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One of the most complex deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon, Thoth was the god of the moon, medicine, science, magic, judgement, and writing. A figure of Thoth (664-343 BCE)Brooklyn MuseumCC BY 3.0Thoth originated far from the
religious centers that spawned the vast majority of the Egyptian pantheon. As a result, Thoth took on the role of the perpetual outsider; he was not the focus of any major myths, and his stories could often proven convoluted or vague. In many tales, he appeared without explanation. Despite Thoth's strange position (or perhaps because of it), he held a
key role in the Egyptian mythos and was respected by all. Thoth's popularity eventually grew beyond the confines of his native civilization. Following the decline of the ancient Egyptian gods, the exact meaning of Thoth's name was
somewhat unclear. It is commonly thought that his name meant "He Who is Like the Ibis."[1] The Egyptians knew him as Djehuty, and the Greeks knew him as Djehuty, and the Greeks knew him as Hermes.[2]Many Egyptian city names were derived from the Greeks knew him as Djehuty, and the Greeks knew him as Djehuty knew him 
worship.Among Thoth's many epithets were: Thoth, Lord of the OgdoadThoth, Without a MotherThoth, The Place-Taker of Ra[3]Hermes Trismegistus (Thoth, the Thrice Great)[4]An incredibly important deity to the Egyptians, Thoth represented many facets of reality. He was a god of the moon, science, wisdom, secret magics, and medicine. Thoth
invented writing and was believed to be the patron of scribes.[5] As the messenger of the gods, he often served as Ra's intermediary between the lands of the living and the dead. As Ra's most trusted advisor, Thoth was tasked with recording all that happened. A just and incorruptible bureaucrat, he was viewed as a judge without equal.[6] More than a
mere observer, Thoth was the enforcer of maat, or cosmic order. In this role, Thoth served as both consummate diplomat and merciless executioner. [7] This scene from the Book of the Dead (c. 1050 BCE) demonstrates the weighing of the heart ceremony. Thoth (in his baboon form) can be seen at the top of the scale recording the result. The deity's
headdress depicts the full and crescent moons. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainThough Thoth appeared as both an ibis-headed man and a baboon imagery predated his ibis-headed portrayals, the latter emerged as his primary
depiction over time.[8]Both of Thoth's representations alluded to his status as a lunar deity. The ibis's curved beak resembles a crescent moon, and as a baboon his head was often topped with a headdress depicting a full and crescent moon, and as a baboon his head was often topped with a headdress depicting a full and crescent moon, and as a baboon his head was often topped with a headdress depicting a full and crescent moon.
was that each major city had its own interpretation. Hermopolis, the center of Thoth's cult, never had the political clout of Memphis, Heliopolis, or Thebes, so Thoth existed alongside their divine families rather than being incorporated neatly into the divine bloodlines. [10] Several stories regarding Thoth's parents, and due to the heterogenous style of
worship found in Egypt, they all contradict one another: A tale from Hermopolis held that Thoth had no parents, and was actually self-created. Thoth may have been created by Ra, Atum, and Khepri, as he once declared "I am Thoth, the eldest son of Ra, whom Atum has fashioned, created from Khrepi." [11] In a lesser known tale, Thoth was said to be
the son of Horus. In a parallel mythology, Thoth had ties to both Horus and Set. [12] Depending upon the myth, Thoth was believed to have a number of different wives: Maat (the goddess of justice and order) Seshat (the goddess of writing) [13] Nehemtawy (a god
Egyptians permitted men to marry multiple women. However, the fact that some myths described Seshat as Thoth's daughter indicates such multiplicity was most likely an artifact of parallel mythologies. Marriage between father and daughter, on the other
hand, was regarded as inappropriate. [14] Thoth played a role in most major Egyptian stories, as well as several myths unique to Hermopolis. His sage advice and medical expertise usually arrived at a pivotal moment, altering the course of events for the better. While Thoth was a tremendously important deity throughout Egypt, he held particular
significance in Hermopolis, which served as his center of worship. A colossal baboon statue representing Thoth has been reconstructed at the el-Ashmunein archeological site. Under Roman rule, the city was named Hermopolis after the Greek god Hermes. This Greek deity was based off of Thoth, and his city served as the center of Thoth's cult. Don
McCradyCC BY-NC-ND 2.0For those living in Hermopolis, the pre-creation universe existed in the form of Nun—an infinite body of inert water. Nun was a difficult concept to fathom, so the Hermopolians divided Nun into 8 components, half male, half female. These eight deities were represented by frogs for the men, and snakes for the women and
included: Nun and Naunet: the boundless watersHuh and Hauhet: infinityKuk and Kauket: darknessAmun and Amunet: secrecyCollectively known as the Ogdoad, the eight deities built an island in the infinite sea of Nun. It was on this island that the ibis Thoth laid an egg. When it hatched, this egg would become the sun.[15]Even outside of
Hermopolis, Thoth played an important role in the creation of their religious belief was the Ennead—a group of gods that would ultimately grow to include Ra, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Set, Isis, and Nephthys. These nine gods were not formed all at once, however, and if not for Thoth's intervention the
list would have been cut short.[16]Ra created two children, Shu and Tefnut, who in turn bore the deities Geb and Nut lying together. In a fit of envious rage, he placed a curse on her such that she would not be able to bear children in any month of the
year. Wise Thoth (whose existence at this point was unexplained) had a plan to help Nut get around the curse. [17] He had been playing draughts with the moon, and—as the god of wisdom—had found himself winning more often than not. He proposed a wager: if he won, then the moon would have to give Thoth a portion of her illumination. An ibis-
headed Thoth can be seen on the ceiling at the Temple of Hathor in the Dendera Temple complex. He appears to the right of a waxing and waning moon, which features the Eye of Horus. TerryJLawrence / iStockThe moon accepted the bet (no one said the moon was good at gambling) and ultimately gave Thoth 1/70th of her illumination. Thoth decided
to add his winnings—totalling five additional days of light—to the end of the 360-day Egyptian calendar. Because these final five days (referred to as epagomenal days) existed outside of the standard calendar, Ra's curse did not apply to them.[18]Now free from Ra's curse, Nut was able to gave birth at last.Ra was prone to anger and jealousy, which
often resulted in disagreements with the other gods. In this myth, Ra and his Eye got into an argument. The Egyptians regarded eyes as deities unto themselves, likely because irt, the word for eye, sounded like the Egyptian word
for "doing" or "acting." Because irt was feminine, even masculine god's eyes were regarded as goddesses. After a particularly nasty argument, Tefnut decided enough was enough and departed for the land of Nubia (or Liberia, depending on the tale). Filled with rage from the argument, she rampaged through the countryside as a fire-breathing
lioness. Depending on the version of the myth, Ra either wished to have her returned so he could use her newfound aggression against his enemies, or he realized he had been relying on her for protection and her absence made him vulnerable. In any case, a desperate Ra sent Thoth to retrieve her. Thoth tracked her down and, in an effort to get close
to her without being recognized, transformed himself into a dog-faced baboon. Despite his disguise, Tefnut identified the goddess that "fate punishes every crime." [19] This gave Tefnut pause, which in turn provided Thoth the opportunity to begin
persuading the upset goddess to come back with him. He told her tales of Egypt's beauty, as well as animal-based fables extolling the virtues of the strong allying themselves with the weak and the value of peace. One version of this myth says that Thoth had to ask Tefnut 1,077 times before she finally acquiesced. [20] Eventually, Thoth convinced the
volatile goddess to return with him to Egypt. On their journey home, they were met with great fanfare and celebration in each town they passed through. By the time they had reached Memphis, Tefnut's transformation into a model
citizen.[21]When the pair finally returned to Memphis, Ra hosted a great festival in Tefnut's honor and congratulated Thoth for his excellent work.[22] In some versions of the myth, Thoth was rewarded with the goddess Nehemtawy as his bride. Nehemtawy as his bride. Nehemtawy as his bride.
by civilization as she left the desert, or an independent goddess unrelated to preceding events.[23]While Thoth had only a few myths directly related to him, he appeared in nearly all major Egyptian myths as an advisor. Most prominently, Ra appointed him his vizier after deciding that handling the daily affairs on earth had become too much for him.
[24] Viziers weren't just found in Disney movies! These officials served as the chief judges of ancient Egypt and acted as the pharaoh's representative in their absence. [25] This relief from the mortuary temple of Rameses II depicts several Egyptian gods, including the ibis-headed Thoth, who appears in the center of the scene. Steve F-E-CameronCC BY-
SA 3.0To facilitate his new responsibilities, Ra gave Thoth the ibis to use as his personal messenger, power over the sun and the moon, and apes that he could use against his enemies. [26] Beyond his role in advising Ra, many myths featured Thoth offering insightful advice that the other gods usually had the wherewithal to take: During Osiris's reign,
Thoth served as his vizier. When Osiris embarked on his civilizing tour of the region and left Isis in charge, Thoth advised her to go into hiding until the boy was old enough to challenge Set.[28]In one bizarre instance, Set claimed that he had intercourse with Horus,
jepoardizing the latter's claim to the throne. Using his magic, Thoth called forth the semen of both Horus and Set to see who was telling the truth. Unbeknownst to Set, Isis had figured out his ploy. In the dead of night, she had sprinkled Horus's semen into Set's lettuce and ensured that Set's semen had been washed into the Nile. On Thoth's
command, Set's semen dutifully emerged from the swamps, while Horus's semen emerging from Set's ears formed a solar disc that Thoth proceeded to wear as a crown. [29] Another of Thoth's recurring roles was that of the divine healer. He was
capable of healing almost any ailment—even those the powerful Isis could not manage:When Geb was just a prince, he became prone to acts of aggression against his father Shu. In one spiteful act, he turned himself into a boar and ate the Eye of Ra (the moon). The Eye sickened Geb terribly, causing blood to pour forth from his skin. While Thoth's
services weren't necessary to heal Geb, the ibis-headed healer did return the Eye to its rightful place.[30]Thoth was integral in the resurrection of Osiris. He assisted with the embalming process, and with reassembling Osiris's dismembered corpse.[31] While he did not perform the spell that resurrected Osiris, he did instruct Isis in the use of charms
necessary for the process.[32]While Isis was on the run from Set, her son Horus's serious injury) brought Ra's solar barque to a halt, prompting Thoth to visit and figure out what was wrong. Upon discerning the nature of
the problem, Thoth recited a lengthy spell (much to Isis's chagrin) and restored Horus to full health.[33]During a battle between Horus and Set, Set managed to seize the eye of Horus and threw it "into the darkness beyond the edge of the world." Thoth witnessed this and upon retrieving the eye found it broken. Thankfully, the god of wisdom was
able to repair the eye and return it to Horus [34] After a battle where Horus had taken Set captive, Isis felt bad for her imprisoned brother and set him free. Furious at his mother's betrayal, Horus struck a mighty blow, decapitating her instantly. Thoth replaced her head with Hathor's horns and solar disk, thus allowing the goddess to live again.
[35] For the average Egyptian, one of Thoth's most important roles was the one he would play after they died. The Egyptian afterlife was not guaranteed, and required one to live righteously, the scales would balance
and allow entry into the afterlife. If the scales did not balance, however, the unfortunate soul would be devoured by the chimeric beast Ammit and cease to exist. This Thoth-inspired amulet (c. 320-250 BCE) was believed to protect the dead during the weighing of the heart ceremony. The Walters Art Museum CC0Curiously, the Egyptians believed that
the process could be cheated. Those buried with the correct amulets and spells could prevent theirs hearts from revealing the sins they had committed in life. This belief offered some explanation for the elaborate burial rituals of the Egyptians are
Intermediate period following the collapse of the New Kingdom (c. 1075 BCE). Though this period saw a rapid succession of rulers, life for the common person went on with little disruption. In fact, most people may have had more disposable income due to the reduction in taxes being sent to a central government authority. [37] The pharaoh was more disposable income due to the reduction in taxes being sent to a central government authority.
than just a political ruler, however—he was also the center of the ancient Egyptian religious leadership, personal piety gained significance. Wealthy Egyptians could afford to give bronze offerings, while less well-off worshippers offered embalmed animal sacrifices. A CT scan of this elaborate mummy (30 BCE -100 CE) has
revealed that there are nothing but feathers inside. Brooklyn MuseumCC BY 3.0Across Egypt, there were at least 31 animal necropolises containing at least 20 million embalmed animals. An estimated six million of these animals were ibises.[38] Thoth could take the form of an ibis, and the birds also served as his personal messengers. It is believed,
then, that these sacrifices were dedicated to the ibis-headed deity.[39]Though some of the sacrificed birds were may have been spoken to the creatures before they were sacrificed. It is not entirely clear what the majority of these petitions were about. As the god of
wisdom, science, medicine, and judgement, however, Thoth would have been able to offer a wide range of blessings. While some scholars believe that sacrifice on this scale required industrial farming practices, more recent evidence has suggested these birds were actually wild fowl captured solely for sacrifice. [40] In either case, the Egyptian fervor
for sacrifice was a hugely lucrative business. Unscrupulous priests and vendors would at times sell fake mummies, often containing just a shard of bone from the alleged animal. Records from the Temple of Thoth at Saqqara included corruption charges laid against the priesthood in relation to counterfeit mummies. Such records, often written
on ostraca (potsherds), indicated that six priests were imprisoned for their crimes and reforms were implemented to prevent future fraud.[41]While many deities faded into obscurity following Egyptian decline, Thoth remained popular across a number of cultures, and has even made appearances in modern works. In Greece Thoth became Hermes, or
 Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the Thrice-Great), but also lived on in philosophy as Thoth, the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom. In Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates cited Thoth while defending the importance of writing.[42]Aleister Crowley's famous tarot card reading companion book was entitled The Book of Thoth. Released in 1944, the book explained
Egyptian Tarot card reading, as well as the underlying philosophy of the practice.[43]The first month of the Coptic Calendar, Thout, was named after Thoth. The month begins September 11th and ends October 10th.In Neil Gaiman's novel American Gods, Thoth appeared as a character named Mr. Ibis. In this guise, Thoth worked with Jacquel (Anubis)
as a funeral director, a nod to his role as the judge of the dead. [44] Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University Osiris, the "Mighty One," was both god of the dead and a central figure of Egyptian mythology. His cult arose around 2600BCE, as those of competing deities, including Andjety of
Busiris and Khentamentiu of Abydos, declined.[1] For nearly 3,000 years, Osiris would stand as one of the most prominent Egyptian gods. The tradition of mummification mirrored Osiris's own experiences. As the god of the afterlife, he decided who was worthy of reincarnation, and who was not. This statuette of Osiris (c. 588-526 BC) features the
deity's characteristic atef (headdress) and shroud. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainAlmost all names from Egyptian mythology have made their way to English through the Coptic language, which was first translated into Greek before being translated into Latin. This etymological chain has made the original meaning of these ancient
names difficult to decipher. Before the development of the Coptic language (the most recent form of Ancient Egyptian) between 300BCE and 200CE, the Egyptian written language did not include any vowels.[2] While the presence of vowels was indicated by certain characters, the nature of the vowels themselves was left ambiguous. The best
approximation of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name is unclear, the epithet "Mighty One" is commonly attributed to him and may allude to him and may all the meaning of Osiris's name is unclear, the properties of the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble: jsjrt.[3]While the meaning of Osiris's name as it was written in Ancient Egyptian is the unpronounceable letter jumble is the meaning of Osiris's name as all the unpronounceable letter jumble is the unpronounceable
Khentamentiu of Abydos, a funerary deity that Osiris ultimately replaced.[5]Osiris was usually portrayed as a mostly-mummified king. He was often depicted wearing an atef—a combination of the hedjet crown, two ostrich feathers, and two horns. Atefs were synonymous with Osiris, though he was not the only god to wear one.[6]The little skin left
unwrapped—usually his face and hands—was typically green or black. These colors may originally have been connected with decay, but as time went on they were said to reflect Osiris's role in the cyclical nature of life and death, as manifested by plants.[7]A partially mummified (and green-skinned) Osiris presides over the rituals of the afterlife.
Bearing his atef crown, as well as his customary crook and flail, this depiction of Osiris features all of his traditional elements. The Book of the Dead of Hunefer (Hw-nfr), Sheet 3. The Trustees of the British MuseumCC BY-NC-SA 4.00siris was often seen carrying a crook and flail. The crook, a symbol of Egyptian kings, was derived from the tools used
by shepherds tending to their sheep. The flail, meanwhile, has been interpreted as a whip or goad indicative of the king's martial power; others believe that it represented a threshing tool indicative of the was still considered a god in all stages of his mythos. At 8
cubits, 6 palms, and 3 fingers tall (15'3" / 4.7 meters) he would certainly have been an intimidating presence. [8]Osiris was the first child of the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb. His siblings included Horus the Elder[9], Set, Isis, Nephthys. Osiris had several notable children. He famously fathered Horus the Younger with his sister/wife Isis
following his resurrection, and unwittingly sired Anubis with Nephthys. His other children include Babi, a mythical man-eating baboon, and Sopdet, the personification of the star Sirius. [10] The stories of Osiris were some of the best-preserved tales in the Egyptian mythos. Most knowledge of Osiris's mythos originally came from Greek accounts, such
as those of Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, Firmicus Maternus, and Macrobius. These accounts have since been confirmed by fragments of the ancient Egyptian record. When Osiris was born, he came into the world wearing his distinctive atef crown. The crown was a symbol of Ra's decision to have Osiris succeed his father as king. On the day of Osiris's
birth, a man named Pamyles heard a voice while drawing water at the temple of Thebes. The voice told Pamyles did so, and was rewarded with the honor of educating the god-king Osiris. [11] While some sources have suggested that Osiris's prophesied rule was a source of strife
between him and his father Geb, other sources have omitted any mention of such contention.[12]By all accounts, Osiris was a benevolent and effective king. The Egypt of Osiris's time was barbarous, and cannibalism was widely practiced. Osiris put a stop to such practices and introduced the Egyptians to wheat, barley, grapes, wine, and copper toolsand.
[13] After civilizing Egypt, Osiris embarked on an expedition to introduce the world to wheat, barely and agriculture. Before leaving, he appointed his sister/wife Isis to rule in his absence. After assembling an army of courtiers, satyrs, and agricultural experts, Osiris initially traveled south toward Ethiopia. [14] He eventually traveled as far as India in
spreading his benevolent rule. Osiris was not always kindly, however. He destroyed those who resisted his program of enlightenment, a barbarian king in Thrace among them. [15] While Osiris was gone, Isis ruled Egypt without any major problems. Not everyone was content with the positive state of affairs, however. Osiris's younger brother Set was
jealous of his brother's achievements, and sought to assassinate him.[16]Set gathered 72 conspirators—including the queen of Ethiopia—and began to plot his brother's demise. Working in secret, Set took precise measurements of Osiris's body and devised an incredibly ornate box to match them. Set presented the box at a party, telling partygoers
that whomever fit in the box could keep it. Each guest tried the box in turn, only to find it did not quite fit. Finally, Osiris laid down in it and found he fit perfectly.[17]As soon as the king had laid down, Set and his conspirators tossed the chest into
the Nile and watched it float out to sea.[18]Isis was in the village of Chemmis (or Koptos), near Thebes, when she felt her husband's death. Sensing the truth in her feelings, she immediately went into mourning.[19]A wooden statue of Isis in mourning (332-30 BCE). The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainIsis set out in search of her husband's
body, but went many months without success. Eventually, however, she came across some some children who told her they had seen a chest floating down the Nile. Upon further investigation, Isis discovered that the chest had washed ashore in Byblos and quickly began to search the area. [20] When Osiris washed ashore at Byblos, a great tree grew
around his chest. King Malkander and Queen Athenais had heard tales of this magnificent tree, and decided to use it as a pillar in their palace. [21]When Isis arrived in Byblos, she realized that Osiris was not there and sat in melancholic silence. Coincidentally
Queen Athenais' handmaids were bathing at Byblos when they found themselves taken in by Isis's silent beauty. As they began to converse with the goddess, they became perfumed by their proximity to her. When the handmaids returned to the palace, the queen asked them about their lovely fragrance. The handmaids then told her of their meeting
with Isis.Intrigued by the handmaids' tale, the queen visited the shore and, after meeting with Isis, asked her to serve as her child's nurse. Isis not only accepted Athenais' offer, but also stated that she could cure her son's incurable illness—on the condition she be able to work in secrecy. Depending on the version of the tale, the queen either
intentionally set out to discover Isis's methods, or accidentally stumbled upon the process. The end result was the same—Isis revealed herself, Isis either demanded access to Osiris's entombed body, or was offered anything she wanted as a gift.[22] Once Isis received Osiris's body, the wave of grief she
experienced was so powerful that it killed one of the monarchs' children. Isis returned home with Osiris's body, and was able to revive him long enough to impregnate herself with the god Horus. [23] Isis, Nephthys, Anubis, and Thoth then embalmed and mummified Osiris's body before hiding it away. Even in death, Osiris would find no peace. Set
discovered his body while on a moonlit boar hunt and tore it into 14 pieces. While some stories say he scattered Osiris's body parts about Egypt himself, most sources suggest that he simply threw the pieces back into the Nile.[24]Isis once again set out to find her wayward husband and managed to collect 13 of the pieces. The 14th—Osiris's phallus—
was eaten by an alligator (or fish) and was lost forever. In order to prevent Set from repeating his last misadventures, Isis made a waxen copy of each body part, with each being told that their location was the true burial site of Osiris. [25] Ultimately, Osiris's body
(including a wax replacement phallus) was reassembled. While Isis's magic had been sufficient to revive Osiris long enough to conceive Horus, he would never again reside in the land of the living. Osiris instead arrived in Duat, the Egyptian underworld. There he served as lord of the dead, judging those who sought to follow him into the afterlife
[26] The most popular accounts of Osiris's tale were written by the Greek scholars Plutarch and Diodorus. Plutarch lived from 46-120CE, while Diodorus lived in the first century BCE, roughly 2,500 years after the cult of Osiris rose to prominence. As such, their tales (while not entirely fabricated) did not necessarily reflect the Osiris worshipped
throughout most of Egyptian history. The accounts of Osiris's murder found in Egyptian sources were much more brief, and came to us via the Pyramid Texts and the Papyrus Salt 825. Pyramid Texts and the Papy
[27] These texts contained fragmentary mentions of the murder of Osiris, as well as Isis and Nephthys's subsequent search for his body. The texts made it clear that Osiris either drowned or was thrown into water after his death, offering partial confirmation of later versions of the story. [28] Papyrus Salt 825—so called because the
series of papyri were purchased from Henry Salt—dated back to the Ptolemaic Period (332-30BCE). The papyrus contained an incantation entitled "The End of the Work" which was meant to be delivered at the conclusion of the mummification process. [29] The Papyrus Salt 825. The Trustees of the British Museum CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 In Egyptian religious
tradition, such spells were thought to be the same as those in the myths told about their gods and goddesses. "The End of the Work" would have been the spell delivered over the mummified body of Osiris before he traveled to Duat. By extension, the spell would enable other recently mummified souls to enter Duat as well.[30]The Egyptians believed
that people were unified beings made from both spiritual and corporeal components. This union dissolved at the time of death, with the ka (body) remaining behind and the ba (soul) flying on to the afterlife in the Duat.After traversing through the Duat to reach Osiris, the deceased would have their sins weighed against the feather of maat.[31]Those
who were righteous in life—or had spells inscribed on the heart scarab they were mummified with—were then free to exit the Hall of Judgement, and their spiritual ba would be reunited with their corporeal ka. Osiris adorns this burial garment from around 125 CE—a time when Egypt was under Roman rule. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic
DomainThose who failed to pass the test would then die a true death and be removed from existence by the Ammit—a beast with the head of a crocodile, the body of a lion, and the haunches of a hippopotamus. The most unfortunate of souls would be tortured by Osiris's demonic associates prior to their obliteration. [32]Osiris was a playable character
in the 2015 multiplayer-online battle-arena (MOBA) video game Smite. Since the mid-1990s, Osiris has been rising steadily in popularity as a given name. While the name is still relatively uncommon, babies are seven times more likely to be named Osiris was
the name of the ship that discovered a machine army digging their way to Zion. Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University An important member of the Egyptian pantheon, Geb was an earth god who held sway over snakes, earthquakes, and the underworld. As the third king of Egypt
(following Ra and Shu), Geb was closely tied to kingship and royal power. In this relief fragment (c. 2145-2025 BCE) Geb can be seen holding a scepter and ankh. The Walters Art MuseumCC0While the meaning of Geb's name has been lost to time, its spelling and pronunciation have been the subject of considerable debate. The famous Egyptologist Siral formula is a scepter and ankh.
E.A. Wallis Budge referred to the deity as Seb, while his peer Heinrich Karl Brugsch favored Geb or Keb.[1]"Geb" is used almost universally today, though older sources may still refer to him as Seb.Geb was usually portrayed as a human with green skin representing his status as a fertility god. His body was sometimes adorned with plants, or their
corresponding hieroglyphs. He was often depicted in a reclined position beneath his wife, the sky goddess Nut, with his phallus pointing in her direction. When standing, Geb usually wore the Red Crown of Lower Egypt or a goose hieroglyph atop his head; the latter represented his name. [2] A relief of Geb and Horus from tomb KV14 in the Valley of the
Kings. Geb is easily identified by the goose glyph atop his head.kairoinfo4uCC BY-SA 2.0As an earth god, Geb was associated with earthquakes, fresh water, and the underworld.[3] Several myths have suggested that Geb also had control over snakes due to their dwelling within the earth. In addition to his control over natural elements, Geb was held
in high regard for his healing powers, particularly in relation to scorpion stings.[4]Geb was closely linked to kingship. Pharaohs were sometimes referred to as "heirs of Geb," and the Egyptian throne was nicknamed "the seat of Geb."[5]Geb was part of the third generation of Egyptian gods. His parents, Shu and Tefnut, were the offspring of Ra.As was
common amongst the Egyptian gods, Geb married his sister, Nut. Together they had Osiris, Horus the Elder, Set, Isis, and Nephthys.[6] Myths relating to Geb mostly dealt with his tenure as prince and later king of Egypt—although as a chthonic god, he was also involved with matters of the afterlife. In this image from the Book of the Dead of Ani (c.
1300 BCE), Geb participates in the weighing of the heart ceremony. In this ritual, the deceased were judged to determine if they were worthy of entering the afterlife. Geb is seated in the top row above the ceremony. The Trustees of the British MuseumCC BY-NC-SA 4.0When Geb and Nut were born, they held each other so tightly that Nut could not
give birth. Eventually, their father Shu forced them apart to allow the earth and sky became separated.[8]This scene from the Greenfield Papyrus depicts Geb lounging below his wife Nut, who is being held aloft by their father Shu. The Trustees of the British MuseumCC BY-NC-SA
4.0Geb was an unruly prince at best and a downright seditious one at worst. On one occasion, he transformed him on the matter. His denials were unconvincing, however, as the eye was bleeding through his skin. [9]The Eye of Ra was a solar disk who
served as Ra's feminine counterpart. A protector of kings, she could destroy enemies with her powerful gaze.[10] Finally, in a myth only found only after the 30th Dynasty, (c. 400 BCE) Geb rebelled against his father, seized the throne, and forced his mother Tefnut to be his queen.[11] This tale seems to have been derived from Greek mythology, where
Cronus (Geb's Greek equivalent) rebelled against his father Uranus.[12]Geb's path to kingship opened when his father, Shu, abdicated the throne. After winning a major battle against the forces of Apophis, Shu returned to find his palace overrun by rebels. Fearing for his life, he fled to the sky, leaving earth—and his throne—behind. Now the de facto
king, Geb formally took his father's throne following a monumental storm that kept everyone locked in the palace for nine days. In an attempt to legitimize his rule, Geb made inquiries into the accomplishments of Shu and Ra. Upon hearing tell of a living uraeus (a rearing cobra) that once served as Shu's headdress, Geb resolved to claim it for himself
The creature was sealed away in a hidden chest, but such obstacles did not hinder Geb for long; his followers soon recovered the priceless treasure and brought it before the king. When they went to open the chest, however, the uraeus burst out and began breathing fire at the group. Geb's followers were incinerated, and Geb himself was badly
burned. Only through the magical wig of Ra was Geb able to heal his injuries.[13]Geb's future endeavors were considerably more successful. In retaking ancestral lands that remain unclear, Geb abdicated the throne to make
way for Osiris, his first-born son. Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University One of the best-known goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon, Isis was the granddaughter of Ra, wife of Osiris, and mother of Horus. While she was best known as a powerful sorceress and healer, she was also a
fiercely protective mother and loyal wife. Her acts of healing and compassion were renowned throughout the land; those who threatened her loved ones, however, did so at their own peril. The etymology of the Egyptian gods' names have largely been lost to time and translation. Nevertheless, some information relating to Isis's etymology has been lost to time and translation.
discovered. Isis was generally depicted wearing a crown resembling the hieroglyph for "throne." Her name—as written in Ancient Egyptian—incorporated this glyph as well. Thus, Isis's name was commonly understood to mean "throne goddess." [1] This statuette of Isis (611-594 BCE) once nursed a baby Horus figure (now missing). Her headdress of
cow horns and a solar disk is in line with common depictions of the goddess in Late Period Egypt. This headdress was also associated with the goddess of contradictions. While she could be bloodthirsty and ruthless, she was also
compassionate and loyal. She was known for her acts of healing, but her grief could also cause the death of innocents. Isis happily extorted her grandfather Ra so that her unborn son Horus could lay claim to the throne. Later, when Horus was engaged in a competition with his uncle Set, Isis cheated on her son's behalf. On yet another occasion, she
released a captured Set out of familial obligation. She was an immensely powerful sorceress known for her wondrous healing spells. Isis was usually depicted in human form, and could sometimes be seen carrying a sistrum (an ancient percussion instrument). The myths and imagery surrounding Isis and another goddess, Hathor, were sometimes
conflated. Isis would, at times, bear the cow horns and solar disk more commonly associated with Hathor [2]In this ancient Roman statue, Isis holds a sistrum, or rattle-like percussion instrument, in her right hand. Marie-Lan Nguyen CC0Isis was the fourth child born to the gods Nut and Geb. Her older siblings included Osiris, Horus the
Elder[3] and Set; she also had a younger sister named Nephthys. Isis conceived her son, Horus the Younger, with her deceased brother/husband Osiris. Isis's relationship with Osiris was somewhat peculiar: the two began their relationship in the womb and thus were born as husband and wife. [4] She raised Anubis, the bastard child of Osiris and
Nephthys, as her own after his mother abandoned him. Isis was an extremely complex goddess, which may explain the longevity of her cult. While other Egyptian gods were replaced or discarded, Isis continued to be worshipped long into the Greek and Roman periods. For a time, the prevailing thought in Greco-Roman culture was that Isis had created
the world, and that all of the other gods were simply alternative names for Isis.[5] Isis's cult remains active to this day, as the goddess has become a part of modern paganism. In Egyptian mythology, knowing someone's name was thought to give you power over them. Accordingly, true names were closely guarded secrets. Ra's true name was
immensely powerful, as whomever had access to it could control the sun god and all his might. Isis had begun plotting her son's ascent to the throne well before he was born. Such a plot required great cunning and ingenuity, for though Isis was a sorceress of great power, even her magic could not harm the mighty Ra. For all his power, Ra did have
several weaknesses. He was elderly, and tended to drool. Isis collected some of this spittle and mixed it with clay, forming it into the shape of a cobra. Then, using her magic, she animated the cobra atruck. Unable to resist the cobra's venom,
had not yet received his true name and told him again, she could only heal him if he gave her his true name. Ra's pain had intensified throughout this process, and he knew that he would have no peace until he was cured. In an effort to avoid giving her any power over him, Ra attempted to bargain with Isis. In his weakened state, however, he
bargained poorly. Isis and Ra ultimately agreed that, if Isis cured him, he would give her as-of-yet unborn son his eyes (here meaning the sun and the moon, the sources of Ra's power). True to her word Isis offered up an incantation to relieve Ra of his suffering: Break out, scorpions! Leave Re! Eye of Horus, leave the god! Flame of the mouth - I am theat - I am thea
one who made you, I am The one who sent you - come to the gods, and a sun god in his own right. This was far in the future, however, and both Isis and Horus would face
many trials before these events would come to pass. Built around 280 BCE, the walls of the Temple of Isis at Philae bear scenes from Isis's storied mythology was the murder of Osiris and Isis's ensuing quest to retrieve his body. The story began during a period of
prosperity and peace. Osiris ruled over Egypt and introduced its citizens to agriculture; he also eliminated barbarism. After civilizing Egypt, Osiris embarked on an expedition to bring culture to the region, which ranged from India to Ethiopia.[8] During Osiris's absence, Isis ruled over Egypt. With Thoth as her advisor, she proved to be a
successful queen.[9]Set was jealous of his brother's success, and plotted to kill him when he returned from his travels.[10] He held a party in honor of Osiris's return, and during the festivities tricked his brother into lying in an ornate box. Set then sealed the box with molten lead and cast it into the Nile.[11]Isis, who was in a distant town at the time
of the murder, instantly knew of her husband's death. Without moving from where she stood, she cut off a lock of her hair and donned mourning robes.[12] Isis then set out in search of her husband's body. Eventually, she came across some children playing who told her that they had seen a chest floating north on the Nile.[13]During her quest, Isis
 discovered that her sister Nephthys had once seduced Osiris. After giving birth to Osiris's child, Nephthys had abandoned it for fear of her husband's wrath. Concerned, Isis searched for the boy and ultimately found him being cared for by wild dogs. She adopted him then and there, naming him Anubis.[14]Upon resuming her search, Isis learned that
Osiris's body had washed ashore at a place called Byblos. While Byblos' true location has been lost to vagaries of time in myths like these is often difficult to discern. Either a significant amount of time had elapsed while Isis was trying to locate the body, or the body of the body of the body.
Osiris's body had magical properties. Whichever the case, a great tamarisk tree had grown around Osiris's sarcophagus.[15]The tree became known, in fact, that the local rulers, King Malkander and Queen Athenais, determined it to be the perfect pillar for their new
palace and had the tree cut down. Unbeknownst to them, the section they had chosen to use for their pillar contained the body of Osiris.[16]Isis arrived too late to find her husband, and recognized that she had lost him once again. She sat in mute despondency long enough to draw the attention of a pair of Queen Athenais' handmaids. The handmaids.
struck up a conversation with the depressed goddess, and became perfumed by their proximity to her. Upon returning to the palace, the handmaids were questioned as to their heavenly scent; they proceeded to tell the queen of their meeting with Isis. Intrigued, the queen set off to meet Isis in person. The two women became friends almost
immediately, and the queen invited Isis to be her youngest child's nurse. Isis accepted the invitation, and, upon learning that the child suffered from an incurable illness, offered to heal him. She offered this service on one condition—she must be able to work in secret.[17]Depending on the version of the legend, the queen either accidentally stumbled
upon Isis working her magic to heal her son, or intentionally hid herself in Isis's chambers in order to discover her methods. Upon being discovered, Isis revealed herself to be a goddess. Here, the stories diverge again: in some versions, Isis demanded to be given the pillar. In others, the queen offered Isis anything she would like as a gift. In both
cases, Isis gained access to the pillar and recovered Osiris's body. Isis's grief at seeing her deceased husband's body was so great that the child's brother). Having finally recovered Osiris's body, Isis set about attempting to revive him. Multiple versions of this tale exist, with each
offering different interpretations as to how and when Osiris was resurrected. The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus (305 BCE) provides a unique interpretation of the myth. The Trustees of the British MuseumCC BY-SA 4.0 The most commonly told version of this tale
comes to us from the Greek historian Plutarch's version is widely known, he wrote his account over a thousand years after the myth had fully developed. As such, his version often differed from those few surviving fragments in the ancient Egyptian record. In Plutarch's telling of the story, Isis recovered Osiris's body only to
have Set manage to accidentally discover its whereabouts. Set dismembered the freshly recovered body and scattered it across the land. Isis was able to locate all of Osiris's body parts, with the exception of his penis.[18] When she put his body back together, Isis replaced his phallus with a waxen copy. Egyptian sources often omitted any mention of
dismemberment; these sources held that Osiris's bodily degradation was the result of natural decomposition. [19]In an alternative version of the story, Isis and Nephthys worked together to revive Osiris. Their efforts were successful, if short-lived. Osiris returned long enough to impregnate Isis, but departed the land of the living shortly afterward.
[20] According to a tradition from the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, Isis stood to the right of Osiris's body and Thoth stood to his left. Together, they put their hands upon him and engaged in a ceremony known as 'the opening of the mouth.' This ritual was an important step in the mummification ceremonial rites and was believed to awaken the dead
for their journey to the afterlife.[21]In another version, Isis took the form of a kite (a bird of prey):[22]She made light [to come forth] from her feathers, she made air to come into being by means of him whose heart was at rest, she drew from
him his essence, and she made therefrom an heir.[23]Fearing that Set would try to destroy her unborn child, Isis petitioned the gods for their protection. Atum was convinced, and decreed that Set could not harm her
unborn child. To ensure this godly restraining order, Atum arranged for the snake goddess Werethekau to protect the pregnant Isis.[24]This relief at the temple of Seti I in Abydos features Isis (in kite form) conceiving Horus with the body of Osiris. Olaf TauschCC BY 3.0After Osiris's death, Set took control as pharaoh. Undeterred by Atum's promise
of protection, Set imprisoned Isis and her sister Nephthys in the spinning house of Sais. Some versions held that while Isis was imprisoned in the spinning house. Having escaped Set's grasp, Isis set out for the
floating island of Pe, where the goddess Wadjet (also known as Uazet or Wadjyt) resided. Upon arriving at this safe haven, Isis cut the island's moorings and set it adrift. The Greek historian Herodotus (circa 484-425BCE) not only knew of this legend, but reportedly visited the island as well. Despite his willingness to present fantastical
representations, Herodotus downplayed the island's mythical properties, writing: "the Egyptians affirm it to be a floating island: I did not witness the fact, and was astonished to hear that such a thing existed." [25] Horus' birth was challenging for Isis, who labored painfully for many hours. Eventually, a pair of gods appeared and anointed her head
with a dab of blood, allowing Horus to be born at last. The son of Isis and Osiris was born on the vernal equinox—better known as the first day of spring.[26]Hearing of Horus' birth, Set immediately embarked on an expedition to destroy him. With assistance from Nephthys, Wadjet, Nekhbet, and Hathor, Isis raised Horus in the papyrus swamps of
Northern Egypt. Whenever Isis sensed Set's approach, the group would move on before his followers could find them. On one occasion, Set nearly caught Isis. She was saved by Horus of Behdet, [27] who engaged Set in a great river battle and allowed her entourage to flee. [28] As is common in Egyptian mythology, no single version of a story was
canon. Another version of Isis's escape from the spinning house of Sais had her embark on a journey accompanied by seven scorpions (manifestations of the scorpion goddess Serqet) from the spinning house, Thoth warned her to evade Set until Horus came of age to challenge him for the throne. Isis, Horus, and seven scorpions (manifestations of the scorpion goddess Serqet)
departed immediately.[29]This scepter ornament (663-346 BCE) merges the imagery of Isis with that of the scorpion goddess Serget. The Walters Art MuseumCC0The group traveled furtively, always moving in order to remain ahead of Set. One day, a rich woman saw Isis and her group approaching her house and quickly shut her doors, denying them
any opportunity for charity. Resigned, Isis continued on. Her scorpions, however, were vengeful, and plotted to make sure the woman would be punished for scorning the goddess. Six of the seven imparted their venom into the one called Tefen. That night, Tefen snuck into the rich woman's house and stung her child. The child awoke in agony, and his
mother rushed to find help. As she ran through the town, the woman found that everyone ignored her cries. The defeated woman recognized the cruel irony of her plight, for she had committed the same moral failing earlier that day. Isis heard of the child's ailment and knew what her scorpion escorts had done. Upset that the innocent child had been
targeted, she set out to heal him. When Isis arrived, she spoke the true names of each of the seven scorpions and commanded the poison to leave the child. Names were routinely invoked as a source of power in Ancient Egypt, and the ritual used here mirrored Isis's call to remove the poison from Ra. Intriguingly, this story suggests that Isis needed to
know Ra's true name in order to heal him, as the poison she had used was made from his essence. When Horus finally came of age, he challenged Set for his kingship. The story has two different versions: an epic version, not unlike an Egyptian version of Homer's Odyssey, and a satirical (or parody) version. There is no evidence to suggest the latter
version developed after the epic version, nor that it was taken less seriously.[30]Isis in the Epic VersionIn the epic tale, Isis supported her son Horus' quest for the crown. She gilded his boat with gold, and prayed for a successful outcome in his upcoming battle with Set.At one point, Horus gained the upper hand over his evil uncle, and took him
prisoner. Horus asked Isis to quard Set while he pursued his uncle's fleeing army. Set exploited his position as Isis's betrayal, he sliced her head off with a single, mighty blow. Killing gods was a challenging task, however, and Thoth
was able to replace Isis's head with the solar disk and horns of Hathor.[31]Isis in the Satirical Version Unlike the martial combat of the epic version, the satirical version was framed as a courtroom drama. As before, Horus challenged Set for the throne. This time, however, Atum-Ra presided as judge over the affair. Atum-Ra was reluctant to award the
throne to Horus, despite the fact that he was the last legitimate king's heir. At one point in the trial the case seems to be decided in Set's favor—at least until Isis turned her fury on the court backpedaled. The court backpeda
Isis barred from attending. Atum-Ra accepted this request, and the next trial was held on an island only accessible via a ferry. The ferryman, Anty (also known as Nempty), was instructed not to allow Isis or anyone resembling her to gain access to the island. [32] Not one to be deterred, Isis disguised herself as an old woman carrying a jar of barley and
wearing a gold ring. The ferryman initially told her he could not bring any women to the island. [33]Once on the island. Isis offered the ferryman her gold ring. This time Anty accepted the bribe and brought her to the island. [33]Once on the isl
maiden. When Set saw her, he came over and suggested that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two become better acquainted physically. Instead of addressing his comment, Isis slyly asked him for some advice. She explained that the two becomes advice. The two becomes advice.
interested in bedding the disguised Isis than thinking about the question, quickly answered that it was wrong for the stranger to disinherit the son. At this admission, Isis revealed herself and declared that Set had effectively argued against his own position. [34] Atum-Ra agreed with Isis, and the court once again looked as though it would award the
throne to Horus. Set was not one to give up, however. He proposed a challenge where the two gods would turn themselves into hippopotami and see who could hold their breath underwater the longest. Concerned that her son might lose, Isis crafted a harpoon out of a bronze ingot and threw it at Set. Unfortunately, she missed her target and hit Horus
instead. Just as before, Horus struck his mother's head off with a single mighty blow. Once again, however, Isis survived decapitation and was apparently no worse for wear.[35]The court decided that Set and Horus should work out the matter on their own, and Set proposed a truce, inviting Horus to dine with him. After a night of drinking, Horus fell
asleep on Set's bed. Set then attempted to rape the younger god, but Horus awoke just in time to catch Set's semen in his hands.[36]Immediately Horus went to his mother and told her about what had happened. Suspecting trickery, Isis cut Horus' hands off and threw them in the Nile. After using her magic to regrow his severed appendages, she
collected some of Horus' semen and sprinkled it over the plants in Set's garden. The next day, Set and Horus once again went before the court. Set declared that he should be king because he had "performed a man's work" on Horus. Horus denied these claims, telling the court that everything that Set said was a lie. Thoth, in an act of what is possibly
the strangest use of magic in all of mythological history, commanded Set's semen to make itself known. As Horus' hands had been thrown into the Nile, Set's belly
via his ears.[37]Isis's trickery saved her son from an embarrassing legal defeat, and ultimately paved the way for Horus to claim his father's throne. While Christianity spread across Rome in the 4th century CE, it had arrived in Egypt as early as the 2nd century. One prevailing image of Isis featured her holding/nursing her baby, Horus. Thanks to Isis's
widespread cult, this image would have been recognizable almost anywhere in the Mediterranean. This 7th century BCE statuette depicts Isis in a classic lactans pose, with baby Horus atop her lap. This imagery bears striking similarities to that of the Virgin Mary, whom Isis predated by several thousands years. The Walters Art MuseumCCOGiven
Isis's popularity, many historians have posited that the Virgin Mary owes much of her religious iconography to Isis. Lactans style imagery, or imagery representing maternal nursing, was cited as a direct link between the two.Despite the apparent connection between the two figures, modern scholarship has suggested that any "cultic continuity"
between them was unlikely.[38] While Marian lactans imagery likely borrowed from a tradition of lactans art rooted in Isis's cult, this shared iconography did not reflect a deeper connection between the two religious figures. Please note that the Islamic jihadist group formerly known as ISIS or ISIL is completely unrelated to Isis and the Egyptian
pantheon. The group's English name originated as an acronym based on a literal translation. In recent years, the jihadist group has undergone several name changes and is now more commonly known as Daesh or IS. Despite the tenuous relationship between ISIS the group and Isis the name, the latter has experienced a steep decline in popularity.
dropping from 266 babies per million in 2014 to just 22 per million in 2018.[39]Isis was a recurring character in the Marvel Comics universe, appearing as a member of the Heliopolitans, who were based on the Egyptian pantheon. She first appeared in Thor #239 in September, 1975.[40]In Downton Abbey, Isis was the name of a yellow lab. She
succeeded a lab named Pharaoh, underscoring her ties to the Egyptian goddess.[41]Bob Dylan's song "Isis" made several references to Egypt. While the song itself seemed to revolve around Dylan's failing marriage, its abstract nature made it difficult to parse.[42]Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from
Georgia State University A wily trickster, Set was the Egyptian god of confusion and disorder. Though he generally played an antagonistic role in Egyptian mythology, Set still played a key role in the Egyptian god of confusion and disorder. Though he generally played an antagonistic role in Egyptian mythology, Set still played a key role in the Egyptian cosmos. He would ultimately ally himself with Osiris, riding on the front of the solar barque and defending it from Apophis—an elemental chaos
beast.Set (right) with his sister/wife Nephthys (c. 1279-1213 BCE). The Louvre Museum, Paris, France.RamaCC BY-SA 3.0As with many Egyptian deities, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the meaning of Set's name. Set's name may have meant something to the effect of "he who is below," on the basis that Set was Horus's opposite. Note
that Horus's name likely meant "he who is above." [1] Set was an easy god to recognize in hieroglyphics, as he always appeared as an unidentifiable aardvark/ant-eater headed man. While most Egyptian deities were associated with a specific animal, it has been suggested that Set's form did not represent an animal at all; rather, he may have
represented a mythical, chimeric beast. [2] Like many Egyptian gods, Set was capable of shapeshifting. He could turn himself into an ox, an oryx, a hippopotamus, a bull, a crocodile, and a panther. He could turn himself into an ox, an oryx, a hippopotamus, a bull, a crocodile, and a panther. He could turn himself into an ox, an oryx, a hippopotamus, a bull, a crocodile, and a panther.
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which features Horus and Set offering their blessings to the newly crowned pharaoh. Museum of Cairo, Egypt.tutincommonCC BY-NC-SA 2.0As a trickster god, Set opposed the Egyptian concept of maat, or divine order. Set was not simply a force of disorder, but instead served as the god of khenenu, or confusion.[4] He was often associated with

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sandstorms, thunderstorms, and flash floods; given Egypt's reliance on the Nile's waters, all of these forces were regarded as destructive nuisances.[5]Regarded as the mightiest of the gods, Set proved his strength in the nightly battles against Apophis, the chaos monster.[6]Set was born to the earth and sky gods Geb and Nut. His siblings included
Osiris, Horus (Note: not in all mythological versions), Isis, and Nephthys. His grandfather was the sun god Ra .Set took his sister, Nephthys, as his wife. Having formed a connection in the womb, the two were married before they were born. A key element of Set's mythology was his unrelenting jealousy of his elder brother Osiris. Some of this jealousy
may have been warranted—his wife eventually bore an illegitimate child with Osiris. While Set was a tremendously important god in the Egyptian mythos, and it is all but
certain that such myths existed as well. This stela shows Set (left) being worshipped by an artisan or craftsman in the ancient village of Deir el-Medina. While Set's primarily links were to chaos and destruction, the deity was also associated with strength. The Trustees of the British MuseumCC BY-NC-SA 4.0Set was originally worshipped in Upper
(Southern) Egypt as a god of the desert. Following the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, Set's worship was incorporated into the larger Egyptian mythos. While he retained his desert-centric characteristics, such traits did not fit neatly into the agrarian framework of Nile-bound Egyptian society. This incongruence may explain why he was cast as
a force of evil and disorder. Unlike his siblings, Set did not have a traditional birth. In some tellings, he tore himself from Nut's womb; in others, his mother spat him into existence. [7] In either case, his unconventional birth was thought to foreshadow his representation of disorder and chaos. The most important extant myth from Ancient Egypt was the
murder of Osiris. The tale, which included nearly every significant god and goddess, was unique in that it managed to capture a sense of the Egyptian value system. [You can read the entire myth at The Murder of Osiris.] [ealous of his brother Osiris success, Set plotted to depose him. Using an elaborate trap involving a finely crafted sarcophagus, he
killed his older brother. For a time, it seemed that he had gotten away with his fratricide, as he went on to rule Egypt as its king. Set imprisoned Isis shortly after coming to power; he believed her to be a threat to his power. A common theme in Set's mythology was his violation of sexual norms and general sexual deviancy. One myth tells that he raped
his sister Isis, impregnating her in the process. The baby, which was born prematurely, emerged as a hideous creature—half black ibis and half baboon.[8]In another tale, Isis was attacking Set's forces under the guise of the goddess Sekhmet. When Set spotted her, he immediately recognized the goddess for who she truly was. Both enraged and
aroused, Set then transformed himself into a bull and pursued her. In response, Isis turned herself into a dog armed with a knife bladed tail. She managed to evade Set's pursuit, causing her horribly aroused brother to ejaculate on the ground. Isis mocked him for his failure, saying "It is an abomination to have scattered [your seed], O Bull."[9]When
Osiris's son Horus came of age, he decided to challenge Set for what he regarded as his rightful throne. Depending on the myth, the two either engaged in battle to decide who will rule, or put the matter before a court presided over by Ra. Horus prevailed and was awarded the kingship. [For a more complete retelling, see Isis and the Ascendency of
Horus.]The base of this statuette of Horus features an antelope, a desert animal sometimes associated with Set. The Horus figure once held a spear above the antelope, creating a tableau rife with symbolism. The Walters Art Museum CC0This myth could be seen as establishing precedent for primageniture—the practice through which the first-born
son inherited his father's throne. Without a clearly defined practice of succession, it was challenging to maintain the continuity of civilization. While Egypt had its fair share of dynastic conflict, on the whole succession, primogeniture (or variations of
it) were the de facto practice for inheritances. A recurring element in Set's myths was his single-minded determination to destroy Osiris's body. No matter how many times he failed, he would not stop until he completed his mission. Despite his great strength, Set met his match when he attempted to steal Osiris's body out from under the watchful eye
of Anubis. While Set was able to briefly steal Osiris's corpse a few times, he was caught and punished severely each time. [The full version of this myth is recounted in Anubis shin and setting fire to his corpse. Wearing Set's skin as a disguise, Anubis snuck
into Set's military camp and killed all of his followers.[11]Constrasting with the evil and destruction he had wrought in life, Set was a force for good in the afterlife. He rode at the front of Ra's solar barque and defended the sun god from Apophis, the great chaos monster.[12]Commonly portrayed as a giant snake or crocodile, Apophis would attack Ra
each night. Though Apophis could be killed, he would regenerate each day, thus ensuring the need for constant vigilance. Some myths explained thunder to be the sound of an epic clash between Set and Apophis.[13]In this relief from the Temple of Hibis, Set battles against the snake-like Apophis.NeferTiyiCC BY-NC-ND 2.0In a tale mirroring Isis's
poisoning of Ra, Set was bitten by a unspecified creature while aboard Ra's solar barque. The bite caused him great suffering, and Horus—having set aside his uncle's secret name. Set was reluctant to provide his secret name to Horus, for names held great
power. Like his grandfather Ra before him, Set prevaricated: am Yesterday, I am Today, I am Tomorrow which has not yet come. Unsatisfied with this response, Horus insisted that Set was none of these things and that he could only heal him with his true name. Set tried again, offering that he was "a Quiver full of Arrows and a Pot Full of
Disturbance."Once again, Horus told him that this response was inadequate. Still not ready to reveal the truth, Set told Horus: "I am a man of a thousand cubits, whose reputation is not known, I am a threshing-floor, made fast like a bronze which a cow has not swept. I am a Jug of Milk, milked from the breast of Bastet."This answer was still not
enough for Horus. Left with no other recourse, Set finally offered his true name: I am a man of a million cubits, whose name is Evil Day. As for the day of giving birth or of conceiving, there is no giving birth or of conceiving, there is no giving birth or of conceiving, there is no giving birth or of conceiving.
throughout popular culture in books, television, film, video games, and music. Set was mentioned in Neil Gaiman's American Gods. In the book, Ibis (Thoth by another name) mentioned that the last time any of the gods had heard from Set was 1905 or 1906 via a postcard from San Francisco. [15] Set served as the inspiration for Sutekh, an antagonist
in Pyramids of Mars, the 3rd serial of the 13th series of Doctor Who. The serial relied on the oft-repeated trope of Egyptian gods being aliens—in this case a race called Osiriars. [16]Gerard Butler plays Set in the 2016 film Gods of Egypt. While the film took several plot elements from the myth of Osiris's death, it also took considerable artistic license.
[17]Due, perhaps, to his status as a mythological antagonist, Set has often been invoked in death and black metal: "In the Desert of Set" from Therion's 1996 album Theis song was subdivided into seven mini-tracks. Evan Meehan
is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University An incredibly important figure in the Egyptians believed him to have a number of manifestations, with each representing a different facet of his being. A sun and sky god in
equal measure, he was typically represented by a falcon and embodied the principles of Egyptian kingship. Falcon-headed Horus once held a spear above an antelope at the base of this statuette (664–525 BCE). The antelope is thought to represent Set, whom Horus defeated to become ruler of Egypt. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Public DomainA
passing familiarity with the major figures from the Egyptian pantheon will give the impression that Horus was also much more than that. The Egyptians worshipped Horus for over three thousand years, and over time he was merged with similar
deities and their accompanying mythologies. As a result of his millennia of worship, Horus's mythos has become somewhat confusing. Horus was not subject to temporal consistency, and existed simulatenously as both child and adult. In one myth that exemplified this paradox, Horus appeared as Hathor's son, husband, and father—all at the same
time. In order to better understand Horus, several of his more prominent manifestations will be examined in isolation. It is important to note that the ancient Egyptians recognized all of these incarnations to be aspects of the same god. A serekh (rectangular box, left) from the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat I of the 12th Dynasty. The falcon sitting atop
the box represents Horus. Osama Shukir Muhammed AminCC BY-SA 4.0The deity's oldest manifestation, Horus the Falcon was also known as Horus the Horizon, or Harmachis to the Greeks). Found only in Greek sources, Horus the
Elder was the son of Nut and Geb. He was also known as Horus the Great, Harwer, and Haroeris. Horus the Younger is Likely the most recognizable iteration of the best-known Egyptian myths. Horus's name was derived from the Egyptian word her,
meaning "the one on high" or "the distant one," a reference to a soaring falcon or the sun itself.[1] The ancient Egyptians called this iteration Horus Upon His Papyrus Plants, referencing his birth in the papyrus swamps of Chemmis).[2] He was also referred to as Hor Pa-Khered
(literally: Horus the Child) which the Greeks transliterated as Harpokrates.[3]Despite having many different manifestation, Horus the Falcon has been found on artifacts dating back to the 1st Dynasty (3050 BCE). Once such object, an ivory comb,
depicted Horus as a falcon riding in a boat with outstretched wings. His speckled breast feathers represented the stars, his outstretched wings represented the sky, and his eyes represented the sun and the moon.[7]Originally a god of Southern Egypt (Nekhen), Horus the Falcon's influence grew and spread. Over time he was merged with other
falcon, sky, and solar gods. One of these mergers was with Ra—resulting in Ra-Horakhty. This composite god was depicted as a falcon crowned by a solar disk.[8]Horus of Behdebt was a fairly unique interpretation of Horus. Best known from his depictions at the Temple of Edfu in Upper (Southern) Egypt, he may have been worshipped in Tell el-
Balamun in Lower Egypt. Similar to other iterations of the deity, Horus of Behdebt was most often depicted as a falcon; he was also portrayed as a lion or winged sun disk. [9] Horus the Elder was falcon; he was also portrayed as a lion or winged sun disk.
portrayed as a falcon-headed man, he rarely (if ever) appeared as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc. Horus the Younger was shown as a falcon-headed man, often crowned by a solar disc.
typically nude, boy with a shaved head and a plaited sidelock of hair. To emphasize his youth, he was often shown with his finger in his mouth. [11] The distinction between Horus the Child and Horus the Younger came from the ancient Greeks and Romans, who worshipped Horus the Child as a separate entity. [12] The Greco-Roman worship of Horus
the Child incorporated another Horus as well—Horus the Savior. Also known as Shed, Horus the Savior appeared in stelae (stone slabs commemorating an event, royal decree, or religious texts) dressed as a young prince, usually wielding a curved sword or bow; he was sometimes depicted trampling crocodiles or strangling lions and snakes. The
Greeks identified this manifestation with Hercules, who famously strangled two snakes in his bassinet. [13]It was common for Horus the Savior and Horus the Savior and Horus the Savior and Horus. In
his interpretation, Harpokrates was the lame and premature child of Isis and Osiris. Plutarch may have mistaken the Egyptian dwarf god Bes for Horus, however, as Bes not only matched this physical description, but frequently appeared on stelae as well.[15]Though the Egyptians practiced a heliocentric religion, the night sky was still extremely
important to them. As some of the brightest objects in the sky, planets were given special status and associated Horus with three of them.[16]Mars: Horus of the Horizon, or Horus the RedJupiter: Horus Who Limits the Two LandsSaturn
Horus, Bull of the HeavensHorus the Elder has an unclear parentage. Greek sources contend that he was the second child of Nut and Geb, while Egyptian sources positioned him as the son of Hathor and Ra.[17]According to the Coffin Texts, Horus and Isis had four children: Duamulef, Qebehsenuef, Imsety, and Hapy. These children protected the
organs of the dead, which were preserved in canopic jars. These gods were collectively known as the Sons of Horus. [18] Ba (pl. bau) was a form through which a god could be experienced on earth; a
physical manifestation of the divine[19]Horus of Behdebt was the husband of Hathor and father of Horus, Uniter-of-the-Two-Lands (also known as Horus Sematawy or Harsomtus) and Ihy.[20]Horus the Younger came to prominence after the rise of the Osirian mythology. The son of Isis and Osiris, he first appeared in the Pyramid Texts during the 6th
Dynasty (c. 2345-2181 BCE),[21]The Edfu temple hosted an annual festival celebrating Horus's "beautiful union" with Hathor, who was featured not only as Horus's mother, but as his consort and daughter as well,[22]The scorpion goddess Ta-Bitjet was sometimes referred to as the wife of Horus, though which iteration she was married to remains
unclear.[23]According to a creation myth from the walls of the Edfu Temple, there was a time when the world was not yet formed and all that existed was a vast swamp. Two mysterious beings worked together to subdue this primeval and all that existed was a vast swamp. Two mysterious beings worked together to subdue this primeval and all that existed was not yet formed and all that existed was not yet form
falcon alighted upon it. The beings proceeded to build a hut around the falcon, and this building became both the center of the world and its first temple. [27] Myth of the Winged Disk: I don't have a good source for this. I just know that Horus the Distant One blinded and destroyed his enemies. Pinch 145. Horus the Elder was most readily seen in Greek
sources, where he was called Apollo. According to the Greek historian Diodoros of Sicily, Horus the Elder accompanied Osiris on his civilizing expedition. [28] To read more about Osiris myth, Horus the Elder assisted Isis and Nephthys in the search for and
subsequent reconstruction of Osiris's body. [29] A common theme in Horus's mythology was the damage or theft of his eyes. Set was generally the culprit behind such schemes, and Horus would often require the aid of another deity in restoring his vision. Eyes were regarded as deities unto themselves, perhaps because irt, the Egyptian word for eye,
closely resembled the Egyptian word for "doing" or "acting." As irt was feminine, the eyes of masculine gods were treated as goddesses. When intact, the eye of Horus, or wedjat, represented maat—divine order. Any attack on the eyes, then, was an attack on order itself. Two of Horus's manifestations were defined by their eyes (or lack thereof).
Khenty-irty was a form of Horus depicted as an ichneumon, a type of mongoose praised for its vision. On the opposite end of the spectrum was Khenty-en-irty, an aspect of Horus depicted as a represented as a species of eyeless shrew. This blind iteration of Horus was a vengeful god who punished the wicked for their sins.[30]Horus's eyes were regarded as the sun
and the moon, though which eye was which remains unclear. While many stories mentioned that Horus's eye was damaged, few explicitly described what happened to it. Accounts tend to agree, however, that Horus's injured eye was the moon, explaining its vastly reduced brightness in comparison to the sun. The waxing moon was thought to be
Horus's eye gradually recovering from its injuries.[31]Several tales of the destruction of Horus's eye(s) come to us from the mythos of Horus the Younger. In one story, Horus beheaded his mother in an act of unthinking rage. Set punished him by tearing out both of his eyes and burying them in the mountains, where they grew into lotus flowers.
Hathor later restored Horus's sight using gazelle's milk.[32]In one myth, Thoth was said to put Horus's eye back together, suggesting that—like Osiris's body—it had been torn apart. The tale may have justified the use of the wedjat hieroglyph in representing the fractions of a standard grain measurement. Each fraction was represented by a different
portion of the eye.[33]Horus the Younger's origin story ran parallel to an older tale in which a sun child was born from a lotus blossom. A primeval goddess protected the child from monstrous, chaotic creatures that sought to destroy him. Because this sun child was destined to create the world during the first sunrise, his survival was of the utmost
importance.[34]When Horus was conceived, Isis knew at once that he was destined to become king and bring order to Egypt. Horus's uncle, the illegitimate king Set, also recognized what fate had in store for the boy. He and his followers worked tirelessly to destroy Horus, but thanks to the interventions of Isis, Nephthys, Hathor, and others, their
efforts were all in vain.[35] For a more detailed account of Horus's birth and childhood, see Isis: The Conception of Horus and Isis: The Birth of Horus. Horus and Isis: The Birth of Horus and Isis: The Death of Osiris. In this tragic tale, the evil Set killed his brother Osiris and usurped his throne. After a lengthy search, Osiris's
wife Isis managed to recovered his body which, depending on the myth, had either been chopped into 26 pieces by Set or suffered the effects of natural decay. [36] All myths agreed, however, that Osiris's penis could not be salvaged, forcing Isis to reconstruct it out of wax. Wax phallus notwithstanding, Isis's efforts proved sufficient to allow Osiris to
impregnate her with Horus. Set immediately became aware of young Horus's conception and tried to destroy him before he came of age.[37]Despite Set's best efforts, Horus reached the age of majority and challenged Set for his throne. After a series of literal and metaphorical trials, Horus defeated his uncle and took his rightful place as ruler of
Egypt. To read more about Horus's legal and martial battles with Set, see Isis: Isis and the Ascendancy of Horus. The primeval battle between Horus, Set was granted a position at the prow of Ra's solar barque. The forgiveness of Set was no
accident. The ancient Egyptians believed in duality, and while Set's actions were generally regarded as chaotic or evil, he was also considered a necessary part of the universal order. Set the usurper still had to lose to Horus, however, as rightful kingship superceded duality in the Egyptian belief system. [38] While Egyptian culture is often viewed as a
monolith, the reality is that it spanned three millennia and became incredibly diverse over time. Elements of Egyptian mythology were also incorporated into Greek and Roman worship. Even the Egyptians sometimes appear to have developed a popular memory for their massive icons. The Great Sphinx of Giza was erected during the reign of King
Khafre (c. 2500 BCE) and its true purpose remains something of a mystery. However, about one thousand years after its construction, the Egyptians believed it to be a depiction of Hor-em-akhet, or Horus of the Horizon. This massive stone figure was so old that even the culture that generated it lost sight of its original meaning.[39]In modern pop
culture, Horus can be found in television, cinema, and video games. Stargate SG-1 featured the Egyptian gods prominently amongst the race of aliens known as Goa'uld. Horus—called Heru-ur in the show—was described as being the son of Ra and Hathor. [40] Such parentage suggests this iteration was based on Horus the Elder, rather than the better
known Horus the Younger. Nikolaj Coster-Waldau portrayed Horus in the 2016 film Gods of Egypt. The film followed Horus as he attempted to oust the usurper Set from his throne. [41] The tabletop game series Warhammer 40K featured a story arc called the Horus Heresy. Both the plot and antagonist Horus Lupercal were named after the god Horus
though neither had further ties to Egyptian mythology. [42]In the massive online battle arena (MOBA) Smite, Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game incorporated several elements of Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology: he was portrayed as a falcon-headed man, and described in-game as the "Rightful Heir," a nod towards Horus's mythology in the massive mythology in the mythology in the mythology in the massive mythology in the mythology in t
Set. The game incorporated Egyptian myths into its game mechanics as well. Horus's rivalry with Set was included in the form of Horus's passive ability "Resolute," which offered greater protection against Set's attacks.[43]Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University Nephthys was the
youngest child of the sky goddess Nut and earth god Geb. Unlike her brothers and sister, she was a relationship with him was distant at best. Her relationship with Osiris, however, was both more intimate and significant. Nephthys seduced him and
subsequently gave birth to Anubis, who would ultimately be raised by her sister Isis. Nephthys (715-650 BCE) was likely worn as an amulet in temples to invoke the protection of the goddess. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainNephthys's name meant "Lady of
the Mansion," or "Lady of the House." [1] In this context, the word "house" meant the portion of the sky in which the sun god Horus resided; as such, the name likely referred to priesthood rather than homemaking. In art, Nephthys was usually depicted as a woman bearing the sign of her name atop her head. Like her sister Isis, she was sometimes
shown as a kite (a small bird of prey), [2] Nephthys and her sister Isis were commonly sights in tombs, as both goddesses were often depicted as identical, save for the symbols atop their heads. This detail proved to be significant during Nephthys's seduction
of Osiris, in which she deceived him into believing that she was, in fact, Isis. The interior of the coffin of Imenemipet (1069-945 BCE). Nephthys appears on the left, while Isis appears on the right; a cartouche bearing Osiris's name lies between them. The kite forms of each goddess can be seen behind their respective human forms. Frans VandewalleCC
BY-NC-SA 2.0Nephthys was one of several Egyptian weaving gods, and the bandages Osiris was the youngest child of the gods Nut and Geb. Her siblings included Osiris, Horus the Elder, Isis and Set. It's important to note that Horus the Elder was found exclusively
in Greek sources; non-Greek sources; non-Greek sources did not include him amongst Nut and Geb's offspring.[4]Like Isis and Osiris was full of love, Nephthys and Set were married before birth.[5] Though the marriage of Isis and Osiris was full of love, Nephthys and Set's relationship was not. In later myths, Nephthys and Set were married before birth.[5] Though the marriage of Isis and Osiris was full of love, Nephthys and Set's relationship was not. In later myths, Nephthys and Set's relationship was not.
that Set would discover her infidelity, Nephthys discarded her child in the wilderness. Anubis was ultimately rescued and raised by Isis. Despite having the same lofty origins as her brothers and sisters, Nephthys was only ever a supporting character in Egyptian mythology. Though her siblings developed cults of worship, Nephthys had no such cult.
She was, however, a common figure on amulets made during the Late Period (664-332BCE).[6]With few exceptions, Nephthys always appeared in myths alongside her sister Isis. Together, the two sisters represented the "wailing women" that were an integral part of the Egyptian funerary rites.[7]Nephthys's marriage to Set was quite different from
the marriage of Isis and Osiris. Nephthys seemingly lived in fear of her husband, and the couple had no children together. Stone relief of Set with Nephthys as a "substitute without vulva," or, alternatively
 "an imitation woman with no vagina." [8] This line suggests her marriage to Set was never consummated. In fact, most literary sources suggest that Nephthys's most significant role in Egyptian mythology was her seduction of Osiris and the subsequent birth of Anubis. The Greek
writer Plutarch described the event in his Moralia: They relate also that Isis, learning that Osiris in his love had consorted with her sister [Nephthys] through ignorance, in the belief that she was Isis, and seeing the proof of this in the garland of melilote which he had left with Nephthys, sought to find the child [Anubis]; for the mother [Nephthys]
immediately after its birth, had exposed it because of her fear of Typhon [Set].[10]Though the passage provided little information, it did reveal that Osiris believed Nephthys to be his wife. This was significant, for adultery was a serious charge in Ancient Egypt. While ancient books of law are hard to come by, most literary sources agree that adultery
any consequences for her actions. Even Isis—who was well aware of the tryst—did not hold any ill will towards her sister. According to Plutarch, Nephthys abandoned her child in the wilderness, fearing that her husband would discover the affair. This practice was relatively common in Rome, and may have been a case of Plutarch taking artistic
 license with the myth.[12]Note: The cult of Anubis predated both Nephthys and the Osirian cult. After Osiris rose to prominence, Anubis's role in Egyptian cosmology was rewritten to fit the new hierarchy; he subsequently became Nephthys's child. Lamentation for the dead was an important part of Egyptian funeral practices. This tradition stemmed
 from the story of Osiris's murder at the hands of his brother Set. In this myth, Set threw Osiris's body into the Nile, making its recovery extremely difficult. Isis eventually found Osiris: The Murder of Osiris and Isis: The Conception of
Horus]Nephthys played a supporting role during these events, and accompanied her sister during Osiris's funeral procession. This act established a tradition where two women would walk with the coffin—one at the front and one at the back.[13]On the rightmost panel, Nephthys (in red) and Isis can be seen standing behind their brother Osiris
sceneInstitute for the Study of the Ancient WorldCC BY 2.0The phrase "wailing women" also explained Nephthys and Isis's association with kites. The kite's shrill call emulated the cries of lamentation heard during funeral processions.[15]Just as Nephthys played second fiddle to her more renowned peers in myth, she has been equally overshadowed
in popular culture. References to her are rare in modern works, likely due to her comparatively minor role in Egyptian cosmology. The English doom-metal band With The Dead's eponymous album included a track entitled "Nephthys." Though the song referenced Egyptian funeral practices, it did not mention any of Nephthys's unique mythological
attributes.[16]In the video games Age of Mythology and Age of Empires: Mythology, Nephthys was among the gods that players could have their civilization worship. She was a secondary goddess, and as such could only be worshipped in conjunction with Isis or Set.[17]Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from
Georgia State University With origins dating back nearly 5000 years, cow-headed Hathor was one of the oldest goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon. Though Hathor was the goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon was one of the oldest goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon.
her father. Her various facets demonstrated both the consistency and the mutability of Egyptian cosmology. While Isis would eventually replace Hathor in many of her traditional roles, the goddess's worship continued well into the Greco-Roman period—over 3000 years after it first began. Statuette of a cow-headed Hathor (c. 664-30 BCE) Brooklyn
MuseumCC BY 3.0Hathor's name literally meant "The House of Horus." Her name's significance is harder to parse, as it has a number of multiple interpretations. One interpretation is that the name referred to Hathor as Horus's mother, with "house" being taken to mean "womb." The hieroglyph (a falcon inside of the sign representing a walled
enclosure) is vague, however, and could just as easily refer to Hathor as Horus's wife.[1] Yet another way to read this sign was as a metaphor for the sky; as a falcon, Horus was thought to reside there.[2] Among her many epithets were: The PrimevalThe Lady of the WestLady of the WestLady of the Holy Country[4] The Foremost One in the Barque of
MillionsThe Distant Goddess (a name she shares with Sekhmet and Bastet)Hathor of the Sycamore[5]Hathor of the Sycamore in All Her PlacesHathor Mistress of the DesertHathor Mistress of the DesertHathor Mistress of the Sycamore in All Her PlacesHathor Mistress of the DesertHathor Mistress of the Sycamore in All Her PlacesHathor Mistress of the DesertHathor Mistress of the Sycamore in All Her PlacesHathor Mistress of the Sycamor
representations including a cow, a woman with cow ears, and a woman with cow ears, and a woman with cow ears, several of these was difficult to differentiate from Isis, who was sometimes portrayed in the same manner.[7]This carving of Hathor at Philae Temple Complex (constructed c. 700 BCE) features a flattened face and cow ears, several of the
goddess's traditional characteristics. Élisabeth RenaultCC BY-SA 2.0More than a mere solar disk, the Eye of Ra was considered to be a manifestation of Hathor, though Bastet and Mut shared this distinction.[8] At times, Hathor was also portrayed as a lioness, a serpent, a sycamore tree, or papyrus plant.[9]The Egyptians associated Hathor with the
 constellation Mesketiu—now known as Ursa Major. This was because Mesketiu resembled the hind leg of an ox.[10]While many elements of Hathor's worship changed over time, she was always regarded as the goddess of love, marriage, and motherhood.[11] Her connection with love persisted well into the Greco-Roman period, where she was
regarded as a manifestation of Aphrodite.[12]In addition to love, Hathor's rituals and ceremonies. Alcohol was also closely linked to her cult, and the goddess's image could often be found on storage vessels containing wine or
beer.[13]Hathor was often shown wearing a menat, a beaded necklace that symbolized rebirth. One confusing element of Egyptian mythology was that gods and goddesses could become one another. In other words, when Hathor expressed elements of Sekhmet (i.e. violent rage), she became Sekhmet. The reverse could also
apply: by placating Sekhmet, worshippers hoped to convert her into a more benign goddess like Hathor was similarly conflated with Nut and Isis.[15]Much like Thoth and Anubis, Hathor was similarly conflated with Nut and Isis.[15]Much like Thoth and 
Egyptian religion was heterogeneous, with four main cults dominating the theocratic spectrum: the Ogdoad of Hermopolis. [16] Due to her unorthodox position, Hathor had peculiar and at times contradictory relations with her fellow gods. Throughout the various cults and ages, she
was described as: The daughter of Ra and Nut[17] The mother of Horus the Elder[19] The wet nurse to Horus of Edfu[20] The work of Horus of Edfu[20] The work of Edfu[20] The work of Horus of Ho
pre-Dynastic period over 5000 years ago. Evidence of her existence prior to the 3rd Dynasty (c. 2660 BCE) is sparse, however, and modern scholarship has shifted away from pre-Dynastic origins. [23] Murky origins nonwithstanding, Hathor's cult rose to prominence during the 4th Dynasty, and solidified its hold on Egyptian theocracy in the 5th
Dynasty. For over 500 years, Hathor held a position of cosmological significance. The Egyptian creation myth centered around a creator god (usually Ra, but possibly Ptah, Atum, or Amun, depending on the tale) who brought the world into being by ejaculating and created the first gods through his seed. Hathor's cult held that the goddess was both the
hand that aroused the creator and the vital force of his seed. [25] The Coffin Text alluded to her role in the formation of the universe, declaring her "the Primeval, the Lady of All." [26] Because Ra created his Eye (one of Hathor's manifestations), and Hathor helped him create the world in turn, Hathor was said to be her own mother. Some myths in
Egyptian mythology were recurring—as was the case with the pacification of powerful female deities.[27]This myth began with humanity making fun of Ra in his old age. Ever sensitive to insults, Ra sent his daughter Hathor to punish humanity making fun of Ra in his old age. Ever sensitive to insults, Ra sent his daughter Hathor to punish humanity making fun of Ra in his old age. Ever sensitive to insults, Ra sent his daughter Hathor to punish humanity making fun of Ra in his old age.
decided that the humans had been punished enough and called Hathor off. By this time, however, she had become enamored with her slaughter and refused to stop her.[29]In order to halt her rampage, Ra ordered that 7000 barrels of beer to be made and mixed with the crimson fruit of the mandrake.
The spiked beer was then sent out across the countryside in a single night. When Hathor next sought to slake her bloodlust, she found the barrels of blood-red beer waiting for her. Hathor was intrigued, and stopped to try the strange concoction. Finding it delicious, kept drinking until she fell into a deep slumber. The mandrake juice did changed more
than the beer's color! It enhanced the drink's sedative properties as well. By the time she awoke, her wrath had passed and Ra was able to convince her to return home. [31] One notable myth involving Hathor was quite peculiar
and not fully understood. A particularly heated debate occurred during the trial of Horus and Set - an event that would determine Egypt's rightful ruler once and for all. In the midst of this debate, the god Babi insulted Ra by telling him "your shrine is empty." [32] This quip caused the sensitive Ra to storm out of the trial, leaving the proceedings
without a judge. Hathor followed Ra to his tent, and without warning began dancing and flashing her genitalia, causing him to laugh out loud. His good humor restored, Ra returned to the trial, allowing it to proceed as planned. [33] Hathor assisted Horus on other occasions as well. Following a particularly brutal battle with Set, Horus found himself
utterly defenseless. Seizing his opportunity, merciless Set beat the broken Horus before plucking out his eyes and burying them in ground. This amulet (743-712 BCE) shows the head of Hathor with the eye of Horus above. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Public Domain Horus was left helpless and alone on a mountainside until Hathor found him crying in
pain. Taking pity on the poor god, Hathor caught a wild gazelle and poured its milk into Horus's vacant sockets, miraculously restoring his sight.[34] Ancient Egypt was divided into regions called nomes, with each region having a god or pair of gods associated with it. Some of these regions were hotspots for mythological activity, with geography and a
bit of luck conspiring to create areas with considerable religious significance.[35]Hathor had an intimate connection to the region of Gehesty. During Set's reign, she lurked on a mountain in the mountain. When their blood fell upon the
ground, the droplets turned into juniper berries.[36]Legend holds that Hathor—as well as Shu, Osiris, and Horus—were all buried in Gehesty. Hathor initially played a minor role in the Egyptian afterlife by overseeing the trials of deceased souls. Over time, however, her role expanded to providing nourishment to the dead. Sitting beneath her sacred
sycamore, she served food and milk from her seven cows (also known as the Seven Hathors).[37]The Seven Hathors played their own role in the afterlife, determining a person's lifespan and the cause of their death.[38]Just because the dead could expect Hathor to provide food did not mean they were free to live off the work of others. In Spell 189
 from the Book of the Dead, the deceased was asked by the demon One who Cannot Count if they "will...live on someone else's goods everyday.[sic]"In this painting of a tomb relief (circa 1295-1170 BCE), a Hathor cow is nearby as the deceased (left) is eating and drinking with a deified king Mentuhotep and queen Ahmose-Nefertari. The Metropolitan
Museum of ArtPublic DomainThe deceased's reply was that, while they intend on dining under the Hathor's sycamore, they also intended on ploughing the Field of Reeds.[39] Even in death, the Egyptians did not appreciate freeloaders. The Festival of the Sacred Marriage was a ritual dating to the Ptolemaic period. In this ceremony, which began 18
days into the month of Paoni, Hathor and Horus of Edfu were husband and wife. Hathor's idol was taken from her temple at Dendera upriver to Horus's temple at Edfu. When Hathor arrived at the temple, Horus's image was brought down to the river to greet her. The following day (the anniversary of Horus's victory over Set), the pair left Horus's
temple to continue traveling upriver. Along their journey, the pair celebrated rituals such as the Opening of the Mouth and the Festival of Behdet. [40] Hathor Temple is the dominant building at the Dendera Temple complex. Olaf TauschCC BY 3.0The festivities continued until Horus and Hathor had celebrated their marriage with a night of drinking at the Dendera Temple is the dominant building at the Dendera Temple complex.
and revelry open to all. When the festival ended, the couple's idols were returned to their respective temples until the following year.[41]While some Egyptians gods and goddesses captured the imaginations of successive generations, others languished in obscurity. Hathor existed somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. Though she has fallen far
from her status as a preeminent goddess, Hathor still maintains a respectable presence in the modern era. In the Capcom's Street Fighter series, the character Menat was partially derived from Hathor. The word menat refers to the beaded necklace Hathor often wore, and its corresponding hieroglyph strongly resembled the glyph for Hathor's name.
[42]Elodie Yung portrayed Hathor in the 2016 movie Gods of Egypt. This version of Hathor was in love with Horus, though it should be noted that the film's Horus was not the goddess and her association with cows. Evan Meehan is a
writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University As creator and sun god, Ra was a vital part of the Egyptian pantheon. Throughout countless dynasties, Ra was a constant figure of worship whose role shifted as newer gods were incorporated into the state religion. This falcon-headed statuette of Ra-Horakhty (c.
1069-525 BCE) combines the attributes of Ra with those of Horus. Art Institute of Chicago Public DomainRa had a number of origin stories. He was either self-created, or one step removed from the creation of the universe. No matter the origin story, Egyptian lore held that most of the major Egyptian gods were direct descendants of Ra. The Pharaohs
also claimed direct descent from Ra, and used it to justify their rule. In ancient Egyptian, Ra's name simply meant "sun." As with many mythologies, Egyptian gods had a multiplicity of names. Ra had many other names, and was sometimes called Re, Amun-Re, Khepri, Ra-Horakhty, and Atum. Each of these names was typically associated with a
different aspect of Ra's being. Such names often emerged as the Egyptians called Iunu. The Greeks referred to this place as Heliopolis, or "city of the sun god." This ancient city was located in what is now a northern suburb of Cairo. While Ra
was most famous as the Egyptian creator deity, he fulfilled other roles as well. His other titles included god of the sun, god of kings, and god of order. Ra could be depicted in a variety of ways. He most commonly appeared as a solar disk—a circle drawn over the head of various sun deities. Ra was also frequently represented as a man with the head of various sun deities.
a falcon.Imagery of Ra often depicted him wielding both a scepter and an ankh.This small figure (4th century BCE) depicts a crouching Ra with a solar disk upon his head. It once held a scepter in its hand. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainRa, particularly in his morning iteration Khepri, was sometimes depicted as a scarab beetle. The
Egyptians would observe the beetle pushing a ball of dung across the sands and burying it before newborn beetles emerged from the earth. This process mirrored the sun's journey as it traveled across the sky, only to be reborn the earth. This process mirrored the sun's journey as it traveled across the sky, only to be reborn the earth.
procreation, Ra created his children Shu and Tefnut. Shu was the god of the air, while Tefnut was the goddess of mists. As the god of kings and order, Ra had a special connection to maat, a key mythological concept. Maat was both the Egyptian word for "truth, justice, righteousness, order, balance, and cosmic law," and the goddess who personified
these ideals.[3] The goddess Maat was believed to have been Ra's favorite daughter.[4] Ultimately, Egyptian rulers were expected to be champions of Maat (both the concept and the goddess), and upon death were judged on how well they had supported her. Wall painting of Ra and Maat within the tomb of Queen Tausert and King Setnakht, Valley of
the Kings. stigalenas / iStockThough some tales held that Ra created himself (or was created by Amun and Ptah), he did have a mother. Neith, whose name meant "the terrifying one," was a creater goddess as well as the goddess of weaving.[5]TefnutMaatBastetHathorSekhmetDeciphering Ancient Egyptian mythology has been described as "trying to
piece together a jigsaw puzzle when the majority of the pieces are missing and someone has thrown away the box."[6]Egyptian religion endured for nearly 3,000 years. As various elements rose and fell during this time, many important myths were merged, edited, and replaced. While Ra became a pivotal figure in the Egyptian pantheon early on, over
time his mythology began to merge with those of other gods, such as Atun, Amun, and Horus.In the beginning, the universe was an infinite body of water called Nun (alternatively "Nu"). Nun was unconscious, unthinking, motionless, and eternal.[7]Amidst this eternal nothingness, Ra willed himself into existence. In what is best understood as an
anatomically implausible sequence of events, Ra then created by his masturbation. The Book of the Dead described this event: 1248a. To say: Atum [Ra] created by his masturbation in Heliopolis. 1248b. He put his phallus in his fist, 1248c. to excite desire thereby. 1248d. The twins were born, Shu and Tefnut. [8] In another
version of the story, Amun created himself from the primordial void of Nun. With Ptah, the god who "represented the transformative force that turns a creative thought into action and material reality," Amun created an egg which floated through Nun. Before long, Ra emerged from the egg.[9]While the stories vary, the basic process of creation in
Egyptian mythology was one of differentiation. From a single homogenous state, the universe divided itself into individuals who continued this pattern of division without diminishing themselves in the process. [10] When Ra created the gods Shu and Tefnut, the world consisted only of infinite ocean and there was no light to see them by. To solve this
 dilemma, Ra created an eye and sent it out to find his children. The twin deities Shu and Tefnut adorn this bronze menat (664-380 BCE), an instrument used in religious ritThe Walters Art Museum CCOUpon returning, the eye discovered that Ra had created a second eye for himself in its absence. The first eye became angry, and in order to pacify it,
Ra gave it more power than the second. Thus, the first eye became the sun and the second eye became the moon.[11]Some tales said that after creating the gods and celestial bodies, Ra wept during its search for Shu and Tefnut. The
reason for its weeping was never specified—though it could have been from loneliness or rage upon discovering it had been replaced. A third explanation was that upon his birth, Ra wept because he was alone and could not see his mother, Neith.[13]The common thread linking these explanations was that humanity always emerged as the "imperfect
product of rage and misery," a classic Egyptian interpretation of the human condition.[14]Ra's children, Shu and Tefnut, gave birth to Geb and Nut. Contrary to most mythologies, the male Geb ruled the earth while the goddess Nut ruled of the sky.Ra expected Nut to be his wife, but she fell in love with Geb and spurned Ra. Furious at this turn of
 events, Ra placed a curse on her, declaring "that she should not give birth to a child in any month or year." [15] Meanwhile, the god Thoth had been gambling with the moon's light, totalling 1/72nd of her illumination. Altogether, he had
accumulated an additional 5 days. The Egyptian hieroglyphic calendar as depicted on the walls of the Temple of Kom Ombo. Stravaiger CC BY-ND 2.0 The Egyptian calendar and the solar calendar into agreement. As a
result, the extra five days that Thoth had won did not fall under the auspices of Ra's curse. When the intercalated days finally arrived, Nut gave birth to Osiris, Horus, Set, Isis, and Nephthys.[16]The Egyptians believed that names held power, so much so that gods went by pseudonyms to keep their power safe. It was for this reason the goddess Isis
embarked on a mission to discover Ra's secret name. By this time, Ra had grown old and feeble; he napped and drooled as he sat upon his throne. Surreptitiously, Isis collected some of this drool and combined it with a handful of earth. Using her magic, she shaped this mixture into a venomous snake. [17] Ra was a creature of habit, and strolled the
same route each day to survey his creation.[18] Isis set the snake loose at a crossroads and waited. The snake struck as soon as Ra had arrived at the crossroads. While Ra was normally immune to such attacks, this poison had come from his own being, and as such he had no immunity to it and was beset by great pain.[19]Now in great agony, Ra
called his followers and told them he had been grievously wounded. He asked if any of them could offer a cure, but none could give him what he sought. After all of the others had tried and failed, Isis told Ra she could help him, provided that he told her his true name. Sensing there was trickery at play, Ra answered: I am the maker of heaven and
earth, I am the establisher of the mountains, I am the creator of the waters, I am the maker of the mountains, I am the mountains, I am the mountains are more mountains.
and Atum in the evening.[20]Unimpressed with his prevarications, Isis insisted that without his true name she could not cure him. Wracked with pain, Ra eventually conceded and told Isis his true name. Reciting a magical incantation, Isis dispelled the poison from Ra's body. In exchange for her 'help,' she demanded that Ra give her yet-to-be-born son
Horus both of his eyes: the sun and the moon. When Horus was old enough, he took over Ra's position as sun god, allowing the elderly deity to retire from his tiresome daily responsibilities. [21] This story was recorded on a papyri (a document written on papyrus) from the 20th Dynasty (circa 1200-1085BCE), and was purported to be a spell used to
cure snake bites. Egyptian priests believed the spell Isis used to cure Ra would also cure a human victim. [22] The Egyptian religion was extremely long lived, and over the span of thousands of years changes were made to it as different groups rose to or fell from power. From the religion's foundation onward, Ra had always been an important deity;
this central status made him a popular candidate for combining with emergent deities. Ra has been merged so many different times that mentions of a singular Ra are now relatively uncommon. [23] Ra-Horakhty Horus of
the Double Horizon" and signified the sun conquering its enemies during the night so that it could rise again.[24]Horus was a complicated god, and had no fewer than 15 forms associated with him. Of these forms, the most consistent (and popular) was the falcon. Ra-Horakhty blended the imagery of Ra and Horus, taking the form of a falcon crowned
by a solar disk or, alternatively, a winged solar disk. [25] Amun-RaAround 2020BCE, the Theban ruler Mentuhotep II overthrew the Heracleopolitan dynasty and unified Egypt under his rule. This marked the beginning of what is now known as the Middle Kingdom (2066-1780BCE). Here, Amun-Ra (760-656 BCE) is identified by a crown of tall plumes
above a solar disk. Brooklyn MuseumCC BY 3.0 Amun was one of Thebes' most significant gods, and it was during this period of Theban control that Amun transitioned from being a relatively obscure local god to one of great prominence. By the 18th Dynasty (1550-1292) Amun had grown to national significance and fully merged with Ra.[26]When the
two gods merged, most of the myths associated with Ra were rebranded as the mythology of Amun-Ra. Atum was a creator deity similar to Amun. In fact, the legends associated with Ra were rebranded as the mythology of Amun-Ra. Atum was a creator deity similar to Amun. In fact, the legends associated with Ra were rebranded as the mythology of Amun-Ra. Atum was a creator deity similar to Amun. In fact, the legends associated with Ra were rebranded as the mythology of Amun-Ra. Atum was a solar god, though his role was more
specific. Atum represented the elderly component of Ra and personified the setting sun. [27] As the setting sun. Atum-Ra was regarded as the god of Upper Egypt. [28] Aten-RaWhen King Amenhotep IV took power
(Either 1351BCE or 1353BCE), Amun or Amun-Ra was the central deity of the Egyptians. This could be seen in Amenhotep's name, which meant "Amun is Satisfied." Five years into his reign, however, Amenhotep changed his name to Akhenaten. His new name meant "One effective on behalf of Aten," and reflected his efforts to increase the centrality
of Aten over Amun.[29]Prior to Akhenaten's efforts to promote him as Egypt's ultimate deity, Aten had been worship of the solar disk. With Akhenaten in power, Aten was merged with Ra-Horakhty. At the same time, Akhenaten banned the worship of Amun-Ra and discouraged the worship of the other members of the Egyptian
pantheon. This limestone fragment (c. 1350 BCE) describes Aten as "the living Ra Horakhty." The solar disk upon the faclon's head is a commonly used to represent Ra in his myriad forms. The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 The changes Akhenaten made did not have popular support, and were
           reversed following his death. Aten would resume his position as an aspect of the sun god, and Amun would likewise return to his role as chief deity of the state religion. 30 Khepri was specifically associated with the morning sun. In the legend of Ra's hidden name, Ra said that he was Khepri in the morning. Khepri
was at times connected with Atum, and in the guise of Atum-Khepri was regarded as the god of personal transformations, called kheperu, included the passages from childhood to adulthood and from life to death.[31]KhnumThe god Khnum was associated with the regular flooding of the Nile River, as well as the First Cataract
of the Nile. He was also connected with pottery wheels, hence his epithet: "lord of the wheel." [32] Though Khnum's origins were unclear, it is known that he was only recognized as a creator deity relatively late in Egyptian history. However, his cult persisted until the second or third century CE.[33] Khnum became connected to Ra once he became
regarded as a creator deity. Montu-RaMontu was another Theban god who was ultimately blended with Ra. A falcon-headed star god, Montu served as the chief deity of Thebes, and was considered an aspect of Ra from the twentieth century BCE onward. [34] Montu-Ra was regarded as the god of Upper Egypt, while his counterpart Atum-Ra was
regarded as the god of Lower Egypt.[35]Raet-TawyRaet-TawyRaet-Tawy was the female aspect of Ra. In classical depictions, she was often adorned with a sun disk and Hathor's cow-horned headdress.[36]. The 1981 film Raiders of the Lost Ark featured Indiana Jones using the Staff of Ra to locate the ark of the covenant. Jaye Davidson played Ra in the 1994
movie Stargate. The film depicted Ra as an alien who had enslaved humanity. Evan Meehan is a writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University One of the most famous figures of the Ancient Egyptian pantheon, Anubis was a powerful deity whose role shifted over time. Before Osiris and Isis rose to prominence,
Anubis was worshipped as the god of the dead. When Osiris took on this role, however, Anubis became the god of mummification (as well as Osiris's bastard son). Seen here in his traditional form, this Anubis statuette (332-30 BCE) greets the recently deceased to the underworld. The Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainDespite his significance
and multi-millennia long worship, Anubis was seldom a main character in the Egyptian mythos. He was an integral part of the Mummy Wrapping. Like much of the Egyptian pantheon, Anubis's name came to us as a Greek translation of his
Egyptian name. This was partly because the Greeks continued to worship or at least admire the Egyptian gods, but also due to the ambiguity of the vowelless writing system employed in Ancient Egyptians. An accurate, albeit unhelpful, rendering of his name in Ancient Egyptian is jnpw.[1] Some translations of jnpw have rendered Anubis's Egyptian
name as "Anpu" or "Inpu." Anubis had many epithets, including: The First of the Westerners[2] Lord of the Westerners[2] Chief of the Westerners[6] Prince of the Court of Justice[7] Master of Secrets The One Who Eats His
FatherThe Dog Who Swallows MillionsOne of the most iconic Egyptian deities, Anubis possessed several distinctive features. While he had a human body (like most Egyptian gods), he also had a jackal's head and tail. He was typically all black, and was often portrayed in a seated position.[8] Like many Egyptian gods, Anubis was capable of
shapeshifting; he was so shocked at the sight of Osiris's dead body that he immediately turned into a lizard. Anubis enacting the mummification—wealthy individuals like Sennedjem could and did comission elaborate tombs
with paintings like this adorning the walls. Gabriel Indurskis CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Anubis was a faithful follower of Isis, who adopted him following his abandonedment as an infant. A fierce fighter, he routinely defeating the god Set in battle. As one of the oldest gods in the Egyptian pantheon, Anubis had a varied and somewhat inconsistent mythology.
Initially, Anubis was a son of Ra who served as the primary god of the dead. As time went on and the cult of Osiris grew in power, Anubis's stories were incorporated into this new, larger mythos.[9]By 2000BCE, Anubis had become a bastard child of Nephthys and Osiris. In this new version of Anubis's origins, Nephthys abandoned Anubis for fear that
her husband Set would discover her infidelity. Isis later found the abandoned child and adopted him. In several alternative mythologies, Anubis was said to be the son of either Bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers," Anubis was said to be the son of either bastet or Set. [10]In "The Tale of Two Brothers, [10]In "The Tale of 
the vagaries of religious change.[11]In myths that place him as the son of Osiris, Anubis had several brothers, including Horus, Babi, Sopdet, and Wepwawet.[12]Anubis's origin and role as god of the dead were directly linked to his depiction as a jackal or jackal-headed man. Jackals were scavengers who would frequent burial sites and uncover
shallow graves. The Egyptians may have enshrined the jackal's behavior in order to make it seem benevolent. [13] Alternatively, Anubis worship may have developed as a means to exercise supernatural control over jackals. If Anubis was worshipped properly, the jackals might not disturb the venerated dead. [14] This wooden statue (664-30 BCE) shows
Anubis poised and ready to defend a burial site. In this role, Anubis closely resembles a full-bodied jackal. Brooklyn MuseumCC BY 3.0 Early on in Egyptian history, Anubis was worshiped as a god of the dead. After Osiris rose to prominence, Anubis's role changed. He became a god of embalming and psychopomp who escorted the dead on their journey
to the afterlife.[15]In the post-Late Period (664-30BCE) era, Anubis became associated with necromancers. Demotic (a written language that superseded hieroglyphs) spells would invoke Anubis, who would then act as an intermediary, fetching spirits or gods from the underworld.[16]The most famous version of Anubis's origin came to us from the
Greek historian Plutarch (46-120CE). Following Osiris's murder at the hands of his brother Set, Isis set out in search of his body. It was during that her husband, Set, would discover her infidelity, Nephthys abandoned the newborn child. Isis, known for her maternal
benevolence, found the child and adopted him. She named the child Anubis, and he thereafter serverd as her loyal protector.[17]Following his murder, Osiris's body was ultimately destroyed. Whether or not it was chopped into pieces—as Plutarch and other Greek historians suggest—or simply subject to natural decomposition is irrelevant.[18] What is
significant, however, is that after Osiris's body was recovered, it was embalmed. The cultural practice of mummification was derived from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer (c. 1450 BCE) depicts the Opening of the Mouth ceremony (left). The Trustees of
the British MuseumCC BY-NC-SA 4.0After Isis had recovered her husband's body, the sun god Ra asked Anubis to assist with the embalming process.[19] With some assistance from Horus and Thoth, he wrapped the body in cloth and completed what would become known as the Opening of the Mouth ritual. This rite was meant to ensure that the
mummified person's senses would continue to work in the afterlife.[20]While Set had succeeded in killing Osiris, he still needed to destroy his brother's body in order to defeat him complete its destruction. During the embalming process, Osiris's body was kept in
the wabet, or place of embalming. Noting that Anubis left the wabet every night, Set devised a plan. Transforming himself into Anubis, he strolled past the unsuspecting guards and stole Osiris's body.[21]Set would not able to make it far, however, before Anubis discovered the theft and set out in pursuit. In an attempt to ward off his pursuer, Set
turned himself into a bull. The jackal-god was not intimidated, however. Upon capturing Set, Anubis castrated him and imprisonment and continued his mission. This time, Set attempted to steal his brother's body in the form of a great cat. The plan failed, and
Anubis caught him once more; the jackal-headed god punished Set by branding him with hot irons. This myth thus explained how leopards became spotted. Ever persistent, Set continued trying to steal Osiris's throne for all eternity—that is,
until he escaped. Set's next attempt would be his last. After catching Set yet again, Anubis shine and decapitated his entire army with a single slash of his sword. [23] Set's army was killed in the 18th nome, where a reddish mineral makes the
land appear stained with blood. [24] This myth is a little different as it fits outside of the Osiris-centric mythological canon. Instead of the normal cast of Egyptian gods and goddesses, the ancient god Bata starred alongside Anubis. Anubis's younger brother Bata worked on his brother's farm. One day, while doing chores for his brother, Bata ran into
Anubis's wife. She was quite taken with what she saw, and invited Bata to bed with her. Shocked at this invitation, Bata told her "you have been to me as a mother and what you say is an abomination!" [25] He promised he would tell no one of the incident so long as she never spoke of this again. Anubis's wife, however, had other plans. When Anubis
came home, she pretended that Bata had beaten her, saying that he had propositioned her and struck her when she declined. Now enraged, Anubis attempted to kill his brother. Try as he might, however, he could not harm Bata; divine intervention prevented Anubis from taking his revenge. The next day, Bata told Anubis his side of the story. He then
demonstrated his conviction by cutting off his penis and throwing it into the river, where it was eaten by fish. Having done this, Bata told Anubis he was leaving for the Valley of Cedars, saying: There I will take out my heart and place it high in The cedar on a flower. If the tree is cut down, I will Appear to die, but if you spend seven years seeking The
tree and find it and place my heart like a seed In water, I will live again. You will know you are Needed when you find your pot of beer in a froth. Bata arrived in the valley and lived alone there for some time. Sympathetic to his loneliness, Ra-Herakhty had the god Khnum make Bata a wife on his potter's wheel. Bata and his wife were happy for a time,
but this happiness would not last. The Seven Hathors soon came to Bata and warned him that his wife was fated to have an unhappy end. Bata loved his wife dearly and told her to take great care since he knew of her prophesied fate. He also told her to take great care since he knew of her prophesied fate.
walking along the beach, the sea tried to catch Bata's wife. She managed to flee, but the sea snatched away a lock of her hair. Eventually, this lock of her hair had come from Ra-Herakhty's daughter, and sent out search parties to discover her
whereabouts. When the king found her, Bata's wife told him the secret of her husband's heart. She also explained that Bata would die if the tree was cut down. Wanting her for himself, the king had Bata's tree cut down, causing Bata to appear to die. At the same instant, Anubis noticed his pot of beer frothing, and knew that it was time for him to seek
his brother. While he found his brother's body, Anubis was deeply saddened that he could not find his heart. Before he returned home, he put the cedar berry as a momento. Unbeknownst to him, this berry was actually Bata's heart. When Anubis returned home, he put the cedar berry in a cup of water. The berry did not sprout as a
normal seed would, but instead revived Bata's body (which Anubis had also brought home for burial). Upon drinking the seed, Bata made a full recovery. [26]In the interim, Bata's former wife had married the king. Through a series of transformations,
Bata became a splinter that the queen (his former wife) eventually birthed into a baby boy. Eventually the king died and the prince (Bata) took power. At this point, Bata testified against his mother/wife, who was disgraced. Bata appointed Anubis as his crown prince. When Bata died many years later, Anubis succeeded him as king.[27]Anubis is
perhaps one of the most recognizable of the Egyptian gods and has been featured in movies, books, TV shows, video games, and music:In Neil Gaiman's book American Gods, Anubis appeared as a character named Mr. Jacquel. The electro-avantgarde band Los Iniciados' first album was entitled "La Marca de Anubis." The cover art for the album
showed Anubis performing the "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony upon a prone, mummified figure—possibly Osiris. While the Nickelodeon mystery TV series House of Anubis (based on the Belgian/Dutch show Het Huis Anubis) did not include Anubis as a character, it did include several references to Egyptian mythology. In the show, the "Mark of the Mouth" ceremony upon a prone, mummified figure—possibly Osiris. While the Nickelodeon mystery TV series House of Anubis (based on the Belgian/Dutch show Het Huis Anubis) did not include several references to Egyptian mythology. In the show, the "Mark of the Mouth" ceremony upon a prone, mummified figure—possibly Osiris.
Anubis" was a curse that would cause those bearing the mark to die. This harkened back to Anubis's classic role as the enforcer of curses. [27] The ancient Roman statue at the Vatican Museums depicts a hybrid of the two deities: Hermanubis. Carole Raddato CC BY-SA 2.0 In
Ancient Greece, the phrase "by the dog" was used to refer to Anubis, and was invoked as a means of guaranteeing the truth of a statement. similar to how we might now say "I swear on my mother's grave" or "I swear on my mother's grave" or "I swear on my mother's grave" or "I swear to god." Plato was fond of having Socrates invoke the phrase, and used it several times throughout his works.[29]Evan Meehan is a
writer, researcher, and historian with an M.A. in History from Georgia State University
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