

Section 8 – The Proliferation of Deity

The Goddess in Egypt

Egypt was a strange country, full of contradictions. Long and thin, it depended entirely on the narrow fertile strip along the banks of the Nile. The river flooded every year, soaking the soil and depositing alluvium, rich in loam and nutrients.¹⁸⁰ The country was divided into northern and southern kingdoms, and their agricultural wealth supported one of the greatest civilisations of the ancient world.¹

In Egypt, there were many representations of the Goddess: Aset (Isis), Bastet, Hathor, Ma'at, Nekhbet, Nephthys, Nut, Sekhmet, Selkhet, Taweret, Tefnut, Uadjet and more. These are cognate to similar deities in the Sumerian pantheon, which points to a common source. From our point of view, the most interesting is the one the Egyptians called Aset. She is better known by her Greek name: Isis.²

Aset/Isis adds something that Inanna never had, the role and image of the nursing Mother. Inanna is a goddess of fertility rather than of birth and motherhood, and while the two are closely related they are not quite the same. We do not see Inanna as a mother until much later, by which time she had become the Babylonian Ishtar, and even then it is a limited role.

The Egyptians had a Great Mother of their own. Nut, the goddess of the Sky, was born from Shu (Air) and Tefnut (Moisture), and was the sister/wife of Geb (Earth). Her star-covered body stretched across the heavens, and her arms and legs were the pillars that held up the sky.

In an interesting parallel to Ki and An being separated by Enlil, many images show Nut and Geb being held apart by the Air god, Shu.³ Nut's name, in hieroglyphs, contains the symbol for a pot, which is also a symbol for the womb.⁴ Nut swallows the sun, Ra, every night and gives birth to him in the morning. The movement of the sun – and, therefore, time itself – is thus under the Goddess' control, a meme that we have seen previously. By the time the great civilisation of Egypt evolved, Nut had already become remote, just as, in Sumer, Ki/Ninhursag had. The divestment of the Great Mother's powers so that they could be given to new deities was well under way by this stage.

¹ 'Kingdoms' because the Egyptians did not use the term 'Pharaoh' to describe their kings; that is a Hebrew word.

² Ions, Veronica. *Egyptian Mythology*. Paul Hamlyn, 1968.

³ Campbell, Joseph. *The Mythic Image*. Princeton University Press. 1974.

⁴ Pots, wombs, motherhood and women are strongly associated in many early cultures.