

R I C H A R D H . W I L K I N S O N

The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt



Thames & Hudson



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

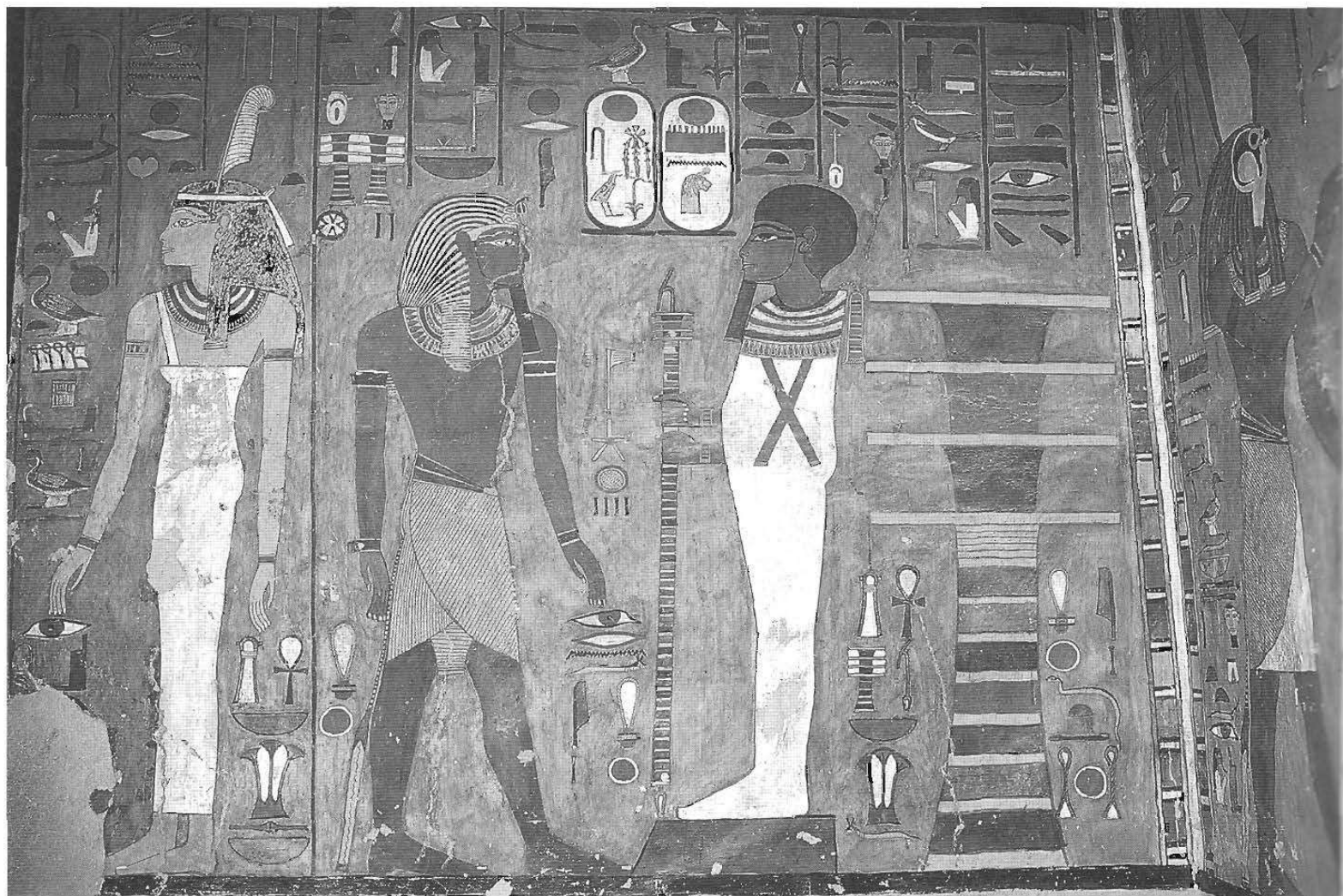
A small temple to Maat was built within the precinct of the Montu temple at Karnak but such

(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