

# Egyptian Art and its Spiritual and Religious Influences

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By Rodney Dagan

The art of Egypt is heavily influenced by spiritual and religious ideas and culture that extends back thousands of years. Dynastic Egypt was one of the first civilizations in the world as defined by the modern concept of civilization. Ancient Egypt was a land of intense and all-pervasive magic.

Egyptians were obsessed with the Afterlife more than they were with this life, even though this obsession belied a deep sensuality. The spiritual and religious ideas of the Egyptians all center around the idea that this life is to be lived in such a way that one makes oneself worthy to be taken by the gods into the next world, the world or land of "millions of years" where there is no aging and people live with the gods for such a long, long time that for all intents and purposes they become immortal.

Many researchers into the spiritual and religious ideas that influence Egyptian art have thus pointed out that ancient Egyptian religion bore a strong similarity to Christianity at least in this way. Of course, the Christian Gospels relate that Jesus and his family somehow had some ties to Egypt, although by that point in history Egypt had long since become an enemy land considered hostile, dangerous, and anti-Jewish. And one of the most important pioneers of the Jewish nations, Moses, came out of Egypt as well. Some researchers believe that Moses was historically the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten.

Even in that renegade Pharaoh's name is the word "akh", which to Egyptian spiritual and religious thinking is one of the five constituent parts of the personality that make up the totality of a being. The Akh in Egyptian religious thinking is the re-united Ba and Ka (two other constituents of a person's being) that have been brought back together again in the afterlife in the new land of "millions of years". The five constituent parts of the personality had a strong influence on Egyptian art.

The Akh has been depicted as a hand with the thumb and the forefinger brought close to each other or brought together to depict the complete circle of earthly birth, earthly death, and rebirth in the new land of the Afterlife. Hieroglyphically, the Akh was depicted as an Ibis bird looking to the right, the East, the direction of rebirth, where the Sun arose anew each day. Indeed, the ibis in ancient Egypt was called "the crested akh-bird".

Originally, Egyptian spiritual and religious ideas held that only the royalty (including the priesthood) could get to the Afterlife; everyone else on earth was just here to serve them and then would perish into blackness when their lifetime was through.

Thus the Pharaohs and other priestly and royal personages would have tomb painters create magnificent murals depicting their life accomplishments and their devotion to the gods (who in ancient Egypt were not truly "gods" as we think of such beings today, but were rather superior beings called NTR, or "neter", which translates into "guardians" but who also created mankind; "neter" is probably the root of our modern English word "nature").

Royal tomb painters were thus extremely important people, although they were not always taken into the Afterlife and were sometimes killed to prevent them from working for another. Later on, however, Egypt grew a middle class which also sought the Afterlife, and religious beliefs were modified to accommodate them.

Animals are extremely important to Egyptian art. The well-known scarab beetle, which rolls up balls of its own dung and

lays eggs within them, is the symbol of rebirth and the sixth sense.

And a divine creature that is half crocodile and half hippopotamus is depicted as waiting to devour a soul whose heart, when weighed by the goddess Ma'at, is heavier than a feather; these people do not pass over into the Afterlife. Artistically rendered feathers and symbols of flight such as birds like the ibis are also extremely important to Egyptian spiritual and religious ideas.

Rodney Dagan invites you to explore the culture and arts of ancient Egypt, you can also view arts and crafts from native and aboriginal peoples from around the world at Native Art World.

Balkan Churches

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