

Uraeus: The Symbol of Pharaohs

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The present paper examines the various aspects of the stylized form of a cobra named Uraeus portrayed through ancient Egyptian art. Apparently, animals and serpents have played an indispensable role representing good and evil in ancient Egyptian religion and art just as in many other ancient civilizations in the world. They were also often personified as gods, goddesses or demons with anthropomorphic characteristics. Whereas the demon Ammut – the Devourer of the Dead- is part crocodile, part lionesses, and part hippopotamus, Anubis – the Protector of the Dead- is portrayed as a jackal-headed man. Of the serpents depicted in Egyptian art, the upright form of Egyptian cobra called Uraeus was often associated with royalty and divinity. Uraeus was an essential element of the Pharaoh's crown through the Old Kingdom until Cleopatra VII of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Further, the monotheistic Akhenaten, abandoning the traditional Egyptian polytheism in favor of the worship of solar deity Aten, used the Uraeus on his crown despite the banning of all the deities associated with animals. Evidently, the crowns, jewelry and amulets representing Uraeus were popular among the Royal affiliates. Royal furniture decorated with Uraeus such as the golden throne of Tutankhamen, and the rows of Uraeus on the tomb of Djoser in Saqqara prove the dignified aspects of the particular cult. The archetype of the divine protective powers attributed to Uraeus can be found in the creation myths illustrated in the Book of the Dead. Uraeus was also associated with other protective deities as means of enhancing their powers. The particular aspect, thus, represents royalty, legitimacy, and divine assets having them equal status simultaneously. Therefore, this study is focused on examining the above justified threefold aspects portrayed by the symbolic characteristics of Uraeus, and the means of protective powers attributed to it.

Key words: Egyptian art, Pharaohs, Uraeus, cobra, symbols of protection