In ancient Egypt, Seshat was the goddess of writing and measurement and the ruler of books. Djhuty and Seshat were divine sesb (scribes). Djhuty is well known as the scribe of the gods, the god of wisdom, knowledge, science, cosmology, magic, medicine, and the afterlife. Seshat was Djhuty's consort and is portrayed as a female wearing a headband with horns and a star with her name written Ss3t on it. Her dress is a plain sheath covered by a long panther skin, with the tail reaching her feet. She is often depicted with the notched palm rib that represented the passing of time. Seshat’s name is inscribed on the obverse side of the upper register of Narmer’s palette.

Seshat was an expert in the art of sighting the stars and planets. She has also been recorded as assisting the king in the ritual of “stretching the cord” associated with astronomical and astrological measurements for the location of temples. The commissioning pharaoh says, “I have established the surveying rod and I have grasped the point of the peg; I hold the plumb-line with Seshat. I turn my sight toward the course of the stars; I make my eyes enter the constellation Meshket [Thigh/Great Bear]. The Time Measurer stands next to his hour clock. I have established the four corners of your temple.”

Seshat was the keeper of ground plans and charts.

Seshat is also portrayed recording the king's jubilees, such as in the Sed Festival, cattle counts, and the king's campaigns as early as the 2nd dynasty. Reliefs found in temples of the Old and Middle Kingdoms (2686-1650 BC) depict her as the recorder of quantities of foreign captives and booty in the aftermath of military campaigns, and she is also shown writing the names of the king on the leaves of the Persea tree.

The inspirations of Seshat are evident in activities concerning the service of the gods, the living, and the Dead. In pre- or protodynastic times, the people of Kernet used canons, a system of proportions resembling an anthropométric description of the body based on the standardization of its natural proportions expressed in the ratios of Egyptian measures of length for metrological purposes. They knew that the various parts of the human body are constant and immutable in all individuals irrespective of any differences in size and dimensions.

The idea of Seshat assisting the king in the ritual of “stretching the cord” for proportional measurement of the ground to plan for the layout of magnificent temples can be advanced to explain the inspiration for the creation of grids, a geometrical projection of the canon, in which the side length of the modular square represents the anatomical unit of one full handbreadth (four fingers plus thumb) with the proportional value of 1 1/3 metrological handbreadths to achieve maat (i.e., balance, harmony, and straightness of objects in drawings and paintings). In this case, grids were either ruled with a straightedge or marked by means of strings dipped in red ochre. Seshat’s inspirations of counting and measurements are demonstrated in city planning, architecture, seagoing vessels, recitations in spells and rituals, writing, medicine, music, and placement of figures in reliefs, bas reliefs, and reliefs en crux.

See also
Goddesses

Further Readings

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seshat_egyptian_deity

Cannon-Brown, Giulie

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA


Copyright © 2009 by SAGE Publications, Inc.
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA