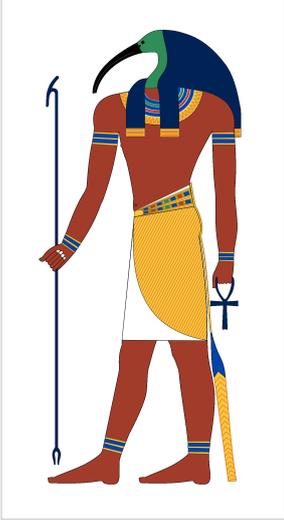


Thoth

For other meanings of "Thoth", or of "Djehuti" and similar, see Thoth (disambiguation).

Thoth	
	
Thoth, in one of his forms as an ibis-headed man	
God of wisdom and the moon	
Major cult center	Hermopolis
Symbol	moon disk, papyrus scroll
Parents	none (self-created); alternatively Ra or Horus and Hathor,
Consort	Seshat, Ma'at, Bastet or Hathor

Thoth (𓂛 /ˈθoʊθ/, /θəʊθ/ or /ˈtoʊt/; from Greek, from Egyptian *djhwty*, perhaps pronounced *dj̥hauṯi*) was considered one of the more important deities of the Egyptian pantheon. In art, he was often depicted as a man with the head of an ibis or a baboon, animals sacred to him. His feminine counterpart was Seshat.^[1] Thoth's chief temple was located in the city of Khmun,^[2] later renamed Hermopolis Magna during the Greco-Roman era^[3] (in reference to him through the Greeks' interpretation that he was the same as their god Hermes) and Eshmûnên in the Coptic rendering. In that city, he led the Ogdoad pantheon of eight principal deities. He also had numerous shrines within the cities of Abydos, Hesert, Urit, Per-Ab, Rekhui, Ta-ur, Sep, Hat, Pselket, Talmsis, Antcha-Mutet, Bah, Amen-heri-ab, and Ta-kens.^[4]

Thoth was often considered to be the heart—which, according to the ancient Egyptians, is the seat of intelligence or the mind—and tongue of the sun god Ra, as well as the means by which Ra's will was translated into speech.^[5] He was also related to the Logos of Plato^[5] and the mind of God^[6] (see The All). He played many vital and prominent roles in Egyptian mythology, such as maintaining the universe, and being one of the two deities (the other being Ma'at, who was also his wife) who stood on either side of Ra's boat.^[7] In the later history of ancient Egypt, Thoth became heavily associated with the arbitration of godly disputes,^[8] the arts of magic, the system of writing, the development of science,^[9] and the judgment of the dead.^[10]

Name

Etymology

<p>Common names for Thoth^[11] in hieroglyphs</p>
<p>, or</p>
<p>, or</p>

The Egyptian pronunciation of *dḥwty* is not fully known, but may be reconstructed as *ḏiḥautī, based on the Ancient Greek borrowing Θωθ *Thōth* or *Theut* and the fact that it evolved into Sahidic Coptic variously as *Thoout*, *Thōth*, *Thoot*, *Thaut* as well as Bohairic Coptic *Thōout*. The final -y may even have been pronounced as a consonant, not a vowel.^[12] However, many write "Djehuty", inserting the letter 'e' automatically between consonants in Egyptian words, and writing 'w' as 'u', as a convention of convenience for English speakers, not the transliteration employed by Egyptologists.^[13] In modern Egypt, tour guides pronounce the name as "Thote" or "Tote" with an aspirated initial consonant.

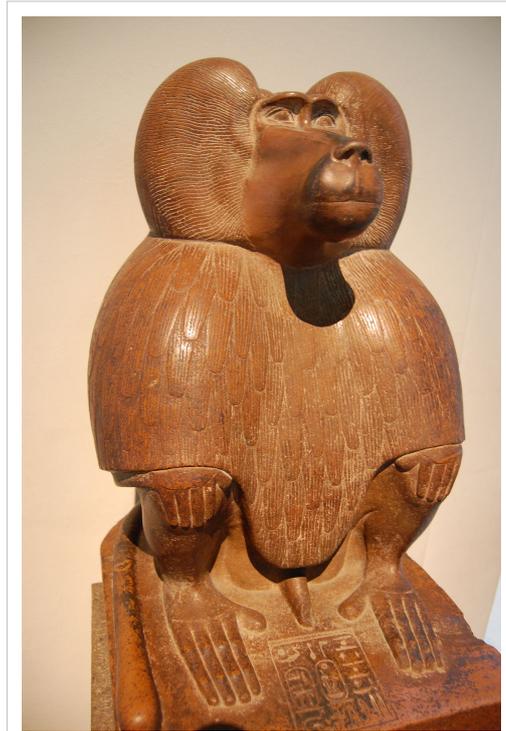
According to Theodor Hopfner,^[14] Thoth's Egyptian name written as *dḥwty* originated from *dḥw*, claimed to be the oldest known name for the Ibis although normally written as *hbj*. The addition of -ty denotes that he possessed the attributes of the Ibis.^[15] Hence his name means "He who is like the Ibis".

Alternate names

Djehuty is sometimes alternatively rendered as **Jehuti**, **Tahuti**, **Tehuti**, **Zehuti**, **Techu**, or **Tetu**. *Thoth* (also **Thot** or **Thout**) is the Greek version derived from the letters *dḥwty*. Not counting differences in spelling, Thoth had many names and titles or names, like other goddesses and gods. Similarly, each Pharaoh, considered a god himself, had five different names used in public.^[16] Among his alternate names are A, Sheps, Lord of Khemenu, Asten, Khenti, Mehi, Hab, and A'an.^[17] In addition, Thoth was also known by specific aspects of himself, for instance the moon god Iah-Djehuty, representing the moon for the entire month,^[18] or as jt-ntr "god father". Further, the Greeks related Thoth to their god Hermes due to his similar attributes and functions.^[19] One of Thoth's titles, "Three times great, great" (see Titles) was translated to the Greek τρισμεγιστος (Trismegistos) making Hermes Trismegistus.^[20]

Depictions

Thoth has been depicted in many ways depending on the era and on the aspect the artist wished to convey. Usually, he is depicted in his human form with the head of an ibis.^[21] In this form, he can be represented as the reckoner of times and seasons by a headdress of the lunar disk sitting on top of a crescent moon resting on his head. When depicted as a form of Shu or Ankher, he was depicted to be wearing the respective god's headdress. Sometimes he was also seen in art to be wearing the Atef crown or the United Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt.^[15] When not depicted in this common form, he sometimes takes the form of the ibis directly.^[21] He also appears as a dog faced baboon or a man with the head of a baboon when he is A'an, the god of equilibrium.^[22] In the form of A'ah-Djehuty he took a more human-looking form.^[23] These forms are all symbolic and are metaphors for Thoth's attributes. The Egyptians did not believe these gods actually looked like humans with animal heads.^[24] For example, Ma'at is often depicted with an ostrich feather, "the feather of truth," on her head,^[25] or with a feather for a head.^[26]



Depiction of Thoth as a baboon (c. 1400 BC), in the British Museum.

Attributes

Egyptologists disagree on Thoth's nature depending upon their view of the Egyptian pantheon. Most Egyptologists today side with Sir Flinders Petrie that Egyptian religion was strictly polytheistic, in which Thoth would be a separate god. His contemporary adversary, E. A. Wallis Budge, however, thought Egyptian religion to be primarily henotheistic^[27] where all the gods and goddesses were aspects of the God Ra, similar to the devas in Hinduism.^[28] In this view, Thoth would be the aspect of Ra which the Egyptian mind would relate to the heart and tongue.

His roles in Egyptian mythology were many. Thoth served as a mediating power, especially between good and evil, making sure neither had a decisive victory over the other.^[29] He also served as scribe of the gods,^[30] credited with the invention of writing and alphabets (i.e. hieroglyphs) themselves.^[31] In the underworld, Duat, he appeared as an ape, A'an, the god of equilibrium, who reported when the scales weighing the deceased's heart against the feather, representing the principle of Ma'at, was exactly even.^[32]

The ancient Egyptians regarded Thoth as One, self-begotten, and self-produced.^[21] He was the master of both physical and moral (i.e. Divine) law,^[21] making proper use of Ma'at.^[5] He is credited with making the calculations for the establishment of the heavens, stars, Earth,^[33] and everything in them.^[5] Compare this to how his feminine counterpart, Ma'at was the force which maintained the Universe.^[34] He is said to direct the motions of the heavenly bodies. Without his words, the Egyptians believed, the gods would not exist.^[30] His power was unlimited in the Underworld and rivaled that of Ra and Osiris.^[21]

The Egyptians credited him as the author of all works of science, religion, philosophy, and magic.^[35] The Greeks further declared him the inventor of astronomy, astrology, the science of numbers, mathematics, geometry, land surveying, medicine, botany, theology, civilized government, the alphabet, reading, writing, and oratory. They further claimed he was the true author of every work of every branch of knowledge, human and divine.^[31]

Mythology

Thoth has played a prominent role in many of the Egyptian myths. Displaying his role as arbitrator, he had overseen the three epic battles between good and evil. All three battles are fundamentally the same and belong to different periods. The first battle took place between Ra and Apophis, the second between Heru-Bekhutet and Set, and the third between Horus, the son of Osiris, and Set. In each instance, the former god represented order while the latter represented chaos. If one god was seriously injured, Thoth would heal them to prevent either from overtaking the other.

Thoth was also prominent in the Osiris myth, being of great aid to Isis. After Isis gathered together the pieces of Osiris' dismembered body, he gave her the words to resurrect him so she could be impregnated and bring forth Horus. When Horus was slain, Thoth gave the magic to resurrect him as well. Similar to God speaking the words to create the heavens and Earth in Judeo-Christian beliefs, Thoth, being the god who always speaks the words that fulfill the wishes of Ra, spoke the words that created the heavens and Earth in Egyptian mythology.

This mythology also credits him with the creation of the 365 day calendar. Originally, according to the myth, the year was only 360 days long and Nut was sterile during these days, unable to bear children. Thoth gambled with



Lee Lawrie, *Thoth* (1939). Library of Congress John Adams Building, Washington, D.C.

Khonsu, the moon, for 1/72nd of its light ($360/72 = 5$), or 5 days, and won. During these 5 days, Nut gave birth to Kheru-ur (Horus the Elder, Face of Heaven), Osiris, Set, Isis, and Nephthys.

In the Ogdoad cosmogony, Thoth gave birth to Ra, Atum, Nefertum, and Khepri by laying an egg while in the form of an ibis, or later as a goose laying a golden egg.

History

He was originally the deification of the moon in the Ogdoad belief system. Initially, in that system, the moon had been seen to be the eye of Horus, the sky god, which had been semi-blinded (thus darker) in a fight against Set, the other eye being the sun. However, over time it began to be considered separately, becoming a lunar deity in its own right, and was said to have been another son of Ra. As the crescent moon strongly resembles the curved beak of the ibis, this separate deity was named Djehuty (i.e. Thoth), meaning *ibis*.

Thoth became associated with the Moon, due to the Ancient Egyptians observation that Baboons (sacred to Thoth) 'sang' to the moon at night.

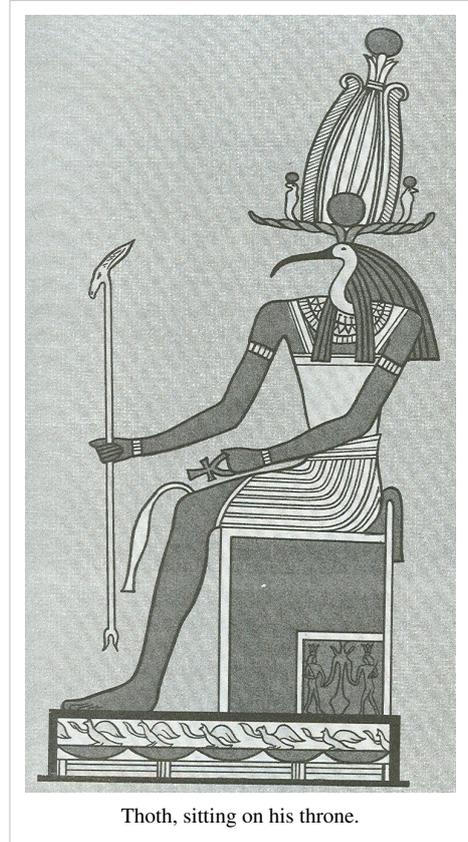
The Moon not only provides light at night, allowing the time to still be measured without the sun, but its phases and prominence gave it a significant importance in early astrology/astronomy. The cycles of the moon also organized much of Egyptian society's civil, and religious, rituals, and events. Consequently, Thoth gradually became seen as a god of wisdom, magic, and the measurement, and regulation, of events, and of time. He was thus said to be the secretary and counselor of Ra, and with Ma'at (truth/order) stood next to Ra on the nightly voyage across the sky, Ra being a sun god.

Thoth became credited by the ancient Egyptians as the inventor of writing, and was also considered to have been the scribe of the underworld, and the moon became occasionally considered a separate entity, now that Thoth had less association with it, and more with wisdom. For this reason Thoth was universally worshipped by ancient Egyptian Scribes. Many scribes had a painting or a picture of Thoth in their "office". Likewise, one of the symbols for scribes was that of the ibis.

In art, Thoth was usually depicted with the head of an ibis, deriving from his name, and the curve of the ibis' beak, which resembles the crescent moon. Sometimes, he was depicted as a baboon holding up a crescent moon, as the baboon was seen as a nocturnal, and intelligent, creature. The association with baboons led to him occasionally being said to have as a consort Astennu, one of the (male) baboons at the place of judgment in the underworld, and on other occasions, Astennu was said to be Thoth himself.

During the late period of Egyptian history a cult of Thoth gained prominence, due to its main centre, Khnum (Hermopolis Magna), also becoming the capital, and millions of dead ibis were mummified and buried in his honour. The rise of his cult also led to his cult seeking to adjust mythology to give Thoth a greater role.

Thoth was inserted in many tales as the wise counsel and persuader, and his association with learning, and measurement, led him to be connected with Seshat, the earlier deification of wisdom, who was said to be his daughter, or variably his wife. Thoth's qualities also led to him being identified by the Greeks with their closest matching god Hermes, with whom Thoth was eventually combined, as Hermes Trismegistus, also leading to the Greeks naming Thoth's cult centre as Hermopolis, meaning *city of Hermes*.



It is also considered that Thoth was the scribe of the gods rather than a messenger. Anubis (or Hermanubis) was viewed as the messenger of the gods, as he travelled in and out of the Underworld and presented himself to the gods and to humans. It is more widely accepted that Thoth was a record keeper, not a divine messenger. In the Papyrus of Ani copy of the Egyptian Book of the Dead the scribe proclaims "I am thy writing palette, O Thoth, and I have brought unto thee thine ink-jar. I am not of those who work iniquity in their secret places; let not evil happen unto me."^[36] Chapter XXXb (Budge) of the Book of the Dead is by the oldest tradition said to be the work of Thoth himself.^[37]

There was also an Egyptian pharaoh of the Sixteenth dynasty of Egypt named Djehuty (Thoth) after him, and who reigned for three years.

Titles

Thoth, like many Egyptian gods and nobility, held many titles. Among these were "Scribe of Ma'at in the Company of the Gods," "Lord of Ma'at," "Lord of Divine Words," "Judge of the Two Combatant Gods,"^[33] "Judge of the Rekhkhuui, the pacifier of the Gods, who Dwelleth in Unnu, the Great God in the Temple of Abtiti,"^[29] "Twice Great," "Thrice Great,"^[21] " and "Three Times Great."^[6]

Notes

- [1] Thutmose III: A New Biography By Eric H Cline, David O'Connor University of Michigan Press (January 5, 2006)p. 127
- [2] *National Geographic Society: Egypt's Nile Valley Supplement Map*. (Produced by the Cartographic Division)
- [3] *National Geographic Society: Egypt's Nile Valley Supplement Map: Western Desert portion*. (Produced by the Cartographic Division)
- [4] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Thoth was said to be born from the skull of set also said to be born from the heart of Ra.p. 401)
- [5] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 407)
- [6] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 415)
- [7] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 400)
- [8] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 405)
- [9] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 414)
- [10] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* p. 403)
- [11] Hieroglyphs verified, in part, in (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 402) and (Collier and Manley p. 161)
- [12] Information taken from phonetic symbols for Djehuty, and explanations on how to pronounce based upon modern rules, revealed in (Collier and Manley pp. 2-4, 161)
- [13] (Collier and Manley p. 4)
- [14] Hopfner, Theodor, b. 1886. *Der tierkult der alten Agypter nach den griechisch-romischen berichten und den wichtigeren denkmälern*. Wien, In kommission bei A. Holder, 1913. Call#= 060 VPD v.57
- [15] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 402)
- [16] (Collier and Manley p. 20)
- [17] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 pp. 402-3)
- [18] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 pp. 412-3)
- [19] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* p. 402)
- [20] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 415)
- [21] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 401)
- [22] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 403)
- [23] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 plate between pp. 408-9)
- [24] Allen, James P. *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, p. 44.
- [25] Allen, op. cit., p. 115
- [26] (Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 416)
- [27] (Budge *Egyptian Religion* pp. 17-8)
- [28] (Budge *Egyptian Religion* p. 29)
- [29] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 405)
- [30] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 408)
- [31] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 414)
- [32] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 403)
- [33] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 p. 401)
- [34] (Budge *Gods of the Egyptians* Vol. 1 pp. 407-8)

[35] (Hall *The Hermetic Marriage* p. 224)

[36] *The Book of the Dead*, E.A Wallis Budge, orig pub 1895, Gramercy books 1999, p562, ISBN 0-517-12283-9

[37] *The Book of the Dead*, E.A Wallis Budge, orig pub 1895, Gramercy Books 1999, p282, ISBN 0-517-12283-9

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- *The Book of Thoth*, by Aleister Crowley. (200 signed copies, 1944) Reprinted by Samuel Wisner, Inc 1969, first paperback edition, 1974 (accompanied by The Thoth Tarot Deck, by Aleister Crowley & Lady Fred Harris)

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