

The Universe as divine sanctuary

Eternity and perpetuity: time and space

The cycle of days and nights

The creation of the tangible, ordered universe generated two types of eternity:

- heh (cyclic eternity): the appearance of sun and light marked the transition from an inert state to a dynamic one, via the perpetual movement of heavenly bodies;
- djed: eternity based on the organization of space upon a solid, lasting platform—the Earth— where the imperishable remains of Osiris rest.

The universe was nevertheless threatened by a return to the inert, disorganized state that preceded creation. The snake Apophis, also born of Nun, attempted to trigger this return during repeated battles with Re. But Apophis regularly lost, allowing creation to continue to exist. The horizons to West and East represented the Gates of Heaven, eternal doors that permitted the triumphal procession of the sun, the succession of days and nights.

“The Beautiful West”, an immaterial gate

The ancient Egyptian word for “West”, Imentet is feminine in gender, which means that the west was personified by a goddess of the same name. She welcomed both the setting sun and the souls of the deceased at the threshold of the underworld. Imentet was assimilated to other goddesses with pronounced maternal traits, such as Isis and more especially Hathor. This latter, in the form of a cow, incarnated nourishment and regeneration thanks to the milk she provided. Hathor accorded her protection to travelers along the paths of the “Beautiful West,” because even though this Gate of Heaven could be entered, the world beyond it was not without unforeseen dangers for the sun god as well as for mortals.

