The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt
Half-title: The divine one of the heavens and her supporting deities. Outermost shrine of Tutankhamun, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Title page: Ramesses I before the enthroned Khupri and Osiris – personifications of the solar and chthonic aspects of the Egyptian view of the cosmos. From the tomb of Ramesses I, Valley of the Kings, western Thebes.

Contents pages: Caryatid pillars in the mortuary temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel associate the great monarch with the god Osiris through the king’s stance and insignia.

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Once Egypt had been united and a central government established, the cult of the living king seems to have been developed in addition to the cults of local and national deities. This fact tends to be taken for granted, but we know very little about how this situation came to be, and if or to what extent the early king was viewed as divine in his lifetime. Even in the later historical periods when evidence is clearer and more plentiful, there is disagreement among scholars as to the degree to which the Egyptian king was regarded as human, divine, or as both.

**Kingship and divinity**

That the living Egyptian king was viewed as divine certainly appears possible. In representations the king is depicted far larger than his human subjects and on the same scale as the gods themselves. Not only were monarchs said to be 'like' (Egyptian nsw) or the 'image of' (Egyptian tnt, or tjt) various deities, but the word netcher or 'god' was also frequently used as an epithet of kings. The formal titulary of the Egyptian king also spelled out his relationship with several key deities, indicating that he was not only viewed as the son of Re during his lifetime (from the 4th dynasty on), but also as the living manifestation or image of the falcon god Horus (perhaps from the beginning of the Dynastic Period). There are other important lines of evidence for this point of view. The myth of the king's divine birth, for example, was developed in the New Kingdom but was apparently not something invented by Hatshepsut, as is sometimes stated, and seems to have existed since at least Middle Kingdom times. Even before this, the underlying purpose of the complex genealogy of the gods constructed by the priests of Heliopolis may have been as much to establish the divine lineage and nature of the king as to establish the order of creation, a fact seen by Rudolf Anthes as early as the middle of the last century. As a result of this type of evidence

Henri Frankfort, *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, believed that this was the new god, a god of the accession period.

On the other hand, the conclusion that the king provided of the scepter was regarded as one of the sacred objects, and was also deemed the manifestation of the king in his role as the ruler of the world. The scepter was also considered to be a symbol of the authority of the king, and was also regarded as a sign of the king's divinity.

Georges F. Dreyfus, *The Pharaohs and Their Mystical Kingship*, notes that the scepter was held by the royal figure and was sometimes depicted as a phallic symbol. This was to signify the invincibility of the king and his divine nature. The scepter was also believed to be a symbol of the king's divinity and was sometimes depicted as a double scepter, which was regarded as a sign of the king's immortality.

**A divine creation**

The truth of these views is still the subject of scholarly debate.
Henri Frankfort, in his important study *Kingship and the Gods*, and a good many other scholars, have believed that the pharaoh's rites of coronation and accession elevated him to identity with the gods.

On the other hand, this may not be the only conclusion that can be drawn from the sources which provide our information on Egyptian kingship. There is no doubt whatsoever that the living king was regarded as subservient to the gods and that in theory, and to some degree in practice, every king acted as their servant in the enactment of temple rituals. The evidence considered above may also be viewed in different ways. The frequent identification of the king with various deities could often be little more than hyperbole. Marie-Ange Bonhême has also recently pointed out that while the king's formal names may indicate an aspect of divinity in the monarch, they do not clarify the 'degree of divinity' which is involved. As early as 1869, Georges Posener showed that the image of the living pharaoh as a god-king is perhaps exaggerated by the royal and religious sources which aim to heighten the divine aspect of kingship. In popular literature and texts the Egyptian king is hardly portrayed as a god. He cannot work the miracles of his wise men and is certainly neither omniscient nor invulnerable in the way we would expect if he were truly regarded as divine. From this perspective it would seem that it was not the king who was honoured as a god but the incarnate power of the gods that was honoured in the king.

**A divine duality**

The truth is probably to be found in a balance of these views. From the human perspective the Egyptian king was viewed as one of the gods—he is called such and depicted along with other gods in divine scenes. On the other hand, it could be said that from a divine perspective the king was still...
human and was, of course, subject to human frailties and mortality. This dual nature of the living king—human and divine—seems to be implicit in the serekh, the device in which the king’s name was written from early times (showing the god Horus atop the royal palace), and in the royal titulary which was drawn up at the king’s accession from Middle Kingdom times. The nesut-bit or ‘two ladies’ title preceded the king’s formal throne name, and has long been interpreted as signifying only rulership over Upper and Lower Egypt. But it may refer, in fact, to the divine identity of the king in general (nesut) and the current human holder of the office in the line of kingly succession (bit). Beginning with Siegfried Morenz, a number of scholars have shown that the dual nature of the king may also be seen in contrasting nesut with another Egyptian word relating to kingship—hem, usually translated ‘majesty’. The first word, nesut, refers to the divine power held by the king and used in the exercise of kingly roles, whereas the second word, hem, really refers to the idea of the individual in whom the divine power is incarnate. These two terms were sometimes used together (hem en nesut) meaning something like ‘the incarnation of (divine) kingship’.

Accepting this duality amounts to a view of Egyptian monarchical ideology which understands the king as being in effect both human and divine during his lifetime. This apparent contradiction would have hardly been seen as problematic by the ancient Egyptians, whose theological systems contained many such enigmas. The apparent contradiction was resolved practically in the duality of the king’s role—in essence, the nature of the Egyptian king depended upon the situation. The king represented the gods to his people as a god, and also the people of Egypt to the gods as a human. Theologically neither the divine nor the human realm could function without him.

Delified in life: Immortal in death

Despite the reign of foreign rulers, the Egyptian people declared from the very beginning that their king was divine. This was signalled in the royal decrees. Kings usually ruled for a long period of time for this concept, and an exact date for the living pharaohs. Ramesses III was the son of Amenhotep III and his reign that of Egypt’s was the longest. According to Raymond J.那一 jubilee celebrated, the king declared...
Deified in life

Despite the human-divine duality inherent in the reign of most Egyptian pharaohs there were instances when living kings do seem to have been declared fully divine within their own lifetimes. This was not the result of arbitrary theological or royal decree, however, and it seems clear that such kings usually ‘earned’ their immortality through long and successful reigns. The clearest evidence for this comes from the New Kingdom; although the exact details of the situation are not always clear, the living deification of Amenophis III and Ramesses II are relatively well attested. In the case of Amenophis III; we find that towards the end of his reign the king began the increasing solarization of Egypt’s major cults and of his own kingship. According to the reconstruction of events by Raymond Johnson and others, at the time of his Sed jubilee celebrated in the 30th year of his reign the king declared himself deified and merged with the solar disk as the Aten or as Re-Horakhty. From this time we find the king taking divine prerogatives in his representations such as those showing him with the curved beard of the gods, with the horns of Amun and wearing the lunar crescent and sun disk or presenting an offering before a statue of himself. Even here, however, the evidence of royal deification may not be what it appears on the surface. Betsy Bryan has pointed out that Amenophis may not have intended by his own deification to have transcended kingship on earth permanently and that the cultic and political uses of a divine ruler could have been limited to prescribed occasions such as the king’s Sed festival.

Representations of living deified kings in the presence of deities show a level of equality which transcends that found in normal scenes of the king among the gods. In the inner shrine of the great rock-cut temple of Abu Simbel, for example, the deified Ramesses II had four statues cut to repre-
divine son of the god Aten, others have seen him as a member of a kind of divine triad which also included his queen Nefertiti. More recently, a number of Egyptologists have pointed out what appear to be associations with traditional Egyptian solar theology even within the Amarna Period. Eugene Cruz-Uribe has shown that just as Amenophis III may have been equated with the Aten, and his queen Tiye with Harhor, complex parallels may have been promulgated which suggested the equation of the living Akhenaten with the god Shu, Khopri and other solar deities, Nefertiti with Tefnut, and possibly, a royal daughter with the goddess Maat.

(Right) Statue of a statue of Amenophis III displays the king as a god and, on its rear face, the image of the human king prostate before the god Aten. Luxor Museum.
Divine Royal Statues

Statues of Egyptian kings functioned as integral parts of divine cults, often serving as intermediaries between the people and the gods within or at the entrances to temples and also - especially in later New Kingdom times - sometimes being regarded as divine themselves. Statues such as the titanic figure of Ramesses II set up in western Thebes - which was the subject of Shelley’s poem ‘Ozymandias’ - were given special names, could own land, had their own attendant priesthoods, and were venerated as gods in their own right. A group of artifacts known as the Horbeit Stelae throw particular light on this phenomenon. The stelae, which were found in the eastern Delta near the modern Qantir, come from the region of Ramesses II’s chief Delta residence and attest to the presence of a cult of several colossal statues of the king in that area. One of these stelae (that of Seti-I-r-neh) depicts a statue of the deified Ramesses II along with the great gods Amun and Pah in a manner which makes the importance of the statue unmistakable. Another stela (that of the military commander Moso) depicts Ramesses II in a unique manner. In its lower register the stela shows a colossal seated statue of Ramesses next to a smaller figure of the king (which is apparently intended as a divine manifestation of the statue) giving gifts to Moso. The statue and its manifestation both share the same name and show the divine nature of the deified king’s image.

Of great interest for our understanding of ancient Egyptian theology are scenes which have survived to us of kings presenting sacrifices to deified statues of themselves. An example is found in the representation of Amenophis III offering to an image of himself in his temple at Soleb. Such depictions are based on the concept of dual (earthly and heavenly) roles played by the gods themselves. Beginning in the Old Kingdom we find evidence for the idea of deities being manifest both in the heavens or ‘beyond’ and in the physical sphere on earth, just as the living king was himself a manifestation of the earthly Horus as opposed to the god Horus in the heavens. Thus, a king deified in his own lifetime - within the physical sphere - could sacrifice to his own self as a deity in the spiritual sphere.

Stela of Seti-I-r-neh marks the god Aman-Re (top left) before Pah and a statue of the divine Ramesses II, ‘Monu of the Two Lands’. From Horbeit, 19th dynasty. Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim.
Deceased and Divine

While what we might call full deification occurred for some monarchs within their lifetimes, it was usually in death that this state was reached and a good deal of evidence seems to show that the deceased Egyptian king was venerated as a ‘full’ god. A number of Egyptian queens were also deified in death – including the illustrious Ahmose-Nefertari of the 18th dynasty and later queens such as Arsinoe II, Berenike II, and Cleopatra III, V, and VII of the Ptolemaic Period. Although the situation is somewhat different for deceased queens and cannot be examined in detail here, a number of similarities certainly existed between the deification of kings and queens.

Dead kings as living gods
The close relationship between the deceased king and the gods may be seen in the textual and representational evidence associated with the royal mortuary cults from early times. The Pyramid Texts clearly attempt to place the deceased king on the same level as the gods – both by directly asserting that he is a god, and by stating that he is ‘is’ Osiris, Re, or some other deity. In some cases the texts not only show the deceased king’s parity with the divine cohort, but they also stress his ascendance over the other gods, showing that he is certainly not viewed as a minor deity in the afterlife. We do not know if these assertions of the deceased king’s deity were originally statements of formally held belief or whether they represented a desired situation which was attempted through the use of the magical texts. The idea of the king’s defiled afterlife was certainly established by Old Kingdom times, however, and the same types of textual evidence are found in royal mortuary contexts throughout subsequent periods of Egyptian history. Representations of the deceased king in the presence of deities likewise indicate equality between the two from early times.

The very purpose of the royal mortuary cults seems to have been the affirmation of the deceased monarch’s divinity, yet the specific nature of that divinity must not be overlooked. A number of years ago William Murnane showed, in a study of the texts and representations of the great mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, that much of the focus of the royal mortuary cult was an ongoing reaffirmation of the king’s divine kingship rather than eternal life per se. This conclusion was expanded in later studies of other mortuary temples dating back to the Old Kingdom, and it now seems clear that in many if not all cases the stress of all these royal mortuary establishments is on the continuation of the afterlife as a relatively unaltered copy of the king’s life on earth, but with some transformations and additions. For example, the king could also acquire the powers of the sun god Ra, and there was also a transformation into the god Osiris. The latter process was envisaged as a transformation into an idealized version of the great god, however, and was probably not envisaged as an afterlife state if one’s spirit was not already in the Osiris-nized state. This transformation into the god Osiris was the case of the kings and so the Osiris cults were particularly prominent in the field of royal mortuary cults and of the temple of Osiris at Abydos.

The royal tomb
Although it is not clear how the cult of kingship was carried through the afterlife, the cult of the king, his deceased...
continuation of the king's reign on a divine level in the afterlife. It must not be forgotten that even from a relatively early date - perhaps by the end of the Old Kingdom - funerary spells for the afterlife transformation to the divine became available to other classes of society. Nobles, and later others, could also aspire to become gods in the afterlife. It is unthinkable that these individuals regarded their afterlife state to be equivalent to that of the king or the great gods. It seems far more likely that what was envisaged for both commoner and king alike was an afterlife which represented a kind of divinized state of their own social stations in life. In the case of the deceased king, there were specific associations which might be seen as elevating his position above that of his earthly reign. This is seen particularly in the concepts of the royal ancestors, and of the king as Osiris and Re.

**The royal ancestors**

Although in reality Egyptian civilization was ruled by kings of many houses and families, Egyptian kingship ideology made use of a particular fiction in the form of the 'royal ancestors'. This represented a kind of monarchical family line reaching back through the ages and linking the living king with his deceased 'forebears'. This does not mean that direct lineage was implied - in fact the official genealogies omit unorthodox or aberrant rulers such as Hatshepsut or Akhenaten. However there was a kind of continuum between the living king, his 'forebears' and, ultimately, the gods who ruled as kings at the beginning of the world.

Some kings of the past were particularly venerated. Senwosret III of the 12th dynasty, for example, was remembered for his subjugation of the region to the south of Egypt and was honoured by a small temple built by Tuthmosis III some 400 years later at el-Lessiya in Nubia. Yet less illustrious rulers were also absorbed into the ancestral tradition upon their deaths, and most were chronicled in the king-lists inscribed in temples such as that of Sethos I at Abydos, where the cartouches of past rulers received veneration and offerings. Representations at a number of sites show that the ancestors also played an important role in various royal and religious rituals. Scenes carved under Ramesses II and Ramesses III showing the harvest festival of the god Min, for example, show statues of the royal ancestors being carried before the king. The statues, which are named in these New Kingdom scenes, include Menes, the legendary first king of the united Egypt. The oldest evidence for the royal ancestors preserve no names and shows simply the...
The royal *ka* seems to have incorporated the royal ancestors, as well as the *ka* of the living king, and as such represented one aspect of the divinity of the deceased king. A particular aspect of the royal ancestors may be seen in the *ka* of the king. While the Egyptian word *ka* is usually translated as 'soul' or 'spirit' in general usage, the royal *ka* was more than just an individual spiritual 'double'. Lanny Bell, who has made detailed studies of the nature of the royal *ka*, has shown that it embraced the royal ancestors as well as the living king and was central to the Egyptians' concept of kingly accession. As Bell has written, the aspect of divinity attained by the living Egyptian king occurred only when he became one with the royal *ka* at the climax of the coronation ceremony. The royal *ka* was, in this sense, the symbolic and spiritual point of interface between the king and his deified ancestors.

**The king as Osiris**

Although the Egyptian sources equate the deceased king with several deities, there is a clear and constant emphasis throughout most of Egyptian history on the association of the king with the netherworld god Osiris. This was doubtless because the role of kingship fitted the Osirian mythology particularly well. Every pharaoh ceased to function as the earthly Horus—son of Osiris—and therefore upon death and was identified by virtue of death with the deceased Osiris. He thus stood as predecessor in relation to the next living king as the mythical Osiris did to Horus. According to this symbolic metaphor, by becoming one with Osiris the dead king also became ruler of the afterlife region—switching realms, as it were, from rule over the living to rule over the dead.

As time progressed royal mortuary iconography was increasingly adapted to this equation of the dead king with Osiris. We find this manifested in dozens of ways. Osiride insignia such as the crook and flail were placed on New Kingdom royal coffins, showing continued afterlife rulership with Osiris despite the absence of an earthly crown in the king's afterlife representations. Also, the figures of Isis and Nephthys were placed at either end of the royal coffin or sarcophagus to protect the deceased for the decrepitude of the netherworld, and at the tomb of the deceased king. In the representation of the king with the Osiride cult, the funerary chambers, hall of judgment, and pyramidion (to be viewed simultaneously), the king is Osiris.

**The pyramid as a temple**

Although the pyramid was built for Osiris upon the cult site of the sun god Re. The pyramid is an Osiride association. It is the Pyramid Temple of Osiris, parallel to the Osiride Pyramid Temple of the netherworld god Osiris, who was held to be the creator of the world and upon death was associated with the Osiride cult. The Re' could further be identified with the Osirian cult of Hathor in the afterlife.
The deceased king as Osiris upon death was represented in the tombs of the New Kingdom as Osiris. This manifestation was often depicted with the crook and flail symbols of Osiris, which were also present in the royal coffins. The king would be shown in the role of Osiris, with the sun god Re, and the goddess Isis. This imagery highlights the king's connection to the afterlife, as he was believed to join Osiris and Re in the realm of the gods.

The king as Re

Although the Egyptian king became one with Osiris upon death, he was also fused with the sun god Re. This idea is at least as old as the Osiride association and is strongly attested from the Pyramid Texts onward. The situation actually parallels that described between the king and the netherworld god. As the living monarch was held to be the son of Osiris but fused with the deity upon death, so the living king known as the 'Son of Re' could fuse with his father Re upon his entry into the afterlife. Deified queens were also frequently associated with the goddess Hathor (or later Isis-Hathor) who was seen as the daughter of Re.

While the iconography associated with the body of the deceased king – i.e., the mummy, coffin, and sarcophagus – was associated primarily with Osiris, the imagery of royal tomb decoration as seen throughout New Kingdom monuments is primarily linked with the king's assimilation with the sun god. This assimilation or fusion involves the king's cyclic travel with Re into, through, and out of the netherworld regions in continuing renewal and rebirth. The imagery of solar assimilation may be varied, however. On the one hand the god-king is said to ride alongside Re in the celestial boat of the sun god and to act as a judge in the realm of Re, while on the other hand he is clearly said to be one with the solar god. Both are depicted iconographically, the latter when the name of Rameses III is written within a solar image in that king's tomb. In either case, however, the deceased king's divinity is clear.