



THE LEGACY OF MA'AT: EXPLORING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN REPRESENTATION DURING THE NEW KINGDOM

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Introduction:

- ❖ In Egyptian antiquity, Ma'at served not only as a deity of truth, balance, and justice but also as a foundational principle of cosmic order for Egyptian society and the universe. To the monarchs, who were considered terrestrial defenders of Ma'at (order) against Apep (chaos), she was an essential part of the rituals for legitimacy. For the laymen, she influenced the judicial system, ideals of justice, and the everyday moral compass of Egyptian civilians as they did their parts to uphold the paragon of harmony that was Ma'at.¹
- ❖ This work looks to close the obvious gap in scholarship concerning change in representation over time, non-royal acknowledgments, and the political or cultural influences that may have established these changes. It hopes to contribute to Egyptological scholarship by providing a nuanced view of Ma'at's complex role in Ancient Egypt.

Methodology:

- ❖ This study involves a detailed examination of Ma'at's visual representations throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th dynasties.
- ❖ Analyzing written sources, including inscriptions, religious texts, and royal decrees that reference or invoke Ma'at.
- ❖ This study will consider the interplay between visual and written representations of Ma'at. Comparisons between different dynasties and contexts will be used to track shifts and continuities in her representation.

Iconographic Evidence (some):

18th Dyn.



19th Dyn.



20th Dyn.



Results:

18th Dyn.

- ❖ Maat was central to legitimizing kingship and ensuring societal harmony, as seen with Queen Hatshepsut emphasizing her divine authority and intertwining religious, moral, and aesthetic ideals to present her reign as divinely ordained and maintaining cosmic order.^{2,3}

19th Dyn.

- ❖ The importance of Maat was reinforced through royal rituals and a personal association with kings like Ramesses II, emphasizing the king's duty as the enforcer of divine and societal order, while Maat's principles were also crucial in promoting truth and justice within governance.^{2,3}

20th Dyn.

- ❖ Despite a continued emphasis on upholding Maat, political instability and weakened royal authority led to shared responsibilities with religious institutions, with representations of Maat increasingly focusing on personal piety and the afterlife amid struggles to maintain Egypt's former influence.^{2,3}

Conclusion:

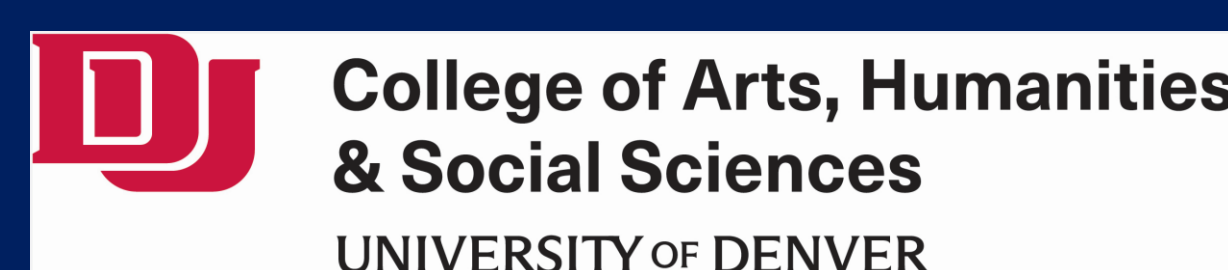
- ❖ Across the New Kingdom dynasties (18th–20th), Ma'at's role evolved as the people did. Initially seem seemed entirely central to royal authority, but later depictions during political shifts focused more on personal piety/relationships and the afterlife, highlighting Ma'at's enduring but adaptable significance.
- ❖ This work highlights the dual influence of Ma'at. For monarchs, as a principle of legitimacy and governance. For society, shaping justice and moral conduct, while acknowledging the growing role of religious institutions as the royal hold on them and the culture weakened over time.
- ❖ This is a small portion of an ongoing thesis project that traces the evolution of Ma'at from the New Kingdom to the Late Period with methodology from interdisciplinary focuses.



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References:

¹Assmann 2005



²Teeter 1997



³Karenga 2004

