

## Glossary of deities

**APHRODITE** – a Greek goddess, the equivalent of Egyptian goddesses Hathor and Isis. Her iconography frequently merges Greek stylistics with Egyptian content. Revered throughout Egypt, she was especially popular from the middle of the first millennium BC. Many towns in Ptolemaic-Roman Egypt were named Aphroditopolis in her honour.

**ALEXANDER THE GREAT** – considered by many Egyptians to be a god, as well as a commander and king, owing his political and theological ‘career’ in the land by the Nile primarily to his liberation of Egypt from Persian occupation. Buried provisionally in the Memphite necropolis, and then moved to Alexandria to his final resting place, the mummy of the Macedonian god of the Egyptians, like his grave, has not yet been discovered.

**AMON** (= ‘the Invisible,’ ‘the Hidden One’) – the personification of invisible divine power present, for example, in the air or in the wind. He was the main god of the Theban pantheon, forming the triad together with the goddess Mut and the god Khonsu. The Greeks saw him as the equivalent of Zeus. Since the Middle Kingdom, the main centre of Amon’s cult was Karnak (East Thebes), where subsequent generations enlarged the enormous temple, one of the best-preserved sacral complexes of pharaonic Egypt. Usually depicted in anthropomorphic form with a crown in the shape of two long feathers and a band encircling the forehead and dropping at the back of the head. His blue skin colour identifies him as a deity with heavenly connotations. As of the New Kingdom, the holy animal of Amon was most frequently the ram. One of the god’s iconographic hypostases was the sphinx with a ram’s head. Amon played a very important role in the royal cult. The pharaonic funerary temples of the New Kingdom period were considered to be his sanctuaries. It was at this time that the legend of ‘divine birth’ was created, according to which Egypt’s rulers were Amon’s sons.

**ANUBIS** – a chthonic deity responsible for the mummification of the dead, frequently conceived as an embalmer who prepared mummies on a table. Anubis’s iconographic hypostasis is a man with a canine head; sometimes represented as an animal lying on a chest. A guardian of secrets and of anything associated with the coffin and Canopic jar housing the deceased’s entrails.

**APIS** – the most popular of the Egyptian holy bulls, with his seat located in the temple of the god Ptah in Memphis, while his burial place were the famous catacombs (see Serapeum) in Saqqara, not far from the pyramid of Djoser. Chosen from among his peers based on the animal’s physical features, Apis

was venerated throughout Egypt. Numerous sarcophagi of the holy bulls have been preserved, but none of the animal's mummies. The votive stelae placed beside these sarcophagi by the founders of subsequent burials are of enormous historical importance.

**ASCLEPIUS** – Greek god-healer revered in Egypt since the Ptolemaic period, frequently in sanctuaries dedicated to Imhotep. He played an important role in magic, acting in sanctuaries through the oracle and healing dreams, as well as through travelling priests/doctors.

**ATON** – deified solar disc; he became the sole god in the solar religion during the so-called Amarna Period (the final phase of the Eighteenth Dynasty's time in power, i.e. during the reign of Akhenaten – the 'pharaoh-heretic'), considered to be the first monotheistic religious system in history. Associated with Akhenaten's father, i.e. Amenhotep III, the solar disc became an omnipresent iconographic motif in the art of this period, characterised by mannerist naturalism as a radical departure from the ancient canons of Egyptian art.

**ATUM** – creator of all things, beyond whom nothing exists; an incarnation of the setting sun, frequently in the form of a tired man walking with a stick. Associated with the pharaoh, he frequently appears in anthropomorphic form with the double crown of Lower and Upper Egypt on his head. He was zoomorphically identified, among other things, with an ichneumon, a snake, an eel, a scarab, a lizard, a monkey shooting a bow and arrows, and other animals. The most important centres of his cult were Heliopolis (the 'City of the Sun') and Pithom (e.g. Per-Atum, i.e. 'House of Atum').

**BASTET** – a lion-headed goddess worshipped particularly in the Lower Egyptian Bubastis, but also in Memphis, where she was equated with the local goddess Sekhmet. As of the Old Kingdom, she played an important role in the political theology related to the ruler. In the Late Period, the goddess's holy animal and her incarnation was the cat. Numerous cemeteries with mummified cats have been discovered in various parts of Egypt. In the mythological circles of the goddess Hathor, Bastet appears as a 'distant goddess.' She was also perceived as the left eye of the god Re.

**BES** – a benevolent guardian of pregnant women, a dwarf with demonic facial features; always depicted with a frayed beard and frequently an exaggerated sexual organ, but never ithyphallic. He played an especially important role in positive magic, which resulted in his frequent presence on magical stelae, as well as in figural art.

**DIONYSUS** – the Greek god of wine, popularised in Egypt by the rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty, who considered him their dynastic deity. During this period, the cult of Dionysus had a State character and was ruled by

strict regulations. In art, especially coroplathy, Dionysus was associated with Egyptian deities.

**HATHOR** – personification of the mother and guardian of the sun, king and every human being, in life and after death; wife of Horus; a goddess whose zoomorphic representation was the cow. Her name means ‘the House of Horus.’ Depicted most frequently in anthropomorphic form, she was considered to be the goddess of love. In the Roman period, she was identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The most important place of her cult was the Upper Egyptian Dendera, where to this day an enormous temple complex has been preserved from that period.

**HORUS** – ‘the face of god’ looking down from the heavens, the incarnation of divine power immanent in the human world and personified by the king; son of Osiris, depicted in Egyptian literature as noble but not very resourceful. The pharaoh was considered to be the earthly incarnation of Horus, which was reflected in the titles and names given to subsequent rulers. Horus’s holy animal was the falcon, worshipped both in a purely zoomorphic form and in his anthropomorphic incarnation with a falcon’s head. Along with Seth, they formed a pair of heraldic gods, between whom the entire country was divided: Horus was the lord of Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta), while Seth was attributed with Upper Egypt and the desert areas.

**IMHOTEP** – a deified architect, priest and doctor, creator of the so-called ‘step pyramid’ in Saqqara, the oldest pyramid in the world, erected in ca. 2650 BC for a pharaoh called Djoser. Imhotep’s cult survived throughout antiquity. A typical image used to depict the sage was a seated man with a cap similar to the one worn by the god Ptah.

**ISIS** – the most popular ancient Egyptian goddess. In Egyptian mythology, she was the wife of Osiris. She was usually depicted as a woman wearing the hieroglyph representing a throne on her head, which became the source of the hypothesis that Isis was the personification of the throne. In New Kingdom, she was frequently depicted with a headdress typical for the goddess Hathor, i.e. a solar disc between two cow’s horns set in a diadem consisting of a frieze of ureai with raised heads, or – as in the case of the queens – with a vulture’s scalp. In the Graeco-Roman period, the representation of Isis breastfeeding Horus, *Isis lactans*, gained hugely in popularity, becoming the iconographic prototype of the Holy Mother and Child.

**KHEPRI** – the hypostasis of the sun god being born at daybreak. Depicted as a beetle, he was also represented in anthropomorphic form, sometimes with the head of a scarab.

NEPHTHYS – Greek version of the Egyptian name Nebet-hut (= ‘Lady of the house’). In Egyptian mythology, the wife of the god Seth, even though during his conflict with Osiris, she backs his adversaries. Together with Isis, they form a pair of mourners, expressing grief after the god is killed in an underhanded manner, and they guard his son, Horus. She is depicted as a woman wearing a hieroglyph on her head signifying her name.

OSIRIS – god of the dead, but simultaneously the symbol of rebirth. He was usually depicted as a mummy-shaped human figure holding a curved sceptre and fly swatter in his hands crossed at his chest. He was worshipped throughout Egypt and had many centres of cult; the most important of which was Abydos in Upper Egypt. In Egyptian theology, he was the father of Horus conceived with Isis.

PTAH – the demiurge in the local pantheon of ancient Memphis, guardian of artists and craftsmen, usually depicted as a mummy-shaped figure with a characteristic headdress similar in appearance to a swimming cap. This is the only Egyptian god depicted with a beard characteristic for the pharaohs, perhaps due to the association with the coronation ceremonies that took place in Memphis. Along with Sekhmet, a goddess with the head of a lioness, and the young Nefertum, symbolised by a lotus flower, they formed the local triad conceived as a divine family.

RE – the universal form of the sun god. He is frequently equated with other deities, especially the solar ones, and endowed with their iconographic attributes, as well as their names. He is usually portrayed anthropomorphically. In political theology, he performed the function of the father of the pharaohs.

SERAPIS – Greek name of a god merging – in his nature and name – the features of Osiris and Apis. He was especially worshipped in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and usually depicted as a hairy man, seated on a throne.

SETH – a deity with the traits of a murderer and violator, but simultaneously the heroic defender of the sun god. He is frequently represented in human form with an animal’s head, similar to that of an okapi, whose exact identity remains uncertain. Together with Horus, they form a pair of conflicted gods with contrasting personality traits. Like his rival, he was often associated with the pharaoh. In Egyptian mythology, he performs the role of Osiris’s murderer. The main location of his cult was in the Upper Egyptian Ombos.

SOKAR – god of the Memphis necropolis, frequently associated with Ptah and Osiris. The present-day name of Saqqara comes from his name. He is depicted as a falcon standing on a pedestal in a *hen* barge, which is frequently the ideogram used for his name. He was also imagined as a man with a falcon’s head. In the Old Kingdom period, he was considered to be the patron of

craftsmen, especially those working with metal. The *Pyramid Texts* describe him as the creator of the royal harpoon. As a chthonic deity, Sokar was lord of the desert and of the land of the dead.

THOERIS (= 'great one') – guardian goddess-mother, depicted as a female hippopotamus with a crocodile's head, lion's legs and human hands, holding a reed plaited *sa* yoke, the symbol of safety. Theoris's important role in Egyptian magic was expressed through the popularity of amulets representing the goddess.

THOTH – god of wisdom, frequently identified with the Greek Hermes, which is where the name of the main centre of his cult, Hermopolis Magna in Upper Egypt, comes from. Considered to be the scribe of divine words and an expert on all the rituals, he was usually depicted as a man with an ibis head. Thoth's holy animal was also the baboon. Memphite theology endows him with the function of the god Ptah's tongue, while Horus is the demiurge's heart.

