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Wepset, one of the many names of the fire-spitting uraeus and of the goddess in the myth of the Eye of Re who returned from Nubia (Augensagen, Sonnenauge). Her name “She who burns” is probably derived from a verb wps “to burn” attested since the NK. An alternative explanation proposed by Sethe, who analysed wps(t) as wp.t “brow” + the nominal affix -s² is unlikely, not only because Sethe wrongly denied the existence of a verb wps, but also since the earliest attestations of the goddess already write her name with the fire-determinative (Gardiner, EG³, Sign-list, Q 7).⁴

W. is usually depicted as a uraeus⁵ but in the Graeco-Roman temples of Lower Nubia she appears as an anthropomorphic goddess wearing a uraeus on top of her head,⁶ in which case she does not wear the vulture-cap (Geierhaube).⁷ Occasionally the uraeus is supplied with Hathor or Tefnut symbols such as a sundisc between cow’s horns⁸ or a lion’s head.⁹

Already in CT Spell 75 W. is associated with the mythical complex of the Eye of Re: Shu (Schu) is said to have calmed (the Ba of) W., “who is in the midst of her rage” and to have “made her to travel,” sc. from Nubia back to Egypt. In the NK Guides to the Hereafter (Jenseitsführer) she prepares the way for the resurrection of Osiris by destroying his enemies. Thus in the Amduat she is one of a group of 12 apotropaic uraei (Götter, apotropäische) “who illumine the darkness of the Netherworld”,¹¹ whereas in the Book of Caverns (Höhlenbuch) W. and her consort Nsr “kindle the fire under the cauldrons which contain the enemies of Osiris” and “their fire opens up the Netherworld”.¹² As a goddess who annihilates the enemies of Osiris and Re she appears also in a hymn to Osiris in the Memphite tomb of Haremheb¹³ and in LP ritual texts.¹⁴

In Philae and other Graeco-Roman temples of Lower Nubia W. appears both as a deity on her own and as a “determinative-goddess”¹⁵ of Tefnut and related goddesses.¹⁶ Her most frequent epithet is “Mistress of the Flame in Bigga” (nbt nbj m Snmt). Owing to the ruinous state of the temple structures of Bigga no traces of her cult have been found on the island itself, but texts from other temples, notably Philae, make it clear that this was the place where Tefnut settled in the
form of W. after Shu and *Thot had brought her back from Nubia. At Bigga W. “purified her body”, i.e., cooled her rage; 18 here she was pacified (Besänftigung) by Thot, who is called shtp nsrt and who receives a scribe’s palette in her presence. 19 Here too she dwells in the Chapel of the Flame (Hwt-Nbi) surrounded with flames (nbj m pbr.s 20) and burns the enemies of god and king with the blast of fire from her mouth. 21 In the Mammissi (*Geburtshaus) of Philae W. appears as a hypostatization of the apotropaic aspect of the mother-goddess Hathor 22 while she herself is never called “mother of the god”. That she was nevertheless an active force in the (re)birth of the child-god is documented by texts in the temple of *Kom Ombo. Here she is associated with the local form of Tefnut, Tasentnferf (*Sent-nofret) and with 23 Nechbet. 24 The latter is called “Ba of W.” who “flies up to the sky as incense” 24 to join the Ba of Dewen’tawy (*Dunau) representing Shu, and as Gutbub has shown the unification of air and incense symbolizes the theogamy of Shu and Tefnut resulting in the birth of the child-god. 25 A similar concept may have existed at Philae 26 and the Chapel of the Flame of W. may be compared with the Island of Fire (*Flammensinel) of Egyptian funerary literature which is both the place where Re is engendered and the place where his enemies are destroyed. 27 The parallelism between the annual return of the Eye of Re from Nubia and the daily return of the Sun god (*Sonnegott) from the Netherworld is likewise found in earlier religious texts and indeed forms the background of the passage from CT Spell 75 quoted above. 28
