



THE GODDESSES OF KEMET



The Goddess Bast

Bast was worshiped from the most ancient times, when her early form was lioness-headed. It wasn't until the first millennium BC that she was worshiped in the form of a lissom domestic cat or else as a cat-headed woman. No life-size (or greater) representations of Bast, in any form, have survived intact, although a great many smaller bronzes and statues have been recovered and can now be seen in museums around the world. But this does not necessarily mean that larger statues didn't exist. In his 'Histories', the Greek historian Herodotus tells us that a statue of the Goddess existed in the main temple shrine at Bubastis, but although he tells us that this statue was carried out among the people as part of Bast's festival he gives us no detailed description of her. In visualizations on the past of Egypt, many people who work with Bast have picked up imagery of huge cat-headed statues, but much as we'd like to believe these are psychic 'photographs' of history, we have to bear in mind that these visions might only be subjective. No anecdotal stories have survived about Bast's mythological life. As with so many of the Egyptian Gods, we know of her characteristics but not her exploits. We have to consider that, unlike other ancient cultures, the Ancient Egyptians may not have placed great importance upon such legends; the stories might not just be lost but never have existed in the first place. In some regions, Bast was regarded as the daughter of the creator God, Atum, in others as the daughter of the sun God, Ra. We know that she had children - Nefertum and Mahes - and she might have shared a husband with Sekhmet in the creator God of Memphis, Ptah.

That Bast was a very important Goddess there is no doubt, as the remains of her city, Bubastis, attest. Huge blocks of pink granite lie tumbled upon the ground, and an extensive cat cemetery can still be explored. We can only hope that the German team who want to reconstruct the ruins will be able to do so, when we shall all be able to appreciate and enjoy an approximation of what Bubastis was like in its hey-day. Herodotus visited the city



during the 5th century BC. He equated Bast (or Bubastis as he refers to her) with the Greek Goddess Artemis, and leaves us this description:

'None of the Egyptian cities , I think, was raised so much as Bubastis, where there is a Temple of Bubastis (the Greek Artemis) which is well worth describing. Other temples may be larger, or have cost more to build, but none is a greater pleasure to look at. The site of the building is almost an island, for two canals have been led from the Nile and sweep around it, one on each side, as far as the entrance, where they stop short without meeting; each canal is a hundred feet wide and shaded with trees. The gateway is sixty feet high and is decorated with remarkable carved figures some nine feet in height. The temple stands in the center of the city, and, since the level of the buildings everywhere else has been raised, but the temple itself allowed to remain in its original position, the result is that one can look down and get a fine view of it from all round. It is surrounded by a low wall with carved figures, and within the enclosure stands a grove of very tall trees about the actual shrine, which is large and contains the statue of the Goddess. The whole enclosure is a furlong square. The entrance to it is approached by a stone-paved road about four hundred feet wide and about two thousand feet long, running eastward through the market-place and joining the Temple of Bubastis to the Temple of Hermes. The road is lined on both sides with immense trees - so tall that they seem to touch the sky.'

Bast was associated with childbirth, perhaps because of the way a mother cat cares for her kittens - and the fact that she might have continual litters of them. During the 2nd Century AD Plutarch wrote, somewhat mysteriously, that the Egyptian Cat gives birth first to one kitten, then two, until the number seven is reached. He points out that this makes a total of twenty-eight, the same as the days of the lunar month.

Nowadays, Bast has assumed a mother Goddess aspect. While there is no doubt she has a side whose teeth and claws are bared, she is now generally regarded as benevolent. Her rituals involve music, feasting and dancing, when she can be petitioned to grant boons. Bast can be invoked to help with problems concerning domestic life, work situations and success, as well as love and good health, for the petitioner, their friends and families, or their cats. Any visit to the Temple of Bast, through visualization, is a time of serenity, contemplation and pleasure.



The Goddess Sekhmet

Sekhmet's name means 'powerful', and like Bast, she also has several variations of it, such as Sekhet or Sakhmet. She too was seen as the daughter of the sun God, Ra, and myth tells us that she was placed in the uraeus on his brow from where she would spit flames at his enemies. Her main temple was at Memphis in the south. She was the consort of the God, Ptah, and the mother of Nefertum.

Unlike Bast, Sekhmet does have a specific myth related to her, as follows:

Ra feared that humanity was plotting against him, having come to the conclusion that he was too old and frail to govern them any more. The other Gods encouraged Ra to punish the ungrateful humans by unleashing the power, or fire, of his avenging Eye upon them. Hathor, Sekhmet and Bast were all known as the 'Eyes Of Ra'. The God sent Hathor into Egypt to exact retribution from the people, and here she transformed into a lioness and became Sekhmet. The Goddess slew everyone she came across, and the land became red with their blood. By nightfall, she left the land to sleep, but would return the following day to finish her bloody work. Ra realized that Sekhmet had got a taste for blood and had become unstoppable. It was all going too far; a full-scale massacre would take place. He needed to stop the slaughter, and devised a plan, whereby he instructed the high priest at Heliopolis to obtain red ochre from Elephantine and mix it with seven thousand jars of beer to create a red liquid that looked like blood, but had rather different properties. The priest spread the mixture over the land. In the morning, Sekhmet returned to Egypt to finish off what remained of the people there, and lapped up what she assumed was their blood on the ground. The beer made her drunk, which effectively ended her rampage of bloodlust.

However, the lioness Goddess was not just seen as a war-monger and vengeful eye of the sun God. Because she was believed to bring plagues, the priests performed a kind of sympathetic magic to ward off and heal infections and illness. In this role, Sekhmet was known as the 'Lady of Life', and many of her priests were also physicians. In times of plague, they might perform huge, large-scale rituals. During the reign of Amenhotep III, hundreds of larger than life statues of Sekhmet were created, thirty of which are now in the British Museum. It seems conceivable that such a massive display of respect and veneration to the Goddess might have been to avert



and drive out a particularly virulent plague. Sekhmet also had a male form, when she known as Sekhmet Min. There is a representation of her in this aspect in the Temple of Khonsu at Karnak, Luxor, which shows the king standing before her to invoke her mighty strength in Min form.

Sekhmet seems more complex than Bast, but probably only because more material survives about her. To the pharaohs, she was seen as a symbol of their prowess as warriors and their ability to succeed in battle. On one limestone fragment, she is shown apparently breathing her divine life force into the mouth of the pharaoh Sneferu of the Fourth Dynasty.

As with the Goddess Isis, Sekhmet seems to have been reinvented in the twentieth century. Although she is still regarded as a powerful force, to be approached with respect and caution, we can perceive a 'watering down' of her aspects. In Ancient Egypt she was dangerous and ferocious, the bringer of plagues and retribution, the fire of the sun God's eye. This was no benign figure, who could be adored and worshiped as a gentle mother. Nowadays, many women (in particular) view Sekhmet as a source of strength, independence and assertiveness, and commune with her frequency when these attributes need to be augmented or instilled. In many ways, we could say that Sekhmet has become the symbol of the modern woman. She is still approached as a healer, bringer of justice and as a guardian or protector, but the emphasis has shifted. If any system is to survive, it has to move with the times and adjust itself to suit the sensibilities of those who adhere to it. It seems a natural progression that Sekhmet has transformed from what was almost a force of chaos into an icon of immanent female power.

Other Feline and Leonine Deities What follows is the list we compiled for the book 'Bast and Sekhmet: Eyes of Ra'. We add information to it as we continue to receive it.



Aker Aker

Aker Aker is one of the oldest of the lion gods. He was an earth god, but also guarded the gate of the dawn through which the sun god emerged every morning. His other attributes included being able to heal people afflicted by the bites of snakes, and if someone had swallowed a poisonous fly, he could neutralize the effects of that poison in the victim's stomach. When a pharaoh died, Aker was the god who opened up the earth's gate for the king to pass into the underworld.

There are later variations on this myth. The Egyptians believed that when the sun left the earth at night, he entered a kind of underworld tunnel beneath the earth. A lion god guarded each end of the tunnel. Together, these gods were known as the Akeru, or Akerui, primeval earth gods, older even than Geb, son of Shu and Tefnut (see Tefnut). Ancient texts indicate they had a somewhat threatening nature. The Akeru were represented either as two lions seated back to back, or else one lion with two foreparts. Between them, the Akeru supported the horizon on which rested the solar disk. They can be equated with Shu and Tefnut.

Later still, the Akeru became Sef and Tuau, which means 'yesterday and today'. The Ancient Egyptians always saw lions as guardians and protectors. As lion gods guarded the gates of morning and evening, so statues of lions guarded tombs and palaces, protecting both the dead and living, keeping demons and human enemies at bay.



Apedemak Apedemak

Apedemak Apedemak is not strictly an Egyptian deity, as he derives from the culture of Kush, in what is now modern Sudan. If Egypt is steeped in mystery and hidden treasures, the land of Kush is perhaps even more mysterious, mainly because it has not generated quite the same degree of archaeological and popular interest as Egypt itself and therefore less is known about it. What we do know is that Kush was seen as an enticing and exotic land of plenty by the Egyptians and many pharaohs sent expeditions south to bring back spoils of incense, animals and slaves.

Kush really came into its own as Egypt's royal dynasties fell into decline. Kashta, a great Kushite king, set out to conquer Egypt in the seventh century BC, a conquest which was completed by his son Piankhy around 725 BC. Some sixty years later, the Assyrians invaded Lower Egypt in the north and the Kushites were driven southward. Their civilisation was finally vanquished by a rival African culture around 300 AD.

For the latter centuries of its existence, the capital of Kush was the city of Meroe, and the dramatic ruins of temples, tombs and palaces that still stand today are a testament to the once great kingdom that flourished there. Nearby lie the remains of the city of Naga, and here stands the Lion Temple, sacred to the lion god Apedemak. Meroe and Naga are now crumbling into the desert sands, but at one time the land would have been more fertile. What fascinating stories must lie buried beneath the numerous unexcavated sites. The names of the Meroitic queens alone inspire the imagination: Amanirenas, Amanishakhete, Naldamak.

It's possible that Egyptian kings of the early dynasties attempted conquest in the lands south of Egypt, but there is little evidence to suggest their victories were long-lasting. However, for centuries, the Kushites enjoyed a trading relationship with Egypt, and there is no doubt that they were influenced by Egyptian culture, if not vice versa. Certain Egyptian gods had temples in Kush, most notably Amun Ra. Apedemak, a lion-headed Kushite god, was absorbed into the Egyptian belief system. Alternatively, it has been suggested that Apedemak was originally a wholly Egyptian god, who became more widely venerated in Kush.



It's fortunate that quite a lot of research has already been done on this deity, who can be viewed as a Kushite Mahes (lion-headed son of Bast). Apedemak shares quite a lot of attributes and qualities with the fully Egyptian Mahes. Like Bast's son, he was most often represented as a lion-headed man, holding a scepter surmounted by a seated lion. However, Apedemak did have at least two other unusual forms. One was that of a lion-headed serpent, while the other was of a man in ceremonial dress, who is shown with three lion heads. There is some question over whether he actually had four heads, as only three are visible in bas-reliefs.

Apedemak was primarily a war god, and we can be sure that in the past he was invoked to bestow his blessing upon the outcome of battles. Warriors would have desired the god's strength and ferocity in combat. In one hymn he was described as 'one who sends forth a flaming breath against his enemies in this his name, Great of Power, who slays the rebels with (his) strength.' He was often depicted as wearing battle-dress of leather armour and carrying weapons, especially a bow and arrows. He was also shown slaying enemies or else holding onto bound captives, who were restrained with cords around their necks.

War was not Apedemak's only area of dominion. He was clearly very important to the Meroitic royal family, for representations have survived showing him being honored by kings, queens and their children. In one hymn, he is addressed as 'Lion of the south, strong of arm; great god who comes to him who invokes him; bearer of secrets, mysterious of form who is not seen by any eye.' In another instance, he is described as a kind of heavenly provider, with the words 'one who provides nourishment for all men in this his name of "He Who Wakes Intact"'. Another, perhaps less important role of the god was that of solar deity. In his three-headed aspect, these benign and provident qualities are emphasized. In one carving, he is shown with four arms.

Two of them are offering bunches of flowers or perhaps corn to the king and queen of Meroe, while his other two arms support those of the royal couple, whose own arms are raised in praise to the god. In another carving, Apedemak holds the scepter of a king in one hand and a bunch of corn in the other. A representation of him survives from the pharaoh Akhenaten's city of Amarna, in which the queen Nefertiti is shown making offerings to him. The Egyptian goddess, Isis, was often regarded as the wife of Apedemak, while Horus was his son. In this way, the



Meroites substituted Osiris for their own god. However, in some instances, Tefnut was depicted as his wife. His cult involved specially bred temple cattle, and also veneration of the African elephant. Sacred pilgrimages were made to his main temple, which was a vast complex at Musawwarat es-Sufra, in Butana, north of the sixth Nile cataract.

Ari-he-nefer

Lion god. May be a form of Mahes.

Asthartet Asthartet

Asthartet Asthartet derives from the Syrian goddess Asthoreth, who is associated with several other goddesses, such as Ishtar, Hathor and Isis. There are many correspondences and attributes given to this goddess, which are often confusing and contradictory, but we shall adhere to the description of her given by Budge in 'Gods of the Egyptians', where she is represented as a lioness-headed woman. In Egyptian texts, Asthartet is referred to as 'mistress of horses, lady of the chariot, dweller in Apollionopolis Magna (Edfu).' Pictorially, she is shown as a lioness-headed woman

standing in a chariot, drawn by four horses that trample over the prostrate bodies of fallen enemies. Her head is surmounted by a sun disk. In one hand she carries what appears to be a whip, while in the other she holds the reins of the horses. It is believed her cult became established in Egypt round about the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty, but it continued in the Delta up until the Christian era. A letter survives that was sent by Tushratta, king of Mitani to the pharaoh Amenhotep III. In the letter, Tushratta refers to 'Ishtar of Nineveh, lady of the world', which was a name of Asthartet. The king suggests that the goddess' worship in Egypt is going into decline and pleads with Amenhotep to do something about the situation, to increase the goddess' influence tenfold. Whether Amenhotep did this has not been recorded, but her cult certainly survived far longer than either king.

Asthartet had two main attributes. Primarily, she was a terrifying and destructive goddess of war, controlling the maddened steeds that drew her chariot over the battlefield. Horses were not used by the Egyptians in this manner earlier than about 1800 BC, which gives some indication of when Asthartet's worship may have started. She was also, however, worshiped as a moon goddess, which suggests a more tranquil and compassionate side to her nature.



The Egyptians never regarded the horse in quite the same way as they did animals such as cats, lions, baboons and jackals, in that there are no representations of a god having an equine-headed form. This may be because of the horse's comparatively late introduction into Egypt. However, Asthartet can be regarded as a patron goddess of horses, who may be approached to request protection for these animals.

Atet

Atet A goddess of Henen-su, who was perhaps a female counterpart of Ra. She was reputed to have killed Apep, the great serpent of darkness, in the form of a cat.

Bes Bes

Bes Bes was one of the most popular gods among the common people of Egypt. Although he does have a warlike aspect, he is primarily a cheerful and benign god, associated with domestic matters, as well as laughter, dancing and general merrymaking. He is the lion dwarf, most likely of African origin, even though his name is properly Egyptian.

Bes has an almost comical, grotesque appearance. He is small and squat, with a great shaggy head of hair like a lion's mane. His nose is flat and beneath it his tongue protrudes as if it's too big for his mouth. He has long arms and short bowed legs, and his body is adorned with a lion or panther skin, whose tail trails down behind him. He is generally shown wearing a crown of tall feathers, like ostrich plumes, which resembles a tribal head-dress. His ugliness was probably regarded as a deterrent to evil demons and spirits, in much the same way as gargoyles on Christian churches were supposed to function.

In paintings, Bes is often shown full-faced rather than in profile, which is unusual in Egyptian art. The only other deity represented this way is the foreign goddess, Qetesh.

In his aspect of god of music and dancing, Bes is shown playing a harp, or a tambourine. Sometimes, he is depicted standing on one leg as if frozen in the middle of a dance. The clamour of his music would also have helped drive away evil spirits. According to one legend, the god was said to have used his musical skills to ensure the goddess Hathor remained in



good spirits while she traveled, reluctantly, from Nubia to Dendera. When he's wearing his more warlike aspect, Bes carries knives, or a sword and shield, and wears a military tunic. In this guise he is said to represent the destructive force of nature. Occasionally, Bes was shown with outspread hawk's wings, and sometimes carried a sign, called 'sa', which means protection.

Many household artifacts remain that bear Bes' image, from hand mirrors, to make-up pots, and pillows. He was associated with restful sleep, and with joy and pleasure. Women were especially fond of Bes as he was supposed to attend them in child-birth. In general, he was regarded as a protector of babies and young children. In this aspect, Bes was often accompanied by another popular deity, the hippopotamus goddess, Taweret. Whenever a woman experienced problems in labour, for example, spells would be recited to Bes and Taweret. The Egyptians didn't mince words in addressing the dwarf god. They refer to him in such terms as 'great dwarf with a large head and short thighs', or else 'a monkey in old age'. It wasn't just the common people who turned to Bes at these times. Many tomb and temple paintings and carvings remain which show that Bes was present in royal birthing chambers too.

Bes was reputed to bring good luck to families and to protect them from the common threat of snakes and scorpions. He may well have had a sexual aspect too, and his presence in carvings and paintings in bedrooms might have been connected with ensuring a satisfactory sex life took place there.

It seems most likely that the cat and lion deities derived originally from Africa, and Bes, more than any of them, seemed to keep certain aspects of his place of creation. He is like a pygmy shaman, complete with ceremonial dress of animal hide and feathers. Pygmies were especially favoured by Egyptian kings and queens, who liked to have them at their court. Perhaps some of Bes' attributes derive from the capering court jester. Dwarves were employed in this manner by ancient Western royalty too.

Our group has done many rituals to Bes, whom we regard mainly as a god of good fortune, especially when associated with money. The rite given later in this book can be used specifically - though not with disrespectful frequency - at those times when money is tight. We've found that Bes is quite happy to refill the coffers when it's sorely needed.



As well as ensuring good luck, Bes can be approached in respect of fertility, childbirth, or simply as a means to lift the spirits. Laughter is, without doubt, the best medicine for anyone feeling miserable, so we can see how invoking this cheerful deity might be beneficial to help those who are depressed.

Beset

Beset Lioness-demon, a feminine form of Bes. Some figurines of Beset show her as having the normal proportions of a woman rather than being dwarf-like, although like Bes she has a mask-like face that resembles a lion. One surviving representation of Beset is a wooden figurine, dating from the second millennium BC. The figure wears a Beset mask and holds metal serpents. Whether this is actually a representation of the goddess or of a woman taking her role in a rite is unsure.

The picture here shows Beset in a very similar form to Bes. This is a carving that has recently been unearthed in excavations in Egypt.

Hathor

Hathor Worship of Hathor, the cow goddess, can be traced back to a very early time in Egyptian history. The cow was seen as a symbol of fertility in an agricultural society and images of a bovine Goddess have been found in pre-dynastic graves.

Hathor is one of the best known Egyptian Goddesses. She is a daughter of Ra and her name literally means 'Mansion of Horus', which is thought to be a reference to Hathor as 'Lady of the Sky.' In this role she was seen as the sky in which the falcon flew. Her main temple was at Dendera in Middle Egypt and was dedicated to the triad of Hathor, Horus and their son Harsomtut. The temple is famous today for its Hathor headed columns, which are all crowned with reliefs of her as a woman with bovine ears.



She is usually depicted as a front-facing woman with the ears of a cow, or as a woman wearing a crown of cow horns and a sun disk. This image is one that was often found decorating sistras and mirrors. Interestingly, she can also be represented as a lioness. She has connections with both Sekhmet and Tefnut and shares many of Bast's attributes.

Like many of the more familiar leonine deities, although Hathor's nature is mostly benign, she does have a destructive side to her character. In some versions of the famous myth, in which Sekhmet slaughters mankind and is stopped by becoming drunk, it is Hathor who Ra first sends into the desert to kill humankind. Once there, she transforms into the raging Sekhmet. In other versions, such as the one given by Lewis Spence, Hathor and Sekhmet are the same deity known as 'Sekhmet-Hathor.'

Hathor is also associated with the primal lioness goddess Tefnut, most notably in the myth which tells how Hathor/Tefnut, having become estranged from her father Ra, wandered off, sulking, into Nubia. Once there she became enraged and transformed herself into a fire-breathing lioness. In this state she relished the drinking of blood and fed on the flesh of both humans and animals that crossed her path. Ra missed her, however, and sent her brother, Shu, and the wise god, Thoth, to bring her home. Even Thoth had difficulty in persuading her to return home because she had acquired a taste for blood and hunting. Eventually he bribed her with promises of unimaginable new temples and riches and she was reunited with her father amidst great celebration. In some versions of this myth, Hathor/Tefnut leaves Egypt because she has been prevented from destroying mankind.

Like Bast, music was very important in the cult of Hathor and the sistrum was sacred to her. The drinking of wine and beer was also a part of rituals to her as she, like Bast, is seen as a goddess of love, pleasure and dancing. She was particularly revered by women and presided over birth.

Hebi

Hebi A lion god mentioned in Budge's 'Gods of the Egyptians'.



Hekenth

Hekenth A lioness-headed goddess of the seventh hour of the night.

Hert-Ketit-s

Hert-Ketit-s A lioness goddess of the eleventh hour of the night. She was in charge of one of four terrible pits or chambers. Her chamber was called Hatet, and it was filled with the bodies of fiends who eternally dashed out their own brains with axes. Hert-Ketit-s stood by the side of the pit, belching fire into it from her mouth. After the fire had done its worst on the fiends within, the goddess chopped them into bits with the enormous knife she held in both hands.

Heru-neb-mesen

Heru-neb-mesen A lion god mentioned in Budge's 'Gods of the Egyptians'.

Huntheth

Huntheth Lioness-headed goddess of the tenth hour of the night.

Ketuit-ten-ba

Ketuit-ten-ba A cat-headed god who administers to Osiris in the Second Hour of the night.

Mafdet

Mafdet Unlike the other deities discussed in this chapter, Mafdet (or Maftet) was not based on lion or domestic cat imagery. As to exactly what animal she was there is some confusion, but she was certainly feline. Different sources claim she was a cheetah, a lynx or a leopard. Her name means 'runner', which seems to favour the idea she was a cheetah, but she is most popularly regarded as a lynx. Mafdet was certainly a ferocious goddess, as were most of the feline deities. In the Pyramid Texts, she is described as killing a serpent with her claws. The mere touch of her claws was apparently lethal to snakes. She reputedly leapt upon the necks of



serpents and was also famous for slaying scorpions. In one instance, she is described as having braided hair, which could symbolize the bodies of scorpions and snakes that she killed.

There is little doubt that Mafdet is a very ancient goddess, predating both Bast and Sekhmet. The details of her worship have mostly been lost, although a representation of her does appear on a vase that was found at a royal tomb in Abydos, which dates from between 2950-2800 BC. It's likely that she is of African origin.

Mafdet is mentioned twice in the Book of the Dead. In one chapter she is reported as cutting off the head of a serpent, while in another, she is called upon to prevent the deceased from being bitten by snakes in the underworld. The following is taken from E A Budge's version of Chapter Twenty-Four:

'Oh Serpent! I am the flame which shineth upon the Opener of hundreds of thousands of years, and the standard of the god Tenpu, the standard of young plants and flowers. Depart ye from me, for I am the divine Mafdet.'

It seems that Mafdet can be either male or female, being referred to in different places as a lynx goddess or a lynx god. In our own group's encounters with this deity, he has so far manifested in our visualizations as male, a guide through the realm of shadows, an opener of the way. We have yet to ascertain whether this interpretation bears any true resemblance to original Egyptian belief.

According to 'The Witch's Goddess' by Janet and Stuart Farrar, Mafdet's titles are 'Lady of the Castle of Life' and 'Slayer of Serpents'. Regarding the former title, as far as we're

aware, castles were not a common feature of the Egyptian landscape. Perhaps this title would be better interpreted as 'Lady of the Palace of Life', or 'Lady of the House of Life'.



Mahes

Mahes When we first began our studies, we knew little of this god, other than that he was the lion-headed son of Bast (sometimes of Sekhmet too) and had a temple at Leontopolis (called in ancient times Taremu). However, we now know more about him, which has enabled us to design visualizations and rituals. We have learned that Mahes was a much more important god in ancient times than we'd previously believed. The men in our temple group especially are interested in this deity.

Mahes, also known as Maahes, Mihos (in Greek), Maihesa (the wild lion), Ari-hes and Miysis, was reputedly a god of healing as well as a protector of the innocent. He also shared the qualities of many other leonine deities in that he had a fierce and aggressive aspect, when he is shown mauling the enemies of the king. He had a consort called Tekhait, a blood-drinking serpent goddess of fire. His name might mean 'True Before Her', which helps confirm an association with Maat, in that he is an upholder of divine truth. His main center was at Leontopolis, modern Tell el Muqdam in the Delta, which is fifty kilometers north of Cairo, but he was worshiped throughout Egypt from the Middle Kingdom onwards. The Pharaoh, Osorkon II of the XXII dynasty, erected a temple to him at Bubastis, the town sacred to the god's mother. Edouard Naville first excavated at Tell el Muqdam back in 1892, but more recently, in 1992, an American archaeological team from the University at California in Berkeley has conducted an investigation of the site. They have unearthed many lion bronzes, statuettes and stela, and we understand that one of the directors of the investigation is currently putting together a book on their discoveries, which will include a catalogue of all the known Mahes stela.

Quite recently, our knowledge of Mahes was increased by the research of Terri Sharp, who has spent many years looking into Mahes. What follows in this paragraph is the information she sent to us:

Initiation into Mahes's cult involved something termed as 'overcoming the lion', which was referred to as 'the little death.' His initiates had to confront and overcome their worst fears, worries, prejudices, failures, and emotions before progressing to higher degrees. Initiation involved injury to, and renewal of, the mahit (the left eye-associated with the moon and magical powers.). Through this process, the initiate's vision was extended from the earthly to the spiritual



world. Mahes' initiates allegedly were able to see the spirits of the dead. They had no fear of death, for they were convinced that, after their death, Mahes would carry them over the abyss on his shoulders. His rites were celebrated with processions, music, dancing, and orgies. His priesthood wore white, and part of their duties involving taking offerings of milk and honey to rock caves high in the cliffs beyond the temples. They would accepted sacrifices in the god's name, and fed the hearts of sacrificial victims to the lions that guarded his temples. Lions were bred in the god's temples. Mahes guards the door to the astral plane, and his eye and hand guard the gates of night. He was called 'Wieler of the Knife', (presumably represented as a phallic god) and 'Lord of the Land of the Daughters', (a special paradise where his priestesses resided after death). Another epithet, 'The scarlet Lord' referred to his bloody sacrifices, while other titles included 'Helper of the Wise Ones', 'Lord of Slaughter', Manifester of Will, 'The Initiator, and 'Avenger of Wrongs'. Mahes repels evil, protects initiates, and stands guard during magical rites. He is a god of sight, sun god of the Nile Delta, and god of midsummer, who was invoked to bring forth the souls of men, gods, and underworld spirits for divination or to discover the truth of a matter.

This information is very helpful towards creating rites to Mahes, although we're not altogether sure of the validity of the god having priestesses, seeing as through our research we discovered that very few gods had priestesses, only priests. But the priestesses referred to may have come later in Egyptian history, when their presence in temples became more common.

The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford exhibits two bronze statuettes of Mahes. One of them shows him wearing a tall crown flanked by tall plumes, while in the other he is bare-headed. In the Field Museum in Chicago, there is a splendid statuette of Mahes, seated on a throne and elaborately crowned.

We do know that Mahes was worshiped extensively throughout Egypt and down into Meroe and Nubia, where he was closely associated with the god Apedemak (which see). Strabo wrote of an Egyptian 'City of Lions', and it seems almost certain that Tell el Muqdam is the site of this settlement. The cult of Mahes appears to have been most active during Ptolemaic times, which coincides with Bast's popularity as a cat-headed deity, rather than her earlier form of lion-headed goddess. Another Greek scholar, Aelian, wrote:



'In Egypt, they worship lions, and there is a city called after them... the lions have temples and numerous spaces in which to roam; the flesh of oxen is supplied to them daily... and the lions eat to the accompaniment of song in the Egyptian language.'

Leontopolis was occupied by the Persians, (525-330 BC) and the Californian archaeological team working there have deduced that the artistic representation of lions suggests a strong Persian influence, exemplified by coloured paste inlays and snarling mouths of the statuettes they have found. It is also possible that the Persian kings honoured Mahes, because they identified with the power of the lion. A powerful Egyptian individual named Nesmihos, whose black granite tomb has been known since 1889, had great influence in the Persian court. He was a prince, a courtier, a sealbearer of Lower Egypt, as well as royal scribe for the temple of Mahes. His name, and that of his father, Pedimihos, clearly derive from the name of the local god. As investigations continue into this site, we hope that more will be learned about the god himself.

In E A Wallis Budge's book, 'The Gods of the Egyptians', the author lists a number of lion gods, and two of them are Ma-hes and Ari-hes-Nefer. Ari-hes is another name for Mahes, so these names could be variations of the same god, or completely different entities.

His epithets include 'great of roaring, great of strength, powerful of arms.' He was also known as 'the raging lion'. While his usual appearance was that of a lion-headed man, wearing a crown (in various forms), he was also depicted as a full lion.

We see Mahes as a god who may be approached in respect of healing, whether of mind or body, and also as a source of protection. He can also be petitioned in respect of truth and justice. His image was often placed at the entrances to large temples as a form of guardian. He has the strength of the lion, but perhaps not the ferocious power of the lioness. Lions are notoriously lazy beasts, who are quite happy to let their numerous

wives do all the hunting work. Therefore, we see Mahes' leonine power as less energetic than Sekhmet's; a slow, inexorable, confident force. Lions, in their beauty, seem well aware of their



own majesty. Mahes can provide protection, a massive impenetrable wall of strength, in contrast to Sekhmet, whose protective power is much more active and fiery.

Mau Apep, the great dark serpent, was slain by Ra in the form a cat, Mau; the great tom cat. One text tells us:

'I am the cat, which fought hard by the Persea tree in Annu on the night when the foes of Neb-er-tcher (a form of Osiris) were destroyed. Who then is this? The male cat is Ra himself and he is called Mau by reason of the words of the god Sa, who said about him, "who is like (mau) unto him?" and thus his name became 'mau' (cat).'

This is a play on the fact that the words for 'cat' and 'like' sounded the same.

Menat

Menat st respects, Mekhit, or Mehit, is very similar to Tefnut in that she is a lioness-headed goddess, who can be known as an 'Eye of Ra'. Like Tefnut, she left Egypt and fled to Nubia, from where she had to be brought back, in this case by a warrior and hunter god called Anhur, or Onuris. The name Anhur means 'the one who leads back the distant one'. Mekhit's name means 'She Who Has Been Completed'. The word, Mehit, another form of this goddess' name can also be used to refer to the Eye of Horus that was gouged out by Set, and subsequently healed, or 'completed', by Hathor.

Once Menat had come home, she became Anhur's consort, and statuettes exist in museums that depict them together. Although there is one instance of Anhur represented as a lion-headed man, he is generally shown as fully human. He usually holds a spear, but in some cases he carries a rope, which perhaps refers to how he managed to capture the prodigal Mekhit. We have yet to find mention of any cult centres specifically devoted to Mekhit, but her husband Anhur had a temple in the Delta at Samannud, which had the ancient name of Sebennytos.

Menat

Menat Lioness goddess mentioned by Budge, who was worshiped at Heliopolis.



Menkert

Menkert Lioness headed goddess of the tenth hour of the night.

Meretseger

Meretseger Meretseger is primarily a cobra goddess, but again she does have a leonine aspect. This goddess was popular particularly with the labourers and artisans of the village now known as Deir el-Medina. At one time, this place was the settlement where those who worked on the royal necropolis permanently lived. Meretseger was supposed to inhabit a mountain that overlooked the Valley of the Kings in western Thebes, which is known as Dehenet Imentet, or 'the peak of the west', an epithet which she shared. Hymns have survived which honour the 'lion of the peak'. During the New Kingdom era, she was regarded with great respect by all who inhabited or worked in the Theban necropolis area. In her snake aspect, Meretseger is generally depicted as a coiled cobra, although she can also be shown as a cobra with a woman's head, which has a human arm sticking out from the front of its hood. In her leonine aspect, she can be depicted as a lioness or a lioness-headed woman.

Meretseger's name means 'she who loves silence', which seems apt for a goddess who presides over a typically quiet area - the tombs of the dead. The workers who venerated her have left stelae behind them, which tell us that they regarded Meretseger as a dangerous yet merciful goddess. She was reputed to have extremely venomous stings, and would strike out and blind anyone who committed a crime or uttered falsehoods. When her anger was aroused she was known as a 'raging lion'. It's been suggested that the working conditions in the desert necropolis, where dry dust must have been a continual problem, might have contributed to the deterioration of workers' eyesight, and for this they would have to blame a local deity or spirit. Scorpions and snakes would also abound in such an area.

However, despite her association with injuring people, Meretseger was also regarded as a healer. No doubt, when workers were stung by scorpions or bitten by snakes, they would have appealed to her for help. It's said however, that the goddess would have to be absolutely sure a



person repented of whatever wrong he'd committed before she'd aid him. One draughtsman who created a stela describing Meretseger concluded it with the words 'Beware the peak of the west!'

Miuty

Miuty In the Book of Gates, Miuty (also known as Mati or Meeyuty) is a cat headed god of the eleventh division of the duat, (or underworld), who carries two scepters, one in the shape of a serpent. He is the guardian of the gateway to this division; the gate is called 'Mysterious of Approaches'. Along with all the other gods of this region, he could never leave his appointed division of the underworld or ascend to heaven. His duties included placing a white crown on the heads of gods in the train of Ra as the sun god passed through the duat in his boat. Miuty also had to weep for Osiris after Ra had passed out of the underworld. His soul was said to stay with the god always, even if his body had to remain in the duat. He also had to 'raise up Maat' and establish it in the shrine of Ra. Along with his companions, Miuty 'fixed the period of the years, which those who were decreed for the duat should pass there, and the period of those who were to live in heaven'. Another inscription tells us that Miuty and his companions '...tore their hair in grief before the great god in Amentet, for although they drove away Set from the pylon, they themselves were not allowed to enter into the heights of heaven.'

In the Book of Caverns, Miuty appears again, watching over Ra's bound enemies, while in 'The Litany of the Sun', Ra himself manifests as Miuty and also as the 'great tom cat'. In the tomb of Seti II, many gods are depicted on the walls, and one of them is a cat-headed deity, in mummified form, called Mauti. Given that Meeyuty and Mauti both bear a resemblance to the Egyptian word for cat 'mau', it's feasible this rendition is a version of the same god. In the same tomb, there is a depiction of a large seated cat, which looks like a male cat, who has the name Mau-aa.



Mut

Mut Along with her husband, Amun-Ra and her son Khonsu, (the moon god), Mut was part of the Theban triad of gods. She was also known as Mui and Mauit. In the temple at Thebes, she appears in many wall carvings and is called 'the mistress of the nine bows', which symbolizes her and her husband's role as protector of both the pharaoh and the land. One meaning of her name is 'Mother' and it was said she had not been born of any woman, although she could give birth herself. However, 'Mut' can also mean 'death' or 'vulture', which resulted in her being associated with goddesses such as Nekhbet, who was the vulture-goddess of Upper Egypt. From her temple at Thebes come the epithets: 'Mut, the great lady of Ashert, the lady of heaven, the queen of the gods.' She was also known as 'lady of the life of the two lands' and 'lady of the house of Ptah'. She is generally depicted as a woman, who wears a red or blue linen dress and the Double Crown of Egypt, and carries a lily sceptre. However, she sometimes has the head of a lioness, and has been associated with Sekhmet and Meretseger. Her sacred and symbolic animals are the lion, the cat and the vulture, although she's more commonly associated with felines rather than vultures. Her sanctuary in Thebes was called Isheru and the hieroglyphs for this name contain the symbol of a recumbent lion. It was at Mut's temple that the pharaoh Amenhotep III erected a great many statues of Sekhmet.

In the New Kingdom, one of the great festivals of the Egyptian year was when Amun's statue was carried up the Nile on a sacred barge to his wife Mut's temple. This was the

Festival of Opet (confusingly another name for Tawaret). At the same time the pharaoh and his queen would conduct secret, sacred rituals, which may have had sexual connotations, connected with the god's annual conjugal visit to his wife.

As with many, if not most, Egyptian goddesses, Mut's name and attributes could be joined with those of other deities, and in Mut's case this certainly included Bast and Sekhmet.

The Egyptians would not have regarded Mut as a mother goddess in same way that mother goddesses are revered in the modern Western tradition. She was, more properly, seen as a symbolic mother of the pharaoh, along with other goddesses such as Hathor and Isis. However,



for the purposes of modern reinterpretation, she could be approached as a benevolent, nurturing deity. Here is the cat who can be picked up and stroked, who is more likely to purr than spit and scratch. She can be seen as a patroness of women, especially mothers, as well as a protectress and a righter of wrongs. Some of her titles are 'Mistress of Heaven', 'the Great Sorceress' and, like Sekhmet and Bast, 'Eye of Ra'. In the Book of the Dead she is referred to as 'She who maketh souls strong and who maketh sound bodies'.

Nefertum

Nefertum Nefertum, also known as Nefer-tem, was the son of Sekhmet and her husband Ptah, the god of creativity. The three of them form what is known as the Memphite Triad, as they were the primary divine 'family' of Memphis.

Nefertum, whose name, having the word 'nefer' in it implies he was associated with great beauty and perfection, is generally depicted as a young man who wears a lotus flower on his head that sprouts two tall plumes. He was the god of the primeval lotus blossom, specifically the blue lotus from which the sun was believed to rise. In the Pyramid Texts, Nefertum is described as the lotus blossom before the nose of Ra. Part of his worship might have involved devotees breathing in the scent of the sacred lotus.

Typically with Egyptian deities, he can claim more than one mother, as Wadjet, Pakhet and Bast are also reputed to have given birth to him. His father is generally regarded to be Ptah, so he can be seen as the full brother or half brother of Mahes. In some instances, he is depicted as a child sitting upon a lotus blossom, like a young sun god, while occasionally he can be shown as a man standing upon the back of a lion.

For our purposes, the most interesting depictions of Nefertum are those to be found in the temple complex of Sety I at Abydos. Here, there is a vaulted chapel dedicated to Nefertum, and the representations of him are of a lion-headed man. This is regarded as a very unusual form of the god and suggests strong associations with Mahes. On the northern wall of the chapel, a relief shows Sety burning incense and pouring a libation in honour of the god. Nefertum stands before the pharaoh, holding an eye of Horus against his chest in his left hand. Upon his head, a



falcon perches, who is crowned with a lotus flower. On the southern wall, Nefertum is shown as a lion-headed mummy, again with a lotus-crowned falcon on his head. The chapel walls are carved with hymns to Nefertum, as well as other pictorial representations of the god. He is said to 'protect the Two Lands, and make to live the common people of Egypt and their children'. We regard Nefertum as being an aspect of the rising sun, and representing beauty, purity and perfume, similar in some respects to Bast. This is not a god of divine wrath or purging power, but a more gentle character. Because of his depictions as a beautiful child, he could perhaps be approached in respect of the welfare of children, especially for their protection. Otherwise he can bestow tranquility and serenity. In his presence, we can imagine ourselves in a divine garden filled with lotus blossoms and the soft light of dawn.

Neith

Neith Neith was generally depicted as a woman wearing the crown of northern Egypt, holding either a sceptre or a bow and two arrows. However, she also had a cat or lioness-headed aspect.

She was widely-worshiped in Egypt, which because of the Egyptian habit of having local reinterpretations of the gods, means she is a complex goddess of many attributes and symbols. She is certainly a very ancient goddess, who may well have Libyan origins. Her cult centre eventually became established at Sais, in Lower Egypt, where her temple was known as Sapi-Meht, which means 'Sapi of the north'. She was also worshiped in Upper Egypt at a place called Esneh, or Seni, and here she was sometimes represented as having a green lioness's head. One of her titles at Esneh was 'Father of fathers and Mother of mothers.'

It's likely that in Sais Neith was seen as a feminine counterpart of the father god Tem. Like him, she was reputed to have self-generated, and it's generally believed she embodied elements of both male and female in her nature. Neith's titles included: 'the great lady, the mother-goddess, the lady of heaven, and queen of the gods'. She was also known as 'mother of the gods'. Every year, a festival dedicated to Isis-Neith was held at Sais, which is described by Herodotus as follows:



'At Sais, on the night of sacrifices, everybody burns a great number of lights in the open air round the houses; the lamps they use are flat dishes filled with oil and salt, with a floating wick which keeps burning throughout the night. The festival is called the Festival of the Lamps, and even the Egyptians who cannot attend it mark the night of the sacrifice by lighting lamps, so that on that night lamps are burning not in Sais only but throughout the country. There is a sacred tradition, which accounts both for the date and for the manner of these observations'.

On other dates, mysteries were enacted upon a lake in Sais, but although Herodotus tells us he's aware of what went on at these events, he will not reveal the details, claiming that the rites must remain secret. It's probable that these mysteries were concerned with the death of the god Osiris, who was said to have been buried at Sais.

Herodotus surmises that the Mysteries of Demeter were brought into Greece from Egypt, and it's likely these were based on the highly secret mysteries of Neith and Isis in Sais.

Neith was identified with many other goddesses who had feline associations, such as Mut, Sekhmet and Bast. Her symbols were mainly the two arrows and a shield, but she could also be depicted with a strange symbol on her head, which represents a shuttle. Thus, she is also associated with weaving. Her earliest aspect, however, is almost certainly as a goddess associated with war or the hunt. Budge suggests that in predynastic times she could have been identified with a local wood spirit, or hunting spirit. In some depictions, she is shown suckling a crocodile, or two crocodiles, which probably represent her son, the crocodile god Sobhek.

Another of Neith's aspects is associated with the magical rituals and ceremonies connected with preserving the dead.

She was said to have given birth to the sun, Ra, in the waters of the Nun and was in fact credited with inventing birth. A legend associated with Neith tells us of when the gods Horus and Set were in dispute over who should be king of Egypt. The dispute had gone on for eighty years. Ra and the other gods could not resolve the conflict and called upon Neith to advise them. Neith suggested that Horus should be crowned as king, while Set should be give two foreign goddesses, Astarte and Anat, as wives. The gods all concurred with her wisdom, but for Set,



who clearly didn't think he got the best end of the deal. In her letter to Ra, while delivering her advice, Neith mentioned that if Horus did not become king she would grow so angry the sky would crash into the earth. This may have partly swayed Ra's decision.

Strangely enough, by the Pyramid Era, Neith was known as Set's wife, and the mother of Sobhek. Some inscriptions describe her as the mother of Apep, or Apophis, the great dark serpent who was Ra's enemy. His birth was unusual in that it was supposed to have been occasioned by Neith spitting him out as saliva into the primeval waters. Another of her aspects is similar to Hathor, in that she was regarded as a sky cow goddess. Then, she is known as the 'cow who gave birth to Ra', the 'spirit behind the veil, whom no mortal could see face to face'. Several queens of the first dynasty carried her name, which shows her great antiquity, and one of her epithets was 'all that has been, that is and that will be'.

Pakhet

Pakhet As Bast's main region of worship was Lower Egypt and Sekhmet's Upper Egypt, Pakhet was worshiped in Middle Egypt, and had a temple which was cut out of the solid rock near the modern day village of Beni Hasan in the eastern desert. A great many mummified cats have been found there, as well as thousands of mummified hawks. She too has several different forms of her name, such as Pekheth, Pekhit, Pakht, Pasht and Pekh. For some time, modern scholars confused her with Bast, before deciding she was a separate entity. Like Sekhmet, she was lioness-headed and was seen as something of a ferocious goddess, for her name means 'the tearer' or 'she who snatches'. One of her titles is 'Goddess at the Mouth of the Wadi'. A wadi is a dry channel between cliffs or rocks, which in certain seasons might become filled with water. Her temple is situated near the mouth of a wadi, and was constructed by the female pharaoh Hatshepsut and pharaoh Thutmose III of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The Greeks equated her with the Goddess Artemis and her temple is known by its classical name 'Speos Artimidos'. At Beni Hasan Pakhet was seen as a local version of Hathor's fierce lion-headed form. Unfinished Hathor-headed columns in the temple complex attest to this. In an Ancient Egyptian work called 'The Coffin Texts', Pakhet is called 'the Great', and described as a 'night huntress with sharp claws'. One of her surviving titles is 'Lady of Sept', which could be translated as 'Lady of the Star



of Sothis' (Sirius). She was identified with forms of the goddesses Isis, Hathor and Sekhmet. In one of the inscriptions at Beni Hasan, she's referred to as Horus Pakht, which along with the

evidence of the mummified hawks found at the site, suggests she also had a connection with a form of Horus. It is clear from the remains of her temple that she was a goddess of great importance in ancient times.

Perhaps because of her association with wadis, we can view Pakhet as being another goddess who might be petitioned to ensure that the land became irrigated sufficiently during the Inundation. Her name 'tearer' suggests she might also have had similar attributes to Sekhmet, in that her energy could be harnessed as a weapon to direct against enemies or harmful spirits. This association with Sekhmet is made clear in her temple where they share many of the same characteristics. Scenes depicted here show Pakhet pledging her support for Hatshepsut with phrases such as; 'My fiery breath being as fire against thine enemies'. Another scene shows Hatshepsut giving offerings of incense and libations to the Goddess, here she is rewarded with 'I give thee all strength, all might, all lands and every hill country crushed beneath thy sandals like Ra'. Such depictions are typical of Sekhmet, which suggests that these goddesses were local manifestations of the same deity.

Reenenet

Reenenet Lioness goddess. She was a goddess associated with suckling, and was said to bring babies their names. She was also a goddess presiding over the harvest and was present during the judgment of the souls of the dead.

Sebqet

Sebqet A lioness goddess mentioned briefly by Budge in 'Gods of the Egyptians'.



Sesenet-Khu

Sesenet-Khu A lioness headed goddess who administers to Osiris in the Second Hour of the Night in the Duat.

Shehberi

Shehberi A lion-headed winged god of the south wind.

Shesmetet

Shesmetet It's likely that this leonine goddess is actually a form of Sekhmet. One of her epithets is 'Lady of Punt', which was the incense region of Africa. This might mean she derived from this area, or else was associated specifically with incense. According to the Pyramid Texts, Shesmetet gave birth to the king, and in some funeral texts, she is credited with becoming the mother of the deceased. A spell survives, which was recited on the last day of the year, and in it, Shesmetet is invoked to protect against 'demons of slaughter'.

Shu *** See Tefnut also see *** The Twin Lion Gods were Shu and Tefnut**

Tawaret

Tawaret The wife and companion of Bes. She was primarily a very ancient, pre-dynastic hippopotamus goddess, associated with childbirth and pregnancy, when she would be called upon to protect women. Occasionally, she's regarded as an avenging goddess, when she is the wife of Set. Although she's usually represented as a hippo with the hind quarters of a lion, she can sometimes be depicted with the head of a lioness, and brandishing a knife.

Tefnut

Tefnut, Although Bast and Sekhmet are more well known today, Tefnut is an equally important goddess. She was the first female deity to be created by the primal sun god Atum or Tem, who can also be called Amun-Ra, or simply Ra. As we've already discussed, the Egyptians have left



comparatively few narrative myths behind them, but one that was developed and preserved in entirety is that of the Atum creation myth.

The story goes that Atum masturbated and produced from his seed his children Shu and Tefnut. Shu was a god associated with heat and dryness, for his name means 'dry, parched, withered and empty', while Tefnut was a goddess of moisture, in particular the moistness of the sky. Another version of the myth suggests that Atum spat moisture from his mouth, which became Tefnut, and breathed air from his nose, which became Shu.

In an ancient hymn to the sun god, it is said:

'Oh Amun-Ra, the gods have gone from thee. What flowed forth from thee became Shu, and that which was emitted by thee became Tefnut; thou didst create the nine gods at the beginning of all things, and thou wast the Lion God of the Twin Lion Gods.'

The Twin Lion Gods were Shu and Tefnut

The Twin Lion Gods were Shu and Tefnut. Collectively, they could be known as the Aker gods, the lions of yesterday and today, each facing away from one another. Tefnut represented the setting sun, while Shu represented the rising sun. Shu can be depicted as a lion, or a lion-headed man, but his usual form is that of a man wearing upon his head one, two or four feathers. The symbol of the feather is the hieroglyph for his name. The Egyptians believed he was the space that existed between sky and earth, and he was therefore shown in sculptures and reliefs as a figure kneeling upon one knee, lifting up with two hands the disk of the sun. Sometimes, he is shown without feathers on his head, but in their place will be found a decoration that represents the hind quarters of a lion. As well as personifying dryness, or dry heat, or air, Shu was a god of light. He was light personified, who manifested in the rays of the sun by day and the beams of the moon at night. Shu was also regarded as life itself, because of the life-breath of Ra which gave rise to him. Like her brother, Tefnut can be shown in pure animal form as a lioness, or as a full human, but is most often depicted as a lioness-headed woman. She wears a solar disk on her head, frequently decorated with a uraeus serpent, and carries an ankh and a scepter. Generally, she appears very similar to Sekhmet, but some sources cite that Sekhmet always has rounded ears, while Tefnut's tend to be squared off.



After their 'birth', Shu and Tefnut became separated from their father and were lost in the Nun, which were the vast primeval waters that existed before the world was created. Atum sent his eye to look for his children, and once they were found, he named Shu as Life and Tefnut as Order. These were powerful natural forces. Shu and Tefnut lay entwined with their father in the Nun, where he kept them safe from harm. But eventually Atum tired of this inert existence and asked the Nun how he could create a more congenial resting place for himself. The Nun said to him, 'Kiss your daughter, Order, put her to your nose; so will your heart live. Never let her leave you. Let Order, who is your daughter, be with your son, Shu, who is Life.' Atum then asked Shu to support him while he held Tefnut 'to his nose', which we can suppose is a euphemism for kissing her, or perhaps something more. From this act, the lunu came into being. This was the first solid mound to rise from the waters of the Nun, and Atum was able to rest comfortably upon it.

The Pyramid Texts tell us that this primal mound was called the High Hill in lunu, and that it was actually a form of Atum himself. Only when he appeared as, or on, this High Hill did the first light break over the eternal darkness of the Nun. Shu and Tefnut became lovers and produced two children, Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky. We can see in this myth how the Egyptians imagined the creation of the earth. First there was air (Shu) and moisture (Tefnut), and when these elements came together the world came into being creating earth and sky. The Egyptians often represented the universe by showing Shu standing with his arms raised to support the outstretched body of a woman. The woman is Nut, his daughter the sky, and she usually wears a long dress covered with stars. A man lies prone at Shu's feet and this is Geb, his son the earth. Shu separated earth from sky, which in the legend created problems. While still in the womb, Nut had been in conflict with her mother, Tefnut, and when the time came to be born, freed herself violently. As Shu and Tefnut had done before them, Geb and Nut became lovers. Nut placed herself on top of the earth god Geb, and there are representations of this act in Egyptian art. Geb is generally shown prone, sometimes with an erect phallus, while Nut arches over him. Nut became pregnant, but once this occurred, their father Shu, the God of Air, became jealous. He put one foot on Geb, pinning him down on his back, while he lifted Nut aloft with his arms. He tore them apart, and through this act, the earth became separated from the sky by air. Shu's jealousy knew no bounds. Eventually Nut gave birth to her and Geb's children, who were the sun, the stars and the planets. She placed them on her belly to protect them,



perhaps so that Shu could not reach them. Shu, however, was incensed that his cherished daughter had borne children to her brother Geb. In his rage, he cursed her. He decreed that she could never again be delivered of a child in any month in any year. Nut was naturally furious about this and decided she must do something about the curse. The legend says that she had another lover, Thoth, who among his other attributes was associated with time. She challenged him to a game of dice, which she won. She demanded from Thoth five extra days, which were separate from the normal year. This part of the myth shows how the Egyptians explained away the five extra, or epagomenal days, which they added to their calendar of three hundred and sixty days. On these days, as they were not part of the normal year, Nut was able to give birth again. It was said that on the first day, she bore Osiris, on the second, Horus (the elder), on the third Set, on the fourth Isis, and on the fifth Nephthys. Eventually, Osiris married his sister Isis, and Set married Nephthys. Thus Atum, his children and his grandchildren became the nine gods known as the Great Ennead of Iunu.

It is tempting to think that this ancient story was partly based upon truth. By this, we don't mean supernatural beings performing supernatural acts, but that the story of the Ennead might be based on a dim memory of an early dynasty of kings. The legend goes on to tell us that Shu became king of Egypt, where he ruled for many years. As he grew older, he lost his power, becoming weak in his body and his eyes. As he was no longer able to exert control, his followers began to fight amongst themselves. More importantly, now that his father had lost his strength, Geb was able to exact a revenge for the time when Shu had separated him from his beloved, the sky goddess. It is said that Geb also envied his father's kingship. Perhaps seeking sanctuary from his warring people and his dangerous son, Shu departed to a heavenly realm, along with those of his followers still loyal to him. Once he had left the earth darkness fell upon it, and a terrible howling wind sprang up. For nine days, it was so dark that no-one could even see one another. Then, after this time, the wind died down and the light returned. Geb chose this moment to ascend the throne of his father and everyone in the royal palace bowed down before him. He now became king of Egypt, while Shu took his place among the gods as an attendant of Ra or Atum.

Another legend continues the story of this royal/divine family, and is probably of later origin than the original myth, perhaps with Greek influences. It was said that once Shu had left Egypt but



before Geb became king, Geb fell in love with Tefnut, his mother. He went to where she lived in the palace at Memphis, and here forced himself upon her. The story goes that he raped her with great violence, but was not punished for it by man or god. He simply became king in Shu's place. By taking the king's wife for himself, Geb

could become king. To him, it was apparently irrelevant that the woman concerned was his mother, and the part of the story that tells us he 'fell in love with Tefnut' does not exactly ring true. At this point, the story ends. Nothing remains to tell us what happened to Tefnut after this. However, there is another, very early surviving legend about her. The story concerns the time when Ra ruled on Earth as King of Egypt. Tefnut was known as the 'Eye of Ra', just as Sekhmet, Bast and Hathor would later on. This story is very similar to the legend of Sekhmet's atrocities against humankind. For some reason, which was not recorded, Tefnut became estranged from her father and fled into Nubia. In this land, she transformed herself into a lioness. She raged through the countryside, emitting flames from her eyes and nostrils. Viciously, she drank the blood and fed on the flesh of both animals and humans. It is conceivable that this legend speaks of a time of drought in Egypt, when moisture went away and was replaced by cruel, murderous heat. It was up to the other gods to persuade the goddess of moisture to return. As time went on, Ra missed his Eye, and longed to see her again. He summoned Shu to him, along with Thoth, who was the messenger of the gods and famous for his eloquence. Ra must have known he'd need the powers of persuasion to draw Tefnut back to him. Ra issued the command that Shu and Thoth must go to Nubia and bring back his recalcitrant daughter. Before they set off on their journey Shu and Thoth disguised themselves as baboons. The baboon is an animal sacred to Thoth. Eventually, Thoth and Shu found Tefnut in Begum. Thoth began at once to try and persuade her to return to Egypt. Tefnut, however, wasn't interested. She liked hunting in the desert and was perfectly happy where she was. Thoth would not give up though, and wove stories to depict to her how gloom had descended upon Egypt since she had left. The people clearly needed her. Thoth also promised that the game she so loved hunting would be piled high for her on the altars in Egypt. She would not have to hunt for herself again. The people of Egypt would do anything for her if she'd just return home. Ultimately, wooed by Thoth's promises, Tefnut relented and returned to Egypt accompanied by the two baboons. All the way there, Thoth kept her entertained with stories. Tefnut made a triumphant entry back into the homeland, accompanied by a host of Nubian



musicians, dancers and baboons. She went from city to city, amid great rejoicing, until finally she was reunited with her father, and restored to her rightful position as his Eye. It was a common fear in many ancient cultures that when the sun disappeared at night it might never return. Similarly, when it lost its heat in winter, the people hadn't the scientific knowledge to be assured of its return. Consequently, they constructed myths to help them understand these frightening processes. The return of Tefnut to Egypt symbolized the miraculous return of the sun, auguring a period of warmth and light after a period of darkness or a season of lifelessness.

In the Pyramid Texts, Tefnut is credited with creating pure water for the king's feet from her vagina. She was responsible for the pharaoh's Delta residence and there created a pool for him. One of her titles is 'the Lady of Heaven', while another is 'The Distant One', which refers to the period she was in Nubia. According to Budge, Tefnut was originally a goddess of gentle rain and soft wind, and later became identified with other goddesses, of whom some if not all were associated with lionesses, such as Nehemaut at Hermopolis; Menhit at Latopolis, Sekhmet in Memphis and Apsit in Nubia.

Shu and Tefnut generally have to be regarded as one entity, as they were reputed to share a soul. Dendera was known as Per-Shu, which means 'the house of Shu', Apollonius Magna was called Hinu-en-Shu-nefer, Edfu was 'the seat of Shu and one name for Memphis was 'Palace of Shu'. A part of Dendera was also known as 'the house of Tefnut'. We do not know whether there were statues of Shu and Tefnut in these cities, but it is probably that they were worshiped throughout the land in the form of lions. The people of Heliopolis kept sacred lions in the temple of Helios.

Tefnut did not venture into Africa just in legends. She became a popular goddess in Kush and Nubia, where she was credited with being the wife of local deities such as Apedemak and Arensnuphis. She was also known there as a wife of Thoth. Some researchers now believe that the site of the sphinx in Giza is that of the first creation or the Primal Mound. At one time, it would have been surrounded by water, the sacred lake or Nun. Shu and Tefnut, as lions, guarded the eastern and western horizons. Shu, as lion of the eastern horizon, supervised the



rising of the sun each morning, while Tefnut, as lion of the western horizon, guarded the sun by night. It has been suggested by the Egyptian writer Bassam El-Shammaa, with convincing conjecture, that at one time there were two sphinx. Shu looked out upon the east, and still remains to this day, but there was another sphinx that represented Tefnut looking out to the west, which has now been destroyed or buried. Perhaps if further study and excavations take place, the evidence to support this claim will be found. When we first began performing visualizations concerning Tefnut, our group was surprised by the rich imagery we received. We felt that here was a goddess eager to make contact, who in some ways yearned for human attention. The results of our initial 'quest' into Tefnut are given later, but every person present all received the strong impression that Tefnut felt she had been ignored long enough. We were all asked to return to her domain again, which we did.

For us, Tefnut is a goddess of knowledge, in that she has the wisdom of the source of creation. She is a teacher, who can lead the way along the path of development or initiation. She cannot really be seen as a lunar goddess, per se, even though she is associated with water and the sky at night. She is the setting sun, the evening, the guardian of the dark hours, the mistress of the primal waters.

According to Lawrence Durdin-Robertson, in his book, 'Year of the Goddess', the 21st May can be regarded as a feast day to Tefnut. This is because in the Dendera Zodiac, Gemini, the Twins, is represented by Shu and Tefnut.

Tutu Tutu

Tutu Tutu was a son of Neith, who was represented in two feline forms; one as a human headed sphinx, and another as a lion-headed man. From inscriptions at Philae, we learn that he was 'great of strength, the champion, pre-eminent in Biggeh, great of roaring, strong of arms' and 'mighty of power, who is over the gods, and who overthrows Apep.' Many leonine deities were credited with being 'great of roaring', and when this phrase is found in a god's name, it's a good indication they had a leonine form. Tutu, in slaying the serpent Apep, is similar to Ra in his feline form. He could also have a wholly human appearance.



Urt-Hekau

Urt-Hekau A lioness goddess. Her name, also written as Weret Hekau, is very much associated with magic, and means 'mighty one of words of power'. This was also a title of Nephthys, so this goddess could well be an aspect of her. She was also said to be the 'protective power of the Eye of Horus', and had associations with Neith. Usit Lioness-headed goddess of the tenth hour of the night.

Wadjet Wadjet

Wadjet Wadjet, also known as Uatchet, Udjat of Edjo, is primarily a cobra goddess, similar in some respects to Meretseger.

Like this goddess, Wadjet has a lion-headed aspect. Her name means 'She Who Is Green', and she was a protectress goddess of Lower Egypt, as well as being one of the goddesses of the four directions, in her case, north.

She is the uraeus, the snake who adorns the royal crown of pharaohs, when she is shown rearing up in a protective manner. Wadjet is often accompanied by the vulture goddess Nekhbet, and indeed many of the crowns of Egyptian queens bore representations of both cobra and vulture.