

## Some Comments on the Animal Signs in the Military Texts of Ramesses III at the Temple of Madinet Habu

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### Abstract

*The temple walls of Madinet Habu in Thebes are considered outstanding for recording the wars of king Ramesses III. The accounts are full of metaphoric descriptions for the legendary power of the king. This paper deals with the words with animal signs to indicate the symbolic ideas the scribe wanted to present through the rhetoric texts. These animal signs, for instance, are the baboon in the word qnd "rage", ibis in gm-drt literally means "hand that finds", the falcon in word bik, the Seth animal in nšny "rage", the hindered snake in words sbi "enemy" and p3 dw qdy "the evil of characters".*

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**Key words:** Madinet Habu, Wars, Animals , Symbolic Ideas

### Introduction





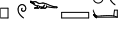
The temple of Madinet Habu in Thebes is considered remarkable for displaying the war scenes and accounts of king Ramesses III against the Libyans, the Nubians and the Sea People<sup>1</sup>. The accompanied texts

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<sup>1</sup> For the inscriptions and the reliefs see Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu, Volume I. Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III, (OIP 8, Chicago, 1930)* and Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu, Volume II. The Later Historical Records of Ramses III, (OIP 9, Chicago, 1932)*. For the inscriptions, see K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical*, V (Oxford, 1983), 8-54. For the translation of the war texts see W. F. Edgerton and J. A. Wilson, *Historical Records of Ramses III: The Texts in Medinet Habu*, Vol I and II, (SAOC 12, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936). There is also the analysis in A.J. Spalinger, *Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient Egyptians*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982), 213-220, B. Cifola, "Ramses III and the Sea People: A Structural Analysis of the Medinet Habu Inscriptions", in *Orientalia* 57 (1988), 275-306 and B. Cifola, "The Terminology of





The repetition of the expression  *m3i qnd* “raging lion” might lead to an enquiry concerning the reason of using *qnd* rather than other words with the same meaning of anger<sup>14</sup> like  *3d* with determinative of crocodile<sup>15</sup>,  *špt* with the determinatives of the blow fish and the sparrow<sup>16</sup> and  *nšny* with the Seth animal<sup>17</sup>. The preservation of the scribe in using the word *qnd* with the lion is clearly featured in the texts of god Amun-re-horakhty who marvelously caused the enemies to see Ramesses III “like a raging crocodile whose paws beat corpses” and “like an infuriated lion whose claw and tooth tear the breast of the wild cattle”<sup>18</sup>. Looking to the hieroglyphic inscriptions the raging crocodile is written as *dpw nšnw* <sup>19</sup> while the infuriated lion is inscribed as

usually as *rw sqnd* <sup>20</sup>.

It seems that the reason of displaying the baboon sign is due to its positive regard in ancient Egypt. Although it was known to be a furious animal but its cleverness was realized as illustrated in numerous scenes from various periods. For example a market scene from the Fifth Dynasty tomb of Tepemankh at Saqqara remarkably illustrated a baboon while catching the leg of a boy who was attempting to steal something from a basket<sup>21</sup>, also the Fifth Dynasty tomb of the brothers Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara depicted a baboon in the act of attacking a wrongdoer<sup>22</sup>, a New Kingdom stela illustrated a baboon while climbing a tree to collect fruit for a woman<sup>23</sup> and an ostrakon from Deir al-Madina dating to the

<sup>14</sup> For the various words of anger in ancient Egypt see I. Köhler, “Rage Like an Egyptian : The Conceptualization of Anger”, *Current Research in Egyptology 2010. Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Symposium*, (2011), 87.

<sup>15</sup> *Wb* 1, 24.12-17.

<sup>16</sup> *Wb* 4, 454.1-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Wb* 2, 340.11-30.

<sup>18</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 112, pl. 102 lines 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu, Volume II. The Later Historical Records of Ramses III*, (OIP 9, Chicago, 1932), pl. 102 line 22.

<sup>20</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 102 line 23.

<sup>21</sup> P.F. Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, (London and New York, 1996), 105-106 and 105, fig. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Houlihan, *Animal World*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> J.V. D’ Abbadie, “Les singes familiers dans l’ancienne Egypte (Peintures et Bas-reliefs) III. Le Nouvel Empire”, in *RdE* 18, (1966), 197 and 198, fig. 57.



“ brave, his **hand that finds**, (when) sending [the arrow] to its place without its fail ”<sup>34</sup>.

II. The king marches to confront the Sea People.



nb w<sup>c</sup> **gm-drt**.f rh phtw.s mi rw qni q3p hr r [wt i3wt]

“the sole lord, his **hand that finds**, (who) knows his strength like a brave lion, hidden and prepared for wild cattle ”<sup>36</sup>.



I.


Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 19.



II.

Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 31.

The previous two sentences refer to the indirect rhetoric method used by the scribe to associate the king with the wisdom god Thoth for the ibis represented his sacred bird<sup>37</sup>. According to this the king possessed the abilities of setting the perfect plans and knew the proper moment of attacking the enemies. This was mentioned in sentence II when he was described as a hidden lion prepared for wild cattle. This suits the clear praising description of the king as clever as Thoth in another text<sup>38</sup>.

From another point the expression  *gm-drt* and its following sentence “sending the arrow to its spot without fail” in sentence I might refer to the ability of the scribe in leading the readers’ minds to make sort of equation between the arrow of the king and beak of the ibis. This imagination can be emphasized in the scene of the king while holding his bow and arrow ready to shoot while behind the king is the vertical text with the image of the ibis bird in the word of *gm-drt* (figure. 1).

<sup>34</sup> See also the translation in Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 12, pl. 19 line 13.

<sup>35</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 31 lines 2-4 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 29.12-13.

<sup>36</sup> See also the translation in Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 37, pl. 31 lines 2-4.

<sup>37</sup> Kurth, “Thoth”, 498.





<sup>38</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 23, pl. 27-28 line 16.



Figure 1. Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 19.

In addition the natural behavior of the ibis in inserting its beak in mud to obtain food which fascinated<sup>39</sup> the ancient Egyptians is considered an indirect consideration for the enemies as worms. This also symbolizes the inability of the enemies in confronting the king for the worms have no arms. Probably the scribe inspired this idea from the so called Kadesh poem in which the enemies were said to be prostrated before the horses of the king and no one of them could find hand to fight<sup>40</sup>.

### The Falcon bird and the Seth Animal

The images of the falcon  or <sup>41</sup> and Seth  or <sup>42</sup> occur in many texts as will be shown below:

I. Among the speech of the king towards the royal princes and officials while watching the piles of cutting hands and phalli of the Libyans, he says:



*iw.i m s3.sn mi **bik** Ntri gmh.f hpwt hr q[3]rt*

“I was after them like a divine **falcon** (when) he sight small birds at [a hole]”<sup>44</sup>.

Then the king describes himself as:



<sup>39</sup> P. Vernus and J. Yoyotte, *Bestiaire des pharaons*, (Paris, 2005), 390.

<sup>40</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 12 footnote 13a.

<sup>41</sup> Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 433, signs G5 and G6 and Bonnamy, *Dictionnaire des Hiéroglyphes*, 834, signs G5 and G6.

<sup>42</sup> Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 431, signs E20 and 21 and G6 and Bonnamy, *Dictionnaire des Hiéroglyphes*, 834, signs G5 and G6.

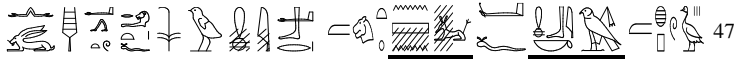
<sup>43</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 23 lines 44-46 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 17. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> See also the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 16, pl. 23 lines 44-46.

*ib.i hr swh mi k3 hr b3w[y ////] mi Sth hft nšny.tw.f*

“My heart (is) with a roar like a bull upon the battlefield, like **Seth** when he **rages**”<sup>46</sup>.

II. The king is capturing two Libyan chiefs and says:



*n wn ḥḥ.tw r ḥ3t.f sw mi Bḥr im 3t n[šn].f mi bik im ḥpw*

“There is no one (who) makes himself stand to the front of him (for he is) like Baal at the time of [**raging**] (and) like a **falcon** among small birds”<sup>48</sup>.



I.


Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 23.



II.

Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 68.

III. The king is pursuing the fleeing Libyans.



*nswt biwk Ntri mh im ph.s n3 ʿ3 š3 šmty hn.s hr ḥpš.f nšnyt.tw wr pḥty*

“the king, a divine **falcon**, the seizer upon his assailant, the great to command, the powerful, who relays upon his strong arm, the one who **rages** and great of strength”<sup>50</sup>.

IV. Describing the terrible condition of the Libyans when they saw the king in the 11<sup>th</sup> year war:

<sup>45</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 23 lines 48-49 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 17. 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 16, pl. 23 lines 48-49.

<sup>47</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 68. lines 3-4 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 44. 8.

<sup>48</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 60, pl. 68 lines 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 70. lines 2-4 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 43. 12-13.

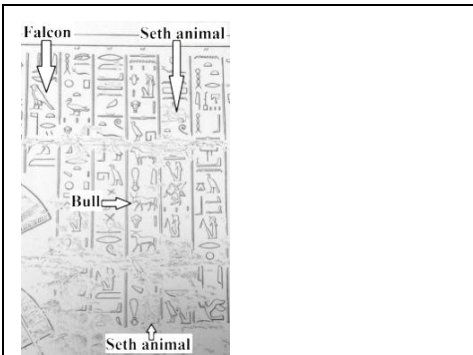

<sup>50</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 61, pl. 70 lines 2-4





their reign, their property and their portions<sup>56</sup>. The stable condition between Horus and Seth was witnessed in various monuments from earlier periods. For example the serekh of king Khasekhemwy from the Second Dynasty is surmounted by the falcon Horus and the Seth animal<sup>57</sup> and the side thrones of king Snusert I from the Twelfth Dynasty represented both Horus and Seth while binding the papyrus plant and the lotus flowers respectively in the *sema-Tawy* sign of unification between Upper and Lower Egypt<sup>58</sup>.

Another point that might be of interest concerning the arrangement of the animal signs in Text I. The king was first described as a falcon (line 45), then as a bull (line 48 middle) and finally like Seth (line 48 lower) when he rages (line 49 upper). They symmetrically resemble the remarkable triad statues in the Egyptian Museum representing *Ramesses III* standing between Horus and Seth<sup>59</sup> and each one of the two gods is extending one hand towards the head of the king (figure. 2).

					
Text I		Figure 2: Wilkenson, <i>Complete Gods</i> , figure in p. 197.			
Falcon	Bull	Seth animal	Horus	King	Seth

Looking to statues and the animal signs in the texts, the statue of Horus is shown on the left hand side suiting the first position of the falcon in the text. In the middle is the king's statue and in the text the king was

<sup>56</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 107, pl. 101 line 17.

<sup>57</sup> P.A. Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs. The Reign-By-Reign Record of the Rulers and Dynasties in Ancient Egypt*, (Thames and Hudson, 2001), 28.

<sup>58</sup> P. von Zabern, Official Catalogue. *The Egyptian Museum Cairo*, (Mainz, Germany, 1987), no. 87.

<sup>59</sup> R.H.Wilkenson R.H., *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, (Thames and Hudson, 2003), figure in 197.

described as a bull. Finally there is the statue of Seth on the right hand side whose animal sign occurred in the third position in the text. The position of the king in this remarkable triad can be also found in the text accompanying the scene of attacking a fortress in Amor in which the king was said to be enfolded between Horus and Seth for their strength and awe were united in his body <sup>60</sup>.

**The Seth Animal and the Snake**

The enemies were usually described as wild animals, cattle, small birds, mice, locusts and fish to symbolize their inability to confront the king and to express their naïve nature. The coming two texts concerning the battle against the Sea People are unique. They associated the Sea People with the determinative of the chaotic evil demon ʕ3-pp “Apophis” <sup>61</sup> shown as hindered snake with several knives penetrating its body while the king was described as god Seth as displayed in the following sentences:

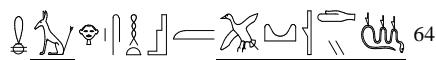
I. In the battle of the king against the land forces of the Sea People.



hft nšn **Sth** hr dh (6) **sbi** r h3t Sktt

“when **Seth** **rages** to cast down the **enemy** in front of the sun bark ” <sup>63</sup>.

II. In the scene of the king while shooting his arrow against the Sea People whose fleets are confronted by the Egyptians.



mi **Sth** hr shtm p3 dw qdy

“like **Seth** at the time of causing the destroy of the **Evil of Character** ” <sup>65</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 100, pl. 94 line 10-11.

<sup>61</sup> LGG II, 72-74.

<sup>62</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 32, lines 5-6 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 30.10-11.

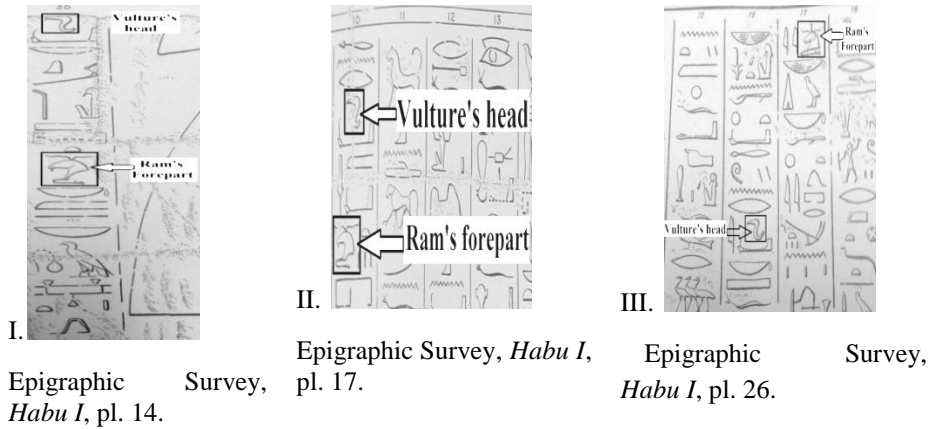
<sup>63</sup> See also the translation in Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 39, pl. 32 lines 5-6.





<sup>64</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 37, line 21 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 32.12.

<sup>65</sup> See also the translation in Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 42, pl. 37 line 21.










Although god Amun provided the king with awe and terror but the ram's forepart and the vulture's head would direct the mind of the readers to the divine role of Amun and his consort goddess Mut to protect the king and hinder the enemies. For the ram forepart  symbolized the impressive dignity of god Amun<sup>77</sup> while the vulture's head  was associated with goddesses Nekhbet and Mut<sup>78</sup>. This idea was expressed in the marching scene of the king to confront the Libyans preceded by the standards of Amun and Mut<sup>79</sup>. In scenes the king presented the Nubian, the Libyan and the Sea People captives to Amun and Mut<sup>80</sup>.  

## Vulture

Many texts described the miserable condition of the enemies who were defeated before the horses of the king<sup>81</sup>. For the word "horses" it is inscribed as    *ssmwt* in texts of the Nubian war<sup>82</sup>. But it is considered remarkable to find the word written in the other texts concerning the wars against the Libyans and the Sea People while

<sup>77</sup> Vernus, *Bestiaire*, 472.

<sup>78</sup> R.H. Wilkenson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*, (Thames & Hudson, New York, U.S.A 1992), 85 and Bonnamy, *Dictionnaire des Hiéroglyphes*, 839, H4.

<sup>79</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 14.

<sup>80</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pls. 11, 26 and 44.

<sup>81</sup> Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 1, pl. 9 lines 9-11; 9, pl. 17 lines 6-7; 10-11, pl. 18 lines 7-8; 38-39, pl. 32-34 lines 6-7; 21, pl. 46 line 21; 62, pl. 70 lines 4-5; 71, pl. 72, line 1 and 63, pl. 73 line 4.

<sup>82</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 9 lines 10-11 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, .6-.





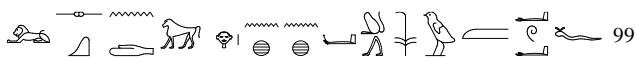




*m3i qnd m33.n.f ph.s*

“ a lion raging when he saw his assailant ”<sup>98</sup>.

II. The king is standing on the shore while directing his arrow towards the fleet of the Sea People.



*rw sqnd hr nhnh ph sw m wy.f*

“ an enraged lion to attack (the one who) **assails** him with his paws ”<sup>100</sup>.

III. The king is chasing the fleeing Libyans.



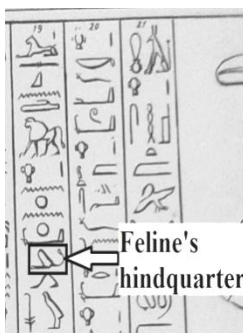
*Nsw biwk Ntri mh m ph.s*

“ the king, a divine falcon seizing upon his **assailant** ”<sup>102</sup>.



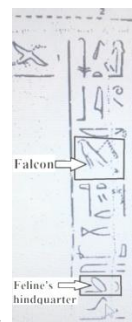
I.

Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 17.



II.

Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 37.



III.

Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 70.

Choosing the verb *ph* with feline’s hindquarter might refer to intention of the scribe to make the minds of the readers imagine the battlefield with the heroic attacking image of the king who was described as lion in sentences I and II and as falcon in sentence III and before him only appear

<sup>97</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 17, line 11 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 13.6-7.







<sup>98</sup> See also the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 9, pl. 17 line 11.

<sup>99</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 37 lines 18-19.




<sup>100</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 41, pl. 37 lines 18-19.

<sup>101</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu II*, pl. 70 line 2.

<sup>102</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 62, pl. 70 line 2.

the hindquarters of the fleeing enemies who became like the terrified animals. This might also explain the reason of not using other verbs with the attacking meaning because of having efficient determinatives like crocodile in *3d* <sup>103</sup>, walking legs in *h3i* <sup>104</sup>, two arms the last is holding a stick in *hd* <sup>105</sup>, arm holding a stick in *sf* <sup>106</sup> and the horn in *tw* <sup>107</sup>. This idea can be emphasized through the association of the king with the leopard head in the word  *phty* “strength” to express his ability in hindering the enemies<sup>108</sup>.

### The Un-horned Ox

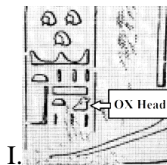
The un-horned ox <sup>109</sup> was used as a determinative in two words  *bšt*w “rebellious” and  *sn* “breath”.

I. For the first word it occurred in the text accompanying the scene of the king while receiving the sward sickle from the god Amun before going to fight the Libyans.




*šsp n.k hpš s3.i mry.i hw.k tpw h3swt bšt*w

“take to you the sward my son, my beloved (that) you may smite the heads of the **rebellious** countries”<sup>111</sup>.



Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 13

II. The second word  *sn* was used among the speech of the captives to the king who was presenting them to god Amun.

<sup>103</sup> *Wb* 1, 24.17.

<sup>104</sup> *Wb* 2, 475.1-4.

<sup>105</sup> *Wb* 2, 504.14-505.9.

<sup>106</sup> *Wb* 4, 421.11-12.

<sup>107</sup> *Wb* 5, 359.11-12.

<sup>108</sup> See the translations of these texts in Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 8, pl. 16 line 14; 11, pl. 19 line 1; 14, pl. 22 line 23; 15, pl. 23 line 1; 17, pl. 24 line 1; 19, pl. 26 line 21; 35, pl. 29 lines 5, 8, 25 and 33 and 37, pl. 31 line 3.

<sup>109</sup> Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 431, sign F 63.

<sup>110</sup> Epigraphic Survey, *Habu I*, pl. 13, line 7 and Kitchen, *Ramesside V*, 10.12.

<sup>111</sup> See the translation of Edgerton, *Historical Records*, 4, pl. 13 lines 6-7.



the readers when seeing the un-horned ox as determinative in the word rebellious to consider the enemies totally blinds.

Concerning Text II the ox head in the word “breathe” expresses to what extent the captives were desperate and their hearts were captured with fear from the miserable fate that was waiting them. Therefore they were seeking mercy through being allowed to have second chance for life. According to these the scribe through using the ox head identified the defeated chiefs with the slaughtered animals presented as offerings to god Amun. This can be expressed through the location of the text above the captives with their heads bound to each other.

### **Conclusion**

The scribe succeeded in using the animal signs to associate the king with the positive symbolic ideas. Through the ibis bird of the wisdom god Thoth the king represented the power of justice. In another aspect the violent nature of the king as the storm god Seth protected the stability of the world against the malicious goals of the Sea People who were associated with the evil snake demon Apophis. The scribe depended on the image dualism to present the political idea of emphasizing the unification of Egypt through the images of Horus and Seth. He used the lion and the baboon to symbolize the king’s possession of both mighty and wisdom. Amazingly this might be the origin of the popular stories that included the lion as the jungle king while the baboon was his private counselor. The scribe referred to the important supporting role of the Theban couple Amun and his consort Mut through the ram’s forepart and the vulture’s head respectively. The scribe was also clever in exploiting the phonetic sign of the vulture of goddess Mut to use it in the component of the word *ssmwt* representing the horses of the king. In addition the scribe expressed the inability of the enemies who could not confront the king through using parts of animals with weak aspect like the feline’s hindquarter and the un-horned ox.

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