





elief in the divine helped ancient Egyptians comprehend the cosmos and understand natural phenomena. The Egyptians embodied the concept of the divine in the forms of gods and goddesses. In art, these gods and goddesses were represented as humans, animals, or a combination of both. Egyptian deities ate, rode in boats, spoke, had emotions, and even a sense of humor. They could be destructive or benevolent.

The ancient Egyptians believed in a number of gods and goddesses such as Isis, Mut, Amun, Khonsu, Osiris, Horus, and Re. The deities of the Egyptian pantheon were often organized into groups of two or families of three that included a mother, father, and child. Gods were often associated with one or more physical locations where temples were built to house their statues and rituals were conducted to honor them. The temples were maintained by priests serving under the semi-divine king, the high priest of every cult.

Sometimes the gods were associated with abstract concepts. For example, the goddess Maat was considered to be the embodiment of a concept that is similar to our ideas about truth and justice. *Maat* was also the essential force that brought order to the universe and was juxtaposed with the concept of chaos (*isfet*).

In ancient Egyptian religion, *maat* had to be maintained by appearing the gods. Otherwise, chaos might gain the upper hand. The task of maintaining the balance between order and chaos belonged to the king, who is often depicted presenting offerings to the deities.

Here the god Amun is depicted in completely human form and the god Re-Horakhty has a human body and the head of a hawk.

Here the high priest of Amun-Re, Ramessesnakht is presenting a shrine to the Karnak gods, Amun, Mut, and Khonsu, who are shown seated on top of the shrine itself

## classroom TUTorials

## Religion in Ancient Egypt

During the 18th Dynasty, when King Tutankhamun ruled, a tremendous amount of religious innovation took place. For instance, a collection of recitations called the *Book of the Dead* was written. Perhaps more extraordinarily, a religious revolution took place under the reign of Amenhotep IV (believed to be King Tutankhamun's father) in which the king changed the national religion from the worship of many gods to the worship of one deity, the *Aten*. Amenhotep IV took drastic measures to support this new god—he changed his name to Akhenaten ("The One Who is Effective for the Aten") and moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes to the new city of Akhenaten, know now as Amarna. He dispatched officials throughout the kingdom to destroy the temples, images, and names of all other gods. For his new religion, Akhenaten also created a radically different artistic style. The changes enacted by King Akhenaten were not popular with the Egyptian population and after his death, his son Tutankhamun and his advisors reinstated the traditional pantheon and practices.

This relief shows Horemheb offering water and incense to the (now missing) god Khepri.

BELOW
This statue of Akhenaten reflects the radical changes he made to Egyptian art in



