

# THE CAT AS SACRED ANIMAL OF THE GODDESS MUT

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In 1979 the Brooklyn Museum Expedition to the Precinct of the goddess Mut at Karnak, found in the remains of flooring just to the west of the south end of the east porch before the Mut-temple in Karnak a poorly preserved statue of a seated cat: height 47 cm; width 25 cm; depth 58 cm.\* It was made of sandstone. As the head was broken, this seated animal could represent either a lion or a cat, but in the partly preserved hieroglyphic inscription the word *myt* (cat) can be read, so that it is reasonably sure that it originally represented a cat. Moreover, on the front edge of the base we can read the name of the goddess Mut: *ḥtp di nsw Mwt* (an offering that the King gives to Mut), and on the left side of the base part of a prayer: May she give a good lifetime in the precinct (*di.s ḥ nfr m niwt*).<sup>1</sup> On the rear of the base can be discerned what is probably a personal name: Neb-Maat-Re. The date of the piece is uncertain.

From the above it is to be concluded that this statue of a cat was a votive offering to the goddess Mut. This conclusion, however, raises the question why the image of a cat was dedicated to Mut.

We know that in the Egyptian religion there were countless relations between animals and gods, that many gods were represented in animal form or as humans with an animal head, and that a religious value was attached to many animals for their symbolic meaning. Frankfort's view<sup>2</sup> that an animal in itself had a religious significance because of its being different from humans, however, is to be doubted, if only because not all animals had such a religious symbolic value and not all gods were

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\* The Brooklyn Museum-American Research Center in Egypt Expedition to the Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Southern Karnak. *Preliminary Report* by R. Fazzini in collaboration with W. Peck and with contributions by R. Bianchi, B. Bryan and L. Kuchman Sabbahy, 1979, 5 and fig. 32 (In private circulation only).

I thank the Field-Director Mr. Fazzini for his permission to study this sculpture during the fourth season of excavation from February 14 through April 14, 1980, while doing work for the expedition and I thank also the other members of that expedition Mrs. Fazzini, Mr. and Mrs. Peck and Miss E. Sherman for their help and stimulating discussions. My thanks go, as always, also to Mrs. G. van Baaren-Pape who translates my Dutch into English.

<sup>1</sup> *Niwt*: domain or precinct of a temple cf. Urk. IV 364 and H. S. Smith in: *Man, Settlement and Urbanism*, ed. P. Ucko, London 1972, 714.

<sup>2</sup> H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 1948. Paperback Edition, New York 1961, 8 ff and H. te Velde, *A Few Remarks on the Religious Significance of Animals in Ancient Egypt*, *Numen* 27 (1980), 76-83.

represented in animal form or as humans with an animal head. The goddess Mut,<sup>3</sup> who is still often called a vulture goddess in Egyptological literature, is never, or extremely rarely and then clearly only by indirect derivation, depicted as a vulture. Usually she is shown as a woman wearing the typical crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, and sometimes as a woman with a lion's head. In what relation she stands to the cat is a problem posed by the find referred to above.<sup>4</sup>

The cat was certainly one of the numerous animals that symbolized religious values. This symbolic value though requires further precision and definition. In the last millennium B.C. the goddess Bastet is usually represented as a cat or as a woman with the head of a cat holding an aegis with a lion's head, a sistrum and sometimes a little basket<sup>5</sup> supposed to contain a cat or kittens. Bastet can also be depicted though with a lion's head, and in earlier times this was always the case.<sup>6</sup> The connection between a god and an animal is practically never exclusive in Egyptian religion. The cat may be connected with various Egyptian goddesses, with Hathor, Neith, Tefnut, Pakhet and as shown by the statue described above, also with Mut.

It cannot of course be attempted here to write a study of the significance of the cat in Egyptian culture and religion:<sup>7</sup> "Tout le travail sur la symbolique du chat en Egypte reste à faire."<sup>8</sup> N. and B. Langton<sup>9</sup> and also E. Riefstahl<sup>10</sup> think it was the peculiar "aloofness" of the cat that gave rise to religious worship. This idea would seem to be based rather upon personal observation of the cat than upon an analysis of the Egyptian data. The following phrases of Hehn<sup>11</sup> will nowadays also be taken cum grano salis: "Das Verschlussene und Stumme, daher Ahnungsreiche, das nach Regel alle Thiere haben, ist in der Katze und deren eigenthümlichen, gleichsam mystischen Sitten und Neigungen besonders fühlbar. Sie hat noch jetzt für den, der sie gewähren lässt und

<sup>3</sup> LÄ IV, s.v. Mut and H. te Velde, *Towards a minimal definition of the goddess Mut*, JEOL 26 (1979-80), 3-9. More studies on the goddess are in preparation. There is yet no monograph on Mut.

<sup>4</sup> Fazzini in his Preliminary Report (p. 5) mentions the sculpture as 'a rare representation of the goddess in the guise of a cat.'

<sup>5</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, London 1906, 32.

<sup>6</sup> J. Vandier, RdE 18 (1966), 80 "... elle n'est associée à la chatte, dans la documentation dont nous disposons, qu'à partir de la XXIIe dynastie."

<sup>7</sup> See for a survey: Dia'Abou-Ghazi, *Die Katze in Religion und Leben im alten Ägypten*, Das Altertum 9 (1963), 7-16; H. de Morant, *Le chat dans l'art égyptien*, CdE 12 no. 23 (1937), 29-40, no. 24 (1937), 162.

<sup>8</sup> F. Daumas, RdE 22 (1970), 73.

<sup>9</sup> N. and B. Langton, *The Cat in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge 1940, 1.

<sup>10</sup> E. Riefstahl, *A Sacred Cat*, Bulletin The Brooklyn Museum 13, nr. 2 (1952), 3.

<sup>11</sup> V. Hehn, *Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere in ihrem Übergang aus Asien nach Griechenland und Italien sowie in das übrige Europa*, Berlin 1894 (9te Aufl.), 448.

sie aufmerksam beobachtet, etwas Aegyptisches, das die Vorliebe der Einen, den Widerwillen der Anderen weckt." We may well agree, however, with his view that the cat was domesticated in Egypt and from there came via Greece to Western Europe in the Middle Ages, so that nowadays "etwas Aegyptisches" sits alive and purring in many a Dutch home, as in many other countries.

According to more recent studies<sup>12</sup> the domestication of the cat already began before and outside the Egyptian culture, but the further process of domestication which led to the cat's becoming a pet animal of man came about in Egypt in the second millennium B.C.<sup>13</sup> This development into a pet animal may have been due to its symbolic religious meaning, so that there is certainly a core of truth in the opinion that makes the cat the clearest case of religious motivation for domestication of all domestication of animals over the whole world.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless there will also have been an economic reason for the domestication of the cat, even though it does not produce meat or milk like the cow or sheep. Already in the third millennium B.C. the cat is depicted in Egyptian art as flushing birds from the papyrus so that the human hunter can bring them down with his boomerang as they rise.<sup>15</sup> In hunting cultures before the beginning of Egyptian culture the cat may have been trained to help the hunters, but this will hardly have been more than incidental. The representation of a woman with probably a cat or a leopard on her arm<sup>16</sup> and the finding of cat's bones in a settlement<sup>17</sup> or a grave<sup>18</sup> may just as well concern individual tamed specimens of wild cat as provide evidence of the domestication of the cat race. At any rate, the cat never had a place in hunting cultures that could be compared to that of the dog. Agriculturalists had a stronger motivation for domesticating the cat. As

<sup>12</sup> L. Störk, *LÄ III s.v. Katze* and the references given there, esp. H. Petzsch, *Zur Problematik der Primärdomestikation der Hauskatze*. In: *Domestikationsforschung und Geschichte der Haustiere*, hrsgg. v. J. Matolcsi, Budapest 1973, 109-113.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Baldwin, *Notes and Speculations on the Domestication of the Cat in Egypt*, *Anthropos* 70 (1975), 428-448.

<sup>14</sup> E. Isaac, *Geography of Domestication*, New York 1970, 113.

<sup>15</sup> The oldest representation seems to be on a limestone relief in the Vatican Museum dated in the 5th dynasty, cf. N. E. Scott, *The Cat of Bastet*, *BMMA* 17 (1958-59), 4. See also: P. E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, London 1893-1900 I pl. 34 and IV pl. 5; M. Alliot, *Les auxiliaires de chasse du tueur d'oiseaux au baton de jet*, *BSFE* 6 (1951), 17-24; L. Keimer, *RdE* 4 (1940), 49-50 and Pl. I; J. Vandier, *Manuel d'Archéologie égyptienne IV*, Paris 1964, 765 and the references given there to Theban tombs. Cf. also R. Macramallah, *Le mastaba d'Idout*, Le Caire 1935, frontispiece (genetcat with chicken in mouth).

<sup>16</sup> J. Mellaart, *Excavations at Haçilar*, *Anatolian Studies* 11 (1961), 54 and fig. 14; B. Brentjes, *Die Haustierwerdung im Orient*, Wittenberg 1965, 83 Abb. 85.

<sup>17</sup> F. E. Zeuner, *Dog and Cat in the Neolithic of Jericho*, *Pal. Expl. Quart.* 90 (1958) 55 f.

<sup>18</sup> H. Behrens, *Neolithisch-frühmetallzeitliche Tierskelettfunde aus dem Nilgebiet und ihre religionsgeschichtliche Deutung*, *ZAS* 88 (1963), 75-83.

doughty hunters of mice and other vermin threatening the stored grain, cats could be kept in and around the granaries. It can hardly be accidental that in a grave at Beni Hasan (c. 2000 B.C.) a cat is depicted opposite a mouse.<sup>19</sup>

The point is that it is only in Egypt that we can show a progressive domestication of the cat from guardian of the granary, a position hardly higher than that of an alley-cat, to pet of the mistress of the house.<sup>20</sup> This cannot be found elsewhere in the Ancient Near East to such an extent. It is significant that the cat is not even mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. The earliest representation of a cat sitting under the chair of her mistress dates from the 11th dynasty,<sup>21</sup> but the rest of the iconographic material showing the cat under her mistress's chair dates from the second half of the second millennium B.C. The cat is then a pet animal like the dog and the monkey and, be it to a lesser degree, the gazelle, the ibex and the goose. Complete domestication is not a necessary condition for the status of pet, as is evident from the case of the gazelle and the ibex which were semi-domesticated,<sup>22</sup> whereas the monkey was specially imported from southern parts. Archaeological material supports the iconographic material: in a tomb at Abydos dating from the 12th dynasty 17 skeletons of cats were found provided with small pots that according to the excavator Petrie must have contained milk.<sup>23</sup> Nor must we omit to mention the cat sarcophagus<sup>24</sup> of the 14th century B.C., that was made for the pet cat of Prince Tuthmosis, probably the elder brother of Akhenaten. According to texts and representations on this sarcophagus, the cat was mummified and ritually buried, so that like a human being it became an Osiris. The mummification of this pet should be distinguished from the large-scale mummification of cats and many other kinds of animal that became rife in the last millennium B.C.

The depiction of cats in hunting scenes show more variation in the N.K. than in an earlier period, when the cat was not yet in such close contact with man as a pet. It not only creeps upon birds along the papyrus stems as the ichneumon does, but may also seize them with

<sup>19</sup> P. E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, London 1893-1900, II, pl. 5. A representation of a cat with a mouse in the mouth is ramesseidic: J. Vandier d'Abbadie, *Ostraca figurés de Deir El-Medineh*, Le Caire 1936, II pl. XXV no. 2201. On further implications of cats and mice see E. Brunner-Traut, *Altägyptische Tiergeschichte und Fabel*, Darmstadt 1968.

<sup>20</sup> See especially the article of J. A. Baldwin in note 13.

<sup>21</sup> A. J. Arkell, *An early pet cat*, JEA 48 (1962), 158; H. M. Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae, Reliefs and Paintings from the Petrie Collection II*, Warminster 1979, 21 no. 87 and pl. 19, 2.

<sup>22</sup> J. Boessneck, *Die Haustiere im Altägypten*, Veröffentlichungen der Zoologischen Staatssammlung München, 3 (1953), 24 ff.

<sup>23</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *Tombs of the Courtiers and Oxyrhynchos*, London 1925, 11.

<sup>24</sup> L. Borchardt, ZÄS 44 (1907), 97 and D. Wildung in: *Götter-Pharaonen*, Mainz, 1978, nr. 28.

mouth and claws.<sup>25</sup> On a wall painting in a Theban tomb transmitted by Wilkinson<sup>26</sup> in an outline drawing, the cat is standing on its hind legs in the hunter's boat and lays its front paws affectionately on the legs of the owner of the tomb. Here the cat is no longer part of nature or a half-wild alley-cat, but it has a special link with man of a quite different kind from that of the wild animals. As we know, the hunting scenes in tombs also have a religious significance. The presence of wife and children in the boat is notable. This fact alone points to the ceremonial character of the hunt. The owner of the tomb, as a hunter, subdues and dominates the chaotic life of the wild animals in the presence of his family and the cat. The cat assists him. Perhaps the mere presence of the cat may be a symbol showing that chaos is curbed and turned to idyllic peace.

The same meaning seems to attach to the cat under the chair of its mistress.<sup>27</sup> This point will be elaborated further on when we consider the role of the cat in Egyptian mythology and particularly the myth of the sun's eye, which changes from a raging lion to a peaceful cat. In any case the cat under the chair is not merely a picturesque detail showing that Egyptian ladies were cat-lovers. It is a component element in a larger whole. Ladies and gentlemen are sitting on chairs enjoying the life of paradise. They are anointed, clothed in white, raise the drinking-cup, play the senet game and listen to the songs of the harper. Already on the earliest, fragmentarily preserved, depiction from the 11th dynasty of the cat under the chair we can read the expression "good day" (*hrw nfr*), that is being celebrated. In all the cases I was able to check the cat is sitting under a woman's chair. When there is an animal under a man's chair it is some other animal, such as a monkey or a dog. The cat is sometimes eating a fish or gnawing a bone, but is often just quietly sitting. Once the master of the house has a kitten on his lap,<sup>28</sup> while a full-grown cat is sitting under the chair of the mistress. We are not surprized that the cat is linked with the woman, for we connect the catlike with the female sphere.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. well-known Theban wallpainting of Fowling in the Marshes in the British Museum no. 37997.

<sup>26</sup> J. G. Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (ed. Birch), London 1878, II 107 no. 365.

<sup>27</sup> Listed in Porter-Moss, *Topographical Bibliography I<sup>2</sup>*, Part I: Theban tomb 10 (1), 50 (9-10), 52 (3), 55 (4), 96 (8), 120 (3), 130 (9), 159 (4), 178 (2), 181 (3), 217 (3), 217 (6), 219 (9), 331 (1), 357 (1-2). To these can be added: Moh. Abdul-Qader Mohammed, *The Development of the Funerary Beliefs and Practices Displayed in the Private Tombs of the New Kingdom at Thebes*, Cairo 1966, 136: Theban Tomb 194; Relief in Strasbourg from Thebes: W. Spiegelberg, *Ausgewählte Kunst-Denkmäler der Aegyptischen Sammlung*, Strassburg 1909, Pl. II, 3 (It is not necessarily a man who is sitting on the chair as is said on p. 3); Chair of Queen Teye C.G. 51112: Porter-Moss, *Top. Bibl. I<sup>2</sup>*, pt 2, 563; J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara 1908-9*, 1909-1910, Cairo 1912, 144 and pl. LXIX, 2; Relief in Leiden from Saqqara: *Artefact*, Leiden 1968, pl. 62 (Inv. AP 6, Meri-meri).

<sup>28</sup> N. de G. Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs at Thebes*, New York 1927, Pl. XXV.

But what applies in one culture need not be the same in another. The sphinx for instance, who since the Greeks is a female symbol for us, was a predominantly male symbol for the Egyptians. In the Egyptian religion the cat was connected with various goddesses who may be called daughter of Re or eye of the sun. In the English summary of his first dissertation J. Zandee<sup>29</sup> remarked: "The name eye of Rē<sup>c</sup> reminds us of the myth of the raging sun-eye which comes back to Egypt after having vanquished the enemies of the sun, which eye is identified with raging goddesses as Sakhmet, Bastet, Mūth. Having been appeased she settles in Asheru, the holy pond of Thebes." Yoyotte already suggested that there was a connection between the representation of the cat under the chair and the goddess Mut.<sup>30</sup>

That the goddess Mut was connected with the cat was not really unknown, even if there is not much to be found about it in handbooks that give a schematic picture of the so variform religious reality. Barguet<sup>31</sup> wrote in a paragraph on the goddess Mut: "Son animal sacré était la chatte." He referred to an often reproduced stela, Cairo 27820 of the 20th dynasty,<sup>32</sup> which shows a goose and a cat with the inscriptions "goose of Amon (*smn n Imn*)" and "cat of the mistress of heaven (*mūt n nbt pt*)." At the time, Hopfner<sup>33</sup> disputed Grébaut's view<sup>34</sup> that this cat indicated Mut, maintaining that it was the animal of Re, because Re in the form of a tom-cat combats the Apopis snake in the vignette to BD 17. He considered that the goose and the cat represented Amon-Re. Yet this interpretation does not seem acceptable, since in the text of this stela Mut is mentioned by name: To give praise to Amon; to kiss the earth before Mut (*rdi i3w n Imn snk t3 n Mwt*).

The Egyptians connected the word for cat (*mūt*; emū) and the name of Mut. On the statue of Ded-Her or Teos-le-Sauveur<sup>35</sup> a seated cat is repeatedly shown amidst many figures of gods. The inscription is sometimes "Mut (written with vulture and bread-sign) mistress of Isheru" and sometimes "Mūt (written with the seated cat, E13, and the bread-sign) mistress of Isheru." In any case the seated cat is here the

<sup>29</sup> J. Zandee, *De Hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden I 350*, Leiden 1948, 137. See for details of the text and commentary: 25-27.

<sup>30</sup> J. Yoyotte, *Les trésors des pharaons*, Geneve 1968, 82.

<sup>31</sup> P. Barguet, *La temple d'Amon-Ré*, Le Caire 1962, 21 cf. 118.

<sup>32</sup> H. Bonnet, *Ägyptische Religion, Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte*, Leipzig 1924 nr. 51; Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography II*<sup>2</sup>, 445.

<sup>33</sup> Th. Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter*, Wien 1913, 39.

<sup>34</sup> *Le Musée égyptien I*, 1890-1900, publiée par E. Grébaut, texte par G. Maspero, pl. III et p. 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> G. Daressy, ASAE 18 (1918), 131, 142, 143 who gives a description and the hieroglyphs. A photograph on which a seated cat is visible is in: F. Daumas, *La civilisation de l'Égypte pharaonique*, Paris 1965, no. 120.

goddess Mut with her familiar epithet. In the late period the normal way of writing the name Mut with the vulture could be replaced in personal names by the sign *mi* (W19), which was often used to write the word cat, so that the personal name Mutirdis e.g. could be understood as "Mut has given her," but also as "The cat has given her."<sup>36</sup>

On a stela from Deir el Medineh,<sup>37</sup> dated in the 19th dynasty and now in the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford, two cats are represented (*mit* ☉ and *mit nfr*). In the text of the hymn<sup>38</sup> upon this stela, however, it is not Mut or some other goddess who is named, but Re, and he is called Tom-cat (*mi(w)* ☉). 'To give praise to the great tom-cat, to kiss the earth before Re. O peaceful one (*htpy*) who turns to peace. Thou lettest me see darkness through what thou hast done. Make light for me, that I may behold thy beauty. Turn unto me, o peaceful one, versed in forgiveness .... give life, prosperity and health to the ka of ...' A striking feature of this prayer is the light symbolism. Perhaps the two cats may be a theriomorphous form of the eyes of the sun-god, that is to say the merciful (*htpy*) eyes of the sun-god. The angry eye of Re is not a cat, but a lioness. In the Destruction of Mankind Re sends forth his eye, his daughter Hathor as the lion-goddess Sakhmet to slay mankind.

In his study of BD 17 Heerma van Voss<sup>39</sup> has demonstrated with considerable material that the cat and the tom-cat pertain to the solar sphere. Many a cat statuette shows this clearly, the maker having placed the solar disk and uraeus upon the animal's head, or set it upon a lotus. In the case of bronzes there is often a scarab engraved upon the head, neck or chest. Cats may figure in amulets representing the wedjat eye.

The difference between a cat and a tom-cat, which as a rule is not easily seen, need not form much of a problem. The animal that defeated the Apopis snake at the Ished tree is usually called a tom-cat and represents Re. Sometimes the conqueror of the Apopis snake is not a tom, but a cat with clearly visible teats.<sup>40</sup> The idea is that not only Re himself, but also his daughter can defeat Apopis. Goddesses associated with cats are commonly given the epithets "daughter of Re" and "eye of Re." In the vignette of BD 17 it is always one tom-cat (or she-cat) that poses as conqueror. It may be imagined, however, that Re and his daughter fought the battle together. This is evident from a passage in the ritual of Mut:<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cf. H. de Meulenaere, MDAIK 16 (1958) 232, who gives more examples.

<sup>37</sup> E. Winter, AfO 20 (1963), 201, Abb. 18.

<sup>38</sup> J. Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, Zürich-München 1975, nr. 168.

<sup>39</sup> M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss, *De oudste versie van dodenboek 17a*, Leiden 1963, 81.

<sup>40</sup> A. Piankoff-N. Rambova, *Mythological Papyri*, New York 1957, II, nr. 15, 6th vignette.

<sup>41</sup> Pap. Berlin 3014 + 3053, XVII, 1-2. I thank my student drs. J. van Dijk for having put at my disposal a hieroglyphic transcription and translation of the Mutritual, that he prepared for a seminar in the university of Groningen.

“Let us dance and shout for our Mistress in her form in which she was when she was found at the splitting of the ished-tree together with Re in Heliopolis.” The form in which Mut then was, was undoubtedly the cat and she was together with Re.

The representations showing not a single cat or tom, but two cats flanking not the ished-tree but the emblem of Hathor, have been extensively treated by Vandier.<sup>42</sup> It will have to be enquired into in how far there is a connection between the ished-tree and the emblem of Hathor or her sistrum. A well-known iconographical motif is Hathor as tree-goddess. Vandier connects the cats to either side of the Hathor emblem with the children of Atum-Re and his hand, the goddess Hathor-Nebet-Hetepet, Shu and Tefnut.

In later times there are links between these cats and Bastet. But a general connection between Bastet and the cat cannot be proved before c. 1000 B.C.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting to note that the cats flanking the Hathor emblem may be replaced by sphinxes. This recalls the cat shown in the window over the door in Theban graves.<sup>44</sup> Alfred Hermann who has studied these representations, thought it was the intention to depict what was to be seen in everyday life, viz. that the cats liked to settle down there so that they could go in and out and enjoy the sun. Hornung<sup>45</sup> has pointed out though that sometimes there were sphinxes over the door instead of cats, and that both sphinxes and cats stand in a single context with djed pillars, falcon heads, wedjat eyes etc. These are not just realistic representations of everyday things, but have a symbolic value which he links with the significance of the door in the tomb as a passage from this world to the next.

On the north wall of the shrine of Mut in the triple shrine of the Theban triad on the court of the Luxor temple two so-called decorated vessels are depicted, that had a function in the cult of the goddess. Two cats are sitting at the foot of one of the vessels, one on either side, while two lions are in a similar position at the foot of the other. Above the vases we see, int.al., papyrus and the Hathor cow. In reality these motifs will

<sup>42</sup> J. Vandier, RdE 18 (1966), 76-84; See now also: D. Wildung, *Zwei Stelen aus Hatschepsuts Frühzeit*, in: *Festschrift Ägyptisches Museum*, Berlin 1974, 255-268 and M. C. Guidotti, *A proposito dei vasi con decorazione hathorica*, *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 1 (1978), 105-117.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. note 6.

<sup>44</sup> A. Hermann, *Die Katze im Fenster über der Tür*, ZAS 73 (1937), 68-74.

<sup>45</sup> E. Hornung und E. Staehelin, *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen*, Mainz 1976, 120. See also the drawing on an ostrakon of what possibly is a façade of a shrine: W. Peck, *Drawings from Ancient Egypt*, London 1978, pl. 131 - E. Brunner-Traut, *Egyptian Artists' Sketches*, Istanbul 1979, Pl. I.



have been engraved upon the vases themselves. On the southern wall of the same shrine only one such vase decorated with Hathor emblems and cats is to be seen.<sup>46</sup> Also in representations elsewhere<sup>47</sup> the vase decorated with Hathor emblems and cats is a regular item in the cult of Mut, but the vase with the lions is left out, as if this were less important than the vase with cats in the cult of Mut. Even though the difference between cats and lions is sometimes not very noticeable in Egyptian iconography, yet in the case referred to above it is clear that the animals are lions, as they lack the erect ears characteristic of cats. In the cult these decorated vases will have been filled with intoxicating liquor. Festivals of Egyptian goddesses could be celebrated exuberantly<sup>48</sup> and feasts of Mut formed no exception to the rule. From the Berlin papyrus of the Mut ritual that dates from the 3rd Intermediate Period, it is evident that the cult of Mut was founded upon the myth of the return of the sun's eye, which is chiefly known from the Greek-Roman period.

Around the eye of the sun or the daughter of Re a varied mythology developed.<sup>49</sup> An important point in it is a situation of conflict in which the sun's eye became infuriated and departed to the south. A male divinity Shu, the twin brother of the sun's eye which is often called Tefnut, or Onuris or the mediating figure Thoth, or sometimes her father, who is called Ptah while the goddess is then called Uto or Mut, goes to visit the angry goddess who has retired to solitude in the shape of a furious lion. This male god brings about the reconciliation with the eye of the sun, who is the first female being. The raging goddess then takes the shape of a peaceful cat. As soon as her anger flares up again, however, she again becomes a savage lion. But finally she returns to Egypt under the guidance of Thoth or some other god. Her return and the reconciliation with the goddess who was so grim at first is the occasion in Egypt for exuberant festivities in and around the temples of the various goddesses who resume their place in the community of gods and men after conflict and reconciliation. However different the names and the variants in these myths of the sun's eye, it is an interesting point that when the goddess has broken with the community she is a raging lioness, but when she returns to it she has the shape of a harmless and peaceful cat. The cat proves to be a theriomorphous embodiment of the reconciled eye of the

<sup>46</sup> S. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstentale*, Wiesbaden 1952, 27, Abb. 8.

<sup>47</sup> A. M. Calverley and M. F. Broome, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, II, London 1935, pl. 11; *The Temple of Khonsu I*, O.I.P. vol. 100, Chicago 1979, pl. 28; *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak I*, O.I.P. vol. 25, Chicago 1936, pl. 66.

<sup>48</sup> H. Brunner, *Die theologische Bedeutung der Trunkenheit*, ZÄS 79 (1954), 81-83.

<sup>49</sup> W. Spiegelberg, *Der ägyptische Mythos vom Sonnenauge*, Strassburg 1917; H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien*, APAW 1911; idem, *Die Onurislegende*, Wien 1917; K. Sethe, *Zur altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge*, UGAA 5, 1912.

sun. The manifestation of the first female being to enter into a place in the cosmic order. A Well-known text runs: She is furious (*nš.n.s*) as Sakhmet (the lioness) and she is contented (*htp.s*) as Bastet (the cat).<sup>50</sup> Being contented is connected in this text with Bastet, the typical cat goddess in the late period from which this text comes. As already indicated above Mut is one of the many names of the sun's eye, and hence the cat could be her sacred animal and could be the symbol of idyllic peace and harmony.

Of the monkey, that as we have seen could also be seated under a chair just like the cat, Derchain<sup>51</sup> remarked that it is often "porteur d'une connotation érotique." This erotic aspect is naturally also included in the cat, that as eye of the sun could be brought home as a bride by a male god.

Further research would be needed to see in how far the myth of the daughter of Re, the first female being, who secludes herself from society and afterwards returns, and from a lioness becomes a cat, contains elements symbolizing woman's menstrual period. The offering of the clepsydra<sup>52</sup> to lion goddesses "marquait le retour à l'équilibre et à la régularité cosmique après une période troublée."<sup>53</sup> It is hardly to be expected, however, that it will be possible to demonstrate that the cat under the woman's chair is an erotic signal that this woman is not hampered by a menstrual period. Hornung and Staehelin<sup>54</sup> have drawn attention to the "Regenerationsaspekt" of the cat, and Heerma van Voss<sup>55</sup> had already remarked "that because of its fecundity and its destruction of vermin this animal was regarded as a renewer and protector of life." The peace (*htp*) symbolized by the cat protects, confirms and renews life.

In this article upon the cat as the sacred animal of the goddess Mut, we must finally remember the votive offering of a bronze cat to the Greek goddess Hera of Samos. Morenz already pointed out that Hera is the Greek name of Mut. His interpretation: "Mut aber ist ihrerseits dreieinige Göttin, die die Katze Bastet und die Löwin Sachmet in ihr Wesen aufgenommen hat. So sind Mut und Katze verbunden und Hera die griechische Mut erhält eine Katze als Weihgeschenk nach Samos"<sup>56</sup> should be read with some discrimination: Mut's connection with the cat

<sup>50</sup> H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Ph. Derchain, *SAK* 2 (1975), 69.

<sup>52</sup> S. Sauneron, *BIFAO* 75 (1975), 454 "... rite associé, on le sait, au retour de la déesse lointaine."

<sup>53</sup> Tohfa Handoussa, *A propos de l'offrande šbt*, *SAK* 7 (1979), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Hornung und Staehelin, *o.c.*, 120 f.

<sup>55</sup> Heerma van Voss, *o.c.*, 82.

<sup>56</sup> S. Morenz, *Religion und Geschichte des alten Ägyptens*, Köln-Wien 1975, 499.

is equally original and according to the data known at present even older than the connection of Bastet with the cat.

It would be a mistake though in treating this matter to end up with questions of priority and originality. All goddesses who were lion goddesses and represented the eye of the sun will have been connected with the cat in principle. It depends largely upon such material as happens to have been preserved, whether it can be proved. It might well be that the Egyptians and others kept cats as pets so that they could stroke lions without danger, or to express this upon the religious level: to find peace and reconciliation with an angry divinity. This nostalgia for the messianic kingdom where the wolf shall lie down with the lamb is a human longing that is not confined to the Egyptian culture and religion.

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*Addendum*

When this article was already in the press I found out that the Egyptians themselves had already transformed their religious truth of the myth of a goddess who changed herself from a fierce lion into a sweet cat and vice versa into terms of human relations:

When a man smells of myrrh his wife is a cat before him.

When a man is suffering his wife is a lioness before him.

(Ankhsheshonq 15, 11-12)