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Feature Story

Montu, Solar and Warrior God

by Taylor Ray Ellison

Throughout the world in ancient times, man worshipped the sun. We find monuments to the sun gods all over the world, but in Egypt we really begin to get a feel for just how the sun dominated early theology. In Egypt, at various locations and apparently somewhat independently, the worship of the sun developed with gods of various names. So many of Egypt's deities were associated with the sun in some way that it is difficult to identify them, and their various forms became very complex. Montu, who we generally identify as an ancient war god in Egypt, actually originated in the form of a local solar god in Upper (southern) Egypt, apparently at Hermonthis (City of the Sun). His worship seems to have been exported to [Thebes](#) during the [11th Dynasty](#).

Because of this god's association with the successful [King Nebhepetre Montuhotep I \(or II, same king\)](#), who ruled during Egypt's 11th Dynasty, Montu (Mentu) achieved the rank of state god. Montuhotep I reunited Upper and Lower Egypt after the chaos of the First Intermediate Period. His association with Montu is obvious from his name, which means, "Montu is satisfied".

However, by the 12th Dynasty, Montu became subordinated to [Amun](#), another deity who probably originated in Upper Egypt, and would later be known as the "King of Gods". It was during this period that Montu's role in Egyptian religion took on the true attributes of a war god.

Actually, Montu's veneration as a war god can be traced originally to the Story of Sinuhe, where Montu was praised by the tale's hero after he defeated the "strong man" of Retjenu. By the New Kingdom, [18th Dynasty](#) pharaohs, some of whom followed a very military tradition, sought specifically to emulate Montu. For example, the Gebel Barkal Stele of [Tuthmosis III](#), often referred to as the Napoleon of Egypt, describes the king as "a valiant Montu on the battlefield". Later in the New Kingdom, he became so personally identified with the [Ramesses II](#) that a cult statue bearing the king's throne name, Usermaare Setepenre, with the epithet, "Montu in the Two Lands", was venerated in Ramesses II's honor during his



lifetime. When kings such as Ramesses II are referenced as "mighty bulls", they are claiming the association with Montu as his son.

It should also be noted that Montu had a connection with Egyptian households and was probably considered a protector of the happy home. He was often cited in marriage



documents. One document from [Deir el-Medina](#) invokes the rage of a husband to his unfaithful wife with, "It is the abomination of Montu!"

Left: The Temple of Karnak, Sanctuary of Montu

Montu was honored with cult centers in a number of locations. Specifically, he was worshipped at four sites within the Theban region. The cult centers

included [Armant](#) (ancient Greek Hermonthis), southwest of modern [Luxor](#) (ancient [Thebes](#)) on the west bank of the [Nile](#), [Medamud](#) (ancient Madu) northeast of Luxor, [Tod](#) (ancient Greek Tuphium), southwest of Luxor on the eastern bank, and at [Karnak](#) which is just northeast of modern Luxor. Most of these cult centers appear to have been established during the Middle Kingdom, with the exception of Karnak. There, the earliest monument dates from the New Kingdom, and specifically to the reign of [Amenhotep III](#).

A hymn from an Armant Stele says of him, "the raging one who prevails over the serpent-demon Nik," and the one "who causes Re to sail in his park and who overthrows his serpent enemy". Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the ancient Egyptian warships were equipped with figures of a striding Montu holding maces or spears. Each of these statues were styled as a god of one of his four primary cult centers.

Right: The Remains of the Temple of Montu at Medamud

Montu is commonly depicted as a man with the head of a falcon surmounted by a solar disk. He wears the double uraeus behind which two tall plumes extend vertically. Later, he became associated with the [Bull Cults](#) such as Buchis at Armant, and so he is depicted with the head of a bull and a plumed, solar headdress. Another bull sacred to Montu was also worshipped at Medamud.



Like a number of other deities, Montu also became associated with Re in the form of Montu-Re. He was also paired with the solar [Atum](#) of Lower Egypt, and in this guise, was often depicted escorting the king into the presence of Amun. Other documentary evidence



suggests that he was also sometimes paired with [Set](#) (Seth), perhaps acting as a



controlled divine aggressor to balance Set's chaotic attributes.

Left: Columns of different types at the Ptolemy VII temple of Montu at Medamud

Montu is also sometimes accompanied by one of his consorts in ancient scenes. Three are known, consisting of Tjenenet, Iunyt and Rettawy (or Raettawy). Rettawy is the

female counterpart of Re, and is depicted like [Hathor](#) as a cow with a sun disk surmounting her head. Through Rettawy, Montu is connected with [Horus](#) and thus the king, for their son was Harpocrates (Horus the child).

Montu's worship survived for many years, and he was eventually considered by the Greeks to be a form of their war god, Ares.

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