Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

By

Dr. Youmna Adel Zaki Nasr

Lecture, Tourism guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University

RESEARCH JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOTELS
MANSOURA UNIVERSITY
ISSUE NO. 12, DECEMBER. 2022 PART 2
Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period
أدوار خونسوس الواقية من تأثير الشر في الديانة المصرية القديمة خلال عصر الأسرات

كان خونسوس من أبرز الشخصيات التي لعبت أدوارا متعددة في العقيدة المصرية القديمة. وقد صلت شعبيتها إلى ذروتها بداية من عصر النصوص الأهرام، فنجد منه عصر الدولة القديمة قدم بأداء دورا كبيرا كمنشئ لفكرة التغذي على ما بداخل الآلهة للتمتع بالأبدية. كما أنه كان يعتبر رسول للآلهة بالإضافة إلى عمله كائه في الظهور المصري القديم. نظرًا لطبيعته ككاتب نموذج شخصية، فقد لعب العديد من الأدوار الحاسمة على مر العصور والتي وجهت لتفادي التأثيرات الشريرة والأرواح المؤذية. بدأ خونسوس هذه الأدوار كمسؤول لأكل أغصان الآلهة والتي استطاع من خلاله أن يساعد الموتى في التغذي على الجوع والآكل الآله وقوة السحرية الإلهية المطلقة وأن يضمن لهم صعودا أمنا إلى السماء في رحلتهم للعالم الآخر منذ عصر الدولة القديمة. كرسول، لعب خونسوس دورًا عظيمًا في تطهير الخصوم، وذلك يمكن اعتباره صورة نمطية للمعايير المتبعة الذين ظهروا فيما بعد خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة لتنفيذ أحكام الإعدام على الموتى المدانين في العالم السفلي. أما في العصر المتأخر، فقد تم إثبات عبادته كائه للقدر والخلق والشفاء والتحقيق على نطاق واسع. كان خونسوس كائه لديه القدرة على ضمان تجدد الكون، وأبعاد الشياطين المرضية، وتحطيم القوى الشريرة، ومساعدة المسموحين على العودة إلى الحالات.
Abstract

Khonsu was one of the most prominent characters in the Egyptian doctrine. His popularity reached its peak since the time of the Pyramid Texts. He endowed many functions as a cannibalism originator, messenger, and a god in the Egyptian theology. Owing to his nature as a multi-character supreme being, he played several crucial apotropaic roles throughout the ages to avert evil influences and malevolent spirits. As a founder of cannibalism, he guaranteed for the king a safe ascension to the sky. Moreover, he was viewed as a protector of the divine essence and absolute power that should be transferred to all the dead to enable them acting as the gods in heaven. As a messenger, he played a punitive role in torturing the opponents. Thus, he was equated to the chthonic executioners, who carried out sentences of death on the condemned inhabitants of the underworld during the New Kingdom. The cult of Khonsu as a god of moon, creation, magic, and healing was widely attested during the Late Period. As a god, Khonsu had a power to ensure rejuvenation, drive away disease demons, destroy evil powers, and aid the possessed to return to the normal state of health and strength.
Keywords: Khonsu, apotropaic, role, destroy, evil, power

Introduction:

Khonsu was known for his multi-character in the ancient Egyptian religion. Despite of being a god of moon, a creator-god, a magical-god, a healer-god, and an obedient member in the Traid of Thebes, he was not only regarded as a god but also as an earlier (1) H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1952), 142.
cannibalism originator and primal messenger of the dead in the next world. He was attested in the Pyramid Texts especially in the versions of the Pyramids of King Unas and King Teti, where he played a double apotropaic role as a good demon participating in supporting the positive face of cannibalism and as a punitive messenger engaging in punishing the opponents of the deceased king. The same retributive function continued to be played by Khonsu during the Middle Kingdom, when he contributed in opposing the opponents of the dead and burning them as was attested in the Coffin Texts. He retained his earlier apotropaic mission as a supporter of the cannibalism during the New Kingdom. As long as the Late Period, he employed his apotropaic function in defeating the evil powers on earth and in the next world. Meanwhile, his functions as a creator-god, moon-god and lunar equivalent of the solar punitive deities, magical-god, and healer-god began to be spread to a great extent. His late apotropaic roles in subduing the primeval creative forces, threatening the foes, destroying the evil spirits, and protecting against the bites of the poisonous reptiles marked the end of the Dynastic Period in Egypt.

The ancient Egyptians believed that surviving the dead kings and individuals in the eternity influenced by their ability to feed on the divine essence and to gain victory over the cosmic adversaries and evil powers. In this context, Khonsu was assigned to perform several apotropaic roles to save the livings on earth and the dead in the hereafter. Such apotropaic functions were played in both of the heavenly realm and the earthly world. In the sky, he helped the royal and individual dead to absorb the
divine supernatural powers of the gods during the Old and New Kingdoms. On the other hand, the Old and Middle Kingdoms witnessed his role in punishing the opponents in the otherworld. He employed the same punitive role in the world of the livings and the next world during the Late Period, when he subdued the evil powers and destroyed the demons. Thus, it was through his apotropaic roles in assisting the dead people to absorb the divine power of the gods and destroying the hostile evil power that they would be able to enjoy immortality and endurance in the eternity.

**Khonsu in the ancient Egyptian pantheon: An overview**

In the divine context, Khonsu began to be depicted in the company of a group of deities on the funerary monument of King Pepi II at Saqqara during the Sixth Dynasty **fig. (1)**. His cult extended to the Middle Kingdom just as a local god. Meanwhile, he began to be responsible for the moon and air and assimilated with many other gods like Re, Thoth, Shesmu, Horus, Shu, and Ihy.

---


Dégardin thought that Khonsu was not started as a primarily god, instead, he could be firstly considered as a simple reflection and substitute for other major divinities\(^{(15)}\). In this context, Posener viewed in Khonsu a terrifying and helpful minor god, depending on circumstances\(^{(16)}\). He also added that the nature of Khonsu as a cosmic divinity, his infantile features, and his young age has always prevented him from taking the first place in any religious center and did not specifically designate him


\(^{(12)}\) Boylan, *Thoth*, 207.


\(^{(16)}\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 66,” 340.
for the supreme patronage of a particular city\(^{(17)}\). Altenmüller determined the role of Khonsu as a slaughter
demon during the Old and Middle Kingdoms\(^{(18)}\).

Legrain and Otto assumed that the prominent divine aspects
of Khonsu as a dependent god started during the Middle
Kingdom, probably in the Thirteenth Dynasty, when the
title \(\text{šš-n-} \text{Ḥnsw} \ i.e. \ “Scribe of}
Khonsu”\(^{(19)}\) was firstly recognized in the religious context
in the caption of Spell 207 of the Coffin Texts\(^{(20)}\). Brunner
confirmed that the essence of Khonsu has originally
changed from being a destructive demon to a major god
particularly during the New Kingdom, when he started to
gain a high reputation in the world of the gods\(^{(21)}\). Meanwhile,
he became a local god at Thebes, where his
temple was built at Karnak next to the temples of his
parents\(^{(22)}\). The prominence of Khonsu as a god outside
Thebes continued later on and many other sanctuaries and

\[^{(17)}\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 66,” 341.
\[^{(18)}\) Altenmüller, Synkretismus, 167.
\[^{(19)}\) A. De Buck, The Egyptian Coffin texts, (Chicago: The University of
Chicago Press, 1947), III: Texts of Spells, 164-267, 155 (b); R. O.
Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin texts, (Warminster: Aris &
Philips, 1973), I: Spells I-354, 168; Ch. Leitz, Lexikon der ägyptischen
Götter und Götterbezeichnungen, (Leuven; Paris; Dudley,
MA: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oosterse Studies, 2002), VI: \(\text{ḥ-}
s, 602.
\[^{(22)}\) Boylan, Thoth, 204; R. H. Wilkinson, The Complete Gods and
Goddesses of Ancient Egypt, (Cairo: American University in Cairo
Press, 2003), 114.
shrine were built for his personal cult in Upper and Lower Egypt (23).

**Khonsu in the ancient Egyptian religion: Apotropaic roles**

Since the time of the Old Kingdom, Khonsu played the role of the supporter of cannibalism through preparing the meal of the dead from the bodies of the gods, who were destined for sacrifice. Furthermore, he acted among the bloodthirsty messengers, who punish the opponents, to help the dead enjoying the eternal life during the Old and Middle Kingdoms (24). He also participated in burning of the hearts during the Middle Kingdom that became an inspiration to the later violent executioners during the New Kingdom. By the New Kingdom, he was raised to be a major god especially at Thebes, where he was not worshipped as an independent god but together with his divine parents. In


addition, he played in the Book of the Dead the same cannibalistic role of the Old Kingdom that apotropically helped the dead in absorbing the power of their lords. During the Late Period, he played an apotropaic magical role to protect from the stings of the serpents and to destroy the chaotic forces of creation. Meanwhile, he was also functioned as a healer-god and healed from the demons of diseases.

The apotropaic acts of Khonsu as a patron of cannibalism, demon messenger, proto-punitive incarnation of the New Kingdom chthonic idols, and a supreme god of moon, creation, magic, and healing and his special abilities in preventing evils were clearly attested in the textual and iconographic contexts of the Dynastic Period as follows:

1. **Khonsu as a cannibalism patron:**

   The analytical study of the “Cannibal Hymn” has been widely recognized in the recent years\(^{(25)}\). All the researches generally explained the act of cannibalism since the time of the Pyramid Texts and up to the New Kingdom. This study will only focus on the apotropaic task of god Khonsu in supporting cannibalism that led to the transformation of the divine powers from the gods to the dead in the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead. This notion could be

analyzed in the textual context of the Old and New Kingdoms as follows:

1.1. In Old Kingdom religious inscriptions:

Khonsu played a violent task reflecting the aggressive side of his character during the Old Kingdom, especially in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. Meanwhile, his dominant feature was ferocity as was described by Posener\(^{(26)}\). It was the first time to meet him in a bloody mission in Utterance 273 (§ Spells 402a-b) of the Pyramid Texts\(^{(27)}\). This utterance represents part of the so-called “Cannibal Hymn”, in which he was described as the slaughterer of the gods as follows\(^{(28)}\):

\[
\text{Ḫnsw mds nbw } d.f.s n N \text{ ṣḏf n.f īmyt īh.sn }\]

“It is Khonsu, who cuts down the gods, he slaughters them for N. and takes out for him what is in their body”.

In the previous spell, Khonsu served as a patron of cannibalism. He slaughtered the gods and took out what was in their bodies to enable the deceased king swallowing and seizing their magical power. Scholars explained this function as an act tending to assist the deceased king in absorbing the divine bodies of the gods to feed on their knowledge, physical strength, life forces, and magical

\(^{(26)}\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 66,” 339.
\(^{(28)}\) Sethe, Altaegyptischen pyramidertexte I, 210; Mercer, Pyramid Texts, 93; Faulkner, Pyramid Texts, 81 (§402).
power\(^{(29)}\). It was through such cruel absorption that the deceased king would be able to live on the essence of every god, consume the divine power that would not be taken away in the otherworld, be elevated to the state of the gods, and reach the stars.

It seems clear that the aggressive role of Khonsu as a patron of cannibalism in the Pyramid Texts was apotropaic because it tended to protect the king in his way to the sky through providing him with special divine powers needed to achieve immortality. In other words, Khonsu participated in the safe transformation of the gods’ spiritual components and essentials, which shall never perish even after the death of their bodies, to the deceased king, who had naturally lost his power and vital essence after his death. This apotropaic task was an extremely positive trait and it tended to ensure the resurrection of the king in the eternal life. When Khonsu innovated cannibalism, there was no intention to support the act of consuming another being as food, instead, the act apotropaically helped the king in incorporating the idealism and perfection of the divine realm of the gods through feeding on their flesh and devouring their unperishable strength and magical power. There is no doubt that the apotropaic service of Khonsu in the “Cannibal Hymn” strengthened the divine might, omnipotence, and magical power of the departed kings in the hereafter. Furthermore, it could be regarded as a prophylactic

procedure protecting the king against evil or bad luck and maintaining his ability to overcome all the possible dangers in the otherworld, just like the gods. In this context, there is a recitation, that was quite repeated in the Pyramid Texts, such as in Utterance 368 (§ Spells 638 a-c), describing the divine ability as a supernatural power that protect from the enemies and chase away evil influences and bad things. It runs as follows\textsuperscript{(30)}:

\[
\begin{align*}
pšš.n & \ s \ mw.t.k \ Nwt \ \fr.k \ m \ rn.s \ n \ šipt \ rdln.s \ \wn.k \ m \ n\fr n \\
& \fr(y).k \ m \ rn.k \ n\fr \ \hn.m.s \ t\fr \ m \ \frn(t) \ g\frt
\end{align*}
\]

“Your mother Nut has spread over you (i.e. the king) in her name of Shetpt. She caused you to be a god without your enemy, in your name God. She protects you from every bad thing”.

Noteworthy is that the required result of the apotropaic role of the aggressive Khonsu in the “Cannibal Hymn” finds its echo in Utterance 213 (§ Spells 134a-135b) of the Pyramid Texts. This utterance confirms that the everlasting of the king depended on assimilating his body parts with the divinities as follows\textsuperscript{(31)}:

\textsuperscript{(30) Sethe, Altaegyptischen pyramidentexte I, 347; Mercer, Pyramid Texts, 127; Faulkner, Pyramid Texts, 121 (§638).}
\textsuperscript{(31) Sethe, Altaegyptischen pyramidentexte I, 80-81; Mercer, Pyramid Texts, 58; Faulkner, 40 (§134-135).}
hWISE N n šmīn.k šīš (m(w))ttīšmīn.k ∆ nḫt īmsr īhr ḫmdw (W)šr ḫbk m ḫḥk ḫmdw n ḫnw mks nḥḥt.k m .k ḫḏ(k) ḫmdw n št wswt .k m (ī)tm(w) rmny.k m (ī)tm(w) ḫt.k m (ī)tm(w) s ḫm (ī)tm(w) phḥ.k m (ī)tm(w) rdwy.k m (ī)tm(w) ḫḥr.k m ḫn(w)

“O Unas! You have not gone dead; you have gone alive to sit on the throne of Osiris. Your scepter is in your hand that you may give orders to the livings, the handle of your lotus-shaped scepter is in your hand. Give orders to those of the mysterious places. Your lower arm(s) are of Atum, your upper arms are of Atum, your body is of Atum, your back is of Atum, your rear is of Atum, your legs are of Atum, your face is of Anubis”.

The demonic nature of Khonsu in the Pyramid Texts was discussed by Zandee, who regarded him as a cannibalistic demon and apotropaic helper of the deceased in the afterlife(32). It was also suggested by Meurer that Khonsu was most probably chosen deliberately in the Pyramid Texts to kill his divine siblings and protect the deceased king against the possible evils because of being a not well-

(32) Zandee, Death, 213.
known god or because he was not be ranked among the prominent deities at the time when the Pyramid Texts were written (33). Accordingly, it was through the apotropaic function of Khonsu, which enabled the king to absorb the divine characteristics during his rejuvenation in the Pyramid Texts, that his subsequent cult was associated with creation and magic as long as the Late Period.

1.2. In New Kingdom religious inscriptions:

Beside being a prominent god during the New Kingdom, Khonsu enjoyed the virtue of performing his earlier brutal mission as an agent of the savage physical violence. In the Book of the Dead, he slaughtered the gods to enable the justified dead realizing their divine essences and power. This role was clearly indicated in Chapter 83, in which the deceased was assimilated with Khonsu, who retained his earlier apotropaic function as a patron of cannibalism as follows (34):

\[ \text{ινκ KH ns w dnd nbw} \]

“I am Khonsu, who cuts off the lords”.

(33) Meurer, Feinde, 48-49.

2. Khonsu as a bloodthirsty messenger:

The apotropaic role of Khonsu as a \( wp(w)t(y) \)-messenger\(^{(35)} \) was limited to the religious textual context during the Old and Middle Kingdoms as follows:

2.1. In Old Kingdom religious inscriptions:

Armour noticed that one of the major duties of Khonsu in the Egyptian pantheon was to serve as a \( wp(w)t(y) \)-messenger of the gods since the time of the Old Kingdom\(^{(36)} \). In the Pyramid Texts, he was employed as a mixture of a demon and a punitive messenger as was attested in the “Cannibal Hymn”. In Utterance 273 (§ Spells 402c), he was described as \( wp(w)t(y) \text{ pw } h \text{ bw} f r \text{ sf i.e. } \text{This is the messenger whom he (i.e. N.)} \)


Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

sends forth to exact revenge”\(^{(37)}\). Thus, as a \(\text{(wp(w)t(y)-messenger)}\), the apotropaic function of Khonsu was to punish the opponents of the king, who might inflict harm on him during his ascension to the sky.

Noteworthy is that the general punitive role of the \(\text{wp(w)t(y)-messengers}\) that was firstly originated in the religious context during the Old Kingdom continued during the time of the Middle and New Kingdoms. For example, they were described as the employed executioners in the place of slaughter in Spell 45 of the Coffin texts, which says\(^{(38)}\):

\[
\text{wp(w)t(y)w nw nmt štȝt}
\]

“The messengers of the mysterious place of execution”.

In the Magical Papyrus Leiden I (346), slaughtering as a severe punishment was also attributed to the \(\text{wp(w)r(y)-messengers}\) of the New Kingdom, who were described as

\[
\text{wpwt(y)w m-ḥt šp ṯt hȝw št ṯt i.e. “The messengers}
\]


who roam the districts, who cause slaughters”\(^{(39)}\). The same retributive task of the \(\text{wp(w)tyw}\)-messengers as tormentors of the dead and inflicting of sanctions as retributions for offenses, was also discussed in Chapter 163 of the Book of the Dead. This chapter includes a spell describing them as \(\text{wp(w)tyw th} \ \text{nty} \ \text{hrw}\) i.e. “The envoys of the transgressor, who do evils”\(^{(40)}\). They were also described as the inflictors of harm as was recorded in Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, which says\(^{(41)}\):

\[
\text{wpwt(y)w wddyw thmsw s} \ \text{kh} \ \text{pryw} \ \text{drywt}
\]

“Your messengers put down harm and bring about punishments”.

The contending of Horus and Seth also provides us with another remarkable New Kingdom proof of the main


\(^{(41)}\) Naville, Aegyptische Todtenbuch, pl. CXXXVII (17-18); Allen, Book of the Dead, 99; Faulkner, Book of the Dead, 33.
apotropaic function of the \( \text{wpw(tyw)} \)-messengers of god Osiris in destroying the hearts of the evildoers to avenge them in the west. This matter was clearly emphasized in the inscriptions of the Papyrus Chester Beatty I (D) (Recto), which says\(^{42}\):

\[
\text{wpw(tyw) } \text{ḥṣ-ḥrw } \text{ḥw bn st snḏw n nb nb nṯt ḫw. ḫḥ}
\text{pry.sn mtw.sn ḫnty np nb ḫt spw bḥw}
\]

“The fierce-faced messenger(s) who fear no of any god or goddess. I will let them come out and they will bring the heart of anyone who commits bad deeds”.

As a punitive messenger, Khnosu was employed in punishing the enemies in the afterlife in order to apotropaically protect the deceased king from the possible threats that might face him during his journey to the sky.

Regarding to the root of his name, \( \text{ḥns} \), which means “to traverse” or “to travel through”\(^{43}\), Khnosu was


generally known for his mobility and as being a traveler\(^{44}\). According to Bleeker, it seems that this distinctive identification characterized him, particularly that his apotropaic role as a violent and aggressive emissary in the hereafter during the Old and Middle Kingdoms depended on his mobility and ability to traverse and protect the sky\(^{45}\).

### 2.2. In Middle Kingdom religious inscriptions:

The apotropaic function of Khnosu as a strict envoy continued during the Middle Kingdom. Meanwhile, he retained his violent nature of the Old Kingdom and served as a \(\text{\textdialect{wp(w)t(y)-messenger}}\), who was often sent to punish anybody, who would oppose the dead. In Spell 573 of the Coffin Texts, Khonsu was invoked by the deceased to be his \(\text{\textdialect{wp(w)t(y)-messenger}}\) and to repulse those who would inflict harm in the otherworld. This spell says\(^{46}\):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{\textdialect{wp(w)t(y)-messenger}} \\
\end{array}
\]

---

\(^{44}\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 65,” 343; Altenmüller, *Synkretismus*, 167; Yoo, “Patterns.” 133.

\(^{45}\) Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth*, 116.

Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

wp(w)t(y). ḫnsw h nb hw rśfw

“This is my messenger Khonsu who is sent against who would oppose (me)”.

It seems clear that the previous spell was an extension of Utterance 273 (§ Spell 402c) in the Pyramid Texts. Moreover, it is another evidence of the apotropaic role of Khonsu as a dangerous wp(w)t(y)-messenger, whose main function was to fight against the opponents of the deceased in the hereafter.

On the ground of the apotropaic roles of Khonsu in punishing the opponents, achieving victory over chaos, and protecting the deceased king during the Old and Middle Kingdoms, he was given several titles indicating his responsibility in ensuring the triumph of order and the defeating of chaos. In Spell 649 of the Coffin Texts, he was given the title of ḫnsw-r-sš-Mȝȝt i.e. “Khonsu, the scribe of Maat”.

During the Late Period, he was invoked as nb-Mȝȝt i.e. “Lord of Maat” on the statue of D jotkhonsouefankh (CG 42211/ JdE 37159) from the Twenty-Second Dynasty.

(48) De Buck, Coffin Texts VI, 272 (c); Faulkner, Coffin texts II, 224.
He was also given the title \( \text{Ḫnsw-nb-Mȝȝt} \) i.e. “Khonsu, Lord of Maat” on the Twenty-Second Dynasty stela of King Sheshonq I from Gebel el Silsila, the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty fragments of a statue from the Temple of Osiris at Karnak, and the healing statue of Hor in the Turin Museum (Turin Cat. 3030) from the late Thirtieth Dynasty respectively. Moreover, on the shaft of the twentieth column in the portico of the court of the Theban Temple of god Khonsu\(^{(53)}\), he bears the title \( \text{Ḫnsw-nb-Wȝst-Mȝȝt} \) i.e. “Khonsu, Lord of Thebes, Lord of Maat”\(^{(54)}\).

3. Khonsu as a proto-punitive incarnation of the chthonic deities:

The apotropaic role of Khonsu in the destruction of the opponents could be traced in the context of the religious texts during the Middle Kingdom. Posener categorized him


\(^{(51)}\) J. Leclant, Enquêtes sur les Sacerdoces et les Sanctuaires Égyptiens à l’Époque dite "Éthiopienne" (XXVe Dynastie), (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1954), 88.

\(^{(52)}\) L. Kákosy, Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples), (Torino: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 1999), 87.

\(^{(53)}\) Budge, Gods, 35.

\(^{(54)}\) The Epigraphic survey, The temple of Khonsu, (Chicago; Illinois: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1979), 1: Plates 1-110. Scenes of King Herihor in the Court, pl. 97 (Line 1).
among the emissaries, who have the task of lassoing and butchering the victims in the Coffin Texts\(^5\). Meanwhile, he was identified as the burner and devourer of the hearts and decapitator of the victims. Spell 310 indicated the punitive aspect of his character together with his fiery nature through describing him as the burner of the hearts as follows\(^6\):

\[ \text{Ḫₙsw šb} \text{ḏnd bḥḥw ḫt(y)w} \]

"Khonsu sends out the rage, which burns the hearts".

Burning the heart into ashes was one of the most practiced apotropaic punishments in the ancient Egyptian eternal hell\(^7\). It was a humiliating action and resulted in the

\(^5\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 65,” 343.
falling into oblivion and the loss of the chance in the eternal life. Since the heart was the center of the human thought and it was the only organ of the body that was balanced against the feather of Maat during the judgment process, it was considered as the seat of the evil or the goodness. This concept was clearly discussed in Chapter 79 of the Book of the Dead, which alludes to regarding the heart as a center of evil that should be destroyed as follows:\(^{(58)}\):

\[
\text{ἰἰ.}\text{n.}\text{ἰ}\text{dr.n.}\text{ἰ}\text{ḏ\text{wt nbt ṭnywt ib._bidyn}}
\]

“I have come to drive away all the evil that is in your heart”.

Thus, the apotropaic role of Khonsu in Spell 310 of the Coffin Texts refers to his ability in burning the hearts, the seat of the evil power. Such a mission supports the apotropaic role of Khonsu in warding off evil and protecting the dead from the evildoers in the hereafter.

---

\(^{(58)}\) Naville, Aegyptische Todtenbuch, pl. XC (9); Barguet, livre des morts, 117; Allen, Book of the Dead, 69; Faulkner, Book of the Dead, 78.
Spell 311 of the Coffin Texts, which refers to the becoming of Khonsu in the netherworld, gives another remarkable evidence of his apotropaic task in swallowing the hearts of either the gods to absorb the magic and spirit powers that was included in their divine hearts or the condemned to destroy the evil that is in their hearts. The spell says:

\[
\text{\textit{l}m \textit{hs}w \textit{n} \textit{mt(y)w}}
\]

“I will appear as Khonsu who lives on hearts”.

It seems that the retributive task of Khonsu as a devourer of the hearts of the gods was inspired from his bloodthirsty role in the “Cannibal Hymn” of the Pyramid Texts. On the other hands, he was also probably an eater of the hearts of the adversaries on the ground of his punitive role as a \(wp(w)t(y)\)-messenger in Utterance 273 (§ Spell 402c) in the “Cannibal Hymn” of the Old Kingdom and in Spell 573 of the Coffin Texts. In the case of eating the hearts of the adversaries, he would be regarded as the earlier textual reference to the eater of the hearts of the unjust. Furthermore, he could be conceived as a functional equivalent of the New Kingdom female demon Ammit, who acted in Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead as the eater of the dead and their hearts after their judgment in the Hall of the Two Truths\(^{(60)}\). Accordingly, the demon Ammit

\(^{(59)}\) De Buck, \textit{Coffin Texts IV}, 67 (r-s); Faulkner, \textit{Coffin texts I}, 229.  
\(^{(60)}\) A. Erman and H. Grapow, \textit{Wörterbuch I}, 186:17; Ch. Seeber, \textit{Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Totengerichts im Alten Ägypten, Deutscher Kunstverlag}, (München; Berlin, 1976), 163-186; Ch. Leitz,
was the New Kingdom female counterpart and the later pictorial figure of the Middle Kingdom male demon Khonsu. In addition, it seems that her role in devouring the hearts of the unjust was probably inspired from his Middle Kingdom apotropaic role in eating the seat of evil in the human body.

The apotropaic role of Khonsu as a chthonic torturer was also indicated in Spell 310 of the Coffin Texts, which gives an explicit identification of Khonsu as \( mds \) i.e. “The slayer”\(^{(61)}\). In this context, Altenmüller described him as a personification of the butcher knife, which underlines his apotropaic aspect as a god of battle\(^{(62)}\). His role as a slaughterer of the dead became more obvious in Spell 994 of the Coffin Texts. In the latter spell, the deceased was assimilated to the aggressive slaughterer Khonsu. Furthermore, he was given the ability to behead the gods to be incorporated in the special powers of their divine thought as was supposed by Altenmüller\(^{(63)}\), or even to decapitate the opponents to get rid of their evil power,

---

\(^{(61)}\) De Buck, *Coffin Texts IV*, 66 (o); Faulkner, *Coffin texts I*, 228; Ch. Leitz, *Lexikon III*, 469.  
\(^{(63)}\) Altenmüller, *Synkretismus*, 168.
Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

which could be also another plausible suggestion in this case. The spell says:

\[ n\text{n}\text{m tpw hkh nsw } \]

“I will live on the heads (for) I am Khonsu”.

Beheading was one of the most frequent and severe torment in the Books of the Otherworld during the New Kingdom\(^\text{(65)}\). The cannibal mission of the demon Khonsu in


the Pyramid Texts could be summarized in beheading the lords and cutting their throats to absorb their magical strength.

It seems that the history of Khonsu in practicing the decapitation since the time of the Pyramid Texts and his aggressive character in decapitating the gods that was firstly attested during the Old Kingdom was a source of inspiration to the dead during the Middle Kingdom. Meanwhile, all the justified departures preferred to assimilate his apotropaic role in cutting the heads to ward off the evil of the opponents that might oppose them in the afterlife. This assumption leads to think about Khonsu as a

prototype, role model, and prototype version of the New Kingdom chthonic demons and cruel messengers, who appeared in abundance in the Books of the Otherworld in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings. Both of Khonsu and the chthonic deities, who were apotropaically employed in cutting the heads and removing the hearts of the damned and condemned in the royal tombs, tended apotropaically to remove the evil power of the opponents and destroy their malevolent spirits.

4. **Khonsu as a moon-god:**

Perhaps it comes to mind the idea that Khonsu, who played apotropaic roles as a patron of cannibalism, bloodthirsty messenger, and violent punisher in the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, was a different being from the moon-god Khonsu of the New Kingdom, who served as the third obedient member in the Triad of Thebes. However, this assumption is completely unacceptable because of several reasons. The first and most important reason is that in addition to acting as a prominent god with divine titles for the first time during the New Kingdom, he was also worshipped as an earlier local god during the Old Kingdom and he began to be responsible for the moon and air by the time of the Middle Kingdom\(^{(66)}\).

The apotropaic function of god Khonsu in his form as a moon-god was clearly indicated in the iconography since the time of the New Kingdom and in the textual context of the Third Intermediate Period. It seems that the Egyptians

saw the gods as personifications of the various aspects of nature, so that, Khonsu derived many apotropaic features from his lunar origin\(^6^7\). In this context, Bleeker stated that the ambivalent character of Khonsu was probably derived from the two contradictory aspects of the moon, which characterizes his good and evil influences\(^6^8\). Just like the moon exerted harmful actions at certain times, Khonsu played brutal apotropaic roles against the evil spirits to protect the dead and repulse the progression of the evil in the hereafter at the same time\(^6^9\).

As two moon-gods, there was a close association between Thoth and Khonsu as was discussed by several scholars\(^7^0\). Boylan viewed in the equivalence between the two moon gods, Thoth and Khonsu, a source of thinking about them as defenders of light against darkness and as a symbol of the victory of order over disorder\(^7^1\). Hornung and Staehelin related the possible sharp aspect of the crescent moon above the heads of the two moon gods, Thoth and Khonsu, to the weapon that could slice through evil and survive from death\(^7^2\). Similarly, Helck compared between the dangerous knife of god Thoth that chops off the heads and cuts out the hearts in Utterance 477 (§ Spell 962a-


\(^{68}\) Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth*, 116-117.

\(^{69}\) M. G. Posener, “Philologie et archéologie 66,” 339, 342.


\(^{71}\) Boylan, *Thoth*, 71, 206.

of the Pyramid Texts and the cannibal role of Khonsu in slaughtering the gods and cutting their throats in Utterance 273 (§ Spell 402a). Thus, the apotropaic roles of Khonsu were supported in the New Kingdom iconography through surmounting him with a dangerous knife-like crescent emphasizing his bloodthirsty nature against the evil power. Kees and Altenmüller viewed in this crescent-moon a stylized knife that was used in cutting the throats of the victims in the sky. Moreover, the shape of the š-sickle sword, which is always written with the determinative of the scimitar, probably derived from the curved sickle shape of the moon. This assumption is strengthened through employing

---

(77) Gardiner, Egyptian grammar, 513 (Sign-list: T 16).
the sickles as weapons in the annals of King Thutmosis III at Karnak, which can be read as follows\(^{(78)}\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ḥpśw n ḫhw} \\
\text{“The sickles are within the battle-axes”}.
\end{align*}
\]

Surmounting the head of the moon-god Khonsu with a knife-like crescent, which might also recall the shape of the sickle sword, is presumably an abridged pictorial expression of his responsibility as a patron of punishment particularly during the Middle Kingdom. Furthermore, it is an indication to his apotropaic role in gaining a triumph over the symbols of chaos and the destruction of their evil in heaven since the Old Kingdom and throughout the whole Dynastic Period.

This concept is clearly indicated in Utterance 674 (§ Spell 1999c) of the Pyramid Texts, which identifies his equivalent, god Thoth, as \(\text{Ḏḥwty mds}\) i.e. “Thoth the sharp”\(^{(79)}\). Similarly, Chapter 95 of the Book of the Dead refers to the crescent on the head of Thoth as a sharp knife in his hand and it can be read as follows\(^{(80)}\):

\(\text{ḥpśw ḫhw}\)

\(\text{“The sickles are within the battle-axes”}\).


\(^{(79)}\) Sethe, Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte II, 483; Mercer, Pyramid Texts, 296; Faulkner, Pyramid Texts, 288 (§1996).

\(^{(80)}\) Naville, Aegyptische Todtenbuch, pl. CVII (4-5); Barguet, livre des morts, 130; Allen, Book of the Dead, 77; Faulkner, Book of the Dead, 88.
Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

In his discussion, Barguet stated that Thoth wields his lunar crescent as a weapon. This notice supported the idea of thinking about the transforming of his crescent moon into a sharp knife in his hand in the danger times to apotropaically destroy the evil powers.

The aggressive attitude of the moon-god Khonsu was clearly persistent in the textual context during the Late Period. On the Third Intermediate Period stela of King Piye (JdE 48862) of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, which was discovered in the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal in Sudan (Tempel B 500), Khonsu was described as

(81) Barguet, livre des morts, 130, (chapitre no. 3).

* There is a transpose between the two signs and in the original text.
The latter identification refers to his crescent moon that transferred into a sharp knife to confirm his violent character and apotropaic fighting against the evil powers. This assumption leads to believe that this sharp form of Khonsu could be compared to the stereotype theme of the New Kingdom chthonic demons, who frequently employed their knives against the condemned in the Books of the Otherworld in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings.


5. Khonsu as a lunar equivalent of the solar punitive deities:


Bastet\(^{(92)}\), Mut\(^{(93)}\), Nekhbet\(^{(94)}\), and Wadjet\(^{(95)}\). Germond supposed that as this furious eye was an extension of the power of the sun, god Khonsu was regarded as a personification of the power of the moon\(^{(96)}\). He was also viewed as the son of the fierce goddess Sekhmet, from whom he inspired his role as burner of the hearts of the victims during the Middle Kingdom\(^{(97)}\). Thus, god Khonsu


\(^{(94)}\) Derchain, *Elkab*, 13, pl. 33.


\(^{(97)}\) De Buck, *Coffin Texts IV*, 65 (i); Faulkner, *Coffin texts I*, 227-228; Altenmüller, *Synkretismus*, 167.
could be conceived as a lunar equivalent of all the violent solar goddesses. Moreover, he was the male counterpart to goddess Tefnut, who was considered as the daughter of the sun-god Re and a lunar female personification of the Eye of Ra due to her connection to the night sky and all what relates to it including the rain, moisture, and mist\(^{(98)}\). On the ground of his equivalence with the several divine personifications of the Eye of Re, the apotropaic role of Khonsu in destroying the evil power could be completely compared to the merciless role of the solar goddesses against the enemies of the sun-god\(^{(99)}\).

Since the right and left eyes of the falcon-god Horus were equated to the sun and moon respectively, scholars viewed the moon as the deputy of the solar eye, which assumed its apotropaic tasks in saving the deceased from darkness and death at night\(^{(100)}\). The crescent moon would also be


conceived as the surrogate of the sun-disc and its rays that were mineralized, compared with the stone spear, and employed as a sharp weapon\(^{(101)}\). Such mineralization process was inscribed in Utterance 519 (§ Spell 1212b-c) of the Pyramid Texts, which says\(^{(102)}\):

\[
m\text{ȝwt.k} \text{ἰḫ} m\text{ȝt} \text{ἰ} trww bwn.s hnbw R\]

“Your spear (which) seizes the rivers, whose points are the rays of the sun”.

6. Khonsu as a creator-god:

In his form as the creator-god, who emerged from the primordial water, he was sometimes represented as a double hawk-headed man with four wings standing on two crocodiles as a symbol of his triumph over chaos Figs. (3-5)(109). Alternatively, he was rarely represented as a creator-god in his form as the creator-god, who emerged from the primordial water, he was sometimes represented as a double hawk-headed man with four wings standing on two crocodiles as a symbol of his triumph over chaos Figs. (3-5)(109). Alternatively, he was rarely represented as a creator-god.
god in the form of a crocodile provided with the head of a hawk and lying on a pedestal recalling the façade of the temple Fig. (6)\(^{(110)}\). According to Armour, the two heads of the hawk represent the sun and moon\(^{(111)}\). They also probably symbolize Khonsu as a divine lunar equivalent of the creator sun-god. In this form, he gathers between the sun and the moon in a single creature, thus, he could be conceived as a mythical complex personification of the death and rebirth simultaneously.

In the ancient Egyptian beliefs, the crocodile was said to have an ambivalent character. Brunner-Traut argued that the crocodile was treated as a solar enemy in the mass of the texts of the later period of Egyptian history\(^{(112)}\). On the other hand, it was generally conceived as a symbol of fecundity and regeneration\(^{(113)}\). In this context, Hornung cited that the crocodile was also closely associated with the

\(^{(110)}\) Kákosy, Healing Statues, 66-67, fig. 23.

\(^{(111)}\) Armour, Gods, 150.


primordial water, from which emerges the regenerated sun\(^{(114)}\). Roulin added that this association motivated the choice of crocodile-headed guides for the last three hours of night in the Book of the Night\(^{(115)}\).

As a god of water, the crocodile-god Wenty played a role in the creation process and the conception of giving birth to the sun by the crocodile or the emerging of the sun out of the chaotic forces\(^{(116)}\). This mythical creation legend was portrayed in the versions of the Book of the Earth in the Tomb of King Ramesses VII (KV 1) and the Tomb of King Ramesses IX (KV 6) Fig. (7)\(^{(117)}\). In this religious composition, the beneficial effect of the crocodile-god Wenty was characterized. His creative role was employed in swallowing the dead sun at night and vomiting it in a live form every morning to ensure the procreation of the solar disc and the continuity of the universe. In the point of view of Piankoff, this positive aspect in the character of the crocodile symbolizes the solar regeneration and connects to the diurnal (living) and nocturnal (died) phases of the universe.


Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

Moreover, it is a source of the predominance of the beneficial qualities of the crocodile over his evil nature.

Another evidence of engaging the hostile creatures in the creation process was depicted on the middle register of the last nocturnal hour in the Book of the Amduat Fig. (8). In the core motif of this hour, the sacred bark of the sun-god has been pull with a long rope passing through the head of a serpent. Hornung explained this gravity as an act to bring the bark out of the mouth of the serpent, directly into the open arms of the air-god Shu, which lifts the sun to the heaven at the end of the scene (119). This assumption is strengthened through identifying the creator-serpent therein with the epithet $\text{kȝ-n-ȝn-kȝnt}$ i.e. “The vital essence which lets the gods live” (120) as an indication that he preserves all the divine life forces and keeps the sun in motion.

In spite of his previous beneficial role in the creation of the sun, the crocodile was also considered as the faithful

---

(118) Piankoff, Création, 69, no. 1.
animal, follower, and son of the evil-god Seth\(^{121}\). Thus, as his father, he was seen as a universal enemy of the gods and his danger was warded off in Chapters 31 and 32 of the Book of the Dead, which form a unity aiming to disable the hostile nature of the crocodiles\(^{122}\).

The ambivalence in the qualities of the crocodile was personified in iconography in each of the two forms of god Khonsu as \(\text{Ḫnsw-wr-pr(ḥ)-m-nw}\) i.e. “Khonsu, the great-one, who comes forth from the primordial water”. The two variant iconographical representations of the creator-god Khonsu apotropaically symbolize the concepts of turning non-existence into existence, returning to the creation through the primeval forces, emerging the beneficial power from the force of chaos, triumph of order over chaos, and possessing absolute power over the evil effects. It was through the standing of god Khonsu upon the crocodile that he could symbolically emerging from the watery abyss as a kind of the daily triumph over the chaotic forces and the setting of the order of the universe at the moment of creation. Similarly, the emerging of a hawk head from a watery reptile in the form of a crocodile invokes the idea of the returning to the


primeval creative force of the water and its aquatic creatures. This idea was clearly indicated in the creation myth of Hermopolis, which referred to the four male frogs and four female snakes, who were responsible for producing an egg, from which the sun arose to enlighten the universe\(^{(123)}\).

The apotropaic function of Khonsu, who emerges from the primordial water, recalls the myth of the creator-god Atum, who was also said to have come forth from the watery abyss to start the creation of an organized world. This idea was discussed in an inscription written on the right wall of the third corridor in the Tomb of King Ramesses IX (KV 6) and says:

\[
\text{ɪm n} \text{ḥpr.n.f w m ṣnw m Nwn}
\]

“Atum, as he came forth alone from the primordial water”\(^{(124)}\).

It seems that the theme of god Khonsu, who emerges from the primordial ocean, is a clear evidence predicated his later role in the creation of the world. This role was described in the later Khonsu cosmogony that was recorded in the


Temple of Khonsu at Karnak, where he was assimilated with the creator-god Ptah, who came forth from the primordial water. It is now clear that the trampling of the creator-god Khonsu on two crocodiles and describing him as coming forth from the primordial water emphasize his apotropaic role in subduing the evil power at the time of creation and transformation from death to vitality.

7. Khonsu as a magical-god:

The apotropaic protective role of the magical-god Khonsu appeared in the iconography of the Late Period. As a god of magical protection, he played a great apotropaic mission on the so-called cippus of Horus, that used to be erected to eject the devils, fiends, and evil spirits from the houses, places, and domains and to protect from the bites, poisons, and lickings of the scorpions, snakes, and other venomous animals.


(126) This kind of stelae appeared from the Eighteenth Dynasty and continued until the Roman Period. Their core motif represents the child-god Horus, in his form as a savior god. He tramples crocodiles, in reference to throttle them, and holds firmly a harmful animal, including scorpions, snakes, desert gazelle, and lion, as a magical indication of seizing them and appropriating their power. The stelae of this kind always include magical spells, which have an apotropaic function. The skill of god Horus appears in reciting magical spells to curse the harmful animals and thus repel their poison. These stelae were also used as amulets to avoid the toxic bites by sealing the mouths of the wild animals and dangerous reptiles. E. A. W. Budge, The Mummy: A Handbook of Egyptian Funerary Archaeology, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1925), 471; W. R. Dawson, “The Writing of the Name Ḥīke,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 24, no. 1 (London, 1938): 128; W. D. Wijngaarden-Stricker and B. H. Stricker, “Magische Stèles,”
On a magical Horus stela from the end of the Late Period and the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period in the British Museum (BM EA 36250)\(^{(127)}\), the magical-god Khonsu appears standing in the form of a falcon-headed mummy topped with a sun disk and carrying two diagonal snakes before his body [Fig. (9)]. He bears the title \(\text{Ḫnw-nb-bḥdt}\) i.e. “Khonsu, lord of Behdet”, who, according to Pinch, was conceived as a protective deity in the Egyptian pantheon\(^{(128)}\).

This apotropaic representation definitely ensures the magical triumph of order over chaos through vanquishing the noxious reptiles to spread a general protection from their harm. Ritner explained that the Egyptian magical practice of grasping a serpent staff could magically protect the person from the danger of the poisonous snakes\(^{(129)}\).

---


\(^{(128)}\) Pinch, *Magic*, 143, fig. 7; Ch. Leitz, *Lexikon V*, 761.

Thus, god Heka, the god of magic, was often depicted holding two wavy snakes crossed in his arms as a kind of appropriating their evil power Fig. (10)(130). The concept of driving away the evil power through seizing the coils of the serpent by the gods was also discussed in Spell 885 of the Coffin Texts, which includes a recitation to drive off the snake saying(131).

\[
\text{ḥf ṭm n(p)shwi}
\]

“The snake is in my hand and cannot bite me”.

Similarly, the vignette of Chapter 182 of the Book of the Dead included several demons grasping serpents as a kind of submitting them and turning their evil power into protective ones Fig (11). The same point was also discussed in the spell of the chapter, which says(132).

\[
s ṭmy i
\]

“The (magical) protection is in my hand”.

---


(131) De Buck, *Coffin Texts VII*, 97 (o); Faulkner, *Coffin texts III*, 49, 51, no. 49.

It is through clutching the undulations of the serpent and turning its evil power into a powerless staff that the apotropaic function of god Khonsu, as a god of magical protection was activated. This function gives a special reference to his merciless character and apotropaic magical ability in overcoming the dangerous creatures and evil powers. Since this apotropaic role was portrayed on the Cippus of Horus, it conferred protection on their owners from snake bites and other forces of chaos.

8. Khonsu as a healer-god:

The apotropaic role of Khonsu as a healer-god could be traced in the religious textual context of the Late Period. Among the later apotropaic forms of god Khonsu was ḫnsw-nfr-ḥtp-m-Wȝst i.e. "Khonsu, is Perfectly Gracious in Thebes"\(^\text{133}\). Khonsu also was conceived as ḫnsw-pẖ-r-šḥrw i.e. "Khonsu, who makes plans"\(^\text{134}\), whose name has other several translations such as "Khonsu, the provider"\(^\text{135}\) and "Khonsu, who determines fates"\(^\text{136}\). The latter form probably refers to his special skill in matters of oracles, protection, and determining the death date of the

\(^{133}\) Ch. Leitz, Lexikon V, 768.
\(^{134}\) Boylan, Thoth, 206; Ch. Leitz, Lexikon V, 763.
\(^{136}\) M. Lichtheim, M., Egyptian Literature III, 94, no. 10.
demons as was discussed by Posener\(^{(137)}\). In his form as \(\text{nfr-ḥtp}\) i.e. “Perfectly Gracious”\(^{(138)}\), the Theban god Khonsu played an important apotropaic role during the Late Period. This role was inscribed on the so-called Bentresh Stela, from Karnak, that dates back to the end of the Late Period and the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period and preserved in the Louvre Museum (Louvre C 284)\(^{(139)}\). The inscription on the stela describes the healer-god Khonsu in his form as \(\text{nfr-ḥtp}\) i.e. “Perfectly Gracious” and invoked him to bestow his magical protection over his other form of \(\text{ḥnsw-p( } ḫ-r-sḥrw}\) i.e. “Khonsu, who makes plans”\(^{(140)}\). Moreover, the latter was also invoked to practice his apotropaic role to expel the enemy demon that possessed the body of princess Bentresh, the daughter of the prince of Bakhtan\(^{(141)}\). This invocation text says\(^{(142)}\):


\(^{(140)}\) Ch. Leitz, *Lexikon V*, 763-764.


Then his Majesty (i.e. King Ramesses II) spoke to Khonsu in Thebes, the Perfectly Gracious:

>O perfect Lord, if you turn your face to Khonsu, who makes Plans, the great god, who drives away the demons of disease, he will be sent to Bakhtan. Strong approval twice.

Then his Majesty said:

>Give your (i.e. Khonsu in Thebes, the Perfectly Gracious) magical protection to him (i.e. Khonsu, who makes Plans). I will send his Majesty (i.e. Khonsu, who makes Plans) to Bakhtan to save the daughter of the Prince of Bakhtan”.

In his form as Ḫnsw-pꜣ-ḥ-ršrw-m-W, st i.e. “Khonsu, who makes Plans in Thebes”\(^{(143)}\), god Khonsu played an important apotropaic role during the Late Period. In general, he was a god of healing and considered as the Theban image of Ḫnsw-pꜣ-ḥ-ršrw i.e. “Khonsu, who makes plans”\(^{(144)}\). Moreover, he was a

\(^{(143)}\) Ch. Leitz, Lexikon V, 763-764.

\(^{(144)}\) Sethe, Urkunden II, 108: 13; Les Réserve de Pharaon. L’Égypte dans les Collections du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. (Exposition,
specialized in hunting the demons and he had a supernatural power over the evil spirits, which used to receive people with an evil intention in the form of disasters, illness, soreness, and troubles\(^{(145)}\).

On the Bentresh Stela, god Khonsu, in his forms as \(\text{ḫnsw-p⟩-ḥsṛr i.e. “Khonsu, who makes plans”}\) and \(\text{ḥnsw-p⟩-ḥsṛrw-m-W⟩st i.e. “Khonsu, who makes Plans in Thebes”}\), was described as the one who apotropaically fight against the demons to smite their evil spirits and to declare the defeating and withdrawal of the possessing spirit as follows:

\[\text{ḥnsw-p⟩-ḥ-(s)ḥr nḥr-⟨⟩ kḥr-šm⟩w}\]

“Khonsu, who makes plans, the great god, drives away demons of illness”\(^{(146)}\).

\[\text{ḥnsw-p⟩-ḥ-ḥsṛrw-st⟩̀y(w) m ḥtp nḥr-⟨⟩ kḥr-šm⟩w}\]

“Khonsu, who makes plans in Thebes, welcome in peace, (you) great God, expeller of the demons of illness”\(^{(147)}\).


\(\text{Lichtheim, \textit{Egyptian Literature III}, 91-92.}\)\(^{(146)}\)
According to the text of the Bentresh Stela, the two forms of the healer-god Khonsu, ḫnw-p-r-h-sḫ i.e. “Khonsu, who makes plans” and ḫnw-m-W sḏnfr-htp i.e. “Khonsu in Thebes is Perfectly Gracious”, were invoked to fight the demon, who seized the body of the daughter of the prince of Bakhtan in the form of a disease\(^\text{148}\). In addition to describing god Khonsu as the one who possessed a magical protection, he bears the title of the expeller of the evil demons on the Bentresh stela. He also practiced his apotropaic role against the disease demons to drive away their evil power and put the demons to death on one hand, and to bring the possessed princess to a sound life, preserve her from evil attacks, and determine a new fate for her on the other hand.

**Conclusion:**

One of the fiercest beings in the Egyptian doctrine was Khonsu, whose aggressive behavior always directed towards the destruction of the evil powers in addition to spreading ultimate protection to the livings and the dead. It seems that he had an ambivalent personality in the ancient Egyptian religion. Moreover, he was a multi-character being, whose apotropaic roles had the primary aim of spreading blood to ward off evil power, protect the justified dead, and creating devastation with no mercy between the opponents of Maat. Generally, he was a henchman to the justified dead and played different harmful actions designed

to ward off evil, drive away the bad spirits, and protect the livings and the dead.

After examining several textual and iconographic evidences, it seems that Khonsu appeared in different forms and played several apotropaic roles meant to destroy the evils and maintain the order of the universe. All his apotropaic functions in Dynastic Egypt were complementary to each other since the time of the Pyramid Texts and up to the Late Period. They were also characterized by having two contradictory aspects: positive and negative. The positive aspect of his apotropaic duties intended to protect the livings and the dead while employing their negative aspect in destroying the evil powers that might oppose their way.

It is logic to adopt the concept of the ambivalent character of Khonsu and his apotropaic roles in the Egyptian religion depending on the circumstances. As a multi-character and apotropaic being, his initial image had demonical traits and served as a patron of cannibalism and cruel messenger. Afterwards, he apotropaically acted as a god of moon, creation, magical protection, and healing in the ancient Egyptian pantheon. In all of his characters, he served as a staunch supporter of Maat and expeller of the malevolent spirits and evil forces. He also acted in favor of the safeguard of the universe and defended the order to destroy the evil powers and restore the harmony of the cosmos.

The Dynastic Period spanning from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period witnessed different forms and apotropaic
roles of Khonsu in eliminating the enemies of the ordered cosmos on one hand and providing the justified dead with great magical power necessary for their protection and survival on the other hand. During the Old Kingdom, he functioned as originator and supporter of the positive aspect of cannibalism, so that he killed the ancestral deities to help the king in absorbing their magical, physical, and moral powers to safely join the train of the gods in the heavenly world. In addition to his apotropaic role in the cannibalism myth, he also acted as a dangerous punitive envoy for the first time during the Old Kingdom. The same apotropaic role of Khonsu as a retributive messenger continued as long as the Middle Kingdom. Meanwhile, he punished the opponents and was conceived as a proto-punitive incarnation of the New Kingdom chthonic deities. With the passage of time, he retained his role as a supporter of cannibalism during the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom also witnessed his entry into the Theban triad and gave a greater attention to his role as a moon-god and Theban equivalent of the Ashmounion god of moon, Thoth. As a moon-god, he was always provided by a crescent as a resemblance of either the sharpness of the knife or the curved shape of the sickle. During the Late Period, he was also conceived as a god of creation, magic, and healing. As a creator-god, he stood on the back of the crocodiles to subdue their evil power. Furthermore, he emerged from the primordial water as a kind of engaging the symbol of chaos in the act of creation. He was also the magical-god, who disabled the evil power of the serpents. In his form as a healer-god, he played a great role in expelling the demons of diseases and healing the possessed people.
The apotropaic roles of Khonsu during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms was only limited to the textual context. On the other hand, it is only during the Late Period, that his apotropaic roles was employed in texts and iconography. It seems that, although Khonsu became a major god during the New Kingdom, he retained his demonical nature and apotropaic roles. Thus, his characters probably expressed a combination and overlapping imagery and ideas of different contexts rather than manifesting individual creativity. Additionally, all the characters of Khonsu as a patron of cannibalism, severe messenger, torturer, moon-god, creator-god, magical-god, and healer-god probably shared combined identity and common attributes that overlap over the ages.

Noteworthy is that, Khonsu was considered the only deity in the ancient Egyptian pantheon, who has an apotropaic demonical origin before his ascension to the rank of the major gods. As for all the other deities, who played apotropaic roles in addition to their divine characters, they differ in their origins. They were either major deities since their inception and enjoyed demonical characteristics as well, such as Re, Atum, Osiris, Seth, and Thoth or they were pure demons with demonical origin from the beginning of their existence and could be regarded in the same rank of the deified persons and the demi-gods and minor deities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Name of ḫnsw “Khonsu”</th>
<th>Special Form</th>
<th>Apotropaic Role</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Fig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patron of cannibalism, Assisting the king in consuming the magical power of the gods</td>
<td>Utterance 273 (§ Spells 402a-b) of the Pyramid Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td>wp(w)t(y)-messenger</td>
<td>Bloodthirsty messenger Punisher</td>
<td>Utterance 273 (§ Spells 402c) of the Pyramid Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td>wp(w)t(y)-messenger</td>
<td>Dangerous envoy Punisher</td>
<td>Spell 573 of the Coffin Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Burner of the hearts</td>
<td>Spell 310 of the Coffin Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td>mds-slayer</td>
<td>Slayer</td>
<td>Spell 310 of the Coffin Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Devourer of the hearts</td>
<td>Spell 311 of the Coffin Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eater of the heads</td>
<td>Spell 994 of the Coffin Texts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patron of cannibalism, Assisting the king in consuming</td>
<td>Chapter 83 in the Book of the Dead</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Name of $\text{nsw}$ “Khonsu”</td>
<td>Special Form</td>
<td>Apotropaic Role</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Fig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the magical power of the gods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting as a sharp one</td>
<td>Stela of King Piye, Egyptian Museum (JdE 48862)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subduing the evil power of the crocodile and turning it into a creative force</td>
<td>Statue of Harwa, Egyptian Museum (CG 48606/ JdE 36711)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subduing the evil power of the crocodile and turning it into a creative force</td>
<td>Statue of Hor, Turin Museum (Turin Cat. 3030)</td>
<td>Figs.  (3-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subduing the evil power of the crocodile and turning it into a creative force</td>
<td>Statue of a priest of goddess Bastet, Louvre Museum (E 10777)</td>
<td>Fig.  (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statue of Psammetiksene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Name of Ḫnsw “Khonsu”</th>
<th>Special Form</th>
<th>Apotropaic Role</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Fig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td>Ḫnsw-wr-pr(ḥ)-m-nw</td>
<td>Subduing the evil power of the crocodile and turning it into a creative force</td>
<td>b, Florence Museum (Turin Suppl. 9 + Florence 8708)</td>
<td>Fig. (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Khonsu, the great-one, who comes forth from the primordial water”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period</td>
<td>Ḫnsw-wr-pr(ḥ)-m-nw</td>
<td>Subduing the evil power of the crocodile and turning it into a creative force</td>
<td>Inscription of Mentuemhat, Temple of goddess Mut at Karnak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Khonsu, the great-one, who comes forth from the primordial water”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period and beginning of Ptolemaic Period</td>
<td>Ḫnsw-nb-bḥdt</td>
<td>Destroyer of dangerous serpents</td>
<td>Magical Horus stela, British Museum (BM EA 36250)</td>
<td>Fig. (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Khonsu, lord of Behdet”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period and beginning of Ptolemaic Period</td>
<td>Ḫnsw-nfr-ḥḥ-m-ḥḥḥt</td>
<td>Healing god Destroyer of demons of disease</td>
<td>Bentresh Stela, Louvre Museum (Louvre C 284)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Khonsu, is Perfectly Gracious in Thebes”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Period and beginning of Ptolemaic Period</td>
<td>Ḫnsw-pū-ḥ-sḥw</td>
<td>Healing god Destroyer of demons of disease</td>
<td>Bentresh Stela, Louvre Museum (Louvre C 284)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Khonsu, who makes plans”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (1): Summary comparison between the apotropaic roles of Khonsu
Figures

Fig. (1): God Khonsu sitting in the company of a group of deities. Funerary monument of King Pepi II. Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty. After: Jequier, Monument Funéraire, pl. 21.

Fig. (2): God Khonsu crowned with the crescent-moon. Temple of Khonsu, Karnak, Twenty-First Dynasty. After: The Epigraphic survey, Khonsu, pl. 58.
Fig. (3). God $\text{Ḫnsw-wr-pr(\.m)-nw}$ i.e. “Khonsu, the great-one, who come forth (from) the primordial water” appears in the form of a double hawk-headed man standing on two crocodiles.

The magical healing statue of Hor, Turin Museum (Turin Cat. 3030), Thirtieth Dynasty.

After: Kákosy, Healing Statues, pl. XXVI (back pillar, register XII).
Fig. (4). Detail of the representation of god  ḫnsw-wr-pr(ī-m)-nw i.e. “Khonsu, the great-one, who come forth (from) the primordial water” appears in the form of a double hawk-headed man standing on two crocodiles.
The magical healing statue of Hor, Turin Museum (Turin Cat. 3030), Thirtieth Dynasty.
After: Lanzone, Dizionario, pl. CCCXLI.
Fig. (5). God ḫnsw-wr-pr(īm)-nw i.e. “Khonsu, the great-one, who come forth (from) the primordial water” appears in the form of a double hawk-headed man standing on two crocodiles. The healing statue of a priest of goddess Bastet, Louvre Museum (E 10777), Thirtieth Dynasty. After: von Bissing, Sculptur, pl. 68A.
Fig. (6). Detail of the representation of god  

\( \text{Ḫnsw-wr-pr(ī-m)-nw} \) i.e. “Khonsu, the great-one, who come forth (from) the primordial water” appears in the form of a crocodile reclining on a pedestal and provided with head of a hawk.

The healing statue of Psammetikseseneb, Florence Museum (Turin Suppl. 9 + Florence 8708), Thirtieth Dynasty.

After: Kákosy, Healing Statues, p. 66, fig. 23.
**Fig. (7).** The crocodile-god Wenty giving birth to the sun-god in the Book of the Earth. Tomb of King Ramesses VII (KV 1) and Tomb of King Ramesses IX (KV 6), Thebes, Twentieth Dynasty. After: Guilmant, *Ramsès IX*, pl. XCII.

**Fig. (8).** Pulling the solar barge with a long rope passing through the head of a serpent in the last hour of the night in the Book of the Amduat, Tomb of King Ramesses VI (KV 9), Thebes, Twentieth Dynasty. After: Piankoff, *Ramesses VI*, Fig. 87.
Fig. (9): God Khonsu appears standing in the form of a falcon-headed mummy and carrying two diagonal snakes before his body.

Magical Horus stela, The British Museum (BM EA 36250), the end of the Late Period and the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period.

Fig. (10): God Heka standing and holding two snakes crossed diagonally across his chest. Papyrus of Nesitanebâhru, The British Museum (EA10554,88), the end of the Twentieth Dynasty and the beginning of the Twenty-First Dynasty. After: Budge, *Greenfield papyrus*, pl. CVIII.

References


11. Bonomi, J. and Sharpe, S. *The alabaster sarcophagus of Oimenepthah I, king of Egypt: now in Sir John Soane’s*
Apotropaic Roles of Khonsu in the Ancient Egyptian Religion during the Dynastic Period


125. Porter, B. and Moss, R. L. B. Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts,


