



Entomological Broadcasting Corporation

Register

Sign In

HOME

NEWS

CULTURE

CONSERVATION

SCIENCE

A God on Six-Legs

31st May 2023, 12:00 EST

By Dr. Victor Johanson
EBC Cultural Correspondent



Khepri: Egyptian God of the Sun Artwork by Eric Jackson

What if I were to tell you that for millennia many god-like mythical beings walked on six legs. They reigned over the passage of the sun, controlled life and death, and are credited for the birth of the universe itself. In this recent EPR episode I got a chance to interview one of those six legged gods: Khepri, the Egyptian Scarab God of the Sun. We discussed his origins and representation in ancient Egyptian culture, his past and

present societal significance, and his thoughts on the current mindset towards insects and how to change them.

So to kick things off, it's likely that many of our listeners haven't heard of you Khepri. Give us a quick rundown of your origins and what you represent.

Khepri: My origins are pretty straightforward, but my representation changed multiple times in ancient Egyptian culture. Early ancient Egyptians imagined me into existence from their observations of dung beetles. They watched how these beetles roll dung around and associated that with the movement of the sun. Thus began my job of lugging the sun across the sky. Do you understand how heavy the sun is....I have to do that every day. Then once it's done, I die and resurrect myself to repeat the same thing the next day.

You mentioned that your representation changed multiple times. I've read that as far back as 2700 BC you were only a sun god, but after 200 BC, you became known as the God of Resurrection.

Khepri: YUP! Lift sun into sky. Die. Resurrect myself. Repeat. Ancient Egyptians believed that all dung beetles were males. This is due to their knowledge of beetle life cycles being limited. They believed dung beetles procreate themselves. Thus, they imagined me creating myself from nothing.

You definitely played a significant role in how ancient Egyptian society viewed insects, especially beetles.

Khepri: It's incredible! My connection with scarab beetles, specifically the species known as the sacred scarab, led ancient Egyptians to associate them with birth, life and second life in eternal existence. Scarab figures are almost always found on Egyptian mummy stone coffins. Some archaeologists even believe that the pupal stage in beetle development inspired human mummification in Egypt! Along with their connection to mummies, scarabs were also associated with good fortune and health. Stone scarab amulets, seals and jewelry were all the rage. Their popularity as good luck charms were so great that it expanded into other cultures. These included the Romans, Persians, and Macedonians. It was truly a great time to be an insect god.

Why do you think insects aren't as popular today as they were in the past?

Khepri: Societies conquer other societies, and the belief of the dominant society wins out. Unfortunately for insects, this meant demonization and has resulted in many of my fellow insect god-kin being mostly forgotten. A great example would be fly gods. Most

people only see flies as creatures of disease, death, and filth. Yet, if they got to meet my buddy Big Fly of the Navajo, they would have a more nuanced view of flies. He is literally a giant fly that acts as the mediator between humans and gods as well as the instructor and helper of heroes. Sadly, due to colonization and the spread of Christianity, the only people who really know of him are scholars like yourself.

In your opinion, how do we change people's mindset of insects from a negative to a positive one?

Khepri: More positive representation. Most movies that either feature or reference insects often associate them with villainy, horror, or destruction. For example, my good friend Itzpapalotl, the Aztec moth mother deity and goddess of war and death was recently featured in a Netflix horror movie called "No One Gets Out Alive". Itzpapalotl had mixed feelings about her portrayal. She was upset that the movie only characterized her as a monster of death and completely ignored her representation as the mother deity. If popular culture had a more nuanced representation of insects, I believe insects and beings associated with them would be viewed in a far better light.

I can personally attest to that. I'm currently featured in a popular video game called SMITE. In the game, people play as gods and mythical beings and compete in a battle royal. I'm quite a popular playable character. I'm characterized as a guardian and protector which is very empowering. It brings back memories of my influence in ancient times. To be seen as a hero again, in such a popular game, gives me hope for the future of insects and insect-god kin.

Reference

- Beetles in Stone: The Egyptian Scarab*. (n.d.). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3210428>
- Capinera, J. L. (1993). Insects in Art and Religion: The American Southwest. *American Entomologist*, 39(4), 221–230. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ae/39.4.221>
- Duffus, N. E., Christie, C. R., & Morimoto, J. (2021). Insect Cultural Services: How Insects Have Changed Our Lives and How Can We Do Better for Them. *Insects*, 12(5), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/insects12050377>
- Gunning, C. (2021, October 9). *No One Gets Out Alive's Monster Itzpapalotl Explained (Origins & Powers)*. ScreenRant. <https://screenrant.com/no-one-gets-out-alive-monster-itzpapalotl-explained/>
- Hogue, J. N. (2009). Chapter 63—Cultural Entomology. In V. H. Resh & R. T. Cardé (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Insects (Second Edition)* (pp. 239–245). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-374144-8.00072-2>
- Kinney, T. (2021, April 3). *Smite: A Complete Guide To Khepri's Skills*. Game Rant. <https://gamerant.com/smite-khepri-skills-guide/>
- Ratcliffe, B. C. (2006). Scarab Beetles in Human Culture. *The Coleopterists Bulletin*, 60(mo5), 85–101. [https://doi.org/10.1649/0010-065X\(2006\)60\[85:SBIHC\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1649/0010-065X(2006)60[85:SBIHC]2.0.CO;2)
- Simaika, J. P., & Samways, M. J. (2018). Insect conservation psychology. *Journal of Insect Conservation*, 22(3), 635–642. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10841-018-0047-y>