

ISIS IN BABYLONIA?

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The transcriptions of Egyptian personal names in the cuneiform sources have long been of interest for the reconstruction of the Egyptian language, but the only comprehensive treatment of the cuneiform transcriptions remains Hermann Ranke's *Keilschriftliches Material zur Altägyptischen Vokalisation*, published in 1910.

In preparing an up-to-date onomastic study of all the Egyptians found in the cuneiform texts the present author has so far collected 414 attestations¹ of identified Egyptian names from Assyrian and Babylonian documents and royal inscriptions of the first millennium BC. Of these names 366 (88.4%) can be identified as theophoric, and most of the well known Egyptian gods, including Isis, Horus, Amon, Atum, Hapy, Osiris, Montu, Bastet, Khonsu, Nefertum, Min, Ptah, Mut, Thoth and Ra, are attested as divine elements in the names.

The divine determinative (marked as ^d in the transliteration of cuneiform) is, however, used in only nine instances of the theophoric names (2.4%). The distribution of the determinative is of particular interest. The divine determinative is used solely in connection with the goddess Isis, and furthermore, the determinative is never used in Assyrian sources, only in Babylonian texts.

A closer look at the Isis names written with the divine determinative reveals that even in the Babylonian sources the use of the determinative is very restricted. With the exception of one text (CT 55 539) from Sippar, the divine determinative is used only in Late Babylonian documents originating in the extensive business archive of the Murašû family at Nippur dating to the reigns of the Achaemenid rulers Artaxerxes I (465–424) and Darius II (423–405).

Cuneiform transcriptions of Egyptian names written with a divine determinative:²

¹ A name referring to one person and written with the same orthography in one text is counted once.

² These three names were identified already by Ranke 1910: 39–40.

p3-di-3st (“the one whom Isis has given”)

¹ <i>pa-aṭ-d^de-si-'</i>	PBS 2/1 65, 23, U.E.	dated at Nippur, 3rd year of Darius
¹ <i>pa-aṭ-d^de-si-'</i>	TMH 2/3 147, 23, oR	Enlil-ašabšu-iqbi, Darius 4
¹ <i>pa-aṭ-d^di-si</i>	CT 55 539, r.7	from Sippar, date lost
¹ <i>pa-ṭi-d^de-si-'</i>	IMT 43:[2, 7], L.E.	Nippur, Artaxerxes 40

p3-di-n.i-3st (“The one whom Isis has given to me”)

¹ <i>pa-a-ni-d^de-si-'</i>	BE 10 129, 18, L.E.	Nippur, Darius 8
¹ <i>pa-ṭan-d^de-si-'</i>	PBS 2/1 91, 3, 6, 11	Nippur, Darius 4
¹ <i>pa-ṭa-ni-d^de-si-'</i>	BE 10 15, U.E.	Babylon, Darius 1

n3-`3-3st (“Isis is great (?)”)

¹ <i>na-'^de-si</i>	BE 10 81, 17	Nippur, Darius 3
¹ <i>na-aḥ-d^de-si-'</i>	PBS 2/1 65, 3	Nippur, Darius 3

Even though the divine determinative is used in only seven texts, it cannot be dismissed as an orthographic peculiarity of a single scribe. The divine determinative in front of the element Isis is used by five different scribes:

- Ninurta-ab-ušur, son of Enlil-šum-iddin (BE 10 81 and 129, PBS 2/1 65, TMH 2/3 147)
- Ubar, son of Nadin (BE 10 15)
- Bel-uballiṭ, son of Itti-Ninurta-inia (BE 10 39)
- Ninurta-iddin, son of Mutirri-gimilli (PBS 2/1 91)
- Erib-Enlil, son of Iqiša (IMT 43)

There is some inconsistency in the use of the determinative even in the above mentioned texts. In BE 10 15 *p3-di-n.i-3st* is written without the determinative in line 15 (¹*pa-ṭa-ni-e-si-'*), but with the determinative in the same text on the upper edge referring to the same individual. This, as such, is a normal feature of the cuneiform script, where variant spellings are frequently used, often in consideration of space. The name ¹*na-e-si-'*, if correctly understood as *n3-3st*, also lacks a determinative in PBS 2/1 65, 1, L.E. However, other Egyptian gods are consistently written without the divine determinative. The name *p3-(n)-imn* (“The one belonging to Amon”) is spelled ¹*pa-mu-nu* (BE 10 81, 17) and *ḥr* (“Horus”) ¹*ḥu-ur-ru* (PBS 2/1 65, 5, 10).

Although Egyptian and Egyptinizing finds representing gods such as Horus and Bes are known from Achaemenid Babylonia (Stolper 2001: 111 note 28), there has so far been no textual evidence supporting the existence of a cult of

Egyptian gods. As Eph'al has noted in his article concerning western minorities in Babylonia: "Unfortunately, we have no evidence for the cult of any foreign minority in Babylonia in the period under discussion" (Eph'al 1978: 88).

Although it does not necessarily imply a cult, the use of the divine determinative to classify the theophoric element Isis in the Late Babylonian cuneiform transcriptions of Egyptian names implies strongly that this Egyptian goddess, whose cult was so widespread in the Mediterranean world during the Hellenistic and Roman period, was a known deity in Babylonia, especially at Nippur, already during the 5th century BC.

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