

Egyptian deities

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When the ancient Egyptian religion is considered, one can see that the entire belief system revolved around the cult of sun-worshipping. Several different names were given to the early sun-gods of ancient Egypt. Horned animals as well as birds were physical representations of these deities on earth. Below left we see a mythical bull-bird carved on the wall of a temple. The central image is the well known Apis bull or ox. The disc with a cobra in the middle is a typical representation of the sun. On the right a row of ram-lions are protecting different pharaohs.



A Bull-Bird carving

Apis ox

A row of Ram-Lion statues from Luxor

The symbolism in mixing animals is also found in the Sumerian culture and can be traced back to the Central Asiatic root culture. We can follow this symbolism throughout the ages as consecutive historical periods. In ancient Egypt this symbolism is very clear and has been transmitted in the form of statues and wall paintings. Below we see some such examples.



Sumerian Ishtar

Egyptian Isis

Horus

Ptah

The female Sumerian deity Ishtar is stepping on two mountain goats. She has wings and a headdress with horns similar to the one Anu wears (see **19-The Bull and the Letter B**). The same symbolism is found in the Egyptian goddess Isis who has wings, bull horns and the solar disc above her head. The wall painting is depicting Horus holding the Ankh in his right

hand and the solar disc encircled by the cobra named Khut stands above his head. On the right we see the half man half goat deity named Ptah.

In Chapter 6, **Universal Symbols**, the connection of the Ankh to the solar disc and to the + sign was discussed. The hawk-headed Horus as well as Ra, Amun and Atun are all different names and representations of the same sun-god. Lewis Spence says (1):

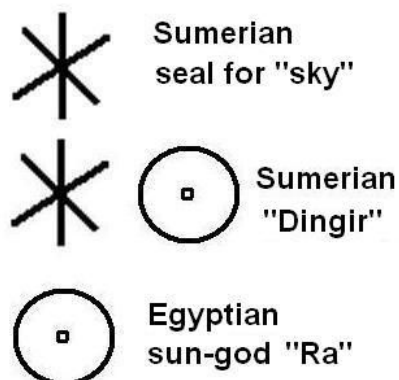
Ra, the great god of the sun, appears to have occupied a prominent position in the Egyptian pantheon at a very early period. The Egyptians of later days appear to have thought that the name was in some way associated with creation. Sun-worship in Egypt was very ancient, and it is probable that a number of sun-cults became fused in that of Ra.

Although almost all of the Egyptian deities had a half human half animal form, only **Ra** was an exception and was represented by the solar disc –a circle with a point in the center-. This representation has its roots in the early ON symbol of the Proto-language (see Chapter 7, **The Minoan culture**). I am of the opinion that Ra was imported from the Sumerian culture and his name came from **Dingir**, the main Sumerian deity.

In the Sumerian pictographic writing system the sky was represented by a six-pointed star and the sun by a circle with a dot at the center. When the Sumerians wanted to write “dingir” they drew the two symbols next to each other, as shown below. Dingir was the sun-god residing in the sky. This way of writing Dingir was logical because the Sumerian language was agglutinative and words could be created by adding suffixes.

In fact **Dingir** comes from the Central Asiatic **Ting-ri** or **Tengri**, still existing as **Tanri** in Turkish. Words similar to Tengri (meaning God) can be found in many remote parts of the world. Examples are: **Tengeri** for the Central Asiatic Buryat Turks, **Tingir** for the Tartars of Crimea, **Tanka** for the North-American Indians, **Tangarooa** for the Pacific islanders, **Tian** for the Chinese and **Tin** for the Etruscans. The ancient Egyptians adopted the solar disc standing for the suffix **-ri** as the name of the sun-god and called it **Ra**, as shown below.

From Dingir to Ra



Actually, not only **Ra** but also **Horus** is known to be related to the sun. Hor-us (Hor is) was adopted as the sun-god by the Romans during the Ptolemaic era. In time **Hor** became part of the Latin language and found its place in words such as “horizon”, “horizontal”, “horoscope” and even “hour” in English and “heure” in French.

Another deity related to the sun is **Ptah**. He personified the rising sun, or, rather the early morning sun, immediately after it has risen (2). **Aton**, one of the most prominent sun-gods of Ancient Egypt came in time to signify both the sun-god and the actual solar disk. It was during the reign of Akhanaton “**Ak-Han-Ata-On**” which lasted only 17 years -from 1379 BC to

1362 BC- that Aton “Ata-on” became the main deity of the entire Egyptian kingdom. Aton was regarded as the creator of the earth, self-existent and measurer of the lives of men.

Below we see Ak-han-ata-on making offerings to the sun with his wives Nefertiti and Kiya standing behind (3). They are receiving ankhs form the sun, the symbol of power and longevity. During his reign artists routinely portrayed the pharaoh in informal situations – being affectionate with Nefertiti or playing with his children. Akhanaton unleashed a creative furor that gave rise to perhaps the finest era of Egyptian art (4). He even founded a new city Akhataton near the present city of Amarna.

After the death of Akhanaton, his son Tutankhamon “Tutan-Okh-Ama-On” (the one protecting Amon) assumed power. He was under the influence of the Amon priests and reinstated Amon as the main god of Egypt. Within two years the religious capital was moved from Akhataton to Thebes. Soon the temples were demolished and Akhetaton was turned into rubbles. The ancient religion of the Amon priests came back to power, even stronger than before.



Akhenaton and wives

References

- (1) Ref. 3 of Chapter 21, page 130.
- (2) Idem, page 144.
- (3) **National Geographic**, April 2001, Pharaohs of the Sun, Rick Gore, page 47.
- (4) Idem, page 54.