Horus Encyclopedia Article

Horus

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HORUS. In ancient Egypt there were originally several gods known by the name Horus, but the best known and most important from the beginning of the historic period was the son of Osiris and Isis who was identified with the king of Egypt. According to myth, Osiris, who assumed the rulership of the earth shortly after its creation, was slain by his jealous brother, Seth. The sister-wife of Osiris, Isis, who collected the pieces of her dismembered husband and revived him, also conceived his son and avenger, Horus. Horus fought with Seth, and, despite the loss of one eye in the contest, was successful in avenging the death of his father and in becoming his legitimate successor. Osiris then became king of the dead and Horus king of the living, this transfer being renewed at every change of earthly rule. The myth of divine kingship probably elevated the position of the god as much as it did that of the king. In the fourth dynasty, the king, the living god, may have been one of the greatest gods as well, but by the fifth dynasty the supremacy of the cult of Re, the sun god, was accepted even by the kings. The Horus-king was now also "son of Re." This was made possible mythologically by personifying the entire older genealogy of Horus (the Heliopolitan ennead) as the goddess Hathor, "house of Horus," who was also the spouse of Re and mother of Horus.

Horus was usually represented as a falcon, and one view of him was as a great sky god whose outstretched wings filled the heavens; his sound eye was the sun and his injured eye the moon. Another portrayal of him particularly popular in the Late Period, was as a human child suckling at the breast of his mother, Isis. The two principal cult centers for the worship of Horus were at Bekhdet in the north, where very little survives, and at Idfu in the south, which has a very large and well-preserved temple dating from the Ptolemaic period. The earlier myths involving Horus, as well as the ritual performed there, are recorded at Idfu.

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