

**Ancient Egyptian deities and their numerous names:  
the One and the Many in religious discourse and practice**

**International Conference  
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**Abstract**

In ancient polytheisms, the way in which the gods are referred to is central to understanding the very notion of "god". Indeed, the deities are named in a multitude of ways to reflect their different capacities, functions and fields of action. In his seminal work on the Egyptian gods *Der Eine und die Vielen*<sup>1</sup>, Erik Hornung wrote "Daraus folgt für die Gottesnamen und Epitheta, daß sich das Wesen und die Wirkensmöglichkeit einer Gottheit mit der Zahl ihrer Namen weiten" (Hornung 1973, 81). However, the study of the names of gods in Ancient Egypt remains a field that has yet to be developed, while research in this area for the Greek and Semitic worlds has been underway for several years<sup>2</sup>.

The multiplication of the names and epithets of the Egyptian deities depended on a variety of processes: the association of two or even more deities, the attribution of titles and epithets in long lists and/or according to their geographical embeddedness, and so on. Similarly, the Egyptians themselves put forward a hierarchy of gods, for example by differentiating between 'great' and 'small' gods, but the cultic reality behind these designations has yet to be clarified.

The aim of this conference is to examine the various names given to the gods in Ancient Egypt, taking into account the context in which they were used (temples, funerary texts, priestly titles, evidence of personal piety, etc.). We suggest to look more specifically at two points: (1) to what extent were the multiple names of the gods linked to ritual practice, and (2) do these names and the context in which they were used allow us to better define what a deity was, in particular by distinguishing the nature of the 'great' and 'small' gods, as well as the relationships between the different groups of divinities?

Following on from a study day devoted to topical epithets, which brought together Egyptologists and specialists from the Greek and Semitic worlds in Lausanne in 2023<sup>3</sup>, this conference will focus more specifically on ancient Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen: ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen*. Darmstadt, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the ERC Project *Mapping Ancient Polytheisms, Cult Epithets as an Interface Between Religious Systems and Human Agency*, directed by Corinne Bonnet (Université Toulouse – Jean Jaurès), <https://map-polytheisms.humanum.fr/>.

<sup>3</sup> Study day « Les épithètes topiques des dieux antiques : une approche comparative entre Égypte, Grèce et monde sémitique » organised by Corinne Bonnet (Université de Toulouse), Laurent Coulon (Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Le Caire/EPHE, Paris) and Giuseppina Lenzo (Université de Lausanne), 17 March 2023. For the program, see <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/recherche/manifestations/ma1503/>.