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The animals of the desert and the return of the goddess

Abstract

The so-called "Demotic Myth of the Eye of the Sun" has two protagonists. The one is the daughter of the sun-god Re, appearing as Hathor or Tefnut. The other is a son of Thot (while in versions attested in monumental inscriptions, he is Thot himself). Both are shown in the form of animals, the one mainly as a cat, then as a vulture and a gazelle, while the other is a wolf-guenon or simple guenon. Also the fables narrated by the male protagonist are illustrative of behaviour and conceptualisation of various animals of the desert or savannah. Further texts, both in demotic script and in hieroglyphs, are studied concerning the relation between Hathor and the desert/steppe animals. Some animals are only attested as entourage of the goddess, not as manifestations of herself. Hathor is linked with desert animals much more than any other ancient Egyptian deity, probably because her conceptualisation as the star Sirius (invisible for part of the year) made her appear as being absent from Egypt for some time. Grouping the different texts into a chronological sequence of compositions (not attestations) seems to show the disappearance of some species, especially ostrich, ibex and oryx antelope. Some demotic texts are remarkable for the combination of hartebeest, deer and gazelle which is likely to attest a relatively northern origin.

Keywords: Egypt, New Kingdom, Late Period, Graeco-Roman period, literature, religion, Myth of the Eye of the Sun, animals of the desert/savannah, Hathor, Re, Sirius

The text which I intend to place at the centre of my discussion is a composition often called "Demotic Myth of the Eye of the Sun", while I prefer to call it a bit more neutrally "The Return of the Goddess".¹ It is written in Demotic Egyptian language and script, and preserved in about eight different copies, all from the Roman Imperial Period. Additionally, there are also rather extended fragments of a Greek translation. I would feel a bit less sure about the actual date of the composition as such, but its core is definitely rather late for ancient Egypt, not before the first millennium BC. While this is one specific literary or at least semi-literary composition transmitted in relatively fixed form on papyri, there are many individual elements of the same basic constellations attested mainly in hieroglyphic inscriptions and scenes of temples of the Graeco-Roman period.²

1 Basic information and bibliography in Quack 2009: 148–159; new German translation in Hoffmann & Quack 2007: 195–229, 356–360. In this paper, the two main manuscripts of the text will be distinguished as "Leiden" and "Lille" according to their actual place of conservation.

2 See as basic studies Junker 1911; 1917; Sethe 1912; Inconnu-Bocquillon 2001.

The basic plot is that the daughter of the sun-god Re, identified with the goddess Hathor or Tefnut, leaves her home in Egypt and turns to the far-away regions of the south-eastern steppe of Nubia. Egypt is in distress at her absence, so efforts are undertaken to get her back. The main protagonist of this operation is, in the demotic version, a figure called "the small *wnš-gwf*", which is a composite of *wnš* "wolf" and *gwf* (with an orthographic variant *kwf*) "guenon" (*Cercopithecus* sp.). The Greek version renders this as *λυκόλυνξ*, a composite of "wolf" and "lynx". According to an indication in the demotic text (Leiden 22,12), he is the son of the thrice-great god Thot, i.e. the god of wisdom often himself depicted in the form of a monkey (but typically a baboon, not a guenon). It should be stressed that this constellation is specific for the Demotic narrative composition while scenes from temples alluding to the same basic myth tend to see Thot himself as the principal agent in bringing back the goddess, often in company with her brother Shu. Still, at one point in the discussion between the two protagonists, the male character is likened to a baboon (Leiden 9,6).

At one point of the tale, the Greek translation of the text indicates explicitly that he changes his form (when she also changes, to become a gazelle) and becomes a lynx (i.e. without the component of the wolf). However, it seems that this shape change is also found in the Demotic version, even if not expressed as directly. When the two come to Egypt, it is said that she appears first in the form of a vulture (Leiden 21,4), and later in the form of a gazelle (Leiden 21,9), both times with a guenon adoring her. At this point, the Demotic text practically ceases to speak of the male protagonist as a "wolf-guenon" except in retrospect concerning the journey in Nubia (e.g. Leiden 22,8) and begins to use the simple word *kwf* "guenon". I suppose that the translator of the Greek version consistently understood this word to mean "lynx", however zoologically surprising that seems to us.

The small wolf-guenon stresses near the beginning of the composition that he lives free under the sky in the trees (Lille A 15–16). The ape-character of the composite being "wolf-guenon" seems to preponderate as can be seen most clearly in a passage on the way to Egypt when the two protagonists encounter a series of trees (Leiden 19,10–21,2). In every case, the male character climbs them, eats their fruits and looks at his home country which he is about to leave for Egypt – as a matter of fact this whole episode is a retarding element given that he is reluctant to depart from his home. The goddess each time has to promise to attend to his needs with all products of the trees in question (including musical instruments made from their wood) in order to keep him going. At least for us this transmits the basic fact that these ape forms, be it guenon or baboon, are not native to Egypt at the time of the story but imported from the south.

The goddess herself also takes on the form of an animal, basically a "Nubian cat" (*imyt lkšt*) which seems to mean something a bit different from the ordinary Egyptian cat, so probably it is the Libyan wild cat (*Felis sylvestra libyca*). Where the demotic manuscripts start to give a connected sense, the cat and the wolf-guenon have already

met and are speaking with each other. Mainly, the cat is describing the circumstances of her life. She is well kept in special buildings and has lots of servants delivering food to her (Lille B 48–A 9) – the description sounds almost like the verbalisation of the typical image of a procession of personifications of agricultural domains towards a tomb owner. Still, she feels unhappy because fish bones frequently turn up in her food and threaten to choke her. Furthermore, the cat describes a neighbourhood of terrifying lions (*mʿy*, *Panthera leo*) and fearsome *lby* – a word which, in Coptic (ⲗⲁⲃⲟⲓ), can mean the bear as well as a female lion (Lille A 25). As I do not see which naturally occurring bear there could be in the lands to the southeast of the Egyptian Nile Valley, I tend to take the second option for the meaning here.

While the feline nature of the female protagonist is mostly preponderant, there are changes at the end of the story. When she comes to Egypt, first she changes into the form of a vulture when arriving at Elkab (Leiden 21,2–4). This is hardly surprising as it conforms to local theology: At Elkab, the vulture goddess Nekhbet is the main deity. A bit more interesting is the shape change which occurs at Thebes. There, she changes into the form of a gazelle (Leiden 21,9). In a hymn, this form is linked up with Mut, the female consort of Amun, the main god of Thebes. So, we have to ask ourselves whether there was any specific affinity between Mut and the gazelle form. Furthermore, I think we should not take both forms for granted or think of them as the result of some haphazard chance, but ask ourselves whether there were any landscape factors which would make the region of Elkab especially relevant for vultures, and that of Thebes for gazelles – not necessarily for the periods of high culture in Egypt but perhaps only in pre- or proto-historic times. I can only pose this question for the zoologists.

Even later in the story, after having passed Thebes (which is much focused on in the manuscript which is of Theban provenience), the goddess changes her shape again and goes in the beautiful form of Tefnut (Leiden 22,2) which probably has to be understood as an anthropomorphic goddess.

These final shape changes can be brought in line with some points of the hieroglyphic attestations of the myth. At Philae, in one invocation transmitted in the kiosk, she is asked to come down from the desert as a gazelle (Junker 1911: 46; Daumas 1969: 10), and there is some evidence that, after the purification and cooling down at the Abaton, she takes on the shape of a beautiful girl (Junker 1917: 89, 111, 165; Inconnu-Bocquillon 2001: 215–218).

Summing this up, the two protagonists appear for almost all of the text in the form of animals, and these animals are mostly not native to Egypt. This is in accordance with the fact that they are coming from the far southeast. Of course I admit that they are not animals of the desert strictly speaking, rather of the steppe and savannah south of the Sahara itself. As the protagonists are animals, it makes sense that a lot of their conversation centres on animals, especially animal fables the male protagonist tells in order to

make his points. Also, their animal nature influences their behaviour, sometimes in a drastic way. I have already mentioned how the male protagonist, as an ape, is allured by tree fruit.

At one point of the story, the female protagonist becomes really angry. She transforms into a lion whose fury is described in detail (Leiden 12,13–27):

She took on the form of a raging lioness who was six divine cubits long and accordingly in width and height. She threw up her tail in front of her. Her lower belly (?) smoked of fire. Her back took the colour of blood; her face had the splendour of the sun. Her eyes were gleaming with fire, shooting flames like the heat of noon in summer. She shrouded herself completely in rays, including everything in her surrounding. She stroked with her paw, and the mountain set off dust. She wagged her tail, and the sand formed dust devils. She bared her teeth, and fire blazed out of the mountain. She whetted her teeth, and the branches of the trees withered. Her nose snorted fumes, and many, many flies came out of it. She roared at full power of her throat, and the mountain opened its mouth. The desert trembled for two hours. The stone talked to the sand. The wolf-guenaon was in very great fear.

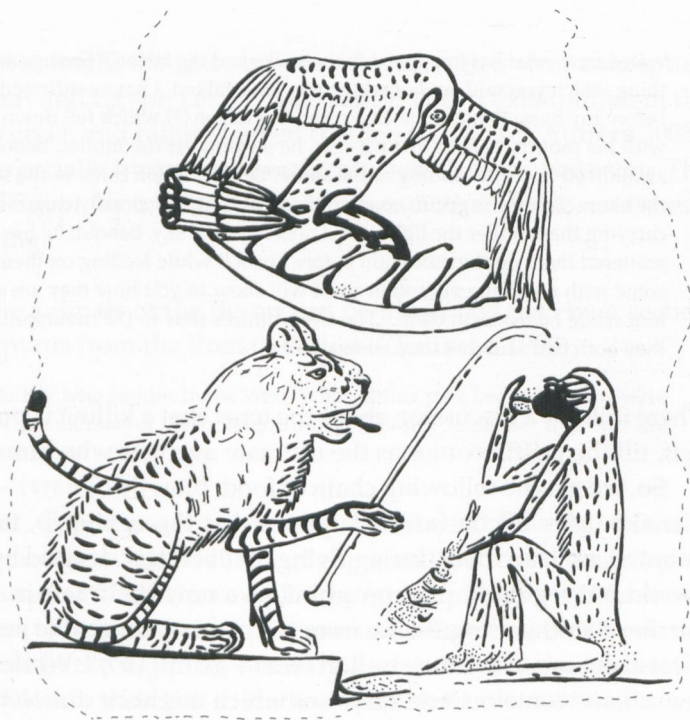
This is not only a fine poetic passage, it should also be compared to zoological reality. The length of six divine cubits – a bit more than three meters – would probably still be within a realistic range, especially if the tail is included in the measurement, even though for a female lion it is quite large.³ While the description of the fury of the lion is certainly exaggerated, especially concerning the fire aspects, it quite captures the effect of a lioness hunting at full speed on dusty and sandy ground.

Another passage of the text, this time not in the narrative framework but in a fable, tells of two jackals (*wnš*; *Canis aureus*?) that are closely related. When they are resting under a tree, they are attacked by a single lion. Instead of running away, they decide simply to attend his arrival (Leiden 16, 14–29). I do not intend to dwell on the plot and the message of the fable, but the question of group structure is of some zoological interest: The jackals are presented here in a very small group, probably a couple, and as a matter of fact the gold-jackal normally does not form large packs. The solitary lion is less normal – perhaps some old male ousted from his pack by a younger rival. In any case, the specimen is described by using masculine personal pronouns which would point to such a special situation since, in a normal pack, it is the females who do the hunting. Furthermore, the gold-jackal is reputed to be rather bold towards large felids, so the behaviour shown in the fable has some basis in natural facts.

Yet another fable presents a lion, a panther, a bear (or lioness, see above) and a mouse as wild animals, while a horse, a donkey, a cow and an ox appear as domesticated animals (Leiden 17,8–19,4). The fable itself is quite instructive as it is one of the rare explicit

3 Still, I am not quite convinced that Vittmann 1995: 61 was right to include it as an example of giant size. Even more so, the hypothesis of Stadler 2004/05: 116 according to which *ky* means “height” here (with the length not expressed) does not make sense and is, besides, not even in accordance with the normal demotic meaning of the word.

Fig. 1 Ostrakon Berlin 21443.
Drawing by Olga Koch.



cases where the Egyptians understood human behaviour towards animals as brutal and unfair, but for the question of zoology, it presents less information, except for some technical details of lion-hunting (cf. Kurth 2003; Thissen 2004).

An important element of the story are also vultures, and this on several levels. First, they occur in some of the animal-fables the wolf-ape tells. One of them concerns a vulture and a cat mother having their nests respectively on top and at the foot of a tree (Leiden 2,7–3,15). It is possible that this scene, the ape telling a cat about a nesting vulture, was illustrated on a New Kingdom ostrakon (Berlin 21443; Brunner-Traut 1956: 91–92, frontispiece; but see Loebe 2009: 34, 39 n. 11) (**Fig. 1**). Another one centres on the story of two vultures – the “seeing” and the “hearing” – who are observing everything on earth and conversing about the chain of food and retribution for killing (Leiden 13,24–15,7). As this passage also has a lot to offer to zoologists, it merits a citation (Leiden 14,12–29):

Irisnef⁴ says concerning the blowfly (?), which was at the end of darkness, that a lizard swallowed it. Irisnef said to him: ‘The skink swallowed the lizard. The snake swallowed the skink. The falcon (?) took the snake to the sea.’ Hearing said to Seeing: ‘Since you see into the sea and look at what is in the

4 This is otherwise attested as a demotic phonetic rendering of *rsi-ḥnb=f* “south of his wall”, an epithet of the Memphite god Ptah, but in this case denotes one of the two vultures in the fable.

water, now what has happened to the snake and the falcon?' Seeing said: 'This truly happened: Everything which you said, and of which you have talked, I have confirmed them. They all happened truly before my eyes. Behold, the snake and the falcon (?) which fell down into the sea, a mullet ate them with his mouth. Behold, the cat-fish, he swallowed the mullet. Behold, the mullet, also the cat-fish swallowed it, while landing at the shore. Behold, a lion came to the sea, and he drew the cat-fish up the shore. Behold, a griffin smelled them, and he has already dug his claws into both of them while carrying them under the light of the rays (?) of the sky. Behold, he has already left them down, he has scattered them on the mountain before himself while feeding on them. If (you think that) I am lying, come with me to the mountain and I will show to you how they are scattered and putrefying before him while he feeds on them.' The two vultures flew to the mountain. They found everything which they both had said that they were all true.

There follows a discussion about the tenet that a killing is punished by being killed yourself, till the griffin comes as the ultimate avenger who himself goes free.

So, we get the following chain of food: blowfly (*ʿfn syr*) – lizard (*hntws*) – skink (*sknks*) – snake (*hḥ*) – falcon (*nšr*). I suppose that the next step, falling into the sea, has to be counted as an accident during flying (deliberately devised by the text author), since a fish would not regularly prey on a bird, so a new chain sets in, build for the first step upon carrion-feeding. Progressing from the carcass, we get the next line: mullet (*ʿt*, ancient *ʿṣṣ*) – cat-fish (*nwr*, ancient *nʿr*) – lion (*mʿe*) – griffin (*srrf*). While not contrary to reality, these two chains contain some surprises which might be due to the desire of the author to include as many ecological niches as possible; thus we have birds and fishes as well as land animals. Still, thus he is forced to include the falling of birds into the water as well as a lion catching a fish swimming too close to the shore. Also quite uncommon is that, while the lion turns up, his typical prey does not appear at all, namely the herbivorous gregarious animals like antelopes and gazelles. There might be a conceptual reason for this: Our author likes to construct a fairly long food chain in order to fully illustrate his overarching concept that there is punishment for every killing. But with a grazing animal which does not kill and a lion as its direct predator he could not have brought this to the fore very well. I will come back later to one very salient point of the fable, namely the idea of the griffin as an animal living in the reality of the desert together with other animals.

Obviously, the last point of the story, namely the two vultures taking off to inspect the rotting prey of other animals, has a very real animal behaviour behind it, whatever we may think about the idealisation of its motives. The capability of vultures to observe events taking place on earth and to gather very quickly where there was carrion did not go unnoticed by the Egyptians.

Secondly, on the level of the main story, the goddess at one point likens herself to a vulture while stylising the male protagonist as a baboon (Leiden 9,6–7). At that point she also considers herself as a female falcon who is an issue of the supreme sun-god (Leiden 9,18). I have already pointed out above how her vulture-form is especially relevant for Elkab, owing to cult-topographic reasons.

Beyond the parade of desert animals, the text also provides us with a clear conceptual opposition between the desert and Egypt, i.e. the Nile Valley. This is exemplified in the topic of opposing vegetable green and mineral green (Leiden 6,1–30; see Aufrère 2005). The desert green is stone – especially turquoise or malachite which cannot be eaten. The green of the alluvial land of Egypt, by contrast, is papyrus and other plants, and these, especially grain, are life-giving.

The relation of Hathor to the animals of the desert can be illustrated also by a section from a demotic funerary papyrus from the Roman Period (Chauveau 1990):

May she (the deceased) find Hathor who resides in the West, while sitting on a bed, while the hartebeests, the gazelles and the deer, the animals of the mountain are on the sand before her, and they say:
‘Is our mother here? Is this our mother?’

The specific terms used are šš, Coptic ⲩⲟⲩ, ancient ššw “hartebeest” (*Alcephalus buselaphus*); ḡhs(t), Coptic Ⲅⲁⲩⲥⲉ “gazelle” (*Gazella* sp.); and ʔyl, from Semitic ayyāl, Coptic ⲉⲓⲟⲩⲗ “hart” (*Cervus* sp.). Within the complete spectrum of Egyptian funerary compositions, this passage has to be regarded as quite unusual – the animals of the desert do not play an important role in the Egyptian funerary literature.⁵ The reason for the presence of the animals is obviously their link to Hathor – and Hathor herself was an important funerary deity⁶ (especially at Thebes, where her cult in the western mountains was an important factor). I strongly suspect this passage to allude to a situation quite similar to the starting point of the myth of the Far Goddess where she is away in the savannah among the animals.

This conceptual link between Hathor and the animals of the desert can also be seen in the demotic narrative preserved in Papyrus Saqqara 2 verso (Smith & Tait 1983: 109–142). In that case, the legitimate Pharaoh has been brought out into the wilderness and sits among the animals of the desert. Explicitly named are hartebeest (šš; *Alcephalus buselaphus*),⁷ gazelle (ḡhs; *Gazella* sp.), hyena (ḡyḡ; *Hyaena* sp., *Crocuta* sp.), wolf-jackal (wnš; *Canis aureus*?) and hart (ʔyr; *Cervus* sp.) (x+1, 34), a bit later also the lion (mʔe; *Panthera leo*) (x+1, 36). It is obvious from the context that these animals are closely connected with Hathor to whom the hero of the tale also prays for saving the Pharaoh.

5 This fact should receive greater acknowledgement by those who ascribe to the desert animals a strong symbolic meaning of rebirth, like Hornung & Staehelin 1976: 138–142 (even if it can be discussed whether rebirth is at the centre of Egyptian funerary texts).

6 See, e.g., Smith 1993: 37 on Hathor to whom the west has been entrusted.

7 Misread as *mm* with the supposed meaning “giraffe” in Smith & Tait 1983: 111. It should be pointed out that the forms of *m* and *š* are very similar in this hand. No word exists for “giraffe” in Demotic; what Erichsen 1954: 153 has entered as *mjmjt* is in reality simply to be read as *mīt* “way”.

Among hieroglyphic texts of similar inspiration, the hymn to the return of the goddess preserved in the temple of Medamud of the Ptolemaic period is of some importance.⁸ It is mainly a description of festival activities. After describing the human beings and their joy, also the animals are involved:

Behold,⁹ oh golden one, stupendous¹⁰ at singing,
Requirement¹¹ of her heart is dancing!
Be shining¹² in rejoicing at the time of lightening (?),
Be content with the dancing at the dark of night!

Behold the walking around at the place of drunkenness,
That hall of traversing the marshes.
Its rule is enduring, its regulation firm,
There is no unfulfilled desire in it.

The children of the king pacify you with what you wish,
The chieftains consecrate¹³ offerings for you.
The chief lector-priest extols you in creating jubilation,
The ritual specialists in reading festival songs.

The official intonates for you with his barrel-shaped drum,¹⁴
The percussionists in taking up the round frame drum,
The maidens rejoice for you with garlands,
The young men with wreath-crowns.

The drunken revellers drum for you in the cool of the night.
The awakened ones heap blessings onto you.
The Libyans (?) dance for you with their cross-bands,
The Asians with their staffs,
The Trogydites overthrow themselves for you in front of you,
The Bearded Ones (of Punt) revere you.

The *kyky*-apes praise you with *spn*-wood,
The *kri*-apes with *ssnčm*-wood,
The griffin¹⁵ swathes himself for you with his wings,
The foxes erect for you their front-parts,
The hippopotami adore you, their mouths open.¹⁶
Their foreparts are in adulation for you.

8 Originally edited by Drioton 1927: 26–29; extended study (although philologically not really an advance) in Darnell 1995.

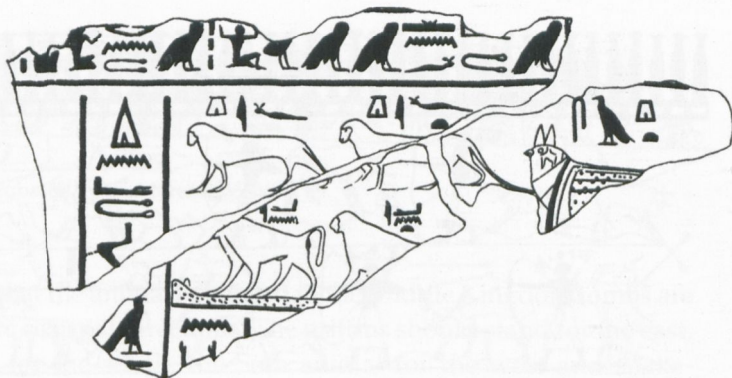
9 The orthography (no determinative of walking legs) strongly militates against reading *ml.t* “come”. I prefer the feminine *m=č* “behold, see”.

10 Read *ggw*, not *wnm* as proposed by Darnell 1995: 49 without explanation of the orthography.

11 To be read *hrt* with the bread as determinative, erroneously read *hr ʕ* by Darnell 1995: 49.


12 To be read *psč* against Darnell’s proposal *wbn*.

Fig. 2 Wall painting in El-Bersheh, tomb of Neheri. After Griffith & Newberry 1895: pl. 11, fig. 5.



The text can be paralleled with an adjacent relief showing music making in honour of Hathor (Drioton 1927: 25). In this, however, only human participants are depicted, while another relief (Drioton 1927: 29) shows only a dancing Bes whereas the animals are never actually depicted. One peculiarity of this text is the inclusion of an animal we regard as fabulous – the griffin – among the otherwise real beings, as he was also in one of the fables of the Myth of the Eye of the Sun quoted above. Obviously, this is far from unique for Egypt. Already the decoration of some Middle Kingdom tombs at El-Bersheh (Fig. 2) and Beni Hasan (Fig. 3) shows griffins next to ‘real’ desert animals.¹⁷ Also, a silver vase from Bubastis (probably from the 19th dynasty) depicts griffins among other animals of the steppe (Morenz 1997/98: 39–40) (Fig. 4). We should recognise that our categorisation of ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ animals is far from being an objective criterion of universal applicability. An ancient Egyptian would have reckoned with the possibility of really encountering a griffin, especially if walking around in the area near the Red Sea coast, and there is even a demotic tale telling of a griffin that comes from the Red Sea and wreaks havoc among the Egyptian army (Quack 2009: 52).

13 To be read *skr*, not the *kib* proposed by Darnell.

14 The sign , misunderstood by Darnell as “lotus blooms”, is to be understood as depiction of the barrel drum, see von Lieven 2003: 51 n. 21, even if, given the phonetic writing of obviously the same word as



in Medamoud 325 (Drioton 1927: 25), the reading might be rather *gʷwt* than *sh(r)* proposed by her.

15 It seems more likely to me that the plural strokes are put erroneously after *sfr* than that the singular suffix *f* should be corrected into the plural *sn*.

16 To be read *pth* against Darnell’s proposal *wn*.

17 Newberry 1893: pl. 30 (top register); Newberry 1894: pl. 4 (top register, left), pl. 13 (second register from top, middle), see also pl. 16, left (griffin depicted with tomb owner); Griffith & Newberry 1895: pl. 11, no. 5 (griffin together with guenons and baboons), pl. 16. Cf. Barta 1973/74: 340–341, 348; Vasiljević 2003.

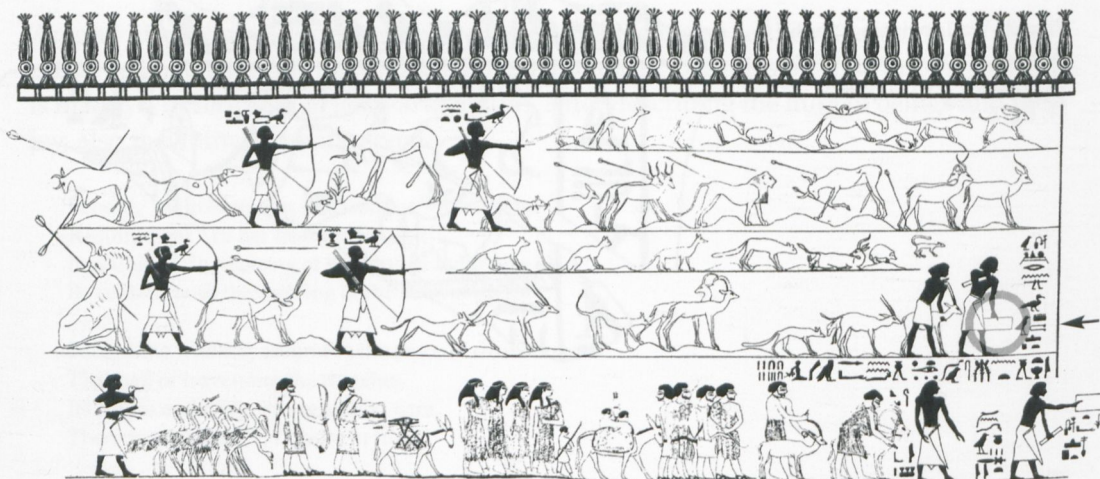


Fig. 3 Wall painting in Beni Hasan, tomb of Khnumhotep II. After Newberry 1893: pl. 30. [Editors' note: The arrow indicates the position of the game list that has been selected as the logo of the workshop.]

Darnell (1995: 91) has proposed that the different animals represent different geographical areas: the simians and the griffin the far southeast and the Red Sea, the fox the gebels and wadis at the edges of Egypt, and the hippopotami the damp, aquatic world of Egypt proper. I would prefer to put more emphasis on the fact that the human and animal groups of associates of the goddess are put side by side, even if the humans still take precedence of order. We first get some groups of people within Egypt or of no specified 'nationality' whatsoever. Afterwards, four foreign populations are enumerated. If we suppose that the Asiatics are representing the north in this case, we could read their order as a compass rose, starting with the Libyans in the west, then the Asiatics to the north, the Trogodytes from the Red Sea area for the east, and finally the Puntites for the south.

Another question is related to the depiction of griffins in the Middle Kingdom tombs, that is their names. They clearly show two different species which also have different Egyptian names. One is called *sfr* or *sfrr*, which corresponds to the form *srrf* used later in demotic Egyptian (Sauneron 1964). This is always a winged type. The name is possibly to be connected with the Egyptian root *srf* "to be hot" (Morenz & Schorch 1997: 372–376). For the other (cf. Fig. 2), the reading is more in doubt. Morenz & Schorch (1997: 377–379) have proposed a new reading *s3w nst r rn=s* "guardian of the throne according to her name". This is however plainly impossible as it creates a discrepancy between a masculine name and a feminine suffix referring to it (making the suffix refer to the word *nst* "throne" would not be convincing from the sense). Thus, it seems better to keep to the reading *s3(w)gt*. This second type of griffin is not winged and seems to be built a bit more sturdily; the completely preserved depiction shows a clearly female animal with tits similar to a she-dog.



Fig. 4 Relief on a silver vase from Bubastis. After Morenz 1997/98: 39.

Morenz (2002) has proposed that the animals depicted in the Middle Kingdom tombs are intended to symbolise specific celestial directions: The griffins should stand for the east, elephants and rhinoceroses for the south, the Seth animal for the west and snake-panthers for the north. However, the association of all four animals next to one another on one single wall of the tombs rather militates against such an interpretation, as well as the fact that not always all four species are present. Morenz has to make several supportive hypotheses in order to explain discrepancies in the actual attestation.

Similar in style to the Medamud composition, but unfortunately badly preserved in some crucial areas is the so-called “Travel of the Libyan Goddess” attested on blocks from a temple at Elkab as well as included in the daily ritual for Mut as preserved in a papyrus from Thebes (Verhoeven & Derchain 1985). In this case, we move around in a milieu which should reflect mainly upon the situation in the Western, not the Eastern Desert of Egypt. Remnants of phrases on one block from Elkab conserve mentions of baboons (*iʿni*) and perhaps guenons (*gwf*).¹⁸ Another passage preserved in a hieratic papyrus at Berlin runs as follows (section B2–C1 according to Verhoeven & Derchain 1985):

Behold, she has come from the fields of [...], that is her [...] of her predilection. Come, let’s perform for her the sleeping in the fields, and let’s get wet from the dew of the sky! May the ostriches come to her, their wings beating, and their chickens all behind them!

Another mentioning of the baboon (*iʿni*) occurs in badly broken context (D1).

The Libyans (*čhnyw*) arrive with gifts which are specified as being gazelles (*tʿw*)¹⁹ and ibexes (*Capra ibex*) (D2) which is a frequent combination in texts as well as iconography. Such a combination reminds one of the well known scene from Beni Hasan where a caravan of Asiatics is shown arriving at the court of a local nomarch (Fig. 3). Not only do they carry with them some animals of the desert, among them gazelles, they are also depicted in the register directly below some desert hunting scenes.²⁰

18 The identification of the word *kjfy* actually written on the stone is not certain.

19 For the meaning of this word, see Leitz 1993: 164–165. The case in question seems to be the oldest attestation of the word known to date.

20 For this scene, see e.g. Goedicke 1984; Kessler 1987; Vernus 1989: 173–178; Kamrin 1999: 93–96; Rabehl 2005.

While a section, in which the journey of the goddess reaches the capitals (Memphis and Thebes), is quite free of animal associations, things change radically with the arrival at Ra-Hesau (L1–M3):

A holocaust upon the altar of an oryx antelope (*mj-ḥč*) is made for you
In order to pacify you in Ra-Hesau²¹ as well as the Ihi-plant.

He/it has made green all her growing plants
Since they were made for the lady of the two lands.
May she settle down on him/it when she is in the desert!

Let's take for her the feathers from the back of the ostriches,
May the Libyans flap for you with their boomerangs,
Their ...²² made of leather.

Let's make for you the jubilation,
Let the Libyans dance (*ibj*) for you.
Let's dance (*ḥbj*), let's rejoice for our lady
In her form in which she took form,
When she was found on the top of the Ished-tree
Together with Re in Heliopolis.

Unfortunately, the text does not explicitly say in which form it was that she was found. But since the position on top of a tree implies a tree-climbing animal and since Re at Heliopolis is well attested in the form of a tomcat, I have some suspicions that here we should understand the form of a cat in which the goddess was found – and this would create a correspondence to the demotic myth of the return of the goddess where she is also found in the form of a cat.

Another passage brings the desert/steppe provenance of the goddess even more prominently to the fore (N5–O1):

I will bear testimony to your name,
having found you in the savannah [of]²³ Punt,
while the jubilation-apes (*ḥčtw*) were dancing for you,
and your Horus was singing for you.
The inhabitants of the valleys were carrying young gazelles.

In order to put these sections into the global perspective of the text, it should be explained that they form part of a larger section on proclaiming the goddess “till the pillars of heaven”. So, it indicates different localities and different sorts of honours and gifts. These include the swamps of the Delta (with Buto and Sais) and the Libyan area.

21 To be understood as *n mr(wt) štp=t m R²-ḥs³w*. The segmentation given in the translation of the edition has to be corrected.

22 The *ishj* given by the Elkab version is otherwise attested as name of an animal in the Book of the Temple (edition in preparation by the author), but perhaps corresponds to *ishj* as word for a linen strip in the post-script to spell 165 of the Book of the Dead (Pleyte). The Berlin papyrus has *isl* “rags”.

23 The lacuna should be restored [*nw*] rather than the [*hr*] proposed in the edition.

Summing up on this composition, what is a bit more specific among the animals mentioned are the ostriches which do not turn up in the other compositions I have looked at in connection with the animals of the goddess. There might be a zoological explanation for this: The other texts are mainly concerned with the arrival of the goddess from the southeast whereas all mentions of the ostrich we have in this composition connect this species with the Libyans, thus with the west. Maybe the Egyptians really encountered the ostrich primarily in the Western, not so much in the Eastern Desert.

A similar combination of followers in human and animal form, plus some 'supernatural' entities, can be seen in hymns written in the kiosk of Philae (time of Augustus) for the return of the goddess (Daumas 1969: 10–12):

How beautiful is your face, while you have appeared,
While you are at peace, oh Hathor, Great, Lady of Biggeh,
Hathor, Great, Lady of the place of appeal!

Your father Re is rejoicing at your rising,
Your brother Shu is giving homage before you.
Thot, the knowing one of the two lands,²⁴ is calling to you, oh powerful one.
The great ennead is in rejoicing and festival cries.

The baboons (*ḥm*) are dancing before you for your majesty,
The dancing dwarfs (*ḥwti* > *hyt*) are playing drums for your Ka.
The existing ones adore you,²⁵ they make hymns for you.
The sun-folk is bowed before your might.
Men and women glorify you while your love is given to them.
Virgins open for you the processions in giving their fate.

You are the lady of favour, the dame of dancing,
Great of love, lady of beautiful women.
You are the lady of drunkenness, numerous of feasts,
Lady of myrrh, lady of knotting wreathes,
Lady of cries, lady of rejoicing,
The sistrum is played for her majesty,
Noble Djedet (the enduring one), the Soul of Bugem.

You are the lady of the *shm*-sistrum, lady of the Menit and *sšst*-sistrum,
for whose Ka the *wnsb* is erected.

You are the lady of dancing, lady of singing and lute-playing,
Radiant of face every day, who does not know wrath.

May you put your beautiful face towards the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Autokrator, son of Re,
lord of crowns Cesar, living eternally, beloved of Ptah and Isis.

May you render him flourishing in joy of heart forever!

24 I suspect the hieroglyphs to be a garbled rendering of *ḥm-tʿwti*, a typical epithet of Thot.

25 I fail to see why Daumas put a "sic" to the *m*; this is a regular and correct form for the dependent pronoun 2nd sg. fem.



Fig. 5 Lute-playing baboon,
from the kiosk of Philae. After
Daumas 1969: pl. 3, bottom.



Fig. 6 Gazelle-bearing man,
from the kiosk of Philae. After
Daumas 1969: pl. 2, bottom.

Fig. 7 Button seal with symbol of Bat. After Wiese 1996: pl. 1, fig. 1.



Fig. 8 Button seal with symbol of Bat and adoring apes. After Wiese 1996: pl. 1, fig. 15.



In this case also, animals are ranked together with human followers of the goddess. They are even ranked more highly, coming after the great gods but before the humans. At the same time, the spectrum is much reduced – we only get baboons paired up with the dwarfs which are on the level of protecting gods or demons. They are also the ones who are depicted in the accompanying decoration as playing music for the goddess (Fig. 5).

The texts we have considered so far show the animals as friendly companions of the goddess. However, there is also another side to it: The animals in question could be used as festive bounty to enrich the altars and to feed the goddess (Fig. 6). For example, in an inscription at the Hathor kiosk of Philae, a priest declares: “I am bringing to you gazelles, ibexes and oryx antelopes in making festive your altars” (Daumas 1969: 5). This seems a bit like a paradox for us. I suspect that this use of the animals as venison does not have any specific link to Hathor but stands more in a general line of tradition where desert animals were an elite source of food deemed fit even for the king and the gods (cf. Fitzenreiter, this volume).

Till now, I have concentrated on texts, but I do not intend to omit iconographic questions altogether. There are some image types which are likely to be due to the conceptual linking between Hathor and desert animals. I will make a special mention of the imagery often found on the so-called button seals of the First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom (Wiese 1996). Some of them have the symbol of Bat who originally was a deity of her own but soon became just a form of Hathor (Fig. 7). Either in combination with this (Fig. 8) or on their own, we can also find adoring apes or dwarf-demons, and sometimes other animals of the desert. It is quite likely that the imagery in general is related to Hathor under her aspect of the goddess associated with the animals of the desert – and given the strong relation of this motive with the pacifying of the Dangerous Goddess, it would make a sensible decoration for protective amulets.

Another point should be mentioned in connection with the animals of the desert and their connection to Hathor, namely the gazelle headdress depicted with some noble women of the 18th dynasty and also attested by some original objects (Radomska 1991;

Lilyquist 2003: 154–162). There is some possibility that they go back to Asiatic prototypes.²⁶ Still, I strongly suspect that, in Egypt, they were given a symbolic connection with Hathor. Perhaps most interesting are the Wadi Qurud headdresses (Lilyquist 2003: 154–162, 225) since they display feline heads as well; and this is probably to be taken as reinforcing the connection with the animals of the goddess.

Perhaps now it is time to draw some conclusions. Concerning the goddess and the animals, we have to differentiate between two conceptions. First, the goddess herself as an animal. This is documented for the Libyan wild cat, the vulture, and the gazelle, but not for antelopes or ibexes. Secondly, animals as entourage of the goddess. This is attested for a larger spectrum of species, including apes which are never a form in which the goddess herself appears. But it should be noted that the Libyan wild cat is not attested among them, i.e. while it can be the form of the goddess herself, it does not appear separate from her. The special case of the cat is probably due to a genealogical conception of the Egyptians. The Far-Away Goddess is thought of as the daughter of the sun-god Re. Since he himself is understood as a tomcat, it is only fitting if his daughter is understood as a pussycat (cf. Quack 2007). Owing to such a conception, we have quite a lot of cat depictions from Hathor shrines, especially those located outside of Egypt proper, i.e. in Sinai or Nubia (Pinch 1993: 184–197).

Now, one important question is of course why the goddess had ties to the desert or steppe animals to a degree not usual for other deities in Egypt. Hathor is, already during the Old Kingdom, a goddess much concerned with the regions outside Egypt; we have her, for example, in the Sinai and at Byblos. Intimately linked to this is the very fact that the goddess leaves Egypt and dwells far away from it – which in itself is enough reason to associate her with the landscape and fauna beyond the fertile Nile Valley. Without delving too much into the details, I think that the mythical conceptualisation of a basic astronomical fact is involved. Several scholars have proposed interpretations along those lines, mainly speculating about a connection with the changing position of the sun (see, most recently, Leitz 2009: 308–311). I myself have demonstrated that a connection with the invisibility phase of Sirius is much more likely, not the least because this involves a total absence (invisibility) from Egypt while the sun would never really be away (Quack 2002). In any case, there is a factual base for the association of the goddess with regions beyond Egypt. Her connection specifically with the animals of those regions makes sense; and in some of our sources it is coupled with a relation to human foreigners.

Finally, we should say a bit about geographical and chronological differences. As already noted, the mentions of the ostrich in the texts I have studied are exclusive for the

26 In that case, it has to be taken into account that a similar object is attested for the god Reshef (of Syrian provenance; see Cornelius 1994: 247) as well as for Shed (Sternberg-El Hotabi 1999: 34).

Western Desert. The griffin is only attested for the eastern region, even if other sources not considered here are less partial in this respect.

Perhaps more interesting is the diachronic development, especially since in that case we have to pose the question of climatic factors and anthropogenic influences which may have led to changes in the faunal pattern (cf. Linseele & Van Neer, this volume; Pöllath, this volume). Our sources have to be handled somewhat delicately for this because we have to distinguish, more than it has been done up till now, between the date of a composition itself and the date of the actual preserved copies – and the literary and religious texts I have used are obviously not the direct notation of a text composed on the spot, they rather have a chain of transmission behind them. Finding objective criteria for gauging their real time of composition is far from easy. I myself place a rather high value on the state of the language, especially given the fact that religious compositions are also well attested in later stages of the Egyptian language (for a fuller discussion, see von Lieven 2007: 223–257).

When sorting the compositions discussed here, the Hathor hymns from Medamud and Philae are likely to be the oldest, even though the one from Medamud has the late feature of using *tw=č* for the dependent pronoun of the 2nd fem. sg. But this is a trait often due to secondary reworking of an existing text, and with texts preserved in several copies we often have a fluctuation between the older and the younger form (cf. Quack 2001: 285–286). The text transmitted in hieratic script in the Mut ritual and in a hieroglyphic version from Elkab could date from approximately the early New Kingdom. The demotic compositions are certainly young, i.e. of Saitic times or later.

Now it is remarkable that some animals which are present in the linguistically older texts disappear from the younger ones. The most noteworthy among them are the oryx antelope, the ibex and the ostrich. As a matter of fact, for none of these species is there an indigenous Egyptian word in demotic or Coptic texts at all. I would like to postulate that this is connected with a real disappearance from the fauna of Egypt, and that this disappearance caused some changes also on the level of the symbolic presence of the animals in religious texts.

The demotic texts have a group of three animals – hartebeest, deer and gazelle – which occur in a quite identical fashion in the quoted passage of the funerary papyrus and in Papyrus Saqqara 2 (there, augmented by a few more). If we attribute a zoological reality to this grouping, it should indicate a relatively northern location, especially concerning the presence of deer. A location near the eastern Delta fringes would be the most probable, according to the opinion of zoologists (Kitagawa 2008). This would not pose a problem for Papyrus Saqqara 2, given that it has a relatively northern provenance and that it makes sense to suppose a northern location for the formative development of Demotic literature. Things are a bit more difficult for the funerary text which is of Theban provenance, thus from the south (cf. Chauveau 1990). Perhaps the fact that it is a unique composition without close parallel could be an indication that it used a motive developed in another part of the country.

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