

Harpocrates “Horus the Child”

Introduction

Horus was the son of Osiris and Isis and the nephew of Seth, Osiris's brother. Horus was conceived posthumously after Seth murdered Osiris and proceeded to contest Horus's right to the royal throne of Egypt. This friction caused Horus to become Seth's enemy. In adulthood, Horus eventually defeated Seth, thus avenging his father and assuming his rightful rule.



In the fight, Horus's left eye (i.e., the moon) was damaged—this being a mythical explanation of the moon's phases—and was healed by the god Thoth. The figure of the restored eye, the *wadjet* (wad-jet) eye, became a powerful amulet.

Variations

Harpocrates, ‘Horus the Child’

Harpocrates (Har-pe-khrad) means ‘Horus the Child’ but the deity slightly differed from the Egyptian Horus as he was transformed into the Greek god Harpocrates after Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 331 BCE (the late period). He is associated with the Hellenistic religion developed in the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Alexandria. In this new role, Harpocrates was the Greek god of silence, confidentiality, and the keeper of secrets. For the Greeks, this was symbolized with his finger to his lips or lower chin.

However, for the Egyptians this gesture was a representation of the hieroglyph



for “child.”

He further gets transformed into Harpocrates-Eros, also known as Cupid, in relation to the Romans. As Horus's mother Isis came to be associated with Venus (the goddess of love). In that manifestation, he's often shown with wings.



Image Source: God Horus (Harpocrates), 644-30 BCE

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/8472/god-horus-ancient-egyptian> | No longer on view

Horus the Younger

Horus the Younger of Egypt, on the other hand, was a powerful sky god associated with the sun, primarily, but also the moon. He was the protector of the royalty of Egypt, avenger of wrongs, defender of order, uniter of the two lands and, based on his battles with Set, was a god of war regularly invoked by Egyptian rulers before battle and praised afterwards.

Markers of his youthfulness included, nudity, the side lock with a finger in his mouth. He is sometimes pictured holding a pet hoopoe, and he might be portrayed standing, crouching, or sitting on a lotus. Both Harpocrates and Horus the Younger can be found portrayed holding cornucopias.

Finally, his role as solar deity is shown with him wearing the double crown (example on right).



Connection to Sunken Cities

Stele of Horus on the Crocodiles, with a receptacle in its base.

End of the third Intermediate Period – beginning of the Ptolemaic Period, ca 380-280 BCE.

In this stele, Horus is portrayed as the “child savior” standing on two crocodiles. He’s wearing an *osekh* collar (broad, wide necklace), several bracelets, an amulet pendant in the form of a heart and his arms are half open. This is of importance because he is clutching in his fists, quite a few dangerous animals while absorbing all their powers.

There’s: scorpions, long twin snakes, a chained oryx with finely sharp horns (on the right) and a lion on his back (left) in low relief. At his right is a falcon headed Re-Horakhty-Sokar-Osiris on a snake and on the left there’s a lotus shaped emblem of Nefertum with straight double feathers and a *menat* counterweight (a protective amulet assigned to the goddess Hathor).

He’s positioned in this stele as the “child savior” because of his story of survival. After his birth, it was Taweret – the hippopotami goddess – who watched over him. She stood

guard armed with a knife so that the young god could achieve his royal destiny of avenging his father Osiris by killing Set and taking over his rightful throne. But, Horus' life in the swamps of the delta was very difficult. He was bitten by a snake and stung by a scorpion.

An ancient text relates how Seth set fire to a dense field of papyrus where the child was hidden; this fire has been interpreted as a metaphor for the sensation of burns and fever the child felt after the stings of venomous beasts.



Thanks to Isis's healing, Horus was able to make it to adulthood. He triumphed over Seth, this episode was then captured in this stele.

Sources

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