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Religion in Ancient Egypt



Belief in the divine helped ancient Egyptians comprehend the cosmos and understand natural phenomena. The Egyptians embodied the concept of the divine in the forms of gods and goddesses. In art, these gods and goddesses were represented as humans, animals, or a combination of both. Egyptian deities ate, rode in boats, spoke, had emotions, and even a sense of humor. They could be destructive or benevolent.

The ancient Egyptians believed in a number of gods and goddesses such as Isis, Mut, Amun, Khonsu, Osiris, Horus, and Re. The deities of the Egyptian pantheon were often organized into groups of two or families of three that included a mother, father, and child. Gods were often associated with one or more physical locations where temples were built to house their statues and rituals were conducted to honor them. The temples were maintained by priests serving under the semi-divine king, the high priest of every cult.

Sometimes the gods were associated with abstract concepts. For example, the goddess Maat was considered to be the embodiment of a concept that is similar to our ideas about truth and justice. *Maat* was also the essential force that brought order to the universe and was juxtaposed with the concept of chaos (*isfet*).

In ancient Egyptian religion, *maat* had to be maintained by appeasing the gods. Otherwise, chaos might gain the upper hand. The task of maintaining the balance between order and chaos belonged to the king, who is often depicted presenting offerings to the deities.



TOP

Here the god Amun is depicted in completely human form and the god Re-Horakhty has a human body and the head of a hawk.

LEFT

Here the high priest of Amun-Re, Ramessesnakht is presenting a shrine to the Karnak gods, Amun, Mut, and Khonsu, who are shown seated on top of the shrine itself.



LEFT

This relief shows Horemheb offering water and incense to the (now missing) god Khepri.

BELOW

This statue of Akhenaten reflects the radical changes he made to Egyptian art in support of his new religion.

