The God Bak “Bṣk” in Ancient Egypt

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KEYWORDS

Bṣk
Moringa Tree,
Shiny

ABSTRACT

Ancient Egyptian religion, which arose somewhere in prehistory, was founded on the beliefs and ceremonies surrounding the ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses. The Egyptians supported and appeased these deities who represented natural forces and phenomena through offerings and ceremonies in order for these forces to continue to function. This paper investigates the god Bṣk, whose name is associated with the determinative of a tree, especially the Moringa tree which was known in ancient Egypt as "bṣk" and its significance came to the fore through its connections to some of the gods, is inscribed in several objects, tombs and temples dated back to the New Kingdom, onwards. The main purpose of this article is to trace and analyse the scenes and inscriptions related to that particular god, to better understand his forms, functions, titles and his relationship with other deities. It also aims to detect the relationship between the god’s name and the Moringa tree. In spite of the lack of references that deals directly with the god Bṣk, the study resulted in specific important conclusions including the name forms of the deity and their relationship with the Moringa tree, in addition to the deity’s forms and relationship with other deities. The analytical and descriptive methodology will be employed.

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1. Introduction

The Moringa tree (Faulkner, 1962, p. 78), Bṣk Sethe, 1909, p. 73 (17)) is known to flourish in arid and hot climates and is considered one of the fastest-growing trees, reaching a great height in few years. Because the Moringa tree's leaves contain anti-oxide substances, it has a high nutritious value. Its seeds contain oil (Faulkner, 1962, p. 78), (Urk. IV, p. 1143), known also as Bṣk, is determined in Arabic as ben oil and is marked by its ability to retain fluidity at low temperatures. The liquid is colorless and transparent, and it is used in the production of hair care products as well as machine lubricant.

During the New Kingdom, this tree appeared as bṣk (Wb, I, 1926, p. 423) which is translated as ‘oily’, ‘shiny”, or ‘bright” (Faulkner, 1962, p. 78), as in someone’s writings called “Anini” in his tomb in Thebes, which dates back to the reign of King Thuthmose I (Urk. IV, p. 73). The

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The tree has modern medical value since it aids in the treatment of a variety of maladies, including blood anaemia and heart disease, as well as brain and nervous system disorders. Its religious significance arose from its affiliation with certain gods, such as the god "Ptah," and it was also associated with a number of other gods, such as "Horus", "Seth" and "Thoth". Moringa oil is also used in the perfume industry, as well as for medicinal purposes.

2. Literature reviews

The god Baka’s name and iconography has been illustrated in the tombs, temples and even funerary objects dated back from the New Kingdom onwards.

2.1 The God’s Iconography and Inscriptions in the Tombs of New Kingdom

2.1.1. Tomb of Khaemouaset, VQ44

In the side-chamber to the right, the prince Khaemouaset appears standing in adoration (fig. 1), in front of the god Baka, who appears as an ibis-headed god followed by a naked falcon-headed god Hr-m-nhn “Horus of Nekhen”. Campbell (1910, p. 39) considered Baka as being another form of the youthful Horus, son of Isis”; the god Horus of Nekhen. The two gods Baka and Hr-m-nhn are declared to be honoured as “The sons of Horus” (Abitz, 1986, p. 15). The inscription reads ρινικαί οι όνειροι του Οσυρίου “Words spoken by Baka”.

2.1.2. Tomb of Nefertari, VQ 66

The god Baka is depicted as a crocodile-headed god with a knife in his hand, seated in a gate (fig. 2) (Goedicke, 1971, pl. 81), as being the hunter of the third gate sbh (Faulkner, 1962, p. 220) of the heart mats ‘insolent’ wrd lh (Faulkner, 1962, p. 64) of Osiris domain (Leitz, 2002, LGG, II, p. 744).

2.1.3. The Theban Tomb of Senenmut TT. 353

The Inscription in the west wall of Chamber A, south section (fig. 3), in the tomb of Senenmut, inscribes the name of the god Baka as being: ḫ nb m nfrw.f “The god Baka of the two lands who cleans up ‘removes’ the ruins”.

2.2. The God’s Inscriptions in Funerary Objects

2.2.1. The Theban Funerary Papyrus BD. II.1, British Museum (BM, no. 9992)

Owner: (Niwinski, 1989, p. 5) Date: Middle or Late 21st Dynasty, the Third Intermediate Period

Formal Features: Size: H. 26.7 cm, L. 0.55m. Colours: Black and red.

Inscription: (fig. 4) Baka r ṭwy ntr ḫr w nb “The god Baka of the two lands, who cleans up ‘removes’ the ruins (LGG II, p. 744)

2.2.2. The Egyptians’ Book of the Dead (Based on the Hieroglyphic Papyrus in Turin):

The god Baka is depicted in this papyrus as a Ram-headed god, armed with two knives, and standing next to the gate (fig. 5) (Lepsius, 1842, pl. 62 (10); LGG II, p. 744).

The inscription related to the god reads ρινικαί οι όνειροι του Οσυρίου “Words spoken by Baka”.

2.3. The God’s Iconography and Inscriptions in the Temples:

2.3.1. The Temple of Edfu

In a scene in the Enclosure Wall, Western Wall, External Face, the king appears in front of Horus and Hathor (fig. 6), the inscription in front of the god Horus displays a name given to the god Horus of Behdet Hr-Bhdyt in a ritual scene of God’s sacrifice htp-ntr, as being ρινικαί οι όνειροι του Οσυρίου (Chassinat, 1932, p. 69 (19); Chassinat, 2008, pl. CLXVII) Baka “Who illuminates the land with its perfection” (LGG II, p. 744)

In a scene in the Court, Southern Wall, East section, the king appears in front of the god Horus.
and The Fourteen ki (fig. 7), in a ritual scene of ‘Praising the God dw3 nfr’, the inscription in front of one of them reads:  

\[\text{Chassinat, 1960, pl. CXVII.} \] Bkhw Hr “The light house of Horus; Edfu” (Chassinat, 1930, p. 181; LGG II, p. 744.).

An inscription in the Pylon, basement indicate a name given to the god Horus-Re as being “Bk kch” who saved Egypt from the harm” (LGG II, p. 744.)

The inscription reads: \[\text{BAq} \] Bk Bkty ir(y) idt “The Egyptian Bk who act against the famine” (Chassinat, 1933, pl. CLXXIX).

### 2.3.2. The Temple of Esna

In a scene in the western interior wall, seven persons with human heads, and one with a monkey head are depicted surmounting a ram-headed figure and praising him (fig. 8) (Sauneron, 1975, p. 198-199); the god Bk is mentioned in front of the second person with a human head as being \[\text{BAq} \] Bk nfrw n ti (LGG II, p. 744) “Bk the beauty of the land”. The god is mentioned again in front of the third person with a human head as \[\text{BAq} \] Bk wy.fy hri (nfr) dw3 it (nfrw) (Sauneron, 1975, p. 198-199). “Bk the very great upon the god (and) praising the father of the gods” (LGG II, p. 744).

An inscription in the hypostyle hall, in the 14th column of an inscription of the festivals and processions of the last days of the month of Athyr, located in the hypostyle hall, probably during the date of Hadrien, the name of the god Bk-Bkty “Who allows Egypt to be safe”, is included in the epithet of the god Khenum as being: \[\text{BAq} \] Bk Bkty hwi st-wrt “The Egyptian Bk who is defending the sacred place”.

In another inscription, in the hymn of the goddess Neith, located also in the hypostyle hall, probably during the date of Trajan, specifically in the 13th column, the name of the god Bk is inscribed as a description of the goddess Neith: \[\text{BAq} \] (Sauneron, 1975, III., p. 18-19) Bk pt m m3wt mt irty.sy “Bk the heaven (that) shines through the rays of her two eyes” (LGG II, p. 744.).

### 2.3.3. The Temple of Karnak

In a scene in the Propylon of Khonsu Temples, Bab el Amarna, king Ptolemy III Eurgretes I is depicted in front of the god Khonsu and the goddess Hathor (Clère, 1961, pl. 5). The god Bk’s name appears within the titles of the god Khonsu (fig. 9), which are inscribed in the front of him as being:

\[\text{BAq} \] Bk m tpt Nwn “I am Bk who comes from the cave tpt of Nun (LGG II, p. 744)”.

In a scene in the Propylon in front of the Temple of Montu, Ptolemy III Eurgretes I and Berenike are depicted in a ritual scene, offering incense snr to the god Montu (Sethe, 1957, 69). Behind the god Montu, the name of the god Bk Msq Imn is translated as “The one with shiny fur”, or “The one with a leather-like skin(?)” (LGG II, p. 744). This name appeared in the titles of the god Montu as being:

\[\text{BAq} \] Bk Msq Imn hsmn hr idb Wsr Tnpw m irw.sn k3 rn.sn n Mntw nb Ws’t “Bk the one with shiny fur, the patron upon the river-bank of Osiris and Anubis in their soul form and their name as Montu lord of Thebes”.

### 2.3.4. The Temple of Dendara

In a scene in the Osirian Chapel (Eastern), the third register, lintel, and exterior frame, The Right-Side of the Lintel depicts the seated god Osiris, who appears facing the goddess Nephthys, the god Shu, the goddess Tefnut and the god Atum, respectively (fig. 10, 11) (P. Koemoth, 1994, p. 252-256). The god Bk is mentioned on line 21 of the hieroglyphic inscription in front of the god Atum as being: \[\text{Cauville,1997, p. 184} \] Bk hri Wsrt s.k di.n.k sw “The god Bk (who is) from Osiris; protecting you, (which) he has given to you”.

In a scene in the Osirian Eastern Chapel No. 3, Western Doorway, First Register:

The god Bk appears in this scene in a Hieracocephale form; as a falcon-headed form. He is seen holding a knife on his right hand and a w3s scepter on his left. The god Bk is depicted followed by three lions and a bull, who are leaning on a s meaning with their front paws, by which they

In a scene in the western Crypt No. 2, chamber A, west wall, the king is displayed playing with two sistrums in front of the goddess Hathor and the god Ihy, in a ritual scene (fig. 13). The inscription in front of the god Ihy depicts the patron god Bšk as being: Bšk-Hr nṯrw m ḫtp.s (Chassinat, 1965, p. 115, pl. DXLIV, LGG II, p. 744) “The god Bšk-Horus in whose the gods are safe”.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1 The Name and Titles of Bšk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Form (Determinate)</th>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❧, ❧, (nht Tree)</td>
<td>New Kingdom</td>
<td>VQ44, VQ66, TT353.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❧, (nht)</td>
<td>Third Intermediate Period</td>
<td>Theban Funerary Papyrus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❧, (nht)</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Egyptians’ Book of the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❧, (bš Soul / nht Tree)</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Edfu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❧, (dhr Shiny Leather (skin))</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Esna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❧, (hr r Flower/ ḫt tree, wood)</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Karnak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the previous table, the Moringa tree religious significance arose from its affiliation and association with certain gods, especially the god BAq; whose name has been depicted in several inscriptions with different determinatives, but the most common determinative is that of the Moringa tree, as ❧, ❧, ❧, ❧, ❧, and ❧. During the New Kingdom, this tree appeared as bšk ❧, which is almost the same name form the god appeared with during the New Kingdom ❧, except for the determinative of a seated god. This tree appeared as bšk which is translated as ‘oily’, ‘shiny”, or ‘bright”. The god’s epithets have also appeared in Esna as “Bšk (who) shines”, in Karnak as “Bšk the one with shiny fur”, and his name also appeared with the determinative of dHr “Shiny Leather (skin)”. On this regard also the god has also appeared with the epithet of “BAq Who illuminates the land”; another metaphor for the word ‘bright’.

As for the wood of the tree, it has been inscribed as bAq ❧, and the god’s name form as ❧, is depicting the same determinative of ❧ “wood”.

It is notable that the god’s name form has never been inscribed as ❧ Bšk; one of the notable name forms of Moringa tree.

The god’s name has been inscribed mostly during the Graeco-Roman period. The god’s name has appeared in the New Kingdom tombs with the determinative of a seated god; and it has never been inscribed that way in the Graeco-Roman temples.

The unusual name forms of the god: In Karnak the god’s name is inscribed as ❧, ❧, in Dendara as ❧, ❧, ❧, while in Esna as ❧.

The word bšk ❧, sometimes refers to ‘white’ or even ‘innocent’.

3.2. The Titles of Bšk:
Table 2

The title of $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ in different era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title (Determinative)</th>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Tomb of Nefertari:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The hunter of the third gate (sbh$\text{t}$) of the heart mats ‘insolant’ wr$\text{d}$ $\text{ib}$ of Osiris domain”.</td>
<td>New Kingdom</td>
<td>Queens’ Valley, n°. 66, TT. n°. 353.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb of Senenmut</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ of the two lands who cleans up ‘removes’ the ruins”.</td>
<td>Third Intermediate Period</td>
<td>Theban Funerary Papyrus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Egyptians’ Book of the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Who illuminates the land with its perfection”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>“Who illuminates the land with its perfection”.</td>
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<td>Edfu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“B$\text{i}$k the very great upon the god (and) praising the father of the gods”.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ who cleans up ‘removes’ the ruins”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k who comes from the cave $\text{tp}$ $\text{h}$ of Nun”.</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Karnak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“B$\text{i}$k the heaven (that) shines through the rays of her two eyes”.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k (who is) from Osiris, protecting you, (which) he has given to you”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k-Horus in $\text{H}$t-$\text{nbw}$ ‘Dendera’”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k-Horus in who’s the gods are safe’.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the previous table, the most repeated epithet of the god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ is “The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ of the two lands who cleans up ‘removes’ the ruins”. This epithet has been inscribed during the New Kingdom, Third Intermediate Period, and during the Graeco-Roman era.

“The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ of the two lands; $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k r t$\text{i}$wy” is an epithet that seems to be coherent to $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$’s names. The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}\text{k}$ and the physical property of illuminating, brightening as “a lighten house” and shining are actually placed in parallel with the god’s features. He is described as being ‘B$\text{i}$k the one with shiny fur’, which might reveal his physical aspect of illumination.

B$\text{i}$k the patron deity, appears in Karnak and Dendara; “The patron upon Osiris and Anubis”, and “The god $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k (who is) from Osiris; protecting you”.

B$\text{i}$k who saved Egypt from the harm, is detected from the epithets of “The Egyptian $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k who act against the famine”, and “The Egyptian $\text{B}$$\text{i}$k who is defending the sacred place”.

The fearful and violent physical aspect of B$\text{i}$k is revealed in the epithet of “The hunter of the third gate (sbh$\text{t}$)”.

3.3. Deities Associated with B$\text{i}$k:

Depending on this study, it is clear that the god B$\text{i}$k is associated with god Horus as one god “B$\text{i}$k-$$\text{H}$r” in $\text{H}$t-$\text{nbw}$ “Dendera”, and has an important role with him.

The Relationship between B$\text{i}$k and other deities could be detected in his epithets:

– Neith: “B$\text{i}$k the heaven (that) shines through the rays of her two eyes”.
– Nun: “I am B$\text{i}$k who comes from the cave $\text{tp}$ $\text{h}$ of Nun”.
– Osiris: “The hunter of the third gate of Osiris domain”, “The god B$\text{i}$k (who is) from Osiris; protecting you”.
3.4. The Figures of B3k:

a. A Crocodile-headed god as in the tomb of Nefertari. B3k is depicted as a crocodile-headed god with a knife in his hand, seated in a gate (fig. 2). This might show some assimilation between the god B3k and the crocodile-headed god Sobek.

b. An Ibis-headed god as in the tomb of Khemouaset where god B3k appears as an ibis-headed god (fig. 1), followed by a naked falcon-headed god _Hr-m-nhn_ “Horus of Nekhen. This might show some assimilation between the god B3k and the ibis-headed god Dhwty.

3.5. The Relationship between BAq and Other Deities:

- **Horus**: god B3k is declared by C. Campbell as being another form of the youthful “Horus of Nekhen” or the two gods B3k and _Hr-m-nhn_ are declared to be honored as “The sons of Horus” (fig. 1). B3k could also be another form of the god “Horus of Behdet” in Edfu; as B3k’s name has been given to him in a ritual scene (fig. 6). B3k’s name has also been inscribed as the lighten house of Horus, in Edfu (fig. 7).

- In Dendera, the god B3k is associated with god Horus as god “B3k- _Hr_”.

- **Osiris**: in Dendera, the god is declaring himself in an epithet as being originated from the god Osiris, and as being the hunter of the third gate of Osiris domain, in another epithet in the tomb of Nefertari.

- **Khnum**: In Esna, the name of god B3k is inscribed in the epithet of the god khnum as being “The Egyptian B3k who is defending the sacred place”.

- **Khonsu**: in Karnak, B3k’s name appears within the titles of the god Khonsu (fig. 9), that are inscribed in front of him as being “I am B3k who comes from the cave _tpht_ of Nun”.

- **Montu**: in Karnak, the name of god appeared in the titles of the god Montu as being “The one with shiny fur”.

- **Ihy**: in Dendera, the name of the god appeared in the titles of the god Ihy (fig. 13) as being ‘god B3k-Horus in who’s the gods are safe’ 3.

The Relationship between B3k and other deities.

References


**Figures**

**Figure 1.**

Khaemouaset in adoration, in front of the God Bīk and the Hor-em-Nekhen

Figure 2.
The Third and Fourth Door of the Domain of Osiris, Tomb of Nefertari.
After, H. Goedicke – G. Thausing, Nofretari: eine Dokumentation der Wandgemälde ihres Grabes, Graz, 1971, pl. 81.

Figure 3.
Inscription of the West Wall of Chamber A, South Section, Tomb of Senenmut TT. 353.
Figure 4.
Theban Funerary Papyrus BM. 9992
After, A. Niwinski, Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11th and 10th centuries B.C., Universitätsverlag Freiburg - Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989, pl. 7a

Figure 5.
The Hieroglyphic Papyrus in Turin.
After, R. Lepsius, Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter: nach dem Hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin, Leipzig, 1842, pl. 62 (10)
Figure 6.
Edfu Temple, Enclosure wall, Western wall, External face.

Figure 7.
Edfu Temple, Enclosure wall, Western wall, External face.

Figure 8.
Western Interior Wall, Esna Temple.
Figure 9.
The Propylon of Khonsu Temples in Karnak. 
After, *LD IV*, p. 13e

Figure 10
Dendera, Osirian Chapel (Eastern), Third Register, Lintel, Exterior Frame. 

Figure 11
Dendera, Osirian Chapel, Right-Side of the Lintel Depiction. 
Figure 12

Dendara, Osirian Eastern Chapel No. 3, Western Doorway, First Register.

Figure 13

Dendara, Western Crypt No. 2, Chamber A, Western Wall