

THE WISDOM OF THOTH

MAGICAL TEXTS IN ANCIENT
MEDITERRANEAN CIVILISATIONS

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Back cover: Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari. A representation of Thoth from the entrance to the Main
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Magic in the sign: iconic writings in the Litany of Neith at Esna and the performative nature of the divine name (Esna 216.1–4)

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The aim of the study is to define the character of the hieroglyphic system according to a 'written theology'; such writing expresses not only a language, but also the deep nature of the divine nature, which is described by the texts. The analysis of the first 16 invocations of the Litany to Neith at Esna recognises the writings of the goddess' name as an actual sign of her growing in the first steps of the creation.

KEYWORDS: EGYPT, HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING, THEOLOGY, PERFORMATIVE POWER

In the discussion on the nature of the hieroglyphic writing, the late Egyptian culture offers a wide range of topics; the diffusion of several scribal traditions is the typical element of the last centuries of the pharaonic civilization, and its core is identified with the temple, where the scribes of the sacred books became the guardians of the ancient models.¹ This writing science is displayed in the very structure of the temple, whose walls are fully covered with texts that blend together the scribal mind with a speech on the nature of the divine being. We might thus talk of theological writing, in which the nature of the god reflects. The mind of this writing could be described as an attempt at the codification of reality according to a theoretical criterion: what exists is expression of the ordered world, and can be represented by hieroglyphs. The deep relationship of reality, and writing is an important factor in the diffusion of a complex system, the modern science calls cryptography.² But this definition reflects better the modern approach to the writing system than its own nature. Some ancient authors, such as Horapollon or Clement of Alexandria, clearly state that hieroglyphs are meaningful representations of complex conceptions; what they deal with, is not a reading or a use of the writing, but its meaning, a visual poetry, known since the New Kingdom³ and widely used in the Graeco-Roman inscriptions.

Thus, we might wonder whether this approach could connect the 'theology', in terms of a 'speech about the gods', and the formal expression of the same speech, that is, the written sign. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct a probable system in the visual speech of the divine nature, starting from some Roman inscriptions in the tem-

ple of Esna:⁴ here we find a good case-study for the use of the hieroglyphs according to the speculation on the complex nature of Neith.

Published in 1982, *L'Écriture figurative dans le textes d'Esna* by Serge Sauneron was the last contribution of the French scholar in the research of the Latopolitan inscriptions.⁵ His analysis starts with a group of litanies, that describe the nature of the main deities of the temple; in this group of inscriptions, a long litany is addressed to Neith. But the litanies in the temples of Esna are not the only expression of this meaningful writing: they are part of a textual net which ties together several compositions, dated to the Roman period (I–II cent. AD). In the description of Neith, the ancient priests used to collect two traditions (from Sais and from Esna);⁶ the result was a theology, that is an actual speech about Neith, whose elements can be recognised in the writing system.

The speech about Neith at Esna is organised in a corpus of texts, whose content is also reflected in the visual shape of the words; thus, what we call cryptography becomes the solution for it, and what is for us a couple of concepts – the content and the shape – becomes an identity. The doctrine of Neith is expressed in various formal constructions; in doing so, the Egyptian mind confirms the concept of multiplicity, in which the ordered world identifies. The variety of the written representation of this multiplicity is the best proof for the last centuries' doctrine of the divine, as well as the role of the temple as cultural machine. A confirmation of this can be found in

¹ The scribes of the sacred books are described in a passage of the Papyrus Salt 825, concerning the House of Life at Abydos: pap. BM 10051, 7.1–5: Derchain 1965, vol. I, 141; vol. II, 8*–9*

² The cryptic text 'would signify intentional concealment': Darnell 2004, 1, n. 1




³ See the iconic system in the construction of the ramesside royal names, above all Ramesses II in the temple of Luqsor: Ciampini 2011–2012, 141–146.

⁴ The inscriptions from the temple of Esna are quoted according to the edition by S. Sauneron

⁵ Sauneron 1982; the work was left unfinished at the death of the author, see the *Note sur l'état du manuscrit* by J. J. Clère, v–vii.

⁶ The collection of the two different traditions in the Cosmogony of Neith at Esna has already been analysed by Sauneron 1962, 249–251. The combination of two traditions in the cosmogonical treatise of Neith can also be a proof for two different chronological phases of the redaction: an ancient Saitic text, and a late Latopolitan elaboration: von Lieven 2000, 101, n. 333.

the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria, who connects the hidden deity in the temple, with the priestly science and the iconic writing.⁷

The current spelling of the name Neith, , does not offer any element for this approach; the basic writing respects the classical tradition, which since the ancient times, identifies the goddess. The aniconic sign of Neith was probably part of the divine nature; thus, it will be used in the graphic construction of the goddess' manifestation (see invocation 15). This spelling, as well as her definition as *ntrt*, , or also the basic iconic writing of her name, , is regularly used in the texts, and may represent her static character. This form is opposed to the impressive evolution of the complex iconic writing (the so-called *écriture figurative* of Sauneron); in the publication of the litany addressed to Neith, Sauneron listed more than 80 invocations, together with some suggestions for their interpretation.⁸ Such graphical solutions are the result of the speculation which governs the composition of the texts. This statement is confirmed by some passages of the litany, where the speech about the deity is more significant. We can here focus our analysis on an initial group of entities, concerning the primeval and creative nature of the goddess; these fundamental aspects of the doctrine are organised in a process from the uniqueness of the Creator, to the multiplicity of the ordered world. Thus, we shall focus on the invocations 1–16, where Neith is depicted in her creative aspects, operating in the first steps of the world; we find here an actual theological treatise on the primeval deity who develops in a female nature, that men call Neith.

§ 1 – Invocations 1–4 (*Esna 216.1–2*)

These first invocations introduce the goddess in her current manifestation:


- (1) 
- (2) 
- (3) 
- (4) 


‘To Neith, the Great, the God’s Mother, Mistress of Esna;
to Neith, the Great, the God’s Mother, Mistress of Sais;
to Neith in the vestibule in⁹ the Temple of Neith;
to Neith, Mistress¹⁰ of Sais, the great Queen of Egypt’.

⁷ Clemens of Alexandria. *Stromateis* V, 19.3–4.

⁸ Sauneron 1982, 35–39. The Litanies at Esna are part of the *tw3 pt*-ritual in the month of Phamenoth: Sauneron 1962, 82–84; 1963, 90–93 and pl. XVIII.


⁹ The writing  is a dittography.

¹⁰ In the sign  the determinative of the divine name, and the epithet *nb*, ‘mistress’, seem to be coalescent; on the other hand, it is

The text shows an elaboration of the graphical composition in order to stress the divine presence: in the invocations 1–2 the name of Neith is written in the basic form, while the sequence of typical epithets (‘The Great’, ‘God’s Mother’) has been elaborated in different spellings. The specific aspects of Neith are connected with her two sacred cities; the signs of Esna and Sais stress the link of the goddess with a general concept of the Land: *t3-snt* starts with the scarab (*t3*), as a manifestation of the primeval mound, while the writing of Sais is very close to the root *s3tw* ‘ground’. The third invocation describes the presence of the goddess in the main hall of the temple; this cultic frame is also confirmed by the writing of the divine name, , which seems to sum up the temple’s service.¹¹ The last invocation links the goddess with the earth, identified with the Egypt; her local epithet (*nbt s3w*) becomes an aspect of Neith, celebrated as mistress of the kingship over the whole Land (*hk3t n b3kt*).

§ 2 – Invocations 5–7 (*Esna 216.2*)


After this introduction of the goddess, the visual treatise describes her aspect connected with the creation of the earth:


- (5) 
- (6) 
- (7) 



‘To Neith, the creative water, which made the earth;
to Neith, who made the raising earth (*tnn*);
to Neith, the Raising One who made the One who made
the earth (*ir t3*)’.



In the invocation 5, Neith is identified with the primeval, creative water (Eg.: *nt*); this spelling has already been object of a note by Sauneron: ‘*l’orthographe du nom divin évoquait déjà, par son aspect, les épithètes de la déesse*’ (Sauneron 1988, 141). The writing of the epithet is the result of a careful use of the signs: the ‘water, that made the earth’ is written with the sign *n*, the sign *ir*, whose late reading probably has a basically vocalic structure, and the sign *t*. We have here a symbolic reading of the epithet, in which it is possible to identify the phonetic elements of the divine name, whose Greek reading is *Nηιθ*.¹² At the same



also possible that the Neith’s sign is to be read *nb*, being her name simply written .

¹¹ The sign , ‘vestibule’, stresses the cosmic dimension of the architectural structure, whose ground is the earth, and the ceiling is the sky; thus, the adoration of the goddess is a cosmic act, reproduced in the temple; for the structure of the temple as cosmic space see now: Konrad 2006, 16–20.

¹² A writing of the divine name:  is rare, but known in *Wb.* II, 198 (Th.T 65, Imiseba; late Ramesside period); it seems to confirm the

time, it is striking to find a variant of the ‘phonetic’ writing of her name, , introduced by the preposition *n*, written ; the first acts in the creation are directly connected with an actual personality, that later will be described in several aspects. The basic writing of the *n* in the divine name might better remind the aquatic nature of Neith as creator (see invocation 5), rather than the phonetic spelling *n*. The second step in the creative process is focused on a form of the creator goddess: the Red Crown (*n*), united with her dynamic manifestation, that is the snake (*t*); this graphic solution also respects the evolution in the form of the goddess: from the primeval water, she becomes a snake, an archaic living form, still awaiting complete development. Thus, the invocation can so be translated: ‘Neith, who made the raising earth (*ir t3 tnn*)’: a singular construction, in which are merged also two well-known deities of the primeval time, that is Irta and Tenen. The divine snakes describe the creation of the earth, identified with two well-known primeval gods, Irta and Tenen.

In the invocation 6, the emergence of the earth becomes a deity in the form of the snake, while his elevation, connected with the root *tni*, bears a divine taxogramm. In the edition of Sauneron, the taxogramm seems to have an androgynous shape: , while in invocation 7 the same has got a definite male character: , this probably depends on the evolution from an undifferentiated creative power, to a differentiated world, embodied by the primeval deities, ruled by Neith.



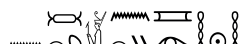

At the end of the process, we have the final spelling of the Neith’s name: the red crown (*n*), and the scarab (*t*). The speculation on the divine nature identifies this step with the complete manifestation of the scarab;¹³ its meaning is stressed by the ram-head, a thematisation of the living being, read *b3*. The result of the process is the full manifestation of the physical reality, represented by the earth, called Tenen. The god bears here the epithet *ir ir-t3*, which can be translated as ‘who made Irta’. Thus, the first part of the creation ends with the appearance of the earth, as a product from the water identified with Neith. Here, as well as in other passages in the inscriptions at Esna, the root *iri*, ‘to make’, is written with  and : here it is probably a question of the bi-sexual character of the creator, expressed graphically;¹⁴ these spellings fit well with the androgynous taxogramm of Tenen: a graphical construction which stresses an active, primeval power, not yet organized according to the sexual genders of the world.

Neith, Irta and Tenen, are the actors in a theological process; they are linked in an evolutive frame, which de-





scribes the passages of the creation; these passages recall the performative forms of the creator: water, snake, and scarab. The role of the snake as a representation of the Creator’s first manifestation will also be confirmed by the primeval being, called *krht* and identified with Neith (see below, § 5: invocation 13):¹⁵ she is the living power of the primeval deity, the matrix of the life, the female ancestor of the world.

§ 3 – Invocations 8–11 (Esna 216.2–3)

With the appearance of the earth, this part of the creation ends; in the litany, the next passage opens a new process: the differentiation of the genders.

- (8) 
- (9) 
- (10) 
- (11) 

‘To Neith, the Male who made the Female;
to Neith, the Female, who made the Male;
to Neith, the water, which made the cyclic time;
to Neith, the flood, which made the linear time’.

The first couple of epithets is an explicit representation of the androgynous character of Neith: the manifestation of male and female elements from the original creator represents the beginning of life. The male-female nature of the creator is also expressed by the writing: in invocation 8, the spelling of the goddess’ name emphasises her female aspect with the two crowns:  (*n*) and  (*t*).¹⁶ But this female deity acts in the invocation as a male, *t3 ir hmt*; thus, we can sum up the content of the text in this way: the goddess with a female name is a male being who created the female. As in a mirror, in invocation 9 the name of Neith stresses her male nature:  (*n*) and  (*t*), while the epithet describes her female nature: *hmt ir(t) t3*; the chiasmic structure of the text is also confirmed by the spelling of the root *iri*, already noted (see above).

In this context, the creation of time is the result of a similar process: both times are conceived as sex-distinguished elements of reality, as proven by their grammatical gender: *nhh* masculine; *dt* feminine.¹⁷ In the litany of Neith, their creation is described with some particular writings. At first,

vocalic nature of the *r* in the late period. The Greek spelling confirms the presence of a long vowel, which is probably expressed in this text by the sign *ir*.

¹³ The writing is ruled by the phonetic value of the scarab as *hpr*

¹⁴ We find here a kind of visual writing, which can distinguish a male and female character of the progenitor; for the use of *iri* in the patronymic and the matronymic, see *Wb.* I, p. 111 (3–5).

¹⁵ See Sauneron 1951, 113–120.

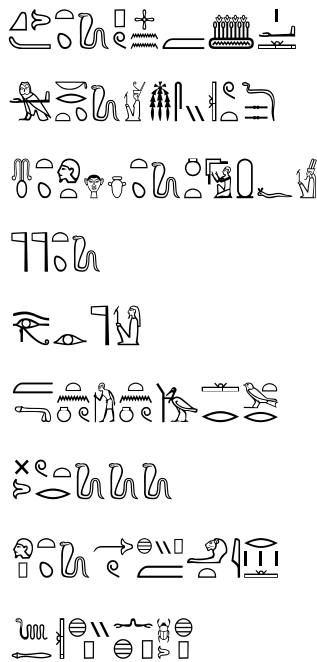
¹⁶ It is striking to find, at the very beginning of the creation, a reference to the royal character of the goddess.

¹⁷ This model in the representation of time is clearly described as early as in the Middle Kingdom: ‘Shu [son of Atum] is the cyclic time (*nhh*), and Tefnet [daughter of Atum] is the linear time (*dt*)’, *CT* II, 28.

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the name of the goddess retains its basic spelling, as well as the verb *iri*; the chiasitic construction is found in the term connected to the creative water: a female water (*nt*), creator of the masculine time (*nḥḥ*), and a male water (*mtr*), creator of the feminine time (*dt*).

This group of invocations recalls other coeval texts from the temple of Esna, where the cosmic powers dwelling in the temple, and the process of differentiation of the sexual genders are described. We can mention here, for instance, a passage from an hymn to Neith, dated to Traian, which runs:

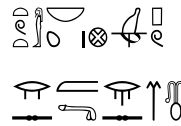


‘It is the Female Ancestor, who existed at the beginning, the Female Matrix, the self-born, the first Mother, the uraeus of the One-whose-name-is-hidden, god and goddess, the goddess who acts (as) a god,¹⁸ the very main guidance, the greatest of the goddesses; she is the first, appeared before them, who begins the existence, when the existence had not yet appeared’ (Esna 317.1–2).

Several elements recognized in the litany are here described: the divine uniqueness, the *status* of Neith as primeval mother, and her manifestation as snake. The primeval nature of the female creator is clearly represented as the uraeus, her perfect manifestation; if the *krḥt* might represent the original power of Neith, her complete manifestation is an enlightening cobra that becomes the protective power of the sun. Such a conception of a Creator, who also blends together the sexual genders into one being is a leitmotiv in the Latopolitan

¹⁸ The translation of the passage is not clear; for this meaning of the root *iri*, see *Wb.* I, 109 (26–28) (*‘Etwas sein’*); in the text, it is necessary to restore a *m* of identity, see also Sauneron 1962, 281

tradition concerning Neith: we can here mention an interesting statement from a hymn dated to Adrian:



‘You are the Mistress of Sais, that is Tenen; her two thirds are male, her third is female’ (Esna 252.25).

Thus, the essence of the goddess is an alchemic mix of genders, whose description is carefully noted in the text; such a combination is the core in the creation. The female nature of Neith appears as soon as the elements of the world are differentiated; at that moment she is clearly a goddess, as well as the time and the sexual genders being well-defined.

§ 4 – Invocation 12 (Esna 216.3)

The light is the next cosmic element, described in the text:




‘To Neith, the One who shines in the Nun, when the earth was still in darkness’.

Neith appears here as a shining light which breaks the primeval darkness. The process is personified in the text by the specific spelling of the deity’s name: the crocodile-idol (n) recalls several cosmological conceptions, known since the II mill. BC,¹⁹ and still fundamental in the Roman texts at Kom Ombo, where the crocodile-god Sobek is described in some texts as a primeval deity, originating from the Nun, bringing light and life.²⁰ In the text of Esna, the crocodile might also remind us of another aspect of the goddess: according to the late speculation, it would represent the time and the eternity (Kákósy 1965, 16–120); thus, its presence in this passage might be connected with the creation of *nḥḥ* and *dt* by Neith. Also the physical construction of the goddess’ name can represent this step in the creative process: the crocodile, as a primeval being and current sign of the emergence of the light, is over the land-sign (*t*), offering a visual representation of this manifestation of the primeval being emerging from the Nun over the earth. At the same time, this icon is a visual writing of Neith’s name.

¹⁹ See the epithet of Sobek-Re: *wbn m nmw*, in the Papyrus Ramesseum VI, col. 1: Gardiner 1957, 43–56.

²⁰ See, for instance, one of the theological monographs at Kom Ombo (KO 59–61, 1–2): ‘Sobek-Re, the Lord of Kom Ombo, the great god, the Lord of Nubia, the revered crocodile, shining in the Nun; Kematef, who appeared at the beginning, the one with the high plumes, the Lord of the two cobras; Tenen, who made the gods, the divine deity, appeared at the first time (...) who made the light in the darkness, whose eyes enlighten what was in the darkness, the great enlightener, who shines at the origin’: Leitz 2010, 313–316.

The crocodile as a later manifestation of Neith can also recall the conception of the twin-gods, born by the goddess; the latter is represented in the writing system of Esna as a crocodile-headed goddess, suckling a couple of reptiles: ; this representation of Neith is described in an invocation of the litany, which runs:

(62) 


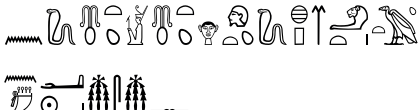


‘To Neith, the Mistress of the Temple of the Mother, who nurses the two crocodiles’ (Esna 216.14).

This definition of the divine nature has its equivalence in the spelling of the name Neith, here written with the vulture (*n*, but also *Normalschrift* for ‘mother’), and the crocodile (*t*): Neith is a mother, while the crocodile is a solar manifestation of the child-god, known as Sobek-Re: all these elements are summarised in the Neith’s title: *mwt r*’, ‘Mother of the sun-god Re’.

The creation of the light is a primeval event; it directly follows the differentiation of the time (*nḥḥ* and *dṯ*), and seems to be a sign of the creative power. In a cosmic perspective, the primeval light expresses a formal element of the divine nature; it is to be understood as an evolution of the being, differing from the dark chaos. According to M. Broze, this stage in the creation does not mean the birth of the light’s cycle ruled by the sun, which will appear later (Broze 1999, 71–72);²¹ thus, we might here recognize a kind of ontological mark of the primeval goddess. In the light, Neith expresses her first and full manifestation as creator and mother; this passage in the creative process is described in the next passage of the litany, where Neith appears as the solar cobra.

§ 5 – Invocations 13–16 (Esna 216.3–4)

This sequence celebrates Neith in her full female manifestation, headed by the figure of *krḥt*:

- (13) 
- (14) 
- (15) 
- (16) 




²¹ The current cyclic model of the sun can be described as a celebration of the primeval separation of cosmic elements: day-night; light-darkness.

‘To Neith, the living female Ancestor (*krḥt nḥt*), who appears in the Nun together with Irta, who lifts the sky;
to Neith, the female Progenitor (*tmꜣt*), the uraeus appeared at the beginning, the mother of the primeval time, she who gives birth to the one who gives birth;
to Neith, the great uraeus up to the cyclic and linear time: each cobra is marked by her name;
to Neith, who raises at the beginning, the living one, who protects this earth’.

The invocation to the deity called *krḥt* emerging from the Nun opens this sequence, where Neith appears as a female deity. She becomes an effective mother, whose manifestation is the cobra, and the cobra is the more representative divine icon in the sequence. The spelling of the name in the invocation 13 shows the cobra and the scarab as representations of the actual manifestation of the goddess; the physical representation of Neith is confirmed by the first position of the cobra, a kind of semantic mark of the goddess. In invocation 14, such an aspect of Neith is identified with a maternal power called in the Late Period texts *tmꜣt*; according to J.-Cl. Goyon, this term has got a more pointed meaning, deeper than the common ‘mother’ (*mwt*); it also recalls the name of the female aspect of Atum, Temet, as cosmic mother of the light (Goyon 2003, 45–46). The stress on such a female character of the Creator seems to be coherent with other coeval doctrines: in a text from the temple of Mut at Karnak, for instance, the bi-sexual creator is described as: *it ḥpr m mwt ir nty*: ‘the father who appears as the mother, who made what exists’ (ibidem, 46); at Esna, a text dated to Ptolemy VI celebrates the Theban Mut in her aspect of solar uraeus with the primeval Amun:





‘Female progenitor, the uraeus that appeared on the forehead of the Mother and Father at the origin’ (Esna 11.16–17) (ibidem, 47).²²

The conception of the primeval mother is the core of invocation 14 (see also the repetition of the sign ); this nature of the Creator is here stressed by means of the root *msi*, which clearly distinguishes the female aspect of the life’s source. The meaning of the term as a connective element in the creation is marked by its two different spellings:  and ; the first identifies the creative power of the goddess, while the second identifies a demiurgic power. Thus, the Latopolitan scribes seem to stress graphically the two writings in order to denote two different actors in the creative process.²³

²² The ‘Mother and Father at the origin’ (*mwt ḥr it m šꜣ*) is identified with Amun: Derchain, von Recklinghausen 2004, 95, n. 333, with a different translation of the passage; such statement confirms the androgynous character of the creator in the late doctrines.

²³ In the graphic solution, which directly depends on a bare phonetic writing, we probably recognise a kind of semantic marker of the creator figures (creator vs. demiurge).





THE WISDOM OF THOTH. MAGICAL TEXTS IN ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN CIVILISATIONS




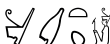








Neith is now a solar cobra, and invocation 15 confirms such a representation: the spelling of the name is striking, because it offers a graphic connection between her an-
 iconic sign, , and the solar cobra, identified as *hrt-tp*, which is here the divine manifestation: .²⁴ The transformation of Neith during this passage of the creation is elaborated in the litany as a mythical model for the current form of reality: thus, the *nt*-sign is impressed in the body of the cobra, and reminds us of its role in the first stages of the world. A confirmation for this interpretation is offered by the same etiological explanation of the cobra, marked (*ht*) by the divine sign. The performative element in this writing is the same basic sign of the goddess' name; thus, the aniconic spelling becomes an element in the speech about the nature of Neith, and a paradigmatic element in the growth of the world; such a process in the creation of the reality at Esna brings to mind other similar Late Period doctrines, like the Theban cosmogony dated to Ptolemy VIII, inscribed on the portal of the second pylon at Karnak (Drioton 1944): here, the core in the treatise is the value of the holy city of Amun, Thebes, which becomes the model for all the other cities.

The cosmos is now ready for a new phase, ruled by the sun-god; Neith appears now as Meheturet, the cosmic cow, mother of Re; she creates with her performative words, that the doctrine identifies with the *dʒisw*. Thus, the primeval time is connected with the present, and the relics of such moments are those creative words buried in the holy necropolis of Pi-neter, in the northern sector of the Latopolitan region. This funerary cult offers another element in the performative role of the words and their expression, the iconic signs, as part of the speech of, or also, about the gods.

Conclusion

Here the first group of invocations in Neith's litany at Esna ends: the 16 spellings of the divine name have been elaborated according to the character and the manifestations of the goddess. The nature of this iconic writing can be summarised as follows.²⁵

Invocation	Writing	
n. 1		Mistress of Esna as primeval earth.
n. 2		Mistress of Sais as primeval ground.
n. 3		Cultic image in the temple.
n. 4		Mistress of Sais and Queen of Egypt (coalescence of the sacred city with the whole land).

n. 5		Primeval water, that made the earth. ²⁶
n. 6		Primeval manifestation as snake.
n. 7		The manifestation of the dynamic power of the goddess (<i>bʒ</i>).
n. 8		Female name; Male power, that made the Female.
n. 9		Male name; Female power, that made the Male. ²⁷
n. 10		Female water, that made the (masculine) cyclic time.
n. 11		Male water, that made the (feminine) linear time.
n. 12		Primeval manifestation of the light as crocodile.
n. 13		Female manifestation of Neith in the ordered world.
n. 14		Female manifestation of Neith as primeval mother.
n. 15		Full manifestation of Neith in the current time (cobra).
n. 16		Neith as protector of the earth (cobra).

Now, we can try to sum up the speech about Neith and its evolution in the context of creation and differentiation in the world. At first, we have to stress the coalescence in the original unity of the semantic duplicity; we have seen the elaboration concerning cyclic and linear time, but the macroscopic evidence of this process is the sexual differentiation of the same creator. The doctrine which rules these statements can also be confirmed by a speech of Neith herself in a text dated to Traian:



²⁶ Note that the sign *t3* is not the same of the previous invocation; may we think to a mark for a particular nuance of the divine character, not directly connected with the earth identified with the Egypt?

²⁷ The organization of the elements in the couple of the statements stresses an alchemic composition of the divine nature: the total of the being is consisting of three parts (see the concept of the plurality in the Egyptian mind: **III**); in these, male and female aspects are present.

²⁴ Here we recognize the same iconic system of the personification of concept, also represented as a divine being, see Hornung 2000, 1–20.

²⁵ A first attempt at an analysis of the writing solutions for the divine name in Sauneron 1982, 73–76.

I am Neith, the god's mother,
 who created the body of Re;
 I am the creative water, who made what exists,
 who created everything;
 I am the ancient progenitor,
 who ties together the offspring of gods and men' (Esna 305.18).

Here the goddess is not only the creator of the world, but also the guarantor in the repetition of the life; it means that she is present in the current time.²⁸ According to other texts, Neith appears in the temple of Esna as light; this doctrine is represented in the ptolemaic façade of the hypostyle hall, ruled by the representation of Khnum-Re as the main deity. But the frame texts of the scene, dated to Nerva, describe a more complex character of the creator. On the right we read:



'The sun shines every day in the sky; Neith shines with him (that is: Khnum-Re) at the New Moon, the unique god, appeared as the two gods, mysterious, and no one knows their forms; their right eye is the sun, their left eye is the moon' (Esna 546.1-2).

On the left:



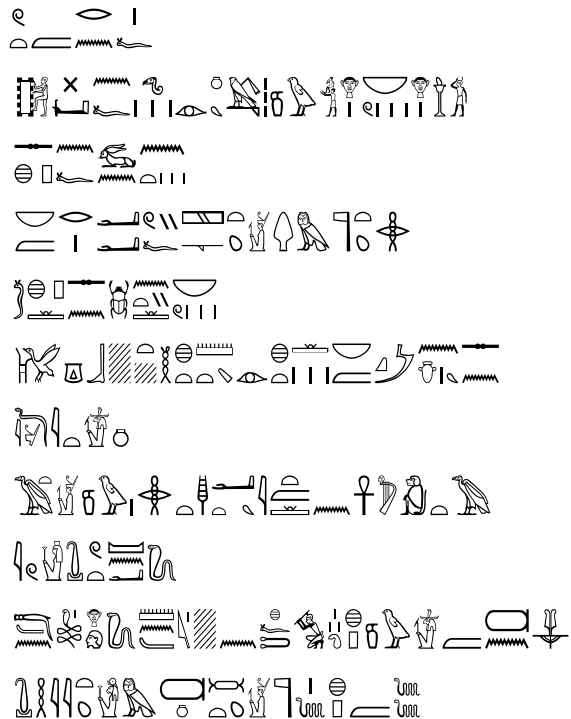
'The sun shines every day in the sky, and the Mystery of the sky unites with him (= Khnum-Re) in her name of Neith' (Esna 546.3).

The light offers an element in the analysis of the epithet; the specular texts open with the light, shining in the sky; and the role of the light in the construction of the main scene is also stressed by the central position of the term *wbn*, 'shine', which opens both texts. Also the icon in the middle of the rear wall recalls the sun and the light, representing Khnum-Re in the middle of the solar disk as full manifestation of the deity dwelling in the temple.

The double nature of the primeval god in the Latopolitan context is the core in another text dated to Domitian:



²⁸ Such a character of the goddess recalls the doctrine of the repetition of the life as sign of the creative power of Aton in the Amarnian tradition, outlined by Assmann 1983, 113-123, with some interesting remarks on the creator as mother and father of the world.



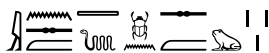
'The district of the Twins, called Lunit, is the Temple of the Father and the Temple of the Mother, He who appears at the beginning is hidden within, the benevolent god who comes to the prayer, who hears the praises of the livings.²⁹ Tenen is called by his name: he fashioned men, he made the gods, he formed everyone on the wheel, he aroused all the creatures with his arms. Neith is there, as the goddess together with him; as they appeared, every living being appeared, the sky and the earth have been created, while everything is in their mind. The father said to the mother: I will unite with you and my body will be full of life. Then the mother said: I rest with you, I coil over you, I cut [the heads] of your enemies. There was Khnum as name of Tatenen, and Menhit as name of Neith, the unique god became the divine couple'³⁰ (Esna 104.1-4).

The unique god manifests in a duplicity, expressed by the two snake-signs; it is surely a graphic indicator for the reading, but it could also have a symbolic meaning, near to the interpretation of the hieroglyphs in Horapollo. The use of this iconic writing probably respects an ancient tradition, according to which the *ba* of every god is represented by the snakes;³¹ thus, in the iconic construction of the text a meta-description of the primeval powers should be expressed. A similar value for the signs has been noted also in other texts at Esna, such as an inscription on the ceiling, dated to Domitian, where Neith is described in this way:

²⁹ Note the juxtaposition in the text of the dual concept of the primeval deity (the twins, the father and the mother), and his single manifestation in the reality (the god invoked by the prayer).

³⁰ The end of the text clearly states the double nature of the primeval god; it does not seem to fit with the beginning, but the statement is a confirmation of that primeval complex deity, in which the current distinguished genders were merged.

³¹ See a passage of the Myth of the Heavenly Cow: 'The ba of every god is in the snakes' (Sethi I; var. in Ramesses VI: 'the ba of every god and every goddess'): Hornung 1986, 27, 70, n. 194.



‘She has come as the unique (goddess), and she has become the hundreds of thousands’ (Esna 424.2).

The use of the snake and frog signs in this text is emphasized by A. von Lieven, who notes a likely symbolic use of them, as representation of the primeval deities of the Ogodoad (von Lieven 2000, 102). Thus, written signs and speeches about the gods are part of a unique attempt to describe the creator and his acts: a possible reading of the world as a divine discourse represented by the ordered cosmos.

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