

Geb (*gbb*; *gb*; *qb*; Gr. $\chi\eta\beta$) is in the main an earth god. His name has not yet been explained. It is not credible that Geb could have been a goose-god in origin,¹ even if there is a word *gbb* in the OK meaning goose. The goose sign in Geb's name is no more than a phonogram. If there is an etymological connexion between the name Geb and the verbs *gbgb* and *gbj* 'to fling down', 'to be weak, paralysed', we can at present only assume that these (younger) verbs are derived from the name of the god, who in the familiar depictions of Geb and Nut is represented as a man lying down, thus stylistically resembling a helpless vanquished enemy or a foreigner debilitated by hunger. The word *gbb* 'earth', too, is derived from the name of the god and not the other way round,² because beside *Aker, *Tatenen, *Sokaris et al. Geb was the principal chthonian god. Innumerable texts and expressions dating from all periods of Egyptian history testify to the connexion between Geb and the earth. The dead person buried in the earth wishes to come forth from the portals, the mouth or the jaws of Geb. The earth or the mouth of the earth opens when Geb speaks. Earthquakes are an activity of Geb. Minerals are a gift of Geb. Corn and plants grow upon the back of Geb. As earth god Geb is the lord of snakes, and may thus be addressed in snake-charms. Yet Geb, in whom nature and history meet, is more than an earth god. He forms part of the ennead of the gods. He is the ancestor (*dfn*)

and father of the gods (*jt ntrw*). The marriage of Geb and Nut was exceptionally fruitful: they produced not one, but four divine children, Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Geb's best-known epithet, which is only sporadically applied to other gods, is *Iripat (*jrj-p't*) 'leader of the inhabitants of earth'. This title acquired the meaning of 'heir of the gods',³ for Geb was the heir of Shu and Atum in the dynasty of the gods (*Götterdynastien). Since kingship was an office exercised by various gods in succession, Geb too can sometimes be regarded as Leader of the Ennead.⁴ Especially because Geb was the first terrestrial ruler, royal inscriptions often refer to the 'legacy' of Geb or the 'thrones' of Geb, thus making historical kingship into an institution reaching back to primeval time. A late story (naos 2248 of Ismailia, 30th dyn.) tells how after a revolution Geb took over the rule of his father Shu and violated his mother Tefnet.⁵ In the theology of *Kom Ombo⁶ on the other hand, where Harueris and Sobek are named as Shu and Geb, they are at peace with one another.

As Osiris and Horus were justified before Geb or in the hall (*wshf*) of Geb, so the royal ancestor continues to fulfil the role of judge of the dead.⁷ The somewhat rare identification of the dead with Geb in funerary literature expresses not so much a wish to become one with the earth or the ancestors, as rather the desire to attain to a high judicial position in the afterworld. The place taken by Geb in the 'Stundenwachen', the ritual of mummification and opening of the mouth, is primarily to be explained from the fact of his being the father of the defunct Osiris.

Next to Osiris and Anubis, Geb is one of the gods to whom offerings are made for the benefit of the dead. Little is known of any special cult of Geb besides his cult as a member of the Ennead. Like other chthonian gods, e.g. Sokaris in Memphis, he seems to have been honoured with the ritual of hacking the earth (*Erdaufhacken) in Heliopolis.⁸ Nor are Geb's connexions with local gods of much importance. His connexion with Sobek in Kom Ombo was already mentioned. Khnum of Antinoe is called the ba of Geb.⁹

Iconographically Geb is always shown in human shape. The earliest known depiction of Geb dates from the 3rd dynasty, on the relief fragments in Turin.¹⁰ In early times Geb bears no special attributes. The goose, often drawn above his head, is a written character. In the late period Geb wears a special crown made up of various components of other

crowns, which in Ptolemaic hieroglyphics even becomes his ideogram.¹¹

The cosmological representations of Geb and *Nut referred to above, and already known to the authors of the Pyramid texts, are chiefly familiar to us from paintings on sarcophagi and vignettes in papyri of the 21st dynasty and later.¹² When colour is present, Geb is always green. Geb's recumbent position recalls the primaeval inertness of reality before the creation; it may perhaps afterwards have influenced the Hellenistic image of Father Nile. The usual manner of depicting Geb and Nut—in which there is actually a good deal of variation—has a remarkable variant: Geb is shown curled over and orally impregnating himself as 'father of the gods, who creates the earth and the whole circuit of Re', while he lies beneath a male sky god standing on hands and feet.¹³

¹ Joachim Spiegel, *Das Werden der altägyptischen Hochkultur*, Heidelberg 1953, 172. — ² Gardiner, in: *ZÄS* 43, 1906, 149; *RÄRG* 201. — ³ Helck, in: *Orientalia* 19, 1950, 416–434. — ⁴ Cazemier, in: *JEOL* 21, 1969–1970, 187; Winfried Barta, *Untersuchungen zum Götterkreis der Neunheit*, MÄS 28, München-Berlin 1973, 40. 49. — ⁵ Goyon, in: *Kémi* 6, 1936, 1–43. — ⁶ Adolphe Gutbub, *Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo*, Kairo 1973, 2. 20. 36. 68. 92. 224. 309. 312. 456. — ⁷ Reinhard Grieshammer, *Das Jenseitsgericht in den Sargtexten*, Wiesbaden 1970, 81 Anm. 75. — ⁸ Kurt Sethe, *Urgeschichte*, § 126; *Pyr.* 1663. — ⁹ Cf. *RÄRG* 203. — ¹⁰ Smith, *Sculpture*, fig. 48–53. — ¹¹ Yoyotte, in: *Kémi* 11, 1950, 57–59. — ¹² Lanzzone, *Dizionario*, pl. 155–163; Piankoff, *Myth. Pap. nrs.* 8. 10. 11. 19. CG 6008. 6234 (Bruyère, Meret Seger, II, fig. 104), 41003. 610027, 610032, 61030; Badawi, in: *ASAE* 54, 1956, pl. 10 (rare representation in relief); pGreenfield pl. 106; *Sarcophagus Berlin nr. 8*; pLeiden T 7 (in: *Kunst voor de Eeuwigheid*, Leiden 1966, Pl. 19); Boeser, *Leiden, Mummiekisten* pl. 6; R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London 1959, pl. 3, etc. — ¹³ *Pap. Brit. Mus.* 7312; Piankoff, in: *Egyptian Religion* 3, 1935, p. 155, fig. 2. H. te V.