

BAST

Kemetic Netjert

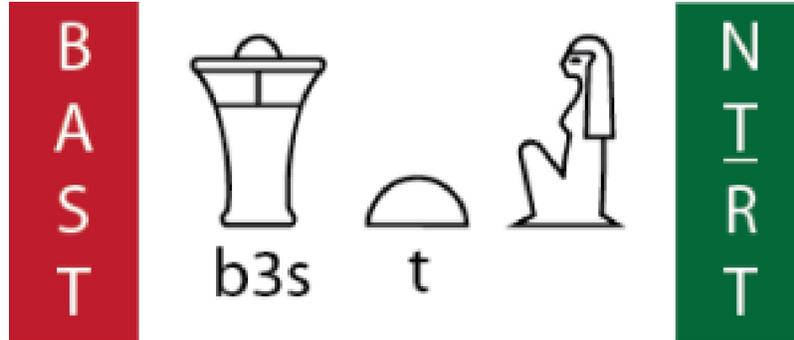
BAST: KEMETIC NETJERT

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Web: chaineddolls.com
Contact: amasbury@twc.com

Part 1: The Name



The hieroglyph for Bast consists of three elements:

1. Bas-jar (heavy and valuable jars in Kemet which were used to store perfumes, oils, ointments)
2. Bread (represents the feminine ending “t” - Sekhmet, Wadjet, Auset, Nekhbet, etc.)
3. Lioness-headed Netjert. Unfortunately, the hieroglyphic font I have doesn’t include a lioness-headed Netjert, so I’ve used the seated women hieroglyph

Bast means “She of the bas-jar”, “She of the ointment jar”, “Female of the ointment jar”, etc. The following titles reflect her association with the bas-jar:

1. Lady of the Ointments
2. Netjert of Perfumes and Oils
3. Perfumed Protector

The oil jar gives an association with perfume which is strengthened by the fact that she was thought to be the mother of Nefertem (who was a god of perfume). Thus her name implies that she is sweet and precious, but that under the surface lay the heart of a predator. - Jenny Hill

Note: Nefertem/Nefertum/Nefer-temu is the son of Ptah and Sekhmet but sometimes listed as the son of Ptah and Bast. He’s also sometimes listed as a sibling of Maahes (son of Bast). Some believe Maahes is an aspect of Nefertem.

A few sources have Bast meaning “Devourer”, “Devouring Lady” and “Tearer”. These terms/phrases have been used as epithets for Bast.

Each translation of her name casts Bast in a very different light. On the one hand she is the Devourer or Tearer, a fierce avenging goddess, while as She of the Ointment Jar, Bast is the goddess of pleasure and joy. - Stephanie Woodfield

Her name could be translated as “Devouring Lady”. However, the phonetic elements “bas” are written with an oil jar (the “t” is the feminine ending) which is not used when writing the word “devour”. - Jenny Hill

Pronunciation

Pronunciation of Kemetic terms vary. The main reason for this is the Ancient Kemites didn’t write vowels. I’ve heard everything from Best, Bist, Bust, Bohst, Bost as a pronunciation for Bast.

The pronunciation I use for Bast is the same as found in the essay “[Pronunciation of “Bast” and “Netjer”](#)” by S. D. Cass (Bahst, as in lost but with the “o” sounding like “ah” - lasht).

You can find more information regarding the pronunciation of Kemetic terms in the article “[The Pronunciation of Ancient Egyptian](#)”.

The Greeks

Bast has always been a Sun Netjert. It wasn’t until the Greeks occupied Kemet and connected her with Artemis that she became associated with the Moon. Ancient Greeks referred to Bast as “The Egyptian Artemis”. Her other Greek name was Ailuros.

Gata is Greek for cat, but ancient Greek words such as ailurophobia (fear of cats) are derived from the name Ailuros which was the Greek name for the ancient Egyptian goddess Bast. The ancient Greeks saw Bast as a version of their lunar goddess Artemis. - Jenny Hill

Bastet

Some refer to Bast as Bastet (bas + t + t, the second “t” being an additional feminine suffix which was added to the already existing suffix – the first “t”). The hieroglyph for Bastet is the bas-jar, bread (denoting the feminine ending “t”) plus an additional bread (denoting the second feminine ending “t”) – Bastt.

More information regarding “Bastet” can be found in the essay [“Bast: Permutations and Bastet Explained”](#) by S. D. Cass.

Part 2: Epithets

The following are epithets I've used for Bast. When I first started working with her, I had a long list of them. Having gone through the list, I realized there were a lot I never even used. The ones listed below were the ones which remained on my list.

Daughter of Tem

Tem is another name for Atum (sometimes rendered Atem).

Daughter of the Sun

During the Old Kingdom, Bast was considered to be the daughter of Atum (the "complete one"). He was associated with Ra (Atum-Ra), a Sun Netjer connected with the morning and midday Sun. Atum was connected with the evening Sun.

Destroyer of Isfet

Isfet means "chaos".

Devourer, Devouring Lady, The Tearer

Eye of Ra

This is also an epithet for Het-Heru, Mut, Nut, Sekhmet, Tefnut and Wadjet.

Hidden Lady of Per-Bast

Per-Bast (House of Bast) refers to Bubastis (Greek), her major cult center.

Lady of Ankh-tawy

At Saqqara in Men-nefer (Memphis, means "enduring and beautiful"), Bast was given the title "Lady of Ankh-tawy". Ankh-tawy means "Life of the Two Lands". Men-nefer was located between Upper and Lower Kemet.

Lady of Ointments, Netjert of Perfume and Oils, Perfumed Protector

Bast is associated with the bas-jar. These were heavy and valuable jars in Kemet which were used to store perfumes, ointments and oils.

Lady of the East

Bast was a Netjert of Lower Kemet, which was in Northern Kemet. Lower Kemet was located East of the Nile River.

Netjert of the Rising Sun

Title earned through her nightly battles with Apep. Bast represents Ma'at (order). Defeating Apep (Isfet - chaos), she restores Ma'at to the world.

Ruler of Sekhet-neter

In the New Kingdom, there was a cult center of Bast in Karnak, at the Precinct of Mut. In Karnak, she was called “Ruler of Sekhet-neter” which means “Divine Field” (Kemet).

Other Epithets

These are epithets I’ve come across through various sites and books regarding Bast. I, personally, never used any of these epithets.

Ba en Aset (Soul of Aset)

This epithet came about through the Greeks associating Bast with Artemis. Artemis had a twin brother, Apollo. To keep the connection between Bast and Artemis, they linked Apollo with Heru (Heru-sa-Aset “Heru son of Aset”). With this connection, they made Bast and Heru twins. (FYI: Aset/Auset is Isis (Greek), Heru is Horus (Greek)).

Lady of Asheru

Asheru is the 19th century translation of Isheru (Lady of Isheru), which was a sacred, “crescent-shaped lake” where lioness-headed Netjerts were appeased. This epithet can be used for any lioness-headed Netjert: Mut (Isheru in Karnak), Wadjet (Isheru near Men-nefer), Sekhmet (Isheru in Men-nefer), Bast (Isheru in Per-Bast).

Part 3: The Cat

...the ancient Egyptians did not distinguish between wild and tame cats in their descriptions of them. There was one word for cat-and that was miu or mii, meaning “he or she who mews”. - Ilene Springer

Felis silvestris lybica



African Wildcat
Mara, Tanzania
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There is a cat known as the African wild cat (Felis silvestris lybica)-one of the closest wild relatives of the modern cat. It is larger than the average domesticated cat of today. The feline’s tawny, yellow-gray fur, long tapering tail and striped markings, affording it ideal camouflage among the rocks and sand of the desert. This cat is known as a predator-a hunter of small game-rather than a scavenger. - Ilene Springer

Felis silvestris lybica is the African wildcat. It’s a subspecies which occurs across Northern Africa, extending along the periphery of the Arabian peninsula and Caspian Sea.

The fur colour of the African wildcat is light sandy grey, and sometimes with a pale yellow or reddish hue. The ears are reddish to grey, with long light yellow hairs around the pinna. Stripes around the face are dark ochre to black: two are running horizontally on the cheek, and four to six across the throat. A dark stripe is running along the back, the flanks are lighter, and the belly is whitish. Pale vertical stripes on the sides often dissolve into spots. Two dark rings are on the forelegs, and hind legs are striped. The feet are dark brown to black. - “African Wildcat”

African wildcats are solitary and nocturnal. They communicate by squeaking, hissing and purring. Having well-developed senses of smell and hearing, African wildcats can respond to frequencies up to 25,000 vibrations per second.

Domesticated cats are believed to have descended from African wildcats.

African wild cats (F.s. libyca) are difficult to distinguish from domestic cats. Their fur is lighter and less dense than European wild cats, and their tails are thin and tapering. - Tanya Dewey

Followers of the goddess Bast, the goddess of pleasure, created sanctuaries with bronze statues of cats and mummified hundreds of thousands of cats. - Tanya Dewey

Hunting of the African wildcat is prohibited in Algeria, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia with regulated hunting permitted in Angola, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania and Togo.

Felis chaus



Felis chaus at the Pont-Scorff Zoo,
Brittany, France by Abujoy

The other cat native to Egypt is the swamp or jungle cat-(Felis chaus), but it is the wild cat which is believed to have been the cat to “domesticate the Egyptians”. - Ilene Springer

Felis chaus nilotica is a subspecies of the jungle cat which inhabits Kemet.

Felis chaus (jungle cat) is native to Asia (southern China in the east through southeast and Central Asia to the Nile Valley on the west). This medium-sized cat is the largest living *Felis* species.

The jungle cat resembles a small lynx and is alternatively known as the jungle lynx, swamp lynx and reed cat.

The face is relatively slender. Fur colour varies with subspecies, yellowish-grey to reddish-brown or tawny-grey, and is ticked with black. Vertical bars are visible on the fur of kittens, which disappear in adult cats, although a few markings may be retained on the limbs or tail. The muzzle is white, and the underside is paler in colour than the rest of the body. - “Jungle cat”

Although never truly domesticated, a small number of jungle cats have been found among the cat mummies of Ancient Egypt (the vast majority of which are domestic cats), suggesting that they may have been used to help control rodent population. - “Jungle cat”

In physique, the jungle cat resembles a Serval (a medium-sized African wildcat which is widely distributed south of the Sahara).

Felis chaus, the Jungle cat seems to have been bred of its ancestor African wild cat in ancient Egypt for the purpose of hunting wild fowl – afterwards it was mummified and entombed there. - “Jungle cat”

Part 4: Depictions

From the 3rd Millennium BCE, Bast was depicted as either a fierce lion or a woman with the head of a lion. During the 18th Century, Bast began to be depicted as a woman with the head of a cat. By the 22nd Dynasty, she became the quintessential Kemetic cat-Netjert with the domestic cat becoming her sacred animal in the Middle Kingdom.

Later her image grew tamer: she became a cat carrying the sun, or a cat-headed woman who bore on her breastplate the lion of her former self. - Patricia Monaghan

Most commonly depicted as a woman with the head of either a cat, lion, or large desert cat, she's often depicted holding the Ankh, Papyrus Wand or Was-scepter.

Note that by "desert cat", we do not mean the approachable domesticates as we now know them. This is the feral cat of the desert, a calculating hunter and survivalist that was far from the (relatively) sweet-tempered creature that stalks neighborhoods today. - S. D. Cass

Bast is often depicted holding various emblems.

- Aegis - symbol of divine protection
- Ankh - represents the breath of life and Lower Kemet
- Was-scepter - signifies strength
- Sistrum - sacred rattle used to evoke and banish spirits

While Bast is perhaps better known as a domesticate, Her representation as a lion or desert cat did not cease with the advent of Bast-as-a-housecat. Images of Bast as a lion-headed figure holding a was-scepter (from the Hall of Osorkon at Bubastis) or with a lion's mane and holding the Eye of Ra can be found throughout Egyptian art from the Late Period on. Bast is even shown in one particular Late Period depiction wearing the Double Crown (the red and the white "nested" together) and suckling the Pharaoh – perhaps an allusion to Per-Bast (Bubastis)'s political rise during that period. - S. D. Cass

Part 5: Quotes

To those who were in her favor, she gave great blessings, but her wrath was legendary and she was sometimes listed as one of Ra's avenging deities who punish the sinful and the enemies of Egypt. - Tour Egypt

It is Bast who helps us to become stronger to protect that which we hold sacred to be mindful of the balance of life and protect our own true integrity. It is the Solar Bast who guards new beginnings. - Lorraine Henrich

The first signs are from Dyn II. she appears on stone vessels of Hetepsekhemwy and Nebra (c. 2890 b.c.) From the steppyramid complex at Saqqara. On these vessels bast is seen standing before the king's cartouche. - Meritites Hatshepsut

By and by, Bast took on the same traits as Het-Hert, (Gr. Hathor) and the Greeks, true to their habit of interpreting foreign culture and deities according to their own culture, likened her to their own Artemis. Thereby Bast became the protector of pregnant women, childbirth, musicians and all kinds of excess, especially sexual. It was probably here, along with the Greek way of likening her to Artemis, that the concept of the cat as a form of female sexuality developed. Originally Bast had nothing to do with this aspect, as she was a fierce protector of the throne, the king and the Two Lands. - Meritites Hatshepsut

...modern scholars often have a difficult time separating the essences of Bast from those of Sekhmet (also a lioness-Goddess and Daughter of Ra), and often set them together as the same divinity in a dichotomy of “nice kitty/big bad lioness”. This is not only incorrect, but devalues the worth of the multi-faceted approach the religion of Kemet offers to the “Neteru”. There was a composite “Neter” known as “Sekhmet-Bast-Ra”, but this “Neter” was a true composite: the union of the individual “Neteru” did not negate Their individualities in a seeming paradox which is a central issue of Kemetic philosophy, called by archaeologist Erik Hornung the concept of “the one and the many”. - Tamara L. Siuda

Even from very old times, as protector, Bast was seen as the fierce flame of the sun who burned the deceased should they fail one of the many tests in the underworld. - Carnaval

Bastet was one of the goddesses associated with the story of the Distant Goddess, the daughter of Ra who quarrels with her father and retreats into the desert. She was particularly identified with the form of this goddess known as the “Nubian cat”, who could be shown with the body of a spotted cat and the head of a Nubian woman. A god, usually Thoth or Shu, persuades the wandering cat to return to Egypt, where she is transformed into a compliant and fertile divine consort. - Geraldine Pinch

*In the “Litany of Ra”, **Ra** (Re) is described as “The One of the Cat”, and “The Great Cat”. The nine realms of the universe are manifested in the cat, for both the cat and the Great Ennead (meaning nine-times-unity) have the same Ancient Egyptian term, **b.st**. This relationship has found its way to the western culture, where one says that “the cat has nine lives” (realms). - Moustafa Gadalla*

It is wise to note that Bastet's primitive link with the Heliopolitan solar god, Atum (or Atum-Ra), indicates that she was probably a rather warlike entity at the outset, a "uraeus" goddess personifying the relentless power and dominion of the sun, much like the closely related deity Sekhmet. - Zachary Gray

Though the Pyramid Texts depict Bastet as yet another, typical mother-figure to Pharaoh, artifacts from the time of King Hetepsekhemwy (2890 BCE) portray Bastet with the head of a lioness, fortifying the notion that her initial persona was far more pugnacious than playful. - Zachary Gray

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