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Representation of Solar Deities in Major Global Mythologies
The Neolithic (New Stone Age)

- Middle East, i.e., the Levant (presently Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey), approximately 10,200 BC to 2,000 BC: revolutionary behavioral and cultural alterations (e.g., terracotta ceramic, cereal farming, domestication of animals) → a single (Levantine) human species (*Homo sapiens sapiens*);

- the Latin name “Levant” also etymologically connected to the rising Sun (cf. the verb *levare*).
Fig. 1: A satellite photograph depicting the present-day Levant.

Fig. 2: A museal reconstruction of the "modern" Neolithic man.
Solar Barque

- a Neolithic petroglyph concept, mythologically represents the Sun riding in a vessel (a barge or a boat) → exerted a direct influence on the ancient (predynastic) Egypt;

- cf. the symbolic “Khufu ship,” 43.6-meter long, disassembled in 1,224 pieces, Great Pyramid of Giza, 2,500 BC, buried into a pit (two ditches), sealed off by 40 blocks (20 tones each) → subsequently, other pharaonic boats modeled on this King Cheops’ paragon.
Fig. 3: Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt.

Fig. 4: King Cheops’ solar barque, rediscovered by the Egyptian archeologist Kamal el-Mallakh in 1954, reassembled after a decennium and exhibited in a separate museum erected nearby.
Mesopotamia ("Fertile Crescent")

- Bronze Age (ca. 1,200 BC): utilization of bronze → the cradle of civilization (the deltas of the Euphrates and the Tigris, presently in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, and Turkey), first scripts (cuneiform, later hieroglyphic);

- Shamash (Assyria, Babylonia = a solar deity) → eventually, a linguistic influence as well (i.e., a royalty addressed as "my Sun").
Fig. 5: A Mesopotamian cuneiform (i.e., wedge-shaped) script.

Fig. 6: Shamash, an Assyro-Babylonian solar deity.

Fig. 7: A papyrus containing the cartouches with the Egyptian hieroglyphics.
Proto-Egyptian Polytheism (Lower and Upper Egypt)

- Sekhmet (Menhit): a leonine, sanguinary female deity, a ferocious nocturnal keeper of the Sun who attempts to decimate the humankind, in whose eyes we see a solar reflection;

- Hathor (Bat): bovine, deity of creation, wet-nurses the renascent Sun (i.e., her son Horus, the bull), one of Ra’s 12 daughters.
Humanoid Solar Deities in Egypt

- interestingly, all other proto-Egyptian solar deities were also females (i.e., the feline deity of elation named Bastet, Lower Egypt, 2,890 – ca. 715 BC; Neuth, the goddess of the universe, depicted as a nude female arching the Earth; and Wadjet, frequently shown as a serpent-headed woman, symbolized by the Uraeus (a “rearing cobra”).
Ancient Egyptian Theocracy (Old Kingdom)

- Atum, later Ra-Atum (the “rays of the setting Sun”), a solar deity, identified as the god of creation, the finisher of the world;

- Horus, a royal celestial deity, national patron, depicted as a falcon-headed male, mothered by Isis, the goddess of prudence and salubrity;

- Osiris (Horus’ son, a divine heir to Ra-Atum’s terrestrial throne).
Fig. 8: Ra-Atum.

Fig. 9: Horus.

Fig. 10: Osiris, frequently depicted green-skinned, having a crook and a flail and wearing an ostrich-feathered crown, was an ancient Egyptian god of resurrection.

Fig. 11: The alate (winged) Sun disk as an ancient Egyptian symbol of Horus, 3rd millennium BC.
Egyptian “Solarization”

- the Sun’s celestial movement → Ra’s nocturnal travel westward through the underworld (Duat, the “realm of the dead”) in a solar barque to escape from the chaotic demon Apep (Greek: Apophis): symbolically, also a daily struggle of the deceased Pharaoh’s soul with Osiris’ avatar in the afterlife;

- the eolian deity of Amun was later fused with the solar deity of Ra in Amun-Ra: solar rituals performed on temple pylons, i.e., on the monumental gateways.
Linguistic Influence

• the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for the “horizon” (akhet) actually depicts the Sun rising and setting between two hills:

Fig. 12: A monumental temple gateway in Philae, Egypt, presently on an island in the vicinity of the Aswan Dam, featuring pylons.

Fig. 13: The Egyptian akhet hieroglyph, associated with recreation/renaissance.
Early Indo-European Religion

- the idea of the Sun traversing the skies in a chariot propagated in Scandinavia (Nordic Bronze Age, ca. 1,700 – 500 BC):

Fig. 14: A partially gilded statue of the Sun chariot, later associated with the Germanic female deity of Sól, Trundholm, Denmark.

Živić, Representations of Solar Deities
Greco-Roman Myths

- in Ancient Greece (ca. 9\textsuperscript{th} – 6\textsuperscript{th} c. BC), the Sun was personified by Helios, an attractive masculine deity of a Titanic origin, coroneted by the aureole:

Fig. 15: A 3D model of Helios, the son of Hyperion and Theia and the brother of female deities of Eos ("dawn") and Selene ("Moon").
Roman Myths

• Helios’ quotidian routine (i.e., driving a four-steed chariot westward to Oceanus) inspired the Ancient Roman (753 BC – 453 AD) deity of Sol Invictus (the “Unconquered Sun”) riding a quadriga;

• subsequently, the Sun was also associated with the god of light known as Apollo, of the Olympian origin.
Late Antiquity and Early Christianity

• as of Aurelian’s proclamation in 274 AD, the Roman Empire celebrated the hibernal solstice according to the Julian calendar (i.e., on December 25) as the pagan festival called *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* (“the birthday of the Unconquered Sun”);

• later, the Ancient Roman “solar monotheism” centralized on the person of Jesus Christ.

Fig. 16: A Roman mosaic depicting the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun, dating back to ca. 225 AD, Orbe, Switzerland.
The Birth of Christmas

• Nicene Christianity (having originated in Nicaea, present-day İzni, Turkey) was tolerated as a religion under the emperor Constantin the Great (as of 313 AD, Edict of Milan), but it became ecclesiastically authorized by the emperor Theodosius I (380 AD, Edict of Thessalonica);

• in the Bible (Malachi 4:2), Christ is the “Sun of righteousness.”

Fig. 17: With the progressive domination of Christianity in the Roman Empire as of the 4th c. AD, Christmas, commemorating Jesus’ birth, has replaced the pagan festivities.
The Land of the Rising Sun

- Amaterasu-ōmikami ("the one who shines in the heaven"), a Japanese solar deity (as of ca. 680 AD), parenting all the Japanese emperors;

- in the Shinto religion, a mythological daughter of Izanagi-no-mikoto, hiding in a grotto (Ama-no-Iwato) overnight to escape her rivaling brother, the storm god Susanoo.
The Sun in Mesoamerican Cosmology

- Aztec creation myth (central Mexico, 14th – 16th c.): Ōllin Tōnatiuh (“Movement of the Sun”) perceived as a celestial leader, the fifth in a line;

- solar alignments → calendar, edifices, and monuments, human sacrifice demanded to assure the solar motion

Fig. 19: In 1521, the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés claimed that 20,000 persons were annually sacrificed to Tōnatiuh.
Solar Deities and Hinduism

• formerly, an elaborate set of idolatrous corporal movements revering the Sun and a fascinating group of 12 solar deities (Ādityas) in hymns and Vedic sacred writings;

• the solar gods metamorphosed into a composite one, named Sūrya (“Supreme Light”) → married to the dual-form Ranaadeh (sunlight – shadow).

Fig. 20: Sūrya is usually transported in a seven-horsed carriage (to symbolize a week) by the ruby-faced charioteer Aruṇā (as a symbol of the crepuscular skies). Rama is conceived as Sūrya’s descendent.
Proto-Slavic Heliocentric Mythology

- several authentic solar deities reconstructed: Bjelobog/Bjelun, depicted as a white-bearded senescent man, a forest guide; Dajbog/Dažbog, 5th – 9th c. AD, a Proto-Slavic deity of fertility and fire, with his twin daughters Danica/Zornica (who opens the palace gates to the morning Sun) and Večernica (who closes the gates at dusk); and Radogost, a nocturnal celestial deity associated with hospitality.
the Sun god Hors, whose name is etymologically Iranian, was also worshiped among the Slavs (9th – 11th c.), as was Svarog, later the supreme Slavic solar deity, the god of celestial fire (modeled after the Ancient Greek volcanic metallurgy protector, Hephaestus).

Figs. 23 and 24: Depictions of Hors and Svarog, respectively.
Solar Eclipse, Or the “Missing Sun” Mystery

• an unscientific theme of solar “exile” (allegorically explaining a natural phenomenon of the eclipse) frequently encounterable in numerous cultures worldwide: e.g., the Sun’s descent to the underworld (cf. Inanna, known as the “queen of heaven,” Mesopotamia, Sumerian deity, ca. 4,000 – 3,100 BC), the Sun devoured by a wolf in the Norse mythology (Sól, eaten by Skoll), etc.

Figs. 25 and 26: Sumerian Inanna and Nordic Sól.
Thank you for your attention!