

## Oracular Gods in Ancient Egypt

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### ABSTRACT

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Oracles were commonly used in ancient Egypt. It was a significant aspect of ancient Egyptian society. Royals and non-royals approached gods in the form of a statue carried on the shoulders of priests during festivals seeking the god's decision in all sort of issues. Royals asked divine approval or advice in a major decision whether for political reason, military or trade campaigns. High and minor officials consulted gods for matters related to their promotion, while ordinary people for property disputes, thefts, locating missing items, and others. There were certain gods, deified kings and queens, deified non-royals who were related with oracles. According to texts, the most famous were the Theban triad; Amun, Mut and Khonsu, sacred bulls, rare aspects of Horus, deified king Amenhotep I, Ahmose Nefertari and non-royals like Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu. This study aims at investigating gods related to oracles in ancient Egypt, when and where they received the oracles. The paper starts with a historical background on oracles in ancient Egypt then it analyzes gods and places related, and hieroglyphic terms used to describe this action. The study ends with a main conclusion.

### Introduction

The word "oracle" is derived from the Latin word *ōrāre* which means "to utter" or "to speak" (1) . The most common encountered term for "Oracle" is taken from "consultation, "wonder" and "Assertion (2). Oracles is a god's response to a question or a query, delivered by a messenger of the deity as a statue (3). On festival days and religious ceremonies, temple priests carried the statues of the gods in portable shrines outside to be seen by the public, and sometimes through the streets of the cities or to local shrines and necropolis regions. The gods were asked questions about the past or future and received ritualized answers (1) (4). The petitioner would call out to the god or send in writing, inscribing a question or wish. The priest will pass it to the god and place it in the mouth of the god's statue. The movement in one direction or the other, forward or backward meant a positive or negative reply (4) (5).

In some cult centers, the gods spoke back to the petitioner where the priests answered using a speaking tube and hiding within the shrine by a niche hollowed in the cult statue (3) . Oracles might have not been limited to festivals but priests needed sometimes to address oracular questions to gods within their sanctuary (6). Over the course of time

the priests became the voice of the oracles. An oracle is more limited than prophecy, oracles were most practical when a “Yes-No” question was asked” (2) (7). Through oracles, ancient Egyptians felt guided, inspired and instructed by their god, and it was also an important social tool to ease people’s tensions (5) (8).

Oracles were not limited for common people but were available for royals as well, where kings consulted oracles to obtain divine approval or advice in a major decision, event or action (4). Oracles were used in the election of some officials or even kings (5). Dreams were regarded as “revelations of truth”, where texts mention the gods appearing in dreams as to inspire the king (9). Oracles were consulted in different daily issues like an advice whether to travel to another town or not, theft cases, consumer queries and others. Serious crimes were discussed in the official judicial system (10). Thus, they became a jurisdiction side by side with the secular jurisdictions (11). The study of oracles and gods involved provide us with valuable information about people’s daily issues and needs and how it might have been used by royals to gain gods’ support and approval on important decisions. It also shows divine involvement with human affairs and the powerful intermediate role the priests played in transferring the god’s will and decisions.

#### **This paper attempt at answering the following questions**

- Who were the significant oracular gods in ancient Egypt?
- When did the oracular power of these gods flourish?
- What were the places in which these Gods gave oracles?
- What were the Hieroglyphic terms used in oracular action?

#### **Aims of the Study**

- Identifying the significant oracular gods in ancient Egypt.
- Shedding light on the period when these gods flourished.
- Discussing the places where these gods gave oracles.
- Displaying the Hieroglyphic terms used in oracular action.

#### **Examples of Oracles in Ancient Egypt before the New Kingdom**

Scholars have generally assumed that oracular practice started in Egypt in the New Kingdom. However, Sinai inscription 13, a rock inscription in Wadi Maghara from the reign of Djedkare (Izezi), is from the **late 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty**. According to Baines it might contain a record of an oracular consultation (12). The inscription was on the cliffs above the entrance to one of the principal mines. The inscription is a record of an expedition to extract turquoise, including a date, identity of a leader and staff. Bains claims that such an expedition was consulted through god’s **Re** oracle at the solar temple nXn raw, and after the success of the expedition, the consultation was recorded at the destination. God’s Re response was that precious stone would be found in a specific quarry (12).

In the tomb of Ankhtifi , **10<sup>th</sup> dynasty** at Moalla , in his autobiography the mention of him succeeding a certain Hetep as nomarch of Nekhen, he was probably chosen either by an oracle or by the king.to reestablish order (13) (14). A Wadi Hammamat inscription, **11<sup>th</sup> dynasty**, reign of king Menthotep IV, records that the god **Min** appeared in the form of rain to help expedition members in the middle of the desert.

In the story of Sinuhe from the **12<sup>th</sup> dynasty**, a record of divine orders descended to men (15). In the **12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty** another possible divine consultation is a long fragmentary inscription of king **Senusret I** from the temple of **Satet** at Elephantine which contains a reference to a royal dream which led to the temple construction (16). A graffito from Hatnub in the **12<sup>th</sup> dynasty** (year 6 of local sovereign Nehery) records a decree issued according to a god. A stela of Horemkauf, **13<sup>th</sup> dynasty** show divine orders (15).

### **Oracular Gods**

The following part divides oracular gods into 3 parts; national and local gods who possessed temples and received oracles, deified kings who gave oracles, non-royal deified people who gave oracles.

#### **I- Oracles of Gods**

In Ancient Egypt several oracular gods were known, the most famous was the god **Amun**, the name of which means the invisible, *Imn* (Wb.I, 85.15, (17) . Oracular power was connected with the god in some places, the most known was **Thebes**, Documents show that Thebes was an oracular centre for Amun especially during the New Kingdom.

During the **18<sup>th</sup> dynasty**, oracles dealt mainly with state affairs and political questions. **Hatshepsut** claimed co-regency of Egypt by the god **Amun** on the occasion of a procession, and consulted him also before her expedition to Punt (Urk IV, 342-343 (18), PM II2, p.347-14, (19), (20). Texts on the plinth of the red chapel at Karnak show oracular consultation (21).

The oracular appointment of **Thutmose III**, visiting a procession of the god **Amun** within the Hypostyle -hall at Karnak as a young prince proclaiming a future king has been recorded. (Urk IV, 158, (18) PM II2, pp.106-107, (19). Amun led him to a part of the temple called “Station of the Lord” (22). Besides the **Opet feast**, Amun received oracles at **New year’s feast** which is recorded on the north face of the 10<sup>th</sup> pylon of Karnak (PM, II 2, p.187, (19). The vizier Usermen assumed his offices on the New Year’s Day in year 5 of **Thutmose III**, recorded in Papyrus Turin 1878(Urk IV, 1384, (18) .

Also, Thutmose III extension of the cord ritual at Karnak in year 24 at an Amun festival, where **Amun** extends the cord, himself represented on stela Cairo JE 34012 (Urk IV, 835, (18). At the feast of Apep, celebrated at Karnak, on the 28<sup>th</sup> day 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Smw, Amun also appeared, recorded on chapel of **Amenhotep II**. (PM II 2, p.186, (19) KRI, VI, p.702,11-13, (23). **Thutmose IV** approached god **Amun** at Karnak in year 8 and asked his consultation concerning his campaign to Nubia (Urk IV, 1545-8, (18). The Konosso Stela inscription of **Thutmose IV** gives a clear example of a divine consultation of the oracle of **Amun**. This stela might have commemorated a royal military journey from Thebes to Aswan, stopping at important temple sites (24).

When the high priesthood of Amun was vacant in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Ramesses II, **Ramesses II** asked **Amun** who should be high priest of Amun. Reading to him a list of candidates, of which the god chose Nebwenenef (22) (25).

There are three other records of oracular consultations at the **Opet festival** dating from the **20<sup>th</sup> dynasty**, and later in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the *3ht*, that are juridical in nature. This suggests that oracular consultations took place during the last half of the feast (15).

The British Museum Papyrus no.10335 is a record of a petition made to the god **Amun** by a servant concerning the theft of 5 fine linen shirts. The papyrus is a single sheet of a light color, inscribed on both sides. The document contains the cartouches of Ramesses III (recto), and that of Setnakht(verso). On paleographical grounds, however, it would seem that it belongs to about the time of **Ramesses IV**. Its width is about the normal size used in Ramesside judicial papyri (26).

There were two names of Amun connected with oracular consultation; the less common "*Imn nb nswt t3wy*", Amun lord of the thrones of the two lands, as in the Ramesside letters and the oracular decree of princess Neskhnw of the **21<sup>st</sup> dynasty** (27). The most common was "*nsw ntrw*", lord of the gods, which is a title known since the New Kingdom (28). "*Imn-R<sup>c</sup> nsw ntrw p3 ntr 3 wr(n) s3<sup>c</sup> n hpr*", Amun Ra lord of the gods, that great god, first of creation (29). On the outer wall at the south-eastern corner of court IV at Karnak, an oracle is dated to time of **Painedjem II** (15).

The high priest Menkheperre, in the **21<sup>st</sup> dynasty**, consulted Amun at the New year concerning some people who banished to an oasis and asked to bring back the exiles to Egypt and to decree that nobody else should be banished to this land again. The god Amun approved to his request (22). Medinet Habu calendar mentions Amun appearing to give an oracle at Karnak on the **10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of *šmw*** coincides with the feast of Anubis (Medinet Habu III, pl.167, list 65, (30).

In year 25 of king **Smendes**, the Banishment stela, informs us of an oracle of the god **Amun-Re** at Karnak during a festival. This oracle asked **Menkheperre** to travel south from el Heba to Thebes to protect the city. Upon arrival to Thebes, Menkheperre became the high priest of Amun according to Amun-Re 's wish (31). Behind the 6<sup>th</sup> pylon, a block originally from the south wall, bears an oracular decision in relation to the Memphite temple estate of **Sheshonq I** (32).

In the **22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty**, general **Osorkon**, the son of the king Takelothis II became high priest of Amun at Thebes with the approval of the god Amun at a festival (22). Another fragmentary inscription on the south wall (behind the 6<sup>th</sup> pylon) of **Osorkon II** records a decree for the estate of the temple of Amun. (PM II2, p.92,264, (19).

In Luxor temple, in the transition between the temple court and the hypostyle hall (base of the wall in the south-east corner of the court), there is an inscription of the scribe Nakhtefmut, reign of **Osorkon III**. The inscription records effects of a flood in Thebes and references of an oracle (33).

Graffito of priest Horkhebi in the **22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty**, carved on an interior wall of a gateway north of the granite sanctuary in the temple of Amun includes an oracular decree. This inscription confirms the legitimacy of his offices through a lengthy genealogy and presenting a certain claim concerning the gateway in which the inscription was recorded. (PMII2, p.103, (19) (33) .

The Adoption stela Cairo JE 36327, of Nitocris the eldest daughter of **Psamtik I**, discovered in the forecourt of Karnak became the 2<sup>nd</sup> in line to inherit the office of divine wife of Amun. This was authorized by divine approval of the god Amun in an oracular ritual (15).

It seems that there were two sacred statues for the god Amun at Karnak., the most sacred was kept in the sanctuary at the back of the *3h mnw* hall, this statue never left the sanctuary and did not participate in the festival processions or oracular appearance. The second statue was on the other hand made for public appearance and at the end of the festivals rested at the sanctuary of Thutmose III (34).

Another important oracular center for Amun was in the south in **Napata** and **Merroe**.

In **Napata**, the capital of an independent kingdom of Ethiopia, Amun was known and worshipped in a temple constructed for him at mountain Berkel at the 4<sup>th</sup> cataract (*dw w<sup>c</sup>b*). King through an oracle of Amun confirmed from a stela of the king Aspelta (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C), where at the death of the old king the army gathered and consulted Amun-Re at his temple, in the stela, Aspelta was declared as king (Urk,III,.81-100, (18).

Since the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty the oracle of Amun was transferred to the western desert to **Siwa**, where a temple for the god Amun was constructed during this period, probably in the reign of king Ahmose Amasis (35) . Two temples received oracles in Siwa; Temple of Aghurmi , and temple of Umm Ubayd (3). In 550 B.C, king Kerosius, king of Lydia (reign of king Ahmose Amasis) visited the oracle to determine his country's fate towards the Persians. Cambyses sent an expedition to the temple of Amun at Siwa to destroy the oracle but the expedition never reached there and disappeared according to Herodotus (36). Simon the Greek military leader, in 450BC sent some of his men to Siwa, while besieging Cyprus to consult the oracle about the result of this war (36).

Alexander the great, visited Siwa to consult the god and to establish his divine paternity as son of Amun-Zeus. Exactly what he consulted the oracle is not known but historian Arrian mentions that Alexander received a reply that his heart desired (2) . Poet Pindar, Lysander the Spartan general, and Strabon, the Greek geographer all attended oracular ceremonies in Siwa (3). During the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, temples for Amun-Siwa were erected in Athens, Asparta, Macedonia, north Africa and Asia minor and temples received oracles (37).

**Mwt** (mother, Wb.II, 53,15-16, (17), wife of Amun, mother of Khonsu, appears as a woman with the double crown. In **Thebes**, the goddess **Mwt** role in oracular decrees is significant in the **21<sup>st</sup>** and the **22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty**. In dynasty 21 an oracular decree under her name was related to the transfer of some royal mummies to the cachette of Deir el Bahari. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty, some decisions were related to protection under the form of “ *Mwt wrt nbt isrw nrt 3t wr (n) s3<sup>c</sup> n hpr*”, great **Mwt** , mistress of ISrw, great goddess , first of creation (38). In some cases, goddess **Mwt** appeared in oracular consultations only as a companion to Amun Re or Khonsu (34) .

**h<sup>n</sup>sw** (wanderer, (Wb. III, 33, (17). Moon god in a human form with a falcon head, as a son of Amun and Mut in Thebes, he is represented with a side-lock (28). **h<sup>n</sup>sw** Appeared as an oracular god in **Karnak** in the form of “*h<sup>n</sup>sw m W3st nfr htp*”, **h<sup>n</sup>sw** in

Thebes, *nfr htp*. **Herihor's** oracular inscription records an oracular session of Khonsu (carved on the east half of the north wall belonging to the forecourt of the Khonsu temple at Karnak). The inscription represents an appeal by Herihor who wished as high priest of Amun -Ra another 10 years of priesthood. It was assumed that if this event was part of the Opet feast, that it might have taken place in 3 *3ht* going back to Karnak (15). This god was responsible for a lot of oracular decrees especially in the **22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty** (38), KRI, II, p.286,14-15 (23) (34).

Oracular Amuletic Decrees are compositions promoted by gods to protect the wearer from danger whether physical or spiritual. Among the examples of oracular amuletic decrees was papyrus Cleveland CMA 14.723, which is the oracle of protection delivered by the god **Khonsu** in Thebes Neferhotep to a male child (39).

**3st** (Wb.I, 20,14, (17). She appears as a lady with the throne on her head, or associated with Hathor (28). In the **19<sup>th</sup> dynasty**, in the reign of **Ramesses II**, in **Coptos**, she gave an oracular consultation in one of the processions in promoting an official under the form of “*3st wrt mwt ntr*”, Isis the great mother of the god( Ashmolean Stela, no.1894/106 ; (22) (40). In the **Ptolemaic period**, in **Abydos**, she gave consultations for pilgrims related to cure and healing (41). In north **Saqqara**, there are demotic texts in the form of oracular dreams, text 28 is a consultation for the cure of **queen Cleopatra**. Text 9, goddess Isis predicts for Hor that he will go to Memphis and stay there forever (42). In the island of **Philae**, during the **Roman period**, Isis gave oracles since we found 2 texts, 1 in Demotic and the other in Greek that mention the consultation of the oracle of Isis (43).

The temple of Abydos was a prominent shrine of Osiris in the Pharaonic period, an incubation oracle of the god **Serapis** began there at the beginning of the **Ptolemaic period**. Pilgrims to **Abydos** would sleep in the vicinity of the sacred precinct and receive dream oracles from the god or like other oracular centers through speaking oracles. This changed from Serapis to Bes in the **Roman period** (44). The elevation of the god **Bes** as oracle giver is partly for **Bes's** popularity and from the god's ancient mythical role as guardian of the head of Osiris, the main god of Abydos (45). The oracle of Bes continued till shut down in 359 A.D by order of the emperor Ammianus Marcellinus (44).

**Pth** (Wb.I, 9-10, (17), was a creation god and a god of artisans (28). In **Memphis**, he was known as an oracular god from the **New Kingdom** till the **Byzantine period** (46). In Thebes, God **Pth** gave oracular consultation to king Merenptah in his dream (47). In the Ptolemaic period there are hymns for Ptah in his small temple in **Karnak** and in **Denderah**, describing him as “*nb m3't sr.(f) ii ti*”, “lord of truth, he predicts what will come. (Urk.VIII, 138, (18).

**ht-hr**, the house of Horus (Wb.III, 5,11, (17). Cow goddess, mistress of sky, daughter of Ra and mistress of the west (48). It seems that Hathor giving oracles was not common since only one dream was documented where the goddess Hathor appeared for a man called Djhoutymheb and predicted for him the place of his tomb (49).

Oracle petitions and texts referring to oracles were found at el-Hiba in the 18<sup>th</sup> upper Egyptian nome and dating to the **21<sup>st</sup> dynasty**. **Papyrus Berlin 8525**, **Papyrus Berlin**

**8526** are addressed to *hrw-h<sup>c</sup>w*, Horus- Khau, a form of Horus almost unknown from other sources. Another goddess is mentioned in Papyrus 8525 which is the goddess *Mhit*, which made Thinis mentioned as a possible provenance (50). The two previous papyri were addressed by a single person.

**Papyrus Boston a-b**, is addressed to **Horus of the camp**, the deity of el-Hiba. The papyri were discovered in an ancient tomb at Nag3 el Deir around 325 km from el Hiba. The two petitions relate to an oracle consultation to settle a dispute over a cow. Karsasi apparently of Hittite origin, had sold a cow to Pameshem who paid only the first instalment and failed and denied to pay the rest of the acquired cost. The oracle appears to have decided in favor of Karsasi (51). Papyrus Strasbourg 21 and Papyrus Moscow 5560 are addressed to “**He -of-the- Camp**”, and that of Strasbourg 21 was written by or on behalf of the high priest of Amun Masaharta. Papyrus Louvre 25359, Papyrus Strasbourg 51 are both addressed to middlemen who are asked to make arrangements to obtain the oracle decision from the god (50).

*sth, swth* (Wb. IV, 345,3, (17) . This god is related to foreign countries, desert and isolated places (28). *swth* was worshipped in the **oasis of Dakhleh** under the name of “*swth nb wh3t*”. In the **22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty** shortage of water occurred and disputes concerning wells took place. A dispute was made by a priest to the governor claiming ownership of his mother of a land near a well. The governor consulted Setekh in his feast “*nfr-wršw*”, who answered in favor of the priest. (Dekhla Stela now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford no.1894/107; (52).

*dhwti* (Wb V, 606,1, (17) . He was a moon God, God of writing, an ibis or baboon (28). In north **Saqqara**, in the **Ptolemaic period**, ostraca from archive of Hor documents the god’s role in oracles through dreams. Healing from diseases, was a main topic related to the oracle of Thot (42).

*sbk* (Wb.IV, 95,2, (17), appeared in the form of a crocodile . Documents in the **Greco-Roman period** from **Fayoum** in Demotic and Greek show the god connection to oracles. In Demotic, the god was known by “*sbk nb t3- tn*” (53).

*hmniw*, the ennead (Wb.III, 283,3 (17). King **Ptolemy III** in front of the ennead “*sr.sn n.f nti r hpr*” , they (ennead) predicted for him(the king) what will happen.(Urk.VIII,90/c ,75, (18).

*hnm* (Wb.III, 377,10, (17), creation god, God of Elephantine with Satet and Anket (28). Appeared as an oracular god in one of the **Ramesseid** letters (22). A record from Late Ramesseid Letter no. 31 shows that the oracle of **Khnum** in Elephantine was consulted on behalf of the scribe Djhutmose, to know whether he would return safely from his travels (54). In **Esna**, he was a god giving oracles under the form of “*B3 nb ddt*” (55).

*hri šf*, “who is upon his lake”, Harsaphes in Greek, main god of Ichnasia, (28). This god gave oracles in dreams as his appearance to prince Osorkon in the **22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty** (56). In the memoirs of a “*sm3-t3wy nht* “, who was a physician in the Persians’ army against the Macedonian invasion, claims that he was saved due to the protection of this god who appeared to him in a dream. (Urk.II,4,7,10, (18) .

Greek and Latin authors refer to oracles related to sacred bulls. The sacred bulls; *hp*, **The Apis bull** (Wb.III, 70,1, (17), *Bh*, Bukhis (Wb. I, 472,14, (17) and *mr wr*, the Mnevis bull (Wb. II, 106,4,5, (17); were used as oracles in their temples, especially Apis. The bull was permitted into a hall full of people, where they posed their questions and the animal was loosed. The bull chose between 2 doors leading to his favorite food, the choice meant negative or positive response to the question (3). 2 similar texts show the consultation of Apis bull, one involving Emperor Claudius in **Esna**, and the other emperor Augustus in **Kalabsha**,” *sr.f n.f*“, he predicts to him (55) (57). An inscription accompanying a relief at **Medamoud** related to the Bukhis bull is marked as a proof of an oracle, the relief is unfortunately damaged and not clear (58).

It is also worth mentioning that historians and classical writers spoke of other oracular gods. Herodotus mention *W3dit* in **Buto** during the **5<sup>th</sup> century BC** (, LA IV, (59), **Bastet** in **Tel Basta** (60), and **Neith** in **Sais** (LA IV, p.603, (59).

## II- Oracles of Deified kings

The oracle of **King Ahmose** at **Abydos** has been recorded. It was approached in order to solve disputes. A land dispute was mentioned during the reign of **Ramesses II** on stela Cairo J.E 43649 the processional boat of the king appears and in the middle is the naos (61). 2 priests approach the statue to consult him concerning the property of a field. (Cerny,1962). The title used for the king was “*p3 t3y wp(w) m3r*“, a title used also for the oracle of **Amenhotep I** (22).

The oracle of **Amenhotep I** at Deir el Medina includes different subjects as disputes over property and stolen clothes, where he is asked to identify thieves, predict future employment and locating missing items (2). The records from Deir el-Medina confirm the impression that women’s involvement with the oracle was related to property cases in a way, Questions referring to men, however, reflected a wider range of cases, such as promotions and wages (62).

In tomb TT2, a scene depicts a statue of Amenhotep I being carried in a naos by priests with a statue of Amun behind him (63). **In dynasty 22**, there is an oracle scene of Amenhotep I , a case between two servants preserved in Theban tomb no.19 of Amenmose (64). BM Ostrakon 5637, depicts a robbery case laid before Amenhotep I (65).

**Ahmose Nefertari** also played a role in oracles through dreams as during the **Ramesside period**, in one of the letters, Cerny mentions that during the 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the statue of **Ramesses II** in his temple at Abu-Simbel used to assign officials (22). A Hieratic text mentions the assignment of two sons of the king in Kush with the desire of king Ramesses II “*p3 ntr 3*“, a title given to a dead king , which might relate to an oracle through his statue in a procession (66).

## III- Oracles of non-Royal Deified People

**Imhotep**, the architect of the funerary complex of Zoser, deified by the ancient Egyptians in later periods and the **Greco-Roman period**, united with Asclepius, God of healing. This explains his oracles through dreams in relation to healing and prescriptions of medicine. He was addressed as “*mnh ntr*“, healing god as in the inscriptions of **Kalabsha** temple (67). In BM Stela 1027 of the priest *P3sry n Pth* in

reign of **Cleopatra VII**, in **Karnak**, the owner was praying to 8 gods to have a son, Imhotep was one of them addressed by “*wr bi3it*”, great miracle/wonder/oracle. Imhotep promised him in a dream a son only if he carries out building work at the god’s shrine in the necropolis of Memphis. Accordingly, his wife became pregnant when instructions were followed (68).

In the Serapeum, **Saqqara**, the priests of the deified Imhotep were responsible for interpreting oracular dreams for those seeking for healing (42) (69). Oracular dreams as in temples of Amun and Ptah in Karnak (67). In his chapel at the upper terrace of the temple of **Deir el Bahari**, reign of **Ptolemy VIII** (70). In Kalabsha and Philae (PM.VI, pp.211-212, (17).

**Amenhotep son of Hapu**, vizier of king **Amenhotep III**, permitted during his life to build a mortuary temple and to erect his statues in the temple of Amun Ra at Karnak. He was deified during the **Greco-Roman period** and associated with the Greek god Amenotes. He was an oracular god through dreams and also related to healing in **Thebes**. In the temple of **Deir el Bahari**, he shares the upper chapel with Imhotep, an ostrakon in Demotic represents the oracular response to a sick man by prescribing a medicine (67).

## Analysis

**Table 1**

Displaying Oracular Gods in regards to name, form, date, place and subject of consultation

Oracular God	Form of God	Date of Oracular Consultation	Places of Oracular Consultation	Subjects of consultation
<b>Amun</b>	1-- “ <i>Imn-R<sup>c</sup> nsw ntrw p3 ntr 3 wr(n) s3<sup>c</sup> n hpr</i> ”, lord of the gods / , king of the gods. 2- <i>Imn nb nswt t3wy</i> ”, Amun lord of the thrones of the two lands.	New Kingdom.  3 <sup>rd</sup> Intermediate Period	-Thebes (Opet feast- New Year’s feast- Feast of Apep. -Napata - Siwa Oasis	-Political (assigning Royals and officials). -Military and trade campaigns. -Daily life matters like thefts. - Estates - Decrees.
<b>Mwt</b>	“ <i>Mwt wrt nbt isrw nrt 3t wr (n) s3<sup>c</sup> n hpr</i> ”, great Mwt , mistress of <i>Isrw</i> , great goddess , first of creation.	21 <sup>st</sup> -22 <sup>nd</sup> Dynasty	Thebes	Transfer of the royal mummies
<b>Khonsu</b>	“ <i>hnsu m W3st nfr htp</i> ”, Khonsu in Thebes, <i>Nfr htp</i>	21 <sup>st</sup> -22 <sup>nd</sup> dynasty	Thebes- Karnak	Granting years of offices-Decrees-Protection.
<b>Isis</b>	“ <i>3st wrt mwt ntr</i> ”	-19 <sup>th</sup> dynasty - Ptolemaic Period - Roman Period	-Coptos - Abydos - Saqqara -Philae	- Promoting an official. - Cure and healing - Dreams

continued

<b>Serapis</b>		Ptolemaic Period	Abydos	
<b>Bes</b>		Ptolemaic Period	Abydos	
<b>Ptah</b>	“ <i>nb m3<sup>c</sup>t sr.(f) ii ti</i> , “lord of truth, he predicts what will come	New Kingdom till the Byzantine.	-Memphis -Thebes- Karnak -Denderah	
<b>Hathor</b>			Not related to a specific place	Dreams
<b>Horus Khau</b>		21 <sup>st</sup> dynasty		
<b>Horus of the Camp</b>			El Hiba	Disputes over property(cow)
<b>Setekh</b>	“ <i>swth nb wh3t</i> ”.	22 <sup>nd</sup> dynasty	Oasis of Dekhla	Disputes over wells, and land.
<b>Djhouty</b>		Ptolemaic period	Saqqara	Oracles through dreams-related to healing
<b>Sobek</b>	“ <i>sbk nb t3- tn</i> ”.	Greco-Roman	Fayoum	
<b>Ennead</b>		Ptolemaic		
<b>Khnum</b>	“ <i>B3 nb ddt</i> ”.	Ramesside period	Esna	Determining the safe return of people
<b>Hryshef</b>	“ <i>sm3-t3wy nht</i> ”	22 <sup>nd</sup> dynasty		Oracles through dreams.
<b>Sacred bulls(Apis-Buchis-Mnevis)</b>			Kalabsha Esna Medamoud	
<b>Ahmose</b>	“ <i>p3 t3y wp(w) m3<sup>c</sup>t</i> ”	19 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty	Abydos	Disputes over property
<b>Amenhotep I</b>		19 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty-22 <sup>nd</sup> Dynasty	Deir el Medina	Disputes over property, stolen clothes identifying thieves, predicting future employment and locating missing items, promotions and wages
<b>Ahmose Nefertary</b>		Ramesside Period		Oracles through dreams
<b>Ramesses II</b>	“ <i>p3 ntr 3</i> ”	20 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty	Abu-Simbel	Assigning officials-
<b>Imhotep</b>	“ <i>mnh ntr</i> ” “ <i>wr bi3it</i> ”	Later and Greco-Roman periods	Kalabsha Karnak Saqqara Deir el Bahari Philae	Oracles through dreams/ related to healing.
<b>Amenhotep son of Hapu</b>		Greco-Roman Period	Thebes (Karnak-Deir el Bahari)	Oracles through dreams/ related to healing.

## Commentary

In some of the oracular consultations, it seems that Egyptians knew which line of action they should take, all what counted was the god's approval and blessings. The table shows that oracles were more common during the late New Kingdom (Ramesside period), 3<sup>rd</sup> Intermediate period, and the Greco-Roman Periods. This popularity of oracles especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> intermediate period was probably related to increase of corruption in the local courts.

The oracular sources of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty - though limited- express more political matters put forward by royals like that of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, Thutmose IV. Also, occasionally approval of military or trade expeditions. However, in later periods documents are more of juridical nature when personal piety was expressed more explicitly in matters related to everyday life like disputes over property, stolen items and health. Majority of evidence in the Ramesside period and later periods reveals that the petitioners were either officials or low- ranking priests or individuals.

Among the important oracular centers common among gods were Thebes, Abydos, Saqqara, and Philae.

The forms and titles of these gods who gave oracles are sometimes limited to oracular consultation as the one used for Amun “*Imn-R<sup>c</sup> nsw ntrw p3 ntr 3 wr(n) s3<sup>c</sup> n hpr*”.

Oracles through dreams seemed to be common, Hathor, Isis, Djhouti, Hryshef, Ahmose Nefertari, Imhotep, Amenhotep son of Hapu were connected to dream oracles. Such oracles were sometimes related to certain temples where the petitioners would sleep in the temple of the god and the god would appear to him in his sleep inspiring him with an answer. However, in some other cases, oracles through dreams were not restricted to the temple or even the city and could happen in different places, away from the god's main place.

Priests as intermediates to explain the answers of the gods to oracular consultations was questioned by some researchers. Cerny thinks that there is good evidence that this process was done in good faith under the influence of “Suggestion” and “auto Suggestion” (22). However, the possibility of manipulation or error occurred, as in Papyrus Turin 1887, reign of Ramesses IV, in Elephantine shows a charge of falsification of the oracle of Khnum (2).

The place and timing within the temple where the consultation took place is not known for sure. The mention of “*p3 t3 n hq*”, floor of silver, and “*n dw3t*”, in the morning as in Painedjem's inscription in Karnak temple, might give some clue (71). Nims was the 1<sup>st</sup> to identify this floor of silver in the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak which might have been the gateway through the 3<sup>rd</sup> pylon being probably ornamented originally by silver (2) (72). This is also based on Cairo stela no.34025 of Amenhotep III, the builder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> pylon mentioning on the stela that he built a great entrance inlaid with gold and its floor of silver (18). But the place identified was too small for crowd consultation.

Another place suggested by Kruchten for public consultation in the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak- at least during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty- was on the north-south axis bordered by pylons from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> pylon where a lot of the oracular texts of the high priests

of Amun were located. The most recommended could be in the space between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. (34).

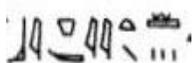
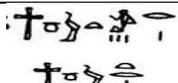
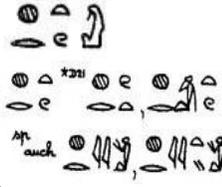
Researcher thinks that the open court between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> pylon provided the space needed for the crowd gathering, and the limit where the public was normally permitted and it suits the “stations of the god” mentioned in texts by being the resting place of the boats. The floor of silver could be another limit for the royals and high priests. The existence of hiding places “Serdabs” in the temples where the oracles were received, might have been used by priests to interpret the oracles. This is shown as in temples of Amun-Ra and Khonsu at Karnak, Luxor temple, Amun’s temple at Siwa, temple of Luxor, Kom Ombo, Kalabsha and Denderah.

21 oracular amuletic decrees were found. Probably the recipients were children for whom their parents’ asked protection. The wish or promise was written on a narrow strip of papyrus and tightly rolled, bound with a flaxen cord and placed in a container made out of either gold, wood or leather according to the financial situation of the devotee (39). The adults may have made some sort of donation to the temple in return for the divine promises.

Oracle petitions could be divided into 2 groups: A New kingdom group written in hieratic on ostraca, and a Graeco-Roman group written on papyrus in either Demotic or Greek (73).

The oracle consultation of deceased royals gave the royals an active role in people’s lives and granted their image the power to take decisions. The oracular power of these dead kings helped to sustain their position in the memory of the people (63).

**Table 2**  
Displaying Hieroglyphic Terms Related to Oracles

Hieroglyphic	Meaning	Examples in Documents
 <i>bi3yt</i> (Wb.I, 440,7-p.441,11, (17))	Miracle/Wonder/Oracle	Ani Papyrus / 18 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty (74). -The coronation text of king Thutmose III (75). -The coronation text of Hatshepsut on the red chapel (76) -Text of high priest Herihor in Khonsu Temple in Karnak
 <i>ndwt-r3</i> (Wb.II, 372,4-6, (17))	Literally meaning “asking a word” - Counsel- advice	Punt text/ Hatshepsut (,Urk.IV, ,342,9-12, (18) Text of Thutmose III, year 23 / Wadi Halfa (77).
 <i>hrtw</i> (,Wb.III, 318, 4, (17))	Oracle	Qadesh battle/Rameses II(,KRI,II, p.115,10, (23) Banishment stela line 4-6

<p><i>h3i</i> Wb.III, 240,4, (17)</p>	<p>Appear, shine in a feast Makes appear, ceremonial transfiguration</p>	<p>BM Papyrus no.10417 / Pianki reign (65)</p>
<p><i>sh3i</i> (Wb.IV, 237,21, (17)</p>		
<p><i>hn / hnn</i> (Wb.II. 494, ff, p.495.7. (17)</p>	<p>To lean/ to agree</p>	<p>Ashmolean Museum 4 r5-6, CG Cairo 25242,25555</p>
<p><i>N h3</i> (Wb.III, 10, (17)</p>	<p>At the back of /unsatisfied</p>	<p>CG Cairo 25555, Geneva MAH 12550 r8-9</p>
<p><i>sr</i> (,Wb.IV, 190-191, (17)</p>	<p>Predicts</p>	<p>Inscriptions of Ptah in Karnak and Denderah .(,Urk.VIII, 138, (18) Inscriptions of the Apis bull in Kalabsha (57) (73).</p>
<p><i>wdt tn</i></p>	<p>A decree (oracular decree)</p>	

### Commentary

*bi3yt* was used since the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty till the Greco-Roman period. Cerny suggested that the god made his bearers move backwards for a negative reaction “*m h3*”, and forward for a positive answer “*hn*” (22) (71).

Oracle consultation of the god seemed to have been associated with the public appearance of the god in the main festivals. Thus, the terms *h<sup>c</sup>i / sh<sup>c</sup>* described this appearance. When the god appeared to the public, maybe in a certain time of the festival people were permitted to ask a question expressed by “*ndwt-r3*”.

The god’s answer to the question is expressed by the movement of the god “*wd3*” whether forward expressed by “*hn*” or backwards by “*m h3*”. “*htp*” related to the putting or the resting of the statue of the god, maybe in the stations made for the boats along the main path of the god on the axis of the temple.

### Conclusion

Study revealed that oracular practice continued without interruption from before the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty till the Roman period. There were several oracular gods in Ancient Egypt, the most important were the Theban triad in Karnak, Amun in Napata and Siwa. Isis, Khnum, Hathor, sacred bulls especially Apis, Horus in some rare forms.

Study revealed that deceased deified royals like Ahmose, Amenhotep I, Ahmose Nefertari, and Ramesses II. Non-royals like deceased Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu also gave oracles especially in the Greco-Roman period. Documents reveal that the consultation was more related to disputes of everyday life. The place where the consultation took place was not in temples on the east bank of the river, but on the west bank in chapels. While oracles through dreams were not necessarily linked with a place.

According to documents collected, Oracular consultation of gods took place in connection with religious festivals. At Karnak; during the Opet festival, New year’s festival, and others. Place could be on the axis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> pylon, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> pylon or the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> pylon or as researcher suggested in the open court between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pylon.

The oracular sources of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty express more political matters put forward by royals like that of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, Thutmose IV. Or approval of military or trade expeditions. However, in later periods documents are more of juridical nature related to disputes over property, stolen items and health.

Oracular Amuletic Decrees were common in the Late Period. There were certain hieroglyphic terms related to oracular consultation; “*bi3yt*” “expressed wonder/miracle/oracle and it was used since the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty till the Greco-Roman period. Moving forward for a positive answer “*hn*” and backwards for a negative one “*m h3*”. “*h<sup>c</sup>i / sh<sup>c</sup>*” “described the god’s appearance in festivals for oracle consultation.



Fig.1: Amun Ra in procession (22)

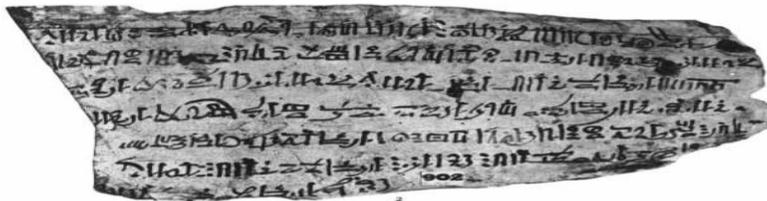
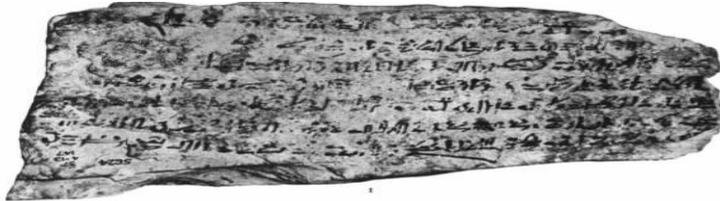


Fig.2: B.M. Ostracon 5624, (65)



Fig.3, pair of Oracle petitions ( Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts , Boston) (51)

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## آلهة الوحي في مصر القديمة

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### الملخص

كان استخدام الوحي شائع في مصر القديمة، حيث كان يمثل الوحي الإلهي جانب هام في المجتمع المصري القديم. تقدم الملوك وغير الملوك الى الألهة في هيئة تمثال تم حملة على أكتاف الكهنة أوقات الأعياد والاحتفالات بغرض استشارته واصدار قرارات في أمور عديدة. طلب الملوك من الألهة الموافقة الإلهية أو النصيحة في اتخاذ قرارات مهمة سواء خاصة بأمر سياسي أو حملات عسكرية أو ارسال بعثات تجارية. أستشار كبار الكهنة والكهنة الصغار الآلهة بخصوص ترقيةهم كما استشار عامة الشعب في أمور خاصة بحياتهم اليومية مثل منازعات على الملكية، سرقات أو معرفة أماكن الأشياء المفقودة. كان يوجد آلهة معينة وملوك مؤلهة وغير ملوك قدسوا في فترات معينة وارتبطوا بالوحي الإلهي. الأكثر شهرة- طبقا للنصوص- ثالوث طيبة: أمون، موت، خونسو، أيضا الثيران المقدسة، بعض الصور النادرة لحورس، أمنحتب الأول، أمحس نفرتاري، والمهندسين أيمحتب وأمنحتب ابن هابو. تهدف الدراسة البحث عن هؤلاء الآلهة المرتبطة بالوحي الألهي في مصر القديمة، أين ومتى تم تقديم الوحي الخاص بهم. تبدأ هذه الورقة البحثية بمقدمة تاريخية عن الوحي في مصر القديمة وبعد ذلك يتم عرض آلهة المرتبطة بها. تقوم الورقة البحثية بتحليل الأماكن وتوقيت الوحي وعرض للمصطلحات المعبرة عن الوحي في اللغة المصرية القديمة. تنتهي الدراسة بمجموعة من الاستنتاجات.

### معلومات المقالة

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