

## Onuris

**I. Introduction.** *Egyptian god.* O. was an ancient hunter and warrior god whose main cult center was Thinis in the region of Abydos, and since the 1st mill. Sebennytos in the Delta. Here he was venerated under the form of O.-Shu. In Nubia and Sudan, O. was assimilated into the god Aresnuphis. His divine consort was the lion-goddess Mehyt.

Although the evidence for the cult of O. dates at least to the end of the 3rd mill. when his name appears in private names and priestly titles, almost nothing is known about his functions, mythology, and iconography before the 18th dyn. Even later the bulk of the existing documents collected by JUNKER (1917) is concentrated mainly in the Graeco-Roman Period, in which O. is frequently depicted on the walls of the temples as one of the main actors in the great astral myths related to the eyes of the solar god. A comprehensive study on his iconography is still lacking, and a thorough examination of all the Egyptian pictorial sources on O. would be beyond the limits of this article. For this reason, only a selection of the Egyptian items will be presented here together with the few representations of O. stemming from Palestine/Israel.

**II. Typology.** A number of objects with inscriptions make it possible to define the basic iconographic profile of O. (2\* [cf. also STEINDORFF 1946: nos. 530, 532], 4-5\*, 12-14). Before the Graeco-Roman Period he is always represented in anthropomorphic form. His characteristic feature is the headdress, a flat crown (modium) surmounted by four tall feathers, generally resting upon a short curled wig. In its more detailed representation (8, 12-14) this headdress is peculiar to O. and thus constitutes a key clue for his identification when inscriptions are lacking. A major problem is that the four feathers are often simplified into two double plumes, a headdress that is also worn by other deities. In this case only the combined recurrence of other features ascribable to his iconography may help. The →uraeus (9-10) and/or the →sun disc (2\*) are sometimes added. Another important element is his clothing which, in all the cases where the identification of O. is certain, consists of a long garment. In the finest items it is lavish, composed of a corselet with two shoulder straps patterned with a feather motif (1-2\*), probably intended as a representation of the metal scales of a cuirass, and a long, pleated or embroidered robe, with a superimposed

short kilt (2\*, 4-5\*). Even more schematic renderings try to suggest the rich appearance of this dress with some ad hoc details, such as fringe (4-5\*).

An apparent exception is the Karnak naos (14) where O. wears a short kilt. The naos decoration, made under Sesostrius I (1971-1926), was erased in the Amarna Period and later restored. Although it is impossible to be sure about the identity of the erased god, many details suggest that the representation of O. is a rude and inaccurate reengraving of the stone upon a preexisting depiction of →Amun.

The god usually has the curved divine beard. No beard is visible on some glyptic items (5\*-7\*). Optional ornaments may be the *usekh* collar and a pectoral.

No special features distinguish the iconography of O. from that of O.-Shu or Aresnuphis.

### II.1. Phenotypes

1. HOLDING AN OBJECT (1-3) 1.1. Thrusting a spear (4-8) 1.2. Holding a cord (9-11) 2. ENTHRONED (12-13) 3. STANDING (14-15) 4. POSSIBLE (16) 5. UNLIKELY

#### 1. HOLDING AN OBJECT.

In metal statuettes the object held by O., cast separately, is often missing (1-3). Consequently in such cases it is not always possible to define its nature or the exact pose of O. Known objects held by O. are the spear or lance, and the cord.

**1.1. Thrusting a spear.** This phenotype is related to the function of O. as warrior god and is usually connected to the gods acting as defenders of the supreme order. Their prototype is the god →Horus spearing the serpent →Apophis or the Sethian (→Seth) animals. In figures in the round, O. is represented striding, the right arm raised over his head holding diagonally a long weapon. Both hands – the right one raised, the left grasping the lower part of the spear or lance – hold the weapon (4-8). On a stela in the British Museum (8), an antelope is represented in front of O. on the ground. On statues and statuettes the weapon is often missing, but the presence of the mythological animal on some statue bases (cf. ROEDER 1956: pl. 72h; STEINDORFF 1946: 574, pl. 89) makes it evident that the pose is evoking the mythical role of the divine hero spearing evil.

**1.2. Holding a cord.** Other statuettes depict O. with his left hand holding a dangling cord to his stomach (9; cf. also DARESSY 1905-06: no. 38025) or even holding it in the raised right hand. In this case the cord falls down along his body and passes through his left hand (10-11; cf. also STEINDORFF 1946: no. 532, pl. 65; DARESSY

1905-06: 11f, nos. 38025, 38028, p. 11f, pl. 3). The cord pertains to O.'s ancient role as hunter to use in binding the prey, or perhaps catching it by throwing the rope as a lasso.

**2. ENTHRONED.** The oldest representation of O. enthroned comes from the superstructure of a grave in the necropolis of Abydos dated to the New Kingdom (12). Here O. is accompanied by the goddess Mehyt. The pose is usually standard and does not vary meaningfully through time as compared with the naos from O.'s temple at Sebennytos dated to the 30th dyn. (13): he has the usual wig and headdress, a long garment, a *was* scepter in one hand and an *ankh* sign in the other.

**3. STANDING.** The standard pose of this phenotype shows O. with his left foot forward, wearing the usual wig and headdress, and holding a *was* scepter in one hand and an *ankh* sign in the other (14-15), objects typical of Egyptian deities. The last feature may vary as, e.g., on a stela in Turin (LANZONE 1883: pl. 34:1), where the object held by O. is composed of an *ankh* sign, a *djed* pillar, and a *was*.

**4. POSSIBLE.** On a scarab from Tell el-Far'ah (South) (16) a male figure with four plumes on his head holds with raised hands a lance or other long weapon over his shoulders. Three hieroglyphs at his sides are interpreted by ROWE (1936: 170) as a "crude attempt" to spell the god's name "O." For a very close comparison see a scarab in the Cairo Museum interpreted as "Mentu" by NEWBERRY (1979: 191 no. 14, pl. 41).

#### 5. UNLIKELY

**5.1.** In the so-called "triad groups," one of the two male deities flanking the goddess →Qudshu is sometimes identified with O. This is the case with two stelae, one in Copenhagen (KOEFOED-PETERSEN 1948: 37f, pl. 49; CORNELIUS 1994: 156f, no. BR16, pl. 42), the other in Moscow (HODJASH/BERLEV 1982: 134f, no. 75; CORNELIUS 1994: 58 with fig. 4); a stela-shaped amulet in Athens (CAPART 1942: 239 with fig. 18; CORNELIUS 1994: 108f, pl. 30:RM20); and a pottery mold from Tel Qarnayim (BEN-ARIEH 1983: 72f, pl. 8a; SCHULMAN 1984: 74f; KEEL/SHUVAL/UEHLINGER 1990: 212f, fig. 37; GIVEON 1986: 7-9; CORNELIUS 1994: 103f with fig. 26). All four date to about the same period: the stelae to the 13th cent., the mold to the Late Bronze Age. On a relief from the temple of Mut at Karnak, crypt of Taharqa, c. 700 (→Qudshu 17\*), this type of object – a plaque more than a stela – is represented among the sacred objects offered to the goddess Mut.

The identification with O. is questioned here. Although the standing god on the Copenhagen and the Moscow stelae has a double-feathered headdress and wears a long garment, the wig is long and the chin is adorned with a pointed Asiatic beard. On the Athens amulet as well, the headdress rests on a long wig. In this case the deity wears a curved divine beard but a short kilt. In the mold the deity's headdress is not identifiable nor does he clearly have a beard, and he wears a short kilt. Especially unusual is his pose, i.e., clutching an axe to his chest. No typical feature of the iconography of O. is present in this mold. It is therefore impossible to accept SCHULMAN'S conjecture (1984: 74f) suggesting a possible identification with O. (and not →Baal as erroneously stated by CORNELIUS [1994: 104]). Both pose and axe point instead to representations of a →storm god with a weapon resting on his shoulder (e.g., CORNELIUS 1994: figs. 31a [→Melqart § II.1.A.2.1], b-c [→Melqart 1\*-2\*]; cf. also LOUD 1939: pl. 22:125). As for the three stelae, it would be preferable to consider new candidates, such as the god Sopdu whose iconography fits the one considered here very well (LANZONE 1886: pls. 356:2; 358:1). Furthermore, Sopdu's cult was particularly popular in the more Eastern regions of the Nile Delta (GIVEON 1984: 1107-1110; SCHUMACHER 1988) and he was connected to Eastern foreigners since remote times. This could explain his presence with Semitic deities in this kind of triad. The god to the right of Qudshu in the upper register of the plaque represented on the relief in the temple of Mut at Karnak (→Qudshu 17\*) apparently does not show "Asiatic" features. It could therefore be identified with O., as dubiously suggested by LECLANT (1961: 234). Currently the entire wall is in very bad condition, and we must therefore rely only upon MARIETTE'S (1875: 64, pl. 43) rather inaccurate plate for details (LECLANT 1961: 234). It is therefore preferable on the grounds of my previous observations on the other "triad groups," to classify the Karnak representation among the unlikely representations of O.

**5.2.** The representation of a bearded male figure with a short kilt and a headdress consisting of four tall feathers and two horns on a steatite scarab from Achzib is tentatively interpreted by GIVEON (1988: 28f, no. 12; cf. also KEEL 1997: Achsib no. 90) as a Philistine warrior (as Egyptians represented them) or O. The horns and the short kilt make the latter alternative improbable, although on a bronze statuette in Baltimore (STEINDORFF 1946: no. 532),

identified with O. a pair of ram horns completes the feathered headdress.

**5.3.** HORNUNG dubiously proposes an identification with O. for the god thrusting a spear on a scarab in Basel (HORNUNG/STAEHELIN: 1976: 363, no. 887). However, the moon crescent on his head and the atypical headdress make other candidates more preferable.

**5.4.** Some scholars propose to identify a wonderful gneiss statue from Saqqara (3rd or 4th dyn.), now in the Brooklyn Museum (PORTER/MOSS 1999: no. 802-046-040), with O. or the Libyan god Ha. It represents a standing, bearded deity with the left foot forward, wearing a short round wig and holding a knife in his right hand. However, no certain data support any definite identification with O., Ha, or other deities.

## II.2. Associations

**1. LION-GODESSES.** O. is often represented together with the goddess Mehyt, usually depicted as a woman with the head of a lioness (1, 11, 13; cf. also PORTER/MOSS 1999: no. 801-643-407; ANDREWS 1994: 19). Lioness goddesses in Egypt (and female deities in a more general way) were often interchangeable. Without associated inscriptions it is therefore difficult to ascertain if the goddess depicted with O. is Mehyt, Tefnut, →Sekhmet, →Bastet, or →Hathor. On a scarab from Achzib (4), a goddess is depicted behind O. Her head is unclear, although she looks anthropomorphic.

**2. SHU.** Groups of statues with O. and the god Shu from the New Kingdom are known (PORTER/MOSS 1999: no. 802-000-320).

## III. Sources

**III.1. Chronological range.** No certain representations of O. are known before the 18th dyn. As already stated, the one on the Karnak naos (14), made under Sesostri I (1918-1875), was originally intended as a depiction of →Amun. From the New Kingdom onward O.'s iconography is well attested in Egypt, with a relatively homogeneous distribution of sources through all the periods and a peak in the Graeco-Roman Period (→IDD 2). Its very scant diffusion in Palestine/Israel is until now restricted to two objects dating to the New Kingdom (5\*, 16) and a scarab dating to the 26th dyn. (7).

## III.2. Geographical distribution.

Regarding O.'s representations on objects in museums, a discussion of their geographical distribution is undermined by the frequent lack of any indication concerning their provenance. However, Egyptian monuments (temples and tombs) and the few con-

textualized objects show that O.'s cult was not only present in his specific cult centers (Thisis and Sebennytos), but in many ancient Egyptian sites, especially (though not exclusively) in the south: Tell el-Muqdam, Thebes, Armant, Gebel el-Silsile, Kom Ombo, and others. The two New Kingdom objects from Palestine/Israel (5\*, 16) come from sites very near to the modern Egyptian border, Tell el-'Ajjul and Tell el-Far'ah (South), in that period under the direct administrative and political control of Egyptian pharaohs. Scarab 7 of the 26th dyn. was found at Achzib.

**III.3. Object types.** While in Palestine/Israel depictions of O. are found only on seal-amulets, in Egypt they are attested on a more diverse range of documents: temple and tomb reliefs and paintings, naoi, stelae, statues and votive statuettes, amulets, scarabs and seals.

**IV. Conclusion.** A strong impetus to the diffusion of O. was given by the 18th dyn. kings, who had a predilection for the icon type of the god holding a spear or cord. The Copenhagen bronze statuette 1 shows the intimate relation between O. and Amenophis III (1426-1400), who wrote his name on the corselet using the eye in place of the sun-disc, a possible allusion to O. The two-sided decorated plaque 4 from the middle of the 18th dyn. joins the decoration of O. thrusting a spear on one side with the king on his chariot shooting enemies with his bow on the other side. The inscription behind O. calls him "the one who smites Naharin [i.e., the Mitanni]" and gives the god, who is spearing the mythical enemy, the typical epithet of Horus, "strong of arm." The plaque compares closely with a plaque from Tell el-'Ajjul (5\*), which has →Amun in place of the king on the opposite face. A reading of this icon type against the background of the imperialistic Egyptian expansion in the Late Bronze Age is, of course, obvious and supported by the mention of the wars with Naharin on the plaque from Basle (4).

The evidence from Palestine/Israel, consisting of two scarabs (7\*, 16) and a plaque (5\*) decorated with O. thrusting a spear, uniquely concerns the private sphere. In this ambit the motif clearly had an apotropaic-protective function against every kind of enemy, granting the victory to the carrier of the amulet. It is possible that this icon type was spread among the soldiers of the Egyptian army in the Levant. The possibility of a further symbolic context, viewing O. more as a hunter than a warrior, must not be neglected, particularly for metal

statuettes which until now were however found only in Egypt.

Regarding the motifs of the enthroned and standing O., their evidence is usually restricted to the ritual sphere, namely the decoration of Egyptian temple and tomb walls or the representation of the cult statues of O. This explains why no items of these types are known from Palestine/Israel.

#### V. Catalogue

1 Statuette, bronze, 1403-1365 (Amenophis III). JØRGENSEN 1998: no. 143 **2\*** Statuette, bronze, 12.9 cm, 664-343 (26th-30th dyn.). Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, 54.2064. STEINDORFF 1946: no. 529, pl. 83 **3** Statuette (amulet), silver, Egypt, 1070-712 (Third Intermediate Period). ANDREWS 1994: fig. 38d **4** Plaque, steatite, 1479-1353 (Thutmosis III–Amenophis III). HORNUNG/STAEHELIN 1976: no. 662 **5\*** Plaque, enstatite, 17 x 13 x 5 mm, Tell el-'Ajjul, 1479-1353 (Thutmosis III–Amenophis III). London, British Museum (WAA), L.1032. PETRIE 1933: pl. 4:193; GIVEON 1985: no. 123; \*KEEL 1997: Tell el-'Ağul no. 554 **6** Scarab, Nebesheh (Eastern Delta), 664-525 (26th dyn.) PETRIE 1888: pl. 8:46 **7\*** Scarab, enstatite (?), Achzib, 664-525 (26th dyn. p.c. O. KEEL). Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority, 48-596. KEEL 1997: Achsib no. 43 **8** Stela, limestone, 380-343 (30th dyn.). BUDGE 1909: no. 937 **9** Statuette (amulet), bronze, 664-343 (26th-30th dyn.). ANDREWS 1994: fig. 12b **10** Statuette, bronze, 7th cent., provenance unknown. ENDRODI 1980: 9-16 **11** Statuette, bronze, 664-343 (26th-30th dyn.). MOGENSEN 1930: I 25 **12** Block (from a tomb), limestone, Abydos, 1539-1075 (New Kingdom). FRANKFORT 1928: pl. 23:1 **13** Relief (on naos), Sebennyto, 380-343 (30th dyn.). ROEDER 1914: 47f, inv. no. 70015, no plate (the naos on pl. 14 erroneously labelled "70015" is inv. no. 70012). PORTER/MOSS 1934: 43 **14** Relief (on naos), granite, Karnak, 1300 (end of the 18th dyn.). PILLET 1923: fig. 3 **15** Statue (upper part), granite, Tell el-Muqdam, 945-713 (22nd dyn.). KAMAL 1906: 236f; PORTER/MOSS 1934: 38 **16** Scarab, frit, Tell el-Far'ah (South), 1292-1075 (19th-20th dyn.). STARKEY/HARDING 1932: pl. 48:4; ROWE 1936: no. 710

#### VI. Selected Bibliography

LANZONE 1883: 75-79 • JUNKER 1917 • BONNET 1952: 545-547  
• SCHENKEL 1982

*Maria Carmela Betrò*

## Bibliography

- ANDREWS C., 1994, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, London.
- BEN-ARIEH S., 1983, A Mould for a Goddess Plaque: *IEJ* 52, 72-77.
- BONNET H., 1952, *Realexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin.
- BUDGE E.A.W., 1909, *A guide to the Egyptian galleries (sculpture)*. British Museum, London.
- CAPART J., 1942, *Les livres: Chronique d'Égypte* 18, 226-252.
- CORNELIUS I., 1994, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Baal (OBO 140)*, Fribourg/Schweiz-Göttingen.
- 2004, *The Many Faces of the Goddess. The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qadeshet and Asherah c. 1500-1000 BCE (to appear)*.
- DARESSY G., 1905-06, *Statues de divinités (Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire; vols. 28-29, nos. 38001-39384)*, Le Caire.
- ENDRODI J., 1980, *Statue de bronze d'Onouris et de Mekhit: Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 55, 9-16.
- FRANKFORT H., 1928, *The Cemeteries of Abydos: Work of the Season 1925-26: JEA* 14, 235-245.
- GIVEON R., 1980, *Resheph in Egypt: JEA* 66, 144-150.
- 1984, *Art. Sopdu*, in: *LÄ V*, 1107-1110.
- 1985, *Egyptian Scarabs from Western Asia from the Collections of the British Museum (OBO. Series Archaeologica, 3)*, Fribourg-Göttingen.
- 1986, *Remarks on the Tel Qarnayim goddess: Biblische Notizen* 33, 7-9.
- 1988, *Scarabs from Recent Excavations in Israel (OBO 83)*, Fribourg/Schweiz-Göttingen.
- HODIASH S./BERLEV O., 1982, *The Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, Leningrad*.
- HOPE C., 1998, *From the Sands of The Sahara: Ancient Kellis and Its Texts: Monash University Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt, Exhibition catalogue, Monash – Victoria*.
- HORNUNG E./STAEHELIN E., 1976, *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen*, Mainz.
- JØRGENSEN M., 1998, *Catalogue Egypt. Copenhagen*.
- JUNKER H., 1917, *Die Onurislegende*, Wien.
- KAMAL A., 1906, *Rapport sur quelques localités de la Basse-Égypte: Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 7, 232-240.
- KEEL, O., 1997, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Katalog Band I: Von Tell Abu Farag 'Atlit (OBO Series Archaeologica, 13)*, Fribourg-Göttingen.
- KEEL O./SHUVAL M./UEHLINGER C., 1990, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina-Israel I (OBO 67)*, Fribourg/Schweiz-Göttingen.
- KOEFOD-PETERSEN O., 1948, *Les stèles égyptiennes*, Copenhagen.
- LÄ = HELCK W./WESTENDORF W., eds., 1975-1992, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols., Wiesbaden.
- LANZONE R.V., 1883, *Dizionario di mitologia egiziana, I*, Torino.
- LECLANT J., 1961, *Montouemhat, quatrième prophète d'Amon, Prince de la ville, Le Caire, = Institut français d'Archéologie orientale. Bibliothèque d'étude, t. XXXV*.
- LOUD G., 1939, *The Megiddo Ivories (OIP 52)*, Chicago.
- MAIER W.A., 1986, *Aserah: extrabiblical evidence (HSM 37)*, Atlanta.
- MARIETTE A., 1875, *Karnak: étude topographique et archéologique avec un appendice comprenant les principaux textes hiéroglyphiques découverts ou recueillis pendant les fouilles exécutées à Karnak, Leipzig*.
- MOGENSEN M., 1930, *La collection égyptienne de la Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg*, Copenhagen.
- NEWBERRY P.E., 1979, *Ancient Egyptian Scarabs. An Introduction to Egyptian Seals and Signet Rings*, Chicago.
- PETRIE W.M.F., 1888, *Nebesheh (Am) and Defenneh (Tahpanhes)*, London.
- 1933, *Ancient Gaza: Tell el Ajjul (BSAE 55)*, London.
- PILLET M., 1923, *Le naos de Senouert Ier: Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 23, 143-158.
- PORTER B.R./MOSS L.B., 1934, *Topographical bibliography of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs, and paintings, Vol. IV, Lower and Middle Egypt*, Oxford.
- 1999, *Topographical bibliography of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs, and paintings, (ed. By J. Malek), vol. VIII*, Oxford.
- ROEDER G., 1914, *Naos. (Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire; vol. 75, nos. 70001-70050)*, Leipzig.
- ROWE A., 1936, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum, Le Caire*.
- SCHENKEL W., 1982, *Art. Onuris*, in: *LÄ IV*, 573-574.
- SCHULMAN A., 1984, *On the Goddess Plaque Mould from Tel Qarnayim: Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 14, 74-80.
- SCHUMACHER I.W., 1988, *Der Gott Sopdu, der Herr der Fremdländer*, Göttingen.
- STARKEY J.L./Harding L., 1932, *Beth-Pelet II (BSAE 52)*, London.
- STEINDORFF G., 1946, *Catalogue of the Egyptian sculpture in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore*.