

Tracking Seth

Amon 210

I have claimed SeTh as my patron of sorts, and naturally wished to know more about him. Searching for the historic mythological SeTh seemed a simple task; I had no idea the road would prove so rutted and forked. What I have learned I wish to present as "notes along the way."

SeTh has the reputation of a sexual deity, and I had read in Katon Shual's Sexual Magick of the homosexual episode between SeTh and Horus wherein Horus submits to SeTh's advances but does not allow penetration. [65] Horus catches SeTh's sperm between his fingers. I wanted to establish the relationship between SeTh and Horus and put this episode in that larger context.

Essential to any understanding of SeTh (and my difficulty in tracking him) is his background. Atum, the solar creator-god, formed order out of disorder. He formed Shu and Tefnut, air and moisture, by masturbating into his hand. Shu and Tefnut bore Geb and Nut, or as Crowley renders them Seb and Nuit, earth and sky, who in turn bore Osiris, Isis, SeTh and Nephthys. These are the earliest Egyptian gods, known as the Ennead.

Osiris came to be king of the land. SeTh murdered him. Typically he dismembers the body and hides the pieces, which Isis and Nephthys search out. Isis, a powerful magician, manages to conceive Horus off the reassembled but not fully alive Osiris. Horus grows up to contest SeTh for his father's throne.

I had assumed SeTh and Horus were brothers, hence "As brothers fight ye!" Here it looked like SeTh was a nasty uncle. But a complication arose: there were two Horuses! Horus the younger is son of Osiris, Hor-pa-krath, pictured as a youth with one finger in his mouth. Horus the Elder is Heru, Horus of the Horizons (sometimes Harakhty, sometimes said to be Ra), often included in the Ennead. Here the solar nature of Horus is established: he is the skygod, or the sun and its travels across

the sky, represented by the falcon. The conflict of Heru Harakhty with SeTh was the natural conflict of day with night, twin aspects of a whole. This conflict, like the identity of Elder Horus, became confused with the later Horus' conflict for kingship. [Budge, *Dead* cxiv-cxvi, Frankfort 40-41] Budge even tells a version in which the conflict over kingship occurs between the Elder Horus and SeTh, before the birth of Hor-pa-krath. [Budge, *Dwellings* 221].

Horus and SeTh fight for rightful kingship. Re-Harakhty tires of their quarrelling and admonishes them to feast together and be at peace. SeTh invites Horus to his house. Horus accepts. They feast together. SeTh prepares a bed and invites Horus to lie with him; Horus accepts. But Horus does not allow penetration. He catches SeTh's semen between his fingers. Later Isis spreads the semen (or, according to James, Horus' semen) over SeTh's lettuce, an aphrodisiac and the only vegetable SeTh eats.

In a battle between the two, SeTh wounds the Eye of Horus, recounted in the Book of the Dead, Spell XVII. This is a highly charged sexual motif. Herman Te Velde points out that the Egyptians saw a wounding of the eye as the result not only of a blow but also of rape. The wound may be Horus' eye becoming smaller and weaker as SeTh's phallus is withdrawn from their embrace. [Shual, 66] The Eye may be a "Freudian" metaphor for the testicles, as when Oedipus blinds himself for his sexual misdeed. [Kaster, 85] The potency of the Eye rejuvenates Osiris when Horus presents it to him. [Eliade 97-98, Kaster 85-86] The Eyes also equate the two Horuses, for they are also the sun and moon.

With SeTh's wounding Horus' Eye, Horus is usually seen as castrating SeTh. Herman Te Velde believes SeTh's wound is a loss of seed and not castration. [Griffiths, 227] "Castrating" may be a substitute translation for "seizing" SeTh's testicles. [Shual, 66] In the yearly-enacted Sed play Thoth tells Horus to

"incorporate" SeTh's testicles in himself to increase his power.
[Frankfort, 130] Testicles and semen, the crux of their
contact, are indeed powerful.

Conclusion: SeTh and Horus leave their mark each other's
divine attribute of fertility. Yet, the fighting concluded,
SeTh and Horus live in harmony, bearing no malice toward each
other. Their wounds are healed. The king rules "by the Horus-
and-SeTh"; only with their combined power when they are not in
opposition can he maintain stable rule. This has the flavor of
an alchemical union, the white-crowned south united with the
red-crowned north. "Horus purifieth and Set strengtheneth,
and Set purifieth and Horus strengtheneth."

References

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J Gwyn Griffiths in Journal of the American Oriental Society, 55.





Set represents the contractive force, the coagulating fire, the styptic power of the sperm. It is Set that imprisons spirit in matter; hence the phallic significance. For it is the procreative act that ensnares the 'soul' and imprisons it in human form. Strictly speaking, esoterically, it is incorrect to say, 'Man has a soul.' It should be the other way round: 'The soul has a man.'

-John Anothy West, Serpent in the Sky.