

Articulata Forma Dei

A Cosmic Epithet from Esna and Medinet Habu

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Therefore heaven is distinguished into members and parts, like those of man, and similarly named (...) In general, the highest or third heaven forms the head down to the neck; the middle or second heaven forms the breast down to the loins and knees, the lowest or first heaven forms the feet down to the knees, and also the arms down to the fingers.

Spirits who are beneath heaven wonder greatly when they hear and see that heaven is beneath as well as above (...) thus their ideas of heaven are confused.

E. Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 1758, 65-66.

IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD, hyper-educated scribes increasingly employed sportive, cryptographic, or unetymological orthographies in hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic texts. Although the phonetic and graphic principles underlying such substitutions are relatively simple, sometimes only the discovery of parallel texts can guide readers towards the correct translation. For example, the remarkably unorthodox spellings in Mss. Golenishev 517–518 become perfectly explicable in the light of similar passages in the Book of Breathing.¹

A peculiar epithet which occurs several times at Esna has perplexed previous translators, despite the existence of minor orthographic variants.² Two newly published examples clarify the seemingly intractable problem and bring to light an interesting theological concept.

Esna II, 28, 14

In this wine-offering scene, the divine column portrays Neith as a luminous mother goddess:

wbn(.t) m Nwn

She who rises from Nun,

mḥ.t p.t t3 m nfrwz s

and fills heaven and earth with her beauty,

tm3.t n ḥḥ.w mw.t n ḥfn.w

parent of thousands, mother of millions,

grg(.t) t3 m pr.t-3ḥ.t

who peopled the earth with excellent seed,

¹ Fr.-R. HERBIN, “Une nouvelle page du Livre des Respirations,” *BIFAO* 84, 1984, pp. 249-302.

² *LGG* VII, 303, read this epithet as: “Der Himmel ...?...(*Gbt-...?...?*)”



z3=s m šww hr šhd-t3.wy

[///]

and her son is the sun, illuminating the two lands.

In the most recent study, the editors left this passage blank: “der Himmel... in ihr (*gb.t... im=s*).”³ Previously, Ramadan El-Sayed had suggested: “qui englobe en elle son fils,”⁴ but the words “her son” actually begin the following clause, since Re is the child of Neith who illumines the two lands.

Esna III, 252, 25-26

The second example occurs in a litany to Neith, here addressing her as a celestial goddess:



ms.n=s h3bs.w r-3w=s n

si'r=s n m-tw dmy=s n

You are (*twt*) [///],

she gave birth to all of the stars,

they arise and then they set ().⁵

In the original publication, Serge Sauneron noted this expression was “de lecture difficile,” and only translated: “Tu es la voûte céleste, dans laquelle.....”⁶ Nonetheless, he offered the following suggestion without further explanation: “Peut-être s’agit-il du soleil qui navigue sur la voûte céleste?”⁷ Based on the parallels, the first word should be *gb.t* or *k3p.t*, “firmament,” apparently derived as follows:

= *g3* / *k3* (< *k3r* / *g3y*, “chapel”).⁸

= *p.t*, “sky”.⁹

³ Ph. DERCHAIN, D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN, *La création – Die Schöpfung. Poème pariétal – Ein Wandgedicht: La façade ptolémaïque du temple d’Esna. Pour une poésie ptolémaïque, RitesEg* 10, 2004, pp. 65-66, who further noted: “trotz der von SAUNERON angegebenen ähnlichen Stellen (...) läßt sich eine eindeutige Lesung nicht etablieren” (*ibid.*, n. 217).

⁴ R. EL-SAYED, *La déesse Neith de Saïs*, II, *BiEtud* 86, 1982, p. 622, Doc. 1004.

⁵ S. Sauneron read the final phrase “et les éleva sur leurs nattes(?)” suggesting the last word might be *tm3.t*, “mat,” or *ttm*, “portable shrine” (*Les fêtes religieuses d’Esna aux derniers siècles du paganisme, Esna V*, Cairo, 1962, pp. 110, 113, n. [e]). Nonetheless, astronomical texts often refer to stars setting in their stations (*dmy.w*); cf. *Edfou III*, 207, 6; L. BORCHARDT, “Ein altägyptisches astronomisches Instrument,” *ZÄS* 37, 1899, p. 11; E. HORNUNG, *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits: nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches*, I, *AegHelv* 7, 1979, p. 372; A VON LIEVEN, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne. Das Sogenannte Nutbuch, The Carlsberg Papyri* 8, *CNIP* 31, 2007, I, §§58, 92.



⁶ S. SAUNERON, *Esna III*, p. 137, n. (d); *idem, Les fêtes religieuses d’Esna*, p. 110.

⁷ S. SAUNERON, *Les fêtes religieuses d’Esna*, p. 113, n. (c).

⁸ D. KURTH, *Einführung ins Ptolemäische I*, 2007, p. 342; M. MALAISE, “L’étymologie égyptienne du toponyme ‘Canope,’” *ChronEg* 74, 1999, pp. 228-29; R. LUCARELLI, *The Book of the Dead of Gatseshen: ancient Egyptian funerary religion in the 10th Century BC*, *EgUitg* 21, 2006, p. 10. This value is quite common at Esna: S. SAUNERON, *L’écriture figurative dans les textes d’Esna, Esna VIII*, Cairo, 1982, pp. 165-66.

⁹ Although some evidence argues in favor of reading *’Is.t*, “sky” (D. KURTH, “ (Isis), eine Bezeichnung des Himmels in Texten der griech.-röm. Zeit,” *GöttMis* 19, 1976, pp. 35-37), the present example requires reading *p.t*, as H.W. Fairman had suggested for other passages (“An Introduction to the Study of Ptolemaic Signs and their Values,” *BIFAO* 43, 1945, p. 107, Obs. 1). The phonetic value might derive from the word *p*, “throne; socle,” usually written with the more elaborate throne sign (D. KURTH, *Einführung ins Ptolemäische I*, p. 363). Note also that the first sign substitutes for *bw*, “place” in a New Kingdom cryptographic

 = determinative.

The epithet in both examples clearly begins with *gb.t*, “upper firmament”¹⁰ and ends with *im=s*, “in her.” Yet the intervening signs have proved insoluble over the years. With these two isolated examples, it is unclear how one might reconcile  (Ptolemaic) and  (Roman).

Esna VII, 633

The final volume of Esna includes a new variant which provides a missing link between the two orthographies.¹¹ The bandeau text commences by referring to Neith as “father of father and mother of mothers”:

dd=tw b3q.t m rn=s







wnm.t=s i3b.t=s m r' i'h

One calls her “Baqet” () by name,

[///]

her right and left eyes are the sun and the moon.

This new example suggests that the bovid head () in *Esna* III, 252, should actually be the hippopotamus head ()¹² both having the phonetic value *3.t*. These later writings in turn might correspond to  in *Esna* II, 28, due to coalescence of *aleph* and *'ayin* in very late texts.¹³ This specific value occurs on a Roman Period shroud from Thebes, in a cryptographic writing of the god Re ()¹⁴. Since the determinative in the first example is damaged, a definitive interpretation would remain impossible.

Medinet Habu

Fortunately, a recently-published inscription from the Small Temple of Medinet Habu brings to light a previously unrecognized variant. This brief text describes Amun of Djoser-Set as a cosmic creator god:¹⁵

text, not via acrophony from *bhdw*, “throne” (so E. DRIOTON, “Essai sur la cryptographie privée de la fin de la XVIIIe dynastie,” *RdE* 1, 1933, p. 46), but due to its nearly synonymous meaning.

¹⁰ The term *gb.t* (var. *k3p.t*) generally denotes the celestial vault (P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon*, pp. 1097-98), but it also has the more specific meaning of “southern sky”: Chr. THIERS, “Le ciel septentrional *ghr.t* et le ciel méridional *gb.t*,” *ENiM* 2, 2009, pp. 53-58.


¹¹ The existence of this parallel was noted already by S. SAUNERON, *Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna*, p. 113, n. (c).

¹² For other examples of such confusion, cf. M.-Th. DERCHAIN-URTEL, *Epigraphische Untersuchungen zur griechisch-römischen Zeit in Ägypten*, *ÄAT* 43, 1999, pp. 88-89.

¹³ D. KURTH, *Einführung ins Ptolemäische*, I, pp. 461, 490-491. C. PEUST, *Egyptian Phonology: an Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*, 1999, p. 102.

¹⁴ Fr.-R. HERBIN, *BIFAO* 84, 1984, p. 261 (D, 24), 273, n. (ca).

















¹⁵ J.B. MCCLAIN, “The Cosmogonical Inscriptions of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and the Cultic Evolution of the Temple of *Djoser-Set*,” in P.F. Dorman, B.M. Bryan (eds.), *Perspectives on Ptolemaic Thebes*, *SAOC* 65, 2011, p. 72, Fig. 5.4. A paraphrase of this text recently appeared in Chr. ZIVIE-COCHE, *Ann. EPHE. Sciences religieuses* 118, 2009-2010, p. 56, who did not comment on the epithet in question, see also, *id.*, “L'Ogdoade à Thèbes à l'époque ptolémaïque II. Le périptère du petit temple de Médinet Habou,” in Chr. Thiers (ed.), *Documents de Théologies Thébaines Tardives (D3T 2)*, to be published.


<i>nfw=f tꜣw</i>	His breath is the wind,
<i>fd(.t)=f h'pī</i>	his sweat is the Inundation,
<i>nt[t]=f [pw īr] wꜣd-wr</i>	his saliva [is what creates] the Sea, ¹⁶
	[///]
<i>ms.n=f hꜣbs.w r-ꜣw=sn</i>	just as he gave birth to all of the stars, ¹⁷
<i>īr.n=f 'q-pr īm=sn</i>	so did he arrange their ingress and egress.

The recent editor broke up the text up differently, and read: “who [...] who made the sea and the sky (*nt[y?]ff[...] īr wꜣd-wr gb.t*), who mo(ld)ed his limb(s) from him(self) (*nh(p) 't=f īm=f*).” Yet this translation requires emending *nh* to *nhp*, a variant not otherwise recorded in *Wb* II, 294-95.

Summary

Considered in parallel, the various components of the epithet become clear:

1.					(Ptolemy VI Philometor)
2.					(Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II)
3.					(Hadrian)
4.					(Hadrian)

In all examples, the second word is the enclitic particle *ꜣ / ꜣy*, appearing twice in an orthography typical for the Graeco-Roman Period (2-3).¹⁸ In (1) and (2), the next term is clearly *'t*, “limb.” Example (4) is likely a corrupted form of (3), to be corrected to: .

Taken altogether, this epithet reads: *gb.t ꜣy 't īm=f / s*, “even the firmament is but one part of him / her.” The phrase *'t īm=f / s* (lit. “a limb of him/her”) employs a partitive construction familiar from the common expression *w' īm=tn*, “one of you.”¹⁹ Similar examples with “limb” occur already in the Pyramid Texts,²⁰ and a closer parallel appears on the Second Pylon at Karnak (Ptolemy VIII), in a description of Victorious Thebes:²¹

¹⁶ For similar descriptions of Amun, see K. SETHE, *Amun und die acht Urgötter*, §§213-14; D. KLOTZ, *Caesar in the City of Amun: Egyptian Theology and Temple Construction in Roman Period Thebes* (in press), pp. 62-63.

¹⁷ Note that this phrase directly parallels the Neith litany (*supra*; *Esna* III, 252).

¹⁸ For this particle in Graeco-Roman texts, see P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon*, p. 1; D. KURTH, *Einführung ins Ptolemäische*, II, pp. 765-67.

¹⁹ A.H. GARDINER, *EG* §162, 5 and 262, 1; E. EDEL, *AG*, §389, 751b, 758f; B. LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar with Chrestomathy and Glossary: Sahidic Dialect*, *PLO* 20, 2004, §203; Chr. Thiers, “La chapelle d’Ipet la Grande sur le parvis du temple de Louqsor,” in Chr. Thiers (ed.), *Documents de Théologies Thébaines Tardives (D3T 2)*, to be published.

²⁰ A.H. GARDINER, *AEO* I, p. 109*, n. 1; J.F. BORGHOUTS, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348*, *OMRO* 51, 1971, p. 94, n. 163; D. MEEKS, *AnLex* II, 78.0608; *Dendara* X, 104, 10 and 298, 10.

²¹ *Urk.* VIII, 143 (9); E. DRIOTON, “Les dédicaces de Ptolémée Évergète II sur le deuxième pylône de Karnak,” *ASAE* 44, 1944, pp. 152-153 (collated by the Author).

<p>Wꜣs.t ḥpr(=tw) m ḥꜣ.t w.w im[y.w] tꜣ.wy wtꜣ(.w)ꜣsn is m qbbꜣs ꜣ.t imꜣs m bw nb</p>	<p>Thebes came into existence before (all other) fields, which [are] within the two lands, since they were begotten from her land, a part of her (𓂏𓂐𓂑) is in every place.²²</p>
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This is one of many texts referring to Thebes as the initial land, whose earth is distributed around Egypt as starter-soil for other cities and nomes.²³

Another unusual reference to Amun's "limbs" or "parts" occurs in the following food offering scene (*Deir Chelouit* III, 143, 14):

<p>[...] ꜣ.wtꜣf nb m nꜣr m niw.tꜣsn ꜣ.t m ḥwi r snwꜣs zbi.nꜣf sꜣ.w m tꜣ.wy-idb.w gs.w-pr.w mn(.w) ḥr sꜣtꜣꜣf nn ḏrw n nmtꜣf</p>	<p>[...] all his limbs exist as gods in their various cities, (each) limb being protected from the others, since he has "roamed the marshes" throughout Egypt,²⁴ and the temples carry his secret image, without limit to his travels.</p>
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Since Amun travels all over Egypt, his numerous manifestations – here designated as coextensive "limbs" – benefited from local cults in each nome.²⁵ Other divinities can appear as distinct limbs, or members, of a certain god. When Shu and Tefnut return to their father, Atum is said to "reunite with his limbs (ꜣ.wt)".²⁶ Much earlier, the vizier Amenemhat claimed that Montuhotep IV dispatched him to the Wadi Hammamat "as a god sends out one of his limbs (m ḥꜣb nꜣr ꜣ.t imꜣf)."²⁷

²² H. Beinlich correctly refuted Drioton's attempt to relate this passage to the distribution of Osirian relics throughout Egypt (*Die »Osirisreliquien« Zum Motiv der Körpergliederung in der altägyptischen Religion, ÄgAbh* 42, 1984, pp. 78-79), but arrived at a problematic translation. Breaking up the text differently, Beinlich read "Der, der sie geschaffen hat ist Geb (wtꜣꜣsn is m Gbb)," emending what follows to sꜣ.t imꜣs, noting that the latter phrase becomes "nicht sicher zu übersetzen" (*ibid.*, p. 79). Despite the divine determinative, the term *qb* most likely means "earth, land" (cf. Cl. TRAUNECKER, *Coptos. Hommes et Dieux sur le parvis de Geb, OLA* 43, 1992, p. 155, n. b; P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon*, pp. 1050-51), and refers specifically to the soil of Thebes.

²³ E.g., S.H. AUFRÈRE, *Le propylône d'Amon-Rê-Montou à Karnak-Nord, MIFAO* 117, 2000, §§82-84 (= *Urk.* VIII, 49b); P. CLÈRE, *La porte d'Évergète à Karnak, MIFAO* 84, 1961, Pls. 38-39 (= *Urk.* VIII, 113 [2]); *Urk.* VIII, 143 (3); S. SAUNERON, *La porte ptolémaïque de l'enceinte de Mout à Karnak, MIFAO* 107, 1983, No. 5, 1. See the discussions of Ph. DERCHAIN, "Quand l'arpenteur pataugeait ou de la fondation d'une ville," *ChronEg* 81, 2006, pp. 71-74; D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN, "Anspruch und Wirklichkeit. Ptolemäische Beschreibungen der Stadt Theben," in St. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Ägypten unter Fremden Herrschern zwischen persischer Satrapie und römischer Provinz, Oikumene* 3, 2007, pp. 150-152; D. KLOTZ, *Caesar in the City of Amun*, pp. 44-46, 157.

²⁴ D. KLOTZ, "The Cult-Topographical Text from Qasr el-Zayyan," *RdE* 60, 2009, p. 29, n. (e).

²⁵ I. GUERMEUR, *Les cultes d'Amon hors de Thèbes. Recherches de géographie religieuse, BEHE. Sciences Religieuses* 123, 2005.

²⁶ P. Bremner-Rhind 27,2; 28,27; 29,2. At Kom Ombo, Shu and Tefnut, equated with the two eyes of Haroeris, reunite with their father Re, enabling him to reconstitute (*nbi*) his limbs (*ḥ'w*); A. GUTBUB, *Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo, BdE* 47, 1973, pp. 77-78, n. (ad), 379-380, n. (f).

²⁷ J. COUYAT, P. MONTET, *Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât, MIFAO* 34, 1912, p. 80, No. 131, 9 (cited by A.H. GARDINER, *AEO* I, p. 109*, n. 1). Humans also identify themselves with divine limbs (ꜣ.t m nꜣr) in *CT* V, 24b-c; *CT* VII, 14p; 242i.

The specifically cosmographic nuance of the phrase *‘t im=f* in the present epithet might also explain a passage in a popular liturgical hymn, where Re-Harakhty is invoked as “he who perpetually rises out of Nun (*pꜣ nty wbn=f m Nwn*), and who sets back into one of his limbs (𓂏𓂐𓂑𓂒).”²⁸ From a traditional solar perspective, the limb might refer to the arms of Nun, the Western Horizon, or Osiris,²⁹ perhaps even the disembodied arm of Re (*‘ R’*),³⁰ all of which could receive the setting sun at dusk. In light of the present epithet which identifies a divine limb with the firmament (*gb.t*), this phrase could simply designate Re reposing within the night sky.

The general thrust of the present epithet, underscored by the emphatic particle *ꜣy*, is that Amun or Neith transcend other mere terrestrial or celestial divinities such as Geb or Nut. Although the firmament might appear infinite to the human observer, it is in reality just the southern, visible sky, which itself is merely one limb or fraction of these colossal divinities. As various texts make clear, Amun presides not only over the sky, but controls the earth, underworld, air, water, mountains, and basically all natural phenomena.³¹

The contrastive emphasis of *ꜣy* makes the most sense at Medinet Habu, where Amun produces the elements through his effluvia (breath, sweat, saliva), and so the sky is only one of his many physical manifestations. In the other examples, meanwhile, the entire epithet appears as a fixed expression, an erudite periphrasis denoting Neith as the sky, which does not really contrast with the preceding phrases.

Numerous texts from the New Kingdom onwards refer to enormous cosmic deities whose head and hands move about in the sky, and whose feet travel on earth or within the underworld.³² Yet the present equation of heaven with a divine limb or appendage is without direct parallel. Perhaps the closest analogy is the famous depiction of a cosmic tortoise from Kom Ombo (*KO I*, 59, 13), whose body lies beneath the cultivated region of Egypt (*idb.w*), carrying the desert regions (*dšr.wt*) of the four cardinal directions upon his arms and legs.³³

Scholars have often noted the close similarities between Latopolite and Theban theology during the Graeco-Roman Period, particularly regarding the doctrine of Kematef, Irita, and

²⁸ *Edfou III*, 10, 15; cf. A. GASSE, “La litanie des douze noms de Rê-Horakhty,” *BIFAO* 84, 1984, pp. 208-209 (with variants), who translated: “il se couche dans son propre corps,” noting that “l’expression *m ‘t im=f* (...) laisse supposer que le dieu et l’océan sont consubstantiels” (*ibid.*, p. 220, n. 52).

²⁹ For the arm of Osiris embracing Re in the underworld, cf. J.C. DARNELL, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity*, *OBO* 198, 2004, pp. 390-411.

³⁰ For the arm of Re, see J.C. DARNELL, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, p. 152, Pl. 14 (bottom).

³¹ D. KLOTZ, *Adoration of the Ram: Five Hymns to Amun-Re from Hibis Temple*, *YES* 6, New Haven, 2006, pp. 129-130, n. B.

³² G. VITTMANN, „Riesen“ und riesenhafte Wesen in der Vorstellung der Ägypter, *BeitrÄg* 13, 1995, pp. 13-34; J. ASSMANN, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the crisis of polytheism*, 1995, pp. 174-78; D. BUDDE, „Die den Himmel durchsticht und sich mit den Sternen vereint“. Zur Bedeutung und Funktion der Doppelfederkrone in der Götterikonographie,” *SAK* 30, 2002, pp. 57-102; J.C. DARNELL, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books*, pp. 374-424.

³³ A. GUTBUB, “La tortue animal cosmique bénéfique à l’époque ptolémaïque et romaine,” in *Hommages à Serge Sauneron I*, *BdE* 81, 1979, pp. 393, 433-34; Chr. LEITZ, “Der Lobpreis des Krokodils. Drei Sobekhymnen aus Kom Ombo,” in H. Knuf, et al. (eds) *Honi soit qui mal y pense. Studien zum pharaonischen, griechisch-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen*, *OLA* 194, 2010, pp. 320-323.

the primeval uraeus (Mut or Menhyt).³⁴ Certain epithets, tableaux, and even entire offering scenes from Karnak were copied and adapted to the temple of Khnum and Neith.³⁵ The influence of Thebes is not altogether surprising; several priests of Amun also served at Esna,³⁶ and the clergy of Karnak and Armant journeyed to Latopolis to inspect a possible Buchis bull on at least one occasion.³⁷ This obscure epithet, seemingly attested only at Esna and Thebes, further highlights the extent of theological discourse between the two religious centers.

³⁴ E.g. J.-Cl. GOYON, "Notes d'épigraphie et de théologie thébaine," *ChronEg* 78, 2003, pp. 44-53 (noting the scarcity of similar epithets in Dendera and Edfu); Ph. DERCHAIN, D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN, *La création*, pp. 63, n. 207, 141-142.

³⁵ Cf. Fr. LABRIQUE, "Rapiéçage ou réécriture? La porte d'Évergète," in W. Clarysse, *et al.* (eds), *Egyptian religion: the last thousand years. Studies dedicated to the memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, II, *OLA* 85, 1998, pp. 883-902.

³⁶ L. COULON, "Quand Amon parle à Platon (La statue Caire JE 38033)," *RdE* 52, 2001, pp. 100-103.

³⁷ Bucheum Stela 9; J.-Cl. GRENIER, "Les pérégrinations d'un Boukhis en Haute Thébaidé," in Chr. Thiers (ed.), *Documents de Théologies Thébaines Tardives (D3T 1)*, *CENiM* 3, 2009, pp. 39-48; D. KLOTZ, "Two Overlooked Oracles," *JEA* 96, 2010, pp. 251-254.