



### **About Us**

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#### **Editorial**

I was recently sharing my moral outrage about the shocking extent of how Big Data have been exploited by politicians to manipulate voters with personalized 'post-truths'. These methods have been used in all the elections of the past year (mostly by the right so far, but no doubt all parties will follow suit) and the politicians can get away with it because our electoral laws cannot cope with these recent developments and on paper they have done nothing that was against the law.

However, what puzzled me was the reaction of some who remained apparently unmoved and unperturbed by these revelations. The reason for their air of indifference was, I found out, something to do with trying to transcend duality and trying to refrain from identifying one thing as wrong in order not to enter the game of the constant struggle between opposites. This way of thinking was inspired by the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*, and the Buddhist concept of non-attachment. '*Advaita*' means simply 'not two' and points to the fundamental oneness of life, which is a universal teaching in most traditions. I don't doubt at all the value of the teachings of Buddhism and Vedanta for our times. But I do doubt the interpretations we give to some of these ancient concepts.

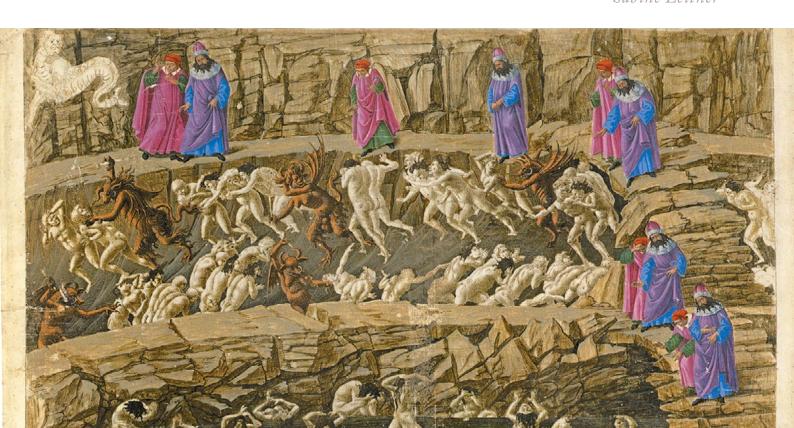
I don't think that any of these teachings aim to make us indifferent to the moral crisis and the human suffering we are witnessing today or that they mean to lead us into the spiritual equivalent of moral relativism. Nor

do I think that we are supposed not to feel anything anymore. It seems to me that this kind of non-attachment and indifference has more to do with self-protection and an escape from that which is painful. This is sometimes combined with a fear of one's own emotions and a preoccupation with one's own development.

I also don't think that these teachings ask us not to participate in human affairs anymore and not to take a stand in conflicts. We cannot escape the fact that we do live in a world of duality and that we are all asked to meet the need of the hour. We all must act. Non-action is still a form of action in our dual world and not making a choice is also a choice.

Having just read Dante's Divine Comedy I found it interesting to see that this great poet who lived in times of political turmoil had very clear ideas on these topics: "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis." He describes the indifferent ones as "those sad souls who lived a life but lived it with no blame and with no praise... The world will not record their having been there..." Heaven doesn't want them but hell neither, so they have to stay forever in the vestibule of hell and their just punishment is having to run forever after an empty banner, since they never committed to anything and "undecided stood but for themselves". Moreover, since on earth they were untouched and unmoved by any care, they are now "stung and stung again by the hornets and wasps.

Sabine Leitner



## Simone De Beauvoir

The Second Sex and its implications for human evolution

In her book *The Second Sex*, published in Paris in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir writes about the female ontological experience from her perspective as a female philosopher. By the term 'female ontological experience' is meant the experience of being a woman at the deepest level (from Gk. *Ontos* = Being). The result is an illuminating description of the particular problems that present themselves in how woman experiences her own existence.

From the outset, de Beauvoir presents us with a crucial point of view that:

"one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"

This is an important key to reading *The Second Sex* and it in itself reveals a deep complexity to the female experience.

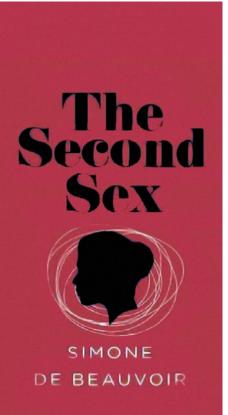
Where we refer to the 'human' or 'man' there is a general acceptance that the term refers to the whole of humanity. Yet where we speak of 'woman' there begins an automatic tendency towards separation in our thinking. The idea of, or experience of *woman* is set apart and divided from the whole *human*.

This subtle shift in thinking may barely register upon our conscious

minds but the implications of it are profound because from the outset of any discussion regarding her experience 'woman' has acquired a position of separation from 'human' and according to de Beauvoir, she becomes 'Other'.

"The advantage man enjoys and which manifest itself from childhood onwards is that his vocation as a human being in no way contradicts his destiny as male [...] However, for a woman to accomplish her femininity she is required to be object and prey; [...] Renouncing her femininity means renouncing part of her humanity"

De Beauvoir presents many ways in which the problems manifest themselves from early girlhood through schooling into adolescence, further education and on into the adult world full of its professions, relationships and family life. However, the main resulting scenario that de Beauvoir presents is that by attempting to be both herself and be feminine, the woman has had to divide her focus between the expectations or hopes of her personal destiny with those of her pre-determined role as a woman, a role which was not set or defined by her.



"The man obeys an imperious necessity: the woman must constantly renew her decision"

It becomes disturbing to consider that nearly half of the human population may be experiencing separation at such a fundamental level. If we think of how many scientists, engineers, artists,

leaders and politicians have potentially not 'gone for' their talent or reached for their truest potential the sense of loss for the whole becomes absurd.

"This is the fundamental characteristic of woman: she is the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other."

The defeat of this general *Otherness* becomes not only imperative for women's development but equally for that of men. The masculine principle needs the feminine principle to be whole within the world in order that it too may know the true

potential of its own nature.

"The man obeys

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her decision."

Imagine, what tragic piano playing would it be if the left hand thought itself as merely an ornament to the efforts of the right? Or, if the right hand were to become so used to the prominence of its own tune so as to never hear

the sound of its balance, it could not know the inherent harmony of its own melody. In the ancient Chinese Yin-Yang symbol whilst Yin and Yang are distinct, both are formed by each other and with each other held within their centres.

"...it is up to man to make the reign of freedom triumph; to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must among

other things and above and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood."

Siobhan Farrar



Simone de Beauvoir

## The Industrial Revolutions

We have all encountered, from our school days to the present day, all kinds of references about the industrial revolution and how it changed life first in Britain and then in the whole world. A shift from an agricultural life to people migrating to live in the growing cities, in order to work in the newly created factories that the industrial revolution brought with it, resulting in a dramatic change in lifestyle.

The first industrial revolution, the famous one, goes from 1750 to 1820 in general terms and brought great mechanical innovations such as the steam engine, applied to the textile industry and the railways among others, with coal as the main source

of energy. The growth of industries such as coal, iron, railroads and textiles contributed to the development of manufacturing and businesses and the number of wage labourers simply skyrocketed. By the time of the American Revolution the people in Britain had begun to use machines to make cloth and steam engines to run the machines. Many rural traditions were lost in the process due to the new life on the outskirts of the main cities and, as the 19th century progressed, all labour workers began to dress in the same way, leaving behind their regional costumes, as had never happened before.

In the 1830s electricity was in its infancy and there



was a debate on the possibility of it being the source of life, as we can see in Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein.

The second industrial revolution, considered to have taken place between 1870 and 1914, brought a new source of energy petroleum which, together with electricity and steel, became the source of many innovations. Most of these innovations and inventions shaped the 20th century, just as those of the first industrial revolution had done for the 19th century. Electrification, in fact, made mass production possible. Steel mills gave way to the production of many new products impossible to even imagine without the new materials available. Electric light transformed the cities and the automobile began to replace railways as the main source of locomotion. It is impossible to forget here the assembly line invented by Henry Ford, which has been copied by every industry ever since.

Skyscrapers were possible thanks to the new materials, as well as the lifts required to reach the higher floors which otherwise would have been impractical for daily use. The Diesel engine was another technical innovation, as was the arrival of the aeroplane, whose development, it must be said, took off during war times. The telephone was decisive in developing communications, as was the typewriter, which replaced the good old fashion quill.

Phonographs allowed sound to be reproduced in an artificial way for the first time. Photographs replaced paintings as witnesses of daily events and not much later motion pictures brought a totally new dimension to the reproduction of reality as something feasible. But probably the most relevant invention regarding household chores was the washing machine, which saved time and effort for housewives for the first time in history.

The third industrial revolution is

"The speed of the normal post was beaten, albeit briefly, by the fax until it was replaced by the email."

considered to have taken place in the 1990s with the arrival of the internet and the popularization of personal computers. The speed of the normal post was beaten, albeit briefly, by the fax until it was replaced by the email. All these developments meant that the speed and quantity of communications increased greatly.

The fourth industrial revolution is supposed to be still in progress. It brings mobile communications, connectivity of devices, the social media and artificial intelligence. Barriers between the physical and digital worlds become confused and people have started to be permanently connected.

It is extremely important not to forget that all these changes, in the last two and a half centuries, have meant a lot for the welfare of many people and the



improvement of their living standards. But while all these inventions and new digital devices are supposed to be there to help us, they have ended up shaping our lives to the point that it is simply impossible for very many people even to consider the possibility of not having them around us. All these advances, and the speed which comes with them, mean nothing from a human point of view if we are not in charge of our own lives.

Alfredo Aguilar

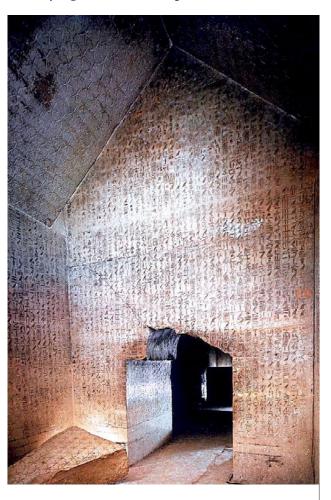
# The Book of the Dead

One thing we know for certain is that death is waiting for us all. Something so natural and irrefutable, but still how much do we understand what that really means? How we see death is how we understand life. Searching for those answers is a quest that has accompanied men and women since time immemorial. Most ancient traditions spoke of a journey in life, which would continue after the physical body ceased functioning.

One of the oldest written texts on the subject of death is the so-called Egyptian Book of the Dead. It is not known how old the Book of the Dead is. Many of the papyruses we have today are from the New Kingdom (1540-1075 B.C.E.). But according to tradition priests from the first Dynasties already possessed one of the very old versions of the Book. The Book of the Dead was part of a tradition of funerary texts which includes the earlier Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, which were painted onto objects, not papyrus. The Book was placed in the coffin or burial chamber of the deceased.

The Book of the Dead was not called like that when it was written, but it was given the name in 1842 when Karl Richard Lepsius published a translation of a manuscript and coined the name "Book of the Dead". In the Old Kingdom the Book had a name *Pert em hru*, "Emerging forth

into the Light". Lepsius also introduced the spell numbering system, which is still in use, identifying 165 different spells.



Pyramid Text from the Unas tomb (c. 2360 BC).

The text consists of a number of magic spells intended to assist a dead person's journey through the Duat, or underworld, and into the The intention was not to describe different encounters on the journey, but to offer practical help and magical assistance. At present some 192 spells are known, though no single manuscript contains them all. They served a range of purposes. Some are intended to give the deceased mystical knowledge in the afterlife. Others are incantations to ensure the different elements of the dead person's being were preserved and reunited, and to give the deceased control over the world around him. Still others protect the deceased from various hostile forces, or guide him through the underworld past various obstacles. Famously, two spells also deal with the judgment of the deceased in the Weighing of the Heart ritual. The central spell is the Judgment of the Dead, with its denial of sin (the Negative Confession).

Every known version of the Book of the Dead contains a different selection of spells in a different order and because of this it seems random, as if there were no internal structure. Some Egyptologists believe that this was due to the choices of the scribes who compiled the book according to their own judgement. But when looking at the core of Egyptian religion and mythology we find the myth of Osiris, who was cut into pieces by his brother Seth, and scattered around Egypt. Osiris' body was reassembled by

his wife and sisters Isis and Nephthys, and finally magically resurrected in spirit.

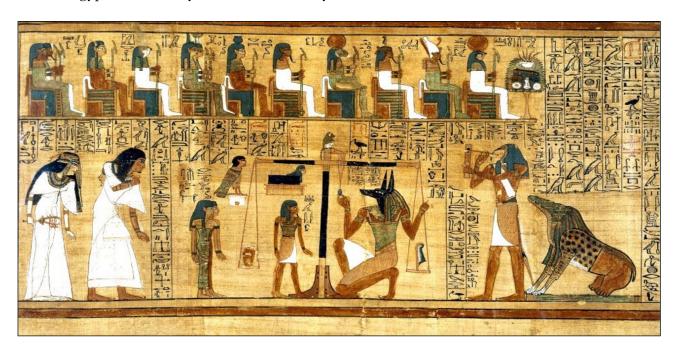
Somehow this speaks of what is going on in this life. The idea is to bring together different parts of our scattered consciousness, putting them into a meaningful whole. This is the so-called spiritual rebirth, when the old dies and the new man is born, the same life but a different state of being, an alchemy of transmutation.

For this reason the Book with its spells and teachings was not intended only for a deceased, but it belonged to a system of training within initiatic schools. The experience of initiation and death are considered to be very similar.

But leaving this esoteric world to the initiates, what we can learn is the central spell from the Book, the weighing of the heart in the hall of Ma'at, goddess of Justice. If the heart is heavier than the feather of Ma'at, it will be eaten by the beast Amam. This means that the person is going to be incarnated again on Earth with another opportunity to purify the heart with good deeds. Thus, morality becomes indispensable for spiritual progress.

Cultures with such understanding and knowledge represents a peak of human achievement, as their work still resonates thousands of years after they are gone.

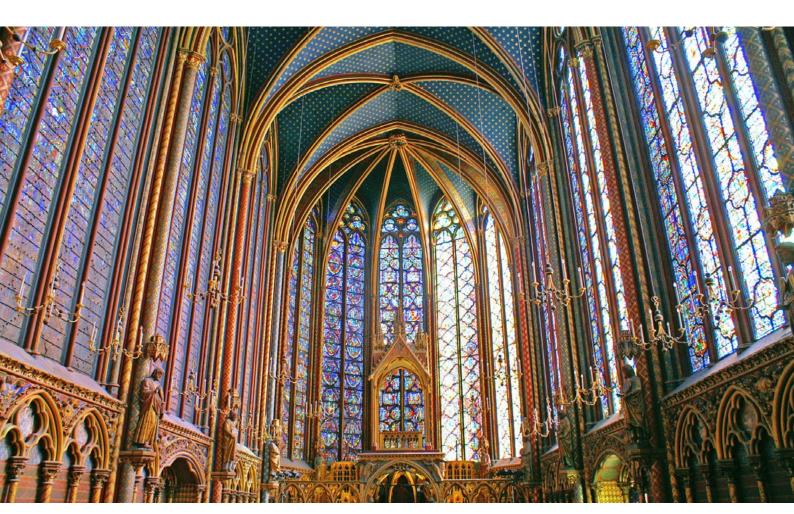
Miha Kosiri



## ARTAND BEAUTY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The title of this article comes from a book by Umberto Eco, an Italian philosopher, essayist, professor of literature and novelist, most famous for his medieval whodunnit *The Name of the Rose*, which was made into a film starring Sean Connery.

In this book, Eco introduces us to a culture very different from our own. Yet the principles contained in his study can enlighten us about the whole question of beauty, so central to the world of art – and to human life in general. The first thing to realise is that much of the philosophy of the Middle Ages comes from the classical world and particularly from Neoplatonism. The basis of Platonic and Neoplatonic aesthetics is that the beauty of the world is an image and reflection of Ideal Beauty (a beauty that exists in some spiritual dimension beyond the material world).



However, the medieval world was not the Classical world of Greece and Rome, it was also heavily imbued with Christianity and was more religious in its outlook, while at the same time having a spontaneous love of light and colour, and a strong feeling for the sensuous properties of things. Colours in medieval art and literature are simple and primary, which perhaps reflects a simpler and less sophisticated time of history. 'Apart from single colours, however, philosophers and mystics alike were enthralled by luminosity in general, and by the sun's light.' The effects of light in Gothic cathedrals are a supreme example of this.

However, there was no separation between this spontaneous love for sensuous beauty and the mystical sense of beauty as the reflection of the divine, for the Medievals discerned 'in the concrete object an ontological reflection of, and participation in, the being and the power of God.... Life appeared to them as something wholly integrated.' John Scotus Eriugena, an Irish Neoplatonist philosopher of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, conceived of the universe as a revelation of God in his ineffable beauty.

So, what was beauty for these medieval philosophers, mystics, poets and artists? We have a number of definitions, from the relatively simple one by St. Augustine that was of central importance in the Middle Ages 'What is beauty of the body? A harmony of its parts with a certain pleasing colour' to the more complex definition set out by Robert Grosseteste (an English Neoplatonist of the 13<sup>th</sup> century): 'Beauty is a concordance and fittingness of a thing to itself and of all its individual parts to themselves and to each other and to the whole, and of that whole to all things.'

Understanding their mystical view of the world can also help us to understand the importance the Medievals gave to heraldry and symbolism, because all things and beings in Nature are "In my
judgement,
there is nothing
among visible
and corporeal
things which
does not signify
something
incorporeal and
intelligible".

'reminders and overtones of Divinity, manifestations of God in things.' Eriugena said, 'In my judgement, there is nothing among visible and corporeal things which does not signify something incorporeal and intelligible.' And as Umberto Eco puts it: 'We have merely to cast our eye upon the visible beauty of the earth to be reminded of an immense theophanic harmony... The face of eternity shines through the things of earth and we may therefore regard them as a species of metaphor.' Or, in the words of another medieval philosopher, Hugh of St. Victor, the earth is 'like a book written by the finger of God.'

In the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, with figures like Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon, the world view began to change, the mentality began to become more scientific and the world ceased to be a 'forest of symbols'. Something was lost and something was gained, but now we can look back and realise that, in the



Simone Martini, Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus, 1333.

words of the German literary scholar E.R. Curtius, 'Contemporary man places an exaggerated value on art because he has lost the feeling for intelligible beauty which the neo-Platonists and the Medievals possessed... Here we are dealing with a type of beauty of which Aesthetics knows nothing.'.

Iulian Scott

# Dystopias in literature

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"Although many of the dystopian novels are set in the future, the authors use elements from their existing societies."

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin muzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him." In this sinister beginning we can recognize the first lines of the well-known novel, 1984, written by George Orwell in 1947-48, just couple of years before his death. Today, it is one of the best-selling books again in the USA, according to the biggest online retail marketer. What makes it so popular again? And with other dystopias, like *Brave New World* or *Fahrenheit 451*, why do these novels never go out of fashion?

The word dystopia or anti-utopia comes from the Greek word "kakotopia" (kakós topos), meaning wicked place, because the stories are set in a depressing, gloomy environment, where people are dehumanized and exploited by a tyrannical government as in 1984, where Big Brother rules with an iron fist and creates a totalitarian world, where war is permanent and people are just cogs in the machinery. On the other hand, in Huxley's Brave New World those who hold power are less brutal, but more sophisticated. They control the people by making them addicted to a drug called Soma that gives pleasures and satisfaction to people who want to escape from reality: "Was and will make me ill, I take a gramme and only am."

Although many of the dystopian novels are set in the future, the authors use elements from their existing societies. In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* the writer refers to the late 40s and early 50s in the United States, when many people were accused without proper evidence (see McCarthyism), but readers could easily recall the book burnings in Nazi Germany. Bradbury felt the threat that people might burn books again and he based his story upon this premise.

Dystopian stories are generally pessimistic. Their heroes and heroines rarely win their battle against the oppressor. In most cases, they are broken down and turned into supporters of the regime or helpless figures. Winston Smith, who is tortured and persuaded to confess, betray his lover and admire the anonymous Big Brother, is completely brainwashed and ends up vegetating as an alcoholic.

So, if these novels are so dark and

baffling, why do people still read them and seek in them a compass for their lives? The answer, in fact, is very simple: because all the dystopias highlight the defects of societies and show up the worstcase scenarios like total surveillance, which is becoming a real threat nowadays, when public cameras are watching us on the streets and on our smartphones and computers at home. We upload intimate details of our lives to the internet, but do we care about who will see and use them? In recent years, when populists are rising again and we hear expressions like "alternative facts" in everyday life and politics, who will help us to discern the true from the untrue?

We feel the urgent need to turn to these writings to find answers, because they do provide some. In 1984 the system manipulates people with an artificial language called Newspeak and slogans like "War is peace" or "Freedom is slavery". What is happening nowadays? The internet, which was developed to connect people, is full of fake news that is generated only to manipulate people's thoughts and beliefs and divide them from one another. Even general elections could be influenced by disinformation.

Since these dystopias were written, many people have been inspired by them. And it seems they never lose their relevance. The threat of a dark Orwellian society is always on the horizon. But 1984 and its peers will always be there like signals from a lighthouse to remind us of the ways we shouldn't follow if we want to avoid shipwrecks.

Istvan Orban

## TECHNOLOGY

The walls of
Sacsayhuaman
(attributed to the Inca
civilization in Peru).

When looking at ancient archaeological features one can be mesmerised by the beauty, complexity and grandeur of some of the buildings, statues or artefacts. In most cases these structures were created at a time of prosperity when skills of a high standard and workforce were abundant.

However, in the cases of the Old kingdom of ancient Egypt (2686 to 2134 BC), the Mayans, Easter Island or the Incas, no wheels or mathematics were known or used to build the Sphinx, great pyramids or the city of Cuzco, Sacsayhuaman or Ollantaytambo.







Those cultures or civilisations didn't have any steel or measurement devices capable of millimetric precision. However they were able to build monuments with stones weighing tens if not hundreds of tons and assembling them at impressive heights with a modern millimetric precision. On top of that a lot of the stones are made of volcanic rocks that are harder than steel. Engineers and scientists are left perplexed by how such feats were accomplished, especially with so little evidence about the methods actually used by the builders.

When you start going into the processes and means necessary to create those structures you encounter various issues, such as: where did the raw materials come from? How did they carry the thousands if not millions of tons of stones on site? How did they manage the logistics behind the extraction, transportation, cutting and assembling? They would probably put to shame some of our modern building projects.

On the subject of cutting stones, I have mentioned that a lot of them were extremely hard to work with, especially those of a volcanic nature such as granite, basalt, diorite or quartzite. These stones would be difficult to cut even with modern tools, as you would need tougher materials (diamonds, special alloys) and to apply a lot of pressure with the tool on the stone. Manual methods, using flint or copper saws are extremely slow and laborious and would not necessarily ensure precision. In his book on stone working technologies in Ancient Egypt, Denys A. Stocks shows a group of primitive copper and flint chisels and pounding balls made of diorite that would be contemporary with the great pyramids. All other tools shown are from much later periods (measurement devices) or are purely hypothetical (copper saws and drills).

One realises rather quickly that the ancient builders "loved" complexity and difficulty. From the materials to the assembly the builders chose what we could describe as the sturdiest and most lasting ways to build their monuments. The most striking proof is that they are still standing today. Their knowledge and effort were directed towards timeless and elevating structures almost if they were pushing us to put ourselves in their shoes to try and resolve their mysteries.

Florimond Krins



### **POWER OF LIFE**

Spring gives us a unique opportunity to witness the immense power of life. Everything in nature awakens, opens up to the warmth of the sun and actively grows unfolding its potential. Observing nature I remembered the ancient Egyptian concept of "sekhem", usually translated as "power". It has several aspects of meaning, indicating power in action. On the one hand, it is the vital force of a human being, which also accompanies him in eternity. It indicates not only a given energy, but also actions that restore universal order, and as such it means mastered power in service of the good. Another meaning is the power of a deity. And lastly, sekhem was magical power in mortuary rituals that enabled the deceased to overcome obstacles in the world beyond.

Sekhem is found is the name of a goddess – Sekhmet or Sekhet, She who is Powerful. She is a consort of the demiurge Ptah, and part of the main triad revered in the ancient religious centre of Memphis. Their child is Nefertum, a beautiful lotus flower that had arisen from the primal waters at the creation of the world. Sekhmet and Ptah are said to be parents of the sage Imhotep, whose wise words still inspire.

Other Egyptian myths tell the story of the first Seven Wise Beings who planned the world. The master architect and workman Ptah carried out the design of the Seven Wise Ones. He and Sekhmet partook in the characteristics of the Seven.

Sekhmet was revered throughout the history of Egypt, from the time of the Pyramid Texts onwards. She was both a fierce warrior and a magician healer. She was believed to bring about the conception of the pharaoh. Sekhmet was protector of the armies and destroyer of the enemies of the land. She punished those who were doing evil and healed the righteous. She appears to be a personification of an active power that establishes divine order, purifies any distortion and restores Life.

If you see a beautiful and mighty statue of a woman with the head of a lioness crowned by a solar disk and the uraeus serpent on top of it, it is Sekhmet. She was also depicted as a lioness. Among her other names were the "(One) Before Whom Evil Trembles", "Mighty Lady, Lady of Flame", "Greatly Beloved One of Ptah, Lady of Heaven". She has many names connected with different places and her breath is said to have formed the desert.

In nature, the power of life manifests by itself. In human beings we discover it by making choices, by becoming more true to our higher self. The Mighty Lady greets every victory in the inner battle. One verse of the Egyptian Book of the Dead reads "May the goddess Sekhmet make me to rise so that I may ascend unto heaven."

### **UPCOMING EVENT**

