

# The king and his role in ancient egypt

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Janelle Richardson Professor Ogden Goelet Ancient Egyptian Religion First Paper 4/8/13 The King and his role During the times of the Ancient Egyptians there were many beliefs that the Egyptians stood by, one of which being the ideal of polytheism. The Egyptians live in a spiritual free reign. Although they tend to follow the beliefs of the community that they lived in and around, they were for the most part free to worship and practice whatever they may with whatever God they felt right.

Another belief the Egyptians held onto was the belief in kingship and order, "Maat". The construct of Kingship during the times of the Ancient Egyptians was crucial to the unification of the Egyptian people. Through his associations with the Gods he was expected to keep the order or rather ma'at of the land, which was inhabited by the Egyptian people. The king was responsible for keeping the peace and amongst the people and the land both figuratively and literally. The king was tasked with protecting the people from potential attacks from foreign lands.

But perhaps most importantly the King served as the median between the people and the Gods. They were therefore expected to make offerings to Gods that would suffice to their needs as deities, pleasing them and placing the king and thus his kingdom, his land and his people in good favor with the Gods. This was crucial because this meant that the Gods have blessed the land that the Egyptians harvest on assuring lasted nourishment, the king had to feed his people, and if he alone managed to please the Gods on behalf of him and his people he was able to accomplish just that.

But we can't forget the idea that when the people are happy the king is secure. All of the positive exchanges between the Gods and king were <https://assignbuster.com/the-king-and-his-role-in-ancient-egypt/>

important in securing a pharaoh's kingship and ultimately giving them the opportunity to create and secure a dynasty for a longer period of time. This is an important idea when discussing the topic of the development of Religion in State. Equal to the construct of kingship, religion and ritual were a vital part of the Egyptian culture, thus a vital part in their unity, especially during times of tribal strife and war.

Also key in the formation of religion is the Egyptian's obsession over death, which could leave a dark air about the culture as whole, but the idea of an after-life, life after death was brought to the Egyptians through the image of Gods. The Egyptians created a world of polytheistic ideals and rituals that reflected their beliefs " Egyptians believed dated back to the time when gods ruled on earth, and by the " law" laid down by the King, their son and earthly representative. " (Cerny 35).

So being that the relationship that the Egyptian people had with the Gods and their importance in the limiting of chaos in their world the ideal of the King's divinity was key for the survival of society and perhaps the sanity of society as well. " Egypt was the first large " nation state," with a culture virtually restricted to that state, and thus was very self-contained... in which kingship was an unquestioned presupposition of social order—indeed order was hardly conceivable without it. " (Baines, 2).

The King's responsibilities stretched as far as the prevention of the collapse of their Egyptian state. Of course it was important to every Egyptian to be responsible for themselves and do their duties unto the land as the Gods may have it and they praised and celebrated and communed because of these rituals and these practices. But in these times, even if an Egyptian

works as hard as he can consistently to please the Gods on his own if the king falls short of his duty as the Divine middleman, the Egyptian's harvest may not bloom crops sufficient enough to feed themselves of their families.

The King as a Divine Creature Although out of the archives and data that has been collected over the past decades about Ancient Egyptian, the evidence that shows the King as being an actual divine being of the Gods, usually an incarnation of a particular God or sometimes a mosh of multiple Gods the King was scene by the people as divine and a direct creation of the Gods, therefore the only person with the ability to be incommunicationwith the God. The sun-god we are told elsewhere had appointed hum ' to be shepherd of this land, to keep the people alive...in theory he was the officiant in every temple in the land...and every religious ceremony and ritual was in a sense a royal ritual. " (Fairman 1958, 76). The Egyptians also believed the Kings, if they weren't to fail and disgrace themselves in the eyes of the Gods, received a different treatment after death.

The afterlife of a king wasn't thought to be the same as one of an Egyptian civilian, rather the Egyptian people believed that after the death of the kings cross over to the worlds of the divine, some believe that they become Osiris in the afterlife. The king This idea is seen in many of the art pieces made by the Egyptians that referenced kings after their deaths and their relationship to the Gods, or in a lot of cases a particular God (For example: The God Horus).

Whole tombs at the highest level of grandiosity and tribute were made for kings after their deaths. Many rituals were had for the kings before and after their passing including the kings initial coronation which involve d the '

selection of the new Sacred Falcon, which was effected by Horus by means of an oracle...special hymns were sung, one greeting the New Year... and the second being concerned with ensuring the protection of the Sacred Falcon' (Fairman 1958, 80).

It was believed that the spirit of Horus enters the king at the coronation and guides the king along the path of maat. Then when the king died his spirit was merged with Osiris ' from where he could guide his successors'. The King was key in the lives of the Egyptians. The King had a foot in both worlds, the secular and the spiritual, or rather the sacred, which were treated as one in the same thing by the Egyptians, at all times. The King was the religious leader and the law book simultaneously.

The Kings was seen as a representation/manifestation of God in a flesh and completely mortal carcass that served the God King for as long as they are to rule until their time to go and take part in their after-life begins " The king, it is true, interprets the evidence, translating radiation and motion in terms of religious meaning, answering them by cultic action and speaking to a God who expresses himself in a strictly ' heliomorphic' way" (Assman 1989, 68). Even the Pharaohs ritual vestments were designed to show his power.

The symbols of the gods were the king's tools of office. The crook, to reward the innocent, the flail, to punish the guilty, showing his authority to rule the two-lands, and the Ureaus Cobra or Eye of Ra seeing all that the Pharaoh did, good or evil. (Humphries). The Kings was responsible for keeping order or Ma'at , the rule of order over the chaos that the Egyptians thought was waiting to sheath the world, at any moment without the guidance of the Gods and the usefulness of the King.

The focus was on balance, the people; the Egyptians themselves were inclined to honor the God's along with the King by living a life of obedience and balance so that they can rest assured that all will be well, they have pleased the Gods and they shall not be punished for any wrong doing. The king's notional strength came from the support of the gods and as long as this was maintained no ill could befall the country.

There is little denying that the Egyptians didn't believe that their kings weren't in part Gods themselves as represented by most of their art and writings. But this system that the Egyptians became so accustomed to held the potential to cause problems for the king. The key to life lived in balance is Maat but once this was lost, however, the kingdom was thrown into turmoil until a new strong king, who had the support of the gods, took the throne. The Kings and the Egyptians found out that the Gods aren't always pleased.

The Integration of the Church and State and the Problems that it caused the King The Pharaoh was seen as the emissary of the gods and life was good as long as the religious rites were performed and maat was maintained, but what happened when maat wasn't contained? What problems arose for the king then, when something hasn't lined up with divine order? Though the importance of the king in Ancient Egypt, we can't forget that not everything always went so smoothly for the Egyptians and those who ruled over them.

Perhaps one of the most obvious drawbacks to being a king endowed with such divine responsibility is if and when the Gods were not perceived to be happy whether specifically at the king's actions or the actions of his people, the state of the king's position in his kingdom comes into question and under

fire. These occurrences however, might have helped balance out the Egyptians belief of the God like ways of being for the king. The King is mortal and fallible, after all, the king is still human.

This ideal is showcased in a lot of the literary texts of the New Kingdom, "Many different types of human frailties and weaknesses characterize all the figures in...The Contendings of Horus and Seth" (Wente 1972c, 108-126 [translation]; and Lichtheim 1976, 214-223 [translation]), "The gods were anthropomorphized from an early period in ancient Egypt's history (Hornung 1982a, 105-107), and their portrayal both in figures and in text clearly is humanized. They have family problems. They bicker. They display moods (Silverman 1995, 53-54).

In other words they're human, just as they were and were witnessed to be in life outside of their association with the Gods. Conclusion Was the king divine? It's obvious now that the Egyptians without a doubt believed in the divinity of their king, some might even say that that belief was necessary for the survival of the Egyptians I would say that by definition and according to what most of society today thinks of to be 'divine', the answer is yes and no, the king wasn't actually divine in the sense that he possessed magical powers that directly affected those around him and his people, or in the sense that the king was actually just God.

But in accordance to what I believe as a member of today's society and from what I know of the Ancient Egyptians and their beliefs, I think that the king was divine, but I believe that by the same nature of the king being divine, so was every other Egyptian that lived during the time. Now this is simply my opinion and lines up directly with my personal beliefs in God, but in a less

personal explanation, the presence and usefulness of the King in relationship to the Egyptian people and the order of the Egyptian world, served as a very sturdy backbone in the Egyptian society.

Footnotes: The silence of the god who expresses himself visually is balanced by the ‘ voice’ of the king which plays such an important part in the inscriptions. The king is the ‘ speaking god’, spreading truth (Maat) upon earth as the Aten Spreads light and life. Sources and Bibliography Assmann, J. , “ The Name Formula,” in *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, D. Lorton, trans. (Ithaca, NY 2001) 83-110. Bell, Dr. Lanny. " Montclair State University. " Divine Kingship in Ancient Egypt -Mythology and Iconography. N. p. n. d. Web. 08 Apr. 2013. . Cited for information on Horus Cerny, J. ,, “ Egyptian Oracles,” Chap. 6 in R. A. Parker, *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes* (Providence 1962) 35-48 Dunn, Jimmy. " King Ramesses I, Founder of the 19th Dynasty. " King Ramesses I, Founder of the 19th Dynasty. *Tour Egypt*, n. d. Web. 08 Apr. 2013. . Fairman, H. W. “ The Kingship Rituals of Egypt,” in *Myth, Ritual and King ship: Essays on Theory and Practice of Kingship*, S. H. Hooke (Oxford 1958) 74-104 Hornung, E. , “ The Pharaoh,” Chap. 10 in S. Donadoni, ed. , *The Egyptians* (Chicago and London 1997) 283-314. Hornung, E. , “ History as Celebration,” Chap. 8 in *Idea into Image* (New York 1992) 147-164. Humphries, Ken. " Egypt: Was Pharaoh Divine. " Egypt: Was Pharaoh Divine. N. p. , n. d. Web. 08 Apr. 2013. Used as a study source Silverman, D. P. , “ The Nature of Egyptian Kingship,” in Chap. 2 in D. O’Connor and D. P. Silverman, eds. , *Ancient Egyptian Kingship. Probleme der Agyptologie 9* (Leiden 1995) 49-92. Lichtheim, M. “ Stela of Sehetep-ibre,” *Ancient Egyptian Literature I* (Berkeley 1975) 125-129. Teeter, Emily. "



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