Neith (Egyptian deity)

In Egyptian mythology, creator-goddess whose symbol is crossed arrows over a shield. She was one of the four protectors of sarcophagi and Canopic jars. Her chief cult centre was at Sais.

Summary Article: Neith
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The goddess Neith was represented as a woman wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. She is primarily associated with her main cult center at Sais (see Sais, San El-Hagar), although she also had a temple called Neith-North-of-Her-Wall at Memphis and played an important part in the cult temple of Esna (see Esna/Latopolis) dedicated to Khnum and Haroeris. Her cult emblem and that of the city of Sais was a pair of arrows crossed through a target or animal skin. She is, therefore, sometimes regarded as a huntress. The name Neith is part of the names of some of the queens of Dynasty 1, reflecting her political importance during the first unification of Egypt. Neith features in the Pyramid Texts as the protector of the king. She is regarded as one of the four protective goddesses of the canopic chest of the king, shown on the box of Tutankhamun with her emblem on her head – here the markings of the cobra hood or a beetle motif. In the story of the Contendings of Horus and Seth, it is Neith who is called upon as an external and impartial judge to adjudicate between the two contenders. In the rich and complex texts of the Roman period at Esna, Neith's cosmological role is fully realized. Here, she is the mother of the sun god himself, and thus the creatrix of the first creator. No male consort is named, suggesting that she held all creative power within herself. She is shown suckling crocodiles, a measure of her power and life-giving nature. Her sanctuary at Sais has not survived, but it once comprised two main parts and may have held the crown of Lower Egypt as well as workshops manufacturing fine linen for the royal wardrobe. The kings of the 26th Dynasty were buried in its courtyard and a temple of Osiris Hemag stood behind it. The temple was visited by pilgrims from all over Egypt and administered by a very powerful and wealthy priesthood during the Saite Period. Many Late period bronze statuettes of Neith attest to her power and popularity.

SEE ALSO:
Saite Period, Egypt.

References and Suggested Readings


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