

Khepry

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The Heliopolitan cult of the sun features the beetle deity Khepry, who represents the morning aspect of the sun god, as the solar disc rises in the eastern horizon. This links the god with rebirth, creation, and resurrection, in addition connecting him with Re and ATUM. The linguistic root is *kheper* – “to come into being/existence” or “to create,” so his name is translated as “he, who comes into being,” since he was reborn every morning by the sky goddess NUT.

The iconography is manifold, Khepry appearing alone or in groups of gods (within the sun bark). He takes the form of a scarab, the Egyptian dung beetle, Latin *scarabaeus sacer*. It was the beetle’s characteristic reproductive behavior which accounts for the link with the sun god, laying eggs in a dung ball which was rolled over the sand into a hole and covered. The beetle’s offspring later emerged from the sand, seemingly out of nothing. Therefore, Khepry is sometimes depicted as a scarab pushing the solar disk, mirroring the beetle with the dung ball. He can also be seen as a scarab-headed

man, a human with a scarab-head, or with falcon aspects (indicating a connection to Horus). The scarab presents various levels of stylization of the beetle’s anatomy. Painted or inlaid versions are often colored blue to signify Khepry’s connection with the heavens. In vignettes of funerary texts, his color is black as scarabs are in nature, connecting him to Osiris.

Khepry is documented from the Old Kingdom up to the Roman Period, but is most evident from the New Kingdom.

SEE ALSO: Funerary cult, Pharaonic Egypt; Gods, Egyptian; Heliopolis, Ain Shams/Matariya; Re and Re Horakhty.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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