

# MondSymbolik – MondWissen. Lunare Konzepte in den ägyptischen Tempeln griechisch-römischer Zeit by Victoria Altmann-Wendling

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Volume 1, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087122ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v1i1.37678>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science

ISSN

1549-4470 (print)

1549-4497 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bojowald, S. (2020). Review of [MondSymbolik – MondWissen. Lunare Konzepte in den ägyptischen Tempeln griechisch-römischer Zeit by Victoria Altmann-Wendling]. *Aestimatio*, 1, 272–276.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v1i1.37678>

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*MondSymbolik – MondWissen. Lunare Konzepte in den ägyptischen Tempeln griechisch-römischer Zeit* by Victoria Altmann-Wendling

Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion 22. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019. 2 parts. Pp. xxviii + 1098. ISBN 978-3-447-11136-2. Cloth €198.00

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This publication comprises the slightly revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation, which was submitted in 2017 to the Philosophical Faculty of Eberhard Karls University, Tübingen. The study concerns the embedding of lunar phenomena and the Moon's cycle in religious contexts, while the calendrical aspect plays only a secondary role. The timeframe of the investigation is concentrated on the Ptolemaic-Roman Period.

## Part 1

In section A, Altmann-Wendling makes some preliminary remarks. As she notes, in Egypt, the terms «iḥ» or «iwn-ḥ» could be used for the Moon [2]. She recapitulates the history of research on the Moon's role in chronology [5–13] and its mythological dimensions [14–19], reaching back in part to the work of R. Lepsius. Some astronomical facts about the Moon are imparted, among which is its motion at a mean distance of 384,400 km from the Earth [29]. She then presents the relevant astronomical knowledge of the Graeco-Roman Period, Aristarchus of Samos gaining special mention as the first proponent of the heliocentric view of life [32].

Section B deals with the temples, starting with Dendera. The scene with the catching of the *udjat*-eye on the astronomical ceiling of the pronaos is interpreted as an increasing lunar phase [38]. In the texts on the eastern margin line of the ceiling, the healing of Osiris is similarly associated with the increase of the lunar phase [58]. The decoration of the pronaos was devoted to the astral Hathor, the key theme being the New Year [69]. In the

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lunar staircase scenes of Dendera, the process of the Moon's waxing to Full Moon is reproduced by the actions of the 14 gods on the steps [105]. The hymn to the Moon on the staircase has several parallels: see pBM EA 10474v Z. 13–19, pBerlin P.157 62a, 10–14; and on the southern door jamb of the outer side, in Bigeh and Kom Ombo 202 [128–133].

The texts in Edfu are introduced next. In the description of the lunar synodic month of roughly 30 days on the pronaos in Edfu, the movement of the Sun runs from east to west, while the Moon proceeds from west to east [277]. The minerals and plants in the pylon texts of Edfu and Philae can be interpreted as integral parts of the filling of the Moon-eye [314]. The bearers with their offering are recruited from the nine hood of Heliopolis,<sup>1</sup> with some additions [315]. The processions of the barques of Hathor and Isis on the northern side of the east tower of the pylons in Philae are comparable to the scene with the two barques of Horus and Hathor in Edfu [337]. The chapel of the leg in Edfu (Room J) is treated next. The sole, clear scene concerning the Moon appears in the second register of the western wall with the handing over of the crown by the king to the god Chons [346].

The procession of the Moon's worshippers on the Euergetes gate in Karnak is next in line for discussion. In the middle of the frieze, there is a Full or crescent Moon to which gods and the royal pair are striding from both sides [352]. The Moon may be venerated by those who worship the Sun as a nocturnal substitute [360]. The choice of the direct object of veneration is interpreted by the author as a hint at the completely round form of the Full Moon [360], which is simply difficult to understand. The eastern side of the frieze on the gate in Karnak deals with the Full Moon, while the western side touches on the New Moon and new light [398]. The scenes of the two bulls on the Euergetes gate are then brought into the picture. The central text contains one of the most exact descriptions of the Moon's cycle, without being limited to one of the two halves of the month [405]. The two bulls perhaps embody the waning and waxing Moon [405].

The lunar inscriptions in the temple of Chons in Karnak follow next. The lunar scenes in the temple from the time of Ramses III are all Ptolemaic redecorations [527]. The investigation is continued by texts in the temple of Opet in Karnak. The appearance of the lunar epithets in the Opet temple is connected with the regeneration and rebirth of Osiris depicted there [549].

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<sup>1</sup> *scil.* a group of nine gods.

The tombs of priests in the Bahria oasis may be considered to show some of the earliest examples for lunisolar scenes [648].

Section C describes papyri with lunar aspects. The myth of Horus and Seth presents the basis for the description of the lunar cycle in the chapters on the Moon and planets in the *Book of Nut* [679].

## Part 2

Section D treats the Moon as celestial body and god. The representation of the Moon as a celestial body occurs for the first time in the New Kingdom [699]. The most frequent way of representing of the Moon is as an *udjat*-eye or the combinations built with its help [703]. The representation of the Moon as an ibis is considered very rare [707]. The gods in the lunar processions of gods are collected mostly from the great Theban nine hood with 14 or 15 individuals who embody the days of the lunar month [732]. In Esna, the scene with 28 gods in two registers as an embodiment of the wholeness of the Moon's illumination during a lunar month is exceptional [734]. The scenes are mostly executed in the east-west direction [735].

Section D3 gives insight into the names of the Moon. The expression «w3ḥ ḳd=f» (who takes off his form) is accepted as a term for the decrease of the Moon under certain conditions [752]. D4 inquires about the Moon as a goddess. The goddesses Hathor and Isis were associated with the Moon [761]. But two and three dimensional representations of the Moon as a goddess are very rare [766]. Section D5 broaches the topic of animals representing the Moon. The Moon was symbolized as a bull [769–770], ibis [770–772], ape [772–773], or cat [773]. The hostile animals representing the Moon include the Oryx gazelle [774] and the pig [777–780].

The most complete inscription about the actions of an Egyptian astronomer is on the Ptolemaic statue of Harchebis [786]. The explicit interpretation of eclipses as omens is documented in Egypt after the first century AD [792]. The first introduction of astrological concepts from the ancient Near East is dated in the Persian Period [795].

Section E addresses the Moon cult. E1 deals with the ancient observations of the Moon. The earliest attestations of star gazers come from the fifth dynasty [782]. In section E2, lunar feasts are examined. The only ritual with a recitation text is the “Book of the New Moon Feast”, written down on two funerary papyri [799]. Since the Old Kingdom, the days of the lunar month occur as dates of offerings for the deceased [802]. Section E3 scrutinizes the names of the days of the lunar month. The terms for the days of the Egyptian lunar month exist in complete form only since the Ptolemaic Period [811]. E4 discusses the filling of the Moon-eye on the sixth day of the lunar month.

The day of the coincidence of Osiris with the Moon and the filling of the *udjat*-eye is important [833]. The origin of the filling on this day goes back to Sun-myths from Heliopolis [835]. Section E5 takes into account the centers of the cult of the Moon. The Theban provenance of this cult can be deduced from the prominence of the Moon in the names of the Ahmosidic family [848–849]. The existence of a cult of the Moon in Heliopolis, however, is not supported by hard evidence [853].

Section F evaluates lunar concepts. In F2, short forms of the text passages are presented. F3 discusses pictures, identifications, and metaphors. The expression «iwn-ḥꜥ» (jubilating pillar) for the Moon dates from the third to the second century BC [878]. The identification of the Moon as bull can probably be founded on the association of the lunar crescent with the horns of a bull [881]. The metaphorical conception of the Moon as an eye may be the oldest means of accounting for the cycle of lunar phases [888]. The frequent connection between the Moon and Osiris can be put down to the power of the Moon to regenerate [894]. The theme of the Moon's rejuvenation is expressed most clearly by its identification with a child [900]. Section F4 samples some aspects of the Moon and the principle of *maat*.

I offer the following as an aid to the reader:

- page 45      For «ḥmś» (sceptre of Osiris), see [Rickert 2011](#), 145.
- 50            For the introduction of the *artabe* measure in the Persian Period, see [Chaveau 2018](#), 3–5.
- 130           For the relationship between «ššṯ» and «ššd», see [Fischer-Elfert 1997](#), 19.
- 131           For «brbr» instead of «bnbn», see [Jansen-Winkel 2005](#), 134 [19]
- 161           The translation “the cloud is driven away” for «dr(.w) iḡp» is grammatically impossible: the correct version is “who drive away the cloud (from the «rdw»-outflows)”.
- 490           «ḥpi n=f ṯw ndm n mḥii.t rꜥ nb» has to be translated by “for whom the sweet breeze of the north wind comes every day”. For «ṯw» (breeze of the north wind), see, e.g., [Assman 1999](#), 393 (no. 167); [Luft 2018](#), 573.
- 532           «ḥśr=k ḥṣ.ti» should be subordinated as “while you are destroying the clouds”.
- 622           For «nhb» (lamp), see [Scheele-Schweitzer 2014](#), 498; [Jansen-Winkel 1985](#), 47 (5).
- 849           The translation “who satisfies the *udjat*-eye” for «šmnḥ wḍṣ.t» must be corrected to “who makes perfect the *udjat*-eye”.

This book will be of value to students of Egyptian conceptions of the Moon and its use as a symbol. With only a few exceptions, the translations are accurate and the interpretations turn out for the most part to be very clear. Moreover, the sources are well mastered. I warmly recommend it.

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