Khonsu

I. Introduction. Egyptian god. Kh. is primarily associated with the →moon and the Theban region. As for Egyptian deities in general, it is rather difficult to describe an exact profile of Kh.’s character and iconography. The deities can be closely associated with other deities, exchanging roles and attitudes. Further, depending on the different cult places, the deities may have several features. Third, Egyptian deities are attested for many centuries, if not millennia, which again may result in alterations and variants.

The god’s name is possibly derived from the verbal root ḫnś “travel around.” Before the mid–2nd mill. Kh. is a marginal deity with negative and even cruel attitudes (CT, spell 310). According to the few attestations within the vast funerary text corpora, he rides the crescent and causes diseases on earth (BRUNNER–TRAUT 1970: 158f). As such he is also able to heal wounds and even delivers occasional support at the tribunal of →Osiris (Papyrus Berlin 3024; CT, spell 335). During the second half of the 2nd mill. the cult of Kh. gained more importance since the god became a favorite addressee of individualized religion (9*, 13*, 17, 29*, 50), called on for salvation from beasts and diseases. His most frequent epithet, Neferhotep “perfect of grace” (17), refers to that fact. He appoints life span to men and gods, and issues oracles. Many personal names are composed with Kh.’s name. According to Kh.’s importance, one of the twelve months of the Egyptian calendar was named after a popular but almost unknown festival, Pakhons.

For certain reasons (moon as nocturnal sun) Kh. has solar features (→Solar deities) and can thus be called Kh.–Re (63; →Re) and Kh.–Shu (17, 24; →Shu; DEGARDIN 2000). At the point at which his popularity turned toward magic, Kh. can be associated or even identified with →Bes (72, 75; MEEEKS 1992: 425–427). It is only in the Ptolemaic period that Kh. is also seen as a creator god (PARKER/LESKO 1988; CRUZ–URIBE 1994; MENDEL 2003).

Usually Kh. is imagined as juvenile, due to his close association with the perpetually renewing moon (CT, spell 563; LABRIGUE 2003). Thus he soon becomes the junior member of the Theban divine family with his parents, →Amon and Mut (18). He is often given the name Kh.–Pakhered “Kh.–the–child” (11). During the late New Kingdom Kh.’s personality tends to split into several Kh.–deities (DEGARDIN 1995). Two of them change their image and are represented as baboons (described in Papyrus London BM 10083; EDWARDS 1960: 1f). Thus the closeness of Kh. to the god →Thot, who is also associated with the moon and characterized by a baboon (→Monkey), becomes obvious. Due to their similar attitude, the two deities are even linked together as Kh.–Thot (77), and share a common iconography.

II. Typology

General remarks. The identification of Kh. is usually clear due to inscriptions; nonepipigraphic sources often have a distinct iconography. Confusion with →Thot, →Re(→Harakhte), →Harpocrates, or →Ptah (TEETER 1989; HERMANN 2006: 96) is sometimes possible. The following typological discussion restricts itself to the 12th–4th cent.

II.1. Phenotypes


A. ANTHROPOMORPHIC

1. Adult Male. Rarely before the 2nd mill. and in later archaic (?) representations, Kh. appears as a human male figure with a short apron (shendyt) and long–haired wig, the face sometimes quite juvenile (1*). Striding (2–3) or sitting (1*, 4) Kh. mainly has the royal →uraeus at his forehead and the crescent and →moon disk combination on his head (1*, 2–4), and appears once with a →star on his head (3). He often wears the gods’ beard (1*, 2–4). His hands typically hold the ankh and was signs, but occasionally other →scepters. Without inscription or archaeological context it is impossible to distinguish Kh. from the personification of the moon, i.e., (→Osiris–) Jah (see statuettes Cairo CG 38029–38044 in: DARESSY 1905: pl. 3f; DARESSY 1906: 12–17; GRAEFE 1994; DOETSCH–AMBERGER 2002).

2. Adolescent Male. As the offspring of a divine couple, Kh. is sometimes represented as a human juvenile. His association with the permanently renewing moon probably contributes to his juvenile iconography.

2.1. With sidelock. Mainly in 1st mill. depictions, Kh. is represented as an adolescent male rather than a little boy, either sitting (5) or striding (6–7). His attributes are a more or less juvenile face, the
sideshow, the moon in one or both shapes on his head (5, 7); in one example the double plume appears instead (6). He is naked (5) or clothed with the ordinary short shendyt apron.

2.2. Harpocrates type. In the second half of the 1st mill. Kh. is identified with popular — Harpocrates, whose iconography he adopts (see statuettes Cairo CG 38124ff in: DARESSY 1905: pl. 8–12; DARESSY 1906: 41–66; explicit identification with Kh. by inscription occurs, for example, on DARESSY 1905: CG 38182 [11], 38202–38203; see also SANDRI 2006: 155f). He is depicted as a standing (8–10), striding (11–12), or sitting (13–15) nude, rather chubby child with one finger in his mouth and a huge sidelock (sometimes without: 12). His head is bald except for a uraeus (8, 12), and he wears one or both moon symbols (13–14, 16), the double crown with uraeus (11), the names headdress with a uraeus and hemhem crown (15), or another composite crown that includes both moon symbols (9*–10).

3. Mummy. For reasons that are unclear, the most popular depiction of Kh. is that of a standing (17–29) or sitting (30–32), rarely squatting (33–34) mummy with a juvenile’s head (in one example an adult with stranded wig: 24), depicted regularly with a sidelock and gods’ beard. Both crescent and moon disk are found on his head, usually added by a uraeus. Prevalently before 1000, only the moon disk or even no moon (confused with Ptah due to missing inscription) is found on his head. Probably depending on the cultic contexts, Kh.’s headdress can be replaced by the atef crown (34), the double plume without sun disk (32), or even a Harhot headdress on a long plain wig (28). The menti necklace is placed around his neck; his hands (exceptions: 20, 25*–26, 28), crossed almost invisibly underneath bandages, hold the two royal insignia and/or the scepter and sometimes additional scepters. The mummy bandages are primarily plain, without any design or coloring. They cover the entire body except the head and hands. In a few cases the mummy bandages are covered with (or replaced by?) the incised or painted wings of a falcon (20, 22*; see BUDGE 1925: 363). This feature is paralleled by many coffins bearing the same decoration.

4. Probable. Some amuletic figurines from the Levant share all features of the mummy form of Kh., hence they probably depict Kh. (35*–36).

5. Possible. A statuette showing a man with short curled hair (or wig), wearing the double crown and uraeus, is identified with Kh. by its publisher (BUDGE 1896: pl. 23:1). Judging only by the photograph, an inscription is missing; the interpretation is thus questionable since the position of the bent left arm, originally with a staff, does not fit the usual Kh. iconography.

B. THIERIOMORPHIC

1. Falcon. In the Hibis temple a falcon with both moon symbols on its head, and sitting on a cube is epigraphically identified with Kh. (37). Kh. is sometimes represented by a falcon’s head with the crescent and/or moon disk on it. In the 1st mill. this type can be found on top of a flag (38*–39). These figures may represent the deity’s symbol rather than Kh. himself.

2. Crocodile. Probably because of a possible identification with the child god Harpocrates, Kh. can be given the features of a crocodile (40). Occasionally the crocodile bears a falcon head (41*), wears the atef crown, and sits on a naos.

3. Baboon. Due to his theological proximity to Thoth, Kh.’s manifestation can be a baboon (→ Monkey). It is depicted either striding (42*) or sitting (43–46), often on a podium, wearing both moon symbols (42*, 46) or the hemhem crown (44–45) on its head. It holds one or two scepters (42*, 46) or the udjat eye (43) in its hands. The sitting baboon can have the head (?) and body of a → falcon (45–46). See also § 4.

4. Possible

4.1. Several uninscribed representations of a sitting or squatting baboon (→ Monkey) with (JACQUET–GORDON 2003: pl. 62:160; BORCHARDT 1930: pl. 123) or without (MONTET 1952a: pl. 3f; MONTET 1952b; KTRAUSPE 1997: 102; LEGRAIN 1909: pl. 49) lunar symbols on its head could represent Kh.’s instead of Thoth’s symbolic animal. Two monumental stone statues portraying baboons are possibly associated with Kh., as suggested by the inscription (MONTET 1952a: pl. 3f; MONTET 1952b). A number of small baboon–shaped figurines and amulets (e.g., Cairo CG 12304–12328, in: REISNER 1907: 165–168, pl. 21; CG 12574–12585, in: REISNER 1958: 7f, pl. 2; HERRMANN 1994: nos. 826–838; HERRMANN 2006: nos. 247, 249–251) may be related to Kh.

4.2. The amuletic figurine of a falcon with both moon symbols on its head found at Megiddo (HERRMANN 1994: no. 863) recalls the Persian period depiction of Kh. in the Hibis temple (see § B.1).

4.3. A uraeus with falcon head and both disk and crescent lunar symbols may represent Kh. (ROEDER 1956: pl. 55r). If
this identification is correct Kh. is accompanied by his mother, Mut, also represented by a uraeus but with a human head.

C. Hybrid

1. Falcon-headed. Kh. has solar aspects and can become Kh.–Re (→Re), a genuine sun god (→Solar deities). He can adopt the features of Re–Harakhte, mainly the falcon head which rests on a striding (47–62; see also Herrmann 2006: no. 90) or sitting (63–64) male body clothed with the shendyt apron, and rarely on an upright (65–67) or squatting (68–69) mummy. In rare examples the falcon head has human ears (60). The falcon-headed male is sometimes clothed in a long, loose garment (51) instead of the usual short apron. Sometimes Kh. holds a long panicle and writes on it (52–53), a feature usually attributed to →Thoth.

1.1. Moon symbols on head. At least one of the symbols of the →moon, the crescent or moon disk, but usually both are depicted on the falcon’s head, mostly accompanied by a →uraeus (47–48, 51–54, 56*–60, 62, 65–69).

1.2. Double plume on head. A close relationship to Re–Harakhte is indicated by the large double plume with integrated →sun disk on Kh.’s falcon head (49, 55, 61, 63). Occasionally the double plume is complemented by two →ram’s horns and one uraeus (50). A double uraeus can be found in this arrangement in one example (64).

1.3. Without headgear. Few representations depict Kh. as standing (73) or sitting (74) falcon-headed male without any attribute. Instead, a large falcon body is attached to the human body. Identification with Kh. is possible only by means of inscriptions.

1.4. Two falcon heads. In magical context Kh. gains the attitudes of a pantheistic deity. He thus shares iconographical elements of other pantheistic deities, including two heads and four wings. The pantheistic Kh. has two falcon heads, and shares one pair of lunar symbols, disk and crescent. The bent arms hold the royal insignia while standing on two crocodiles (75).

1.5. Mummy. Mainly in later periods the very popular representation of the mummy can be combined with the falcon head with the sun (or lunar?) disk on it (76–77). In one instance Kh. holds two →serpents in his hands (77).

2. Ibis-headed. Due to Kh.’s association or identification with →Thoth, he can appear as striding or sitting male with the head of an →ibis, wig, and one or both lunar symbols (→Moon) on his head (78).

These representations are rare before the Hellenistic period.

3. Scarab’s body. A depiction of Kh. representing a sitting male with short hair and →moon disk and crescent upon his head (79) is probably unique. The upper part of is body is replaced by that of a →scarab, possibly because of his solar character; hence he is associated with the sun god (→Solar deities) Khepri.

4. Child with monkey’s tail. Kh. as a squatting, apparently not mummified boy with his finger close to the mouth like →Harpocrates (80) is probably unique. The sidelock is missing, and he wears a crescent and →moon disk on his head. A →monkey’s tail is added to his back, which curls down from the child’s rear. By this means Kh. is associated with his symbol animal, the baboon.

5. Probable. A striding falcon-headed figure (81), probably from Palestine, shares all attributes of Kh. Although the image is identified by inscription with →Ptah–Sokar, a representation of Kh. is very likely (see also Herrmann 1994: no. 265).

6. Possible. A human–headed →sphinx with both moon symbols on its head is engraved on an Iron Age I scarab from Acco (Keel 1997: no. 225). Due to the moon symbols the image possibly represents Kh.

II.2. Associations


General remarks. Although normally attended by certain gods or groups of gods, Egyptian deities can be accompanied by almost every possible deity. This occurs due to the manifold aspects that gods can be associated with. Especially beginning around 500 Kh. can appear within long rows of goddesses and gods (e.g., 24, 28, 42*, 65–67, 73, 79). Only the most important associations will be mentioned below.

A. Anthropomorphic 1. Associated with deities/monsters 1.1. Theban triad. Kh. often accompanies his divine parents, →Amun and Mut, whom he follows in third position (7, 18, 22*, 27, 31, 34, 41*). Kh. is often depicted in the company of only his father (2,
23, 29), sometimes only with his mother nourishing him (16); this posture adopts the iconography of --Isis feeding her son Hor- 26 siese--Harpocrates (Cairo CG 39369–39374; in: Daressy 1905: pl. 63; Daressy 1906: 343f). On occasion the triad is en- 27 large by one or more deities (7, 33; Degardin 1992). In all these scenes Kh. is a passive rather than active member (possi- 28 ble exception: 12).

1.2. Others. Starting with the Persian period the gods’ panthea of the temples link Kh. with several deities (24, 28). These are 29 associated primarily with the Theban gods →Amon and/or Mut, all of them receiving offerings from the →king. Kh. can also be 30 an astronomical god, associated with dozens of other astronomical deities (3).

2. Associated with Humans. Although not always possible, in association with humans one should differentiate between representations of the god himself and representations of the god’s images; the latter are usually associated with nonroyal humans (21).

2.1. King. Playing a →Horus–like role, Kh. can be associated with kingship and the →king himself. Hence there are numerous images depicting Kh. receiving offerings or adoration from the king (6, 32). In these scenes Kh. is an active partici- 33 pant.

2.2. Nonroyal. As a partner of the individualized private religion Kh. is repre- 34 sented along with nonroyal persons, alive or deceased. On stelae Kh. is depicted as receiving adoration in triadic company (29). 35 There are records of theophorous or naophorous statues depicting a private person with images of Kh. (21, 30) or the Theban triad (31, 34) in its hands.

B. Theriomorphic

1. Associated with deities/Demons

1.1. Varia. In the temple of Hibis and other late attestations crocodilian and simian manifestations of Kh. (see §§ II.1.C.2–3) 36 are found within rows of several other deities, mainly receiving offerings from the king (37, 40–46, 76).

1.2. Possible. If the identification of the →falcon–headed →uraeus (see § II.1.B.4.3) with Kh. is correct, it is associated with another cobra representing Mut.

2. Associated with Humans: Nonroyal. Theophorous and naophorous statues of nonroyal persons can bear a baboon (→Monkey) (67). Since the inscriptions make reference to Kh., it likely identifies the animal with the god, since he is an intimate partner of individual religious activity. Also, the manifestation of Kh. as 38 falcon head can be the object of human adoration (see also 38–39).

C. Hybrid

1. Associated with deities/Demons

1.1. Theban triad. No apparent difference can be found between anthropomor- 39 phic and falcon–headed Kh. accompanying his parents (47, 59); in one example he joins his mother Mut alone (68).

1.2. Min and Hathor. Kh. rarely occurs in a rather uncommon triad between →Min and →Hathor (61). If this triad is considered equivalent to the Theban triad, Kh. would be expected to be in the third position.

1.3. Others. Like the anthropomorphic Kh. in Persian and Hellenistic periods, Kh. in his hybrid attitudes can be aligned with several deities (49, 65–67, 73, 75, 77– 40 80).

2. Associated with Humans

2.1. King. Even more than the anthropomorphic representation, →falcon–headed Kh. interacts with the king in several ways: receiving offerings or adoration (49–51, 57, 62–64), holding the king’s hand and giving him the ankhl sign or scepters (54–55), recording regnal years (52), or presenting sed festivals (53). Sometimes additional deities complete the scene (63–64).

2.2. Nonroyal. As part of the Theban triad, →falcon–headed Kh. figures on a cuboid statue of a nonroyal person (68). By that means the piety and personal relationship of believers toward the deities are expressed.

3. Associated with Animals: Crocodile. Representing a pantheistic deity, Kh. is depicted as standing on two →crocodiles (75). This apotropaic element is well known from the so–called →Horus stelae.

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. The earliest attestations of Kh.’s iconography come from late Old Kingdom (2300–2200) reliefs (Jéquier 1940: pl. 21). The vast majority of Kh.’s depictions date from the New Kingdom (1500–1000), when Thebes becomes the capital (2–3, 6, 18–20, 30–32, 47–48, 50–55, 57, 61–64). Contemporarily, Kh. gains more and more importance as a partner of individually performed religion (30–31), which continues throughout the 1st mill. (1*, 4, 8–11, 17, 21, 25*–27, 29, 34–36, 38*–39, 56*, 60, 67, 69–72). Beginning from the Saïte period (7, 12, 65, 78) and throughout the Persian period in Egypt, depictions of Kh. can be found on temples and funerary monuments (22*, 24, 28, 37, 41*–42*,

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73, 79, 81). This development continues (16, 23, 40, 43–46, 49, 66–67, 75–77) to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, during which a great number of representations of Kh. is attested. However, their iconography basically does not change, although some rather rare or even unique figures appear due to the tendency to create universally valid figures.

III.2. Geographical distribution. Originally the god is domiciled in the Theban region, where his well-preserved main sanctuary is found in Karnak (2, 18–19, 21, 29–32, 39, 47–55, 61, 63–64, 68, 74). By the end of the 2nd mill. the trinity of Kh.—deities is transferred from Thebes to Tanis (34, 62), the new capital in the Nile delta (Montef 1952). In addition, Kh. is represented and worshipped in several temples throughout the Nile valley down to Nubia and beyond in the Dakhleh (temple of Deir el-Hagar; Hölbl 2005: 82, fig. 122), Bahariya (7), and Kharga oases (22*, 28, 33, 37, 41†–42†, 73, 79–80). At several locations Kh. has special epithets and postures, but his iconography does not usually depend on a certain cult location. The most important cultic sanctuaries for Kh. are found in the Theban region (3, 6, 17, 57), i.e., the temples in Karnak, Luxor, and along the west bank of the Nile (Medinet Habu [13], Qasr el-Agus). A large number of wall reliefs in these temples and chapels depict Kh. Moreover, almost all temples in Egypt and peripheral locations bear at least a few representations and manifestations of Kh. (e.g., Edfu, Kom Ombo, Tanis, Tukh el-Qaramus, Heraklion [8, 58], Kharga, Bahariya, Musawwarat es-Sufra). The provenance of most bronze and faience figurines and statuettes is unknown, but the majority probably come from the Theban region. Kh. is also most likely attested in Palestine/Israel (35*–36; §§ II.1.B.4.1–2, C.5–6).

III.3. Object types. The attestations of Kh.’s iconography can be divided into two groups: two-dimensional (reliefs [2, 6–7, 18, 22*–24, 28, 32–33, 37–46, 47–55, 57, 61, 63–64, 73, 75–80], paintings [3], stelae [17, 29], graffiti [13], naoi [16, 65–67]), and three-dimensional (statues [12, 19, 21, 30–31, 34, 68, 74], statuettes [1*, 4–5, 8–11, 14–15, 20, 25*–26, 56*, 58, 60], amulets [27, 35*, 36, 69–72†]) monuments. A majority of depictions come from sacred contexts, primarily as part of the wall decoration. Others are to be regarded as votive offerings to the temples or commemorative monuments. The monumental stone statues may be called cult statues (19). Only a few items originate with certainty from royal funerary contexts (3, 57, 62), while others seem to be related to private funeral cults. However, Kh. usually does not figure on other funerary equipment (e.g., papyri, coffins). With some exceptions it is nearly impossible to associate monuments to the profane and daily-life context, such as a mirror (59).

IV. Conclusion. The iconography of Kh. is quite rich and varies in several aspects. As is the general tendency in Egyptian culture history, forms and iconography of Kh. are more and more enriched and elaborated through the 1st mill., the climax of this development being its end in Hellenistic and Roman times. The god can be represented alone as well as linked to and interacting with other divinities and humans. The attestations of his iconography are restricted to the Egyptian Nile valley (with a few exceptions: Nubian Nile valley, Libyan desert), with a focus in the Theban region.

Kh.’s iconographic features do not seem to depend on local historical situations. However, on the functional level of the documents depicting Kh., certain presettings are visible (see Teebet 1989: 145, n. 1). Thus, in royal and cosmological contexts, Kh. appears as a rather ←Horus-like ←falcon-headed god. In his role as addressee of individualized religion, primarily as the offspring of ←Amon and Mut, he prevalently features the mummy with the child’s head. These tendencies can be observed alongside many iconographical details whose appearance has not yet been explained.

V. Catalogue


VI. Selected bibliography

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