

Gabrielle Goodwin, University of Idaho, undergraduate student, “Changes in the Relationship Between the Horus and Seth: Set-ting the Score”

Abstract: As can be seen in Ancient Egyptian mythology, the gods Horus and Set had a rocky relationship that was most often represented as bitter rivalry. They both contended for the throne left empty by Osiris after his death with Horus eventually emerging victorious. Rather than remaining static in narrative and character, this is a story consistently tweaked across the fabric of Ancient Egyptian history. The Horus and Set of the Archaic Period are very different gods from the Horus and Set of the Late Period though the base story remains the same. By looking at the material and visual culture related to these two gods period by period, a pattern of the changes begins to emerge. These material and visual culture artifacts show just how closely the changing relations of eternal beings matched the ever-changing social context of the ancient present. The two who were once equals in power though unique in responsibility and jurisdiction became rivals unbalanced in might and notoriety as Egypt faced foreign invasions and Pharaonic difficulties. Set, god of foreigners and chaos, suffered from a series of social made mythological setbacks that blackened his reputation beyond recovery and started his decline into obscurity. Horus, in contrast, rose with every period until his honored position in the New Kingdom cemented his permanent prestige. Ancient Egyptian history mirrored their mythological contendings and ended with Horus on the throne.

Changes in the Relationship Between the Horus and Seth: *Set-ting* the Score

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Undergraduate¹**Introduction and Framework**

Several key pairings of Ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses find themselves immortalized together. Geb and Nut with their embodiment of the sky and earth. Osiris as the favored king that was tricked and only regained a throne thanks to the loving and dedicated actions of his wife Isis. These relationships are painted and sculpted across Ancient Egypt without much change era to era. Yet, one of the main pairings of the Ancient Egyptian gods find themselves with dynamic depictions that match the social changes happening in the world of mortals. Unlike the previous god and goddess groups, Horus and Seth are constantly dancing on the fine line between outright hatred and polite animosity. Although Horus and Seth's relations through the Old to early Late Period can be easily seen and tracked, the material and visual culture shows just how closely the changing relations of eternal beings matched the ever-changing social context of the ancient present.

Although the antics and depictions of the Ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses were immortalized, they were hardly set in limestone. In Vincent Arieh Tobin's *Mytho-Theology in Ancient Egypt*, he begins by explaining the gods and goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon as "an attempt to give concrete expression to an abstract reality"² or as anthropomorphic shades of concepts constantly in study and revolving. These concepts were then followed by a population that both understood and encouraged a "multiplicity of answers"³ in their faith and belief system. This leads, he argues, to the wide spectrum of explanations and roles we have and see Ancient Egyptian deities function in. It is a correlation of order in chaos, chaos in order, and Ma'at that keeps the stability and balance between wildly different forces. This impacted the contemporary world in which the mythologies were produced because although Egyptian mythology primarily concerned itself with eternity, the present and eternity were balanced -- just as chaos and order.⁴ Rather than thinking of the Egyptian gods and goddesses as being determined by set personalities, one can focus instead on how Egyptian gods and goddesses might be similar to a roleplaying character sheet. They have their stats, their basic backstory, and a name but how one moves forward with that character will differ based on experience, location, time, and individual preference.

Egyptologist David P. Silverman in his section of *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* wryly remarks that "the Egyptians...had no problem relating their beliefs on the subject, nor were they

reluctant to record their versions...some of which conflicted with others".⁵ While there was some general consistency provided by the roleplaying character sheet of mytho-theological framework, it is important to understand that the gods and goddesses were forever changing in their relationships and personal situations.⁶ The Horus of the New Kingdom was markedly different from the Horus of the Old. It would be highly unlikely to find gross contradictions in title or in image, but the beauty of this style of mytho-theological presentation is that it allowed many gods and goddesses to have complex dual characteristics and behaviors. For Horus and Seth, whose own interpretations differ greatly from one period to another, it is important to look at exactly what the base character sheet for them looks like as depicted by material and visual culture of the time.

The base character sheet of Horus can be easily understood by looking at his presence in the material and visual culture starting around 2575 BCE in the Old Kingdom. Likewise, it can be summed up with one word: dominating. Horus, god of kingship and the sky, proudly claims his position as one of the most powerful and important gods of the Ancient Egyptian pantheon. His likeness was echoed everywhere from the grim lines of the Pharaohs⁷ in their courts to tiny amulets bearing his all watching and protective eye. One such example from the early part of the Third Intermediate Period⁸ shows a small Eye of Horus amulet meant for protection and recovery.⁹ Horus has carved his mark and made sure that his name will be forever remembered. He is the heir of Osiris in multiple wall paintings, beloved child of Isis in statues, the darling nephew to Nepytis in exalted prose, and the permanent rival to his uncle Seth everywhere. Whether standing in equality across from him at the crowning of a new pharaoh -- or locked in fierce transformed battle -- Horus often finds himself matched with Seth on wall reliefs, in temple statuary, and in word. Yet Horus is able to also escape from this relation to stand on his own two feet as a ruler in his own right. This is the character framework that major players in each of these major periods had to work with as they utilized Horus for their own benefit.

Seth's basic framework is both simple and complex. Seth, underrepresented in every fashion of material and visual depictions when compared to his nephew, is the god of violent desert storms, foreigners, and reconciled disorder. He stands in near complete opposition to the goddess Ma'at: matching her "order, balance, harmony, justice, and truth" with "storms...chaos, evil, and confusion".¹⁰ One such early depiction is from the 2nd dynasty¹¹ above the name of the Pharaoh Peribsen on a clay jar seal found at his tomb.¹² Seth takes pride in his very prevalently depicted and positive position as the protector of Ra as he crosses the sky and daily defeats Apis the Chaos Serpent. Yet he truly finds his fame in the place he would least like to find it: in the depictions of his relationship with Horus. The death of Osiris is laid at his feet: despite this murder of his brother, Seth is still in line for the now vacant throne. This where the contentions between Horus and himself truly begin and where Seth makes an even more infamous name for himself.

These are the basic depictions of Horus and Seth in antiquity that form the individual frameworks used to track their relationship with each other. Horus as the favored son that will bring order and Seth as the unmoored uncle that brought chaos. Using this framework, major players from periods such as the Second

Intermediate were able to solve the problems of contemporary succession by mooring Seth in rightful kingship in a mirror of their own situations. In the same way that they used this built-in way to legitimize their rule, Pharaohs of the New Kingdom would use that framework to villainize them. Present and eternity were linked just as chaos and order were linked, tracking these interpersonal relationships between the two gods that best represented these dual natures uses the eternities to depict the attitudes of the ancient present.

A Historic Introduction to Their Roles: A Bit Older than the Old Kingdom

One of the earliest traces found of Seth and Horus depicting contradictory but equal stances comes from the Egyptian Archaic Period that ran from around 3100 to 2686 BCE -- predating the Old Kingdom by a little over a century. Also known as the Early Dynastic Period, it was at this time that the concept of kingship aligned with the gods in order to give credence to the new ruling class. Against much opposition from the culturally distinct peoples of Upper and Lower Egypt¹³, Pharaoh Menes successfully managed to unite the two halves through conquest of Lower Egypt around 2925 BCE and founded the city of Memphis to act as his royal seat. Historically, he is marked as having celebrated this victory by creating the double crown that meshed the two disparate crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt into one symbol of ultimate power.

Also known by its two Ancient Egyptian names of *pschent* and *shmty*, the double crown had both practical and ideological use as an easily identifiable sign of rulership. A sign of rulership and symbol of combination that extended to the gods that had previously held sway in the two kingdoms. In particular, the name of *shmty* as translated means 'the two powerful ones'.¹⁴ The *hedjet* of Upper Egypt¹⁵ was the crown of Horus and worn by the southern kings while the *deshret* of Lower Egypt¹⁶ was the crown of Seth and worn by the northern kings. This color-coding of the two gods continued as the years progressed with white representing Horus and red representing Seth: white for order and red for the chaos. Specifically, red as the opposite to white as red represented the violent and dangerous red sands of Lower Egypt.

This can be seen depicted on the Narmer Palette of the Pharaoh Narmer¹⁷ dating from the beginning of the Egyptian Archaic Period around 3100 BCE. Pharaoh Narmer, crowned king of Upper Egypt, wears the white crown of Horus as he subjugates the people of Lower Egypt -- the king who bears the red crown of Seth is shown on the flipside in majestic disgrace. Horus presides and further joins in on the subjugation. Although Horus is shown to be victorious over Seth, as Seth himself does not appear, the disgraced king is still depicted at a greater size than the others and still carries with him the crook and flail of kings. He has lost the battle, he has been forced to hold funerary rites for his beheaded soldiers, but he has not lost his dignity. The red crown of Lower Egypt is still respected and thus by extension, Seth is still respected. This archaic example shows the mytho-theological roles that would become the framework for later depictions of Horus and Seth.

Justification in the Old Kingdom

In the Old Kingdom of Ancient Egypt dating around c. 2575 - 2181 BCE, Seth and Horus were commonly depicted as equals in stature and honor. Historically speaking, this can be attributed as a display of

newly obtained land as the pharaohs of this period had just recently managed to regain full control over both Upper and Lower Egypt. After a series of shorter wars and temporary occupations occurring in the century between the Archaic Period and the Old Kingdom, the Old Kingdom was founded on a peaceful note. Although already popularized as a symbol of both domination and unity by Pharaoh Menes of Upper Egypt after his successful conquest of Lower Egypt around 2925 BCE, the double crown became paramount during this period as it came to be a physical representation of the two halves of Egypt being united under a pharaoh spiritually in tune with the gods it represented. Only a Pharaoh, they insisted, spiritually in tune with Seth and Horus could create the peace and calm that the Old Kingdom boasted.

Order over chaos -- domestic power over foreign interference -- was the rule of the 3rd and 4th dynasties as the combined force of an united Upper and Lower Egypt managed to quell their neighbors to the south in Nubia and their neighbors to the west in Libya. In other words, the domain of Horus over the domain of Seth. Pharaoh Djoser, first ruler of the 3rd dynasty running from around 2670 to 2613 BCE, exemplified this by his choice to frequently have a symbol of Horus depicted alongside his name. However, Seth was not to be left behind as his dual nature of god of foreigners insured both successful warfare and lucrative trade. For the rulers of the 4th dynasty covering the years 2613 to 2494 BCE¹⁸, Horus became the public image of royalty as opposed to the private importance of Seth. A presentation of their equal cooperation, just as the rulers of periods past had established, was once again deemed necessary for the continuation of what was later to be called a Golden Age. A Golden Age that required a certain level of prosperity necessary to finance the grand building projects known as the Pyramids.

This cooperation of Horus and Seth can be found on the Shabaka Stone¹⁹, a physical relic from the 8th Dynasty with its written section rumored to originate from an older, crumbling papyrus dating from the late Old Kingdom. This basalt stone has inscribed on its face what is known as the Memphis Theology, or Creation Myth, and the *Justification of Horus*. In the *Justification of Horus*, Horus and Seth both put forth their claims to the throne to Geb, father of Osiris and Seth, only to be delayed. Geb summons his council of nine before assigning them roles in order to end their contentions: "Geb's words to Seth: "Go to the place in which you were born." Seth: Upper Chem. Geb's words to Heru: "Go to the place in which your father was drowned." Heru: Lower Chem. Geb's words to Heru and Seth: "I have separated you.".²⁰ Both parties accept this with grace until Geb begins to feel as if Horus is not properly receiving his firstborn inheritance and grants him leadership of both Upper and Lower Egypt. This leads to another brief bout of fighting before Isis forces them to reconcile as brothers. Other artifacts from this time seem to suggest that the reconciliation of Horus and Seth was more commonly appreciated than their constant struggles against each other. Or at the very least, that Horus and Seth were equal in might and recollection -- as one was necessary for the other.

The 8th dynasty, c. 2181 to 2160 BCE²¹, was an extremely short-lived dynasty marked by numerous leaders and violent internal coups. It marked the end of the peaceful Old Kingdom that kept Horus and Seth as

equals in might and recollection, even if one was more hidden from public view. As the *Justification of Horus* tells, the 8th dynasty rulers found it necessary to have the two reconcile before Horus was placed above Seth in leadership, though not in influence. The violent chaos running rampant through their dynasty was unwanted and unproductive, so Horus had to be named leader so that chaos could be controlled. It was an attempt to rid both sides of disparate loyalty -- Upper and Lower Egypt, domestic and foreign powers -- by having the ultimate authority figure of Geb switch their respective loyalties. Horus, formerly of Upper Egypt, was sent to rule over Lower Egypt. Seth, formerly of Lower Egypt, was sent to rule over Upper Egypt. A offering of justification for the present by justifying Horus in the eternities. Justification, but not replacement or removal, as other artifacts of material and visual culture from the Old Kingdom affirm.

In the Pyramid Texts found on the burial chamber walls at the pyramid for the Pharaoh Unis who ruled c. 2375-2345 BCE, two poems in particular focus on granting the Pharaoh Unis aspects of both gods. In “The Resurrection of King Unis”, Unis is praised for bearing the “hawk-image of the divine...[the] best likeness among fierce forms”²² in a nod to Horus, as he would have wanted to represent Horus’s leadership and royal position. This is paired with the image of Seth as the strength and quick virility presented in “Hymn to the King as a Flash of Lightning”: “a blinding light...until his blazing bolt is gone...this is the King, the messenger of storm”.²³ It is important to note these are both positive qualities as Seth has yet to be fully villainized. As it stands in the Old Kingdom, he and Horus were the equal rulers of Upper and Lower Egypt respectively until Horus was granted the right to rule both.

This relationship can be seen on the previously mentioned jar-seal from Pharaoh Peribsen’s tomb²⁴ for Seth, and countless examples like the Serpent-King Stele²⁵ from a tomb at Abydos for Horus. While the Shabaka Stone certainly suggests that there had been contentions, the change in power resulted in peace both times. This suggests that Horus and Seth willingly accepted their new reconciled roles to fight against a common enemy rather than against each other.²⁶ They are capable of maintaining a professional relationship when needed, both still representing the good qualities any leader of Lower, Upper, or unified Egypt would appreciate in their own rulership. Even the chaos of the late Old Kingdom was unable to upset this established balance, but the First Intermediate period that chased on its heels successfully disrupted it.

Justified: First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom

In the wreckage of the Old Kingdom, the First Intermediate Period c. 2160 to 2055 BCE was born -- only for its rulers to stumble around without a clear path to recovery. Despite all efforts, civil war broke out leaving no clear unified ruler while a series of famines, droughts, and destructive desert storms only aided the perception that Horus and Seth were using all that their domains offered to fight against one another. Another series of invasions from the nomadic Bedouin²⁷ around 2100 BCE only contributed to the chaos though they were never successful at seizing either Memphis or Thebes -- both seats of power -- despite their weakened state. Mentuhotep I from Thebes, located in Upper Egypt under the jurisdiction of Seth, managed to unite Egypt once

again in 2055 BCE -- founding the 11th dynasty.

In contrast, the Middle Kingdom which ran from 2055 to 1650 BCE, started on a rocky note that met much less trouble than expected before ushering in nearly four centuries of stability. Mentuhotep IV, the last ruler of the 11th dynasty, was assassinated and peacefully replaced by his vizier Amenemhet starting the 12th dynasty in 1985 BCE.²⁸ The 12th dynasty rulers flourished in immense prosperity not unlike the Golden Age of the Old Kingdom. Unlike previous periods, these rulers practiced aggressive and stern foreign policies that usually culminated in invasions and wars against their Nubian and Bedouin neighbors. These same foreign policies, contrary to expectation, facilitated excellent trade relations which allowed for an increase in wealth that led to more architecture, more literature and poetry, and more amulets made from imported materials such as ebony. The Middle Kingdom alone provides the majority of the material and visual culture as represented by little Eye of Horus amulets.

If the First Intermediate Period disrupted the careful balance between Horus and Seth, the Middle Kingdom made sure to make the imbalance permanent. Just as before, Horus is shown in begrudging fraternity with Seth. The two are shown as equal in power and regard in the “Prophecy of Neferty”. A 4th dynasty Pharaoh is comforted by the prophecy that a true king -- Pharaoh Amenemhat I -- will come from the south and manage to “unite the Two Mighty Ones, /let Horus and Seth be at peace, and their fellows”.²⁹ It is interesting to note here that the “Prophecy of Neferty” was not only written both as entertainment and socio-political propaganda against foreign invaders from the east during the 12th dynasty, but also set in the 4th dynasty. This places the prophecy before Horus and Seth switched halves of Egypt. Seth is being placed in a distinctly unfriendly and dangerous position as the god of foreigners, chaos, and the former ruler of Lower Egypt. He needs to be quelled, subdued and forced to unite with Horus once again by a ‘true’ king from the south. It is yet another justification.

Amenemhat I takes the role of Horus to a new, previously unseen level as he becomes the prophesied hero that not only spares Egypt from foreign violence, but does so in emulation of Horus. This little section of the poem highlights yet another small difference from the Old Kingdom depictions: “for a worthy son...justice shall rise to her throne; wrongdoing be utterly driven away!”.³⁰ Whereas the earlier section of the poem gave the implication that Horus and Seth must be once again reconciled, this section also paints Horus as the rightful heir to both thrones as dictated by justice and birthright that must drive Seth’s “wrongdoing[s]”³¹ away. Old Kingdom depictions mentioned that they had contentions, but it was never worded nor shown in a way that put Seth in the wrong for doing so. This shows the start of a shifting public opinion against Seth, his relationship with Horus, and the subsequent shift in their visual and material cultural depictions. Horus and Seth might be equal, but it is not an equality founded on justice or birthright. It is an equality forced on them by their responsibilities.

As said by Egyptologists Henk and Herman te Velde in their book *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*, this differing in responsibility and prescribed duality grants the Ancient Egyptians great freedom in their presentation: “all kinds of distinctions or contrasts in contemporary

reality...heaven and earth, earth and the underworld, right and left, black and red, to be born and to be conceived, rulership and strength, life and dominion".³² By implication, even if Horus was granted the double crown of Egypt, he should hold no more power over Seth with his single crown as the two are intricately bound. To completely usurp his uncle, Horus would be creating an imbalance in Ma'at. Middle Kingdom depictions seemingly acknowledge how this disruption of balance might impact the order and power of Horus, but they do not acknowledge it as foolish. Rather, it is an attempt to make this imbalance the new order in organized chaos. If Pharaoh Amenemhat I could establish a successful dynasty by disrupting the balance in the present, then Horus could surely do the same in the eternities.

On the wall relief at Sekhemre-Sewadjtowe Sebkhotepe³³ c. 1749 BCE, they are depicted in similar sizes as they face each other -- neither one below or above the other. The written texts even ask a blessing from both in similar language. They still must work in tandem in order to assure prosperity. Only some major players in this period used this framework to push for change in the eternities while others were satisfied with the current present and used that same framework to promote equitable unity. Outside of royal rule, Horus is much more commonly depicted in material goods such as amulets during the Middle Kingdom. Indeed, the sheer number of discovered *wedjat*³⁴ amulets in the Middle Kingdom period alone speaks to the social and religious presence of Horus in daily life. In contrast, Seth finds himself subjugated to a stern and aggressive domestic policy, as pushed by the foreigner and violence weary populace, that alone would disprove the relative wealth of the period. There is only one Seth-animal head figurine from the Middle Kingdom to be found in both the British Museum and the Met collections. Hardly equal in position on a material and more practical level despite what the visual culture might suggest. If the visual culture was to be believed, the Seth of the Middle Kingdom should be equally important to the common populace as a god capable of promoting prosperity. However, this positive role, and the earlier begrudgingly friendly working relationship between Horus and Seth, slowly shifts to one of negativity. In one such papyrus³⁵ from the time Seth is being called upon in his capacity of violent, chaotic storms as Horus is covering the more protective side of spells. Destruction and regeneration: balanced, but perhaps not quite equal. This could be the very first step towards a removal of Seth both from his position of protective ruler and his gentler dual nature as the little material and visual culture existing in this modern day speaks of neglect. Or more appropriately, it speaks of deliberate destruction.³⁶

In the Lintel of Amenemhat I, the Pharaoh Amenemhat I proves his ability to still rule and is blessed by the gods and goddesses. The presence of Anubis would suggest that Seth has once again been usurped from his rightful place by a worthy son whose own area of expertise touches on the more positive aspects of Ma'at rather than operating in direct opposition. It seems highly illogical that a pharaonically commissioned piece such as this would have such a glaring mistake unless the decision was cleared by either the priests or Pharaoh himself. Considering this particular Pharaoh's previously discussed penchant towards depicting Seth as quarrelsome to his rule, it hardly seems an accident and more a deliberate work of mytho-theological sabotage. A sabotage that

the Second Intermediate Period and early Ramesside Pharaohs attempted to correct to no avail.

Exceptional Times 1: Second Intermediate Period

During the Second Intermediate Period c. 1650 - 1550 BCE, Lower Egypt was temporarily overrun by a group from the east³⁷ called the Hyksos, though they were often somewhat inaccurately referred to as the Asiatics.³⁸ As most other conquering groups in Ancient Egyptian history, they decided to adopt and adapt to the culture and religion of Egypt over their own. Their chief god Hadad happened to be similar to Seth, so the cult of Seth became chief among all the gods for the duration of the occupation. This rise in the cult of Seth can be seen in the first of the Papyrus Sallier.³⁹ The King of the Hyksos, Apophis⁴⁰, is quoted as saying: “he chose for his lord the god Seth...he did not worship any other deity in the whole land except Seth”.⁴¹ It seemed rather apropos that the god of foreigners and chaos would become the chief god of the invading foreigners once they settled. This can only be further improved as Seth briefly held more power in Lower Egypt than Horus despite it being the original half of his inheritance from Geb through this power shift. Once the Hyksos were removed from Lower Egypt by the future Pharaoh Ahmose I in 1550 BCE, marking the start of the New Kingdom, public opinion very quickly balked at the cult of Seth for all that it represented.

Updated Stories in the New Kingdom

In the New Kingdom which ran from around 1570 to 1069 BCE⁴², the relationship between Horus and Seth and the resulting right to rule once again begins to change. For Seth, a change for the worse as the start of the New Kingdom and 18th dynasty under Pharaoh Ahmose I saw yet another period of foreign policy and warfare against Egypt’s neighbors. Positive royal and public opinion towards Horus followed the example of the expanding empire and grew as it spread from Nubia in the south to the borders of the Fertile Crescent to the east. Unconquered foreigners, such as the Hittites, were othered as enemies of the empire that were granted the option by the pharaohs of this period to either assimilate or be deemed vassals. In an echo of the times, Horus -- symbol of domestic power and order -- seemingly began to offer Seth -- symbol of foreign power and now barbaric chaos -- the same option. The consequences of Seth’s choice ring throughout the material and visual culture of the New Kingdom.

Nowhere else is the outcome of this offered option acknowledged quite as well as in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* from the Chester Beatty Papyrus collection. This set of papyrus tells the story of Horus and Seth as they attempt to win the vacant throne of Osiris from the other⁴³: not yet unlike the one told in the earlier periods. As compared with the Middle Kingdom tale, Osiris takes the place of Geb in delivering the final verdict and it is only after Ra has finally had enough of their contentions that he brings them before Osiris. New Kingdom Horus is a bit weak due to his youth. New Kingdom Seth is vindictive, constantly seeking to undermine Horus as if he believes he cannot win with his own power. When he hears the verdict that comes from Osiris, he challenges Horus for his throne once again. For this breach of conduct, Seth is “restrained with manacles, as a prisoner”⁴⁴ and berated for his actions until Seth resentfully concedes his placement as below

Horus and subject to Ra. In other words, Seth is presented with the same option offered to the unconquered foreign neighbors and ends a vassal. As this updated story tells, the dynamics between the two have changed drastically. Seth is no longer equal to Horus in power, only receiving his thunder and role as Ra's protector as a consolation compensation.

Horus is also a sole ruler as in this tale as Seth was never given control of Upper Egypt, making the double crown of both Upper and Egypt his from the beginning. Neither Ra nor Osiris even pretend towards granting Seth a position that could put him on equal footing with Horus. Horus and Seth are not even truly reconciled as Seth acts with cowardice rather than grace when the final verdict is delivered. They never had a chance to be joined in dual aspect like during the Old Kingdom, but "neither of the two gods can be eliminated...using a modern name for an ancient condition, one might call this peace a cold war".⁴⁵ Vassal as he was, Seth could only briefly gain back influence as can be seen in the early Ramesside period even though he never quite regained the influence that would allow him to end the cold war favorably.

Exceptional Times 2: The Early Ramesside Period⁴⁶

Complete Destruction: Third Intermediate and Late Periods

As the Third Intermediate Period begins in 1069 BCE⁴⁷, Seth and Horus once again find themselves in the center of a changing dynamic. The Ani Papyrus marks the two as opposing roles that could not truly be without the other: "Horus purifieth Seth and Seth strengtheneth, and Seth purifieth and Horus strengtheneth".⁴⁸ This would suggest that the two are once again equal in stature, yet this is only supported by wall reliefs solely dedicated to the crowning of new Pharaohs. Seth is nearly erased from both material and visual culture at this time nearly everywhere else as "the image of Seth as the helper of Horus could no longer function when the rule of the pharaoh was confined to Egypt. When the Egyptian empire...collapsed after Ramses III, the flourishing cult of Seth began to fade".⁴⁹ This paired with the still fresh memory of the Hyksos occupation of Lower Egypt and the temporary erasure of Horus from the foreigner dominated material and visual cultural landscape. Seth's relationship with Horus had finally been reduced to that of an ambitious uncle to Horus's heroics. Heroics echoed in countless artifacts from the time.

At the same time, Seth is rarely depicted anywhere unless in the company of his wife Nephtys. His part is removed from reliefs depicting Osiris, Horus, and Isis in the crowning of the young king. His name is practically erased from use in naming conventions and by "the texts of the Ptolemaic period Seth has been expunged wherever he was shown there in a positive aspect"⁵⁰ if he was even truly included. As per the Egyptian mytho-theological custom, the removal of a name from the written and known record was akin to damning him. Although his relationship with Horus has been deemed practically nonexistent, it is Seth's relationship with the chaotic evil alignment of his character sheet that saves his *ren*.⁵¹ An unbalance in his own character, but a role that had been decided for him over the course of time. A villain to hero, the foreigner to the Egyptian, and the storm to the falcon.

Seth does not completely disappear from the material and visual culture narrative. He is instead placed at the prow of Ra's boat in an albeit smaller stature than most of the other gods depicted despite his importance as the slayer of Apes the Serpent of Chaos. This can be seen in the God of Chaos plate⁵² in one of the Late Time period's few depictions of him. Not only do both he and Apes the Serpent now share the domain of chaos, Seth is also being blended into Ba'al⁵³ in material culture such as a scarab seal amulet from the late part of the Third Intermediate Period shows. He is no longer a god capable of standing or appearing on his own. Seth once again irredeemably loses to Horus.

Conclusion

Horus and Seth is one such relationship that does much the opposite: it is constantly changing from era to era with new details constantly being added to their dynamic. Through the material and visual culture of Ancient Egypt, Horus and Seth's relations through the Old Kingdom to the start of the Late Period can be easily seen and tracked. Just as can be seen in the mytho-theology, Horus ends up being recognized as God-King over his uncle, rising above most others in power and authority while reaping the benefits granted to him. Yet contrary to the mytho-theology of the New Kingdom, Seth is granted no consolation prize as he sinks to destructive-coded obscurity. A god of destructive chaos that ended up destroying himself in the name of victory over Horus.

¹This is the date this was originally written, it was edited to this form March 12, 2021.

². Tobin, Vincent Arieh. "Mytho-Theology in Ancient Egypt." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 25 (1988): 169-83. doi:10.2307/40000877. Page 169.

³. Tobin, 170.

⁴. Tobin, 172.

⁵. Shafer, Byron E., John Baines, Leonard H. Lesko, and David P. Silverman. *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991. Silverman, David P. "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt", pg. 30.

⁶. Silverman, 30.

⁷. This term was not consistently used to describe Egyptian kings until the New Kingdom, but it will be used as the term for Egyptian kings no matter the time period for the purposes of this paper.

⁸. C.1069-525 BCE.

⁹. Myres, John L. 1914. *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus*. no. 4526, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession Number: 74.51.4526.

¹⁰. Silverman, 34.

¹¹. Pre- Old Kingdom, placed in the Egyptian Archaic Period. C.2890-2686 BCE.

¹². Peribsen Jar-Seal. The British Museum, BM EA35595.

¹³. As an important side note, Upper and Lower Egypt refer to southern and northern Egypt respectively. This may seem opposite to how it should be. This is because the Nile flows south to north rather than the normal north to south. All rivers flow downward -- it just so happens that 'down' is south to north for the Nile. As a result, Ancient Egypt is flipped to our understanding though certainly not to theirs.

¹⁴. Griffith, Francis Llewellyn, *A Collection of Hieroglyphs: A Contribution to the History of Egyptian Writing*, the Egypt Exploration Fund 1898, p.56.

¹⁵. As translated, White One or White Crown.

¹⁶. As translated, Red One or Red Crown.

¹⁷. Narmer Palette. Egyptian Museum at Cairo, ID 14716.

¹⁸. Shaw, Ian, ed. *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford, England: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002.

http://www.ancient-egypt.co.uk/people/pages/king%20list.htm#3rd_Dynasty.

19. The Shabako Stone. The British Museum, BM EA498.
20. Translation of the Stela. Ln. 10-12.
21. Shaw, ct.8. This source is used for most of the dates of the ruling Pharaohs and periods as well as the history of Ancient Egypt as presented.
22. Foster, John L. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001. Pg. 68, vii.
23. Foster, 74, p.t.261.
24. Peribsen Jar-Seal. The British Museum, BM EA35595.
25. Stèle du roi-Serpent. The Louvre, ID E11007.
26. Velde, Hank te, and Herman te Velde. *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1977. Pg. 69.
27. This is what they are called modernly. Historically, the Egyptians called them nomadic foreigners with the all the same implied disgust other empires have when calling people barbarians. The Ancient Egyptians were loath to give proper names to their neighbors outside of peaceful moments of trade probably tracing back to their belief about the power of names.
28. Shaw, ct.8.
29. Foster, 84.
30. Foster, 84.
31. Foster, 84. See note 27.
32. Velde, 60.
33. Wild, Henri. "A Bas-Relief of Sekhemrē-sewadjtjowē Sebkhōtpe." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 37 (1951): 12-16. doi:10.2307/3855150. Pg.14.
34. Eye of Horus -- both a human and a hawk/falcon eye within one to represent two aspects of Horus as well as call upon the powers of healing and safety that were granted to him upon the loss of his eye at Seth's hands.
35. Papyrus inscribed with an account and a religious text. The Met, ID As. 22.3.528.
36. Velde, 146.
37. Perhaps there really was something to the Prophecy of Neferty.
38. Shaw, ct.8.
39. Sallier Papyrus 1. *Tale of Apophis and Seqenenra*, col 3.4-3.5. The British Museum, BM EA10185,2.
40. This name is very similar to the one that later Egyptian sources used to call the chaos snake. This is most likely not a coincidence.
41. Sallier Papyrus 1.
42. Shaw, ct.8.
43. Chester Beatty Papyrus 1 *The Contendings of Seth and Horus* from the Papyrus Collection at the Brooklyn Museum.
44. *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*.
45. Velde, 63.
46. Due to length restrictions, this paragraph long section will be in the endnotes instead.
Banishment and punishment of Seth in material and visual cultural sources did not come to pass until after the death of three of the named Ramesside Pharaohs that ruled from 1295 to 1153 BCE. During this time, several Pharaohs kept up the previously highly favored worship of Seth to the point that a few included 'Seth' in their names -- a naming convention that had not happened since the Old Kingdom. Ramses II made an attempt to show that Seth could provide blessings just as well as his eternal counterpart Horus. On the walls at the Temple of Hathor in Abu Simpel, Horus and Seth once again stand on equal footing, equal in stature, and bless Ramesses II by reaching to touch the double crown of a reunified Upper and Lower Egypt. It is an attempt to help repair the relationship between the two as well as repair the ever-blackening reputation Seth was receiving from just outside the court. Yet the tension that lies in the unbroken stare shared between Horus and Seth in this material source is only a prelude to how much further their already frayed relationship will deteriorate in the New Kingdom.
47. Shaw, ct.8.
48. Ani Papyrus 1, 26/36.
49. Velde, 66.
50. Velde, 148.

⁵¹. Or his True Name. This was one of nine parts of the soul. Knowing a true name was a direct outlet to power, so for the name of Seth to be erased would be like completely draining him of power. It is vaguely similar to the idea of the Anglo-Gaelic faeries using a true name to compel and command.

⁵². Seth, God of Confusion Plate VIII. Cairo Museum.

⁵³. God of storms and fertility in the Levant region.