

The God Set

by Setnakt

The best English study of Set is Te Velde's *Seth: God of Confusion* Brill 1977. If this particular text is unavailable through your library, I recommend a short cheap and very reliable book by George Hart: *A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. This very ambiguous god was alternately deified and demonized depending on the cultural/political currents running through Egypt. Allow me to present here a brief history of Set.

Predynastically: Set was an important deity appearing in the art of the Hamitic peoples living in the Ombos and Naquada regions. Interestingly, his was the only god-figure not composed of parts from recognizable Earth animals.

(The Hamitic speakers donated most of the terms to religious philosophy to the Egyptian language that separate it from other Semitic languages including ba, ka, neter, etc. If somebody really wants to find the roots of the Egyptian religion, they should go up the Nile and do some serious anthropology among Hamitic speaking native cultures-- the roots of the Nile may hold keys to Egyptian thought that mute stones do not).

Archaic Egypt: Set generally occupies a secondary role to his enemy Horus, champion of the people of the North (except in the 2nd dynasty when one pharaoh took a "Set" name rather than a Horus name.) Set is intimately connected with teaching astronomy, the methods of agriculture, medicine, and above all magic. He is said to have opened the mouth of the other gods, and is the patron of the sem ritual. His cult titles include "Great of Magic" and "Eternal". There is indeed evidence that Set is set apart from other gods to die (Bonnet's commentaries on the Pyramid texts).

The astronomical cult, which placed the afterlife in the region of the Northern heavens -- particularly in and around the constellation of the Great Bear was replaced in the Fourth dynasty by a growing sun cult centering on Re and Horus. The great stellar monument that Imhotep designed were replaced by the solar pyramids of the Fourth and Fifth dynasty's. (Notably Cheops took no chances in the great Pyramid's design -- although outwardly a solar monument he had a hole bored through the stones aligned with the position of Alpha Draconis (a star in the Great Bear called Thuban = "the Subtle One" a Set cult title?) just in case that was where his ka was heading.

During the next few dynasties (4 - 17), Set is generally ignored. His functions are absorbed into other gods. Thoth picks up the attributes of magic, Osiris picks up the attributes of Mysterious time *djet* as opposed to exoteric time *neheh*. Set keeps his attributes a storm and stellar god, and gradually comes to be associated

with all night fears -- nightmares, desert fiends, and bad animals such as the hippo and the jaguar of the South. He is mentioned in a famous 12th dynasty writing called *The Discourse of a man with his Ba* in which his solar aspect IAA is referred to. Bikka Reed has a great translations of this text.

In the 18th dynasty a remarkable Pharaoh Hatshepsut reintroduced the worship of Set by building a Temple dedicated to him and Horus the Elder at Ombos. This marked a strong interest in Set's eternal nature, for example in Hatshepsut is the prophecy (which she had placed in her tomb at Der el-Medina) that "She will not only enjoy the days of Horus, but the days of Set will be added to her span." She was also interested in the antinomian nature of the Set cult -- in fact she preformed one of the most scandalous acts available to a woman -- she acted as a man. This early feminist clearly found Set, a great archetype to Work with. Set was popular among her family until the Kingship of Akhenaton.

(may he be reborn forever drowning in the jaws of Sobek the crocodile god). The very militaristic pharaohs of the Nineteenth dynasty, who were probably descended from a family of Set priests at Tanis, delighted in Set both in his militaristic role and as God of Foreign places. Ramses II for example called himself the Son of Set. The Set cult too was very popular with foreigners coming to live in Egypt. His worship has always been connected with the outsider.

The Twentieth Dynasty began by looking very favorably on this god, as is shown in the name of its founder Setnakt, "Set is Mighty." There is also considerable evidence that the set cult was favored among artisans of the time (see Romer's *Ancient Lives*, Henry Holt, 1984, and if you've got a copy of Stephen Quirk's *Ancient Egyptian Religion* check out the beautiful Stella of Aapehty -- probably the most beautiful surviving example of Setian art).

By the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, as the funerary cult of Osiris became the dominate force in popular Egyptian religion, more and more, Set as the murderer of Osiris became the Evil One. In fact by the Twenty Sixth dynasty it was a common practice to disfigure any representations of Set. He became --for all practical purposes the Christian devil. Some scholars have even derived the name Satan from Set-Hen, a cult title meaning the Majesty of Set, but I am dubious of this particular derivation.

However Set was not down for the count. During the Ptolemaic period Set, merged with the Greek titan Typhon, became the figure for the *goes* or sorcerer to use. After Hermes the most often invoked god in the Magical papyri is Set-Typhon. This entity was used to bring spirit helpers (bird would fly down and announce that the magician was now under the protection of a god -- a popular Typhonic practice outside of Egypt as well see Morton Smith's *Jesus the Magician*). Set was also the god to invoke to send dreams, perform healings on the head or spinal column, and

to cause enmity between enemies.

There seems to be a few common threads running through the Set cult: the quest for immortality, antinomianism, and the practice of magic. Perhaps this is why Michael Aquino's current Temple of Set finds this figure so appealing as an archetype for the Left Hand Path. Like Hatshepsut before Aquino has Opened the Mouth of this ancient god, and the articulation of the Principle of Isolate Intelligence is available to us today.