

SETH. The god of confusion, spirit of disorder and personification of violence, and bad faith was nevertheless venerated by the Egyptians as a god with whom one had to come to terms. Disorder, at least to a certain extent, was accepted as a reality of life and as essential to the living order.

Seth was also known as the god who brought death into the world by killing Osiris. Osiris had to die, but Seth gave him an untimely, sordid, and lamentable death.

Seth and Horus fought for the rulership of the world, the kingship of Egypt, and the function of Osiris. In this battle Horus lost the light of his eye, and Seth the semen of his testicles. Seth, god of exuberant male sexuality not yet channeled into fertility, induced Horus to take part in pederastic acts and homosexual violation. The fruit of their relationship was the moon god Thoth, the son of the two lords. This pair of gods could also be referred to as the "two combatants." When they are mentioned by name, Horus as the royal god and prototype of the Egyptian gentleman always comes first, and Seth as the spirit of disorder comes second, for Horus has the more central and Seth the more peripheral position. Although these two gods were the mythological symbols of all strife and the primal antagonists, they were separated, reunited, and reconciled. The justification of Horus in the verdict of the gods on their case always had an exclusive tendency; in chiefly later variants of the myth, Seth is punished and driven out. But as long as Horus and Seth are reconciled, they unite the two lands of Egypt by joining the sedge and papyrus so that pharaoh can rule over a country of order and peace. The pharaoh is a Horus reconciled to Seth, or a gentleman in whom the spirit of disorder has been integrated. Together these two gods rule over the world through the pharaoh whom they purify and crown, but still each one has his special half of the world: Horus has Lower Egypt and Seth has Upper Egypt, though this bipartition may also be reversed. During the New Kingdom,

Horus is lord of the Black Land, the fertile Nile Valley, and Seth is lord of the Red Land, the desert and foreign countries. Not only the bipartition of the world but also many other contrasts were connected with these gods: north and south, heaven and earth, earth and underworld, right and left, black and red, being born and being conceived, rulership and strength, life and dominion.

Seth was also famous in a third and more positive role, first noted in the Coffin Texts: standing on the prow of the boat of the sun god Re, he repelled the evil snake Apophis. This aggressive warrior god and powerful thunder god, with his mighty scepter weighing 4,500 pounds, was employed by the sun god to conquer the reptile. In the myths of many cultures worldwide, the figure of the trickster—as this Egyptian god of confusion may be called—not only tricks gods and men, but is also the slayer of monsters.

A fourth aspect of Seth is that of the divine foreigner. His identification with Baal, the god of the Semites, is connected with the vicissitudes of the history of Seth and his cult. The first certain attestation of Seth can be found on the protohistoric votive mace head of King Scorpion on which appear clear depictions of dog-, pig-, or ass-like so-called Seth animals with the typical long curved snout, truncated ears, and raised tails. In later artifacts Seth may be represented in animal form as a sitting, standing, or lying Seth-animal, but also in human form, often with the head of a Seth-animal. More than twenty different animals, and even a bird and a fish, have been suggested as the mysterious Seth-animal. It seems best to accept the old idea of Champollion that it is a fabulous animal, like the griffin, supposed to live in the desert. It is not impossible, however, that this fabulous animal had the body of a dog or ass and the head of a pig. In writing system, the Seth-animal served as a determinative classification sign for about twenty-five words denoting confusion in cosmic, social, and personal life, such as "storm," "tumult," and "illness."

The kings of the first dynasty and also of Dynasty "0" were associated with Horus-falcons, but king Peribsen of the second dynasty replaced the falcon with the Seth-animal, and King Khasekhemwy put both falcon and Seth-animal above the *serekh* in which his name was written. But whether this indicates a Seth rebellion, as Newberry suggests in *Ancient Egypt* (1922, pp. 40–46), remains to be proved. Neither can it be proved that Seth was the god of the original inhabitants of Upper Egypt, the predynastic Naqada I culture who were subjugated by the Horus worshipers. It is interesting to note that Naqada, or Ombos, was the most important cult center of Seth in later times. The belief that one religion's devil is the god of a conquered religion is not uncommon and is not to be rejected in itself, but there is not enough proof that this was the case for Seth in Egyptian religion.

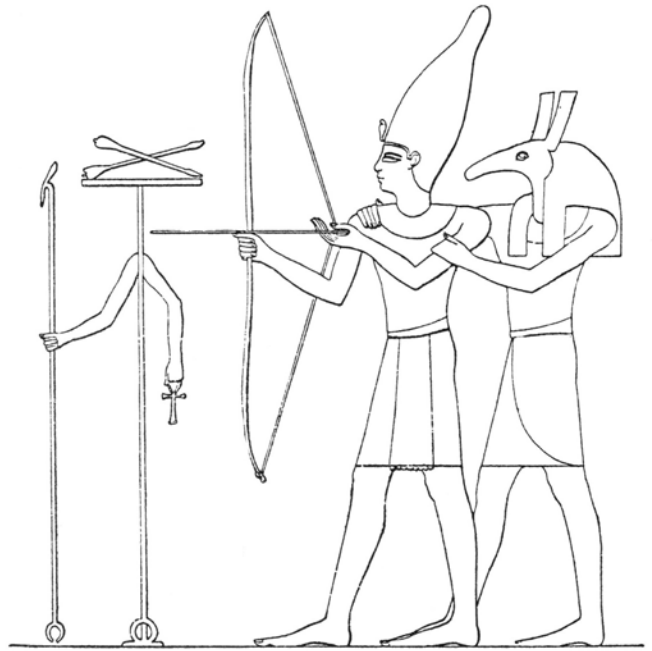
Already in the Old Kingdom, but especially in the imperial Ramessid period of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties, Seth was viewed as the lord of foreign countries. The Libyan god Ash, the Western Semites' god Baal, and the Hittite god Teshub were recognized as forms of Seth, although such identifications or even combinations with other Egyptian gods are rare. Seth remains a god apart (*wḏ*), as he is called since the Coffin Texts. Nevertheless, he had his traditional place in the Ennead of Heliopolis up into the first millennium BCE. His marriage with Nephthys remains a rather formal affair and, atypically, does not produce a divine child. It is at least doubtful whether Seth was ever held to be the father of Anubis, the child of Nephthys. That the crocodile Maga is said to be a son of Seth accentuates its demonic nature. Seth, whose exuberant sexual activities result in his being invoked in love charms and whose testicles are a symbol as a pendant of the Eye of Horus, has relations with the goddesses Hathor and Neith, and especially with the foreign goddesses Anat and Astarte. In texts the name of Seth is often substituted by "son of Nut," as if this violent, noisy thunder god is still a big boy. He is, however, not depicted being tended by his mother, like Horus by Isis. The texts of the first millennium BCE cursing Seth do not forget to mention that his own mother has turned against him.

Special cults of Seth were established on the border of the desert and at the beginnings of caravan routes: at Ombos, Sepermeru, the oases in the Western Desert, Avaris, and Piramesse. The frontier god or disorderly foreigner became the equal of Re, Ptah, or Amun as a god of state, court, and army when the Ramessid pharaohs of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties had their residence in Piramesse near the border in the northeastern Delta. Even pharaohs took their name from him: Sety ("man of Seth") and Sethnakht ("Seth-is-strong").

The remarkable reputation of Seth in mythology and his reputedly violent and disorderly character did not prevent some Egyptians from adopting him as their local or personal god. Personal names show that some did not hesitate to ascribe to Seth the same qualities that others assigned to more reputable gods: "Seth-is-great," "Seth-is-gracious," "Seth-is-kind," "Seth-is-content," "Seth-gives-salvation," "Seth-causes-to live."

One title of a high priest of Seth was *šd-ḥrw*, which means "he who raises the voice" or "who causes commotion" or "who kicks up a row." We do not know whether this expression indicates the social position and behavior of the priesthood of Seth, or whether it is simply a nickname given by outsiders who abhorred Seth.

In the first millennium BCE the Seth-animal disappeared from art and hieroglyphic writing. As an enemy of the gods, he was represented as an ass with a knife stuck in his head. In the western oases, where he was venerated



SETH. Depiction of Seth at right, teaching Thutmose III to shoot with the bow, from a relief at Karnak.

as a god until the end of Egyptian religion in the fourth century CE he was represented with a falcon's head, like Horus, his alter ego. The turning point from veneration to demonization of Seth in the Nile Valley must be dated shortly after 700 BCE, in the time of the pious Kushite pharaohs of the twenty-fifth dynasty.

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HERMAN TE VELDE