

THE GODS OF HUT-SEKHEM AND THE SEVENTH NOME OF UPPER EGYPT

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Neither ancient nor modern scholars have ever paid much attention to Hut-sekhem and the seventh nome of Upper Egypt (U.E. 7). This fact is certainly a consequence of its geographical position, squeezed between the two big religious centres of Dendera and Abydos. As a matter of fact, the nome also seems to have been neglected by the kings of Egypt. This fact is one of the main interests of a study dedicated to this nome. After collecting all the documentation related to this place, it appears that U.E. 7 provides us with a typical picture of what a nome of secondary order could be during pharaonic times. In a word, U.E. 7 presents a combination of geographical constants inherent in the country itself and very local particularities.

On one hand, we are faced with the traditional view of agricultural Egypt. Like so many other nomes, U.E. 7 is depicted as essentially a farming land. Most of the documents concern agricultural business, land leases, taxes, and so on. On the other hand, we discover quite a number of rare or unknown gods specific to the site, whose existence can sometimes be traced over a long period. Most of these cults never reached national status; they sprang into existence, grew in importance and sometimes disappeared, all in the nome itself, in a relative independence. Major religious movements, involving the whole country, left their mark on the history of the nome, but they were most of the time transformed, or adapted, to the particularities of the spot. My intention is to present here a brief chronological summary of the fate of the different deities of U.E. 7; the different aspects of this subject will be developed at length in a series of future articles.

Remains from the Old Kingdom are scarce. The rock-tombs of Qasr es-Sayyad on the right bank and the mastabas of Abadiyeh on the left bank are not very informative concerning the peculiar cults of the nome. Bat, the eponymous goddess of the nome, is mentioned in neither of these¹. Except for the symbol of the nome itself, this cow-goddess is actually connected with U.E. 7 by one single stela of the Old Kingdom (UC 14312) and by a mention of her name on the White Chapel of Sesostris I. However, Bat is likely to originate from the nome, and, more precisely, from the town of Batiu, given its etymology. It seems that the fate of the goddess Bat was linked very closely to the fate of her native town, Batiu. As long as Batiu was

¹ On this goddess, see H.G. Fischer, *JARCE* 1 (1962), 7-18; id., *JARCE* 2 (1963), 50-1.

the main centre of U.E. 7, Bat was the only important goddess of the nome (viz. during the Old Kingdom).

From the Middle Kingdom onwards, with the creation of Hut-sekhem by Sesostri I, the pole of attraction is moving toward this new town of growing importance. At the same time, Bat is gradually being superseded by Hathor. In the New Kingdom, the town of Batiu even disappears in the documentation, completely overshadowed by the neighbouring Hut-sekhem. It should be stressed that Batiu and Hut-sekhem are not two names of a single town, as it has sometimes been stated; both of them were quoted side by side in two different lists of towns: Onomasticon Ramesseum and P. Brooklyn 35.1446. However, the overshadowing of one town by the other implies that they were not too distant from one another. Onomasticon Ramesseum says that Batiu was situated up-stream from Hut-sekhem. This is confirmed by archaeology: viz. the localisation of the cemeteries excavated by Petrie². Most of the cemeteries dating from the Middle Kingdom and after are located in the neighbourhood of Hut-sekhem while all the Old Kingdom cemeteries are located seven miles up-stream, near the town of Abadiyeh. This shifting of the cemeteries is an exact reflection of the moving pole of attraction from Batiu to Hut-sekhem as observed in written documentation. Last but not least, the modern name of Abadiyeh is probably derived from the former name Batiu. With the decline or the disappearance of the town of Batiu, the goddess Bat disappears as well. The only relic is the nome emblem itself, which will soon be re-interpreted as a sign for the *sh̄m*-sceptre and the *sh̄m*-sistrum.

From the New Kingdom onwards, Hathor is mentioned as the main goddess of the nome. Her place of origin is still rather obscure. She might be the goddess of the neighbouring Dendera, whose cult was prosperous, and might have assimilated and superseded the cult of Bat. Nevertheless, a completely independent origin may also be possible. One wonders if the overshadowing of Bat by Hathor is not the direct consequence of the opposite fates of their respective towns: Batiu vs Hut-sekhem. In this case, the worship of Hathor could have its origin in the foundation of Hut-sekhem, an important agricultural domain of Sesostri I. This agricultural estate *hwt-sh̄m Hpr-kj-R* 'the domain (called) the power of Kheperkarâ' was to become the town of Hut-sekhem, the main city of the nome, shortened as 'Hu' even as early as the New Kingdom. Hathor could be the goddess who was worshipped in this new foundation. Whatever her origin may be, from the New Kingdom onwards Hathor was considered as the main deity of the nome.

During the New Kingdom, Sesostri I was also deified and considered as a minor deity of Hut-sekhem. He was worshipped under his praenomen Kheper-ka-Râ, enclosed in a cartouche. It is evidently as the founder of the town of Hut-sekhem that

Sesostri I was worshipped in Hut-sekhem. The god Sesostri is quoted on three statues from Hut-sekhem, dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty, beside Hathor. Where she is quoted as *nbt Hwt-sh̄m* 'Mistress of Hut-sekhem', Sesostri is merely *hry-lb Hwt-sh̄m* 'dwelling in Hut-sekhem', this epithet showing his lesser importance. It is possible that Sesostri I was deified during his lifetime in Thebes and Buhen but no evidence is available yet for Hut-sekhem. The first trace of his deification in this town is the name *Hpr-kj-R* borne by a man from Hut-sekhem around the time of Amenemhat III, attested from P. Brooklyn 35.1446. By the end of the New Kingdom, it seems that his cult had disappeared.

Besides Hathor and Sesostri I, the Benu-bird is also attested by a statue of the Eighteenth Dynasty recently sold at Sotheby's New York. The god is called 'Benu-Râ lord of the East'. This is the first proof of worship of the Benu-bird in U.E. 7. It can certainly be linked to the town of Per-Benu, quoted in different lists of towns of the New Kingdom and which was situated down-stream from Hut-sekhem. We may assume that the sacred ibis and falcon necropolis found in the Twenties by a Belgian expedition in the neighbourhood of Hu was part of that city of Per-benu.

Sources become more important from the Third Intermediate Period onwards. Hathor is still the main goddess but a number of other cults appear at that time. The god Neferhotep is first attested in the nome by the titles of Third Intermediate Period priests. However, these priests are always referred to as 'priest of Hathor (and) Neferhotep': the main goddess Hathor is still pre-eminent in the nome at this time. But in the course of events, Neferhotep will gradually increase in importance and, in the fourth century BC, he will be considered as the main deity of Hut-sekhem, having superseded Hathor.

One of the earliest occurrences of Neferhotep at Hut-sekhem shows him as a baby, held by a priest. The appearance of this god is likely to be linked to the general rise of the cult of child-gods during the Third Intermediate Period. However, in the geographical inscriptions of Ptolemaic and Roman temples outside U.E. 7, Neferhotep of Hut-sekhem is represented as having three distinct aspects. He is a child-god, but he is also described as a demiurge — as *bj'nh* 'living Ba' — and is also assimilated to Osiris as Osiris-Neferhotep. These three aspects of the god do not appear separately; they usually appear together in a single scene or description of the god. Neferhotep is not one of these aspects; he is the whole cycle of birth, procreation and regeneration. The Egyptians simply choose three significant aspects of the cycle of life in order to illustrate this movement represented by Neferhotep. It seems to me that Neferhotep-*pj-hrd* — Neferhotep-*bj'nh* — Osiris-Neferhotep illustrate the cycle of life in the same way that Khepri — Râ — Atum illustrate the cycle of the sun.

The documentation related to Neferhotep makes it very probable that the birth place of this god is Hut-sekhem, by the end of the New Kingdom or the beginning

² See the map in W.M.F. Petrie, *Diospolis Parva* (London, 1901), pl. i.

of the Third Intermediate Period. One has to be very cautious regarding so-called attestations of the existence of Neferhotep before the Third Intermediate Period. In fact, we can state for certain that the epithet of Khonsu 'neferhotep' was not related to the god Neferhotep, at least before Ptolemaic times, and neither was the common name Neferhotep of very ancient origin. The use of this epithet 'neferhotep' can never be considered as evidence for the existence of the god Neferhotep himself. On the contrary, onomastical research based on the name Padi-Neferhotep, where Neferhotep is clearly a reference to that god, corroborates the fact that Neferhotep was a god originating in Hut-sekhem by the Third Intermediate Period and whose cult extended later on to Thebes and perhaps other towns of Egypt.

It may seem strange that a god would appear out of thin air. As an hypothesis, I would venture a guess: Neferhotep is always pictured as a human being, wearing a round wig and the double crown. This iconography is very similar to that of a king. We know that there was a king who was especially worshipped in Hut-sekhem during the New Kingdom and whose cult disappeared in the Third Intermediate Period, exactly when we encounter Neferhotep for the first time: Sesostri I. Would it be possible that a particular statue or image of Sesostri I worshipped at Hut-sekhem was later re-interpreted as a god called Neferhotep? The connection is tantalising but still awaits confirmation.

Udjarenes is an especially interesting goddess of Hut-sekhem³. As it can be inferred from the very few documents where she is mentioned, Udjarenes was a woman living in U.E. 7, in the Late or the Ptolemaic Period. After her death, she was deified and became part of the local pantheon. She was sometimes assimilated to Isis. It seems that the cult of Udjarenes never extended out of Hut-sekhem. This poorly attested worship is still of interest, however, as she is the only deified woman known to me in Egypt (excluding queens and princesses). On a funerary stela, she is mentioned as a goddess from Hut-sekhem under the title of 'the Osiris God's Wife of Neferhotep Udjarenes, justified'. The epithet 'Osiris' and 'justified' clearly indicates that she was in origin just a human being.

She bears the title of 'God's Wife of Neferhotep' in every occurrence of her name. At present, it is impossible to know if this title of 'God's Wife of Neferhotep' was her real function, during her lifetime, or if she inherited it after her death, in order to be integrated into the theological system of Hut-sekhem. In fact, it seems to me very likely that she bore this title both before and after her death. We have no idea of the time when she lived, but all the documentation related to her is Ptolemaic. In the middle of the modern town of Hu I discovered a Hathor kiosk inscribed with her name, which could probably be one of her worship places. She is also mentioned in a fragmentary and very tantalising decree dated to Ptolemy III Evergetes and

³ See now Collombert, *RdE* 46 (1995), 55-79.

recording an oracular session of King Ptolemy II Philadelphos in U.E. 7. In this decree, Udjarenes is mentioned as the daughter of a 'second prophet, prophet-*whm*, prophet of Hathor mistress of Hut-sekhem' called 'Pucher' and a 'musician of Hathor mistress of Hut-sekhem' whose name is lost.

In this very decree, we are faced with still another specific god. The deity invoked in the oracle is not Udjarenes but a mysterious *sh̄m šps* 'august *sh̄m*-scepter'. The text says: 'Taking the *sh̄m šps* out of his House of Gold in order to soothe the two sisters in their anger and to repel evil'. Later on in the text, the *sh̄m šps* 'stopped and leaned toward His Majesty very intensely', as is usual in oracular sessions. This happened 'in the far gebel, in front of the necropolis of Kenmet', that is to say on the way to the oasis of Khargâ, which was sometimes included in the sphere of influence of U.E. 7. This strange oracle might be linked to another one which occurred six centuries earlier, in the oasis of Dakhla. This is the well-known oracular session recorded on the larger stela of Dakhla and published by Sir Alan Gardiner⁴. The text says that the oracle was given by Seth, but in the upper register we can see the governor in front of a broken figure. This must certainly be restored as the Bat-emblem. We can even recognise the two sisters mentioned in the decree at the foot of the emblem.

We have seen that during the New Kingdom the Bat-emblem of the nome was gradually re-interpreted as a *sh̄m*-scepter. It is therefore very likely that this *sh̄m*-god who used to give oracles is the same deity as the one pictured on the Dakhla stela. This is certainly the last development of the ancient and forgotten cult of the goddess Bat. The *sh̄m*-scepter was important enough to have priests of its own. Djed-Iset-iufankh, a priest of Hathor and Neferhotep of Hut-sekhem who probably lived in the Twenty-second Dynasty, was also 'prophet of the (big?) *sh̄m*-scepter of Hut-sekhem'.

The cult of Osiris is known in Hut-sekhem from the Third Intermediate Period onwards. It is likely to be linked with the growing importance of Osirian worship throughout Egypt. In U.E. 7, we know of a 'prophet of Osiris' and a 'prophet of Osiris pre-eminent in the divine booth' (*hnty-sh-ntr*). This significant epithet shows the peculiarity of the Osirian cult in Hut-sekhem: it was essentially focused on the rites carried out on the dead body of Osiris. This ritual implied the participation of the whole family of Osiris. Accordingly the cults of Horus, Isis and Nephthys also existed in Hut-sekhem.

In the geographical inscriptions from Ptolemaic and Roman temples, Osiris of Hut-sekhem — very often assimilated to Neferhotep — is either mentioned as the divine benu-bird, Wenshepsef, or Iun. These three epithets refer to the same designation of Osiris as a dead man on the point of coming to life again, the first one

⁴ *JEA* 19 (1933), 19-30.

(benu-bird) being certainly also a reference to the cult of the benu-bird attested earlier. Nephthys, whose name had been re-interpreted as 'Mistress of Hut', also played an important part in the protection of Osiris' body, especially under the epithet of Kherseket.

A number of other less well attested deities also exist, but they can not all be quoted here. However, we are still lacking one important god. The Greek name of the town 'Diospolis *hê mikra*', explicitly naming the Greek god Zeus, would suggest that there was a major cult of Amun in U.E. 7. As a matter of fact this god is once attested by an Eighteenth Dynasty statue, beside Hathor and Sesostris I, but the text states 'Amun-Râ Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands': this god is certainly Amun of Karnak. Amun of Karnak is also attested very often by documents dealing with economic aspects of U.E. 7, but none of these documents explicitly states that Amun was worshipped in the nome. The documents only provide evidence of the wealth of Amun of Karnak: that he owned many lands and herds of animals in U.E. 7. We have to conclude that if a cult of Amun ever existed in U.E. 7, it was never an important one. It was totally dependent on the cult of Amun of Karnak and it allowed the god Amun of Thebes to be present in his own lands but far from his temple of Karnak.

The mention of the god Zeus in the Greek name of the town 'Diospolis *hê mikra*' should therefore refer to another god. If we only refer to the actual documents, we come to the conclusion that the Greek god Zeus must be identified with the main god of Hut-sekhem during the Late Period, and that is Neferhotep. This identification is likely to be supported by the theology of Neferhotep. This god is very often described as a fecund begetter, and this may have been compared by Greek writers with the numerous sexual exploits of Zeus. It can be noted that this fertility aspect is also shared by Amun himself.