

Tutankhamun Knew the Names of the Two Great Gods

dt and *nḥḥ* as Fundamental Concepts of
Pharaonic Ideology

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Epigraph

Be sure there is only one external reality, but every description of it presupposes – according to quantum mechanics – the adoption of a particular point of view.

Realism and Objectivism in Quantum Mechanics

Vassilios Karakostas

Abbreviations

BM	British Museum
BoD	Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day
CT	Coffin Text
ES	Epigraphic Survey, Oriental Institute of Chicago
GSL	Gardiner Sign List (Gardiner 1957: 438–548)
KRI	Kitchen, K. A. 1968–1990. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions</i>
n.	note/footnote
ODE	Oxford Dictionary of English 2018
P.	Papyrus
PM II ²	Porter, B. and R. L. B. Moss. 1991. <i>Topographical Bibliography ... Theban Temples</i>
PT	Pyramid Text
temp.	in or from the time of
TT	Theban Tomb
<i>Urk IV</i>	Helck, W. (ed.) 1958. <i>Urkunden der 18. Dynastie</i>
<i>Wb</i>	Erman A. and H. Grapow. 1971. <i>Wörterbuch</i>

Convention adopted for brackets

round brackets (...) contain material which serves to clarify (in the manner of a gloss) or is aside from the main point; square brackets [...] enclose comments inserted into a quote so as to clarify the original.

Introduction

This treatise focusses on the ancient Egyptian terms *dt* and *nḥḥ*, each of which, from the manner in which they have usually been interpreted in Egyptological scholarship, has been thought to denote infinite time; both have been rendered into English using a range of expressions, most frequently by ‘eternity’, or ‘forever’. In translation each term has been variously interpreted as a noun, adjective, or adverb in accordance with its position within a given literary and grammatical context. However, in whatever situation those terms have appeared they have typically been regarded as temporal synonyms. When adopting this convention in translation of original textual sources the resultant readings often appear sensible. Yet a deeper examination of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, as used in a wide range of literary works, suggests that this sense of rationality may be somewhat illusory, and that the convention – which has become embedded within the Egyptological discipline – is in fact flawed. It also becomes apparent that in translating *dt* and *nḥḥ* in the manner indicated, scholarship may have missed an opportunity to discern some deeper meaning from each example of their usage: meaning which may better reflect the manner in which the ancient Egyptians understood the nature of the universe in which they lived.

A conspicuous defect in the described interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* is indicated by the graphic representation of the words themselves; a defect yet more apparent when noting the anthropomorphisation of those terms as a pair of gender differentiated entities depicted in a prominent motif in the tomb of Tutankhamun: an image shown again in the sepulchres of at least two later 19th Dynasty kings.¹ These overt graphic differences have of course been recognised by scholars in the past, and explanations have been given to account for them. However, as will be shown, the solutions offered to date – while many and varied – often appear untenable.

In addition to the graphic dissimilarities – circumstances strongly suggesting that two distinct notions were being presented – the usage of the terms also tends to militate against their synonymy: and here it is of note that while either word may appear alone in qualifying a passage of text – which may, in the absence of further determining factors, allow the possibility of their equivalence, or being of similar meaning – the terms, as will be demonstrated below, are frequently expressed in apposition. This would indicate that while both *dt* and *nḥḥ* may in fact relate to a particular phenomenon, or class of phenomena, they are not synonyms at all; rather, each term refers to one of a duality of conditions relating to a specific area of thought. And here it is of note that the tendency to express aspects of reality in terms of contrasting dualities has often been recognised in the study of ancient Egyptian perception.² It therefore

¹ A motif (shown at Figure 29) to be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

² Frankfort (1948a: 19–23) viewed the totality of existence in ancient Egyptian thought ‘as an equilibrium of opposites’ and a world couched ‘in dualistic terms as a series of pairs of contrasts balanced in unchanging equilibrium’. Baines (1995: 100) noted that in Egypt duality was ‘fundamental in ideology and iconography’. Loprieno (2003: 129) remarked that this series of dualities extended from the physical, as may be characterised by the geographical duality between Upper and Lower Egypt, to the cosmic (and therefore mythical) dualities of the type, ‘ciel et terre’. See also on this topic: Hornung 1982a: 240–241; McBride 1994: 55, 197; Silverman 1991: 64; Niwiński 2009: 153; and Wilkinson 2003: 74. Following his assertions as to the synonymy of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, Žabkar (1965: 79, 83) suggested that the ancient Egyptian ‘propensity towards dualism’ may have played some part in the adoption of those terms which was then accepted as a convention, although the Egyptians themselves never fully reasoned out their ‘philosophical connotations’. However,

seems that these posited temporal conditions are but a further example of that conceptual pattern. Allowing this conclusion it follows that, in any attempt to present a reliable and meaningful translation of texts in which the terms occur, it would be necessary to establish the precise nature of the *dt-nhh* duality.

At first sight, the attempt to explain the nature of *dt* and *nhh* appears to be a rather hopeless task in that it entails something of an irresolvable cultural quandary. The ancient Egyptians appear to have had two distinct terms for something which, from a modern, Western cultural perspective – the viewpoint which informs much modern interpretation of the ancient Egyptian world – is a distinctly singular phenomenon: the notion of infinite time. The modern understanding of reality, both from the perspective of Egyptological discourse and, for that matter, the wider popular view, does not appear to allow for two distinct versions of eternity: a circumstance perhaps forcing the conclusion that *dt* and *nhh* – if those terms are indeed to be considered as references to infinite time – must be synonyms. However, in the disciplines of philosophy and theology at least, the concepts of eternity and infinite time are not considered to be identical. They do not relate to a singular phenomenon nor, as will become apparent, has this been the case throughout much of recorded history. Moreover, as it seems reasonable to expect some shift in philosophical outlook over more than 5000 years of history – some divergence between past and present understanding of the nature of the universe, or distinct aspects of it – it is remarkable that the complementary duality of conditions I believe to be encapsulated in the terms *dt* and *nhh* has remained pertinent to cosmological theories with some constancy. And it is in this context that I propose that *dt* and *nhh* are, respectively, consistent with notions denoted by the English terms ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’ – concepts which are not merely temporal, but which have wider ontological connotations. The terms describe a duality of metaphysical and physical aspects pertinent to cosmic reality which can be identified in a chain of philosophical discourse from pharaonic³ Egypt to relatively recent times.

It may here be recognised, as I noted in a preliminary study on this topic,⁴ that if my interpretation of the *dt-nhh* duality were to be accepted it would suggest the need for a significant shift in the manner in which the ancient texts – a great many of which contain the terms in question – may, or in fact should be interpreted. And while my earlier conclusions seemed reasonably founded, I acknowledged in that treatise that the discussion was focussed upon texts and associated circumstances which related primarily to the 1st millennium BC. It therefore seemed necessary, as intimated in those earlier conclusions, that further examination of available pertinent material be undertaken to test the validity of my earlier findings. To that end those deductions will now be re-examined in the light of a more extensive study of texts drawn from across the complete Dynastic Period of Egyptian history. Particular attention will be given to the bodies of work now referred to as Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, material originating in the Old and Middle Kingdoms respectively. This will be augmented by

while it seems apposite to include *dt* and *nhh* among the examples of dualism apparent in pharaonic thought, the suggestion that the ancient Egyptians were not fully aware of the precise nature of each of the concepts in question seems improbable.

³The term ‘pharaonic’ is used throughout this study with reference to that period of time when Egypt was under the rule of those designated ‘Horus Kings’, whatever their particular origin or ethnicity. All translations in this study are by the present author unless otherwise stated.

⁴The preliminary study has been published as: Gregory, 2017, *On the Horus throne in dt and nhh: changeless time and changing times*.

reference to a range of additional literary material drawn from a variety of settings, including inscriptions from the monuments of the ritual landscape of later periods.

One might argue that the methodology adopted restricts the scope of the study, for the most part, to the more ideological or mythological material; however, it seems that it is mostly in such genre that the terms of particular interest are occasionally used in a narrative literary style: a context from which their meaning may be more readily determined. That said, other, somewhat more formulaic material in which the terms are often found – as for example in the terminal sections of royal epithets – will not be entirely disregarded. Firstly, however, it seems appropriate to consider, in some detail, the manner in which scholarship has hitherto construed *dt* and *nḥḥ*.