



EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY: A JOURNEY INTO ANCIENT BELIEFS

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Egyptian mythology, with its rich tapestry of gods, goddesses, and captivating stories, forms a cornerstone of ancient Egyptian culture and religion. These myths were integral to understanding the cosmos, natural phenomena, and human existence. From the majestic gods who ruled the heavens to the intricate tales of creation and the afterlife, Egyptian mythology offers a profound glimpse into the ancient Egyptian worldview.

Creation Myths

The Egyptian creation myths provide various accounts of how the world came into existence. Central to these stories is the concept of the primordial waters, known as Nun, from which the first land emerged.

- **Heliopolitan Myth:** In the city of Heliopolis, the creation myth centered around the god Atum, who emerged from the waters of Nun and created the gods Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture). Their offspring, Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), gave birth to Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys, forming the Ennead, a group of nine deities.

- **Memphite Myth:** In Memphis, creation was attributed to Ptah, a god associated with craftsmanship and creation through speech. Ptah conceived the world and the gods by speaking their names, emphasizing the power of words and thought.

- **Hermopolitan Myth:** The city of Hermopolis had a different creation story involving eight primordial deities, known as the Ogdoad, representing aspects of chaos. Their interaction led to the birth of the sun god, Ra, who brought light and order to the world. Major Deities Egyptian mythology is characterized by a rich pantheon of gods and goddesses, each with distinct roles and attributes. These deities were often depicted with human bodies and animal heads, symbolizing their connection to nature and specific powers.

- **Ra:** The sun god, Ra, was one of the most important deities, representing life, creation, and power. He traveled across the sky during the day and through the underworld at night, battling chaos to ensure the sun's rise.

- **Osiris:** The god of the afterlife, Osiris, symbolized death, resurrection, and fertility. His story, involving his murder by his brother Seth and his resurrection by his wife Isis, highlights themes of renewal and eternal life.

- **Isis:** Known for her magic and healing powers, Isis was revered as a mother goddess and protector. Her devotion to Osiris and her son Horus exemplified her nurturing and protective qualities.

- **Horus:** The falcon-headed god Horus represented kingship and the sky. He was considered the avenger of his father Osiris and the protector of the pharaohs, symbolizing royal power and legitimacy.



- **Anubis:** The jackal-headed god Anubis was associated with mummification and the afterlife. He guided souls to the underworld and oversaw the weighing of the heart ceremony, determining the fate of the deceased. The Afterlife and Judgment The concept of the afterlife was central to Egyptian mythology, with elaborate beliefs about the journey of the soul and its ultimate destination.

- **The Duat:** The Egyptian underworld, known as the Duat, was a complex and dangerous realm that the soul had to navigate. It was populated by gods, demons, and monstrous beings. Successful navigation of the Duat led to eternal life in the Field of Reeds, a paradise.

- **The Weighing of the Heart:** Upon death, the soul underwent the weighing of the heart ceremony, presided over by Osiris and Anubis. The heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at, representing truth and justice. A balanced heart indicated a righteous life and granted access to the afterlife, while a heavy heart resulted in being devoured by the monster Ammit. Symbolism and Art Egyptian mythology heavily influenced the art and architecture of ancient Egypt. Temples, tombs, and monuments were adorned with depictions of gods, myths, and symbolic motifs.

- **Hieroglyphs:** These sacred carvings were used to tell mythological stories and inscribe religious texts. Hieroglyphs often included depictions of gods, animals, and symbols representing various concepts and elements of mythology.

- **Temples and Monuments:** Temples dedicated to gods like Amun, Ra, and Horus were constructed to honor and worship these deities. The Great Pyramid of Giza and the Sphinx are monumental testaments to the significance of mythology in Egyptian culture.

In-Depth Exploration of Egyptian Mythology

Additional Major Deities

- Beyond the well-known gods and goddesses like Ra, Osiris, and Isis, Egyptian mythology includes a multitude of other important deities, each with unique roles and stories.

- **Thoth:** The ibis-headed god of wisdom, writing, and knowledge. Thoth was believed to be the inventor of hieroglyphs and served as a mediator among gods. He played a crucial role in maintaining the universe's balance and presided over the weighing of the heart ceremony alongside Anubis.

- **Ma'at:** The goddess of truth, justice, and cosmic order. Ma'at represented the fundamental concept of balance and harmony in the universe. Pharaohs were expected to uphold Ma'at in their rule, and her feather was used in the judgment of the dead.

- **Bastet:** The cat-headed goddess of home, fertility, and childbirth. Bastet was a protective deity who warded off evil spirits and disease, particularly diseases affecting women and children.

- **Hathor:** The cow-headed goddess of love, beauty, music, and motherhood. Hathor was also associated with the sky and was considered a nurturing and joyous deity, often depicted as a cow or a woman with cow horns.



- Seth: The god of chaos, desert, storms, and violence. Seth was both a necessary force and a disruptive one. While he murdered Osiris, he also played a role in protecting the solar boat of Ra from the chaos serpent Apophis during its nightly journey.

- The Myth of Osiris and Isis

- One of the most significant and widely told myths in Egyptian mythology is the story of Osiris and Isis, which revolves around themes of death, resurrection, and eternal life.

- Osiris, the benevolent king of Egypt, was murdered by his jealous brother Seth, who dismembered his body and scattered the pieces across Egypt. Isis, Osiris's devoted wife, embarked on a quest to find and reassemble his body. With the help of Anubis and her magical abilities, she resurrected Osiris, who then became the ruler of the underworld. Their son Horus avenged his father's death by defeating Seth, symbolizing the triumph of order over chaos.

- This myth was central to Egyptian religious beliefs, particularly regarding the afterlife. Osiris's resurrection assured Egyptians of their own potential for rebirth and eternal life if they lived in accordance with Ma'at.

- The Egyptian Underworld: Duat

- The Duat, or the Egyptian underworld, was a complex and perilous realm through which the deceased's soul had to journey to reach the afterlife.

- Journey Through the Duat: The deceased had to pass through various gates and caverns, each guarded by gods, demons, and mythical creatures. They had to recite spells from the *Book of the Dead* to protect themselves and gain passage.

- Osiris's Court: Upon reaching Osiris's court, the deceased's heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at. If the heart was lighter than the feather, the soul was granted eternal life in the Field of Reeds, a paradise mirroring the Nile Valley. If heavier, the heart was devoured by Ammit, resulting in the soul's annihilation.

- Symbolic Art and Architecture

- Egyptian art and architecture were deeply influenced by their mythology, serving not only aesthetic purposes but also religious and symbolic ones.

- Pyramids: The pyramids, especially the Great Pyramid of Giza, were monumental tombs for pharaohs, reflecting the belief in the afterlife. The pyramid's shape symbolized the primordial mound from which creation emerged.

- Temples: Temples dedicated to gods such as Karnak (Amun), Luxor (Amun, Mut, and Khonsu), and Edfu (Horus) were centers of worship and ritual. These structures were adorned with reliefs depicting gods, myths, and the pharaoh's divine role.

- Sphinx: The Great Sphinx of Giza, with the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh (likely Khafre), symbolized royal power and protection. It represented the combination of human intelligence and animal strength.

- Hieroglyphs and Symbolism: Hieroglyphic writing, a gift from the god Thoth, was not only a means of communication but also held magical significance.



Symbols such as the ankh (life), the scarab (rebirth), and the Eye of Horus (protection) were integral to religious and everyday contexts.

- Festivals and Rituals
- Ancient Egyptians celebrated numerous festivals and performed rituals to honor their gods, seek protection, and ensure the prosperity of the land.
 - Opet Festival: Celebrated in Thebes, the Opet Festival involved the procession of statues of Amun, Mut, and Khonsu from Karnak to Luxor. It was a time of renewal for the king and the gods, reinforcing the connection between the divine and the pharaoh.
 - Wepet-Renpet: The New Year festival, Wepet-Renpet, marked the start of the agricultural cycle and the flooding of the Nile. It was a time of feasting and rituals to honor the gods and ensure a bountiful harvest.
 - Beautiful Festival of the Valley: This festival involved the journey of the god Amun's statue from Karnak to the mortuary temples on the west bank of the Nile, where offerings were made to the deceased. It reinforced the bond between the living, the dead, and the divine.

The Role of Pharaohs in Mythology

- Pharaohs were not only political and military leaders but also considered divine or semi-divine beings. They were seen as intermediaries between the gods and the people, embodying Ma'at and ensuring the stability and prosperity of the kingdom.
 - Divine Kingship: Pharaohs were believed to be the earthly embodiment of Horus, the falcon-headed god of kingship. Upon their death, they were associated with Osiris, the god of the afterlife, ensuring their immortality and continued protection over Egypt.
 - Rituals and Offerings: The pharaoh conducted rituals and offerings to the gods to maintain cosmic order. Temples across Egypt were centers of worship where daily rituals were performed to honor the gods and sustain their favor.

76 Mythological Creatures

- Egyptian mythology features a variety of mythical creatures, each with symbolic meanings and roles in different stories and contexts.
 - Sphinx: The Sphinx, with a lion's body and a human head, symbolized royal power and protection. The Great Sphinx of Giza, guarding the pyramids, is the most famous example.
 - Serpopard: This mythical creature, depicted with a leopard's body and a long serpent-like neck, is seen in early Egyptian art, representing chaos and wild forces of nature.
 - Griffin: The griffin, a creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle, symbolized divine protection and was often depicted in temple art and amulets.



Lesser-Known Myths and Legends

- In addition to the major gods and creation stories, Egyptian mythology includes many lesser-known myths that offer unique insights into their beliefs and values.

- The Tale of the Two Brothers: This story of Anubis and Bata explores themes of betrayal, loyalty, and divine intervention. After a series of dramatic events, including false accusations and transformations, the brothers are ultimately reconciled by the gods.

- The Contendings of Horus and Seth: This series of stories recounts the struggle between Horus and Seth for the throne of Egypt after Osiris's death. Their battles, filled with trickery and divine judgments, emphasize the themes of rightful rule and justice.

Mythology in Daily Life

- Egyptian mythology was not confined to temples and tombs but permeated everyday life, influencing customs, practices, and personal beliefs.

- Amulets and Talismans: Egyptians wore amulets depicting gods, symbols, and mythical creatures to protect against evil, ensure health, and bring good fortune. The Eye of Horus, scarabs, and ankhs were among the most popular.

- Household Deities: Deities like Bes and Taweret were venerated in households. Bes, a dwarf god with lion features, protected families from evil spirits, while Taweret, the hippopotamus-headed goddess, safeguarded childbirth and motherhood.

The Influence of Egyptian Mythology on Later Cultures

- Egyptian mythology has had a lasting impact on subsequent cultures and religions, influencing Greco-Roman beliefs, early Christianity, and modern popular culture.

- Greco-Roman Influence: When Egypt became part of the Greek and Roman empires, many Egyptian deities were integrated into Greco-Roman religion. The worship of Isis, for example, spread throughout the Mediterranean, blending with local traditions.

- Christian Symbolism: Early Christian art and iconography often drew from Egyptian motifs. The imagery of Mary nursing Jesus, for instance, has parallels with depictions of Isis nursing Horus.

- Modern Pop Culture: Egyptian mythology continues to captivate the modern imagination, inspiring books, movies, and video games. Characters like Anubis, Ra, and Cleopatra frequently appear in popular media, reflecting the enduring fascination with ancient Egypt.

Conclusion

- The mythology of ancient Egypt, with its rich array of gods, myths, and rituals, offers a profound understanding of the civilization's beliefs, values, and cultural achievements. From the majestic gods of creation to the intimate household deities, these myths provided a framework for understanding the world and one's place within



it. The enduring legacy of Egyptian mythology continues to inspire and inform, bridging the ancient past with the present and ensuring that these timeless stories remain a vital part of our shared human heritage.

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