

BECOMING GOD

DEIFICATION FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT

LECTURE 3: AMENHOTEP III

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AMENHOTEP III



In the Beginning: The Miraculous Birth



Amun-Re / Mutemwia / Thutmoses IV

‘She awoke on account of the aroma of the god and cried out before him... He went to her straightaway, she rejoiced at the sight of his beauty, and love for him coursed through her body. The palace flooded with the God’s aroma... The majesty of this God did all that he desired with her... [Mutemwia declared] “Your dew fills my body!” [God Amun-Re informs Mutemwia that the name of her child is] “Amenhotep, ruler of Thebes. . . . He shall exercise the beneficent kingship in this whole land, he shall rule the Two Lands [of Egypt] like Re forever”.’

Amenhotep's Reign & Genealogy



- Ruled in the period of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1069 BCE)
- The ninth ruler of the Eighteenth Dynasty
- Grandfather of king Tutankhamen
- Father of Akhenaten
- Reigned 1391–1353 BCE

The King's *Ka*

- the divine spirit of the king
- shared with all pharaohs who came before and all who would come after
- molded as the “twin” of the king at birth
- officially inherited at the coronation
- the immortal creative spirit of divine kingship
- the spirit of the creator and king of gods Amun-Re himself
- “Endowed with the divine force of *ka*, Amenhotep III was son of the living God and a god himself
- After the king's death, the *ka* returned to heaven

What's in a Name?

- Birth Name: Amenhotep = Amun is at peace
- Throne Name: Nebmaatra = Re, lord of truth = implicit identification with the Sun God himself

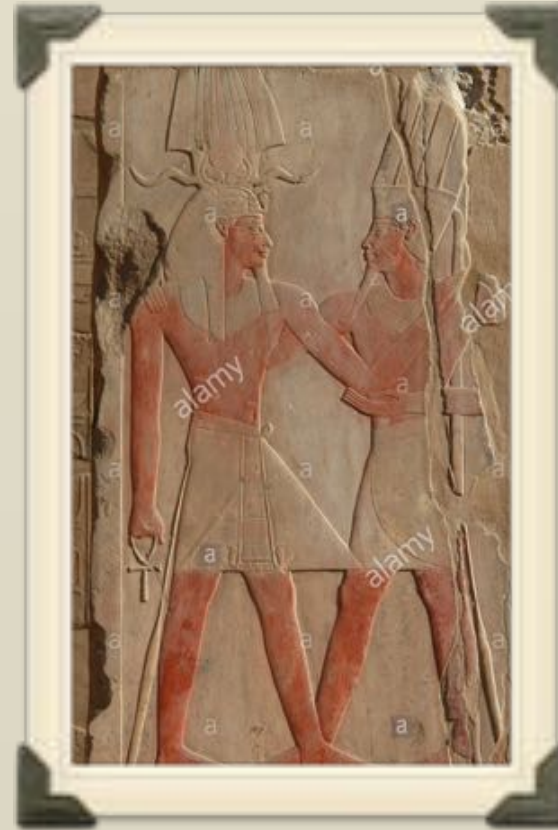
Re

- Horakhty (=horizon); Khepri (=dawn); Atum (=sunset); Aten (= visible sun disk).

Amun

- The Hidden One
- Amun of Thebes
- Absorbed the energies and being of the divine Sun

Amun-Re & Amenhotep III



The Significance of the Sun

- Egyptians viewed the sky as the surface of a cosmic ocean above the air
- The Sun travels on his “Dayboat.”
- During the night, the Sun God sails on his “Nightboat” along the underbelly of the cosmos called the “Duat” or netherworld.
- The next morning, the Sun is reborn as Egypt’s creator and life-giver.
- The Sun’s daily movement through the sky was viewed as a journey from birth to death.
- His rebirth at dawn was made possible by merging with Osiris in the underworld

The Opet Festival



Opet Festival: Structure, Aim, Importance

- Stick fighting, trumpet blowing, acrobatic dancing, butchering of animals, piles of food
- Early summer = Nile inundation
- Life recycle
- Gift of the Sun and his representative on earth
- The monarch was identified with the royal *ka*
- Divine kingship was reborn
- The king's right to rule was reconfirmed

Sed (Jubilee) Festivals: Becoming Amun-Re

- Late April, 1361 BCE: 30th anniversary
- ancient rite renewing the powers and promoting the divinity of the king
- All of Egypt was involved
- Dancing, singing, and jubilation
- An international affair

Celebrations & Symbolism

- “The king appeared gloriously at the great double doors of his palace” (i.e., west of Thebes)
- “Lake of His Majesty”: sailing across the lake in barks made to look like Re’s Dayboat and Nightboat
- Gold jewelry, glittered in the glaring Egyptian sun
- 3rd jubilee: Amenhotep wears the *shebyu* collar—a finely coiled double necklace = assimilation and identification with his Father Amun-Re.

The Temple of Soleb



- Modern Sudan
- Dedicated to two gods: Amun-Re of Karnak and Nebmaatra lord of Nubia.

Ante & Post Mortem Deification

- Amenhotep III and his deification
- Post or ante mortem?
- Why does it matter?
- What is at stake?
- What are the different conditions and consequences?

Politics or Religion?

- Why Amenhotep III wanted to be deified?
- Is it a political or a religious (or both) phenomenon?
- What difference does it make?
- What did people believe?
- Which people?
- Centre and periphery
- Indigenous and foreigners

The role of the proclamation

- A rebel?
- A hero?
- A crazy person?
- Is Amenhotep's deification important?
- To whom?
- Why and why not?

The function of deification

- Political stability
- Historical continuation
- Social cohesion
- Natural order
- Public imagination and/or reality
- The role of myth

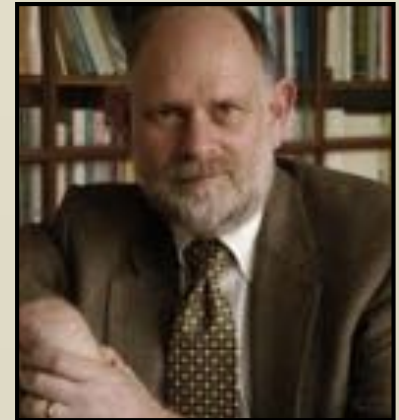
Myth as Paradigmatic Truth

In my view we would do better to classify narratives not by their content but by the claims that are made by their narrators and the way in which those claims are received by their audience(s).

- Class of stories that possess both credibility and authority: *Myths*

Authority: ‘claims are made not only to the status of truth, but what is more, to the status of *paradigmatic* truth.’

Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (1989), pp. 24–36



Next: Alexander the Great

