

= Eye of Ra =

The Eye of Ra or Eye of Re is a being in ancient Egyptian mythology that functions as a feminine counterpart to the sun god Ra and a violent force that subdues his enemies . The Eye is an extension of Ra 's power , equated with the disk of the sun , but it also behaves as an independent entity , which can be personified by a wide variety of Egyptian goddesses , including Hathor , Sekhmet , Bastet , Wadjet , and Mut . The Eye goddess acts as mother , sibling , consort , and daughter of the sun god . She is his partner in the creative cycle in which he begets the renewed form of himself that is born at dawn . The Eye 's violent aspect defends Ra against the agents of disorder that threaten his rule . This dangerous aspect of the Eye goddess is often represented by a lioness or by the uraeus , or cobra , a symbol of protection and royal authority . The Eye of Ra is similar to the Eye of Horus , which belongs to a different god , Horus , but represents many of the same concepts . The disastrous effects when the Eye goddess rampages out of control and the efforts of the gods to return her to a benign state are a prominent motif in Egyptian mythology .

The Eye of Ra was involved in many areas of ancient Egyptian religion , including in the cults of the many goddesses who are equated with it . Its life @-@ giving power was celebrated in temple rituals , and its dangerous aspect was invoked in the protection of the pharaoh , of sacred places , and of ordinary people and their homes .

= = Roles = =

= = = Solar = = =

The Egyptians often referred to the sun and the moon as the " eye " s of particular gods . The right eye of the god Horus , for instance , was equated with the sun , and his left eye equated with the moon . At times the Egyptians called the lunar eye the " Eye of Horus " , a concept with its own complex mythology and symbolism , and called the solar eye the " Eye of Ra " ? Ra being the preeminent sun god in ancient Egyptian religion . However , in Egyptian belief , many terms and concepts are fluid , so the sun could also be called the " Eye of Horus " .

The yellow or red disk @-@ like sun emblem in Egyptian art represents the Eye of Ra . Because of the great importance of the sun in Egyptian religion , this emblem is among the most common religious symbols in all of Egyptian art . Although Egyptologists usually call this emblem the " sun disk " , its convex shape in Egyptian relief sculpture suggests that the Egyptians may have envisioned it as a sphere . The emblem often appears atop the heads of solar @-@ associated deities , including Ra himself , to indicate their links with the sun . The disk could even be regarded as Ra 's physical form . At other times , the sun god , in various forms , is depicted inside the disk shape as if enclosed within it . The Egyptians often described the sun 's movement across the sky as the movement of a barque carrying Ra and his entourage of other gods , and the sun disk can either be equated with this solar barque or depicted containing the barque inside it . The disk is often called Ra 's " daughter " in Egyptian texts .

As the sun , the Eye of Ra is a source of heat and light , and it is associated with fire and flames . It is also equated with the red light that appears before sunrise , and with the morning star that precedes and signals the sun 's arrival .

= = = Procreative = = =

The eyes of Egyptian deities , although they are aspects of the power of the gods who own them , sometimes take active roles in mythology , possibly because the word for " eye " in Egyptian , jrt , resembles another word meaning " do " or " act " . The presence of the feminine suffix -t in jrt may explain why these independent eyes were thought of as female . The Eye of Ra , in particular , is deeply involved in the sun god 's creative actions .

In Egyptian mythology , the sun 's emergence from the horizon each morning is likened to Ra 's

birth , an event that revitalizes him and the order of the cosmos . Ra emerges from the body of a goddess who represents the sky ? usually Nut . Depictions of the rising sun often show Ra as a child contained within the solar disk . In this context , the Egyptologist Lana Troy suggests , the disk may represent the womb from which he is born or the placenta that emerges with him . The Eye of Ra can also take the form of a goddess , which according to Troy is both the mother who brings Ra forth from her womb and a sister who is born alongside him like a placenta . Ra was sometimes said to enter the body of the sky goddess at sunset , impregnating her and setting the stage for his rebirth at sunrise . Consequently , the Eye , as womb and mother of the child form of Ra , is also the consort of the adult Ra . The adult Ra , likewise , is the father of the Eye who is born at sunrise . The Eye is thus a feminine counterpart to Ra 's masculine creative power , part of a broader Egyptian tendency to express creation and renewal through the metaphor of sexual reproduction . Ra gives rise to his daughter , the Eye , who in turn gives rise to him , her son , in a cycle of constant regeneration .

Ra is not unique in this relationship with the Eye . Other solar gods may interact in a similar way with the numerous goddesses associated with the Eye . Hathor , a goddess of the sky , the sun , and fertility , is often called the Eye of Ra , and she also has a relationship with Horus , who also has solar connections , that is similar to the relationship between Ra and his Eye . Hathor can even be called " the Eye of Horus " ? one of several ways in which the distinctions between the two eyes are blurred . The Eye can also act as an extension of and companion to Atum , a creator god closely associated with Ra . Sometimes this eye is called the Eye of Atum , although at other times the Eye of Ra and the Eye of Atum are distinct , with Ra 's Eye the sun and Atum 's Eye the moon .

A myth about the Eye , known from allusions in the Coffin Texts from the Middle Kingdom ( c . 2055 ? 1650 BC ) and a more complete account in the Bremner @-@ Rhind Papyrus from the Late Period ( 664 ? 332 BC ) , demonstrates the Eye 's close connection with Ra and Atum and her ability to act independently . The myth takes place before the creation of the world , when the solar creator ? either Ra or Atum ? is alone . Shu and Tefnut , the children of this creator god , have drifted away from him in the waters of Nu , the chaos that exists before creation in Egyptian belief , so he sends out his Eye to find them . The Eye returns with Shu and Tefnut but is infuriated to see that the creator has developed a new eye , which has taken her place . The creator god appeases her by giving her an exalted position on his forehead in the form of the uraeus , the emblematic cobra that appears frequently in Egyptian art , particularly on royal crowns . The equation of the Eye with the uraeus and the crown underlines the Eye 's role as a companion to Ra and to the pharaoh , with whom Ra is linked . Upon the return of Shu and Tefnut , the creator god is said to have shed tears , although whether they are prompted by happiness at his children 's return or distress at the Eye 's anger is unclear . These tears give rise to the first humans . In a variant of the story , it is the Eye that weeps instead , so the Eye is the progenitor of humankind .

The tears of the Eye of Ra are part of a more general connection between the Eye and moisture . In addition to representing the morning star , the Eye can also be equated with the star Sothis ( Sirius ) . Every summer , at the start of the Egyptian year , Sothis ' heliacal rising , in which the star rose above the horizon just before the sun itself , heralded the start of the Nile inundation , which watered and fertilized Egypt 's farmland . Therefore , the Eye of Ra precedes and represents the floodwaters that restore fertility to all of Egypt .

= = = Aggressive and protective = = =

The Eye of Ra also represents the destructive aspect of Ra 's power : the heat of the sun , which in Egypt can be so harsh that the Egyptians sometimes likened it to arrows shot by a god to destroy evildoers . The uraeus is a logical symbol for this dangerous power . In art , the sun disk image often incorporates one or two uraei coiled around it . The solar uraeus represents the Eye as a dangerous force that encircles the sun god and guards against his enemies , spitting flames like venom . Four uraei are sometimes said to surround Ra 's barque . Collectively called " Hathor of the Four Faces " , they represent the Eye 's vigilance in all directions .

Ra 's enemies are the forces of chaos , which threaten maat , the cosmic order that he creates .

They include both humans who spread disorder and cosmic powers like Apep , the embodiment of chaos , whom Ra and the gods who accompany him in his barque are said to combat every night . The malevolent gaze of Apep 's own Eye is a potent weapon against Ra , and Ra 's Eye is one of the few powers that can counteract it . Some unclear passages in the Coffin Texts suggest that Apep was thought capable of injuring or stealing the Eye of Ra from its master during the combat . In other texts , the Eye 's fiery breath assists in Apep 's destruction . This apotropaic function of the Eye of Ra is another point of overlap with the Eye of Horus , which was similarly believed to ward off evil .

The Eye 's aggression may even extend to deities who , unlike Apep , are not regarded as evil . Evidence in early funerary texts suggests that at dawn , Ra was believed to swallow the multitude of other gods , who in this instance are equated with the stars , which vanish at sunrise and reappear at sunset . In doing so , he absorbs the gods ' power , thereby renewing his own vitality , before spitting them out again at nightfall . The solar Eye is said to assist in this effort , slaughtering the gods for Ra to eat . The red light of dawn therefore signifies the blood produced by this slaughter .

In the myth called the Destruction of Mankind , related in the Book of the Heavenly Cow from the New Kingdom ( c . 1550 ? 1070 BC ) , Ra uses the Eye as a weapon against humans who have rebelled against his authority . He sends the Eye ? Hathor , in her aggressive manifestation as the lioness goddess Sekhmet ? to massacre them . She does so , but after the first day of her rampage , Ra decides to prevent her from killing all humanity . He orders that beer be dyed red and poured out over the land . The Eye goddess drinks the beer , mistaking it for blood , and in her inebriated state returns to Ra without noticing her intended victims . Through her drunkenness she has been returned to a harmless form . Nadine Guilhou suggests that the Eye 's rampage alludes to the heat and widespread disease of the Egyptian summer , and in particular to the epagomenal days before the new year , which were regarded as unlucky . The red beer might then refer to the red silt that accompanied the subsequent Nile flood , which was believed to end the period of misfortune .

The solar Eye 's volatile nature can make her difficult even for her master to control . In the myth of the " Distant Goddess " , a motif with several variants , the Eye goddess becomes upset with Ra and runs away from him . In some versions the provocation for her anger seems to be her replacement with a new eye after the search for Shu and Tefnut , but in others her rebellion seems to take place after the world is fully formed . Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard @-@ Meeks interpret these events as the Eye 's reaction to being deceived by Ra after her slaughter of humanity , whereas Carolyn Graves @-@ Brown sees it as a later elaboration of the myth related in the Book of the Heavenly Cow . With the solar Eye gone , Ra is vulnerable to his enemies and bereft of a large part of his power . The Eye 's absence and Ra 's weakened state may be a mythological reference to solar eclipses . Moreover , it may be part of a larger motif in Egyptian myth in which a god 's Eye is lost and then restored with the help of another deity . This motif also applies to the Eye of Horus , which in the Osiris myth is torn out and must be returned or healed so that Horus may regain his strength .

Meanwhile , the Eye wanders in a distant land ? Nubia , Libya , or Punt . She takes the form of a wild feline , as dangerous and uncontrolled as the forces of chaos that she is meant to subdue . To restore order , one of the gods goes out to retrieve her . In one version , known from scattered allusions , the warrior god Anhur searches for the Eye , which takes the form of the goddess Mehit , using his skills as a hunter . In other accounts , it is Shu who searches for Tefnut , who in this case represents the Eye rather than an independent deity . Thoth , who often serves as a messenger and conciliator in the Egyptian pantheon , can also seek the wandering goddess . His role in retrieving the Eye of Ra parallels his role in the Osiris myth , in which he heals or returns Horus ' lost Eye . In a Late Period papyrus dubbed " The Myth of the Eye of the Sun " , Thoth persuades the Eye of Ra to return through a combination of lectures , enticement , and entertaining stories . His efforts are not uniformly successful ; at one point , the goddess is so enraged by Thoth 's words that she transforms from a relatively benign cat into a fire @-@ breathing lioness , making Thoth jump .

When the goddess is at last placated , the retrieving god escorts her back to Egypt . Her return marks the beginning of the inundation and the new year . The pacified Eye deity is once more a procreative consort for the sun god , or , in some versions of the story , for the god who brings her

back . Mehit becomes the consort of Anhur , Tefnut is paired with Shu , and Thoth 's spouse is sometimes Nehemtawy , a minor goddess associated with this pacified form of the Eye . In many cases , the Eye goddess and her consort then produce a divine child who becomes the new sun god . The goddess ' transformation from hostile to peaceful is a key step in the renewal of the sun god and the kingship that he represents .

The dual nature of the Eye goddess shows , as Graves @-@ Brown puts it , that " the Egyptians saw a double nature to the feminine , which encompassed both extreme passions of fury and love . " This same view of femininity is found in texts describing human women , such as the Instruction of Ankhsheshonq , which says a man 's wife is like a cat when he can keep her happy and like a lioness when he cannot .

= = Manifestations = =

The characteristics of the Eye of Ra were an important part of the Egyptian conception of female divinity in general , and the Eye was equated with many goddesses , ranging from very prominent deities like Hathor to obscure ones like Mestjet , a lion goddess who appears in only one known inscription .

The Egyptians associated many gods who took felid form with the sun , and many lioness deities , like Sekhmet , Menhit , and Tefnut , were equated with the Eye . Bastet was depicted as both a domestic cat and a lioness , and with these two forms she could represent both the peaceful and violent aspects of the Eye . Yet another goddess of the solar Eye was Mut , the consort of the god Amun , who was associated with Ra . Mut was first called the Eye of Ra in the late New Kingdom , and the aspects of her character that were related to the Eye grew increasingly prominent over time . Mut , too , could appear in both leonine and cat form .

Likewise , cobra goddesses often represented the Eye . Among them was Wadjet , a tutelary deity of Lower Egypt who was closely associated with royal crowns and the protection of the king . Other Eye @-@ associated cobra goddesses include the fertility deity Renenutet , the magician goddess Weret @-@ hekau , and Meretseger , the divine protector of the burial grounds near the city of Thebes .

The deities associated with the Eye were not restricted to feline and serpent forms . Hathor 's usual animal form is a cow , as is that of the closely linked Eye goddess Mehet @-@ Weret . Nekhbet , a vulture goddess , was closely connected with Wadjet , the Eye , and the crowns of Egypt . Many Eye goddesses appear mainly in human form , including Neith , a sometimes warlike deity sometimes said to be the mother of the sun god , and Satet and Anuket , who were linked with the Nile cataracts and the inundation . Other such goddesses include Sothis , the deified form of the star of the same name , and Maat , the personification of cosmic order , who was connected with the Eye because she was said to be the daughter of Ra . Even Isis , who is usually the companion of Osiris rather than Ra , or Astarte , a deity of fertility and warfare who was imported from Canaan rather than native to Egypt , could be equated with the solar Eye .

Frequently , two Eye @-@ related goddesses appear together , representing different aspects of the Eye . The juxtaposed deities often stand for the procreative and aggressive sides of the Eye 's character , as Hathor and Sekhmet sometimes do . Wadjet and Nekhbet can stand for Lower and Upper Egypt , respectively , along with the Red Crown and White Crown that represent the two lands . Similarly , Mut , whose main cult center was in Thebes , sometimes served as an Upper Egyptian counterpart of Sekhmet , who was worshipped in Memphis in Lower Egypt .

These goddesses and their iconographies frequently mingled . Many combinations such as Hathor @-@ Tefnut , Mut @-@ Sekhmet , and Bastet @-@ Sothis appear in Egyptian texts . Wadjet could sometimes be depicted with a lion head rather than that of a cobra , Nekhbet could take on cobra form as a counterpart of Wadjet , and a great many of these goddesses wore the sun disk on their heads , sometimes with the addition of a uraeus or the cow horns from Hathor 's typical headdress . Beginning in the Middle Kingdom , the hieroglyph for a uraeus could be used as a logogram or determinative for the word " goddess " in any context , because virtually any goddess could be linked with the Eye 's complex set of attributes .

= = Worship = =

The Eye of Ra was invoked in many areas of Egyptian religion , and its mythology was incorporated into the worship of many of the goddesses identified with it .

The Eye 's flight from and return to Egypt was a common feature of temple ritual in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods ( 305 BC ? AD 390 ) , when the new year and the Nile flood that came along with it were celebrated as the return of the Eye after her wanderings in foreign lands . The Egyptians built shrines along the river containing images of animals and dwarfs rejoicing at the goddess ' arrival . Scholars do not know how well developed the myth and the corresponding rituals were in earlier times . One of the oldest examples is Mut 's return to her home temple in Thebes , which was celebrated there annually as early as the New Kingdom . At the temple of Montu at Medamud , in a festival that may date back to the late Middle Kingdom , it was Montu 's consort Raettawy who was equated with Hathor and the Eye of Ra . The return of this Eye goddess , in fertile , moisture @-@ bearing form , set the stage for her subsequent marriage to Montu and the birth of their mythological child , a form of Horus . The temple 's new year festival celebrated her homecoming with drinking and dancing , paralleling the goddess ' inebriated state after her pacification . In other cities , two goddesses were worshipped as the belligerent and peaceful forms of the Eye , as with Ayet and Nehemtawy at Herakleopolis or Satet and Anuket at Aswan .

In another temple ritual , the pharaoh played a ceremonial game in honor of the Eye goddesses Hathor , Sekhmet , or Tefnut , in which he struck a ball symbolizing the Eye of Apep with a club made from a type of wood that was said to have sprung from the Eye of Ra . The ritual represents , in a playful form , the battle of Ra 's Eye with its greatest foe .

The concept of the solar Eye as mother , consort , and daughter of a god was incorporated into royal ideology . Pharaohs took on the role of Ra , and their consorts were associated with the Eye and the goddesses equated with it . The sun disks and uraei that were incorporated into queens ' headdresses during the New Kingdom reflect this mythological tie . The priestesses who acted as ceremonial " wives " of particular gods during the Third Intermediate Period ( c . 1059 ? 653 BC ) , such as the God 's Wife of Amun , had a similar relationship with the gods they served . Amenhotep III even dedicated a temple at Sedeinga in Nubia to his wife , Tiye , as a manifestation of the Eye of Ra , paralleling the temple to Amenhotep himself at nearby Soleb .

The violent form of the Eye was also invoked in religious ritual and symbolism as an agent of protection . The uraeus on royal and divine headdresses alludes to the role of the Eye goddesses as protectors of gods and kings . For similar reasons , uraei appear in rows atop shrines and other structures , surrounding and symbolically guarding them against hostile powers . Many temple rituals called upon Eye goddesses to defend the temple precinct or the resident deity . Often , the texts of such rituals specifically mention a set of four defensive uraei . These uraei are sometimes identified with various combinations of goddesses associated with the Eye , but they can also be seen as manifestations of " Hathor of the Four Faces " , whose protection of the solar barque is extended in these rituals to specific places on earth .

The Eye of Ra could also be invoked to defend ordinary people . Some apotropaic amulets in the shape of the Eye of Horus bear the figure of a goddess on one side . These amulets are most likely an allusion to the connection between the Eye of Horus and the Eye of Ra , invoking their power for personal protection . In addition , certain magical spells from the New Kingdom involve the placement of clay model uraei around a house or a room , invoking the protection of the solar uraeus as in the temple rituals . These uraei are intended to ward off evil spirits and the nightmares that they were believed to cause , or other enemies of the house 's occupant . The spell says the models have " fire in their mouths " . Models like those in the spells have been found in the remains of ancient Egyptian towns , and they include bowls in front of their mouths where fuel could be burnt , although the known examples do not show signs of burning . Whether literal or metaphorical , the fire in the cobras ' mouths , like the flames spat by the Eye of Ra , was meant to dispel the nocturnal darkness and burn the dangerous beings that move within it .

The Eye 's importance extends to the afterlife as well . Egyptian funerary texts associate deceased

souls with Ra in his nightly travels through the Duat , the realm of the dead , and with his rebirth at dawn . In these texts the Eye and its various manifestations often appear , protecting and giving birth to the deceased as they do for Ra . A spell in the Coffin Texts states that Bastet , as the Eye , illuminates the Duat like a torch , allowing the deceased to pass safely through its depths .