

Khonsu the child the Theban triad, from about 1500 BCE until the end of Egyptian religious history. She is, however, not just a vague mother goddess, though she is often represented with the child Khonsu on her lap. She is a stately royal lady, wearing the Double Crown, the two royal crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, as do some masculine gods. She is the divine queen mother and even queen regnant, a divine female pharaoh who represents kingship with her Double Crown. Beginning in the time of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut, the pharaoh may be called "son of Amun and Mut."

The name of Mut was written with the vulture hieroglyph, but she was not a vulture goddess like Nekhbet, as is often suggested in older literature. She was also represented as an anthropomorphic being with a human head or a lion head. Only very seldom, and evidently secondarily, was she given a vulture head next to a human or lion head. The vulture headdress that she often wears together with the Double Crown is common to many other goddesses and royal women. This vulture headdress, as well as the vulture hieroglyph with which her name was written, is a symbol and ideogram of motherhood, as Horapollon knew: the Egyptian word for "mother" is written with the vulture hieroglyph and is to be read *mwt*. The name of the goddess Mut thus means "mother." (For particulars and problems, see the article by Wolfgang Brunsch in *Enchoria* 8 [1978], pp. 123–128.)

In comparison with other divinities, Mut makes a late appearance in the history of Egyptian religion, or at least in the material that is preserved. So far, no definite proof exists that she played a part in the religion of Predynastic and Early Dynastic times, or even of the Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and Middle Kingdom. The oldest certain attestations date from the Second Intermediate Period and come from Middle Egypt, for example, from Megeb in the tenth Upper Egyptian nome and from Karnak. Whether, when, or how Mut was introduced in this cult center of Amun is not known, but she replaced Amaunet, the "grammatical" female companion of Amun, in the Middle Kingdom in some aspects. Mut is known from the seventeenth dynasty on as "the Great One, Mistress of Isheru."

The precise meaning of the word *išrw* is unknown. Isheru is not only the place and temple where Mut was worshiped in South Karnak, but it is also a term for a lake that surrounds a temple of lion goddesses on three of its four sides. Mythologically, Isheru is the place where these feline deities were appeased, so that their burning wrath was cooled. Leonine goddesses were considered to be representations of the Eye of Re, or the daughter of Re, or the original first feminine being; they had a dual or ambivalent nature in which pacific and creative elements coexisted with fiery, anarchic, destructive, dangerous characteristics. These goddesses had to be pacified with

MUT. The goddess Mut is known primarily as the spouse of Amun-Re, king of the gods; she forms with him and

specific prayers or litanies and rituals (see Yoyotte 1980). The festival of the navigation of Mut, together with some other leonine goddesses, on the *išrw*-lake was famous in Thebes and all Egypt.

In Amun's train, Mut was worshiped in many places in the Nile Valley, the Delta, Nubia, and the Western Desert oases. By herself or together with other gods, such as Ptah or Re, she was worshiped near Antinoöpolis as mistress of Megeb; in Memphis, as Mut in the house of Ptah; in Giza, as Mut-Khenty-Abu-Neteru; and in Heliopolis, as Mut-Her-Senutes, the cruel goddess to whom human victims were offered, as Jean Yoyotte (1980–1981) has shown.

In a late Wisdom text (Papyrus Insinger 8, 18–19) one can read: "The work of Mut and Hathor is that what takes place among women, for there are good and bad women among those upon earth." Although Mut is not without malevolent and dissipated traits and remains a leonine goddess who is not always a peaceful cat, she is not, like Hathor, a symbol of sexual excitation. Mut is the matron, the divine mistress of the house. She is the female compassion man meets in his mother, sister, daughter, and—to a certain extent—in his wife; she is not so much the sexual attraction man finds in strange and dangerous women outside the family. Mut was venerated by women and men, and she had both priests and priestesses. The important priestesses called "God's Wives of Amun" had names mostly composed with the name of Mut and were regarded as earthly incarnations of Mut. The femininity of Mut with her royal crowns was authoritative and sometimes also aggressive and terrifying: unlike any other Egyptian goddess, she could be depicted as an aggressive woman with a penis, who frightens off her opponents.

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