

HĒPHAISTOS vs. PTAH

Václav Blažek

1. The Greek theonym Ἥφαιστος was known already to Homer - see *Ilias* XVIII, 397; VIII, 195 and *Odysseia* IV, 617 etc. In other Greek dialects other variants appear: Doric Ἄφαιστος, Aeolic Ἄφαιστος (Frisk I, 646). The theonym is attested already in Mycenaean *a-pa-i-ti-jo* (KN I 588.1), which reflects *Ἀφαιστῖος or *Ἀφαιστῖων (Aura Jorro 1985, 73). Interesting is the variant ΗἘφαστος, attested on the Attic vases (Furnée 1972, 336; Chantraine I, 418).

1.1. There is perhaps the only semantically acceptable internal etymology of the theonym, viz. its derivation from ἀφή "lightning, kindling" (see Herodotus VII, 215 about the lamp-lightning time: Ὀρμέατο δὲ περὶ λύχνων ἀφὰς ἐκ τοῦ στρατοπέδου "and they set forth from the camp about the time when the lamps are lit") : ἄπτω πῦρ "I kindle fire", ἀφάω "I handle" (Preller & Robert 1894; see Liddell & Scott 1901, 657; Schrader & Nehring II, 239, 330; Frisk I, 126). The relation of the divine smith to fire is apparent, e.g. in the metonymic use of the name of Ἥφαιστος instead of πῦρ by Homer: καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄρ σξίζησιν ἀφύλλοισιν κατέκαιον, σπλάγχνα δ' ἄρ' ἀμπεύρατες ὑπεύρεχον Ἥφαιστοιο "These the burned upon the split logs of firewood, but they spitted the inward meats, and held them in the flames to cook" [*Ilias* II, 425-26; translated by S. Butler], cf. also φλόξ Ἥφαιστοιο [*Ilias* XVII, 88] for "fire", ἀνήφαιστος "fire that is no real fire" [Euripides, *Orestes* 621]. Concerning the hypothetical second component **aistos*, it seems possible to accept the idea of Carnoy (1957, 69) to see here a derivative of the type of **ait^htos* from Greek αἶθω "I light up, kindle", cf. αἶθος "burning heat, fire".

1.2. The ugly and lame Hephaestus (see *Odysseia* VIII, 306-311) had the most charming wife in the Olymp, Aphrodite (their marriage is implicitly indicated already in *Odysseia* VIII, 267-70, where the perfidy of Aphrodite with Ares in the house of Hephaestus is described). Her name, Ἀφροδίτη, Cretan Ἀφορδιτᾶ, Cypriotic Ἀφοροδιτᾶ, Pamphylian Φορδιτᾶ, was etymologized in numerous studies (their survey is summarized and briefly commented by Witczak 1993, 115-16). I prefer the idea proposed by K. Witczak (1993, 118-20) who see here the compound of **ab^hor-/*ab^hro-* "very" & **dītā* "shining", hence "super-shining", in agreement with one of her epithets, δῖα "bright". Among numerous epithets of Aphrodite it is possible to find the information about her "power", expressed by the word μεγέθος "greatness, might, power", when Hesiodus describes Alcmene and compares her with Aphrodite ["Shield of Heracles", vers 5].

2. At least comparably promising is Egyptian origin of the theonym.

2.1. In his Histories Herodotus (5th cent. BC) mentioned several times the Temple of Hephaestus in the Egyptian city of Memphis, the capital of the Old Kingdom:

[II, 3.1] .. ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἐν Μέμφι, ἐλθὼν ἐς λόγους τοῖσι ἱερεῦσι τοῦ Ἥφαιστου
"I also heard other things at Memphis in conversation with the priests of Hephaestus"

[II, 99.4] ὡς δὲ τῷ Μῖνι τούτῳ τῷ πρώτῳ γενομένῳ βασιλείῳ χέρσον γεγονέναι τὸ ἀπεργμένον, τοῦτο μὲν ἐν αὐτῷ πόλιν κτίσαι ταύτην ἣτις νῦν Μέμφις καλεῖται, ... τοῦτο δὲ τοῦ Ἥφαιστου τὸ ἱρὸν ἰδρύσασθαι ἐν αὐτῇ, ἐὸν μέγα τε καὶ ἀξιαπηγητότατον

"Then, when this first king Min had made dry land of what he thus cut off, he first founded in it that city which is now called Memphis, ... and secondly, he built in it the great and most noteworthy temple of Hephaestus."

2.1.1. Apparently, Herodotus' Hephaestus from Egyptian Memphis was the Egyptian god Ptah, because just this god is the main patron of the city and had a big temple here. It was Cicero in his *De Natura Deorum* [III, 22.55f], who unambiguously identified Vulcan, the Roman correspondent of Hephaestus, with the Egyptian god Ptah:

Volcani item complures: primus Caelo natus, ex quo et Minerva Apollinem eum cuius in tutela Athenas antiqui historici esse voluerunt, secundus Nilo natus, Phthas ut Aegyptii appellant, quem custodem esse Aegypti volunt, tertius ex tertio Iove et Iunone, qui Lemni fabricae traditur praefuisse, quartus Memalio natus, qui tenuit insulas propter Siciliam quae Volcaniae nominabantur.

"There are also several Vulcans; the first, the son of the Sky, was reputed the father by Minerva of the Apollo said by the ancient historians to be the tutelary deity of Athens; the second, the son of Nile, is named by the Egyptians Phthas, and is deemed the guardian of Egypt; the third is the son of the third Jupiter and Juno, and is fabled to have been the master of a smithy at Lemnos; the fourth is the son of Memalio, and lord of the islands near Sicily which used to be named the Isles of Vulcan."

2.1.2. Interesting is the notice of Herodotus [III, 37.2-3] about the Phoenician god Pataikos, corresponding with Greek Hephaestus:

ὥς δὲ δὴ καὶ ἐς τοῦ Ἡφαίστου τὸ ἱρὸν ἦλθε καὶ πολλὰ τῷ ἀγάλματι κατεγέλασε· ἔστι γὰρ τοῦ Ἡφαίστου τῷγαλμα τοῖσι Φοινικῆιοισι Παταϊκοῖσι ἐμπερέστατον, τοὺς οἱ Φοίνικες ἐν τῆσι πρῶρησι τῶν τριηρέων περιάγουσι. ὃς δὲ τούτους μὴ ὅπωπε, ἐγὼ δὲ σημανέω· πυγμαίου ἀνδρὸς μίμησις ἔστι. ἐσήλθε δὲ καὶ ἐς τῶν Καβείρων τὸ ἱρὸν, ἐς τὸ οὐ θεμιτὸν ἔστι ἐσιέναι ἄλλον γε ἢ τὸν ἱερέα· ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ἀγάλματα καὶ ἐνέπρησε πολλὰ κατασκώψας

"He [= Cambyses] likewise went into the temple of Hephaestus, and made great sport of the image. For the image of Hephaestus is very like the Pataeci of the Phoenicians, wherewith they ornament the prows of their ships of war. Of persons have not seen these, I will explain in a different way - it is a figure resembling that of a pigmy. He went also into the temple of the Cabiri, which it is unlawful for any one to enter except the priests, and not only made sport of the images, but even burnt them."

[translated by George Rawlinson]

2.2.1. The Phoenician theonym has no parallels in the Semitic pantheon, although it could be etymologized on the basis of the verb $\sqrt{p-t-q}$: Akkadian *patāqu* "to shape, create, form", particularly "to form brick, wall, building, statue", "to create heaven, earth, mankind", also "to cast metal", *pitqu* "casting of metal", e.g. *pitqu erī, kaspi* "cast copper, silver" (CDA 270, 276); Post-Biblical Hebrew $\sqrt{p-t-q}$ "to cleave, split", Syriac $\sqrt{p-t-q}$ "to cleave, split, break", Arabic $\sqrt{f-t-q}$ "to tear, rip open, split, yield well" (see Klein 1987, 537; Takács 2001, 532).

2.2.2. Alternatively the theonym *Pataikos* can represent an adaptation of the name of one of the most important Egyptian gods, *Pth*, patron of artisans, who was worshipped especially in Memphis (Wb. I, 565; 329), Demotic *Pth*, Coptic *Ptaḥ*. Interesting are the cuneiform transcriptions of this divine name: Middle Babylonian ^m*Si-ip-ta-ḥu* = *Z3 Pth* "son of Ptah" and ^{ālu}*Hi-ku-up-ta-aḥ* = *H.t k3 Pth* "house of the spirit of Ptah", i.e. the sacred name of Memphis; from the Boğazköy archive the name of the king Merneptah ^m*Mar-ni-ip-taḥ* = *Mry ny Pth* "beloved by Ptah"; latest one, from the Assyrian epoch, is ^m*Ip-ti-ḥar-ṭi-e-šu* = *Pth i-ṭr dy-sw* "it is Ptah who gave it" (Vycichl 1983, 166, 517; Id. 1990, 80-81, 179-80, 191). It is apparent, the transcriptions from the 2nd mill. BC reflect the vocalization **Ptaḥ*, but the Assyrian record from the 1st mill. **Ptiḥ* is closer to Herodotus' Πάταϊκος not only in form, but also in time. The name of the Greek god could ultimately represent an adaptation of the idiom of the type Egyptian *ḥ.t Pth* "house/temple of Ptah", which may be vocalized as **Ḥāt-Ptaḥ-i* (**-i* is the genitive ending), cf. the name of the goddess Hathor, Egyptian (from the

Pyramid Texts) *H.t Hr*, lit. "house/temple of Horus", in the New Kingdom the fest, continuing in Coptic Sahidic *ḥat^hōr* "third month of the Coptic year", Greek Ἄθῶρ, Arabic *Hātūr* (Vycichl 1983, 317). The following development is difficult to reconstruct, perhaps **Hāt-Ptah-i* > **Hāpsta(h)i^o* > **Hāp^hstai^o* > **Hāp^haist^o*. The epenthesis of this type is known in history of Egyptian, e.g. Coptic Sahidic *noyt*, Bohairic *nōit*, Fayyumic *nait* "flour", Demotic *nyt* : Middle Egyptian *ndy-w* "flour" (Wb. II, 370; Vycichl 1983, 141: **nadyaw* > **naydaw*).

2.3. The most archaic attestation of the divine name *Pth* appears in the Pyramid Texts, namely in the Utterance 573, §1482c: "Commend N. to *Wr-šps.f*, the beloved Ptah, the son of Ptah", where the epithet *wr-šps* means "greatly noble" (translated by Samuel A. Mercer: *The Pyramid Texts*, New York: Longmans & Green 1952 - see http://thepyramidtexts.blogspot.com/2007/09/texts-of-miscellaneous-contents_4942.html).

2.4. The theonym could be connected with the verb *pth* "to form, create", according to Wb. (I, 565) attested only in the Greek-Romance period, but included in the *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* by Faulkner (1981, 96; cf. also WPS 519; this dictionary covers the Egyptian lexicon from the time interval 2800-950 BC), which continues in Demotic *pth* "to carve" = "sculpter, ciseler" = "schnitzen, meisseln", Coptic Sahidic *pōth*, Bohairic *p^hōth* "to carve, engrave" (Vycichl 1983, 166). Outside of Egyptian Hebrew *pattāh* "to engrave", *pittūah* "engraving, engraved decoration", Jewish Aramaic & Phoenician *pth* "engraving" (Koehler & Baumgartner 2001, 985-86; Ricks 1989, 132) seem to be related. But Černý (1976, 130) supposed the late Egyptian and Coptic verb was borrowed from West Semitic. The examples from other Semitic languages confirm **ḥ* in the position of the third radical: Akkadian *patāhu* "to puncture, bore through", Qatabanian *fih* "to inscribe, engrave", Sabaic *fih* "decorated stonework", Mehri (Jahn) *fātaḥ* "Loch, Verwundung" (Takács 2001, 532). This fact represent a very strong argument for its borrowing from a Semitic source characterized by the change **ḥ* > **h*. This feature is typical for such languages as Hebrew, Phoenician or Aramaic. Vycichl (1959, 146) tried to connect the Egyptian verb with Akkadian *patāqu* "to shape, create, form", particularly "to form brick, wall, building, statue", "to create heaven, earth, mankind", also "to cast metal" (CDA 270). From the point of view of semantics this motivation looks very convincing not only for the verb "to carve, engrave", but also for the god who was the patron of craftsmen. But the difference in the third radical is incompatible with the idea of common origin. And so from the point of view of historical phonetics best seems the etymology connecting the Egyptian verb with Epigraphic South Arabian: Qatabanian *fih* "to order, direct", Sabaic *fih* "to leave the decision to someone, authorize"; further cf. Himyaritic *fataḥa* "to give judgment" (Biella 1982, 412), Geez *fataḥa* "to judge, decide, arbitrate" (Leslau 1987, 170). Finally, the semantic development from the meaning "to order, direct, judge" to the name of the god, who was a universal creator and demiurg, is quite acceptable.

2.5. The title of Ptah's high priest *wr ḥrp(w) ḥmwt*, lit. "greatest of the controllers of craftsmen" (Wb. I, 565; 329), represents a witness of relation of *Pth* to craftsmen.

2.6. Ptah is associated with the figures of dwarfes in workshop scenes from mastaba tombs in the Old Kingdom. In the Late Period it was probably Ptah who was depicted as a big-bellied

dwarf on magical stelae and as figurines, going back to the association with the craftsman-dwarves < <http://www.philae.nu/akhet/NetjerUP.html> >.

2.7. The Egyptian tradition knew the spouse of Ptah. It was the goddess *Shm.t*, first appearing already in the Pyramid Texts and attested still in Old Coptic in the form *Sahmi* and in the Greek transcription Πετεσάχμις of an Egyptian toponym, lit. "that what was given by Sakhmet - see Vycichl 1983, 203 who proposed the vocalisation **sāhimat*). She was characterized by the lioness' head. Her name was formed from the word *sh̄m* "power", hence "powerful". This word also served as an epithet of the goddess Hathor (Wb. IV, 249-50).

3. The common features of Ptah and Hephaestus and their spouses can be compared in the following table:

	Ptah	Hephaestus	Paragraph
Name	<i>*Ḥāt-Ptah-i</i> "house of Ptah" > <i>*Hāpsta(h)i^o</i> > <i>*Hāp^hstai^o</i> > <i>*Hāp^hais^o</i>		2.2.
Specialization	Patron of craftsmen	Active craftsman	2.6.
Physical shape	Dwarf-like	Lame	2.6.; 1.2.
Wife	<i>Shm.t</i> "powerful"	μεγέθει dat. "power"	2.7.; 1.2.

It seems, it is enough to conclude that the theonym *Ptah* could be adapted in the compound **Ḥāt-Ptah-i* "house of Ptah" in Greek already in the 2nd mill. BC not only as a word, but also with basic features characterizing him and his charming and warlike wife.

References

- Aura Jorro, Francisco. 1985-93. *Diccionario micénico*, I-II. Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas.
- Biella, Joan C. 1982. *Dictionary of Old South Arabic. Sabeian Dialect*. Chico: Scholar Press.
- Carnoy, Albert. 1957. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la mythologie gréco-romaine*. Louvain: Universitas.
- CDA *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, ed. by J. Black, A. George, N. Postgate. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2000.
- Chantraine, Pierre. 1968-80. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, I-IV. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Cicero: *De Natura Deorum*, edited & translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University - London: Heinemann 1972.
- Černý, Jaroslav. 1976. *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Faulkner, Raymond. 1981. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Griffith Institute.
- Frisk, Hjalmar. 1973. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I-II. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Furnée, Edzard I. 1972. *Die wichtigsten konsonantischen Erscheinungen des Vorgriechischen*. The Hague - Paris: Mouton.
- Herodotus' *Historiën*, ed. by B.A. Van Groningen. Leiden: Brill 1963.
- Klein, Ernest. 1987. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. New York-London: Macmillan.
- Koehler, Ludwig & Baumgartner. 2001. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill.
- Leslau, Wolf. 1987. *Comparative Dictionary of Ge^cez (Classical Ethiopic)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Liddell, Henry G. & Scott, Robert. 1901. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ricks, Stephen D. 1989. *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian*. Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico.
- Schrader, Otto & Nehring, Alfons. 1917-29. *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde*, I-II. Berlin - Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter.
- Takács, Gábor. 2001. *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian*, Vol. II: *b-, p-, f-*. Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill.
- Vycichl, Werner. 1959. Ägyptisch-semitische Anklänge. *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 84, 145-147.
- Vycichl, Werner. 1983. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*. Leuven-Paris: Peeters.
- Vycichl, Werner. 1990. *La vocalisation de la langue égyptienne*, I: *La phonétique*. Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire (Bibliothèque d'étude, T. 16).

Wb. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, I-VI, ed. by A. Erman & H. Grapow. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1971.
Witczak, Krzysztof T. 1993. Greek Aphrodite and her Indo-European origin. In: *Miscellanea Linguistica Graeco-Latina*, ed. by Lambert Isebaert. Namur: Société des Études classiques, 115-123.
WPS *Wortschatz der Pharaonen in Sachgruppen*, by Rainer Hannig & Petra Vomberg. Mainz: von Zabern 1999.