyet and the solar goddess Raettawy.

Iconography

Montu was represented in a number of ways. Originally a falcon god, other forms were applied to him as time progressed. A ceremonial axe from the burial



Tuthmosis IV slays an Asiatic captive before the martial deity ***Montu****, who holds a* khepesh *sickle-sword and a symbol of the king's long reign. Ivory wrist ornament. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Berlin.*



*The god **Montu** 'Lord of Thebes', with characteristic solar disk and twin plumes, escorts the 'pharaoh' Alexander the Great and offers him life. Relief scene in the inner area of Luxor Temple.*

of the 18th-dynasty queen Ahhotep depicts Montu in the form of a ferocious winged griffin, but this iconography was possibly influenced by Syrian sources, since most representations of the god show him in semi-anthropomorphic form with a human body and the head of a falcon. Sometimes he carries the curved *khepesh* sword as a symbol of his warlike nature. Montu usually wears the sun disk and uraeus but is distinguished from Re and other falcon deities by the two tall plumes which also adorn his head. When depicted in fully falcon form, the god is also identified by this headdress. Montu could also be represented in the form of his sacred bull, the Buchis (see p. 172), or occasionally in the later dynasties as a bull-headed man.

Worship

The main cult centres of Montu were all in the Theban region and included four important temple sites: Medamud, where a sanctuary established by Senwosret III was expanded during the New Kingdom when it was linked to Thebes by a canal, and further expanded in the Graeco-Roman Period; Karnak, where Montu had his own temple precinct to the north of the Great Temple of Amun; Armant, where the god's most important sanctuary – no longer in existence – was located; and Tod, where temples were built in the Middle Kingdom and also New Kingdom and Graeco-Roman times. It was in the Middle Kingdom temple at this last site that the rich 'Tod treasure' consisting of chests of items dedicated to Montu was found in 1936. Amulets were made of the god in the later periods and sometimes these took the form of four falcon-headed deities side by side - representing the 'four Montus' of the four Theban area sites.

Nemty

Mythology

The god Nemty (previously read as Anti) was an ancient falcon deity (Egyptian 'wanderer') whose cult was assimilated from quite early times into that of the god Horus. Nemty may also be associated with two other falcon gods mentioned in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts respectively: Dunanwi and Dunawi. The Coffin Texts characterize Nemty as supervising the *henu* boat of the falcon deity Sokar, and in later texts he appears as the ferryman who transports Re and other gods. A late Egyptian myth preserved in the Ptolemaic Period Papyrus Jumilhac relates how the head of the cow goddess Hathor was cut off by Nemty – an act reminiscent of that perpetrated by Horus against Isis in the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth'. Nemty was flayed of his skin and flesh for this crime, which appears to be an etiological story explaining why the worshippers of Nemty in the 12th Upper Egyptian nome constructed their cult image of silver – the metal associated with the bones of the gods – rather than the usual gold of which the flesh and skin of the gods was said to be formed.

Iconography

Nemty is usually depicted as a falcon squatting on a curved, stylized boat which resembles a lunar crescent or even a throw stick in its simplicity. On the standard of the 18th Upper Egyptian nome, however, the boat does not appear; and in the form of Dunanwi, the god stands atop the standard's pole

with wings outstretched. His association with Horus means that the god could indirectly be associated with Seth and, as a result, Nemty is known to have been depicted with the head of Seth on at least one occasion.

Worship

Nemty was predominantly worshipped in the 10th, 12th and 18th Upper Egyptian nomes (the capital of the 12th nome was *per nemty* 'the house of Nemty'), and was of some importance in the regions between and adjacent to these Middle Egyptian provinces on the east bank of the Nile. The god is found as a theophoric element in personal names in the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom, but his assimilation to Horus doubtless eroded his importance as time progressed.

'Hail to you, Re, perfect each day,
Who rises at dawn without failing...
In a brief day you race a course,
Hundreds, thousands, millions of miles.'

Litany of Re II 87

Mythology

The sun god Re was arguably Egypt's most important deity. Though possibly not as old as the falcon god Horus, Re was an ancient deity who coalesced with many other solar and cosmic gods through time while retaining his own position. At an early date he seems to have merged with the falcon god becoming Re-Horakhty as the morning sun, and with Atum as the evening sun. In the Book of the



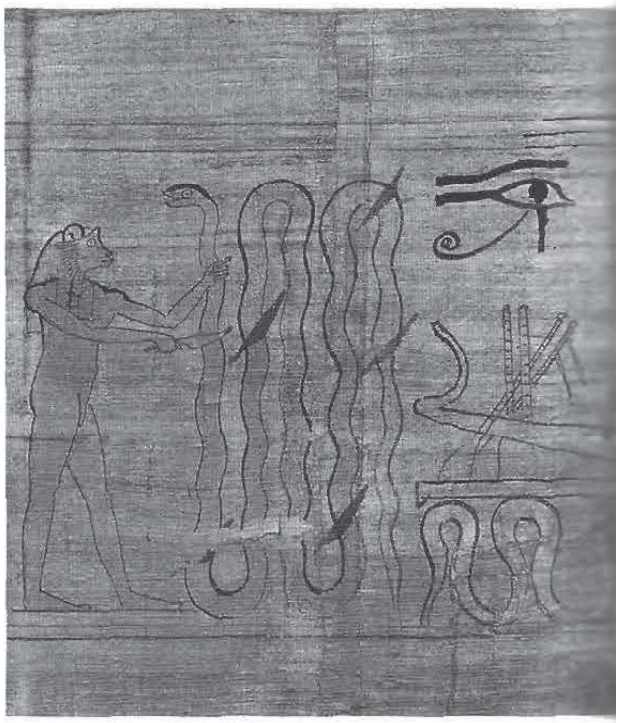
The deceased worships before a form of the sun god ***Re*** *(left) above a register depicting tombs of the Theban necropolis. Stela of Djedamuniu(es)ankh, from western Thebes. 22nd dynasty, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

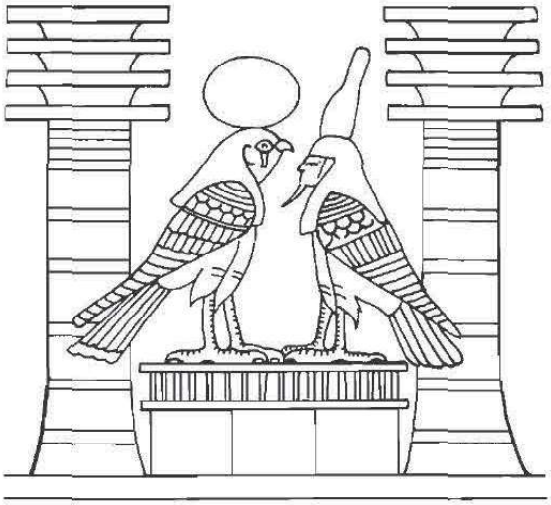
Dead we actually find Re fused with these and other deities as the composite Re-Horakhty-Atum-Horus-Khepri. Even when the god Amun rose to national supremacy in the Middle and New Kingdoms, Re was not suppressed and the two deities were brought together as Amun-Re in a process of syncretism which led to the association of most of Egypt's major gods with the powerful solar deity. Re was a universal deity who acted within the heavens, earth and underworld. In addition, the god was a prime element in most Egyptian creation myths and also acted as divine father and protector of the king. The extensive mythology pertaining to the god may perhaps best be understood in terms of these five roles.

Re in the heavens: According to Egyptian myth, when Re became too old and weary to reign on earth the god Nun ordered Nut to turn herself into a cow and to raise the god up on her back. When the goddess lifted Re high above the earth, she became the sky and Re became king of the heavens. The name Re is simply the Egyptian word for the sun and while the blazing solar orb was considered to be the visible body of Re, it was also seen as his independent 'Eye' (giving rise to expressions such as 'Re in the midst of his Eye', though the 'Eye' could also be a fierce manifestation of one of a number of goddesses) and as the vessel of his daily journey. According to this latter view, the solar god daily navigated the great celestial ocean in his *mandjet* or 'day barque' which crossed the sky from sunrise to sunset. He was said to be accompanied in this voyage by his daughter, Maat, and by various other deities. From the time of the Pyramid Texts we also find descriptions of the monarch ascending to the sky to join the entourage of the sun god. An important mythological aspect of the solar god in the heavens is found in his identity as a cosmic lion as seen in Chapter 62 of the Book of the Dead, for example, which states that 'I am he who crosses the sky, I am the lion of Re...'. The stellar constellation now known as Leo was also recognized by the Egyptians as being in the form of a recumbent lion, and as its bright shoulder star, Regulus, travels through the night sky along the ecliptic – the apparent path of the sun in the daytime sky – the constellation was directly associated with the sun god.

Re on earth: As Egyptian mythology tells how Re ruled on earth in the earliest ages there are also ample indications that the Egyptians recognized the sun's influence in the physical world. Akhenaten's celebrated Great Hymn to the Aten, for example, while directed to his own chosen solar manifestation, nevertheless speaks to the power of the sun in providing light and heat, causing crops to grow, etc. Normally this power of the sun on the earth was ascribed to Re, as may be seen in many scattered references in hymns and other texts honouring the sun god for the manifestations of his power on earth. A specific and important example of Re's influence on the earth is seen in that the god was said to direct the three seasons of the Egyptian year – thus influencing the annual inundation of the Nile and the subsequent growing and harvest seasons. Re's power on earth was also expressed in the role and position of the monarch according to Egyptian kingship ideology and in various other ways. Sacred books kept in the temple scriptoria or 'Houses of Life' were said to be emanations of Re, for example; and as the head of the divine tribunal Re decided many cases which affected life on earth.

Re in the netherworld: Just as Re travelled the sky in his day barque, at dusk he entered the underworld in the *mesketet* or 'evening barque', travelling through the nether regions (often depicted in his ram-headed form as the 'flesh of Re') before being reborn the following dawn. The funerary texts which were inscribed on the walls of the tombs of the Valley of the Kings depict this underworld journey and also the manner in which Re interacts with the underworld god Osiris during this time. The texts show a complex and evolving relationship between the two gods which ends with a kind of fusion in which Osiris is seen as the corpse or 'body' of the dual god and Re is the *ba* or 'soul', so that the combined Re-Osiris might be said to both ascend to the heavens as a *ba* in the day and be joined with his body in the earth at night. There are complex variations on this theme, however, and in the text known as the Litany of Re the sun god is said to visit multiple forms of himself in the underworld (74 are depicted in the tomb of Tuthmosis III, for example).







The sun god himself is also regenerated in the nightly cycle, but before this triumphal occurrence, the serpent Apophis, arch enemy of Re, is defeated each night with the aid of those deities that accompany Re in his barque. Just as the deceased king was said to ascend to the heavens to join Re's journey across the sky, so he also accompanied the solar god on his underworld journey.

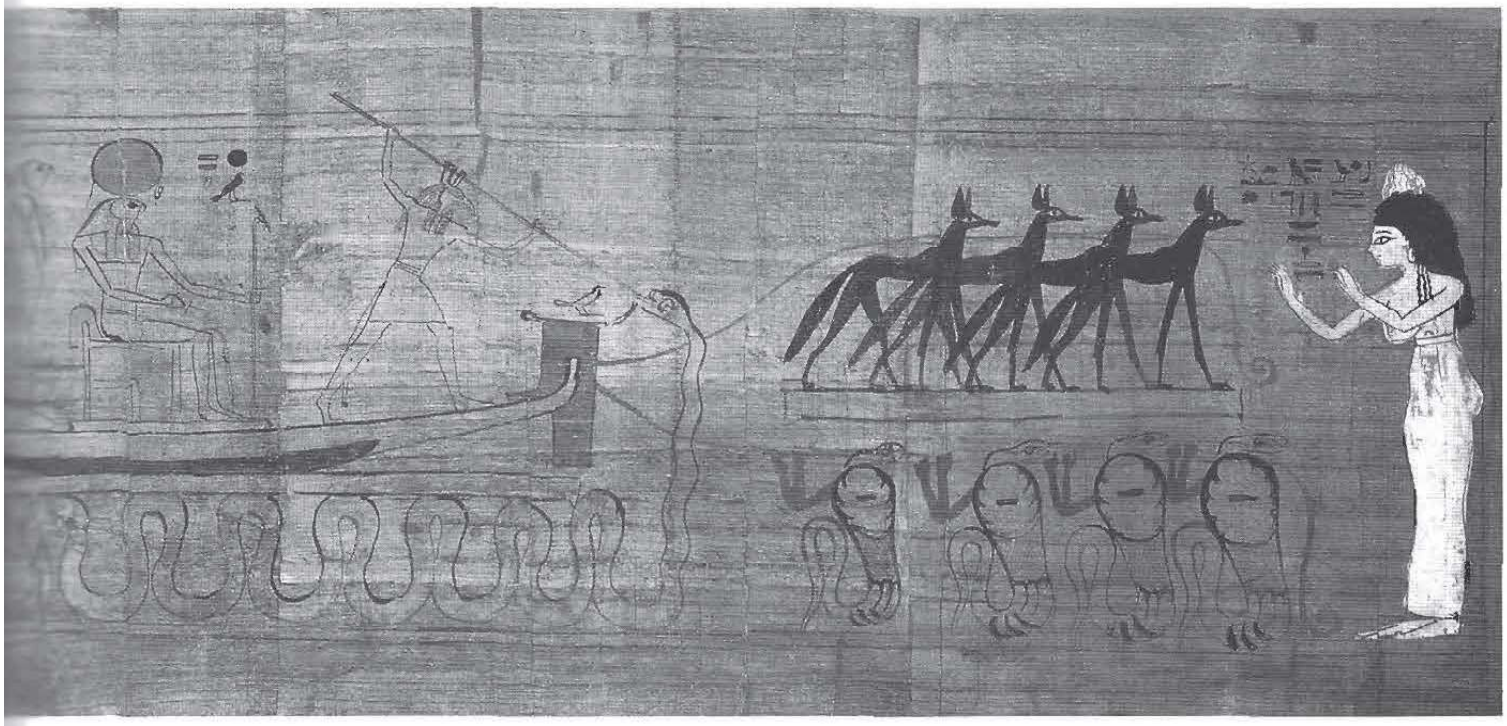
Re as creator: According to the cosmogonic ideas developed in Heliopolis and at other sites, the sun god Re was the supreme creator who emerged from the primeval waters at the beginning of time to create every aspect of the world. There were many versions of this myth, and the solar demiurge was envisaged as coming into being upon a mound or a lotus flower rising from the waters in the form of a child, or a heron, falcon, scarab beetle or other creature (see p. 19). Re then went on to create all living things in a manner which varies according to different versions of the myth. In one story involving a play on words Re created man (*remetj*) from his tears (*remut*) which fell to the earth, while in another, the sun god 'cut' his own phallus (possibly meaning circumcision) and the two deities Hu ('authority') and Sia ('mind') are said to have sprung from the drops of blood which fell to earth. In all versions of the story, however, it was the sun god who created other deities and human beings, and in this guise Re was called both 'father' and 'mother' of all living things.

Re as king and father of the king: In Egyptian mythology the creation of kingship and social order was synchronous with the creation of the world. Re was thus the first king as well as the creator of

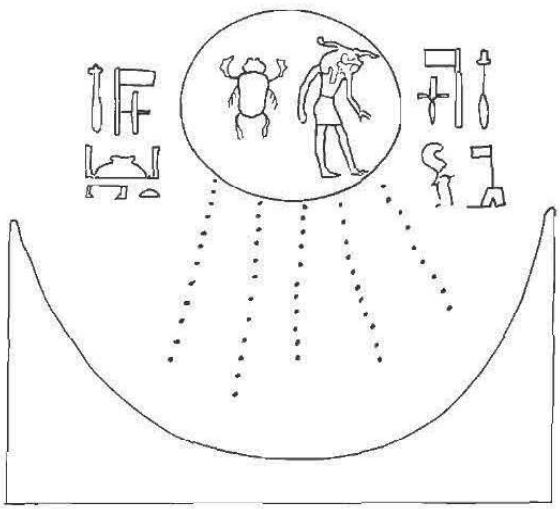
(Above left) The ba *'souls' of* ***Re*** *and Osiris showing the association of the two deities in Egyptian funerary belief. Vignette from the Papyrus of Anhai. British Museum.*

(Above) Ramesses III given life by ***Re****. 20th dynasty. Detail, column relief, mortuary temple of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu, Thebes.*

(Below) Vignette from the Papyrus of Herubes showing the nocturnal voyage of ***Re-Horakhty*** *through the netherworld, accompanied by Seth, Horus and Thoth. 21st dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



kingship. The god ruled on earth over his creation until according to legend he became old, then Re departed to the heavens where he continued to rule and also acted as the ancestor of the king of Egypt. In the Pyramid Texts we find the combined Re-Atum called the father of the king, and according to the legend preserved in the Westcar Papyrus, the kings of the 5th dynasty were actual sons of Re divinely begotten on the wife of the high priest of Heliopolis. Already by the 5th dynasty, the 'Son of Re' epithet of the king's titulary had been introduced which formalized this mythical relationship for the rest of Egyptian history. Rulership under Re was synonymous with right rulership or rule according to *maat*, and we find inscriptions of the opposite which are historical condemnations – as when Hatshepsut recorded of the foreign Hyksos rulers that they were kings 'without Re'.



(Right) The three major forms of ***Re*** *combined – as morning scarab beetle, noon solar disk, and evening ram-headed man. 21st dynasty. Detail, Papyrus of Bakenmut.*

(Below) The enthroned ***Re-Horakhty-Atum****, '...great god, Lord of Heaven'. 18th dynasty. Tomb of Roy, western Thebes.*

Iconography

Re was represented in many forms. The god could be depicted as the fiery disk of the sun, usually encircled by a protective cobra, and often given outstretched wings. Occasionally prior to the Amarna Period and in that time the solar disk was depicted with outstretched rays. While not usually represented in fully anthropomorphic form, Re was commonly depicted semi-anthropomorphically as a man with the head of a falcon, a ram or a scarab. Re was also represented in zoomorphic form as a falcon wearing the sun disk upon its head. Under the guise of his various manifestations he could also be represented as a ram or scarab beetle, a phoenix, heron, serpent, bull, cat, lion and other



creatures. The combination of the beetle, solar disk and ram-headed man into one composite image was particularly common in representing Re in his morning, noon and evening forms. Re was also sometimes depicted fused with other deities as a composite god, though in the case of Amun-Re the iconography is essentially that of Amun alone (see p. 92), apart from the addition of a small solar disk to the god's crown. Clearer fusion is seen in representations of the combined Re-Osiris where, as 'Re resting in Osiris' and 'Osiris resting in Re', the god is often depicted as a mummiform figure (Osiris) with the head of a ram (Re in his night-time aspect), though Re may also be represented in this combination by the head of a falcon or scarab. Although by at least the 5th dynasty Raet or Raettawy, a female counterpart to Re, had been assigned to the sun god, he is usually depicted without a consort in his representations.

A number of solar-related images and iconographic devices were also used to signify Re in various contexts. In the New Kingdom royal tombs carved in the Valley of the Kings, elements such as sun disks, flying vultures, and yellow bands painted on the ceilings and tops of the walls of tomb passages are all used to define the path of the sun's journey through the underworld as represented by the tomb. Royal cartouches – which were themselves solar related in origin – were also sometimes utilized alongside purely solar symbols to signify the fusion of the deceased king with the sun god on this netherworld journey. Winged solar disks and other sun symbols placed under lintels and along processional routes were utilized in a similar manner in depicting the sun's symbolic passsage through many Egyptian temples. Solar symbols could also be architectural in nature. The forms of the pyramid, *ben-ben*, staircase, mound and obelisk were all solar-related symbols utilized in Egyptian religious iconography that were based on concrete architectural analogues. In fact, taken together, the various solar symbols are the most prevalent elements utilized in Egyptian iconography and they are found in a wider range of contexts than any other divine symbols.

Worship

The cult of Re is first attested in the name of the 2nd-dynasty ruler, Raneb, and during the 4th dynasty worship of the god evidently reached a peak with kings taking the epithet 'Son of Re' from the time of Khafre, and the pyramids and their associated temples being unequivocally linked to Re in various ways. By the 5th dynasty Re had become, in essence, Egypt's state god, officially recognized as the head of the pantheon. Doubtless a great temple to Re was constructed at this time in Heliopolis, though remains of this structure have never been found. But in the 5th dynasty several kings built sun temples with large masonry obelisks in the region of their own pyramids and mortuary temples, and these solar-oriented structures may well have been modelled after the Heliopolitan cult centre and its *ben-ben* (see p. 212).

While Re's cult was centred at Heliopolis, he was worshipped universally throughout Egypt; and although there were definite high points in the importance of solar religion, Re was venerated in every age of the country's long dynastic history. Sanctuaries were constantly constructed or renewed for him, and he was included in many of the temples of other deities throughout the remainder of dynastic history. The god certainly enjoyed a kind of renaissance in the New Kingdom, beginning in the reign of Amenophis III, who constructed a number of great solar temples and courts. This reign directly preceded the ultimately aborted efforts of Akhenaten to establish the sun god, in his form of the Aten, as sole god. Despite the repudiated doctrines of the Amarna Period, solar religion continued to be of great importance during Ramessid times when Re was frequently honoured by his eponymous kings. Re also has a strong presence in New Kingdom religious literature – especially in funerary texts which successfully balanced the position of the sun god with that of Osiris. In the later periods of Egyptian history the position of the sun god is overshadowed to a large degree by other deities, yet Re remained important, and even after the close of the dynastic age, in Christian times, we find occasional texts appealing to Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the sun god Re.

Although the cult of Re was always of primary importance to the Egyptian king and in officially sponsored religion, the god was not without popular appeal and veneration. His importance is seen in non-royal as well as royal names incorporating the name of Re, and the god was represented in amulets. Many of these were made to be worn in life as a mark of veneration, in addition to the images of the god which accompanied the deceased in the funerary assemblage. Re also appears in various magical spells including those which make an ultimate threat – to stop the course of the sun in its journey. Such spells were usually aimed at attempting to cause the sun god to right some wrong and to restore balance in his creation.

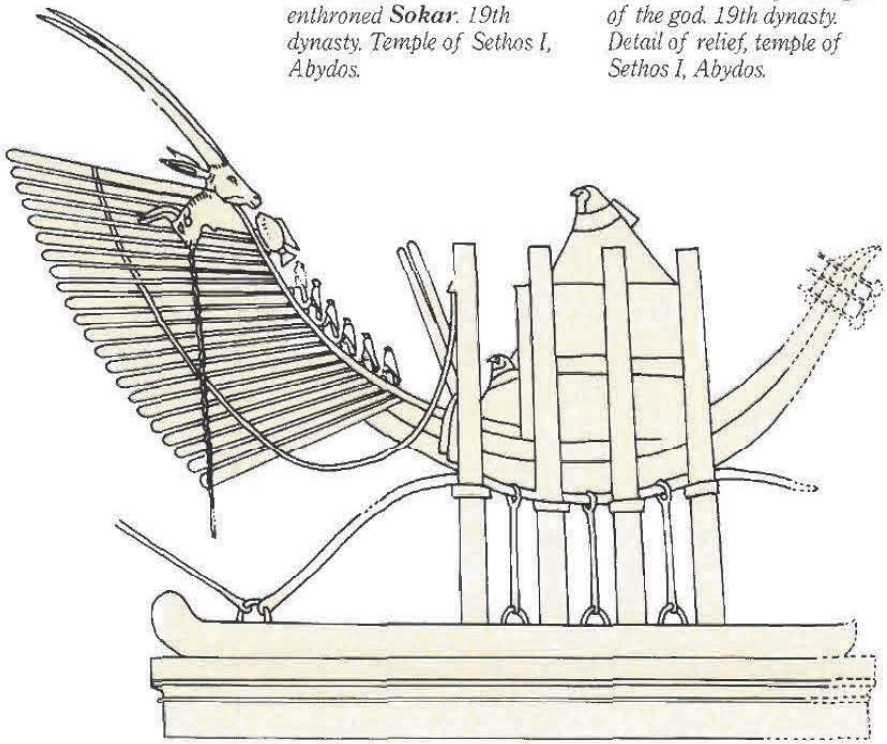
Sokar

Mythology

An ancient falcon god of the Memphite region, Sokar was perhaps originally a god of craftsmanship who became associated with the necropoleis of that area and rose, in time, to considerable importance as a chthonic and afterlife deity. He is frequently mentioned in the Pyramid Texts in the afterlife context where the deceased king is said to be raised into the 'henu barque' of Sokar and equated



(Above) Sethos I offers incense and a libation to the enthroned ***Sokar****. 19th dynasty. Temple of Sethos I, Abydos.*



(Below) The henu barque of ***Sokar*** *with multiple images of the god. 19th dynasty. Detail of relief, temple of Sethos I, Abydos.*

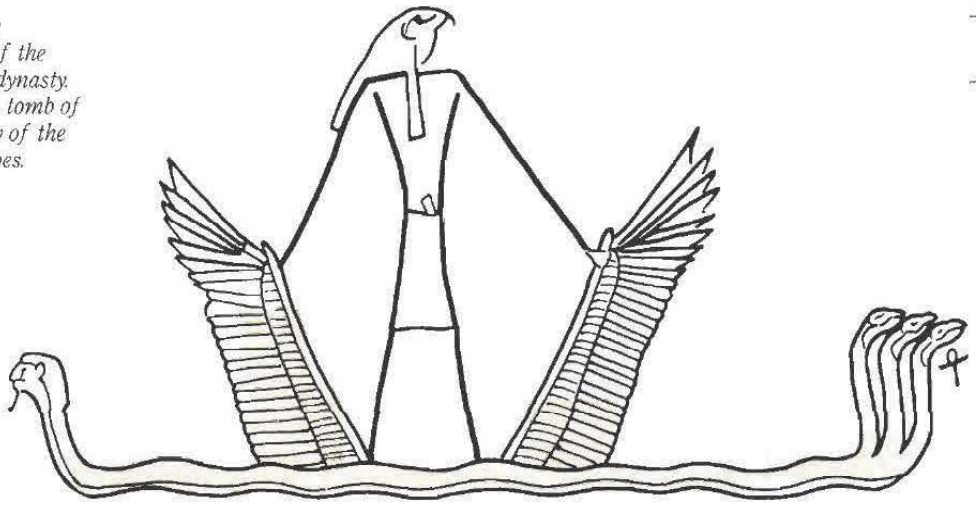
with the god (PT 620, 1824, 2240, etc.). Sokar is also given many epithets such as 'he of Rosetau' (the necropolis entrance into the underworld), but the meaning of the god's name is uncertain, and while the Pyramid Texts seem to explain it as being based on the words of an anguished cry of Osiris (PT 1256), this is clearly based on an association of Sokar with Osiris which occurred only after the latter god's rise to importance. Even before his association with Osiris, Sokar had became linked with the Memphite god Ptah as the combined Ptah-Sokar and also by taking Ptah's consort Sekhmet as his own. By Middle Kingdom times all three of these gods had been combined into the tripartite deity Ptah-Sokar-Osiris who remained an important funerary deity for most of the remainder of Egypt's dynastic history.

Iconography

Sokar could be depicted in various ways in addition to that of the falcon which was his original form. In the more symbolic forms he is represented by an earthen funerary mound surmounted by a falcon's head which is sometimes set in a boat, an image depicted in vignettes of the Amduat where Sokar is called 'he who is upon his sand'. As a falcon-headed man Sokar is often represented as mummiform and sometimes wears a complex conical crown with sun disk horns and cobras. In the tomb of Tuthmosis III in the Valley of the Kings he is depicted as a falcon-headed god standing on a multi-headed chthonic serpent, emphasizing his power over the nether regions and their inhabitants. The most impressive surviving example of this falcon-headed type of the god's iconography is found in the silver coffin of Sheshonq II found at Tanis. In later times his most common representation is in the form of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, and from the Late Period onwards small statues of the combined deity were made which show him as a mummiform human-headed god standing upright on a sarcophagus-like box or pedestal, often surmounted by Sokar's falcon-head image. Ptah-Sokar-Osiris could also be represented as a squat, pygmy-like male, sometimes with a scarab beetle on his head, and the amuletic deity Pataikos appears to have been derived from these particular Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figures.

Worship

Memphis was the cult centre of Sokar and it was there, at least by early Old Kingdom times, that the great Sokar festival took place each year in the fourth month of the spring *akhet* season. During this the god was carried from his temple to assist the king in ceremonial activities including hoeing of the earth or the digging of ditches or canals. From New Kingdom times the Sokar festival was also celebrated with great ceremony in western Thebes where it is depicted in reliefs in the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The festival seems



***Sokar**, 'Lord of the mysterious region [of the netherworld]'. 18th dynasty. Detail, wall painting, tomb of Tuthmosis III, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

to have stressed the continuity of the royal mortuary cult along with the resurrection of Sokar and involved the image of the god being carried in his distinctive henu barque which had a cabin signifying a funerary chest surmounted by a falcon. Outside the funerary context, veneration of Sokar is difficult to document. Amulets of Sokar are not common, but some depicting squatting, mummiform falcons may represent the god.

Sopdu

Mythology

The mythology of Sopdu is complex and presents two very different aspects of this god – he is both a cosmic falcon god similar to Horus and also, in anthropomorphic form, as a god of Egypt's eastern frontier. In the Pyramid Texts, the astral nature of the deity is stressed. The deceased king, in his role as Osiris-Orion, is said to impregnate Isis as the star Sothis and to produce Horus-Sopdu. Sopdu is also equated with the teeth of the deified king, apparently as an allusion to the curved beak of the god who is said to be 'sharp of teeth' (PT 201). On the other hand, Sopdu also gained significance as 'lord of the east' who protected Egyptian outposts in the border regions such as the turquoise mines of the Sinai Peninsula. The god thus appears in royal inscriptions where he is said to provide the various resources of the east and to be a helper of the pharaoh in controlling the native populations. As god of the Asiatic regions Sopdu was himself often associated with Near Eastern deities who were assimilated into Egyptian religion such as Baal, Reshep, Astarte, Anat and Qadesh.

Iconography

In his zoomorphic form Sopdu was depicted as a falcon crouching on a standard with two tall plumes on its head and a ritual flail held over its shoulder. This is the symbol of the Lower Egyptian nome over which the god presided, but it is found in a number of representations of the god including a fine example of gilded wood from the tomb of Tutankhamun. In anthropomorphic form, as god of the eastern desert regions, Sopdu appears as a Bedouin warrior with long hair and a pointed beard. He wears a crown of two tall feathers and a tasselled or beaded *shemset* girdle, the Egyptian name of which is perhaps related to the mineral malachite. Sopdu may carry a spear or tall *was* sceptre in one hand and an axe and *ankh* sign in the other.

Worship

As the god of the 20th Lower Egyptian nome, Sopdu's main cult centre was at Per Sopdu (the modern Saft el-Henna) in the eastern Delta. However, priests of the god are attested at a number of Egyptian sites from Old Kingdom times and he was also venerated in many eastern desert outposts such as the site of Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai Peninsula where he was worshipped along with Hathor and certain other deities.



*(Left) Gilded wooden image of the god **Sopdu** as a falcon on a standard. From the tomb of Tutankhamun, 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

OTHER AVIAN DEITIES

It is not clear why some avian species came to represent deities in the Egyptian pantheon and others did not, and among those birds that did receive veneration there are few common characteristics. The heron, goose, vulture and ibis were the most important of these species, though other birds played occasional roles in Egyptian mythology.

Benu

Mythology

The word *benu* is related to the verb *weben* 'to rise' as well as to the *ben-ben* – the upthrust sacred stone of Heliopolis. The Benu bird was an important avian deity, originally of solar connections, which came to represent three major gods: Atum, Re and Osiris. As an aspect of Atum, the Benu bird was said to have flown over the waters of Nun before the original creation. According to this view, the bird finally came to rest on a rock at which point its cry broke the primeval silence and was said to have determined what was and what was not to be in the unfolding creation. The Benu was also said to be the *ba* of Re, and by the Late Period the hieroglyphic sign depicting the bird was used to write the name of the chief sun god. Believed to constantly rise anew like the sun, the Benu bird was called the 'lord of jubilees' which doubtless led to the conception of its long life and to it becoming the prototype for the Greek phoenix which renewed itself in a fiery death like the sun rising at dawn. According to Herodotus the bird lived for 500 years before it fashioned a nest of aromatic boughs and spices which it set it on fire to be consumed in the flames. From the conflagration a new phoenix miraculously arose, which after embalming its father's ashes flew with them to Heliopolis where it deposited the ashes on the altar of the temple of Re. Although the bird was associated primarily with Atum and Re, its connection with rebirth also led to an association with Osiris.

(Below) The grey heron or ***Benu*** *bird with characteristic twin plumes. Vignette from funerary papyrus, 21st dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

(Right) The god ***Benu*** *in hybrid avian-anthropomorphic form. Rarely represented in this manner, this deity was usually depicted in fully avian form.*

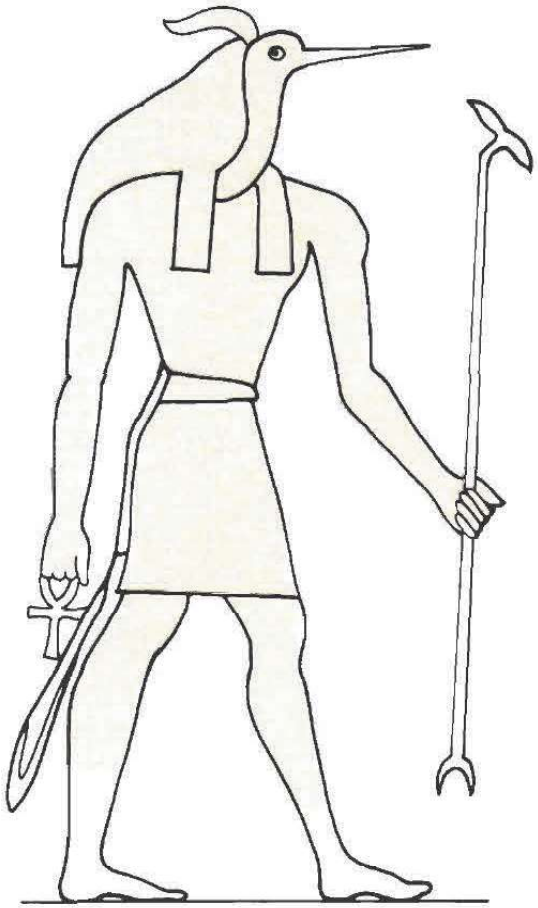


Iconography

The bird which first served as a symbol of solar deities in Heliopolis was probably the yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) which, according to the Pyramid Texts (PT 1652), represented Atum himself. By New Kingdom times, however, the Benu was usually depicted as a grey heron (*Ardea cinera*), with long legs and beak and its head adorned with a two-feathered crest. Usually the Benu is depicted atop a stylized *ben-ben* stone as a symbol of the great solar god, but its association with Osiris meant that it was also sometimes depicted in the sacred willow of that god. The bird was also represented wearing the Atef Crown in its role as a symbol of Osiris. According to the Classical vision of the phoenix, the bird was said to be as large as an eagle, with red and gold (solar or flame-coloured) plumage. Benu could also be depicted in hybrid form as a heron-headed man.

Worship

Little is known of the formal veneration of the Benu, though its central association with the solar mythology of Heliopolis doubtless formed the basis for an important role in the cults of that area. The frequent depiction of the Benu bird in the vignettes of the 'afterlife books' as well as on heart amulets (such as that of Tutankhamun) and other objects also shows the persistence of the god's importance in funerary contexts.





Celebrated depiction of bean, white-fronted, and red-breasted geese from the tomb of Nefermaat at Meidum, 4th dynasty. Several species of geese could represent the primeval deity ***Gengen-Wer****.*

Gengen-Wer

Mythology

A primeval goose representing certain gods in their creative aspects, Gengen-Wer manifested the power of creation through his honking call or through carrying the egg from which life emerged. The god's name is based on the goose's characteristically raucous call or cackle (the onomatopoeic Egyptian word *gengen* means 'honker' and *wer* means 'great'), and he was also called by the name *negeg* or 'cackler'. According to some texts it was the honking call of Amun in the form of this god that 'awoke' the creation (e.g., Papyrus Leiden I 350, Chapter 90). The goose was also closely associated with the earth god Geb who was himself sometimes called the 'great cackler' and who, in this form, was credited with having laid the first egg from which the sun emerged as the Benu bird. The goose was also a symbol of certain other deities including Hapy and Harpokrates. According to the complex interaction of Egyptian creation mythology and afterlife beliefs Gengen-Wer is also found in descriptions of the netherworld in which the deceased is sometimes said to guard or even to be the god's egg. From the time of the Pyramid Texts the deceased aspired to fly to the heavens as a goose, and models of the bird in New Kingdom tombs are believed to represent this desire.

Iconography

Various species of geese appear in Egyptian art including the Nile goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*) and others which could represent Gengen-Wer. Because the goose was also used to represent Amun, its image was desecrated by the agents of Akhenaten during the Amarna Period – as in the botanical room of Tuthmosis III in Karnak Temple where the representation of this avian species was defaced.

Worship

Geese figure more frequently in Egyptian religion in the context of offerings – as food offerings given to the gods and the deceased and even as ritually offered symbols of the enemies of the gods – than as the objects of worship. Nevertheless, although not widely venerated directly, the goose was worshipped in certain localities, and a flock of sacred geese was kept on the temple lake in Amun's Great Temple at Karnak.

Henet

Henet was a pelican deity known from Old Kingdom times and venerated as a beneficial goddess. In the Pyramid Texts, for unknown reasons, she is called 'mother of the king' (PT 511), and in the later funerary texts she is said to prophesy a safe passage for the deceased through the netherworld. Henet also had a directly protective function apparently related to the pelican's ability to scoop up fish and other creatures regarded as mythologically hostile or inimical, in a manner parallel to the symbolic representations found in Egyptian tombs of the snaring and netting of those same creatures.

Nekhbet

Mythology

The vulture goddess Nekhbet 'she of Nekheb' was the chief deity of ancient Nekheb (the modern el-Kab some 80 km south of Luxor) which was the capital of the 3rd nome of Upper Egypt. The significance of the site lay in its close proximity to the town of Nekhen (the Greek Hierakonpolis and modern Kom el-Ahmar) which was an early capital of all Upper Egypt, so that the goddess was eventually adopted alongside the cobra goddess Wadjet of

Inlaid pectoral ornament from the tomb of Tutankhamun showing ***Nekhbet*** *(left) and Wadjet (right) as the tutelary deities Isis and Nephthys guarding the figure of Osiris. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



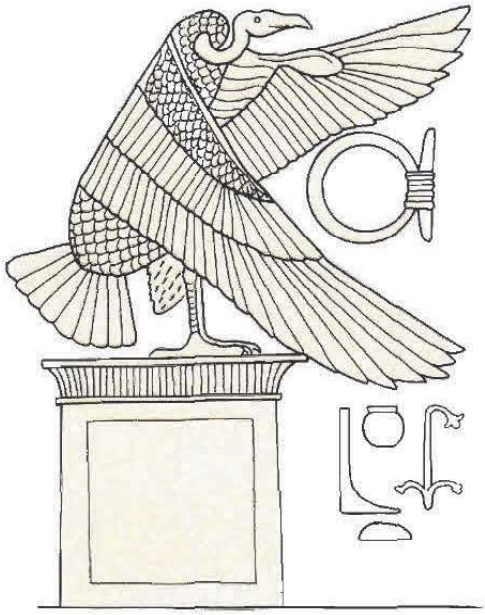
Buto in the Delta region as one of the two tutelary deities of the united Egypt. From at least Old Kingdom times Nekhbet was identified with the White Crown of Upper Egypt and thus became closely connected with the person of the king. In this role Nekhbet was also a mythical mother of the king. The Pyramid Texts depict her as a mother goddess in the form of a great white cow, and in royal birth scenes such as that in the mortuary temple of Sahure at Abusir Nekhbet is present as a protective nurse of the king. The Greeks thus equated Nekhbet with their goddess of childbirth, Eileithya, and called her city Nekheb Eileithyiaspolis. The Egyptians also sometimes equated or associated Nekhbet with Hathor.

Iconography

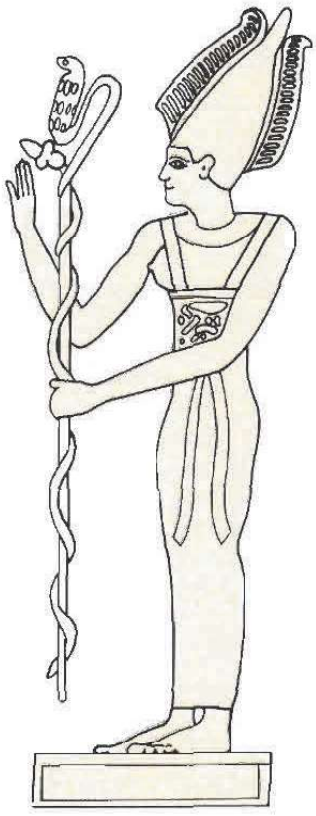
From her earliest appearances Nekhbet is often represented as a vulture (the Sociable Vulture, *Vultur auricularis*, which is still common in Upper Egypt) either standing in profile view, or with wings outstretched in direct view, with only head and legs in profile. Often the Nekhbet vulture is depicted holding the circular *shen* or 'eternity' hieroglyph in her claws, though this is an iconographic element associated with a number of deities. Assimilation with her northern counterpart led to Nekhbet occasionally being depicted as a serpent (just as Wadjet may sometimes be shown in vulture form), though this fusing of the imagery of the two deities was usually for heraldic, decorative purposes and to stress their association rather than for mythological reasons. In serpent form Nekhbet usually wears the White Crown in order to maintain her identity. Egyptian monarchical symbolism utilized the image of the Nekhbet vulture in the *nebty* or 'two ladies' name of the royal titulary in which the goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt were shown as vulture and cobra standing on woven baskets, and the two goddesses were also depicted as personifications of the crowns of the Two Lands. In anthropomorphic form Nekhbet was usually represented as a woman wearing a vulture cap, though she could also be shown wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt.

Worship

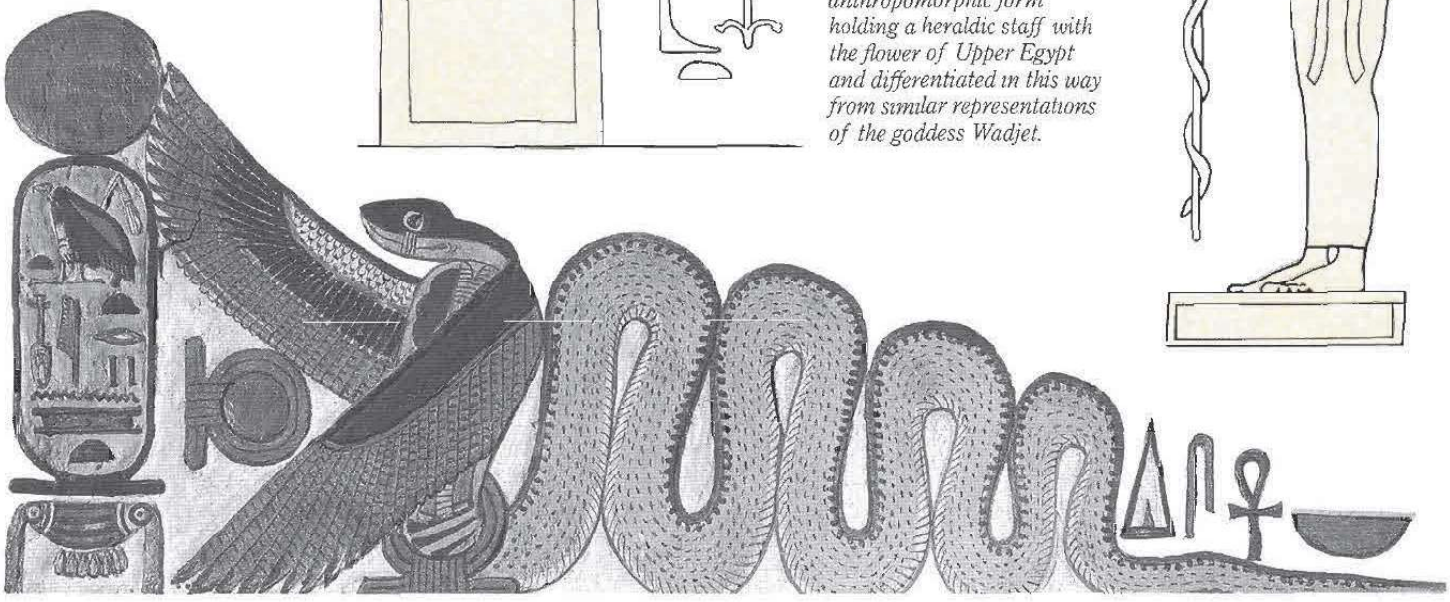
Nekhbet possessed an impressively large sanctuary at el-Kab, though little has survived of this cult centre. Most of the present ruins there date to the later Dynastic Period, and only traces remain of New



(Left) ***Nekhbet*** *in the form of a vulture on a shrine from the fourth shrine of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



(Right) ***Nekhbet*** *in anthropomorphic form holding a heraldic staff with the flower of Upper Egypt and differentiated in this way from similar representations of the goddess Wadjet.*



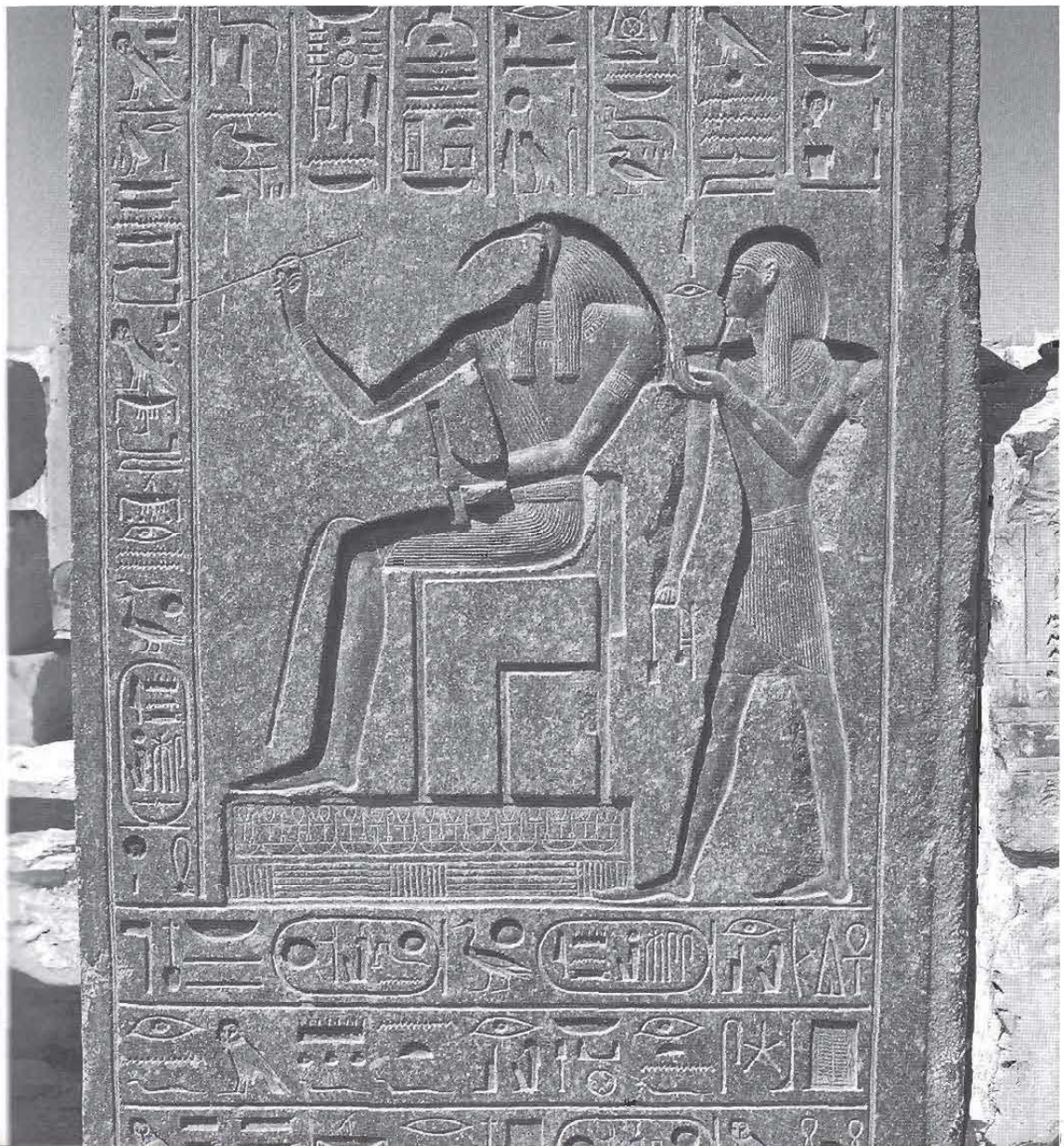
(Below) Like Wadjet, ***Nekhbet*** *could also be depicted in serpent form, usually when the two deities were juxtaposed. 19th dynasty. Detail, tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*

Kingdom and Middle Kingdom structures. Nothing has been found of the shrines which undoubtedly stood at this site in very early times. The importance of Nekhbet in what might be called royal religion is seen in the many times she appears in a protective role alongside the pharaoh and in jewelry such as the exquisite vulture pendants found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. In the popular religion of the New Kingdom and Late Period Nekhbet was also venerated as a protectress and as a goddess of childbirth.

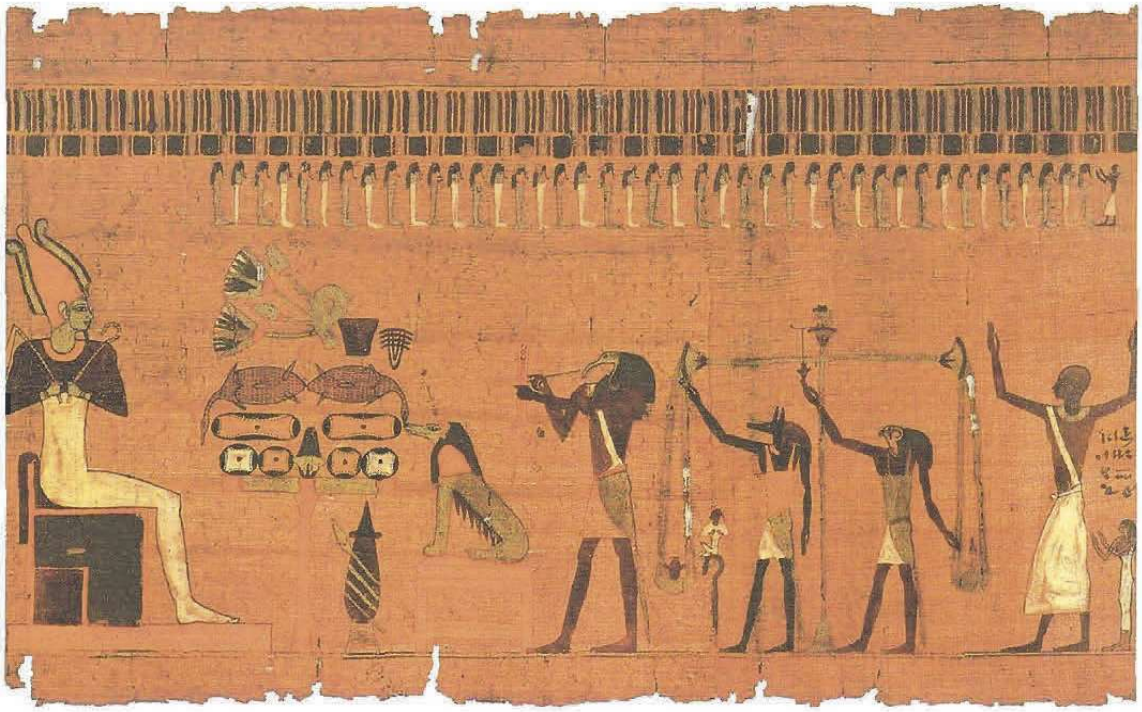
Thoth

Mythology

The god Thoth, or Djehuty as he was called by the Egyptians, was originally a moon god who eventually came to be associated with writing and knowledge and to preside over scribes and scholars of all types. The god appeared in two distinct manifestations, as an ibis and as a baboon, and though both were lunar-related, that of the ibis was primary. His standard, or that of the ibis that later represented him, appears on slate palettes of the Predynastic Period, and Thoth was clearly already an important deity in Old Kingdom times when he is mentioned frequently in the Pyramid Texts. There, along with the sun god Re, he is one of the 'two companions' which cross the sky (PT 128) and the gods are said to travel on the 'wing' of Thoth across the 'winding waterway' or 'river' of the heavens (PT 594–96). During the Old Kingdom Thoth was also incorporated into the prevailing solar theology along with Osiris whom he is said to protect and serve – both directly and in the person of the deceased king who became one with Osiris. Although he is called the son of Re, the legends pertaining to Thoth repeatedly reflect this linkage with the myths of Osiris and his associated gods. The legend preserved in the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth' asserts that Thoth was the son of Horus and that he emerged from the forehead of Seth who had eaten the semen of Horus on some lettuce plants. A later version of the same legend has the seed of Horus appear on the head of Seth as a shining disk which Thoth took and placed on his own head as his emblem. He was said to heal the injured eye of Horus which was associated with the Moon, and he often acted as a messenger, intercessor and conciliator between the gods.



*The enthroned **Thoth** writes with brush and scribal palette – assisted by Ramesses II who holds a water pot and writing kit. As scribe of the gods Thoth 'recorded' long reigns for the Egyptian kings and also played a purificatory role in monarchical mythology. 19th dynasty. Temple of Ramesses II, Abydos.*



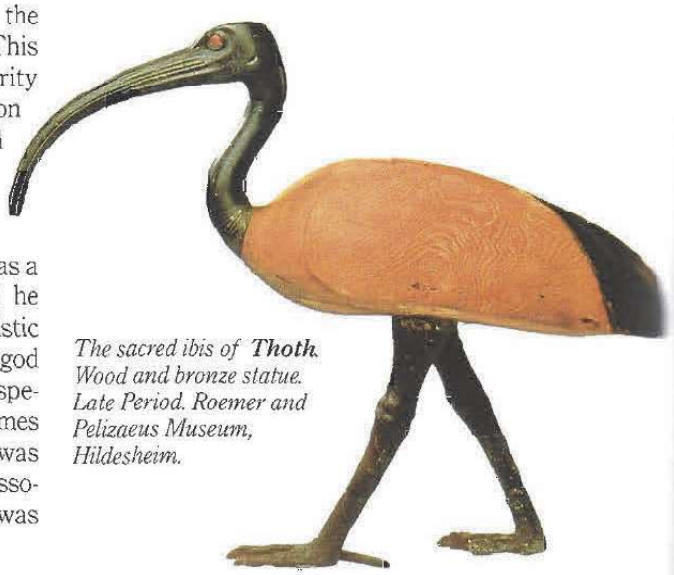
***Thoth** (centre) as recorder at the judgment of the deceased. Book of the Dead of Iahtesnakht from Herakleopolis Magna. 26th dynasty. Seminar for Egyptology, Cologne.*

Importantly for his mythology Thoth was said to have invented the art of writing. He was thus the scribe of the Ennead who recorded 'the divine words' and was responsible for all kinds of accounts and records. As 'lord of time' and 'reckoner of years' he recorded the passing of time and assigned long reigns to kings. He was the patron of all areas of knowledge, and written treatises of all kinds fell under his care as lord of the 'houses of life' which functioned as scriptoria and libraries which were attached to the temples. Not surprisingly then, Thoth commanded magic and secrets unknown to even the other gods, and his select followers were regarded as possessing special knowledge as is seen in a Middle Kingdom story called 'The Magician Djedi' set in the reign of King Khufu. Thoth's record keeping also has afterlife associations, and in vignettes of the Book of the Dead he stands before the scales which weigh the heart of the deceased and records the verdict. This role gave Thoth a reputation for truth and integrity and is seen in the common assertion that a person had conducted his life in a manner 'straight and true like Thoth'.

Thoth's lunar identity remained an important aspect of his personality. The god was also often placed in juxtaposition to the sun god Re as a kind of 'night sun', and in the Late Period he acquired the epithet 'silver Aten'. In the Hellenistic Period the Greeks equated him with their own god Hermes and, based on one of Thoth's epithets, specifically as Hermes *trismegistos*, or 'three times great'. The little known goddess Nehemetawy was the consort of Thoth, though he is more often associated with the goddess of writing, Seshat, who was variously depicted as his wife or daughter.

Iconography

Although there is considerable overlapping in the iconographic use of the two forms in which Thoth was manifest – the ibis and the baboon – there are also some differences worth noting. In his purely zoomorphic forms the baboon is somewhat more prevalent in representations than the ibis, though representations of the god as an ibis-headed man are most common of all. It is impossible to know, as is sometimes suggested, if the Egyptians saw the shape of the baboon (*Papio Cynocephalus*) in the lunar disk in a manner similar to our 'man in the moon', but Thoth is depicted in baboon form in both lunar and scribal contexts. Unlike solar apes which are often depicted standing with their arms raised in adoration, Thoth as a baboon is usually shown as



*The sacred ibis of **Thoth**. Wood and bronze statue. Late Period. Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim.*

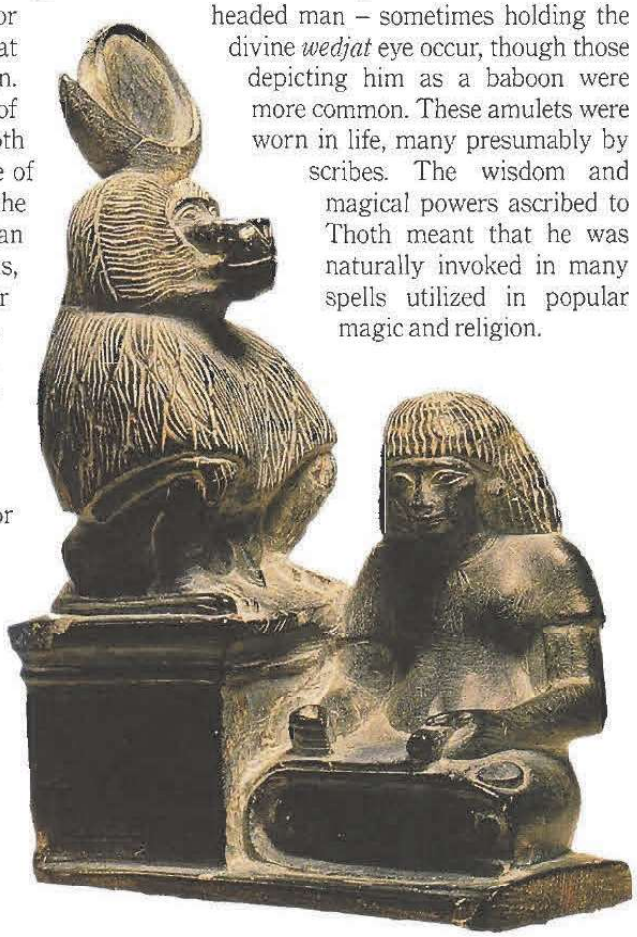
a seated animal, heavily maned, resting on its rear with its legs drawn up against its body and with its paws resting on its knees. Massive, 30-ton statues in this form were set up by Amenophis III at the main cult centre of Thoth at Hermopolis. Sometimes the god is depicted with the lunar disk and crescent on his head symbolizing the moon's phases – either in statues stressing the god's role as lunar-deity or those stressing his role as patron of scribes. One famous example shows the animal squatting on the shoulders of a scribe (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and another, more common type shows the scribe seated before the baboon god who is raised on a pedestal (Egyptian Museum, Cairo; Louvre, Paris; etc.).

In the form of the sacred ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), whose distinctive white surrounded by black plumage and crescent-curved bill may have held symbolic significance, Thoth was depicted in many statuettes which represent the god in general without suggesting a specific lunar or scribal aspect. The ibis may be depicted standing or sitting, and a depiction of the bird perched on a standard was the usual image used to write the god's name. In underworld scenes the god is usually depicted as either an ibis-headed man or as a baboon, and scenes showing Thoth presiding over the judgment scales may depict him in either form. As an ibis-headed god Thoth also appears in many temple scenes where he may assist the gods or record matters of importance relating to the king. An important motif is that which shows him notching the palm branch which was ritually used for recording years in order to write down the great number of years granted to the king as his reign. Sometimes, as in a scene in the hypostyle hall of the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak, Thoth takes the place of Seshat in writing the name of the king – here Ramesses II – on the leaves of the sacred persea tree. Thoth also appears in an ancient purification ritual accompanying Horus, Seth and the falcon god Dunanwi who together personify the four cardinal points (PT 27). Often, however, only Horus and Thoth are depicted in this scene, pouring *ankh* or life signs over the pharaoh from sacred water jars. In one peculiar form the ibis-headed Thoth may appear naked, except for jackal-headed shoes, in his aspect of Hermopolitan creator god.

Worship

Thoth's appearance in the names of several New Kingdom monarchs (e.g., Tuthmosis – 'born of Thoth') shows important royal acceptance and patronage of the god's cult, but earlier references to offerings made in private tombs on the festival of Thoth also show the importance of this god to non-royal individuals, and his worship appears to have always had a wide base among ancient Egyptians. It is uncertain whether the ancient Khemnu, which the Greeks called Hermopolis or 'Hermestown' (the modern el-Ashmunein) in Middle Egypt was the original cult centre of Thoth, although it was certainly his chief centre of worship in dynastic times. It is possible that Thoth had an early cult centre in the Delta as the 15th Lower Egyptian nome had the ibis as its emblem. Thoth also had a sanctuary at el-Baqliya in the Delta, in the Dakhla Oasis in the western desert, and even in the Sinai at Serabit el-Khadim. A little to the west of Hermopolis the necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel is the site of an extensive catacomb, the Ibeum, which housed the mummified bodies of thousands of ibises, as well as many baboons, which were sold to pilgrims as votive offerings to the god. Another large burial ground for ibises and baboons was located at Saqqara, and these catacombs well illustrate the continued widespread popularity of Thoth in the religion of the later periods. In the 4th century BC the high priest of Thoth, Petosiris, renovated the cult centre of Hermopolis in the wake of the Persian invasion, and constructed a splendid tomb for himself decorated on its exterior with images of Thoth as ibis and baboon and inscribed inside with texts which show the god's great local importance. Thoth was, naturally, particularly venerated by scribes, who it is said made a small libation to the god by pouring a drop of water out of the pot in which they dipped their brushes at the beginning of each day.

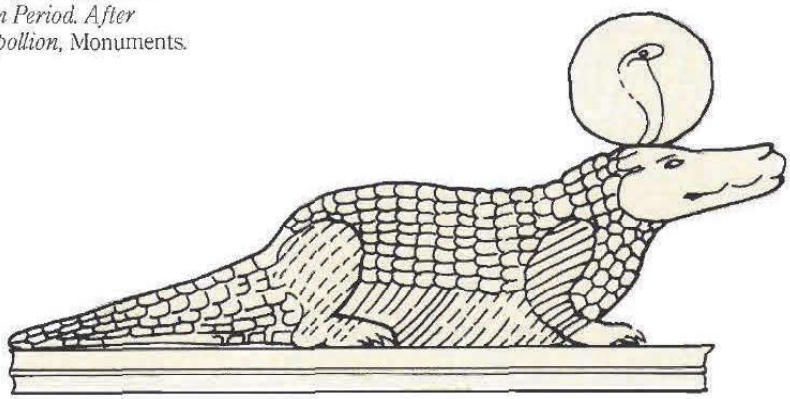
Amulets of the god as an ibis or an ibis-headed man – sometimes holding the divine *wedjat* eye occur, though those depicting him as a baboon were more common. These amulets were worn in life, many presumably by scribes. The wisdom and magical powers ascribed to Thoth meant that he was naturally invoked in many spells utilized in popular magic and religion.



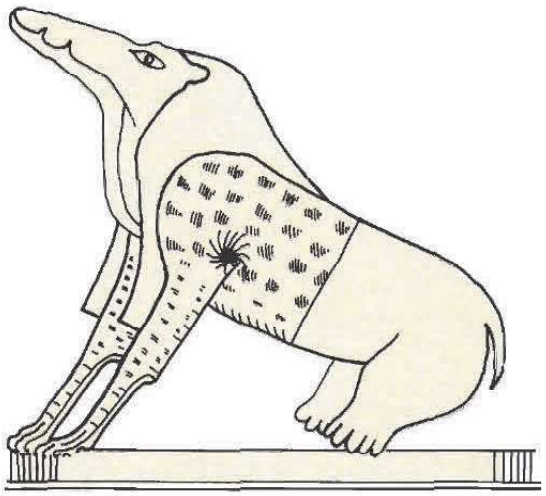
A scribe writes at the feet of ***Thoth*** *as a baboon, with lunar disk, seated on a pedestal. From el-Amarna. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Reptile, Amphibian and Fish Deities

Crocodile deity from the temple of Esna, Graeco-Roman Period. After Champollion, Monuments.



(Below) The composite deity ***Ammut****, one-third crocodile, one-third lion, and one-third hippopotamus, from the Papyrus of Anhai, British Museum.*



CROCODILE DEITIES

The crocodile was one of Egypt's most dangerous animals and it is not difficult to see why the creature held an impressive degree of religious and mythological status. Although a number of minor crocodile deities may have existed, most of these were assimilated with the powerful god Sobek who was venerated throughout Egypt. The composite, crocodile-headed Ammut was also an important deity who must be included in this section.

Ammut

Mythology

The Ammut was a composite mythical creature whose head – and therefore most essential aspect – places her with crocodile deities. Her name meant 'female devourer' or more fully, 'female devourer of the dead'. In this role, as an underworld deity, she was also called 'great of death' and 'eater of hearts' and was supposedly the destroyer of those who had led wicked lives and who were not to be granted access into the afterlife. In the 'reality' of Egyptian myth and magic this fate was usually circumvented, but the goddess nevertheless remained a fearsome token of afterlife retribution.

Iconography

Ammut combined elements of the most dangerous animals known to the Egyptians. Her head was that of the crocodile, her neck, mane and foreparts those of the lion (though occasionally a leopard), and her rear quarters were those of the hippopotamus. It has been suggested that this composite form of land and water animals left the damned no place of escape from the goddess's wrath. Ammut appears almost exclusively in the vignettes of funerary papyri, especially illustrations of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead where she is shown waiting beside the scale on which the heart of the deceased is weighed against the feather of *maat* in the 'Hall of the Two Truths'.

Worship

Ammut was not worshipped in any formal cult and does not appear to have received popular veneration despite the fact that her image was doubtless recognized by many if not most ancient Egyptians. Although the name of Ammut was written with the determinative for 'deity' (see p. 26), the goddess was primarily viewed as a demonic creature to be avoided and whose power must be overcome.

Sobek

Mythology

Sobek was venerated from at least Old Kingdom times, and while the name of the god means simply 'crocodile', he was regarded as a powerful deity with several important associations. In the Pyramid Texts he is said to be the son of Neith and called the 'raging one' who 'takes women from their husbands whenever he wishes according to his desire' but who also makes green the herbage of the fields and river banks (PT 507–10) – tying him to both procreative and vegetative fertility. He was.



Raised relief of the god ***Sobek*** *– the most widely worshipped of Egypt's crocodile deities – from the joint temple of Horus the Elder and Sobek at Kom Ombo. Graeco-Roman Period.*

quite naturally, a god of water (it was said that the Nile issued from his sweat) and of areas such as marshes and riverbanks, wherever crocodiles were commonly found. Sobek was also said to be 'Lord of Bakhu', the mythological mountain of the horizon where it was asserted he had a temple made of carnelian. He was linked with the cults of certain other gods, such as Amun, Osiris and especially that of the sun god in the form of Sobek-Re. This association with the sun god led to his being identified by the Greeks with their own god Helios. Sobek was also associated with the Egyptian king and could act as a symbol of pharaonic potency and might.



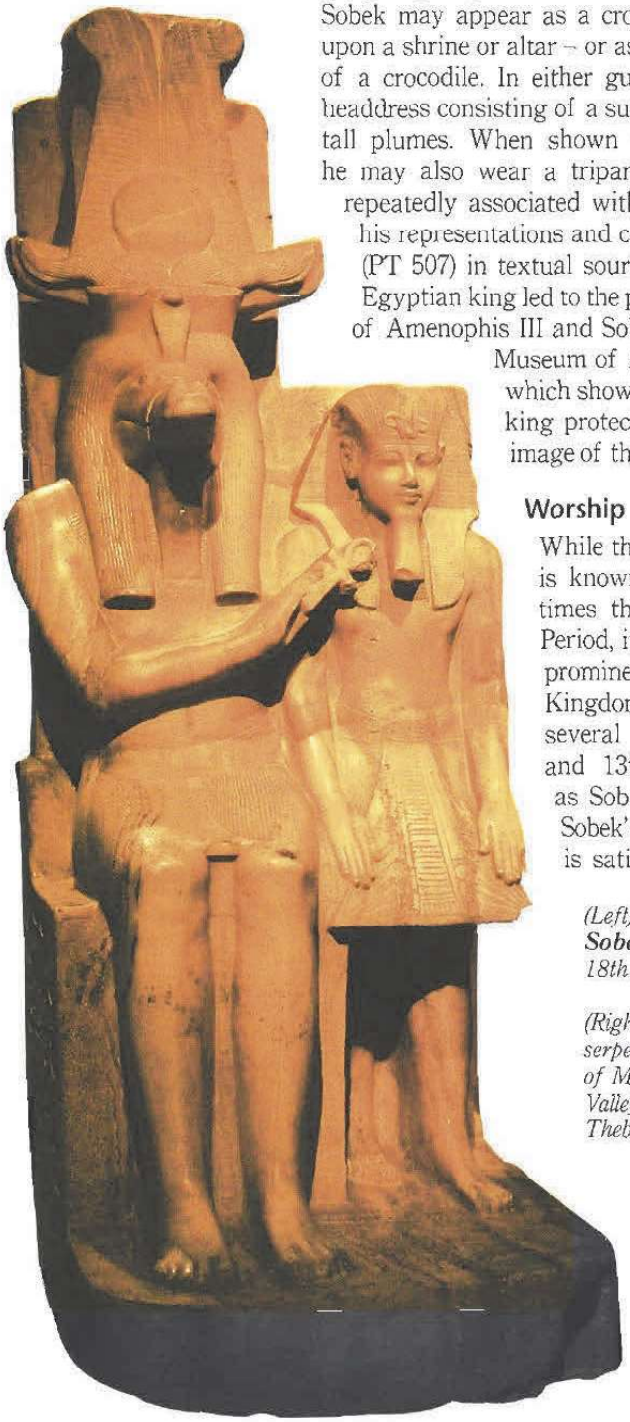
Cult image of **Sobek** *in fully zoomorphic form. 12th dynasty. Museum of Egyptian Art, Munich.*

Iconography

Fully or partly zoomorphic in his representations, Sobek may appear as a crocodile – often seated upon a shrine or altar – or as a man with the head of a crocodile. In either guise he often wears a headdress consisting of a sun disk with horns and tall plumes. When shown in semi-human form he may also wear a tripartite wig. The god is repeatedly associated with the colour green in his representations and called 'green of plume' (PT 507) in textual sources. His link with the Egyptian king led to the particularly fine statue of Amenophis III and Sobek now in the Luxor Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art which shows a small figure of the king protected by a much larger image of the god.

Worship

While the worship of this god is known from Old Kingdom times through to the Roman Period, it was given particular prominence during the Middle Kingdom as the names of several rulers of the 12th and 13th dynasties – such as Sobekneferu 'beautiful of Sobek' and Sobekhotep 'Sobek is satisfied' – indicate. The god's sanctuaries were numerous and widespread, but the two main cult centres of Sobek were in the area of the ancient Shedet (the Greek Crocodilopolis and modern Medinet el-Fayum) in the Fayum region which was the home of the 12th-dynasty rulers, and at Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt where he and his consort Hathor and son Khonsu shared a temple with Horus. Other important cult sites were located at Gebelein and Gebel el-Silsila. His temples were usually provided with pools containing sacred crocodiles which were mummified when they died. While apotropaic amulets of crocodiles are known from virtually all periods, amulets of crocodiles or crocodile-headed men wearing sun disks and plumes clearly represent the god and seem to have been worn in life.

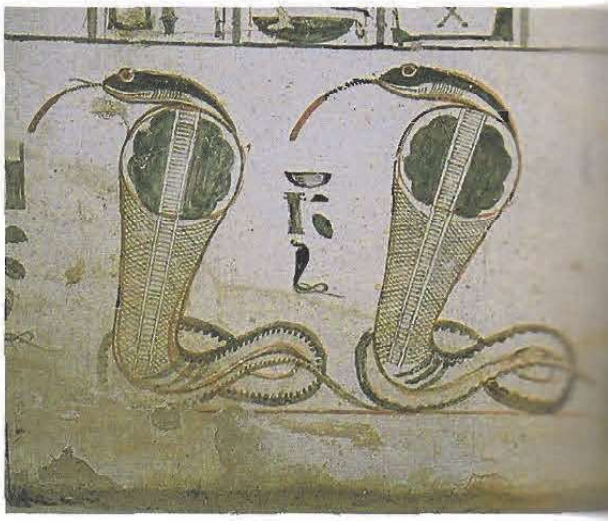


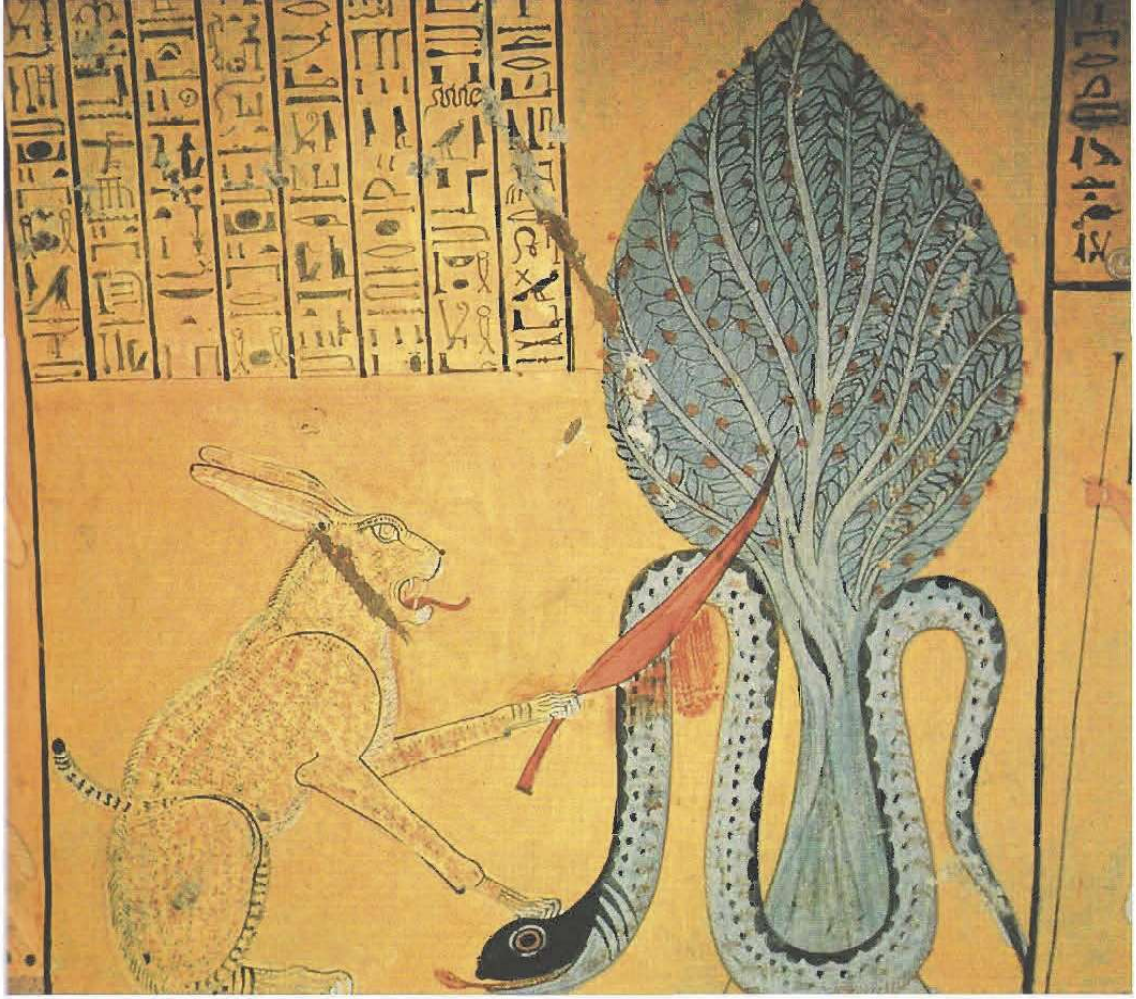
(Left) Calcite pair statue of **Sobek** *with Amenophis III. 18th dynasty. Luxor Museum.*

(Right) Isis and Nephthys as serpent deities, from the tomb of Montuherkhepeshef, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes. 19th dynasty.

SERPENT DEITIES

Of great importance in Egyptian religion, various serpent deities represented both benign and malevolent powers. While the fearsome serpent Apophis was the nemesis of the sun god himself, the powerful Mehen protected him. Both male and female deities were represented in serpent form and ranged from deities known only from mythological contexts to the serpent goddess Meretseger who was actively worshipped in ancient Thebes.





The 'great cat' of Re 'who dwells in Heliopolis' kills the serpent deity ***Apophis*** *shown coiled around the sacred sycamore or persea tree which was a symbol of the sun. The scene reflects Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, which states that the great male cat cuts off the head of Apophis, and which was often depicted in Egyptian funerary art. 20th dynasty. Detail from the tomb of Inherkha, Deir el-Medina, western Thebes.*

Apophis

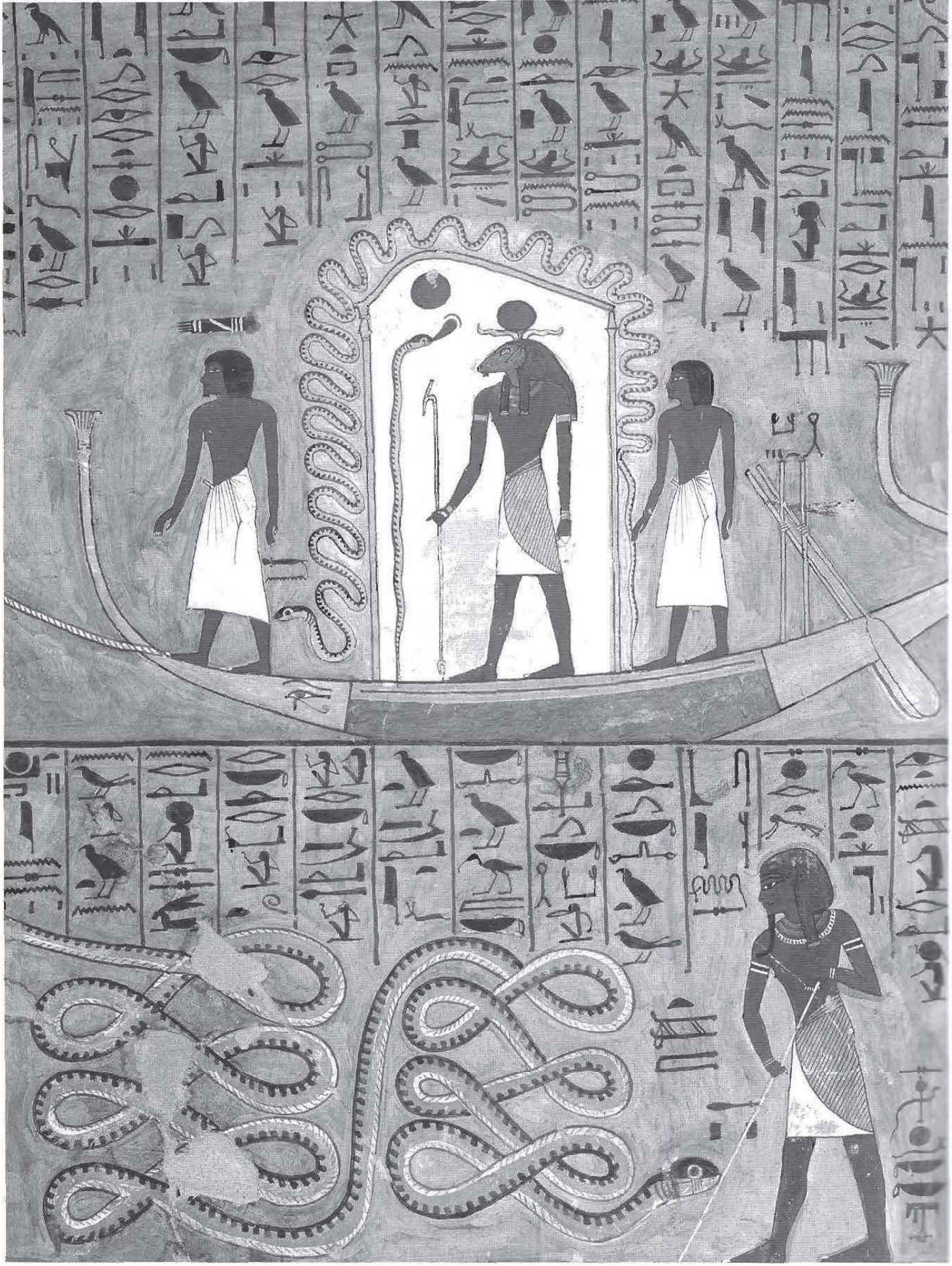
Mythology

Apophis was the great adversary of the sun god Re and the embodiment of the powers of dissolution, darkness, and non-being. The huge serpent was believed to have existed from the beginning of time in the waters of primeval chaos which preceded creation and it was thought that he would continue to exist in an endlessly malevolent cycle of attack, defeat and resurgent attack. The god is not attested before the Middle Kingdom and seems to have come into being in the uncertain and fearful times which followed the pyramid age. It is the New Kingdom funerary texts which provide most of the evidence for the god's mythology. According to these various mythic accounts, as the sun made its nightly voyage through the underworld and each morning as it emerged, the solar barque was attacked by the great serpent whose terrifying roar echoed through the underworld. Apophis was sometimes equated with Seth, the god of chaos, yet in some texts the aid of that same god was enlisted in defeating the serpent. It was said that each night Apophis hypnotized Re and the entourage who sail with him except for the god Seth who resisted the serpent's deadly stare and repulsed him with the thrust of a great spear. The serpent was also said to hinder the passage of the solar barque by means of its coils which are described as 'sandbanks', and also by gorging the waters of the underworld river in order to attempt to strand the barque of Re.

Other deities and the dead themselves were also involved in the cyclic defeat of the great serpent in the various stories, most notably in the Book of Gates, by Isis, Neith and Serket and by various deities, some in the form of monkeys, who successfully capture the monster with magical nets. He is then restrained by deities including the earth god Geb and the sons of Horus, and his body cut into pieces – only to revive in the ongoing cycle. In some versions of the myth the sun god was in fact encircled or swallowed by the serpent who later disgorged him as a metaphor of rebirth and renewal. Apophis may thus bear many epithets ranging from evil lizard, opponent and enemy to world encircler and serpent of rebirth.

Iconography

In the vignettes of the funerary texts and in other settings in which he is depicted, Apophis is shown as a large serpent, sometimes with tightly compressed, spring-like coils to emphasize his great size. Almost invariably Apophis is shown restrained, dismembered, or in the process of being destroyed, often by multiple knives. Only a relatively few scenes transcend this pattern. A scene painted



within the tomb of Ramesses VI in the Valley of the Kings shows the serpent with twelve heads above its back representing those it has swallowed who are freed from the monster – if only briefly – when it is vanquished; and in private tombs and funerary papyri, another scene of a different type is found where Re or Hathor appear in feline form in order to slay the chaos serpent by cutting it up with a knife. There are also a number of temple scenes (at Dendera, Deir el-Bahri, Luxor and Philae) which depict the king striking a circular ball-like object which represents the evil 'eye of Apophis'.

Worship

Although the god was neither worshipped in a formal cult nor incorporated into popular veneration, Apophis entered both spheres of religion as a god or demon to be protected against. Like the god Seth, Apophis was associated with frightening natural events such as unexplained darkness, storms and earthquakes as well as his underlying threat to the very stability of the cosmos, so magical texts and rituals were produced to combat these things. The so-called Book of Apophis was a collection of these magical texts and spells dating to the late New Kingdom, though the best preserved example – the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus in the British Museum – was produced in the 4th century BC. These spells for the 'overthrowing of Apophis' provided protection from the powers symbolized by this deity or from snakes which could be viewed as minor yet dangerous manifestations of the monster. During the Late Period when such a ritual book was read in temples daily to protect the world from the threat of the sun god's arch enemy, a wax model of the serpent was cut into pieces and burnt with fire. Other spells used to protect against Apophis involved drawing a picture of the serpent on a piece of papyrus, then sealing it in a box which was spat upon and set on fire.

Denwen

Denwen was a serpent god with dragon-like ability known from Old Kingdom times. In the Pyramid Texts Denwen was said to have the power to cause a fiery conflagration which would destroy the gods, but the serpent was thwarted from this act by the deceased king.

Kebehwet

Kebehwet was a celestial serpent (assuming a derivation of her name from the word *kebhu*, 'firmament') who is mentioned several times in the Pyramid Texts. She was said to be the daughter of Anubis and the king's 'sister' and one whom he loves. The Pyramid Texts also somewhat enigmatically identify Kebehwet with the king's middle or hindparts (PT 1749, etc.), and assert that she refreshed and purified the heart of the deceased monarch with pure water from four *nemset* jars (PT 1180) and that the goddess helped open the 'windows of the sky' to assist the king's resurrection (PT 468). Her ministrations were eventually extended to all of the dead, but the goddess was never a very important deity.

Mehen

Mythology

The coiled serpent god known as Mehen protected the god Re on his nightly journey through the underworld. The earliest known mention of the god is in the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom where there is reference to 'the mysteries of Mehen' (CT 493, 495), which may have involved specific rituals related to the veneration of the serpent deity. The same texts also assert that the god is a warden of criminals – primarily meaning the enemies of Re – and it seems that the deceased for whom the spells were inscribed was thought to assist in this work of Mehen.

Iconography

The Coffin Texts (CT 758–60) tell how the serpent god exists as nine concentric rings which are 'roads of fire' encircling and protecting the sun god and Peter Piccione has shown that the so-called 'coiled serpent board game', examples of which have survived from the Predynastic Period through to the

(Opposite) Scene from the third hour of the Book of Gates showing the serpent ***Mehen*** *protectively encircling the cabin of the sun god who passes through the underworld in his evening form, accompanied by the gods Sia and Heka. Beneath the sun god's barque, the great serpent Apophis is also shown. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Ramesses I, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.*

(Below) The deceased king encircled by the protective serpent ***Mehen****. At the right and left of this image an enigmatic text states 'He Who Hides the Hours'. Detail, second gilt shrine of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



Old Kingdom in Egypt, was based on this image of Mehen. Later, in the New Kingdom, Mehen is extensively represented in the vignettes of the 'Underworld Books' such as the Amduat. There the god is depicted as an immense serpent, often shown coiled around or above the shrine-like cabin of the boat of Re, protecting the sun god from evil and especially from the inimical underworld serpent Apophis.

Worship

As with most of the more bizarre denizens of the underworld Mehen was primarily the subject of myth rather than an object of ritual worship.

Meretseger

Mythology

Goddess of the pyramidal peak which lies at the heart of the Valley of the Kings in western Thebes, Meretseger presided over the whole Theban necropolis. Sometimes called Dehenet-Imentet 'the peak of the West' after her dwelling place, her more usual name was Meretseger 'she who loves silence', which was an apt one for the goddess of the lonely and desolate region uninhabited except by the deceased and, temporarily, by those workmen who constructed the tombs there.

Iconography

Although Meretseger was identified with the peak of the Theban royal necropolis, the hill itself rarely enters the goddess's iconography. Instead, she is usually represented as a coiled serpent, as a rearing cobra – sometimes with a woman's head, as a snake-headed woman, or occasionally, as a scorpion with a female head. The serpent and scorpion were among the few creatures to inhabit the remote desert site and these were seen, therefore, as fitting symbols for the manifestation of the goddess. In her various forms, the goddess may wear a disk with horns, a modius with uraeus, or other attribute upon her head.

Worship

Because she was worshipped primarily by the workmen of the royal necropolis, Meretseger's cult is attested from much of the New Kingdom but seldom later – when the Theban necropolis ceased to be used for royal burials. A good many stelae dedicated to the goddess have been found in the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina; and some of these, imploring the goddess's forgiveness, are among the most poignant of Egyptian religious texts (see p. 50). Meretseger was believed to strike those guilty of crimes with loss of sight or poisonous stings and bites, but a number of stelae record the goddess's forgiveness and the recovery of the workmen.

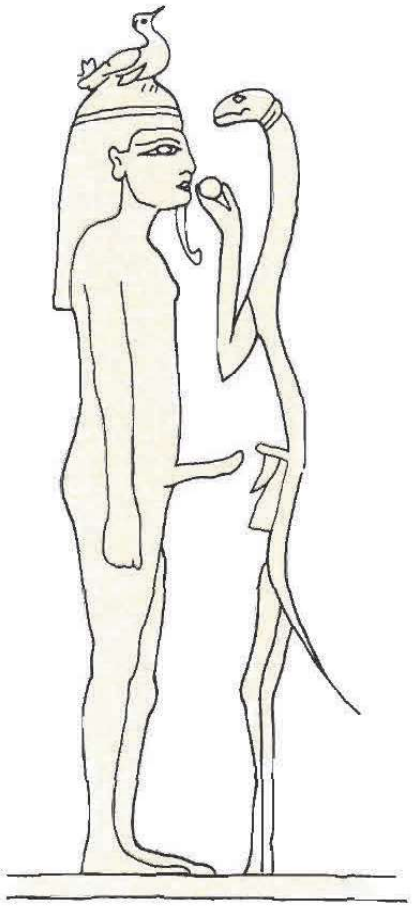
Nehebu-Kau

Mythology

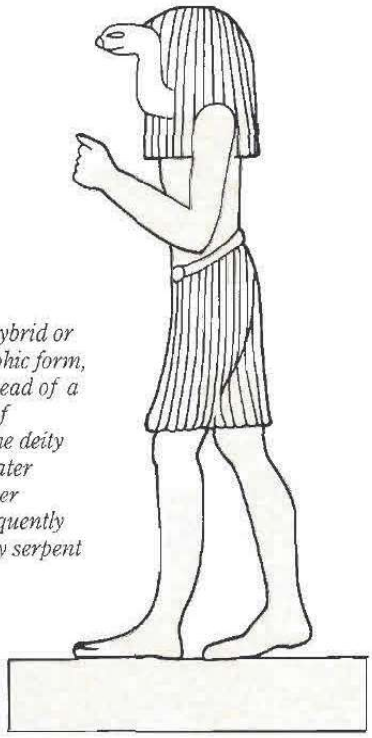
First attested in the Pyramid Texts, the serpent god Nehebu-Kau whose name means 'he who harnesses the spirits' was regarded as a benign and helpful deity. He assisted the deceased king in various ways and seems to act as an intercessory on his behalf in that several spells record the king's desire that his 'good name' be told to Nehebu-Kau who will 'raise up this good utterance...to the Two Enneads' (PT 1708). The god is said to be the son of the scorpion goddess Serket, though an alternative tradition claimed that he was the son of the earth god Geb and the serpent harvest goddess Renenutet. His chthonic origins and serpentine nature – coupled with the 'seven cobras' he is said to have swallowed – are the sources of Nehebu-Kau's considerable power. This is seen in later texts which assert that Nehebu-Kau is not subject to any harmful magic and cannot be harmed by water or fire. The god's consort was said to be Nehemtawy.

Iconography

Although he is called a 'great serpent, multitudinous of coils' in the Pyramid Texts and may be depicted in this manner, Nehebu-Kau was frequently represented as a man with a serpent's head and tail. In serpent form he is sometimes depicted on the



*The protective and assistive deity **Nehebu-Kau**, in the form of a serpent-man, feeds the deceased. Detail of a cartonnage mummy case. Louvre, Paris.*



***Nehebu-Kau** in hybrid or semi-anthropomorphic form, as a man with the head of a serpent. This type of representation of the deity tends to appear in later contexts, while earlier depictions more frequently show the god in fully serpent form.*

sides of divine thrones, doubtless as a protective deity, and in his semi-anthropomorphic form he is often depicted on amulets and plaques with his arms raised before him holding an offering pot.

Worship

The cult of Nehebu-Kau was practised at Herakleopolis Magna (modern Ihnasya el-Medina) and probably in other locations, and a feast of the god is known to have been celebrated since at least Middle Kingdom times on the first day of the first month of the winter season. The powerful nature and assistive qualities of Nehebu-Kau also led to his use in many amulets, and it is probably fair to assume that he was quite widely venerated in popular religion. While the god appears on amulets of late New Kingdom times, most date to the Third Intermediate Period and later.

Renenutet

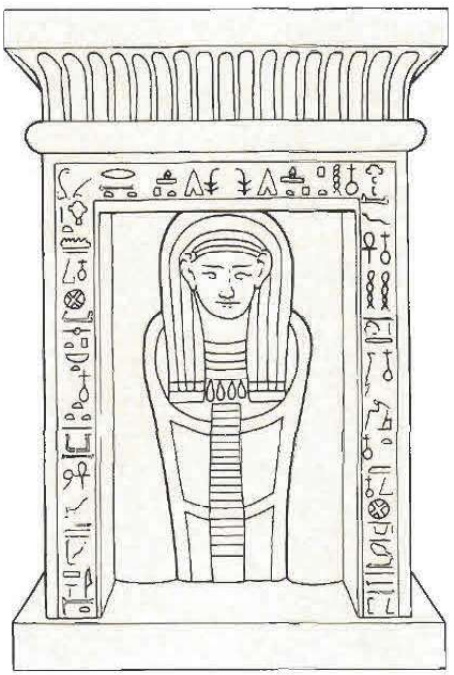
Mythology

Although serpentine in form, Renenutet (Egyptian for 'snake who nourishes') was a popular and beneficent deity. Protective in nature and of a nurturing rather than venomous disposition, she was a goddess of the harvest and a divine nurse. In the Old Kingdom Renenutet was venerated as a guardian of the king in this life and in the beyond, being identified, like Wadjet, with the flame-breathing royal uraeus (PT 302) and also the king's robe 'of which the gods are afraid' (PT 1755, 1794). In the latter aspect she came to be sometimes associated with the bandages of the mummy. Her aspect as a goddess of fertility and harvest is clearly denoted in her epithets 'lady of the fertile land', 'lady of the threshing floor' and 'lady of the granaries', and her role in this area may have originated in the imagery of the serpent who protects the crops from the rats and mice which threatened standing crops and stored grain alike. Renenutet was also identified with the household and family life in her role as provider, nourisher and as a nurse of infants.

The interrelationships of the goddess with other deities were extensive. In the Fayum Renenutet came to be linked with Sobek and Horus as a member of a triad named by the Greeks Hermouthis, Sekonopis and Ankhoes. As a grain goddess she was identified as the mother of Osiris in his form of the child Nepri, and in the Book of the Dead Renenutet is said to be the mother of Horus by Atum and thus came to be identified with Isis, with whom she shared the trait of divine nurse. Her associations with children also identified her with Meskhenet as a birth goddess and with Hathor whose headdress she wore. In the New Kingdom Litany of Re she appears in the underworld as the 'Lady of Justification' and in this form she may be associated with the goddess Maat. Finally, in the Late Period, like the god Shay, Renenutet was associated with the idea of fate and destiny, deciding not only the length of an individual's life but also many of its events.

Iconography

The iconography of Renenutet is most frequently that of an erect cobra with a sun disk and horns atop its head, often with two tall plumes surmounting the solar disk. The goddess may also be depicted anthropomorphically as a woman or a woman with a snake's head, standing or enthroned



*New Kingdom shrine, now lost, of the serpent goddess **Renenutet**. The shrine was doubtless typical of many local shrines dedicated to this deity. After Champollion,* Description de l'Égypte.

and sometimes holding or nursing a child which may be her son Nepri or a more generalized infant. In vignettes of the Litany of Re Renenutet is depicted as a mummiform being with the head of a cobra, though this is a specialized iconography not usually applied to the goddess. Sometimes she is the object of veneration of minor gods as in a granary at Karnak where the god Hapy was shown presenting offerings to her. Terracotta figures of the Ptolemaic Period depict the goddess as a form of Isis with a snake's head rising from a woman's body or with a woman's head atop a snake.

Worship

While amulets depicting the goddess show she may have functioned as a protective deity, it was as a goddess of fecundity that Renenutet was most widely venerated, and the goddess was popular among agricultural workers especially. The festivals of Renenutet were celebrated in the last month of the season when crops were sown, and in the following month, the first month of the summer season when they began to ripen. From Middle Kingdom times onwards we have evidence of the cult of the goddess in the Fayum where large scale crop production was accomplished, and her cult in the city of Dja (modern Medinet Madi) was particularly strong. She was also evidently venerated at Terenuthis (Kom Abu Billo) in the Delta, and in the New Kingdom we find evidence of her worship at Giza, Abydos, and especially at Thebes. We know Renenutet was honoured in shrines erected in harvest fields and vineyards, and during the harvest and the pressing of grapes offerings were made before her image. Shrines dedicated to the goddess were also placed in magazines and granaries where the harvested crops were stored. The affection of the ancient Egyptians for this goddess is clear. As a much loved deity Renenutet even survived the pagan era in that she was ultimately transformed into the Greek Thermouthis who was later venerated as a Christian saint.

Wadjet

Mythology

The cobra goddess Wadjet was associated with the Nile Delta region from early times and became the tutelary deity of Lower Egypt in juxtaposition to her counterpart, the vulture goddess Nekhbet of Upper Egypt. Her name means 'the green one' which may refer to the natural colour of the serpent or perhaps to the verdant Delta region which she inhabited. Perhaps because she was associated more with the world of the living, the goddess does not play an important role in the Pyramid Texts. though references to the crown as a goddess do give her the epithet 'great of magic' (PT 194, 196). She was certainly closely linked to the king, both in the

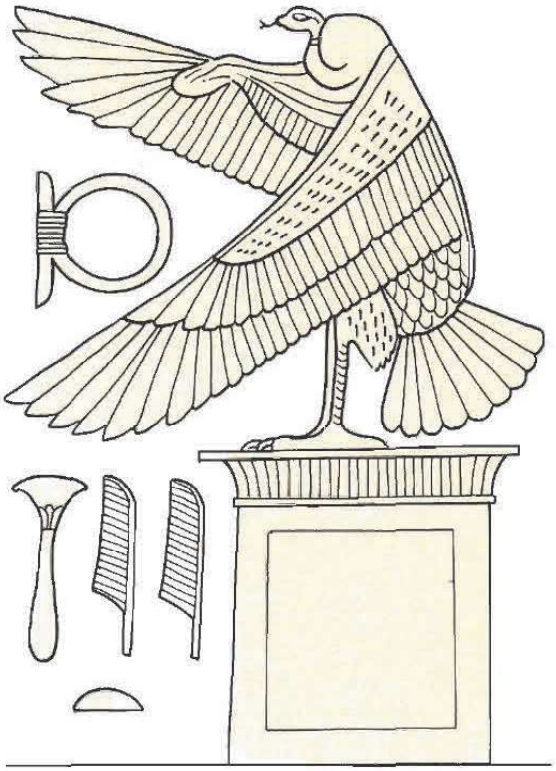


*Classic hieroglyphic form of the goddess **Wadjet** as a serpent on a basket, along with the vulture of the goddess Nekhbet, representing the 'Two Ladies' name of the king which symbolized the titulary position of these goddesses over Upper and Lower Egypt. 12th dynasty. Chapel of Senwosret I, Karnak.*

'two ladies' or 'two goddesses' title of his royal protocol and as a protective deity in the form of the royal uraeus worn on the monarch's crown or headdress. In later texts she is called the 'mistress of awe' and 'mistress of fear', as mythologically the royal serpent spat flames in defense of the king; and military inscriptions (such of those of Ramesses II regarding the great Battle of Kadesh) describe her as slaying the monarch's enemies with her fiery breath. In the cycle of myths relating to Horus as represented in the temple of Hathor at Dendera, Wadjet acts as the young god's nurse when he is raised in the Delta site of Khemnis, giving her an association with Isis who usually took this role. Wadjet was also associated with a number of leonine goddesses as an 'Eye of Re', and like them she is sometimes said to be the mother of the god Nefertem.

Iconography

Usually Wadjet assumed the form of the erect cobra with hood extended in the creature's pose of readiness to strike, and it is in this form that the goddess is represented as the uraeus which protected both king and gods and was often shown attached to the solar disk – even during the Amarna Period when the depiction of most non-solar deities was avoided or proscribed. The raised serpent is often shown seated along with the vulture Nekhbet on two baskets, an iconography known from the 1st dynasty.



***Wadjet** as a serpent-headed vulture, in iconographic parallelism with her Upper Egyptian counterpart, the vulture goddess Nekhbet. Detail from the roof of the fourth gilt shrine of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Because of the connection between Wadjet and Nekhbet some fusion of their iconographies took place, and the serpent Wadjet may be shown as a vulture or as a serpent with wings, just as a cobra depicted wearing the White Crown usually represents Nekhbet. It is possible that some depictions and amulets in the form of a papyrus sceptre or column, especially when surmounted by a cobra, are also meant to represent the goddess due to the similarity of the Egyptian word for papyrus with her name. As an 'Eye of Re' Wadjet can appear in fully leonine form and can thus also be depicted as a cobra with a lion's head – a form which may represent her or other 'Eye' goddesses. Amulets of Wadjet in various forms were quite common beginning in the Saite Period (724–712 BC).

Worship

The major cult centre of Wadjet was in the region of the ancient towns of Pe and Dep which came to be called Buto (modern Tell el-Fara'in) in the northwestern Delta. Her shrine was called the *per-nu* or 'house of flame' and is attested from predynastic times, eventually becoming representative of all the local shrines in its region. Royal sarcophagi patterned after the distinctive form of the *per-nu* shrine are known from the Old Kingdom, and the burial mastaba of the 5th-dynasty monarch Shepseskare seems to have been constructed in this shape. In the New Kingdom several royal sarcophagi of the later 18th dynasty take this form, as does the innermost of the four funerary shrines of Tutankhamun. Many coffins and sarcophagi were also made in the



*Inlaid golden uraeus of Senwosret I representing **Wadjet** as the protective serpent who mythologically spat flames of fire against the king's enemies. 12th dynasty. From Lahun, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

shape of the *per-nu* throughout the later periods, as were other funerary containers, showing that the Lower Egyptian shrine had become thoroughly associated with the funerary sphere to an extent that was often seemingly independent of direct associations with Wadjet herself. Yet the goddess was often incorporated in funerary decoration, and this provides much of the evidence for her veneration.

Wepset

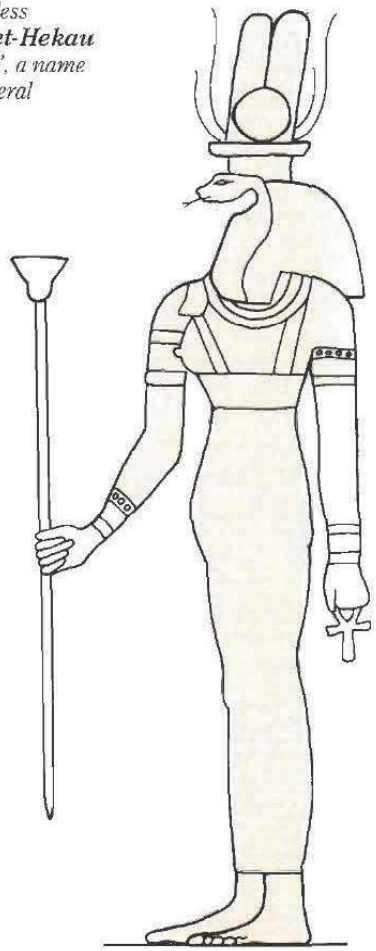
The serpent goddess Wepset, whose name means 'she who burns', appears to be one of the various identities of the fiery uraeus (see Wadjet) who guarded gods and kings, and also of the fearsome 'Eye of Re'. She is first attested in the Coffin Texts as the 'Eye', and in New Kingdom afterlife texts she is said to destroy the enemies of Re-Osiris. Wepset is usually represented in serpent form, though in the Graeco-Roman temples of Nubia she appears in anthropomorphic form as a goddess wearing a uraeus on her head, sometimes with horns and sun disk, or even with the head of a lion linking her to other 'Eye' goddesses such as Hathor and Tefnut. Although no temple of Wepset has been found at the site, known texts claim that the island of Biga was a cult centre of the goddess, and she appears in other temples of that area and Lower Nubia.

Weret-Hekau

The name Weret-Hekau, which means 'great of magic' or 'great enchantress' as it is sometimes translated, was applied to several goddesses. In the Pyramid Texts the name is associated with the divine uraeus (see p. 227) and with the crown of Lower Egypt as manifestations of the goddess Wadjet, and the name was in fact written with the determinative sign of a serpent. In later times the name is found applied more widely and also takes on a more independent nature. Weret-Hekau is mentioned several times on the objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun, particularly on a small shrine which contained an image of the goddess as a rearing serpent with the head of a woman who is depicted nursing the king, a maternal role which is found in the Pyramid Texts for the uraeus goddess (PT 1107–09).

Yam

A Semitic god, Yam is best known in Canaanite sources from Ugarit and elsewhere which show he was a tyrannical, monstrous deity of the sea and other bodies of water. He was known also in Egypt as a minor foreign god, and a fragmentary papyrus



Cobra-headed goddess representing ***Weret-Hekau*** *or 'Great of Magic', a name associated with several serpent deities.*

indicates that in his mythology his demands of tribute from other gods were thwarted by the goddess Astarte. In Canaanite myth he was finally defeated by the god Baal, and in Egyptian sources by Seth with whom Baal was identified. The mythological battle may have been representative of winter sea storms which calmed in the spring. Yam is not clearly described in the ancient sources and has no clear iconography though he appears to be serpentine in form. He may have had a great (sometimes seven-headed) sea monster in his following or he could himself have been that monster. Unserved by any Egyptian cult, he may have nevertheless been a god known and feared by Egyptian seafarers.

AMPHIBIAN AND FISH DEITIES

Hatmehyt

Mythology

A minor fish goddess, Hatmehyt was worshipped in the Delta city of Mendes but does not seem to have played a part in any major mythic cycle and little is known of her. Her name means 'she who is before the fishes'; this could suggest either pre-eminence – being foremost among fish deities – or temporal pri-

macy, as the one who was before in the primeval world. Lack of mythological examples would perhaps suggest the former meaning as the most likely. Hatmehyt was eventually incorporated into the cult of Banebdjedet, the ram god of Mendes, as the consort of that more powerful god.

Iconography

Hatmehyt was depicted as a woman wearing a fish emblem upon her head, or in the form of a fish. It has sometimes been thought that the goddess's emblem was a dolphin, but it is now believed that the creature represented is the common Nile *Lepidotus* fish.

Worship

The Delta city of Mendes, chief cult centre of Hatmehyt, doubtless contained a temple of this goddess at some time. Despite her eventual assimilation into the cult of the ram god of Banebdjedet, Hatmehyt does not seem to have been venerated much beyond the Delta, perhaps because fish, which were regarded as taboo in many areas, were seldom viewed as divine symbols. Usually she is represented as a woman with a fish on her head. Amulets on the Schilbe fish, which represented the deity, first appear early in the 26th dynasty.

Heket

Mythology

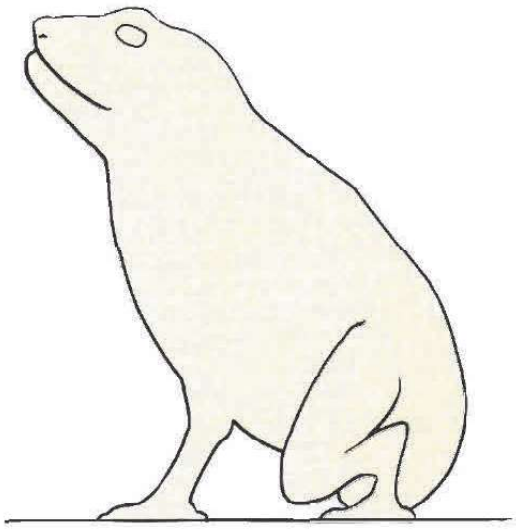
A frog goddess who assisted in fashioning the child in the womb and who presided over its birth, Heket is first attested in the Pyramid Texts where she assists the deceased king in his journey to the sky (PT 1312). Her connection with birth is first apparent in the Middle Kingdom story preserved in the Westcar Papyrus, however, in which the goddess 'hastened the birth' of the three kings who inaugurated the 5th dynasty. Also from this time, the term 'servant of Heket' may have been applied to midwives in Egyptian society. Mythologically, Heket's life-giving power caused her to be associated with the Osiride family of deities and with the afterlife, and she was regarded as the wife of Haroeris/Harwer and venerated as a female complement of Khnum.

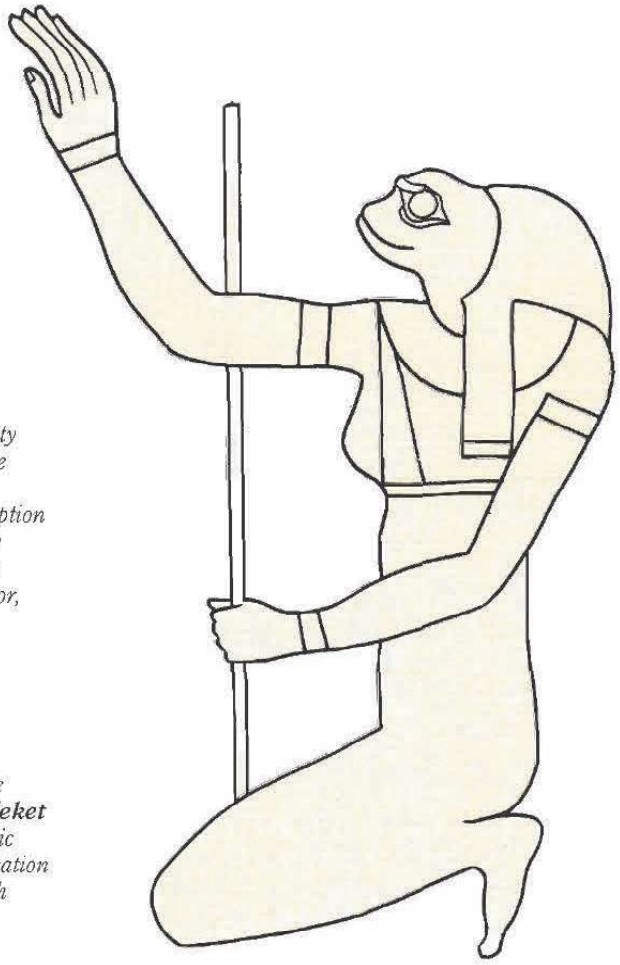
Iconography

Heket was represented as a frog or as a woman with a frog's head. While temple representations tend to utilize the partially anthropomorphic form, amulets of the goddess are usually zoomorphic.

Worship

The main cult centre of Heket was at Herwer (perhaps modern Hur near el-Ashmunein), and the remains of a temple of the goddess have been found at Qus. She also appears in the temples of several other deities and was depicted receiving an offering of wine from Sethos I in his temple at Abydos, for example, and mentioned in the tomb of Petosiris (*c.* 300 BC) at Tuna el-Gebel, showing her cult was still strong. In less formal contexts Heket appears along with other deities on ivory 'wands' of the Middle Kingdom, and she appears in amuletic form from New Kingdom times.





(Left) The frog birth-deity ***Heket****. Detail of a scene showing the goddess's attendance on the conception of Horus by Isis and the deceased Osiris. Roman Period. Temple of Hathor, Dendera.*

(Right) Detail of a scene depicting the goddess ***Heket*** *in semi-anthropomorphic form assisting in the creation of human children. 30th dynasty. Mammisi of Nectanebo, Dendera.*

Invertebrate and Insect Deities



(Right) Plaque of wood, glass paste and gold, representing the Scarabaeus sacer *beetle, symbol of the god* **Khepri**. *Graeco-Roman Period. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Hededet

Hededet was a scorpion goddess whose characteristics resemble Serket in many ways but who was associated in the later periods with Isis. Like both of these goddesses, Hededet (in Egyptian *Hedjedjet*) can symbolize motherly qualities; and amulets in the form of a seated goddess with a scorpion on her head and nursing a child are likely to represent Hededet.

Khepri

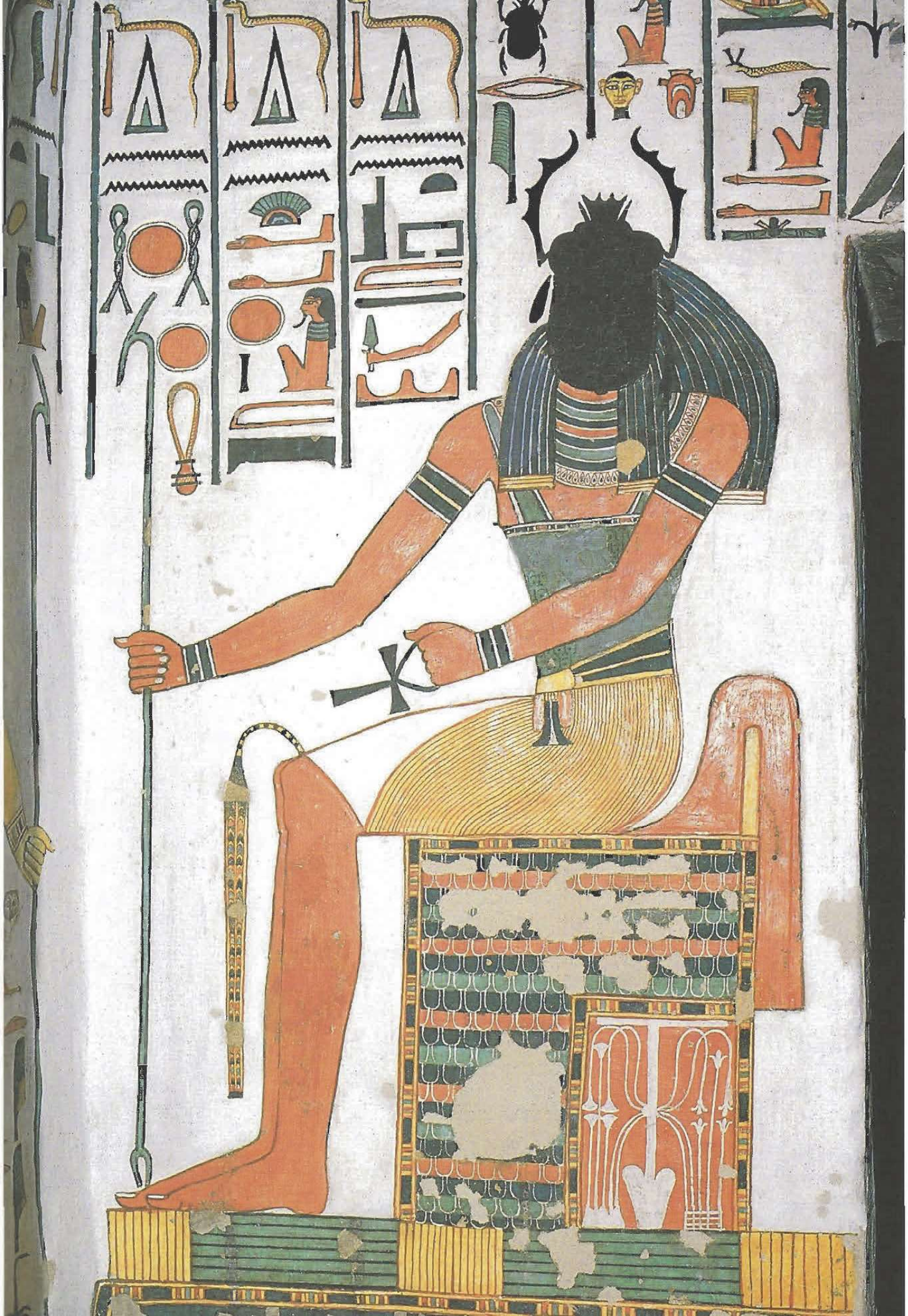
Mythology

Khepri was the form of the sun god which represented the solar disk rising on the eastern horizon. As such he was one of the three forms or aspects of the solar deity who was 'Khepri in the morning, Re at midday and Atum in the evening', though it is impossible to know whether the god originally functioned in this carefully delineated role or whether he was accorded the position when, at some point, he was fused into the Heliopolitan cult of the sun. The name of the god in its earliest known occurrences, *kheprer,* is simply that of the scarab or dung beetle (*Scarabaeus sacer*) which the Egyptians visualized as a symbol of the god due to the beetle's habit of rolling a ball of mud or dung along the ground in a manner suggestive of the god pushing the solar disk across the sky. The female scarab beetle also lays her eggs in a similar ball from which the young eventually emerge as though spontaneously. The biology of the insect thus seems to underlie the name of the god as Khepri suggests the Egyptian verb *kheper*: 'develop' or 'come into being'. As the 'developing one' Khepri was the god of the first sunrise at the dawn of creation, and was thus linked with Atum as Atum-Khepri. To some extent Khepri also represented the sun in a general way and he could be linked with the solar god Re, though his identity as the morning sun remained primary and his essential mythological role was that of raising the sun from the horizon into the body of the sky goddess Nut. The god could therefore be said to be swallowed by Nut each evening and to travel through her body in the night hours to be reborn each morning. As a god who was constantly reborn Khepri was also directly associated with the concept of resurrection. In this regard it has been suggested that the underground tunnels of the insect take the same form as the vertical shaft and horizontal passage found in Old Kingdom mastaba tombs, and that the pupae of the insect resemble the bandaged mummy of the deceased, though there is no indication that the Egyptians themselves recognized such similarities, for these types of embellishments to the lore of the scarab were recorded by Classical writers such as Plutarch and Horapollo.

Iconography

Khepri is most commonly represented in the form of the scarab beetle with varying degrees of stylization of the insect's anatomy. Painted and inlaid works often colour the insect blue or utilize lapis lazuli inlay to symbolically stress the beetle's association with the heavens, though in the vignettes of funerary texts the scarab is invariably shown black as in nature. The beetle may be shown alone or pushing the solar disk ahead of it; and although in nature the insect usually propels its mud ball with its hind legs, Egyptian depictions prefer to show the ball being pushed in a forward manner by the insect's front legs. The vignettes of funerary papyri and other scenes show the god standing on a boat being lifted by the god Nun as the personification of the primeval watery chaos towards the heavens in representation of the creation event. The body of the insect was occasionally fused with that of other

(Opposite) The god **Khepri**, *in the form of a scarab-headed man, enthroned as the powerful solar deity. Although frequently representing only the aspect of the 'emerging' sun god, Khepri could also personify the broader nature of the solar god. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*



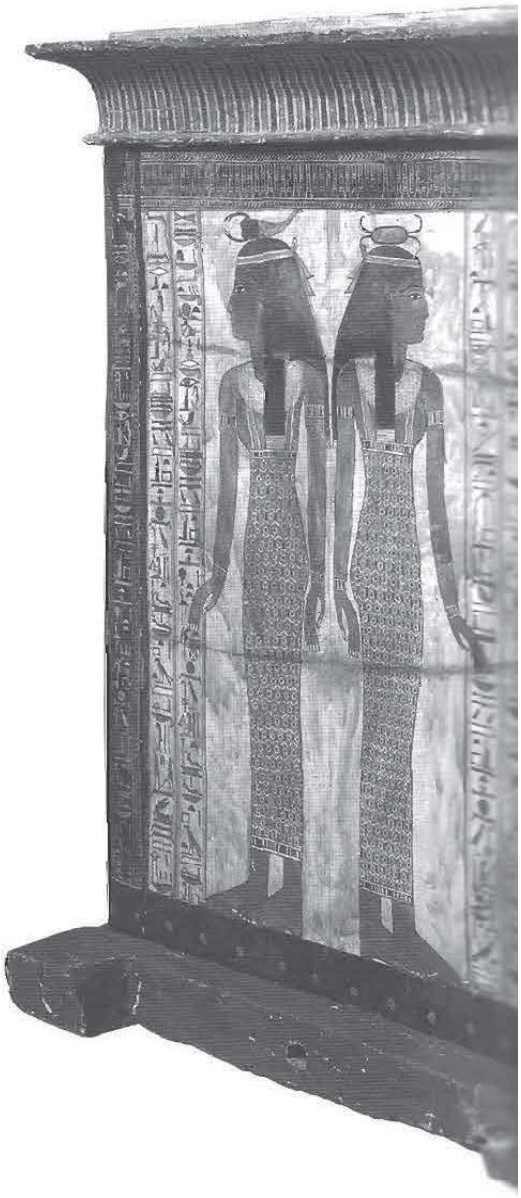
creatures such as the falcon or vulture, with the body of the scarab often being united with avian legs, tail and wings. Sometimes, as in the 4th-century BC tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel, the insect is depicted with the Atef Crown of Osiris in order to unite the solar and netherworld realms in one image. Khepri was also depicted in semi-anthropomorphic form as a man with a scarab beetle as his head, as may be found in the tomb of Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens, and representations of this type sometimes unite the mummiform body of Osiris with a scarab head in the same kind of linkage indicated by the Atef-crowned beetle. A final variant on the image of the god is that which fuses the head of a ram on a scarab body in order to represent the joining of Atum-Khepri as the creator sun god or the combined rising-setting sun.

Colossal scarab beetle on a large plinth erected by Amenophis III and later moved from that king's mortuary temple in western Thebes to Karnak Temple's sacred lake. 18th dynasty.



Worship

As with many related cosmic deities, Khepri was not accorded a cult of his own, though examples of colossal stone statues of the beetle god (such as the example now preserved beside the sacred lake in the temple of Amun at Karnak) suggest that the god was honoured in many Egyptian temples and might have represented the concepts of creation and the ongoing solar journey which were symbolically incorporated into temple architecture. On a much smaller scale, scarab beetle amulets are known from the 5th dynasty, and scarabs used as seals appear in the First Intermediate Period and were produced in great numbers from Middle Kingdom times onward. The undersides of these scarabs were incised with the owner's names and titles, with the names of deities or kings used for their protective value, or simply with decorative designs. Egyptian kings even used the undersides of scarabs as a medium for the recording of victories and other important events, with those of Amenophis III recording events as varied as the king's lion hunting



expeditions and the arrival of a new princess for his harem. Other types of scarabs included 'heart scarabs' placed on the mummy of the deceased and scaraboids which fused the basic form of the scarab with the image of some other creature. The scarab was, in fact, the most popular of Egyptian amulets, and while Khepri may not have enjoyed the widespread services of a formal cult, his utilization as a potent symbol of creation and resurrection made him an almost ubiquitous deity in ancient Egyptian culture.

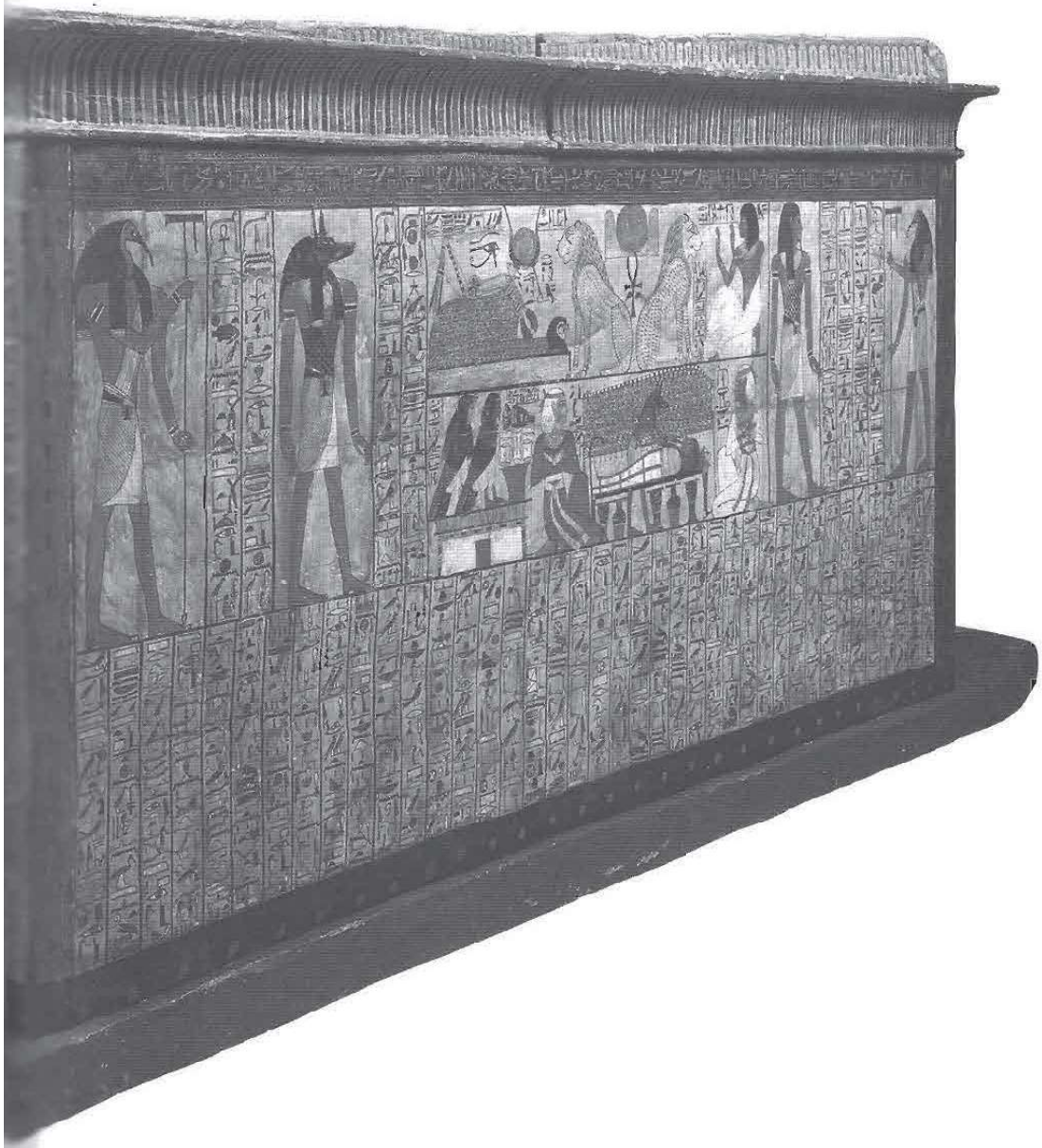
Sepa

The centipede god Sepa, sometimes called 'the centipede of Horus', is attested from Old Kingdom times through to the Graeco-Roman Period. He was linked with the gods of Heliopolis, particularly with Horus and with Osiris, sometimes appearing as Osiris-Sepa. In addition to his myriopodic form, Sepa could be represented with the head of a donkey or as a mummiform god (relating to his association with Osiris) with two short horns on his head. He was viewed as a protective deity having the power to prevent snake bites and was honoured with a festival from early times. A temple of the god was situated in Heliopolis.

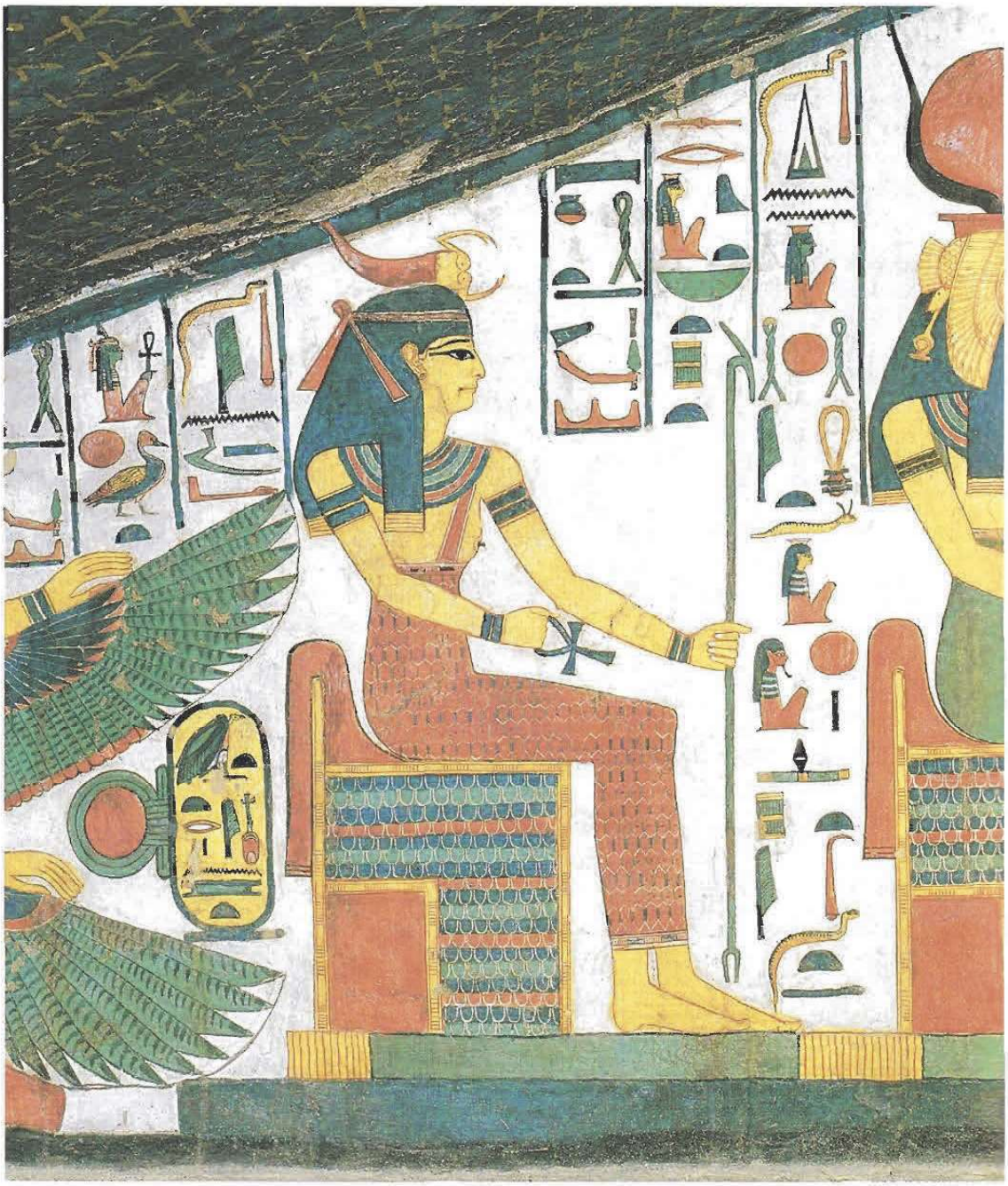
Serket

Mythology

Serket was a scorpion goddess known from the 1st dynasty whose protective role is attested from at least the Old Kingdom when she appears in the Pyramid Texts – both alone and in the company of other goddesses – guarding the deceased king. Her importance as a protective deity is seen in texts such as that in which the king claims 'My mother is Isis, my nurse is Nephthys...Neith is behind me, and Serket is before me' (PT 1375). Along with these same goddesses – Isis, Nephthys and Neith – Serket became one of the four protective deities who



Stuccoed, painted and varnished wooden outer sarcophagus or funerary sled of Khonsu, son of Sennedjem, showing ***Serket*** *with the goddess Neith on one end, with Thoth, Anubis and other figures (including Isis and Nephthys mourning the mummy of the deceased) on its long side. 19th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*



The enthroned goddess ***Serket****, given the designations 'Lady of Heaven, Mistress of the Sacred Land [the necropolis]'. 19th dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, western Thebes.*

guarded coffins and the canopic chests and jars in which embalmed internal organs were placed, with the specific canopic responsibility of protecting the god Qebesenuef (see p. 88). She is often paired with Neith as Isis is with Nephthys. Her funerary role was a primary one, and she is sometimes called 'mistress of the beautiful house' referring to the embalming pavilion.

The full form of her Egyptian name – *Serket hetyt* – means 'she who causes the throat to breathe' and appears to be euphemistic of the fact that the scorpion can be fatally dangerous, and the goddess may heal just as she might destroy. Serket also fulfilled the role of a mother goddess in which she was called 'Serket the great, the divine mother'. Historically the scorpion was regarded as a symbol of motherhood in many areas of the Near East, and as early as the Pyramid Texts Serket is said to nurse the king (PT 1427). In the New Kingdom scenes which record the 'divine birth' of Amenophis III in Luxor Temple and that of Hatshepsut in her mortuary temple, Serket is present with Neith supporting the god Amun and the queen on the marriage bed. She also appears with Nephthys in the mythological story of the birth of Horus when the two goddesses assist Isis in guarding the infant god after he is stung or bitten. In the same myth Isis is accompanied by seven scorpions which are emanations of Serket, and which protect Isis and her unborn child but also punish a woman who refuses to give her shelter. According to Egyptian mythology,

Serket was herself the mother of the serpent god Nehebu-Kau.

Iconography

Serket is usually represented in anthropomorphic form as a woman wearing a scorpion with raised tail atop her head. Almost always – as in the writing of the scorpion hieroglyph in the goddess's name and elsewhere – the creature is not drawn completely for protective, magical reasons, having its sting and often its legs or claws omitted. This is the standard depiction of the goddess when she appears in funerary contexts as, for example, in the graceful gilded statue which guarded the canopic chest in the tomb of Tutankhamun. In settings such as this the goddess stands with outstretched arms both protecting and embracing her charge. In her aspect of divine mother, however, Serket may be represented quite differently with the body of a woman, armed with knives, and with the heads of both a lioness and a crocodile. In funerary scenes Serket could be shown in fully zoomorphic form as a rearing cobra, and the goddess could also be represented in leonine form, as well as in the form of the scorpion. Amulets and images of the later dynasties which show a scorpion with the head of a woman wearing horns and solar disk may represent Serket with the attributes of Isis, Isis in scorpion form or simply a fusion of the two goddesses.



*Gilded wooden statue of **Serket** made to guard one side of the canopic shrine from the tomb of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

Worship

The cult of Serket is known to have existed since the 1st dynasty when she appears on a funerary stela from Saqqara, though the presence of her 'priests' seems to indicate medical magicians rather than the servants of a temple. Early Egyptian amulets of scorpions – which are known from Old Kingdom times – could have been apotropaic in nature and may not have represented Serket herself, though the goddess appears in anthropomorphic form as an amulet during the Late Period. As might be expected, Serket appears in many magical spells although, oddly, the majority of known spells against scorpion stings invoke Isis rather than Serket. There are, however, many spells in which Serket is said to protect and heal poisonous bites, and she appears to have been a patroness of the practicioners of magical medicine who dealt with such bites.

Ta-Bitjet

A scorpion goddess said to be the wife of Horus, Ta-Bitjet was believed to have power against poisonous bites and was invoked in many magical spells for this purpose. As is common with other minor goddesses invoked for anti-venom spells, Ta-Bitjet was sometimes conflated with the much greater deity Isis.

Inanimate Object Deities

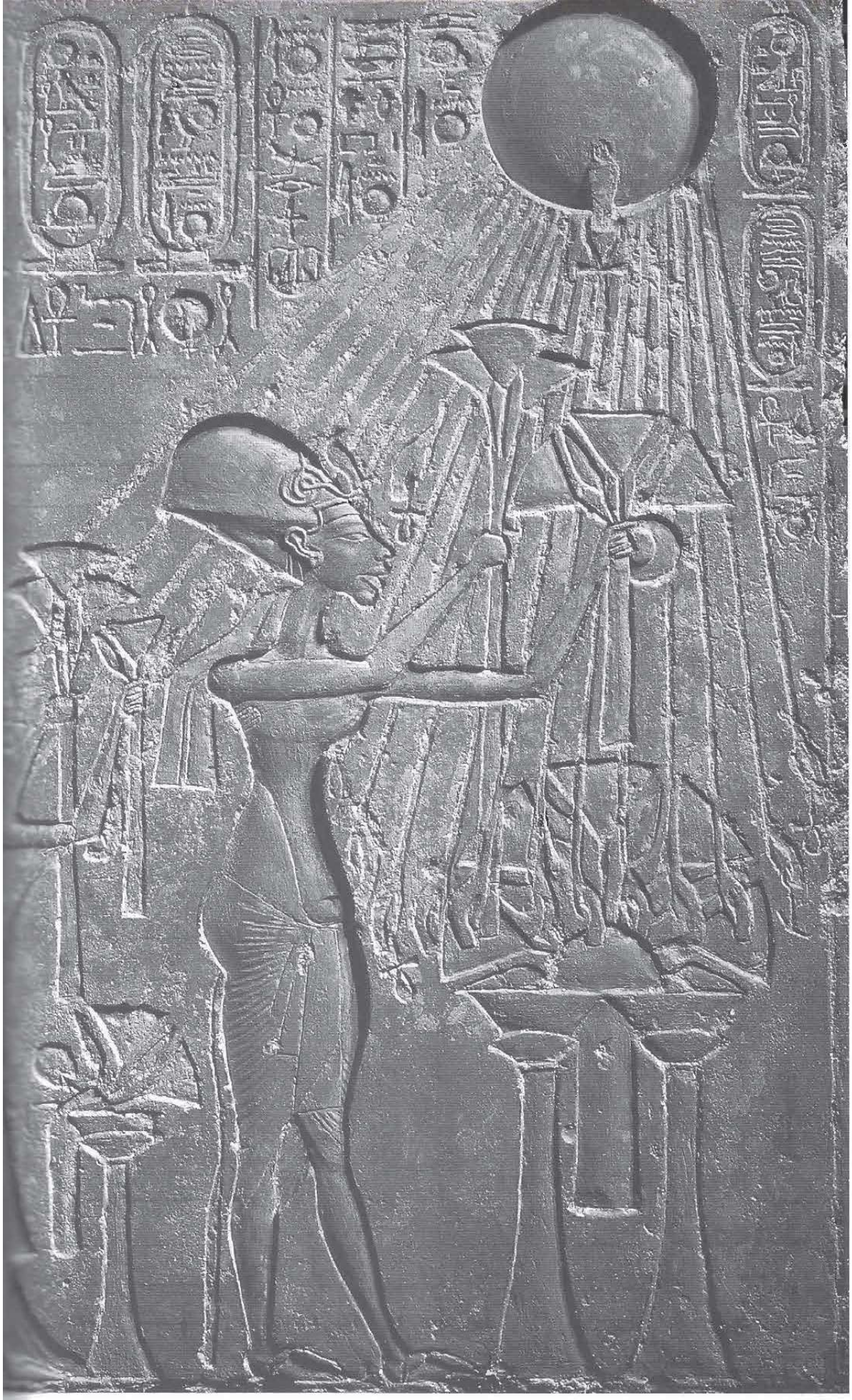
Aten

Mythology

The mythology of the Aten – the radiant disk of the sun – is not only unique in Egyptian history but is also one of the most complex and controversial aspects of Egyptian religion. Forever associated with the heretic pharaoh Amenophis IV/Akhenaten, the Aten predates that king but rose to become a universal and almost exclusive deity during his reign – only to plunge into virtual obscurity within a generation of Akhenaten's death. The word *aten* is known to have been used from at least Middle Kingdom times to designate the solar disk and is used in this way in the Coffin Texts; but in the 'Story of Sinuhe', from the same period, the word is used with the determinative for god (Papyrus Berlin 10499), and by mid-New Kingdom times a solar god named Aten appears to be well established. Tuthmosis IV issued a commemorative scarab on which the Aten functions as a god of war protecting the pharaoh, and his successor, Amenophis III, the father of Akhenaten, seems to have actively encouraged the worship of Aten. The third Amenophis stressed solar worship in many of his extensive building works; and one of the epithets of this king was Tjekhen-Aten or 'radiance of Aten', a term which was also used in several other contexts during his reign. But it was with Amenophis IV/Akhenaten that the ultimate elevation of the Aten occurred. Exactly what kind of god the Aten was envisaged as at this time is not always clear. Recently, Raymond Johnson has discussed the possibility that the Aten worship promulgated by Akhenaten was one stressing the god as a deified form of his father, Amenophis III, but whatever the case may be in this regard, the Aten mythology propounded by Akhenaten was revolutionary and had far-reaching consequences.

Evidence such as the Great Hymn to the Aten shows that not only was the god viewed as being universal and transcendent, but also the Aten's position relative to the king and his direct family was conceived of uniquely. Akhenaten and his queen Nefertiti served the god directly and despite the existence of a priesthood of the Aten, Akhenaten alone was said to have true knowledge of the god. As a result, even the most universal aspects of the theology of Atenism were short-circuited in the closed system espoused by the god's chief adherent.





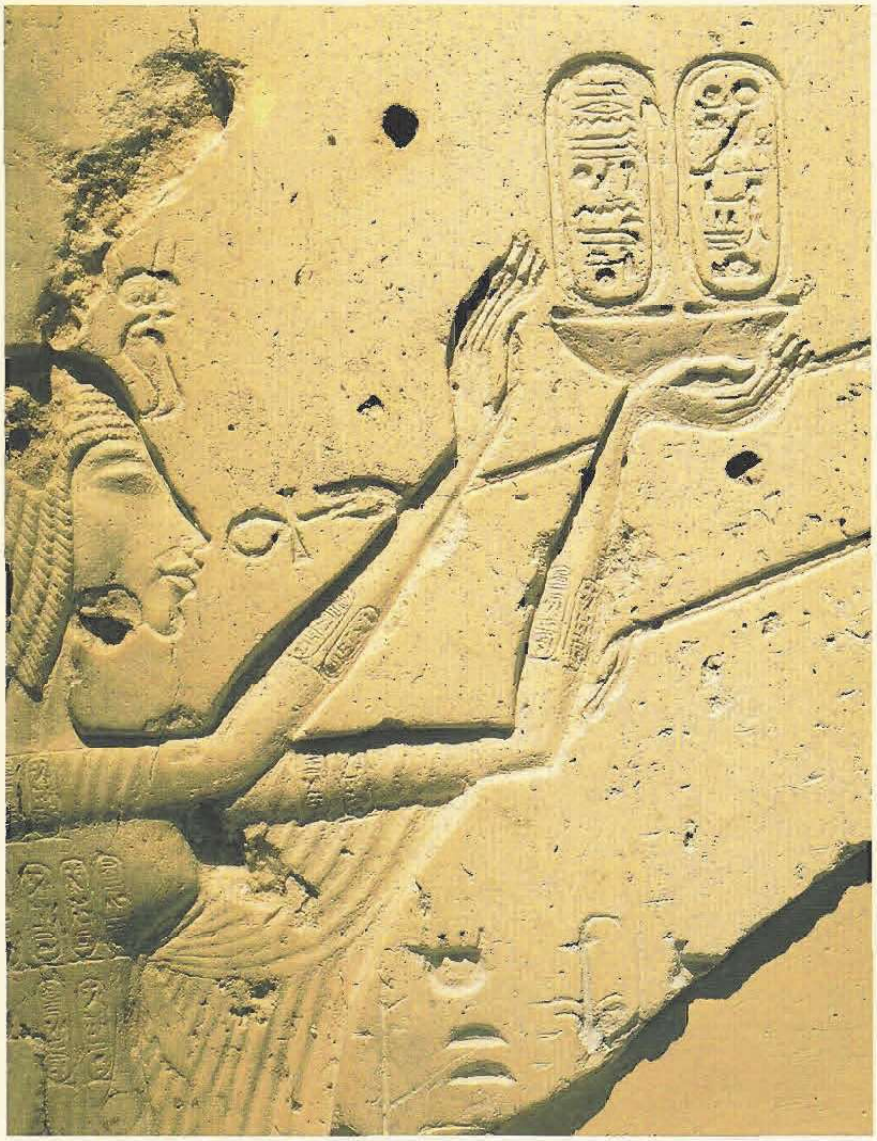
The radiant disk of the ***Aten****, depicted with a uraeus and pendent* ankh *sign, and with each ray terminating in a hand, accepts the floral offerings of Akhenaten and Nefertiti who worship the sun disk with two of their children. 18th dynasty. Limestone relief from el-Amarna. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

*The **Aten** illuminates a royal couple identified by the altered inscription as Tutankhamun and his wife Ankhesenamun. Back panel of the golden throne from the tomb of Tutankhamun. 18th dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*

It could even be said that Atenism espoused a closed triad consisting of the Aten, Re and Akhenaten himself. Even the high priest of the Aten was called the priest of Akhenaten – indicating not only the elevated position of the king in this theology but also the effective barrier that he formed between even his priests and the god Aten.

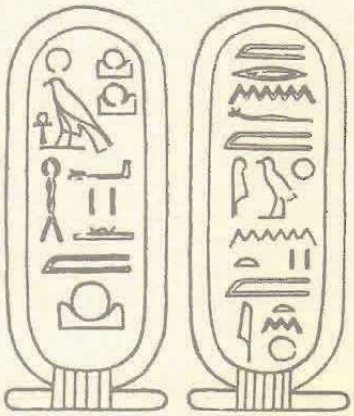
The Aten's relationship with other gods was also complex. Akhenaten may have suppressed the cults of some deities, but there remains clear evidence that other gods were admitted in the Atenist theology. Principal of these other deities was the sun god Re who was equated with the Aten in certain contexts and who was retained in the renewed titulary of Akhenaten and incorporated in the names of two of the king's own daughters, Nefernefrure and Setepenre. Akhenaten also seems to have acknowledged other forms of the sun god, for example, by making provision at his city of Akhetaten for a tomb for the Mnevis bull which was held to be a physical manifestation of Re. Some other deities, such as the goddess Maat and the god Shu, were



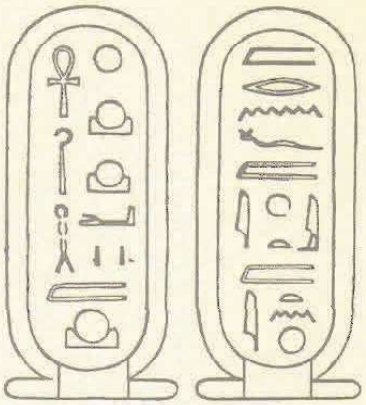


*Detail of a limestone relief showing Nefertiti offering the early form of the **Aten**'s cartouches to the divine sun disk. 18th dynasty. Brooklyn Museum of Art.*

The Royal Titulary of the Aten



*The early form of the **Aten**'s cartouches incorporating other forms of the sun god.*



*The later, more restricted form of the **Aten**'s twin royal cartouches.*

In his capacity as universal god and king of all, the Aten was given a titulary with two cartouche names of the same kind as those given to the Egyptian king on his coronation. It existed in two forms – an earlier version which included the names of Maat, Re-Horakhty and Shu and a later, more focused protocol of the ninth year of Akhenaten's reign which limited the identification of the Aten.

Early titulary:

Introduction:
Live, beautiful god who rejoices in Maat [the goddess is depicted rather than just the phonetic symbol for truth]
Lord of all which his disk circles
Lord of the sky, Lord of the Earth
Aten, living and great,
Illuminating the two lands
May my father live!

First cartouche:
Live Re-Horakhty who rejoices [or becomes active] in the Horizon

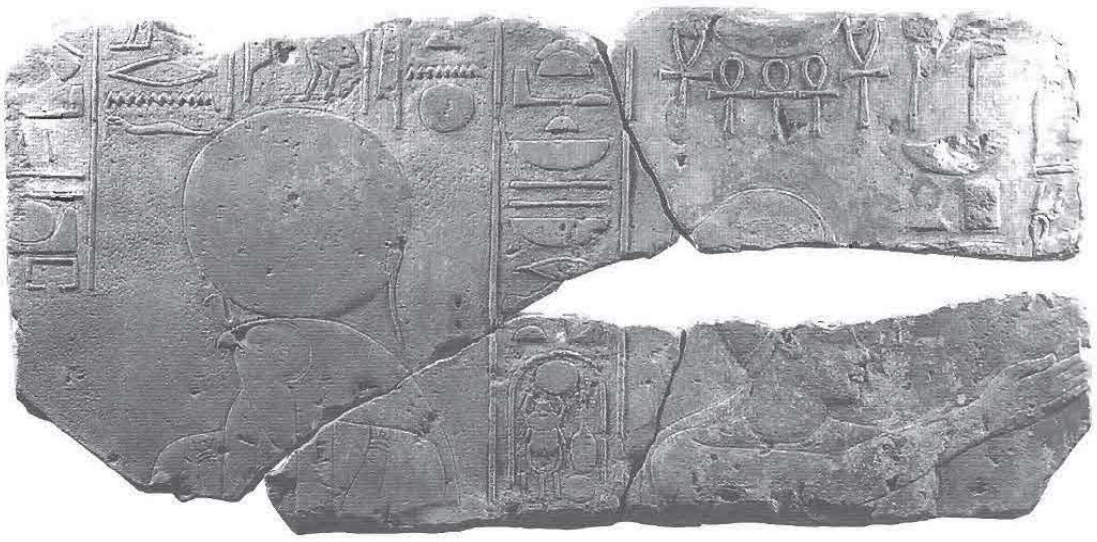
Second cartouche:
In his name of light [*shu*] which is in the Aten.

Conclusion:
Given life eternally forever,
Aten living and great
Who is in jubilee residing in the temple of Aten in Akhetaten.

Later titulary:

First cartouche:
Live Re, ruler of the two Horizons who rejoices [or becomes active] in the Horizon
Second cartouche:
In his name of light that is in the Aten.

In this second version of the Aten's titulary Akhenaten replaced Re-Horakhty with Re (or possibly 'sun') and also replaced the name of the god Shu with a word for 'light' not associated with any god – thus divorcing the worship of the Aten from traditional Egyptian polytheism.



*Sandstone block showing Amenophis IV/Akhenaten and the **Aten** in his early form as a falcon-headed god wearing the disk of the sun on his head. The god's name does not yet appear in a cartouche. Egyptian Museum, Berlin.*

also accepted – as in the early cartouche names of the Aten (see inset box), though this acceptance was later restricted.

Iconography

Originally it was customary to represent Aten as a god in the form of a falcon-headed anthropomorphic deity similar to the usual depictions of Re or Re-Horakhty. However, early in the reign of Amenophis IV this iconography underwent a radical change in that the god began to be depicted in the form of the solar disk with a uraeus at its base and with streaming light rays which terminated in hands which were either left open or shown holding *ankh* signs when they fell upon the image of the king or a member of the royal family. Although the origin of this iconographic form actually predates Amenophis IV/Akhenaten and examples can be found from the reign of Amenophis II (1427–1401 BC), under Akhenaten it became the sole manner in which the Aten was depicted.

Worship

Evidence exists of the cult of the Aten at Heliopolis during the reign of Amenophis III, but it was under Amenophis IV/Akhenaten that the cult of the god reached its peak. Upon his accession, the latter king constructed a large temple complex, which included at least three sanctuaries just outside the eastern perimeter of the temple of Amun at Karnak. Within a short time of the founding of this new temple, the worship of Amun and other gods seems to have been diminished and eventually, in the case of Amun at least, actually proscribed. Beginning in approximately his 5th year when the king changed his name to Akhenaten, a new capital – Akhetaten: 'the horizon of the Aten' – was built at the virgin site of el-Amarna in Middle Egypt, and new temples



*View of el-Amarna, the site of Akhenaten's city of Akhetaten or 'the horizon of the **Aten**', looking northwest from boundary stela K.*

were built to honour the god. These included the so-called 'great temple' and 'small temple' which were constructed according to a novel architectural plan emphasizing open access to the sun rather than the traditional darkness of Egyptian shrines.

There also appears to have been temples of the Aten at Memphis, at Sesebi in Nubia and perhaps elsewhere for at least part of Akhenaten's reign, though evidence for popular acceptance of the Aten religion is decidedly lacking. Many of the rock-cut tombs cut for the nobles of el-Amarna have prayers to the Aten (often seemingly extracts from the great hymn to the god) inscribed on their doorways, and there are other formal indications of respect for Akhenaten's god among the city's ruling elite, but Atenism remained an exclusive religion – only the king and his family are depicted worshipping the god and it is only to them that the Aten holds out the gift of life. There is no real evidence for personal, individual worship of the god on the part of the ordinary Egyptian whose only access to the Aten was through the medium of the king. This situation created a religious vacuum which was unstable even from the beginning, and the presence of amulets and representations of various deities and other indications of traditional worship demonstrate that even in the new capital popular worship of the older gods – even if covert in nature – nevertheless continued.

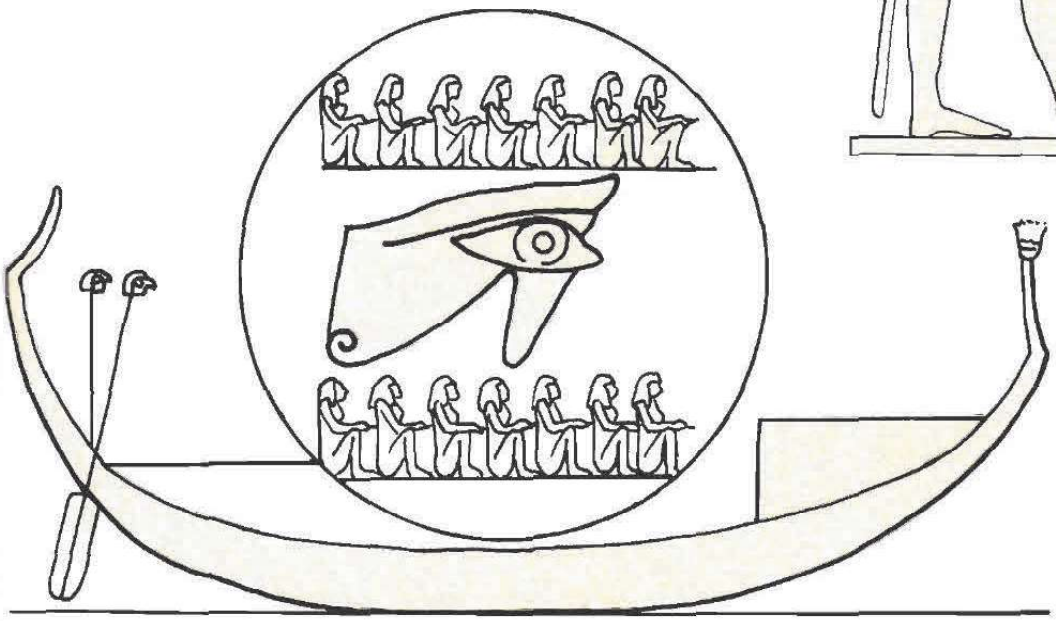
Although the priesthoods of the various gods were powerless to stop the religious changes which came with Atenism during Akhenaten's lifetime, the religious and political realities extant at the end of the king's reign meant that a return to orthodoxy was inevitable. Akhenaten's successors returned to Thebes, and the cults of Amun and Egypt's many other gods were renewed. The Aten's temples were quickly deserted and within a few years they were torn down, often, ironically, to be used in the renewal and expansion of temples for the very gods Atenism had sought to displace.

Moon

Unlike the solar *aten*, it is uncertain that the disk of the moon was itself worshipped in Egypt as a deity during historical times, and the evidence which is extant seems to show that it was regarded rather as a symbol or manifestation of specific deities associated with the moon. Most prominent of these gods were Horus (see p. 200), Iah (see p. 111), and Thoth (see p. 215), though the lunar disk was also a symbol of Osiris according to the mythology of that god. Additionally, 14 individual deities were sometimes associated with the days of the waxing moon and 14 were associated with the waning moon.



The god Anubis attends the lunar disk which stood in contrast with the sun and which could symbolize Osiris according to Egyptian mythology. Redrawn from E. Naville, The Temple of Deir el-Bahari.



The deities of the 14 days of the waning ***moon*** *surround the 'lunar eye' within the moon's disk in its barque of the night. Detail of a late relief.*

Epilogue: A Lasting Legacy

Long before the ancient Egyptian civilization reached its end, Egypt had exerted enormous influence over its neighbours, trading partners and even its enemies. Much of that influence is reflected in the presence of Egyptian deities which have been detected as far from the Nile as Persia in the east and Britain in the west. The ancient Minoans, for example, absorbed the goddess Taweret into their own culture (see p. 185), and the image of the Egyptian god Bes (see p. 102) became that of the Greek Gorgon. Sometimes the influence was oblique, yet it was clearly present. The Achaemenid Persians, who ruled at least part of Egypt from the late 6th through to the 4th century BC, were influenced considerably by Egyptian culture and religion, and Persian rulers such as Darius the Great even commissioned Egyptian-style statues of themselves, not unlike statues of Egyptian gods. Images of the Egyptian gods intrigued and mystified outsiders for centuries and were carried to many distant lands. Statues of Egyptian deities are thus known to have stood in many ancient cities and, at the height of the Roman Empire, Roman legions carried images of the protective god Bes (see p. 102) and the great goddess Isis (see p. 146) as far afield as England. The Romans were particularly enamoured of things Egytian and the Egyptian phoenix (see p. 212) – which was compared to undying Rome – appears on the coinage of the late Roman Empire as a symbol of the Eternal City. It was also viewed as an allegory of resurrection and life after death – ideas that appealed to early Christians throughout the Empire.



Ritual stela of the goddess Isis shown in typical Graeco-Roman manner and with only the diminutive horns and sun disk atop her head directly betraying her Egyptian origin and identity. 1st–2nd century BC. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Only at the very end of Egypt's ancient history when the old beliefs gave way to new, monotheistic faiths, did Egypt's many deities fall into oblivion – but even then, the old ways and old gods would prove to be the seeds from which new religious ideas would continue to grow. Here, in fact, among the ancient gods and goddesses of the Nile lie the roots of many later religious traditions – and perhaps, ironically, even the concept of monotheism itself (see p. 36), as well as that of the transcendent nature of the divine, can be traced ultimately to Egyptian beginnings. While this is not to diminish fuller developments of these concepts in later religions, the influence of Egyptian deities and religion cannot be denied in the formative periods of those same religions, and particularly that of Christianity which provides an excellent case study of Egyptian influence.

Christianity took root in Egypt at an early date. By the end of the 2nd century it was already well established in the Nile Valley and soon came to replace the old religion of the gods. Doubtless the spread of the religion was aided by the fact that many aspects of Christianity were readily understandable to the Egyptians in terms of their own ancient myths and beliefs, not least the role of Jesus as the son of God. As has been pointed out, the fact that the Egyptians, since ancient times, had viewed their king as the incarnate son of a god, meant that the Christian concept of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God was far more readily embraced in Egypt than elsewhere in the Roman world.

The iconography of Christianity – precisely because it encountered the Egyptian deities at



Bronze statue of the god Horus in the dress of a Roman soldier. c. 1st century AD. Provenance unknown. British Museum.

an early and formative period in its development – was particularly affected. Often the gods are in the details. The four evangelists of the Christian tradition were frequently depicted in animal form or as animal-headed like the Egyptian gods in early Christian art, and the precursor of the St. George and the Dragon motif may possibly be first found in Hibis Temple. But even major Christian motifs may have Egyptian origins. The sacred mother and child of Christianity are certainly foreshadowed in the countless images of Isis (whom the Egyptians called the *mut-netcher* – the 'mother of god') and her infant son Horus, as is even the symbol of the cross (which is first attested in Egypt as the 'Egyptian' or *tau* cross – a form of the *ankh* sign). It has also been suggested that scenes from the Egyptian underworld books which graphically depict the fate of the damned inspired much of the later iconography of the Christian hell with its demons and punishments and it is probably impossible to know the full extent to which such pagan revenants have influenced the imagery of Christianity.

Other later religions and even secular philosphies have likewise been affected by the deities of Egypt. Greek accounts of Egyptian myths continued to influence Western cultures during the Medieval and Renaissance Periods. The philosophy of Neo-Platonism and various forms of the Hermetic mysteries all contained ideas which were essentially Egyptian, and as late as the 17th century, the German Jesuit-scholar Athanasius Kircher argued that the goddess Isis was an emanation of the queen of heaven of Roman Catholic belief.

Even today, in the 21st century, many of Egypt's gods and religious symbols continue to exist – sometimes unbeknown to their perpetuators and sometimes knowingly. Throughout the Mediterranean sailors still paint an eye on the prow of their boats for protection and to 'see' their way ahead without realizing they continue a custom begun by the ancient Egyptians with the Eye of Horus (see p. 200). In Egypt, local women desiring to have children still occasionally visit the crypts of Hathor's Temple, as that goddess retains a reputation for granting fertility almost two millennia after her cult was overthrown.

There is also a vast modern interest in ancient Egypt which often focuses on the civilization's gods and goddesses – ranging from the detached study of scholars of comparative religion to the fervent efforts of latter day pagans who desire to resurrect the ancient cults. The legacy of the gods is to be found in an amazing number of places and with ongoing reinterpretations, for the influence of Egypt's deities has far outlived the ancient civilization with a persistence which – viewed historically – may outlast our own.

Further Reading

Abbreviations

AAWLM	*Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz*
ÄAT	*Ägypten und Altes Testament*
ADAIK	*Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo*
ÄF	*Ägyptologisches Forschungen*
ASAE	*Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*
BACE	*Bulletin of the Australian Center for Egyptology*
BES	*Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar*
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
BRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BSA	*Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie*
GM	*Göttinger Miszellen*
JAF	*Journal of American Folklore*
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSSEA	*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KMT	*KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt*
LÄ	Helck, W., and E. Otto (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden,1975–)
MÄS	*Münchner Ägyptologische Studien*
MDAIK	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*
OBO	*Orbis biblicus et orientalis*
OEAE	*Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*
PÄ	*Probleme der Ägyptologie*
RHPR	*Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire de religions*
SAK	*Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur*
VA	*Varia Aegyptiaca*
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift fur Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

There is a vast literature extant on ancient Egyptian religion in general and on the individual gods and goddesses themselves. The following bibliography aims to provide access to that literature through a selection of standard works and recently published articles on the major deities. For further information on the many hundreds of minor Egyptian gods and goddesses, the reader is encouraged to consult some of the excellent handbooks listed in the Introduction section below as well as the bibliographies found in the specialized studies listed under the various categories of deities.

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