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The god 'Nt' in Ancient Egypt"

المعبود "نت" في مصر القديمة

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with god Nt, an uncommon god in the ancient Egyptian religion. The earliest mention of the name of the god Nt dates back to the Middle Kingdom and his only representation dates back to the 19th Dynasty, New Kingdom. This paper aims to introduce a comprehensive study of this god through the textual and representational evidence; it aims to discuss the different forms of writing his name and epithets in the ancient Egyptian language and their meaning, and finally, his role and his relations to other gods in ancient Egyptian religion.

Keywords:

Coffin Texts; Deir El-Madina; Nt; Wadjmes Stela.

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة عن المعبود نت، وهو معبود غير شائع في الديانة المصرية القديمة. يعود أقدم ذكر لاسم المعبود نت إلى عصر الدولة الوسطى، ويعود تمثيله الوحيد إلى الأسرة التاسعة عشرة، عصر الدولة الحديثة، ويهدف البحث إلى تقديم دراسة شاملة عن هذا المعبود من خلال المصادر النصية والتصويرية المتاحة وحصص الطرق المختلفة لكتابة اسمه وإلقابه ومعانيها في اللغة المصرية القديمة، وأخيراً دوره وعلاقته بالمعبودات الأخرى في الديانة المصرية القديمة.

الكلمات الدالة: نصوص التوابيت؛ دير المدينة؛ نت؛ لوحة

"واج مس".

Introduction:

There were many gods and goddesses worshipped in ancient Egypt. Some of them rose to prominence to become supreme gods with main cult centers and temples dedicated to them. There were certain gods some of whom patronized a Nome or more. Moreover, there were local gods, some of whom gained fame while others gained no attention. This is probably because of the fewer sources that deal with such gods. *Nt* is one of these uncommon gods whose name was referred to two times in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts. The only representation of *Nt* dates back to the 19th Dynasty, Ramesside Period on the Stela of Wadjmes, which is preserved at the Turin Museum.

1. Textual sources:

Nt was mentioned in CT 684¹. The inscriptions ascribe this coffin to Djehuty-Nakht² from El-Barsha. It dates back to the 11th Dynasty, the reign of King Senusert I. (20.1822-27). The spell occurs in the coffin's outer side, which is now kept at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It is written in two columns as follows:

Text: 



Transliteration: *twt tr mi N pn Nt i Nt ii.n.k tr (ir).k mi šsp 3wt m hrt-ntr*

Translation: Who are you then? that *N* is *Nt* o! *Nt* (If) you really came, what do you do? Receive gifts in the necropolis.

Comment: This spell is concerned with demanding the celestial ferry boat³. This is the boat that would carry the souls of the dead into the underworld⁴.

¹ FAULKNER, R.O., *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Vol. 2, Spells 355-787, Warminster, 1977, 250; DE. BUCK, A., *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, VI. Texts of Spells 472-786, Chicago, 1956, 314.

² DE. BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, VI., IX.

³ FAULKNER, R.O., *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin texts*, 266.

⁴ ABDEL-RADY, R., «The Celestial Ferryman in Ancient Egyptian Religion "Sailor of the Dead"», *JGUAA1*, 2016, 126.

Nt was mentioned once more in CT 707 from the outer coffin of Gwa-tp⁵ from El-Barsha at the British Museum (B. M 30840)⁶. It reads as follows:



Transliteration: *ink s3b pw prw m drd rw pw hnty t3-šm^cw wn.n.i 3wy pt ny m swnw n(y)w ptr twttw n ink (is) pw ink šsnty ink pw Nt ii.n.k rk tn ii.n.i m ht nhb n(y) iw nsrsr*

Translation: I am that jackal which went out from the leaf, and that lion which is in front of Upper Egypt, Open the doors of heaven⁷ for me, turn back from the towers of seeing which belongs to you, (because) I am not that, I am *šsnty*⁸, I am *Nt*, Where did you come from? I came from behind *Nhb* from the Island of Fire⁹.

Comment: the doors of heaven are the entrances to the celestial domain that opens and close at the passage of the sun god and the blessed deceased¹⁰.

As for the island of fire, it is the sacred place that represents the birthplace of the sun god¹¹.

⁵ RANKE, H., *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, Band I: Verzeichnis der Namen, Glückstadt, J. J. Augustin, 1935, 350, 10.

⁶ DE. BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts VI, IX*.

⁷ A series of spells in the Pyramid texts mention the 'doors of heaven' where Ra awaits the King in order to introduce him into the heavenly conclaves (pyr. 422). it is through these doors that the King must pass to bathe and be purified; BROVARSKI, E., «The Doors of Heaven», in *Orientalia NOVA* 46, N^o. 1, 1977, 110.

⁸ LGG VII, 126(a).

⁹ Island of fire *iw nsrsr*: The island of Flames/Fire is the region of birth of the sun god every day, so associated with the underworld side of the eastern horizon. It is the place where the sun god destroys his enemies. It is the island of fire where the deceased is reborn every day. This term is attested for the first time in the Pyramid Texts. BUDGE, W., *The Book of the Dead. The Papyrus of Ani I*, London and New York, 1913, 597; CANNUYER, C., «Le Nome de l'iw nsrsr, L'île de l'embrasement Perpétuel des Textes Religieux de l'Égypte Ancienne», *AOB XXVI*, Lille, 2013, 101- 107.

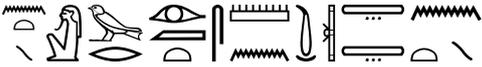
¹⁰ ALY, M., ATTATALLAH, H. & BORHAN, M., «The Relation between *nhh* and *d.t* with the Doors of Heaven», *IAJFTH*, Vol. 7, N^o.1, 2021, 92.

¹¹ CANNUYER, «Le Nome de l'iw nsrsr, L'île de l'embrasement Perpétuel des Textes Religieux de l'Égypte Ancienne», 101- 107.

2. Representation:

The Stela of Wadjmes 50038 (=Cat.1548) is unique in that it bears the only representation of *Nt*. It dates back to the 19th Dynasty, New Kingdom. It is a painted limestone stela that was discovered at Deir El-Madina¹² (FIG. 1- 2). According to Porter and Moss, the stela is dedicated to Neith, Ptah, and Wadjms¹³.

The left side carries a representation of god Ptah facing god *Nt*. They are depicted in the same size and attitude. *Nt* is shown in an anthropomorphic form sitting over a throne. He is holding a *w3s* scepter in one hand while the other hand is occupied by an *ʿnh* sign¹⁴. He is shown in profile, wearing a hair wig, exposing his ear. He is wearing a turned-up false beard and an oxen tail. The texts above his head read as follows:

Text: 

Transliteration: *Nt wr ir m3ʿt smn t3wy Nt*

Translation: “*Nt* the Great, peacemaker, the establisher of the Two lands, *Nt*”.

The Lower register is divided into two parts. Both parts carry a representation of Wadjmes kneeling with raised hands which is a praying attitude in ancient Egyptian art. Above Wadjmes, there are prayers dedicated to *Nt* on the right side as follows:

Text: 

Transliteration: *rdi i3w Nt ntr ʿ3 di.f ʿnh wd3 snb n k3 n sdm ʿš m st pr m3ʿt w3d-ms*

Translation: “Adoration to *Nt*, the Great god, who gives life, prosperity, and hale to the Ka of the servant at the place of truth wadjmes”.

¹² The site of Deir el-Medina, located in a desert valley on the west bank of Luxor. Known in ancient Egyptian texts as "Set Maat" (*st-m3ʿt*), "Place of Truth". Tombs were built there as early as the Middle Kingdom and a village settlement housing the royal-tomb builders was founded on the site in the early New Kingdom. The workmen's village gradually became surrounded by chapels and temples.

TOIVARI-VIITALA, J., «Deir El-Medina (Development)», *UEE*, 2011, 1

<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002b227q> [Accessed at 1/2/2023- 3:00 pm];

ČERNÝ, J., «A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period», *BdE* 50, 2001, 8-10.

¹³ *PM*. I, 735.

¹⁴ KRI. III, 725; BARTA, W., «Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel», *ÄF* 24, 1968, 150, N. 122 a; FABRETTI, A., *Regio Museo di Torino*, Vol. 1, Torino, 1882, 150; TOSI, M. & ROCCATI, A., *Stele e altre epigrafi di Deir el Medina n. 50001- n. 50262*, in: *Catalogo del Museo egizio di Torino* 1, Torino, 1972, 72- 73.

3. Name of the god *Nt*:

There are no attestations for the name of *Nt* in ancient Egypt before the Middle Kingdom. According to Leitz, the meaning of the name of the god *Nt* is unknown¹⁵. It was written in different forms as follows:

(Table 1) Different forms of the name of *Nt*

name	source
 16	CT 684
 17	CT 707
 18	Stela of Wadjmes
 19	Stela of Wadjmes
 20	Stela of Wadjmes

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According to Osing, the name of *Nt* was mentioned in Papyrus Berlin 3056 IX as . He believed that the meaning of this title is unknown. Then, he noted that “*nt*” which is mentioned in this Papyrus does not refer to the god *Nt*. It is probably the singular form of *ntj.w* which means ‘those, who are’²¹.

It could be noticed that some scholars linked the name of the god *Nt* and the name of the goddess Neith. However, the researchers believe that the god *Nt* is another entity. This could be suggested through two evidences.

- First, the determinative of the name Neith in the ancient Egyptian language is either a lady  (B1), two bows tied in a package, or a cobra, while the determinative of *Nt* is  (A40)²².
- Second, the depiction of *Nt* on the stela of Wadjmes in a male form.

¹⁵ LGG IV, 387.

¹⁶ DE. BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, VI., 314.

¹⁷ DE. BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, VI., 338.

¹⁸ STELE TURIN 50038 (=Cat.1548).

¹⁹ STELE TURIN 50038 (=Cat.1548).

²⁰ STELE TURIN 50038 (=Cat.1548).

²¹ OSING, J., «Die Worte von Heliopolis (II)», *MDAIK* 47, 1991, 270.

²² GARDINER, A. H., *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, London, 1973, 503.

4. Epithets of god *Nt*:

The list of epithets of *Nt* occurs over the New Kingdom stela of Wadjmes as follows:

4.1. *wr* :

This title was mentioned for the first time in the Pyramid Texts, the Old Kingdom. It remained in use until the Roman era. It was a commonly used epithet for several gods is Ptah, Osiris, and Amun²³.

4.2. *ntr* 𓂏:

It was a common epithet that was associated with several gods, for instance, Ra, Horus, Osiris, and Ptah²⁴. This title was connected with status and authority. Accordingly, it was a common epithet for living King and dead King²⁵. According to Gardiner, *ntr* 𓂏 started to occur as an epithet for defied Kings²⁶.

4.3. *ir m3ct*:

The tile *ir m3ct* 'He who acts according to Maat/Peacemaker' occurred in the Middle Kingdom and remained until the Greco-Roman era. It was a common epithet for several gods such as Amun, Osiris, and Ptah Tatenen²⁷. It describes *Nt* in a positive light. It reflects that his works are going in accordance with *maat*²⁸.

4.4. *smn t3wy*:

The epithet '*smn t3wy*' is attested since the New Kingdom. It means 'the establisher of the Two lands'. It seems that this title is not attested before the New Kingdom. It was associated with Amon-Ra and *Nt*²⁹. It was also a part of the Nebty name given to King Ptolemy V³⁰. This epithet probably reflects the power of god, a power that extends over a certain geographical area.

²³ LGG II, 420.

²⁴ LGG IV, 395; FISCHER, H.G., «Marginalia II», *GM* 128, 1992, 72-75.

²⁵ FAULKNER, R. O., *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford, 1962, 142; ALLEN, J., *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2ndEd., Cambridge, 2010, 365.

²⁶ GARDINER, A. H., «Horus the Behdetty», *JEA* 30, 1944, 23 ff.

²⁷ LGG I, 456.

²⁸ BUDDE, D., «Epithets, Divine», *UEE*, 2011, 3, https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/5595/1/Budde_Epithetes_divines_2011.pdf [Accessed at 10/2/2023- 3:00 pm].

²⁹ LGG VI, 338- 339.

³⁰ *Wb.* IV, 134, 1-3; LEPSIS, R., *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, IV, Berlin, 1849, 18; BECKERATH, J., *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, Mainz, 1999, 236- 237, 5:N.

5. Role of the god *Nt* in ancient Egyptian religion:

So far, very little is known about the nature of god *Nt*. However, it could be assumed that he played an essential role to help the deceased in the afterlife.

According to CT 684, *Nt* was probably a mortuary deity who receives gifts (offerings) in the necropolis. Moreover, the inscriptions of Wadjmes stela are addressed to *Nt* who will give life, prosperity, and hale to the *k3* of the wadjmes. The offering formula is usually directed to the *k3* of the deceased. Accordingly, it could be suggested that *Nt* was one of the deities for whom offerings were presented and Wadjmes wished to benefit from it.

In the Coffin Texts, the deceased is transformed into various mythological beings³¹. In CT 707, the deceased is transformed into *šsnty* and *Nt*. This should be emphasized through the term ink 'I/me' followed by the determinative  (A50)³² 'revered persons' commonly used on Middle Kingdom coffins.

It seems that the deceased wishes to transform into a divine entity of the netherworld who will provide him with safe passage into the netherworld and reach glorification. CT 707 deals with the 'doors of heaven' that deal with the passage of the sun god into the netherworld and the 'island of fire' which is the sun god's birthplace. This reflects the deceased's desire to join the sun god which asserts resurrection, rebirth, and life after death for the deceased.

6. *Nt* and other gods:

6. 1. *šsnty*:

Through CT 707, it could be concluded that *Nt* is associated with *šsnty*. According to Leitz, *šsnty* is a designation for the deceased³³. *Nt* and *šsnty* are divine entities that the deceased wishes to get assimilated with in order to help him in the netherworld.

6. 2. *pth*:

Ptah is the head of Memphite theology and the patron god of craftsmen³⁴. It could be assumed that *Nt* acquired some of Ptah's nature as a patron god of craftsmen. This is clear through the depiction of *Nt* together with god Ptah on the stela of Wadjmes, the Priest who lived during the 19th Dynasty at Deir el-Madina.

³¹ NYORD, R., «Scribes of the Gods in the Coffin Texts», MKS 1, London, 2015, 273.

³² GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar*, 447.

³³ LGG VII, 126(a).

³⁴ LGG III, 168; VAN. DIJK, J., «Ptah», *OEA* III, 2001, 74- 76.

Conclusion:

The available data concerned with the god *Nt* is scarce. *Nt* was mentioned for the first time in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts. Worthy of note that his name was not mentioned either in Pyramid texts or the Book of the Dead. Only one pictorial reference for *Nt* belongs to the stela of Wadjmes of the 19th Dynasty that was found at Deir el-Madina. *Nt* is represented in an anthropomorphic form and there are no other representations for him so far.

The name of *Nt* was written in different forms starting from the Middle Kingdom until the New Kingdom. The meaning of his name is obscure. As for the argument of the equation between *Nt* and Neith, it could be denied through his representation on the stela of Wadjmes.

Nt carried several epithets as follows: *wr*, *ntr nfr*, *ir m3t*, and *smn t3wy*. Some of which were very common in ancient Egypt. As for *ir m3t*, it describes *Nt* in a positive light and his work in accordance with *m3t*. *šmn t3wy* reflects his power that would be extended over Upper and Lower Egypt.

Spell 684 of Coffin Texts is concerned with demanding the celestial ferry boat that would carry the souls of the dead into the underworld. Accordingly, it could be suggested that *Nt* is a funerary divinity that would help the deceased to enter the underworld. It is clear that one of the roles of god *Nt* is to receive gifts in the necropolis.

According to CF 707, it is clear that *šsnty* is one of the gods who was connected to *Nt* and shared the same role. They probably were responsible for helping the deceased's soul accession to heaven and to be united with the sun god. Worthy of note that *Nt* and *šsnty* were divine entities the deceased wishes to get assimilated within the netherworld.

It could be suggested that *Nt* was one of the local gods whose cult was spread in Upper Egypt. This opinion is derived from mentioning his name on el-Barsha coffins and the stela of Deir el-Madina. According to the available data, his cult was not introduced into Delta. There are no temples dedicated to his cult.

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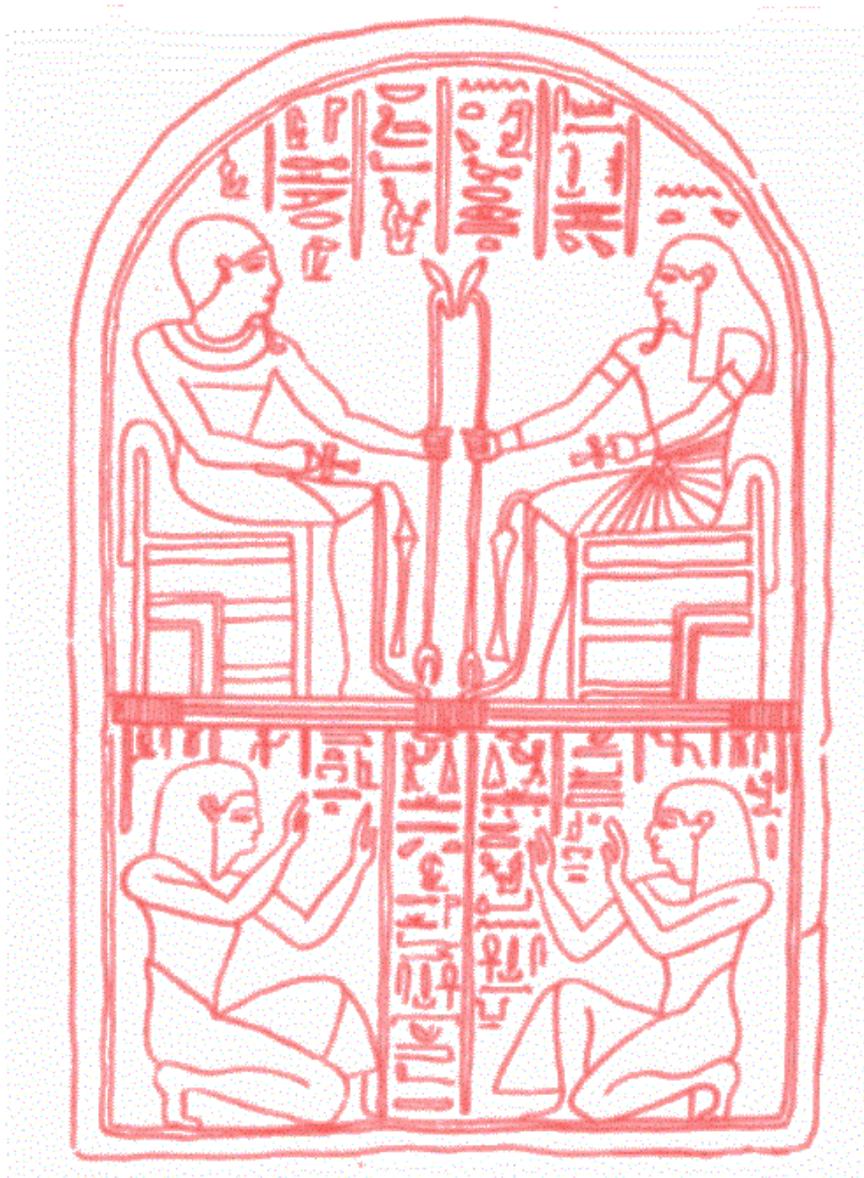
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(FIG. 1) Stele of Wadjmes

https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat_1548

Accessed at 1-11-2022- 4:00 pm.



(FIG. 2) A Facsimile of Stele of Wadjmes

LANZONE, R.V., *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, Torino, 1884, Tav.CLXXV (1).