

DICTIONARY OF DEITIES AND DEMONS IN THE BIBLE (DDD)

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BASTET

I. The name of the Egyptian goddess

Bastet occurs in the Bible in Ezek 30:17 as part of the name Pibeseth, (פִּיבֶסֶת) an Egyptian town in the Delta near the modern Zagazig. The place of the ancient town is called nowadays Tell Basta. The Greek name was Boubastis and the Hebrew rendering Pibeset. The ancient Egyptian name of the town was *pr-bꜣstt* (lit. House of Bastet).

II. The Greek historian Herodotus (2:138) who travelled in Egypt in the 5th cent. BCE gives a description of the temple of the goddess Bastet which he calls Artemis and writes: "Other temples may be larger or have cost more to build, but none is a greater pleasure to look at". From his description and from Egyptian texts it may be deduced that the temple was surrounded on three sides by water which formed a lake or *isheru* like the lake which still surrounds the temple of Mut in Karnak on three sides.

Egyptian temples surrounded on three of the four sides by a so-called *isheru* were devoted to leonine goddesses e.g. Tefnut, →Hathor, →Mut, Sakhmet and Bastet who were called daughter of the Sun-god →Re or Eye of Re. These goddesses were considered to be representations of the original, first feminine being and to have a dual nature in which fiery anarchic and destructive characteristics coexisted with pacific and creative elements. These goddesses had to be pacified with specific rituals. According to a mythical story the original furious and fiery lioness changed into a peaceful cat and settled down in her temple. The lake around the temple was meant to cool off her burning wrath.

In older times since the third millennium BCE, Bastet was represented as a lion or lion-headed woman, but in the first mill. BCE when the cat had been domesticated and had reached the status of pet animal in Egypt, she was more and more represented as a cat-headed woman and became the typical cat-goddess of Egypt. The many cat-bronzes and cat-mummies were originally dedicatory offerings of pilgrims, though now found in Egyptian collections all over the world. They may come for a considerable part from the temple site of Tell Basta.

Herodotus (2:60) describes not only the temple but also a festival of Bastet in Bubastis: Men and women came by ship to the city in great numbers, up to 700.000 persons, singing, dancing and making music with flutes and castanets. Elaborate sacrifices were made and more wine was consumed than during all the rest of the year. This fits in with Egyptian sources according to which leonine goddesses had to be pacified with "the feast of drunkenness". Bastet was certainly a very popular and beloved goddess. One could characterize an Egyptian goddess by saying that she was raging like Sakhmet (the lion-goddess) and friendly like Bastet (the cat-goddess).

The writing and pronunciation of the name of the goddess as Bastet is a generally accepted convention in Egyptological literature, but is no more than a modern reconstruction. The second *t* in the word *bꜣstt* denotes the feminine ending and was usually not pronounced. It seems that the aleph (ꜣ) which is found in traditional Egyptian writing changed place and became a *Vortonsilbe* *bast(t)* > *ubesti* (J. OSING, *Die Nominalbildung des Ägyptischen* [Mainz 1976] 855-856 n. 1319 and 376 n. 55). An Aramaic writing of the name of the goddess was *ꜣbst* (Wb I, 423). The Egyptian pronunciation of the name of the goddess was more like 'obast' or 'ubesti' than 'bastet' in the 1st millennium BCE. It remains remarkable, however, that in the Hebrew rendering of the place-name the '*Vortonsilbe*' is not indicated: Pibeset. The difference in the Hebrew version with the Greek rendering Boubastis might be the work of the Masoretes, so that the pronunciation of the place-name might have been 'Bubast' or 'Bubaset'. The meaning of the name of the goddess is uncertain. The older, problematic explanation was "She of Bubastis" (Wb I, 423); a more recent explanation is "She of the ointment-jar" (S. QUIRKE, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* [London 1992] 31). Her name was indeed written with the hieroglyph ointment-jar (*bꜣs*) and she was among other things goddess of protective ointments. Bubastis or Pibeset was still one of the most important

cities of Egypt in the time of Ezekiel. It had even been capital of Egypt during dynasties 22 and 23 (945-730 BCE).

III. The mentioning of the placename *pî-beset* in Ezek 30:17 has no religio-historical implications. A deity Bastet was not venerated by Ezekiel's Israelite contemporaries.

IV. Bibliography

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H. TE VELDE

BES

I. The name of the Egyptian god or demon Bes (Copt BHC; Gk βῆσας) occurs in the personal name *bēsāy* in Ezra 2:49, cf. Neh 7:52. In Egypt this divine name was also often used as a personal name.

II. The god or demon Bes was represented as a bandy legged deformed dwarf or more precisely as a lion-man (ROMANO 1980). His ugly human face, his animal hair or manes, ears and tail are indeed more likely those of a lion than of a human dwarf. He dances, plays musical instruments such as harp, flute and tambourine, or brandishes knife and sword to avert evil and to protect the pregnant and birth-giving mother. He sometimes shows an enormous phallus and may make dirty jokes (MALAISE 1990). Often a plurality of Bes-gods is represented, figuring in an erotic context. These erotic representations were supposed to bring about pregnancy and childbirth. L'amour pour l'amour, as well as l'art pour l'art, was largely unknown or unacceptable as a cultural expression in an ancient culture such as Egypt, although contraceptives were not unknown or forbidden (DERCHAIN 1981).

Several explanations of the name Bes have been given (MALAISE 1990:691-692). His name has been connected with verbs meaning "to initiate", "to emerge" and "to protect". Very recently, arguments have been brought forward that a Bes means a prematurely born child or foetus, which was enveloped in a lion's skin and kept in a basket of reeds or rushes (MEEKS 1992; BULTÉ 1991:102.108-109). So it seems possible that the dancing, jesting and sometimes aggressive gnome or lion-man Bes was a personification of a prematurely born child or foetus, who protects mother and child. It may be that the personal name Bes was considered to be a fitting name for prematurely born children.

III. Except for the PN *bēsāy*, Bes is not attested in the OT. In epigraphical Hebrew, Bes occurs twice as a theophoric element in a PN: *ql.jbš* (Samaria Ostrakon 1:5; Probably Egyptian 'Bes created', A. LEMAIRE, *Inscriptions Hébraïques I* [LAPO 9; Paris

1977] 54); *bsy* (R. HESTRIN & M. DAYAGI-MENDELS, *Inscribed Seals* [Jerusalem 1979] No. 54). On Pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud two figurines occur which can be interpreted as Bes-depictions probably a male with a bisexual feminized variant (KEEL & UEHLINGER 1992:244-248). Bes-amulets from the Iron-Age have been excavated at e.g. Lachish, Tell-Jemme and Gezer (KEEL & UEHLINGER 1992:248-251). The archaeological evidence suggests that Bes was known in Palestine in the Iron Age as an apotropaic demon esp. in times of pregnancy and birth.

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H. TE VELDE

KHONSU

I. The name of the Egyptian god Khonsu occurs once in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament (3 Macc 6:38) as part of the Egyptian name of the ninth month of the year and first month of the summer season: Pachôn, i.e. 'He of Khonsu'.

II. The god Khonsu was mostly represented in the form of a mummy with the head of a child wearing the sidelock of youth or with the head of a hawk. In both cases he usually wears the sign of the moon on his head. He was a moongod. His name might be explained as the "wanderer" or "he who comes and goes". He was the divine child of →Amun and Mut in the divine triad of Karnak. He had a beautiful temple in the precinct of Amun at Karnak. The famous Bentresh-stela which extols Khonsu as a healing god was found in another temple of Khonsu in Karnak. Besides in Karnak or Thebes, Khonsu was venerated together with Amun and Mut in many places and temples in Egypt.

III. This ninth month of the Egyptian calendar received its name after the festival of the god Khonsu (BRUNNER, *LdÄ* I, 962; ALTENMÜLLER, *LdÄ* II, 174). The name Pakhôn/Pashons is still retained as the name of a month in the Christian-Coptic calendar (April 26 - May 25).

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H. TE VELDE

NILE נִלוֹ

I. The name of the Egyptian river Nile is attested many times in the Bible e.g. Gen 41:1-3.17-18; Ex 1:22; 2:3; 7:15-25; 8:3. 9.11; Jes 19:5-9; Jer 46:8; Ez 30:12; Amos 8:8. *Yē'ōr*, the Hebrew name of the Nile is a loanword; it is a derivation from the Egyptian word *itrw*: the river, i.e. the Nile. This word has dropped its *t* at an unknown date in the course of the history of Egyptian language, probably much earlier than the new Kingdom when the first variant in writing is found without *t* (*Wb* I, 146; DE BUCK 1948: 1). The Coptic phonetic writing *eioor* confirms a pronunciation of the word in Egypt corresponding with the Hebrew *Yē'ōr*.

The Greek name *Neilos* is also a loanword derived from *itrw*. The *n* presents the definite article *n* regularly used in Late Egyptian and onwards. Egyptian post-vocalic *r* was weak. The Fayumic Coptic dialect writes the root in the form *iaal*. Whether the final *o* of *Neilos* should represent the plural ending *w* of *itrw* rather than the plural adjective 'גדול "great" is debatable (SMITH 1979:163; LUFT 1992:403-411).

II. The Egyptian word for river or Nile *itrw* contains the word *tr* meaning season or

time. The name of the Nile then, would mean something like the 'Seasonal One', the 'Recurrent One' or the 'Periodic One' (KADISH 1988:194). This name refers to the recurrent, periodic or annual flooding of the Nile or inundation called Hapy. The difference between the minimum and the maximum waterlevels could be ca. 7 metres in Assuan. The rising of the Nile began in June, the maximum height was reached in September-October. The Nile valley and Delta were turned into an enormous lake for 6-10 weeks. Only the sandy higher places and settlements on tells remained dry as the desert did. The retreat of the floodwaters began in November and the Nile reached its lowest point in April. The rising and falling of the Nile was well-known in Israel (Amos 8:8; Jer 46:7, Ez 30:12 etc.). The Greek saying that Egypt is a gift of the Nile (Herodotus II 5) is famous. The river itself, however, was not venerated as a god. The term Nile god found in modern publications refers to Hapy, the Inundation of the Nile. He is the personification of the fertility inherent in the Nile. He was depicted as an obese human figure with a clump of papyrus on his head and with a huge paunch and pendant breasts, the image of welfare and prosperity. He was often called father of the gods. He was honoured with offerings, hymns and festivals.

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H. TE VELDE