UCLA ENCYCLOPEDIA *of* EGYPTOLOGY

EPITHETS, DIVINE
الألقاب الإلهية

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Götterbeinamen/Götterepitheta
Épithètes divines

The almost infinite number of epithets applied to Egyptian deities attests to the complex and diverse nature of Egyptian gods. In general, epithets outline a deity's character, describe his/her physical appearance and attributes, and give information about the cult. Epithets immediately follow the deity's name and can be made up of several distinct components. In hymns and ritual scenes, epithets often occur in long strings. It is useful to distinguish between epithets that identify a unique aspect of a deity's personality ("personal epithets") and epithets that refer to a particular situation or activity ("situational epithets"); in the latter case, the epithet can be applied to multiple deities.

هناك عدد لا نهائي تقريباً من الألقاب التي تنطبق على الآلهة المصرية والتي تشهد على طبيعة الآلهة المصرية المعقدة والمتنوعة، وتلخص هذه الألقاب شخصية الإله وتوصف مظهره الجسدى وسماته، وتعطى معلومات عن عبادته، وتلي هذه الألقاب اسم الإله مباشرةً، ويمكن أن تتكون من عدة عناصر مميزة، فأحياناً تظهر هذه الألقاب مكونة من عبارات وجمل طويلة في التراتيل ومناظر الطقوس. ومن الأهمية التمييز بين الصفات التي تحدد الجوانب الفريدة لشخصية الإله «الصفات الشخصية» والصفات التي تشير إلى حالة معينة أو نشاط «الصفات الظرفية» وفي هذه الحالة الأخيرة، يمكن استخدام اللقب لوصف آلهة متعددة.

In addition to their proper name (*rn*), Egyptian deities carried epithets that give information about their nature, forms of manifestation, and spheres of influence, as well as genealogical relations and connections with particular locations. In most cases, epithets immediately followed the name. In the course of time, particularly in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, they grew in complexity. Their length and meaning varied according to context and text medium.

Whereas a name was normally associated with one deity only, epithets could be transferred to other deities (Hornung 2005: 89) and occasionally even become autonomous. This principle (*Antonomasia*, see below) allowed for the creation of new deities. "Personal epithets" (for definition, see below) could be combined with names and titles into a titulary (*nḥbt*, *rn-wr*; Kuhlmann 1977b). Like the royal titulary, names and epithets of gods were occasionally written in cartouches. This was often the case with Isis, the God's mother (*mwt-nṯr*), Osiris-Onnophris (*Wnn-nfrw mꜣꜥ-ḫrw*; fig. 1, cols. 13 and 14), and Horus "Who decides the battle of the Two Lands" (*wpj-šꜥt-tꜣwj*).

The location of the inscription, a deity's position and function within the pantheon, and the situational context were crucial factors in the formation of epithets.

Figure 1. Names and epithets are here arranged in long lists, together forming a morning hymn that was recited to wake the gods in the temple at daybreak. Inner sanctuary, temple of Hathor in Dendera.

Classification

The numerous epithets of Egyptian deities encompass in principle the following three domains (see Kuhlmann 1977a): 1) nature and function, 2) iconography (physical characteristics, posture, and attributes), and 3) provenance and local worship; to which can be added the following subdomains: 4) genealogy, 5) status and age, and 6) myths and cosmogonies.

1. Nature and function. A deity's nature can be expressed in his/her name, e.g., Amun ("the hidden/secret one"), Khons ("the traveler"), Sakhmet ("the mighty one"), but epithets usually give more information about his/her character and spheres of influence. In the formation of epithets, an ideal image of humans was partly projected onto the world of the gods (Otto 1964: 39). Epithets can therefore refer to human traits like wisdom, friendliness, honesty, and a sense of justice. Further themes are the ability to change shapes, to regenerate, and to create, as well as physical strength and weaknesses, freedom of movement, and the closeness to humans

(Otto 1964: 11 - 40). This is illustrated by the following examples: as sun god, Ra is the "Lord of rays" (*nb-ḥḏḏwt*); in his role of moon deity, Khons appears as he "Who repeats rejuvenation" (*wḥm-rnp*). Osiris, the dying and eternally reborn god, was worshipped as "Lord of life" (*nb-ʿnḫ*), "Weary of heart" (*wrḏ-jb*), and "Who wakes up complete" (*rs-wḏꜣ*), as well as "Master of the course of time (*nb-nḥḥ, ḥḳꜣ-ḏt*). Due to her intelligence, Isis is "Great of magic" (*wrt-ḥkꜣw*) and all-knowing, "Without whose consent no king ascends the throne" (*nj-ʿḥʿ-ḥr-nst-m-ḫmt.s*). Horus, the falcon deity and son of Isis and Osiris, is the "Lord of the sky (*nb-pt*), dappled of plumage, who appears from the horizon" (*sꜣb-šwt-pr-m-ꜣḫt*; fig. 1, col. 3), "Beautiful of face, who shines in the morning and brightens the sky and earth at his rising" (*nfr-ḥr psḏ-m-ḏt.f sḥḏ-pt-tꜣ-m-wbn.f*; fig. 2). Thoth is the "Judge" (*wp*), "Who does not accept bribes" (*bḫn-šnw*) and "Who separates the Two Contestants" (*wp-rḥwj*); the latter refers to Horus and Seth as they fight over who will succeed Osiris in office. Foremost, Amun dispenses the breath of life (*dj-tꜣw*), but he is also a deity who—like the sun god or Hathor and Maat—"hears prayers" (*sḏm(t)-sprw/snmḥw*) and thus serves as a contact for humans.

Epithets generally describe deities in a positive light. Gods act in accordance with *maat*, are hence "Lord or Lady of Maat" (*nb(t)-Mꜣʿt*), overcome chaos and enemies (*dr-jsft/sbjw/ḫftjw*), loathe lies (*bwt.sn-grg*), and everyone rejoices at their sight (*ḥʿʿ-ḥr-nb-n-mꜣꜣ.f/.s*). However, Seth is an example of how negative traits can also be expressed. This happens, for instance, when Seth is called "unsuccessful" (*wh* or *wh-sp.f*).

2. Iconography (physical characteristics, posture, and attributes). The outer appearance of Hathor is addressed in her epithet "Whose eyes are festively painted"(*sḫbt-mnḏtj*), while for child deities, especially in the Roman Period, the epithet "With a beautiful side lock" (*nfr/ʿn-dbnt*) is characteristic (Cauville, *Dendara XIII*: 193, 7; 222, 12; and 54, 8; 217, 1). Posture is addressed in epithets like "With extended arm" (*fꜣj-ʿ, ʿwt-ʿ*), which are

Figure 2. Names and epithets often served as labels to deities in wall scenes, thus identifying the god depicted here as Horus of Edfu. Roman mammisi in Dendera.

characteristic for Amun-Min, who is depicted with a raised arm, and for the vulture goddess Nekhbet, who extends her wing in protection. Amun-Min is also "Tall of two plumes" (*kꜣ-šwtj*), a reference to his double-plumed crown (Budde 2002). Amun-Min's epithet "Who boasts of his perfection" (*ʿb-m-nfrw.f*) demonstrates that the transition between domains 1 and 2 can be fluid. It refers on the one hand to the ithyphallic representations of the deity, but on the other hand also to his fertility and potency traits.

3. Origin and local worship. Epithets that establish a connection with a cult site usually consist of two parts and are constructed with "Lord/Mistress (of)" (*nb/t*), "Ruler (of)" (*ḥkꜣ/t*), "Foremost (of)" (*ḫntj/t*), or "Dwelling in" (*ḥrj/t-jb*) followed by the name of a location. The formulations *ḥrj/t-jb* and *ḫntj/t* generally signal that the deity is the recipient of a local guest cult, whereas *nb/t* is reserved

for the main deity of the area (Kurth 1983: 182 - 183).

4. Genealogy. Epithets can also refer to kinship relations. This is most often expressed in a genitival construction with the words "Father (of)" (*jtj*), "Mother (of)" (*mwt*), "Son, Daughter (of)" (*z3/t*), "Brother, Sister (of)" (*sn/t*), "Child (of)" (*nḫn, ḥwn, ḫj, ḫrd, sfj*, etc.), and "Heir (of)" (*jwˁw*) followed by the deity's name or characteristic epithets.

5. Status and age. With adjectives like "great," "small," and "first" (*wr/t, ˁ3/t, nḏs/t, šrj/t, tpj/t*), epithets can indicate the status of a deity or his/her position within a hierarchy. Many label the deity as "unique" (*wˁ/t*), others distinguish the deity with formulations such as "Whose like does not exist (among the gods)" (*jwtj-sn.nw.f/.s, jwtj-mjtt.f/.s, n-wnn-mjtt.f, nn-ḥr-ḫw.s-m-nṯrw*) and "Beyond whom nobody exists" (*jwtj-m33-ḥrj-tp.f/.s*), or establish a relationship with a comparative construction like "Who is greater than all other gods" (*wr-r-nṯrw-nbw*; for the principles and possibilities of these formations, see Otto 1964: 11 - 14). Expressions referring to age such as "Small child" (*ḫrd-nḫn*) and "Eldest one" (*j3w/smsw*) also belong in this category.

6. Myths and cosmogonies. Phrases constructed with the lemma *š3ˁ* ("to begin") designate creator gods and label the deity as primeval (Budde 2010). Others refer to myths (e.g., "Eye of Ra," *jrt-Rˁ*) and cosmogonies ("Who creates sky, earth, water, and mountains," *jr-pt-t3-mw-ḏww*) and can further be of a very general nature when they characterize the deity as "Great god" (*nṯr/t-3ˁ/t, nṯr/t-wr/t*), "Beneficent god" (*nṯr/t-mnḫ/t*), or "Noble god" (*nṯr/t-šps/t*).

Formation Principles

Various principles were applied in the formation of epithets. In most cases, epithets consist of two parts. Most common are two nouns in a genitive construction such as "Lord of the sky" (*nbt-pt*) or "Mistress of all gods" (*ḥnwt-nṯrw-nbw*). Other constructions include noun with adjective (e.g., "Great goddess," *nṯrt-ˁ3t*, "Great sovereign," *jtj-wr*,

"Perfect youth," *ḥwn-nfr*), participle with direct object (e.g., "Who breastfeeds her son," *pnḫt-z3.s*, "Who strikes the foreign lands," *ḥw-ḫ3swt*), and adjective with object (e.g., "Who has great strength," *wr-pḥtj*).

In comparison, epithets were rarely construed with definite articles like, for example, "The child" (*p3-ḫrd*) as a designation of several child deities or "The menit (necklace)" (*t3-mnjt*) as an epithet of Hathor. Sporadically, demonstrative pronouns occur, most often for Horus and Seth, who can be designated as "This one" (*pn*) and "That one," respectively (*pf*; Leitz 2002, Vol. 2: 36).

Occurrence and Sources

Epithets can be found in almost all text genres, in particular in the religious text corpora such as the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, the *Book of the Dead*, the underworld books, but also in literary texts, on funerary objects (e.g., stelae, sarcophagi, and coffins), in administrative documents (e.g., inventory lists), legal documents, correspondence, as part of priestly titles and proper names, etc. On stelae, tomb and temple walls, and in papyri, hymns (Assmann 1980a, 1999; Kockelmann 2008; Žabkar 1988), cult songs (fig. 1; Assmann 1980b; Rüter 2009), litanies or lists of deities (e.g., see Assmann 1980c; Daumas 1987: 26 - 32; Faulkner 1958), aretalogies (e.g., Isis aretalogies, most recently Quack 2003; see also Assmann 1975), and mythological texts offer a comprehensive characterization of the addressed deities (Hornung 2005: 85 - 89).

In the temples, ritual scenes on the walls provided ample room for new, occasionally very long formations and combinations. In particular in the elaborate formulae of the ritual scenes of the Egyptian temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, the redactors devised chains of epithets, which, following a trend in contemporary royal titularies, increased successively in length and variety. The designation *ˁš3/t-rnw*, "She/He with many names," which was associated particularly with Amun, Ra, Osiris, and other creator deities since the New Kingdom (Leitz

2002, Vol. 2: 217 - 218, 225), reflects their almost inexhaustible diversity. In Greek texts, this epithet occurs with Isis as *Isis Polyonyme* or *Isis Myrionyme* (Bricault 1994). Other epithets of Egyptian deities were also Grecized, the most famous being *Trismegistos*, "Thrice-great" (ꜥꜣ-ꜥꜣ-ꜥꜣ), specific to Thoth (Leitz 2002, Vol. 2: 15 - 16), and *Nepheros*, "He with perfect face" (nfr-ḥr), characteristic for Ptah or Osiris (Leitz 2002, Vol. 4: 214 - 217; Quaegebeur 1982) and occasionally Horus (fig. 2).

Personal and Situational Epithets

In addition to the categories listed above, there exists a distinction between epithets that express the unique personality of the deity irrespective of context or medium, in other words, that establish the deity's identity (Kurth 1983: 188), and those that refer to the immediate context. The latter occurs primarily in ritual scenes in which the deity adopts a scene-specific role. Dieter Kurth has coined such epithets "personal" and "situational" epithets, respectively (1983: 185 - 186, 195ff.).

Situational epithets are often ad hoc formations, which could yet develop into formulaic sequences of epithets, for example, in a scene with Hathor in which she is offered a *menu*-jar with an intoxicating beverage (Cauville 2002a: 70 - 80; Sternberg-el Hotabi 1992): "Hathor, the Great, Lady of Dendera, Eye of Ra, Lady of the sky, Ruler of all gods, Lady of the Two Lands, Lady of bread, who brews beer, Lady of dance, Ruler of the *jba*-dance, Lady of drunkenness, Lady of jubilating, Lady of making music, Lady of jubilation, Ruler of joy" (Chassinat 1934, Vol. 2: 176, 2 - 3). In this case, the personal epithets end with "Ruler of all gods" and are followed by the situational epithets. The same happens in a scene in the Roman Period mammisi in Dendera in which emperor Trajan symbolically offers the horizon to Hathor of Dendera and Horus of Edfu (Daumas 1959: 252 - 253). Following a listing of her personal epithets, the goddess is called here "Powerful one, Daughter of Atum, Rait in the sky, Ruler of the stars, who rises in gold together with him who shines in gold" (*wśrt sꜣt-Ỉtmw Rꜥt-m-*

Figure 3. Names and epithets identifying the goddess depicted here as Hathor of Dendera. Roman mammisi in Dendera.

nnt ḥḳꜣt-ḫꜣbꜣsw wbnt-m-nbw-ḥnꜥ-psḏ-m-nbw; fig. 3).

In ritual scenes, the possibilities are nearly unlimited; multiple relations to the subject matter of the scenes and the offering items are established in the epithets. The deity is oftentimes called their possessor (*nb/t, jtj/t, ḥḳꜣ/t, ḥnwt*), conceiver (*šꜣꜥ*), distributor (*rdj/t, sšm/t*), etc.

Personal epithets tend to follow the name immediately in apposition, are often of ancient origin, and remain basically unchanged in their structure and predication, as the nature of deities changed little over time even if their sphere of influence could be extended. Examples are Anubis, who as god of the necropolis always carried the epithet "Lord of the sacred land" (*nb-tꜣ-ḏsr*; Leitz 2002, Vol. 3: 774 - 776), and Seshat (resp. Sefekhet-abui), who in her role of architect of tomb and temples is called "Lady of the
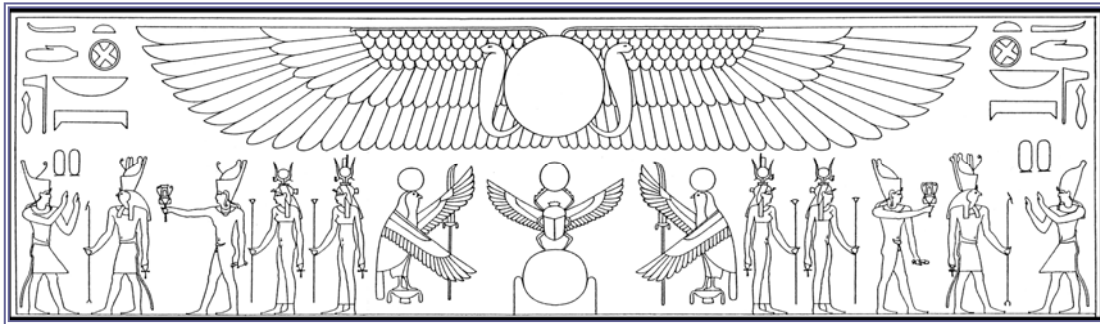
Figure 4. Names and epithets could be integrated with wall decoration as is done here with name and "personal epithets" of Horus of Edfu. Door lintel, main temple of Edfu.

Figure 5. Names and epithets could be written cryptographically for visual effect as is done here with the name and "personal epithets" of Hathor of Dendera. Dendera main temple.

builders" (*nbt-ḳdw*) already in the Pyramid Texts (Budde 2000: 293).

Spelling Conventions

In their hieroglyphic spellings, personal epithets were subject to developments in the hieroglyphic writing system. Hence new ways of writing the names and epithets of deities evolved, particularly in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, when the iconic nature of hieroglyphic signs began to be truly exploited; this allowed for visual and phonetic punning in the spelling of words, adding an extra layer of meaning to the linguistic message (Cauville 2002b; Kurth 2007 - 2008; Sauneron 1982).

Important epithets could also be written as monograms, the signs of which could then become part of the iconographic repertoire of temple decoration. The epithet sequence "Dappled of plumage, who appears from the horizon" (*sꜣb-šwt-pr-m-ꜣḫt*), which is typical for Horus-the-Behdetite, occurs both as a single hieroglyph in texts (⬚ or ⬚) and in large format on temple walls (fig. 4;

Chassinat 1929: pl. 74). Moreover, in the latter case the falcon god, the child god, and the goddesses Hathor and Isis incorporate the names and personal epithets of Horus-the-Behdetite ("Great god, Lord of the sky," *nṯr-ꜥꜣ nb-pt*). The example illustrates that knowledge of mythological connections is often demanded for the reading and correct understanding. This is also required when the appellation "Eye of Ra" (*jrt-Rꜥ*) is written with a seated falcon god holding a wedjat-eye on his lap (fig. 5, seventh deity from the right; Cauville 1990: 87, 88). Similarly subtle writings of god names have been discussed by Junker (1903) and more recently Cauville (2002a: 100, 126 - 127).

Antonomasia

A phenomenon of late texts is the use of epithets as autonomous names (antonomasia; Traunecker 1997: 171 - 173; Willems et al. 2003: 14 - 18; cf. Guglielmi 1986). This led to the creation of new, independent, usually locally worshipped deities, as in the Theban region in the temples in El-Qala and Shenhur,

where "The great goddess" (*tꜣ-nṯrt-ꜥꜣt*) and "The lady of joy" (*nbt-jhj*) were worshipped as

manifestations of Isis and Nephthys.

Bibliographic Notes

With the publication of reference works, monographs, and text editions, the overwhelming abundance of divine epithets has become more accessible for study. However, a comprehensive analysis of their structures, formation principles, and functions remains to be written. The as-of-yet single, large general study and classification of divine epithets is by Eberhard Otto (1964: esp. 1 - 40), who added a list of epithets to his study (Otto 1964: 95 - 163). The *Lexikon der Ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* (7 volumes; Leitz 2002) provides the largest source collection to date with about 56,500 entries. An index volume with the epithets organized by major deities completes this reference work (Leitz 2003). Specialized epithets, e.g., those of Thoth, have received detailed studies (Derchain-Urtel 1981). Monographs or studies about individual deities are often provided with indices, enabling a survey of the deity's epithets (Boylan 1922: 180 - 200, 213 - 124; Budde 2000: 281 - 326, 2003: 89 - 93; Guglielmi 1991: 319; Sandri 2006: 292 - 306; Schumacher 1988: 311 - 321; Zecchi 1996). This is also the case with recent text editions and their philological commentaries (Cauville 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Christophe 1955: 33 - 66 and 73 - 84; de Wit 1962: 4 - 16; du Bourguet 2002: 195 - 257; Jasnow and Zauzich 2005: 538 - 539; Kurth 1998, 2004; Thiers 2003: 362 - 388; Willems et al. 2003: 145 - 148). For the references to the epithets cited in this article, see the respective entries in Leitz (2002).

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Figure 1.   Names and epithets are here arranged in long lists, together forming a morning hymn that was recited to wake the gods in the temple at daybreak. Inner sanctuary, temple of Hathor in Dendera. (After Chassinat 1934, Vol. 1: 4.)

Figure 2.   Names and epithets often served as labels to deities in wall scenes, thus identifying the god depicted here as Horus of Edfu. Roman mammisi in Dendera. Photograph by Ursula Verhoeven.

Figure 3.   Names and epithets identifying the goddess depicted here as Hathor of Dendera. Roman mammisi in Dendera. Photograph by Ursula Verhoeven.

Figure 4.   Names and epithets could be integrated with wall decoration as is done here with name and "personal epithets" of Horus of Edfu. Door lintel, main temple of Edfu. (After Chassinat 1929: pl. 74.)

Figure 5.   Names and epithets could be written cryptographically for visual effect as is done here with the name and "personal epithets" of Hathor of Dendera. Dendera main temple. Photograph by Dagmar Budde.